Keck and Keck, architects.

Menocal, Narciso G.
Madison, Wisconsin: Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980

Keck & Keck · Architects

Elvehjem Museum of Art University of Wisconsin - Madison

Keck & Keck • Architects

Introduction and catalogue by
Narciso G. Menocal

With best wishes,
Narciso Menocal

Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin - Madison
1980

Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Elvehjem Museum of Art,
April 20-May 25, 1980.

Library of Congress Card Catalogue Number 80-66407

Design: Anne Boyle
Typesetting: KC Graphics, Madison
Printing: Litho Productions, Inc., Madison
Edition: 1,000

Acknowledgement is made to William Keck, Hedrich-Blessing, Trowbridge Photographs, Gerald Gard, Craig Kuhner, Llewellyn Thomas, and G. Bostick and Associates, whose photographs have been reproduced to illustrate this catalogue.

Cover Illustration: Edward W. Morehouse Residence, Madison, Wisconsin
Cover Photography: Don Stott

ERRATA

Page 20, Col. 2, line 13: Where it reads, above; should read, above the.

Page 27, Col. 2, line 10: Where it reads, 1973, should read, 1977.

Page 41: Photograph is reversed

Page 56, title: Where it reads, Oconomocowc; should read, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

Page 86, title: Where it reads, 1973; should read, 1977

Page 88, third entry under Partially Discussing Keck and Keck: Where it reads, Goldberg; should read, Goldberger.

Foreword

The idea of devoting an exhibition to the work of the Chicago architectural firm of Keck and Keck has been under consideration by the Museum staff for several years. Not only are the Kecks native sons of Southern Wisconsin, having been born and raised in Watertown, but they have executed a number of important commissions in this area during the last half century. Moreover, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin houses the archival materials of the firm, providing ready access to a body of work which has not previously been subjected to comprehensive examination. Thus, when Madison was designated as the site of the 1980 Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, with former Director Eric S. McCready and Professor Narciso Menocal appointed as local chairmen, the opportunity arose for a timely presentation of this long-needed exhibition.

While buildings such as **The House of Tomorrow** and the **Crystal House** have been well documented in architectural publications it was the 1976 exhibition and catalogue **Chicago Architects** that served to focus a broader appreciation on the contributions Keck and Keck made to modern design in the 1930's. Additionally, the technological advances pioneered by the firm during the 1930's and '40's in the field of passive solar heating have been subjected to renewed study in recent years. Yet, no general survey of the work of George Fred Keck and William Keck has been undertaken since 1947. The present exhibition, along with the catalogue introduction by Narciso Menocal, Department of Art History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, provides such an overview of their long careers. At the same time, it must be pointed out that the buildings treated in this exhibition represent less than five percent of the total production of the Kecks.

The organization of this exhibition has been made possible by the cooperation of numerous people. George Talbot, Curator of the Iconography Collection at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, generously permitted us access to the Keck archives; Archivist Christine Schelshorn patiently coordinated and tolerated our many forays into their vaults. Most of the work of reviewing those archival materials, making selections from them and attending to a myriad of organizational details was done by Daniel Steen, Assistant Curator of the Elvehjem Museum of Art. William Keck has been most helpful in providing photographs and information on specific buildings which could not be found at the Historical Society.

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Other members of the Museum staff who have contributed to this organizational effort are Administrative Assistant Ruth Struve, Registrar Lisa Calden, Irene Guski, Lise Hawkos, and Tim Quigley.

Special recognition must be made of Narciso Menocal's participation in this project. He undertook the scholarly organization of the exhibition on short notice, over and above his other commitments. His many contributions are deeply appreciated.

Carlton Overland
Acting Director

Acknowledgements

Information for this essay has been collated from a number of sources, all of which I most gratefully recognize. Fred and William Keck, and their wives, have been more than generous with their time and support for this project; Jeffrey M. Dean, Historical Preservation Planner of the State of Wisconsin, has allowed me to use tapes of interviews with Fred Keck he conducted in 1972, 1973, and 1974; Robert B. Tague, an architect long associated with the Keck firm, granted his permission for the free use of material he published in the catalog of the show **Keck on Architecture,** exhibited in 1947 in the Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center; Carlton Overland, Frank Horlbeck, and Norman Sacks have reviewed different versions of the manuscript; and, last but not least, Daniel Steen, Assistant Curator of the Elvehjem Museum of Art, has solved more problems than anyone can possibly remember. To all these persons goes my deepest gratitude and my acknowledgement of a debt difficult to repay.

N.G.M.

William and George Fred Keck

Introduction

After World War I, American and European attitudes toward modern architecture were as dissimilar as the social and intellectual climates out of which they stemmed. Contrary to what happened in many European countries after the War, America suffered no violent change in its political order. No demands were made on her for an immediate utopia based on ethical and esthetic harmony in balance with the universal order, nor did she feel an urgent need for a covenant between the creative individual and society. Reflecting these circumstances, her modern architecture became far less fraught with symbolic connotations of novel political or intellectual positions than did that of Europe; although, as everywhere else, modern buildings in the United States became naturally associated with images of life in the future. Having no expressive duties to perform other than proclaiming itself, progressive American architecture of the 1920's and 1930's was perhaps less intense in design than its European counterpart, but it was much freer to search for a greater variety of solutions in planning and construction.

The old romantic notion that each problem carries within itself its own particular solution had not been forgotten in America, and indeed, this became the central axiom in the architectural ideology of Fred and William Keck. The expression of a universal idea through a consciously sought stylistic continuity has never been one of their artistic aims. Beyond any other theoretical consideration, for Fred Keck "an esthetically valid building cannot exist independently of sound engineering principles." Asked why it is that he has never written "about architecture," he is quick to answer that he is "no Hemingway, just an architect."

Born in Watertown, Wisconsin, on May 17, 1895, into a family established by a German cabinet-maker grandfather, Fred, the eldest brother, became aware of design early in life; his two favorite childhood pastimes were painting with watercolors and working in the shop of his father's furniture store. In 1915, after one year of study in civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin, he came to the realization that his passion for building required outlet through artistic expression, and transferred to architecture. Believing even then that the beauty of a building had to be a product of logic in planning and construction and not of decoration or "style," Keck chose the architectural engineering curriculum of the University of Illinois over the "regular" architectural program that was also offered there.

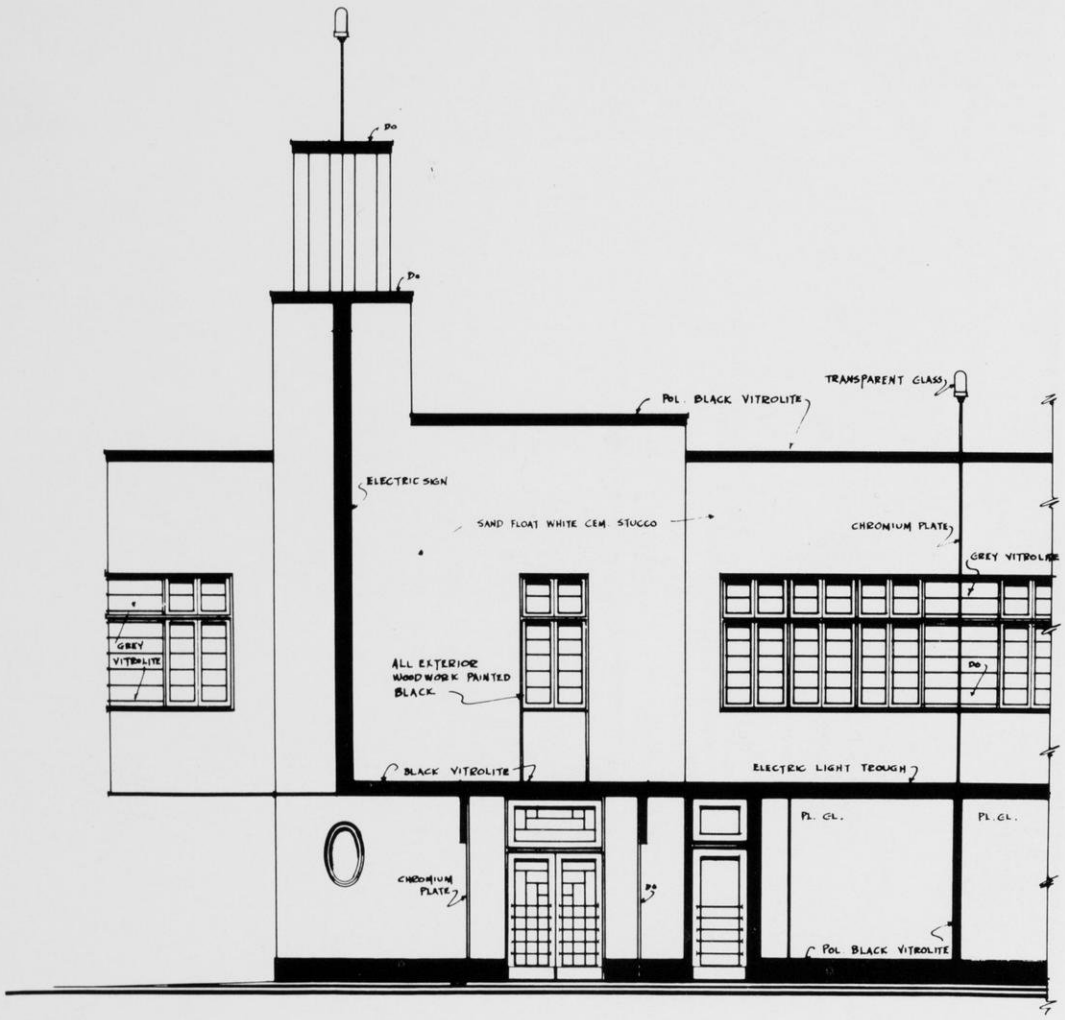
Illus. 1: Cruger Apartment Building, Elmhurst, Illinois, 1926-27 (Cat. No.1)

Illus. 2: Newton B. Lauren House, Flossmor, Illinois, 1927

After two years in the Army during World War I, a subsequent apprenticeship served in a number of offices, and an architectural partnership that lasted but for a few months, Keck began his independent practice in 1926.

Ideas of simplification, truth to materials, and rational planning, which scarcely more than a decade before had been important to progressive Midwestern architects, became meshed in Keck's mind with similar new pronouncements coming from abroad. The Cruger Apartments (Elmhurst, Illinois, 1926), Keck's first important commission, points to a striving for a stylistic synthesis of regional and foreign trends (illus. 1). It presents to the street a three-and-a-half story mass in brick. Although comparable in general lines and proportion to earlier work by Garden and Schmidt, for whom Keck had worked, this building is much more simplified and considerably lighter than was any Prairie School precedent. Establishing a link between American progressive design and advanced European trends, the corner band windows give evidence of Keck's awareness of contemporaneous experiments by the Amsterdam School.

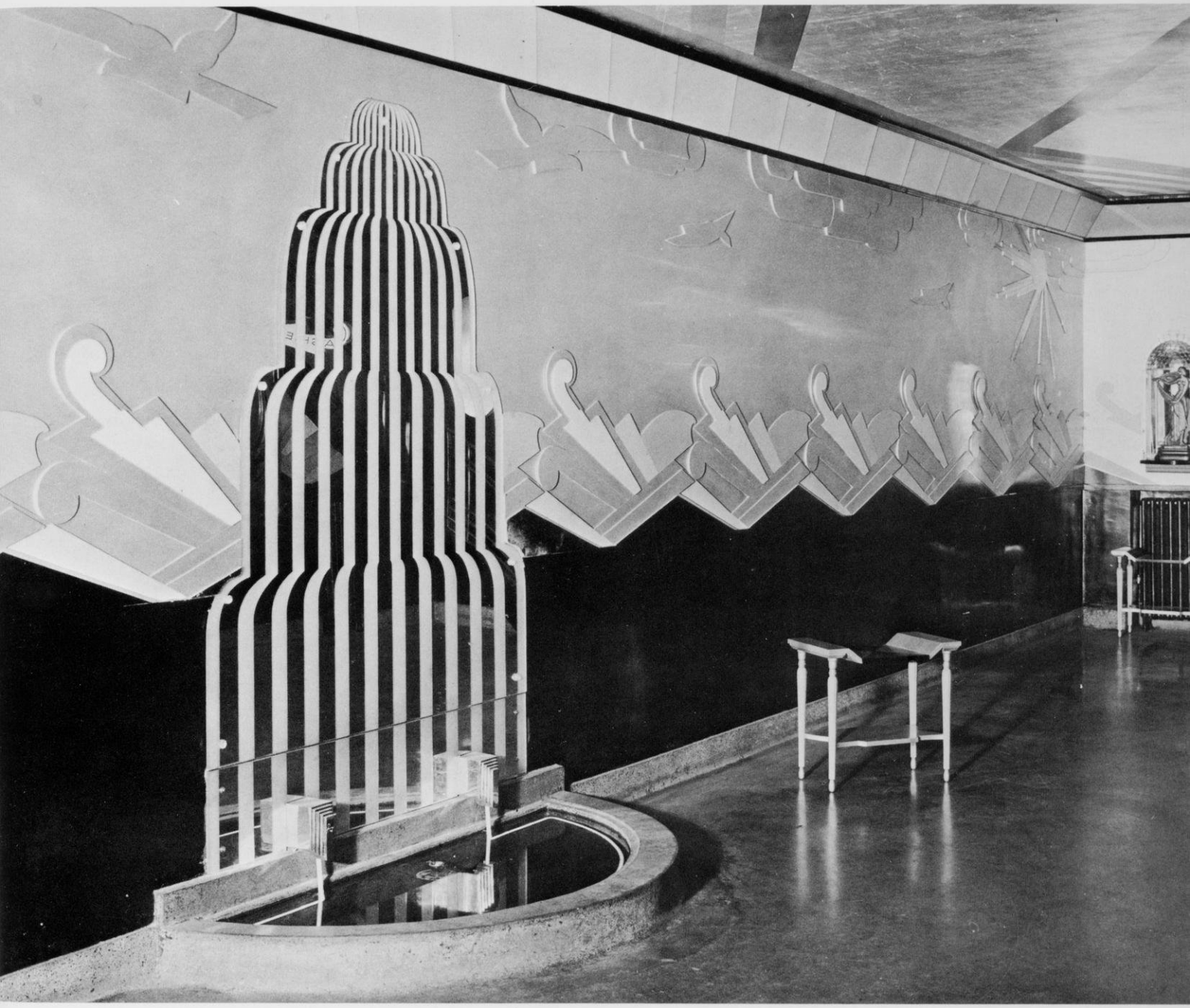
Among his residential commissions of the period, there are some that have an appearance different from that of the Cruger Apartments. At times Keck favored bold compositions of crisp, angular, and almost crystalline forms that would also include a faint evocation of English picturesqueness. The Newton B. Lauren House, in Flossmoor, Illinois (1927), is a good example of such work (illus. 2).



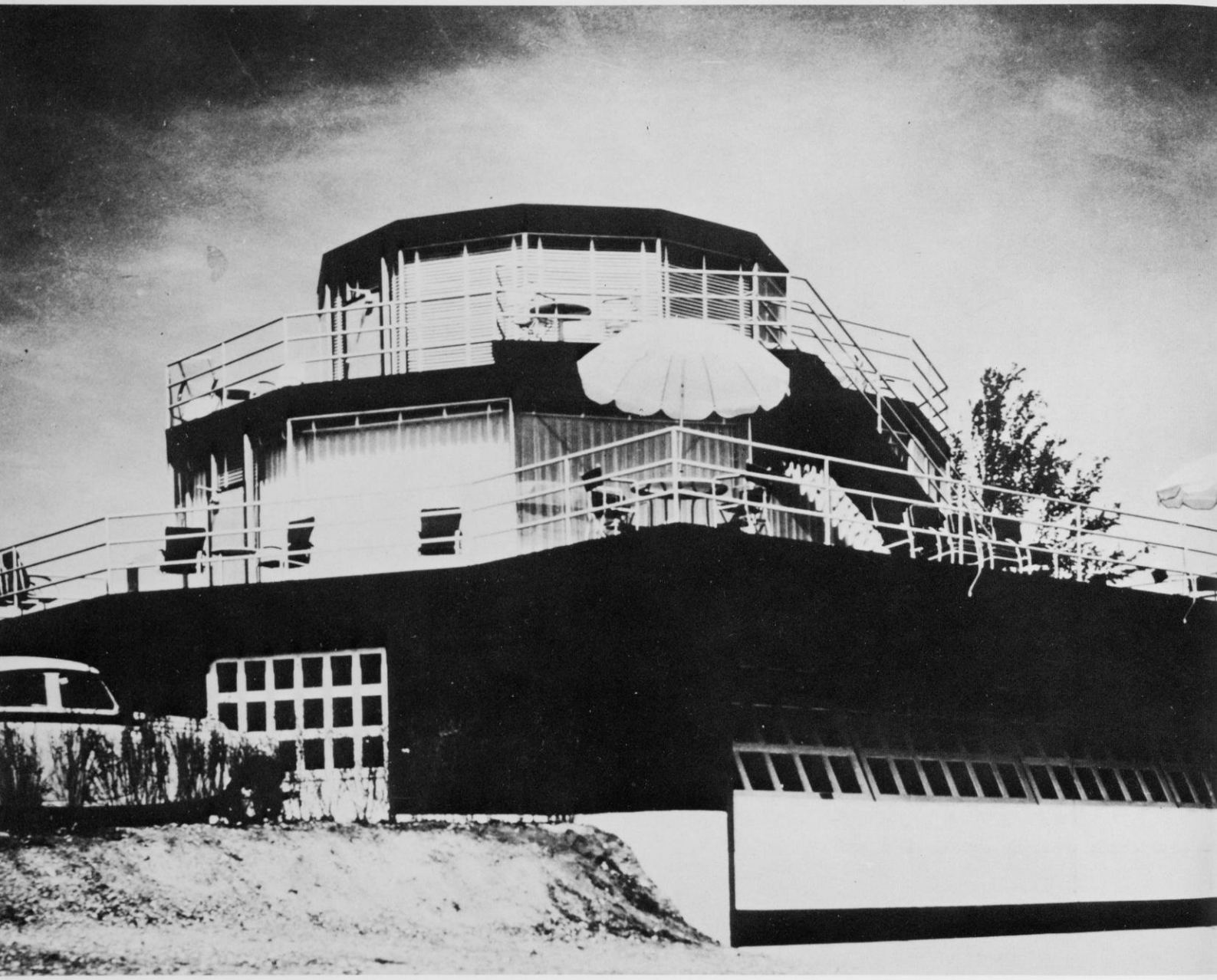
Illus. 3: Elevation drawing of Miralago Ballroom and Shops, Cook County, Illinois, 1929 (Cat. No.2)

Keck's consistent use of simplified forms eventually led him to the design of the Miralago Ballroom, located near Wilmette, Illinois (1929; destroyed by fire January, 1932). The client wanted "something Spanish." Keck, however, convinced him that such materials as Vitrolite, chrome, and white stucco would create "a festive air" at a lesser cost than carving would entail. A first design, made for the benefit of the client, displays an amusing stylistic mixture of International forms and Spanish Renaissance whimsy. Keck purified that conception without revealing his final intention to the owner. The outcome was not only a pivotal work in his career, but also one of the important avant-garde American buildings of the 1920's. The design established on two facades a superbly controlled tension between horizontals and verticals proving that, unlike most American architects of the period, Keck was as conversant with principles of Constructivism as were, for instance, Neutra or Schindler (illus. 3).

The inside of the building, however, was stylistically different from its outside. Witnessing to American freedom from the esthetic canons of European "isms," the interior scheme of Miralago showed no kinship with Constructivist severity. On the contrary, in a design well in keeping with the carefree function of the building, deep-blue and silver-leaf ceilings, columns sheathed in black vitrolite, zig-zag plasterwork, and a fountain made of black and white mirrors and neon lights were some of the features of a lavishly elegant Art Deco interior (illus. 4).



Illus. 4: Fountain of Miralago Ballroom



Illus. 5: **The House of Tomorrow,** Chicago, Illinois, 1933 (Cat. No.3)

Keck purchased a copy of Le Corbusier's **Towards a New Architecture** shortly after it appeared in its first English translation. The consideration by a major avant-garde architect that grain elevators, ocean liners, airplanes, diesel engines, and motorcars were important esthetic objects of a new culture made a strong impression on young Keck. "Let us listen to the counsels of American engineers, but let us beware of American architects," Le Corbusier had written, warning his colleagues about the pitfalls of American eclecticism. **The House of Tomorrow,** built by Keck for the Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago (1933), was indeed conceived in a spirit of engineering efficiency as a "machine for living" (illus. 5).

Superficially the design may evoke a memory of German Expressionist form, or even Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House, but in fact the conception of **The House of Tomorrow** evolved from Keck's study of an 1854 octagonal house built in his native Watertown according to ideas Orson Fowler had presented in his book **A Home for All** (1848). A central core in **The House of Tomorrow** carried the staircase and also housed all mechanical, plumbing, and electrical equipment. Moreover, it supported two cantilevered duodecagonal floors and the roof on a principle similar to that of a tree trunk supporting branches. The second and third floors of this building were totally enclosed in glass, and the first story housed, among other things, a hangar for a private airplane.

The three-story **Crystal House** (1934) was also built by Keck for the Century of Progress Exhibition. Supported by a delicate trellis-like system of steel columns and trusses, it was entirely different from **The House of Tomorrow.** Dissimilarities existed not only between their outward shapes, but more fundamentally between their spatial conceptions, which depended on the structure of each building. The plan of **The House of Tomorrow** echoed its radial construction and featured wedge-shaped rooms. The **Crystal House,** responding to a structural program allowing for greater flexibility in planning, exhibited a spatial fluidity coming close to that of Mies van der Rohe's work, which Keck knew through publications. Furniture also made manifest the stylistic differences between the two exhibition houses. The simplified overstuffed chairs of **The House of Tomorrow** gave way in the **Crystal House** to pieces following designs by Mies and Marcel Breuer that heightened the exquisite elegance of their surroundings (illus. 6, 7).

Keck's undertaking for the same fair two houses similar in size but presenting such decided contrasts offers new evidence of his pragmatic attitude toward design. No ulterior symbolic meaning is to be attached to either of these buildings other than their being two very good attempts of the 1930's to solve problems of housing through technology. Through prefabrication, Keck simply meant to show "what can be done toward cutting down the time required to build a home."

Shortly before the Century of Progress Exhibition, Keck's younger brother William (born December 1, 1908), then a student of architecture at the University of Illinois, had begun working at his brother's office during summer vacations. This professional association was made permanent after his graduation in 1931. William's influence on his brother's work became considerable in the mid-1930's, after which all projects by the firm have to be understood as very close collaborations between the two brothers. Because of economic uncertainties during the Depression, and later because of the War, William did not become Fred's partner until 1946, after four years of service in the Navy.

Illus. 6: Living room of **The House of Tomorrow**

Their association is a very intimate one, entailing no division of labor. It is rather the product of an awareness that the views and character of the one complement and temper those of the other. Moreover, they have always maintained a large measure of respect for each other's opinions and feelings; their working together serves to strengthen a family relationship that was already extraordinarily close.

