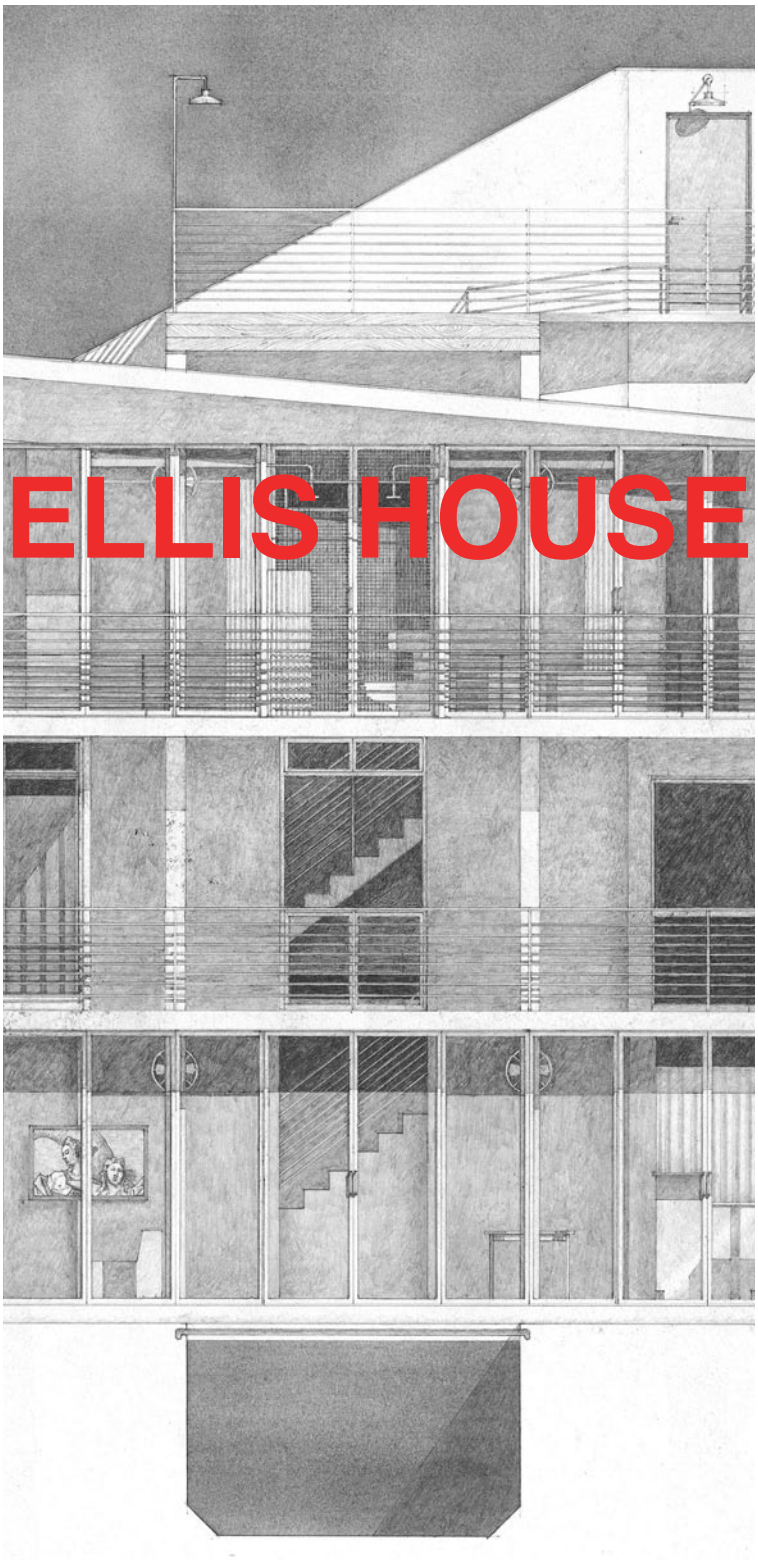


Ellis House,
Wndermere Island, Bahamas

CLIENTS AND PROGRAMS or REJUVENATION VEHICLE
The clients for this residence are a family of four—a father-businessman, a mother-gallery owner and two daughters—all of whom travel extensively. “Home” addresses would include Toronto, London and now Windermere. The house is conceived as a retreat in an un-spoilt environment. It is designed primarily with small-scale domestic uses in mind. The hose is also adaptable to large scale entertaining, accommodating varied numbers of occupants from one to several, in a comfortable and gracious, yet efficient and informal manner.

