

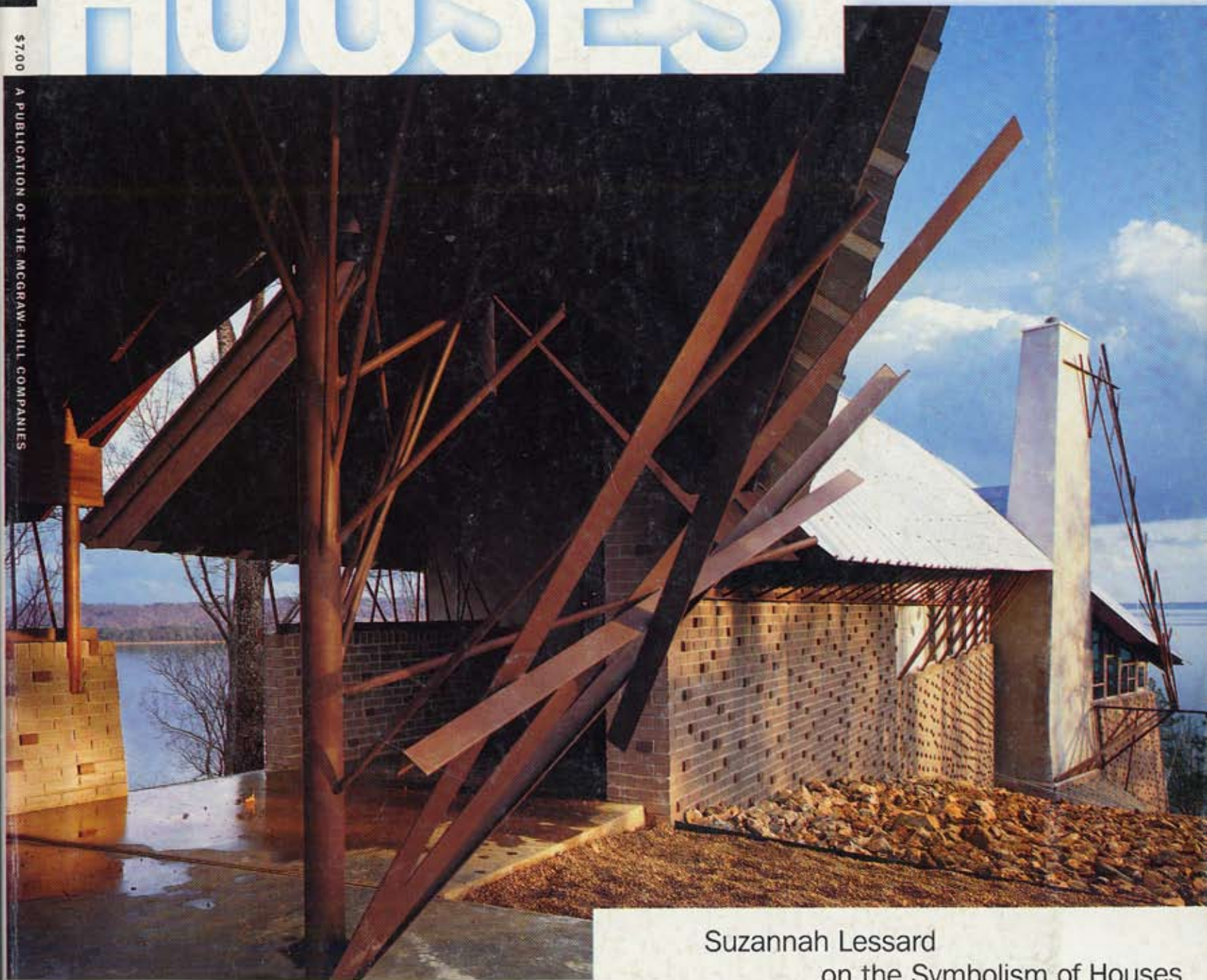
ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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Suzannah Lessard
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A house in the north Georgia mountains by **SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY** finds common ground for opposing elements.

by Clifford Pearson



The entry court (opposite) is paved with local river stone and raised a few steps to enhance its status as a separate element. The primary entrance (this page) leads to a tall, cloistered gallery.

