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A thesis in Historic Preservation Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master of Science in Historic Preservation 2008. Advisor: Randall Mason

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People in Glass Houses: The Practical and Conceptual Challenges of Public Access in Mid-Century Modernist Residences

Abstract

High Modernist residential architecture of the mid-twentieth century embodied an austere beauty of simplicity and purity of form. Applying strict design theory to material and structure, architects connected man, architecture and nature in a way that enabled a surreal experience, pushing a residential structure beyond a dwelling to a spiritual place.

Over time, some of the most famous and iconic pieces of this architecture have shifted ownership and are no longer used as residences. A new demand for public access and visitation has transformed them into museums and public spaces, turning each into a piece of art in its own right. The function has now shifted in part into the public sphere.

As ownership shifts, places originally designed as private retreats for their occupants are now under pressure to open to the public for view and exploration. Highly appreciated as works of art, they draw crowds eager to experience the unique and sensational lifestyle they provided. While this transformation gives a second life to buildings that otherwise might be threatened by destruction or unsympathetic ownership, it also presents problems. Issues of practicality (public access), integrity (durability of physical fabric), and theory (conceptual continuity) raise questions about the most appropriate future for Modernist residential architecture.

Disciplines

Historic Preservation and Conservation

Comments

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PEOPLE IN GLASS HOUSES:
THE PRACTICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ACCESS IN
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Alexandra Bevk

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

High Modernist residential architecture of the mid-twentieth century embodied an austere beauty of simplicity and purity of form. Applying strict design theory to material and structure, architects connected man, architecture and nature in a way that enabled a surreal experience, pushing a residential structure beyond a dwelling to a spiritual place.

Over time, some of the most famous and iconic pieces of this architecture have shifted ownership and are no longer used as residences. A new demand for public access and visitation has transformed them into museums and public spaces, turning each into a piece of art in its own right. The function has now shifted in part into the public sphere.

As ownership shifts, places originally designed as private retreats for their occupants are now under pressure to open to the public for view and exploration. Highly appreciated as works of art, they draw crowds eager to experience the unique and sensational lifestyle they provided. While this transformation gives a second life to buildings that otherwise might be threatened by destruction or unsympathetic ownership, it also presents problems. Issues of practicality (public access), integrity (durability of physical fabric), and theory (conceptual continuity) raise questions about the most appropriate future for Modernist residential architecture.

This thesis explores the pros and cons of converting a High Modernist house to a public museum, and whether this reuse robs it of significance or integrity. It aims to demonstrate that such an adaptation can have detrimental effects on the building, as well as the surrounding landscape that was so integral to the experience of place. It examines the theoretical foundations of such designs and whether public access to private spaces fundamentally contradicts the architect's intent, destroying more values than it preserves. By personally experiencing the houses as museums, comprehensive first-hand research provides a thorough and accurate analysis of their successes and failures in terms of practicality. Having identified the problems associated with this particular kind of adaptive reuse, this thesis explores alternative solutions and recommendations.

These questions will be explored through examination of three case studies: Philip Johnson's Glass House (New Canaan, CT), Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House (Plano, IL), and Louis Kahn's Fisher House (Hatboro, PA). They were chosen not only for their architectural merit, but because all three are or soon will be under the stewardship of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This commonality provides a unique opportunity for comparison, as each has been handled differently by the same organization. Through the analysis of successes and failures at the Glass House and Farnsworth House, which are already open to the public as museums, this thesis then proposes preservation solutions for the upcoming conversion of the Fisher House from

private residence by the original owners to the stewardship of the National Trust. The case studies included are all examples of Modernist architecture appreciated and heralded nationwide as masterpieces of residential architecture. These houses are not threatened by indifference, rather by misunderstanding.

The conversion of these three houses proceeds under the context of an upsurge in preservation attention to Modernist works. Many Modernist structures are at risk today, yet these particular cases show a renewed interest and enthusiasm towards the genre. Exploring appropriate use and management through these examples will inform solutions for similar, perhaps less-famous, Modernist houses and landscapes in the future.

This thesis is structured in such a way as to provide an initial contextual history and subsequent specific examples. First will be a framework chronicling the development of Mid-Century Modernism and its role within the preservation community, followed by an explanation of history house museums. After that are the two case studies of the Farnsworth House and the Glass House, which adhere to a similar chapter structure, and finally a speculative case study of the Fisher House. Closing thoughts and analysis are summarized in a concluding chapter.

HISTORY OF MID-CENTURY MODERNISM

For the purpose of this study, the term “Mid-Century Modernism” refers to buildings built after the Second World War, sharing characteristics such as

deduction of form and removal of ornament. Best approached as a belief structure that then shaped architectural ideas and practices, the Modern Movement was manifest across a wide breadth of art forms, including painting, sculpture, music, and literature. More so, however, the Modern Movement influenced culture itself, which can be traced through the dynamic shifts in American lifestyles. There has been much study conducted on post-war American sociology, which exceeds the scope of this research. But these changes in household cultures act as a direct reflection of the post-war period, and the architecture that facilitates them should also be considered part and parcel of the movement.

While conventional arguments regarding the origin of Modernist architecture suggest a linear progression based off early European innovations, the reality is composed more from a “mutable hybrid” of competing styles.¹ As opposed to a singular coherent style that can be easily defined, Modernism reflects a variety of artistic ideals and sensibilities. The architecture echoes the period in its desire for exploration, as well as its own contradictory nature. In fact, one connecting element for all of Modernist architecture’s manifestations is the lack of a singular physical definition, as all the varied expressions are equally influential and representative. The movement indicates

¹ See Gwendolyn Wright, *USA: Modern Architectures in History*.

an attitude more than a style, “a determination to break with the past and free the architect from the stifling rules of convention and technique.”²

The true origin of Modernism in architecture cannot be pinned to one specific influence, as a variety of factors created the ideal conditions for a dramatic change in aesthetics.³ Some attribute the stylistic shifts to be a direct result of post-war social and political revolutions, yet this does not account for other driving forces, and one to two generations of Modern works, dating back to 1900. Its growth can also be traced to technological and engineering advancements and the availability of new materials. Drawing on the work of the proto-modernist forefathers who harnessed the power of reinforced concrete, steel, iron, and glass (such as Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright), post-war Modernists utilized these materials in new and experimental ways. It was these materials that enabled open floor plans and large expanses of glass that characterize the style. Still, some historians consider Modernism a strictly aesthetic reaction, and a rejection of the previous verbose and excessive styles of the Victorian Era and Art Nouveau.⁴

Regardless of what combination of formative factors, that which is now regarded as Mid-Century Modernism derived its initial characteristics from transformations following the First World War in the 1920s and 1930s. There

² Bose, Sudip. “What is Modernism?” *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* 60, no. 3 (May/June 2008): 36.

³ Deitsch, 12.

⁴ See Charles Harrison, *Modernism: Movements in Modern Art*.

was an early desire to create architecture for the new machine age and to express the shifts in the social and political spheres of the time three-dimensionally. These aspirations were then matched with an aesthetic emphasis on light and openness.⁵

The movement that was to become known as the International Style gelled after World War I on both sides of the Atlantic. Shifts in stylistic tendencies for residential design remained consistent with larger architectural trends. The residential work in the US by Viennese architects Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra introduced new ideas of informality and minimalist interiors through the open plan (Figure 1). The Modernists championed the use of inexpensive, mass-produced materials, and experimentation with standardized components pioneered the new approach to construction. But perhaps most revolutionary was the linkage of the house with nature. The open architecture embraced its surroundings and began to blur the boundaries between indoor and outdoor, as “the careful consideration of the site, skillful manipulation of daylight and sunlight, and the imaginative use of landscaping” fell under the responsibility of the architect.⁶

Meanwhile, Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier (nee Charles-Edouard Jeanneret) had set up practice in Paris, and devoted his work to developing a new aesthetic for a new way of life. His houses, which he intended to be

⁵ Weaving, 14.

⁶ Weaving, 16. Most prolific in California, the two architects were able to capitalize on the new healthy modern lifestyles so prevalent on the west coast.



Figure 1. Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House (Image courtesy of Christie's Realty International, Inc)

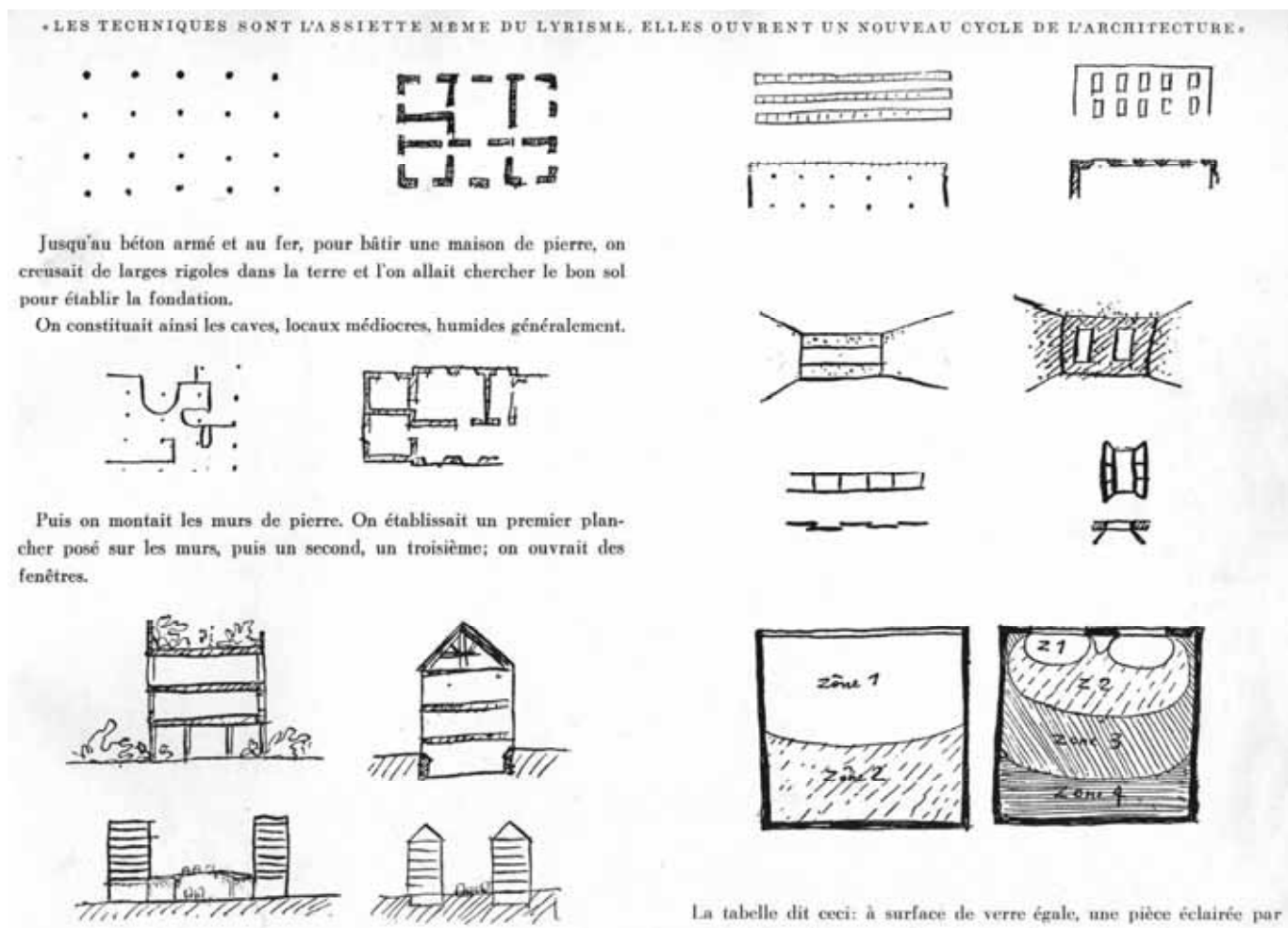


Figure 2. Le Corbusier's "5 Points of Architecture" (Image courtesy of Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: Oeuvre complete de 1910-1929)

“machines for living”, exemplified what he outlined as The Five Points for New Architecture: an open floor plan, a free façade that operated as a thin membrane, long spans of sliding horizontal windows, pilotis (or thin columns) that raised the mass of the house off the ground, and a roof garden which compensated for land occupied by the house (Figure 2).⁷

The face of early twentieth century Modernism was altered by the role played by the Bauhaus and its protégés throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Formed as an amalgamated state school of fine art and craft in Germany, the Bauhaus was directed by Walter Gropius, and concentrated on the design of objects for mass production. Elements of design that were traditionally reserved for the architecture of old nobility - decorative ornamentation and labor-intensive materials - were rejected in favor of an “expressed structure.”⁸ The machine-made parts of the building would be exposed, clearly visible from the outside and concealing nothing. By the early 1920s, German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe pushed Modernism even further, utilizing glass as a structural element that could achieve greater openness and transparency. In 1930 Mies took over as director of the Bauhaus, but the rise of Nazism and World War II ended the institution. Its founders and followers, such as Gropius, Mies, and Marcel Breuer, left Germany, and many settled into academic jobs in the US. Their design philosophy of deriving maximum effect from a minimal

⁷ *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: Oeuvre complete de 1910-1929*. 4th ed. Zurich: Erienbach, 1946, 129.

⁸ Weaving, 19.

use of form had a profound impact on the development of architectural principles in the US and helped to shape the post-war American landscape.

In 1932 a landmark exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) titled “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition” brought the designs of the European masters to an American audience. MoMA director Alfred Barr, head of the Architecture and Design Department Philip Johnson, and architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock curated the show, which coined the generalizing term ‘International Style’ and represented an academic acknowledgement of this evolution in design ideology (Figure 3). Modernism hit the American mainstream. The clever and urbane Johnson spearheaded the promotion of Modernism, later becoming a licensed architect and building his own contributions.⁹ Other American architects, such as Paul Rudolph and Charles Eames, attracted attention for their elegant houses and pre-fabricated industrial components, respectively. The lightweight, modular homes they created developed out of a streamlined vocabulary that was less demanding than the severe boxes of the Bauhaus. Their innovations, and those of many others, reflected a larger post-World War II trend of engaging a new consumer society with a Modernist aesthetic, driven by technology and innovation.¹⁰

The International Style was only one of many branches of Modernism, and advancements in Scandinavia brought a gentler approach to form and

⁹ A further exploration into Philip Johnson and his work will be in Chapter 4, “The Glass House”.

¹⁰ Weaving, 30.

materials through the work of Alvar Aalto and Arne Jacobsen. Although the artists were most renowned for their pioneering furniture and product designs, their buildings echoed the new shapes drawn from nature through curved walls, sculptural structural elements, and a return of traditional materials such as timber and brick. The results were a mix of warmth, richness, and personality. The hard-line functionalism of the International Style became softened, loosened, and tempered with the fresh and organic work of the 1950s. Perhaps as a critique of the previous homogenous incarnations of Modernism, these later approaches embraced individual creativity.¹¹

In the 1950s, Orthodox Modernist geometries gave way to the more expressive and monumental works of a second generation of Modern architects, including Eero Saarinen, Oscar Niemeyer, and Louis Kahn. About a decade younger than Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe, Kahn revised ideas of functionalism to include architectonic expressions of space and form, and reveled in the use of concrete as a main construction material (Figure 4). The strictures of the International Style gave way to more elemental geometric forms and “deep structures” which allowed for monumentalization of space.¹² The “poetry and sensibility” of his work, as well as his nature, “marked an

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kahn, 183. The Richards Medical Center, for example, exists as a series of juxtaposed concrete and brick elements, with the service strongly expressed as exterior brick towers. The vertical components are monumental in their stature, and provide an intellectual approach to the use of space. See Chapter 5 for additional examination of Kahn’s theories.

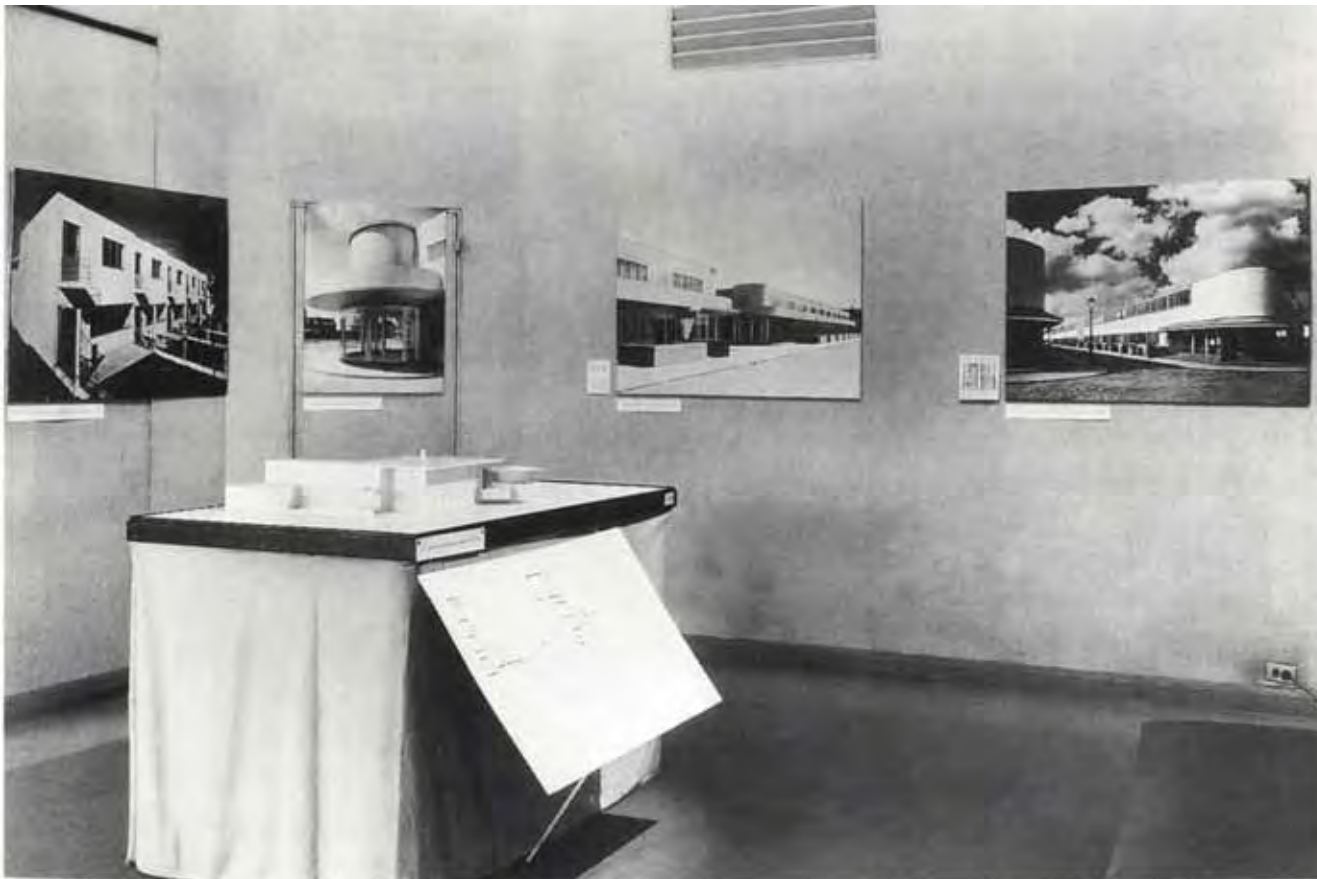


Figure 3. “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition” at the Musuem of Modern Art (Image courtesy of P. Blake, *Philip Johnson*)



Figure 4. Richards Medical Center at the University of Pennsylvania (Image courtesy of P. Gast, *Louis I. Kahn*)

important phase in twentieth-century architecture, and had an immense influence on architectural sensibilities.”¹³

Acting as a constant throughout these evolutions was the idea of embracing nature and merging inside with outside. Within Modernism lies an architectural realism that reflects strong interrelation between interior and exterior. Walls of glass lightened houses through the 1940s, all made possible by new technologies.¹⁴ With the huge windows creating a view, the landscape became as important as the house. The glass could act as an extension of the plan, translating architectural elements into pools and plantings, and mirror the natural topography of the land.

PRESERVATION OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT

The cultural shifts that brought a dismissal of the International Style in architecture had a similar effect on the consuming public. The masses, having never fully accepted the perceived harsh forms and ideologies associated with the minimalist designs, began to turn away from the styles. With the dynamic changes throughout the twentieth century, progress and innovation replaced security and stability, and the backlash of such was felt in the design community. The rapid speed at which Modernism developed and, perhaps

¹³ Kahn, 183.

