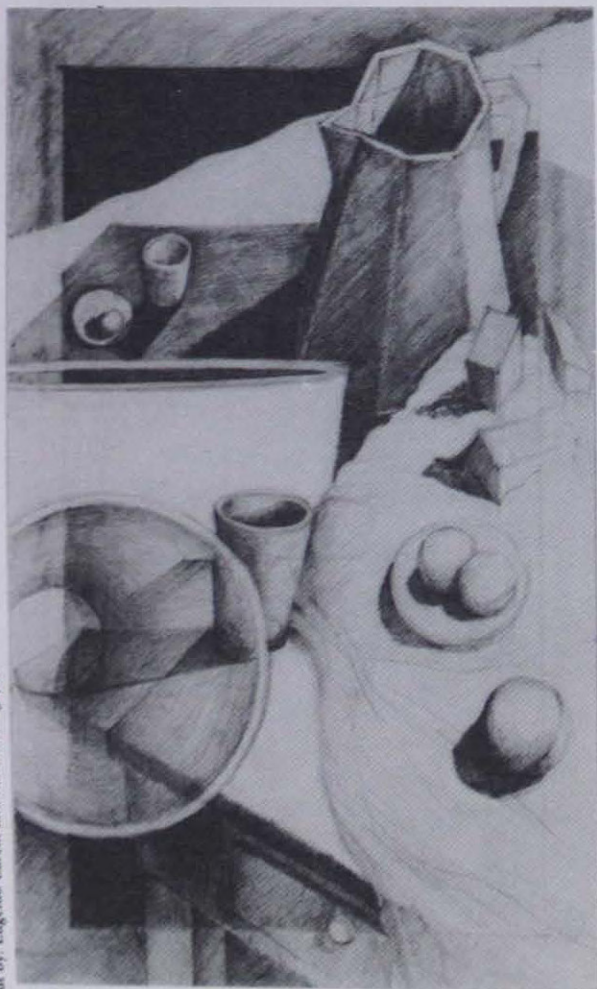


HOUSEPLACE



L'essence d'un édifice ne consiste pas en ses murs et toit mais de l'espace qu'ils définissent. A partir de cette citation de Lao Tzu, Eugenio Carelli explore l'aspect métaphysique et physique des maisons.

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Layout by: Eugenio Carelli and Marianne Nguyen

All things have an inherent inner quality.

It is an intangible inner essence which is unique to each thing and is to be found at its source. This inner quality reveals itself through physical presence. There exists an indivisible affinity between the essence and presence of a thing. Character, the uniqueness and identity of things stems from this inner quality.

The oceans, trees, mountains, seasons, and light are all manifestations of the all encompassing spirit of Nature, shadows of the Great Being. They are natural things, each beholding and outwardly revealing their particular inner quality. The infinite manifestations of these and other qualities given to us by nature become the framework of our reality. By attempting to come to terms with the inner and outer structures of natural things, i.e. form, we can arrive at the sense of harmony which prevails in Nature.

As human beings we are also manifestations of Nature. Collectively, we possess an inner quality which is unique to us and which reveals itself physically through our presence and actions. The objects we create embody this "humaneness" to a great extent.

