

RON BROADHURST

RETREAT THE MODERN HOUSE IN NATURE



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NEW YORK

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PREFACE

RON BROADHURST

When I first conceived the idea for this book I had wanted to title it *Retreat: Houses at the Edge of the World*, but my publisher found that to sound more apocalyptic than inviting. However, then and now the prevailing mood of the culture, at least in the United States, seemed to be in a schizophrenic state: on the one hand, weary of our endless war in the Middle East, and on the other, optimistic regarding technological innovation at home (thank you, Apple). And indeed at least one of the projects featured in this book could represent a flight from the realities of twenty-first-century civilization—Fearon Hay's Island Retreat, on Waiheke Island, eleven miles off the coast of New Zealand, with its bunker-like profile, retractable metal screens over glass walls, and impressive array of solar panels.

But as I carried out the process of selecting projects that were among the most responsive to their natural contexts and the most formally and structurally innovative, not to mention the most reasonably recently completed, I discovered that my proposed title would have been a fallacy. The projects that most captured my attention led me to question what constituted the nature of a domestic retreat in the early twenty-first century.

For instance, the two Scandinavian projects in this volume, by Tham & Videgård and Atelier Oslo, are on waterside sites that are not particularly isolated but which offer a context of nearly undisturbed natural beauty, and are distinctly second homes, small in scale and designed specifically as retreats from quotidian life in the city or suburbs. Similarly, Bates Masi + Architects' project in the Hamptons and Peter Rose + Partners' project on Martha's Vineyard could hardly be considered isolated, and the former's natural context could hardly be considered rustic, but both projects exhibit an almost aggressive desire to engage with their surrounding environment, the Rose project by virtue of its uninhibited openness, the Bates Masi project by way of its site-defining boardwalk, which extends like an outstretched arm to an isolated guesthouse built by Andrew Geller in 1962.

Maybe the gold standard of the modern retreat can be found in Bohlin Cywinski Jackson's Skyline

House in Oregon, crowning a steep slope with breathtaking views of the Cascade Mountains, or Rick Joy's Lone Mountain Ranch House, lonesome indeed on a 27,000-acre cattle ranch outside the ghost town of Golden, New Mexico. Coincidentally both of those projects are composed of simple forms and, in the case of the Skyline House, remarkably modest materials. But formal refinement and a deliberate engagement with the natural environment, as well as a fair degree of isolation, perhaps best capture the spirit of *Retreat*.

Such are the conditions of William Reue's project in the woods of upstate New York, where an enigmatic structure with a curved steel front facade evocative of a Richard Serra sculpture and a glass-walled rear facade sits like a jewel box among a phalanx of spruce trees. On the other side of the country, Barbara Bestor's Toro Canyon House is an object lesson in nature tamed, a luxuriously rustic villa overlooking artfully manicured grounds, but set among the wild canyons of Santa Barbara County. The site is idyllic, just outside the small town of Toro Canyon, between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, yet a world away from either. Up the coast, near Big Sur, Anne Fougeron's Fall House is a tour de force of structural ingenuity and material richness, a gravity-defying essay in copper and glass that clings to a bluff lowering to the ocean until culminating with a cantilevered master bedroom suite. Naturally my publisher selected Fall House to appear on this book's cover.

At some point I had to wonder if a site within a so-called megalopolis—an outdated term that has been bureaucratically deconstructed into smaller "metropolitan statistical areas"—should disqualify certain projects from being included in this volume. Though these census-designated areas are still large enough to expand the urban population of, for example, New York from 8.5 million to 20 million, should the masterfully crafted houses by Allied Works Architecture in Dutchess County and Kieran Timberlake in Pound Ridge have been excluded from these pages? Not if one considers a retreat to be defined by the poise a house displays in the company of nature.



