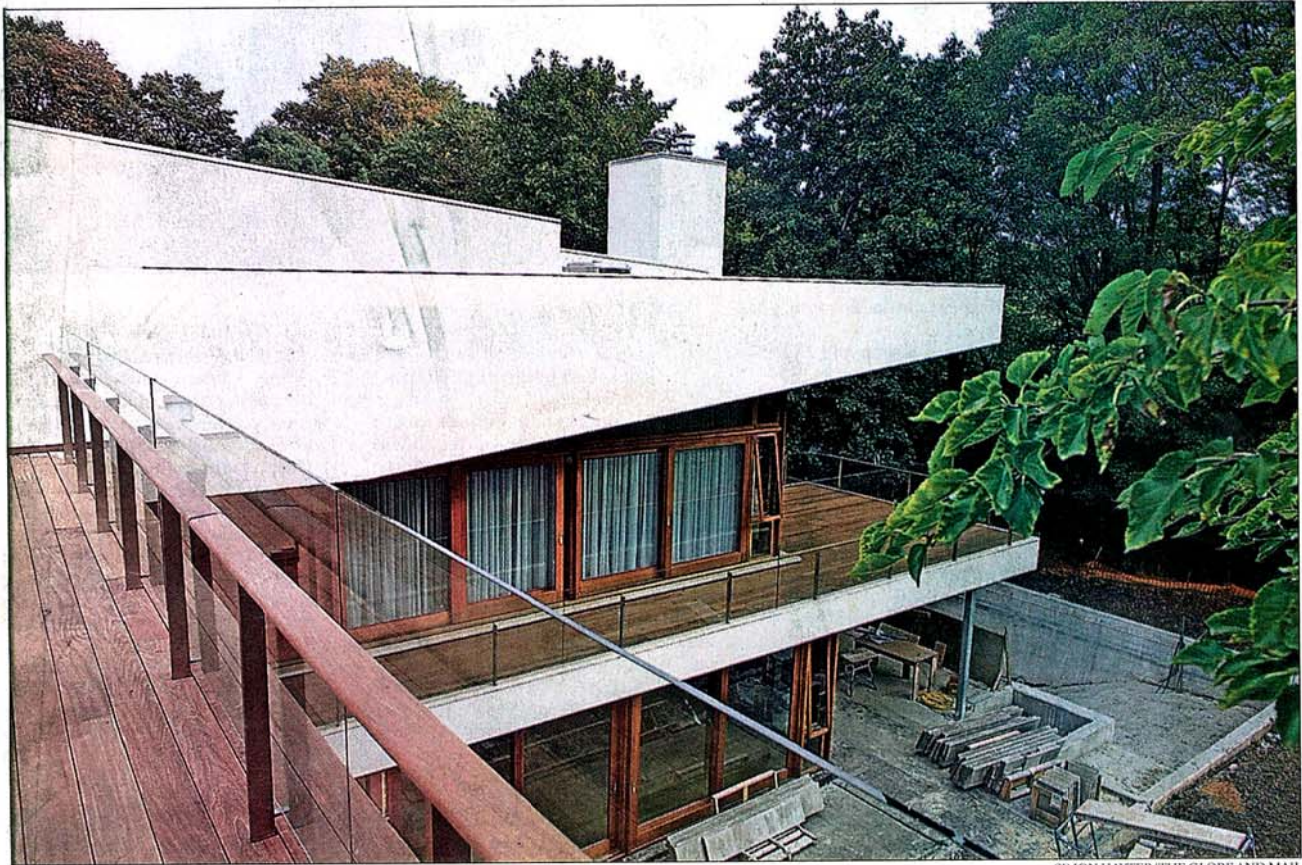


Globe Review



SIMON HAYTER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

A view from the third-floor balcony of a North Toronto house designed by Hariri Pontarini Architects: a heightened sense of craftsmanship.

CITYSPACE HOGG'S HOLLOW HOUSE

Soulful, sculpted space



LISA ROCHON reports feeling more of a spiritual zinger in this home than she did in a new cathedral in Los Angeles

Every once in a while, an architect gets the chance to do the right thing. To design something that jolts us awake, that flips the song playing for too long across our minds.