If some architecture today glorifies the collision of building elements or forces, this mountain house in northeastern Georgia searches for balance. Designed for a couple with varied backgrounds and interests, the house accommodates differences by finding common ground. The result is a house that is urban and rural, formal and informal, but never contradictory.

The clients, whose children by previous marriages are grown and live elsewhere, come from different parts of the country: the husband from Missouri and then the Washington, D.C., area, and the wife from Atlanta. He is a journalist and avid collector of regional art, while she has become a knowledgeable gardener and landscaper. But just as husband and wife have learned to share in each other's avocations, the house itself brings different elements together—blending indoors with outdoors, for example. “There isn't a clear-cut his-her dichotomy in the house,” says Merrill Elam, AIA, one of the three principals involved in the project. “We wanted to keep things seamless.” A weekend retreat that is a two-hour drive north of Atlanta, the house will eventually become the couple's primary residence.

The first clue that a delicate balancing act is going on here is the arrival court, an elegant stone-paved drive around which the major parts of the house are arranged. “We liked the idea of placing this urban element in a rural setting,” says Elam. “It isn't exactly a new idea, since the French and English often did it with their country estates,” she adds, “but it works.” The juxtaposition of city and country is heightened by centering a large screened porch on the entry court, an arrangement that offers visitors views through the porch and toward the trees even before they leave the confines of their cars.

Because the house is broken into three major components—a guest house and garage, the screened porch, and the main house—it can seem either large or small, depending on how you define it. Certainly, 4,095 sq ft is a lot of space for a two-bedroom house. But if you subtract the guest house/garage and screened porch from the total, the house is a more modest 2,400 sq ft. From some perspectives, the house seems to disappear in the landscape, while from others its cantilevered roofs give it a strong presence. “I love the enigmatic scale of the house,” says Mack Scogin, AIA. “You don't quite know if it's big or small. It keeps changing.”

Set in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains less than a mile from Georgia's border with North Carolina, the structure spreads out along the ground. “We didn't want the house to compete with the rolling forms of the mountains,” explains Elam. Indeed, the flat roofs and strong horizontal lines were designed to contrast with the verticality of the hills and the site's slender poplars. Although heavily wooded when the clients bought it, the property had been cleared and farmed earlier in the century. A small stream called Barker's Creek runs near the southern edge of the site, supplying power for an old grist mill and water (*text continues*)

Project: Mountain House
Dillard, Georgia

Architect: Scogin Elam and Bray
Architects—Mack Scogin, AIA, Merrill Elam, AIA, Lloyd Bray, AIA, principals; Denise Dumais, Kevin Cannon, Beth Morris, Kathy Wright, design team

