

A House For A River Rat

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Master of Architecture in Architecture

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Abstract

This is a house situated by a river. It is a retreat, or a cabin, and is not occupied on a full time basis. Its form is an interpretation of a cube, and retains its general appearance. It is lifted off the ground to prevent damage when the river floods, and has a deep foundation to achieve stability on the loose floodplain soil. It has three levels, the first containing the main living areas, the second, a lofted space containing the bed and bath, and the third, a roof terrace. It is for two people, and so has a small footprint of about thirty two feet square. The footprint is subdivided into nine squares, with a fireplace and chimney occupying the center and habitable spaces surrounding the periphery. Its foundation is of a concrete two way flat slab supported by concrete caissons, its walls are of reinforced concrete masonry units, and its floors and ceilings are of small timber frame construction.

Acknowledgements

This project was not a sole effort, and would not have been possible without the help of others.

To my Father, the original Architect, for His wondrous creation upon which this project rests.

To my fiancé, Kathleen, for her love, encouragement, and empathy through this process.

To my parents, for showing me the beautiful things a house can hold.

To my committee, Scott, Steve, and Patrick:

Scott, for guiding and believing in me and pushing this project beyond what was comfortable.

Steve, for confusing me to the point of realization, and for seeing potential when I didn't want to.

Patrick, for the constant encouragement and care, especially when I needed it most.

To my grandfather, Joe Schaefer, the original River Rat and the inspiration for this project.

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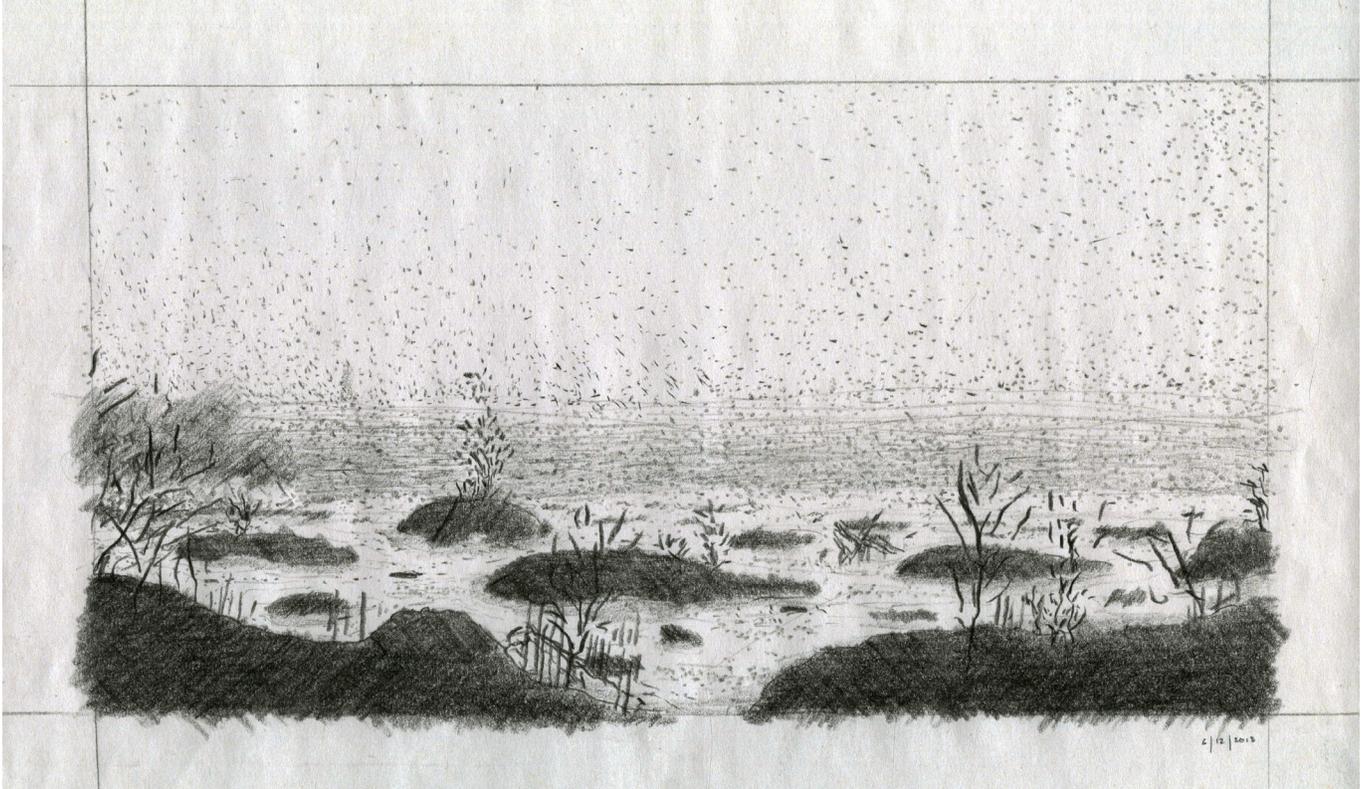
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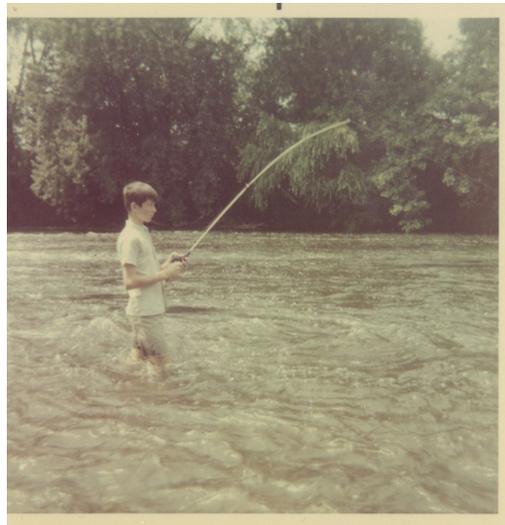
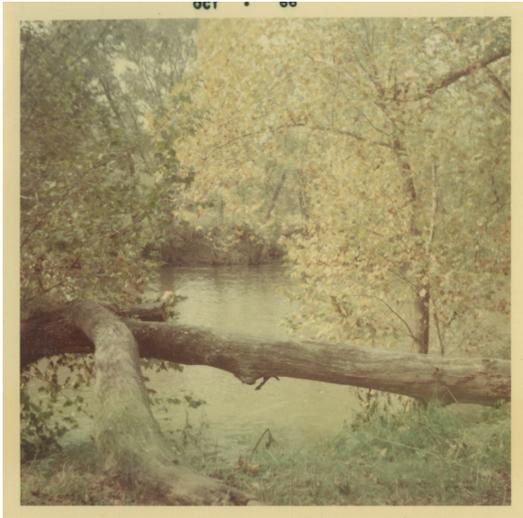
The River

No man ever steps in the same river twice. - Heraclitus

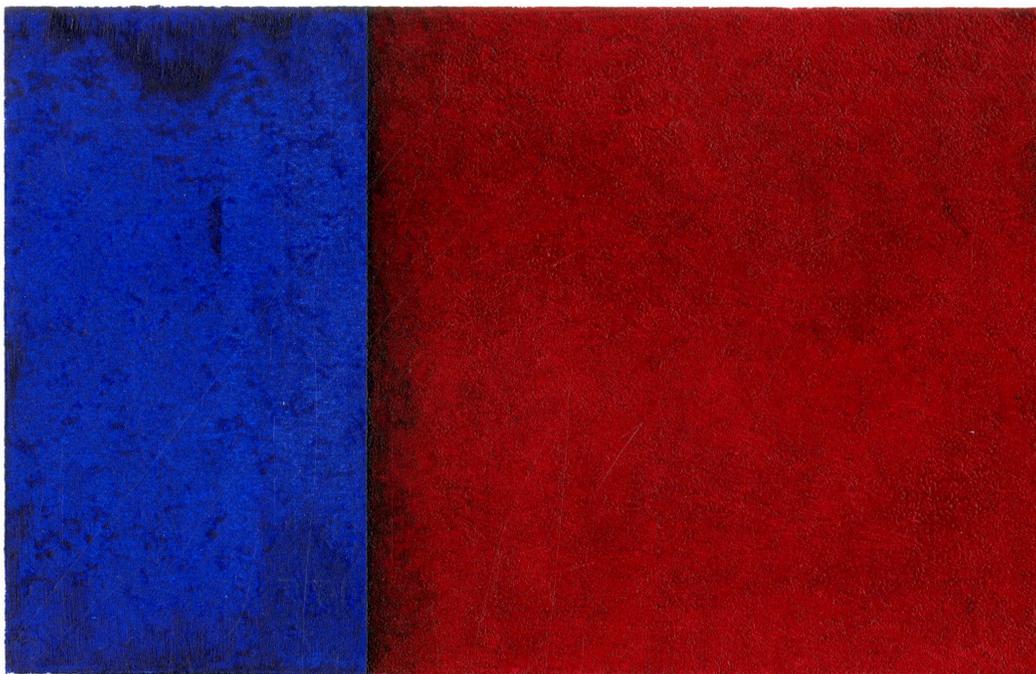
A River Rat is a person who knows and loves the river; a person who understands it, not merely from an ecological point of view, but from an experiential one. The river has power. It can build and it can destroy. It can give life and it can take it away. A river can be seen, can be heard, can be smelled, and can be touched. It is an ever changing thing, flowing, and ethereal. But in the physical reality of the moment the river is a sensuous being. And what can define a river? Surely not its shores nor its destination, for those are constantly and ever moving. And surely not the water it holds, for that is only suspended momentarily before disappearing forever. A river marches from mountains to sea. It gathers forces from the forests and hills, parading proudly as it has done since before time began. It has seen history, from lofty dinosaurs to wounded soldiers, and it makes history. This is a River. The experience of it in its truest form is profoundly more than its ecology could ever tell. This is what a River Rat knows and loves.

