

Designing in the Margins: Two Backyard Retreats

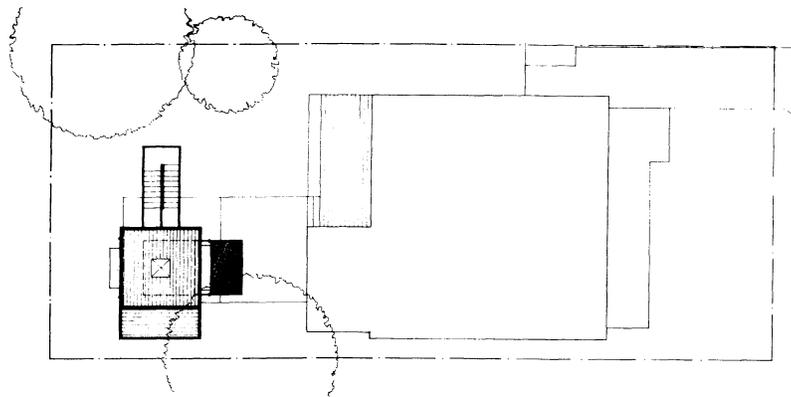
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Two backyard projects investigate the potential of architecture to import significance to the confined, residual space of the urban backyard. They consider the default conditions of boundary identification, typical lot size, existing mature vegetation, and redefine them as lyrical parameters for exploring smallness, efficiency, and economy of means. The compressed landscape of the backyard site yields opportunities for long vistas and treetop habitation.

The Hershey and Reese retreats claim the margins of the built environment as legitimate sites of living, working,

studying, recreating. The Houston tradition of primary structure on the street setback and garage or “Mother-in-law” apartment in a rear corner of the lot is exploited to clarify the expressive and use potential of expensive inner-city property.

Both investigations resulted in rigorous programs demanding that the buildings respond to Houston’s hot, humid climate, be easily maintained, and take advantage of views of the city’s distinguished skyline. The clients required that the buildings be ecologically safe, versatile, durable, and beautiful.



HERSHEY SITE PLAN

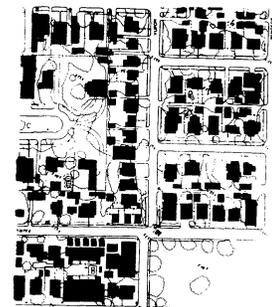
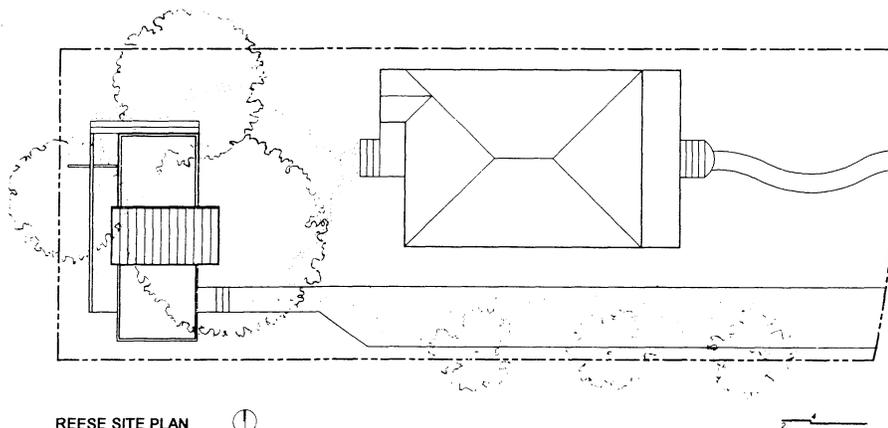