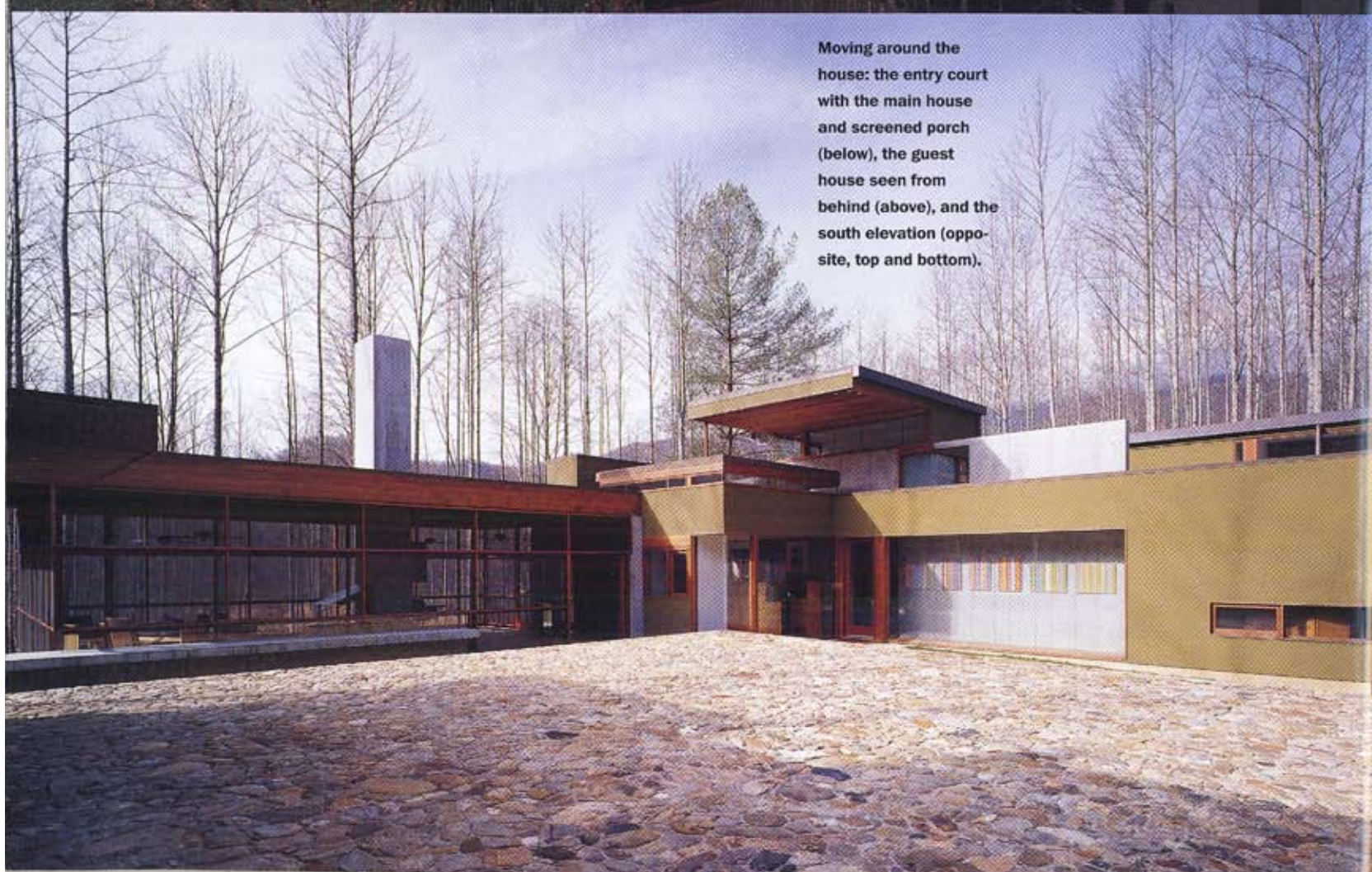
Engineer: Palmer Engineering Co.

(structural)

Landscape Designer: Marchant Martin

Consultants: Ramon Luminance Design (lighting); Waller Davis & Assoc. (hardware); Parker Sales Co. (hydronic heating)

Builder: Winfred McKay Construction



Moving around the house: the entry court with the main house and screened porch (below), the guest house seen from behind (above), and the south elevation (opposite, top and bottom).



Various spaces offer a range of outdoor experiences. The 900-sq-ft screened porch is practically an indoor space, with its built-in concrete bench (left in photo below), cooking grill, and radiant-heat floor. A porch off the living room (top right) offers views to a neighbor's pasture, while a concrete wall with its corner cut away (bottom right) helps define an outdoor room to the west of the house.



for horses in a neighbor's pasture. An artists colony is also nearby.

