

dwellings

Full Circle

**A flower-shaped house in Massachusetts finds a family living under the same roof—
make that roofs—again.**

TEXT BY

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PHOTOS BY | [@WANBAAN](#)

Iwan Baan



Doug and Lara Holtz tapped New York architect Andrew Heid to design a weekend home on a scenic family plot in the Berkshires. “We wanted something that was sympathetic to the views and nature,” says Lara. The result is an artfully arranged house that looks out on open fields (protected by a land trust) and the rolling landscape beyond. “The only downside is that the area is farmed, so we get manure smells,” Doug jokes.

It's late October in Western Massachusetts and the countryside bears all the hallmarks of the season: browning leaves, flapping Halloween decorations, and yard signs asserting either political allegiances or opposition to a proposed marijuana farm. A thick blanket of rain has smudged out the Berkshire Hills, and what remains of the landscape is a gray smear in the windshield wipers.

Stepping into the Holtz family residence—a low-slung house a few miles from Great Barrington—just might make you forget what's going on outside. Here, after casting aside your umbrella and passing along a hallway, the gloom gives way to lofty timber beams, a crackling wood stove, and misty views in every direction. In the open-plan dining area, a breakfast of soft-boiled eggs and toast is being cleared away.



Heid kept the interiors largely raw, which left Lara, Doug, and their interior designer friend, Elaine O'Dwyer, to fill in the blanks with a mix of modern furnishings and family treasures. The open-plan kitchen is a particular point of pride for Lara, who designed every detail with a local carpenter, from the textured zellige tile to the spice drawers.

“You don’t really get a sense of what it’s like inside from the outside,” says Lara Holtz, who, along with her husband, Doug, built this place as a weekend retreat on a shared family property. “It’s a bit like a Tardis,” she adds.

Even if the *Dr. Who* reference is lost on you (Lara is from the U.K.), this kind of spatial wizardry has become the 3,600-square-foot home’s biggest asset as the Holtzes and their children, Charlie, Izzy, and Isaac (ages 25, 22, and 16), as well as Charlie’s girlfriend, Saskia Randle, have been holed up here since March, when most of the Northeast went on coronavirus lockdown. And despite the surrealness of being reunited under the same roof for the first time in years, the Holtz clan is finding that their weekend house and family unit are both operating in surprising new ways.





The couple's two sons, Isaac and Charlie, play music with Charlie's girlfriend, Saskia Randle, in the living room, where an Isamu Noguchi Akari lantern hangs above a Cloud sectional from RH Modern.

“For the first three months of the pandemic, we hiked every day—rain or shine or snow.”

DOUG HOLTZ, RESIDENT



At night, the family often gathers around the rustic stone fire pit.

The Flower House—so named for its ring of overlapping, petal-like roofs—is the handiwork of New York firm No Architecture, founded by Andrew Heid. Doug and Lara had been looking to build a weekend home next to Doug's parents' own Berkshire retreat—a charming reconstructed barn made from 18th-century timber beams—for some time, in order to be close to the kids' paternal grandparents and to host Lara's parents when they visit from the U.K.





The house comprises six pavilions—five enclosed living spaces and an open-air entryway—arranged in a ring. The overlapping roofs rest on structural timber window frames, allowing for column-free views through the interior. The landscape, designed by horticulturist Patrick Cullina, will evoke both a forest and an alpine meadow when fully grown, according to Heid. It also leaves room for one of the family's new hobbies: vegetable gardening.

The stunning landscape made for the obvious starting point, as did the architect and client's mutual love of Japanese design. Doug, who works as an intellectual property lawyer for such companies as Toshiba and Casio, has been traveling to Japan for the last three decades, bringing back an appreciation for the country's culture and cuisine to his family. Heid, meanwhile, learned to value Japanese aesthetics through his mom, who was raised in Hawaii, where Japanese design has long held a strong influence. That reverence carries over to his architecture. "I was very influenced by [SANAA founders] Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, who lectured at Princeton when I was there," says Heid, "and this idea of really reducing architecture to the absolute minimum."



Thanks to open interiors, there are clear sight lines through the landscaped courtyard, into the living spaces, and out to the surrounding scenery. “I really let the landscape and the activities inside be the focus,” Heid says.

A lightness pervades the completed building. Its six overlapping pavilions—one is the large, open entryway—are oriented around a hexagonal courtyard filled with silver birch saplings. To allow seamless circulation and provide airy, column-free interiors, the entire house is supported by load-bearing window frames and stabilized by structural cores that enclose bathrooms and storage. The home follows a gradual slope, giving you a subtle sense of burrowing into the earth as you meander clockwise along the two bedroom pavilions, the living area, the open kitchen, and, finally, the main bedroom suite.

