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Proportion and Beauty—the Lovell Beach House by Rudolph Michael Schindler, Newport Beach, 1922–1926

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It is not enough appreciated how directly and clearly our attitude toward life is expressed through our houses. The peasant who is trying to build his house exactly like his father's modernizes it unconsciously. The architect, however, who does not work freely from memory, but who uses reproductions to help his imagination, is too conscious about his effort and creates dead replicas.¹

I

This is a contextual investigation of the theory and design of Rudolph M. Schindler (1887–1953), one of the most outstanding and interesting architects of the Modern Movement in the United States. Born in 1887 in Vienna, he was trained under Otto Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts, under Adolf Loos in the Bauschule, and under Frank Lloyd Wright working in his studio in Oak Park and Taliesin.

The architectural design of Schindler not only reflects the influence of his teachers but it also has had a lasting influence on modern architecture in the United States. Although Schindler did not teach extensively at architectural schools, his articles and buildings were published throughout the United States and Europe. Schindler's personal background is unusual since, although trained in Austria, he spent the rest of his life in the United States without ever returning to visit Europe. He left Europe before World War I and maintained no direct relationship with architects and artists of the Russian Constructivism, Dutch Cubism, German Bauhaus, or Italian Futurism, and, living in the United States, he also was never confronted with the cultural policy of the German Third Reich and the notion of Entartete Kunst.

Most modern architects from Austria and Germany left their countries during the time of the fascists. Schindler was in a unique position. Since he remained in the United States after World War I, he was spared the fate of his contemporaries. Throughout his life, Schindler was very much isolated from the so-called International Style, and as a result he gave his body of work a very personal interpretation.

HISTORIANS customarily have considered Schindler's Lovell beach house (1922–1926) to be one of the most important buildings of the Modern Movement in the United States, and its importance is often compared with the Bauhaus Building of Walter Gropius at Dessau (1925–1926), the German Pavilion at the Barcelona exhibition of Mies van der Rohe (1929), the Lovell house of Richard Neutra (1929), and the Villa Savoye at Poissy of Le Corbusier (1929–1930). Historians also have treated Schindler's Lovell beach house as a transitional building standing between the de Stijl and the Constructivist tendencies in Schindler's work.

This contextual investigation will be concerned with the question of explaining a single work of architecture and its intentions and relations to the greater body of work of the architect. In order to answer such a question, one has to reconstruct first the relationship between the architect and the client, and try to reconstruct the design process. In the case of the Lovell beach house the evidence for this process is considerable and includes drawings, letters, and notes.²

It is a coincidence that the two most famous houses of the 1920s in California were commissioned by the same client, Dr. Philip Lovell. Rudolph Schindler built the beach house, Newport Beach, while Richard Neutra built the town house

1. R. M. Schindler, "Shelter or Playground" (in "Care of the Body" column), *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1926.

2. University of California, Santa Barbara, Architectural Drawing Collection, hereafter UCSB-ADC.

in Los Angeles.³ Schindler met the Lovells through the sociocultural and educational activities of Mrs. Lovell. She directed a kindergarten on Olive Hill (Hollyhock Center) which was attended by the daughter of Miss Barnsdall. Through her teaching at Olive Hill Mrs. Lovell met Frank Lloyd Wright and subsequently she met Schindler. Mrs. Lovell's sister Harriet was married to Sam Freeman who commissioned Wright to design their house in the hills above Highland Avenue in Hollywood. Leah and Philip Lovell did not seem impressed by Wright, but they became close friends with Schindler.

We liked Schindler better. At the time we were living in a Swiss chalet-type house on Mt. Washington, and Philip wanted a playhouse for the summer. He let Schindler build a cabin for us in Wrightwood. He wanted Schindler to build a beach house for us, too. Schindler incorporated all of Philip's ideas in the cabin. We thought he had the genius of Wright.⁴

Schindler was engaged in creating a new idea of "space architecture." His solutions to individual buildings were examples of his theoretical writings. In the case of the Lovell beach house, the building process was paralleled by the publication of six articles in the "Care of the Body" column of the *Los Angeles Times* during the spring of 1926.

The six articles, published in the *Times* during March, April, and May 1926, represent the first theoretical writings of the Modern Movement by an emigrant European architect in the United States.⁵ In combination with his own house, built on Kings Road, Hollywood, and the beach house for Dr. Philip Lovell, Newport Beach, these articles illustrate the new spirit of Schindler's architecture.

In these six articles Schindler advances his principles for the dwelling question; the relationship between a good physical environment and a healthy life is pervasive throughout his writings. The topics of his articles are "Ventilation," "Plumbing and Health," "About Heating," "About Lighting," "About Furniture," and "Shelter or Playground." Written for

a popular magazine, these articles use semiscientific explanations of historical and cultural phenomena. Their ideological roots reveal two categories: first, Schindler's belief in the importance of technological change and progress; and second, Schindler's demand that the house be adapted to the new social and cultural conventions and conveniences.

Schindler adopted the specific need of a family for a vacation house to create the general image of a "health house." Combining structural efforts with his concern for "space architecture," Schindler approached the program of a vacation house with a completely unconventional attitude. Schindler's term *space architecture* today has a different connotation. His use of "space architecture" was to emphasize the importance of spatial relationships in his architecture. "Space architecture" also was defined as his term for a new contemporary architecture versus the term *International Style*. His article, "Space architecture," published in 1932 in *Dune Forum*, tried to explain his different architectural understanding of space.

II

The Lovell beach house is published in almost every architectural history book as the representative work of Schindler. The usual black-and-white photograph of the house accentuates the heavy concrete frames at the entrance façade; the other, completely different, façades rarely are published.⁶

The site for the beach house is the southeast corner of 13th Street and the beach walk off Balboa Boulevard, Balboa Peninsula, Newport Beach, California. The Lovell beach house is surrounded by small houses and vacation cottages built in the various revival styles of the late 1930s. As a contemporary photo shows, the house had few near neighbors in 1926. It directly faces the beach walk and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The entrance elevation faces north. The contemporary photos of the Lovell beach house in the Schindler archive serve as the primary visual documentation, including construction photos from 1925/26, seven exterior photos, and five interior photos.⁷ The earliest reference to a design for the house is a

3. The discussion of the reasons why Dr. Lovell commissioned Neutra instead of Schindler for his city house is ongoing. Mrs. Neutra told the author in a discussion on 16 January 1982 that Dr. Lovell commissioned Neutra in the expectation that Neutra would care more about the costs and the detailing of the house. Prof. Thomas Hines of UCLA holds the opinion that Dr. Lovell assumed that both architects were working on his project, since at that time both architects shared a common office.

Esther McCoy believes that by 1927 the relationship between the Lovells and Schindler had cooled, but that the Lovells nevertheless had asked Schindler to start with the design process for their town house. When finally Neutra received the commission, Schindler's wife Pauline described the situation: "There was not an open rift but a dark cloud slowly began to descend." The final break between Schindler and Neutra was caused by the traveling exhibition of the League of

Nations project through Europe, which was presented in Europe only under the name of Neutra. To present an answer to this problem seems impossible; only the juxtaposition of the different subjective statements seems possible. See also Esther McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles: Two Journeys*, Santa Monica, 1979, 68–69.

4. McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles*, 66, quotation after Esther McCoy in a conversation with Mrs. Lovell.

5. These articles were published in the Sunday Magazine section of the *Los Angeles Times*, and have been reprinted in *Oppositions*, 18 (Fall 1979), 74–85.

6. The photos published in Esther McCoy, *Five California Architects*, New York, 1960, and in David Gebhard, *Schindler*, Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City, 1980, show only illustrations of the beach and entrance façades.

7. UCSB-ADC, photograph collection of R. M. Schindler. There are no inventory numbers.

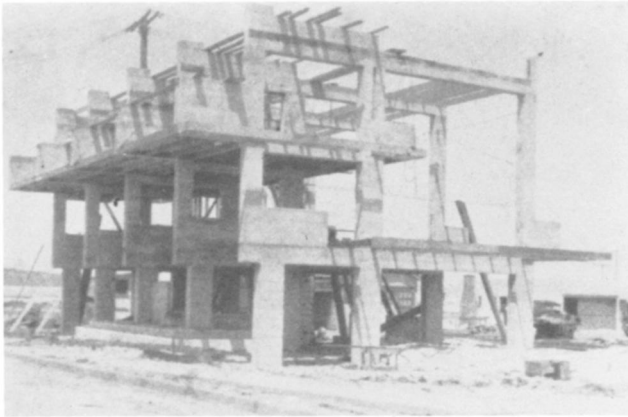


Fig. 1. Rudolph Schindler, Beach House for Dr. and Mrs. Lovell, Newport Beach, 1922–1926, construction photo (University of California, Santa Barbara, Architectural Drawing Collection).

sketch from 1922. Today there are 15 plans and 12 sketches of the beach house in the Schindler archive; 11 plans are directly related to the design and building process of the 1926 project; four other plans, dated 1947, show design sketches for an apartment to be built on the first floor, transforming the playground area into a separate studio apartment. These plans were never executed, however. The drawings and plans consist of preliminary sketches, one presentation drawing, and six working drawings showing woodwork details, furniture details, the kitchen design, and electrical conduits.

