

# Maine Home

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+ DESIGN

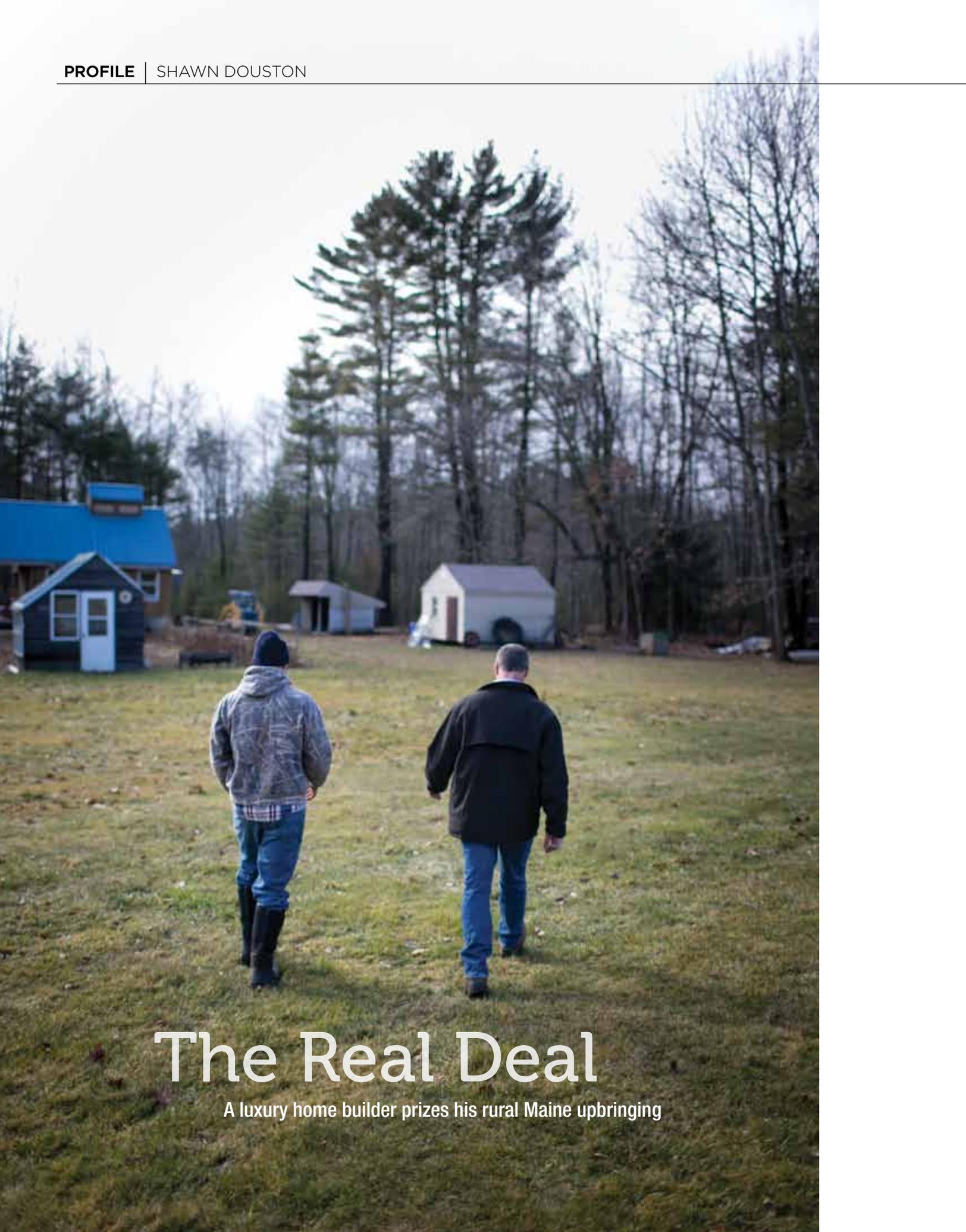


March \$5.95



## Elegant, Simple Lines

An artist's spare, Swedish-inspired home on Deer Isle's Wing Cove



# The Real Deal

A luxury home builder prizes his rural Maine upbringing



Shawn Doustou and his son Logan head out to the sugar shack on their property in Arundel (opposite).

Doustou relaxes on the gracious front porch of a Kings Highway house his company completed in 2012 (above, left).

A folk art painting of Doustou's family farm in Benedicta hangs in his conference room (above, right).

The late November sky is flint gray and the air smells like snow as I turn onto Route 111 and head west through Biddeford, past the recent eruption of big-box stores and massive mall signs. As I cross the town line into Arundel, the landscape calms into small wood-frame buildings, a patchwork of winter lawns, and driveways full of family cars and work trucks.

It is along this stretch of Alfred Road that owner Shawn Doustou headquarters his company, Doustou Construction, in a white split-level office building shared with Changes Hair Design, which is run by his wife, Gail. As I climb the front steps, the basement window offers a glimpse of Gail's salon clients flipping through magazines while getting their foil highlights and haircuts.

