



MARTIN BOATHOUSE AND BRIDGE, AUSTIN

# Natural Connection

by STEPHEN ROSS



OVER two decades, Arthur Andersson, AIA, and Chris Wise, AIA, of Andersson-Wise Architects, have developed a strategy for designing projects by drawing inspiration from the cultural and physical imagery of their context. Through client and design team collaboration, the firm's work seeks to uncover and understand the complexities of each site. The investigation inevitably reinforces both the physical and emotional connections already established in a locale, and ultimately yields a new destination of symbolic importance to this intersection of client and context. The Martin Boathouse and Bridge project embodies the success of the firm's strategic approach to design solutions.

As the family's new residence was under construction in the hills of West Austin, the Martins asked Andersson-Wise to design a half-mile pathway from the site of their house across a deep ravine to an opposing ridge and eventually leading down to a boathouse sited on Lake Austin below. The client's program required convenient means of access to the lake with minimal intervention on the surrounding landscape. These criteria, coupled with the existing texture and terrain, compelled the architects to consider a pedestrian link rather than a mechanical connection. This sensitive orientation towards the immediate context allowed the architects to create a series of subtle, mediated responses that are at once delicate yet dramatic and experientially rich.

A 200-foot-long wood-and-steel cable-stayed suspension bridge was designed to span the ravine and thus afford an easy path to the opposite ridge. At this point, the ridge drops 100 feet and is negotiated via a stone staircase to the shores of Lake Austin and the boathouse below.

The boathouse is a two-story prefabricated steel grid infilled with ipe wood window frames, floors, walls, and ceiling. The barge-delivered steel structure is welded onto pylon supports which rest atop submerged rocks. The steel is painted with a protective zinc coating in a sympathetic hue that allows for a gentle visual transition between lake and sky. The 800-square-foot structure's first level provides covered space for two slips (for a boat and a personal watercraft) and a minimal amount of dry

**CLIENT** Tom and Mary Martin  
**ARCHITECT** Andersson-Wise Architects  
**PROJECT TEAM** Arthur W. Andersson, AIA; F. Christian Wise, AIA; Jim Moore, AIA; Gregory Brooks  
**CONTRACTOR** Four Corners Construction  
**CONSULTANTS** Architectural Engineers Collaborative (structural); Fabric Structures (bridge engineer)  
**PHOTOGRAPHER** Paul Bardagjy