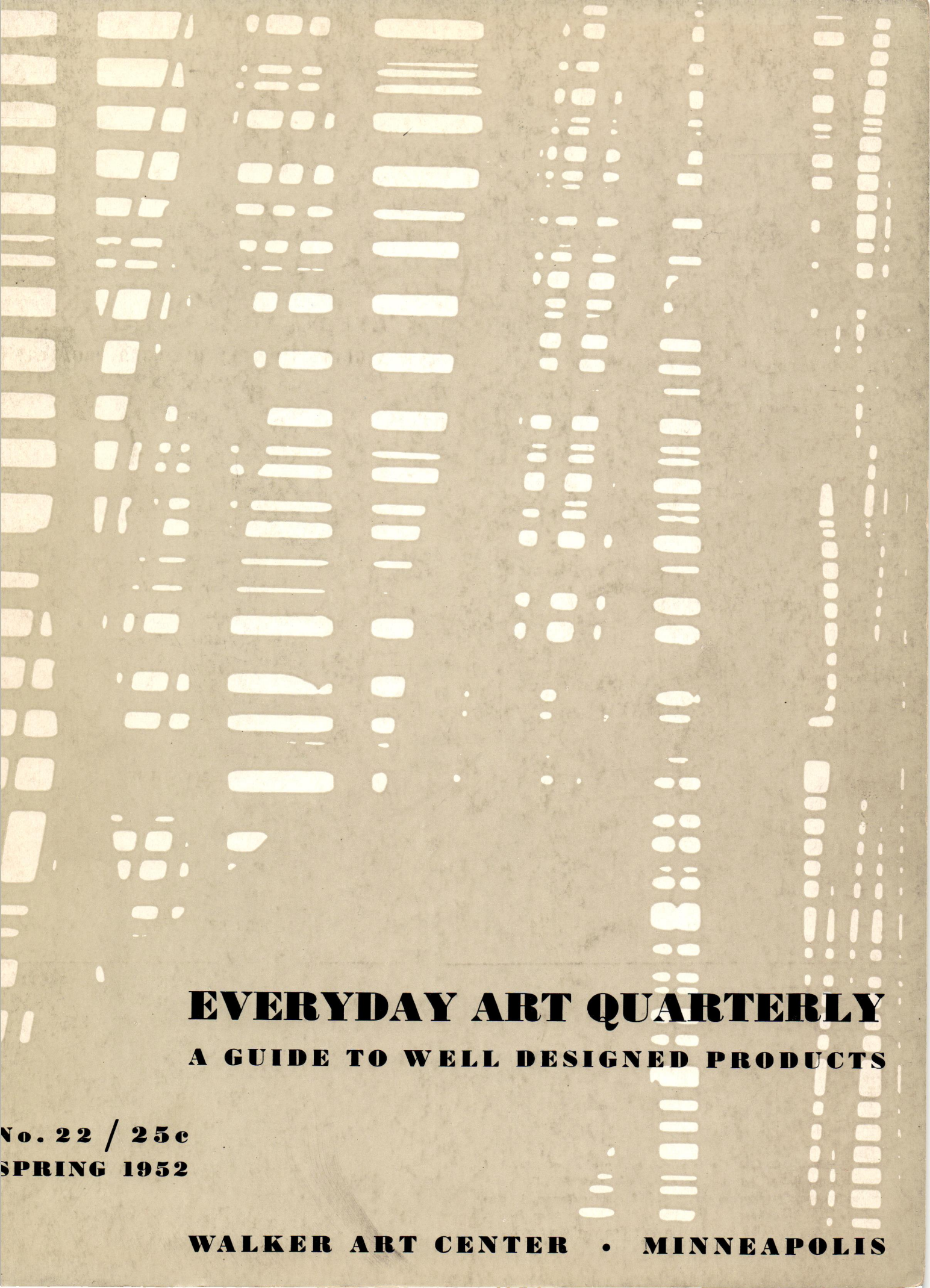

EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

No. 22 / 25c
SPRING 1952

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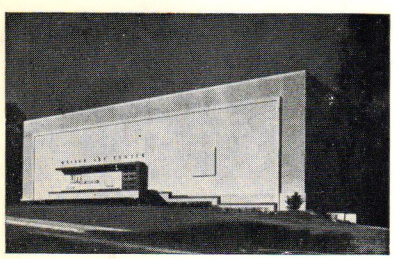

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EVERYDAY ART QUARTERLY

A GUIDE TO WELL DESIGNED PRODUCTS

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Everyday Art Quarterly, published by the Walker Art Center since 1946, is devoted to the encouragement of good design and craftsmanship, and has, through the selection and presentation of furniture and accessories, served as a consumers' guide to well designed products.

We have been called "good design missionaries", "arbiters of taste", "evangelists of purism" and other less complimentary names. We are aware that personal bias enters into any selective process. History has proven the choices of many critics to be unsound, but one does not stop making decisions because history may prove one wrong. In stating the basis for a choice, one declares a prejudice—a bias—a point of view—an attitude towards people. As events occur, problems change and specific solutions change, but insight into the problems and needs of people will always be of primary importance in determining the value of a design solution. So it would seem that a publication concerned with any phase of art must be a forum of opinion, and a means of airing the attitudes that go into the creation of a product, as well as a vehicle for presenting the product itself.

We are celebrating six years of publication by expanding the magazine in size and content. Everyday Art has always been difficult to delimit. We would like to see all art an everyday affair. Beginning with the next issue, there will be added to our present content of design and architecture, critical articles on painting and sculpture.

The magazine will have a new format. We hope that it will become a center of communication for artists, designers, and laymen—and an extension of both the Walker Art Center and the T. B. Walker Foundation which makes its publication possible.

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of Everyday Art Quarterly is devoted to the Architects' Workshop, a recent exhibition in the Everyday Art Gallery. Like the Artists' Workshop of last fall, it was both an exhibition and a program. There was a series of panel discussions, and nine architects exhibited plans, photographs and models of contemporary houses built for clients in the Twin Cities area. Because of limited space, we are presenting only three of the houses in this issue. On page 16 there is a listing of houses designed by the participants in the exhibition with references to their publication in other periodicals.

CONTRIBUTORS

Art historian, Dr. Donald Torbert, who made a comprehensive study of architects and architecture in this area, has given us some historical perspective on contemporary building.

Architect and Art Center staff member, Norman Nagle, contributes his point of view toward a clarification of some of the existing confusion in modern architecture.

THE ARCHITECT AND THE CITY by DONALD R. TORBERT

Within the course of a century Minneapolis has developed from a village site on a treeless prairie to a city with a population of more than a half million. Throughout its brief history the city has been an architectural chaos where good and bad, old and new, are jumbled together into an inharmonious whole. This unfortunate visual quality is common to practically every city that had its origins in the later nineteenth century.

As Minneapolis enters a second century of growth, the city is fortunate to number among its architects a sizable group whose primary concern is with the design of buildings that are rational and humane as well as esthetically satisfying. In their several ways each of these architects would have his design be a logical solution to the problems that are posed by the building's use. Each would attempt to solve the problems of material, structure, and esthetic expression without recourse to the adoption of plan organization or ornament inherited from the past. These architects have divorced themselves from the attitude of mind that led so large a proportion of designers in the past century to ape the accomplishments of earlier times. They are fortified by a theory which asserts that architecture is more seriously concerned with man's life than with abstract esthetics or questions of style, and they find that their efforts to use the materials of architecture in a direct and honest way receive the sympathetic attention of an increasingly large section of the public. It would seem that these competent architects are now in an admirable position to improve the over-all quality of our physical and visual environment. We must nevertheless ask: How much opportunity to effect a major change in the esthetic quality of a city's architecture does a group of contemporary architects actually have? In any period the architect is only one link in the chain of forces that determine the character and quality of a city's building. The architect of mid-twentieth century is no more independent of the forces that shape his period than was his nineteenth century counterpart. In order to assess the contemporary architect's opportunity to reshape our esthetic environment, it may be well to survey the complex of related influences that made an architectural shambles of the city in the past.

Among the men who dominated Minneapolis' economic and cultural life in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an "inner circle" of early settlers who had emigrated from New England, upstate New York, and the Central Atlantic seaboard during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. They came West to improve their economic status, not because of dissatisfaction with the culture of the areas from which they had come. The primary interests of this influential group were more closely linked with the exploitation of the timber and wheatlands than with the orderly development of the city. Compared with pioneering groups in other American cities, they appear to have been markedly conservative, seldom given to extravagant display. The architecture that they favored reflects both their conservative frame of mind and their dependence on the East.