Doustou, a fit 50-year-old, steps out of his office extending a hand. With aviator glasses and a slightly receding hairline, he has an easy and affable manner, a genuine grin. In the company's comfortable conference room, a visitor is immediately drawn to the unusual wall art: a Grandma Moses-style landscape of a storybook white farmhouse and barn nestled in the shadow of Mount Katahdin—all painted on an oversized circular-saw blade. Commissioned from Stacyville artist Sheryl Thompson, the scene depicts Doustou's grandfather's dairy and potato farm in Benedicta, a remote farming community between Millinocket and Houlton where Doustou, who is one of seven children, grew up working on the farm together with a family of 10 cousins. As an intriguing aside, Doustou tells me Benedicta is noteworthy as the site the Catholic church originally contemplated for the establishment of College of the Holy Cross. (Founders evidently yielded to the siren song of Worcester, Massachusetts.)

Life on the farm planted Doustou's roots deep in Maine soil. He, Gail, and their three sons—Logan (22), Garth (20), and Blake

(15)—still relish time spent at the Benedicta homestead, where Doustou's aunt now resides. Family reunions there can draw several hundred relations from around the globe to a town where the year-round population is about 300 residents. Doustou speaks warmly of his rural Maine background, his role models, and the early influences that led him to become one of southern Maine's most sought-after custom builders.

Professionally trained at Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute (now Northern Maine Community College) as a carpenter and mason, Doustou credits his early career direction both to his father-in-law, who engaged him in an ambitious timber renovation of a historic log-cabin estate on New York's Long Island, and to mentoring in the 1980s from leaders at the National Association of Home Builders. "It was never competitive," Doustou recalls, "always about sharing knowledge, partnering, and collaborating with other builders and tradesmen." It is that same spirit of openness and trust that Doustou brings to his own home-building and light-commercial construction business, established 27 years ago in Arundel. Doustou says Arundel's small-town feel is reminiscent of Benedicta. "While the surrounding urban areas have changed dramatically, here you can still find an agricultural store and a meat market."

With few exceptions, the Doustou Construction portfolio is contained within the geographic area around Arundel, the Kennebunks, and Biddeford. Not wandering too far afield enables the staff to maintain hands-on control of projects and lets Doustou drop in on multiple sites in a day's work. Doustou apologizes for his muddy truck as we climb in to take a quick tour. I tell him I spent years of a real-estate-development career riding around to site inspections with contractors in big trucks, and couldn't



A Goose Rocks Beach house designed by architect John Einsiedler (far left).

This seaside-themed interior (above, left) is a collaboration between frequent Douston partners Hurlbutt Designs of Kennebunk and architect Brian J. Beaudette.

Veteran carpenter Herb Goulden on the jobsite of a new condominium home at Lexington Meadows in Kennebunk (above, right).

Sugar maples and beehives on Douston's property produce the sweet stuff for Douston Maple and Honey (left).

be happier. You can't help feeling safe with these capable guys, wheeling around on terrible roads in terrible weather, heat blasting, the ubiquitous jumble of jackets, coffee mugs, and tape measures shifting from side to side in the back.

Our tour of Douston Construction projects takes us through an inviting new neighborhood of freestanding condominium homes under construction on Kennebunk's Mousam River, past classic shingle cottages in Kennebunkport and stunning oceanfront homes with turrets and wraparound porches on Goose Rocks Beach. Striking as these handsome structures are, I'm equally impressed that, everywhere we go, Douston seems to know people, greeting them by name as they walk down the sidewalk or pull out of a driveway. We wave to a former jobsite super. We pause on a cliff road to chat with a fellow who wants Douston to build his new home after he sells his current one. People compliment his latest projects or send regards to his crew and staff, which include a brother and two cousins. The average Douston employee has clocked more than 12 years with the company. In fact, Douston and his construction team seem less like an area business than members of some extended family that encompasses several towns.

With three sons growing up in Arundel, Douston was an enthusiastic Little League booster and an active scout leader for 10 years. He still hosts an outpost camping event for the Boy Scouts on his land. The firm is a regular participant in Habitat for Humanity home building, the Blitz Build for Special Olympics, the Kennebunk Senior Center's annual Coastal Kitchen Tour, and various other community efforts. Douston insists the goodwill goes both ways. "Engaging with other people on these projects

is rewarding on so many levels. It carries over to your work and your personal life, especially involvement with young men and women you see trying new things and gaining skills you know they'll take with them into their adult lives. It's also just fun," he admits with his trademark grin.

On the rare occasion Douston finds free time, he and his family head for their camp in Crystal to go snowmobiling or four-wheeling. Douston sketches landscapes and creates wood-burning crafts using wood he harvests from his properties. He and Garth are building a mini mobile house for Garth to live in while he oversees the Community Supported Agriculture program at Rogers Farm at the University of Maine-Orono. Recently Douston and his sons started tapping trees at their home in Arundel to produce maple syrup; they have a small bee and honey operation they call Douston Maple and Honey. Douston rolls his eyes when I ask if this is his next corporate venture. Like any dad, he wants to encourage his kids' endeavors, but there are only so many hours in a day and a business to run.

Maybe someday Douston and Gail will get around to the travel they dream about. But right now, Douston finds his work deeply satisfying and is committed to maintaining his firm's enviable position as one of southern Maine's premiere home builders. With his family around him, a community he loves, abiding ties to the farm of his childhood, and a growing roster of devoted clients, Shawn Douston is, by all accounts, that most valued of Maine's natural resources: he's the real deal. **MH+D**

*For more information, see Resources on page 98.*

# Maine Home +DESIGN

75 Market Street

Suite 203

207-772-3373

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