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Elemental

Wheeler Kearns Architects fashion an eye-filling yet understated home on the shores of Lake Michigan

LAKE MICHIGAN, MICHIGAN

Design styles play out in all different ways when it comes to waterside properties. Homeowners in Southern California or Florida may opt for a crisp contemporary à la Richard Meier, while plenty of folks from Maine to Oregon like a house whose lines and material dovetail more intimately with the landscape. For a Munich couple making their primary residence on the shores of Lake Michigan, home is a combo that mixes a contemporary sense of interior space with a profile that echoes traditional vernacular forms.





A project of Mark Weber and Thomas Boyster of Chicago's Wheeler Kearns Architects, the property was designed for a family of four, with plenty of space for entertaining. In order to meet all the client's needs without creating a monster of a house, the architects settled on a compound of simple volumes linked by an expansive, trellis-covered terrace and clad in Accoya, a natural timber that has been modified to resist the elements. Originally a pine-yellow hue, this material mellowes over time to assume a gray patina, a seaside shade common to homes that have stood for years in sun, rain, and wind.

While the street side face of the property is almost austere, the lakeside elevation is animated with extensive fenestration that allows the house to visually encompass a vista of grassy dunes and the horizon-lapping lake beyond. The black, steel-framed windows – large expanses of glass below, with a mullioned format for the bedrooms above – add an industrial contrast to the taut, rural aspect of the wood siding and cedar shingle roof. Inside, white oak on the floors and ceilings invests the streamlined public spaces with a warmth one might expect in a home so oriented to the natural environment.

"This project is as much about the definition of internal space as it is about the vistas," suggests Weber. "The entry is a quiet space and as you proceed through the house, the views open up and the spaces open up. This was about creating spaces that are experientially very different, with the house becoming more kinetic as you progress through it and see the lake, and feel the wind, and sense movement in the landscape."





ASSETS

Indoor and outdoor entertaining spaces, including a swimming pool, oriented to maintain privacy. Exterior: horizontal shiplap cladding, cedar shingles and black steel – enclose a spacious contemporary interior, with continuous white oak floors, ceilings and millwork. Floor-to-ceiling glass brings in natural light and offers views of the dunes and Lake Michigan. Lighting: Hess GmbH LICHT + FORM. Suspended steel entry staircase, with white oak treads.