

PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE

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A Spectrum of Housing



Cover: A beach house designed by Richard Kaplan. Photo: Jeffrey Fox.

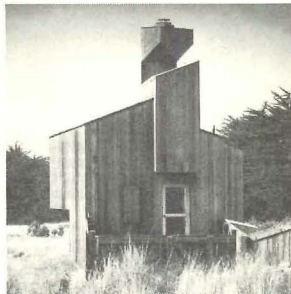
P/A THIS MONTH

Progressive Architecture® April 1970



A Spectrum of Houses

Beginning with introductory comments, which include a discussion by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. about the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition featuring a century of architect-designed houses, P/A presents a broad spectrum of the housing industry — from the individual house as a work of art to industrialized housing in the market place. **80**



The Right Angle for Steel

An architect's own house makes unique structural use of a 32 in. module, panelization, and a shop-fabricated steel framing system. An innovative surfacing of sand, glass, and acrylic resin is applied on both interior and exterior walls. *Denis Charles Schmiedeke, Architect.* **82**



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Forms as a Kit of Parts

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Villa Saltzman

Conceived in the Le Corbusier tradition of man-made form versus nature, the architect coordinates two structural systems to achieve visual qualities seldom seen in the master's work. *Richard Meier, Architect.* **100**

Ordinary as Artform

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A Contrast of Scale

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Operation Breakthrough: Operation P/R

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Forgotten Breakthrough, 1941

A Defense Housing Program using prefabricated housing techniques was implemented at Indian Head, Maryland in 1941. Besides harnessing industry to provide innovative solutions to the housing problem, the project bore other similarities to the present Operation Breakthrough program. The authors are H.Z. Rabinowitz and James Stanek, a systems analyst and systems designer. **134**



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A foremost authority on prefabrication and industrialized housing points out those aspects of the automotive production process that can be rationally applied to industrialized housing. The author is Richard Bender, Professor of Architecture, College of Environmental Design, University of California at Berkeley. **138**

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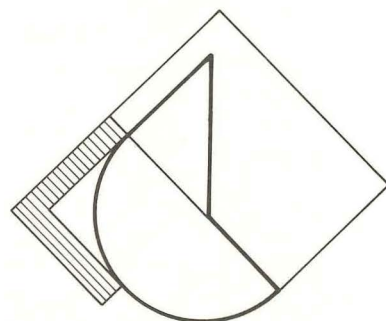
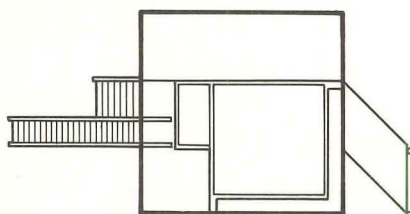
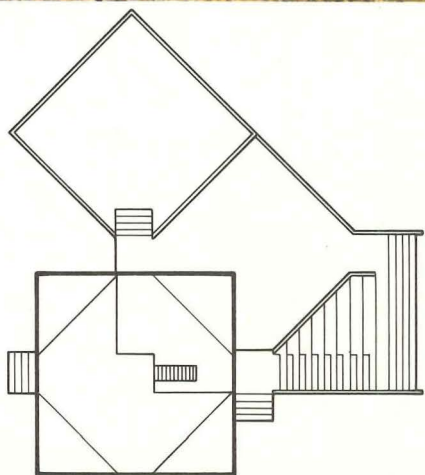
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Forms as a Kit of Parts

In four years of practice, Philadelphia Architects Murphy-Levy-Wurman have done planning and architectural projects of some range — including the Industrial Valley Bank's downtown headquarters (p. 98 SEPTEMBER 1969 P/A) — but they had never designed a house. Then, virtually all at once, they did six.

All are beach houses on New Jersey's Long Beach Island. All have basically similar sites, similar pro-

grams, and comparable budgets, as well as similar construction methods and identical materials. Two are at separate locations, but a group of four provided a special opportunity: they are on adjacent lots, part of a long strip of land owned by three clients who will sell parcels on the proviso that buyers build similar houses — preferably designed by Murphy-Levy-Wurman.



"I always try to use the simplest forms until I know why to do it another way," Architect Wurman explains about his firm's work. "So our forms are often the same. Boxes and semicircles are our vocabulary."

For the first of these six houses, which was for Barbara and Robert Kulicke, the architects designed "an architectural landscape of rotated squares," as Architect Wurman sees it. They did not use the circular form in the second house either, except in an interior usage as a conversation-pit furniture arrangement. But for the group of four houses sited together, they foresaw the need for the variety that the full range of forms would provide — still using only those basic forms.

