



Interior designer Richard McGeehan's country house in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The former farm building was constructed in 1906 and originally housed pigs. See Resources.



# *far afield*

*Wisconsin isn't the first place most  
New Yorkers think of for a country escape, but decorator  
Richard McGeehan has no trouble  
going the distance*

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**LEFT:** McGeehan outside Hog House. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** In the living area, a 1970s sofa, a '40s side chair upholstered in a Schumacher fabric, a '60s armchair covered in a fabric from Holly Hunt, and tree-trunk tables from Peridot Antiques; the walls and ceiling are stained pine, the painting once hung in a Paris church, and the wood numbers were used to post horse-race results. A 19th-century mahogany dresser in the bedroom. The kitchen cabinetry is custom made, the oven and cooktop are by Gaggenau, and the stainless steel countertops were manufactured by a restaurant supply company; the vent hood is by Miele, the dishwasher is by Bosch, and the sink fittings are by Arwa. See Resources.

**DESIGN PROFESSIONALS** have a knack for finding charm in the most unprepossessing buildings, and Richard McGeehan is no exception. The Manhattan-based decorator transformed what had literally been a pigpen into a getaway fit for even the most sophisticated city dweller. Naming it Hog House was simply showing off.

McGeehan first came across the house a quarter century ago while visiting friends in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin; the structure was situated on a 1,200-acre estate that had been in their family for generations. McGeehan immediately recognized the remote, pastoral setting as the ideal escape from his frenetic New York life. (His closest neighbors here, a herd of 44 cows, are unlikely to expect invitations for cocktails.) Built around 1906, the unpretentious farm building was outfitted for human habitation after World War II but had been left empty for nearly three decades before McGeehan came into possession of it three years ago. “It was a wreck,” he says with the confidence of the determined renovator.

McGeehan clearly has a predilection for no-frills architecture: His New York apartment is in a cement-and-glass high-rise designed in the 1960s by I. M. Pei, which the decorator describes as a “modernist envelope” for his collection of 19th-century furniture. He has decorated five residences for Robert Duffy, the business partner of fashion

designer Marc Jacobs, including a seaside retreat in Provincetown, Massachusetts, that is filled with an eclectic array of antiques and vintage pieces but is nevertheless bright and airy. The Shaker-like simplicity of Hog House—“it was really little more than a shed,” he says—appealed to his rigorous aesthetic. Another draw was the row of windows along the building’s 44-foot length, which provides stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

Inevitably, there were naysayers. McGeehan’s mother found it hard to understand why her son would wish to travel to a field in Wisconsin to play out his Petit Trianon fantasy. “Many of my friends find it difficult to imagine anything west of Pennsylvania,” he admits. McGeehan decided to visit his country residence five days each month, rather than the more typical weekend sortie. This arrangement, he says, allows him to reap the benefits of country life in “just long enough” spells.

McGeehan has no plans to alter or extend the wood exterior—which is painted a classic hunter green—or to replace the original “opposite of weathertight” windows, a feature that enchanted him at first sight. Instead, he has concentrated his efforts on transforming what was a dismayingly dismal interior. The walls were covered with faux-wood paneling, and the cement floors had been cracked and damaged by frost. Underneath the paneling, McGeehan discovered horizontal







An antique pendant light hangs above a Paul McCobb dining table, which is surrounded by 1950s French chairs; the painting is French, and the cement floor is stained blue. **FACING PAGE:** In the bedroom, the linens and bedside table are vintage, the bench is from the '50s, and the rug is by Dash & Albert; the Chinese vessel once belonged to Elsie de Wolfe. See Resources.







pine boards in a state of decay; he replaced them with new pine boards and stained the walls a pale, washed gray. Fortunately there were no pesky architectural features to preserve, and he was able to demolish internal walls and then approach the space as a blank canvas.

Redesigning the floor plan meant creating a deceptively roomy combined living-and-dining space, a neatly proportioned master bedroom, and a compact kitchen. "This is my experiment in living with just enough," says McGeehan. He admits that he constantly has to curb the decorator's tendency to acquire more possessions. "If I introduce anything new," he says, "something has to go." Even books are in short supply. "When I come here, I only bring *The New Yorker*," he says.

Despite the bucolic setting of Hog House, the decorator has resisted the pull of rustic country style. There are no hunting trophies, no checks or plaids, no ironic taxidermy or rustic geegaws. (His one concession is a wood-burning stove.) In fact, his eclectic mix of furniture, jewel-bright color schemes, and pigmented concrete floors would be equally at home in a metropolitan apartment. His delight in mixing things up is further evidenced by his choice of art. McGeehan, an expert trained at Sotheby's, salvaged two large French religious oil paintings from the collection of junk furnishings that came with the house, removing their ornate frames before hanging them. A scene of Judith beheading Holofernes was deemed unsuitable for the dining area, McGeehan says, but it works successfully in the living area.

Although his off-road address, unreliable cell phone service, and lack of guest accommodations might not bode well for his social life, McGeehan has made friends in the area. While he rarely has time to entertain or even cook at his apartment in Manhattan, he enjoys throwing parties at Hog House. Even his mother has become a convert, declaring on her first visit that she wished she never had to leave such an idyllic spot. In order to make it easier to host friends from New York, McGeehan plans to construct a guest annex. Perhaps a chicken coop might do the trick. ■