Loblolly House

Elements of a New Architecture

Stephen Kieran
James Timberlake

Preface by Barry Bergdoll
Introduction by Michael Stacey
and totaled in an integrated building information model. (BIM technology has been operative in the cabinet industry for several years.) The fully integrated model—representing design through selection and including implications of cost and schedule—prefigures the technological reality that Loblolly House aspires to. The elements are fabricated directly from data captured in the model and delivered at a fixed price and schedule.

**FURNISHINGS**

Beyond the selection of finish materials and colors, the furnishings at Loblolly were not custom designed. Initially, we thought that the furnishings should extend the aesthetic of the house and therefore be made of wood and metal. With the intervention of Marguerite Rodgers as interior design consultants, the notion of a fixed palette gradually gave way to a matrix based on four principles derived from the house’s dominant architectural features: fusing materials with elements of the site, such as the native cordgrass and pines; integrating prefabricated furnishings of an earlier generation of high modernists; selecting affordable low-modern furnishings from the 1960s onward; and celebrating the fine joinery of historic Asian furnishings while also considering design for disassembly. As with the house’s architectural elements, we hoped the furnishings would convey our reverence for the art of selection and, in doing so, elevate the supply chain to an act of design. Rather than draw from a narrow palette, we undertook the more complex path of selecting pieces one by one, which demanded a diverse supply chain with numerous vendors at the helm of the interior designer.

The selection process evolved into a consideration of the house’s overall context, including its reverence for the surrounding environment, its manner of production, and our own aspirations for affordability. Just as the materials were selected with renewable resources in mind, so were many of the furnishings. The carpets, which resemble woven cordgrass, rest on top of green bamboo floors. Both layers evoke the site’s ground plane. The vintage dining table designed by John Widlicomb—with staggered planks of differing grains—further extends the forest metaphor. Upholstery for the living room couch features vertically striated lines of green, brown, and

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7.4
Carpet for the living room, resembling woven cordgrass

7.5
Upholstery for the living room, with striations of green, brown, and yellow
Master bedroom, with adjustable west facade in the open position
yellow. Two Hans Wegner–designed chairs were chosen, not only for their beautiful profiles but also for their bentwood structure and woven cane seats. An ancient material, cane is as renewable today as it was thousands of years ago, and it exists naturally on the site.

The furnishings we’ve selected also forge connections to the design, fabrication, and assembly of the house. Our off-site fabrication agenda is not new; it is a recurring modernist concern that dates from the turn of the twentieth century. Nearly every high-modern architect of relevance took a turn at solving the ongoing demand for prefabricated mass housing. This history provides the third context for the selection of furnishings. Swivel lounge chairs in the living room pay homage to Charles and Ray Eames, who, in many ways, are Loblolly House’s intellectual predecessors. In their own home, ordinary off-the-shelf elements were transformed into works of art. They molded plywood into the classic shape known today as the Eames Chair, two of which have been placed on either side of the sofa. A molded plastic chair in one of the bedrooms is also of their design.

Perhaps more so than any high modernist, Le Corbusier confronted the mass-housing dilemma head-on. He considered it the architect’s obligation to provide quality housing at low cost. For him, it was fundamental to the profession, and he revisited the challenge throughout his career. The photographs of cars, ships, and airplanes in Towards a New Architecture included their mode of assembly in factories. To generations of architects and builders, these images were a call to action. The early twentieth century, however, was not equipped with the kinds of information management tools and labor structures that we have at our disposal today. To acknowledge Le Corbusier’s clarion, we’ve placed his LC1 chair in one of the bedrooms. Other high-modernist objects by designers such as Harry Bertoia have been placed for their singular appropriateness within the context of the house.

The low-modern tradition of the 1960s and ’70s—variously called art moderne or vintage modern—followed the lead of the high-modern classics. Designed for mass consumption, such furnishings have historically been marketed throughout Scandinavia, Europe, and the...
United States. For example, turned wooden lamps, serving trays, and the dining room table all stem from this genre. In the guest bedrooms, the end tables, blanket chests, and beds celebrate this tradition of affordable modernism, as do the Italian Glo-Ball lamps designed by Jasper Morrison, which anchor both sides of the great room.

The final context for the furnishings is derived from non-Western cultures, specifically Japanese and Chinese furnishings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cultural objects from these time periods were a generative source of design for many Western architects working in the early twentieth century. The abstraction of Japanese and Chinese wood detailing and joinery made its way into the work of numerous early modern architects in the United States, such as Greene and Greene and Frank Lloyd Wright. Their architecture was one of exposed structure that, especially in the case of temples, was designed with disassembly in mind. Many of Loblolly’s furnishings celebrate these traditions. Among the most beautiful and useful is a Japanese mingei stool sculpted out of a single log. A notch carved several inches below the top provides a finger hole for lifting the stool. The natural tendency of the log to split as it dries is dealt with in a simple and matter-of-fact way, through the placement of structural patches in the form of wooden butterfly connectors.

In place of closets, Chinese wardrobes crafted out of light-colored wood provide storage in the bedrooms. Also of Chinese origin, wood and metal tables painted red and green serve as buffets in the dining room and provide a colored counterpoint to the birch plywood details. A black-lacquered library cabinet in the form of a small staircase offers a place for books and storage at the first-level entry. As a result of these diverse selections, we were able to create a visually rich palette, and each furnishing is, in its own way, in conversation with the architecture.