THE FIFTH COLUMN

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THE HOUSE

THE FIFTH COLUMN
The name of the Canadian Student Journal of Architecture, THE FIFTH COLUMN, is intended to be interpreted in a number of ways. First, there is an architectonic reference; the preoccupation with the development of a comtemporary order of architecture that is at once respectful of antiquity and responsive to new conceptions of architecture. Second, there is a reference to journalism and the printed column of text. Finally, there is the twentieth century political connotation; an organized body sympathizing with and working for the enemy in a country at war.
These three references essentially define the role of THE FIFTH COLUMN. The magazine promotes the study of architecture in Canada at the present in terms of both the past and the future. It attempts to stimulate and foster a responsible critical sensitivity in both its readers and its contributors. Finally, THE FIFTH COLUMN provides an alternative forum to established views not for the sake of opposing them, but to make it possible to objectively evaluate them.

Objectives:
To promote the study and the appreciation of a sensitive architecture within the architectural and wider communities, thereby positively influencing the development of architecture in Canada;
To promote a forum for and to encourage the dialogue between students, academics, professional architects and interested members of the 'lay' population;
To provide a critical alternative to the commercial trade magazines by publishing a journal that originates from the Schools, traditionally the vanguard of architectural thought.

Editorial Policies:
1. To publish articles by students, academics and professionals and by other interested parties that would otherwise find little opportunity for expression and publication.
2. To publish a series of articles in each issue exploring a specific and relevant theme which contributes to an understanding and a greater awareness of current architecture.
3. To publish articles on the diversity of Canadian architecture as a means of promoting an understanding of these local traditions and their influence on current architectural thought.
4. To publish articles discussing historical influences on the development of architecture.
5. To publish student projects from the various Schools in order to stimulate architectural debate.
6. To publish critical reviews of current works of architecture in Canada, as well as outside the country, in order to reflect on and positively influence the development of architecture in Canada.
7. To publish critical reviews of activities, publications, lectures and exhibitions of interest to our readership.

Montreal
October 30, 1985

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THE FIFTH COLUMN, The Canadian Student Journal of Architecture, is a non-commercial, non-profit enterprise whose principal purpose is the study of Architecture. We invite submissions of material from the Canadian architectural community. They should be typed double spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Include a 100 word summary and a one line biography and send in triplicate. All graphic material included should be in black and white and may include negatives, large-size photographs (8" x 10") or posistats. Please note that the material sent will not be returned. Articles submitted are subject to the magazine's editorial requirements. The articles and opinions which appear in the magazine are published under the sole responsibility of their authors. The purpose of reproducing drawings, photographs and excerpts from other sources is to facilitate criticism, review or news journal summary.

THE FIFTH COLUMN, la revue canadienne des étudiants en architecture, est un organisme sans but lucratif, dont le but est de promouvoir l'étude de l'Architecture. Toutes contributions écrites et graphiques de la communauté architecturale canadienne sont grandement appreciées. Tout document doit être dactylographié, à double interligne, sur papier 8 1/2" x 11" et accompagné d'un résumé de 100 mots et d'une biographie d'une ligne, le tout en trois examplaires. Les illustrations doivent être en noir et blanc sous forme de négatifs, de photographies grand format (8" x 10") ou de posistats. Notez que les documents et illustrations ne seront pas retournees. Les articles acceptes seront assujettis aux exigences du Comité de Rédaction.

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C O N T E N T S

State of Affairs

The Fifth Column is Canada's only student journal of architecture published solely through the efforts of Canadian students of architecture. It functions as a non-commercial and non-profit enterprise whose principle purpose is the study of architecture.

The journal encourages debate and discussion within the architectural community by providing a means for the publication and dissemination of both architectural theory and design.

The Fifth Column is proud of its short, yet fruitful history. What was once a small scale regional journal, published by a handful of students at McGill's School of Architecture, has grown into a national journal published with the support and contribution of a complete network of Canadian students. Its audience includes students, professionals as well as interested citizens of the architectural community. In addition to its Canadian readership, the Fifth Column also enjoys a limited American and international market.

Inherent within every student organization is a periodic turnover of collaborators and participants. The year 1986 has seen such a turnover, and thus reorganisation and familiarisation with production, graphics and editorial work has been the journal's primary and immediate concern.

Furthermore, the magazine is no longer affiliated with the RAIC and CSA. This constitutes an important change, as the Fifth Column must now establish and expand its existing readership without the aid of these organisations. The consequences of this editorial decision will alter the future of the magazine, for it implies a major alteration of our existing promotional and communication network. We hope to strengthen our ties across Canada, and as such, a major promotional campaign is soon to be undertaken in order to re-establish the Fifth Column's presence within the architectural community.

We at the Fifth Column are hoping to receive your ongoing support. Join us in keeping the journal a symbol of student involvement within the Canadian architectural community.

Editorial

Segovia has said that the guitar was at once the easiest instrument to play badly and the most difficult to play well. The design of houses represents the same kind of paradox to the architect by opposing the familiarity and apparent simplicity of the building of the house to its multi-purpose role. As a home, it must reflect the individual needs and dreams of the inhabitants, while at the same time belonging and responding to the community. It is usually small as a building, and therefore easier to build than other types of architecture, but because of its smallness, it provides the designer with the opportunity to budget more energy to innovation, to take risks, and find daring solutions to the problem of creating a home. Conversely, the familiarity and simplicity can and too often does lead to the creation of thoughtless, mass produced, cheap houses, which unfortunately proliferate due to their economic appeal. These houses are no longer built as homes, but as machines for shelter.

The phenomenon of the impersonal mass produced house is a new one. How did it come about? One answer is that architecture evolves with society. Such an answer avoids the question. How far has the mass produced house deviated from the ideal, what is the ideal, and how has the house been treated in the past are questions that must be answered before defining the designer's role with respect to today's home.

What are some ideals that make up a home? A home cares, it follows tradition, it adapts and it provides a symbol for its inhabitants. Of course, a home is also shelter, and must fit pragmatic considerations such as maintainability and affordibility. The weighing of these factors is very variable and history can help to trace and explain the shifts in emphasis which seem to have occurred.

In the Middle Ages, the hostility of nature was offset by the enclosure of the house. It was an artifact designed to protect against the outside. This separation of inside and outside remains strong until modern times. Then begins the opening up of the house to nature. Some architects, notably Frank Lloyd Wright, go as far as wanting to merge with nature by making the house its extension. Others try to establish the building as a man-made object, while still allowing it to penetrate through large glazed surfaces. This reversal from the medieval attitude comes in part from the growing urbanization and industrialization of the world. Nature having been dominated becomes benign and decorative, not threatening. Nature becomes a symbol of serenity.

The technology of houses also changes radically in the twentieth century. Houses reflect industrialization and become machine-made artifacts. This comes about as the new building technologies are used to solve post-war dwelling shortages, and to provide cheap worker housing. The advances made have significant economic advantages, and it is probably for this reason that they so strongly influence house design today. Yet this technology, if used too directly, can and does alienate, since it provides too strong a reminder of the efficient and impersonal aspects of mass production. If the house is designed as an artifact, using machine-made materials, and if it limits itself to being an optimal assembly of parts, it loses its identity as a haven from the mechanized world. As a mass produced object, the house becomes merely physical shelter, not emotional shelter.

Another aspect to be considered is that of tradition. Two streams of development must be looked at to understand the way tradition is espoused by the house: the vernacular and the commissioned.

In the vernacular stream, houses espouse the locale through a constant and delightful evolution, an evolution which is a combination of local ingenuity, borrowed idioms, memory and accident. Houses which emerge in this way cannot help but have a very strong sense of place. But are such houses still possible in todays accelerating world? Renovation of old houses is, in a way, part of this process, but the stability and constant improvement of the ancestral home is no longer a prevalent phenomenon.

The other main current of house types is the designed residence. Many of the designs are no less superb adaptations to the environment than the vernacular types, but they are generally more self conscious and specific to the inhabitant. This was and still is very much the domain of the architect. Only recently has he seen himself as a designer for the masses. The use of his services as a technical problem solver during housing shortages was the seed of his involvement, but gradually, the concept of a house for the Average Person emerged. Le Corbusier's dom-ino and Wright's Usonian are examples of this abstraction of the house from the individual.

As a parallel development, today's mass produced houses borrow idioms from architect's designs, designs which were meant for one particular site, client and time. So the architect designed house is influencing today's version of the vernacular house, the object of consumption.

So where exactly does the architect fit into the process of making houses? As an idea generator, as a wrench in the works of tradition? As a historian, interpreting the language of the past? As a technological consultant? As a custom fitter? Of course the answer lies in seeing all the modes as complementary. The unifying thrust must be to maintain the link between the house, and the individual's experience of the home.

Tony Barake
Judith Letarte
Jacquin Lorange

LOW COST CLASSICISM

BY WITOLD RYBCZYNSKI

Selon James Ackerman il est l'architecte le plus imité de l'histoire. De qui s'agit-t-il? Nul autre que Andrea de Pietro della Gondola, dit Palladio. Sa popularité à travers les siècles est due en grande partie à la publication de ***I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura,*** *suite à l'invention de la presse. Aussi doit-il sa popularité pendant son époque à ses bonnes pratiques et manières architecturales. Il savait construire pour se satisfaire sans toutefois vider la bourse de ses clients.*

He has been described by James Ackerman as the most imitated architect in history. Alberti? Wren? Many would argue that the (dubious) honour should be laid at the feet of Mies van der Rohe, copies of whose buildings proliferate the world, from Chicago's Loop to Lagos. But if Mies was the most imitated architect, it was an imitation that has, at least for the moment, not proved to be particularly long-lived. The old man was barely in the grave and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, surely his most ardent imitators, were already dropping the characteristic steel and glass box in favour of more stylish designs. Nor will there be any public appeal for a revival of the Mies' style, judging from the Mansion House Square Imbroglio in London. This is not to say that the I-beam may not yet stage a comeback — given the vagaries of architectural fashion, and the shallow conceits of today's young fogies, it is by no means impossible — but not even the most ardent Mies disciple would dare to hope that the van der Rohe style could survive four hundred years after its creator's death, that is, until the year 2369.

Nevertheless, four hundred years after *his* death, "the most imitated architect in history" is still going strong, more admired than ever. Andrea di Pietro della Gondola, also called Palladio, a sixteenth century Veneto architect, has not just survived, his is the unique case of an individual architect giving his name to a comprehensive, and long-lived style — Palladianism. This recognition was the result of a modern phenomenon: the printing machine — Palladio was the first architect whose international reputation was based not on people visiting his buildings, most of which were in remote locations, but on reading about them. His fame, in other words, was the result of a book. Resurrected by Inigo Jones, Palladio's *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* was published in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and formed the basis for the durable Georgian neo-Classical style. *I Quattro Libri* is also recognizably modern because, except for an introduction to basic principles and a historical section, it is largely a self-promotional catalogue of the author's work.

Except at the end of its creator's lifetime, Palladianism has never been altogether out of fashion. It influenced Kent at Chiswick, Jefferson in Virginia, and Ledoux in Paris. From Leningrad to Montreal, any building with a pedimented, columnar central porch owes something to Palladio. A recent book on contemporary English "country houses" lists more than two hundred stately homes that have been built in the last thirty years. What is surprising, apart from the large number, is not that few are in the Modern style (as one wag once suggested, large Modern houses inevitably look like small office buildings or community clinics) but that the majority are neo-Georgian, hence, to some extent Palladian. So, if there has recently been a renewed popular interest in his work, it would be incorrect to speak of a Palladian revival, but of a continued fascination.

Last year, a well-known Italian magazine published a *Domuskit* that consists of a punch-out cardboard model, at 1:100 scale, of a Palladian villa. A Milanese publishing house has recently produced a facsimile edition of *I Quattro Libri. Edizioni Cartoleria Zamperetti* has published a handsome poster that illustrates over thirty of the great architect's buildings. Nor is the interest in the architect confined to the profession. The Baker Furniture Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan last year introduced a Palladian Collection. This is a quirky idea since, as far as is known, Palladio designed no furniture, still, if a highrise office building can emulate a Chippendale tallboy why not a drop-leaf commode that resembles a building?

What is fame, after all? Many a public career has been promoted, or at least given a nudge, by a widely acclaimed poster — Farrah Fawcett, for instance. The wearable poster, the illustated T-shirt, is found around the world; African dictators and British rock stars — Mobutu and Jagger — both maintain their public presence with T-shirt icons. I have not seen James Stirling's face adorning any architectural torsos, but there are "Classical" and "Post-Modern" T-shirts being marketed by a London architectural bookshop (no "Modern," thank you very much). Big Jim was recently featured in *House and Garden*, but in terms of mass appeal, architects are still small beer. At most, a famous architect may have a street named after him. There is a *Boulevard Le Corbusier* in Montreal — a drab street of warehouses and industrial sheds in the suburbs — although Le Corbusier never built anything in Montreal, never honoured it with one of his napkin master plans, never even visited the place. There is not, as far as I know, a *Rue Nobbs* in Montreal, a Lutyens Mews in London, or a Richardson Drive in Boston. But, in Vicenza, Palladio's adopted home, not only is the *main* street named Corso Andrea Palladio, there is also a Palladio Real Estate Company, a Palladio Trucking firm and a Palladio Hair Salon. In a small square — named the Piazetta Palladio, of course — stands a statue of the architect himself. A sturdy, no-nonsense type (just the man to entrust with your florins), he is shown in robust middle-age ... but this is speculation, no one really knows what he looked like.

Layout by: Jennifer Joyal and Julie Lyras

"The villa rotunda that Goethe described is a reminder that Palladio was above all a domestic architect, the first architect whose reputation was founded not on religious buildings but on homes."

There are more than two dozen buildings by Mies van der Rohe in Chicago, but in that huge metropolis even such a large body of work scarecely makes an impact. In Vicenza, a small provincial capital with a population of slightly more than one hundred thousand, the visitor encounters a Palladian building around every corner, at least in the old city centre. At one end of the Corso Palladio are two bays of the unfinished Palazzo Porto — Breganze, at the other end, scarecely half a mile away, the large Palazzo Chiericati (now the Museo Civico), dominates a tree-filled square. Across the street a large gate leads to the Teatro Olimpico, which is still occasionally used for performances. Elsewhere in the city there are five more palazzos and a chapel, not to mention the Casa del Palladio, whose doubtful authenticity, like that of Juliet's house in nearby Verona, is more disturbing to the historian than to the tourist. The main square, the Piazza del Signori, is dominated by the great copper-roofed Basilica (a public meeting-hall, not a religious building, recalling the proper, pre-Christian meaning of the word), and facing it the Loggia del Capitaniato, a civic pavilion — both are by Palladio. Thirteen buildings in all, the first built when he was thirty-two, the last — the Teatro — completed forty years later, just before his death.

The most famous of Palladio's buildings is not in Vicenza but on its outskirts, situated on a hill overlooking the city. It is best approached not by the modern highway that leads beside it to the busy *autostrada*, but by foot along a narrow, steeply climbing lane. The rocky track, hemmed in by tall stone walls, is much as it was four hundred years ago; we can imagine Palladio and his patron visiting the building site on donkeys. The arrival at the building is at once self-effacing and dramatic. Without warning a pair of large iron gates opens onto a long ascending ramp cut into the hill — what appeared to be a garden wall is really a retaining wall — and squarely (how squarely) at the top of the ram is the porticoed villa. When Goethe climbed the ramp, in 1786, he was moved to write, "Never, perhaps, has art accomplished such a pitch of magnificence."

The Villa Rotonda that Goethe described is a reminder that Palladio was above all a domestic architect, the first architect whose reputation was founded not on religious buildings but on homes. Of course, he did build churches, one of them — Il Redentore — a masterpiece, and every visitor to Venice has admired the magnificent white facade of San Giorgia Maggiore, shimmering across the water of the Canale di San Marco. But he was fifty-seven when he designed the monastic complex of San Giorgio, and another decade passed before he was commissioned to build the Redentore. Meanwhile, he had built dozens of palaces and villas in and around Vicenza, in that part of Italy which is today known as the Veneto, and which was then a part of the Venetian Republic.

The sixteenth century is usually called the golden age of the Venetian Republic. It *was* a golden age of art, but politically and economically the Republic was no longer the power it had been in the fourteenth century. A series of exhausting wars with the Turks, a decline in commercial prosperity thanks to the discovery of the Cape route to the Indies and the resultant reduction in Mediterranean trade, and the ganging-up of her European enemies, who formed the Anyone-But-Venice League of Cambria in 1508 (the year of Palladio's birth), signalled the beginning of her economic decline. This economic decline was slow, and obviously did not affect the visual arts — Veronese, Tintoretto and Titian were all contemporaries of Palladio — but it did affect architecture, not so much in its design, which was as splendid as ever, but in its execution.

The Venetians, while severe in their political life, had been unrestrained in their enjoyment of beautiful buildings, a penchant which their material prosperity allowed them to indulge in. The Basilica of San Marco was assembled from assorted plunder taken during holy wars waged against the infidel. Its exterior resembles, in Mary McCarthy's words, an Oriental pavilion — half pleasure-house, half war-tent. Although San Marco was built out of brick (lightweight brick is the predominant Venetian building material, as it is of that other city built over the water on piles — Amsterdam) it was covered in an astonishing patchwork veneer of marble, alabaster, porphyry and mosaic encrustations. The famous checkerboard facade of the adjacent *Palazzo Ducale* — the Doge's Palace — was clothed in white Istrian stone and pink Verona marble. The old palazzos that line the Grand Canal were also clad in stone — marble above and water-resistant Istrian limestone below — and all the important details were carved in stone. The delicately Gothic Cà d'Oro was so named because its stone tracery was originally gilded.

Only one of Palladio's buildings — the Basilica in Vicenza, his first large commission — was built entirely out of stone. Dressed masonry was, and is, an expensive technology, and, if enough funds were unavailable construction tended to drag on. Work on the Basilica dragged on for sixty-eight years, long after its architect's death. The lesson was not lost on Palladio, who never again designed a building using stone; all his later buildings were constructed out of brick. This did not mean that the brick was left visible as it had been in medieval times. A building of importance such as San Giorgio was provided with a marble-covered facade, although the structural brick of the sidewalls, the adjoining monastery buildings and the *campanile* was left exposed. Lesser buildings incorporated stone only in selected areas, at the base of columns or around windows. But the solution that Palladio and his contemporaries used most was to duplicate the style that they admired most — that of ancient Rome — not in stone but in stucco plaster. Columns, pilasters, rustica-

"Palladio had to adapt his designs to the economic reality that he, or rather his clients, faced. Probably because these were rural buildings, he felt free to experiment."

tions, friezes, metopes and quoins — the vocabulary of stone masonry — were all built out of brick, and rendered in plaster. Even the statues and decorations that adorned the cornices and pediments of the palazzos were stucco.

Using plaster to imitate stonework was cheaper and faster than the real thing, but still required a considerable amount of skilled workmanship. Consequently, none of Palladio's large urban palaces in Vicenza was finished according to his plans; usually, as in the case of the Palazzo Valmarana, only the front block was built, and money ran out before the large Roman-style courtyards could be enclosed on all sides. The Palasso Thiene, the most complete, has only two wings out of a projected four. Construction of the Porto-Breganze was stopped by the financial crisis of the 1570's, leaving only two bays out of a planned seven, and producing a queer, one room wide building. Even publicly-financed buildings such as the Loggia del Capitaniato were affected by economic recession — only three bays out of five were built.

Unlike the urban palaces, Palladio's country villas, of which some twenty examples survive, were generally finished as planned. The reason for this was owing to the nature of the clients. The gentleman-farmers who engaged Palladio were not traditional landowners, they were what would be called, today, agro-businessmen. These were Venetian noblemen who had settled on the mainland, and were involved in a large scale attempt to develop progressive agricultural estates that would diversify the sagging economy of the Republic. They had been awarded unused public lands, in return for which they invested in land reclamation, irrigation, new crops and new methods of cultivation. Like the fictional Ewings of South Fork, whom they resembled, these sixteenth century venture capitalists wanted homes which would bring a measure of grandeur to their provincial lives. But one imagines that these businessmen were hard-headed enough to insist on an architecture which would be inexpensive, and easily and quickly built. A major part of Palladio's success as a country-house architect was his ability to satisfy these aspirations.

It is important to appreciate that these rural villas were not, on the whole, country homes in the English tradition. A summer pavilion like the Villa Rotunda was exceptional — most of the villas were intended as permanent residences and the centres of large, agricultural estates — the Villa Emo continues to function this way, inhabited by descendants of the original clients. Its great flanking wings contained barns for live-stock, equipment and grain storage. The broad "terrace" in front was really a threshing floor. The wonderful curved gables at each end of the Villa Barbaro at Maser contained dove-cotes. The landscape that stretches on each side of the great poplar-lined, axial *allée* in front of both of these houses does not consist of parks or gardens, but of cultivated fields. The effect is not so much of a rural palace, but of a larger, more sophisticated farmhouse.

Palladio had to adapt his designs to the economic reality that he, or rather his clients, faced. Probably because these were rural buildings he felt free to experiment. He developed a stripped-down architecture that did not rely on fine materials or careful detailing for its effect, but on proportion and overall composition. It was also, and this was surely no coincidence, cheaper to design; then, as now, reduced budgets meant reduced architectural fees. The roofs were simple — undisguised village tiles. The construction was still out of plastered brick, but there was no attempt to imitate stone. Instead, the plastered wall was rendered flat, and given a coat of paint. The results are curiously Modern (and markedly un-Postmodern) in their almost complete lack of exterior ornament. There are no frames around the doors and windows, which are simply punched-out of the wall in a Corbusian manner. The white walls of the Rotunda are unrelieved by pattern or ornament. The arcades of the colonnaded wings of Emo have a vestigial capital, just a block, and no mouldings. Those of the Villa Barbaro are similar, although a nominal keystone is added at the top of the arch. The sole exception is the entrance porch, invariably columnar and pedimented and surmounted by a triangular frontispiece. This not only gave prominence to the front-door, always an architectural issue, but also, in Palladio's words, was a convenient place to stick the owner's family coat of arms. Like the grille of a Rolls-Royce, every Palladian villa had this distinctive feature, inexpensive but prestigious.

It is important to say immediately that Palladio's international reputation did not rest on the economic aspect of his work. An eighteenth century reader of *I Quattro Libri* would have assumed that what he was looking at were buildings of stone, and my 1929 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* still maintains that although executed in brick, the buildings of Palladio were intended to be built out of stone. This erroneous view misses precisely one of Palladio's architectural achievements.

