

d i s t i l l a t i o n

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by b r a d s c h m i e d i c k e

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Polytechnic Institute and State University
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I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt . . . was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced. . . . (T)he real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it.

Ernest Hemingway
Death in the Afternoon

d i s t i l l e d m i n i m a l i s m

Art is shared emotion between artist and individual. Early in his career, Hemingway regarded his stories, essentially, "as machines for arousing emotion". (Cowley, xiv) He painstakingly realized this simple ideal, developing a methodology that allows the reader to truly *feel*.

Emotion is caused by particular actions and experiences. Hemingway tried to find exactly *what* made him feel. He distilled his prose until it contained only the sharp details that made the emotion.

I am learning to design. I hope that my architecture, if nothing else, is a vehicle for sharing fundamental feelings. If I can find precisely *what* makes me feel, and if I can design these "sequences of motion and fact" honestly, with no extraneous confusion, I will make a place that connects others to my passions. The real thing which made the emotion will be as valid in a year or ten or (if it is presented purely enough) always.

I waited outside in the hall. I waited a long time. The nurse came to the door and came over to me. "I'm afraid Mrs. Henry is very ill," she said. "I'm afraid for her."

"Is she dead?"

"No, but she is unconscious."

It seems she had one hemorrhage after another. They couldn't stop it. I went into the room and stayed with Catherine until she died. She was unconscious all the time, and it did not take her very long to die.

... after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain."

A Farewell to Arms (354)

t h e r e a l t h i n g

the sequence
of motion and fact
which made the emotion

"He spoke of writing 'truly,' of knowing elements of life which, when presented 'truly' would capture the essential, larger meanings in human experience. He pruned and trimmed and simplified. . . in order to create true scenes for the reader."
(Nelson 52)

Hemingway was a profuse revisor; the clarity of his work depended on distilling vast quantities of irrelevance and convolution. Beginning with *every* detail that produced the emotion, he boiled them down until he was left with only the most pure. Pure details were expressed straightforwardly, honestly, without embellishment. One "true" sentence might take pages to write.

In "Big Two Hearted River: I" Hemingway writes about a handful of *real things*: Nick's spaghetti, stirred with pork and beans, catchup, bread, cooking implements, a tent, a river, and a swamp. Through these "pruned and trimmed and simplified" details, we feel hunger and anticipation and self control and well earned satisfaction. No extraneous details confuse us. We are left with "the *real things* that made the emotion".

Nick was hungry. He did not believe he had ever been hungrier. He opened and emptied a can of pork and beans and a can of spaghetti into the frying pan. . .

He started a fire. . . Nick put the frying pan on the grill over the flames. He was hungrier. The beans and spaghetti warmed. Nick stirred them and mixed them together. They began to bubble, making little bubbles that rose with difficulty to the surface. There was a good smell. . . The little bubbles were coming faster now. Nick sat down beside the fire and lifted the frying pan off. He poured about half the contents out into the tin plate. It spread slowly on the plate. Nick knew it was too hot. He poured on some tomato catchup. He knew the beans and spaghetti were still too hot. He looked at the fire, then at the tent, he was not going to spoil it all by burning his tongue. . . He was very hungry... Across the river in the swamp, in the almost dark, he saw a mist rising. He looked at the tent once more. All right. He took a spoonful from the plate.

"Crise," Nick said, "Geezus Crise," he said happily. He ate the whole plateful before he remembered the bread. Nick finished the second plateful with the bread, mopping the plate shiny.

Big Two Hearted River: I

k n o w i n g t r u l y
w h a t y o u r e a l l y f e l t

My architecture, like Hemingway's prose, is a means to share my deepest feelings. These fundamental connections spring from involving myself in other lives, from peace in solitude, and from harmony in the Earth's rhythms.

