

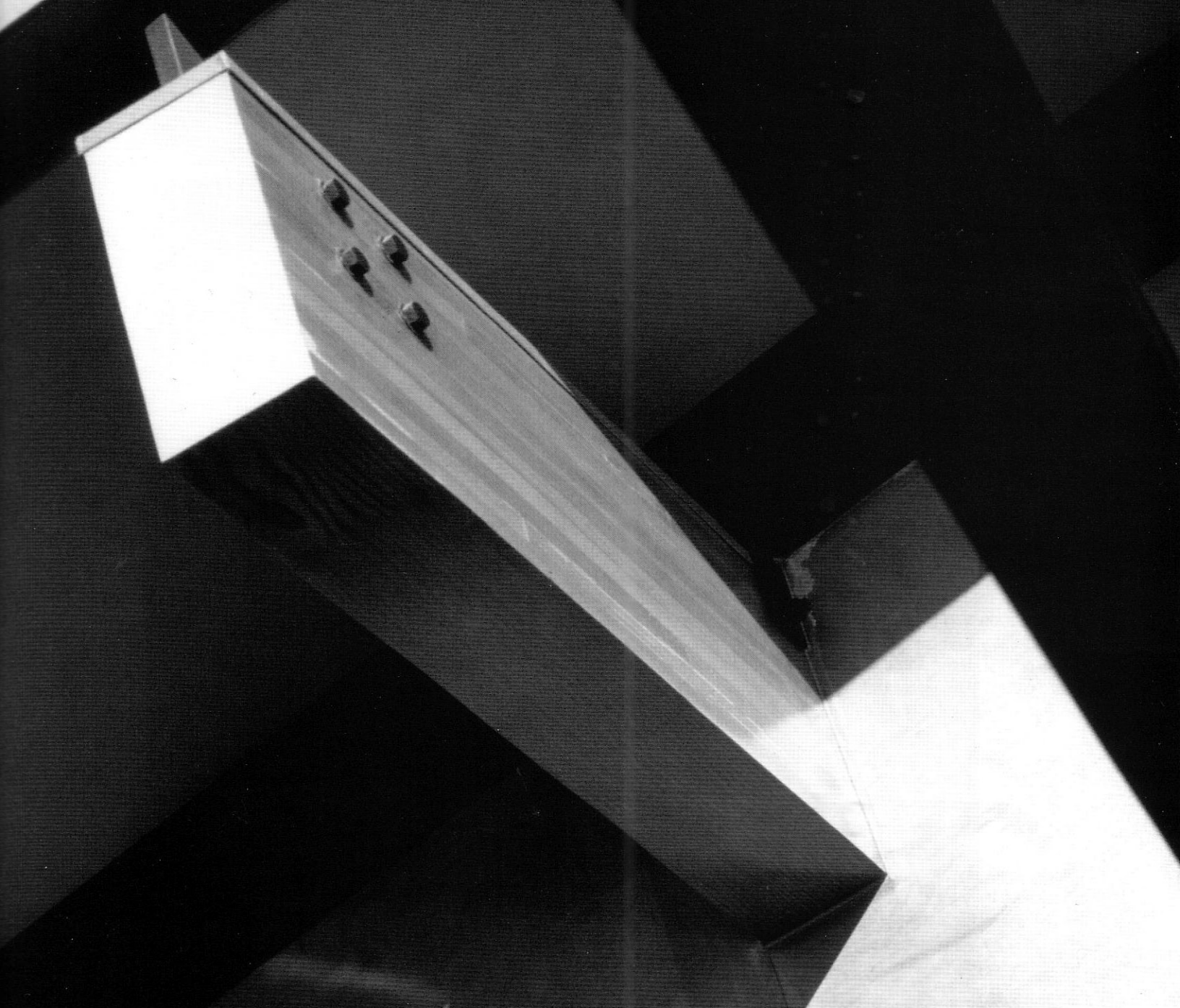
# PRAXIS

issue one volume one

journal of writing + building

detail

specificity in architecture



**smith-miller**

*It is possible that an architectural detail can reveal more than just the resolution of materials. A fragment of a building can provide an entrance into a particular way of thinking. A detail can be seen as a kind of evidence, a piece of evidentiary material; building can therefore be the result of the building up of this material evidence.*

*As an addition to an addition, (this house for a film producer) magnifies a density of relationships. The project acknowledges and identifies by design, a continuously evolving domestic condition. The original house and its configuration physically and formally inform subsequent additions. The appropriation of a prior condition brings, in part, prior context. By necessity—as in the cases of footings and foundations, or covenant and zoning setback laws—these conditions carry with them the cultural and social mores under which they were created. At the same time the addition responds to current needs, which in turn reflect current social organizations. The final project, while appearing casually assembled, is actually a carefully crafted weave of the new and a re-presented old.—Laurie Hawkinson*

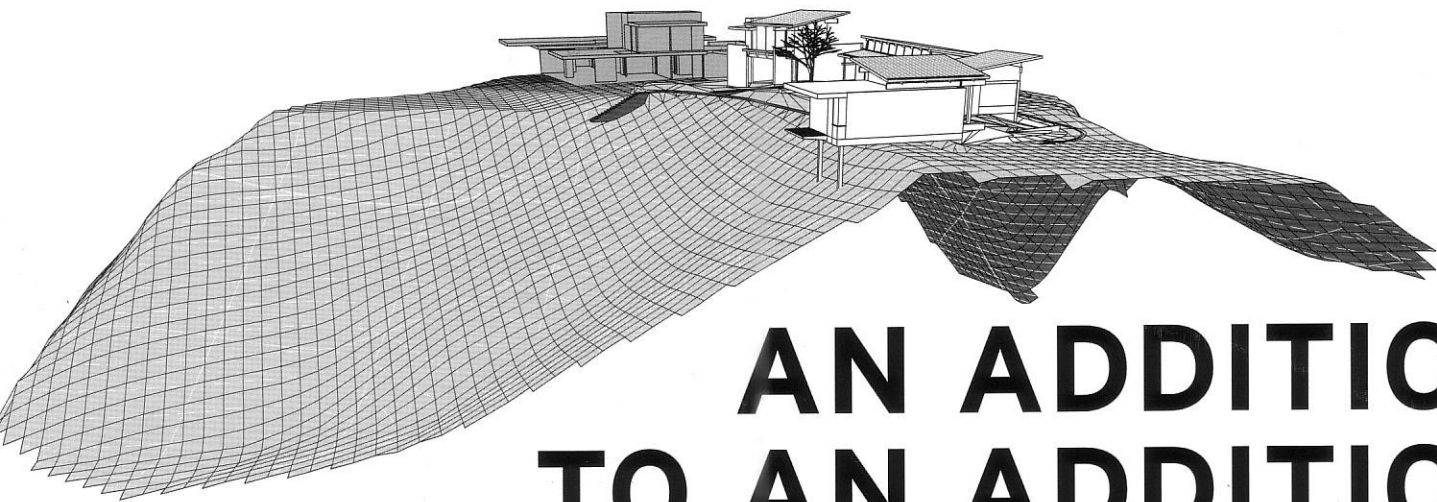
*from Between Spaces: Smith-Miller + Hawkinson Architecture Judith Turner Photography  
to be published by Princeton Architectural Press, September, 2000*

## **AN ADDITION TO AN ADDITION**

### **MODERNISMS "EN ABÎME"**

by Anthony Vidler

# **+ hawkinson**



# AN ADDITION TO AN ADDITION

HOUSE FOR A FILM PRODUCER  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



**TOP:**  
Three new pavilions – an office, screening room, and painting studio – were sited on a narrow ridge adjacent to the original case-study era house.

**ABOVE:**  
The three new buildings are sited parallel to the slope of the steep hillside providing cinematic views of the landscape and ocean beyond.

