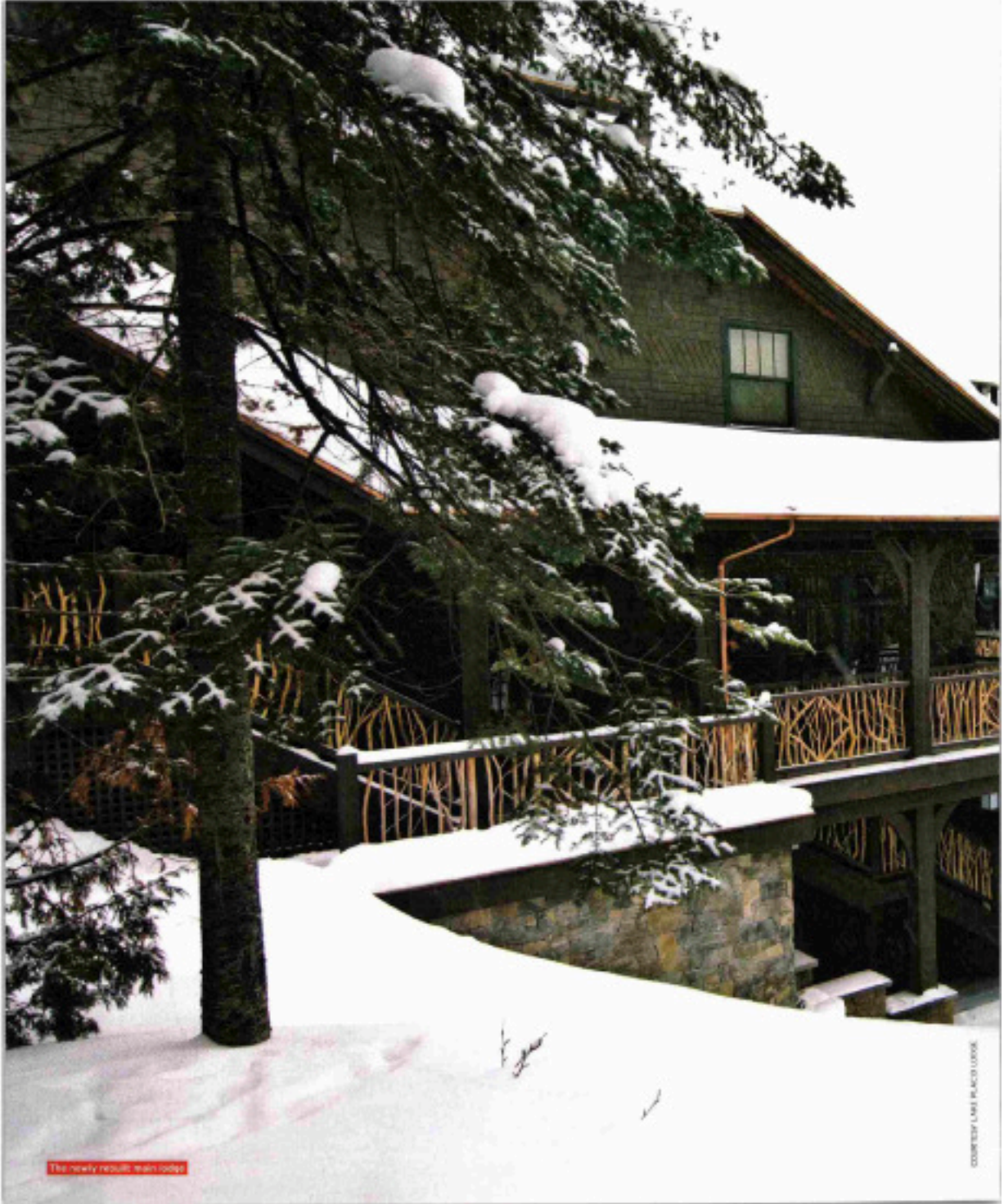


DEPARTURES

M A G A Z I N E



The newly rebuilt main lodge

COURTESY, LARK PLACE LODGE

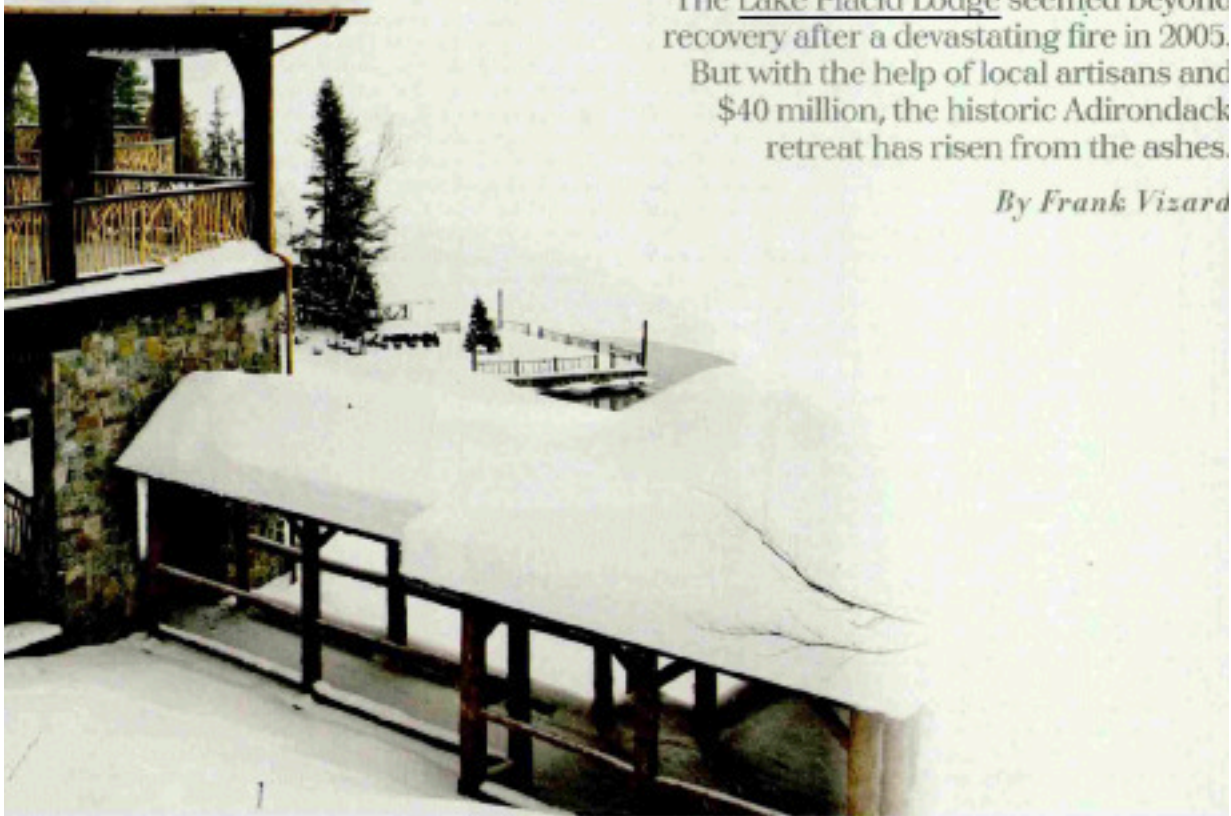
LODGE

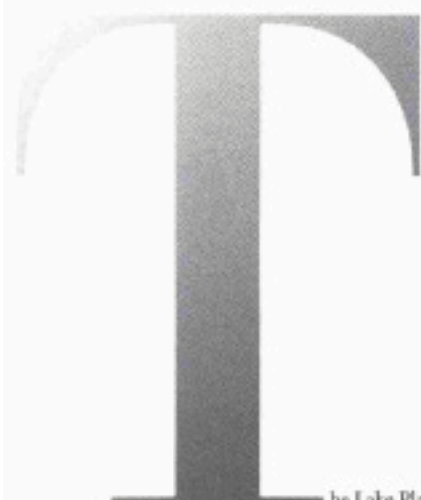
on the

LAKE

The Lake Placid Lodge seemed beyond recovery after a devastating fire in 2005. But with the help of local artisans and \$40 million, the historic Adirondack retreat has risen from the ashes.

By Frank Vizard





The Lake Placid Lodge traces its roots back to 1882, when a German family built a cabin along a slope on the lakeshore. This was the era when big-beamed wooden palaces—collectively dubbed the Great Camps—were being built throughout the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York by wealthy Manhattanites like the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers. By 1946 the lodge had evolved into a hotel, and nearly a half-century later, in 1993, it was purchased by David Garrett, a financier who was one of the original investors in the hugely successful Vermont Teddy Bear Company as well as the owner of The Point, a small, exclusive resort that once belonged to the Rockefeller family, on nearby Upper Saranac Lake. Under Garrett's direction, the Lake Placid Lodge became a showcase for local artisans who built furniture in the Adirondack bent-twig-and-bark tradition.

