



**THE MODERN IMPULSE:
PETER L. GLUCK AND PARTNERS, ARCHITECTURE**

The Modern Impulse is a book about modern architecture – a book about buildings conceived and constructed from the perspective of what their award-winning architect, Peter L. Gluck, defines as "the modern impulse."

Committed to the principled practice of modernism, Gluck began his career at Yale in the 1960s. For more than forty years he has continued to develop, refine, and insist on the best, and boldest, of modernist design.

Believing that "the construction of a building is the equivalent of a musical performance, which is in fact what makes it real," Gluck leads a practice that controls everything from the initial design conception through the construction process to the landscaping.

A rich array of over 1500 photographs and 100 pages of drawings present scores of Gluck's projects – from small houses to large schools – in such a way that they can be fully understood, both aesthetically and in terms of the evolution of his architectural thought.

A provocative and beautiful book for architects and designers, for clients and enthusiasts – for all who believe that architecture truly matters.

Hardcover, 680 pages
ORO Editions (October 1, 2008)

Sold at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

BOOK REVIEW OF THE MODERN IMPULSE IN *CONSTRUCTS* SPRING 2009



The Modern Impulse

Peter L. Gluck and Partners
ORO Editions, 2008, pp. 679

Time to sober up, friends. The physical dimensions of Peter L. Gluck and Partner's new book alone seem to mandate preparedness and responsibility. I cannot help but recall an equally heavy proposition—now fourteen years old—*S,M,L,XL*. Nearly identical in their bulky physical dimension, these two volumes represent equally productive philosophical camps of excess or restraint like opposing magnets. Indeed, they make a good pair: Rem's entropic but all-consuming overload of representation versus Gluck's rigorous path of structured responsibility. Confronting them, I'm not sure whether to be terrified, simply intimidated, or ashamed. In reading Gluck's book, it is the first time I've felt guilty for skipping ahead while perusing a monograph.

The Modern Impulse is a hefty but well-tailored book. It is strikingly earnest and precise in its construction at every level. Gluck lays out a philosophy for his work that is not revolutionary in content but is unusual in its pursuit of a singular mission. It is a representation that, at least in these well-worked pages, comes across as an authentic portrayal of an architect searching for the truth. One can question Gluck's didactic approach but not his impressive and genuine belief in himself. There is a sensitive exposure of a whole personality here—a rare quality for an architectural publication.

After opening comments by Gluck and critic Joseph Giovannini, the book follows a somewhat unexpected but entirely rational structure whereby project photos are separated from their drawn representations. Beginning with a comprehensive review of projects since Gluck's graduation from Yale, in 1965, the bulk is taken up by images of seventeen mostly rural residential projects (three are notably public), followed by corresponding presentation sketches and models; one case study of the construction processes included beautifully reproduced working drawings. The narrative is then rounded out

with a section on current work in the office, which is delightfully indeterminate and raw, especially relative to the tight choreography of the preceding pages.

Outside of the large chapter of project photos—about 180 spreads, all highly composed and notably unpopulated—there are some valuable minor works that exhibit a genuinely impulsive mode of production. Gluck's 1960s beach houses, recognized by critics at the time, are fresh and unself-conscious. A 1975 study project on Tokyo's Shinjuku Station contains some impressively delirious plan drawings, sadly reproduced only in thumbnail sizes. The late chapters on process and construction also provide some relief from the compositional march of the project photos, adding depth and cohesion to the work. This makes up for an absence of diagramming but is consistent with Gluck's tendency toward a self-evident representation of the whole.

This wholeness, and the corresponding tendency to follow through, is the theme of the book and no doubt reflects the commitment to completion of Gluck's practice itself. Acting as construction manager for nearly all his projects, the architect controls the entire process, from idea to final product. The orderliness of this working method lends itself to a precisely managed publication that is succinctly conceived, detailed, and executed as yet another built work. The accompanying text is similarly explicit, offering complete narrative disclosure without need for interpretation.

The Modern Impulse is more crafted than impulsive, and amid such complete execution one is hard-pressed to locate the artistic struggle. But Gluck makes a concerted effort to point out that this is an evolving process, an act of becoming, strained by the contradictory criteria of use, structure, context, and social effect. A building with maximum overlap between these four attributes, Gluck maintains, is a kind of

unattainably perfect platonic ideal. His iterative search for a better balance is the impulse referred to in the title. Gluck articulates the universal responsibilities of the profession without mandating a method. The challenge for us all is how to pick battles from within the mix and define concepts such as structural efficiency and social responsibility.