The interiors of Palladio's villas, being difficult to photograph, have not received the attention they deserve. Unlike the exterior, the rooms are elaborately decorated with classical architectural motifs. Tall Corinthian columns support the roof beams, stone dadoes with carved panels surround the rooms and the famous broken pediment crowns doors and windows. Niches contain allegorical statues, and busts are placed on carved stone brackets; garlands hang between the pilasters. An octagonal room in the Villa Barbaro has a decorated vaulted ceiling that springs from a balustraded gallery, high above the floor. We have entered the room through a door on one side, and symmetrically across the floor is an identical door, this one half-open, with a boy mischeviously

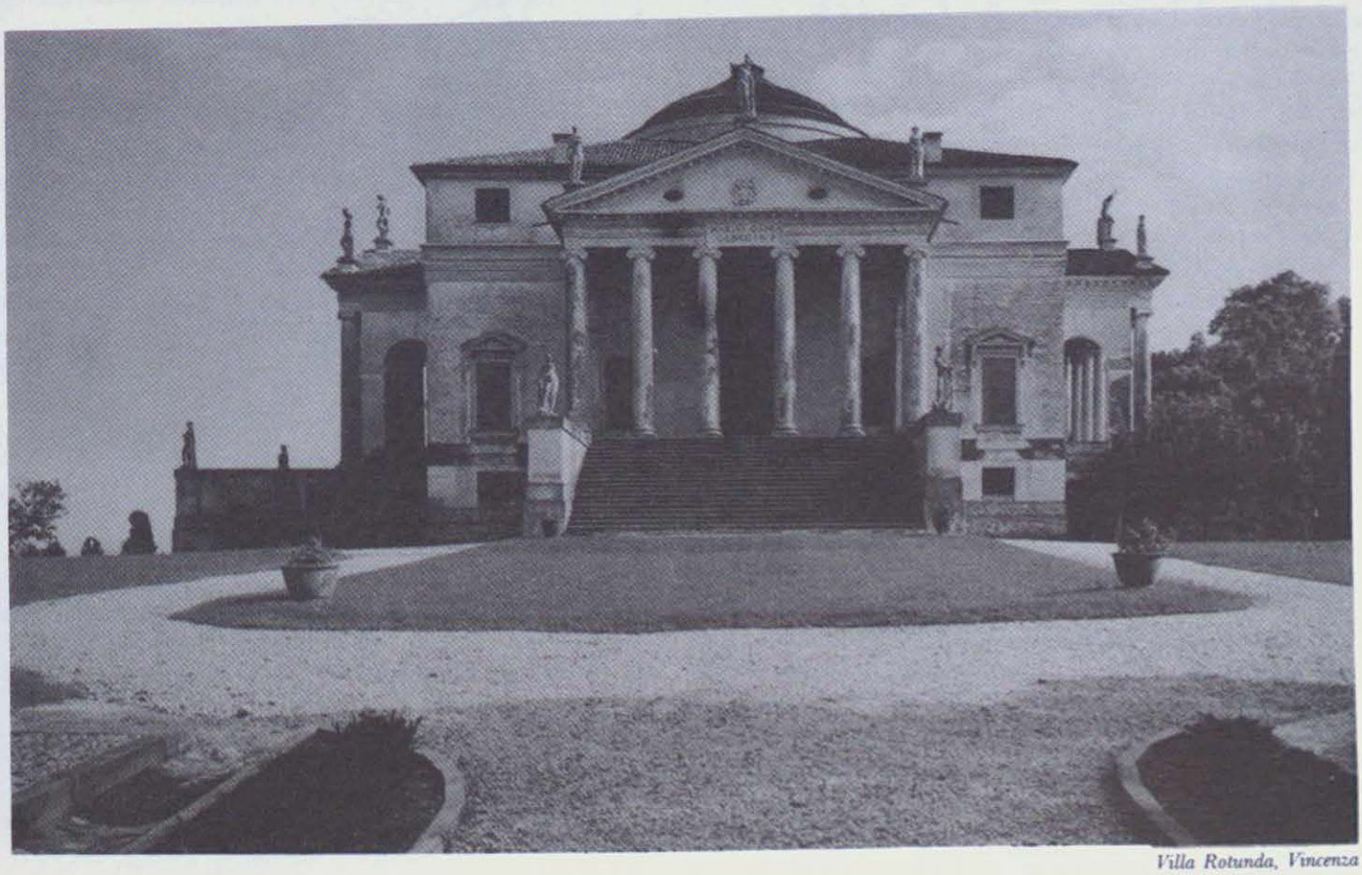
"...Veronese was responding to the limited resourses of his clients. If they could enjoy the sense of space afforded by the trompe l'oeil simulation."

looking out. He does not move; he has been peeking out of that door for more than four hundred years, ever since Paulo Veronese painted him on the wall. There are more figures relaxedly leaning over the gallery railing. Everything here, the columns, the statues, the lifelike figures, even some of the doors and windows (those required by symmetry, not function) are only fingernail thick — a coat of paint.

Like his collaborator and friend Palladio, Veronese was responding to the limited resources of his clients. If they could not afford a gallery, they could enjoy the sense of space afforded by the *trompe-l'oeil* simulation. Far from the sophisticated charms of Venice, their homes could at least offer their eyes the sensual delight they were accustomed to. These paintings, whose first stimulus was economic, are much more than large scale *faux-marbre*. They are also a mirror of their owners' lives, for the figures that look down from the gallery or stand in the doorway are real people: the lady of the house, her husband and children. Their presence simultaneously reinforces and undermines the effect of the painted interior, for Veronese has transformed what might have been simple decor into a disquieting and moving work of art. This house within a house, peopled by magical ghosts, makes us feel like interlopers.

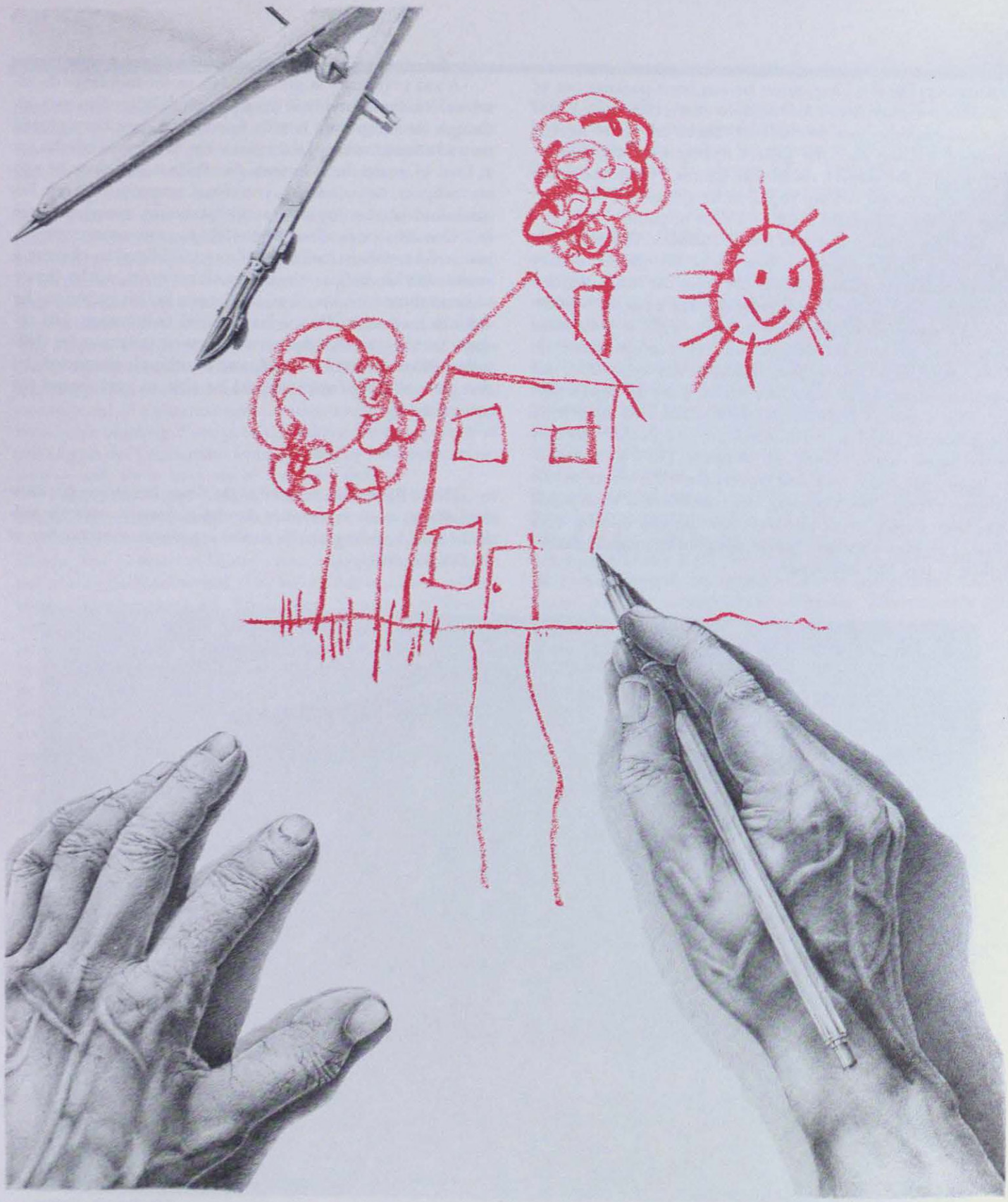
A sad poignancy is present, also, in the buildings themselves. It is less literal than the melancholy of the frescoes, although the sculptured human figures that have been placed on and around some of the villas seem likewise to inhabit, or at least to guard these houses. But Palladio, because he was an architect, not a painter, could not resort to trickery, his brick and plaster capitals notwithstanding; someone once said that artists can allow themselves to paint square wheels, but architects must build round ones. Obliged to observe a restraint in his design — by economic necessity, not by choice — he mourned his loss, but, and herein lay his greatness, he did not conceal it. Hence his classical farmhouses. His respect for the past was too great to permit tinkering; he skillfully retrieved what he could, and unwillingly discarded the rest. We, of all people, should be able to understand his achievement.

Witold Rybczynski, travelled in the Veneto last spring. His latest book **Home,** *on the evolution of the idea of domestic comfort, is published by Viking-Penguin. He is also a professor of architecture at McGill University.*

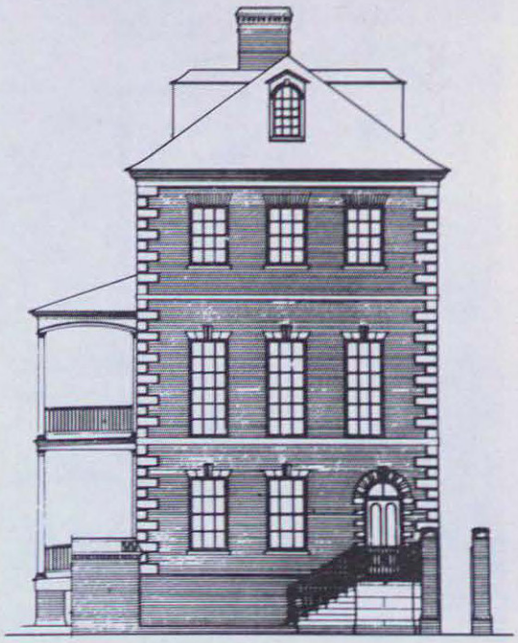


Villa Rotunda, Vincenza

THE HOUSE



90-92-94 Church Street (built between 1730-1805)



The "single" house

Learning From Charleston

by Derek Drummond

Il y a de cela deux cents ans, une forme particulière de maison fut developpée à Charleston, en Caroline de Sud. Celle-ci était ingénieuse puisqu'elle repondait trs bien au climat cotier de la Caroline, la culture et au style de vie des constructeurs.

Cette forme de maison fut reproduite à Charleston pendant les cent vingt cinq ans qui suivirent.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, in Charleston, South Carolina, an unusual house form was developed Ingenious in its response to both the sub-tropical climate of the Carolina coast and the culture and life-style of its builders, this house form was reproduced for the next one hundred and twenty-five years. Its negligible influence on house design outside Charleston and even within Charleston from the civil war to just recently, is as real as it is surprising.[1]

Due to the efforts of groups of interested citizens including the Preservation Society of Charleston, the Historic Charleston Foundation and individual owners, many of the original homes have been preserved. Together with some impressive public buildings and churches they form a concentrated historical urban environment that has, since 1970, attracted thousands of tourists.[2] Hundreds of architects have also studied the houses but the form has remained indigenous to Charleston.

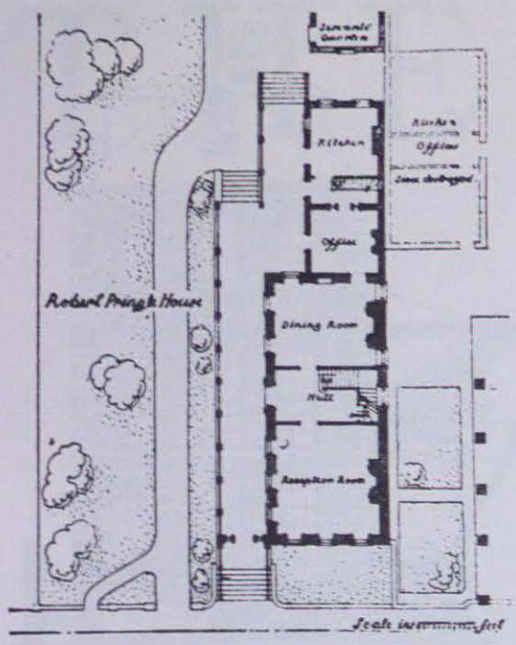
Perhaps it has been felt that both the climate and the culture of this southern town were such that any house form closely associated with it would have little or no application elsewhere. Or perhaps there has been a lingering reluctance to build a form closely associated with the South and its distinctive social and cultural values. Nevertheless there are aspects of this house form that could or should have had a serious impact on housing design — particularly the design of detached single family dwellings.

The first of the Charleston "single" houses were built in the 1730's to provide plantation owners and their families a house in the town.[3] The "single" house was narrow, only one room wide, with two major rooms on each floor. Rectangular in plan, the house was located in the front corner of its lot with its narrow end toward the street. The majority of the "single" houses had two or three storey galleries of piazzas along the south or west sides of the house, providing protection from the summer sun and a pleasant outdoor space for use during the summer evenings or warm winter days. The lots were narrow but deep, providing enough space for sizeable side and rear gardens which were surrounded by walls. The formal door abutting the sidewalk was actually an entry not directly into the house but into the piazza and the property as a whole. Entry to the house was through a door off the lower level of the piazza and was secluded from the street.

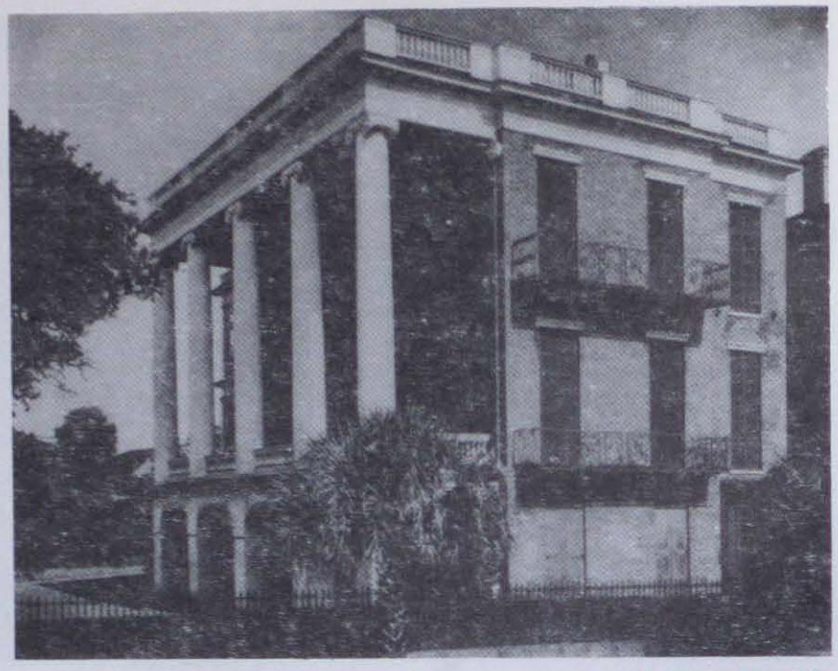
As it has been built for over one hundred and twenty-five years, examples of the Charleston "single" house can be found in styles popular at various times. From Colonial through Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival to Victorian, the style of decoration changed but the fundamental planning and architectural concept did not. As well as variations in style, there were variations in size — from the very modest two storey to the elaborate three storey mansions of East Battery Street on the waterfront.

However fascinating the historical development of the "single" house might be, what is of greater importance for us today is the uncanny manner in which the concept of the house form and its planning implications provide possible solutions to some contemporary problems of sub-division

Layout by: Michael Finkelstein



The Pringle House



Roper House (built after 1845)

planning and detached house design. Specifically the "single" house provided a solution, unparalleled since, to elegantly entering a house other than through the principal street facade, to minimizing lot size while maximizing possible use of outdoor space, and to making the house liveable in sub-tropical climatic conditions without benefit of electricity. These solutions, almost totally disregarded for over one hundred years, are relevant today and should be studied in detail. Fortunately, many "single" houses remain, some restored and turned into museums, but many as private homes. Since the kitchens of the original houses were located, along with the servants' quarters, in separate buildings at the rear of the lot, the houses have had to be renovated.

Cultural and architectural history should be studied coincidentally in order to understand a building form, and to properly comprehend the physical form of the "single" house, some understanding of the social values and lifestyle of the original builders is necessary. These values and patterns of behaviour played a vital role in determining the architectural concept which, although conditions have changed, is still appropriate today. However, today's use of the "single" house is an indication that an architectural solution to a given problem can be an appropriate answer to a different set of cultural and social conditions.

The original "single" houses were built by the owners or masters of the large plantations located along the Ashley and Cooper Rivers west of the town.[4] In making decisions about the design of a townhouse, the plantation owner was, no doubt, influenced by the physical design of the plantation itself, as well as the lifestyle that the new home was expected to support. There would be a natural desire to duplicate plantation conditions although obviously at a smaller scale. The typical plantation consisted of a considerable number of buildings, the most important being the manor house or, as it was often referred to, the Big House. The Big House was the showpiece of the plantation. "Because it was the most visible symbol of the slaveowner's wealth and status, it was usually as grand and lavish a monument as the planter could afford."[5]

It has been said that "a more hedonistic, pleasure-oriented society never lived on the North American continent."[6] But most of the pleasure was reserved for the slaveowner himself. Not only the slaves but the poor-whites as well lived a substandard existence in substandard housing.[7] The planter's wife had an extremely difficult life. She "was in charge, not merely of the mansion but of the entire spectrum of domestic operation throughout the estate from food to clothing to the spiritual care of both her white family and her husband's slaves."[8]

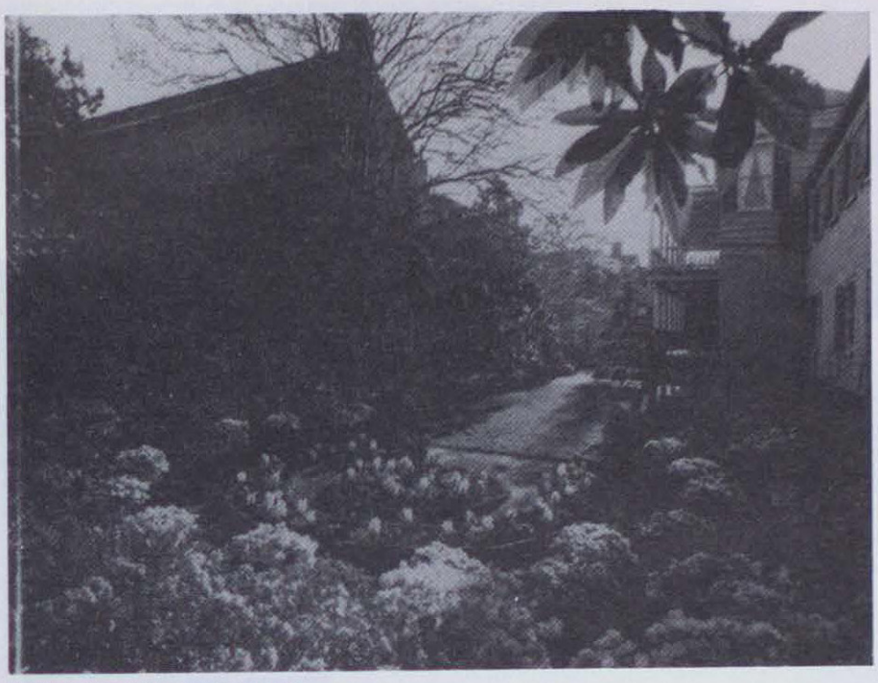
Forced to abandon the plantation during the summer months (May until November) in order to escape yellow fever and malaria, social pressures dictated that the plantation owner provide, in town, a home as impressive as the plantation, including a manor house and out-buildings to provide accomodation for his slaves.

Hence, the townhouse was a scaled down version of the plantation complete with manor house, which became known as the "single" house, and quarters behind the manor house for the slaves. "The slaves' quarters had their own kitchens, storerooms and stables. Rooms were small, frequently lacking windows, and furniture was minimal."[9] In contrast, the Big House on the street, where the master's family lived, had generously sized rooms, was often lavishly furnished and was planned more for entertaining than for everyday living.

"By law the slave had to reside on the master's property unless he had a ticket giving him permission to reside elsewhere." In order to better control the slaves, "high thick walls" surrounded the entire lot and "gave the house and grounds a prison-like atmosphere" and "Slaves could be watched more easily that way since the only exit was past the master's house."[10]

Today, only the "single" or Big House remains. Virtually all vestiges of the slaves' quarters have disappeared. What remains is merely a house set in a walled garden. Little thought is given to the fact that the walls which today keep unwelcome people out were originally designed to keep slaves captive.

But besides containing the slaves, the walls surrounded magnificent gardens. "No American city has a richer horticultural tradition. Talented botanists and landscape architects of the 17th and 18th centuries were drawn to Charleston by the rich variety of native flora."[11] The 18th century walled



Single house garden, 64 Meeting St.

The Glasden House

gardens were a tropical profusion of fig trees, pomegranates, peaches, oranges, acacias, roses, oleanders and yellow jessamine, the whole shaded by giant live oaks and magnolias.[12]

Although the original gardens have disappeared along with most of the out-buildings, the walled lot has been relandscaped in accordance with most 20th century needs and tastes. Without the out-buildings and with the "single" house in the corner of the lot against the sidewalk, there is a generous amount of space available for a garden. In some instances provision has been made for one or two automobiles in the side yard beside the piazza, but the area is treated more as an entry court than a parking space. Access to the courtyard is through a gate thus reducing the visual impact of the automobile from the street. Since the entry level of the house is usually raised well above the level of the street and entry court, the automobiles are barely visible from the principal rooms of the house.

As in the past the gardens are generously planted. Along with a rich variety of flowers including the rare camellia, introduced into North America at the nearby plantation, Middleton Place, by André Michaud,[13] azaleas abound, all beneath the live oaks and crepe myrtle trees. It would be difficult to imagine a more exquisite and urbane resolution of the problem of designing a private open space on a restricted city lot. The space is as visually private as is possible in an urban pattern of multi-storeyed dwellings. Views of the entry court from the sidewalk are, in some instances, possible but most are effectively blocked by walls and gates.

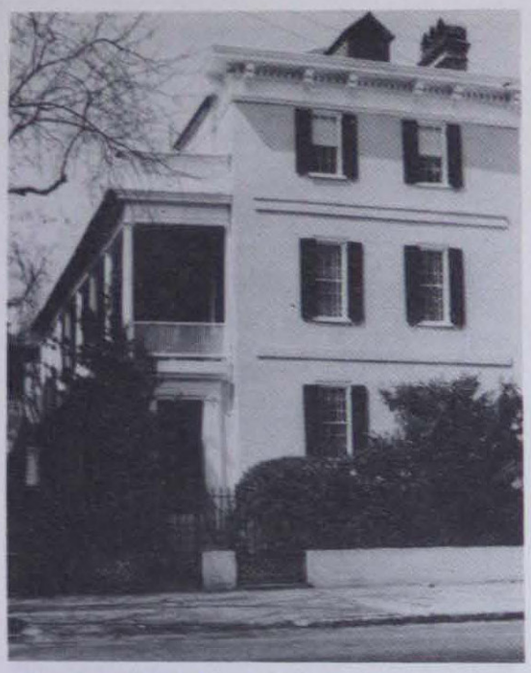
The relationship between the "single" house and the private open space is as effective as it is unusual. Unlike the typical North American house, the principal rooms "enfront" the side yard rather than the street.[14]

Effectively serving as an intermediary or transition space between the rooms and the garden is the piazza. Unique in North America the piazza may have been introduced from the West Indies.[15] Although historians feel that the piazzas were not added to the original "single" houses until late in the 18th century, the word *piazza* first appeared in legal documents in 1700 (before the introduction of the "single" house) and with increasing frequency after 1750. But definite reference to the two-storey piazza does not occur until the end of the 18th century.[16] Unlike the galleries or front porches of the early American homes which were essentially semi-private spaces enabling social and visual contact with neighbours and others in the street, the piazza is a private space hidden from the street end on the upper levels, views to the street are almost completely blocked.

The decision to orient the piazza toward the garden rather than the street was, in all probability, influenced by the typical plantation owner's desire to keep separate the activities related to his household and those one would expect to find in the street. In such a structured society as that of the anti-bellum south (when the vast majority of piazzas were built) the home, which included the Big House, the garden, slaves' quarters and other out-buildings, was a contained unit. It was assumed that those living in the master's house would, or should, have little interest in the activities taking place in the street. Contact with neighbours was frequent but formal. One suspects that the informal or spontaneous contact associated with the front porch of other house forms neither existed nor was encouraged in 19th century Charleston. That the piazza was conceived as a private space is therefore understandable.

Throughout North America, detached single family dwelling design indicates a similar attitude on the part of the owners towards the street and towards their neighbours. The disappearance of the front porch from new houses — except in the occasional summer home — and the walled-in rear yard are both clear indications of changing social attitudes. More emphasis is placed on privacy than on opportunities for spontaneous social interaction.

Recent patterns of detached housing are neither as elegant nor as economical in terms of land use as the "single" house pattern. Much of this is due to regulations controlling the siting of buildings. To maintain a legal right-of-way, houses are required to be set back from the street. It is not unheard of for forty percent of a building lot to be required to satisfy these zoning requirements. It is the authorities' concept of street rather than that of the owners that has dominated planning decisions regarding detached house patterns.



