

"A WALK THROUGH THE WOODS"

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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in  
Architecture

Approved:

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D. J. Kilper, Chairman

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R. P. Schubert

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Blacksburg, Virginia

## A WALK THROUGH THE WOODS

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(ABSTRACT)

A wooded 7.8 acre parcel located in Northern Virginia near the Potomac River is bordered by a National Wildlife Refuge and provides a setting for "A Walk through the Woods", a place for a single family to live. As one enters the site, travels along the entrance road and moves through the house, stimulating and dynamic visual experiences occur. Physically, the residence is a linear horizontal structure with a natural stepping of rooms in plan and elevation. Characteristic of the residence are extroverted experiences, contrasts between openness and closure, transitions from outside to inside, rooms well-lighted by daylight and rhythmic experiences as one travels from common areas to personal areas along a path not unlike a path through the forest. The site, of rolling terrain bisected by small streams, encompasses a knoll from which the house evolved. The structure is compatible with nature on the outside and incorporates nature on the inside. At times the house and its surroundings almost become one.

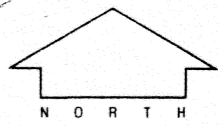
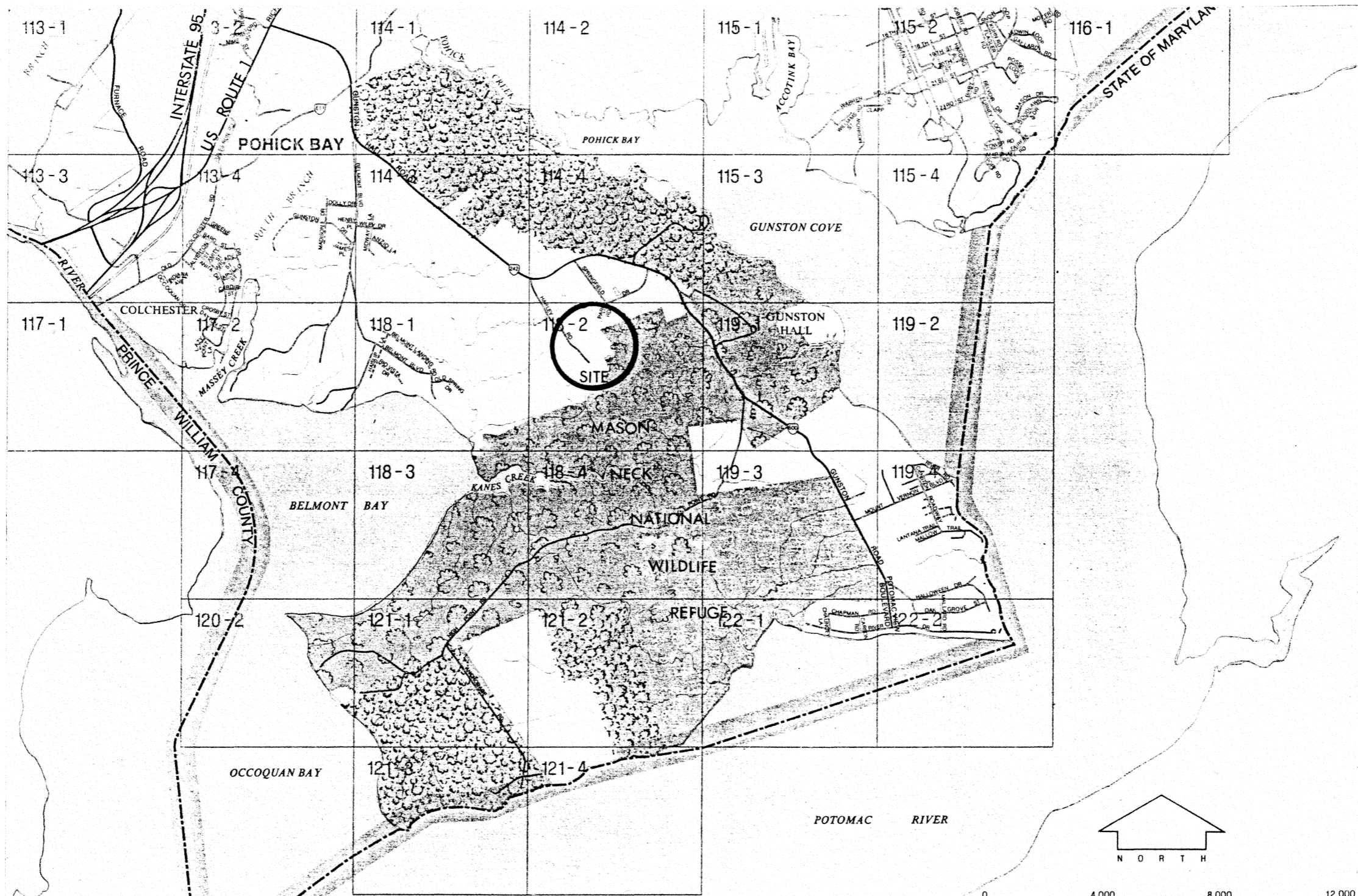
# THE SITE

The site is located on Mason Neck Peninsula which is situated along the Potomac River in Northern Virginia. State and Federally owned parklands occupy a large part of this peninsula and include recreation facilities and historic landmarks such as Gunston Hall. The County of Fairfax has intentionally controlled the future development of this area by zoning it for a minimum lot size of five acres. It is unlikely that zoning on the Mason Neck Peninsula will change because of local interest in protecting the national wildlife refuge.

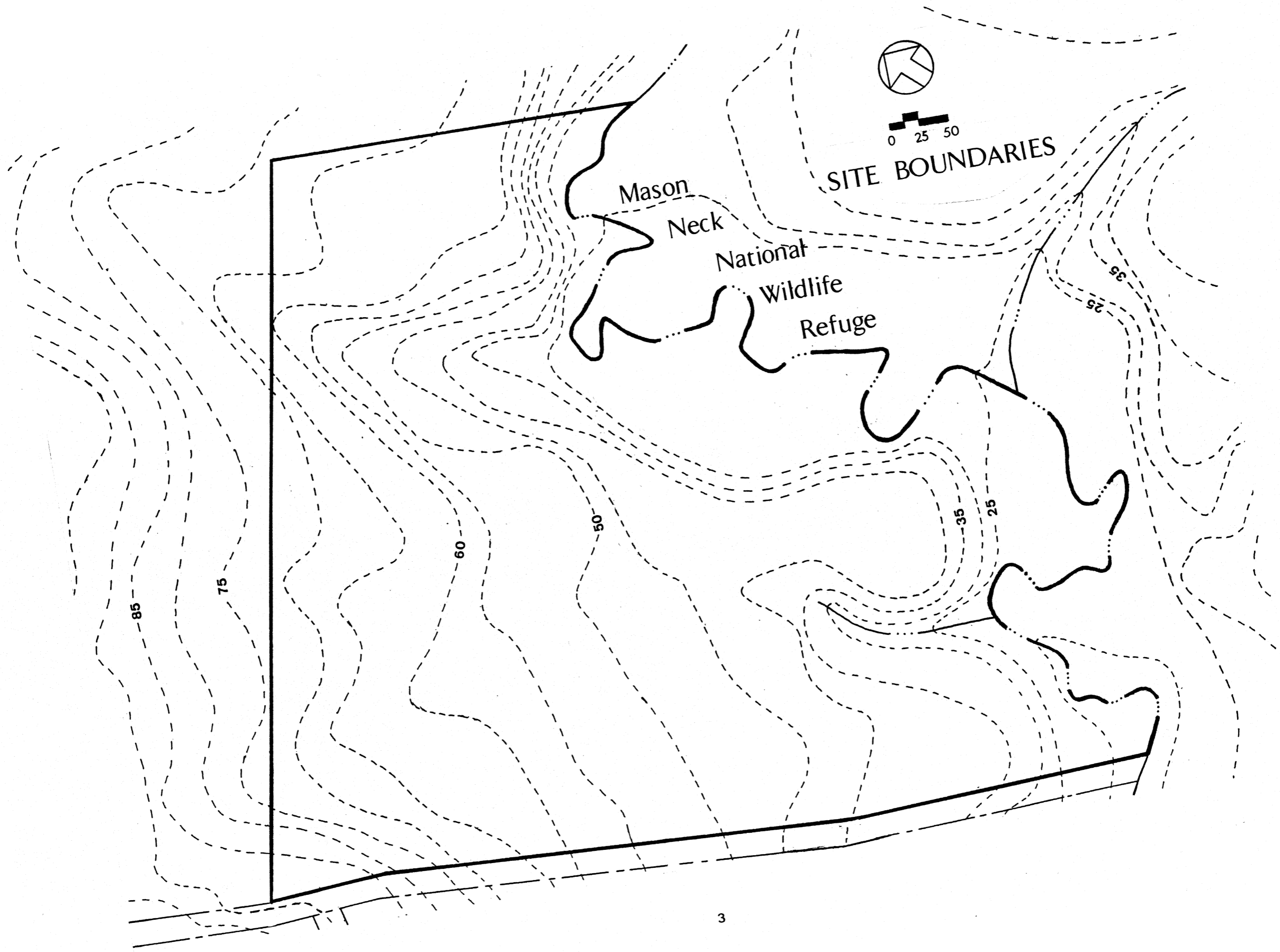
Interstate 95 and U.S. Route 1 are both accessible within five miles of the site and provide linkages to the north and south. Access to the site is from Gunston Hall Road via a private gravel road of about one mile in length. Located at the end of this road is the 7.8 acre site selected for this project. Historically, this parcel was part of a 40 acre estate owned by Mr. and Mrs. Harley for whom this road is named.