While the site is undeniably beautiful, it presented the architects with a host of challenges. The first was finding the right place on the property to build the house. An old farmhouse had once stood at the foot of a large oak tree near the road leading to the property and the clients originally thought they would build there. But after walking the site with the architects and builder Winfred McKay, the clients agreed that the house should sit farther in on flatter land that had more privacy and offered better views of the pasture. That meant building a long driveway curving through the property. McKay, a third-generation builder born and raised in the area, found evidence of an old access road on the site and followed it, adjusting the route to save as many trees as possible. McKay also used the base of the driveway to form a small dam and create a pond west of the new house.

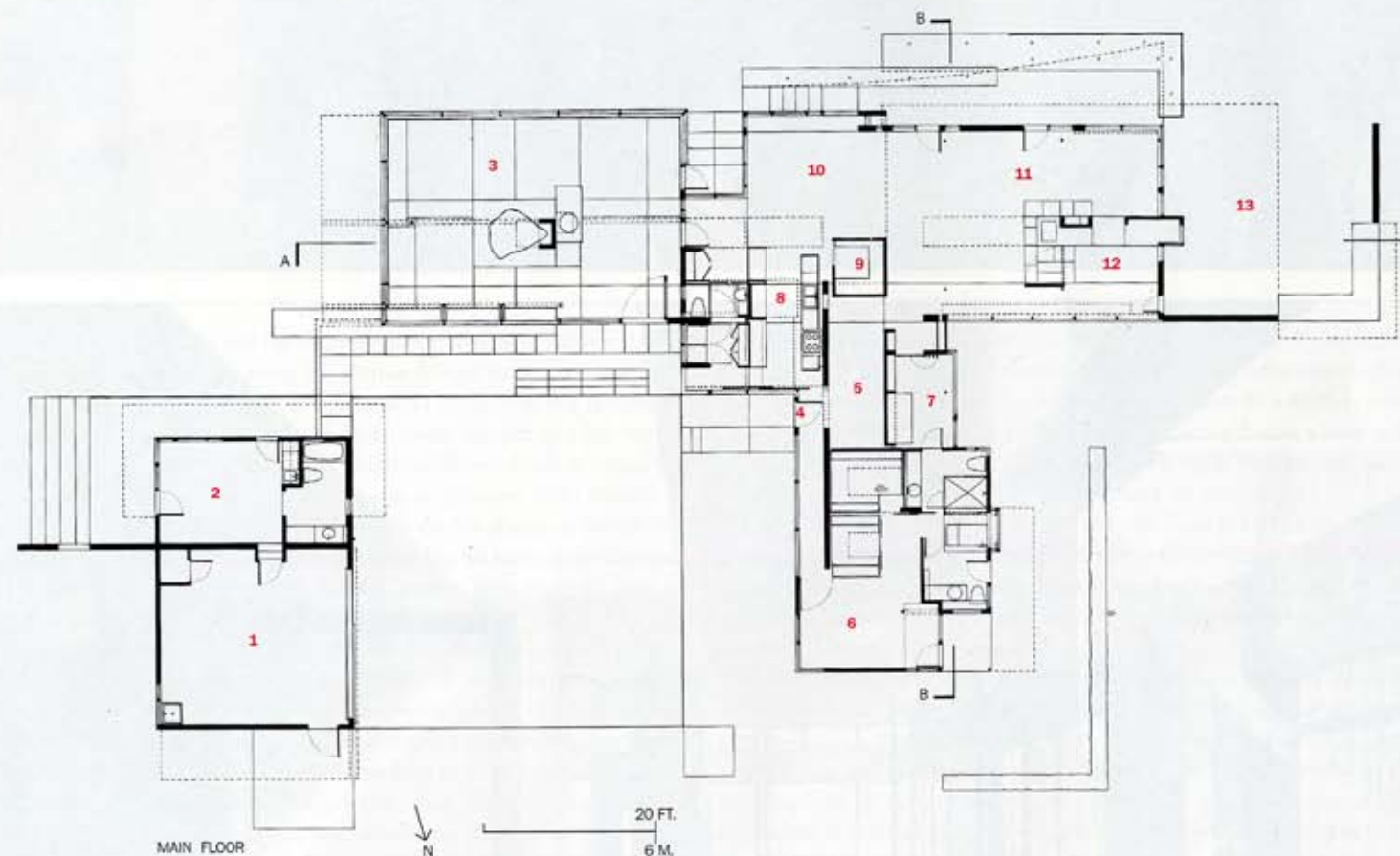
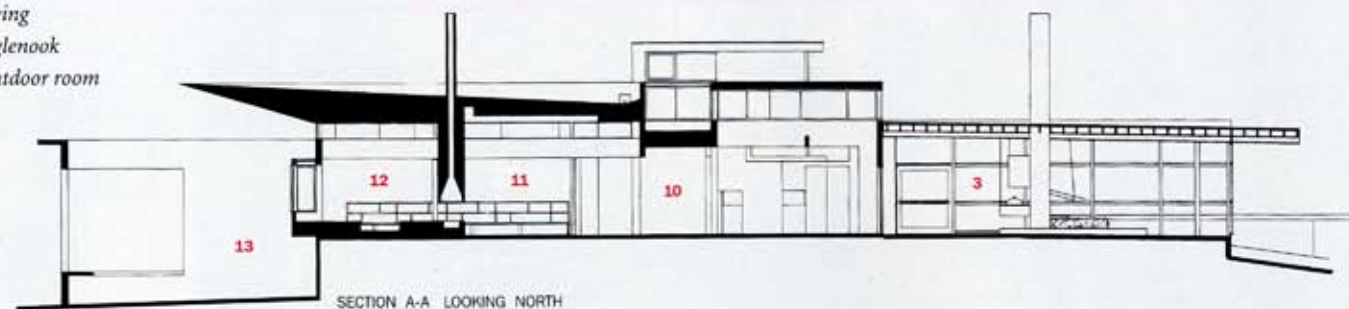
Another problem with the site was the abundance of water. The northeast corner of Georgia is one of the wettest areas on the Eastern seaboard and, as McKay explains, "There's a world of underground springs and streams" on the property. So concrete footings and foundation walls were built to create a partial basement, allowing water to run around the house and down to the creek to the south. A pleasant discovery about the area, though, was the number of local subcontractors who

