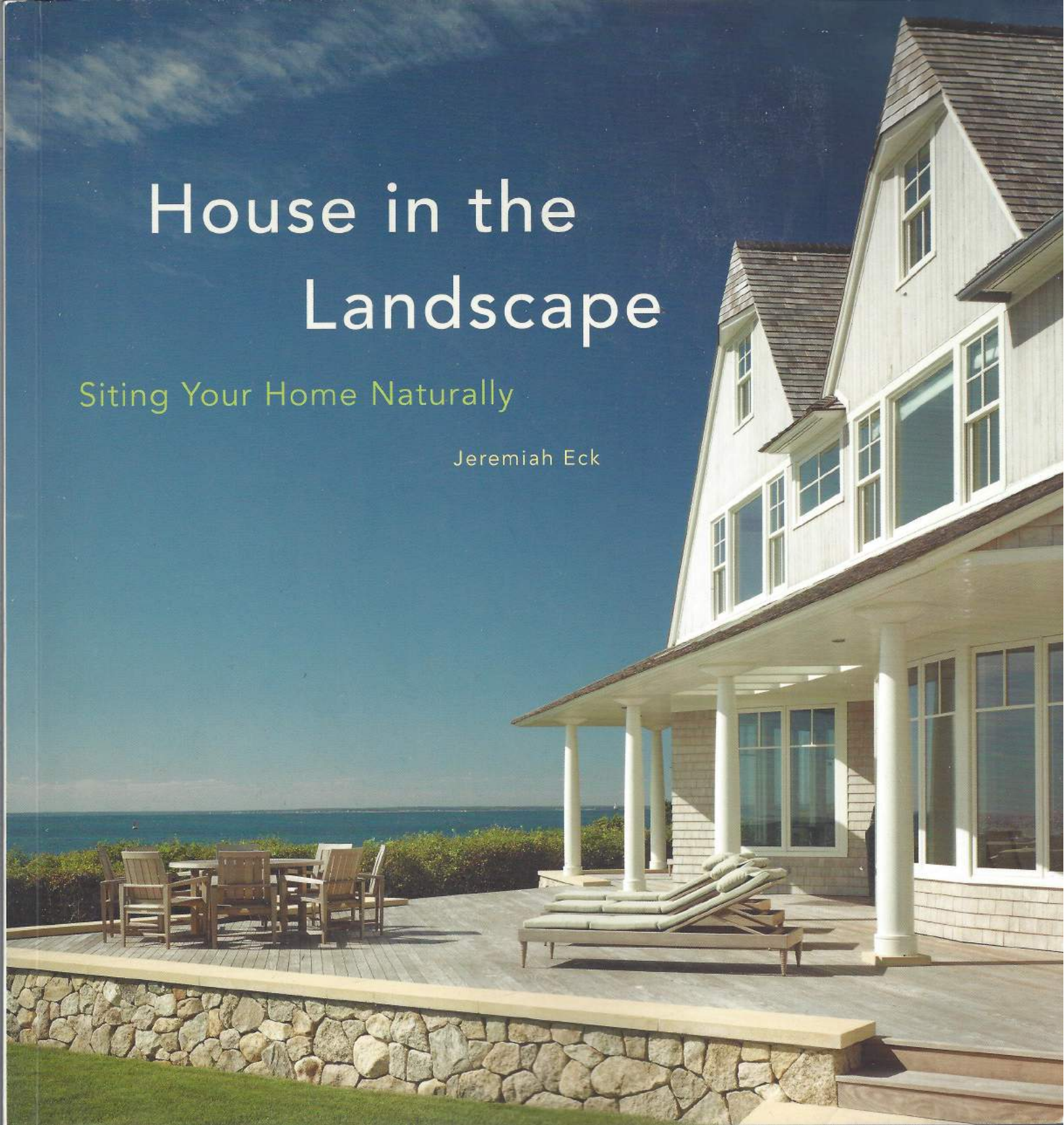


# House in the Landscape

Siting Your Home Naturally

Jeremiah Eck



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# Pond House

Phoenix, Arizona, 2005  
Will Bruder + Partners

THE BEST HOUSES almost disappear; they are designed in such a way that their placement and materials blend with the site rather than stand out, and all the various components work in unison with the natural landscape. House and landscape are experienced as one entity rather than a series of parts that don't seem to add up. These houses can be enjoyed much like a meal made of many courses is meant to be enjoyed. This modest house in the Arizona desert of just under 1,800 square feet by Will Bruder + Partners of Phoenix, Arizona, demonstrates clearly that house and site can be experienced together as one integrated pleasure.