These leading citizens of the city maintained their contacts with the East and every fashion change that occurred in that region was reflected at a later date in an impoverished form in Minneapolis architecture. The stylistic devices that were adopted from Eastern fashions were foreign to the region and to the local economy. Since "style" was arrived at through the application of detail rather than through the expression of structure, new fashions could be adopted piecemeal, and style became a commodity which the architect stocked and the client purchased according to his taste and ability to pay. The shifts in style that occurred throughout the period, and which destroyed the possibility of harmoniously designed building groups, were not the result of mere caprice or a desire to be individual. They are evidence of the architect's and the client's repeated rejection of the spare and economical building which was natural to the economy, a type of building lacking the "artistic" symbolism that flattered the ego of culturally ambitious clients. Under these conditions, there was no adequate basis within the community for the development of an architectural style that was truly suited to the region. Designers and clients alike showed neither the independence of spirit nor the commonly- held attitudes, philosophy, and areas of agreement that are essential to the formation of a distinctive mode of expression. It is not surprising then that the majority of the city's buildings did nothing more than reflect that taste for borrowed but unassimilated styles which was an international phenomenon during the period.

A second group of influences that helped to destroy the possibility of harmonious development in the city had its source in the prevailing attitudes toward land and land use. The original survey of the city site and the plotting of street and property lines was based on the use of the surveyor's-grid, or military-grid, system. The use of a grid-iron system had been

standard procedure for laying out American town sites for over a hundred years at the time Minneapolis was settled. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it had been common practice to set aside some central area or areas for use as park, common, or public plaza. These open areas, as physical and visual nuclei of the plan, served as unifying elements in the town development. Central areas that stimulated unified development were lacking in the Minneapolis plan as were integrated ownership or management of the townsite lands. The competition that existed between the owners of various plots of ground was destructive of harmonious development from the start, and no community influence developed which had sufficient strength to counter the pressure to use land and place buildings in terms of private rather than public interest. The selection of sites for important civic structures was determined by the relative political power of rival real estate interests rather than by concern for public convenience or for the physical and visual amenities.

The grid lines that established the basic pattern of streets were capable of infinite extension and the system provided a quick and simple means for dividing large tracts of land. Grid plotting, however, was a mechanical system; it was not devised out of a desire to create a good human environment, or within a framework of thought that was concerned with the problems of town life. While the grid-plot was ideally suited to yield maximum economic returns to the owners of salable ground plots, it took no account of the character and configuration of the land or of those peculiarities of local climate-temperature, winds, and light that are so important to intelligent architectural planning. Despite these several deficiencies the grid system continued to be used in platting the major additions to Minneapolis.

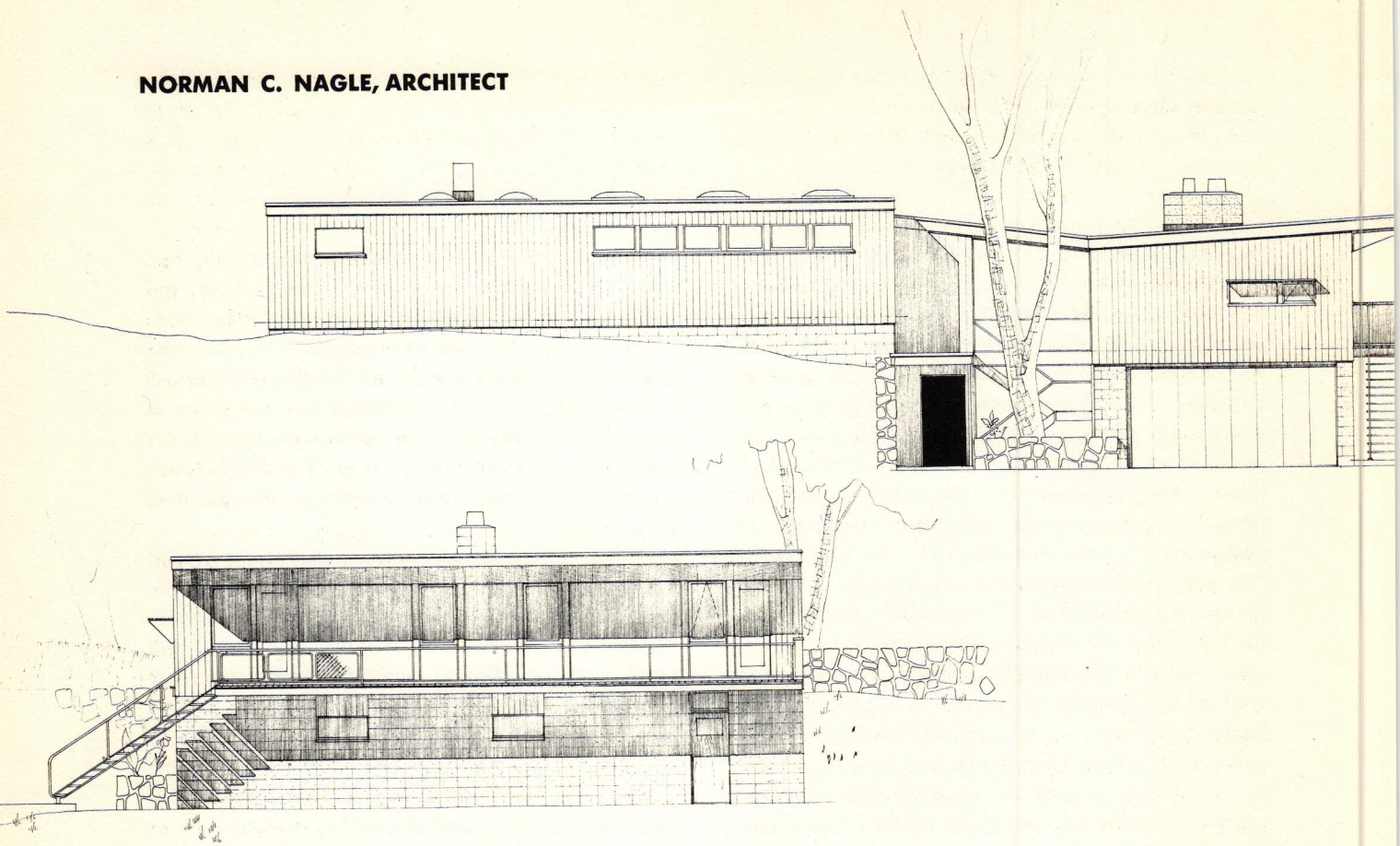
The inadequacies of both eclecticism and the grid-iron system were most apparent in those periods when great waves of immigrants increased the population of the town. This rapid but sporadic growth periodically created a strong and immediate demand for building. The waves of immigration and the prosperity that usually accompanied them were welcomed, but the town was never well prepared to receive a sudden influx of permanent settlers. In the course of the decade 1880-1890, the period of most rapid growth, the population of the city increased by 251%, increasing by 174% in the course of the years 1880-1885. Of the forty thousand buildings that existed in the city at the end of the year 1900, approximately 50% had been erected in the boom years between 1880 and 1887. There was ample basis for a visiting critic's assertion, in 1891, that Minneapolis had ". . . risen like an exhalation." Under such conditions of growth the adoption of a variety of building styles that had no real basis in the life of the community together with the casual attention that was given to the orientation of structures, had a disastrous effect on the architectural character of the city.

During the recurrent periods of expansion, ground plots of city-lot size became a major item on the speculative commodity market. While the way in which city lots were sized, subdivided, oriented and priced, had little direct influence on the style of the buildings that occupied the lots, it was nevertheless true that the temper of mind that allowed the land of the city to become a speculative commodity was a major factor in making a visual chaos of the town. Speculation stimulated random, sporadic, and uneven growth in hastily plotted additions and high ground coverage in already built-up areas. This use of land was always unjustified in terms of human welfare, civic beauty, and architectural design; it was justified only by the high cost of real estate. During the periods of financial crisis that occurred in every generation, partially built-up areas were further subdivided and covered with structures that were, of necessity, minimal in size, quality and cost.

The individual and collective effect of these several forces on the quality of Minneapolis as an environment did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. In 1883 Platt Walker used editorial columns of the *Mississippi Valley Lumberman* to ridicule the excesses and irrationalities of eclectic design. Among the architects, Frederick G. Corser, writing in 1885, pointed out the follies that resulted from too much concern with the superficialities of style. He demanded that building be shaped in response to the living needs of the people, with proper attention given to site, spacing and orientation. In the first quarter of this century the work of Sullivan and of Wright was not without influence in Minneapolis. Men like John Jager, William Gray Purcell, and George Grant Elmslie devoted themselves exclusively to the production of designs that give full evidence of their concern with architecture as a living art. Their influence, unfortunately, was not sufficient to curb the admiration of their contemporaries for the grandiose emptiness of Beaux Arts eclecticism.

continued on page 16

NORMAN C. NAGLE, ARCHITECT



Although the fundamentals of modern architecture were explored and stated in the twenties by the participants of the Bauhaus and even before the turn of the century by such men as August Perret, there is still much confusion as to what a modern house is and what it is not. The layman's confusion is understandable. In any city we see around us many different styles of architecture and innumerable mutations of any given style. Unfortunately, this is just as true of modern houses when the principles of modern architecture are misunderstood and misused, as in houses of the recent past. Modern is too often considered another style, rather than a creative solution to real problems.