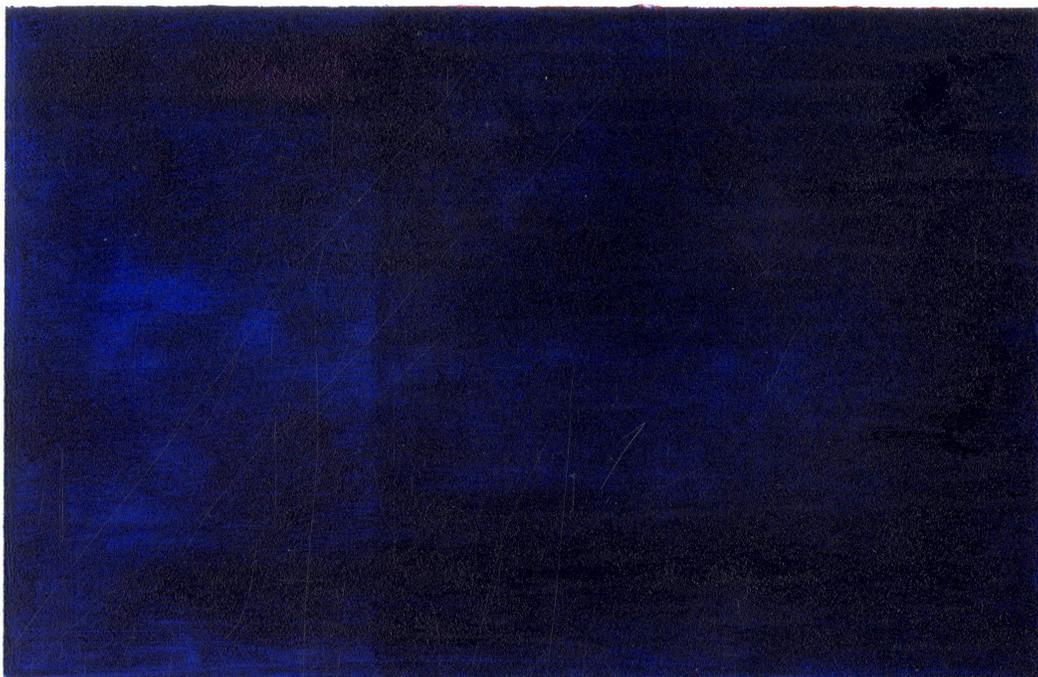


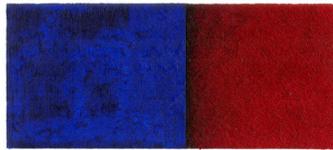
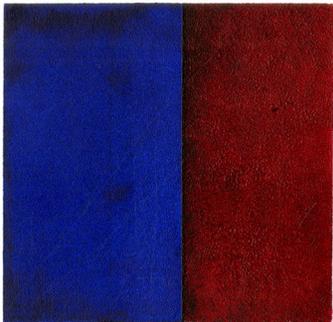
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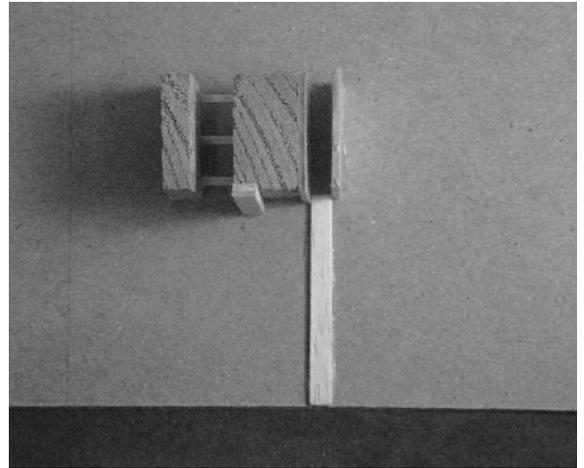
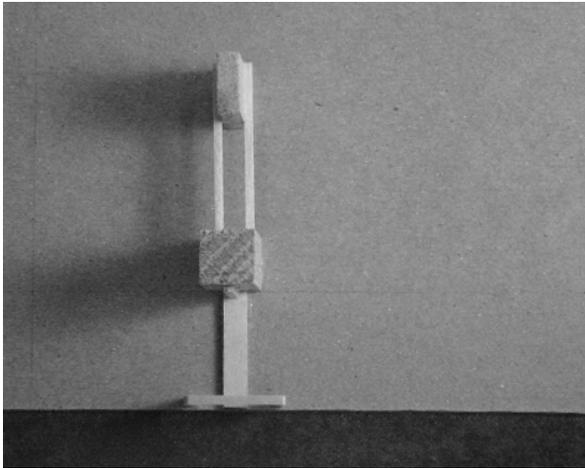
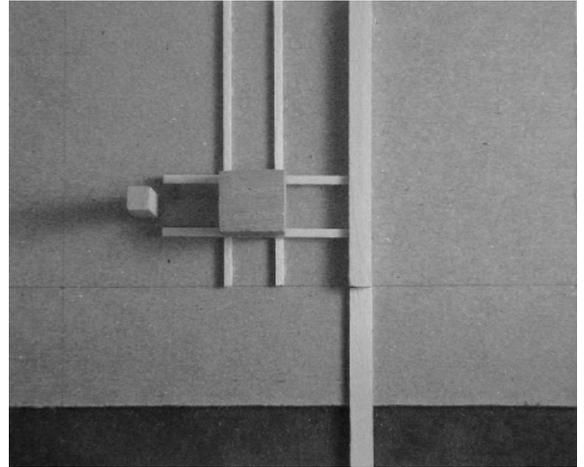
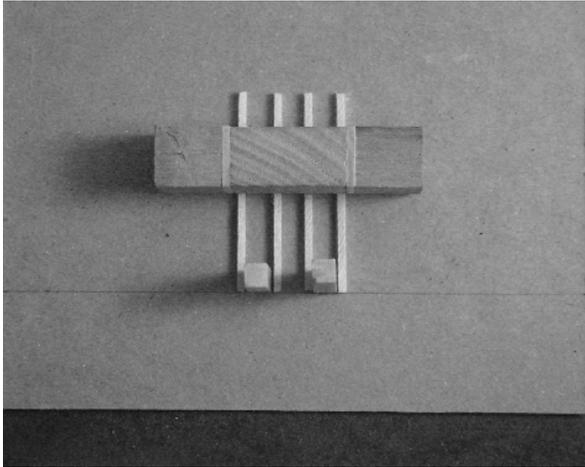


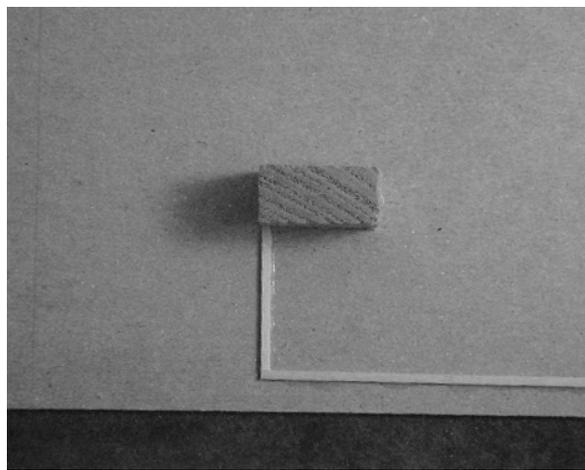
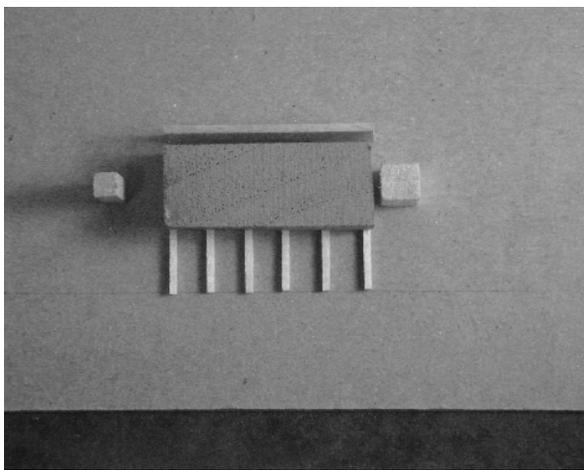
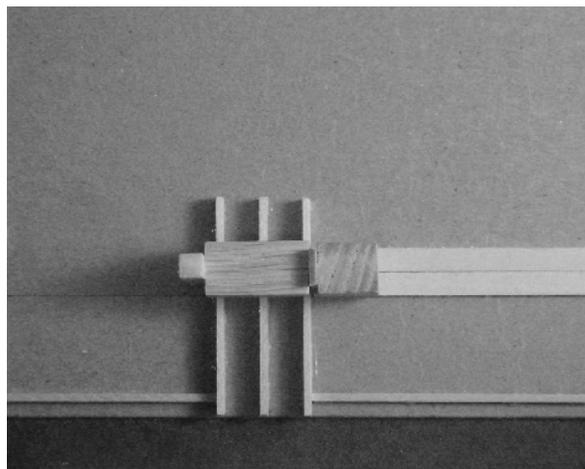
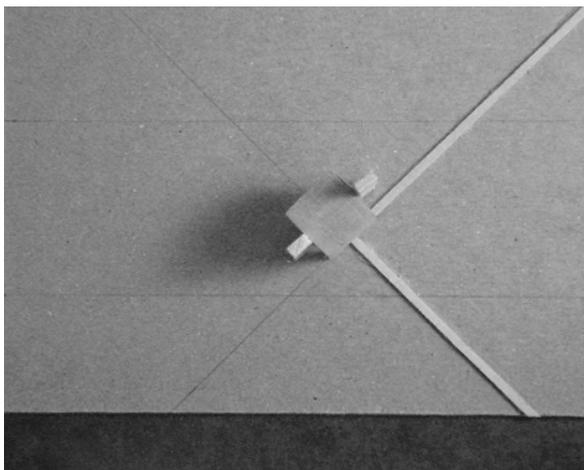
Photographs by Arlene Schaefer





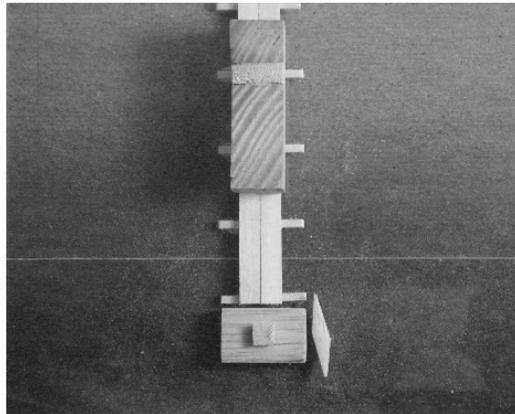
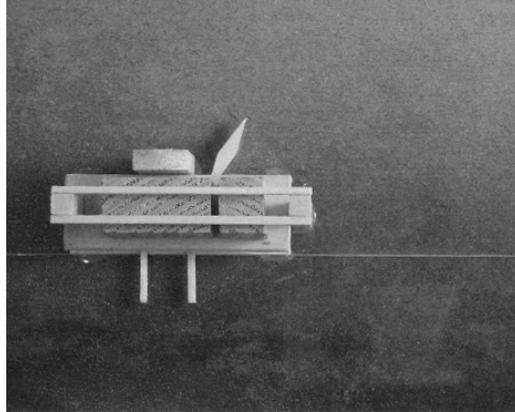
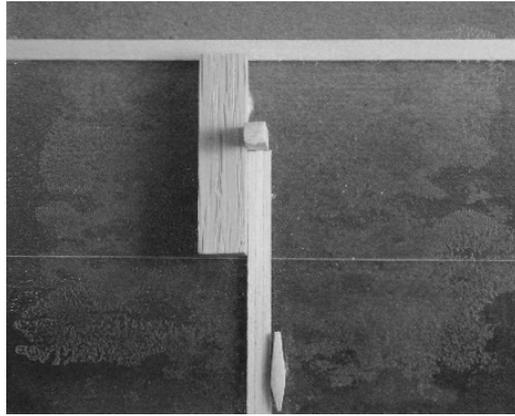








Photographs by Arlene Schaefer



The Ground

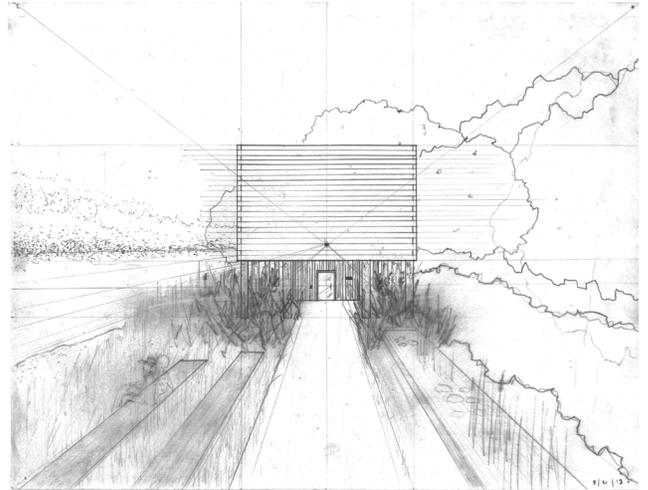
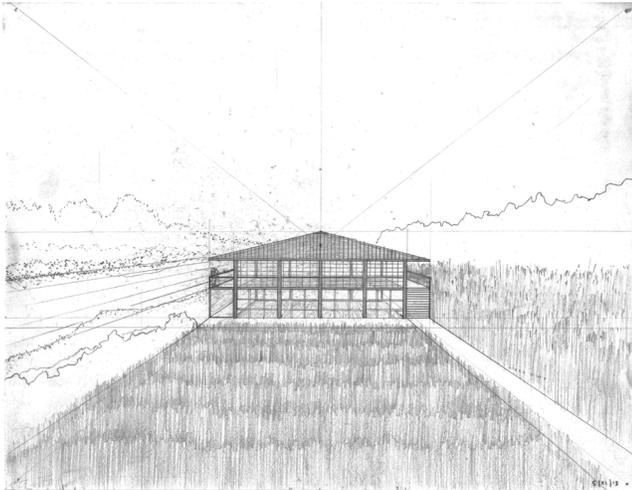
“Architecture, whether as a town or a building, is the reconciliation of ourselves with the natural land. At the necessary juncture of culture and place, architecture seeks not only the minimal ruin of landscape but something more difficult: a replacement of what was lost with something that atones for the loss. In the best architecture this replacement is through an intensification of the place, where it emerges no worse for human intervention, where culture’s shaping of the land to specific use results in a heightening of beauty and presence. In these places we seem worthy of existence.”

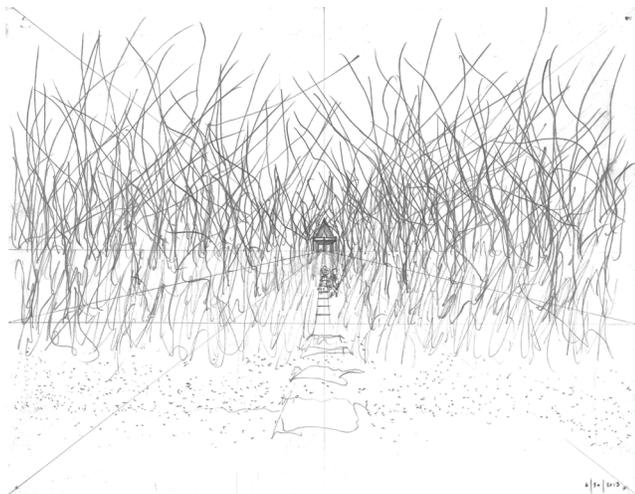
(W.G. Clark, Jensen 10)

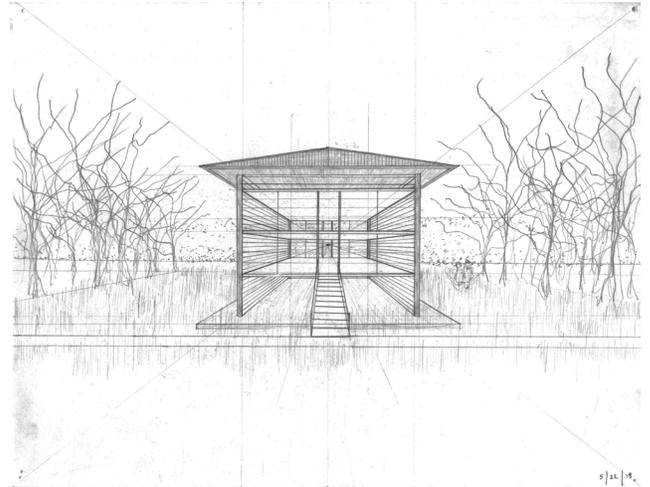
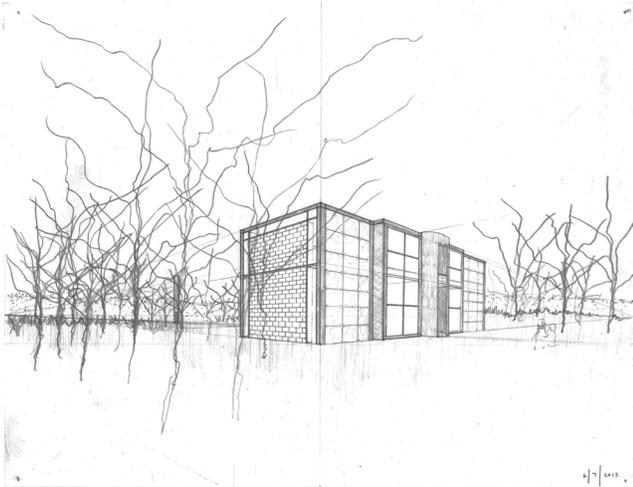
The connection to the ground here is a pragmatic problem as well as an opportunity for the celebration of the place. It is a recognition of the fact that the river will rise and flood, but rather than emphasizing a separation between house and land, a connection is made. It is a respectful one, and one which has warranted a great deal of caution in design. To create something which is established in the place, that does not deny it nor is dignified over it, has been the intention in design. It seeks to find harmony with the ground and its impending flood, and to welcome the rising waters as nothing less than its truest expression of being.

