

# Suburban Home:

In March of 1997 I was commissioned to design a house for a young couple on a suburban lot in Ohio. The quarter acre site, which had already been purchased, came with a long list of deed restrictions. Material efficiency was of high importance due to budget constraints and the square footage of the program. A high standard of craftsmanship and material were desired. The house reflects an impure introduction to the idea of an architecture of parallel walls. The house was compromised in many different ways. Negotiation became the primary idea of the house. The clients expanded the original program and had many conflicting ideas about what they wanted.

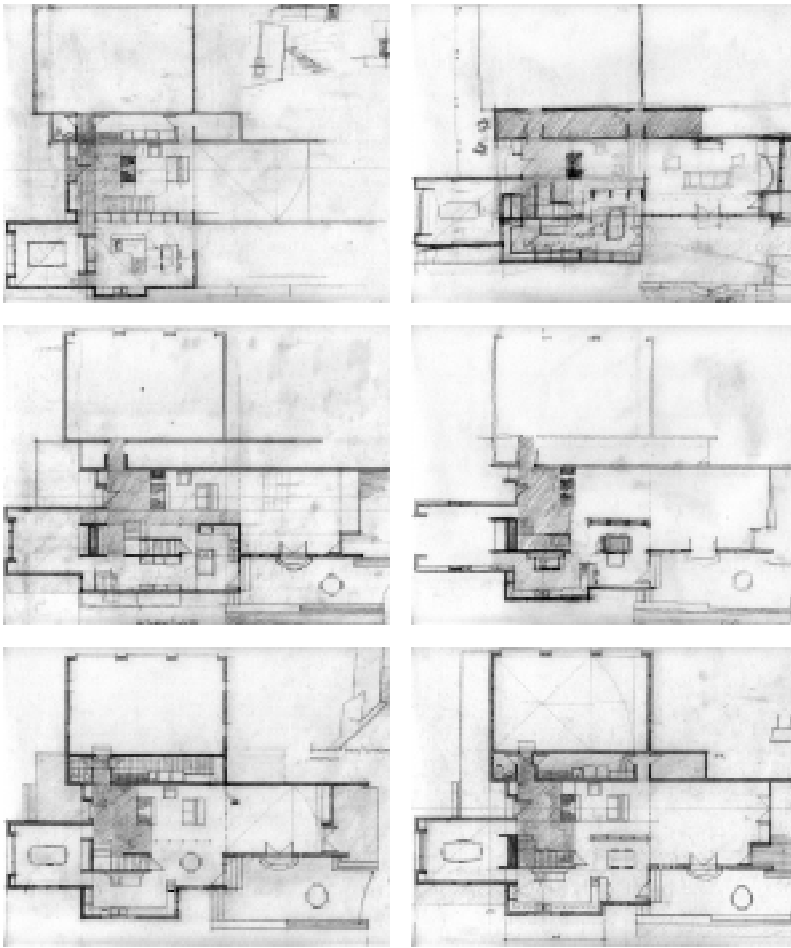
Among the original goals of the design was the personalization of the house to the clients' program, they did not want the typical builder's home. Deed restrictions and this desire often came into conflict. Ultimately, when confronted with the costs of all that they wanted, the client was forced to pare down the program. The completion of this thesis forced me to turn down the redesign of the house. Although I am unable to pursue it, a solution that makes a far more simple and straight forward architecture and substantially reduces costs is presented at the end of the chapter.

The many resistances to the work proved a rigorous testing ground for the ideas. A simplified architectural idea, initially, may have been more successful in moving through those resistances without as high a degree of mutation. Meaning, that the architecture would have been more ideologically successful from the outset. This, in all probability, would have made it formally and economically more successful as well.

The suburban home was my first attempt at working on my own for a client. It was a valuable experience for learning about the client/architect relationship. It also led me to a more simple and straight forward understanding of architectural ideas. The less than idyllic wall architecture of the house bred the work at the Laurentian as well as the planning at the sawtooth. The design was investigated deeply as the project advanced through the working drawing stage of development. The client interaction was, at times, trying. It was difficult to make decisions because they did not trust me. This failure on my behalf to convince them of the most fundamental issues led to the project's ultimate demise.

Questions of context were revealed throughout the design process. What is appropriate in architecture today? For John Hejduk, shutters are no longer appropriate yet, awnings may be used if they have a strong form.<sup>1</sup> What is nostalgic? What is authentic? These questions give rise to others that deal with political aspects of architecture. How does one convince a client of the ideological tenets from which a building is designed? How does one avoid selling out yet, design within (around, through) guidelines provided (even in poorly formulated deed restrictions)? How do will and resistance play in architectural design?

