

Manhattan gallery owner Sean Kelly represents Marina Abramović, known for her haunting performance pieces, and more than a dozen other artists whose works arouse powerful emotions. He is no stranger to theatricality.

So almost a decade ago, when Sean and his wife, Mary, bought a 16-acre plot north of New York City because of its spectacular Hudson Valley views, he envisioned building a house that, like a work of art, would reveal itself gradually and in unexpected ways. From the outside it would have the ephemeral quality of a cloud passing by. It would be a structure, he says, "that wouldn't quite come into focus, that would almost dissolve when you looked at it against the sky."

Inside, he wanted rooms that would make the most of the vista, sometimes by keeping it tantalizingly out of sight. The entry hall, for instance, should be windowless—"a brutal space," Sean says, producing an effect of delayed gratification, giving the views from the living and dining areas extra impact.

The local broker who sold the couple the land told them that, because of its steep topography and rocky ground, it would be exceedingly difficult to build on. "Reverse psychology," says Sean, who relished the challenge of overcoming the site's design obstacles. He and Mary picnicked on the property, getting to know the terrain, discussing how to orient the house, and watching storms roll in across the valley while their terrier chased squirrels.

The pair also traveled to Iceland, Japan, Switzerland, and other countries to look at architecture—but they generally avoided taking pictures of buildings they liked, since their goal was not to copy particular details but to capture feelings. "We didn't have a photo bank," Sean says. "We had a memory bank."

The obvious choice to design the house was their longtime friend Toshiko Mori, the Manhattan architect and

Right, from top: A work on paper by Rebecca Horn is displayed against walnut paneling in the living area; the chair is by Oskar Zieta. The Kellys' terriers, Molly (left) and Finnegan, in a reading corner with wicker seating by Marc Newson and a Poul Kjærholm PK 64 cocktail table.

Opposite, from top: The living area's Hilton sofas by Minotti, with pillows by Judy Ross Textiles, face a pair of PK 57 cocktail tables by Kjærholm, one topped with Jeff Koons's Balloon Dog porcelain plate; the painting is by Callum Innes. The suspended sofa by Kjærholm and the Antony sconce by Serge Mouille are both 1950s; beneath the framed work, *Void* by Gormley, is a circa-1940 Penguin Donkey bookshelf by Ernest Race and an African sculpture.

