

Ridge House

The parti and design document

Texas Hill Country. A modern courtyard house on a ridge, oriented to the western sunset. Program: a full family home — 3–4 bedrooms, everyday living. Register: warm and lived-in. Honeyed stone, ipe wood, soft materials. Feet-up modern.

The one-sentence house

A long honeyed-limestone wall laid along the crest of a Hill Country ridge: closed and grounded to the east where you arrive, dissolved into glass to the west where the land falls away toward the sunset, split at its center by a courtyard you pass through to reach everywhere, with water at the door that you hear before you see the view. Crisp modern lines held by glass and steel; every surface you touch is warm.

Everything below is that sentence, resolved.

1. The site and the parti

The ridge, and why the house sits where it sits

The Hill Country ridge runs north–south. Its long, generous slope falls away to the **west**, and that west slope is the reason the house exists: it holds the low sun and the whole burning arc of a Texas sunset, sky to caliche horizon. The east side is the uphill side — the road, the arrival, the quiet earth of the ridge's back. This is the orienting fact of the entire design, and it is not decoration: **the sunset is the house's clock, and the plan resolves toward the west.**

So the house does not sit *on* the view like an object on a shelf. It sits **across the ridge like a low wall along the crest**, a single long honeyed-limestone datum that reads, from the approach, as a piece of the ridge that has been squared and warmed by the sun. You come up the east slope and meet stone. The house holds the earth behind it and gives nothing of the view away yet — that is deliberate, and it is the whole tension the arrival sequence trades on.

The diagram: closed east, open west, hinged at the courtyard

The governing move is a section and a plan at once:

- **East face. CLOSED, STONE, GROUNDED.** The uphill, arrival, road side. Long masses of honeyed Lueders limestone, deep and largely solid, punched with few and careful openings. This face anchors the house to the ridge and to the earth behind it. It is the mass that Herzog & de Meuron and Chipperfield would recognize: restraint, weight, a wall that means it, yet warm, sun-gold, never austere.
- **West face. OPEN, GLASS, DISSOLVING.** The downhill, sunset side. The stone thins and gives way to full-height glass in blackened steel, held back under a deep overhang. The building lets go of its own weight and hands the room to the view. This is where limestone becomes glass: the client's own opposition, built.
- **The COURTYARD, the hinge, the still center.** The long wall is *split at its middle* by the courtyard, an outdoor room open to the sky and largely walled from the west wind, that you must physically pass through, or pass along the edge of, to get from any wing to any other. It is not a garden you look at. It is the crossroads of the house. Arrival compresses you in stone; the courtyard releases you to the sky; the great room, one move further west, releases you entirely to the sunset. **Compression, release, release again** is the sequence, and the courtyard is the pause in the middle that makes the final release land.

The arrival sequence (east → west, the experience of the house)

1. **The approach.** You come up the east slope. The house is a long, low honeyed-limestone wall on the crest, deep-shadowed under its overhang, offering weight and a single dark recess where the door must be. No view yet. The ridge behind, the warm stone ahead.
2. **The threshold and the water.** At the entry recess, deep in the shadow of the overhang and out of the western glare, a long **still water runnel** runs at the door. You hear it before you have seen anything of the west. It cools the air in the shade, it catches and throws the last light later in the day, and it marks the exact seam between the hot outside and the calm within. Water as *sound before sight*.
3. **The compression.** You enter through stone. Low, held, quiet — a stone-lined entry that keeps the view withheld one moment longer.
4. **The release into the courtyard.** The entry delivers you to the edge of the courtyard: sky opens overhead, the covered loggia runs around it, and you can read the whole house across the open

center — bedrooms to your right and left, the great room ahead to the west, glowing.

5. **The great room, and the sunset.** One move west from the courtyard, the great room's full glass wall gives you the falling land and the whole western sky. The house has been withholding this since the road. Now it gives everything at once.

2. The plan: a family home organized around the courtyard

The program is a full family home: three to four bedrooms, everyday living, the courtyard carrying **daily circulation, not just contemplation.** Four zones meet the courtyard, and you cross the courtyard's covered edge to move between them. The still center is the family crossroads.

The four wings around the still center

WEST, the Great Room (the sunset face). The living, dining, and kitchen as one long room across the west face, glass wall to blackened steel, opening to the falling view and the sunset. A deep covered western porch (the *portal*, in Hill Country language) runs the full length outside the glass. This is what makes the glass wall survivable in Texas: the overhang cuts the low, punishing western sun and turns the west face into the great gathering shade of the house. Kitchen at the north end, nearer the service and the secondary wing; living at the south end, nearer the primary suite. The hearth is a board-formed concrete mass anchoring the room, warm-grey and grained. This is the feet-up heart of the house, and it should feel it: soft, inviting, lived-in.

