





Country Gothic

Graceful curves and arches unify and adorn a sprawling weekend house.

By PILAR VILADAS Photographs by SCOTT FRANCES



Previous pages:
The main house and
two guest houses,
seen through a
forest of scrub oak.

This page, above:
The living room's
22-foot ceiling
is painted wood.

This page, right: The
walls of the domed,
elliptical entry are
hand-rubbed plaster.

Opposite, top: In the
kitchen, free-standing
cabinets contain
storage on both sides.

Opposite, bottom:
Green ceramic and
glass tiles line the
master bathroom.

BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER, BUT IN VACATION ARCHITECTURE it is sometimes a necessity. When Mark Simon and James C. Childress of Centerbrook Architects undertook the design of this Northeast weekend retreat, their clients asked for a house that would accommodate gatherings of a very large extended family while retaining the cozy feeling of a summer cottage. So the architects turned what could have been a 15,000-square-foot behemoth into a more down to earth compound of smaller buildings, including two guest houses, a pool, a tennis pavilion and garages, in addition to the five-bedroom main house. To satisfy local height restrictions, these buildings had to lie rather low on the landscape (elegantly designed by the late Lester Collins), which is dominated by small-scale scrub oak, low-bush blueberry and other native plants.

To create a sense of intimacy, the architects arranged the main house and outbuildings along two curves that converge around an English-style courtyard. The bulk of each building was further reduced with curved, steeply pitched roofs that recall 19th-century shipbuilders' houses (which showed off their owners' prowess at bending large wooden boat ribs). Deep overhangs, reminiscent of Victorian cottages, shade tall arched windows with whimsically Gothic airs. Board-and-batten exteriors, rising from stone bases, give the compound a solid, weather-beaten feeling — despite its rather grand breadth — that would pass muster with even the most unassuming Yankee. ■



