

We're Not in Kansas Anymore

A DUTCH-INFLUENCED HOME FOR TWO
GLOBAL SCHOLARS AND WRITERS

BY Debra Spark PHOTOGRAPHY BY Jeff Roberts





The kitchen and dining room of a North Bath home renovated by Houses and Barns by John Libby features white cabinets from Hammond Lumber Company, quartzite countertops from Morningstar Stone and Tile, a dining room table found on Craigslist, and chairs from Restoration Hardware. McIntosh and Company Cabinetmakers of Lewiston built the custom cabinets that wrap from the kitchen island onto the dining room wall. To the left is a painting by homeowner Harald Prins's aunt, Yerre Timmer. It depicts the harbor in Buschoten, the Netherlands town where Prins's uncle was the Protestant minister. The ceiling beams are eastern pine with a pickle finish. Other items here include an Australian aboriginal spear thrower, a drawing of Yupik walrus hunters, and an amber bead necklace from Mali. The kilim is from Afghanistan.





Harald Prins sent architectural designer Jozef Tara photographs of houses typical of those in the area of the Netherlands where Prins grew up. These images formed the basis of Tara's design for the renovation (above) of the existing gambrel home. The flare at the bottom of the roof is called a Dutch kick.

Homeowner Bunny McBride stands on the balcony off Prins's study (opposite, top). Although *Houses and Barns* by John Libby is well known for timber-frame construction, the ceiling here is conventionally framed, and the pine beams are nonsupporting. A woolen rug from Kurdistan is in the center of the room; the other two are Afghan kilims. A Guatemalan Highlands cloth is draped over the table that serves as Prins's desk.

The riverside house is well hidden in the woods (opposite, bottom), thanks to exterior paint colors and materials inspired by the immediate environment.

When I first emailed Harald Prins to get the street address of his house in North Bath, he sent back a message describing how I might arrive by canoe, if I happened to be coming from the old Abenaki village at the mouth of the Sebasticook. Then he tacked on a quick street address, in case GPS was my chosen method of navigation. This, it turns out, is how an anthropologist jokes, especially if he is an anthropologist who has spent his life—as has his wife, journalist and author Bunny McBride—with indigenous people around the globe.

Although not in a particularly contrary mood, I choose to come by car, driving north from Portland instead of paddling south from Merrymeeting Bay and down the Kennebec to the tidal estuary by which Prins and McBride live. In this way, I find myself experiencing their property as they first experienced it when they were house hunting four years ago. I travel down a gravel road bordered by wildflowers then into the woods. I round a bend, and suddenly the water opens up before me, framed by tree trunks. "It just hit us," McBride says of making the same turn for the first time. "You know the feeling. You know you are home."

At the time, their actual home was rather farther afield, in Kansas. Prins had been a professor at Kansas State University for 25 years and was in the process of retiring from academia. But Maine was already familiar to

the couple. McBride's Maine roots go deep—her paternal line goes back to the 1600s. Prins, who is from the Netherlands, was the newcomer. They'd both come to the state in the ways that many first come—to work as camp counselors and to visit relatives. They later spent a decade living in Hallowell and commuting to Aroostook County to do ethnographic and activist work with the Wabanaki, in particular the Mi'kmaq. Even after they'd moved to Kansas for Prins's academic job, they remained engaged with the tribal community and returned to do curatorial and other work.

The North Bath property that Prins and McBride purchased had a gambrel-roof house that wasn't quite right for their needs, so they turned to architectural designer Jozef Tara and builder John Libby of *Houses and Barns* by John Libby in Freeport for help. "We took the skin off what was there and built an addition," says John Libby of the process, which involved stripping the house, leaving only the studs, sheathing, and a Rumford fireplace—a shallow fireplace with a large opening and sharply angled firebox walls. Libby and Tara entirely reconfigured the floor plan, designing spaces for two prolific scholars with an extensive collection of art objects, either inherited (as with their many paintings) or related to their fieldwork.

