

Anyone

The Lewis Residence

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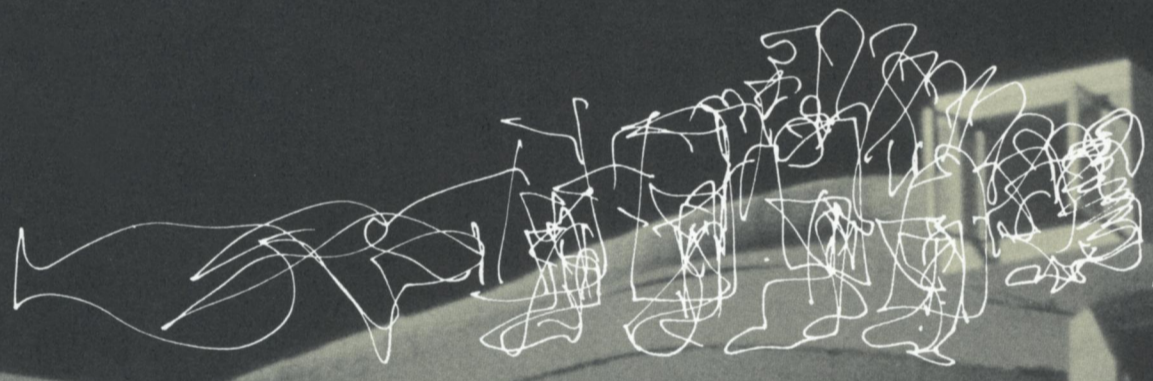
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FIGURE