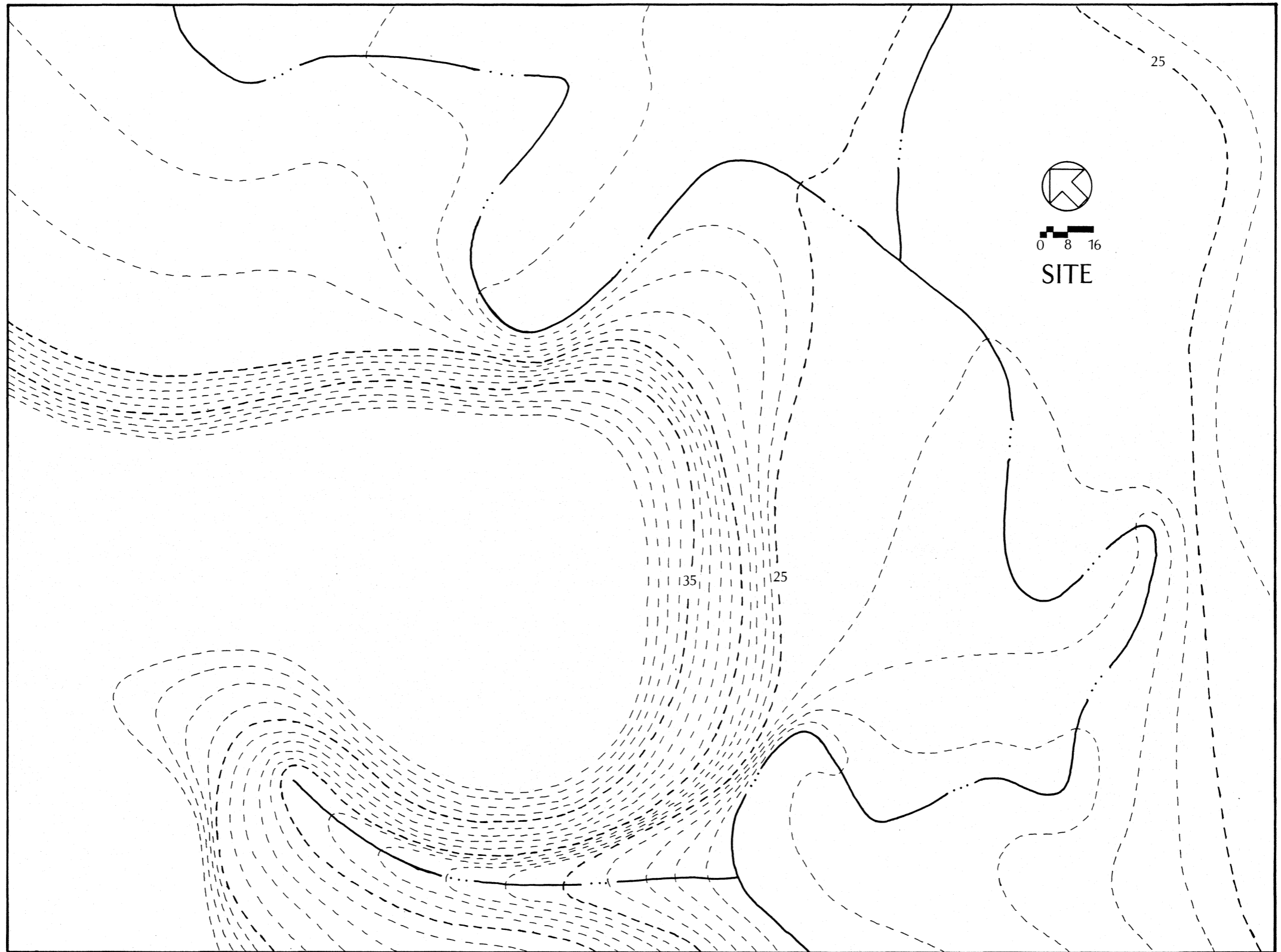
The property is bounded on three sides by privately owned land and on the fourth side by Mill Run. Mill Run separates the site from the Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge. The property is characterized by rolling terrain bisected by several small streams. This topography produces natural knolls bordered by streams and lowlands. One such knoll is especially pronounced and provides a beautiful setting for a home. This knoll is adjacent to the parkland and consequently offers exceptional views that will remain undisturbed in the future. In addition, no other structures are visible from this knoll due to its location and the size of the lot.

The 7.8 acre site is almost entirely wooded. A mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees is typical with a limited number of mature hardwoods. The understory vegetation is primarily composed of dogwoods, rhododendrons and azaleas. Mayapples and ferns carpet most of the forest floor.



**SITE CONTEXT**





# THE IDEA

Vertical trees, the dominant feature in a forest, rest upon and gain stability from the horizontal forest floor. The opposition of these horizontal and vertical elements must be recognized and addressed when designing a home for a wooded site. This project will involve a structure that is horizontal in nature to juxtapose and emphasize the vertical trees. The structure will intrude into the natural realm of the forest and hence should be subordinate in stature. A horizontal profile which reflects and reinforces the forest floor will provide a relationship in which the trees rise above the structure and are clearly dominant. The structure, however, should recognize the verticality of the forest in a subtle way which references and emphasizes this aspect of the forest.

The structure proposed for the selected wooded site is a single family residence. This residence will have common spaces shared by all family members and their guests, in addition to personal spaces where each family member may seek privacy and tranquility. The connection or transition between these two types of spaces will be a guiding principle in the design of the house. An attempt will be made to make this transition zone "A Walk through the Woods". One will take "A Walk through the Woods" when moving from a common space to the privacy and seclusion of his or her personal realm.

The movement through this transition zone is critical. The pathway should not be straight and direct as is characterized by the movement of someone who is hurried or destination-oriented. Instead, the pathway should take on the character of a meandering, leisurely walk through the woods in which one is encouraged to continue, discovering new things along the way.

Finally, the house must be visually open and extroverted in character, to take advantage of the exceptional views out into the parkland.

# THE PROJECT

## Issues and Concerns:

Status of the automobile relative to nature and the house - Automobiles do not belong in the forest and consequently an effort was made to minimize their impact. The driveway follows an existing swale making it three feet lower than the surrounding grade and five feet below the elevation of the house floor. This grade differential reduces the visual impact and importance of the automobiles. Walls and window placement were also utilized to screen the automobiles from view.

Inside-outside areas or transition zones - prepare one to enter or exit the house by providing transition zones which are partially enclosed as at the entrance or perceived as partially enclosed as along "The Walk through the Woods".

