

PROJECT FOR A HOUSE ALONG A ROAD

by

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Architecture

(ABSTRACT)

The existential significance of buildings is considered with the aim of discovering an ahistorical paradigm for architecture based on the assumption of an ultimate or primary reality which is innate and unchanging. Particular attention is paid to the cosmogonic functioning of buildings through their role as places. Two aspects of the concept of place are considered: that of an inhabited realm which is set apart within undifferentiated space; and, that of an axis mundi about which a habitable world may become ordered.

A vocabulary of architectural elements consisting of a chimney, plynth, wall, and roof is then used to pursue these ideas within a design project.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*,  
Boston 1969.

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*,  
New York 1959.

Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language,  
Thought*, New York 1971.

Christian Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of  
Dwelling*, Milan 1984.

## INTRODUCTION

A tin cup, a cold night, a lingering sorrow: we inhabit the world among things, they are its constituents. It is through its presence in them that the world is near. Design is an active engagement with things, it is a focused attentiveness aimed at drawing out and articulating their nature such that that nature is made more intensely present; it is a refinement, a distillation which seeks an ontological ideal. In this light, architecture may be understood as the consideration of such an ideal through an act of making. It is, at once, both an inquiry which seeks insight into the nature of that which it undertakes to create, and a means of implementing the insight which is thereby gained.

This project is a thinking about buildings. From the start, it has been predicated on the assumption that the significance and richness belonging to them originates in their being as buildings and neither requires nor benefits from extrinsic embellishment. It is undertaken as an attempt to create a work of architecture by pursuing the ideal of a building *as such*, removed from external obligations and significances, in order to

focus on that which is innate and essential.

*Why build? Why buildings at all?* It is with these first questions that the nature of buildings, and thus their significance as things, is pursued. It is difficult, however, to encounter the word *building* without implicitly interpreting it as *mere building*. This is because so many of the things so named are dissatisfying. Nonetheless, it remains that architecture is driven by a concern with buildings. The first temptation is to explain that there are good and bad buildings, and that architecture is concerned only with the better ones. A more clear insight is gained, however, with the realization that it is not a matter of relative design success; but rather, that *buildings* and *mere buildings* are separate things, and that *buildings*, because of the presence which they possess by being as such, are distinct from mere buildings. It is this presence that draws us to them and provides the basis for architecture.

In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Martin Heidegger explains that a thing's origin - that from which it is as it is - is the source of its being and thus its nature. A building stands through an act of making, as a built object. Thus it is, at

least in part, simply as a manifestation of the vital energy that marks us as human. We build in accordance with instinct, not in order to gain the utility of the finished product, but because we are builders - because of the intuitive gratification of placing a stone, of raising a column and setting a beam, and because of the satisfaction of seeing a thing arise before us and the materials within it raised to their potential.

Along with materials, incorporated into a building are the virtues which characterize it as the product of human undertaking. Containing the effort of labor, as well as the clarity and directness which characterize the intelligent process of assembly, a building stands as evidence of aspiration and accomplishment. Unified and whole, the structure is made sufficient unto itself as a tectonic fact. Gravity, wind, tremor, decay: verticality it improbable, yet a building stands confidently with the self-evident capacity to do so.

Most of this, however, can be said of all acts of making; and so, by itself, a built presence is insufficient as an understanding of the discrete nature of buildings. Revealingly, buildings are as artifacts, and as such are characterized not

only by their made quality, but by the purposefulness which directs the act of making. Superficially, this purposefulness is specific to each building as a response to the particulars of program and context; yet, more deeply it exists as the ideal, common to all buildings from all times, which is based in the same desire which was present at the making of the first building.

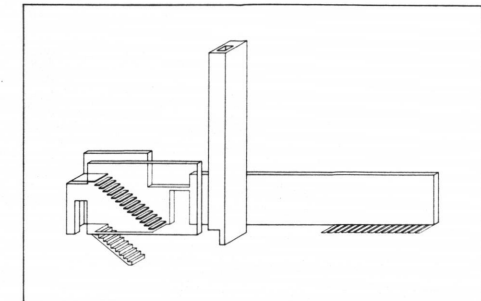
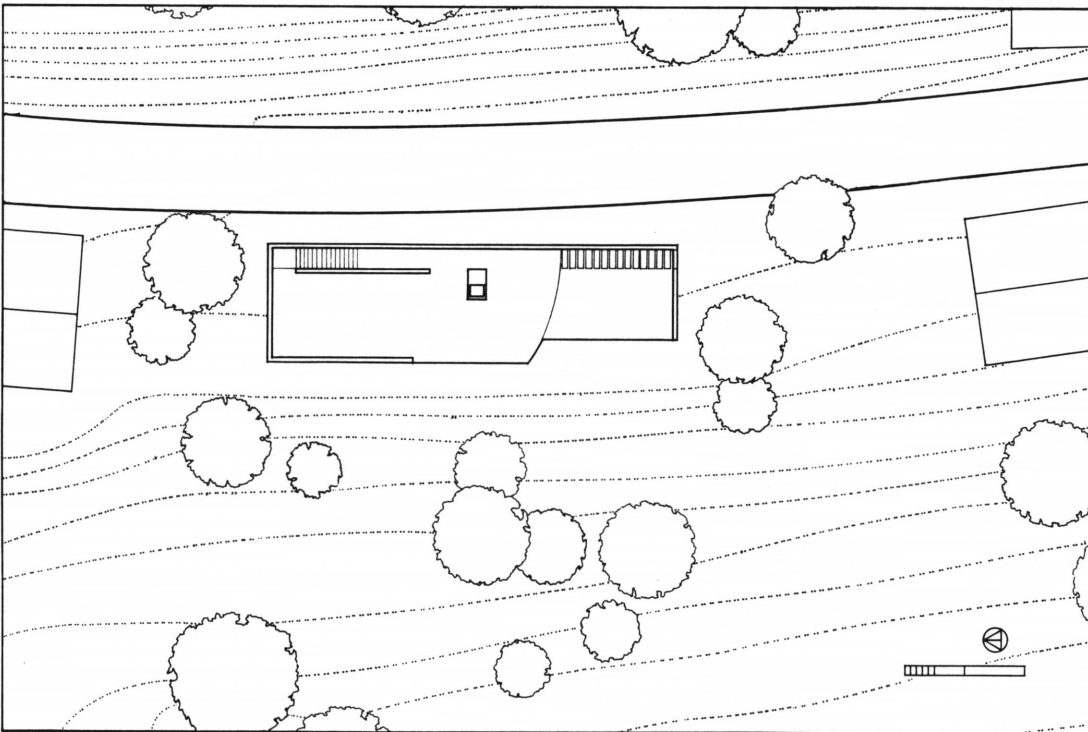
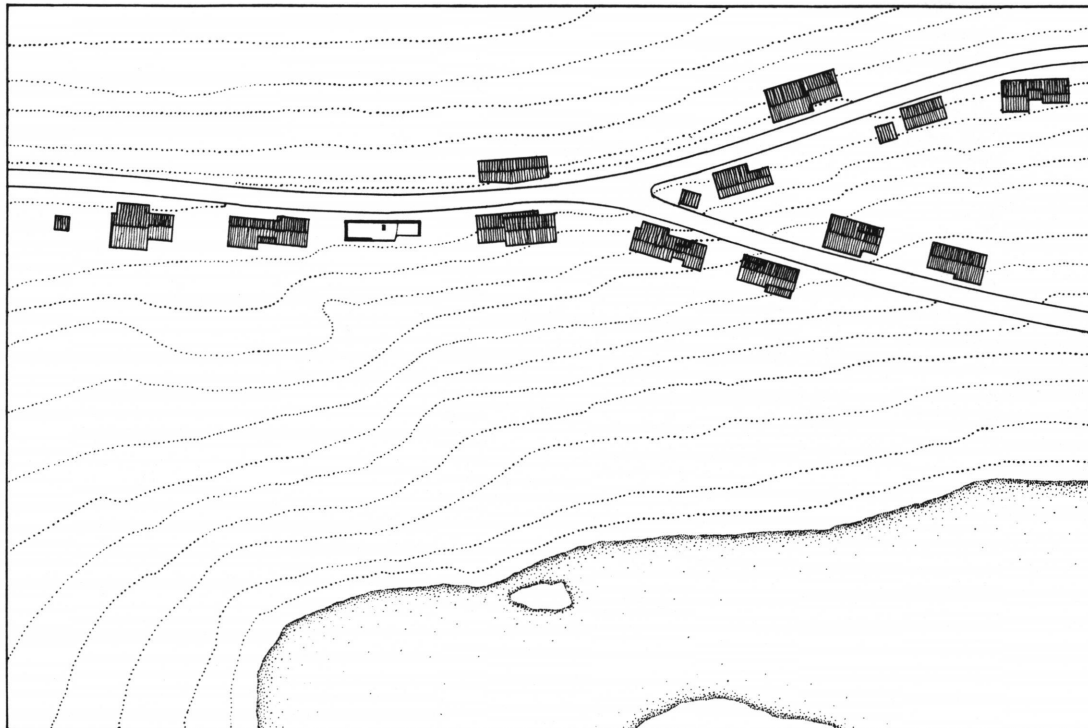
Buildings are the things within which and about which life occurs: they are places. The making of a building is a manifestation of the desire for place; it is an act of inhabitation. With a building a location is established and an existential foothold is gained in the universe. As places, buildings provide the fixed points which allow the universe to be ordered as a human domain. By itself, space is formless and empty, an undistinguished continuum which is impossible to enter or experience. As such, it does not truly exist as space, but only as a kind of latent potential, as would be space. It is through a constituency of places, meaningfully configured, that space is transformed into a habitable cosmos. Buildings create the distinctions in space which allow it to be differentiated as *here* and *not here*, *there* and *not there*, and thus to take on the

topological order which characterizes existential space. They are able to accomplish this because of the figural capacity which allows them to be set apart, not only as locations within a spatial surround, but as objects for contemplation and revery as well. Linger in our thoughts, they stay with us as we stay among them, capturing anticipation and populating memory such that experience and ultimately life itself become attached to them.

The consideration of a building as a place, or location serves as the basis for this project, providing the intent upon which decisions are founded. A house serves as its vehicle. The choice of a house is mostly arbitrary; however, there are a couple of benefits which accompany it. First, the correspondence between home and place is readily grasped, so that a discussion of the project is facilitated; and also, the idea of home particularly embodies two aspects of place which are emphasized: that of an origin or center about which the world spreads; and that of a domain or precinct containing a discrete and privileged realm.

In a positive sense, the house is considered to be mundane. Its purpose is to provide a place for the quietness and

poignancy of daily life. Its program is based on the conscious accommodation of the things called upon in everyday rituals and acts: the bed; the table; the sink; the fire. It does so not by appropriating their functions within its own, but by providing places for them in order that they may be housed as things in their own right, things which inhabit life and among which dwelling occurs. Thus, furniture and fixtures are placed within rather than built-in to the building, such that the house is as a found object, or perhaps a blank page, or armature, which is ultimately completed by becoming inhabited.

