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There's a Better View in Every Direction at This “Lake House” in Indiana

Its vertical plan channels the progressive homes brought to Beverly Shores as an installation for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.

Text by

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After moving to Chicago from Lithuania in the 1990s, Danas and Odetta Lapkus quickly discovered the small beach town of Beverly Shores on Lake Michigan in Indiana. Just an hour drive from the city, the community is a tranquil getaway situated among rolling beach dunes and towering trees within a state park. "We would visit Beverly Shores' beaches and dune trails with friends for years," reflects Danas. Eventually, the couple sought out Chicago firm dSPACE Studio to design a family retreat here.



dSPACE Studio designed a 2,200-square-foot weekend house in Beverly Shores next to Lake Michigan. The house is located within Indiana Dunes State Park, perched atop a large dune.

Photo: Tony Soluri

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"Beverly Shores has a very interesting history of modern and progressive architecture," says Robert McFadden, principal at dSPACE. The community was a satellite site for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, hosting several homes designed specifically for its "Century of Progress" theme, five of which are still extant. Building on this history, McFadden and Kevin Toukoumidis, another of the firm's principals, set out to design a home that was both innovative and artful. "The intention was to create art," declares Danas.



"With the white metal, the trees reflect and create shadow play," explains dSPACE principal Kevin Toukoumidis of the aluminum cladding. "The design and material selection were about letting the house reflect the nature surrounding it."

Photo: Tony Soluri

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The result is a 2,200-square-foot home set atop the site's highest point, nicknamed Tree House by the designers because of its upright, three-level plan. In part, its shape was out of necessity. "The property is quite steep, and there were some restrictions from the local municipality about where we could and could not build," explains McFadden. "That meant we had to focus on a limited footprint." Because the volume had to move up instead of out, the designers decided to invert the standard multilevel floor plan by locating the primary living spaces on the top level.



A cedar-clad porch serves as the home's entrance. There are three decks, each oriented for a different view of the site.

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"The Lapkuses mentioned they wanted to showcase the natural landscape surrounding the home," says McFadden. "They didn't want us to focus on one particular viewport, but instead to look at all four sides of the property." By carving out voids and apertures in the rectangular massing, each of which points to a different cardinal direction, the design team gave each room its own unique view.



In the living area, located on the top floor, the architects selected an adjustable shelving system from Rimadesio to hold books, records, and music equipment for the clients, who are self-proclaimed audio- and bibliophiles. The owners refurbished furniture they got from a neighbor, who was downsizing. A glass slider from Marvin expands the space to the deck, built in Western red cedar.

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"In life, I strive for essentials: freedom, beauty, excitement, oneness with nature," explains Danas. "We designed the house to work as an observation point of the natural surroundings with three balconies oriented to different directions. We like moving from one to another depending on the direction of the sun and wind."



In the kitchen, high-gloss lacquer cabinets from Armazem Design reflect the trees. Miele appliances and a pair of Sub-Zero freezer drawers complete the kitchen.

Photo: Tony Soluri

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Stacking the home's program vertically also meant the circulation and entry to the home had to be carefully orchestrated. "It becomes an experience and an adventure to enter this house," says Toukoumidis. The home is accessed via a steep driveway, where a concrete stair leads up around a corner to a cedar-clad porch that serves as the entry. "Inside, it's quiet," says Toukoumidis. "The house and the architecture becomes a backdrop to nature."



There's not a kitchen island, but an ovoid dining table from Bontempo provides definition between the kitchen and living room. The pendants are by DePadova.

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Solid red oak flooring was chosen to bring warmth and comfort to the interiors. The home's lowest level contains two guest bedrooms, one of which doubles as an office, with the primary suite located on the second floor. On the top level is an open plan living, dining, and kitchen area, which spills onto a south-facing balcony. "We studied a number of different scenarios with the clients," says McFadden. "But it really seemed they wanted to spend most of their time in the living spaces on the top floor. They wanted to be up high with the views of the surrounding forest, and have the secluded feel of being out in nature."

