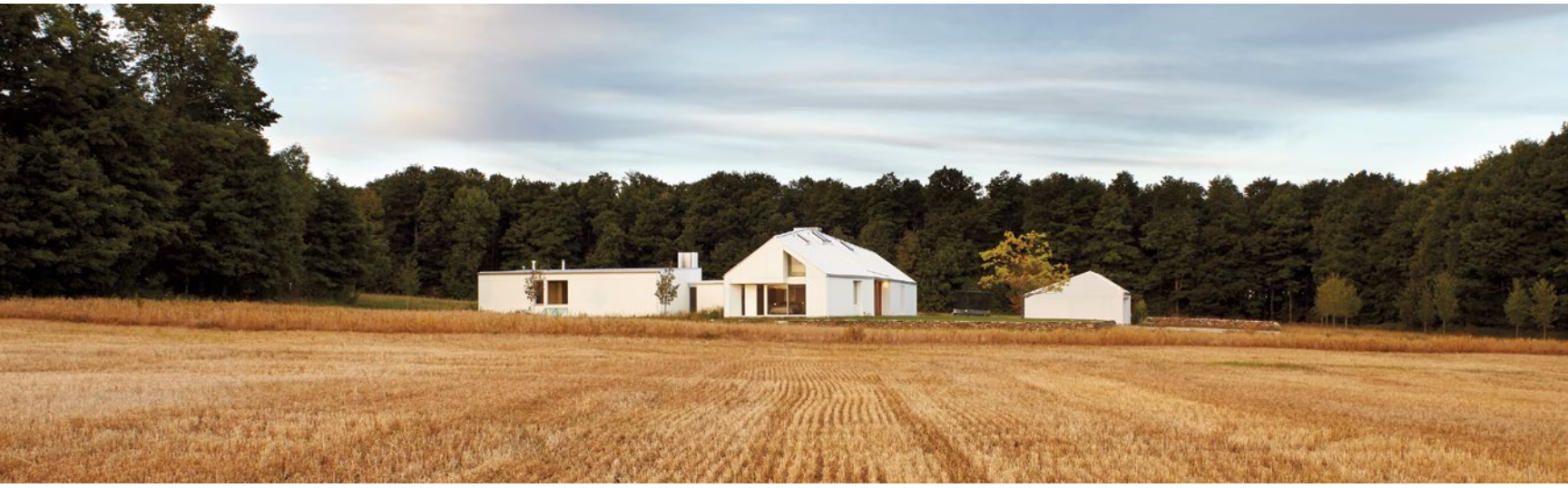
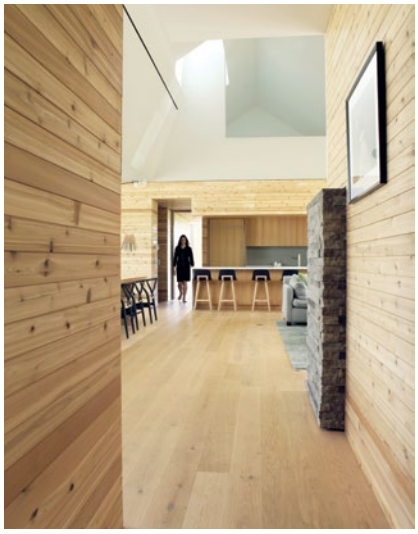
perspective **house of the month**

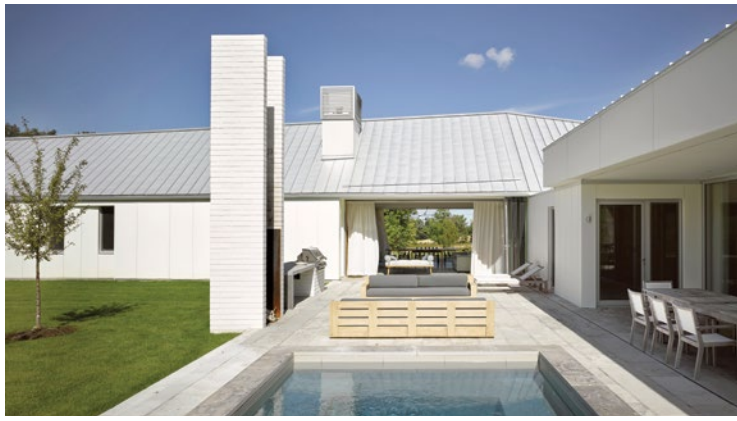
A DISCREET RURAL RETREAT WEST OF TORONTO NAVIGATES THE CHANGING SEASONS. **BY MIRIAM SITZ**



IN RURAL Ontario, where mild summers give way to cold, snowy winters, a family of six was ready to chart a new course in a sustainable second home. The Compass House, designed by Toronto-based superkül, responds to the dramatic seasonality of its context and the needs of its occupants by reconfiguring shared spaces around a central point as seasons change.

Returning to Toronto after living in London, the clients longed for a pastoral retreat reminiscent of those they had frequented in the English countryside, which could accommodate family and friends. On their 200-acre property in Mulmur, Ontario—part of a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve—they selected a wooded site that offered privacy, views, and a buffer from winds blowing across the high plateau of the Niagara Escarpment. "We wanted to blend in and not be seen," says the husband.



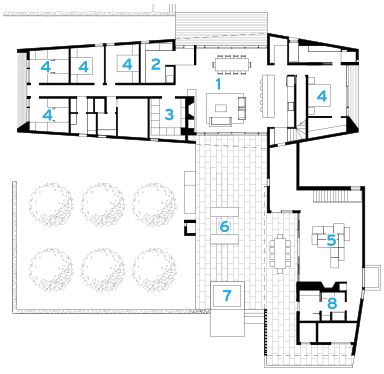


A detached garage sits just north of the main wing (top). For warmer months, operable glass doors open to a patio with an outdoor fireplace and plunge pool, which becomes a hot tub in the winter (above). Inside, a skylight connects a lofted room above the kitchen to the outdoors (left).

Taking cues from the English vernacular-style long barn, the architects designed a low-lying house with perpendicular volumes, built in two phases, aligned to the cardinal directions. In the winter, the house operates along an east–west axis, with communal spaces concentrated at the center of the main wing. In the summer, when insect screens usually replace operable glass walls running parallel along the open-plan kitchen, living, and dining room, the common areas expand to include a courtyard and the secondary wing, effectively rotating the hub of activity 90 degrees to the north–south line.

"The clients were interested in being as light on the land as possible," says principal in charge Meg Graham—a fact that influenced both the sustainability features and the appearance of the house. Passive cooling and a geothermal system contributed to a LEED Gold certification for the first phase of the project. Clad in white cement-board panels, the wood-frame structure has a low roofline that matches the undulation of the surrounding hills. The house is "a little bit stealthy," says Graham, explaining that "in the summer months, when the fields grow up around it, you don't see it right away. Then, when it snows, it's stealthy in a completely different way."

Inside, oak floors and durable knotty cedar walls tie the house to its forested setting and provide a warm contrast to the white ceilings, punctuated with skylights. "When you look up from inside the house and see the boundless sky, for a nanosecond you don't register the scale of it. You can just breathe and feel this connection to the cosmos," says Graham. "It's kind of spiritual." ■



GROUND-FLOOR PLAN

0 16 FT.
5 M.

1 KITCHEN/LIVING/DINING
2 MUDROOM
3 DEN
4 BEDROOM
5 FAMILY ROOM
6 OUTDOOR FIREPLACE
7 HOT TUB/PLUNGE POOL
8 CHANGING ROOM