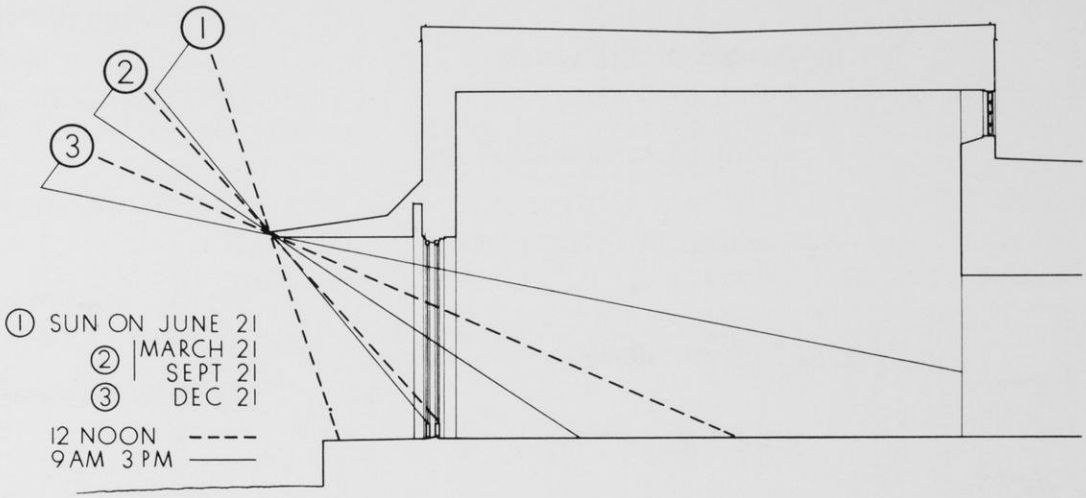
It would be incorrect to consider William exclusively "as a builder" and Fred "as an artist," as Nory Miller implied in an article in the **Inland Architect** of May, 1976. This notion is proven false by William's accomplishments as a photo-

Illus. 7: Living room of the **Crystal House,** Chicago, Illinois, 1934 (Cat. No. 4)

grapher, as well as by Fred's success in the use of prefabrication for mass housing immediately after World War II, when hundreds of Green's Ready-Built Homes were erected throughout the Midwest following designs he had produced for a Rockford, Illinois, construction company. Yet, by and large, it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the firm's pioneering work in solar heating as well as its very high standards of construction are due in greater measure to William's sustained efforts in research and attention to detail than to Fred's more idealistic and esthetically minded point of view.

The idea of using solar heat in residential architecture originated with Fred.

Illus. 8: W. H. Fricker House, Whitewater, Wisconsin, 1935-6



Illus. 9: Solar diagram for Benjamin J. Cahn House, Lake Forest, Illinois, 1937 (Cat. No.8)

During construction of **The House of Tomorrow,** in February of 1933, in spite of a very low temperature outside, workmen inside the unheated building were comfortable in their shirtsleeves. It was then that the idea of heating a house by means of a "greenhouse effect" occured to him.

The first solar house by the Keck brothers was the Wilde Residence (Watertown, Wisconsin, 1935). It had small windows to the north and wide floor-to-eaves ones to the south. These were shaded by trees for summer comfort and allowed the sun to penetrate for winter warmth. In that same year, first in the Bruning House (Wilmette, Illinois), and immediately after in the Fricker Residence (Whitewater, Wisconsin), the Kecks improved the design of their windows by introducing external aluminum Venetian blinds (illus. 8). These are three inches deep with a two-and-a-half-inch vertical spacing between them. They allow for bright or totally dark rooms, replace storm windows in winter, regulate the flow of air coming into the room in summer, and render draperies unnecessary. Moreover, they can be raised into a pocket under the eaves, thus making possible an unhindered view through a glass window, as is similarly the case in many Mediterranean buildings of which the Kecks had heard.

These technological improvements of 1935 had depended in no small measure on studies of solar paths the Kecks had begun conducting in that same year. These led, in 1937 in the Cahn House (Lake Forest, Illinois) and two years later in the Kellett House (Menasha, Wisconsin), to eaves on the south side that were calculated to keep direct sunlight away from rooms in summer, yet allowed the winter sun, rising low over the horizon, to penetrate to the rear wall (illus. 9). Finally, in 1940, the work of the Kecks profited much from William's making use of meteorological research on solar heating then being conducted exclusively at the University of Chicago, and from the appearance on the market of Thermopane, which the Kecks first used in that same year in the Sloan House (Glenview, Illinois). From this design on, large Thermopane windows protected by wide eaves practically became a trademark of Keck and Keck houses, and exterior Venetian blinds, no longer necessary, were not specified again.

Another of their experiments in the 1930's incorporating natural phenomena for heating and cooling consisted of using flat, pan-like roofs capable of holding water and functioning as cooling ponds in summer to prevent excessive heat gain. The Keck-Gottshalk Apartment Building (Chicago, Illinois, 1937) and the Lamar Johnson House (Columbia, Missouri, 1938) are examples of designs with this feature. The use of pan roofs was abandoned during the war years; the quality of waterproofing pitch and felt had deteriorated, and furthermore, these materials were scarce. Also, at times, an owner would neglect to drain the roof in late autumn. Sudden freezing weather would cause the ice to boom overhead to the great annoyance of everyone, "who would think that the building was about to collapse." For these and similar reasons not all clients were willing to sponsor such pioneering ideas. After the War, when combined central air-conditioning and heating systems became standard items in American houses, features like pan roofs were considered obsolete by many. Yet, even in projects executed when the nation enjoyed seemingly inexhaustible sources of inexpensive energy, Keck and Keck continued to be concerned with thermally efficient design, as is proven, for instance, by the Fagen House (Lake Forest, Illinois, 1948), the Kunstadter House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1951), and more recently, the Wolf House (Munster, Indiana, 1973).

According to William Keck, one of his brother's main concerns throughout the 1930's and early 40's had been to familiarize the public with modern architecture. But at no time did Fred expect an endorsement by any future client of such advanced style as that of **The House of Tomorrow** or the **Crystal House.** In his mind, a practical attitude toward modern architecture would achieve the best results, and he chose to produce designs that were perhaps "less progressive" than he would have liked them to be, but that were acceptable to clients, and hence built.

His own preferences during the late 1930's are known, however. They were recorded in the design of the apartment building in which he and his brother still live. This four-story, three-apartment building presents a carefully composed facade based on a system of nine eight-foot squares inscribed within a larger square taking up all of the facade above garages. A grid of eighteen-inch-thick posts and lintels becomes the controlling feature, however much it may be disguised by contrasts of masonry panels and large windows (illus. 10). In its general scheme, as well as in some of its details, this design shows great affinity with Constructivism. Its flavor, however, has been rendered, more than American, entirely personal. For the outside Keck chose a rich red-orange brick instead of a ubiquitously European smooth white stucco. The staircase of the Keck Apartment Building matches the artistic importance of the facade. Executed in steel construction within a brick well painted white, it features exposed soldering and electrical conduits, as well as a continuous tubular handrail, all antedating by a good two decades similar work by English Brutalists.

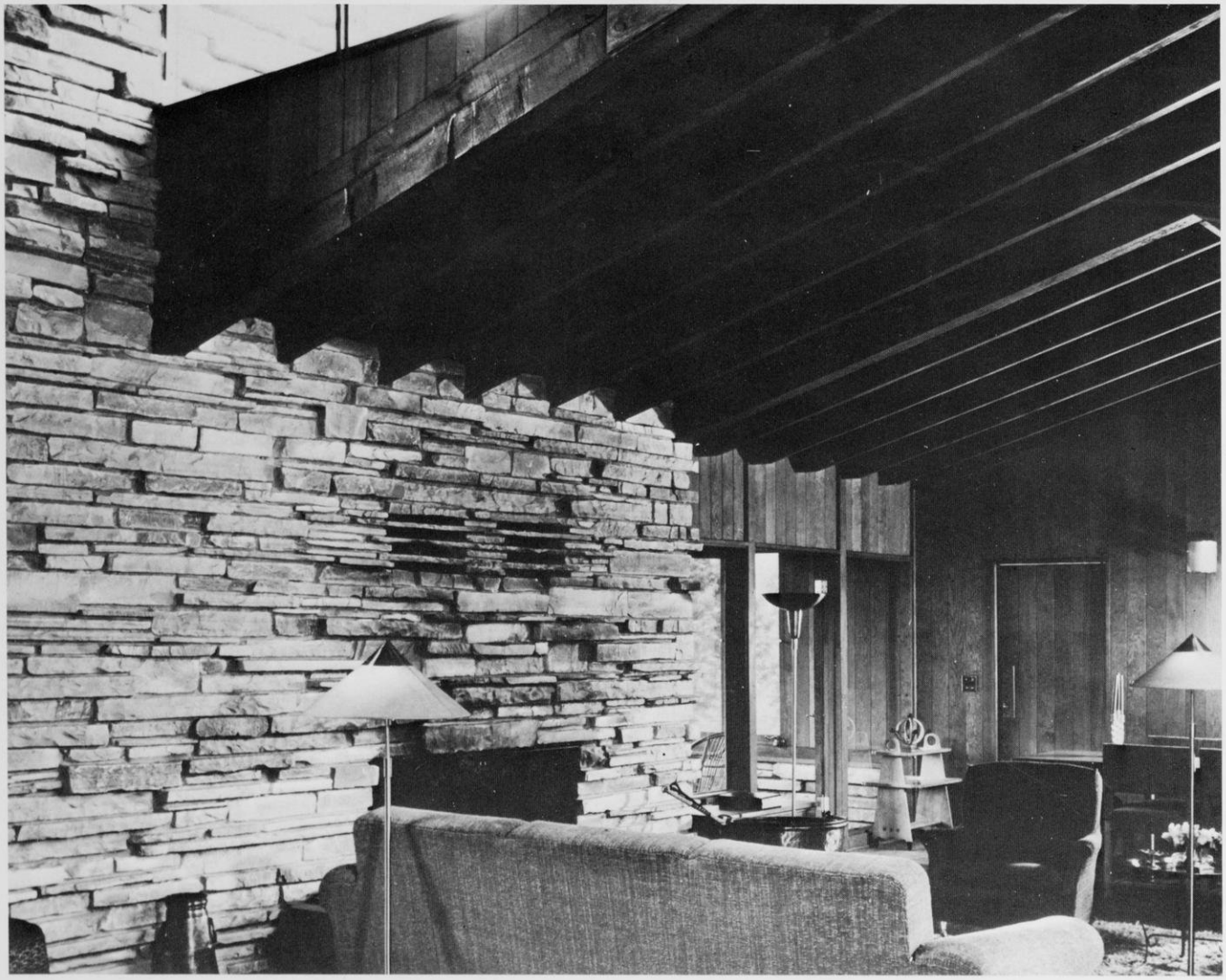
Illus. 10: Keck-Gottschalk Apartment Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1937 (Cat. No.9)

Besides using a modified International Style, as in his own apartment building, and a purer expression of it in the Morehouse Residence (Madison, Wisconsin, 1936), during the pre-War years Keck also favored a style of softer, rounder forms than those then prevalent in the European avant-garde. In the Bruning House (Wilmette, Illinois, 1935-36), for instance, a graceful free-standing helicoidal staircase in black terrazo turns inside a semicircle of glass brick, and links the bedroom floor with the ground floor around an open well of rounded corners (illus. 11).

Similar curvaceous shapes appear in the Benjamin Cahn Residence (1937), built to a crescent plan on a large estate in Lake Forest, Illinois. Color became important in Keck's interior decoration for this house. He chose strong contrasts of light yellow walls and a dark blue ceiling for the living-dining area, and yellow ceilings, green walls, yellow furniture, and white upholstery and bedspreads for the bedrooms. Floors of black rubber tile polished to a high gloss, and tall ceilings and high clerestories of glass brick, complete spatial sequences well within the Moderne trend of the period.

For both the Bruning and Cahn residences, Keck designed not only the furniture (in a Moderne style), but also doorknobs, wastepaper baskets, lamps, ashtrays, and even dishes.

Illus. 11: Staircase of Herbert Bruning House, Wilmette, Illinois, 1935-6 (Cat. No.6)



Illus. 12: Living room of J. R. Buchbinder House, Fish Creek, Wisconsin, 1939 (Cat. No. 12)

The Kecks' first tentative use of materials generally associated with organic architecture was in a stone floor and fireplace in the Kellett House (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1939). In that same year, in the Buchbinder House in Fish Creek, Wisconsin, they fully explored the possibilities of that mode of expression. A picturesque rural composition of differently shaped roofs, walls of horizontal limestone slabs, and vertical wood siding matches the feeling of the Buchbinder interior, where the warmth of wood and stone walls is complemented by huge fireplaces and ceilings with exposed rafters (illus. 12). The last example in this vein, the Fagen House, designed after the War (Lake Forest, Illinois, 1948), presents a plan of irregular polygons with roofs ending in pointed eaves above walls where stone, wood, and large expanses of glass prevail.

In 1941, in a vacation house designed for their brother Pete in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, the Kecks extended into a single residence ideas of composition they had first developed in their apartment building. Their brother's house has a flat roof and an elevation given order by a rhythm of well-proportioned rectangles. In the Ready-Built Homes (1946), the very nature of modular prefabrication meth-

Illus. 13: Living room of Edward McCormick Blair House, Lake Bluff, Illinois, 1955 (Cat. No.21)

ods allowed for a similar treatment of the elevation as well as for a highly developed interior spatial fluidity (an important characteristic of the Kecks' post-War designs), in this case determined by folding walls of soundproof nylon hanging from tracks in the ceiling.

This style of rectangular forms, spatial fluidity, and large windows was developed during the 1950's in a series of residences the Kecks built on large estates. Technological advances in materials of construction allowed for this new mode of expression. Their new windows, which they still use, consist of large fixed glass panels in the center and wood louvers for ventilation on the sides. In the Kunstadter House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1951), Blair House (Lake Bluff, Illinois, 1955), and Payne House (Bucks County, Pennsylvania, 1959), these windows, which become veritable glass walls, create an impression that rooms are garden pavilions opening onto each other. Slab-like free-standing fireplaces of travertine marble, wide views opening into well-tended forest-like gardens, and sparse furnishings by the best modern designers give these houses an aura of restrained elegance that makes them important examples of what may well be the golden age of modern architecture in America (illus. 13).

Illus. 14: Prairie Courts Apartments, Chicago, Illinois, 1950

Concurrently with these projects, the Kecks were also addressing themselves to solving urban problems in the standard manner of the day (illus. 14). In a number of commissions combining high-rise buildings and row houses designed for the Chicago Housing Authority, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union, and similar institutions, they created good examples of mass housing in Chicago, such as the Pioneer Co-op Apartments (1949-1950), the Prairie Courts Apartments (1950), the CHA Elderly Housing (1959), and Harper Square (1970).

Illus. 15: Child Care Society Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1959

Other designs of the last twenty years include the three-story Child Care Society Building (Chicago, Illinois, 1959). In this design, a two-floor concrete-and-glass volume supported on high posts above the ground story, pierced-concrete sun-shields, and a greater measure of movement in composition than they had used before give indication that the Kecks, along with other architects, were moving away from the classical style of the earlier 1950's (illus. 15).

They continued this trend during the 1960's and 70's. The Peerless Confectionary Factory Building (Chicago, Illinois, 1965) is a clean rectangular concrete volume of no small size with only one large opening, clearly a composition in which the Kecks experimented with a non-anthropometric scale in a manner proper to the period (illus. 16). In the earlier Weinrib House (Highland Park, Illinois, 1961-62), and in the more recent Wolf House (Munster, Indiana, 1973), they searched for form, composition, and movement in ways pointing further to their sharing in major concerns of the current post-Modern period.

Illus. 16: Peerless Confectionary Factory Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1965

The career of the Keck brothers began when the first examples of Modernism were appearing in America; it continues in our own Post-Modern days. To study their work is to review more than half a century of American architecture. Beginning at a time when, unlike Europe, the United States had no architectural circles defining a modern style in terms of a universal esthetic or of utopic notions, Fred's early attempts to design in a contemporary manner wavered from one mode of expression to another. He used Moderne features to modify simplified Prairie-like compositions in some of his houses of the late 1920's and early 1930's; in others he came close to an International taste. His sharp white volumes of that period, however, reveal a remnant of earlier notions of picturesqueness. Concurrently, in the Miralago commission and the two Century of Progress Exhibition houses, Fred reviewed his position on modern architecture. With these designs he also learned to adapt to his needs new concepts and ideas coming from abroad.

In the mid-1930's Fred and William's work fell into a definite pattern of choosing the best solution for each problem out of a wide scope of modern forms and techniques. Two distinctly national characteristics emerge from such pragmatism and give their design historical relevance. The first is the strongly functionalist bearing of their buildings. Every form, every structural component, every detail the Kecks use serves a practical purpose first and foremost; no element in any of their works responds to a dogmatic or associational end. Fred Keck was instrumental in bringing László Moholy-Nagy to America. In 1938, along with Moholy and Gyorgy Kepes, he was a founder of the School of Design in Chicago (which was meant to be an American continuation of the Bauhaus), and served as its professor of architecture until 1944. Yet, with the exception of some of William's photographs, at no time does one find in the work of the Keck brothers strong evidence of a preoccupation for expressing that non-empirical idealism proper to the Bauhaus.

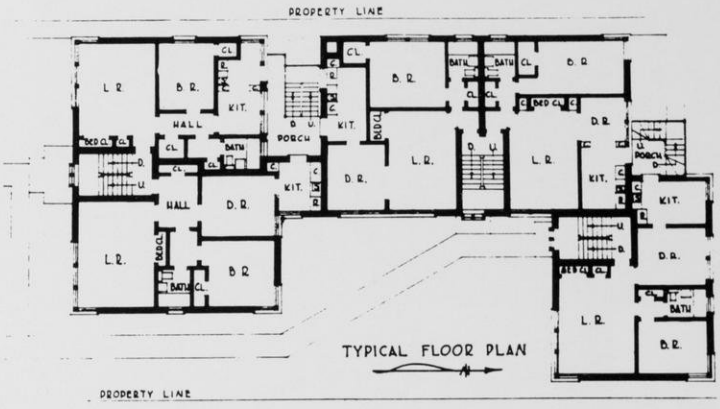
The second important characteristic of the Kecks' design, and one that is perhaps a corollary of the first, is their concern for nature. It is in this area that they have made their greatest contribution, both technologically and esthetically. The Kecks learned an important lesson from **The House of Tomorrow.** After its design their scientific use of natural phenomena to increase a building's efficiency is consistently matched by their bringing of landscape into the house through large solar windows. And as any Keck and Keck house will readily prove, comfort, economy, and beauty are immediate results of such design technique. Yet, far beyond these characteristics, it is their concern for honesty in design, coupled with their high measure of professional pride and their deep respect for their own conception of architecture, that compels admiration for the long and productive career of the brothers Keck.

Narciso G. Menocal
Department of Art History
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Catalogue

1. Cruger Apartment Building, 1926-1927

127 Virginia Avenue
Elmhurst, Illinois



Contrary to usual practice, Fred Keck's first position as draftsman followed his registration as architect; in 1921 he obtained employment in Chicago in the office of an architect by the name of William Pruyn, "who produced standardized plans by the yard." Not having ever considered Pruyn's office as a place where he would stay long, in the following year Keck moved to D.H. Burnham and Company (then headed by D.H. Burnham, Jr.). That firm was seeking temporary extra staff to draw plans of the Burnham Building (presently the State of Illinois Building on LaSalle Street). After the Burnham project was completed, Keck taught architectural design at the University of Illinois during the 1923-1924 academic year. Subsequently, after a European trip that was cut short because his wife became ill, Keck found work at the office of Schmidt, Garden and Erikson. It was there that he met Vale Faro, who had known Sullivan, was a belated follower of the Prairie Style, and was also enthusiastic about the new European architecture, which had been introduced in Chicago mainly through the Chicago Tribune Building Competition four years earlier. Of the two men, Faro had a deeper understanding of modern design, but Keck had a much larger store of enthusiasm. Realizing instinctively that each brought to their friendship what the other lacked, the two decided to become partners and opened an office in 1926. But after a few months of association, not sharing Keck's optimism concerning the economic future of the firm, Faro decided to return to the security of Hugh Garden's office.

Since it was designed shortly after the partnership was dissolved, the Cruger Apartment Building represents Keck's architectural position at the outset of his career. It reveals a conception of modern architecture which, although earnestly believed, did not go far beyond a superficial understanding. Corner windows, for instance, and a preference for simple lines in general, point to Keck's commitment to modern architecture, but, at the same time, a plan where rooms are self-contained gives evidence that he had not yet fully grasped the principles of modern design.

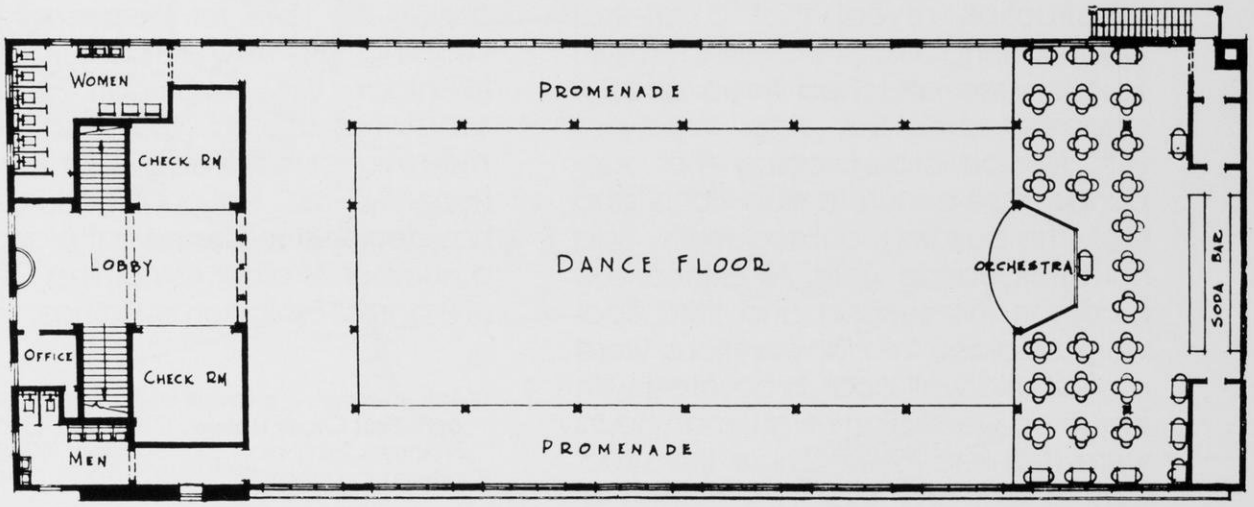
"Portfolio of Apartment Houses." **Architectural Record** 71 (March 1932):185-86.

2. Miralago Ballroom and Shops, 1929

Sheridan Road, No Man's Land (between Kenilworth and Wilmette), Cook County, Illinois

This was the first building in the International Style erected in the Chicago area. It had shops on the first floor and a ballroom on the second. It stood a hundred yards away from Lake Michigan, on a steep bluff rising seventy-five feet above water level. Its promoter was Bills' Realty Corporation, for which Fred Keck had designed a number of houses in the Indian Hills Estate subdivision of Wilmette. In November of 1929, four months after its opening, Miralago was described in a critique written about it in the **Western Architect:** "It is a roadhouse on the lake, catering to the young set of automobiling, jazz dancing nite lifers. Mr. Keck has done it well . . . It is not a setting for Spanish shawls but a fitting place for the little modern American girl, short haired, short skirted, clean, direct, and colorful." In January, 1932, fire broke out in the building as a result of someone applying a blow torch to a frozen pipe. Since Miralago was in No Man's Land, firemen from Wilmette and Evanston at first refused to come. When they finally did, damage was so extensive that the building could not be saved.

