

# PUARL LECTURE: AFTER A PATTERN LANGUAGE

What do we do now?

by Max Jacobson

Thanks to Hajo Neis for inviting the authors of *A Pattern Language* to this conference. We assume he thought it would be interesting to see if we were still alive and what we look like after the 35 years since the completion of *APL* in 1975 (published 2 years later in 1977). These remarks today will focus on the *APL*'s role in the subsequent work of myself and Murray Silverstein, as we decompressed from the intensity of the group work at the Center for Environmental Structure under the direction of Chris Alexander.

Initially, we simply enjoyed the opportunities to raise our newly-born kids, repair our homes, garden, and raise chickens. We were teaching part-time at the U. of California (Los Angeles and Berkeley) and at the Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, CA, and life felt unusually calm and simple for a change. (Sara Ishikawa was a full-time faculty member at UCB, while Ingrid King and Soli Angel each went out of the country to teach).

One of the topics of my research at UCB and at the CES had been the surprising extent to which *APL* enabled laypersons to do schematic design of buildings on their own, without any professional help. After leaving the CES, it seemed natural to set up information booths at local fairs, showing interested passersby how the patterns, along with a few other references, would enable them to design a remodel or addition themselves.

Our notion was that as folks developed their schematic design idea, they would then need more professional



Figure 2: The Design Help Booth

help in preparing construction drawings and calculations in order to get a building permit, and that we could offer that service.

Although considerable work had gone into the development of a new building system at the CES, and had been incorporated in *APL*, we didn't feel that it was applicable to user design in our local suburban residential communities, and we immediately embraced the local conventional stud construction. For example, as part of our teaching at UCB with Ray Lifchez, we made a little pamphlet titled "30 Patterns for Wood Frame Construction" to help the students get a grasp on how modest buildings were conventionally built in our area.

I think that Murray and I were getting impatient at just writing and teaching about architecture, feeling that it was time to drum up some actual projects. We envisioned projects that started with as much user design as possible, aided by *APL* and our ability to untangle any rough spots and to integrate seemingly conflicting ideas. These projects would be carried through construction documents by us, and we would even help folks get the buildings built. We decided that we would start an unusual architectural practice!

We advertised in a local paper that we could help a family to both design and build a residential project, and got

