



Jessica Gordon's 1,700-square-foot home in Bucksport is bright, spacious, climate-controlled, and fully handicap accessible. When a car accident left her unable to walk, she and her father, architect John Gordon, designed a home that enables her to live independently.

easy access, and the bathroom, which includes a 4-foot by 6-foot tile shower, features ample room at the toilet and sink.

Gordon's limited ability to regulate her own body heat would pose special problems when considering the heating systems. The floor contains in-slab radiant heat throughout and is covered with a laminate of a cherrywood appearance. The temperature is evenly controlled and the surface was chosen to provide both visual warmth and ease of wheelchair movement. Additional heat sources are a gas fireplace in the living room and a radiant-heat ceiling in the bedroom.

While John Gordon, a principal at Gordon Stanley Architecture in Bar Harbor, had been designing and building houses since 1982, this project was in a league of its



own. "I must say that this has been the most successful and rewarding project of my career to date, a culmination of my 25 years of studying and practicing architecture," he says. He and his daughter generously share what they learned in designing and building this home, including hosting visits from individuals and groups interested in adaptive design. Jessica Gordon also is active with Alpha One in Bangor, a statewide organization with a mission to provide independent living services for people with a wide

range of disabilities.

In 2006, this home was recognized as a finalist in the AIA Maine design awards. Today, it shares the grounds with an additional building, "the barn." Housing recreational and physical therapy equipment, as well as a sauna and greenhouse, the space has expanded the living space of the entire family while providing for Gordon's specific needs. An athlete all her life, this workout space helps her train for quad rugby, which she plays at various locations

throughout the winter.

Before the accident in 1999, Gordon could not wait to get out of Maine after graduating from high school. But through this process of becoming more independent, she says, she has come to realize the value of living in Maine. "People are more friendly, more in touch with reality and the things that really matter in life."

John Gordon is happy to have his oldest daughter both close by, and living independently in a home she loves.

Jessica's House

Father and daughter work together to realize the restorative nature of good design.

BY LESLIE BOWMAN



Most architects are driven by the dream to build something meaningful, a structure that will make a difference in the world. The Jessica Gordon house is just that. Designed by her father, John Gordon, the handsome, handicap-accessible home is sited on 18 acres of fields and woods adjacent to her parents' house in Bucksport. Gordon's home is the place she imagines living the rest of a full and productive life. Walking into this stunning 1,700-square-foot homestead, you quickly understand why.

The practical and required modifications for the home of a quadriplegic are so naturally designed into the structure, that a tour of its unique features is required to truly appreciate the adaptations. Gordon's injuries from a car accident in 1999 claimed the life of her dear friend and left her paralyzed from the mid chest down with limited use of her arms and hands.

(The spinal cord injury is technically classified as a C6/C7.)

Gordon, after more than eight weeks in intensive care and four months of rehabilitation, moved into a small addition her parents had built onto their home. While equipped with all the features for accessibility, it was tight. "Dad purposely designed the addition so that I would grow out of it," Gordon says. Still, she adds, "It was scary to think of living alone." In 2003, after a three-week intensive rehab program at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia, which Gordon attended with her younger sister, Elissa, she came back ready to give independent living a try.

During the home design process, father and daughter, architect and client, worked closely together to conceive, draft, model, and select all fixtures and detailing. Sited close to the main highway in Bucksport, the design team also wanted to make sure that the structure was configured to buffer traffic noise.

The resulting floor plan is organized around a courtyard and formed by three simple gabled structures. A garage stands on one end, living space is in the middle, and bedrooms are at the other end. The bedroom wing, which is tilted in plan by 10 degrees, takes advantage of sun and views. It also has a wide hallway with a 15-foot desk workspace so that Gordon can access her computers and video editing equipment. (She is a multimedia artist.)

In "Jessica's House," form is never sacrificed for function. Outside, a 26-foot-tall tower complements the home's uniquely sided and colored sections. This contemporary approach, which adds elements of fun and spirit to purely practical design considerations, is echoed inside with brightly colored walls and fanciful decoration.

Gordon loves to cook and entertain, and hosts family gatherings at least once a week. Her kitchen consists of back wall cabinets and a 30-inch-high countertop for cooking, food prep, and storage. The 34-inch island accommodates wheelchair access below the sink and next to the dishwasher. During the design process all appliances were carefully researched and selected with the help of Dunnetts of

Bangor, where the Gordons made numerous visits. All counter surfaces are granite, and all drawers and cabinets feature wide stainless steel pulls. A front-loading washer and dryer were raised for



LOWER LEFT: JESSICA GORDON; TOP: JOHN GORDON



TOP RIGHT AND LEFT: JOHN GORDON