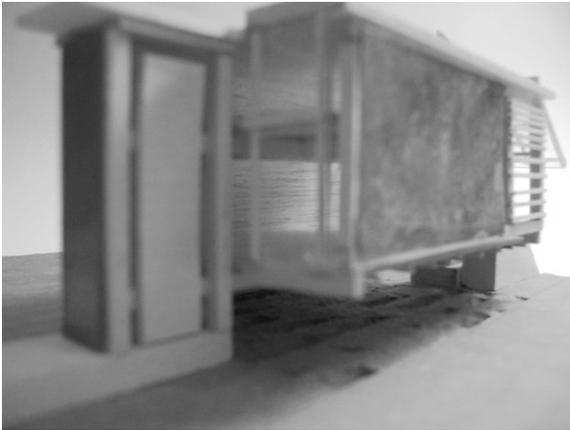
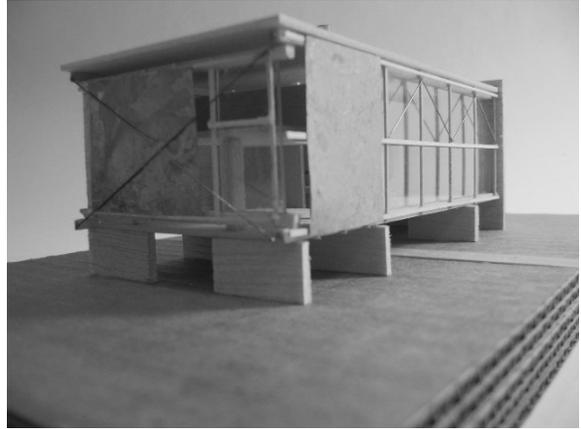
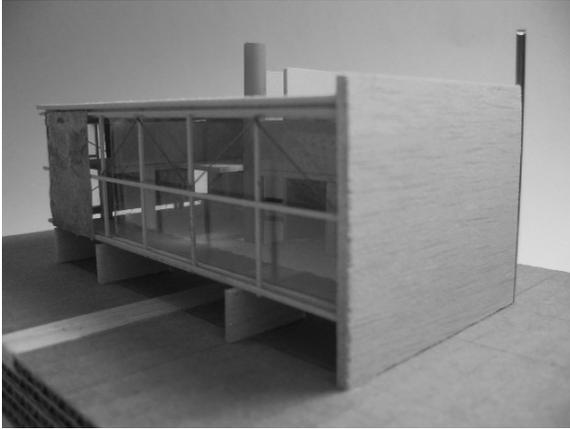


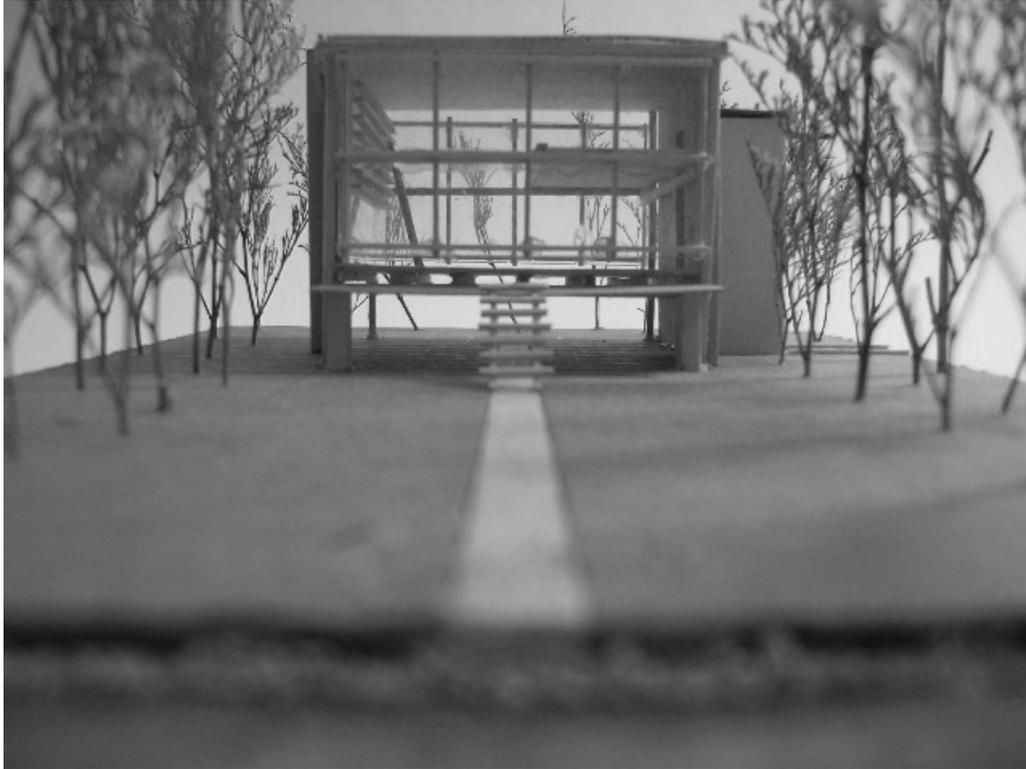
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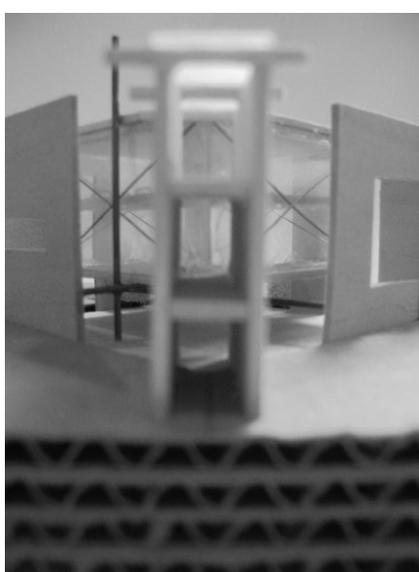












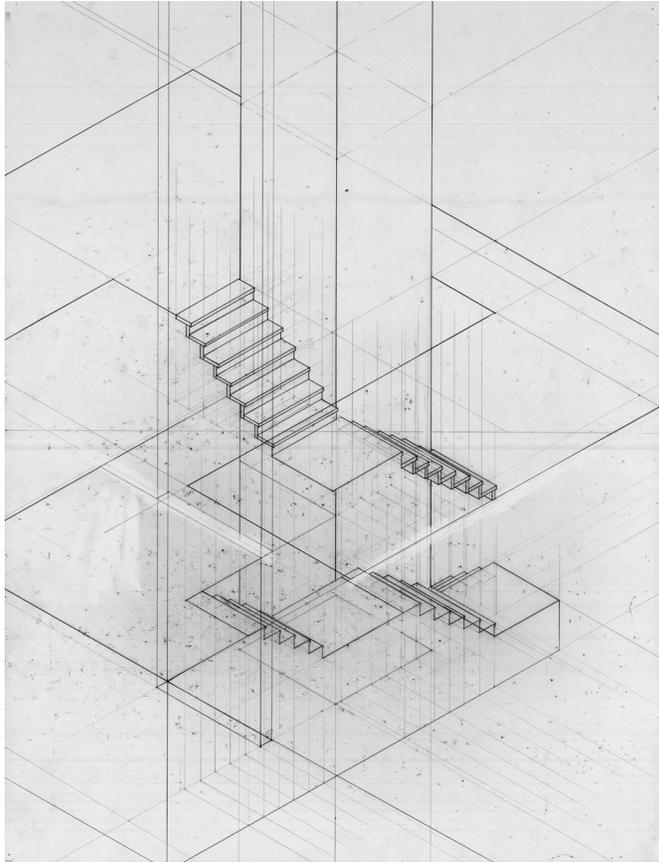


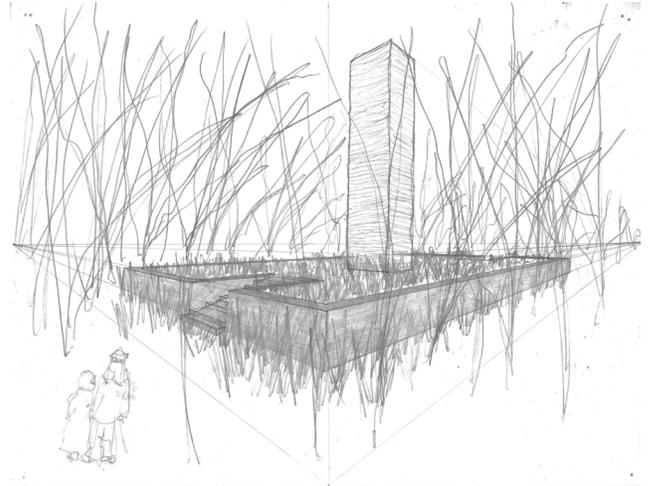
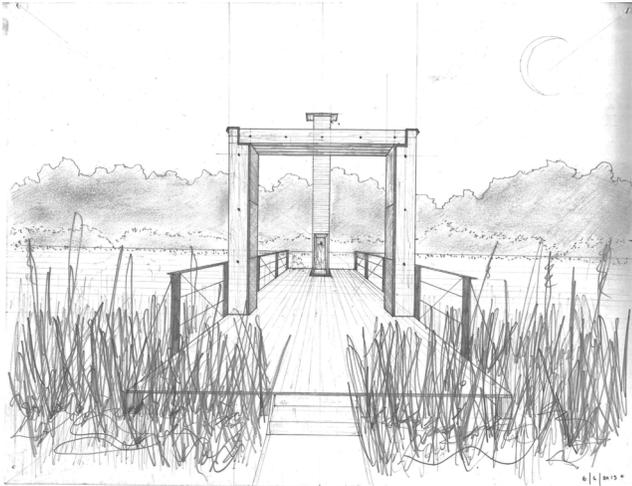
The Chimney

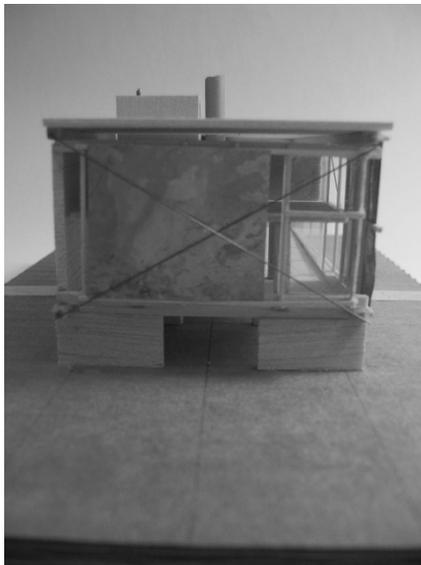
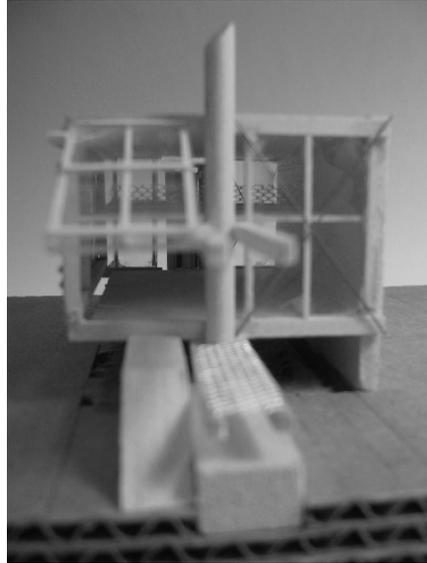
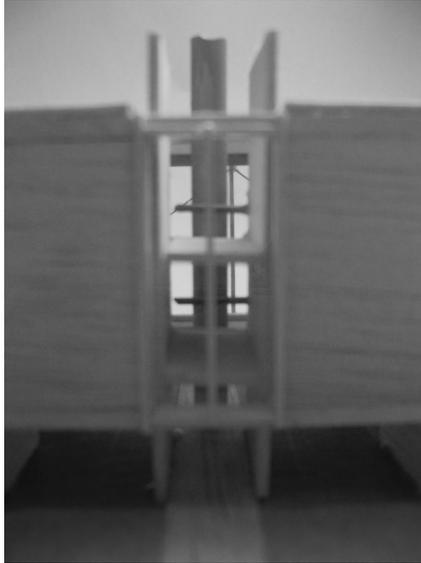
My chimney is grand seignior here--the one great domineering object, not more of the landscape, than of the house; all the rest of which house, in each architectural arrangement, as may shortly appear, is, in the most marked manner, accommodated, not to my wants, but to my chimney's, which, among other things, has the centre of the house to himself, leaving but the odd holes and corners to me.