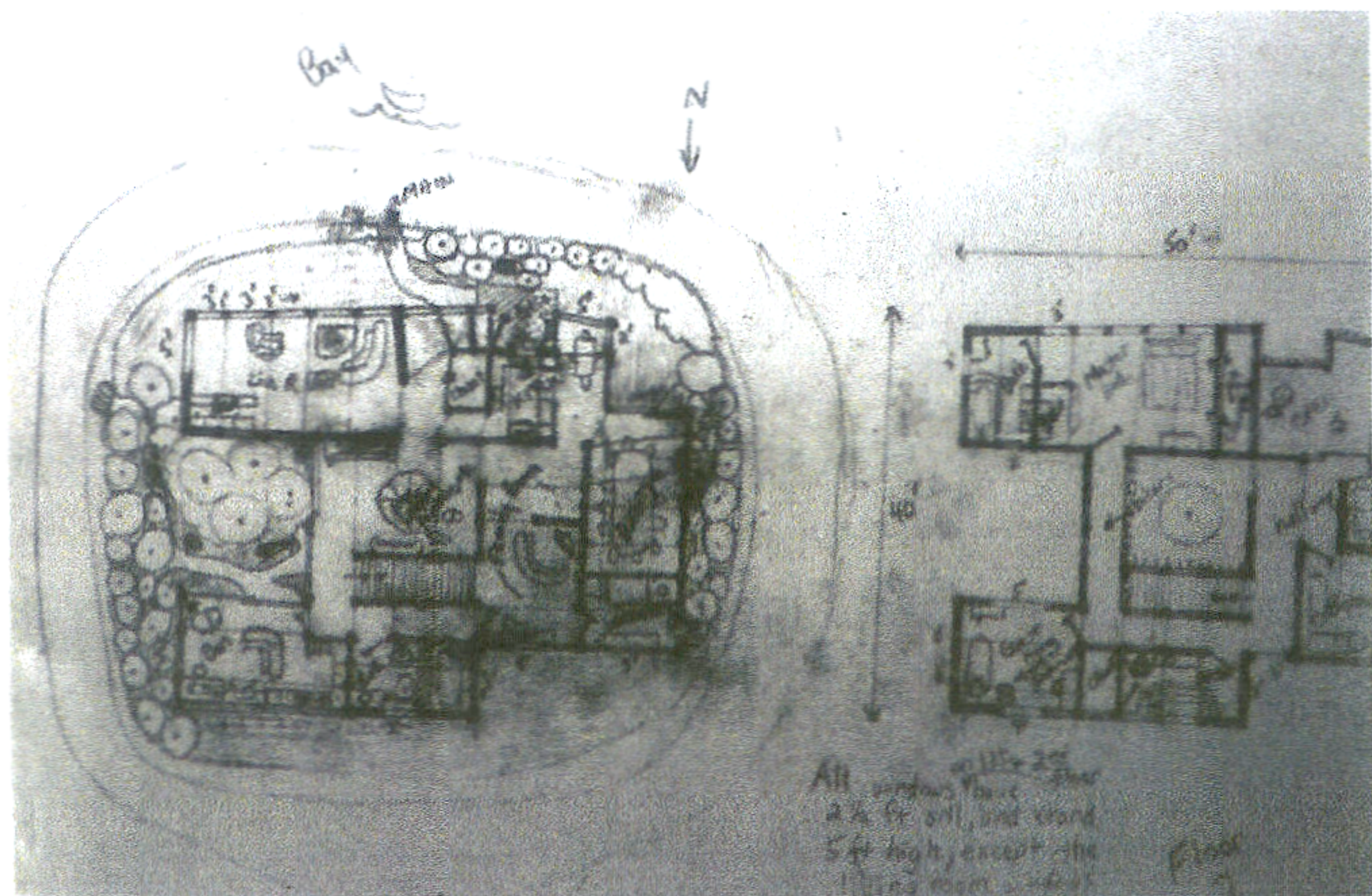


Figure 1: A typical layman design using *APL*



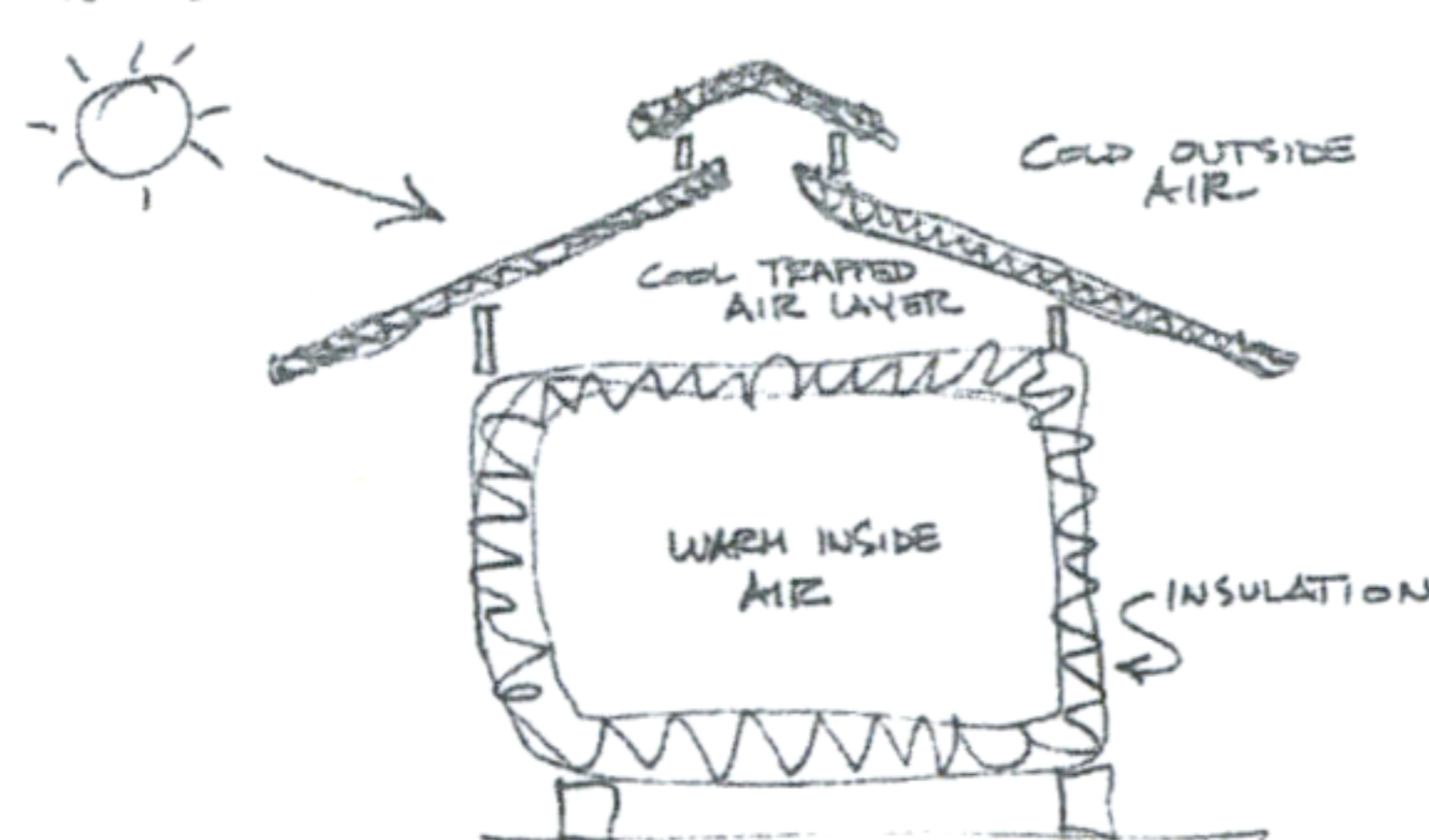
Figure 3: The Experimental Cottage at the CES, based on APL building patterns

a reply from a couple who wanted to add a master bedroom to their suburban home – our first job! We really didn't have any experience actually building, so we teamed up with some contractor friends to successfully complete the project.



Figure 5: Lance and Ed showing us how to build

In the winter, one can close the vents and thereby trap an additional air layer between the insulation and the roofing (Even in winter, however, a small amount of ventilation is desirable to prevent the buildup of water condensation). WINTER SUN



The details for constructing this situation in wood frame buildings are shown below.