## SECOND ADDITION, MAY 1999

Smith-Miller + Hawkinson's latest addition to this Los Angeles residence is composed of three pavilions arranged along a narrow hilltop site adjacent to an existing case-study era house which they first renovated in 1989. Each of the new buildings houses a distinct program, but all three face onto a landscaped courtyard and engage the dramatic western view.

Building "A," an elevated office pavilion, is the only new structure that connects to the original house. The second floor opens onto a new deck which connects to the existing outdoor deck for the penthouse bedroom (part of the first addition completed by Smith-Miller + Hawkinson). The ground floor is used as an open-air billiards room, with sliding glass panels that close the area off from the main courtyard.

Building "B," a new screening room and guest bedroom, is the largest of the three new pavilions—a long, low building that addresses the western view with a mullion-free glass wall and clerestory windows. A new fireplace near the window is encased in glass, keeping the view uninterrupted. Structural and programmatic elements slide seamlessly from interior to exterior - glue-lam beams, steel rafters, a stone bench and service bar - further reinforcing the connection with the landscape.

Building "C" provides a new painting studio above and a wine cellar below. It is suspended dramatically beyond the site edge, extending the programmed space into the view of Los Angeles and the ocean beyond.

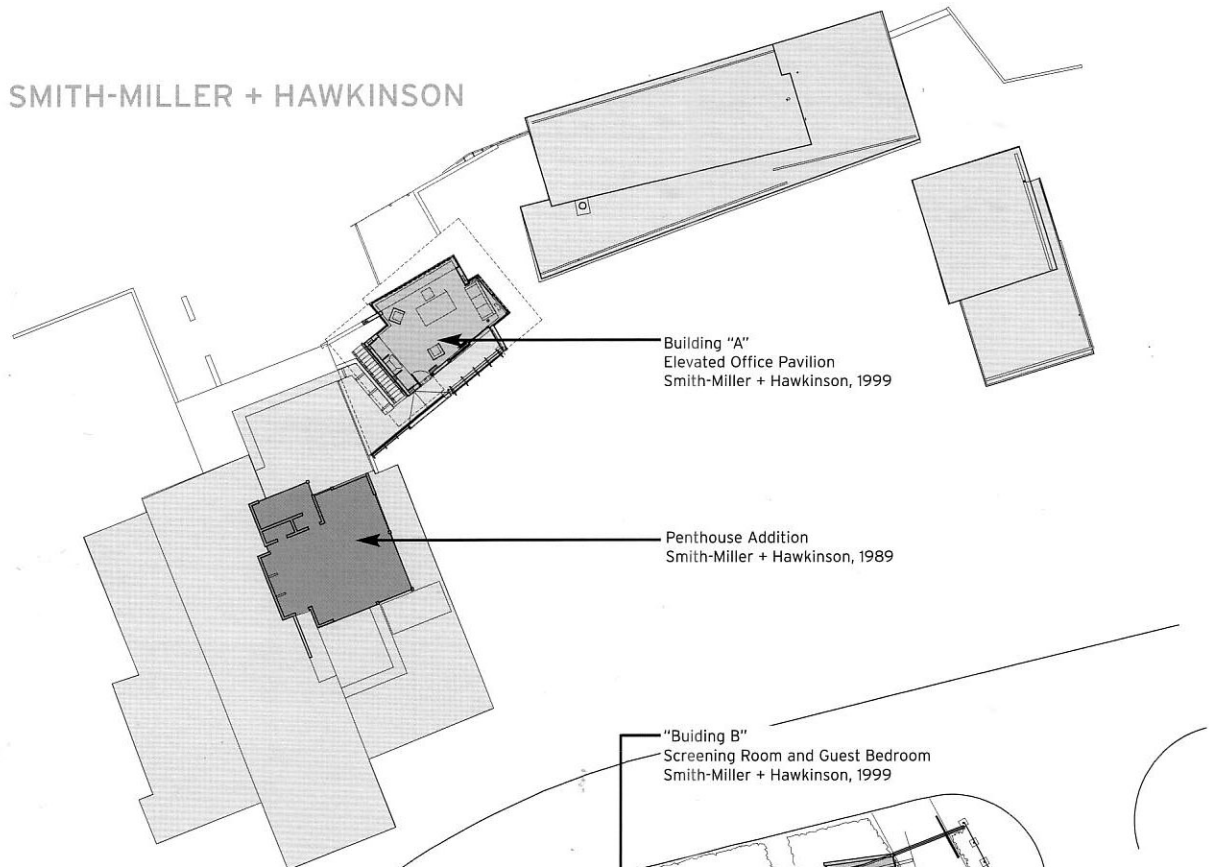
Though their programs vary, the three buildings share an architectural language that seeks to 'reveal' the structural logic, as well as a commitment to prioritizing transparency and the simultaneity of outdoor/indoor living and working.

-Amanda Reeser



ABOVE:  
The void between the office pavilion, at left, and the screening room, at right, defines an outdoor room that extends into the paved courtyard. Continuing the tradition of the LA modernists, SMH designed the new residence for exterior as well as interior living.

SMITH-MILLER + HAWKINSON



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



**FACING PAGE ABOVE**

Only one of the three new buildings - Building A, the elevated office pavilion - engages the existing Donald Polsky house (in dark gray) across an outdoor terrace on the upper level.

**FACING PAGE BELOW**

The screening room, Building B, and the painting studio, Building C, are independent, but all three buildings are linked both through the landscaped courtyard and through a series of paths on the sloped hillside.

**ABOVE**

A view from the first penthouse addition (completed in 1989) toward the new elevated office pavilion at Building A, with the clerestory of Building B visible behind. The seam between new and existing is reflected in the shifted patterns on the wood decking.

**RIGHT**

The 'infinity pool' at the edge of the site sits below a kirkstone bench.





**BUILDING A**

**ABOVE**

The structural steel angle at the roof edge is supported by steel rafters composed of two sandwiched four inch by seven inch angles which are in turn supported by glue-laminated wood beams. The end of the beams are sealed from exposure and then repainted with the wood 'grain.'

**RIGHT**

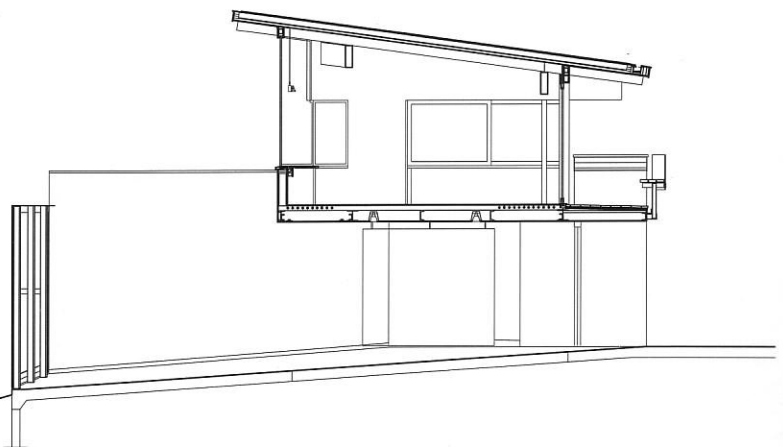
Section through the office pavilion and the open billiards room below.