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—Danas Lapkus, owner

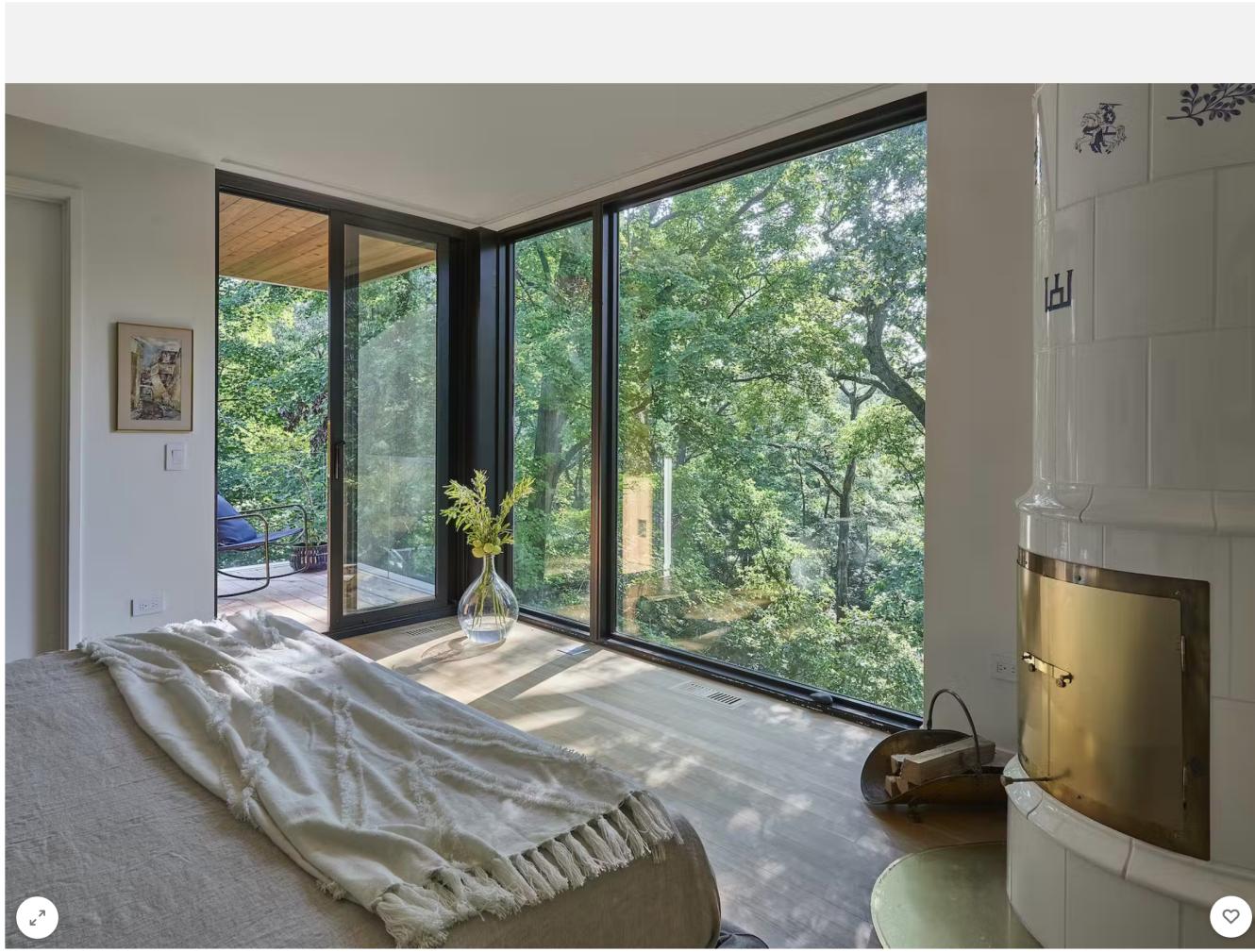


On the third-floor balcony, a rope chair and ottoman from Brown Jordan offer a cozy perch for viewing the trees.

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Because the living area combines so many functions in a limited area, the designers had to get creative. "We asked ourselves, how can we create multiple uses for this space?" reflects Toukoumidis. "How can we expand on its functionality to make the most of the tree house?" A built-in bar, wall-mounted shelving, and a hidden projector screen for movie nights provide for all of the family's creature comforts. A retractable window wall in the living room opens to a cedar-clad deck with a roll-down bug screen, allowing the outdoor space to expand the living area during temperate weather.



In the primary suite, situated on the second floor, a Swedish Gabriel woodburning stove with hand-painted tiles anchors the space. The client grew up in a home with a similar stove, and desired one here. "The porcelain wood stove in the bedroom is one of my favorite parts of the home," says Danas.

Photo: Tony Soluri

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In the primary bathroom, custom oak cabinetry by Caron Custom Homes floats above light gray porcelain floor tiles from Ariostea. The counter is Caesarstone quartz, and the fixtures are by Grohe.

Photo: Tony Soluri

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Odetta and Danas are finding that their home is shaping their lives in ways they expected, but it continues to surprise. "It feels a little strange to be in the house," admits Danas. "Since we were so involved in the design, it reflects our dreams of an ideal life. Thus, the house seems to be trying to change our lives—and it feels right."



"Architecture can be powerful when it's restrained," reflects designer Kevin Toukoumidis. "This is an incredibly detailed house, and our client had the vision and dedication make it his home."

Photo: Tony Soluri

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