Producing a work of originality doesn't require a massive commission. The bravest, most hopeful strokes in architecture often come in smaller packages — a house at the end of a street can shift the ground under your feet.

The house in Toronto's Hogg's Hollow by Siamak Hariri returns us

to the possibility of domestic architecture as sacred space. To be sure, there is everything you would expect from an upscale home: a kitchen with honed brown-black granite counters; washrooms with marble walls and generous decks with glass balustrades that push like headlands toward the heavily forested ravine. But the divine is there, too. Sculpted, soulful space has managed to survive 3½ years of design and construction. Light falls from ribbons of windows.

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Pure geometry, honest materials

ROCHON from page R1

The walls and ceilings billow gently to shift our perception of space — these are the kinds of gestures you might expect in places of worship. If only, I got more of a spiritual zinger from this house than I did at Spanish architect Rafael Moneo's much anticipated new cathedral in Los Angeles.

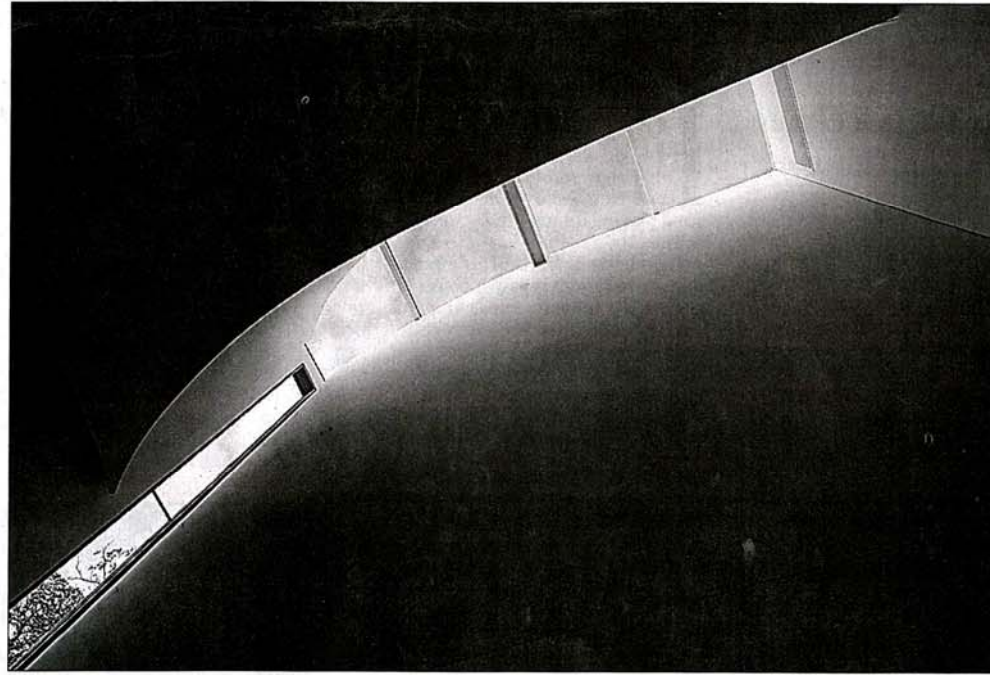
Set within a North Toronto neighbourhood of mostly rugged stone baronial mansions, the house by Hariri is clean and tight with a natural interest in architecture as theatre, as place-maker, as landmark. The front façade is a sublime gesture in muted, earthy tones of French limestone and it curves ever so slightly in two directions: along the horizontal and vertically toward the street. Behind the large stone shield is a double-height living room with a light slot that gets tucked behind an undulation in the ceiling and then rises another floor — light enters the room through a narrow ribbon window running up one of its walls and connecting to a long skylight. Transparency comes underneath in the form of generous sliding windows clad in teak on the exterior and white oak on the interior. Another stone clad volume with a single vertical window pushes forward to the street with windows below for the client's office.

With this, Hariri, whose firm was among those to receive Canada's highest award in architecture yesterday, has established his reputation in North America as a sculptor working in architecture, an honour that places him in the ranks of esteemed thinkers in design. Cana-

dian Arthur Erickson understood the art of sculpting in architecture with some of his designs for private residences and universities. So did Ron Thom. And American Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings & Merrill is acclaimed for his exceptional design of the Beinecke Library at Yale University as a box with coffered panels made of translucent Vermont marble.

