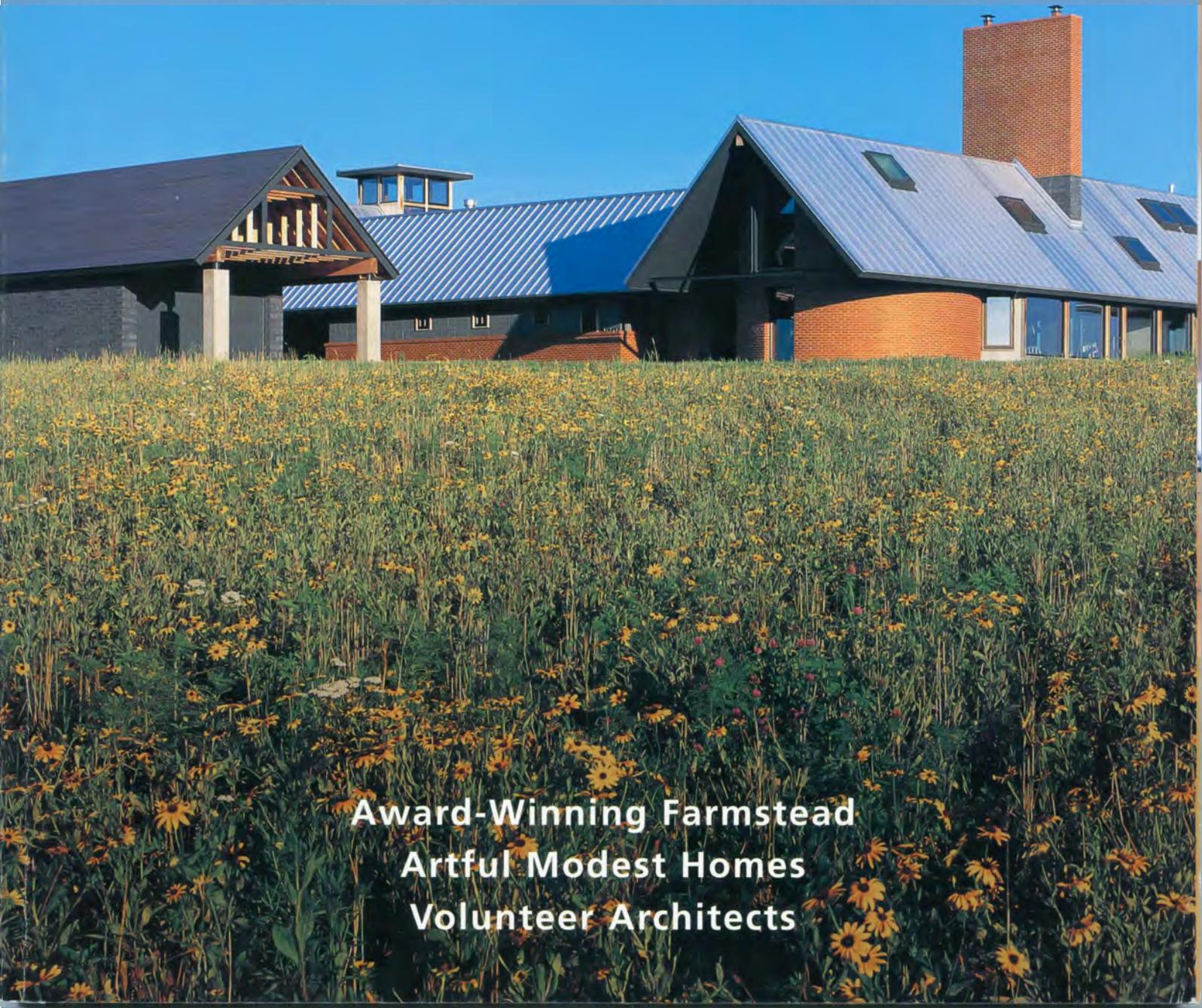


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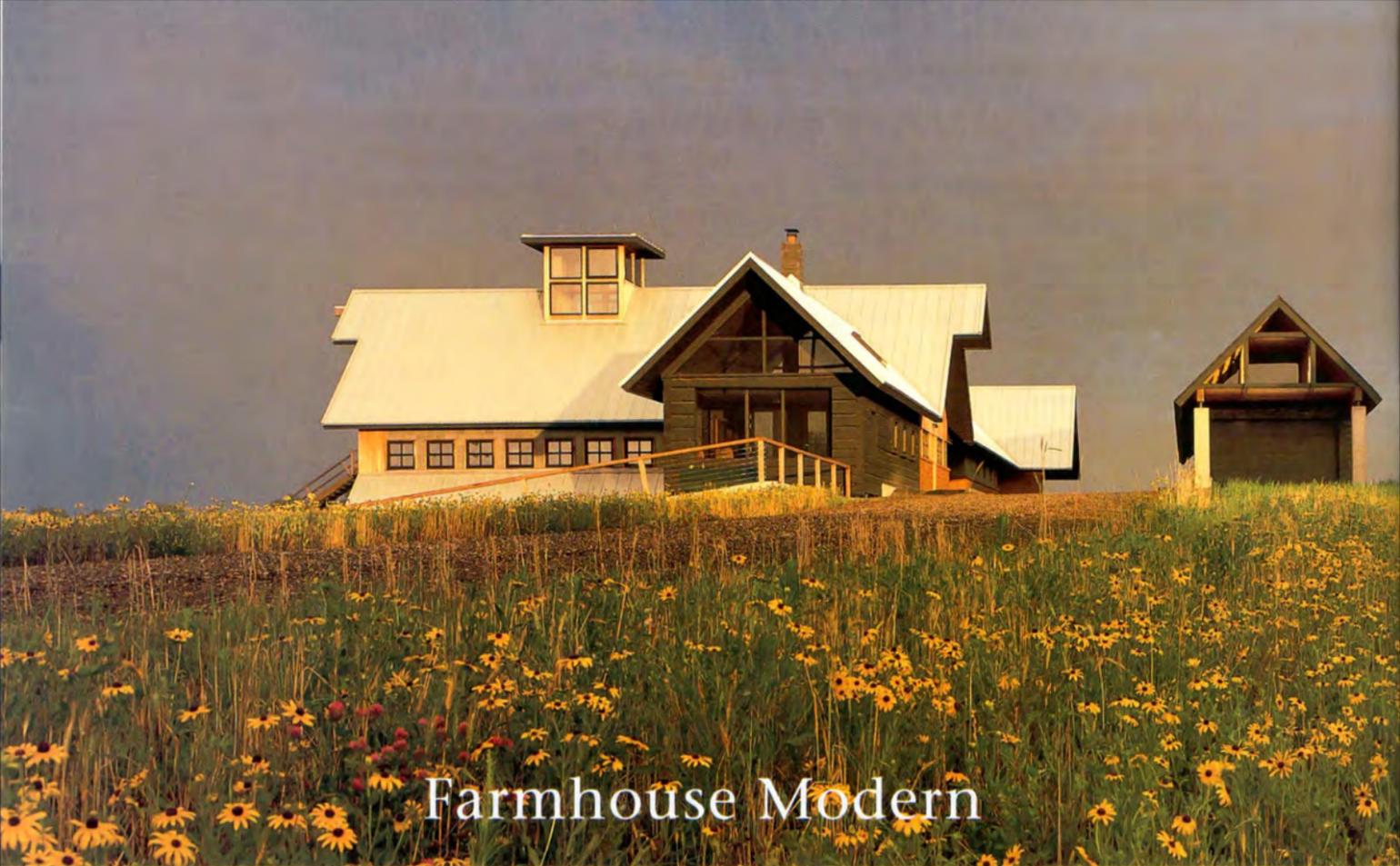
# Architecture

## MINNESOTA

### New Houses



Award-Winning Farmstead  
Artful Modest Homes  
Volunteer Architects



## Farmhouse Modern



PETER BASTIANELLI-KERZE

A midwestern rural vernacular tempers the high-style modernism of an award-winning Nerstrand farmstead *By Robert Gerloff, AIA*



Project team (left to right):  
Souliyahn Keobounpheng,  
David Salmela, AIA.

Some of the most delightful buildings in architectural history are the country homes of gentleman farmers: Palladio's Villa Rotonda, which has a granary in the attic; Sir John Vanbrugh's Blenheim Palace, often surrounded by sheep; or Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, where test plots of onions and tobacco substituted for formal gardens.

The joyous collision of high-style architecture with earthy farm life, of formal manners with casual surroundings, makes the traditional country home an irresistible icon. Now, on a 137-acre farmstead near Nerstrand, Minnesota, David Salmela, AIA, Salmela Architect, Duluth, has given the traditional midwestern farmhouse a high-style, modernist twist.

Clients Doug and Mary Jones, who were ready to leave their Georgian home in south Minneapolis for the country life, asked Salmela for a one-bedroom house, with separate guest

quarters, a garage for cars and a barn for the tractor. "We also wanted a house that was all on one level and handicapped accessible so we wouldn't have to retrofit it later," Mary adds. "Oh, yes. Doug wanted a cupola."