“We realized that having a circular house allowed us to take advantage of all of the views, as well as the topography and the solar exposure to the south.”

ANDREW HEID, ARCHITECT

The team broke ground in 2015, but the desired 360-degree views posed one of the project's biggest headaches. The German company in charge of the high-performance glass went bankrupt, leaving the manufacturer with a disconnected phone line and Heid with zero windows. He eventually found a Canadian company to finish the job, but the point of contact there tragically died mid-project. "Things went from bad to worse," Heid says. The windows were finally installed, but the lack of continuity around their specifications left some panes cracked. Despite the snafus, the project adheres to rigorous energy standards, relying on the highly insulated envelope and glazing, plus a ground-source heat pump, to achieve Massachusetts's highest energy rating, enabling the Holtzes to recoup \$10,000 through incentives.

Hunkering down in this unconventional house has made the Holtz family an even tighter unit. In the last few months, they have become avid hikers, cyclists, gardeners, and *Settlers of Catan* enthusiasts. Isaac, the youngest, even started an iced coffee delivery business, biking orders down country roads to neighbors. In the mornings, they'll watch the sunrise, do yoga, or have breakfast in the courtyard. Come evening, they'll invite the grandparents over for a meal, and then the boys will play their guitars for sing-alongs around the fire.

The family, formerly scattered, has embraced the unplanned togetherness. "There's just something about being here—we sit around the table with cups of tea and cake and play Bananagrams and Scrabble," says Lara, with a tinge of happy disbelief. "Sometimes we look around at each other and are like, 'Who *are* we?'"





Concrete walls provide privacy in the main bathroom, where the Holtzes installed a deep hinoki cypress soaking tub.



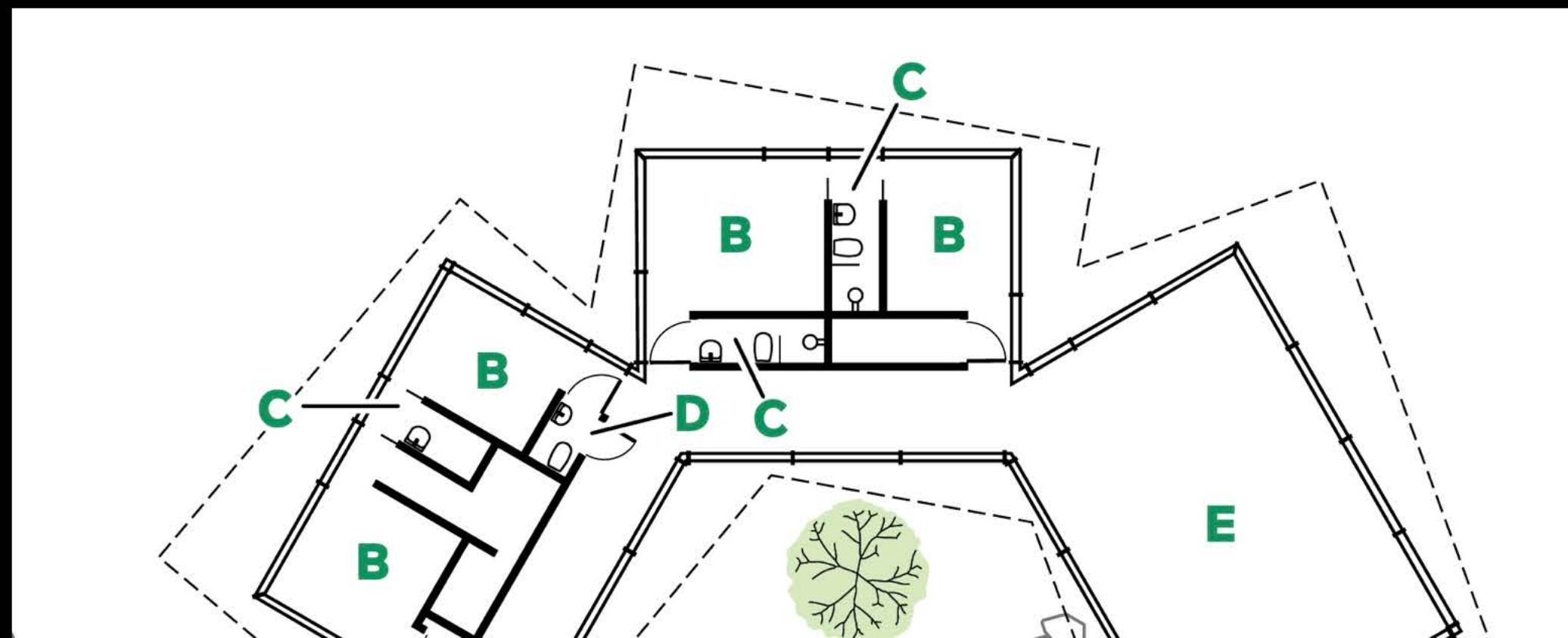
A guestroom has become Doug's remote office for the duration of the pandemic.

