

The Light in the Forest

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ABSTRACT

A house was designed to express the clearing in which it stands. The site was analyzed in terms of the elements that lend themselves to architecture. The character of light, space and order contribute to the overall design of the house. Thus the house can be said to be an expression of the natural beauty of its site.

Table of Contents

The Clearing	1
Biography and Criticism	7
Renderings and Assembly Drawings	10
Section and Details	19
Photographs of Model	20
References	42



The Clearing

A world within a world.
Light within the shady darkness of the forest.
A release from being lost under the trees.
An orientation.
An opening on the ground.
An opening to the sky.
Light spills down and moves in the eddy of atmosphere enclosed in the edge of trees.
An edge of trees in silhouette.
An edge of light spilling out faintly.
Bright in the morning.
Deeply colored in the afternoon.
A light in a dark world.
Magic.
A place of heightened awareness.
A volume of light.
The air is warmer, and rises toward the sun.
Cool forest air is pulled in.
Not a place of hiding, a place of finding, being found.

Man makes a clearing
when he removes vegetation from only part of a plot
of land for his buildings.
What is the nature of a work of architecture
that expresses the act and experience of a clearing
Man has made for himself?
There are at least three categories of questions he
might ask the clearing:
what does the clearing say about light, space and or-
der?





Light

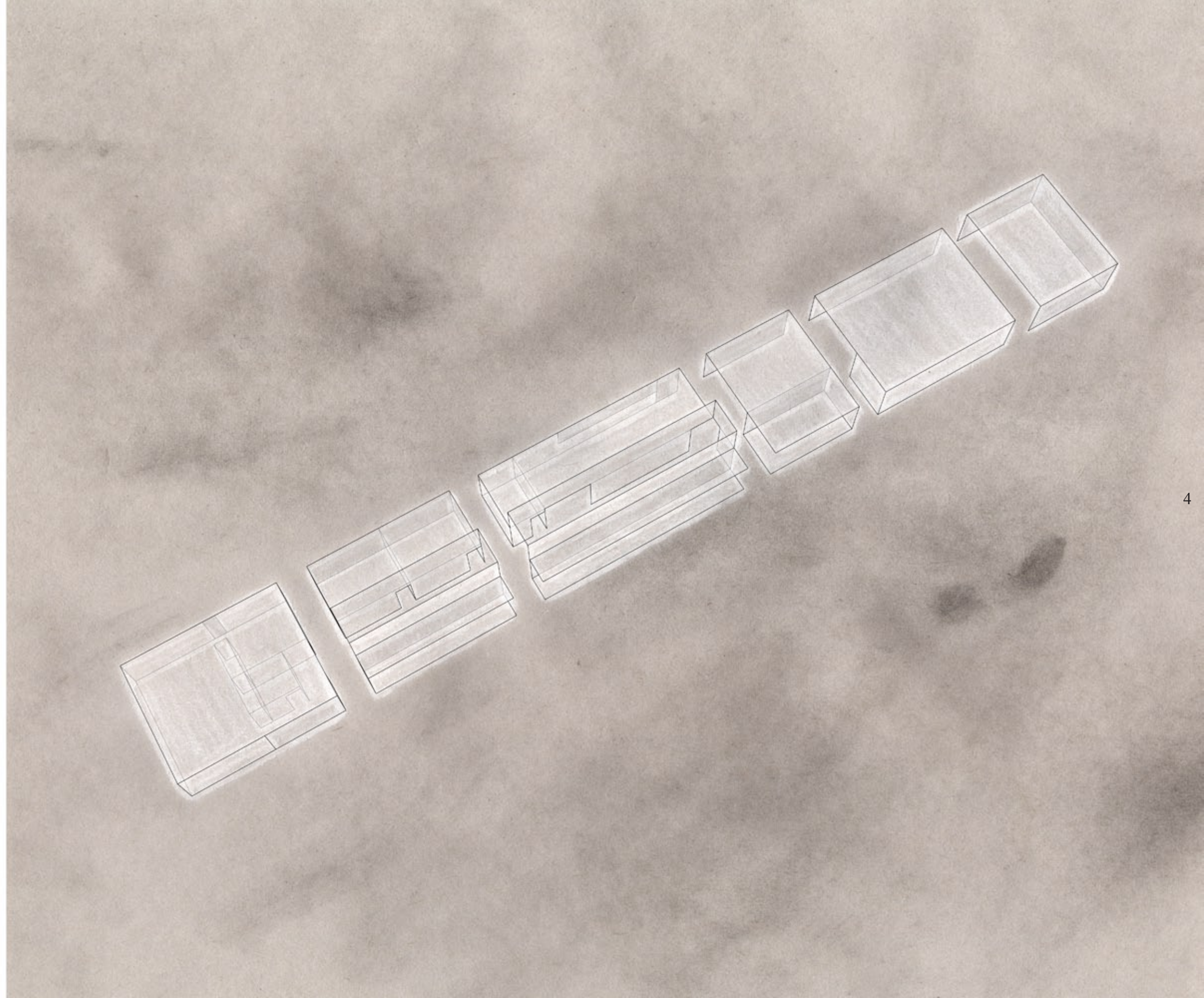
In general,
the light shines down through the opening to the sky
into the space contained
within the tree line and the ground,
reflected light that spills beyond the edges
in what is perceived as a glow.

In particular,
as the sun moves across the sky,
the character of the glow changes in intensity.

Space

The inner space of the clearing
is a volume of light,
contained within the line of trees
and open to the sky.

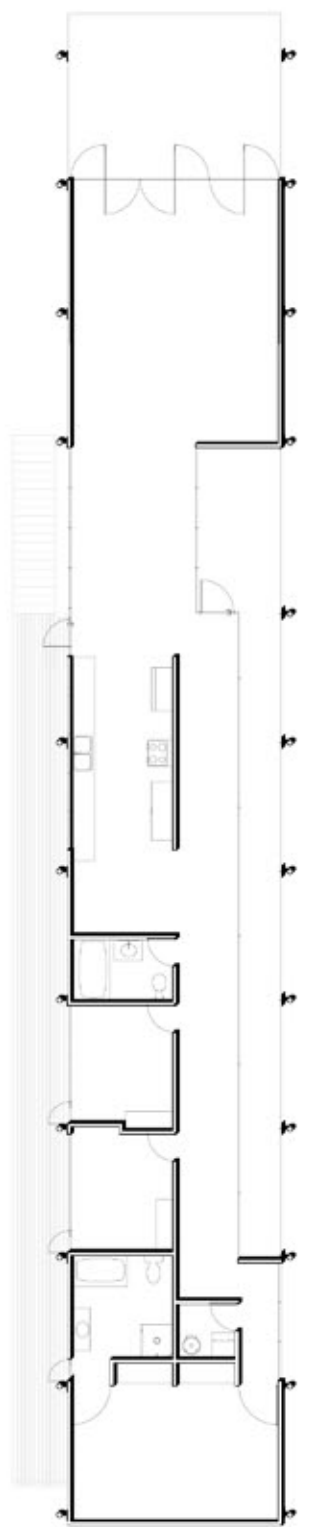
There is a physical difference
between the inside and the outside.
The bright inside appears as a contained, felt, space,
an atmospheric presence,
distinct from the outside.



Order

There is an order
to the light and space of the clearing:
a vertical axis,
which is perceived in the opening to the sky
and the vertical direction of the tree line –
a directional axis,
which is perceived in the horizontal planes of sky,
tree line and ground –
and an axis of reflected light,
which in this particular case
runs perpendicular to the directional axis,
dictating the glowing of the volume of light.





Biography and Criticism

Biography of the Idea

There is a resemblance between a clearing and a house lit up at night. Both share a central lighted volume of space, an outer darkness, and an edge between them that consists of both high contrast and a glowing spillage of light from inside to outside.

The character of the inside is light-filled and contained space. When you look at the house at night, you see the inside space more than the silhouette of the enclosure.

I wanted to recreate the night condition, and translate it to daytime using natural light.

The first response was a long light well, with a form that played on the axis of the clearing.

The juxtaposition of the light well with the atmospherically different contained space brought to mind the image of an aquarium. An aquarium seemed an archetype known as containing an atmosphere quite distinct from the outside.

I did not want a glass box. I needed walls to capture the light and reflect it out through openings.

As for the enclosure, this became an extension of the image of the aquarium. Besides the windows,



Korman Residence, Louis I. Kahn



Night condition.



Day; interior photo-edited.



Day; interior and exterior photo-edited.

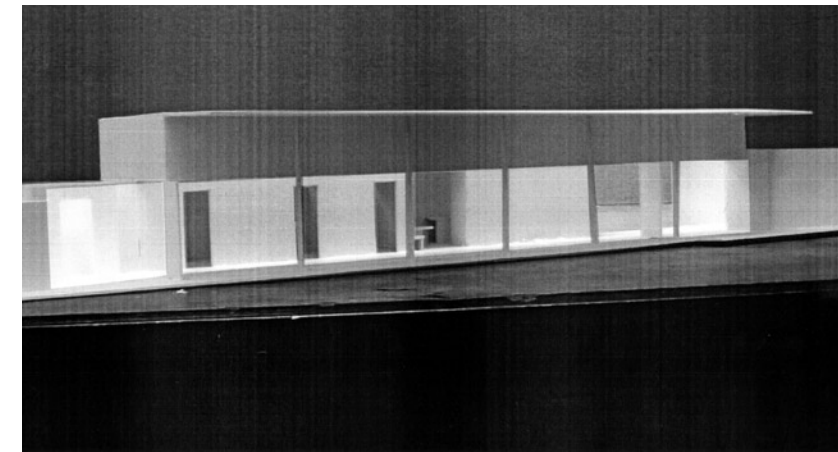
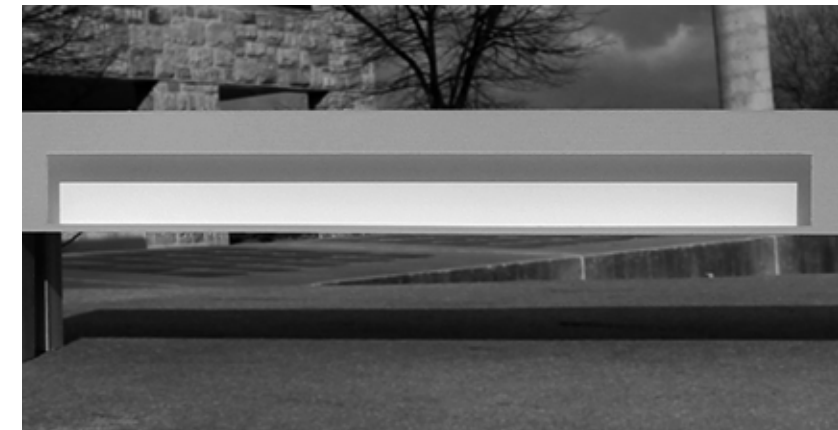
it is normal for aquariums to have black edges that disappear into the background, while the eye is instead drawn to the bright space within.

I wanted a weather-enclosure that would fade into the background. Differing light and color values were studied. Since I wanted the inner space to be primary, it was important for the weather-enclosure to “disappear” into the background of the site.

Of course black and white was the obvious solution: faced with a stark contrast the eye has to choose one or the other colors. Therefore, the inner white space would be the primary focal choice of the observer. The black exterior would fade into the background shadows. This type of contrast is also informed by the clearing – its dark trees on the edge of the bright inside.

In addition, two other types of contrast presented themselves. White appears more intense when coupled with an off-white color. The off-white leads the eye towards the white. Consider on oil painting – if an object is to be painted some off-white color, the most reflective areas of the object are painted a bright white.