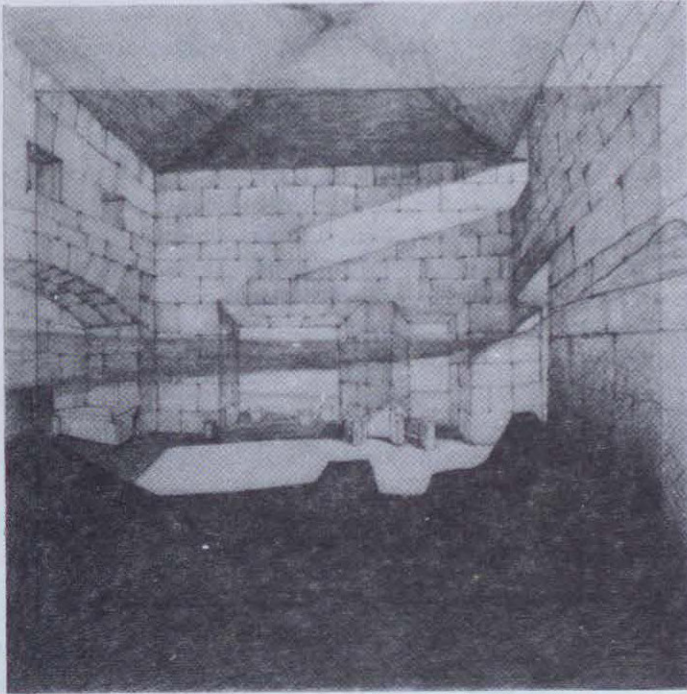
A man-made thing stems from our thoughts and actions and brings us into harmony with the reality of things and Nature. It is born from the desire to be a certain way, to enter into a rapport with things and Nature in a certain way. A man-made thing achieves its most articulate form in lyrically fulfilling the desire which brought it forth. Through it, we come to terms with nature as a giving of form to our awareness and aspirations.

A house is above all a thing, an intensely human instrument vested in allowing us a place to dwell. In the making of a house, we must be sensitive to the fact that along with anything we create, we bring into being a quality which is unique to that thing. This quality is quite important because it has never existed before. A house becomes a gathering of those qualities which will allow and help us to dwell. We thus experience a house through the immeasurable qualities it reveals to us.





Eugenio Carelli



"The reality of the building does not consist of the four walls and roof but in the space within to be lived in."¹

Although Lao Tzu, the Chinese Taoist philosopher, wrote these words over two thousand years ago, the statement still holds true today. The reality of any building resides not in the physical elements themselves but, as Lao Tzu suggests, in something intangible in nature: the space within. It is the inner realm, the space and its inherent quality, created by the physical elements of the building. Hence the space between things and enclosed by them warrants as much attention as the things themselves.

The silent gestures of a house are to enclose and shelter a "space within" which will become a place of focus. Here, room is made so that we may dwell with a naturalness of being and so life may unfold. All the elements of a house move towards creating this inner realm which comes to behold the essence of the house. The reality of the house is in this "space within" to be inhabited. It will have achieved its inherent quality by virtue of the elements which enclose the space and what these impart to the space. In a broader sense, the inherent quality of an enclosed space is arrived at through what has been "gathered" by that space. By gathered we mean what has been allowed presence or been revealed within.

Topography, vegetation, sky, seasons, light and materials may be "gathered" by the space within. The nature of these things and their uniqueness to the immediate environment may be revealed in the space within. The way in which these elements are permitted to animate and presence a space, moves towards creating the quality of that space.

An enclosed space which has arrived at its inherent quality becomes a room. Louis Kahn states, "The room is the beginning of architecture."² It is intensely human and sensitive. Its light, structure, dimensions and elements are born from a human desire to dwell in a certain way. A room helps us to gain identity with one's self and with one's immediate world. A room which has truly "gathered" allows us to enter into a harmony with the reality of things and Nature. The integrity of a room rests in its ability to allow place for life to unfold and in its silent revealing of its intended use.

A house is the coming together of a variety of rooms vested in allowing us place so that we may dwell. There exists a natural rapport between these rooms. It is a tightly knit arrangement of parts which are held together by a common interest: to uphold a chosen and ever-evolving way of life. In coming together towards forming a whole, the inherent qualities of each room reinforce one another like friends.

The integrity of a house rests in its ability to allow us a place in which we may dwell with a naturalness of being. A house, in providing an inner realm which offers a continual renewal of spirit and regaining of identity to its inhabitants, tends towards strengthening life.

