

# AH! WILDERNESS

*Living in informal plein-air settings has been a consuming American passion since the days of Davy Crockett. Three of today's weekend houses—one in California, one in Oregon, another in Connecticut—show how it can be done in style*



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Cicero, the philosopher, declared that the pastoral life was an effective hedge against the creep of age. A good thing for us, because camping has long been the great American getaway, one that echoes the shaping, bonding experiences of our first settlers. The pioneer spirit is still everywhere, and nowhere more visibly than in the West, its mild winters making indoor-outdoor living enjoyable all year long.

In the San Francisco Bay area, where interior designer Jonathan Staub lives, early houses that derived from the gold prospectors' canvas tents may have helped trigger this unusual family vacation compound perched high on 240 mountainous acres in the wine country, an hour north of San Francisco. Staub, half Hawaiian on his mother's side, envisioned a ranch in the spirit of the island homes of Hana, Maui, as a place for family gatherings. A bachelor, the gregarious Staub likes spending time with his parents, his four siblings, their spouses, and his many nephews and nieces.

At first, Staub and architect Dirck Bass designed one large, many-roomed structure, but it didn't have the desired expansive look. "We wanted to spread out, engage with the land," Staub says. Serendipitously, when the family considered pitching tents for temporary shelter during construction—an alternative to trailers—the lightbulb went on: "We threw away our old drawings and decided to use tent-cabins on platforms as sleeping quarters permanently," he recalls.

These tents, set up along a ridge, have wood frames, real doors and windows, galvanized brackets, and polyester vinyl skins that last up to fifteen years. Nestled among the live oaks, they disappear from view until dusk, when their lantern glow becomes mesmerizing, linking them to the living spaces in the main house, a 1,400-square-foot wood-framed pavilion.

On a similar quest, Jeffrey Biben and Peggy Bosley, married architects based in Claremont, California, chose to design a wood-and-glass house on stilts where their far-flung extended family could settle in together and commune with nature. On a five-acre wooded site outside Eugene, Oregon, overlooking the Willamette River, they built a structure divided into two wings by a partially enclosed dining breezeway. One wing is a large open living space with a mezzanine sleeping-loft, while the other is a bedroom suite for Biben's parents, who visit annually from Australia. To better connect with the land, they built a separate guesthouse; Biben, Bosley, and their daughter, Biben's brother and family, along with their parents share a parklike setting that offers nature hikes, fishing, deer-watching, and privacy.

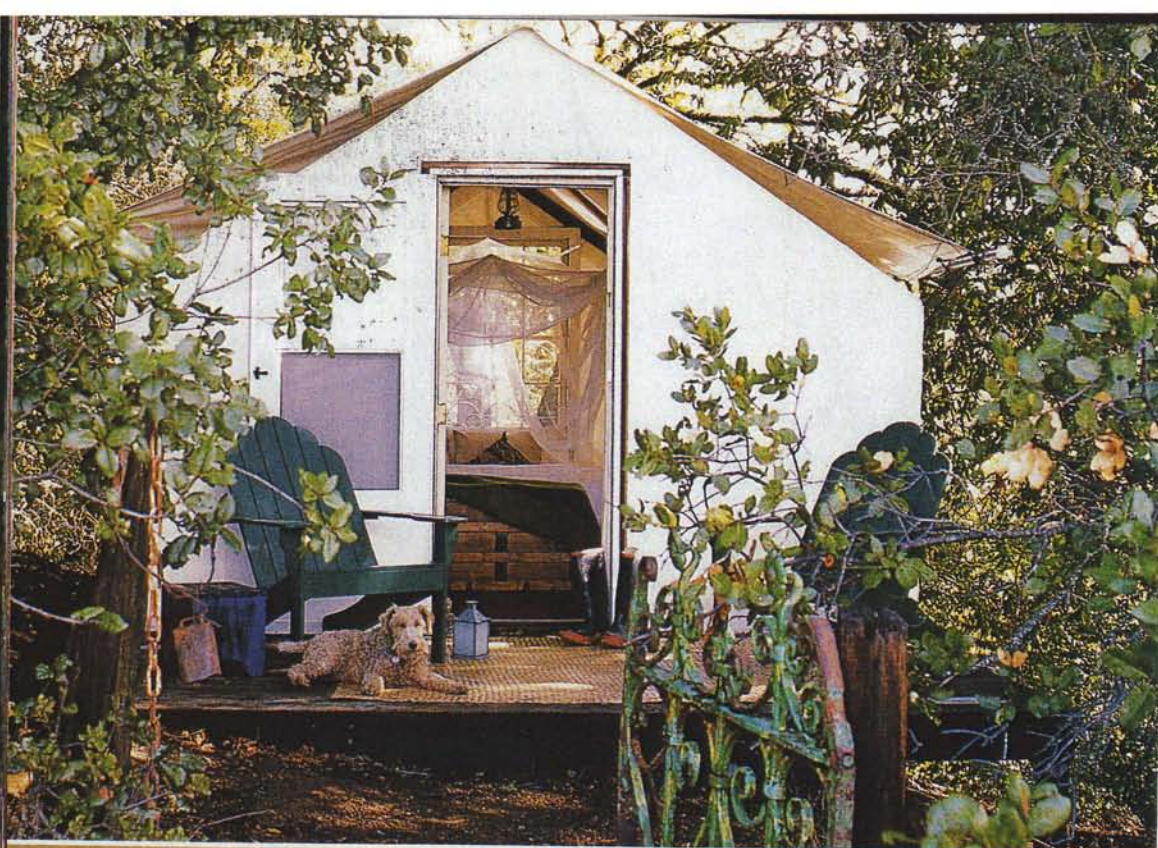
Meanwhile, in Connecticut, where harsher winters make tents or informal pavilions unfeasible, New York-based architect Donato Savoie's clients commissioned a unique outdoor pizza oven of brick and local stone that has become a nucleus for parties well into the fall.



