

A photograph of a modern interior space, likely a living room. The room features a high ceiling with a large, multi-paned skylight. The walls are primarily composed of large windows that offer a view of greenery outside. A brown leather sofa is positioned in the foreground, facing towards the right. In front of the sofa are three small, dark wooden coffee tables arranged in a cluster. A floor lamp with two adjustable shades is visible on the left side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is bright and airy, with natural light streaming in from the windows.

PLAYING ^{THE} ANGLES

IT'S ONE THING TO
DESIGN HIGH-END
CUSTOM HOMES AND ANOTHER
TO BUILD A COMMUNITY.
ARCHITECT STEVEN F. HAAS DOES BOTH.



FLINGING OPEN THE FRONT DOOR AND STEPPING INTO THE VESTIBULE.

Steve Haas shows off the house with all the enthusiasm of a 10-year-old who has just successfully completed a complex Lego construction. This is in spite of Haas's thirty-plus years of designing and more than fifteen multi-million-dollar custom homes to his credit.

"It's very important to create a sense of entrance when walking into a house...and a line to the view," Haas observes. We're touring one of forty-five completed homes at Long Lake—the community Haas is developing in Ancramdale, New York. Each home features a stunning view on entrance—of woods, the lake, or a tranquil pond. In fact, breathtaking views are a Haas hallmark. Often sited on land he discovered, Haas houses always bring the outside in. And all four designs at Long Lake and the Sagan-Hill home in Old Chatham, New York, are built around courtyards that feature plantings and comfortable seating. At Long Lake, a 14-by-22-foot screened porch connects to the patio, extending the view to either a master bedroom or a family room.

Steven F. Haas is a hands-on architect who is able to understand and appreciate the vagaries of construction as well as the three-dimensionality of building design. In fact, he chose the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) School of Architecture over Cornell and Columbia because it offered a degree in the building sciences. However, during his four years at the Troy, New York, institution, he focused on the liberal arts of architecture—history and philosophy. "These are the things that ultimately make a good architect," he muses, gazing from the patio of his Alford, Massachusetts, home to the stunning view of Mount Everett, twelve miles away.

His career got off to a great start; Haas worked for I.M. Pei & Partners in New York City for three years. When he grew restless, he partnered with a colleague and left the prestigious firm. The young architects had a contract in hand to build a hospital for New York State. But after two years of planning, politics intervened and the project was cancelled. So was a cutting-edge skating rink in Alpine, New Jersey. It was 1974, and interest rates were sky high. During the month of August that year, every single project on the design tables was cancelled. The young architects had to close their doors.

WRITTEN BY SUSANNA OPPER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREGORY CHERIN



Man on a Mission: Steven F. Haas (left) employed dramatic use of glass and a living room that features views of the Adirondack foothills, helped out by 24-foot sliding glass doors, at this home in Old Chatham, NY.

The Ins and Outs: (Right) A signature of a Steve Haas design is the connection between outside and inside.

Long Lake's Journey Into Night: (Below left) At Long Lake, everyone believes they have the best lot with the best views. (Below right) An example of "Steve's jewelry," a structural element that extends outward from the house and helps to define space.

Tough times call for radical solutions. Haas realized there was only one route to success: become his own client. With \$25,000 seed money from his family, he bought land in Westchester, New York. Acting as architect and general contractor, he built a house for himself and his family. (After college, he married his childhood sweetheart, Roberta, who today is coordinator for the Dowmel lecture series held at Monument Mountain Regional High School in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.) A year later, they sold the house and bought another property with three building sites. Haas applied the formula yet again, this time in Rye, New York. It was a stunning parcel overlooking Long Island Sound that Haas subdivided into five building sites that were sold with the proviso that he design and build the houses.

"The 1980s were the formative period in my development," he reflects over a ham-and-cheese sandwich at a picnic bench at Taconic State Park in Copake Falls, New York, not far from Long Lake. "I was

building million-dollar homes with very good clients who allowed me to do innovative things." (One of these houses was featured in *Architectural Digest* in September 1990.)

Dick Cantor, now a retired investment executive, built three houses with Haas—one in Rye, one in Aspen, Colorado, and the other in New Preston, Connecticut. "He's incredibly immersed in the details of his work," Cantor observes about Haas. "Concepts are great as a starting point, but unless the architect has a relentless commitment to the execution of his vision, the project won't turn out. No detail is too small for Haas's constant attention. From an owner's point of view, having someone who feels that way about his projects is a wonderful thing."

But keeping track of all these details eventually began to feel overwhelming. Haas had fifteen architects working for him and managed a construction company. As administrator, he no longer had time to concentrate on architecture. Occasionally on weekends, he would



escape to the 25 acres he owned jointly with another couple in Stephentown, New York. There, with his wife and two sons, he lived in a trailer without a telephone. When he was able to make his getaway, he savored being in the country air, hiking, and going on camping trips. Although Haas didn't know it at the time, his Stephentown retreat hinted at a significant shift into the next stage of his life.