One approaches the site on land, from the north, arriving at the highest point on the site. Here a court is cleared in the brush, with the residence to the immediate west. This relatively high elevation allows entry at an upper, or more precisely, middle level. This middle entry level consists of a large open loggia, a glazed office/apartment, an outdoor kitchen, a bathroom with outdoor shower, and storage. The front door opens to a foyer with stairs that lead down to the main living areas and lower terrace, and lead up to the bedrooms and roof terrace.

The lower level consists of a kitchen area, a living/dining area and a small office, with a small terrace and stairs to the adjacent western shore and large terrace and lap pool with outbuildings to the south.

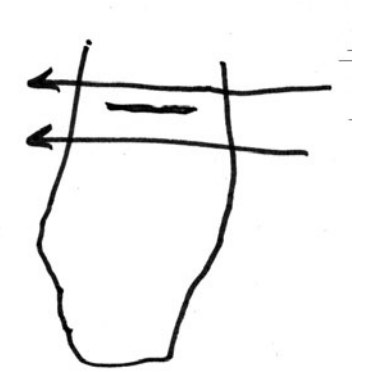
In addition to the house proper, various small landscape shelters and miniature garden follies are planned for the site.

RESPONSES, FORMS AND USES

EARTH

As with sites on the sea, the context is dominated visually by the horizontal line of the ocean/sky seam. Hard geometries occur relatively rarely in nature and the nominal straight line of the sea is one of the most dramatic of such instances. The less innocent line found at the island is that of the imposed road that runs its course north south, leading to our site at its southern tip.

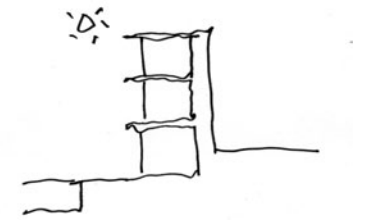
We might plausibly suggest, in semi-fictional chronology, that our first thought was to impose another line, now running east-west, perpendicular to the ma n-made datum of the road and parallel to the prevailing winds and the potential surge of the ocean (1). We modeled this line as a wall. This perpendicular datum was then widened in the middle, making it more resilient, and the resultant mirror-wedge is pulled through the rock (2,3). Wind and hydrology have fashioned a marine-form that cleaves the land and creates and organizes spaces.



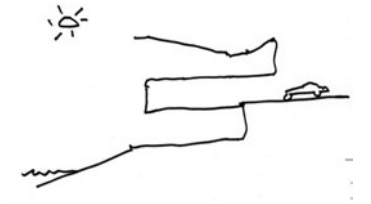
1. Location of Building to Prevailing Winds and Storm Surge