19th century Charleston house

Edmonston-Alston House (built 1829)

One specific feature of house design has remained consistent since the inception of the "single" house. The importance of the principal street facade, as a symbolic gesture to others, remains as strong today as it was in 18th century Charleston. Even in the most modest house today special attention is given to the design of the street facade. Use of more expensive materials exclusively on the street facade, an embellished front door, lavish landscaping and front lawn decorations are all signs of a desire to impress others. While the entire "single" house was required to be a visible symbol of the slaveowner's wealth and status, and although the interior rooms and piazza were oriented toward the side garden, the street facade nevertheless received special attention and detailing.[17] A more elaborate cornice on only the street facade, window pediments exclusively on the front windows, and the often ornate doorways to the piazza are some of the features used specifically to enhance the principal facade. This embellishment of the principal facade is extremely subtle given the major orientation to the side garden and the fact that the narrow end of the house faces the street.

Historically an important feature of any principal facade, the front door or main entrance is interpreted in an ingenious manner in the "single" house. By simply incorporating two "front doors" into the design, one into the entire site and one into the house, the inconsistency between degree of formality and amount of use present in the entrance in today's detached houses, was never a problem. By not having to locate the formal entry into the house in the street facade, it was then possible to enter anywhere along the long side of the house. Architects and homeowners alike appreciate the advantage of entering a long narrow house on the long side rather that on the narrow end. It provides the opportunity for an easily understood and economical circulation system — economic in the sense of percentage of total area used by the halls, corridors and stairs. For the original "single" house which had family rooms on the first floor, and bedrooms above, it provided the opportunity to have, on the ground floor, two large reception rooms, one on either side of a spacious entry hall — ideal for entertaining, a prime requirement of its original owner.

In the typical twentieth century detached single family dwelling, the long side of the rectangular house usually faces the street and the rear yard. Lot dimensions are proportionally similar to those of Charleston — rectangular with the narrow end toward the street. The typical detached house, in a sense, acts as a wall between the street and the family garden in the rear. There is seldom a well planned relationship between the parking of the automobile and the formal entrance to the house, with cars parked beside, in the house, or under it.

By placing the shoulder or narrow end of the house toward the street, a paved entry courtyard can be incorporated into the design that relates directly to the main entry into the house. The number of rooms oriented toward the quiet garden and away from the potentially noisy street is maximized. As can be seen in Charleston, the street facade can be elaborate if the owner wishes to make a symbolic gesture. The entire lot can be designed as one integrated scheme as has been done for centuries in Japan and for a one hundred and twenty-five year period in Charleston — far preferable to a detached house in the middle of a landscaped lot, as has been the case in the rest of North America for over three hundred years.

Historian Samuel Gaillard Stoney has depicted the typical Charleston "single" house as a hot weather dwelling that is also habitable in the winter.[18] There is an old saying that "Carolina is in the spring a paradise, in the summer a hell, and in the autumn a hospital."[19] The summer heat, mosquitos and resultant malaria and yellow fever drove the planter and his family to the city and designers to create a house form receptive to the cooling summer breezes off the waters of Charleston. It is ironical that the black slaves were able to survive in this malaria producing environment because thay had become immune in Africa, while Europeans, who had no such defense, died from the resultant fevers in great numbers.[20]

The building of the piazza on either the south or west side of the "single" house, thus providing protection from the sun at the hottest times, is generally credited with keeping the house relatively cool. In addition, it provided an airy place to sit on warm evenings as its location took advantage of the prevailing summer breezes. However, since it was over

half a century before the piazzas were added to the original "single" houses, the initial design had to have other features to keep the house relatively cool in the summer.

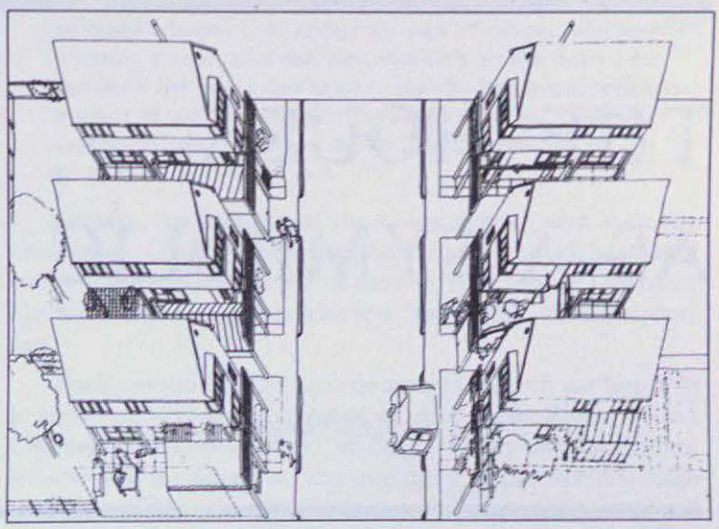
The most important cooling feature was that the house form was detached and was narrow, one room in width, enabling most rooms to have windows on three sides and to take advantage of the natural cooling effects of any breezes. From the "Shotgun" houses of the South to the 19th century cottages of Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, there has been a tradition of narrow, detached house forms in North America. But unless combined with high ceilings and tall windows, they do not provide the natural cooling effect present in the "single" house.

In an attempt to take even greater advantage of cross-ventilation and to improve on the quality of the air, the principal floor was raised well off the ground. (Early "single" houses were raised only two feet above the grade, but by the 19th century they were often raised more than three feet.)[21] This had the advantage of both catching more on-shore breezes and avoiding the *miasma* or infectious or noxious emanations from the damp ground and vegetation of the garden.[22]

The "single" house has remained indigenous to Charleston, precursor to few, if any, contemporary housing patterns. Some of the features described above can occasionally be detected in new house forms but rarely are more than one or two of the features present. Robert Stern, for the 1976 Venice Biennale, designed a housing pattern in which the houses, rectangular in plan, had the narrow end toward the street.[23] Lawrence Speck of Austin, Texas, in 1979, published designs of houses with their shoulders to the street that even included piazzas.[24] Terry Montgomery of Toronto, in an entry for the 1979 National Housing Design Competition in Canada, developed a pattern closely related to that of the "single" house.[25] Shoulder to street, located in the front corner of an enclosed lot, the house was narrow (17 feet wide) and one room wide on the ground floor. Due, no doubt, to zoning regulations, legal requirements, and need for privacy, there are no windows on the elevation facing the neighbours property. The upper floor has stairs and service spaces against this blank wall and hence none of the bedrooms have the type of cross-ventilation prevalent in the "single" house.

The concept of the domain of the house including the garden and garage, and the house being entered through one gate is present in the Montgomery design. The usual suburban house design problem of dual entries, one of which (the "front" door) is never used, has effectively been solved in this plan.

The historic reference is clear but the true potential of the precedent is still unrealized, and so it has been since the last of the "single" houses which were built. Perhaps because they are considered monuments to a period of American history (anti-bellum South) which many Americans do not admire, considering the conditions under which slaves had to exist and the hedonistic nature of the slaveowners' lifestyles, many of the ideas present in the "single" house have remained indigenous to Charleston. The increased interest in the history and architecture of Charleston shown by tourists and architects, could, however, result in a renewed appreciation of a house form, two hundred and fifty years old. It would be a well deserved tribute to the graceful and appropriate "single" house.



Images of the Charleston house. Submission of architect Terry Montgomery, National Housing Design Competition, 1979.

NOTES:

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10. Ibid., p. 67.
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14. Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Holt, Rinegard and Winston, 1974), p. 195.
15. Morrison, *Early American Architecture*, p. 171.
16. Beatrice St. Julien Ravbenel, *Architects of Charleston*, (Charleston: Charleston, Carolina Art Association, 1945), pp. 4-5, quoted in Morrison, *Early American Architecture*, p. 171.
17. Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, p. 18.
18. Davis, *Charleston Houses and Gardens*.
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21. Simons, *Architectural Forum*, (October 1923), p. 154.
22. John W. Linley, *A Comparison of Charleston and Savannah Domestic Architecture, 1810-1860*, (ACSA Conference Paper, Savannah, 1979), Abstract.
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25. *National Housing Design Competition 1979*, (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1979), pp. 34-39.

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THE HOUSE AS A SYMBOLIC MANIFESTATION

RAFEL H. AZIZ

Au-delà de son rôle d'abri, la maison est une source de symboles et d'images. L'auteur retrace le symbolisme de la maison de l'enfance à l'âge adulte.

The first inhabitants took it upon themselves to perform three basic yet fundamental earthly necessities: to clothe, feed and shelter themselves. Needless to say, the significance of shelter was undeniable then, as it is now. After all, our ancestors had to quickly learn to contend with the elements of the environment, the ferocity of beasts and the barbarism of fellow beings. It was not long before the essential need for shelter would be served by the house.

Over time, however, the importance of this shelter form has surpassed the basic functions it originally sought to satisfy. The house, as Gaston Bachelard claims, has become "our own corner of the world."[1] This most humble of physical structures has bestowed and been bestowed with a rainbow of symbolic imagery. The purpose within these pages will therefore be to trace such imagery from our infancy to our maturity or, rather, from the house as analogous to the womb to the house as a symbolic manifestation.

Of the underlying characteristics associated with the house, those rooted in infancy will reveal the initial basis for its attachment. The intimate relationship between child and mother soon becomes an analogy between womb and house. As the mother represents the centre of the universe for the child, the house becomes, first, indicative of that universe and, later, a reference to which all is relative.

In an essay titled *The House as Symbol of the Self,* Clare Cooper traces a child's maiden experiences and contends that the notion of security is what binds the child to its mother and, in turn, to its house.

> At first, the mother is its whole environment. Gradually, as the range of senses expands, the baby begins to perceive the people and the physical environment around it. The house becomes its world, its very cosmos... familiar, recognizable, a place of security and love... As the child matures, he ventures into the house's outer space, the yard, the garden, then gradually into the neighbourhood, the city, the region, the world. As space becomes known and experienced, it becomes a part of his world. But all the time, the house is home, the place of first conscious thoughts, of security and roots. It is no longer an inert box; it has been experienced and has become a symbol for self, family, mother, security.[2]

Once able, a child begins to represent the experiental images in pictorial form. In a fascinating examination of the development of human consciousness vis-à-vis human habitation, titled *Psychology of the House,* Oliver Marc maintains that a child reaches into the depth of the inner psyche to portray the mother's womb. The first scribbles depict circular shapes, spirals, wavy lines and dots. By school age, a child's drawing of a house often contains a self-portrait. This is not merely eyes for windows, a mouth for the door, and a forehead for the roof, but the inclusion of a nose, hair and even eyebrows. At times, the gender of the artist may also be detected (figs. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1

Layout by: Franco Maccarone and Anna Mainella

Fig. 2

A house's humanistic qualities, in particular as symbolic of the mother's womb, remain the exclusive domain of childhood. This strong emotional bond is carried, both consciously and subconsciously, throughout a lifetime. In his fictional story, *Malicroix*, Henri Bosco turns to this analogy while writing about a man being protected from a violent storm.

> The already human being in whom I had sought shelter for my body yielded nothing to the storm. The house clung to me, like a she-wolf, and at times I could smell her odour penetration maternally to my mother. She was all I had to keep and sustain me. We were alone.[3]

Security attributed to the mother's womb is one of the reasons that primitive beings, after seeking refuge in the warmth and safety of one, called the cave the first home. This natural derivation, the womb of nature, was also due to beliefs that the world had originated from an egg. Although ancient cultures later believed in a world as square and built according to that form, some aspects of the round shape have remained through time. Marc suggests that elaborately decorated entrances varying from arch to a full circle, for instance, are a direct result of our inner being and closeness to the womb. The same may be said for indigenous housing in Africa.

The womb, however, is but one analogy of the protective armour implied by the house. Sir Edward Coke's old adage that "a man's home is his castle" suggests a home fortified against the world at large. Marc explains:

> to build a house is to create an area of peace, calm and security, a replica of our own mother's womb, where we can leave the world and listen to our rhythm; it is to create a place of our own, safe from danger. For once we have crossed the threshold and shut the door behind us, we can be at one with ourselves.[4]

Clearly, the security of the house carries with it strong sentiments. One need not look far for sayings such as "home sweet home," "home is where the heart is," "there's no place like home" and travellers who feel "homesick" during a journey.

Such emotions have become associated with the house as a universal archetypal symbol of self. Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore, co-authors of *Body, Memory and Architecture*, believe that the house is "the one piece of the world around us which still speaks directly to our bodies as the centre and measure of that world."[5] Cooper concurs that we attempt to give the archetype of self concrete substance by searching for physical forms or symbols which are intimate and meaningful as well as definable.

> The first and most consciously selected form to represent self is the body, for it appears to be the outward manifestation, and the enclosure of self. On a less conscious level, I believe, man also frequently selects the house, that basic protector of his internal environment (beyond skin and clothing) to represent or symbolize what is tantalizingly unrepresentable... It seems as though the personal space bubble which we carry with us and which is an almost tangible extension of our self expands to embrace the house we have designated as ours... We project something of ourselves onto its physical fabric.[6]

No one more profoundly exemplified this personal projection than Carl Jung in his dreams and actual manifestation of his house, drawing from both experiences to describe the complexity of the human psyche at its deepest levels. In a dream, Jung described a house with various levels of consciousness: the ground floor, cellar and vault (representing the lesser known realm of the unconscious). With respect to his house, built in four stages over some thirteen years, Jung realized that after all the parts were assembled it became "a symbol of psychic wholeness." The house was a representation of his own evolving and maturing psyche. He concluded that it was the place where "I am in the midst of my true life, I am most deeply myself... in which I could become what I was, what I am and will be. It gave me a feeling as if I were being reborn in stone."[7]

Images such as these correspond well to Bachelard's phenomenological symbolism as revealed in his illuminating work, *The Poetics of Space*. The notion of house is understood as a topography of our inner being. The house is, Bachelard asserts, "one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind."[8]

This fixed point of reference around which an individual structures the world both encloses space, the house interior, and excludes space, everything ouside of it. In other words, the house has two essential and differing components, namely, its interior and its facade. Both elements are often selected so as to reflect how one views oneself both as an individual and in relation to society. Thus, the house, as a representation, portrays our characters and personalities, our image of self. In essence, the house becomes a self-portrait — no different in adulthood than it had been in childhood but perhaps somewhat more sophisticated (fig. 3).

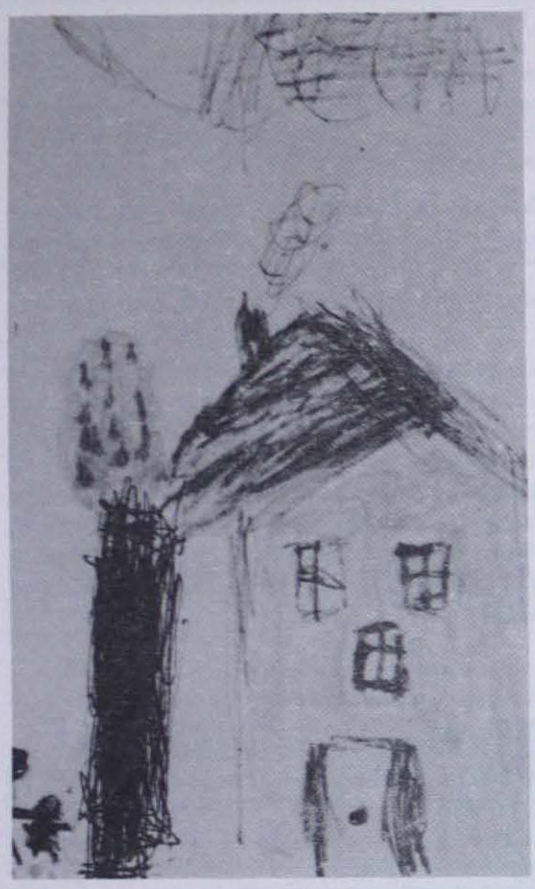

Fig. 3

First impressions are initially revealed on the exterior via the front yard, with its landscaping and objects, then through the facade, with its materials and colours. The exterior may be likened to the cover of a book, for as Bloomer and Moore correctly point out, "the house front speaks to us about what lies behind it, and what it might be like to be inside."[9]

A significant element within the facade is the entrance or threshold, the dividing line between the outer public world and the inner private domain. Carrying the bride over the threshold goes back to Roman times. Removing one's hat and wiping off one's shoes before entering a dwelling also remain part of our rituals. Some cultures go further, to the point of orienting the entrance towards the cosmos; in China the door is oriented southward while in Madagascar it is towards the west. Furthermore, Orthodox Jews observe the scriptures by attaching the Commandments onto the doorpost of the house.

The location of the threshold also has its cultural differences. In North America, for example, the threshold is at the front door with the front yard acting as semi-public space, no doubt a reflection of our openness. In England, on the other hand, the front garden is enclosed with a fence and gate, placing the initial entry at some distance from the house itself and suggesting a greater desire for privacy. Even more restrictive are Moslem homes where solid perimeter high walls reflect the extreme privacy sought by individuals, particularly women, from strangers and neighbours.

Nowhere is individuality more expressed, on entering the house, than in the living room. This highly decorative space becomes the central show-place, the me or us.

> The living room is the area where "performances" for guests are most often given, and hence the "setting" of it must be appropriate to the performance. Thus, we expect that more than any other part of the home, the living room reflects the individual's conscious and unconscious attempts to express a social identity.[10]

Receiving special attention in the living room is the fireplace or hearth, over which a favourite painting and treasured objects are displayed in all their splendour. Although today the hearth may merely be an electric heater containing artificial smouldering logs, its significance is as old as civilization. The hearth is said to have been originally conceived as a microcosm of the sun, similar to the sacred flame in the temple. It was not something to cook on but rather a symbol of the sun whose flame must never be allowed to extinguish for fear that the sun itself would disappear. Moreover, Pierre Defontaines suggests that the house originated as a shelter for this sacred fire. A few examples will demonstrate the importance of this eternal flame: in northern China, the Kang or central hearth is considered "the mother of the dwelling." Until recently, the hearth in rural Sardinac homes was kept alight continuously and only extinguished on the death of an inhabitant (for the period of mourning). Finally, in Madagascar, fire is the first item brought into a newly completed dwelling.[11]

The notion of fire also proved significant in Vitruvius' conception of the origin of the house.[12] The father of architectural theory explains that it was the discovery of fire which first brought about the assembly of people and, in turn, resulted in the genesis of conversation. It was at that first gathering, Vitruvius declares, that shelters began to be constructed — be they dug on mountainsides or made of mud and twigs. On observing the works of one another, these people "of an imitative and teachable nature" were able to continously improve upon their dwellings. Vitruvius proceeds to trace the development of the primative hut, making particular note of one whose form strongly resembles that of Marc-Antoine Laugier's image: four trees denoting a square, connected by branches on top with additional branches forming a pyramidal roof. The correlation is clear: columns, entablatures, and pediment. It was this "little hut," argues Laugier, "on which all the magnificences of architecture are elaborated."[13] For "higher ideas born of the multiplication of the arts," adds Vitruvius, led to "civilization and refinement."[14] Hence, the house was not only the first form of architecture, albeit rustic, but with its elements, the first temple, built not to divine deities but to mere mortals (as recreated by Sir William Chambers) (figs. 4 and 5).

This theme may also be read into Joseph Rykwert's own search for the nature of the first house while contemplating *On Adam's House in Paradise.* In his unrelenting quest for origins, Rykwert has, among other insights, brought forth the true meaning of the house, simply, as a temple of being. He describes this "notional" sanctuary:

> Its floor was the earth, its supports were living beings, its trellised roof was like a tiny sky of leaves and flowers: to the couple sheltering within it, it was both an image of their joined bodies and a pledge of the world's consent to their union. It was more; it provided them — at a critical moment — with a mediation between the intimate sensations of their own bodies and the sense of the great unexplored world around. It was therefore both an image of the occu-

pants' bodies and a map, a model of the world's meaning. That, if at all, is why I must postulate a house for Adam in Paradise. Not as a shelter against the weather, but as a volume which he could interpret in terms of his own body, and which yet was an exposition of the paradisal plan, and therefore established him at the centre of it.[15]

Fig. 4

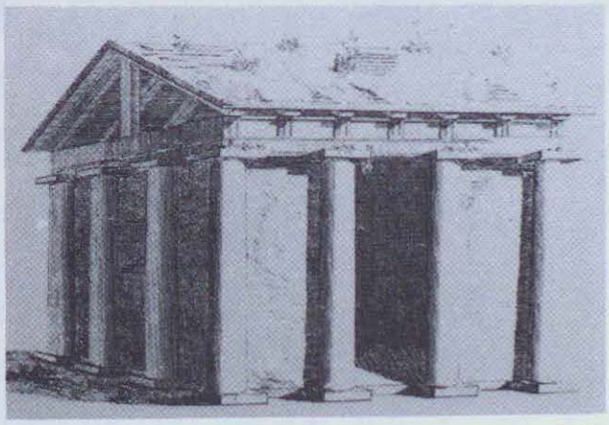

Fig. 5

Indeed, the symbolic meaning of the house is embedded within its mediative enclosure. It is at once the centre of our universe and of the universe itself. Returning again to the poetics of Marc:

> The house is seen as the fullest and oldest manifestation of the psyche. Like dance, like song, it represents a necessity of expression, with the added function of protecting a vulnerable creature in the course of his development. Its reality is durable and tangible: the place whence all human activities have emerged. It provides the necessary base from which consciousness is formed, consolidated and expanded, and the self-defined. The house is the hearth, the common ground of the psyche's growth and transformation.[16]

Veritably, the house always satisfies its initial function of shelter, a given of all buildings. And, like architecture, its significance goes beyond the basic necessity of a physical enclosure. The house has become both a metaphor for the mother womb and a mirror of self. Ultimately, when it achieves its essence, this first form of architecture is a symbolic manifestation of the sanctuary of conscious and subconscious eternal being.

NOTES:

1. G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 4.
2. C. Cooper, "The House as Symbol of Self,' *Designing for Human Behaviour,* ed. Jorh Lang et al. (Pennsylvania: Dowen, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., 1974), p. 138.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 137-138.
4. O. Marc, *Psychology of the House* (London: THames & Hudson, 1977), p. 14.
5. K. Bloomer & C. Moore, *Body, Memory and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 5.
6. Cooper, p. 131.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
8. Bachelard, p. 6.
9. Bloomer & Moore, p. 2.
10. Cooper, p. 136.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
12. M. Vitruvius, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books of Architecture,* trans. M.H. Morgan (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1960), p. 38-40.
13. J. Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primative Hut in Architectural History,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 44.
14. Vitruvius, p. 40.
15. Rykwert. p. 190.
16. Marc, p.67.

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Rafel H. Aziz is a recent graduate of the School of Architecture at Carleton University.

BRAVE NEW HOUSE
by Robert Platts, Gary Hasler, and Paul Anderson

Les auteurs de cet article sont trois étudiants de première année du programme de maîtrise de l'Université du Manitoba.

BRAVE NEW HOUSE

Today's society is at once progressive, fickle, trend-following and highly mobile. In the space of ten years, almost any family will experience wide swings in space needs, personal tastes, and requirements. Whether they know it or not, such a family, straight-jacketed by its studwall-drywall-stucco house, fairly screams for cheap and quick flexibility: a house which will accommodate changes with little or no disruption of the inhabitants' lives.

The traditional house was wholistic, in that the structure served as both interior and exterior expression and was integral with any contained systems (i.e. fireplaces, venting windows). As new services became necessary (i.e. plumbing, electricity, communication, central heating), they were shoehorned into existing wall and ceiling types to preserve the traditional appearance. The resulting house is clumsy and inflexible, in that changing or moving any one system or component requires radical surgery followed by finicky, labour-intensive cosmetic repairs.

A truly contemporary house must be atomistic, with components as independent as possible so that changing one does not require disturbing the others. The components can be separated into three types:

A. **Structural Base Layer:** both structural and weatherskin on the exterior, space-dividing on the interior.

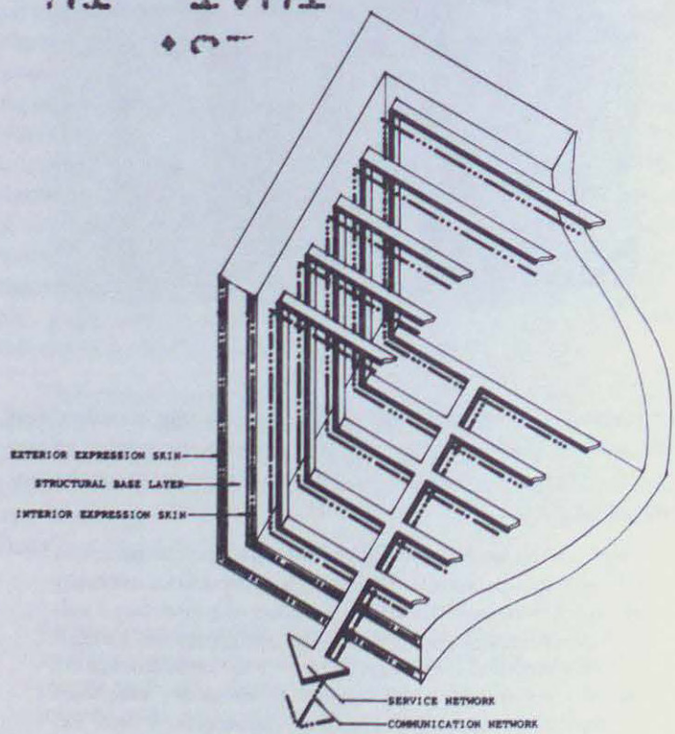
B. **Expression Skin:** covers both surfaces of the base layers, both on surfaces of the base independant: (i.e. "bolt-on").