LOWIS JULY 94

Frank O. Gehry & Associates

fact

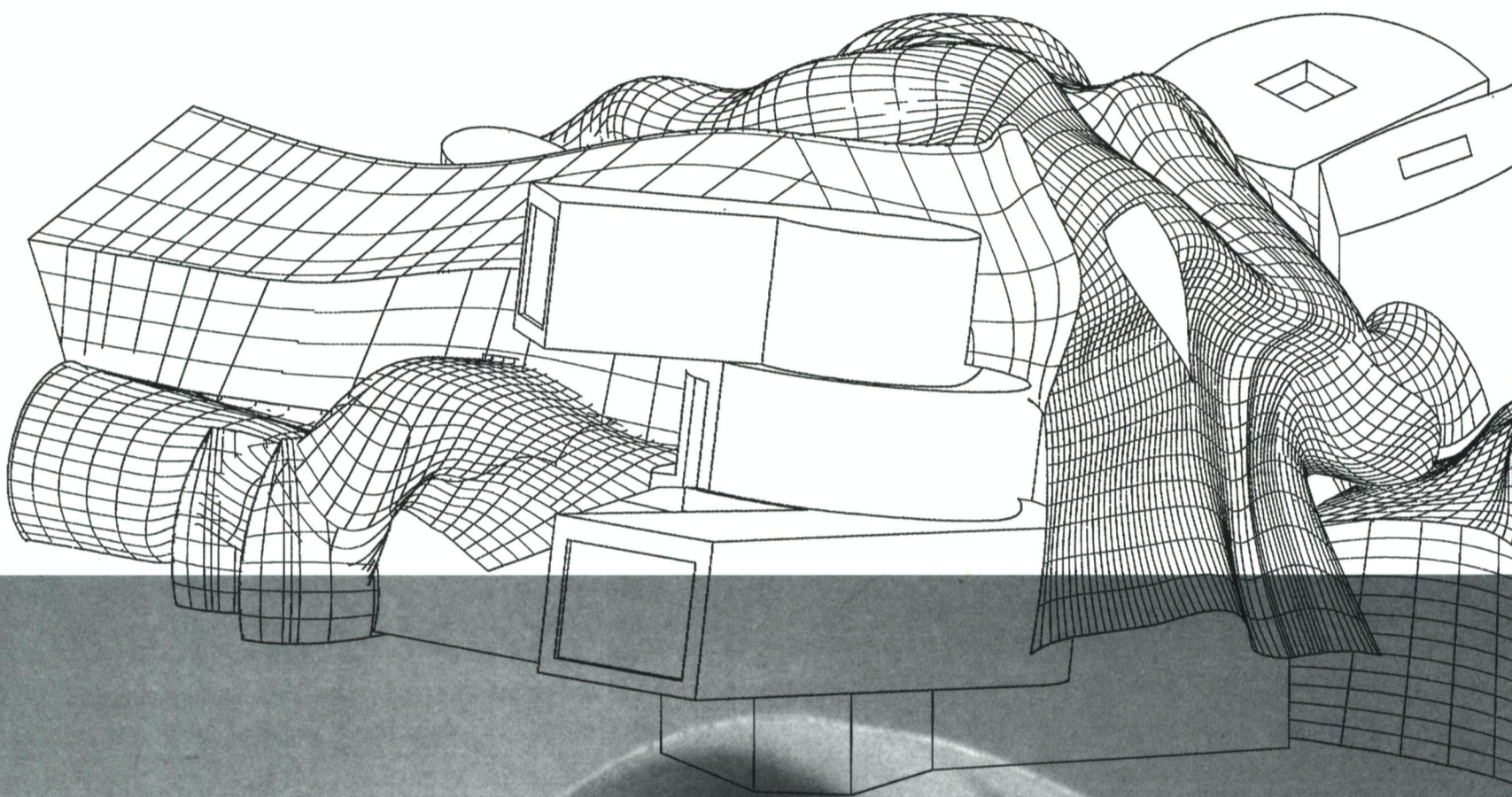


F. Gehry

LOWIS - 002'93

The Lewis Residence, designed for a hilltop in Lyndhurst, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, is a 22,000-square-foot house for Peter B. Lewis. The main house provides a semipublic area for entertaining and a private area for Mr. Lewis. The semipublic area consists of a commercial-grade kitchen, a dining room, a living room, and an entry hall/gallery, while the private area consists of two master bedrooms, a study, a conservatory, and an enclosed lap pool. In addition to the main house, there are two separate guest houses, staff quarters, and a five-car garage.

12.30



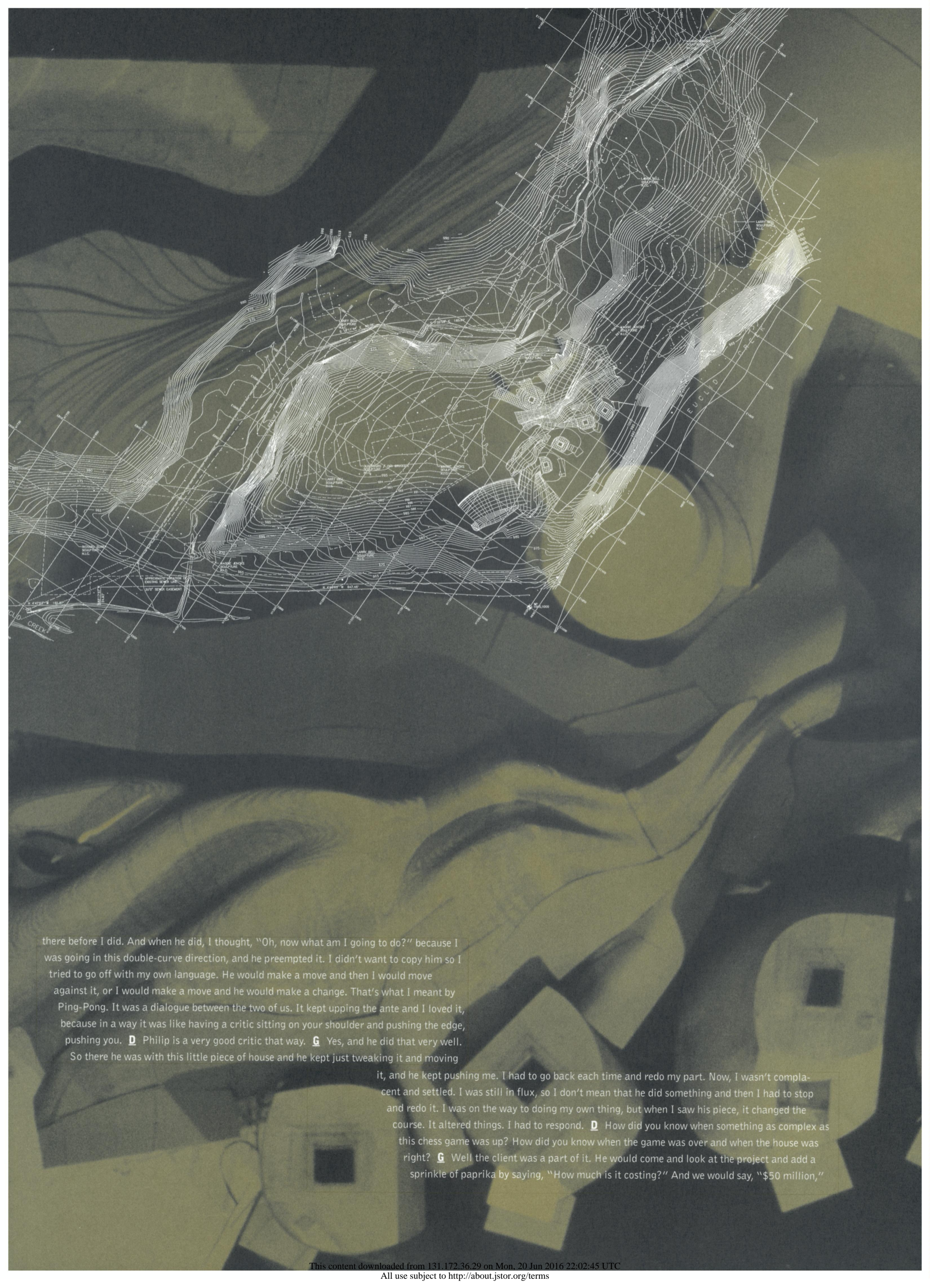
The house, landscape, and surrounding sculptures are the result of a collaborative exploration of forms and ideas between Frank O. Gehry, Philip Johnson, and several celebrated artists. Located on nine acres of woodlands, the house is bounded by two large reflecting pools, bronze figures, steel plates, a tower, and a light/water sculpture; all play an integral role in the composition and form of the project.