Construction was of steel and reinforced concrete with a roof slab held by cantilevered continuous beams; all loads were carried down through exposed columns in the ballroom. Ex-



terior walls were finished with white cement stucco, woodwork was painted black, and gray Vitrolite panels were placed between the windows. Copings, base, and trim were of black Vitrolite. All metalwork was of chromium plate on brass and copper.

Inside, the dance floor was of natural maple and walls were covered with green fabrikoid stretched on forms. Drapes were of silver fabrikoid. The ceiling was of silver leaf over the dance floor and painted deep blue over the promenade. The orchestra shell was of veneered wood silvered with a design, and the south wall, facing it, carried a mural that represented downtown Chicago. Columns were sheathed in jet-black Vitrolite.

In the lobby, downstairs, the floor was of black terrazzo with aluminum strips, walls were of smooth plaster with low-relief plywood patterns glued on and painted, and the ceiling was of silver leaf. The stairway had a similar ceiling, a raisin-colored carpet, and a monel metal railing.

"Miralago in No Man's Land." **Western Architect** 38 (November 1929):205-06.

"Miralago Ballroom and Shops." **Architectural Record** 67 (February 1930):105-09.

3. House of Tomorrow, 1933

Chicago, Illinois

This building was commissioned by Century Homes, Incorporated, for the Century of Progress Exhibition. According to a contemporary pamphlet written by Fred Keck, **"The House of Tomorrow,** America's first glass house, was designed to demonstrate mechanical equipment and new building materials that are now on the market." Photographs taken during construction reveal that a central stack housing utilities was erected first. To this were attached three duodecagonal wheel-like steel structures with tension cross-bracing that supported fibre-concrete slab floors and roof. The building, consequently, had no load-bearing walls. All exterior surfaces on the second and third floor were of glass. Interior partitions were of synthetic wall boards covered with laquered wood. Forty-eight man-hours were required to assemble the structure, and it only took two months to finish the house.

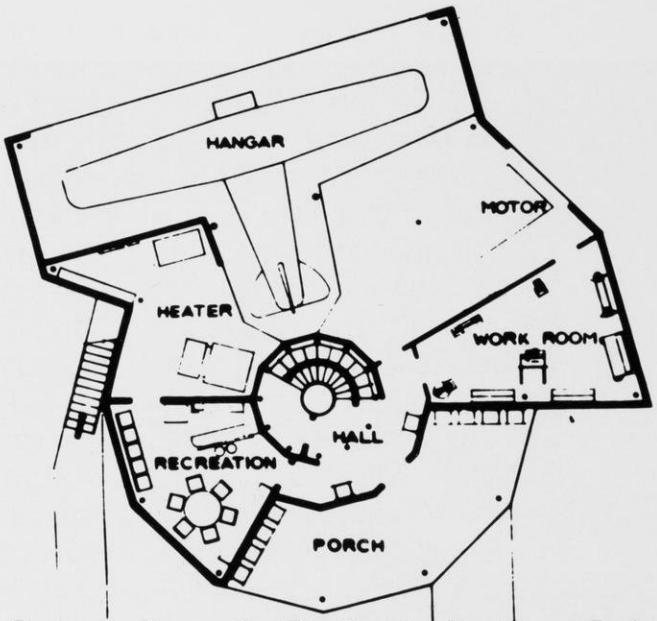
A number of new technological devices were used in this project. Central air conditioning, electric dishwasher and garbage disposal, electric outlets integrated with the finish trim, doors opened by an electric eye, radio-operated hangar and garage doors, and beds that disappeared at the push of a button were some of the "labor-saving devices" featured in **The House of Tomorrow.** All furniture was custom designed by Keck with the collaboration of two interior decorators, Leland Atwood and Irene Hyman.

Following Fair regulations, at the time Keck obtained permission to build **The House of Tomorrow,** he posted a $500 bond to insure funds for demolishing the building after the Exhibition was over. Subsequently, Robert Bartlett, a Chicago developer, acquired that bond, along with fourteen others, for two dollars each, allowing Fair authorities to realize a $498 profit per building. Bartlett moved the fifteen exhibition buildings across the lake for purposes of advertising his new subdivision near Michigan City, Michigan. Although somewhat altered, **The House of Tomorrow** has survived in that location. Recently, the National Park Service has decided to preserve it along with a number of other remaining Century of Progress Exhibition buildings.

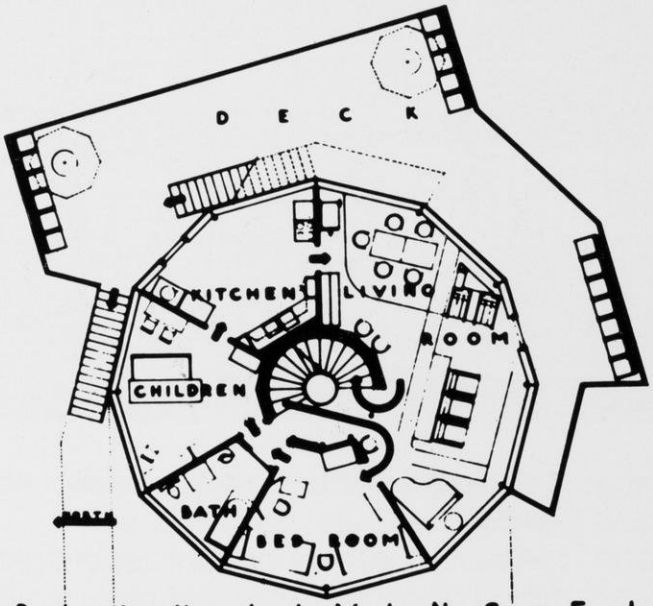
[Keck, George F.] **House of Tomorrow, America's First Glass House.** Chicago: Century of Progress Exhibition Commission, 1933. [Exhibition pamphlet.]

"House of Tomorrow." **Architectural Record** 75 (January 1934):29.

"World's Fair Building Saved." [Chicago] **Sun Times,** 3 February 1980, p. 64.



PLAN · GROUND-FL.



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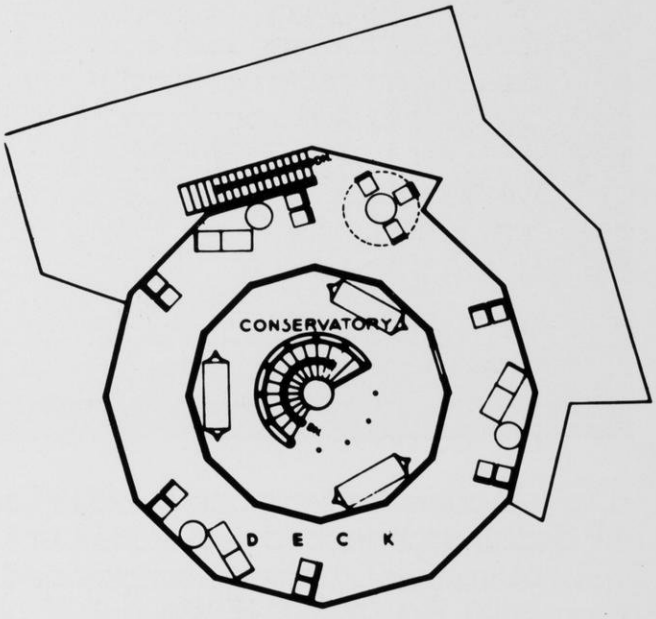
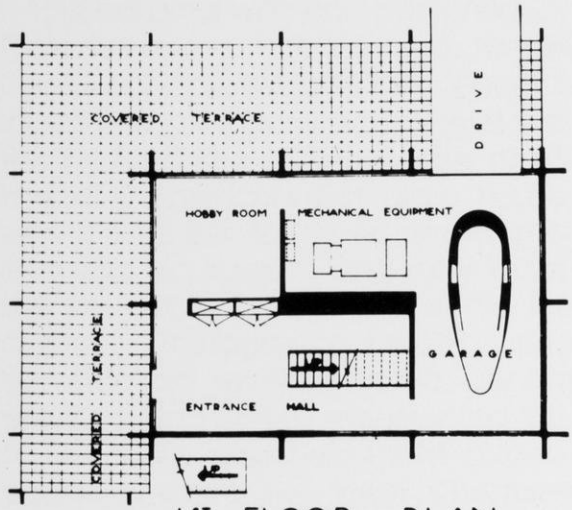


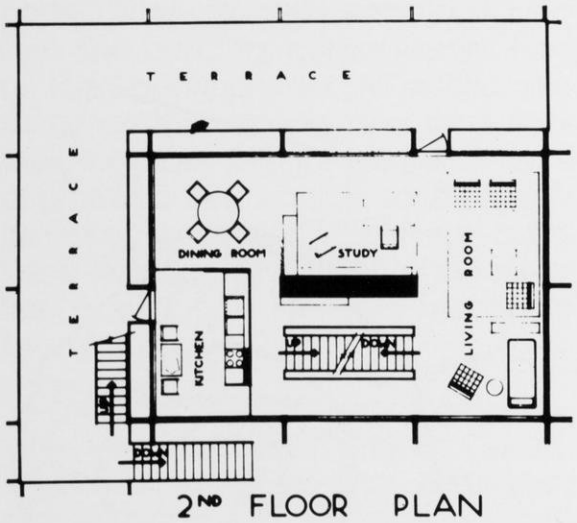
THIRD FLOOR

4. Crystal House, 1934

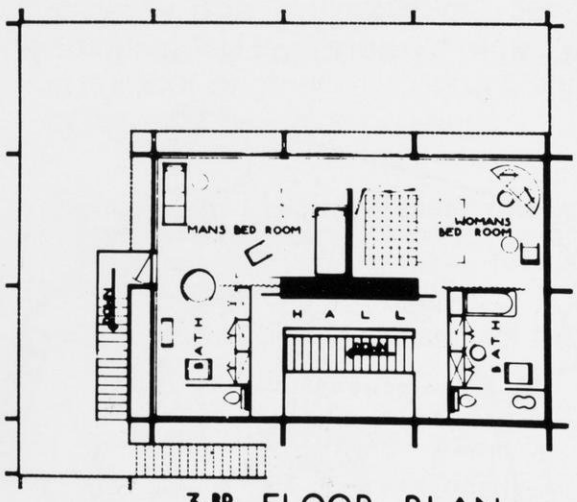
Chicago, Illinois



1ST FLOOR PLAN



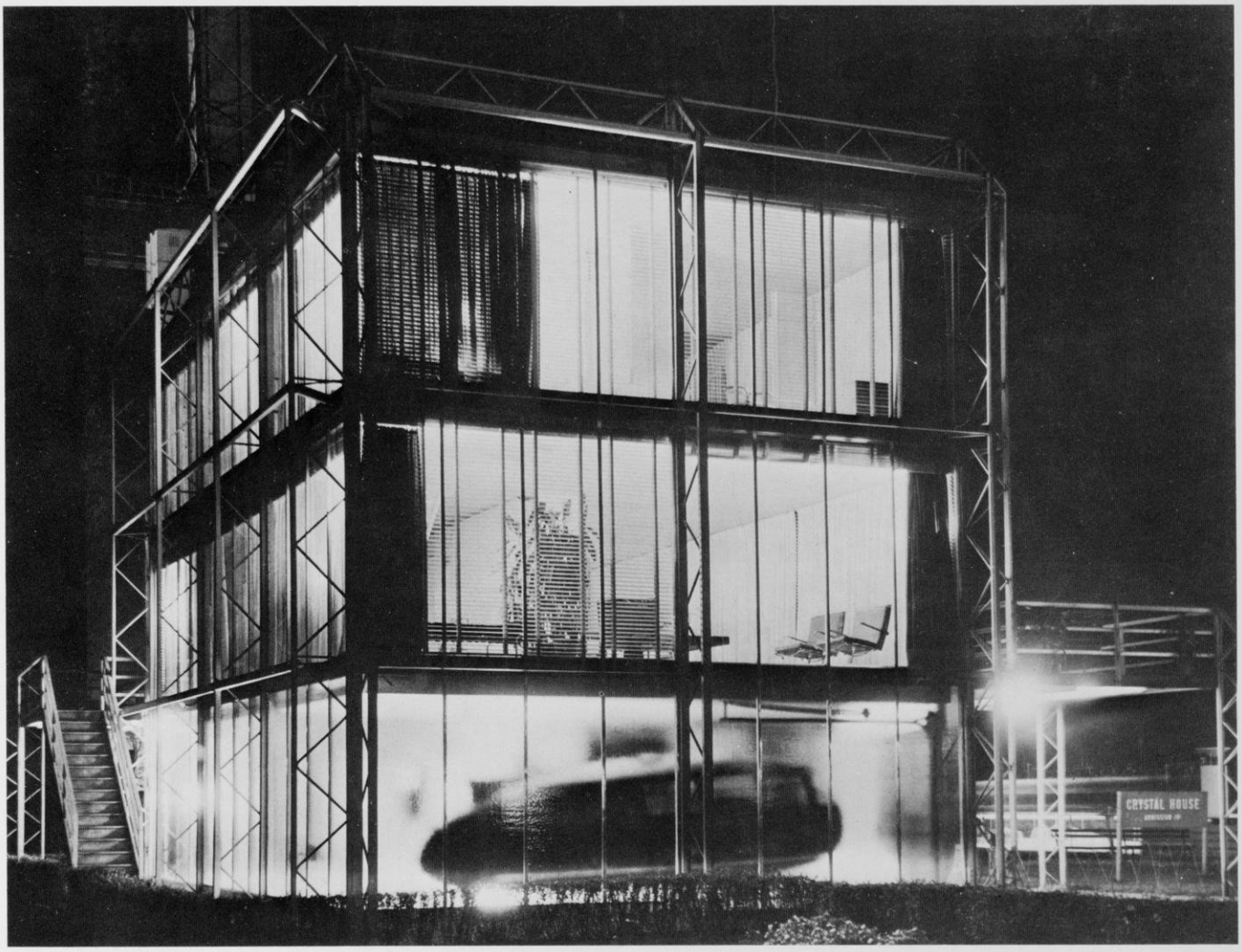
2ND FLOOR PLAN



3RD FLOOR PLAN

Against better financial judgement, during the second year of the Century of Progress Exhibition, Keck decided to build the **Crystal House** out of personal funds. The cost was $15,000, but this amount does not include the cost of much equipment and material donated by manufacturers. The idea for a "crystal house" was inspired by those residential buildings at the Fair that featured different building materials. Examples of some of these were The Brick House, The Lumber House, The Steel House, and The Masonite House.

With its fine exterior contrast of light latticed steel supports and glass walls suggesting its elegant interior spatial fluidity, the **Crystal House** was one of the most important American examples of a building inspired by the European avant-garde in the early 1930's. Yet partly because of the advancing Depression, and partly because it stood on a remote location, the **Crystal House** was not seen by as



many people as **The House of Tomorrow** was. After the Fair ended, it was dismantled and its furnishings and materials were auctioned off to pay debts incurred during its construction.

Built on a concrete slab, the **Crystal House** was of welded steel construction. Floors were of prefabricated welded steel plates bolted together, and exterior walls were entirely of glass. Interior spaces were not divided by partitions, but by arrangement of furniture and storage units. Most of its furniture was designed by Leland Atwood, who chose to reproduce examples by Mies, Breuer, and other major European masters. Buckminster Fuller first exhibited his Dymaxion car in this building. The **Crystal House** featured the same type of mechanical and electrical equipment used in **The House of Tomorrow.**

Slade, Thomas M. " 'The Crystal House' of 1934." **Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians** 29 (December 1970):350-53.

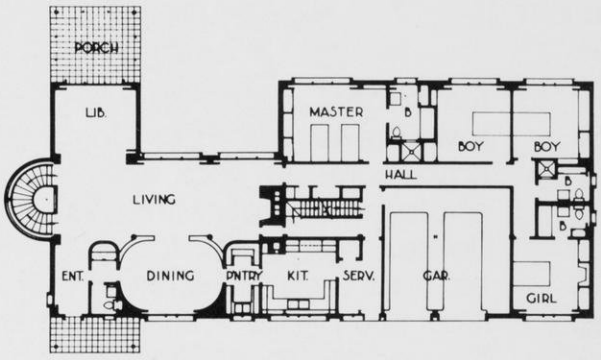
5. F. L. Wilde House, 1935

305 Elizabeth Street
Watertown, Wisconsin

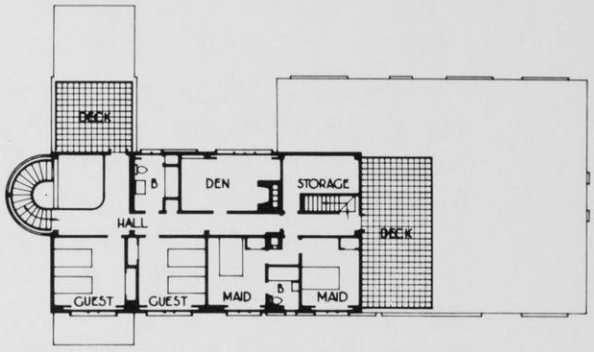
The commission consisted of designing a small house for a childless couple. The site was on a hillside on the north side of the Rock River. Because of the sloping lot and the location of the road, the garage and entry hall, as well as the study (which could serve as a second bedroom), were located at street level, from which a half run of stairs led to the remainder of the house. The bedroom wing was tucked halfway into the hillside, thereby reducing the heat loss to the north. Large windows were provided on the south side of the building. At this early stage in the development of solar houses, the Kecks had not considered protection of the windows in summer, using only trees to shade a southern exposure.

6. Herbert Bruning House, 1935-1936

2716 Blackhawk Road
Wilmette, Illinois



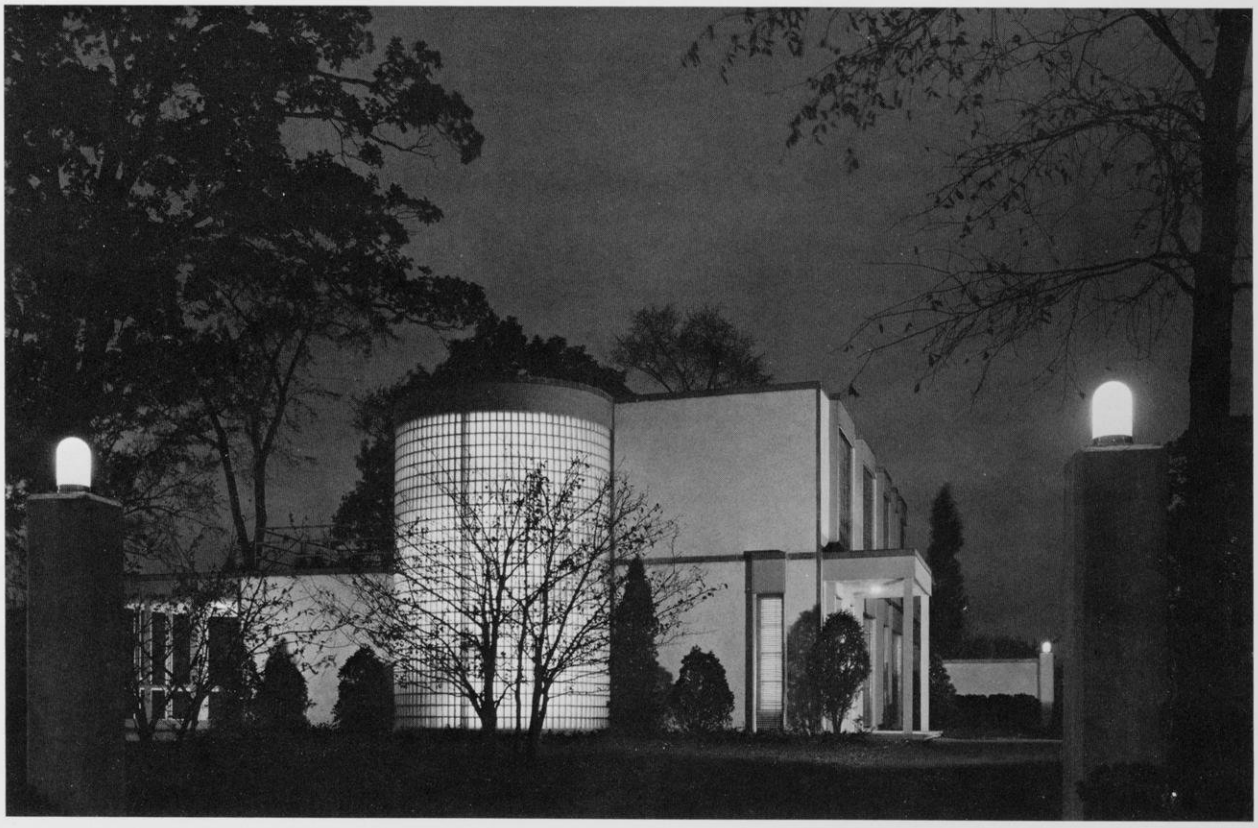
1ST FLOOR PLAN



2ND FLOOR PLAN

Some of the construction features of this house are a welded steel skeleton, lightweight steel studs supporting metal lath and stucco wall panels, a steel pan roof, a lightweight concrete floor deck, and the first use by the Kecks of exterior aluminum Venetian blinds. The stucco was disposed in rectangular panels surrounded by expansion joints to prevent cracking due to expansion and contraction usual to this material in severe climates.

The design of the Bruning House has been altered by others.



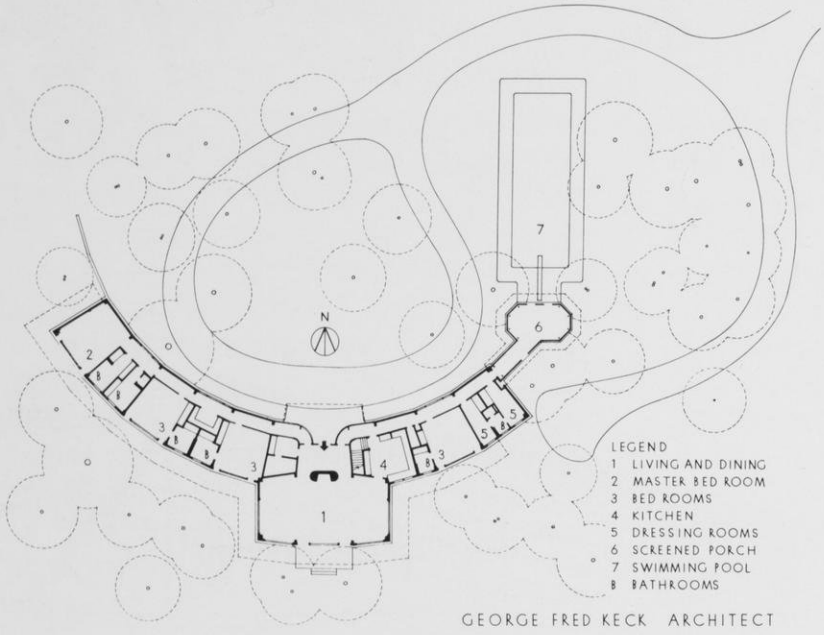
7. Edward W. Morehouse Residence, 1936-1937

101 Ely Place
Madison, Wisconsin

Of all Keck buildings designed after the **Crystal House,** the Morehouse Residence, commissioned by a Professor of Economics at the University of Wisconsin, is by far the closest to a Constructivist esthetic. But since its standard wood framing is expressed on the facades by means of narrow vertical banding, this design may be seen as well as an experiment to make American traditional methods of construction fit into European avante-garde stylistic trends. The steep slope of the site was used to create an interesting composition. The building terraces down in a manner reminiscent of **The House of Tomorrow.** The idea for such terraces may have come to Keck from looking at photographs of Mies's Tugendhat House, the garden facade of which he had used as a prototype for at least two previous unbuilt projects. At the insistence of Mrs. Morehouse, double-hung sash windows were provided instead of the casement windows Keck had originally chosen. Pockets above the windows were intended to conceal exterior aluminum Venetian blinds that were never installed at the request of the client.

