

inform

architecture ■ design ■ the arts

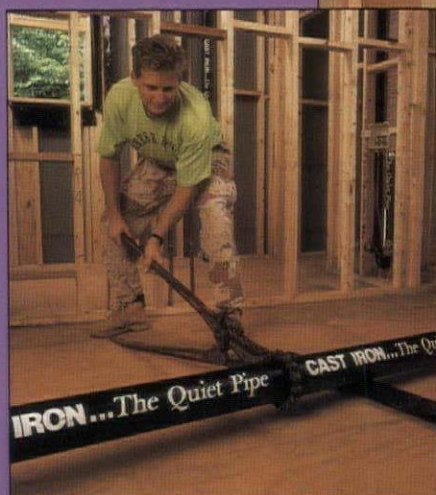
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Houses: The Pursuit of an Idea ■ Preservation in Waterford ■ Revealing Philip Johnson ■ Renaissance Models ■ The Making of a University

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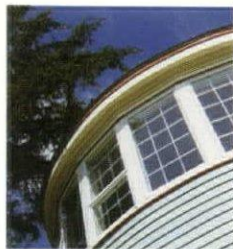
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volume six number one

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Houses: The Pursuit of an Idea

Small by comparison to many building types, the house lends itself to artful interpretation and idiosyncrasy. In this issue, Inform looks at five new houses that derive important aspects of their physical form from the diligent pursuit of an idea. *By Vernon Mays*

Capitol Hill Rowhouse, Robert M. Gurney, AIA
An Artists' Residence, Dennis J. Kilper, AIA
The Tree House, Bond Comet Westmoreland + Hiner
Up From Ruins, Susan Woodward Notkins, AIA
Made Like a Mill, Karl E. Kohler Associates

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Thoughts on a Small House

Architectural treasures exist in unlikely places, if we only bother to look for them. One homeowner's search yielded a modest ranch house with clear ties to Frank Lloyd Wright. *By Ronald Faleide*

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Design Lines

new developments in design and the arts

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Waterford: where time stopped

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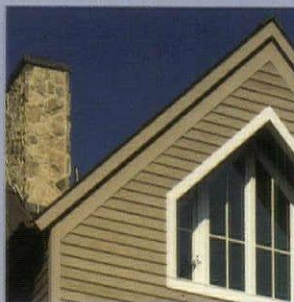
Books

the revered and reviled Philip Johnson

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Taking Notice

doing the small thing well



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On the cover:
Gurney Residence.
Photo by John Cleave.

Renaissance Architecture

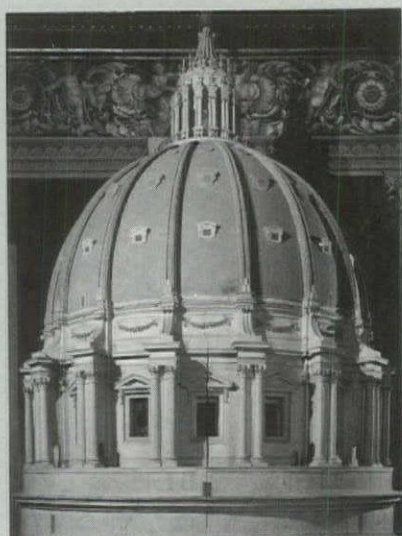
at the National Gallery

For centuries, model-making has been essential to the architect's design process. But with recent advances in computer technology, today's architects are placing more emphasis than ever on developing video walk-throughs of "virtual" spaces they're designing, rather than building three-dimensional study models for clients to consider. The result is that many new buildings look like they were spit out of a computer.

But long before the advent of computer-aided design and drafting, model-making was the best way to show what was on the drawing boards. The practice arguably reached its zenith in the Italian Renaissance, when scale models weren't simply a way to create buildings as works of art. Models were works of art in themselves.

The National Gallery of Art provided a fascinating glimpse into that era with a recent exhibit of 14 of the most important wooden architectural models to survive from the 15th and 16th centuries. Titled "Italian Renaissance Architecture: Brunelleschi, Sangallo, Michelangelo - The Cathedrals of Florence and Pavia, and St. Peter's, Rome," the traveling exhibit illuminates the stages of design for three of the most significant buildings in Western architecture. Though supplemented with paintings, drawings, prints, and medals, the exhibit clarifies the important role that models played in determining the final outcome of these Old World masterpieces.

In their day, models such as these were indispensable tools. Architects relied on them to understand and improve their designs; to perfect details; to guide workers during construction; to accurately estimate the quantity of building materials;



Dome of St. Peter's, after Michelangelo (above). Façade study by Sangallo (below).

and to demonstrate for patrons and clients the likely appearance of the finished work.

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a large, recently restored model of St. Peter's in Rome. It was built over seven years, from 1539 to 1546, to the specifications of the architect Antonio da Sangallo. The largest model still in existence from the Renaissance, it measures nearly 15 feet high and 24 feet long, weighing more than six tons. Also included are two models for St. Peter's based on designs by Michelangelo. One shows the dome and supporting drum,

and the other shows the vault of the south apse. They are accompanied by the second largest wooden model still existing from the Renaissance, a design for the Cathedral of Pavia, and ten models representing the Duomo in Florence.

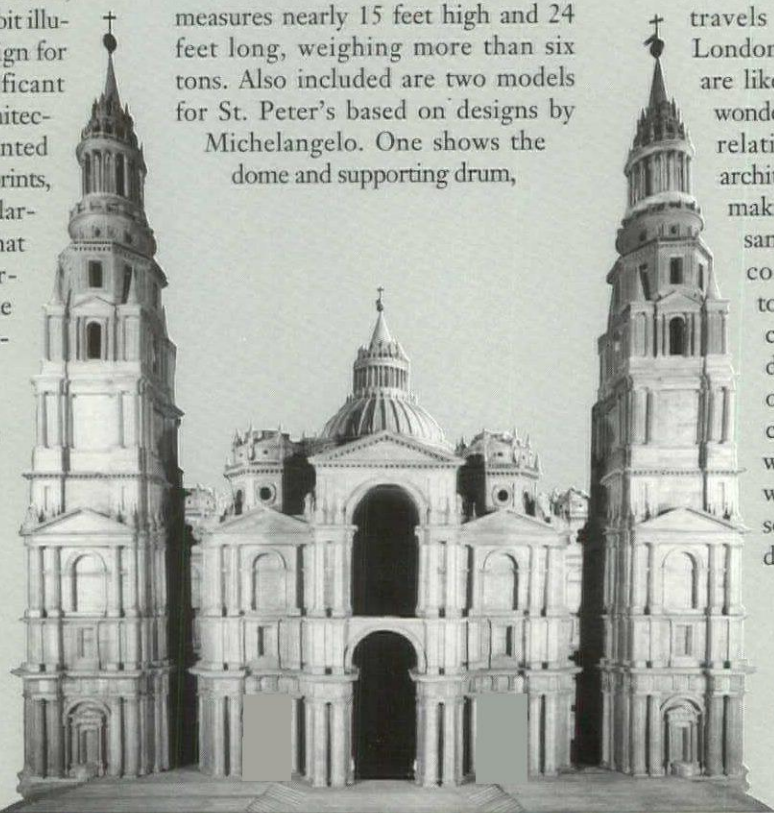
What makes this exhibit so awesome and awe-inspiring is the high level of detail and craftsmanship that went into these elaborate creations. In the large model of St. Peter's, for example, more than 1,000 pieces of fir, elm, lime, and apricot wood were used. Artisans painted it inside and out to simulate travertine and stone.

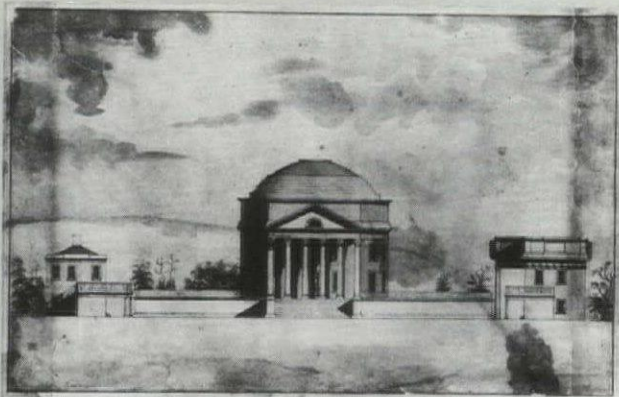
Equally remarkable is the time invested in these works of art. During the Renaissance, it was a commonplace that architects died before their buildings were completed. Sangallo, for one, died even before the model of his design for St. Peter's was finished. Yet, because the model was a lasting record of the architect's intent, the commission could be carried on by others.

The show seen at the National Gallery was a modification of an exhibit first mounted last year at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. From Washington, it travels to Paris, Berlin, and London. Modern-day viewers are likely to leave the exhibit wondering how much of a correlation exists between the architect's reliance on model-making during the Renaissance and the reliance on computer-aided design today. Does one process consistently lead to better design? That's a matter of debate. But, despite a current preoccupation with computers, architects will always use models to some extent. This splendid exhibit showed why.

— Edward Guntz

The author is the architecture critic of *The Sun* in Baltimore.





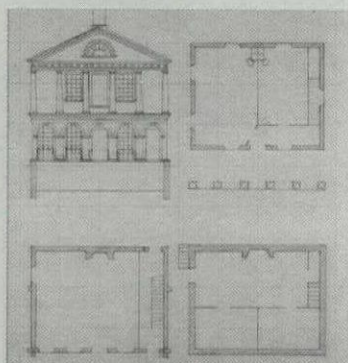
This study for the elevation of the Rotunda at the University of Virginia, showing Pavilions IX and X, is attributed to Jefferson collaborator John Neilson.

Jefferson's Place-Making:

Design for the University of Virginia

Of all his accomplishments, Thomas Jefferson was most proud of the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, and the University of Virginia. While the political documents built the framework for individual liberty, he believed an educated populace would best ensure its survival. Just how his ideas on education were transformed into bricks and mortar is admirably captured in "Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village: The Creation of an Architectural Masterpiece, 1817-1826," an exhibit appearing through April 16 at The Octagon in Washington, D.C.