The resulting composition of complex forms and geometries is to be constructed from a variety of materials, including plaster, stone, metal, and glass. The participation of trades and artisans in the process is integral to the form-making envisioned. Given the unique sculptural qualities and constructability issues, 3-D computer modeling was employed extensively in the design and documentation process.

- Client
Peter B. Lewis
- Design Architect**
Frank O. Gehry & Associates
- Design Principal**
Frank O. Gehry
- Project Principal**
James M. Glymph
- Project Designers**
Craig Webb
Susan DeSko
Vincent L. Snyder
- Project Architects**
Terry Bell
George Metzger
Laurence Tighe
- Project Team**
Rich Barrett
Karl Blette
Naomi Ehrenpreis
John Goldsmith
Michael Jobes
Michael Mantzoris
Jay Park
David Reddy
Philip Rowe
Eva Sobesky
Kevin Southerland
Tensho Takemori
Robert Thibodeau
Lisa Tawning
Dane Twichell
Scott Uriu
Jeff Wauer
Kristin Woehl
Nora Wolin
Brian Yoo
- Collaborating Design Architect**
Philip Johnson Architects
- Principal/Design**
Philip Johnson
- Project Architect**
John Manley
David Harrison
- Artists**
Richard Serra
Larry Bell
Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen
Maggie Cheswick-Jencks
- Landscape Architect**
Hanna/Olin, Ltd.
- Associate Architect**
van Dijk, Pace, Westlake, & Partners
- Structural Engineer**
DeSimone, Chaplin and Dobryn Consulting Engineers, P.C.
- Mechanical/Electrical Engineer**
Cosentini Associates
- Interior Programming Consultant**
Lewis Wallack & Associates, Inc.
- Computer Design**
C-cubed, Rick Smith

The complex amalgamation of forms and flows was developed first in model form (preceding pages) and then digitized in the computer, where such aspects as the draped velvet used in the model could be manipulated (at left and above) to distill several forms, including the "horse's head" (directly above).

Cynthia Davidson When you first talked to me about the Lewis house, you compared the process of development to a Ping-Pong game. What did you mean by a Ping-Pong game, who were the players, and who was the referee? **Frank O. Gehry** The referee!? **D** Well doesn't there have to be a referee, Frank? Professional Ping-Pong has a referee. Is this non-professional Ping-Pong? **G** Non-professional. It's probably more like a chess game. When Philip first came on the project, he did a little building that looked like it fit into the Deconstruction show. I was doing curvy shapes but with squared corners, so that the shapes were not like an airplane body. His squared-off forms and my squared-off curves all went together. But I kept working; I wasn't satisfied with mine and I kept working on it and pushing it, and this took a long time. Philip saw what I was doing and made the move. It was almost like a checkmate – he moved



there before I did. And when he did, I thought, "Oh, now what am I going to do?" because I was going in this double-curve direction, and he preempted it. I didn't want to copy him so I tried to go off with my own language. He would make a move and then I would move against it, or I would make a move and he would make a change. That's what I meant by Ping-Pong. It was a dialogue between the two of us. It kept upping the ante and I loved it, because in a way it was like having a critic sitting on your shoulder and pushing the edge, pushing you. **D** Philip is a very good critic that way. **G** Yes, and he did that very well.

So there he was with this little piece of house and he kept just tweaking it and moving

it, and he kept pushing me. I had to go back each time and redo my part. Now, I wasn't complacent and settled. I was still in flux, so I don't mean that he did something and then I had to stop and redo it. I was on the way to doing my own thing, but when I saw his piece, it changed the course. It altered things. I had to respond. **D** How did you know when something as complex as this chess game was up? How did you know when the game was over and when the house was right? **G** Well the client was a part of it. He would come and look at the project and add a sprinkle of paprika by saying, "How much is it costing?" And we would say, "\$50 million,"