8. Benjamin J. Cahn House, 1937

270 South Western Avenue
Lake Forest, Illinois



The Cahn Residence was built on a thirty-acre site landscaped years before by Jens Jensen. The old house was difficult to maintain and gave no sense of proximity to a fine private park. For these reasons, the owners demolished the old house, retained the property, and commissioned Fred Keck to design, in Mrs. Cahn's words, "The House of the Day After Tomorrow." This was to be a $125,000 weekend retreat "requiring minimum maintenance and capable of being opened on an hour's notice." The Cahns, who lived in an apartment in Chicago, eventually made this house their permanent residence.

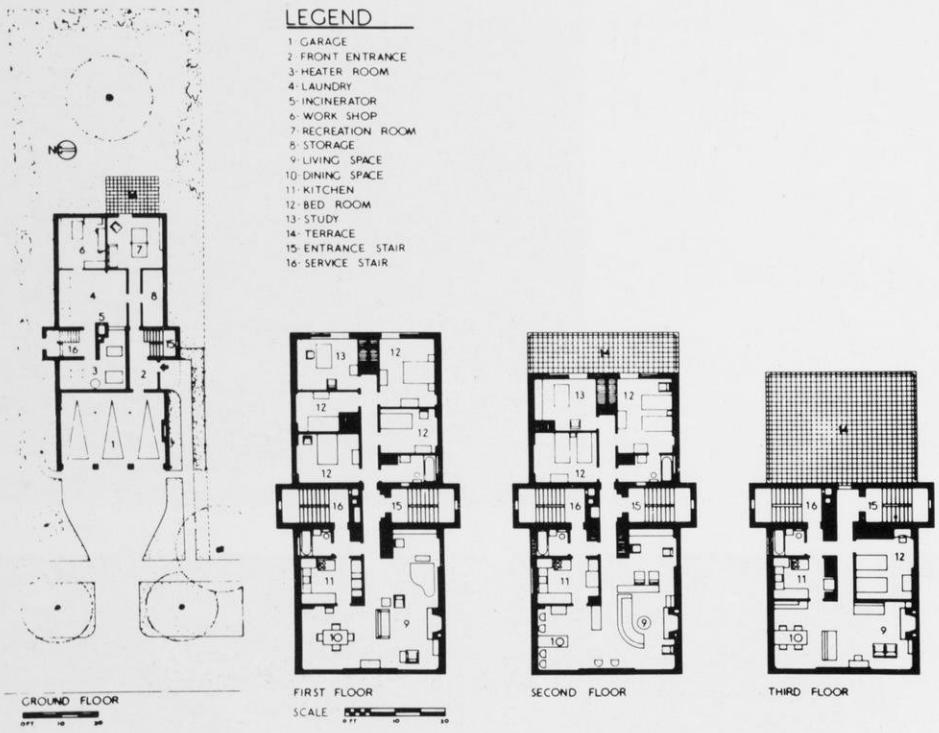
The building is crescent-shaped and is approached from the north by a circular drive. A corridor extends along the north side and all rooms open to the south view through a wall entirely of glass. Because of wide overhangs, no curtains were needed. Since Mrs. Cahn had suffered a hip injury and walked with a limp, one of her requirements for the house had been that no rugs or carpets were to be specified. To compensate for hard surfaces on the floor, Keck used acoustical tile on the ceiling. Mrs. Cahn was a heavy smoker; much of the furniture, especially the dining room table, was laminated with sheets of aluminum to prevent cigarette burns. Deep, brilliant colors on the walls, permissible because of intense light, created an informal atmosphere proper to the intended purpose of the building, which is also recognized in the fact that no formal dining room was provided.

This building has been altered by others.

"George Fred Keck, Architect: House for Mr. B.J. Cahn, Lake Forest, Illinois." **Architectural Forum** 71 (July 1939):12-15.

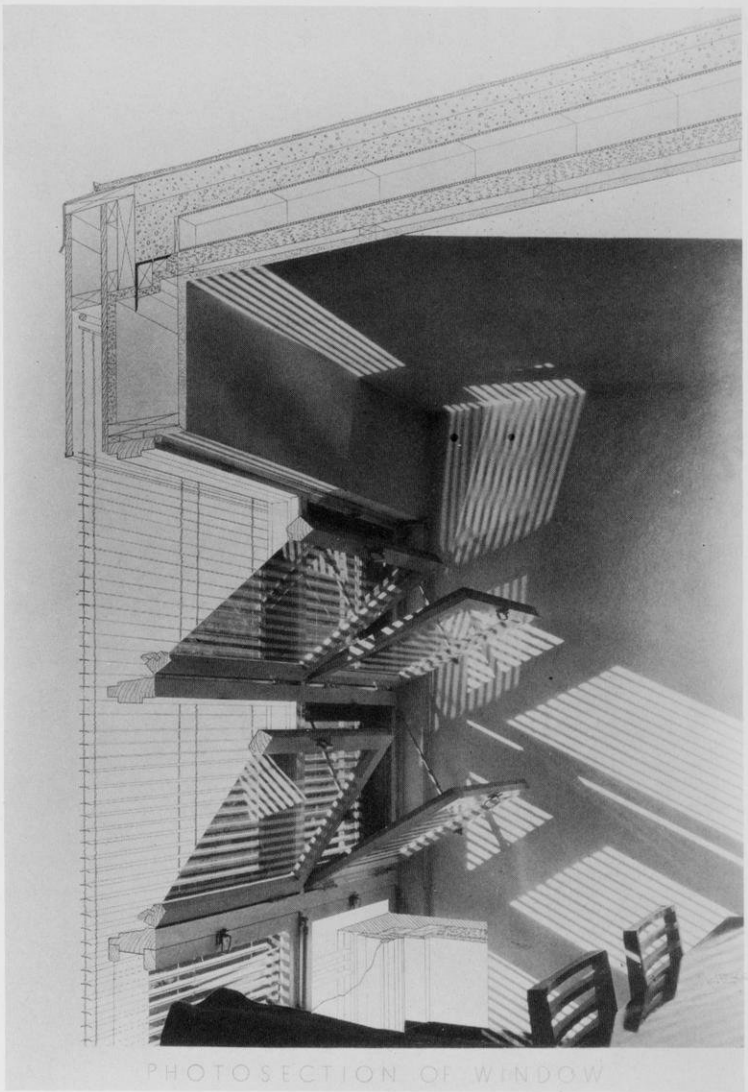
9. Keck-Gottschalk Apartment Building, 1937

5551 University Avenue
Chicago, Illinois



This building was a result of a co-operative enterprise undertaken by the Keck brothers (who had just collected a handsome fee from the Cahn commission) and their friend Professor Louis Gottschalk. By pooling their resources, they built a three-apartment structure on a relatively expensive lot near the University of Chicago, a neighborhood that was convenient not only to Professor Gottschalk, but also to Mrs. Fred Keck, who was a librarian at the University. The two Keck couples and Mrs. Gottschalk, now a widow, still live in their apartments.

Load-bearing walls of smooth red-orange brick generally rise to their full height unpunctured by windows. Large windows with black wood fascias screening pockets for exterior Venetian blinds also rise to full height at each floor, leaving no unstructural masonry to be supported over them. These windows, on the front and back elevations, were designed especially for the building rather than selected from a catalogue. They are built up of square and rectangular transom-type wood sashes hinged at the bottom and swinging in. With this design, an upward flow of fresh air brings into circulation stale warm air otherwise trapped below the ceiling. In no exterior wall of this building is a rhythm of masonry and glass broken by plac-



PHOTOSECTION OF WINDOW

ing brick above or below a window. For this reason, on the side elevations, where windows are smaller, glass blocks bring them up to a full floor height.

Fire resistant construction made it legal not to build a parapet above the roof. A lesser-than-ordinary height also resulted from thin floors and roof of hollow-tile construction on bar joints, covered with a light concrete screeding. Floors are finished with black rubber tile, and the roof with tar and gravel.

Garages, entrance, utilities, and a recreation room facing the garden are on the ground floor. Each of the other three stories has an apartment with a balcony opening onto the garden, located at the rear of the property. The main staircase is of steel, with non-slip cement treads and metal tube railings.

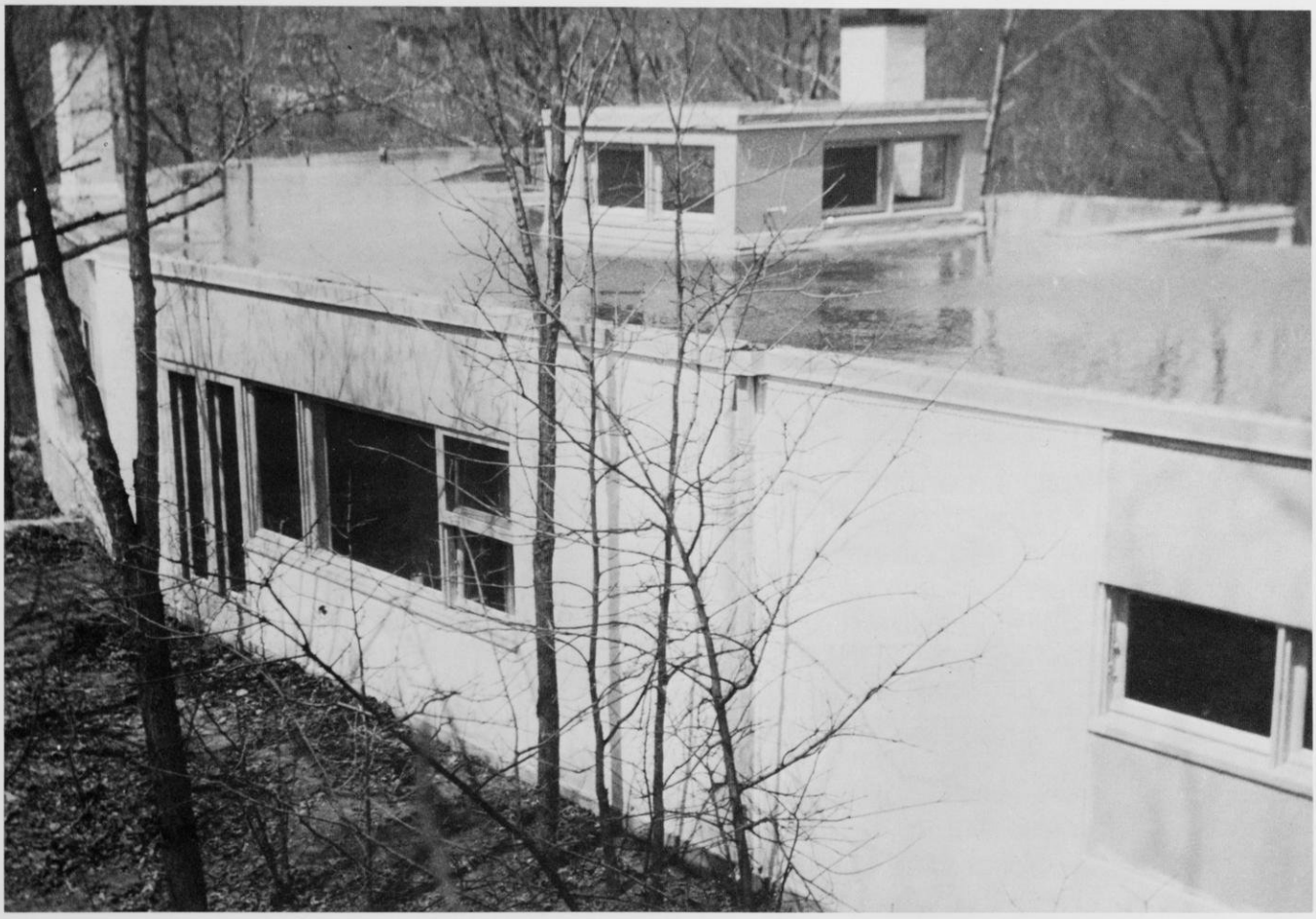
The Keck-Gottschalk Apartment Building was designated a Chicago Landmark on February 26, 1959.

Keck, George. "Flats." **Architectural Review** 88 (December 1940):175-78.

10. B. Lamar Johnson House, 1938

609 Rockhill Road
Columbia, Missouri

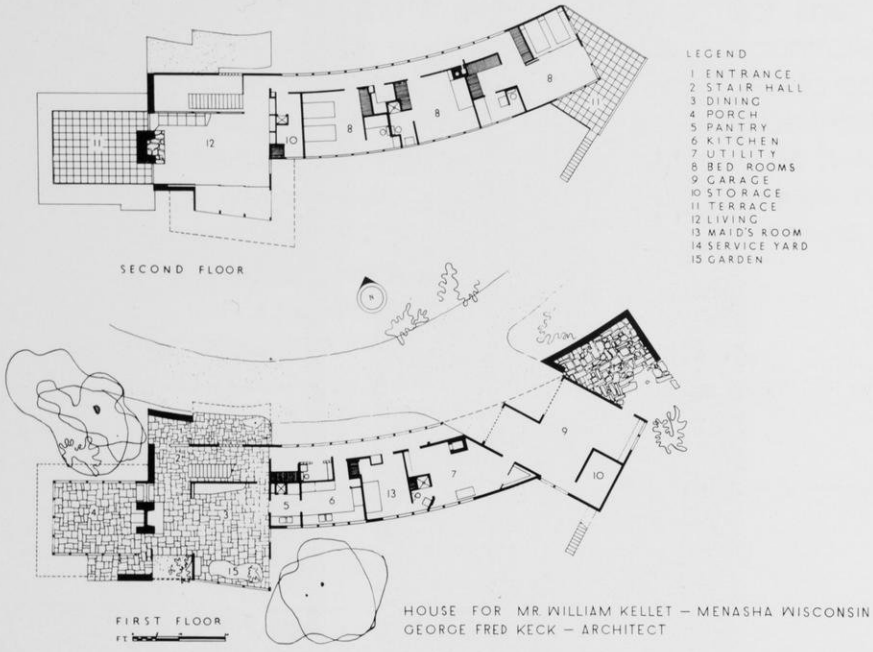
This house is located on a sloping site facing a ravine. It is another example of a sweeping plan with the main rooms facing south. The site was heavily wooded, and consequently no overhangs were provided for protection against excessive sunlight. Continuous slots under the large, single-pane windows served to draw out the cold air which formed on the interior of the glazing. This idea had first been tried out successfully in **The House of Tomorrow.** Evaporation of water in a one-inch-deep pan roof helped considerably to keep the house cool during the summer. Above the roof line, a splash pan and a spigot controlled at ground level were provided to add water should normal rainfall be insufficient to keep the pan roof full. To help prepare the house for winter, roof drains had removable adaptor rings.




Jackson House Columbia Mo.

11. William Kellett Residence, 1939

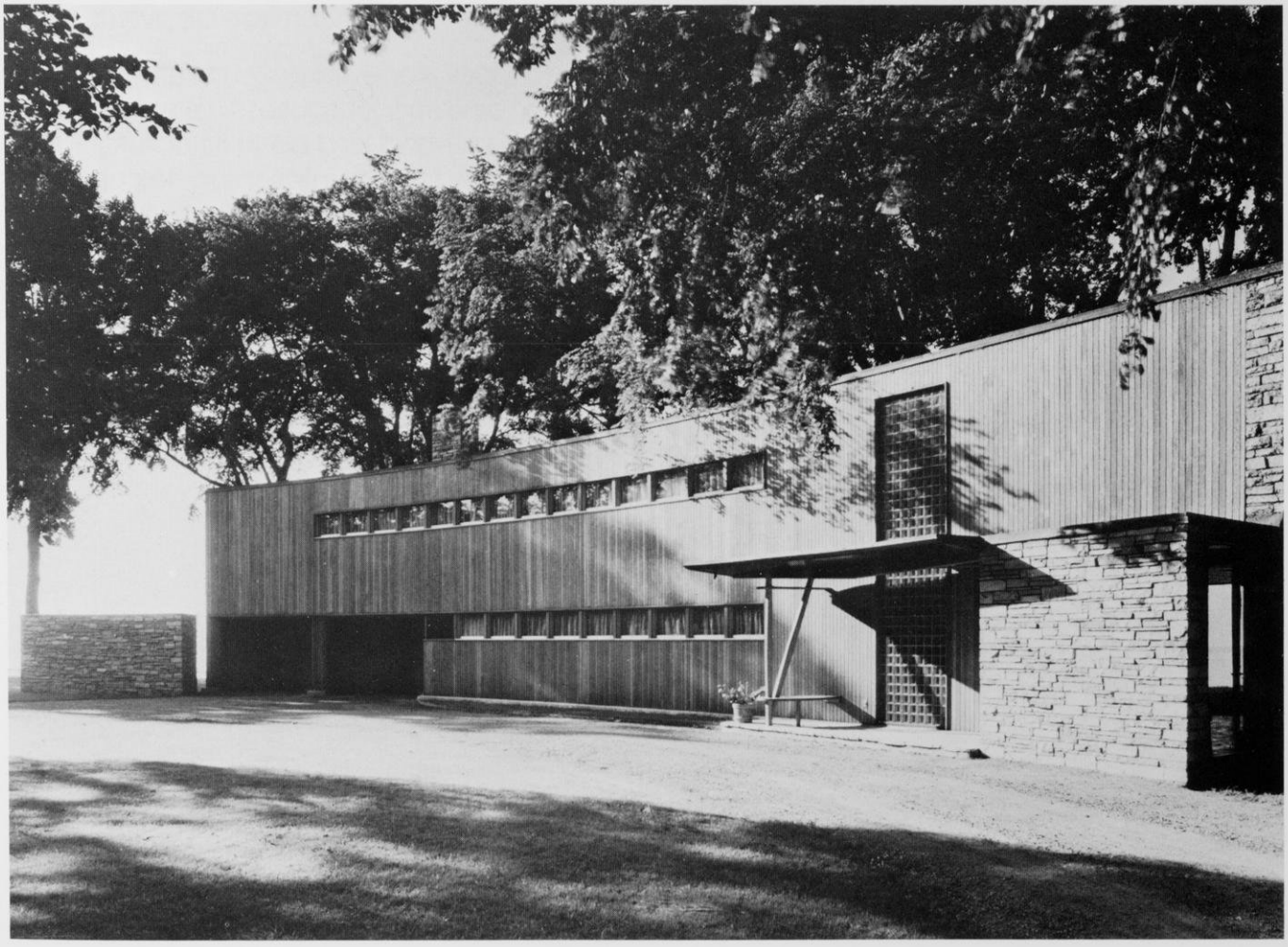
Winnefox Point
Menasha, Wisconsin



This house is on a low peninsula, with high trees, jutting into Lake Winnebago. The living room and bedrooms are on the upper floor to command a view of the lake. As in the Cahn House, the entrance and corridors are to the north on the inside of a curve; the rooms to the south open to the view and conform to the shape of the property. The living room is seemingly suspended in space between an open stairwell and a two-story solarium. The stair is of remarkably simple design. It is formed out of a sheet of steel bent to form treads and risers welded to the railing, the whole forming a truss that supports its own weight.

Technically, this building is interesting for three features. It has a pan roof carrying a thin sheet of water in summer for cooling; heating is by means of hot water coils radiating warmth from inside the concrete floor slab; and the windows, of a type now well known, were of innovative design in their day. They consisted of a variation on a stock double-hung aluminum window producing a double glazing when both sashes were down and a complete opening when both were raised. A third sash contained the screen, which could be raised or lowered as needed. With this system the Kecks eliminated the necessity of interchanging screens and storm sash. But a major difference between the Kecks' window and other similar ones in the market is that, whereas two different sashes one above the other are generally on view, in the Kecks' design the upper sash is concealed in an overhead pocket in the wall.

"What Houses Will Be Like After the War." **House Beautiful** 84 (July-August 1942):30-31.



12. J. R. Buchbinder House, 1939

Fish Creek
Door County, Wisconsin

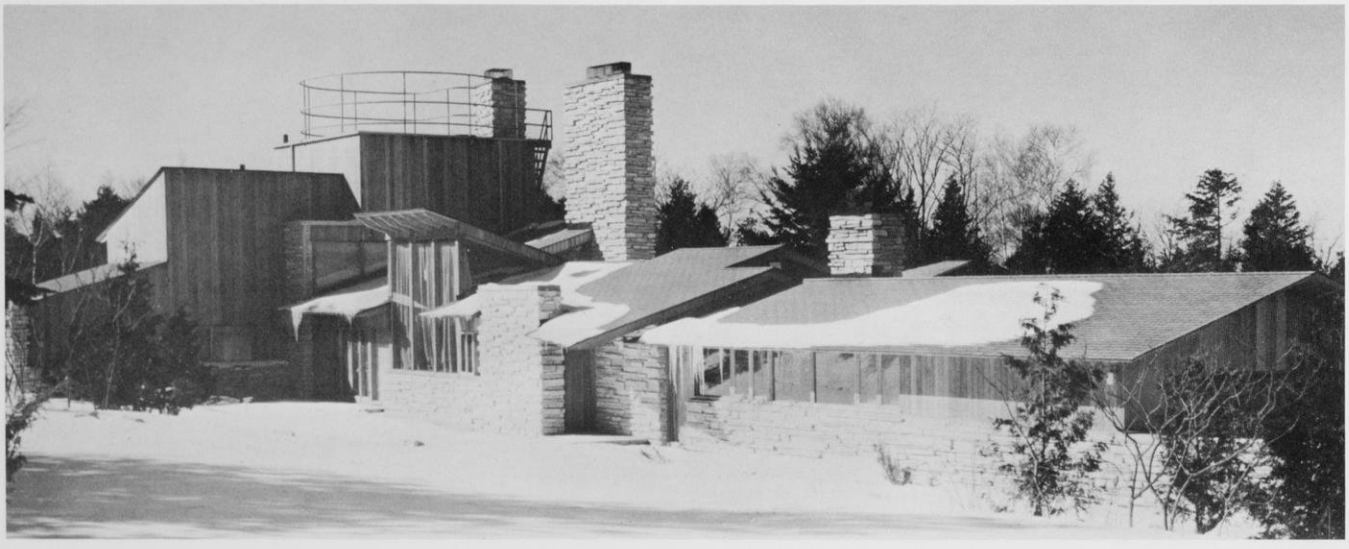
"To many people, a modern house must be a square smooth white box. I hold no brief against square smooth boxes. The approach to contemporary architecture is and must be more fundamental; [it] must stand on broader premises if it is to have the right to exist as a legitimate philosophy capable of solving man's need of enclosed space conveniently disposed." So said Fred Keck, in relation to the Buchbinder House, in one of his few pronouncements on architecture published in the catalogue of the 1947 exhibition **Keck on Architecture.**

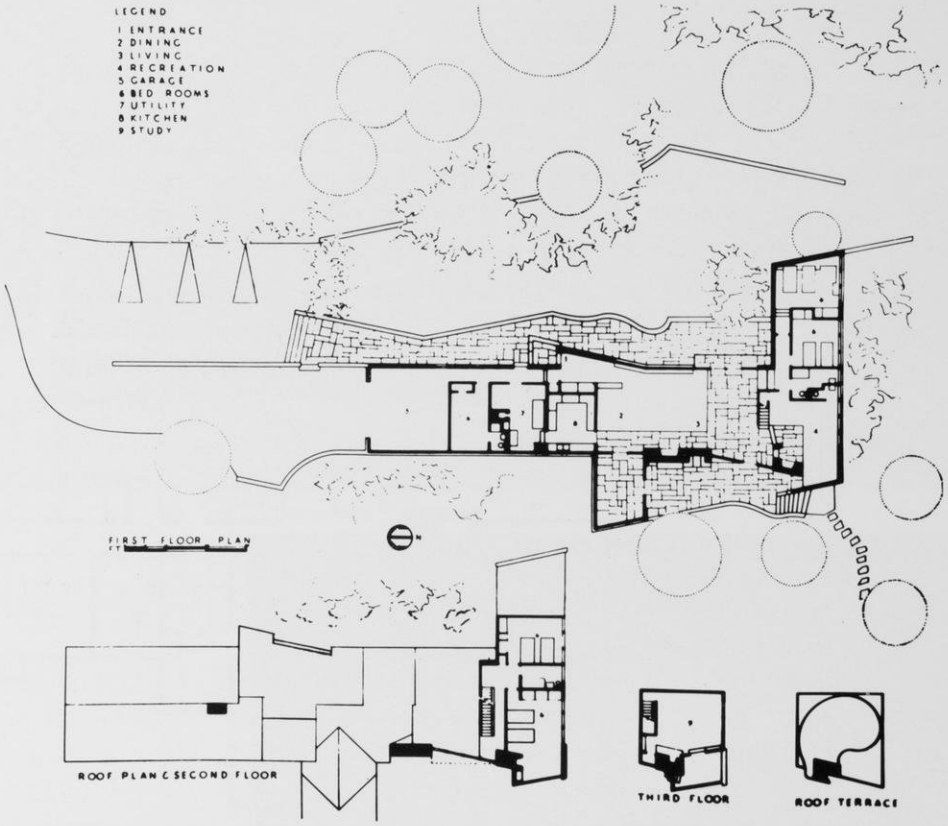
The design of the Buchbinder House was for Keck an experiment with new forms of widely overhanging pitched roofs sloping at different angles and directions. This composition was suggested to him by the northern Wisconsin forest that surrounds this summer residence, located a few hundred yards from the shores of Green Bay.