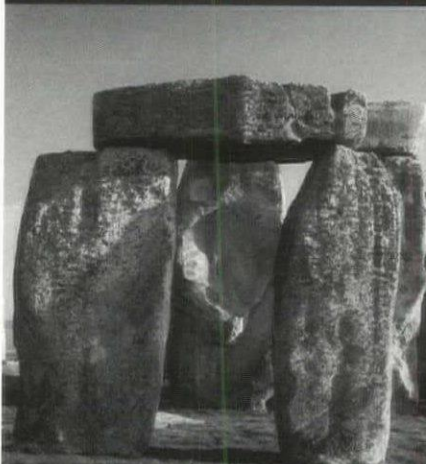
The exhibit documents Jefferson's long political struggle to establish an institution for higher learning in Virginia; suggests architectural precedents that may have informed his initial plan; and displays key architectural books, such as Giacomo Leoni's *The Architecture of A. Palladio; In Four Books*, from which Jefferson took many of his details. But what is most intriguing about this show is the way guest curator Richard Guy Wilson, a professor of architectural history at the University of Virginia, skillfully lets the viewer peer over Jefferson's shoulders to witness his design deliberations.



Study for Pavilion VII, ink on paper, by Thomas Jefferson, 1817.

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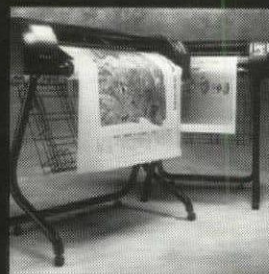
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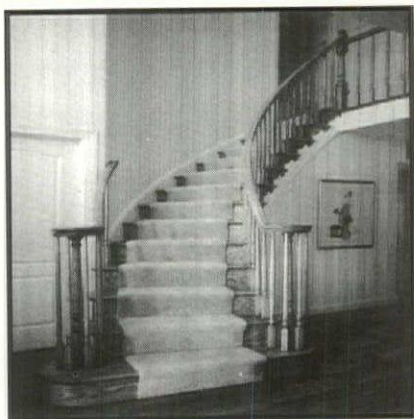
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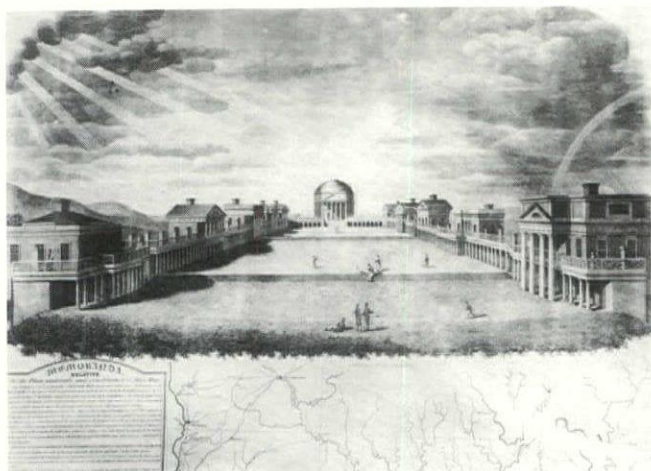
for example, we can see Jefferson rethinking the relationship between the buildings directly fronting the central Lawn and the so-called Ranges containing student rooms and hotels (dining halls). The architect carefully cut out a portion of his initial drawing that had placed the Ranges between the Lawn and a series of gardens, substituting an insert that located the gardens between the two parallel rows of buildings instead. By mid-summer of 1819, Jefferson had refined the scheme to the point where the famous serpentine walls were appearing in the plan. In his façade studies for several pavilions, Jefferson used paper overlays to explore design alternatives. And through drawings and notes in a specification book, he explained to workmen the proper placement of ceiling joists.

But Jefferson did not stop at design. He was fully immersed in the day-to-day details of overseeing construction, as the exhibit illustrates. In one document, he estimated that Pavilion VII would require no less than 53,360 bricks. On the back of another drawing, a workman scribbled, "Mr. J. directs the windows of the hotels to be 12 x 12 Glass, eighteen lights." And in what appears to be the equivalent of today's punch list, the former President requested the exact dimensions of a pediment's tympanum so he could order a correctly sized clock and bell.

Jefferson often has been called a gentleman architect, implying that he merely dabbled in the art. But the scholarship upon which this exhibit is based reveals the depth of his involvement in the field. The exhibit first opened in 1993 at the Bayly Art Museum at U.Va. and then appeared at the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Next stop: an as-yet-unnamed location in New York.

— Nancy B. Solomon, *ALA*

The author is a contributing editor of Architecture magazine.



Engraving of the University of Virginia by Benjamin Tanner, published 1826.

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Still a Glimmer of Van de Velde's Beacon

After decades of neglect, the landmark tower at Virginia Union University in Richmond has been repaired – albeit in a manner that some would find troublesome. The louvered tower is part of the Belgian Friendship Building, first erected as the Belgian Congo Pavilion for exhibits at the 1939 New York World's Fair. Architects for the building worked under the direction of Belgian architect Henri Van de Velde, the predecessor of Walter Gropius as head of the Grand Ducal School of Art in Weimar, Germany, which later became the Bauhaus. The Belgian Building was intended to be moved to Europe after the fair, but the outbreak of World War II derailed the plans. In 1941, Belgium gave the building to Virginia Union, which was selected because it had a need for additional facilities and a suitable site. Virginia Union adapted the austere, flat-roofed building for use as a library, gymnasium, and classrooms. Its distinctive features include a slender tower ornamented with transparent blocks on one corner and a louvered top that glows at night.



The restored tower.

Repairs on the tower involved removal of the existing metal, wood, and slate exterior and installation of a new synthetic stucco finish that restores the tower's monolithic appearance. So much of the original slate had fallen off the tower that it had been clad with metal panels as a stop-gap measure. "We determined a method of duplicating as closely as possible the original appearance while using contemporary materials," says Cheryl Huvard, project manager for Heyward & Lee Construction of Richmond. Acrylic blocks were substituted for the original glass blocks and aluminum louvers replaced the wooden ones. Purists might argue that the building should have been restored with materials matching the originals, but Huvard says the weight of the slate panels and the cost of rebuilding the deteriorated panel supports recommended another approach. "At least it's a step in the right direction," said one historian, who remembers a time when the tower was so full of holes that one could see clear through it.

Monacelli Breaks onto Publishing Scene

For architecture bibliophiles, the universe just got a little larger with the founding of Monacelli Press. Founded last spring by Gianfranco Monacelli, former president and publisher of long-established Rizzoli International, the new imprint has charged onto the publishing scene with four new books – the latest of which is the mammoth 1,213-page *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial*. A panoramic study of what cities and city life ought to be, the book "should be read and pondered by all who value architecture and who understand, or wonder about, its importance in their lives," writes UCLA's Thomas S. Hines. Just how quickly the new publisher has made its mark is evidenced by its winning Book of the Year honors for *New York 1960* in the International Architecture Book Awards, sponsored annually by the American Institute of Architects. Treat it as mere coincidence that Robert A.M. Stern, one of the book's three authors, also served on the awards jury.

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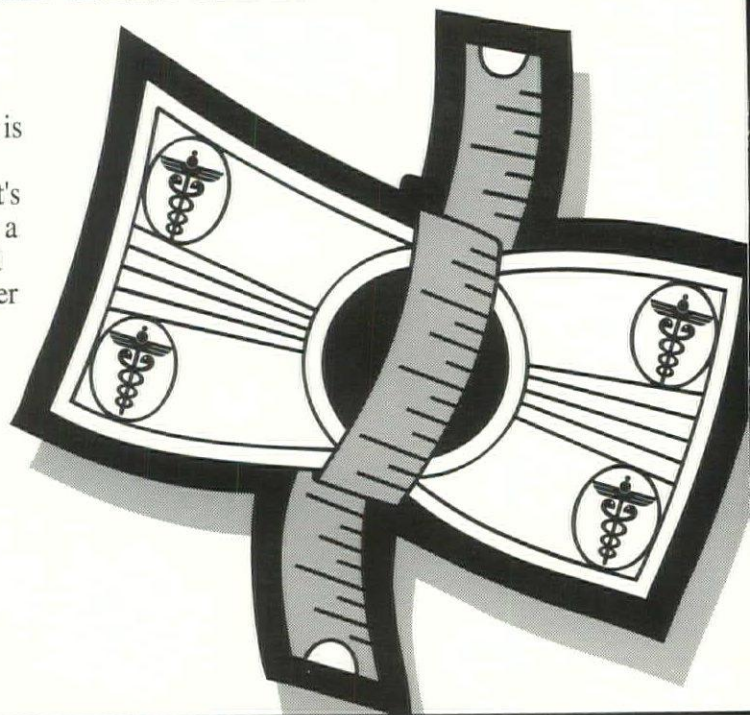
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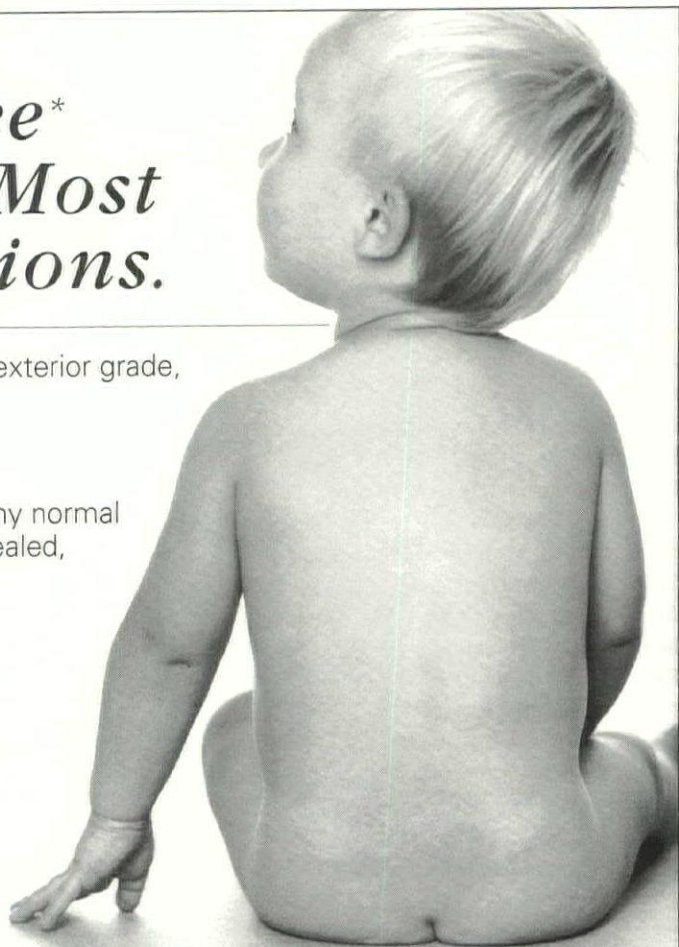
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■ "Shaker: The Art of Craftsmanship." An exhibit featuring objects that characterize values of simplicity, utility, order, and craftsmanship. At the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, through April 16. 804-622-1211.