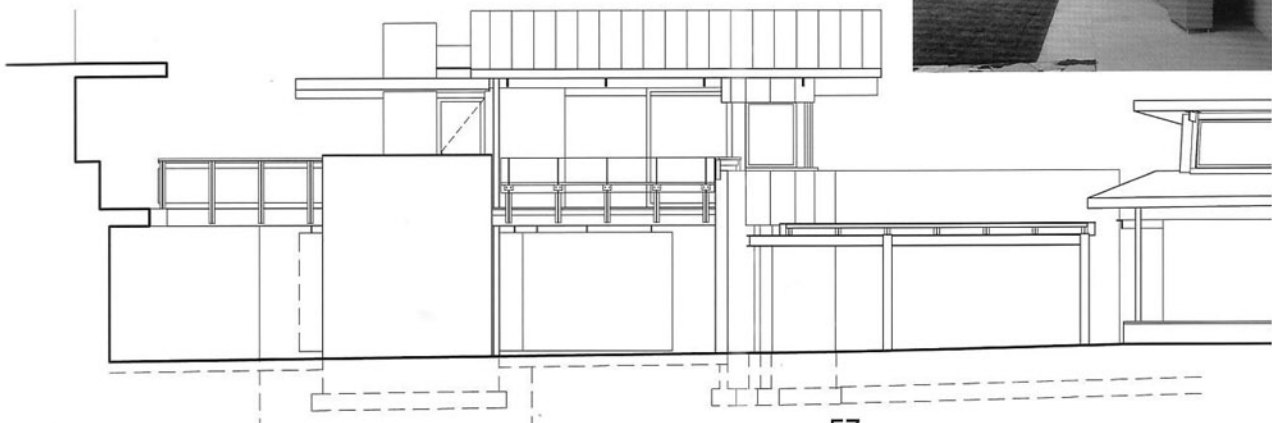
**FACING PAGE ABOVE**

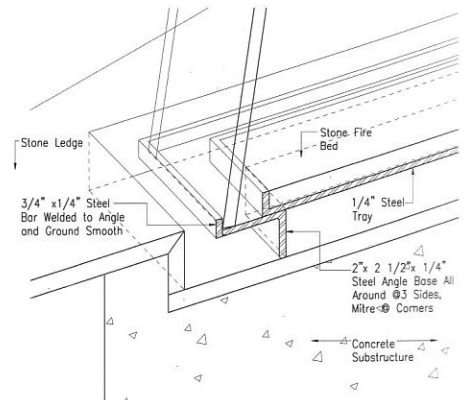
A view from the street reveals the complex geometries of the office pavilion. The low roof at right defines the entry area.

**FACING PAGE BELOW**

The elevation of the office pavilion as seen from the courtyard shows the terrace connection to the existing building, at left.







## BUILDING B

### ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT

Because it is freestanding, the all-glass fireplace was classified as an 'appliance' and had to be specially tested. The steel flu and cap are hung from the ceiling rafters, while the glass walls are supported by the kirkstone bench below (which slides through the glass wall behind to the exterior.) A detail explains the wide reveal between the fireplace base and the stone.

### ABOVE RIGHT

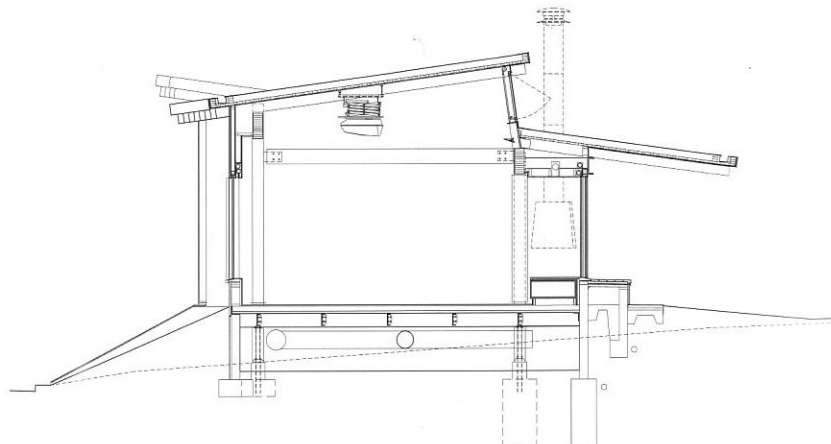
The large glass wall of the new screening room reflects the setting sun.

### RIGHT

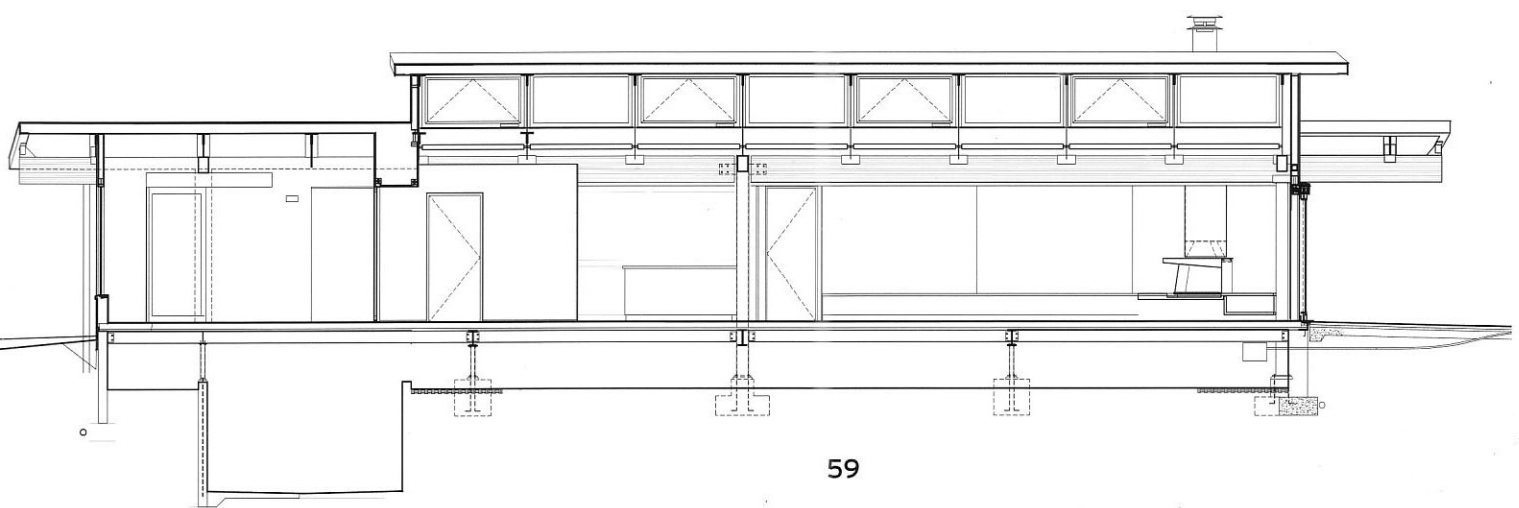
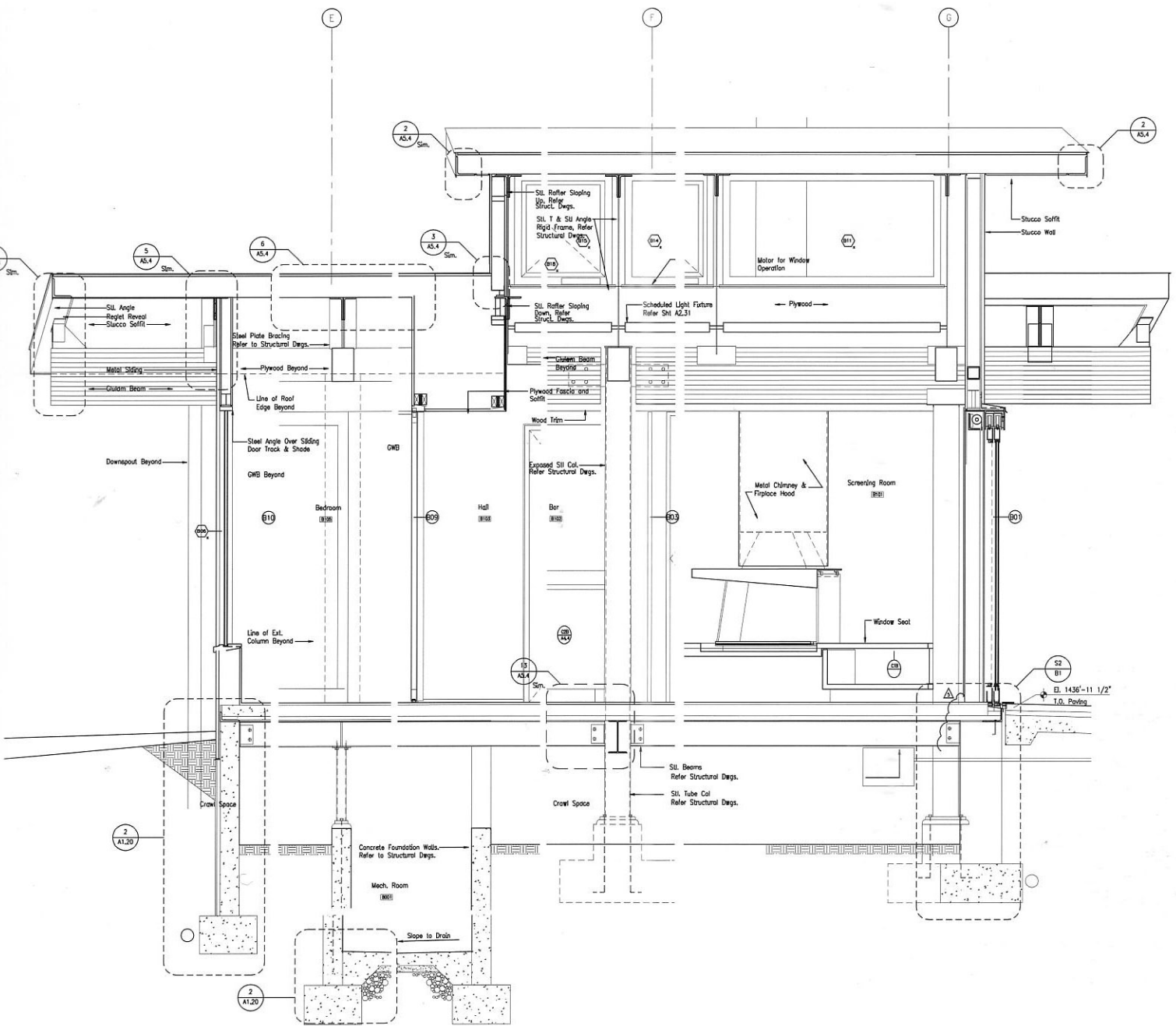
A cross-section through the screening room shows the projector hung from a scissor lift and the retractable screen hidden within the soffit. Motorized blackout shades at the clerestory and ground floor windows provide total lighting control.

