

# Houses Undergoing Psychoanalysis: Gehry's Residence, Venturi's Mother's House and Johnson's Glass House

by  
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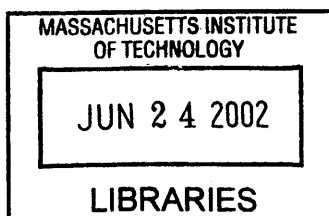
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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the self and the house. In approaching the subject, my assumptions were that the basic condition of the house-self relationship is of tension and animosity and that architectural design, following a psychoanalytical tendency to reduce tension, is used to improve this condition. When great amounts of energy and care are invested in this process, the narrative of tension and its resolution is brought to the surface through architectural drawings.

Based on these assumptions I developed a methodology of analyzing architectural process drawings. In applying this methodology, the process of tension reduction through design is uncovered. Similarly to psychoanalysis, this methodology privileges process and the observation of change over time.

In order to test these assumptions, I chose three case studies of house designed by architects either for themselves, or for a close family relation. I focused on cases where process drawings were available, and applied the methodology of tracing changes from scheme to scheme. I gave special attention to the arrangement of bedrooms and bathrooms, but considered many other aspects of design.

In each case study, the house has its own narrative of tension which is resolved through its design. This narrative is not an analysis of the architect, nor is it architectural criticism, it is something that happens when self and house come together through design.

Thesis Supervisor: Julian Beinart

Title: Professor of Architecture

To Hadas Ben Meir (1952-2001)

Architect, teacher and friend, who believed in me throughout my architectural education and growth as a young architect. Her thoughtful teachings, independent opinions and unconditional support were always a source of strength and inspiration for me.

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"Man abide in the world as having come to it from a private domain ... he goes forth outside from an inwardness. Yet this inwardness opens up in a home which is situated in that outside - for the home, as a building, belongs to the world of objects. But this belonging does not nullify the bearing of the fact that every consideration of objects, and of buildings too, is produced out of the dwelling. Concretely speaking the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated in relation to my dwelling."<sup>1</sup>

(Emmanuel Levinas)

### House and Self; Architecture and Psychoanalysis

Throughout the twentieth century, there has been an extensive preoccupation with the importance and meaning of the house in one's life. The question of house and self has been addressed by scholars from various disciplines, such as philosophy, psychoanalysis and architecture. In addressing this question, most scholars assumed a positive relationship between the two. Contrary to these views, I suggest that there is an inherent tension between the house and its inhabitant. This tension is an outcome of a conflict between subjective inhabitation and the conventional system of the house.

Emmanuel Levinas approaches the question of the dwelling from a philosophical point of view. He claims that the dwelling is a precondition for existence, and that only from within the dwelling, while being separated from the world, can man contemplate the world, represent, and become an individual.<sup>2</sup> Levinas's idea of the dwelling as essential to the existence of man is powerful. However, since dwelling is presented as an abstract category, his ideas can be unproductive in guiding an architectural investigation.

From the field of psychoanalysis, Carl Jung shows how a house can be an expression of the unconscious. In his autobiography, Jung describes a house he built, the Tower, over a period of thirty years. Every part of the house represents a part of himself. Jung had a deep interest in his own unconscious, yet he felt that words and paper could not express it. In building the Tower, Jung felt that he was able to project the unconscious parts of himself onto a house.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority*. (Pittsburgh, Duquesne: University Press 1969) 152-153

<sup>2</sup> Levinas, 168-174.

<sup>3</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, (New York, Pantheon Books 1973), 223-237.

Another interesting attempt to formulate the relationship between self and house is made by an architect, Clare Marcus. Building on Jung's theory of projection, Marcus studies the house as a mirror of the self. Through interviews with many individuals, she shows that the complex web of emotion and thought, conscious and unconscious, is involved in decisions one makes towards the purchase, design, and decoration of their house.<sup>4</sup> According to Marcus, the self is reflected in the house.

Whereas Levinas presents us with "man", Marcus constructs a "self" as a psychoanalytical identity. I suggest that these two points of view may be reconciled. The inhabitant of the house may be seen as both a subjective self and a real person in space. The house is not a simple term; it is interchangeably used to signify an abstract concept, as well as specific artifacts, that is real houses. In this project I examine the relationship of the "self" with a concrete house, a work of architecture. Since cultural specificity is better embraced than avoided, all of the examples presented here belong to post World War II American suburbia.

It is not by accident that many investigations into the house and the self are deeply influenced by psychoanalysis. One reason is that the subject of psychoanalysis is the self. It is a method of investigation that is directed towards understanding the self and the workings of the human mind. In investigating the development of the self, it privileges experiences of early childhood, sexuality and the relationship of the self with parents and siblings.<sup>5</sup> Many of these experiences occur inside the house, as the house is the realm of the personal life and of the family. It is from this strong identification of house and family life that the connection to psychoanalysis is made. When psychoanalysis theorizes the family, it cannot be divorced from the physical context of family life that is, the house.<sup>6</sup>

## Habitation

Thoughts, memories and emotions that are subject to psychoanalytical investigation usually have a relationship to external events and persons. There is an external (real) mother and the

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<sup>4</sup> Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self*, (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1995)

<sup>5</sup> Freud's theory of the Oedipal Complex, the desire of the son to kill the father and marry the mother, is the most striking example.

<sup>6</sup> Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism The Family & Personal Life*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1976) 128. Zaretsky, in writing the history of psychoanalysis, sees a connection between the creation of the house as a private realm outside of capitalist production, and the emergence of psychoanalysis as the science of the family defined by its own autonomous laws.



relationship with the mother develops through events that happen externally to the self in real life. These events and persons do not have any direct connection to architecture, but they can happen in architecture, in the house. Moreover, architecture is constantly used throughout the chain of events that make up our personal lives. A door can be slammed, locked, left open; a room can be exited, entered, avoided. All these practices and family events, that happen in the space of the house and interact with its architecture, can be titled “habitation”. Habitation is a set of social conventions of how to use a given space; it is not quite architecture and not quite personal life. Habitation mediates and negotiates between the house, a three dimensional architectural space, and psychoanalysis, the theory of familial structure. Habitation is the ways in which the space is used. It connects and negotiates family structure and architectural structure. Habitation is key to understanding the relationship between the self and the house.

The trio of architecture-habitation-psychoanalysis can be articulated in the following way:

<b>A)Architecture</b>	<b>B) Habitation</b>	<b>C) Psychoanalysis</b>
Bedroom	children sleeping alone, parents having sex	Sexuality
Bathroom	bathing	privacy
Living room	watching TV together	familial identity

#### A) Architecture – Space

The American suburban house can be described as a combination of the following architectural elements:

Functional division of space: Bedroom, Bathroom, Kitchen, Living room, Dining room, Family room.

Connecting Elements in space: Windows, Doors, Entrances, Room sizes, Layout, Location (of rooms), Proximity (of rooms).

This list describes a functional understanding of the house: in the house, activities take place in spatially defined areas (rooms) and these activities are assigned to rooms on a permanent basis. In other words, the rooms’ functions are, generally speaking, fixed. Rooms are arranged in space; the relationship between the rooms is articulated through their location and physical relation to each other, as well as by connecting elements such as doors and windows.

## B) Habitation – Use

Habitation is not strictly part of the architecture or the space. It is a social code, a set of conventions that determine the ways in which a space is used. Use connects the spatial and architectural ideas of the house to its inhabitants. The system of rooms and openings described above is generally used in the following ways:

Room assignment, bedrooms: Each bedroom is assigned to one person or more, this assignment generally persists for a period of years. Every person in the house has a bedroom that belongs to him/her, and is used consistently by that person.

Room assignment, bathroom: Bathrooms are used by all, but only one person at a time. A house can have more than one bathroom, and there can be a distinction between the bathrooms (guest, children, master), but this distinction is not necessarily strictly followed.

Room assignment, Communal Space: The kitchen, dining room, living room and family room belong to all and are used by all at the same time.

Room assignment creates a consistent association of person to space within the family. The house as a whole is associated with the family through ownership, but within the house there is another layer of space ownership, that of bedrooms. The bedroom is a spatial representation of the individual within the family. The arrangement of the bedrooms reveals the relationship between the family members. The kitchen, dining room and living room represent the family as a whole. Bathrooms, with their private, yet flexible use, further articulate relationships inside the house.

## C) Psychoanalysis – Self

On the most basic level, family members sleep separately in their own bedrooms, bathe in private in a bathroom, and eat together in a dining room. Mother and father share the master bedroom, where they can have a sex life. Sexuality is only allowed between the parents and is practiced behind closed doors. Nudity is discouraged as well; bathing and changing happen in closed rooms. Privacy is highly evaluated: for instance, rooms have no windows looking into other rooms and doors can be provided with locking mechanisms, so it is possible to exclude persons.

The picture that is painted is of a personal life structure, where each individual is a part of a group, the nuclear family, in relation to which he/she lives, grows, develops, matures, and then moves on to start his/her own family. Within this structure, sexuality, privacy and individuality play important roles. This structure is expressed in the architecture of the house through bedrooms, that are a representation of the individual and s space of sexuality. These facts can only become apparent if one brings into account the ways in which the architecture of the house

is used through the practices of habitation. For instance, the preference to provide separate bedrooms (architecture) to adolescent children of the opposite sex (habitation), is, in addition to accommodating individuality, an enforcement of the incest taboo (psychoanalysis).

### Self-House Conflict

The house is a highly conventional system, in which social generalities are expressed through architectural conventions. The question of the house and the self has a sense of subjectivity; it returns to the question of the individual. How can a unique relationship between the self and the house be established within this conventional system? Though I suggest that architecture and psychoanalysis are negotiated through habitation, I do not mean that there cannot be a conflict or animosity between the two. The encounter of subjectivity and convention through habitation is bound to create friction and incompatibility. Each convergence between an individual and an architectural environment creates a unique story that cannot be told through generalizations or rules. I would like to look at personal expression in the house as something that originates from a conflict between the individual and his environment.

I will discuss the reduction of tension through design, later in this thesis, following Freud's Pleasure Principle. But first, I would like to present an example where tension was not reduced and conflict was not resolved. An example where the animosity between self and house is most powerful.

A well-documented case of conflict between house and self is the Farnsworth House designed by Mies van der Rohe and built for Dr. Farnsworth. (fig. 1) When Dr. Edith Farnsworth described the experience of living in her modernist glass box on stilts she claimed she felt restless, like a "prowling animal", because she was being observed at all times.<sup>7</sup> She also described feeling "grotesque," because her closet partition was too short, and her head was "sticking out" while she was changing. She felt that she was serving the house rather than the having the house serve her, because its maintenance was so complicated. Dr. Farnsworth felt that the glass box on stilts was arbitrary in relation to her life. What was the nature of the conflict between Dr. Farnsworth and her house? Essentially, the house failed to provide protection from the outside. Its negotiation with the outside world did not provide enough privacy for Dr. Farnsworth to relax. Furthermore,

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph A. Barry, "Report on the battle between good and bad modern houses", *House Beautiful*, May (1953) 270.

the exterior skin of the house was a mismatch with her need for privacy. It also failed to negotiate the relationship between her and her guests and she felt uncomfortable having to sleep in the same space with a guest, since there were no interior enclosures.<sup>8</sup> The house's dimensions were not in alignment with her height, and the too short closet partition made her look grotesque in the eyes of her guests and people from the outside. In this case, the modern concept of transparency, glass and steel and the open plan did not match Dr. Farnsworth individual needs and her understanding of her self in the world. She was in conflict with the house.

### Design as Tension Reduction

If standing in front of a window provokes discomfort or feelings of exposure, one is compelled to pull the curtain down or move away from the window, thus resolving the source of discomfort. In Freud's understanding, this tendency would be a manifestation of the Pleasure Principle, the tendency to reduce tension, that is, unpleasurable sensations, and to produce pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Mental processes and actions are directed towards the reduction of tension, in the ultimate goal of achieving nirvana, or constancy. Changing the environment in order to reduce tension, as the workings of the Pleasure Principle, can be seen in the minute act of pulling down a curtain and in general in the ways one interacts with his/her environment.

Designing a house is a process in which an environment is being created and adjusted to fit its future inhabitant. When designing a house, habitation is generally taken into account. Among many other goals, the architect attempts to create a habitable space, a space that protects its inhabitants from the outside world, a space that arranges the relationships between the members of the household in a satisfactory manner, in other words, a functional space. Accommodating personal life is essentially about reducing the pain and conflict that are involved in living in the world. As seen in the Farnsworth house case, a house can produce a great amount of stress and tension. Although celebrated as a masterpiece by admirers of modern architecture, according to the pain reduction criterion, the Farnsworth House would be considered imperfect.

I would like to suggest that the design process of a house is also, in addition to many other things, a process of tension reduction between the inhabitant and his house. I propose that design decisions are directed towards resolving situations where a certain space, or layout, would

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<sup>8</sup> Alice Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998) 143

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, (New York: Norton, 1961)

produce stress, tension, and conflict.<sup>10</sup> This process, the working through the social conventions of the house, in order to adjust them to the inhabitants' specific needs, is also what makes the built form an articulation of the inhabitants' personal life.

In addition to the convergence of subjectivity and conventions, the process of house design brings in another set of variables. The relationship that should be considered is triangular: **client** (self) – **architect** (space producer) – **house** (space). In this relationship, the architect mediates between the future house and its future inhabitant, the client. It is the architect's role to anticipate the ways in which the client will inhabit the space and to provide the appropriate space. When architect and client converge that is, when an architect designs a house in which he/she intends to live, the triangle is altered. First, the architect has most insight into the client's future use of the house, and second, there is a greater commitment towards tension reduction. After all, if the architect would have to live in the house he/she is designing, it had better work.

### Analysis of the Design Process

I am proposing to look at the process of design and the architectural documentation of the process, in order to explore the dynamics of tension reduction between the client/architect and the house. Looking at the design process rather than at the built result is important because the process of tension reduction cannot be read from a static result. It can only be understood through change and through action. The difference between two consecutive schemes in the design of the house is the subject of this analysis. In other words, my method lies not in the scheme itself, but rather in the changes that the design undergoes.

The first plan that is drawn is a given. It is not meaningless, nor arbitrary; it has everything to do with the architect's personality, history, wishes and desires. However, it is only a starting point of the psychoanalytical process of tension reduction through design. When the first plan is drawn and then contrasted with the architect's idea of habitation, tension arises. Once a second plan is drawn, it can be seen in relation to the first plan. The difference between the plans is the architect's intentions. If the first plan embodies architectural conventions that convey social ones, changes that are made to the second plan can be seen in relation to that. For example, locating a

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<sup>10</sup> Whether this process is conscious or unconscious is an interesting question, but also very hard to address. Nevertheless, as Freud claimed that the unconscious parts of our mind participate in our mental life just as much as the conscious parts do. Furthermore, they have as much influence on our actions as the conscious parts. Based on that, I claim that the method of drawing analysis is valid whether the drive to reduce tension between house and self is conscious or unconscious. Sigmund Freud, *introductory lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1989) 25-26.

bedroom in the first or second floor of a house in itself does not mean much. But when a bedroom is moved from the first floor to the second floor, one can speculate why. The new location of a bedroom, associated with an individual in the family, can be read as a relief of tension. If the previous configuration were at odds with the inhabitant's sense of self, the new location would provide an arrangement that attempts to solve that problem. Thus, through the redrawing of plans, elevations and sections, the architect can manipulate the spatial articulation of family structures and of the relationship between the inhabitant and his/her built environment.

Regardless of the outcome, the process itself can tell the story of the individual in the house. Tracing the language of rooms and relationships between rooms, one can gain insight into the psychoanalytical problems that are driving the design of the house. This process is easily witnessed when the architect and inhabitant are one. The commitment to the resolution of tension is the greatest, and the architect has most insight into the ways of living and practices of the inhabitant himself.

It is Mies's complete control over every detail in the Farnsworth house that created a "bad house." It is the absence of client feedback and the psychoanalytical process of tension reduction from the design process that created a house that produces apprehension and agony.

Understanding the house as something that is lived in and used is crucial to the negotiation of psychoanalysis and architecture. In the design process this is "anticipation of habitation."

### Case study Selection

The idea for this research came about after I completed a renovation for my parents bedroom. While explaining the renovation process to a friend, I was surprised to find out how much information concerning my parents, myself and our relationship, could be generated from a description of a modest bedroom renovation.

The renovated part of the house included two rooms, a bathroom, a closet and a balcony. The goal was to reconfigure them into a master bedroom suite. The designed suite included a larger bath, more closet space, a bedroom, an adjacent sitting room, and a balcony. The new suite functions as a self-sufficient mini-apartment within their quite large and empty house. The other bathroom and bedrooms were now made available for my brother's family to move in with their kids in times of

need.<sup>11</sup> Thus the space vacated by my parents shrinking into their bedroom was claimed by the next generation.

Inside the renovated suite there was a new space, the sitting room, adjacent to the master bedroom. This space doubled as a grandchild's bedroom for occasional sleepovers. The house became a spatial diagram for a generational stitch - the grandparents moving inwards allowing space for their children around them, while creating a pocket inside their shrunk territory for the grandchildren. The driving theme of the renovation was reproduction and generational relationship.

Another emerging theme was the acceptance of me, their youngest child, as an adult and a professional. My parents' bathroom floor tiles have always been too slippery. As my parents grew older, the fear of slipping in the bathroom became very real. Three years before the renovation, when I was already an architect, my parents took me to their basement and showed me a floor tile out of a box. They had purchased a few boxes of a ragged grayish floor tile and were about to hire someone to replace their bathroom (also gray) floor tile with the ragged one. My reaction was an instant veto, I thought the tile was quite dull, ugly in fact. To my surprise, my parents respected my opinion, and agreed not to use that tile. In the same conversation it was agreed that they would take this opportunity to renovate their bathroom, and that I would provide professional advice. The renovation scope expanded to the bedroom suite, and through the process, it was acknowledged that I was an adult with a useful profession. My newly acknowledged professional status was used to establish my adulthood. In other words, while my brother was producing the grandchildren to sleep in the space, I was producing the space to contain the children.

I was intrigued by the fact that the process of a bedroom renovation can articulate the cycle of life in a family of three generations.

With this somewhere in the back of my mind I approached the first case study, "Mother's House" by Robert Venturi. It was conceived as a paper in a graduate seminar.<sup>12</sup> Fascinated by the ten published schemes, I started wondering why the plan evolved the way it did. To my surprise, the plans and sections fell into a coherent narrative that told the story of the spatial presence of a son gaining autonomy and identity within his mother's house. I had no biographical information

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<sup>11</sup> This scenario was speculated upon in my family in case of Middle East unrest. as was the Gulf War where most people left the city centers and moved to the periphery.

<sup>12</sup> The Post War House, taught by Beatriz Colomina, at MIT Department of Architecture, Fall 2000.

about the Venturi family, but the story felt convincing because of the detailed architectural evidence.

Trying to repeat this insight and substantiate the claim that a personal story can be told through the plans and sections of a house, I set out to look for more case studies. At first, trying to follow a consistent theme, I looked at sons designing for their mothers. I considered *La Petite Maison*, by Le Corbusier. Expanding the search, I looked at other kinds of family configurations, and considered Wittgenstein's house for his sister. I decided against these case studies because I did not feel they had a story that could be retrieved through architectural analysis. This was part of a larger realization, that the specific methodology I was developing could not be applied to just any house, and that not all houses can be successfully analyzed through my methodology.

I decided to look for case studies that appeared to have a story embedded in their architecture. The Farnsworth House, designed by Mies van der Rohe, was conceived through an intimate friendship between architect and client. The outcome was one of the most important works of modern architecture in America in the form of a pure steel and glass structure. An additional outcome was the filing of lawsuits by Mies and Ms. Farnsworth, and an angry exchange of opinions through the printed media. The house had an unexpected dramatic impact on Ms. Farnsworth, she felt caged in, on display, and very uncomfortable.<sup>13</sup> Despite the conflict between architect and client, and the animosity between client and house, the story was not told through the architecture. There were no process drawings available, and I could not detect change or intention on behalf of the architect or client.