Gluck's narrative defends the relevance of the work and positions its Modern aesthetic in an evolving contemporary process. But what really stands out in these pages is a personal obsession and genuine loyalty to original design intent. Gluck's work appears to be uniquely not post-justified. *The Modern Impulse* is a counterpoint to the unrestrained representational bonanza of recent years, a return to integrity delivered in earnest, and this alone is a great refreshing discovery.

By the end of the book, as layers of information are added to each project, I found myself wanting more. The documentation of process and construction gives a sense of the breadth of diligent and increasingly informed work taking place in Gluck's office. But these pages are fleeting and beg an extraordinary question: is this book big enough? Part of me wishes for many more volumes—an encyclopedic collection of all Gluck's hard-fought buildable details. But the real lesson here is that it's best to learn the hard way, in the field.

—Jonathan Toews

Toews (Yale College '98, '03) is a design associate with SHoP Architects, in New York.

17 In response to the overwhelming need for affordable housing in Aspen, we partnered with the City of Aspen to build a complex of 14 units for working families who previously could not afford to live close to their workplace. Subsidized by the City, we acted as developer, architect and construction manager and delivered it "turn key" to the municipality. As part of the planning process, an open space parcel was created linking together the many public trails surrounding the site.

We were able to convert a brown-field site, previously seen as unusable because of its steep elevation and presence of mine waste rock, into a multifaceted solution to the City of Aspen's need for affordable housing.

A unique housing solution, this complex is a riff on the traditional courtyard scheme. It redefines and expands what is typically a formulaic architectural typology. A skewed geometry allows the building to conform to the streetscape in front and the natural contours and vegetation of the slope above. The project steps up the hill, providing covered parking that is only partially visible from the street. Three angled 'slots' slice through the courtyard block breaking it into an interconnected series of volumes. The 'slots' provide internal circulation and a physical and visual connection to the mountains.

A series of 2nd floor walkways and playful bridges provide multiple connections to the units, public trails and city sidewalks. Multiple circulation routes enhance fire safety and provide privacy by insuring that most units are accessed without passing neighboring apartments. A special wall system combines high performance glass with colorful insulated panels.

An efficient centralized mechanical system, low VOC paints, recycled content carpets, and laminates that did not require finishing resulted in a building that far exceeded the strict sustainability code of the City of Aspen which is based on LEED formulas.



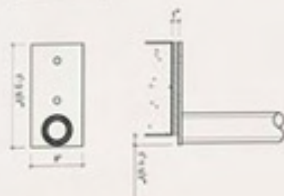
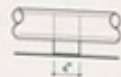
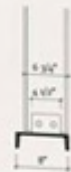
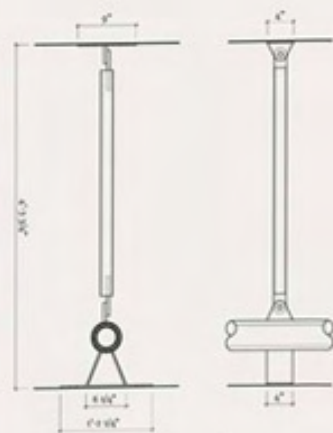




