




# sense of space

By Janet Wilson  
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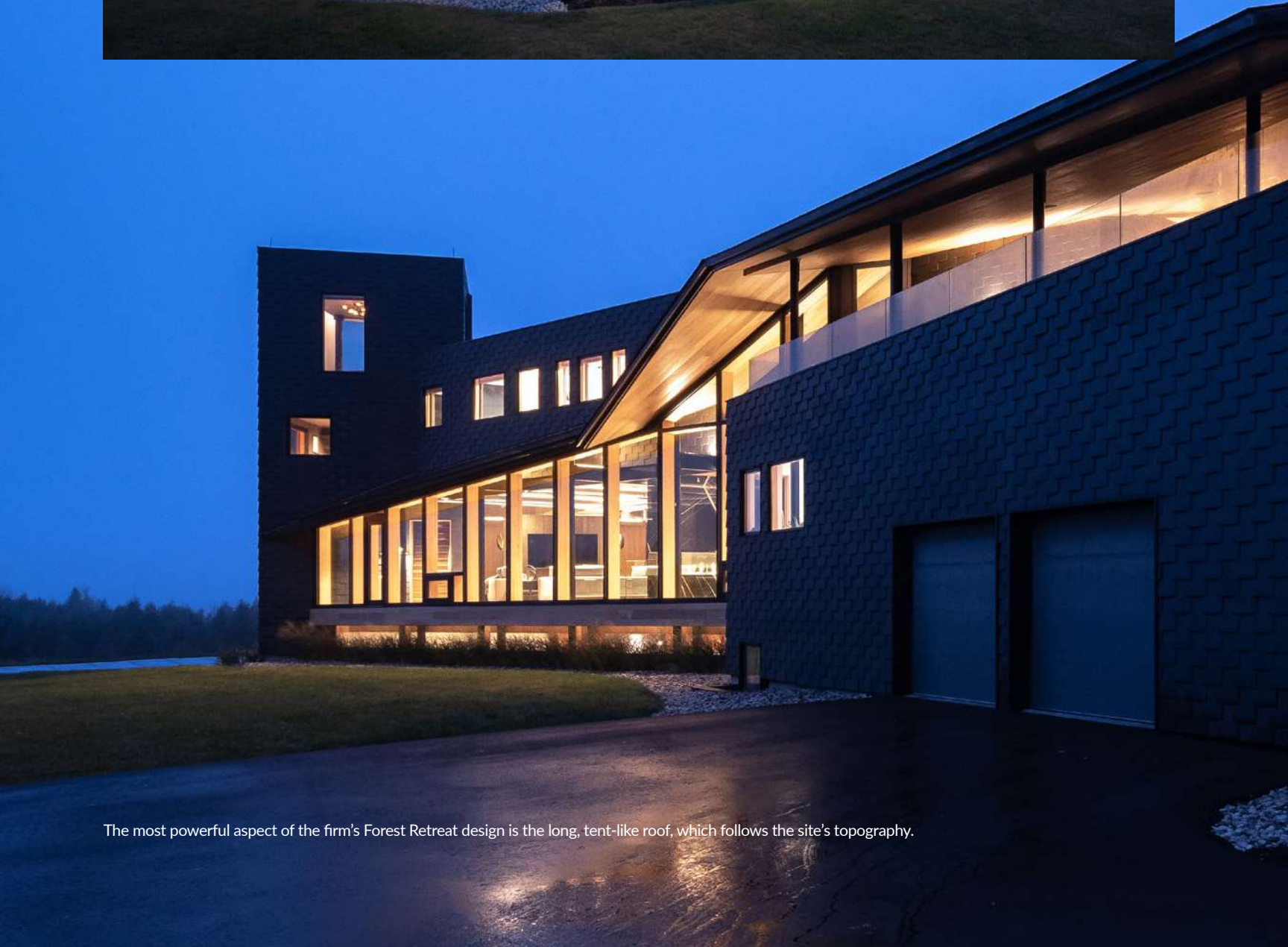
**N**o one would ever accuse Kariouk Architects of taking a cookie-cutter approach to design. A quick glance at the Ottawa firm's website reveals that no two projects are alike with an array of residential homes bursting with personality and rooted in a modern matrix where form meets function with esthetically pleasing results. Founder Paul Kariouk readily admits that his firm works solely with clients who desire a true design project and forever home.

"If you're replicating something that's been done before, it's not design. If someone wanted us to build a classical house, I'd say that's really not what we do. Most of our clients aren't interested in flipping their house. They're building it once, love Ottawa and want a home to grow old in."

Respect for nature was paramount in Kariouk Architects' Forest Retreat project. This home was situated on an existing cleared ridge to avoid the cutting of trees. As a result, the views are spectacular.



Kariouk Architects' Forest Retreat project, for a large, young family, is on a 100-acre rural property of forest, wetland and meadows.



