

up close

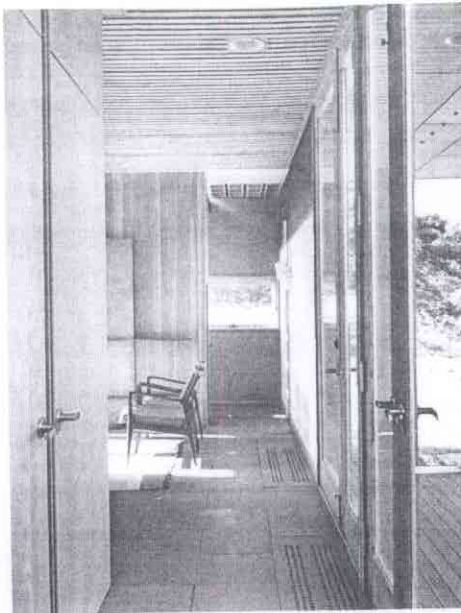


HM/FM House: Revisiting the Roots of Modernism

In a place known more for tradition than innovation, David Piscuskas, a principal of 1100 Architect, used conventional construction materials in an inventive way to build a casual and comfortable beach house overlooking Cape Cod Bay that is anything but conventional. **Text by Carol Berens. Photography by Michael Weber and 1100 Architect**



Previous page: Deceptively simple, the house is composed of two intersecting rectangular volumes, one set atop the other at a 90 degree angle. This page, clockwise from top right: A two-story soaring glass wall floods the stairwell with light; The dining room floor is particle board soaked in aniline dye and finished with many coats of polyurethane. The ceilings are composed of stripped Douglas fir over homosote, recalling Alvar Aalto designs while absorbing sound; Windows are stock sizes, combined in syncopated patterns to create large expanses of glass; The stair treads, actually wooden boxes cantilevered from one side wall of the stairwell, float sculpture-like, skimming the other wall by only a few inches; The main entrance; Visual interest stems from the nature, color, and pattern of the materials themselves

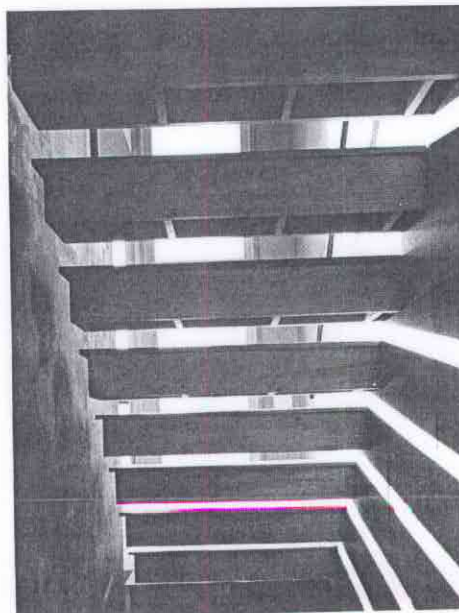
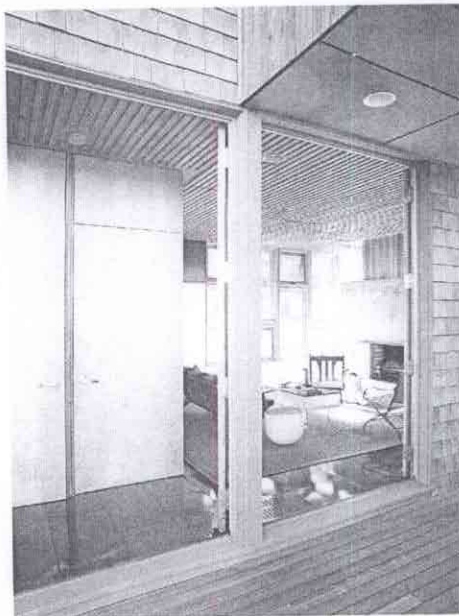


"I wanted to bring modernism back to its roots, to achieve design within a budget," David Piscuskas, a principal of 1100 Architect, explained. He was talking about his own house on a hill overlooking Cape Cod Bay, a place known more for tradition than innovation. His goal: Use conventional construction materials in an inventive way to build a casual and comfortable beach house that would stand up—in looks and function—to the wear and tear of family living. The result: A sculptural wood-framed house that is anything but conventional.

