



SLEEK GEOMETRIES IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

SURPRISING COMPLEMENT TO A RURAL VERNACULAR

Peter L. Gluck gave his modern addition to an 18th-century New York farmhouse the character of utility farm structures pieced together over time. "The context demanded that the existing house remain prominent in the composition without inhibiting the sculptural possibilities of the new structure," the architect says. "I chose not to miniaturize the original but to enhance it by contrast."

ARCHITECTURE BY PETER L. GLUCK, AIA TEXT BY PAUL GOLDBERGER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL WARCHOL



It seems, at first, to be altogether wrong, this sprawling modernist addition of stone, glass and metal on a delicate Federal-style farmhouse. Some kind of demonstration project in architectural insensitivity, you wonder? Why would any thoughtful architect do such a thing to a graceful eighteenth-century house?

Because he understands it, and the land around it. The wonderful thing about the residence that Peter L. Gluck recently completed in upstate New York is how splendidly it turns out to

relate to the exquisite old architecture beside it, to the farm buildings nearby and to the magnificent landscape. The relationships are subtle and are obviously not those of simple imitation. But this is as contextual a house as any being built today, and its way of responding to its context brilliantly confounds our expectations.

To understand the house, it is necessary to look first at the village in which it sits. The community is too far from the city to be a magnet for all but the most intrepid weekenders, and it

has remained largely agricultural. But its gentle mix of eighteenth-century buildings has attracted a number of sophisticated ex-urbanites who have gradually restored it, fixing its architecture while preserving its farms, so that today it is that rare kind of place, gentrified without a hint of preciousness.

The village nestles in a flat valley cut off by surrounding hills from neighboring towns and interstate highways and the commerce they both bring. The site of this house covers five hundred acres, a fair chunk of the town; it



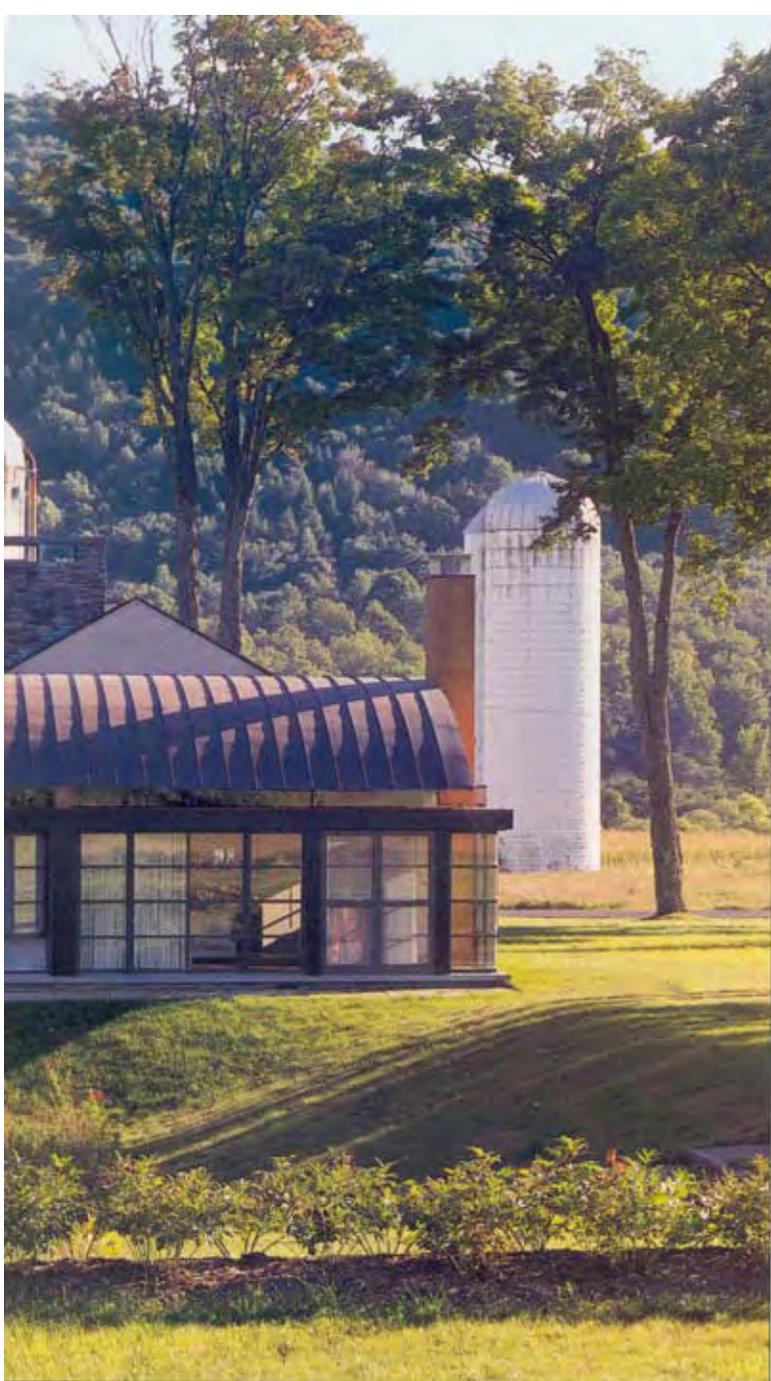
is bisected by the village's one road and has views across the entire valley. The house's owners, a business executive and his wife, who teaches yoga, first encountered the rural locale in the mid-1970s. They bought property and lived there for a couple of years, overseeing the operation of their dairy farm. When a fire burned down the main barn, they decided to step back somewhat from farm management, lease much of the land to local farmers and convert the farmhouse into a more substantial country retreat.