■ Boston architect Andrea Leers, of Leers, Weinzapfel & Associates, speaks April 19 at the U.Va. School of Architecture, Campbell Hall. Call to confirm. 804-924-3715.

■ "The Art of Building in North Carolina." Large-scale black-and-white photographs by Tim Buchman record vernacular buildings in North Carolina from Colonial times to the present. At the Barret House, Richmond, through May 12. 804-644-3041.

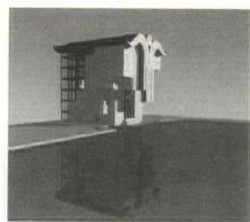
■ "World War II and the American Dream." How war-driven cooperation and inventiveness by government, industry, architects, and builders transformed a country. Through 1995 at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C. 202-272-2448.

■ English gardening expert Penelope Hobhouse is the keynote speaker for the 1995 Charles F. Gillette Forum presented by the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond. Other speakers include the resident landscape architect for Colonial Williamsburg. May 9 and 10. 804-262-9887.

■ "Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect for America." An exhibit of models, drawings, furniture, and photographs explores Wright's "organic architecture." Through May 10 at the Portsmouth Community Arts Center, 804-393-8983. Future shows in Farmville, Roanoke.

■ "Making It in the Birmingham District." Through a series of recent photos, the Historic American Engineering Record examines how industry influenced development in Birmingham, Alabama. Through June 4 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448.

■ "Uncommon Beauty in Common Objects: The Legacy of African-American Craft Art." includes diverse works in ceramics, fiber, jewelry, furniture, quilts, basketry and other materials by contemporary U.S. artists. At the Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C., through June 18. 202-357-2247.



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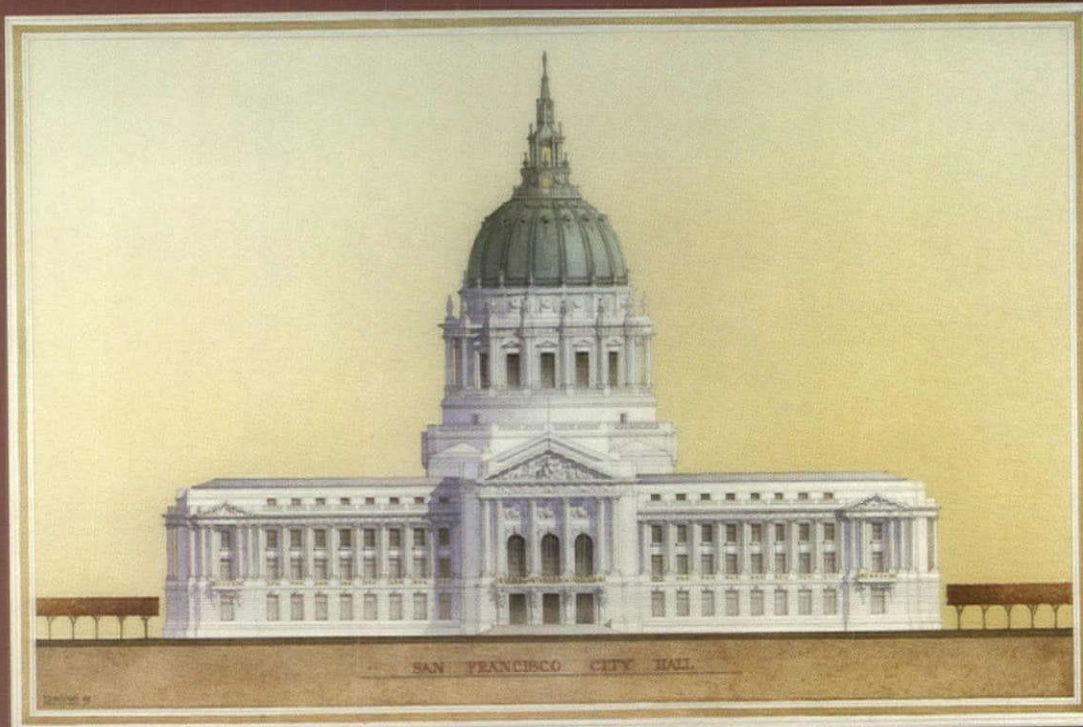
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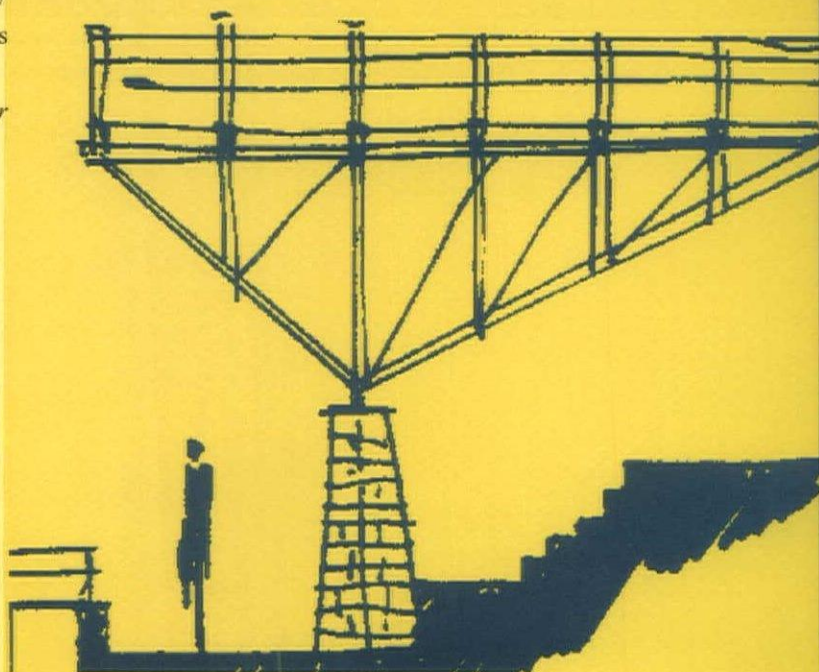
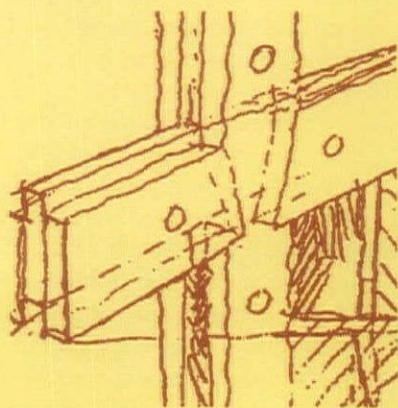
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Houses:

The Pursuit of an Idea

Few commissions present a broader range of opportunities for an architect than a house. While small by comparison to many types of buildings an architect may design, the house often lends itself to artful interpretation and idiosyncrasy largely because the functional needs are relatively simple, the personality of the client is free to emerge, and the relationship between owner and architect is unfettered by the demands of many-headed buildings committees. Two people can agree more easily than twelve. On the following pages are five new houses that incorporate a wide variety of concerns in a variety of settings—from city to suburb to rural countryside. They differ in materials from wood to masonry to steel. Some emerge solidly from the earth; some hover magically above it. But all have in common the fact that they derive their physical form from the pursuit of an idea about what that particular house should be. The subject brings to mind a pleasant little book called *The Place of Houses*, by Gerald Allen, Donlyn Lyndon, and the late Charles Moore. These accomplished architects agreed that "a good house is a created thing made of many parts economically and meaningfully assembled. It speaks not just of the materials from which it is made, but of the intangible rhythms, spirits, and dreams of people's lives. Its site is only a tiny piece of the real world, yet this place is made to seem like an entire world. In its parts it accommodates important human activities, yet in sum it expresses an attitude toward life." They are exalted words for something as seemingly humble as a house. But a house deserves that kind of scrutiny, just as much as any public monument does.

—Vernon Mays, Editor



A D.C. Rowhouse Makes

Capitol Gains

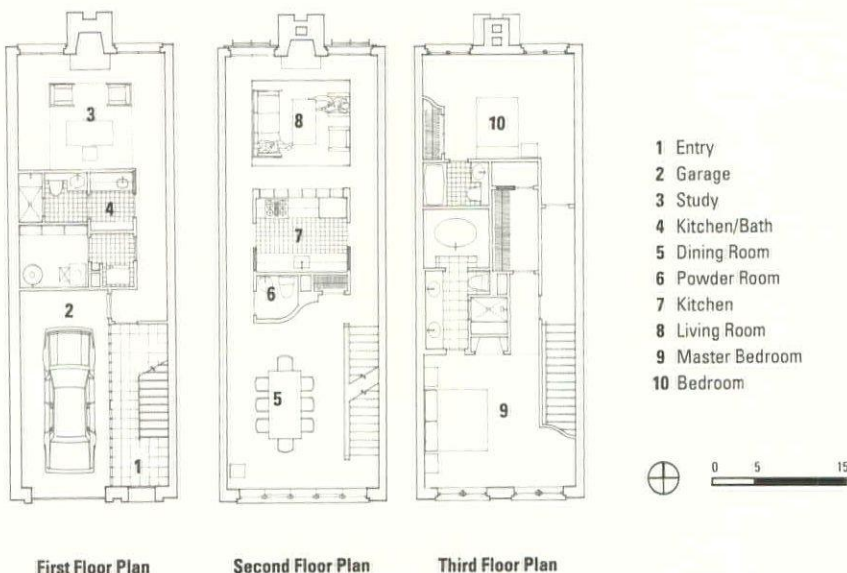


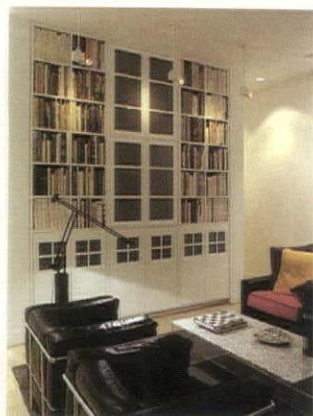
Robert Gurney was asked to design an urban house for his brother. But without a clear design direction – other than “give it two bedrooms, two baths, and a dining room” – he completed the task in a way that suited his own tastes. Good thing: For when his brother moved to Boston, Gurney bought the house for himself.

While reminiscent of the stately rowhouses that surround it on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., the house that Gurney built is a departure from the neighboring structures – typically narrow-slice buildings with a sequence of dark rooms. “I wanted it to be light and open,” says the Alexandria-based architect. He achieved that in part by concentrating the kitchen, bathrooms, and utilities in the heart of the building and placing the living spaces near windows to the front and rear. To further increase the levels of natural light inside the house, Gurney dispensed with the conventional small windows and introduced larger expanses of glass instead.