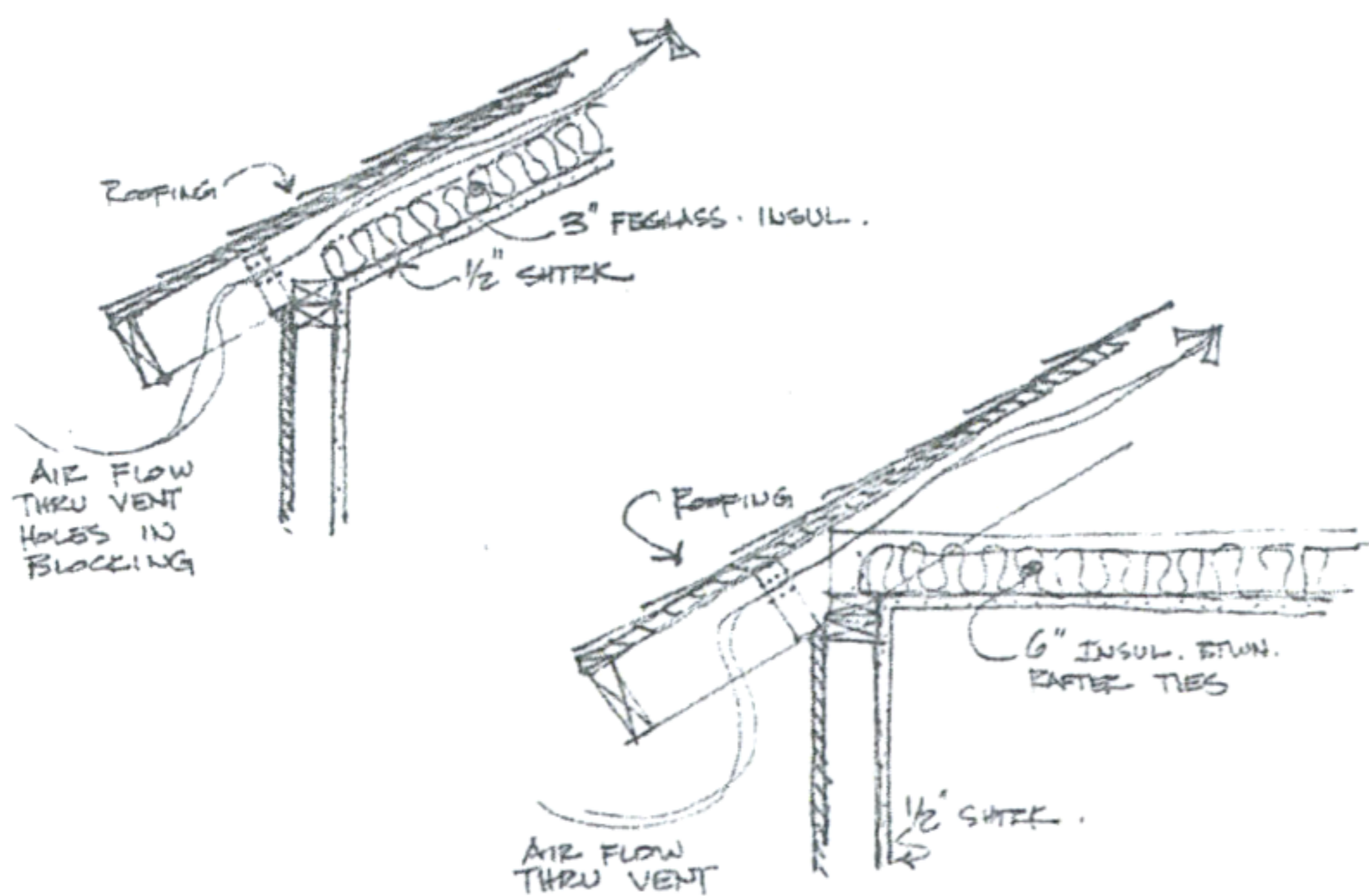


Figure 4: Typical stud construction patterns

My next-door neighbor – seeing us remodeling our own homes and teaching at the universities, and reading what we were saying about user design in *APL*, asked us to help design a new house for him starting with his own unique design ideas. This was a fabulous opportunity for us, because his design ideas were so bold and interesting, and he trusted us to weave them into a good house. One of his ideas, for example, was to conceive of the house as composed of 4 realms or “houses” – one for him, one for his wife, one for the kids, and a commons. Another was a similar idea for the kids, each of whom would have a private space for sleeping and studying, but each would open onto a large commons for play and socialization.

