

SHORE THING

The pavilion blends into its Hudson setting, with the deck planks running parallel with the river and the roof's metal ribs moving towards it

RIVER'S EDGE

A new kayak pavilion on the Hudson River in upstate New York pushes the boat out with its minimalist design

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES EWING WRITER: MARC KRISTAL

A rowing club boathouse is generally a pretty traditional affair: insignia flags projecting from balconies; interiors tricked out with trophy cases, victory photos and crossed oars. Everything, in short, that Architecture Research Office's new kayak pavilion in Beacon, New York – a modernist shed that makes Mies look maximal – is not. 'When you're at the water's edge, you should be able to enjoy it,' says ARO principal Adam Yarinsky. 'It's about the experience, not the architecture.'

In fact, Beacon, an 80-minute train ride up the Hudson River from Grand Central Station, remains the ideal setting for the Manhattan-based firm's concise effort. A commercial hub and factory town from the 19th to mid-20th century, Beacon has emerged, since the opening of the Dia:Beacon museum in 2003, as an artsy, unpretentious and socially aware getaway. Accordingly, Yarinsky's client, Scenic Hudson – an organisation committed to rescuing brownfield sites along the once heavily industrialised waterway – engaged landscape architects Reed Hildebrand Associates to transform Beacon's formerly mercantile Long Dock into a 15-acre park; ARO's brief was to convert an existing barn on the site into an arts/education centre, and add a storage and launching facility for kayaks and canoes.

While Yarinsky and partners Stephen Cassell and Kim Yao recognised 'an iconic destination' in the 19th-century post-and-beam barn, they conceived of the pavilion as 'more immaterial... as a transition from land to water'. ARO's solution was to float a 30ft by 100ft corrugated steel roof 12ft above a wooden launching deck that folds into the river. Between the two planes, five cages made from aluminium bar grating enclose open-air changing areas and simple aluminium speed-rail racks for storing up to 64 boats. The pavilion's rugged sturdiness belies the ethereality of its elements – its 16 support columns are just 3.5in in diameter – and recalls the site's industrial history.

ARO's thoughtful handling of the details makes what might otherwise have been a quotidian structure distinctive. And it is the building's restraint, Yarinsky believes, that ultimately gives the project its panache. 'There are many precedents for little pavilions that become focal points at the water's edge,' he says. 'Our challenge was to make the architecture recede. It's one of those things architects love – a simple problem you can make exquisitely difficult for yourself to solve.' ★
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