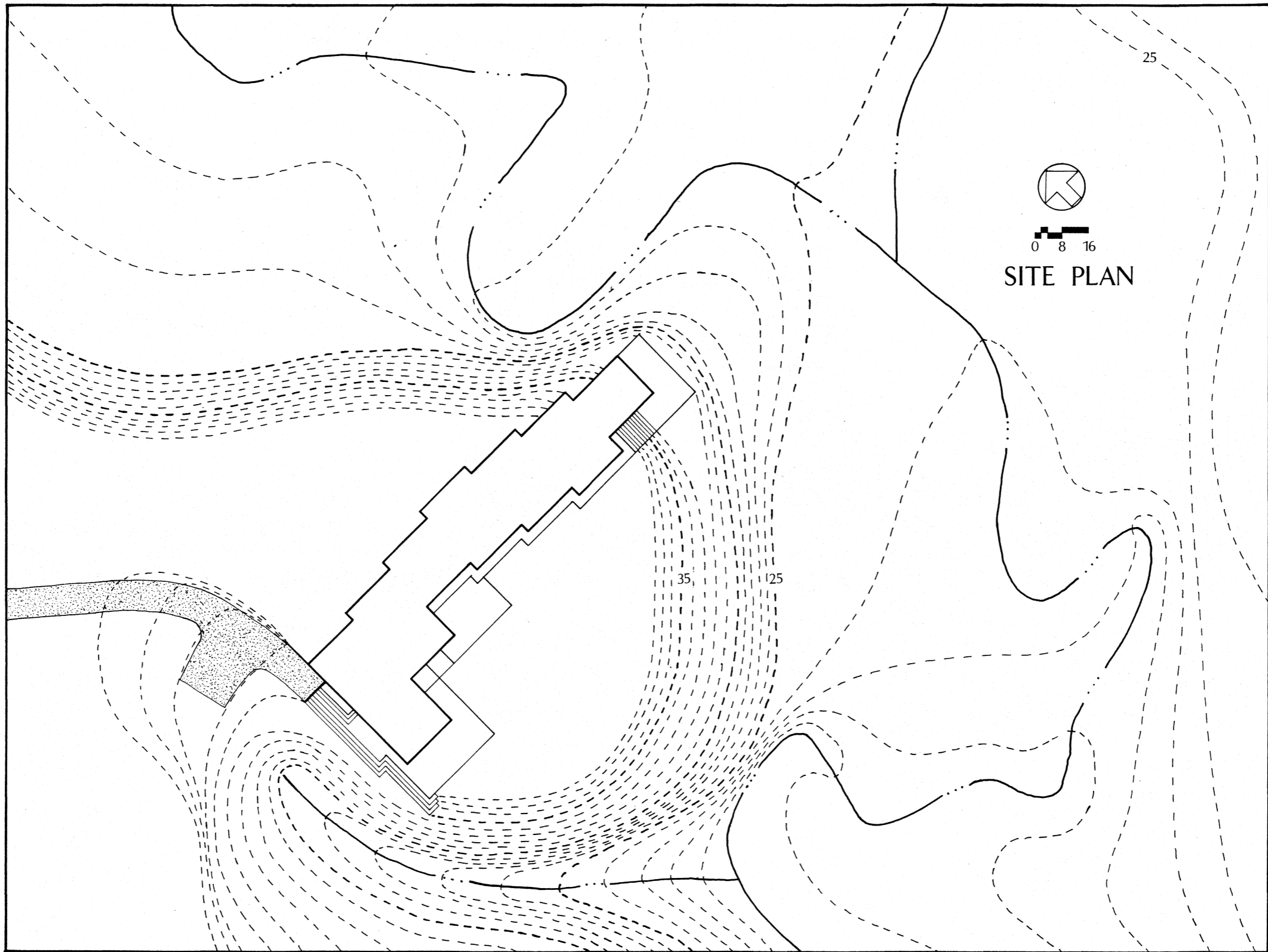
Bright interior spaces - result from a southern exposure and natural lighting considerations.

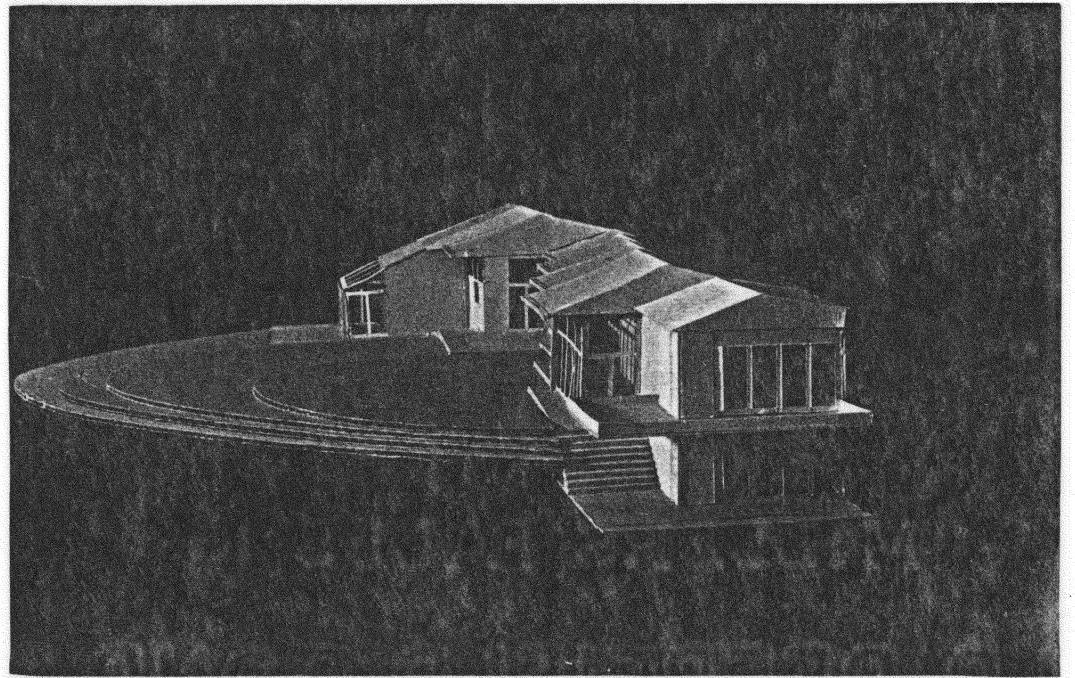
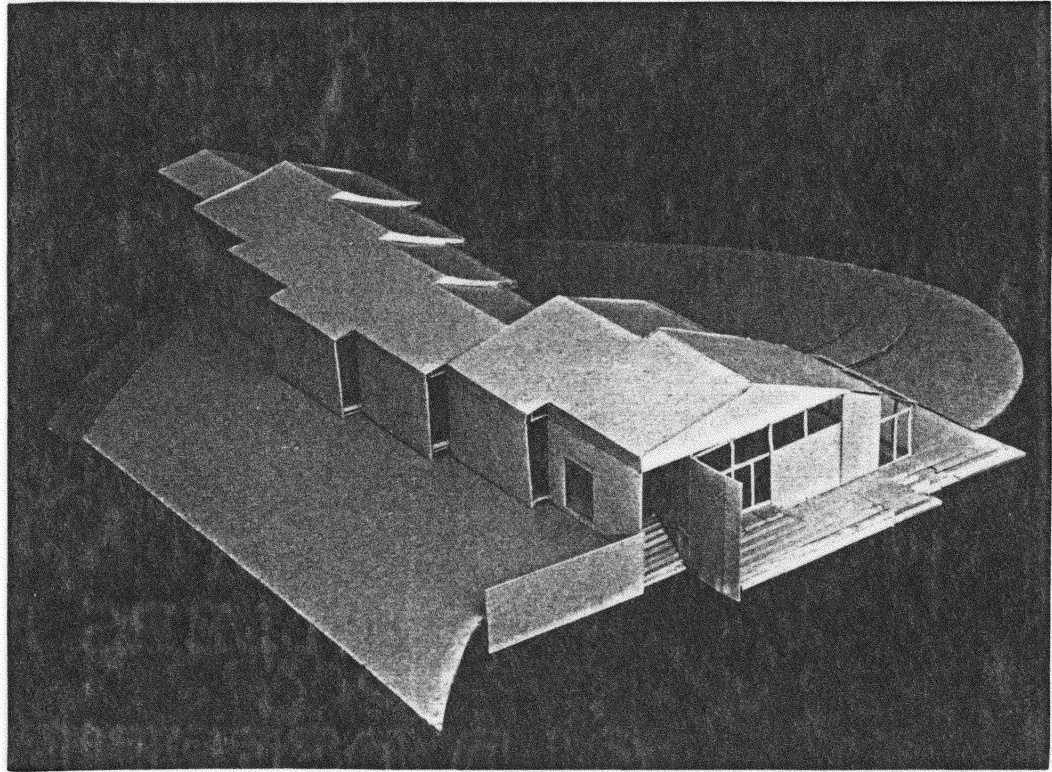
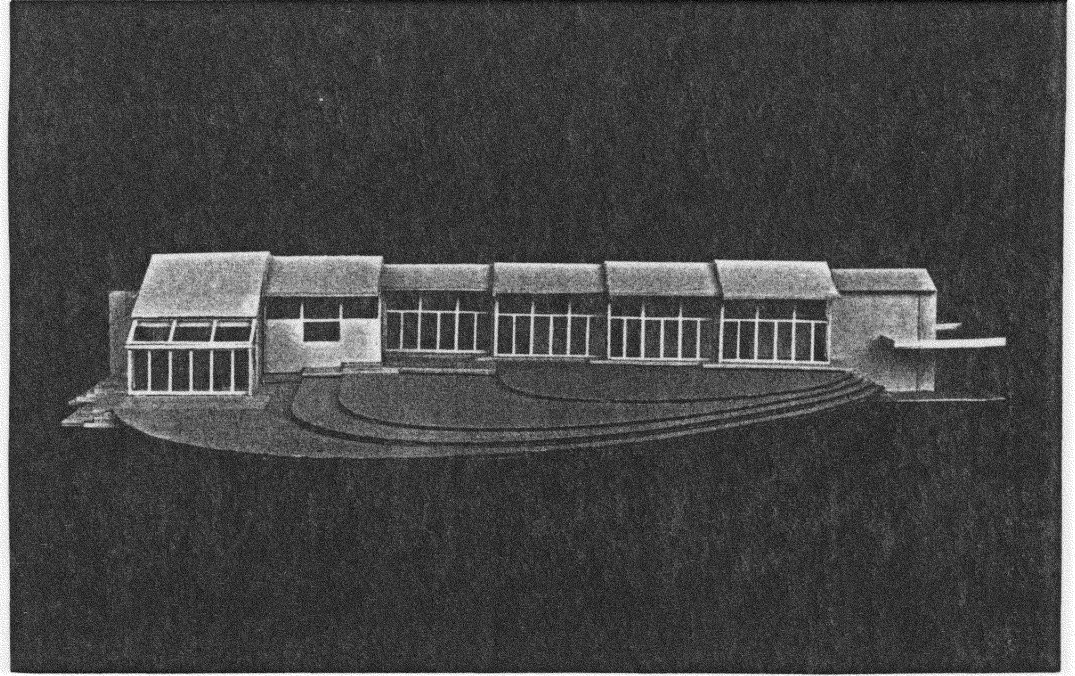
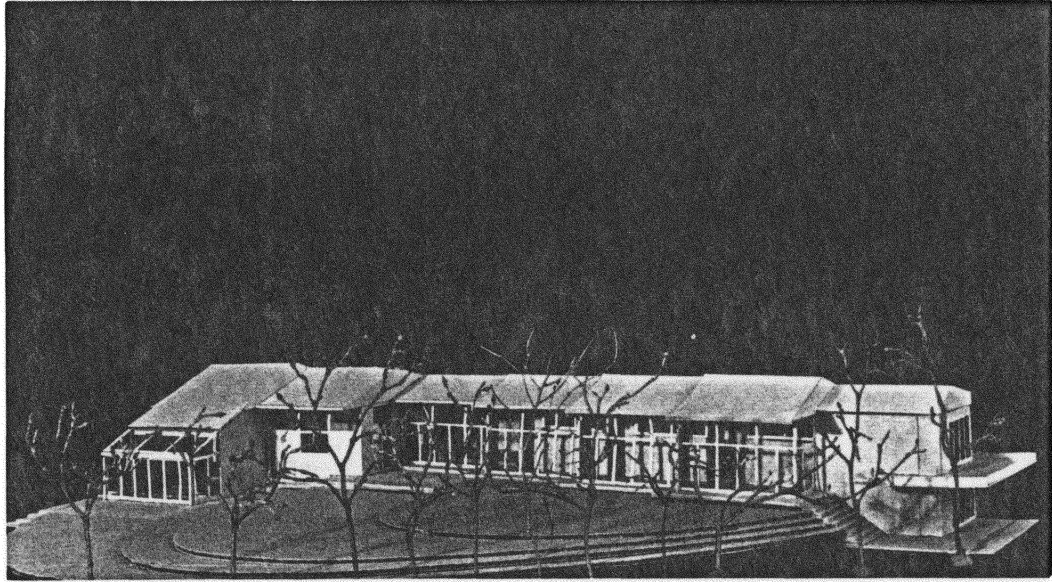
Strong visual connection to the National Wildlife Refuge - accomplished through building siting, orientation and window placement.