From this case study I turned to Johnson's Glass House that seemed to have not produced the apprehension as in the Farnsworth case. In addition, there were process drawings available for Johnson, which made it possible to follow his intention through the project. I recognized Johnson oscillation between the desire to expose and the need to conceal. I was able to articulate that theme through analysis of the design process of the house.

The next case study I looked at was Gehry's Residence. This case study proved to be very interesting because there were many psychological interpretations in writings, but none of its process drawings were published.

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<sup>13</sup> Alice Friedman explores the story of the Farnsworth House thoroughly in: Alice Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998)



Two of the cases chosen here (Venturi and Johnson) have extensive process drawings, where intention can be followed and discerned. With the third case study (Gehry) many attempts were made to psychologize it, but as I have argued, it cannot yield much insight, due to the unavailability of process drawings.

The fact that Venturi has published ten complete schemes of Mother's House might be part of his perception of himself as an important architect. The publication was probably also made possible because of his reputation, but for the purpose of this research it was simply a valuable publication. In trying to find comparable case studies, I have focused on well-established architects in hope that the fortune of excessive publishing will repeat itself, as it did with Johnson's Glass House. I believed that the kind of relentless perfectionism that causes an architect to invest astonishing amounts of energy in the design of their own house, drafting a large number of plans, going through numerous schemes, is more likely to be found in architects who have made a reputation for themselves.

### Summery

In approaching the three case studies of this thesis, my assumptions were:

- There is a psychoanalytical tension in the relationship between the house and the self. This tension comes about when subjective habitation is confronted with architectural conventions.
- Whereas the house is a reflection of familial structure, the bedroom is a representation of the individual within the household.
- Design is a process in which architects search for a reduction of tension between their habitation and the conventions of the house.

In order to test these assumptions, I chose case studies of architects who designed houses either for themselves, or for a close family relation. I focused on cases where process drawings were available, and applied the methodology of tracing changes in the rooms' layout from scheme to scheme. I gave special attention to the arrangement of bedrooms, and bathrooms. Each house has its own narrative of tension, which is resolved through its design. This narrative is not an analysis of the architect, nor it is architectural criticism: it happens when self and house come together through design.

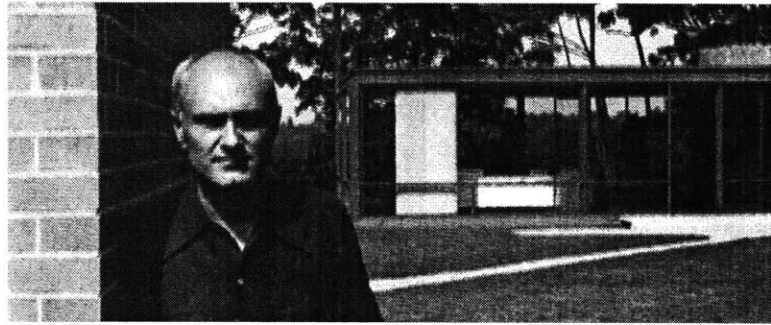


**Fig. 1:** Farnsworth House, Mies van der Rohe, Plano, Illinois, 1945-1951

## Glass House and Guest House

Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut

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**Fig. 2:** Philip Johnson leaning against the Guest House, 1950.

### **Philip Johnson: Biography**

American. Born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1906. Studied at Harvard University, 1923-30 A.B. Harvard Graduate School of Design 1940-43, B.Arch. Founder and director of the Department of Architecture, Museum of Modern Art, 1930-36 and 1946-54. Practiced since 1946 in Cambridge, and in New York; Partner with John Burgee, 1967-1987. Consultant to John Burgee Architects since 1987. Fellow, American Institute of Architects, 1963, Pritzker Prize, 1979.<sup>14</sup>

“Whether you want to close yourself in is Freudian in one way, but exposing yourself is Freudian in another way.”<sup>15</sup>

(Philip Johnson)

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<sup>14</sup> Randall J. Van Vynckt, *International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture –I, Architects*, (Detroit: St. James Press 1993) 440.

<sup>15</sup> Alice Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998) 147

Through the design of the Glass House, and its counterpart the Guest House, Johnson is resolving an internal conflict: Johnson's wish for a pure glass box and the desire to expose and his acknowledgment of the need to conceal and that some spaces must be enclosed. The way Johnson resolves this conflict is through the identity of the guest. With the first scheme the house has two clients, the host and the guest. The two clients are represented at first through two volumes, main house and guest pavilion. When the architectural idea of the glass box and the desire to expose took over, Johnson comes across difficulties in reconciling the need to expose with the need to conceal within a single unified structure. Subsequently he splits the house into a transparent one and a solid one (fig. 3). Though the two volumes are still named Glass House and Guest House, they no longer stands for two clients, but represent the two sides of Johnson's life. Thus, Johnson locates his private life, his master bedroom in the Guest House, pretending to be a guest of his own Glass House. As Johnson's personal life is located in the Guest House, the Glass House can also be seen as the location of Johnson's architectural discourse.<sup>16</sup>

When Johnson published his Glass House, accompanied with architectural criticism and analysis, he named Farnsworth House as one of his sources of inspiration. The Farnsworth house had been designed only a few years before by Mies van der Rohe for Edith Farnsworth, a doctor in her late 40s. She met Mies in a social gathering in Chicago and commissioned him to design and build a small weekend house for her in Plano, Illinois. The design took a few years, during which Farnsworth and Mies developed a close relationship. The house, considered by many to be a masterpiece of modern architecture, was a rectilinear steel box on stilts with all glass walls. After the house was completed, lawsuits were filed on behalf of both parties involved, and one of the most famous fights of modern architecture began.

Farnsworth and Mies fought in the media as well as in the courtroom. In 1953, she was interviewed for an article in *House Beautiful* titled "Report on the American Battle between Good and Bad Modern Houses"<sup>17</sup>. In it Farnsworth explained her dissatisfaction with the house. Apart from spending twice as much as she had planned to, Farnsworth complained about the lack of privacy. She felt observed at all times. She could not keep a trash can in her kitchen, because it was fully exposed to the road. The partition that was supposed to provide her with privacy for changing her clothes was a foot shorter than she was, and her head stuck out.

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<sup>16</sup> The idea of the Glass House as belonging to architectural Johnson contributed by Emily Katrencik.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph A. Barry, "Report on the battle between good and bad modern houses", *House Beautiful*, May (1953)

Though the Farnsworth House and Johnson's Glass House appear to be similar, Philip Johnson seems satisfied with his own house. Whereas Dr. Farnsworth might have felt that a work of modern architecture was imposed on her, Philip Johnson as an architect-client must have been well aware of the architectural implications of his design. The Glass House was a good match, it answered his needs as a home.

The important difference between the Farnsworth house and the Glass House, was the existence of the Brick Guest House. When published by Johnson, he presented the two houses together, and blandly described them as the "separation of functional units into two absolute shapes". That is, Johnson considered the two houses as two pieces of one whole. The complete transparency of the Glass House was made livable for Johnson because he had the Guest House's complete opacity to contain his bedroom and his private life.

For Johnson, the Guest House – Glass House split scheme became a mechanism to deal with the possible social implications of being a homosexual in 1950's America.<sup>18</sup> Johnson's scheme might have been more effective than he had anticipated. The Glass House received a lot of media attention; the Guest House, however, was generally ignored, demoted to the status of mere pavilion, or treated as a landscape feature.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the more ignored, the more the Guest House becomes associated with the closeted and hidden part of Johnson's life.

### The drawings

For this purpose I will examine seven schemes, divided into five groups. Each group, I would claim, represents an important phase in the design process.<sup>20</sup>

Scheme I	– Courtyard (integrated)
Schemes XA, XI, XII	– Glass House (integrated)
Scheme XIII	– Wall
Scheme XVI	– Courtyard (split)
Final Scheme	– Glass House / Brick Guest House (split)

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<sup>18</sup> Alice Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998) 147.

<sup>19</sup> Examples for such descriptions of the Guest House can be found in articles by Tompkins and Goldberger, in: David Whitney and Jeffrey Kipnis, *Philip Johnson The Glass House*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> 10 of the 27 Glass House schemes were published by Kenneth Frampton in: Kenneth Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited". In: *Catalogue 9*, :September 12 to October 31, 1978 New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1978.

### Scheme I – Courtyard (integrated)

Scheme I (fig. 4) lays out the initial intentions of Johnson. The house is located on a hill, with a scenic view overlooking the pond to its west; access to the house is from the east. An elevated courtyard connects the main house and guest house. At the back of the courtyard, on its west side, a colonnade connecting the two volumes frames the scenic view. The main house, not yet a glass house, has a foyer, a living room with a dining area. The kitchen opens to the foyer, and through the living room one can access a study area, and through it a small bedroom with a bathroom. The kitchen is enclosed. The foyer and the living room are separated by a free-standing wall that also serves as backdrop to the fireplace in the living room. The bedroom is well hidden behind a wall. The guest house has two similar bedroom suites, each with a bathroom, a closet and a separate entrance. One bedroom's entrance opens to the courtyard, the other with a carport has an entrance on a lower level in front of the courtyard's retaining wall. The guest house bedrooms have large windows to the west and the main house has wide floor to ceiling glass doors on four sides. The proportion of opening to wall in both the main house and the guest house is similar.

In this scheme, Johnson's basic program intentions are laid out. The main house serves the host, Johnson, and the guest house serves his guests.

### Schemes XA, XI, XII – Glass House (integrated)

The glass house (integrated) is a set of three schemes in which Johnson experiments with a glass box, a free plan and the integration of the program into a single element.

Scheme XA (fig. 5) is a rectilinear box with four steel columns on each side, as well as a row of columns in the middle, and all glass walls. It has an entrance on the east side. Upon entering, a dining table is located on the left and a living area ahead. To the right, two cylindrical shapes made out of brick enclose a kitchen and a bathroom. The two cylinders are formed by a single curved wall. There are two bedroom areas behind the wall. The bed nearest to the bathroom is a double bed, and the other bed is a single. Sliding partitions provide enclosure on both sides of the curved wall, and a low closet-partition separates the two bed areas. A possible reading of the plan is that the double bed accommodates Johnson and the other bed serves a guest. Guest and host share the same bathroom.

In scheme XI (fig. 6) the cylinders become two separate elements: bathroom and kitchen. A third cylindrical element is added as a fire place. There are no longer any sliding partitions between the living room area and bedroom area. A desk is added between the two beds. The guest bed loses

its closet partition and becomes a bed in a corner. The glass box is shallower, and does not have a row of columns in the middle. Johnson's bedroom area although visually separated from the living room and facing west, away from the entrance, can still be simply walked into in the absence of a door or any other obstacle. In this scheme, the idea of the free plan overrides requirements of privacy and separation.

In scheme XII (fig. 7), the two cylinders become one cylinder split in half to accommodate bathroom and kitchen. The guest bedroom disappears altogether, the desk taking its place. Although this scheme looks very close to the final Glass House scheme, it offers no solution to the problem of accommodating guests. It is possible that in a moment of clarity Johnson realized that a pure glass box is not habitable and he turned away from it only to come back with a more sophisticated attitude, armed with a solid bedroom, some 13 schemes later.

### Scheme XIII – the Wall

I find Scheme XIII “the Wall” (fig. 8) to be one of the most intriguing phases in the design of the Glass House. The impossibility of reconciling host and guest in the glass house is resolved here by means of a single long brick wall. The wall extends beyond the house on both sides, and the two glass objects are offset in relation to each other. On one side of the wall, facing the view, is a glass box with living room, study and bedroom separated by a low closet partition. The bedroom's bathroom is located on the other side of the wall, and is accessed through a door in the wall. On the other side of the wall, facing the entrance to the site, is a kitchen, bedroom and another bathroom. The parts of the house that Johnson worked so hard to hide with cylindrical elements, the kitchen, the bathroom and the fireplace, are now embedded in the wall. The space of the glass box is freed of any obstructions. In addition, a separate guest room with its own bathroom is provided.

In the wall scheme, the idea of a domestic theater is brought to an extreme. The “Glass House” part of the house is in front of the wall, and the “Guest House” part of the house is behind it. This scheme expresses most clearly the idea of a stage: the now completely free Glass House has a backdrop in the form of a brick wall. Service elements that should be away from public eye are located behind the wall. The area behind the wall functions as backstage. It might seem like Johnson has solved the problem, but this is not the case. There is still a great amount of domestic ambiguity and contradiction in this scheme, even more so than in most of the other schemes.

Consider the main entrance: the Glass House portion of this scheme has four doors located on two axes. The idea of four doors on four sides is implied in the first scheme, but is made explicit in

the two prior schemes (XII and XIII). Whereas in the Glass House Scheme, the door facing east is naturally the main entrance, in the Wall Scheme this condition is ambiguous. The east door is located in the backdrop wall between the bedroom's closet/partition and the living room. It leads to the kitchen, and through the kitchen outside. The natural access to the house is from the east. However, the east door is more like a service entrance, as it goes through the part of the house where the kitchen and bathrooms are supposed to be hidden. The door opposite it, on the west, opens to where the hill drops and overlooks the pond. The north door is located between the bedroom and study area. The south door opens to the living room, but a couch is located four feet in front of it. It is also an inappropriate entrance in terms of site access: one would have to walk around the wall in order to get into the house. None of these doors functions as a proper main entrance.

In the Wall Scheme Johnson is able to arrange all the program elements in a single structure with a clear division for private and public. In addition, the Wall Scheme does not compromise the idea of a glass box facing the view without any obstructing elements in it. However, this cannot be reconciled with the desire to enter the glass box from the east and to face the view on the west. In this scheme the entrance sequence as such would mean going through the service space to enter.

Expressed in the plans, thus far, is Johnson's desire to have an open and transparent house with no interior partitions, a house merging with the scenic view and a pure modernist glass box that reveals its own structure as well as the structure of its inhabitant's lives. This desire, however, is in severe conflict with his understanding of what it would be like to live in a glass box, and his need for a closet, a space outside of the purity of modernism. In the wall scheme the glass box and its service space cannot coexist without creating foreground/background ambiguities. Therefore this scheme is abandoned as well.

#### Scheme XVI – Courtyard (split)

In scheme XVI (fig. 9), Johnson adopts a new approach to the problem of glass box and service space. Picking up on ideas from early schemes, Johnson separates the two into two houses. This time, both bedrooms and bathrooms are in the "guest" wing, and the main glass box has only a kitchen and a living room in it. The resolution of Johnson's two conflicting aspirations, that is pure openness and privacy, is made possible through the splitting of the house into two parts: an entertainment wing and a sleeping wing. The sleeping wing has two bedroom suites: one large with courtyard access for the host and a smaller one for the guest.



In this scheme it is clear that Johnson sees the glass house as a public face, an entertainment wing, all kitchen and living room. His own bedroom is located somewhere else. This attitude, I suggest, is applied to the final scheme as well.

### Final Scheme – Glass House / Brick Guest House (split)

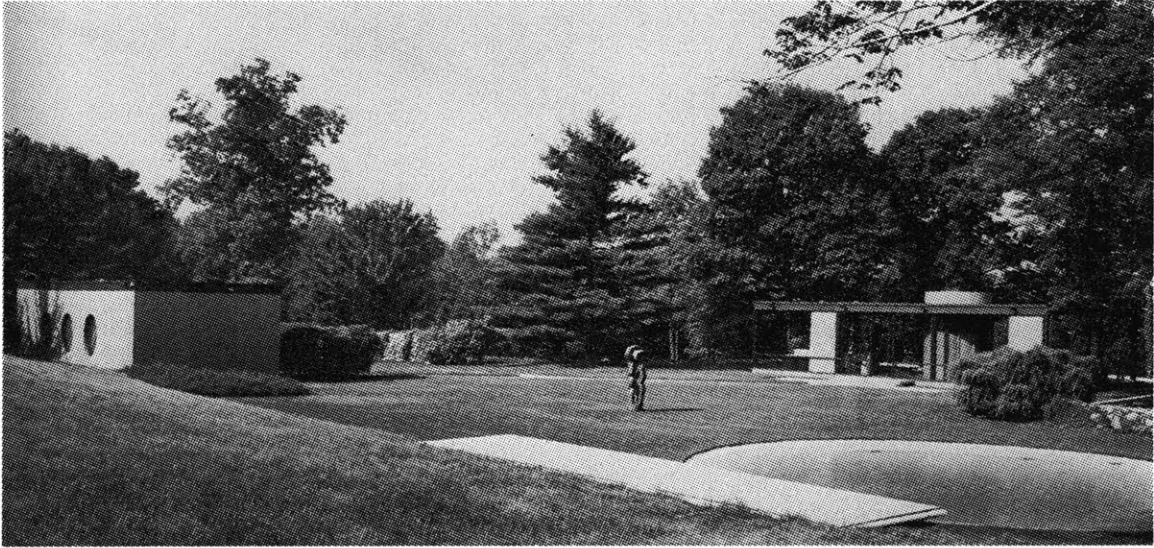
In the final scheme (fig. 10), Glass House and Brick Guest House are placed away from each other, connected on a diagonal with a path across the lawn. The Guest House (fig. 11) has two equally sized bedrooms at the ends and a sitting room/study in the middle. In front of the rooms there is a hall with a bathroom at one end and a kitchen at the other. The entrance is located at the middle of the hall. The Guest House is a self-sufficient entity. The Glass House (fig. 12, 13) has a living area, a bedroom area and a bath in a single brick cylinder. The bath's brick cylinder accommodates a fireplace. The kitchen is a floating aisle facing the living room. In the Glass House Johnson reduces obstructing elements to a minimum.

Four years later the Brick Guest house is renovated to have only two bedrooms, a large one and a small one. (fig. 14) The large bedroom is provided with its own bath (with bathtub) and closet. The small bedroom is served by a bathroom off the corridor (shower only). The kitchen might still be in place, although this is hard to determine from the plans. It is claimed that in this renovation Johnson converted the brick guest house into his own master bedroom.<sup>21</sup> The image of the large bedroom with a soft carpet and an interior arched structure that provides only ambient light to the bedroom is heavily published (fig. 15).

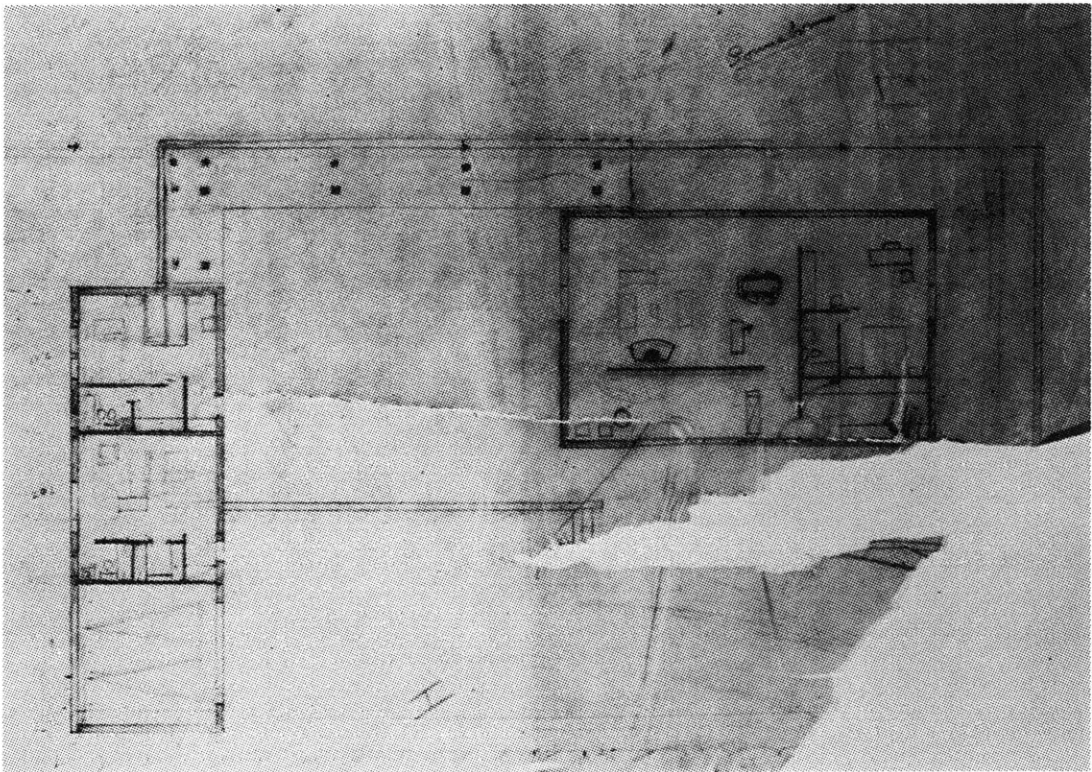
In the final scheme Johnson takes the proposition of splitting his life to the extreme with two self-sufficient houses located away from each other. The Glass House – public and transparent, and the Guest House – solid and hidden away. It is my claim that the doubling of the house as a life strategy, comes about through the design process, when conflicting wishes can not be resolved with architectural means. The renovation of the pavilion reinforces its status as a master bedroom belonging to the host and not to the guest. Through the drawing of 27 schemes Johnson came to terms with his wishes and his needs. He formulated them as a coupled Glass House – Brick Guest House.

