

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

Record Houses



IS THERE AN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE?

AN ESSAY BY ROBERT CAMPBELL

PAVILIONS OF PLEASURE



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* You can find these on our Web site at www.archrecord.com, your source for a virtual tour of recently featured projects, an index of past articles, and more.



Continuing Education: The AIA/ARCHITECTURAL RECORD continuing education opportunity this month is "Siting Houses in Hard Places" (page 153). The education self-report form appears on page 182.

Cover: House at Leymen, Haut Rhine, France. Herzog & de Meuron.
Photograph © Margherita Spiluttini.
Above: The GucklHüpf, Mondsee, Austria. Hans Peter Wörndl.
Photograph © Paul Ott. See page 82.

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Record Houses 1999

Is she beautiful?" Groucho Marx once reportedly said of a woman. "Well, if you take away her eyes, nose, and mouth, all you're left with is a blank expression." A similar comment could almost apply to the eight projects chosen as this year's Record Houses. True, their range of expression owes much to their prominent features: the massing, spatial sequences, and rhythms of apertures and materials. But in every case, the site or "blank" canvas, unlike that featureless face, holds a distinctive and compelling character.

The sites vary from the arid desert of Arizona to a tiny urban lot in Toronto, a salty pond's edge in Long Island to a meadow in Vermont, a hilly orchard in rural France to a classic townhouse row in Chicago, a bungalow-filled 'hood in Los Angeles to a lush gully in Australia.

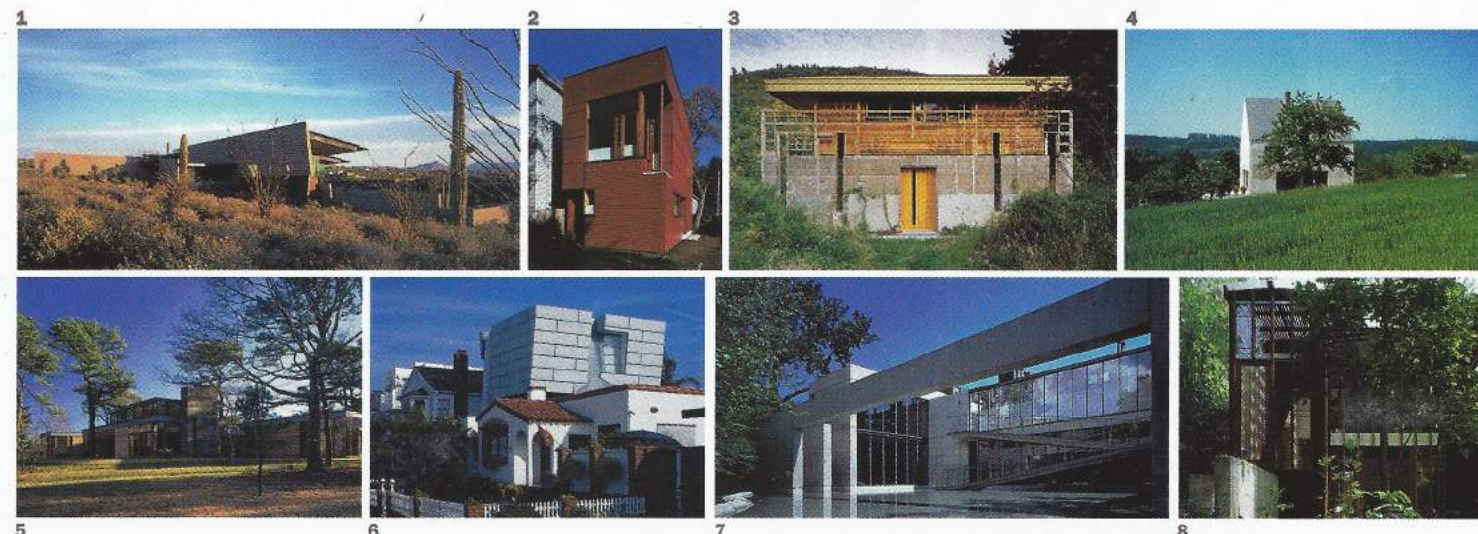
- Houses by:
1. William P. Bruder, Architect
 2. Shim-Sutcliffe Architects
 3. Michael Singer, Inc.
 4. Herzog & de Meuron
 5. Tod Williams Billie Tsien and Associates
 6. Morphosis
 7. Tadao Ando Architect & Associates
 8. Andresen O'Gorman Architects