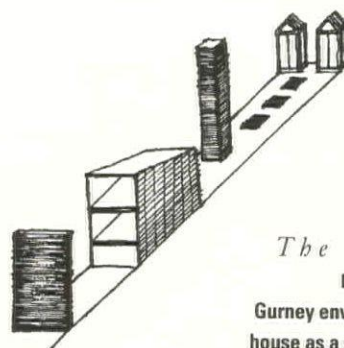
Still, he was concerned that too much innovation might not sit well with the local preservation board. Luckily, the board’s staff encouraged him to do “something other than a Victorian replica.” That suited Gurney just fine. Using the cornice lines and window alignments of the adjacent houses as guidelines, Gurney presented the street with a façade that is contemporary in spirit and detailing, without forsaking neighborhood traditions.

The alley façade is enlivened by a graphic composition of windows, metal panels, and lights (above).
The front façade is an adaptation of traditional elements (facing page).





Four-square geometric theme repeats in living room cabinetry (above). Generous windows flood the second-floor dining room with light (below).



The Idea:

Gurney envisioned the house as a sequence of layers (drawing above). A brick wall that aligns with adjacent houses is followed by the stuccoed main block of the house and brick chimney tower. Paved squares in the garden and twin storage buildings emphasize the house's organization along a central axis.

City regulations threw another obstacle his way; local zoning ordinances required that he provide off-street parking. Unable to get a car to the rear of the property, which abuts a condominium parking lot, Gurney turned his attention to the front. By raising the main living spaces above street level and dedicating the first floor to a garage and guest quarters, he solved the problem. The fact that his house ended up being taller than the ones beside it was a minor concern, because the houses on the block already varied in height.

But the primary source of their variety rests in the architectural details, and Gurney sought to generate a similar visual interest in his design for the cornice, window eyebrows, and brick patterning at the base of the building. The rear façade does much to upgrade a chaotic alley, where the consistent feel of the sidewalk out front is lost. To counter the chaos, Gurney built a 6-foot-high wood fence and two small storage buildings that enclose the rear yard in a self-contained garden.

Inside the house, Gurney worked with a theme of simple geometric shapes that relate to his earlier designs for chairs and candlesticks. Working with his wife, interior designer Therese Baron Gurney, he treated the rest of the interior as a white canvas, against which the couple's art collection is displayed. Now, even on gloomy days, the spacious rooms are a welcome respite from the tensions of city life.



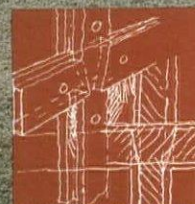
Custom Fit



18

The Idea:

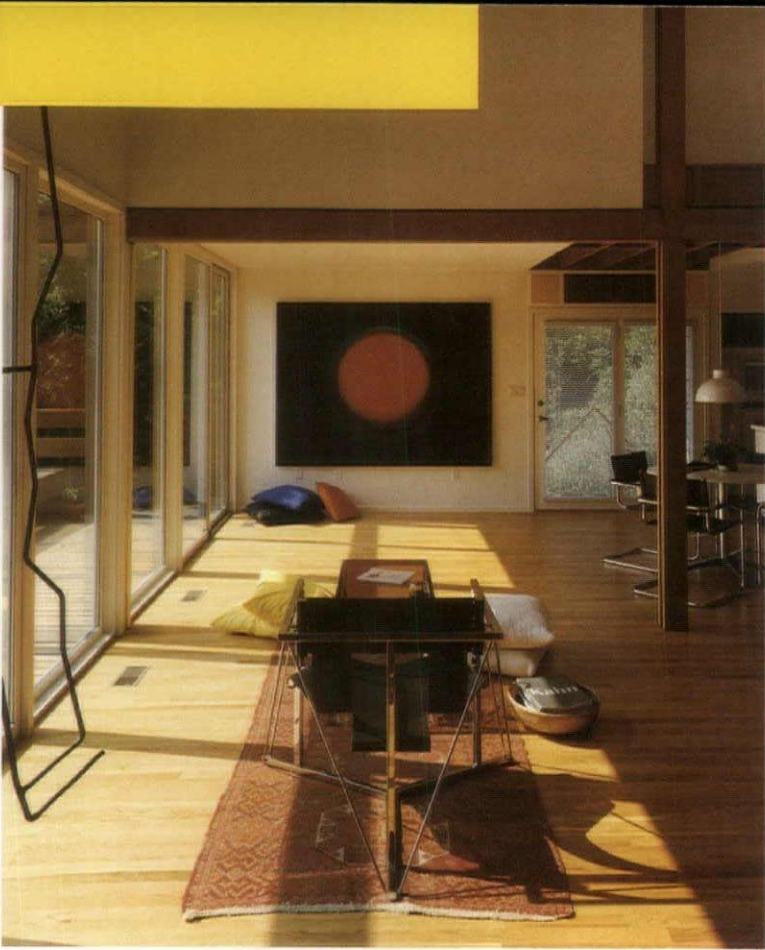
■ Kilper's interest in maintaining a clear consistency between the vision of the whole and the resolution of its parts is evident in his sketch (left) for a beam-post connection. Similarly, structural details are articulated throughout the house and made integral to its overall aesthetic.



The topsy-turvy look of Dennis and Rosalie Kilper's mountainside residence gives a first impression that is counter to the orderly arrangement of space inside. It is a Modern house through and through, but one which breaks away from what Kilper calls the rigid form-making that was characteristic of early Modern architecture. Instead Kilper, a professor of architecture at Virginia Tech, allowed himself the freedom to search for what he calls "the ingenuous qualities" of building that can result when an architect is sensitive to the specifics of a place.

That's an attitude encouraged by the so-called "Team 10" group of architects, several of whom taught at Washington University when Kilper was a student there in the 1960s. As architects, the group strayed from the school of thought promoted by Walter Gropius at Harvard, which tended to elevate the importance of buildings as art objects – often to the exclusion of human concerns. Team 10 was more focused on human experience. "Team 10 was interested in making places for people that had spiritual meaning as well as achieving habitability," Kilper says.

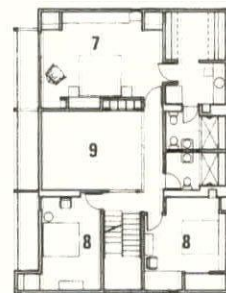
As originally conceived, Kilper's house in Blacksburg was more rectangular and sat closer to the street in front. But once he began to clear the site, Kilper realized there were vastly improved views to be gained if the house was shifted about 30 feet south. Problem was, in that location the hill next to the house would have collided with the projecting lower-level braces that supported the upper floors. How to remedy that? Kilper made the house narrow at ground level and broadened it on the upper floors. Thus was created the dramatically slanted west wall. The benefits



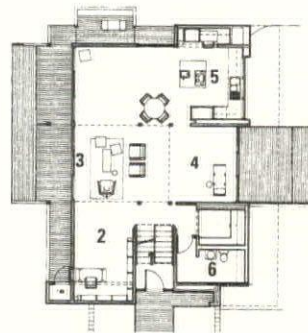
In the main living space, wood columns and beams framing neutral walls create a serenity akin to Oriental architecture (above). An encroaching hillside prompted a series of decisions resulting in the dramatically tilted west wall (facing page).



Large openings (left) draw cool breezes through the house. Kilper thought of the roof terrace (below) as a place where built and natural forms are in balance.



Second Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



0 5 15

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1 Entry | 6 Powder Room |
| 2 Study | 7 Master Bedroom |
| 3 Sitting Area | 8 Bedroom |
| 4 Dining Area | 9 Open to Below |
| 5 Kitchen | |

are a more spacious dining area, increased open space above the double-height sitting room, and a larger roof deck. Even better, says Kilper, the change unraveled the static symmetry of the original house, producing a more dynamic result.

Visitors enter the house along a narrow walk above the garage; next to the recessed front door is an abstract mural that will change over the years. The first floor provides the principal living and entertaining spaces, with the kitchen, dining area, and study adjoining a sitting area. Upstairs

are two guest bedrooms and the master suite. One floor above is the roof terrace – a place to relax, sunbathe, garden, and entertain. “More important, it afforded an opportunity to make an urban space where one could be surrounded by a balance of built and natural forms.” Kilper’s keen interest in the elements of structure is revealed in the carefully articulated framework connections. “You can be excited about the surface of things only so long,” he says. Beyond that, he says architecture derives its interest from the relationships between the individual parts and a greater whole.





Solace in the Trees

Stepping out onto the second-floor balcony of the Snow Residence's new addition, a visitor is apt to feel he has just climbed into an overgrown child's wild and wonderful treehouse. There, suspended 30 feet over a steep hillside, one is met with a panoramic view of the unspoiled James River. The spectacular result is more than owner John Snow bargained for when he asked Richmond architects Bond Comet Westmoreland + Hiner to expand the master bedroom of his ranch-style house to include a sitting area, dressing room, bath, and private office.

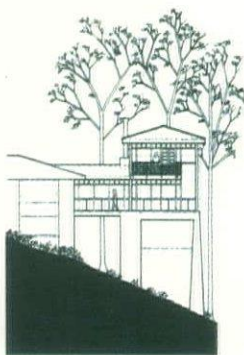
Architect Sanford Bond designed an addition that seems like a natural outgrowth of the original house. Tapering masonry piers anchor the wood-framed tower to the site, which drops steeply into a ravine. Glass walls on the south and east sides of the addition fill the study and gallery with light while offering clear views of the river. On the north side, a near-solid wall of brick shelters the addition from chilling winter winds, while lending privacy. Because of difficult access to the outside of the building, Bond favored low-maintenance materials such as cedar siding. Sturdy roof shingles and brick were selected to match the existing house. "We wanted a building that would lay in there quietly," says Bond.

The addition is entered from the master bedroom, which opens into the new sitting area with a cozy fireplace. This wedge-shaped room connects the existing house and tower, which has a lower-level dressing room and bath. A stair leads up to the study, which is lined on the north side with bookshelves and a built-in desk. Because of the openness of the walls facing the views, great attention was paid to the idea of containment in other parts of the study. The desk, for example, fits snugly into the north wall of floor-to-ceiling brick. In the end, the addition makes a small visual impact on the house, but greatly improves its livability.