C. **Service Network:** (i.e. plumbing, ventilation, electricity, communications) — permeates the interior space, enabling access to any point; linked to exterior mains through a command centre.

All of these components would be accessible and flexible. However, this does not require that services be exposed or "expressed," so long as they can be easily accessed. The Structural Base Layer can even be of a conventional construction type as long as it is sufficiently flexible towards changes and additions, and is not dependent on the expression skin for rigidity or weatherproofing. The expression skin is the most individualistic, customised component, changing from room to room, from time to time, and even being "unbolted" and taken to the new house when the family moves.

A design based on this new attitude will result in a house flexible enough to accomodate the changing needs and desires of the truly contemporary person. This new house, by its very flexibility, can avoid the inevitable obsolescence which plagues current forms.

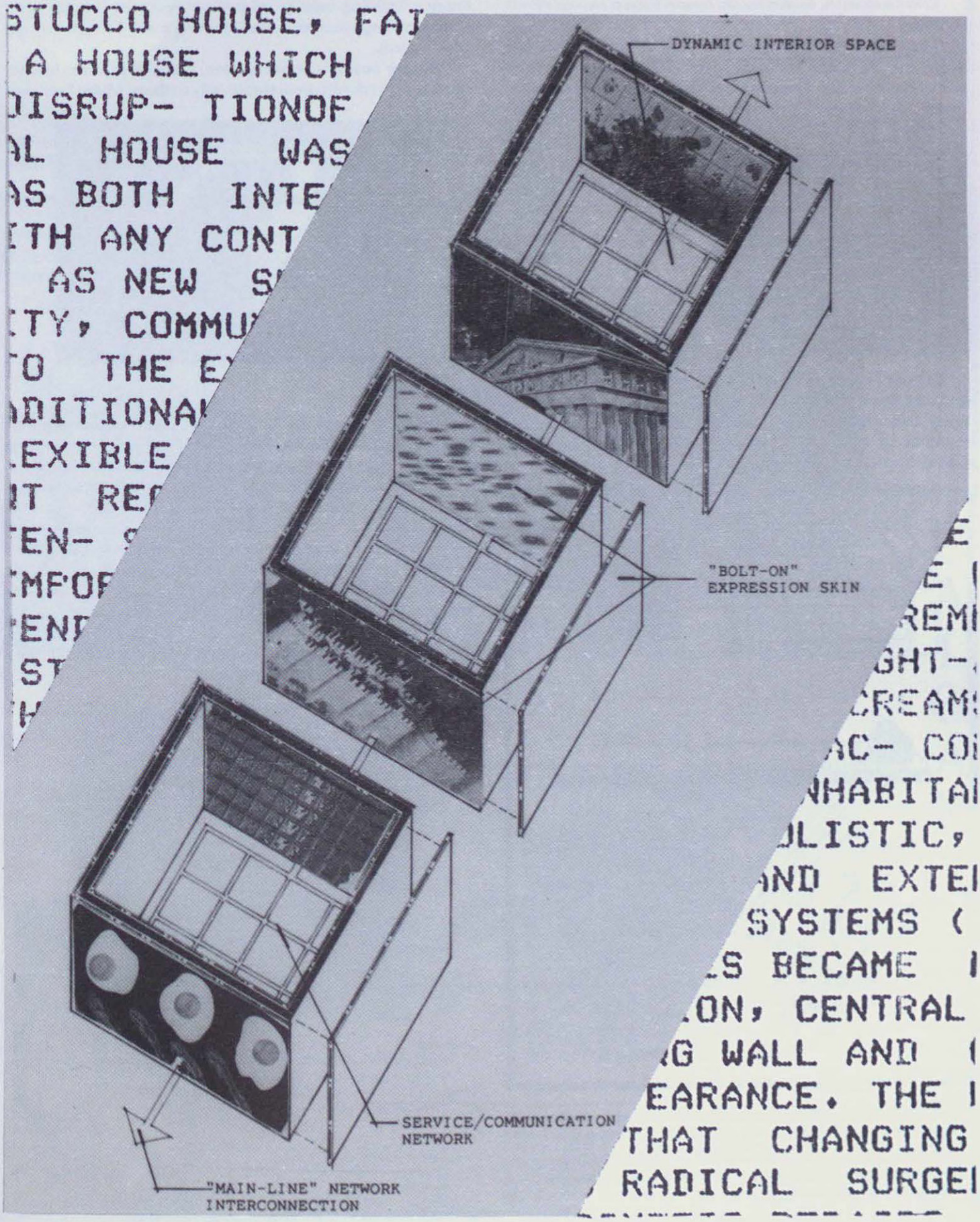
Robert Platts, Gary Hasler, and Paul Anderson are first year master's students of architecture at the University of Manitoba.



THE SYSTEM

Layout by: Christiane Mong-Hine and David Morin

THE SYSTEM APPLIED



SELF-HOUSES

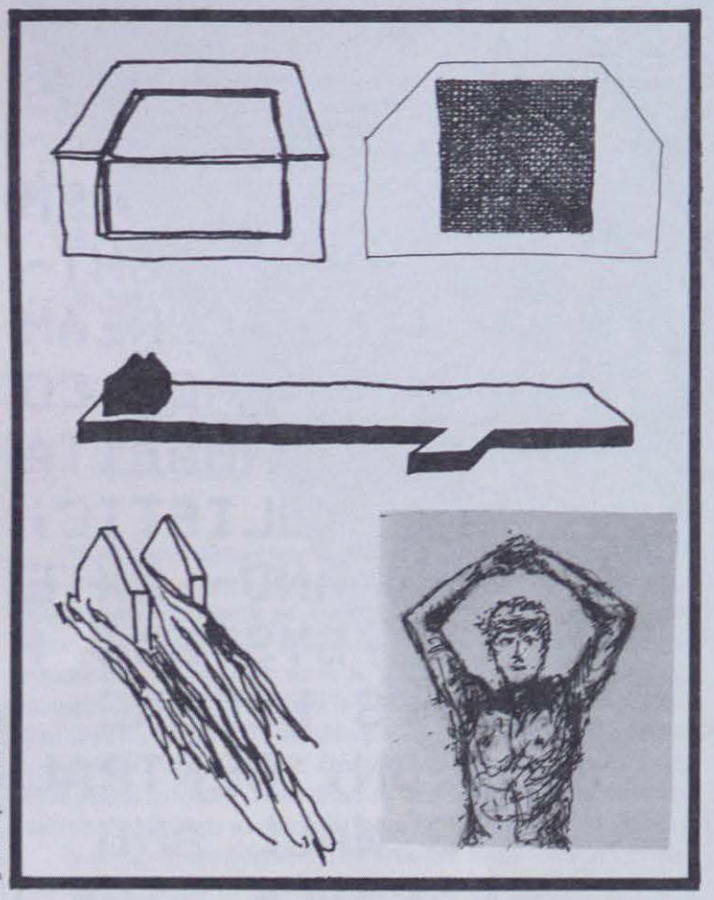
by Peter Trépanier

Voici des esquisses, oeuvres finales, commentaires et travaux récents de l'auteur.

The plans for my houses are numerous. Sketches are traced and then altered. Each succeeding plan is a novelty and a surprise. My designs stem from memories of many houses I have known. Gradually, the disparate buildings are reconciled. The plans now represent expressions of dailyness:

habitat,
hearth,
comfort,
cloister,
shelter,
retreat,
work,
childbirth,
family,
and death.

In public, this species of house emerges as an unadorned structure that regenerates its own familiarity. It is a portable object and is adaptable to its surroundings. My house is impersonal in style but personal in content. Privately, it staunchly retains its individuality.

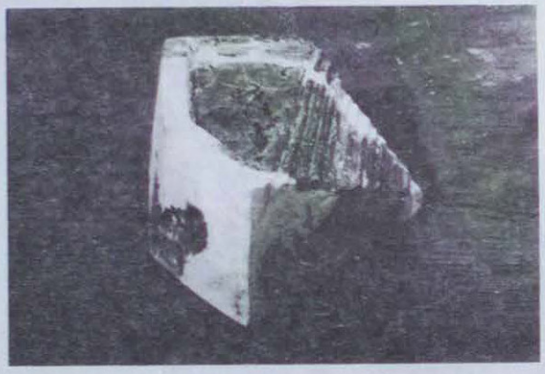


What was the reaction of the person who first made a symmetrical house? He felt a new contentment in the house. He could see that it reflected himself. He felt a new satisfaction in having built it and perhaps an awareness of clarity in his mind as the means.

Agnes Martin

My house is a house within a house. It sits in a clearing, serves earthly necessities, structures events, provides privacy and projects publicly. Unfenced from the human cycle, the smudged walls breathe the dense weight of time. Disdainful of any precision, broken lines spread intently through the mortar tracing interrupted surfaces of dips and hollows. The sagging building baits persistent impressions. Countless interpreters impose a past, maneuvering many footnotes to invent a truth.

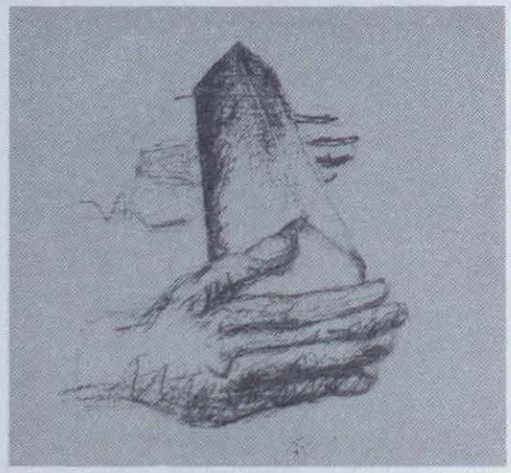
But for now this house is mine. I inhabit its core. It functions as my redoubt, penetrable only to those whom I choose.



Standing upon the beaten earth, yet softened by irregularities and afterthoughts within its simple geometric forms, my house functions as the sensible shelter of my mind. The syntax of clay articulates building with thinking, bringing into being. Motifs are pruned to reinforce a modest style of economy.

Confident of the future, this simple structure is prepared to muffle the jolts from narrated interpretations amid claims of authenticity. My house speaks a common language. It keeps me out from the sun and in from the rain.

Peter Trépanier is presently a librarian at the Canadian Centre for Architecture as well as a practising artist.



Illustrations:

1. *Family house,* Loretteville, Quebec. Photographer Unkown, 1954. "Citing excerpts from my ancestral past."

Figures 2-5. Preparatory sketches, ink on paper, 1984.

2. *House within a house*
3. *Screenhouse*
4. *Landing*
5. *Snowdrift house*
6. *Forming a double pitched roof over my head,* 1985. Preparatory sketch, Graphite on paper.
7. *Redoubt,* 1985. Self-hardening clay, plaster, tile grout, and water putty.
8. *With house in hands,* 1985. Black diazo, Graphite and Conté.

Layout by: Vincent de Hartog and Stephen Silverman

STUDENT DESIGNED HOUSES

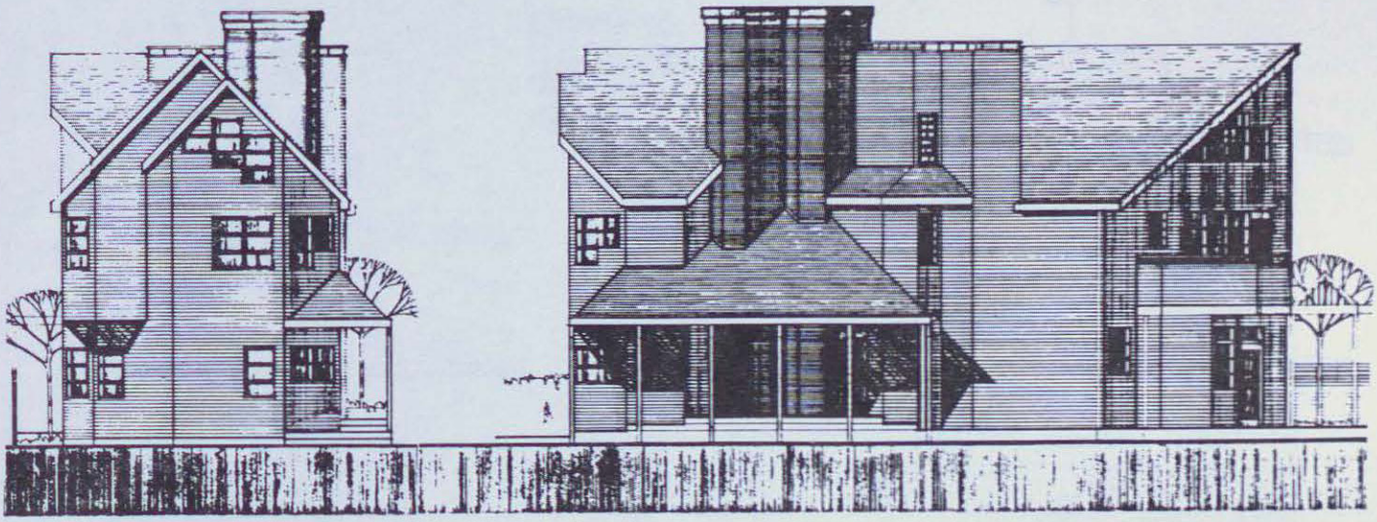
FROM ACROSS CANADA

The Fifth Column made a request to each school of architecture in Canada to submit a student project of a house; a single family detached dwelling.

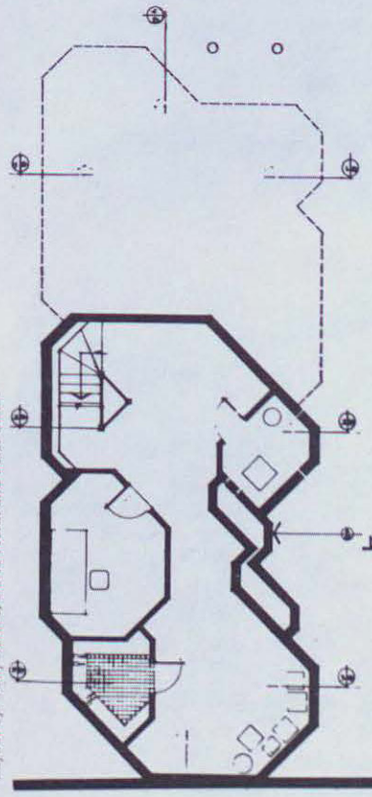
Nous avons proposé à chacune des écoles d'architecture canadiennes de publier un projet résidentiel: une maison. Les projets présentés reflètent, nous espérons, une perception nouvelle d'un type de bâtiment qui, depuis toujours, a permis à l'individu de s'exprimer.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Environmental Design
Design for an Infill Home
Project by: Miles J. Burgoyne

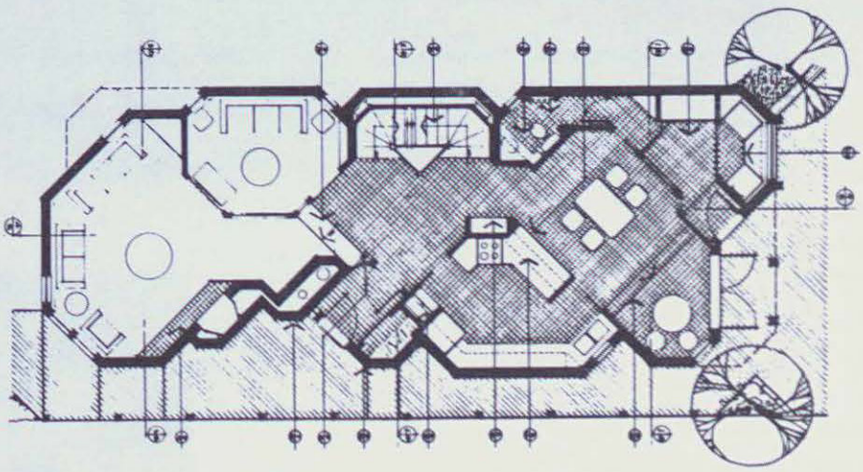
CALGARY



west south



basement



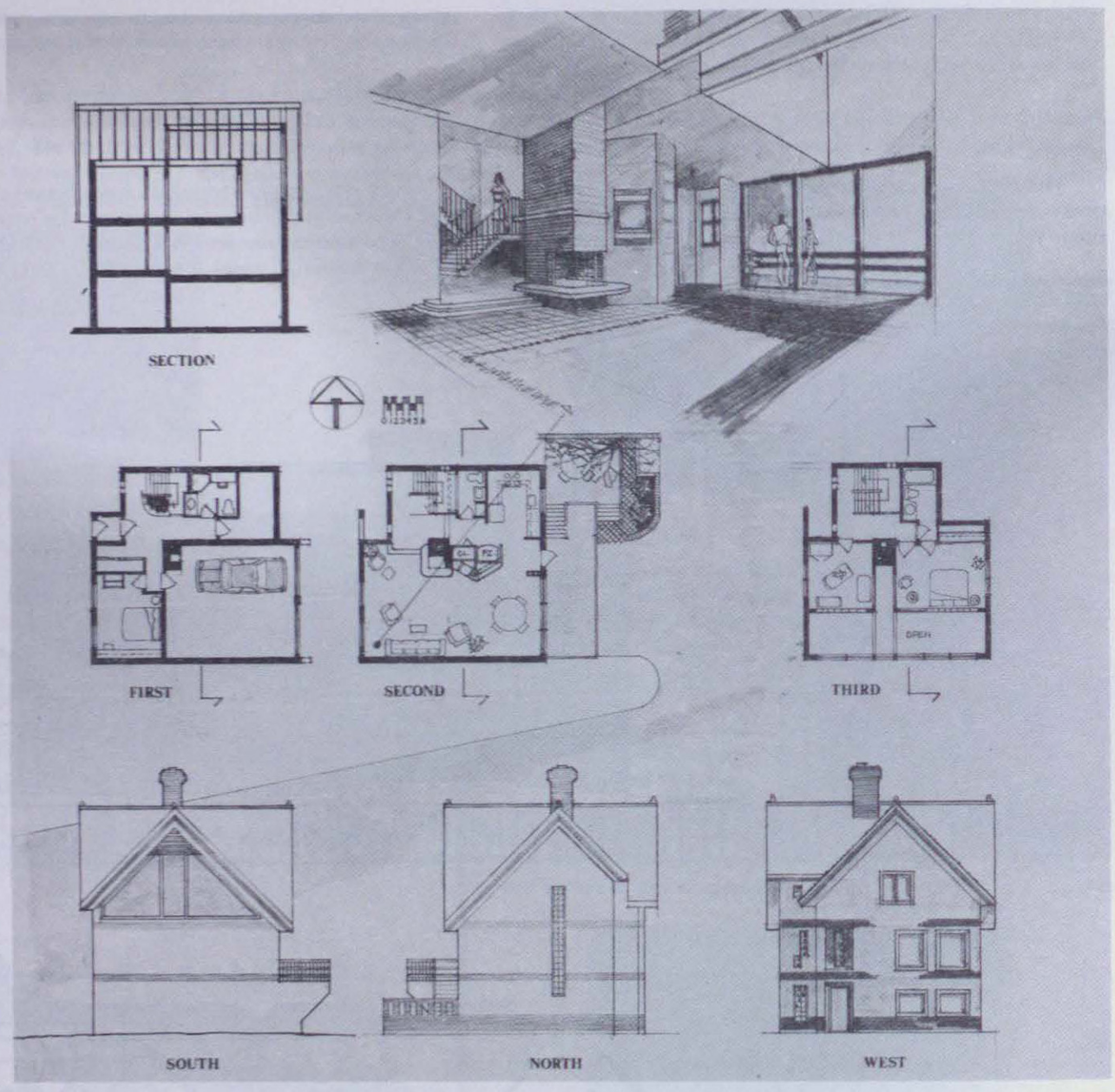
first floor

Layout by: Tony Barake, David Morin and Peter Smale

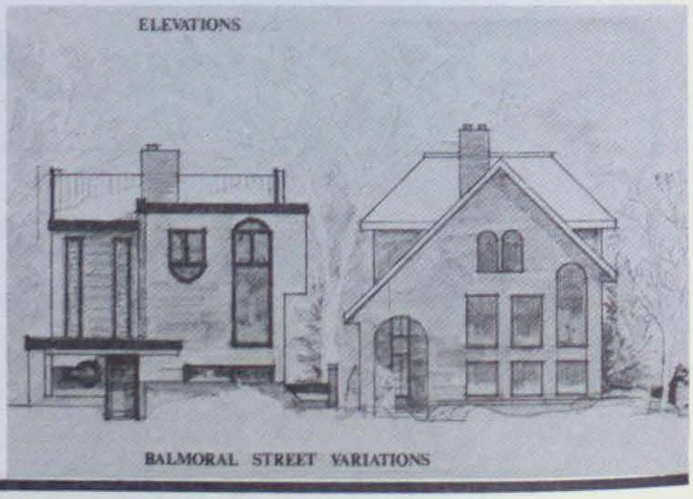
The project is a design investigation of details and detailing in residential architecture. The presentation illustrates both the overall architecture and some details of a single family home in one of Calgary's inner-city communities. It presents an illustrated argument of a careful concern for both the quality and coherence of detailing, and it stresses that the compatibility of the overall design and its details directly affects the quality of the architecture as a whole.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
December 1985
Inner-City Solar
Project by: Michael Treble Lysenko