2. Wall Widened in the Middle for Structure and Space

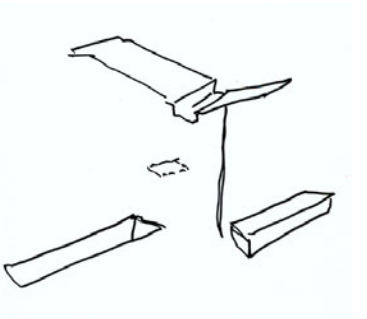
3. Resultant Wedge Placed in the Rock



Sun Shading Diagram



Line of the Water Leads to the Expanse of the Sky

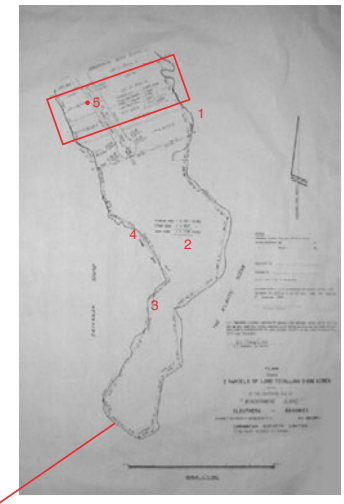


Water Collection Devices

Arrival View

Exisiting Road to Site

Island of Eleuthera

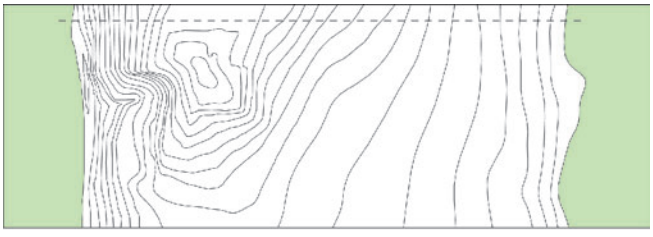


Plot Plan - 7 Acres at the Tip of Windermere Island

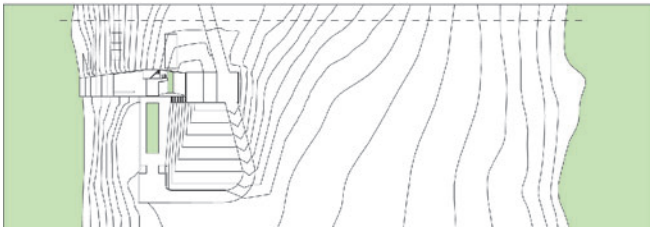
SITE AND SITING

The site is a spectacular preserve of 7.01 acres on the island of Windermere, located off the eastern side of the long thin island of Eleuthera. Like most of the Bahaman Islands, Windermere is composed mainly of limestone and coral, and rises from a large submarine plateau. Oriented north south this small island is bifurcated by a gravel road that runs for nearly its entire length. The site is covered by a dense layer of trees and bushes that typically rise to a height of only about eight feet due to the persistent prevailing east to west winds.

Some trails have been cut through the brush and several areas of particular character are found across the site: 1, the rocky texture of the eastern shore has been made menacingly sharp by years of windblown water crashing down upon it; 2, on axis with the main road, south of the middle of the island, is a clearing marked by a circular stand of taller trees; 3, at the southern tip of the island a small natural rock bridge forms a sort of blow hole when the water reaches a certain depth; 4, a sandy beach of approximately 200 linear feet is found midway along the western side pf the site; 5, a small rise is located to the north rear the entrance to the site.



Topographic Plan of Existing Island



Site Plan Showing New Grading

This area, the crest of the existing hill at the northern entry to the property is chosen as the location for the house. The elevation here is 20 feet above the water level.

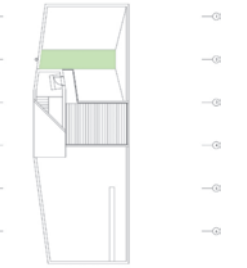
Longitudinal Section at Gallery Looking North