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<sup>21</sup> David Whitney and Jeffrey Kipnis, *Philip Johnson The Glass House*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) p. XVIII



**Fig. 3:** Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut



**Fig. 4:** Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme I

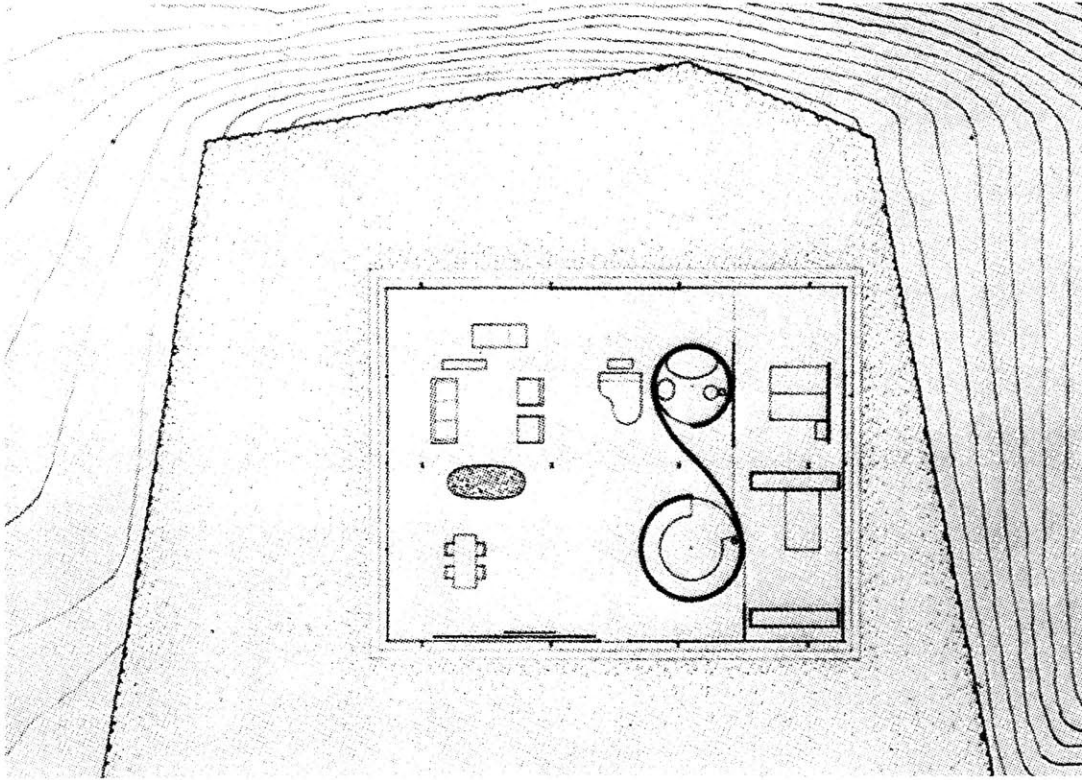


Fig. 5: Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme XA

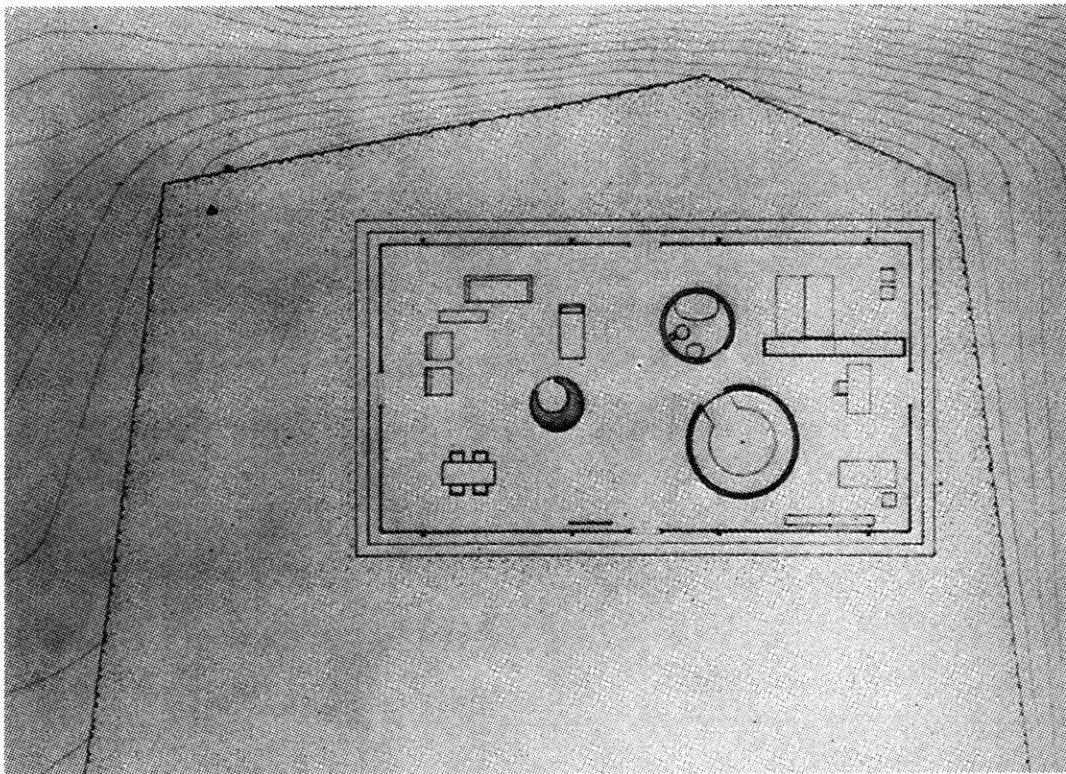


Fig. 6: Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme XI

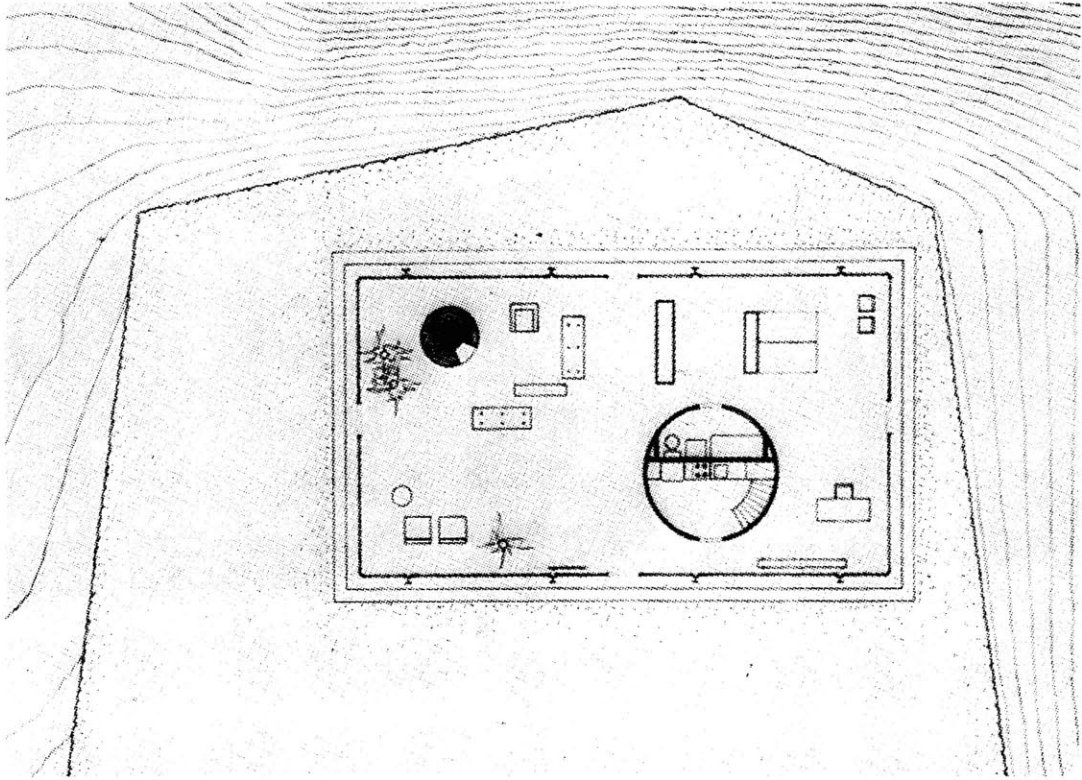


Fig. 7: Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme XII

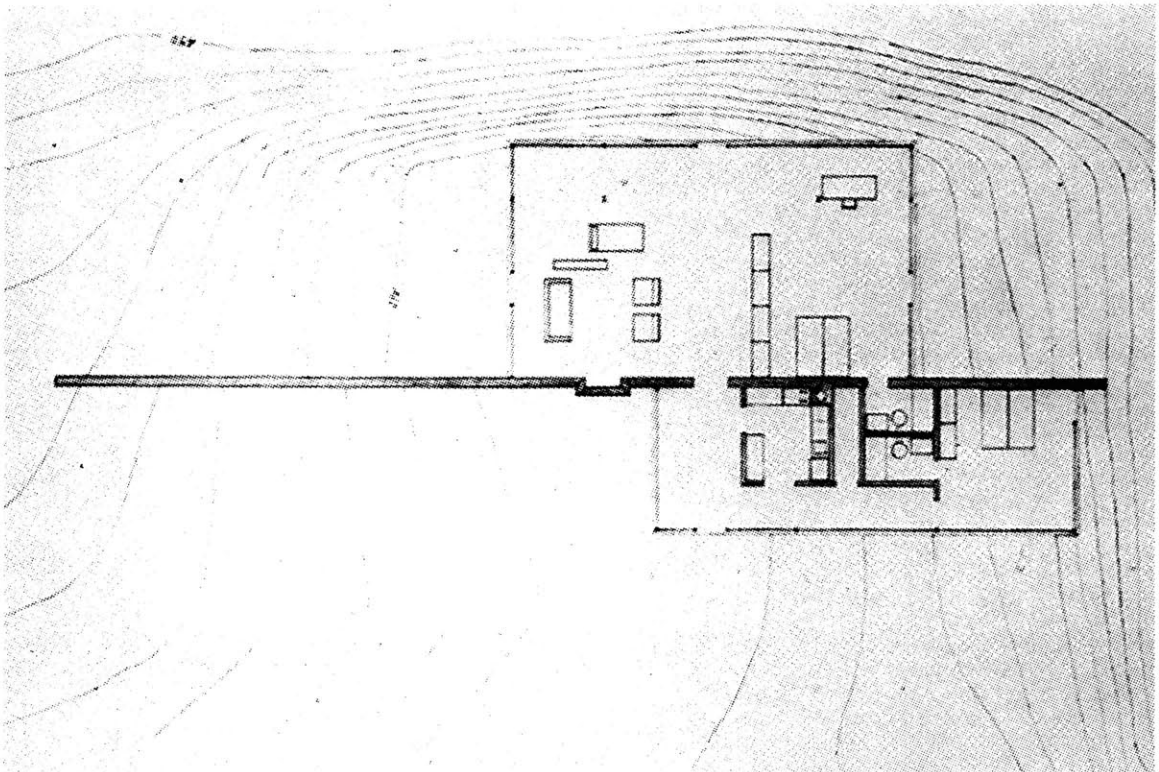
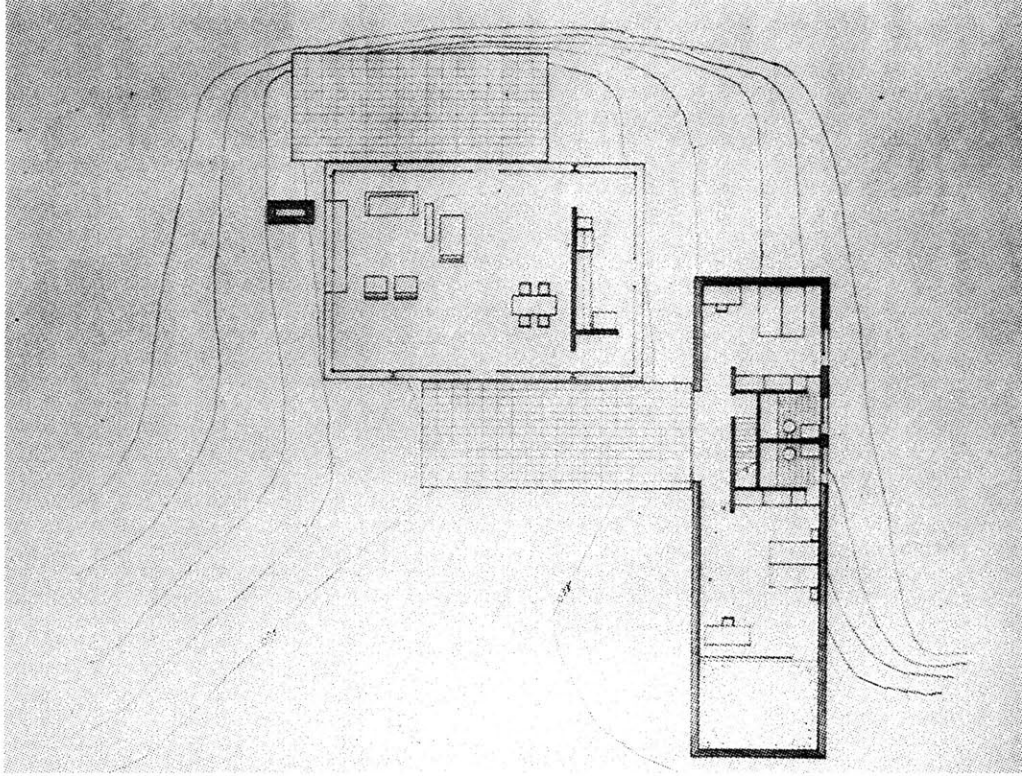
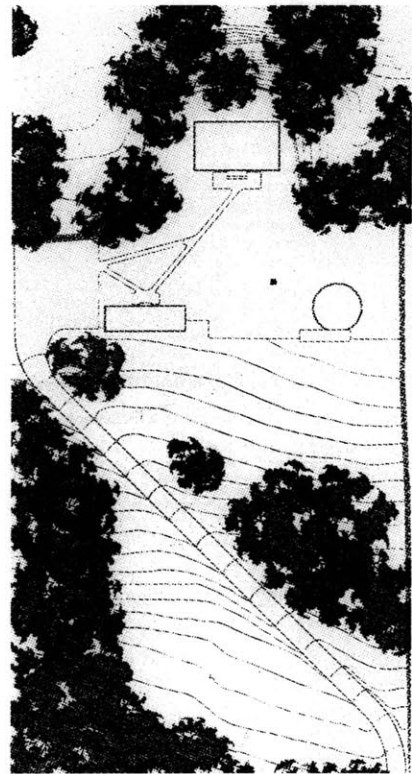


Fig. 8: Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme XIII, "the Wall"



**Fig. 9:** Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Scheme XVI



**Fig. 10:** Glass House and Guest House, Philip Johnson, Final Scheme, Site Plan

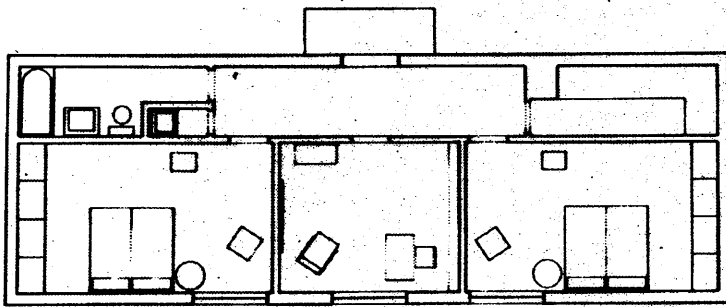


Fig. 11: Guest House, Philip Johnson, Final Scheme

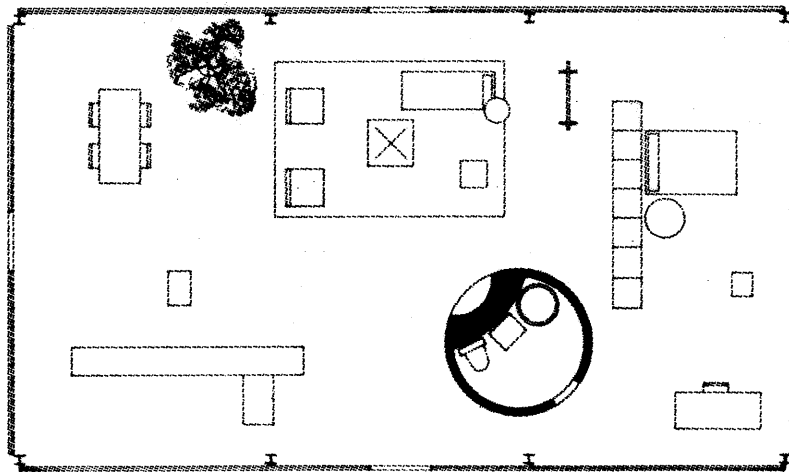
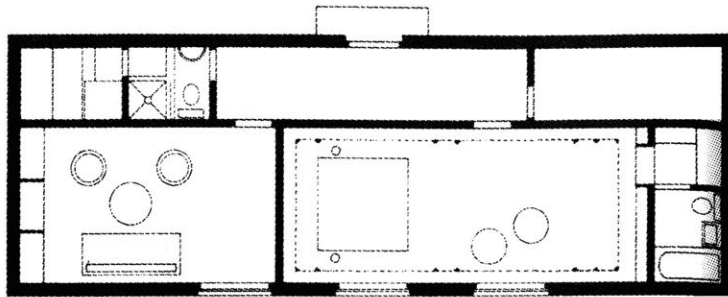


Fig. 12: Glass House, Philip Johnson, Final Scheme



Fig. 13: Glass House, Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut



**Fig. 14:** Guest House, Philip Johnson, Plan, after the 1953 remodeling



**Fig. 15:** Guest House, Philip Johnson, Bedroom, 1953



## Mother's House

Robert Venturi, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia Pennsylvania

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**Fig. 16:** Robert Venturi, in front of Mother's House

### **Robert Venturi, Biography**

American. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1925. Studied at Princeton University, New Jersey, A.B. 1947; M.F.A. 1950; American Academy, Rome, 1954-56. Partner with William Short, 1961-1964; partner with John Rauch, 1964-89; and with Rauch and Denise Scott Brown, 1967-89; partner with Denise Scott Brown, Venturi, Scott Brown Associates, since 1989. Taught in University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, American Academy in Rome, and elsewhere in the United States. Fellow, American Institute of Architects. Pritzker Prize, 1991.<sup>22</sup>

“The little house for a close friend or relative is usually therefore a first opportunity for the young architect to test theories and expand them ... And if the client is poor, the years spent refining the plans while waiting for the financing to be arranged can be in the nature of a personal odyssey for the architect. Of earlier houses, our Beach, Mother's and Frug houses were, to some extent odysseys”<sup>23</sup>

(Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown)

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<sup>22</sup> Randall J. Van Vynckt, *International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture –I, Architects*, (Detroit: St. James Press 1993) 944.