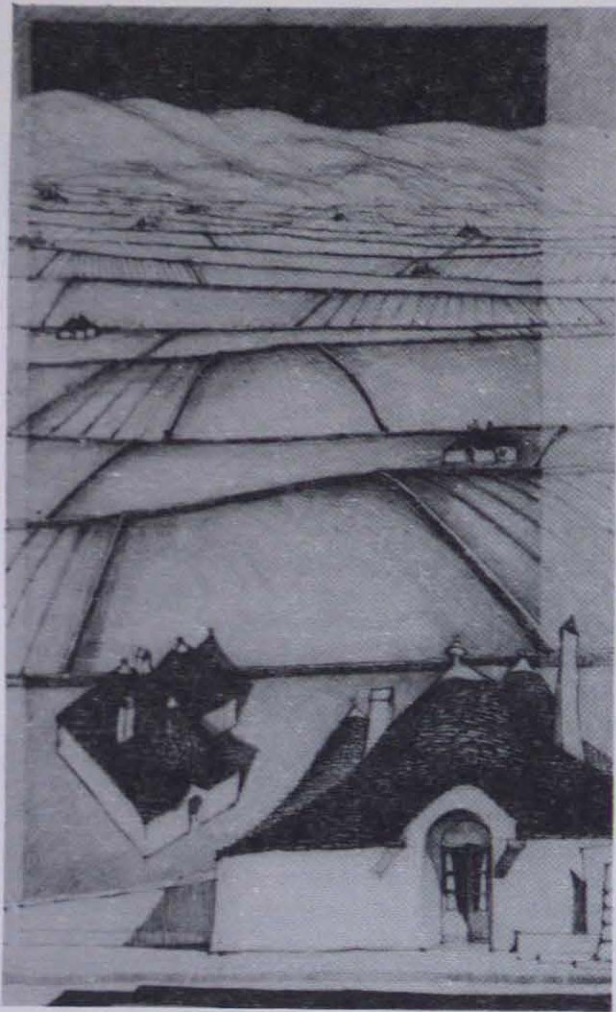


The essential nature of a house is to shelter.

A house actively engages itself in safekeeping the life it serves. It becomes a protective arm against the harshness of the elements and the given environment. In sheltering, a house fulfills the physical human need for warmth and dryness as well as the psychological need for a place of retreat from the public world. It comes to be a fixed point of reference within an environment about which we organize our daily lives. A house can thus be seen as a private inner realm enclosed by a protective filtering screen which gathers and reveals only those facets of the outer world that we wish to allow to inhabit our inner world.

The earliest forms of the house are the cave, tent and primitive hut. These structures illustrate an intuitive and immediate putting to use of things found in nature. Though these forms only crudely satisfy basic physical and psychological human needs, they shelter life and thereby allow it to persist.

The nature of the house is perhaps best revealed by the indigenous house — indigenous meaning native to a particu-



lar place. This type of house stems from the intuitive and rational application of things immediately at hand and given by nature. By using the materials and means readily available from the given place and by responding to the local topography, climate and social patterns, the house begins to take form. The indigenous house moves towards sheltering and safekeeping a way of life. This way of life stems from having come to terms with the reality of place and Nature. (The making of the house is in itself an expression of this coming to terms.) Thus, the indigenous house comes to stand not only as an expression of life unique to a given place, but it is life — life which has taken form.



A house gathers and reveals place.

Place is the totality of the given environment. Place consists of material presence, shape, colour, texture, and light which move to impart an immeasurable quality to a given place. As an encompassing, and multifaceted thing, a place has its particular inner essence which continually reveals itself outwardly through its physical presence. Place is what provides the unique, occasional, and potential waiting to be made known. The circumstance of place desires to play a role in the form of the house — it desires to be allowed presence in the space within.