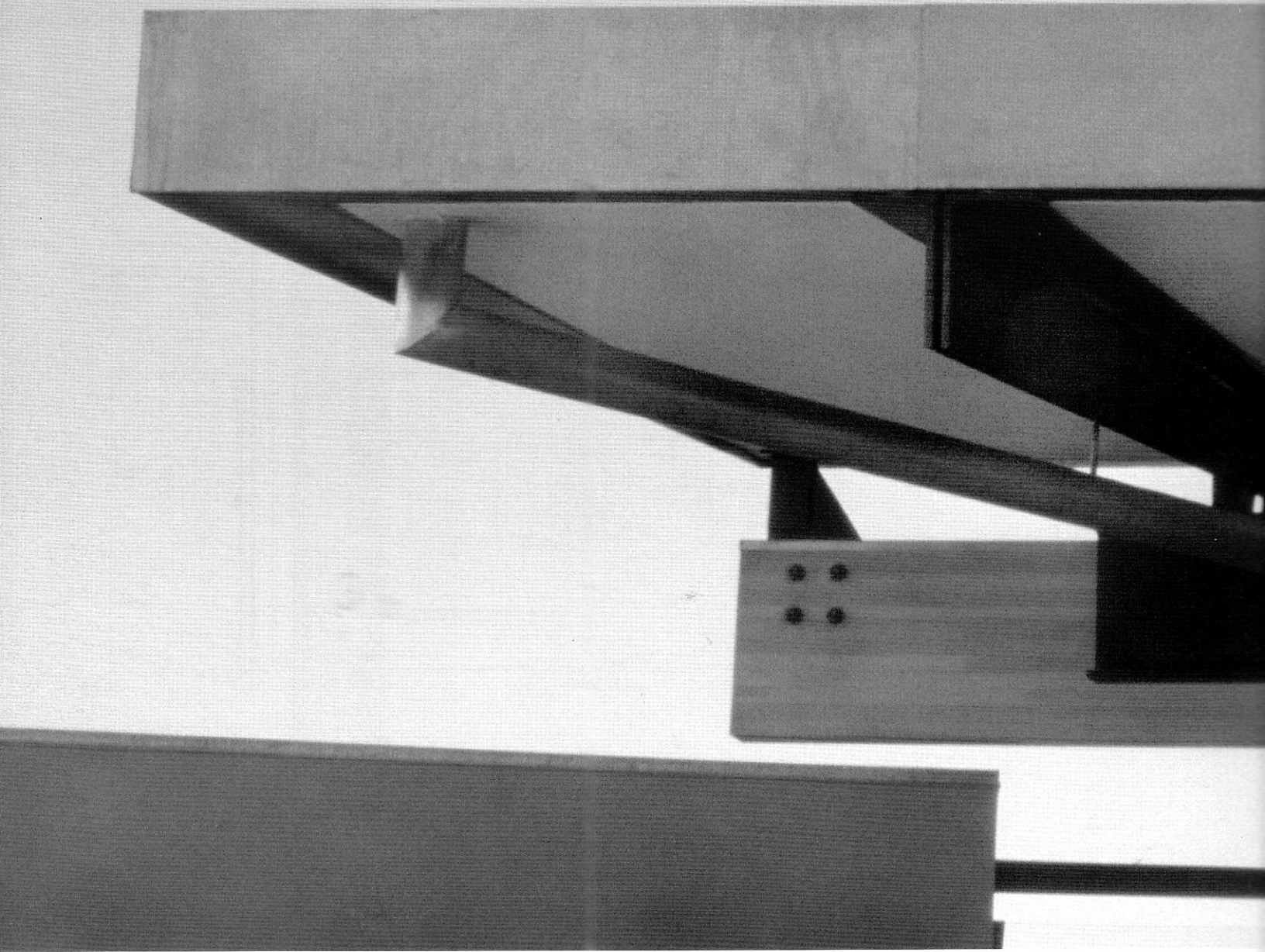
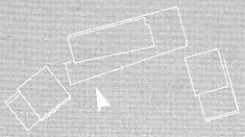
### FACING PAGE

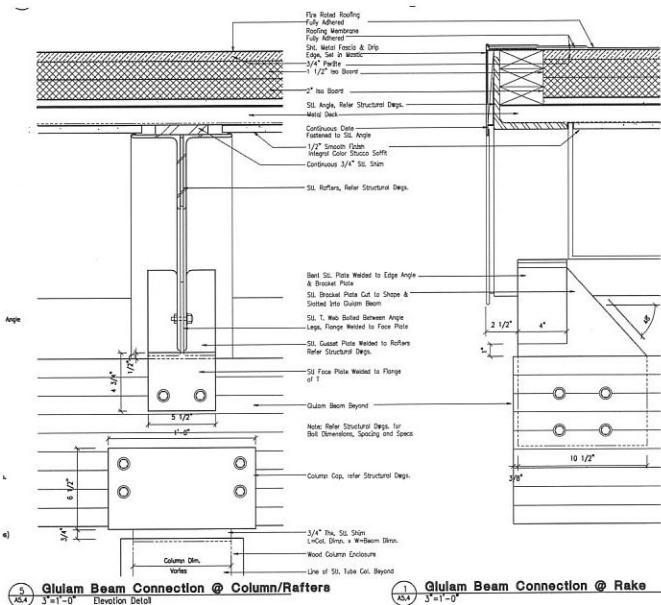
Longitudinal sections through the screening room illustrate the structural and aesthetic importance of the principal glue-lam beam, which extends from the interior to the exterior, supporting the clerestory and allowing for the large expanse mullion-free glass.