<sup>23</sup> Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, “Some Houses of Ill Repute”, *Perspecta* 1971, Vol. 13-14.

Mother's House is a story of a separation between mother and son. From its conception to the end the son in his mother's house, gains more and more privacy as his bedroom travels away from the first floor, where his mother's bedroom is located, into a second floor, creating his own domain. The conception of a second floor is anticipated by the appearance of a double bed in the son's room. But while Venturi is carving out his own space inside the house, his presence is suppressed on the outside. In the front façade the house is expressed as a single-storey house. The son's room in the attic can only be discerned at the back, where it has a large window facing the backyard. A single column in the dining room, supporting the second floor, provides only the subtlest indication of the presence of the son in the first floor.

### The Commission

In 1959, after the death of her husband, Mrs. Vanna Venturi purchased a lot and commissioned a small house in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia. The architect was her 34-year old son, Robert Venturi. Five years later, on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1964, Mrs. Venturi moved into her new house. It quickly became an icon of postmodern architecture. In 1992, the original drawings and models were retrieved from storage and published in a book named "Mother's House", with an introduction by Frederic Schwartz.<sup>24</sup> The book "Mother's House"<sup>25</sup> (fig. 17) includes about 100 drawings of 10 different schemes. The commission had two declared goals: to provide a modest suburban house for Mrs. Venturi, client and mother; and to promote the career of Robert Venturi, son and architect. In the words of Frederic Schwartz: "his mother trusted him to design without deadline, dialogue, or a detailed list of requirements"<sup>26</sup>

The Mother's House drawings, as published in 1992, include 10 fully drawn schemes, with plans, elevations, sections, and site plans.

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<sup>24</sup> Frederic Schwartz, the author, who edited the drawings and contributed an introduction and an article, was at the time Venturi's office manager. For analysis purposes, I have assumed that he speaks for and in agreement with Robert Venturi.

<sup>25</sup> Frederic Schwartz, *Mother's House: the evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, (New York: Rizzoli 1992)

<sup>26</sup> Schwartz, 22.

## The Main Characters

A consistent program was kept throughout the design process. Every scheme included the following:

3 Bedrooms

2 Bathrooms

Living Room

Dining Room

An Enclosed Kitchen

Basement

In the final scheme (fig. 36, 37), as in most of the intermediate ones, one bathroom is always shared by two bedrooms. The third bedroom has its own bathroom (located on the second floor in the last scheme). The kitchen is always enclosed, and in most cases, overlooks the driveway. The house is entered through the dining room, and the living room is adjacent to it, in some schemes separated by the fireplace. The fireplace, with a monumental chimney, is a consistent element as well.

At the time when the house was commissioned Venturi was living with his mother.<sup>27</sup> When Mother's House was completed, Venturi moved in to the new house with his mother. He lived there until his marriage in 1967. In addition to mother and son, there is a third bedroom in the house, that can be used by a live-in help for Venturi's aging mother.<sup>28</sup>

## Plumbing Fixtures

The first scheme (scheme I, fig. 18) resembles a Palladian Villa (fig. 19). The plan is symmetrical on both axes. The center space is divided by a fireplace into living room and dining room. The four corners are occupied by three bedrooms and a kitchen. The bathrooms are located between the two bedrooms, and between the third bedroom and the kitchen. The four corner rooms are all of equal size, but the kitchen is subdivided into kitchen proper and a small space that can modestly accommodate a bed and a closet and can serve as a fourth bedroom. This fourth bedroom, however, was to be abandoned in the second plan and never appears again. The house

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<sup>27</sup> Frederic Schwartz, *Mother's House: the evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, (New York: Rizzoli 1992) 22

<sup>28</sup> Alice Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1998) 204

has two entrances opposite each other, one between the kitchen and the dining room, and the other between the living room and a bedroom.

The first plan conveys three bedrooms that are equal in size and shape (aside from the little room adjacent to the kitchen that disappears soon after). The arrangement of the house's inhabitants, mother, son and guest/help, should be considered within the three bedrooms. At a closer look, there is a difference between the two bathrooms, the one that is shared by two bedrooms has a bathtub, whereas the other has only a shower. The plumbing fixtures arrangement will not only remain consistent through the final scheme, but serves as a key in this analysis through which ambiguous intermediate schemes can be interpreted. Judging from later schemes, as a rule, the son occupies the bedroom adjacent to the bathroom with the shower. This bedroom is named study/bedroom in one of the plans. The mother, and a guest, or a live-in help, occupy the two bedrooms that are adjacent to the bathroom with the bathtub. This arrangement is satisfactory in the sense that the son does not have to share a bathroom with the mother or her live-in help. The intimacy of sharing a bathroom is only allowed between the mother and her future caretaker.

Changes in the relationships between the inhabitants can be traced throughout the design process, based on this sleeping arrangement hypothesis.

### Sleeping Arrangements

The second scheme (scheme IIA, fig. 20) is drawn about three weeks later. In this scheme the diagonal axes are now emphasized, bringing in a new formal vocabulary. The corners are chamfered, and the massing becomes more plastic as walls shift in and out. One entrance is eliminated. A dramatic diagonal indent cuts the kitchen in half, creating a triangular outdoor niche, and taking the place of the small fourth bedroom.

The diagonal indent through the kitchen creates a complete separation of the third bedroom from the kitchen. In the previous scheme (fig. 18), the son's room had an awkward proximity to the kitchen. Sleeping next to the kitchen is appropriate for a live-in help, maybe, but not for the architect. Thus a diagonal design vocabulary, superimposed on an orthogonal one, serves as an instrument in the refining of the program.

The same sleeping arrangements are kept through schemes IIB and IIC (fig. 21).

In scheme IIIA (fig. 22), though the basic arrangements are untouched, a few significant changes creep in. First, a mezzanine appears. To judge from the section (fig. 23), it is a narrow space around the chimney with bookshelves, probably a library. The mezzanine library is accessible by

two staircases, an interior one from the kitchen, and an exterior one from the entry space. In the model (fig. 24) another exterior staircase leads from the mezzanine to the roof. The second floor is clearly articulated in the front elevation by the exterior staircase and a large window (fig. 25).

The mezzanine library is Venturi's first attempt to carve out some privacy and autonomy within his mother's house. A couple of things imply that this is his space and not his mother's. First, how convenient would a second floor library be for an aging person? And second, the double access, from within the house and from outside, grants the second floor a privileged status, a place from which the son can come and go without his mother's supervision. The interior staircase leading to the mezzanine ascends from the kitchen and it is provided with a door. It is almost a secret stair.

The bedroom provides an interesting clue regarding Robert's sudden need of autonomy. In his bedroom, that is the room with its own bathroom equipped with a shower, a double bed appears. A quick glance at previous schemes reveals Venturi's emerging sexuality. In the first scheme the mother and the nurse had twin beds and Venturi provided himself with an obscure combination of a desk, a single bed and another unidentified piece of furniture. In schemes IIA and IIB all the bedrooms had twin beds, however, only in the son's room are the beds drawn together.

Scheme IIIB (fig. 26) is almost identical in plan. The only noticeable changes have to do with the kitchen and the fireplace. A minute drawing convention might be of some importance. When the mezzanine appeared for the first time in the previous scheme, an abstract diagonal line appeared on the stairs to the basement to denote the existence of the second stair to the mezzanine. In this scheme, the diagonal line has become a conventional cut mark, as if legitimizing the mezzanine and predicting the real second floor; the floor that would give sufficient privacy and autonomy to a son in his mother's house.

When a second floor appears in scheme IVA (figs. 27, 28) it is not a secret anymore. The stairs ascend from the living room space, not from the kitchen hidden by a door as before. The second floor holds real program - two bedrooms and a bathroom. An exterior staircase leads to one of the second floor bedrooms. The entrance and the exterior stair are separated and placed on the sides of the house (see elevation fig. 29) providing more privacy to the second floor.

Going through the exercise of "who sleeps where" again, the beds in the bedrooms provide very little information. Not only has Venturi's double bed disappeared, The twin beds have disappeared as well. The bedroom on the first floor has a single bed, so has one of the second

floor bedrooms (the one that has exterior access). The third bedroom has two single beds arranged foot to foot, an arrangement which does not facilitate drawing them together.

Based on the sleeping arrangement hypothesis that was put forth before, the plan can be interpreted in the following way: Venturi, with his own shower, sleeps on the first floor and his mother and her live-in help sleep on the second floor with a shared bathtub. Scheme IVA seems like a missed opportunity. The second floor, with the direct outdoor access, was supposed to be Robert's. Instead, Vanna is sleeping upstairs, and her son, Robert, is again risking awkward proximity to the kitchen.

Maybe his mother refused to climb the stairs, or maybe Venturi eventually asserted his need of autonomy. In any case, in Scheme IVB (figs. 30, 31), the sleeping arrangements are modified. The plans of Scheme IVB look very similar to Scheme IVA, except for one change: the upstairs bathroom has a shower instead of a bathtub, and the downstairs bathroom has a bathtub instead of a shower. According to the sleeping arrangement hypothesis, this means that the mother is now downstairs and the son upstairs. The anomaly of this scheme is the live-in help/guest being adjacent to the son. If only Robert could push that spare bedroom downstairs and have the second floor completely to himself.

Scheme V lives up to these expectations (fig. 32, 33). In this scheme, for the first time, a clear relationship between the three characters emerges. The first floor is divided to four quarters:

- dining room into which the main door opens,
- living room, separated from the dining room by the fireplace.
- Mrs. Venturi's bedroom
- the fourth quarter is divided into kitchen and a smaller bedroom - the live-in help/guest. The bathtub bathroom is located between the two bedrooms.

Venturi's bedroom with a bathroom and a dressing area is located in the second floor. An exterior staircase leads to the second floor, and an interior one connects the two floors. In this scheme, for the first time, the three bedrooms are of different sizes, representing the different roles of their occupants in the household.

In scheme VI, the final scheme (figs. 36, 37), the program is accommodated in a very similar way, although the design has changed. The main entrance, located in the center of the gabled façade (fig. 38) opens into the dining room. To the right, occupying the corner, the kitchen. To the left, the living room. Beyond the living room, Mrs. Venturi's bedroom is located next to the

very small live-in help/guest's bedroom. The bathroom with a bathtub is adjacent to the bedrooms. A steep stair leads to the second floor, where Robert has his own attic-like modest bedroom with a bathroom and a shower.

An important difference from previous schemes is the absence of the exterior stair to the second floor. The exterior stair was eliminated due to objections from the developer.<sup>29</sup> The developer's objections are driven by a need to keep the neighbors content. In other words, just how much of this relationship between mother and son should be displayed on the house's façade?

### The Son in the Attic

The Mother's House façade looks like a simplified child's drawing of a gabled house with a chimney, a big door in the middle and a window (fig. 42). It is figurative rather than abstract, romantic and picturesque rather than modern; it is the signification of a house rather than the true expression of structure and program. This distancing of symbol from meaning creates an interesting relationship between façade and plan. Plan is the program, the content, what is actually going on, and façade is an appearance for suburban neighbors.

Although it is a two-storey house, Mother's House has a facade of a single-storey house (fig. 42). The second floor is underrepresented in the front façade: the second floor window is placed behind a façade -wall and in fact, doesn't read as a window (fig. 40). The elimination of the exterior stair to the second floor further helps to hide the house's second floor. Only the rear elevation reveals the second floor with an arched window punched into a recessed plane (fig. 39). Inside the house, a single column in the dining room indicates the need to support a second floor. The column becomes a figurative element, almost a stand-in for the son (fig. 44).

The façade gained a life of its own only in the later stages of the design. In the first schemes (when the house was still single-storey in all of its aspects), the façade was elaborated in the tradition of Luis Kahn.<sup>30</sup> When the mezzanine-library was introduced (Venturi's first attempt at autonomy within the house), the existence of the second floor is fully articulated in the elevation (fig. 25). With a large window and a staircase the second floor is even made more important than

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<sup>29</sup> Developer letter published in: Frederic Schwartz, *Mother's House: the evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, (New York: Rizzoli 1992) 6.

<sup>30</sup> The influence of Kahn on the early design is fully described in: Vincent Scully, "Everybody Needs Everything", in: Frederic Schwartz, *Mother's House: the evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, (New York: Rizzoli 1992) 45.

the first. The only first floor opening in the facade is Venturi's square bathroom window. There is a disjunction between façade and plan. In the plan, the first floor is primary and the second floor secondary, almost hidden. In the façade, the second floor is rendered as important and the first floor is hidden.

As the design process continues, the relationship of facade-plan reverses. In schemes IVA and IVB, the second floor expands to include bedrooms, thus gaining meaningful programmatic value (fig. 27, 28). While this is happening in plan, the opposite process happens in elevation. The big window moves to the side elevation, and the stairs are an annexed piece on the side, not a dramatic slot as before (fig. 29).

In Scheme V, the second floor is clearly the son's residence. But, when the plan is rotated, the large window finds itself in the front again. To downplay the second floor in elevation, Venturi devises a facade wall, behind which the exterior stairs and the large window are hidden (fig. 34). In scheme VI the arrangement in plan is rectilinear and not square (figs. 36, 37). The plan is flattened, as if subjected to the facade. The thick facade wall becomes stronger, and the second floor articulation in elevation becomes subtle (fig. 41).

Mother's House's thick façade functions as a solid public face. It under-articulates the son's second floor, thus hiding the mother-son family structure. In the façade, the main entrance is clearly marked, while the front door is kept out of sight. Consider the difference between Mrs. Venturi's Kitchen and Ms. Farnsworth Kitchen (fig. 45) Ms. Venturi, while engaged in domestic activity such as washing dishes, overlooks the driveway to her house. She is protected by her house, and in control of its surrounding. Ms. Farnsworth, while washing dishes, her back turned to the big glass wall, is observed and supervised by neighbors and passers by. While Mother's House is a personal therapeutic instrument, it rejects the institutional psychoanalytical gaze.

## Trash

The comparison between Mother's House and the Farnsworth House can be taken a step further. For instance, consider Ms. Farnsworth's complaints about having to hide the kitchen's trash bin in a cabinet since her kitchen was so exposed.<sup>31</sup> In Mother's House, on the contrary, extra attention was given to the appropriate location of Mrs. Venturi's trash bins. In the first scheme

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<sup>31</sup> Joseph A. Barry, "Report on the battle between good and bad modern houses", *House Beautiful*, May (1953)



(fig. 18) no solution was given to the trash bin question. But in scheme IIA (fig. 20) the outdoor triangular niche that separated the son's room from the kitchen, was also a place to put trash bins. But Mrs. Venturi's sense of privacy and control was not satisfied, and in scheme IIIA (fig. 22) a small niche with doors was provided. A variation on the small niche is provided in scheme IIIB (fig. 26). Now the niche is on the side of the house, as opposed to the façade, thus achieving even greater privacy. In the next iteration (scheme IVA, fig. 27), the trash bin niche is separated from the main entrance, and has direct access from the kitchen. The outcome is the trash bin niche's over-articulation through a strong T-shaped element in the center of the façade (fig. 29). In the next scheme the trash bins are moved to the side, and are combined with an obscure part of the yard, surrounded by a high fence. (fig. 35) The final solution is quite elegant and functional, a small niche at the side of the house, accessible directly through the kitchen (fig. 36). It is apparent that Venturi took great care in solving the habitation aspects of his mother's house.

The story of mother and son is told through the immaculate architectural documentation of Mother's House design process. Twin beds drawn together, a bathtub, a cut mark, an elevation disclose in great detail the course of the mother-son relationship. The separation of son from mother might be predictable or even inevitable, but doing so through the use of architectural space is not.

