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Gilcrest: A house for the president of a record company, Hollywood California

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Gilcrest

A house for the president of a record company, Hollywood California

Robert Mangurian

Gil:

I enjoyed dinner last week and look forward to our next meeting.

Enclosed are two copies of the agreement. Some notes follow that should make clearer certain points of the Standard Agreement. Also, I thought I would elaborate some on our discussion concerning the present design.

Discussion of the house

The site of course is fantastic. It is probably one of the last remaining great Hollywood hill sites. The site, because it falls off sharply on three sides, reminds me (on a smaller scale) of situations one finds in Italian hill towns. I also like the alignment of the site — winter sunrise/summer sunset and pointing towards the downtown.

I also like the coincidental aspects to the site — the street name Gilcrest, the site being the theoretical intersection of the straight parts of Wilshire and Sunset, and the line running due south from the site through the center of the MGM facade in Culver City.

The existence of the terraces on the site (from the previous garden) is a help. The present design respects these terraces and the ring of mature eucalyptus trees. In fact the terraces, trees and orientation of the site provide the direction for the present design.

The site is large, but the flat terraced part of the site is relatively small. I have attempted to occupy the entire site by placing a number of building elements throughout the site.

Some of these (on the north side) are formal terraces ending in small buildings. I hope to develop this north side into a (mysterious) set of interconnected terraces. One of these will be aligned precisely with the winter sunrise. As we have discussed, this was the important alignment to the California (and Southwest) Indians. The room at the end of this terrace is for some kind of modern ceremony to mark this event. As we have discussed, the house and the

site structuring will, from time to time, attempt to calm things and provide perspective to your frenzied life.