The family, consisting of a surgeon, a composer of contemporary classical music, and their son and daughter of college age, required of the architect large spaces for informal entertaining of guests. To this end, the main part of the house consists of a sequence of dining, living, and recreation areas that open through large glass walls to terraces on the east and west sides of the building, from which one can see the forest and bay, respectively. Service units and the road are to the north, and the bedrooms face south. Mrs. Buchbinder's studio, segregated on the third floor from the rest of the house, affords an uninterrupted view and has, furthermore, a sun terrace above it.

Local stone, largely uncut, was used for building purposes. Taken from the ground and laid up in its natural form, it provides an interesting texture that contrasts against large expanses of glass and fir panels that serve, with the stone, as main building materials.

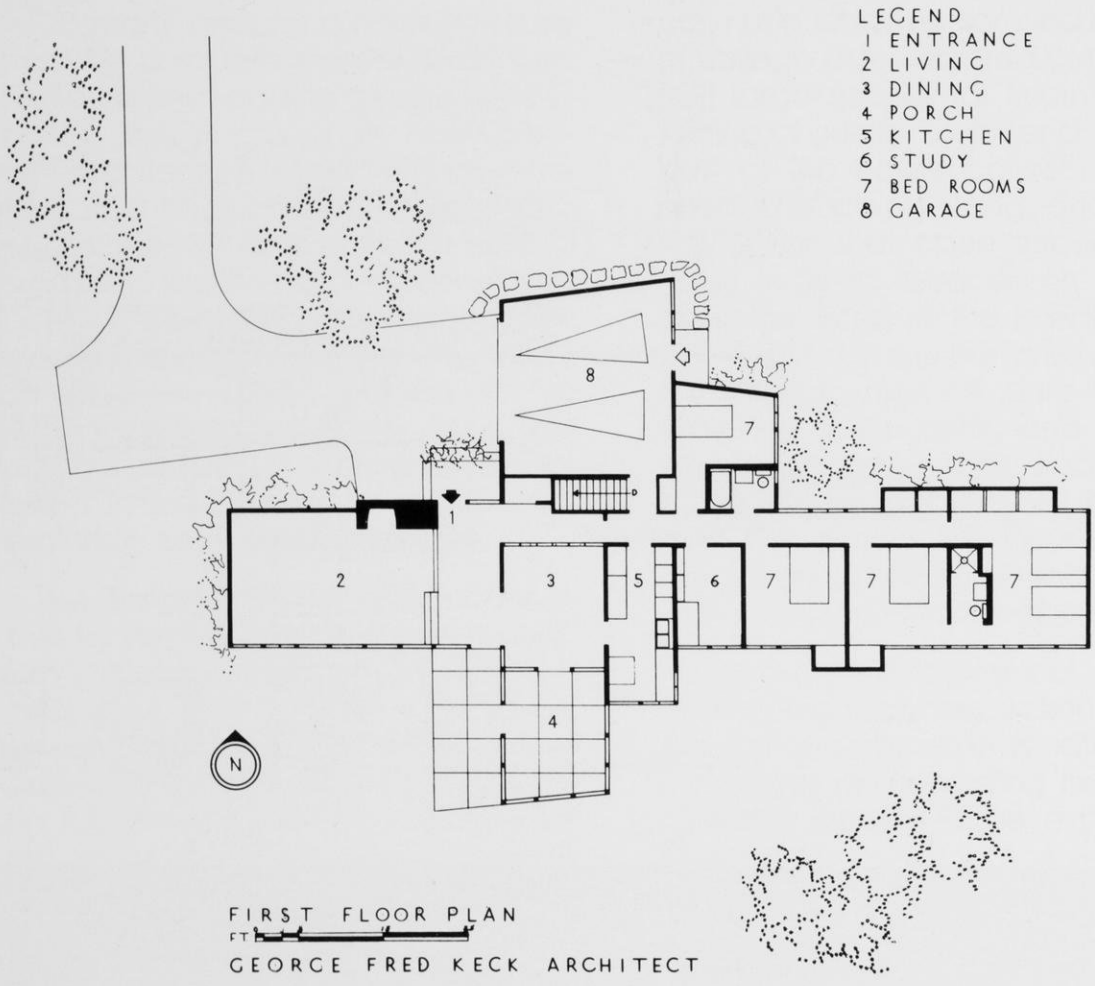
"Planned for Space and Freedom." **Architectural Record** 92 (November 1942):65-68.




LEGEND
1 ENTRANCE
2 DINING
3 LIVING
4 RECREATION
5 GARAGE
6 BED ROOMS
7 UTILITY
8 KITCHEN
9 STUDY
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
ROOF PLAN & SECOND FLOOR
THIRD FLOOR
ROOF TERRACE

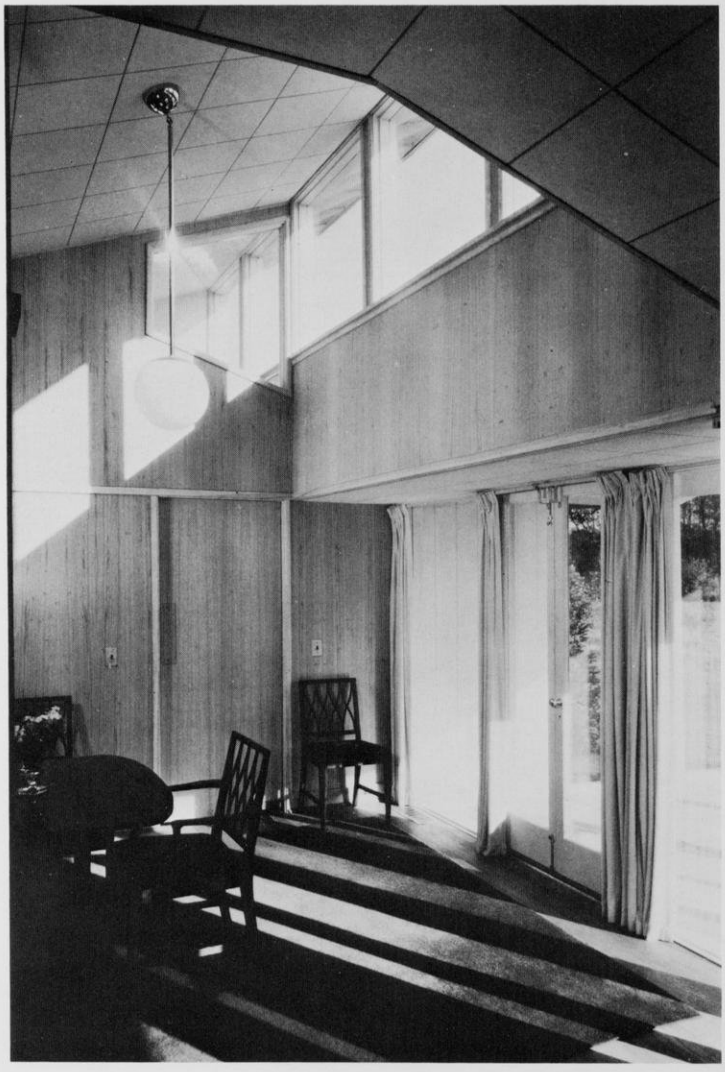
13. Howard M. Sloan House, 1940

825 Glenview Road
Glenview, Illinois



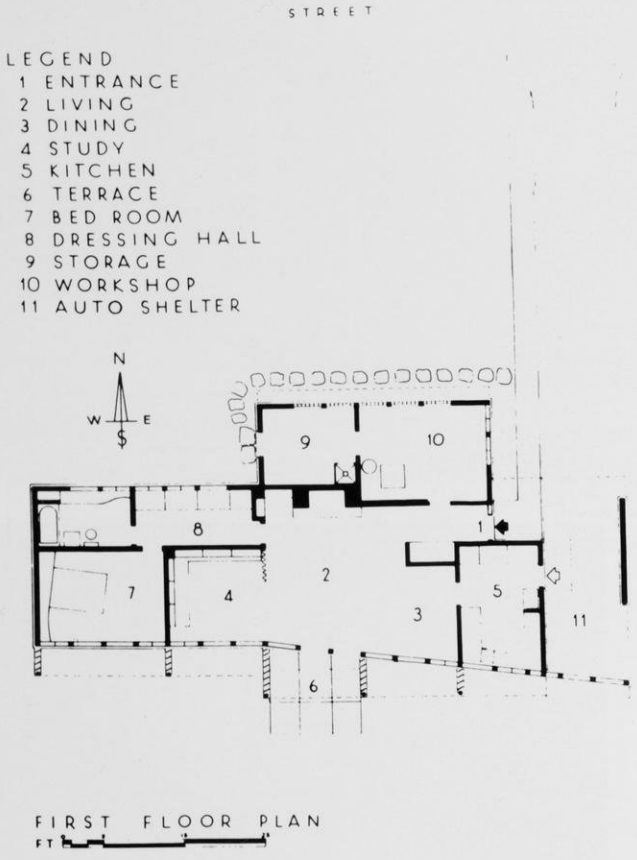
This residence was commissioned by a Chicago North Shore developer and contractor. Since Thermopane had appeared on the market, large areas of double glazing were used. Thermopane presented a problem, however. Its sealed edges were subject to rupturing if stresses were placed on the glass. Fearful of what could happen if Thermopane transom or double-hung windows were slammed, the Kecks decided to fix the glass in place and provide ventilation on each side of the window through wood louvers, behind which, on the inside, were a screen and a weather-stripped wood door. This gave better control of ventilation as well as security from prowlers in a one-story house. Sloan eventually built in the area quite a number of houses similar to this one. Promoting Mr. Sloan's business, Al Chase, the real-estate editor for the **Chicago Tribune,** coined the term "solar house" in describing this building.

Sloan, Howard M. "Insolation and House Design." **Pencil Points** 25 (February 1944):76-82.



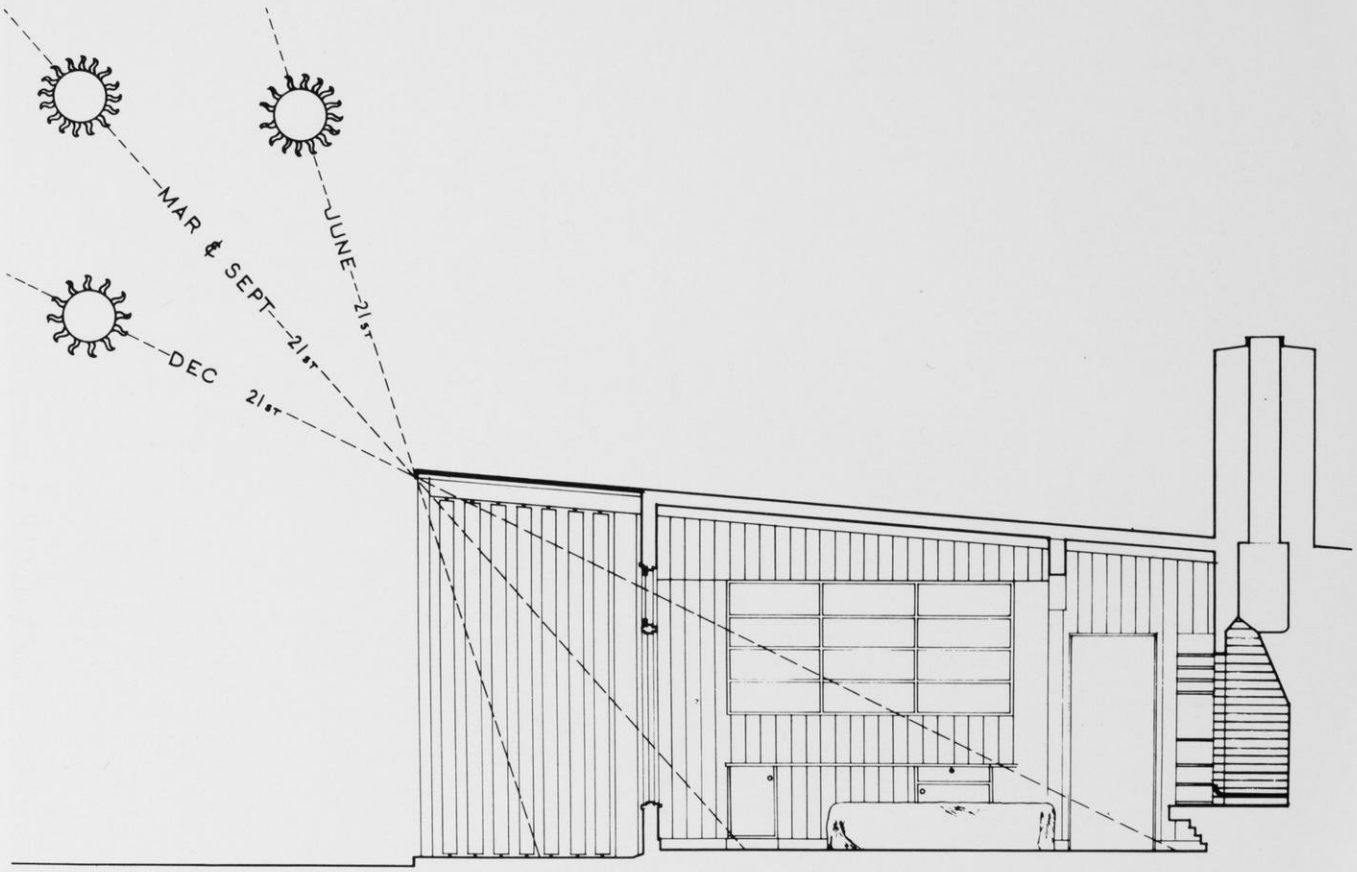
14. Hugh Duncan House, 1941

1612 Sylvan Court
Flossmoor, Illinois

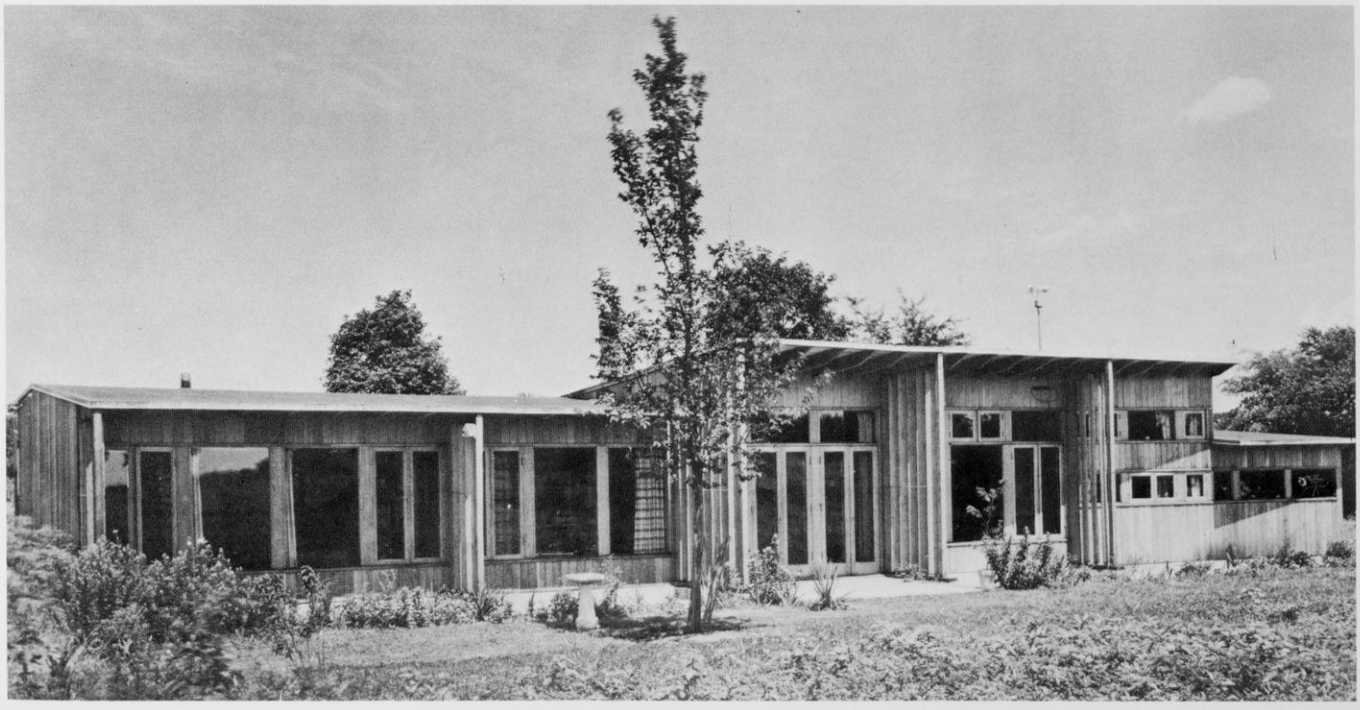


Designed for a young sociology professor and his wife, the original plan (which was later enlarged) had one bedroom and a study that could be curtained off as an extra bedroom or opened to enlarge the living-room area. The kitchen faces south and is protected by a corridor and storage-utility room to the north. Radiant hot water heating was installed in a concrete slab on the ground. The surface of the floor was stained a dark brown to absorb heat. Double glazing was used in the sash. The Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company became interested in sponsoring a year's test to be operated by the Illinois Institute of Technology. Results were published in the **Architectural Forum** issue of August 1943. It was concluded that, on a southern exposure, Thermopane would realize a fifteen to twenty per cent savings over conventional glazing. Overhangs to the south were provided for sun protection. In addition, vertical adjustable wood louvers were placed at intervals on the south elevation to control excessive sunshine when required.

"Products and Practice: Solar Heating." **Architectural Forum** 79 (August 1943):6-8†.

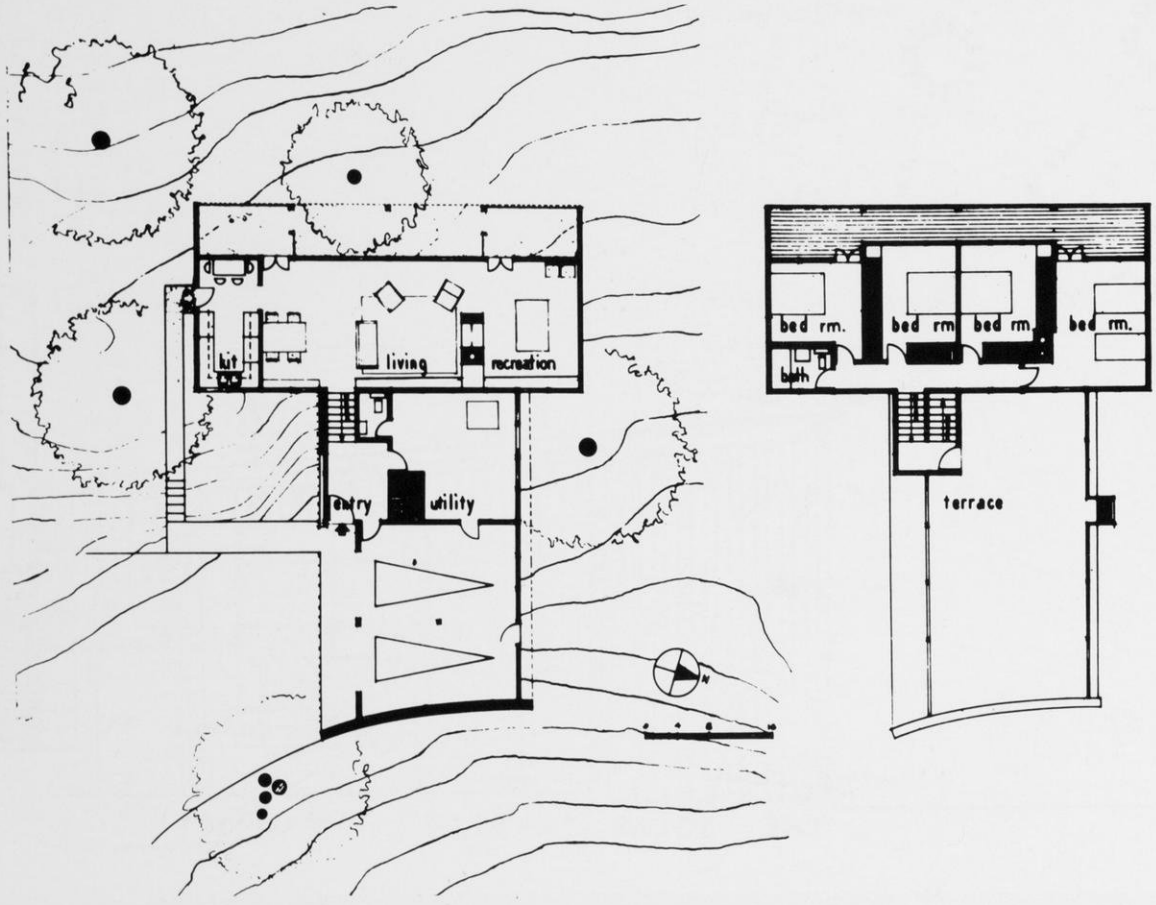


THE SOLAR ANGLES . . .



