

September/October 2012

# Residential Architect

A Magazine of The American Institute of Architects







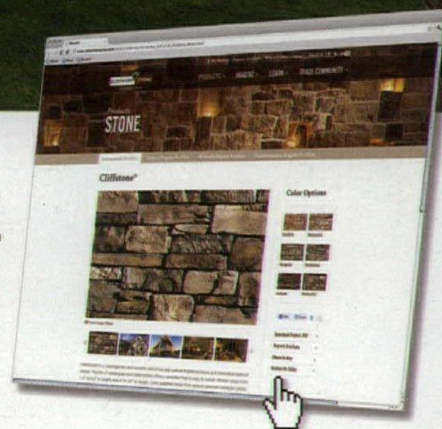


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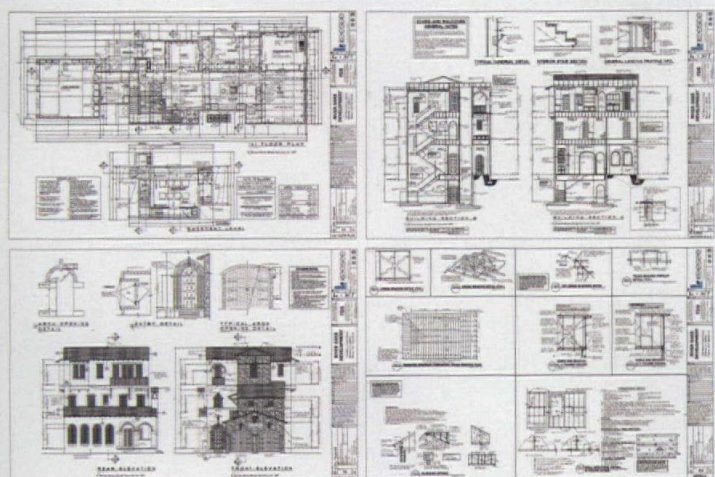




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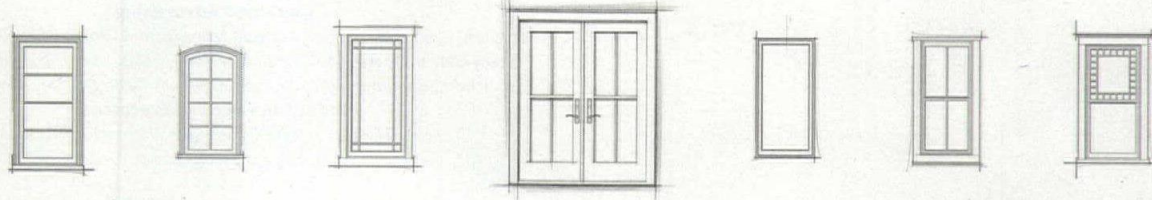
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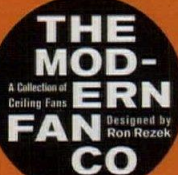
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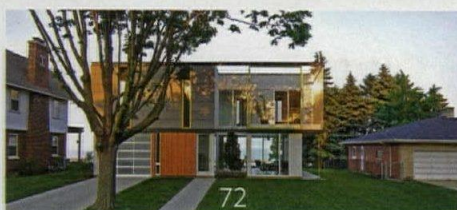
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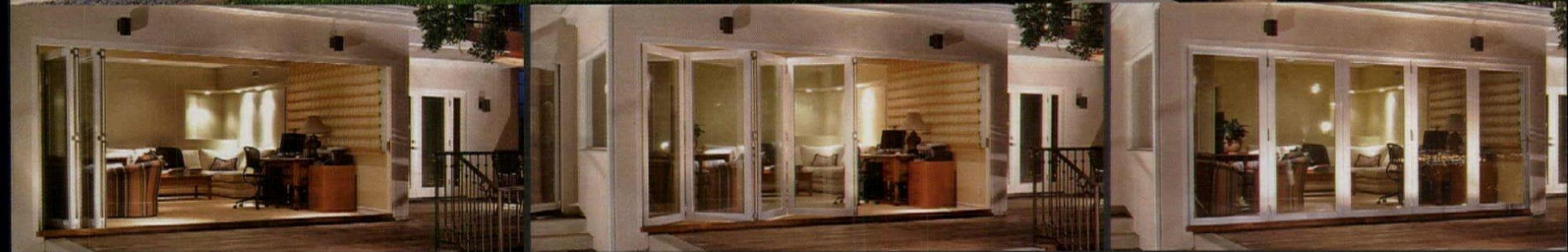
Milwaukee-based Johnsen Schmalig Architects wins our Top Firm award.

By Bruce D. Snider

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**Welcome to our second-to-last** issue of 2012. It's also the penultimate issue in our 15th anniversary year. And if all that weren't enough cause for self reflection, this is the magazine we send to our annual Reinvention Symposium. Birthday. Reinvention. Maybe now you're beginning to understand what we've done here. This is the new, redesigned **RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT**. And I have to say, I'm very happy to uppercase those two words after all these years as editor of the magazine. Goodbye, e.e. cummings. Hello, a more dignified treatment of the profession we admire so much.

We loved the original design of the magazine. It's served us well for a very long time, changing and evolving along with us. We have our late design director, Judy Neighbor, to thank for our durable good looks. But even she would have itched for a change by now to reflect our maturity and the growing stature of the profession to which we are dedicated. We are The American Institute of Architects' residential architecture journal, and we should look the part.

Our new look is cleaner and more streamlined. We've rearranged the furniture a bit in our new house, but you'll recognize many of the pieces. A new front section called Reinvention takes its cue from our symposium and contains new ideas, practice models, and entrepreneurial practitioners. This also is where you'll find the prototypes we used to feature in standalone departments like Shelter Lab and Green Piece. Spec Tech is a new section that encompasses Doctor Spec and New Material, our products application story and new products departments of yore.

We've moved the project coverage to the front of the magazine as well, into a new section called Case Study. The projects will relate to a specific

housing problem. This month, we look at vacation homes. The cover story in most issues will be a profile of an achieving residential firm. This month, we have our annual Leadership Awards profiles. All told, we aim to give you more of what you've said you love—more photos, drawings, and plans. And more projects, products, and profiles, presented in a crisper package that connects us more clearly to our sister publication, **ARCHITECT**. You'll notice our shared DNA, while we both preserve our individual identities.

We admit it, change is hard. We knew we needed to update our wardrobe, but it's always nerve-wracking to go out in public for the first time in your new outfit. We've shed our jeans for more formal attire. Our portraits of architects are more stoic and serious. One architect friend called it "full frontal architecture"—our subjects photographed head-on. Form, function, with no artifice.

Like the scientists who subject themselves first to a new vaccine, I was the first to swallow the medicine. I have a new portrait. You'll see I've aged in a flash—15 years gone in a single click of the shutter. Well, we all have our battle scars and we've earned them.

We hope you like your new magazine. Yes, we've rearranged the furniture, but we still want to sit down with you at the kitchen table and hear what's on your mind. So don't be shy; tell us what you think.

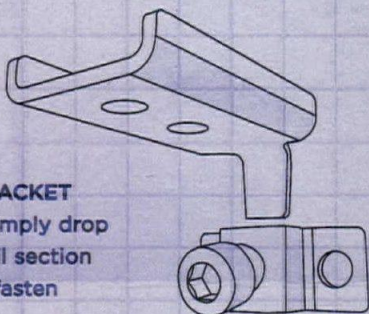
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "E. Kaplan".



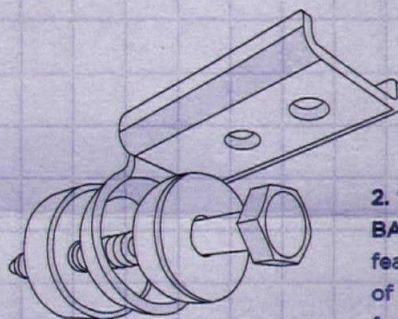
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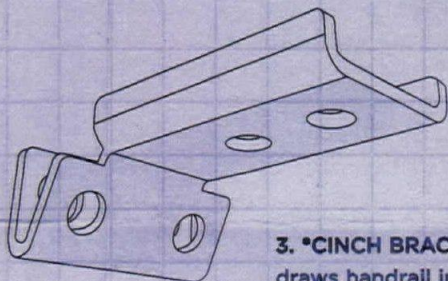
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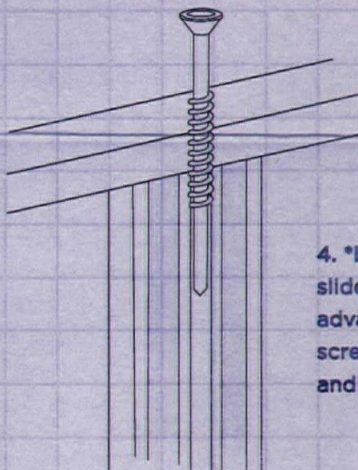
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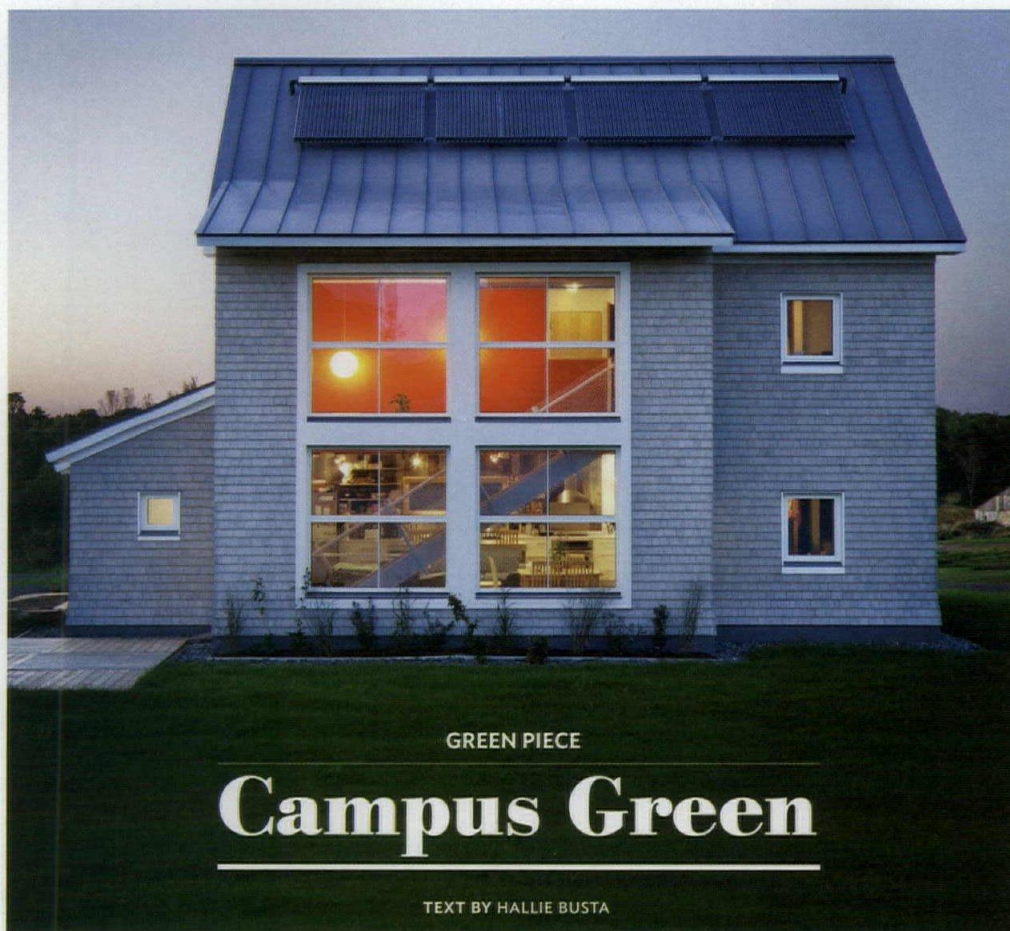


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## A PASSIVE HOUSE-CERTIFIED DORM UNITES SUSTAINABILITY ENTHUSIASTS.

**Architect Matt O'Malia** had no idea that the students for whom his firm G•O Logic was designing and building a dorm-style passive house (the first in the U.S.) preferred to study on their beds rather than at a desk—or that some of them used a bucket and a plunger to do their laundry. Until he asked them. “It’s an environmental college and an environmental [themed] dorm,” he says, to the point that if his team’s first foray into sustainable campus housing was missing anything, it wasn’t client know-how.

The client, Unity College, sits less than an hour’s drive northeast of Augusta, Maine, and is known for its green bent. With one low-load house on campus already, the school was a likely candidate to win a grant to build an actual passive house

for use as a teaching tool and as a 10-person student residence. The resulting 2,100-square-foot design replaced two existing 1970s ranch-style residences, and included a landscape plan for an area of campus where the school hopes to add two more similar structures.

The region’s climate makes it an ideal setting for Passive House design—cold, but with enough sunlight for a passive solar gain system to counteract heat loss. An exposed concrete slab on the first floor stores energy by day and radiates it back at night. The slab, along with a small air-source heat pump, a large solar-thermal domestic hot-water heating system, and a well-insulated and airtight envelope reduce energy consumption to near-zero.

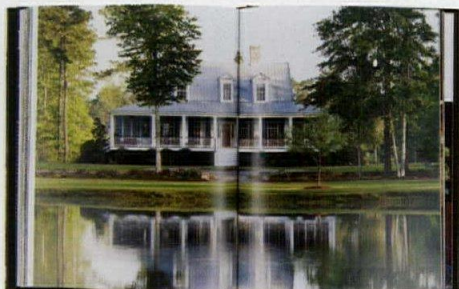
Orchestrating communal and private spaces

(weighted toward the latter) and large, triple-glazed windows vital for passive solar gain required shrewd design. The result: an open staircase and second-story landing set in a two-story projection along the house’s south wall. This, says O'Malia, visually shields the open first-floor living and kitchen space from a busy area of campus while also preventing the private second-story rooms from turning into heat sinks.

That the house was built in three months to accommodate the academic year was a challenge, O'Malia says, but the administrators controlled the purse strings, which helped smooth the process.

“The owners, in this case, were not all caught up in it being their home,” explains G•O Logic’s Alan Gibson. “The process was really simple.”





### BOOK REVIEW

## Southern Homecoming

There's a difference between a house that (however lovely) seems like a reproduction, and one that feels alive. Jim Strickland and his co-writer, Susan Sully, articulate that distinction in the new book *Coming Home: The Southern Vernacular House* (Rizzoli, \$45), which features the work of Strickland's architecture firm, Historical Concepts. "It may sound counterintuitive, but we rarely enter the design process with the idea of faithfully reproducing a specific style," he writes. "Rather, the natural setting, the region's architecture, and the vision of the client are our guides. As a result, the style in which a house is built evolves gradually in a way that is never forced or unnatural."

Strickland and his team, based in Atlanta and Peachtree City, Ga., draw from a bevy of Southern influences such as 18th- and 19th-century townhouses, rural agricultural buildings, and modest beach cottages. "Although deeply engaged with the built environment of the South, we never lose sight of the architecture of the Northeast, in part because of its historic influence down the Eastern Seaboard," Strickland writes. The firm uses history to its best advantage, infusing traditional veins with imagination and style.

*Coming Home* showcases Historical Concepts' portfolio, highlighting 14 custom homes as well as the town center for the community of Palmetto Bluff, S.C. Lush images of each project, by photographer Richard Leo Johnson and several others, accompany a thoughtful commentary with captions. The projects shown provide invaluable lessons about scale, proportion, and detailing, and the text serves as a useful primer or refresher on traditional Southern architecture. —MEGHAN DRUEDING



## Hog Heaven

Moskow Linn Architects' Studio North student program created this Rolling Pig Pen during a six-day Vermont workshop in June. Made of stock lumber and translucent fiberglass, the wheeled pen features an enclosed outdoor area, a sheltered indoor space, and a food storage zone.

RA See full slideshows at [residentialarchitect.com](http://residentialarchitect.com)

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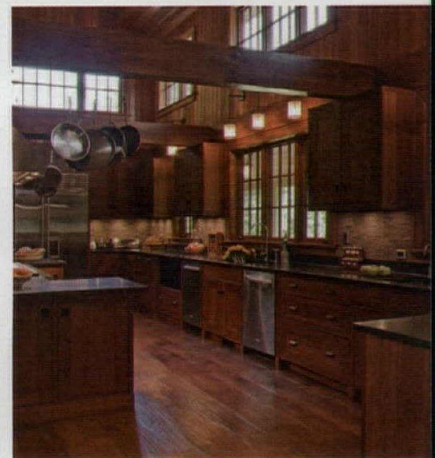
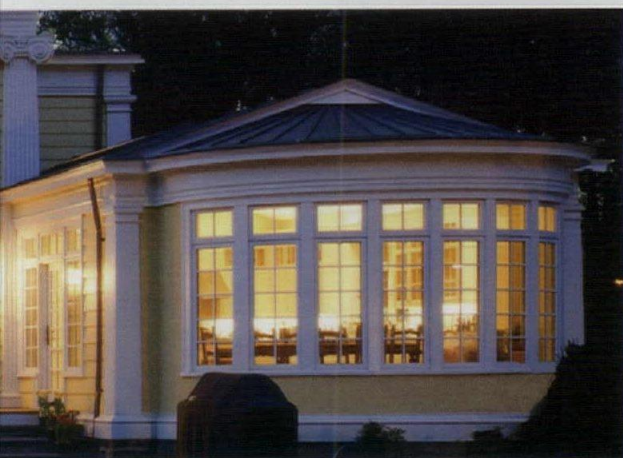
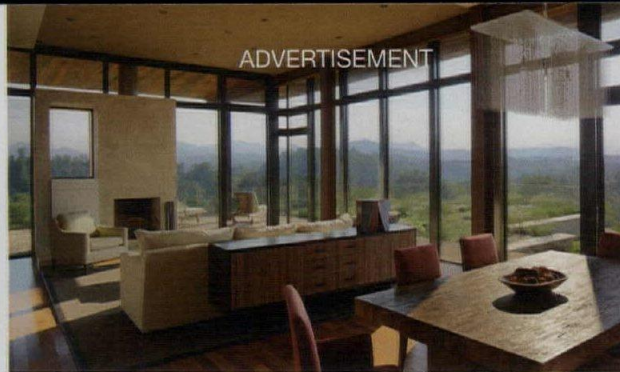
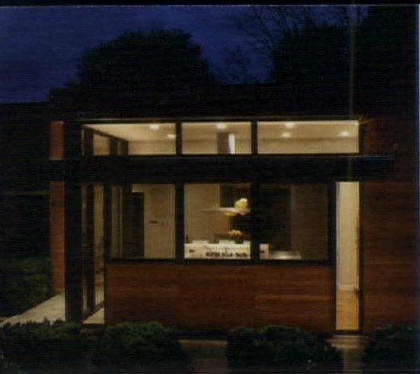
**Part architecture firm, part flash mob,** The Global Studio is a cooperative of design professionals serving disadvantaged communities around the world. The group has undertaken architecture, planning, and design/build projects in the United States, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and India, typically under contract with nonprofit development organizations. "A lot of our current work is with [the Seattle-based nonprofit] Agros International," founding partner Geoff Piper says, primarily in master planning new villages in Nicaragua. "The focus is on eradication of poverty through land ownership."

Piper and Stephanie Ingram, both principals at the Seattle-based architecture firm FiveDot Design/Build, take the lead role. "Because we're self-employed, we have the flexibility to do these projects as they come along," Piper says. Local colleagues Matthew Sullivan (an architect), Ashley Waldron (assistant project manager for a local builder), and Court Harris (a civil engineer) pitch in as needed.