Bruder's approach was to create an oasis or retreat only thirty miles to the south of the intensity of metropolitan Phoenix. His first step in achieving that goal was direct and straightforward: he left the entrance drive off the main access road unpaved. Even before reaching the house, homeowner and guests experience firsthand the desert under their feet or their wheels. Then, arriving at the house, a naturally weathered curved steel plate parallel to the drive emerges from the earth, separating the house from its neighbors as a fence but also connecting back to the house, whose exterior stone wall curves in an opposing direction. The thin, ethereal steel plate is a nice juxtaposition against the heavy, solid stone wall of the house. These opposing curves and their materiality set up a beautiful site symmetry. Just before the earth-colored steel plate meets the wall of the garage, it is pierced by an opening that reveals a path to the house.

The two opposing curves form a kind of funnel that leads visitors down a series of natural flagstone steps to the house entrance. A small cylindrical concrete fountain overflowing into a narrow watercourse that channels water along the edge of the flagstone stair gives a prelude to what is found on the other side of the site. The thick stone wall of the house rises up next to the watercourse, forming a kind of metaphorical canyon wall, and a single, rusted steel pipe handrail marks the descending path toward the entry. Stone, weathered steel, and trickling water demonstrate clearly that this is a desert site.

The house is sited along the grain of the steepest portion of the site and overlooks an exposed rock outcropping and a geological depression that forms a pond and provides a rich habitat for plants and animals, as well as a swimming hole. The living/dining/kitchen and master bedroom areas are down five more steps from the entrance level, an effect that further

embeds the house in its site. In many ways, the building acts as a transition between the harsh Sonoran Desert and the pond, rare in this landscape. While its thick stone curved wall on the west side seems to embrace and protect the house's inhabitants from the desert, the almost completely glazed east wall exposes it completely to the natural beauty of the pond, the desert, and Spur Cross Mountain beyond. Large sliding glass doors, a see-through hearth, and a wide cantilevered concrete deck running along half the length of the house further erode the distinction between inside and out. The stone wall and concrete floors also act as heat sinks and help temper the hot days and cool nights common in the American Southwest. What began as a small fountain and descending flagstone steps at the entrance culminates in a dramatic yet peaceful view of natural desert and pond.

The coursing of the curved wall is one of the most interesting aspects of the house.

Normally stones are laid up parallel to the ground; instead, Bruder has sloped the coursing on the outside face at the same angle as the low-sloped roof of the house. The result is a wall that seems to have erupted from the earth like some ancient tectonic plate. It feels and looks less like a new wall than a ruin that is linked metaphorically to the desert past. That implied continuity is intriguing, since historical continuity is a form of sustainability that is often ignored.

