

Solace in Nature

Homes that blend with the landscape

Introduction by Robert Swatt, FAIA

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The designs featured in this book are as different as the countries and landscapes where they are located—some step with the land with seamless indoor-outdoor connections, while others are more like pavilions that hover above the land, creating a poetic relationship between architecture and nature. Some are sheathed in wood boards, while others are clad in stone, cement plaster, or metal, drawing inspiration from their settings. Rooflines are flat, sloped, and curved, as diverse as the topography. Though the architectural languages are varied and quite distinct, each project in its own way expresses a reverence for the natural features of its site—just as Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater and Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House relate to nature in powerful but profoundly different ways.

I believe that there are three key timeless principles of modern residential architecture. First, as a reflection of the informality of contemporary family life, open planning, with fewer compartmentalized spaces, provides connectivity and spatial excitement. Second, in response to varying site typologies, knitting the architecture to the land, with varying degrees of contrast, can create a lyrical dialogue between architecture and nature. Finally, strong indoor-outdoor connections that blur the boundaries between the two help to connect family life to nature by bringing the outside in. Each of the projects illustrated in this volume exhibit these three tenets of modern architecture in unique and beautiful ways.

All 34 of the projects featured here are, by and large, country homes—as opposed to urban, infill, or even suburban homes. As such, the primary context of each home is the site itself and the surrounding landscape. These houses hail from all over the world with sites that range from forests to high mountains and deserts, from lakesides and jagged coasts to rain forests and wine

country. Each design is profoundly sensitive to its site and nature inspired. One superb example is the Dans L'Escarpement house in Montreal, Canada, with its minimal impact on land, and the dramatic bridging of the fully transparent great room over two concrete plinths—expressing the delicate footprint of this beautiful home. Another striking example is the Glass Villa in Lechlade, United Kingdom. The architectural parti is dramatic and simple—a pavilion that visually floats over the edge of a lake. However, simple can be deceiving. It takes great care and attention to detail to build a home of such consistency—creating an environment of beautiful spaces, consistent detail, connected to nature with walls of floor-to-ceiling glass, and flooded with light from a linear skylight that parallels the stair and circulation spine. One project, the Okada Marshall House, embraces nature and in so doing creates its own microclimate, providing outdoor areas that are sheltered from the prevailing winds.

Taken together, this is a compelling collection of beautiful homes on unique sites throughout the world, emphasizing the connections to and symbiotic relationship of architecture and nature. The owners of these homes are truly fortunate—to have a place of comfort and repose to observe the quality of the changing light over the days, experience the rain, wind, sun, and sky. To follow the slow change of seasons and growth of plant life, perhaps see some curious animals passing by. Each home creates a careful balance of connection and openness to privacy and coziness, filtering the elements to protect occupants from harshness of nature providing feelings of security while creating uplifting environs.

Our relationship to nature is as profound as our connection to home. These projects celebrate a union of both—places to nestle in and contemplate the beauty of their extraordinary sites.



Mountain Views

CRESCENT H

CLB Architects | 2016 | Wilson, WY, United States





This large house is situated atop a gently sloping knoll inhabited by a mature aspen grove on a sizable site at the base of the Teton Range in northwest Wyoming. The house takes full advantage of panoramic views of the mountain range, and a framed view of Grand Teton, the tallest peak in the range, is visible through an opening in the trees. The entry drive ascends through the aspen grove and emerges in an open meadow where the house is revealed on the knoll.

The home is organized to capitalize on views, light, and sequence opportunities offered by this extraordinary site. The building program elements are arranged in separate building forms to optimize intimacy and exposure. The broad protective roof of the living, dining, and kitchen pavilion stretches along an east-west axis to take advantage of views and natural light. Two sculpted stone buildings containing bedrooms and other private zones are connected to both ends of the pavilion. Movement through the house is choreographed to contrast the characteristics of solid and void, alternately creating shelter, intimacy, and connections to outdoor spaces. This movement through the project culminates in the living area where glass walls roll away to create gracious connections to porches and terraces.

A carefully chosen, yet reductive, palette creates simplicity and timelessness while enhancing the connection to its mountain environment. Sedimentary stone from a regional quarry mimics the surrounding mountain ranges and rock formations. Clear vertical grain cedar siding breaks up the stone pattern and adds warmth and texture to the exterior. The same stone reappears on chimneys that define the public spaces within the pavilion. Stylishly simple, Crescent H sits lightly but confidently within its spectacular setting.