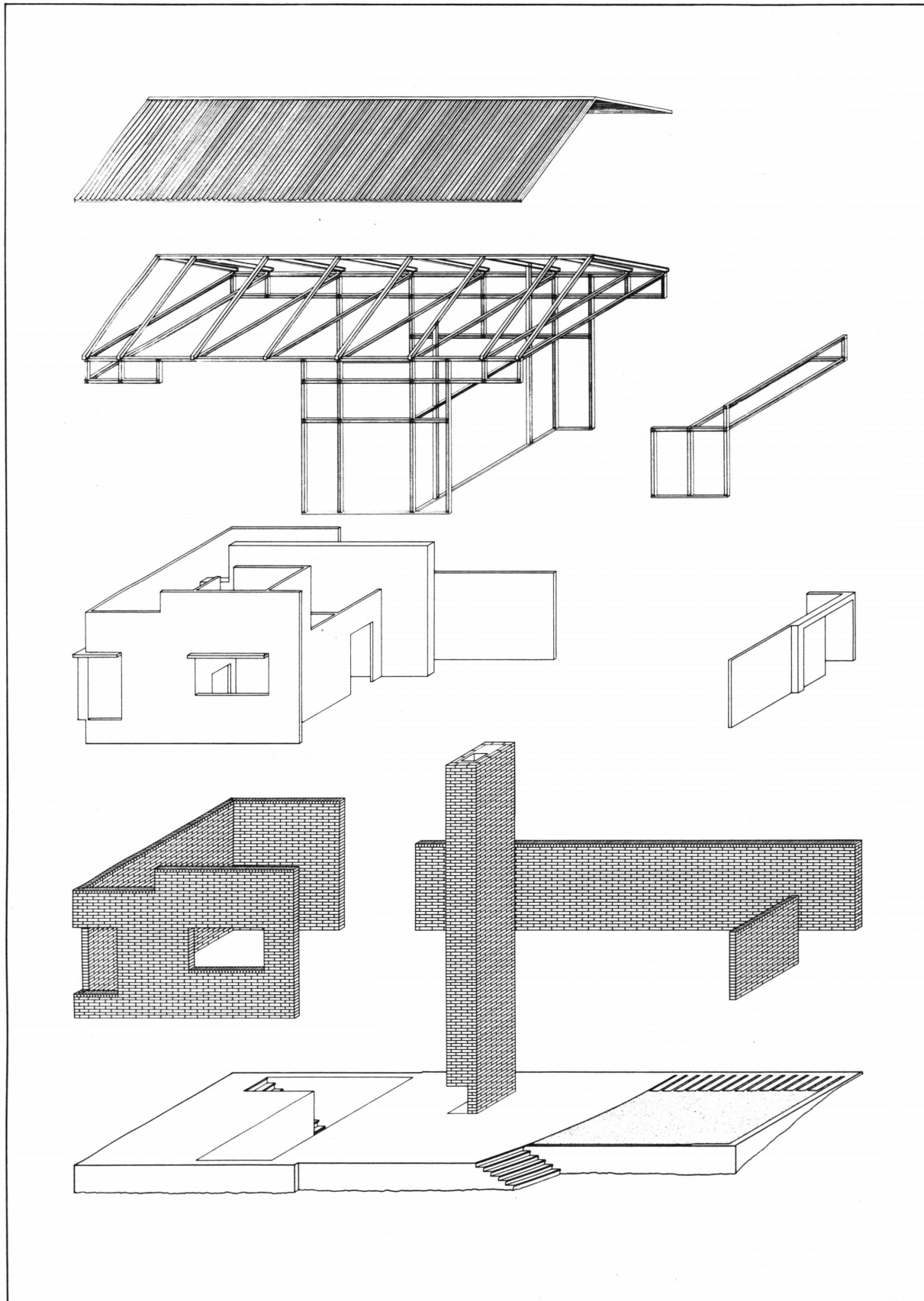


The promenade.

## SITE AND CONTEXT

The house is to be located beside a road, on a hillside, within a line of other houses and neighborhood commercial facilities. It is conceived as a place apart within the public world of street and community, and as a place of vantage overlooking the landscape. A perimeter wall partly encloses the project, providing seclusion from the public surround while leaving the house open to the undeveloped domain above which it stands.

A promenade runs along the inside of the east wall, thickening the boundary between street and house. In the same way that the community is ordered along the street, the house is structured as a sequence of events along the promenade. Consisting of a pathway, corridor, and stair, the promenade links the house's various levels and provides continuity horizontally along its length.



### A VOCABULARY OF PARTS

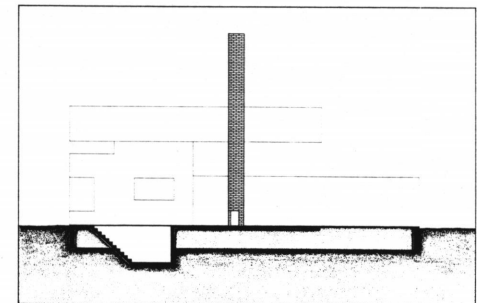
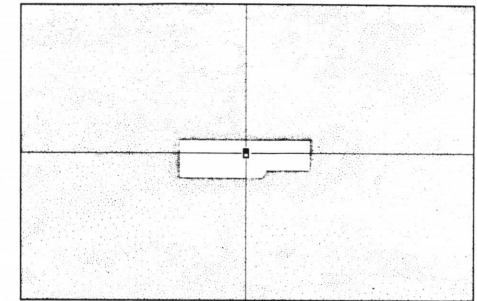
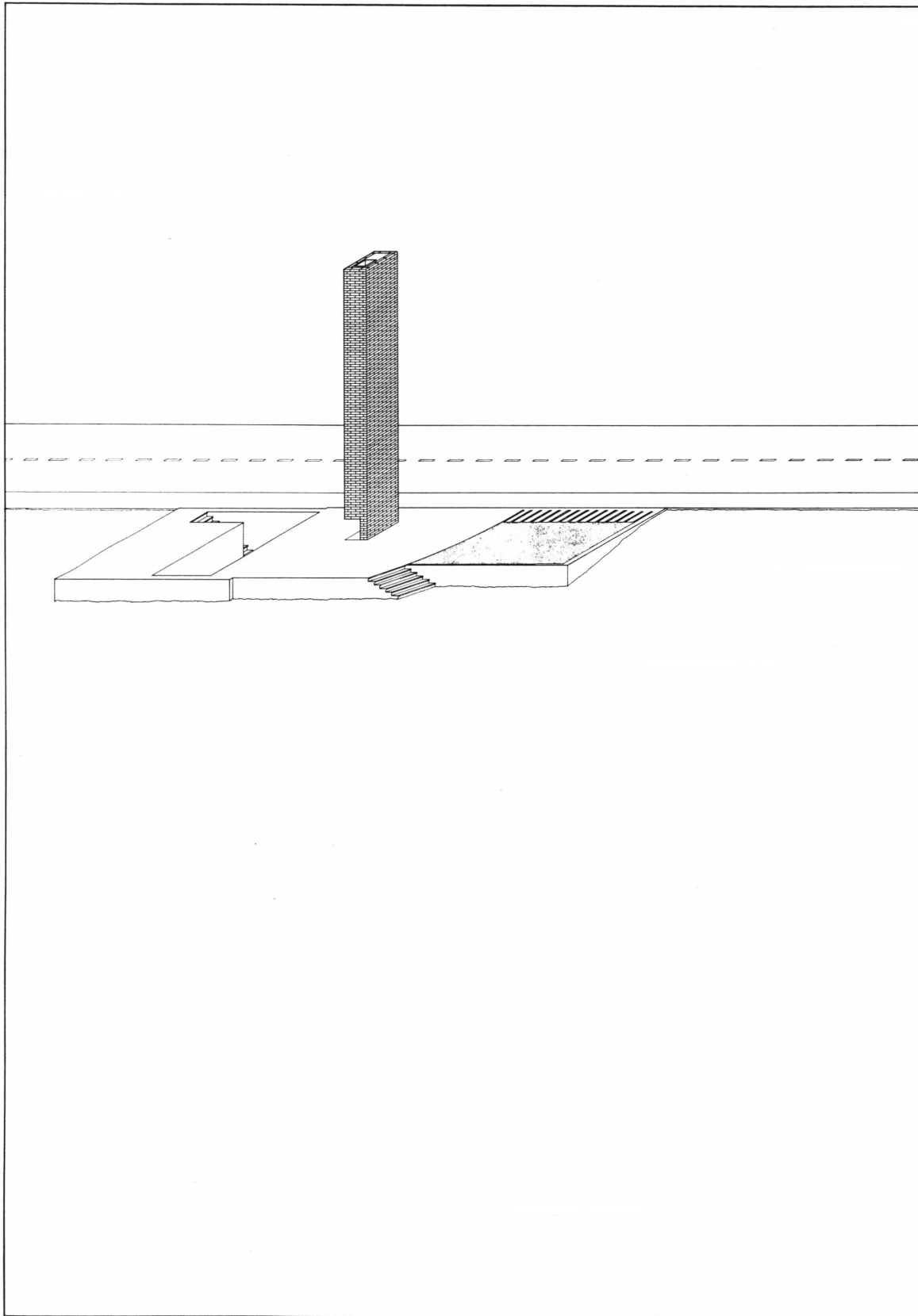
The focus of this project is an elaboration, within a work of architecture, of the concept of location. A vocabulary of parts is called upon to provide the means for this elaboration. From the parts a building is assembled and, through them, is established as and functions as a location.

Along with the chimney, the primary components of this vocabulary are: a plinth, a wall, and a roof. These, along with the spaces which they contain (cellar, ground floor, and garret), are ordered within a vertical hierarchy corresponding to the mythic structure of space:

the heavens  
the terrestrial plane  
the underground.

This reference is used in the project in order to emphasize the link between house and universe, and to reinforce the house's role as a point of origin within the expanse of existential space.





Top: Origin and domain.  
Above: A fixed point.