The family's participation continued with their construction of a model of the house, and a full-scale model of typical interior door.

The completed house became a cooperative synthesis of the family's ideas, selected patterns, and our architectural knowledge and instincts. The house reinforced our sense that we, too, could be architects.

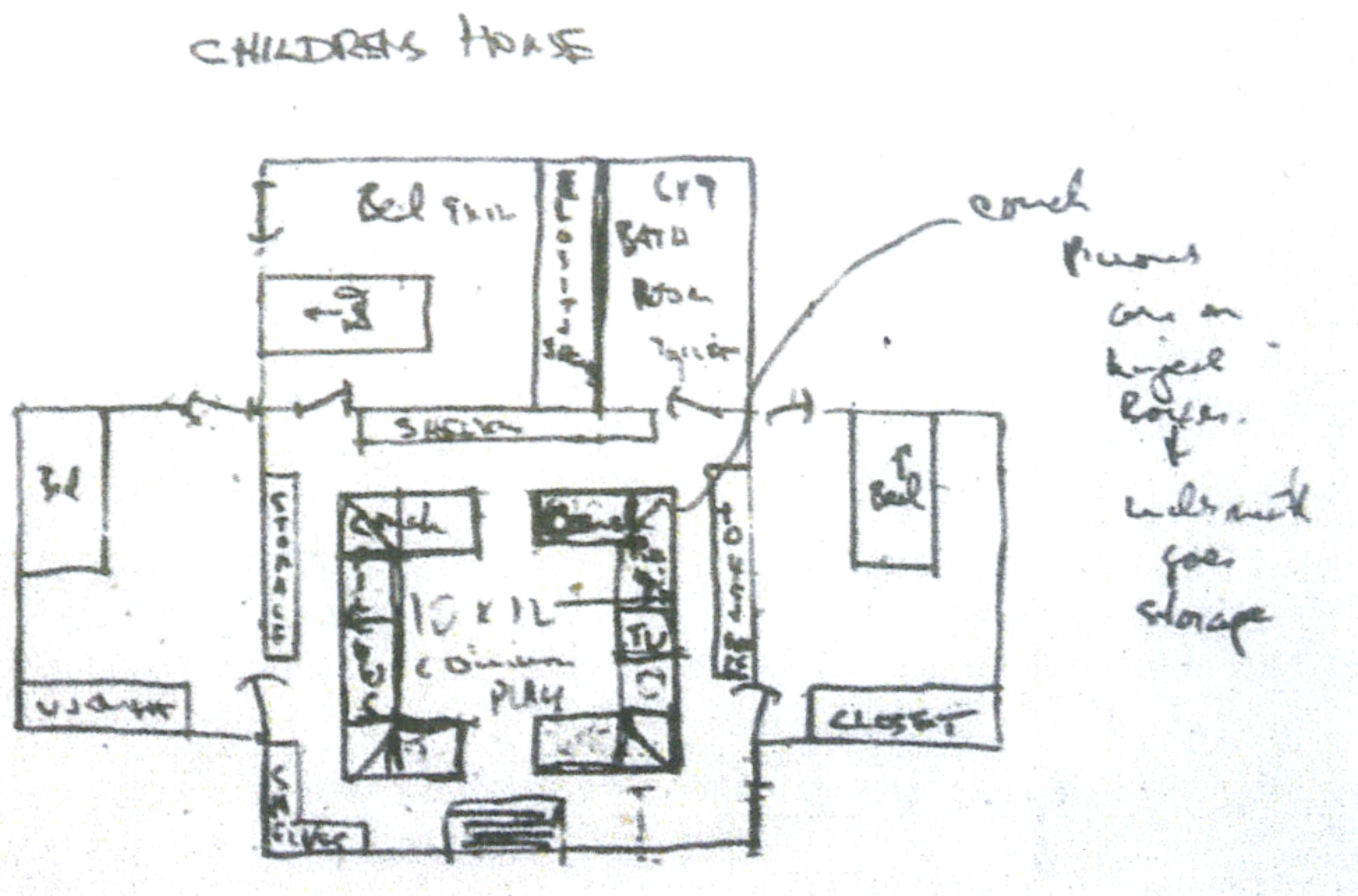


Figure 6: One of Sol's drawings - The Kids' House

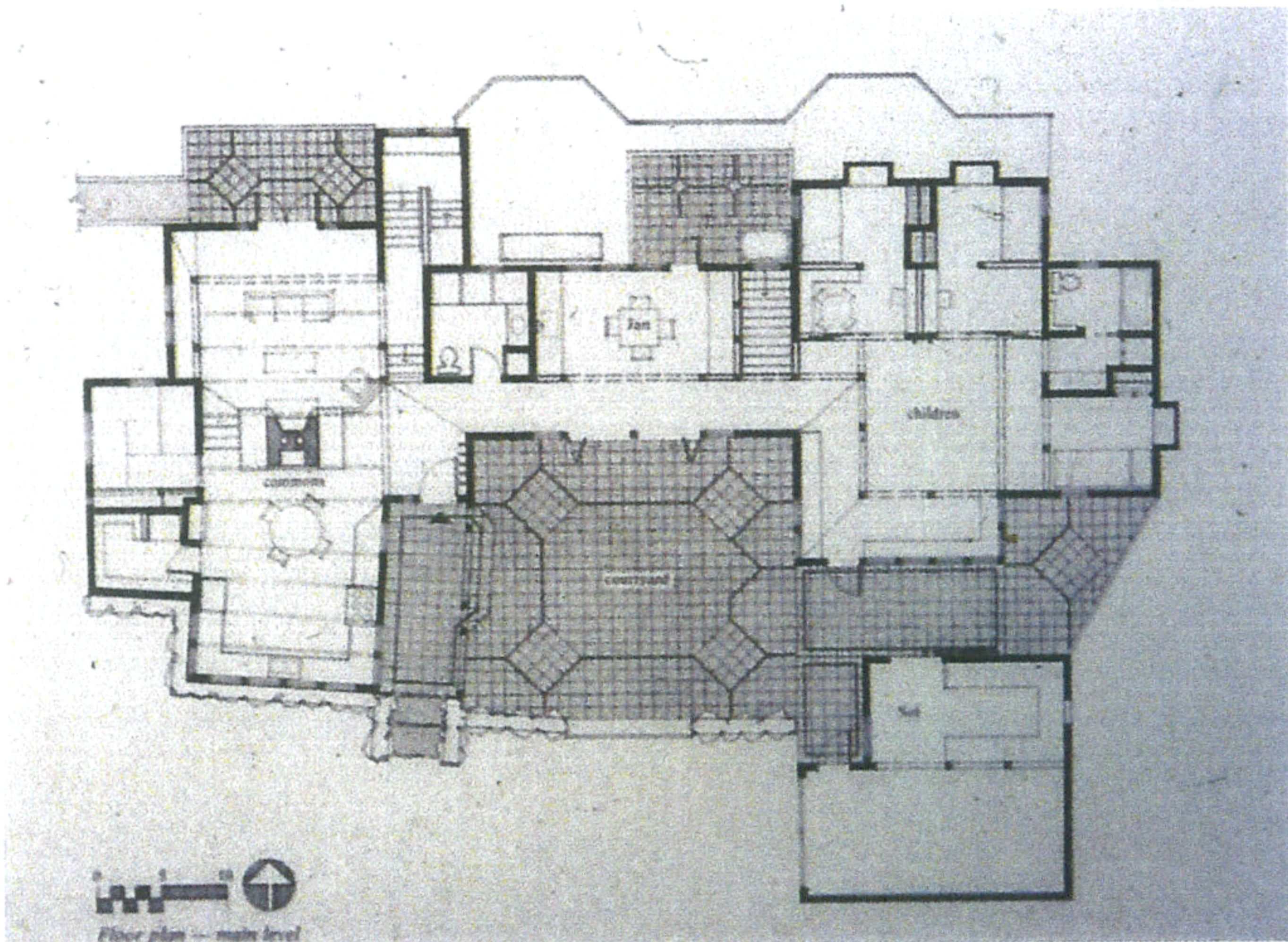


Figure 7: Our final plan of the Kuperman house



Figure 8: Jan's model of the house



Figure 9: Murray holding Sol's door mock-up



Figure 10: Overall view of the Kuperman House, Moraga, CA

Sometimes we are asked how we use *APL* in our work. From the beginning, this was never an issue. We never felt it necessary to follow the instructions in the book, to make a sub-language explicit, to follow any specific order, or even to re-read the patterns to make sure that we were incorporating them correctly. This may be obvious, since we wrote the material, but we also found that that was how the general public used the book. They simply picked out what seemed

important and interesting, and integrated it in their own way.

As a result of Murray's teaching at UCLA with Chuck Rusch, we got a chance to work with Charles Moore on an assembly hall for Krishnamurti in Ojai, CA, experiencing the pleasure of learning new design concepts and patterns from an amazingly creative and fun architect. This project, while it didn't get built due to Krishnamurti's death, introduced us to the potential advantages of paying attention to the work

of other architects. This was something that we didn't do at the CES, focusing almost exclusively on indigenous architectures, or buildings by unknown designers. In our later work, we couldn't resist the influences of the previous generation of Bay Area architects, including Maybeck, Wurster, Esherick, Turnbull, and many others.

As we got a little more work, we moved out of our home offices, and started sharing office space with a group

