



Poetry on the Edge

House Dra (named after the first three letters of the client's name) hovers conspicuously over a steep ledge in Vienna's 16th District. It was designed by a happy band of young Viennese architects called Querkraft (roughly translated as "independent thinking"), who blatantly defied a form-follows-function prescription for an open-minded client willing to try something new. House Dra was squeezed ingeniously into its tiny, seemingly unbuildable lot: Concrete trucks couldn't even get to the site, so the architects opted for a simple steel frame, which they willfully subverted by applying an asymmetrical sheathing of prefab aluminum panels that appear to be scored by randomly angled joint lines—not unlike the accidental facial scars of Edward Scissorhands.

Broad balconies project from each of the main floors,

extending the living spaces through floor-to-ceiling walls of glass. The outer skin wraps around the balconies like horse blinders to provide a sense of enclosure. "We wanted the clients to feel as if they were inside the house even when they were sitting out on the terraces," says Jakob Dunkl, one of Querkraft's four partners. Another, Peter Sapp, compares the outer cladding to a woven net: "We take the landscape, we take the aluminum skin, and we make a pullover for the house."

Out of a tight situation that might have stymied others, Querkraft created an unexpectedly lateral solution: a house that rises above and even gathers strength from the limitations of its site. As Dunkl explains, "Ninety percent of our work may be functional, but ten percent—the most important part—is poetic." ■