¹⁴ Dietsch, 29.

more importantly, was recognized as a styling phenomenon encouraged suspicion of its potentially ephemeral and elitist intentions.¹⁵

Seen as rejecters of traditionalism and history, the Modernists were accused of object fixation and inhumaneness by critics, instead of being seen as the social revolutionaries they aimed to be. Those who railed against Modernism often got stuck on the “imagery without regard for its agenda.”¹⁶ The motives for a virtual abandonment of the Modernist ideals in the late 1970s stem from two sources: first, the failure of much post-war architecture to meet political, social, and technical expectations; and second, the intellectual perception that Modernism had been too narrowly prescribed to serve diversified cultural interests in the US. Political realities undercut the role of architecture linked to social purpose and it became dominated by commercial patronage and mass marketing.¹⁷ There still exists a misunderstanding of the movement’s intentions, fueled by a professional prejudice within the architectural community and the response of a “visually uneducated public to [a] unfamiliar, experiential world”.¹⁸

This lack of public understanding and support has put Modernist buildings at risk recently, as development pressures and shifts in cultural preferences have made them seemingly obsolete. Small (less than one thousand square

¹⁵ Cunningham, 1.

¹⁶ Cunningham, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

foot) houses are torn down in favor McMansions, and the transparency of glass walls and open floor plans are considered undesirable when compared to privacy provided by other building designs and techniques. This undesirable “un-private house” lifestyle puts the houses at risk if no sympathetic owners can be found.¹⁹

These threats, as well as parallel risks to Modernist civic buildings, prompted the historic preservation community to address the genre and facilitate conversations regarding its significance. The first international movement to preserve Modernist heritage began in 1990 through the International Working Party for Document and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement (Docomomo), established by Dutch architects Hubert-Jan Henket and Wessel de Jonge. Comprised of architects, conservators, historians, and urban designers, the group formed around six main aims:

1. Bring the significance of the Modern Movement to the attention of the public, the authorities, the professions and the educational community concerned with the built environment
2. Identify and promote the recording of the works of the Modern Movement, which will include a register, photographs, archives and other documents
3. Foster the development of appropriate techniques and methods of conservation and disseminate knowledge of those throughout the profession
4. Oppose the destruction and disfigurement of significant works

¹⁹ Riley.

5. Identify and attract funding for documentation and conservation
6. Explore and develop the knowledge of the Modern Movement.²⁰

Today there are national chapters or working parties in 49 countries with over 2000 individual members.²¹

Though the most publicly active, Docomomo is not the only preservation group committed to the Modernist cause. The Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN) operates as a grass-roots advocacy campaign that “promotes preservation education, assistance, and activism through the medium of new technologies.”²² By creating an open platform through internet groups and a wide membership base, RPPN is able to focus its attention not only on large scale public threats but also on smaller vernacular projects, such as shopping centers, roadside icons, playgrounds, and diners. They are compiling a national windshield survey of recent past resources, and open the database to the public to encourage submissions that might not get wide-scale attention. Even the National Trust for Historic Preservation²³ has enacted new Modernism Initiatives to protect threatened Modernist sites that it deems irreplaceable parts of American heritage.²⁴

²⁰ Cunningham, 4. The Docomomo manifesto, better known as the Eindhoven Statement, was created at the First International DOCOMOMO Conference in Eindhoven in 1990.

²¹ Docomomo-US, “About Us.” <http://www.docomomo-us.org/about>. Accessed 2 April 2008.

²² Recent Past Preservation Network. “The Network”. <http://www.recentpast.org/rppn/index.html>. Accessed 2 April 2008.

²³ See Chapter 2 for more on the work done the National Trust and their role in this research.

²⁴ The entire May/June issue of the National Trust’s magazine *Preservation* is dedicated to Modernism and threatened resources.

The initial stagnation in the defense of Modernist sites in the US was partially due to the leniency embedded in preservation legislation. Recent past resources are at an immediate disadvantage when threatened because of the time limits in historic designation processes. According to the National Park Service, “properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register”, and are only eligible to be nominated if “of exceptional importance” or part of a National Historic District.²⁵ Additionally, many local laws follow this fifty year rule. This stipulation is meant to prevent “judgments based on current or recent popular trends”, but it also implies that recent past heritage is not as important as older, clearly “historic” resources. The hurdle will soon become less of an issue, as a large number of the building stock we consider to be Modernist have turned or will soon turn 50, and therefore presuppose the age requirement. For this reason alone, further consideration of recent past resources should be regarded as the obligation of preservation professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Modernist architecture has garnered much attention in recent literature. From monographs of individual architects to photo essays depicting residential furnishings or regional manifestations of Modernism to analytical study of contextual influencers, scholars have explored the timing, development, and results of the Modernist period in great detail. This literature review is divided

²⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. “National Register Bulletin, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation.” 1990, revised 2002.

by research veins. Though not all of these topics receive equal scrutiny in the later research and analysis chapters, the understanding of current scholarship and professional literature is vital to further development of ideas and solutions. Additional information on each resource is listed in the bibliography of this thesis.

Issues with Preservation of the Recent Past:

Docomomo's collection of essays in Allen Cunningham's book *Modern Movement Heritage* aims to determine what factors should be considered when determining whether or not a Modernist structure is worthy of preservation. As much of the work was focused on ordinary buildings, the focus was placed on works that were "innovative in its social, technical, and aesthetic intentions".²⁶

Most of the case studies and examples used are foreign, which is understandable since Docomomo is an international organization established in Europe. The dominance of European examples does, however, highlight the United States' delayed participation in preservation of Modernist works. Why was the US so late to join the conversation, and why do some people in this country still disagree with the designation of Modernist architecture as historically significant? While intense sociological analysis on post-war culture and differing mid-century responses between the US and Europe is available,

²⁶ Cunningham, 15.

this thesis seeks only to recognize the difference, not investigate it.

Docomomo founder Hubert-Jan Henket's *Back from Utopia* serves a function similar to *Modern Movement Heritage*, as international professionals contributed their analyses of the paradoxes and challenges with preserving the Modern Movement. Of particular interest is Gerard Monnier's essay, "The Reception of Modernism by Users: Practical Value and Symbolic Value." Using Villa Savoye as an example, he illustrates that the appreciation of the architecture by those who live around it is independent of its reputation among experts.²⁷ Modernist buildings are at a greater risk of neglect and loss of interest if there is no value of usage at the local level, he argues. This conclusion bears strongly on the evaluation of the public accessibility of Modernist residences as detailed in the case studies in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Since Docomomo has served as the primary organization focusing on the preservation of the recent past, a look at its published conference proceedings helps to highlight the questions and themes discussed amongst this elite group of preservation professionals who maintain a deep architectural, as well as personal, interest in the Modern Movement. One consistent theme is the transitory nature of Modernist design. This theoretical boundary pops up again and again within preservation discussions, as does the idea of functionality and utilitarian art. Both of these conceptual challenges remain unanswered questions within academic considerations.

²⁷ Heynen, 358.

Preserving the Recent Past, a collection of proceedings from a 1995 conference in Chicago edited by Deborah Slaton, sheds light on the American role in preserving the Modern Movement. One predominant theme that emerges is the importance of vernacular culture and the everyday modern experience, particularly in American suburban communities. This focus on American lifestyles, as opposed to architectural iconography, offers another vein for interpretation of mid-century sites, especially for those that might function as house museums. It also takes preservation interest toward vernacular forms and away from exclusive concern for monumental and high-style examples.

As preservation practice has shifted to accommodate this influx of recent past interest over the past ten years, the professional community has responded enthusiastically, though at times somewhat hesitantly, in journals and periodicals. *Preservation*, the magazine of the National Trust, has often reported on the complex nature of the Modern Movement²⁸. One complication addressed is the irony that many of America's Modern works, buildings that stand now where older buildings once did, are themselves threatened.

In an article from *Traditional Building*, David Fixler asks, "How should the work of the Modern Movement be evaluated and engaged, and what kind of theoretical framework should guide the preservation of this work?" He brings up the issue of "OEM" - ordinary everyday Modernism - and the complications

²⁸ One of the first notices regarding the preservation of Modernism was in the July/August 1995 issue, recounting the events of *Preserving the Recent Past* conference in Chicago.

that arise out of vernacular place-making. His approach emphasizes the preservation of cultural heritage, not just buildings.

Principles of Modern House Design:

Extensive literature addresses the theoretical and social inspirations of the Modern design standards. Particularly over the past ten to twenty years, a younger generation's renewed interest in Modernism has brought with it an influx of scholarly work, exhibits, and large-scale photo documentation and cataloging.

Of particular interest is work placing Modernism within its historical and social contexts. Sandy Isenstadt's *The Modern American House : Spaciousness and Middle-Class Identity* provides ideological contexts of the time these houses were constructed (primarily 1920s through 1960s). Though focused more on the suburban and vernacular manifestations of Modernism, the conceptual themes remain consistent. Ideas that Isenstadt explores include the sense of spaciousness that a small scale of interior space can create, relationships of building and landscape, and framing of exterior/interior connections through glass and cultivated vistas. The underlying theme remains space and its domestic utilization, and such an analysis proves vital in the understanding of Modernist contexts.

In *The Modernist Home*, Tim Benton poses the questions: Do these houses lack the qualities associated with a "home"? What makes a home in the

mind of a Modernist? While it is possible to appreciate the architectural value of spaces, light, color, and texture to find satisfaction in the house, these buildings were often seen as inhuman and mechanistic, more appropriate as offices or factories than living spaces.

Benton explains the characteristics of Modernist houses, both those by masters of the field and their lesser known contemporaries. He highlights the structural potential of new materials and the freedom this allowed within design: the open spaces and free floor plans, built-in furniture, and technological advances in ventilation and lighting.

The definition of functionalism receives some explanation, emphasizing the early Modernist belief that anything that was well-made and served its purpose would necessarily be beautiful. Benton also explores the concept of the “zeitgeist”, the idea that architects “should assimilate the overall conditions of the time and create buildings accordingly.”²⁹ Such an idea poses a threat to the preservation of these structures, as the conditions at the time of creation vary dramatically from those of the present day.

Spatial blurring, a symbolically transparent character, and the negative claim of “nudity” are all discussed as aspects of the new sense of space and interconnection between interiors and exteriors. As such, these ideas make Modernist residential design site-specific and innately linked with its surroundings.

²⁹ Benton, 27.

Benton's chapter dedicated to the Modernist client is particularly helpful. While domestic projects were usually catalysts for experimentation and creativity, the needs and desires of the residents helped mold the program for the houses. Examination of this designer-client process helps to shed light on the domestic world of the mid-century, and also draw comparisons for today's residential lifestyles. Such an analysis provides evidence for the appropriateness of potential privatization of certain Modernist sites.

Benton also highlights feminist theory, which argues that Modernism represented masculine values forced on the home-bound woman. This thought comes up again in discussions of the Farnsworth House and the design process between Edith Farnsworth and Mies van der Rohe. Of particular interest on this subject are Ilse Crawford's essay "All Modern and Emotional: New Designs for British Living," which elaborates on the female's domestic role within Modernism and residential design,³⁰ and Alice Friedman's seminal book *Women and the Making of the Modern House : A Social and Architectural History*.

Numerous works dating from the mid-century provide contextual information through responses from the time.³¹ While James and Katherine Ford's *The Modern House in America*, published in 1940, is primarily an illustrated presentation of examples of Modernist architecture, the first chapter helps define what is Modern. As it was printed some ten years before

³⁰ Castle, 30.

³¹ In regards to this thesis, these collections function to create historical contexts. For additional research, reference Rogers, Ford, and *Mid-Century Houses*.

the construction of any of these case studies, it predates the context a bit. It does, however, summarize influential factors, such as economics and shifts within fine arts.

Likewise, Architectural Record's *Mid-Century Homes*, from 1958, serves as a database of contemporary design of the time. While not specific to any of the houses in question for this research, the collection of houses from Architectural Record helps to illuminate the tone of the architectural field post-Farnsworth House and Glass House, and shows the influence they had on later designs. Both houses were included on what are essentially "best of" lists, from both the time of design and today.³²

Though not specific to any of these case studies, the approach utilized in Thomas Hawk Creighton and Katherine Ford's *Contemporary Houses Evaluated by their Owners* focuses the "success" of house design on the clients and users, and not the architectural community. The houses included are of a similar design aesthetic (two are, in fact, Philip Johnson houses), and provide insight not only to the clients' reactions but, as the book is from 1961, also the ideals and needs set forth by the owners at the time. Additionally, the introduction thoroughly and clearly describes various Modernist characteristics as applicable to residences, such as open planning, glass walls, flexibility, materials and finishes, and ornament.

³² "The 25 most Important Houses in America" and "One Hundred Years of Significant Building : Houses since 1907"

A few sources discuss Modernism's role in today's design world, and give credit to the mid-century artists whose work remains influential. Andrew Weaving and Lisa Freedman's *Living Modern* explores the history of Modernism and its development as a design aesthetic. A useful and interesting addition is the chapter titled "Trademarks of Modernism," in which major players in the design field are identified and then deconstructed in categories of plan and features, materials, color, and furniture. It provides a basic and clear delineation between the various forms Modernism took, and the ways in which they materialized through different designers.

Deborah Dietsch's *Classic Modern : Mid-century Modern at Home* takes a unique perspective in that it showcases houses and interiors that epitomize Modernist principles, such as transparency and mass-production, and then shows the ways in which they are inhabited today. With side-by-side photographs, several houses are depicted as originally built and as they appear now, showcasing the flexibility of contemporary occupancy in the Modernist designs. A later chapter also displays more vernacular suburban examples of the Modernist principles in action, bringing them into the mainstream and making them more accessible.

Conservation Issues with Modernist Materials:

This thesis will not focus on material conservation in detail, as there is existing literature which deals with this topic in great depth.³³ The primary objective of this work in terms of historic fabric is to identify the effect of increased visitation and access on often-experimental modern resources, perhaps more detrimental than that on traditional building materials.

Preservation as Private Residences: is it practical?

Would continued stewardship by a private owner be more cumbersome as interested parties would have to trespass to see the house? Would this then incite alterations, or even a sale, because of the inconvenience? If so, then privatization would be a failed solution.

There is a large store of Modernist homes in New Canaan in particular, and there have been problems with trespassing and invasion of privacy, as modern architecture enthusiasts have disregarded the fact that the houses remain private residences.³⁴ Fred Bernstein's article, "Private Lives," addresses the problems that occur when Modernist homes remain occupied, and what happens when changes are necessary to accommodate the residents'

³³ For additional material-related research, reference: Allen, John. "The Conservation of Modern Buildings," in *Building Maintenance and Preservation: A Guide to Design and Management*, edited by E. Mills, 140-80. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, and Stratton, Michael, ed. *Structure and Style: Conserving Twentieth Century Buildings*. London: E & FN Spon, 1997. Also see Restoring Buildings of the Modern Movement, special issue of *Architects Journal*, 16 February 1994.

³⁴ Bernstein, 138-144.

quality of life. Is the “ethos” of the building only understood when it is experienced through a visit to the house?

The article highlights the preservation success of prominent Modernist buildings and the risk to hidden residential architecture due to less publicity. Solutions suggested include increased tours, articles, and anything to get the word out. The biggest threats are identified, particularly the changing of ownership, as the small lots and tiny features of the Modernist house are seen as disposable to those relocating to New Canaan from New York. Residents that do respect the designs are usually the original owners, many of whom are of retirement age or beyond and cannot provide the upkeep required, thus leaving the buildings vulnerable to deterioration. Luckily, an opposition to the new McMansion style of construction presents an opportunity to utilize the town’s strict zoning laws, which could help prevent tear-downs.

Reiterating the threat caused by the desire for McMansions, Alexandra Lange, in "Big Plans, Small Houses", describes steps fans of Modernism are taking to seek stronger protections. Examples include increased publicity, local landmark designations, neighborhood historic designations, cooperation with sympathetic realtors, and voluntary legal means such as covenants or easements. A later Metropolis feature by Lange, “Family Comes First,” poses solutions for various problems involving the preservation of Modernist homes, including how to make a real estate profit from restoration, converting a structure into a cultural center for Modernism, and creating new landscaping

around a house that will be both true to the spirit of the original and new and vital.

Michael Webb highlights the architecturally aware's increased desire to own Modernist houses in "A Modern Renaissance". Since High Modernism was generally excluded from post-war suburban America, it has found new appeal among the generation that grew up in that setting. In "The End of Openness," however, Akiko Bush questions the applicability of transparent houses and whether(?) such designs deny the basic human need for privacy. In trying to determine why the Glass House doesn't feel like a "home," Kevin Melchionne's "Living in Glass Houses" acknowledges that much of what people consider attractive about houses has little to do with the visual, but more with perceived livability. He identifies the reason the house worked for Johnson as his lifestyle as a curator.

Architect Biographies and Monographs:

There are dozens of books devoted to the work and lives of the three architects in consideration.³⁵ It is outside of the scope of this thesis to provide a thorough biographical history of the players involved in the house designs, but some comprehension of the contextual work of each is necessary to understand design development.

³⁵ Reference the bibliography for a full list of additional readings on Mies van der Rohe, Philip Johnson, and Louis Kahn. The history and design philosophies of these architects are also addressed in the histories of each house within the following case study chapters.

Of all the writing done on Louis Kahn, only one book is devoted entirely to his house design.³⁶ Perhaps due to his enigmatic persona, there are many analyses of his theoretical and unbuilt works, as well as his fascination with and utilization of space, light, and order. A large base of literature provides thorough contextual understanding of Kahn as an architect and his larger repertoire of work. The houses he designed, however, receive limited attention, and particularly in larger surveys, are lost as mere side notes amongst commercial and institutional projects. A much deeper consideration of his house designs is necessary when addressing his work as a whole.

Most discussions about the Glass House or Farnsworth House mention the other - the influence Mies had on Johnson, the ways the houses differ. None, however, discuss the differing ways in which they function. Each analysis notes the individual circumstances of creation, and then projects the similarities between them, but no found writings compare how the two structures met (or did not meet) the needs of their occupants. Since comparisons are inevitable and unavoidable, it is only logical that the next step of analysis be a comparison of their functionality as private residences, and then of their functionality as public spaces.

No contemporary literature has examined the successes or failures of these two cases in terms of conversion to public space. While only a few years have passed since their adaptation and some initial planning for both sites has

³⁶ Saito.

yet to come to fruition, there is still the opportunity to analyze the current state of affairs and conceptually evaluate the interpretive plans.

CHAPTER 2: THE HOUSE MUSEUM

WHAT IS A HOUSE MUSEUM?

To better understand these case study sites and accurately analyze their conversion to public institutions, one must first define the nature of a historic house museum, as well as its role within the American public realm. Narrowly defined, a house museum is a historic residence that is “currently exhibited and interpreted as a dwelling place.”³⁷ Beyond this, the structure’s significance as an artifact and landscape is seen as valuable enough to be protected for the use and enjoyment of the public. Although house museums are usually famous for their former inhabitants or for the events that happened there, a unique new breed of house museums is emerging that highlights their significance as architectural works. As historic house museums are part of American culture (there were well over 2500 listed in 1999)³⁸, they are ideally as culturally and socially diverse as the society they serve.

The house museum as an institution acts as a valuable resource in heritage management. House museums help facilitate an understanding of our own broader culture, while projecting information about particular subsets we might not be intimately familiar with. They function as a physical materialization of memory - stories and histories are told about them, in them,

³⁷ Patricia Walker, xi.

³⁸ Ibid. As Walker’s directory was printed in 1999, there are presumably many more that are not included. The two house museum case studies in this thesis, for example, are not listed.

through them. Beyond just facts and objects, the historic house museum can create an experience.

According to the American Association of Museums³⁹, a successful museum will have the following characteristics:

1. Be a legally organized nonprofit institution or part of a nonprofit organization or government entity
2. Be essentially educational in nature
3. Have a formally stated and approved mission
4. Use and interpret objects and/or a site for the public presentation of regularly scheduled programs and exhibits
5. Have a formal and appropriate program of documentation, care, and use of collections and/or objects
6. Carry out the above functions primarily at a physical facility/site
7. Have been open to the public for at least two years
8. Be open to the public at least 1,000 hours a year
9. Have accessioned 80 percent of its permanent collection
10. Have at least one paid professional staff with museum knowledge and experience
11. Have a full-time director to whom authority is delegated for day-to-day operations
12. Have the financial resources sufficient to operate effectively.⁴⁰

Historic house museums have the additional responsibility of interpretation and performance, as they must act as story-tellers and not just gallery spaces.

