1. Name of Property
Historic name: Douglas, James and Jean, House
Other names/site number: Richard Meier’s Douglas House
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location
Street & number: 3490 South Lake Shore Drive
City or town: Friendship Township
State: MI
County: Emmet
Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets
the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I
recommend that this property be considered significant at the following
level(s) of significance:

_x_ national ___ statewide ___ local
Applicable National Register Criteria:
___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: Date

Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain: ) ______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the Keeper</th>
<th>Date of Action</th>
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private: [x]

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

Building(s) [x]

District

Site

Structure

Object
The Douglas House  
Emmet County, MI

Name of Property  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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<th>Noncontributing</th>
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</table>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register  **0**

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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```

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

```

```
7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement (subcategory: Moderne)

________________________
________________________
________________________

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Wood pilings (multiple telephone poles hammered into the earth)
Walls: Tongue and groove 3 and ¼” wide solid, clear, redwood siding
Roof: Flat, covered with rubber-like sealant, topped with redwood decking areas
Other: West elevation foundation covering: Plywood sheathed

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph
The Douglas House is a four-story, bright white, wood and glass modern home designed by influential American architect Richard Meier. This northern Michigan residence dramatically rests on a steep slope on the shore of Lake Michigan. The house was designed for the Douglas family from Grand Rapids, Michigan, who sought out the architect in hopes of building their own version of Meier’s earlier Smith House (1967) in Connecticut. The overall form of the Douglas House is that of a rectangle set on end into the side of a steep slope. The base of the house is primarily the same width and depth as the top floor. Within the house, each floor is accessed by one stairwell at the northeast section of the home. Its flat roof and upright rectangular form are punctuated by a cantilevered stairway on the western (lakeside) elevation and its fourth floor entrance bridge on the eastern (roadside) elevation. The exterior walls and decking are finished in unblemished redwood and the foundation is made up of a series of telephone pole-like pilings hammered into the earth. In signature Meier style, all exterior and interior walls are white with only the decking left
untreated to reveal a natural patina. Historically, though, the quarter-round stairwell was originally covered with an electric pink paint – the only color, other than white, chosen for the interior pallet.

Narrative Description

The Douglas House fronts South Lake Shore Drive (also known as Michigan route M-119), a winding, tree-lined road along the bluffs and high ground along the eastern coast of Lake Michigan. The Douglas House sits on the western half of an approximately 3.25-acre lot. The lot is divided by the narrow and winding M-119 or South Lake Shore Drive roadway, which is known as the “Tunnel of Trees” because of the large trees arcing over its narrow width for many miles between Harbor Springs and Cross Village. The route has been designated by the State of Michigan as a Scenic Heritage Route, providing protection from otherwise standard road engineering requirements in the interest of maintaining the highly picturesque character and setting.

The house is set back from the street, with only its fourth floor and entrance bridge slightly visible to passersby. The 3.25-acre lot is wooded and divided by the road. The lot’s shape is rectangular separated by M-119, with roughly 60% on the west or lake side of the road, where the house is located. The west side of the lot is primarily a steep slope to the lake, with the exception of a small flat area just west of M-119 where vehicles can park and where the entrance bridge spans the gap from the house to the top of the slope. Two vehicles can park along the west side of M-119 on a small gravel driveway less than twenty-five feet from the entrance to the home’s bridge. There is neither a garage nor significant outbuilding associated with the house, only a tennis court and small storage shed on the east side of M-119 which mimics the house’s simple, angular box shape. Similar to the house, the shed and tennis courts sit as far back on the east side of M-119 as the house sits on the west side. The topography on the east side of M-119 is more flat and accommodating to the shed and tennis court.

Entrance to the house is made via a bridge connecting the slope to the fourth story of the home. The roadside (eastern) elevation is primarily flat and non-descript, dotted with a series of square and rectangular black metal casement and stationary windows.

