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Canyon Residence - Salt Lake City, USA Sarano + Mooney Architecture

Images courtesy of the architects

Bordering a 200-acre campsite, this single family home of 2500sq ft sits among wooded slopes in a mountainous environ of Salt Lake City, capturing canyon views and offering plenty of access to the wide outdoors. Given its site, exploiting views was a priority; the great room features an operable 30-foot wall opening directly to nature. Materials were inspired by the rugged traditions of the American West, although with a decidedly contemporary bent. Corten steel panels in a harlequin pattern clad the exterior, lending it a textured surface that softens its boxy massing. The pattern casts subtle designs upon the walls, particularly in oblique light. The gradual evolution of the material's palette, as it rusts with time, represents, according to the architects, "the non-static quality of domestic life". Furthermore, it is magnetised, allowing for the personalisation of attachments, including the surface panel of the front door, which can be removed and replaced at whim.

To reduce its impact on the site from an environmental point of view, the house sits on legs, which gives a treehouse atmosphere to some of the spaces. A rainwater collection system helps irrigation, the steel is recycled, and all spaces enjoy natural light sources. It is the first residence in the state to receive a LEED Silver certification - no insignificant feat.

On first impression, the house seems anything but 'environmental', in the sense of an aesthetic image of organic or 'natural' construction. This is thanks to the use of metal and the shoebox form of the building, as well as to its dropped-from-the-sky site use. It is therefore ironic that precisely those aspects are what burnish its sustainability credentials. Rather than attempt the conventional 'make it look soft and cuddly' version of environmental building, the architects here argue that a steel box set abstractly upon the land is a 'softer' answer. And it is refreshing to learn that architecture which is environmentally respectful can assume tough, some would say 'aggressive', formal personality.



