

# Progressive Architecture

April 1964



# Return to grace

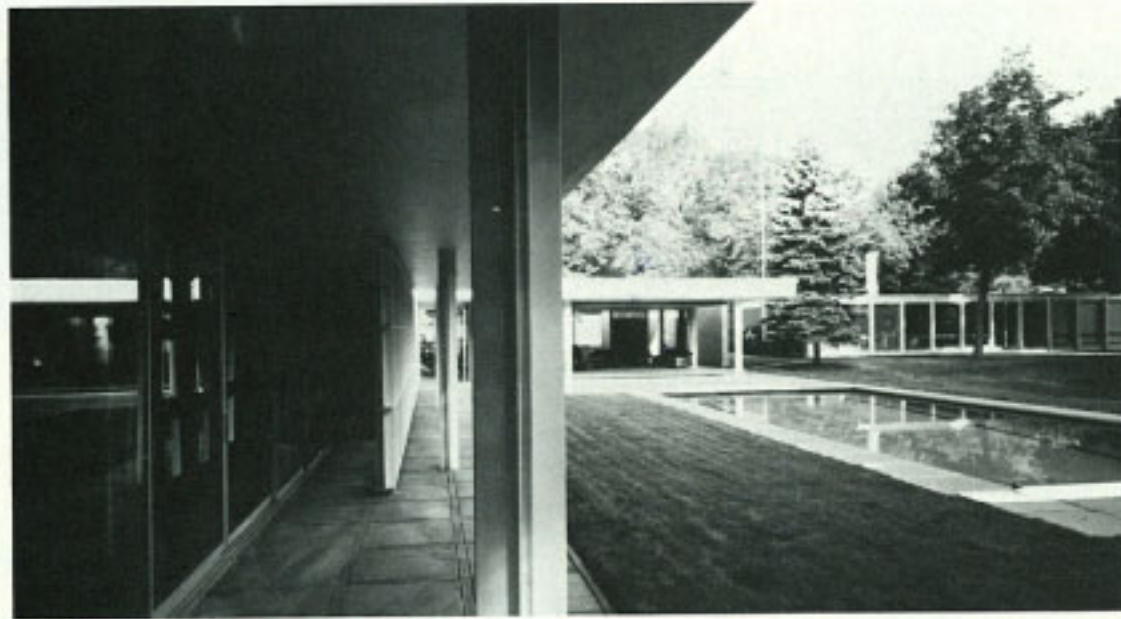
*Given a current professional bias toward International Style unthink, a return to exquisite detail and classic formal siting by Peter Gluck forms a basis for revisiting the Bauhaus.*

It was that kind of classic design problem we all thought only our design professors fiendish enough to devise. All that would be required to strike terror and paralysis into the heart of a prospective architect/designer is the imperative "Add to an existing house by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe." The rest of the program could say just about anything; God has left the details for later.

Originally designed in 1955, the house in lower Connecticut was built for the brother of Mies's client for the renowned Lake Shore Drive apartments. Its fenestration and glazing echo those apartment towers and, in fact, the house even used materials left over from the Chicago projects. This was a forgotten Mies, however, having been in quiet repose on its six-acre river-edged site between the 1950s and 1981 (it was not generally known that a Mies building existed in Connecticut). In 1981 new owners surfaced, with the house, in order to obtain zoning variances for a proposal by their architect, Peter Gluck.

So the challenge to Gluck was clear: increase the living space to more than double, but respect the venerable 1955 design statement of an acknowledged master. The obvious inner goal of any architect in this position is to be deferential without simply copying, to bequeath the new with required respect without becoming enslaved. It seemed clear that the existing house should not be physically affixed to the additions. It seemed just as clear that the Miesian grid and attention to every detail would be among the imperatives.

In broadest terms, Gluck proposed to add two pavilions, one for entertainment/food preparation and one for guest/bathing/sauna facilities. Thus the two variances were sought from zoning officials, waiving setback regulations and permitting a single residence comprising more than one building. Because the clients' representatives proposed this route to avoid compromising a significant self-contained architectural object, the granting of the variances is a seminal decision in acknowledg-



*"Outside" the screen wall, the north guest bedroom is oriented away from the pool (above), while the south one and the entertaining pavilion focus on it (above right). Original Mies house (far right, this page, and inset, facing page) completes the complex.*

While the original house was a pristine example of Miesian clarity—even a two-bay later addition stuck to the rigorous aesthetic—it wasn't livable, within the new owners' definition. Gluck, therefore, was asked to provide an entertainment space, a pool, and guest quarters; the total of the additions would exceed the area of the original. The client wanted not so much a homey comfort as space for entertaining and perhaps business conferences away from Manhattan.

