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On Art and Architecture

Michael Grandy

Critics: Ed DeVilbiss

Gordon Ashworth

David Bell

Rex Slack

The development of ideas in art and architecture have a way of paralleling each other. This is brought about in part by changes in society, religion and the dual artistry of individuals like Michelangelo as sculpture/architect, Le Corbusier as architect/painter and Michael Graves as painter/architect. In these cases the parallel is deliberate; the study of ideas across the canvas and the built form is intentional and occurs simultaneously. There are occasions, however, when the parallel is intentional yet does not occur during the same time frame. In the case of this project, the ideas dealt with in the architectural vocabulary of the buildings and site organization purposely draws upon the Impressionist way of thinking.

The approach to art in Impressionism, based upon ideas about the nature of what we see, was a perceptual one. It was concerned with actual visual experience, a transient approach to reality in art. In expressing this concern the Impressionist artists concentrated on capturing the momentary or fleeting aspects of the subject, the effects of light and shadow, and the perception of the subject based on viewing range.

In order to capture the momentary, the artist began working outside of the studio. Subjects dealt with everyday events of the fun loving bourgeoisie people such as picnics, boating parties and days at the cafe.¹ The intent here was to catch the atmosphere of the moment,

much like a camera captures the image of what it sees during a specific point in time. Another method of achieving the momentary involved an off-registration or ghosting of images which permitted the viewer to believe that the subject was indeed in a state of movement or change.²

The effects of light and shadow were also explored by the Impressionists. In many of their works dealing with nature, architecture, and engineering, sequential studies of a particular subject were executed to explore the power of light and seasonal change to produce different images of color, shades and shadows. Claude Monet is especially known for these studies as can be seen in his "La Gare St. Lazare" series of 1877, "Haystacks" series of 1891, and "Rouen Cathedral" series of 1894. To express these different sensations, the Impressionist created a shimmery overall effect in their work by employing a broken, discontinuous brush stroke. This produced an allusion much like the glimmering patches of light our eyes perceive.

Thirdly, the Impressionist artist was concerned with the perception of the subject based on viewing range. The artist realized that one's perception of an object is dependent on the distance from which the object is viewed. Again he depended on the discontinuous brush stroke to produce a hazy, undefined visual effect.

These basic notions of the Impressionists were used as a basis from

which a series of rules for the design were developed. These rules revolved around the aspects of the momentary, the effects of light and shadow, and the perception of the object.

Architecture to a degree addresses the momentary, however, it carries this concept to a further degree of definition. The ruinous state of buildings creates a sense of change in the actual building forms we see. As David Bell states in his essay, "Because of the strong order and harmony which a ruin can often imply about its original state, there seems a tendency always to want to see the ruin simultaneously in both states — its ruinous state showing the physical transgression of the original by the effects of time and nature, and its original state as an intellectual conception. Manifesting both time frames at once, the ruin hovers between pragmatic usefulness and complete dissolution."³ In addition, Modern Architecture incorporates into its vocabulary fragmented and incomplete forms which also suggest that the building is in a state of change or unrest.

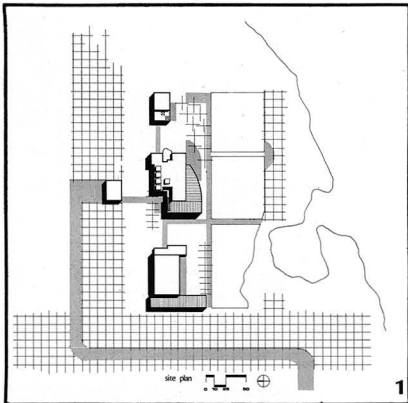
The effects of light and shadow always play an important role in the design of buildings. They can be manipulated to create effects upon both interior and exterior spaces. In the William's residence, this effect is accentuated by the extensive use of intricate lattice work along with bold fenestration patterns to produce dynamic changes in the play of light upon the building and its context.⁴

The perception of the building is affected by all of these aspects, although this notion of perception was intensified in the project through careful attention to viewing range, the creation of transparencies and the de-emphasis of edge.

The building formation on the site and the position of the orchard around two sides of the buildings begins to create perceptual variations of the complex. Compositional elevation similarities on the north side produce the illusion of one large structure when viewed from a distance. Likewise, the extensive greenhouse areas on the south and west elevations begin to question the existence of the buildings which support them. These effects are heightened as one passes through the orchard catching glimpses of the site through the trees.