Enter Peter Gluck, who had designed the couple's Manhattan apartment. "We had this very nice, very tiny house," recalls the husband, "and we wanted to extend it but not lose the special feeling of the place. We didn't want it to be like a big house in Scarsdale or Litchfield County—we wanted it to capture a sense of rural society."

The farmhouse was not easy to build on to. Like many structures of its time, it stands close to the road, and the property is unbounded by fences. Every acre of the sprawling site is spectacularly unobstructed, and

the owners had no intention of having their new house change this. Finding a way to create privacy without violating the open spirit of the area was a central issue in the design.

"Putting up hedges or fences would have been totally out of sync with the strength, the beauty, the nobility of an old house like this," says Gluck, who likes to think of himself as a modernist with a Postmodernist's value system—a modernist without modernism's hubris. "These old houses, just sitting out here on the land—that's American architecture. And yet



The farmhouse is “the picture of rural vernacular architecture,” says Gluck; his addition is consistent with the principles of what he terms “contextual modernism.” ABOVE: A stone wall marks the new entrance. BELOW: Exhibitions by local artists are held in the house’s skylit central gallery.

At the rear of the house, Gluck notes, is “a pileup of shapes created by the additive arrangement of old and new.” LEFT: Steps lead from the garden terrace to the art gallery, to the right of which is the barrel-vaulted master suite. The pool pavilion, at left, is reminiscent of traditional farm outbuildings.

we had to find a way to deal with the fact that a very fancy vacation house would be totally exposed.”

Gluck’s solution, executed with project architects Fritz Reid and Jim Walker, was to give the addition, which is more than twice the size of the original house, a long, narrow configuration and place it entirely behind the older structure. The new wing is shaped like a stretched-out L and is far enough from the road that distance alone confers some sense of separation. Within the L is a slightly sunken garden, situated so that most





of the land is at eye level, thus offering partial enclosure without cutting off a view of the expansive fields.

The wing Gluck designed is all but invisible from the front, where the farmhouse hides it. The highest portion of the new section, a gable, is below the peak of the gabled roof of the farmhouse, allowing the old house to command the skyline. From the side, however, the new house sprawls; its various sections, with chimneys and gables and vaults, are many times longer than the original house. The composition looks something like a modern train pulled by a vintage locomotive, the farmhouse.

Gluck knew from the outset that he did not want to copy the Federal architecture of the farmhouse. He ad-

mired it, but he saw this project as an opportunity to demonstrate his belief that there are other ways to show respect for historic architecture than literal replication. Moreover, he realized that the context, which he felt an obligation to defer to, actually consisted of much more than just the farmhouse: It also involved the farm buildings across the road, particularly three handsome, solid silos; the flat, wide fields that gave the house a podium; and the distant mountains that served as background.

"I wanted it to be a double reading—are they utility buildings added to a farmhouse, or is the whole thing a modernist composition?" Gluck says. "But, most important, it all had to be broken down into parts, so that the

original house remained dominant."