This white against almost-white pointed towards a differentiation of space through planes and volumes. White on white relies more on shadows and glowing gradients. This perception of depth is contrasted to the apparent 2-dimensional plane of



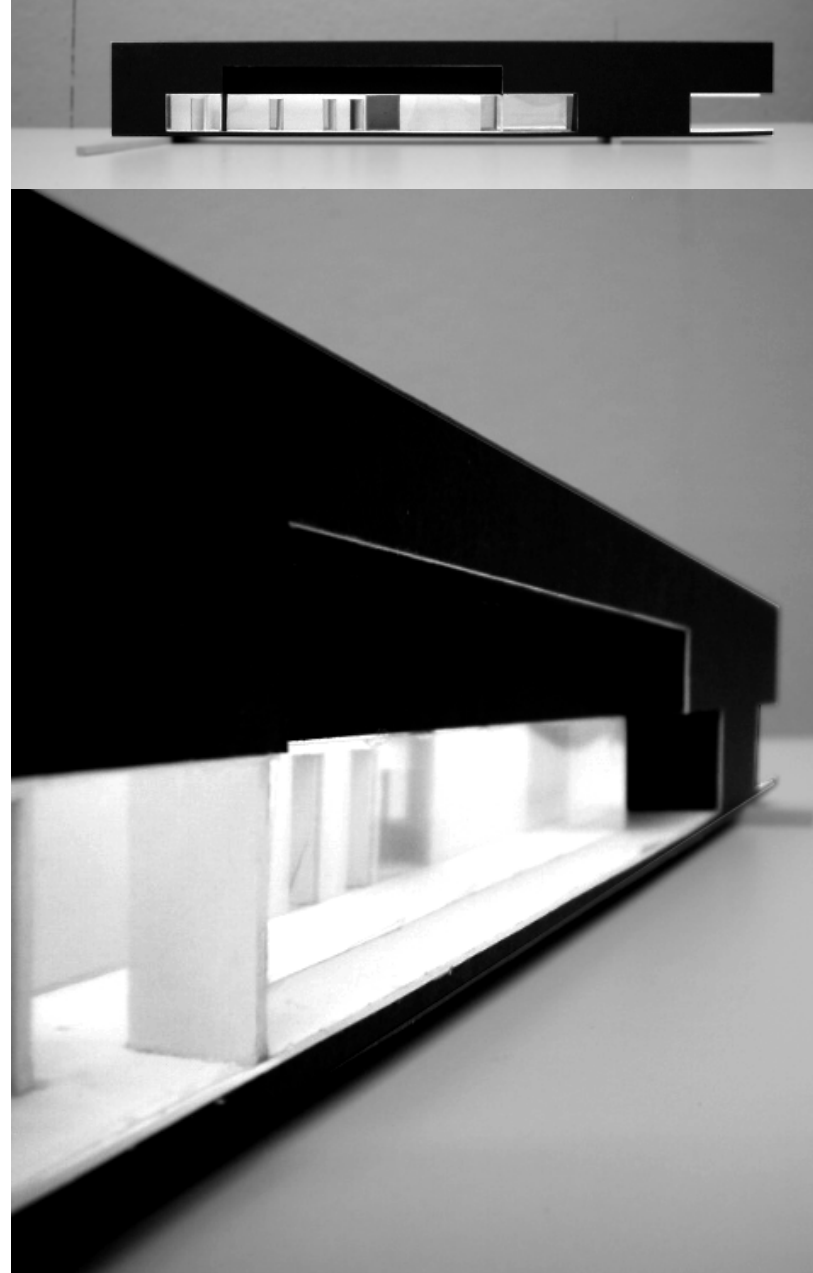
the clearing's edge condition – the immediate tree line.

I began to explore the idea of a box – a simple container – black on the exterior, white on the interior, with large window-walls allowing a clear perception of the inside space and allowing this light-volume to spill and glow around the joints of the window and black exterior.

The white, glowing, interior space started to take on the image of a cloud that wanted to float in the clearing – a cloud being a sort of concrete symbol of atmosphere.

The outer black exterior weather-enclosure dematerialized into two rows of black columns that both lifted the cloud-space up into the air, and extended past the cloud-space, further enhancing the idea of the cloud-space floating between the tree line of the clearing.

I knew from the start that the long light well might result in an excess of a good thing. While the placement and dimensions of the light well would be a solution, I wanted some areas of the house to have a distinct atmosphere of their own – one with a cooler light – more indirect, more cave-like. So the walls began to take on a rhythm of transparent and opaque planes. In addition, further playing on the idea of a cave in the clearing, I made two large, windowless rooms on either side of the illuminated hallway – relying on their light from adjacent



areas.

This spatial-light differentiation also appears in the breakfast nook of the kitchen. Its low ceiling and windowless shade strike a gentle contrast to the bright hallway – inviting intimacy.

This arrangement of bright and variably shady rooms set off the hallway as an inner clearing itself. Perhaps the light well and the hallway preserve the original clearing within the house's outward expression of that clearing.

Form and Material

Material is important to me. While the play of forms may strike at the emotions via the intellect, the perception of materiality “tunes” our senses via the emotions – a sensual sensitivity.

In this project, materials seemed to be important for the control of light. However, I took the position that the form should take priority in being the necessary instrument for controlling light, and that materiality should only strengthen the expression.

My position has evolved to see how both form and material are necessary for complex, timeless expression. That is, the necessity of expression of form through material.

Take, for example a Greek sculpture.



There is an expression of the idea, which is the form. Though we may accept that the form is greater than the sum of the parts, in a work of art – in its totality – form without materiality is empty abstraction. The strongest form would be but a shout – loud but soon forgotten.

Perhaps this criticism places undue restriction on the tectonic, as opposed to the sculptured.

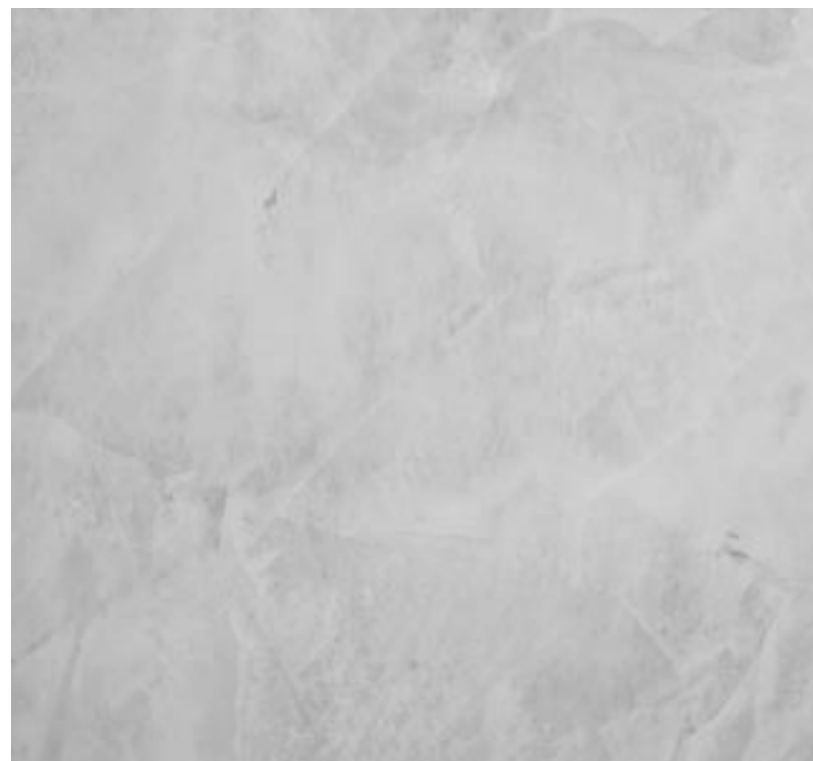
In this project, a light architecture was desired, so a steel and wood structure, covered in paint and polished stucco was chosen. Thus, here is a form skinned in material, rather than a form that grows out of the material.

This question is open-ended and will be an on-going search.

Imitation of Nature

The one who makes architecture stands on the site. He watches the sun. If it is autumn, he smells the leaves. If it is winter, he smells the bark. If it is spring, he smells the air. If it is summer, he smells the ground. In all of this, he senses the site. He listens to the music of the site. His mind expresses a lyrical composition of the richness of his senses.

The intuition becomes a vision. The music becomes an image. He shares in Nature's song, and at the same time it is his own song like the voice of a bird. He doesn't think of

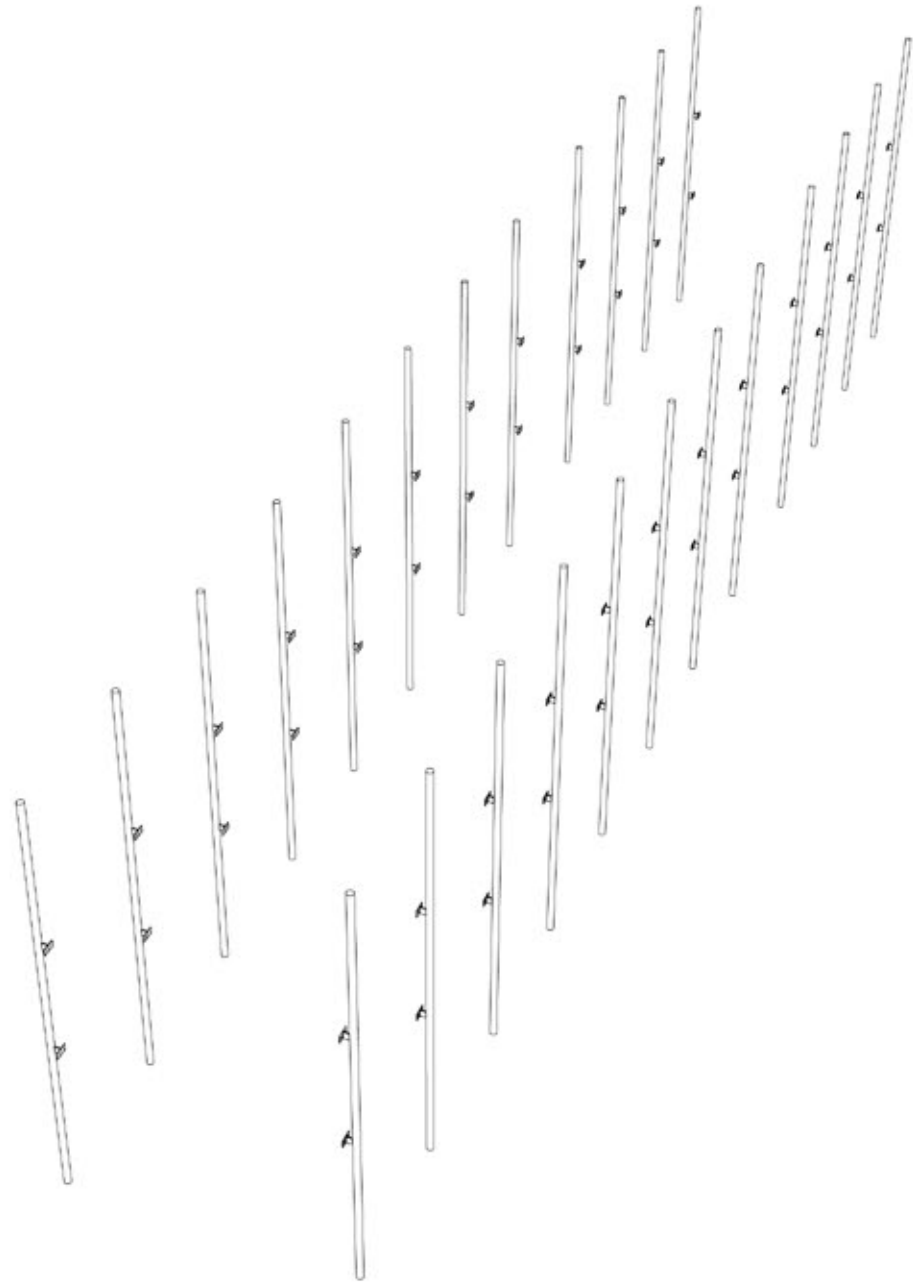


this as imitation. He sees Nature as something that exists beautifully, even if he never existed to see her. He sees Man living beautifully in that vision of Nature – only complementing Nature from necessity. He expresses a union of Nature and Man, with his personality and insight. And this is his imitation.