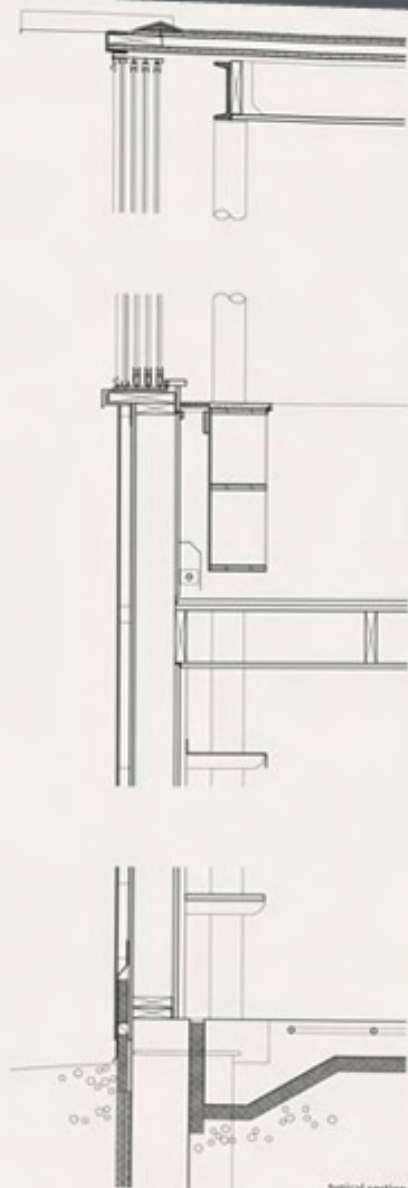
roof edge detail



section looking east



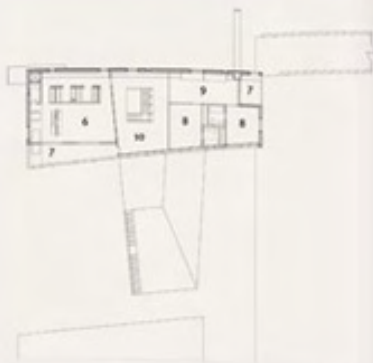
steel details



typical section



first floor plan

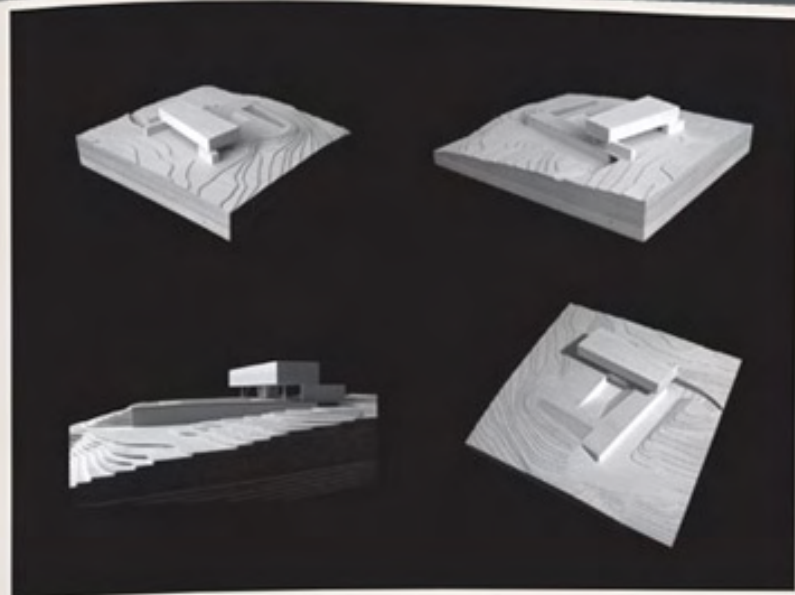


second floor plan



lower floor plan

- 1 living
- 2 kitchen
- 3 dining
- 4 sunken courtyard
- 5 pool
- 6 master bedroom
- 7 terrace
- 8 children's bedroom
- 9 play area
- 10 sitting area
- 11 guest bedroom
- 12 prep kitchen
- 13 entry
- 14 gallery
- 15 media
- 16 sauna
- 17 office
- 18 garage
- 19 driveway
- 20 pool above



model views



early design sketches

site

To retain the rural feeling of the native Texas landscape evoked by the live-oak grove and also frame the view of the modern urban skyline in the distance, the house is split into parts that either float above or are buried below the ground. The preservation of the elegance of the site with its unusual combination of city and country determined the form of the house.



01.2000

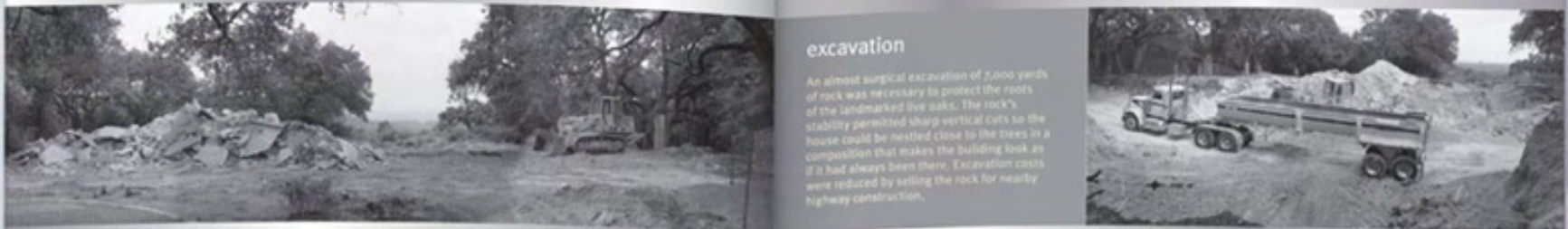


demolition

After the initial design and construction documents, we oversaw the careful demolition of the existing house and pool, followed by adjustments to the position and dimensions of the new house that could only be made once the site was cleared. These changes, though burdensome at an advanced stage of the design, made it possible to preserve the sensitive nature of the site.



08.2002



excavation

An almost surgical excavation of 3,000 yards of rock was necessary to protect the roots of the landmarked live oaks. The rock's stability permitted sharp vertical cuts so the house could be nestled close to the trees in a composition that makes the building look as if it had always been there. Excavation costs were reduced by setting the rock for nearby highway construction.