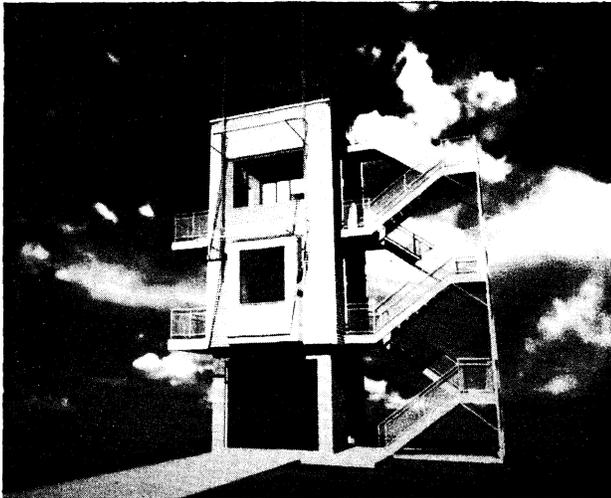
Figure Ground Cherryhurst



REESE SITE PLAN

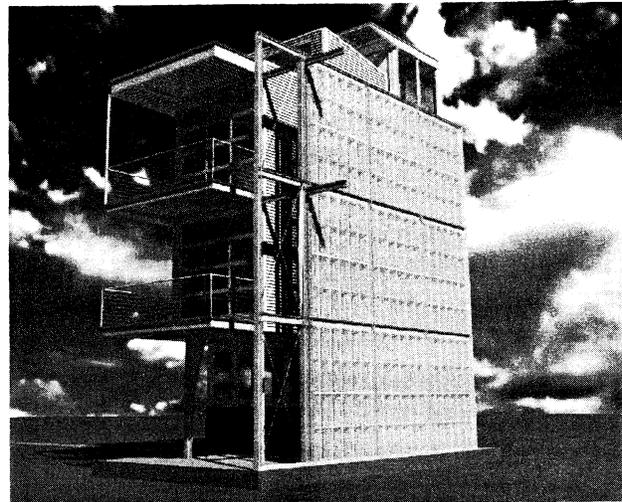


Figure Ground Glendower Court



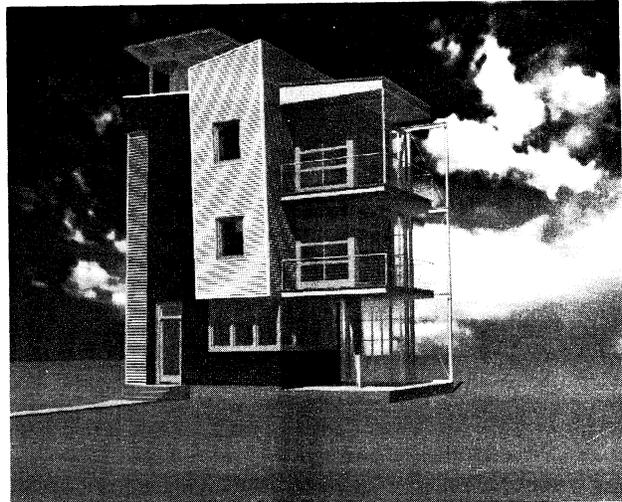
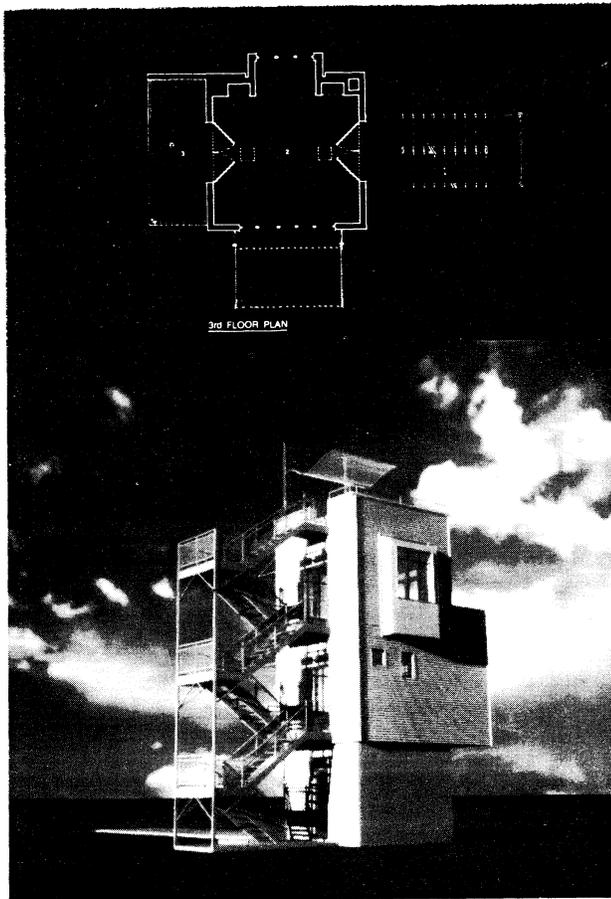
HERSHEY RETREAT

A twelve-foot-square, three-story structure provides kitchen and utility space, sleeping and toilet facilities and a study/living area in fewer than 450 square feet. Projecting porches and screens provide protection from the sun, and casement windows are oriented to catch the prevailing breezes. A thin skin of galvanized metal allows heat to escape quickly for evening comfort, and a “whole house” ventilator moves fresh air through the building via grated openings in the floors.



REESE RETREAT

The three-story cottage affords kitchen/dining, study/living, and bath/sleeping areas in under 900 square feet. Overlooking a lush native garden, it opens to the northeast for dramatic views. The west face is protected from the afternoon sun by a trellis of louvered and expanded metal. The south stair, glazed and shaded by louvered panels, functions as a chimney terminating in a cupola enclosed by jalousie windows. A steel frame wrapped in brick and metal was selected for its structural integrity, resistance to blight, and ease of maintenance.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Computer renderings by Richard Dodge, University of Texas, Austin

