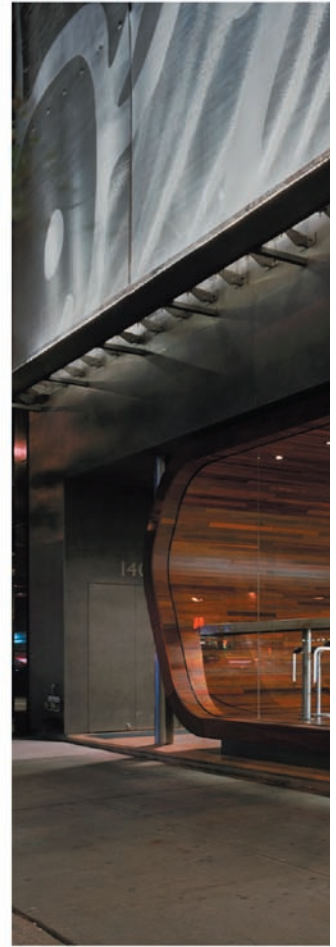


# CITY

THE DESTINATION FOR STYLE  
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## PROFILE

# HARIRI SQUARED

It's the 20th birthday for Hariri & Hariri Architecture. What better way to celebrate than with a **new book chronicling Hariri style**, starting from the inside. Tim McKeough catches up with the sisters.

**THE ASSIGNMENT:** CREATE A RESIDENCE IN THE Hamptons—carte blanche. The catch: The parcel of land also will hold the houses of three dozen of your avant-garde architect peers.

Such was the task that Gisue and Mojgan Hariri set out to fulfill at the ambitious Houses at Sagaponac development. The easy route would have been to respond with an ostentatious gesture that set them apart from the crowd—as if the striking, Iranian-born, New York-based sisters weren't already. But the duo took the high road, finding a design that was restrained, pared down, and immensely livable—and still stopped people in their tracks. Theirs was the first home to be completed and some say the

results hinted at a brand new strain of classic modernism.

The sisters moved to the U.S. in the 1970s to attend Cornell University and founded Hariri & Hariri Architecture in 1986. Since then, they've produced an accomplished portfolio of work—like the flagship Juan Valdez coffee shop on East 57th Street in Manhattan, with its curving layer of dark wood wrapping a seating area at the front of the café and blobby “liquid” wall curling into benches in the back. But their biggest proponents will argue that it's with their less-showy residential projects that they've made their mark.

At Sagaponac, the Hariris' L-shaped house practically hovers in the landscape, its horizontal volumes hugging a generous pool deck before cantilevering out over the





surrounding earth. Massive glass sliding doors hint at the airiness inside and promise a breezy escape from the clutter of daily life.

Writing in the *New Yorker*, architecture critic Paul Goldberger put it this way: "It has a kind of sumptuous, self-assured grandeur that plays on the floating planes and transparent volumes of Mies without ever directly imitating him. ... They know how to produce minimalism with a certain majesty."

Balancing such contradictions as minimalism and majesty is no easy act. But the sisters say that's what their work is all about. "It's spatially, and in some ways, materially, opulent," says Gisue. "But on the other hand, it's very down-to-earth and quiet."

Cindy Allen, editor-in-chief of *Interior Design* magazine, which inducted Hariri & Hariri Architecture into its hall of fame last year, concurs. "They're very passionate about the legacy of Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Wright, but they've been able to take that knowledge and translate it into design that's uniquely their own."

Flipping through the pages of their new monograph, *Hariri & Hariri Houses* (Rizzoli), which covers 20 years of

the firm's residential building, it's easy to be left breathless by the creative scope of their portfolio, each house distinctly different from the next. Turning past the Sagaponac project, you arrive at the Aqua House in Miami, a three-story townhouse featuring curved metal roofs and porthole windows. Flip again, and you get Gisue's own Park Avenue apartment, where subtle mint-green canopies curl up from the floor to define the living and dining areas while delivering light overhead. Turn to the back of the book and you get a cottage in Barry's Bay, Ontario, where they've reinvented the idea of a Canadian cabin.

"Each project we do is very different," says Gisue. "We get bored by repeating ourselves." Instead, they aim to respond to specific sites, paying particular attention to the working and living methods of their clients.

"Unfortunately, many times I've seen architects sacrifice these very minute, but extremely important facts of life against a larger idea," says Gisue. "I think it's absolutely important to have a clear vision for every project you do, but at the same time, not forget that kids will be raised in these projects. People will work in these environments you create."

Left to right:  
Looking to the pool and beyond at the Sagaponac home; Juan Valdez flagship coffee shop on 57th Street; the interiors of artist-designer Michael Aram's home.





Clockwise, from above: A suburban Greenwich home for a young couple; Aram's West Village loft-gallery, which was built to let in light; the architects; Gisue's own Park Avenue apartment; interiors of the Juan Valdez cafe; the sisters' new book from Rizzoli.

## “[DO] NOT FORGET THAT KIDS WILL BE RAISED IN THESE PROJECTS. PEOPLE WILL WORK IN THESE ENVIRONMENTS YOU CREATE,” SAYS GISUE.

In fact, the Hariris' attention to the human aspects of buildings have led casual observers to question whether their work should be considered part of the modern canon at all. Recounting when neighbors have visited her apartment, Gisue says, “A lot of people come in and say ‘Oh my God, I thought you did modern things. This is not modern.’ I’ve heard it so many times now that I wonder what people think modern architecture is.”

No doubt, these visitors are imagining the old cliché—tough, sterile interiors painted a blinding white. While the sisters have a flair for minimalism, their work can't be described as harsh. Their judicious use of color, experimentation with form, and careful mix of materials—like a rough stone bathroom sink atop a stainless steel vanity, or a rusting metal door in a wall of blue stucco—result in multi-layered environments that give a personalized sense of home. The Hariris say their language of architecture does indeed come from modernism—they've just pushed it to a new degree, and are responsive to today. “We've managed to bring a certain warmth and tactility,” says Gisue. “Things have textures and colors. All this was lost in the big original picture of modernism.”

Yet despite the sense of calm and serenity in their work, architecture has not always presented an easy road for the sisters. When they first moved to the U.S. to study at Cornell, they found they often were left out when classmates and instructors got together to collaborate on competitions. “We were some of the very few women in the school of architecture,” says Gisue. “On top of that, we were considered foreigners. We were never approached.”

So the sisters pulled together and entered competitions on their own. As luck had it, they found they worked extremely well together.

Today, the Hariris are focused on an ambitious plan for a \$200 million residential project in Toronto expected to take 15 years to complete, and a new museum at the Rockland Center for the Arts in Nyack, New York. They're also actively seeking out an urban tower. “There are quite a number of changes and moves one can bring even to that type of architecture,” says Gisue.

And just in case there are those who still wrestle with how to characterize the firm's work, Gisue has the easiest answer: “We won't call it modern anymore. It's Hariri and Hariri's work.”