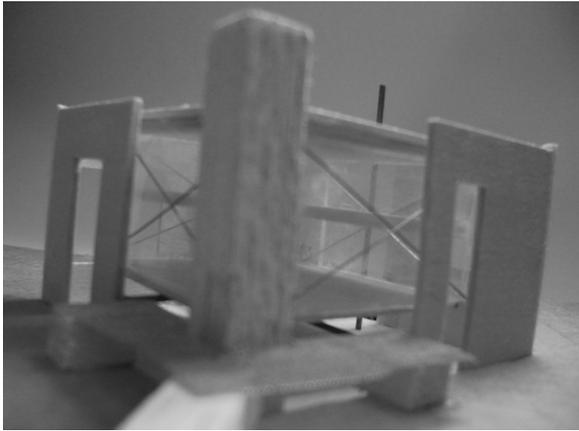
(Melville, 2-3)

The chimney here represents the defining moment expressing the distinction between man and nature within the design of the house. As an artifact of cultural memory, the chimney has come to symbolize one of man's most basic desires in habitation. It recalls memories of snowy mornings, smoky air, a glowing warmth, and most importantly, comfort. Not merely physical comfort, but a comfort that is rooted in the recognition of safety and the embrace of the fire's call to community. The fire is of people, and it always has been. Appropriately, the chimney expresses itself unabashedly in the design of the house, emphasizing even from a distance, that this space is by man and for man.











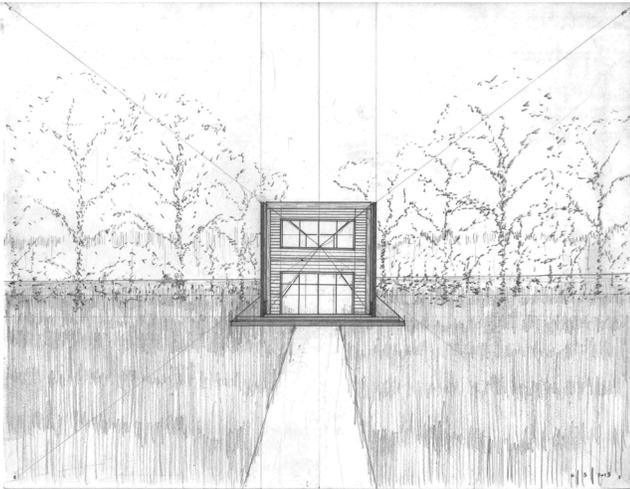
The Window

The spatial flow of the interior towards the exterior is not only a projectural mechanism for making the inside seem larger. It is precisely through this perception of the exterior that the protective qualities of the private retreat can be discerned. The private retreat allows its inhabitants to participate passively, like a bird-watcher hidden in the woods, in the surrounding natural scenery while, at the same time feeling protected from it in such a way that the house becomes a vantage point looking out onto an ideal world, a “heaven on earth”.

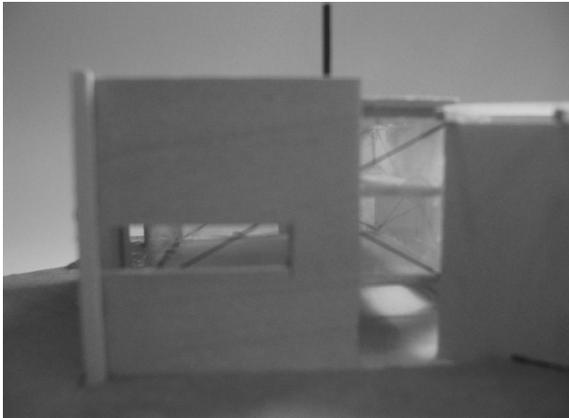
(Galfetti, 14)

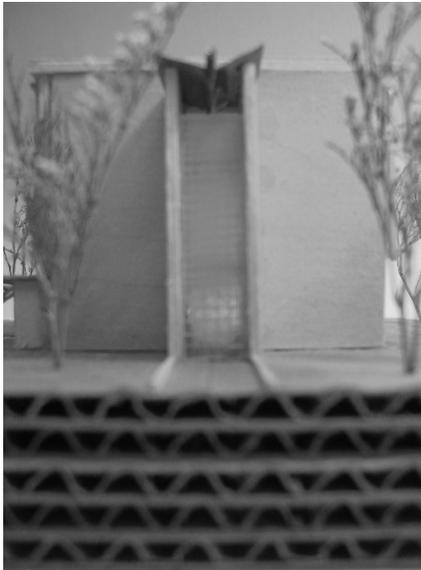
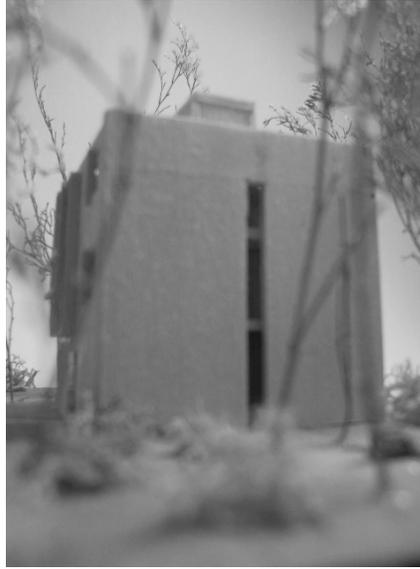
Windows are the gatekeepers to the senses. From the outside they control light, sound, smell, and feel, ensuring the house be a pure space for man alone, or allowing a connection elsewhere to be made. They are the intermediary between inside and outside, granting a context of senses at one point, and denying it at another.









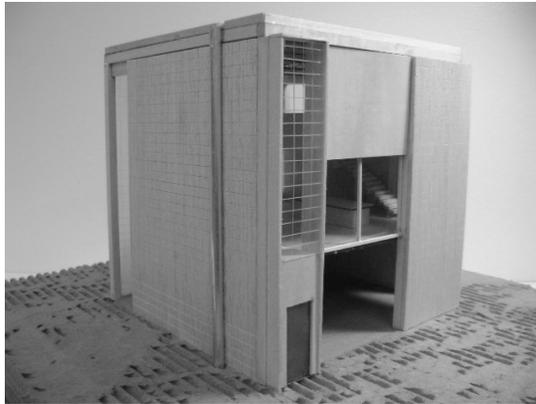
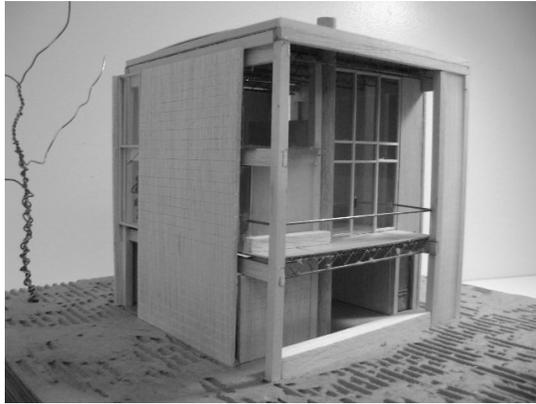


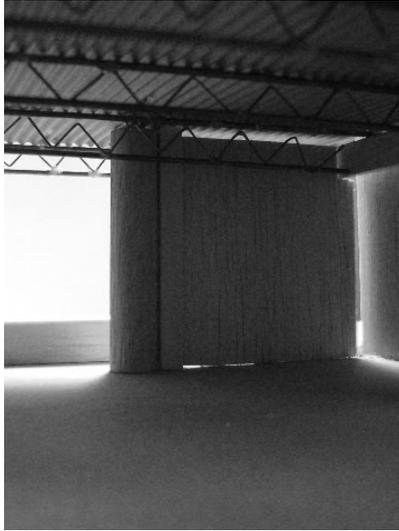
The House

This is a house for two people. It is a secondary residence, a retreat, or cabin. The house is sited on ten acres of land abutting the James River in Buckingham County, Virginia, and the land will eventually flood. The design of the house takes this inevitability into account in its connection to the ground, which also implies exploration of its relationship to the place. This place is the true retreat, the focus of affection and the reason to visit. The house then becomes a retreat within a retreat, acknowledging man's need for safety and comfort in a place of untamed wilderness. Regularity and understandability are given to the building's form in response to this desire, as is an attention to the fireplace and chimney, seen throughout time and culture as distinguishing artifacts of human habitation. Within the house attention is given to its apertures, its windows out into the wild, which serve to frame views and memories of the exterior while enhancing the contrast found inside. The design of the house is in no manner conclusive, but is rather an exploration of several transcending ideas about how one lives by the river and how architecture intersects this meeting of man and nature.

