

Jensdóttir Family Residence: A New House in Iceland

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Iceland is often described as the land of fire and ice. The geological drama and contrast implicit in that description extends to most every other aspect of Iceland, whether it be climate, society or history.

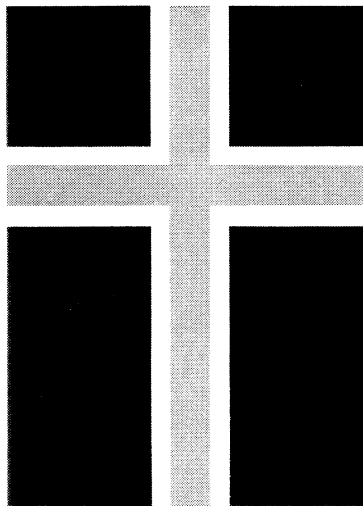
These harsh conditions which plagued previous generations can now be harnessed to produce cheap and environmentally friendly sources of energy. Most homes are geothermally heated and electricity is generated from the numerous waterfalls supplied by the glaciers.

The natural surrounds and the climate have obviously influenced the built environment in Iceland. The first settlers brought with them the turf house of Norway and Sweden. Although this house type fell out of favor in Scandinavia, its use was extensive and long lived in Iceland. It was ideally suited for the harsh climate and the tree shortage that the new settlers brought about.

The site is in Reykholt, a small village in the rural countryside, approximately 100 kilometers outside of Reykjavik.

The client built a house on the site some years ago as a country retreat. Since then the family has decided to combine their resources to build another retreat on the same property of approximately seven hectares.

Reykholt is a geothermal area with many greenhouses. The hot spring Reykholtshver spouts regularly every 10 minutes. The new home will include a lap pool and a heated whirlpool,



both to be fed by this local hot spring.

Sight Lines/To and From. The home is designed to take advantage of the dramatic views to the south while minimizing its own imposition on the landscape. Since the property extends southward to the river the future of these views is guaranteed. Iceland's most famous and feared volcano, Mt. Hekla (known in medieval Europe as the twin mouths of Hell), can be seen in a distance across the river. The new house is nestled in the earth below the sight lines of the original house and any future houses that might be built.

XYZ. This residence is composed of three areas of use which constitute the legs of three overlapping "L's"—the entry-library, the lap pool, the living area.

The upper entry appears from a distance as the tiniest of outbuildings. Only upon entry does a guest realize that living areas are much larger and located below at another ground level. The lap pool is located lower yet. From the pool or the living spaces one may ascend to the entry/library room. This space is a kind of submerged tower offering views but not disrupting the view of others.

Materials, Construction, and Structure. The house is made of poured in place concrete, by far the most common material for almost every building type throughout the country since the 1940's. The roof is sod over concrete reminiscent of older vernacular construction and desirable for its insulative property.

