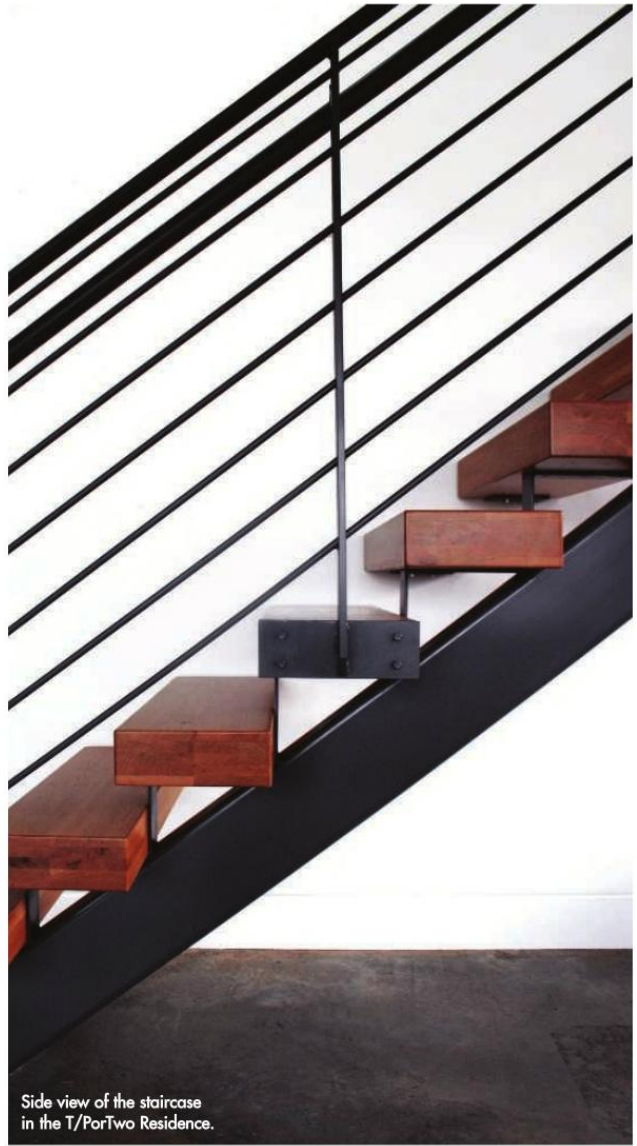




Detail view of the connections of the stair treads to the side wall.



Side view of the staircase in the T/Portwo Residence.

Photos © Wiebenson & Dorman Architects PC/JT Roy

Washingtonian Detail Award

T/Portwo Residence Staircase

Washington, VA

Wiebenson & Dorman Architects PC

Structural Engineers: JGK Structural Engineers

Interior Designers: Carey Reid Kirk Inc.

General Contractors: Hampton & Massie Construction

“This one,” said juror Natalye Appel, FAIA, LEED AP, “uses simple, almost off-the-shelf elements, but is detailed so elegantly.”

For a weekend house in Rappahannock County, Virginia, **Wiebenson & Dorman Architects PC** looked to vernacular buildings for inspiration: barns, lookout towers, and old farmhouses and slave quarters. The stair’s material vocabulary is drawn from these



Staircase and kitchen in the T/PorTwo Residence.

Photo © Wiebenson & Dorman Architects PC/JT Roy

same sources—the thick wood treads recall the wood studs of older buildings (larger and more roughly hewn than modern dimensional lumber such as the 2x4), while the black steel structure and connectors speak directly to the work of rural blacksmiths.

In contrast, the basic configuration of the stair—single stringer with treads cantilevered to either side, with

metal railings following the diagonal of the stair—pulls from mid-20th-century Modernism. In a subtle diversion from the mid-century standard, however, the architects included a steel cover plate at the exposed ends of treads where there are guardrail posts. On the wall side of the stair, the treads are held back from the wall by black steel angles, providing structural stability and a bit of aesthetic interest visible mostly when one actually uses the stairs. The thickness of the treads also deals with the safety code restrictions on open risers (less than four inches remains open).

The marvel of this stair is the combination of historic materiality and modern form, a sort of mash-up creating something new and beautiful in its own right. The jurors noted that the stair “almost seems obvious in its simplicity and elegance,” but that they couldn’t recall seeing a stair quite like it previously.

Unrelated to the stairway, this competition entry was noted for having one of the most dramatic “before” shots: a photo of a house engulfed in flames. The owners, having determined that razing the pre-existing house and building new was the only viable option, donated it to the Sperryville Volunteer Fire Department. It was burned to the ground, eliminating landfill waste while providing live training for the firemen and unique entertainment for the owners, friends, and neighbors. It seems that, if architects love stairs, everyone loves a good fire—at least one that’s controlled and for a good cause! 🏠



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