Before any drawing of lines or laying of bricks, the reality and quality of place must be sensed. You must feel what is

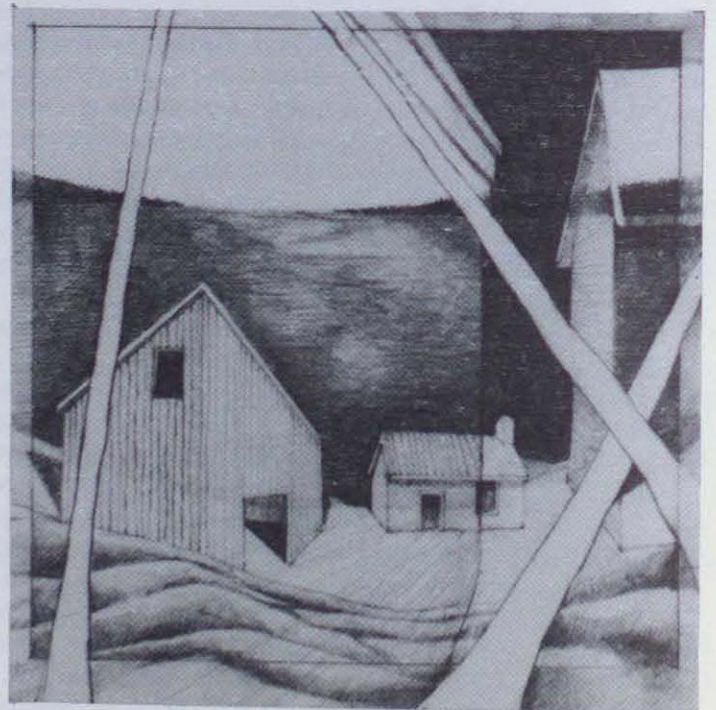
unique to this place you have chosen to build upon and know how the house will move towards revealing or expressing this uniqueness. There must be an intuitive knowing of how this space within, the inner realm we are enclosing, will gather and meet this place.

The reality of place is intimately tied with Nature, which forms the broad framework of our existence. Nature reveals itself in the inherent structure of things. It is the dynamic equilibrium which unites and holds all things on their course towards becoming. All things in nature are in a continual flux — in the process of flowing in some perpetual state of becoming. The unity and harmony of things resides in the integral order that is Nature, the oneness of this encompassing spirit.

Nature becomes our reality by manifesting itself in the circumstance of place, and by imparting to us wonder, awareness and understanding. The house should not lay dormant to this reality. The house, in revealing the reality of place and nature brings us into a harmony with the things around us; it will allow us to dwell in a meaningful way.

This earnest desire to confront and reveal the reality of place and nature is a phenomena not uncommon to North America. The works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Walt Whitman and the Group of Seven are perhaps the best examples. Their efforts quite evidently arise from a desire to give concrete form to an understanding or a coming to terms with the reality of nature as revealed through place.

It is through the making of buildings which express the reality of place and nature, that a truly Canadian Architecture will appear. Although a great disparity exists in the types of places and settlements within Canada, from immovable mountains to serene plains, from sparse coastal villages to large urban centres, it is the presence of nature as a great living spirit which unites them. It is through an image of vastness and infinite breadth as witnessed in the Canadian landscape, encompassing sky, low horizon, the largeness and



silence of space which surrounds and flows between things, that a prevailing sense of harmony and wholeness reveals itself. It is this prevailing spirit which is continually manifesting itself in a given place through natural and man-made things that should be gathered by the buildings we build. Architecture comes to be the lyrical play of revealing Nature in space and form, creating something unique and native to that place.

Through this awareness of place and Nature, the house in Canada will achieve a sense of purpose and meaning reaching beyond the bare fulfilling of material and practical needs. The house will tend towards satisfying spiritual and psychological needs: a sense of belonging, permanence, and freedom of being.



The house begins in the realization that there must be a place of focus where we are able to dwell.