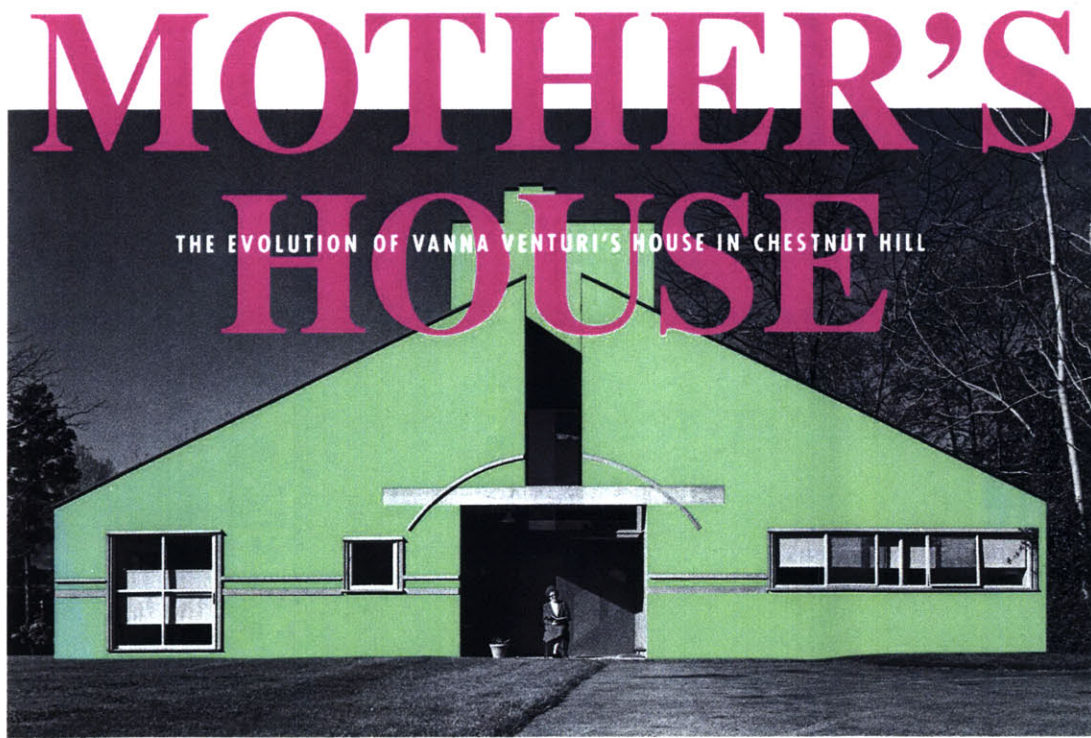


Fig. 17: "Mother's House" by Frederic Schwartz, Book Cover

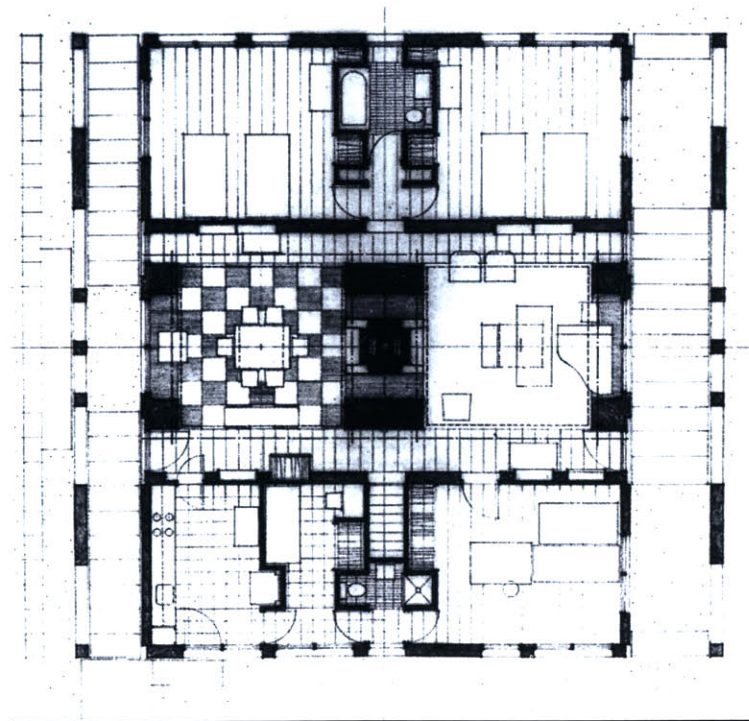


Fig. 18: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme I, Plan

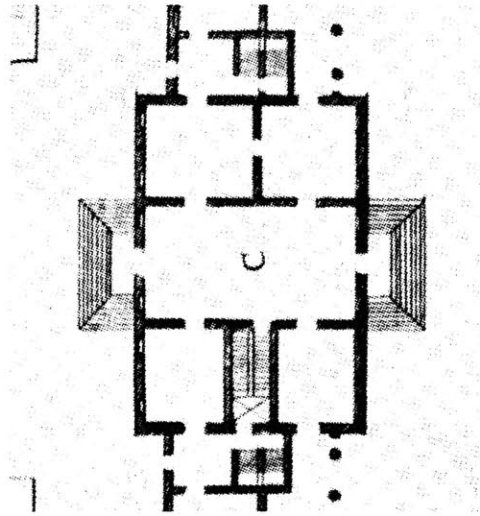


Fig. 19: Palladio, Villa Angaran

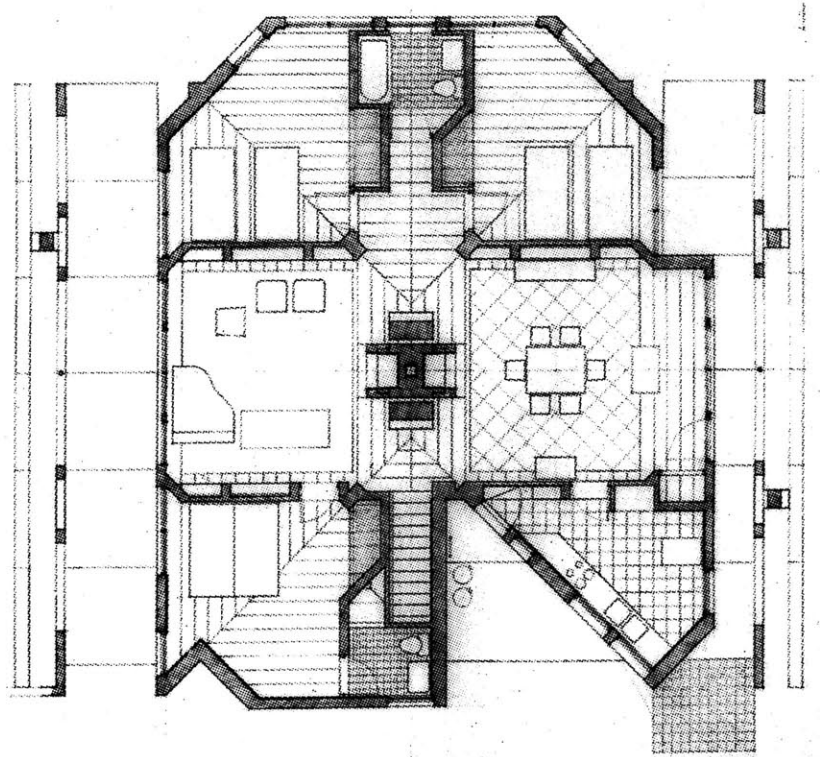


Fig. 20: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIA, Plan

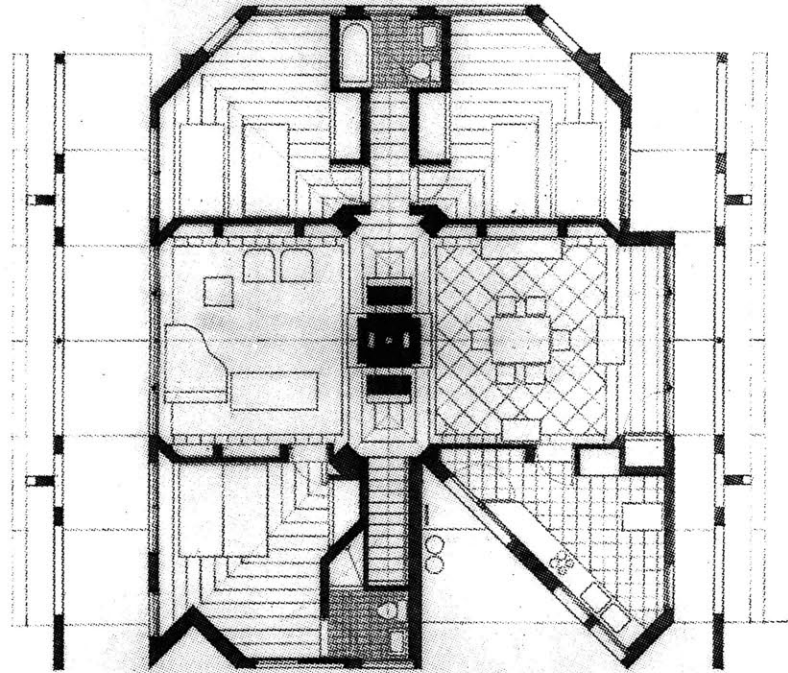


Fig. 21: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIB, Plan

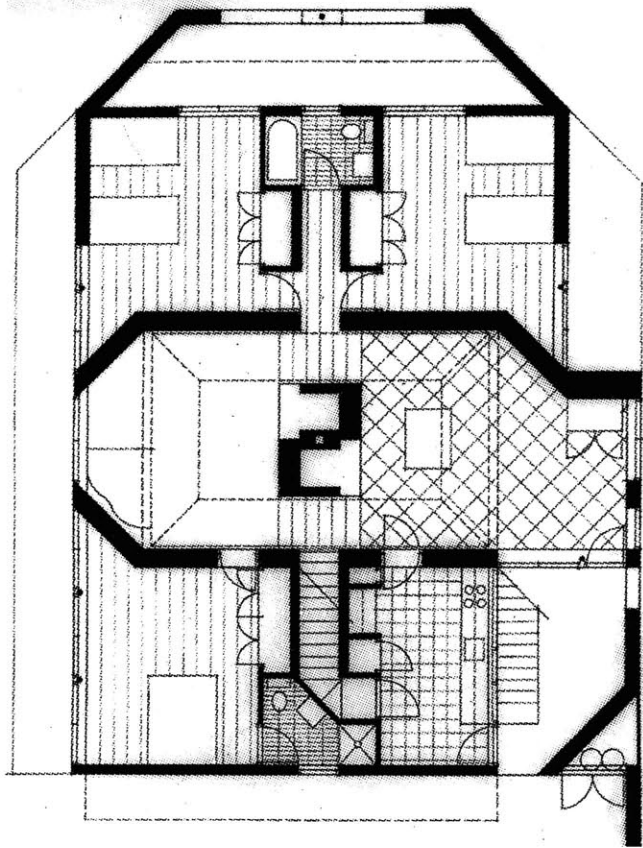
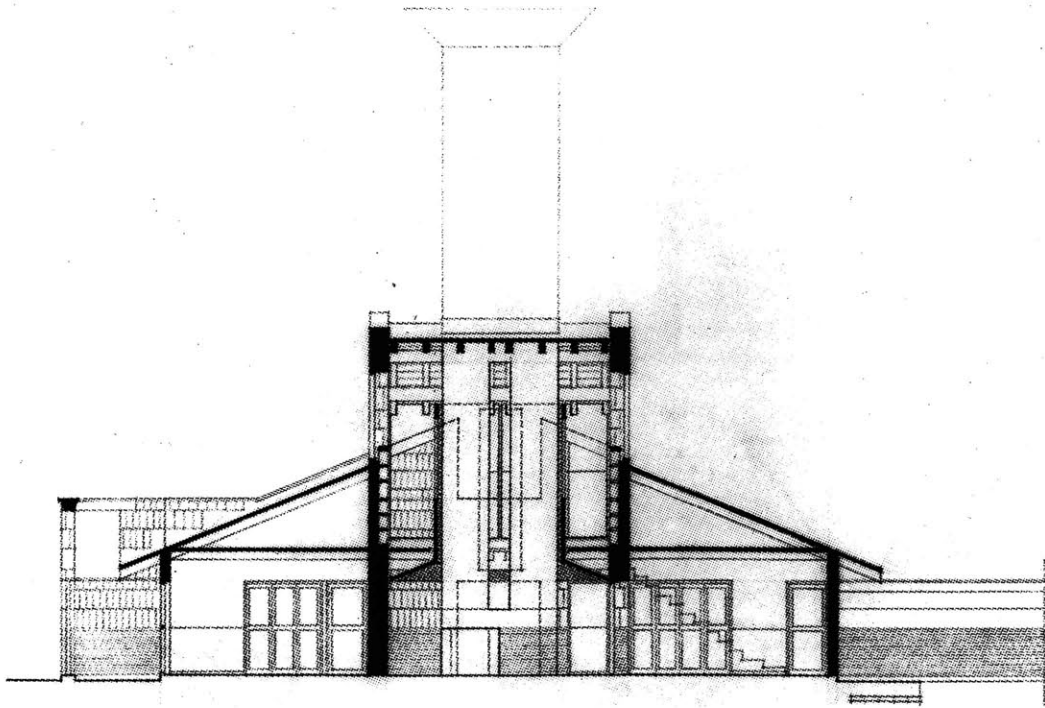
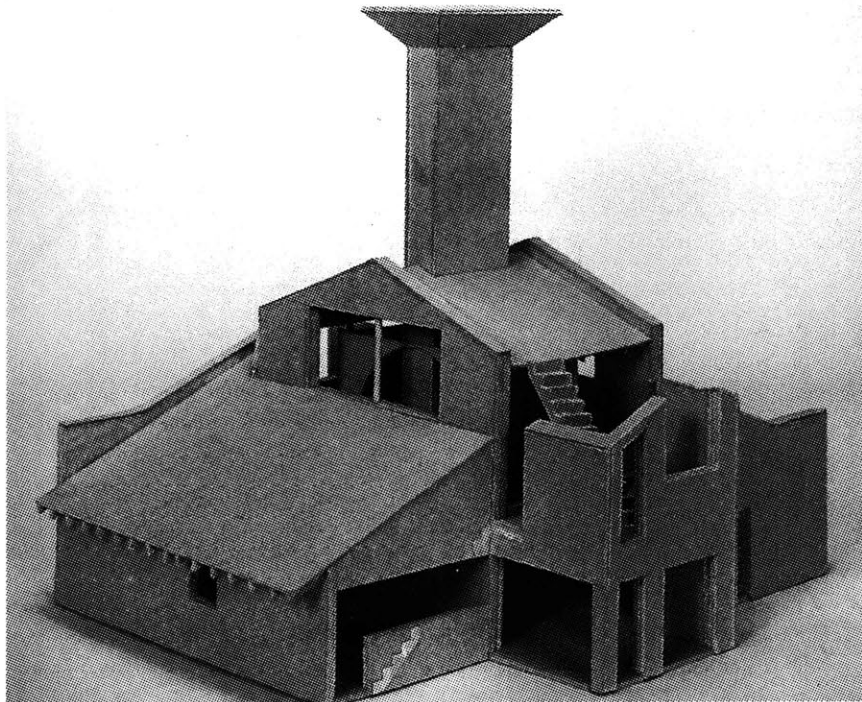


Fig. 22: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIIA, Plan



**Fig. 23:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIIA, Section



**Fig. 24:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIIA, Model

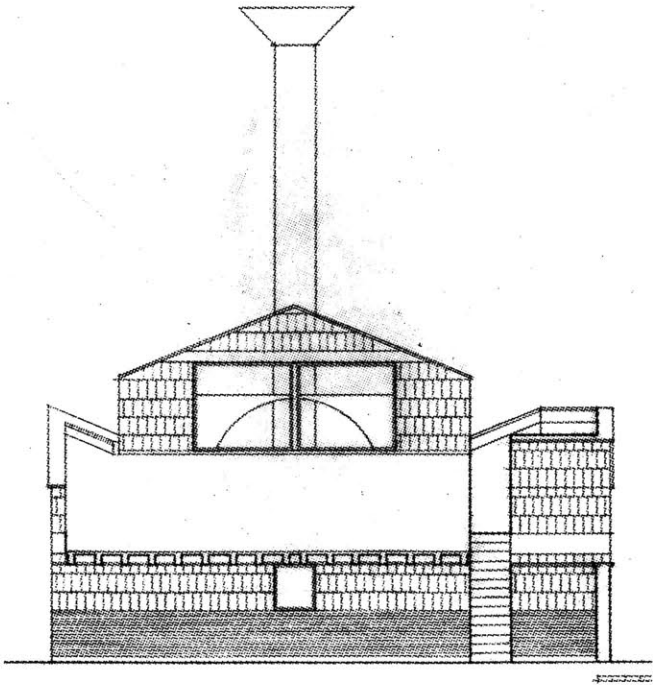


Fig. 25: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIIA, Elevation

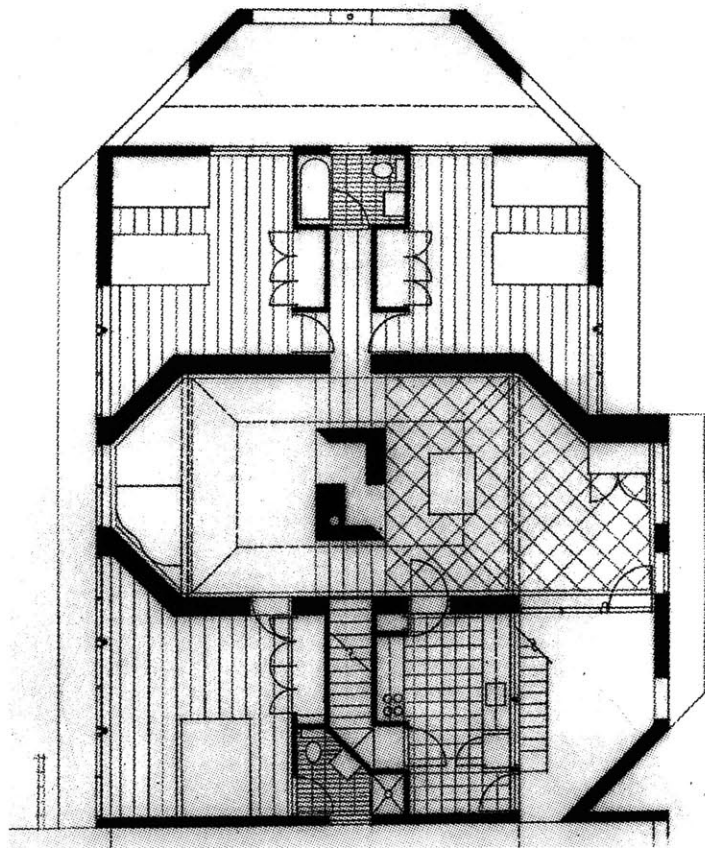


Fig. 26: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IIIB, Plan

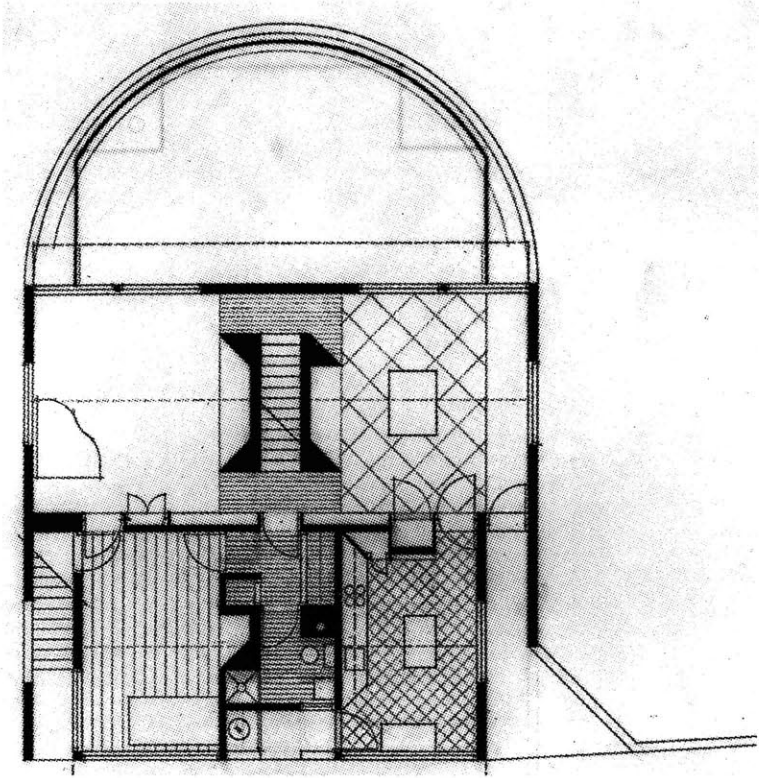


Fig. 27: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IVA, First Floor Plan

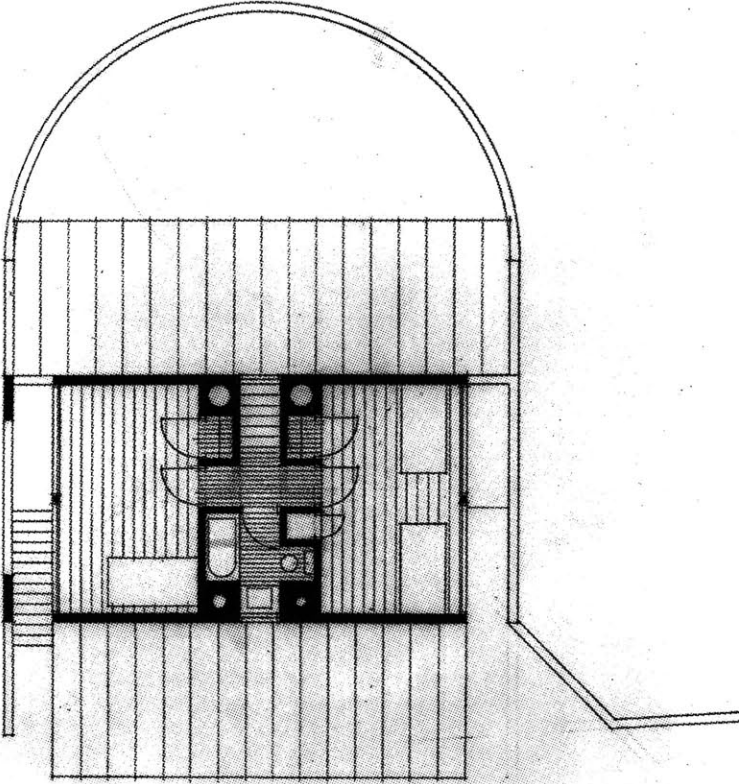


Fig. 28: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IVA, Second Floor Plan

