



# in the seventh house

The seventh time was the charm when veteran Minneapolis builder Kevin Streeter applied the art of his craft to construct a unique home for himself on a problematic site.



Kevin Sreeter had already built six homes for himself and his family before undertaking the most winning of them all. "Each becomes more minimal," he says, "and more difficult to build." This 2,200-square-foot sculptural shelter in the woods, designed by David Salmela, consists of an open-plan ground floor with two upstairs bedroom suites set perpendicular to the foundation.





There aren't many lots left in Deephaven, Minnesota. Early in the 20th century, the rolling farmland began to surrender to vacation estates. The growing mercantile class, attracted by the area's proximity to Lake Minnetonka, had adopted it as a summer retreat. A century later, Deephaven hosts a smorgasbord of architectural styles, from the original old farmhouses to amiable cottages and sprawling '70s ranches. Hardly a style is unrepresented, and the locals seem to like the eccentricity this eclecticism bestows.

There was one awkward little lot. It was heavily wooded and sloping, a sliver of land caught between two marshes. Kevin Streeter and his two brothers, all partners in Streeter and Associates, a high-end construction company in Minneapolis, purchased the land as part of a larger package in 2003. One brother built a home on an adjacent site; another portion is undeveloped. The marshy little lot? "No one thought we could build on it," says Streeter. But he knew better. He also knew both David Salmela, an architect based in Duluth who is known for simple but elegant forms and "common-sense" solutions, and a cutting-edge landscape architect who often partners with Salmela, Shane Coen of Coen + Partners, based in Minneapolis and New York. Streeter was ready for the next evolution in his string of self-built homes, and this would be the place.

The creative triumvirate went to work with minimalism as their mandate. Ultimately, Salmela created a warehouse-like space punctuated by elegant geometries. Interior partitions are made with vertical basswood strips, a Salmela signature, which are local and affordable and can create both solid and translucent walls. Coen arranged the landscape and the home's unique visual access to it.

Furniture in the main room (left and above) includes a black leather *Stricto Sensu* sofa with matching armchairs from Ligne Roset. The custom coffee table, built of reclaimed Douglas fir, and the wire sculpture were designed by architect David Salmela. The 401 red Alvar Aalto armchair sits beside a partition made of basswood (a variety of linden prolific in the region) that hides a small home office.

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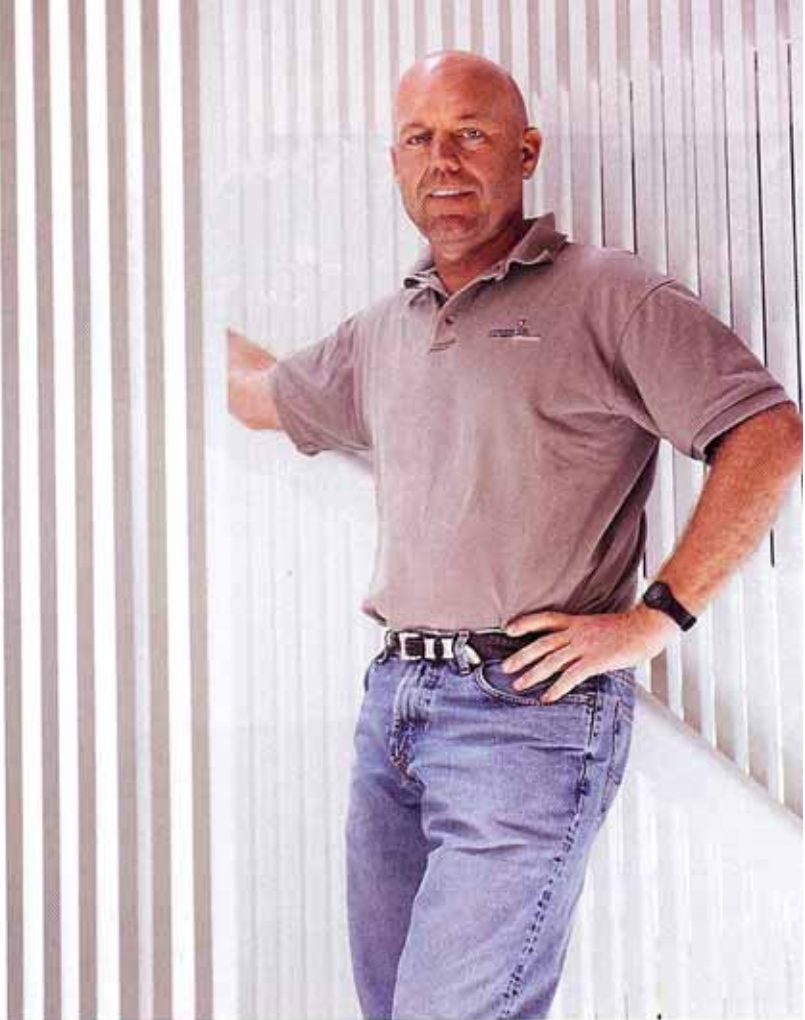


