

# Globe Real Estate



Deep blue brick and painted aluminum cladding combines with solid geometry to give the house a general air of toughness and resilience. TOM ARBAN

## ARCHITECTURE

# BLUE ON BLUE

Perched on a weather-beaten site above Lake Erie, this brawny home reflects its rugged setting **PAGE 6**



# A perch to view the watery wilderness

With windows everywhere, Indigo House is designed to take advantage of stunning views of Lake Erie



**JOHN BENTLEY MAYS**  
**THE PERFECT HOUSE**  
jmays@globeandmail.com

On a deep-frozen afternoon last week, I visited a place on Lake Erie called Indigo House and, through its wide windows, saw one of those winter scenes I will probably never forget.

The expanse of lake ice stretched from the bluff the year-round residence is perched on out into the misty distance, toward the far American shore. Here was something wildly, bleakly beautiful that southern Canadian city-dwellers rarely experience even in our chilliest months – something desolate, severe, completely unforgiving. Here was winter in its essence, hard and grey as steel. Indigo House has been designed by Toronto architect Cindy Rendely to open toward this stunning view from every room.

In other ways, as well, the 3,380-square-foot structure has been made to sync with its high, exposed, weather-beaten site. There is nothing pretty or sentimentally rustic about it. The roof is flat, and the strict overall composition is a modernist matter of clearly articulated oblong or bevelled volumes bundled together.

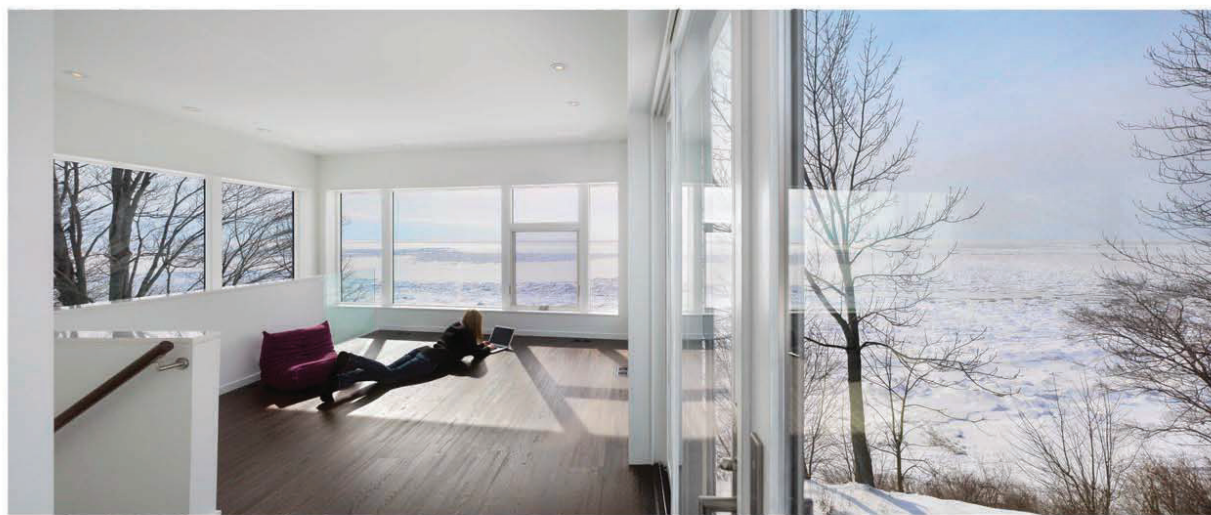
Also, the deep blue brick and painted aluminum cladding (hence the project's name) combines with the solid geometry to give Indigo House a general air of toughness and resilience. This is architecture that stands its ground in a dramatic landscape – carefully, without making a great fuss about itself, but forthrightly.

The modernist simplicity that characterizes the exterior is echoed in the interior. The space is divided, generally speaking, into three areas. The two sleeping wings are connected by a link containing the living room and kitchen, the one sharply distinguished from the other. (The living room is casual, relaxed; it even has a short flight of bleacher seating for the expansive entertaining the family likes to do. The kitchen, in contrast, is tightly organized around a built-in dining table.)

One of these wings, featuring an en-suite bathroom off a spacious bedroom with tall windows on



The Cindy Rendely-designed home stands its ground in a dramatic landscape. PHOTOS BY TOM ARBAN



two sides, has been set apart for the adult in this single-parent family of four. Its separation from the rest of the house has been underlined by giving it the sense of a self-contained unit, and also by lifting the mass of it off the

ground.

The other sleeping wing, elevated and cantilevered out over the front side of the house, is accessed by means of a handsome riserless staircase framed by thick slabs of clear glass. This zone

comprises bathrooms and three small bedrooms, one for each of the three nearly grown children, and a lounge overlooking Lake Erie and glassed in on three sides.

This high room, with its spectacular vistas up and down the lakeshore, is like an eyrie, or the top storey of a lighthouse. For whatever architectural pleasure is worth, it is surely the most attractive space in the whole house. Down below on the main level, at the foot the stair, is a similarly well-windowed room with a 12-foot ceiling, outfitted for use as a home office, but also suitable for dining, or merely for watching the eagles swoop up and over the bluff's edge. (The family has not yet decided exactly how they want to use this area.)

Throughout Indigo House (which cost, Ms. Rendely told me, about \$325 a square foot to build),

walls and ceilings are stark white. This can seem like a lot of whiteness on a day (such as the one I was there) when the sky outside is whitish grey and Lake Erie is an icy waste.

Ms. Rendely's prescription for relieving a monotonously light interior palette has involved the installation of walnut and dark brown tile flooring, and cabinetry and other millwork fashioned from acrylic-coated sapele, a dark, strongly patterned African wood that resembles mahogany. In spots (such as the kitchen) where sapele millwork makes an appearance, it effectively cuts down the glare of the too-white walls.

The problem is, however, that all of the wood finishing has, so far, not been executed. The living room, for example, looks especially barren without the cabinets originally designed to fill one end of it. The stairs lack completed treads, and so on.

Everyone who builds and furnishes a new house or renovates an old one, of course, wearies of the process at some point. A homeowner will some time need a break from the clutter and bother of construction before the vision of the project is fully realized. Such a break has apparently been taken here, though the work is very nearly done. With any luck, Ms. Rendely will be invited back to Indigo House to finish the interesting job that she has started, and that has already produced an effective lookout on the edge of watery wilderness.