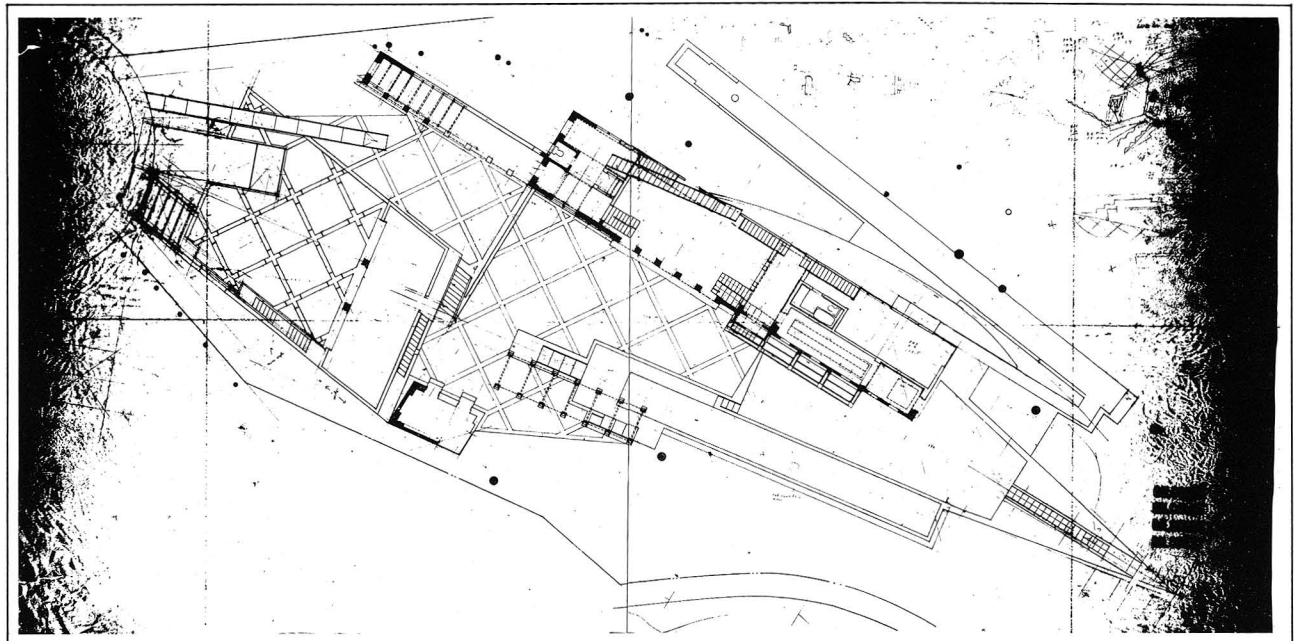
Entrance

I like the cul-de-sac — not so much for its visual qualities (the other houses are typically unfortunate) — but for the conceptual aspect. We enter the site following a long drive leaving the city. The drive ends at the cul-de-sac. The site is not “along the way.” And the site has been structured to allow a view of the city (our life of work) just after leaving the car and just before entering the house.

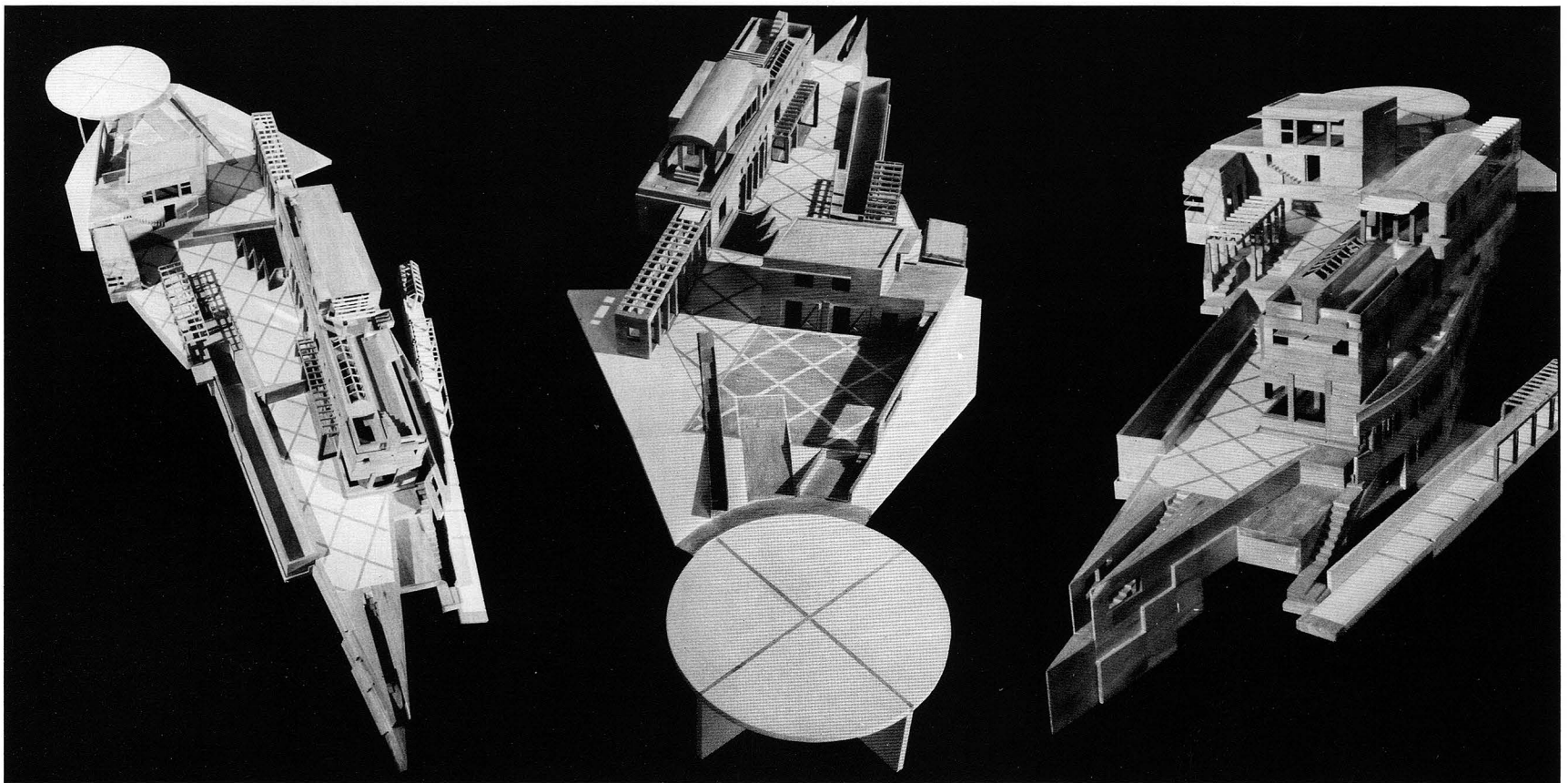
The model shows a kind of cross hair on the cul-de-sac. This is the north-south/east-west indication. (Can we talk the neighbors into this?)