The earliest reference to the Lovell house was published in 1927 in *Popular Mechanics Magazine*⁸; it was two years before the house was published in one of the leading architectural magazines.⁹ Photos of the Lovell house were first published in a book, *The New World Architecture* by Sheldon Cheney, in 1930.¹⁰ This reference is important, since Cheney juxtaposes Walter Gropius's house in Dessau (1926) with Schindler's Lovell beach house. The visual difference between these two houses is striking. The house in Dessau is still a Cubist juxtaposition of volumes, walls, and openings; the later house in Newport Beach already shows transparency and a new relationship between cantilevering concrete frames and a plaster skin.

8. The article was entitled "Unusual Home is Built of Concrete and Glass," *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, June 1927, 969.

9. "A Beach House for Dr. P. Lovell at Newport Beach, California," *Architectural Review*, 66 (September 1928), 257–261. This was the only extensive article about the Lovell beach house published in an American architectural magazine. The article presented the three floor plans, cross section, and two exterior and two interior photos (entrance elevation, beach elevation, two-story living room showing the large ocean window, and two-story living room showing the fireplace).

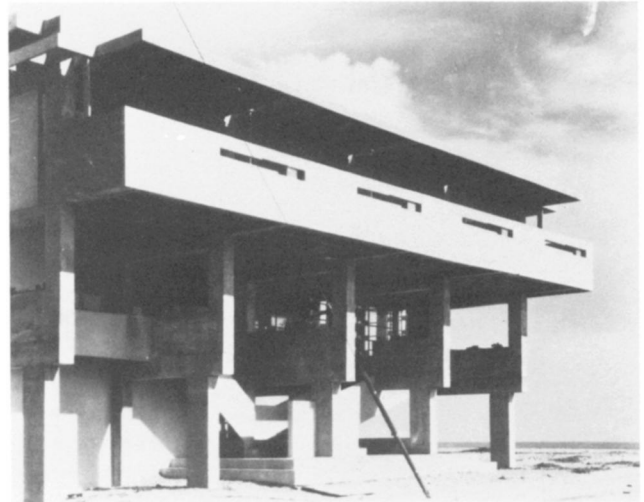


Fig. 2. Schindler, Beach House, street elevation (north elevation), 1926. Photo taken before the wall was built (UCSB-ADC).

III

The elevations of the Lovell house represent Schindler's idea of "space architecture." His construction is functional and poetic, the spatial concept of the house is the most complete system in his oeuvre up to then, and the interrelations of the interior spaces reveal a new and, until then, unknown transparency.

The present condition of the house, however, no longer corresponds to the original. Important visible characteristic alterations have been made:¹¹ first, the original lot was subdivided and another beach house built so close that the south elevation can hardly be seen; second, the service staircase to the kitchen on the second floor was removed; third, a wall was built on the 13th Street side; fourth, the open sleeping porch was glazed; fifth, the east living room balcony was removed; and sixth, alterations were made in the kitchen area.

Approaching the house from 13th Street, one is immediately aware of the cantilevered third floor and the five concrete frames that dominate the overall form of the house. The Constructivist quality of the elevation is nowadays not so strongly apparent, since the former open sleeping porches on the third floor have been screened with windows (Figs. 1–3).

10. Sheldon Cheney, *The New World Architecture*, London, New York, Toronto, 1930. This extremely well-illustrated book was published one year after Hitchcock's *Modern Architecture*, New York, 1929, presenting a more complex and elaborate image of modern architecture in Europe and America. Illustrations of Schindler's Lovell beach house are on p. 235, opposite Gropius's house in Dessau (1926), and an interior view is on p. 286.

11. This is not a complete list of alterations made during the past years.



Fig. 3. Schindler, Beach House, street elevation (north elevation), 1926. Photo taken before the wall was built (UCSB-ADC).

In 1926 the house was not surrounded by a wall as it is today, and therefore the contrast between the continuous sandy beach and the house raised on the concrete frames must have been much more dramatic. Old photos show the transparency of the entrance elevation, with the concrete frames resembling a huge entrance portico. Next to this, the diagonal lines of the two exterior staircases leading to the second floor are the most characteristic formal elements. One could describe the frames as the static, space-creating elements, and the stairs as the dynamic space-penetrating elements (Figs. 4, 5).

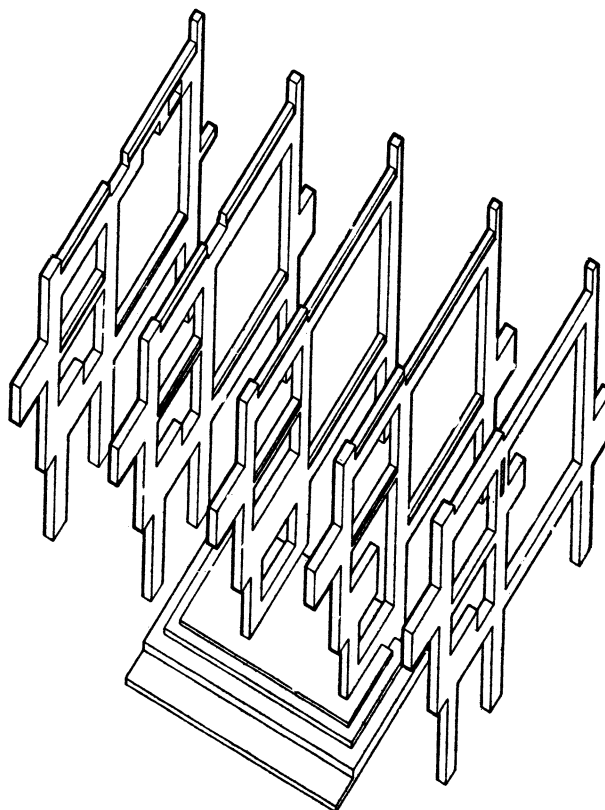


Fig. 4. Schindler, Beach House, frame construction (*Oppositions*, 18 [Fall 1979], 65).

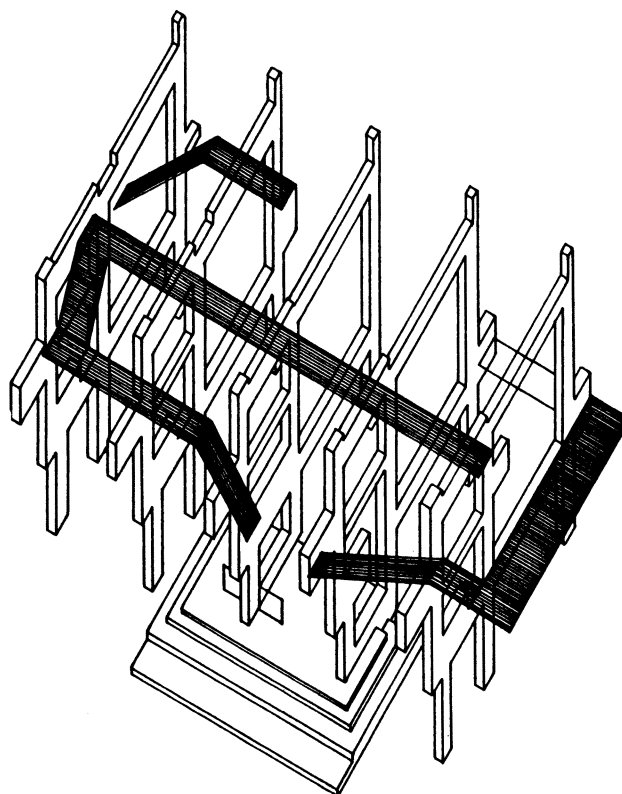


Fig. 5. Schindler, Beach House, circulation system (author).

