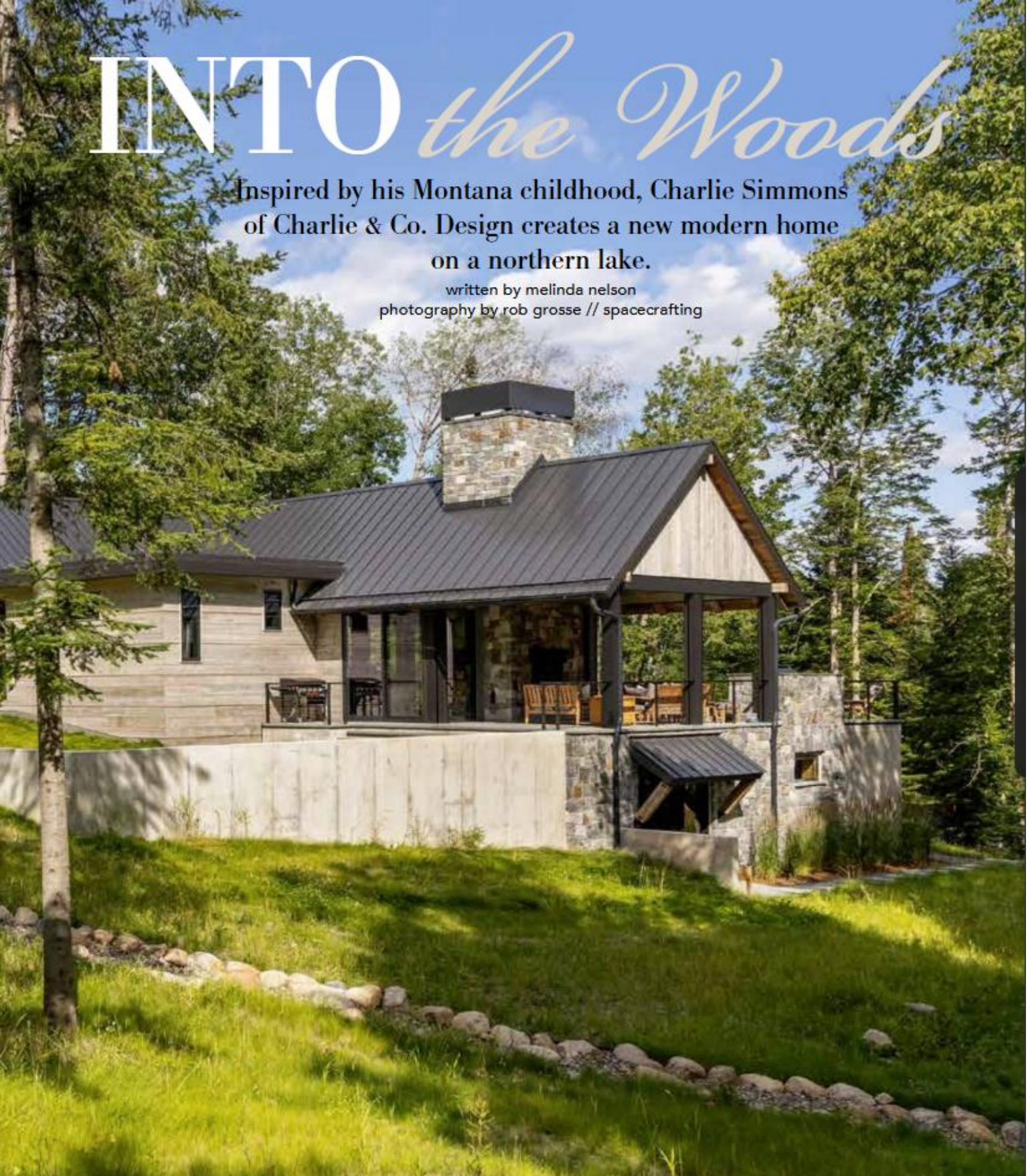




INTO *the Woods*

Inspired by his Montana childhood, Charlie Simmons
of Charlie & Co. Design creates a new modern home
on a northern lake.

written by melinda nelson
photography by rob grosse // spacecrafting







Charlie Simmons speaks the language of tall trees, gravel roads and big skies, a vernacular he learned while growing up in Montana. “I spent half my life in the middle of nowhere,” he says. “As a young human, the experience of driving through the mountains—and boom!—suddenly seeing a magnificent vista had a visceral impact on me, which continues to inform and inspire my cabin designs.”

When a Wayzata couple sent him the survey for a property in Cass County, Simmons felt a kinship with the land. “It was completely virgin land that had never been built on,” he says. “It had been logged out more than a century ago, and the only access was a gravel road that wound through a dense forest of second-generation pine trees that were 90 feet tall.”

Half of the five-acre parcel was protected wetlands and there was a steep bluff that sloped down to a lake, but Simmons was undaunted. After conferring with the county and the DNR, he found the only flat piece of land on the property. It was small relative to the rest of the parcel, but perfect for the clients’ goals.

“They wanted a clean-lined modern home hidden in the woods, where they could entertain friends or just sit with their two wonderful golden retrievers and experience their surroundings,” continues Simmons. “They wanted it to be more than a building, so we envisioned a series of interconnected pods with expanses of glass to bring the outside in.”

Simmons designed a public pod with an open living, dining and kitchen area on the main level and a bunkroom, sauna, gym and golf simulator on the lower level. A private pod encloses the bedrooms while the garage, boat storage and mechanical systems have their own pods. To create an organic connection to the land, he arranged the pods on a gutsy stone foundation that appears to have been nestled in the forest for decades. Inspired by all the different tree species on the clients’ property, he gathered an eclectic collection of reclaimed timbers for the materials palette.

“The story of the wood is just as important to me as the gradients and textures, so I love mixing Douglas fir, oak, elm and ash from Manomin Resawn Timbers with silvery weathered corral wood from Montana ranches,” he says. Balancing modernity and rusticity, he clad the pods in Douglas fir, juxtaposing vertical boards with a bevel and a strong horizontal banding motif, and modern floor-to-ceiling windows with narrow vertical frames that allow the glass to dance across the elevation.

Just as Simmons intended, the home always takes the clients and their guests on a journey of discovery. Leaving their luggage in the auto court until later, they follow the dogs’ wagging tails along the boardwalk into a light-filled hallway, which leads to the soaring living room overlooking the water. Captivated by the magnificent vista, they walk out to the patio, down the steps and through the trees—and boom!—there’s the lake.



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—CHARLIE SIMMONS



project credits:

- architectural design:
charlie simmons, charlie & co. design
- builder: l. cramer builders
- interior design: studio m interiors
- landscape design: pebl design