did high-quality concrete work, a result of the need for retaining walls in a hilly county that gets a lot of rain. Scogin Elam and Bray saw this as an opportunity to use concrete as a key element in the design of the house.

Mostly wood-framed, the house includes some steel and poured-concrete elements. The screened porch, for example, is framed in steel, and steel beams were used for some of the cantilevered roofs (such as the one over the front door). Interestingly, the longest roof cantilever (on the west side of the main house) is supported by wood trusses that, because they run deep into the living room, can extend far beyond the building envelope without the aid of any steel. Steel columns, though, are used to support the open porch on the back of the main house.

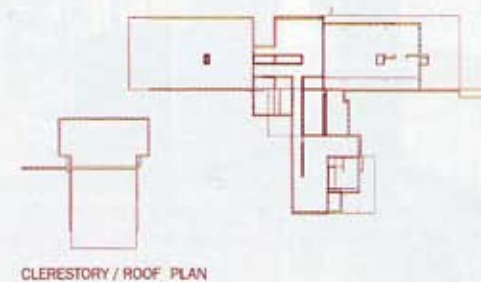
Concrete is put to use for both practical and expressive means. Forming the foundation and base of the house, poured concrete performs much of the structural grunt work. But it is also used to extend the house into the landscape and provide a link between ground and architecture. An exposed concrete wall running through the kitchen and entry gallery in the center of the main house and a concrete chimney in the middle of the screened porch help anchor the house to the land. At the same time, a right-angled concrete wall reaches beyond the western end of the house to partially enclose an "outdoor room." On the opposite side of the house, another concrete wall extends past the guest house.