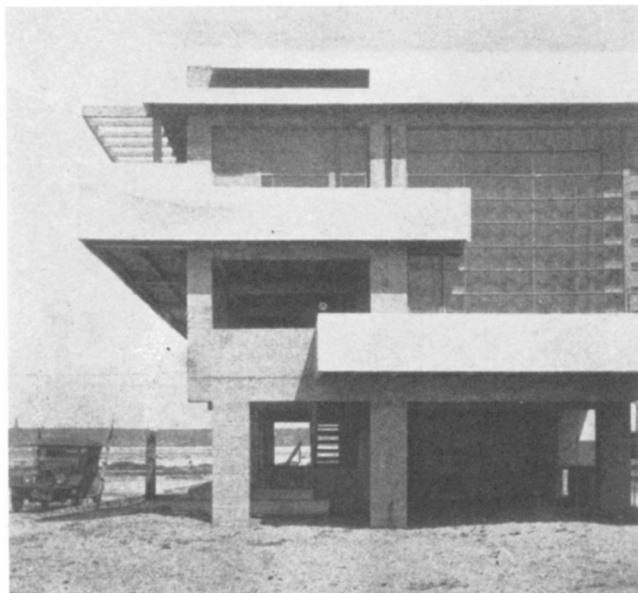


Fig. 6. Schindler, Beach House, west elevation, 1926 (UCSB-ADC).

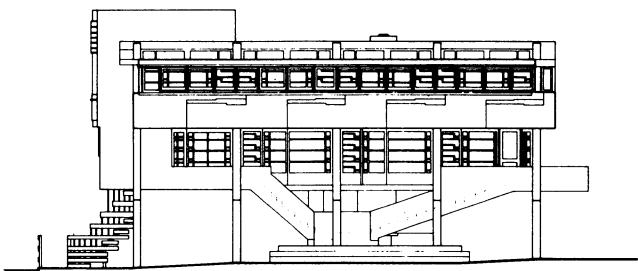


Fig. 7. Schindler, Beach House, north elevation (*Oppositions*, 18 [Fall 1979], 68).

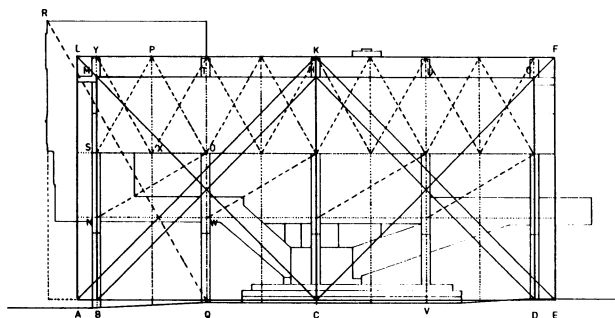


Fig. 8. Schindler, Beach House, north elevation, proportional analysis (author).

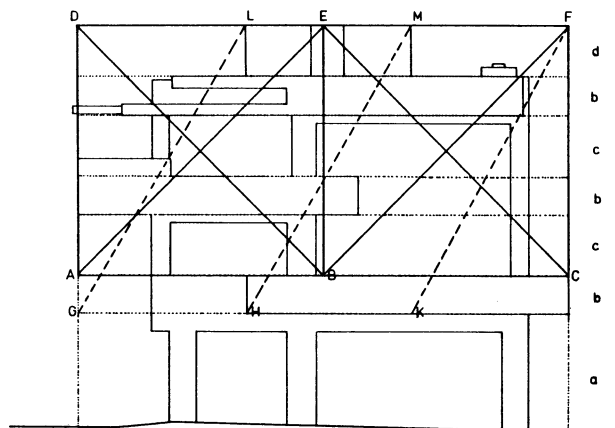


Fig. 9. Schindler, Beach House, west elevation, proportional analysis (author).

The ocean elevation (west elevation) is completely dominated by horizontal lines and surfaces (Fig. 6). The balustrades of the two balconies and the attic repeat "literally" the structural concept of the house, while the huge window openings correspond to the double-story living room on the second and third floors.

In contrast to the planar plastered surfaces, the large windows are carefully subdivided into smaller sections in order to give the window a relation to the human scale. The entrance door (on the second floor, ocean elevation) within the larger window was carefully detailed (no longer existing today), differentiating between the symbolic meaning of the entrance and the glass surfaces of the window. The subdivision of the windows is reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's early prairie houses, although the blue color of the window frames is not Wrightian.

At present the south elevation can hardly be seen because the original lot was subdivided and another beach house built very close to the Lovell house. Characteristic for the south façade are the five concrete frames, which appear here as pilasters rhythmically dividing the elevation into four large sections.

In general, photos of the elevation are perspectively distorted and consequently a frontal view of the elevations is impossible. A study of the elevation reveals the striking formal rhythm and the repetition of similar proportions. Schindler himself states in the description of the house that "both floor plan and elevation are designed, with the help of a scheme of unit lines, to assure uniformity of scale."

The division of the north elevation in units is apparent. Two large squares subscribe the overall configuration of the house. An analysis reveals and demonstrates the following proportions (Figs. 7, 8):

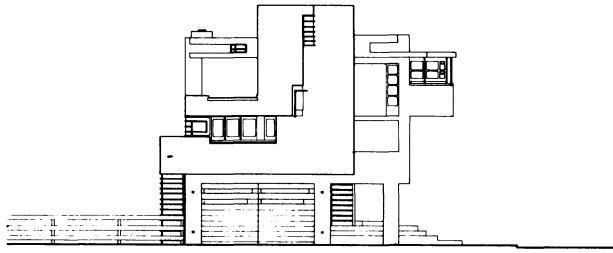


Fig. 10. Schindler, Beach House, east elevation (*Oppositions*, 18 [Fall 1979], 69).

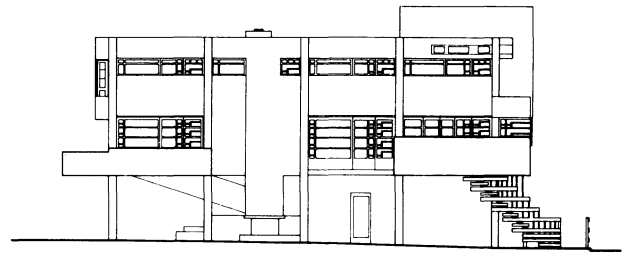


Fig. 12. Schindler, Beach House, south elevation (*Oppositions*, 18 [Fall 1979], 68).

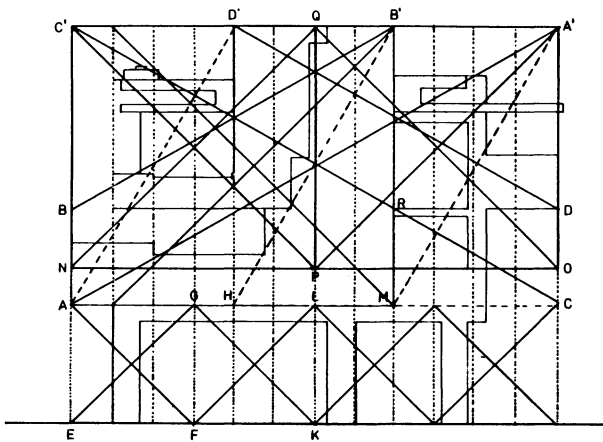


Fig. 11. Schindler, Beach House, east elevation, proportional analysis (author).

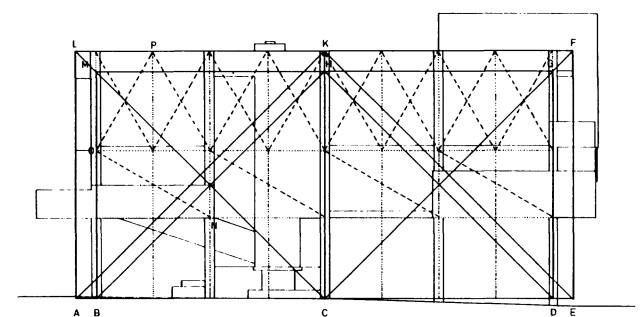


Fig. 13. Schindler, Beach House, south elevation, proportional analysis (author).

1) the two squares ACKL and CEFK describe the overall limits of the elevation, with the distance CH on the center axis being the base of two additional subsquares;

2) the squares ACKL and CEFK correspond to the overall height of the house;

3) the squares BCHM and CDGH circumscribe the cantilevering volume of the second and third floor; and

4) the square QVUT describes the entrance area being half the size of the overall elevation.