"We thought there would be a greater good in

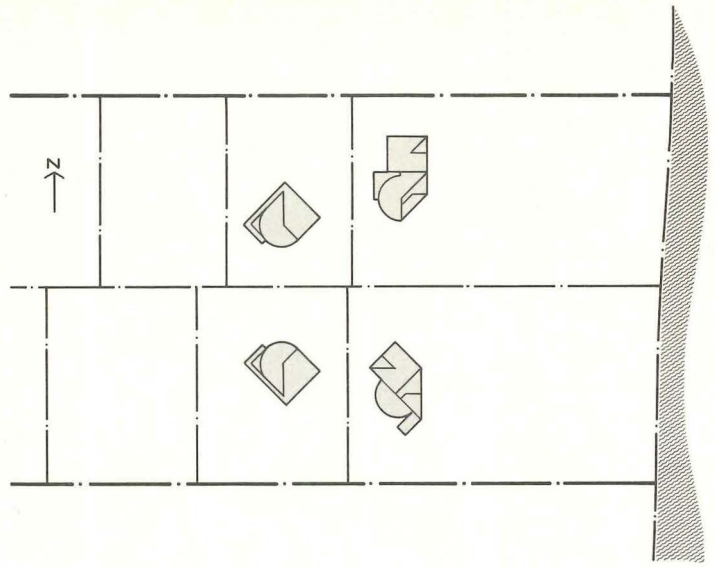
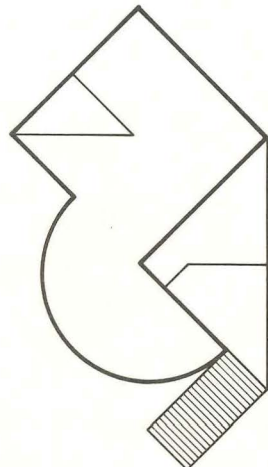