The side rises about 5-feet from the street, and then steps down at approximate 5-foot intervals. There are two ramped entrances (one for cars, one for people) that cut seemingly arbitrarily through the slight rise in the site. These are like gang planks that connect your “ship” to land.

The walking stepped path leads directly to the front door of the house. I hope to fabricate this ramp out of ¼-inch galvanized steel diamond plate with two



Plan.



Building Model

thin strips of dark blue (with a little red) neon imbedded and running the full length. Much like those dark blue airport runway lights.

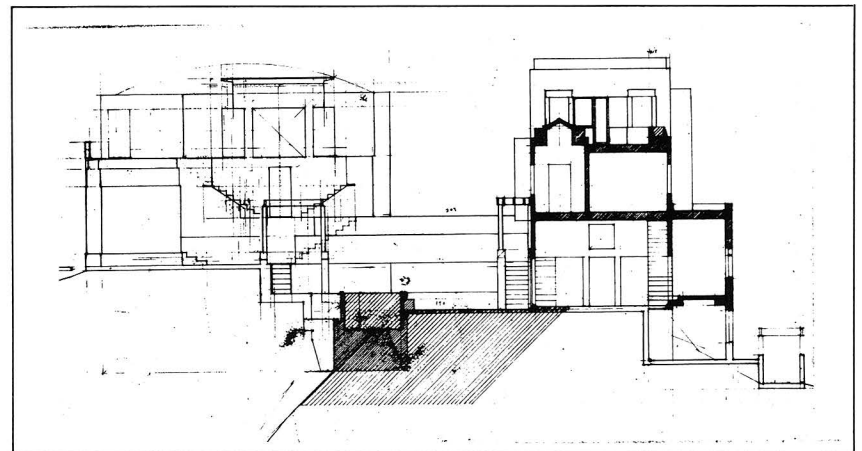
The other ramp leads to a parking court (slightly skewed to fit within the setbacks) and the garage with the guest quarters above. I am not quite sure about the surfacing of this yet, but as the model shows it should appear (visually, not just conceptually) as the reverse of the gridded grass terraces. Perhaps the grid lines could be a kind of green tinted ridged glass with light under, or green again ridged marble. The squares inbetween could be the same material that the grassed terrace grid lines are (don't ask me what this is yet).

The entry court will hopefully be an elegant place to deposit the car before entering the house. The cul-de-sac and entry court will hold enough cars for large dinner parties.

If you park in the garage (three cars), you can leave the garage through the east door that is on axis with the lap pool. At this point you have a rather dramatic view of the city. From there you can walk towards the columned porch and front entrance. What happens when it rains — bring an umbrella.

Guest House

The garage and guest quarters are combined (this is somewhat traditional in old Los Angeles) to form a single building. This building serves to "guard" the private lower grounds, provides a visual termination to the exterior sequence that starts with the prow and has two faces. The street side face is somewhat anonymous and guard like. The garden facade is an active participant in the drama of the garden. If the house represents the mother/father (and it has its two sides), then the guest house, pool house, other objects around the site are the offspring.