Some of the resulting confusion is due to a spurious necessity for "newness"—a state of mind that characterizes merchandising but which the arts, particularly architecture, would do well to question. Producers of automobiles and ladies' hats extol newness as a virtue and use it as a means of business survival. From a merchandising point of view newness has become more important to many articles than basic function. While this approach may be acceptable or even desirable when applied to ladies' hats, it becomes irresponsible when applied to a major creative art. The hat maker has limited social responsibility. The architect must work with the knowledge that for most people a house is the greatest investment of a lifetime and cannot be discarded easily for a new model. The housewife with an inadequate kitchen must live with it every day of her life. She cannot get a new model each season to bolster her morale. However, it is not only the public that is sometimes confused on this score. Because architecture is a creative art in addition to being a business, there is a strong temptation to treat each design problem as something new and different, esthetically as well as structurally. The urge to design a building which will stand out from its neighbors because of a peculiar interpretation of the esthetic of modern architecture is strong in many of us. Insofar as differences of appearance are the result of a discipline which requires a fresh look at each new problem, this is a healthy attitude, but the temptation to design something "different" results only in unhealthy exhibitionism. It is unhealthy because it leads to a new vogue each year, as in the clothing industry, and it concentrates attention on irrelevant details while avoiding real investigation. Architecture which has nothing more than newness to distinguish it from the past will soon join its eclectic forbears in undistinguished obsolesence.

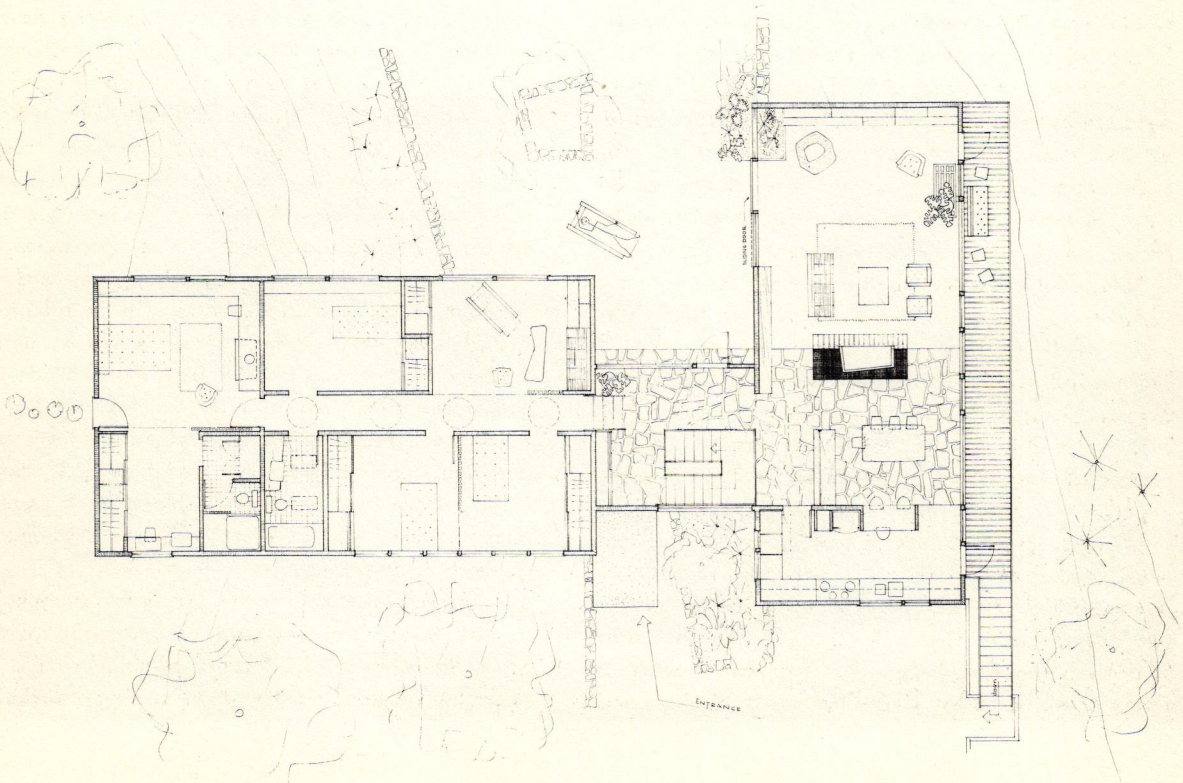
A second reason for confusion is the tendency to transplant local or regional solutions haphazardly across the country. The "ranch rambler" is just one example. The conditions which influence the architect's

solution are not external except for those of site and climate. Otherwise they are determined by the architect's interpretation of the esthetic possibilities inherent in good structure. Major differences in appearance should occur in different topographical and climatic regions. The houses in Florida, for example, make less use of solar heat, and therefore will probably have smaller areas of glass than the houses of Minnesota. The houses in the hilly bay region of California necessarily are confined in area, as compared with those on the flat lands of Long Island. A good solution of the problems presented by major differences of climate and topography inevitably results in visual variations. But when buildings designed for one area are transplanted to areas with completely different site and climatic conditions, they lose the integrity of the original design and, in many cases, become ridiculous.

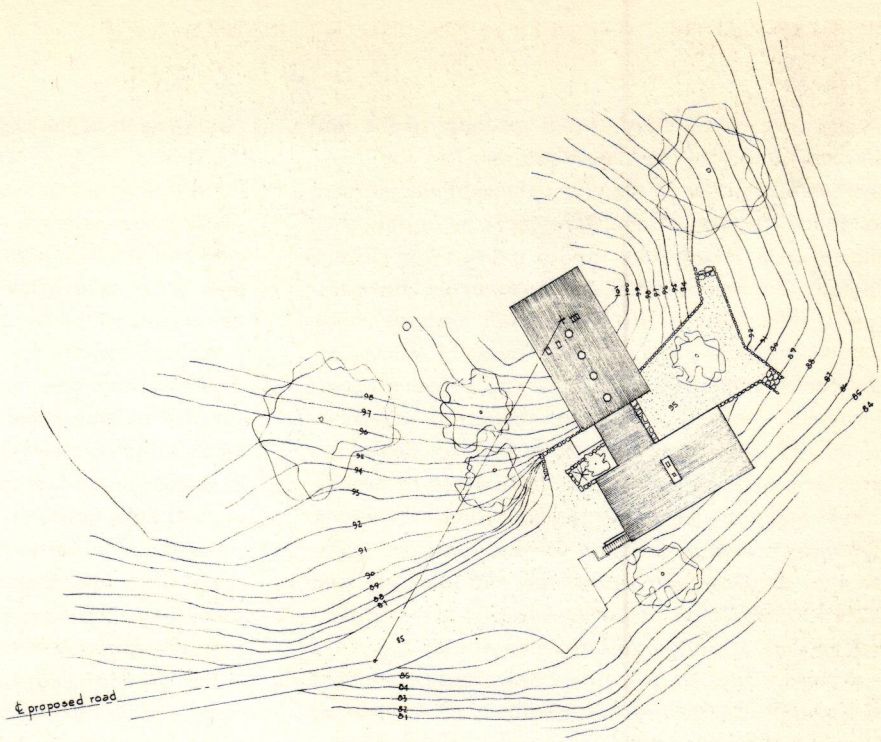
A third confusion over and above these conditions of site and climate are the conditions of function or use as dictated by the future owner. Too much has been said and too little thinking has been applied in a broad sense to this problem of functional requirements. Very often the thesis is put forward for the architect that each house he designs is different because the client is different. Within limits, this is true; but more often it is used as an excuse to achieve that spurious virtue — uniqueness — of which we wrote earlier. With the exception of extreme differences in income or physical ability, few of us are so individual in our requirements or personal needs as to make our houses extremely different in over-all appearance. The architect's job, then, is to understand the broad requirements of the climate in which he is working and the special requirements of the particular site. With these thoroughly in mind, he may plan for the client's specific requirements. The change of pace and the individuality that both he and the client require will then occur as a result of adapting the planning requirements to the broader consideration of site.

A final reason for confusion is the result of the thousand and one materials available to the prospective builder. In the past all windows, cabinets, and other woodwork were done at the site and resulted in a coordinated, craftsman-like appearance. At the present time, however, there are many manufacturers competing for the market of each of these prefabricated parts and if each item is picked for economy's sake, there is a danger of a patchwork appearance, even though each of the items may be good in itself. In this area of endeavor both the architect and the manufacturer have a responsibility. The manufacturer could spend more time developing materials and products to solve a particular requirement, instead of taking a material or product he produces and attempting to find a multitude of uses for it. On the other hand, the architect will avoid using "stock" windows or other items manufactured simply because they are "stock". Rather he will consider each unit of the structure and detail in relation to cost, both present and future, and to its esthetic fitness. This would greatly decrease the hundreds of unnecessary materials and fixtures now used popularly and would further decrease the confusion on the part of the public concerning the modern house.