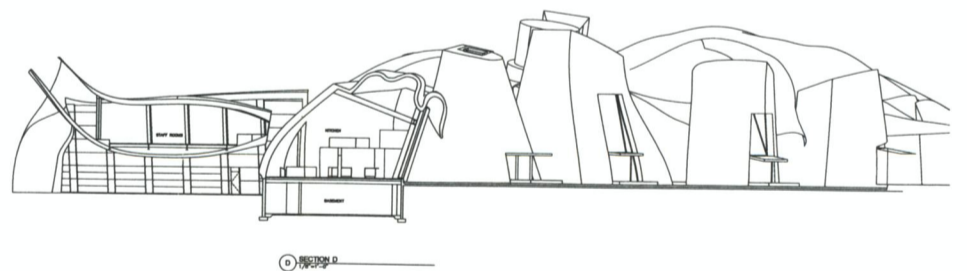
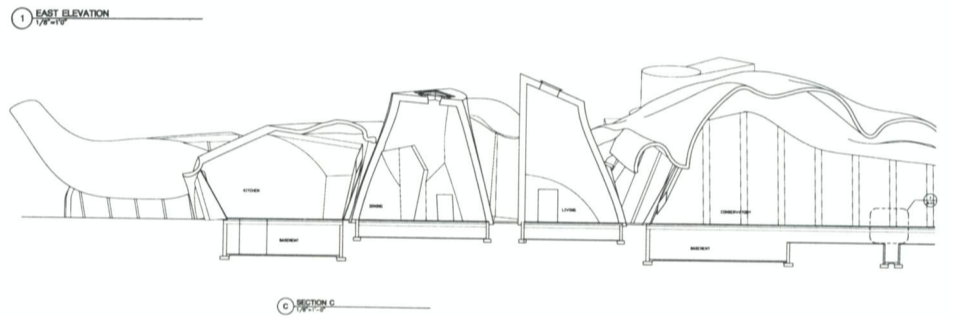
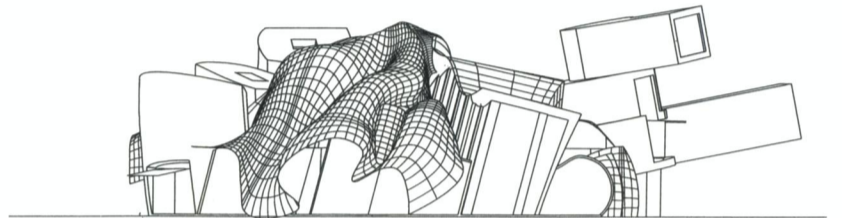
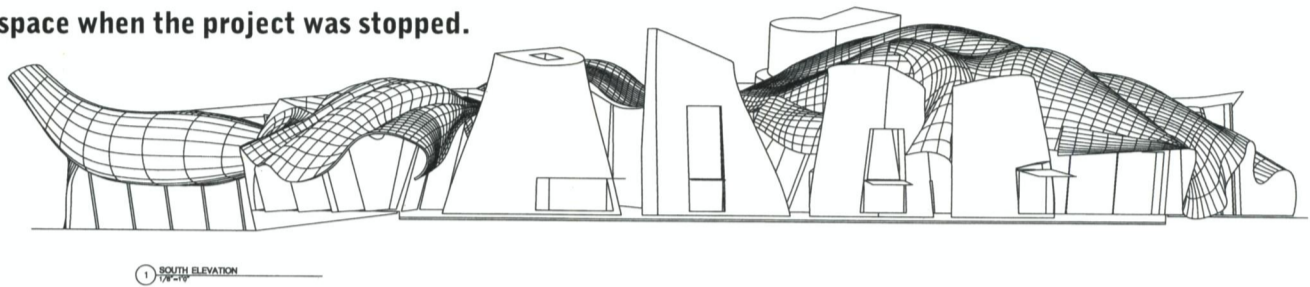
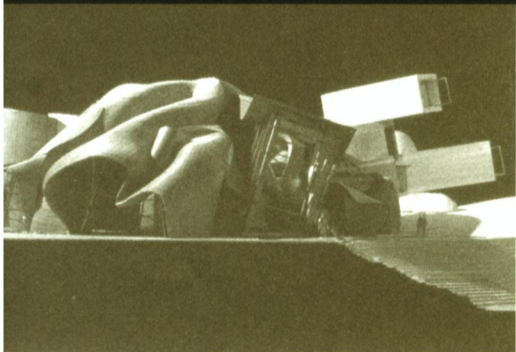
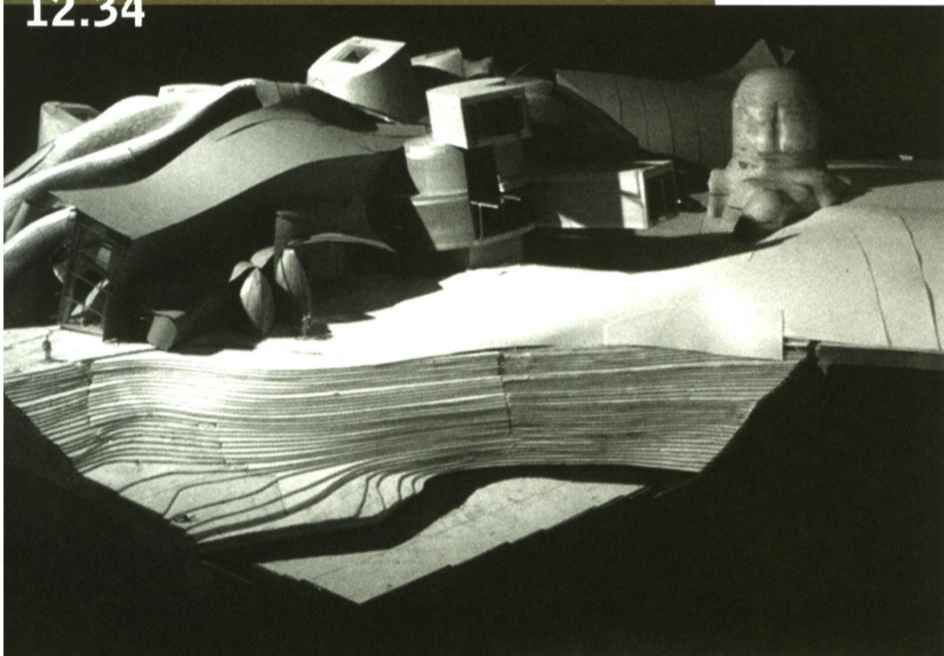
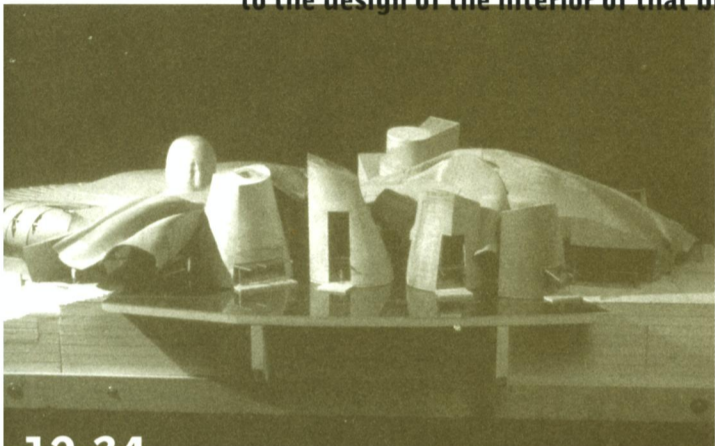
and he would say, "Oh, how much does Bill Gates' house cost? We said, "Oh, about \$60 million." He'd say, "Oh, okay. We're okay." So those were the little sprinkles of encouragement. The house got up to \$80 million, and it was flabby. There were a lot of good ideas in it, but it was flabby.