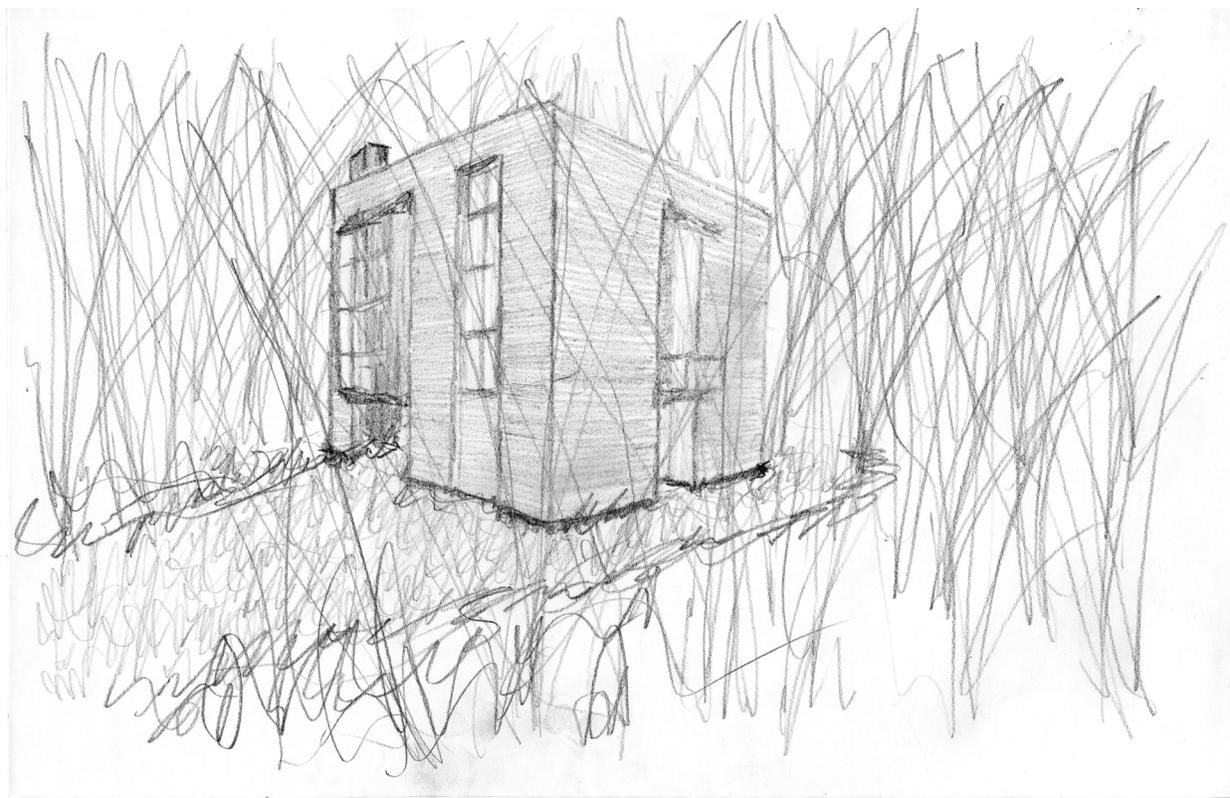
House I

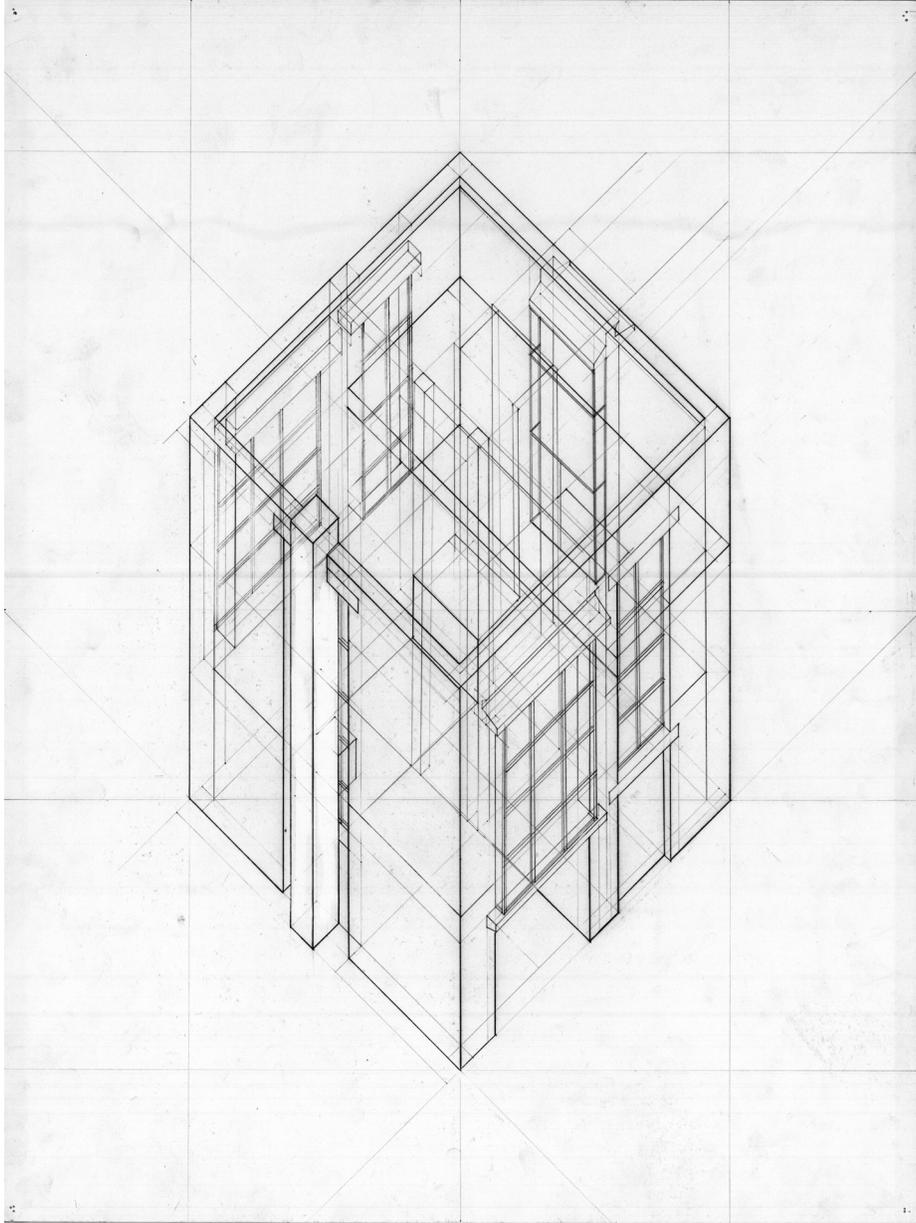


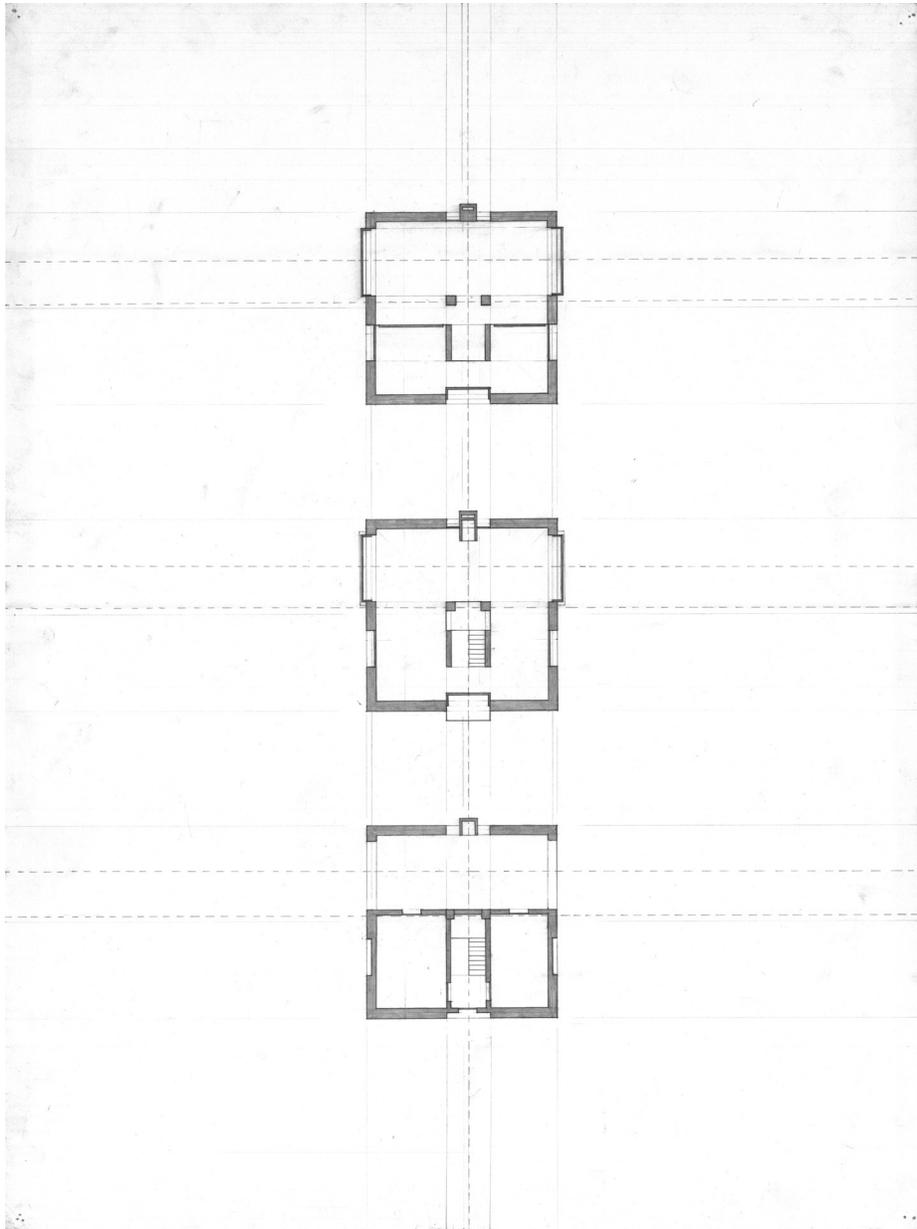


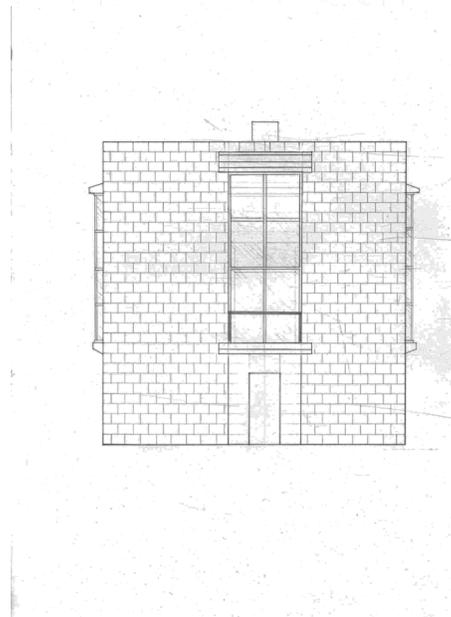
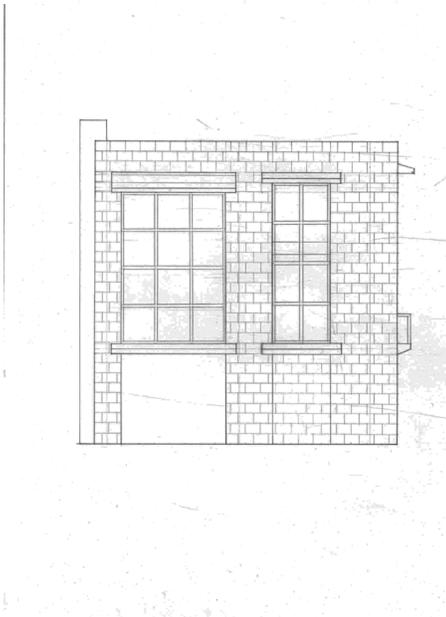
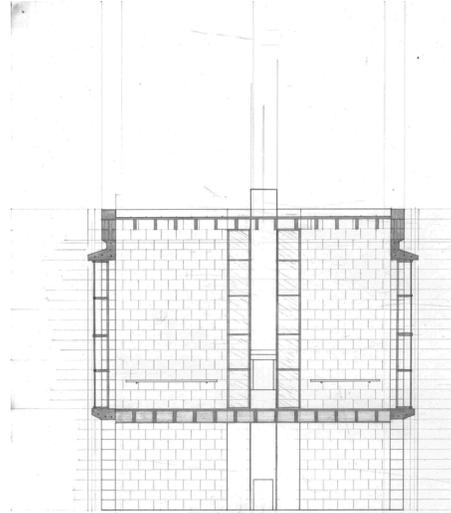
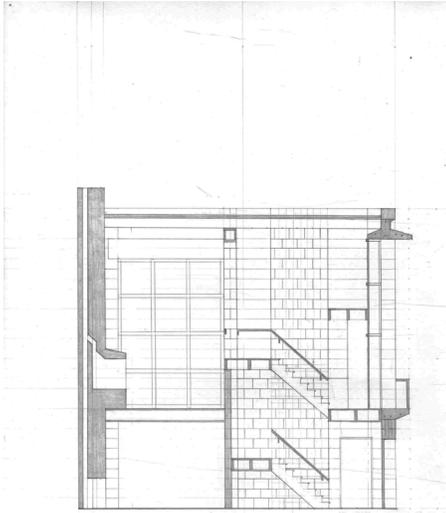


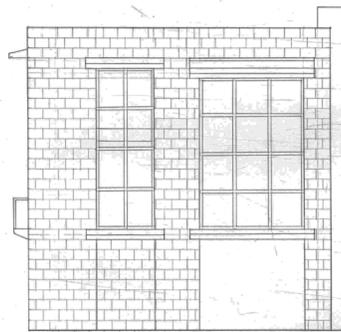
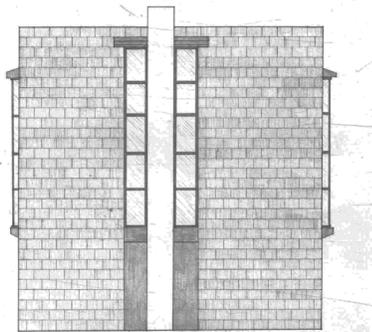
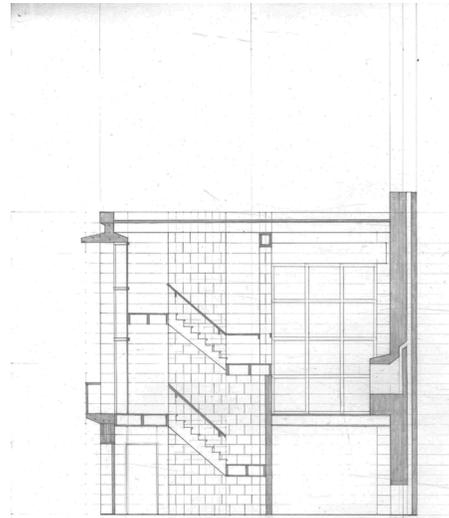
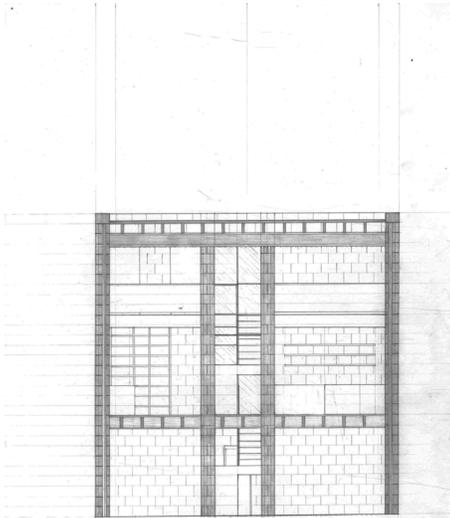
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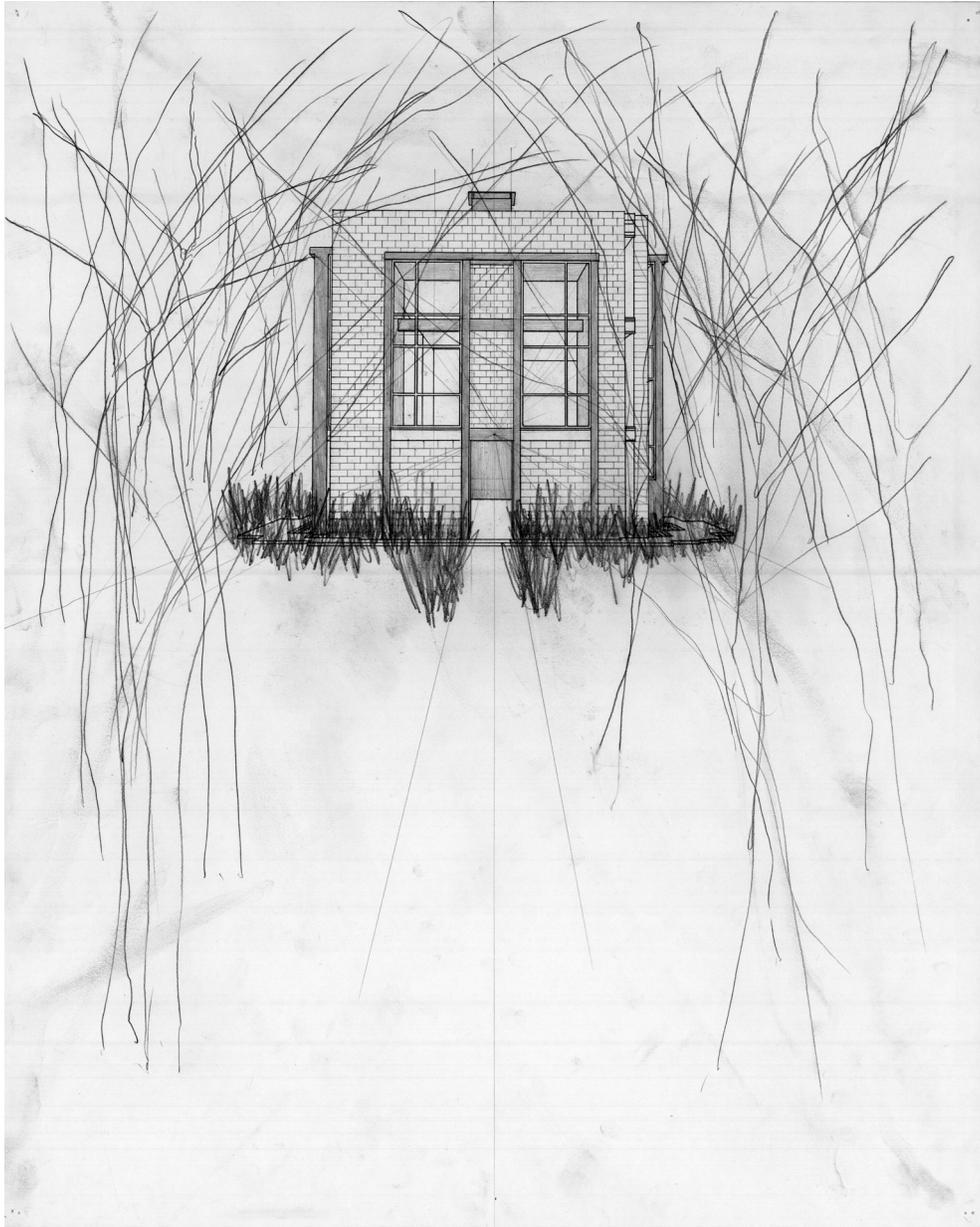