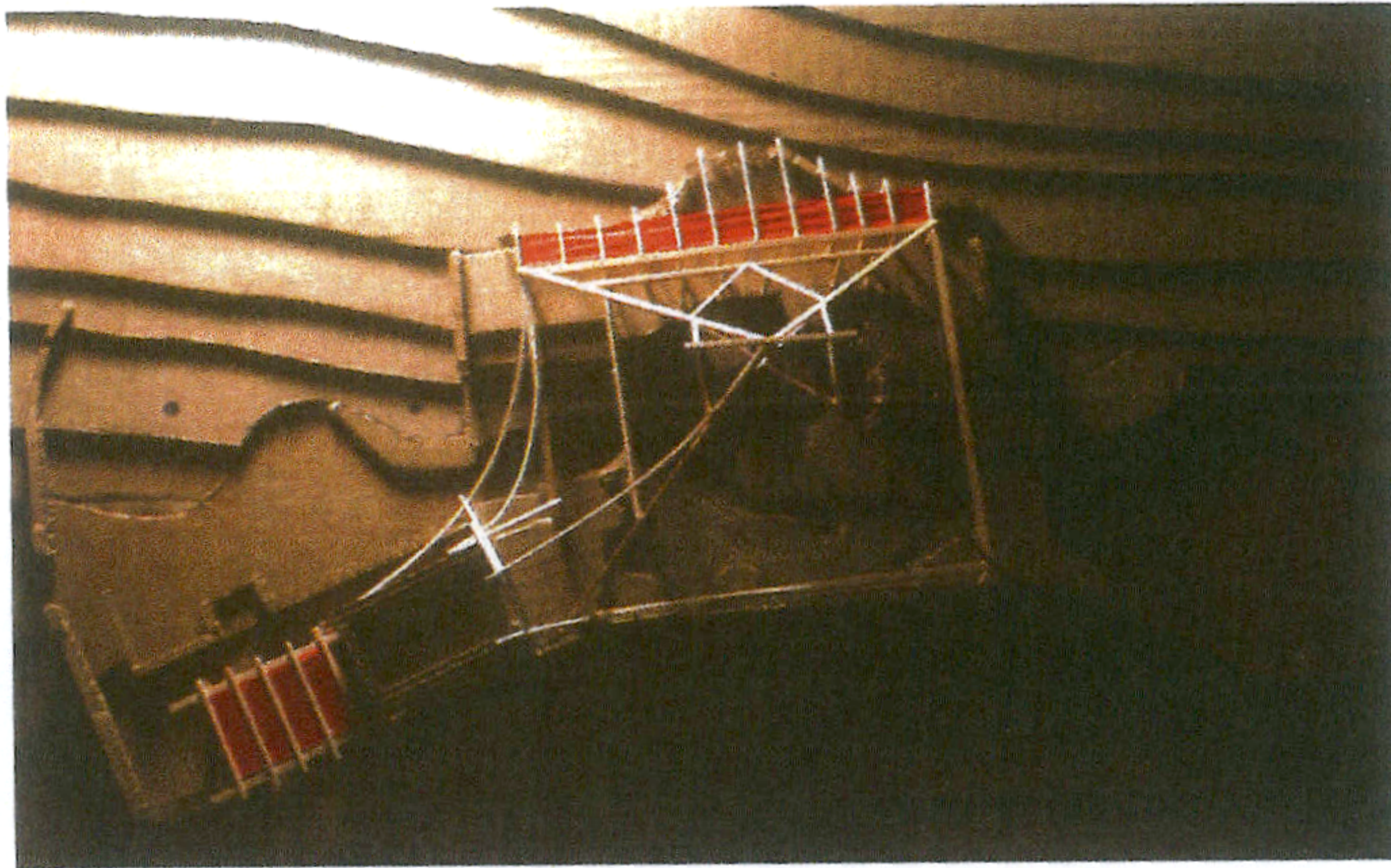
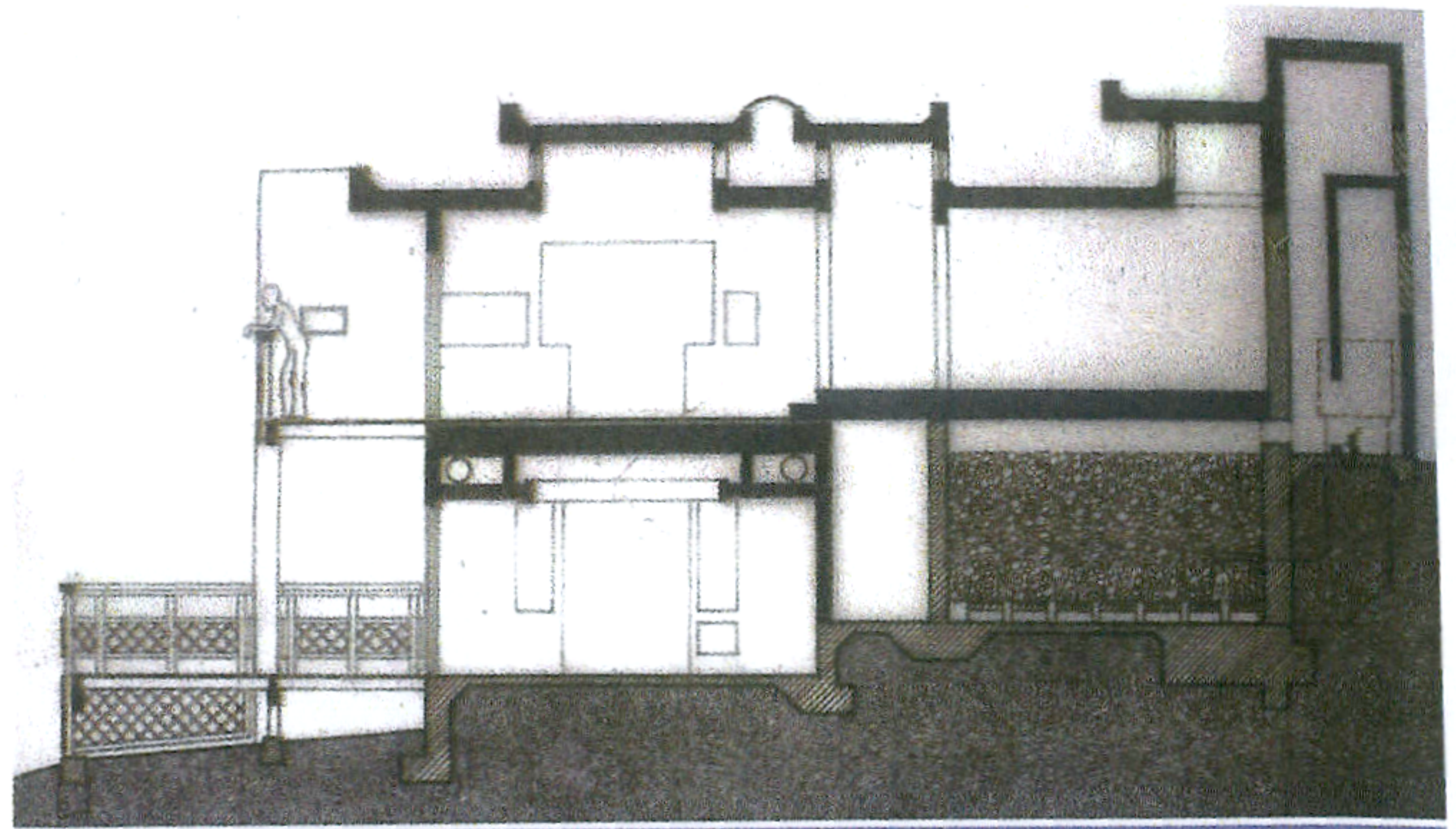
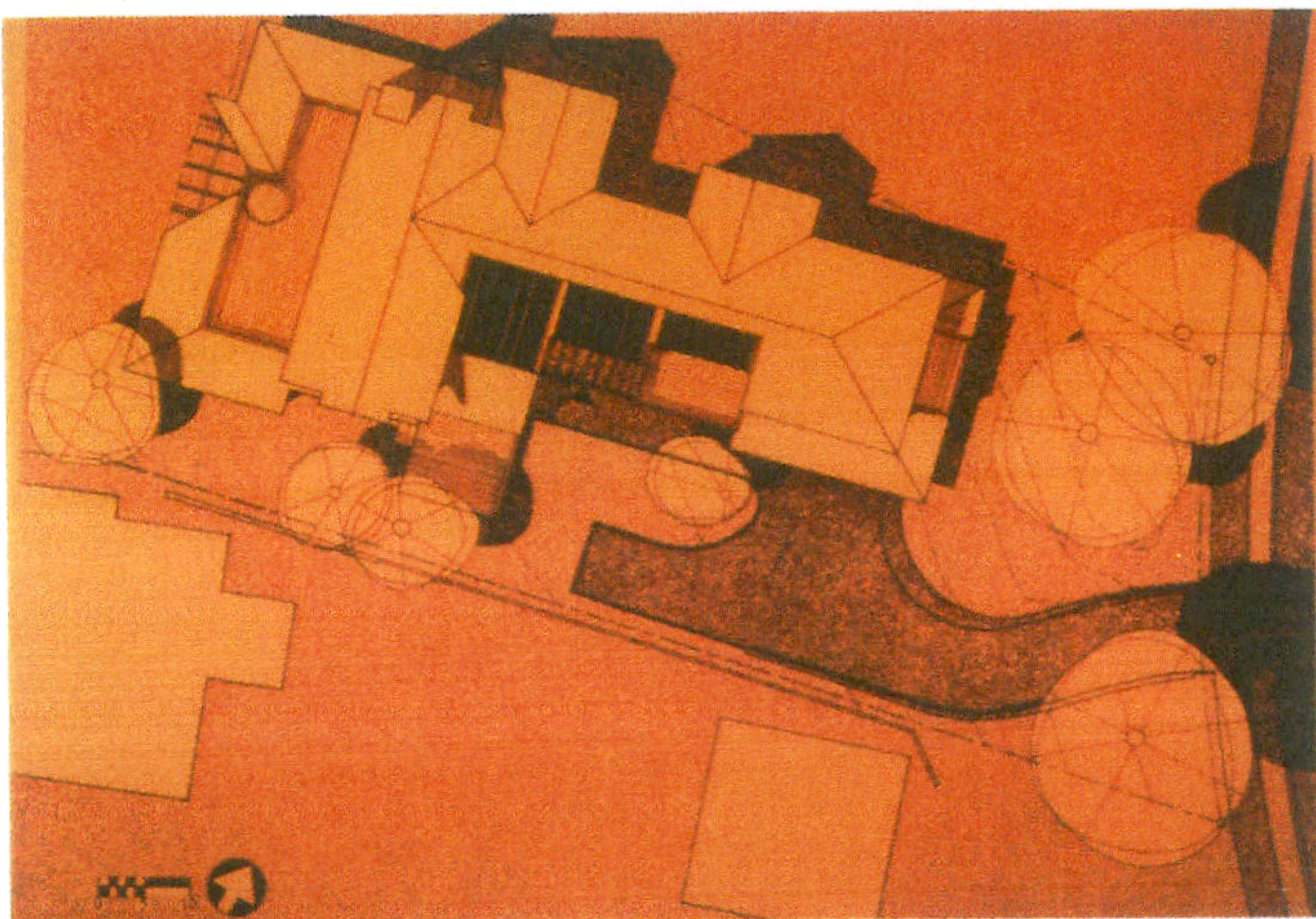