The flat-roofed home has four stories of living space and is perched on a steep slope overlooking the shore of Lake Michigan. Below the first floor is the operations room, housing the HVAC, water/electrical services and storage. The first floor contains the dining room, kitchen, laundry and one bedroom with a full bath. The second floor includes the living room, wet bar and master bedroom. The third floor contains three bedrooms, a central full bath and an open, built-in work desk overlooking the living room. The fourth floor primarily serves as the home’s entry from the bridge. It offers the utility of a small beverage refrigerator, two closets and access to the dumb waiter which services each of the four floors. The fourth floor also offers a large exterior deck space with spectacular southern, western and northern views of Lake Michigan.
The Douglas House

Above the fourth story is a small, private upper (open and without railings), deck space. The house rests on a series of wood pilings (telephone poles) hammered into the earth. It is barely visible from the roadside (east elevation), a brief glimpse of the fourth story framed by trees and shrubs, but stands out like a modern art object from the shore and the lake. It is surrounded by its original blanket of cedars, conifers and other indigenous trees to northern Michigan.

The exterior walls are finished in white-painted, clear, vertical tongue and groove redwood siding. The decking is also redwood. The façade (west elevation) is composed primarily of a grid pattern of double-paned windows. The foundation’s wood piling supports are covered by white plywood sheathing bent at the northern and southern elevations in order to form a curved base to the whole structure. The home’s main entrance is via a forty-three-foot bridge on the eastern elevation. Entrance is gained on the fourth floor with a two-flight walk to the living room, then down one more flight to access the kitchen and dining rooms. Three of the five bedrooms are on the third floor, which also contains the only “public” bathroom. The rounded corner stairwell is at the northeast corner and contains rectangular lights, at each level, to allow for natural illumination.

The interior of the house reflects Meier’s penchant for simplicity and streamlined design. Furnishings consist of those designed by Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Alvar Aalto and Meier himself. Original to the house were two authentic (Cassina) Le Corbusier LC4 lounges, three LC2 armchairs, two LC1 sling chairs, a built-in sofa and burled maple dining table (the latter both designed by Meier), ten Mies Van Der Rohe cantilever cane dining chairs, five wooden Aalto 66 desk chairs and a large, white modern coffee table also designed by Meier.

True to its original plan, the home has no significant outbuildings associated with it. Vehicles were and continue to be parked off the road, as no garage or guest house was every constructed. The rectangular white wood and glass-grid structure is a modified version of Meier’s earlier (1967) Smith House in Darien, Connecticut. However, its breathtaking setting, nautical-inspired touches (steamship smokestacks, exterior ship lights and curved-glass deck windows) and complex site adaptations make it unique and consequently one of the great American homes of its time.

The base of the exterior chimney is white-painted brick topped with three silver toned metal ship-like smokestacks. Viewing the home from the shore (western elevation), gives one the sense of looking at an art object framed by the beauty of the green cliffside forest.

The property is in excellent condition and has been painstakingly restored by its current owners. The structure has not been altered from its original design and footprint. All rooms and almost all furnishings remain intact. All bathroom fixtures and hardware are original as are the kitchen stove and double oven. The original Sub-Zero refrigerator, KitchenAid dishwasher and trash compactor have only recently been replaced due to age.

8. Statement of Significance
The Douglas House  
Emmet County, MI

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [ ] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [x] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- **Architecture**
- 
- 
- 