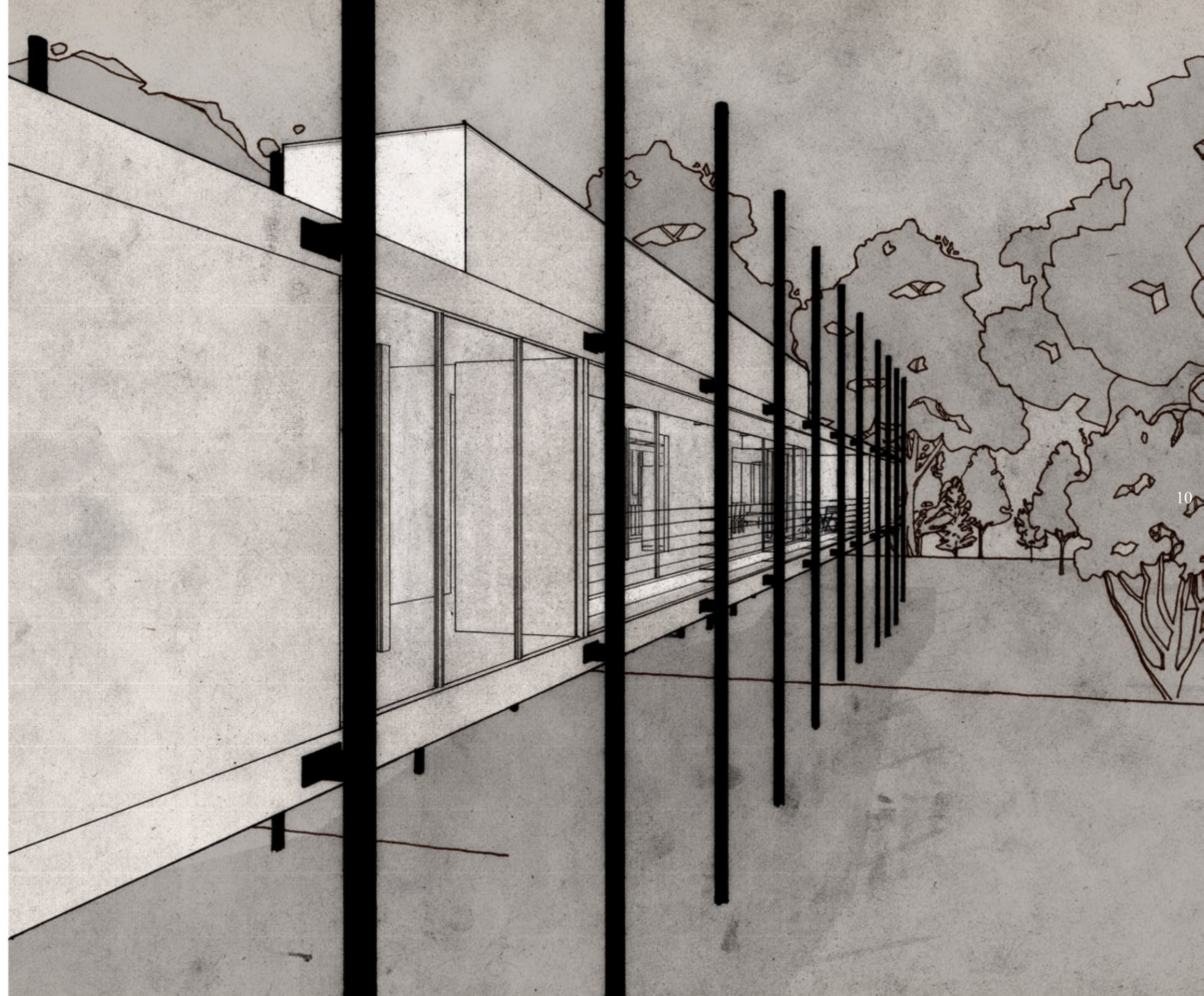
When I imitate Nature, I attempt to reveal Nature's presence through the man-made. I am concerned with the totalities of Nature, the concretes – not just the "Laws of Nature." I do not desire the mathematician's beauty – the elegance of an equation – but the complex beauty of a sunrise. The qualities of such phenomena can be analyzed, abstracted, re-cut and elicited through intension. However, the whole of the totalities are greater than their parts, and it is the meanings within these totalities that I attempt to understand through imitation.

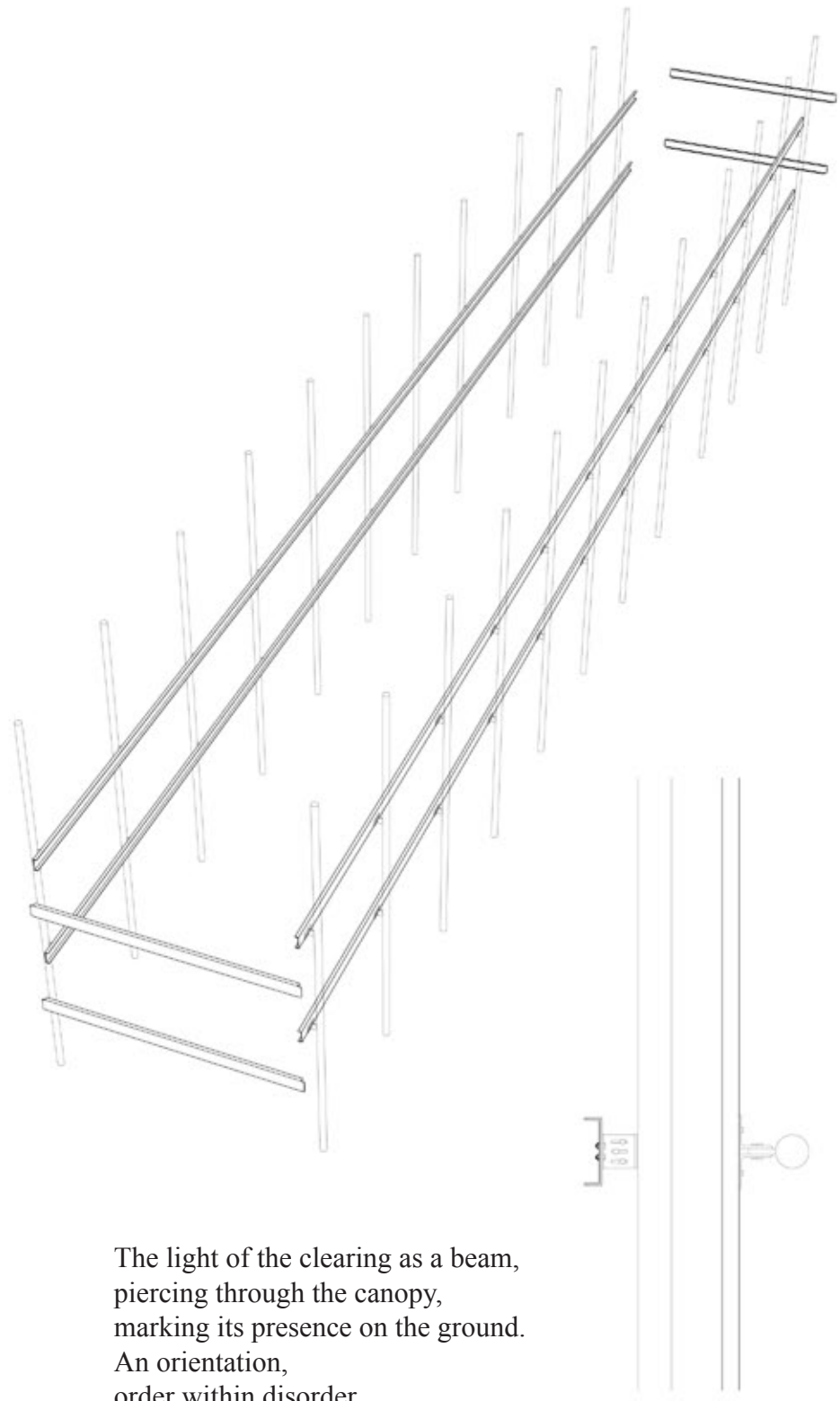
Why not imitate architecture? I do, but not exclusively. Self-referential expression becomes stale in isolation – like a boring ironic personality, retired from life. I find great inspiration from natural places. Let us be inspired by place, and complement and articulate place with human settlement. Let architecture not be a cultural object, but a man-made extension of the landscape that houses our cultural objects. Let our cultural objects orient us to our civilization. Let our architecture orient us to our natural world.