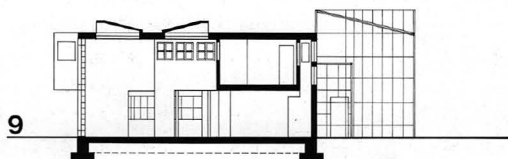
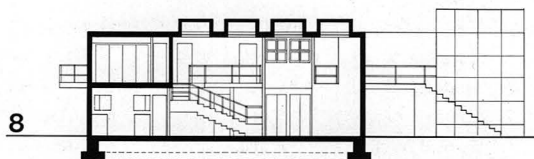
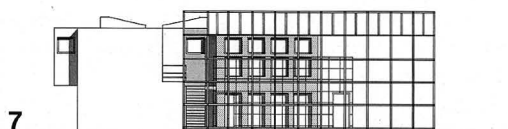
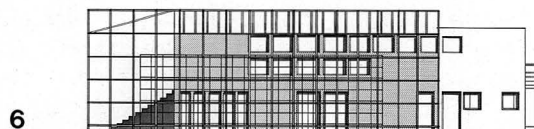
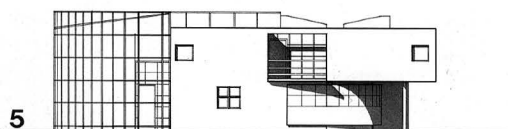
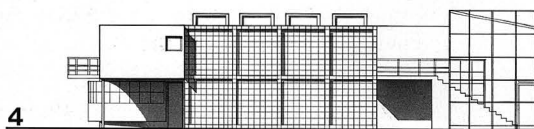
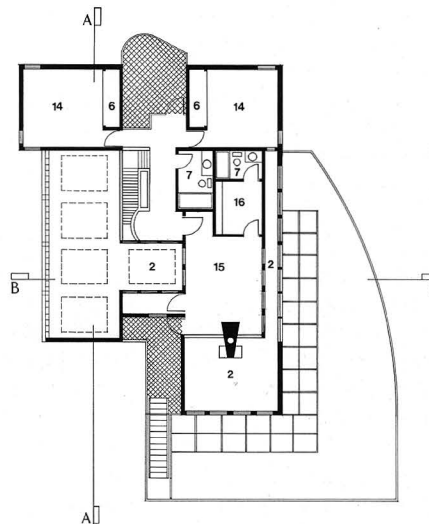
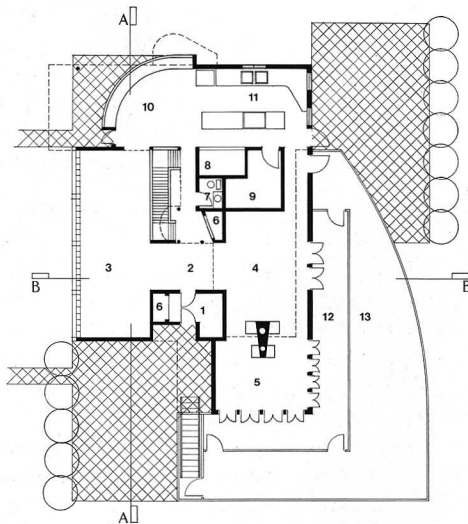
In the siting of the building, a de-emphasized edge condition was incorporated. Upon approaching the house one must pass through the close confines of the orchard, moving out again along a space which is both open and closed to the garage. From this point, the visitor can see the house through a number of large windows before crossing a long, narrow lawn which leads to the vestibule of the house.⁵

Upon confronting the house, a series of literal and implied transparencies are set up.⁶ Transparency in the literal sense is used to de-emphasize the strong edge of the building. A series of glass planes forming a



- 1 Site plan**
MAIN HOUSE
2 First floor plan
3 Second floor plan
4 North elevation
5 East elevation
6 South elevation
7 West elevation
8 Section A-A
9 Section B-B

- KEY**
- 1 Entrance vestibule
 - 2 Open
 - 3 Living/gallery
 - 4 Dining
 - 5 Living
 - 6 Closet
 - 7 Bathroom
 - 8 Laundry
 - 9 Mechanical
 - 10 Eating
 - 11 Kitchen
 - 12 Greenhouse vestibule
 - 13 Greenhouse
 - 14 Bedroom
 - 15 Master bedroom
 - 16 Dressing



greenhouse and vestibule to the main living space of the house in turn sets up layers of space which act as intermediary between the inside and the outside. These spaces produce ambiguities as to where the interior begins and the exterior ends. This ambiguity is brought about because of their function, which is plant growing a primarily outside activity, and the nature of the enclosure being glass which promotes a high degree of visual proximity. These transparencies continue once inside the house with spaces created within spaces and views penetrating through the house in all directions.

Throughout the duration of the study, which does not end with the completion of this project, three schemes were produced. Each one investigated new organizations and governing concepts. The end result is an accumulation of ideas which form into a complex of buildings that in turn represent the accumulation of thought about the overlapping ideas in art and architecture.

NOTES

1. Reference Impressionistic paintings: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "The Luncheon of the Boating Party," 1881. Claude Monet, "La Grenouilliere," 1869. Claude Monet, "Boating of the Epte," 1887.

2. This off-registration lead to the development of Futurism in painting which dealt with action or mobility in its subjects. See Giacomo Balla's painting "Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash," 1912.

3. David Howard Bell, "Unity and Aesthetics of Incompletion in Architecture," *Architectural Design*, Volume 49, Number 7, 1979, pp. 175-182.

4. Gerald A. Williams, "Williams Residence," *Architectural Record*, Mid-May 1979, pp. 80-81.

5. Impressionists explored compositional elements such as open and closed spaces and layering of elements to distort the visual field. Claude Monet, "The Banks of the Seine" ("Spring through the Branches"), 1876. Camille Pissaro, "La Cote des Boeufs a Pontoise," 1877.

6. For a detailed explanation of transparencies see: Colin Rowe, "Transparency Literal and Phenomenal," *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976, pp. 159-184.