"We charge about half our going rate, sometimes less, to work for nonprofits," Piper says. But the effort provides a welcome perspective on market-rate work. "As a design/build company, we can't just design something pretty and throw it at the contractor. We're focused on getting things done—in the development work and the design/build work. They reinforce each other." —BRUCE D. SNIDER

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INTEREST  
DESIGN]  
IS GROWING.  
IT'S ALWAYS  
BEEN AROUND,  
BUT IT'S  
BECOMING  
MORE  
ORGANIZED  
AND  
RECOGNIZED  
IN THE  
PROFESSION.  
IT'S A GREAT  
TIME TO  
BE DOING  
THIS KIND  
OF WORK."





## MEET THE myMarvin ARCHITECT'S CHALLENGE WINNERS

The myMarvin Architect's Challenge honors the best in architecture and design. Now in its third year, the Architect's Challenge winners represent a variety of architectural styles, both residential and commercial. Marvin® products were showcased in a 19th century barn, a small house designed for energy efficiency, a restored Neoclassical mansion, an elementary school renovation and an Irish school renovated as a residence. Marvin's beautiful products helped make these houses and buildings look great and have better energy efficiency.

**Congratulations to the winners of the myMarvin Architects Challenge!**

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- James Estes of Estes/Twombly Architects Inc.
- Eric Gartner of SPG Architects
- Jon Hensley and Sunny Carroll of Jon Hensley Architecture
- Catherine M. Knight, AIA of Knight Architects, LLC
- Todd Hansen of Albertsson Hansen Architecture, Ltd.
- THA Team of THA Architecture Inc.
- Patrick Lennon of Project Architects The Priory
- Paul Bedford of Keystone Associates Architects, Engineers & Surveyors, LLC

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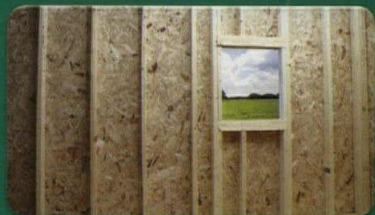
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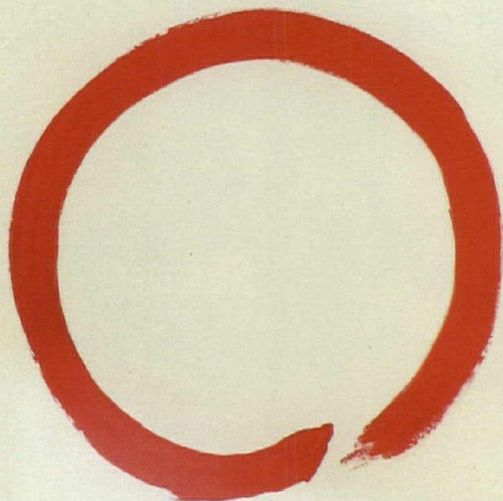
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PHOTO: BRUCE VICKMARK

## AIA VOICES

CRITICAL DISCOURSE | WHERE WE LIVE IS WHO WE ARE

*William Morgan is an architecture critic based in Providence, R.I., who has written on everything from license plate design to the Cape Cod cottage typology. He is the author of a dozen books, including The Abrams Guide to American House Styles (2004), and Monadnock Summer (2011) about Dublin, N.H.'s architectural legacy, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Morgan, who has held teaching posts at the University of Louisville, Princeton University, and Brown University, is a contributor to "This New England" at [newenglandblog.projo.com](http://newenglandblog.projo.com).*

**RESIDENTIAL DESIGN IS THE MOST RIGOROUS AND THE MOST demanding architectural specialty.** You are dealing with where clients live, how they'd like to live, and how they are perceived to live—or, identity. When an architect does a house, it says so much more about what they really are than when they do a skyscraper. The house is the ultimate naked truth of what an architect really cares about.

Any house is about both shelter and aspirations. A successful house has to be designed from the inside out, and the plan is crucial. It's much harder for an architect to do a small house and get it right than it is to design, say, an Olympic stadium. A house has to be based on human measurements and it has to feel good. Good residential architects will take the landscape into account as a matter of course. The genius of the place has to be

consulted—not so much the clichéd idea of placemaking, but the opposite: figuring out what the place is inherently about. The break between landscape architecture and architecture is needlessly artificial when it comes to residential work—both camps ought to be asking the same questions about place.

A good client, on the other hand, needs to ask around. Getting the right architect is like finding a doctor. I used to teach a course at Princeton on the visual arts in contemporary society; it was designed to snag non-art students, believing them to be the patrons and clients of the future. Conscious design decisions shape our environment, and it's crucial that the decision makers have some design training.

One of the biggest issues facing residential architecture is that people cannot leave well enough alone. Beyond the landscape, certain house types suggest their own materials and sensibilities—and they rarely suggest multi-car garages and 17 different roof pitches. How much granite, for instance, do we need in our kitchens? People have more resources today to think about good design. They also have more white noise with which to contend. What I've always tried to do is find a way to introduce people to good design—whether they're students or colleagues or the reading public—in hopes of inspiring a better world. — *as told to William Richards* **AIA**



# AIA FUTURE

LOCAL HARVEST

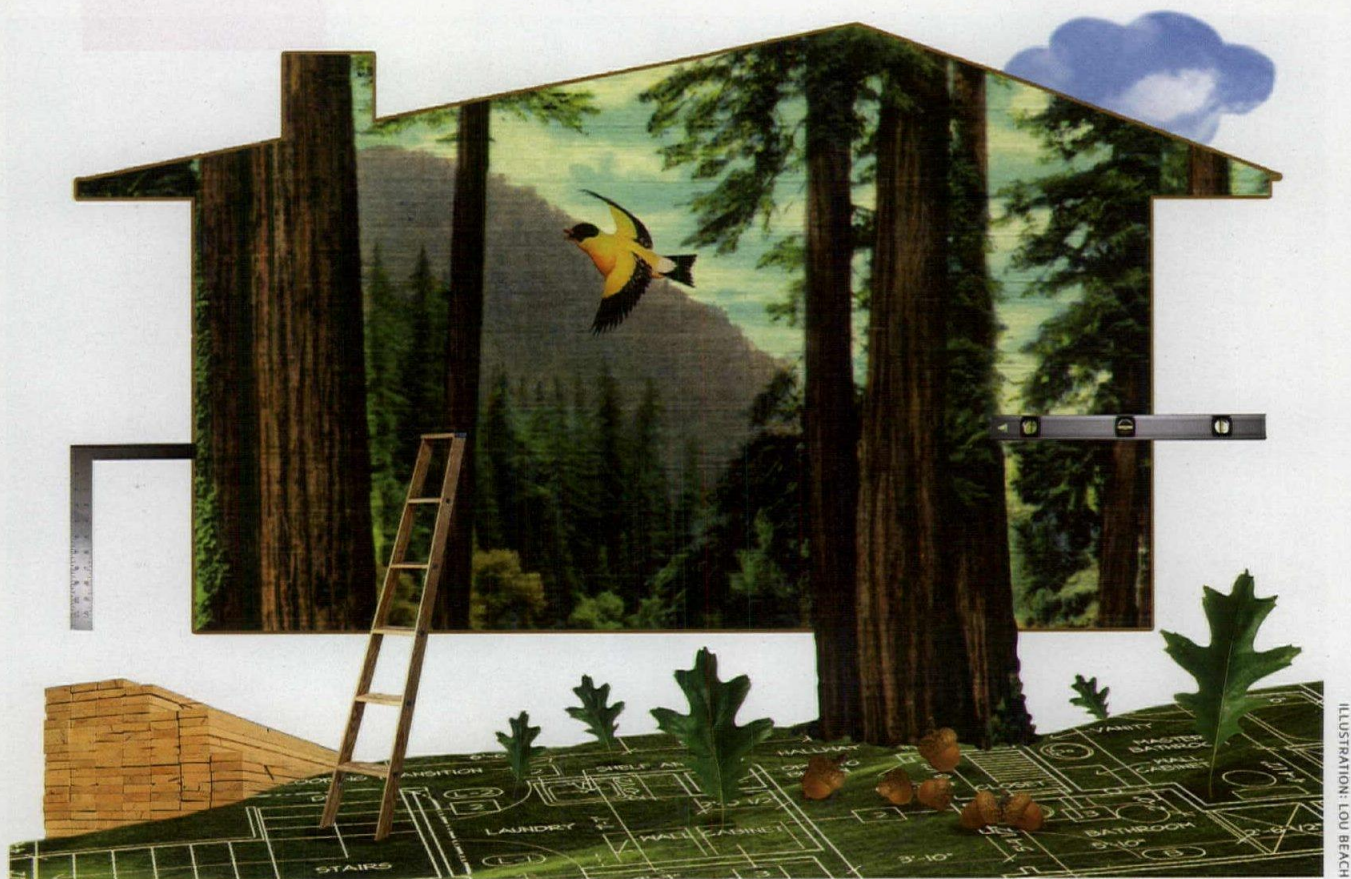


ILLUSTRATION: LOU BEACH

## Sustainable Northwest helps area architects to source environmentally preferable wood products

BY KIM A. O'CONNELL

ON A SCENIC GREEN HILL IN PORTLAND, ORE., A NEW HOUSE represents the next generation of sustainability—and a new opportunity for architects working in the region. Called the Full Plane Passive House, the nearly 2,000-square-foot residence includes, among other sustainable features, an airtight envelope that allows the house to be heated through passive solar gain and limited reliance on an active heating source. The house also contains a significant percentage of sustainably managed wood products, sourced through a subsidiary of the nonprofit organization Sustainable Northwest.

Based in Portland, Sustainable Northwest works with policymakers, builders, designers, residents, and other

organizations to foster improved land management and sustainable development throughout the rural West. The organization has been active in several environmental arenas, particularly with regard to fostering collaborations across the urban-rural divide. Sustainable Northwest was actively involved, for instance, in the long and complex effort that resulted in an agreement to remove four dams from the Klamath River on the Oregon-California border.

Sustainable Northwest Wood is the organization's for-profit subsidiary, which operates as a wholesale lumberyard connecting local mills with green-building opportunities. The company fills a niche in a region that has long been at the forefront of sustainability, but faces ongoing challenges with regard to sustainable wood. Large lumber companies have asserted that limited marketplace demand for sustainably harvested wood has kept costs too high to justify third-party certification through such entities as the Forest Stewardship Council. And reports have confirmed that sustainable and locally grown certified wood products can cost up to 25 percent more than standard lumber.

By increasing awareness and demand, and by promoting small eco-minded landowners and wood providers, Sustainable Northwest and its subsidiary are hoping to make the supply chain more efficient and cost-effective. To do this, the organization has been reaching out to area architects through tours, talks, and other events to help them learn how locally harvested and



third-party certified wood can be incorporated into their designs.

"The challenge for so many architects with FSC wood is sourcing high-quality wood that is timely and affordable at both the commercial and residential scales," says Clark Brockman, AIA, principal for sustainability at Portland's SERA Architects. "Without Sustainable Northwest, we had small architectural firms spending many, many hours on the phone searching for these products. Through Sustainable Northwest's centralizing role, the industry is seeing improved quality and reduced sourcing time." Last year, Brockman participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by Sustainable Northwest Wood on sourcing and using certified wood products.

### The challenge for so many architects with FSC wood is sourcing high-quality wood that is timely and affordable at both the commercial and residential scales.

Recently, Sustainable Northwest worked closely with Portland-based Departure: Architecture Planning Interiors and JRA Green Building, the architect and general contractor, respectively, on the Full Plane Passive House (named for a sailing term). "By collaborating with the architect and the general contractor during the design phase, we were able to help them understand the wood selection process and design the home for the maximum cost and resource efficiency, reducing materials costs while increasing the project's green credibility," says K.C. Eisenberg, director of sales for Sustainable Northwest Wood. "All of the wood in this home, from the framing and plywood to the flooring, trim, cabinetry, and doors, was sourced from sustainably managed local forests."

Eisenberg says that the organization wants to work with architects to broaden their knowledge of sustainably harvested wood products and building materials. Available products include pressure-treated lumber, plywood, architectural hardwood panels, and pre-primed trim, among others. "Restorative products include juniper that is harvested through grassland restoration efforts, as well as fir, cedar, and pine that are harvested during forest thinning projects like those facilitated by Sustainable Northwest," Eisenberg says.

Departure: Architecture Planning Interiors worked with Sustainable Northwest Wood's availability. "We wanted to use their dimensional lumber, which was limited to 2x14 for roof framing, so we worked with our engineer to arrive at a straightforward design that worked to that lumber's capacity," says Departure principal Michelle Jeresek, who managed this project. "For finished wood, we would visit Sustainable Northwest with our client to review the available species and learn more, like where the wood was sourced. ... We have so many terrific local species to choose from, there's no need to source from elsewhere. Using locally sourced wood also complements the design, adding to its 'sense of place.'"

Specifying locally sourced wood also promotes the economy, of which architects are direct beneficiaries, proponents say. "Instead of the profit being shipped out of town into the larders of a large corporation with typically questionable environmental practices," says Eisenberg, "it stays within the community, strengthens the local economy, and ultimately comes right back to the architect." **AIA**

# AIAPERSPECTIVE

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER



PHOTO: WILLIAM STEWART

**OF LATE, A LOT OF INK HAS BEEN SPILLED ABOUT THE MIGRATION** of people back into the city. The good news about the economic, social, and cultural implications of new life in the urban core is welcome. More efficient because of their density, our cities also have emerged as fertile ecologies that foster creativity and advance a more sustainable lifestyle.

Less noticed or commented on has been the reverse migration of the poor and immigrants out of the city into the suburbs. Yet both movements have much in common. Whatever the direction, into or out of the city, those on the move are in search of jobs as well as affordable, quality housing.

Design professions have little influence over the dismal unemployment picture. If we get busier, more construction jobs follow. We have a real effect on the morphology of housing, however. What, how, and where we build are critical if our cities are not to become gated precincts for the well-off, and the suburbs tomorrow's wastelands.

To put this another way, the design and construction of housing can no longer be piecemeal—here a house, there a house; here a development, there a development. We need to be thinking holistically.

This does not mean reverting to the kind of master planning that rearranged our cities and surrounding suburbs after 1945. Government has neither the appetite nor the resources to bankroll the big-picture programs that gave us the Interstate Highway System and urban removal.

Moreover, we have been humbled—and rightly so—by the unanticipated consequences of top-down planning that often was deaf to what it takes to encourage and sustain vibrant communities.

However, neither government paralysis nor our past mistakes diminishes the need to invest in comprehensive planning whose keystone is where and how we live. Whether the subject is affordability, mobility, the care of the growing number of elderly, the increasing diversity of our communities, or the fact that more of us are choosing to live alone, we need to design and build as if what we do truly matters. And I believe it does.

As citizens we have responsibilities to one another. This may be a good time to remember that whatever the future holds, we're all in this together. **AIA**

Jeff Potter, FAIA, 2012 President



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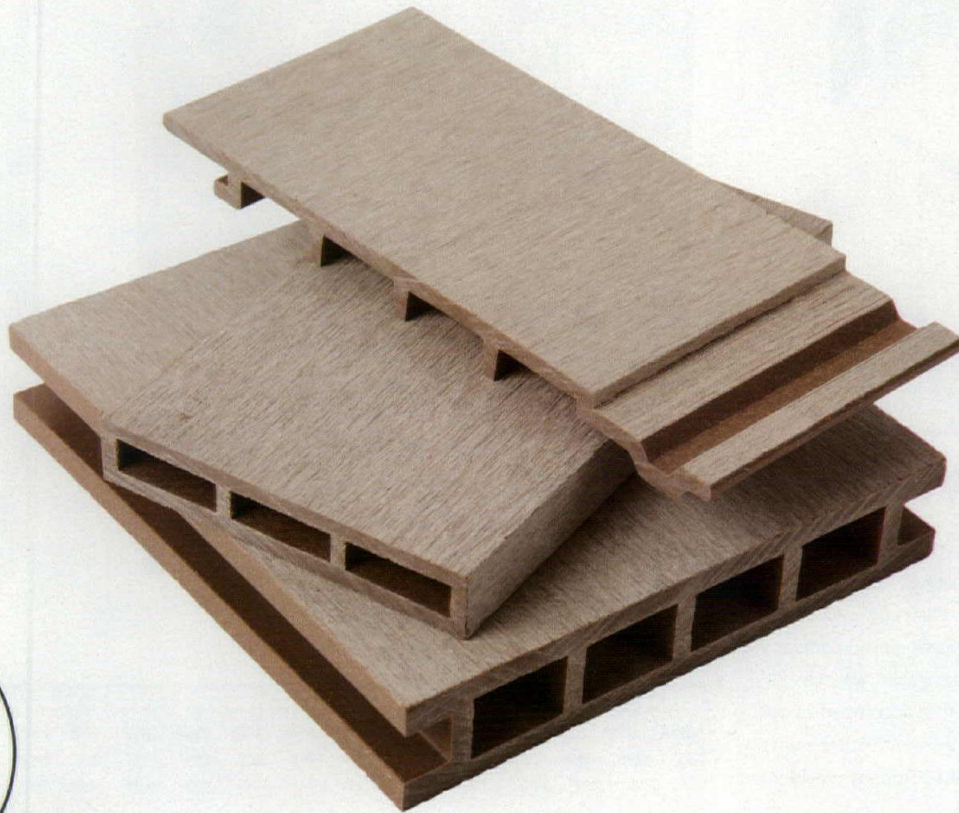
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ARCHITECTS' CHOICE

## Hard to Resist

TEXT BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD

**Although architects appreciate** the characteristics and beauty of wood, the material cups and buckles in certain applications and requires routine maintenance. Architect Max Strang, AIA, says Resysta is a durable substitute that offers the look and feel of a tropical species. "It's a great alternative to FSC-certified lumber and provides a really sophisticated appearance," he says.

Made from approximately 60 percent rice husks, 22 percent common salt, and 18 percent mineral oil, the fiber-reinforced material is resistant against sun, rain, snow, and salt water, according to the Germany-based manufacturer. "You handle the material in the exact same manner as you handle real wood," Strang explains. "One huge advantage, however, is that Resysta is dimensionally stable and will not warp, splinter, bend, or cup." The company says the product can be used for decking, façades, and interior applications. Resysta International, 909.465.1000; [www.resysta.us](http://www.resysta.us).





## Time Warp

Among the many baubles that architects love, timepieces hold a prominent position. The Markuse Corp. recognized this years ago, which is partly why the Bedford, Mass.-based company works with architects to design its watches. “If you look at the description that accompanies our name—‘architecture you can wear’—that pretty much tells the story,” explains company president Jack Markuse.

It makes sense to enlist architects, Markuse says, because they bring a different sensibility. “Architects look at these watches as architecture—miniature construction entities, if you will. The architect focuses on the overall structure of how the watch is built.”

César Pelli, FAIA, Moshe Safdie, FAIA, FRAC, Daniel Libeskind, FAIA, and Laurinda Spear, FAIA, are among the names with which Markuse has worked. One of the company’s recent introductions is Michael Graves’ Witherspoon watch, a product that embodies the company’s philosophy. “The overall design of the watch has more of a complete design feel with matching stitching to the dial as well as a matching color crown to the dial,” Markuse says. “We feel that if the overall design is good, then the details can be left up to the technical people.” —NIGEL F. MAYNARD

RA See full slideshows at [residentialarchitect.com](http://residentialarchitect.com)



## PRODUCTS

### 1. Vir Stil, Kallista

Designed by Laura Kirar, this vanity measures a compact 24 inches wide to fit small baths and powder rooms. It comes in either black walnut or white lacquered wood with a metal base that can be ordered in four finishes. The white marble or gray limestone top is sold separately. 888.452.5547; [www.kallista.com](http://www.kallista.com).

