



CLARE MELHUISH

MODERN HOUSE 2

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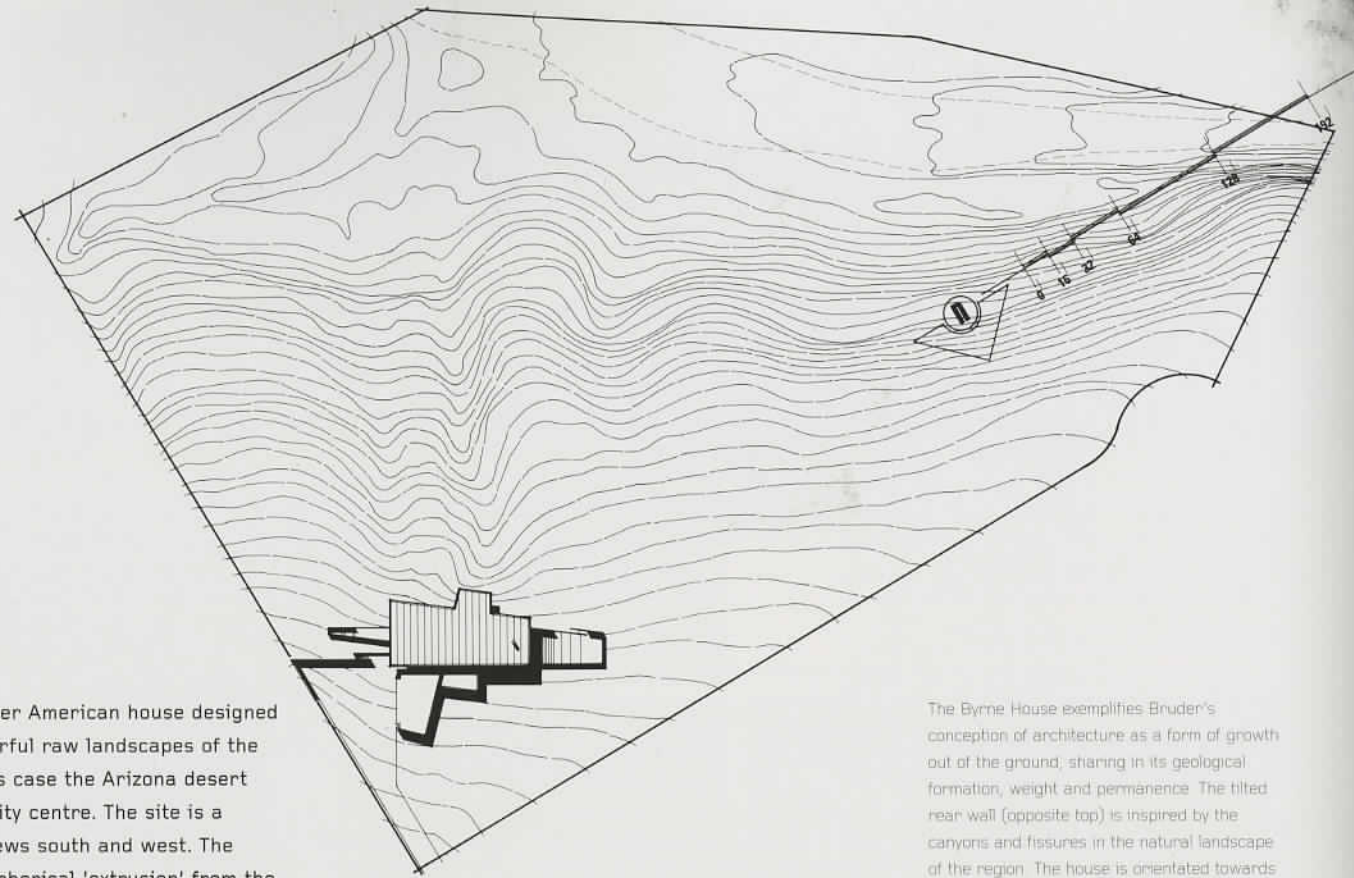
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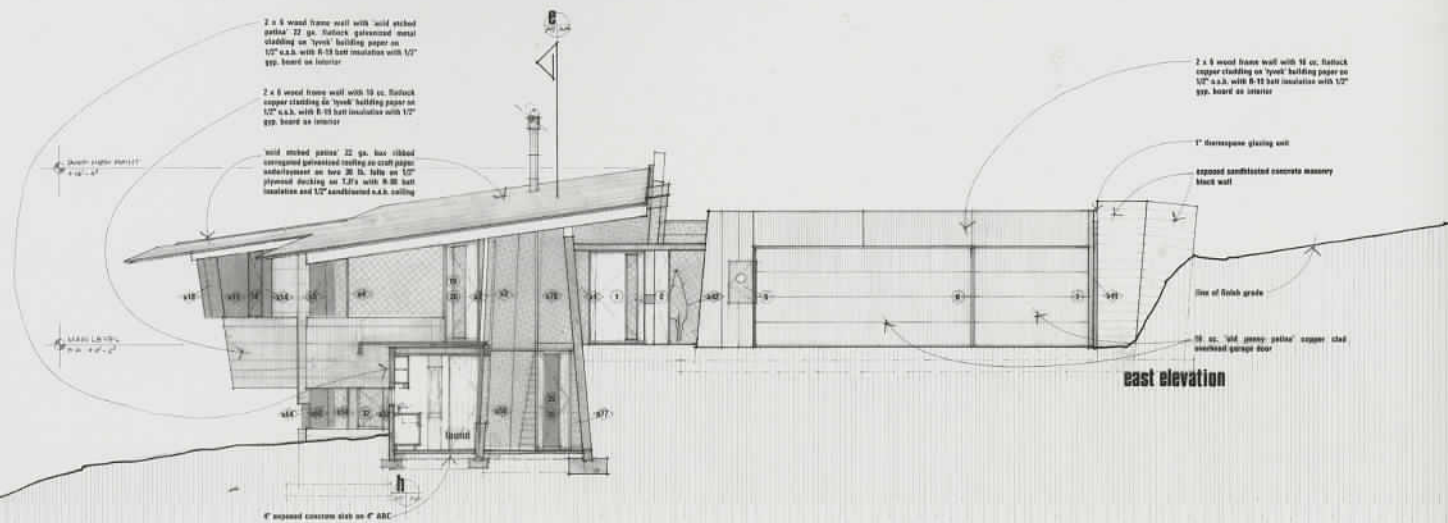
The Byrne Residence is another American house designed for communion with the powerful raw landscapes of the west of the continent – in this case the Arizona desert sixty miles north of Phoenix city centre. The site is a rocky hillside with striking views south and west. The house is conceived as a metaphorical 'extrusion' from the hillside, embodying ideas of 'stratification and layering' which are informed by Bruder's interest in, and knowledge of, geology and archaeology.