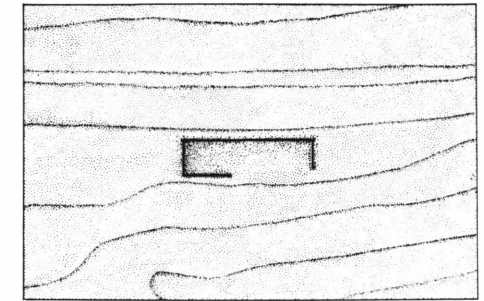
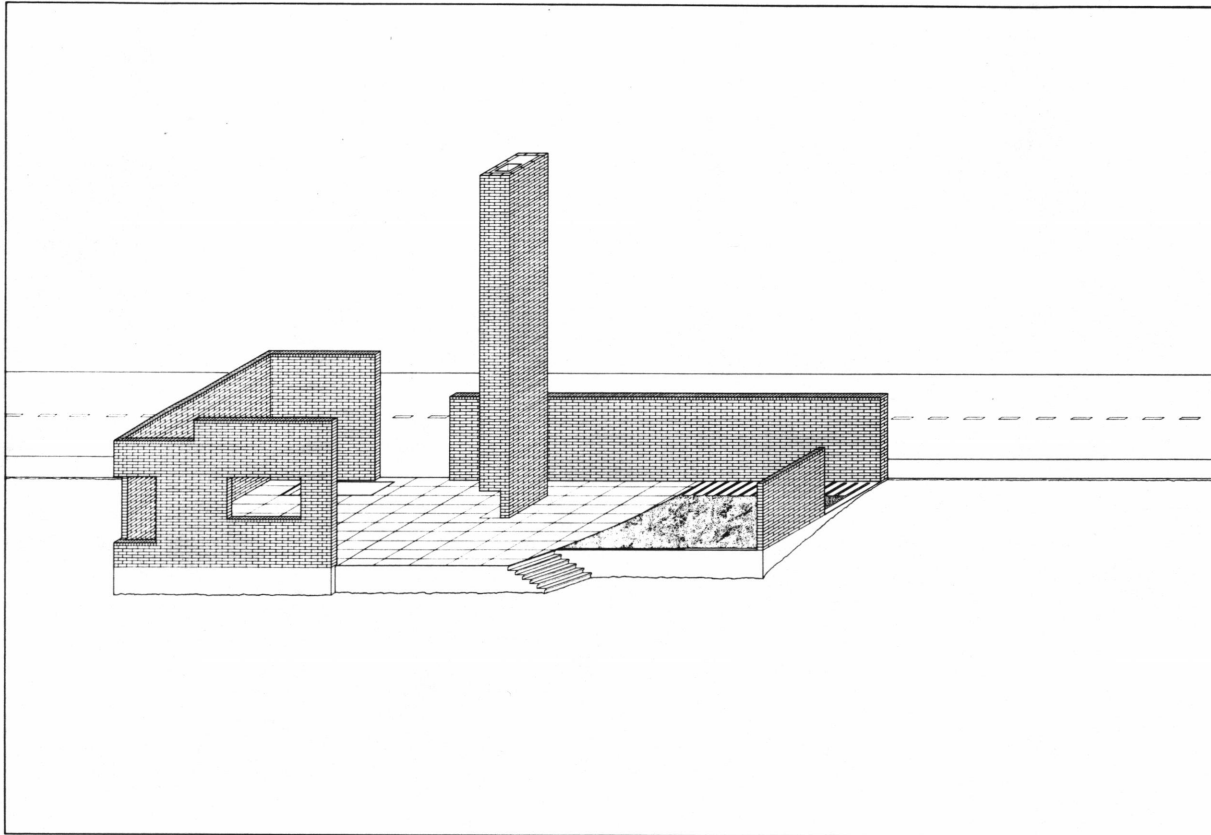
## CHIMNEY AND PLINTH

The chimney and plinth embody two aspects of location which are particularly important to this project: *origin* and *domain*. The term *origin* is used to designate a center, or fixed point, about which the world is ordered; while *domain* refers to a discernable realm set apart within its surround.

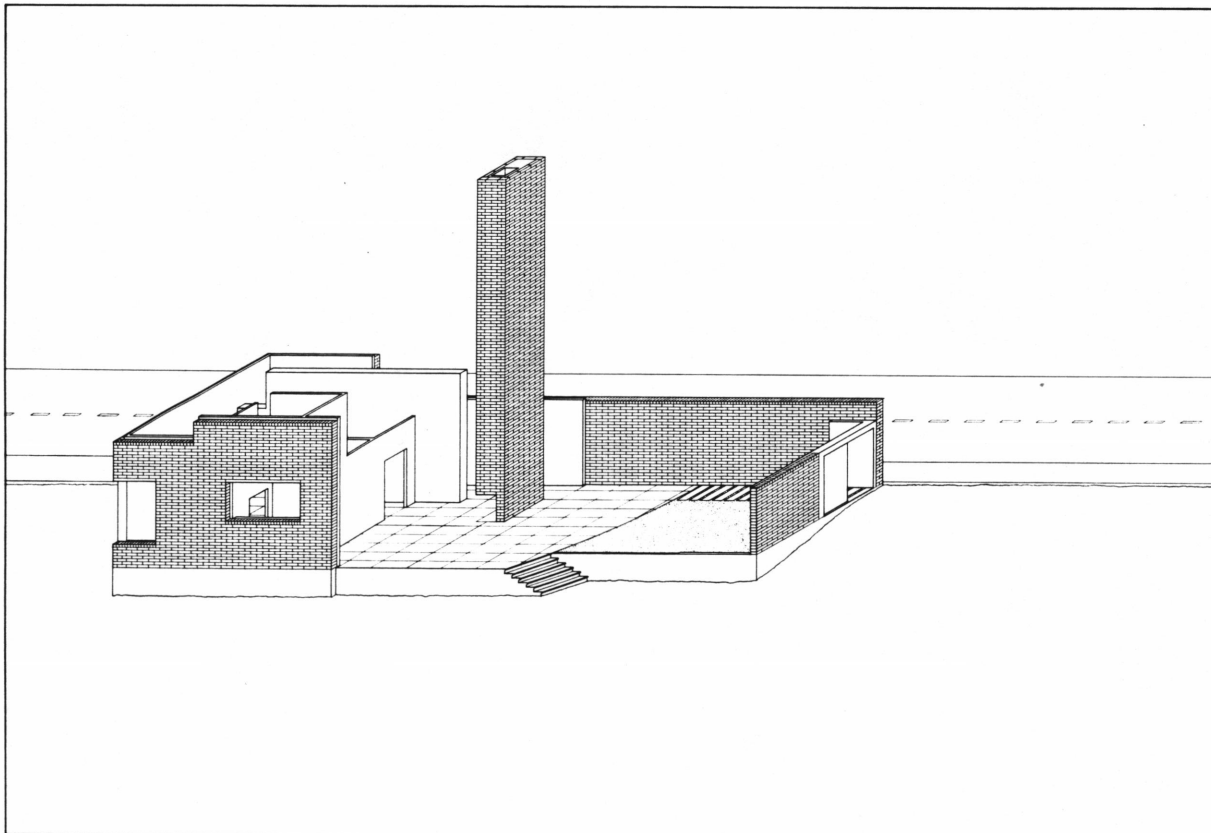
With the chimney a center is created; it is a destination, a place to gather, a point of departure; it is the point from which the land spreads and the sky disperses. A vertical gesture in the landscape, the chimney serves as an affirmation of place -- a marker which establishes this location by occupying it and by declaring its existence. As well as providing a sign in the landscape, the chimney is placed to have a recurrent presence inside the house itself; it is present upon entering the living room, either from the garden or the street; it is

present upon leaving the bedroom in the morning, and while sitting at the table during the day. The chimney is the figurative center, dominant in both plan and section, about which the house takes place.

The plinth's role, with regard to the building's functioning as a location, may be considered both in plan and section. In plan, the plinth is a clearly defined surface, its simple shape and distinct perimeter strengthen its clarity as a figure and make it more distinct within the surround. The plinth designates that portion of land which belongs to and comprises this location. Considered in section, the plinth serves as the connection between the building and its site, it is both a part of the building and the thing upon which the building stands. The plinth establishes the site and fixes it as a location.



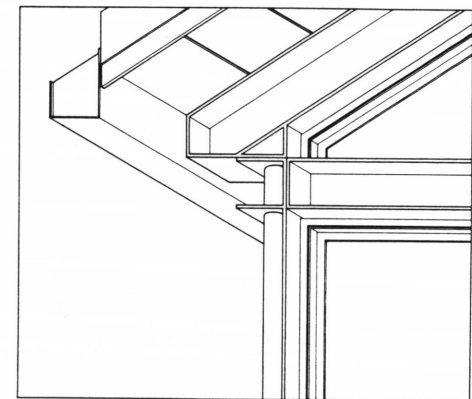
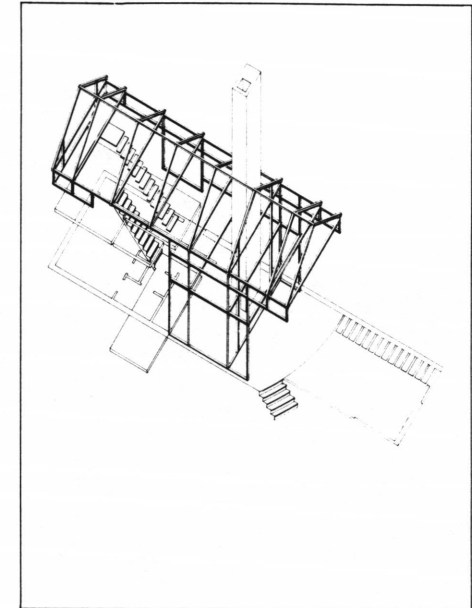
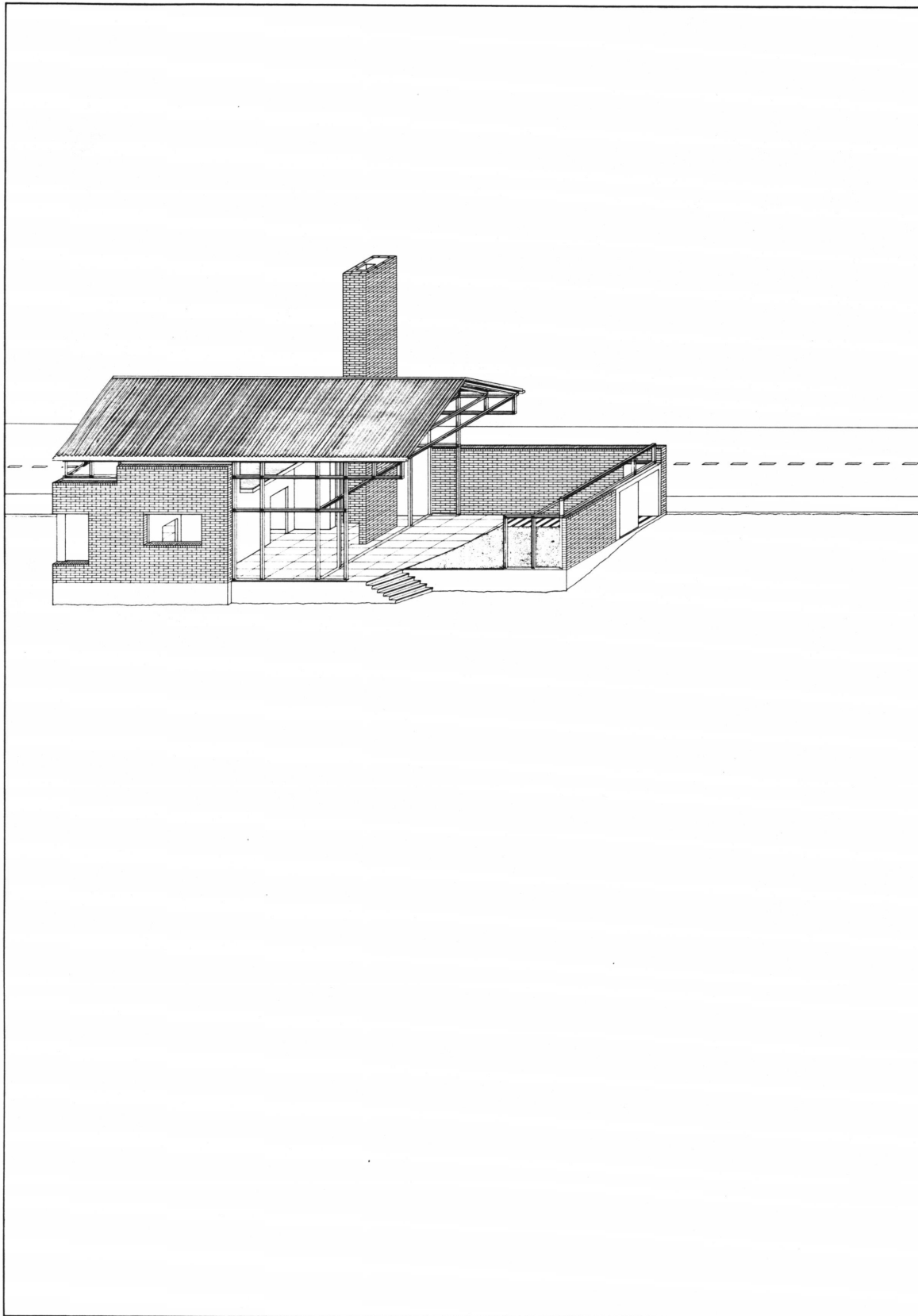
Inside and outside.