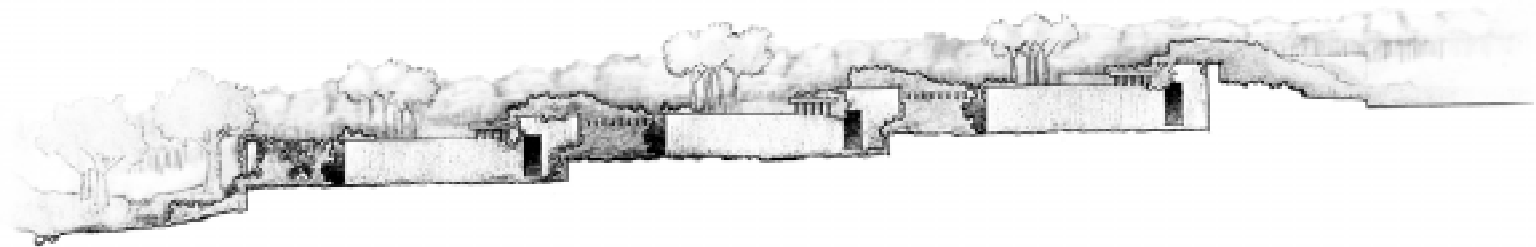
I began watering a tree when it just reached my chin. Through years, it has housed generations of sparrows and, more recently, a mole among the deep roots. My brother visits to trade books and share a beer. We empathize, share genuine concern, and change one another. I am more complete because of my part in these lives.

Another peace exists in solitude. Momentarily forgetting others, I read or listen to music. Mesmerized in the glowing coals of a fire, my world shrinks. A security grows from independence, from finding joy alone.

On a long canoe trip, I live in the midst of the day. I feel it pass from early fog, to sparkling sun swallowed by humidity, then a cool breeze fades to lightning bugs, to crickets, to pitch black, and back to grey dawn. The slivered moon marks a longer cadence. Mounting gusts and spring torrents begin each year. I sense a quiet power living in harmony with the earth's rhythms.

My architecture centers about sharing these fundamental connections.





three houses for a family

a b s o l u t e s

A mother, father, and two sons wish to build their homes together. The houses must encourage interaction, reserve privacy, and keep each individual in touch with the rhythms of the day, the season and the year. In joining these fundamental concerns with a schematic design, three certainties make themselves obvious.

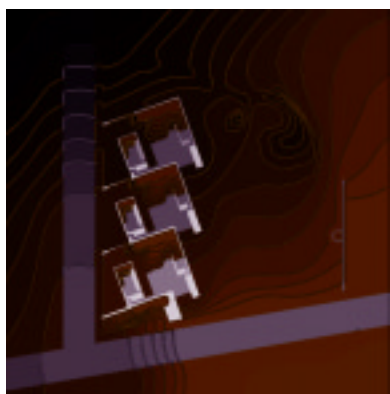
The houses share walls.
Shared walls keep the houses visually separate from one another. One cannot see into one house from another.