# AN ADDITION TO AN ADDITION







**BUILDING B**

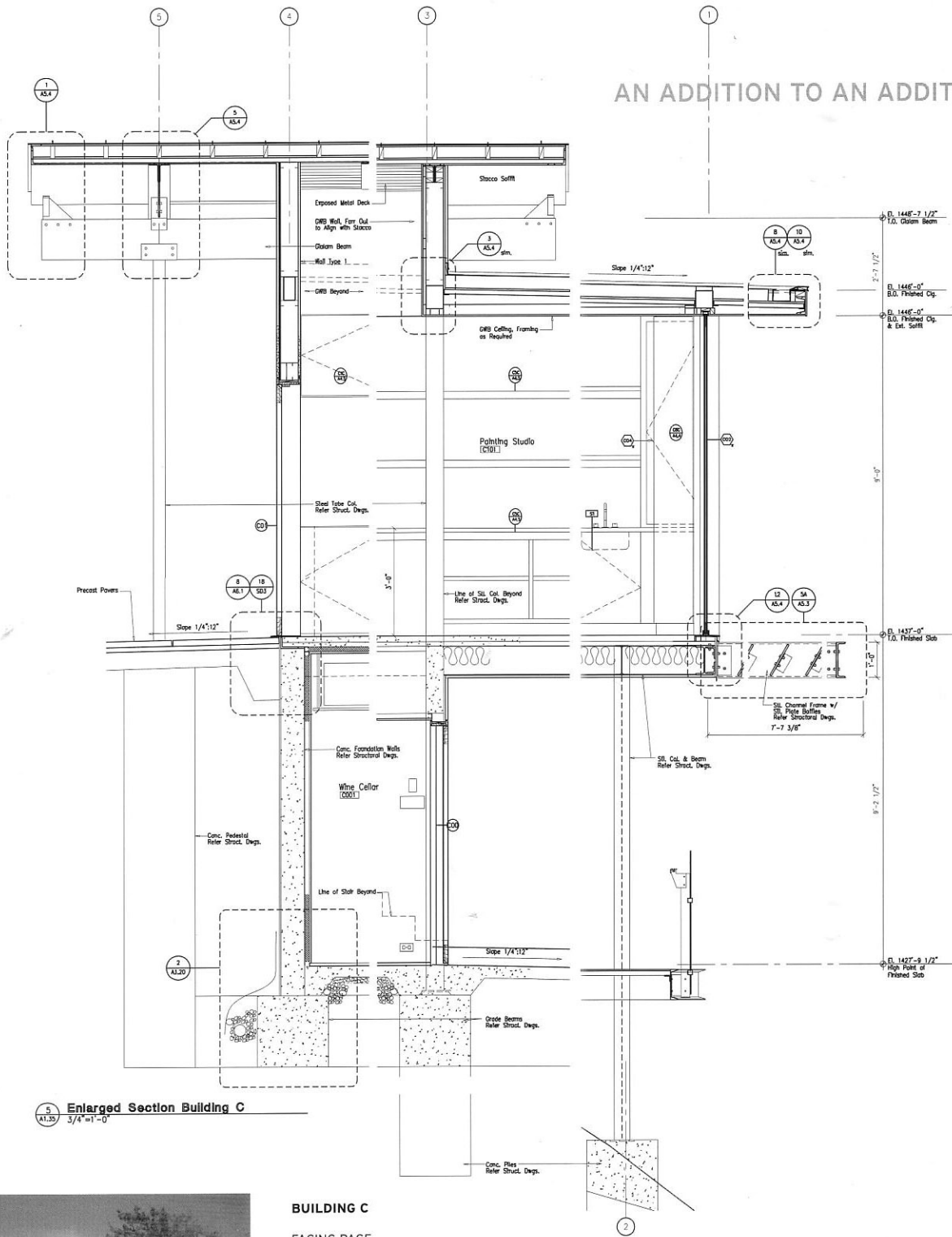
**ABOVE**  
Structural members, lighting and drainage were all exposed beneath the deep roof overhang of the screening room. A steel transfer plate at the end of the glue lam beam supports the perimeter roof angle

**LEFT**  
The steel rafters are attached to the glue-lam beams through a custom channel. At the perimeter of the building, an exposed steel transfer plate and provides a gap between the roof and glue-lams while accommodating the space of the steel rafters.

**FACING PAGE BELOW**  
The 40 foot glue lams were erected on the site first, supported by six 8" square steel tube columns. The steel framing was then erected, followed by the roof.



# AN ADDITION TO AN ADDITION



**5 Enlarged Section Building C**  
 A1.33 3/4"=1'-0"

## BUILDING C

### FACING PAGE

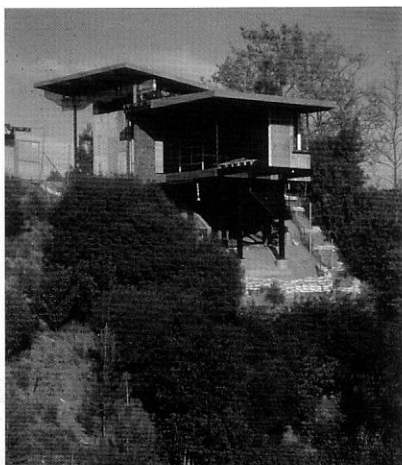
The painting studio extends dramatically beyond the ridge, projecting a glass room into the view. A horizontal steel baffle further extends the building, screening the studio from neighbors below and shading the terrace for the wine cellar on the lower level.

### ABOVE

The top of edge of the glass wall is frameless, 'disappearing' into a steel channel buried in the underside of the roof slab. Concrete piers more than 20 feet deep support the steel columns beneath the cantilever; their depth is a product of stricter seismic codes following the Northridge earthquake of 1997.

### LEFT

A view of the studio from one of the landscaped paths on the lower property.



**PROJECT TEAM**  
 Henry Smith-Miller,  
 Laurie Hawkinson,  
 Starling Keene  
 Ferda Kolatan, Keith  
 Krumwiede, Christian  
 Lynch, Wanda Dye,  
 Alexis Kraft, Margi Nothard

**CLIENT**  
 Anonymous

**STRUCTURAL**  
 Steven Mezey +  
 Associates

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**  
 Achva Benzinberg Stein