### 2. Torre, Fagor America

Measuring 24 inches wide, the Torre refrigerator is ideal for small condos, apartments, or summer homes. The unit’s flat design offers a clean look

that easily integrates with cabinetry, and its “no-frost” technology keeps food fresh for a longer period of time, says the manufacturer. It’s available in a stainless steel or black finish. 201.804.3900; [www.fagoramerica.com](http://www.fagoramerica.com).

### 3. Kerdi-Line, Schluter Systems

This slim-profile drain allows for flush-mounted installations that satisfy ADA requirements or a minimalist aesthetic. It’s available in lengths from 20 inches to 48 inches and is ideal for large-format tiles on shower floors. 800.472.4588; [www.schluter.com](http://www.schluter.com).





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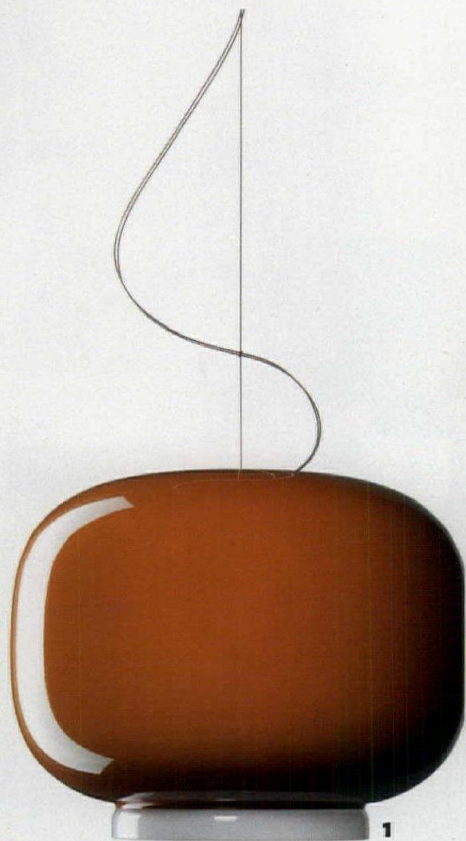
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## PRODUCTS

### 1. Chouchin, Foscarini

Foscarini has reinterpreted the traditional Japanese paper and bamboo lantern in mouth-blown glass. Created by French designer Ionna Vautrin, the fixture features a colored varnish that renders the body impervious to light so illumination funnels to the opening. Three colors and three shapes are available. 39 041 595 3811; [www.foscarini.com](http://www.foscarini.com).

### 2. Haiku, Big Ass Fans

Instead of the large, industrial-style fans the company is known for, Big Ass Fans eliminated the ubiquitous metal shroud and mounted the electronics inside the core for a smooth, elegant look. It comes in bamboo or a matrix composite. 855.694.2458; [www.haikufan.com](http://www.haikufan.com).

**3. American Classics, Viridian Wood Products**  
Viridian's new collection of flooring is made from red, white, and rustic oak that has been reclaimed from industrial shipping crates. Available in random lengths from 3 feet to 8 feet, the boards measure ¾-inch thick and 4½ inches wide. 877.909.9663; [www.viridianwood.com](http://www.viridianwood.com).

## DOCTOR SPEC

# Heavy Lifting

ZERO-THRESHOLD DOORS REQUIRE DETAIL DRAWINGS AND A GOOD TRACK.

TEXT BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD

**Sliding doors are great** for blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor. If you're using a conventional track system that typically protrudes up to 1 inch from the finished floor, however, the amount you actually can blur is limited. Enter the lift/slide door with a flush-mount track.

A sophisticated piece of engineering from Europe, a lift/slide door operates on a simple concept: special hardware allows large and heavy door panels to be lifted (and slid) above a flush track while also allowing the door to be lowered onto seals that provide air and water protection. The beauty of the system is that you can have one ma-

terial—tile, stone, concrete—running from inside the house to the outside for a seamless look. Seen in application, the setup is elegant in its simplicity and invisibility. It also hides how complex such a spec is to execute.

"Zero-threshold doors are very difficult to do right," says Hans Berglund, of Edwards, Colo.-based Berglund Architects. "There are so many things to think about, including drainage, a tight seal, and other technical issues." Berglund adds that there are other considerations that one would never think about with traditional doors such as snow loads and deflection. In one of his early lift/slide specs, the architect allowed the contractor to perform the installation, which didn't go well.

"We had to rip out the doors completely and basically start over from scratch," he said. "The floor has to be dead flat and level for these systems to work properly."

Though all components work together, a good track system is an part of a successful lift/slide installation. Oceanside, Calif.-based Weiland Sliding Doors and Windows—Berglund's preferred brand—has developed a unit that takes the guesswork out of the system. "All lift/slide doors should have a drainage channel," explains company CFO and principal Sue Weiland, which is why the manufacturer developed the Weiland Flush Track. "It

Cont. on pg 28





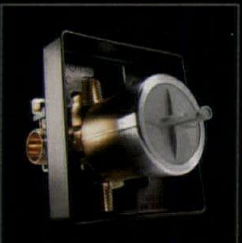
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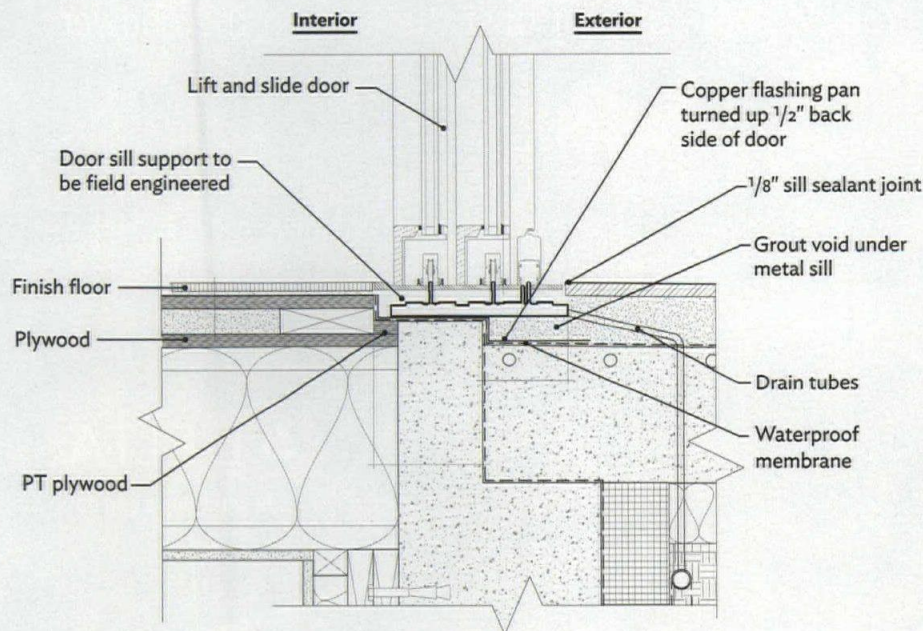
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Cont. from pg 26

has a gasket and weep system underneath."

Typical sliding tracks protrude up to an inch above the finish floor while the Flush Track projects a mere  $\frac{3}{16}$  of an inch. The system also has built-in tubes that allow moisture and water to drain out and away from the house.

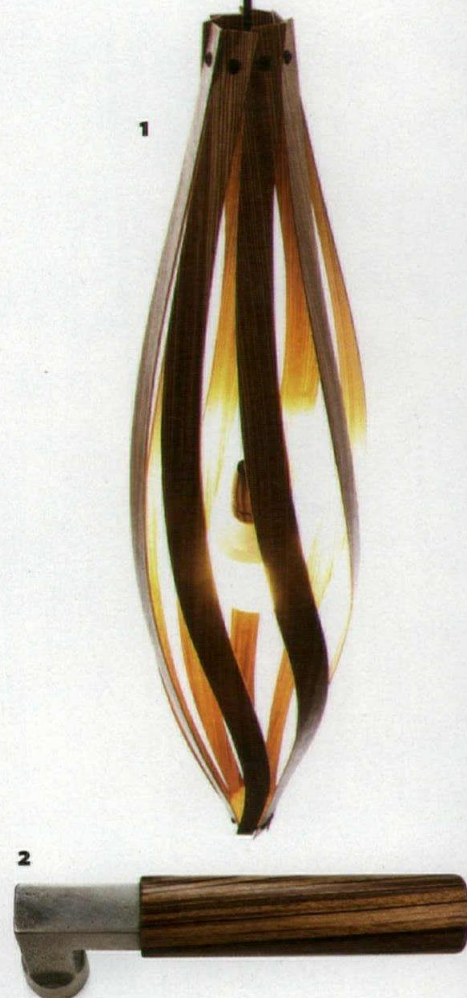
Warroad, Minn.-based Marvin Windows and Doors manufactures three types of tracks, including a recessed option with drainage. Pacific Architectural Millwork in Brea, Calif., also offers architects a variety of sills, and other companies have systems of their own.

But the track is only part of the story. To achieve maximum performance, you must keep movement to a bare minimum. "The system has a low tolerance for deflection in the header above the door," Berglund says. "If you live in a place that gets snow loads or strong winds, you have to be very careful," as the operation of the door might be compromised. "You could beef up the header to reduce deflection, but you pretty much have to use steel to avoid it."

The freeze-thaw cycle also could affect the door's performance. If proper steps aren't taken, the constant movement could permanently damage the track, causing the drainage system to fail.

No matter how good manufacturers say their lift/slide systems are at sealing against air infiltration and moisture, common sense still applies. For example, Berglund uses a flush track only when a house has a significant overhang. "I try to have 5, 6, even 8 feet of overhang," he says. If the overhang happens to be 2 feet or 3 feet, he uses the traditional sill with a 1-inch stop.

Local climate conditions also play a role, the architect says. If you live in a temperate climate such as San Diego, the flush track will work just fine. But if you live in a place with significant snow, wind, or rain, it will be more of an issue over time. Berglund produces detail shop drawings to convey to the installers what he's trying to achieve, and he strongly recommends a waterproofing membrane installed from the inside out for added peace of mind. He concludes, "It's well worth the money to have them installed by someone certified by the manufacturer." ▢



### PRODUCTS

#### 1. Cocoon, MacMaster

This pendant light is fabricated from eight laminated veneer leaves that are packed flat and assembled on site using the small fittings provided. Available in oak, maple, walnut or cherry, the fixture measures 47.2 inches long and 9.8 inches in diameter. 44 (o) 7887 523 924; [www.macmasterdesign.com](http://www.macmasterdesign.com).

#### 2. Pioneer, Sun Valley Bronze

Sand cast in solid bronze, this lever features an inlay made from reclaimed apitong, a Southeast Asian hardwood often used as flooring in trailers. Pioneer measures 5½ inches long and comes in a light or dark finish. 866.788.3631; [www.sunvalleybronze.com](http://www.sunvalleybronze.com).





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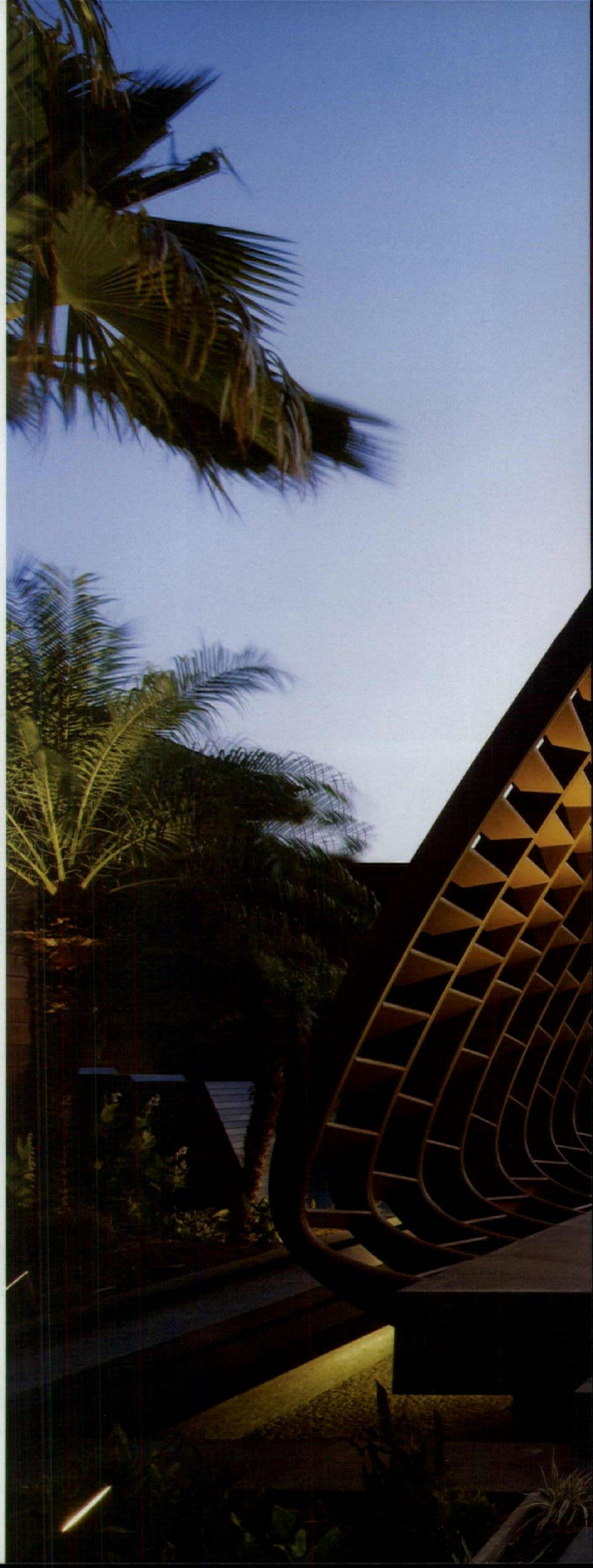
TEXT BY CHERYL WEBER, LEED AP  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BENNY CHAN

## “A series of pods” is how Hagy Belzberg, FAIA, describes the vacation house he designed on Hawaii’s Big Island for a large extended family.

But in building code parlance, it’s a main house with one detached building. When local regulations prohibited the indoor-outdoor pavilions the owners asked for, Belzberg and his team came up with four structures of varying sizes, two on each side of an outdoor hallway. Recycled teak timbers reach across it, joining the garage/guest quarters pod on one side with the main living pod and separate media room on the other. The children’s pod, which holds bedrooms and play space, stands on its own beside the motor court.

The sculpted home breaks with the island’s Colonial architecture tradition, but it has a Hawaiian soul. “Over the last few decades in Hawaii, historical elements introduced into the building fabric have resulted in a Disneyland effect,” Belzberg says. “We used local and recycled materials, and tried to reintroduce cultural elements as details.”

Once visitors have parked in the motor court, they enter the hallway, a long spine that acts as a spacious outdoor foyer before tipping slowly into a zero-edge reflecting pool. The hallway sits off-axis on the linear lot, pointing toward views of the ocean to the west and a volcanic mountain range to







**Project** Kona Residence  
**Architect** Belzberg Architects,  
Santa Monica, Calif.  
**General contractor** Tinguely  
Development, Kailua-Kona,  
Hawaii  
**Structural engineer** William  
Blakeney Inc., Kailua, Hawaii  
**Landscape architect** Belt  
Collins, Honolulu  
**Interior designer** MLK Studio,  
Los Angeles  
**Project size** 8,000 square feet,  
including covered patios and  
exterior hallway  
**Site** 1 acre  
**Construction cost** Withheld

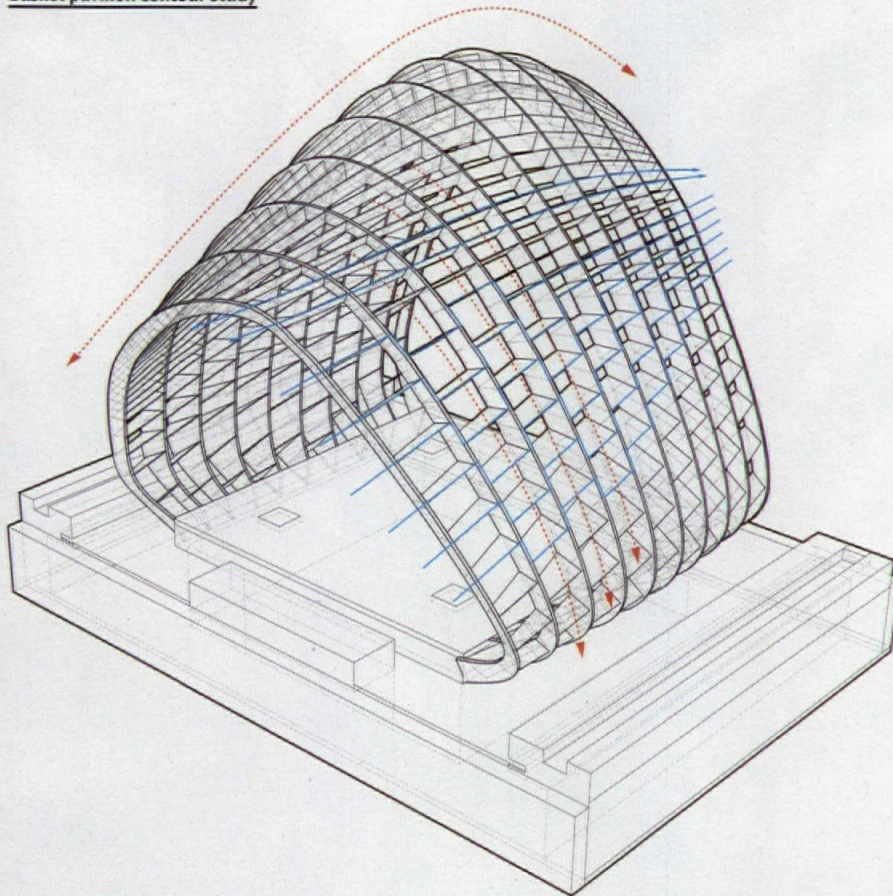
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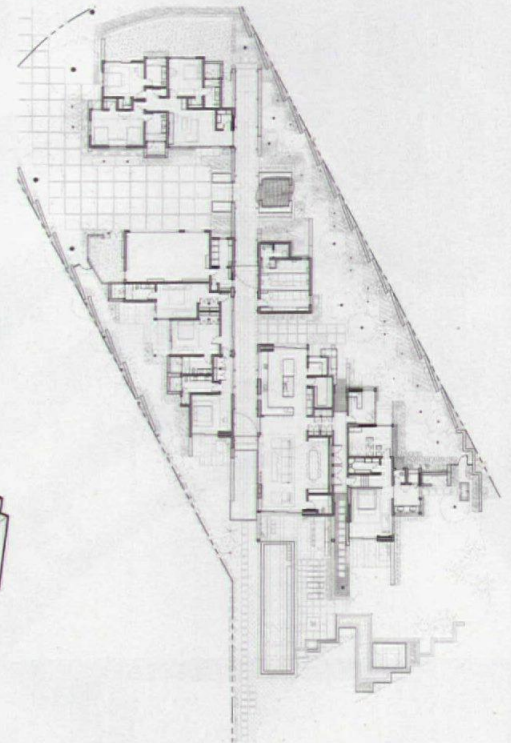
## VACATION HOME CASE STUDY

### Kona Residence (cont.)

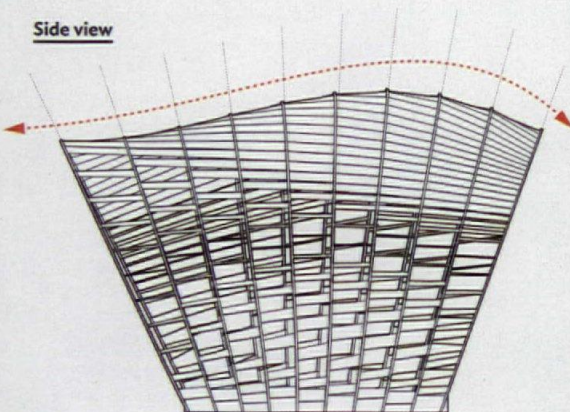
Basket pavilion contour study



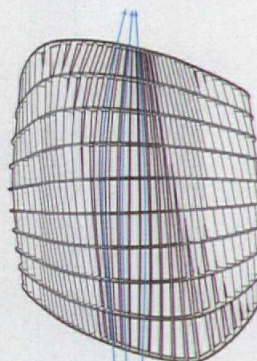
Site plan



Side view

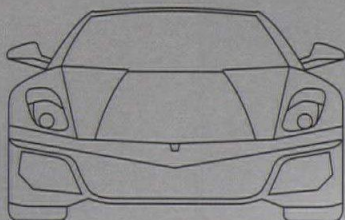


Top view

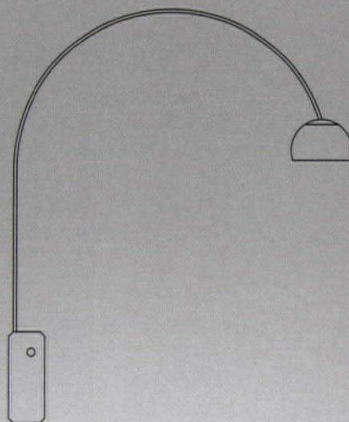


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## Residential Architect

VACATION HOME

CASE STUDY

### Kona Residence (cont.)



Cut, stacked basalt ties the house to local geology and to terra firma during tropical storms.

the east, while the glassy pods and private lanais zigzag around it.