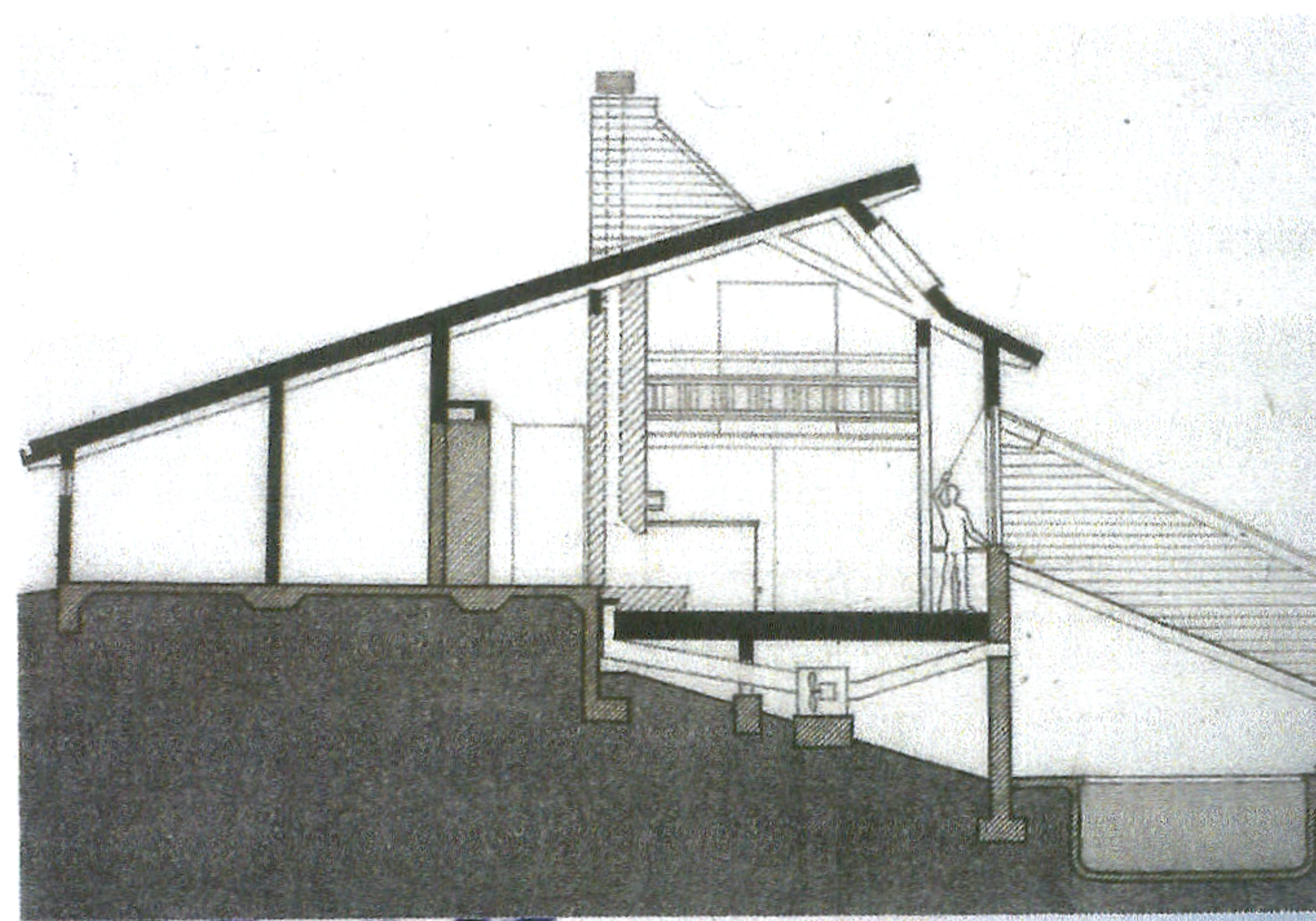
Figure 11: The Krishnamurti Assembly hall model



