



HEATHER SEXTON, ASSOC. AIA

Agrarian Rhapsody

By day Kerrik Wessel, Assoc. AIA, works on dream houses for clients of SALA Architects, Inc., Stillwater. For the past three years, however, he's devoted his nights and weekends to designing and building his personal vision of the ideal single-family home. "I wanted to get out from behind the drawing board," he says. "The experience of building is important to me." Wessel's great-grandfather and grandfather were architects and built houses, he explains. His father, St. Paul developer Brian Wessel, who helped on the project, is also an architect and builder. "I was anxious to have something to show for myself," Wessel says.

Sited on a steep inexpensive lot in residential St. Croix Falls (it was considered unbuildable by local developers and the neighbors dumped lawn clippings and garbage there) with the ruins of a stone barn foundation nearby, the 2,000-square-foot house was affectionately dubbed "the corncrib project" by the Honor Awards jurors for its "simple poetic connection to agrarian architecture." The



Design team: Kerrik Wessel, Assoc. AIA, Heather Sexton, Assoc. AIA.

house's defining feature—a corncrib-inspired walkway composed of cedar strips, which separates the upper street level from the lower private courtyard before extending toward the old barn foundation—"is a penetrable enclosure that thoughtfully extends an agrarian vocabulary with poetic, economic means," the jurors said.

In addition to the house's easy flow between interior and exterior spaces, the jurors were impressed with the project's "simple, thoughtful plan." Built into the site's slope, the structure's lower level can be used as two large rooms or partitioned into three spaces. Constructed of exposed poured concrete partially submerged in the earth, the space stays cool in summer while in-floor heat warms the floors in winter.

The upper level of the house, an open multipurpose room, has floor-to-ceiling windows facing south; glass and screen doors open to an outdoor porch. Large overhangs and trees shade the windows in summer, yet allow light to pene-

JURY COMMENTS

"THOUGHTFULLY EXTENDS AN AGRARIAN VOCABULARY WITH POETIC, ECONOMIC MEANS."



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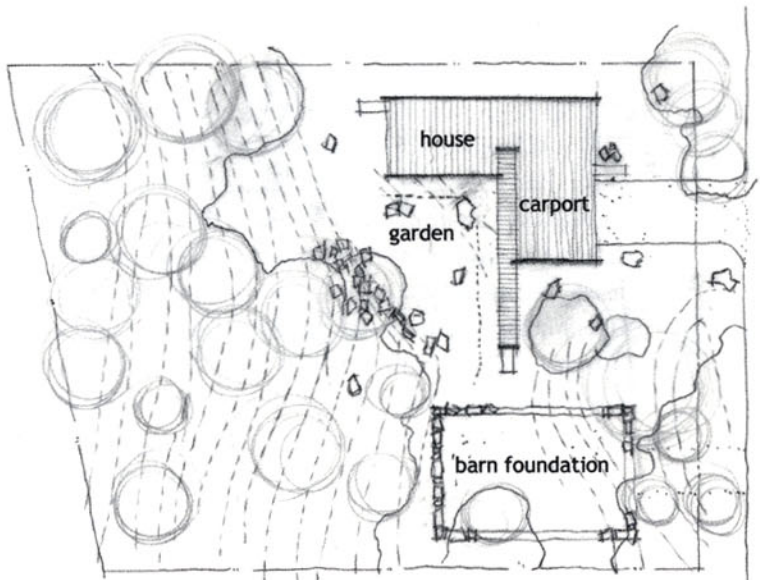
trate interiors in winter. An air exchanger, cross ventilation and super-insulated roof panels eliminate the need for air conditioning in summer.

Materials include concrete, galvanized metal siding and roofing, cedar posts and plywood, custom cedar windows and wood flooring. To finish the house, Wessel used store-bought metal shelving framed with wood, custom-built steel-and-plywood casework in the kitchen topped with reused laboratory countertops, and Douglas fir beams and trim salvaged from a northeast-Minneapolis warehouse.

Although the site's rural character and the nearby barns, corncribs and sheds largely inspired his design, Wessel says—"the materials have a purpose that's expressed simply in the details of the building"—he also cites Japanese detailing and modernism as influences. His wife, Heather Sexton, Assoc. AIA, designer, Hammel, Green and Abrahamson, Inc., Minneapolis, who also helped with the house, calls it "retro-pioneer," he continues. "The term speaks of something modern but harks back to the past, when craftsmanship was everything."

"This house is close to our hearts," he says of the family's project. "We wanted to do something small, affordable and accessible. It's another definition of dream house." —C. L.

The simplicity of the house's defining gesture—a corncrib-inspired walkway composed of cedar strips (opposite, above left)—is continued indoors, with an open plan and the use of such materials as salvaged wood, reused countertops and wood flooring (top, above).



Honor Award

359 Day Road
St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin
Kerrik Wessel, Assoc. AIA
St. Paul, Minnesota