

Ellis House, Windermere Island The Bahamas

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CLIENTS AND PROGRAMS OR REJUVENATION VEHICLE

The clients for this residence are a family of four—a father-businessman, a mother-gallery owner and two daughters—all of whom travel extensively. “Home” addresses would include Toronto, London and now Windermere. The house is conceived as a retreat in an un-spoilt environment. It is designed primarily with small scale domestic uses in mind. The house is also adaptable to large scale entertaining, accommodating varied numbers of occupants from one to several, in a comfortable and gracious, yet efficient and informal manner.

One approaches the site on land, from the north, arriving at the highest point on the site. Here a court is cleared in the brush, with the residence to the immediate west. This relatively high elevation allows entry at an upper, or more precisely, middle level. This middle entry level consists of a large open loggia, a glazed office/apartment, an outdoor kitchen, a bathroom with outdoor shower, and storage. The front door opens to a foyer with stairs that lead down to the main living areas and lower terrace, and lead up to the bedrooms and roof terrace.

The lower level consists of a kitchen area, a living/dining area and a small office, with a small terrace and stairs to the adjacent western shore and a large terrace and lap pool with outbuildings to the south. In addition to the house proper, various small landscape shelters and miniature garden follies are planned for the site.

RESPONSES, FORMS AND USES

EARTH. As with sites on the sea, the context is dominated visually by the horizontal line of the ocean/sky seam. Hard

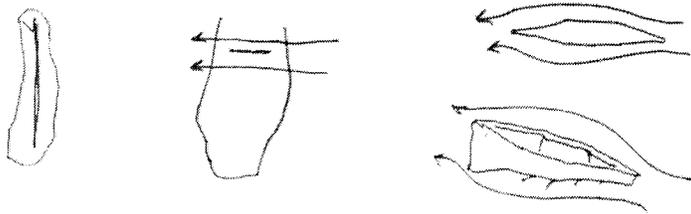
geometries occur relatively rarely in nature and the nominal straight line of the sea is one of the most dramatic of such instances. The less innocent line found at the island is that of the imposed road that runs its course north-south, leading to our site at its southern tip.(1)

We might plausibly suggest, in semi-fictional chronology, that our first thought was to impose another line, now running east-west, perpendicular to the man-made datum of the road and parallel to the prevailing winds and the potential surge of the ocean.(2) We modeled this line as a wall. This perpendicular datum was then widened in the middle, making it more resilient, and the resultant mirror-wedge is pulled through the rock.(3) Wind and hydrology have fashioned a marine-form that cleaves the land and creates and organizes spaces.

SPACE. The main spaces of the house are organized along the south side of this wall. All of these spaces afford a 180 degree or wider view of the landscape of the island and its surrounding shoreline. Stacked three stories high, all of these spaces are conceived in intimate relation to the out of doors. Vast concrete ceilings organize open spaces in relation to glass enclosure.

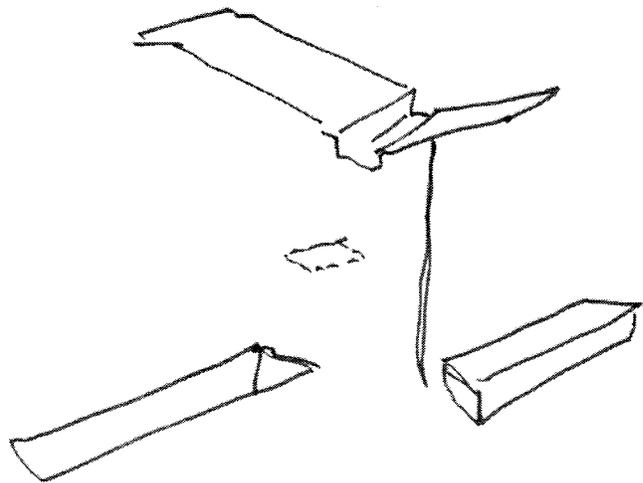
The porch is a notable, and sometimes unfortunate, omission in many of the canonical works of modern architecture. This loss can be more keenly felt in southern climates where the porch performs a primary role by cooling the interiors, providing an outdoor retreat and contributing to a complex and subtle relation of interior and exterior spaces. In this house the porch is subsumed within the living spaces.