D Flabby? **G** Well there was too much stuff. It was just overdone. So then Lewis read Paul Goldberger's article in *The New York Times Magazine* in which I said to build a \$5 million house and give the rest of the money to charity. He would get upset with me for telling him what to do with his money, saying "I'm only spending three percent of my fortune on a folly." He wanted eventually to give the folly to the city for a kind of cultural center. He even cited Oscar Wilde as saying that things that are not useful can be important. But when Lewis remembered my comments in the article, he used it to say that we couldn't build an \$80 million house; that we had to cut the budget. He told me it had to be \$30 million

with everything, so we cut the budget, and the house you see is \$30 million with everything. **D** So did the budget determine when it was right? **G** The budget determined when it was over. **D** Is that the same thing as right? **G** No, no. Here's what happens: You design an unlimited and open-ended house for somebody, and he says "go, go, go, go, go!" Then you find yourself desperate for constraints because you know "go, go, go" is not realistic. Somewhere in your gut you know this is not going to happen. So you look for the defining edge that is going to be what the client really wants, since they do control it because they are paying for it. When we finally were able to beat this project through and get a definitive edge, we were then able to conclude the game. But that didn't design it. The crystallization of the forms happened after we knew how much of it was going to be built; then I could make the final composition. Does that make sense? **D** Yes, it does. But can we back off from the discussion of budget and talk about how you could develop such a complex a piece of architecture and feel that you had it right? How did you know when something as complex and fluid as this piece was sculpturally, formally, artistically, and aesthetically where you wanted to be? **G** Well I always search for some kind of clarity that is personal. It's my personal definition of clarity, not somebody else's. When I see the clarity, which I did in this case, the individual pieces are really beautiful to me. With this project