Then everything went up in smoke. Fire had long been the scourge of the Great Camps, and on a wintry morning of December 15, 2005, a faulty fuse sparked a catastrophic blaze that reduced the hotel to ashes, save for a string of guest cabins and another building along the lake. Thankfully there were no injuries, but news of the landmark's devastation made the front page of *The New York Times*. It seemed that an architectural treasure—and part of the history of a town famous for hosting the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics—had disappeared forever.

Not so fast. "Within a few days after the fire, we decided to rebuild," says Garrett, a tall, soft-spoken man whose calm voice belies his fierce passion for all things Adirondack. In addition to being the chairman and chief executive officer of the lodge, Garrett is a noted furniture maker. A well-made piece in the Adirondack style can take thousands of hours to construct, requiring extraordinary patience and attention to detail. Possessing those traits served Garrett well as the new Lake Placid Lodge took shape.

Completed this year, the \$40 million restoration masterfully captures the spirit of the Great Camps—and of the old hotel. The new bar top, for example, is made from

the wood of the maple tree that once stood outside the hotel. While the counter's surface is highly polished, its edges are rough and blackened: evidence of the fire's destructive power.

The new place isn't the old place, of course, and for some, the fire was heartbreaking. George Jaques, a retired state trooper and third-generation Adirondack craftsman, lost 20 pieces of handmade furniture to the flames, and while he has contributed two new creations to the restoration, he hasn't been able to bring himself to visit the new building yet, even though he lives relatively nearby in the village of Keene Valley.

Modern construction techniques, however, mean that fire is no longer the fierce enemy it once was. "As is so often the case, good things come out of tragedy," notes Lake Placid mayor Craig Randall. "The new lodge has more facilities than the old one and is a better fit with today's environmental requirements."

And there's one aspect of the old hotel that probably won't be missed. Climbing the 72-step staircase that linked the lakeside dining room to the lobby up the hill was murderous, especially after a meal. An elevator now connects the four floors of the lodge. But it's still worth a trip up the stairs, as the stairwell walls are lined with superb examples from Garrett's private collection of Hudson River School landscape paintings by artists such as Augustus Rockwell and George Henry Boughton. (The river itself originates in a nearby lake called Tear of the Clouds.)

The work of a living artist, Michele Gannon, covers the walls of the Map Room, a kind of briefing center for guests, at the top of the stairs, off the lobby. The local geography on Gannon's mural-size map is largely accurate, but here and there one spots drawings of elephants and hippos and the odd cape or inlet named after a hotel employee. Gannon, who teaches art at a regional school, says, "I was inspired by antique maps dating back to the sixteenth century."

The Map Room is emblematic of the 11 public areas in the lodge. Each is a museum-like exhibition space for craftsmen working in the Adirondack tradition, which developed in the 19th century, when local guides spent long winters fashioning furniture from branches, burl, and bark. Many of the more than 40 artisans whose works are on display had contributed pieces to the old building, and they served as a built-in network for Garrett to turn to after the fire.

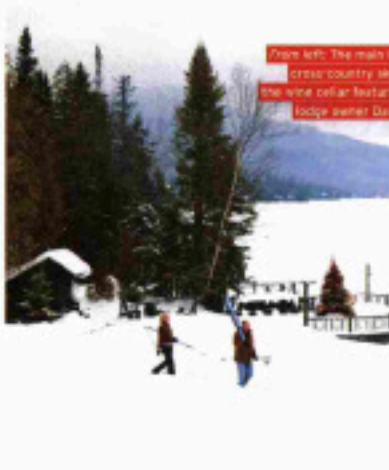
"You can't redo what was there," says Wayne Ignatuk, who was one of the first to have his furniture shown at the lodge, 16 years ago. While many Adirondack-style creations are rather delicate, his furniture is known for its durability. The New Jersey native is a master at building a specific type of joint—the wedged mortise and tenon—that is arguably the strongest in furniture design. As Ignatuk notes, "The new lodge is still a great showcase. Every time I'm there, I discover something fresh, like the life-size beaver and other small animals made from pine cones, which represent hundreds of hours of work."