1. John Hejduk. Mask of Medusa. 130



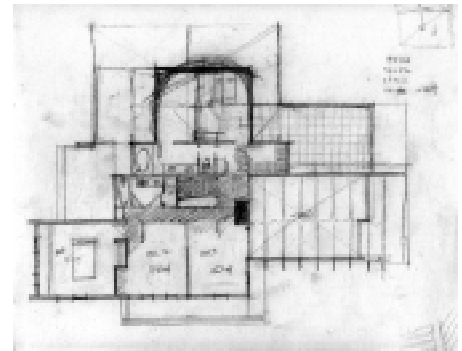
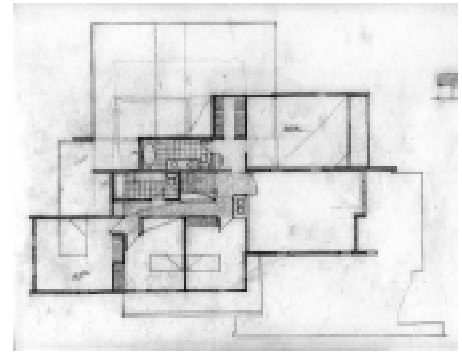
Dining Room  
 Kitchen/Dinette  
 Den with fireplace  
 Great Room with adjoining  
 exterior space

Foyer  
 Storage  
 Laundry  
 Half Bath  
 Three Car Garage

This project was designed in plan according to a functionalist approach of relationships between spaces. At its inception there were no critical or strong ideological notions driving the architecture. Attitude reared its ugly head in the end with a critical/cynical understanding of the project type. The primary resistances were formed in negotiation with the client. Those resistances were not necessarily logically formulated, a point from which problems were to arise. At this point in the project (drawings at left), the connections to other Descendent work was weak, the nature of the architectural idea was still not formulated.

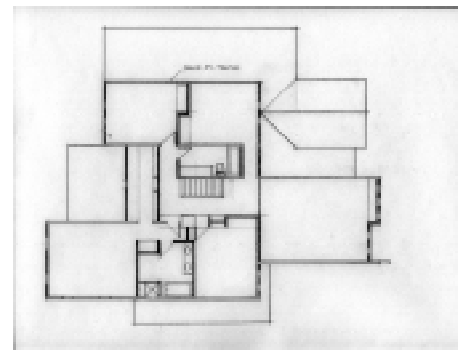
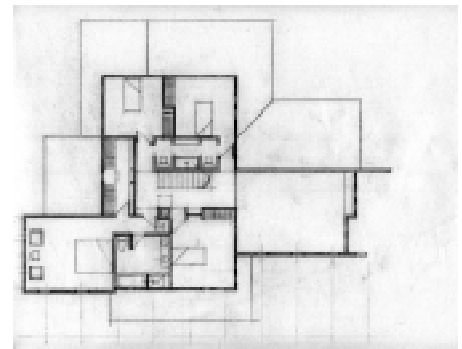
The initial first level program was worked out with the clients through e-mail and one meeting. Schematic design of the first floor revealed a zone based functional concept. The garage and living areas were separated by a service zone containing storage, laundry, and a half bath. The kitchen/dinette was placed between the two primary areas that it served. The kitchen/dinette, however, was not treated as a service area as it may have been a few years ago. Today, the kitchen is a primary gathering place in our culture. The kitchen was investigated thoroughly in drawing and in several e-mails with the client. The entry was centralized as the cruciform-like plan minimized circulation space. The house merges open, flowing, modern spaces with formal, closed spaces.

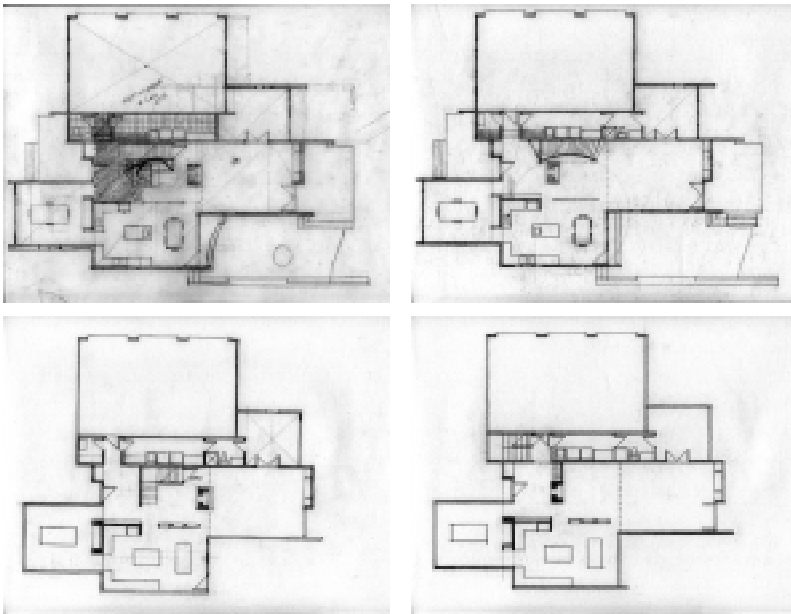
The Second level was treated traditionally; independent bedrooms open onto a central hallway. The placement of the Master Suite was questioned in the drawings below, this was quickly resolved. Its placement at the front of the house, above the dining room, with a view to the street made the clients feel secure. The second level overlooks the two story great room with a small sitting area. The largest challenge on the second floor became the full bathroom associated with the smaller bedrooms. The bathroom had limited space due to its location, therefore, making it difficult to fit everything they wanted into the bathroom. The best and most agreeable solution slipped the necessary second sink into a secondary entry area, creating internal privacy for the users.