**Period of Significance**

1971 - 1973
The Douglas House
Name of Property

Emmet County, MI
County and State

Significant Dates
1973

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Meier, Richard

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Built in 1971-73, the Douglas House meets national register criterion C at the national level of significance as a masterwork of renowned architect Richard Meier and as a widely recognized outstanding example of modern architecture. Richard Meier has achieved global recognition for his modern architectural designs. He has received numerous awards for his more than fifty years of work. Consistently modern and almost always in signature white, Meier’s unique geometric designs reflect a timeless simplicity and beauty that stands out among his peers. The Douglas House not only reflects his hallmark modern style but also contains furnishings created by Meier himself (living room sofa, coffee table and dining room table). Most of Meier’s noted works are commercial or public buildings. Very few of his residential works have achieved global recognition. The Douglas House is one of those remarkable residential achievements. The Douglas House is an excellent example of modern architectural design. Its clean geometric form, simplicity and all white surfaces clearly reflect the modern style. Its dramatic location, a cliffside perch on the Lake Michigan shoreline, only adds to its dramatic appearance. It reflects the basic premise of the modern architectural movement in that it marries technological advancement with simplicity of design. The modern style of the Douglas House is enhanced by its amazing setting. Meier differentiated the house from its surroundings, yet through his use color and fenestration, he also
pulled the outside in. His placement of wood, glass and steel yielded a beautifully modern home that is not at odds with its surroundings. Though not yet fifty years old, the home meets the register’s exceptional significance requirement for less than-fifty-year-old properties because of its impact on modern architecture.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Richard Meier was born in 1934 in Newark, New Jersey. He pursued a degree in architecture from Cornell University and began his career working for such architectural powerhouses as Skidmore, Owings and Merrill as well as Marcel Breuer. His approach to architectural design has remained consistent through the years: clean, crisp lines reflecting the rectangular planes of the Modernist movement. Following the lead of such mentors as Le Corbusier (a.k.a. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris), Meier keeps ornamentation to a minimum in his homes and furnishings. Always conscious of the environments in which his projects are built, he incorporates the surroundings into his designs. Light and the natural environment, though seemingly contrasting with his hallmark white, work together to form a compatibility from their difference – both from the inside looking out as well as outside looking in – neither one less important than the other. He has remained consistent in this design concept from his earliest work.

Two years after starting his own firm in 1963, he was commissioned to design the Smith House in Darien, Connecticut. The Smith House, with its unusual full glass façade, set a standard that Meier continues to rely upon to the present: white, box-shaped modern structures filled with large expanses of gridded glass. The Douglas House is a direct descendent of the Smith House. Though also on a large body of water and barrowing key design concepts, it is a new and improved version adapted to a much more complex landscape. The Douglas House reflects Meier’s growth in design and understanding from completing Smith in 1967 to beginning Douglas in 1971. Furnishings are less chunky and dated and more classic and rounded. Levels are more flowing than layered and the masterful adaptation of its cliffside perch makes it truly remarkable. Light and space, though abundant in both, are more dramatic and open in the Douglas House. From its refined design to its dramatic location, the Douglas House set the standard for Meier’s future work.

The Douglas House was designed as a permanent residence by noted architect Richard Meier for James and Jean Douglas and their three children. Jim Douglas was transitioning to a slower pace of life in beautiful Harbor Springs from downstate Grand Rapids where he had run the trucking company his father had established. The couple contacted Meier after seeing pictures of Meier’s earlier Smith House in Darien, Connecticut. They loved the clean lines and modern design of the home and wanted to duplicate it in northern Michigan. Planning and construction began in 1971 and was completed in 1973.
Jim and Jean Douglas had originally planned to build the house on a lot in the upscale community of L’Arbre Croche (the Crooked Tree). L’Arbre Croche is nestled on Little Traverse Bay just south of the city of Harbor Springs. The gated community had strict rules for home design and landscaping. The neighborhood strove to keep the lots within its borders as natural as possible. Rules and regulations enforced a natural environment with earth-toned exteriors, minimal tree removal and walking paths throughout. This was all well and good with the Douglases. However, when they presented their plans to the review board, they were informed that the house, with all its glass and multiple levels was fine, but the exterior could not be white.

The Douglases and Meier were not deterred. The house had to be white, so they would find another lot. The rejection by L’Arbre Croche made all the difference. The Douglases found another lot roughly ten miles north on Lake Michigan. Though it looked unbuildable because of its steep slope from the road down to the water, Meier and the Douglases took on the challenge. Using a pile driver, Meier’s team built a stable foundation by pounding twenty-eight telephone pole-like pilings into the earth. Unlike the Smith House, in which one enters from the first floor, the Douglas House entrance is on the fourth floor. ¹

Richard Meier has been an architect for more than fifty years. In that span he has designed such acclaimed structures as the Getty Center in Los Angeles, California, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, and The Hague City Hall in The Hague, Netherlands. In 1984 he was awarded the Pritzker Prize, in 1997 he was awarded the AIA Gold Medal and in 2008 he won the Gold Medal in architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.