The "twiggy" look, as Adirondackers describe the local furniture style, is the key to the lodge's authentic sense of place. All 30 guest rooms—split among the main building, a second one a few steps away, and the cabins on the

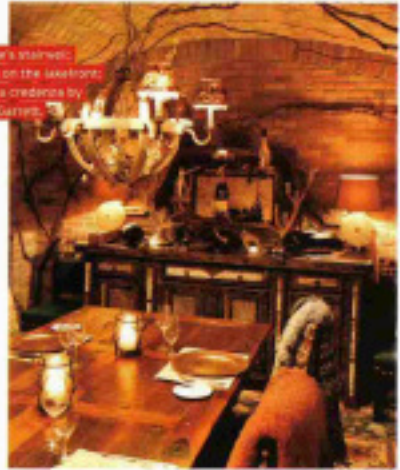
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Into the Woods

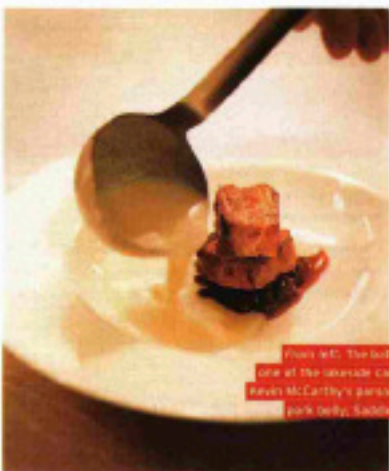
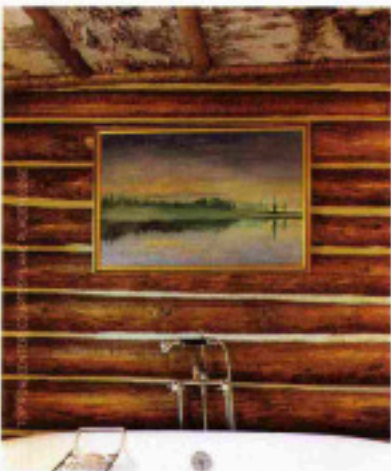
The Lake Placid Lodge is a five-hour drive north of New York City and about five hours south of Montreal. The region's winter activities include skiing, bobbed rides on the World Cup course, and dog sled runs on Mirror Lake. In summer there's fishing and boating (the lodge has its own 36-foot Hacker-Craft), horse shows, and a number of festivals. Rooms from \$750. 807-522-2700; lakeplacidlodge.com



From left: The main lodge's starwell; cross-country skiing on the lakefront; the wine cellar featuring a credenza by lodge owner David Garret.



From left: Some of the artisans who contributed their work to the lodge; Maggie's Park, named for the resident golden retriever; artist Michele Gennaro's whimsical cartography.



From left: The hot tubs in Saddleback; one of the lakeside Cabins, executive chef Kevin McCarthy's parakeet and pear soup with pork belly; Saddleback's interior.



shoreline—feature one-of-a-kind beds, each made by a different artisan and that serve as the artistic centerpiece. The beds also set the theme for the artwork in the rooms, much of which reflects the taste of Garrett's wife, Christie. It is her collection of framed antique paper targets, once commonly seen in amusement-park rifle ranges, that lines the hallway called the Shooting Gallery. Other items seem to have arrived at the lodge by a twist of fate. A large antique painting of a speedboat, bought on a whim at a summer fair in France, turns out to be a portrait of the 1924 *Baby Boatlegger*, the fastest boat on Lake Placid in its day. San Francisco interior designer Joszi Meskan worked on the lodge's decor, while the Burlington, Vermont, architectural firm TruexCullins made sure every room had a balcony or a terrace with a view of the lake and the mountains.

Prominent among the artisans is Garrett himself. Each of the public spaces features at least one of his handmade pieces, a reflection of his lifelong love of forests, which began with watching *Davy Crockett* on TV as a child. The self-taught Garrett likes to combine odd materials, such as wine corks, with traditional textures, like birch bark. His massive credenza in the wine cellar stands as a testimony to his devotion to both his craft and fine wine. Vines crawl along the ceiling of the vaulted brick cellar, a popular spot for private dinners and home to an impressive wine collection.

The appetite for all things Adirondack extends to the 42-seat dining room, where exquisite meals are prepared under the supervision of executive chef Kevin McCarthy, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America. McCarthy was the top chef at The Point, where he developed an extensive network of suppliers of fresh seasonal fare from surrounding farms. His dishes might feature lake trout or in-season game. Desserts include ingredients like maple syrup, served over a toasted pecan cake with green-apple sorbet. Guests can dine outside on one of the porches or eat at the 30-seat pub, where the keen-eyed will notice an abstract map of the lake chiseled into the stone above the fireplace. The mapmaker used a garnet to mark the location of the Lake Placid Lodge—suggesting, rightly, that a jewel can still be found in the Great North Woods. ■