1. Garage
2. Guest
3. Screened porch
4. Entry
5. Gallery
6. Bedroom
7. Office
8. Kitchen
9. Pantry
10. Dining
11. Living
12. Inglenook
13. Outdoor room



Built for less than \$200 per sq ft, the house combines wood-frame construction with some steel and poured-concrete elements. It arranges three main components—an 800-sq-ft guest house and

garage, a large screened porch, and a 2,400-sq-ft main house—around a central court. A clerestory/roof plan (right) shows how the architects brought in sunlight from above.





A two-story entry gallery (left) provides wall space for art. Wood floors throughout the house are Australian Sydney Blue and have radiant heat-

ing below. The living room (below and opposite) is a sweeping space but has some areas like an inglenook (opposite top) that are more intimate.

This project is just the second house that Scogin Elam and Bray has completed—the first being the Chmar House in Atlanta [RECORD HOUSES, April 1991, pages 76-85]. “We don’t really seek out residential work,” says Elam, “but I enjoy the close client contact you get with a house.” She also likes the chance to combine different kinds of construction systems. “Wood-frame construction is so different from the sort of commercial or institutional work we usually do. We ended up combining what we knew from our other projects with what we learned on this one.” The firm now has two more houses under construction, one in Massachusetts and one in Maine.

The clients found Scogin Elam and Bray through a mutual friend and then remembered seeing the Chmar House on a house tour. The wife’s visit to the architect’s office convinced her to hire the firm. “Talking to Merrill in her war room with all those amazing models, I knew this was the firm we wanted,” she remembers. In terms of requests, the clients asked for just two things—wall space for artwork and lots of views to the outdoors. As part of the balancing act that runs throughout the project, the architects opened the house along much of its south side to views of the creek and pasture and attached a long open porch here as well. The north side of the house is more closed off, providing the wall space needed for the clients’ collection of regional artwork.

The couple moved into the house last summer and what surprises them the most is the changing nature of the daylight (and even moonlight) that comes inside. Although the horizontal sweep of space in the living room, the back porch, and the screened porch is quite strong, the architects provided vertical accents with extra height in a few places, such as the entry gallery and a portion of the master bedroom. Wherever the roof is raised, clerestory windows bring light in from above.

The clients also like the fact that the screened porch essentially acts as a second living room—playing country cousin to the more urban indoor one on the other side of the house. Equipped with a built-in concrete bench that extends beyond the screens on the north side, a large grill hanging off a central chimney, and radiant heating in the concrete floor, the 900-sq-ft covered porch works year-round for entertaining.

By setting the guest house a few feet from the main house, the architects provided privacy while maintaining the feeling of a closely knit compound. Although small, the guest house has its own outdoor porch overlooking one of the property’s two ponds and has proved comfortable for adult children and in-laws.

“The house has some radical moves that seem perfectly natural,” explains Scogin. “Things such as centering the house on the screened porch—a void—and treating the entry drive as an object raised slightly above grade are really quite radical. But they don’t hit you in the face.” Looking back on the project, Scogin concludes, “The house is much like the clients. It seems simple and straightforward at first, but becomes more complex the better you get to know it.” ■

Manufacturers’ Sources

Redwood windows: custom by Simpson Millworks
Glass: Clayton Mountain Glass & Mirror Co.
Mahogany doors: custom by Simpson Millworks
Maple and slate cabinets: Peter Bull; Gillespies Cabinet & Furnishings Shop

Paints and stains: Glidden; The Martin-Senour Co.

Paint on metal: Duron
Stucco paint: Tnemec Coatings
Plastic laminate: Wilsonart
Ceramic wall tile: Dal-Tile
Australian Sydney Blue wood floors: Woodrich Wood Floors