Photos: James Adcock

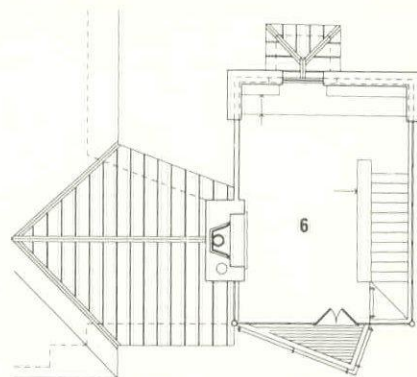


Bright color warms the feeling of the upstairs study, with views beyond the balcony through steel-framed double doors (above). As night approaches, the addition takes on a transparent quality (facing page).

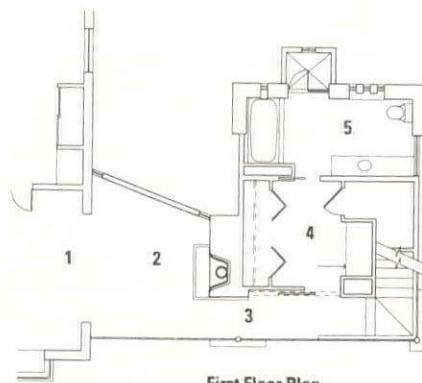


The Idea:

■ The need for a tall foundation that would lift the addition level with the existing bedroom generated a two-part design: heavy masonry forms rising from the ground, topped by a lightweight structure that seems at home in the treetops (drawing above).



Second Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Existing Master Bedroom | 4 Dressing Room |
| 2 Sitting Area | 5 Bath |
| 3 Gallery | 6 Study |



Photos: Hoachlander Photography Associates

The house's front façade steps back gradually to maintain the scale of the neighborhood (above).
Brick masses to the left and right are remains of the original Cape Cod-style house.



The Idea:

■
When the owners asked that their new house recall the one being removed from the site, Notkins envisioned the image of a building that appeared to emerge from the ruin of the original brick house.

22

Stripped to its Essence and

Risen From Ruin

Bill and Nada Finan lived in a modest Cape Cod house in Bethesda, Maryland, that was too cramped and a bit on the dark side. But they knew it could be more. Much more. Specifically, in expanding the 1,350-square-foot brick house, they had two things in mind. First on the list was to add a flowing master bedroom suite complete with sleeping area, bath, sauna, study area, and private sundeck. Their second concern: enlarge the first-floor living space to provide a spacious eat-in kitchen, a dining area for ten people, a sitting area that would accommodate a piano, and a window seat.

With that charge, McLean architect Susan Woodward Notkins set to work. Responding to the owners' request that



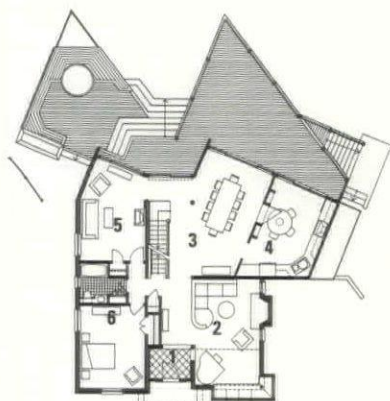
Drawing shows how rear of the addition was shifted to capture views and offer privacy.

the new house recall the original brick structure, she retained the house's end walls like a "ruin" in an English garden. An addition with vertical cedar siding was inserted between the leftover pieces in front and wrapped around them in back. Despite the proximity of other houses nearby, Notkins was able to offer privacy to the Finans by skewing the rear addition toward the wooded landscape and adding wing walls that block views from houses next door. Sharply angled decks, one with a spa, hang over the ravine in back to further heighten the experience of living in the woods.

The front of the building employs a series of setbacks and flat roofs to maintain a residential scale and an entrance that feels approachable. Warm exterior



Second Floor Plan



First Floor Plan

0 10 20



- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1 Entry | 7 Master Bedroom |
| 2 Living Room | 8 Study/Exercise |
| 3 Dining Room | 9 Bath |
| 4 Kitchen | 10 Closet/Dressing |
| 5 Sitting Room | 11 Private Deck |
| 6 Bedroom | |

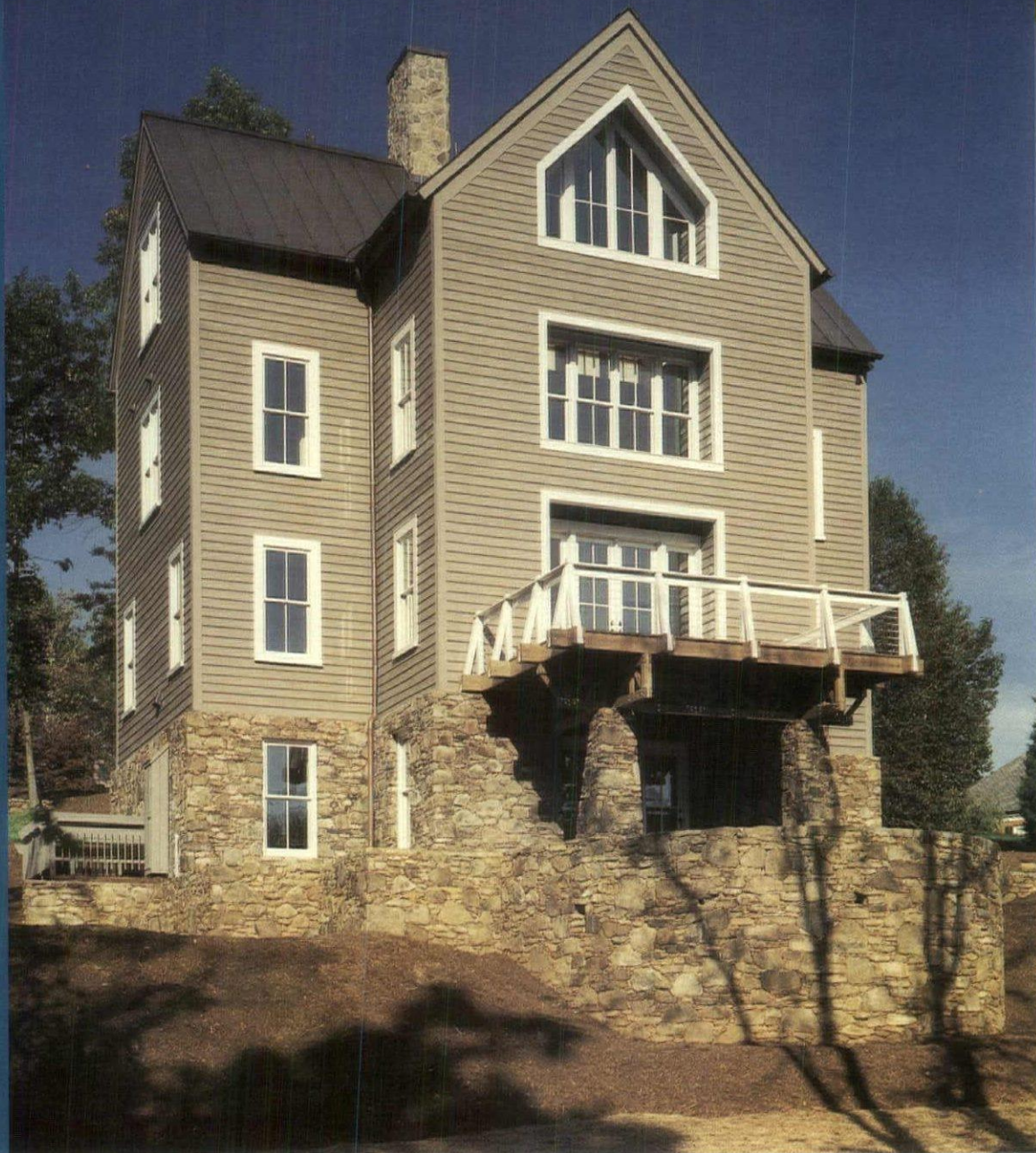


Custom-designed interior elements include the kitchen table and display unit, which opens to reveal glimpses into the dining room (above). Projecting side walls on the rear facade (below) block inward views from adjacent houses.

colors mirror the owners' collection of French posters and Provençal prints, changing with the sunlight throughout the day to alter the mood of the house. Inside, intimately-scaled living areas in the front of the house lead gradually toward dramatic, open views through expanses of glass in the rear.

Austere interiors make a fitting background for the Finans' growing collection of Japanese artifacts and furniture. Yet the project also provided several opportunities for the architects to design custom furniture, including the multilevel glass kitchen table and display unit, a freestanding bed unit for the master suite, and a modular desk reminiscent of stepped Japanese storage cabinets.



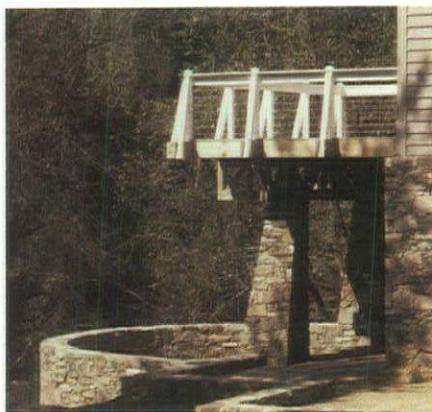


Viewed from the creek, the house rises tall from a stone base (above). Wood deck offers enjoyment of the idyllic site (below).

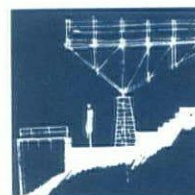
Built Like a Mill

Down by the Riverside

In 1992, while on a walking tour of Tuscany, custom builder and developer Judi Simpson made a point of finding out all she could about mills. Camera in tow, she photographed every mill that she passed, mindful that when she returned to Virginia she was going to build a house on a rise overlooking a creek – a site with limitations calling for a tall slender building like a mill. Back home in Charlottesville, she brought in Vienna architects Karl E. Kohler Associates and listed her requirements.



She planned a house for an “empty nester” couple with three bedrooms, a large master suite on the second floor, and a circulation pattern that allowed for easy entertaining. Architect Mark Kohler provided the necessary rooms, and added a garage beneath the house, which helped to lift the building skyward. Stained redwood siding covers the outside of the house, which is anchored to the site by a stone base that adds color and texture to an otherwise austere building.



The Idea:

■ Mills don't have porches, as a rule. So in searching for a form that evoked associations with a rural past, Kohler designed a wood deck on a trusslike structure echoing a 19th century railroad trestle (drawing above). Stone buttresses support the timber deck.



Photos: Joseph Eggleston Garland



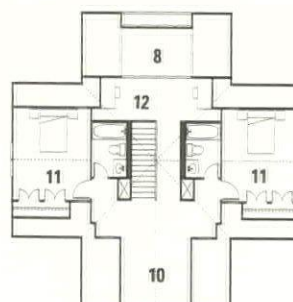
The unpainted finish of the first-floor fireplace (above) lends an air of rusticity to the interior. The space is opened dramatically by the double-height ceiling in the second-floor family room (left).