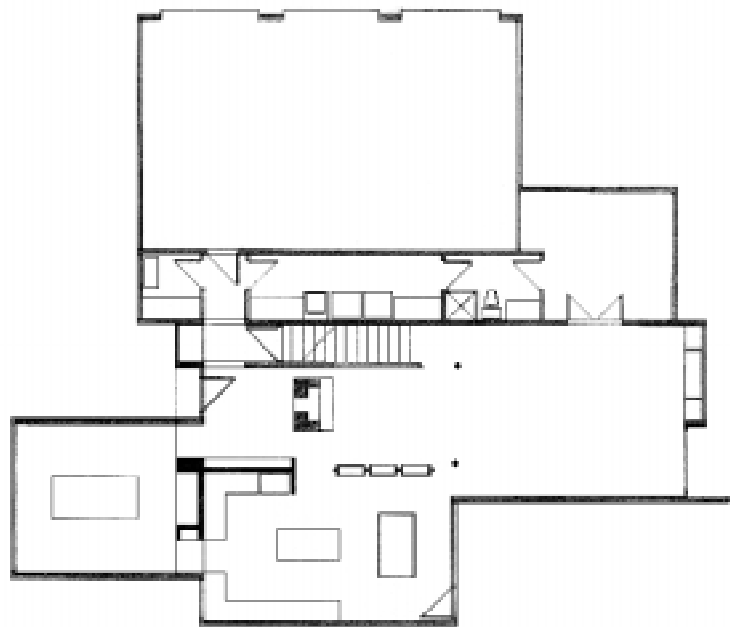
Master Suite-(Bedroom,  
Walk-in Closet, Full Bath)  
Bedrooms 1, 2, 3

Sitting area  
Full Bath  
Storage



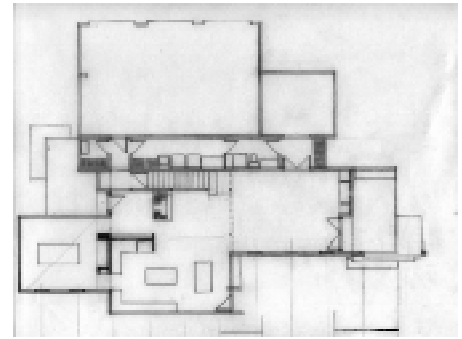


The realization of the parallel wall idea came in these drawings. The idea impacted the work at the Laurentian Library and the Sawtooth. The Suburban Home drew more from those projects than they were able to extract from it, though, this project lasted much longer and went deeply into the constructional design/working drawings stage of development. The Laurentian Project was in some way the ideological simplification of the resistance found here, an extension/descent to investigate the concepts more purely. That Descendant was unable to find its way back after its completion to any satisfactory degree.



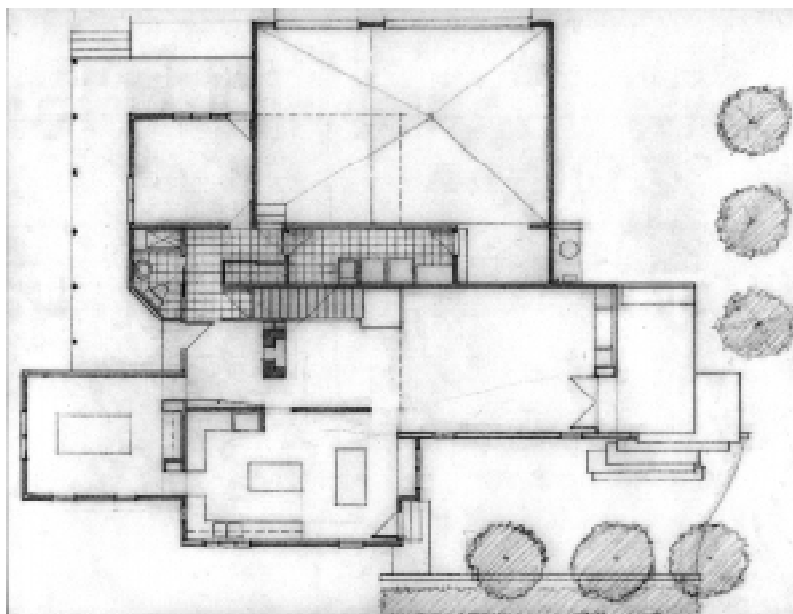
The architectural idea of parallel walls was realized late in the schematic design process. The idea was not a generator of the plan so much as a simplifier. The idea helped to open and reduce the first floor plan. It also began to connect interior and exterior spaces through extension. Here, the addition of a private bedroom/office to the first floor began to obscure the functional ideas that generated the plan, which, by the time of the addition, was to the clients liking. I was unable to convince the clients that the extra room was a poor idea, this was a major error on my part.