Longitudinal Section at Gallery Looking South

Longitudinal Section at Main Spaces Looking North

Lateral Section at Daughter's Bathroom

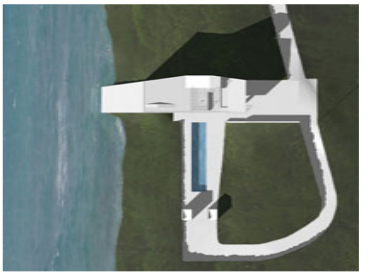
Middle Floor Plan



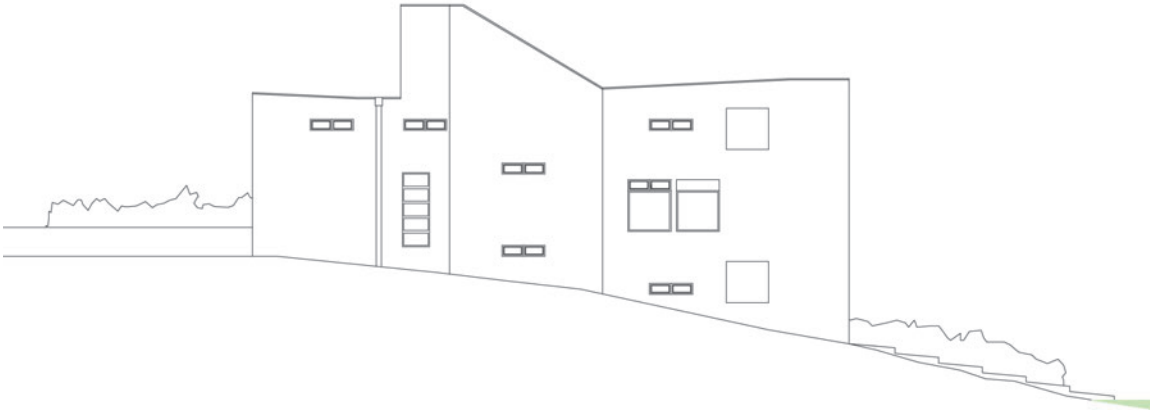
Roof Terrace Plan

Lower Floor Plan

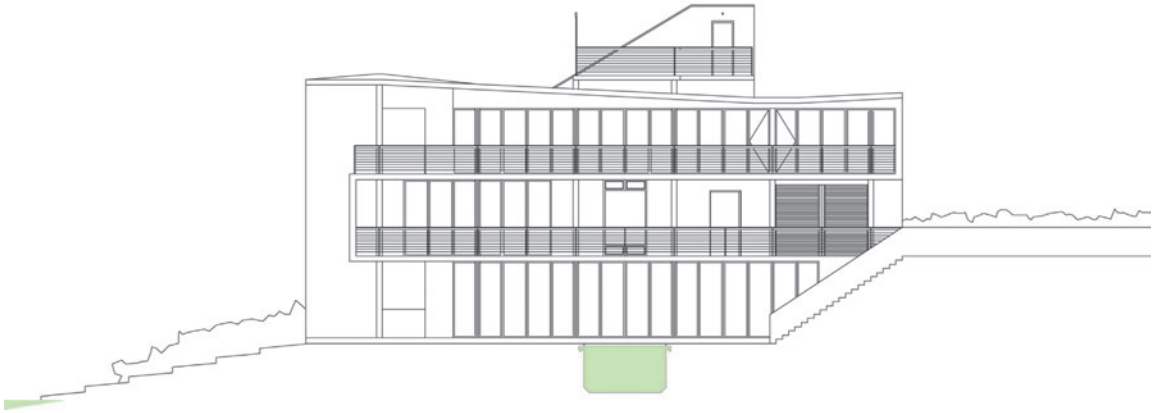
Upper Floor Plan



Site Plan



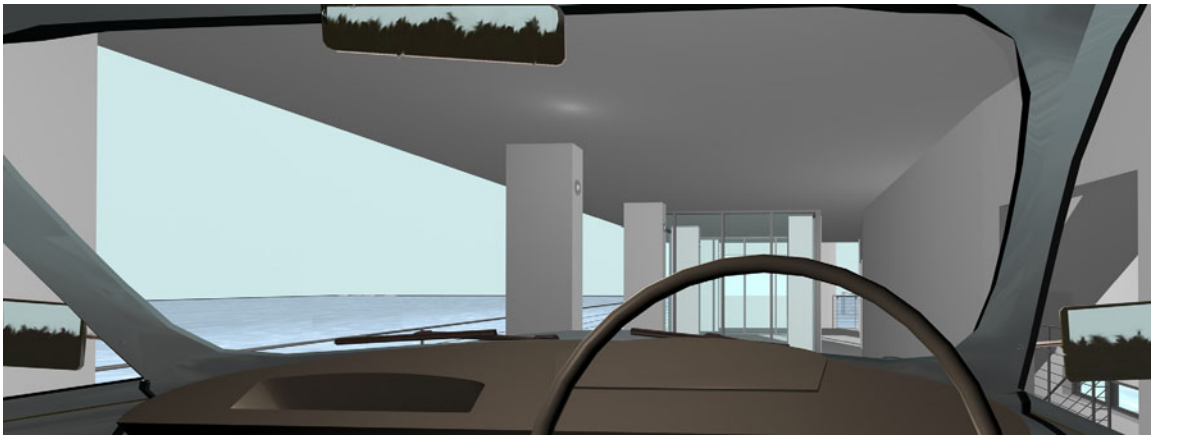
North Elevation



South Elevation

East Elevation

West Elevation

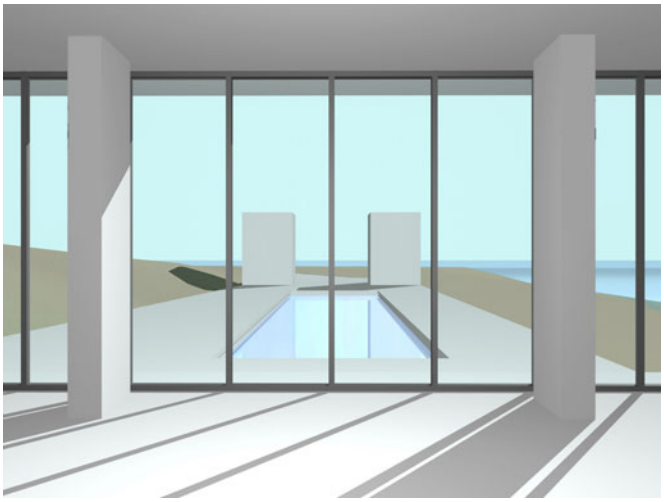


Views Approaching the House by Automoblie

Lower Gallery

Living Room

Upper Gallery



View to Pool

Bathroom

SPACE

The main spaces of the house are organized along the south side of this wall. All of these spaces afford a 180-degree or wider view of the landscape of the island and its surrounding shoreline. Stacked three stories high, all of these spaces are conceived in hin relation to glass enclosure.