What resulted was a mix of steel, glass, fieldstone, board, concrete panels and copper roofs in a complex arrangement of low, curving vaults, gables and flat-roofed horizontal sections. The rhythms gently play off the farmhouse: The pitched roof, for example, is set perpendicular to its predecessor, while the two vaults are set perpendicular to each other. The roofs appear as geometric forms, softly floating over the powerful horizontal planes of the walls that anchor them.

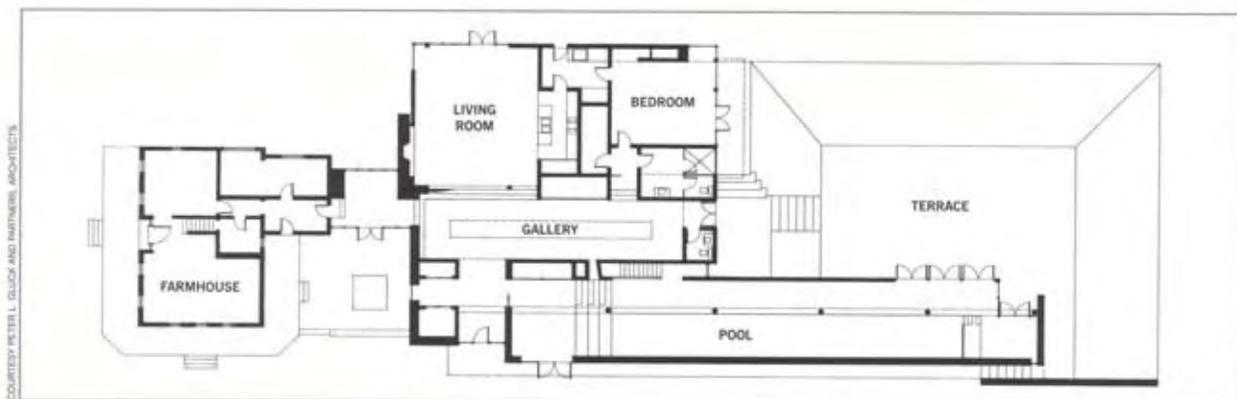
Within, the space is open and flowing, a deliberate modernist contrast to the tight, small rooms of the farmhouse. Gluck spent two years during

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ABOVE: The pool pavilion, at left, features a gridded window wall and opens to the sunken garden terrace. BELOW: The site plan illustrates the four main components of the new building. Their linear placement, says Gluck, "reduces what could be an overwhelming scale."

