

SMITH HOUSE

Sean Corriveau
ARCH 211

Architect	Richard Meier
Location	Darien, Connecticut
Date	1965 to 1967 timeline
Building Type	house
Construction System	vertical wood siding
Climate	temperate
Context	suburban
Style	Modern
Notes	Simple forms and materials for a reserved modern sculptural expression.

http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Smith_House.html



<http://richardmeier.com>



Jodidio, Philip. [An Richard Meier](#). Printed in Germany:

Prestel, 1995. P54



Frampton, Kenneth. [Richard Meier and the](#)

[City in Miniature](#). New York: St.

Martin's press 1990. P23



Jodidio, Philip. [An Richard Meier](#). Printed in

Germany: Prestel, 1995. P55

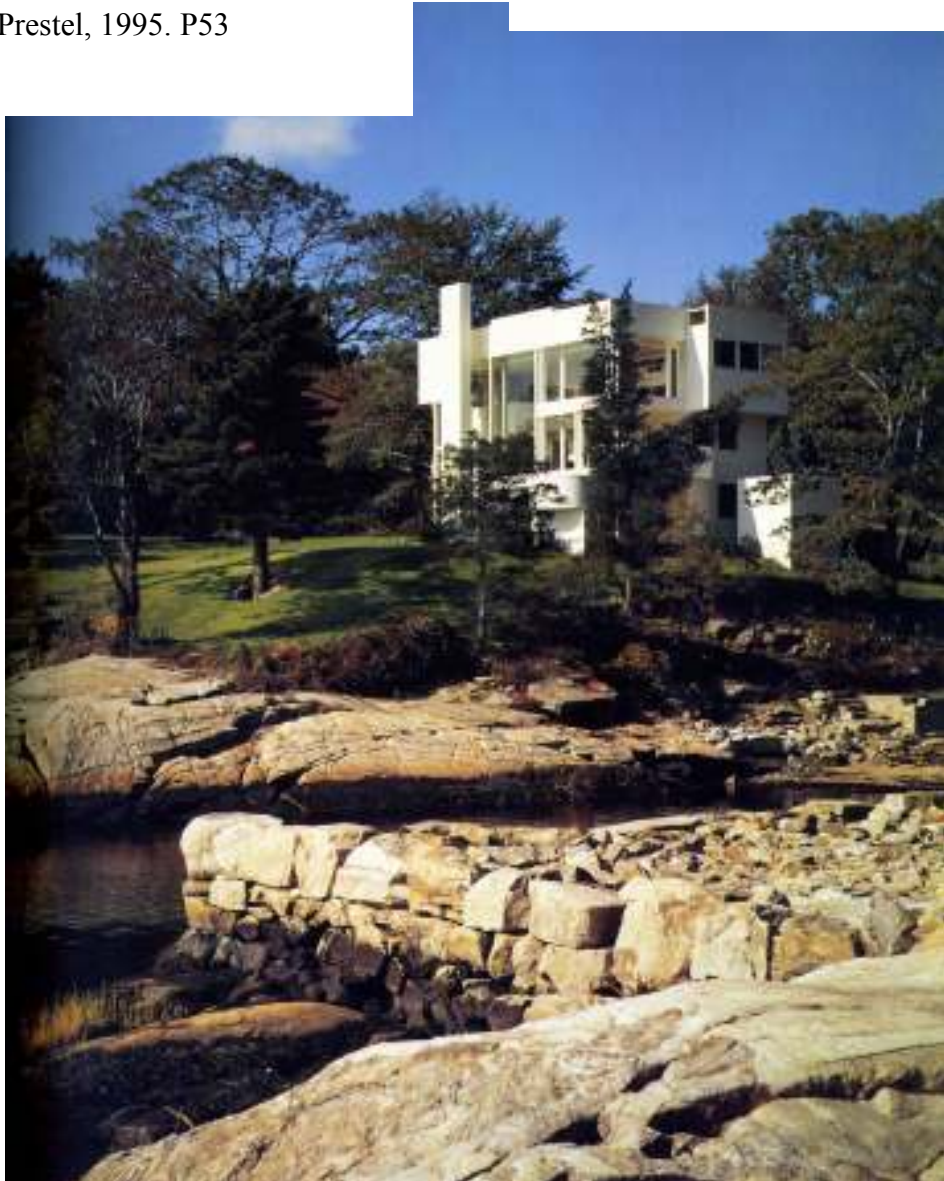
SMITH HOUSE

Sean Corriveau



Jodidio, Philip. An Richard Meier. Printed in Germany: Prestel, 1995. P53

<http://richardmeierer.com>



Jodidio, Philip. An Richard Meier. Printed in Germany: Prestel, 1995.

Smith House

Darien, Connecticut
1965–1967

niveau
CH 211



Set on a 1.5 acre site overlooking Long Island Sound, the Smith residence is remarkable because of the number of elements of the architect's mature style which it contains. Approached via a bridge, it is closed on one side, and open on the other, which faces the water. Though clad in wood, it is white, with a double-height living room. Undoubtedly influenced by Le Corbusier and other Modernist masters, Richard Meier gives this private house a sense of comfort and space which seems far removed from the functionalist rigor of his European mentors. American architects accepted the unadorned forms of the "International Style" without ever finding much use for the social theories born of periods of extreme turmoil in the Old World.

Das Haus Smith liegt auf einem 1,5 Morgen großen Grundstück mit Ausblick auf den Long Island Sound und enthält bereits viele Merkmale von Meiers reifem Stil. Eine Brücke führt zum Eingang des Hauses. Die eine Seite ist geschlossen, die andere zum Wasser hin offen. Obwohl mit Holz verkleidet, ist das Haus weiß und besitzt einen zwei Geschosse hohen Wohnraum. Meier ist zwar zweifellos von Le Corbusier und anderen modernen Meistern beeinflusst, hat diesem Privathaus aber einen