A powerful sense of place preceded the architecture—and, with each house, prompted a potent response. Metaphors evoking the forms and textures of the surrounding landscape, for example, characterize Will Bruder's Byrne Residence in

Arizona, as well as Brit Andresen and Peter O'Gorman's Rosebery House in eastern Australia. Lying low in the desert, Bruder's building evokes the Southwest's subtle and dramatic rock formations: shifting strata, chasms, and canyons. Andresen O'Gorman's timber-battened house, by contrast, draws poetic inspiration from its region's delicate eucalyptus groves.

Instead of echoing the setting, some projects offer a decisive counterpoint. In Toronto's Craven Road House, Shim-Sutcliffe Architects joined commonplace materials with the precision of fine cabinetry—inserting an essay in subtle invention into a neighborhood of conventional aluminum-sided cottages. In his museumlike Chicago house, Tadao Ando created an inward-facing precinct—a tranquil world apart—while still retaining a dialogue with the city's panorama of rooftops.

In this era when American cityscapes have yielded to the homogenizing effects of Banana Republics and Pottery Barns, when the force of the Euro threatens to blend France's quiche Lorraine with England's beef-and-kidney pie, when throngs of workers spend their days in the experiential sameness of cyberspace, real-world architectural diversity is still alive and well. Sarah Amelar



In the Arizona desert, **WILL BRUDER** creates a house that emerges from its rocky site, evoking chasms, canyons, and shifting strata.

by Clifford A. Pearson



difficult, the architect switched to concrete block. The resulting design, says Bruder, seems to be “extruded” from the land, rather than unfolding out of it. “In the end, I think this was the right way to go. You get a better sense of stratification and of layering.”

Set on a five-acre site beyond the sprawl of the country’s sixth largest city (and one of its fastest growing), the Byrne Residence presents an almost solid face to visitors approaching by car: concrete block, rusting

steel, and copper cladding. It’s an uncompromising facade—not as graceful as it might have been, but strongly connected to the desert terrain.

Visitors enter through a glass-and-metal seam between the copper-clad garage block and the elongated form of the house. The interior unfolds as a pair of canyons—one serving as the main-floor spine, the other leading down to the lower level. Each is defined by a thick masonry wall along one side and a clear-glass plane at the end that draws you along with the promise of a view. On the main floor, the canyon reveals the house’s structural system: a great sloping metal roof attached to a concrete-block wall with seven steel brackets. By pulling the roof four inches from the wall and allowing daylight to creep in through a long narrow skylight, Bruder both creates and exposes the illusion of weighty elements floating in space.

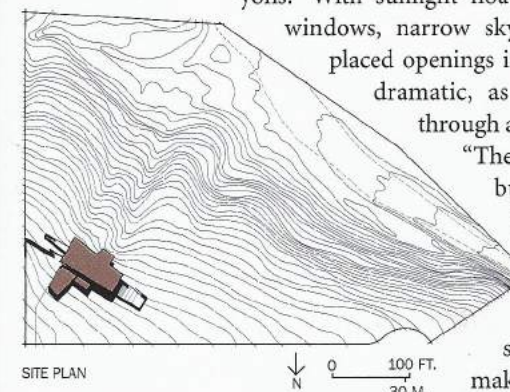
Modest in size, the house draws our attention through contrasting shadow and light, architectural brawn and visual dexterity. While its north facade is mostly concrete block, the south side is just the opposite, with expanses of glass that reveal impressive views of arid hills and great sculptural cacti. If the front elevation is a cliff face, the back is a crystalline formation breaking free of the earth. The highlight of this transparent composition is a glass table set in a faceted, glass-enclosed dining room that projects beyond the rest of the house.

To take advantage of a climate that encourages outdoor living, the house has a patio off the living room and a long terrace off the master

Spend some time with architect Will Bruder and you’ll hear as much about geology as architecture. The man knows his strata, canyons, and fossils. After all, he is married to an archaeologist and has designed an interpretive center for viewing native American rock art [RECORD, October 1995, page 64]. A Midwesterner by birth, Bruder loves the desert and all its rugged glory the way a convert loves his adopted religion. Needless to say, geological metaphors abound in the Byrne Residence, a 2,900-square-foot house that appears to be at once anchored to and emerging from a rocky hillside about 60 miles north of downtown Phoenix.