SOUTH, the Primary Suite wing. The quietest arm, reaching south off the courtyard, protected from the west wind and the harshest sun by its own orientation. Bedroom oriented to catch the western view obliquely (the sunset, glimpsed, never glared at) with its own deep overhang; a stone-calm bathroom; a private walled garden or shower court open to the sky, in the Studio KO manner, a small outdoor room of its own. Far enough from the kids' wing across the courtyard that the courtyard itself is the acoustic buffer.

NORTH, the Secondary / Kids' Bedroom wing. Two to three bedrooms along the north arm, sharing bathrooms, a bunk or flex room, reached by crossing the courtyard's loggia from the great room. North light is the steady, kind light, good for these rooms all day. This wing and the primary suite face each other across the courtyard, so the whole family passes through the still center to reach one another. That is the daily crossroads working exactly as intended.

EAST, Entry & Service (the grounded arm). The arrival, the water threshold, the mudroom and drop-zone a family actually lives by, pantry, laundry, garage buried into the stone mass and into the ridge so it never shows on the view side. This is the closed, earthbound face. It does the unglamorous work and holds the house to the ridge, keeping the west face pure.

How the courtyard carries circulation

The courtyard is ringed by a **covered loggia**: deep overhang on all four sides, honed limestone underfoot, ipe soffit overhead, and the loggia is the corridor. To go from a kid's bedroom to breakfast, you step out under the loggia, along the edge of the open sky and the still center, past the water, and into the great room. The house has almost no interior hallways; the courtyard replaces them. This is why the still center is never precious or unused: the family threads it a dozen times a day, and it stays cool and quiet in the acoustic shadow of the surrounding masses. **Circulation as the daily ritual of crossing the calm.**

The section: how the deep overhang works as the house's clock

The house is essentially single-story, low and long on the crest. A lower service or flex level may tuck into the west slope where the land falls, but the family lives on one datum. The section is governed by the overhang:

- Deep roof overhangs, on the order of eight to ten feet on the west and courtyard faces, carried on the honed limestone masses and slender blackened-steel posts where they cross glass.
- The overhang is tuned to the **western** and **summer** sun: it shades the glass through the brutal afternoons and the high summer, and lets the low winter sun and the last horizontal minutes of every sunset reach in under it. The house works its owner's comfort by the position of the sun. The overhang is not a style; it is the instrument that makes a west-glass house livable in Texas.
- Roof: a thin, flat-to-low-slope plane reading as a single clean shadow-line against the sky, oversailing the stone. The shadow the overhang throws on the limestone is a designed element, a deep cool band of shade that reads as strongly as the warm stone itself.

3. The material palette: named, specific, one warm house

One building, one set of materials, everywhere. The renderings draw from *this list and only this list*, so arrival, courtyard, great room, and water all read as the same house. The register is **warm and lived-in**: glass and steel hold the crisp modern geometry; stone and wood carry the warmth; every surface a hand or a foot touches is warm. Nothing austere, nothing chalk-cold.

- **Honeyed Lueders limestone.** The primary mass material and the soul of the warmth. A Texas Hill Country stone cut in large ashlar coursing, honed to a soft matte surface in its **warm honey-gold to buff range** (the sun-warmed face of Lueders, never the pale grey cut). It holds the light like held sunlight and goes deep amber-gold in the late western sun. This is the wall that holds the ridge, the entry lining, the loggia floor. It is the house's warm body.
- **Board-formed concrete.** The secondary structural mass: the hearth, select interior walls, the base that meets the earth where the land falls to the west. The wood-grain board texture is visible and deliberate, a **warm grey with a tactile grain**, in the Ando and Lake|Flato register. Mass with a fingerprint, warmed by the wood that formed it.
- **Ipe wood soffits.** The underside of every deep overhang, and the loggia ceiling, in ipe (Brazilian walnut): a dense, fine-grained, **warm red-brown hardwood** that glows in reflected sun and silvers gracefully over time. The soffit is what you look up into in the shade, the warm ceiling of every porch and the loggia, and one of the two or three surfaces that make this a warm house rather than a cold one. Ipe is the default and the load-bearing choice; western red cedar is an acceptable regional alternate only if a lighter tone is ever wanted, but **default to ipe** for the deep warm glow.
- **Blackened steel window sections.** Slender, dark, matte blackened-steel frames and posts for the full-height glazing on the west and courtyard faces, and for the few precise punched openings in the stone. Minimal sightlines: the glass reads as almost frameless, the steel as fine dark lines. This is the geometry-holder, the crisp modern edge against all the warmth. It is the one cool material, and it earns its coolness by being minimal.
- **Low-iron glass.** Full-height and extra-clear (no green cast) on the west and courtyard walls, so the view reads true and the sunset color arrives uncorrupted. Glass dissolves the wall; it never tints the sunset.
- **Water.** A still, dark-bottomed limestone runnel and basin at the threshold, and a longer reflecting element along the courtyard or west edge. Mirror-calm, no fountains, no jets. Water that reflects the warm stone and the sky and makes sound only where it slips over a honed limestone lip.