First floor plan, design development, Office/Bedroom placed at the rear of the house.

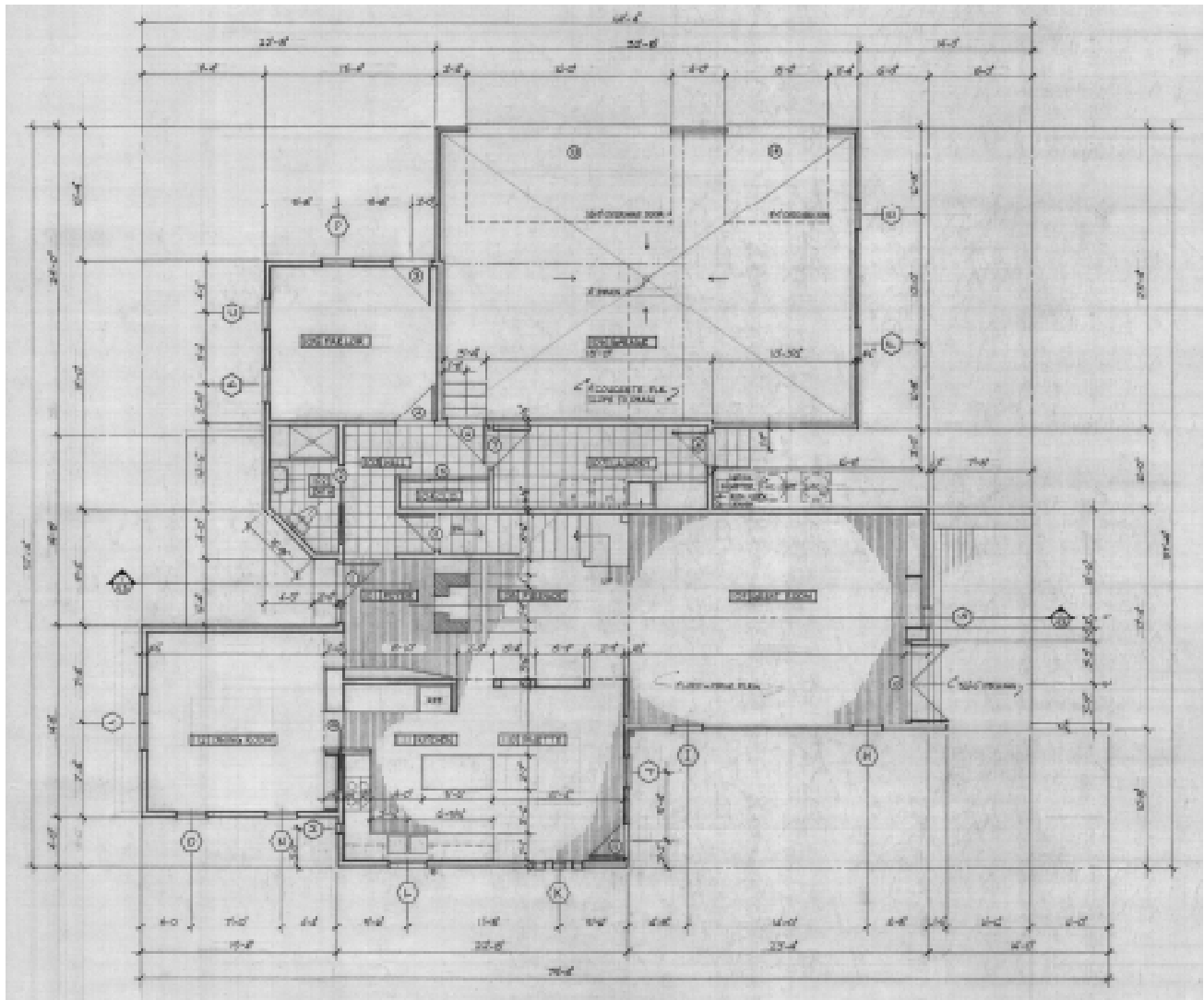


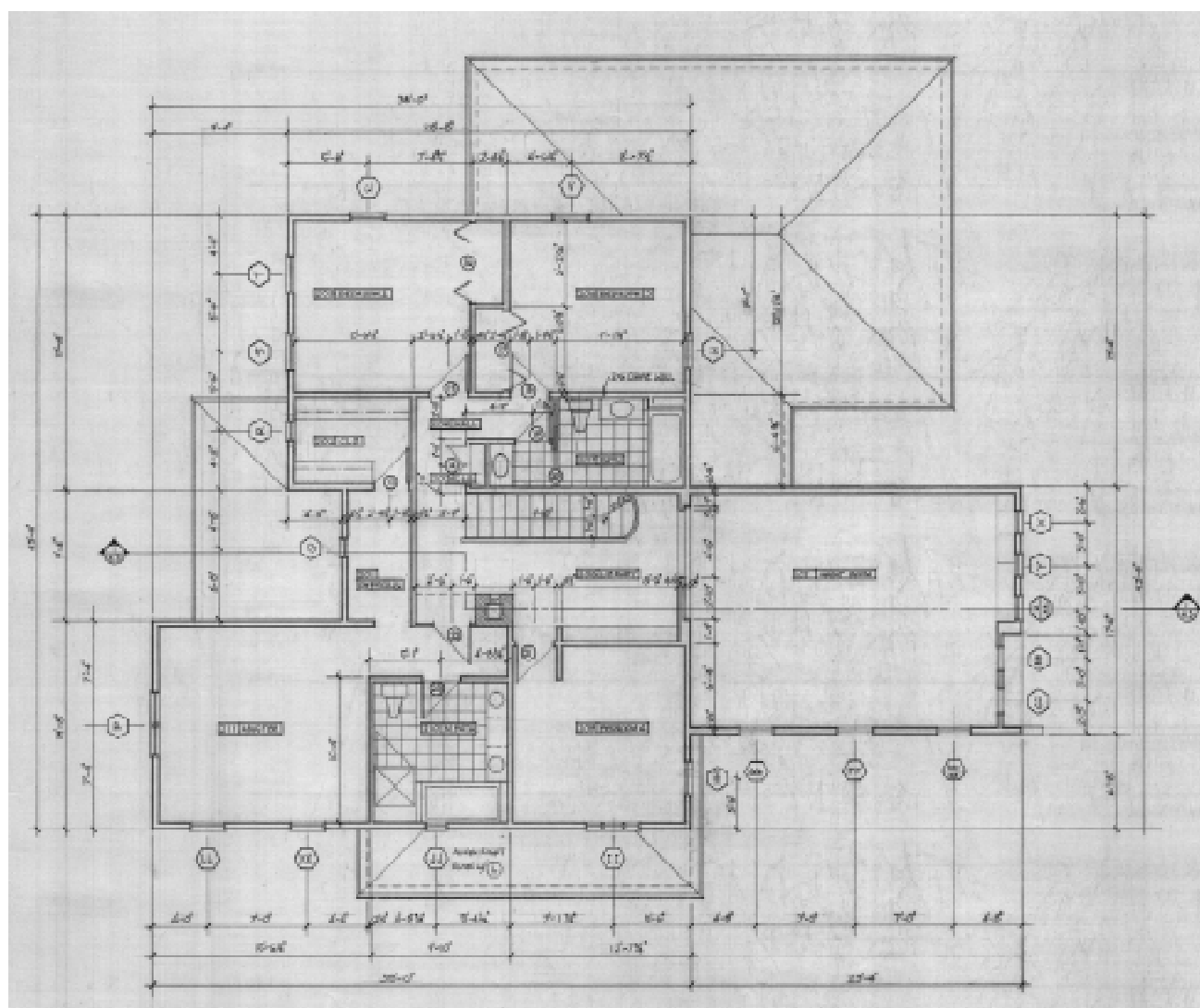
A resolution to the conflicts between the initial planning concepts and the additional room, as well as the problems in elevation that the room agitated, became the next primary concern. The room was placed on the garage side of the service area in order to provide privacy. At first the room was placed to the rear of the house off the great room but, later, it was moved to the front along with the, now, full bathroom.