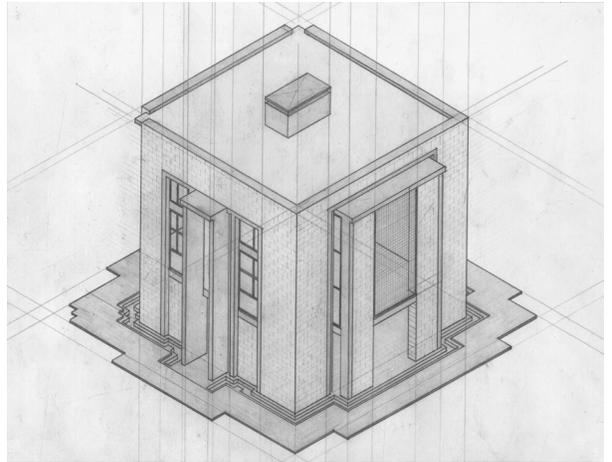
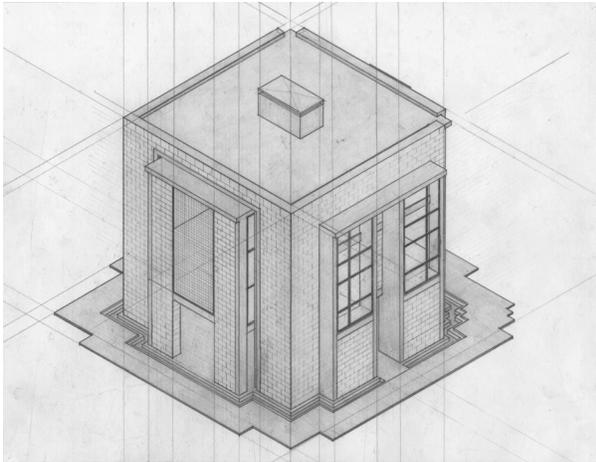
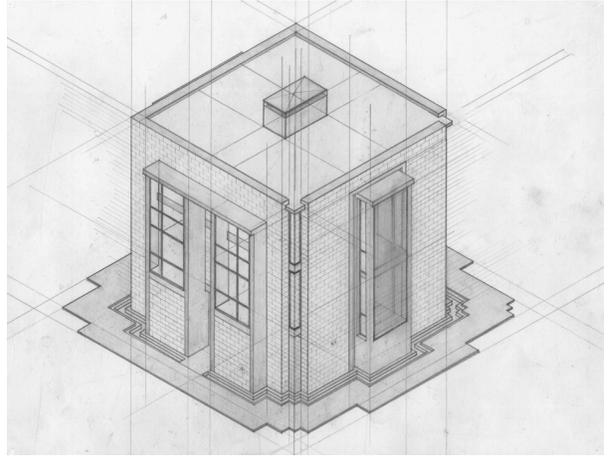
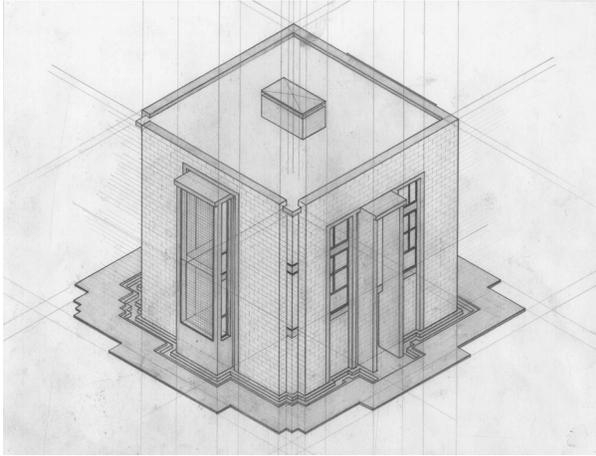


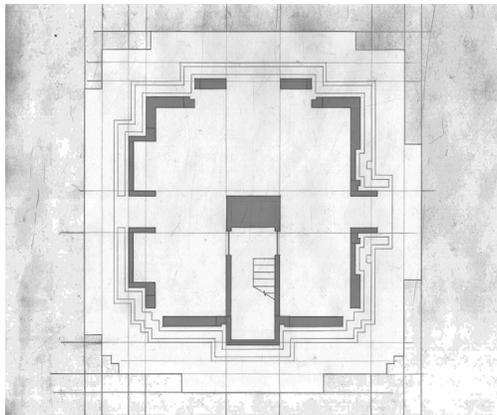
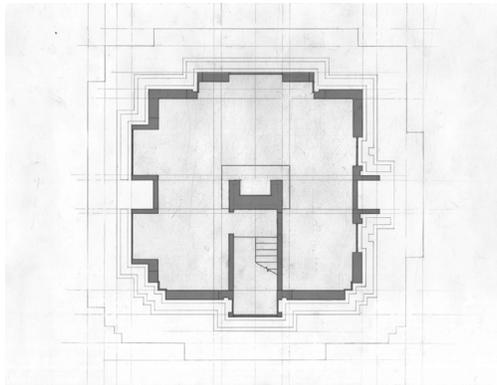
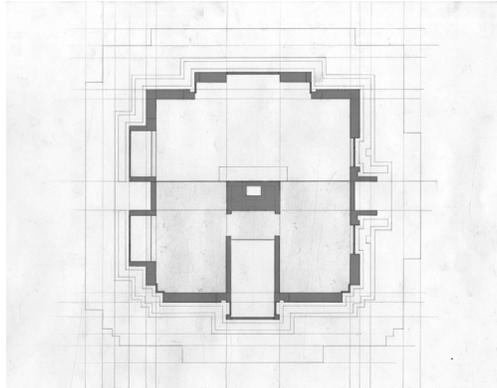


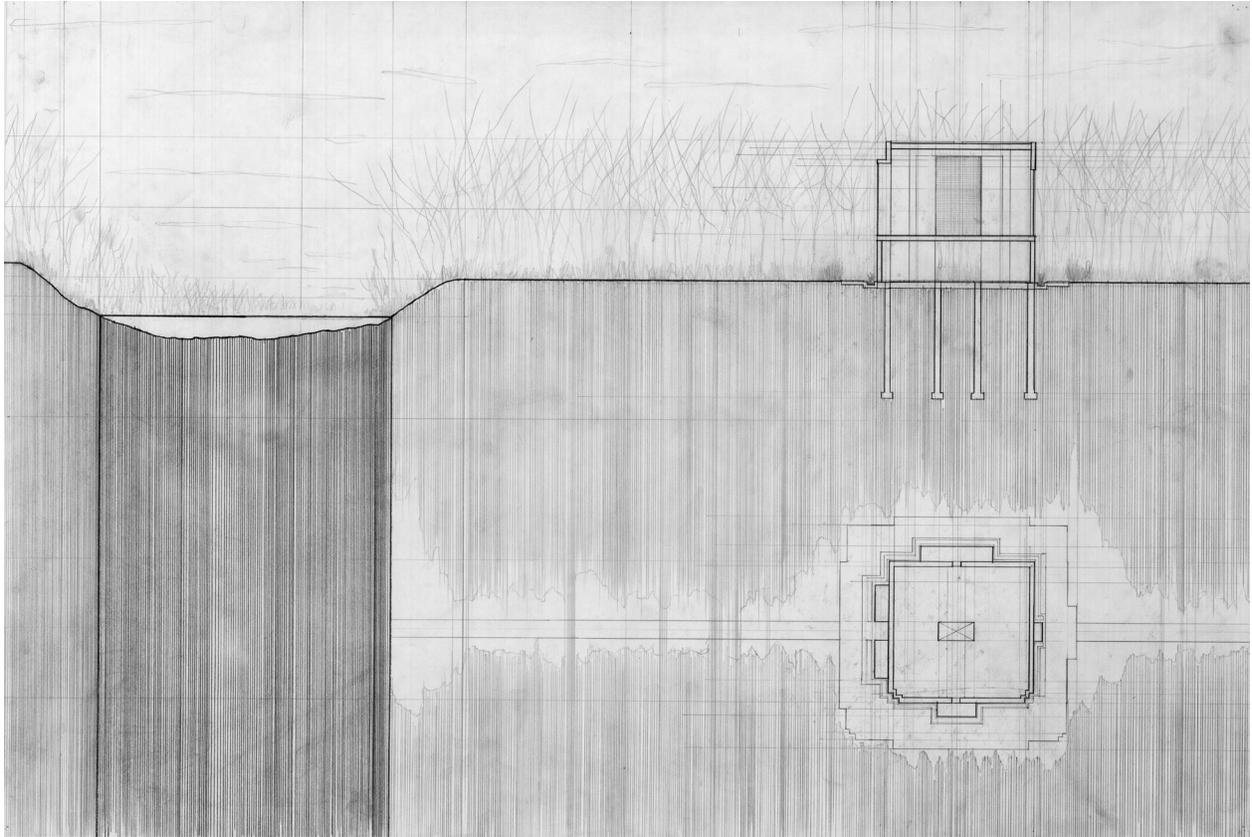


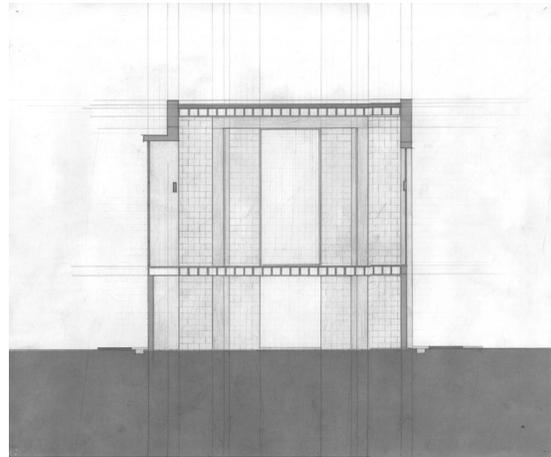
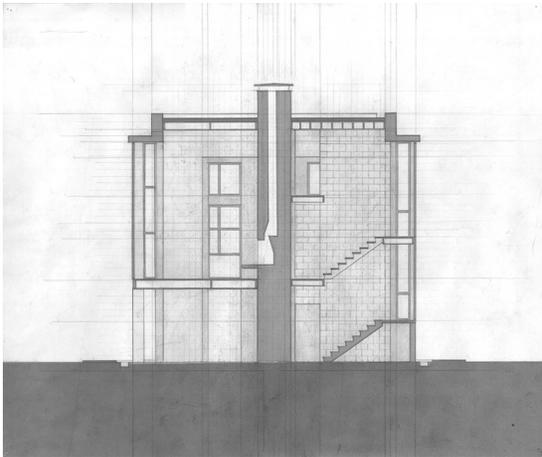
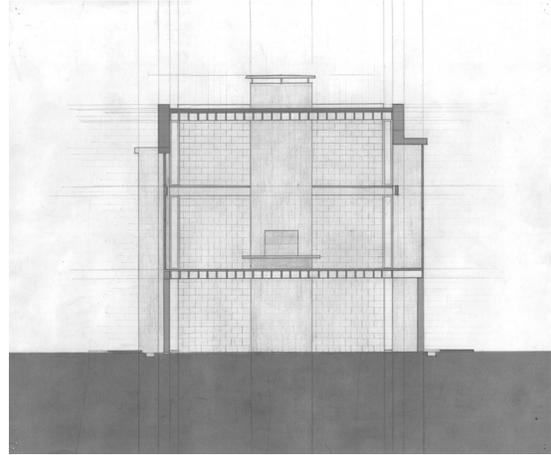
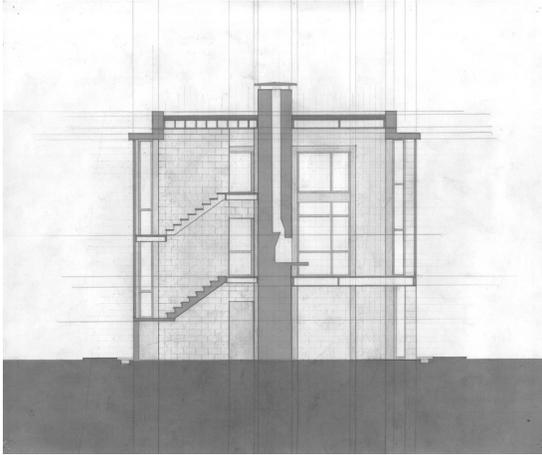
House III



