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SEEING . FEELING . REMEMBERING  
THE MAKING OF AN APPALACHIAN PLACE

by  
**Timothy P. Hannaway**

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TIMOTHY P. HANNAWAY

to my parents

SEEING . FEELING . REMEMBERING  
THE MAKING OF AN APPALACHIAN PLACE

by  
Timothy P. Hannaway

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia  
Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

approved:

February 6, 1997

Joseph Mashburn, chairman

Robert J. Dunay

Michael O'Brien

*The real artist never arrives. He struggles on toward a dream of excellence and beauty that seems to be ever ahead of him and never, or rarely, attainable. But that he perseveres in his struggle, in this inevitability to the end, regardless of disappointments and defeat, that is his joy, his reward, and his glory.*

Marguerite Wildenhain

SEEING . FEELING . REMEMBERING  
THE MAKING OF AN APPALACHIAN PLACE

The process of speculation, building and examination are universal and permanent to man.  
It is our challenge to develop a unity between these concepts and the momentary events  
within a region, landscape, and culture.

## *Appalachian*

The New River Valley is set within the ridges of the Appalachian mountains. The province is a region of ancient continental shelf crumpled into parallel ridges during the Appalachian orogeny. These ridges divide the landscape into secluded valleys and ridge-top vistas. Spring thaws brought floods of the New River through the landscape, carving out the New River Valley, leaving high limestone bluffs and wide flood plains. The surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains protect the region within the valley from extremes of coastal and plateau weather. Prevailing summer breezes are directed up the valley from the southwest.

The New River Valley was settled over agrarian landscapes and structured within the boundaries of early settlements. Plotted under the English system of metes and bounds, roads, farms, field rows and fence lines express an order which is both crooked and linear at the same time. Settlement patterns follow ridge-top roads, while suburban lots and malls connect crooked field patterns between. Farm houses, out buildings and mills indicate the order of systems past, where massive paved lots mark the field pattern of the new.

*An underlying grammar orders quilt patterns, from fractal crazy quilts to Euclidean block quilts. Quilt grammar is multi-layered, complex, and pattern oriented. Cover pattern, block pattern, piecing and quilting each establish a layer of order in the composition. Pattern layers within the quilt may act in harmony or counterpoint. Traditional block-quilting patterns are modular, assembled from small polygonal blocks that repeat and interlock like puzzle pieces to form the complete quilt cover.*

*-journal entry, form and pattern  
Tracy Walker Moir-McCLean*

The Appalachian landscape exhibits characteristics of collage. The settlement patterns of houses, fields, and roads are structured by an underlying geometry of parallel ridges and rock beds. Within the landscape there is evidence of careful patchwork to old machinery, roofs and facades - each repair adding a new tone and complexity to the material composition. Frugality, re-use, and adaptation are universal expressions of agrarian life. Characteristic of Southern Appalachia, a pragmatic frugality is expressed in the resolution of simple problems into elegant solutions.

Modern Appalachia occurs within and over Appalachian systems of the past: geologic, geographic, agrarian - nostalgic, pragmatic, and poetic. The modern material palette is assembled from memories left behind by previous Appalachias: images, traditions, techniques, etc. From within this collection, elements containing potential are selected - some may be physical, tangible material, and others may be material in the form of poetic ideas or inquiry. However, each element is considered within the context of place, moment and time.

The Appalachian landscape is a varied collection of distinct elements which momentarily occur within the region. Its people and their lives are continually challenged and redefined by the forces of rapidly developing world technologies and the ever changing American national culture. Building within this context, a modern designer must develop theories of landscape, region, assembly and craft.

The additive nature of Appalachian culture is characterized by patterns of re-seeing: the found object - pieces of older items introduced into a new context, and the found use - the adaptation of standard items to new uses. Re-seeing is not exclusively Appalachian, it is a trait common to cultures whose economic constraints and limited resources command the continual recycling of material; the difficulty of obtaining new material in poor isolated communities, and constant need to adapt standard items to fit the regional topography. What characterizes this trait as uniquely Appalachian is the flexibility and elegance with which found objects and uses are re-seen and assembled. The freedom to envision new uses is attributed to an ability to perceive elements and problems not by name or by function, but as a collection of qualities and potentials. A layer of potential association between the object and the place is provided by indirect references to tradition. Historical and technological developments within this palette share the Appalachian landscape, beginning with log cabins on loose limestone foundations. Traditional Appalachian building forms and techniques were continually adapted to the new variations on familiar materials: sawn lumber and nails, cement, concrete block, galvanized tin roofing, etc. Within the additive re-making of Appalachian structures, materials of modern Appalachia are delicately interwoven with existing materials of Appalachias past.

### *material*

*...The distinction between materials and materiel, though originally developed in other conceptual contexts, is in fact well worth borrowing for our purposes. Materials are indispensable and durable: stone, brick, cement and concrete, for example... Materiel, by contrast, is quickly used up; it must be replaced often; it is comprised of tools and directions for their use; and its adaptive capability is limited: when new need arises, new materiel, must be invented to meet them.*

*-Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space*

Material is a collection of all of the elements involved in the making and forming of a place. The elemental palette of materials available to the modern designer is broad within the present context of a local region. These elements include those tangible materials readily associated with a process of building: wood, steel, masonry, etc. However, there are also elements within the local environment which are not as readily perceived. The significance and meaning of a place is attributable to the presence of various intangible elements: image, attitude, tendency, etc. The multitude of images available in the local history, culture and landscape provide the defining elements of form and place. However, one must not succumb to the poetic nostalgia which resides within the image when including this material palette within the process of making.

Throughout their journey within a region the designer builds a collection of material and materiel. The distinction and selection of these elements contributes to the development of sensibility. Through casual observation one is able to readily recognize the tangible material utilized in the local building culture: wood, metal, stone, etc. However, it is through the conscious perception of the artist; through careful observation, research, recording, memory and speculation, that the intangible qualities of both the material and the materiel of place are revealed. This act of collection and selection contributes as much to the creation of form as does the placement of the stone or timber.

The language of material is poetic. Like words, material evokes memory, association, and meaning through metaphor, simile and analog. Clarity and appreciation depend on reading, and occasionally, on serendipitous mis-readings. Detached from the intentions of the maker, it is the care and quality of thoughtfully crafted and assembled material which imparts clarity and meaning to the object.

### *making*

In making, nostalgia and progress are delusive qualities. One's judgment is clouded with the desire for the new and strange by progressive thought. Whereas, the poetic nostalgia which permeates the traditional image is too concerned with holding onto the passing moment which, because it is passing, cannot be regained. Cities and suburbs cannot be unmade, 19th Century agrarian landscapes, materials and methods cannot return. A passing moment can inform the present, but never be the present. Progress is merely advancement into the momentary now.

Form is the resolution of the idea into both the act and the result of making. Place is given form through the arranging of collected elements: tendency and character within the local culture, observation of landscape and climate, regional material and resources, the presence of memory in local craft and assembly, etc. The traditions and tendencies inherent in each of these elements provide a structure within which the designer will find the freedom to re-present, re-discover and re-make. Inquiry is focused on connections and joint form as they become analogs to the local tradition and craft. Details are puzzle-like, intricately solved, twisted and layered.

Making is an act of acquisition, selection, order, and assembly. It is the profuse expenditure of labor and diligence balanced by the elegance of frugality. Within the processes of selection and assembly exist opportunities to impart layers of complexity and meaning to the object. Traditional forms and assemblies provide a pattern within which to improvise, discover and redefine the act of making according to personal sensibilities.

*field . alley . forest*

Three houses are sited in the New River Valley of Southwestern Virginia in 1996. Each house is designed to provide the essential utilitarian resources necessary for habitation in modern Appalachia. The relative context within which to make each house has been found within the unique character of the individual sites. Each house exists within the current moment and place, so they therefore associate with a modern version of the Appalachian material palette: milled lumber, concrete and concrete block, raw and galvanized structural steel and roofing. The re-seeing of material is enabled through an understanding of the physical and metaphorical characteristics of chosen materials: chemical and physical properties, appearance, composition, regional presence, interaction with climate, structural capacity, manufacturing process, adaptability of form to standard construction and detail, etc.

# House on Taylor Hollow Road

Ellet Valley, Virginia

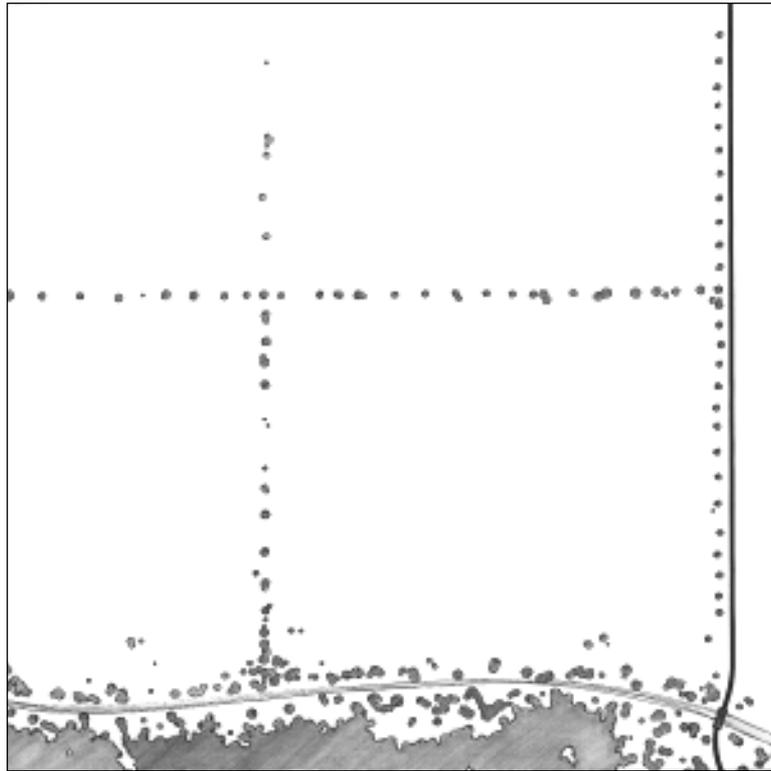
## House on Taylor Hollow Road

Ellett Valley, Virginia

Set along the edge of a densely wooded slope and an open flood plain, the house is a long pavilion oriented to a central axis which parallels a tributary stream of the New River. The traditional dog-trot house form is inverted to provide a central mass at the point of entry into the house, while opening the adjacent living spaces and allowing the framing of views from shaded woods to barren meadow and distant mountains.

A central service core separates the daily living space from the private sleeping room. Spatial composition and form are kept simple in order to articulate the diversity of the natural landscape - on one side, the canopy of trees shades the forest floor and tributary stream, while on the other is the outstretched expanse of tall grasses and open sky. From within the living and sleeping spaces, views toward the natural setting are filtered through a series of three screens. The longitudinal walls of these rooms are formed entirely by sliding glass panels. Flush with the exterior walls, operable metal louvers are raised and lowered to control daylight and privacy. Gliding along standard barn-door roller mechanisms, insulating panels clad with galvanized corrugated sheet metal form the third and final screen. Providing a slender view of the landscape, a six inch window runs the length of each panel, accentuating the horizontal axis of the house.

The house is structurally simple. To escape occasional flood waters, a steel frame creates a platform which elevates a system of standard wood framing and shop-fabricated wood trusses. Structural steel is introduced into the framing over the longitudinal wall openings in order to free the sliding glass panels from any load-bearing function. Interior wall surfaces are finished with plaster on gypsum sheathing, while the floor and ceiling are finished eastern white pine. The building's exterior is clad entirely in galvanized corrugated sheet metal with pressure treated eastern white pine decking.