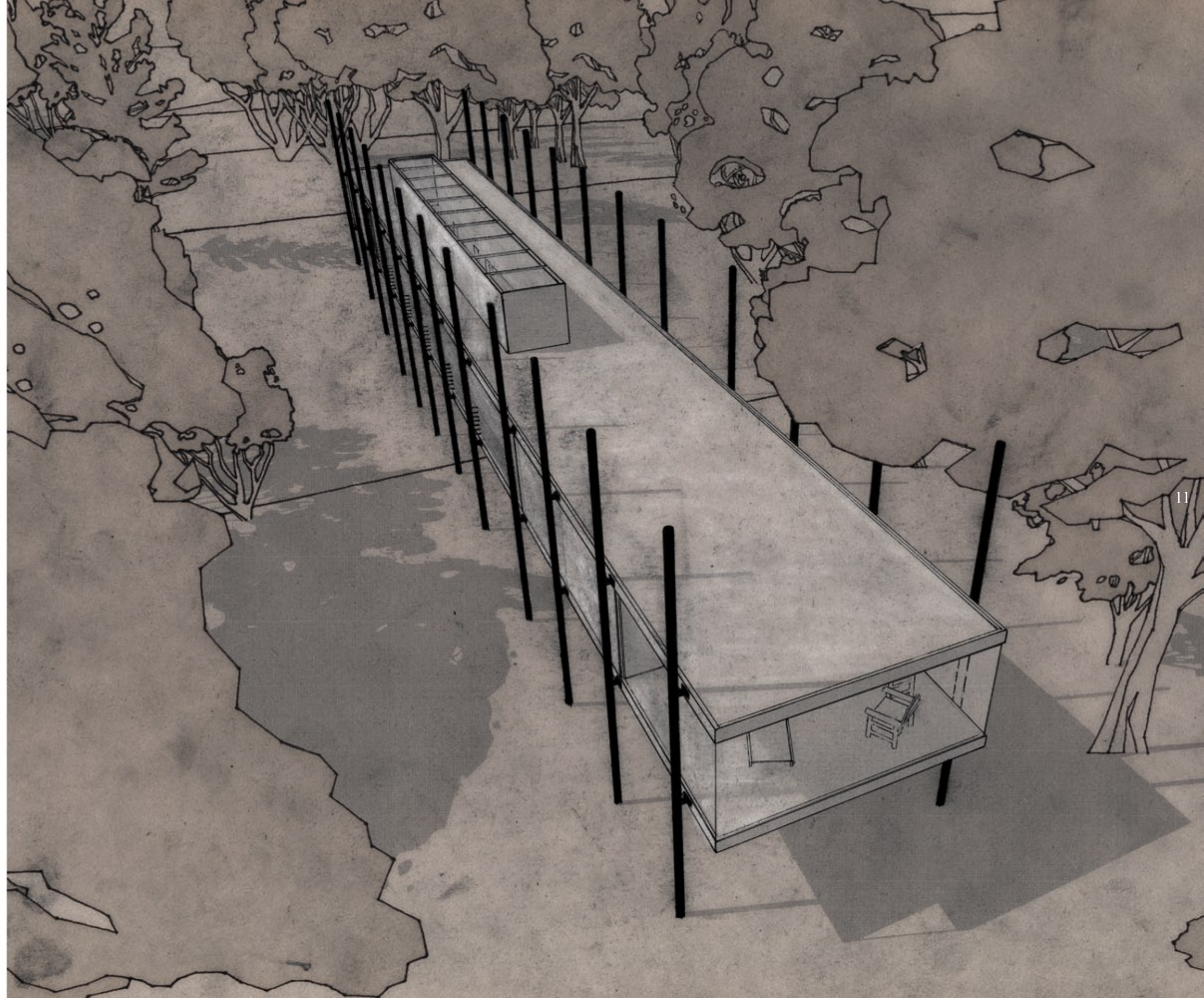


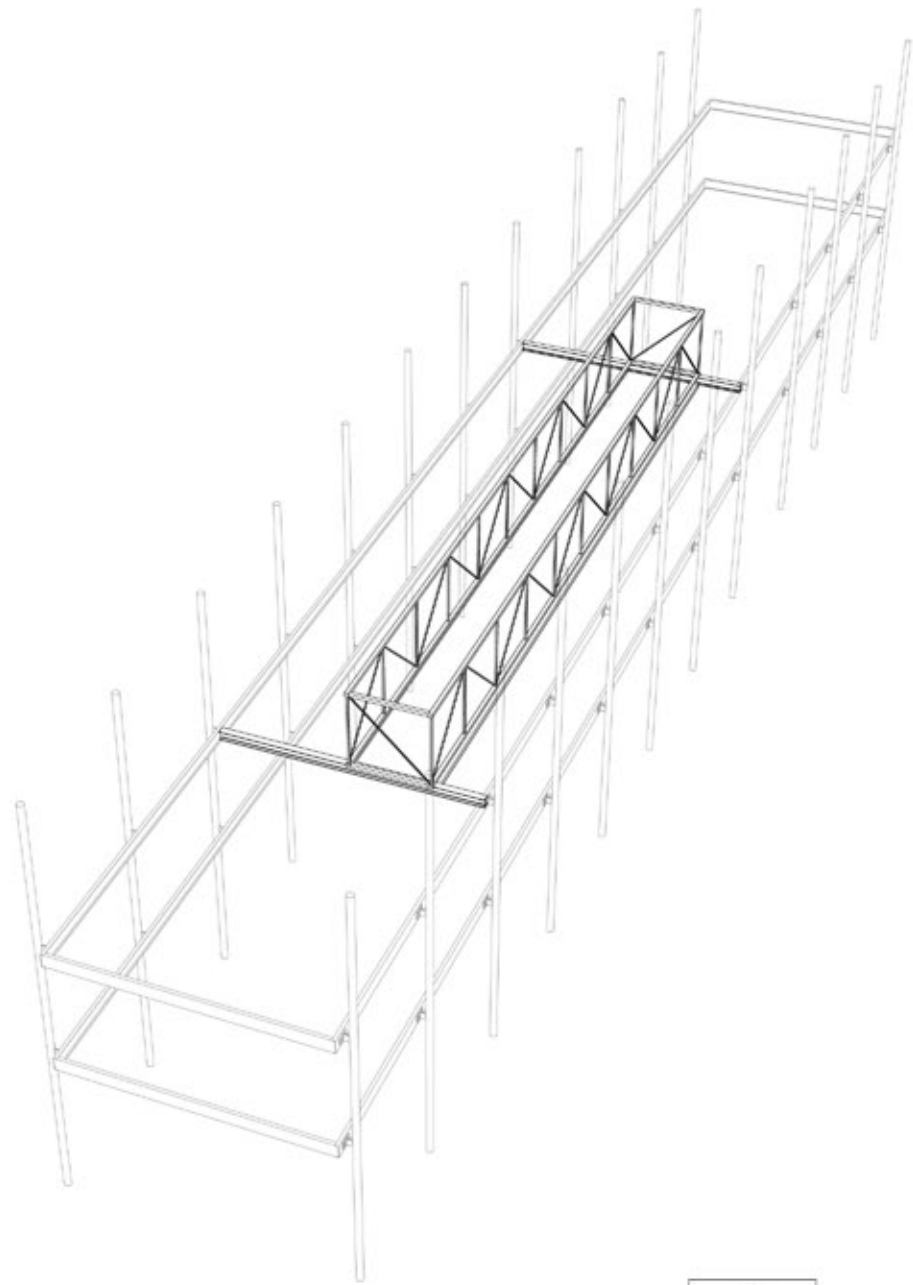
The light of the clearing in contrast to the shadow,
setting the trees in silhouette,
removing surface detail,
leaving only vertical shadows lifting from the forest
floor . . .

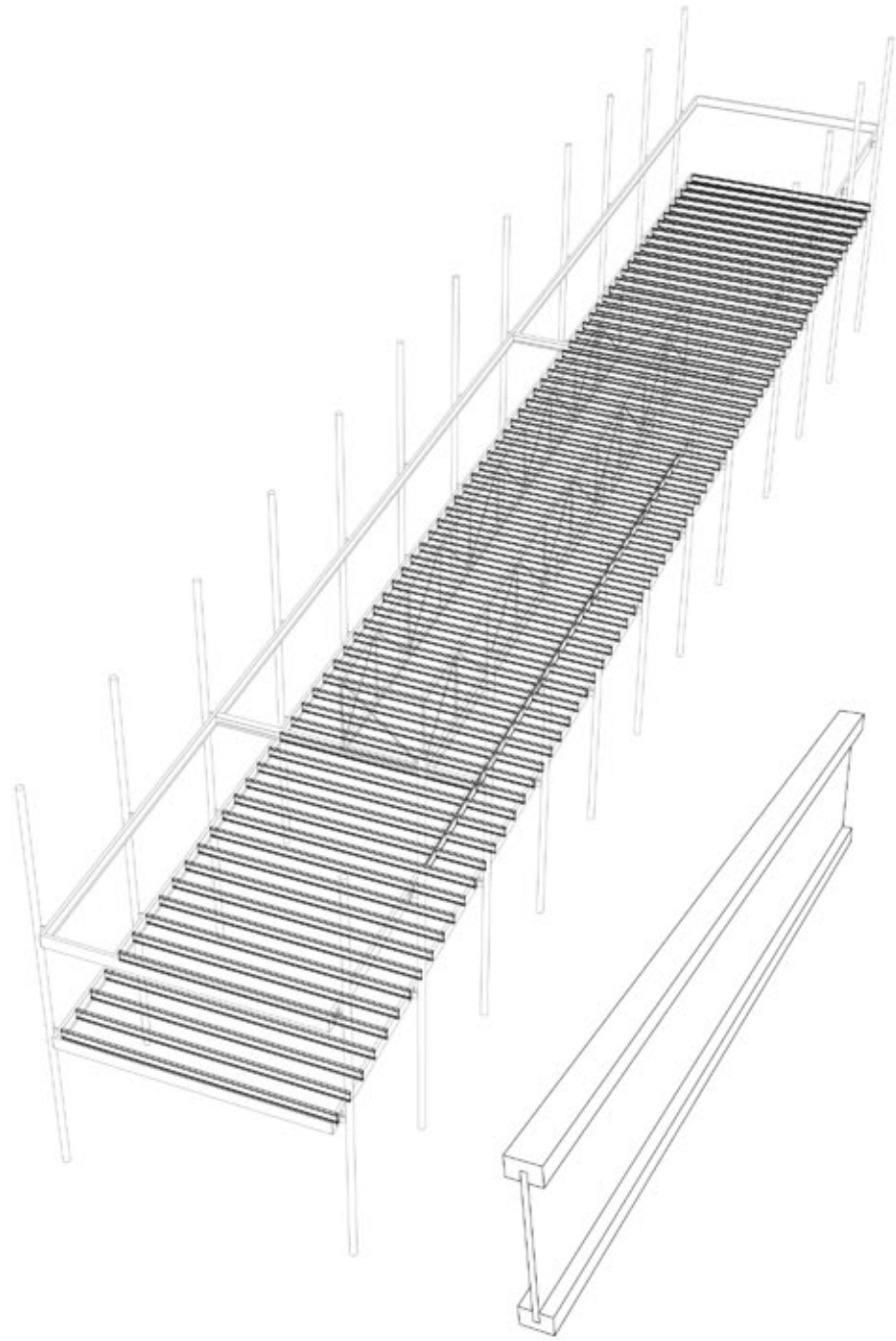




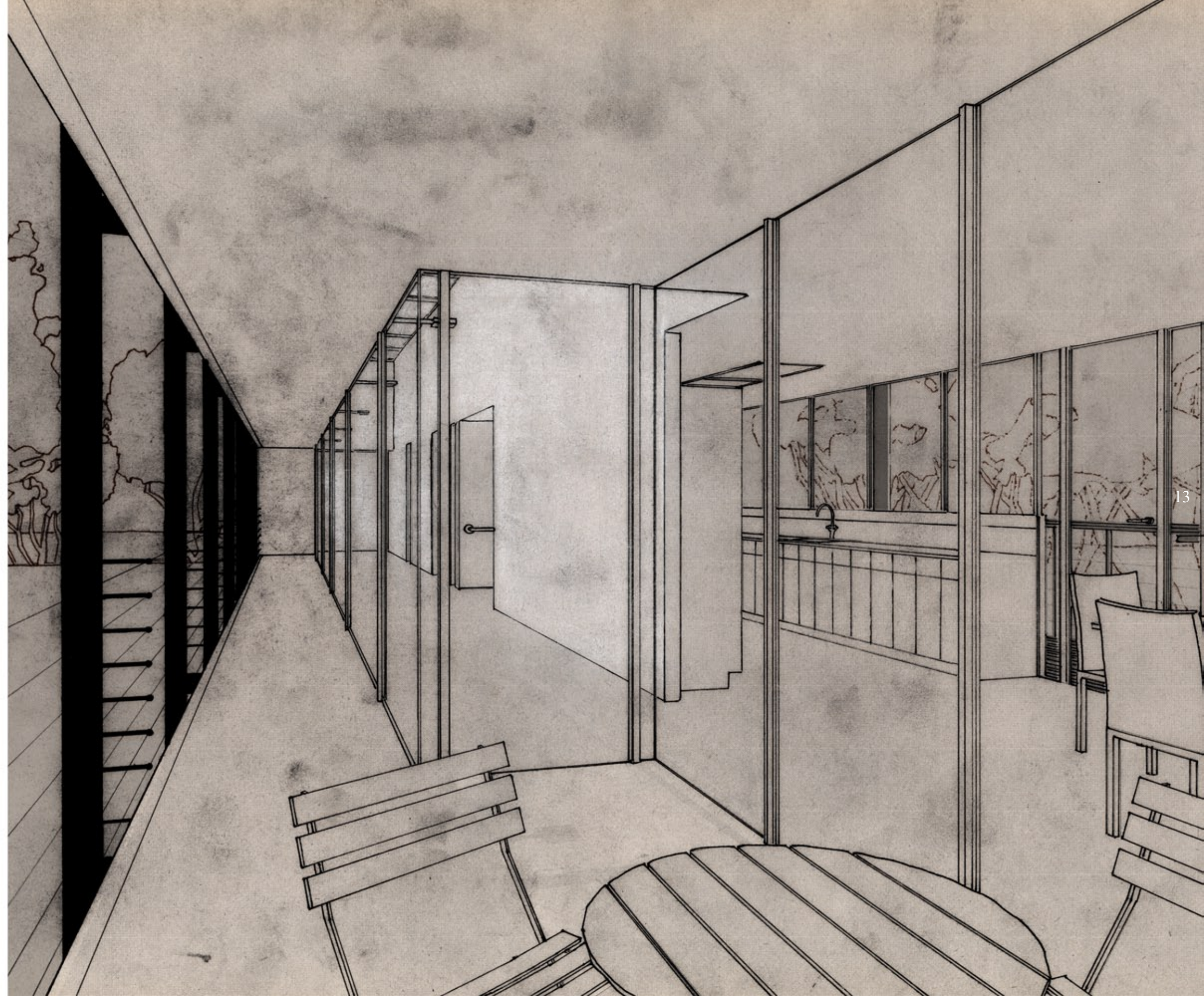
The light of the clearing as a beam,
piercing through the canopy,
marking its presence on the ground.
An orientation,
order within disorder . . .