Section.

There are other interpretations. The building is probably smooth stucco (like they do in Italy and like they used to do in Los Angeles) and colored. I would like each of the buildings to have its own look and different from its neighbor — much like the colored buildings in Giotto's painting of St. Francis chasing the devils from Arezzo. If most of the buildings are in stucco, at least some of them will be in other materials (glass —

I found a large supply of Vitrolite in New Orleans, hardwood, galvanized metal, etc.). The set of objects will be linked by their colors.

I forgot to mention the bamboo wall (this doesn't show on the model or in the drawings) that separates the car court from the cul-de-sac. This would be kept at a uniform height and in reality appear as another of the site objects.

Entry porch

The stoa-like entry porch shields the entry area from the neighbor to the north. By the way, we might have to buy the guy next-door a new (and quieter) pool motor. I see that he was just installed as president of 20th Century Fox — how long will he last?

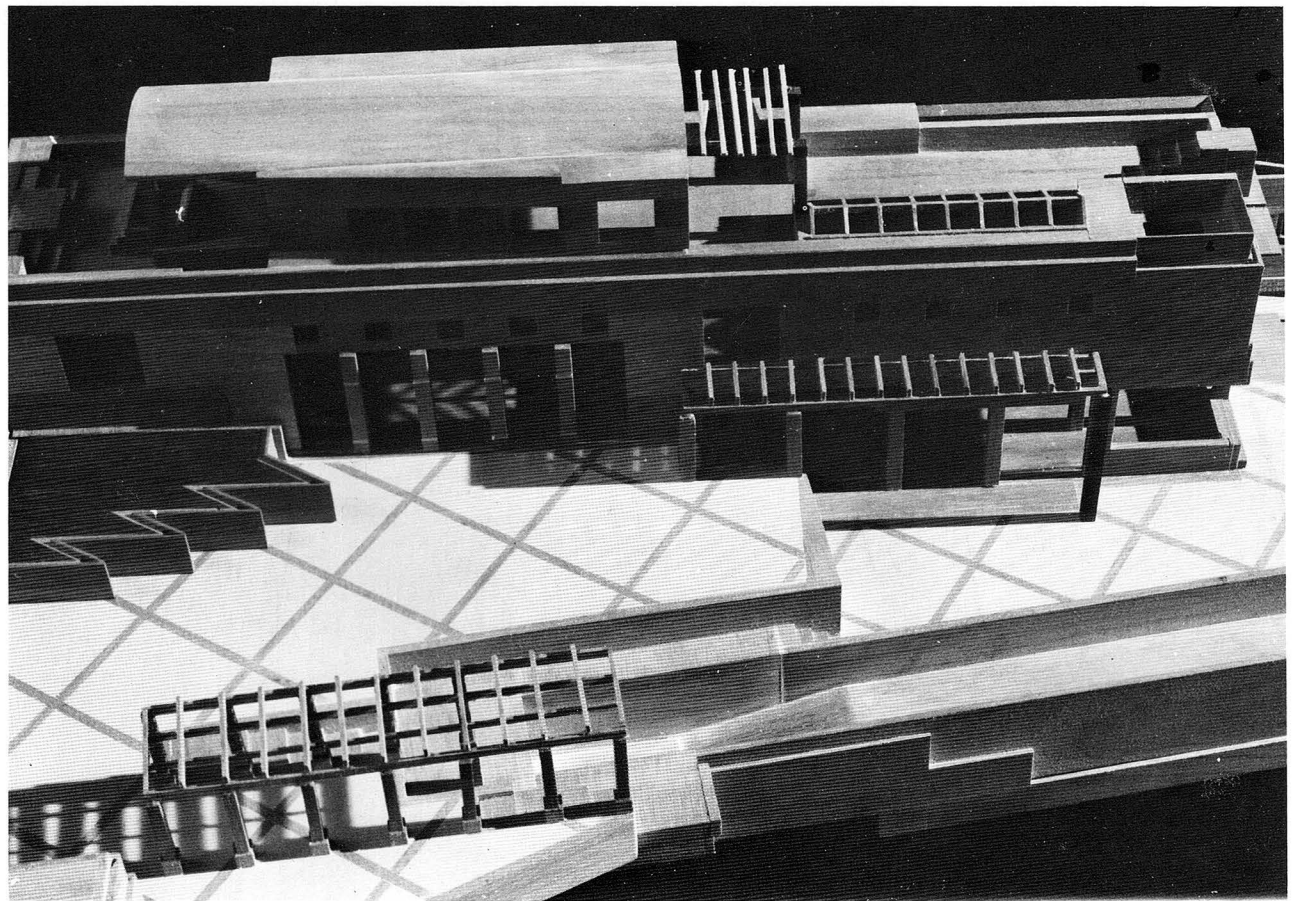
This columned entry porch is a good place to sit and chat with guests who are leaving (and a good place for Susan to take off her riding boots). This "stoa" has a large opening (a counterpart to the opening in the auto court south wall) that looks on to a small private garden.