Because the structure acts as an artifact itself, the house is both an exhibition space and an exhibit.

³⁹ AAM is an organization established in 1906, which aims include “helping to develop standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and providing advocacy on issues of concern to the entire museum community”. (American Association of Museums, <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutaam/index.cfm>)

⁴⁰ American Association of Museums. “What is a Museum?” <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/whatis.cfm>. Accessed 3 April 2008.

MODERNIST HOUSE MUSEUMS: OTHER EXAMPLES

While the Farnsworth House and the Glass House are two of the more dramatic examples of modernist residences converted into house museums, they are not the only ones. Particularly popular in Europe, houses designed by Walter Gropius, Gerrit Rietveld, Le Corbusier, Richard Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright have been opened to the public. These precedents could help in determining appropriate approaches to the unique circumstances associated with Modernist sites. Usually operated by a private non-profit or a heritage management group, these examples have found approaches that garner them success.

Rietveld-Schroder House, Utrecht, The Netherlands (1924):

The great masterpiece by Gerrit Rietveld was occupied by its original client (and the architect's lover) Truus Schroder, until her death in 1984 (Figure 5). Schroder created a fund to protect the house, as well as all of Rietveld's work and archives that were still in it. Soon after her death, the house was put under the management of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, which opened the house to the public. Tours typically involve a hands-on demonstration of the various spatial arrangements made possible by the revolutionary sliding walls.⁴¹

⁴¹ "More Modern Houses." *Docomomo Journal*. No 22. May 2000.



Figure 5. Rietveld-Schroder House (Image courtesy of Great Buildings Online)



Figure 6. Villa Savoye (Image courtesy of Great Buildings Online)

Villa Savoye, Poissy, France (1928-31):

After a dramatic and thorough restoration in 1997, the archetypal Le Corbusier house opened as a public museum (Figure 6). The restoration itself was the subject of much debate, but helped to open up ideas on how Modernism could be considered nationally or internationally significant. There are multiple tour types available, one that is guided, and another that utilizes an audio tour. There is also an unaccompanied tour, as visitors are allowed to explore the house on their own.⁴²

Fallingwater, Mill Run PA, USA (1935):

Internationally renowned for its dynamism and for its interplay with its natural surroundings, Fallingwater remains one of Frank Lloyd Wright's greatest masterpieces (Figure 7). Built on top of an active waterfall that flows under the house, the design has brought marveling visitors since its creation. Now run by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, the site offers seven guided tours catering to visitors' interests.⁴³

Walter Gropius House, Lincoln MA, USA (1937):

Designed as a house for the Gropius family, the Walter Gropius house is modest in scale, but combines elements of local traditional materials with

⁴² Centre de Monuments Nationaux. "Villa Savoye A Poissy." <http://www.monuments-nationaux.fr/>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

⁴³ Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. "Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater." <http://www.paconserve.org/index-fw1.asp>. Accessed 5 April 2008.



Figure 7. Fallingwater (Image courtesy of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy)



Figure 8. Walter Gropius House (Image courtesy of Historic New England)

revolutionary modern technologies (Figure 8). The house still contains several pieces of original furniture designed by Marcel Breuer and assembled in the Bauhaus workshops, as well as all the family possessions still in place. It was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 2000 for its significance as an interpretation of the Modernist philosophy. Operated by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, the house is open for scheduled tours.⁴⁴

Greenbelt Museum, Greenbelt MD, USA (1937):

Built as a planned community under the New Deal, Greenbelt existed as a cooperative garden suburb, and aimed to be the model for contemporary town planning. Initially designed to reinforce community spirit and cooperation among its residents, all the original buildings exist today and are used by the community that still lives there. Multiple touring options include historic home tours, a community exhibit space, and guided and self-guided walking tours.⁴⁵

Curutchet House, La Plata, Argentina (1949-54):

This later Le Corbusier design is critical in charting the transition from his interpretation of pure modernism to the later “brutalist” approach. The house

⁴⁴ The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. “Walter Gropius House.” <http://www.spnea.org/visit/homes/gropius.htm>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

⁴⁵ Greenbelt Museum. “Greenbelt History.” <http://www.greenbeltmuseum.org/index.htm>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

today holds the offices of the local Architect's Union chapter. They allow public visitors, though groups are required to make reservations.⁴⁶

NATIONAL TRUST PROPERTIES AND ACQUISITIONS

The previous examples are all successful models of Modernist residences open for public access. The residences on which this study focuses, however, were chosen because of their affiliation with one particular governing organization.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1949 to “provide leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities.”⁴⁷ Chartered by Congress, the Trust operates as a private, nonprofit membership organization out of Washington DC. There are also six regional offices, which help to manage the stewardship of the Trust's historic resources that exist nationwide. Managing 29 sites, the Trust prides itself on representing “the broad range of the American experience.”⁴⁸ The organization hopes to utilize the properties

⁴⁶ “More Modern Houses.”

⁴⁷ National Trust for Historic Preservation. “About Us.” <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

⁴⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Stewardship of Historic Sites.” <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/programs/stewardship-of-historic-sites.html>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

to engage the public in a universally American built heritage, but also in a national preservation ethic.⁴⁹

According to preservation law, the National Trust is authorized to serve as steward to a historic site in a variety of manners. The option offering the most security for the property would be a purchase, allowing the Trust to own the site and all the rights associated with it in full. If the Trust is not able to purchase, or does not have the resources to maintain and run the site, it can act as an easement holder. In this scenario, the Trust can purchase or be the donation recipient of a conservation easement, which is defined as a “private legal interest conveyed by a property owner to a preservation organization or to a government entity.”⁵⁰ Once drafted, these enforce a legal agreement that binds current and future owners to protect the historic character of the property.⁵¹

A third option exists, and is slightly more complicated. Known as a “gift of heritage,” a historically or architecturally significant property can be donated to the National Trust so that it may be protected in private ownership.

⁴⁹ For a more detailed history of the National Trust, reference: Finley, David E. *History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1947-1963*. Washington D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1965., and Mulloy, Elizabeth. *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation 1963-1973*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1976. Additional information can also be found in: Hosmer, Charles B., Jr. *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981.

⁵⁰ National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Preservation Easements.” <http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/legal-resources/easements/>. Accessed 5 April 2008.

⁵¹ These should not be confused with façade easements, which only protect the exterior façades of a historic structure.

A preservation and conservation easement is established, and a portion of potential sales to outside buyers is placed in an endowment fund for the Trust to regularly monitor the easement. This alternative essentially allows the National Trust to act as realtor, and select the most appropriate and sympathetic new owner. Deeding a gift of real estate can occur in four ways: a gift through a signed deed; a deed of gift, with the right to live on the property until death of the donor; an asset to fund a charitable remainder trust, which would put the money from the eventual sale of the property into a trust for the donor to generate a fixed income for his or her lifetime; or a donation in the donor's will.⁵²

The following three case studies all represent historically significant properties in which the National Trust plays varied stewardship roles. For the Farnsworth House, the National Trust is the title holder, but the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois is the managing party. Philip Johnson donated the Glass House to the National Trust, retaining a life estate. A similar scenario exists for the Fisher House, as the estate and archives were a gift of heritage with the retention of life estate.

⁵² National Trust for Historic Preservation. "Gifts of Heritage."
<http://www.preservationnation.org/support-us/planned-giving/gifts-of-heritage.html>.
Accessed 9 April 2008.

CHAPTER 3: THE FARNSWORTH HOUSE

“Where everything is beautiful and privacy is no issue, it would be a pity to erect an opaque wall between the outside and the inside. So I think we should build the house of steel and glass; in that way we’ll let the outside in.” - Mies van der Rohe to Edith Farnsworth⁵³

HOUSE HISTORY

date: 1945-51

architect: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

client: Dr. Edith Farnsworth

location: Plano, IL

square footage: 1500 ft ²

estate size: 58 acres

materials: glass, steel, travertine, with Primavera wood and plaster finishes

alterations: restorations in 1972, 1996

additional buildings: 2 car garage (late 1950s), boathouse and pool (after 1972), visitor center (2004)

protection: National Register (Oct 7, 2004), NHL (February 17, 2006),

The story of the Farnsworth House begins with a chance meeting at a dinner party. In 1949, the then 59-year-old German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe met Chicago doctor Edith Farnsworth.⁵⁴ The single doctor had just purchased a plot of land on the Fox River about sixty miles west of Chicago, and wanted to build a weekend retreat. Familiar with the architect’s unique work, she asked him if he would be interested in the commission.

The project represented an ideal challenge: a house for one person that, as a weekend home, did not require the general necessities of everyday life. Mies could play with the ideas of privacy and minimalism of possessions that

⁵³ Goldberger, 38.

⁵⁴ Edith Farnsworth Papers, Chapter 13. Box 2, Folder 27.

would otherwise be impossible for a full-time residence. Dr. Farnsworth was an avid musician and writer, and wanted her house to serve as a place of solitude and reflection. An avid supporter of the arts, she made it her mission to build a house that could be considered a contribution to modern architecture, even before giving the commission to Mies.⁵⁵

The choice was an appropriate one, however, as the architect was exploring ideas of simplified, translucent living in his earlier European residential designs. Previous work on the Tugendhat House in Brno, Czech Republic illustrated his move towards transparent separation between interiors and exteriors, as the glass walls allowed the landscape and sky to become the room boundaries (Figure 9). Tugendhat also represented the idea of subtle zoning of interior spaces, such as conversation, dining, and study, through free-standing partitions and the calculated positioning of specific furniture.⁵⁶ Mies's work in Chicago at the Illinois Institute of Technology in the 1940s would further his thinking in regards to open planning. Segregated architectural elements gave way to an open floor plan, as external supports were connected by overhead joists (Figure 10).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Vandenberg, 14. Dr. Farnsworth wanted a place to play the violin and study poetry. An avid poet, she eventually moved to her Italian villa outside of Florence, and spent her final years translating Italian poetry. Three volumes of her translations of the work of Montale, Albino Pierro, and Salvatore Quasimodo were published by the Henry Regnery Co., 1969-1976. (Newberry Library)

⁵⁶ Vandenberg, 16.

⁵⁷ Mies was given free rein to design the entirety of the IIT campus after beginning his tenure as director of the School of Architecture in 1938. Thirteen Miesian buildings were constructed from 1943 to 1957, culminating in his final and most celebrated work, S.R. Crown Hall, which now a National Historic Landmark (the entire campus was listed on the National Register in



Figure 9. Tugendhat House (Image courtesy of the New York Times)



Figure 10. Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology (Image courtesy of Great Buildings Online)

2005) and still houses the College of Architecture. Crown Hall underwent a major restoration in 2005. (Illinois Institute of Technology, <http://mies.iit.edu/index.html>)

Situated on the banks of the river, the Farnsworth site was susceptible to flooding and therefore required an innovative design. The secluded yet tumultuous setting would highlight the relationship between the building and the landscape, creating a union between nature, the house, and its occupant. In order to cope with rising river waters, the house stands just over five feet above the ground, leaving the actual site untouched by a foundation and raising the house above the floodplain (Figure 11).

In terms of spatial relationships, the composition of the house seems to “embrace its entire surroundings.” The glass walls dissolve into the landscape, and the trees and surrounding woods act to regulate space and provide visual wall elements (Figure 12).⁵⁸ Unlike some of Mies’s other designs, there are no naturalistic elements to the composition, so the house literally floats like a piece of technology amid nature. Recalling eighteenth century romantic notions of landscaping, all thresholds between building and surrounding are eliminated.

The structure itself is a mixture of steel, glass, and Roman Travertine. Though Mies played with hundreds of preliminary drawings, the final design shows a totally open floor plan, with only bathroom spaces and the central utilities internalized (Figure 13). Two parallel horizontal planes creating the roof and floor are held in suspension between the earth and sky by only eight steel columns. All eight stop short of roof channels, so the roof plane does not

⁵⁸ *Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois 1945-50*, 5.



Figure 11. Farnsworth House elevated off the ground (Image courtesy of Farnsworth House)



Figure 12. Farnsworth House interior and exterior relationship (Image courtesy of M. Vandenberg, *Farnsworth House : Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe*)

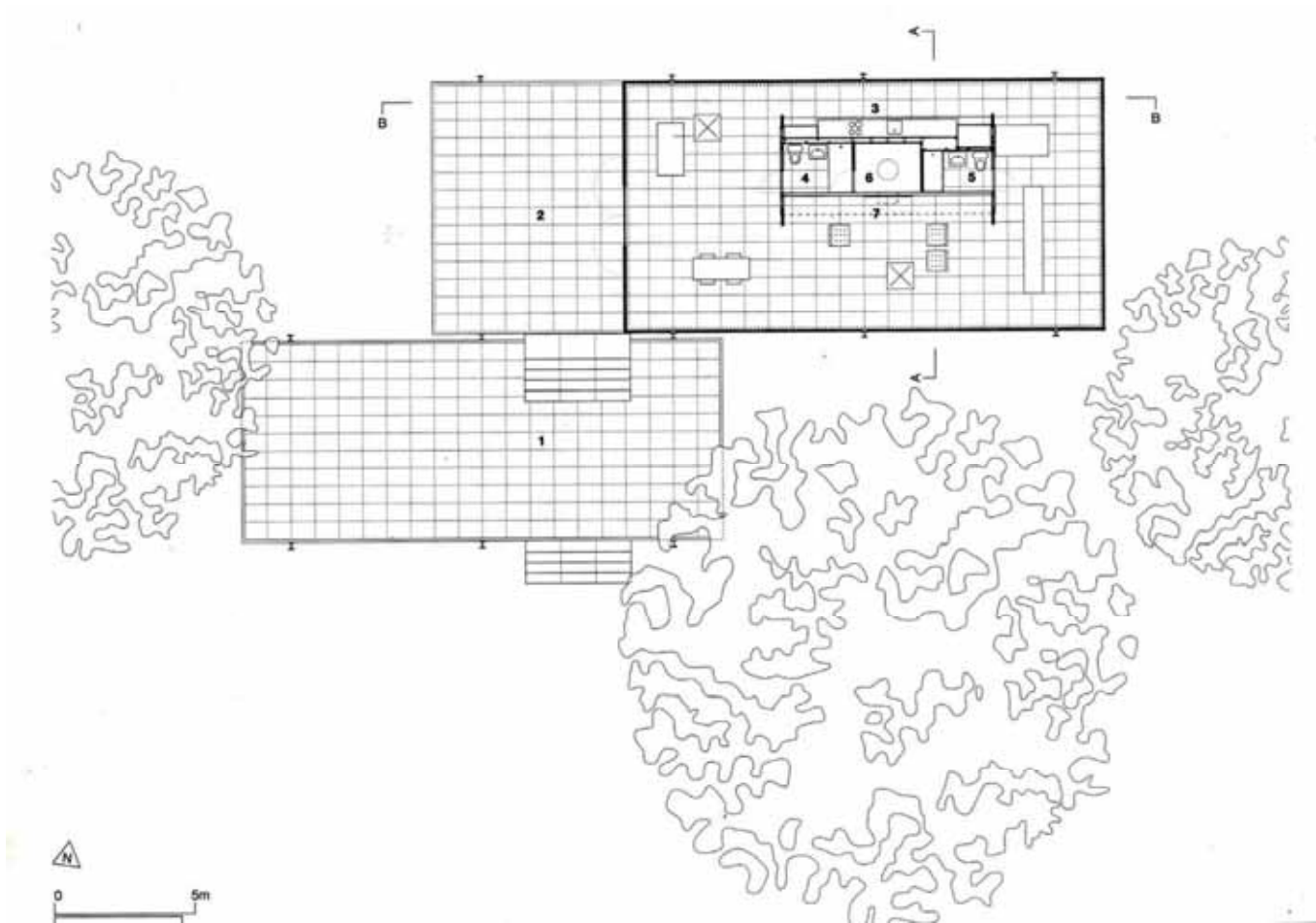


Figure 13. Farnsworth House floorplan (Image courtesy of M. Vandenberg, *Farnsworth House : Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe*)

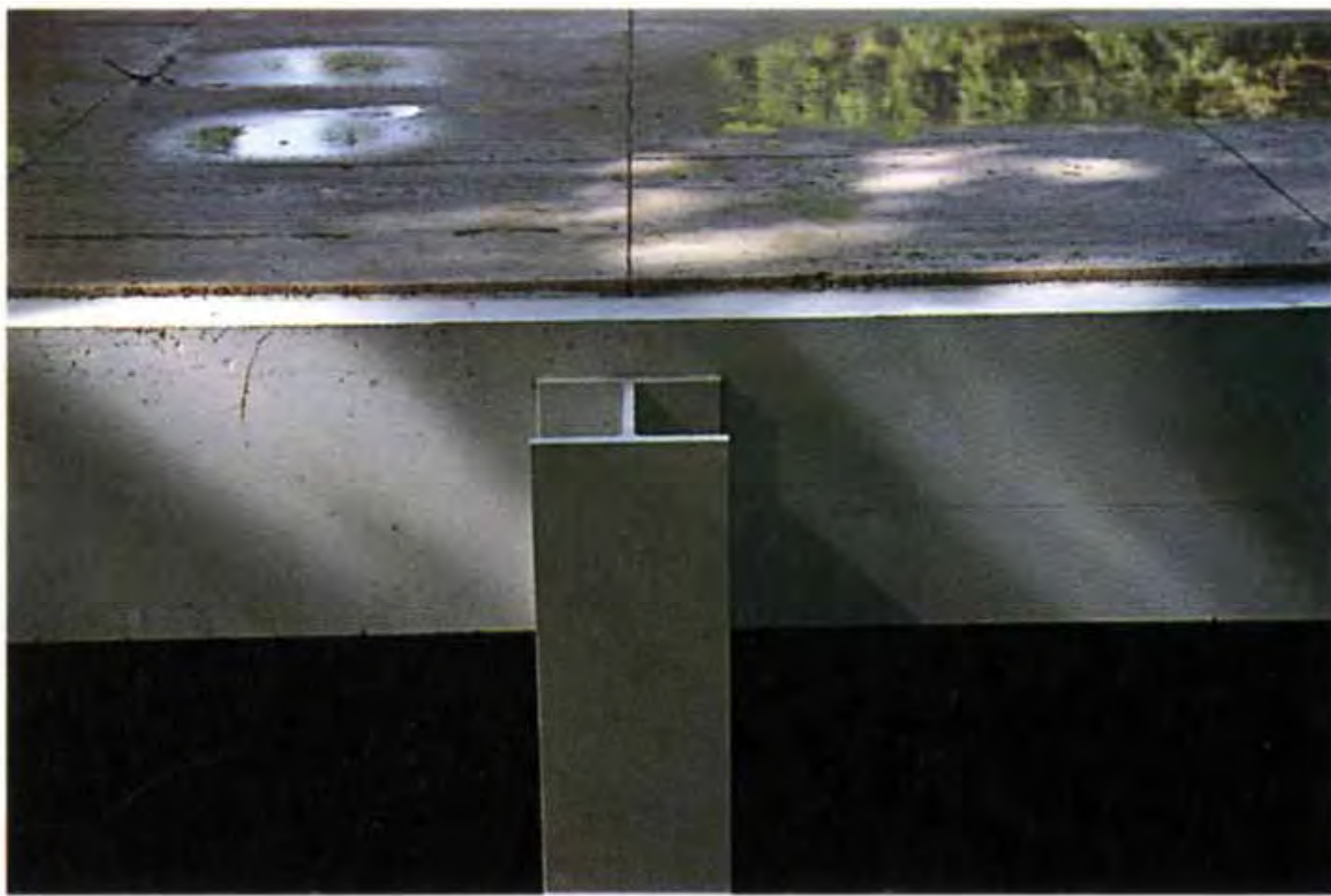


Figure 14. Farnsworth House I-beam detailing (Image courtesy of M. Vandenberg, *Farnsworth House : Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe*)

rest on the columns but merely touches them. This detailing gives the illusion that the horizontal and vertical elements are held together by magnetism (Figure 14).⁵⁹ The columns are located on the exterior, giving complete flexibility to the one-room interior arrangement, which exists as a single space unpartitioned except for the central service core. A thin black cylindrical drum hides beneath the floor slab, holding all drainage pipes, incoming water piping, and electrical wiring.⁶⁰

Actually located slightly closer to the northern wall, the core creates a narrow kitchen galley and a much larger living area, and is composed of natural primavera wood. The kitchen side of the core is composed of a single run of cabinets above a counter space, while the living room side features a low, open hearth (Figure 15). Mies chose the core material for its neutrality, as well as the white paint that covers the steel and the white travertine marble, because he wanted the shades of the house to be muted in comparison to the robust changing colors of nature.⁶¹ “These colors are continually changing throughout, and I should like to say that it is simply marvelous.”