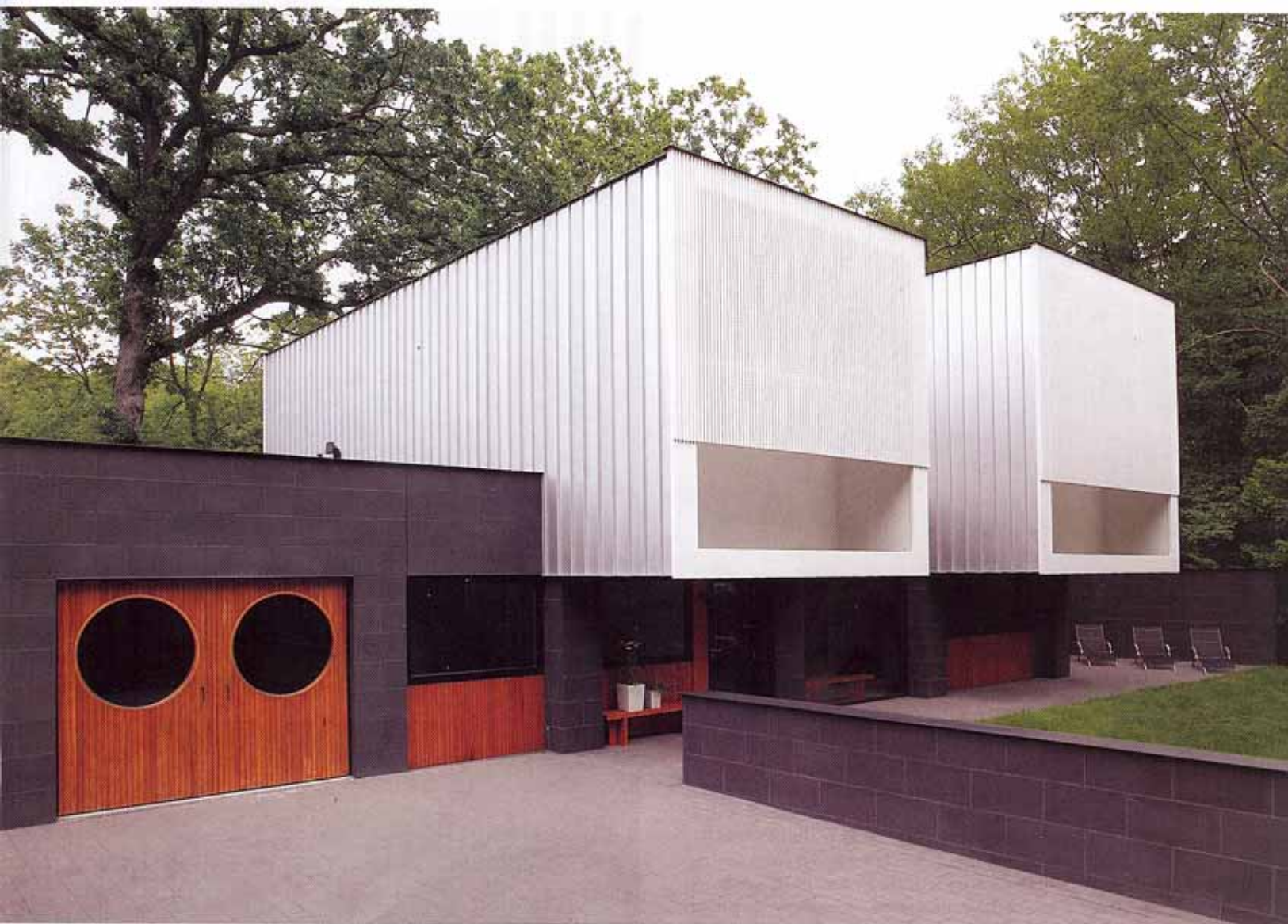
**t**he project was a happy and productive collaboration. Salmela calls Streeter an “exceptional peer client,” noting that “Kevin cares about design and that makes all the difference. We kept asking, ‘How do we simplify?’” Project architect Carly Coulson explains that they did not pre-wire or place ducts in the block walls. “This was one of those things that Kevin felt was too constraining on design development to determine at the beginning of construction,” she says. “The sensitive decisions he made concerning construction sequence had a very positive impact on the design process and the final aesthetic.”

