

Linear Cabin
St. Germain, Wis.
Johnsen Schmalig Architects

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PHOTOS BY JOHN J. MACAULAY



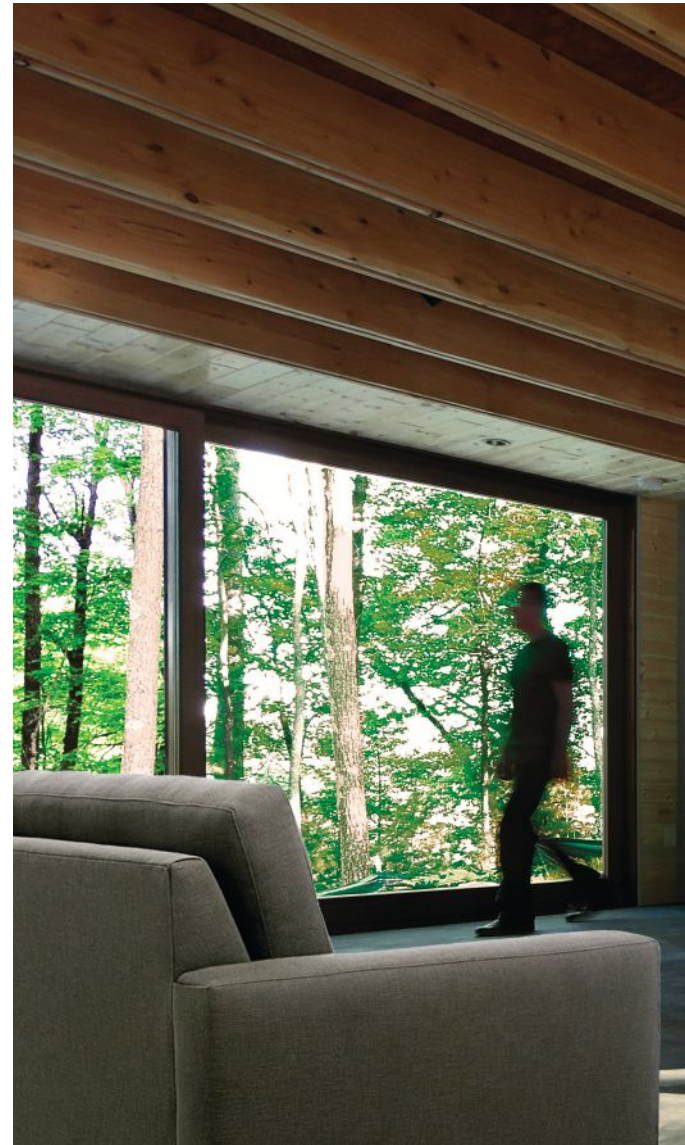
Call to mind a picture of the typical woodland cottage, and it's unlikely you'd imagine Johnsen Schmalig Architects' project in the northern Wisconsin woods: the 900-square-foot Linear Cabin, which won a 2016 AIA Small Projects Award, is a sparse yet striking arrangement of three rectilinear boxes separated by two voids and organized under a continuous, flat roof.

Starting with the utilitarian purpose of rural cabins—a step up from a tent, a place for sleeping and eating between hikes and fishing trips—the Milwaukee-based firm focused on a three-part program, with little room for amenities. The firm consciously avoided the sort of rural-modern affectations that define many of its neighbors. “We didn’t want it to be a formulaic, slap-some-wood-slats-on-it sort of project,” says principal Brian Johnsen, AIA, who co-founded the firm with Sebastian Schmalig, AIA. “We wanted to make something simple and efficient.”

The first volume provides storage for canoes, fishing gear, and other outdoor equipment; the second contains a kitchen, bathroom, laundry, and boiler; and the third has two bunk rooms for sleeping. The project is wrapped in regionally sourced black pine cladding outside and varnished cedar and knotty pine inside, creating a severe exterior and rustic, inviting interior. The floor is polished concrete throughout.

The spaces between the three identically sized volumes play multifunctional roles: one a carport, entryway, and covered terrace; the other a living area called the hearth room. Floor-to-ceiling, lift-slide glass doors expose the hearth room to the elements during warmer months, while a wood-burning stove helps offset harsh winter temperatures. This indoor-outdoor space accommodates most of the socializing and entertaining, and provides compelling views toward nearby Alma Lake on one side and down the gravel road that connects the house to the outside world on the other. “By pulling the volumes apart, we’ve provided voids that create a connection to the landscape,” says Johnsen, whose firm, founded in 2003, has developed a reputation for small, high-design residential projects marked by an attention to detail and carefully selected materials.

The building fits surprisingly well in its wooded context, a tribute to its understated character and sympathetic material palette. “There’s a battle we have on every project,” Johnsen says. “We see this beautiful lot, and we’re asked to place something foreign on it. We’re always torn, but it’s our job.” The result is a paradox, a strong statement that slips easily into natural surroundings. “It reminds me of stacks of firewood that people leave in the woods to dry,” Johnsen says. “It feels like you’re almost camping.”

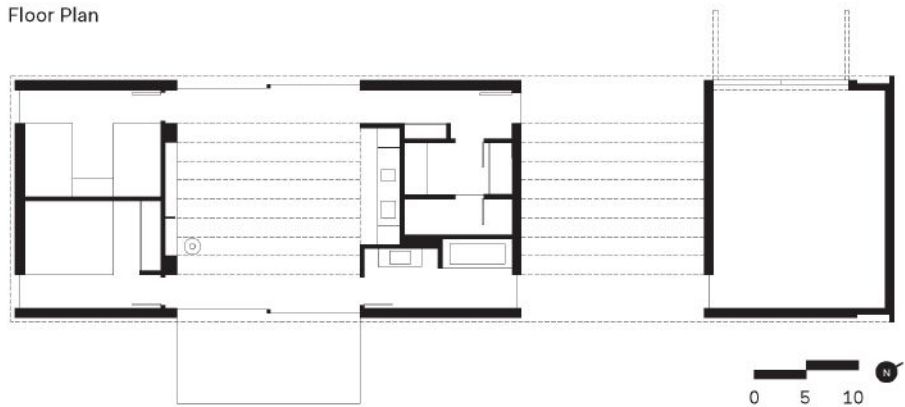


Opening Page: View of main living area from west

Above: Main living area, with view to bunk room beyond



Floor Plan





Above: Hearth room, with view of kitchen at right

Opposite: Bunk room



Project Credits

Project: Linear Cabin, St. Germain, Wis.

Client: Matt and Julie Sager

Architect/Interior Designer: Johnsen Schmalig Architects, Milwaukee · Brian Johnsen, AIA, Sebastian Schmalig, AIA (principals-in-charge); Matt Wendorf (project manager)

Structural Engineer: Core 4 Engineering

General Contractor: J&J Lee Construction

Size: 900 square feet

Cost: Withheld

View of storage and covered breezeway from north