*site*

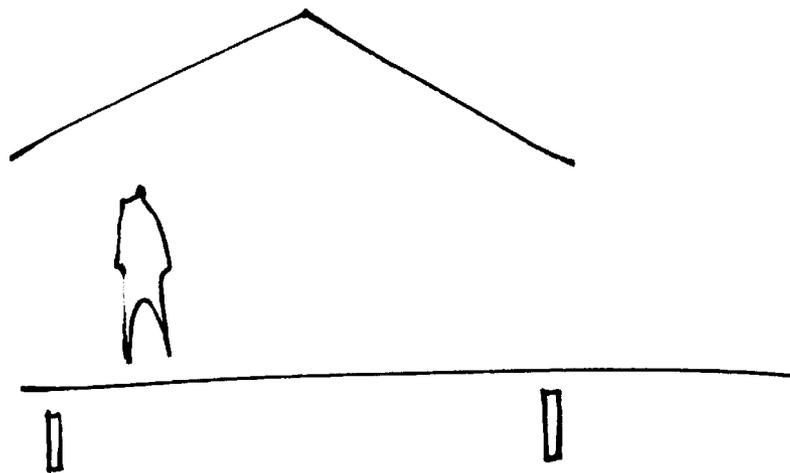
Taylor Hollow Road  
Ellett Valley, Virginia