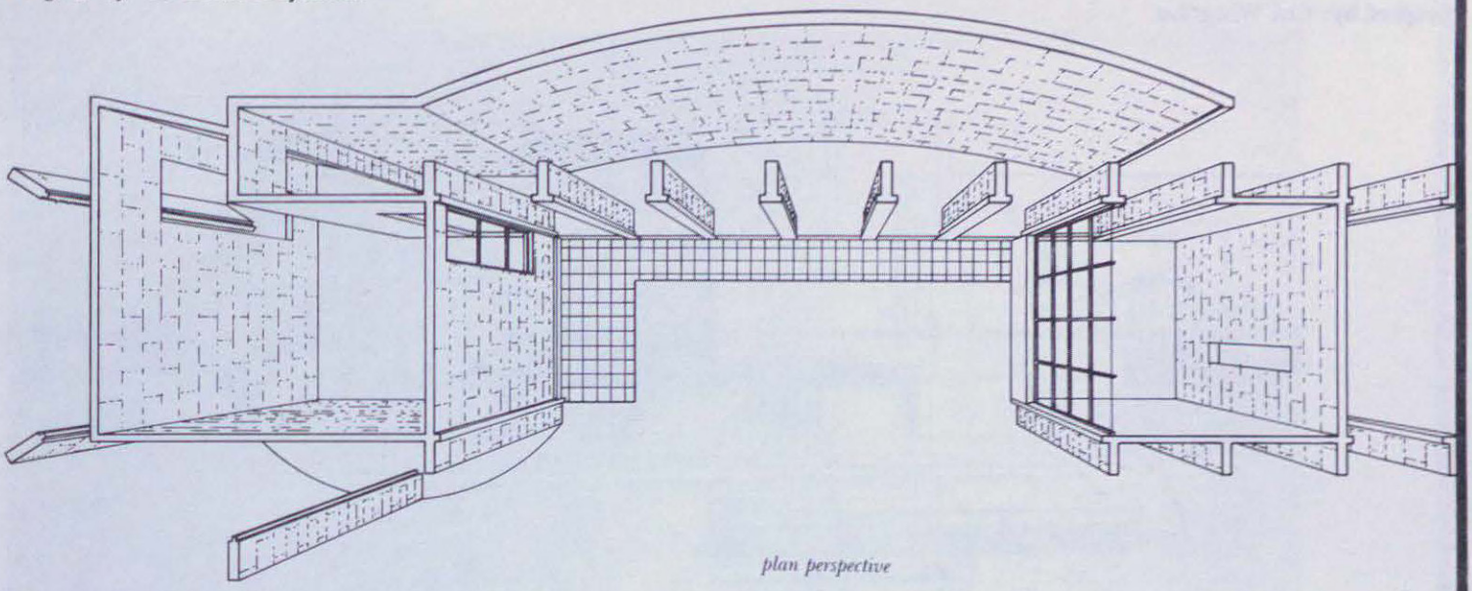
MANITOBA



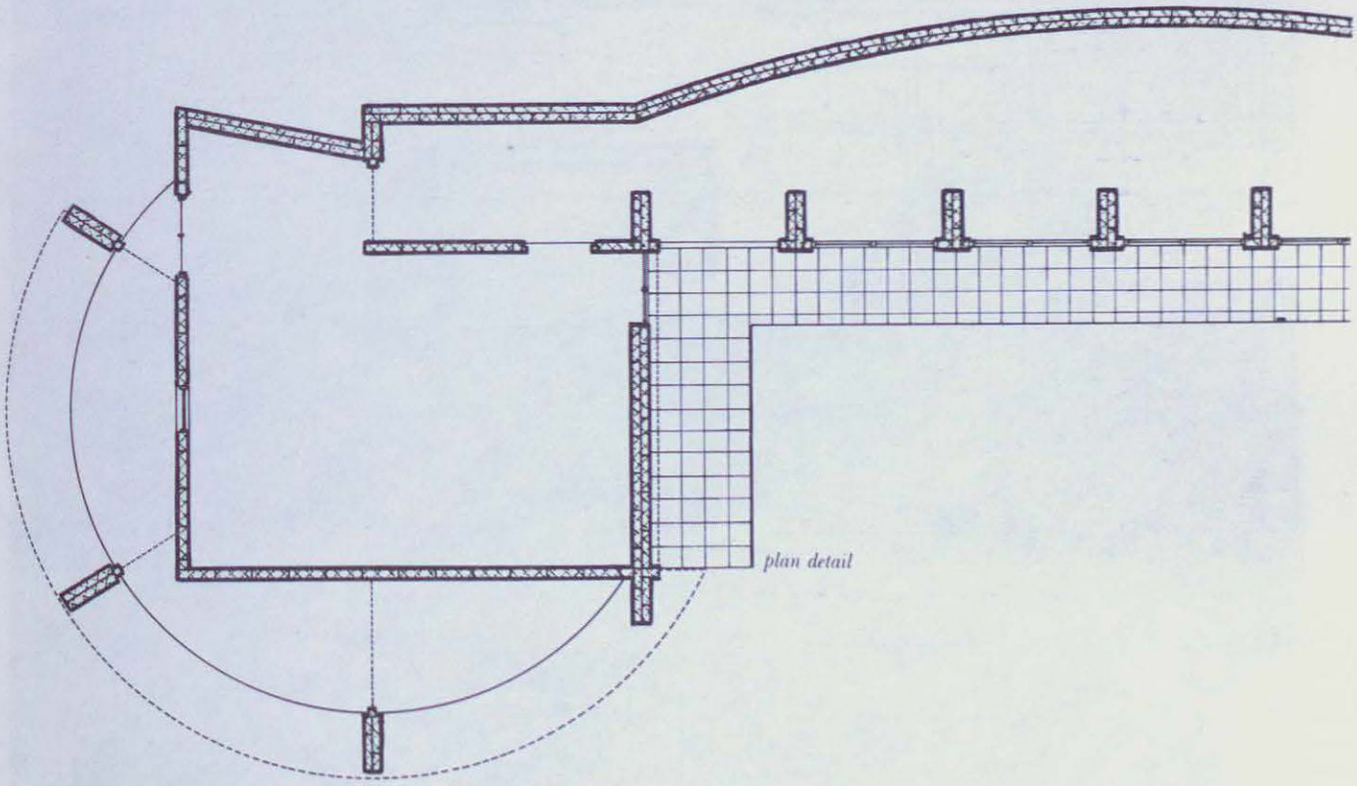
This house forms one part of a high density urban development competition entry, consisting of housing forms of varying densities (30 units/acre). Priorities include: responding to an existing Victorian neighbourhood of three-storey detached houses, using the product of a brick industry sponsor, and being energy conscious. The street facade of the house (West) is in sympathy with the older buidings without resorting to imitation. The remaining elevations gradually evolve into a more contemporary statement on the south and east sides. Extensive use of concrete and brick in the interior form a heat-sink for the large amount of solar gain facilitated by the high south glazing. Rooms are oriented to collect sunlight at the times of peak use. Second floor punctures encourage natural convection and heat circulation, while providing a dynamic visual sense to the otherwise tight unit.



UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
School of Architecture
Project by: Graham Goymour

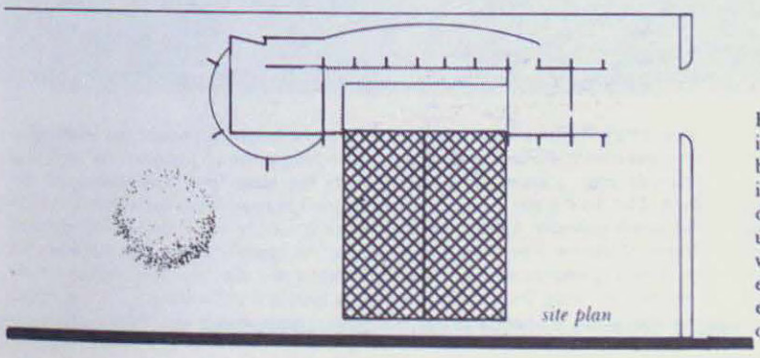


plan perspective



plan detail

WATERLOO

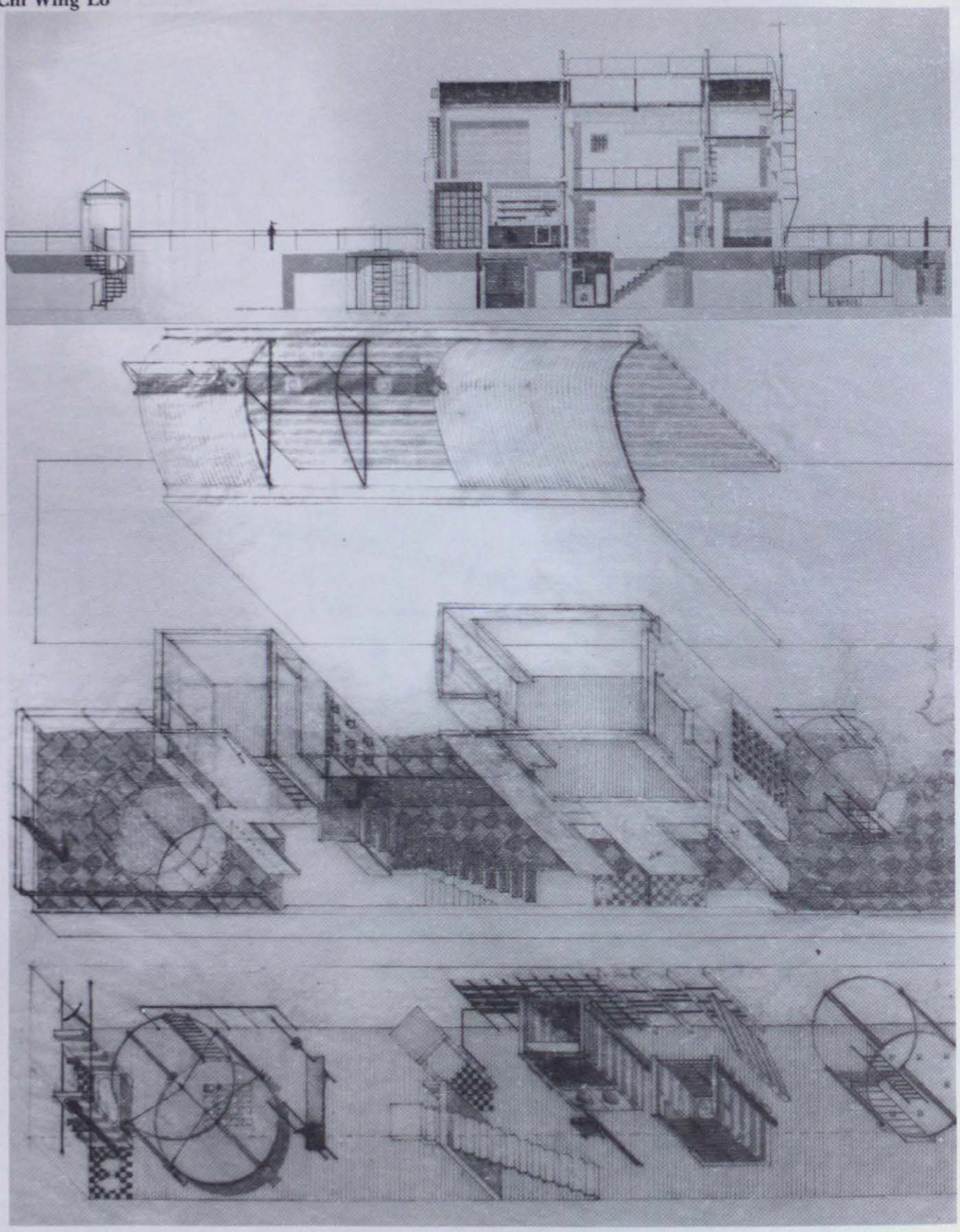


site plan

Prepared as a short introductory exercise for a second year term, this building is a supplementary house built on the driveway of an existing suburban bungalow. The new house is planned so that it creates a court with the existing building which operates as an outdoor room during the summer. The dwelling was designed as part of a programme of intensification for the suburbs; a programme which would repopulate this underdeveloped realm without undermining all of the assumptions behind suburban forms. To this end it is intended to appear as a kind of inhabitated pergola and garden wall, extending the typology of dwelling while remaining true to the iconography of the garden.

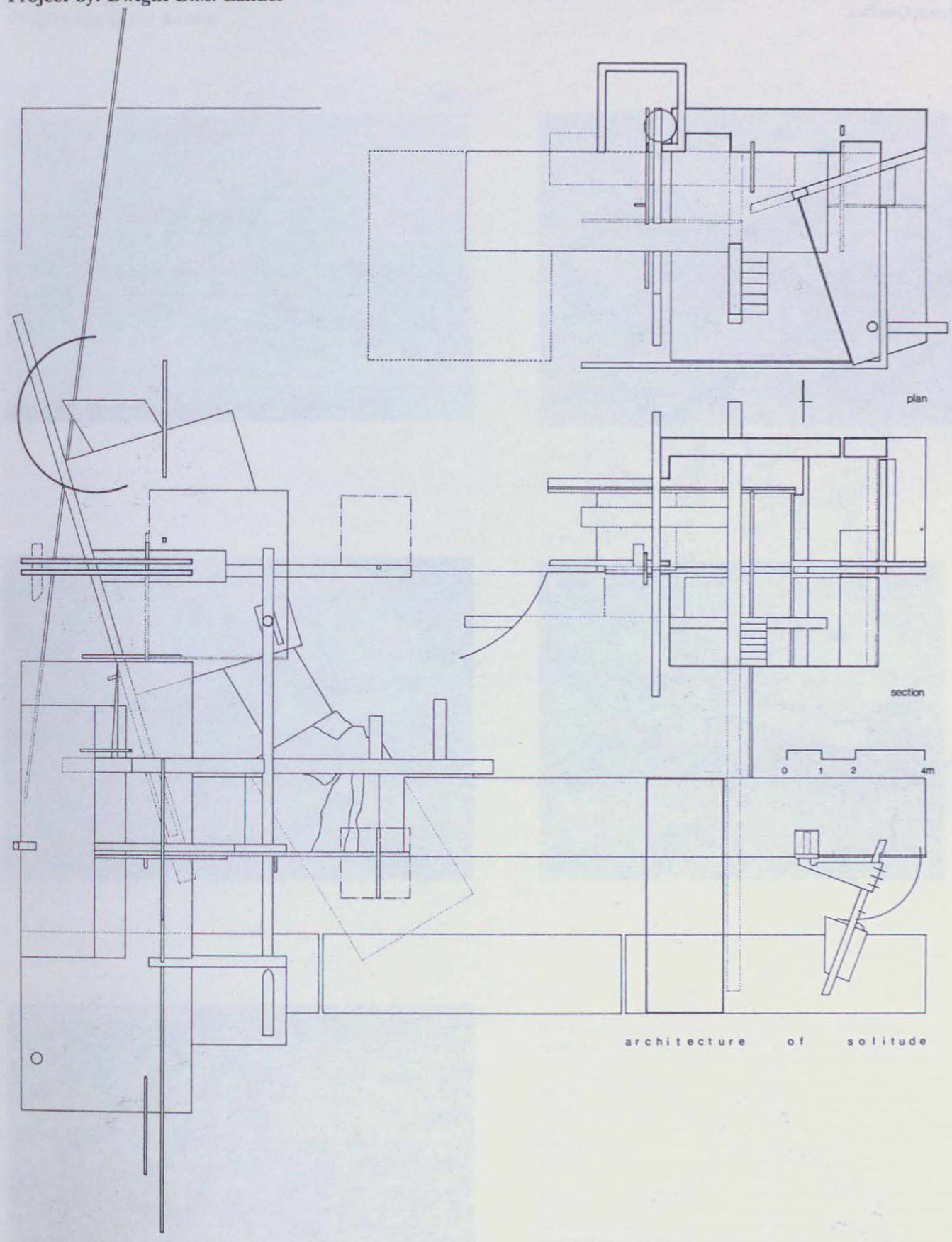
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
1984: Third Year Studio
School of Architecture
Project by: Chi Wing Lo

TORONTO



Very often, and especially in cities organised by grids of streets, I come across gaps between row houses. The most tempting thing to do in this situation is to roof the gap between the party walls, and I feel that by doing so, half of the house is already built. The front andback walls then remain to be executed. In this case, I decided to use a pavillion blocking each ends, leaving the party walls intact. The larger pavillion at the front houses the music room in the upper level, in a position relative to the house which echoes that of a navigator's room in relation to a ship. The smaller pavillion at the rear is denser and will be packed with books, precious objects and ladders. Between these two pavillions is a court; the heart of the house. Its neutrality and inclusiveness excite me as it is both a place to fix a piece of furniture as well as a place to greet a guest. The court shares the same level and paving as the deck. The deck is the arrival level after one has risen from the street level via the spiral staircase. Under the deck there is a large room occupying the full extent of the lot. The theme of the object-in-space is carried through at this level in a fragmented way. The light wells are the two foci and are surrounded by beds. The smaller bed has a ladder for climbing up to the deck, and the larger one has a tension structure for contemplation.

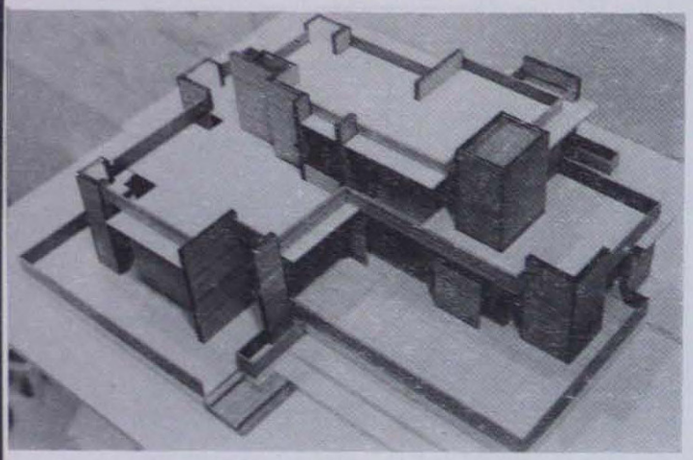
CARLETON UNIVERSITY
School of Architecture
1985-86 Session: Fifth Year Studio
Project by: Dwight D.M. Lander

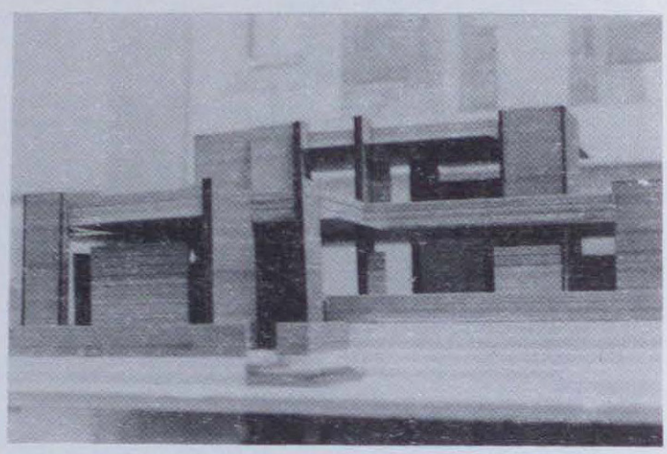


CARLETON

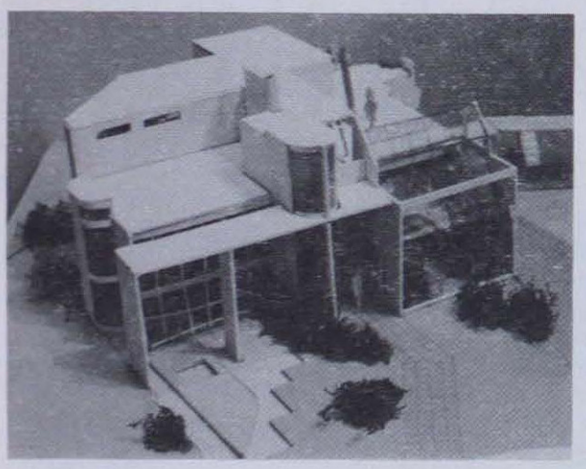
Situated on two islands in the southwestern Finnish Archipelago, the studio/house for sculptor Kain Tapper and his poet wife Marjo proposes a dynamic dialogue with the climatic extremes of the Gulf. The seasonal transformations of nature allow this simple house to interact with its surroundings in an almost theatrical way; and they provide a complex variety of situations for the exploration of mental solitude.

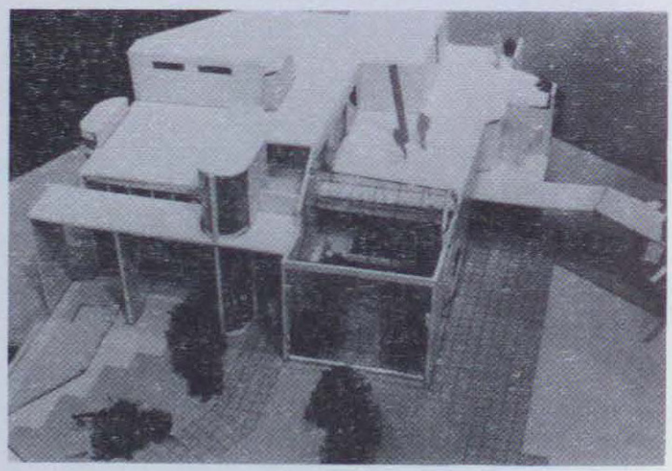
UNIVERSITE DE MONTREAL, hiver 1985
Micro-projet de la semaine
Etudiants: Patrice Gamache (Frank Lloyd Wright) et Alain Desforges (Richard Meier)
Tuteur: Jean Ouellet





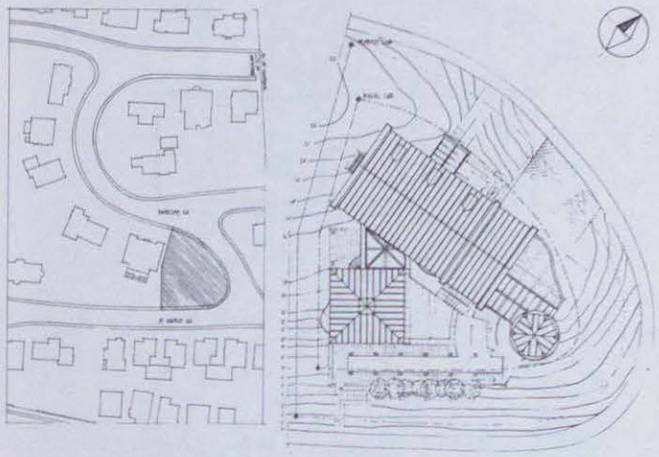
MONTREAL

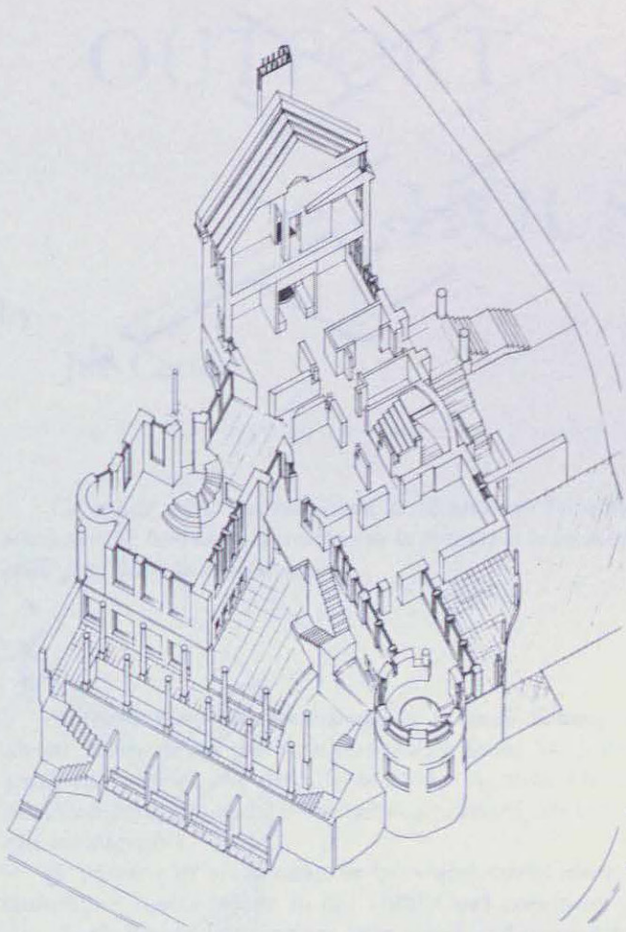




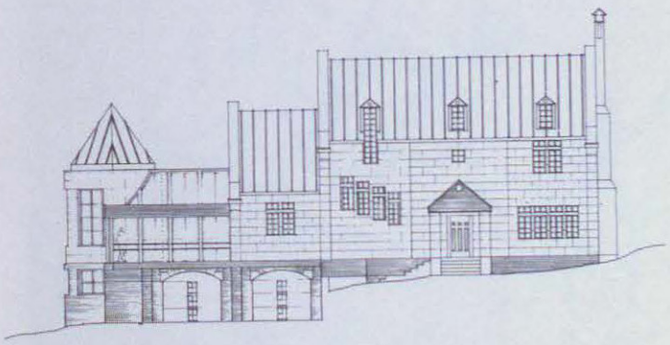
A la manière de... est un exercice connu par plusieurs écoles d'architecture dont nous résumons ici le fonctionnement: il s'agit de bien comprendre l'inspiration du climat théorique et mental d'un architecte particulier afin de pouvoir réinterpréter sa typologie. Bien que bref, l'exercice fut jugé enrichissant par tous les participants. Ils apprécièrent l'apprentissage qu'il permit ainsi que l'occasion de travailler à petite échelle, dans une école où les projets à échelle urbaine reçoivent davantage d'importance.

