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## Bringing 'home' to North Carolina

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Simplicity, sustainability and a sense of place. The panel looking at Home of the Month entries for 2009 know that these are the factors valued by architects and homeowners in today's climate.

During the past three years, Home of the Month has featured a wide spectrum of cutting-edge design, lifestyle trends and regional responses to architecture from around the state. This year, The News & Observer continues its collaboration with N.C. State University's College of Design to show readers houses designed by architects practicing across the state.

The projects, chosen from 34 projects submitted by architects registered in North Carolina, range from beach to mountain retreats, new homes to renovations, and from historically significant houses to fresh prefabricated examples.



The selection panel met in December, a time when people in our state and across the country were reconsidering the way architects and owners should think about the way they build houses and what we value in our lives and our homes. Simplicity, sustainability and a sense of place all came to the forefront.

The lucrative times of financial security in the form of real estate equity, development and builder speculation are behind us. As panel member Nigel Maynard of Residential Architect magazine said, "It seems that the economy is now forcing people to reverse course from the grandiose new house and additions. It was refreshing."

Given the economic downturn, these are difficult but useful times for architects to evaluate the fragility of the homebuilding market. It has allowed homebuyers and architects to pause and honestly consider what they have, what they can afford and what they really need in terms of house design.

Architects are well-suited to this new environment. Their designs tend to be innovative, modern and somewhat minimal. Architects seek to locate in a project the essential and basic needs of their clients -- a process that is often more rewarding than offering them the usual "extreme make-over."

Panelists also considered the ways that individual projects affected their environment and how new technologies were used to meet this goal. Panelist Mark Larson of Rehkamp Larson Architects in Minneapolis "was looking for projects that were well composed, thorough and consistent in their detailing, sustainable projects that made use of new construction techniques, durable materials and effective natural day lighting."

This eye toward building strongly suggests the landscape is changing in the way house design makes use of sustainable and renewable techniques. Building for the "long term" is the new mantra for architects and provides a way for touching the earth and its environment "lightly" while setting new standards for construction.

By the same token, the panel found all of the architects asking themselves questions about how to make specifically North Carolina architecture. While innovation and advanced design is important for North Carolina architects, they must also recognize they are designing homes in an area of the country rich with tradition.

"I would say that I was impressed with the diversity of the work and a sense that firms were trying to understand how to make a good North Carolina home," said panelist Eric Naslund of StudioE Architects in San Diego. In other words, "something that draws from the local history, setting, climate and cultural understanding (both old and contemporary) of the place. I was particularly drawn to schemes that reached back and looked forward at once. ..."

The panelists agreed that despite the great diversity of work, all of the architects were in search of how to bring "home" to North Carolina.

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I am happy to see this series returning for 2009. Thanks for continuing it and I hope we see more of the same in 2010.