

Ohara Davies-Gaetano Delivers European Elegance to Big Sky Country

Old West meets Old World in this rugged-yet-sumptuous lake house on the shore of Montana's Flathead Lake.

by Vicky Lowry



For the past eight years, [Ohara Davies-Gaetano](#) has split her time between Southern California, where her interior design practice is based, and northwestern Montana, where she and her husband and their young son enjoy the outdoor life on a 50-acre property on Flathead Lake. "Our hearts and souls are there," Davies-Gaetano says of the latter.

So, when a Dallas couple asked her a few years ago to handle the interiors of their own [Montana residence](#), under construction on the shore of the 30-mile-long lake, she readily accepted the commission. Their vision, however, initially caused her concern. "They wanted Montana-meets-Lake-Como, and my first thought was, 'Oh, this could go really wrong,' " Davies-Gaetano recalls with a laugh.



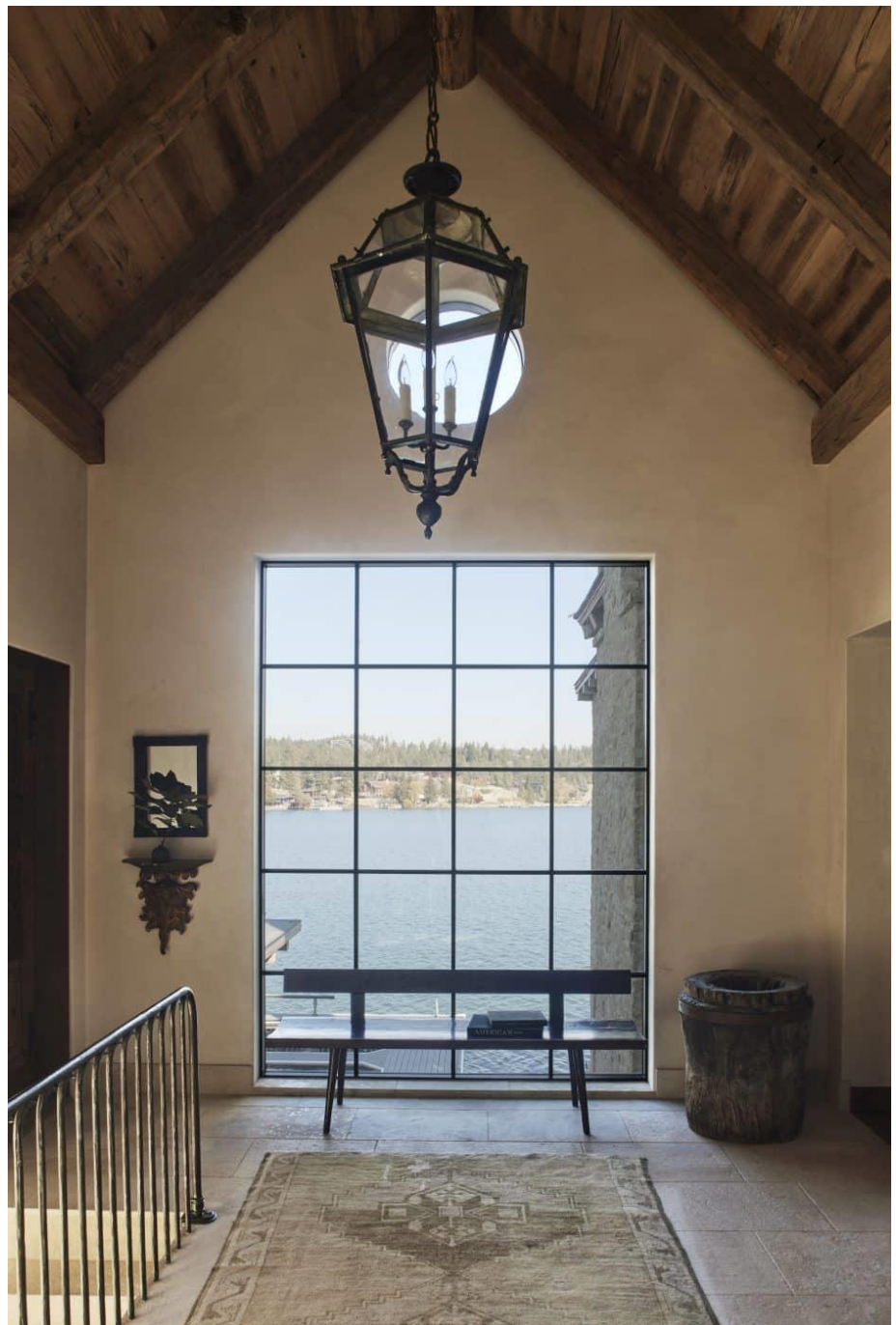
Photo by Lisa Romerein

[Ohara Davies-Gaetano](#) designed the interiors of a 9,000-square-foot house on Montana's Flathead Lake, deploying her signature European sophistication and rough-hewn materials (portrait by Lisa Romerein). Top: In the great room, a custom-made sofa upholstered in a [Colefax and Fowler](#) linen mingles with a cerused-oak lounge chair from 1stDibs attributed to [René Gabriel](#). The [18TH-CENTURY FIREPLACE](#) is flanked by an [ANTIQU CHEST](#) and a [17TH-CENTURY OAK TRUNK](#); the painting by Nick Gaetano, Davies-Gaetano's father, swings open to reveal a TV.

It didn't go wrong, not in the least — because Davies-Gaetano has built a career on imbuing homes, especially newly constructed ones, with depth and soul. In the expressive interiors she conceives, her innately stylish eye is immediately apparent in their use of reclaimed materials, rough-hewn textures, subdued earthy hues and mostly European antiques that seem basked in warmth and light.

