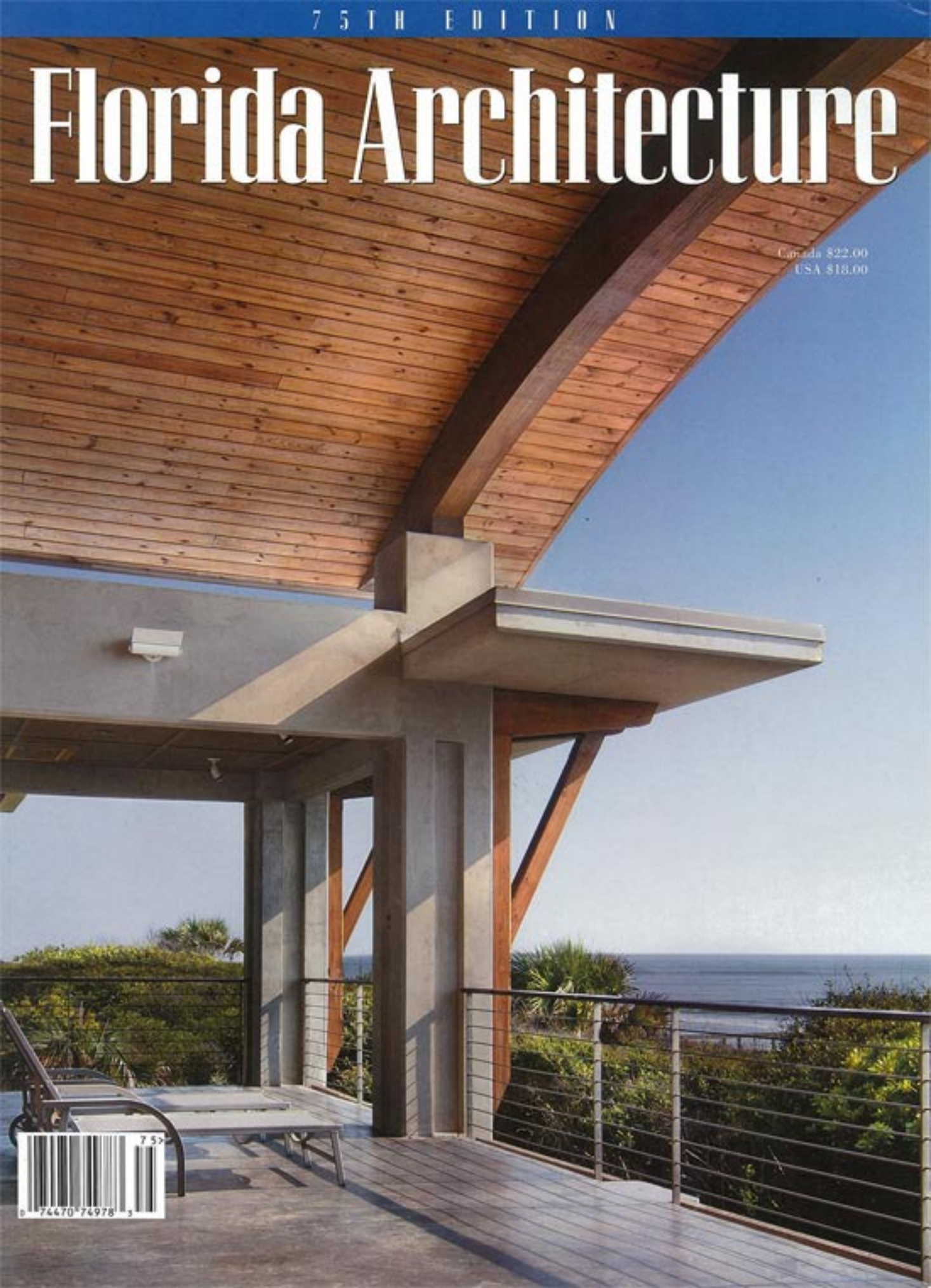


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A PATH TO INFINITY

EXPANSES OF GLASS AND A LIGHT QUALITY LEND TRANSPARENCY TO A CONTEMPORARY AMELIA ISLAND BEACH HOUSE

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On first encounter, the extremely contemporary, concrete-and-glass structure that commands a choice piece of beachfront on Amelia Island brings a single word to mind: monumental. Everyone, it seems, has the same reaction. According to the owners, Francis and Diane Lott, passers-by routinely stop to take photos. Some have even had fender-benders, so compelled were they to rubberneck.

It isn't that Sealoft is the biggest or most lavish home on the island. It simply is, according to Francis Lott, "unlike anything else here. Nothing has this riveting design."

That design is the work of William Morgan, who is known nationwide for his distinctive - even radical - architecture. The only home on Amelia Island to be designed by Morgan, Sealoft embodies the master architect's philosophy: "A structure has to do two things: It has to reflect, respect and respond to







its site. And it has to respect the inhabitants and their unique lifestyle.”