First, there are the house’s canted concrete-block walls, which evoke the sloped cliff faces of Western mesas. Not only do the masonry blocks inch out from the vertical plane as they rise, but the courses—exposed on the interiors and exteriors—are laid at an angle to the floor, recalling rock strata that have shifted over time. In addition, parallel walls stand close together, forming compressed spaces that Bruder calls “canyons.” With sunlight floating in from clerestory windows, narrow skylights, and irregularly placed openings in the walls, the effect is dramatic, as if one were walking through a charged landscape.

“The original idea was to build a tilt-up concrete house, to have it unfold out of the earth,” explains Bruder. But when contractors said site conditions would make tilt-up construction



SITE PLAN

The main entry (this page) shows how vertical elements balance the angled roofs and canted walls. From the street the house presents a mostly solid front (opposite).

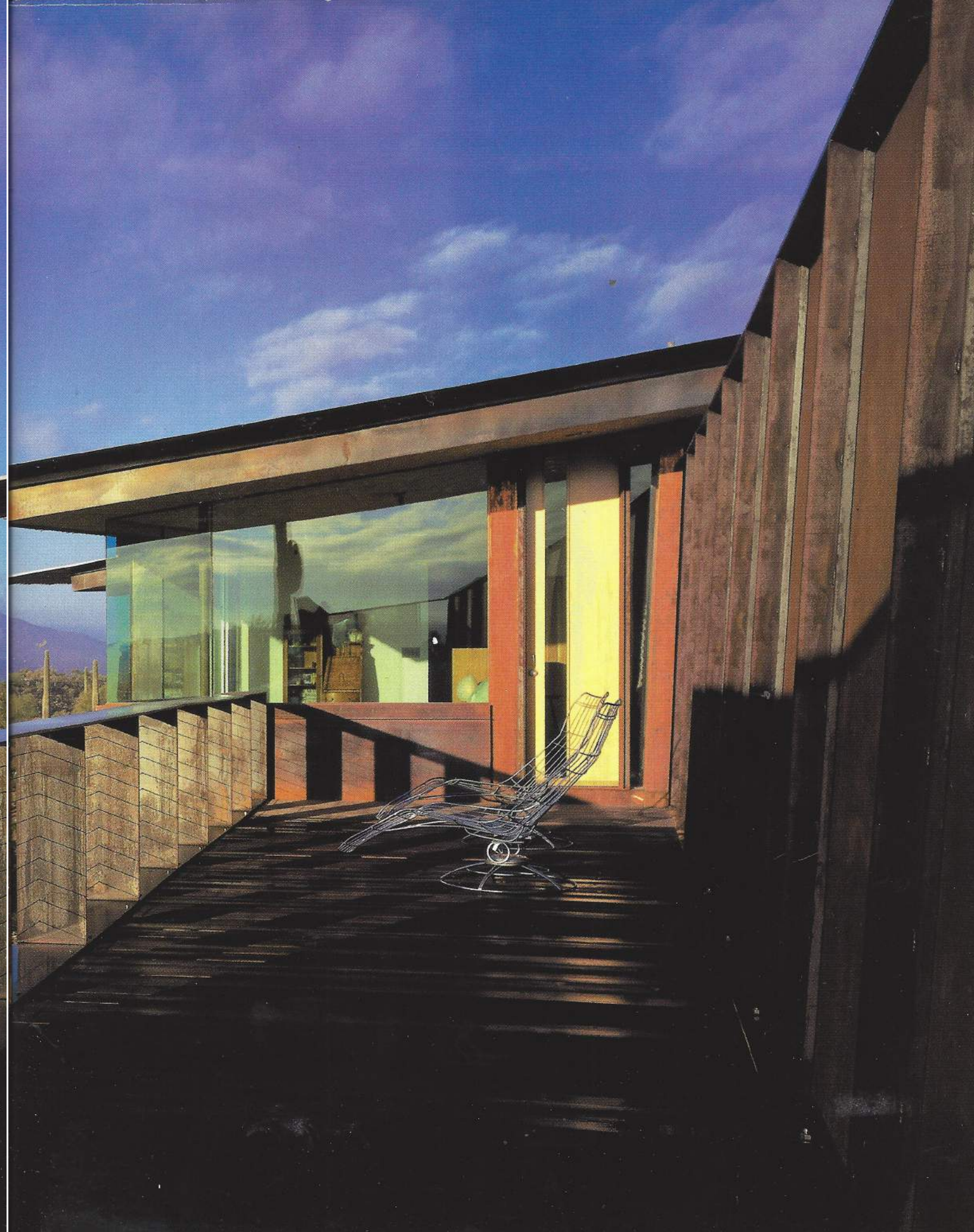
Project: Byrne Residence, North Scottsdale, Arizona
Owners: Bill and Carol Byrne
Architect: William P. Bruder, Architect—Will Bruder, Tim Christ,