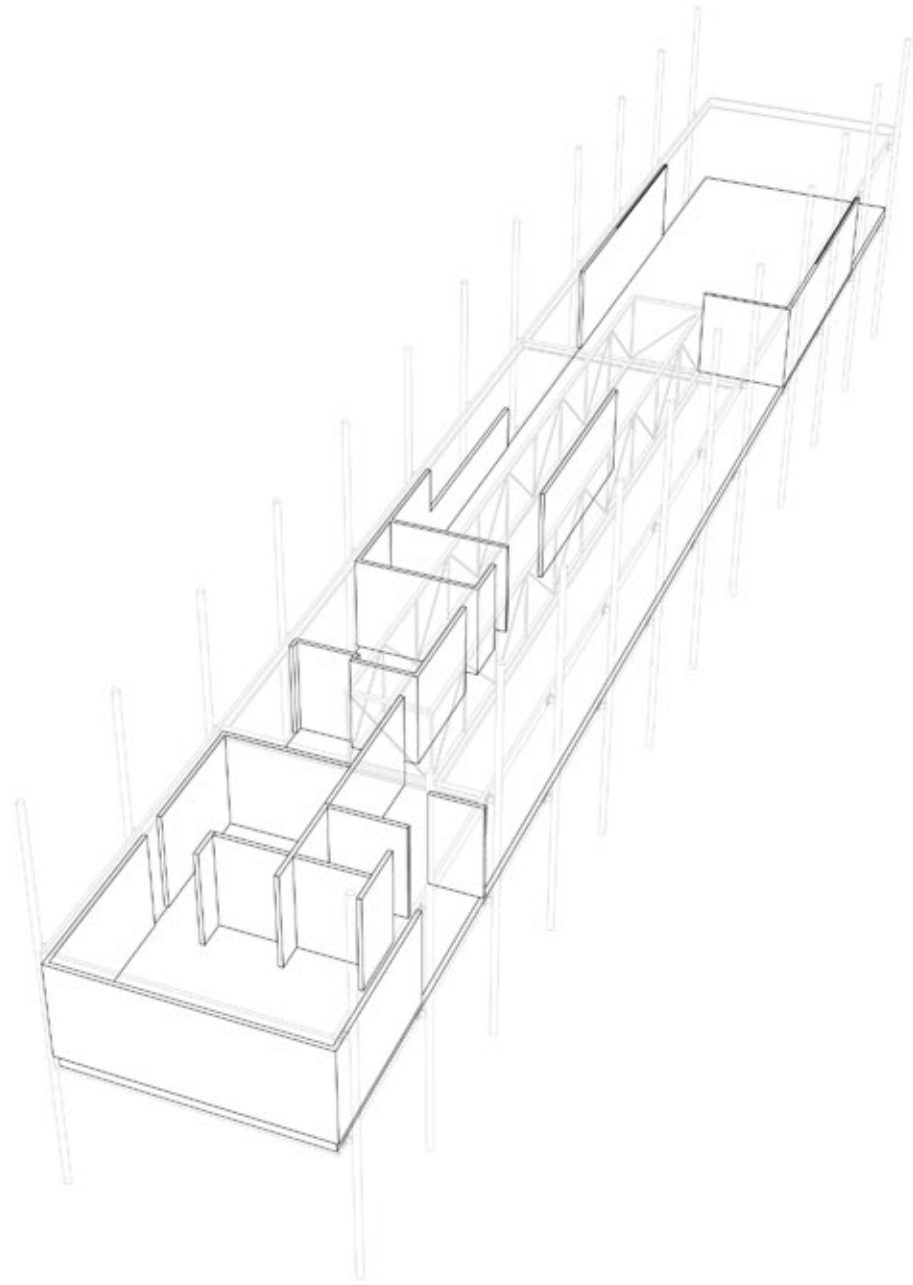






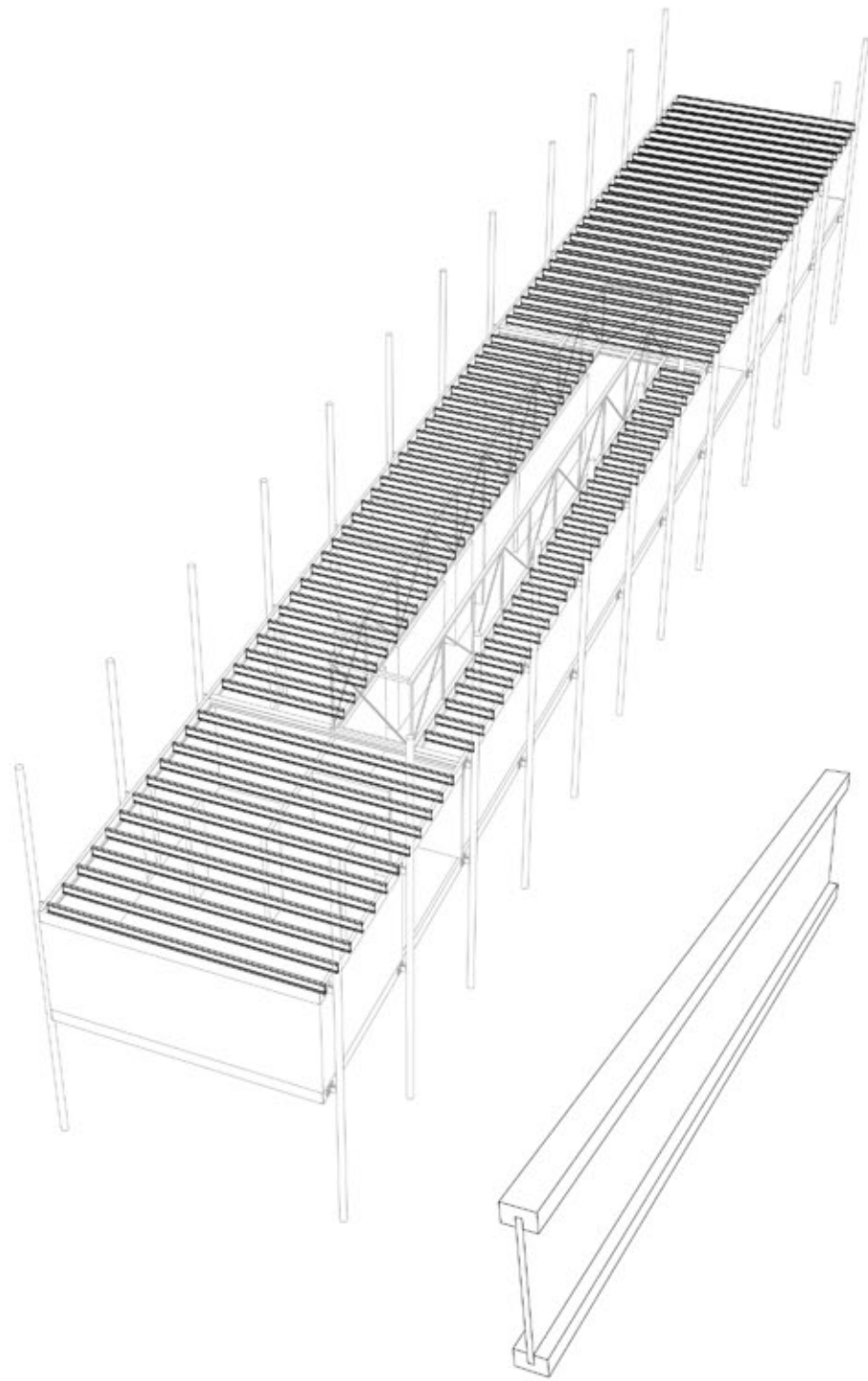
The inner space is a room of streaming light,
bright and intense,
set in contrast to the filtered light through the tree
canopy . . .





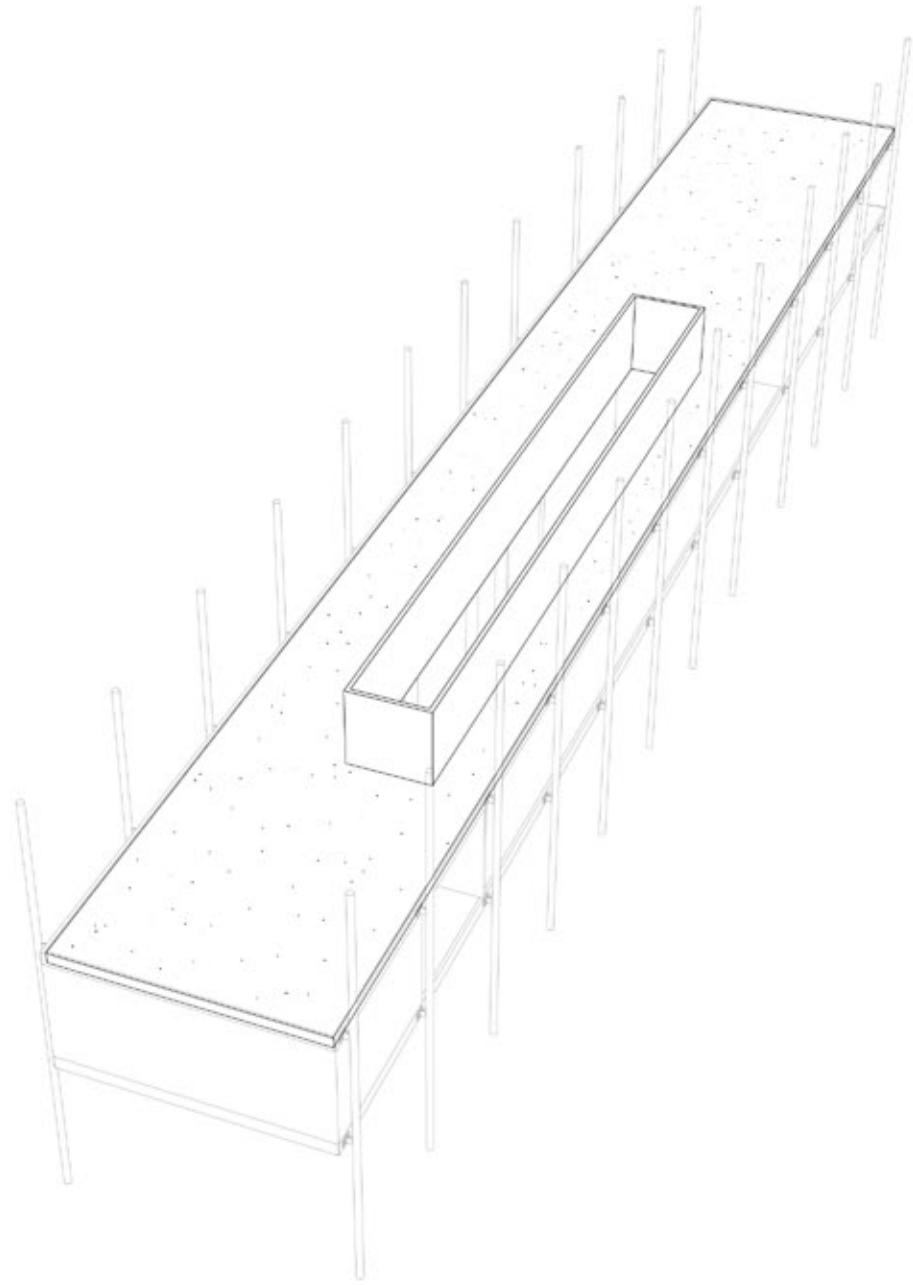
A clearing within a clearing . . .



