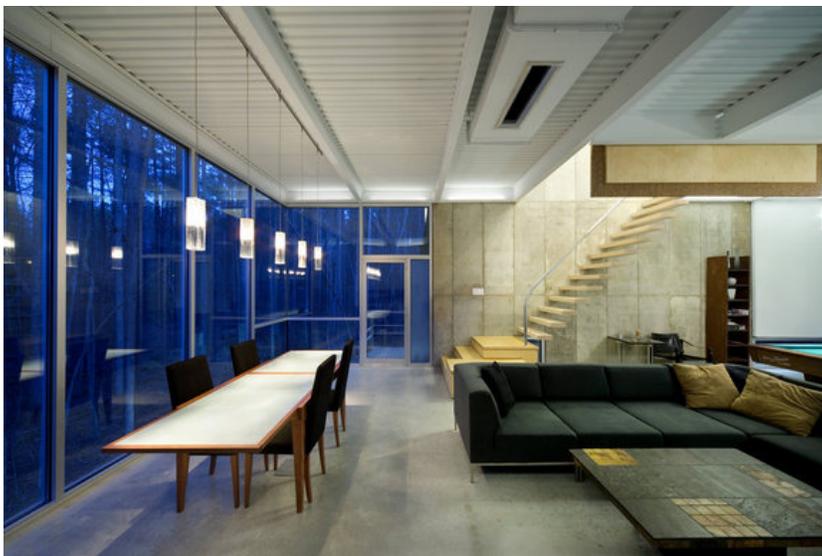


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## A house that stacks up

PUBLISHED SAT, DEC 18, 2010 02:00 AM  
MODIFIED SAT, DEC 18, 2010 07:27 AM



COURTESY OF MARK HERBOTH

A spacious living room occupies the lowest block, and it opens to a covered wood deck and the forest beyond.

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DECEMBER'S PROFILE OF A WELL-DESIGNED LIVING SPACE BY DAVID HILL - CORRESPONDENT

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Architect Michael Rantilla figures he looked at more than 20 properties before finding a beautiful - but challenging - lot on Pictou Road in Wake County. The site was heavily wooded, with evergreens and hardwoods, but it was also hemmed in by setbacks, a stream buffer zone and a few restrictive covenants - all conditions that left very little room for a conventional footprint.

Using these constraints as inspiration, Rantilla decided that the only way to go was up. The result is a dramatic towerlike house that seems to defy gravity as it rises above the hilly terrain. It resembles three boxes stacked and balanced precariously to form large overhanging rooms and decks that mingle with the nearby tree branches.

With its modern glass, steel and concrete construction, the house has a bold presence in the quiet, secluded neighborhood of 1960s ranches and newer homes with traditional details. But despite the house's unique qualities, its sensitive proportions and thoughtful details make it a good companion to the older homes.



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Realizing they needed to balance many uncommon materials and features, Rantilla and his wife, Angela, invited several contractors to consider the project, but in the end they built much of it themselves. The couple were dedicated to constructing the house on nights and weekends, and they worked to build their hillside home.

Rantilla says he has a "curiosity for the way things work," and he spent much of his childhood taking things apart. With help from several skillful subcontractors, he and his wife showed that they know how to put things together.

**David Hill is a registered architect and assistant professor of architecture at the NCSU College of Design.**

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