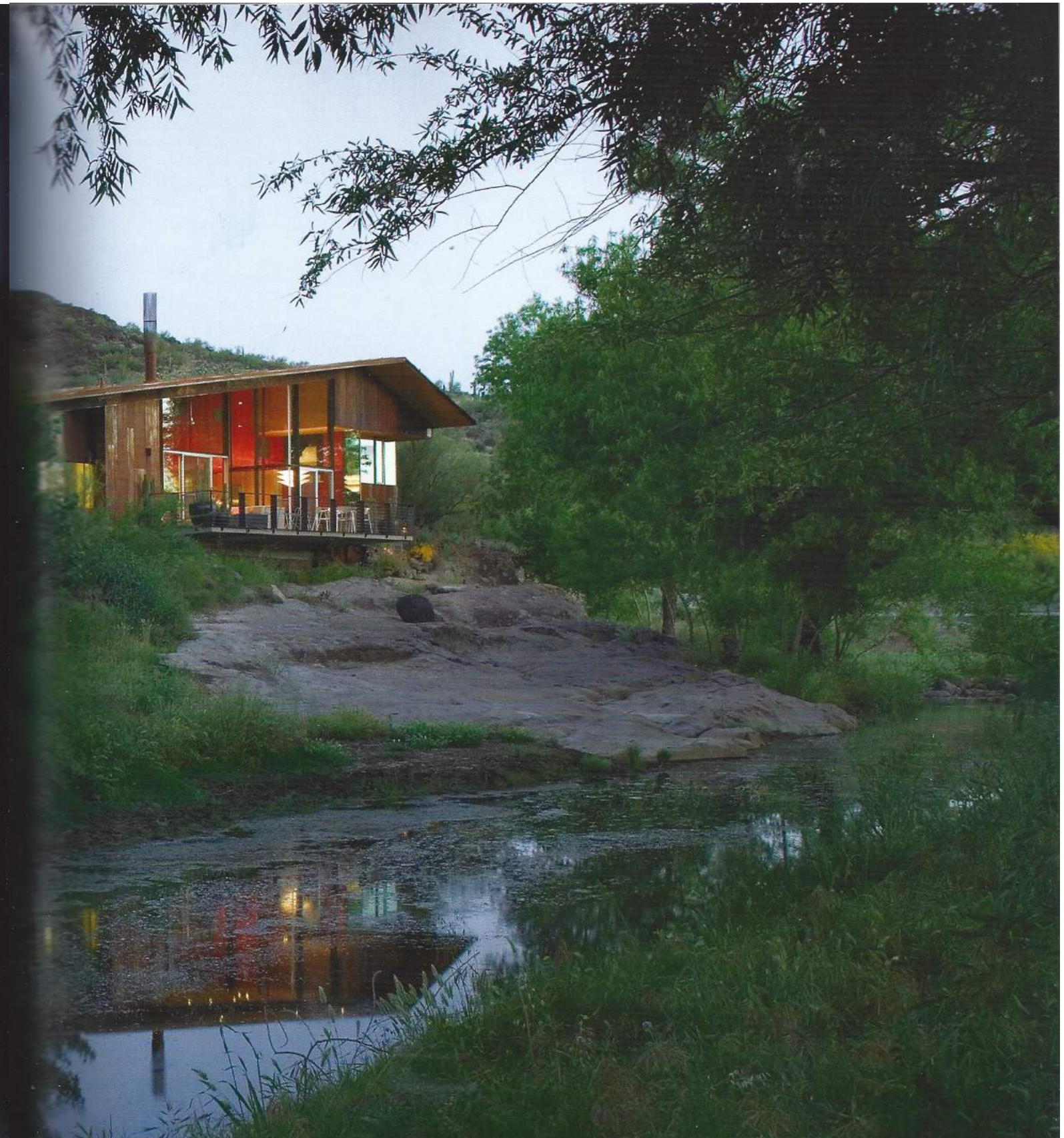
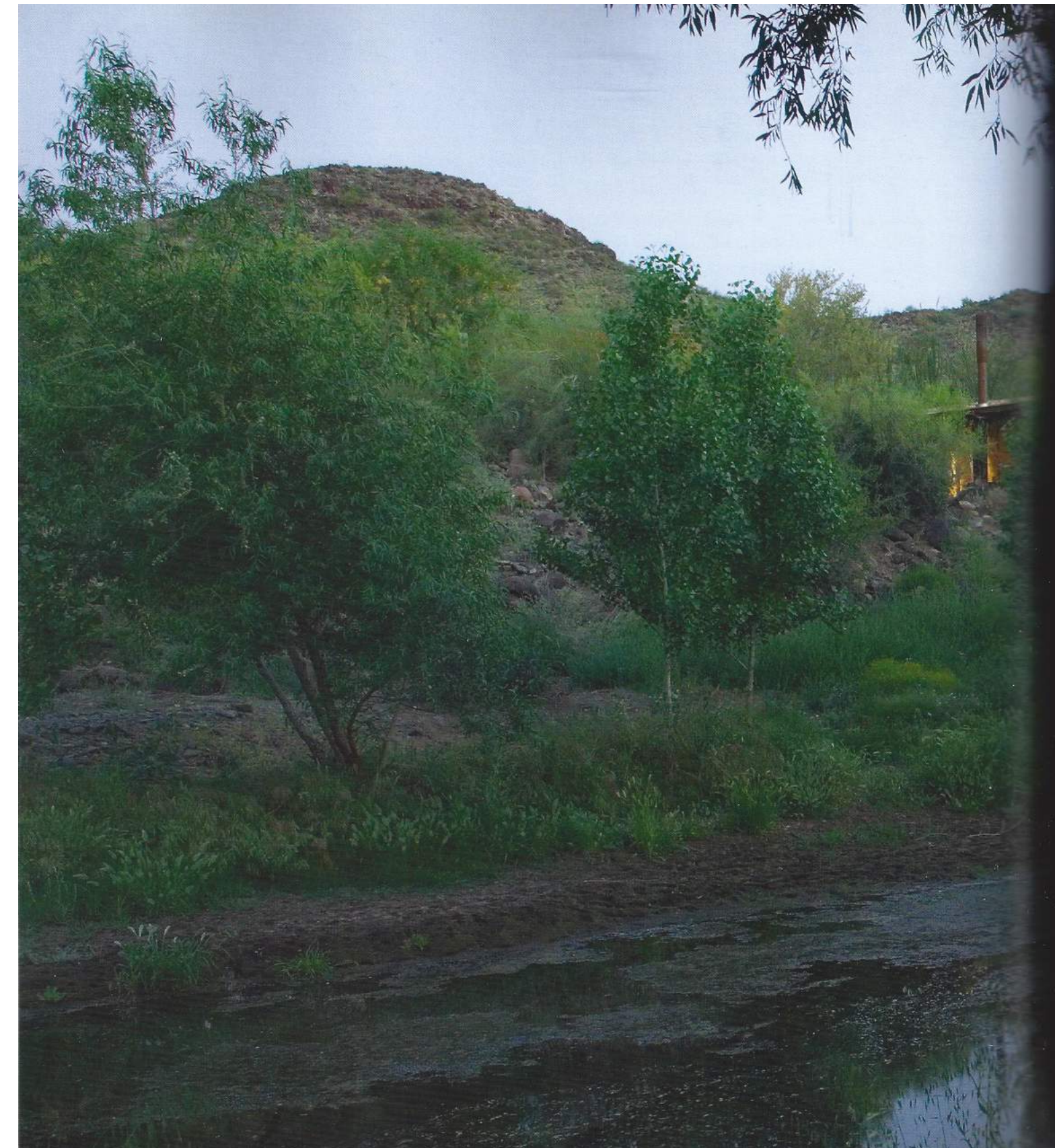
Where some might have been tempted to design a house like a loud brass band, standing alone and ignoring its natural surroundings, Will Bruder has instead provided us with a soft chamber orchestra. At every step in the design process, starting with the simple dirt road, he has treated the desert site as a partner to be quietly listened to rather than ignored. The result is a true oasis.