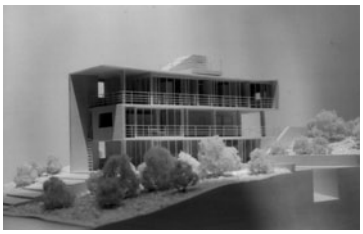
The porch is a notable, and sometimes unfortunate, omission in many of the canonical works of modern architecture. This loss can be more keenly felt in southern climates where the porch performs a primary role by cooling the interiors, providing an outdoor retreat and contributing to a complex and subtle relation of interior and exterior spaces. In this house the porch is subsumed within the living spaces.

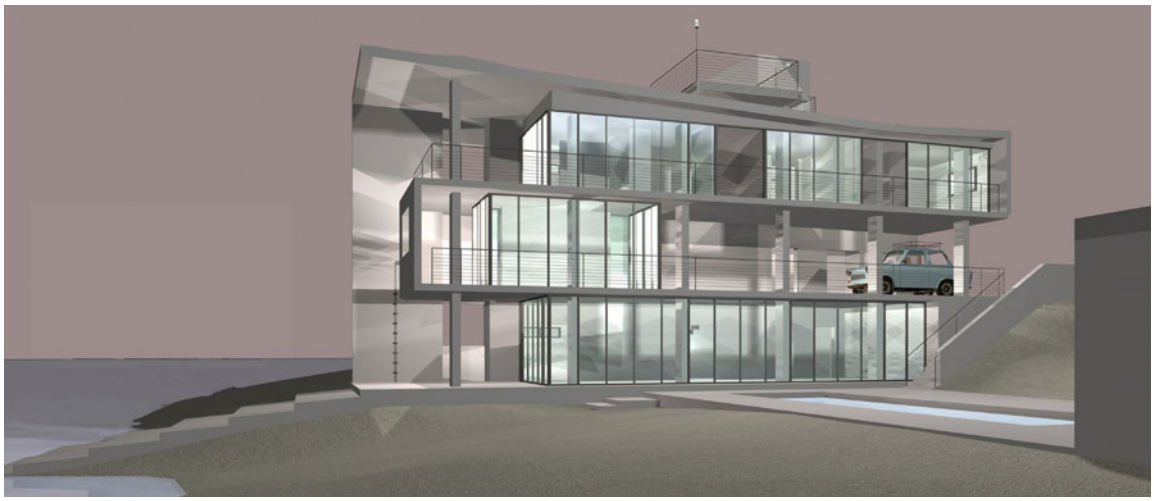
SUN

Every floor is conceived of as a type of porch or loggia, a protected semi-exterior space. The finishes contribute to this perception—floor to ceiling glass with smooth stucco on all walls-both interior and exterior. The floors are stacked three high and the glazing is placed back from the southern edge a full 3'-4". This setback, in combination with removable canvas awnings, blocks sun from the interior slabs year round.