## WALL

In its tectonic capacity, the wall stands between the roof and plinth; bearing this load, it is made more stable and stands more firmly, more inevitably, in its place between inside and out. Its purpose is to separate and thus to enclose and seclude. With the wall, an inside is brought into being and this place is transformed into a *place within*.

Indoors, the wall (which is of stacked block otherwise) is lined with poured concrete. As well as refining the interior surface, this thickens the wall and provides a cavity. The concrete liner is then further elaborated into the partitions which divide the interior, and create the building's minor spaces.

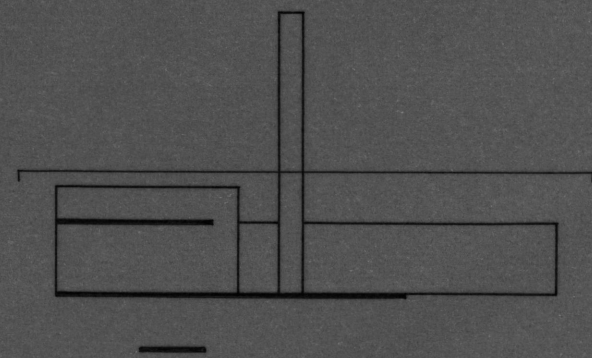


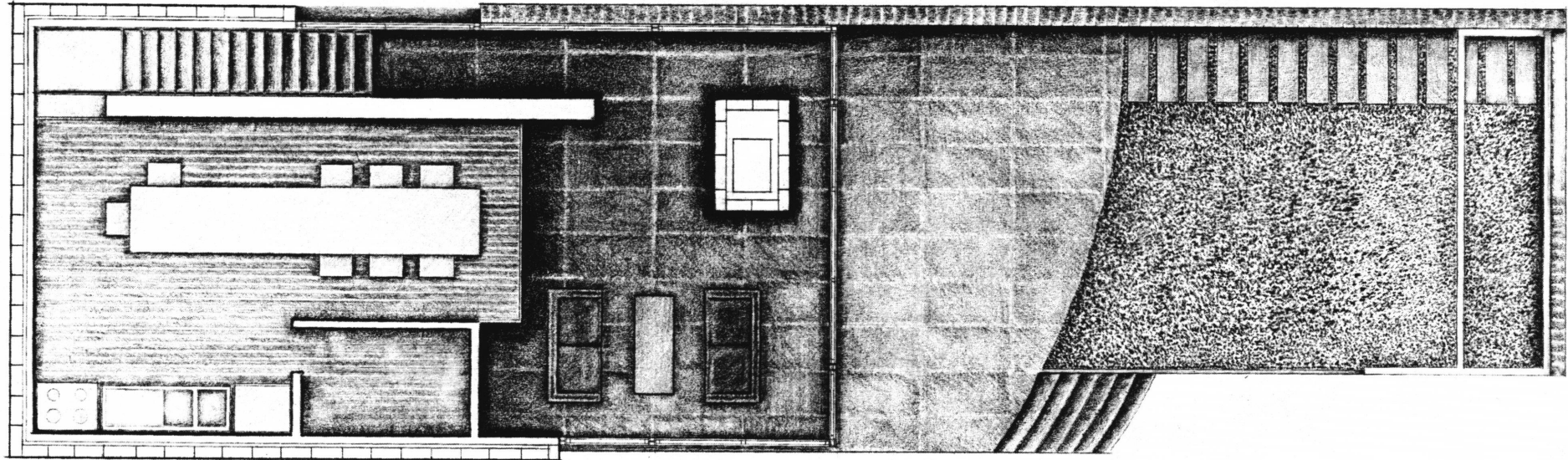
## ROOF

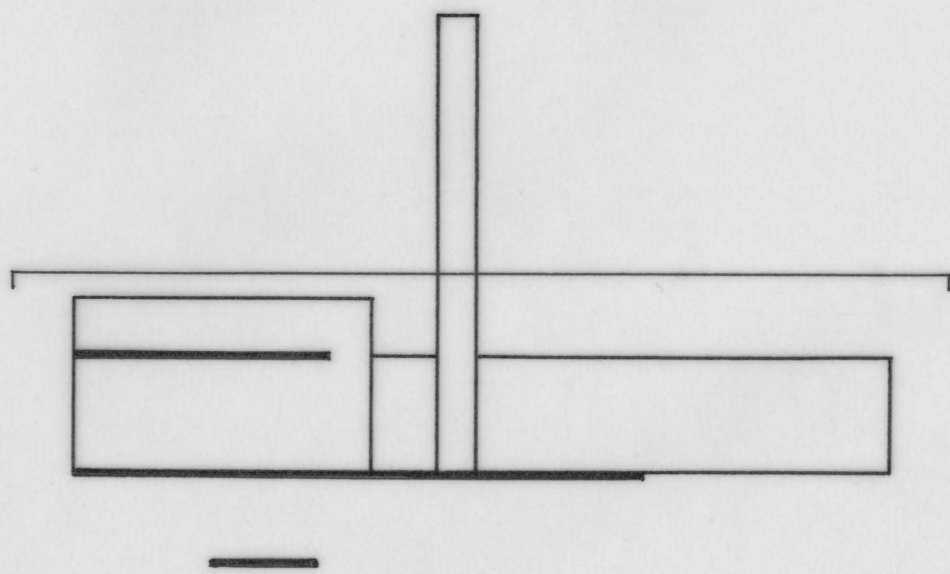
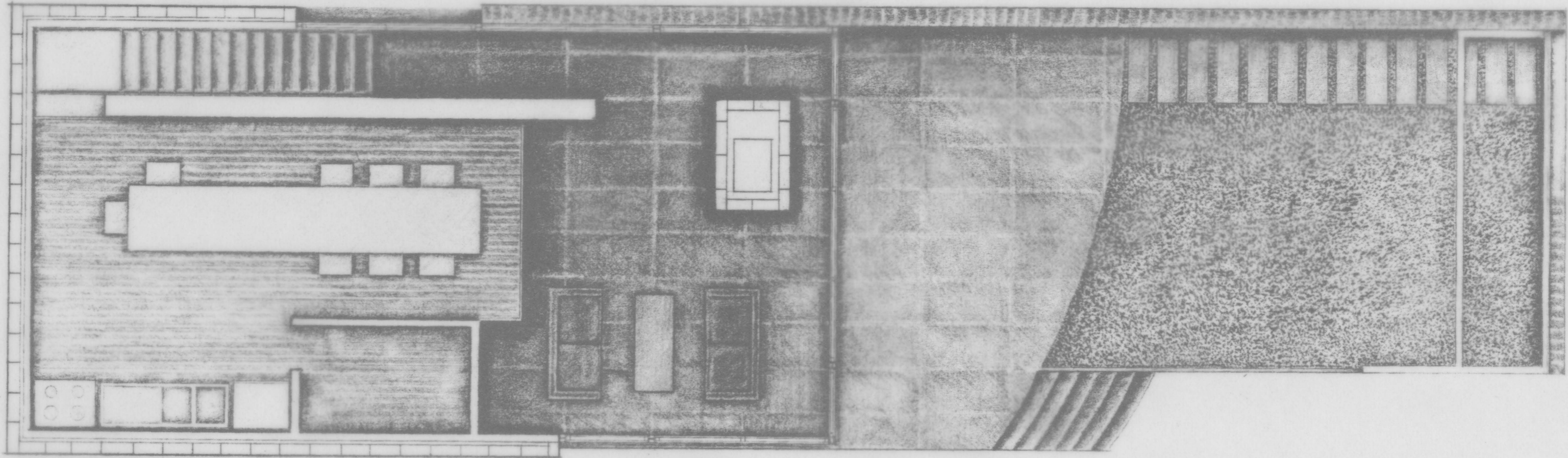
As the foundation is built for the earth, the roof is the meeting of house and sky; lightness is its essence, it spans and hovers. The roof gathers the house into itself, tempering the cycle of days and seasons by dispersing the sky's malevolence.

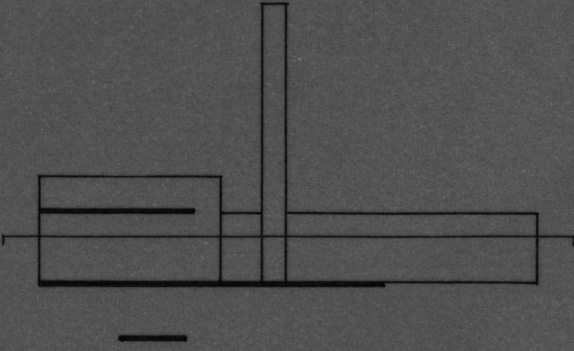
The roof completes the building's enclosure and serves as a unifying element. Carried on an open framework of welded steel, the roof forms a single continuous entity encompassing the sequence of spaces from indoors to out, from private to public, and from secluded to open. Thus contained, the building becomes more distinct as an entity, and more clearly defined as a location within the expanse which surrounds it.