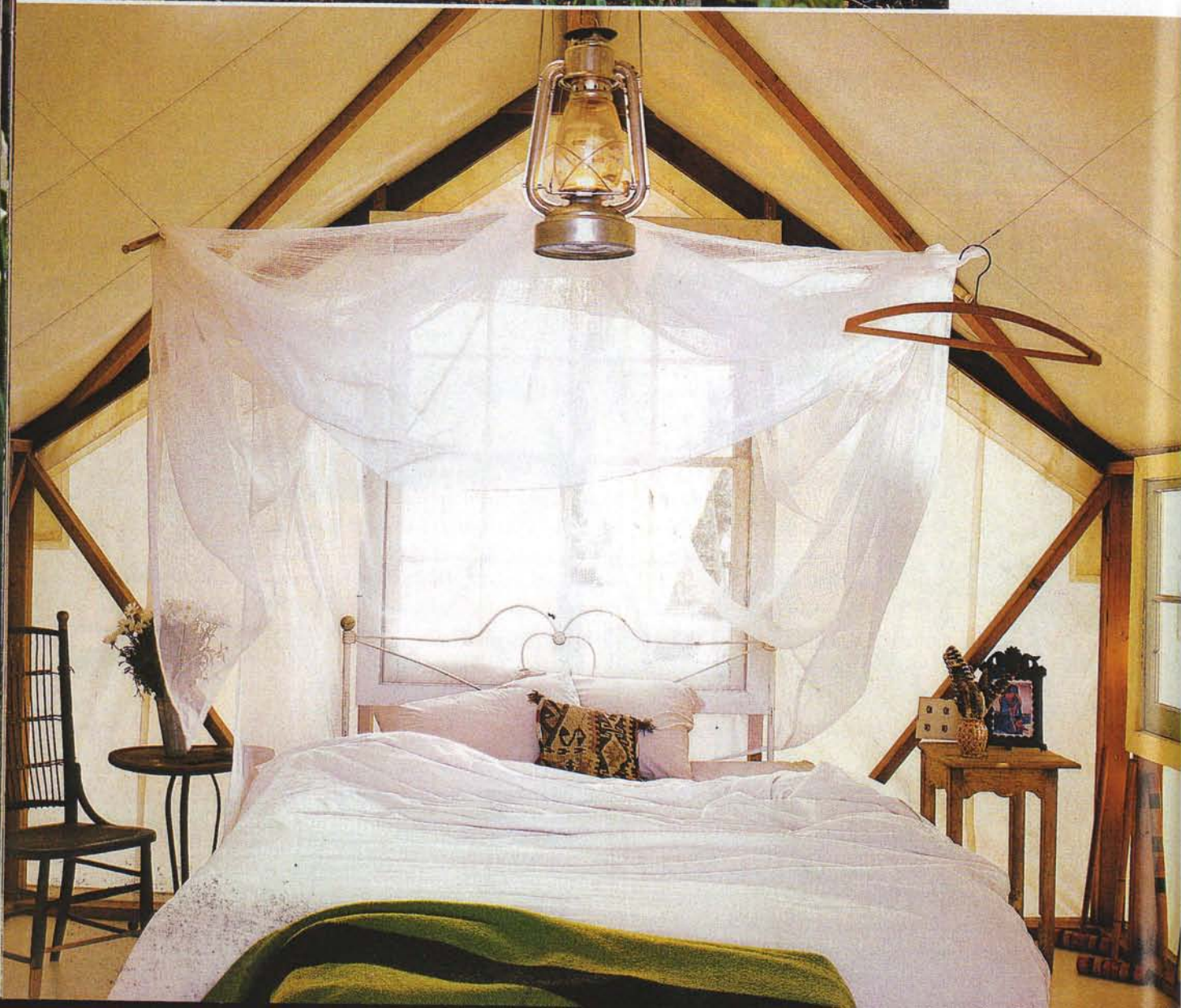


At night, Jonathan Staub's inviting tent-bedrooms become beacons in the unlit landscape. By day, shadows cast by surrounding live oaks play on the walls. An Adirondack chair from Willow Creek Woods faces a long view of the valley and on lucky nights is a prime seat for counting shooting stars. Opposite: From Jonathan Staub's favorite meadow he can look at the main house and pool. A path along the ridge leads to the tents. Staub has gone into business to produce Sweetwater Bungalows tents for sale.