each piece was working, and there was a synchronicity between the pieces. They were getting together, playing off each other and weaving together in a way that I was searching for. I was trying to achieve a bunch of sculptural goals, and when I got there, I could say "this is it." And it really was it in the end. The only piece I would be inclined to change – and it's a matter of re-proportioning – is the fish-shape in the garage. Other than that I was really happy with everything. We drew it to a close when the project met all my visual criteria. **D** You always seem to work intuitively. **G** Yes, but I do know where I'm going. I have a goal that I can articulate. I want the forms to read clearly. I want an integrated composition so there is a oneness, as well as a sense of movement. I work toward lots of things, and I try to build them in. When I get there I can, by my own standards, decide that it's done. I mean, I don't go on and on and on until somebody cuts it off. I stop it when I'm ready. **D** That's why I asked you to articulate your idea of completion in another way. You started by saying that the budget determined your edge, and it sounded like you were not in control. **G** Oh yes, I am. **D** What are the architectural issues, the conventions in architecture such as perspective or meaning or space, that you think this project deals with? **G** You know, I think all architecture is sculpture by definition because it is a three-dimensional object. To use the word sculpture is normal for me because I see it that way. You use a number of different scales and different materials to create different spatial experiences and objects that knit together into a whole. They have disparate visual characteristics but create a continuous architectural space. And yet in this case the client asked for discrete rooms. I was trying to solve a project that had visual continuity inside and out yet met the client's one requirement – to have separate, discrete bedroom, living room, dining room, kitchen. That's why those four sentinels, as I call them, are set apart. I always try to move ahead of where I was with my last project.

D A question that relates to some of these architectural issues is the one of plan. The master suite here is incredibly imaginative. The rooms become figures on the ground of an interior, and the interstitial spaces also serve as functional areas. I cannot recall any plan like it. **G** With the two fish? **D** They look like pods on the plan. **G** You're seeing just the bottom of a fish. It's the way the fish sits on the floor. We never built a model of it, but those are two fish shapes that would be made like Viking ships by wood craftsmen. One of them is the bathroom and the other is the dressing room. Yes, that is nice. It is as if the figures on the exterior, like Philip's octopus, my horse's head, the fish in the garage, and the snake form – whatever critters are lying around – go inside and become part of the interior parade with these two fish. There was a big snake room too, though it isn't defined in the material we gave you. We were just getting to the design of the interior of that big space when the project was stopped.

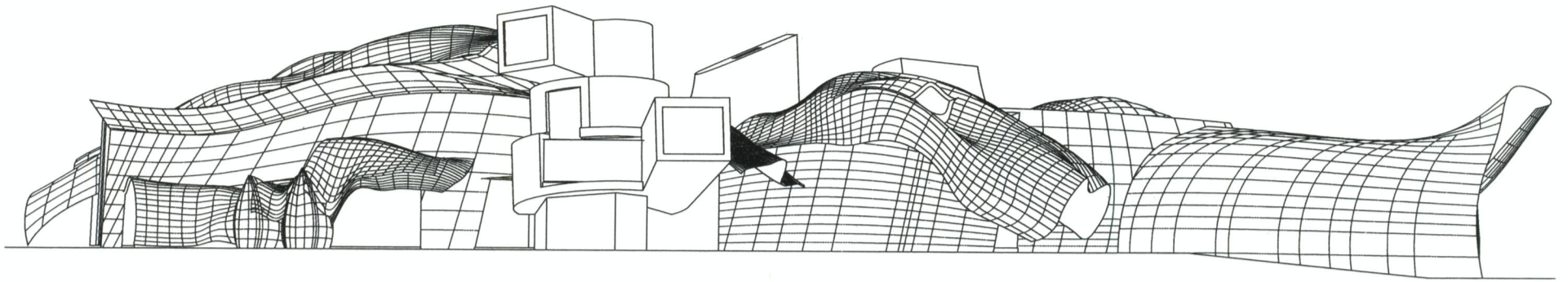


D Okay, there is an idea of the sea life moving inside, but when you put these fish or Viking ships into this interior space, you create leftover interstitial spaces for inhabitation. In terms of a plan, this seems to be quite different from what you have done before. **G** I have been a plan-designer architect for years, like Gwathmey. I've watched Charlie. He sits down and works out plans, and I am that kind of designer too. I am always drawing plans.

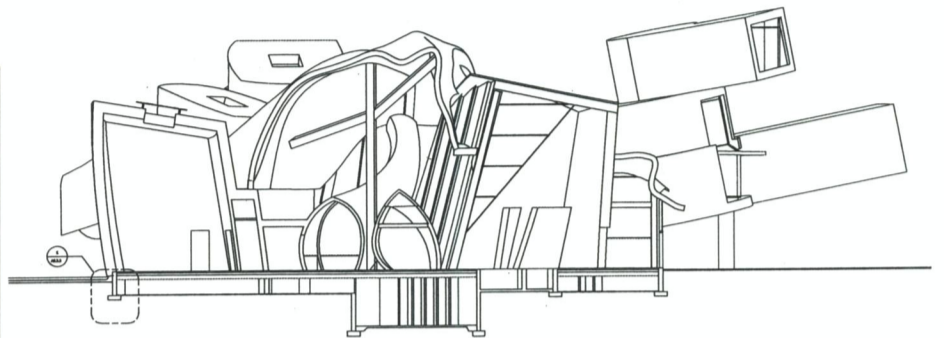
In the last few years I have been consciously avoiding the plan drawing

approach because it is a kind of a crutch. It gets you back into the same things you've always been doing. And yet I think designing a plan is important so I've started to design three-dimensionally with the model. **D** To design the plan? **G** Yes. It evolves, and then I work backward and draw it. But I do have plan studies where I organize it, so it comes quite naturally. The only way you can do what I'm doing is with the damned computer. **D** You don't really hate the computer do you?