Weathered cedar shingles and siding clad this New England seaside house, but no shutters or gables or widow's walks are in sight. Deceptively simple, the house is composed of two intersecting rectangular volumes, one set atop the other at a 90 degree angle. (Piscuskas dubbed the house the "HM/FM House" to identify which part of the house the contractor was in when speaking with him over the phone from New York. HM is the grounded box; FM, the cantilevered one.) The roof of HM tilts up asymmetrically at two ends, making the house look like a ship afloat on the water, its peaked prow cutting through the waves. FM perches atop metal pipe columns like a lifeguard station looking out over the landscape. Roof edges are sharp and minimal with no overhangs or eaves, creating a crisp man-made object in the middle of scrubby, seaside nature.

As in modernist homes of earlier times, light suffuses the inside of the HM/FM House through large expanses of windows which open onto seascape vistas. The front wooden deck leads into both the kitchen/dining area and living room through a wall composed of wood-framed glass doors. The stairwell, tucked behind the fireplace wall at the end of the living room, leads

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Up Close: HM/FM House

(continued from page 16) upstairs to the three rooms comprising the private part of the house, with two of the rooms occupying the FM part of the second story. A two-story soaring glass wall floods the stairwell with light. The stair treads, actually wooden boxes cantilevered from one side wall of the stairwell, float sculpture-like, skimming the other wall by only a few inches. "I've always been intrigued about floating things," said Piscuskas.

Piscuskas achieved his goal of economy by designing the proportions of the house around material dimensions—there are no half-cut shingles or custom-made windows. He embraced American modernism's post-war use of off-the-shelf, everyday materials deployed in a slightly off-beat way. Things are never quite what they appear to be nor handled in a standard way. Exterior doors and windows are stock sizes, combined in syncopated patterns or installed together to create large expanses of glass. The stairwell wall is homosote, cut in an ashlar pattern, like stone panels, and soaked in aniline dye to lend subtle changes in tone to each piece. The living/dining room floor is particle board also soaked in aniline dye and finished with many coats of polyurethane. The ceilings are composed of stripped Douglas fir over homosote, recalling Alvar Aalto designs while absorbing sound, a necessary job in an open plan.

True to modernism's doctrine of avoidance of applied ornament, visual interest stems from the nature and color of the materials themselves. Natural, of course, does not mean artless. On the exterior, two five-course bands of Western red cedar shingles wrap around the house and contrast with Eastern white cedar shingles. These color bands connect the second story windows and give scale to the house, preventing the HM portion from looking like just a big box. FM, clad in a weathered vertical-grain Western redwood, is set against HM both in volume and surface treatment. Contraposition is also evident in the interior. A hard, smooth-surfaced concrete-stuccoed square fireplace wall is asymmetrically framed by a warm, vertical-grain Douglas fir wall. Two steel shelves act as a mantel and create a horizontal (and again floating) connection. Color is not applied, but dyed so the color comes from within, embodying the material.

1100 Architect (its name taken from the address of its original studio) has been refining its interpretation of modernism for almost 20 years. Based in New York, the two partners, David Piscuskas and Juergen Riehm, have worked on a broad range of projects from the highly visible newly-designed Museum of Modern Art Design Store to private apartments and artists' lofts. Their architecture, as is evident in the HM/FM

(continued from page 47) House, updates modernism's aesthetic simplicity by imbuing warmth and livability into their projects while not losing sight of an inventive, intellectual rigor. *see resources for details*