It took astonishing clarity from Hariri to pull this one off. And guts. For one thing, there exists tremendous pressure — let's call it a stylistic expectation — to produce work that continues, spins around and ultimately upholds Toronto's school of new modernism. There's plenty of that aesthetic that has colonized the University of Toronto and shown up at the National Ballet School and other of the city's cultural renaissance projects. Gracefully articulated by architects such as Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg or Montgomery Sisam or Ian MacDonald, it makes for a superb addition to the streetscape; how to play a building over its site, and work it in and around historic structures, how to carve out discreet public space, how to invite masses of natural light. It's not that the system needs fixing; just that some of the motifs — thin pieces of wood that run horizontally over fences or facades of buildings — have become chestnuts.

There is the new sense of direction that Hariri of Hariri Pontarini Architects has brought to design in Toronto and Canada but also this: that the house has triumphed because of a mutual respect between the architect and his clients. The



SIMON HAYTER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Hariri's design features a curving interior wall and a skylight: '... it had this amazing temple-like quality.'

house operates as a house, and a humane one at that. The plan flows easily and gracefully from the front entrance through to the kitchen. One step leads to a family room with a fireplace and a floor of French limestone. The terraces in Brazilian Ipe lead to a pool, grass for the kids to play on, and the ravine beyond. Though it consumes 8,000 square feet above ground (not including the basement level, which features a basketball court that converts into a squash court), there's never a sense of space in which to get lost, or where to go next.

"I've always thought it has a kind of spirituality," says the client, who asked, along with her husband, for anonymity. "Siamak is a deeply spiritual person — and I really feel

that some part of his soul is in the house. Even when it was in the stage of going up as a steel structure, when it was just the bare bones, it had this amazing temple-like quality."

After interviewing several architects, the clients were drawn to Hariri, his portfolio and his interest in listening — something that, they say, he managed throughout the process. His design of McKinsey management consultants' headquarters (1999) on Charles Street in Toronto's downtown had deeply impressed them, because it was a contemporary addition to the street that integrated a sensitive handling of stone and wood. Much of that language was learned when Hariri was the associate in charge of Woodsworth College (1992), work-

ing closely with Tom Payne of KPMB.

When he started to design the house in Hogg's Hollow, Hariri moved himself temporarily out of his downtown architecture firm to work, instead, from the quiet of his house. "For this one, I retreated home for quite a while — I set up my own place. I wanted to break out . . . and struggle with space that is both provocative and stirring but is also peaceful."

At the same time, the house builds on some of the experiments in curved form that were already being tested at another Hariri house detailed in copper, limestone and wood. Located in the Bridle Path area, the house was selected as Architecture magazine's home of the year in 2005.

Hariri Pontarini Architects has been in business for 12 years but only this week received their first Governor-General's Medal in Architecture, awarded for the Schulich School of Business at York University designed as a joint venture with Robbie/Young + Wright Architects.

The design of a house can go terribly wrong from one space to the next. One moment, you're wandering through the social spaces delighting in the elegance of a design and then you encounter a nonsensical connection between kitchen and dining room or an excess of copper detailing and, boom, the place looks like a fetishized fool.

Restraint is in evidence throughout the Hogg's Hollow house. That, and a heightened sense of craftsmanship. For this one, the team pulled hard altogether. Jaegap Chung worked as HP's project manager on the house. Contractor Richard Wilson built it with the talents of J. W. Custom Drywallers, which sculpted the walls and ceilings. Castlewall laid up the stone exterior, segmenting the French limestone and matching the darker hues so that it looked like a continuous curving wall. French Bros. worked the fine copper detailing. Blackwell Engineers figured out how to create the front façade as a steel web of rebar, requiring the final support of a thin steel column located to one edge of the house.

Contrary to the schlock-and-dreck campaign being waged across North America, here is a house pushing for pure geometry and honest materials. I saw the residence just as the clients were moving in, at that just-born moment when cutlery was being laid for the first time in drawers and there was dust in the air and boxes everywhere. But here was architecture that was original and courageous. So great was the joy of sculpted space that the debris turned out to be invisible.

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