**LIGHTING DESIGN**  
 Claude Engle

**AUDIO VISUAL**  
 Audio Command Systems

**CONTRACTOR**  
 J. D. Group, Robert  
 Pittman, superintendent

**DESIGN**  
 1994-1996

**CONSTRUCTION**  
 1997-1999

**COMPLETION**  
 May 1999

**BUILDING AREA**  
 2,500 square feet  
 10,000 landscaped grounds

**BUDGET**  
 Not available

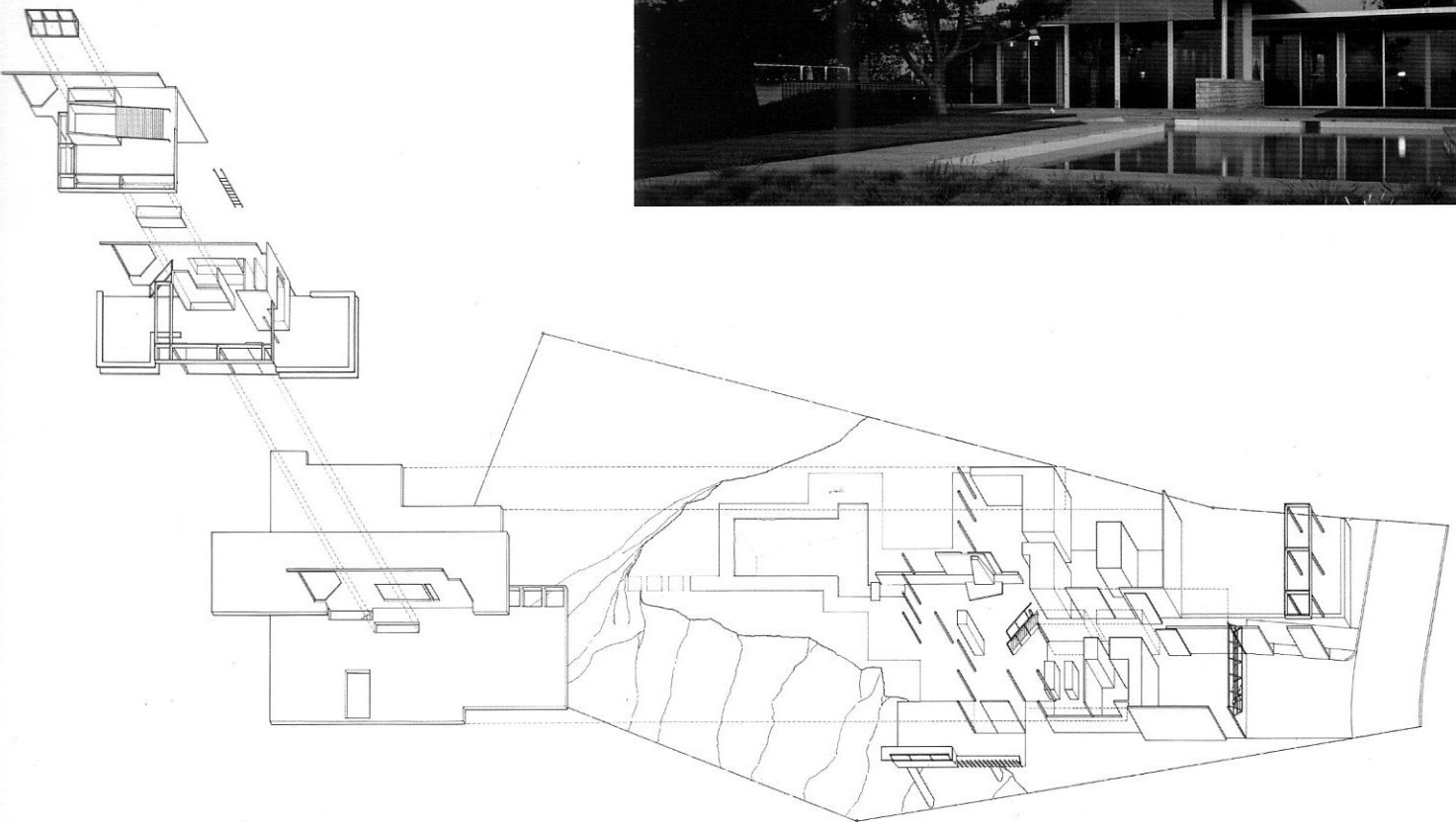
**FIRST ADDITION, 1991**

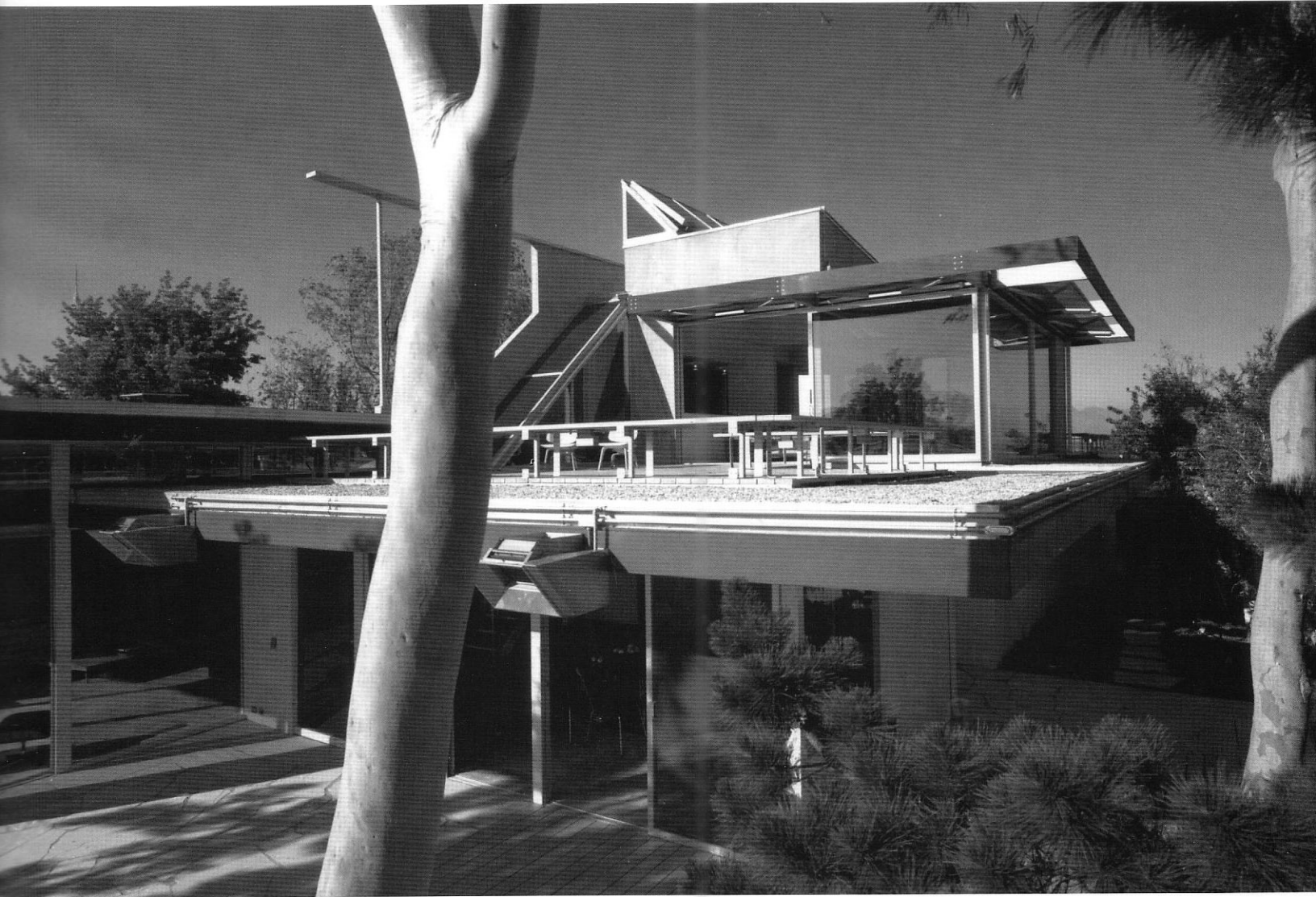
In their initial renovation and expansion of the 1961 Donald Polsky house, Smith-Miller + Hawkinson created a new rooftop penthouse atop the original one story structure, adding a series of roof terraces and further opening the house to views.

Polsky's language of large mullion-free glass walls and horizontal roof planes was updated in the penthouse addition. The new structure incorporates a scissor-hinged retractable shade and a glass volume surrounding the steel staircase connecting the new to the old.

**ABOVE**  
A view of the restored western facade of the original Donald Polsky house, with the Smith-Miller + Hawkinson's rooftop penthouse visible above.