Some of this element will be constructed out of concrete block. I would like one material (probably concrete block but possibly with a smoother finish) to act as the restructuring device for the site. Real and perceptual. Thus it will become the foundation and retaining walls, the prow and lap pool, and the base or plinth for the buildings (and perhaps the grid lines).

Lap pool

As we have discussed, the south side cliff will need extensive retaining walls to pass the city's sloped site standards. By putting the lap pool here we can pay for the retaining walls and the pool at the same time — it will be designed as a large U-shaped beam. The pool is raised up about 36-inches from the surface of the lower terrace. And water is allowed to spill over the outside edges, into a troff that is part of the stepped retaining wall. Thus when sitting in the dining room and looking west, a bit of the city and the Pacific will be seen as emerging from the reflective bar of water.

At night this will appear as a bar of light — a kind of frame for the city lights. Note that the 3-foot pool wall and the 3-foot kitchen counter, curved wall, form a kind of room that acts to extend both spaces.



View of main house.

Prow

The final major site element is the prow which serves to formalize what the site is already doing. The stair leads down to a walk through the north garden and the small room in the prow. This room is very special to the house (the soul, the spirit, the conscience) and a good place to store wine, to be alone or to be with close friends.

There will be two days of the year when the sun will rise along the axis of the stair. (Your bringing up the possibility of dropping this element if the building goes over budget was somewhat disturbing.)

The main house

(You are probably wondering why we are now only getting to the house. We are trying to make the entire site the house which has its inside parts and its

outside parts. This is especially true in the flat terraced portions of the site.)

