

For 7 Architects

projects that surprise and inspire



COTTAGE STREET DESIGN LARASON GUTHRIE ARCHITECT, BELFAST

Like the goddess who was born out of another god's head, Rothrock House emerged from the imagination of its architect, Larason Guthrie, 72, after a winter of work with a wood model. "It couldn't be drawn," he said.

The undulating roof of the new structure, attached to a square and plumb building constructed earlier on this site by the owners, Britain and Anne Rothrock, doesn't have a square or plumb line anywhere.

"The soul of it is a grove of trees," Guthrie said. He constructed the interior with beams all branching in different directions, which meet at the ground in several massive "trunks." Guthrie did the work of building the house with Michael Fletcher, a mason and a fine art painter, and John Byrer, another painter who didn't know a thing about carpentry but was willing to learn. He didn't want to work with carpenters who would have set ways.

"This house is the most wonderful I've ever built and the most difficult," he said. "We had to do things over and over again. Every cut is a compound miter, requiring two angles." One hundred and five windows, many cut and double-glazed on site to fit odd and trapezoidal openings, let light seep inside the way the sunlight slides underneath branches at sunset.

With no interior walls, Brian Rothrock said, "You can sit in one place and see many things." Perhaps among them might be the Taoist philosophy about the inward nature of things that Guthrie said inspires him.

Guthrie senses a mystical underpinning to making spaces. He left an art class he attended as a 16-year-old levitating with exhilaration at a sudden insight into the curves of the Parthenon. The curves of Rothrock House are his metamorphosis into architecture of local hemlock, pine, cedar, and spruce, the softwoods of Maine.

"There's no way to forget it's made of trees."