The balanced form of the façade is due to the invisible unit lines. The overall height relates to the overall length as 1:2, and the length of the singular distances BQ, QC, CD, VD to their height BM, QT, CH, VU, DG as 2:1. The principle of the entrance elevation consists of the circumscribed large squares and inscribed small forms. A similar proportional system exists for the other elevations (Figs. 9–13).

Principally there are four entrances; the main entrance, the secondary entrance, the service entrance (to kitchen and maid's room), and the entrance from the garage to the secondary staircase, with the pattern of circulation corresponding to

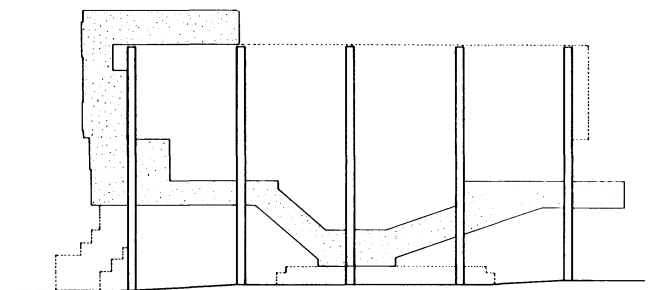


Fig. 14. Schindler, Beach House, north elevation, proportional analysis (author).

the different functional requirements. Throughout the house the dynamic element of circulation is evident: the exterior and the interior integrate staircases, galleries, decks, and steps into the complex system of space architecture, with the circulation being the counter element to the static structure of the concrete frames (Fig. 14).

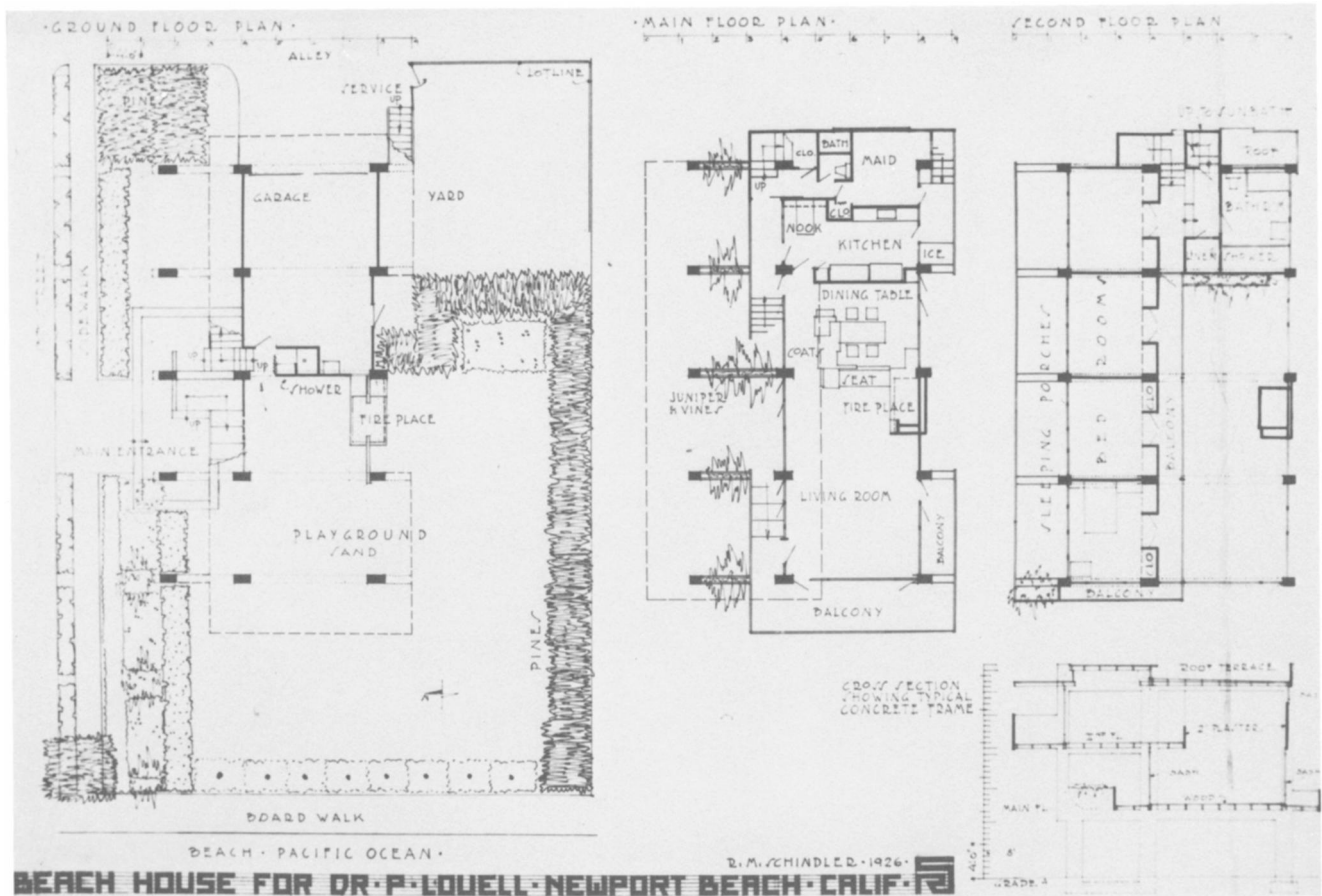


Fig. 15. Schindler, Beach House, floor plans and section, 1926 (UCSB-ADC).

IV

The interior configuration of the house is highly elaborate and the concept of light and space is handled with great mastery.

The clear organization of the second and third floors fulfills well the needs of a vacation house (Fig. 15). The house was placed on stilts not only to provide some privacy from the public beach and to obtain a better view of the ocean, but also to give the possibility for the sandy beach to penetrate directly under the house, forming a sheltered outdoor living space equipped with its own open fireplace. Elevating the living area to the second floor also gives reference to the classical tradition of the *piano nobile* used since the Italian Renaissance for country houses and providing a spectacular view of the surrounding landscape. The great two-story living room has more the character of a hall than a "living room," which seems appropriate for a vacation house where one invites friends and entertains guests. The hall is overlooked by a gallery on the third floor that leads to the bedrooms (Figs. 16, 17).

The spatial quality of the living area is highly determined by the way the light penetrates the rooms from three sides (south, west, north). The living area runs through the entire depth of the building and, in its central part, through the full height of the two stories. On the third floor a gallery runs all the way along the north side of the central space, giving access to the master bedroom and the three bedrooms of the children. This gallery continues visually at the outside of the house, leading to a small balcony (Figs. 7, 15). Originally each bedroom opened through French doors into a sleeping porch running the complete length of the house. Some years after the completion of the house the clients asked Schindler to enclose the porch. The top floor of the beach house is used as an enclosed space for sunbathing.

The system of spatial intersection was described as the main characteristic of the elevations. The floor plans of the Lovell house reveal a surprising simplicity which is most evident at the first floor. Basically, this plan consists of 15 pilotis and a small number of nonbearing walls: a garage, an open fireplace, a sheltered playground, and cabins (Figs. 18–20).



Fig. 16. Schindler, Beach House, living room, 1926 (UCSB-ADC).

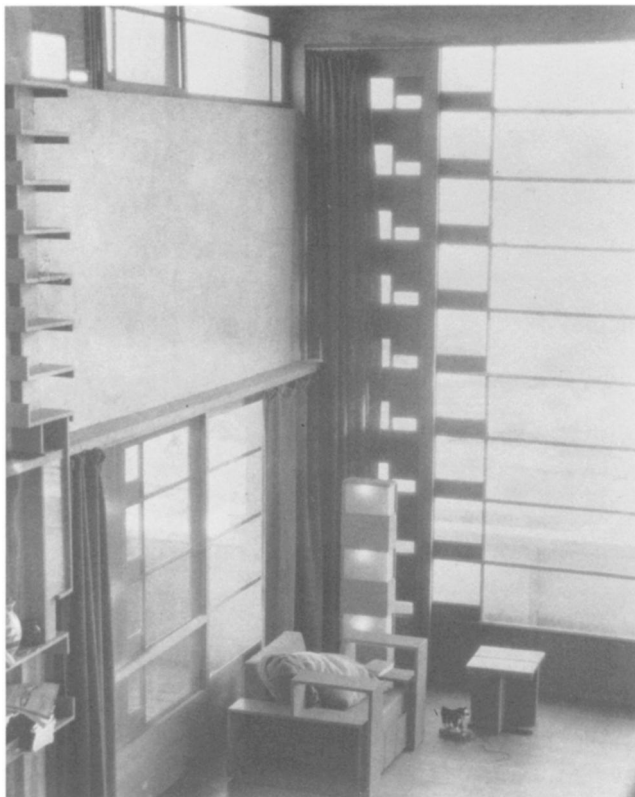


Fig. 17. Schindler, Beach House, living room, 1926 (UCSB-ADC).