McGILL UNIVERSITY
Third Year Studio
1985: Fall Term
School of Architecture
Project by: Bram Ratner





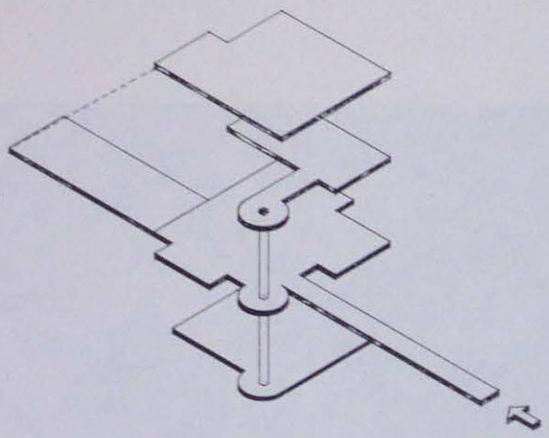
sectional perspective

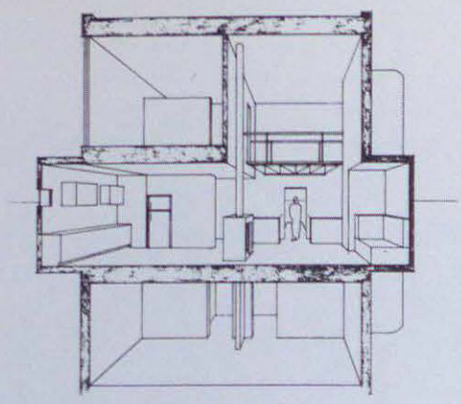


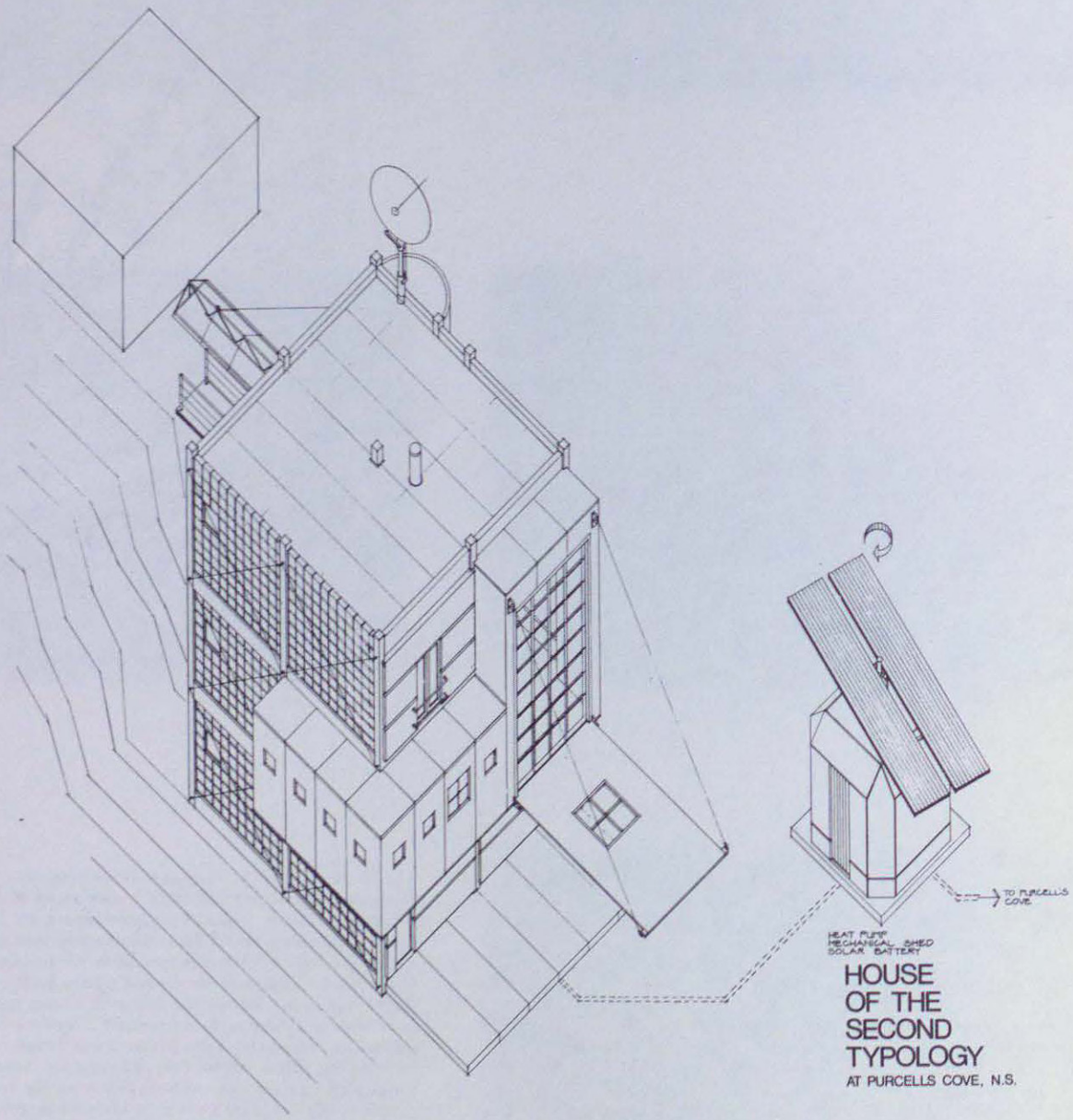
McGILL

The house provides a response to three basic design criteria: historicism, regionalism, and contextualism. It is comprised of three separated and independent elements, linked by glazed structures. The three elements are derived from early French Canadian Architecture in urban Montreal, and the details are abstract elements specific to Westmount Architecture. The three elements: the main body, tower and square pavilion are placed on the site in such a way as to continue the sweep of houses down Ramzay Road, and to provide a focal point at the corner and carry the observer's eye along St. Sulpice Road. Placement of the elements was therefore chosen with a high concern for the urban fabric. The planning was based on served and service zones with a progression in formality from the entrance to the court. The geometry of the square and circle was used to govern the inner dimensions of the house and to define the vertical zones within the main body. The elements are unified through their materials and are tied together on the main floor by a cross-axis, with the intersecting node located at the entrance. The overall feel of the house was designed with the intention of creating sequential yet individual rooms providing varying experiences. The spaces were designed to an intimate scale to provide comfort for the individual attempting to eschew the pretension usually associated with the upper Westmount house.

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF NOVA SCOTIA
School of Architecture
Project by: Brent Ash







TUNS

HOUSE OF THE SECOND TYPOLOGY

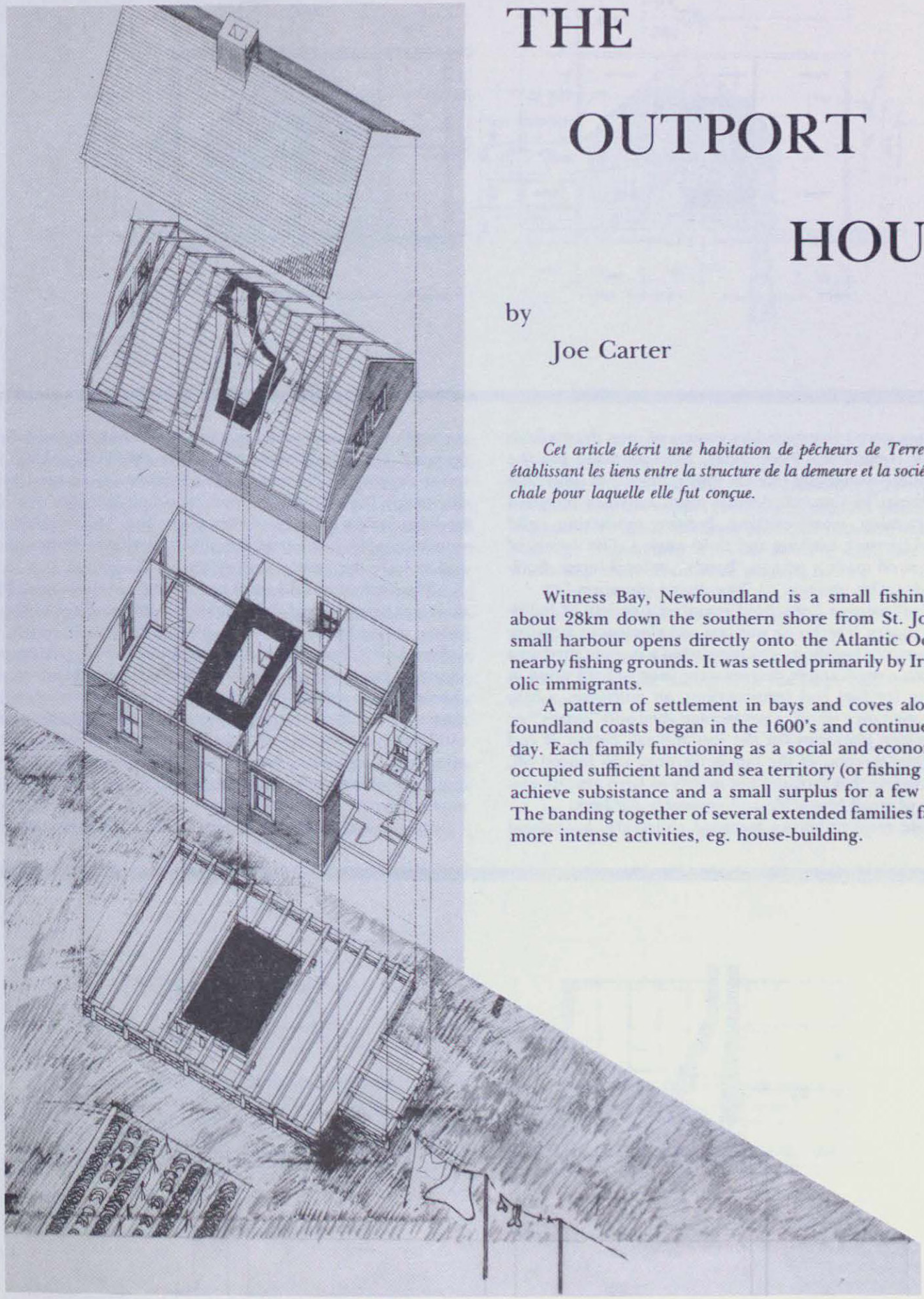
AT PURCELLS COVE, N.S.

The project represented is a first term studio project. It was executed after an initial study for a "rustic" house. Some of the goals of the problem were to deal with basic aspects of enclosure, light and procession through space.

THE OUTPORT HOUSE

by

Joe Carter

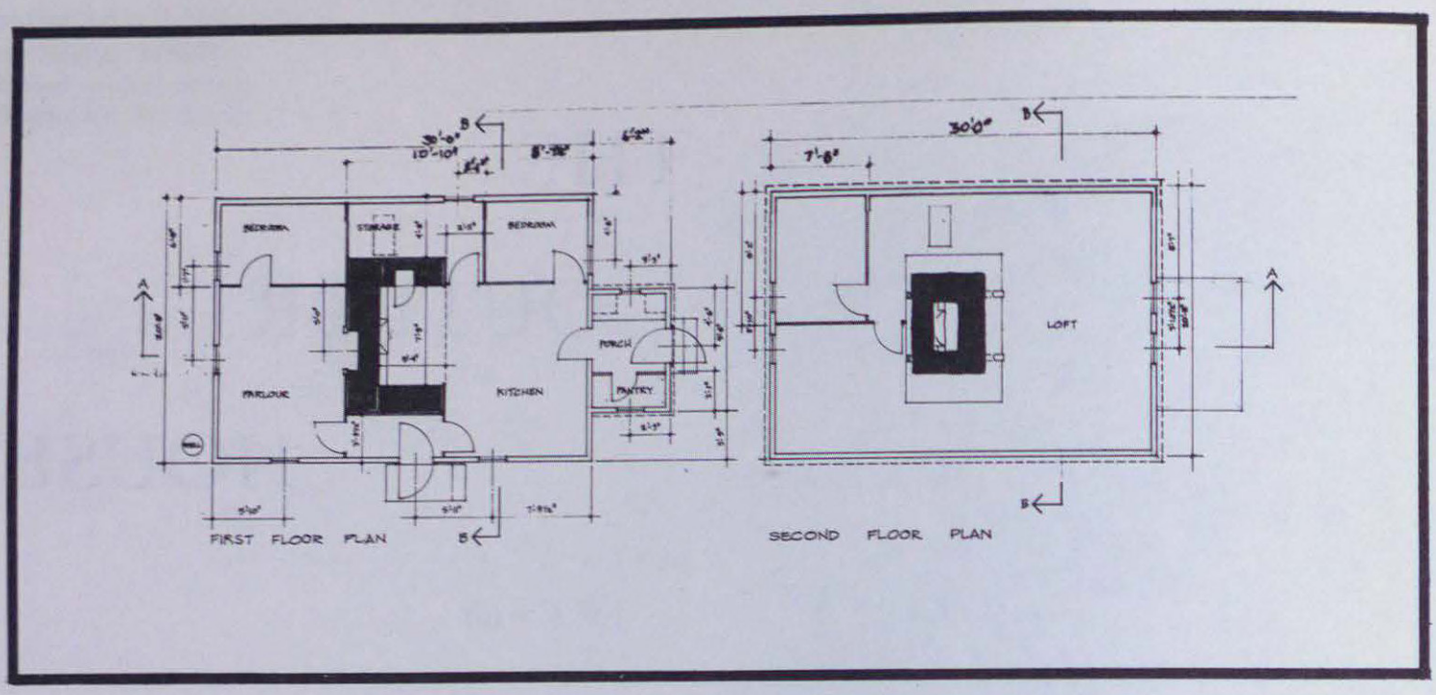


Cet article décrit une habitation de pêcheurs de Terre-Neuve en établissant les liens entre la structure de la demeure et la société patriarchale pour laquelle elle fut conçue.

Witness Bay, Newfoundland is a small fishing village about 28km down the southern shore from St. John's. Its small harbour opens directly onto the Atlantic Ocean and nearby fishing grounds. It was settled primarily by Irish Catholic immigrants.

A pattern of settlement in bays and coves along Newfoundland coasts began in the 1600's and continues to this day. Each family functioning as a social and economic unit, occupied sufficient land and sea territory (or fishing berth) to achieve subsistance and a small surplus for a few luxuries. The banding together of several extended families facilitated more intense activities, eg. house-building.

Layout by: Joseph Browns



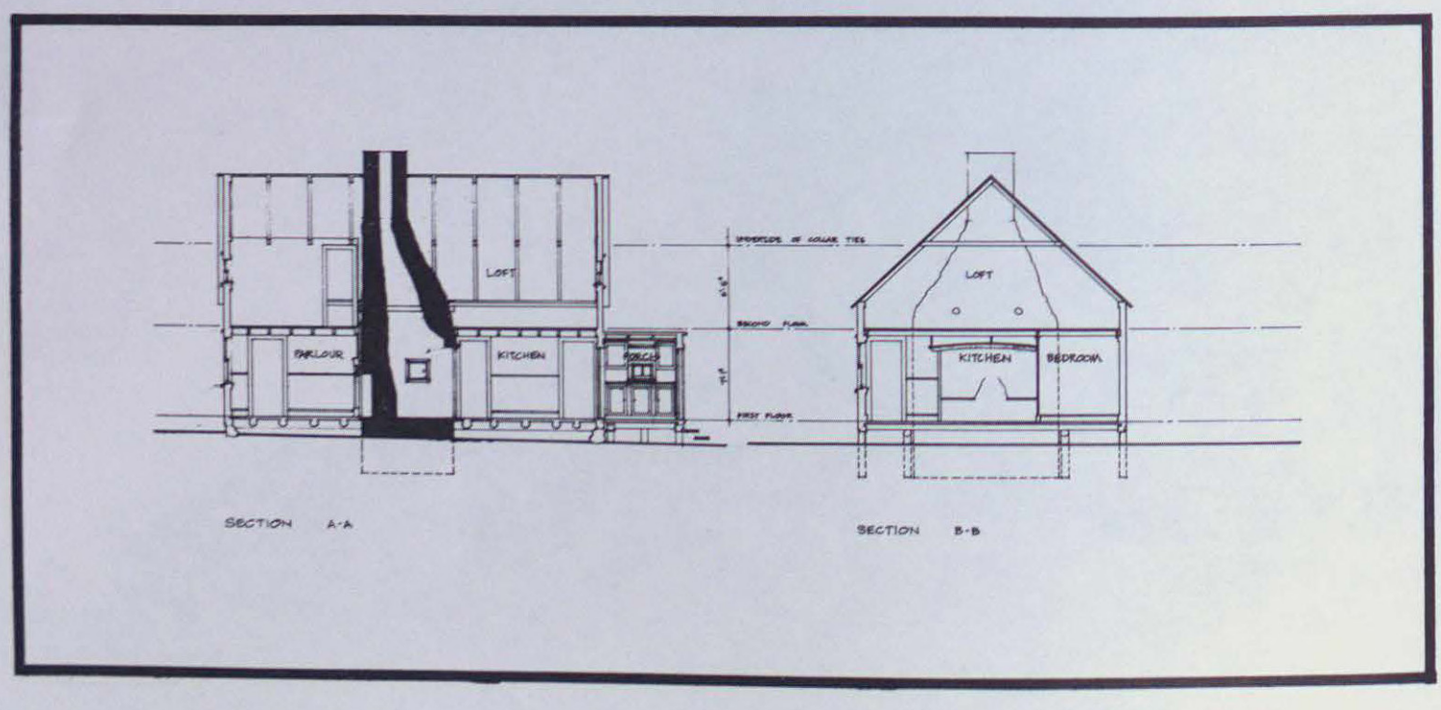
Houses were constructed by groups of men drawn from the larger community. Even today, Newfoundland has the highest home-ownership rate (or lowest degree of mortgage indebtedness) in Canada. Annual work activities included fishing, farming, wood-working, hunting, gathering (wild fruits and berries), cooking and child-raising. The variety of skills required made a person "handy" in local terms. Sociologists describe this trait as "vocational pluralism."

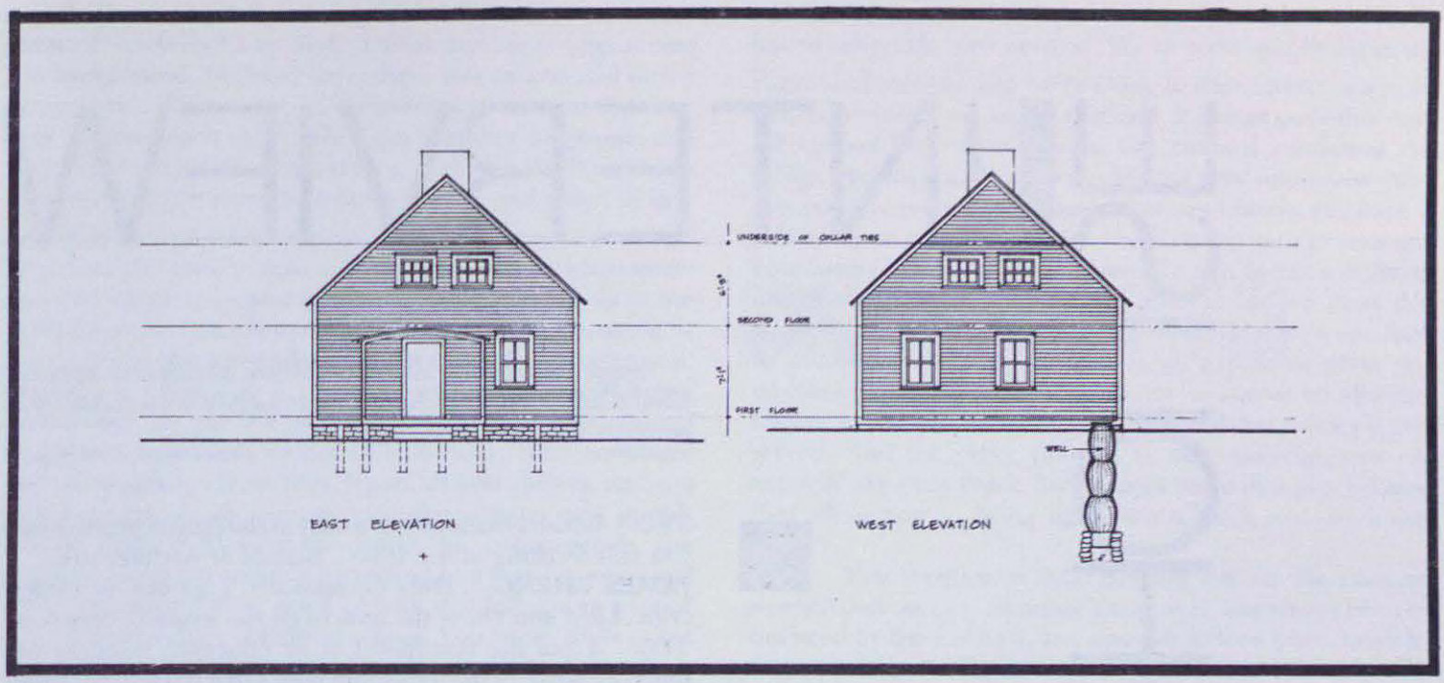
The subsistance household required a variety of buildings and spaces. The house was just one element in a cluster of family-owned buildings which included a storage shed on a roof cellar, a small stable (horses were used to haul wood in the winter for fuel and construction), an outhouse, a fish-splitting shed on a wharf, a net storage shed and "stages" or large wooden platforms for the sun and salt curing of cod fish. A good portion of the family territory was fenced off, partly to define that territory but mainly to keep grazing animals out of small hay fields and vegetable gardens.

Female responsibilities included child-care, household management, some gardening and some shore-based fisheries work. Household management consisted of cooking, interior design and furnishing. The house was oriented (why do we say "orient"ed and not "occident"ed?) so that the kitchen window had a good view of the bay. This enabled the woman to see when her husband was coming in from fishing and to have the family meal ready for his arrival.

The kitchen was the most public space in the house. The door was never locked and neighbours did not have to knock before entering. Of the time spent in the house, nearly all waking hours were spent in the kitchen. Eating, talking and snoozing on a "day-bed" all took place here. Most of the chimney's capacity is thrown towards the kitchen. A community event like a wedding results in the kitchen packed with well wishers. House parties today in Newfoundland often have a kitchen crowded with talking, singing and drinking, while other rooms are almost empty. Crowdedness is an important part of celebration.

In contrast to the public nature of the kitchen, the par-





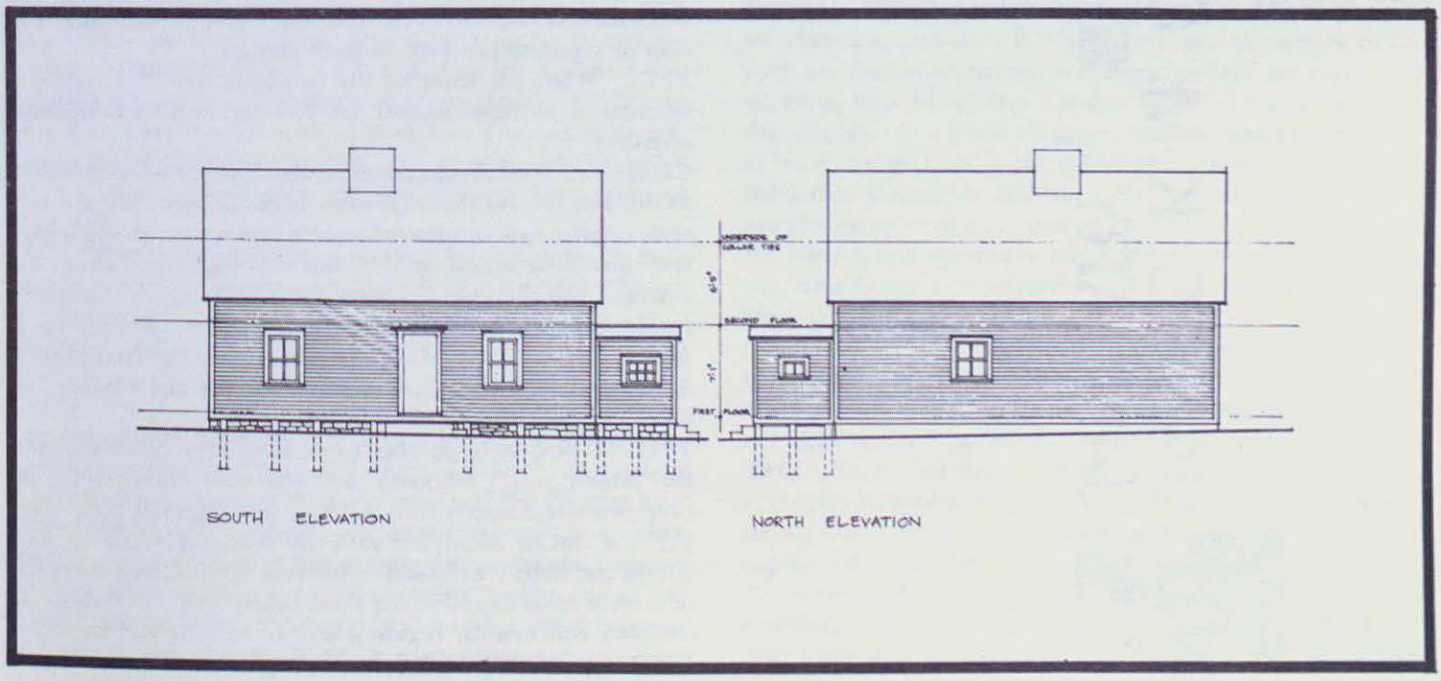
lour was off-limits to the community and even to the children of the household. Visitors from outside the community or the local priest were brought to this room through the "front" door, on the longest wall of the house, and presented with family treasures and the best of everything the family could provide. The parlour (derived from the french *parler*) would have store-bought furniture, finer room finishes, fine dishes, family pictures, a pump organ, and in more recent times, graduation photographs and sport trophies. Despite the relative lack of "creature comforts" by modern standards, almost thirty percent of the floor area was devoted to this expression of the importance of the family and to provide hospitality for "strangers" or formal visits. This expression obviously had great importance with so much space set aside for such infrequent use.