▷ A palette of stone and the rust-colored roof render this house barely visible on the site.

overleaf Set parallel to a rocky slope overlooking a small pond, this house is a natural oasis in the desert.



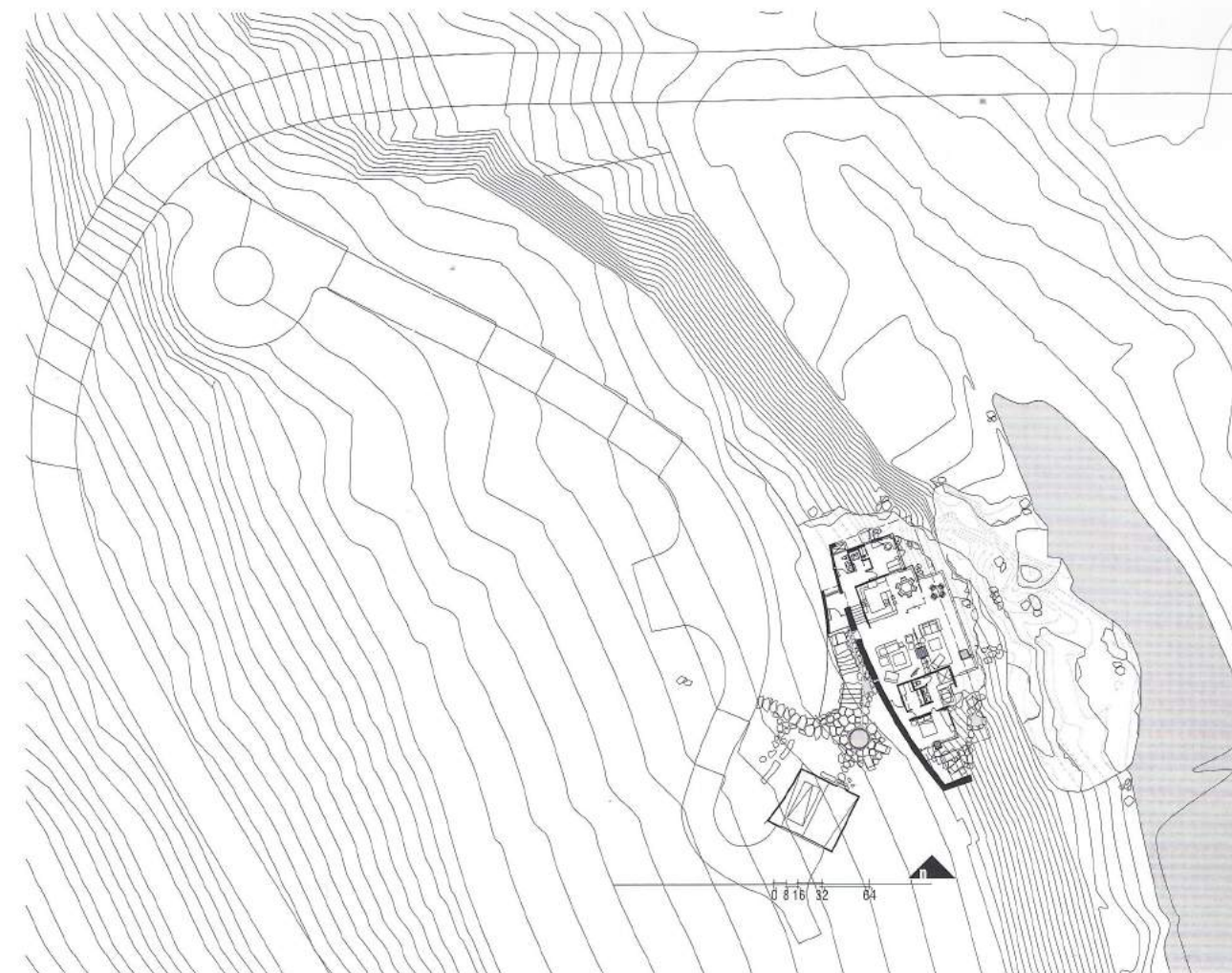






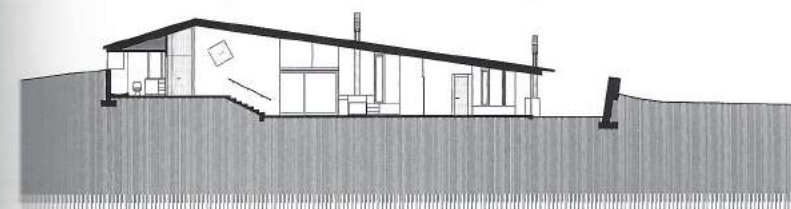
▷ Sheltered outside spaces are part of the desert experience of this house.

▽ A thin barrier of steel and the house's stone wall curve in opposite directions, funneling visitors to the house entrance.