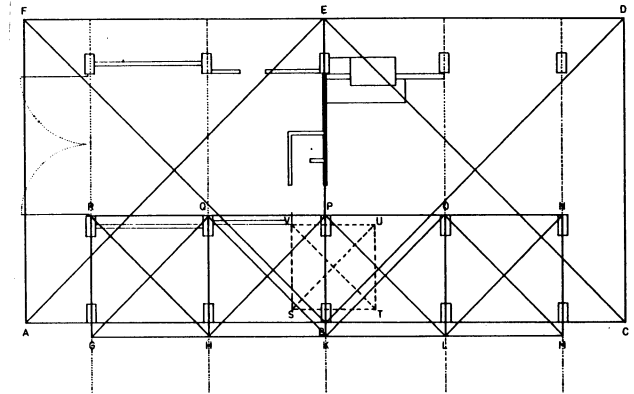


Fig. 18. Schindler, Beach House, first-floor plan, proportional analysis (author).

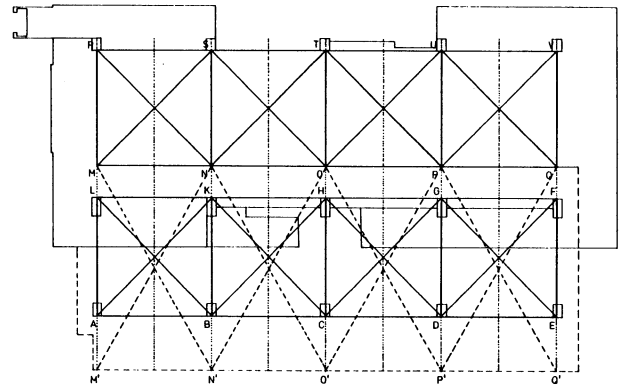


Fig. 19. Schindler, Beach House, second-floor plan, proportional analysis (author).

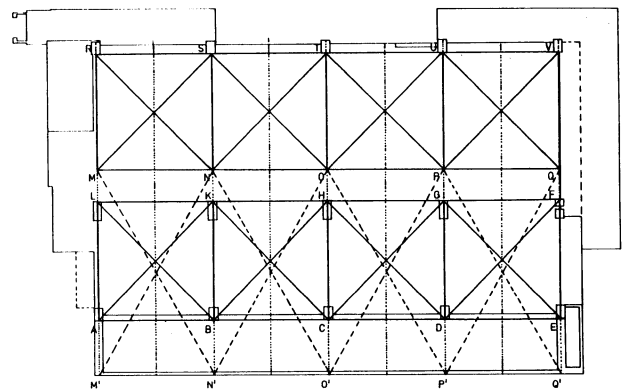


Fig. 20. Schindler, Beach House, third-floor plan, proportional analysis (author).

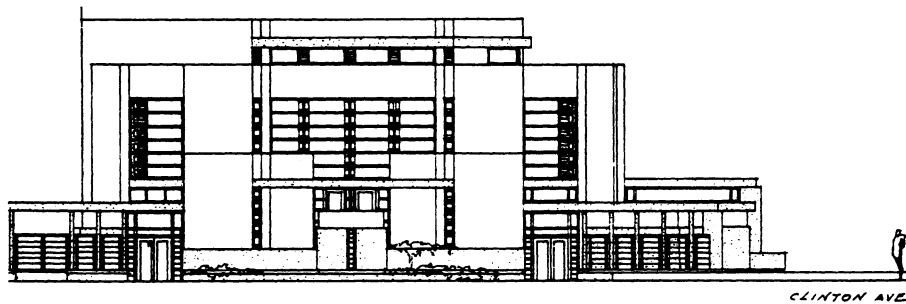


Fig. 21. Schindler, Public Library, Bergen, Jersey City, 1920, project (UCSB-ADC).

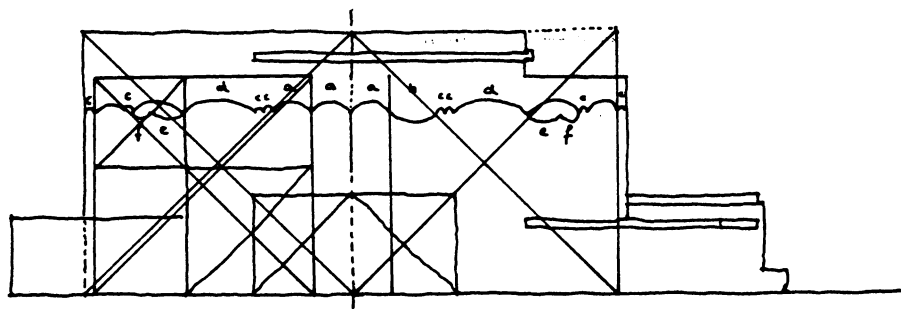


Fig. 22. Schindler, Public Library, Bergen, proportional analysis (author).

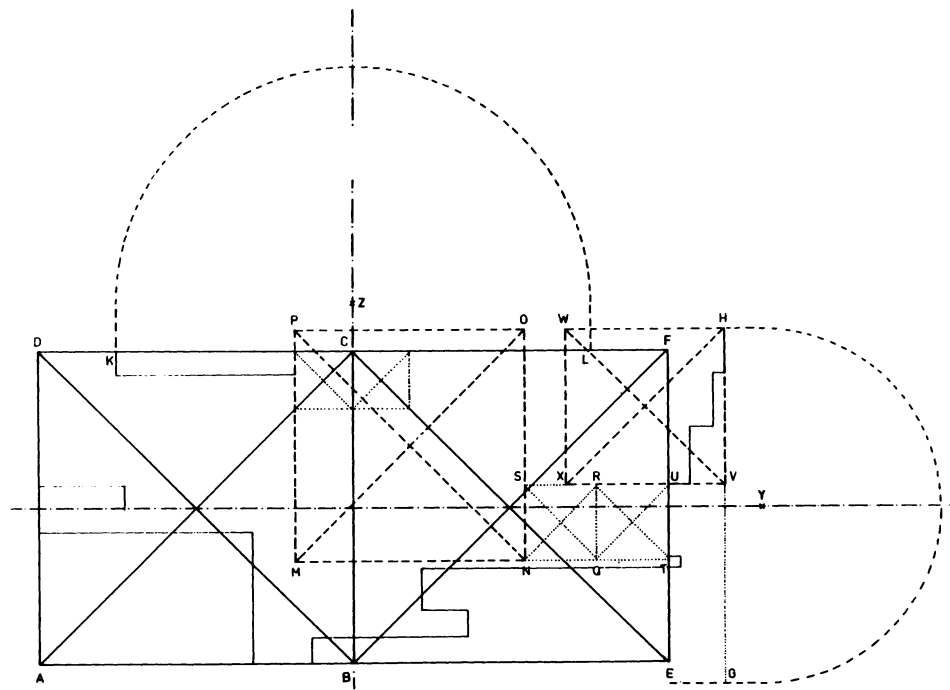


Fig. 23. Schindler, Rodakiewicz House, Los Angeles, 1937, main floor plan, proportional analysis (author).

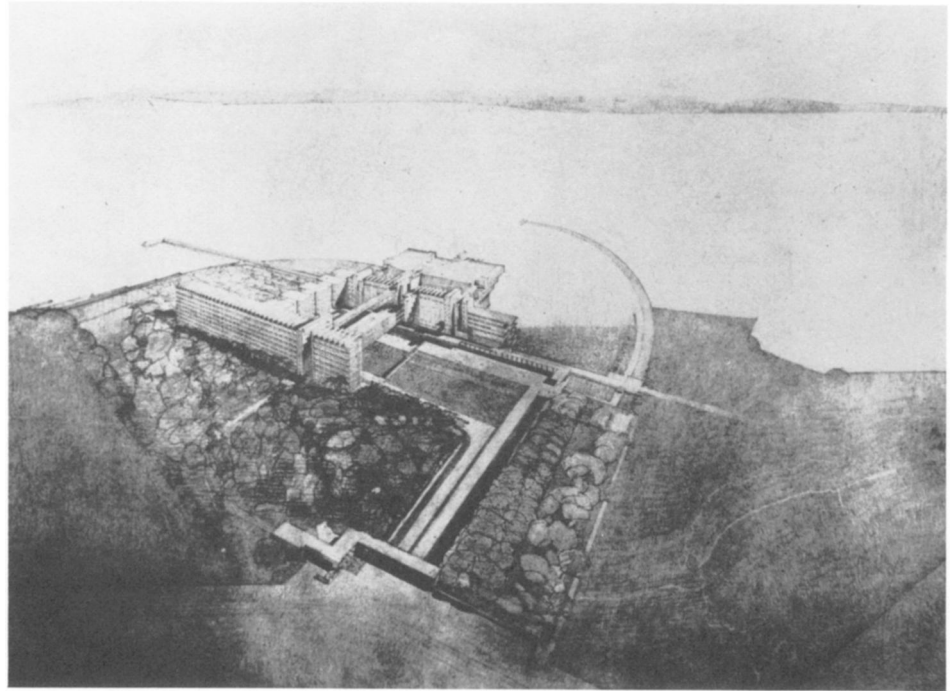


Fig. 24. Schindler, Neutra, League of Nations project, Geneva, 1926, perspective view (UCSB-ADC).