Much like in the Tugendhat House, the interior spaces are zoned by the precise placement of furniture. The living space sits between a dining area on the west and the sleeping space on the east side, positioned so the sleeper

⁵⁹ Vandenberg, 18.

⁶⁰ Original sketches and drawings are housed in the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe Collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

⁶¹ Blaser, 121.

awakes with the rising sun. Contrastingly, an open bi-level terrace extends on the west side of the house, providing a porch to watch the setting sun, as well as open-rise stairs connecting to the ground. In 1951, Dr. Farnsworth had stainless steel screens installed to enclose the porch and protect it from mosquitoes that rose from the river banks in the summer. The porches were previously part of Mies's original design, and are visible on the model of the house shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1947 (Figure 16), but the architect removed them from the final design in favor of the transparency effect created without them on the porch. Architect and client had a famously tumultuous relationship at this point, so Mies' design assistant William Dunlap did the work.⁶²

The reason for the deterioration of an initially friendly relationship between Mies and Edith Farnsworth is unknown, but many speculate on a romance gone wrong. By the time construction was complete, the two had an icy relationship, and in 1953 Mies sued the doctor for unpaid fees of \$28,173. She countersued, accusing the architect of going \$33,872 over the agreed construction budget, as well as problems with a leaking roof and window condensation. Eventually the two settled out of court, with Dr. Farnsworth paying a \$14,000 settlement.⁶³

⁶² Vandenberg, 17.

⁶³ Mies van der Rohe vs. Farnsworth, Kendall County Circuit Court case 9352. Transcript. Sarah J Hahn Resource Center at the Farnsworth House, Plano IL.



Figure 15. Farnsworth House kitchen (Image author's own)



Figure 16. Farnsworth House in 1970 with screen porch (Image courtesy of Farnsworth House)

Edith Farnsworth would never truly be happy with the house, as her initial excitement was tainted by the falling out with Mies and continued to dissipate as she grew frustrated with frequent visits by architecture enthusiasts. She felt her oasis, her supposed place of solitude, became too famous, and thus more of an exhibit than a home. The final straw came in the late 1960s, when local county officials decided to widen and realign a previously infrequently used bridge along the western end of the property. The bridge extension project included the proposed purchase of a 200ft strip of the doctor's property, bringing the road much closer to the building. She aggressively contested the proposal, and brought the County authority to court, but eventually lost the fight. In 1967 Kendall County built a new bridge and road that brought louder and faster traffic closer to the house, and Farnsworth advertised its sale in 1968.⁶⁴

Soon after, Lord Peter Palumbo, a British property developer, bought the property from the doctor. An avid modernist architecture fan, he originally planned to ask Mies to restore the building. Unfortunately, the architect died shortly after Palumbo's purchase, so the new owner turned to Dirk Lohan, Mies's grandson and partner in his successor firm. The restoration began in 1972, including installation of a renovated roofing system with new vapor barriers and waterproofing elements, removal of the mosquito screens, repainting of the steel beams, and replacement of the glass wall panels. All of

⁶⁴ Vandenberg, 24.

the utilities and services were renovated, and Palumbo furnished the house in the mode Mies had imagined. A few classic Miesian pieces were strategically arranged, supplemented by additional designs by Lohan.⁶⁵

Most radically, Palumbo dramatically altered the landscape of the site. On an additional 55 acres adjacent to the house, he commissioned landscape architect Lanning Roper to replan the approach by car to the house, as well as to plant trees to the east and north of the house, but to leave the lawn directly surrounding the house to be scattered with daffodils and mown short when not in bloom. The addition of the trees created a canopy of privacy for the house that had been partially lost with the road extension a decade earlier (Figure 17). A new access point to the site included a driveway and parking area a few hundred feet away from the house, and an additional small bridge to cross the small stream bordering it.⁶⁶

It was in 1996, however, that the most significant changes to the interiors occurred, though unintentionally. A huge rainstorm drenched the site with over eighteen inches of water in twenty-four hours, and the resulting floods broke through two of the glass walls, submerged the interior floor under five feet of water, and destroyed artifacts, furniture, and the core's wood elements (Figure 18). A total restoration was necessary, and once again the job went to Dirk Lohan. The interior core was so badly damaged it had to be

⁶⁵ Farnsworth House. "History." <http://www.farnsworthhouse.org/history.htm>. Accessed 28 January 2008.

⁶⁶ French, Whitney. Interview with author. 3 January 2008. Farnsworth House, Plano, IL.



Figure 17. Farnsworth House Lanning Roper landscaping (Image courtesy of Farnsworth House)



Figure 18. Farnsworth House after 1996 flood (Image courtesy of M. Vandenberg, *Farnsworth House : Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe*)

completely rebuilt out of new, now very rare, primavera wood. Lohan attached the new core panels in a new way, with clips that would enable their quick removal from their frames in case of another flood.⁶⁷

Lord Palumbo opened his home to public access in 1997, allowing visitors to explore the house and the adjacent sculpture garden that he had amassed in the landscape redone by Lanning Roper (modern masterworks by Richard Serra, Anthony Caro, Harry Bertoia, George Rickey, Jim Dine, and others could be found nestled under the trees).⁶⁸ He employed a group of paid tour leaders and property managers who took meticulous care of the property. After falling ill in 2000, Palumbo could no longer make the trip out to Illinois as often as he would have liked and decided to sell the house. In 2001 he made a deal with the state of Illinois to sell the house for \$7 million and open it for public access. The plan fell through in early 2003 due to a state budget crisis, and a group of concerned members of the architectural community formed a group called the Friends of the Farnsworth, aiming to buy the house though eventually unsuccessful in doing so. Overwhelmed by the selling process, Lord Palumbo decided to have Sotheby's auction the building and its furnishings in December of 2003.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Vandenberg, 27.

⁶⁸ Abercrombie, 67.

⁶⁹ "Saved From the Wrecking Ball." DVD. Tower Productions. Public Broadcasting Services, 2007. The video as shown as an introduction to tours at the Farnsworth House Visitor Center.

Once again, the Farnsworth House made national headlines when it went on the auction block. Initial estimates priced the sale between \$4.5 and 6 million - over sixty times the price Dr. Farnsworth paid for its construction. Members of the architecture, preservation, and history communities responded with fervor, fearing that the house would be bought by a developer and moved from its current site. As so much of the house's design and significance were linked to its specific setting, breaking its context would cause irreparable damage. It was a risk they were not willing to take.

In October of 2003, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) joined forces to save the house. Both organizations contributed \$1 million towards the purchase, and solicited contributions from their members, philanthropists, and the architectural community. Despite the rally, it looked as though the groups would fall short of the estimated purchase price, as a week before the auction they had raised only \$3.5 million. Some speculated that the lack of funds reflected a lack of sympathy for the Modernist style.⁷⁰ Despite personal preference, however, no one disputed that the house represented a monumental moment in architectural history, as well as American cultural identity.

Until the morning of the auction, the group had not raised sufficient funds and the outcome looked bleak. Luckily, a last-minute publicity blitz

⁷⁰ Hamilton, William. "A '51 Mies Classic Comes Down to the Wire." *New York Times*. 11 December 2003.

brought in additional donors to win the bid, which came in at over \$7.5 million. According to National Trust president Richard Moe, “People increased their pledges. New pledges came in. We had an enormous boost from a wonderful NPR piece that played Friday morning that was a real catalyst to get people to pick up the phone and call us.” Over 300 people donated to the cause, but former Sara Lee Chairman John Bryan, an avid supporter of the cause from the beginning and founder of Friends of the Farnsworth House, doubled his previous \$500,000 contribution in the closing hours to put the bid over the top.⁷¹

Immediately following the auction, an easement was placed on the house, prohibiting any structural alterations and preventing its relocation to another site. Now jointly owned by the National Trust and LPCI (but managed and run by LPCI), the site functions as a public house museum. In 2004 the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2006 it was designated as a National Historic Landmark, the highest designation that the Department of the Interior can give. The group’s victory was a turning point for the preservation of post-war architecture, serving as an example of a modernist site worthy of attention and recognition. The success of the Farnsworth House is monumental in recognizing the importance of Modern architecture.

⁷¹ Adams, 26-27.

HOUSE MANAGEMENT:

parent museum/owner/governing authority: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois

date of acquisition: December 2003

open to public: open early April through mid-November

primary interpretive period/theme: leave the site as it was acquired in December 2003

date and style of interiors: interior architecture original from 1951 with restorations from 1972 & 1996, interior furnishings from Lord Palumbo's restoration of 1972 & 1996

artifact collection: Lord Palumbo collection of Mies van der Rohe and Dirk Lohan furnishings

archival collections: papers regarding acquisitions, copies of the law suit between Mies Van der Rohe and Edith Farnsworth from 1953, copies of the law suit filed by Edith Farnsworth regarding the Fox Drive bridge project, oral histories on DVD, magazines and books featuring the house, site-based curriculum for schools, copies of Edith Farnsworth's journals, various other paper documents

The purchase by the National Trust and Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois marked a new beginning for the Farnsworth House. No longer a private residence for a single individual, the site would now be opened to the public as a historic house museum. The new owners were faced with the challenge of interpretation and management, made even more difficult by the lack of precedent for a modernist house in America. Previously converted modern homes, such as the Gropius House, Fallingwater, and even the later acquired Glass House, were donated by their owners and did not require the amount of interpretive restructuring that the Farnsworth site did.

Master plans from 2004 indicate five distinct points of interest in determining a narrative of significance:

1. The house's initial design
2. The relationship between the architect and client

3. The owner as a steward
4. Saving the building at Sotheby's
5. The legacy of the site for future generations.⁷²

These points are the framework of the interpretation plan as presented to visitors. The house functions on a traditional house museum template, in that visitors tour the site in small groups led by a trained guide. Devised by LPCI and the National Trust, the interpretive plan remains transformable and has been revised many times.⁷³

Tours are led by volunteer docents, as recently there has only been one full-time staff member, site director Whitney French. LPCI, a not-for-profit organization, has limited funding capabilities and the volunteer status of most of the staff helps to minimize operations costs. French and other experienced docents train the volunteers through two 90-minute lecture sessions and additional readings and video presentations. They then accompany experienced guides on a variety of tours, learning to read their audiences and adjust their tours to meet a variety of interests and needs. A majority of visitors have some architectural background, so many tours require an advanced knowledge of Mies, modernism, and architectural history. Though the guides are required to cover some specific topics, they are encouraged to share their own perspectives on the house and promote exploratory

⁷² Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. *Master Site Plan for the Farnsworth House*. November 2004.

⁷³ Having been revised so many times, there was no fixed paper copy of the interpretation plan on file at the house's management office at the time of the author's visit.

conversations with their groups. Instead of following a script, docents stop their groups at are five unmarked “stations” along the quarter mile path between the visitor center and the house to provide a few minutes worth of information.⁷⁴ This tactic is meant to allow the visitor to truly experience the advances and reveals of the house while approaching the building through the wooded area. Many who see the house for the first time express awe and appreciation at the exact moment the structure itself comes into view, and the docents try to give as much privacy to this experience as possible. The docents apply the same approach inside the house, providing some basic information and making themselves available to answer questions, but generally allowing visitors to explore the interior on their own. The small scale of the structure and open layout allow this freedom without sacrificing protection of the resources.

Though owned by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) and advised by the National Trust, the Farnsworth House site suffers from a limited budget and strained resources. The high cost of its acquisition created a set-back in terms of start-up capital for operations and maintenance. While visitors pay an admission fee (\$20 per person, \$15 for groups of ten or more, \$30 Season Ticket per person, and free to National Trust and LPCI members),⁷⁵ the revenue that ticket sales and the gift shop produce are not enough to

⁷⁴ Interview with Whitney French, 3 January 2008.

⁷⁵ Farnsworth House. “Visitor Info.” <http://www.farnsworthhouse.org/visitor.htm>. Accessed 28 January 2008.

maintain the site. The site has joined forces with regional architecture groups and Chicago-based tours to generate an additional visitor base. Tours such as the “Farnsworth House PLUS By Bus”, offered through the Chicago Architecture Foundation, connects the house to Mies’s Chicago career by touring the Lakeshore Drive Apartments, the neighboring Esplanade Apartments, the IBM Building, Federal Center, and Illinois Institute of Technology before making the hour-long drive to Plano.⁷⁶

Additional funding comes from LPCI’s fundraising efforts, such as the Farnsworth House Critical Fund for yearly operation and maintenance as a museum, as well as allocation from the LPCI’s annual stewardship allotment.⁷⁷ The site allows for rental opportunities, which help generate additional funds. Wedding ceremonies, receptions, luncheons, seminars, corporate meetings, and photo shoots are approved rental uses, and the house charges \$2,500 for a minimum three hour block.⁷⁸

The house’s fame has drawn attention from celebrities and marketing campaigns, benefitting the site financially. In the past few years, the house has been rented for a photo shoot for shoe designer Stuart Weitzman, the filming of a Kenny Chesney country music video, and most famously, the filming of a Japanese jeans commercial starring Brad Pitt (Figures 19, 20).

⁷⁶ Chicago Architecture Foundation. “Farnsworth PLUS by Bus tour.” http://www.architecture.org/tour_view.aspx?TourID=23. Accessed 31 March 2008.

⁷⁷ Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. <http://www.landmarks.org>. Accessed 18 March 2008.

⁷⁸ Farnsworth House, “Visitor Info”.



Figure 19. Farnsworth House filming Kenny Chesney music video (Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois)



Figure 20. Farnsworth House executive director Whitney French with Brad Pitt (Image courtesy of Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois)

Pitt, an avid architecture enthusiast, visited the site with his family in 2007, bringing the house once again into the celebrity spotlight. Filming the jeans commercial at the house took only a few days, but generated over \$60,000 in revenue for the site - enough to cut the year's deficit in half.⁷⁹

Opening up the house for rentals comes with its own set of problems, however. Executive Director Whitney French was on site during the filming of the Pitt commercial to prevent potential damages. Rightfully so: despite strict rental contract policies, crews for filming and photography often act carelessly around the landmark building. Imagine ten or twenty foot metal rods used for lighting and sound, waving and swaying around the house, teetering dangerously close to the glass panes, as French recounted in regards to the jeans commercial. The influx of necessary trucks and equipment takes a toll on the landscape as well, as the small driveway leading down to the house cannot support large vehicles and the lawn falls victim to tires and dozens of crew members.⁸⁰ The small staff and lack of security make such rentals stressful and potentially hazardous, despite the large amounts of capital they bring in.

While the site aims to garner additional visitation once more funding is available, supplementary programming hopes to open up potentially untapped markets. Some educational opportunities were identified soon after LPCI

⁷⁹ Interview with Whitney French, 3 January 2008.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

acquired the site, and local educators helped create curricula for high school and college students (though none have been implemented yet, and they remain shelved until the site has a deeper staff resource)⁸¹. Site director Whitney French indicated a desire to create further events that could help bring in other markets.

One of Ms. French's ideas is to utilize the 12-acre wooded area east of the house designed by Lanning Roper, which housed Lord Palumbo's sculpture collection, as a changing outdoor display space. Referring to the spot as the "Heritage Grove," Ms. French hopes to transform the now unmaintained and overgrown woodland area into a place for displays of interest. The changing exhibits would change annually and could attract repeat visitors.

At this point, she has offered three proposed uses. The first is to create a preservation education exhibit, positioning pieces of Chicago architectural salvage throughout the woods. Through various interpretative techniques, the display would communicate the buildings' significance in their heyday, as well as the story of their loss. Highlighting lost resources, Ms. French hopes, would convey the importance of saving historic structures to those not necessarily intimate with preservation. This would also be explicitly linked to the story of the Farnsworth House purchase and would serve as an informational resource of case studies and precedents.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The second suggestion is to use the woods as an exhibition space for student architectural projects, forming a partnership with local Illinois- and Chicago-based Masters of Architecture programs and studios that would involve final presentations on the grounds of the Farnsworth House. Various models on a theme would focus the works, such as Building Green, New Modernism, etc. Another variation would be designing a new weekend home for the site, as if the Farnsworth House were never built. The models would then be installed on the grounds, and available for public viewing. This use would not only bring student groups to the site, but force them to work with its physical surroundings and history, exhibit their designs to the public, and expose them as emerging architects.

A third use of the space would also help reduce the need for volunteer docents. A new interpretive signage program that would be physically installed throughout set pathways in the wooded area would aim at diverse groups with a variety of needs. The hope is to create a self-guided tour, with signage that would follow various themes and allow visitors to experience the place in silence. By exploring the site quietly and at one's own pace, the original intent of seclusion and privacy would become more tangible, while the information and stories of the house would still be accessible.

ASSESSMENT

While the rescue of the Farnsworth House in 2003 was one of preservation's greatest and most dramatic success stories, the site still faces

many challenges. Staffing, budget, and access issues create obstacles that must constantly be kept in mind during all aspects of future planning. Its status as an architectural icon now secure, LPCI and the National Trust have an excellent opportunity to utilize the house for additional advancements.

LPCI seems to be making every possible attempt to garner more attention for the site, and visitation numbers will increase as programming becomes more diverse. A limited staff can inhibit this type of growth, so the organization's reliance on volunteers is a smart and expected source of manpower. Visitation numbers have averaged around 6,500 per year during the site's first years of operation, which is less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of what was originally anticipated.⁸²

Currently, almost 70% of visitors are foreign travelers that made a special trip to the Farnsworth House. Most are architectural enthusiasts, professionals, or students - in other words, individuals that are already familiar the site and its significance. Only 8% of visitors are from the state of Illinois, implying that locally and regionally the house does not attract much interest.⁸³ Ideally, the managers of(?) a historic house want visitors to come from the neighboring community, indicating that the locals value and appreciate the resources provided by the site. The residents of Plano, however, have limited allegiance to the Farnsworth House, and play a small role in its maintenance

⁸² LPCI and National Trust, "Master Plan".

⁸³ Interview with Whitney French, 4 January 2008.

and promotion. As with any town that is the proprietor of a major architectural landmark, especially one that does not fit in with the regional pattern, the attention associated with the house is not always welcome or encouraged. In this respect, the proposed reuses of the wooded sculpture garden would be most beneficial. Directing programming to an otherwise overlooked demographic would bring positive attention to the house locally, as well as generate a sense of personal attachment, in the case of the student work exhibitions, and place attachment, through the Chicago salvage installations.

This increase of local and, perhaps more importantly, repeat visitors would help to alleviate what is potentially the site's greatest hindrance: access. Located 60 miles west of Chicago, the house is not easily accessible by public transportation, thus requiring a carefully planned trip, and is usually not included on the itineraries of tourists in Chicago. There is a train station in the town of Plano that has a line from Chicago, but service only runs twice a day (inbound once in the morning, and outbound once at night) and the station is over three miles from the Visitor Center. Therefore, the best and most appropriate mode of transportation is by car, which immediately reduces the potential visitor pool. Luckily, the site's cooperation with Chicago-based tour operations has started to bring additional Chicago tourists.

Despite this, these visitors remain part of the demographic already interested in architecture. What would benefit the Farnsworth House most

would be to expand its sights to include programming that might appeal to other interests. The suggestion of interpretive signage that would be placed throughout the wooded area and focus on various themes hints at this approach. Such an altering of programming could be understandably met with hesitation, as it runs the risk of deviating too far from the established narrative of significance. But the meaning of the house can still be explored through alternative themes, such as American lifestyles and interiors. One of the major pitfalls for Modernist architecture is that many believe it to no longer foster an appropriate or practical living situation. An exploration of the shifts in American comforts and home lives, with the Farnsworth House acting as a case study and example, could bring in an audience that would otherwise launch those exact arguments against the house.