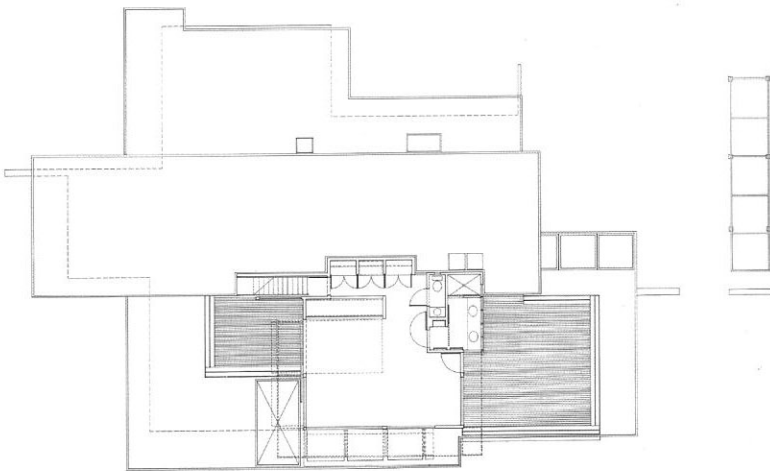
**BELOW**  
An exploded axonometric describes the relationship of the penthouse addition to the existing house.

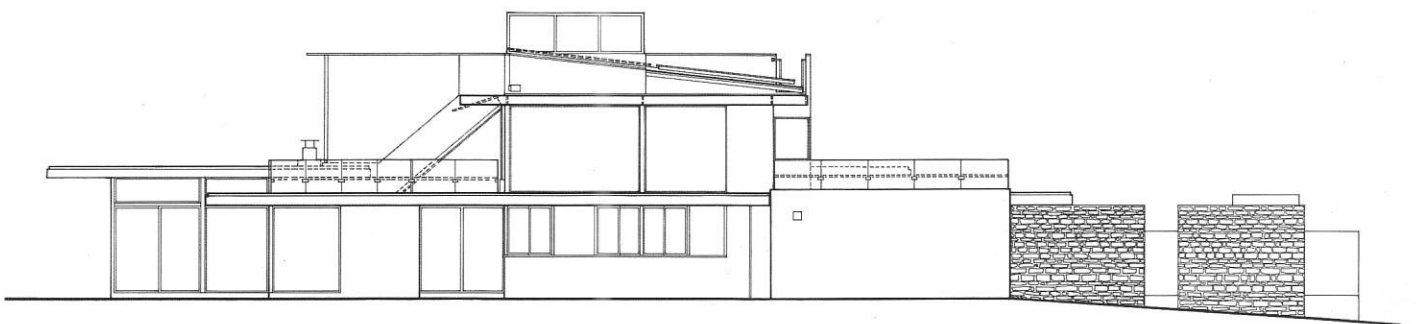




**ABOVE:**  
The rooftop penthouse incorporated the language of the original one-story house - including the deep overhangs and large glass panels - while also introducing a new architectural language that included a canted skylight and a glass-enclosed stair.

**LEFT**  
A plan of the penthouse level. Decks adjoining the front and back of the penthouse addition continued the California modernist's explorations of indoor/outdoor living.





**FACING PAGE ABOVE**

A new steel stair leading to the penthouse above was inserted into the renovated living space, sliding by the existing clerestory windows.

**FACING PAGE BELOW**

Elevation of the new penthouse atop the original one-story Polsky building.

**LEFT**

A view onto the deck of the penthouse addition. The scissor-hinged screens, above, can be extended to provide shading.

**BELOW**

A section through the living space shows the new penthouse and its relationship to the original house below.



**PROJECT TEAM**

Henry Smith-Miller,  
Laurie Hawkinson, Knut  
Hansen, Ruri Yampolsky,  
Starling Keene, Charles  
Renfro, Kit Yan, Eric Cobb,  
Jenifer Stearns, Annette  
Fierro and Rob Rothblatt.

**CLIENT**

Anonymous

**STRUCTURAL**

Steven Mezey +  
Associates

**MECHANICAL**

Carlo Marzot

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**

Achva Benzinberg Stein

**LIGHTING DESIGN**

Claude Engle

**CONTRACTOR**

Mounir Boctor,  
Monet Contracting

**DESIGN**

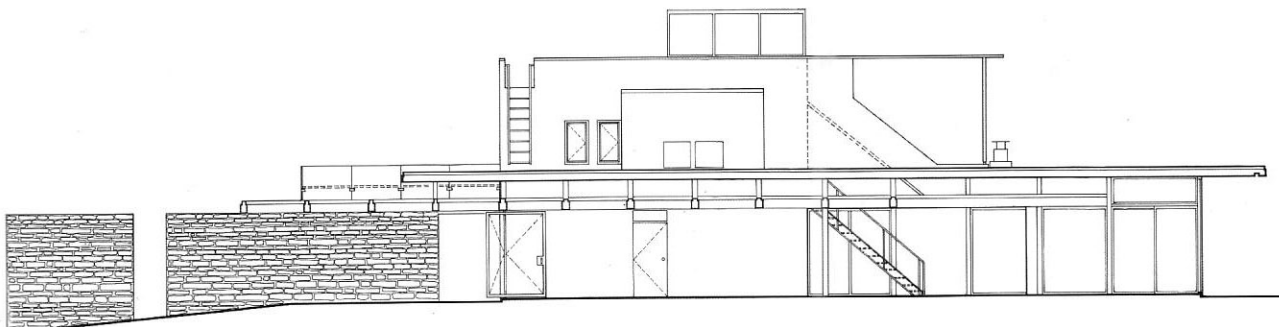
1989-1990

**CONSTRUCTION**

1990-1991

**COMPLETION**

1991



ANTHONY VIDLER

# MODERNISMS "EN ABÎME"

## NOTES ON SMITH-MILLER AND HAWKINSON'S "HOUSE FOR A FILM PRODUCER"

In a city where the economics of the "tear-down" has rapidly overcome any sensitivity towards existing building-stock, where even the "fixer-upper" has taken on the guise of a mere strategy for hugely over-building, and where the restoration of all-too rare modernist structures too often takes on the air of a stultifying museological project, it is refreshing to find an architect-patron committed to a long-term policy of extension and addition. The "House for a Film Producer," completed this year by the architectural firm of Smith-Miller Hawkinson, represents a second stage of an expansion begun in 1990 to an house originally designed in 1956 by architect Donald Polski, creating a hill-top ensemble that, so to speak, marks three important moments in some forty years of late modernist architecture.

There was a period in the late-sixties and early seventies when the Neo-Brutalist modernisms of Breuer and Rudolph, and the revived modernisms of the New York Five, revelled in contrast and opposition: the blind facades of the Whitney, and the Yale Art and Architecture Buildings, seemingly opposing in scale and materials their residential settings, or, more directly,

the white neo-Corbusian curves and glass blocks of Gwathmey's Whig Hall at Princeton, invading and taking over the neo classical shell of the old structure -- the modern revealed as the biological organs of the classic. It was, of course, against such relentless historical contrast, that many postmodernists sought unity in the often caricatural return to pre-modern styles.

But in Los Angeles, and despite the attempts of New Urbanists to adopt the Spanish Revival as their own, the various iterations of modernism, from Irving Gill, Wright, Schindler, Neutra, Milton Black, Gregory Ain, through to Lautner, the Eameses, Gehry, Moss, and Morphosis, have always tended to live easily beside each other. LA absorbs each without necessarily denying the other; even the Spanish Revival of the 1920s and 30s, seems in spatial and formal terms more "modernist" than "Spanish." If there is such a manner as "California Modern," it resides more in this compatibility, this apparently effortless capacity to adjust and accept new and transformed meanings within the terms of a broadly defined and already established language, than in any fixed stylistic labels. What Reyner Banham in





1971, noted as the “sympathetic ecology for architectural design” of Los Angeles, may be seen, in this light, as its sympathy for modernism.