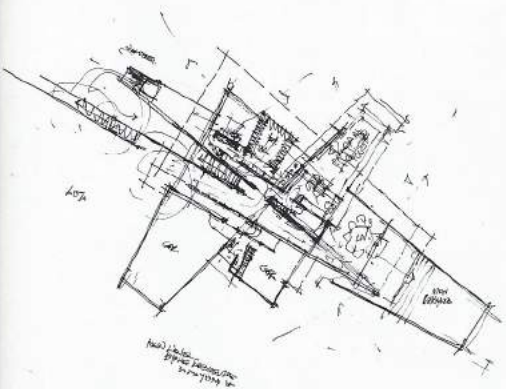
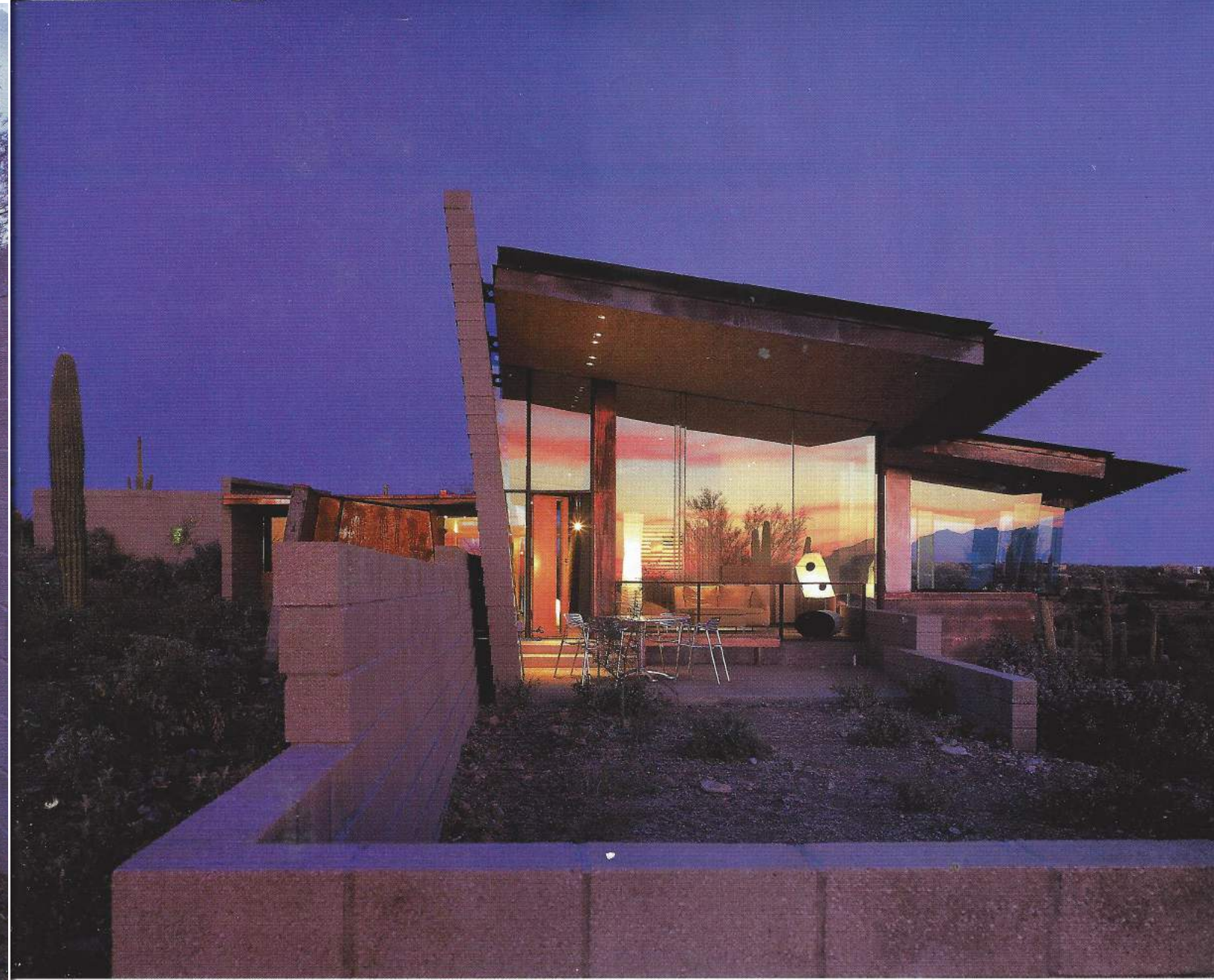
Jack DeBartolo III
Engineers: Rudow & Berry (structural); Roy Otterbein (mechanical); CA Energy Designs (electrical)
General Contractor: Bill Byrne



