



ELEVEN'S Heaven

Former
Detroit Tiger
Bill Freehan's
Walloon Lake
getaway

By Dave Scropo
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Flash back: October 10, 1968. Seventh game of the World Series: Detroit Tigers vs. St. Louis Cardinals. The Tigers have evened the series at three after a three-one deficit against the world champs. Cards pitcher Bob Gibson's the winner of two by a combined score of 14-1.

Gib's back on the mound in St. Louis. Still scoreless in the seventh. Twenty of 21 Tigers go down. Then a lapse—three runs on four hits. Two frames later, Tigers add another. Score 4-0.

Last at-bat for the Cards. Two outs and McCarver at the plate. Lolich with the pitch ...

A pop fly on the infield. Freehan tips off his mask and ... squeezes it for the final out. A bear hug for Lolich.

The image is seared into the memories of Tigers fans everywhere.

Now, 28 years after one of Detroit's finest sports moments, the players from the final at-bat are settled into their lives after baseball.

Tim McCarver, a steady and dependable catcher who bounced around the bigs, does play-by-play for CBS Sports. Mickey Lolich, the MVP of the '68 Series, owns a

doughnut shop in Lake Orion. And 15-year Tiger catcher Bill Freehan, a devot-

ed outdoorsman and former coach of the University of Michigan baseball team, is most at home at his year-round getaway in Northern Michigan.

For Freehan, his three-level, 4,300-square-foot log chalet on 190 feet of sandy Walloon Lake frontage is the perfect place to retreat after a long and distinguished career in the majors. A place where he and his wife, Pat, have collaborated with their builder to create 19 custom-built rooms to meet their needs for space and privacy. And a place that has come together with painstaking attention to detail and the unmistakable touches of Up North artisans.

"My Dad is not a big city guy," says Cathy Jo, the youngest of the Freehans' three daughters. "He always liked to get away."

For Bill, the urge to get away is a likely byproduct of a career in the limelight. He was an All Star in 11 of his 15 years and ranks among Tiger career leaders in home runs (ninth), games played (10th) and at-bats (10th). Behind the plate, a dependable mitt and sure hands won him five straight Golden Glove awards in the late '60s. His most unusual claim to fame: a league record for being hit by a pitch—24 times in one season.

By 1976, when 1,774 games had taken their toll, Bill hung up his spikes. Moving on to a second career, he worked in the auto industry as a manufacturers representative. Among Detroiters he remained a familiar face doing TV commercials for a garage-door company.

On the home front, Bill and his wife, Pat, and daughters Corey, Kelley and Cathy Jo were settled year-round in Bloomfield Hills but summered in the North—first at a getaway near Lewiston and then at a





LEFT: To create stool legs out of baseball bats, the Freehans ordered from Louisville Slugger. On the island, the tile and its unique glaze are the work of Sweetwater Pottery of Branch and potter Paul Flickinger.

BELOW: Bill and Pat Freehan kneeling behind home.

RIGHT: The Freehans' trilevel retreat perches 40 feet above Walloon's emerald waters. Helping the cedar home blend into its wooded surroundings, an all-but-transparent Dutch stain called Sikkens lends a slight tint to the wood while letting natural color come through.

Boyne City condo on Lake Charlevoix. Even Up North, his face was a familiar one—so familiar that fans begged autographs when he and the family were dining out. “We liked the proximity to town,” says Cathy Jo. “But we wanted more privacy.”

The Freehans would find it in early winter 1989 on a Walloon Lake hillside cloaked with birch, beech, maple and cedars. “We were visiting a couple doors down, and Bill was out cross-country skiing,” Pat says.

“We always felt we were going to have a log home on Walloon Lake,” Pat says. “But I thought it was far into the future.”

“He saw a for-sale sign down on the lake that was covered with snow. He said, ‘I think there’s a lot for sale.’ It was the end of January, and sure enough, February 14 was the day we signed.”

To Pat and Bill, Walloon seemed their destiny. “We always felt we were going to have a log home on Walloon Lake,” Pat adds. “But I thought it was far into the future.”

The three-level cedar home was finished that fall, but it would be a while before they could visit as much as they liked. By spring Bill was coaching baseball at the University of Michigan, where he had played two years before the Tigers drafted him. “My predecessor was fired,” Bill says. “Bo [Schembechler] was the AD at that time, and I called to find out what hap-

pened.” When one thing led to another, Bill found himself in charge of a team hampered by restrictions stemming from recruiting violations. Nevertheless, he led the Wolverines to a 166-167-1 record over five years before stepping down last summer.

Freed of the time-consuming constraints of recruiting and a 50-game spring schedule, the Freehans now have plenty of time to make the most of their Up North getaway. It is three minutes by boat (20 minutes by car) from the golf course, close to an extensive network of snowmobile trails and near excellent deer hunting—all favorites of Bill’s.

When looking to create the perfect home base for their new sports schedule, the Freehans took time weighing their options. “They’d stopped by Town & Country once a year every year,” says Steve Biggs, president of the Petoskey-based log home company. “We were baseball fans and were thrilled to have them in.”

The Freehans were drawn to Town & Country’s weather-tight construction. Insulated wall panels and hand-hewn white cedar logs are fitted tightly, lined with two inches of insulation and sealed with polyurethane. “Bill and I really liked the log look and its energy-efficiency,” Pat says. “We’ve spent the night with people where the snow comes through the chinking in a real log house.”