Flower House

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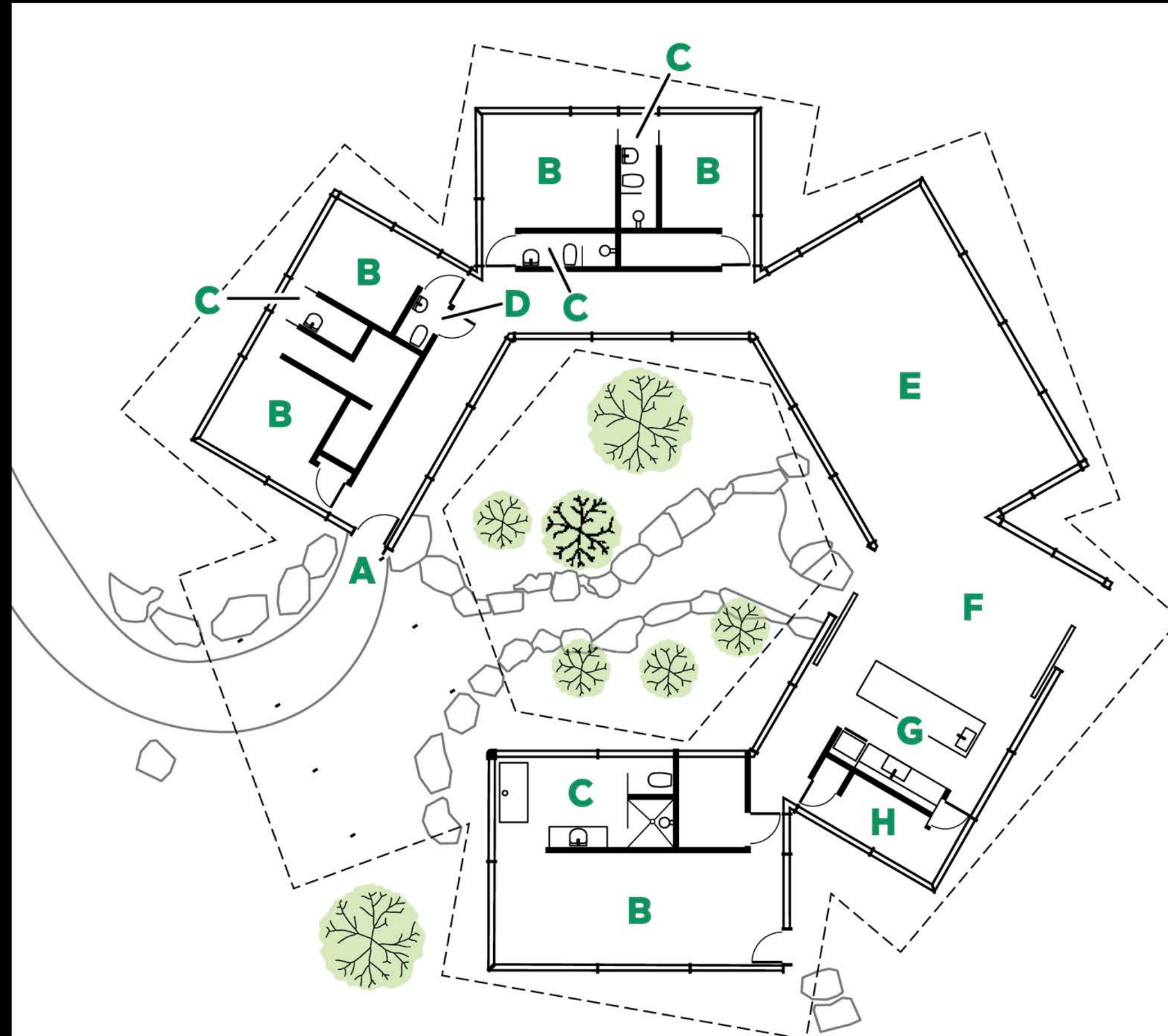
ARCHITECT **No Architecture**