Komfort und eine Räumlichkeit verliehen, die weit von der funktionalistischen Strenge seiner europäischen Mentoren entfernt ist. Die amerikanischen Architekten akzeptierten die schornkellosen Formen des «Internationalen Stils», ohne daß sie je viel mit den sozialen Theorien anfangen konnten, die aus den extrem schwierigen Verhältnissen in der Alten Welt entstanden waren.

Construite sur un site de près d'un hectare surplombant le Long Island Sound, la maison Smith est tout à fait intéressante par le fait qu'elle réunit de nombreux éléments caractéristiques du style mature de l'architecte. Accessible par un pont, la maison est fermée du côté de l'entrée, et ouverte de l'autre sur la mer. Bien que revêtue de bois, elle est toute blanche, avec un salon à double hauteur. Nettement influencé par Le Corbusier et d'autres maîtres de l'architecture moderniste, Richard Meier donne à cette résidence privée un sens du confort et de l'espace qui paraissent bien loin de la rigueur fonctionnaliste de ses mentors européens. Les architectes américains se sont bien servis des formes dépouillées du «Style international» mais sans jamais avoir adopté les théories sociales nées des bouleversements politiques et sociaux du Vieux Continent.

building.

C J: We are all aware, Venturi and everyone, about how the Modernist turns construction and decoration into a kind of ornament. There is a difference between your nature framed through these vistas and nature drawn on the building. I was just wondering if you don't feel that these arguments of Venturi and myself and others had a kind of truth to them?

R M: No I don't. I feel that truth is within those things which bear the signs of them, but I don't feel the necessity to involve myself. Maybe at some point I'll change my mind about it.

Interview II, June 1982, on the Hartford Seminary, Atlanta and Frankfurt Museums

On Rhetorical Types

C J: I'd like to discuss the differing Late-Modern rhetorical types in your work, the various figures or motifs. In the early houses you get a *reversibility* of back and front in both the Smith House and Douglas House; you get an inversion of materials, of wood that looks like concrete, at least in the photographs.