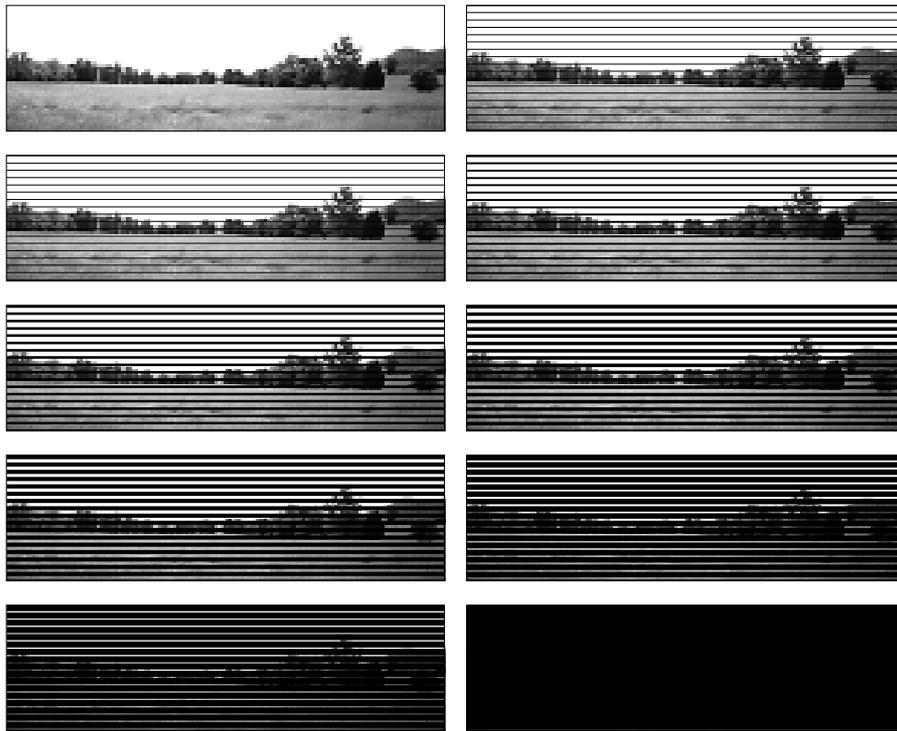


*site*

Taylor Hollow Road  
Ellett Valley, Virginia

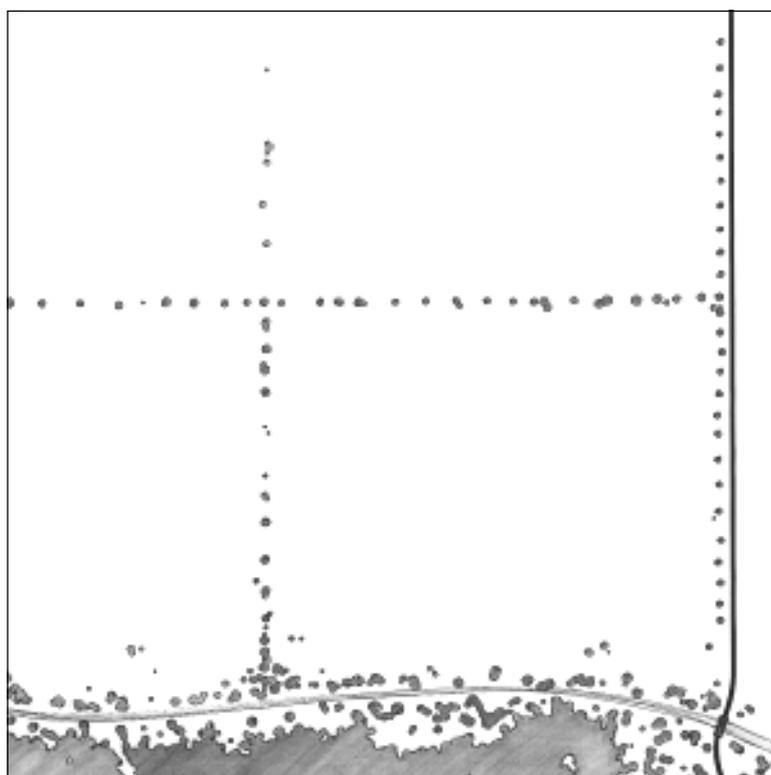


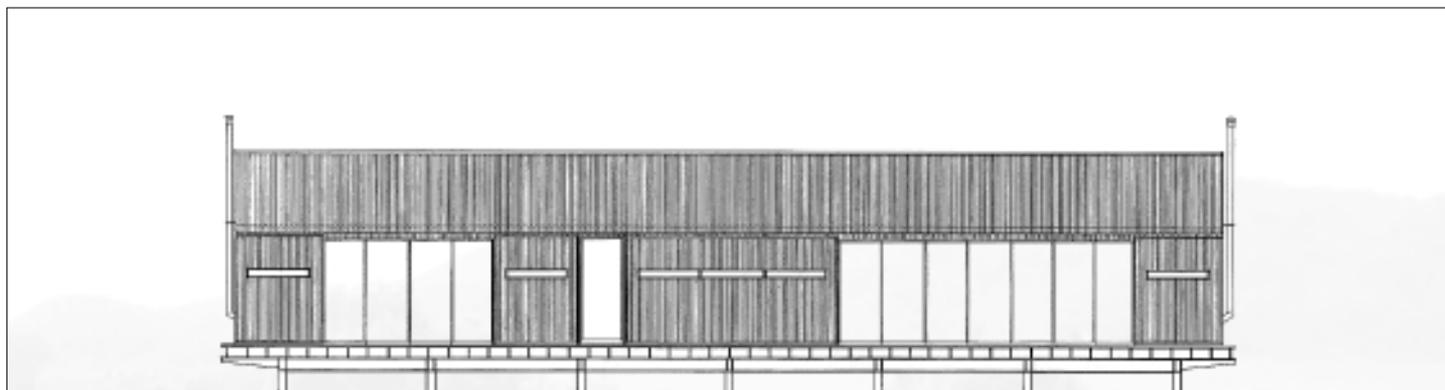
*conceptual sketch*



*conceptual design*

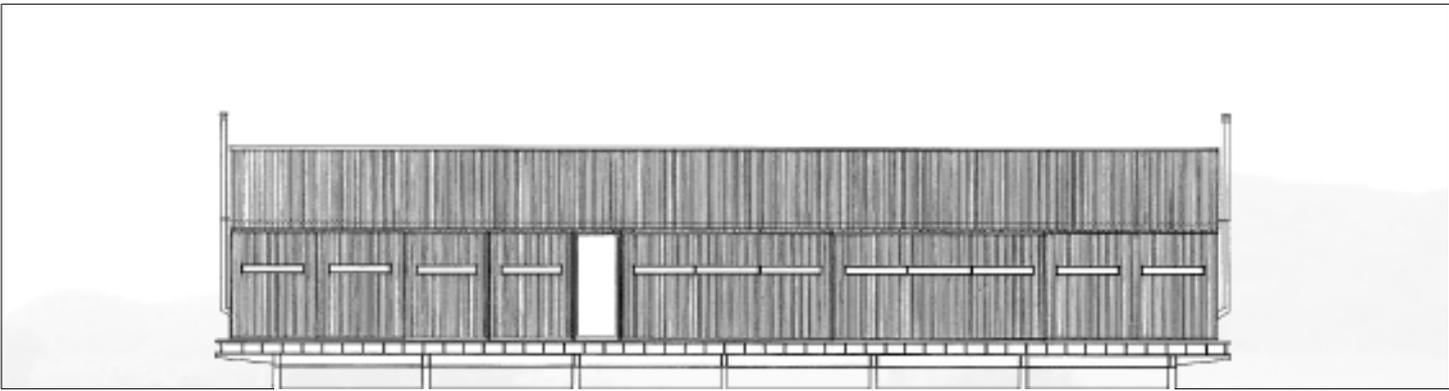
transmissibility





*south elevation*  
open





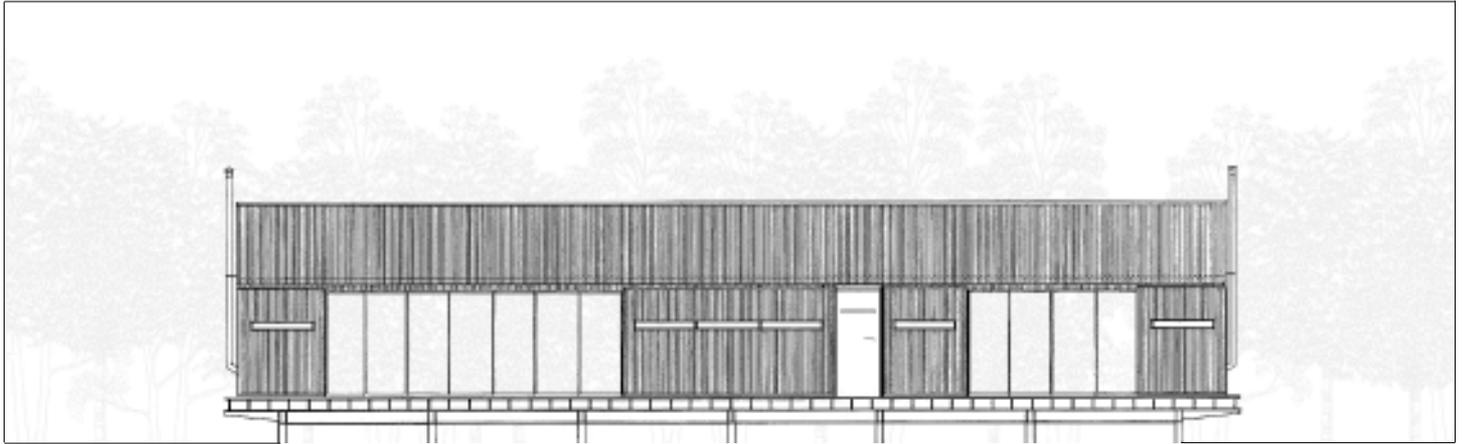
*south elevation*  
closed





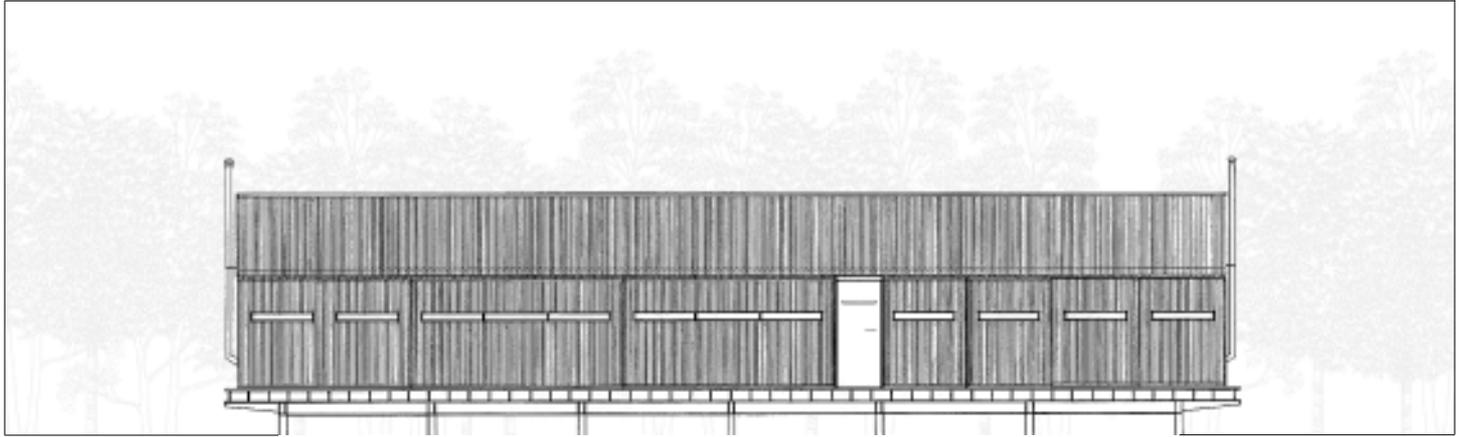
*east elevation*



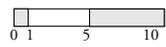


*north elevation*  
open



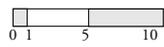


*north elevation*  
closed





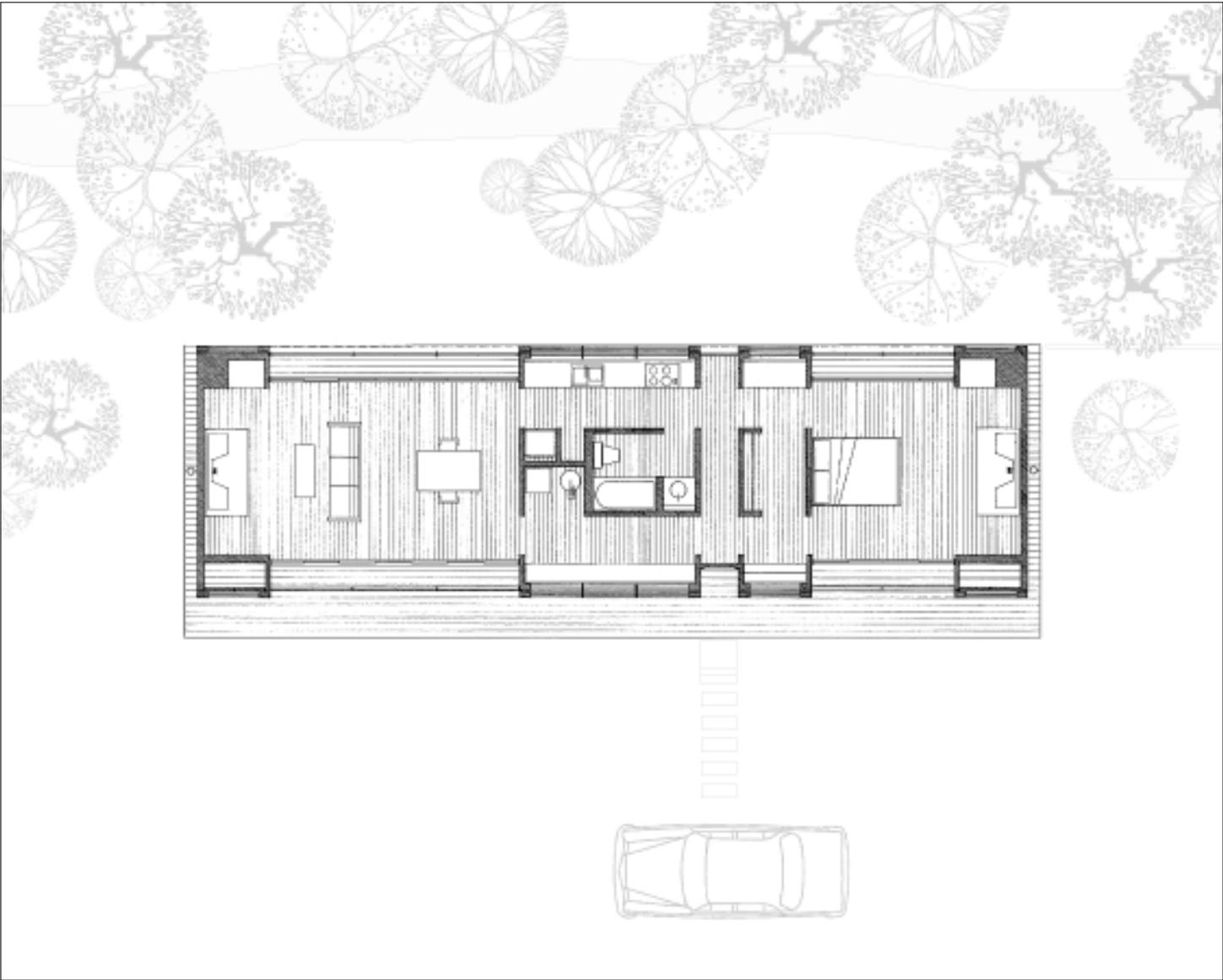
*west elevation*





*foundation plan*





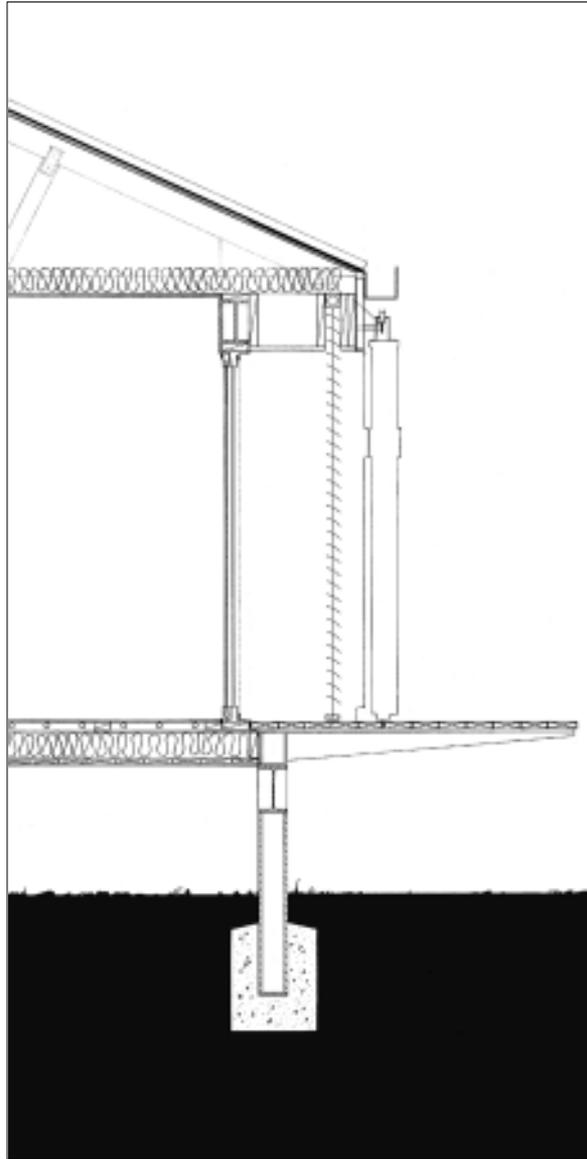
*floor one*





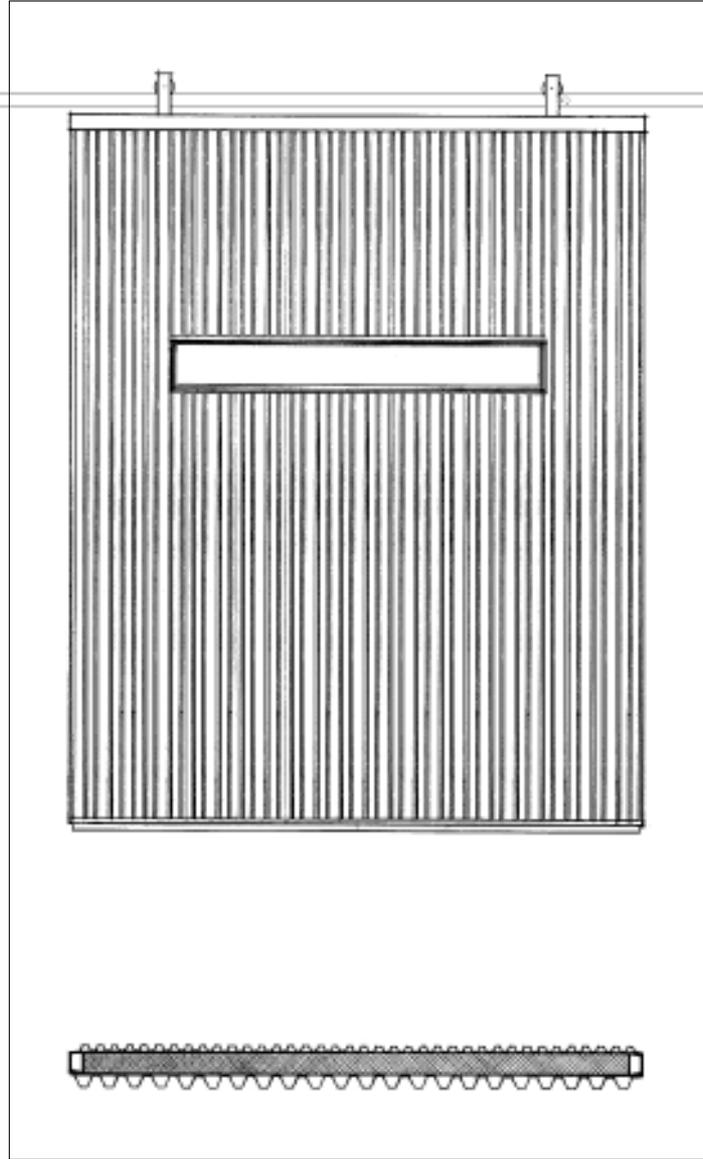
*roof*





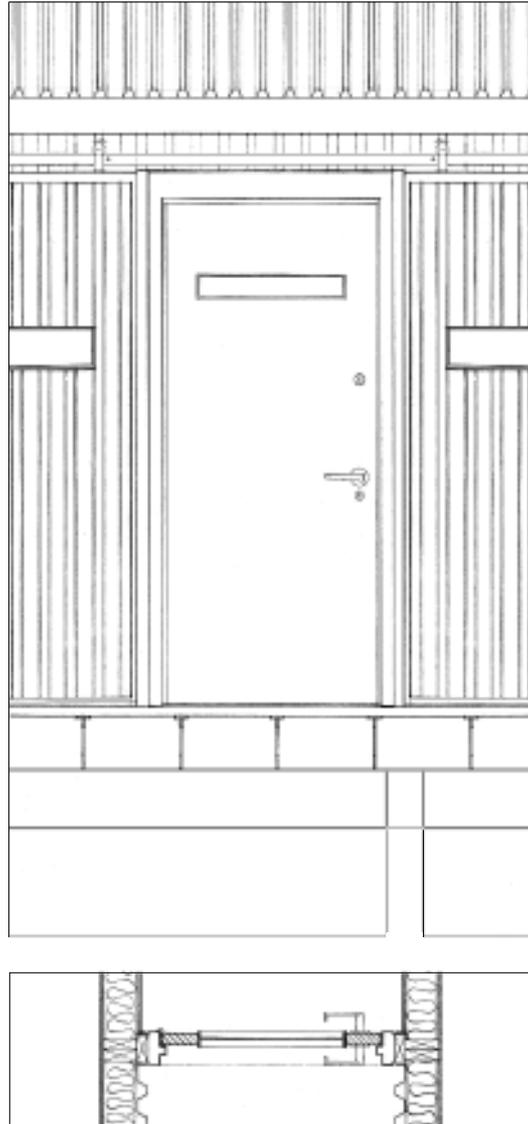
*transverse cross-section*  
detail  
sliding glass panel . louveres . insulation panel





*insulation panel*  
detail





*entry door*  
detail



# HOUSE

South Main Street  
Blacksburg, Virginia

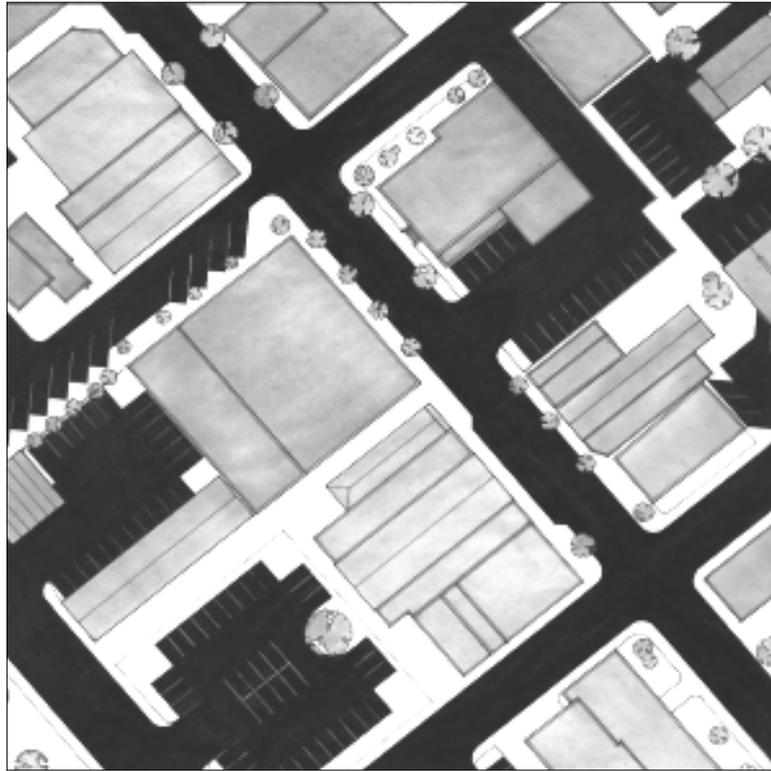
## House on South Main Street

Blacksburg, Virginia

The house is set within a twelve foot by eighty foot alley bound by rows of mercantile rental spaces in an archetypical small town urban landscape. Amidst the continual commotion and change of the urban environment, the building establishes a vertical axis between ground and sky by severing its horizontal axis to the town. A massive brick wall circumscribes the territory of the house, securing a place of constancy and introspection. In direct response to the focus of the urban environment on the phases of man, the space of the house focuses on the phases of Nature. Within the house, the mass of the brick wall is accentuated by a light wooden assembly and glass enclosure walls.