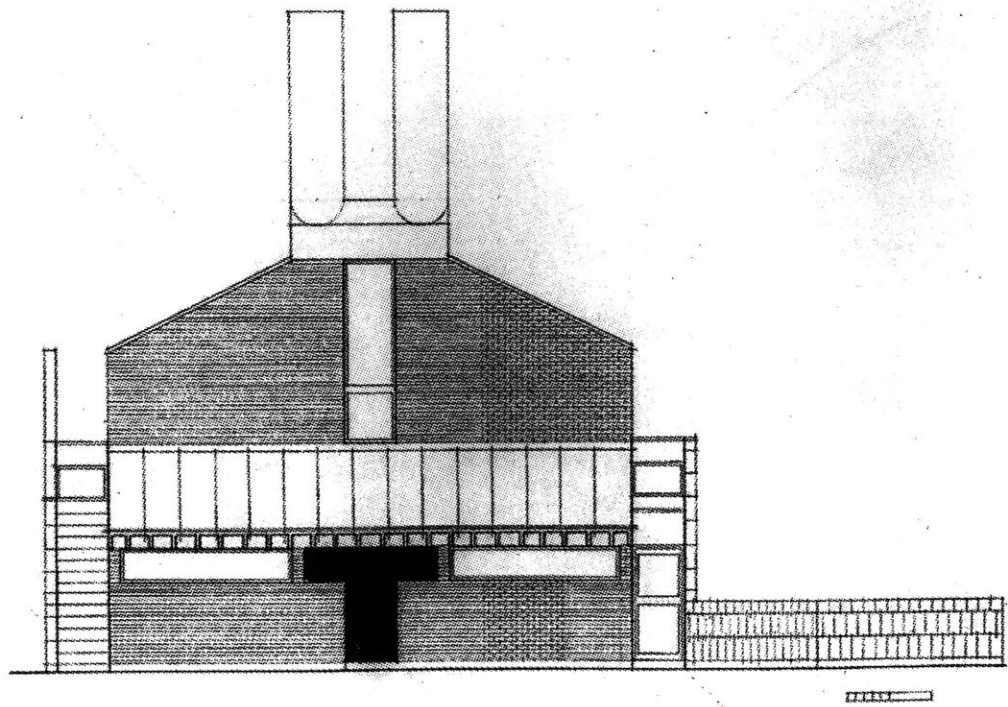


Fig. 29: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IVA, Elevation



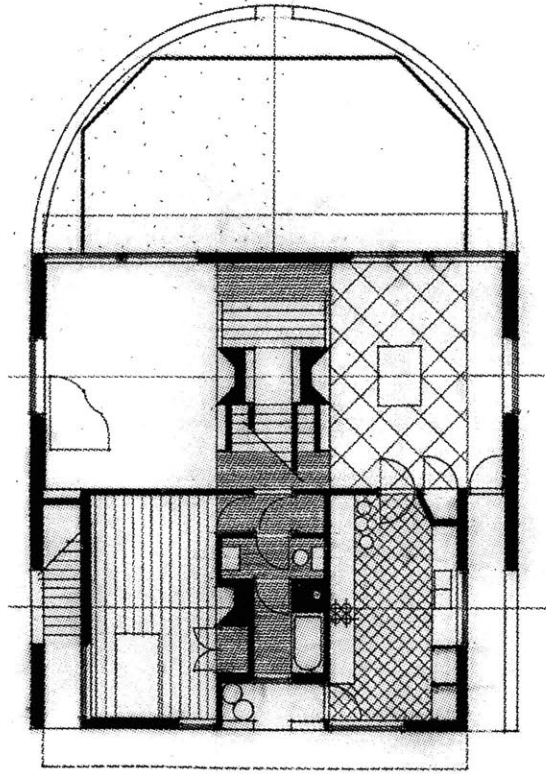


Fig. 30: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IVB, First Floor Plan

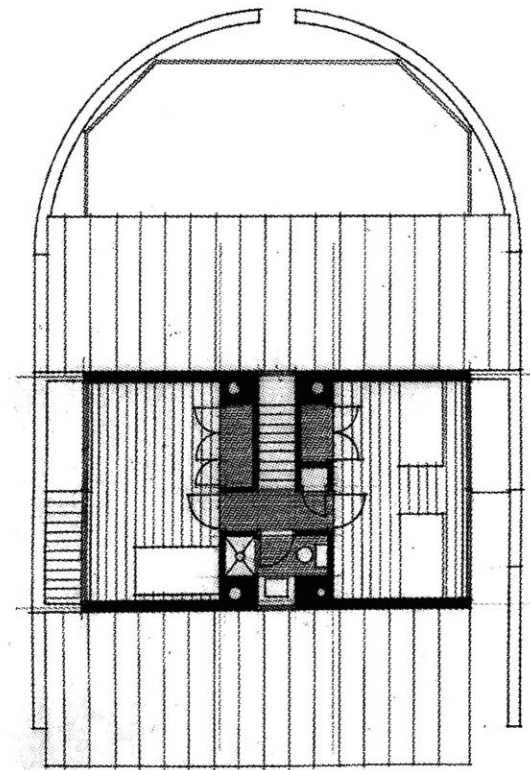


Fig. 31: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme IVB, Second Floor Plan

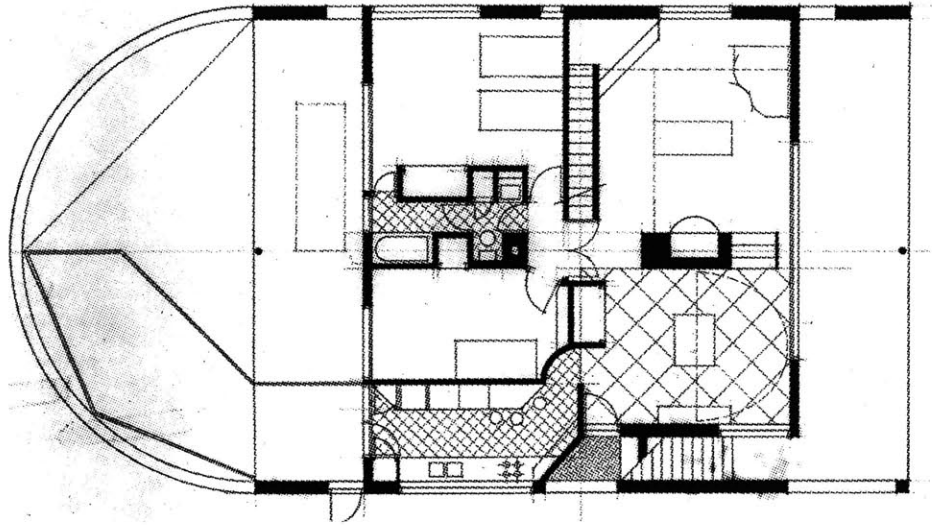


Fig. 32: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme V, First Floor Plan

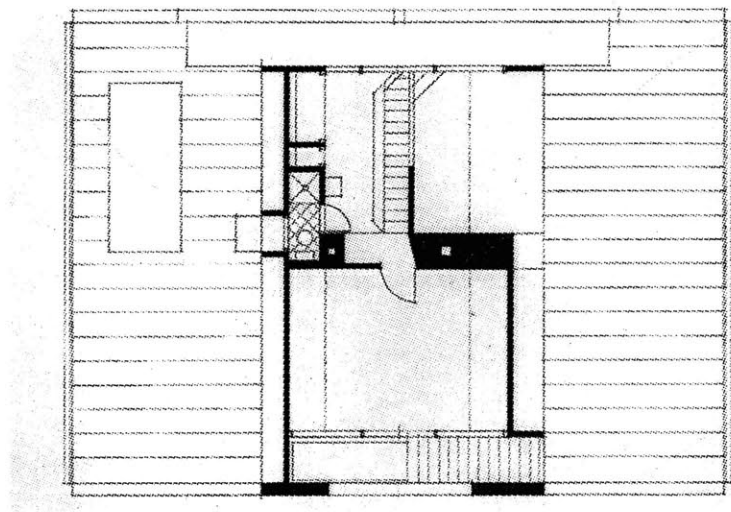
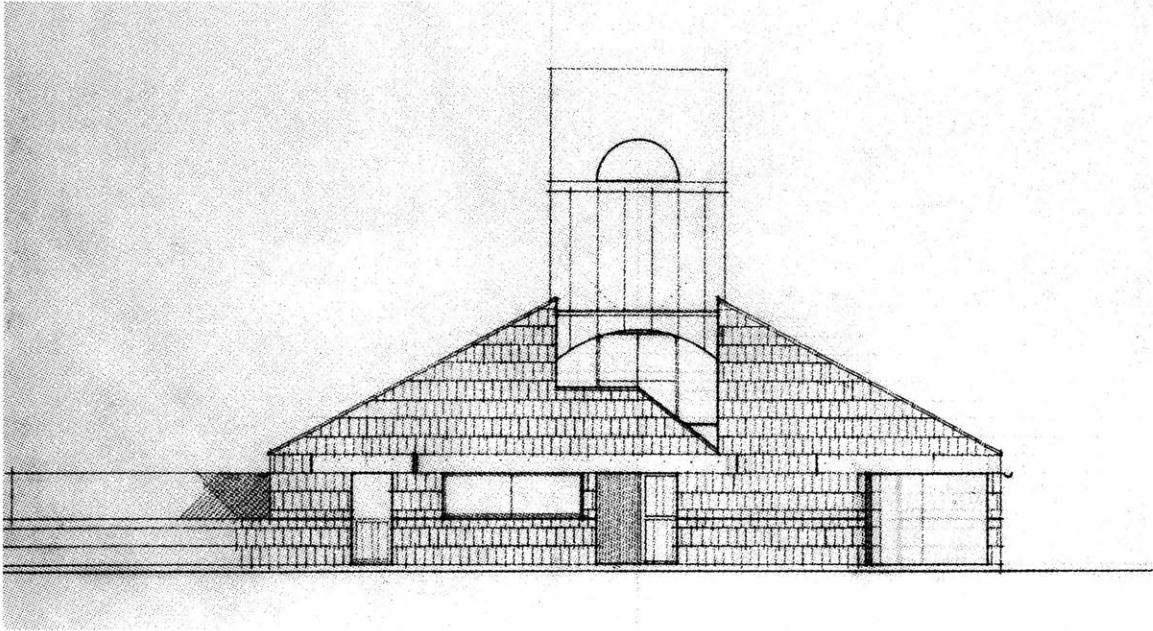
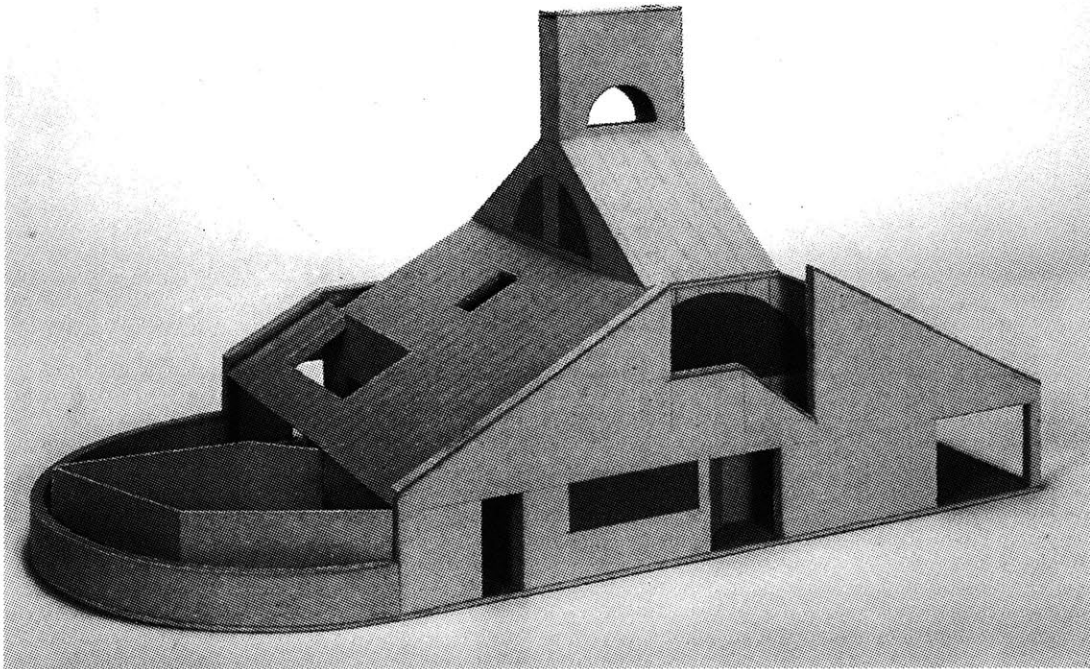


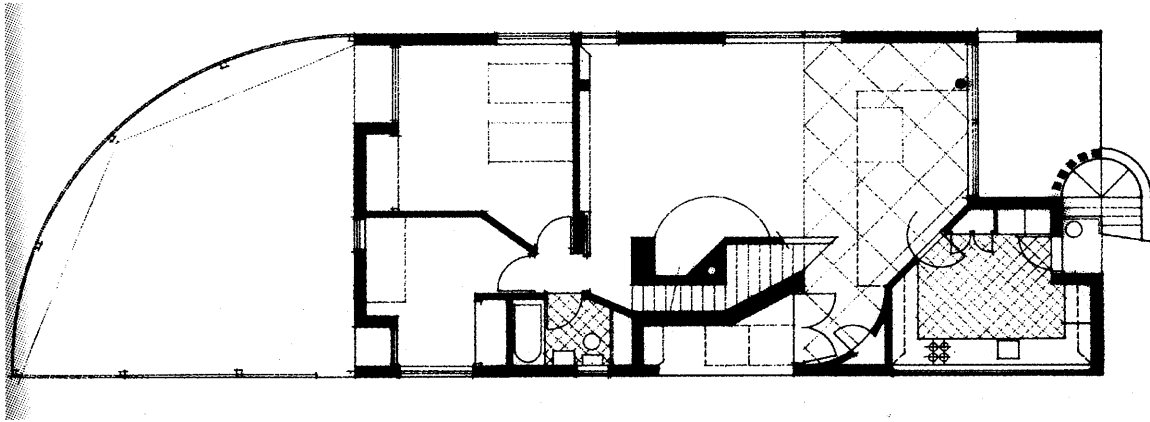
Fig. 33: Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme V, Second Floor Plan



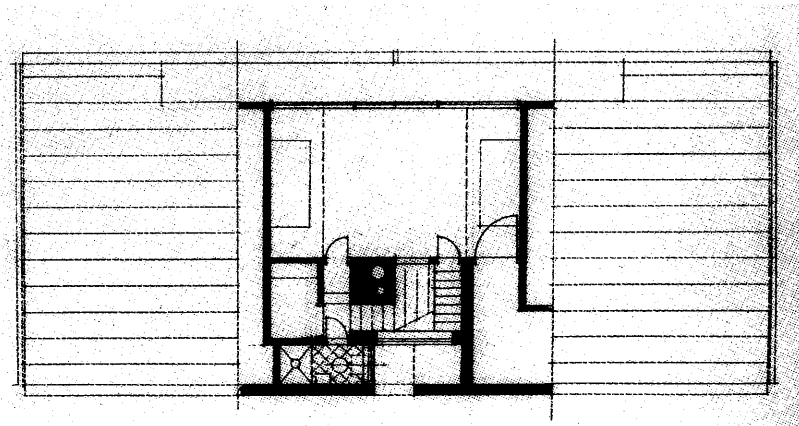
**Fig. 34:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme V, Elevation



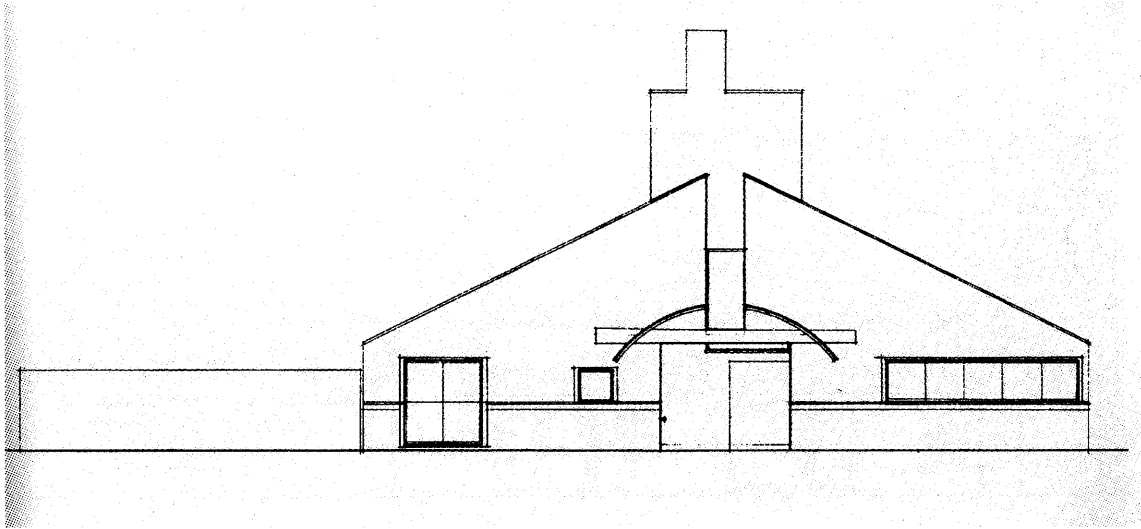
**Fig. 35:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Scheme V, Model



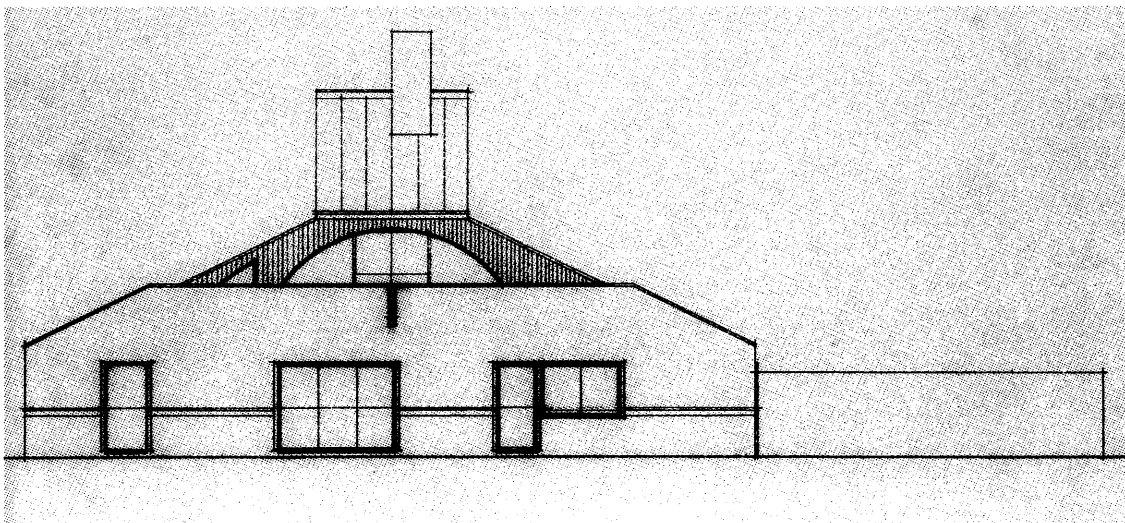
**Fig. 36:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, First Floor Plan



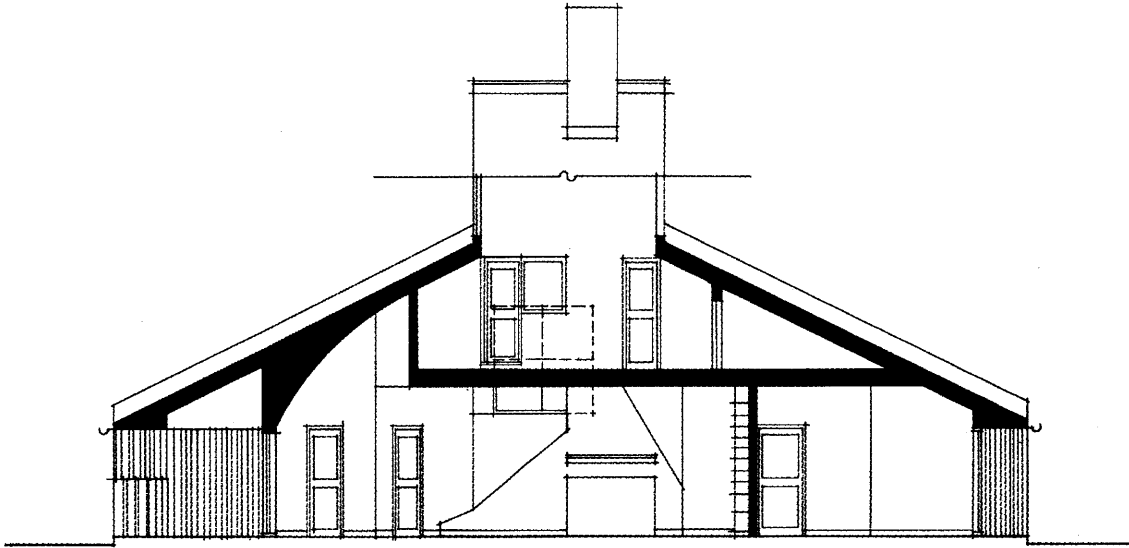
**Fig. 37:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, Second Floor Plan