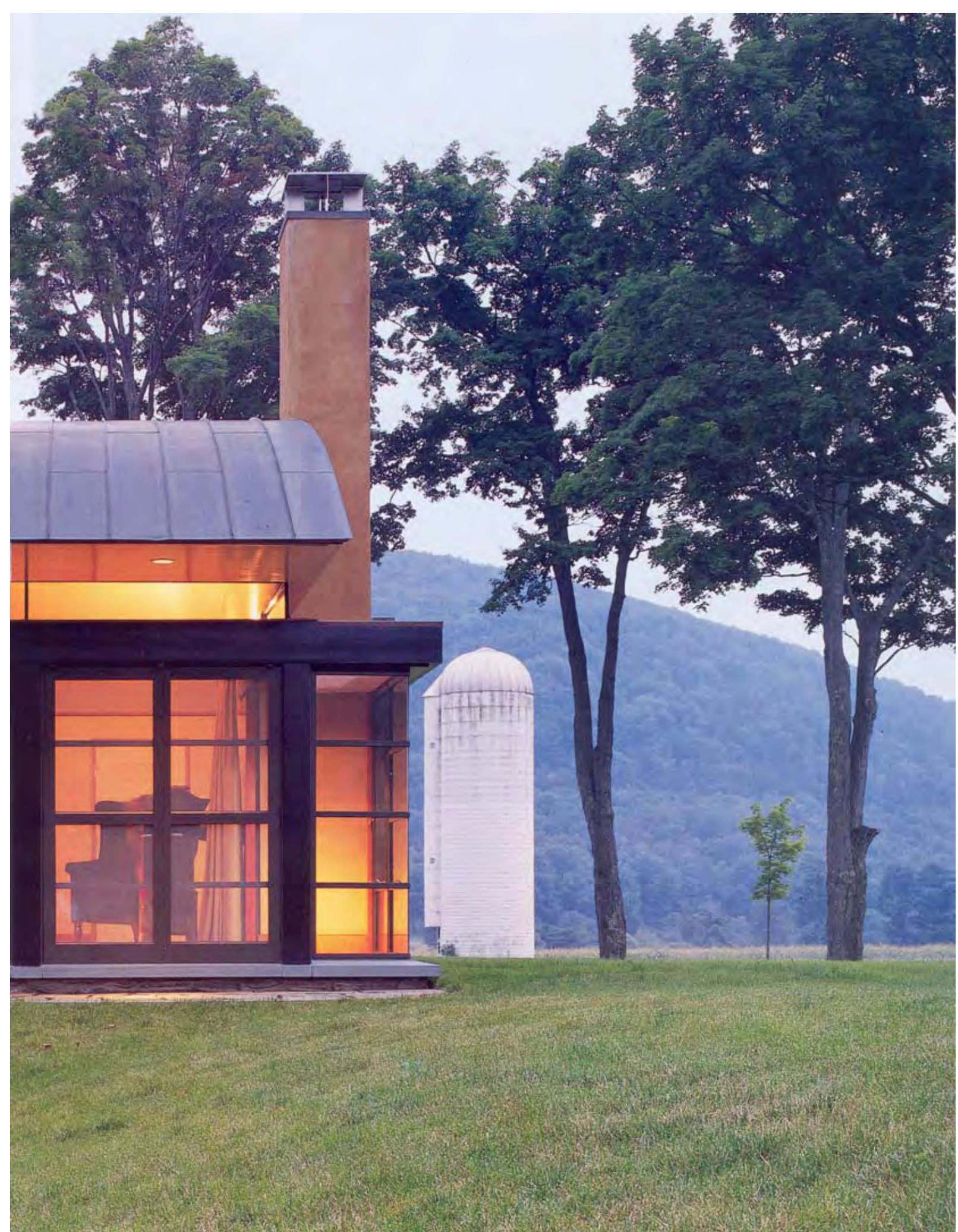
ABOVE: A level lower than the rest of the building, the 95-foot-long pool pavilion features views from the pool up through the trees. Raymond Verdaguer crafted the pillars, which are beech trunks from the grounds. The sculpture *Joy of the Waters* by Harriet Frishmuth is circa 1920.



COURTESY PETER L. GLUCK AND PARTNERS ARCHITECTS

"The architecture doesn't stop at the outer walls," says Gluck. "The buildings respond to the larger landscape and create landscapes of their own." Clerestories above the steel-gridded window wall of the master suite give the copper roof a floating effect. Throughout, Gluck's palette of materials and forms complements the silos and barns of the region.





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the early part of his career in Japan, and the influence is still apparent in his work: Well-crafted cherry paneling highlights the bluestone, metal and glass with a meticulous level of detailing that strives to reveal structure, not hide it.

The plan is simple. A large entrance hall with a stone floor rises three steps to a living area that includes an open kitchen, a dining area with a view of the fields and a seating area around a huge stone fireplace. A wide corridor that doubles as an art gallery leads from the entrance to the master suite. There is only the one bedroom; guests are accommodated either in the original wing or in an old house just down the road that the owners have renovated as a guesthouse.

The most striking interior space is the indoor lap pool, which occupies a long, narrow wing off the entrance hall; it is illuminated by natural light and covered by a low, vaulted roof. The pool space embodies all of the ideas of the house: carefully wrought materials, modernist proportions, traditional craftsmanship yielding comfort and warmth. Four pillars, handcrafted by Raymond Verdaguer from beech trees that stood on the property, mark the length of the pool. Together with the ceiling, covered in aluminum leaf, and the floor of brick-size tiles in orange and gray Indian slate, they impart both sensuousness and sharpness.

The room points up another aspect of the remarkable quality of this house, which is Peter Gluck's ability to create an intensely active design at no cost to serenity. Like the work of many contemporary Japanese architects, his buildings have a lot going on in close proximity, yet each piece always seems to have its own essence, to feel at once as part of a whole and as a thing unto itself. For most architects, serenity exists in inverse proportion to the amount of activity in a particular design. But here, with new and old coming together and all kinds of materials making all kinds of shapes, Gluck has tamed every element, and tranquillity reigns. □