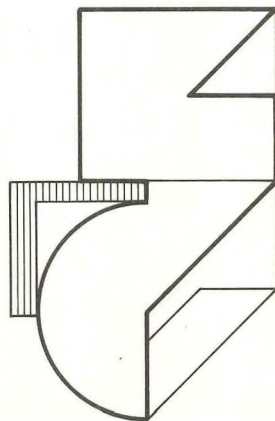
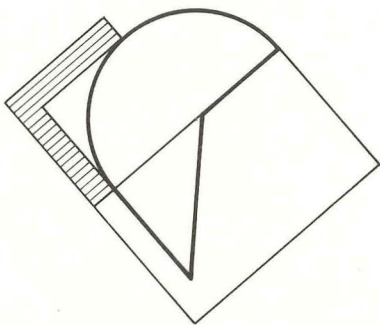
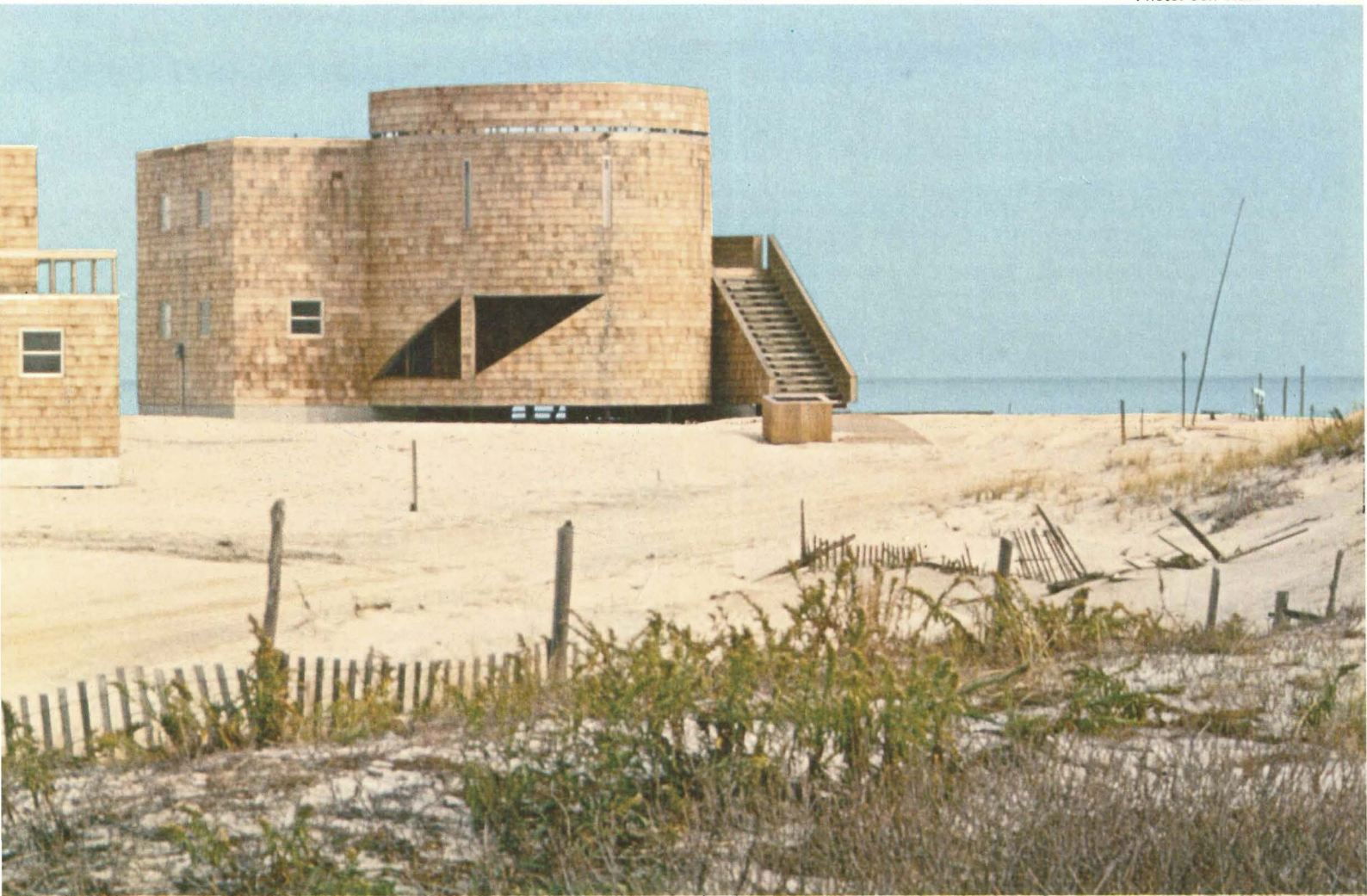
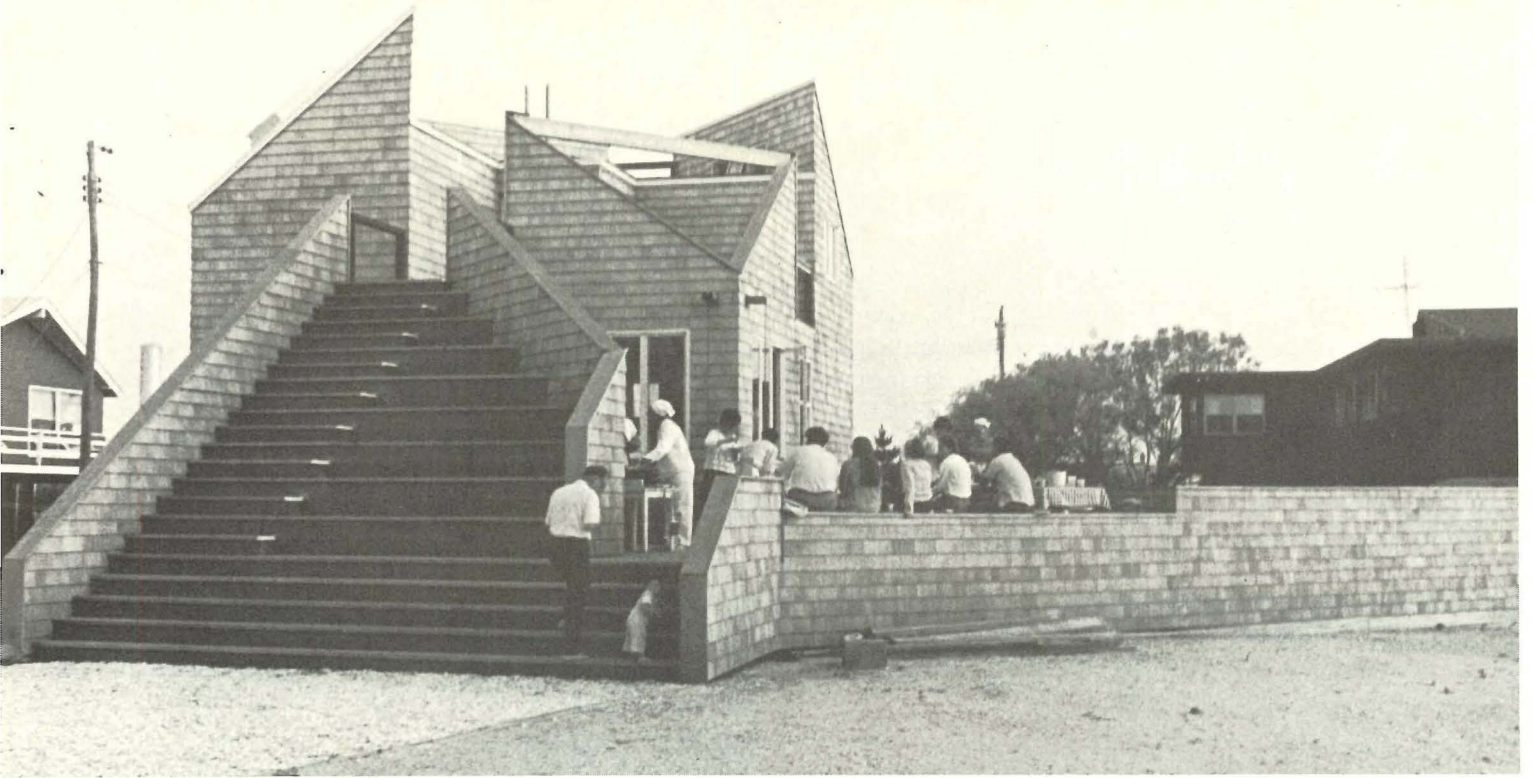