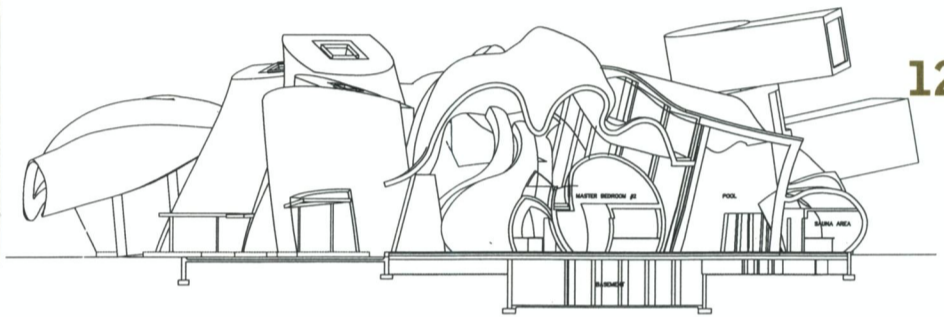
The guest house designed by Philip Johnson does not appear in these drawings of the Lewis Residence, but in the model its strong ovoid shape and oozing base – it is called the octopus – generate a playful dialogue with the variety of forms that constitutes the main house.



2 NORTH ELEVATION
1/8"=1'-0"

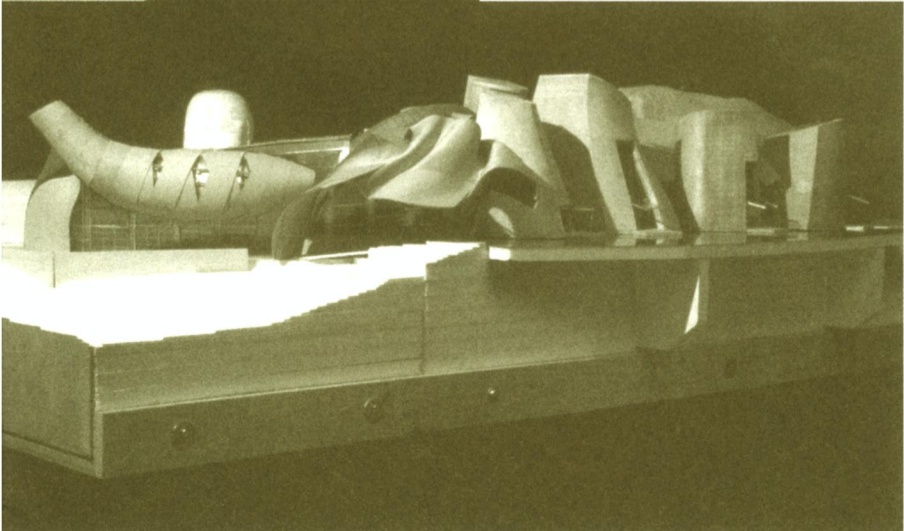
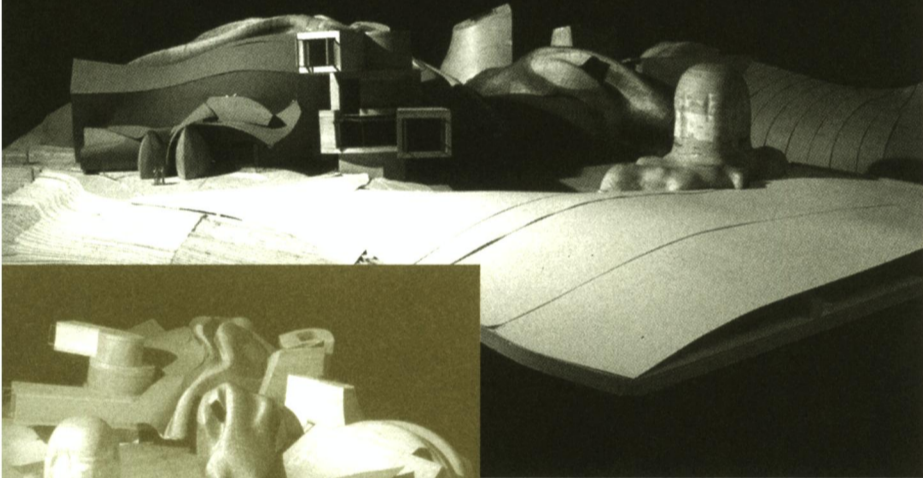
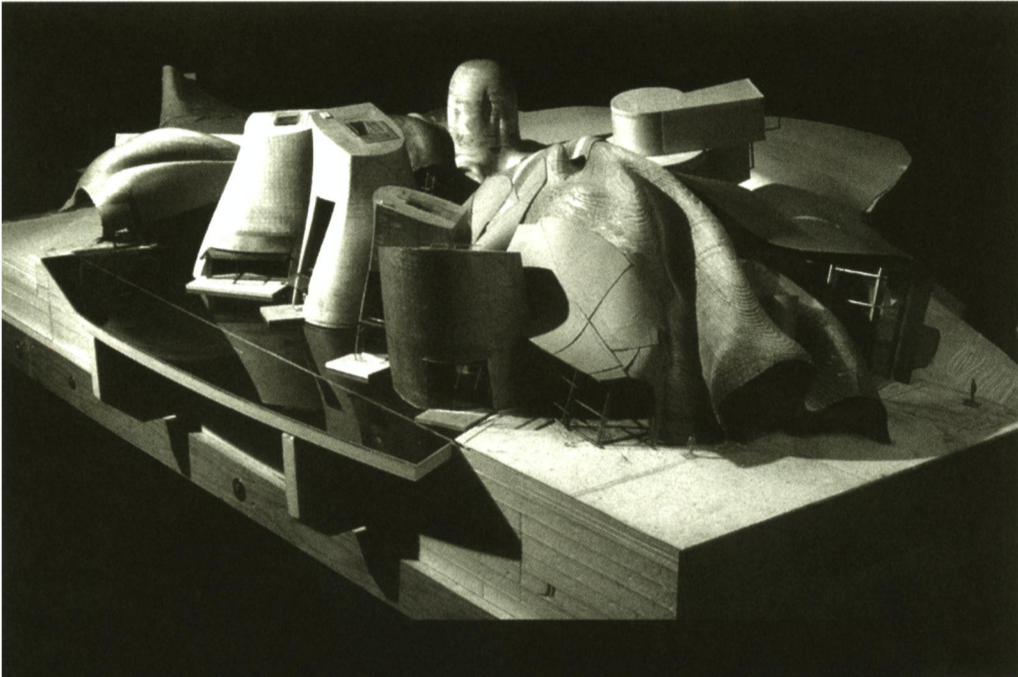