Not long after the Freehans decided to go with a cedar home, the collaboration produced a first for Town & Country. When the Freehans toured a model home, the master bedroom seemed small. That’s why they







came up with the idea for a hexagonal bay window to extend the room—a feature Town & Country has since added to its repertoire of options. “They kind of invented it for us,” says Town & Country’s Biggs. “It’s not on our model and Pat and Bill’s is the first one we did.”

Such innovation didn’t stop indoors. The Freehans also devised, with the help of Town & Country, a clever way to support the second-floor decking. Rather than choosing standard lumber as post supports, the Freehans thought to prop up the deck with cedar trunks that were stripped of branches and bark, shipped from the Upper Peninsula and embedded in the earth with

home. On the basement walls are a few frames holding World Series tickets and team photos. Upstairs in the kitchen, Bill’s own Louisville Slugger baseball bats are the legs for stools. In the adjoining family room, the most prominent display is the wooden mantel, which is carved with the inscription “Eleven’s Heaven,” a reference to Bill’s number during his playing days. The mantel, inlaid with bats and baseballs and the Detroit logo, was a three-week undertaking for German-born carver Pietro Vinotti, who works through Town & Country.

Above the mantel hangs a watercolor of the catcher standing at home plate expecting a throw. A West Coast artist based the work on a late ’60s *Sports Illustrated* cover taken when the Tigers played the Oakland As. “It was up in a restaurant in San Francisco,” Bill says. “It’s nice now, but I sort of voted against putting it up.”

“He didn’t want to have it hanging there,” Pat says, “but I thought it would be perfect since we had that mantel.”

Bill sighs. “My family outvoted me again.”

When decorating, Bill did his best not to let the family outvote him. “We have three daughters, and he said we weren’t going to have peach carpeting like we have down home,” Pat says. “So he likes the colors—he chose green.”

Working with Puff’s of Petoskey, Pat and Bill selected a combination of textured Berber and teal wall-to-wall carpeting for the basement and main floors. A basement bedroom is decorated with a Navajo rug Bill

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roots intact. “They didn’t want people looking into a bunch of pressure-treated four-by-fours,” Biggs says. “This way you feel like you’re looking into the woods.”

It’s just one way the Freehans were looking out for their guests. Another is by designing a bathroom for each of five bedrooms. “Wherever we went as guests, we started collecting things in our brain that we liked,” Pat says. “We always liked to have a bathroom we didn’t have to share.”

Although the Freehans went all out for their guests, when decorating they chose to downplay baseball memorabilia—a theme you might expect to dominate their

found in Sedona, Arizona, and a painting by Bev Doolittle, which he bought after former Tiger catcher Lance Parrish gave him a book about the artist and her works.

Bill's influence carried over to the kitchen, where the Freehans turned to a number of local artists. An island is topped with red earthenware terra cotta tiles—the handiwork of Ann Arbor potter Paul Flickinger, formerly of Sweetwater Pottery in Branch, near Ludington. Flickinger painted ducks, a favorite of Bill's, into

round deco tiles inlaid into the terra cotta squares as well as cattails into the basin of a vegetable sink. For the cupboards, the Freehans sought out Boyne Falls craftsman Fred Denise, who built pine cabinets with raised-paneled doors and white birch sides. Into the upper cabinets the couple set nine stained-glass panels etched with an array of Michigan songbirds. The intricate glass is the creation of former Charlevoix-area artist Mary Teesdale.

Denise's and Flickinger's works are evident around the house. In the master bedroom, Denise built a white cedar log headboard that mirrors the shape of the hexagonal bay window and matches the home's cedar railings. In the master bath, Flickinger painted a floral design of dogwood blossoms that meander from the countertop into the sink. Denise also added his signature to the bath by fashioning the vanity out of birch. His other works include the main-floor entertainment center and third-floor bunk beds for the grandchildren.

But up on the third floor, signs of Bill's influence come to a halt. ("Now let's go upstairs to the girls' part," Pat says.) Here, wicker and florals make a soft state-



ment in one of two guest bedrooms. To complement ecru-colored cedar paneling, two bent-twig double beds are draped with comforters in a cabbage rose floral pattern. Another smaller room offers a comfortable and cozy retreat with a Provençal-pattern bedspread covering a double bed, chairs with coordinating pillows and a wooden double dresser with a wicker inlay. Down the hall a smaller room for the grandchildren is outfitted with Denise's bunk beds and an antique log crib from Levering Antiques.

A final touch by a local craftsman is back on the main floor. Near the front entry hangs a Pietro Vinotti wood carving of St. Florian on a horse, with the view of the house from the lake carved into the statue. It was a gift from Steve Biggs. "We Catholics kind of stretch things," Pat says, laughing. "We came up with a patron saint for wooden homes."

If St. Florian is watching over the Freehans, surely he's smiling down on them on a warm Sunday evening in summertime. The sun's rays are slanting through the leafy canopy, the lake sparkling through the trees.

The weekend company is on the road headed home, and Pat and Bill hop into their Corvette convertible and drive. They run up to Muggie's, a drive-in roadside eatery in Alanson, where they pop an Elvis tune into the jukebox. They've postponed cleaning and laundry. They've got the urge and the freedom to get away. "That's what we do," Pat says, "when everybody's left." T

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LEFT: To match the home's railings, Boyne Falls craftsman Fred Denise built a cedar log headboard for the master bedroom.

ABOVE: When choosing accessories for the patio, the Freehans selected wicker-like furniture from Lloyd Flanders Industries of Menominee, which wraps a woven fiber around a non-corrosive metal core.

RIGHT: In the master bath, Sweetwater Pottery hand-painted trellises of dogwood blossoms.