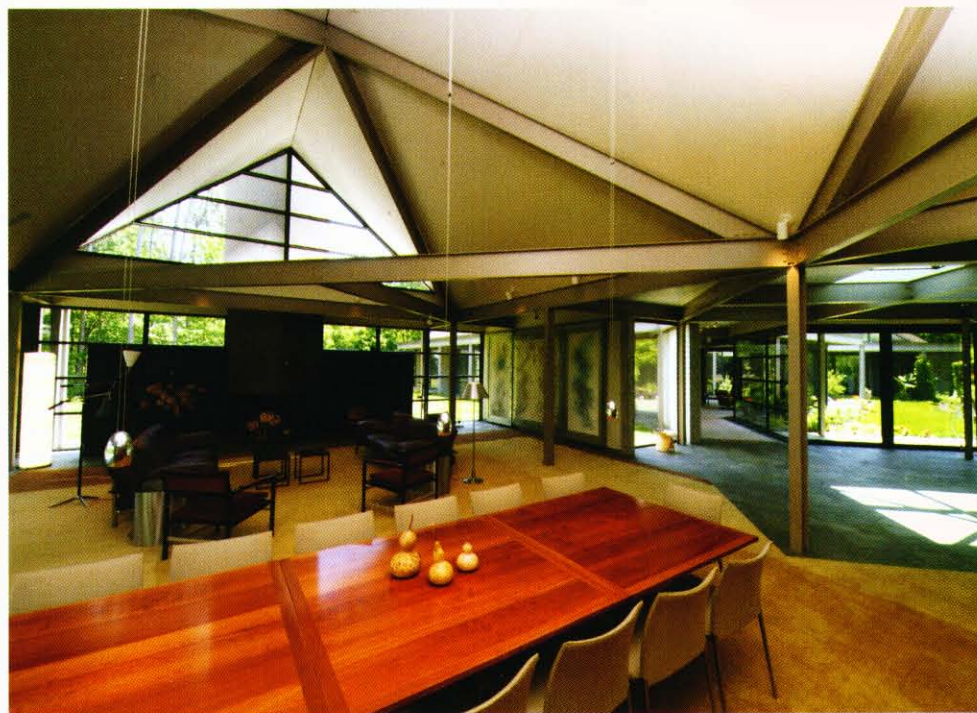
Enter Long Lake. Inspired by his father's unrealized dream of becoming a developer, Haas had his own ideas about building a community as a getaway for pressured city dwellers. When he saw the 220 acres on Long Lake, he immediately put down a deposit, and enrolled Samson Management, a real estate management and development firm in Queens, New York, to finance the project. The timing was perfect, as Haas had already decided to close his New York office, and the couple's sons were in college.

Building high-end custom homes had taught Haas patience. Since many houses had taken up to two years to plan and another two to build, the three years of planning for Long Lake didn't seem unreasonable. Haas had also learned to relish the process. "Process is very important to him," says Great Barrington residential designer Chris Blair, a friend and colleague. "He knows you have to become involved in the process. If you're not, you're wasting your time."