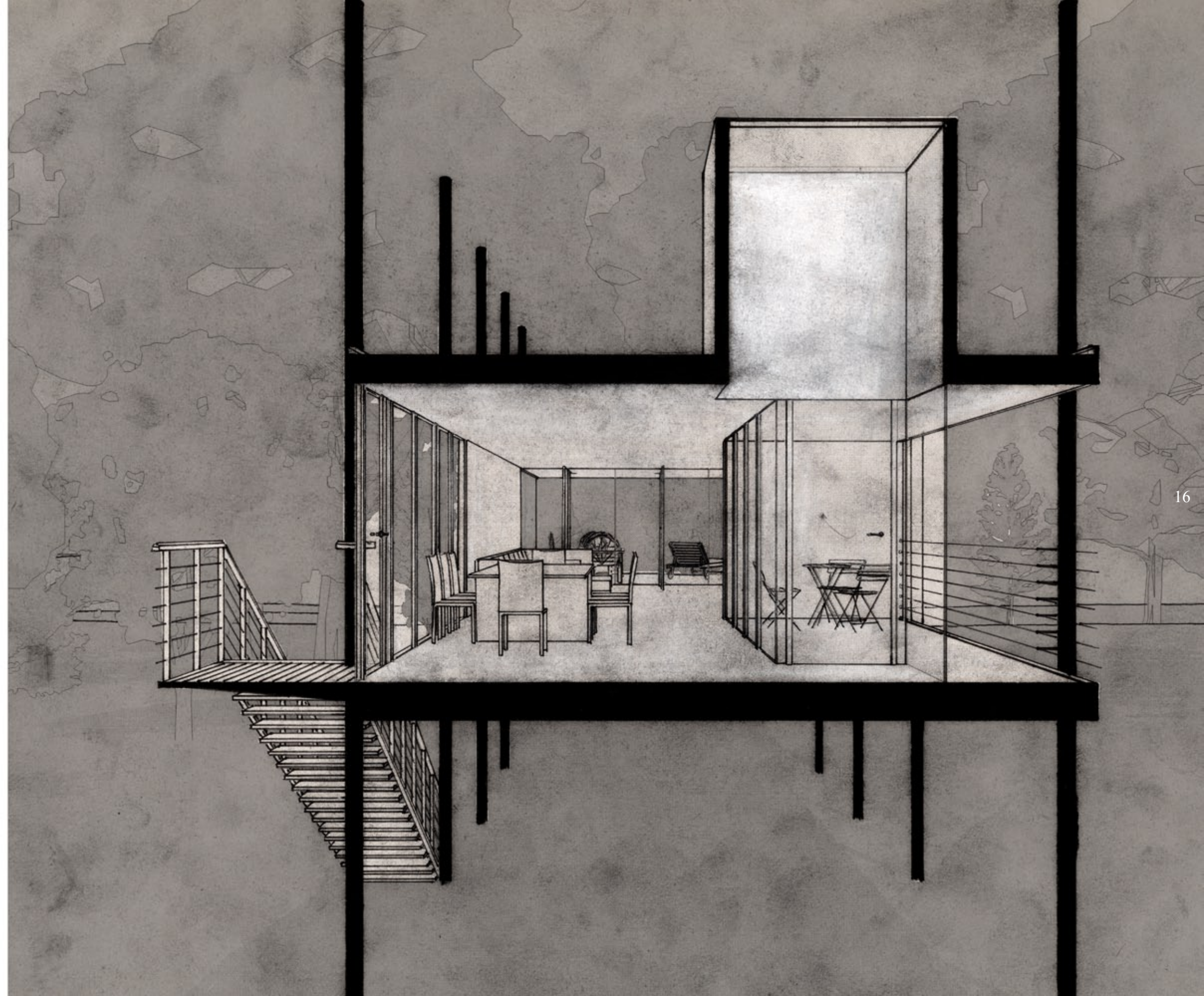


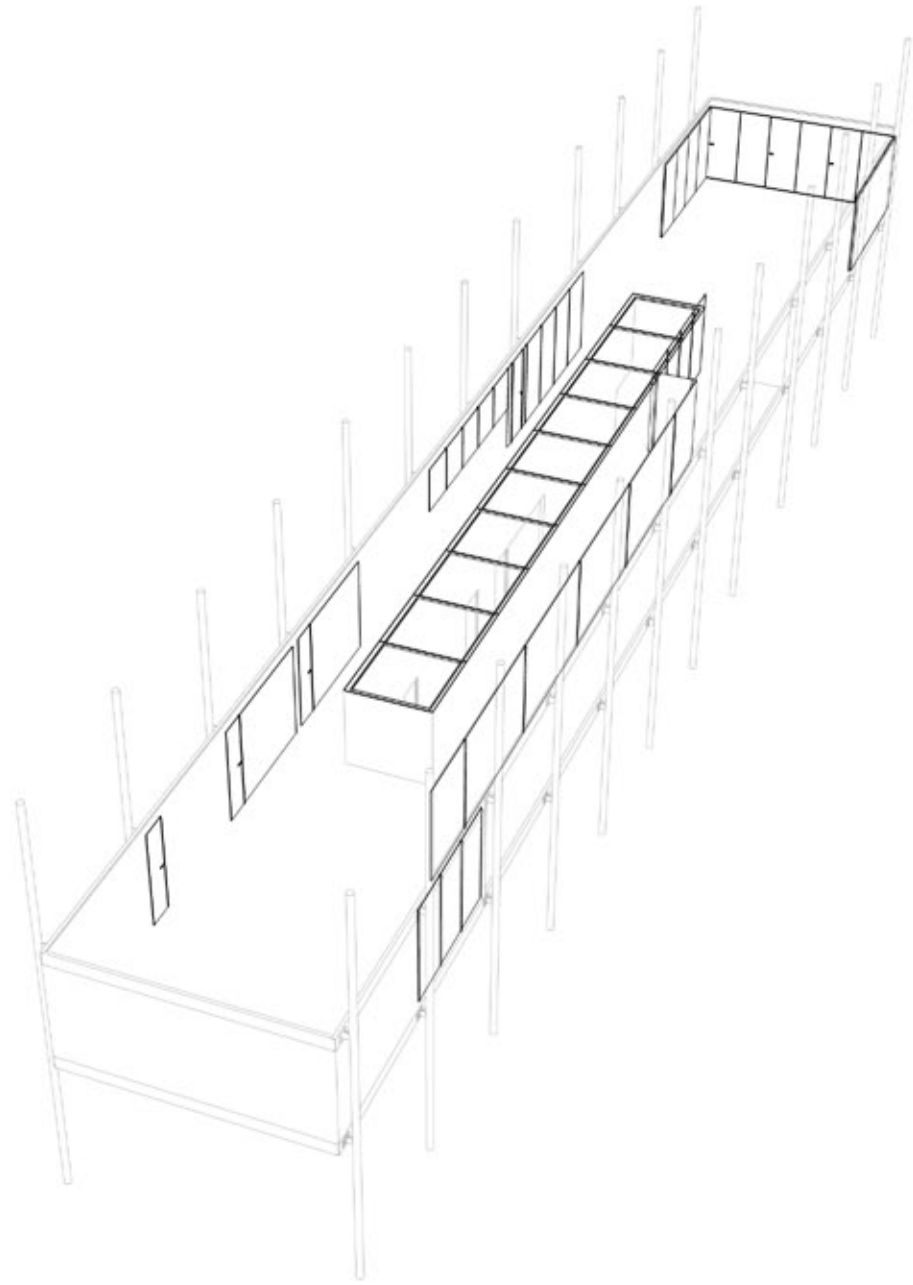
A cave within a clearing . . .