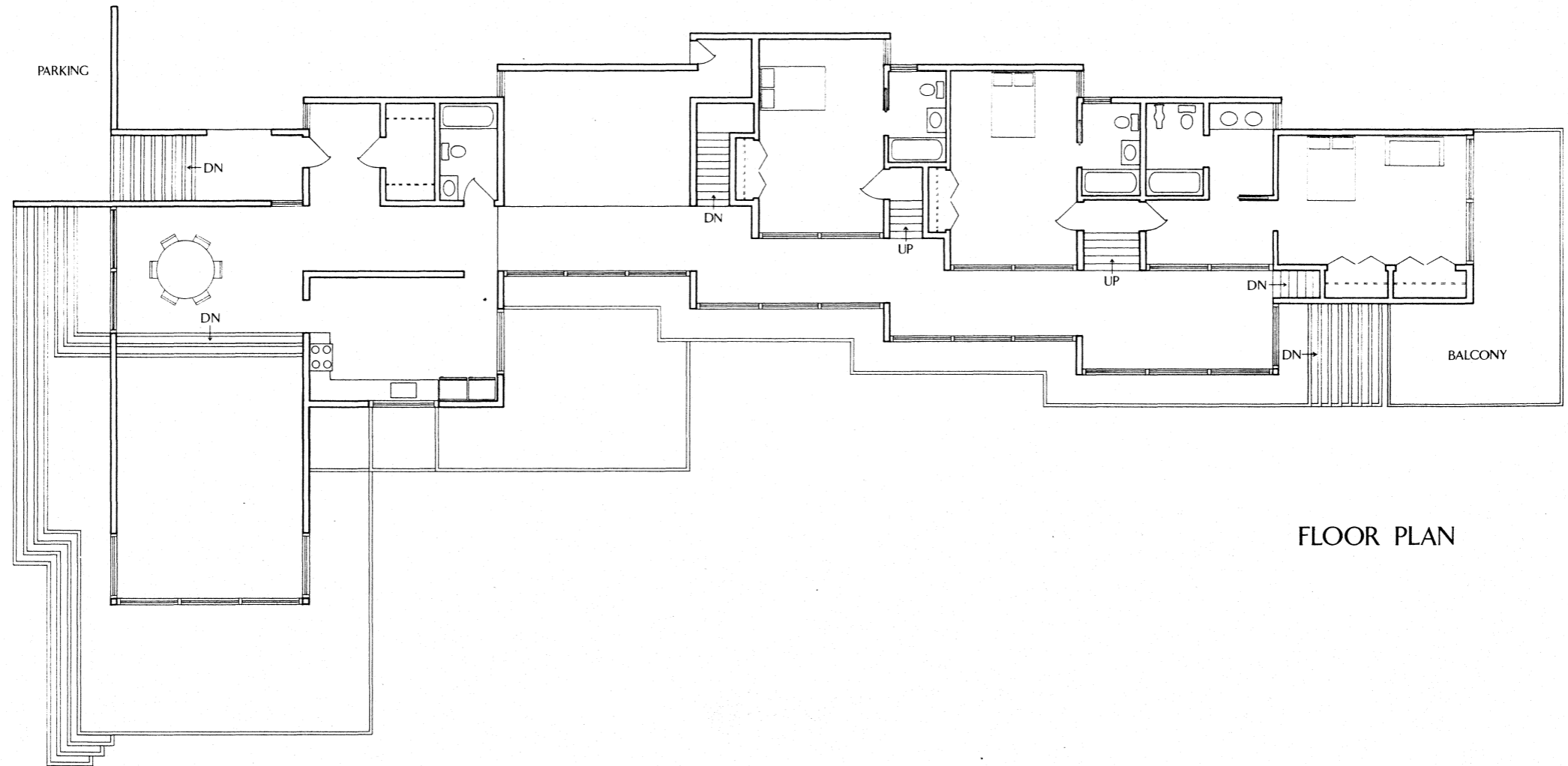
Visual openness - achieved through large expanses of glass, an open floor plan in the common areas and the use of interior walls that do not reach the ceiling.

Visual comfort - obtained through minimizing excessive contrast ratios and glare by utilizing overhangs, window placement and building geometry.

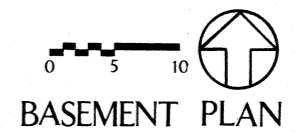
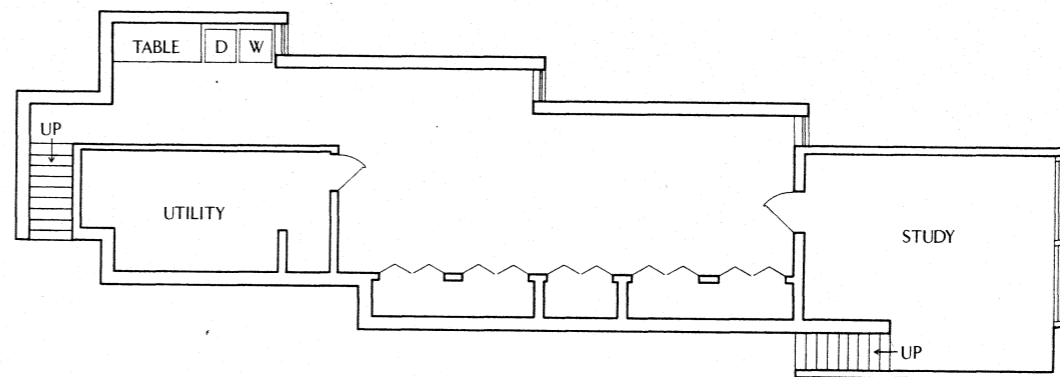
Privacy in the personal spaces or bedrooms - achieved through changes in elevation.