From the South Main Street entry into the large courtyard, a clear view is presented through the entire structure to the far courtyard and the sky beyond. Terminating in a service core which shields the sleeping room from view, a single interior partition acts as a plane which separates the longitudinal axis of the house into circulation and living space.

The exposed brick wall provides the structural bearing for the eastern white pine floor and roof assemblies, while the interior partition is finished with plaster on gypsum sheathing. To the exterior, the house presents Virginia red clay brick, the black metal frame of its glass enclosure walls and a roof of galvanized corrugated sheet metal. The top edge of the wall is articulated by a thin cap of green-gray slate.



*site*

South Main Street  
Blacksburg, Virginia





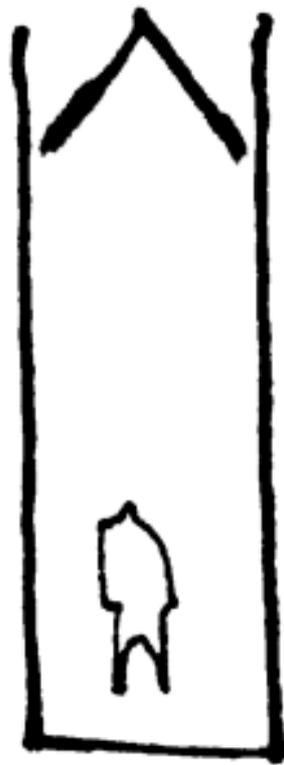
*site*

South Main Street  
Blacksburg, Virginia

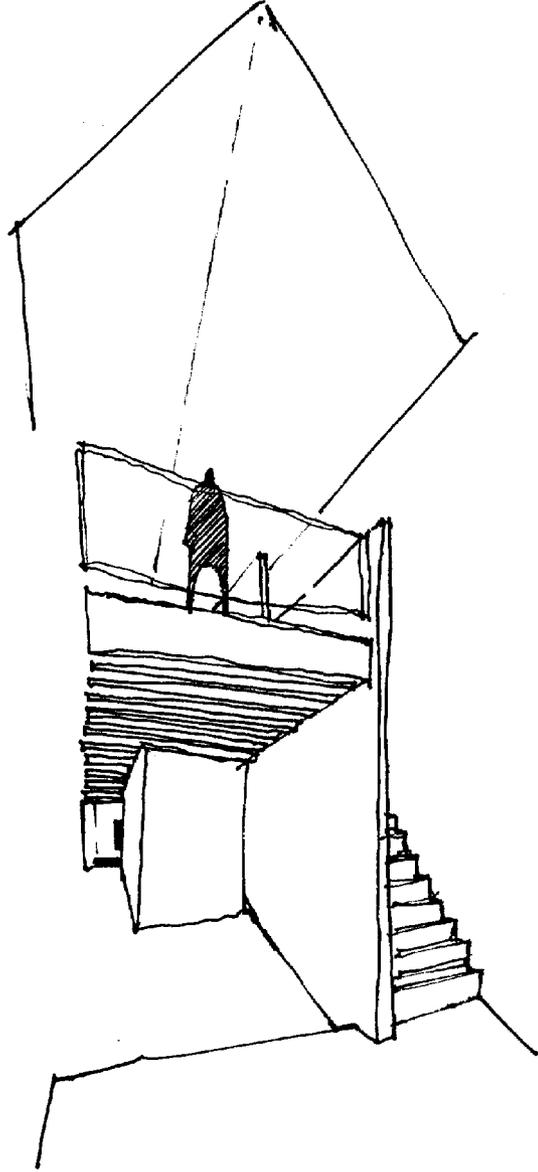


*site*

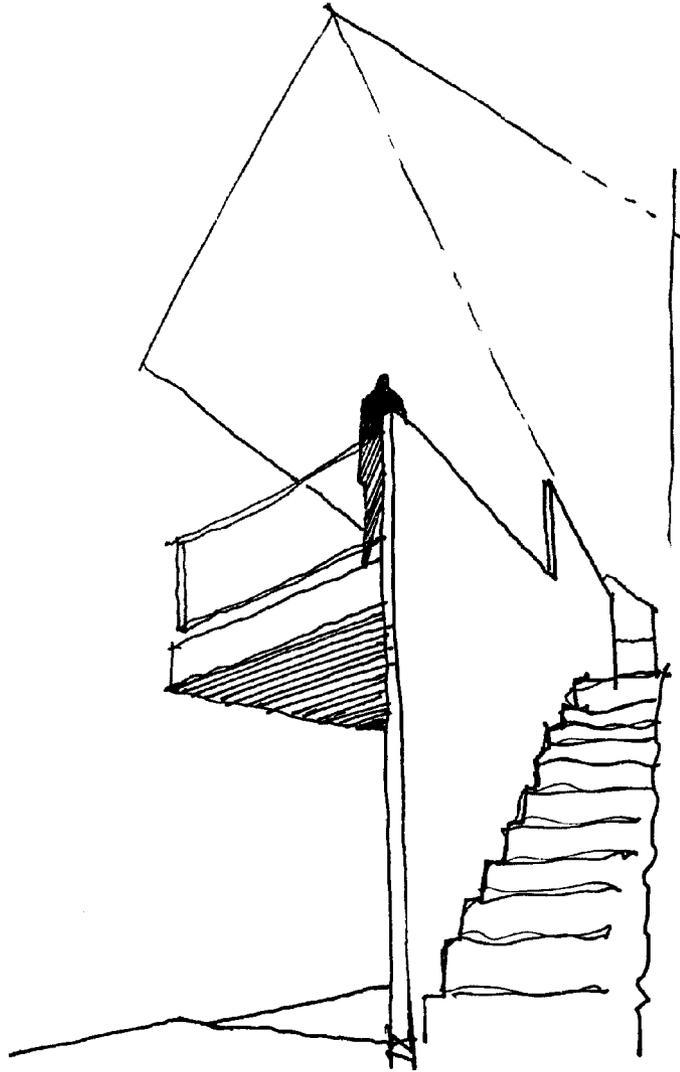
South Main Street  
Blacksburg, Virginia