In 2007 the American Institute of Architects (AIA) named the Douglas House one of America’s Favorite Architectural Structures. Of the 150 honored buildings, only twelve were homes. The Douglas House shares this honor with the likes of The White House, Monticello and Falling Water among other notables. Only two structures were from Michigan. The other Michigan honoree was

The Douglas House  
Emmet County, MI

York and Sawyer’s Gothic Revival Legal Research Building on the campus of the University of Michigan. This level of recognition by architecture professionals, underscores the significance of the Douglas House.

The Douglas House has been recognized for its “ahead of its time” modern design in combination with its amazing cliffside location by numerous books and magazines including Architectural Digest (December 1988), American Masterworks: The Twentieth-Century House and even the cover of 1974’s Global Architecture.

Adding to its significance is the fact that the house has basically remained intact after more than forty years. No additions or modifications to the physical structure have been made. Also, there have been no changes to room uses or layouts.

The Douglas House is worthy of recognition because of its significant modern architectural design as well as its status as one of the most celebrated residences designed by architect Richard Meier.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)


Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____ previously determined eligible by the National Register
____ designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  #
____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #
The Douglas House
Emmet County, MI

Name of Property
County and State

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: McCarthy, Michael H. and Myers, Marcia K., property owners

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ______________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property __3.25 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: ______________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
1. Latitude: 45.30.03.191 N Longitude: 85.05.52.086 W

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

- NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:
The Douglas House

2. Zone: ___________________ Easting: ___________ Northing: ___________

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Parcel ID: 06-11-24-200-009

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the Douglas House, situated on its Lake Michigan lot and the adjoining lot on the east side of South Lake Shore Drive including the tennis court and small outbuilding. The parcel of the original site north of the Douglas House, containing a guest house (older and not designed by Richard Meier), has been excluded because it has been subdivided and does not contribute to the significance of the Douglas House.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: _Garon Gopigian_ ____________________________
orGANIZATION: _Historic Preservationist_ ______________________
stREET & NUMBER: _5568 Stanhope_ ___________________________
cITY OR TOWN: _W. Bloomfield_ ___________ STATE: _MI_ ___________ ZIP CODE: _48322-1220_ 
e-MAIL: _oldhouse1@earthlink.net_ __________________________
tELEPHONE: _248.396.4664_ ________________________________
dATE: _January 23, 2015, v3 April 12, 2015_ __________________

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
The Douglas House

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: The Douglas House

City or Vicinity: Harbor Springs (Friendship Township)

County: Emmet
State: Michigan

Photographer: Garon Gopigian

Date Photographed: July 7, 2013

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 27 – Façade, (east elevation) bridge to main entrance, north end of house [camera facing west]
2 of 27 – East elevation, south end of house [camera facing southwest]
3 of 27 – East elevation, entrance bridge to fourth floor [camera facing west]
4 of 27 – Second floor looking up to fourth [camera facing east]
5 of 27 – Second floor looking up to fourth [camera facing east]
6 of 27 – West elevation facing Lake Michigan [camera facing east]
7 of 27 – Southwest elevation, fourth floor deck [camera facing southwest]
8 of 27 – Fourth floor deck taken from interior [camera facing west]
9 of 27 – West elevation, fourth floor deck [camera facing east]
10 of 27 – Fourth floor looking down to second floor living room [camera facing down, west]
11 of 27 – Fourth floor entry [camera facing south]
12 of 27 – Southwest elevation, fourth floor deck chimney stacks [camera facing southwest]
13 of 27 – Third floor looking onto second floor living room [camera facing north]
14 of 27 – Third floor child’s room [camera facing east]
15 of 27 – Third floor children’s and guest bath room [camera facing east]
The Douglas House

Emmet County, MI

Name of Property: The Douglas House

County and State: Emmet County, MI

Sections 9-end page 16