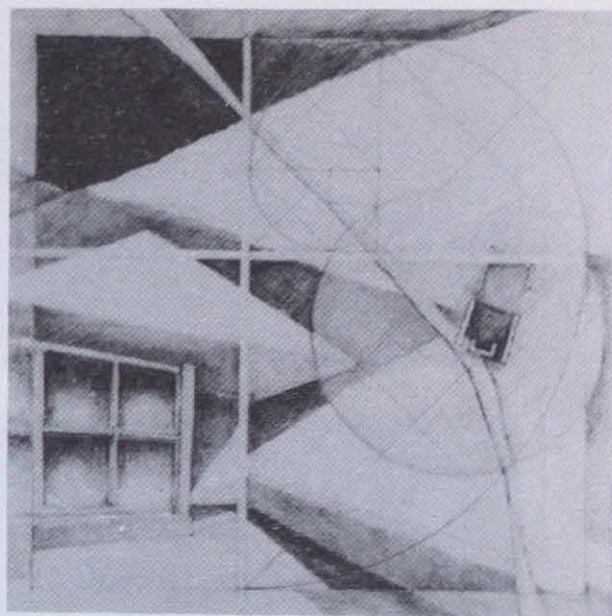
The house must allow room for a desired way of life to take place. It should aspire towards imparting a sense of beauty; a prevailing sense of harmony which would enable us to dwell meaningfully and poetically.

The house today, has come to be a most conscious vehicle for architectural expression and experimentation. It should, therefore, arise from a clarity of thought, not taste. There exists a tendency on the part of architects to seek expression through an indulgence in arbitrary gestures, in opulent use of materials for their surface value only, and in preconceived forms devoid of any affinity with the reality of place and nature. There is a broader tendency to cover up the construction and structure of the house through decorative styling of surfaces; there is no effort to reveal the inherent workings-within. Space is allowed to be either inarticulate and nebulous without pattern or structure, or on the other extreme a formalistic and strict imposition on life. Further, there is an absence of a sense of unity, and integrity of the house as a whole. If the house today is lacking of any real richness of spirit or quality, it is because architects do not take the time to appropriately and sincerely interpret the life which is seeking to be brought forth and given form.

The house should be true to its own nature; it must stem from its inner essence of desiring to shelter and safekeep. In following its own nature, the house will appear as a house and *be* a house. The house should respond to the realities of place and nature so that it will come to be a real and meaningful thing. Finally, the house should stem from life, giving life place to persist and unfold.

In the resolution of all the forces which play upon the form of a house, there must be a synthesis. This filtering of sorts enables one to arrive at an inner essence, a radiance not wholly defined. It moves, evolves and dances like a flame; one travels with it towards becoming a physical presence. Along the way the architect seizes opportunities to reveal this inner essence. In reality, he is giving physical form to nature and to life, which is giving rise to this house.

In perceiving the house as Form, as a vehicle for poetic



expression, we may learn something from St. Thomas Aquinas. He states that three conditions are needed for beauty to exist: wholeness, harmony and radiance. This insight may be extended to the making of a house which aspires towards beauty:

A house should be apprehended as one whole. It is to be seen as one thing discernable from all other things around it. The house should move towards expressing this oneness/wholeness.

A house should consist of a balance and harmony of parts, whereby one part may not be altered or removed without disrupting the whole. From the sense of the house as one, it reveals itself as consisting of a multiplicity and complexity of parts. The elements of a house, the roof, wall, window, and fireplace..., in creating a whole, should themselves be identifiable and articulate things.

A house should possess an inner radiance or essence unique to itself. It is that quality which makes the house exactly what it is. This quality, in revealing itself through the physical presence of the house allows the house to be a unique thing, distinct from all other houses. It is this intangible quality which we experience, behold, and remember. It is the same intangible essence the architect first sensed and desired to reveal through space and form.



NOTES:

1. Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Future of Architecture, An Organic Architecture*, New York, Horizon Press, 1953, p. 245.
2. Louis I. Kahn, *The Room, the Street and Human Agreement*, AIA Journal, September 1971, p. 33.

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4. *The Natural House*, Frank Lloyd Wright, Horizon Press Inc., New York, 1954.
5. *The Room, the Street and Human Agreement*, Louis I. Kahn, AIA Journal, p. 33-34, September 1971.
6. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, England, 1964.
7. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert M. Pirsig, Bantam Books Inc., New York, 1974.