

CLOSE TO PERFECT

Close Associates continues its legacy of modern residential design with a flat-roofed 21st-century home that's big on views and sustainability

By Bette Hammel



Many neighbors have built to twice the height of this house, which is tucked into the slope to soften its impact on the site. Less thermal envelope allows two stories of glass to face into the protected ferns, trees, and marsh.



Choosing an architect was easy for two biomedical engineers returning to the Twin Cities for new jobs. Because the husband had grown up in a 1973 home designed by Elizabeth and Winston Close, modern residential architecture's emphasis on openness and daylighting held a special appeal for him. Small wonder, then, that he and his wife commissioned Close Associates' Gar Hargens, AIA, who had designed two seamless additions to the husband's parents' home, to create their dream house.

The outdoors-loving couple had found two-plus acres of rolling wooded land where they envisioned building a "house based on symmetry and simple, clean, crisp lines," says Hargens. To meet these criteria, the architect nestled a three-story, metal-clad rectangular contemporary into the side of a hill, using loads of commercial glazing to bring the scenery inside. At 4,200 square feet, the house is one of the largest in Hargens' portfolio.

And also one of the most sustainable. "We used LEED principles throughout without spending for LEED certification," says Hargens. The flat green roof is covered with Hydrotech, a membrane made of recycled car tires. Other energy-saving features include geothermal heating and cooling, spray-on insulation, rolling exterior shutters, and sun-shielding roof overhangs. "Our energy tester gave the house high marks and said it would certainly qualify for programs like LEED for Homes and Energy Star," Hargens adds.



NORTH OAKS RESIDENCE

Location:
North Oaks, Minnesota

Architect:
Close Associates Inc.,
Architects
www.closearchitects.com

Principal-in-charge:
Gar Hargens, AIA

Associate:
Laurie Whipple

Landscape architect:
Close Landscape
Architecture+
www.cloسلاندarch.com

Structural engineer:
Rollie Johnson

Lighting design:
Schuler & Shook

Metal sculptor:
Marcia McEachron

General contractor:
Michlitsch Builders

Size:
4,200 square feet

Completion date:
March 2008

Photographer:
Don F. Wong

Windows bring light into the upper garage and also operate to naturally ventilate the space. The garage gives privacy to the entertainment porch, terrace, and fire pit behind it.





Inside, the various woods, such as the lacewood in the master bedroom (top), are complemented by a mixture of metals wraps. The railing of the spiral stair (above) leading up to the lookout, for example, is perforated metal.

Outside In

The house, approached by a driveway winding through the trees, is symmetrical on a north-south axis, with the west end (informal living areas) primarily tan in color and the east end (main entry and living room) finished in dark brown metal. A broad terrace paved with concrete tiles resembling travertine welcomes visitors, while two screened-in porches with affordable fir plywood ceilings balance the two ends of the house. Topping the roof is a 12-by-12-foot glass overlook, designed to serve as a treetop reading spot.

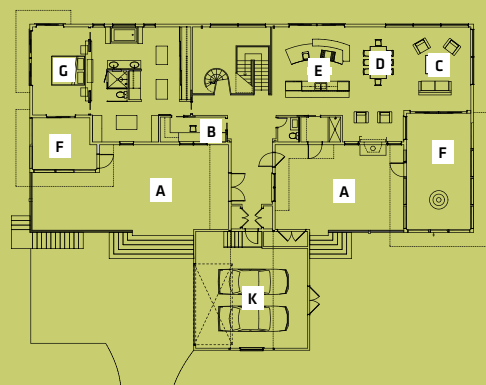
Inside the main entry and to the left, guests are greeted by a stunning three-story view of the woodsy setting, with a white spiral staircase leading up to the reading room and a broader stair descending to the lower level. And that isn't the only panorama they get to enjoy: The open kitchen, dining room, and living room are virtually wrapped in glass on two sides.

To warm the modern white interior, the homeowners chose a variety of interesting woods, including Zebra-strand bamboo flooring for the main level, recycled Douglas fir for the staircase treads (recycled-rubber inserts ease stair-climbing for the couple's two large dogs), maple for the family-room fireplace surround, and a delicately patterned lacewood for the wall behind the bed in the master bedroom.

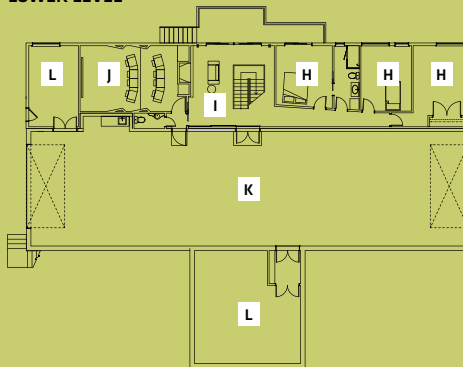
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MAIN FLOOR



LOWER LEVEL



The efficient plan tucks the lower—and larger—garage into the slope behind the lower-level living spaces. Even further into the slope, below the upper garage, is a large storage space dubbed “the holiday room.”

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| A Terrace | G Master bedroom |
| B Office | H Bedroom |
| C Living | I Family room |
| D Dining | J Theater |
| E Kitchen | K Garage |
| F Screened porch | L Storage |



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Left: The owners wanted a fireplace/TV surround that would add visual interest even when the fireplace and TV weren't in use. With artist Marcia McEachron, the Close team created removable, backlit screens with a snowflake motif. Above: Precast concrete planks span the large lower garage.



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Work/Live/Lake

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the fireplace stands a utility room and washroom and to the right a book-lined office—areas that would feel right at home in a working artist's loft. At the far end of the house lies the bedroom, with a large closet area and toilet and bathtub enclosures divided by a common sink. Here, too, the design echoes an artist's studio: The small area for the bed reflects the way that painters make the work in progress their primary focus and sleep a secondary consideration.

Indeed, there exists at the Ryan compound a pull that occurs in our lives between working, whether in an office or a loft, and relaxing, as in the sauna and screened porch that beckon across the driveway. Even out in nature, hundreds of miles from our official workplaces, that tug remains with us, and it suggests that the real influence art has had on life amounts to more than the loft spaces that so many people now occupy. It has led to an inseparability of living and working that artists have long known and that technology has now made a fact of life for us all. **AMN**

Close to Perfect

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The kitchen boasts maple cabinets, an island crowned with brown speckled PaperStone, and a countertop made from recycled glass. Behind the kitchen, a pantry lined with cabinets made of Makore wood doubles as a link between the entry hall and the dining room, living room, and fireplace.

On the lower level, cleverly embedded in the slope of the hill, lies the surprise of the design: a large second garage for the husband's sports cars. At 96 feet long—the full length of the house—the space nearly qualifies as a small hangar, providing the husband with plenty of room to polish his cars and trailer in heated comfort.

It's often said that great architecture starts with great clients. Hargens wholeheartedly agrees: "This project was blessed with owners who were clear about their goals and gave us the support and freedom to accomplish them." **AMN**

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