Davies-Gaetano never formally studied the decorative arts, but creativity and an artistic aesthetic are in her DNA. Her father is a painter, her mother a weaver. She spent the first 14 years of her life in New York City before the family moved to rural North Carolina. Fun fact: She got her name from a meat-packing truck emblazoned with the words O'Hara Wholesale Meats that had caught her father's eye.

A tall iron-framed window in the entry offers a pictorial view of the lake. The 1940s [Oushak rug](#) and 19th-century [French bronze lantern](#) are both from 1stDibs. Davies-Gaetano designed the bench.



In her 20s, she opened a home-furnishings business with her husband in Dallas. As neither of them proved particularly interested in retail, Davies-Gaetano started picking up small interior design projects — decorating a room here and there. She launched a full-scale design studio in California in 2009.

Since then, Davies-Gaetano has created incandescent interiors in stylish retreats up and down the Pacific coast, in the Rocky Mountains and the Caribbean and along Florida's Atlantic shore. In 2018, she won the Andrew Martin Interior Designer of the Year Award — known as the Oscars of the interior design world.



Nature reigns in the spacious kitchen, which includes a custom walnut-slab table that seats at least eight and a chandelier bursting with metal leaves.

All her projects are replete with eye-pleasing materials and carefully considered details.

"I've made it my mission to create authentic, soulful design in a bespoke manner," she says. "We ask our clients lots of questions: 'What can we do so that every aspect of the design enhances the experience?' 'What does it sound like when you are moving through the house?' 'Do you like the lights on really bright, as that affects the surface of the walls?' The materials are integral to what we create and how people connect to the spaces. How we feel things emotionally and physically in our homes is incredibly important."



Left: Between the great room and the kitchen, a small vignette includes a squat vintage chair, an antique chest of drawers from [Obsolete](#) and a mirror, vase and pedestal sourced by the designer. Right: A corner rotunda facing the sunset boasts a circular honed-wood bar with a copper countertop, Paula Rosales stools, sconces from [Lumfardo Luminaires](#), a chandelier from Obsolete, a walnut ceiling and a wall of windows.

The owners of the 9,000-square-foot, five-bedroom Montana lake house wanted it to feel connected to the landscape, and to be livable, comfortable and fun, especially when filled with family and friends. Surfaces needed to be sturdy. Nothing should feel precious.

With this in mind, Davies-Gaetano introduced durable architectural elements outside and in. Some, like the weathered-wood beams for the ceilings, are Old West, but the majority have old-world origins, including the 18th-century rubble stone and reclaimed bricks used for the portico and loggias and the [French plaster](#) stucco on the walls. All the flooring is 18th-century [reclaimed oak](#) sourced in Europe, and most of the [antique bedroom doors](#) are French and Italian.



An antique French mirror and a rustic 18th-century [Swedish sideboard](#) grace this powder room.

Davies-Gaetano visits Europe several times a year, not only to hunt for such finds but also to seek inspiration — “for my own need of being enlightened and instilled with a drive to create something authentic,” she says.

The house's rooms are filled with genuine treasures, even the smallest spaces, such as a powder room that's graced with an ornate antique French mirror and a rustic 18th-century [Swedish sideboard](#) from 1stDibs. The entry features two other 1stDibs discoveries: a 1940s [Oushak rug](#) and a 19th-century [French bronze lantern](#).



The rugged bunk room sleeps four, while a vintage stool and 1950s rope chair make it feel homey.

In the great room, which is outfitted in subdued hues that reflect the natural world seen through iron-framed glass doors overlooking the lake, a custom-made sofa upholstered in a [Colefax and Fowler](#) linen joins a cerused-[oak lounge chair](#) from 1stDibs attributed to the French 20th-century decorative artist [René Gabriel](#).

A tranquil painting by Nick Gaetano, Davies-Gaetano's father, swings open on piano hinges to reveal a TV. The [18th-century fireplace](#) is flanked by an [antique chest](#) from [Horsch & Huebscher](#) and a [17th-century oak trunk](#).



Left: In the primary bedroom are 18th-century [Italian painted doors](#), a tapestry from [Seref Ozen Tribal Rugs and Textiles](#) and a sculptural table lamp. Right: This cabana includes a [17th-century Spanish writing table](#), a Dear Keaton chair, a 1970s [Swedish pine stool](#) and a Diego Giacometti [tête de femme](#)-style floor lamp (the last two items from 1stDibs), plus [Schumacher](#) curtains.

The primary suite really does look as if it could be ensconced in a villa perched above Lake Como, thanks to timeless plaster walls and 18th-century [Italian painted doors](#) that Davies-Gaetano retrofitted for the space.

The simple furnishings include a table lamp from Lucca Antiques and a tapestry from [Seref Ozen Tribal Rugs and Textiles](#).



Davies-Gaetano custom designed the hefty table on the lakeside terrace. The English [verdigris copper lanterns](#) came from 1stDibs.

The [bar](#), situated in a glass-wrapped, walnut-domed rotunda, is the cornerstone of the house when the sun sets. Davies-Gaetano fashioned a gleaming copper counter and ringed it with comfy stools by Paula Rosales that she covered in a verdant Jerry Pair leather. After all, entertainment of a high order is earned after a day of hiking, fishing and outdoor play in Big Sky country.

“The family opens all the doors, the kids are jumping on sofas, the bar gets danced on — you name it,” says Davies-Gaetano. “The house has fun.”