Figures 14 & 15: Cooper House – Passive night cooling via rock storage



Figures 12 & 13: The Penn House – Central solar greenhouse and internal mass

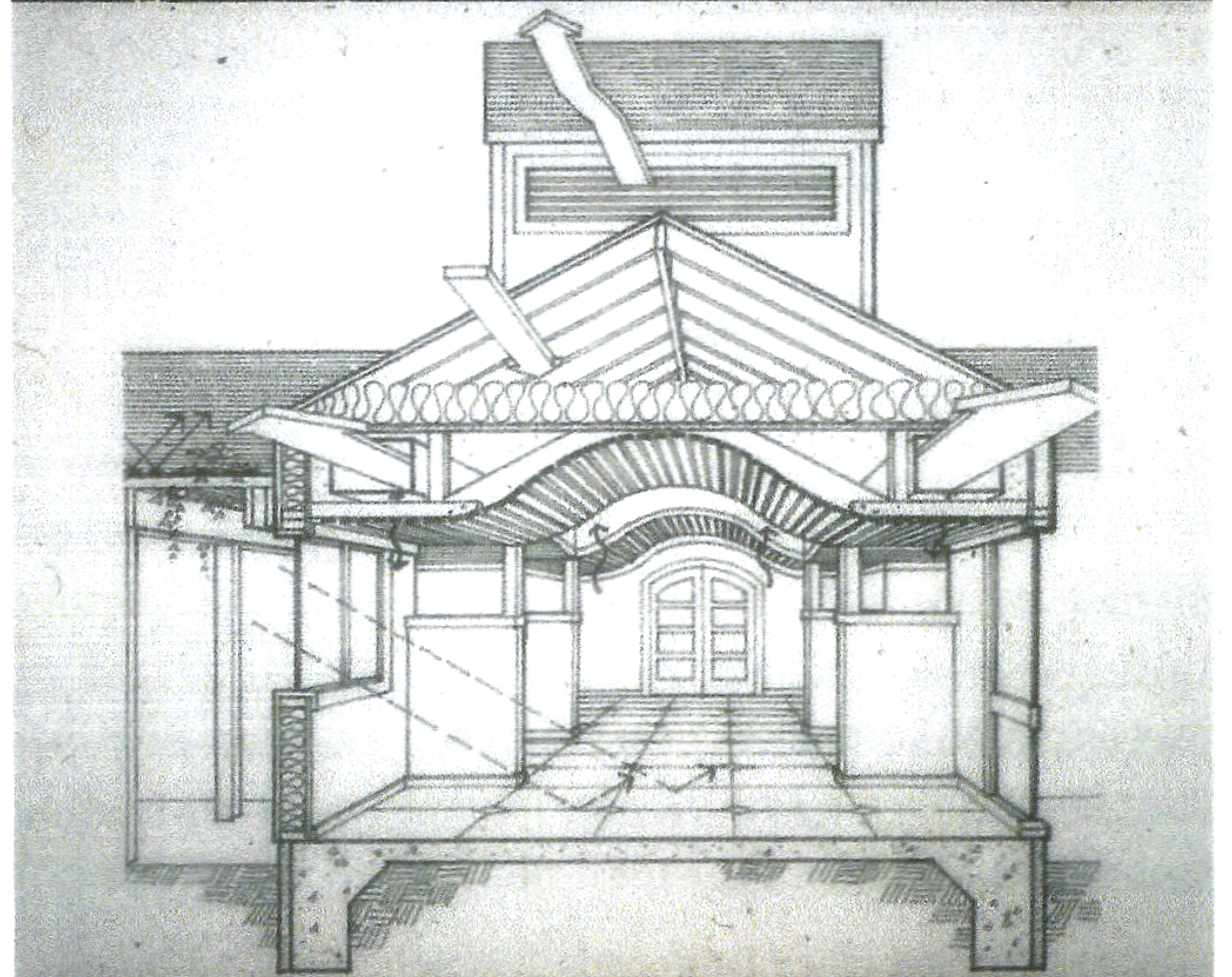
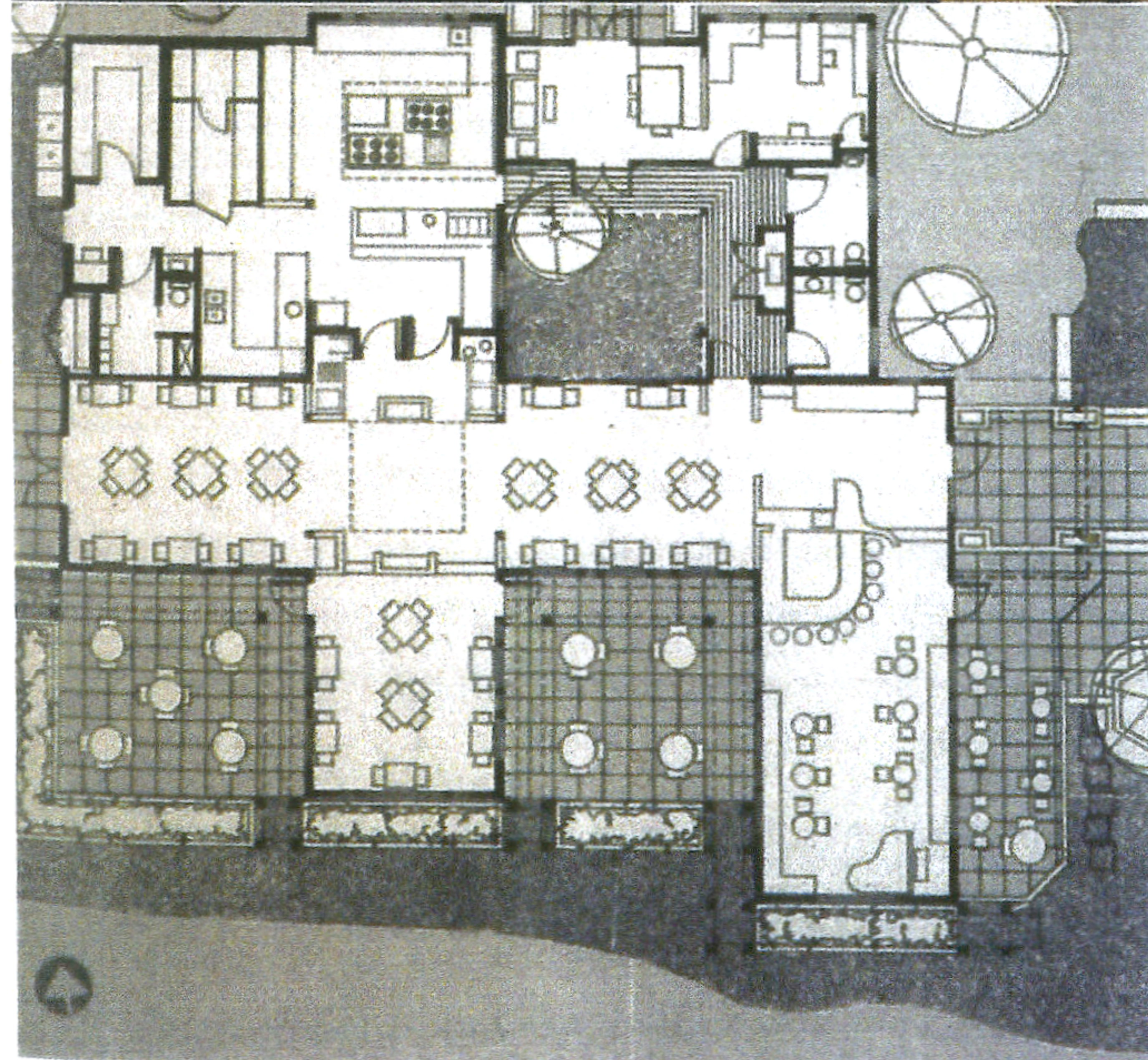


Figures 16 & 17: Johnson I House – Thermal mass of adjacent swimming pool

of passionate solar buffs, the Berkeley Solar Group. They wrote the Title 24 energy standards for buildings under the governorship of Jerry Brown and state architect Sym Van der Ryn. Using them as consultants, we became more aggressive in incorporating those patterns that relate to intelligent use of winter sunlight, and increasingly touting passive solar design. In 3 early houses, culminating in Mudd's Restaurant in 1980, we and our clients became bolder in concept and execution of passive solar work.

We got this early work not from our proven built

projects but from our reputations as coauthors of *APL* and as instructors of architecture. The book was really a selling point – potential clients must have felt that anybody who could write such a book must be a good architect. Clients would find favorite, relevant patterns, and emphasize that we needed to incorporate them. They would also have some really interesting unique, even eccentric, concepts that they relied on us to incorporate (for that matter, so would we). We learned that our role was to integrate everything into a reasonable design, making compromises as appropriate.



Figures 18 - 22: Mudd's Restaurant and Gardens – all of the above plus food sourced from the surrounding gardens

I'll come back to these points at the end, but before summarizing the impact of the *APL* on our work, I want to mention how our firm eventually developed. Our office, and our work, transitioned when we took on 2 additional partners. In 1981, Barbara Winslow became a partner, bringing a special concern for social service, design for special needs, and childcare facilities (like the Husky Childcare Center in Toronto, shown below). We have done many such projects in this vein since then. We are currently working on several affordable housing projects, including a 60-unit housing complex in Fremont, CA. And we recently completed a childcare center for the University of California here at Berkeley, the campus's first LEED-rated building.



Figure 23: Husky Childcare Center, Toronto

Later, Helen Degenhardt became a partner, spearheading design for several Bay Area Buddhist groups, including the San Francisco Zen Center (consisting of work at Green Gulch and Tasajara), the Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County, and currently, the Abhayagiri Meditation Center in Redwood Valley, CA.

During all of this work, we maintained an interest in writing. In 1990, we wrote *The Good House*, arguing that a good building embodied strong contrast between its parts, but also linked to each other via another, lower-level part.