The Lotts, who use Sealoft as a weekend house, concurred with that thinking. “I feel as if a beachfront house should not be a fortress, but be light and uplifting,” Francis Lott says. “I wanted something more contemporary, with a light feeling.”

In considering the site, a sweeping stretch of beach with a broad expanse of dunes, Morgan made the view his top priority. “They had an unbroken expanse of waterfront,” he says. “In order to see the surf, which is the main reason for being there, we opted for a two-story design, in which the upper zone was reserved for the couple and formal entertaining, and the lower level was dedicated to the younger members of the family, who often visit.” The upper level, he says, has a commanding ocean view from practically every

vantage point, and the lower level looks out to the pool and the dunes beyond.

To allow that panoramic ocean view to express itself fully, Morgan designed what the Lotts’ neighbors frequently refer to as “a glass house.” Massive glass walls command both the east and west elevations. The entrance, which faces west, is constructed of six sheets of stacked, butted glass that measure 18 feet wide and about 20 feet high. Complementing this glass wall are two vertical masonry towers, which are as functional as they are striking. One tower encases the stairwell, the other the elevator shaft.

Because they didn’t want to interfere with the uninterrupted nature of the frameless glass, the Lotts searched for a solution to the doorbell dilemma. “There was no place to put a doorbell,” Francis Lott says. “On the walkway leading to the

The dining room table, custom designed by Rebecca Davisson, is made of cherry with ebonized maple inlays and stainless steel.





front door, we installed sensors. When someone walks past the sensors, it chimes inside."

The glass makes for a completely transparent entry experience that guides the eye through the house and out to the surf. To maximize that impact, Morgan designed the house on an axis. The driveway, front door, two-story atrium space, pool and ocean are aligned with the horizon line. "There is an element of infinity that is introduced," the architect says. "The house becomes an experience on this path to infinity." That honesty defines the structure. "This is a pavilion by the sea," Morgan asserts. "There is no mystery about that."

With transparency comes light. As Morgan puts it, "Light is one of the essential qualities of architecture. So often we overwhelm ourselves with light in some areas and leave other areas dark and spooky.





Because the house was surrounded by glass, it was necessary to build deep overhangs so that interiors wouldn't become too hot during the day. The overhangs, extend as far as 17 feet at some points.

If a building is to be a serious work in architecture, it needs to have a light quality, where it glows within itself."

Because the house was surrounded by glass, it was necessary to build deep overhangs so that interiors wouldn't become too hot during the day. The overhangs, extended as far as 17 feet at some points, provided necessary shade but presented a lighting challenge. Francis Lott, who is a degreed, but not practicing, architect, explains: "Originally, there wasn't enough light coming in to the atrium. I felt we needed a skylight over the atrium, but Bill had this idea to run the skylight over the length of the roof ridge. It was a brilliant solution."

That glass slit, which culminates on either end in large light wells that project upward like chimneys, not only suffuses the atrium with sunlight, it also casts a glow that gives the space a dreamy

quality during the day. At night, the mood is equally striking.

Interior designer Rebecca Davisson installed lights inside the skylight and cut out niches in the walls of the light wells to install track lighting. When it's dark outside, these hidden lights create a soft illumination effect on the grand salon - a large, open area on the second level, which encompasses the living and dining rooms, kitchen, breakfast room and den - and the atrium, a central, two-story space that facilitates a dialogue between the two levels.

Interior elements were developed with the architecture in mind. On the interior wall of the atrium, for example, Davisson used the same fluted concrete block that is so prevalent on the exterior. A repetition of two-inch-wide, curved flutes, this decorative wall treatment gives texture and mutes



the starkness typical of concrete. On the exterior, it serves another purpose: As the sun travels in the sky, the light plays on the flutes and gives the impression that the façade is constantly changing.

That tactile texture was a big part of the design strategy. "Though this is a highly contemporary house, the owners were emphatic that they didn't want it to feel stark," Davisson says. "We used a lot of texture - tactile, nubby fabrics like chenille and mohair - and warmer woods like cherry."

To emphasize the integrity of the architecture, Davisson used a minimalist scheme and a palette of neutral tones accented by punches of color. "We brought in bold color with the accent pieces, like the rugs and the art," the designer says. "And we used a lot of colorful art glass, beach glass and glass mosaics, which add a little sparkle to the house but also maintain the transparency element.

It provided an extra layer of texture and depth."

Instead of "overdesigning" the space, Davisson let the details make the statement. The living room fireplace, for example, reflects the geometry and purity of the architecture, yet is unafraid to command attention in the space. And the furniture - massive and substantial - has simple lines but great detail. The dining table is made of cherry with ebonized maple inlays and stainless steel.

All elements work in unison to articulate the owners' and architect's vision - to create a monumental, yet livable, structure by the sea. "It is a house that is on the beach, and belongs to the beach," Morgan says. "It's not like any other house I've done on the ocean, but no two houses are ever alike. They do tend to reflect differences in time, place and people. That's what this house is. It's uniquely itself." ▲

The east façade of the house features huge expanses of glass that bring the panorama of the ocean inside.