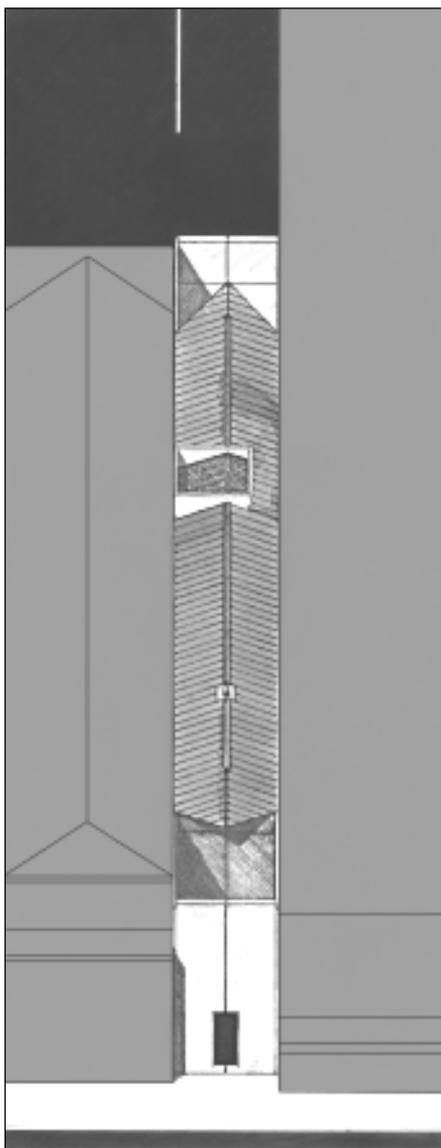
*conceptual sketch*



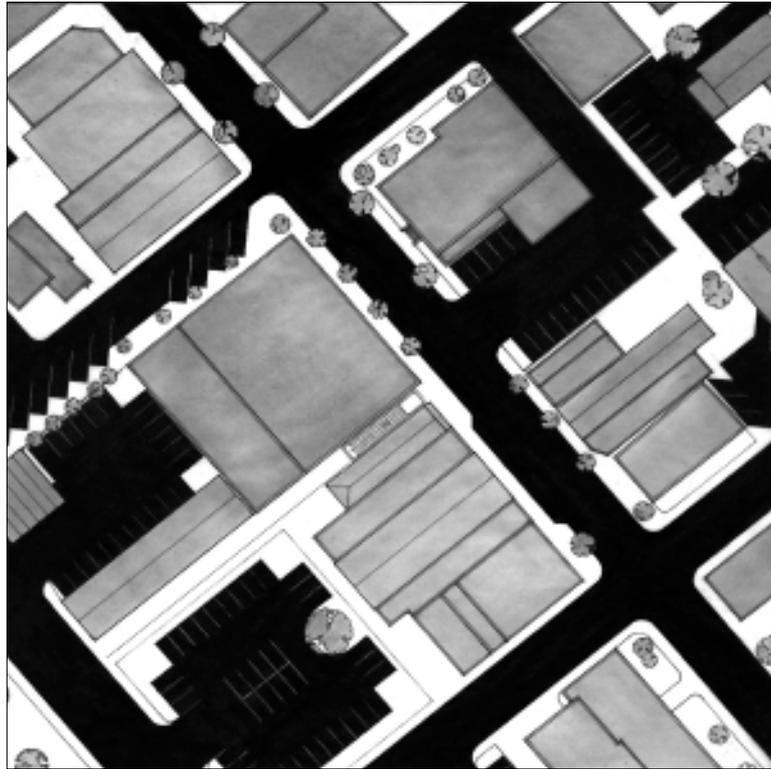
*schematic drawing*



*schematic drawing*



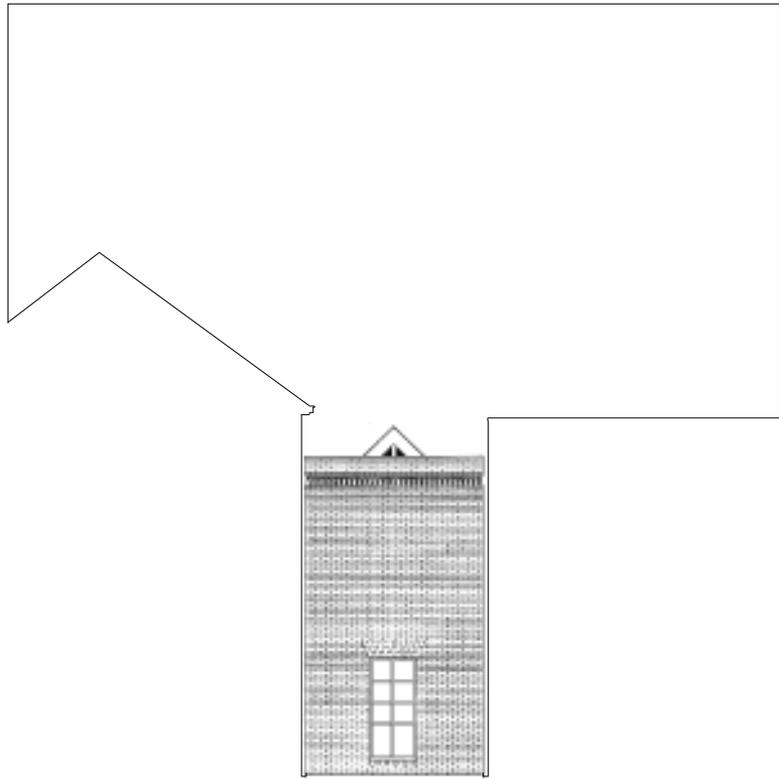
*schematic drawing*



*house*

South Main Street  
Blacksburg, Virginia

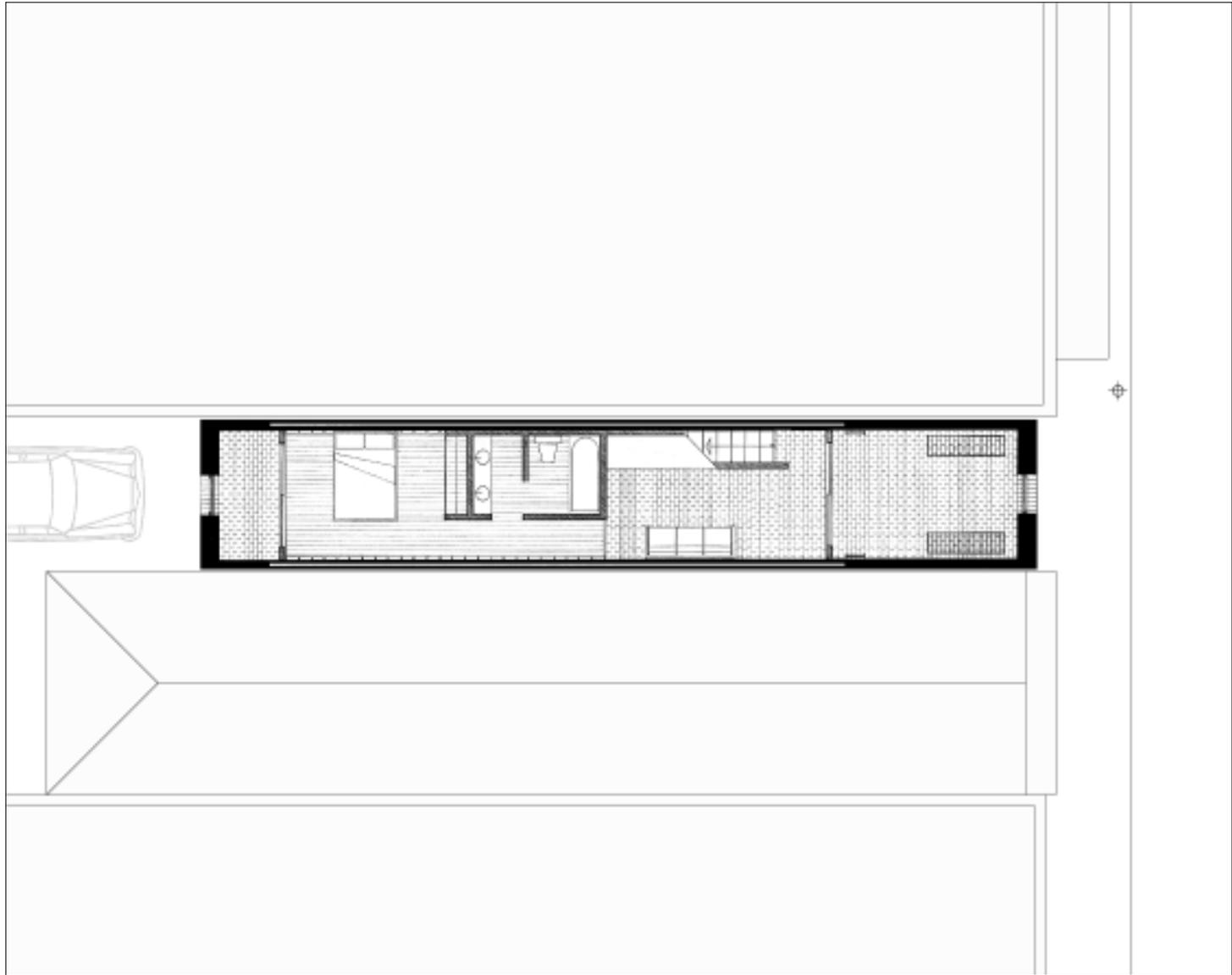




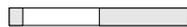
*facade*





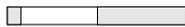


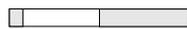
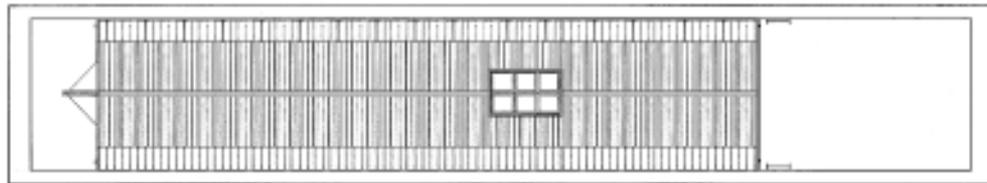
*floor one*

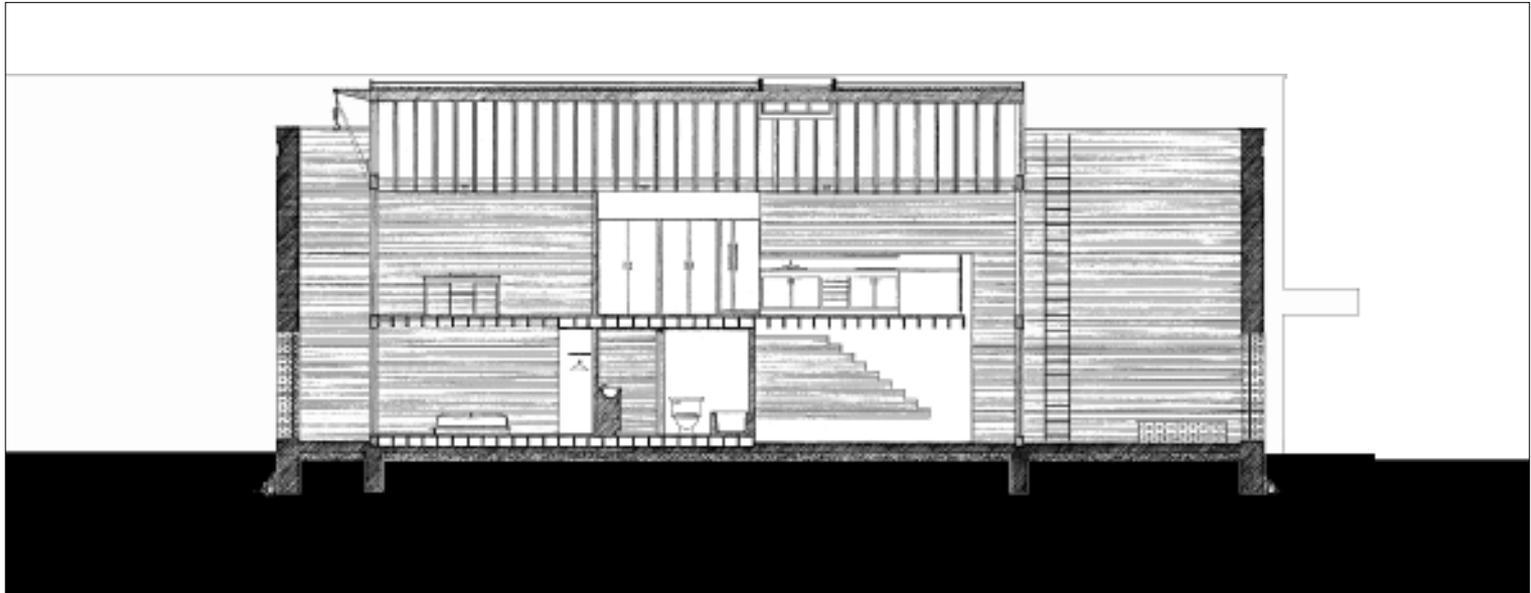




*floor two*

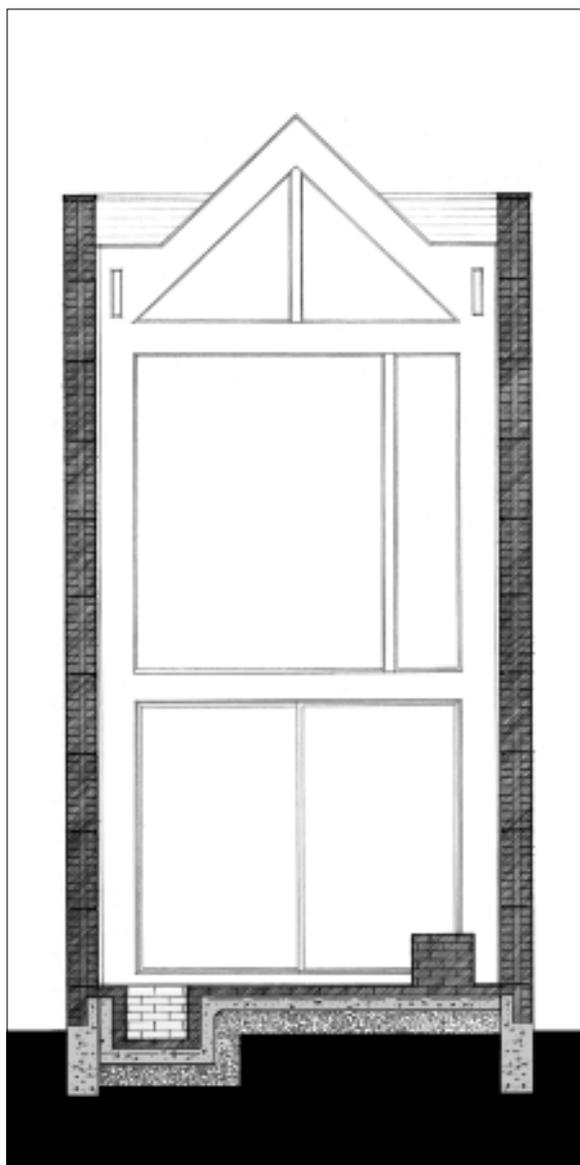






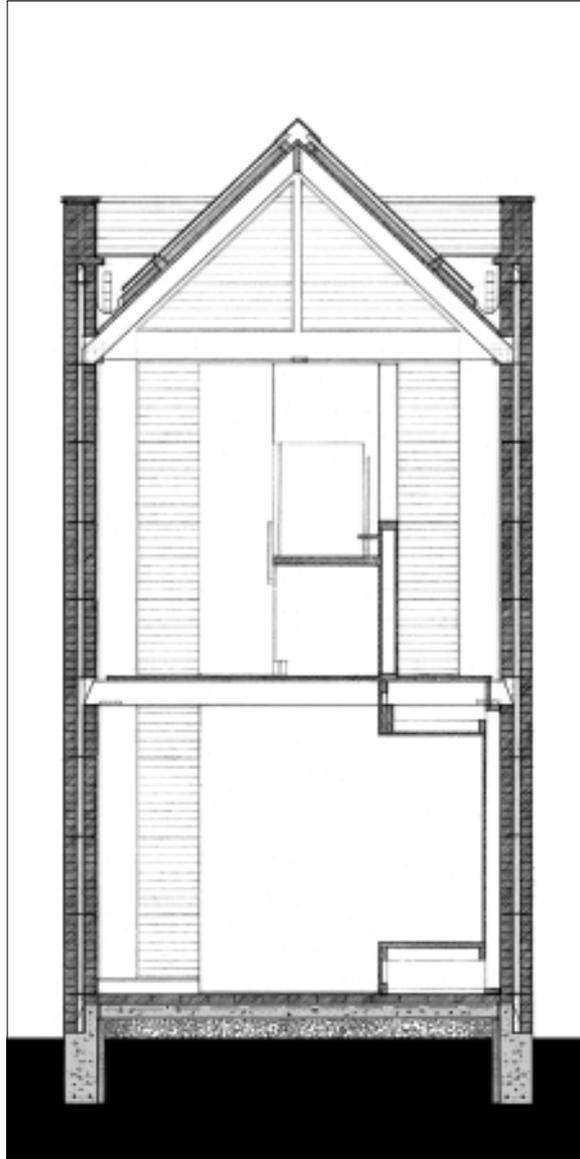
*longitudinal cross-section*





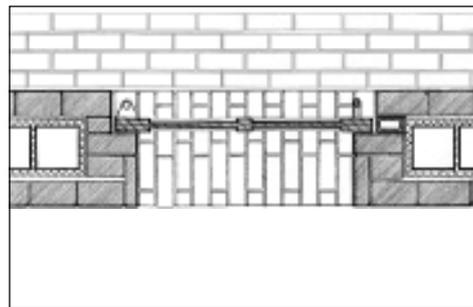
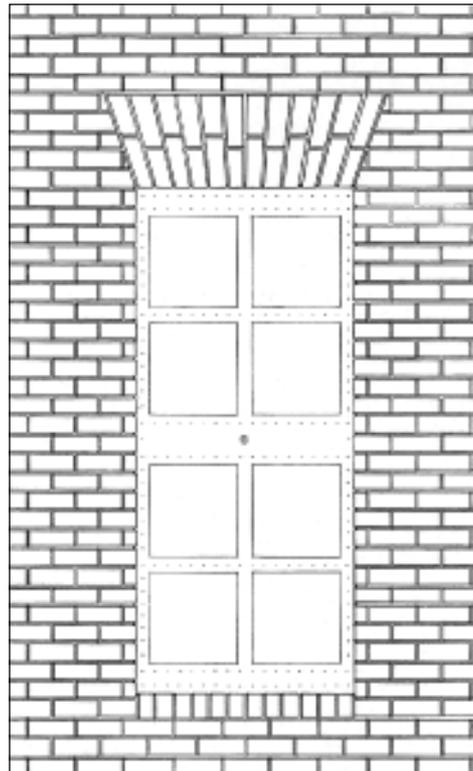
*transverse cross-section*  
exterior courtyard





