

Kayak House - Lotus, California, US A Ogrydziak/Prillinger Architects



Photography by Tim Griffith

For owners passionate about kayaking, this house in Lotus California sits on the American River's South Fork, giving direct access to one of the best kayak runs in northern California. The brief to the architects also stipulated that it be built to last (at least 100 years), environmentally responsible and appropriate for them as they age. The basic parti establishes an L with two different aspects: private and public. Towards the riverfront, which witnesses plenty of rafting and kayak traffic, the house opens up, while at the rear it clusters more privately around a rectangular courtyard facing the distant hills, inducing a sense of calm. Two double-height rooms are positioned to take advantage of the contrasting views. The structure is of steel and concrete block, with plywood, stone and metal finishes and details, most left intentionally exposed. Roofs are metal. Renewable materials were used wherever possible.

Because the owners are so passionate about their sport, a number of 'kayak' references were incorporated directly into the design, such as the blue garage door (the colour of the client's favourite kayak), hanging hooks in the entry hall to display six kayaks and a ground floor bathroom that is used to clean them, with wetsuit hooks along the wall. Luckily, the singular focus doesn't compromise the architecture; the house is not 'themed' to death. The dominant character is lofty and open, and the large windows aimed at views, together with the choice of 'rough' finish materials and exposed joints and detailing work emphasize this. Even the landscaping is left 'raw' and indigenous, as if the building has been here for a very long time already, or happened to land on the site a moment ago. Where other architects or clients might have opted for a prettier, more decorative language, Kayak House seems to embody the spirit of the sport quite faithfully: little fuss, minimal equipment, as direct a relationship with the environment as possible. Just water, man and building.

