

UPCHER HOUSE

EAST HAMPTON, NEW YORK

BATES MASI ARCHITECTS

\$190.00 PER SQUARE FOOT

2005

“When designing within a budget, it is essential to understand what the client views as the project’s single most important element,” says Paul Masi of Bates Masi Architects. “In this case it was adaptability.” The client, a British novelist, wanted a flexible, year-round house that could contain her collection of over 2,000 books. When considering the excessive load-bearing requirements for this weight, Masi conceived of a house built on a giant, adjustable cantilevering rack system of the kind frequently employed in lumberyards.

“You find solutions that you would never even have looked for if you had more money,” explains Masi. The elegant structural system, fabricated of black-painted vertical steel columns with prepunched holes, an assortment of adjustable steel brackets, and movable steel arms, supports the flat roof, the second floor, kitchen cabinetry, handrails, and both interior and exterior lighting. A mahogany catwalk that provides access to the library is also hung from these supports. The entire interior skeleton, which allows each element it supports to be raised or lowered, was purchased and built for \$7,000. The Upcher House can easily be adapted, retrofitted, expanded, or reduced by manipulating this clever oversized rack system.

The efficiency of the structure is echoed in the simple, square footprint of the house. The overall 1,400-square-foot floor plan is organized around one large, double-height room for living and dining. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a study, the library, and two outdoor decks emanate from this central area. Construction costs were kept to a minimum by incorporating inexpensive materials such as green-tinted fiberboard for the exterior cladding, rough-sawn okoume wood, aluminum-frame windows, preassembled wood screens, industrial cedar planks for the bookshelves, Ikea kitchen cabinets (also used as medicine cabinets in the bathrooms), and kitchen appliances from General Electric.