Photo: Jon Naar

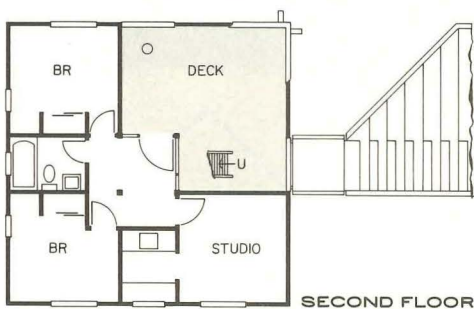
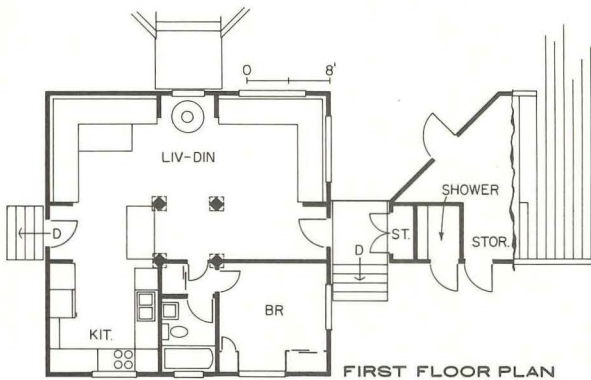




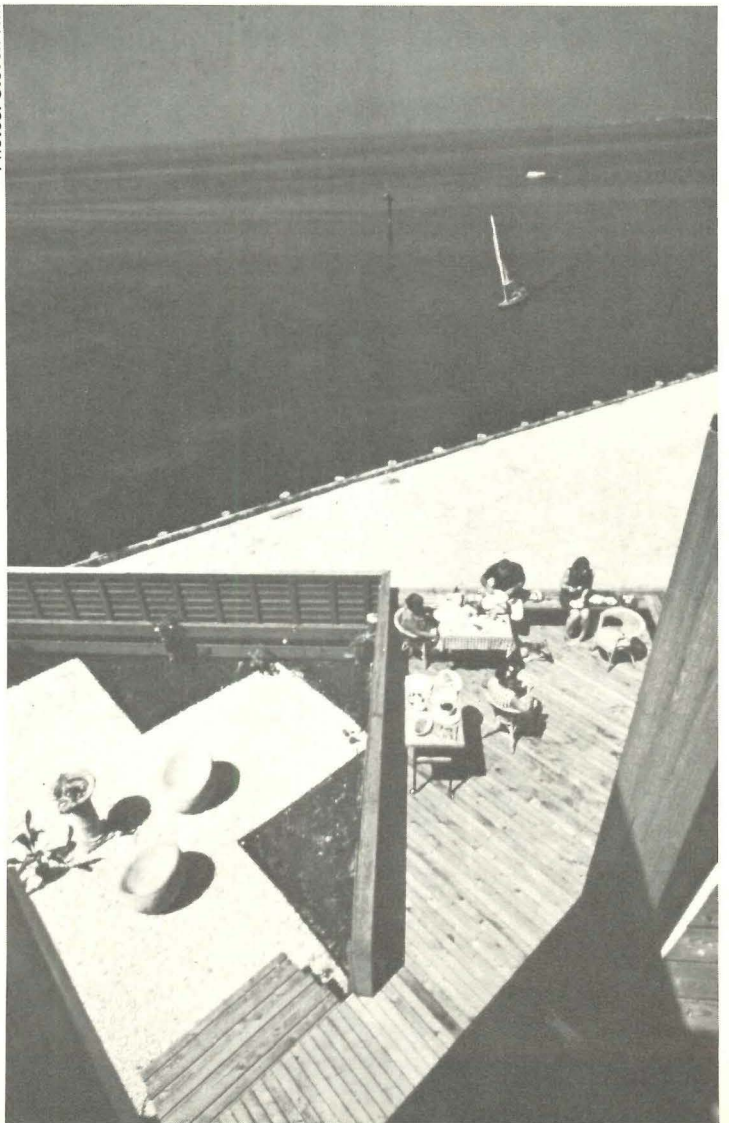
The house for Barbara and Robert Kulicke—he, a painter and head of the distinguished frame-making firm that bears his name; she, the organizer of Multiples and the Betsy Ross Flag and Banner Company—is on a point of land with uninterrupted views of both the ocean and the bay. Adult spaces are on ground level with teenage spaces above. The house is a square 25' x 25', composed of four 10' x 10' spaces and four 5' x 10' spaces with a space 5' x 5' in the center. It is a simple plan, but the section shows some inventive complexity, particu-