The stewards of the Farnsworth House have thus far managed a miraculous feat: by saving the structure from potential relocation or destruction, they have successfully safe-guarded its existence for future generations. The current interpretive scheme utilizes its architectural significance in the best of ways, and the narrative associated with it is thorough and captivating. But unfortunately the very aspect that made the house so dynamic will serve as the site's biggest obstacle: the seclusion and remote location that enabled such a ground-breaking plan, a design that would later change the direction of Mid-Century architecture, now limits its ability to be viewed by the public.

The question then has to be raised, and will be addressed further in the final chapter: if the very aspect that defined the house now limits its success as a house museum, is public access the most appropriate use? In this case, because of the regional lack of interest in Modernist architecture and the risks that threatened the house at the time of its sale, public access is indeed the best use. But the Farnsworth House has a surrounding community that does not feel connected with the site, and the only way to remedy that is to reconstruct its vision to embrace its local constituency and increase linkage with its own region.

CHAPTER 4: THE GLASS HOUSE

*“When people come into my house, I say “Just shut up and look around.” -
Philip Johnson⁸⁴*

HOUSE HISTORY

date: 1949

architect: Philip Johnson

client: Philip Johnson

location: New Canaan, CT

square footage: 1792 ft ²

estate size: 47.5 acres

materials: glass, steel, concrete, brick, earth, stucco

alterations: Guest House interiors redesigned in 1953, driveway reconfigured in 1964

additional buildings: Guest House (1949), pool (1955), concrete pavilion (1962), painting gallery (1965), sculpture gallery (1970), entrance posts (1977), studio (1980), Ghost House (1984), Kirstein tower (1985), Da Monsta (1995)

designation: National Register (February 19, 1997), NHL (February 19, 1997)

Always highly aware of his celebrity status, Philip Johnson acted as his own client when designing the Glass House in the late 1940s. From then until his death in 2005, he remained a central architectural presence, around whom other architects and artists gathered.

When the Glass House was completed, it brought Johnson instant celebrity at the age of 44. Designing buildings was not his first career, however. Having received a gift of ALCOA stocks from his father as a young

⁸⁴ The National Trust for Historic Preservation. “The National Trust for Historic Preservation Announces The Opening of The Philip Johnson Glass House in Spring 2007.” Press Release. 24 January 2007.

man, Johnson was a millionaire before he graduated college.⁸⁵ The large fortune allowed him to travel Europe extensively throughout the early 1930s, where he gained an appreciation for the Modern architecture he experienced. Once back in the US, Johnson joined up with Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Alfred Barr, the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), to launch “The International Style: Architecture Since 1922.” It was this exhibit and accompanying book that would launch the Modern Movement in America.⁸⁶

Johnson would go on to serve as the first director of MoMA’s Architecture and Design department for two years, before taking an unexpected turn into extremist right-wing politics.⁸⁷ Perhaps attempting to return to favor with his previous social circle of designers and intellectuals, Johnson enrolled in Harvard’s Graduate School of Design in 1940, permanently withdrawing from politics. While there, he channeled his love for the International Style modernism into a thesis project that was a testament to his appreciation of the Miesian aesthetic.

After Johnson acquired a five-acre lot in New Canaan, he began the designs for the Glass House. Echoing the first attempts of his thesis project, he came up with twenty-seven various designs. The scheme he finally settled on

⁸⁵ Author’s tour of the site, 12 March 2008.

⁸⁶ Dean, 76.

⁸⁷ Johnson rarely spoke of this period in his life, except to call it “the stupidest thing I ever did. I never forgave myself, and I never can atone for it.” (Dean, 76)

bore an unexpected resemblance to Mies's initial designs for the Farnsworth House. It should be no surprise however, as Johnson had recently prepared a retrospective on Mies's work and inevitably saw initial drawings for the house in Illinois. Johnson himself always admitted to the influence of Mies's design, and called the German architect an original genius.⁸⁸

The house is a perfect rectangle in plan, an oblong cube constructed of sheets of quarter-inch glass and framed in black painted steel (Figure 21). Upon entrance, if following the perimeter, stands a round brick column, one half of which is the bathroom, the other a fireplace. Just beyond that is the sleeping nook, screened by free-standing cabinets. The living room is defined by a very specific placement of Mies van der Rohe-designed furniture over a white rug (Figure 22).⁸⁹ Bookending the living space are two pieces of art, a Poussin landscape on an easel and a sculpture by Elie Nadelman. An exposed countertop caps the stretch of free-standing cabinets that create the kitchen corner, and a dining table and chairs round out the fourth corner. In the direct center of each glass wall is a door which opens to the exterior. There are no windows in the house, but opening all the doors created a sufficient cross

⁸⁸ Johnson did, however, note that he was indebted to a number of sources, including French 18th Century architect Claude Nicolas Ledoux and 19th Century German designer Karl Friederich Schinkel (Dean, 74).

⁸⁹ The placement of the furniture was so meticulously planned out that small dots indicate each pieces position, so that if moved during cleaning they can be put back as Johnson intended them.



Figure 21. Philip Johnson Glass House (Image courtesy of S. Jenkins, *The Houses of Philip Johnson*)

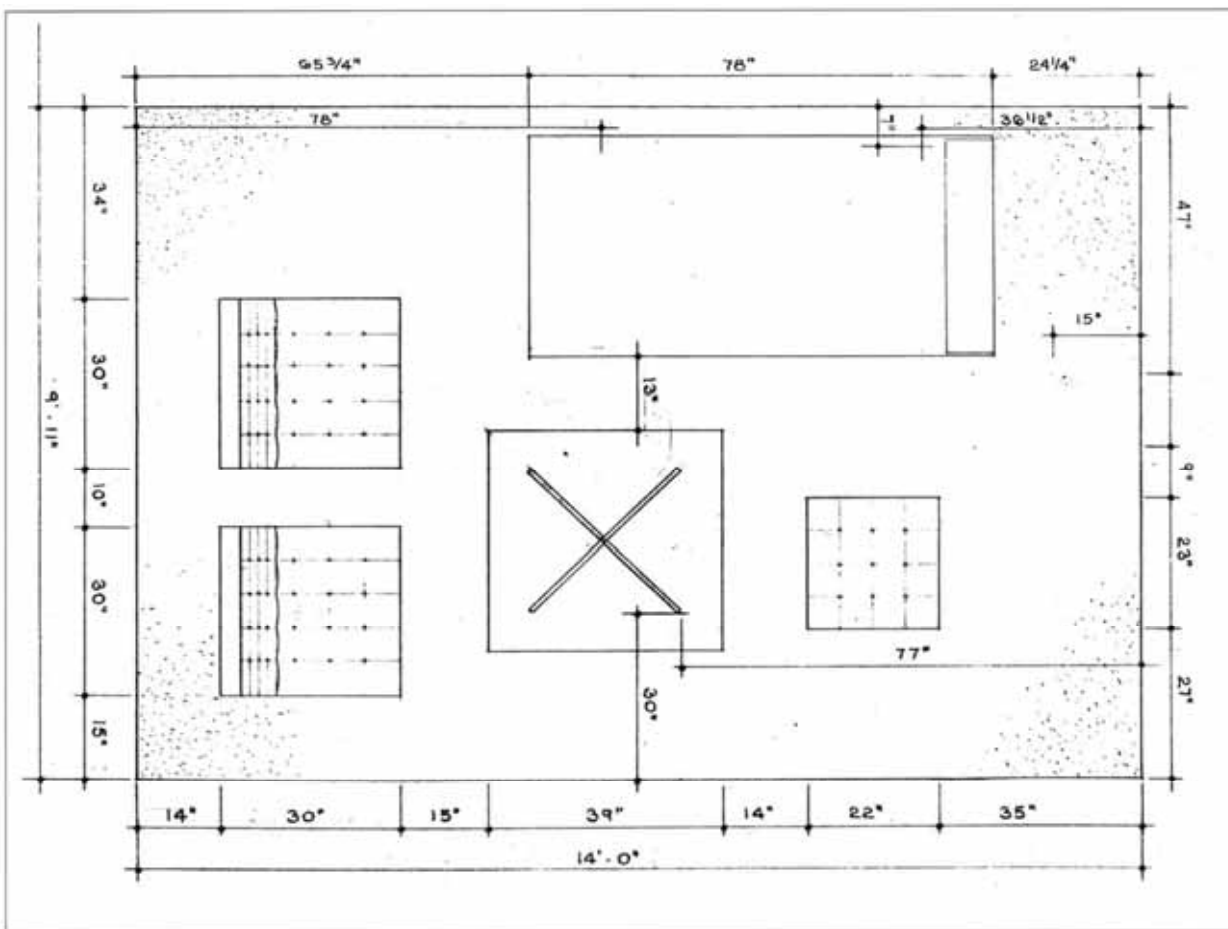


Figure 22. Glass House furniture plan (Image courtesy of P. Johnson, *Philip Johnson : The Architect in His Own Words*)

breeze in the summer. “Johnson considered the house to be a viewing platform, and its purpose was to provide a vantage point on the landscape.”⁹⁰

As the house is placed at the edge of an overlook and sited below a hilltop, it immediately plays a role within the surrounding nature, even if by placement alone (Figure 23). The landscape has been manipulated by the careful pruning and cutting of trees, shaped to expose a play of clearings. Each building, additionally, is sited carefully and with great thought so as not to disrupt the framework created by the existing stone walls.⁹¹

The site grew over the course of fifty years, with the addition of ten other structures (Figures 24, 25, 26, 27, 28). The brick guest house was built at the same time as the Glass House, and is the only structure on the property to have undergone alterations, as Johnson turned the two-bedroom space into one, with a vaulted ceiling copied from the breakfast room of English architect Sir John Soane’s home in London. Each additional building reflected Johnson’s evolving aesthetic and his breaks with rigid architectural styles. It was during the 1950s and 1960s that he truly began to challenge Modernist dogma and embrace his love of history to experiment in new ways, such as the Concrete Pavilion in 1963. Constructed on a smaller scale, the pavilion seems tiny to a person looking at it from the main house, making “a normal person feel

⁹⁰ National Trust for Historic Preservation Press Release. 24 January 2007.

⁹¹ The site has stone walls that once acted as dividers for the farmland that previously existed on the site. Ever the historian, Johnson not only kept the stone walls, he designed his estate around them, incorporating the site’s previous life into its new one.



Figure 23. Glass House structure within site setting (Image author's own)

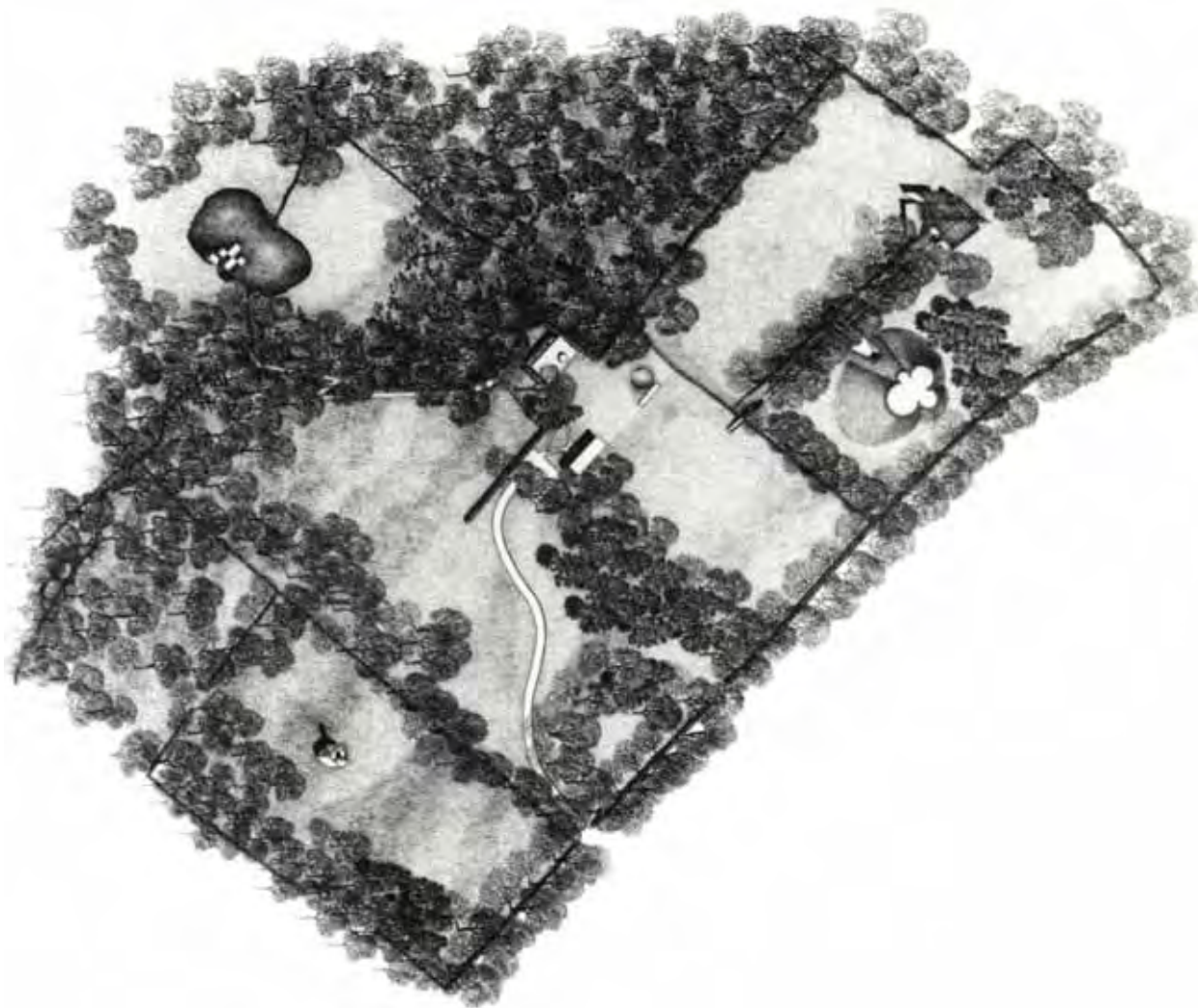


Figure 24. Glass House site plan (Image courtesy of Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Philip Johnson Papers Archival Accession No. 980060)



Figure 25. Glass House brick guest house (Image author's own)



Figure 26. Glass House concrete pavilion (Image author's own)



Figure 27. Glass House painting gallery (Image author's own)



Figure 28. Glass House sculpture gallery (Image author's own)

enormous and important.”⁹² The Glass House became a salon for up-and-coming Yale architects and new artists to meet and exchange ideas (Figure 29). Johnson’s love of art and the artistic method inspired the creation of the Painting Gallery (1965) and Sculpture Gallery (1970). With each new building, he explored his curiosity and interest in the new.⁹³

Despite the differences in design, each structure retains three principles according to Johnson. The first is the idea of a procession, a game of enclosures and reveals. He likes to play with the way a person experiences a place while walking through it.⁹⁴ Second is the treatment of buildings like caves, insisting that each space be comfortable and secure. The third is “his conviction that all his architecture is sculpture.”⁹⁵ For Johnson, architecture is art, and buildings “are artistic expressions.”

In 1986, Johnson bequeathed the entirety of the property - buildings, landscapes, possessions - to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, reserving life rights. In preparation for the shift of ownership, he built Da Monsta (1995) as a visitor center (Figure 30). But Johnson lived in the house with his long-time partner David Whitney, a renowned art collector, curator, and art advisor, until his death in 2005. The two maintained the house and the site meticulously, and until his death a year after Johnson’s, Whitney directed

⁹² Dean, 77.

⁹³ This constant shift in stylistic approaches was at times criticized as reactionary and irrelevant.

⁹⁴ Author’s tour of the site, 12 March 2008.

⁹⁵ Dean, 79.



Figure 29. Glass House gathering with (left to right) Andy Warhol, David Whitney, Philip Johnson, Dr. John Dalton and Robert A.M. Stern (Image courtesy of The Philip Johnson Glass House)



Figure 30. Glass House Da Monsta (Image courtesy of S. Jenkins, *The Houses of Philip Johnson*)

the estate “to support the National Trust’s preservation and programming of the Glass House.”⁹⁶

HOUSE MANAGEMENT:

parent museum/owner/governing authority: National Trust for Historic Preservation

date of acquisition: 1986, open to public 2007

open to public: open mid-April through late-October

primary interpretive period/theme: leave the site as it was acquired in 2005

date and style of interiors: interiors as acquired in 2005

artifact collection: personal belongings and collections of Philip Johnson and David Whitney: extensive library and art collection

A unique advantage of the Glass House’s interpretative plan was that the original resident, client, and architect had a hand in determining what would happen to the site once the National Trust acquired it. According to the press release for the opening of the Glass House, the Trust’s mission is:

“...for the 47-acre campus to become a center point and catalyst for the preservation of modern architecture, landscape, and art, and a canvas for inspiration, experimentation and cultivation honoring the legacy of Philip Johnson (1906-2005) and David Whitney (1939-2005). In addition to guided tours and on-site seminars, the Glass House plans to launch a residential fellowship beginning in 2008. The Glass House will also provide leadership in the national preservation of modern architecture and landscape and engagement in regional preservation efforts.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ National Trust for Historic Preservation Press Release. 24 January 2007.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The Trust hopes to accomplish this mission through three approaches: public tours, preservation of the Modern Movement training and education, and on-site cultivation of new talents.

The first approach - access to the public - is in most ways the most traditional in its reuse as a house museum. Tours are the main source of visitors, and all begin at the new visitor center in downtown New Canaan. Located across the street from the New Canaan train station, the 2,000 square foot facility features an interactive exhibit and museum store. The exhibit, created by Apple, is a media installation that runs on twenty-four Mac computers installed into a wall (Figure 31). Each screen simultaneously displays a video loop depicting a range of topics regarding the life and career of Philip Johnson and David Whitney. They all focus on different themes (for instance, one is a slideshow of childhood photos of Johnson, while another shows Johnson's Rolodex flipped card by card, filled with the names of celebrities and friends) (Figure 32).

After visitors have finished exploring the visitor center, a shuttle van takes them to the Glass House property. Tours are limited to ten people and occur six times per day, and all are led by a trained guide. Before the site opened in April 2007, the entire 2007 season had sold out, and by March of 2008, both the 2008 and 2009 seasons were also completely booked. There are four different tour options, each one expanding on the experience. The standard tour is 90 minutes, costs \$25, and includes access to the Glass House,



Figure 31. Glass House visitor center media wall (Image author's own)

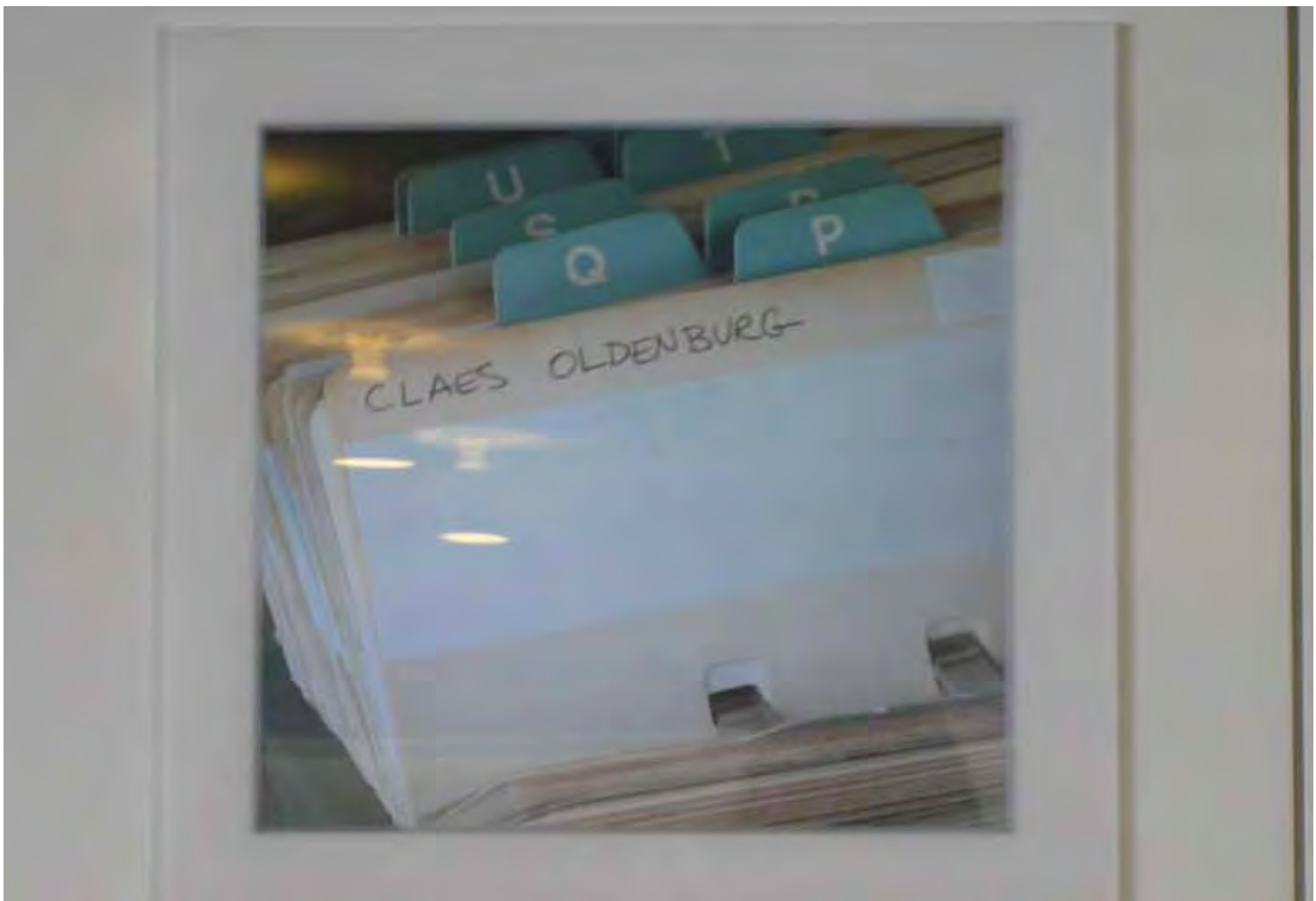


Figure 32. Glass House media wall exhibit (Image author's own)

Painting Gallery, Sculpture Gallery, and Da Monsta. An extended tour is two hours, costs \$40, allows for more time at each location, and allows visitors to sketch and photograph the property. For \$500, visitors are allowed special access through a private tour when all other tours are booked, as well as during the off-season. A fourth tour, known as The Patron Tour, includes a picnic lunch on the grounds and can be tailored to follow a specific theme. This specialized tour costs \$1,000 per person.