The pods are low, their walls and roofs braced with steel to withstand the island's gale-force winds and seismic shifts. Exteriors are clad in recycled teak planks and slabs of stacked basalt, a lava rock that also covers the floors, outdoor terraces, and pools. In addition to providing thermal mass, the heavy stone helps anchor the buildings to the ground. Rainwater is collected in three dry wells that replenish the aquifer, and solar panels lighten the electricity load.

For the past five or so years, the architects have been experimenting with CNC milling, fascinated by the customization that digital fabrication allows. Here, the shop-made pieces allude to the vegetation and culture. The island's basket-weaving history inspired the entry pavilion, which re-enacts the tradition of presenting guests with a gift. The marine plywood inverted basket was assembled on site from a kit of parts fabricated in Los Angeles.

"You can walk through it to the orchard gardens beyond, or make a left or right down the





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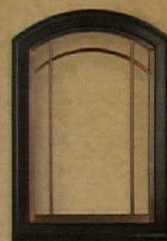
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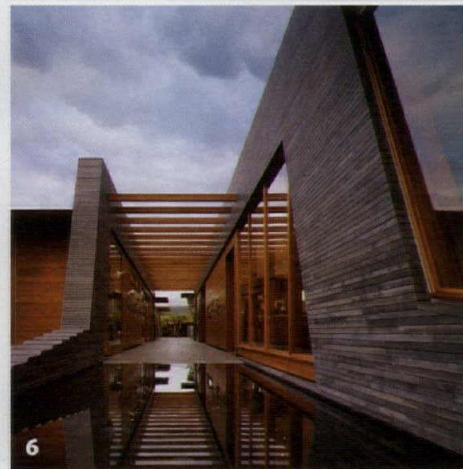
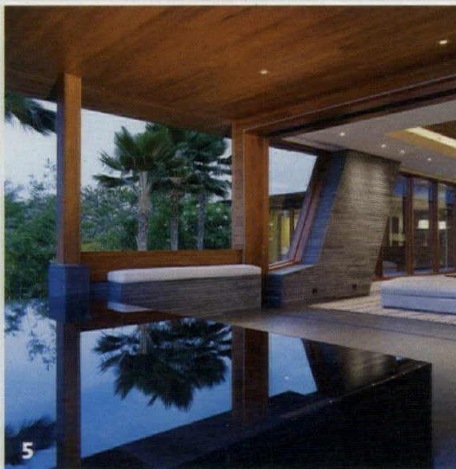
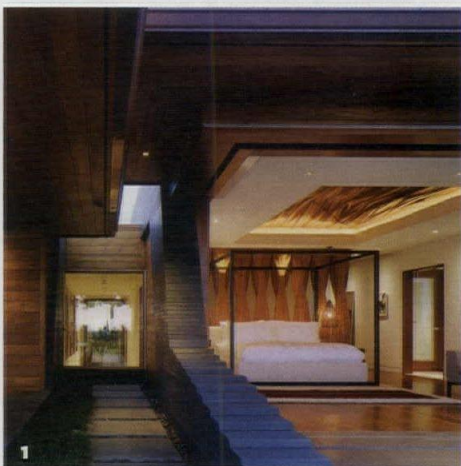


## Residential Architect

VACATION HOME

CASE STUDY

### Kona Residence (cont.)



1. The building is clad in recycled teak and basalt lava rock. 2. The outdoor hallway culminates in a reflecting pool. 3. CNC-milled glulam beams evoke palm trees. 4. A carved "grass skirt" ceiling pays homage to the local craft tradition. 5. Glass sliders open each pavilion to a lanai. 6. Teak timbers join three pavilions across the outdoor hallway.

outdoor hallway," Belzberg says. "It's pulled off the main axis so you make a decision to walk into it and engage it."

Inside, the living room's billowing ceiling, digitally cut from an off-the-shelf glulam beam, is an abstracted grass skirt and a nod to the island's wood-carving tradition. In the master bedroom, the headboard and ceiling suggest palm trees. The mosaic on the powder room wall is computer-generated, too. Belzberg used a pixilated photo of the client's favorite orchid to model the location of the tiles.

This home celebrates the history and spirit of its place, whether it's the stunning Hawaiian sunsets reflected on the swimming pool's dark surface, the sliding glass walls that dematerialize to admit tropical breezes, or the fruit trees planted in private niches outside each pod. And—perhaps best of all—the design inspires new traditions.

"After all the work we did on the outdoor hallway, the kids use it as a giant slip 'n slide," Belzberg says. "When it rains they slide off the edge and into the reflecting pool." ▢

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TEXT BY BRUCE D. SNIDER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM CRANE

Pond House boasts what may be the granddaddy of all grandfathered locations. Its site, on the shore of Mount Desert Island, Maine, borders an inlet enclosed with an earthen dike that forms a saltwater “pond” for swimming.

“The tide can roll in there, and the owners can dam it up, or they can let it flow freely,” says principal-in-charge Matt Elliott, AIA, of the unique site work, which dates from the laissez-faire 1950s. In designing this family compound, which replaces a structurally unsound building from the same era, Elliott and project architect Eric Reinholdt drew on the imagery of wharves and fishing shacks that the site suggested, subtly refracting those Down East archetypes through a distinctly modernist lens.

Distributing a classic summer cottage program among three buildings, joined by decks, Elliott and Reinholdt reinforced the impression of a shorefront village deeply entwined with its site. “The decks act as a way to mediate between the structures and the landscape,” Elliott says. The buildings—a central living pavilion flanked by a master suite cottage to the north and a separate two-bedroom pavilion to the south—wear the original Yankee uniform: steep roofs, tight overhangs, and cedar shingles over everything.

Closer inspection yields clues that all is not flinty tradition here: slender stainless steel railings; yachty varnished mahogany doors; a center chimney clad in lead-coated copper rather than brick. And as the compound turns toward the water, the rural New England vernacular admits gestures of more overt modernism. Wide sliding



**Project** Pond House  
**Architect** Elliott + Elliott  
Architecture, Blue Hill, Maine  
**General contractor** Mike  
Temple, Hampden, Maine  
**Structural engineer** Becker  
Structural Engineers, Portland,  
Maine  
**Landscape architect**  
Richardson & Associates,  
Saco, Maine  
**Interior designer** Gary Ruff  
Interiors, Moorestown, N.J.  
**Project size** 2,768 square  
feet  
**Site** 17 acres  
**Construction cost** Withheld

See pg. 85 for resources



VACATION HOME

CASE STUDY





## Residential Architect

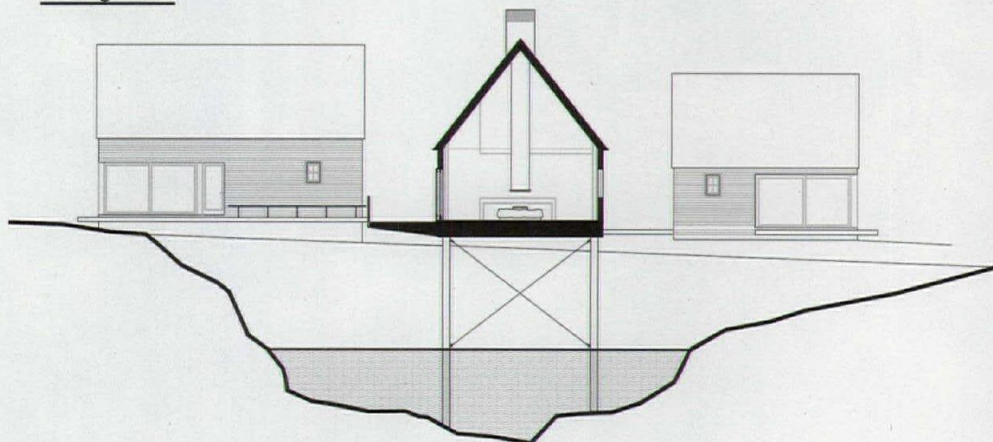
VACATION HOME  
CASE STUDY

### Pond House (cont.)



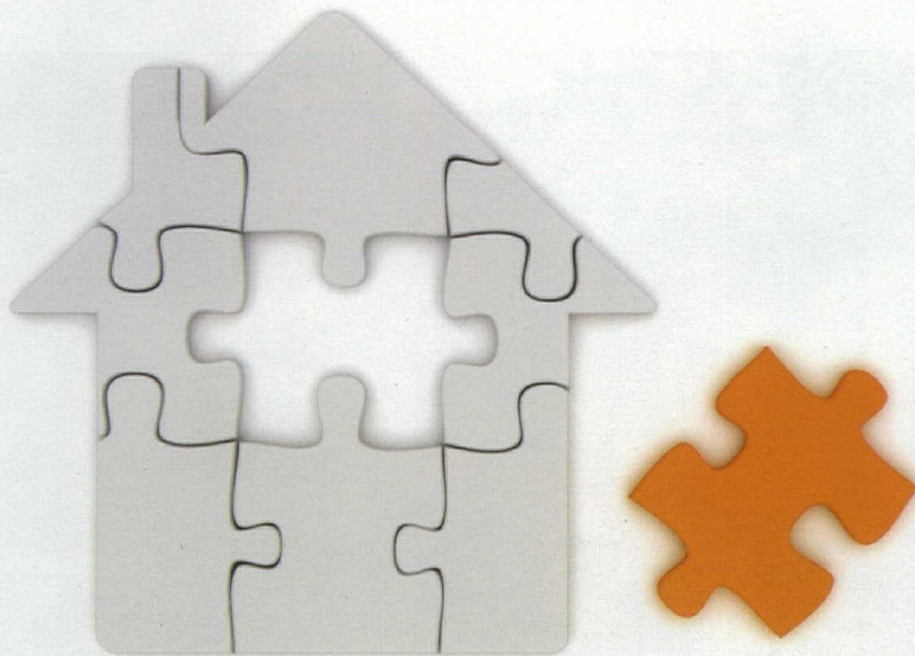
Pond House gets its name from the basin of water it overhangs: a saltwater inlet enclosed years ago with an earthen dam. Water sequestered between summer high tides warms up to a comfortable swimming temperature. The compound's three pavilions reflect a modernist interpretation of traditional New England building types.

**Building section**





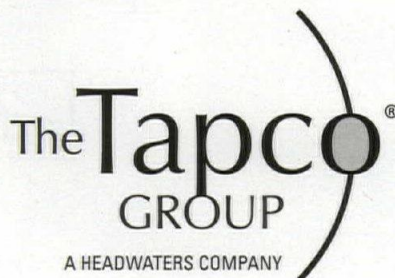
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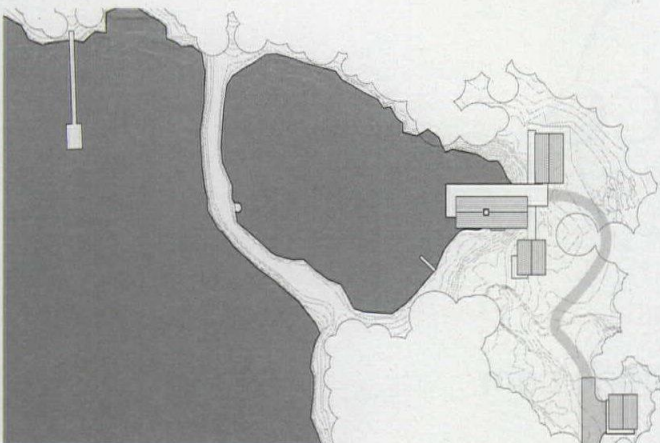
# Residential Architect

VACATION HOME  
CASE STUDY

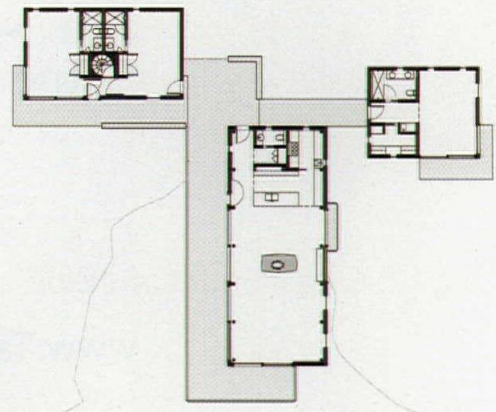
Pond House (cont.)



Site plan



Floor plan







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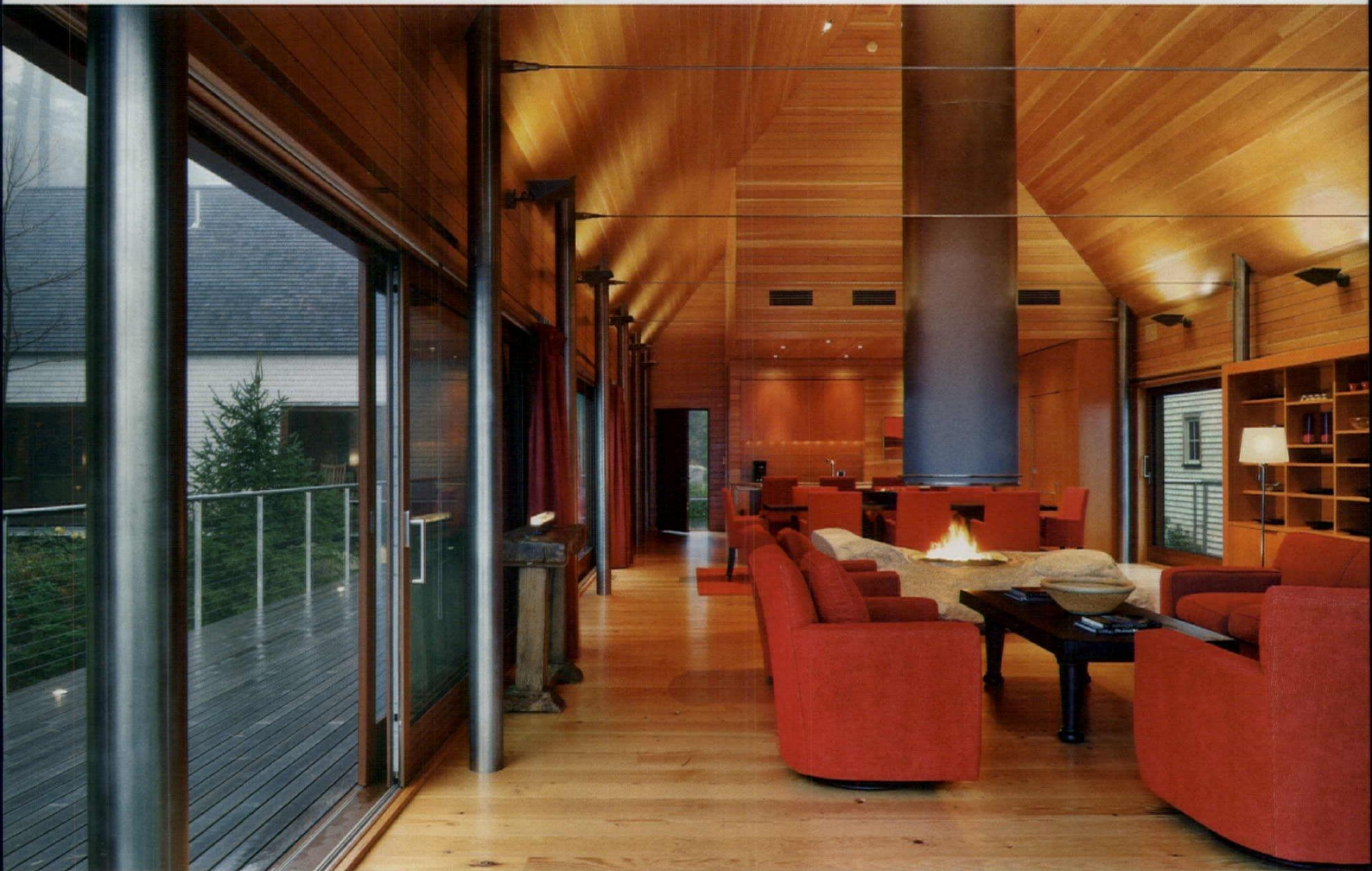
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## Residential Architect

### VACATION HOME CASE STUDY

#### Pond House (cont.)



The central living pavilion's shingled exterior conceals a deceptively advanced structural system. Stainless steel columns, restrained by steel cable ceiling ties, obviate the need for bearing walls. The interior centers on a fireplace consisting of a massive granite hearth stone and a brushed steel chimney that hangs from the roof peak.

doors open onto cantilevered decks. The main pavilion perches over the water on two neat rows of piers X-braced with steel rods.

The level of abstraction jumps several notches at the interior, where brushed stainless steel columns, restrained with steel tie rods, transmit roof loads to the piers below. The exposed structural elements, which recall sailboat spars and rigging, permit the large wall openings while intruding minimally in the space overhead. Fir wall and ceiling paneling emphasizes the vertical dimension of the simple Monopoly-house volume. Piercing its core is a sculptural fireplace assembly that pairs a rough granite-boulder hearth with a chimney that

descends from the ceiling's peak.