15. Pete Keck House, 1941

5713 North Lake Road
Oconomowoc,



The Kecks designed this weekend house for their brother and his family. The site is deep and relatively narrow, with a highway on the east and a small lake to the west. The house sits on the highest land and among the best trees. Because of contours of the land, the entry, garage, and utility room are on a level between the living floor and that of the bedrooms. The possibility of such arrangement was one reason, along with a desire to have all rooms facing the lake in spite of the narrow site, for a two-story scheme.

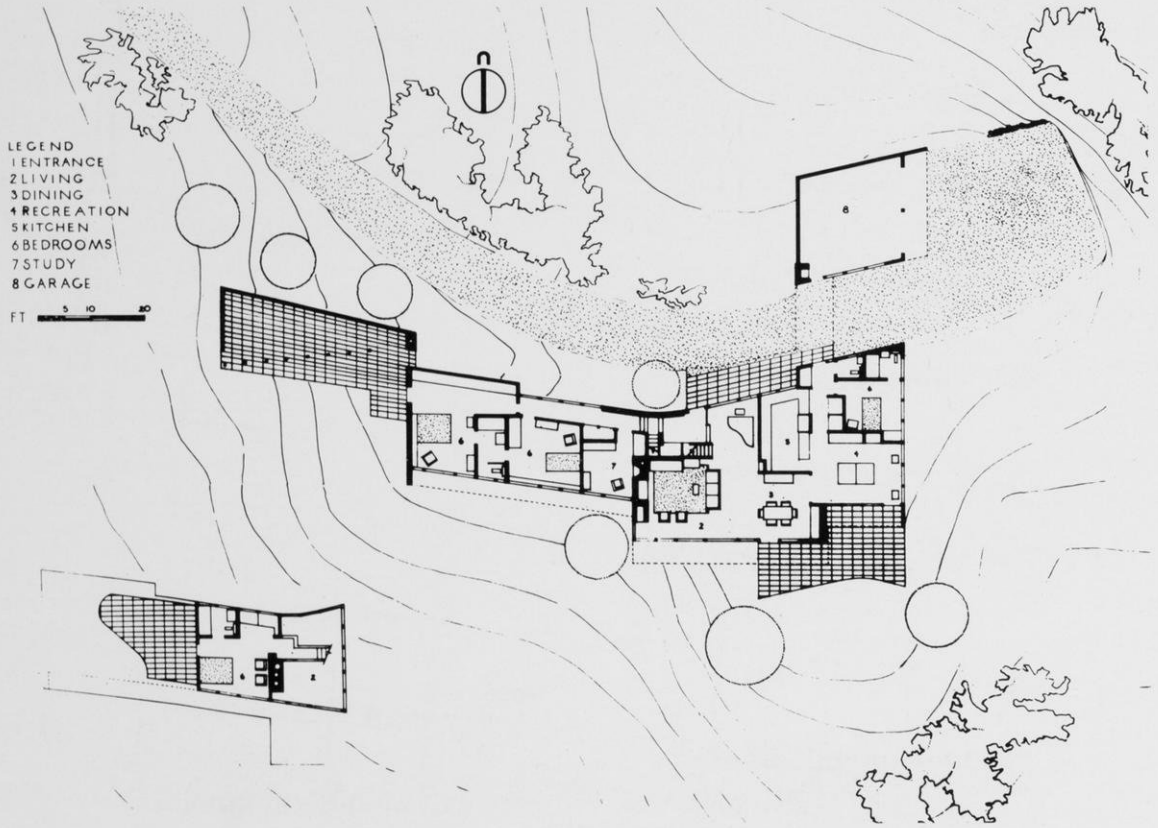
A radiant-heat system in the ground-floor slab is reinforced by a network of pipes inside the second-story wood floor, which radiates down into the living room area and up into the bedrooms.

A widespread use of standard-size Thermopane panels in this house determines its modular design, and that in turn, its shape. Because of these reasons, the Pete Keck House is an important technical and stylistic antecedent of a substantial number of post-World War II residences designed by the Kecks.

"House in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin." **Pencil Points** 27 (July 1946):64-67.

16. John Bennett House, 1941

Plum Tree Road
Barrington, Illinois



Because of the fortuitous circumstance that the Bennett House was the last important commission Keck and Keck executed before World War II, it serves well as a landmark signaling the changes in the firm's manner of design. On the one hand, the Bennett House presents all the new characteristics of solar design prompted by the appearance on the market, the year before, of Thermopane and Twindow. On the other, although it shares a number of features with the Cahn House (such as lofty ceilings and high clerestories), all Moderne connotations, which had been so important four years previously, were now abstracted out to favor a crisper interior geometry. Not unimportant among the changes in the Kecks' architectural vocabulary were a consistent preference for ninety-degree angles to the exclusion of round shapes; a use of clear glass instead of glass block for clerestory windows, which became larger than previous ones; a richer dynamic effect brought about by ceilings of different heights; and not least of all, the placing of fireplaces flush behind a single stone wall rather than making their volume protrude into the room.

"Solar House for A Sunny Hilltop." **Architectural Record** 95 (March 1944):58-65.

"High on a Windy Moraine." **House and Garden** 86 (November 1944):80-81.

17. Green's Ready-Built Homes, 1942; Built, 1946+

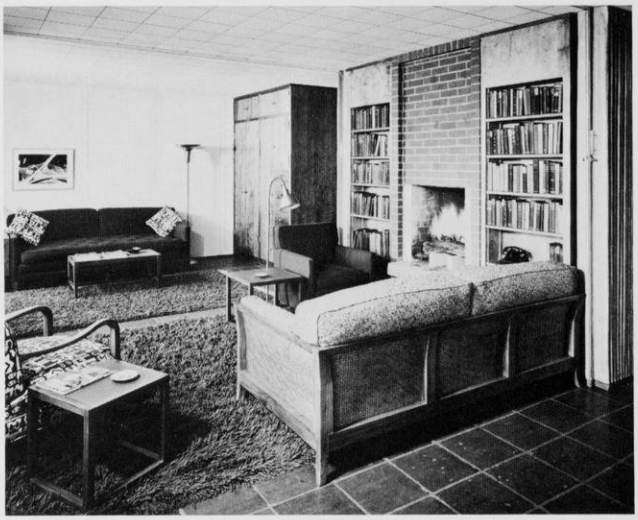
Rockford, Illinois

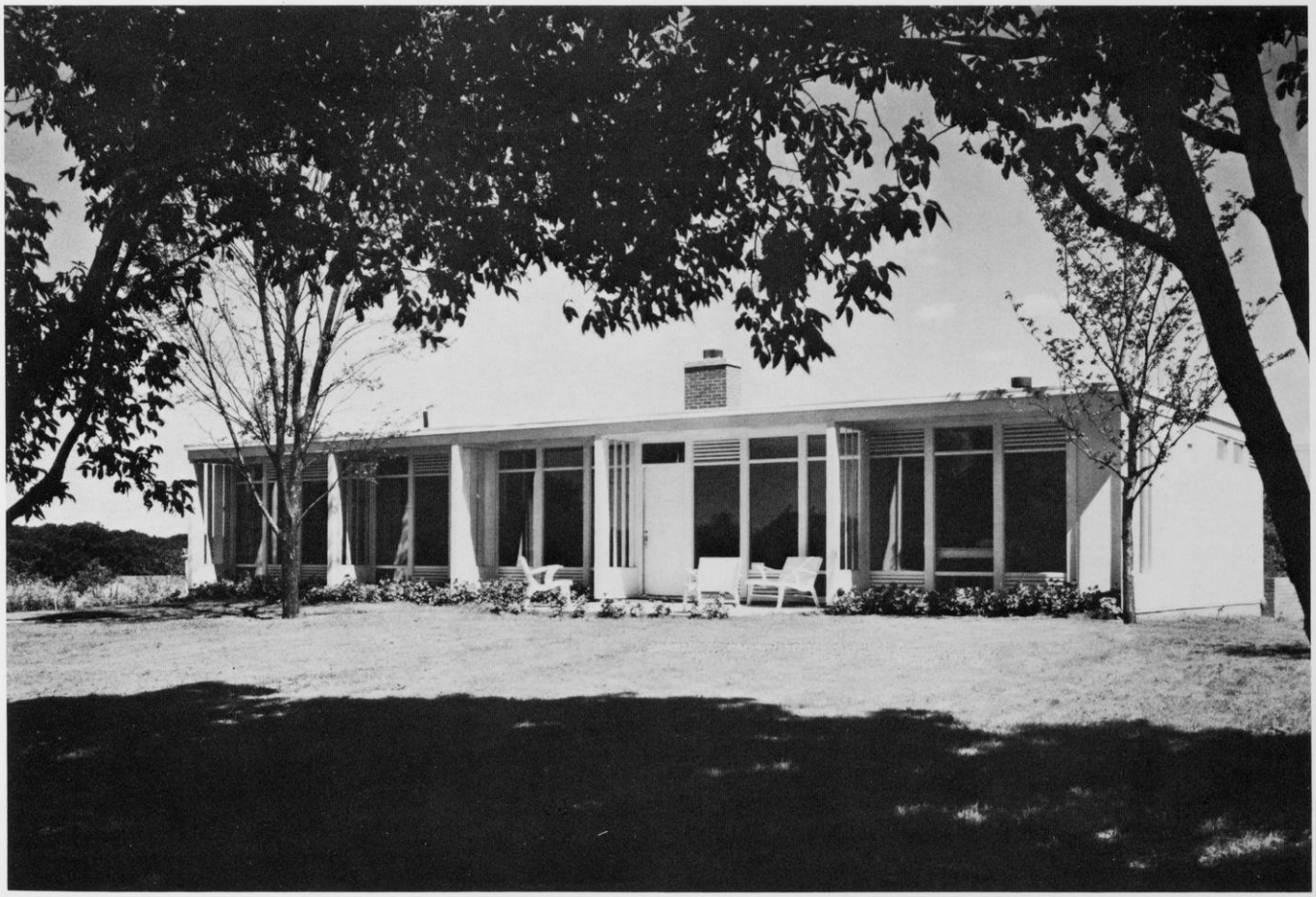
In 1942, while William Keck was in the Navy, his brother Fred approached Edward Green, of the Green Company, Rockford, Illinois (builders of prefabricated panels for War housing and shell boxes). Keck proposed a system of prefabrication that would be more efficient than the one being used by the company which consisted of cumbersome large panels that had to be assembled, part by part, on the site. A priority permission to design the method and build a model sectional house in Rockford was secured from the government. The Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, also cooperated with this project.

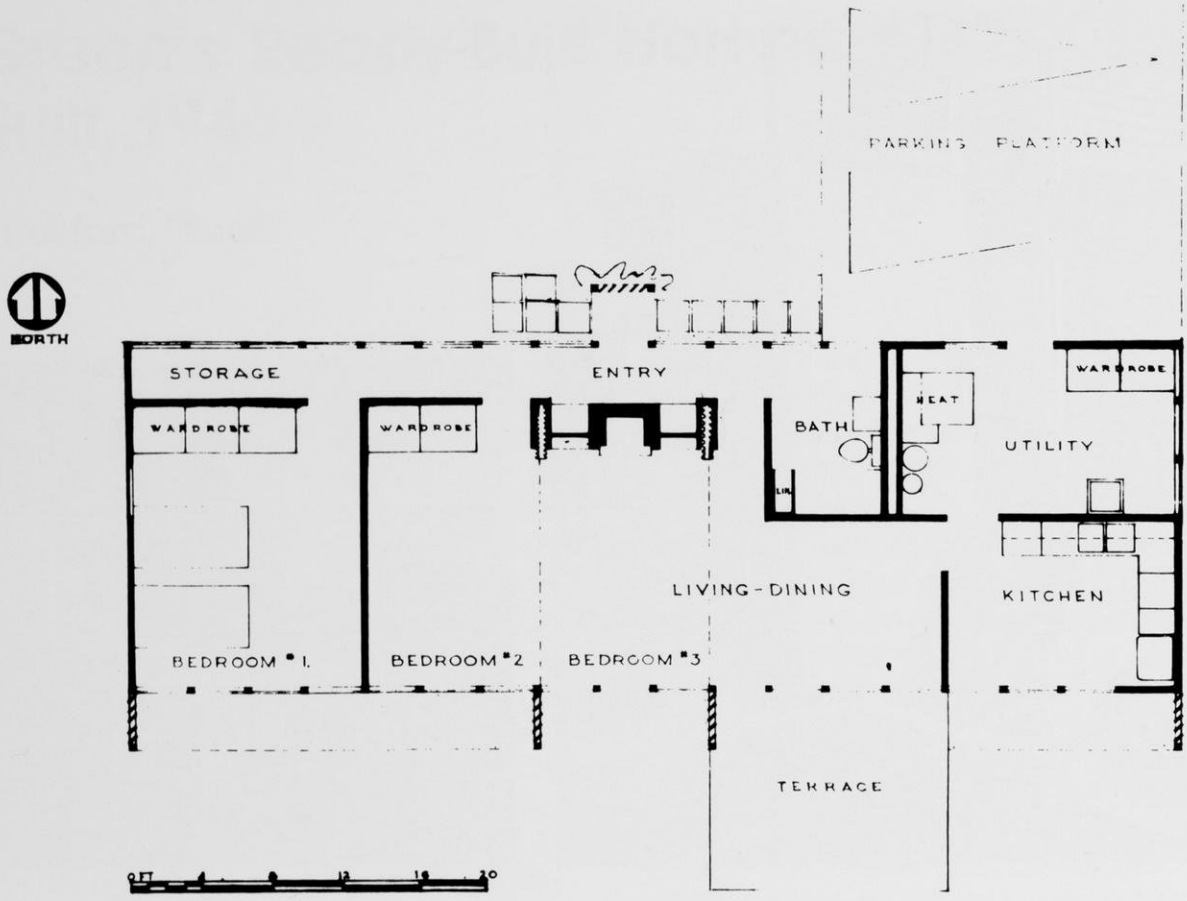
Keck's elements of prefabrication consisted of thirty-nine-inch-wide panels for the interchangeable wall sections, which were eight feet high. Roof sections were of the same width as wall sections, but were twelve feet long. Electronic glue welding of plywood, studs, and roof joists increased the structural strength of the prefinished panels, which could be bolted together on the site to form a house in only eight hours.

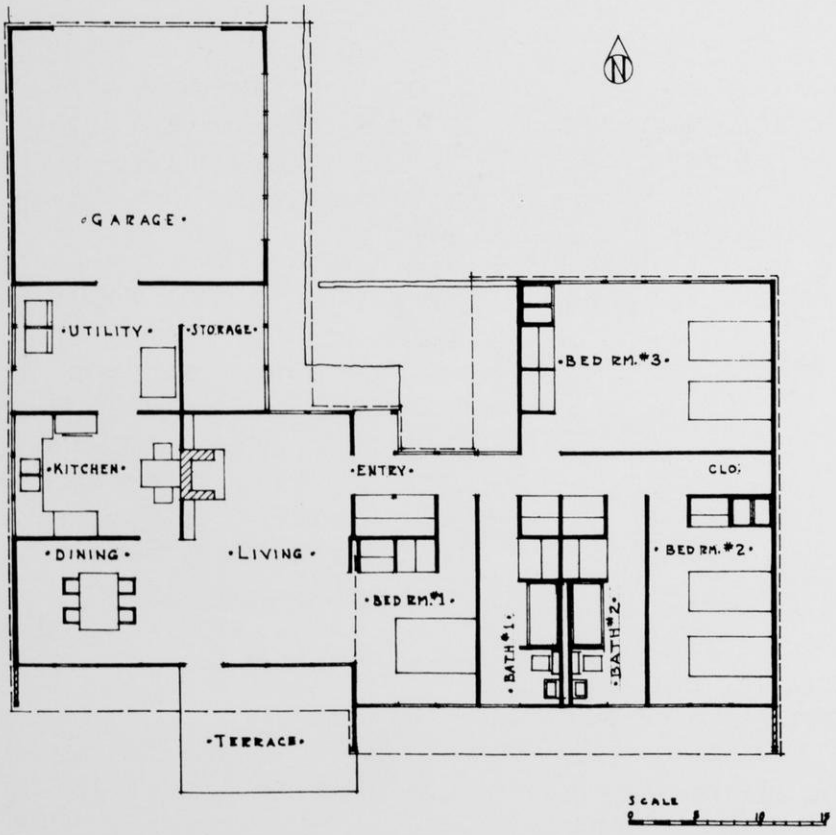
A combination floor and radiant heating system was developed with the aid of the Clay Products Association. Circulating through a closed circuit inside hollow floor tiles, hot air kept the temperature of the floor uniformly warm. Metal was scarce during the War, and ample supplies of clay led to the development of this method of heating.

From 1946 on, hundreds of Green's Ready-Built Homes were erected throughout the Midwest following the design Fred Keck had developed in 1942. Different models were made available, all sharing, naturally, similar characteristics. With flat roofs, south walls of Thermopane and louvered panels, and deep overhangs supported on stud frames acting as exterior buttresses, Green's Ready-Built Homes were not very different in appearance from the Pete Keck House, had it been one-story high. Inside, rational planning made flexible by means of folding panels allowed for an almost Miesian spatial fluidity that created possibilities for decoration hardly available in any other speculative model house in the nation.





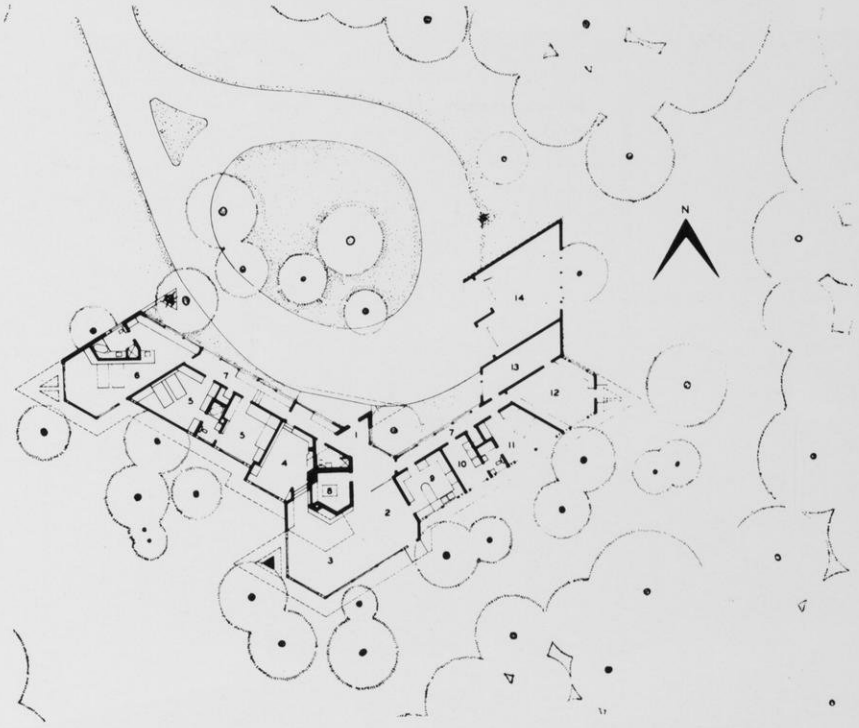




One of many variations

18. Abel Fagen House, 1948

1581 Old Mill Road
Lake Forest, Illinois



This building is one of the first important residential commissions the Kecks received during the post-War period. Its plan follows a distribution of parts similar to that of the Cahn and Kellett houses. To the north there is a circular driveway, the contour of which is more or less reflected by the shape of the building. The vestibule and service corridors are located on this side of the house, and shield from view, as well as from northern exposure, all other rooms, which open to the south through large glass windows protected by eaves. But while the Kellett and Cahn houses paralleled the curve of the road and their interior partitions more or less conformed to that arrangement, in the Fagen House the Kecks used a system of polygons evoking a Wrightian geometry. The use of stone and wood in this house is similar to that of the Buchbinder Residence, and enhances the organic flavor of a mode of expression the Kecks never again used.

The living room of the Fagen Residence is exceptionally attractive. Not only does it have an interesting shape and ceiling, but also, while the Fagens lived in the house, a Calder mobile decorated it and an etched-glass Archipenko screen separated the dining area from the rest of the room. (Archipenko and Fred Keck had been colleagues in the faculty of the Chicago School of Design.)

"A House with 'Emotional Content'; Residence for Mr. and Mrs. Abel E. Fagen, Lake Forest, Illinois." **Architectural Record** 109 (March 1951):105-110.

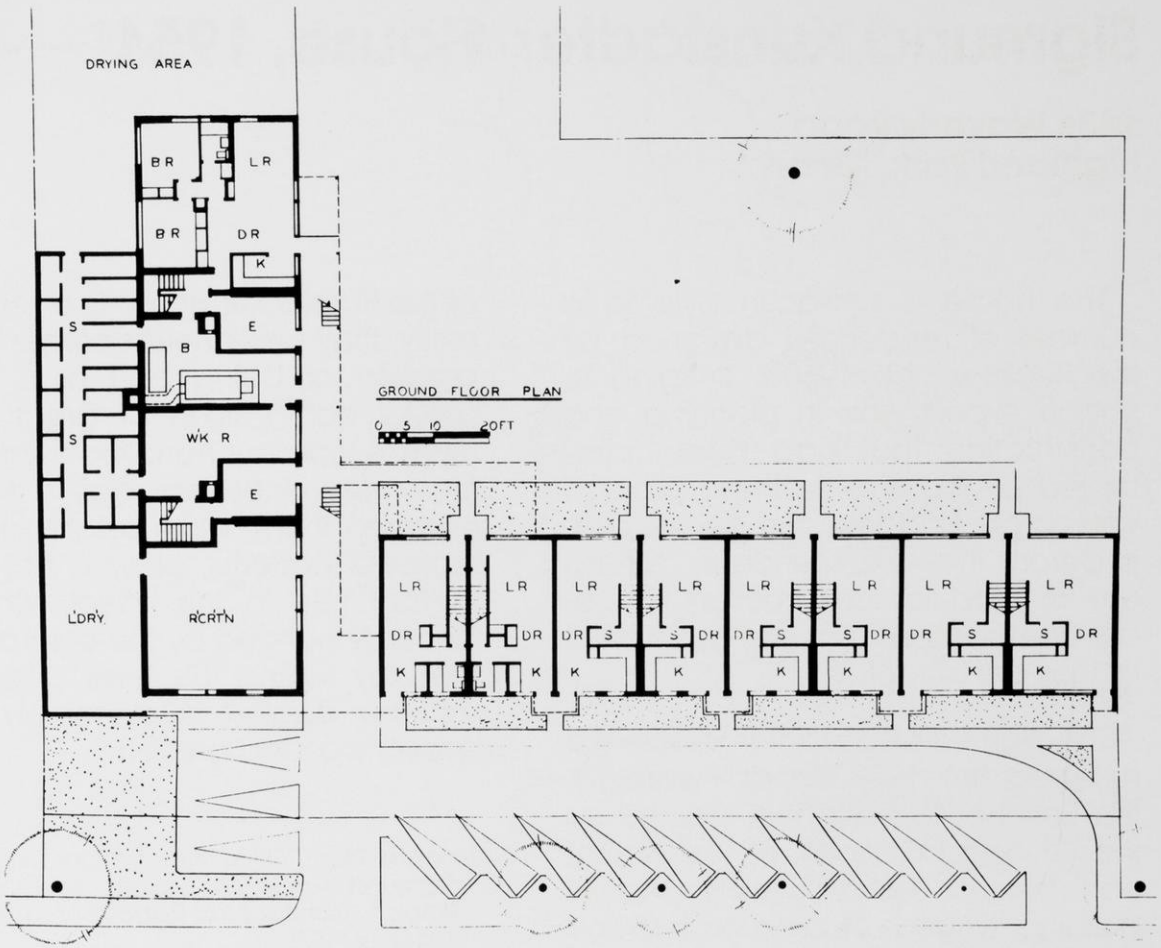
19. Pioneer Co-op Apartments, 1949-1950

5427-37 Dorchester Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

This cooperative enterprise, made up principally of professors from four nearby universities, consists of twenty-three units housed in a four-story and a two-story building completed for $268,000, exclusive of the cost of land and architects' fee. There are efficiency apartments, one- and two-bedroom flats, and two- and three-bedroom two-story units. The design includes such standard Keck and Keck features as radiant heating systems embedded in floors and ceilings, wall-to-wall windows that extend from the ceiling to within eighteen inches off the floor, and overhangs that provide ample sunshine in winter yet shade the living areas in summer. The buildings are supported on a combination concrete frame and load-bearing wall system, interior partitions are two-inch solid plaster, floors are of asphalt tile, and ceilings are painted exposed concrete.