larly on the upper levels. The plan, according to Architect Wurman, is "an architectural landscape." The overall site plan shows a geometric manipulation of rotating squares.

The first spinoff square is a porch; the second, a high-walled secret garden that protects espaliered pear and mimosa and roses from the wind. Between the porch and the house is a great stair, which provides a seemingly lavish sculptural wall to one side of the house and which also provides an additional outdoor room with furniture for summer parties.



Photos: Steven Hill



building similar things," Architect Wurman says, "so they would not fight each other." With this determination, the architects developed a series of parts that could be assembled like a kit: first, the half-circle living room where people can sit around for talk with each other and still see the ocean through the glass-walled flat side. It is the conversational scale of the open stage. Second, "and the dumbest thing," Wurman notes, is a square, which can be easily and variably divided into bedrooms.

"With every new project you do not try to reinvent the wheel," Wurman states. "If you can get rid of this hump, you are healthier."

From this point the architects went on to manipulate the basic geometry, both to serve the functional requirements of the several clients and also to permit the houses to compose a micro-community image that would enhance the aesthetic density of the beach. The major landscape effort was to have all telephone and electric lines on the site put underground.

The basic architectural forms were manipulated so each had views of the ocean despite setback limitations. The two smaller houses on the second lot line back were set so they had views between the two ocean-front houses. And Architect Wurman feels that these two houses "have a surprisingly intimate relationship with the ocean."

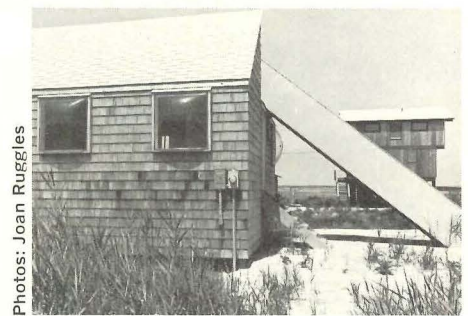
The basic forms were also manipulated to provide privacy. In the boxes, windows are high on the lower floor bedrooms, whereas those in the upper level master bedrooms are set back from the beach-view decks that protect them from outsiders' view. In the semicircle, windows are placed on the flat sides oriented to the ocean; wide decks prevent the view from the beach. The curved walls present windowless private sides to the other houses.

"You have to think about the immediate outside of a beach house and how it is to be used," Wurman observes. This thinking brought the architects to provide a covered outdoor space where children could play in the rain — a time when most beach houses become impossible. As a result of elevating the semicircular living room, a covered outdoor play area was provided underneath.

Other than this manipulation in section, the elemental parts were simply manipulated in plan — "and the elevations just happened," according to Wurman. "The last thing we draw are elevations."

"Once we had the semicircle and the box," he continues by way of example, "the most elemental connection was to overlap them and make a straight line." This became the diagonal deck of the first house — for the Salkes. There, according to Architect Wurman, "the outdoor stair is generated out of the difference between the dimension of the radius of the semicircle and the side of the box." The outdoor stair, part of the thinking about the use of a beach house exterior, is a variably useful element — for entering from the beach, for playing, and even as a partyscape that provides its own furniture.

The danger of using simple forms is that their



Photos: Joan Ruggles

The second of the firm's houses was a speculative venture. Perhaps, because there was no client to make complications to the program of "a nice place for anybody to live at the beach," Architect Wurman considers this "the simplest plan and the best." It starts with a square 27' x 27' that is divided into a tick-tack-toe grid. Above, a deck the size of a living room is left on the roof and reached by a long stair to the apparent gable; shed roofs are designed as 14 ft-high monitors over the bedrooms and kitchen. Plastic skylights used as windows give a fisheye effect from the inside. Because of them the building is known as the "Bubble House."