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan

A winding path approaches the house, which is entered by crossing a stream bed on a narrow footbridge designed to resemble a mill race. A hayhood above the front entrance further underscores the mill house theme. Inside, a two-part central core rises through the house, penetrating the roof as a pair of stone chimneys. This central mass cradles the wooden stair and provides the focal point for the open floor plan. Oversized windows allow natural light to filter into the house, which opens into two-story

spaces at key points. Pine floors, handmade kitchen cabinets, granite counter tops, reclaimed mantles and beams, and built-in cabinets add to the finished effect of the interior, which was designed by Simpson. The mill house qualities are best appreciated from the rear of the house, which opens to a wood deck overlooking the creek. A curved stone wall cut into the hillside heightens the perception of the house's verticality, giving it the appearance Simpson had in mind from the start.

0 10 20



- 1 Entry
- 2 Living Room
- 3 Dining Room
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Family Room
- 6 Dressing Area

- 7 Bath
- 8 Open to Below
- 9 Master Bedroom
- 10 Sitting Area
- 11 Bedroom
- 12 Balcony

Thoughts on a Small House

By Ronald Faleide

The 1950s suburban house on Apple Tree Drive (near right) shares a number of similarities with Prairie Style houses designed 75 years ago by Frank Lloyd Wright (far right).



Architectural treasures may reside right under our noses, if we are only willing to dig for them. I did a bit of digging in the fall of 1993 and found a house rooted in Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Style – right in the middle of the Northern Virginia suburbs.

26

The house, at 4800 Apple Tree Drive, is one of a series of “Virginia Ramblers” in the Rose Hill section of south Alexandria. Built in 1954, it reflects the optimism and demand of the post-war building boom that redefined American culture. Its generous one-third-acre lot, large window walls, carport, and even a built-in barbecue grill somehow captured the spirit of a nation that was riding the momentum of an exploding economy, space exploration, cars with fins, and early rock and roll.

The house was every inch a disaster when my wife and I bought it. The grass was up to our knees, the floor was down to the concrete slab, and the living room ceiling bore the scars of spontaneous bonfires, lit not in the fireplace but in the middle of the floor. Decades of grease clung to the kitchen ceiling and cockroach carcasses abounded.

Our neighbors wondered what I saw in the house, but were relieved to know an architect was moving in. My wife shared the neighbors' skepticism. But I knew that although the house was not designed by Wright, it shared, in a muted voice, noble Wrightian characteristics: horizontal lines, an extended roof, window walls, flowing space, and vertical supports – all orga-

nized within a regular grid. My goal was to enhance these existing features, bringing them to their full potential and strengthening what I recognized as the very real connection between this modest box and Wright's Prairie Style of the 1920s.

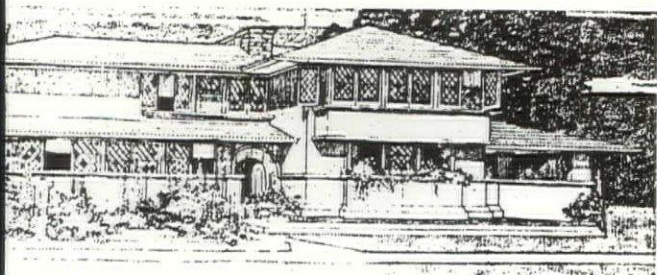
What caught my eye initially were the house's low, horizontal lines and extended roof – characteristics intrinsic to the Prairie Style. Wright, in his pursuit of a truly egalitarian and healthy house, sought first to eliminate the attic and basement. In Wright's view, such “amenities” perpetuated an upstairs/downstairs separation of individuals and space into an undesirable hierarchy. Attics were for “the help” to swelter in. Dank basements, meanwhile, were dug out of clay, shoving the house up into the air and creating second-class space below. Like Wright's houses, the 1950s Rose Hill houses have low roofs and no basements.

In his Prairie houses, Wright also employed walls as long, low screens that altered the traditional relationships between inside and outside. Consistent with his desire to create houses that were at one with the landscape, he designed walls that tapered upward from the ground and stopped about four-and-a-half feet above floor level. Windows filled the band between the wall and the roof. Thus the enclosure of the house was modulated to human scale and human experience. While sitting, occupants remained in a private setting. While standing, they enjoyed an open view of the landscape outside. This stratification of the façade offered Wright the means to elim-

inate the conventional use of the window as a “punched opening.” Instead, his invention of the strip window is the opposite of the “hole in the wall.” In harmony with Wright's philosophy, the house on Apple Tree has windows that are not stuck on, but rather are part of the building's internal organization. And by freeing the walls from the obligation to support the roof at all points, other benefits are gained. In the house at Apple Tree, for example, the roof continues past the walls of the house to provide cover for a carport.

At places where the wall disappears into floor-to-ceiling windows, the Apple Tree house gains its vertical support from brick piers. Here the pier is both structurally and spatially ambiguous – it is neither a wall nor a column. In true Wrightian fashion, the roof also is supported by the fireplace. Disappointed with the multitude of spindly chimneys that were commonly used in Wright's day, the grandfather of the ranch house foresaw the advent of central heating and its single combustion source as an opportunity to return to the house what he regarded as the essence of dwelling: the hearth. On Apple Tree, as in many of the best Prairie Style houses, a massive brick chimney penetrates the roof, figuratively anchoring the house to the landscape.

Yet, to fully appreciate the house's place in architecture, we must consider its reliance on the grid. Though not unique to the Prairie School, use of the rectilinear grid was indicative of the control underlying most good floor plans. Wright's employment of the grid was particularly refined. Like a tartan



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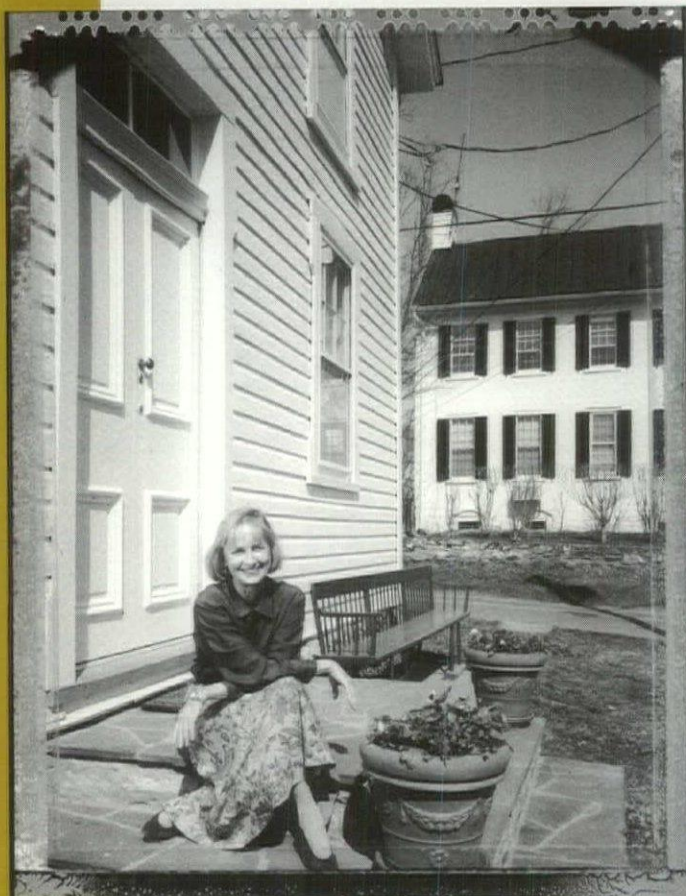
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plaid, the organizational grid determines placement of building elements, establishes rules of proportionality, and creates a cohesive whole by integrating the parts. At the house on Apple Tree, a grid organizes not only the wall, piers, and fireplace elements, but also the varied sizes of space and even the built-ins, floor materials, and furniture. Even on the outside of the house, the grid clearly is evident in the size and placement of windows.

This use of geometry to lend order to the house sets up further conditions that were important to Wright and that remain part of the architect's repertoire even today. The idea of transparency – that one might be able to see completely through the house at controlled points – only reinforced Wright's attempts to link inside and outside, particularly in the house's public spaces. Such a way of thinking about buildings begins to dissolve the psychological barriers within them, and Wright did not stop at the outer walls. Frustrated with conventional boxlike rooms, Wright sought to make a new kind of space within his houses. Although the rooms he made for sleeping and bathing may have remained boxy, the public spaces of the house and the world outside were fused to create a more complex sense of continuity. So it is in the Apple Tree house. Because of its floor-to-ceiling windows, the living room is visually extended beyond the limit of the walls. Even within the house, space flows freely between the kitchen, dining room, and living room, whose boundaries are folded over one another.

Today the finished house shines. Through a reinforcement of the fundamental ideas that, by cultural osmosis, influenced its design, the Apple Tree house now has a generous capacity to offer its inhabitants a high quality of life. I also like to think this humble dwelling illustrates, in its own way, that Wright's influence on post-war building extended not just to the well-to-do, but also to the many Americans who dwell in more modest homes.

Last fall, Ronald Faleide sold his house on Apple Tree Drive and moved to Denver, where he lives and practices architecture.



Photos: Prakash Patel

PRESERVATION ABOUNDS *in Waterford*



Waterford Foundation Director Linda Cox (left) says fund-raising is a constant concern when caring for the ten buildings owned by the foundation. The 1905 town post office (above) remains the center of town gossip.

By Andrea Oppenheimer Dean

Progress, while tightening its grip on most of Northern Virginia, has mercifully overlooked Waterford, a tiny hamlet that lies just outside of Leesburg. But Waterford is far from safe. In fact, it is an endangered species, says Calder Loth, senior architectural historian at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Loth regards Waterford, which has one of the state's most extensive protective easement programs, as a test case for "whether a picturesque little village on the Eastern Seaboard in the path of development can maintain its scenic integrity."

To J. Jackson Walter, a long-time Waterford resident, the village of 300-odd residents resembles the mythical Scottish town of Brigadoon, which was bypassed by time. Walter, a former president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, recently renovated one of Waterford's newer buildings, the 1879 Methodist Church, to use as an office for his consulting business. He describes life in the village as

"revolving in the oldest, most old-fashioned way around the post office." Located at the center of town, the post office, to which nearly every resident makes a daily pilgrimage, is presided over by the Postmistress, known to all simply as Bernice, "the keeper of the gossip and the news," notes Walter.