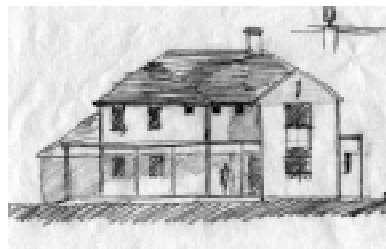
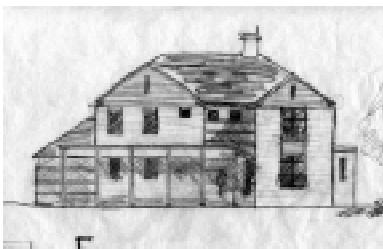
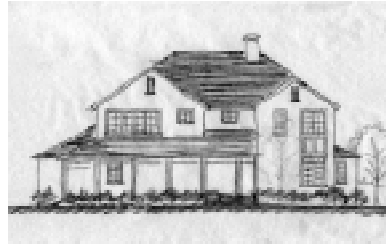
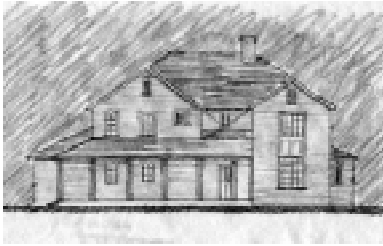
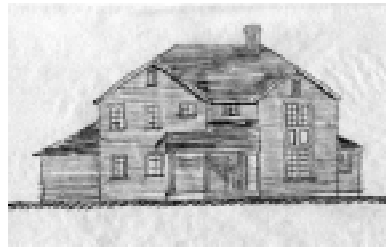
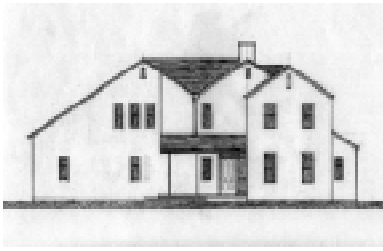
The house is wood platform framed construction on a concrete block foundation, standard residential construction in the area. Brick was considered initially but, as the program increased, the cost of brick became prohibitive. Instead, cedar lap siding finishes the exterior. Interior finishes vary but, inexpensive drywall dominates. Wood flooring is used in the first floor living areas; tile is placed in the service areas. Trussed roofs are used everywhere, except the Great Room, where a cedar cathedral ceiling is created with 2x8 rafters. The house is roofed with charcoal colored asphalt shingles.



First floor plan, design development, Office/Bedroom moved to front of house.



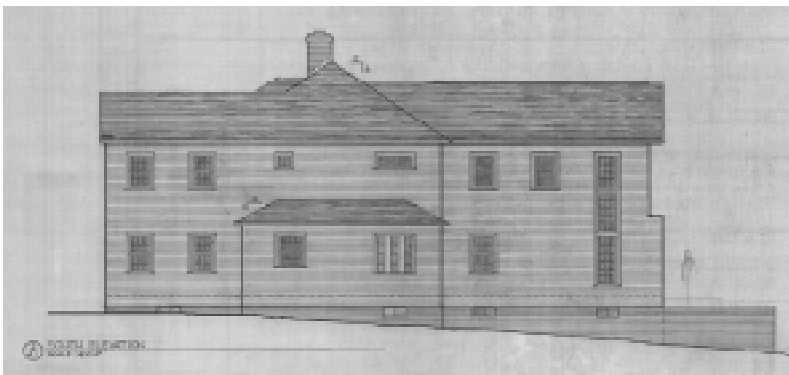
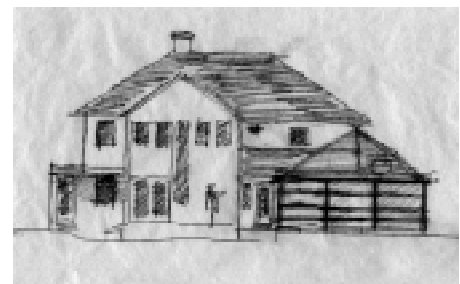




The west elevation faces the street. The front facade became a problem of massing as the design was investigated. The first of the elevations above reflects the massing with the office to the rear of the house. Chief among the resistances that were encountered here was the deed restriction stating that there could be no flat roof on any portion of the house. Two of the drawings above violate that restriction.

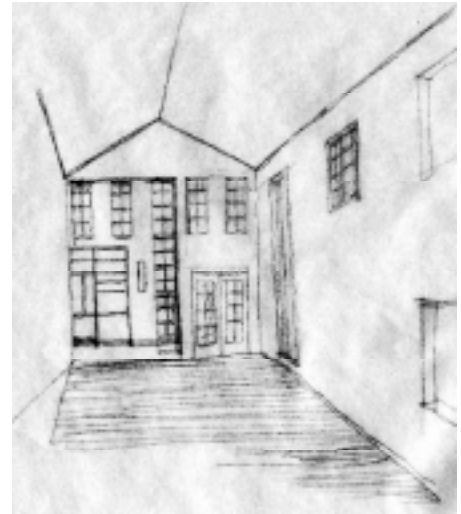
The southern elevation is simple and rhythmic, revealing the nature of the spaces behind.

The elevations were a battle, they could not be what they needed to be. It was a matter of trying to force incompatible notions; a consistent shortcoming in this project.