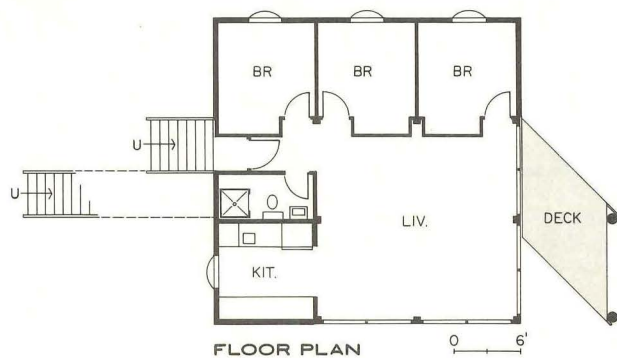
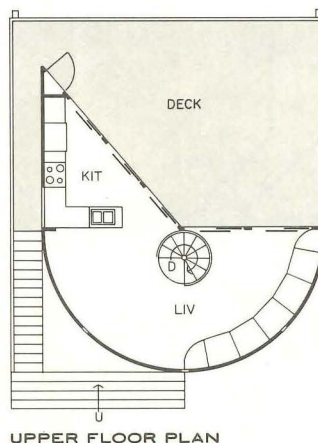


Photo: Steven Hill



Two of the four "Sandcastles" have identical but flipped plans. Since the requirements of clients Hyman and Kay were for smaller houses, the architects composed their forms into a more compact unit, setting the semicircular element directly onto one side of the box. Only half of the semicircle is planned for living space; the other half is devoted to the dining area, and it adjoins the kitchen. A critic might observe that this plan leaves the living room banquettes facing into the kitchen, but the circular stair at the center of the space and the large glass expanse overlooking the sea may well provide a stronger focus.

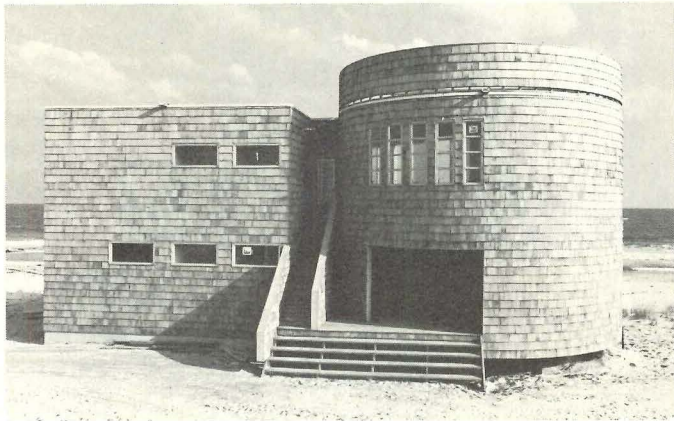
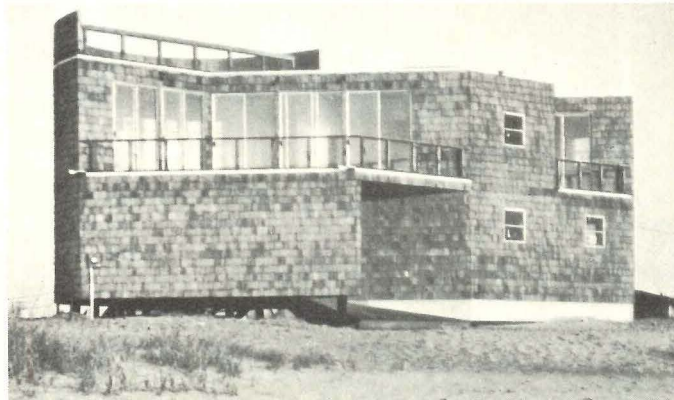
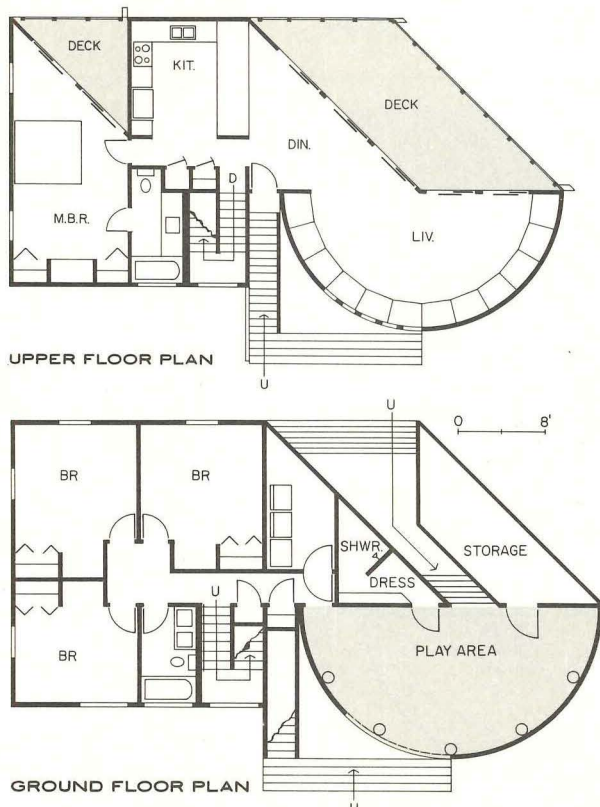


