

Algoma Cottage

What are the unique and outstanding functional, environmental, and aesthetic features of this project?

The most common structures to be found in this area of northeast Wisconsin are modest, efficient, functional wood-frame vacation cabins dating from the 1940s and 50s which were built as spots of respite for weary city dwellers. This new, clearly contemporary house shares much in common with these earlier structures. While lifestyles and building technologies have evolved, the desire to escape the everyday and appreciate the beauty of nature remains as strong today as ever. The painted lap siding and gabled form of the house harken to the local vernacular while subtle moves such as tweaks to the geometry of the house's volume and its relationship to its site, perched on the slope of a bluff that runs down to the boulder strewn water line of Lake Michigan, relate to more contemporary principles.

From conception, the design focused on the home's setting. Intended for family retreats, care was taken to keep the spaces intimate, with emphasis on the outdoors. Responsive to its Northwood's site, the mudroom/foyer serves as an air lock during the winter and a refined residential interpretation of a containment zone to "de-bug" in warmer seasons.

The main level's multipurpose room houses the open kitchen, dining and living spaces. Having eastern and western exposure, the room is inviting at both breakfast and dinner. Massive glass doors focus views east to the lake. A fireplace with reclaimed wood provides an intimate space along north wall. Beyond the fireplace a pantry and office (which doubles as a third guest room) screen a neighboring residence.

How does the design respond to the surrounding physical and cultural context and environmental constraints?

Approaching down the drive, the house appears to grow from the hillside. A split level layout was used as a direct response to the slope of the bluff the house is nestled within. The shifting levels maintains a compact overall footprint for the house while providing for heightened privacy for the master suite and guest rooms from the public areas of the house. On axis with the main entry steps, a large picture window allows views through the house to the lake beyond as you approach the house on foot. The patio on the side of the house opposing the lake is nestled within a retaining wall made of stone sourced from a nearby quarry. It is here to an intimate dining area enjoys a prime seat to enjoy the sun setting amongst the old growth cedar forest.

In massing, scale, and in materials, the house evokes neighbor vacation cabins. The building was located just a few miles down the road and completed almost all of the construction using local materials and craftsmen.

Describe uses of materials and building systems that created an environmentally and contextually responsive design.

The house is exceptionally energy efficient. All windows are triple glazed and the walls and roof are super insulated. Reclaimed materials, such as the oak flooring were used throughout. The house is conditioned using a series of geothermal wells. The design includes sustainable features such as utility grade floors, and Richlite counters. Recycled rubber roofing and cement siding were chosen for their long life. Throughout the design and construction process, the property's history emerged through site exploration and insight from local community members. The construction crew resided within fifteen minutes of the site. All these elements strengthen the relationship between the land

and the structure. A step up from the living area, the master bedroom peers into the tree canopy through large plate glass windows. A lower band of screened awning windows falls below the main sightline and provides ventilation even in light rainfall. The home is not air-conditioned. A pair of oversized corner windows above the tub opens the master bath into the woods.

Project Details

New Construction: Yes
Year Completed: 2011
Building Type: Residential
City: Algoma
State: Wisconsin
Country: USA
Foundation: Poured-in-place concrete
Superstructure / Framing System: Wood framed
Exterior Enclosure: Hardie Plank
Roof Material: Carlise EcoStar
Square Footage: 2,100 sqft
Number of Rooms: 3 bedrooms / 3.5 bathrooms
Mechanical: Geothermal
Site Area: 6.38 acres

Project Team

Architect:

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