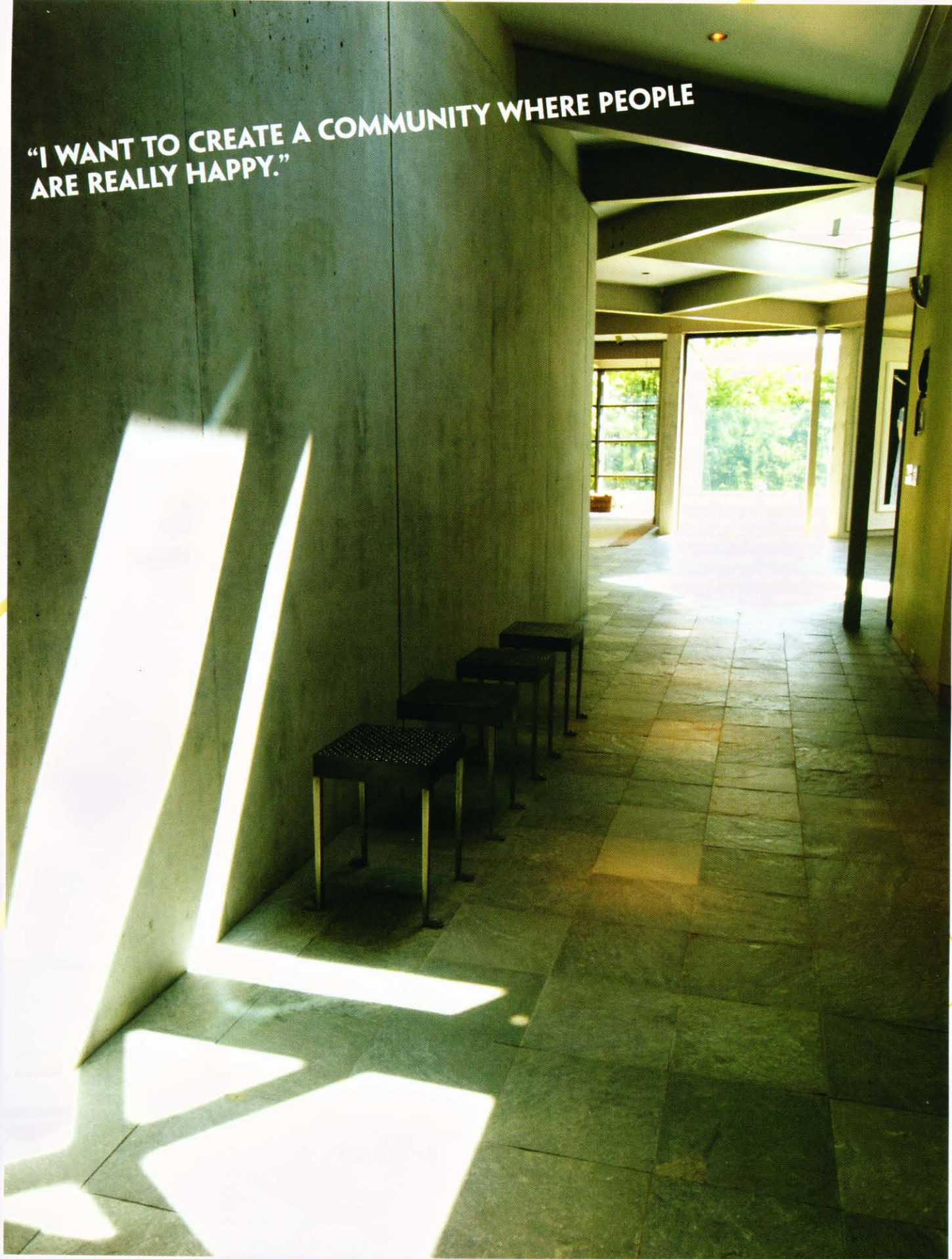
Haas's idea for the community was innovative, like the design of his houses. He wanted to cluster the buildings, leaving most of the stunning environment available to residents for hiking, boating, tennis, and swimming. Although the concept was new to the Ancram Planning Board, they embraced it. In fact, when all sixty-eight houses are complete, they will only occupy about five acres of land—less than three percent of the total acreage.

The challenge was to design houses that were close together but appeared to be otherwise. "Steve is a master at siting houses," says Sandra Rothe, a Princeton, New Jersey, realtor whose husband, Edward, is an architect with RJF Fletcher Thompson. The couple weekend at Long Lake year-round. "Even though we're close to other houses, it doesn't seem that way. It's like we're the only people on a huge amount of land. The joke at Long Lake is that everyone thinks they have the best lot."

In fact, Long Lake residents are experiencing the realization of Haas's dream. "I want to create a community where people are really happy," he says. The surprise for Vivian Kominos, a New Jersey cardiologist, and her newly retired husband, Elliot Smith, was not just that it's a phenomenal getaway,



"I WANT TO CREATE A COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE
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No Pane, No Gain: Hass's trademarks include his generous and unexpected windows, introducing natural light into typically dark corners of his homes.

but that they've made so many new friends. "We're not big risk takers," says Kominos, "but the beauty of the place was so incredible, we put down a deposit right away."

During the planning, permitting, and designing phase at Long Lake, Steve and Roberta Haas rented the old Peck house on Seekonk Cross Road in Great Barrington. By 1991, they were hooked on the Berkshires and bought 28 acres on East Road in Alford. The next year they moved into a quintessential Haas house honed from steel, glass, and mahogany. It sports his signature diamond window. "The diamond window does two things: it provides access to light in the gable end of the house, and it introduces light across the planes of the ceiling. This enhances the three-dimensionality of the space itself," Haas instructs.

It was Haas's genius with light that excited Bruce Sagan and Bette Cerf Hill (who winter in Chicago) when they were looking for an architect to design their second home in Old Chatham, New York. "We wanted light coming from every direction in every room," Hill observes.

They got that and much more—like the window in the master shower. "Bruce didn't want a window there," Hill reflects, "but Steve said, 'Trust me. You'll love it.'" And what's not to love? A little, private, walled flower garden peeks in at the bather while still allowing for total privacy. Most Haas custom homes employ dramatic use of

glass, and the Sagan-Hill abode is no exception. The entire living-room area opens up to a dramatic view of the Adirondack foothills with 24-foot sliding-glass doors and matching screens. Beyond the doors on the exterior terrace are what the owners call "Steve's jewelry:" the delicate steel tracing that structurally supports the living-room ceiling extends outside, but only as decoration. It makes the distinction between what is not the house (the surrounding landscape), what is partially the house (the terrace), and the house itself. It's but one of many intriguing details, like matching fireplaces with different surrounds and square, dark, gray-green Chinese-slate-floor tiles carefully crafted to form diamond shapes.

"He is a great geometrist," says interior designer Lisa Tillinghast, who has worked with Haas since 1984. "With him, it's all about form and connections. There are always issues of how you go from one material to the other, from one space to the other, from one detail to the other. His mind thinks in three dimensions. Even when he thinks linearly, he's thinking in three dimensions." **BI**

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{the goods}

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