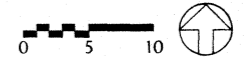
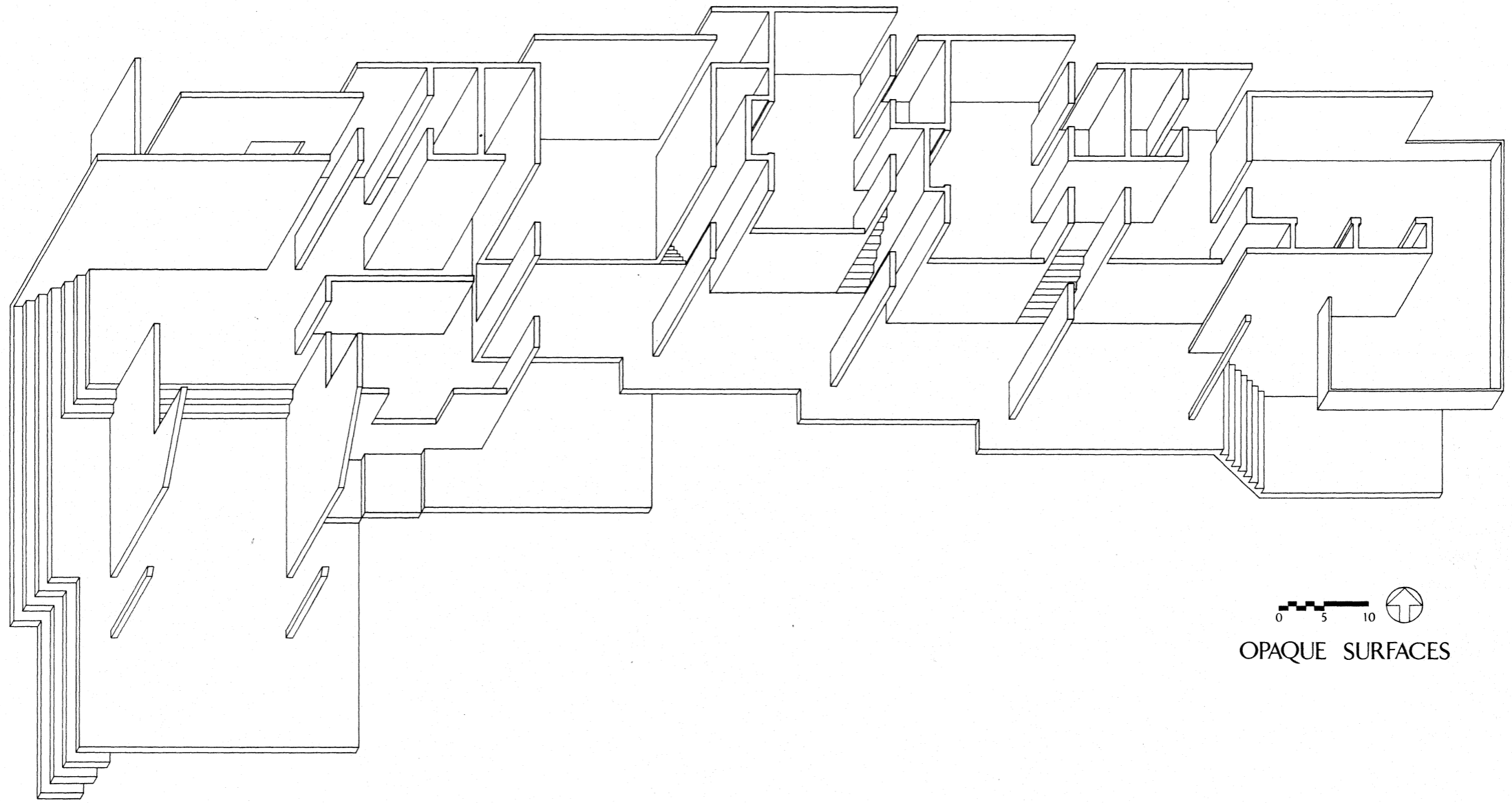




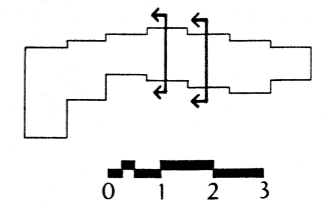
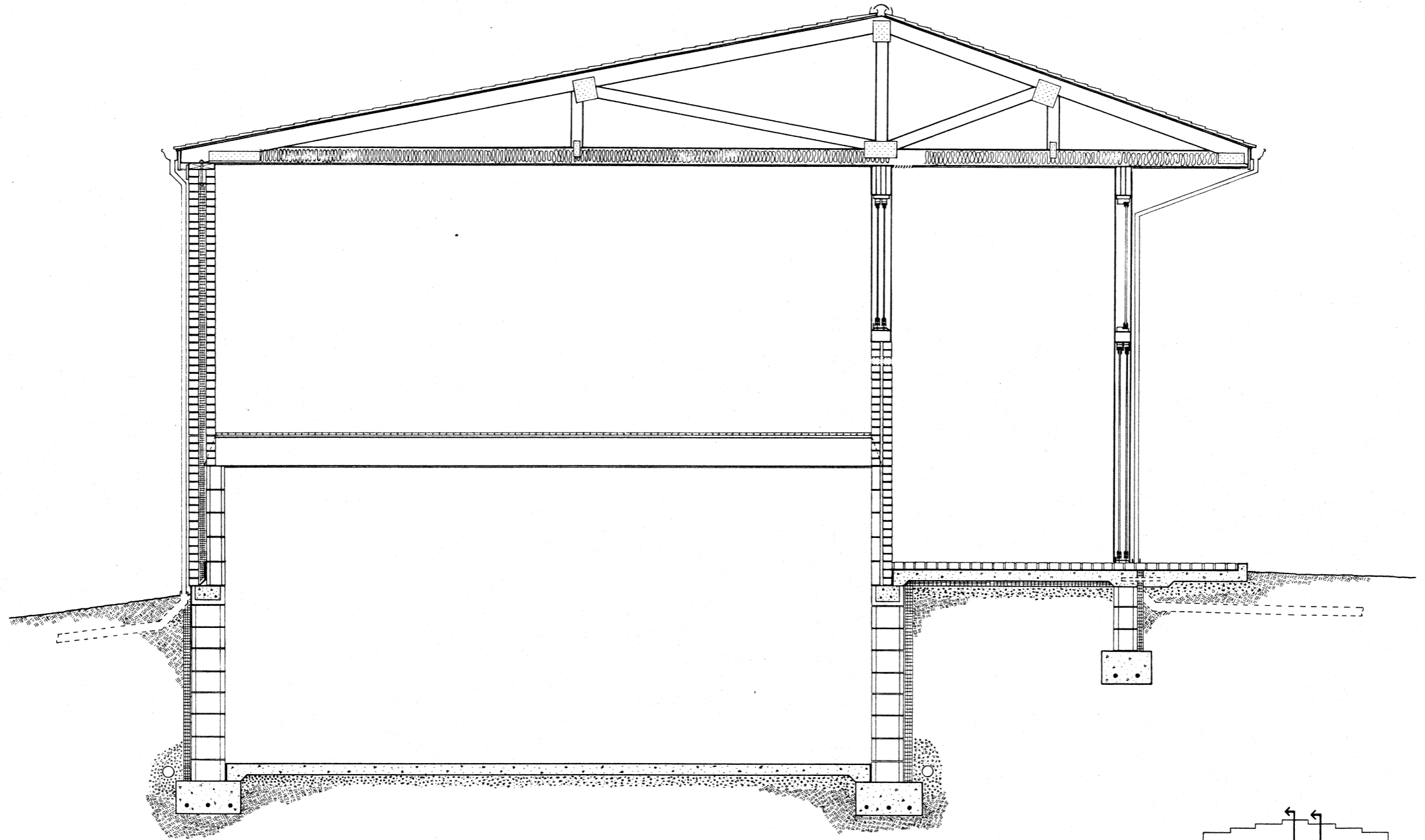
FLOOR PLAN



