

## SCOOTER HOUSE



A CHARMINGLY SIMPLE BACKYARD STRUCTURE IN THE CITY IS ACHIEVED THROUGH AN ADMIRABLE ECONOMY OF MEANS.

TEXT LESLIE JEN  
PHOTO BRIAN O'BRIAN

A relatively new presence on the Canadian scene, O'Brian Muehleisen Architecture Studio (OMAS) is making a name for itself around the world. With most of its work thus far in the United States, the firm is currently toiling away on projects as far flung as Costa Rica and Ireland. Canada was introduced to the practice in 2011 through the firm's inclusion in *Twenty + Change*, a biennial exhibition and publication series focused on the promotion of emerging Canadian designers in architecture, landscape architecture and urban design.

With its origins in New York, the firm expanded operations when co-principal Brian O'Brian relocated with his family to Ontario in 2010. While partner Carl Muehleisen continues to run the Manhattan office, O'Brian steers operations north of the border, tucked away on charming Gilead Street in Toronto. Despite the distance and often challenging commuting schedule, the former classmates and architectural graduates from the New Jersey Institute of Technology work better together than apart, and have no plans to go their separate ways.

In stark contrast to OMAS's work on high-end residential projects—mostly posh apartment penthouses and luxe carriage houses—the Scooter House is the most elemental of forms. Measuring a mere 7'9" x 10', this is a

**ABOVE** A VESPA RESTS ON THE SCOOTER HOUSE'S LOWERED DOOR, WHICH DOES DOUBLE DUTY AS A WORK PLATFORM FOR THE OWNER TO INDULGE IN HIS HOBBY.

modest backyard shed for a Vespa enthusiast in Toronto's east end. Housing two handsome scooters and a couple of road bikes, the structure features a sizeable door that lowers via a manually operated winch to form a functioning platform for all the tinkering that client Joe Park does on his prized collection.

O'Brian basically detailed a kit-of-parts strategy for Park to build on his own. Costs were kept to a minimum with simple wood-frame construction, cedar shingle cladding and an asphalt shingled roof; the entire budget was \$3,000 including materials and labour. Instead of glass, inexpensive polycarbonate panels form a band of clerestory windows that permit daylight to enter the work/storage space, eliminating the need for artificial light. The Scooter House is a fitting counterpoint; a dialogue is established as the height and slope of its roof mimics the roof pitch of the main house, and its form creates a complementary termination at the back of the garden.

The humble quality of this tight little structure charms with its honesty and simplicity; and in true man-cave fashion, a taxidermied deer head is mounted on the back wall of the Scooter House, evoking the rusticity of an iconic hunting lodge in the Great White North—so, so apropos for one of OMAS's first projects in Canada. **CA**