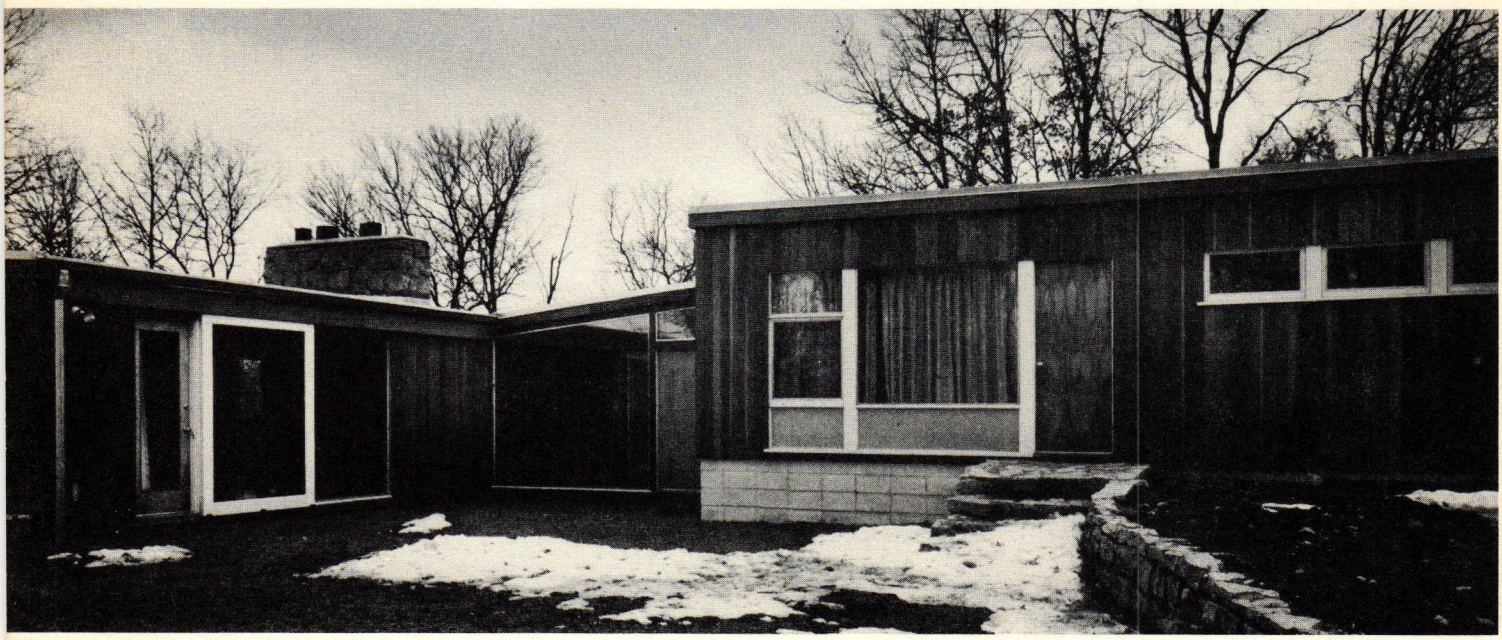
N. C. N.