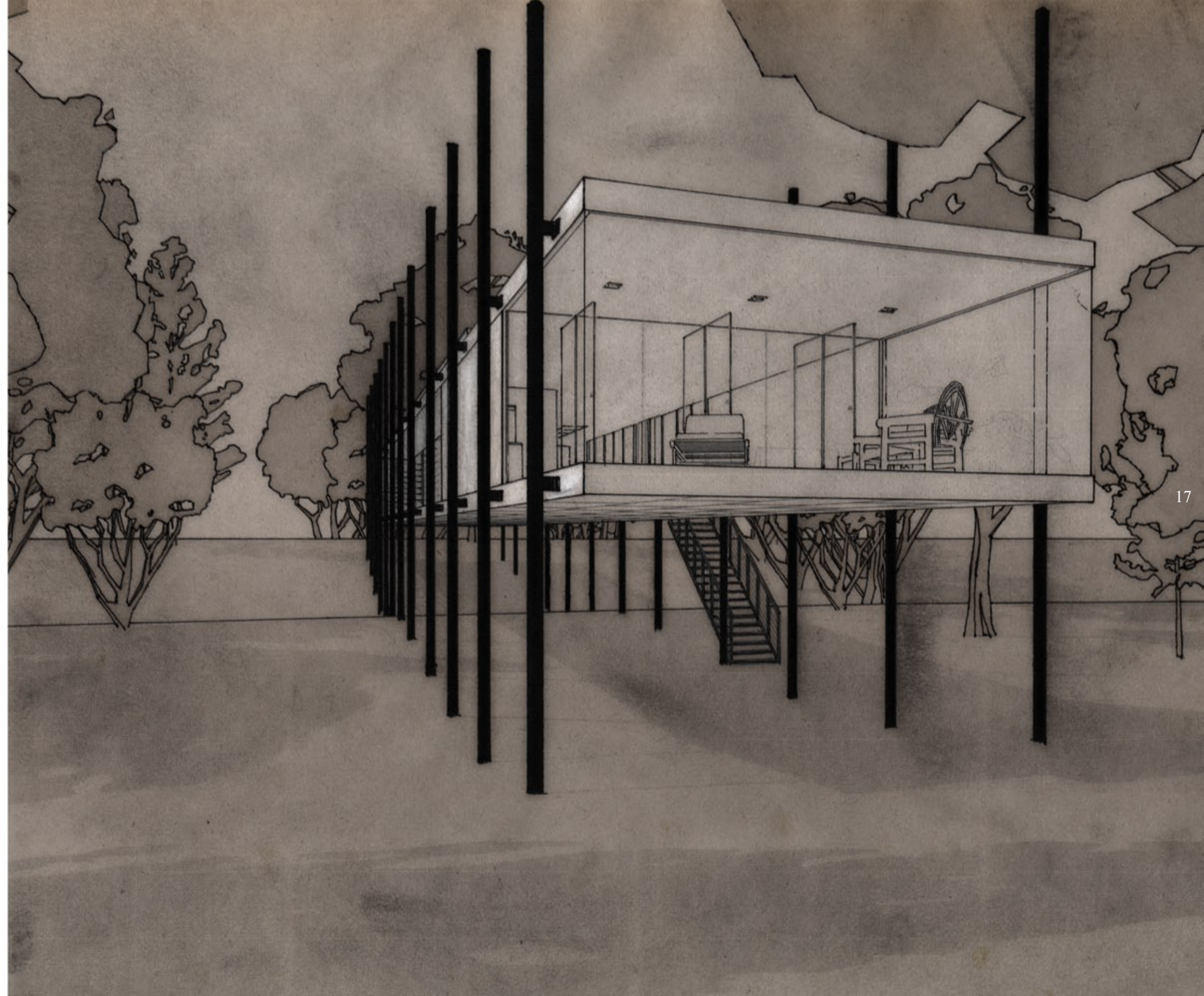


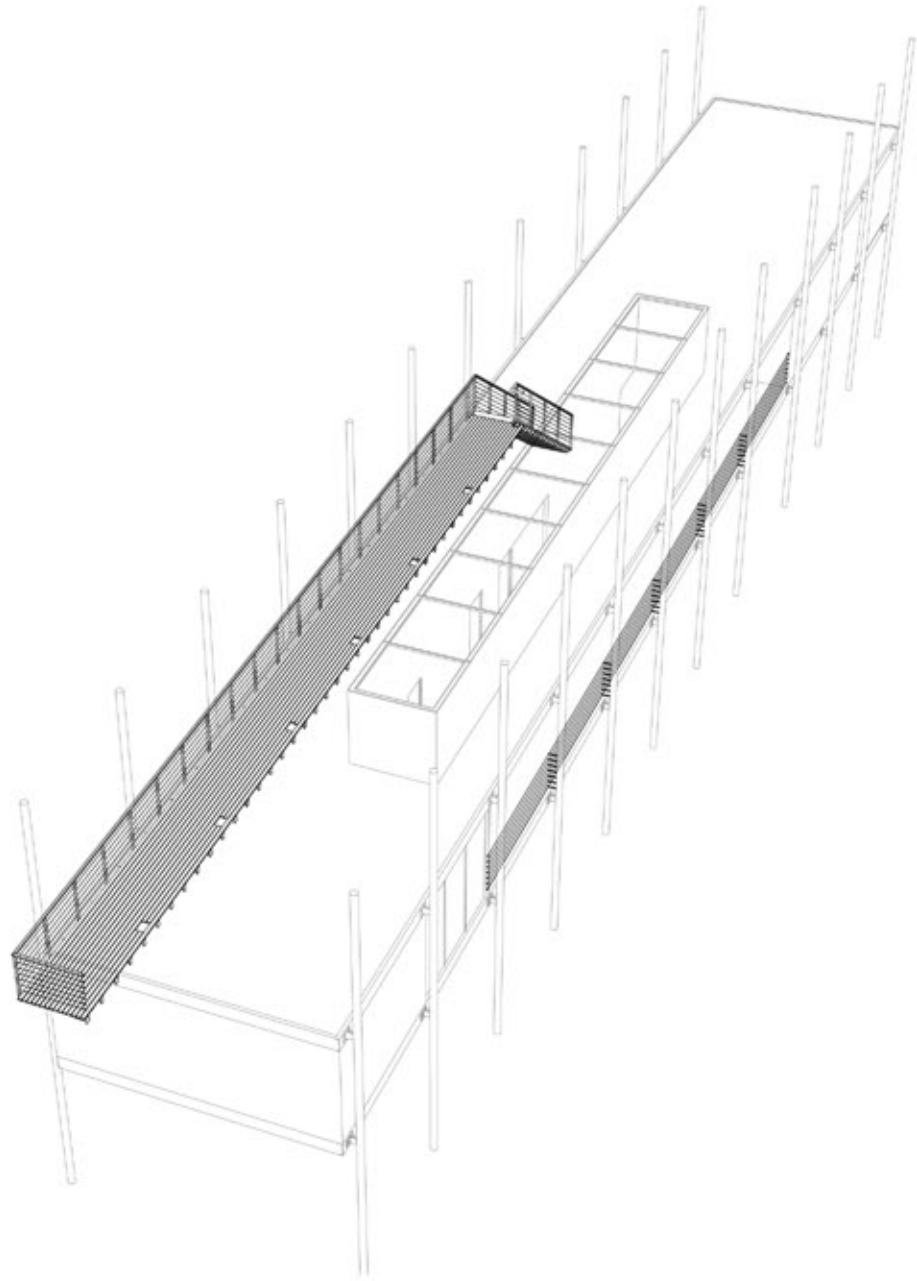
The spatial character of the clearing is a void,
a room within the forest,
warm, inviting,
uplifting to the sky . . .



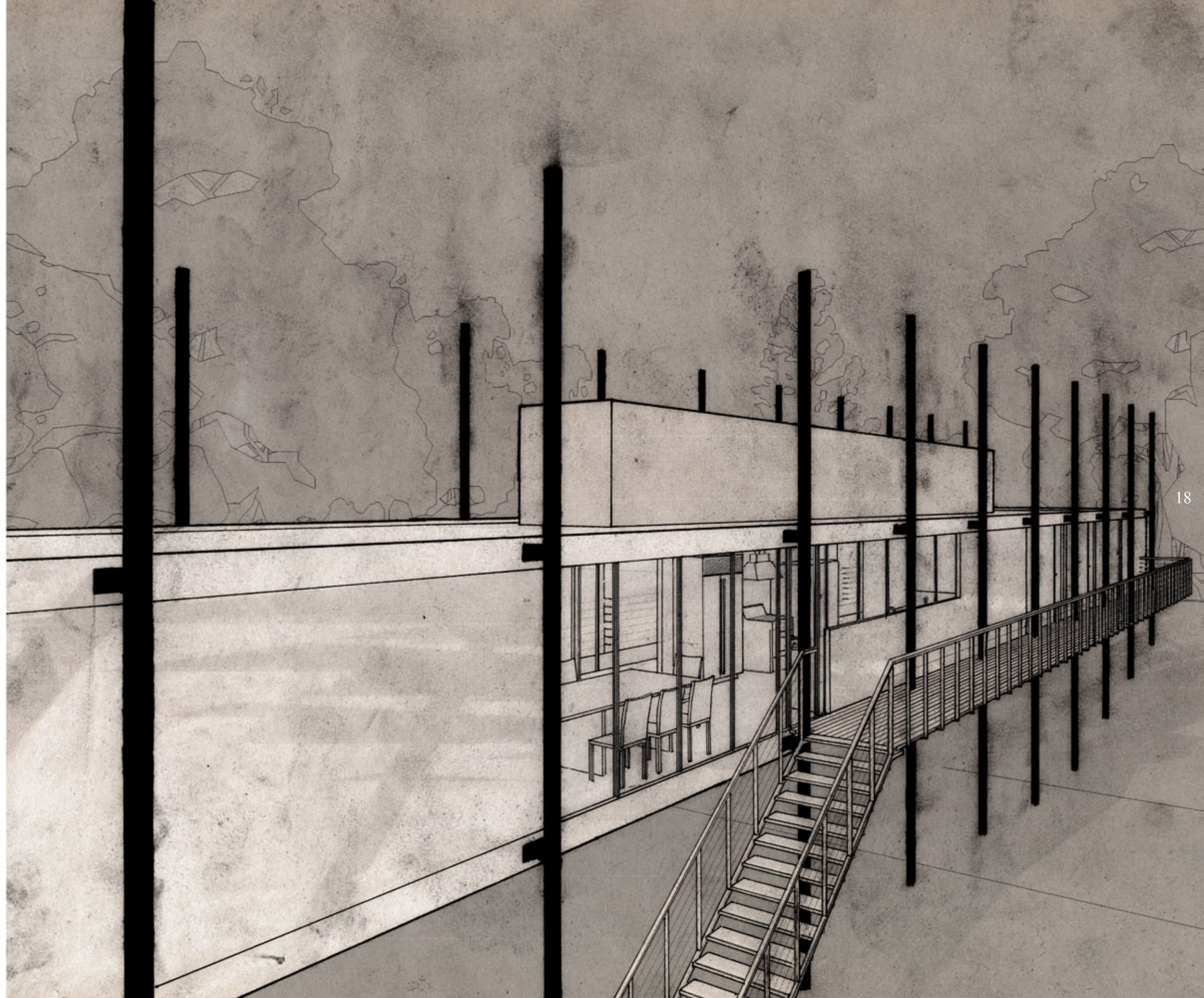


In perspective, the columns become a plane
set in contrast to the spatial depth of the interior . . .