Photo: Steven Hill



The fourth of the "Sandcastles" clients wanted a longer frontage on the beach, a larger kitchen, and a straight rather than circular stair; they also wanted the deck to be entered only from the living and dining rooms and not from outside. The architects filled this requirement by spreading the two elements apart, placing them alongside each other, in effect, and putting the entry stair between them, so that it enters the main spaces upstairs. The overall shape of this stair, however, is the same as in the two more compact houses, where it is outside the forms. Beneath the semicircular form, the children's outdoor play area has a ramped entry from the beach, rather than steps as in the Salke house.



architectural immediacy may look like glib stylishness. Architect Wurman's explanation of how the diagonal deck was derived adequately defends that critique, but he does admit that the opening to the covered outdoor play area, which is a parallelogram, is more questionable. "Except, it was a shape that was an opening, but clearly not a doorway that would automatically invite grownups," he adds. "The diagonal deck of the master bedroom, also, is a result not of stylishness but of not wanting a spindly corner." Beneath the main deck, a diagonal entry makes a funnel into the house and reveals an expanding view out from the covered play area.

Together, the simple forms have produced a fair degree of mystery and romantic ambiguity. It is not because of the cylindrical shape alone that the group of houses has been dubbed "The Sandcastles." Architect Wurman feels that the houses are "full of theater inside and outside."

"It has proved to me and to the clients," Wurman observes, "that not having four things fighting each other is quieter and pleasanter. Besides, it is something very special to have variations on a theme in four houses together.

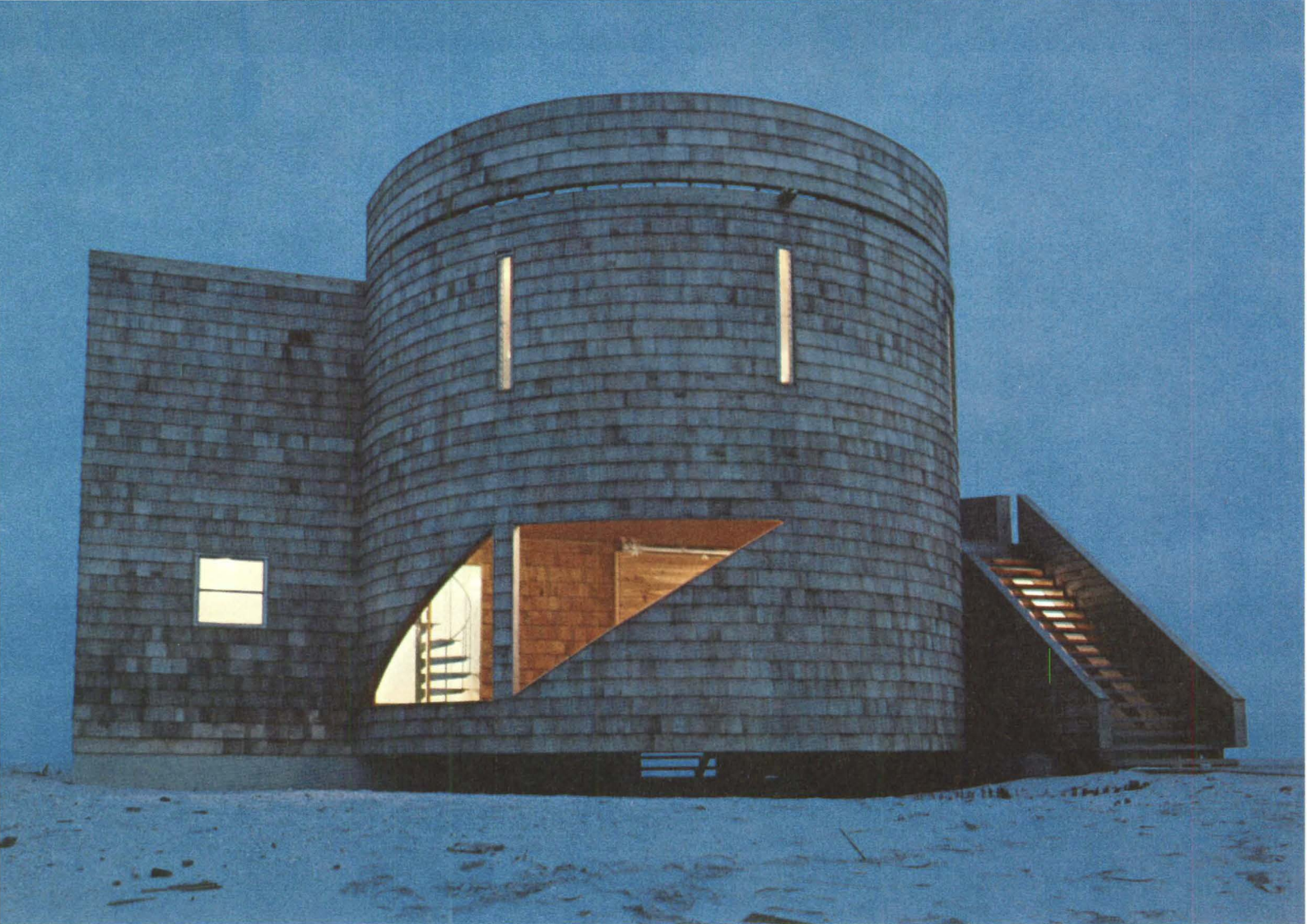
"Gawkers sometimes say," he continues, "'Well if I were going to build my own house I would want it to be different.' And there is talk about the four Sandcastles 'all being the same' and that 'it is just a development.' But this is certainly different."