The contrast between outdoors and indoors is striking. "You see this sort of fishing village complex of buildings," Elliott says, "and you walk inside and see something entirely different." But threads, both direct and implied, connect the two. The fir paneling and pine flooring are traditional cabin materials; the granite hearth is a chunk of the very bedrock that underpins this island; even the highest-tech bits were fabricated by local tradespeople. And every glance toward the water will remind the owners of what this building is about. "That was our starting point," Reinholdt says. "We took it to a different place, but we kept it rooted in Maine." ▢



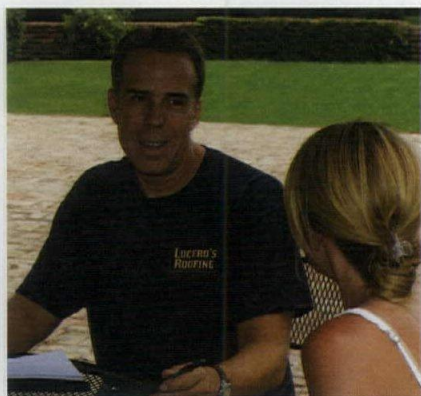


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VACATION HOME

CASE STUDY

TEXT BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD

L

**Long Beach, N.Y.**, might not be as celebrated as its seaside neighbors up the coast—Fire Island, the Hamptons, or Montauk—but its location on the Atlantic Ocean is just as good, offering the same sand, water and views of the sunrise. This is partly the reason a Manhattan couple bought a small cottage on the beach and hired New York-based West Chin Architect to design this open-plan weekend retreat with modern flourishes such as a large airport hangar door that opens the house to the ocean, exposed metal framing, and a cast concrete shear wall.

"The wife had been going to Long Beach since she was a child and her family had a small cabana there," says architect West Chin. But in contrast to the New England-style homes in the area, the couple wanted something modern but warm enough for entertaining.

Chin razed the cottage, and in its place he nestled a 6,000-square-foot home set on 100 piles driven into the sandy soil. He organized the home on three levels: a ground floor with a family room, four Jack and Jill bedrooms, and a powder room; a second level containing the kitchen, dining room, and living room; and a mezzanine for the master suite. "The neighborhood has a height restriction of 32 feet," Chin says. "The mezzanine allowed us space to insert a full bath and the master bedroom."

A cast concrete shear wall anchors the house but acts as a thermal mass that collects heat from the



**Project** Beach House on Long Island, Long Beach, N.Y.

**Architect/Interior designer**

West Chin Architect, New York

**General contractor** Custom

Homes by Eric, Long Beach

**Structural engineer** Dominick

R. Pilla Associates, Nyack, N.Y.

**Project size** 6,000 square feet

**Site** ¼ acre

**Construction cost** Withheld

**Photography** Courtesy West

Chin Architect

See pg. 85 for resources







## Residential Architect

### VACATION HOME

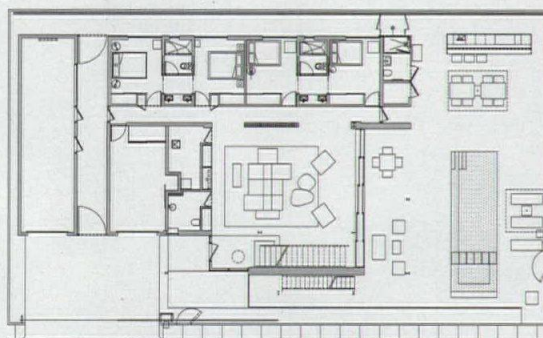
### CASE STUDY

#### Beach House on Long Island (cont.)



The 26-foot-wide fold-up aluminum and glass door allows the homeowners a clear view of the dunes and waters beyond.

Ground floor



Second floor







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## Residential Architect

### VACATION HOME CASE STUDY

#### Beach House on Long Island (cont.)



An elevated kitchen and soaring ceilings create a spacious living area, while wood finishes, travertine floors, and a butterfly speckled wall add texture.

sun during the day and radiates it at night. Left exposed, the wall also serves as an integral part of the design. Additionally, Chin used Austrian laminated structural members measuring about 8 inches thick and 40 feet long to form the floor and roof deck. "The uniqueness of this construction material is that it can span very long distances while maintaining minimum depth," the architect explains. It also serves as exposed finished surfaces inside and out.

The roof slopes up from the street, easing the transition of scale from the bungalows on one side and the water on the other and creating a 9-foot ceiling in the kitchen and a 22-foot ceiling in the living room. The effect is a large open living area with an airport hangar door that funnels breeze

and light into the space. "It ensures that even the deepest reaches of the house have an unobstructed view of the Atlantic," the architect says.

Despite the home's modernist/industrial take on the beach house, the spaces are warm and informal. Chin chose materials such as Douglas fir, oak, cedar, and pebble-tiled walls in the master bath to add not only warmth but texture. And the large glass doors upstairs and down make outdoor living easy. For the family of five who entertains at the house almost every weekend, the home is the perfect respite from the hectic pace of life in Gotham, a place to soak up the sand and the sun or swim in the backyard pool. Says Chin, "It's modern and exciting, but it's comfortable for entertaining." ▢

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Presents:

## Steel Framing for Composite Decking A Next-Gen Solution

By: Kathy Price-Robinson



From homes to docks to public walkways, the emergence of composite boards more than 20 years ago transformed and shifted the decking industry. Composites started out with a single digit share of the market when compared to wood, increasing from 2% in 1999 to 24% in 2010. However, one factor in the deck assembly did not see a change: the framing. So while architects and builders specified or installed composites that would not twist, splinter or get eaten by termites, most frames were being built with the same old wood. While deck substructures are a \$1.9 billion market that remains primarily composed of pressure-treated lumber, the status quo is starting to shift as steel framing enters the mainstream market.

If you think about it, the substructure of a deck is the heart of a deck's durability, the basis for its aesthetics. You could say the old way, the wood way, is putting a high-performance decking on top of a low-performing foundation. As with any innovation, questions arise.

- What is this product?
- Why does an architect choose to specify it?
- How does a builder install it?

This education unit will answer those questions. Let's begin with the benefits and features of steel deck framing.

### BENEFITS OF STEEL DECK FRAMING

The benefits of steel deck framing become evident when contrasted with the shortcomings of wood framing. With deterioration from weather, moisture, time and pests, wood framing can twist and warp, flaws which transmit to the surface decking. No matter the high quality of the decking boards, the overall appearance and functionality will become compromised. With the stability of steel, this new type of framing eliminates those problems. In an article in *Professional Deck Builder*, Robert Shaw, who owns Colorado Deck and Framing in Colorado Springs, wrote that while decking material has come a long way in recent years, "I don't think the quality of framing materials has kept up, and it seems



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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this educational unit, you will be able to:

1. List the benefits of steel deck framing.
2. Discuss design and planning with steel deck framing.
3. Describe the steps and options for installing steel deck framing.
4. Identify the finishing touches for this new building product.





**Case study: Apartment Complex Decks** The Challenge: Property managers at Ryan's Run West Rental Community in Maple Shade, New Jersey, were faced with replacing small, aging and decrepit decks on 160 apartment units for the third time in about 30 years. They sought a solution that was cost effective and long term. Over the years, the wood had shrunk, warped and twisted so much that some of the 6 x 8 decks were sloped away from the building. Property management sought a replacement more durable than wood and one that would not have to be replaced in the next 10 years.

**The Solution:** Property managers had already considered using a composite decking material for the boards, and when they were introduced to a steel deck framing product that could be used for the substructure, they opted to rebuild the decks out of the longer-lasting and durable products. Choosing the steel deck frame met and even exceeded the property owners' needs. Neither the boards nor frame will rot or decay, remaining impervious to insects and termites. The products will create a stable and straight deck and will not warp or twist over time. The non-combustible nature of the product is an added boost in this apartment complex that hosts thousands of residents.

silly to put decking with a 20-year (or longer) warranty onto a wood frame that I doubt will last that long. Because of this, I've begun building decks using ... steel joists that allow me to offer customers a frame that will last as long as the decking I put on it," (Professional Deck Builder, March/April 2011).

**Additional Benefits of Steel Deck Framing**  
**Consistently Flat** — Steel framing equals a refined and consistently flat foundation on which to install deck boards. This eliminates that familiar yet tiresome exercise of shuffling through stacks of lumber for uncompromised boards.

During installation, there is no worry about which way to turn a crowning board.

**Remains Stable** — Query any deck builder and they will share myriad stories of composite decking boards that became wavy and uneven over time because of the instability of the wood framing underneath. When wood framing twists and warps, those impacts show up on the surface of the decking. In contrast, steel framing won't twist and warp over time, so the deck boards remain in place, resulting in fewer callbacks and sullied

reputations. Straight steel beams and joists below mean level decking above.

**Longer Spans** — Because of the strength of lightweight steel beams, longer spans between posts are possible. This gives the architect more flexibility in post placement, preserving views where desirable.

**Design Flexibility** — Curved decks, popular with owners and designers alike, are simple to create with a steel framing system. The process involves notching the flanges of a C-shaped header to allow it to bend. As most deck builders know, it's as difficult as it is time-consuming to bend wood. A curved deck topped by a corresponding curved railing or pergola makes a stunning design statement. Other designs made easy with steel framing include expanded cantilevers and angled corners.

**Easy to Install** — While the term steel framing might conjure up visions of heavy iron and blow torches, lightweight steel deck framing requires no special tools and cuts and installs as easy as wood, if not easier. If someone can work with wood, they can work with steel framing. According to the professional deck builder referenced earlier, moving steel deck framing components is much easier than moving around pressure-treated lumber.

**Nationally Available** — Steel deck framing is available on a national scale and is not a specialty item. This lessens the potential for delays during construction and keeps the job moving along.

**Non-Combustible** — Steel deck framing qualifies for extreme wildfire building codes under the International Code Council (ICC) – Wild Land Urban Interface (WUI) building material requirements. That makes it a good choice for areas of high-density housing and frequent wildfires, eliminating one more combustible item on a home's exterior.

**Termite/Insect Repellent** — While extreme measures are taken to dissuade insects from eating fibers in wood used for decking boards, those measure are not necessary with steel framing. Insects





### Case Study: College Campus Walkway

**The Challenge:** To create a serene walking path on a busy private college campus in the Western United States that would prove to be wear-resistant, protect the fragile surrounding environment, and provide a lovely spot for student and alumni gatherings. Because of the pond and wildlife in the area, it was a popular place where students and nearby residents socialized. But the activity took a toll on the root system of the fragile Cyprus trees and on the banks of the pond, which were eroding.

College officials sought to build a 2,200-square-foot boardwalk-type walkway around the pond that would not rot or decay over time due to its proximity to water, the chemicals in the water, or from insect or termite damage. They wanted

a product that was stable and strong enough to withstand the thousands of weekly visitors while, at the same time, would protect the environment.

**The Solution:** Upon learning about a steel deck framing option offered by the same company that manufactured the selected composite decking boards, university officials decided to use this product to gain the stability, durability and flat, straight surface that couldn't be achieved with wood. They also were impressed with the 25-year warranty that accompanied the steel deck framing. The product proved easy to install and, as importantly, was compatible with the helical piers that the builders chose to use instead of concrete footers in order to provide extra protection to the tree roots. There is a high level of satisfaction with the results.

cannot eat it. This strength protects the deck from rotting and, therefore, the tragedies that oftentimes follow from unexpected collapse.

### SUSTAINABLE FEATURES OF STEEL DECK FRAMING

These features may appeal to architects and builders who cater to environmentally conscious homeowners, and may contribute to LEED points:

**Long Lasting** — Galvanized, dual-coated steel lasts longer than pressure-treated

lumber, eliminating callbacks and the cost of replacing or repairing wood framing.

**Recycled Content** — Steel framing components may contain 25% recycled content which could contribute toward LEED points.

**Recyclable** — Check with the framing manufacturer, but steel framing waste may be 100% recyclable. And in the event that the deck project is eventually torn down, the steel substructure can be returned to the recycle stream and possibly repurposed.

**Chemical Free** — Unlike pressure-treated lumber, which is infused with volatile chemicals to protect it from pests, steel is chemical free. Even without LEED points, or points from other green building rating systems, a chemical-free building material will appeal to clients trying to minimize chemicals in and around the home.

### DESIGNING AND PLANNING STEEL DECK FRAMING

Not all designs will be as large or complex as a rooftop pool surround, but before one designs or builds a deck, it's





### Case Study: The Mercedes House Rooftop Deck

**The Challenge:** Two Trees Management Company, a multi-billion dollar residential developer in New York City, sought a product that would meet required fire codes in the construction of an elevated deck project on the fourth-floor set-back roof terrace of an 850-unit luxury condominium and rental complex on the Upper West Side. Fire codes would not allow the company to use pressure-treated wood for the entire 36,000-square-foot terrace, so they elected to incorporate steel deck framing to support the 80' diameter outdoor wading pool deck.

**The Solution:** Lightweight steel deck framing offers several benefits. It is a highly stable material that provides a uniform grid onto which the curved deck plants can be fastened. The complex deck design has an outboard circular edge that was

easily framed by using the C-channel style track material. The steel deck framing also contributed to the building's LEED points for recycled content and local sourcing of the steel framing.

Finally, with such a large investment being made in the pool deck itself, opting to use steel will extend the lifespan of the installation well beyond what could be expected of wood, further protecting the \$1.3M investment. In the event that the deck is torn down, the steel framing can be recycled back into the product stream. This showcase project, built on top of the building that houses the flagship Manhattan Mercedes dealership at 11th Ave. and 53rd St., incorporates more than 2,000 curved 8-foot deck planks that were custom bent to conform to the circular pool deck and bench surround. It is the visual focal point of this rooftop wonder.

helpful to review design options and considerations. While an all-wood deck may deteriorate and require replacement in just a few years, as was the case at the apartment complex, a deck on a steel frame will last much longer. Therefore, more care should be given to the design. Here's what to think about:

#### Design and Build to the Space

In a smaller space, designing a multi-level deck to make use of vertical space should be considered. Double-check local building codes about setback requirements first. The space under a deck can be used as well, as a patio or

storage area (however grills should not be used under decking areas due to ventilation and fire hazards). In a large backyard, the possibilities are limitless — multiple levels, pergolas, gazebos, and sweeping curves are all possible. Distinct activity areas could include a garden, grilling station, or a pool. Irregular spaces can benefit from the flexibility of curved decking space, which is easily attainable with steel.

In terms of size, some common rules of thumb for deck designers and builders include:

1. A deck should be no larger than 20%

- of the house to which it is attached.
2. No single section of deck should be larger than the largest room in the house. This is where different deck sections and heights are most compatible with a smaller house.
3. A deck area that includes a dining space will most likely be the largest portion of a multi-section deck. The recommended space for a table and chairs should be at least 12' x 12'.

This article continues on [www.hanleywooduniversity.com](http://www.hanleywooduniversity.com). Go online to read the rest of the article and complete the corresponding quiz for credit.





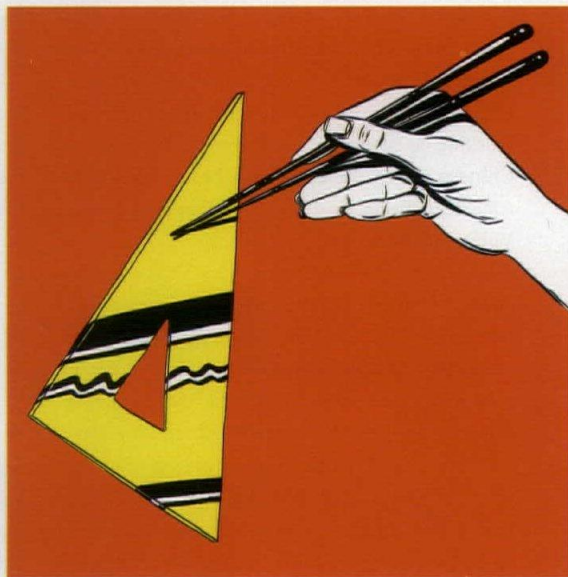
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## The China Commission

THE GUSH OF WORK IN CHINA HAS AMERICAN FIRMS TRAVERSING A FOREIGN LANDSCAPE.

TEXT BY CHERYL WEBER, LEED AP

ILLUSTRATION BY KELSEY DAKE

**In china—a chaotic,** complex, vast, and diverse country whose coastal metropolis, Shanghai, is the fastest growing city in the world—many U.S. architects have found a frontier. While American clients sit on the sidelines, China has an insatiable appetite for architecture. Although the pace of residential development has slowed recently, the long-term trend looks robust. More than 100 million farmers are expected to move from the countryside to the cities by 2020, making China, for better or worse, a giant construction site.

Large North American firms have been there for decades, of course, but as momentum builds, even some small offices are planting staff on the other side of the world. In July, New York-based Obra Architects launched a seven-person office in Beijing. Principals Pablo Castro and Jennifer

Lee are no strangers to international work. Two of their 18 employees are in Seoul and one is in London. Still, Castro says, working in China has unique challenges. With developers looking for something “stylistically backward,” inadequate regulation, ferocious bureaucracy, and a fair amount of corruption, “we were lucky to meet the right people, and we’ve been paid.”

The hyper-rapid growth of China’s second- and third-tier cities makes it a land of opportunity, especially in this post-recession era. But for small firms with little international experience, exploiting that project pipeline can be tricky. What follows, then, is a glimpse into what it takes to hopscotch across borders, time zones, language barriers, and foreign contracts to find profitable work.



### Peer Review

**IN THE MID-2000S**, Jessie Yan, now an associate at NBBJ Architects in Los Angeles, worked for a Chinese management firm hired as a consultant to the ZK Group, which developed the Zhonghai Seshan Villas near Shanghai. She mediated between the Chinese client and foreign architects. Here are her thoughts on bridging the cultural divide.

#### How did the ZK Group identify candidates to design the villas?

Since 1949, when the Communists took power, most of the new residential buildings have been workers' units. Since the local architects have never lived in villas, how could they design a lifestyle for wealthy people, including buyers from overseas? The developer concentrated on small- and medium-size foreign firms because those are the ones doing residential work. We chose firms we knew through previous connections, and also looked at architects' websites to check quality, experience, reputation, and client list. The architects also needed to be flexible in terms of contracts, trip requirements, and schedule.

#### What advice would you give North American firms trying to land residential work in China?

- Research the clients' vision, reputation, and past projects. You'll also have to collaborate with local architects, which you usually cannot select. This is like a forced marriage, but it's very important to have a good relationship. If they ruin your design, the whole thing becomes meaningless.
- Respect the culture and tradition. In the villa designs, the American architects wanted to have a room for the maid, but in China they don't want to spend money for that. You can't say, 'Because we have equal rights, I want to put this in the design.' In the end the local architect will change it.
- American architects should push to get paid for construction administration and construction document review, to guarantee your design intent is realized. It's expensive to hire American architects, so clients usually just buy a concept. NBBJ is getting paid now to follow through with construction administration on commercial and mixed-use work, but it's a fairly new development.

#### A Foot in the Door

The world is smaller these days, making possible alliances that were unlikely 10 years ago. Many small firms go global unintentionally as search engines direct foreign companies to their website. Others are found through professional networking, as was the case when the ZH Group, a Chinese mixed-use developer, began looking for American firms to design 78 Zhonghai Seshan Villas near Shanghai.

CBT Architects, Boston, was on the list because a former employee, Jessie Yan, was working for a Chinese company representing the developer. She had left CBT to attend graduate school and then moved to China. When nominations were solicited, she recommended the firm.

"It's a good lesson in being nice to your employees," says CBT associate principal Ellen Perko, AIA, LEED AP BD+C. The firm designed 12 houses, some of them takeoffs of traditional Chinese courtyard houses. "We tried to find the best way to do a house that would meet the needs of the Chinese population culturally and aesthetically, while also bringing in some Western elements," she says.

More often, long-term marketing underpins a China presence. Los Angeles-based architect Richard Landry, AIA, heads up the Landry Design Group, which does 75 percent of its work outside the United States. Five years ago, following the advice of Asian clients in L.A., Landry started sending project photos to Chinese magazines, which subsequently published his work. He also wrote two books about classical design that were translated in Chinese.