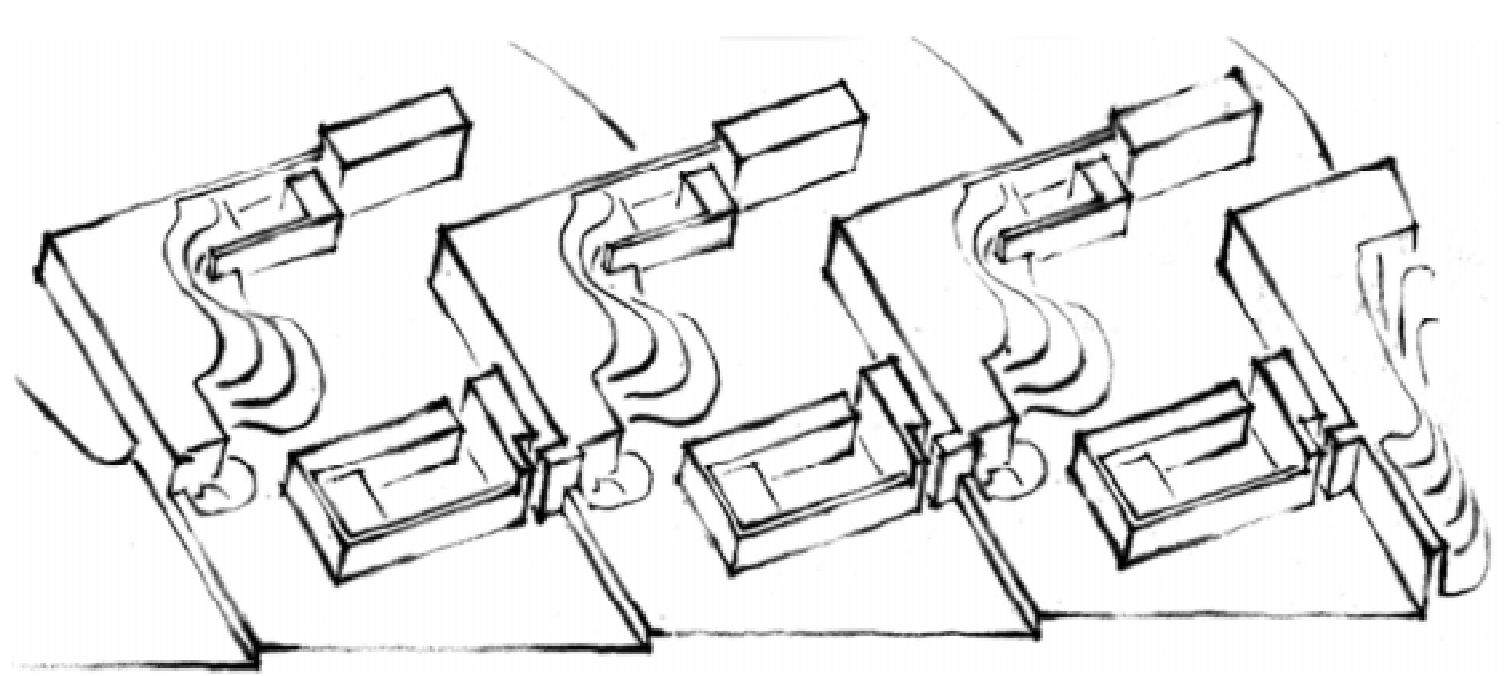
Each house extends south into a courtyard.
Private outdoor space is reserved from the common lawn. Additionally, each house gains a southern exposure to the sun, the moon and the stars.

The north edge of each house is buried.
The houses are depressed into the ground, hidden from one another. Earth deadens sound. Only the sky is visible.











burial shared walls southern courtyard

t h e r e a l t h i n g

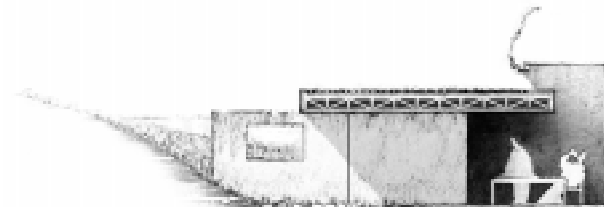
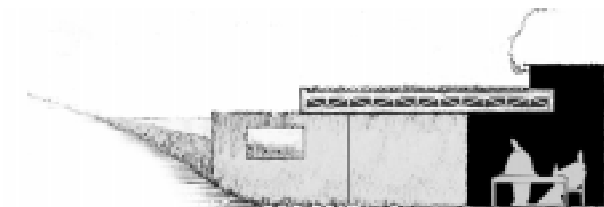
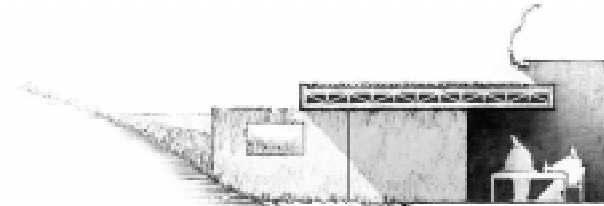
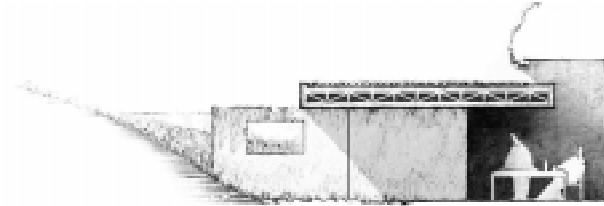
the sequence
of motion and fact
which made the emotion