His discussion raises the old question about repetition even of good forms: No matter how much better than the development house an individual house is, the repetition of it somewhat cancels the effect. As more than one designer has asked, how many thousand Parthenons will look interesting together?

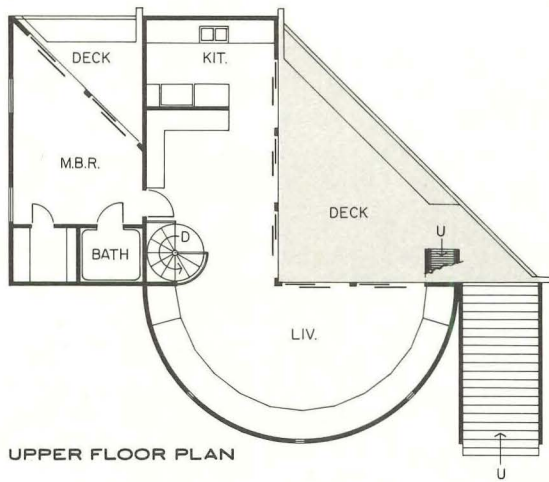
Architect Wurman says that six or eight houses on this long strip of property might be variations on the same theme and still look good. Anyway, "by the time you get back some distance from the beach," he notes, "you will have to relate to a different site in some way. Perhaps by making internal decks to make a private world."

"It will be nice if the clients hold to the proviso that all the houses must be similar," Wurman muses, "but I hardly believe that possible in the real world."

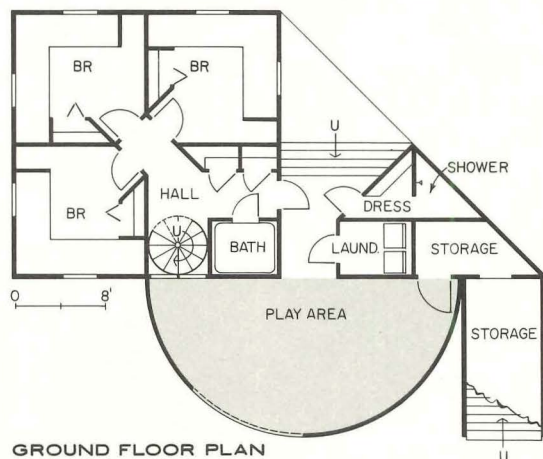
Asked about beach community planning in general, Wurman replied, "Given my druthers, I would rather not design a beach community with different houses for each client; I think it should be a very dense development with a lot of open land around. But sometimes you have to make a decision to do the best you can with the givens, or not to do anything at all. The givens can push you into inaction if you decide that your blood is royal and that you cannot accept them. And it is difficult to change the givens in a beach community because the guy who runs the local grocery is also the mayor or the building inspector — and he lives there all year round, whereas the people who build beach houses live elsewhere. Still," Wurman concludes, "it is the important problem of the Public Environment, and you have to accept some givens and do the best you can."



Photos: Jon Naar



UPPER FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

The Salke house, the first of the four year-round beach houses in the cluster, initiated the full kit of parts that the architects used throughout the complex (see text) as well as the enclosure of the quadrangle-like space between the houses. The cluster makes predictions about the future of community planning and the problems of aesthetic density at the beach. Upstairs, the living room of the Salke house—a glossy-painted, super-striped, nude-bulbed contemporary space—looks out over a deck to the changing ocean beyond.