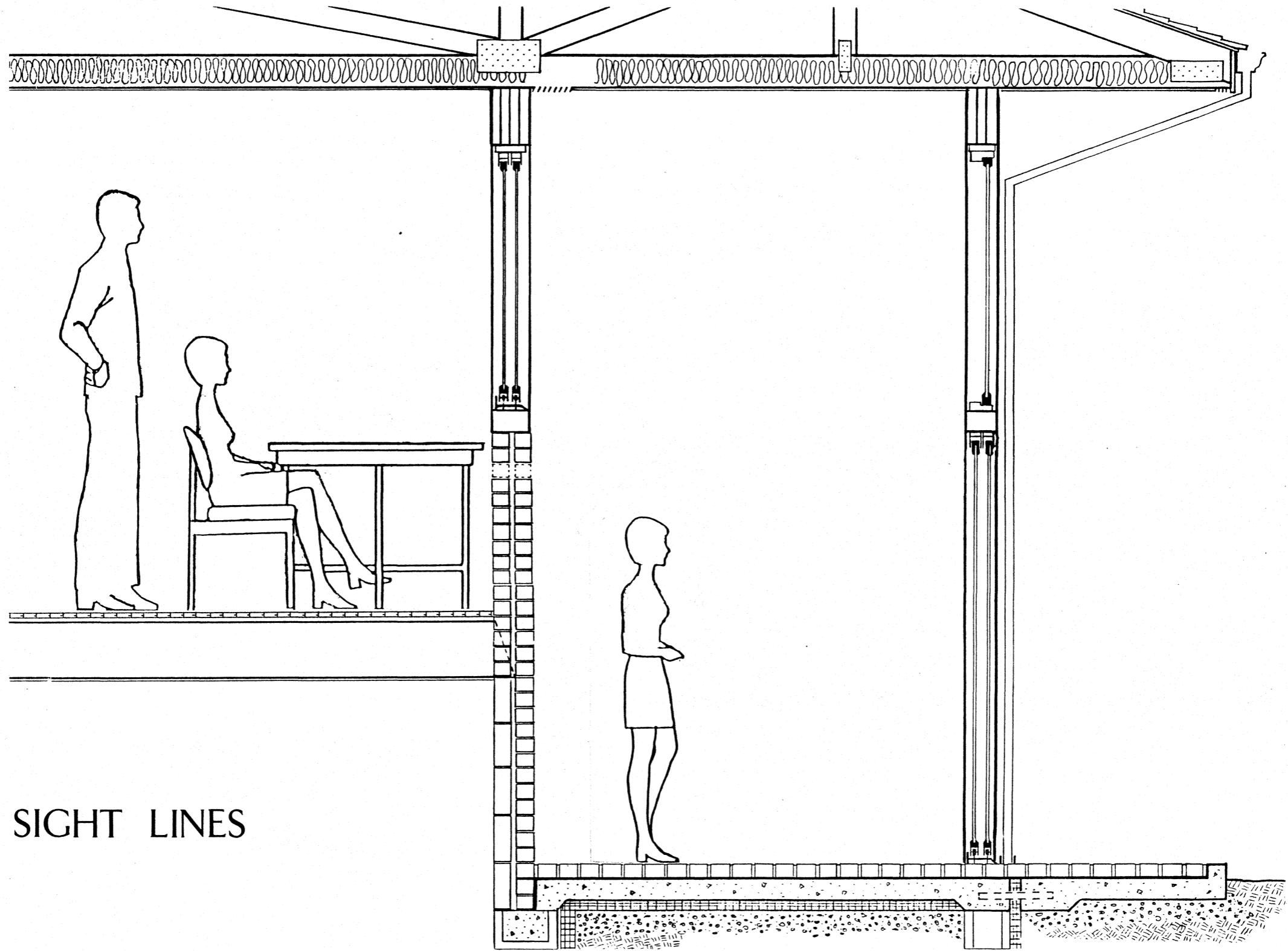
BASEMENT PLAN



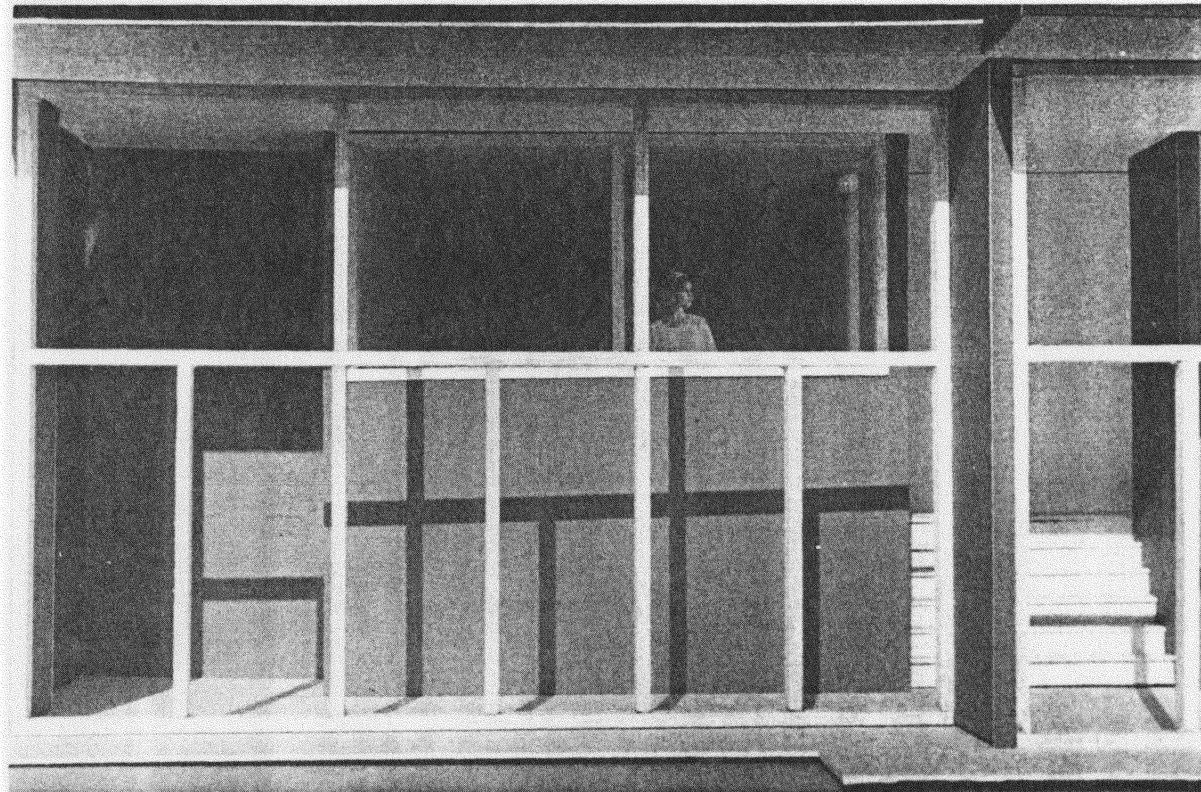
OPAQUE SURFACES



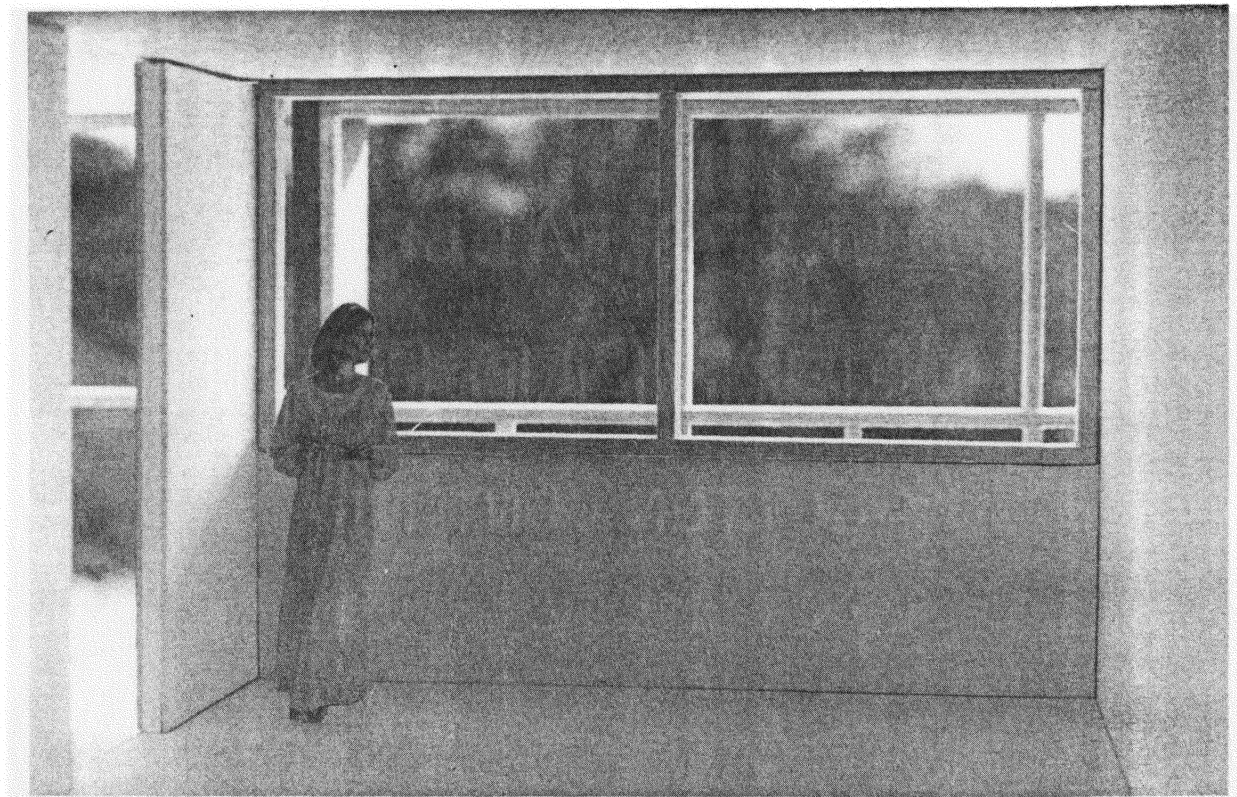
BEDROOM SECTION

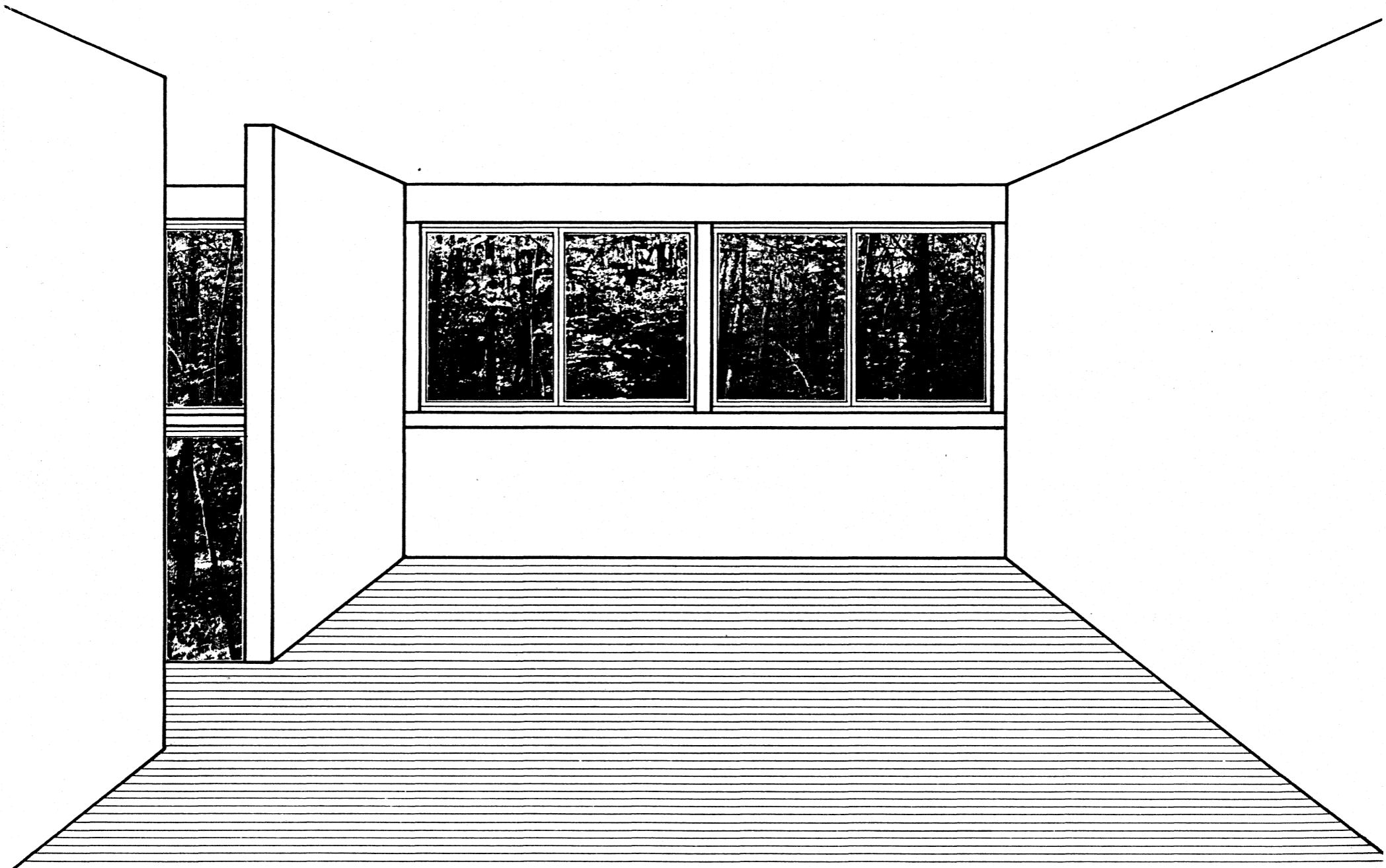