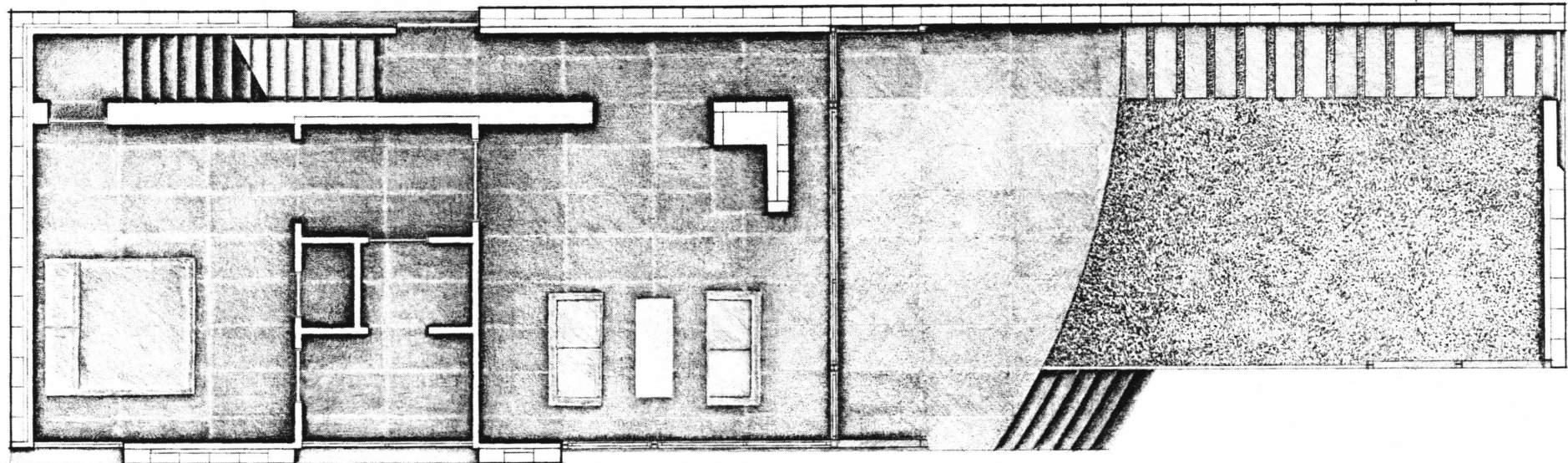
Top: A unifying element.  
Above: Frame detail.



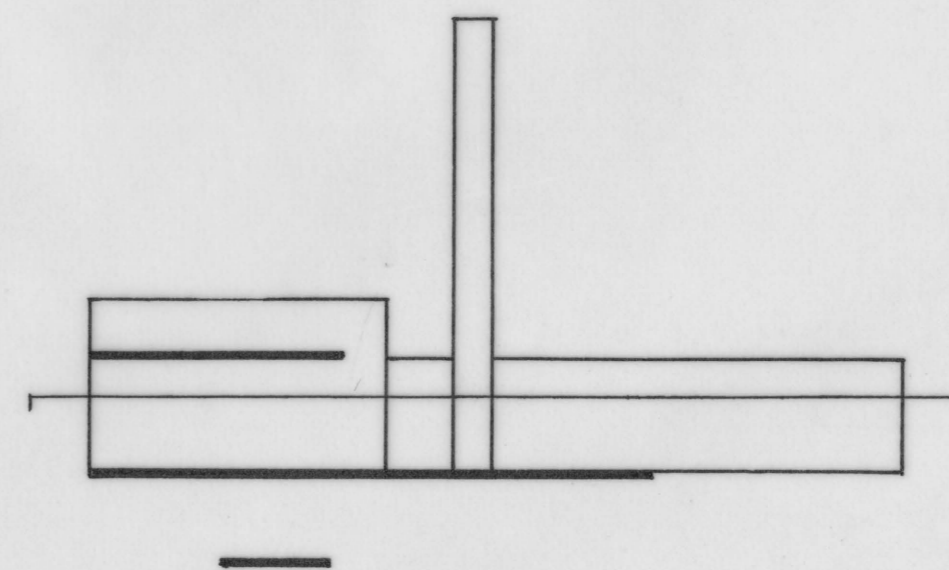
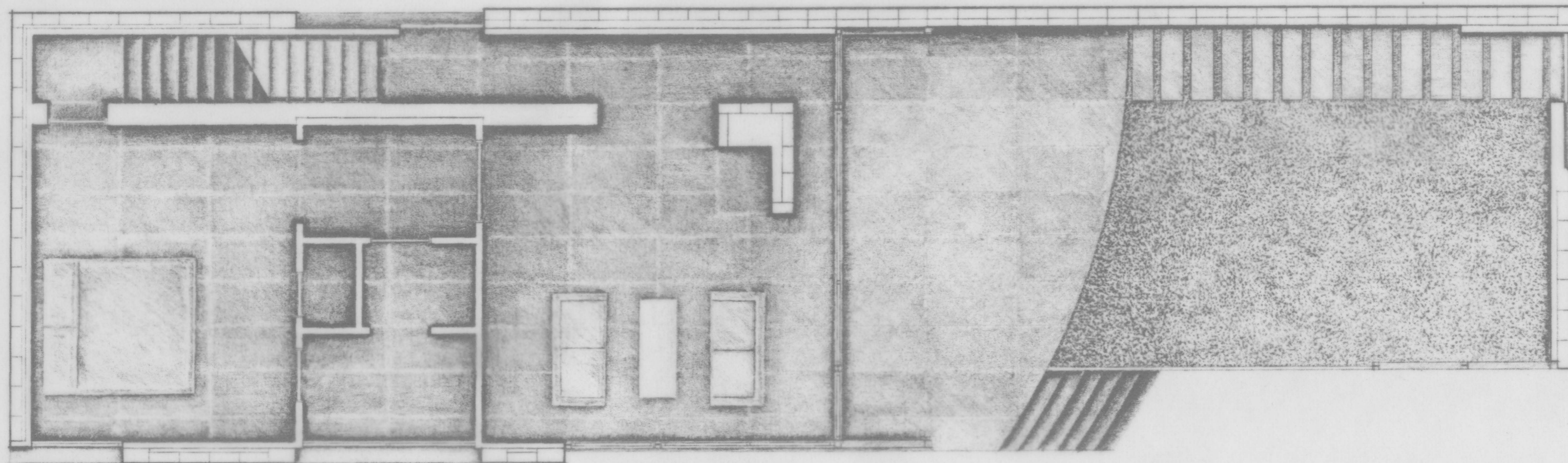