They talked with Salmela about siting the buildings together to create "a little village" or "the barn/house/shed quality that traditional farms have," Salmela explains. Consequently, the U-shaped, approximately 5,000-square-foot structure is comprised of a guesthouse/office (which the Jones's call "the barn") to the east; a west wing that houses the living area, kitchen, dining room and loft; and a connector or bridge section that includes the master-bedroom suite and a project room.

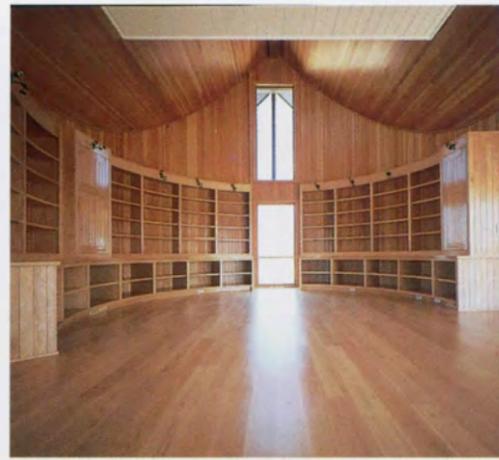
The structure wraps around a south-facing exterior courtyard—with fireplace, bluestone walks and six northern pin-oak trees—which anchors the house to its hill-top site in a sea of



The modernist farmstead is sited on restored prairie (top). The house wraps around a south-facing courtyard (above and left) with pin oaks and outdoor fireplace. The U-shaped house (above) includes a guesthouse/office to the east; a west wing that houses the living area, kitchen, dining room and loft; and a connecting section with the master-bedroom suite.



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The house interior (above) features compelling sculptural elements, including a built-in china cabinet in the middle of the space that hides stairs leading to a loft (top left), which filters light from skylights to the living space. The semicircular bookcase (top right) is expressed on the house's exterior as a silo-shaped structure.

restored prairie. "Wherever you sit in the main house, you look across the rural landscape," Salmela says.

The building forms are simple and, from a distance, dominated by standing-seam metal roofs. "The metal roofs were the most important reference to rural construction," Salmela says, as they reflect the spirit of tin roofs still topping farm buildings throughout Minnesota. Other material choices were equally pragmatic. The detached garage, for example, is constructed of low-maintenance, half-size block made from waste granite polished to look like cut obsidian.

Some exterior walls of the main house are covered with slate, "which never needs to be painted or stained," Salmela notes. Long-lasting, recycled cypress covers some gable ends. A

silo-shaped, one-story structure that contains the library and a thin, three-story chimney that extends above the house like a masonry mast are made of everyday red-orange brick.

Inside the house, the floors, cabinets and a semicircular bookcase are constructed of durable maple. The central truss supporting the roof is fir, as is the ceiling. In contrast, the floor and railings of the loft are white-painted wood.

The loft, Salmela notes, isn't so much a room as a form to shape light and space. Light that pours in through 11 skylights bounces off the floor of the loft, reflects off the fir ceiling and spills through the white railings—constructed from thin, delicate strips of wood—into the living space below. "The loft lowers the ceiling in the sitting areas so you don't feel like you're in a cathedral," Salmela adds.



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The guesthouse/office, which the Jones's call "the barn" (left and top) continues the artistic, agrarian theme with wood beams and wood-lattice ceilings. A stairway leads to guest bedrooms, a loft (above) and Doug's cupola.

Narrow, almost unnavigable ship's ladders, tucked behind the built-in white-painted china cabinet in the middle of the house, lead to the loft; the main staircase is actually outside and functions as an exterior sculptural element, as well as an observation platform. "A staircase inside would have compromised the purity of the main floor," Salmela explains, "and besides, the loft is a secondary space that the homeowners don't use every day."

The architect's artistry and pragmatism drew the Honor Awards jurors to the project, as did his siting of the house. "The project team really researched the placement of the building on the site," they said, also praising the "refreshingly balanced use of wood and other materials, so the wood can really speak." They commented on the "consistent

theme of materials that ties the buildings together" and the "very contemporary interior that's still strongly tied to a traditional, agrarian image."

Finally, the jurors lauded Salmela's "unpretentious and straightforward approach" and his "strong interpretation of forms and materials of the region." Jones Farmstead, they said, "is respectful without being imitative or kitschy" and "rational rather than romantic."

In other words, Jones Farmstead perfectly fits the typology of the classic country house, updated for 21st-century Minnesota.



Honor Award

Jones Farmstead, Nerstrand, Minnesota  
Salmela Architect, Duluth, Minnesota