While money does not seem to be the biggest hurdle for the Glass House site, it is of need at every turn. “Johnson left the house to the National Trust with an \$8 million endowment; Whitney’s estate is estimated to raise \$8 million–\$9 million more.”⁹⁸ The Trust estimates that it will need to raise about \$400,000 per year for operating expenses, and then between \$300,000 and \$700,000 annually for the next five years for capital restoration. Additional conservation funding, for projects such as the conservation of selected artworks in the collection and the purchase of adjacent parcels of land to protect the viewshed from development, is solicited from private donors and sponsorship.

In addition to tours, the property will also be used for informational and educational seminars, utilizing the Glass House as a context for innovation in architecture, art, and design. Participants will explore the collections on site and contribute to large-scale preservation activities. One such example is the

⁹⁸ Lange, “Extending the Legacy,” 93.

Glass House Conversations project, a “series of six invitational dialogues” that aims to bring together great minds in art and design in the tradition of Johnson and Whitney. An additional Oral History initiative, set to begin in 2008 with initial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, will aim to capture insight and stories from those who regularly visited and contributed to the Glass House since its construction.⁹⁹ Beginning in 2008, the site will also become host to the invitational Glass House Residential Fellowship, which will provide an opportunity for young talent to develop their skills on the property. The fellowship recipient will be housed in Calluna Farms, the former residence of David Whitney located at the edge of the site, and work at the site. The Trust hopes that eventual partnerships with furniture companies, such as Knoll, will be formed to produce the designs of fellows.¹⁰⁰

As well as education regarding Philip Johnson himself, the Glass House property will become the Trust’s new center for *Modernism*. *Preserve the Modern*, a new initiative started in conjunction with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Trust, and other Modernist preservation groups such as Docomomo, will be based from the site and aims to increase awareness of recent past preservation through four tactics on various levels:

1. Educate (on site): Document preservation projects at the Glass House online

⁹⁹ National Trust for Historic Preservation. *The Glass House*. “Glass House Programs.” <http://philipjohnsonglasshouse.org/programs/>. Accessed 4 April 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Lange, “Extending the Legacy,” 91.

2. Preserve (regional): Launch a survey of 90+ Modern Homes in New Canaan, CT to work toward a thematic national register nomination
3. Connect (national): provide a resource guide to Preserve the Modern activities across the US
4. Proactive (ideas): proactive preservation ideas.¹⁰¹

Current documentation and conservation projects are already listed on the Glass House website, available as case studies on the repair of twentieth century buildings and the unique problems that their manufactured materials pose. The resource guide is also available online, and includes information on grassroots Modern activities across the country, such as Modern real estate resources, Modern auctions, and Modern advocacy groups. As an online repository for news regarding recent past preservation, the Preserve the Modern initiative should be a helpful tool in creating connections on the national level.

It is the New Canaan Modern Home Survey, however, that is the largest, and perhaps most influential, of the site's programs. Co-funded by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism and the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, this survey of Modern homes in the town will "surpass most normal survey criteria" to meet both CT SHPO and National Register guidelines.¹⁰² Through research, fieldwork, and photography, the project will produce historic context statements, character biographies, and a Modernism

¹⁰¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation. *The Glass House*. "Preserve the Modern." <http://philipjohnsonglasshouse.org/preserve/>. Accessed 4 April 2008.

¹⁰² National Trust for Historic Preservation. *The Glass House*. "New Canaan Moderns Home Survey: An Update." <http://philipjohnsonglasshouse.org/preserve/preserve/>. Accessed 4 April 2008.

glossary. The goal of the survey is to provide a model for other states and communities with dense concentrations of modern resources to use.¹⁰³

To date, over eighty homeowners in New Canaan have been contacted, and with their consent, a more detailed survey of landscapes, additional buildings, and materials will compliment material previously collected by the New Canaan Historical Society and Docomomo.¹⁰⁴ The privacy of the homeowners will be protected however, as a blind labeling system will be developed. Such a survey could prove to be pivotal in the development of recent past preservation, as “[while] the recognition of mid-century Modern homes and their role as an asset within real estate investment is growing, the formal recognition of this architecture is still necessary for a proactive approach to preservation.”¹⁰⁵

ASSESSMENT

The Glass House is a unique case in more ways than one. In terms of interpretation, the client/architect who endowed the house left his intentions known. Johnson was such a celebrity that the architectural and art communities wanted to know what would happen to his property, even before he passed away. In terms of management, the site’s executive director, Christy McLear, is determined to take the property beyond its initial stage as a house museum, and make it something larger, with a stronger impact. Her

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

commitment to creating innovative strategies for alternative uses and programming is the forward-thinking approach necessary for success. Additionally, the site has a large endowment, as well as many wealthy patrons who gladly donate to ensure its advancement.

Despite its exceptional circumstances, the Glass House should be looked at as a model for Modernist residential conversion. The visitation and interest is there, and the management staff needs to continue its exemplary work at generating attention. Since the property will be housing and facilitating the National Trust's new initiatives on recent past preservation, it needs to be proactive at constructing positive support.

Why does the Glass House seem to be off to such a productive start, especially compared to the Farnsworth House? The obvious answers all stand true: the Glass House has more money, enabling a larger staff and additional resources. But the largest difference has little to do with financials, and much to do with location. The Glass House is situated in a wealthy town that has been declared a treasure trove of Modernist architecture. Few other places possess the density of Modern residences that New Canaan does, and the infiltration of the Modern aesthetic shows in the community's support of the site. Since so many local properties are of a similar time period and belong to

the portfolios of Modernism's northeastern masters, there is an instant appreciation for, and even pride in, the Glass House.¹⁰⁶

Located a mere fifty miles northeast of New York City, and accessible by train, the site also benefits from the visitation of the architectural and art communities that were so integrated in Philip Johnson's life. This built-in audience of design professionals and enthusiasts can make their visit a day trip. Unlike Plano, the town is easily reached by public transportation, and the visitor center is centrally located downtown to facilitate out-of-town guests.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the interpretation of the site encourages repeat visitors through varied and ever-changing programming. Projects and event offerings continue to evolve, and the visitation demographics will do so as well. By creating a pilgrimage site for architourism, executive director Christy McLear and her staff will renew interest in both Modernism and preservation. Acting as a strong and glamorous voice for the recent past, they have the momentum necessary to generate additional support for the movement.

The use of the property to promote new designers highlights its other successful aspect - the continuation of Johnson's ideals. As McLear states, "There's the idea of inspiration and cultivation. Who are the next Harvard Five?"

¹⁰⁶ The New Canaan Historical Society used to host tours of other Modernist residences in the city. Once the Trust's survey of Modern resources is complete, the Historical Society plans to utilize a soon-to-be restored Landis Gores pavilion from 1959 as a salon of sorts, exhibiting the survey results as an architectural exhibit of the Modern Movement in New Canaan (Author's tour, 12 March 2008).

It helps bring the place to life.”¹⁰⁷ As both architect and client, it would be easy to focus attention on Johnson as a man, but the Glass House’s approach instead focuses on his ideas and his thematic contributions to the design world. While the house itself is an object to be admired, more impressive are the conversations and ideas that it helped facilitate. By continuing with this tradition, the Glass House truly can be a monument to its creator.

¹⁰⁷ Lange, “Extending the Legacy,” 123.

CHAPTER 5: THE FISHER HOUSE

“House, a house, home: House is the form, in the mind of wonder it should be there without shape or dimension. A house is a conditional interpretation of these spaces. This is design. In my opinion the greatness of an architect depends on his powers of realization of that which is house, rather than his design of a house which is a circumstantial act. Home is the house and the occupants. Home becomes different with each occupant. The client for whom a house is designed states the areas he needs. The architect creates spaces out of those required areas. It may also be said that his house created for the particular family must have the character of being good for another. The design in this way reflects its trueness to Form.” - Louis Kahn¹⁰⁸

HOUSE HISTORY

date: 1960-67

architect: Louis Kahn

client: Dr. and Mrs. Norman Fisher

location: Hatboro, PA

square footage:

estate size: about 2 acres

materials: stone masonry, wood framing, wood siding

alterations: insertion of dining room window 6 months after construction,
addition of bridge over stream (designed by Kahn)

additional buildings: storage shed, footbridge

designation: none to date

Louis Kahn believed that every building was a house, regardless of what activity took place within it.¹⁰⁹ It seems fitting, then, that some of his most recognized and revered designs are for residential projects. Between the end of World War II and 1972, he designed twenty houses, and of these, nine were built to completion. Possibly the most famous is the Dr. Norman Fisher House

¹⁰⁸ Kahn, Louis. “Form and Design.” *Architectural Design*, Vol. 31, April 1961, p148.

¹⁰⁹ Ronner, 179. “Every building is a house, regardless of whether it is a Senate, or whether it is just a house.”

in suburban Philadelphia, which demonstrates brilliantly his architectural ideas regarding order and space.

Kahn's design theories started to truly articulate themselves in the early 1950s. Possessing a laborious sense of order, his designs were simultaneously formal and abstract, "compositions of solid and void imbued with ineffable qualities of light."¹¹⁰ While his Modernist contemporaries ushered in a new style of house built of steel and glass, he used traditional materials such as wood and stone. Glass, wood, and stone "collide[d] without meditation, drawing out the distinctive characteristics of each."¹¹¹ In most of his designs, not just the residential, Kahn paired materials in a dualistic manner - brick with concrete, wood with stone, and all accented with large panes of glass. What made Kahn so innovative, however, was not material choice alone, but also his reintroduction of "the antique notion of mass" with the structural elements clearly expressed.¹¹² Instead of addressing Modernism in the manner of the International Style architects, he rethought aspects of spatial divisions, fenestrations, and the relationship between interior and exterior.

In 1950 Kahn won a fellowship to the American Academy in Rome, and his travels in Greece and Italy had a profound impact on his design sensibilities. Inspired by the ancient ruins, he began to hunt for a geometric order influenced by his exposure to historic architecture. The Modernist canon of

¹¹⁰ Reed, 2.

¹¹¹ Saito, 11.

¹¹² Brownlee and DeLong, 51.

open-ended spatial planning was challenged when Kahn started to differentiate spaces in externally visible ways. No longer did furniture placement dictate separation of a space; instead, each function of the structure was expressed as an independent geometric unit.¹¹³

Kahn initiated his early houses' design in "diagrammatic terms,"¹¹⁴ housing specific uses in separate structural units.¹¹⁵ He believed that there needed to be a distant demarcation between the spaces in which people interacted and the spaces in which they spent time alone. By creating discrete sleeping and living units, he rejected traditional approaches of dividing large volumes with walls for smaller spaces. Embracing the square as a prototypical geometric element, he created common space units for essential functions (eating, sleeping, entertaining) and created variations in space by manipulating the combinations, scale, and arrangements.¹¹⁶ Declaring his preference, he once stated, "I always start with a square, no matter what the problem is."¹¹⁷

In the M. Morton Goldenberg House (1959, unbuilt), this geometry is expanded and explored further: by creating 45-degree radial units, the space is reconfigured into diagonals (Figure 33). This diagonal geometry is also seen in his Bryn Mawr Dormitory design, which was commissioned at about the same

¹¹³ Brownlee and DeLong, 55.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 56.

¹¹⁵ An initial example of this is the Francis H. Adler house, 1954-55. The house was designed as three separate structural elements, all containing different uses.

¹¹⁶ Saito, 13.

¹¹⁷ Ronner, 98.

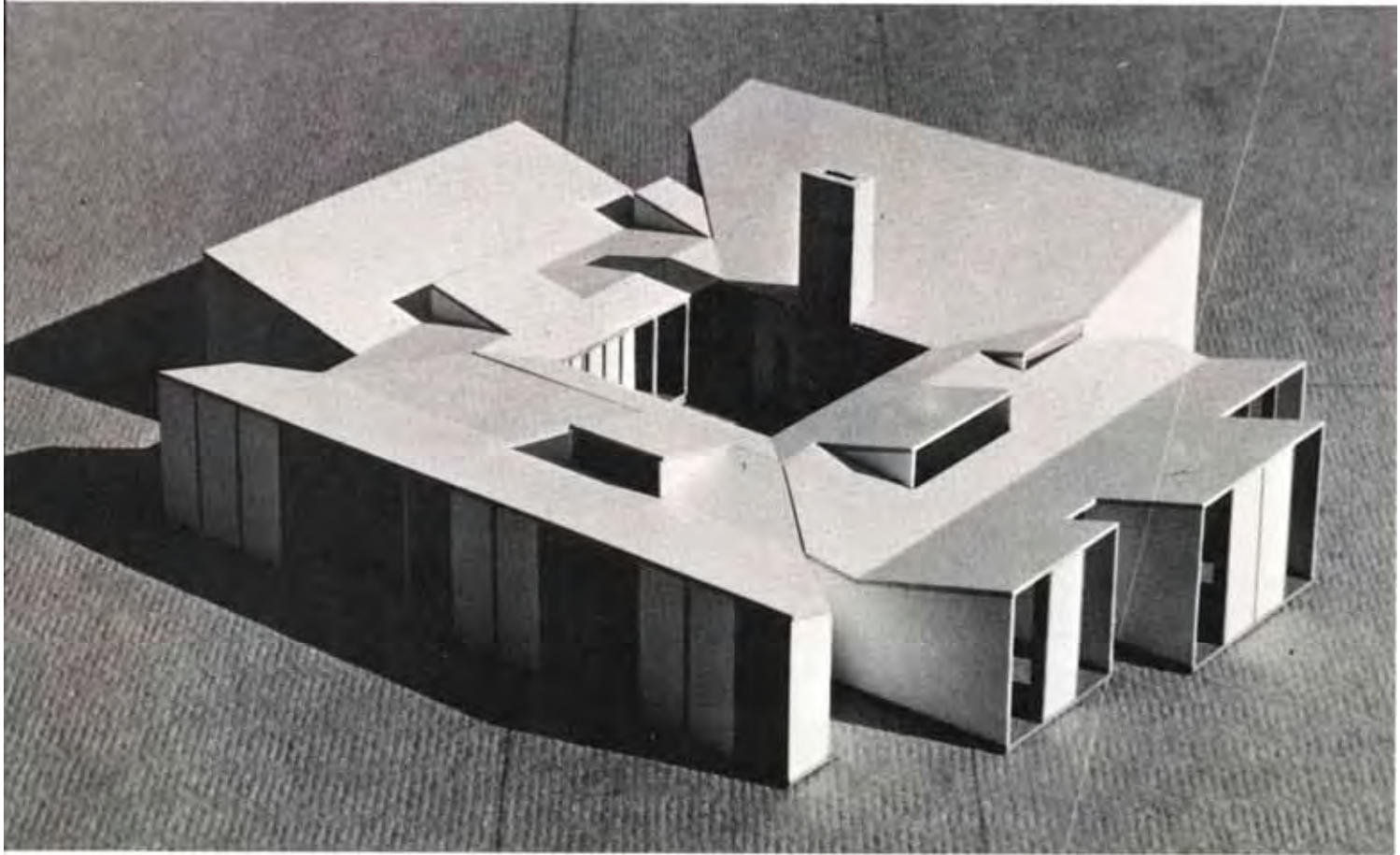


Figure 33. Louis Kahn M. Morton Goldenberg House (unbuilt) (Image courtesy of H. Ronner *Louis I. Kahn : Complete Work, 1935-1974*)



Figure 34. Louis Kahn Bryn Mawr dormitory (Image courtesy of P. Gast, *Louis I. Kahn*)

time as the Fisher house (Figure 34). For the dormitory, Kahn rotated three squares, “placing them at a 45-degree angle to create a concatenated-diamond plan.”¹¹⁸

When Kahn received the commission in 1960 for the Fisher residence, his work in the public realm was creating what would be the busiest period of his career. Additional projects he worked on while designing the house include the Salk institute, the Fort Wayne Fine Arts Center, the Institute in Ahmedabad, and the capital complex in Dhaka.¹¹⁹ The site on which the house would be placed was a two acre suburban lot of trees and a meandering stream, located directly off a low-traffic road. The Fishers had no intention of hiring a celebrity architect for their project, but were referred to Kahn by another architectural firm.¹²⁰ The planning of the design took over four years, and Kahn went through eight other proposals before settling on a plan consisting of two cubes arranged at a 45-degree angle sometime in 1963 (Figure 35).¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Saito, 93.

¹¹⁹ Project timelines compiled in the appendices of Brownlee and Delong.