A terrace off the master bedroom offered the architect a chance to play with varying degrees of transparency. Angled planes of rusting steel mesh, a

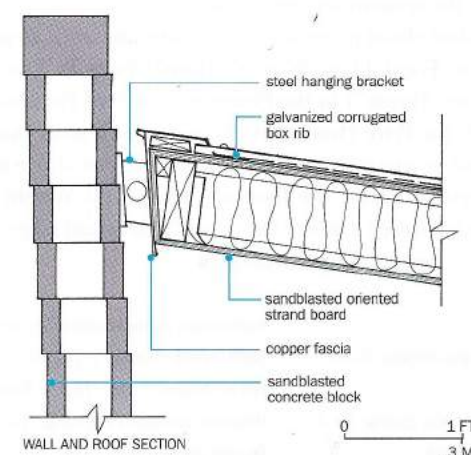
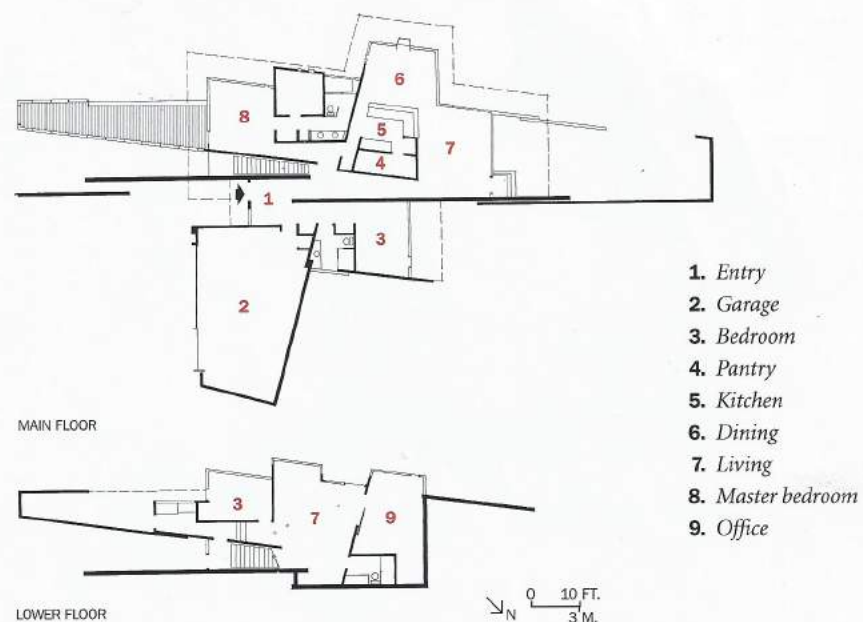
steel-plate balustrade, and large sheets of glass on the house filter, frame, or reflect views of the desert and nearby mountains.