In lieu of multiple bedrooms, the house has two sizable upstairs offices. The downstairs is composed of two central spaces: a great room and a piano room.





Prins likes to rest in the handwoven Mayan hammock that hangs in his study (top). On the floor, Prins has surrounded a mask from the Pacific Northwest coast with moose antlers from Newfoundland. The latter were a gift from the Mi'kmaq, as Prins served as an expert witness for the tribe in federal court cases about indigenous hunting rights. He added feathers from the Ayoreo people of the Gran Chaco of Paraguay and jokes that the grouping is "one of my surrealist ensembles of indigenous art." The floor and built-in bookcases are oak.

Hanging on the wall of the owners' bedroom (bottom) are three bags made of wild pineapple fiber by Ayoreo women. Each tribe has its own design. The woven bags are increasingly being developed as a source of income for the tribe. On the bed is a blanket from Mali made of sheep and camel wool.

Woolwich's Landcrafters moved boulders to the front yard (opposite) and repurposed and cut granite slabs for steps to the oak front door.



Although House and Barns by John Libby took the existing house almost down to the studs when they renovated, they kept the shallow Rumford fireplace. The leather chairs are from Romania. A wood Asmat shield from New Guinea is on the wall to the left. A wood Asmat drum, which Prins has had since he was a child, is to the right of the fireplace. The traditional Dogon rabbit dance mask from Mali above the fireplace was a gift to McBride because of her nickname. The pair of pillows on the sofa are mud cloth; the other is a Tuareg goat skin pillow. The painting above the sofa is by McBride's grandmother. The rug is a kilim.





The open-concept floor plan is broken up by partial walls and a kitchen peninsula that wraps part of the dining area wall. The piano room has three separate sitting areas, one with a coffee table and two-tiered shelf made of weathered pine that Prins and McBride found at Higmo's, a nearby lumber mill.

Prins's ideas for the home were drawn from his childhood experience of Dutch architecture. "You will learn a new word when you come here," he told me, and indeed I do. *Zeeg* is a Dutch word for a flare at the base of a gambrel roof, sometimes referred to as a "Dutch kick." Prins wanted such a flare, as well as gable peak detailing, casement windows, and ceiling beams, the latter a feature of the home he grew up in. "I started to refer to what I was doing as 'Netherlandizing' the house," says Tara. Other desires weren't Dutch per se but geared to comfort and the view, such as an inset balcony off Prins's office and, rather surprisingly, an indoor hammock. Although the house is conventionally built, *Houses and Barns* by John Libby is also known for their timber-frame construction, which makes use of wood pegs called *tunnels*. Two such pegs were fitted into the fir ceiling beams of Prins's office in order to hang the hammock.

In a certain way, the house has contrasting impulses. On the one hand, it wants you *not* to notice it, but to focus instead on the landscape. To this end, the exterior colors are quite consciously drawn from the environment, with the gray of the shingles based on granite, the green trim on lichen, and the forest green of the garage doors on evergreens. On the other hand, the house is set up for display, with bookcases and cabinetry designed to showcase beloved objects, thanks to the combined efforts

of *Houses and Barns* by John Libby, Lewiston's McIntosh and Company Cabinetmakers (who built dining room and office cabinetry), and Joani Hamill at Brunswick's Hammond Lumber Company (who designed the kitchen and upstairs hall cabinetry).