"A lot of Chinese architects bought the book to learn more about classical design," Landry says. He landed his first villa project from a couple who initially had looked for a local architect to design their European-style house. "After five or six interviews where the architects pulled out my book and said, 'Is this what you're looking for?' the clients made a cold call," Landry says. "They flew in, and the first thing we knew we were designing the biggest house we'd ever done." Now he says the firm is designing a collective 8 million square feet of high-end homes for four Chinese clients. "Different Chinese companies contact

us almost every week," he adds. "Most are looking for production houses, and we don't really do that. We never felt a slowdown and have been growing since 2008."

For Silver Spring, Md.-based Torti Gallas and Partners, patient relationship-building was key to landing its first project two years ago: the master plan for an upscale community in a Beijing suburb, including designs for an eight-story condo building, two club houses, and seniors housing. Before that, firm principal Feng Xiao, AIA, had spent five years introducing herself and attending marketing tours while vacationing in her native China.

"We've done projects that are similar in scale and detail to what the client was looking for," she says. "I have friends who work for the developer; they do things formally and can afford us. You have to find your own niche and the value you bring to the table."

#### Style and Substance

The question of value—and values—is always at the forefront of architect-client discussions. But in China, which is developing at a faster pace and on a grander scale than other parts of the world, those negotiations are complicated by questions about what it means to be modern without necessarily emulating the West. China's urbanization drive has generated criticism that too many buildings are eyesores, yet architects face intense pressure to design whatever is commercially expedient.

In his Pritzker Prize acceptance speech in May, Chinese architect Wang Shu noted the demolition of old villages and the loss of what makes China so distinctive. He wondered: "Is it possible to find smarter ways for addressing environmental and ecological challenges by drawing on the wisdom found in traditional architecture and grassroots building activities? Is there a way for us to express our architectural pursuit with stories and feelings without resorting to gigantic, symbolic, and iconic structures?"

Obra Architects experienced similar tensions when a developer commissioned the firm to design a community in Wenzhou in southern China. The client asked for something modeled on high-



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end American suburban development—essentially large houses that swallow their lots. Castro came back with a scheme for four- and five-story vertical houses connected by bridges, presenting the opportunity for someone to buy two or three to form a compound, while preserving the green areas around them.

"We were not successful," he says. "They didn't care about the island or the city. Good architecture requires a somewhat courageous and illuminated attitude on the part of the client. You have to find your client, just like the client has to find their architect."

But working with culturally sensitive clients can be just as perplexing. In 2008, a developer picked Boston-based Höweler + Yoon Architecture to design a Chinese courtyard house that evolved into the award-winning SkyCourts Exhibition Hall in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province in southwestern China. Eric Höweler,

AIA, LEED AP, and his wife and partner, Meejin Yoon, struggled for years to find an appropriate architectural response.

"We would show up with an abstract interpretation, and he would say, 'No, I want a traditional house with more Chinese feeling,'" Höweler recalls. "We tried to figure out what that meant. We're not interested in attaching historical features to a building. Was it a quality of light? A materials or alignment issue? They'd send us famous poems by a Chinese poet, asking us to interpret the poems in the architecture. No American developer would ask you to do that. It was confounding and strange."

Höweler says that western China has a different sensibility than the newer eastern cities such as Shanghai and Beijing. People in Chengdu have access to a history that most of China doesn't have, and their claims to tradition are stronger than on the coast. "Their desire for an architec-

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tural vocabulary that recuperates what was lost is stronger," Höweler explains. "That posed trouble for us; we weren't comfortable with the idea of redeploying those elements, but in interpreting their traditions."

He and Yoon finally arrived at a design that surprised them. They devised a series of gallery spaces around seven outdoor courtyards, layering them so that visitors look from inside to outside to inside. Windows are clustered in Cor-Ten panels that break up the traditional Chinese brickwork, and roof planes slope in toward the courtyard voids, evoking an undulating landscape. "We found ways to reappraise what we were being asked to appreciate," Höweler says.

#### **Time Change**

Whether it's single-family homes, residential towers, or other project types, China's building boom offers opportunities for almost any firm with the

fortitude to work across cultures. Although the government has made financing more difficult for speculative housing recently, there are new incentives for seniors projects, as the one-child policy has resulted in fewer family caretakers for aging parents, says RTKL vice president Daun St. Amand, AIA, LEED AP, who heads its residential sector in the Los Angeles office.

China commissions are complicated by the time difference, the two days of travel to get there, and the many spoons in the pot: Local firms remain the architect of record. But profits can be higher because there's less risk. American architects aren't allowed to stamp drawings and typically aren't involved in construction.

There's also, obviously, less control. "We don't hear from the client for months, and suddenly we see a picture of the project under construction," Höweler says. "It's easy for them to attribute changes to code. When you go to see the project,

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## Residential Architect

### PRACTICE

**"CONTROLLING THE QUALITY OF THE DETAILING BECOMES MORE DIFFICULT, ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE ARE NOT MANY CHINESE ARCHITECTS WHO UNDERSTAND CLASSICAL DETAILING."**

you hope it's 90 percent of what you designed."

CBT's Perko recalls spending 10 days in China going over working drawings with the local firms assigned to the Sheshan Villas. But they changed the beam size on one house, which affected the clerestory. "They told us they'd fix it, but when we saw the pictures, it wasn't done," Perko says. "The project was totally worth doing, but you have to be realistic about expectations."

Nearly every architect has such a story. On one RTKL project, the local architects ignored the specs for a particular glass color. "The time change is a big part of the difficulty," St. Amand says. "We have a full-time Chinese-national translator on staff here in Los Angeles. But our clients can't pick up the phone and say, 'We're going to pick glass today.' They're in a hurry and just do it."

The construction pace is astonishing. Three months after Torti Gallas presented schematic

designs for its current project, the concrete framing was finished on the first 31,000-square-foot building, Xiao says.

The breakneck speed makes identifying and correcting construction mistakes difficult, agrees Weiqing Feng, LEED AP, who directs the design studio in the Beijing office of Hostetler Zhang Studer (HZS), based in Atlanta. Her staff is designing high-end multifamily housing and large villas for speculative developers. "Controlling the quality of the detailing becomes more difficult, especially since there are not many Chinese architects who understand classical detailing," she says.

Keeping up means coordinating efforts virtually around the clock. At Cincinnati-based GBBN Architects, a handful of stateside employees are teamed with 45 staff in Beijing. "They're working seven days a week, doing design concepts for a million square feet in a matter of weeks," says

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## Residential Architect

PRACTICE

*"OUR CLIENTS ARE FANTASTIC AND THEY'RE ALSO OUR FRIENDS AT THIS POINT. IT'S HARD FOR CHINESE ENTREPRENEURS TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY OF THE SYSTEM, AND THEY DO THE BEST THEY CAN WITH THE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST. WE'RE NOT RELYING ON CHINA TOO MUCH, BUT WE INTEND TO GROW OUR BUSINESS THERE."*

CEO Matthew Schottelkotte, AIA, LEED AP.

One reason for the haste is that land costs in China represent more than half the cost of developing a project, compared with 5 percent of development costs in the U.S., so the sooner developers can build, the sooner they can recoup their investment, says Jervy Zhu, AIA, who runs GBBN's Beijing office. "Once you have land, you're substantially in debt, and the core and shell must be completed before you can obtain a license for selling the units. There's tremendous incentive to speed it up."

### Due Vigilance

In any case, architects say that China projects are at least as profitable as domestic work, assuming you've done your homework. RTKL looks for clients who've already built the kind of project they're asking for, rather than trying to move, say, from mid-priced to high-end products.

The fee structure is considerably different. "Adjusting your fee to the scope and the schedule has become a great art in China, and managing client expectations is a full-time job," says HZS' Feng. To expeditiously navigate the bureaucracy of government-approved payments, billings usually are broken into small phase-related chunks—say, three payments for the schematic phase, Landry says. He asks for 20 percent up front and issues all the invoices at once so that paperwork is processed apace. By all accounts, that's an un-

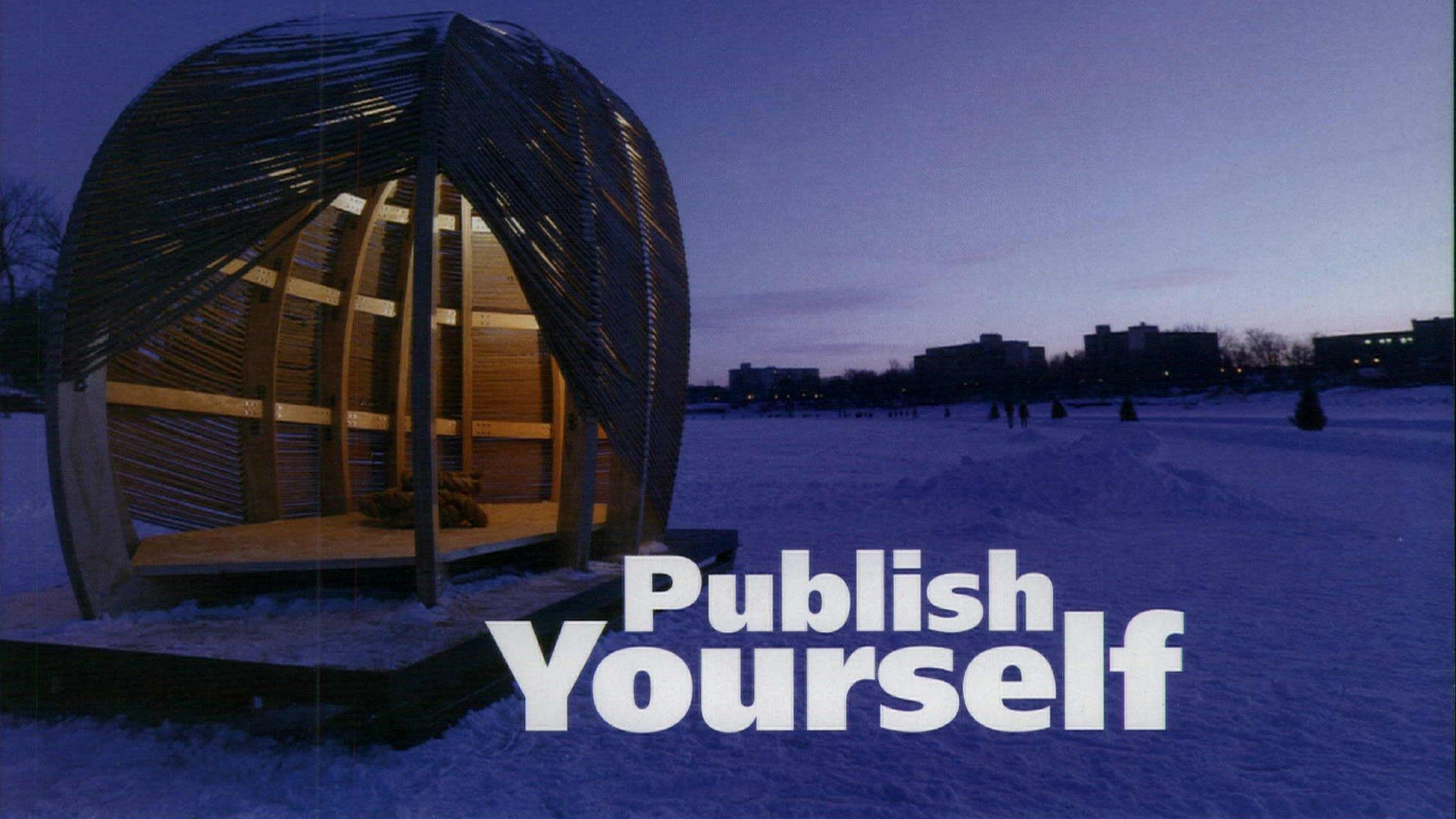
usual arrangement, and one of the benefits of working with repeat clients.

When San Francisco architect Ian Glidden, AIA, coordinated construction of the Seshan Villas, he accelerated the payment schedule—12 payments for 13 months of work. "You have to understand your value on the job. It's part of the business culture that once you're no longer needed, you're no longer paid," he says, adding: "They'll often tell you what you want to hear rather than the truth. It's not different from Western culture, but maybe more prevalent. But I'd go back in a heartbeat. The people were very friendly and receiving."

Architecture is a mechanism that demonstrates China's arrival on the global scene, and the government feels it has an incredible amount of catching up to do. For North American architects, especially young, nomadic firms who find it hard to get a ground-up project built here, the prospects are tantalizing.

"Our clients are fantastic and they're also our friends at this point," Castro says. "It's hard for Chinese entrepreneurs to work independently of the system, and they do the best they can with the conditions that exist. We're not relying on China too much, but we intend to grow our business there." Feng, too, believes this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in a unique period in China. "It's not perfect by any means," she says, "but the opportunities are limitless." ▢





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No one knows towns and cities like Hall of Fame winner David Dixon, FAIA, of Goody Clancy. He understands them down to their DNA and revels in recombining it to form more livable, walkable, and enjoyable homes for communities and society as a whole. As chairman of the AIA's Regional and Urban Design Committee, he spearheaded its response to Hurricane Katrina.

There's a stoic brilliance at work in one of our coldest climes, where Top Firm winners Brian Johnsen, AIA, and Sebastian Schmaling, AIA, LEED AP, of Johnsen Schmaling Architects, toil. They're the only firm ever to win both Project of the Year in this magazine and Custom Home of the Year in our sister publication, Custom Home, in the same year. In the five years since, they've designed some of the strongest residential work in the country—locally inspired, national in caliber, and environmentally aware.

Our Rising Star, Mark Peters, AIA, of Studio Dwell Architects, has mastered the urban dwelling that mines breathtaking internal vistas, making the most of limited square footage and ho-hum streetscapes. And he's carved a niche as the go-to local firm for out-of-town multifamily architects. Having won multiple awards at both scales of housing, Peters is one to watch now and in the future.



TEXT BY CHERYL WEBER, LEED AP  
PORTRAIT BY IAN ALLEN

# Hall of Fame: David Dixon

ARMED WITH RESEARCH, CHARM, AND ENTHUSIASM, FOR FOUR DECADES DAVID DIXON HAS HELPED CREATE COOLER NEIGHBORHOODS THAN PEOPLE COULD HAVE IMAGINED. MANY ARCHITECTS ARE DESIGNING WORK HE HAS PLANNED.

**Walk far enough** in any major city, and you'll notice its failures: trash-strewn lots, monolithic buildings on main pedestrian streets, and isolated pockets of public housing. Drive through suburbia, and you'll see circuitous subdivisions, tired retail sectors, and office parks trapped by ribbons of highway.

David Dixon, FAIA, sees something different. Instead of deadly monotony, there are humanly scaled urban buildings, blocks that mix housing with offices, and ground-floor retail in bustling residential areas. He also sees suburbs that are compact, complex, and lively enough to attract the young, skilled workers that existing businesses need to grow.

Dixon, principal in charge of urban design and planning at Boston-based Goody Clancy, has helped propel the smart growth movement into the 21st century, over terrain that is vastly more complex than it was 35 years ago. He began his work in the mid-1970s, when the push for transit-oriented development was more about reducing energy consumption than about something you could build an economy around. But he has always been guided by a core credo he borrowed from Louis Kahn, his professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

"We are never handed a paradigm that explains everything," he says. "We are taught a world view that is dominant at a point in time.

One of our jobs is to test it, explore it, and find what comes next."

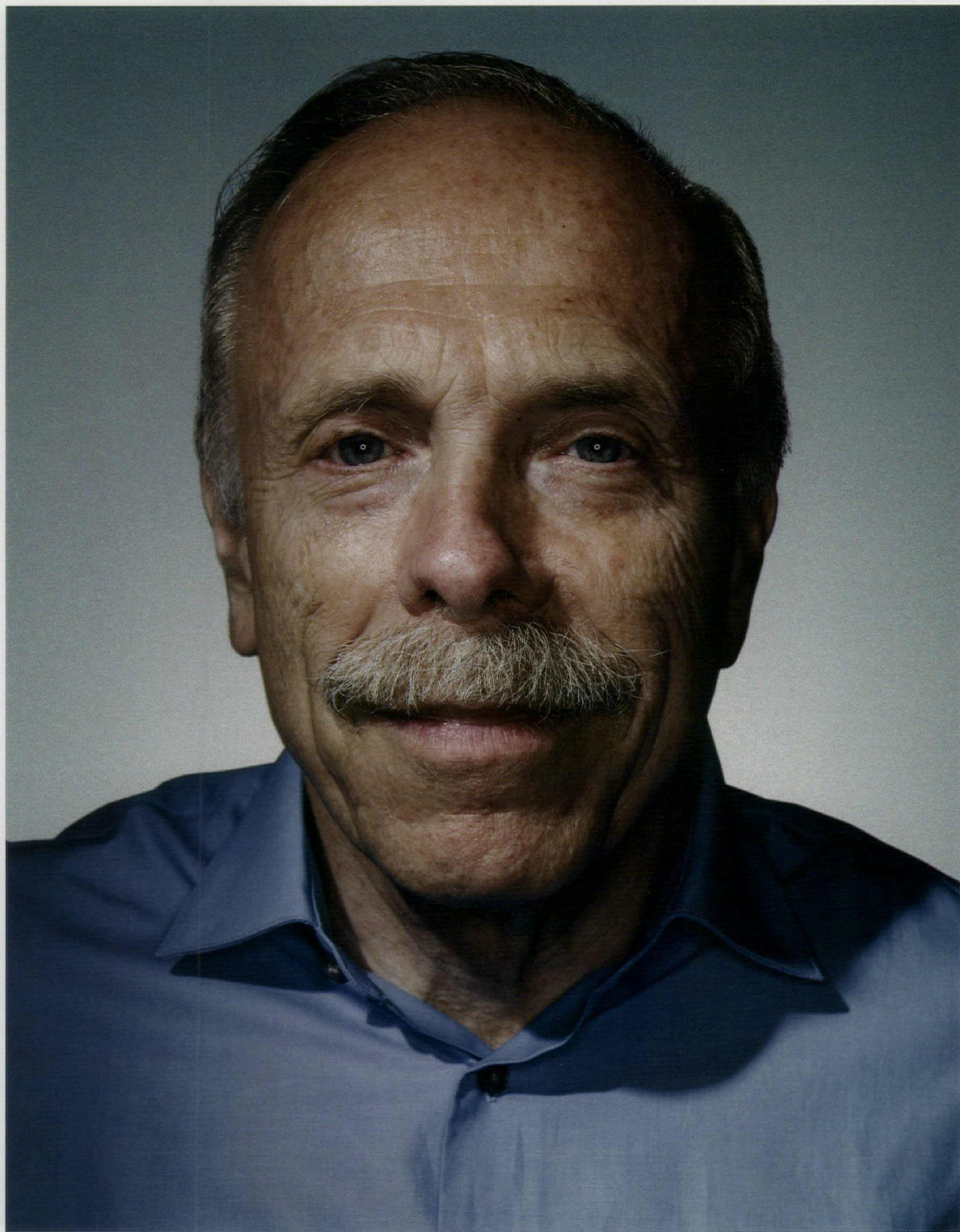
## **Density: From Negative to Positive**

Dixon, who holds master's degrees in architecture and urban design from Penn and Harvard, came of age professionally at a time when urban design was beginning to focus on redeveloping existing communities rather than demolishing the city's depressed areas. After a short stint with Harry Weese and Associates in Chicago, he returned to Boston, working on transit-oriented development at a handful of urban design firms. Much of his time was spent engaging community groups up and down the planned Orange Line extension from Boston to its northern suburbs, and the reconfigured Southwest Corridor. For five years he also ran his own firm, David Dixon and Associates, before joining Goody Clancy in 1991.