Antiques and flea-market finds are recycled at Jonathan Staub's modern-day pioneer camp. Each tent in the compound contains personal memorabilia and offbeat furniture (left) to give it the Out of Africa look Staub loves. His own tent (below) is fitted with windows originally used in buildings within the San Francisco Presidio. Mosquito netting is his canopy. Overhead lantern is fueled by kerosene; two guest tents nearest the main house are the only ones electrified.





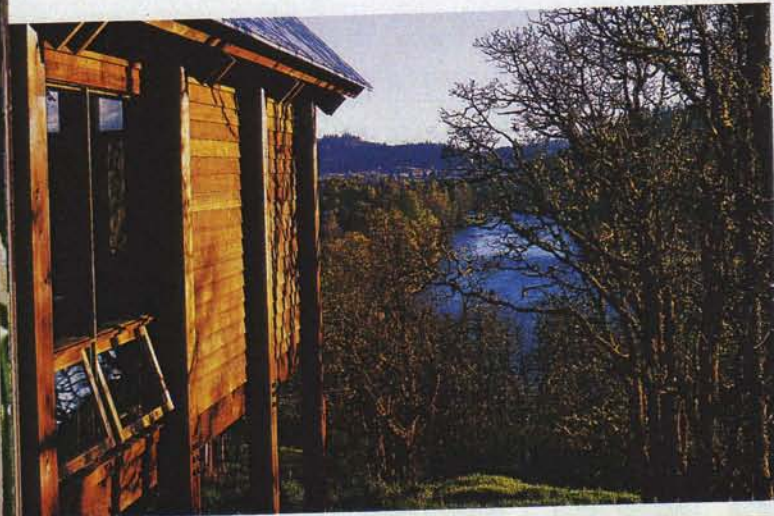
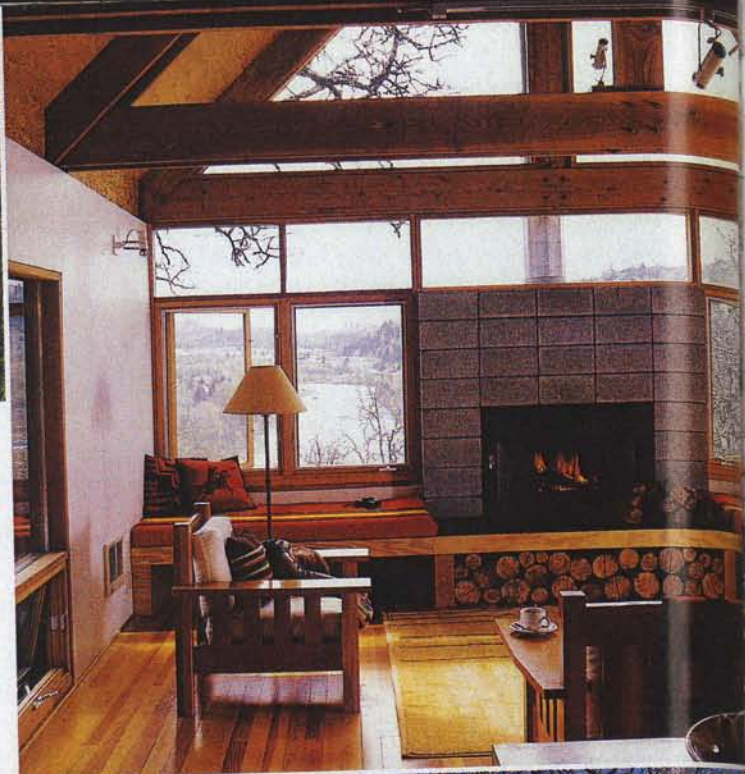


For a couple that weekends on a 55-acre wooded property east of the Connecticut River, New York-based Studio Morsa designed this cookout area made of local granite, bluestone, brick, and stucco. The Italian-style wood-burning pizza oven with a chimney, preparation counter (topped here with red peppers in carved wooden plates), and a grill (recessed above the wicker basket for tools) were made as part of the open dining terrace of a rustic house. "It is an expanded version of the outdoor barbecue," says Donato Savoie, who designed it with partner Antonio Morello. "It is used from late spring to late fall."





Architects Jeffrey Biben and Peggy Bosley's summer camp is affordably, comfortably rustic, clockwise from above: A satellite cottage is clad in corrugated galvanized metal. In the post-and-beam main house, the hearth in the Douglas fir-beamed living space with owner-designed Mission-style furniture doubles as a seat. The glazed main-house wall faces south; chimney and a bathroom are the only elements allowed to touch the ground. The curved tiled skylit shower has windows for deer-watching. The dining area opens to a view of the cottage. The Willamette River flows by.





"The heavy timbers and corrugated metals evoke the vernacular sheds of the area," says Jeffrey Biben. Peggy Bosley enjoys the way sunlight defines the metal ribs of the shower exterior. Biben hand-built the wood windows in southern California. "We wanted a clean, unfussy look," he says. Deciduous black oaks, wild lilies, irises, and blackberries provide summer-camp delights.

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