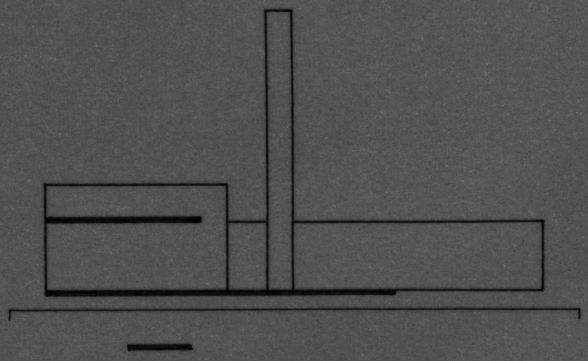


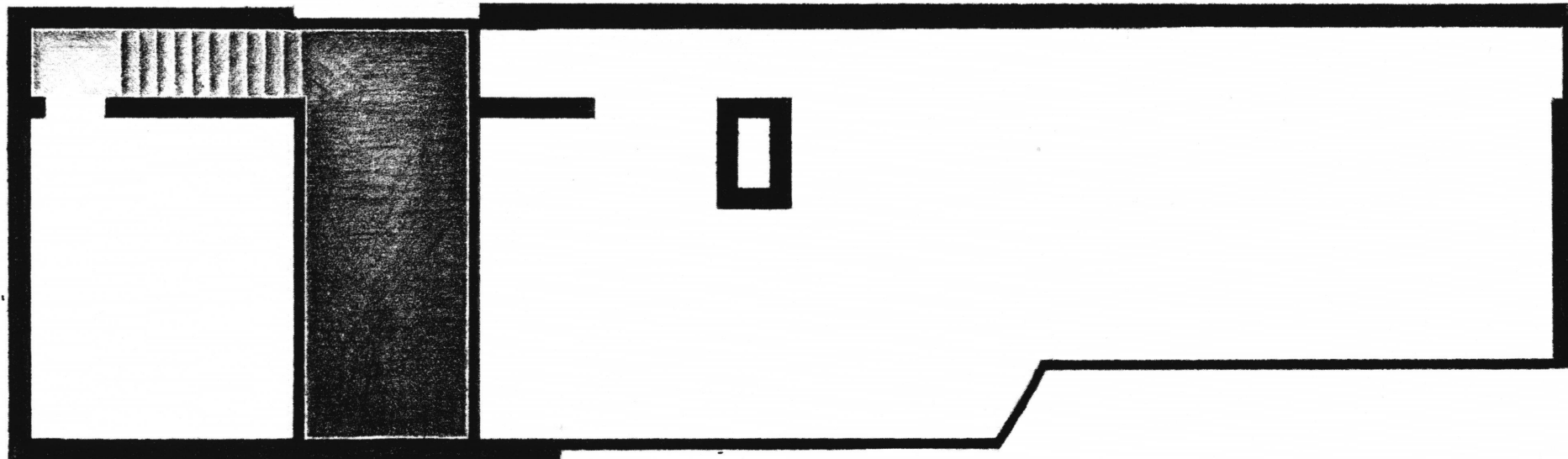






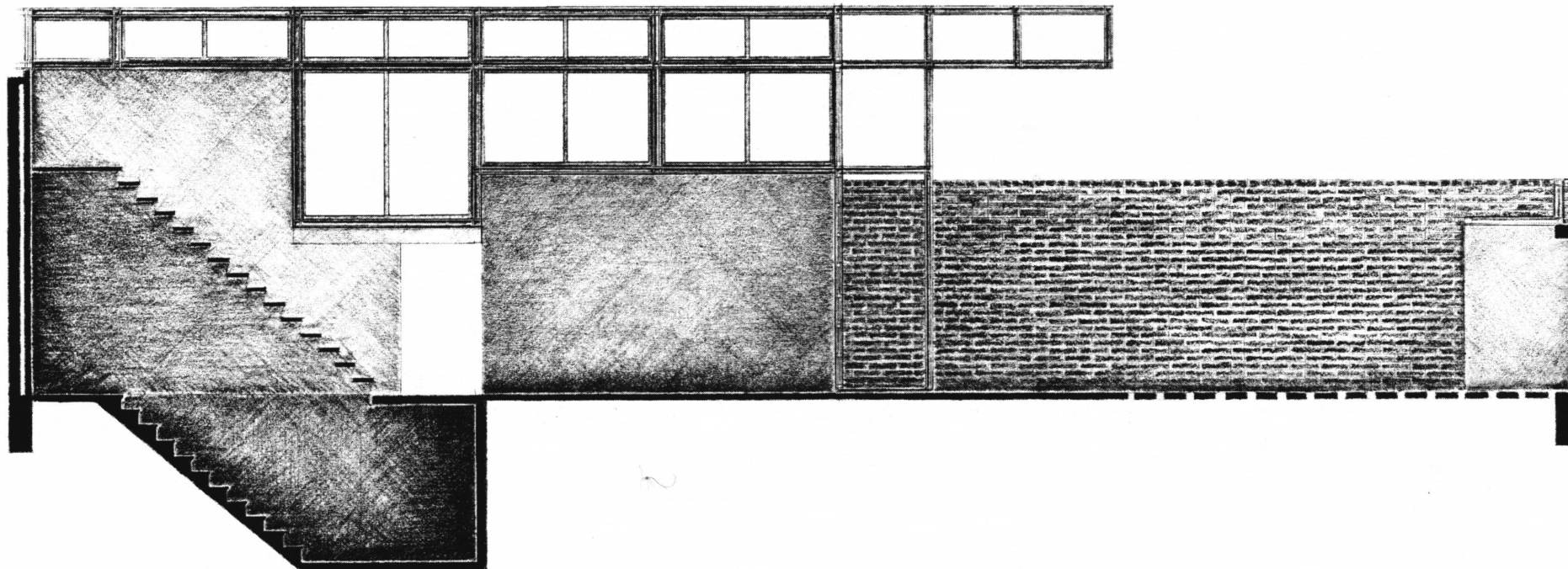




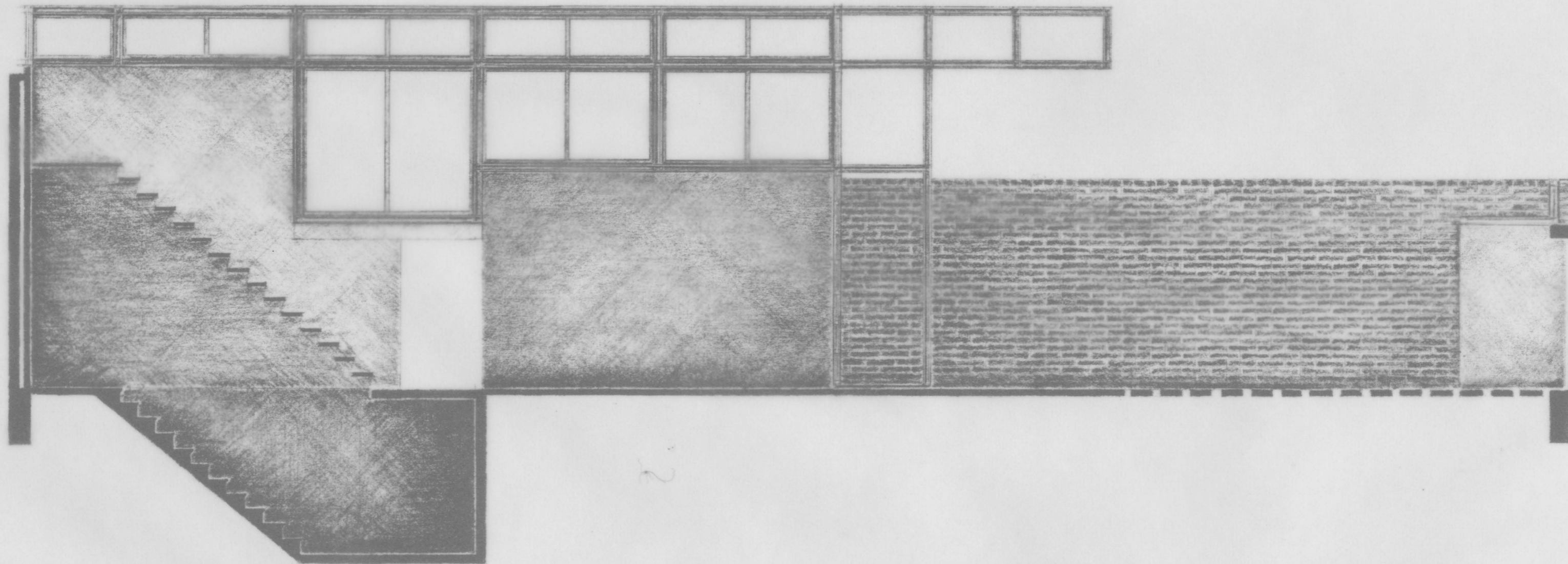




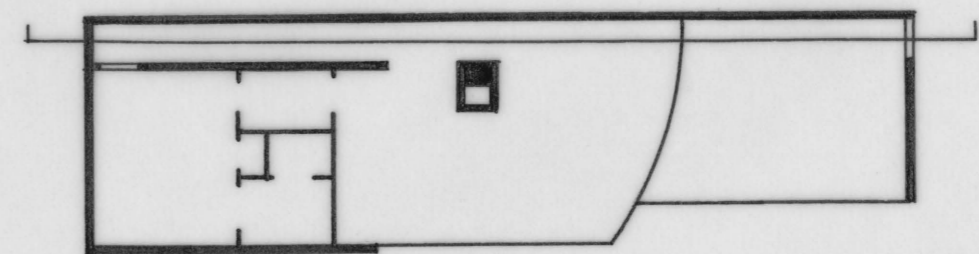


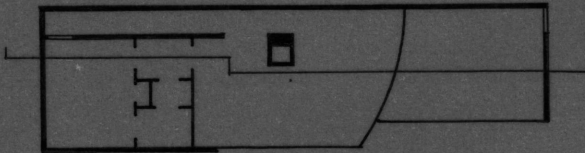


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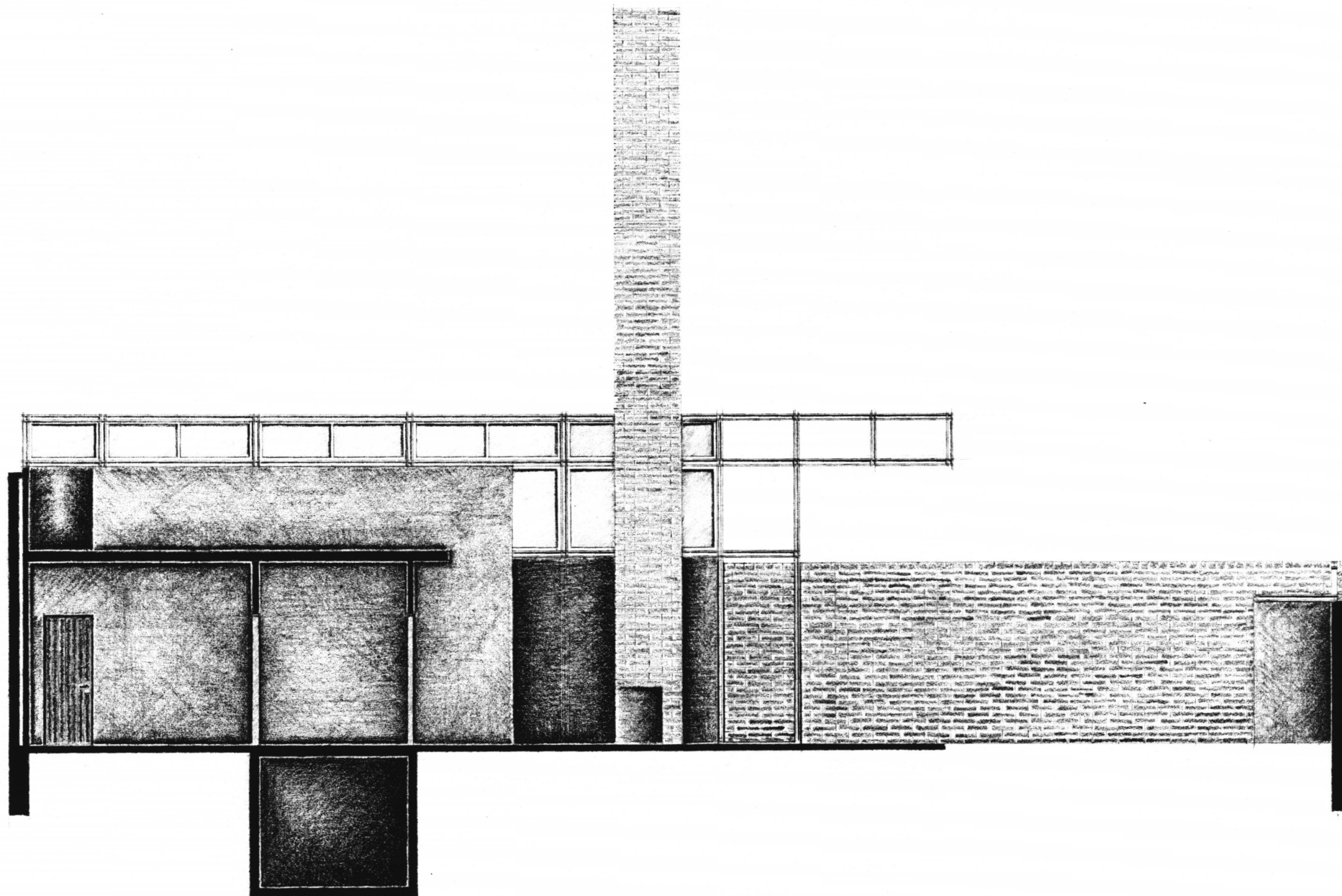