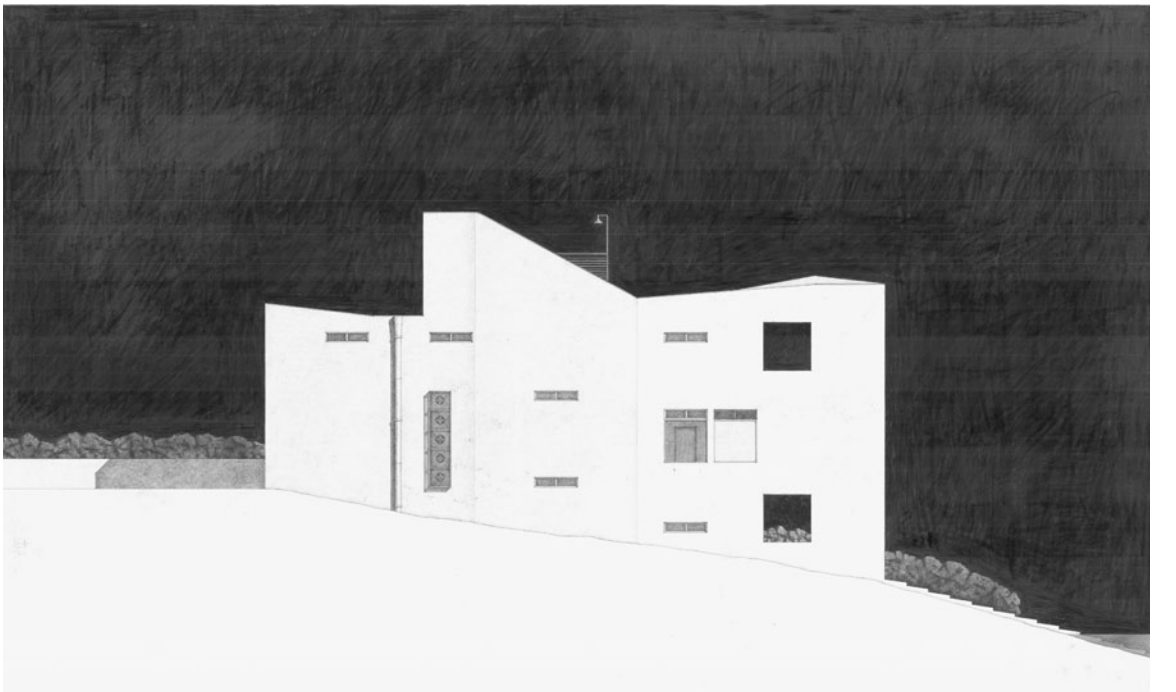
View of the House from Sea and Air

View from Pool Deck

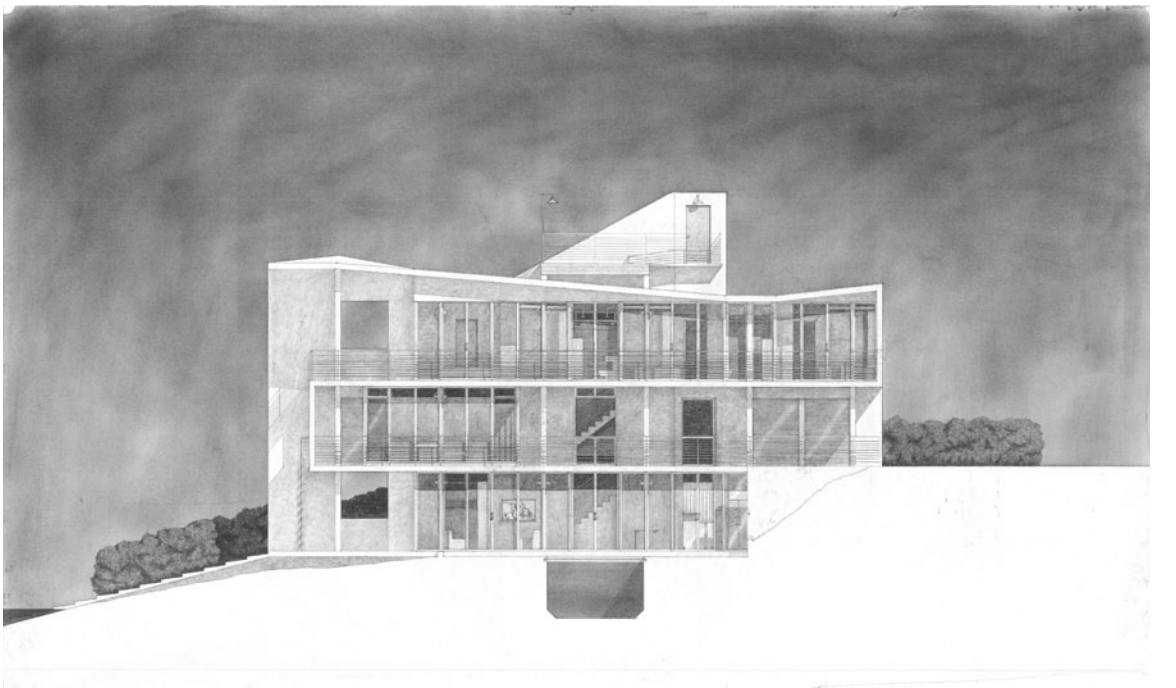




Night View



North Elevation



South Elevation

WATER

The water supply is collected at the site and supplemented by a municipal water line. The roof slab pitches up to the east and west, collecting and moving water from the roof to the belowground cistern located to the north. This source can also feed the lap pool to the south. The pool water will be treated with ultraviolet light rather than chlorine.

CONSTRUCTION, MATERIALS AND NUMBER

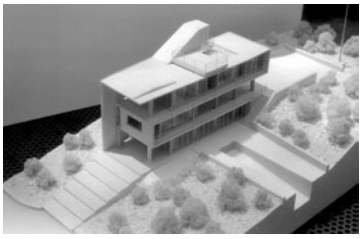
With a similar approach to interior and exterior finishes, the house is constructed and composed simply, with a minimum number of materials and minimum of special details. The structure is largely mono-chromatic-a few select materials in gray and silver. The entire house is made of locally manufactured concrete block and poured-in-place concrete, finished for the most part inside and out in smooth gray stucco.

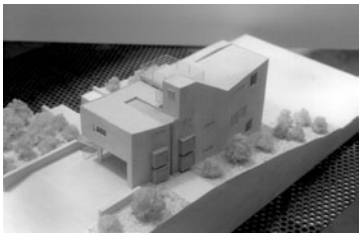
Eight-inch block is used above ground and twelve-inch block is used at retaining walls and below ground. The poured-in-place columns are located at twelve-foot intervals and set the spatial rhythm for the entire ensemble. The glazing respects a rigorous three to six to twelve foot plan disposition. The openings in the block walls are based on an eight module that biased to dimensions of 1'-4", 2'-8", etc. The vertical datums move from 4'-0" to 6'-8" to 8'-0" to 9'-4".

With the exception of a few tile surfaces in the bathrooms the floors are polished concrete. The roof terrace is made of teak bleached and stained silver-gray. The planks span a typical 12' bay over wood beams.

The exterior glazing is impact resistant glass in aluminum frames. The window frames and most other metal elements are painted medium-dark gray. The handrails are welded stainless steel with horizontal stainless steel cables.

Wood cabinets are made locally of teak or mahogany. Typical lighting consists of recessed fixtures covered by round nickel-plated plates, leaving exposed bulbs. Light fixtures, as well as appliances and kitchen cabinets are shipped in form the U.S. The exterior terraces and retaining walls are concrete and stone. A few exterior concrete walls show conch shells applied in a masonry pattern.













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