¹²⁰ The commission came so casually, that Mrs. Fisher recalls looking up Kahn’s office in the phonebook to initially contact him. (Interview with Doris Fisher, 30 January 2008)

¹²¹ According to the Fishers, “In the first set of plans was a handsome stone cube with the outside walls leaning inward as they ascended. The inside walls were vertical and described a circle. At the base the walls were three feet thick. Of course the amount of mass in the corners was major. The masonry contractor estimated the cost of this work alone would be \$250,000. We had nine sets of plans during the formulation of our final plan. If we were not satisfied with a set of plans, he would not modify them but insisted on starting over.” (Norman and Doris Fisher, “Seven Years with Louis Kahn,” from Saito, 151)

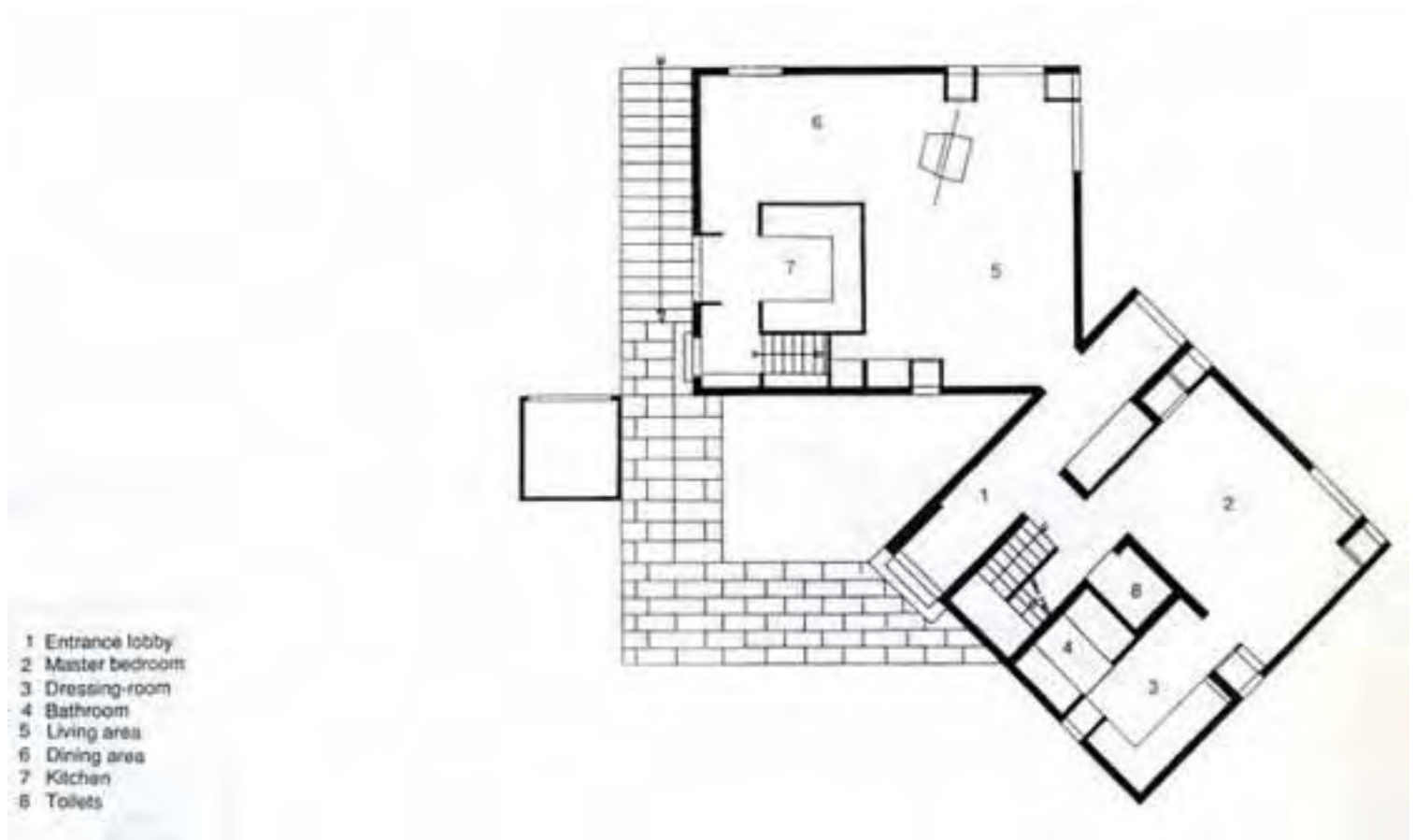


Figure 35. Fisher house first floor plan (Image courtesy of P. Gast, *Louis I. Kahn*)

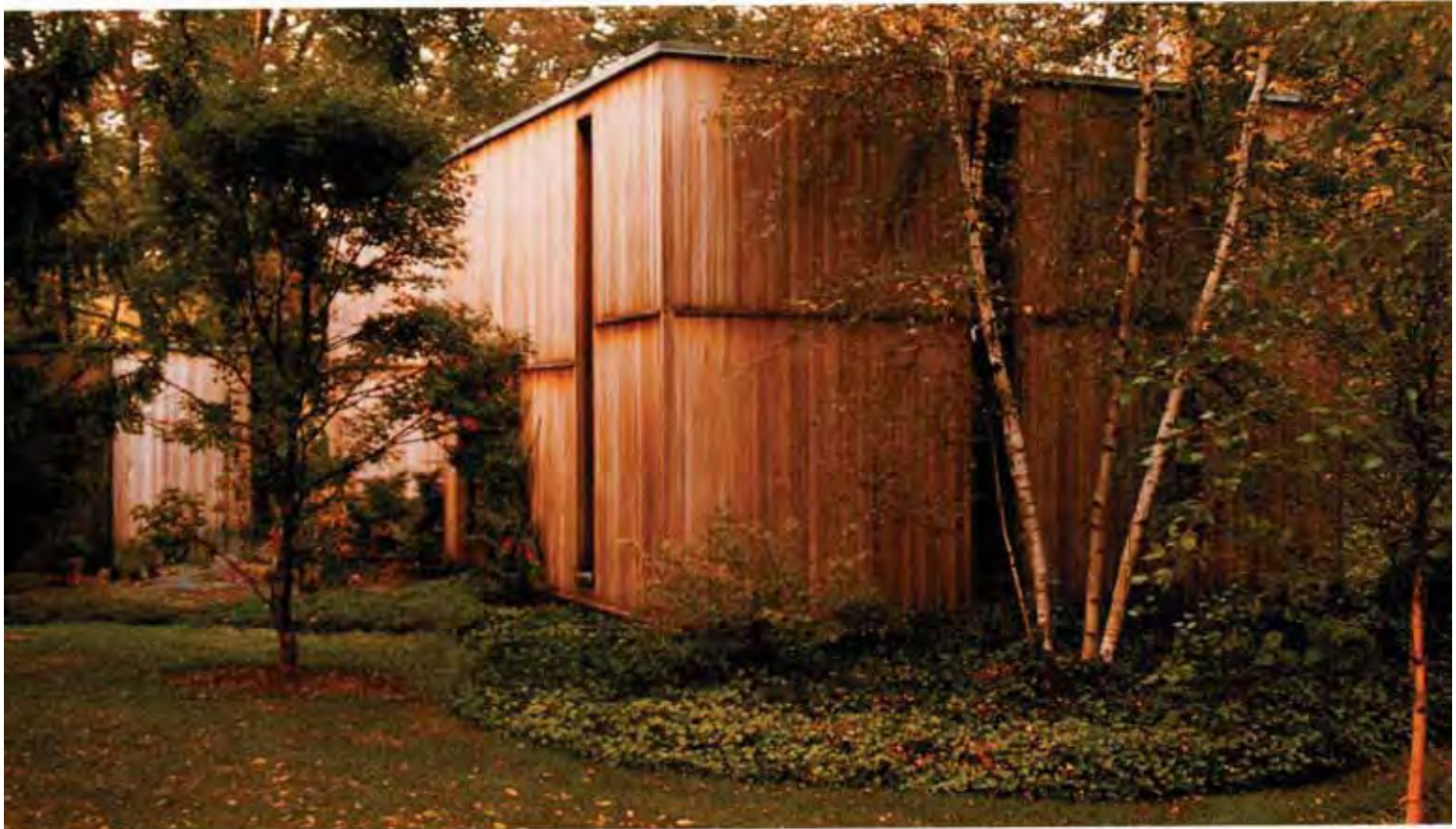


Figure 36. Fisher House view from street (Image courtesy of P. Gast, *Louis I. Kahn*)

According to the site plans, the house was to be situated about eighty feet back from the road. To the passer-by, the building sits as two large wooden cubes set close together; no windows are visible from the street, but long slits punctuate the otherwise solid exterior sides (Figure 36). While the road defines one end of the property, the other end consists of a sloping grass hill that meets a small stream with woods beyond it. “The basic design premise for this property was to liberate the house to this vista while at the same time shutting out the view to the south and west on the opposite side, which faces the road.”¹²²

To facilitate this setup, the plan of the house consists of two cubic shapes - a two-story “sleeping” square housing the bedrooms, bathrooms, and a foyer, and a “living” rectangle with a living room, dining room, and kitchen. The double-height living room fills over half of the living section (Figure 37), and the kitchen exists as another cube within the cube. A basement level beneath the rectangular section cuts into the side of the hill facing the creek below (Figure 38). The only connection between the two blocks is a four-foot-wide opening in which the entrance foyer of the square penetrates the living room of the rectangle.¹²³ Within the design, the cubes strike a symmetrical balance, separately articulated but “juxtaposed so that no single one

¹²² Saito, 94.

¹²³ McCaster, 297.



Figure 37. Fisher House double height living room (Image author's own)



Figure 38. Fisher House stone basement level (Image author's own)

dominate[s].”¹²⁴ This equality of space removes any type of hierarchical insinuations, and each element plays just as vital a role as the next.

The placement of each part of the structure on the site was meticulously planned. As the cube containing the bedrooms is angled to the east, the windows facing the woods are flooded with morning sun. In contrast, the large glass windows in the living room and dining room in the other living cube are exposed all day to the constant light coming from the north (Figure 39).¹²⁵ The windows of the sleeping cube that faces the road are either placed within the v-shaped corner where the cubes intersect or the deeply incised ventilation openings seen only as slits from street. By rotating the cubes at 45 degrees in such a position on the plot, Kahn ensured that the windows would receive both eastern and western sun and fill the house with changing light throughout the day.

The main entrance to the house is positioned within the sleeping cube, opening to a hall that is punctuated with a large glass opening at the opposite end, which creates a line of vision straight through to the backyard and woods. The hall creates the point of intersection of the sleeping and living cubes, and from this spot the living room, fireplace and dining room are “all visible from

¹²⁴ Brownlee and DeLong, 205.

¹²⁵ Saito, 95. The original plans for the dining room contained only one small window, set off to the side. Kahn felt that since the rest of the house was open and visible, the Fishers might want an enclosed dining space for privacy. Six months after moving in, they decided they did not, and Kahn redesigned the wall to include an eight by ten foot glass pane window and two functioning wooden ventilation openings. (Norman and Doris Fisher, “Seven Years with Louis Kahn,” from Saito, 153.)



Figure 39. Fisher House living room built-in window seat with northern exposure (Image author's own)

the diagonal perspective.”¹²⁶ Additionally, the backyard landscape is visible from all vantage points; sometimes the positioning of the windows seems to visually erase the house’s material elements, creating an intense sense of spatial depth.

Within the living room of the living cube, Kahn designed a window seat for the eastern corner. Simultaneously cozy and flushed with natural light, this area illustrates the idea of the window area as a way to create motion and life in a room. The built-in bench is sculptural itself, but is surrounded by seven differently shaped windows and four wooden panels. Answering the bench is the semi-circular ashlar masonry fireplace, rising through the floor from the basement like a pillar (Figure 40). Of the fireplace, Kahn says, “I feel it represents the presence of a man and therefore is of home.”¹²⁷

The lower basement section is constructed as a stone foundation, while the two cube portions are clad in vertical wood siding. Elevation views suggest a minimalist quality to the design, as the large fixed glass panel windows have a seemingly abstract placement (Figure 41). Deeply set slit windows on the road side of each cube contrast the thin, delicate quality of the wood siding. The stone element of the basement is continued into the interior as the freestanding fireplace, set at a diagonal angle within the open space. This unexpected placement further plays with the theme of separation and

¹²⁶ Saito, 96.

¹²⁷ “An Architect Speaks His Mind.” *House & Garden*, vol. 142, no. 4. October 1972, p124., as reproduced in Latour, 296.



Figure 40. Fisher House fireplace rising behind kitchen (Image author's own)



Figure 41. Fisher House rear elevation windows (Image author's own)

movement throughout the different sections. Here the stone foundation appears to emerge from the hillside itself, and then rise throughout the entirety of the living cube, simultaneously compressing and connecting the building into the landscape.

The unique use of the site to facilitate such an innovative design was not lost on the community in which the house stood. The neighbors “were intrigued with the building of the house, though most were concerned and a few alarmed by the contemporary nature of the building, situated in the middle of the standard suburban architecture.”¹²⁸ But the design fit, for though it was a radical approach to domesticity, it was successful. It embraced the landscape and responded to the circumstances of the plot. Kahn once said, “A house must be made so that any person, not necessarily the one who ordered it, must feel he can make there a home.”¹²⁹ While the Fisher House was created to accommodate the family that commissioned it, the design can appeal to a multitude of potential residents.

CURRENT DISCUSSIONS

The Fishers planned all along to open their home to those interested in its residential idiosyncrasies. Throughout their lives there, the house has proven a pilgrimage site to Kahn fans and scholars, and the Fishers have always

¹²⁸ Norman and Doris Fisher, “Seven Years with Louis Kahn,” from Saito, 155.

¹²⁹ “An Architect Speaks His Mind.” *House & Garden*, vol. 142, no. 4. October 1972, p124., as reproduced in Latour, 294.

responded cooperatively. Currently, most visitors contact William Whitaker at the University of Pennsylvania Architectural Archives. As the curator of the archives and a Louis Kahn expert, he has an advanced knowledge of Kahn designs, as well as a positive relationship with the current occupants of most of Kahn's built residences. The Fisher family allows people to look around the house if they call ahead of time, and have treated the structure with the utmost attention, even going so far as developing a regimen to care for the cypress exterior.¹³⁰

Hoping to share their house with others, the Fishers donated the property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation as a Gift of Heritage with retention of life estate in 1996. Dr. Fisher had at one time also discussed leaving furniture and a \$100,000 endowment.¹³¹ Knowing that they did not necessarily want the property turned into a house museum, the Fishers hoped that gifting it to the Trust would ensure its protection.

“Our original hope was to build a special home for ourselves, not a museum or a monument. Living in a Kahn house you didn't have a choice. Because of that, we have given our home to the National Trust for Historic Preservation with the hope it will be

¹³⁰ “We treat the exterior of the house almost like a piece of furniture. Through trial and error we came up with a regimen to bring out the beauty of the cypress. About every fourth year, when the wood is developing a little irregular graying, we wash and scrub the walls with sodium hypochlorite (Chlorox). The formula is roughly four parts water with one part chemical. If there is much dirt we might add a little trisodium phosphate, as a detergent. When dry we use a colorless linseed oil, such as Cabots 3000. It requires a moderate amount of effort, but the results are well worth the work and the expense.” (Norman and Doris Fisher, “Seven Years with Louis Kahn,” from Saito, 159.)

¹³¹ National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Meeting Minutes, re: Fisher House planning.” University of Pennsylvania. 14 December 2007.

preserved unchanged for future architectural students, architects, and historians to study.”¹³²

Initial conversations have begun in determining the most appropriate use and management of the Fisher House. A preliminary meeting in December 2007 was supplemented by an additional, more extensive meeting on April 18, 2008. Members from the National Trust and faculty from the University of Pennsylvania met with the Fisher family to discuss the direction of the project, as well as identify specifics still to be worked out.¹³³ The contributors to this first round of discussions will serve as an advisory group throughout the planning process, with additional experts invited to participate as necessary. The following recommendations and analysis are based off the content of the April 18 meeting, as well as various informal conversations with the family and members of the advisory group.

The first step in the planning process will be to develop the preservation philosophy for the project. This is a most critical step, as it determines

¹³² Norman and Doris Fisher, “Seven Years with Louis Kahn,” from Saito, 161.

¹³³ Present at the April 18 meeting were: Jim Vaughn, *National Trust, Vice President, Stewardship of Historic Sites*; Tom Mayes, *National Trust, Associate General Counsel*; William Dupont, *AIA San Antonio Conservation Society Professor UTSA College of Architecture and former Graham Gund Architect of the National Trust*; David Young, *Executive Director of Cliveden of the National Trust*; Adrian Scott Fine, *National Trust, Director of Northeast Field Office*; Mary DeNadai, *partner at John Milner Architects and National Trust Advisor*; Randall Mason, *University of Pennsylvania, Associate Professor Graduate Program in Historic Preservation*; David DeLong, *University of Pennsylvania, Professor Emeritus*; William Whitaker, *University of Pennsylvania, Collections Manager, The Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania*; Mrs. Doris Fisher, Mrs. Claudia Fisher-Gohl, and Mr. Michael Gohl. Author was granted permission to sit in on the meeting as well.

whether the house will be a living site, meaning that its interpretation and management choices will be revisited and revised over time to adapt to new needs and changing external influences, or remain a frozen site, meaning the entirety of the site will remain in the state in which it was received when the Fisher family turned it over. In addressing this decision, the April meeting proposed and confirmed four long-term objectives for the Fisher House:

1. Preserve the house and site at the same level the Fisher family has
2. Continue traditional access for visitors, and expand to include scholars as long as the level remains consistent with current visitation
3. Continue use as a residence
4. Use the house to promote National Trust initiatives, including excellence in residential design, high levels of preservation, and sustainability through modest-sized and energy efficient housing.¹³⁴

The most insistent point made was the confirmation to not adapt the site into a house museum. All parties involved agreed on that issue.

Deciding to keep the house as a private residence then raises the question of who will live in the house. It is an important decision, as the future resident would not only function as the steward, but the caretaker as well. The resident will have to facilitate visitors, as well as care for the house and whatever furnishings are included on the site.¹³⁵ Since the management

¹³⁴ Long-term objectives as described by Jim Vaughn at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

¹³⁵ As of the April 18 meeting, the Fisher family was still undecided on whether or not to include the furnishings in the donation.

plan has not yet been finalized, the specific responsibilities are still to be determined, but some initial qualifications can be established.

First, a caretaker must have some curatorial training, regardless of his or her academic background.¹³⁶ Though the position will not be considered one of curatorship, the general philosophies and approaches of curative management will be necessary to steward the house. The objects within the house, and the house itself, will not function as a closed display, but the curator will need to protect and care for materials in a meticulous manner. Additionally, it would be prudent to interview the candidates in their own homes, to observe their manner of living.¹³⁷ Since the Fisher House will be the caretaker's place of residence, it would provide insight into their stewardship ethic and upkeep tendencies. It would also help to verify their appreciation for the Modernist period based on their own personal style, and determine whether their inevitable personal additions to the furnishings collections would be sympathetic to the Fishers'.

Some historic sites utilize students or academic institutions for their stewardship needs. The University of Southern California, for example, has such a relationship with the Greene and Greene-designed Gamble House. The USC School of Architecture operates the house and its affiliated object collection. While the house remains open to visitors, it also functions as a

¹³⁶ As suggested by David DeLong at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

¹³⁷ As proposed by Jim Vaughn at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

study house, and each year two fifth-year USC Architecture students receive a fellowship to reside there as part of its Scholar in Residence Program.¹³⁸ Since the University of Pennsylvania will be involved with the Fisher House in some form, the site could play a similar role.

Much like the USC fellowship, the University could create a program that offered housing to a design fellow through the School of Design.¹³⁹ The University could offer the program to current students, as well as visiting scholars. The specifics of the fellowship could vary greatly, but might include lodging at the Fisher House and subsidized transportation costs to the University (the house is located half a mile from the Hatboro train station, which is on a regional rail line that connects directly to the campus). As the University would not have to cover the rental costs of housing the fellow, expenditures could be minimal.

There is hesitation, however, to appoint the University as the primary steward, as large institutions often have responsibilities that outweigh their property management obligations. The same concerns could manifest if the stewardship were given to a larger preservation entity - money and attention

¹³⁸ An endowment fund supports the preservation and educational activities at the house in perpetuity. (The University of Southern California School of Architecture. "Resources: The Gamble House." <http://arch.usc.edu/Resources/Physical/HistoricStructures/TheGambleHouse>. Accessed 21 April 2008.)

¹³⁹ The University of Pennsylvania School of Design houses the Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, City Planning, Historic Preservation, and Fine Arts departments.

would go to the organization first, and the property second.¹⁴⁰ As such, full stewardship by the National Trust, with a local advisory board, could probably be the best solution. The Trust could own the site, and hire a staff to run it. It could be managed as part of the larger National Trust Modernism Initiative, with local management through the Northeast Field Office located in Philadelphia, or as an adjunct site to Cliveden, another National Trust site in Philadelphia.

Planning the management approach of the Fisher House is a weighty task, and requires an enormous amount of preliminary foundational research. Since the University of Pennsylvania will be playing a yet-to-be-determined role in the management of the site, it is awarded a unique opportunity to incorporate the decision making processes into coursework. Members of the Fisher family are enthusiastic about the assistance students could provide, and encourage their participation.¹⁴¹

Thorough documentation on all aspects of the site is necessary, and such work can be done through Penn's historic preservation courses. Documentation needs identified during preliminary discussions include landscape plans, house conditions, oral histories, and a potential Historic Structures Report (HSR) or National Register Nomination. Students can work with archival materials and

¹⁴⁰ As discussed at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

¹⁴¹ As expressed by Mrs. Doris Fisher, Mr. Michael Gohl, and Mrs. Claudia Fisher-Gohl at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

conversations with the Fisher family to develop a detailed and elaborate timeline. This will help to produce a deeper understanding of various phases of construction, as well as the evolution of the use of the house and its physical manifestations.