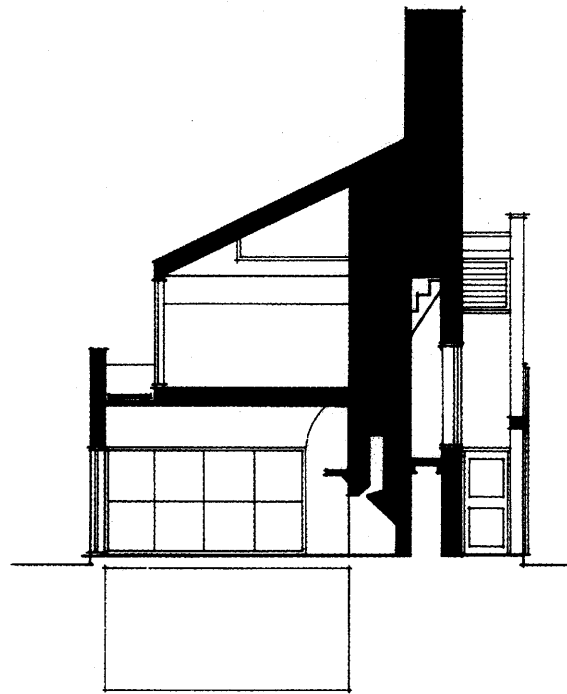
**Fig. 38:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, Front Elevation



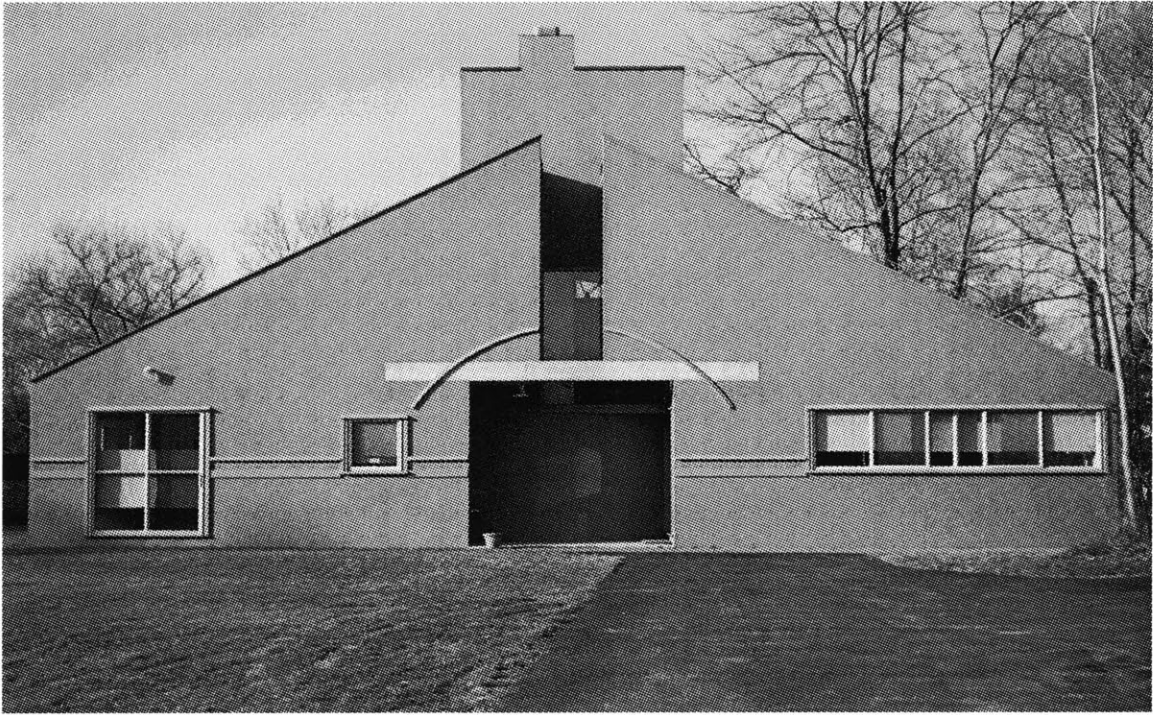
**Fig. 39:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, Back Elevation



**Fig. 40:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, Long Section



**Fig. 41:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Final Scheme, Short Section



**Fig. 42:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia Pennsylvania



**Fig. 43:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, View from the Back



**Fig. 44:** Mother's House, Robert Venturi, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, Dining Room



**Figure 45:** Mies Van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, Kitchen



## Gehry's Residence

Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California



**Fig. 46:** Frank O. Gehry, in front of Gehry's Residence

### **Frank O. Gehry, Biography**

Canadian. Born in Toronto, Ontario, 1929. Studied architecture at the University of Southern California, 1949-1951 and 1954, B.Arch., and city planning at Harvard University, 1956-57. Principal, Frank O. Gehry and associates, since 1962. Taught at the University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles, Yale University and Harvard University. Fellow, American Institute of Architects, 1974, Pritzker Prize, 1989.<sup>32</sup>

"I had nightmares, I woke up one night sweating. I've been through a dream where a helicopter crushed into a dirigible over my head, and I was sitting in a café with my mother, and a helicopter came crushing toward us, and there was a woman in a pink dress gonna crush into us. Well, the woman in the pink dress, I realized the next day, was my pink house. ... Some how that freed me. I got up and tore out pieces of the house that were sacred cow pieces, that I loved, I tore them out. I was released somehow."<sup>33</sup>

(Frank O. Gehry)

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<sup>32</sup> Randall J. Van Vynckt, *International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture -I, Architects*, (Detroit: St. James Press 1993) 302.

<sup>33</sup> *Frank Gehry: Architecture in Motion*, (Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1996)

Gehry's residence is a twice-renovated pink suburban house in Santa Monica, California.

The original house was purchased by Gehry's wife, under the advice of his mother without Gehry's active participation (fig. 47). The house motivated Gehry to act, "to do something."

"I thought it had a lot of things going for it, and it was the opposite of what I liked, and I realized that I could play against it".<sup>34</sup>

The renovation was completed in 1978 (fig. 48). It was widely published and is considered today to mark the beginning of his career as a star architect. The house was especially ground breaking in the use of industrial materials, such as corrugated metal and chain link fence, in a domestic context. It was also an experimental proposition of fragmented geometric forms. But it was also acknowledged from the start that it had psychological importance. John Pastier in an article from 1980 recognized its "emotional nature" adding:

"What remains is for someone adept in psychology and fluent in English to examine Gehry's house as a manifestation of non-linear logic, visual symbolism and the Jungian unconscious"<sup>35</sup>

The absence of progress drawings in this case makes it difficult to apply the methodology that I have used in the other two case studies. In spite of this difficulty I try to make a few assumptions about what the house might mean to Gehry in the process of forming his own identity. In order to examine alternatives to my methodology, I will start with looking at two published psychological interpretations of the Gehry Residence, one by Kurt Forster and the other by Beatriz Colomina.

### Gehry's house as an autobiographical text

Kurt Forster, in an article for "Frank O. Gehry, the complete works", defines the house as "actually and metaphorically autobiographical."<sup>36</sup> Forster's article tries to explain the architect as well as the architecture. By defining the house as autobiographical, Forster implies that not only the house can be discussed in psychological terms, but that this discussion would yield a psychological explanation of Gehry as a person.

Forster bases his analysis on two observations. Firstly that

"Gehry broke down this division, not only between inside and outside but within the house and on its exterior"<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Frank Gehry*, (New York: Michael Blackword, 1987)

<sup>35</sup> John Pastier, "Of art, self-revelation and iconoclasm", *AIA Journal* mid-may (1980) 169

<sup>36</sup> Kurt Forster, "Architectural Choreography" in: Francesco Dal Co, *Frank O. Gehry, the complete works*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998) 19

<sup>37</sup> Forster, 16

Yet the corrugated metal wall that defines the edge of the house and extends to contain its backyard is a very clear border (fig. 49). Inside that border, there are spaces such as the kitchen that are in fact interior, but feel like exterior space due to materials such as the house's original pink asbestos shingles. Even though there is a play of being inside/outside, the sense of containment is never compromised. It is very clear when inside the house, that the house is separated and protected from the outside world. Forster's second observation is that the exterior of the house is fractured and through it one can glimpse into its inside. It is true that large, non-rectilinear wood framed windows puncture the exterior corrugated metal wall. But close consideration reveals that even in a night photograph (fig. 50), when the house is lit from the inside, the only thing one can see is the walls and windows of the old house. This is due to a very simple fact: the new addition was built at street level, about 4 stairs lower than the house's first floor. This fact is not legible from the outside because the front door is at the level of the first floor. Once inside, a few stairs lead down to the new addition. From the outside, the height of the new windows seems consistent with the house elevation, but on the inside they are above eye level. Complete privacy is therefore provided. The exterior wall might seem fractured, but when it comes to protection of privacy, it functions perfectly.

In order to turn his observation into a psychological interpretation, Forster also attaches gender values to the exterior and interior of the house. The basis for this attachment is:

"Conventionally, the domestic sphere is considered a female realm, receptive, cozy, and relaxed; the public appearance of the house is rather a tablet on which masculine notions of social standing and safety are inscribed"<sup>38</sup>

This served-as-fact generalization might originate from an ideology of space that poses domestic space as the realm of feminine reproduction in opposition to public space as the realm of masculine production.<sup>39</sup> This gendered perception of space, however, does not generally attach masculine values to the exterior of the suburban house, quite the contrary, the suburb as a whole is considered feminine. The notion of a fractured masculine exterior, which I find problematic, is used by Forster to establish that Gehry assumes a "complex identity", and he is trapped "in the dilemma of gender roles"<sup>40</sup>. This is supported with anecdotes from Gehry's history and casual observations regarding his behavior. The house is "autobiographical" in that it has the same

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<sup>38</sup> Kurt Forster, "Architectural Choreography" in: Francesco Dal Co, *Frank O. Gehry, the complete works*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998) 15

<sup>39</sup> Jane Rendell, Introduction: 'Gender, Space', in: *Gender Space Architecture*, Routledge, London 2000, p. 103.

<sup>40</sup> Forster, 19

personality traits and the same conflicts that Gehry has. According to Forster, in designing the house, Gehry duplicated himself, wrote an accurate autobiographical text, with no artistic license or a separation between artist and object. Reading the house is reading Gehry as a person.

### Gehry's House as an extension of self

Published again in 2001, in the exhibition catalogue "Frank Gehry, Architect", Gehry's house is established as seminal to his career. Not only is it the third project in the catalogue, one of the five articles in the catalogue is devoted completely to the house. The article, by Beatriz Colomina, narrates the house in ten parallel stories. The last of them is "Couch House" – the house as a form of therapy.<sup>41</sup>

Colomina looks at the shallow space between the two houses from the point of view of Gehry, standing inside the old house. From this point of view when looking outside, Gehry is actually looking into another interior space – the kitchen (fig. 51). Colomina calls this the doubling of inside/outside and reads it as a form of delay or resistance to the outside. That is, the new addition surrounding the old house is another inside around the real inside, and looking out is looking inside again, thus delaying the encounter with the world outside. The second observation is that the house is unfinished, permanently under construction, as another form of delay, this brings a delay of criticism by architectural critics.

Whereas in Forster's analysis the house is an autobiographical text, a stand-in for Gehry, in Colomina's article the house is an instrument, a mediator between Gehry and the world. The house is not a manifestation of Gehry's personality; it is the vehicle through which Gehry works out his issues and puts a space between himself and the world. Thus, he is creating a safe space for himself, where he could create free of traditional constraints. The house is therefore a "safe space," an essential instrument for Gehry's "creativity".

### The house has an identity

In the case of the Gehry Residence house renovation, keeping the old house intact inside the new house, but visible from the outside, is definitely the exception to the rule. Being an abnormality, like in the case of Philip Johnson's complete transparency, it arouses curiosity. It is taken for granted that single family houses, much like human subjects, have an identity. This identity is

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<sup>41</sup> Beatriz Colomina, "The House that Built Gehry" in: J. Fiona Ragheb, *Frank Gehry, Architect* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2001)

assumed to be similar to our experience of ourselves as both fully in the world, and separate from it. Although single family houses are part of a continuous built environment, they are experienced as discrete entities, much more so than apartments, or other forms of habitation. Understanding the single family house in these terms can account for some of the strong reactions to Gehry's house-in-a house. The house was even said to be: "tortured in public."<sup>42</sup> But it is these strong reactions, our empathy for the house in pain, that helps us understand the way we feel about houses. And we can only be empathic towards something as long as it exists, that is, has a legible identity. In other words, keeping the old house intact provokes feelings of empathy towards the house, and towards houses in general.

If an addition like a prosthetic limb becomes an integrated part of the renovated body, then we understand the outcome as the new improved body. The new body maintains a coherent identity. But what if, as I would claim is the case with Gehry, new cannot be integrated with the old, the house remains two things, the old and the new. Achieving an integrated self image is a precondition for, if not the definition of, sanity.

### Materials

The use corrugated metal wall, chain-link fencing and unfinished plywood, is a way of bringing cheap low-tech materials into high design. But those materials also stand in sharp contrast to the old pink 1920's house. This contrast is a mechanism of masculine individuation. The infant's individuation process must happen in relation to an externally recognized object, the mother. In a similar manner, Gehry understands himself to be a unique individual in relation to the old house. The old pink house becomes a mother icon for Gehry (fig. 52).

This perceived contrast between inside and outside, between domesticity and the rough unfinished world of industry, is produced not by the choice of materials, but, by they way they are used. The extensive use of chain link fence, for example, that makes the house look like a prison, a school, or a junkyard, shows this very clearly. As Gehry once mentioned, chain link is about denial. It is used repeatedly in suburban neighborhoods, but remains invisible. What is visible is the tennis court, not the fence around it. Gehry's materials are not alien to their setting, as titanium would be; they are used in ways, which makes the invisible visible.

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<sup>42</sup> Colomina, 304.

Gehry himself has often claimed that his neighbors' strong reaction to his house surprised him. He rationalizes it in the following way:

“Once [chain link is] used by someone like me, people get furious, you are getting closer to making a kind of mirror of what is really going on”<sup>43</sup>

Described in these terms, Gehry's use of chain link is not only a way to differentiate himself from the old cute pink house and all that it stands for, it is also a way of observing himself, and then creating a mirror of “what is really going on”, a better representation, a more truthful, accurate and honest discussion of his life. Colomina points out the psychoanalytical quality of this discussion in terms of denial. Forster, on the other hand, calls this “spilling the beans.”<sup>44</sup> Seen from the street the chain link fence that surrounds the second-floor balcony completely covers the old house (fig. 53, 54). While much was said before about the house being trapped, this image also brings in the perspective of child, to whom fences are seen as much higher than they are to adults. Images of childhood repeat in a comment made by Milton Wexler, Gehry's analyst,

“[in Frank] there is some kind of a need to put on a posture of don't hit me, while I kick over everything in the room”<sup>45</sup>

### Breaking away yet staying in touch

There is something dynamic about the house's front façade that attracts attention (fig. 55). It is as if the new house is stretching out and up, and the old house is shying away behind it. A close look at the elevation reveals that the corrugated metal wall at the front slopes up towards the street corner, and then dramatically drops down to accommodate a large corner window. On the lower side, the wall folds into a little roof/canopy that shades the balcony on the second floor. At the corner the wall drops down to half story and reveals the corner. Gehry's complex geometric shapes, that have become his trademark, are what make the new house seem to be constantly breaking away from the old house.

Although appearing to be breaking away, in architectural reality the new house is far from separated from the old house. The new house is in fact in close symbiotic relationship with the old house. It is not even a house on its own, but three walls placed around three sides of the old house, with only a shallow space between them (about 5'-0” at the front and back and 15'-0” on the side). The new house is thus completely dependent on the old and even its big windows are

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<sup>43</sup> *Frank Gehry*, (New York: Michael Blackword, 1987)

<sup>44</sup> *Frank Gehry*, (New York: Michael Blackword, 1987)

<sup>45</sup> *Frank Gehry*, (New York: Michael Blackword, 1987)

located in relationship to the old house, revealing an existing bay window or a corner. Hence the “acting out house” announcing its difference and uniqueness is in fact inseparable from the “mother house”.

### The Kitchen – A house within a House

Inside that shallow space, Gehry located the kitchen and the dining room (fig. 56). This is how he describes it:

“if you go into my kitchen, and sit at the table, the sunlight passes overhead and leaves beautiful patterns from the trellises of the skylight on the walls, and it is very comforting, I think, and warm and friendly, etc. It’s from that base then, you are sitting there and then you notice that you’re in a room in which an existing old house is in the room with you, which is disconcerting, for a moment. I think you gotta put people in ease and then you can introduce the new information. Somehow.”<sup>46</sup>

The new information is the house as an object, having presence within the house, and revealing the complexity of the house within a house. In order to augment the presence of the old house, Gehry uses exterior finishes in the space between the two houses. When sitting in the kitchen, near the old house, the floor is asphalt, and the once-exterior wall of the old house (now interior), is left as is with pink asbestos shingles.

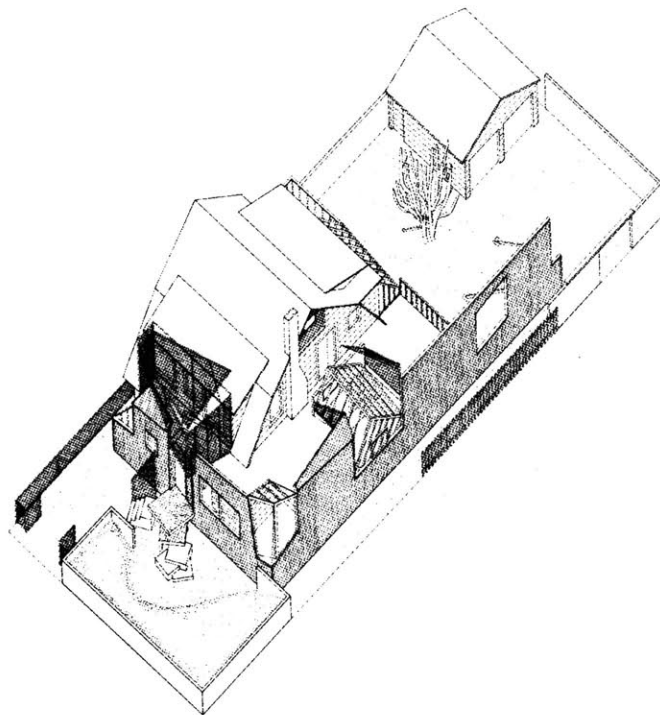
The tension between Gehry and his house can be interpreted in many ways: the old house can be seen as a symbol for suburban conformity, a mother icon, or, to put it in Gehry’s words, simply “too cute.” Through the contrast between old and new Gehry is able to construct an intriguing architectural proposal. The new part also can be given many interpretations; it can be seen as a protective shield, or Gehry’s own masculine identity. It can also be an icon of Gehry himself, and thus a mechanism of individuation.