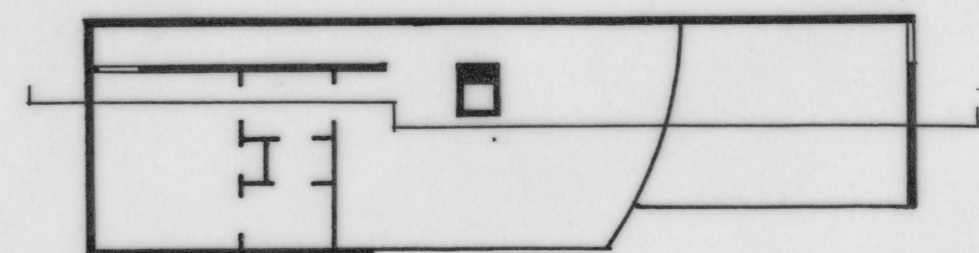
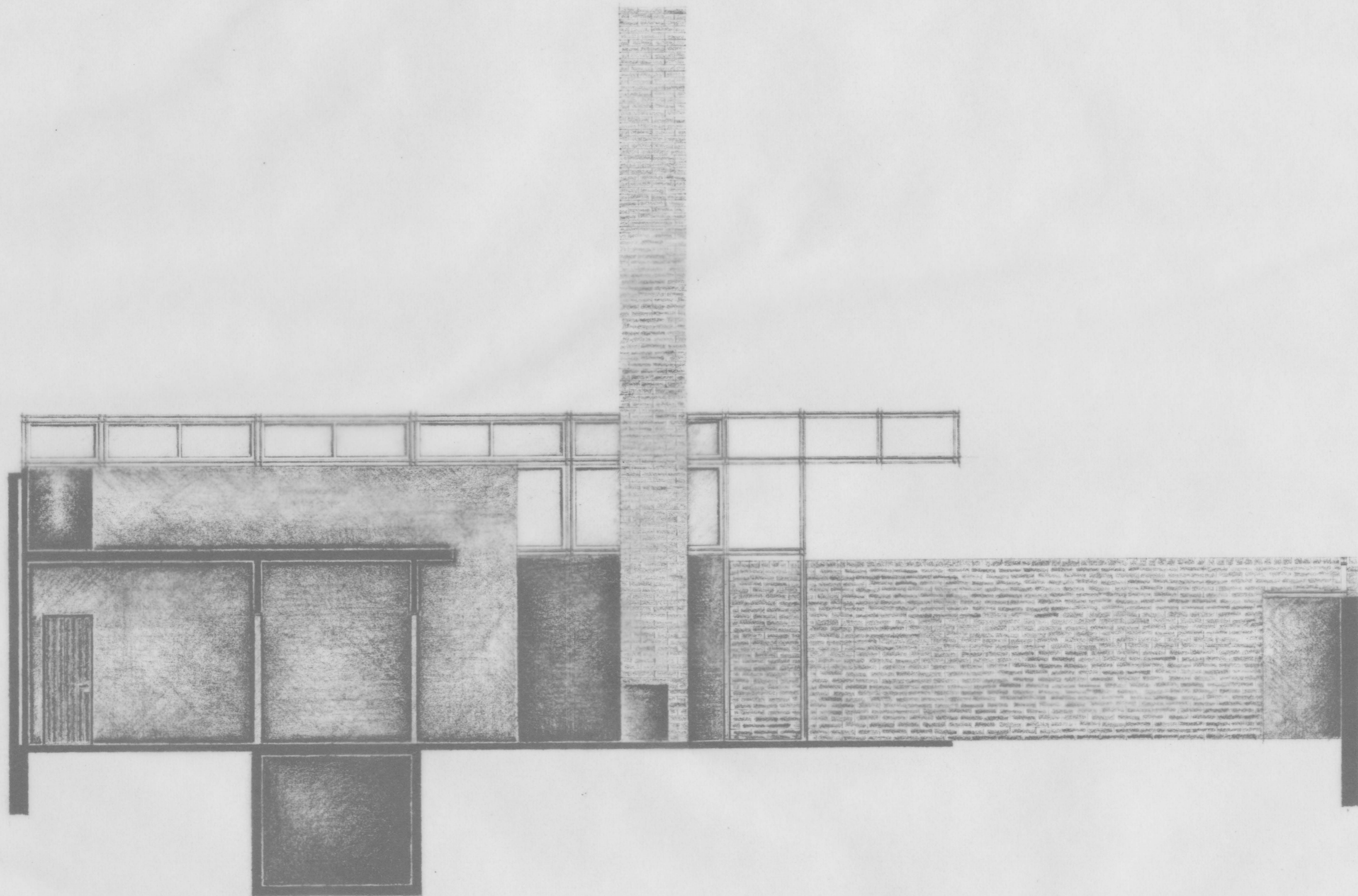
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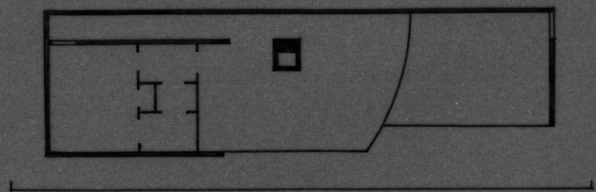