The simplicity of the floor plans is complemented by the pregnancy of the geometric proportions.¹² By means of the concrete frame a relation is achieved between two-dimensional plans and spatial forms. The section demonstrates this relation: one part of the concrete frame received architectural coating and became interior space, the other part remained “pure” and therefore became exterior space. Constructively speaking, the house is made of wood joints laid crosswise between concrete frames to support the floors. All walls and partitions are 2 inches thick; they are made of metal lath and cement plaster and are suspended between the concrete forms.

In comparison to the Lovell house, the competition entry for the League of Nations, Geneva (1926) comes closest to the constructive expression of the beach house (Figs. 24–27). Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra entered the competition with one project, and the data for the project show that both architects contributed largely to it. A great number of sketches

are by Neutra and they indicate an affinity to the architectural language of Mendelsohn, for whom Neutra worked in Berlin in 1922, but the final project shows a great similarity to Schindler’s Lovell house, especially the constructive details and the functional requirements of circulation. Although the jury was composed of leading architects like Berlage, Hoffmann, Horta, and Karl Moser, the project of Schindler/Neutra did not receive a prize. Unfortunately, the project was exhibited in Europe only under the name of Neutra.¹³

V

The Lovell beach house reflects the very happy relationship between the client and the architect, a fact clearly expressed in the consistent character and quality of the building which shows that few compromises were forced. There was a fundamental agreement between the ideas of the Lovells and the

12. The same system of geometric proportions was used in other projects and buildings. For that reason, compare the project for a library in Bergen, New Jersey (1920; Figs. 21, 22) and the residence for Mr. and Mrs. Rodakiewicz, Los Angeles (1937; Fig. 23). Geometric proportions are intrinsically connected with several architects of the Modern Movement; Le Corbusier’s “Modulor” is probably the most famous. In particular, Stanford Anderson mentioned to me the geometric order of the architecture of Peter Behrens and its influence on modern architecture. However, the importance of F. L. Wright

and his geometric proportions remains the most direct influence on Schindler. See also Otto A. Graf, *Die Kunst des Quadrats*, Vienna, 1983.

13. Mrs. Neutra explained in a discussion with the author, 12 January 1982, Los Angeles, that the name of Schindler was omitted in Europe because Alfred and Lilly Niedermann (the parents of Mrs. Neutra, who lived in Switzerland and who were handling the exhibition for Neutra) were uninformed about the collaboration.

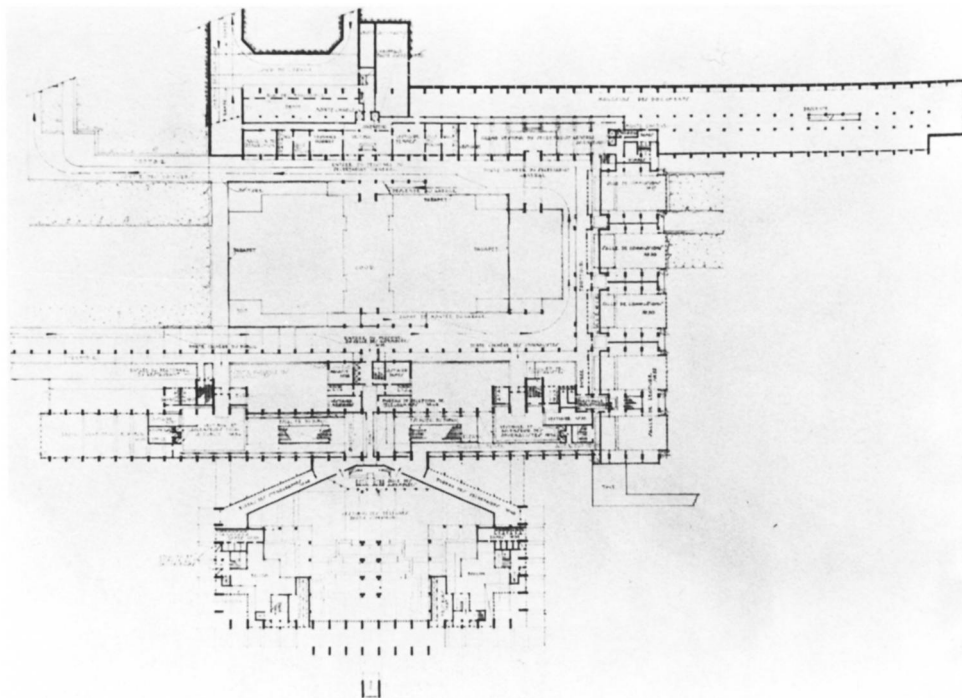


Fig. 25. Schindler, Neutra, League of Nations, first-floor plan (UCSB-ADC).

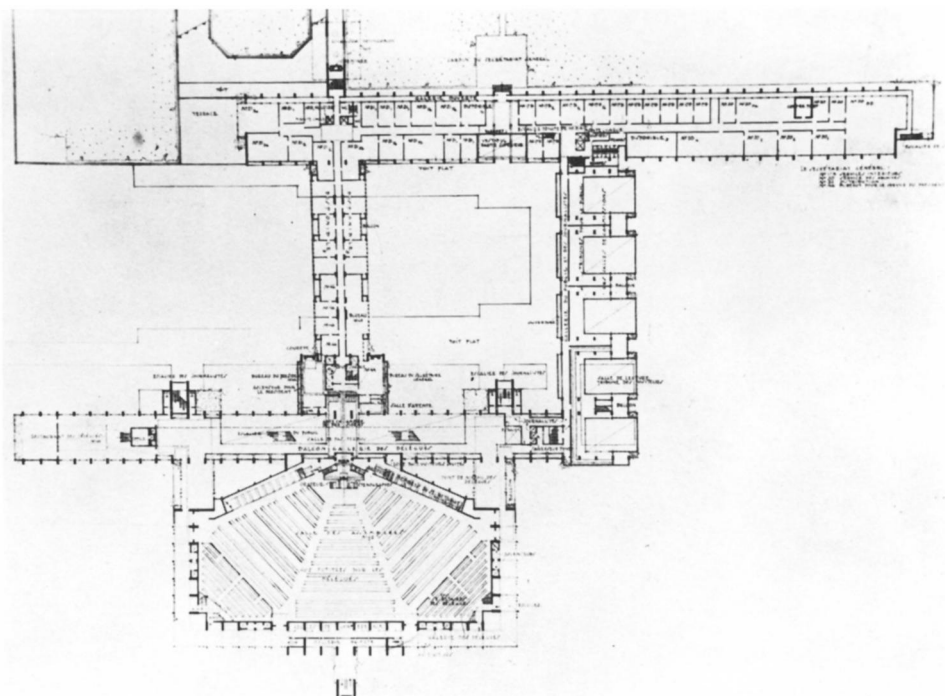


Fig. 26. Schindler, Neutra, League of Nations, second-floor plan (UCSB-ADC).