The most private spaces were the two bedrooms along the rear wall of the house. Children had access to the sleeping loft up a ladder in the storage room.

This fifty-eight square metre house is supported by a wooden sill on field stones with vertical logs forming the exterior walls. These logs were slightly flattened inside and out to receive wood sheathing and clapboard respectively. Rafters and collar ties support roof sheathing and wood shingles. A massive two-flue chimney provided heat for warmth and cooking. Water came from an outdoor well, the lining of which was made from three wooden barrels.

This particular house was typical in the early to mid 1800's, and is similar to houses built in Ireland. These measured drawings were done by the author and Robert Mellin in 1982. The house was since demolished in 1984. It was one of the last remaining examples of the large chimney house in the province.

Joe Carter is a practising architect who has just received a six month teaching appointment in China.



THE·HOUSE INTERVIEW

JAMES K.M. CHENG
JANUARY 1986

Angus Cheng, Rédacteur du Graphisme, a récemment interviewé James K.M. Cheng, un architecte en pratique priv de Vancouver sur sa perception de la "Maison."

TFC: Besides maintaining a busy architectural practice, are you still teaching at the U.B.C. School of Architecture?
JAMES CHENG: Only occasionally. I go out as a guest critic. I just don't have the time to go run a tutorial anymore.
TFC: From the standpoint of an educator, what do you think are some of the important issues that students of architecture should address today?
CHENG: OK. That's a tough one, because I think every school has different opinions. My personal opinion is: I think young architects should be as well rounded as possible before they get out of college, and I would avoid specializing in the first professional programme. The main issue that I would stress is to equip the student with as good a design background as possible. After all, in the end, what distinguishes an architect from a draughtsman is that the architecture student has the ability to design. The drafting college graduates might be able to draft and draw very well, but they certainly cannot resolve problems that deal with the same issues as an architect.
TFC: Do you feel then that the practical skills, for example, of doing working drawings, could be learned at the office, and the design theory or the baisis should be learned while you're at school?
CHENG: I disagree with that. Look in my office anyway. We don't see working drawings as a separate issue from design. We design everything from conceptual design to the last detail of the window trim, because I feel that every little bit of that contributes to the final making of the building. You cannot separate production from design.
TFC: What are some of the products that your office is working on at the moment? Are you very much a residential architect?
CHENG: Well, we do anything that a client would allow us to do, but the bulk of our work is residential. We are currently doing two residential towers and we are doing a high rise mixed-use building. Well not that high, only about 8-9 storeys. And then we did work for EXPO, which is not of a residential nature. We do have commercial office buildings as well. So generally speaking, we like to have the challenge of different design problems rather than finding a niche and hiding our heads in it.
TFC: Going on to another topic, if we may. Since the 50's, the West Coast/Vancouver area was considered to be the only place in Canada with a distinctive regional style. This perhaps can be identified with the domestic works of Ron Thom and Arthur Erickson. What role do you think these figures have contributed to the West Coast Style and is there an ongoing concern for regional architecture in Vancouver?
CHENG: Well, I think there is no question that Ron Thom

Layout by: Jennifer Joyal and Julie Lyras

and Erickson and B.C. Binning and a few others have contributed to a West Coast Style. I think one has to understand the background. In those days, there was an arts and hiring programme. These people, meaning architects and artists, they all knew each other. They got together frequently and they discussed where architecture is and what the West Coast thing is. So there was a conscious effort to put a sort of unified front to the public to promote a new sense of architecture. You also have to realize that's also the time when international architecture and Neutra were just coming up to the West Coast of Canada and everything was just changing at that time. So that particular moment of time is quite critical. Whereas if I compare it to today, we are constantly being bombarded by the media, meaning all the international magazines. Nowadays, we can walk down to a local bookstore and see magazines from Italy, Japan, all over shelves, and any new building of any consequence that is done next month will be flashed all over the world. So consequently, the younger architects today are exposed to a very international set of influences. Now, good or bad, that influences a lot of the thinking of the students at school. You know, there is not as much regional thinking in Vancouver right now as there was in the days of Ron Thom and Erickson. However, I do say that we have a different climate say than Alberta, Nova Scotia or Toronto, and certain conscious architects are trying to deal with this, and with the materials and the labour force that's available, to try to generate a kind of architecture that is more peculiar to our region than just anywhere else, especially concerning the quality of light and so on. It is actually interesting to see and to read the manifestos that the Ron Thom Group (well I call them the Ron Thom Group, but that's really the whole gamma of those people), they talk about dealing with the light in B. C. They talk about dealing with the landscape. They talk about the colour of natural wood and all that. And I think you'll find that some of those concerns are still very valid today. However, we don't have the beautiful country sites like they had, anymore. Most of the architects today are building in the city or in the suburbs, and we don't have the same kinds of labour force or lifestyles anymore. Life is far more complex than, say, in the 50's so that a person's home requirements are totally changed. You know if you look at the early houses, they are rather simple houses, but today, because of multi-media, you know things that we have, people are going back to wanting rooms. They have rooms for their videos, rooms for stereos, rooms for sewing, rooms for all kinds of things. And the activities that one does at home are completely different than in the 50's, so the programme becomes more complex. The electronic intrusion is definitely here, so that also dictates. All that influences, I think, a whole different type of house that's going to come out.

TFC: Would you consider wood as a local material to be a contributor to the West Coast Style, and is it a very relevant material for today?

CHENG: Oh, it's still the absolute material for building in Vancouver, and there are very few people who can afford steel or masonry houses. To that end, it is still a major influencing factor. However, the use of wood is different, the approach to wood is different. In the older days, when you're building in a forested setting like some of the famous Ron Thom and Erickson houses, you want the wood to weather naturally, you want it to blend with the landscape because that was the whole purpose of choosing to live out in the country, even though the country was only twenty minutes from downtown. Nowadays, you live in a context of suburbia, you live in an urban rowhouse situation, so the use of wood has to reflect the new context. We're no longer living in the context of volume, but we're living in the context of a man-made environment, and to that end, it brings out other considerations like urban design, like cultural continuity and things like that, and privacy, which is very important. Now that you have very close proximity of neighbours, you have to find a way to retreat and you have to obtain your privacy and your sanity when you are at home. So that forces a different use of wood other than the big wide expensive glass that made the early West Coast houses so famous. Now you have to consider how you use that large expansive glass and whether glass is used as transparent or almost an absolute folly or so that you can create illusions and that privacy is preserved. And the other thing is in new material, new old material like glass block. Such things come into play because they allow you to bring light into a place without losing privacy.

TFC: You mentioned B.C. Binning before. He once remarked that the city, meaning Vancouver, has always been influenced by the Far East, and one can indeed trace Asian influences in both Thom and Erickson's work. And he also mentioned that we are exposed to so much worldwide media at the moment. Do you think Binning's statement still holds true today?

CHENG: Which statement?

TFC: That Vancouver has always been influenced by the Far East.

CHENG: Oh, I think so, but now you have to count the influences of Rome and New York and Chicago and everywhere else.

TFC: I guess you can say that Vancouver is now a melting pot of ideas?

CHENG: Oh, I think most major cities are right now. I don't think there's an isolated city anymore. Just look at the work of the Japanese architects. Look how much American influences they have absorbed. Look at the work of, say, even people like Stanley Tigerman in Chicago or Michael Graves in Princeton. They are getting ideas from Aldo Rossi; they are being , you know. There is a cross- fertilization that happens all the time. These people are constantly travelling on the same circuit. They're lecturing, talking to each other. They are good friends of each other, so it's not unusual for Frank Gerhy to be in New York one day and be in Toronto another day, and then in Vancouver, and then back to Los Angeles. So consequently, you know, people are exposed to all these new ideas. But I think the most important thing though, is to be a good designer, to understand the problem at hand. To go back to the question of Oriental influence. I think that Vancouver still has a very strong Oriental base in our design approach because of Erickson and Ron Thom and the Neutra and the Frank Lloyd Wright School from which the West Coast architecture was derived. We don't have the kind of Roman base or the Greek base from which the East Coast architecture is derived. However, because of this Oriental influence, I think the West Coast architects are still more sensitive to nature and landscape and the softness of the light we have up here, say compared to the East Coast.

TFC: So, to that end do you think then that the West Coast is more susceptible to the influences from the East or perhaps from its neighbour to the South, where the climate and topography may be more comparable, for example, San Francisco and the California Coast?

CHENG: Well, urban design-wise, there's no question that San Francisco has exerted a major influence, in the city

"I look at Wright as an inspiration or as an influence because of his integrity as an architect, because of his philosophy, how he deals with architecture and what architecture meant to society..."

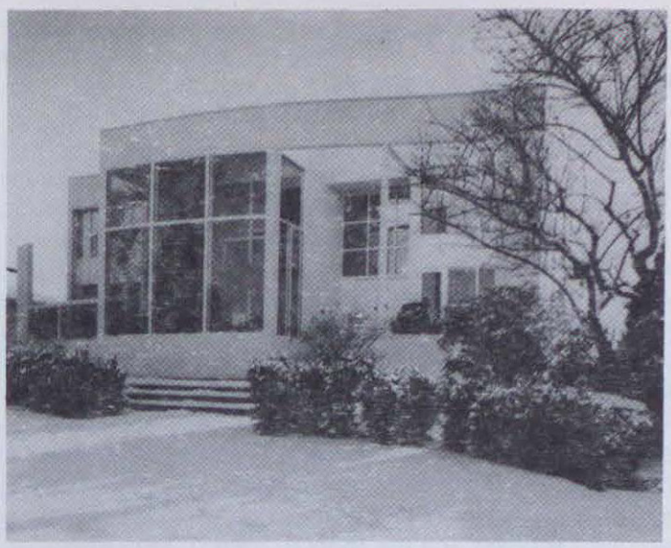
guideline. For example, a lot of the Fairview Slope urban design guideline is based on some of the housing types in San Francisco. However, that is like a policy statement from the bureaucrats. But as you look at how architects are responding to those policies, that's where you see a regional approach perhaps about to emerge. For example, you use a lot more skylight and natural light than, say, most other provinces. For several reasons, we do have more grey days here and also our climate is much milder. We can afford to use more glass. A lot of it you don't use in Alaska or Winnipeg, where you have 30 below. Also, a lot of West Coast architects, I believe, are sensitive to the colours. For example, you will very seldom see the West Coast architects use bright primary colours, whether they're in or not, just because of the quality of light we have here, the vibrant colours just don't come off. You can't do it like you do it in Mexico or in the Mediterranean. Also, more importantly, for me anyway, in my own work, I'm more interested in a balance of diffused light rather than a direct input of huge quantities of sunlight, because, especially on grey days, that kind of light is not very pleasant if it just comes in from one side of the room. It's very important to balance it on two sides. So we tend to have, for example, a South-facing window on the opposite end of the room, to introduce a wash of natural light, so that you don't have a dark cave-like effect. And sometimes that becomes a generator for the ordering principle of the house. Then you deal with structure and integrating it with light admitting devices that penetrate a sort of internal order that in turn could be expressed on the exterior or form of the building. And perhaps this kind of an investigation could lead to a stronger personal style or regional style, depending on how you look at it.

TFC: Do you consider yourself a regional architect? And if so, what makes your architecture more Canadian?

CHENG: Well, I do consider my work regional. I certainly would not do the same kind of houses I do in Vancouver if I were to get a commission in San Francisco. In that sense though, I look at my own work as very regional. But I have to admit it, I do have international influences. Let's face it, all of us that are interested in design are constantly trying to expand our horizons and explore what is in the nature of architecture. And my personal interest is in evolution rather than making a statement all the time. What I'm interested in developing in my own work is a sense of continuity and a sense of evolution, so that my work is gradually evolving with a philosophy that I believe in, and that hopefully each work that I do is sort of based on the previous example that I've done and reading further. As you learn more about the making of buildings, you know, that to me is very important. So every job that we do sort or refers to the work that we've done before, but takes on a different departure or whatever. So, we never quite abandon something that we've done and jump into something else.

TFC: Judging from the work of yours that's familiar to me, would you consider yourself a disciple of Le Corbusier or how would you compare your designs in residential architecture to that of the 50's and 60's?

CHENG: Oh, OK. I do have two influences that I admit to very much. When I was in college, I was very much, as an undergrad, very much influenced by Wright and when I was at Harvard, at graduate school, of course, I was very much influenced by Le Corbusier and Richard Meier, because Richard Meier was my studio master or whatever you call those. It's really interesting because when I was an undergraduate student, I didn't like Le Corbusier at all. I don't think I understood him and superficially, you know, I didn't like his crude concrete work and the use of bold columns. I found it was a bit harsh. That was very bad judgement in the sense that, you know, as a young architect, you don't really understand architecture that well, and to cut him off like that wasn't very good. It took me ten years to understand what he was doing. But I still personally say that the Wright influence is the strongest even though it doesn't show in the work. I would say it's the philosophy. I don't look at an architect's work just by their formal attributes, meaning the forms or the technique of making a building; I look at Wright as an inspiration or as an influence because of his integrity as an architect, because of his philosophy, how he deals with architecture and what architecture meant to society. His forms are highly personalized forms and it is very difficult for anybody to copy, whereas Le Corbusier has a set of almost kitten parts that you could copy or you could take off from. His influences is therefore far easier to superficially look at. But I find Wright's philosophy or attitude towards landscape and so on are far more conducive to the work in architecture here in Vancouver; meaning the regard to landscape and integrating the inside outside and all that stuff. I do not, however, find the personal forms of Wright suitable. For instance,in that period when Ron Thom was literally adopting and Fred Hollingsworth literally doing Frank Lloyd Wright houses; they are beautiful houses but I find them kind of dark and a bit, you know, outdated for what the style is today. They are beautiful pieces for



what they are and a sort of reckoning of a different lifestyle of a recent past. People just can't live like that anymore. We don't have that much leisure. We don't have that kind of gardener to maintain the lawn and trees and shrubs, cut branches for Christmas and this and that. So one likes to change. Also we don't have the kind of craftsman that we use to have. Now we have to deal with pre-manufactured items, meaning siding is pre-cut, your studs are pre-cut. You don't get custom pieces of lumber anymore. I mean, if you do you're paying through the nose for it and most of our clients can't afford those things. So we have to find a new expression based on the machine produced items and that is what Le Corbusier had anticipated. And so in that sense, the five points that he puts out of how to build a free plan and all that is still quite relevant in the design of the building. And secondly, you know, for an Oriental that I am, I am fascinated by the Western contribution, and for me to see Le Corbusier, you know, being able to draw inspiration from the Mediterrenean and from the Greeks and carry it through, that is quite important, because afterall, this is North America, and our basic influences do derive from Europe. And it is a Western inclination even though it's now being moderated by other influences. So for me it is a very interesting mix of the two. So it is very important for me to understand Le Corbusier and to understand the Western civilization.

TFC: You mentioned the importance of a reflection of the times: I would like to read you a quote from Le Corbusier in which he said, 'A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit. Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which flows on towards the destined end, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by the new spirit. The problem of the house is the problem of the epoch.' How relevant do you feel is this statement today?

CHENG: I still believe that it's very accurate in the sense that I don't think that we're at the same epoch making period as Le Corbusier was all the time. But the house is still to me, a prototype of the whole architecture gamble because the work that we do in houses are some of the bases of the large works. To that I refer to a lot of traditional European architects. Take currently, Leon Krier, for instance, who is very interested in a city room, and that kind of urban space. But what is really desired is a room in a house. So in that sense, it goes back to my early comment about a young architect's education because you have to know how to design a room before you can design a city and what is involved with the design of a room is so different in proportion than say some of the things that is involved in the city. It's just a matter of magnitude. If a person doesn't have the sense of scale to be able to deal with problems in a room, then they can't deal with it on a city scale. In that sense, houses are still very very important in the development of a lot of architects' careers because they give them a chance to modify their ideas, to try out their ideas, make the mistakes and still not have a major impact on the environment. Houses, can absorb a lot of personal idiosyncracies in them. Whereas if you're doing a major work downtown, you can't do that. It would become, you know, quite an eyesore. So in that sense, houses are always going to be a very important experimental vehicle for any architect that is formalizing their ideas.

TFC: Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I can recall you saying once that architecture is really very simple. All you have to understand is about the wall, the column, and the window. If this is true, how have you adopted it in your house designs?

CHENG: I still believe that that's the basic tools an architect has to work with: the wall, the columns and the window. What we have done is gradually clarify these elements a little bit more. Our early houses tend to deal with volume, like the Gwathmey, Seigel or the Richard Meier houses where the concepts of space interpenetrating space and volume are the most important things. But after working with clients and developing further, I come to find that that doesn't work for most people. When you have a family of young children and so on, who are running around, you do need privacy, you do need places where you can shut off and also you have people that have messy living habits. Not everybody could live in a Richard Meier house. Also I value the traditional works. A lot of people like Tudor. A lot of people like Georgian houses and so on and I became curious trying to understand why, and it is because they have formal rooms. To a lot of people, you know, they can go to a living room, they can go to a dining room, they can go to a certain space. So in our recent works, that is what we have done — but I'm still fascinated by space that is one, that is highly integral with the quality of light because you cannot deal wih space without light. So the two have to come together and to me, the quality of light, is one of the paramount concerns of my works. So I'm still very much interested in space but at the same time I'm very interested in articulating light in space. So in order to articulate light in space, I have to deal with columns, windows, walls. So

"...houses are still very, very important in the development of a lot of architects' careers because they give them a chance to modify their ideas, to try out their ideas, make their mistakes without having a major impact on the environment."

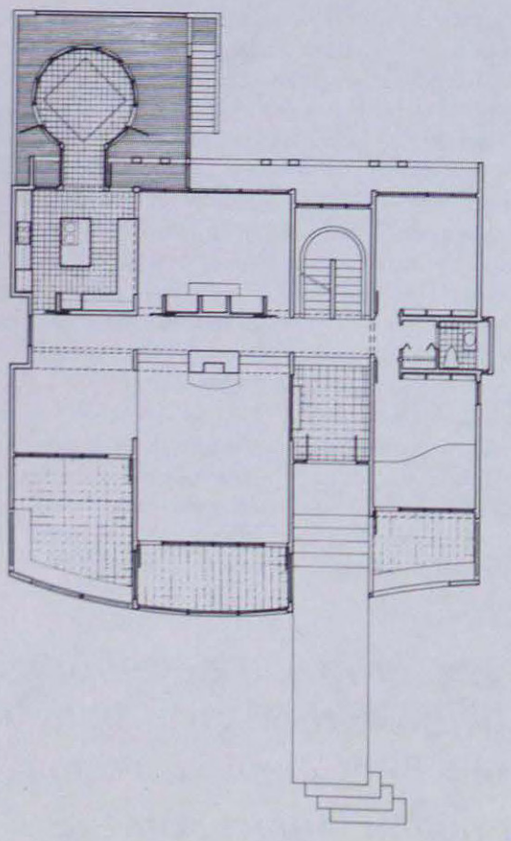
we are now constantly working on a system, looking at a house as a series of interesting walls and columns and placing enough windows to have various kinds of transparency and reflection. It creates many different kinds of spaces and different moods within this dwelling. At the same time, I try to integrate that back into my personal interests of, say, Oriental architecture, where landscape and building merges together. We're now extending the columns and carrying out the walls, which becomes a frame into the landscape. Or we include the landscape into this kind of structure, so that you blur the boundary of the object. In other words, we hope to fragment the object and integrate it more. So, that is the resolution that I'm trying to get between some of the Wrightian attitude and Corbusian form. The Corbusian form basically is an object in space. You're designing a piece of sculpture to live in. But I'm interested in fragmenting that sculpture and to bringing the landscape into it and giving it a softer scale, because quite often, and that's my criterion of my own house too, they tend to be too much of an object that they dominate things surroundings them, including other people's houses. But we haven't found a perfect resolution of the two. Sometimes, you have to suppress certain things in order to investigate other issues. That's why, for example, when Peter Eisenman was doing his house series, he was actually only interested in the structural sense of the architecture. He wasn't really addressing a lot of other issues and that allowed him to investigate just that. Of course, we don't have that kind of privilege. For a practicing architect, it could be deadly to suppress something to such an extreme. Houses become not likeable. However, you do have to play that sort balance game, that you have to suppress certain things in order to explore and understand others. But then I really believe that an architect has to build in order to understand architecture.

TFC: Do you feel then that the house is the most personal form of architectural expression as well as perhaps a response and a reflection of social values? And would you consider it a cultural artifact?

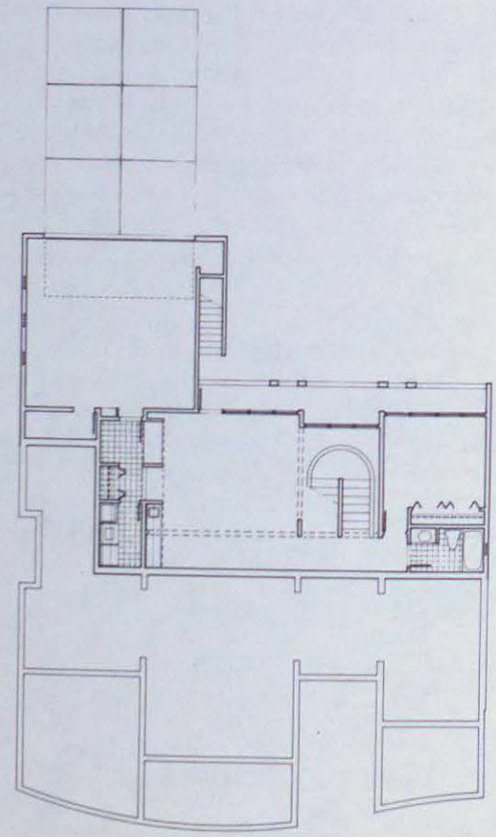
CHENG: Well, it is a very personal expression and it does reflect certain kinds of social values because you're dealing with a very elite sector that can afford to have a custom house built. But I certainly would not say that it reflects a wide range of social concerns. I think houses are basically rich men's follies and to that end an architect has to use it to enrich his own vocabulary, so that you can apply it to the less gifted project. For example, we adapt a lot of things, light admitting devices and spatial qualities that we learn from single family houses, to our multiple family dwelling properties. A lot of the things, the details and approaches that we we developed through single family houses, we were able to adapt onto other projects and use them to inform other things, so to that end, I think that that's very important.

TFC: Would you say that the idea of the American Dreamhouse, or the American Dream of owning a house is past and that the condo is in?

CHENG: Oh no, I wouldn't say that. But I wouldn't distinguish a condo and a house as two separate things. I mean the dream is to own your own home, be it a house or a condo. It's just a matter of your financial capabilities. People nowadays have a choice whether they want a city dwelling or a country dwelling. In the old days you had to be very rich to have one of each. In Vancouver or in most of our cities now, you do have a choice. You can try to own a house on a lot in a traditional-house sense, or you could own a condo, or a townhouse downtown. It depends on the lifestyle you want. It's a very interesting phenomena right now in Vancouver. A



Ground Floor Plan



Lower Floor Plan

condo on Fairview sells for the same price as a house in Richmond. So you have a choice.

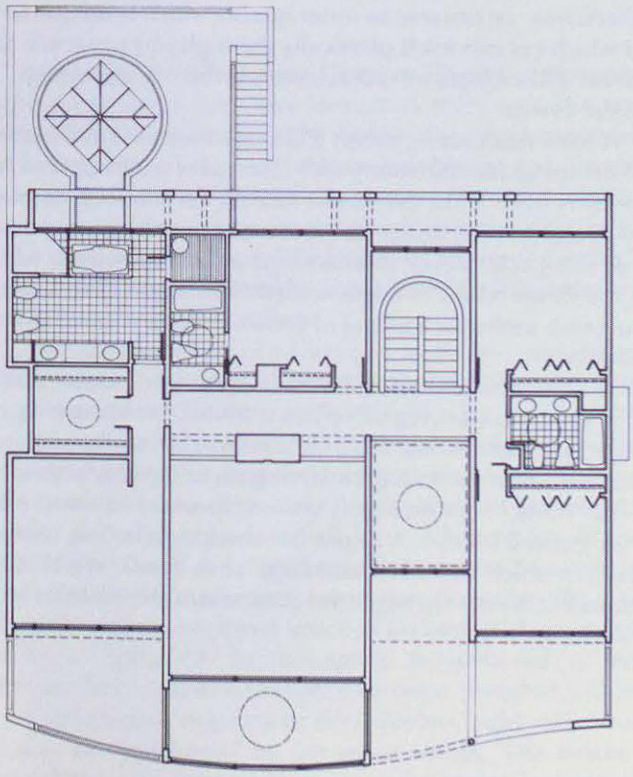
TFC: Does that reflect a tendency towards a more urban lifestyle?