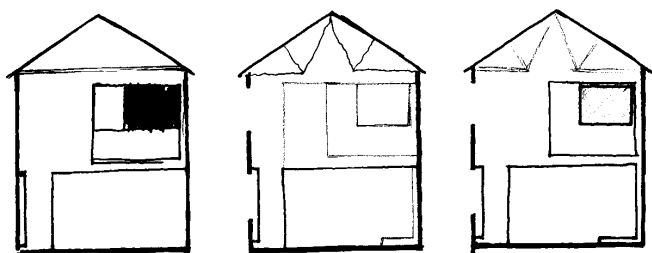


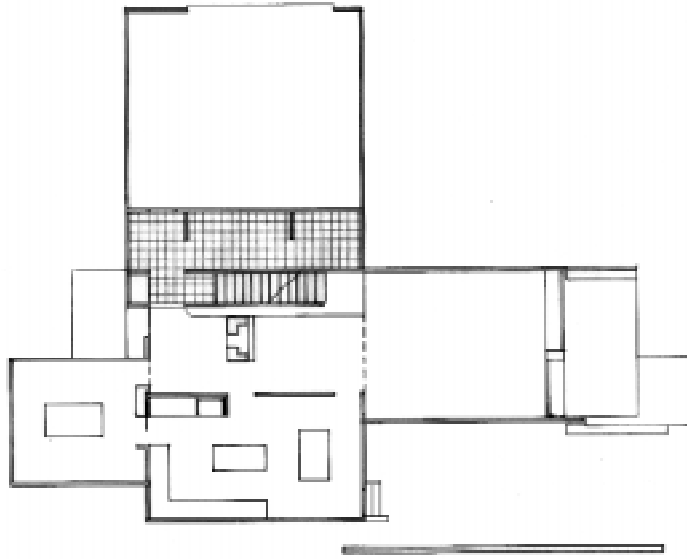
An intuitive attitude was taken toward proportions throughout the project. The Great Room is the best example of this, walls work in relief defining floor ceiling and opening. Proportional exercises are executed with book shelves and windows, presenting human scale in the two story space.



The resistances were not smoothly worked through this project. In a way, the project that the clients wanted was competing with what the building seemed to be about, its sort of “inner concept”. In some ways, the project may not have been completely appropriate for the site. I attempted to force things first, upon the site, then upon the house. What I mean is the house seemed to need to be something other than what the conflicting resistances allowed it to be through this point.

A question. If the architects role in all this is to be the organizer of that which is to be built and he is further to give something critical/thoughtful/enriching back to the world in doing so, what happens if the client, for whom he is organizing the building, seems to be opposed to the inclusion of that second component of our profession? Do we hide it and do it anyway (only to be slashed as a cost saving measure)? Do we do a second project for ourselves that lives up to both standards (but not really both because it does not answer the clients desires)? Do we quit (then we starve)? Not that this happened here, simply that the question comes to light in our dealings with the clients that are out there.





First floor plan, after programmatic reductions.

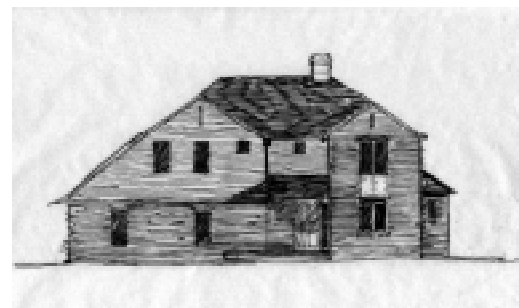
The plan above is based on the changes in the program which occurred after bids returned on the 3000sf residence. The clients eased on their demands for a fifth bedroom/office area on the first floor as well as their desire for a three car garage. This plan reflects a reduction of over 200sf of liveable area plus, a further reduction of one bay in the garage. The simplicity of the original organization is rediscovered. Garage and living areas (including the kitchen) are separated by a service zone that includes the laundry, bathroom, closet and vertical circulation. This version also simplifies the structural framing of the second level above the garage due to that space's diminished width. The slipping cruciform plan remains an impure architecture of parallel walls, without legible rhythms or proportions. However, the expression of function in plan is clear and appropriate room dimensions are held.

The west elevation returns to a point close to where it began with an elongated sloping roof sheltering the garage wing. The southern elevation remains unchanged, while the north and east elevations lose complex roof conditions.

Critical tendencies have begun to emerge with severe attitude, at times cynicism may peek through. The thematic notion of optimism and pessimism engages the projects. A struggle of ethical or moral responsibility pours forth. The story is then one of good and evil, or at least of opposition where the good guy does not always win every battle, but hopefully will win the Project.