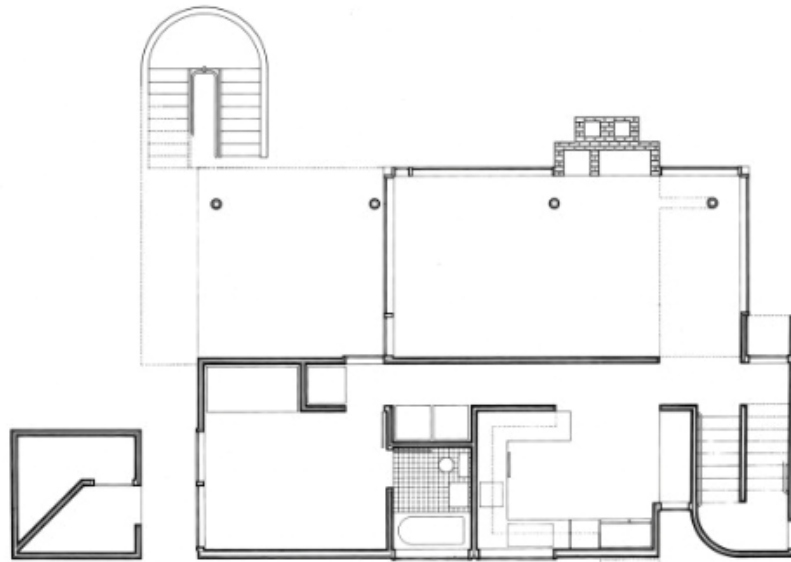
R M: It looks like concrete to a European, but not to an American. If you look at houses in New England, you are aware of the predominance of white-painted wood buildings. The pseudo-colonial house which you associate with American suburbia is white-painted wood with stone or brick ornamentation around the doorway. These typically New England houses have either vertical or horizontal wood siding. These houses are not meant to look like concrete or appear like anything other than what they are: white-painted wood. The reason that the overlap joint has been eliminated, in terms of the horizontal clapboard is very obvious: in order to get a planar reading of the surface.

C J: I would argue that there is another reason to insist on the planar reading. It's not just to *look* like concrete, but to conceptualise the plane as an abstract datum – or dematerialised material. So it becomes less wood than an *abstract white plane*.

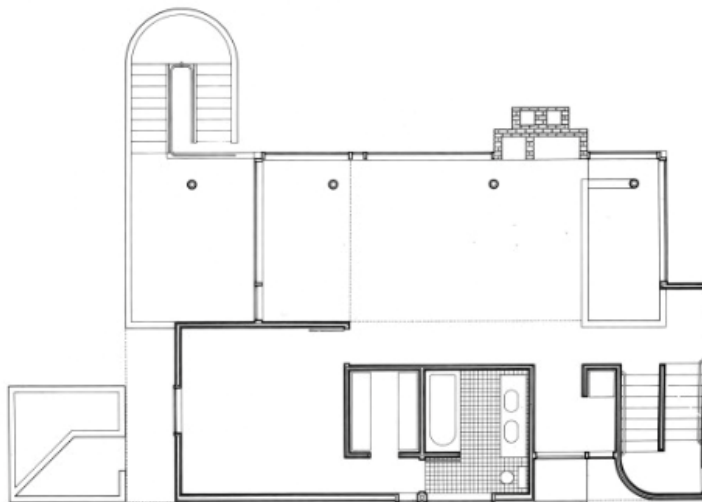
Smith House, Darien, Connecticut



Frampton, Kenneth. Richard Meier and the City in Miniature. New York: St. Martin's press 1990. P23