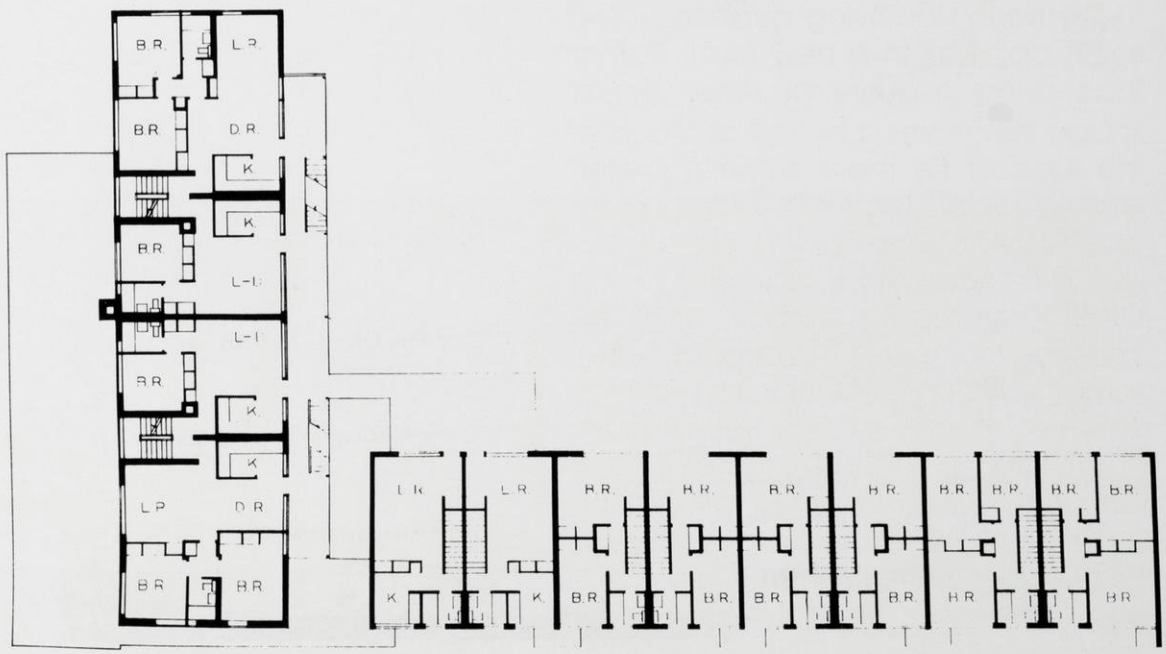
"Chicago Cooperative Has Exterior Corridors." **Architectural Record** 110 (December 1951): 146.

"Chicago: Wide Variety of Apartment Sizes." **Architectural Record** 115 (June 1954): 176-78.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

0 5 10 20FT



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN

0 5 10 20FT

20. Sigmund Kunstadter House, 1951

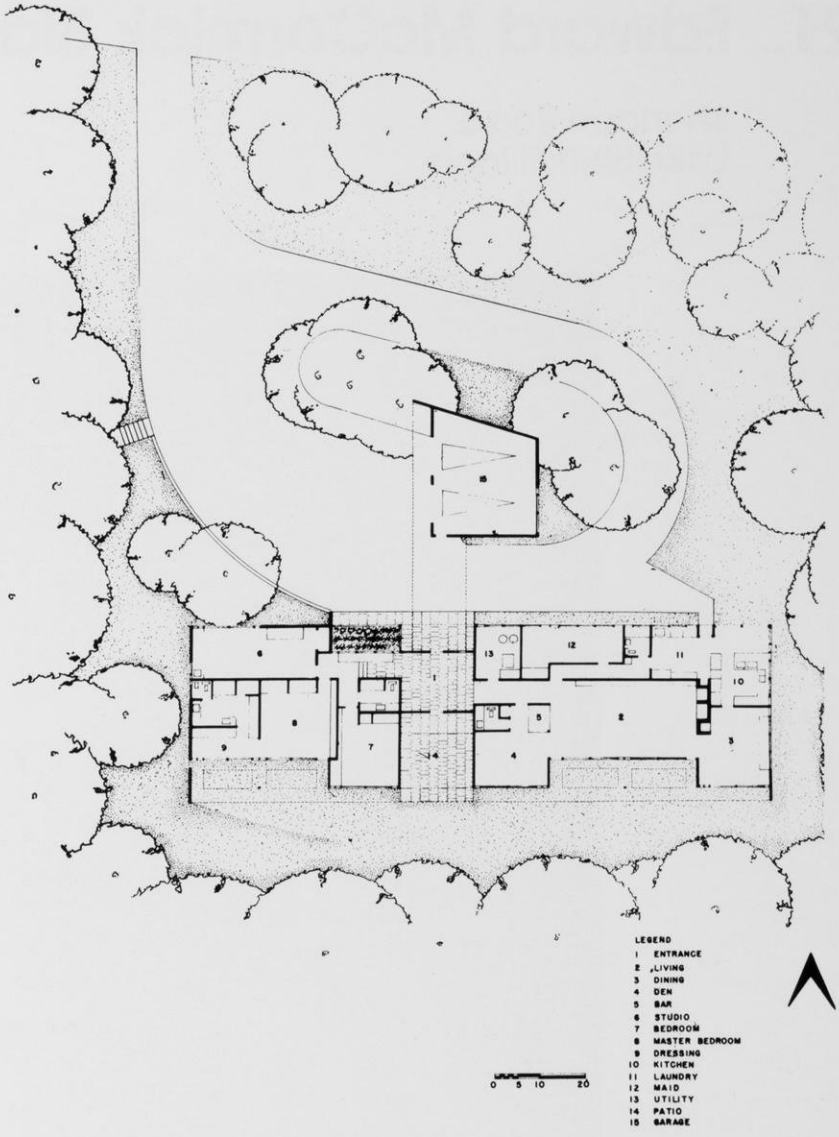
1436 Waverly Road
Highland Park, Illinois

This house is similar in style to a number of residences designed by the Kecks in the 1950's. Bringing to fruition experiments in planning and construction that had been interrupted by the War, in these projects with large budgets, the Kecks profited from their experience in making use of modular construction to create compositions that are as efficient as they are attractive.

The Sigmund Kunstadter Residence received the 1953 Honor Award for the Best House Designed, offered by the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In the building, which is situated on a ravine just off Lake Michigan, the usual Keck and Keck distribution of service areas to the north and living quarters to the south appears in a new form. Rather than using a curve or other similar shape determined by the contours of the land or by mere esthetic preference, the architects allowed a system of modular construction to dictate the use of a rectangular plan. But for the sake of interest (or privacy, as in the case of the master bedroom suite), some rooms are set back from others. Yet the integrity of the rectangular structural form, consisting of eight uniform bays, is maintained by an unbroken fascia on posts which surrounds the house. Where recessions occur, sunlight coming through open spaces between the fascia and the wall highlights the ordered plasticity prevalent throughout the composition.

Although each of the different areas of the Kunstadter House is a separate entity, they nevertheless create an impression of being part of a single spatial composition of great dynamism. A judicious handling of crisp surfaces with lines that define spaces between them, while establishing directional patterns, plays a not unimportant role in this effect, which is further enhanced by the contrast created by setting this terse geometric scheme against a seemingly wild, heavily wooded garden.

"Zonate Plan Yields Amenity in Living: The Sigmund Kunstadter House, Highland Park, Illinois." **Architectural Record** 115 (February 1954):197-201.


LEGEND
1 ENTRANCE
2 LIVING
3 DINING
4 DEN
5 BAR
6 STUDIO
7 BEDROOM
8 MASTER BEDROOM
9 DRESSING
10 KITCHEN
11 LAUNDRY
12 MAID
13 UTILITY
14 PATIO
15 GARAGE
0 5 10 20

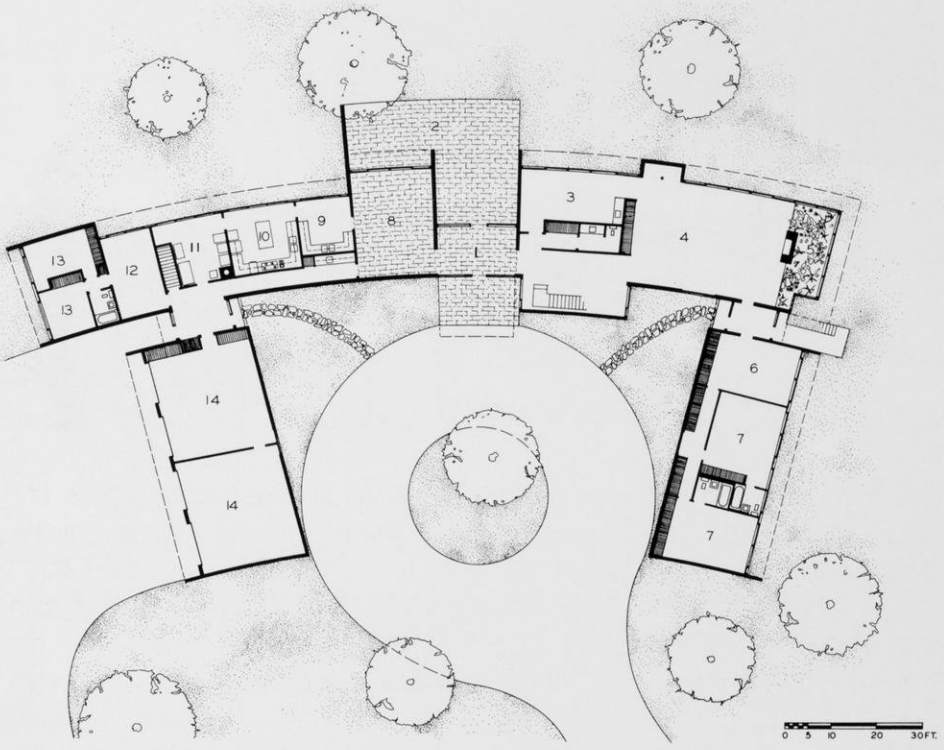
21. Edward McCormick Blair House, 1955

Sheridan Road
Lake Bluff, Illinois

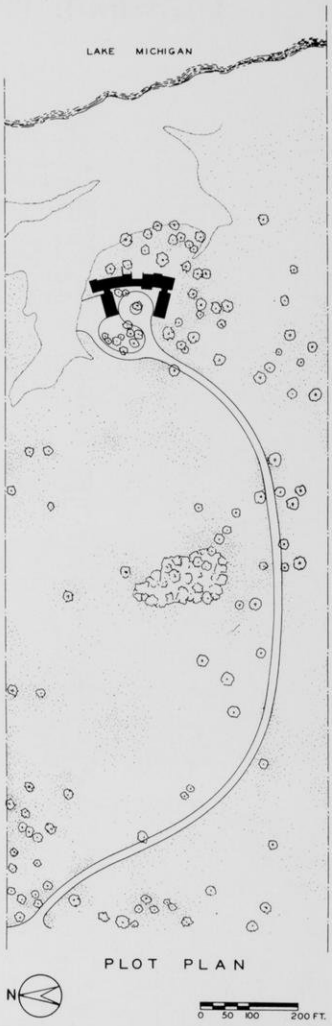
As elegant and as dramatically situated as the Kunstadter House, this residence is located on a large wooded piece of property that includes a bluff, on the west shore of Lake Michigan. Since the view was of great importance, a curved plan fitting the site was chosen, and the main rooms had to face east. Because of the building's orientation, a two-story solarium was provided at the south end, opening into the living room on the ground floor as well as into the master bedroom above it. A free-standing rectangular volume of travertine marble linking the two floors gives the solarium vertical direction, helps define the different areas, and houses fireplaces for the living room and master bedroom. On the upper level, sliding glass doors at each side of the fireplace control both sound and sunlight coming into the room. A pan roof was provided to help cool the house without air conditioning. The precisely laid cream-colored brick wall on the exterior follows a true curve, and not a series of segments.

"A Residence of Exceptional Distinction, Lake Bluff, Illinois." **Architectural Record** 121 (February 1957):183-86.

UPPER LEVEL



LOWER LEVEL



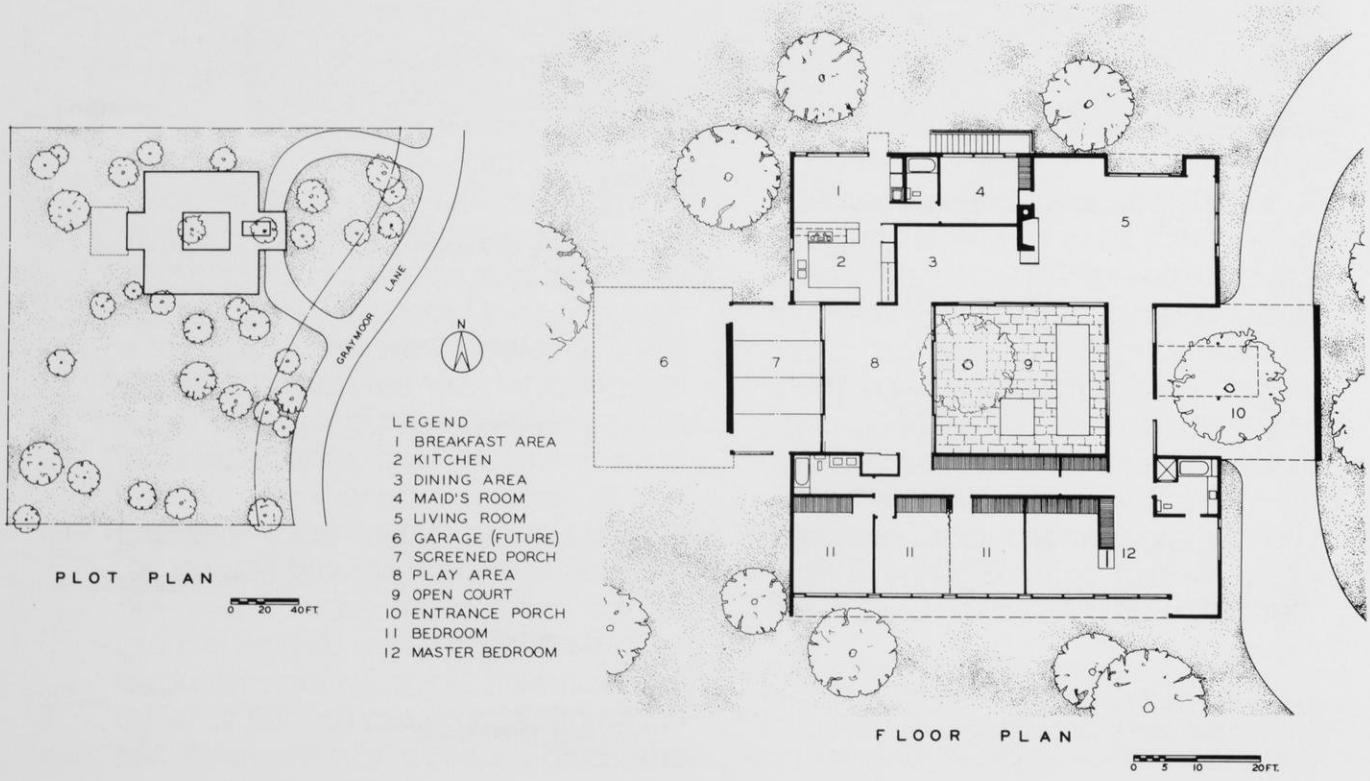
PLOT PLAN

LEGEND
1. ENTRY
2. TERRACE
3. STUDY
4. LIVING ROOM
5. LOWER GARDEN AREA
6. BOYS' LIVING ROOM
7. BOY'S BEDROOM
8. DINING ROOM
9. BUTLER'S PANTRY
10. KITCHEN
11. UTILITY
12. MAIDS' LIVING ROOM
13. MAID'S BEDROOM
14. GARAGE
15. GUEST BEDROOM
16. MASTER BEDROOM
17. UPPER GARDEN

22. Harold Levin House, 1955

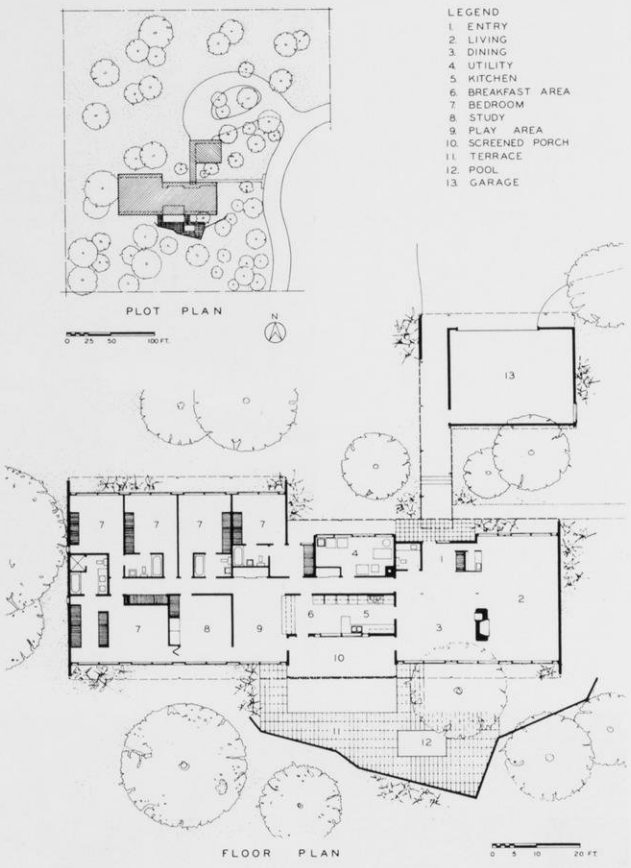
Graymore Lane
Olympia Fields, Illinois

The Levin House has a remarkably open plan developed around a central courtyard of generous proportions onto which open a playroom, dining and living room, and entrance porch. These areas, along with a large screened porch west of the playroom, form what could be considered as a single space subdivided into interconnecting areas by walls and partitions. The effect is one of great spaciousness and transparency. A row of bedrooms is given privacy by a corridor and two banks of closets that act as a sound barrier against the living areas. In typical Keck and Keck manner, the bedrooms open to a southern exposure through glass walls protected by a deep overhang.



23. Walter Gray House, 1958

Graymore Lane
Olympia Fields, Illinois

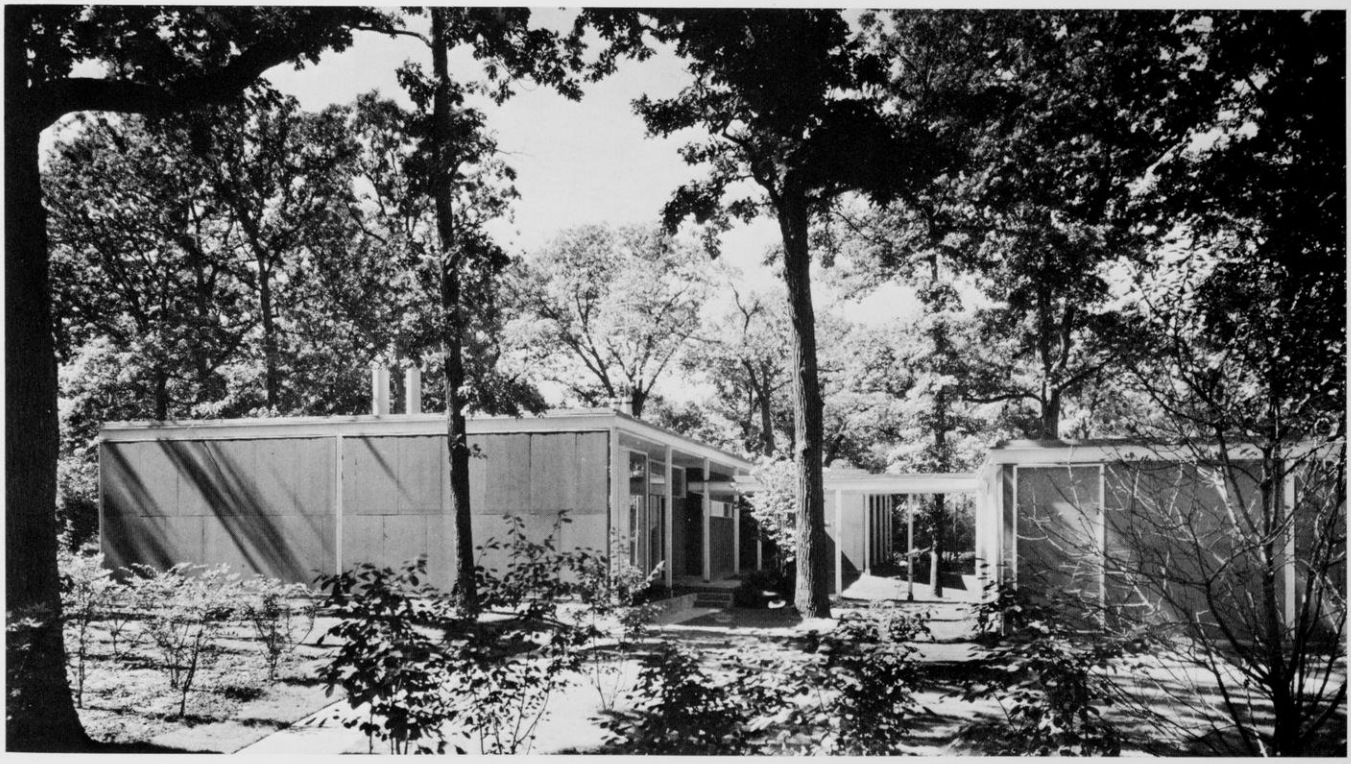


The Gray House represents a further refinement of the style the Kecks first stated in the Kunstadter House. For this project the architects scaled down the system of steel structure and curtain wall then prevalent in high-rise buildings. With great sophistication, the proportions of the usual glass walls and louvered panels the Kecks had been using since the early 1940's were adapted to suggest the rhythm of the system of construction. By so doing, and by painting the exposed steel white and using black slate as the material for fill-in panels, they achieved an effect that is as crisp and delicate as the conception of Japanese architecture current at the time.

Separation of living and bedroom areas to the east and west of the building was achieved by placing the kitchen and utility room at the center of the plan. Profiting from the advantages of modular construction, bathrooms and kitchen were located on the line of a "mechanical core." Radiant heating is produced by hot water coils embedded in the concrete floor slab and in the ceiling.

The Gray Residence was awarded an honorable mention in the Homes for Better Living Competition of 1958.