The most powerful aspect of the firm's Forest Retreat design is the long, tent-like roof, which follows the site's topography.





**P**aul, who operates a small firm on George Street in the ByWard Market, is proud of his team's personalized approach and is hands on during the entire design-build process. They place a strong emphasis on attention to detail, a connection to nature and light, creating functional spaces that speak to the needs of their clients' lifestyles and delivering a project on time and budget.

The award-winning architect, who grew up in New York City after his parents moved there from Paris, France, in 1960, studied at Columbia University and the University of Virginia. Paul spent a lot of time in Canada during his youth, visiting family friends in Montreal and cycling throughout the country where he fell in love with the varied landscape and wide-open spaces.

He landed in Ottawa in 2001 after accepting a teaching position at Carleton University's Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, where he remains a full-time professor. With more than 25 years of experience, he continues to work throughout Ontario, Quebec, New York, California and the Caribbean.

"Canada is in my blood. I'm the self-appointed poster kid for Ottawa: It's a very stable, well-educated city and a wonderful place to teach and have a practice. It's not so easy to set up a practice in New York unless you have an affluent family willing to support you for years until you can build a project. It's very difficult and most of the work there is interior stuff, but here it's ground up construction. The work is more vital."

Shortly after arriving in Ottawa, Paul needed help on a construction project for his home and hired Chris Davis. The two became fast friends and have been business partners for 20 years. When talking about his tight-knit office of five colleagues, including some former students, Paul's eyes light up as he describes the warm atmosphere and friendly banter.

"We're like a family and even hang out on weekends with our respective spouses and children. It's really lovely and completely energizing. We're lucky in that way," says Paul, who became a Canadian citizen 15 years ago. "As a full-time professor and running a full-time practice, it just wouldn't be possible without my staff. We're

all so close we can finish each other's sentences. We just know what needs to be done without having to say it."

The company's motto—"architecture with soul"—is a term used often to describe how a home needs to respond to a person's or family's particular way of life, their habits and how they relate to one another.

"Architecture is always about human shelter and is immensely pragmatic as opposed to sculpture, which is for esthetic purposes," says Paul. "Construction is incredibly expensive, so you can't be just doing whimsical things. I describe to future clients how architecture has to be a choreography of social relations for all of the people using that home. How a space moves and flows completely affects familial relations. Architecture needs to develop that soul. You need to sit back and look at things such as lighting and whether your clients are morning or evening people and where the sun rises and sets and how it relates to things internally."



**P**aul says his firm offers the full package—everything from selecting doorknobs and door pulls to figuring out where light switches should be placed. All the work they do is turnkey—from the initial consultation until a client moves in.

“If someone only wanted the shell, I wouldn’t be interested in the project. Every square centimetre of the inside and outside is drawn and designed by us and discussed with the client. I’m not picking the furniture and rugs, but I’d be happy to oblige with my opinion. We get involved in all of the interior finishes, too, including tiles, flooring and colour and tone.”

Kariouk Architects relishes a good challenge and was recently named one of five of the world’s top “Small Offices” (under 10 employees category) by Architizer, a leading database for architecture and sourcing building products. It was the only Canadian office to make the list. The firm also won a recent Greater Ottawa Home Builders’ Association award for its Dash project (an acronym formed from the first names of each member of the clients’ family). The primary living area for this bright, airy home is on the second floor and features a dramatic sculptural steel staircase illuminated by a large, round skylight.

Two other projects that have garnered award nods are Forest Retreat and m.o.r.e. Cabin, both rooted in a sense of place with a marvellous synchronization of function, form and style.

“We use industrial materials, but there isn’t any obvious ornament. The ornamentation of the m.o.r.e. Cabin is really about what it’s made of—the cross-laminated timber interior and its sculptural shape on the outside. For the Forest Retreat, the ornament is the way the interior—the wood and steel—come together like a jewel box; it’s a very precise, finicky sort of a way. These are the characteristics of a modern house—it’s in the details in how it came together.”

#### **Forest Retreat**

This dramatic, modern retreat, with a long, tent-like roof that cantilevers and tapers at all edges, rests on an existing cleared ridge overlooking a pretty wildflower meadow. Rising above a well-treed, 100-acre private sanctuary in rural Caledon, the holiday getaway was built for a busy family of five with numerous pets, who divide their time between Los Angeles and Ontario. Paul and his colleagues spent time getting to know their clients and their needs before beginning the work.



“Our clients had a wish list, but they put their trust in us. There’s a really great energy and vibrancy about this family, which told us how the house should be spread out—it couldn’t fundamentally be a precious house. They wanted private spaces, but didn’t want a home with lots of separate bits. The teenagers have their own bedrooms, but they’re fairly small. They put all of their money and energy into having generous, shared spaces.”

**The Forest Retreat, featured on this page, serves as a rustic, modern space and Canadian homestead for a family living abroad.**