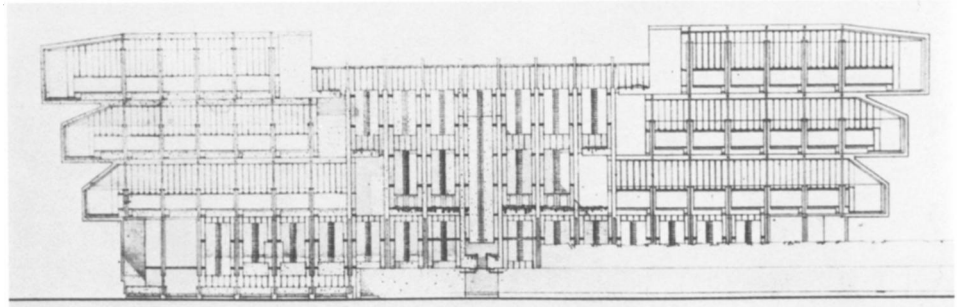


Fig. 27. Schindler, Neutra, League of Nations, shore elevation (UCSB-ADC).

architectural intentions of Schindler. Dr. Lovell was the editor of a column in the *Los Angeles Times* called "Care of the Body," and he regarded himself as a truly modern person who believed in the power of nature and health. His journalistic activities and his occupation as a drugless practitioner distinguished him as an unconventional person who was willing to encounter new ways of living and new ways of building as essential to a modern time. The discussion about the relationship between the form of a house and health consequently involved Schindler in five projects for the Lovells, of which three were executed.¹⁴ The beach house was certainly the most important commission, and the documentation about this is well reported through letters.¹⁵ Relevant to the discussion of the beach house's design are some revealing comments by Dr. and Mrs. Lovell. The Lovells bought two lots across the street on 13th Street and Balboa Boulevard where they used to play tennis:

There was a public walk past the lots to the beach, and that was why Schindler raised the house above the ground. The living room is on the second floor and the ground under it is a playground for the children. . . . On the positive side, Schindler paid attention to our way of living and adjusted to it, which Neutra didn't. They called it the upside down house. They thought it was crazy. So did the loan companies. I was never able to get a loan on any house I built. I've always been a minority in everything. There were other modern houses around but you couldn't see them for all the Mission and Moorish styles. So I did some experimenting. . . . RMS wanted everything in the house to blend together. The bed frames were the same design as the windows. I remember that the wood had the look of seaweed. The leftover wood was cut up to make the stool and the long sofa in the living room. He gave Maria Kipp (a textile designer) yards and yards of cheese cloth and monk's cloth to dye a golden yellow for the curtains and rust for cover for the sofa. When he finished, everything looked as if it belonged there. . . .

14. The five projects are:

1924: Vacation house for Dr. Lovell, Wrightwood, destroyed.

1925: Bedroom for Dr. Lovell, Los Angeles, destroyed.

Ranch house for Dr. Lovell, Fallbrook, destroyed.

Furniture for the children's workshop, Dr. Lovell, Los Angeles, destroyed.

1926: Beach house for Dr. Lovell, 1242 Ocean Ave., Newport Beach.

15. UCSB-Schindler Archives.

The beach house ran 30 percent above the estimates, but then the town house ran a hundred percent over . . ."¹⁶

The building was a very personal setting for a way of life based upon a profound respect for sport, health, and nature. In one way or the other both Lovell and Schindler were romantics, since they believed that they could solve social problems through building "health houses." The strong belief of Lovell in a "health house" is reflected also in his town house, built by Richard Neutra between 1927 and 1929, which actually tries to eliminate the traditional urban culture of a town house by replacing it with a clubhouse for fitness training.¹⁷

VI

In discussing the influence on the process of designing the Lovell beach house, and the relationship of the beach house to its contemporary architecture, one has to reconstruct the context of its time. In the case of the beach house, the historical evidence is considerable and will draw its information from the letters between the client and the architects, the articles published by Schindler in the *Los Angeles Times*, and Schindler's personal file of cuttings. These files contain references and cuttings from a good number of major European, American, and Japanese architectural periodicals, including *Der Architekt* (Austria), *L'amour de l'art* (France), *Die Baugilde* (Germany), *Das Werk* (Swiss), *Moderne Bauformen* (Germany), *Bauwelt* (Germany), *Schweizerische Bauzeitung* (Switzerland), *L'architecte* (France), *Architectural Record* (United States), *Pencil Points* (United States), *The Architect and Engineer* (United States), and *Kokusai-Kentiku-Kyokai* (Japan).

16. McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles*, 66, 67.

17. For the discussion about the Lovell town house by Neutra, see McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles*, 68, 69.

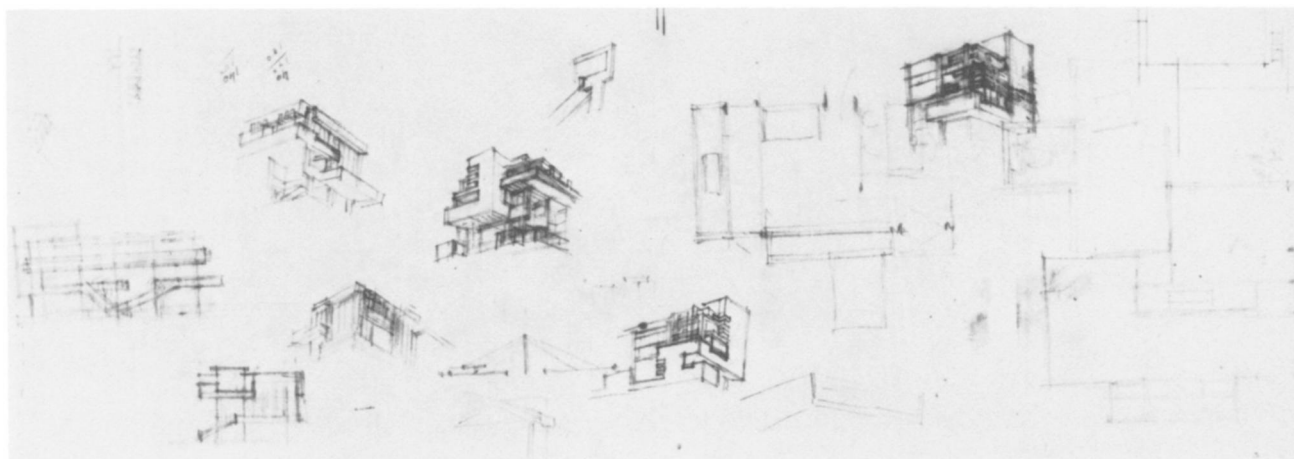


Fig. 28. Schindler, Beach House, sketches, 1922 (UCSB-ADC).

The remarkable photographs showing the cantilevering concrete frame structure situated on the sandy beach recall the notions of an arcadian world of permanent holidays, a world of healthy bodies and healthy minds in which modern time and nature create a harmonious background for a life where the “eternal joys” of space, light, sun, and unspoiled nature are available to everybody.

The notion of nature and its appreciation by living in a vacation or weekend house is truly a post-romantic 19th-century notion. The capitalistic city—as contrasted to the arcadian rural good world—the city without quality, inhabited by the “blasé metropolitan man” and by the “man without qualities,” had become the least desirable place to inhabit in the eyes of modern architects.¹⁸ One way to escape the unhealthy cities was to live in a weekend or summer house.¹⁹ The weekend house was not a city residence transferred to the country, not a suburban bungalow reduced in scale. As a possible definition, the weekend house is the anticipation of a new lifestyle; it is the minimum stationary setting for a family life reduced to its simplest and most elementary terms, in close contact with the sun, soil, and sky, and the house is free from obsolete social and conventional architectural forms.

The layout should be made in such a way as to reduce construction cost and maintenance cost to a minimum. The relation between the daytime space and the nighttime space should clearly be in favor of the daytime space, with bed-

rooms reduced to their minimal size. Provision for extensive “body care” is essential to any weekend house, offering good sanitary accommodations, outdoor sleeping porches, and a place for sunbathing.

One of the key issues of the weekend house is its informality. It evolved out of the idea of the English country house, embracing the occupants with comfort and ease. Schindler’s *Los Angeles Times* articles on modern architecture respond very closely to the vacation-house ideology. In his opinion, there was little or no difference between everyday housing and vacation housing, since for him every house was regarded as a shelter for a more harmonious life.

The distinction between the indoors and the out-of-doors will disappear. The walls will be few, thin and removable. All rooms will become part of an organic unit, instead of being small separate boxes with peepholes.²⁰

The earliest sketches for the Lovell beach house date back to 1922.²¹ Pervasive in all sketches is the idea of a concrete frame against which stucco and glass edges of the rooms are juxtaposed. Even in the early sketches the horizontal lines and the deep layering of the elevation generate the expression of sculptural plasticity (Fig. 28).

The only alternative plan compared to the executed design is dated from April 1926 and shows a different solution for the first-floor plan but rather similar solutions for the second- and third-floor plans.²²

18. Cf. Georg Simmel, *Die Grossstadt und das Geistesleben*, Dresden, 1903; English translation, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, New York, 1950, and Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, London, 1961.