*transverse cross-section*  
interior





*entry door*  
detail



# House on Woodland Hills Drive

Montgomery County, Virginia

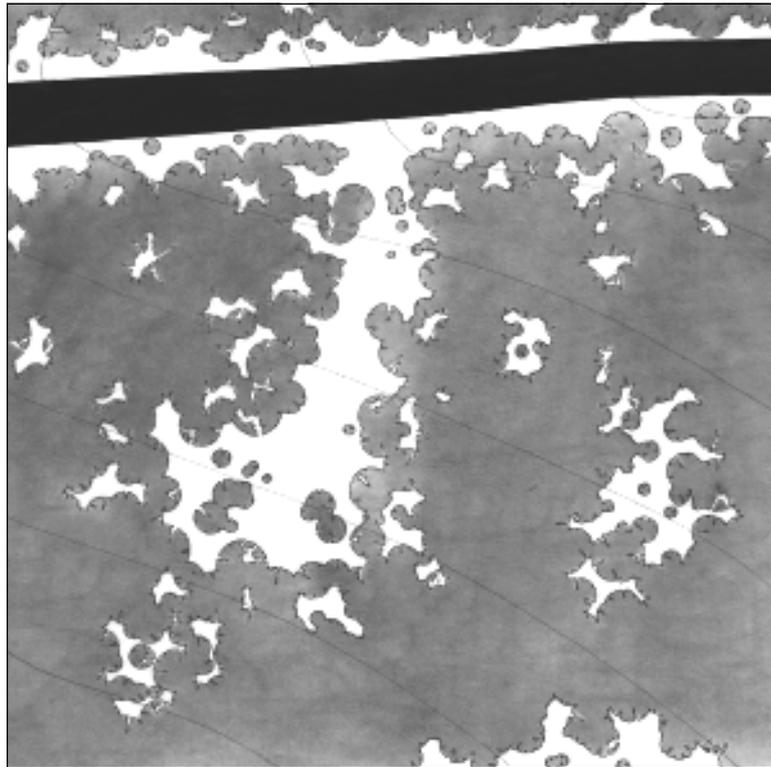
## House on Woodland Hills Drive

Montgomery County, Virginia

Rising above the surrounding forest, the house is a sixty foot tower oriented around a central vertical axis between a dense forest and the open sky. The building form responds to the privacy and shading offered by the dense vegetation. From the road to the north, a progression around the house reveals an increasing transparency towards the southern exposure. Along its vertical axis, the house exists as a bridge from the immediate view of the forest floor to its final culmination at a roof deck which provides a clear view of the surrounding Appalachian mountains.

The house's spatial order follows its vertical axis. Spiraling upward around an open framework of lumber, a continuous steel stair ties together a composition of platforms nested within the structure. The only interior partitions are introduced to provide privacy. Upon the moment of entry into the house, the stair guides a vertical progression through space from public towards private - terminating in the sleeping room.

Structurally, the house is an open framework of eastern white pine set on a base of reinforced concrete piers. The lateral support of steel angles enables the splicing of columns at each level, while the individual platforms are framed with standard joist-on-beam construction. The frame is stabilized through the structure of the steel stair and combinations of wall and floor panels acting as planar shear bracing. Suspended from the lumber frame, the exterior enclosure of the house is a framework of steel girts clad with galvanized fluted sheet metal. The suspended enclosure is extended to cantilever over the mass of a concrete block base. To the interior, finished birch veneer plywood panels fasten to the enclosure frame over sheets of rigid insulation. Interior partitions are finished with plaster on gypsum sheathing, while finished panels of oriented strandboard form the floors.



*site*

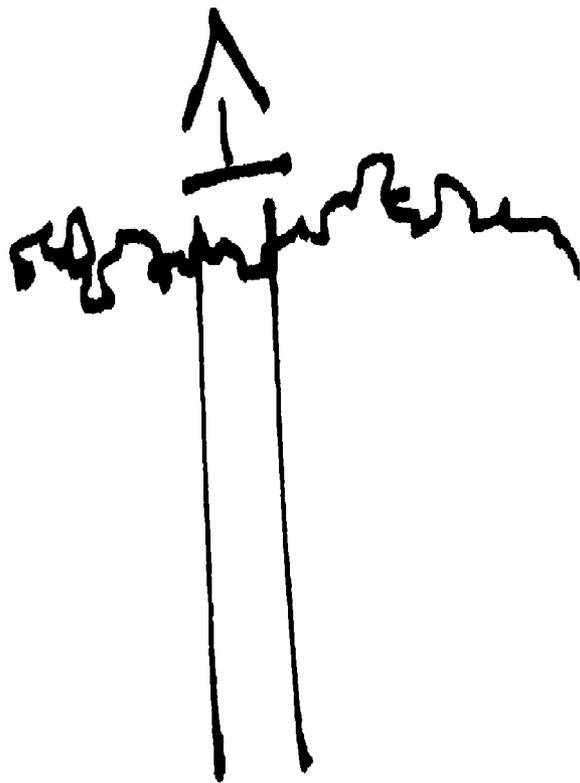
Woodland Hills Drive  
Montgomery County, Virginia



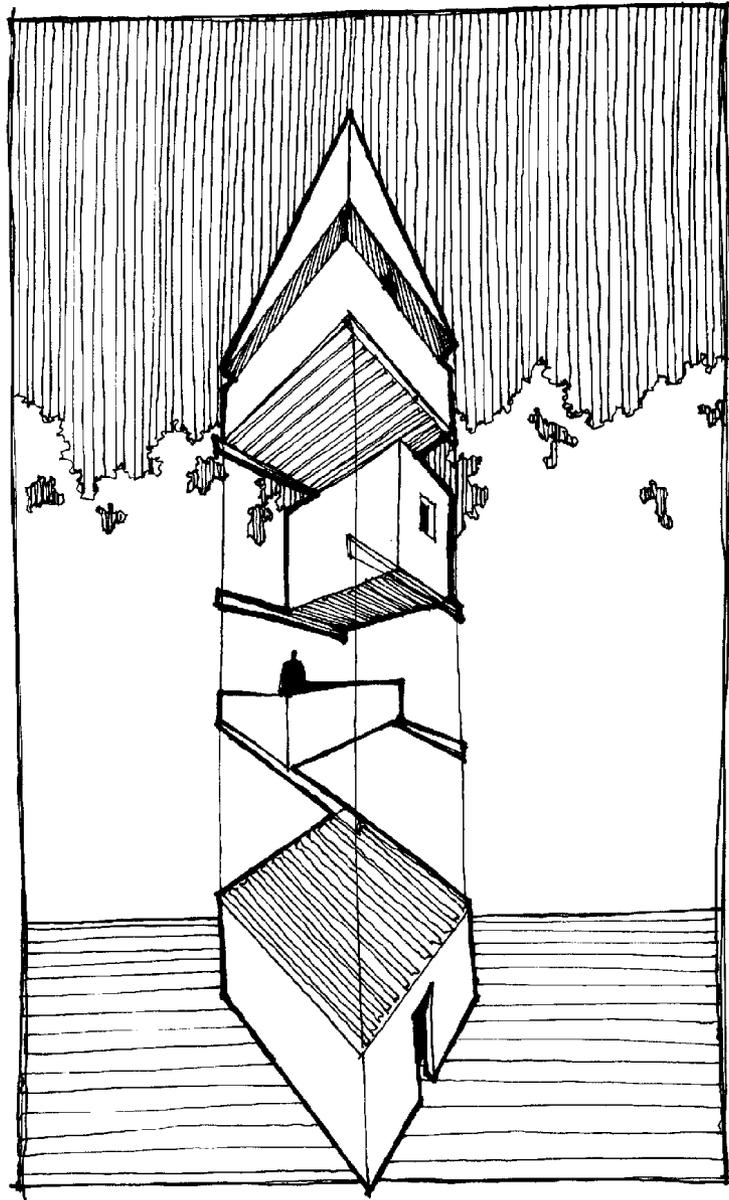


*site*

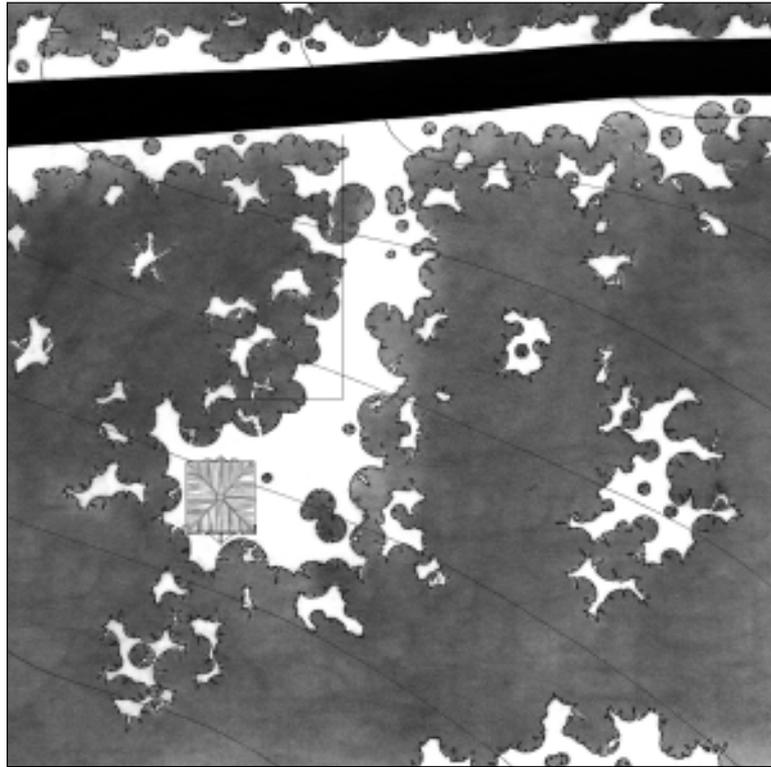
Woodland Hills Drive  
Montgomery County, Virginia



