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The client gleefully envisioned the east-west setting of the house during a tour of the property: "We'll watch the sun come up over the pond from the bedrooms and set in the evening over a stand of birch trees."

He says he and his wife, who initially favoured a French chateau-style home, interviewed several architects. "I wanted to see if anybody would listen to what I was saying, who would be an out-of-the-box thinker." They were impressed with Mr. Jacobs' creative responses to what they wanted and the designs of friends' homes the firm had done in Toronto. "We saw that he [Mr. Jacobs] listened. ... Some architects were just interested in making a splash, and weren't on the same page."

Within a few weeks, the client and his wife liked the concept, which he calls "beyond contemporary" and with Mr. Jacobs' participation they have since tweaked the design to get it to exactly where they want it.

"We could have built the house somewhere else, but we wanted to experience nature, so the house comes out of the forest and in time will be more enclosed by it," he says. In more practical terms, a well, septic tank, back-up generator in case the electric power goes off, and a heating and cooling system that taps into the earth will sustain all the necessities and creature comforts in their home/airport in the woods.

This is the kind of welcoming house that many parents would obviously like to build and inhabit, not only for their own pleasure, but long-term, as an alternative to a small condo in the city. Mr. Jacobs' client put it this way: "We want our kids to come back as often as possible when they're going to university or working and living elsewhere, and bring their friends or families with them to visit."

With all the four seasons' attractions of land, water and air, this is one couple who likely won't have to worry about their children becoming strangers.

Special to The Globe and Mail

Architect Julian Jacobs has been commissioned by a local wealthy entrepreneur to build an 8,000-square-foot 'dream home' with an avian theme.

TARAS KOVALIV/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Landing at the front door

One frustrated commuter has found a way to beat the traffic on the 401 — build a house with its own airport

BY ALBERT WARSON

As architectural proposals go, it was very unusual, to say the least: A flying fanatic asked Toronto architect Julian Jacobs to design a new house that would allow the pilot to taxi his small airplanes right into the living room.

"We wanted a plane in the living room, to incorporate our family's love of flying and have everything revolve around it," says the client, a wealthy gentleman farmer who asked not to be identified. He has a passion for buying vintage airplanes, in one piece or in parts, restoring them to mint condition and flying them — every weekday, and often on weekends with his family.

A house-cum-hanger may sound fanciful, perhaps even bizarre, but the client recalls once waiting for a fellow aviation aficionado in his Connecticut home, who coasted into the living room in a Cessna, cut the engine, climbed out of the cockpit and went into the kitchen a few steps away for some beer.

There are, in fact, airplane communities in the United States where people live beside their airplanes, much like golf course communities.

A high-profile example of such a setup is the Ocala, Fla., residence of film star and seasoned pilot John Travolta. His house, which resembles an air-control tower, sits next to a 2.2-kilometre landing strip where the actor operates two jets.



The new house will be built of several connected wings. The roofline will mirror the gentle roll of the surrounding countryside.

He can taxi right up to outbuildings connected to the house.

Flying golf balls are one thing, however, airplanes are another. Mr. Jacobs saw the impracticalities and potential hazards of his client's romantic notion, and persuaded him to keep his seven airplanes out of the living room and park them in a new hangar to be built 75 feet from the house. But, even aside from the fact it is situated near two runways, the house the architect finally designed for the 27-acre property northeast of Toronto — and the way it came into being — is anything but ordinary.

For starters, it's 8,000 square feet in size. At a going construction cost of \$200 to \$300 a square foot, the family's new home will come in somewhere between \$1.6-million and \$2.4-million, not including the value of the land, which they own.

The client, who is in his early 40s, currently lives with his wife and three children under 14 in a 2,100-square-foot renovated farmhouse a few kilometres away from the site. His family owns large tracts of land

in the area and also raises horses and cattle.

Mr. Jacobs says the new house, which will be started in the spring and completed within a year, will feature separate but — appropriately — connected "wings." The central wing — enclosed mainly in stone, oak and glass — will incorporate a sunken living room, dining room, master bedroom, and kitchen with an outdoor terrace overlooking a man-made pond. With the addition of three children's wings and a guest wing, the house will contain six bedrooms and bathrooms.

"A stone wall will be projected into the living room, with a glassed-in fireplace visible from the outside and the carport as well," he says. "There are no load-bearing walls in the middle of the house, although the bedrooms will be enclosed with drywall," Mr. Jacobs says.

"The grey-coloured, insulated steel-deck roof and supporting columns will be welded together at different angles and tilted to create a topography, much like the rolling

hills of the surrounding countryside. It will be covered with a vinyl membrane material similar to the SkyDome roof, and recall Frank Gehry's undulating forms, but won't look industrial or commercial. The cantilevered roof will project over the walls several feet in some places, for both aesthetic and energy conservation reasons.

"The interior ceiling, a combination of architecture and engineering, will have a cathedral effect. It is extremely expensive to do on houses, but offers the drama and excitement of larger commercial projects."

Mr. Jacobs has used oak and other woods, along with perforated metals, inside to simulate the feeling of lofts in Toronto's industrial condo conversions.

There will not be a full basement; the house will be built on a more or less flat concrete slab, except for a soundproof concrete basement room that Mr. Jacobs' client calls a "bunker," where the family can indulge their diverse musical tastes without necessarily inflicting them on others.

A greenhouse with an indoor swimming pool, ringed by exercise equipment, will be attached to the kitchen. The 75-by-250-foot hangar for the airplanes will be built nearby. To say the house will be secluded is an understatement. Mr. Jacobs' client says he, and occasionally his wife and two lumberjacks, spent about a year hacking, chain-sawing and bulldozing a path through the 150-acre forest, which was overgrown with poplars, cedars, birches and white pine. The bush was "so thick you couldn't walk through it," he says.

They eventually cleared 27 acres, and in the landscaping process, moved about 800 mature trees, grew grass on 900 truckloads of topsoil, and dragged boulders out of the cleared fields and lined them up along parts of new roads they created. They dug a 250-by-350-foot

spring-fed pond 25 feet deep with two sand beaches, and stocked it with pickerel minnows he hopes will grow to a size worth catching by next summer. A small windmill at its edge is pumping oxygen into the pond to keep the water fresh.

When they were done, there were golf-course-like open spaces between the trees on the cleared land, and lighted, unpaved runways of 2,000 and 2,800 feet long. The strips run at different angles to allow for alternative landings to compensate for high winds in a particular direction.