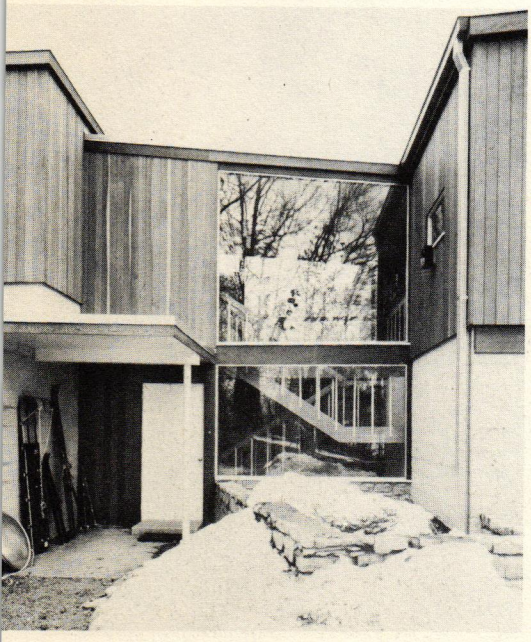


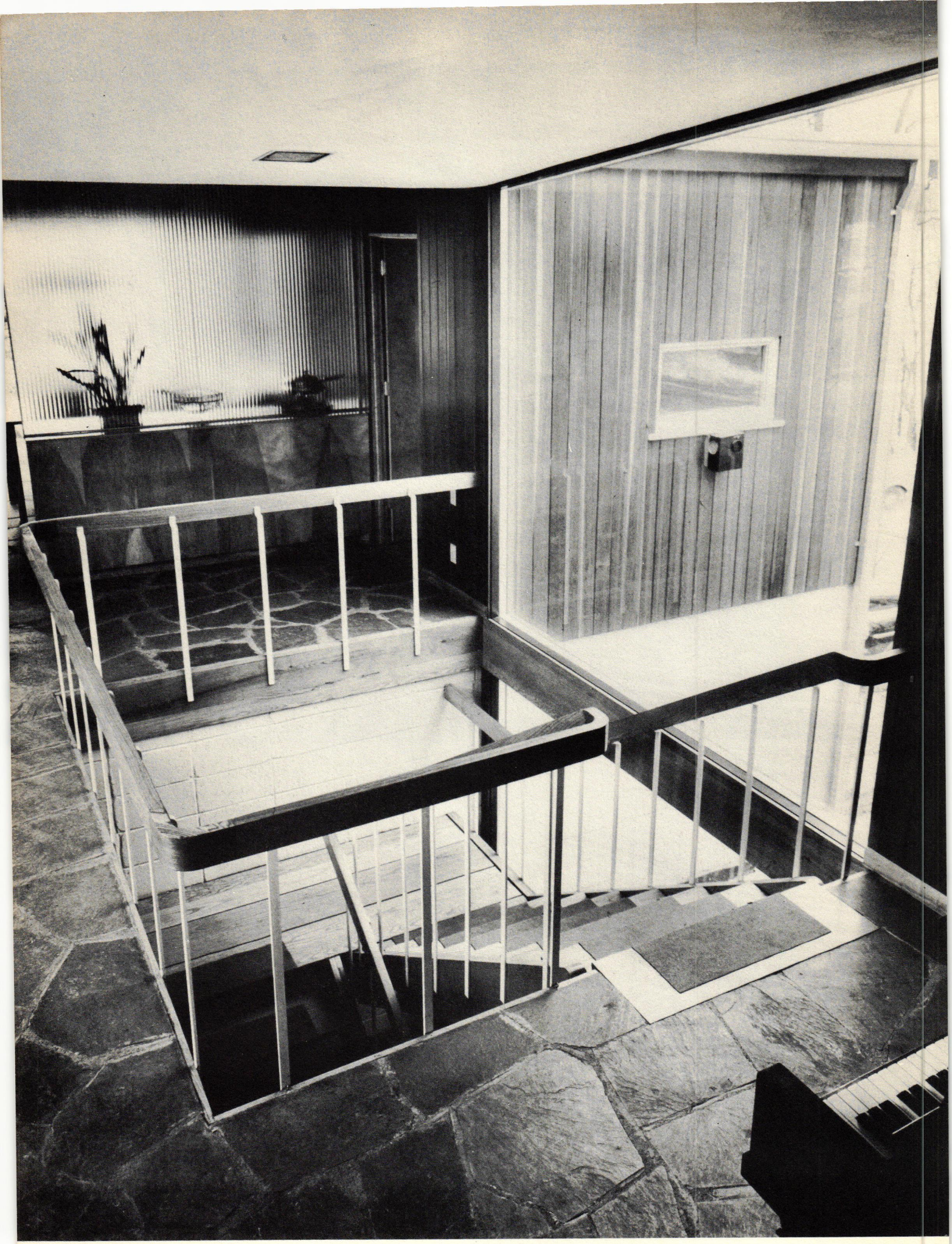
NAGLE, *continued*

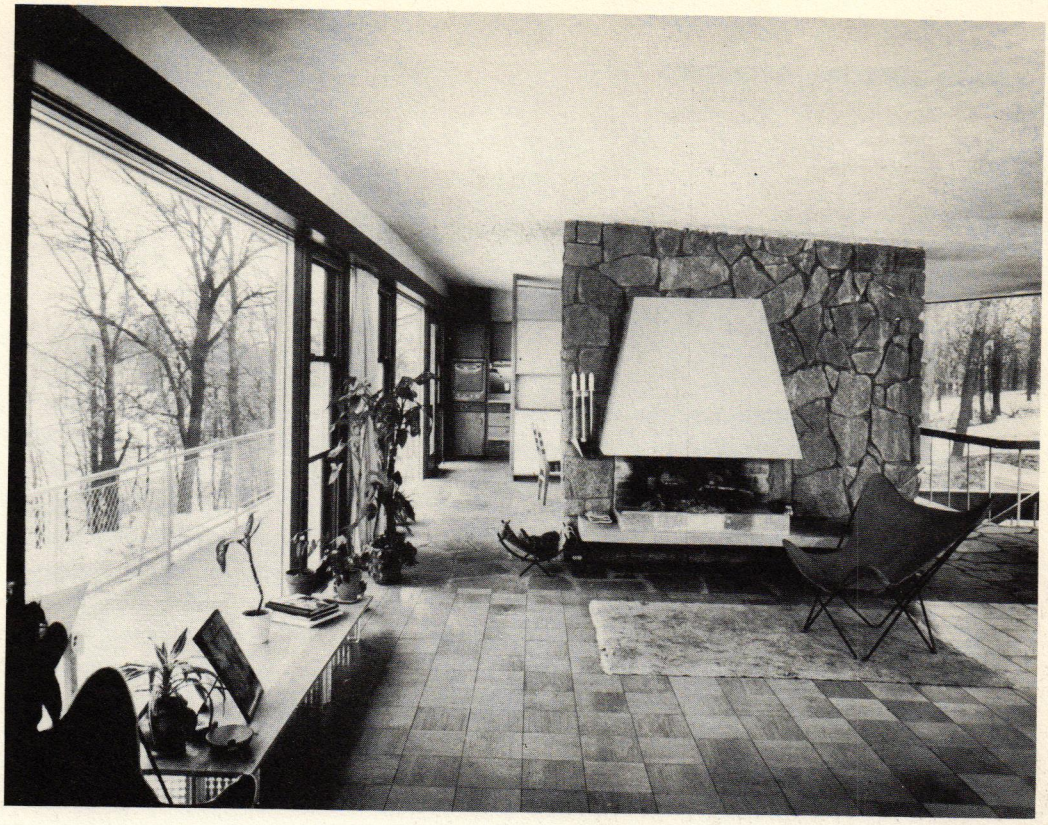


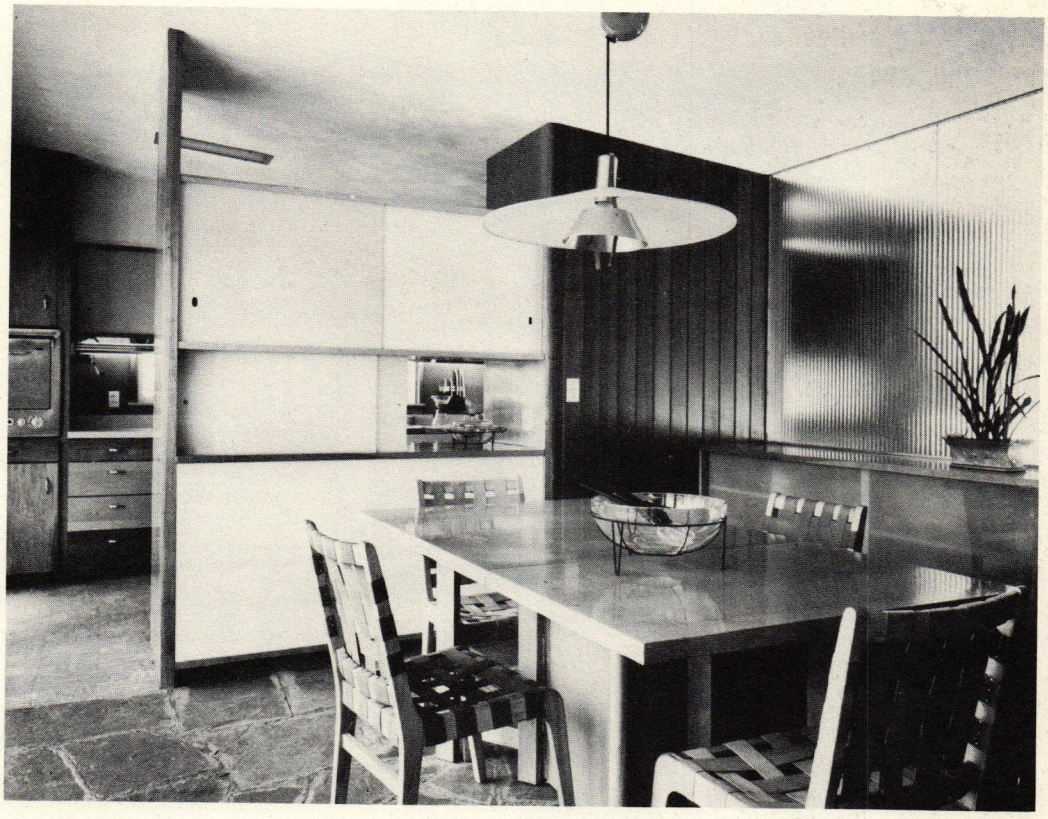
The Oppenheimer house, by architect Norman Nagle, is one in which easy circulation was an important requirement. Mr. and Mrs. Oppenheimer, who have a small daughter, wanted a complete separation of sleeping and living areas and provision for entering those areas without crossing other rooms. They also wanted a separate living room for themselves when their daughter becomes old enough to entertain. The central entrance provides the circulation point from which to get to all parts of the house. It also serves as a vestibule which is a virtue in the Minnesota winters since it provides shelter from cold winds and space for guests to remove boots and heavy clothing. The house, situated on the edge of a ravine, is admirably suited to the site. The second floor living area looks over the valley to the southeast, and is related to a terrace which is protected by its location from prevailing winds. Perhaps the most pleasant aspect of the house is the open planning of the living and dining wing, which increases the apparent size of the areas and also relates the house to the beautiful rolling country-side in which it is built.