While studying at Harvard, Dixon worked at the Boston office of Skidmore Owings & Merrill, which was headed by a charismatic fellow named Peter Hopkinson. "He used to say, 'A word is worth a thousand pictures'—most people communicate verbally," Dixon recalls. "Architects are constantly trying to draw pictures to explain ideas, but they're not always successful. I was told that I was better at thinking than drawing."

Two events in particular crystallized his calling as a thinker, researcher, and communicator. In







1-5. Goody Clancy's five-year transformation plan for East Franklinton, a gritty 200-acre urban neighborhood next to Columbus, Ohio's central business district, includes new mixed-use buildings, affordable artist housing, and a riverfront park.

6-7. Bridge Street Corridor, a new town center with 3 million square feet of mixed-use development, will help Dublin, Ohio, compete for residents and employers who want to live and work in Main Street settings.

8-9. The redevelopment scheme for East Cambridge, Mass., unlocks the potential for connections between MIT, Kendall Square, North Point, and residential neighborhoods by breaking down unworkable mega-blocks, increasing density, and creating access to the Charles River.

2001, as president-elect of the Boston Society of Architects (BSA), he co-chaired a smart-growth conference called *How We Live*, which led to the formation of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, with the BSA as lead sponsor.

That was followed, once he became president, with the first national conference to tackle urban design's toughest challenge: the fear of density. Yet as he talked to research organizations such as the Urban Land Institute in preparation for the event, even he was amazed at the strength of his case. Since 1970, the number of married couples with children had fallen by half, to 20 percent of all households. "We had changed very rapidly in ways that had a lot to do with household size and where people would want to live," he says. "Even in the real estate industry this wasn't thought about."

The symposium, "Density: Myth and Reality," attracted 400 city and state government officials, planners, architects, developers, and journalists. Diane Georgopoulos, FAIA, an architect at MASS-Housing and a member of the planning committee, recalls: "David's energy level about the issue was so refreshing compared to the usual ponderous statistics about housing. He was able to capture imagination at a different level and across a very broad range of stakeholders. It came as a consequence of drilling into the data and coming up with profound connections between location and demand."

### Market Maps

Every plan issuing from Dixon's office comes with a numbers-based snapshot of the underlying market and the values that redevelopment can achieve. Goody Clancy works with consultants such as Zimmerman/Volk Associates to analyze emerging housing markets, with W-ZHA to explore public-private partnerships on commercial ventures, and with MJB on psychographics—local values, tastes, and aspirations that suggest what kinds of retail can succeed. Rather than trying to create demand, Dixon demonstrates that the demand is already there.

"He's on top of everything he does and loves to work with people," says *Boston Globe* architecture critic Robert Campbell, FAIA. "He gains wisdom from every project, which becomes a valuable re-

source for the whole community."

Two current projects illustrate Dixon's conviction that design can be an effective means of mustering a community's physical, intellectual, and economic resources. One is East Franklinton, a poor neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio, being developed by the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. It calls for 2,000 new housing units, a robust arts component, and affordable housing for artists.

"We're taking the most depressed part of Columbus and saying a vigorous new mixed-income neighborhood can be built there in five years by groups of different developers and will have strong market appeal," Dixon says. "This was something that literally no one believed in eight months ago."

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the firm also is creating a downtown for Dublin, Columbus' wealthiest and most competitive suburb for class A office space. Dublin had projected about 10 million square feet of growth, all sprawl, in high-end subdivisions and office parks. At least half of that is being channeled into 1,000 rezoned acres, called Bridge Street Corridor, on a series of failed office parks.

"This is radical in a community of high-income, politically conservative people who moved there for golf courses," Dixon says. The change, though, is driven by employers who are starting to get nervous about their ability to grow. In the past two years, it's become clear that the U.S. has a shortage of educated young workers who are essential for a thriving economy, he says. The folks that communities like Dublin need to capture want lofts and walkability. "If they want Dublin to grow, and people to buy single-family houses in 10 years, this is how to get people to come."

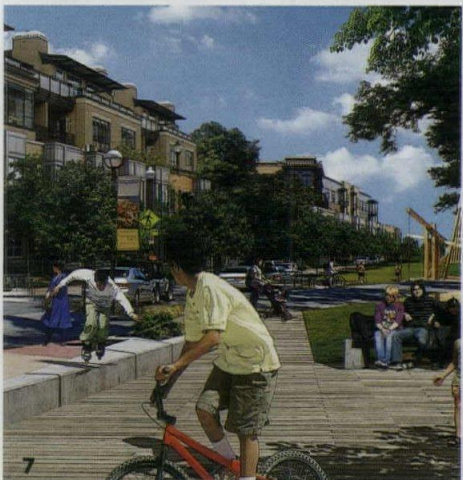
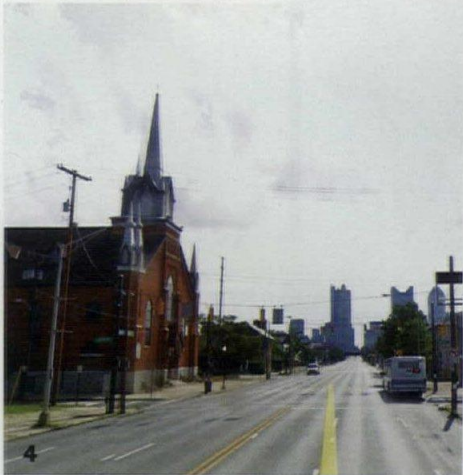
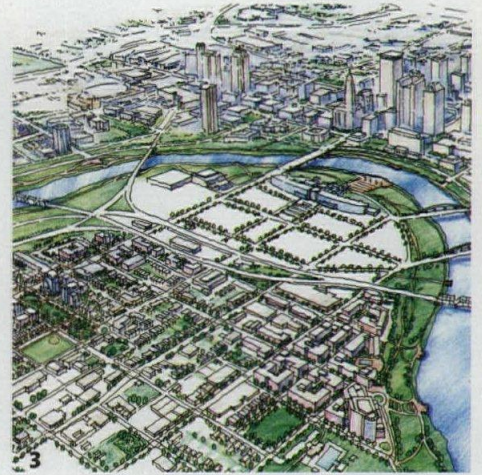
But for Dixon, at 65, this is only the beginning of a much steeper learning curve. An urgent issue now is what designers can do for a society where the poverty level is rising. For people who can't get the education they need to fill those labor shortages, it will be a much tougher life. What's necessary now, he says, is to widen the circle, cross-referencing with experts in education, public health, and job training.

"I have to acknowledge that all the things I'm excited about are only half the battle," Dixon says. "Those are some dots we all need to figure out how to connect." ▢



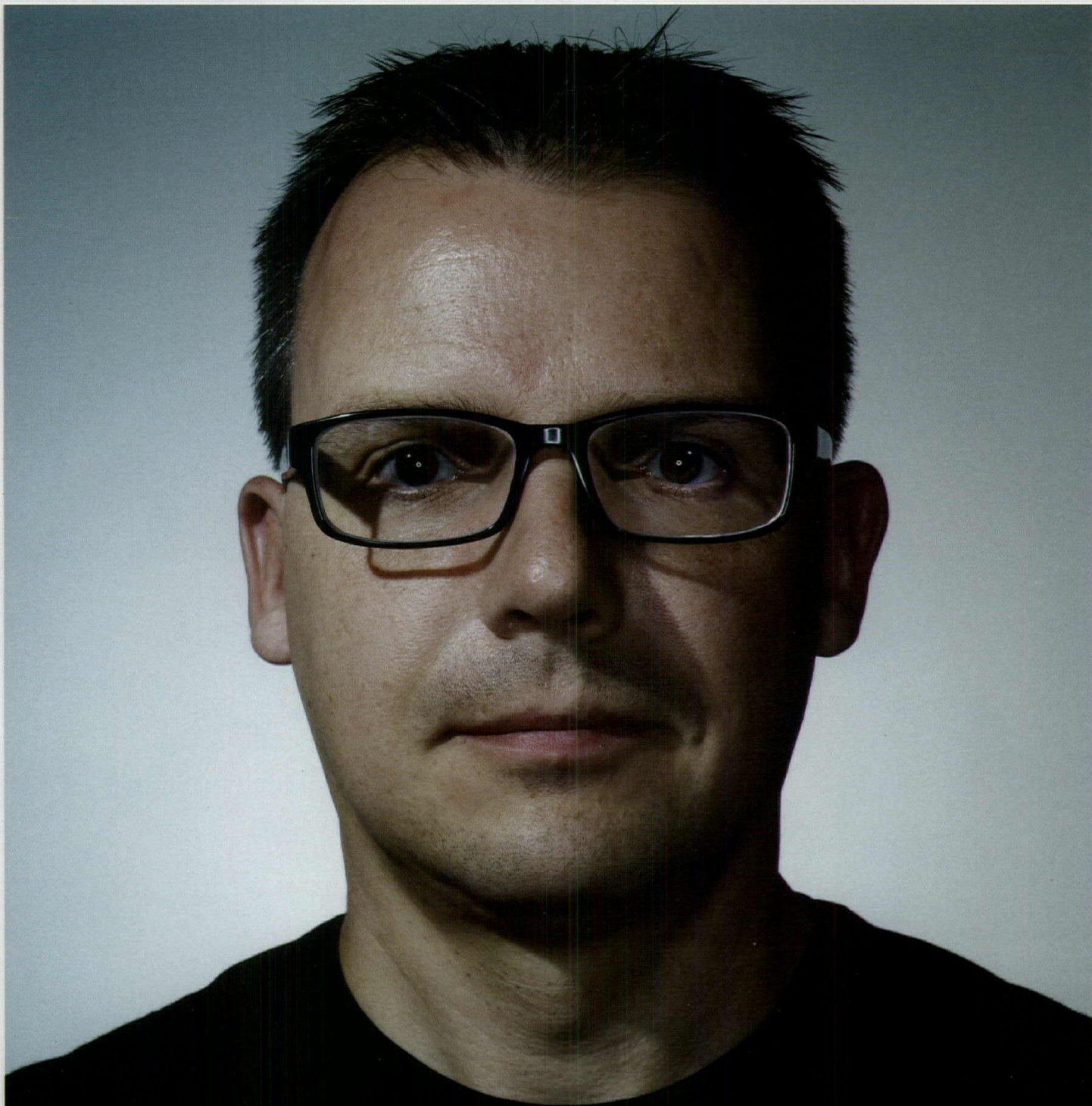
# Residential Architect

2012 LEADERSHIP AWARDS



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## **Top Firm: Johnsen Schmaling Architects**

JOHNSEN SCHMALING'S HOUSES DISTILL GEOMETRY INTO POETRY

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TEXT BY BRUCE D. SNIDER  
PORTRAITS BY IAN ALLEN







*"WHEN WE WENT INTO PRACTICE, WE KIND OF NAIVELY SAID THAT WHATEVER COMES TO OUR DOOR, THAT'S WHAT WILL SUSTAIN US. THAT'S SERVED US VERY WELL."*

*—SEBASTIAN SCHMALING*

**Brian Johnsen and Sebastian Schmaling** would have been great candidates for a RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT Rising Star award, but the trajectory of their rise was so steep that they simply got ahead of us. Founded in 2003, Johnsen Schmaling Architects (JSA) first came to our attention less than three years later, when its Parts House Pavilion, an ingeniously economical rooftop dining space, won a RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT Design Award. In 2007, the Milwaukee-based firm's second design awards entry, Camouflage House, walked off with Project of the Year honors from our jury. In both cases, we were struck by the assuredness of the work—which is both rigorously modern and subtly, inventively contextual—and by its narrative clarity. The projects not only showed how they were made, but also told the story of their design. Subsequent JSA projects have followed a similar path. Varied in setting, program, and response, they assemble simple forms with a reductive logic whose outcomes seem—like the best poetry—both novel and inevitable.

"Our goal throughout is to distill the design to its very essence," says Schmaling, AIA, LEED AP. "Not as an aesthetic dogma," he adds, but, rather, to fully resolve the matter at hand. The partners began developing their approach to practice in the mid-1990s, when they met as graduate students at the University of Wisconsin School of Architecture and Urban Planning. Johnsen, AIA, is a native of Chicago, while Schmaling grew up in Berlin, but each recognized in the other a natural ally. "We have a sort of blind trust in each other's capabilities," says

Schmaling, who describes their collaborative method as "two ideas collide and you see what happens."

"You have this constant critique to question all of your assumptions," Schmaling says, "to ask, 'Do we really need this?' That dialogue is healthy. It's easy to agree with yourself." In its intellectually driven approach, the four-person firm is "almost an extension of the studio we were in 15 years ago as students," with the partners tackling each project much as they would an academic assignment. "We are building a lot of models, we are diagramming a lot, we are analyzing site and context ... for us, it's the only way to make sense out of what we're doing." More than simply an instrument of design and presentation, he adds, "every one of our models is a beautiful little artifact, part of the building."

In 2003, Milwaukee was not exactly overrun with this breed of architecture, and that presented an opportunity. "It was very fortuitous for us," Johnsen says. "No one was doing what we had to offer: highly detailed, very clean, modern architecture." The city was experiencing something of a post-industrial renaissance, and the firm's intellectual approach appealed to educated urbanites. "It showed the process and the story line of how we come up with our ideas," Johnsen says. All of those models, exploded axonometric drawings, and written rationales gave clients "a much deeper idea of where the architecture comes from." As a result, "the fact that it looked so different wasn't as frightening."

Architectural League of New York program director Anne Rieselbach wasn't frightened when

she first encountered JSA's work, but she may have been a bit shocked. "I'm also from Milwaukee," Rieselbach says. "Seeing the work and knowing where it was built ... it would still stand out in L.A., but it way stands out in Milwaukee." The league awarded Johnsen and Schmaling a spot in its Emerging Voices lecture series in 2008, and Rieselbach plans to include their address in a 30-year anthology of the program. "There's a kind of joy in their architecture and the way they talk about their practice," she says, "a willingness to break the rules, not in a transgressive way, but in a way that really amplifies the work. They have a distinctive body of work, and they're clearly developing it. In each project, there's the intensification of an idea."

"There's always a set of issues that we're interested in at the time, in materials or technology," Schmaling explains, and each project presents the opportunity to explore one or two themes that have drawn the partners' focus. The strength of the work lies in reducing each design problem to its simplest terms and solving it in the most direct and economical way possible. JSA's success in doing so increasingly has drawn clients from beyond its heartland base. "We're working for a couple from New York on a house in Montana," Schmaling notes, and they're also acting as the design firm on a music school in Bahrain. But JSA's method remains as it always has been. "When we went into practice," Schmaling says, "we kind of naively said that whatever comes to our door, that's what will sustain us. That's served us very well." ◊

Johnsen Schmaling Architects works by distilling each program to its essential elements, which it then addresses with a visual economy that deftly balances austerity and playfulness. The firm's OS House serves as a visual gateway between its suburban Racine, Wis., street and the shore of Lake Michigan (opposite page).

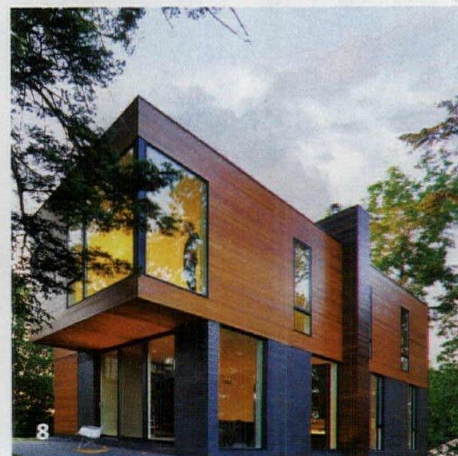
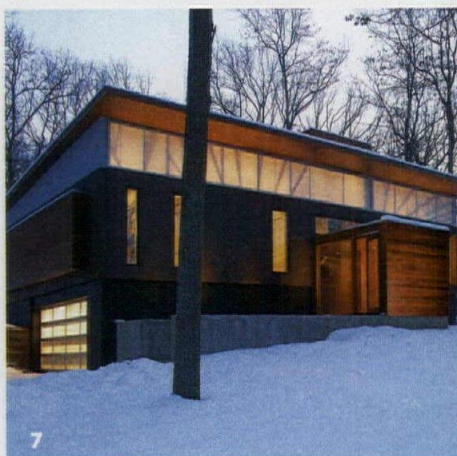
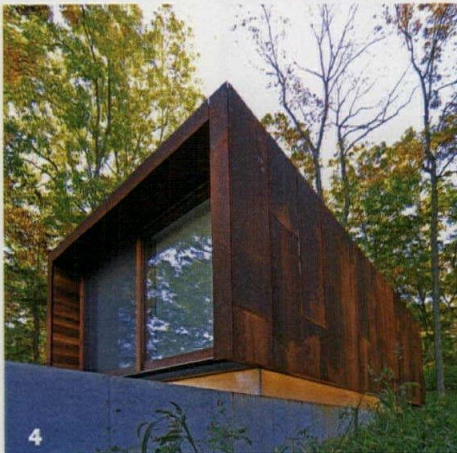
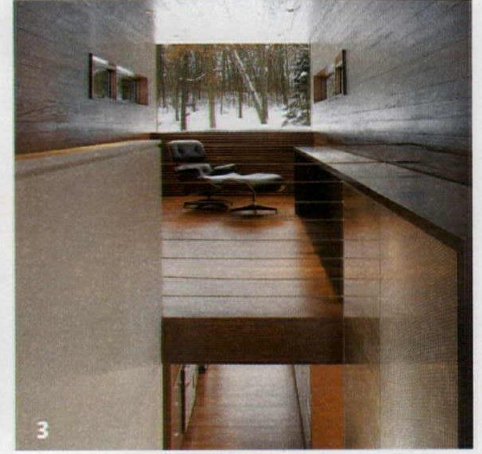
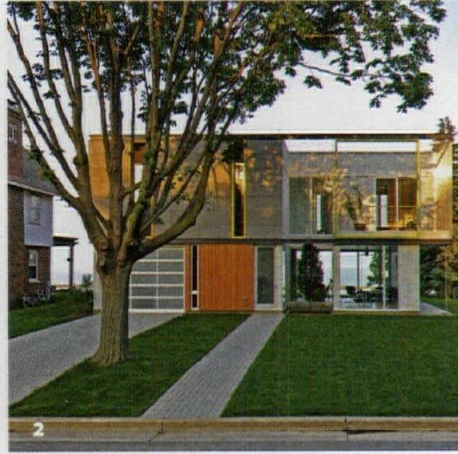
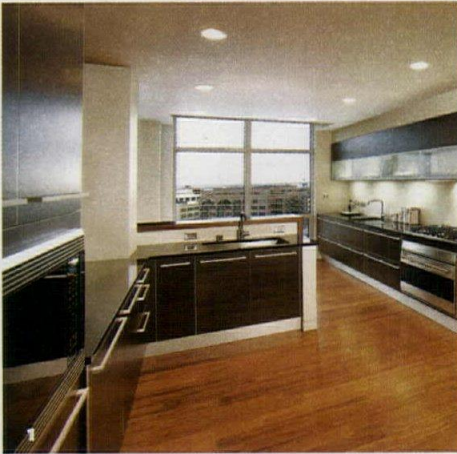






## Residential Architect

2012 LEADERSHIP AWARDS



1. Blur Loft, Milwaukee 2. OS House, Racine, Wis. 3. Ferrous House, Spring Prairie, Wis. 4. Studio for a Composer, Spring Prairie 5. Camouflage House, Green Lake, Wis. 6. Camouflage House 7. Ferrous House 8. Nexus House, Madison, Wis. 9. Nexus House; Opposite page: Stacked Cabin, Muscoda, Wis.