09.2002



07.2003

framing

Metal stud walls increase stability and minimize movement, and also help to prevent mold and rot in the extremely humid climate.



08.2003



09.2003



drywall

Gypsum board was installed with two overlapping layers skin-coated for a smooth finish that was as elegant as plaster but far cheaper and easier to maintain.



05.2004



06.2004



09.2004



sheathing

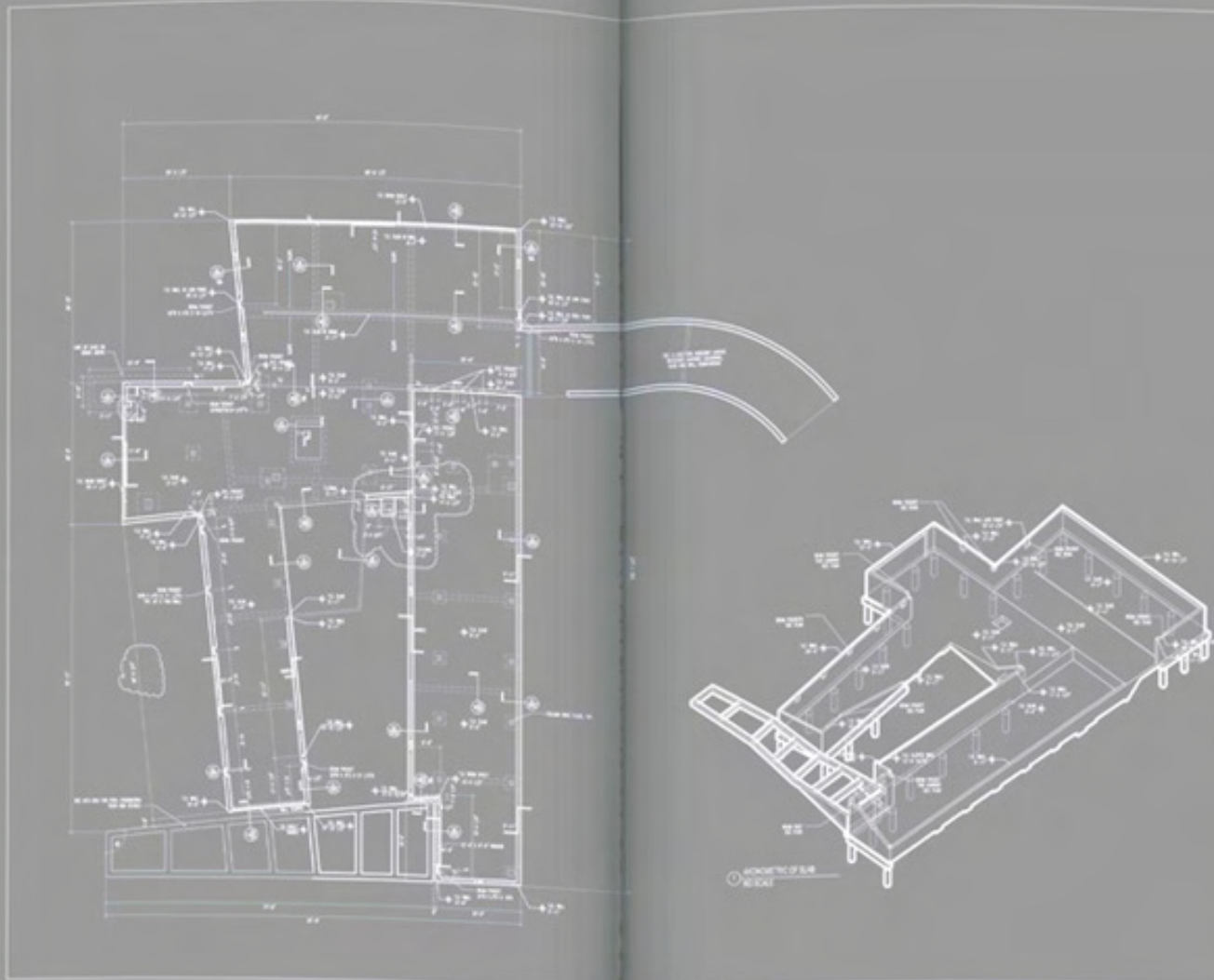
Standard sheathing plywood adds to structural stability and also serves as the substrate for the exterior rain screen. A building wrap that acts as a vapor barrier covers the plywood sheathing.



12.2003



14-11-99



foundation finish surface plan

- NOTES
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CONSTRUCTION

Peter L. Gluck and Partners, Architects

FOUNDATION FINISH SURFACE PLAN 5-132