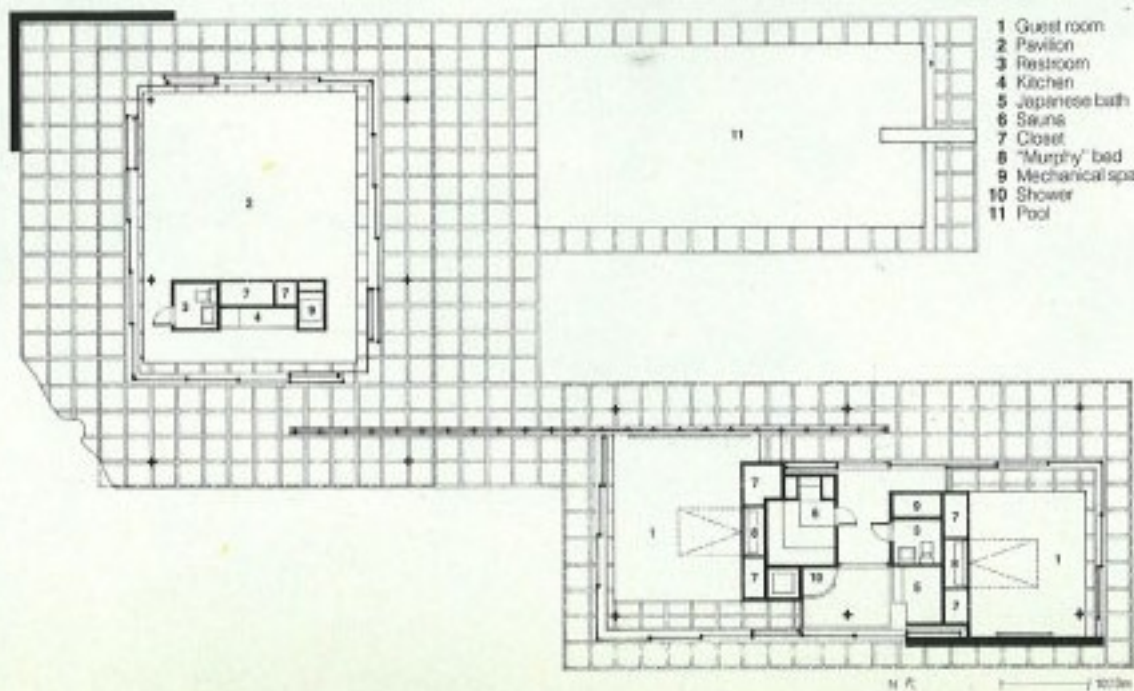
ing hardship with respect to architectural importance.

From a slightly closer viewpoint, the importance in Mies's work of the 1929 Barcelona Pavilion was not lost on Gluck either. In many respects, this Connecticut complex is the Barcelona Pavilion, with clear references in the





- 1 Existing Mies van der Rohe house
- 2 Pavilion
- 3 Guest house
- 4 Pool



- 1 Guest room
- 2 Pavilion
- 3 Restroom
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Japanese bath
- 6 Sauna
- 7 Closet
- 8 "Murphy" bed
- 9 Mechanical space
- 10 Shower
- 11 Pool



Photos: Paul Warchol

With all sliding sash stacked in an open position (left and bottom photos) the entertainment pavilion becomes an extension of the site, or vice versa. Detailing of the tracks, columns, and floor/ceiling planes assumes heightened importance, while those elements imply an easily crossed boundary. Sculptural steel screen wall goes from disengaged and open to engaged and glazed (right to left, facing page) as it becomes part of the

exterior wall of the larger guest bedroom. Part of the central bathing area (below) is devoted to a shower enclosed in a curved acrylic screen and a recessed stepped Japanese bath, both with views out to the site.



guest pavilion and the pool location. But Gluck, having lived in Japan for two years recently, began to notice the linkage between traditional Japanese and Miesian inspiration as it concerns structural and spatial refinement—including the flexibility of the latter.

Deity must, therefore, return in the details. Not the least of these are the two planar design decisions which strongly pull Mies to Japanese. Creating an edge condition both top and bottom, Gluck has dropped the ceiling and raised the floor, giving the sense of a place-within-a-space inside and separate from the floor-to-soffit glass. This seemingly simple ploy is very effective in clearly defining living space within the transparent envelope.

Another self-evident but brilliantly executed design element brings us from shoji to sliding sash. In a major way, the very large movable glass doors combine with the platforms to create Japanese tea houses; options are nearly complete openness—closed but transparent, or open but screened. The doors

Southern Connecticut.

**Architect:** Peter L. Gluck & Associates (Kent Larson, associate in charge; Peter L. Gluck, Kent Larson, and Louis Turpin, design team; Richard Allen Heinrich, sculptor, steel screen).

**Site:** six acres bounded by a river; rural, with stone walls, and slightly sloping toward the flood plain of the river.

shower, whirlpool, and sauna facilities; provide two guest bedrooms, and an entertainment pavilion with food preparation area.