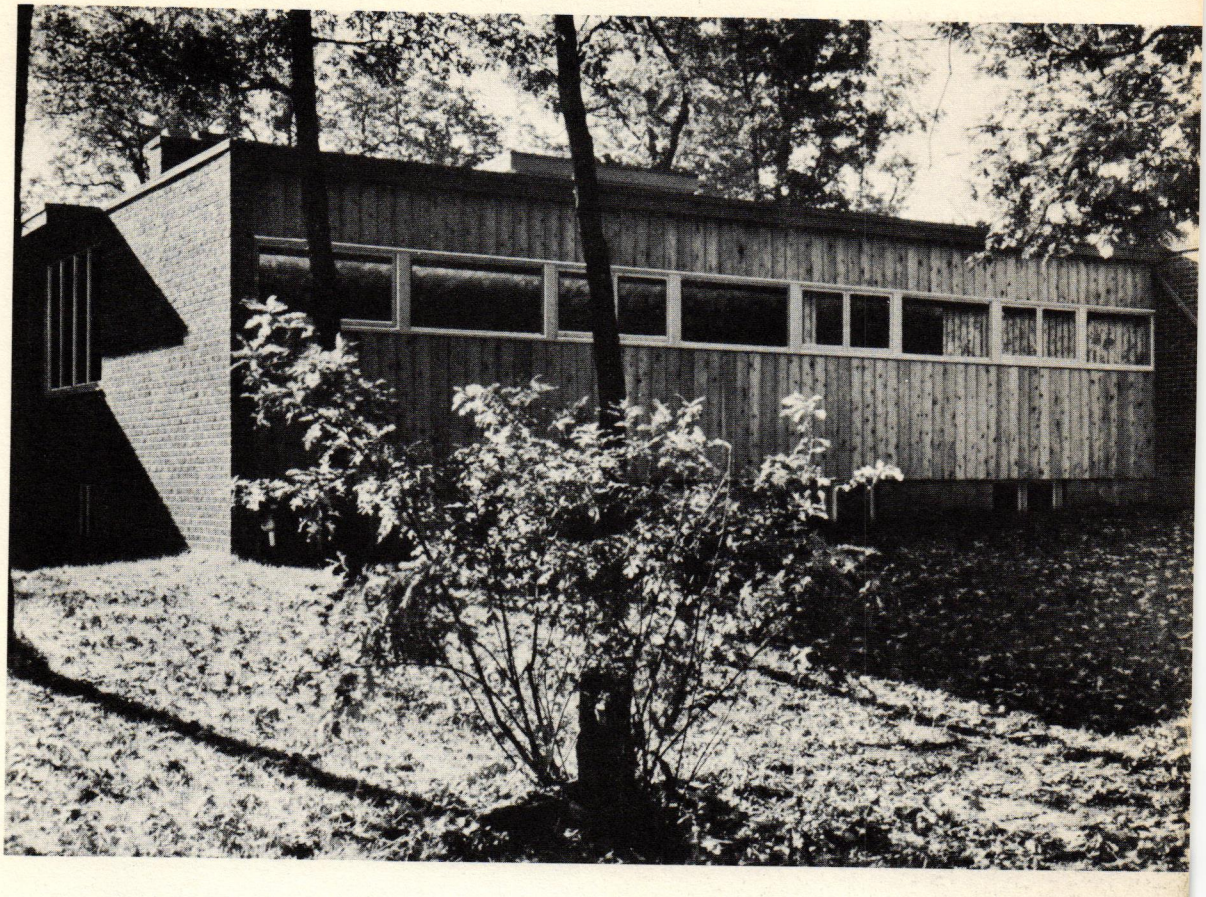


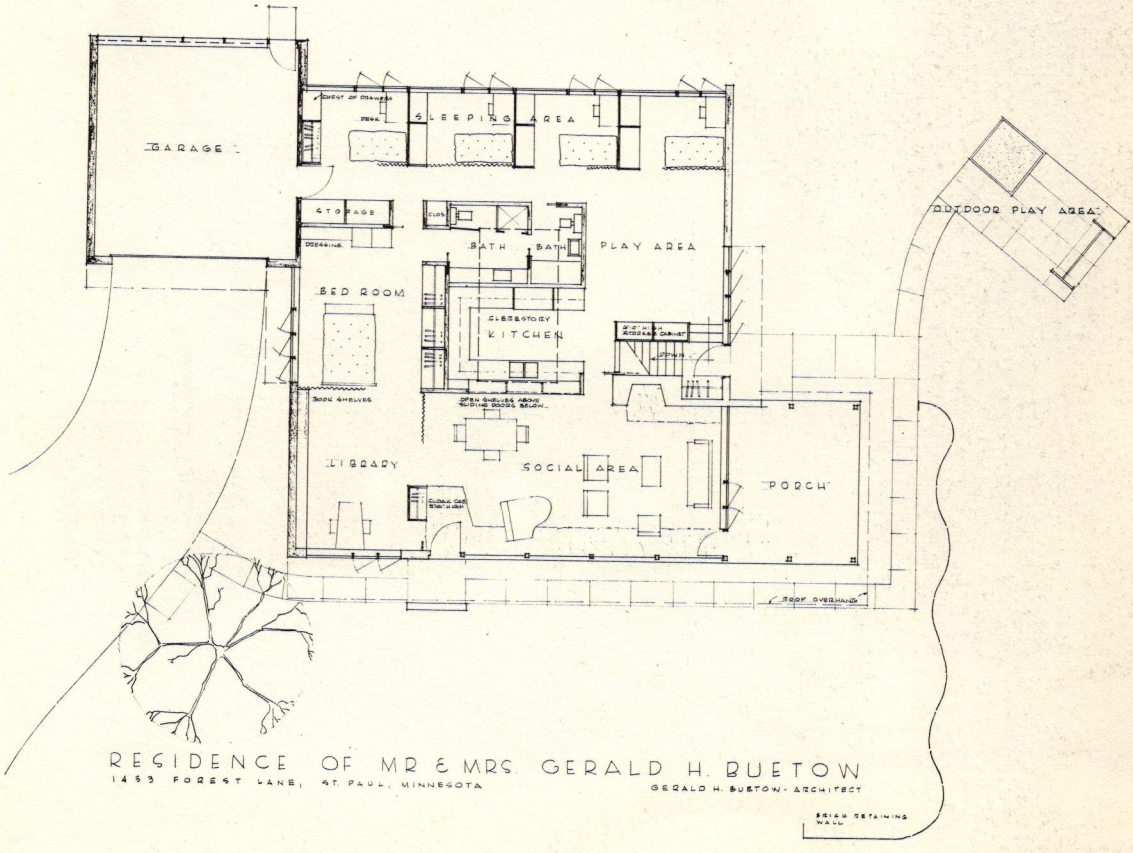




GERALD BUETOW, ARCHITECT

Architect Gerald Buetow's solution for a house for himself, his wife and five children is a cube-shaped one-story plan which gives maximum square footage for the cost. Each child (with the exception of the twins) has a separate sleeping area. These areas are partitioned off by curtains and movable wardrobes, and may be opened when desired. The playroom is easily supervised from the kitchen, and has its own entrance. Kitchen and bathrooms, in the center of the house with clerestory windows for light and ventilation, permit all major rooms to have outside exposure with the least amount of waste space. The master bedroom and library, adjacent to each other, provide privacy for the parents and a second living area for them when the children are old enough to entertain. One of the delightful aspects of this house is the controlled use of interior partitions in relation to a judicious use of glass area, giving the impression of a large space in a relatively small house. The plan makes it possible to entertain fairly large groups comfortably, makes use of every inch of space, and permits complete through circulation.



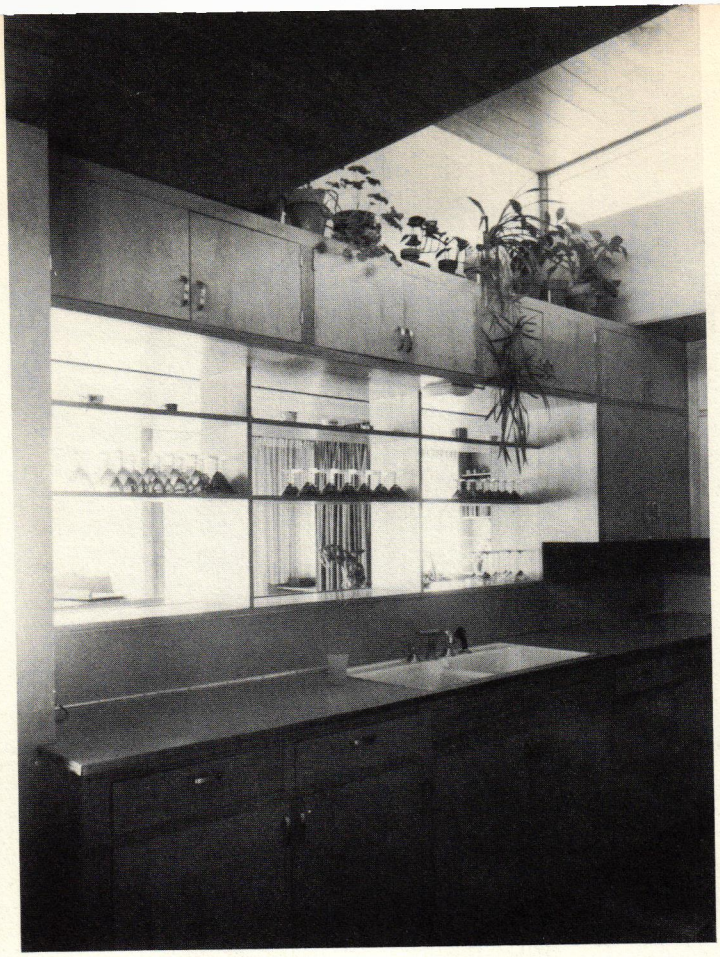


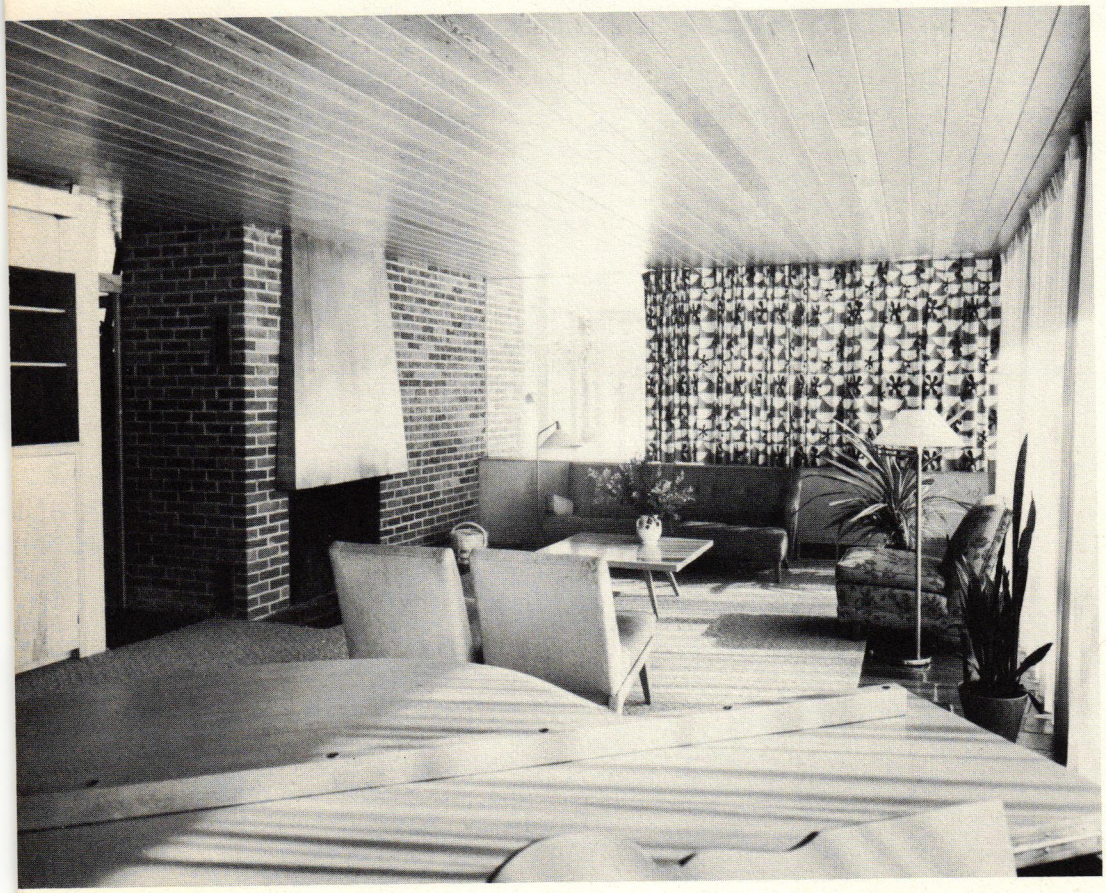
RESIDENCE OF MR & MRS GERALD H. BUETOW

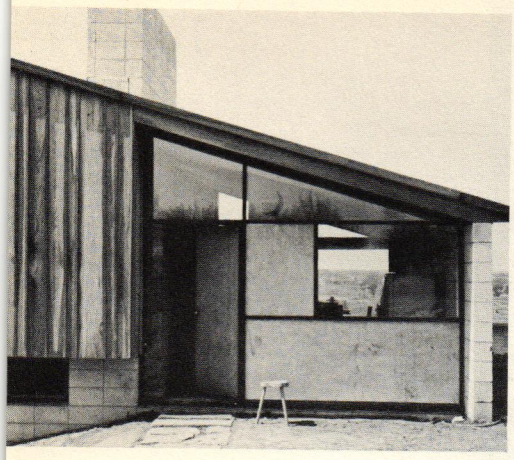
1453 FOREST LANE, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