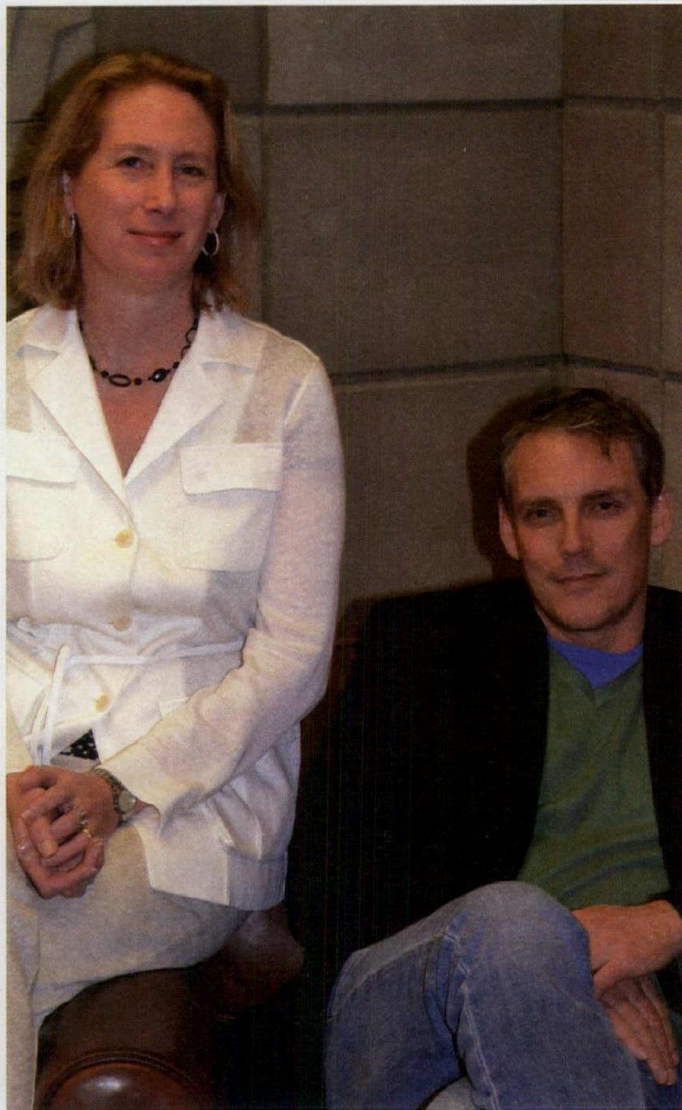
1, 3, 7: DOUG EDMUNDS; 2, 4, 8, 9 AND OPPOSITE PAGE: JOHN J. MACAULAY; 5, 6: KEVIN J. MIYAZAKI







# why we love residential architecture



“

It's a really intimate relationship with the clients and is an exploration of all the issues of architecture in a way. It's a great testing ground for trying out ideas—spatial ideas, material ideas, and technical ideas—in the service of a complicated program because houses have lots of different kinds of spaces in them, with hierarchy of privacy, but are small enough to accomplish quickly, so it feels really satisfying.”

**elizabeth p. gray, faia,  
and alan organschi**

Gray Organschi Architecture, New Haven, CT



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TEXT BY MEGHAN DRUETING  
PORTRAIT BY IAN ALLEN

# Rising Star: Studio Dwell Architects

*A CHICAGO FIRM FINDS BEAUTY IN RESTRAINT.*

**Entering a Studio Dwell house** involves more than just walking up to the front door. A typical outdoor entry sequence at one of the Chicago firm's custom homes contains a 90-degree turn or two, and also may include stairs and landings before ending at the threshold. "The path is not a direct path to the door," says principal Mark Peters, AIA. "It's part of getting people to experience the architecture and the building. We're getting them to take a pause and look around."

People definitely have paused to peruse the work of Studio Dwell, one of the Windy City's hottest young firms. Peters started the company in 2004, after a four-year partnership in a start-up firm, Mass Architect, and five years at Pappageorge Haymes Architects. Initially Studio Dwell designed multifamily projects with a sprinkling of single-family, but once the recession hit in 2008, that ratio reversed. A few lean years flowered into an active 2011, and today the firm is busier than ever.

Peters and his four-person team have become best known for skillfully shoehorning Modern abodes into tight urban lots. They do have a house in suburban St. Charles, Ill., under construction, but the majority of their work lies inside the city. The firm invites generous natural light into its projects, discreetly placing windows to wash walls with the sun's rays. "When we put windows close to an adjoining wall or ceiling, it lights the adjacent plane," Peters says. "We use that as a technique to maintain privacy." Skylights, open staircases, and

translucent materials are a few other favorite ways to let light flow throughout a home, even if it's on a narrow site.

The houses of Paul Rudolph and the Sarasota School have influenced Peters, as have mid-20th-century South American architects. Studio Dwell's challenge is to translate the classic warm-climate connection between indoors and outdoors into something that works for the Midwest. The firm takes a creative approach to finding spots for exterior rooms, often placing them atop garages and roofs. Many of its homes wrap around courtyards that provide a core of natural light and fresh air to the interiors. In the dead of winter—and on the smallest of lots—clients still have direct visual access to a private outdoor space, ideally with year-round plantings chosen by a landscape designer. And in multifamily projects, Studio Dwell adds terraces, decks, or patios to each unit.

The firm has earned widespread praise for its restrained detailing, winning awards from AIA Chicago as well as three RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECT Design Awards. "Mark understands the critical details of a project and how to make them come together," says David Miller, FAIA. (His Seattle firm, The Miller Hull Partnership, has used Studio Dwell as its architect of record on two Chicago projects, one multifamily and one single-family.) Purposely limiting its materials palette has helped Peters and his team shape quietly elegant environments that don't shout for attention. "We







narrow down our palette as much as possible to create a calm environment," says project architect Gary Stoltz. "When you come home, you want to relax. We try to eliminate distractions."

Peters' relationship to buildings began during the summers he spent working for his father's commercial and house painting company in Hartford, Wis., alongside his two brothers. (Today, Marty Peters is a photographer who shoots Studio Dwell's projects, and Mike Peters is an industrial designer.) Mark majored in architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and earned his master's at the University of Illinois-Chicago, where he met his future wife, fellow architecture student Tamar Myers. The two ran a concrete countertop and furniture business for a few years, calling it Cityspeak after the made-up language in the film *Blade Runner*.

The couple eventually closed Cityspeak, as Myers shifted into pharmaceutical sales. But the experience of making things has no doubt helped Peters with Studio Dwell's recent entry into design/build. It started as a fluke: In 2009, a general contractor walked off a project, so the firm stepped in to finish it. That house turned out so well—and building it provided such valuable extra work during the downturn—that Studio Dwell began to build more of its own designs. "Design/build is a much easier process for us, and for clients, too," Peters says. "There are fewer change orders, because we're right there at the site." The firm still works with outside general contractors sometimes, but has built three of its houses so far and has three more under way. "It's been hassle-free for me," says design/build client Bill Nudera.

Studio Dwell's latest design/build project is its new office, which occupies an old mechanics' garage in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood. The firm rehabbed the 3,000-square-foot space, inserting a courtyard and leaving much of the raw industrial character intact. Staffers bring their dogs to lounge under the plywood desks, and Peters rides his scooter to work from the home he shares with Myers and their two children, ages 12 and 16. The studio's design captures the firm's low-key yet polished ethos. Says Peters, in characteristically understated fashion: "It kind of goes with what we do." ▢

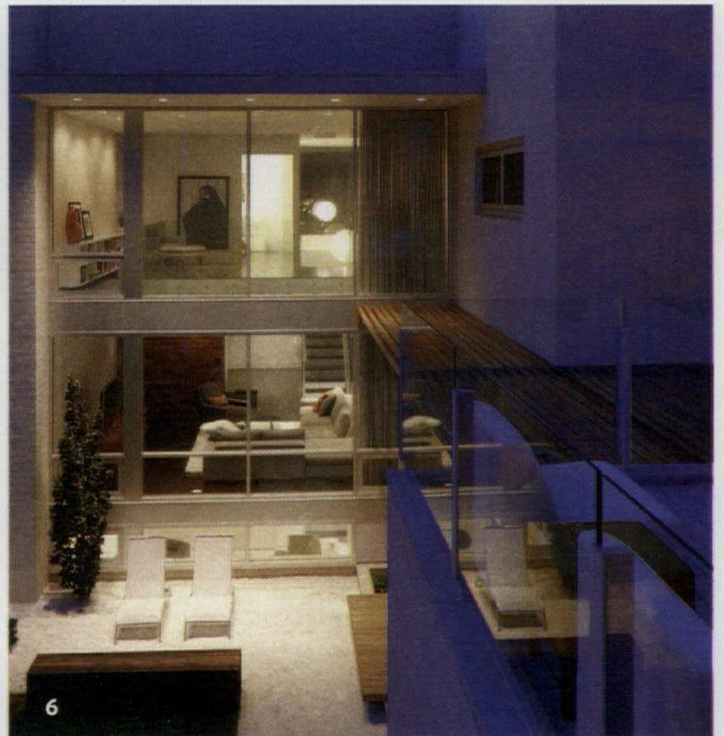


1-2. Bucktown One demonstrates Studio Dwell's loftlike approach to interiors.  
3. 1748 N. Winchester's den and roof deck.  
4-6. Bucktown Three presents a reserved façade to the street and then opens up to a private rear courtyard. All three residences are in Chicago.



## Residential Architect

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## Residential Architect

### RESOURCES



#### Kona Residence pg. 30

**Bathroom plumbing fittings and fixtures:**

Agape, Axor, Boffi, Brasstech, Calazzo, Dornbracht, Duravit, Mountain Plumbing, Vola, Waterworks

**Countertops:** Bianco Dolomiti, Boffi

**Exterior siding:** TerraMai

**Flooring:** Floor Gres, International Flooring

**HVAC equipment:** Daikin, Krueger

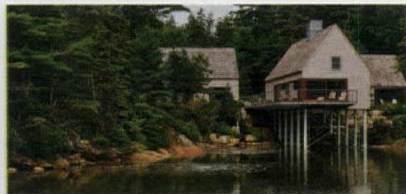
**Kitchen appliances:** Gaggenau, Hobart, Insinkerator, Miele

**Kitchen cabinets:** Boffi

**Kitchen plumbing fittings and fixtures:**

Boffi, Kohler

**Windows:** Stilewood



#### Pond House pg. 38

**Bathroom plumbing fixtures:** Duravit

**Dishwasher:** DCS

**Entry doors:** Duratherm

**Hardware:** FSB, Tectus

**Kitchen plumbing fixtures:** Elkay

**Lighting fixtures:** Bega, USA Illumination

**Oven and range:** DCS

**Plumbing fittings:** Dornbracht

**Refrigerator:** Sub-Zero

**Windows:** Duratherm, Marvin



#### Long Beach pg. 46

**Cooktop and grill:** Gaggenau

**Counters:** DuPont Corian

**Dishwasher:** Miele

**Faucet:** KWC

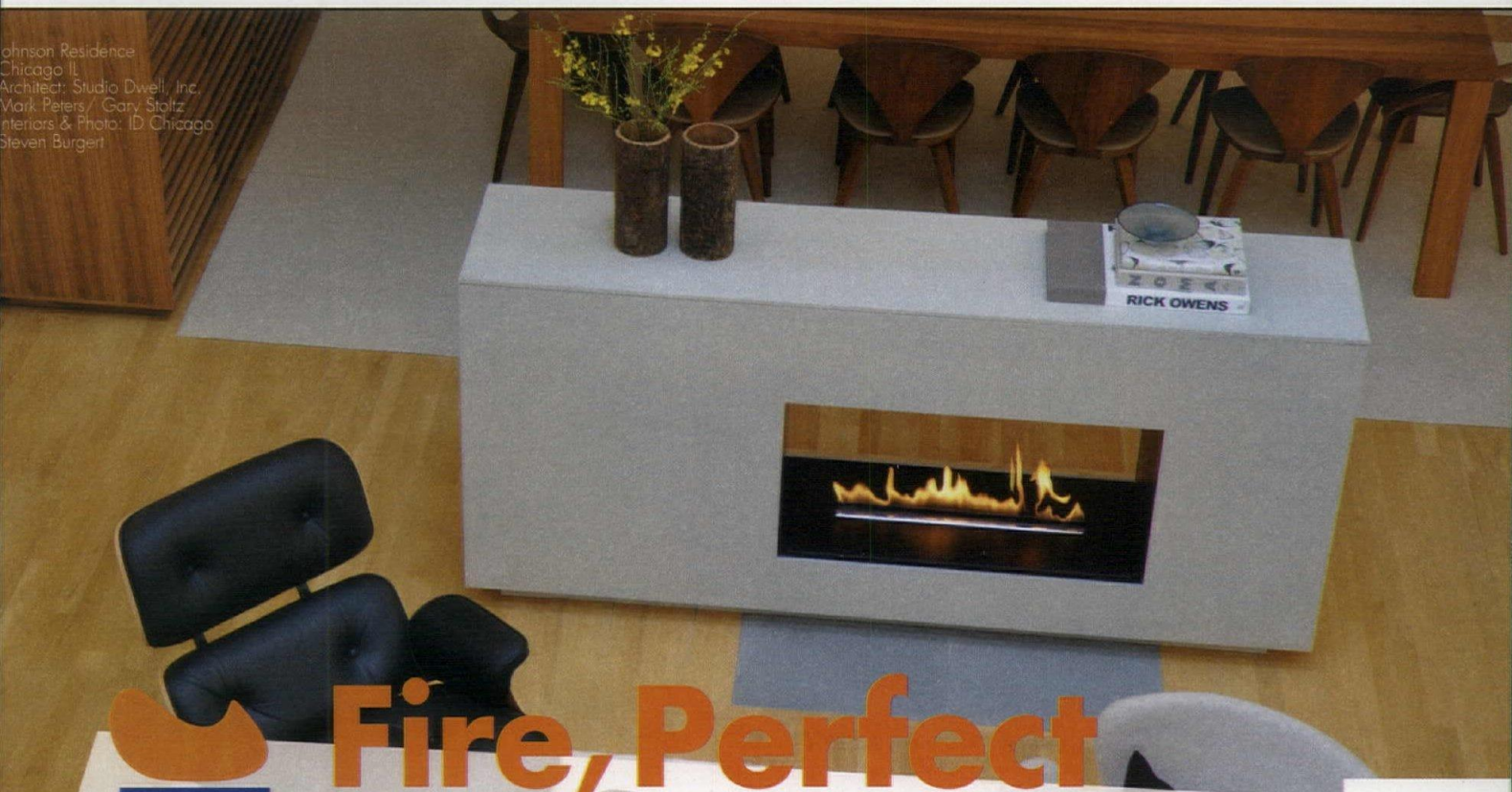
**Master shower:** Boffi

**Refrigerator/freezer:** Gaggenau

**Vent hood:** Boffi

**Wall ovens and wok burner:** Gaggenau

Johnson Residence  
Chicago, IL  
Architect: Studio Dwell, Inc.  
Mark Peters / Gary Stoltz  
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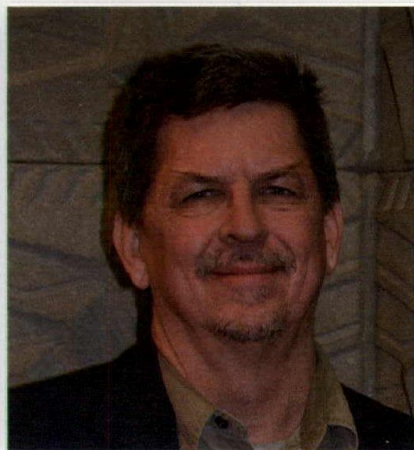
# why I love residential architecture



I love residential work because it attaches us to our childhood. Everyone grows up thinking about their home, and to be able to actually design houses is a way to be a grown-up kid of sorts. The wonder and the joy of thinking about the most basic things—the door goes here, the windows are here, trees are there—you get to do that, practicing architecture.”

**dan shipley, faia**

Shipley Architects, Dallas, TX



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## Residential Architect

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| Pabco Roofing Products             | 45     | 800-426-9762 | <a href="http://www.pabcoroofing.com">www.pabcoroofing.com</a>                                       |
| Panasonic                          | 22     | -            | <a href="http://www.panasonic.com/ventfans">www.panasonic.com/ventfans</a>                           |
| PERC                               | C3     | -            | <a href="http://www.buildwithpropane.com/energypod">www.buildwithpropane.com/energypod</a>           |
| Perennial Wood                     | 64a-d  | 800-530-7495 | <a href="http://www.perennialwood.com">www.perennialwood.com</a>                                     |
| PlastPro                           | 56     | -            | <a href="http://www.plastproinc.com">www.plastproinc.com</a>                                         |
| Residential Architect Design Award | 79     | -            | <a href="http://www.radesignawards.com">www.radesignawards.com</a>                                   |
| Residential Architect Testimonial  | 78, 86 | -            | <a href="http://www.valueofresidentialdesign.com">www.valueofresidentialdesign.com</a>               |
| Schlage                            | 51     | -            | <a href="http://www.builder.schlage.com">www.builder.schlage.com</a>                                 |
| Sherwin-Williams                   | 18     | -            | <a href="http://www.sherwin-williams.com">www.sherwin-williams.com</a>                               |
| SoftPlan                           | 4      | 800-248-0164 | <a href="http://www.softplan.com">www.softplan.com</a>                                               |
| Spark Modern Fires                 | 85     | 866-938-3846 | <a href="http://www.sparkfires.com">www.sparkfires.com</a>                                           |
| Sub-Zero / Wolf                    | 25     | -            | <a href="http://www.subzero.com/contest">www.subzero.com/contest</a>                                 |
| Sunbrella                          | 43     | -            | <a href="http://www.sunbrella.com/snow">www.sunbrella.com/snow</a>                                   |
| TallWall Wall Sheathing            | 16-17  | -            | <a href="http://www.norbord.com/TallWall">www.norbord.com/TallWall</a>                               |
| The Modern Fan Co.                 | 6      | 888-588-3267 | <a href="http://www.modernfan.com">www.modernfan.com</a>                                             |
| The Tapco Group                    | 41     | -            | <a href="http://www.TapcoSolutions.com">www.TapcoSolutions.com</a>                                   |
| Tile of Spain                      | 64     | 305-446-4387 | <a href="http://www.TileofSpainUSA.com">www.TileofSpainUSA.com</a>                                   |
| Trex                               | 52-55  | -            | <a href="http://www.hanleywooduniversity.com">www.hanleywooduniversity.com</a>                       |
| Weiland                            | 49     | 760-722-8828 | <a href="http://www.weilandslidingdoors.com">www.weilandslidingdoors.com</a>                         |
| White River                        | 59     | 800-558-0119 | <a href="http://www.whiteriver.com">www.whiteriver.com</a>                                           |





## Peterssen/Keller Architecture

MINNEAPOLIS

TEXT BY NIGEL F. MAYNARD

**Gabriel Keller and Lars Peterssen, AIA**, started their residential-focused firm just less than three years ago, renting space from Elness Swenson Graham Architects. The next stop for Peterssen/Keller Architecture was this—the firm's own 2,000-square-foot space. "We knew we wanted to be in Uptown because of the potential for work," Keller explains, referring to the affluent residential neighborhoods nearby.

Once a warren of rooms with a drop ceiling and firebrick everywhere, the office now showcases exposed steel columns, a renovated kitchen, and a terrazzo floor. At the entrance, the partners designed a comfortable, relaxing area "with a nice residential feel," Keller says. Translucent panels separate some of the areas, red cord fixtures articulate the space, and wood recovered from a grain silo's interior adds rustic warmth.

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