*conceptual sketch*



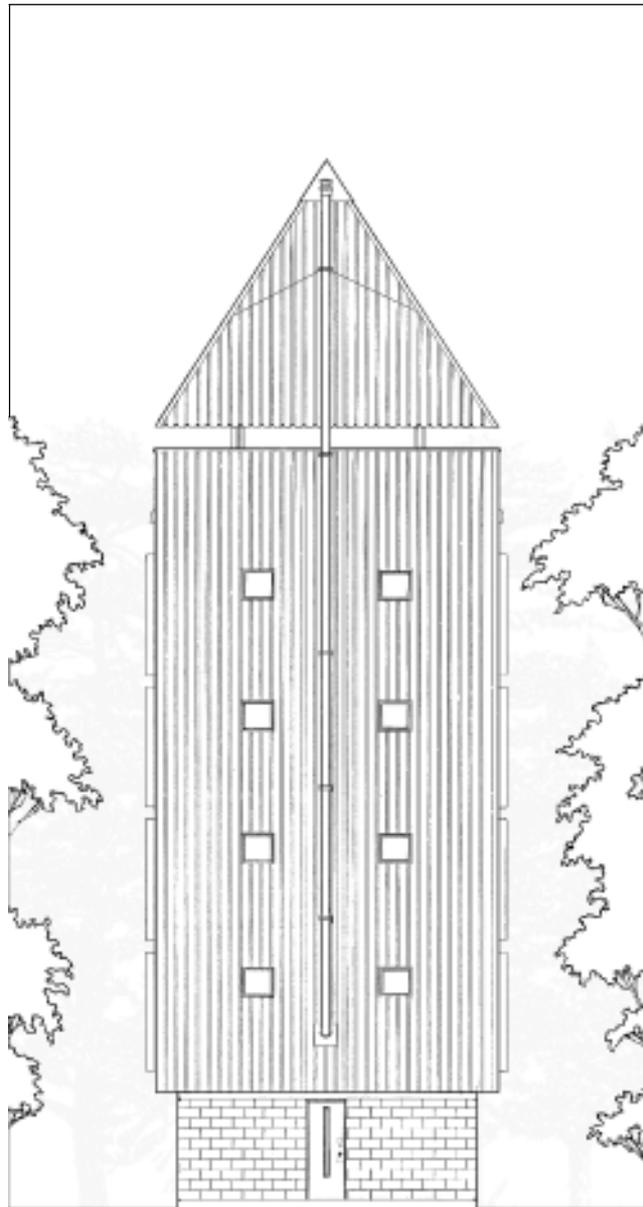
*schematic drawing*



*house*

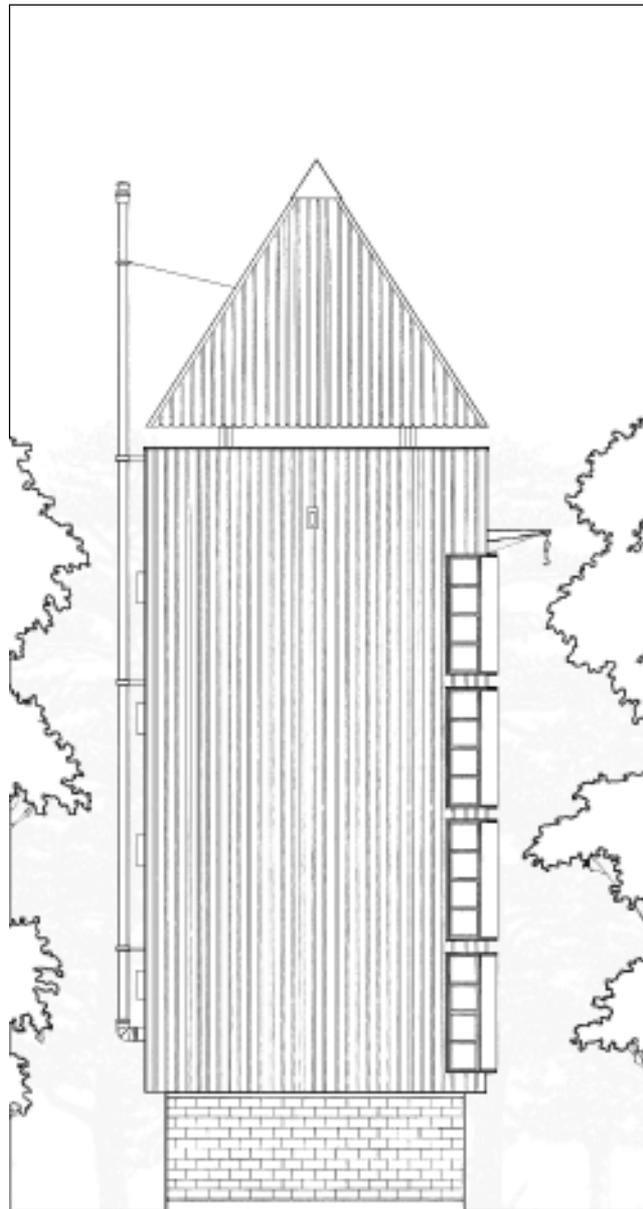
Woodland Hills Drive  
Montgomery County, Virginia