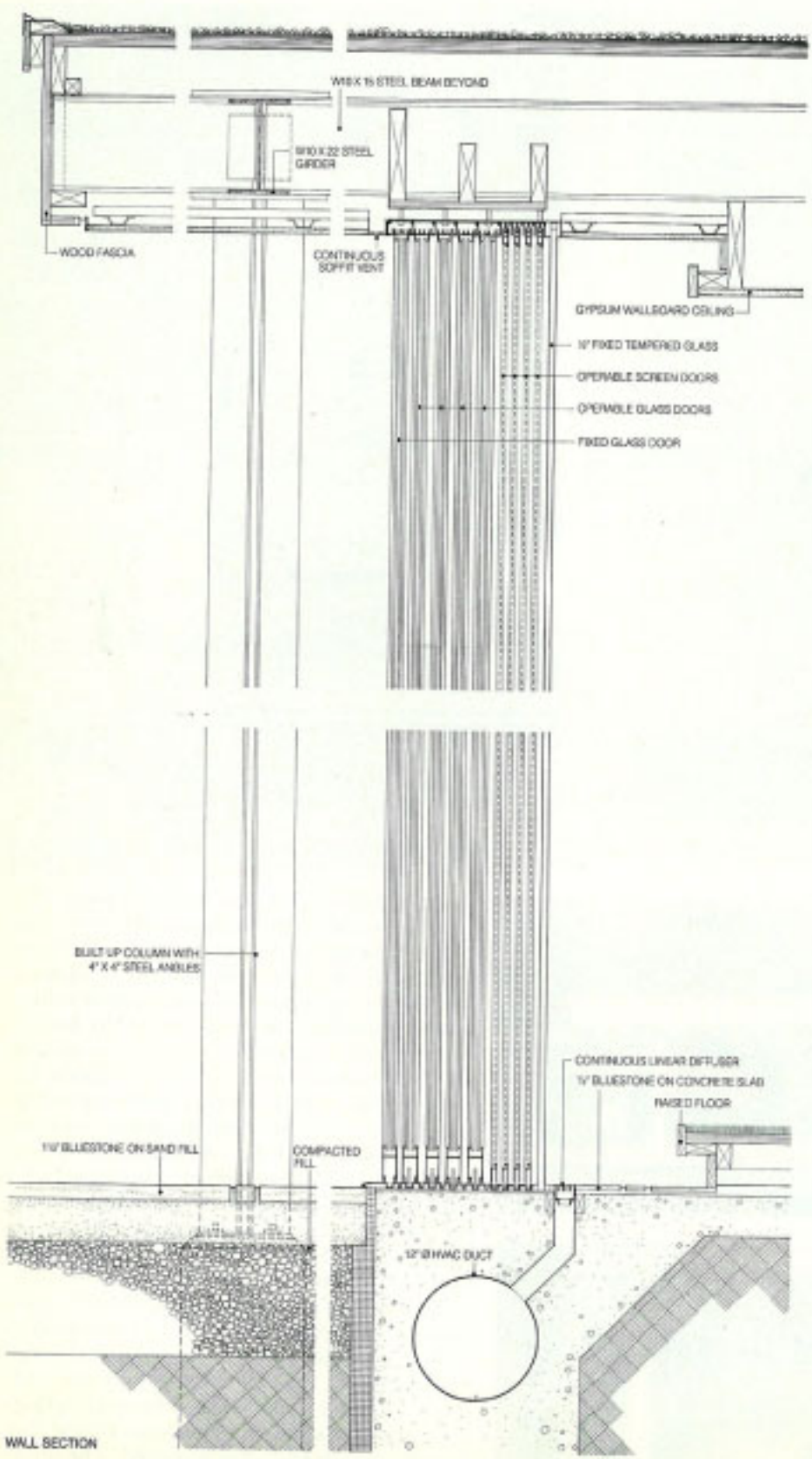
**Structural system:** steel frame roof with cantilever steel columns bolted to concrete foundation; concrete slab on grade with concrete grade beams.

**Major materials:** steel frame, glass walls, oak cabinetry, ceramic tile and carpet floors, bluestone pavers (see

**Mechanical system:** gas-fired forced-air with air conditioning.

**Consultants:** Vreeland & Guerierno, landscape; DeSimone, Chaplin & Associates, structural; Thomas A. Polise, mechanical.

**Photography:** Henry Bowles, Courtesy House & Garden Magazine, © 1984 by Conde Nast Publications Inc., except as noted.



and tracks—some of the largest built by their manufacturer—generated 42 sheets of shop drawings. Needless to say, absolute structural rigidity is essential to the effortless telescoping of these planes. When everything is stacked in the open position, the multiple glass and screen layers create an illusion of a semisolid panel with a dramatic moiré overlay.

A gridded steel screen (executed in conjunction with sculptor Richard Allen Heinrich) links the pavilions visually and engages one wall of the largest guest bedroom. Here the vertical grid is glazed and wood trimmed inside, to harmonize with the other cabinetry—including panel-hidden pull-down beds.

By becoming the general contractor himself, Gluck was able to keep admirable control over the myriad details required to "out-Mies Mies." The overall complex is compelling, even stunning. But beyond that it arrives, again, at a sense of correctness and serenity—in our "beyond Modernism" era, a large accomplishment indeed. [Jim Murphy]