

Plan of the Back-of-the-Moon community, showing the three houses in position, top right the Gioja house, middle right the Heisey house, and bottom right the Goddu house. The lake is at the top of the drawing.

During this second phone call, I asked that they work, as far as possible, *with their eyes closed*, imagining themselves in the actual place that we were going to build *as if it already existed*. I told them I, too, would keep my eyes closed most of the time during our telephone discussion, and that, working in this way, we would be most likely to succeed in visualizing something good, and something real.

Now, to get things moving, I simply began asking them questions, one at a time. These questions were put to them in a certain order, and were a way of creating a sequence of unfolding. Each question, when answered,

would create a further unfolding of the house that had been generated up until then by the answers to the previous questions. As we went forward, we all three together built up, in our minds, a picture of the house they had in mind. Each of my questions was designed to bring forth a new feature of the emerging whole. I chose the order of the questions carefully, so as to cause the house to unfold as cleanly and smoothly as possible.

Although my questions, and the order in which I asked them, were largely the same for each family, each family gave entirely different answers to these questions.



### 3 / A HOUSE FOR GEOFFREY AND LINDA GIOJA

With the Gioja family, Geoffrey and Linda, I began by saying:

*Q: We are walking across the site, towards your house. Now, tell me, how do we come into the house, where are we coming from?*

They told me, in answer:

*A: The house is pressed over against the trees. We want to be far from the common land. The*

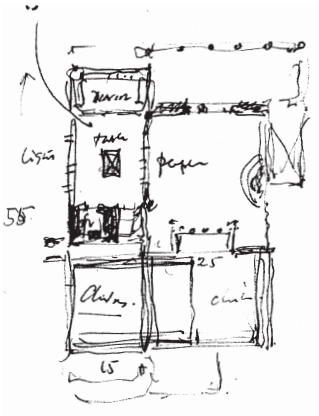
*feeling of the inside of our house is enclosed and private.*

When they had finished answering, and I was reasonably sure I understood what they meant, I asked

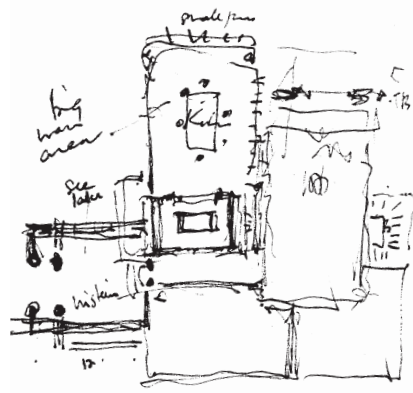
*Q: So now I come to the door. What happens as I go inside, what is the first thing I see, where are we, what are we looking at?*



*The Gioja house*



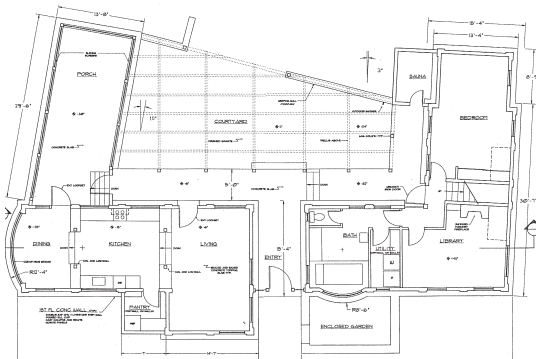
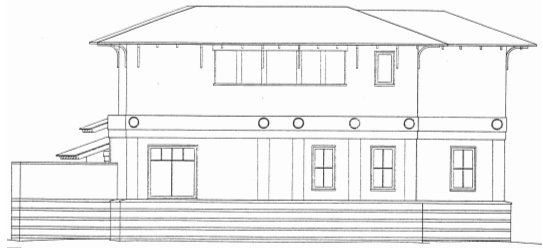
*The Gioja house plan after a one-hour telephone discussion and visualization by Geoffrey and Linda Gioja. The courtyard they described is on the right.*



*More detailed plan of living room and kitchen area, also drawn immediately after the one-hour telephone discussion. This plan shows an entrance porch sticking out to the left, something not shown in the smaller plan. It also shows the stair on the far side of the courtyard from the entrance—something that moved later in the plan's evolution. Christopher Alexander, 1994*



*Bed alcove in the Gioja house*



*Gioja house, Back of the Moon, Austin, Texas. Christopher Alexander, Saul Pichardo, Randy Schmidt, 1996.*



*Mockup we did to get the pattern of glazing bars for the windows in the dining room. We adjusted the tapes you see in this photograph, until they formed a beautiful pattern and enhanced the lake. Then we had the windows built. Christopher Alexander, Randy Schmidt, 1996.*



*Dining room windows, as we then built them from the mockup, overlooking the lake.*



*The passage between living areas and private areas—as you see in this photograph, half indoors, half outdoors.*



*The outdoor fireplace on the porch, seen through a window in the dining-room door.*

The Giojas told me, in answer to this second question:

*A: We are now looking at an internal courtyard, everything opens from it. As we come into this courtyard, rooms open directly off it.*

In this case of the Giojas, who had described the courtyard, I then said,

*Q: But where is the main room? As I come in through the entrance, do I walk right or left to get to it? Is it to the left or to the right; how do I get there?*

*A: It is to the left, they said, towards the lake.*

And then:

*Q: What is it like when I get there?*

And the answer was,

*A: It has a beautiful window with a view of the lake, and another window looking on the courtyard.*

The house became complicated after this initial conversation. Geoffrey, of Latin descent, and Linda, of North American descent, had a different understanding of their shared idea that



*The stairs to the two bedrooms*

the house might open off the main courtyard. For Geoffrey this courtyard was the main living

room, it was the place where they would “live.” That meant it was lockable, it really was like a room. For Linda it was an outdoor courtyard, not necessarily secure, and therefore could not truly be felt as their main living room. Did it, for example, have a ceiling of vines? As the house went from initial sketch to finished building, the question of how secure this room or courtyard was to be — how lockable, how private? — came repeatedly into focus. The chapel, which was a tiny building in the trees reached from the court-

yard, took on different qualities; the path to the lake had different attributes.

Even in this slightly tortured discussion, though, the essence of the house always remained what it had been from the first day: a house built around a courtyard, which was to be their main living space. Even the fireplace, for example, is in the *outdoor* space. It is visible on page 370, seen through the glass door of the dining room, which leads out to the porch that closes the courtyard and overlooks the lake.



#### 4 / A HOUSE FOR JIM AND SYLVIA HEISEY

With Jim and Silvia Heisey the process began quite differently! The most important thing in the area the Heiseys had chosen for their house, was a stand of small, beautiful, old oak trees, just

towards the lake from the place where they wanted to put the house. This was in their minds from the beginning. The very first thing they said to me, when I asked:



*The Heisey house*