Russell Versaci, an architect who has lived in the village since 1981 and has designed a house for it that seamlessly fits into the historic streetscape, believes Waterford's sense of community is strongly reinforced by the town's physical layout. The village is a compact configuration of small free-standing dwellings and rowhouses that overlook narrow streets. "The street, therefore, is everyone's front yard," says Versaci. "That makes for a lot of interaction, a lot of casual conversations."

Perhaps the most striking thing about Waterford is that, unlike many historic Virginia towns from Lexington to Alexandria, it has not been marketed for tourism. Most of

the time it is tourist-free. And although the village's collection of 170 historic buildings functions as a museum for two-and-a-half centuries of vernacular American architecture, none of Waterford's structures is imposing, many could use a fresh coat of paint, and few of the gardens look fussed over. That's precisely what gives Waterford its authenticity. "It has a kind of grit," explains Versaci. "Part of Waterford's character comes from being made up of very diverse but relatively middle-class folk who don't have vast amounts of money to throw at things. People don't mind being unfashionable."

In fact, Waterford boasts more than its share of eccentrics. "It's always been a minority community, never having been mainstream. That's given it a sort of fierce independence," says W. Brown Morton, who has been involved with Waterford since he surveyed the village for the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1958 as a student at the University of Virginia. He has lived in the town since 1967.

Waterford began as an anomaly in 1733 when Amos Janney, a Quaker,



Waterford's old stone jail, circa 1812.

traveled to Virginia from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, stopped at Catocin Creek, and decided to build a mill there. By 1741, other Quakers had followed to build four or five houses, a blacksmith shop, a tannery, and a meeting house. Versaci explains that Waterford's first buildings, made of log and stone, spread east from the mill on Main Street in shoulder-to-shoulder rowhouse formation for protection from Indians. On the north side of Main a jumble of linked structures is tucked into the hillside, their street-facing basements exposed and spanned by porches. Here Waterford's citizens lived according to Quaker principles of passivism and simple decency, which prevented all but a rebellious few from taking up arms against the British in the Revolutionary War and prompted the appointment in 1790 of a committee to "care for freed slaves."

After Waterford was chartered in 1801, it experienced a period of growth along Second Street, which runs south from Main Street for four short blocks and is lined with buildings that once provided essential services such as tanning, milling, and coach making. The earliest structures, built of stone and log, were followed by brick and timber buildings. The 1860 census found 990 residents in Waterford, including 129 Quakers and 155 freed blacks. But Waterford's economic momentum was short-lived. During the Civil War, the town was harassed by both Union and Confederate troops, the latter being understandably outraged by Waterford's Loudoun Rangers, the only regiment of Union troops to have originated in the Confederacy.



The "Pink House," a private home and B&B.

The town never recovered, mainly because when the railroad came to the region shortly after the war it skirted past Waterford. A few summer houses were built on High Street, which runs parallel to Second, during the late 19th century and early 20th, but otherwise Waterford stagnated until the 1930s, when brothers Edward and Leroy Chamberlin came to town. They set to work buying and renovating vacant buildings, which had the additional benefit of providing employment for local laborers and craftsmen who had lost their jobs because of the Depression. What the Chamberlins commenced, the Waterford Foundation has continued. Described by Walter as "the keeper of Waterford's conservation and preservation flame," the foundation was established in 1943 by local families to preserve buildings and restore the town's crafts tradition. The foundation began buying deteriorated buildings, placing them under façade easements – which prohibit making changes or additions to building façades without approval from a review board – and reselling them. To foster the crafts that were part of the town's earlier life and to provide itself with financial support, the foundation in 1944 inaugurated an annual juried crafts fair, which still fills Waterford's streets each year during the second weekend of October. Last year, some 30,000 people attended the fair, which yielded earnings of approximately \$200,000.

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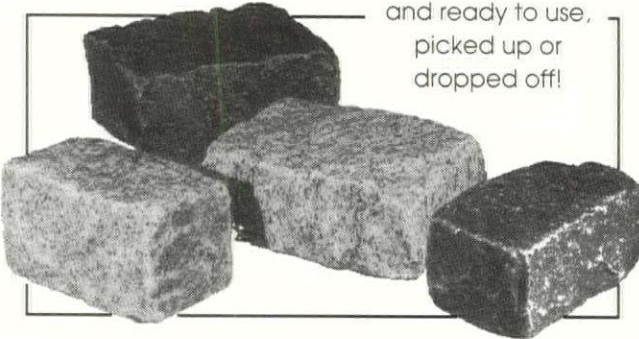
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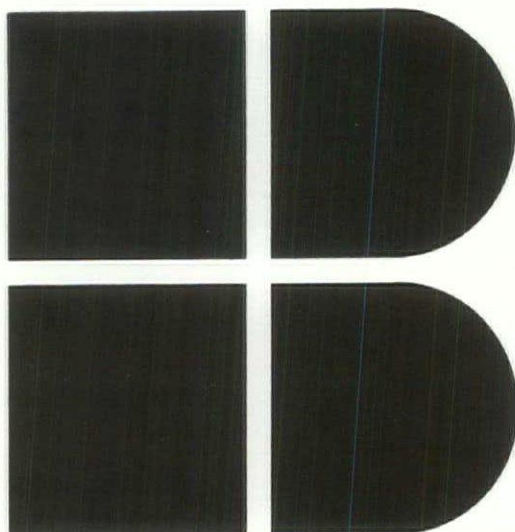
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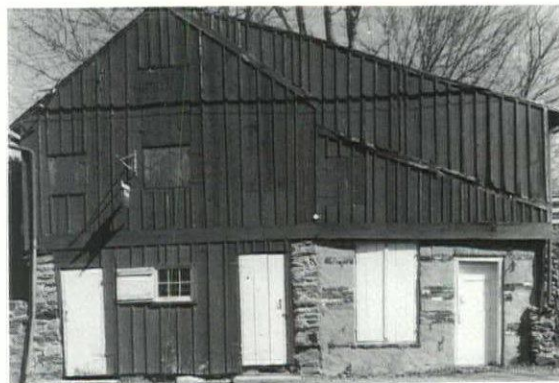
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Prakash Patel

**The forge, begun in 1855 and altered many times since, houses
blacksmith demonstrations during the October crafts fair.**

The foundation needs every penny it can earn, for it currently owns ten buildings "plus lots of open land," says Director Linda Cox. The foundation also sponsors activities such as a day-long children's program in the former freedman's school that attempts to replicate a typical 19th century school day. The sessions are open to children from public and private schools and run continuously during fall and spring. The foundation also sponsors research into the history of the town's now-depleted black population.

The foundation's task of preserving Waterford has become more complicated since the 1960s, which brought the ever-increasing threat of rapid suburbanization. Farmers, met with declining agricultural profits, face an all-but-irresistible temptation to sell their land at greatly inflated prices. One result has been to expand efforts to preserve both the village and the surrounding hills and farmland that provide Waterford's gemlike setting. In 1969 the village obtained a place on the Virginia Landmarks Register, and the following year the U.S. Secretary of the Interior designated the 1,420-acre Waterford Historic District a National Historic Landmark. "That means Waterford is of national significance and has the same status as a cultural resource as Monticello or Independence Hall," says historian Loth. The designation, however, provides more prestige than protection.

A degree of security has been gained by the expansion of easement programs, however. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources now holds permanent preservation easements on more than 50 Waterford properties, the National Trust for Historic Preservation holds another ten, and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation has control over additional open land. But, although they are helpful, easements cover only a small portion of Waterford and its surrounding landscape. They do not prevent most large landowners from selling their holdings, and cookie-cutter mansions with an overabundance of columns, wings, and gables are beginning to appear on hilltops just outside the village. What is threatening Waterford, say Loth, is the constant march of development out Route 7 and past Dulles Airport right to the edge of Leesburg. He asks: "What would happen if a developer built a 100-unit development on the edge of Waterford? What does this do to such a little community? It can happen."

Andrea Oppenheimer Dean is editor at large of Historic Preservation magazine.

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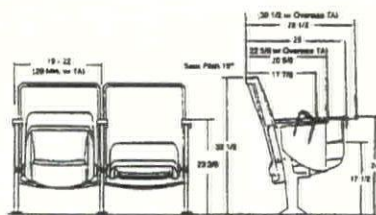
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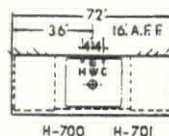
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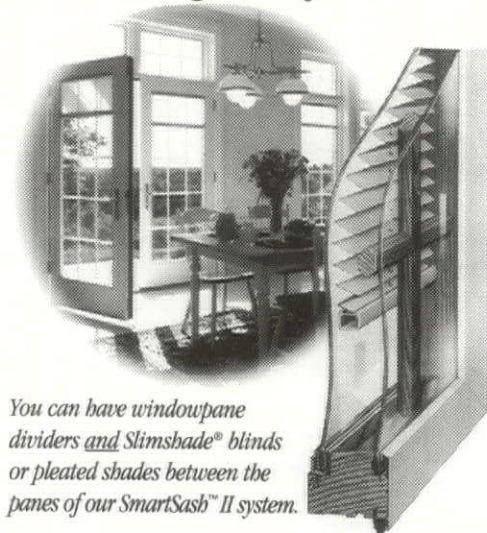
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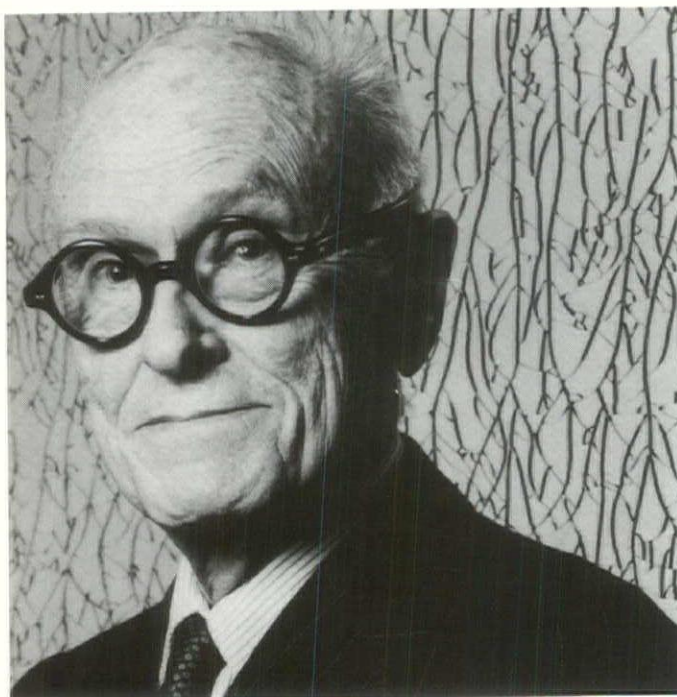
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Luca Vignelli

From Strident Devotion to Reckless Indifference

Philip Johnson: Life and Work. By Franz Schulze. 465 pp. Illustrated. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$30.00 cloth.

