

David Rieff: How Republican Are Miami's Cubans? Melissa Broyer: Female Farmers at the Top of Their Fields

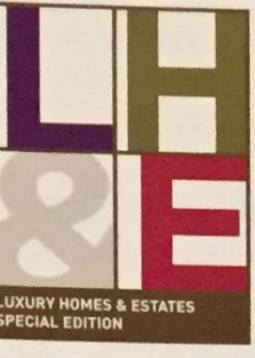
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Animal Pharm

Americans are spending millions on mood-altering drugs for pets. Is that because we've driven them mad? **By James Vlahos**



OF THE LAND

In the Pacific Northwest, two respected Seattle firms continue the region's long tradition of building in concert with nature.

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COMPLEMENTARY CONTRASTS

Privacy and proximity are desirable commodities in any city. To have both is practically unheard of in metropolitan Seattle where buildable land is scarce. So when a couple asked architect Eric Cobb to design a new house on a secluded wooded lot close to downtown Bellevue, he relished the chance to take full advantage of the unique setting. As an avowed Modernist, Cobb was even more excited about the commission when the client requested the house possess an "expression of design."

The property's location at the end of a private lane and its commanding views of Lake Washington offered undeniable opportunities for Cobb's unapologetic brand of Modern architecture, yet the steeply sloping topography posed its own set of challenges. In addition, the lot encompassed nearly an acre, but setbacks required the house to be set on a small triangle of land close to the street.

"We responded with an utterly urban attitude with respect to the use of space and architectural detailing," explains Cobb. "The compact footprint and stacked arrangement of rooms allow the 4,000-sq-ft house to feel secluded and sheltered within its lush green forest."

Rather than fight the geometries generated by the hill's contour, Cobb engaged them to create a striking composition of wood and concrete that accommodates the conventional requirements of a family home and a commercial-grade workshop in the garage for the husband who restores vintage cars and boats as a hobby.

The house is organized as a pair of interlocking structures that appear to fold one into another without the edges lining up. A concrete base anchors the structure to the land and responds to the demanding loads of the sloping site and the oversized garage/workshop, while the main living spaces occupy a Modern wooden box that is deliberately misaligned and rests atop the foundation. "The house is a series of tightly controlled moves with the efficiency of a yacht," adds Cobb. "Not big, broad strokes."

To keep it local, Cobb wrapped the structure with western red cedar without extraneous trim or ornamentation. "There's an inherent leanness in the overall aesthetic of the house," says Cobb. "I avoid layers of extra stuff."

A CONTEMPORARY SLANT

Positioned vertically and sloping in two directions, the columns establish a welcoming sense of arrival for visitors. Cobb reduced the apparent mass of the structure



Designed by Eric Cobb, this contemporary home in Seattle hugs its sloping site and opens up for long views through the forest.



with skewed overhangs and asymmetrical projections. "An angular deflection of seven degrees allows your eye to pick up the skewed geometry," explains Cobb. "The slight angle allows the spaces to flow and creates just enough tension to be interesting without being jarring."

Inside, the house opens up in a way that befits its surroundings. A procession of architectural components threading throughout the home introduces a sense of circulation that activates the spaces. The drama unfolds with a central stairway ascending from the children's bedrooms on the lower level to the master suite on the upper floor. Ornamentation is actually structural and functional. Bathed in natural light and elegantly crafted of steel, glass and concrete, the sculptural staircase creates an engaging connection between floors as well as a powerful reminder of the separation of the gracious living spaces and the working garage.

The language of the details and the choice of materials are consistent inside and out. The slate floor of the foyer flows to the outdoor terrace, and a structural wind beam extends through the house to frame the great room. An unadorned terra cotta wall ends the long view with a punctuation of color, while floor-to-ceiling windows along the long north wall embrace the forest and views of the water and downtown Bellevue.