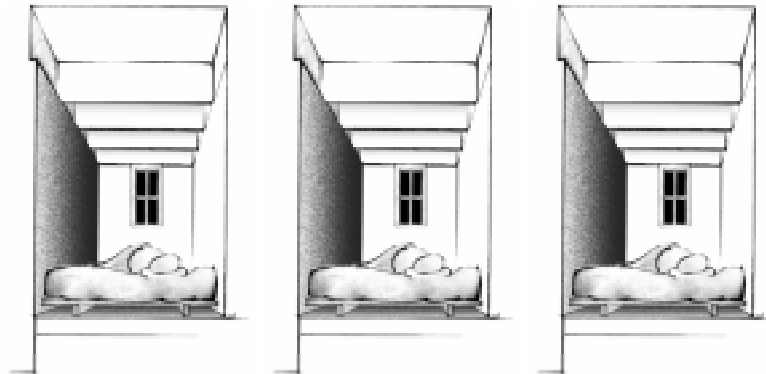
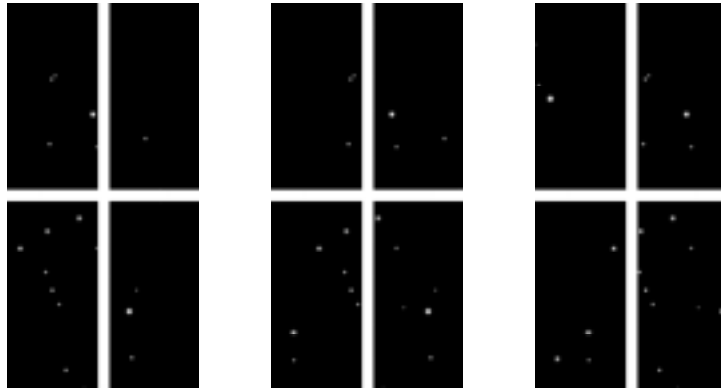
Each place focuses on a handful of *real things*: a cloud momentarily dimming bright daylight; the smell of honeysuckle; a murmur of voices; warm sunbaked stone; stars creeping across the sky. Autumn *arrives* in the central hall: crisp crosswinds whistle through then stop; the buzzing bees fade to a dry red rustle; the waning sun now peeks below the eave, warming the stone floor. Emotions grow from such real things.

Every detail that causes a feeling must be considered, eliminating all but the most pure. The house is sculpted and resculpted, until only a few moves make these pure things present.



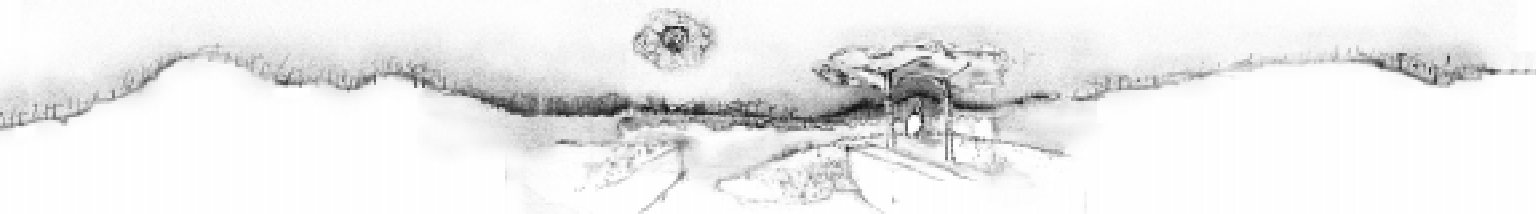
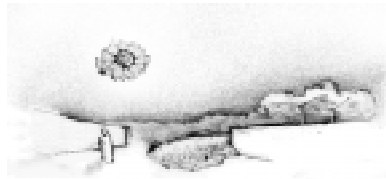
a cloud passing over the sun