- **Interior, warm and soft (Vervoordt / Van Duysen register).** Plastered walls in a **warm chalk-cream**, not cold white; wide-plank **warm oak** floors where stone gives way, with a soft matte finish; **linen and un-dyed wool** in generous, feet-up upholstery; patinated bronze hardware; deep quiet. Nothing shiny, nothing hard-edged where a body rests. The interior is the soft-spoken warm counterpart to the stone, built for a family to actually live in.

The light logic (the one constant across every frame). The house's true hour is the **golden hour before sunset**: low, warm, horizontal western light. It rakes across the honeyed limestone and deepens it to amber, throws the deep overhang's shadow as a cool band, ignites the water at the threshold and courtyard, glows in the ipe soffits, and pours horizontally into the great room under the overhang. Every hero frame is lit by this same late-day western sun unless noted. That single warm light logic is what binds the building into one house across all the renderings.

4. The hero moments: scenes for the renderings

Four frames. Each is the *same building* in the *same warm light*: one house, one palette, one sun. Written so a visualization artist can shoot them.

HERO 1 — ARRIVAL (approaching the limestone masses, from the east)

Vantage: low and frontal, from the east approach, looking west at the long limestone wall on the crest of the ridge. The land of the ridge-back rolls up to it; sky above and behind. **What's in frame:** a long, low, honeyed Lueders limestone wall in large ashlar coursing, deeply shadowed under a thin oversailing roof plane with a warm ipe soffit. Few openings; the stone is closed and grounded here. A single dark recessed entry at the center, where the wall parts. A slender blackened-steel line of the door glimpsed in shadow. **Light & mood:** late golden hour. The low western sun rakes along the face so the honeyed stone glows deep amber-gold and the overhang throws a cool shadow-band across it. Long shadows on the approach. Weight, restraint, warmth, withholding. You cannot see the view; the house is keeping it. A piece of the ridge, squared and warmed by the sun. **One-true-form anchors:** honeyed Lueders limestone ashlar; thin flat roof plane; ipe soffit; deep cool shadow line; the recessed dark entry; blackened-steel door edge.

HERO 2 — THE COURTYARD (the still center)

Vantage: standing within the courtyard, under the edge of the covered loggia, looking across the open center toward the west and great-room side, sky open overhead. **What's in frame:** the outdoor room at the heart of the house. Honeyed limestone paving, walls of honeyed limestone and warm-grey board-formed concrete around it, the ipe-soffit loggia running the four sides on slender blackened-steel posts, deep overhang shadow. A still, dark reflecting element (water) mirroring the sky and the warm stone. Through the far (west) glass wall, the great room and the falling view read faintly beyond. Doors from the bedroom wings visible around the edge; this is the crossroads. **Light & mood:** golden hour, softened and cooled here, because the courtyard sits in the acoustic and thermal shadow of its own masses. A wedge of warm western light spills across one honeyed wall or the water; the rest is calm shade. Silence you can feel. Ando's discipline: sky, stone, water, and the cut of light. The still center, warm-toned but serene. **One-true-form anchors:** same honeyed limestone; warm-grey board-formed concrete walls; ipe loggia soffit on blackened-steel posts; still dark water; the west glass wall beyond.

HERO 3 — THE GREAT ROOM AT SUNSET (facing west through glass)

Vantage: from inside the great room, looking west through the full-height low-iron glass wall, out under the deep covered porch, to the falling Hill Country land and the whole western sky on fire. **What's in frame:** the long living and dining space. Warm chalk-cream plastered walls, wide-plank warm oak floor, a board-formed concrete hearth mass anchoring the room, Vervoordt-calm feet-up furnishing (linen, un-dyed wool, patinated bronze, low and soft). The glass wall in slender blackened steel, near-frameless. Beyond it, the deep ipe-soffit porch in shadow, then the ridge falling away west, then the sunset, sky to horizon, the reason for the whole house. **Light & mood:** the peak moment. Horizontal golden-to-amber western light pouring *in* under the overhang, raking across the warm oak floor and the concrete hearth, the room glowing, the sky outside going gold and rose over deep blue. The overhang keeps the glare off the glass; the last minutes reach in low. Release, arrival, warmth, the house giving everything it withheld at the road. This frame must feel like a family's favorite hour. **One-true-form anchors:** low-iron glass in blackened steel; ipe-soffit porch beyond; board-formed concrete hearth; warm oak floor; warm chalk-cream plaster; the western sunset as the light source.