19. The idea of the weekend house and the summer house was pervasive throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries.

20. Schindler, “Shelter or Playground.”

21. UCSB-ADC, Schindler drawing collection, no inventory numbers.

22. UCSB-ADC, Schindler drawing collection, no inventory numbers.

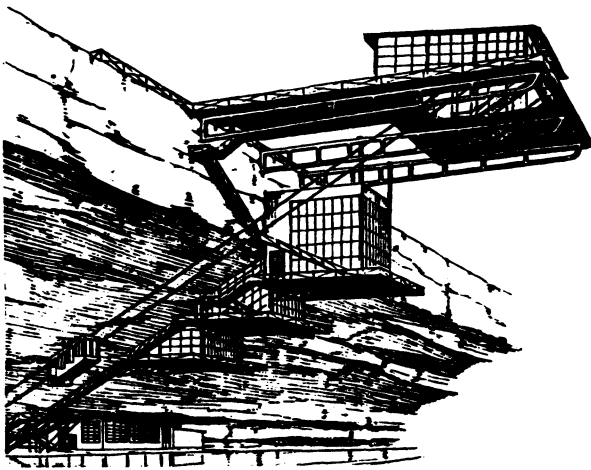


Fig. 29. Ladovsky, Restaurant at the Cliff, 1922, project (Lissitzky, *Russland*, Vienna, 1930).

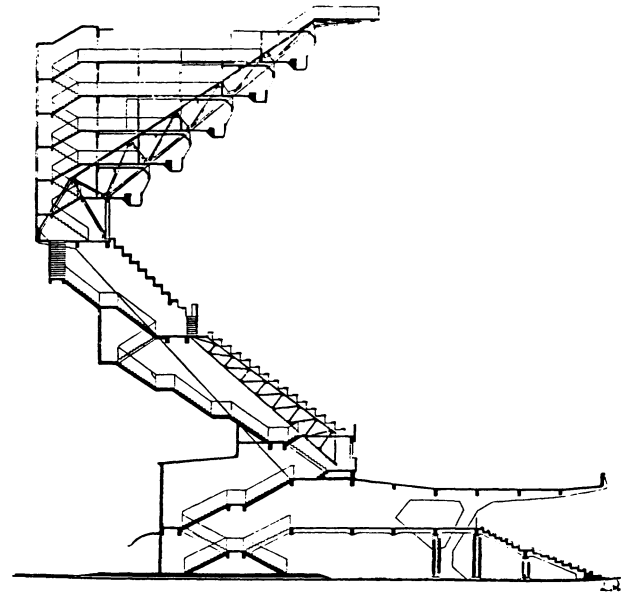


Fig. 30. Korschew, Stadium at Moscow, 1926, project (Lissitzky, *Russland*).

The questions concerning possible influences on the process of designing the Lovell beach house are multiple and the answers given can only be hypothetical.

H.-R. Hitchcock in his book *Modern Architecture* (1929) describes Schindler as “another Austrian” who has remained closer to the New Tradition (Hitchcock’s term for transitional architects prior to true modern architecture; Richard Neutra was the other Austrian).²³ Yet, at the same time, Hitchcock continues, Schindler has achieved with mediocre success more extreme aesthetic researches of Le Corbusier and the men of de Stijl. David Gebhard, on the other hand, in his book *Schindler* describes the connections to de Stijl with greater accuracy and sophistication.²⁴

A different approach to Schindler’s Lovell beach house is presented by Reyner Banham in *Los Angeles—The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, where he compares the beach house with Le Corbusier’s work rather than with de Stijl architecture:

Designed and built between 1923 and 1926, it was a world class building not only because of its quality as design, but also because its style, and manner of handling space, demand comparison with the best European work of the same period—and emerges from the comparisons enhanced, not diminished.

Put alongside, say, Le Corbusier’s Villa Cook, its catalogued virtues reveal a buildings that could carry all Le Corbusier’s theoretical propositions. It has a concrete frame which raises it clear off the ground on legs; it has a two-story studio-type living-room and a roof terrace; it has parking space, a play area and a wash-up at the ground-floor level. But the Corbu version is a timid, constrained design whose adventures take place only within the almost unbroken cube of the building envelope, whereas Schindler’s spatial extravagances break forward and oversail the ground floor, with staircases threaded visibly through the frame.²⁵

These three opinions show the changing attitude toward Schindler’s Lovell beach house. However cut off California might have been in the 1920s from European culture, Schindler was at least connected with the Old World through architectural periodicals and through his correspondence with Austrian architects. The relationship between de Stijl and the architecture of Schindler seems more diverse and complex than is suggested by Henry-Russell Hitchcock.²⁶

The open and not so open contradictions in Schindler’s design belong to the most crucial issues of the Lovell beach house. While exact evidence is uncertain how well informed Schindler was about European tendencies of the 1920s and de Stijl, it is most likely that he followed closely European archi-

23. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture*, New York, 1929.

24. Gebhard, *Schindler*, 77.

25. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles—The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, London, 1971.

26. This study of de Stijl is heavily indebted to H. L. Jaffe’s book, *De Stijl 1917–1931*, Amsterdam, 1956.

tectural magazines. This was always confirmed by his wife Pauline Schindler in later years.

The Lovell beach house does not follow the canonical architectural vocabulary that was related to the "International Style." This was one of the reasons why Philip Johnson together with Henry-Russell Hitchcock refused to present the Lovell house at the influential exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.²⁷ On the one side, the controversial design of the house seems too far away from a Cubist, horizontal, white architecture of the Bauhaus-inspired "International Style"; on the other side, there is no clear reference to de Stijl. Only small details like the original service staircase to the kitchen recalled a distinct affinity to Dutch de Stijl elementarism, and the complete lack of color is atypical for de Stijl.

In 1929 Lewis Mumford wrote Schindler in order to request photographs of the Lovell beach house for his German publisher friend Walter Curt Behrendt, who then was preparing a book on the modern house. Mumford described the house in the letter as "the stunning beach house in concrete you have done."²⁸ It seems important that the new use of concrete was more relevant to Mumford than was the issue of style.

Besides this, the often quoted Constructivist influence on Schindler's Lovell beach house is connected with two projects, the Restaurant at the Cliff, designed by the atelier of Ladovsky (1922; Fig. 29), and the Stadium at Moscow designed by Korschew (1926; Fig. 30). Both projects are found in

Schindler's personal file collections; the illustrations are taken from El Lissitzky's book *Russland*, published in Vienna in 1930. But the argument that Schindler was influenced by Russian Constructivism is very unlikely, since the book about Russian architecture was published after Schindler completed the Lovell beach house.

The controversial discussion may result from stylistic questions and from the unconventional use of the cantilevering concrete: this was not a "style" but a single piece of *objet d'art* with no further references of stylistic applications.

With regard to the client, the commission of the beach house fulfilled virtually his need for a "health house," but economically the house was a disaster: the cost had run 30 percent over estimate due to the changes, the concrete construction, and the remote site in Newport Beach.²⁹ However, the beach house suited the Lovells much better than the town house designed by Neutra. As a consequence, the Neutra town house was sold in the 1940s whereas the Schindler beach house is still occupied by descendants of the Lovell family.

This investigation has suggested an approach to the question of dwelling and the architectural design process. Philip Lovell, a pioneer of healthful living and an encouraged experimentist, realized together with Rudolph Michael Schindler the first programmatic example of the modern house in the United States—an *experiment with living, space-form, and construction*.³⁰

27. Letter of Philip Johnson to Schindler dated 17 March 1932, where he states, "From your letter and from my knowledge of your work, my real opinion is that your work would not belong in the Exhibition" (UCSB-ADC).

28. Letter of Lewis Mumford to Schindler dated 22 July 1929 (UCSB-ADC).

29. McCoy, *Vienna to Los Angeles*, 68, conversation with Mrs. Lovell.

30. UCSB-ADC; Schindler's own reference to his selected houses from 1921–1948 is entitled "A chronological record of some of my

experiments with living, space-form and construction." However, the history of Neutra, Schindler, and the Lovell houses is still controversial. "New aspects" were added in the late 1960s and early 70s when Schindler already was dead. Thomas Hines presented a fine selection of letters on this topic in his biography and history, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, New York, 1982, 303–308, attempting to clarify this historical dispute. Since there are no letters by Schindler himself, but only letters by Neutra and the Lovells, it is suggested that the historiography never can fully be resolved concerning the question of this commission.