s t a r s c r e e p i n g a c r o s s t h e s k y

the discovered horizon has a *presence*



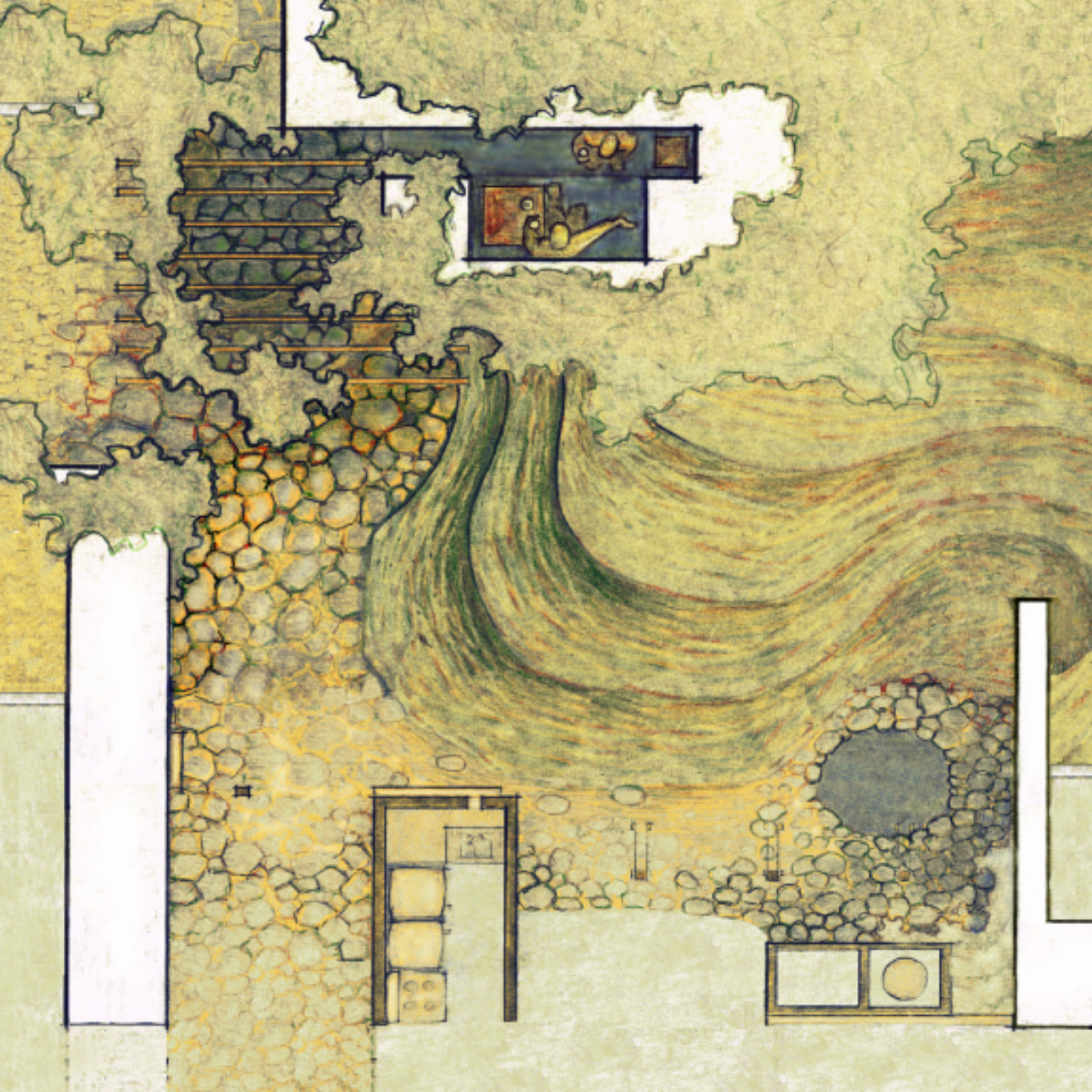
a range of experiences

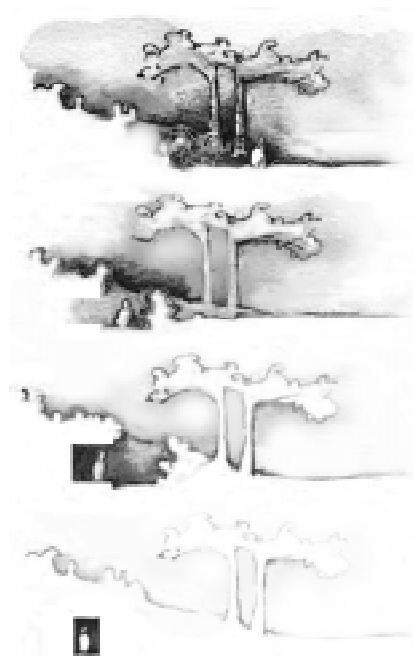
The cellar instills a sense of peace. Pure real things make this emotion: unchanging dim quiet, and absolute withdrawn enclosure. These real things are more *present* next to their contrasting extremes (dazzling sunshine followed by quiet dimness, vast space followed by massive constriction).

The cellar is entered from the patio, a busy extension of the central hall. It is a spacious path joining the interior house, the courtyard, and the car port. Lying half out of doors, its character changes extravagantly with dry baking heat, bathwater downpours, bitter midnight wind.

The cellar is carved from a monolithic solid, underground, partially excavated. Descending from the patio, the wide sky is covered by a translucent vine roof; a sun soaked breeze stills to dark green quiet. Around tight corners, space constricts. Inside the solid, air is always dry, light is always dim, and dust rarely stirs.

These places intensify one another. The remaining design decisions utilize a range of extremes to lend real things a *presence*.





c e n t r a l h a l l
r e t r e a t e d r o o m s

Each house is centralized about a great hall. The courtyard, front door, common lawn, kitchen, bedrooms, study, and sitting room open directly onto this space.

I sit on the couch, by the fire, talking, as my brother sets the table; the smell of gumbo simmering when Mom and Dad walk in from the lawn, Dad clomping feet and clanking wine bottles. Traffic and activity focus here.

Rooms retreating from the hall are dead ends. The reflecting pool is a special place, visited rarely but intentionally, never passed *through*. Its stillness would be compromised by passers by. Independent of one another, these are withdrawn spaces.