This simplification of the house allowed it to become much closer to what it really needed to be, it was a removal of some of the conflicts that were pulling it in different directions. The client resistance was alternatively routed by other determinants allowing this solution to be more closely tied to material and functional issues. The resistances then became more an instrument of refinement than of "opposition to". This is as it should be. Further, the doors open to the inclusion of attitudes and issues that had not been a considered or had been glossed over, when the preoccupation of the architect was with the negotiation of necessity. Those negotiations proved to be consuming affairs. This adds up to one of the most valued experiences of my career thus far. As a testing ground for ideas this project shows many shortcomings, for example, my starting point, yet it allowed me to explore the resistances of architecture and building as I have not had the opportunity to do before. The next house will be better because of it.

West elevation sketch.



"I wanna be stereotyped.  
I wanna be classified.  
I wanna be a clone.  
I want a suburban home, suburban home, suburban home, suburban home.

I wanna be masochistic.  
I wanna be a statistic.  
I wanna be a clone.  
I want a suburban home, suburban home, suburban home, suburban home.

I don't want no big hip pad. I want a house just like mom and dad.

I wanna be stereotyped.  
I wanna be classified.  
I wanna be masochistic.  
I wanna be a statistic.  
I wanna be a clone.  
I want a suburban home,

suburban home,

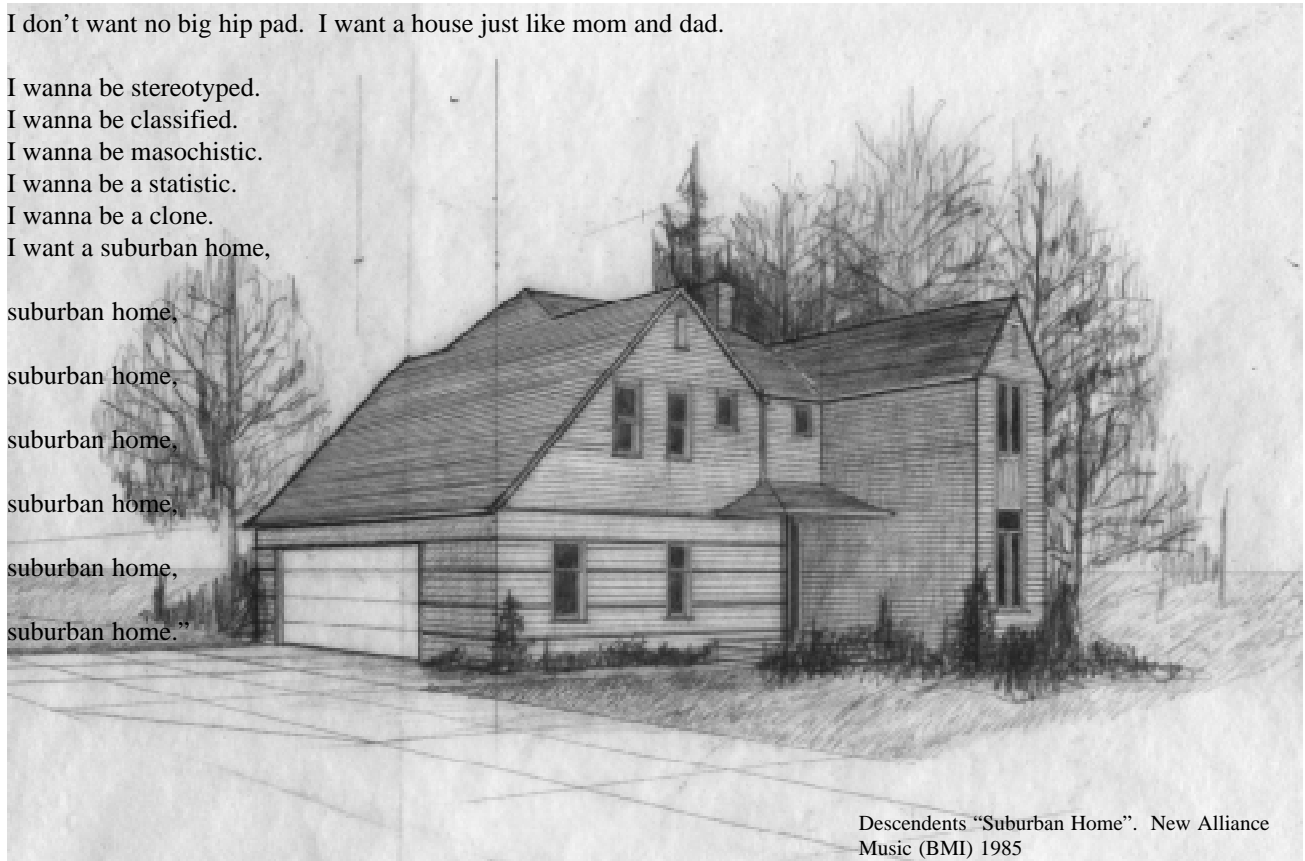
suburban home,

suburban home,

suburban home,

suburban home,

suburban home."



Descendents "Suburban Home". New Alliance Music (BMI) 1985

"I want to be stereotyped. I want to be classified."