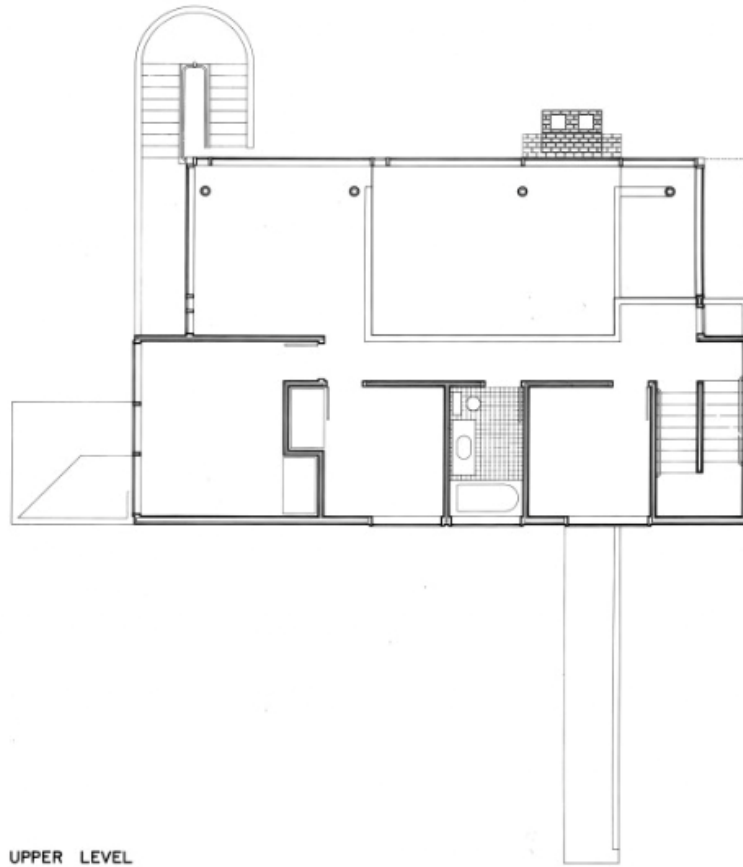
<http://richardmeierer.com>



<http://richardmeierer.com>

SMITH HOUSE

Sean Corriveau
ARCH 211