GERALD H. BUETOW - ARCHITECT

BUETOW, *continued*

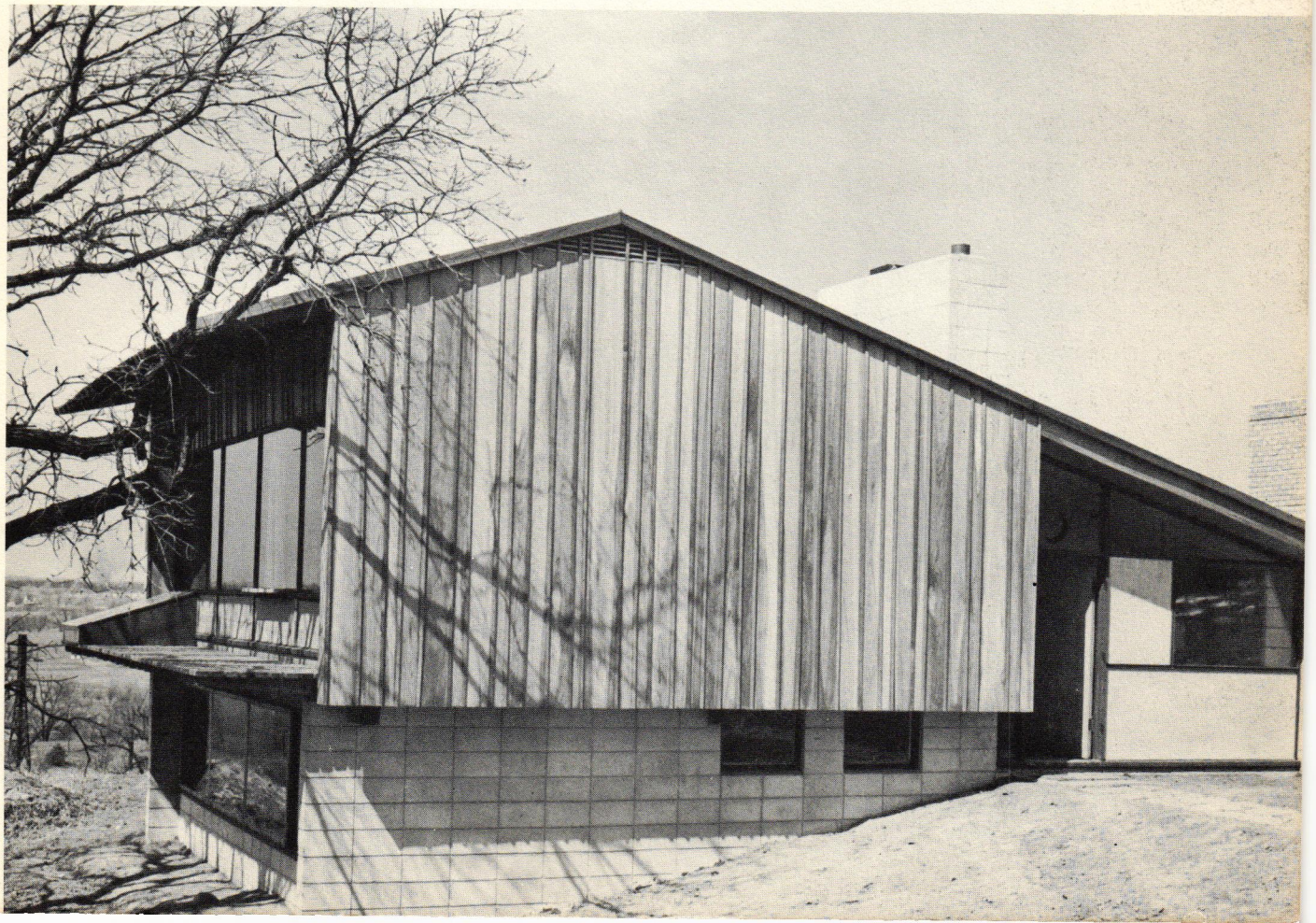


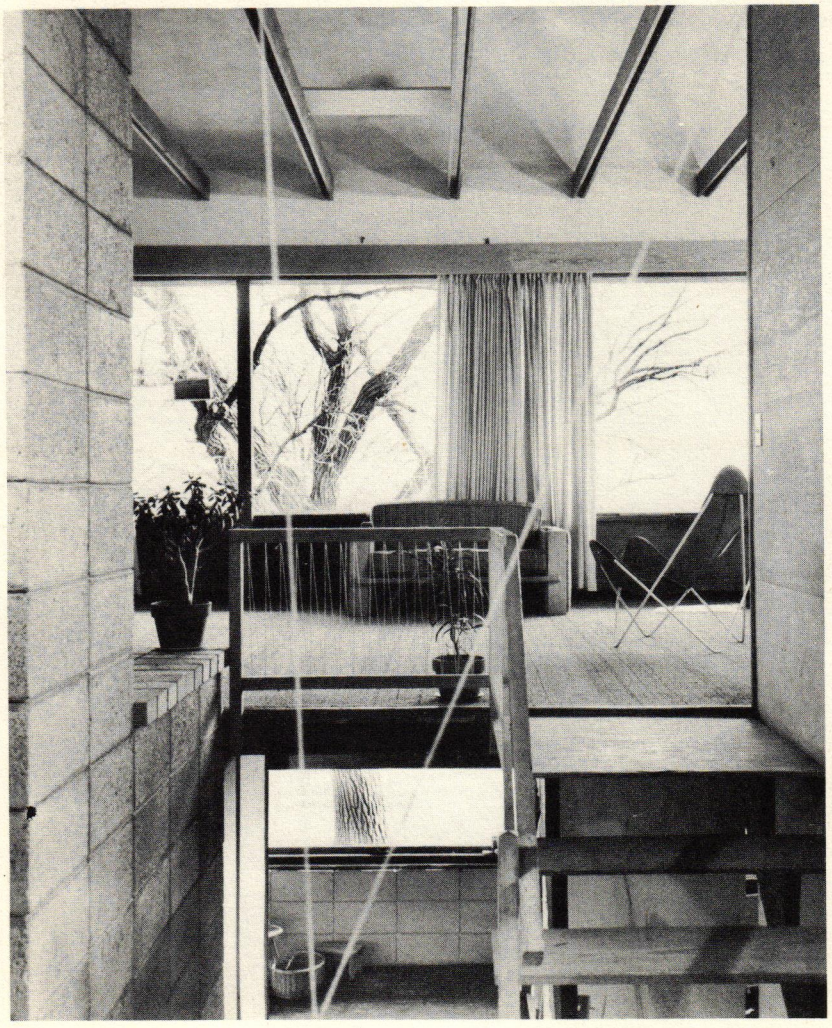


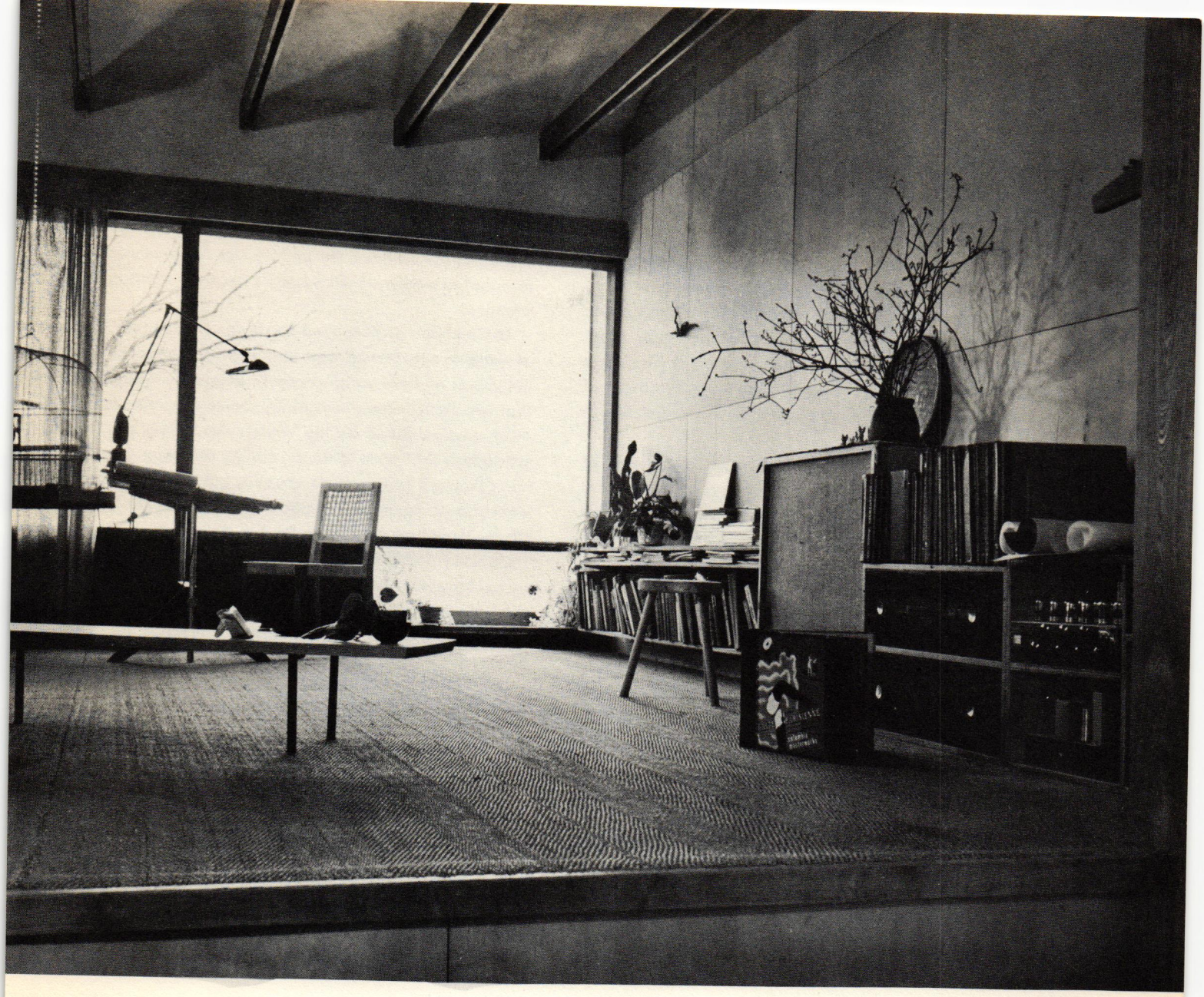


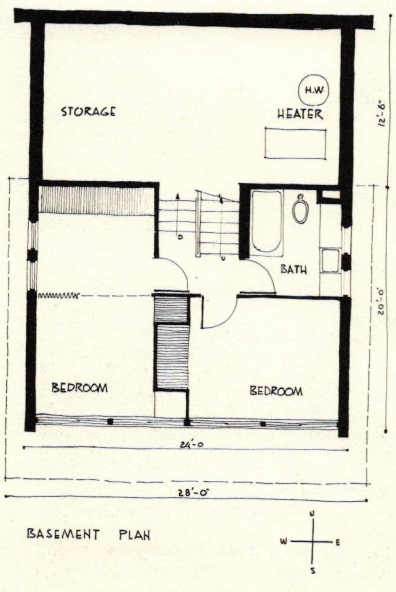
CARL GRAFFUNDER, ARCHITECT

After experimenting with one-story plans, architect Carl Graffunder found that a two-story house cost less for the space required by his family of five. His final solution is a split-level house, built on a hillside lot, which permits division into four main areas and avoids the usual full flight of stairs between living and sleeping quarters. Even with such a simple plan, the living area gains a certain amount of privacy from children's activities and yet maintains a large open feeling. The house takes complete advantage of the sun in the living and sleeping areas and is protected both by design and location from severe winter winds. A very small budget required a maximum use of space given by the cube-shaped plan and by such devices as the centrally located stairs and the bathroom under the fireplace. The architect cut costs further by careful detailing so that stock parts might be used, avoiding over-finishing, and by doing much of the work himself. The final product is a house of 1328 usable square feet, built at a cost of 1500 hours of work and a little less than $7 per square foot.

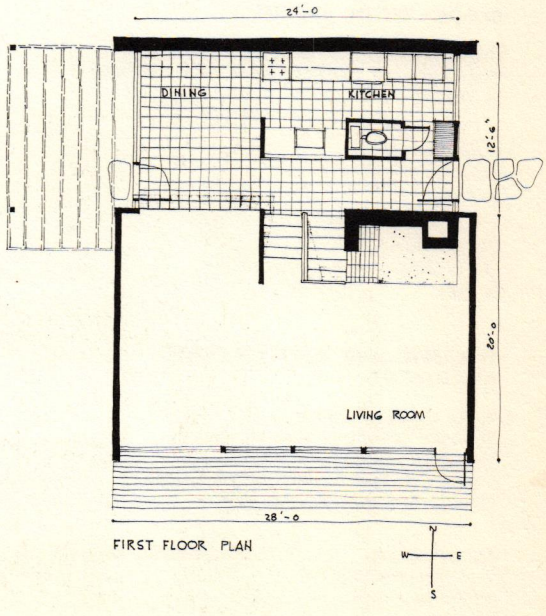








BASEMENT PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

continued from page 3

The development of the plans to beautify Washington, D.C. stimulated a general interest in large scale rehabilitation and city planning in the early years of this century. A partial and temporary "rehabilitation and beautification" of the Bridge Square area in Minneapolis was accomplished between 1908 and 1915. Agitation during these years for the adoption of a master plan for the city culminated, in 1917, in the publication of a plan that projected a system of boulevards on which buildings were axially distributed along great vistas. The ideas that determined the form of the 1917 plan were lifted out of the past and had little real identity with the everyday life of the city.

In the course of the next twenty-five years it did not, of course, become possible to shape the growing city to accord with an economically and artistically unrealistic pattern that had been suited only to the social conditions of an earlier epoch of history. As yet we have perfected neither the social instruments nor the temper of mind that will effect controls over the form and quality of twentieth century Minneapolis as a whole.