Though the project might not be appropriate for a preservation planning studio course, as it is already past the initial strategic phase, particular aspects could be addressed. Students could gain excellent practice by drafting a statement of significance. This activity, in a classroom setting, could enable a variety of voices and perspectives to be considered, supplementary to those formulated by the parties already involved in determining the site's future. There are also no existing as-built drawings for the house that reflect current conditions. A significant project for technically trained students would be to verify the drawings and to create a new set that accurately depict the structure, as well as its surrounding landscape. Likewise, an interiors plan with accompanying documentation would verify the existing placement and conditions of furnishings and plantings, which would provide assistance in the later management planning process.

Since the landscaping and plantings throughout the exterior and the interior are so essential to the feeling and life of the house, additional consideration must be taken regarding their needs. A landscape survey and detailed documentation of existing exterior landscaping is vital, as is an oral history with the family to record the changes throughout the years. This

surveying should be done during each of the four seasons, at least at a photographic level. Mrs. Fisher is an avid gardener and takes great care of the landscaping and interior plantings. It is critical to have conversations with her regarding the history of her landscaping - her care regimes, the specific plant choices, and changes in styles over the forty years she has lived there. The mapping of plantings - exterior landscaping, gardens, and throughout the house interior - will provide vital information for later planning actions. Even examining outdoor family photographs could illuminate the changes in landscaping over time.¹⁴²

In addition to landscape planting at the micro level, it is necessary to focus some research on a cultural landscape study of the site. Questions to be asked include: how has the neighborhood changed since time of construction, how did the neighbors react initially and what do they think of the house's notoriety now, in what ways did the family utilize the site, and what aspects of the site make it come alive? One of the biggest disappointments in historic sites is the disconnection between original use and current display techniques. Documenting the other senses that are activated within the house - smell, sound, touch - creates a larger landscape and allows the site to remain as alive and vibrant as it is today.

Since the project is so extensive, the documentation and planning work could be done through a post-graduate professional certificate. The advanced

¹⁴² As proposed at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

certificate provides “post-graduate training focused on research or praxis” for recent graduates of the Masters of Science in Historic Preservation program. It allows them “the unique experience of directed research and field work [...] under direct professional mentorship.”¹⁴³ Since the certificate funds a two-credit tuition expense as well as a living stipend, the costs for such research would be dramatically lower than for an outside consultant, and the student would benefit from the professional practice. While each certificate project varies in scale and mission, this scenario could create an opportunity for highly detailed research and analysis done locally.

If the Fisher House is to be used as a study house for architecture and history students, the educational component of the management plan must be broad and highly detailed. As the significance of Modernist sites is as multi-faceted as the movement itself, it is necessary to provide learning that would address a wide breadth of concentrations. In addition to architectural study and the promotion of the value of Modern architecture, the house should assist in lessons regarding American sociology, history, science and technology, and ecology. It is only by adopting a comprehensive approach to educational programming that the site can utilize its versatile significance.

Though it would limit the number of non-student visitors to the house, additional programming through the University could organize regularly

¹⁴³ University of Pennsylvania School of Design, Graduate Program in Historic Preservation. *Prospectus 1*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania, 2005, p. 32.

scheduled tours to oblige outside visitors. These tours could be part of larger Kahn-oriented outings, or even tours related to modernism in Philadelphia. The Architectural Archives certainly has the informational resources to make this possible.

Using other National Trust sites as models, further programming could include commercial advertising and rental opportunities. The Farnsworth House finds enormous financial gain by leasing the site for photo shoots and commercial filming. The Fisher House's unique architecture and picturesque location within proximity of downtown Philadelphia might appeal to a commercial base, though such programming would have to be done with great care so as not to disrupt or inconvenience the resident caretaker. Farnsworth House also receives offers for per-night rentals, in which individuals offer large sums of money to spend a night in the house, as well as rental requests for VIP parties and events. Offering such opportunities, especially at auctions or fundraisers, could be an avenue for donor assistance.

The process of creating management and interpretation plans must first be coupled with the formation of a coherent business plan. To determine the annual operations budgets, the Trust will need to calculate the annual maintenance and operating costs of the house at its current state, as well as the costs of cyclical routine maintenance. After the management plan has been resolved, the decisions regarding what type of activities would take place

on the site, who will be responsible for them, and whether there will be admission charges, will all be factors in the financial planning. A rather substantial endowment will be necessary to facilitate these operations, probably around \$3-5 million.¹⁴⁴ Luckily, the National Trust's Modernism initiatives' success at the Glass House will help to identify donors who might be sympathetic to cost of Modernist sites, as well as create interest within a community with an appreciation for Modernism and the financial resources to support it.

An alternative option to National Trust stewardship could be to place protective easements on the site and find a new owner that would be sympathetic to the house's architectural significance. But if the Trust and Penn both hope to utilize the property for education and research, private ownership could create difficult obstacles. By maintaining stewardship and control of the occupants, the Trust would be able to monitor the status of the property at all times, while still allowing the house to be used as both Kahn and the Fishers wanted - as a residence.

Learning from the Farnsworth House and the Glass House, the Fisher House project can adopt some of its predecessors' successful tactics to maintain a sense of residential life. The first step should be to identify immediate needs that afflict the site, such as items and characteristics worthy

¹⁴⁴ As estimated by Jim Vaughn at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

of documentation, urgent maintenance issues, and future financial funding sources. Next, the National Trust should work with the Fisher family, as well as their friends and associates, to record oral histories. These stories about people, events, life style, and experiences will then help create interpretation approaches for visitors and students by dictating what factors made the house a home. After interpretation is developed, the process to characterize and identify an appropriate caretaker resident can begin. This undertaking will take time, as the resident will help to curate the site, and the responsibility of retaining the Fisher's sense of home. Finally, the project should create solid interpretive, management, and business plans for the site. Most importantly however, all levels of planning should be revisited and reconsidered multiple times. Through multiple periodic assessments, the planning process can remain true to the mission of the project and the wishes of all parties.

While the other two National Trust Modernist sites have been converted into house museums, they ironically lack the sense of home that is so engrained within the Fisher House. Whether this deficiency of "home-ness" is a result of the original architecture or current site interpretation can be debated, but the Fisher House has a unique opportunity to capture the sense of family living that was so vital to its creation. The architectural innovation found in the Fisher House could not exist without this "home-ness", nor would the sense of home have been possible without Kahn's originality. The particular atmosphere created by the unique combination of everyday domestic items alongside the

artfully crafted furniture and the house itself could be destroyed upon conversion to a house museum. By avoiding barriers and ropes, both of which Mrs. Fisher claimed would “really turn her off,”¹⁴⁵ the house can open up for exploration, and to the experience of this “home-ness.”

While Louis Kahn gave birth to the design, it is the Fisher family’s use of the house that gives the structure its life. One cannot be separated from the other, and they should not be when transitioning into the next phase of the site’s existence. When Mrs. Fisher introduced herself at the April 18 meeting with, “I’m Doris Fisher and I’m part of the Fisher House,”¹⁴⁶ she, however inadvertently, articulated the exact perspective that should be used for future preservation planning for the house.

¹⁴⁵ Mrs. Doris Fisher at the Fisher House Meeting, University of Pennsylvania, 18 April 2008.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Today the preservation of Modernist houses prompts as many conflicting opinions as the original designs did when they were first constructed. Luckily, the complexity of the situation allows for multiple approaches, each tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of each site. The three case studies in the previous chapters illustrate only a few options, and the future is open to further consideration of other tactics.

Since multiple preservation methods are not only welcome but required in future planning for Modernist houses, no single approach should be seen as superior. The multiple manifestations of Modernism facilitate a versatile preservation regiment, as the Farnsworth House, Glass House, and Fisher House show.

Other sites are taking a different route, offering voluntary public access while maintaining private ownership. Louis Kahn's Korman House, also in the Philadelphia suburbs, is still occupied by the Korman family. They are proud of their architecturally important house, and welcome visitors and guests to explore the grounds.

Late twentieth century shifts in domestic lifestyle, as explained in Chapter 1, still present complications for the continued existence of many homes. Modernist notions of transparency deny contemporary desires for privacy, and it takes a unique and dedicated homeowner to deal with the

challenges glass walls and open floor places can present. In California, most of the prime examples of Modernist residential architecture remain in private hands. The real estate market enables these sites to be sold at high prices, putting them under the ownership of people with the financial means to care for them. Members of the West Coast media, pop, and arts community, such as fashion designer Tom Ford and musician Gerald Casale of the band Devo, have purchased houses by Richard Neutra.¹⁴⁷ As Modernism becomes desirable again amongst design enthusiasts, these houses exhibit a second chance at appreciation.¹⁴⁸

But when these residences are reconsidered as masterpieces, another dangerous situation presents itself. Suddenly there is a shift of emphasis away from function - the very motivating factor for the innovative designs - towards art collecting. These houses were revolutionary for their utilization of space, movement, and position. They acted as places to not only lay one's head, but to explore spirituality and to connect with nature. Their construction challenged the way we live, daring us to break with conformity and experiment with a new approach to domestic life. Within their radical concepts lay the key element of the Modern Movement - problem solving through innovative

¹⁴⁷ Gleadell, Colin. "Art sales: is it a house, or a work of art?" *The Weekly Telegraph*. 4 August 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Webb's *Modernism Reborn: Mid-Century American Houses* focuses on the stories of how houses such as these were saved. Such stories illustrate the renewed interest and market demand for Modernist structures, and prove the desire to restore and maintain them in their original condition. The success stories provide alternatives to public access by finding appropriate and sympathetic owners who act as stewards to the houses.

techniques. These new conceptions of living are what made Modernism and all of its varied expressions so ground-breaking. A shift in emphasis from function to collecting jeopardizes the spirit of the architecture. As a market-driven society consumes historic architecture, “are we as the preservation community manipulating its status [...] in order to assert our own convictions about the value?”¹⁴⁹

While it would be easier to separate function from architecture, the fundamental design theory behind Modernist houses makes such a division. A Modernist house is meant to be a place of residence and a setting for home life, however unconventional it may be. As such, perhaps the trend of treating Modernism's domestic experiments as art trophies could be the key to their survival.

The auction of the Farnsworth House and the public opening of the Glass House brought about a renewed interest in Modernist houses, and now their contemporaries are being considered valuable as more than simply places to live. Often unsympathetically altered or, even worse, torn down, these buildings are receiving a second wind as top ticket auction items. The Louis Kahn Esherick House in Philadelphia, for example, will be put to bid on May 18, 2008 by Chicago auction house Richard Wright (Figure 42). The group, which focuses on modernist furniture and design objects, sold Pierre Koenig's Case

¹⁴⁹ Sunwoo, 74.

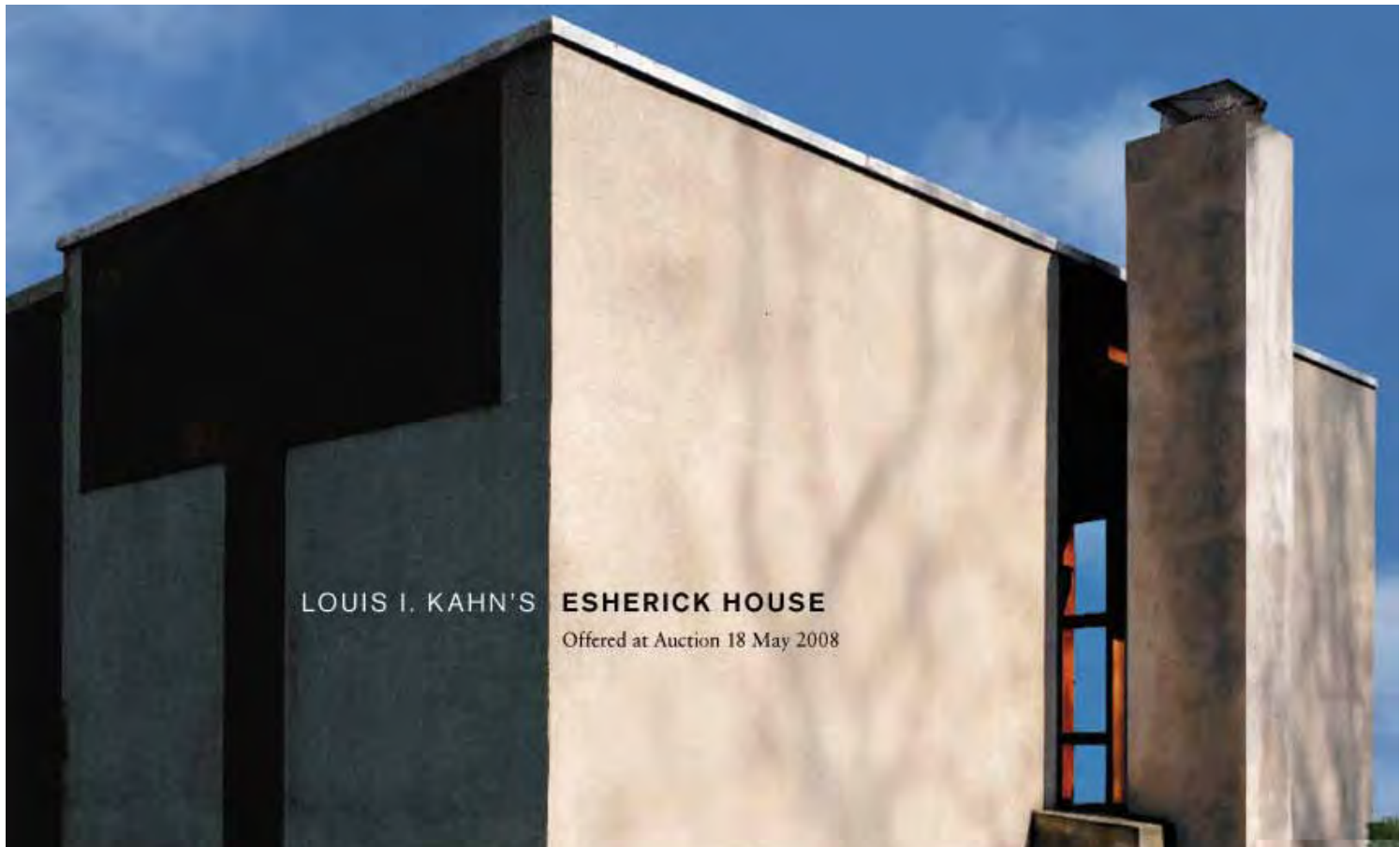


Figure 42. Esherick House Richard Wright auction catalog cover (Image courtesy of Richard Wright Auctions)

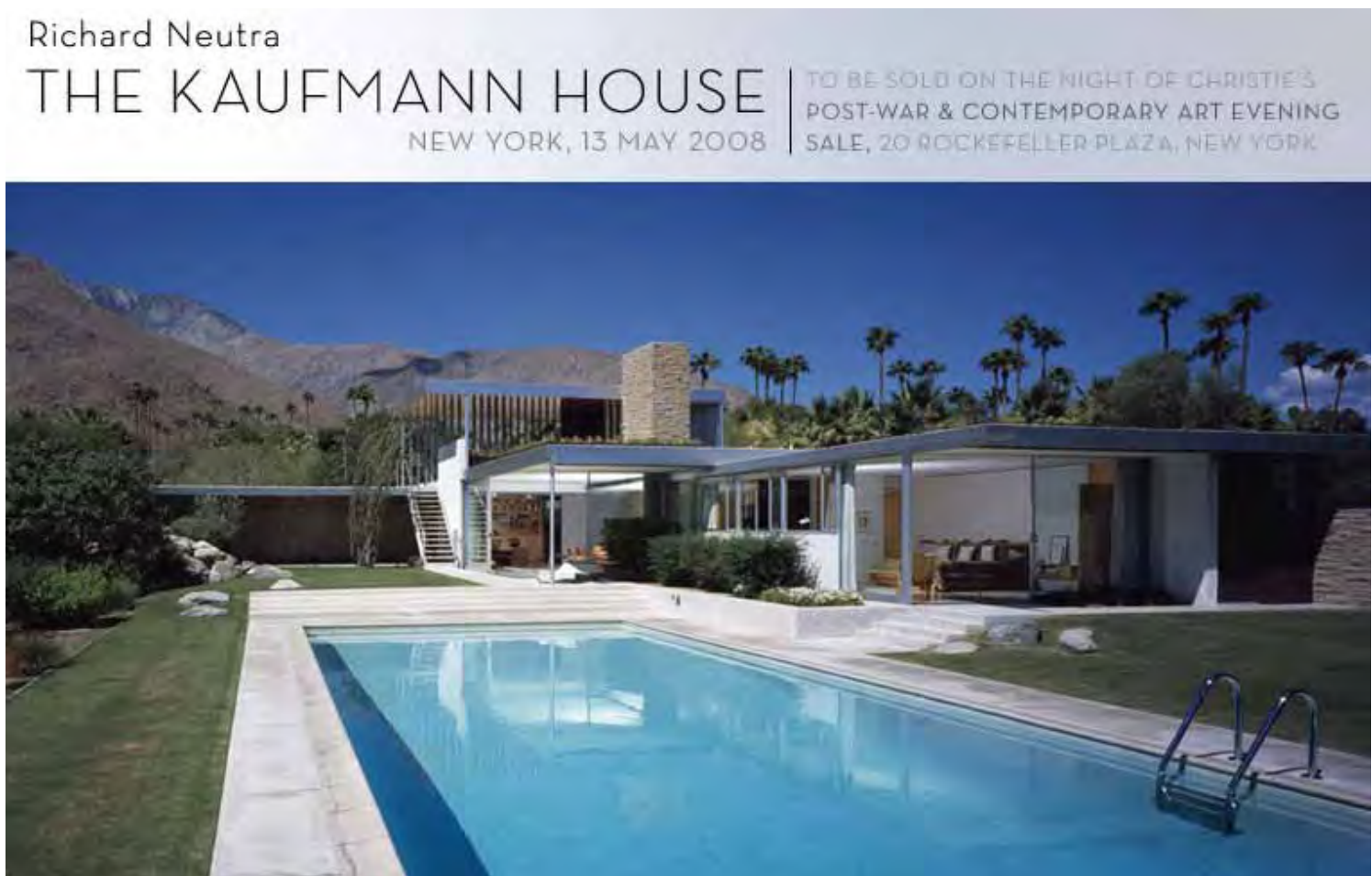


Figure 43. Kaufmann House auction catalog (Image courtesy of Christie's Realty International, Inc)

Study House No. 1 in 2006 to a South Korean businessman. The new owner restored the site, and uses it as a residence during trips to the US.¹⁵⁰

Also in May 2008, the iconic Richard Neutra Kaufmann House in Palm Springs will be auctioned, at an estimated selling price of \$15-25 million (Figure 43). The minimalist 3,200-square foot residential house in the Californian desert is included Christie's Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale.¹⁵¹ By including the house in such an auction, Christie's is marketing it as art, claiming "it is also symptomatic of the trend to include design in contemporary art sales. The barriers between the two disciplines have now become blurred."¹⁵² Only a few houses have been sold through art auction, and all have been "mid-20th-century modernist houses presented within the contexts of specialized decorative arts or design sales."¹⁵³

While the preservation community might take issue with architecture being traded and sold like objects on a competitive market, these Modernist houses are remaining residences. Their significance lies innately with the "home-ness" of the sites, and their continued use as private residences will guard this. Success in architectural experimentation and expression can be measured in the continued appropriateness of its use.

¹⁵⁰ Saffron, Inga. "Changing Skyline: On the market: Masterpieces to live in." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 28 March 2008.

¹⁵¹ Christie's Realty International, Inc. "Richard Neutra The Kaufmann House, New York, 13 May 2008." http://www.christies.com/special_sites/kaufmann_house/images.asp. Accessed 23 April 2008.

¹⁵² Gleadell.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

The three case studies included in this thesis represent a spectrum of Modernist residences as different as the movement itself. With the Farnsworth House, Mies van der Rohe put “home-ness” second to his revolutionary design theories. Using the building as a display for his own expressions, the life and, perhaps more importantly, the lifestyle of Edith Farnsworth got lost amongst the pomp and circumstance of minimalism.

Always the art lover, Phillip Johnson used his Glass House as a frame, a microscope, focused on his own life and the things he deemed beautiful and exciting. This included people, ideas, landscapes, art - anything that inspired and stimulated him, provoking his loving attention. As such, the house is exhibited much like the objects it inspired and patronized. Less a home in the conventional sense, the Glass House’s “home-ness” is found in the ideas that lived there.

The Fisher House however highlights the balance between “home-ness” and architectural brilliance. Function is not created through theory, but instead the theory is formed through need. As a house truly designed for family living, the Fisher House innovates and inspires, and embodies the inherent quality that makes a house a place for living.

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