By Mark Alden Branch

A biographer could choose for himself an easier task than making sense of the life of Philip Johnson. The architect, now 88 and still practicing, has repeatedly disproved F. Scott Fitzgerald's claim that there are "no second acts in American lives." As told by Franz Schulze in *Philip Johnson: Life and Work*, Johnson's life has had so many acts that it resembles a long-running situation comedy – often funny, but with a few disturbing episodes.

Johnson is best known to many as the architect of highly publicized works ranging from his own Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut (1949), one of the purest statements of American Modernism, to the AT&T Building in New York (completed in 1984 and now called the Sony Building), an equally important – if far inferior – exemplar of Post-Modern historicism. But even Johnson knows that he will never enter the pantheon of great

20th century architects. His more pervasive influence has been as a tastemaker and power broker, promoting styles and making (or breaking) careers through his vast wealth, his long association with the Museum of Modern Art, and his nose for new trends.

Schulze, a professor of art at Lake Forest College in Illinois and author of a previous biography of Mies van der Rohe, takes us through the ups and downs of Johnson's existence with more critical emphasis on his life than on his work. He does not offer much architectural criticism, although his brief judgments of Johnson's work are usually on the mark. Instead, he concentrates on exploring the motives for the almost reckless shifts in attitude in Johnson's life and work. In this task he was aided by interviews with the architect and free access to Johnson's letters and papers.

Johnson generously cooperated with Schulze without asking to review the completed work, perhaps because the book was originally intended to be published after Johnson's death. (Someone forgot to tell the copy

editors of the change in plans, for in several places Schulze refers to feelings or situations that persisted "for the rest of his life.") Johnson clearly was quite candid. Following up on a 1993 *Vanity Fair* interview in which he first publicly disclosed his homosexuality, he talks here of "the four Mrs. Johnsons," (men he has lived with through the years) and of his efforts to keep his sexual life separate from his high-society New York social life until the 1970s. Given this account of his concealed sexuality, his famous New Canaan abode – a hidden glass house for a man in the closet – seems especially poignant.

In a section titled "The Inglorious Detour," Schulze does a thorough job of explaining just what Johnson was up to from 1934 to 1940, when he flirted with fascist and right-wing politics both at home and abroad. Suffice it to say that Johnson easily did more damage to the world as an architect than as a fascist sympathizer. The accounts of his naive, inept attempts to enter American politics with a former Harvard classmate are painfully funny: they started their own political party, begged a dismissive Huey Long to pay attention to them, and finally tried hitching their wagon to the less-than-bright star of the demagogic radio priest Father Charles Coughlin. Less funny are Johnson's Nazi-friendly, anti-Semitic articles for the Coughlin journal *Social Justice*, filed from the war front when Hitler invaded Poland.

Schulze is not just being an apologist when he suggests that Johnson's enthusiasm for the Nazis was largely aesthetic. Johnson has always been a Germanophile, reveling in the decadence of 1920s Berlin, and he confessed to Schulze to being excited by "all those blond boys in black leather." Johnson's ability to ignore the substance of fascism and enjoy its stirring marches and colorful banners was not anomalous, only extreme; he was similarly able to reduce architecture to strictly formal concerns, ignoring the social content of



Richard Payne

Johnson's 1949 Glass House – unlikely quarters for a man in the closet – became an icon in American Modern architecture.

Modernism, Post-Modernism, and the most recent “ism” he tried to promote, Deconstructivism.

And if form is divorced from meaning, then it follows that any form might do. Although Johnson's much-scrutinized conversion to Post-Modernism seemed like a change in convictions, this book reminds us that, except for a very early strident devotion to Miesian Modernism, Johnson never really had any strong convictions, even about form. His work started looking eclectic as early as the 1950s, with allusions to history appearing now and then within a more or less Modern idiom. In the 1980s, he took advantage of the Post-Modern theories promoted by scholar Vincent Scully and architects such as Robert Venturi and Charles Moore as license to embark on a historicism binge that now seems almost as uncharacteristically ill-advised as his 1930s politics. In works such as *The Crescent* in Dallas (1985), *PPG Headquarters* in Pittsburgh (1984), and the ever-laughable *Tycon Towers* in Tysons Corner (1980s), Johnson somehow lost control of his most undisputed strength: his sense of good taste. Johnson has always been at his best when sticking to abstraction. His great knowledge of history informed and strengthened his Modern works – including the *Kline Biology Tower* at Yale (1965)

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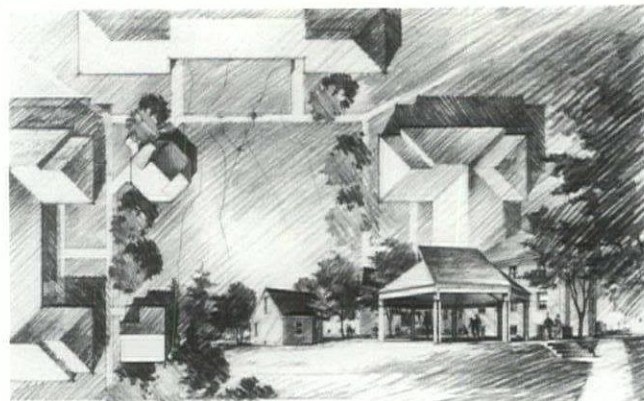
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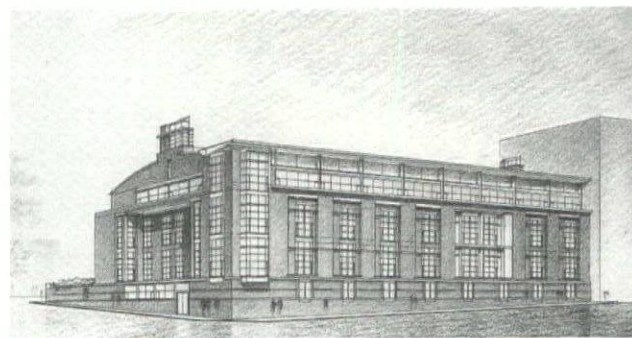
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and the Pre-Columbian Museum at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. (1963) – but that knowledge, when applied more literally, came off as the worst kind of paper-thin Disneyesque kitsch.

Challenge Philip Johnson on any of this – with the exception of his political past, the gravity of which he seems to recognize – and he will invariably respond with cheerful, dismissive agreement. He virtually invented the Disarmingly Candid Architect pose that so many of his proteges – from Peter Eisenman to Michael Graves to Robert A.M. Stern – have since adopted to pre-empt criticism. The most famous example comes from *The Charlottesville Tapes*, transcripts of a 1982 conference at the University of Virginia. Johnson, when confronted by Luxembourg architect Rob Krier about the general inappropriateness of tall buildings, replied: "I agree with [you] completely, but I am a whore and I am paid very well for building high-rise buildings."

While it is undeniable that Johnson has contributed a number of good buildings and incisive writings, such cavalier denial of architecture's social responsibility has become a model for too many architects. It is one of Johnson's most lasting and dubious gifts to the architecture culture.

Mark Alden Branch lives in McKinney, Texas, and writes about architecture for Progressive Architecture and the Dallas Observer.



Johnson's high-profile AT&T Building earned him far-ranging criticism.

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Taking Notice

The arrival of a baby seemed to shrink the household of Bruce Beard and Beth DeLucenay, who discovered they were fast outgrowing their California Bungalow in Alexandria. Their dilemma: whether to buy a larger house or expand the one they already owned. After consulting with McLean architect Randall Mars, they decided to add new space in a manner sympathetic to the Arts and Crafts residences of Charles and Henry Greene in California.

Mars opened up the rear of the house with a new family room and enlarged kitchen, while improving circulation patterns. A side entry offers convenient access from the driveway, and anticipates movement to and from a spa planned for the back yard. Mars also added a roomy porch – a necessity for a couple that enjoys the outdoors. Spaces beneath the gables were put to good use where possible on the second floor, which now includes a new master bedroom and bath, child's bedroom, and much-needed closets. In all, the couple gained an additional 800 square feet of interior space.

The architect's emphasis on craftsmanship is revealed throughout the addition. Exposed wood joinery on the side porch reveals notched cross-lapped joints, which are nearly a lost art. Double-hung windows, with three panes on the upper sash and one below, were patterned after windows in the original house, but slightly elongated. A similar pattern was developed for the custom-made doors. In the new family room, the Greene & Greene-inspired fireplace features tile inlays and overlapping grid patterns in the wood surround. While original plans called for a battered-stucco base for the back porch and a roof above it, in the end both features were cut from the project to save cost.

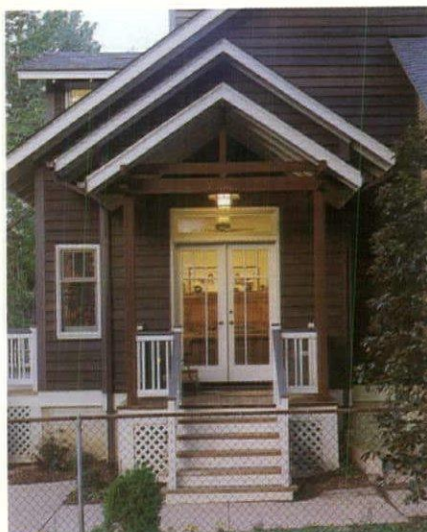
– *Vernon Mays*

The Rear Addition

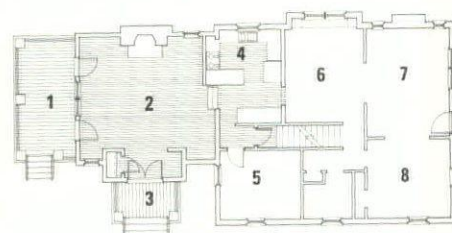


Photos: Jim Tetto

The initial vision for the project (above) was pared down slightly to save cost. An Arts & Crafts-style fireplace is the centerpiece of the new family room (left).



A sympathetic light fixture complements the craftsmanlike quality of the porch (above).



First Floor Plan

0 10 20



- 1 Back Porch
- 2 Family Room
- 3 Side Entry
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Playroom
- 6 Dining Room (Existing)
- 7 Living Room (Existing)
- 8 Library (Existing)

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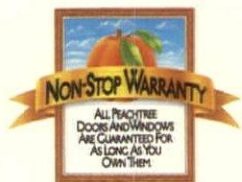
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