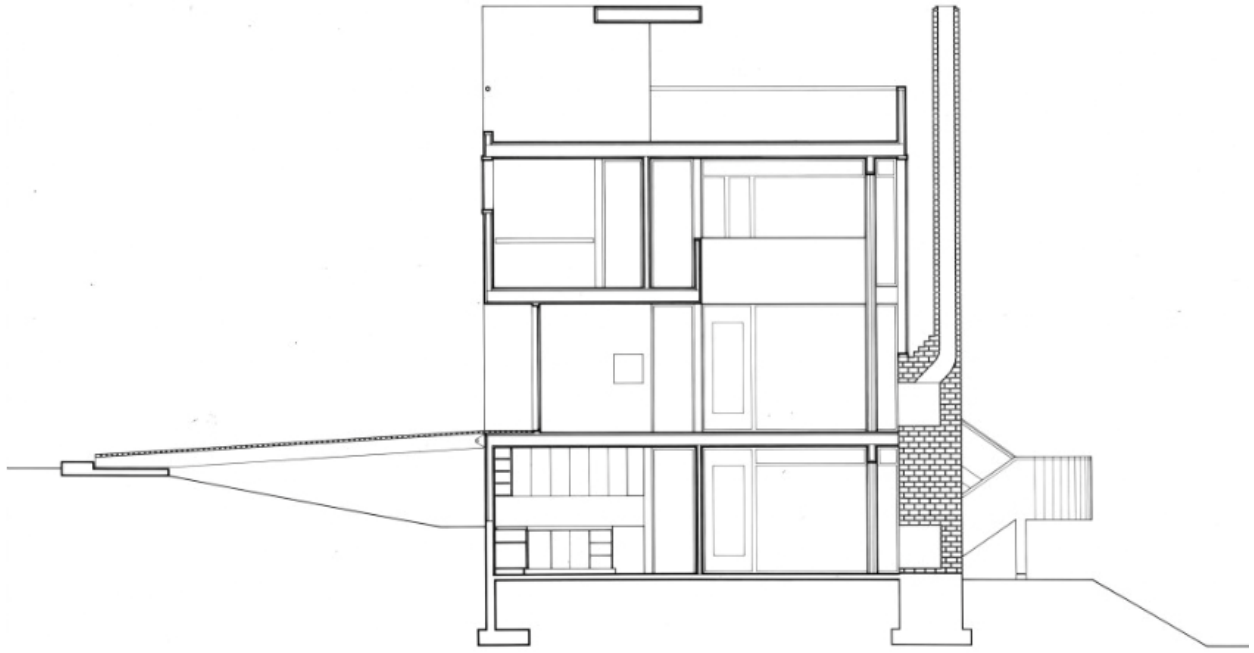
UPPER LEVEL

<http://richardmeirer.com>



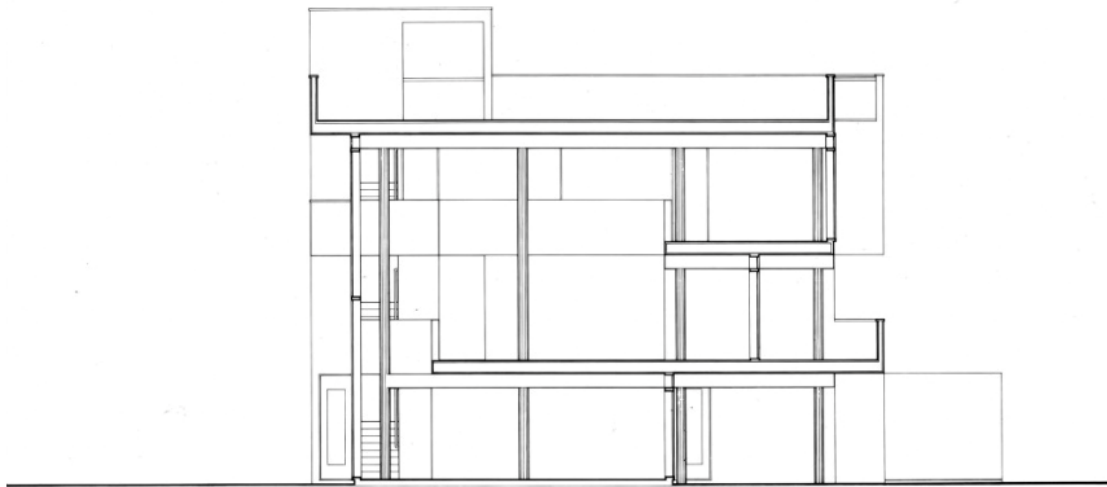
Jodidio, Philip. An Richard Meier. Printed in Germany:

Prestel, 1995. P53



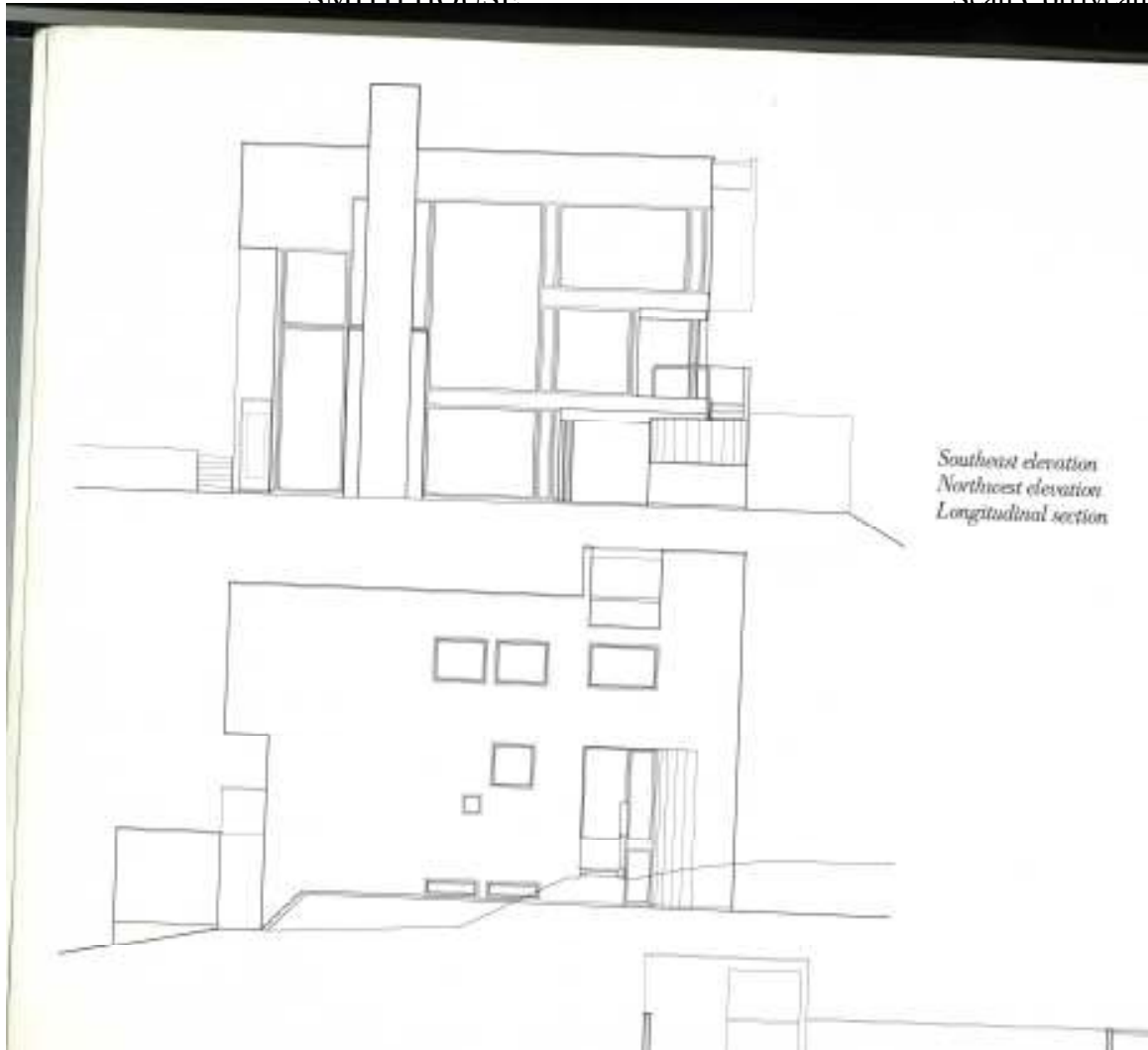
SECTION

<http://richardmeierer.com>



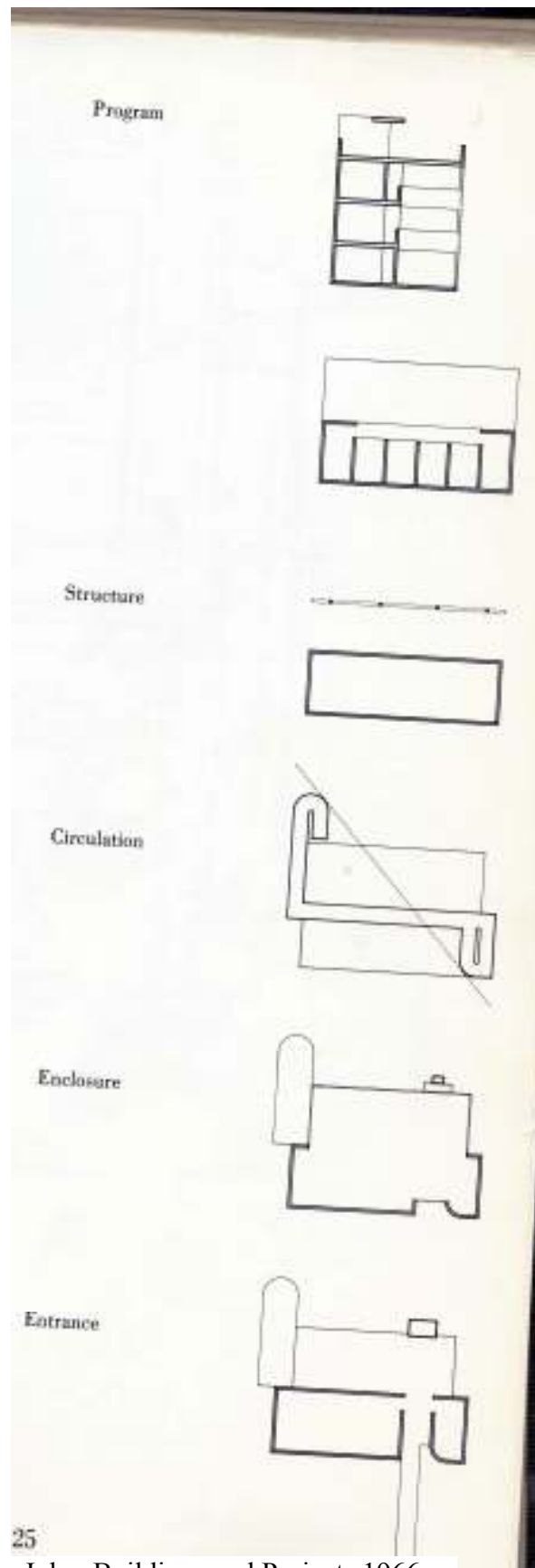
SECTION

<http://richardmeierer.com>



*Southeast elevation
Northwest elevation
Longitudinal section*

Hejduk, John. Buildings and Projects 1966-1976. New York: Prestel, Oxford University press 1978. P26



Hejduk, John. Buildings and Projects 1966-

1976. New York: Prestel, Oxford

Universtiy press 1978. P25

1960 - 1967

Photographs
Credits
Related

Backmark



The Smith House, built amidst the rocks and trees of a one-and-a-half-acre site, overlooks Long Island Sound from the Connecticut coast. A dense cluster of evergreen stands at the entrance to the property. Behind the sand dunes and near to the center of the site, their slope abruptly to the rocky shoreline and a small, sandy cove.

The spatial organization of this house hinges on a programmatic separation between public and private areas. The private side of the house is of the entrance facing land, woods, and road. A series of closed, cellular spaces, from private areas are organized through three levels behind an opaque facade, which is memorably pierced with windows. The public spaces, where the family meets and entertains, are to the rear of the house, overlooking the water. This public sector consists of three levels nested within a three-sided glass enclosure, from the outside the ground and upper levels appear as solid white held fast in the white mullions of the glass.

The climatic view of sea and sky that guests see upon entering is framed and intensified in the transparent skin of the rear facade. Placed directly opposite the entry, a painted brick fireplace pushes to the outside through the light frame of mullions. Suspended between the chimney and the steel structural columns, the glazed wall creates a subtle tension that draws the occupant across the living space to the outside. The balustrades of the lower and upper levels are set back from the glass, amplifying that tension.

As a chimney records the moment of an event, the experience of changing light and weather activates the crisp surfaces of the house, while the clear glazing gathers subtle reflections of the interior across its surface. The natural and the man-made exist as separate, elemental experiences, yet it is impossible to separate one from the other.

