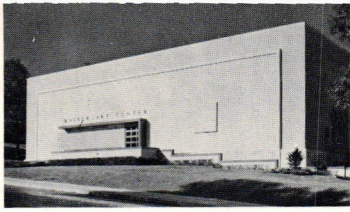




DESIGN QUARTERLY

44

WALKER ART CENTER, MINNEAPOLIS, 1959



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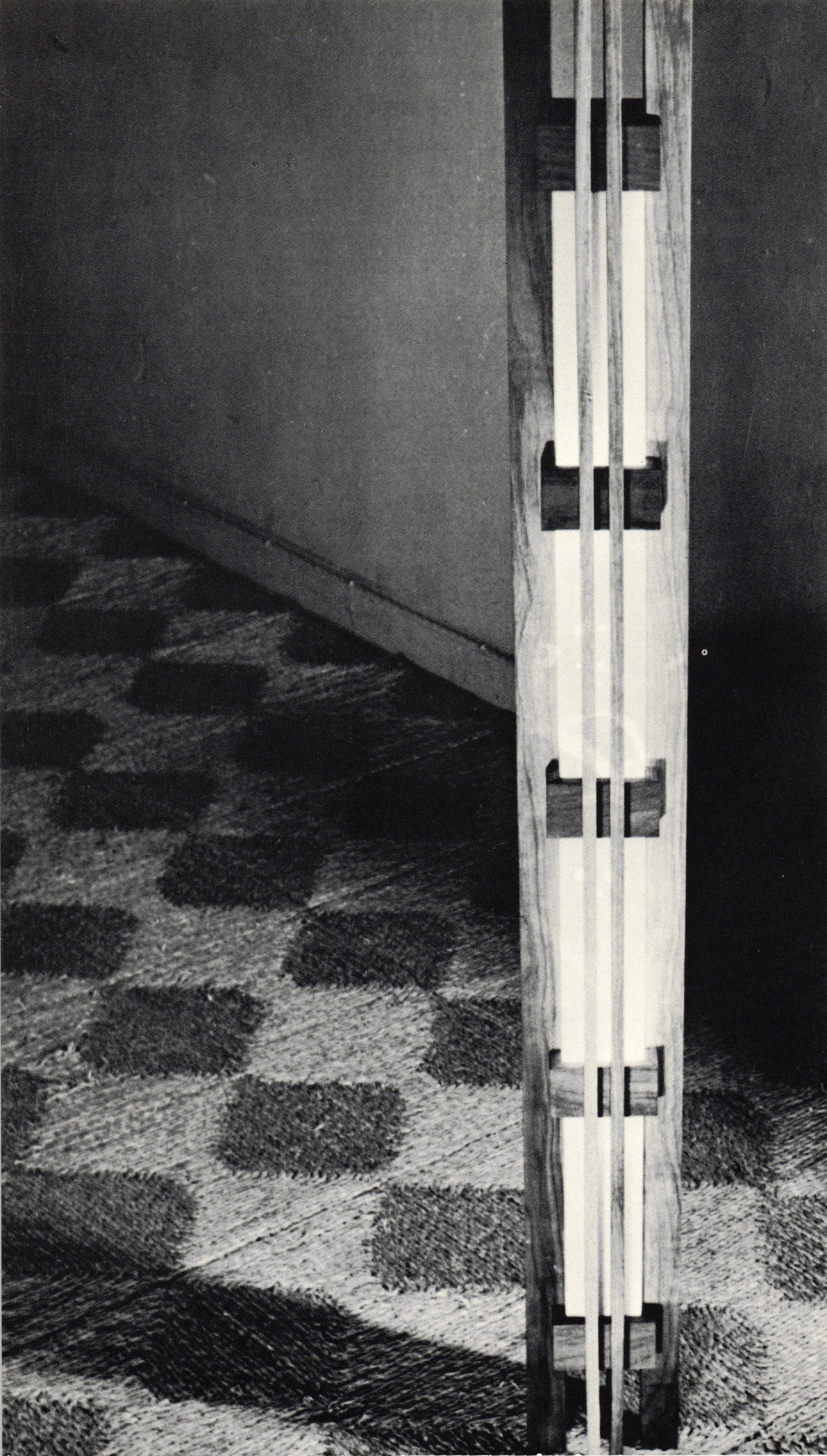
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LESLIE LARSON



The apartment, as we first encountered it, consisted of three rooms plus bath and a completely grubby L-shaped backyard on which all rooms "looked out." The building, typical of many small East Side New York apartment buildings, is a converted mansion. Our rooms are on the ground floor in the rear and were probably at one time utility rooms. They were occupied by the building superintendent immediately prior to our taking occupancy. The spaces were rather awkward with ceilings at 10 feet, which is about midway between grandeur and intimacy. As a result of the ceiling height, I felt it necessary to introduce the suggestion of a lower level, both to give a feeling of intimacy to certain areas and to accent the height in others. This was accomplished by the use of wood trellis-work, which is typical of and recurrent in my solutions to this kind of problem. In the entry and showroom the trellis consists of a rhythm of two by twos; in the living room it takes the form of light panels made of wood and plastic. I feel that the contrast of heights and levels gives scale and drama to interior space.

The showroom had, originally, an exposed kitchen and walls rather broken up by doors and windows. To adapt it to the many purposes which it now serves I built panels to act as partial dividers so that we now have a kitchen (built-in cabinets attached to the panels), a work-space for drafting, and a combination dining room and showroom for the lamps. The panels are of yellow insulation board framed in pine. Doors and windows on other walls were covered with dark brown corkboard with thin pine framing and divisions. A long display shelf is of pine one by fours and the furniture and lamps are of walnut. Rush squares are on the floor. Original walls which still remain exposed in all rooms were painted the same color (a light brown — described as "thatch beige" on the paint can label) to unify the rooms.

The living room was an odd-shaped space with bay-window, a huge ugly radiator, and too many doors. The radiator is covered with wood grille-work which is integrated into book shelves under the windows. The wall with three doors was panelled with a rhythmic pattern of pine one by sixes and one by twos, which give a textured surface and against which a light shelf is mounted over built-in cork-surfaced ledge and cushioned seating. I designed two chairs in walnut, and a circular travertine coffee table to complete the grouping. Along one wall, which had a natural indentation, I installed a closet with sliding screens of walnut and rice paper. The living room looks out through large windows on the backyard-turned-garden which has brick walls and planting beds with ivy, mountain laurel, myrtle, and several trees; here there are also cedar fencing and more corkboard surfaces.

The bedroom is built-in, as is practically everything else. Bed with cabinets against a wall with light shelf above. The dressing table forms an L under the windows in front of the radiator covered with separated boards.

The problem was basically one of building a structure, within the unacceptable given space, which would produce a functional environment and at the same time redefine the space in more human and dramatic terms.

I like to think primarily of construction, rather than decoration, as a basis for design. What ornament there is derives from the rhythm of the boards, texture of the surfaces, and from the joinery — from the materials them-

On preceding page:

Standing light column, walnut and fiberglass, 60 inches high, 6 inches wide

Designer's apartment in Manhattan, walnut shelf over corkboard seat and ledge, pine magazine shelf