

REAL ESTATE

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SILENCE AND SYMMETRY

In Mulmur, Ont., a country home in a snow-clad landscape evokes the modern sculptures of Henry Moore ■ H6

This house owned by Dr. Mark Unger and Linda Friis Petersen in the countryside north of Toronto was designed by architect Wanda Ely. SCOTT NORSWORTHY

THE LISTING

In the push for more affordable housing, development charges come under scrutiny ■ H2

NEXT MOVE

As the number of listings on the market dwindles, it might take some detective work to find the perfect home ■ H3

HOME OF THE WEEK

Home in Toronto's Beaches neighbourhood just a stone's throw from the water's edge ■ H8



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The house has a pair of farm-like buildings, one for the public and one for sleeping. The two buildings are connected by a glassy link and an outdoor deck. PHOTOS BY SCOTT NORSWORTHY





The owners of this house in Mulmur, Ont., worked with architect Wanda Ely to find the perfect location for the structure on an 18-hectare site. They positioned the house, and its windows, to offer the best views of nature and certain trees. PHOTOS BY SCOTT NORSWORTHY

Two large forms: A country home that evokes the sculptures of Henry Moore

Inspired by Danish summer homes, this rural Ontario house is nestled into nature

DAVE
LeBLANC
ARCHITOURIST



MULMER, ONT.

We've all seen them. So-called "OCD triggering" videos that feature sadistic folk haphazardly cutting pie or cake in non-geometric ways, ne'er-do-wells squeezing toothpaste tubes from the middle, or a window-gone-rogue that spoils an otherwise perfectly mathematical wall composition.

While there are equally soothing antidotes to be found online, might I suggest soothing one's nerves with Sommerhus instead?

Recently completed by architect Wanda Ely for Dr. Mark Unger and Linda Friis Petersen, this holiday home in Mulmur, Ont., is an architectural balm of with crisp lines, creamy-white high ceilings, the yin and yang of black-and-white, precise millwork, rigorously planned moments and the odd pop of colour.

And symmetry, says Ms. Ely. "I like the idea of two buildings that are farm-like [and] exactly the same size. ... One is the public, one is the sleeping/family wing, and then they're joined by a little glassy link, and then they all join [to] one really big deck."

Today, that deck is covered in deep snow. When a visitor's car trundles up the long, curved driveway, it's the sight of two black art-objects hovering over an endless white landscape that greet the eye. The experience is not unlike encountering Henry Moore's *Large Two Forms* minutes after a snowfall. It's magical.

Because this was family land – Dr. Unger's parents bought 80 hectares a long time ago – and Dr. Unger and Ms. Petersen were gifted with 18 hectares for their own use, much thought went into how to create that magic. To wit, after dismissing a site much closer to a stand of trees (for the diminished light and increased insects) and settling on a little rise in an open field of short grasses, the two house-forms and their windows could be positioned, literally, in any direction.

"This was such an interesting experience for me," Ms. Ely says. "We stood [on site] and kind of rotated the foundation until we thought, 'You know what, we're getting a perfect view of this perfect tree,' and that's not something you can do in our semi-detached, downtown, 25-[foot]-by-60-foot lots."

"That's something we see a lot in Denmark," adds Dr. Unger, who, with his Danish wife, lived in Denmark for a while. "These beautiful – they're called Sommerhus – summer houses, nestled in fields. ... We always notice how well they use light, and how big a difference that makes in your feeling of the space."

And how does one feel here? Calm is the first word that comes to mind. The high, peaked ceiling in the public wing is immediately reassuring, domestic and unfussy. There is the warmth of wood underfoot (and it is warm to the touch as the home is heated via radiant floors). The kitchen does away with uppers so that the (ordered) clutter of life is in evidence; be-



The interior of the house has crisp lines, creamy-white high ceilings, precise millwork and the odd pop of colour.

cause this is a house that co-exists with nature, half of the backsplash is window. The black line of lower kitchen cabinets leaps past a long window to become a black, metal box that contains the fireplace.

And because it's reassuring, ritualistic, and primal, it's a wood-burning fireplace. "You can't roast a marshmallow on a gas fireplace, right?" Dr. Unger quips.

The mullion-free corner window is a little bit of *trompe l'oeil* – what's holding the house up there? – and it combines with two others and a glass door to create a window-wall that invites a zillion photons inside. A walk past the dining table and its Ely-designed banquettes (a "part of my dream," Ms. Petersen says) and into the glassy link to the other wing causes yet another photon-shower before exploring the coziness of the bedrooms.

While the principal bedroom, the children's bedrooms and the bathrooms are not huge, they all benefit from the same simple material palette, white walls, float-

ing vanities and a pop of colour via light fixtures or tile. In the principal bedroom's ensuite, royal blue tile extends from the sink right into the walk-in shower; because that tile is set into a niche, a special piece of machinery had to be employed to cut a bump-out into the shower's glass wall.

Is it too much to consider one little glass-seam as unsightly? Maybe, but it's those sniggly little, individual things that really good architects obsess over, that, once there are a thousand of them, combine to produce great architecture. Here, at Sommerhus, changes in floor finishes are undetectable to the foot, the position of a lighting fixture – or the switch that controls it – is at exactly the right height, and metalwork around the fireplace and on the building's exterior is thin, precise, and geometric. And speaking of geometric, exterior cladding is vertical on top and then switches to horizontal at window-height. Power lines have been buried to keep the view pristine.

"The more things you customize, the more time it takes," Ms. Ely says simply.

To keep things calm during the build itself, Ms. Ely or her project architect, Brie Gillespie, would usually bring just three samples for their clients to choose from, whether that be tile, door handles, plumbing fixtures, or even a chair. Because, as anyone who's ever browsed online can attest, there is so much choice out there it can overwhelm to the point of paralysis.

No paralysis here, just running free: because Dr. Unger's parents are just a short walk away, and most of his siblings have built here too, this little piece of Dufferin County is a safe, fun and calming place that generations can (and do) enjoy.

"It's nice for my parents that we still come under their roof," Dr. Unger finishes. "Sometimes people are here, and the kids are all here and the cousins are here, and sometimes we're in somebody else's place making a mess."

A mess that I'll bet probably doesn't last very long.