parking area

wine cellar

JL-7

JL-5

bedroom lawn

patio

extended
bedroom-
bath-patio

bath

bedroom

kitchen

storage

heater

bedroom

storage

reflecting pool

bath

storage

storage

laundry
room

central hall

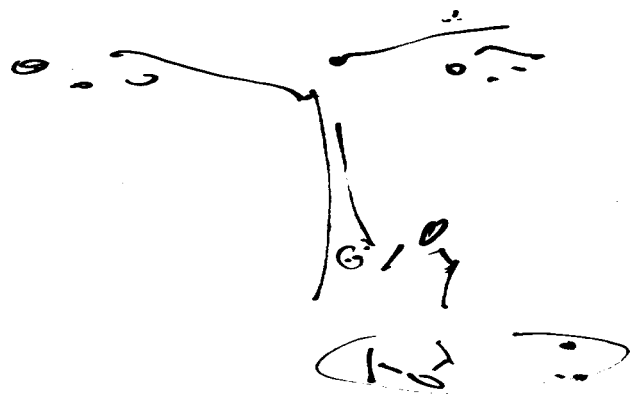
sitting room

storage

fire room

study

common lawn



f l o w i n g s p a c e
a n d e n c l o s u r e

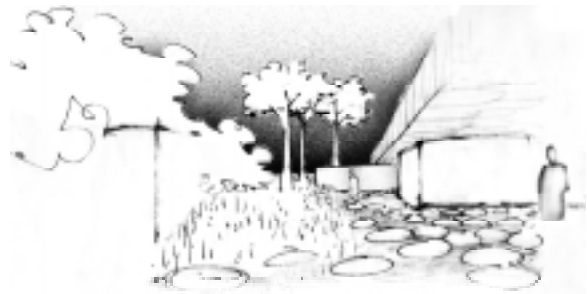
Each central hall flows, without a clear stopping point, south into its courtyard and north onto the common lawn. In the midst of a spring shower, it is sheltered warm and dry, but open to the damp breeze making the sycamores rustle, creak and drip. It is part of a continuous space, in touch with the day, a few steps from a gathering on the lawn.

Rooms retreating from the hall are *enclosed*. Carved from a monolith, constricted around corners, deep inside a solid, space is filled by one person.

An enclosed room has a limited communication with an open, active space. Through a narrow slot in the study squeezes dimmed daylight, muted barking, the remains of a breeze. Hints of inaccessible vastness intensify the enclosure.