HERO 4 — THE WATER AT THE DOOR (the threshold)

Vantage: close and intimate at the entry recess, in the shade of the deep overhang, looking along the still water runnel toward the dark quiet door, with a slice of the bright west beyond. **What's in frame:** the long, still, dark-bottomed limestone water runnel at the threshold, running in the cool shadow of the overhang. Its mirror surface reflecting the warm ipe soffit above and the honeyed limestone wall beside it. The blackened-steel-and-glass door beyond, quiet and dark. A honed limestone lip where the water slips and makes its sound. The transition from hot bright outside to cool calm within. **Light & mood:** shade and edge-of-light. The runnel in cool overhang shadow; a blade of low western sun catching the far end of the water and igniting it, or throwing a warm reflection up onto the ipe soffit. Sound before sight: the frame should feel like the moment you *hear* the water on approach. Cool, still, threshold, welcome. Water doing what water does in this climate, cooling the air and catching the last light and marking the seam. **One-true-form anchors:** still dark limestone runnel; honeyed limestone wall; warm ipe soffit reflected; blackened-steel door; deep overhang shade against bright west.

5. Plan diagram

A plan diagram, to be drawn as a long crossing of plan and section:

- **Orientation:** north up. The **long axis runs north–south along the ridge crest**; the house presents its long faces east (arrival, uphill) and west (view, sunset, downhill).
- **The datum:** a single long limestone wall and mass along the crest, reading as the house's spine on the east side.
- **The split:** the courtyard cut into the *center* of the plan, open to the sky, roughly square, ringed by a covered loggia (deep overhang, marked as a shaded band on all four sides).
- **The four zones around the courtyard:**
 - **West** (downhill, sunset): the Great Room, living/dining/kitchen as one long bar across the west face, glass wall, deep covered porch (portal) running its full length outside the glass. Kitchen at the north end, living at the south end, concrete hearth marked.
 - **South:** Primary Suite wing reaching south off the courtyard: bedroom, bath, private walled shower court (a small open-air room).

- **North:** Secondary / Kids' wing: two to three bedrooms, shared baths, flex or bunk room, along the north arm.
- **East** (uphill, arrival): Entry & Service: the water threshold at the door (mark the runnel), mudroom and drop-zone, pantry, laundry, garage buried into the stone mass and into the ridge.
- **Circulation:** show the covered loggia around the courtyard as the primary path, with arrows from the bedroom wings crossing the loggia edge (past the water) to reach the great room. Minimal interior corridors. **The courtyard is the crossroads.**
- **Water:** mark two water elements, the **threshold runnel** at the east entry, and a **still reflecting element** along the courtyard or west edge.
- **The section note (draw as a small companion section, east to west):** closed stone east / courtyard open to sky in the middle / great room plus deep west overhang / land falling away west to the sunset. Show the deep overhang and its shadow; note the overhang tuned to cut the low western and summer sun while admitting the last horizontal sunset light and the low winter sun.

6. The rules that keep it one house (for every downstream seat)

1. **One palette, everywhere:** honeyed Lueders limestone, warm-grey board-formed concrete, blackened steel, warm ipe soffits, low-iron glass, still dark water, warm chalk-cream plaster and warm oak inside. No material appears that is not on this list.
2. **One register: warm and lived-in.** Glass and steel hold the crisp modern geometry; stone and wood hold the warmth. Every surface a hand or foot touches is warm. Never chalk-pale, never austere, never cold.
3. **One light logic:** late golden hour, low horizontal **western** sun, unless a frame explicitly needs another hour. The west is always the bright side; the east and courtyard hold the cool shade.
4. **One diagram:** closed stone east / open glass west / courtyard hinge in the center / water at the east threshold / deep overhang cutting the western sun. Every frame must be reconcilable to this plan. No window, mass, or opening that the diagram would not allow.
5. **The sunset is the clock.** The house is designed around one hour of the day. Honor it.

6. **The DNA, verbatim, survives:** a *courtyard* house (the still center, passed through to reach everywhere); on a *ridge* in the *Texas Hill Country*; long views *west* for the *sunset*; *limestone and glass*; *deep roof overhangs*; *water near the door*. If a rendering or a page loses one of these, it has lost the house.