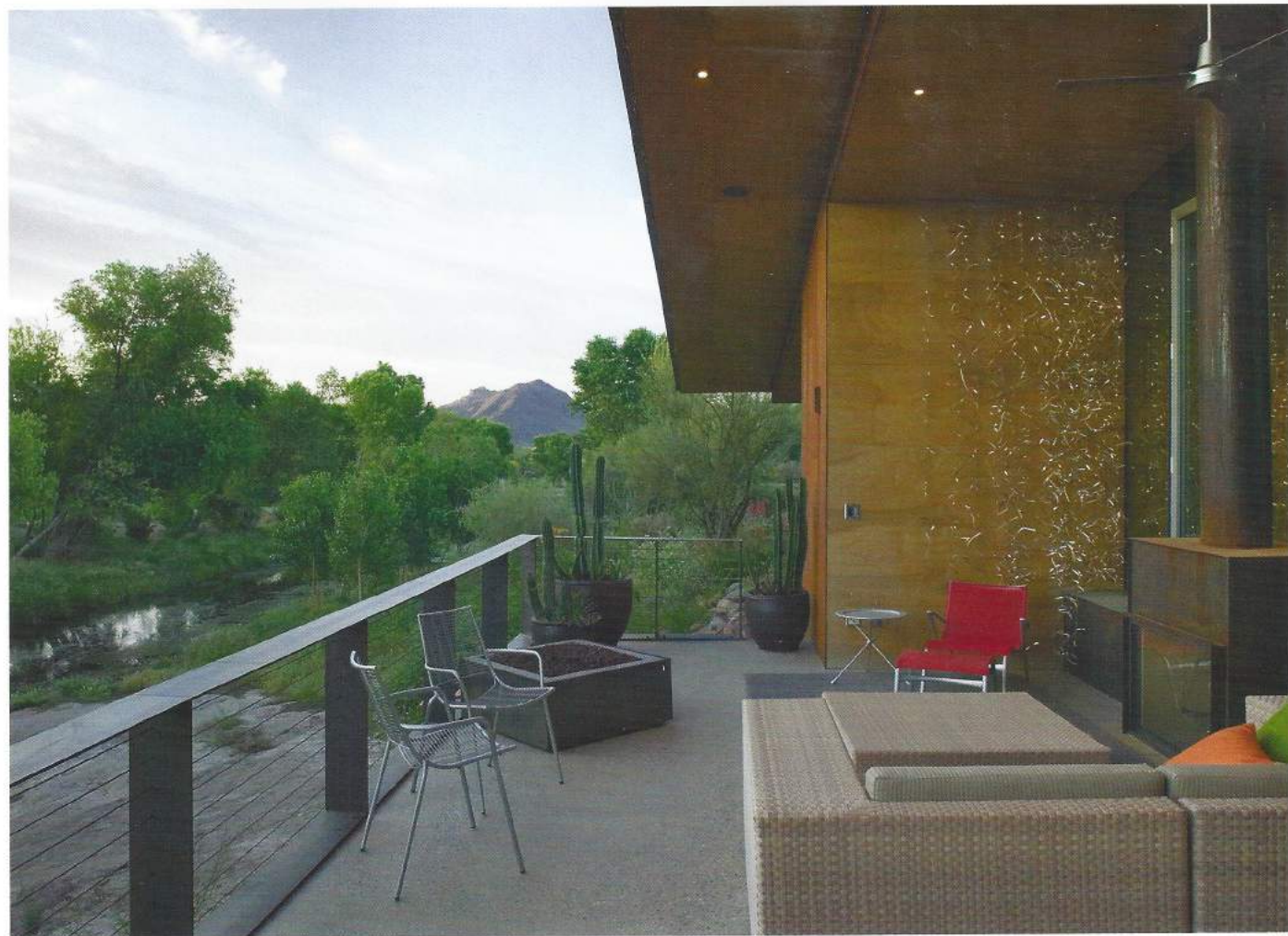
△ Site plan

▽ Section



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△ A sheltered deck provides generous views of the surrounding natural landscape.



◁ Coursed at the same angle as the roof, the new stone wall appears to erupt from the earth.

▽ A curved path of stone slabs set in the sloped landscape and a single handrail connect the garage and entry to the house.