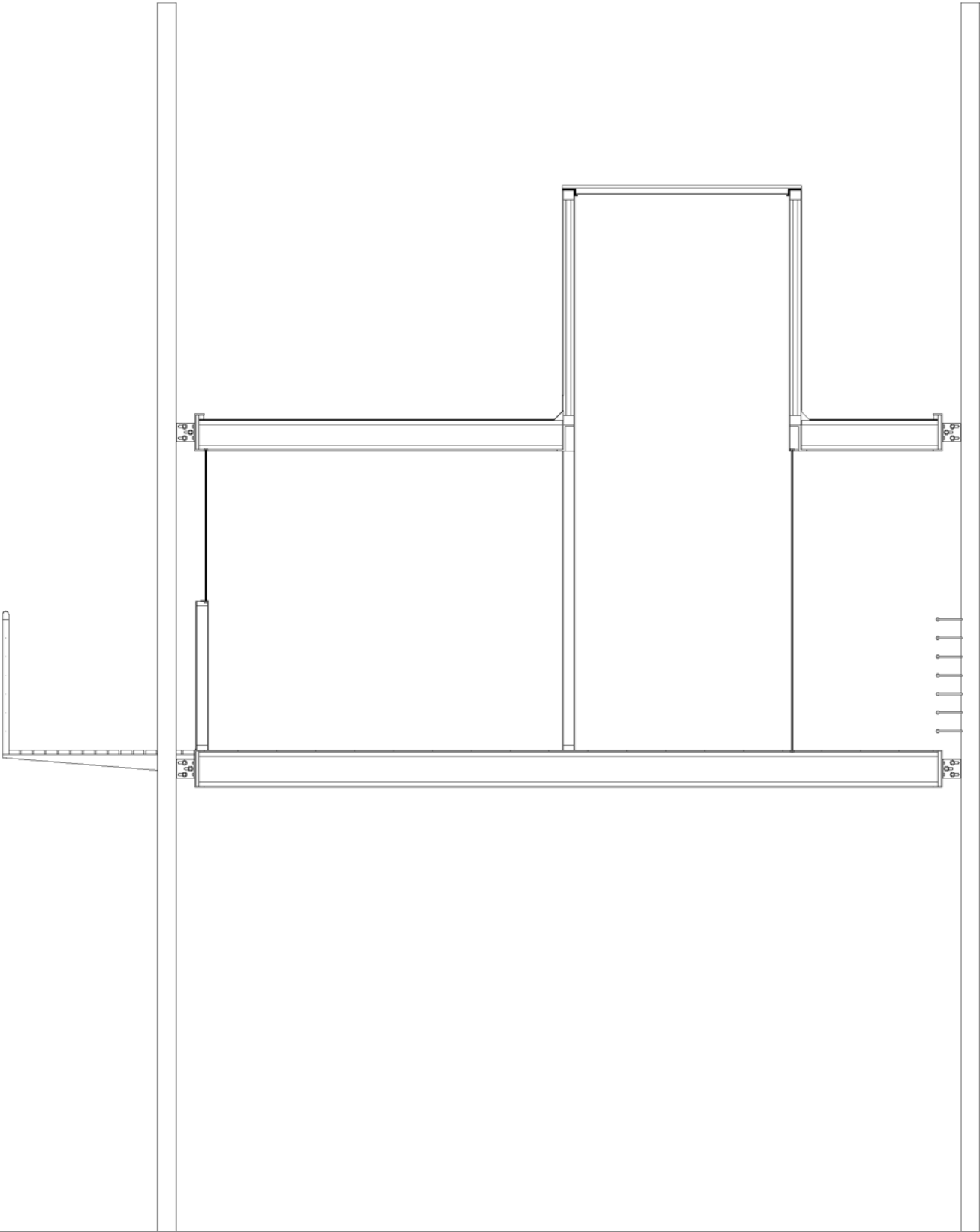
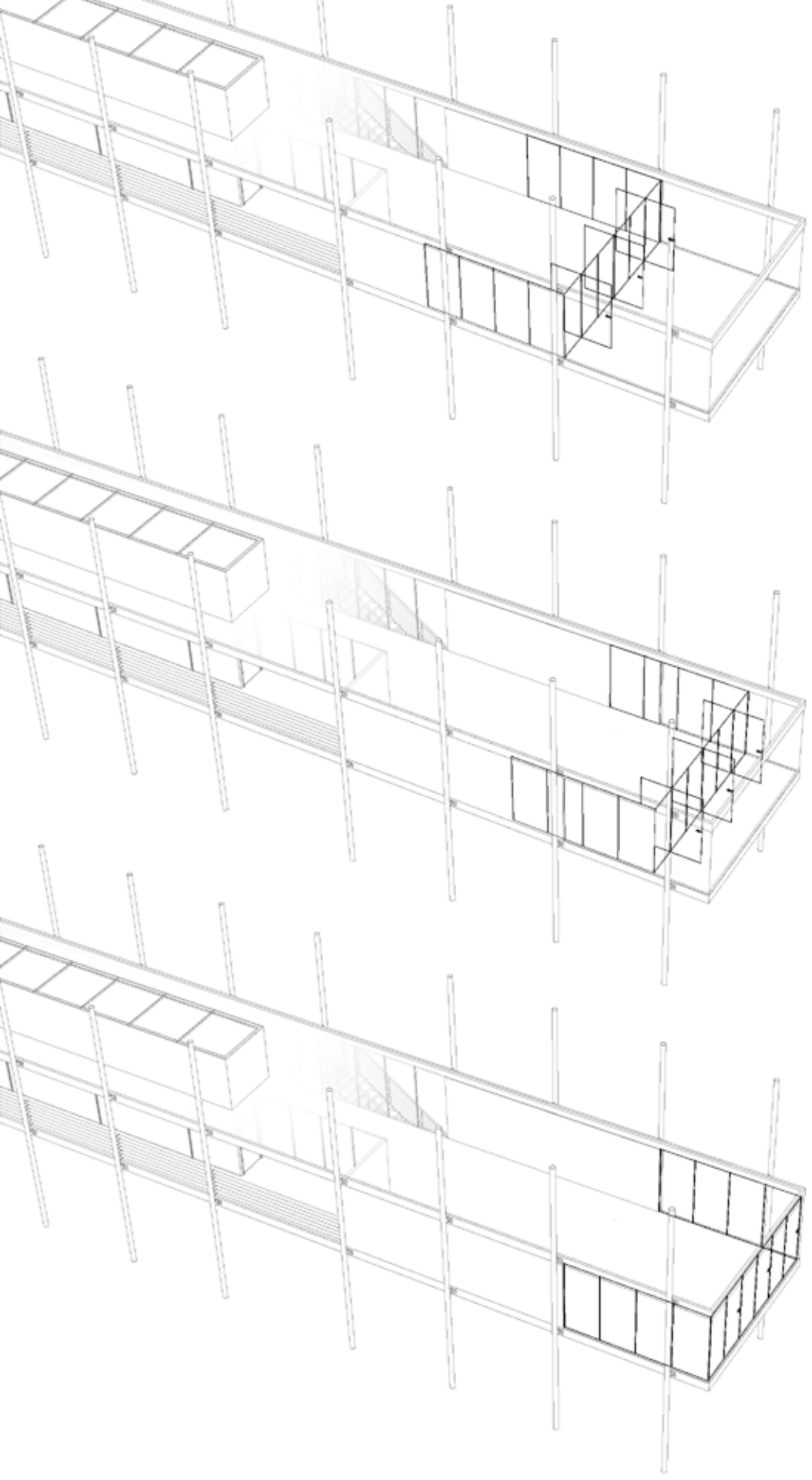




The reflected light of the clearing
spills into the forest . . .



Section and Details





Photographs of Model















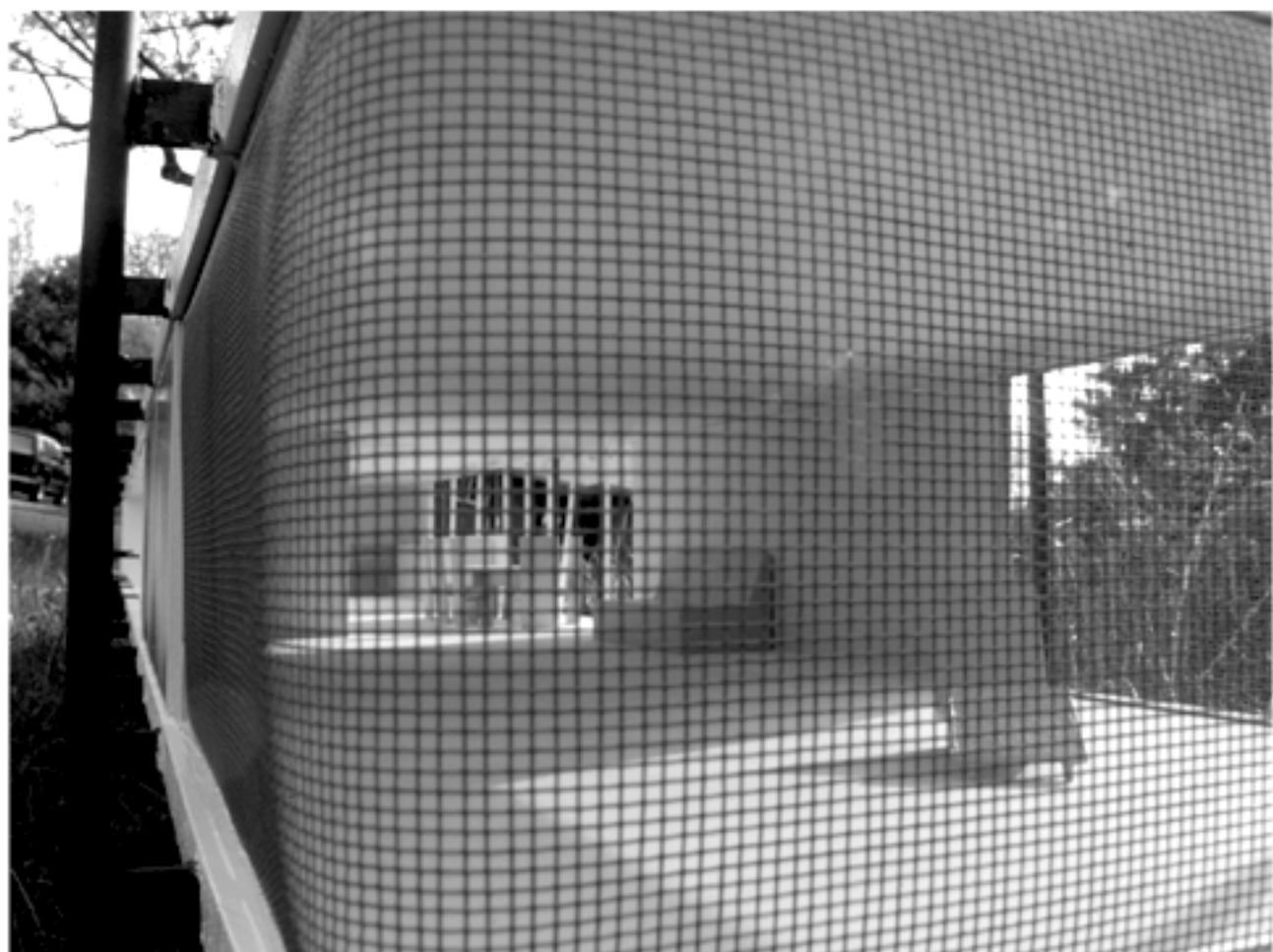
















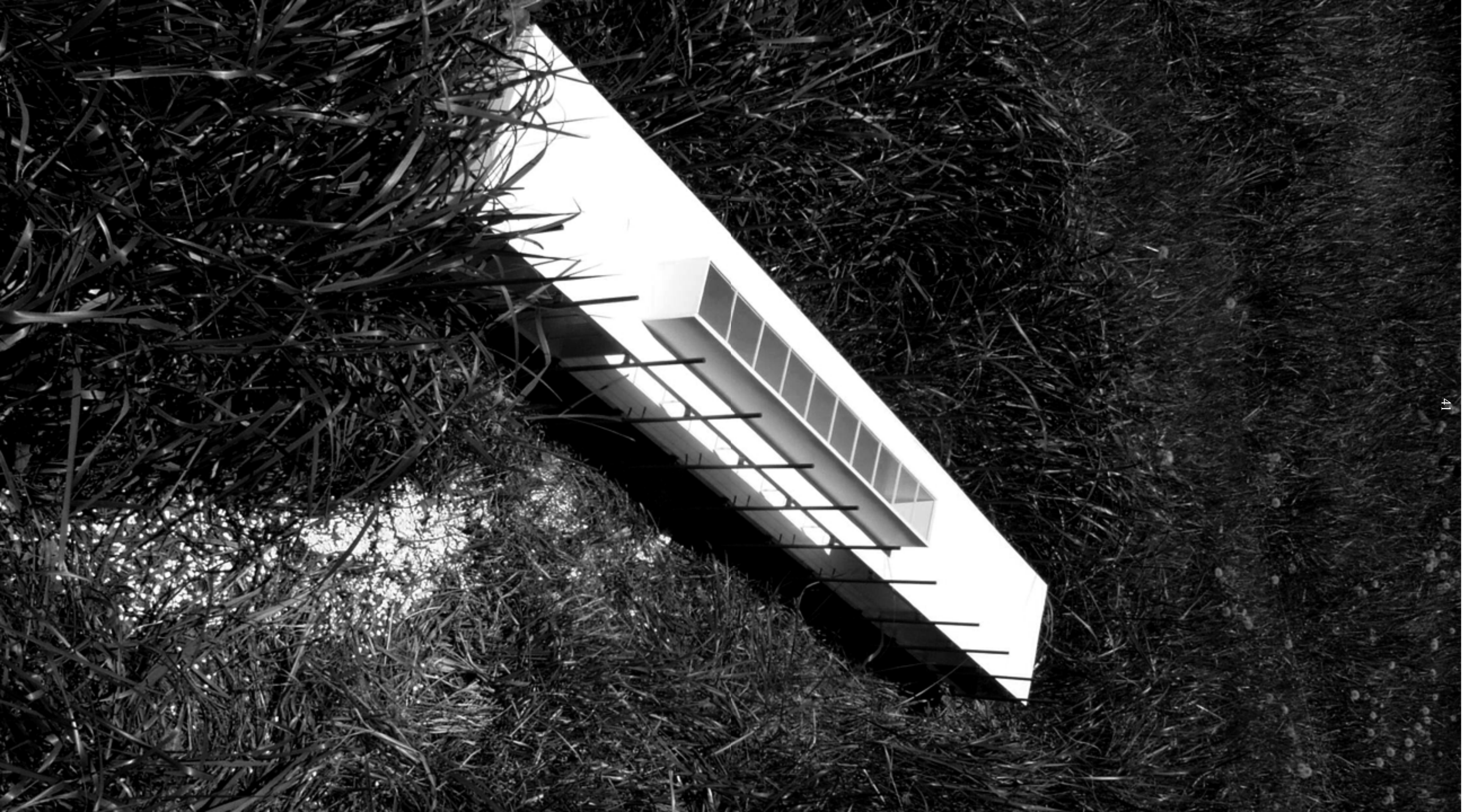












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