SIGHT LINES

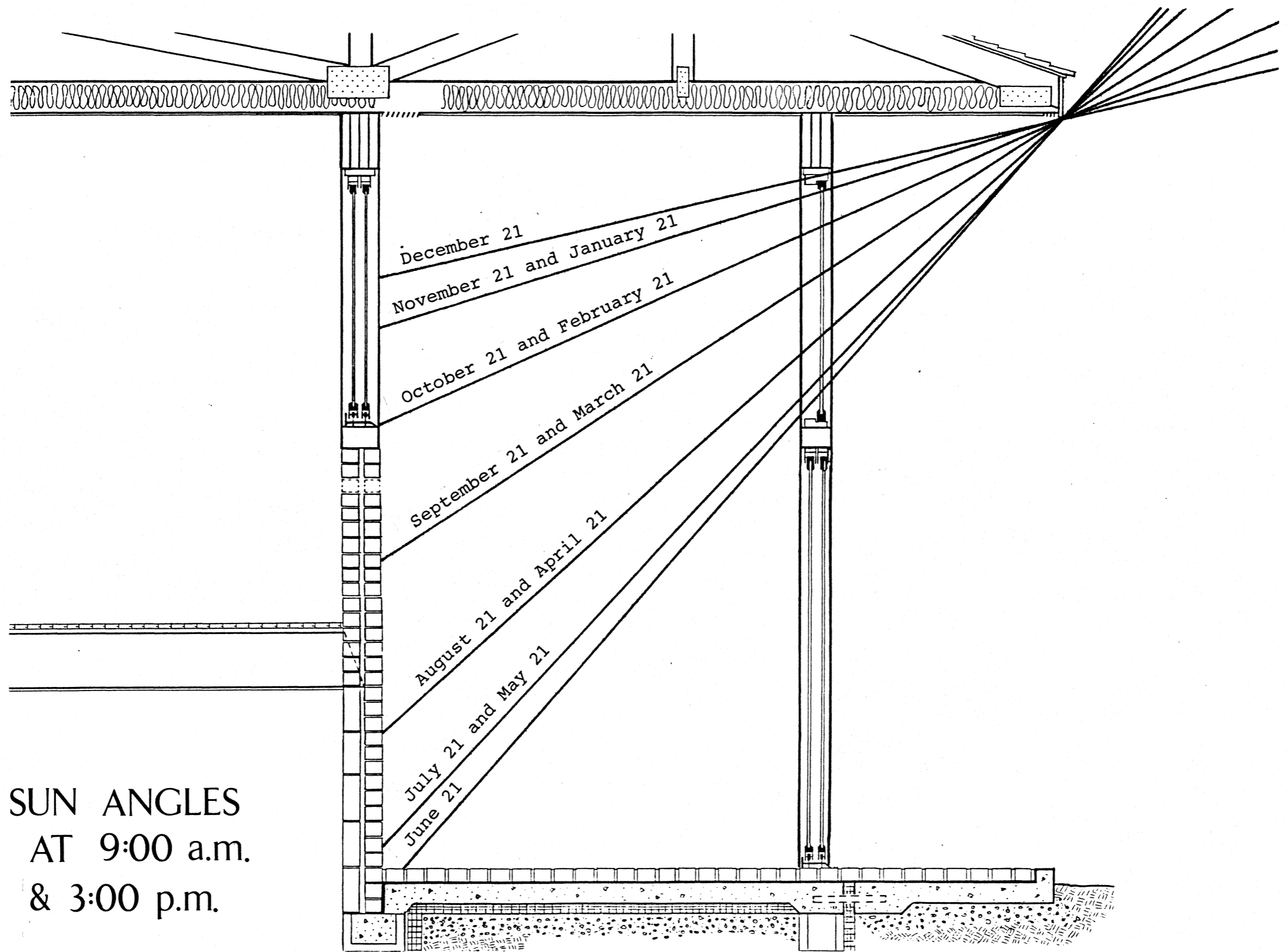


Views into and  
out of the bedrooms

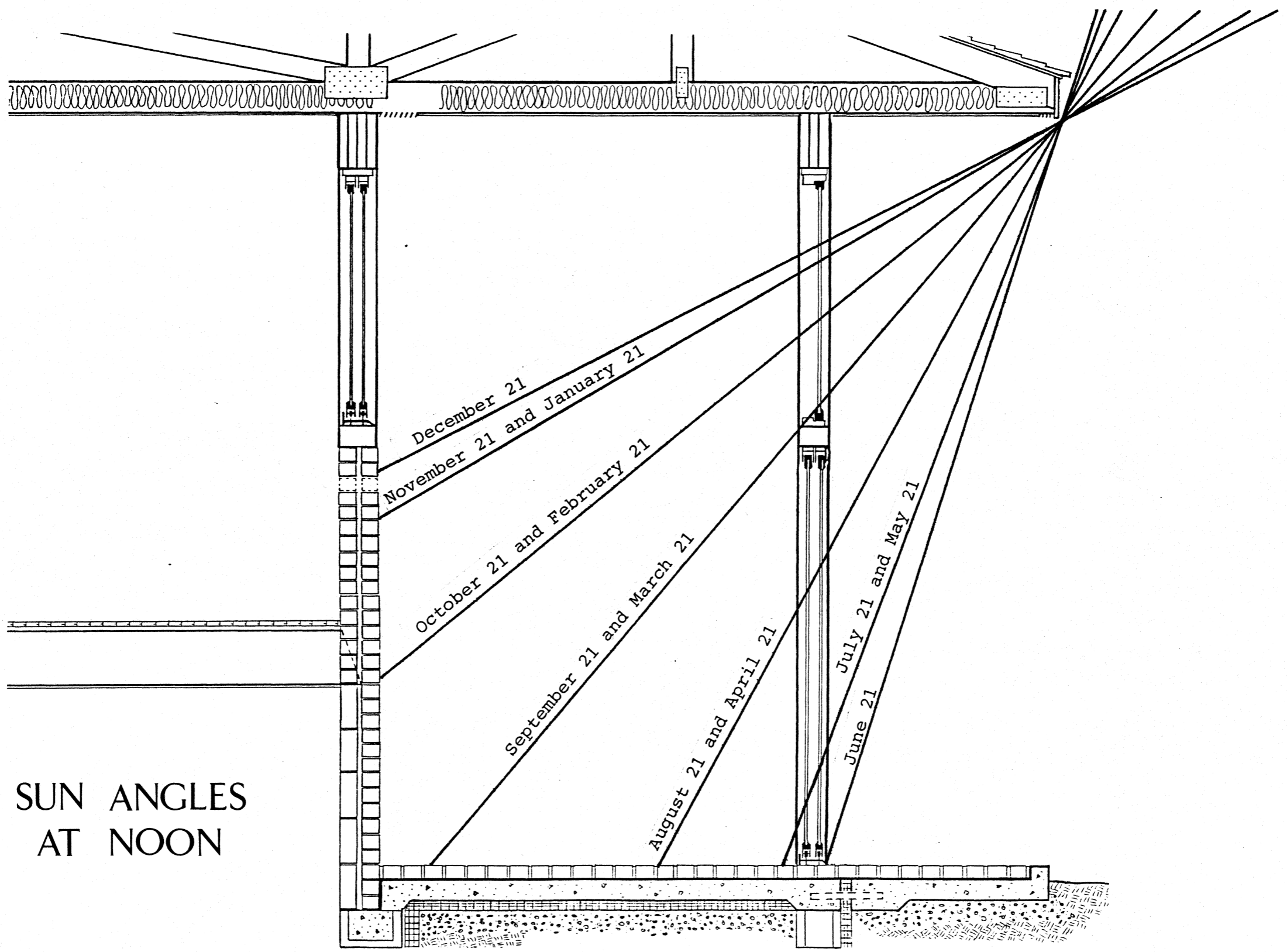




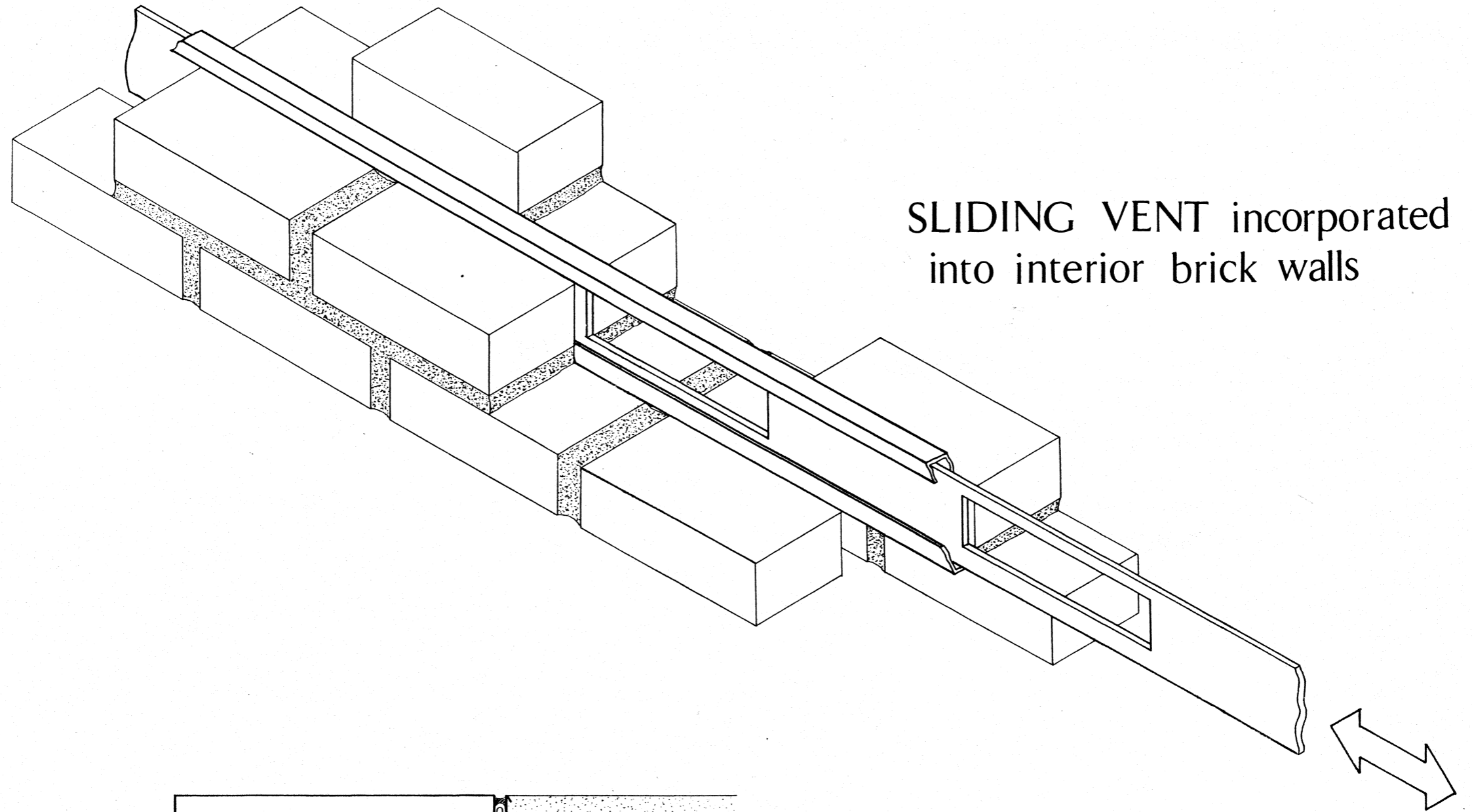
VIEW FROM THE BEDROOMS



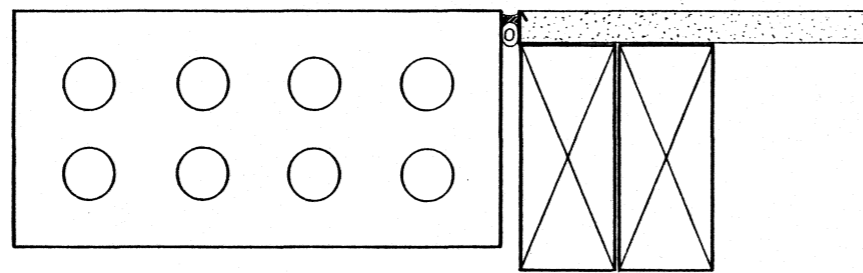
SUN ANGLES  
AT 9:00 a.m.  
& 3:00 p.m.



SUN ANGLES  
AT NOON



SLIDING VENT incorporated into interior brick walls



JOINTS between brick and plaster

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