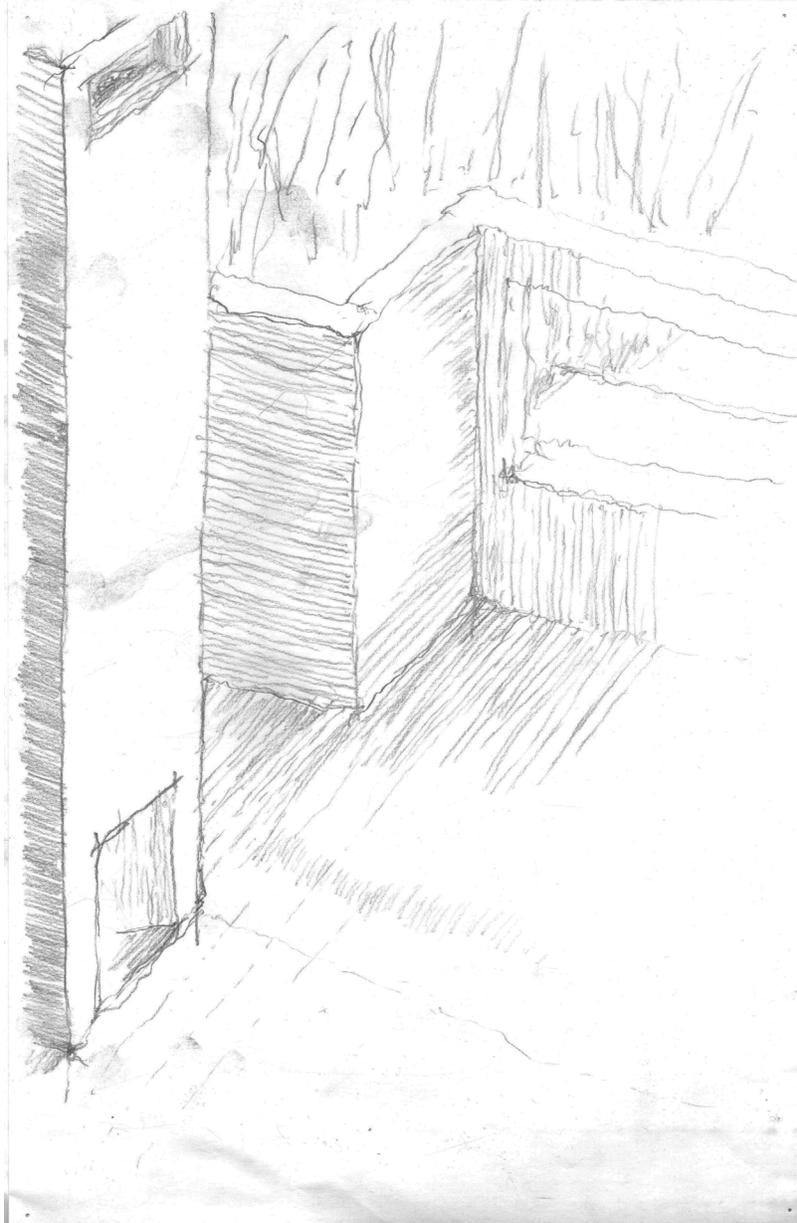


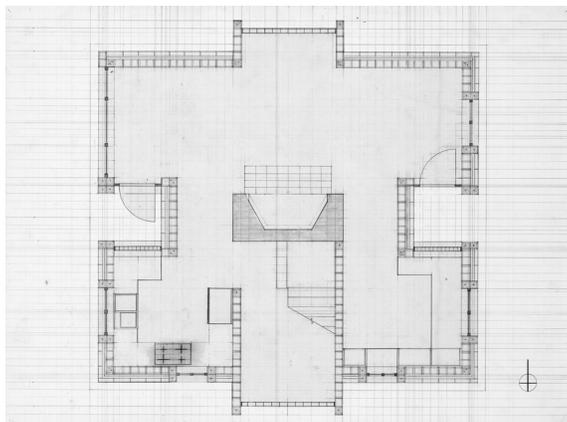
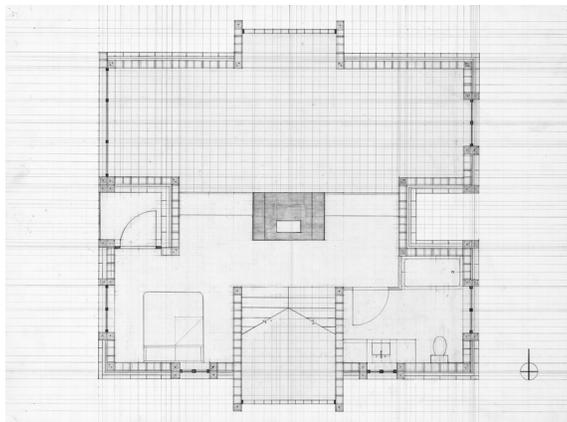
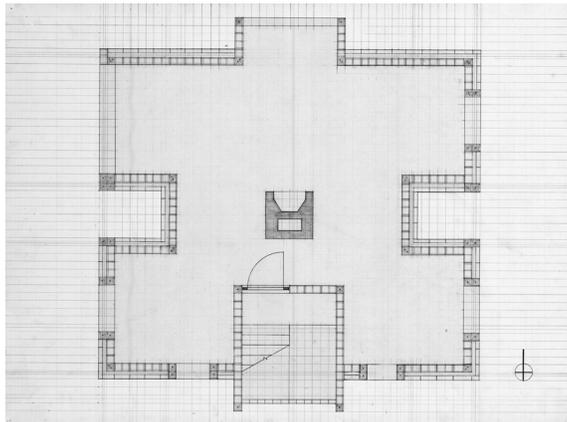