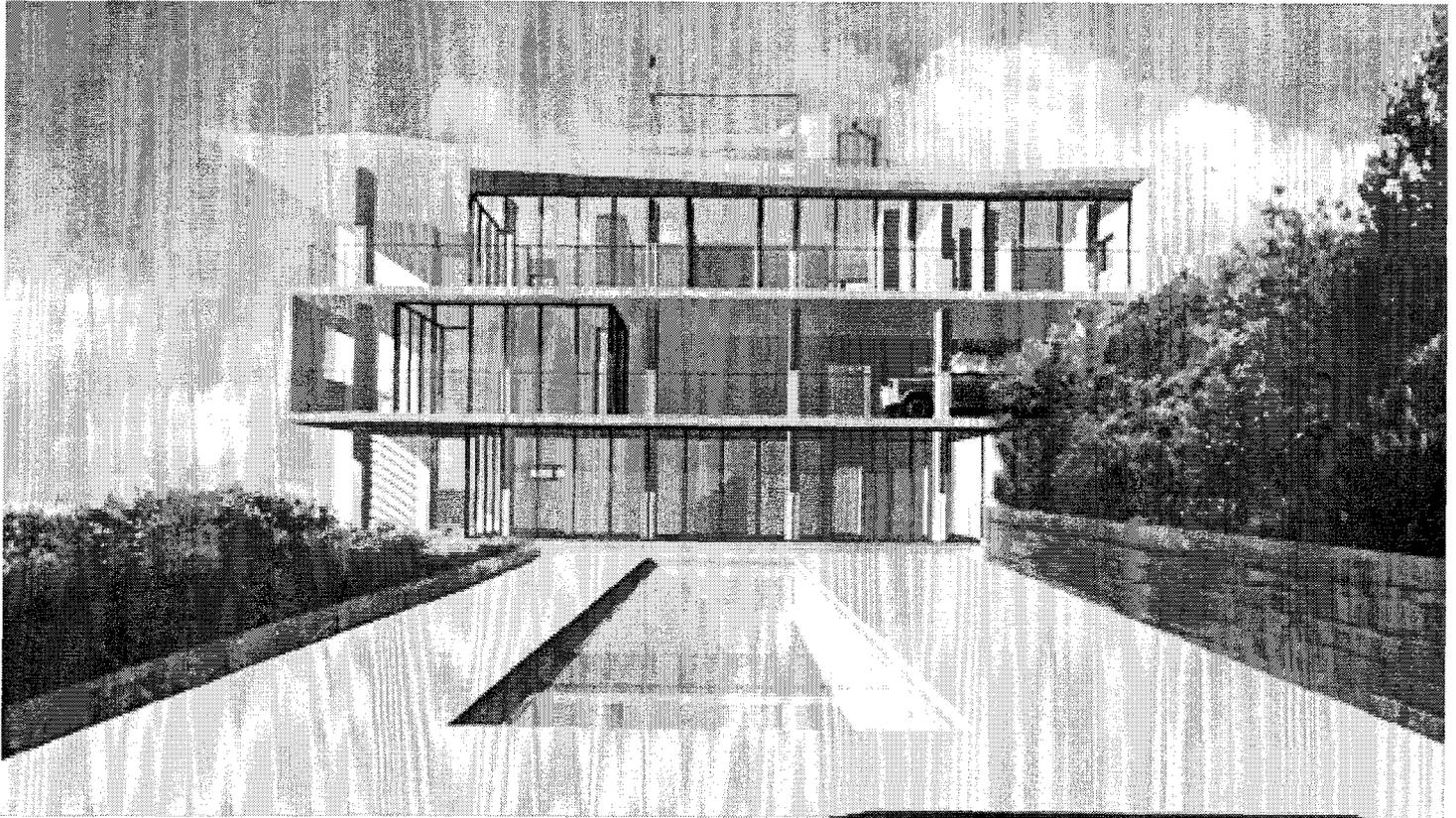
SUN. Every floor is conceived of as a type of porch or loggia, a protected semi-exterior space. The finishes contribute to this perception-floor to ceiling glass with smooth stucco on all walls—both interior and exterior. The floors are stacked three



high and the glazing is placed back from the southern edge a full 3'-4". This setback, in combination with removable canvas awnings, blocks sun from the interior slabs year round.

WATER. The water supply is collected at the site and supplemented by a municipal water line. The roof slab pitches up to the east and west, collecting and moving water from the roof to the belowground cistern located to the north. This water source can also feed the lap pool to the south. The pool water will be treated with ultraviolet light rather than chlorine.





CONSTRUCTION, MATERIALS AND NUMBER

With a similar approach to interior and exterior finishes, the house is constructed and composed simply, with a minimum number of materials and a minimum of special details. The structure is largely mono-chromatic—a few select materials in

gray and silver. The entire house is made of locally manufactured concrete block and poured-in-place concrete, finished for the most part inside and out in smooth gray stucco. The exterior terraces and retaining walls are concrete and stone. A few exterior concrete walls show conch shells applied in a masonry pattern.