The project was commissioned by a couple, Bill and Carol Byrne, as a primary residence in the desert. They had moved from the East Coast to Arizona some time before, evidently drawn by the promise of its wide open, wild spaces. The house represents the deliberate pursuit of an 'organic' ideal which originally came out of the Byrnes' brief, and is embodied in an emphatically material architectural aesthetic in order to emphasize an integral relationship between the building and the natural landscape. In the architect's words, 'the architecture possesses a mysterious quietness and power in the landscape'.

Bruder's is a design approach which produces a very different type of building from the houses of, say, Murcutt or Poole, which come out of an ideal of lightness on the ground, and have an almost ephemeral quality within the landscape – as if they could be blown away and forgotten at any moment, without trace. While these houses are consciously designed as interventions in the superstructure of the landscape that should disturb and alter it as little as possible, Bruder's work is conceived as a form of growth out of the ground itself, sharing in its geological formation, weight and permanence. This distinction is also indicative of the contrasting

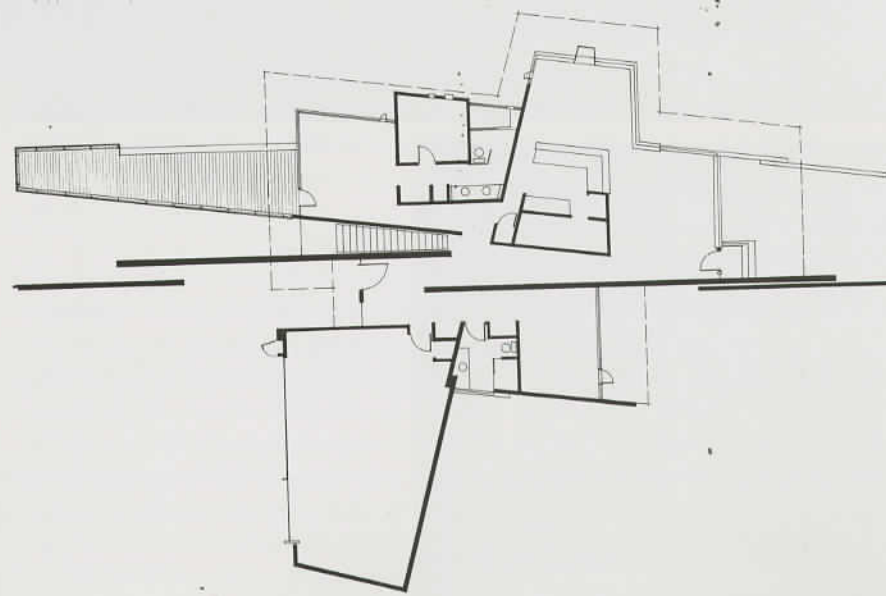
The Byrne House exemplifies Bruder's conception of architecture as a form of growth out of the ground, sharing in its geological formation, weight and permanence. The tilted rear wall (opposite top) is inspired by the canyons and fissures in the natural landscape of the region. The house is orientated towards the desert (see site plan, above, and view below) and the front is glazed, maximizing views out from the main living spaces, and a sense of connection between interior and exterior (opposite bottom).





