

HOUSE OF THE MONTH **INGRID SPENCER**

BETWEEN THE SWISS ALPS AND LAKE LUGANO, JACOPO MASCHERONI CREATES A ROUNDED GLASS PAVILION ATOP A SUBMERGED BASE.



1. To instill a feeling of weightlessness, a thin, slightly slanted concrete slab covers the pavilion. Insulated aluminum doors with carved-in handles flush with the glass offer access to the upper-level gardens.
2. The pavilion's high-performance glass walls came curved and already treated with argon gas pumped between their airtight double panes as insulation against the cold Swiss winters. A dropped ceiling hides electronic shades, while Prunus trees provide shade in summer but let in winter sun when they lose their leaves. Reflective, crushed white Carrera marble covers most garden surfaces, while round skylights offer glimpses of the house's lower level.
3. Built-in and custom furniture, such as a 45-degree angled sofa, become part of the architecture.

ACCORDING TO ARCHITECT

Jacopo Mascheroni, people from the village of Brusino Arsizio, Switzerland (population 475), have been trying to get a glimpse of the house he designed for Nicoletta Messina, a financial consultant, and her family. The 3,700-square-foot polygonal glass pavilion and garden above a partially buried lower level is almost hidden behind walls on a hill. An engineering feat resulting in an innovative modern artifact, it is unlike any other house in the village.

Mascheroni, who worked for Stanley Saitowitz/Natoma Architects in San Francisco and Richard Meier & Partners in New York City before founding JM Architecture in 2005 in Milan, admits that his client was brave. "I asked him for a house with many large windows," says Messina, "and then I gave him carte blanche."

With Lake Lugano on one side and the Swiss Alps on the other, a glass house on a hill seemed the obvious move. But the challenges of a steep slope, building-code setbacks, and surrounding houses made a typical solution impractical and undesirable. Instead, Mascheroni carved into the slope and inserted a reinforced concrete structure, which is approached from a private lane

leading to a garage on the west.

The underground level comprises three bedrooms, two baths, an office, formal entry, laundry, staircase, and playroom. Rather than facing out toward houses that block the lake view, the bedrooms open onto a garden enclosed by a wall and tall hedges. Climb the stairs to the public spaces of the house and you find another garden – on 2 feet of earth atop the lower-level roof. Here the house's curved glass walls allow extensive views of the landscape beyond a perimeter wall to the northeast and a parapet wall to the southwest.

Within the glazed pavilion, no walls divide the living areas, but a central, white-lacquered rectilinear-wood volume contains the kitchen, bathroom, stairway, and all mechanical and technological equipment.

Geothermal heat pumps, a rain-water collection system, and radiant heating are some of the environmentally friendly systems used. The house is sculptural, sustainable, and practical. Messina, who works in the house, says that to witness the lights of the village and lake from the upstairs pavilion each night "is a wonderful experience. I live so much more intensely than ever before." ■