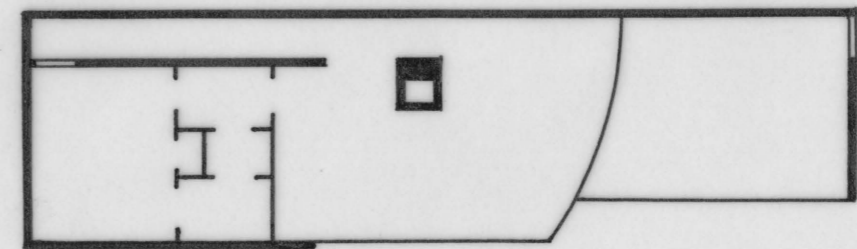


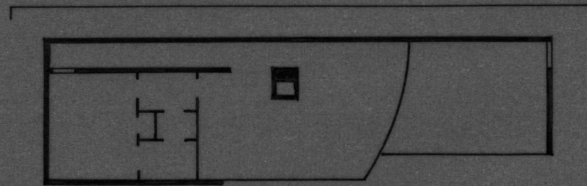


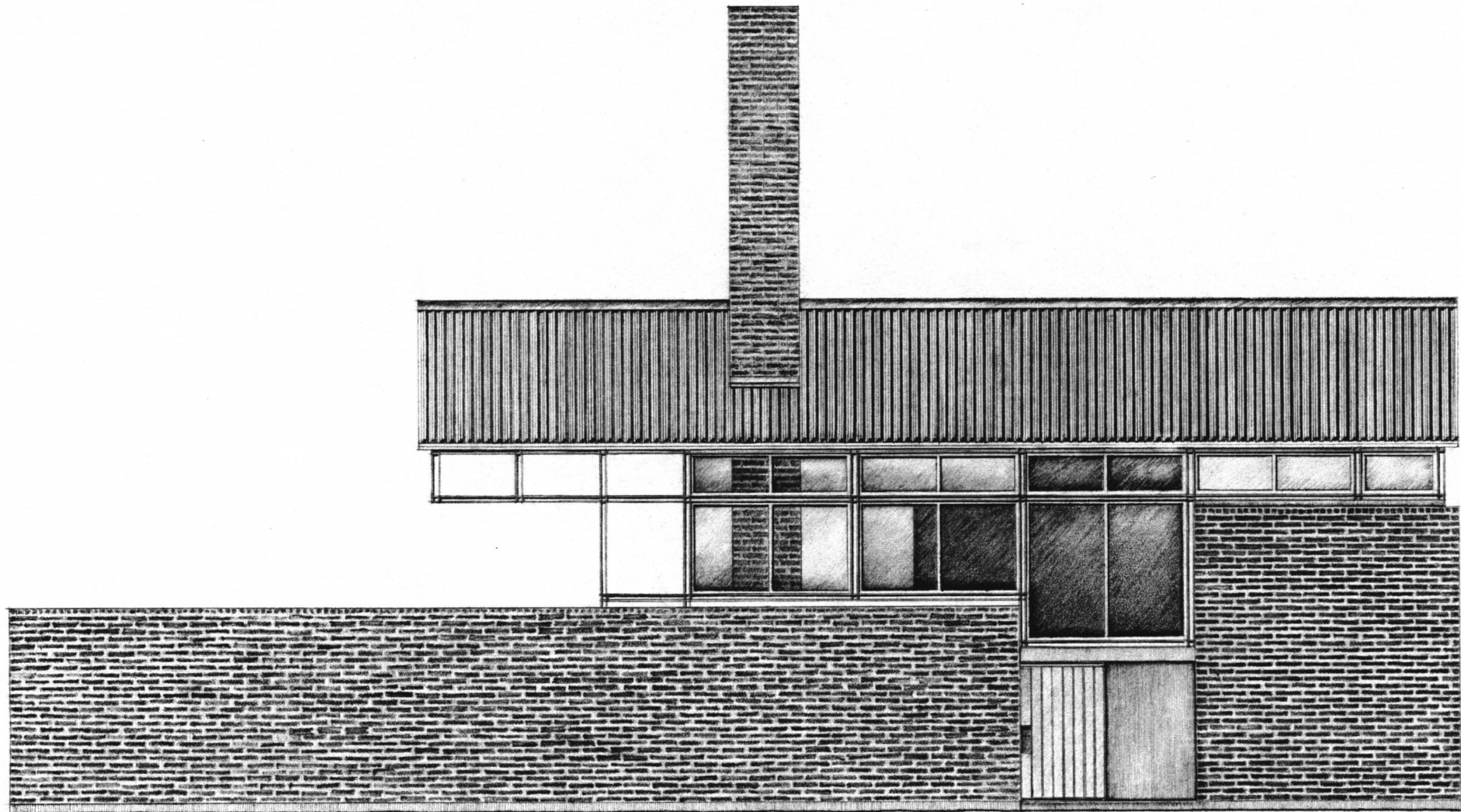


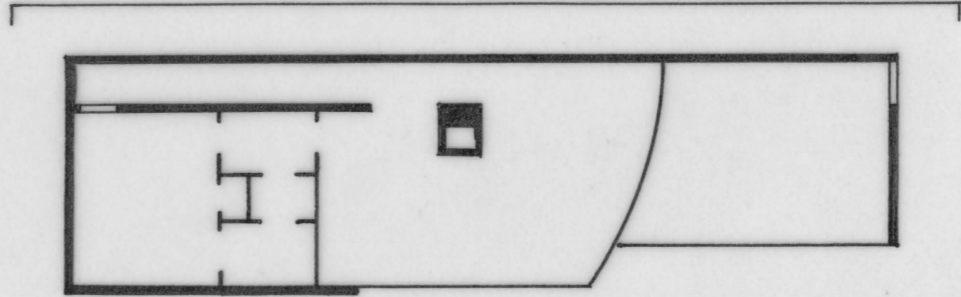
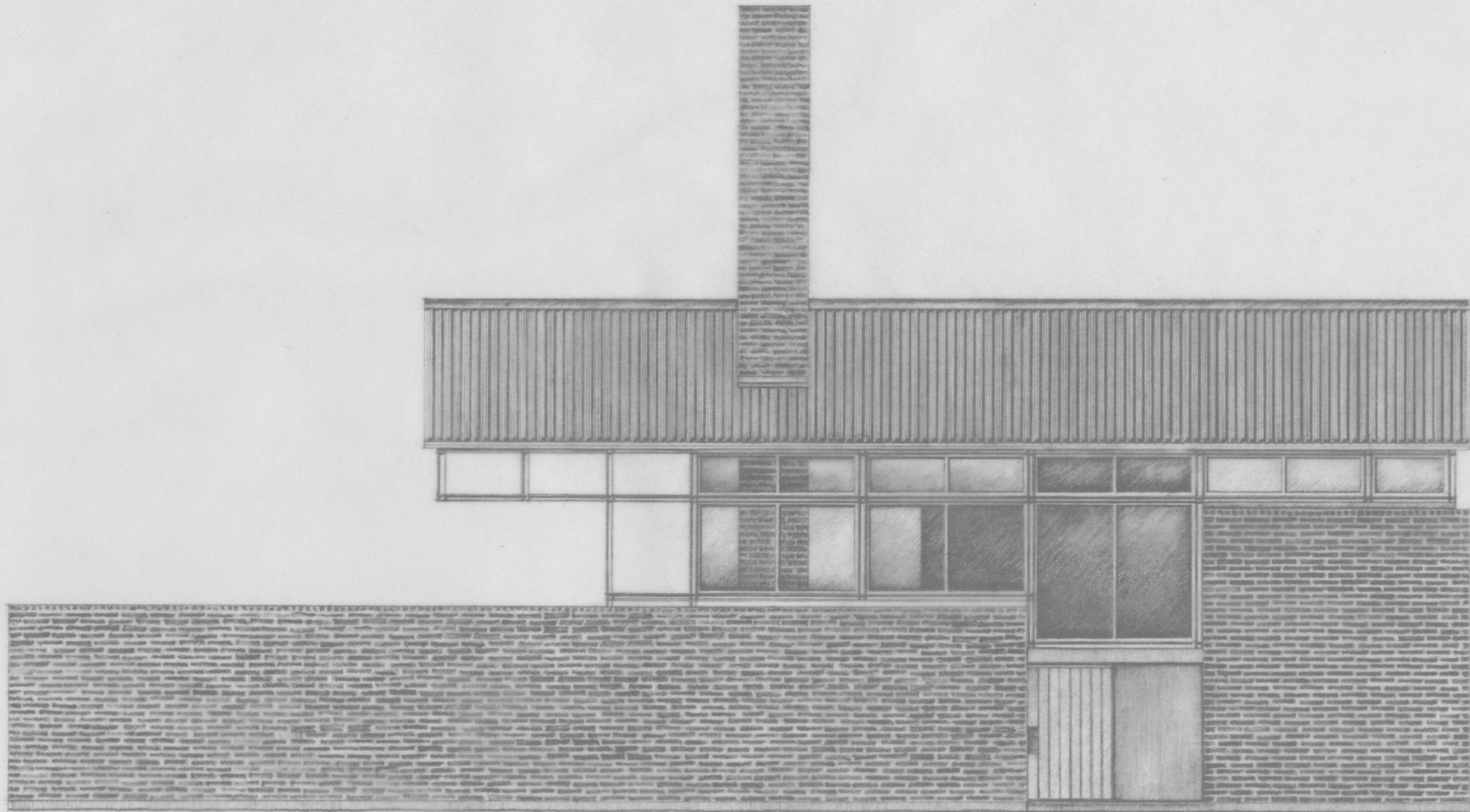




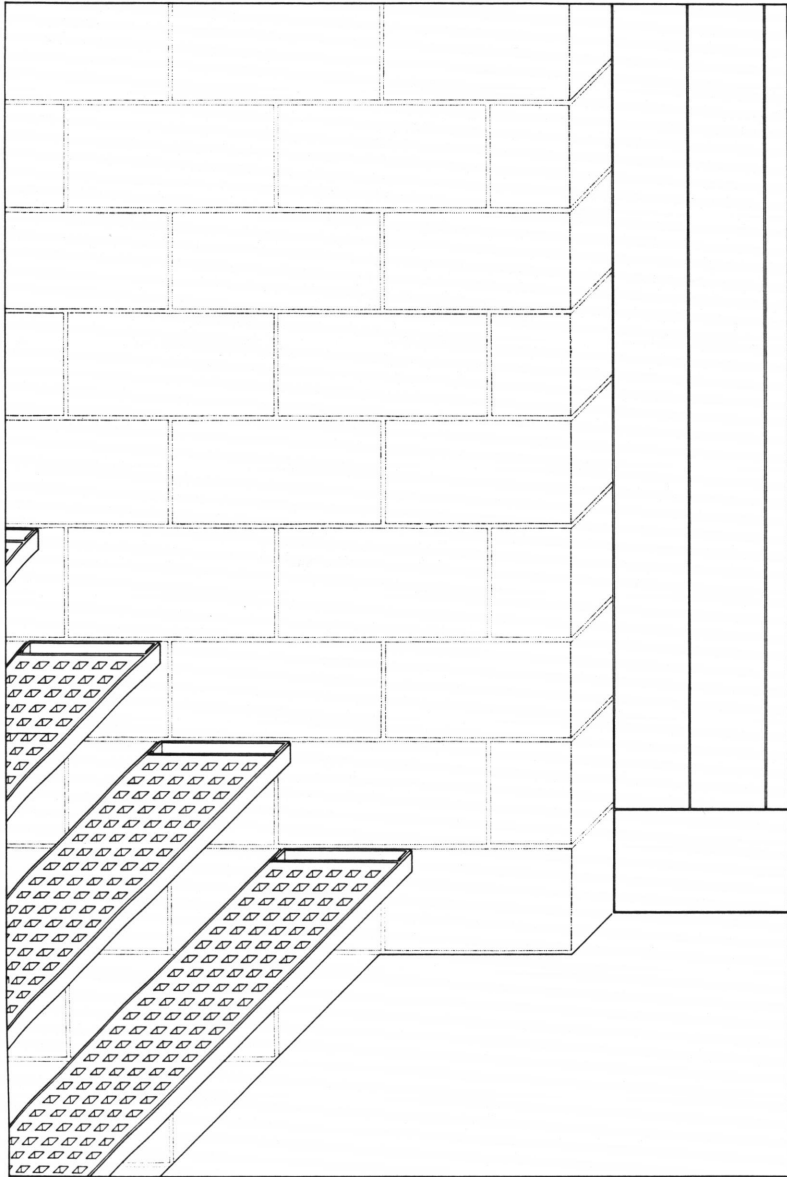






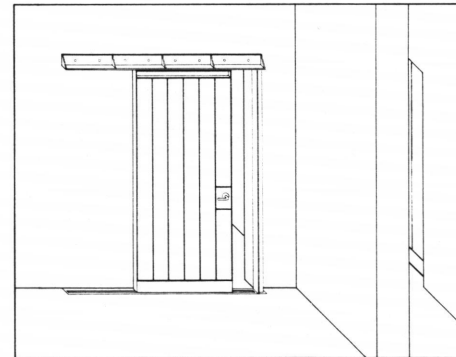
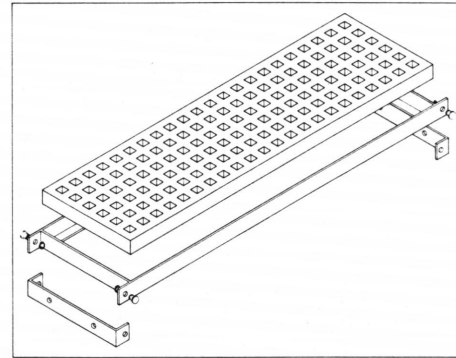




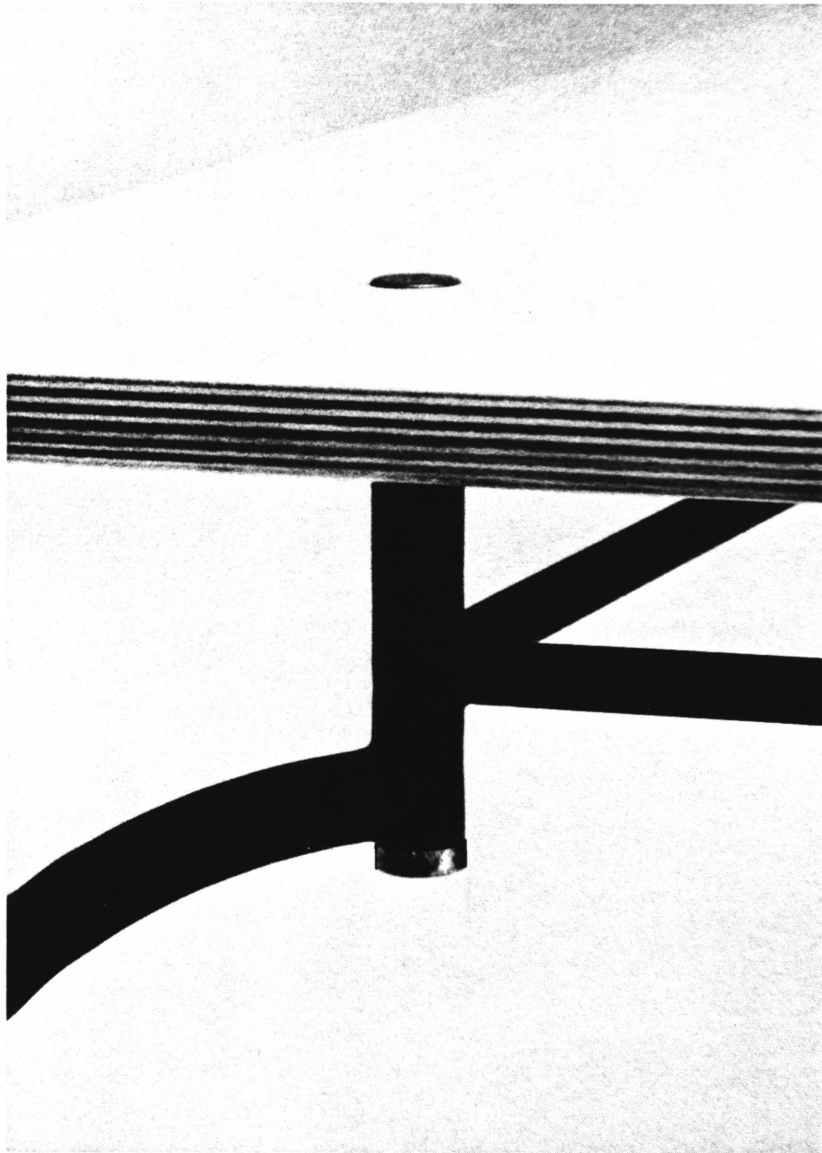


Stair.

SOME DETAILS



Top: Stair tread.  
Above: Bedroom door.



### PROJECT FOR A LOW TABLE IN PLYWOOD AND STEEL

The table is at once a useful surface and a vehicle for carrying the surface. The design focuses on the distinction between these roles, and on resolving them within a single unified entity. The project is approached with a regard for machine methods and mass production, and uses a limited vocabulary of stock industrial materials.



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