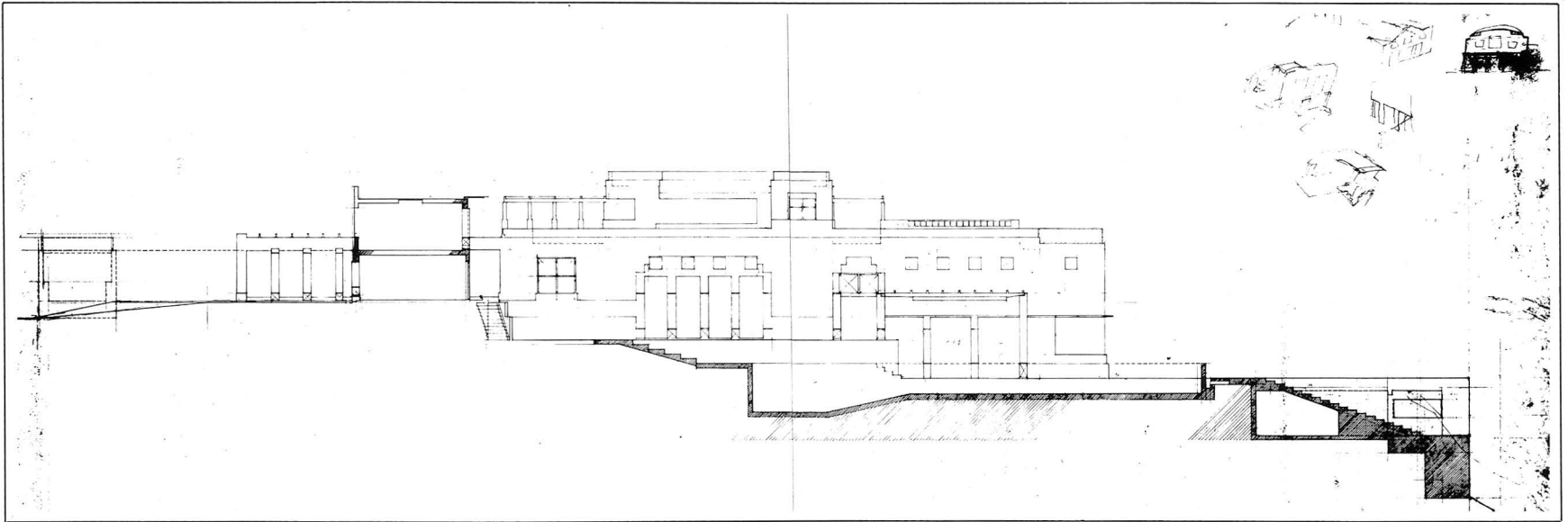
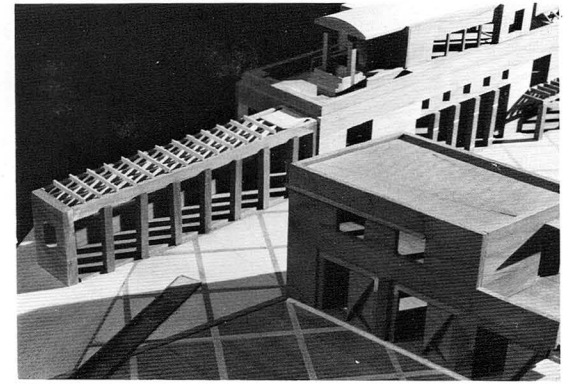
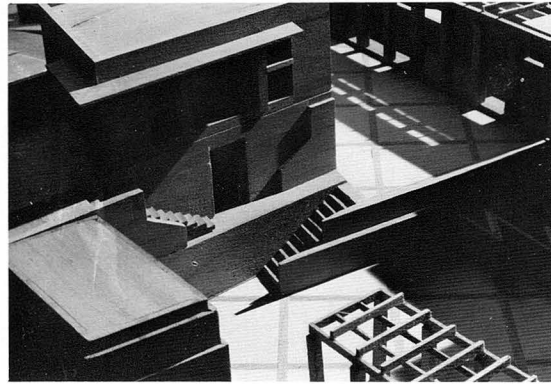
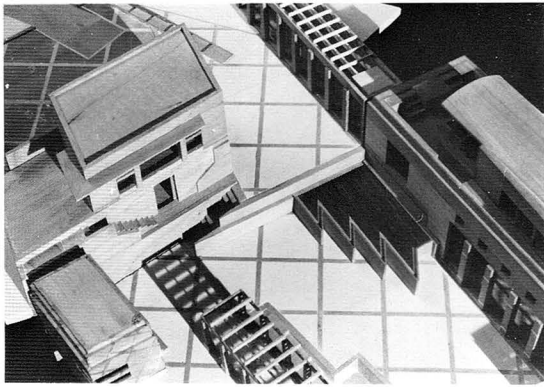
I have included here drawings of the original five schemes for your reference. Our decision to place the house along the north edge of the site I think is a sound one, both from an economy point of view and in order to the usable flat outdoor space.