Clearly, process is Streeter’s passion. Even with 20-plus years as a builder, he keeps challenging himself. “One of Michael Graves’s project architects once said, ‘Make everything look like you thought about it,’” he says, thoughtfully. “We do that for our clients, and here I could practice that for myself.”

At the time the house was built, Streeter’s son, Ryan, was still at home. Streeter wanted separate but not quite identical bedrooms for the two of them. The solution was two white boxes resting on the black block base. His room is slightly larger than his son’s, but each has an en suite bathroom and private staircase. For his collection of motorcycles, Streeter wanted a garage that was as streamlined as the rest of the home, with minimal visual “pollution.” So there are no light switches (only a sensor) or tracks for the garage doors (because they open manually).

This page (from top): Kevin Streeter heads up one of two white staircases; downstairs, the kitchen is white-on-white design at its best. Opposite (from top): Viewed from the garage end, the home reveals itself as a progression of boxes; the entry space is grand enough, but in an understated, minimalist (and symmetrical) way that stays connected to nature. The bench is by David Salmela, rug from Ikea.





Salmela used several of his signature gestures in the design of the house, such as the black exteriors. Also typical of his work are the 1¼-inch strips of basswood and the prefabricated ceilings he dropped into Douglas fir timber framing to give the modern rooms an echo of vernacular inspiration. Ninety-five percent of homes designed by Salmela, who is of Finnish extraction, have a sauna (the ultimate Finnish flourish), and this is no exception: However, the sauna stands free from the main building, as does a small guest house.

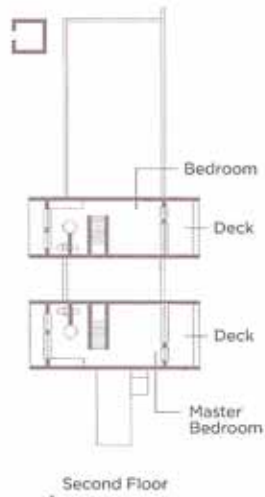
Beginning with the site, Coen and Salmela worked together to give Streeter the privacy and tranquility he requested, while preserving the existing wetlands, birch grove, and mature oak and cottonwood trees. Coen notes, "The landscape is in constant dialogue with the architecture. This is one of the most subtle and challenging projects we have done." His innovations extend to the 'ground' on which the architecture sits. Wanting to avoid the beveled edges that are typi-

cally produced by concrete-paver surfaces, Coen laid them on the "wrong side" (with the side that is usually underneath facing up) to create a completely flat surface. "Working with David has transformed my sense of architecture, space and light," says Coen. "I have become more of a minimalist."

As for the peripatetic Streeter, a self-described "rambler by nature," he now loves coming home. "I can spend a full day here and never feel the need to go anywhere. But I would build another home tomorrow because I love the evolutionary process. What is next? I can't quit because there is too much possibility." 📍

*See Resources, last pages.*

▮ Above: The two bedroom suites are clad in standing-seam metal (each has its own terrace). Carriage-style garage doors have overscaled round windows. Opposite: The master bedroom suite features warm fir floors and cool white walls and furnishings, including a bed and cabinetry by David Salmela; the bedrooms flow into their baths without walls (there are only two interior doors in the whole house).



## What the Pros Know

With seven notches in his tool belt—and that counts only the homes he's built for himself—Streeter's management persona emerges when advising a client. "Get a builder on board early. Many clients work for a year with an architect, have a set of plans and *then* shop for a builder, as if construction can start tomorrow. It can't." Now, Streeter is not one to rain on anyone's artistic parade. He is passionate about the conceptual stage and takes it a step further. "A client should really assemble the whole team up front, including the landscape architect and interior designer. Get selections made as early as possible. Things like lighting, plumbing and flooring can hold up a project and challenge budgets." He also recommends that clients consider the real cost of quality. "Analyze how long a product will last. Higher quality products will almost always cost less in the long run."