



**ART
INVENTION
HOUSE**

**MICHAEL
WEBB**

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



**MACK SCOGIN
MERRILL ELAM
ARCHITECTS**

RHEINGOLD HOUSE

**BROOKLINE,
MASSACHUSETTS**

Over its twenty years of practice in Atlanta, this husband-and-wife partnership has done a broad mix of institutional buildings, but their dozen exuberant houses have drawn the most attention. "We've never sought residential work, it just comes to us," explains Mack Scogin. "We love that type because it's the most intricate, intense, and fertile—the consummate American dream. The residential client invests more, emotionally and financially, than any institution, and is both frightened to death and fascinated by the possibilities. Our houses are done for people associated with the arts who are comfortable with the unknown—they've got to enjoy the adventure and take a risk."

One audacious couple interviewed nine other architects before commissioning a large family house for a secluded site in an upscale neighborhood of Boston. They had very definitive ideas about the way they and their three children would live—as a group, sitting down together to share dinner and live music, and as individuals with different tastes. The design, which was quickly sketched and then developed over a period of eighteen months, expresses that dichotomy. Scogin and Merrill Elam work together on every design, but it was he who saw it through to completion. It's a house of controlled complexity, with a dramatic shift from organic to rectilinear, and a rich interplay of spaces within.

Located at the end of a cul-de-sac and backing into a leafy enclave, the 8,500-square-foot house stands apart from its colonial-style neighbors, though it respects their scale. Its language is as unique as theirs is conventional. A concave and a convex wing enclose a horseshoe entry court that's anchored by a red steel sculpture by Alexander Liberman. Walls curve away to enclose a front yard and conceal the garage as effectively as they mask the main entrance. The sinuous geometry engages the landscape, reduces the apparent bulk, and plays off the acute angles and expansive wood-framed windows to the sides and rear.

Sharply ridged Endicott brick clads the curved walls, with lead-coated copper on the upper level and chimneys. The dark brick is speckled with iron and was first ordered, years before, to simulate the grooves in a vinyl record on the facade of an Atlanta radio station. That project was never realized, but the brick adapts perfectly to this house, giving it a strong rusticated base that is boldly modeled by the sun and shimmers



in the rain. The mystery of the facade is enhanced by the lack of openings.

You enter through a curved fissure in the corrugated walls and a massive bowed steel door that's thoughtfully fitted with hand-modeled bronze pulls at different heights. It's lined with leather, and that mix of hard and soft recurs throughout. A double-height skylit spine slices transversally through the interior, a luminous canyon that pulls light into the center of the house and, through walls of glass, to the upstairs corridor. It divides formal from informal spaces, and ties the disparate parts together. Living, dining, and kitchen-family rooms open off this axis, and steps accommodate the natural slope of the site. In the raised dining room, a folded buffet table at the top of the steps, a light bar over the table, and fire doors set into a pleated red leather wall are all crafted from etched steel. You look down on this space from a window set into the upstairs study.

At the second level, bridges cut across the spine at either end, and pocketing doors close the master suite off from the three children's bedrooms. Cherry floors and mahogany joinery warm the cool white and glass walls, exposed concrete and steel. The owners delight in challenging the preconceptions of friends who always supposed that a modern house had to be cold and boxy. They enjoy their privacy and the abundant natural light, the sense of enclosure and the multiple vistas. And the house has five miles of plastic tubing, which provides radiant heating and thaws ice on the driveway.

It's no surprise to learn that the partners' favorite architects include Francesco Borromini, who carried the baroque to new heights of theatricality, and Sigurd Lewerentz, who created earthy, rough-textured chapels that defy the blandness of much Swedish modernism. Here they've struck a balance between rooted and airy, rough and refined, tempering the expressive forms that are their signature. It's the product of a firm whose principals honed their skills at Heery International, a major corporate office, spread their wings, and have now achieved a confident mastery of form and function.