And when it comes to beloved objects, the house is full of them. Each seems to elicit a personal story, a bit of history, and a hint at what is often another line on Prins's and McBride's resumes. A (very) partial list includes Wabanaki baskets, Kurdish rugs, and East African spears, as well as bows and arrows from Paraguay, mud cloths from Mali, and a Mi'kmaq box made of bark and embroidered with porcupine quills. On the edge of the Sahara, while writing about the Tuareg desert nomads, McBride saw a woman using a stick to paint geometric designs on a rectangular pillow made of goat skin. The cushion is now on a chair in her office. Prins watched Ayoreo women in South America's Gran Chaco make patterned bags out of wild pineapple fiber. Three of these hang on the couple's bedroom wall. A larger bag in Prins's office would have been used for turtle hunting. When I admire an Irving Penn book on the living room coffee table, it turns out that it is the catalog of the 2017 Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Irving Penn: Centennial* exhibition: Prins wrote the chapter on Penn's 1967-1971 tribal photographs. Other beloved objects relate more to family history than professional pursuits, such as paintings by McBride's grandmother (one of Bunny as a young woman hangs above the piano) and a 1634 map of the area in the Netherlands where Prins grew up.

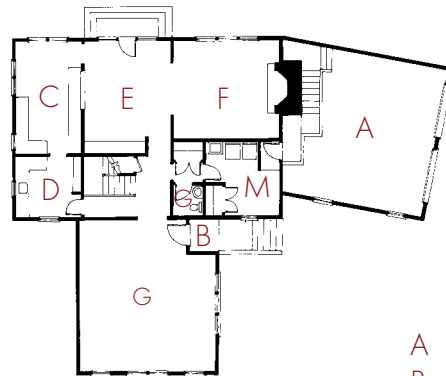
Part of what McBride appreciates about the river house is how neatly it fits the couple's needs. Just in terms of day-to-day



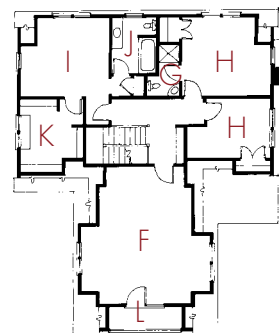
The house has a curving roofline, gable detailing, and an inset balcony off Prins's study (left). The oak on the balcony is used throughout the house. On the ground floor there is a music room with sitting areas and a piano.

McBride's office (opposite) has custom cabinetry by McIntosh and Company Cabinetmakers. The weaving above the daybed is from Mali, as are the blanket and the mud cloth pillows. Artwork by McBride includes the bust on the lower shelf and a wooden box for holding paintbrushes on the far right.

First Floor



Second Floor



- A Garage
- B Entryway
- C Kitchen
- D Pantry
- E Dining Area
- F Living Area
- G Bathrooms
- H Bedrooms
- I Owners' Bedroom
- J Owners' Bathroom
- K Owners' Closet
- L Balcony
- M Laundry

workability, everything feels like it is the right height or placed in the right location. Small things suit—such as a ledge for books by the bathtub or the placement of McBride's work desk, so that when she swivels around to talk to her husband, she is looking out at the water. Even the basement is very much a scholar's basement—not because it is fancy but because it has a temperature-controlled storage room for archival material. When I peek my head in, I see at least 100 bankers boxes, maybe more, labeled with what I assume are partial titles for the books Prins and McBride have written and the exhibitions they've mounted. One box, though, says "turkey feathers," and it actually contains turkey feathers. Apparently, their presence dissuades birds from flying into nearby windows. A cardinal has been pecking at my living room window for weeks now, so McBride takes me to her office, where she has other turkey feathers artfully arranged in a woodsplint basket, and hands me two particularly pretty ones. They are from the exotic land of Kansas, where Prins and McBride used to have a lot of turkeys in their yard.

"Do you ever go back?" I ask McBride of Kansas, as we are saying goodbye at the front door. Before she answers, Prins points out that, from where I am standing, I can see the green of the outdoors in four separate directions. "No," McBride says. And, given the beauty all around, I am hardly surprised when she adds: "People like to visit us here." **MH+D**

For more information, see Resources on page 132.



While tracking historic portage routes on Google, the couple realized that they lived two miles from Higo's, a Brunswick sawmill whose motto is "The Only Thing We Don't Cut is Our Hair." Prins and McBride visited and found a locally harvested piece of white pine, grayed by weather, which they now use as a coffee table in the piano room. Above the piano is a portrait of McBride painted by her grandmother.

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