<http://richardmeier.com>



on the wall, the entry facade was treated as an opaque screen that must be penetrated in order to reveal the view to the water lying beyond. The volume that follows the entrance is celebrated at the rear of the building, where the highly reflective surfaces of the aluminum catch light and color from the land, the sky, and the water. The masonry fireplace seems as a solid drawn from the first facade. It is directly opposite the entry, and so continues a line of movement through its own glass plane.

many of the projects to date, incorporates a programmatic separation between public and private areas. Ideally, every person in the household would have his or her own private space for sleeping, bathing, and retirement. The private side of the house is on the entry side, facing the land, the woods, and the road. The public spaces, where the family meets and entertains, are at the rear of the house, overlooking the water. The private sector is a series of closed, cellular spaces, organized on three levels. The public sector consists of three platforms within a single, three-sided glass enclosure.

Hejduk, John. Buildings and Projects 1966-1976. New York:

Prestel, Oxford University press 1978. P29



Hejduk, John. Buildings and Projects 1966-1976. New York:

Prestel, Oxford University press 1978. P30

Richard Meier's Milestone Moment: The Smith House

Set on the craggy coast of Long Island Sound in Darien, Connecticut, Richard Meier's Smith House is a Modernist lighthouse of transparent geometry. Critic Kenneth Frampton called it "a panoramic belvedere overlooking the rocky shoreline," a work of "neopurist" architecture that harked back to the best of Le Corbusier. One of Meier's first major residential projects, the house also represented a turning point in his career.

When he won the commission for it in 1965, the 31-year-old Meier had been running his own firm for two years after apprenticing in the studio of Marcel Breuer. "The Smith House was a seminal project for me," Meier acknowledges today. "It allowed me to articulate some ideas I was starting to pursue, such as the balance between public and private space."

Designed as a weekend retreat for New Yorkers Carole and Fred I. Smith and their two young sons, the house capitalizes on its dramatic 1.5-acre site. Beyond a dense cluster of evergreens, the land clears and rises to the center of the site, then drops sharply to the rugged shoreline and a small, sandy cove. The spatial organization of the house hinges on the programmatic separation between public and private

areas. From the front walkway, visitors approach a mostly opaque white wood facade before crossing a ramp and entering on the house's second level to discover what Meier calls a "180-degree explosion" of light and space. The living room, dining area, and study embrace the waterfront views, pinwheeling in a three-level enclosure of glass on three sides. The family's private quarters, meanwhile, are stacked to hug the street-facing facade of the 2,800-square-foot building.

Elements that would become Meier signatures are present as well: the pristine white exterior, expanses of plate glass framed by finely proportioned piers and mullions, and minimal interiors creating intersecting volumes. When the Smith House was published as the cover story of *Record Houses* in May 1968, the editors noted that "design impact is produced by the simplest means, with no frills and a remarkable absence of most current architectural clichés.

Soon after the house was completed, the Smiths divorced. When Carole later married Herrick Littlefield, the family decided to make Darien their full-time residence, and Meier was enlisted to expand the house. Completed in 1973, the 300-square-foot addition enlarged the master suite and added closets and support spaces. Today, the Littlefields again

enjoy the house as a weekend place, "where the play of light is incredible year-round," Carole says.

"I believe the success of the house lies in the capacity to absorb and enter into a dialogue with the temporal phenomena of light and context," Meier concurs.

"They are, in the end, its material."

By William Weathersby, Jr

Reference: Architectural Record, May, 1968.

Sources:

<http://www.moderndesigninterior.com/2006/03/richard-meier-smith-house.html>

<http://richardmeierer.com>

http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Smith_House.html

Jodidio, Philip. An Richard Meier. Printed in Germany: Prestel, 1995.

Hejduk, John. Buildings and Projects 1966-1976. New York: Prestel, Oxford University
press 1978.

Frampton, Kenneth. Richard Meier and the City in Miniature. New York: St. Martin's
press 1990.

Futagawa, Yukio. Richard Meier. New York, Office of Richard Meier and Partners 1997.