The group of architects whose work was exhibited in the Everyday Art Gallery represent more firmly established traditions, and enjoy a somewhat wider acceptance, than did the pioneer generation of "modern" architects. The social context within which they work unfortunately still has much in common with that in which the much lamented architecture of the recent past developed. The social context, therefore, must change if architects are to have the opportunity for producing architecture that is worthy of our society's avowed social and political intention.

The architect is prepared to design shelter that is a source of esthetic satisfaction and that provides opportunity for the individual and the social group to enjoy the relation to nature that twentieth century technology makes possible. Buildings like those now published by the Walker Art Center can function as guideposts that point to the possibility of a finer urban environment than we have yet developed, but the realization of that environment cannot be made the responsibility of architects alone. If we are to realize the full potential of what the contemporary architect has to offer, we must forge effective instruments for controlling the pattern of urban growth and realize that our individual interests will best be served through the development of a more rational, humane, and beautiful community plan.

HOUSES DESIGNED BY ARCHITECTS PARTICIPATING IN THE ARCHITECTS' WORKSHOP

GERALD BUETOW, ARCHITECT

Buetow House
1433 Forest Lane
Arden Hills, St. Paul
St. Paul Pioneer Press, February 18, 1951

BROOKS CAVIN, ARCHITECT

Hagstrom House
Ridge Place and Wactler Avenue (off Dodd Road)
St. Paul

Hawkinson House
4038 Valentine Court
St. Paul

Garrett House
North Oaks
St. Paul

ELIZABETH AND WINSTON CLOSE, ARCHITECTS

Beach Cabin, "Skywater"
St. Croix River Bank, South of Osceola
Wisconsin
Progressive Architecture, December, 1948
Nuestra Arquitectura, June, 1949

Mitchell House
Pine Tree Orchard
White Bear Lake

Smith House
Manitoba Road, Bellgrove Addition
Minnetonka Mills

Hathaway House
222 Melbourne Avenue South East
Minneapolis
Progressive Architecture, November, 1947
Reinhold Publishing Corporation
Homes, 1947

Gray House
Essex Road
Wayzata

Rank House
Lake Josephine
St. Paul

Thomes-Naftalin House
19 and 21 Barton Avenue South East
Minneapolis
St. Paul Pioneer Press, August 7, 1949

Quist House
5301 Glenbrae Circle
Edina Highlands

Rood House
1650 Dupont Avenue South
Minneapolis
Minneapolis Sunday Tribune, December 4, 1949
Interior Design, February, 1952

Brin House
2861 Burnham Boulevard
Minneapolis

Hoffman House
Little Canada (off McMenemy Road)
Minnesota

Johnson House
2700 Glenhurst Avenue
St. Louis Park

Boynton-Cutright House
18 Norman Ridge
9100 Normandale Road
Minneapolis

Dayton House
Long Lake

Watson House
3318 Edmund Boulevard
Minneapolis

O'Brien House
Northrop Avenue, University Grove
St. Paul

Meehan House
Northrop Avenue, University Grove
St. Paul