

away from its position on the back wall, as far as the upstairs was concerned. No, he said, it was just taking up valuable space now. So we did it.

Line of doors. Tried moving the door from entrance room to living room even further back

in the entrance room. It didn't help, somehow made the room seem funny inside. By moving doors, the line-up between living room door and kitchen door was no longer quite as nice. So we didn't change it.



24 / THE LILY TILES

THERE WAS A BREATHING SPACE DURING THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. DURING THIS TIME, THE BUILDING AS IT HAD DEVELOPED SO FAR NOW BEGAN ALLOWING ME TO GENERATE THE CHARACTER OF CERTAIN ORNAMENTS.

While the work on the floorplan changes was going on, I started to think about other details that would affect the house. I had been enjoying the idea of making small tiles to put in the front foundation wall. The first sketches I made

of these tiles were of a small black octagon, with a yellow, red, and lilac star on it. I sized it against a bit of real concrete, and then made a tile sample. It seemed rather crude. Then I started wondering if the form of the insert should be tall and delicate, not squat and hard like an octagon. When I had first seen the site, there had been several tall pink lilies growing there. They suggested lilies as ornaments which might decorate the lower part of the foundation: I started to



Early experiments with an octagonal tile and a lily tile, to see which one fit better into the landscape and into the wholeness of the site



Holding up a full-sized drawing of a lily, in the rough position on the site where it would occur, to see if it feels harmonious and fitting.

imagine that the inserts might be lilies, also made of tile, but more realistic. The technical difficulty of making big clay lilies would have been formidable, but I pressed on anyway. I tried more mockups. Meanwhile, another version of the black octagon tile worked out better, with a delicate color, and began to feel right. I took it to the site to check its feeling.

The tiny question, octagon with star or naturalistic lilies, as the ornaments for the front foundation wall was growing in importance. I was very much aware that the main rooms were not yet fixed: The spaces of living room and kitchen were crucial but not yet perfect at all. I had the odd, intuitive sense that getting clear about this small decorative tile — whether to go for the geometry of the octagon, or the organic character of the lily — would help establish the nature of the house and would then guide the evolution of larger questions about living room space and kitchen space.

After a few weeks of reflection, the lily tiles were beginning to seem like the right thing to do, especially since the lilies themselves originated on that land. Randy and Lizabeth (my assistants) and I met on site to look at my first sketches of the lily tiles.⁶ On site, the sketches were horrifying, too big, too gross. The big lily I



First painting of the final lily tile

had drawn on paper, about 18 inches high, did not in any sense feel harmonious with the land or with the house as we saw it or visualized its foundation. This feeling was clear, palpable. Also — a practical detail — we found out that the tiles couldn't be seen from the road — so whatever we put there would be seen only from close-to, from 10 or 15 feet from the house. Given that fact, the size of lily that felt natural was about seven inches high, not 18 inches as I had thought at first. We could feel, as we did experiments at four, five, seven, and nine inches, that the seven-inch lily was a natural continuation of what was there. All three of us saw this clearly and agreed.

On the other hand, the octagon I had already made did look beautiful. Color was vital to the place. One lily I drew on paper — a small watercolor — also looked very good. It was a red lily, green stem, sky-blue background. But after looking for a while, it seemed too sweet. Then we tried (one person held it up, while the others looked at it) a painting I had done of a red lily, with yellow spots, green leaves, blackish gray ground. This looked better.

We went back to my workshop and started making a three-dimensional lily in clay. The idea of a clay lily directly set in concrete which I had started with was not practical — I couldn't

figure out how to attach so many pieces to the formwork. So I tried a small clay plaque, the size of the painting — only seven inches high, with the lily in relief within the plaque — and the idea that we could cast recesses in the concrete wall of the foundation to hold these plaques.

After looking at the first rough lily plaques tried by Randy and Lizabeth, I asked for the clay they were using and began a much more basic thing, in which negative and positive really worked (POSITIVE SPACE). This meant rebuilding the whole lily design from scratch, as a low relief. It changed the design quite strongly. I played with the clay until its centers were more powerful (the leaves as centers, the space between leaves as centers, and the borders of the tile as centers). Then we made a plaster mold from the modeling clay, tried pulling a few clay tiles from the mold, and fired them. Meanwhile, a glazing sample began looking quite good, though a bit harsh compared with the subtle color of the octagon. I made many different color studies, on paper and with glazes, until the color of the tile began to feel right on the site. The one which had the deepest feeling was a striking color, with a red ground, purple surround, and yellow and orange glazes for the lily itself.

After a few days, we had eight of these lily tiles in a row and could see them on the site. We compared them with the octagon which I had still not given up completely. After thinking about it for six or seven days, I began to feel clearly that the lily was more true to the house than the octagon. The octagon was more elegant. But the lily had more of the real "original" feeling of the site.

From this, my knowledge of the emerging house took a huge jump. I saw the house changed. The unfolding had progressed not only in the emergence of this one detail, but in some subtle way that also changed feelings and qualities in the larger whole.

In effect, the size and color of the ornamental tiles unfolded from the size and character and spacing of the tile positions along the foundation wall.



Blossom tile: another early tile experiment



Various hand-glazed lily tiles