

# INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

SUMMER 2009

## HOMES THAT EMBRACE THE **OUTDOORS**

MANHATTAN ROOFTOP GARDEN + LAURENTIAN FOREST SANCTUARY  
+ NEVADA DESERT OASIS + MODERN GEORGIAN BAY COTTAGE

HISTORIC BATH, U.K. • OUTDOOR FIREPLACES  
• DISCERNING GEORGIA O'KEEFFE



ARCHITECTURE





Laurentians, Que.

*In keeping with the Zen nature of the home, the greenhouse, living room, and master bedroom all open to the terrace, which overlooks the lake. The steel support pillars seem part of the surrounding forest.*

**THE LAURENTIAN MOUNTAINS' EVOLVING  
NATURAL DRAMA IS ON VIEW FROM EVERY ANGLE  
OF THIS STREAMLINED MODERN SANCTUARY.**

**BY LISA FITTERMAN**

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY UNDINE PROHL**

# LEAN AND GREEN

At first glance, it looks like a long wood box at the end of a nearly deserted country road, simple and opaque, with a whimsical bronze sculpture of children on a see-saw and a bank of narrow windows placed too high to peek through. Set in a clearing by a lake in the Laurentian Mountains, north of Montreal, where the topography is carved out of harsh winters and humid summers, it seems of the place rather than built on it, something waiting to be discovered, as silent and mysterious as the surrounding woods.

Enter and it is like stepping through the looking glass into a world where light plays off water, windows, and mirrors, so that it seems there are no boundaries between inside and out. Materials such as pine, cedar, and slate contribute to the giddy sense of suddenly being thrust into nature, as do shades of green, ochre, brown, and grey. With a vista that slopes about 40 feet down to the lakeshore, it is a house in flux with the seasons, as changeable and synergistic as Nature herself, with one thing flowing into the other. A greenhouse opens onto a kitchen, dining, and living area, which in turn lead to a sculpture garden and a terrace that wraps back toward the greenhouse. Slender steel support columns add to the ambience, for their colour mimics the greyish trunks of the birch trees outside.

Think of it as a Zen aesthetic, a place of pure structure that is Japanese in its execution, stripped down into a streamlined, luxurious space on more than 4,800 square feet that can accommodate a crowd as easily as one person. That is exactly what the property's owner, a financial consultant, wanted—a home for generations, where he could live happily on his own but where his children and grandchildren would want to come often.

"It was challenging because we had to create synergy between all the spaces while also ensuring privacy," says architect Renée Daoust of the Montreal firm Daoust Lestage. She and her team made numerous visits to the site before they drew up their plans, checking out the terrain, walking back and forth as they deter-

*An advantage of building on a property that plunges is that the front of the house can be deceptively simple, while the back features dramatic floor-to-ceiling windows over two levels. Rocks recovered from the site were used to bolster the structure and contribute to the sense that it springs from the land. Opposite page: Is it real or a reflection? Even the shelving in the kitchen is lined with mirrors, which reflect the greenhouse. A freestanding, high-performance semi-combustion wood stove—one of two—helps make the house self-sufficient, even in the event of an ice storm.*





## ARCHITECTURE



**ENTERING THE HOUSE IS  
LIKE STEPPING THROUGH  
THE LOOKING GLASS INTO A  
WORLD WITHOUT BOUNDARIES  
BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUT.**

mined sightlines and sunlight. They decided that the shell of the structure would be two rectangular pine boxes fitted together, not flush but rather like pieces of a larger puzzle; the pine would be purchased from a local supplier to underscore both the team's and the client's commitment to sustainable, user-friendly design.

At street level, only one storey is visible, with the entrance facing northwest; at the lake level, one sees two, with windows that go from floor to ceiling and rocks recovered from the site used to bolster the house and articulate the slope.

One box contains two suites, complete with bathrooms and kitchenettes, for the owner's adult children and their families. The other has the public living areas, the master bedroom, a bathroom and sauna, and the greenhouse. Downstairs are a games room and the children's sleeping quarters, individual berths on which they have each put their own individual stamp. There is also a 48-foot pool in a glistening white room, which was not part of the original plan and is testament to the homeowner's willingness to go with the flow.

"It was supposed to be a kind of technical room, but when the space was dug up, the builder decided on his own to enlarge the entire basement," Daoust explains. "When we

**Laurentians, Que.**

The entryway along the greenhouse has a mottled slate floor and a black water feature that irrigates both a cactus garden and tall stalks of papyrus sedge. The greenhouse offers another bonus: the heat it generates is recovered and distributed throughout the rest of the house. **Opposite page:** Artificial lighting is all done with tracks; with all the natural light and mirrors, there is little need for a more sophisticated system. A simple living room and work area front the master bedroom behind the curtain, which consists of a mattress and little else.





The pool room seems otherworldly, with light reflecting off the water and on the stark white walls. Although it is ostensibly the basement, bright light sconces, floor-to-ceiling windows, and even the ladder-like staircase contribute to a sense of being suspended in mid-air.

**Below:** The lone bathroom has a cedar-lined shower with two sets of controls; two can shower at once by drawing the curtain through the middle.

**Bottom:** The grandchildren chose the colour of the curtains for their individual built-in bunk beds. The nylon-like fabric, called "sushi," blocks out light, not noise. Their sleeping quarters also house the games room.

arrived on-site, we said, 'Well, what do we do now?' And then [the builder] said, 'With all that space, why not a lap pool?' So that's what we did.'

The colour of the water, a cool greenish-blue, was a happy accident, for it was simply pumped in from a local artesian well. And the white contrasts with the rest of the house, especially the greenhouse, which sits at the top of the staircase. There, the floor is a mottled slate, with a black-painted shallow water feature that is used to irrigate both a cactus garden and tall stalks of papyrus sedge that are thriving out of their natural habitat in the humid, hot Nile delta. An added bonus: heat from the greenhouse is recovered and distributed throughout the rest of the home.

In the kitchen, everything is wood, glass, mirrors, and light. Mirrors back the open cupboards that hold tableware and glassware, while floor-to-ceiling mirrors are used to hide the microwave, coffee maker, refrigerator, and other large kitchen implements.

"The only thing is, we had to make sure the ventilation for the [enclosed] fridge would work," says Daoust.

For the master bedroom, located just beyond the kitchen and living room and bordered on three sides by glass, the client opted for a simple space that is closed off, not by a wall with a door but with a curtain. "What's the point?" he'd asked Daoust. "It's my children and grandchildren who come here. My family. And this way, I get to wake up in the middle of nature. It doesn't get any better than that." ●

