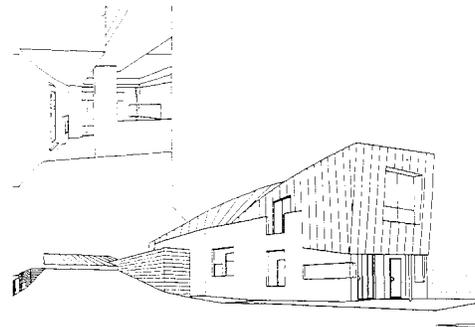
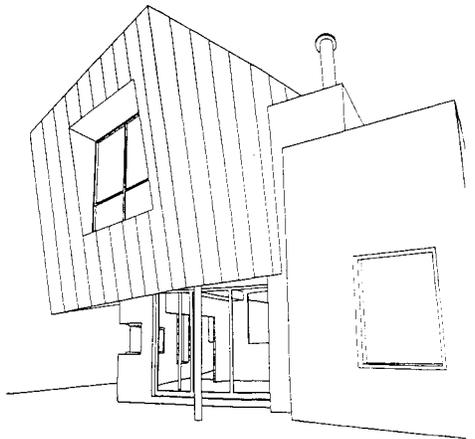
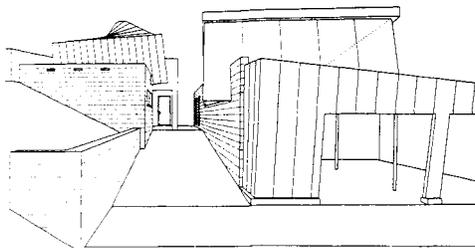


The Home Eastanollee, Georgia

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"Far from our body being first for us, and revealing things to us, it is the instrumental things which in their original appearance indicate our body to us."

- Jean-Paul Sartre

Asked to design a retirement home for my parents on a heavily wooded site in northeast Georgia this project has developed as a critique of contemporary cultural and spatial responses to aging. The program--a single-family house constructed of low-maintenance materials with all major functions located on the ground floor for potential handicap accessibility--prompted my initial fear of, and subsequent fascination with, retirement in terms of repression and mortality. In a traditional, macro view of life beginning with birth and followed by school, job, marriage, and ultimately death, retirement is, paradoxically, both the goal and culmination of life; by definition a time to literally, and/or figuratively, go away. What is architecture's role in this journey?

The term Retirement Home conjures frighteningly benign images of contemporary, geriatric architecture in which insipid hours are spent playing bridge in a "tastefully decorated activity room" beneath a "warm, light-filled atrium." These layers of decor camouflage the reality of aging much the way the vulgarity of a satin lined casket draws our attention away from the reality of death; so plainly exhibited yet desperately repressed beneath the layers of formality, opulence, and flowers. In comfortable surroundings, life passes easily.

Thus, architecture can be used strategically to normalize and repress, but what are its tactical capabilities? Can it interrogate? Can it provoke? If so, how can these abilities be formalized into a valuable alternative to generic and ultimately boring housing trends. I see the potential for architecture to simultaneously inform, and be formed by, critical evaluation of program, site, and society.

The formal manifestation of this withdrawal into the Georgia woods is not an idyllic Walden, but a tacit denial of repression as a viable alternative to reality. Here the allegory of aging is expressed through an ambiguous relationship between architecture and ground. The story, as told by this building, attempts to provoke a recognition of death and, more specifically, a conscious action in response. Is it, as an indication of the bodies within, rising from or sinking into the ground? Is retirement rebirth or reinterment? The goal is not a definitive answer, but the contemplation of the question.