From the east (top) and the west (opposite), the house opens up to views and reveals an architecture of walls extending beyond the

interior spaces. Landscaping was kept simple in order to allow the natural desert flora to reclaim the land around the house.



bedroom that extend the interiors—providing casual spaces for enjoying an alfresco meal or reading a good book. Such weaving together of indoors and out certainly has roots in Frank Lloyd Wright's work, which Bruder has long studied, but the use of rusting metal mesh and canted concrete walls brings a 1990s aesthetic to the work.

Rather than designing an overly precious landscape, Bruder let the desert flora reestablish itself all the way up to the house's hard edges. The careful fit between house and site—requiring the removal of only a few cacti during construction—made the landscaping job easier.

By tucking the building up against a hillside, Bruder protects it from the desert sun's brute force and creates a cool lower level for guest bedrooms and home offices. The heavily glazed living room, though, faces southwest and can take a beating from the sun in the winter when the rays are low enough to slip under the deeply cantilevered metal-deck roof. "This was a trade-off we were willing to make to get the views," explains Bruder. "And we're adding perforated fabric scrims to the windows here." The rest of the house stays cool most of the time, thanks to natural ventilation through screened doors and casement windows set within the insulated glazed walls.



Casement windows like the tall one set within a large plane of glass in the dining room provide cross ventilation.

The clients, Bill and Carol Byrne, had lived in more traditional houses in New Jersey and Arizona. But both knew a great deal about architecture—he as a general contractor and she as a textile and interior designer. Before hiring Bruder, the Byrnes prepared a program calling for a “simple and basic” house that was “comfortable and modest,” had nat-

BRUDER CREATES THE ILLUSION OF HEAVY ELEMENTS FLOATING IN SPACE.

ural materials, and was energy-efficient. They imposed no stylistic requirements other than a request for “organic architecture.” Other architects who interviewed for the job looked at the rocky, sloped site and talked about all the problems of building on it. “When Will looked at the site, he got excited immediately,” remembers Carol. “Within 15 minutes he was already putting ideas down on paper.”

Working as his own general contractor, Bill Byrne took on the job of building something radically different from the colonial houses that usually fill his work sheet. Concrete slabs, corbeled masonry walls, and a great cantilevered steel-framed roof were all new to him. The most challenging task, he says, was making sure that a canted block wall properly met a roof tilting in two directions.

Despite all the angles, the house never seems off-kilter or unbalanced. This is because every canted or angled element is structural and reveals the way it is built. “They’re not faked with gyp board and studs,” says Tim Christ, a member of Bruder’s project team. In other words, these

angles aren’t just for show or for expressing some theoretical conceit.

In several of Bruder’s recent projects, including Temple Kol Ami in Scottsdale, the Cox Residence in Cave Creek, Arizona, and the design of a Scottsdale Arts Center exhibition on 25 years of his work, the architect explored innovative ways of building concrete-block walls. Rotating, corbeling, and moving blocks in and out of plumb are some of the imaginative ways he has stacked these humdrum masonry units. The result is a rich palette of effects made from just one cheap material. And when sunlight is added, the rewards are even greater.

When asked about inspirations for his recent work, Bruder recommends a visit to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Harold Price Sr. House (also called the “Grandma House”) in the Phoenix suburb of Paradise Valley. Dating from 1954, the Price House has concrete-block walls that corbel out as they rise and an expansive roof that seems to float above bands of glass. Without trying to copy the look or feeling of a Wright design, Bruder has clearly borrowed a few of the master’s ideas and taken them in his own distinctive, freewheeling direction. ■

Sources

Sandblasted concrete block: *Western Block*

Insulated and tempered glass: *HGP*

Aluminum sliding doors:

International

Locksets: *Titan*

Bathroom accessories: *Agape*

Sofas and chairs: *Ligne Roset*

Wire chairs: *Knoll (Harry Bertoia)*

Interior ambient lighting: *Tech*

Downlights: *Halo*

Task lighting: *Album*

Lighting controls: *Lutron*



“Canyons” that slope to the lower level (top) and create a circulation spine for the main floor (right) seem to be shaped by geological forces. The concrete blocks in the canted interior walls are laid in courses parallel to the angled roof, not the floor. Rebar runs vertically through each concrete-block cell and across every third course. Glass orbs are by artist Mayme Katz.

