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House of the Month

Houses

Montauk House by Robert Young Architects

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Josephine Minutillo

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A landscaped garden and pool separate the two barnlike structures of the main house from the guesthouse.

Photo © Michael Moran

Drive down most roads in Montauk—the coastal hamlet at the eastern tip of Long Island—and you'll find simple fishermen's cabins alternating with elaborate constructions that serve as second homes for New York's upper crust. A new house by Robert Young Architects is located on one such road, but its design deftly straddles a delicate balance between achieving a discreet presence and an undeniable grandeur.

Young, who has offices in New York and in Bridgehampton, also on Long Island's East End, helped find the two-acre property along Lake Montauk, whose calm waters are a far cry from the mighty ocean waves for which surfers flock to Montauk. The site was previously home to a small, poorly built split-level, and sits beside a modest residence. The clients—a Manhattan couple with two small children— wanted the new house to remain unassuming.

To achieve that, despite requiring just over 10,000 square feet of program, Young created several distinct volumes—two connected ones that make up the main house and a third for guest quarters above a garage—pushing them to opposite edges of the property. “They don't link together in your eye,” the architect says.

The barnlike structures represent “the archetypal suggestion of shelter,” according to Young, their gables visible on the inside, most dramatically in the vast space of the main living room, which soars 20 feet to its peak.

That long double-height volume also contains the kitchen and dining area. A taller, two-story structure parallel to it includes bedrooms and auxiliary spaces such as the open laundry area and a television room with built-in furniture that Young's office designed.



The expansive living room, modestly finished in painted wood planks, overlooks the lake.

Photo © Michael Moran

The simplicity of the structures is matched by the materials that form them, ones that will patinate or become duller or more varied over time. Vertical cedar planks clad the exterior walls, standing seam natural zinc the roofs, and rough brick the chimneys (all interspersed with bronze hardware and light fixtures), giving the compound a slightly industrial aesthetic while remaining highly contextual and appropriate in the salty air.

Other aspects of the design are expected to be enhanced with time as well. The property, particularly around the pool that separates the main building and guesthouse and the area between the main house's large outdoor deck and the shore, is heavily planted with native grasses and shrubs. "We want it to look as if we parked the house in the natural environment," Young explains.

Inside, Young maintains a muted palette but again introduces a variety of textures, including rugged handmade Moroccan tiles and finishes of heavily knotted wood. "We didn't want anything blingy," he says.

The exterior walls facing the road feature scant, small windows, but the portions of the compound with views across the property and to the water are largely clad in high-performance glass (that captures solar gain). Though not designed to Passive House standards, the buildings have extremely energy-efficient envelopes, with 8-inch-thick structural insulated panels sandwiched between the zinc roofing and the exposed wood structure, and a continuous layer of 4-inch-thick mineral wool outside a layer of conventional batt insulation within the walls. "It just makes sense for a house that is not used that often in the winter to keep it as tightly sealed as possible," says Young. "You barely have to run any heat to keep a stable temperature."

Upon entering the main house, you are immediately greeted with a panoramic view of the lake, a view that permeates many of the spaces within the compound. Any house located here would inevitably compete with its spectacular setting. Young avoided that issue entirely by creating pure, timeless structures in which one is in awe but at ease, and completely at home.

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