

STYLISH LIVING IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

HOME

CAROLINA

+ GARDEN

SPRING 2012

A LIGHT TOUCH

A Fresh Look for a Mountain Retreat

CONVERGENCE POINT
ASHEVILLE'S ALEPH HOUSE

CAN-DO ATTITUDE
A UNIQUE COLLECTION

JOY AND AMBIANCE
WITH LINDA CONSTABLE



White oak salvaged from the site was locally milled and utilized for the flooring throughout the home. Extensive custom built-ins by 3D Works and Bifaro Woodworks maximize storage space, reduce clutter and maintain a clean, modern aesthetic.

POINT OF CONVERGENCE

Conceptual elegance meets practicality in a contemporary home designed for a young family.

By Kate O'Connor
Photography by David Dietrich

“It’s wonderful to have a client who is very open to something that is forward-thinking.”



Perched on the hillside, the Aleph House blends seamlessly with the landscape. Stone steps, integrated into the site by Cloos Landscape Architecture, provide exterior access between the staggered levels of the house. The lower-level woodshop features a commercial roll-up door.

Architecture is not static. At its best, it is a creative mélange that incorporates not only the physical considerations of a project, but the life experience and intuition of the makers. "Architecture can accommodate an almost infinite number of disciplines," notes Elihu Siegman. "Anything — mathematics, building science, philosophy, literature — can influence the project. For some, it's all about the engineering, for others it's about the poetry."

Imagine, then, the blended skills required to create a contemporary home on a severely sloping lot that is able to accommodate both the challenging topography and the ever-changing needs of a young family. With the Aleph House, on Town Mountain Road in Asheville, Siegman Associates have done just that; the architectural equivalent of a perfect poem.

It's an organic process, and for Siegman and his partner, Michael Silverman, it began with the site itself — and with a calligraphic form from the Hebrew alphabet. "The configuration of Aleph was the impetus of the design concept," explains Elihu. "It's the first letter of Hebrew alphabet. It's the first breath of creation — a point where things converge. It's also silent letter, so there are also aspects of simplicity...and of humility."

Their clients had a strong attachment to the location. A professional couple with school-aged children, they had chosen the four-acre lot for its sense of sanctuary and easy access to downtown. "There was something really unique about the site," the homeowner notes. "The views captivated us. Even before the house was constructed, we'd drive up and just enjoy being there."

The designers were charged with preserving the integrity of the site — minimizing the footprint of the structure and capturing the views — while providing for the functional needs of the family: communal and private spaces, guest quarters and...studios. Both the husband and wife are artisans: he is a



The central stairway is the fulcrum of the house. The stainless steel railing was fabricated by Portable Welding, using cable produced by American Cable, a local manufacturer.

The effect is reminiscent of building blocks, almost playful in the simplicity of their arrangement.





ABOVE: The front entry door of the Aleph House opens on a pivot, a tip-of-the-hat to the home's overall design concept. Custom made of Douglas fir by 3D Works, it features laminated glass by Bendheim Glass. **LEFT:** Douglas fir cabinets, fashioned by Chris Bifaro of Bifaro Woodworks, reprise the strong horizontal lines of the home. Delicate crystal pendant lights from Shonebek Lighting add a touch of glamour. The massive concrete island is by Mandala Designs. Backsplash tile from WNC Tile.



woodworker; she is a ceramic artist.

So they returned to the beginning: to Aleph. The character has a strong diagonal central line, flanked by two smaller accent strokes. "Aleph was in the back of our minds and as we developed the project, the image came back into play," explains Silverman. "The clients weren't initially specific about the style of house that they wanted. They were more attuned to the site.

"It's wonderful to have a client who is very open to something that is forward-thinking," he continues. "A contemporary architectural approach allowed us to take full advantage of the site and be directly responsive to what they were after without pre-conditions or the imperative to employ certain forms."

On the main level, two bedrooms wings are bisected by the communal space. That core area — an elongated, slender span that echoes the strong central stroke of the Aleph — sweeps outward from the ridge and thrusts forward into the sky itself, supported by a cantilever. The lower level provides firm support, hugging the side of the mountain and offering a multi-function sector which links the discrete workrooms for the couple's avocations. The studios feature easy access to the outdoors, each with a private patio.

The effect is reminiscent of building blocks, almost playful in the simplicity of their arrangement. But the apparently effortless stacking of modules belies the complex geometry involved. Angles and trajectories are resolved in the nautilus-curved central stairway — the vertical fulcrum of the house. Horizontally, the main structure is aligned to the south, perfect for both active and passive solar gain. A solar heating system by Sundance was installed in anticipation of adding the collection panels in the near future.

The structural design is conceptually elegant, but goes beyond the theoretical to provide a welcoming environment for the family. "I appreciate modernism," the gentleman of the house observes, "but I find that much of it is rather cold. A great deal of effort was invested in finding materials that would give the house a warm feeling — natural materials and handmade things. Anywhere we could have local craftspeople make the elements, we did. It adds character to the house."

Siegman and Silverman also managed the construction, coordinating the efforts of those local talents. White oak, felled on site, was milled for flooring and Daniel Stephens of 3D works constructed extensive built-in cabinetry and storage. Cris



Bifaro fashioned the Douglas fir kitchen cabinetry. Mandala Designs created the monolithic kitchen island and an elegant polished concrete bench that extends along the length of the living room, serving as both a base for the wood stove and abundant seating space.

Greg Cloos of Cloos Landscape Architecture designed the terraced landscaping to blend seamlessly with mountainside, utilizing the stone salvaged from the site excavation to build nearly 1800 feet of decorative and retaining walls.

"Wherever we used a material, we tried to exploit its capacities and maintain its integrity," Siegman explains. Whether in the raw state or with refinements, we wanted the materials to be true to their nature."

The Aleph House, too, is true to its nature: point-on and poetic. "This project is so special for us," says Silverman. "It's so fully realized — from concept to manifestation." ■



LEFT: The modular design of the Aleph House allows for maximum flexibility while keeping the discrete spaces integrated with the common area. The roofs are standing seam Galvalume sheet steel from All Aluminum Co. **ABOVE:** The built-in cedar hot tub offers a view of the surrounding woodlands. The deck is fashioned from untreated ipe wood, a durable Brazilian hardwood.