f l o w i n g s p a c e a n d e n c l o s u r e

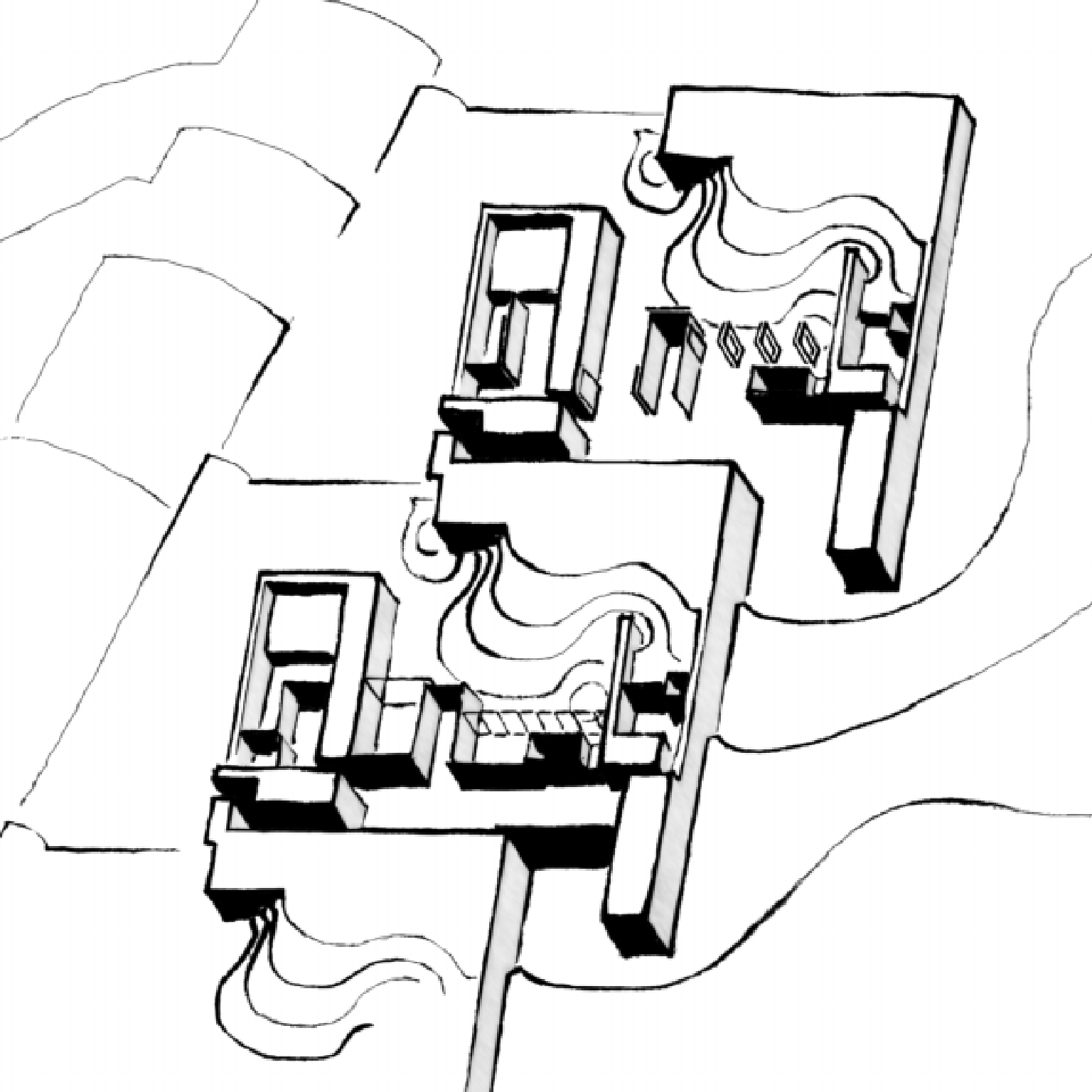
m u t a b l e s p a c e s

Places change with seasons and moods. During overcast February, the hall closes from a breezy pavilion to a snug cave. Winter has a *tangible presence* in the real things that now materialize: foggy light filtering through the clerestory; dim quiet surrounding a crackling fire.

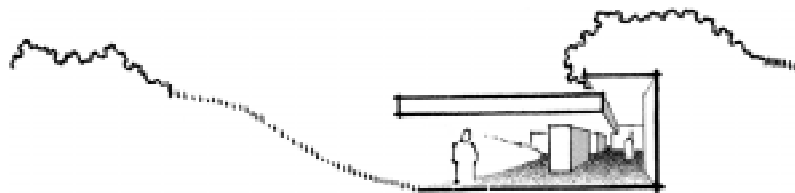
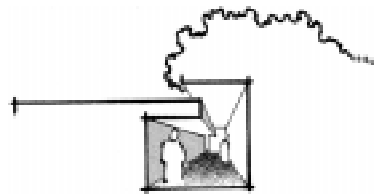
A closed back door separates the central hall and common lawn. No longer bleeding into one another, the house is absolutely removed from barking dogs and undesired company.

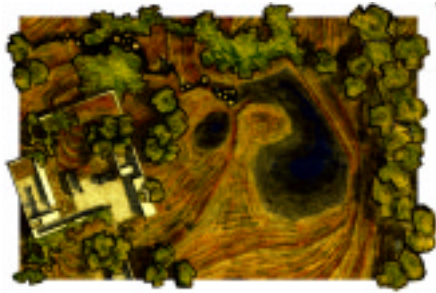
The wetland transforms rhythmically through the day and season. Gurgling snowmelt overflows. Midnight frogs chorus from the warm, inky black. Red and yellow sycamores mirror deep into the pond. Frost glazes under January stars. The wetland is consistently remarkable, new each day.

Mutability lends a range of experiences to each place. These experiences highlight one another, keeping one another fresh. Furthermore, these changes give a physical presence to the earth's rhythms, to solitude and social connection.



February and July





m u t a b l e s p a c e s

d i s t i l l a t i o n

A particular mode of architectural design runs parallel to Hemingway's methodology. Emotional connections are focused to the handful the architect *knows*. Every real thing that causes the emotion is collected, then boiled down, leaving only the most pure. The building's form is centered about giving these pure things a *presence*.

"The arts inspire, if not complement one another, at least to lend one another new energies." (Watts) Hemingway drew from painters and composers, and developed a methodology that does indeed lend new energies to other arts. Clear lucid simplicity, the ability to share deep emotion with a single act, is an ideal of all art alike.

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