CHENG: Oh, no question. I think the lifestyle is definitely more urban. A lot of the houses that I've designed in my career are actually a mixture of a city house and a country house. I say in my career since I haven't designed a country house yet.

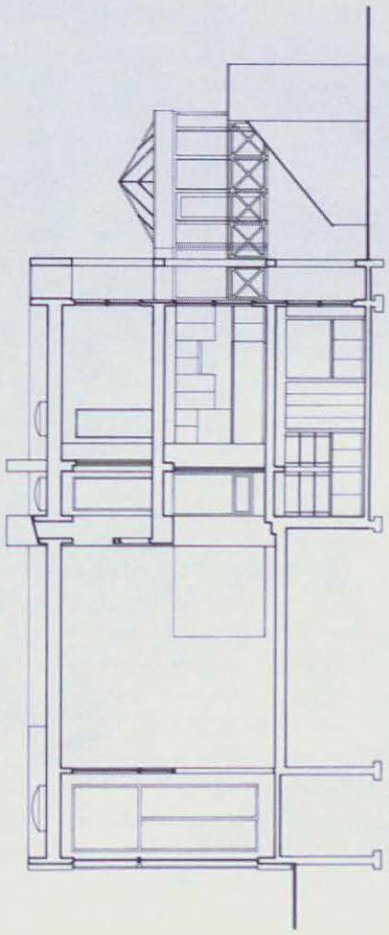
TFC: A final note perhaps about the upcoming EXPO? EXPO '67 was considered to be a watershed event for Canadian architecture. As a contributor to EXPO '86, are there any architectural lessons to be learned from the coming event?

CHENG: I don't think so. I think, right now, EXPO '86 is at best an example of what's currently going on. I think it has opened the doors to new directions. I don't think it's going to have a tremendous impact on the practice of architecture. It's basically a showcase of the current expression of architecture. Actually, the only thing that is beneficial to a lot of B.C. architects is that it's mandatory for every building to be demountable and reusable. And it forces a lot of architects to consider the use of steel. If any influence is to come out of EXPO it is that it opened up a lot of architects' vocabulary to include steel. But as far as I'm concerned, unfortunately we don't have any so-called super stars working on the site. You know, Erickson was excluded, and the only person of any international stature that has been allowed to practice is Zeidler. So in that sense, we do not have any real great works of architecture in EXPO. To me it's just a bunch of competent buildings that would make the fair very successful. That should not be construed as criticism of the fair, because I think there's two different issues here — One is to create a very successful fair and the other one to make works of architecture. It would be ideal if the two could come together, but even if you look at the Olympics in L.A., it's very successful, but there's certainly no architectural legacies left over. So maybe it's a sign of the times that we're in that it becomes very difficult. I think the architecture state that we're in right now is very exciting, but also very confused, because right now anything goes. It was rather amusing to read the current issue of Newsweek, where there was an architectural criticism on post-modern architecture that's been springing up everywhere. And now post-modern architecture in high rises or corporations have completely replaced all the glass plates. And this particular critic is saying that so many of them are done by bad hands with no understanding of what post-modern architecture was originally intended as. It's like a bad dream. It's like a Walt Disney on air. It's all aver the place. We are at that kind of stage in our architectural world where anything is possible. And I think it is up to the good designer to exercise a certain sense of constraint and a certain sense of selectivity. And that's one of the reasons why I'm more interested in evolution rather than jumping on band-wagons, because eventually a person's work has to be judged by the whole entire body of work that he's created. You don't look at Le Corbusier as one building or Aalto or anybody like that. It is the embodiment of their life's work, and that's what matters to me or Luis Barragin, or any of those people that I'm very interested in. There is a consistency in approach and a quality that prevails in every one of their projects.

Angus Cheng, Graphics Editor, recently interviewed James K.M. Cheng, a Vancouver architect in private practice on his views of the "House."



Second Floor Plan

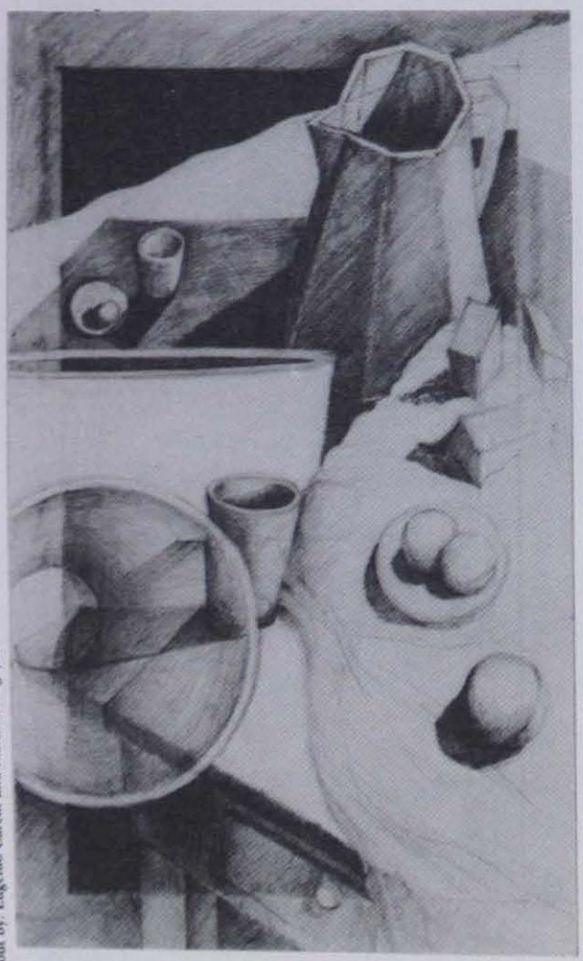


Longitudinal Section

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.

Eugenio Carelli is a recent graduate of the School of Architecture at McGill University, and is presently working in Montreal.



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 indivisable 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.

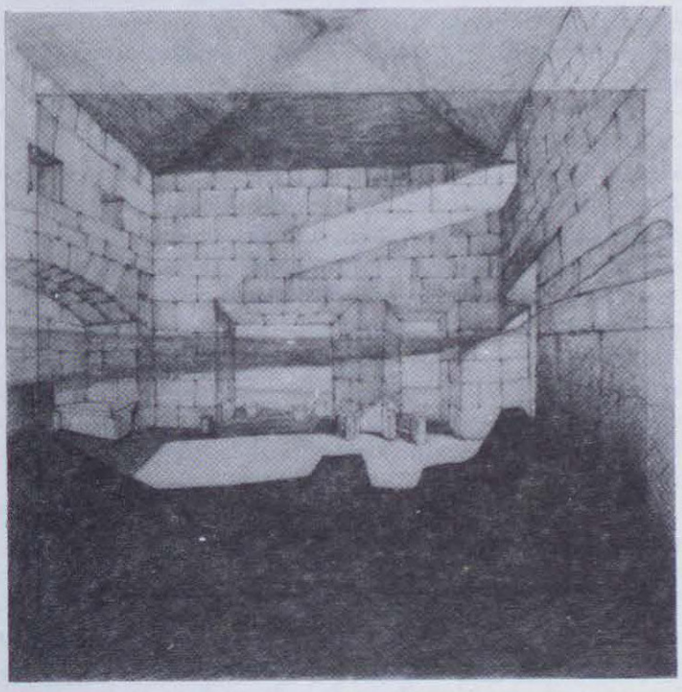
As human beings we are also manifestations of Nature. Collectively, we possess an inner quality which is unique to us and which reveals itself physically through our presence and actions. The objects we create embody this "humaneness" to a great extent.

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.

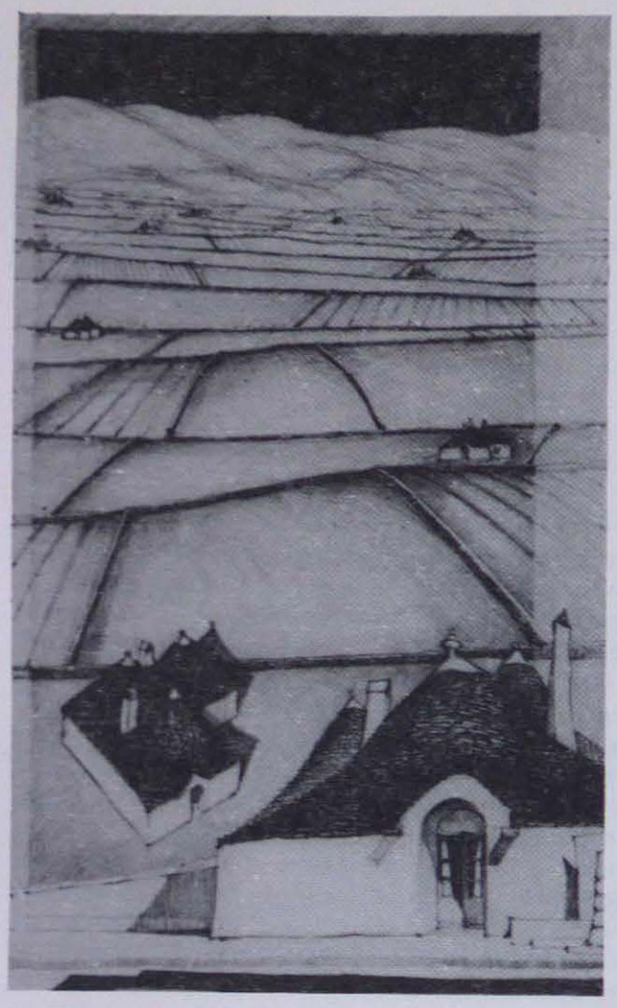
▽

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.

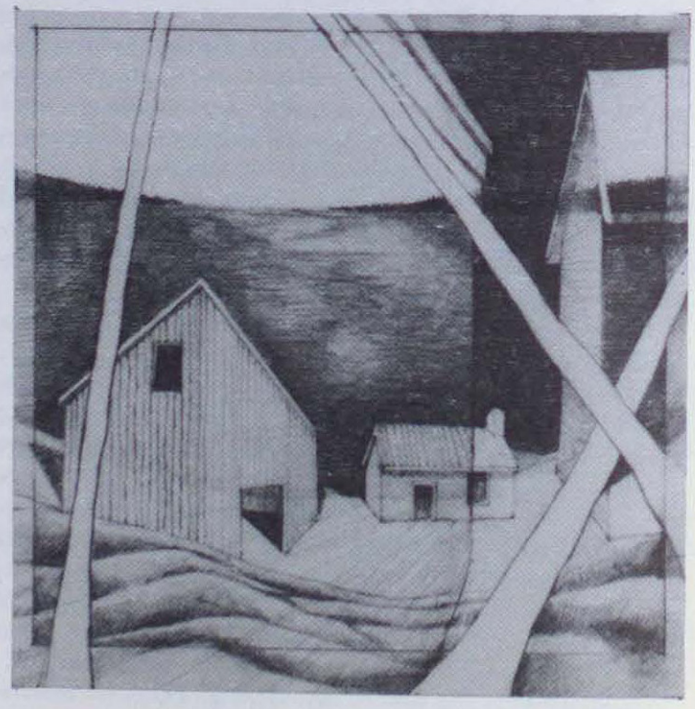
Before any drawing of lines or laying of bricks, the reality and quality of place must be sensed. You must feel what is unique to this place you have chosen to build upon and know how the house will move towards revealing or expressing this uniqueness. There must be an intuitive knowing of how this space 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 truely Canadian Architecture will appear. Although a great disparity exists in the types of places and settlements within Canada, from immoveable 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.

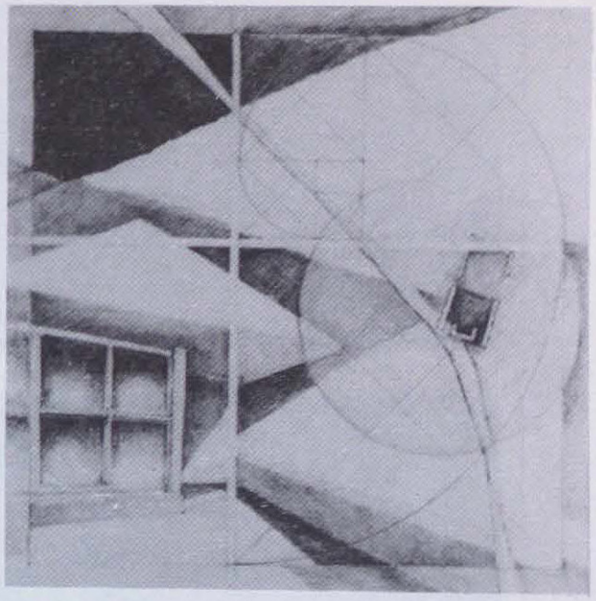
The house must allow room for a desired way of life to take place. It should aspire towards imparting a sense of beauty; a prevailing sense of harmony which would enable us to dwell meaningfully and poetically.

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 wholely 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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2. *The Future of Architecture*, Frank Lloyd Wright, Horizon Press Inc., New York, 1953.
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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.
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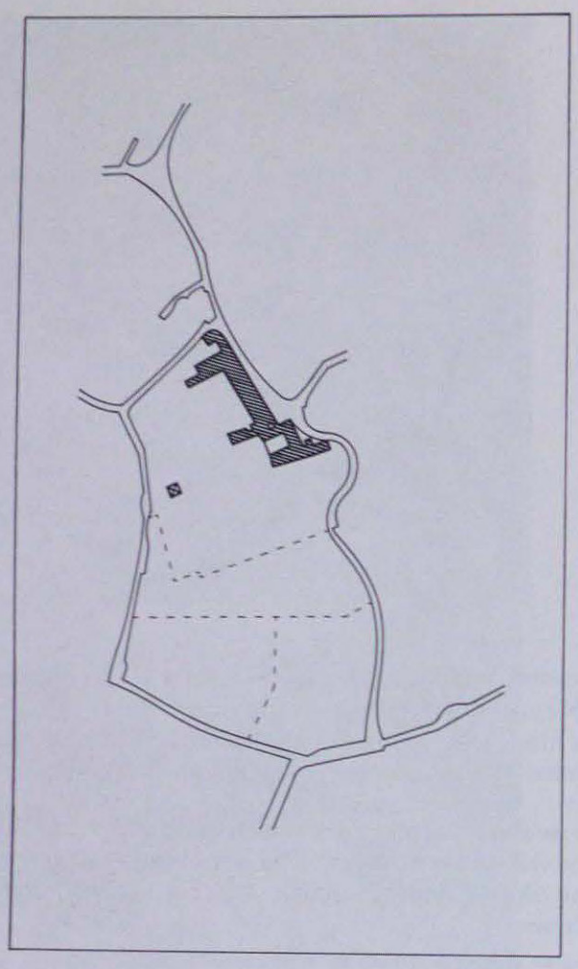
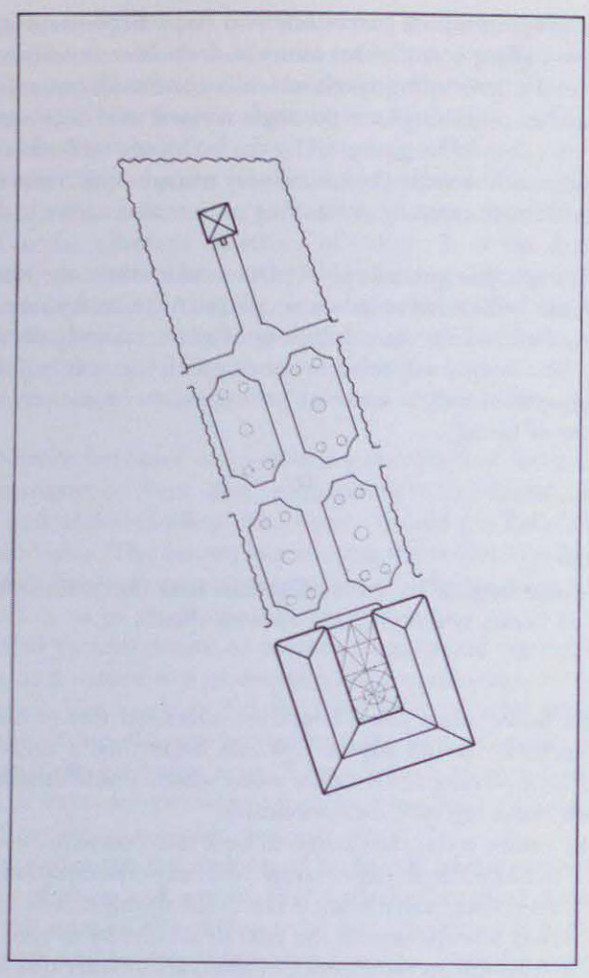


1. Site plan



2. Plan

HOUSE FOR PANZA DI BIUMO

Après avoir rencontré l'homme d'affaires italien et grand collectionneur d'art contemporain, Giuseppe Panza di Buomo, Frédéric Urban entreprend une oeuvre d'art intitulée ***House for Panza di Biumo*** *qui utilise la villa familiale de Panza comme point de départ.*

The "Client"

The Milan industrialist, Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, is generally regarded as having one of the world's foremost collections of contemporary art, much of which is installed at Villa Litta, Panza's family villa and private museum in Varese. It is, perhaps, his purchases of minimal, conceptual and environmental art — the "dematerialized" and "uncollectable" — that best reveal Panza's contemplative nature and aesthetic vision.

> In the converted stables where Panza had exhibited Minimalist sculpture since 1969, the existential mood became increasingly pronounced through the mid-70's. In 1976, Maria Nordman created a penumbral space in which the solitary viewer gradually becomes the self-observed "subject" of the piece. Significantly, Panza situated the installation at the beginning of the complex, where it serves as a perceptual "decontamination chamber." He concludes with an ethereal suite of rooms by James Turrell, whose use of available light to determine both form and content is the logical coda to Panza's pursuit of the dematerialized art object. It also establishes the crucial link to his earlier purchases of Kline and Rothko.[1]

In 1984, eighty masterpieces from his collection — including seven Mark Rothko's, eleven Robert Rauschenberg's and twelve Franz Kline's — became the core of the collection of the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

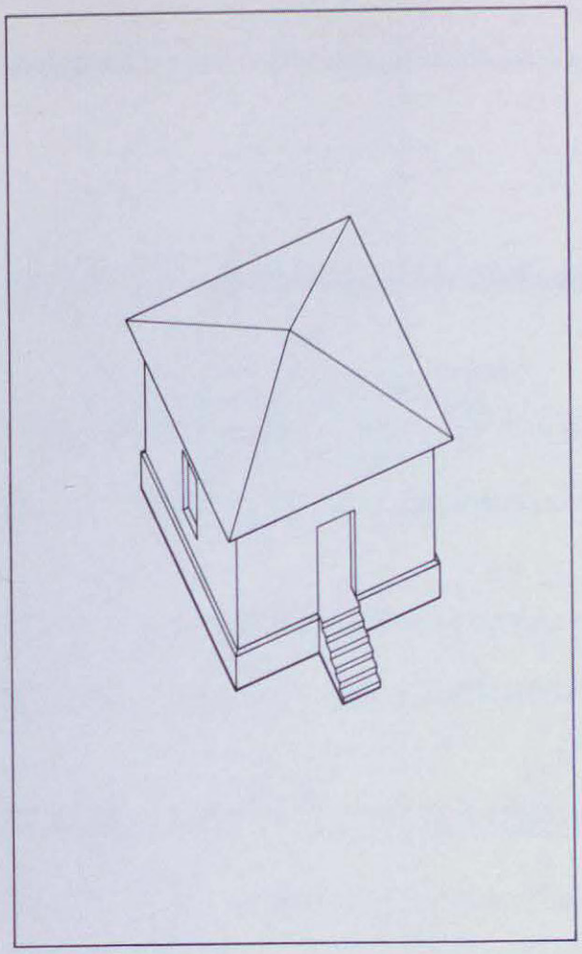
The "Architect"

Since 1980, Frederic Urban's artwork has investigated primary notions about architecture and the relationships between architecture and the other fine arts. It is the kind of work that places itself in an "expanded field" and within "the modern tendency to broaden the boundaries of art by breaking its frame, both physically and conceptually."[2]

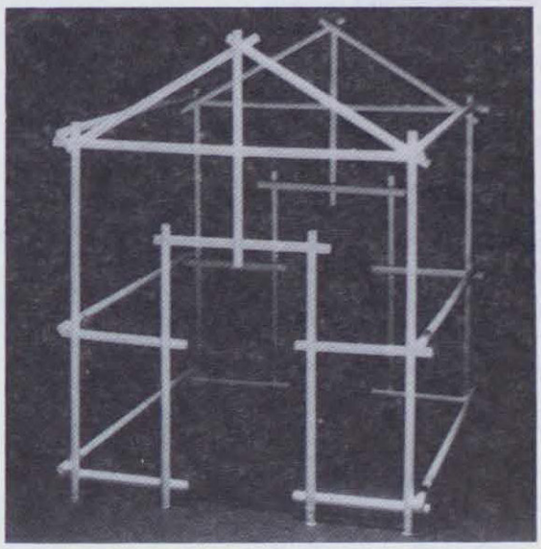
> It examines social as well as art conventions. It situates itself between formal art categories and non-art categories: between art and architecture... Rather than reducing media tautologically to a single aesthetic problem, it positions itself in dialectical relation between categories to allow it to relate to social factors and specific contextural meaning(s).[3]

In 1981, Urban first met Panza, viewed his private collection and photographed Villa Litta with the intention of using Panza's villa as a vehicle for making an artwork.

Layout by: Louis Regimbal



3. Axonometric



Frederic Urban

The "House"

In 1985, Frederic Urban sent Giuseppe Panza three drawings called *House for Panza di Biumo.* The text for these three drawings includes (location plan, site plan and axonometric, respectively):

1. It is proposed that a house be built on the grounds of Villa Litta, Varese.
2. The location of the new house and its relation to the existing house establishes dialogue and opposition between the two.
3. As well as being an object to be confronted and a place for contemplation, the new house creates a paradigmatic relationship with the general notion of house itself and with Villa Litta in particular.

With Panza's interest and support, *House for Panza di Biumo* will be realized in three versions: *House/Custoza, House/Saguenay* and *House/Toronto.* Originally scheduled for construction and installation in the Summer of 1985, *House/Custoza* will be built on a site — one similar to the site proposed in the original drawings — at Villa Pignatti-Morano in Custoza, Italy in 1986.

Canada is the site for the second and third versions of *House for Panza di Biumo.* Early work has begun on *House/Saguenay* (to be built and installed on a site in Quebec) and *House/Toronto* (to be built in a gallery in Toronto as part of an exhibition which documents the history of *House for Panza di Biumo*).

Rather than being a simple exercise in cross disciplinary discourse, *House for Panza Biumo* retains an understanding of the difference between art and architecture and uses drawing and sculpture to comment on architecture.

NOTES:

1. David Galloway, "*Report from Italy,*" *Art in America,* December 1985, p. 10.
2. Melinda Wortz, "*Surrendering to Presence,*" *Artforum,* November 1981, p. 64.
3. Dan Graham, "*Situation Esthetics,*" *Artforum,* December 1979, p.25.

Frederic Urban is an artist who teaches at the School of Architecture, University of Waterloo.

(***House/Custoza*** *has been funded in part by a grant from the Canada Council).*

I sit alone.
The room grows pensively around me,
Its faded frescoe-covered walls forever rising
And reverberating in the explosive stillness above,
Joining, arching at a Gothic point,
From which a centre,
A Builder's end or beginning
Stares down on the empty, dusty tomb.
Solemn battles and saints
And sometimes a Christ
Careen with abandon and
Reckless repetition
Across the walls in
Translucent,
Holy,
Stained
Glass.

I sit alone.
I sit alone and
The room is a myriad of shades of ochre;
Even the shadows have an ochre tinge:
In an effort to arise from the dark stone
They have be-ochred themselves
Into meaningful gestures of monotone colour.
The liquid stone spirals, curves,
Assume human form,
Peering down at me with
Saintly benignity or
Gargoylic horror.

I begin to sing.
My voice resounds in a fantastic chorus
Of Gregorian chaos,
Caressing the liquid stone and glass,
Pouring through the vacant eyes
Of a de-jewelled Saint,
Who stares forever into the emptiness
That is no longer the empty room;
The crushing notes collide in the heavy air
And meet all at one point,
The Gothic point where
A Builder may end or begin,
And cease.
Long after their utterance,
The notes can be heard
In the imagination of the
Stone,
Saints and
Glass.
I can almost hear the voice,
Emanating in deep rich chords
From the saintly, pouting stone lips,
And finding a grave
In the ochre shadows.

St. Gereon's Church (Cologne)

by Eric Russell Bunge

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