The main floor plan (below) and east elevation (above) show the organization of the internal space around a linear 'spine', made of concrete-block walls leaning at varying degrees from the vertical and horizontal (opposite right, above and below). A steel-framed roof is cantilevered off the 'spine' and juts out over the main living spaces towards the front of the house (see elevation).

The accommodation to the rear of the spine comprises a garage and secondary bedroom, while the master bedroom opens onto a long terrace running parallel to the primary axis. The entrance is located at the same end of this axis, tucked between the tilting structural elements and colliding roof plates as if at the centre of a momentous geological event (opposite left).



architectural genealogy of the architects' work. While the two Australians can be linked to an essentially European tradition dominated by the influence of Le Corbusier and his ideal of buildings 'liberated from the soil' through the use of pilotis, Bruder represents a line of descent from the great American master of what has been called the 'organic tradition' – Frank Lloyd Wright, and his ground-hugging Prairie Style houses. He explicitly relates the Byrne House to Wright's Price House of 1954 in the suburbs of Phoenix, and the similarity between the two, in terms of form and materials, is evident.

The striking character of the Byrne House derives from the angular geometry driving the plan, and the use of concrete-block walls leaning at varying degrees from the vertical to form the spine of the house. The hefty cantilevered steel-framed roof juts out over the main living spaces of the house, which are enclosed by glazed walls of clear and 'solex' green, non-reflective glass, maximizing views out over the landscape, and the sense of connection between interior and exterior. The weight of the roof is somewhat disconcertingly held off and away from the back wall by steel brackets, the glazed gap allowing sunlight to filter into the spinal circulation zone of the plan, where there are few windows.

Bruder attributes the inspiration for the tilted walls to the canyons and fissures in the natural landscape of the region, and the entrance to the house, located at one end of the linear axis, is tucked in between the tilting structural elements and the colliding roof plates as if at the centre of a momentous geological event – a reminder that the forces of nature can be both dramatic and unpredictable in their physical impact. By contrast, the steel and timber deck which stretches out beyond it





along the same axis, exaggerating the attenuated linear quality of the plan, evokes a landscape of leisure and peaceful enjoyment.

In fact, the possibilities of outdoor living are limited by the sheer force of the sun. Considerable effort was made to protect the interior of the house from its rays, while also allowing enjoyment of landscape views. Precautionary measures included the deep overhang of the roof over the glazed living-room walls and the use of solar glass, fitted with operable perforated metal screens. The rest of the house was designed to allow as little sunlight to enter as possible, set on the level below the main living space, with narrow horizontal strip windows, so forming a cool underbelly to the building.

The house was, most unusually, constructed by the client. Bill Byrne was a general contractor with considerable experience in domestic work, but none in the sort of structure and materials which the scheme required. This entailed a process of learning in new fields of experience which proved 'exhilarating'. Carol Byrne was herself a textile and interior designer, working as a colour consultant to the car industry, and the house provided her with an opportunity to explore her sensibilities and talents in a joint project with her husband and their architect. Hence, in a very real sense, the project of the house embodied a voyage of personal self-development and discovery for the pair, both as individuals and as a couple, leading to an expression of self-identity facilitated and mediated by the architect.



The main internal spaces, including the master bedroom (top left), dining area (top right and bottom) and living room (above left and left) are enclosed by 'solex' green non-reflective glass, shaded from the glare of the sun by the deep overhang of the roof, and framing inspiring views of the landscape. The entrance (opposite), by contrast, is located at the side of the house in a more sheltered position, opening into the deeply shaded main circulation space along the back wall.