LOCATION **Egremont, Massachusetts**



Flower House

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ARCHITECT **No Architecture**LOCATION **Egremont, Massachusetts**

A. Entrance

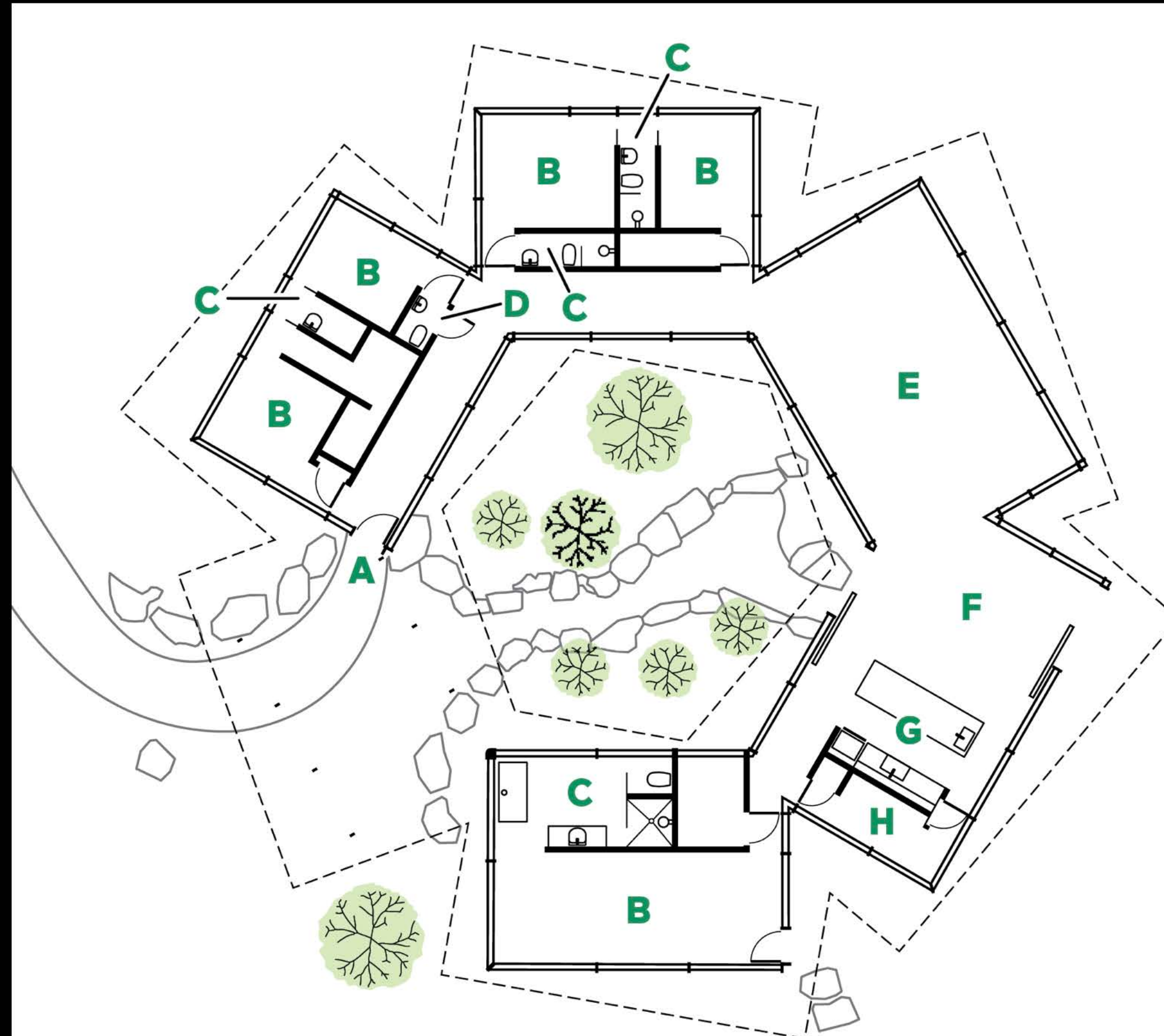
B. Bedroom

C. Bathroom

D. Powder Room

E. Living Area

LOCATION Egremont, Massachusetts



- A. Entrance
- B. Bedroom
- C. Bathroom
- D. Powder Room
- E. Living Area
- F. Dining Area
- G. Kitchen
- H. Pantry



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