So it is no surprise that, in the context of their careful respect for the “classical” modernism of Polsky, himself trained in Neutra’s office, Smith-Miller and Hawkinson have twice been able to extend their own formal language in ways that both place them centrally in this California tradition, and exemplify its constant ability to adapt and change without abandoning the essential premises of an original modernism that, almost a century later, seems as fresh as ever.

These premises, more often than not forgotten in the endless consumption of style, in the disturbing but relentless shift from public to private patronage, and in the search for the spectacular, were, despite superficial differences, deeply embedded in the architectures of the first, second, and third generations of modernists. They included the deep conviction that modern space and its proper distribution was propaedeutic in its effects on body and psyche; that materials structural and otherwise demanded their

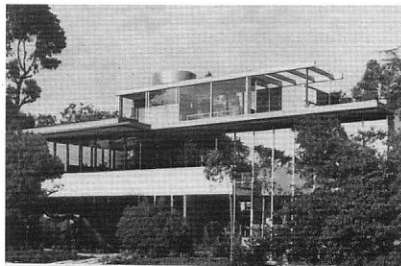
own special aesthetic derived from use and characteristics; that the interrelations of structure, function, and form were best represented through the different vocabularies of abstraction; and that, finally, modernism was not simply an attitude towards architecture, but to the entirety of nature, thus affecting all decisions from regional planning to the siting of individual buildings.

In the “House for a Film Producer,” the first addition, which consisted of the enlargement of the original house to include a penthouse and remodeled living spaces, was carefully inserted into the original wooden structure, with gentle references to a modernism already become mythical. The architects, trained in a period where the canonical moves of 20s and 30s modernism had already become “signs” in themselves, detailed a set of tell-tale events, that, in effect, brought the 1950s house back to its own roots in an earlier moment at the same time as marking it indisputably as a product of the highly technologically aware 1990s. The original overhanging roof was rendered as an aluminum trellis with operable shades, thus mechanizing a typical Neutra gesture; a new



TOP  
 heir first addition to the 1961 Donald Polsky House added a new penthouse and stair bulkhead to the original one-story structure (below.)

FACING PAGE:  
 The Charles and Ray Eames House (1949) was fabricated entirely of pre-made parts, expressed in the exposed steel and wood structure.



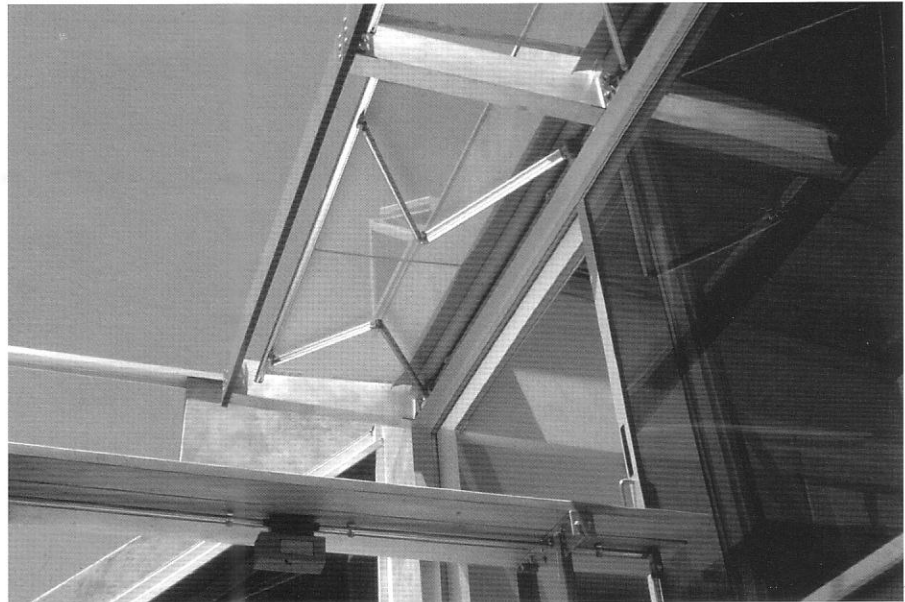
TOP  
The open-air billiards room, at left, opens onto the paved courtyard. At the backside it provides access the street and a view of the Los Angeles mountains beyond.

BOTTOM  
Neutra's VDL Research House in Los Angeles reflects early California Modernism. The aluminum louvers are later recalled in Smith-Miller + Hawkinson's house for a film producer.

aluminum stair was lit from above, producing a complex transparency/translucency effect that recalled Chareau; the strict orthogonality of the original plan was disturbed by shifts and gentle diagonals in hearth stones, kitchen worktops, and built-in cabinets in moves that enlivened the living space, reinforced its relationships to the multiple vistas from pool to horizon, and unconsciously perhaps preparing for the refraction of axes that were to become the matrix for the second addition.

This second, most recent addition, comprising three pavilions, one lightly attached to the old house, and the other two grouped in such a way as to form a rough semi-circle looking to the West on the crest of the site, extends this vocabulary but takes advantage of the free-standing nature of the structures to develop a new and exciting material vocabulary. The resulting compound takes its angled inflections from the first renovation, continuing around the site as if following the arc of the sun until coming to a stable resting point in the studio pavilion "C."

But the language of these new pavilions is no longer that of a wood and stucco modern LA house from the 50s, but now, with the first addition as a linguistic hinge so to speak, firmly built on the expression of the exposed steel and wood structure. Wood beams, bolts, steel members, grillwork, make polite reference to the Eameses and before them to Mies, but are used in a way that is neither expressionistic, nor recessive. Rather, it is the spatial structure of the pavilions, reinforced by boldly horizontal roofs that join themselves to the original roofscape, that ultimately controls the vocabulary of the details. Thus the central pavilion "B", with its screening room and guest suite, faces the view with confidence, open to the front, and again above in a tilted clerestory, while the studio and wine cellar to the South, fronts the view, while closing the semi-courtyard space of the group with a composition of wall and window that echoes in miniature that of the original house. The middle "term" of this language, meanwhile, that of building "A", partially joined to the first addition, is part Wrightian and part Schindlerian in massing and form, acting as a semantic as well as a lit-

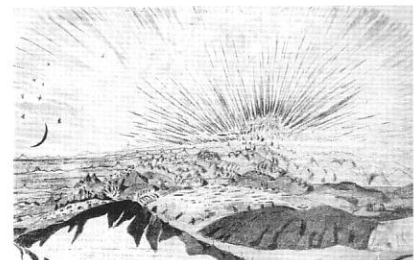


eral bridge back to the old modern and forward to the new.

The detailing of the interiors follows through on this logic, with cabinetry, hardwood surfaces, and exposed metal, offering a pre-image of the heroic age of *Maison de Verre* and *Lovell Beach House*, while realizing a firmly contemporary environment. Here, in the "ghosting" of previous modernisms behind an evident presence of the "now," we find a clue to the nature of Smith-Miller's and Hawkinson's special version of late modernity. No expressionistic celebration of technology for its own sake, nor a postmodern return to styles and quotations, the architecture hovers between past modern and present modern, taking its cues from the elemental principles that governed the first functionalists and space architects while resolute in its resistance to historicizing rhetoric.

In this way, the continuity of "Los Angeles Modern" has been assured; what has been seen by some as a kind of "dreamscape" somewhere between the virtual past and the utopian future, has here been brought down to earth, or rather to mountain top, as a

microcosm of that "city crown" dreamed by Bruno Taut, mediating the space between sky and sea, and confirming yet again that Los Angeles works well as a laboratory of an ever-fresh modernity.



TOP  
Scissor-hinged retractable shades at the original penthouse addition allow for control of sunlight on the bedroom deck.

MIDDLE  
The structure of the glue-laminated wood beams and steel columns is left completely exposed in the screening room interior.

BOTTOM  
A plate from Bruno Taut's *Alpine Architektur* (1917) showing a view of Monte Generoso.

**Anthony Vidler is a Professor of Art History and Architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles. His latest book, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* will be published by MIT Press in June.**