

RAVINE HOUSE (aka Levy House)

GRACE LA

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This post-tensioned concrete and steel-clad residence sits atop one of the deep ravines feeding into Lake Michigan (the second largest of the U.S.'s Great Lakes watershed). Traditional homes lie to the north, northeast, and west of the house. The wooded ravine stretches to the south and south east, dropping dramatically some seventy feet to the lake's edge below.

The sculptural characteristics of land form -- the conditional, restless realm of geology and fluvial systems -- provide inspiration for the design. The house's material and tectonic assemblies are enabled by collaboration and experimentation with regional fabricators of the Midwest's "rust-belt."

On its public façade, the house builds up earthen density with stoic volumes of weathering steel, wood and stucco. This restrained face acts as a carapace, shielding the interior from the public and cradling the entry sequence. The steel façade also serves as an embankment yielding to a series of erosions and subsequent sedimentations along the private, ravine-side of the house. Primary living spaces are carved out of the deep strata of the first floor mass, and anchored by the fireplace about which the house plan pivots and subtly adjusts to the site's tree line. These glass-enclosed spaces open to broad views into the ravine landscape and capture filtered light from the east and south. The living room is simultaneously embedded within and thrusting free of the eroded mass of the house. The

house's interior is engaged with the surrounding landscape: "erosions" pulling the landscape into the interior, "sedimentations" thrusting the interior into the landscape.

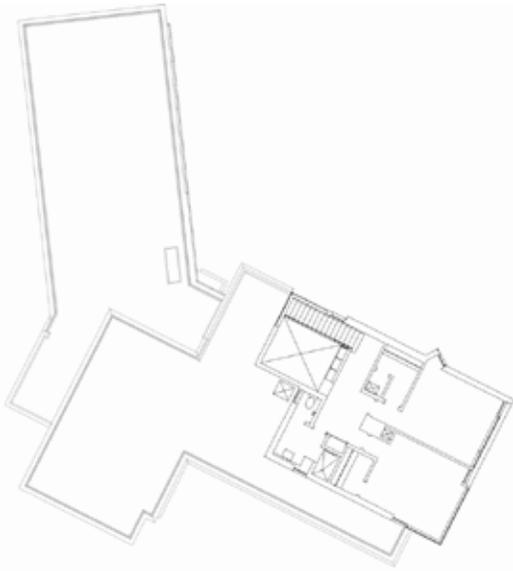
The house attempts to unify several intentional juxtapositions, examining an array of outcomes: the second floor slab of post-tensioned concrete produces a progressively cantilevered massing; a steel box hovers above a long-span living space and a delicate, 42' length of wrapping window wall; the reserved front facade shelters an unexpected, extroverted, and expansive rear façade that captures views to Lake Michigan and the ravine; the sharpness of the sculptural form contrasts with the velvet texture of the weathering steel; the forest provides a foil for the chiseled massing; the glass, prismatic volumes sculpt shafts of natural light deep into the interior; the warm copper stain softens the toughness of the concrete. Woven together, these opposing qualities produce a project that seeks and roots itself to the site.



The master bedroom volume acts as a glacial erratic, thrusting toward the ravine edge over a bed of native ferns.



Site plan of the wooded ravine



The prismatic volume of the second floor cantilevers over the glass-enclosed living room (above). Floor Plans (left). Section looking north (below).