Figure 24: Tasajara Bath House

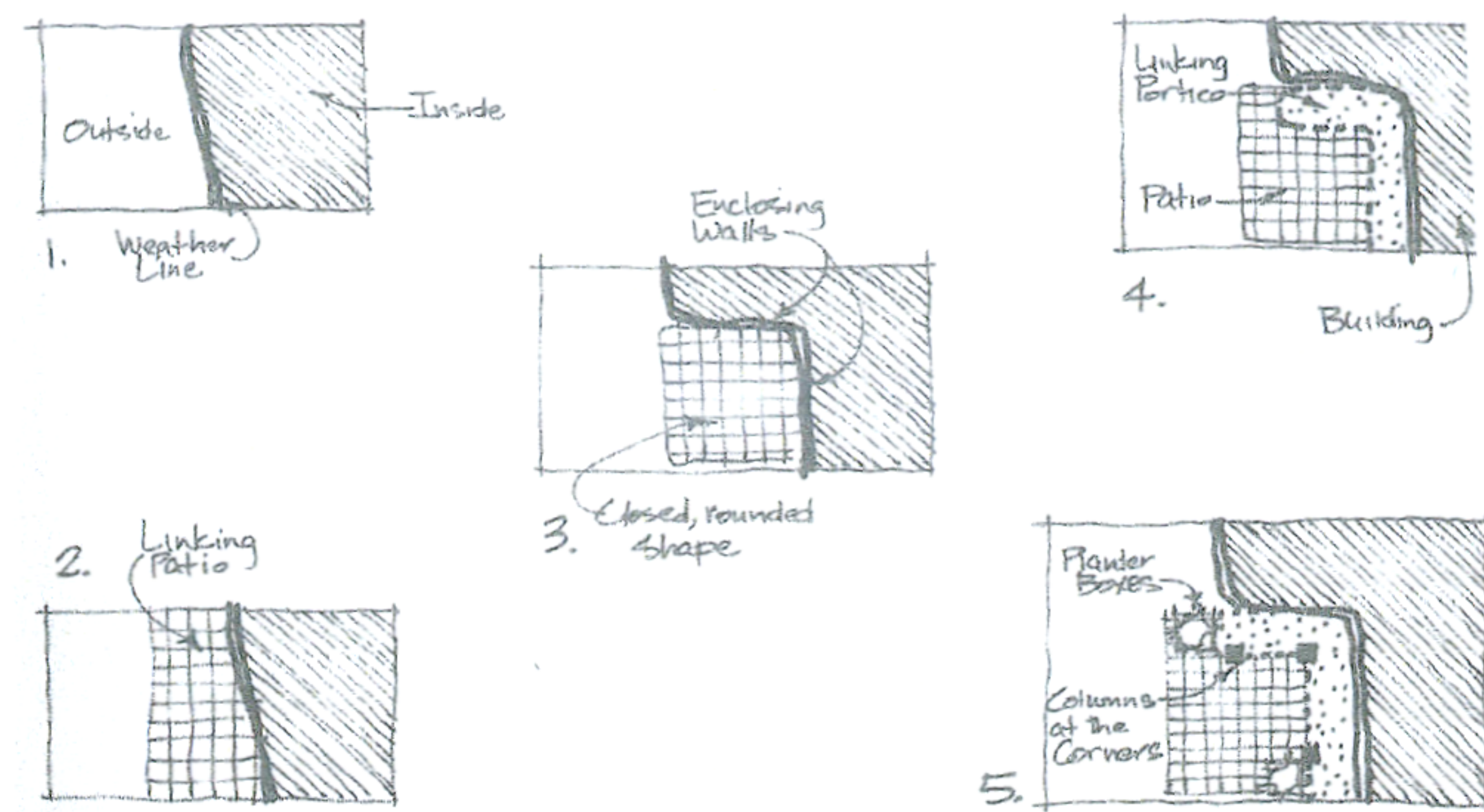


Figure 25: Diagram of outdoor patio - linking contrasting parts

For examples, inside and outside linked by a porch, floor and wall linked by a base, dark and light linked by a deep window reveal, column and lintel linked by a capital, etc. We thought this concept of linked contrasts, at all levels of detail, captured much of what we considered good design. We also recognized that this approach bore a similarity to what Chris was explaining in his book on carpets.

As soon as this book appeared, the Berkeley/Oakland fire destroyed 3,000 well-insured homes in the hills above the campus. Along with most Bay Area residential architects, we were very busy re-building for several years after.

More recently, in 2002, we wrote *Patterns of Home*, covering what we considered to be the 10 most useful patterns in our residential design work. While we included a bit of our work, basically we used the work of other architects from around the country to illustrate how very different architects all used these same 10 patterns. The reviews were either very positive ("This is really a helpful simplification of *APL*") or very negative ("This is a totally dumbed-down version of *APL*"). Among the partners, I seem to be the one still interested in teaching. Along with *APL*, I use this book in my current teaching of beginning architectural design. Patterns from *APL* have been the basis of my many years of teaching, but I have also tried to explain how all good architects utilize certain patterns of design to solve the specifics of their projects. For example, I wrote a paper discussing Palladio's patterns of design after visiting many of his villas. And I discussed the design patterns of the contemporary architect Tom Bosworth in my introduction to his monograph *Building with Light in the Pacific Northwest*, 2007.

In summary, let me try to assess the relationship of our early work on *APL* with our subsequent development as a firm, by tracing the arc of my personal experiences from student days to now.

- Even as a "good" student of architecture at Berkeley, I was often mystified by what design meant. My teachers were good architects, but I wasn't able to pick up much of their design methods or goals. I think this must be a very common experience among students.
- In that environment, the discovery of the idea of patterns was like the dawning of light - so straight-forward, logical, easy to understand, easy to sense when applicable and when not. Again, I think this must be a very common experience.
- Thus, the concept of *A Pattern Language*, and the developing collection itself, was a tremendously empowering possession. As a student, I began to feel that I had essential design knowledge in my hands, and that I could confidently produce design work.
- Berkeley in the 2nd half of the 60's was not a school to learn about building systems, construction drawings, codes, or budgets. It was assumed that we could all pick that up on the job, and Murray and I gradually did. But those of us working at the CES on the book, felt, I think, an unusual sense of inner confidence regarding what buildings should be like, what they shouldn't be like, and how to design them.
- We felt that the book was built on firm rock, giving us a firm foundation on which to design. This extraordinary confidence (call it arrogance) underlay our early work:
  - i. We did not need to be influenced by the work of other architects - even though we were appreciative of several;
  - ii. We could design without hesitation or fear;
  - iii. We didn't need to worry about style or visual interest - it would all come about naturally, as an outcome of the design process;
  - iv. It wasn't necessary to try to be unusually innovative or "creative" in design - all that was required was to deal with the particularities of the process in a creative way;
  - v. We had confidence that we could let the client take a leadership role in the design. They would choose those patterns that seemed relevant, dismiss those that weren't (So could we). We felt that

we could harmonize this disorder in the developing design.

- vi. The design was so predominantly important that the details of planning and building codes, budgets, contractors, construction documents, etc, could be taken care of secondarily. We were naïve, but bold;
- vii. As a result, each of our early projects had a unique final appearance, coming from the particularities of each project (site and client), but coordinated by the patterns.

In spite of the fact that we increasingly take planning and building codes, budgets, and good CD's very seriously, and in spite of our office's increased appreciation for the work of many other architects, these early elements, tempered by 35 years of practice, continue to be at the heart of our work:

- Our buildings have no single stylistic theme;
- We continue to convince clients that their unique participation will result in a building they will love;
- But we haven't hesitated to bring our own design ideas to the table;
- We have striven for (and gotten) satisfied clients rather than recognition from the profession or press.

Overall, we consider ourselves extraordinarily lucky. Our loose mix of practice, teaching, and writing has proved refreshing. We have actually had a modest measure of financial success as a firm. Our close work with clients has allowed us to look at our buildings with affection, accepting their strengths and weakness with some satisfaction. With the help of these clients, our other partners, and our wonderful staff, we can sometimes dispel the feeling of being fakes, and admit that we are, in fact, architects!