"Slated: The Curtain Wall." **Architectural Record** 123 (Mid-May 1958):122-27.

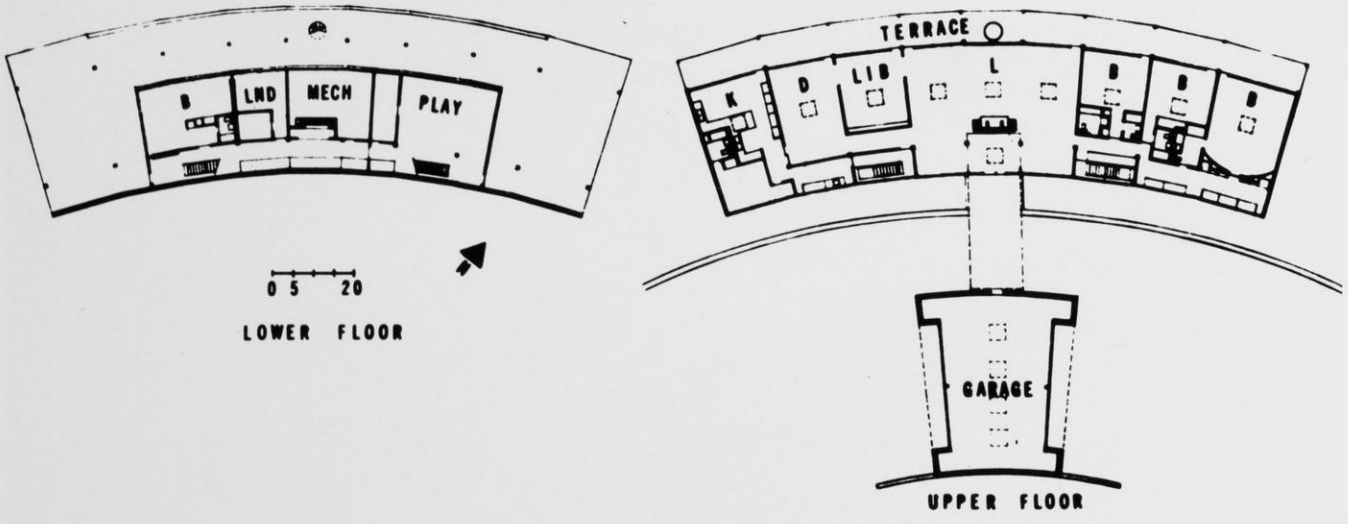


24. Mrs. Frank E. Payne House, 1959

Bucks County, Pennsylvania

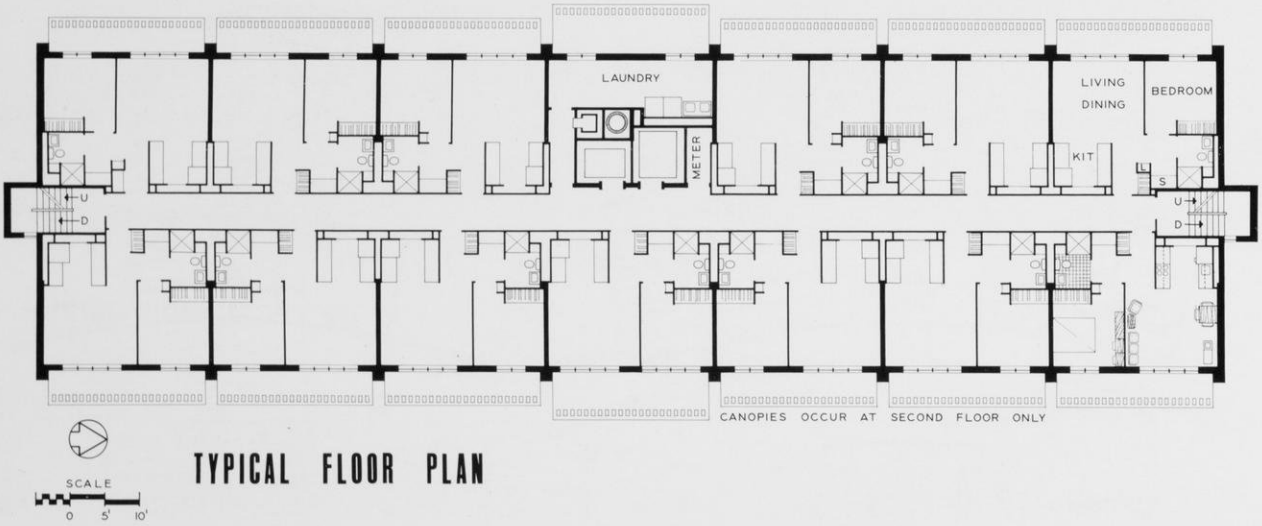
As in the Gray House, for the Payne Residence Keck and Keck used a system of structural steel and slate panels (in this case locally quarried). But while the plan of the Gray House responded to the nature of a flat site, the Payne House is developed on an arc to profit from a superb downhill view of rural Bucks County. Mrs. Payne, a collector of eighteenth-century American furniture, wanted quiet contemporary interiors in which to display her treasures. More formal than in any other plan the Kecks designed in that period, the disposition of rooms fit admirably the needs of the client as well as the architects' conception of the building, which ran to a $225,000 cost.

"Curving House Designed for Sweeping View." **Architectural Record** 131 (Mid-May 1962): 102-05.



25. Chicago Housing Authority Elderly Housing, 1959

Franklin and Drake Streets
Chicago, Illinois

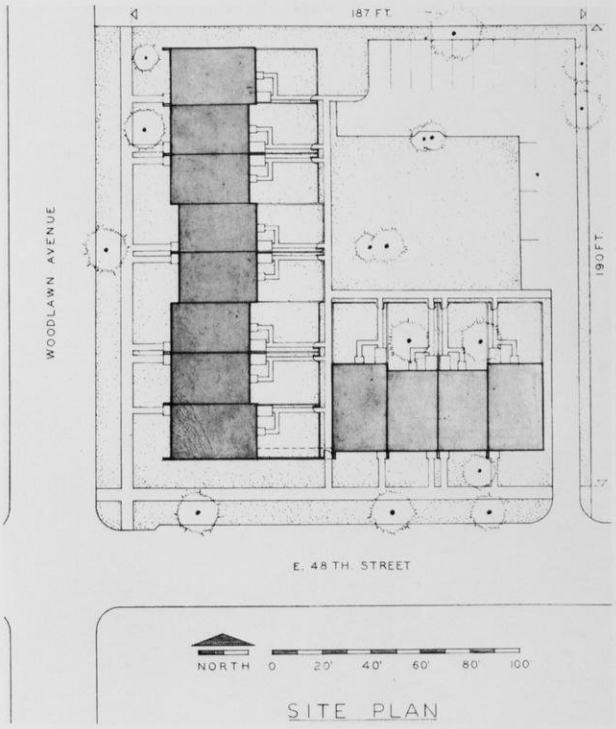


TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN

For this project, consisting of a thirteen-story block, the Chicago Housing Authority received assistance from federal funds. All apartments have the same facilities. Each is provided with a living-dining area with a kitchen to one side, one bedroom, and a bathroom. Eight-inch reinforced concrete-block shear walls between apartments cut down on noise transfer from unit to unit, a function that is similarly fulfilled by a storage area set against the outside corridor wall.

26. Row Houses, 1960-61

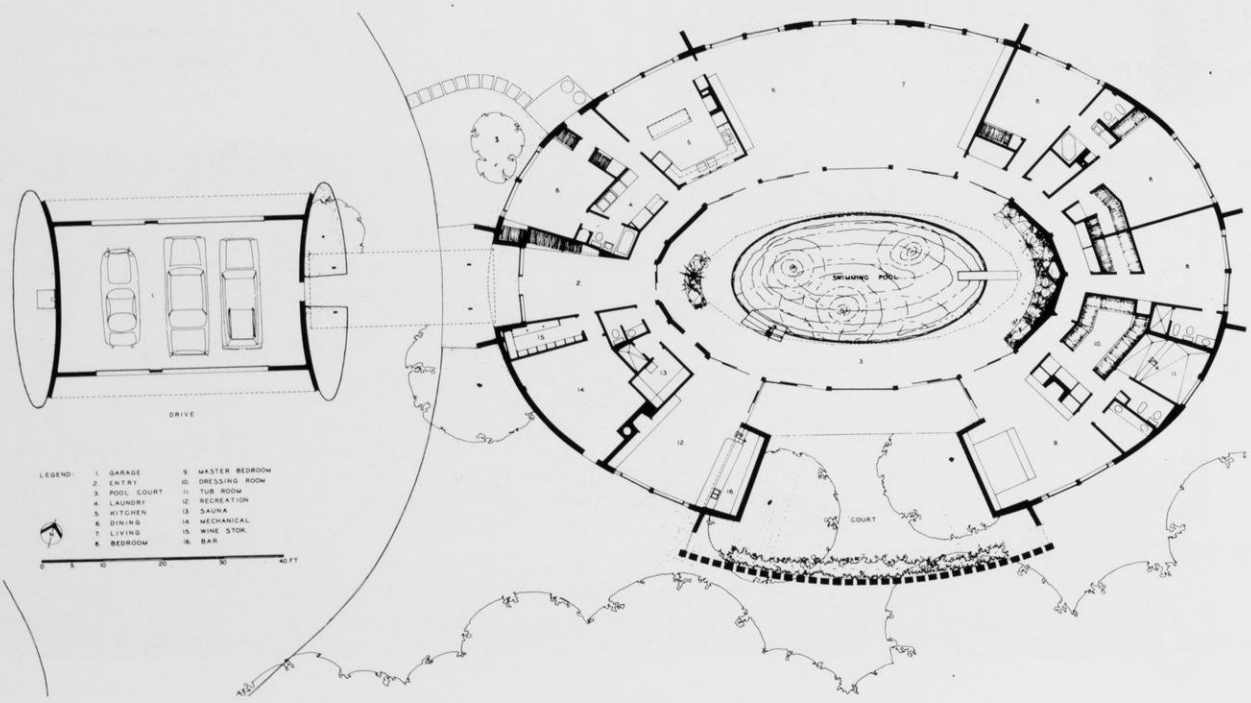
48th Street and Woodlawn Avenue
Chicago, Illinois



This is a housing project designed for the University of Chicago and consisting of two rows of two-story apartments forming an "L" on a corner lot. Brick, glass, and vertical wood siding are some of the materials on a facade that, by displaying a greater amount of movement than do previous compositions, singles out how the taste of the Kecks was moving with that of the times.

27. Norman Weinrib House, 1961-1962

2077 Partridge Lane
Highland Park, Illinois

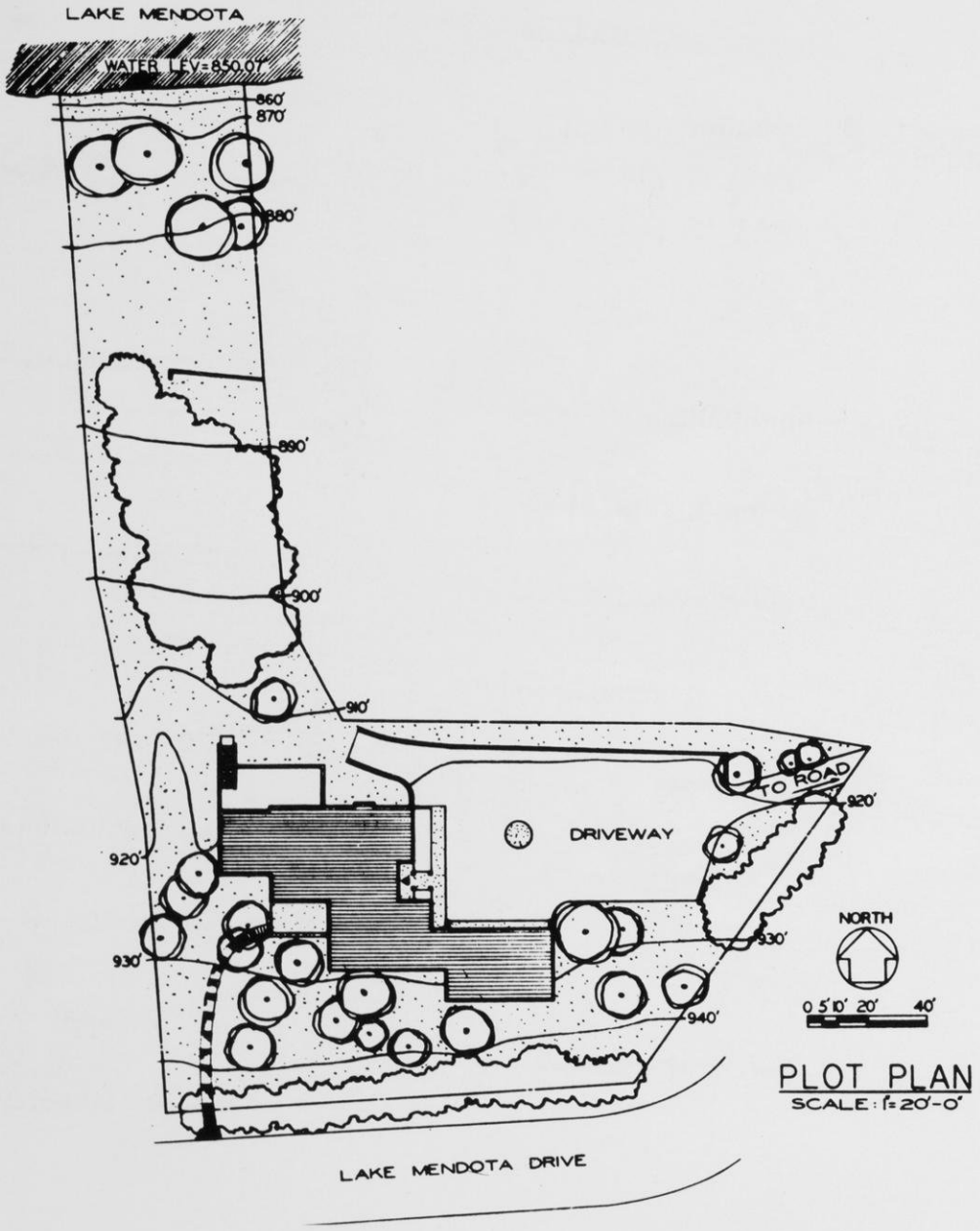


The Weinrib House is built around an elliptical swimming pool over which is a retractable skylight. Exterior walls are of rough, chipped-face brick that masks inevitable irregularities in a wall curving on a small radius. Some of the interior partitions extend beyond the outside wall to serve as buttresses.

"Sliding Roof Gives House Year-Round Use of Patio." **Architectural Record** 137 (February 1965):157-60.

28. W. J. Frautschi House, 1966

3206 Lake Mendota Drive
Madison (Shorewood Hills), Wisconsin

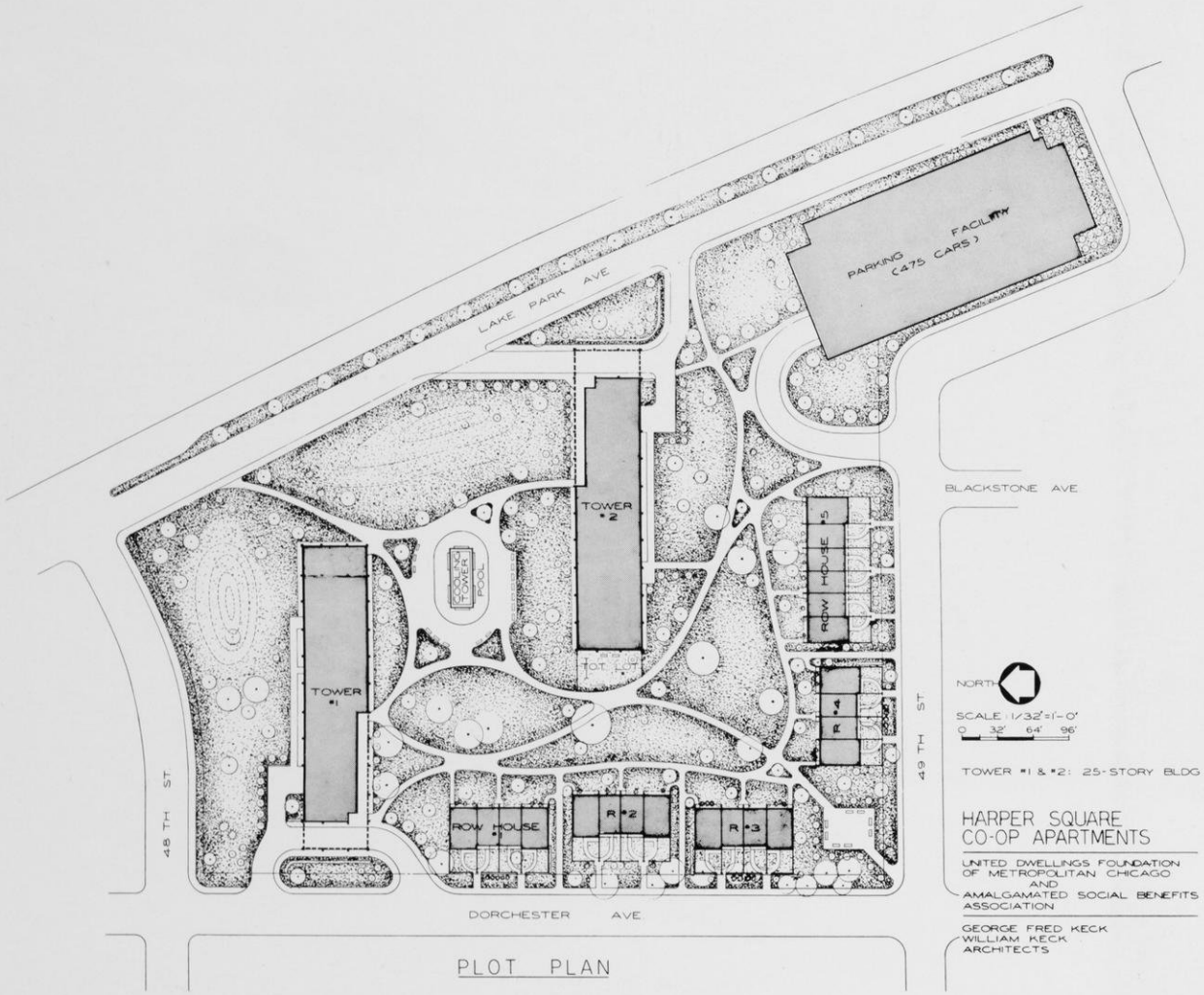


PLOT PLAN
SCALE: 1"=20'-0"

Located at the foot of a bluff, the heavily wooded lot of the Frautschi House eventually drops towards Lake Mendota, to the north. Taking advantage of site conditions, Keck and Keck placed the house on a natural terrace near the south property line, where the side of the bluff insures the building's privacy. This choice also allowed for the largest possible rear garden. The view of the lake, seen from all main rooms, was thus much enhanced.

29. Amalgamated Clothing Workers Apartments (Harper Square), 1970-1971

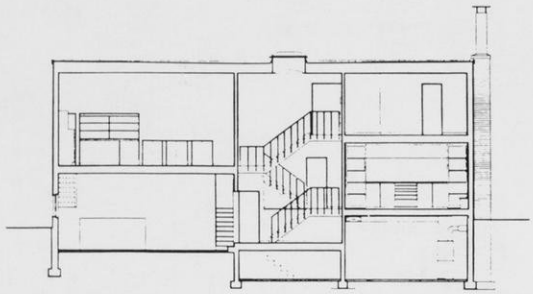
4800 Lake Park Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

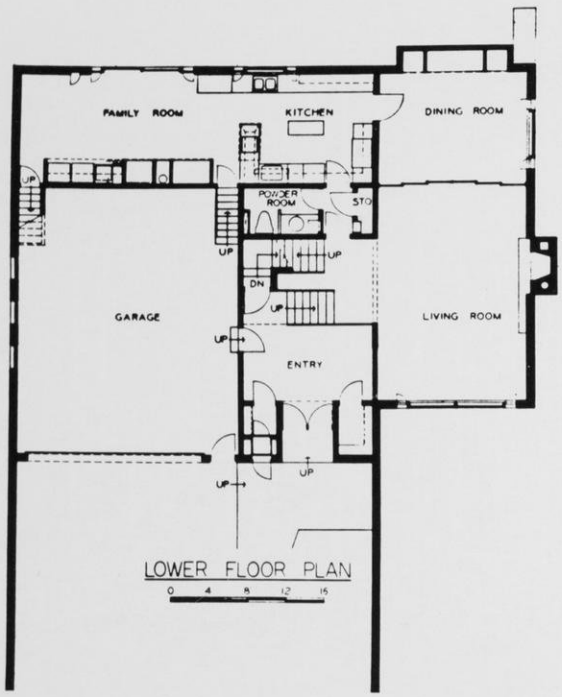


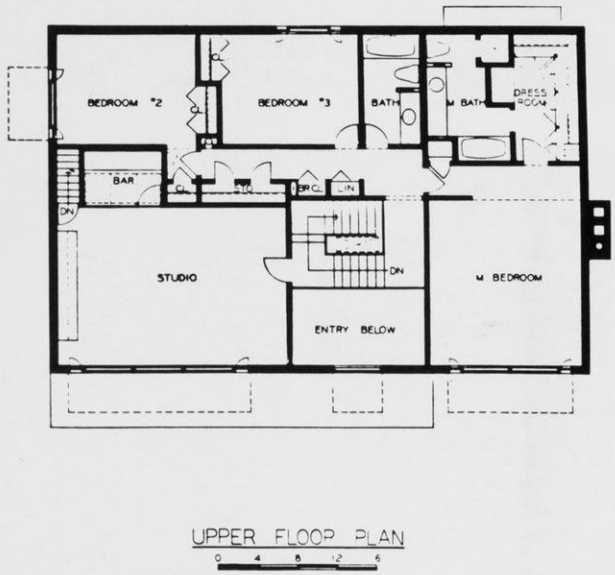
This non-profit cooperative housing project for 591 families is located on a 7.2-acre site in the Hyde Park-Kenwood Urban Renewal Area on the south side of the city. It consists of two twenty-five story buildings of concrete construction, plus five brick row-house buildings containing twenty-two four-bedroom units. The larger units, serving families with a greater number of children, are found close to the ground for ease of access. Each apartment has a living room of fairly large size and an ample kitchen, and some have separate dining rooms. All bedrooms are large enough to accommodate twin beds. Each floor of the towers has a variety of dwelling units, from one-bedroom to three-bedrooms, some of the latter having one and one-half baths. The so-called "fronts" of all the row houses face the park; their rear entrances are on the street sides.

30. Robert Wolf House, 1973

1447 Oak Park Drive
Munster, Indiana







Features on the elevation of the Wolf House, such as vertical brick panels, make it similar in character to the 48th and Woodlawn Apartments. But in the Wolf House, the elements suggesting the dynamic rhythm of the building's interior architecture create a composition of a far greater distinction than they do in the apartments. Because of the nature of the terrain, the house, although giving the impression of being two stories high, is in fact developed on four levels. The first is that of the garage and entry; the second, houses the living-dining areas and the kitchen; a large study (with a much higher than usual ceiling) takes up the third; and the bedrooms occupy the fourth. A centrally located staircase is developed in a well that is as high as the house. This creates an attractive spatial composition that brings clarity and cohesion to a complex organization of spaces that allows for a much larger house than is suggested by its facade.


1447

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