The house is a simple rectangular solid with two shapes attached (roof building and curved element). Inside, the house terraces down following the exterior terraces.

A brief description of the rooms might be useful. As I mentioned last week, I would like each of the rooms (spaces) to be quite distinct. Thus the rooms are to be seen as separate entities much like the exterior site elements.

As you can see in the drawings, these spaces share a geometric language. But I would like the rooms (through their surfaces sometimes, through their size and shape) to be distinct, almost disjointed. I have not gotten too far on this but the concept seems clear and correct. The entry space (which overlooks, by the way, the saw-toothed coy pond and is on a cross axis with the pool house — I like the buildings and rooms being connected this way. It's like people in a room or around a table having a lively conversation) might be surfaced in lead — the floor, walls and ceiling. This space then leads down a half-flight of stairs (split like the prow) to the formal living room with perhaps white plaster walls and ceiling.

I would like the floor surface of this room to be perceptually continuous with the associated terrace. Again going from



Sectional elevation.

one room to the next will be both continuous (in terms of geometry) and discontinuous (in terms of materials — real materials).

I like very much the angled and gridded box that cuts through the formal living room and enclosed a stair that connects the kitchen with the entry (and also the living room). I keep thinking of Duchamp's "Nude...". This element is probably structured in steel, or hardwood, with very thin marble or etched glass panels. The windows behind would let light animate this sloped box.

The stairs at the southeastern corner of the living room lead either up to the gallery and mezanine bedroom level, or down to the informal living room, dining room and kitchen. The gallery is an interesting space. It is like a belvedere and a sitting deck of a ship. We original-

ly talked about this as a library, but I think it is much better as a raised porch. The views from this room are great.

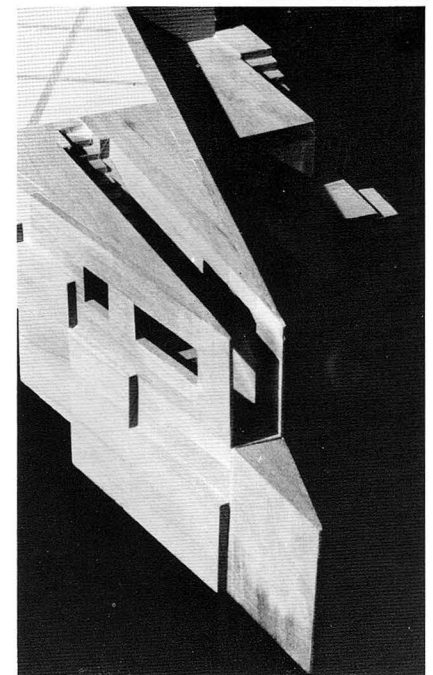
The curved element contains the kitchen with associated small breakfast (great east light for the morning), housekeeper's quarters below (with access to the north terraces) and roof terrace for the mezanine bedroom.

The dining room is at the east end of the rectangle, adjacent to the kitchen, and at the same level as the lower terrace. As I mentioned before, the surface of the dining room table and the lap pool are at the same level. Perhaps that fantastic dark blue Brazilian granite as the table's surface.

The stair along the north side of the house from the kitchen level leads directly (but two floors up) to the

bedroom on the roof. This whole area should be seen as a kind of fantasy garden, and a kind of retreat from the rest of the house. The building within this garden is the bedroom. The vaulted ceiling may have small randomly placed glass disks simulating the stars (somewhat like those stars in the early Sieneese panel paintings). This "garden in the sky" is a restatement of the entire site composition. The lap pool becomes the gallery skylight (glowing at night) with a small bathing pool at the end. The lower solstice walk becomes a narrow fish pool with water spilling off the northern edge. The prow becomes a stair leading up to a look out.

Enough for now. Again, I look forward to our next meeting — oysters on ice at the site?



Prow