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<sup>46</sup> *Frank Gehry: Architecture in Motion*, (Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1996)



**Fig. 47:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Existing House

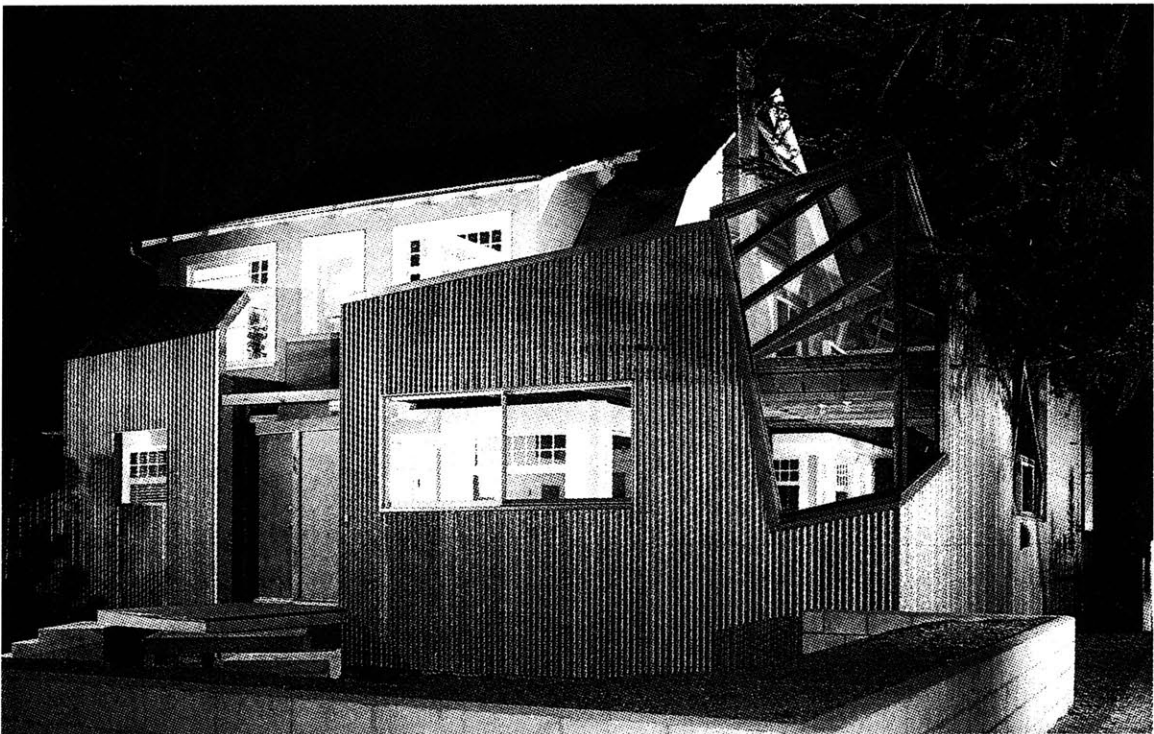


**Fig. 48:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Axonometric Drawing





**Fig. 49:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Side View



**Fig. 50:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, View from North East



Fig. 51: Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Living Room

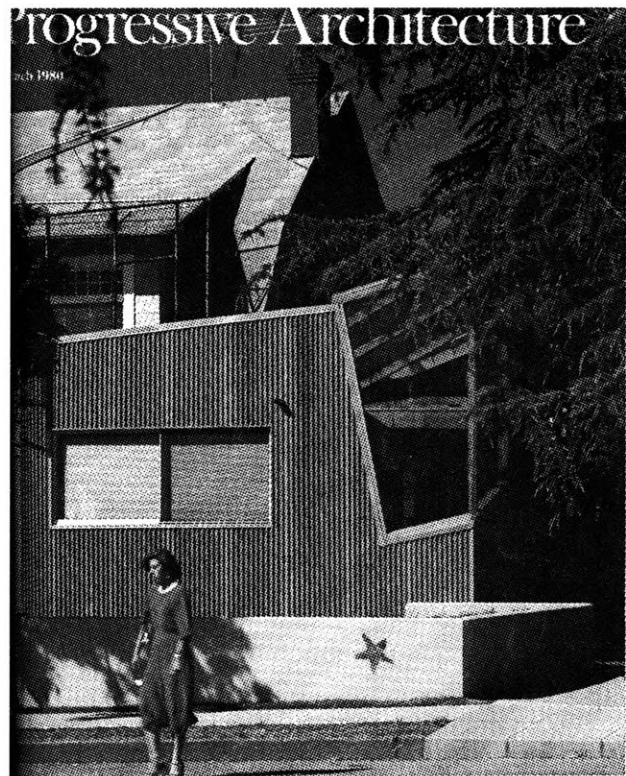
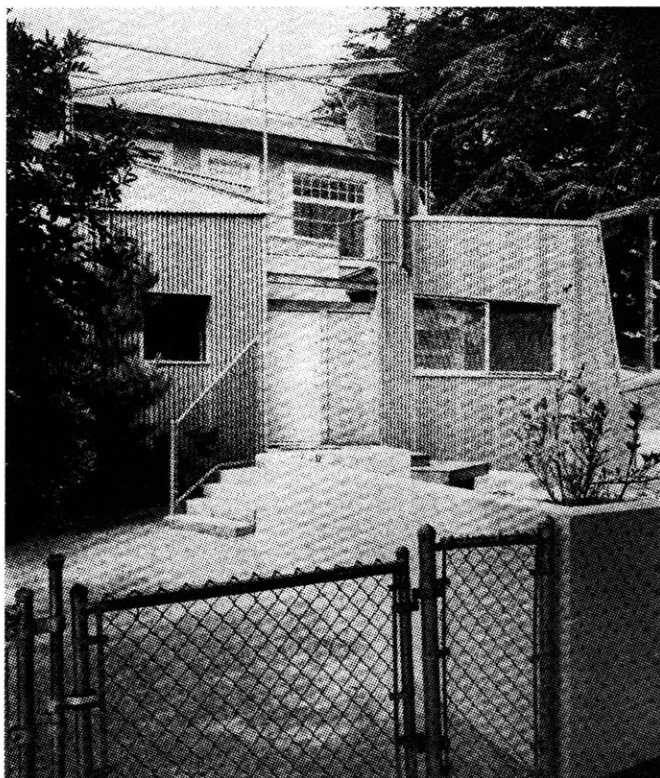
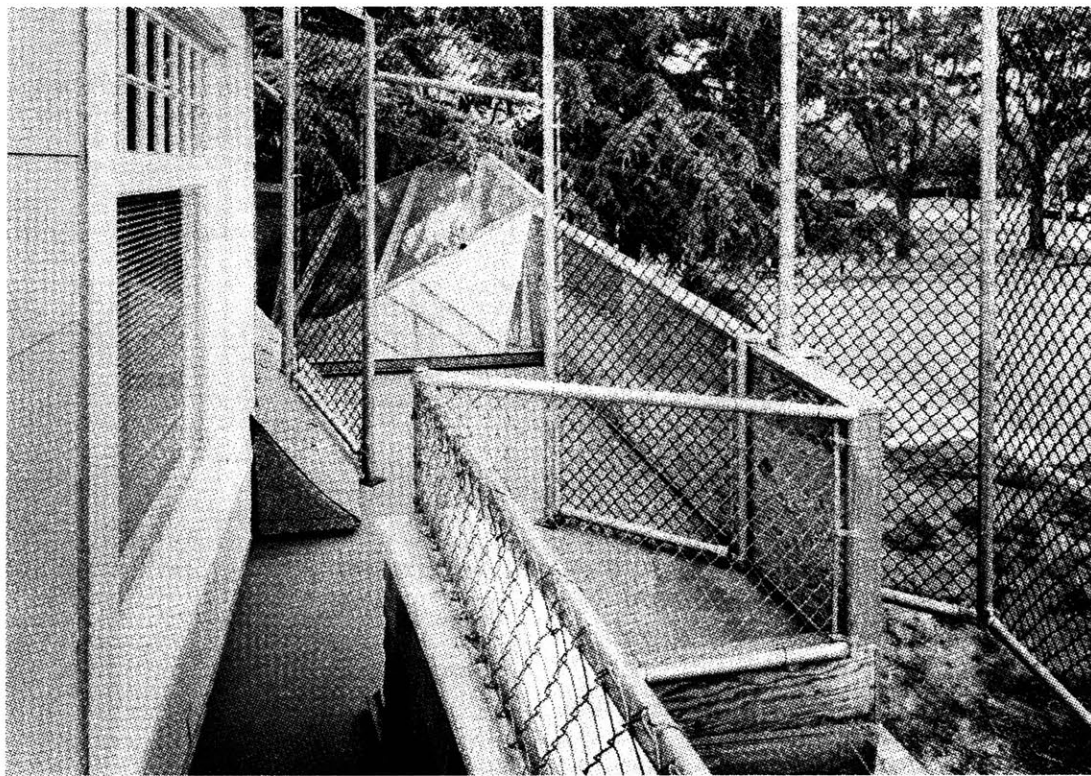


Fig. 52: Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California



**Fig. 53:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Entrance



**Fig. 54:** Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Second Floor Balcony

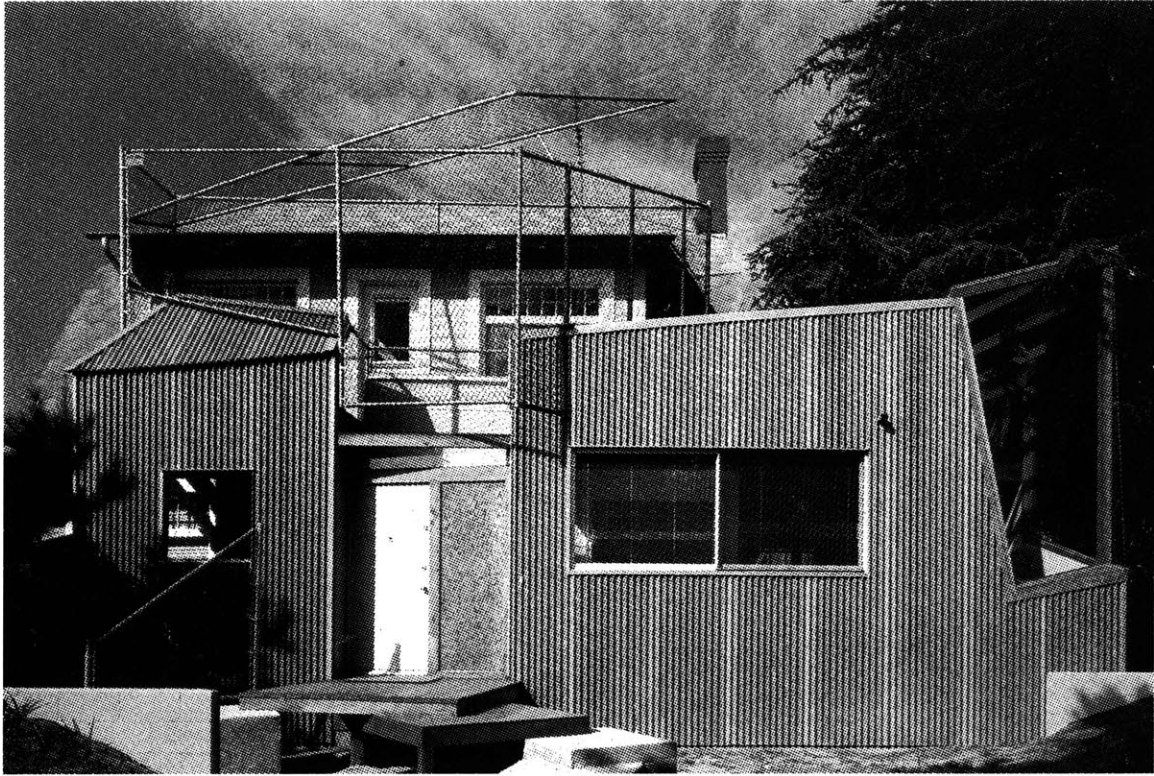


Fig. 55: Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Front View



Fig. 56: Gehry's Residence, Frank O. Gehry, Santa Monica, California, Kitchen

In trying to understand the relationship between a house, as an architectural proposal for a habitable space and its inhabitant, as both a body in space and a constructed identity, I have put forth the following propositions: that there is an inherent tension between the house and its inhabitant, that habitation is an element that mediates between the house and its inhabitant, and that the design process can be applied to the reduction of this tension. I will now try to test these assumptions in light of the case studies that were presented.

Tension: Can the assumed animosity between self and house be detected? Is there any evidence of tension, conflict or any negative feelings between Gehry, Venturi, Johnson and their houses?

Frank O. Gehry himself has repeatedly expressed discomfort with the Santa Monica suburban house that his wife purchased. He said that house was the opposite of what he liked<sup>47</sup> and that it was a “dinky little cutesy-pie house”<sup>48</sup>. He also expressed distaste for the smugness of middle class neighborhoods.<sup>49</sup> Gehry’s comments can be interpreted as a resentment of conformity and middle class suburban living. The 1920’s pink suburban house might represent all of those things to Gehry. In Gehry’s story, there was nothing of the romantic revelation that is sometimes described when a dream house is found and purchased. Gehry’s case is different from Johnson and Venturi, because it is a renovation and not a new house. Gehry’s first interaction with the house is not in relation to his own first proposal, rather, it is in relation to a found house. The found house feels foreign to Gehry. Its foreignness is understood by Gehry as the state of being too cute. Having to renovate or paint a purchased house in order to make it one’s own is quite

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<sup>47</sup> *Frank Gehry*, (New York: Michael Blackword, 1987)

<sup>48</sup> Henry Cobb, *The Architecture of Frank Gehry*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1986) 34

<sup>49</sup> Cobb, 32.

common. Though most people do not wrap their houses in corrugated metal in order to make it “their own”, even a minute change such as replacing a bathroom tile can bring two alien entities, house and inhabitant, a little closer to each other. In Gehry’s case the antagonism between himself and his house is rooted in a sense of alienation. To some degree, alienation exists every time somebody moves into a new house. Many of the actions, such as painting, renovating or even cleaning, that are taken when entering a new house, are also a form of ritual to reduce the sense of alienation.

It is harder to claim feelings of alienation in the case of Philip Johnson, since the Glass House is his own design from start; it is not a found object. Why would Johnson feel any discordance with an architectural proposal that is completely under his control, a product of his imagination and wishes? In Johnson’s case the discordance is between two conflicting architectural desires: the need to conceal and the desire to expose. A proposal that cannot accommodate both is bound to generate tension. The moment in which this tension is most noticeable, I suggest, is in the transition between scheme 12 and 13. In Schemes 10, 11 and 12 Johnson experiments with a glass box that would contain the whole program, that is room for host and guest. In Scheme 13 Johnson introduces a wall that cuts through the glass box and divides it into two parts. The house is noticeably divided into a displayed part (living room, bedroom and study area) and a hidden part (kitchen, bathrooms and bedroom). The introduction of the wall, violently dissecting the house, confesses the impossibility of the Glass House as one unified element.

In the case of Venturi, tension between him and the house is even less obvious. Mother’s House evolves consistently through 10 coherent schemes. No dramatic design moves highlight moments of crisis and no comments made by Venturi or his Mother can reveal animosity. Nevertheless, it is possible to assume that the programmatic changes that were applied to the plan, namely, the increasing degree of autonomy and privacy granted to the son, were a result of Venturi’s unhappiness with the proximity of his and his mother’s rooms, as presented in the first scheme.

Habitation: The second point that I raised is that the relationship between the house and its inhabitant is negotiated and formed through a third element, which is habitation. Can the presence of habitation be detected in the case studies? Is there a consistent assignment of a bedroom to an individual? Does this assignment bring new ways of understanding the case studies?

The design process of Mother’s House has great consistency of programmatic requirements. Each scheme has exactly three bedrooms. One belongs to Venturi, the second to his mother, and the

third is designated for a guest or helping hand. The rooms are served by two bathrooms. One bathroom, with a bathtub, serves the mother's and the guest's bedrooms. The second bathroom, with a shower, serves Venturi's room. These programmatic assumptions are rarely broken throughout the 10 schemes of the house. What does change, and this is where insight can be gained, is the relationship between the rooms and their relative location. Only through the identification of this anticipated habitation (room assignment) one can detect the narrative of the increasing degree of privacy provided for the son in his mother's house. In other words, the story of Mother's House can only be told through a description of the ways in which the house will be used when built, that is, through its habitation. During the design process, habitation is anticipated by Venturi in great accuracy, therefore it is very telling when analyzing the house. The central and most important aspect of habitation, in this case, is who sleeps where.

Johnson's use of his bedroom has less to do with identity and privacy within the household and more with his sexuality and the ways in which he presents himself to the world. While in the early schemes there is a clear distinction between guest's bedroom and host's bedroom, the later schemes are deliberately ambiguous. In the final scheme the Guest House masquerades as a guest's bedroom while it functions as Johnson's master bedroom. This is reiterated in the 1953 renovation of the Guest House, when Johnson transforms one of the two bedrooms in the Guest House into a noticeably large and luxurious master bedroom. Johnson's known yet largely ignored homosexuality is expressed in the many contradictions in the description of his house. On the one hand the Guest House is ignored and the Glass House is presented as the only house Johnson ever had. This is the view of Johnson as an eccentric yet impeccable public figure with an all transparent bedroom, inside the Glass House and nothing to hide. On the other hand, the Guest House (still called the Guest House) is known to be his master bedroom and images of its pink and soft interior, after the 1953 renovation, are published in the media. Johnson's Glass House maintains a certain use ambiguity to negotiate the difficulties of being famous yet gay.

In spite of the bold renovation, Gehry's use of his house is quite conventional and does not reveal much. One can point out the location of the kitchen and dining room outside of the walls of the old house in the new interstitial space. But there is no evidence of the possible meaning of this act. It is possible that use, in Gehry's case, is not the main means through which he interacts with his house. This fact limits any observation regarding the Gehry residence to the architectural nature of the house.

Design: I have shown in the three case studies how problems and conflicts of habitation were resolved through the design process. Does design always reduce tension?

Not always. There is something extraordinary in all of the case studies I have chosen. All of them were design by prominent architects in a crucial moment in their career. Robert Venturi designed Mother's House as the first commission of a young but promising architect. The sense of ambition and self importance is present in the unusual number of fully drafted schemes and the amount of time spent on the design. Furthermore, Venturi has enough respect and care for his process to preserve a large amount of drawings and models and to publish them in a book some 30 years later.<sup>50</sup> A similar combination of a prolonged process and a disposition to excessive publication is evident in Johnson's Glass House. Though not all as complete and immaculate as Venturi's drawings, there are 27 recognized schemes for the Glass House.<sup>51</sup> Only under these exquisite conditions can the house narratives be seen by people that are not part of the design process. If the conditions are poor, one should ask, is the tension between the house and the self and its developing narrative invisible or non-existent? In other words, in the absence of a prolonged process consisting of numerous schemes, does the self-house tension remain unresolved, or is the tension resolved but its resolution left undocumented?

On the one hand, tension resolution is not dependent on special conditions, and does occur even if it is undetectable. I claim that the examples I have brought are only the extreme case of a phenomenon that is widely spread. I claim that even minor renovations of purchased houses play a role in reducing the sensation of estrangement. A room can be made one's own even through painting, a completely undocumented activity. It is conceivable that in most client-architect interactions issues of family life and psychological conflicts would arise and that in many cases they would get resolved. It is also conceivable that building one's own house is stressful not only because it is a major financial and time-consuming undertaking, but also because it is a process that brings tension and conflicts to the surface. But these are assumptions that can be tested in further research.

On the other hand, I claim that some insight can only be gained through hard and prolonged work of design. In other words, the quality of the resolution is dependent on the conditions of the design process. For instance, I claim that when approaching the design of his Glass House,

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<sup>50</sup> Frederic Schwartz, *Mother's House: the evolution of Vanna Venturi's House in Chestnut Hill*, (New York: Rizzoli 1992)

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited". In: *Catalogue 9*, :September 12 to October 31, 1978 New York: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1978..



Johnson had a clear distinction of where the host sleeps and where the guest does. It is only through many design iterations, going back and forth between an integrated house scheme and a split house scheme, that Johnson came up with the ambiguous arrangement of guest and host bedrooms that served him so well as a gay public figure. In Venturi's case, following the careful and slow development of the second floor, it is possible to assume that Venturi needed these architecturally articulated baby steps in order to assert his own independence in his mother's house. Contrary to these two positive examples, the Farnsworth House is an example of an unresolved tension that leads to an unfortunate condition of habitation.

To conclude, while the basic condition of the house-self relationship is of tension and animosity, architectural design, following a psychoanalytical tendency to reduce tension, is used to improve this condition. When great amounts of energy and care are invested in this process, the narrative of tension and its resolution is brought to the surface through the architectural process drawings. The methodology that I have put forth is aimed at the retrieval of this narrative through close examination of these drawings. Similarly to psychoanalysis, it privileges process and the observation of change over time. This methodology cannot be reduced to a set of rules in the service of architecture and house design, however, it highlights some shaded areas of domestic space and might offer a new design sensibility.

### Illustrations Credits:

Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the making of the modern house*, 1998: **1, 13, 14, 15**

David Whitney and Jeffrey Kipnis, *Philip Johnson The Glass House*, 1993: **2, 10**

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