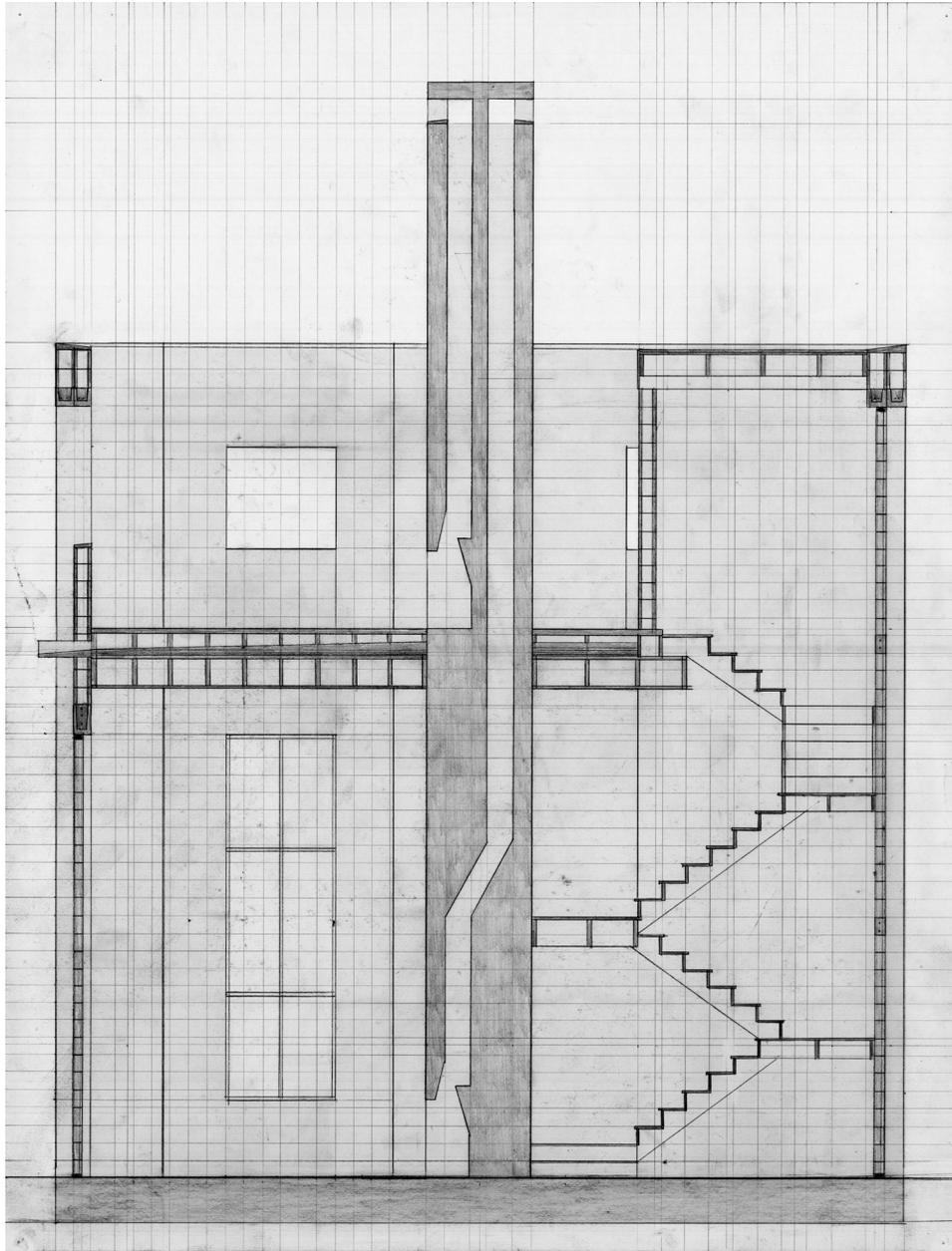


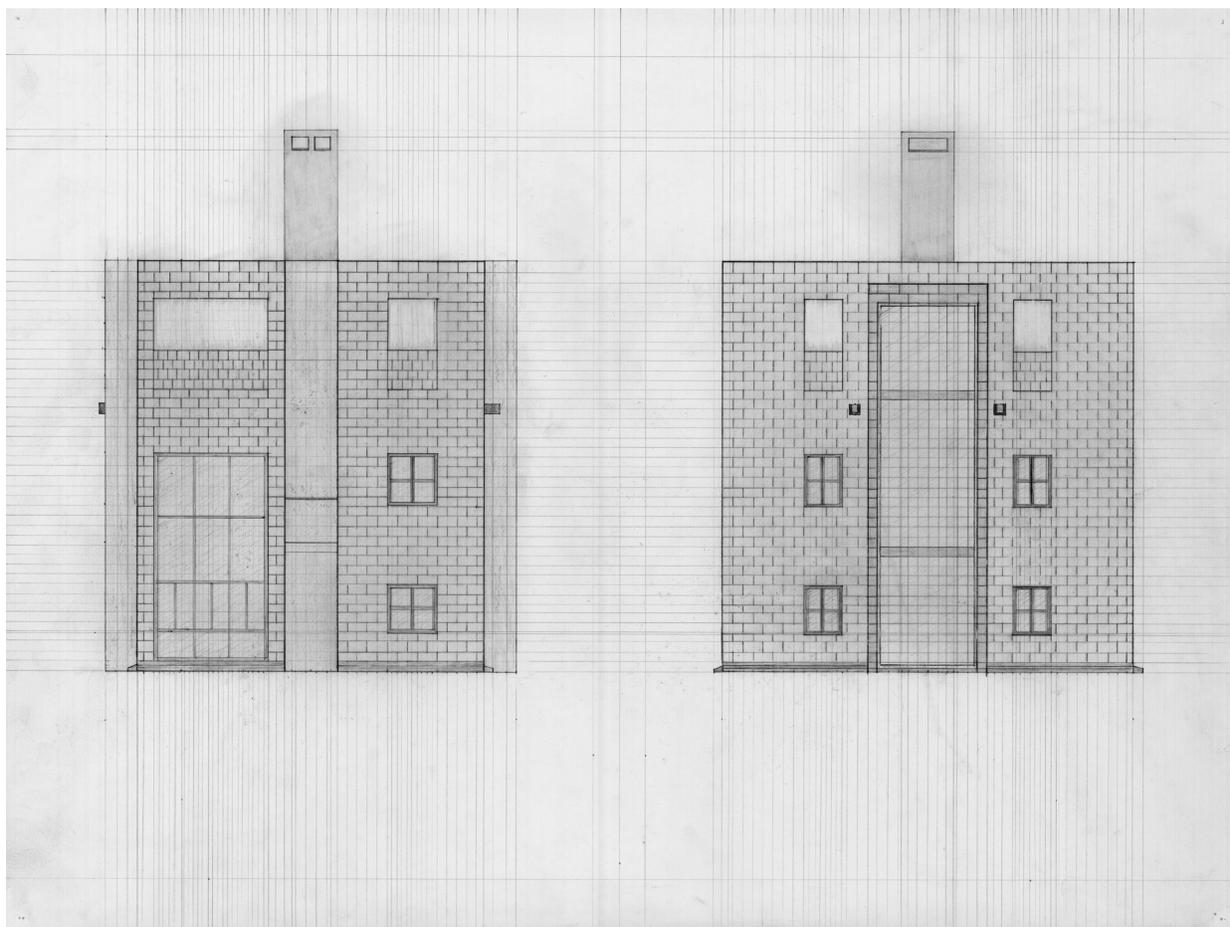


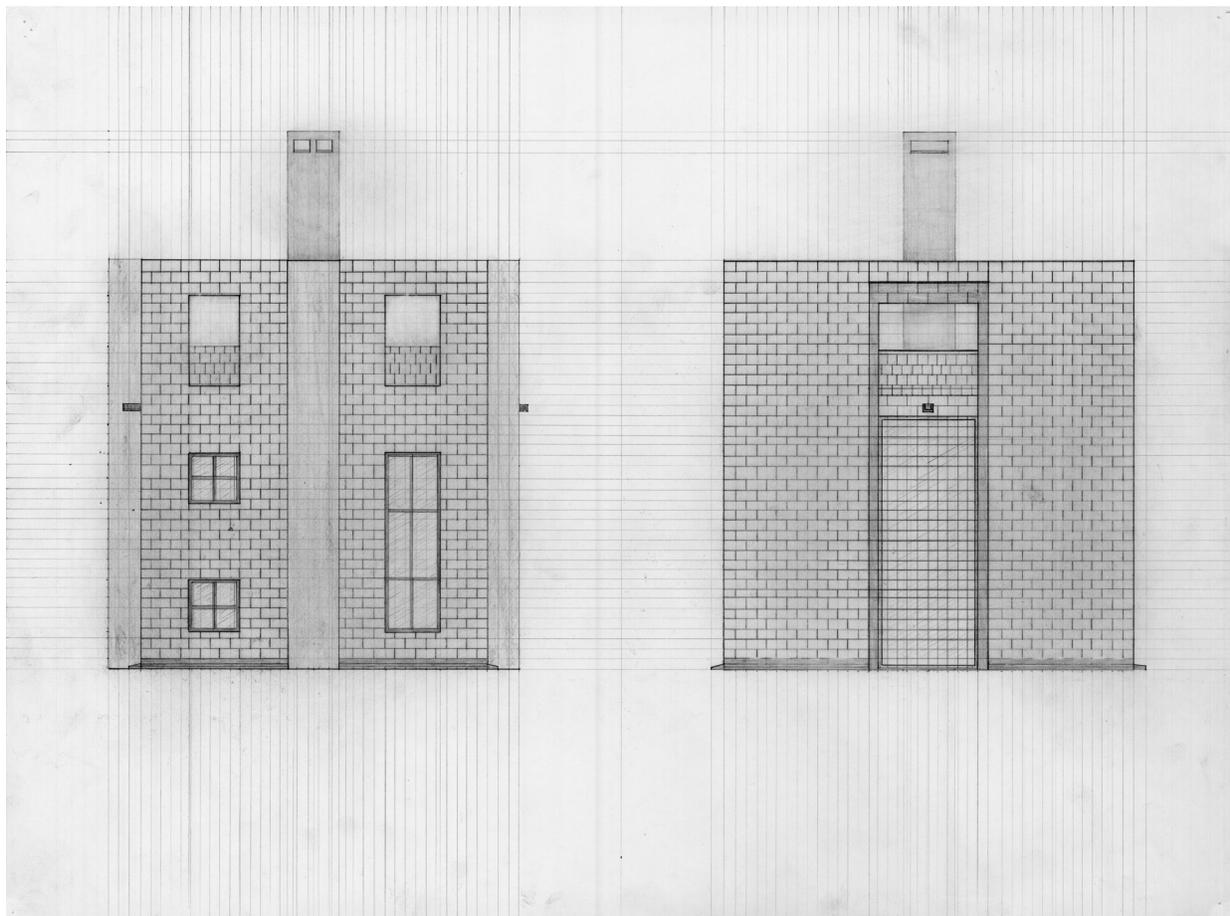
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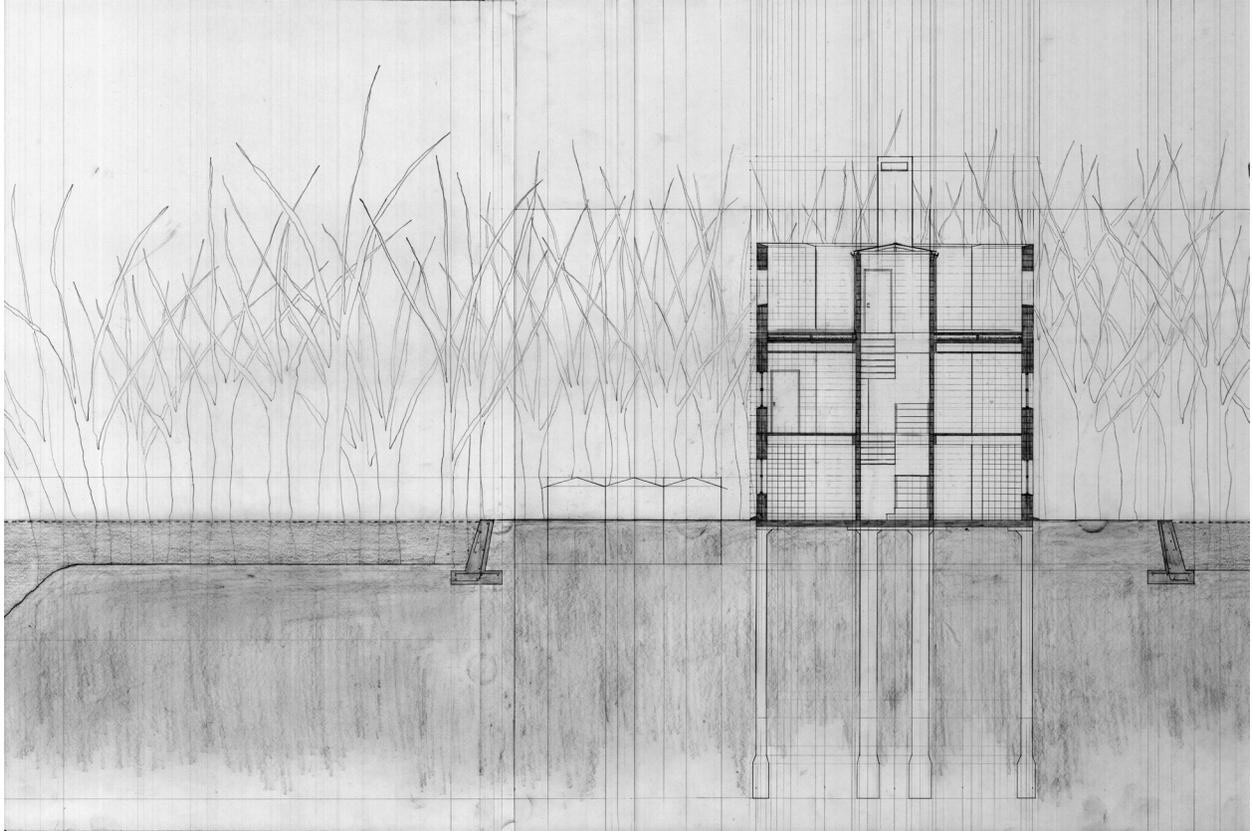


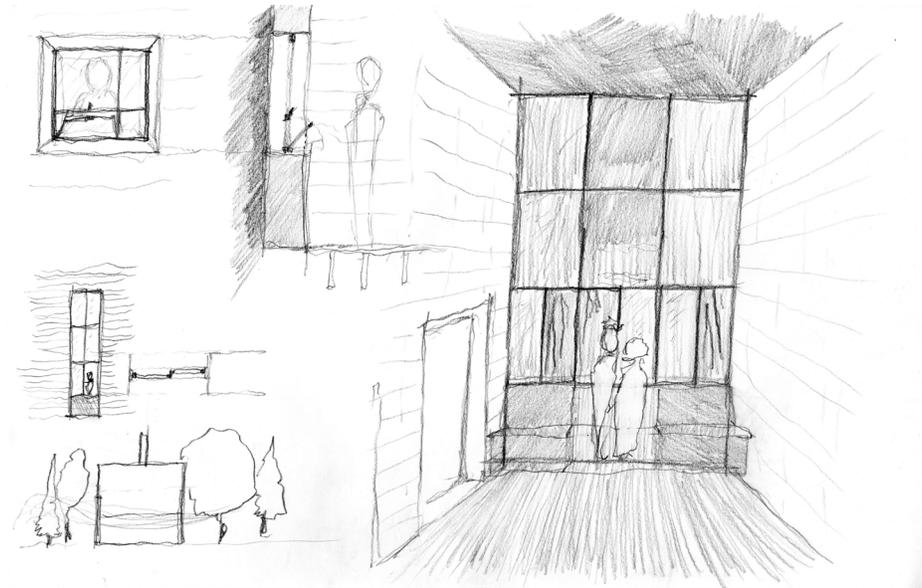
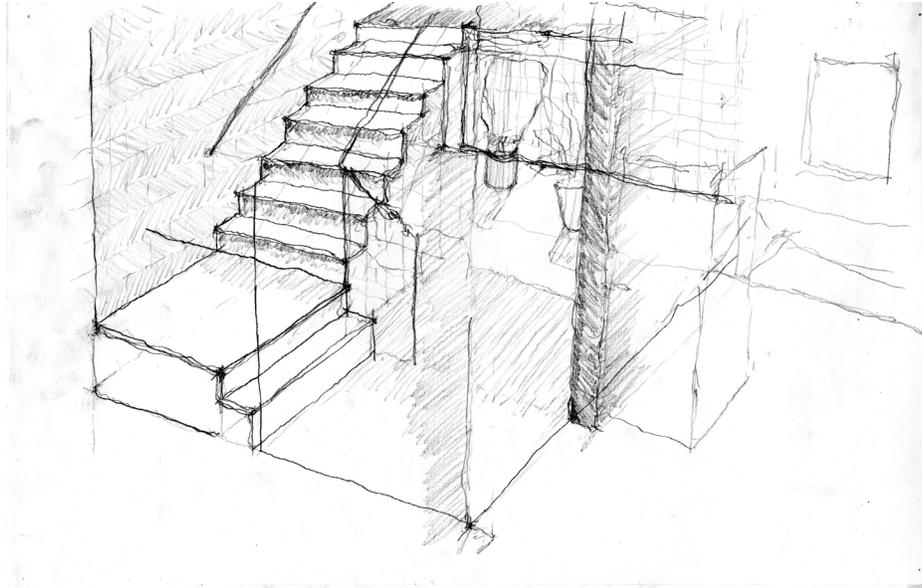


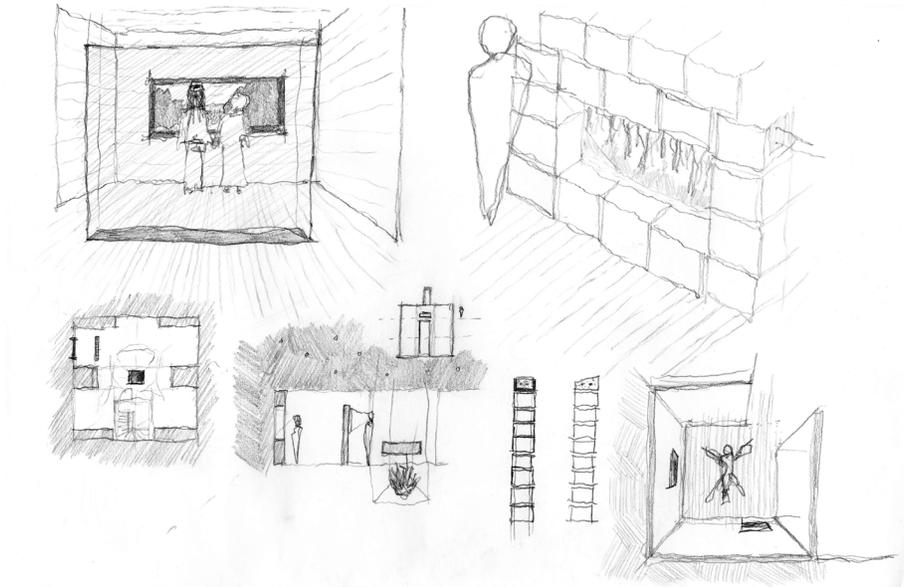
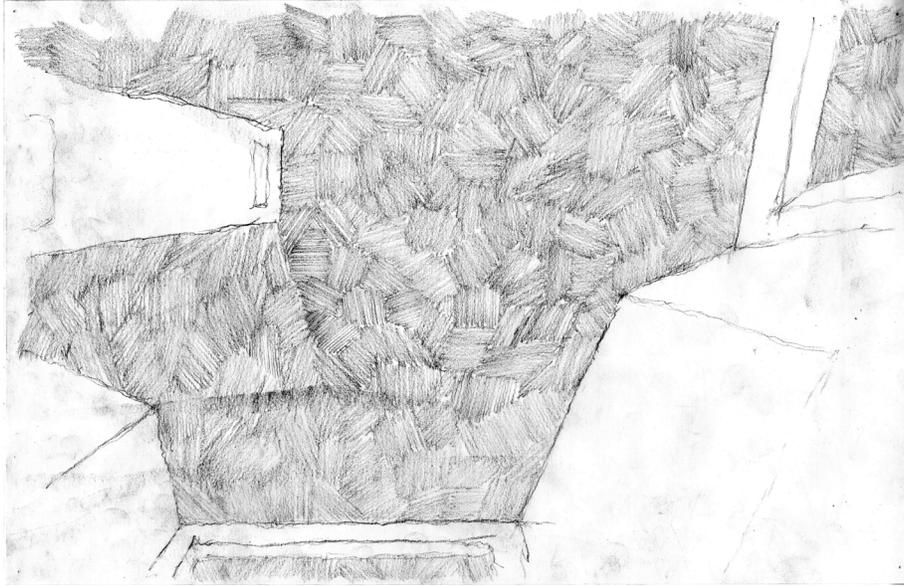












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