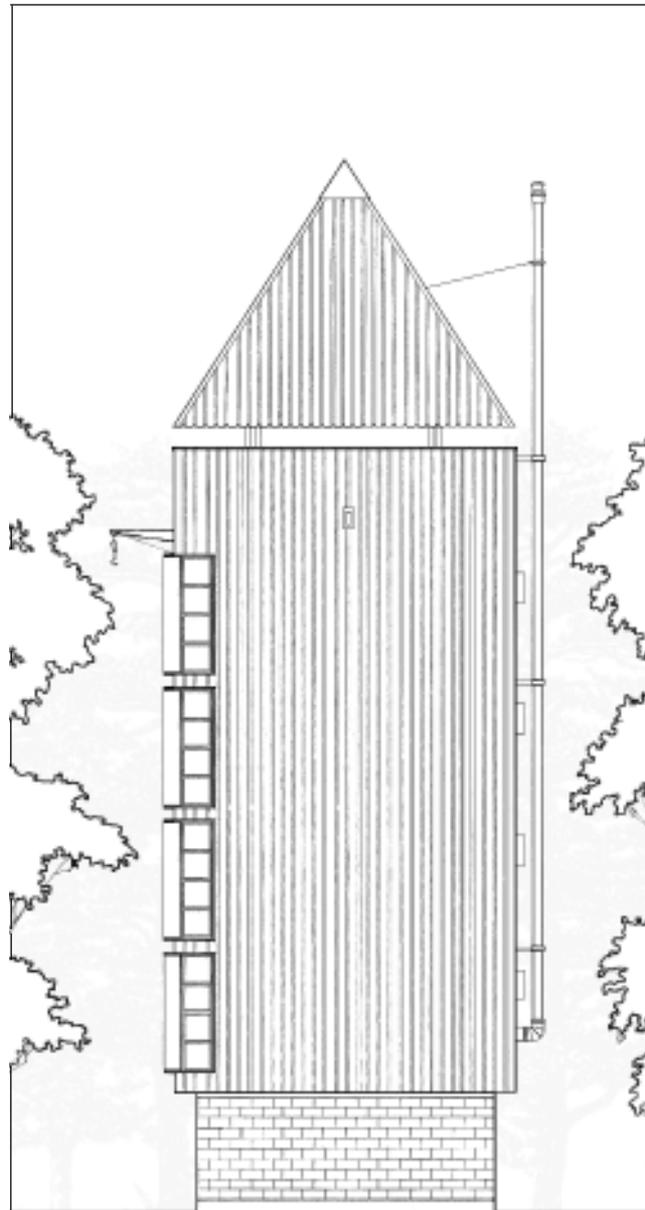
*north elevation*





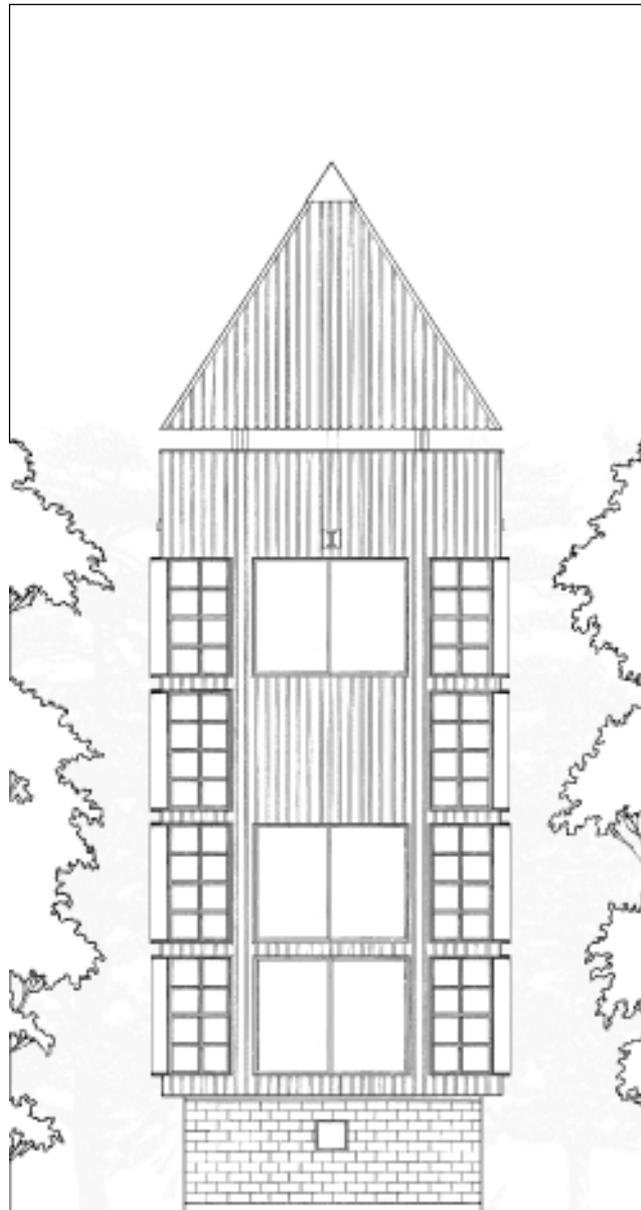
*west elevation*





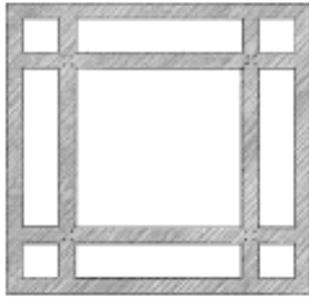
*east elevation*





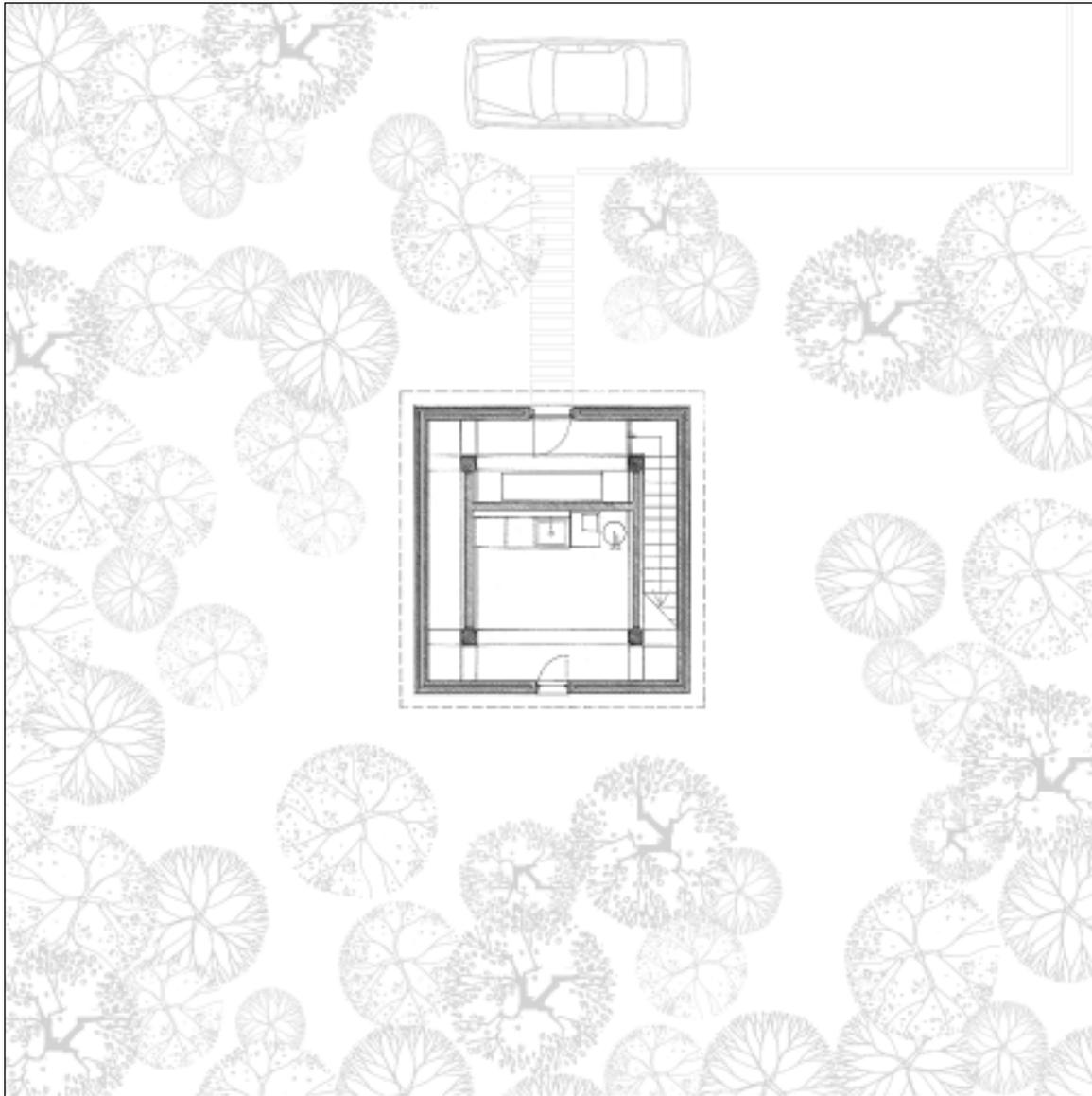
*south elevation*





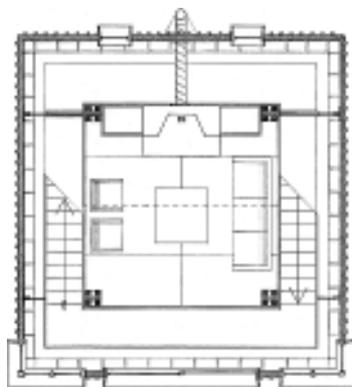
*foundation plan*





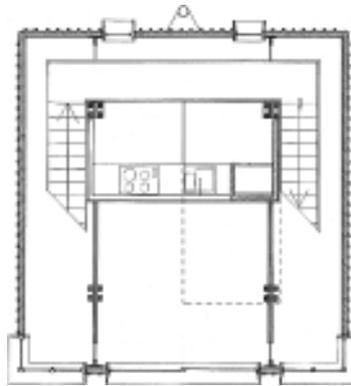
*floor one*





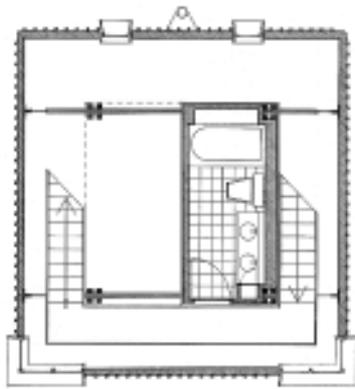
*floor two*





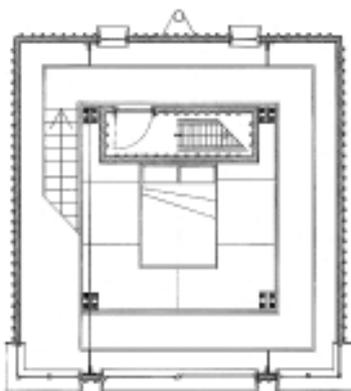
*floor three*





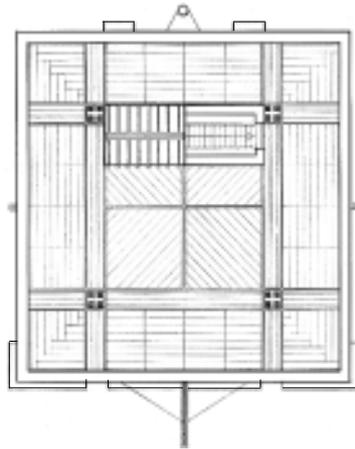
*floor four*





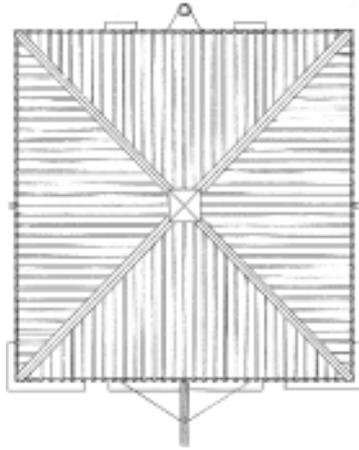
*floor five*





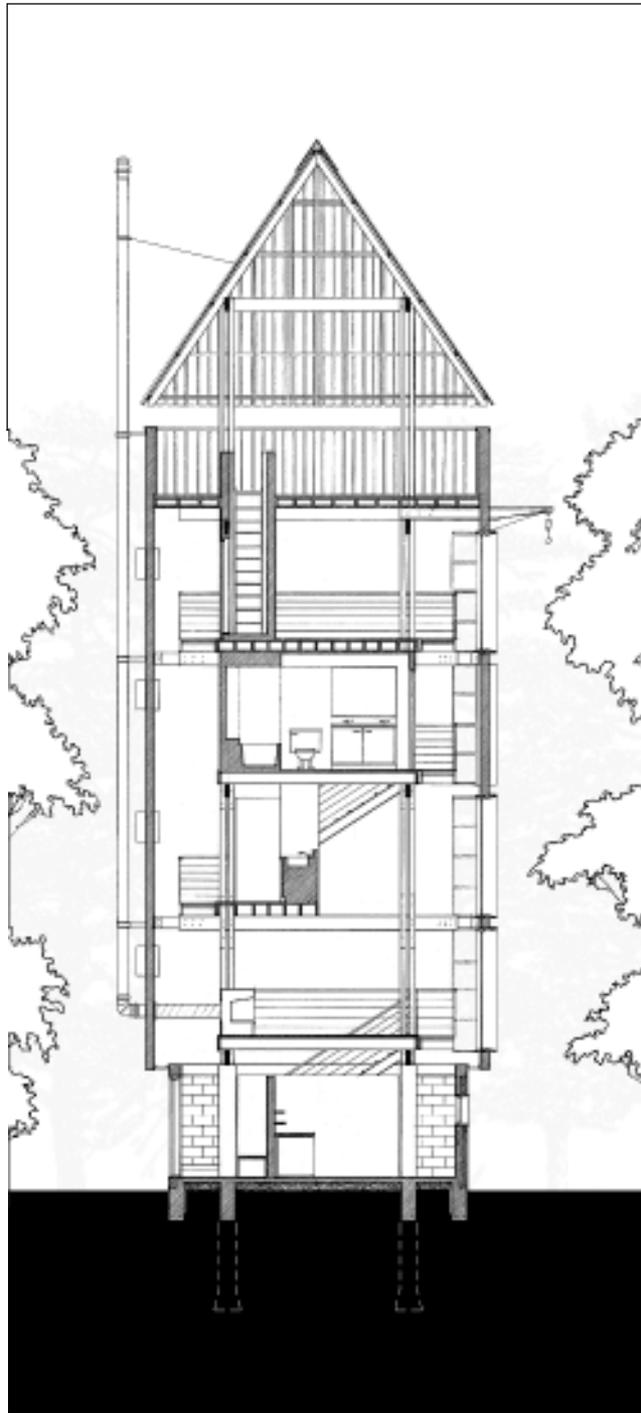
*roof deck*





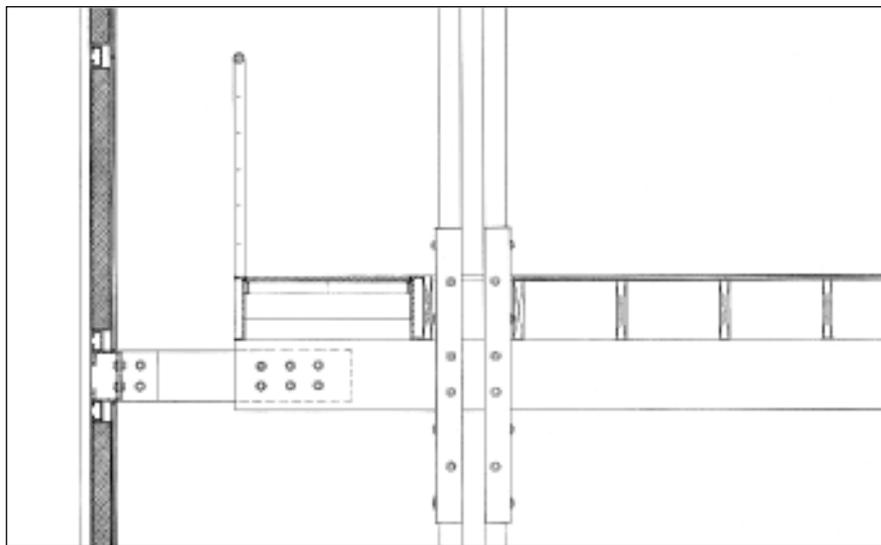
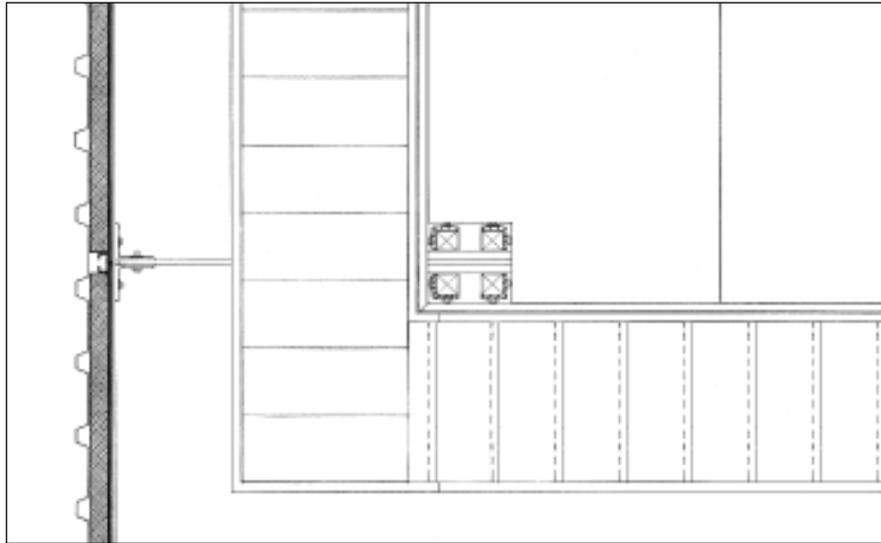
*roof*





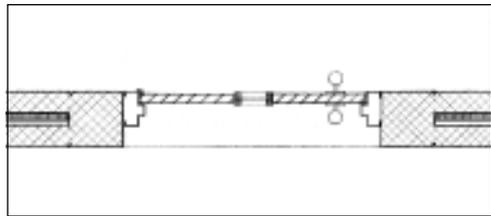
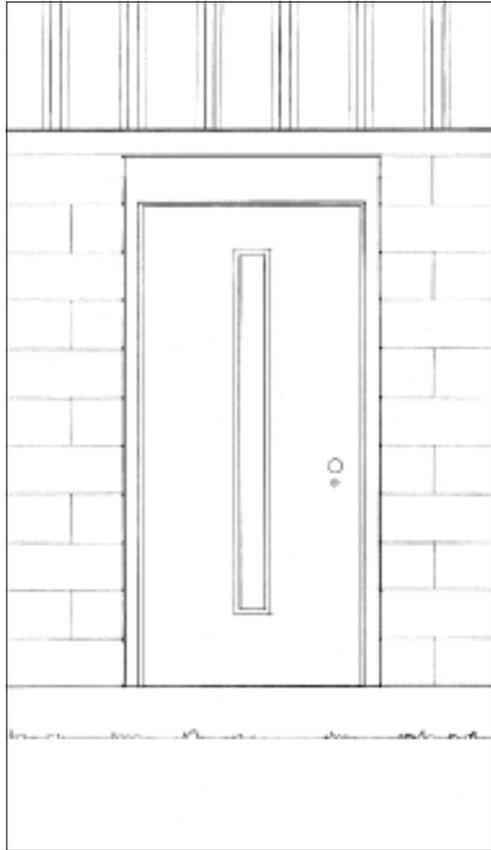
*cross-section*





*structural detail*  
interior column and enclosure membrane





*entry door*  
detail



## CHRONOLOGY

February 1996

CENTER. A Journal for Architecture in America.  
*Dwelling: Social Life, Buildings and the Spaces Between Them.*

Edward T. Hall.  
*The Hidden Dimension.*

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*House, Form and Culture.*

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*Walden.*

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*The Dance of Life.  
Beyond Culture.*

Richard Serra.  
*Writings and Interviews.*

Robert Morris.  
*Continuous Project: Altered Daily.*

How does one make *place*?

The inquiry begins with an act which evokes an awareness of the place which already exists.  
research: regional history, culture and landscape  
conceptual design: one house - one site

How does one *make* place?

a concern towards the act of making is coupled with the investigation of place.  
research: regional materials, assemblies and patterns, theories and processes of making  
conceptual design: one house - three sites

field . alley . forest

making is an act of observation, acquisition, selection, order and assembly occurring within  
the context of a place, moment and time.  
place is a direct product of the conscious act of making.

conceptual design: three houses - three sites

August 1996

*America's Glorious Quilts.*  
edited by Dennis Duke and Deborah Harding.

Lenice Ingram Bacon.  
*American Patchwork Quilts.*

John Brinckerhoff Jackson.  
*A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time.*

*Peter Forbes & Associates: Ten Houses.*  
edited by Oscar Riera Ojeda.

January 1997

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*Wood Design Manual: The Complete Reference for Wood Design in Canada.*  
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*Donald Judd: Sculpture: September 16 - October 15, 1994, Pace Gallery, 32 East 57th Street NYC.*

February 1997

*Ansel Adams: The American Wilderness.*  
edited by Andrea G. Stillman.

*Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews.*  
edited by John P. O'Neill.

schematic design: three houses - three sites

field . alley . forest  
boat . core . tower

I am interested in the articulation of the structure and content and character of a space  
and a place through the composition of resources into a physical form.

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