1 SECTION E
1/8"=1'-0"



F SECTION F
1/8"=1'-0"

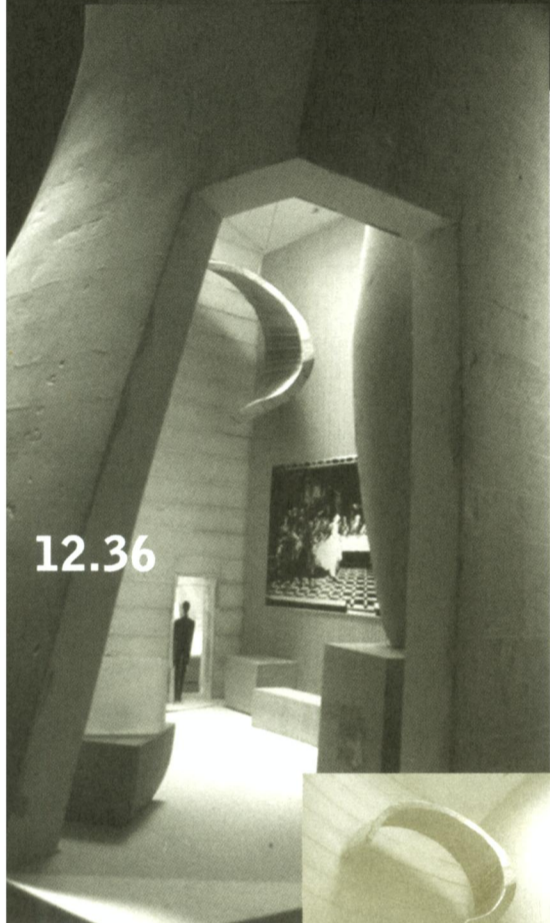
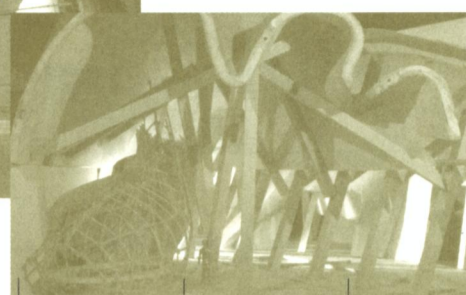
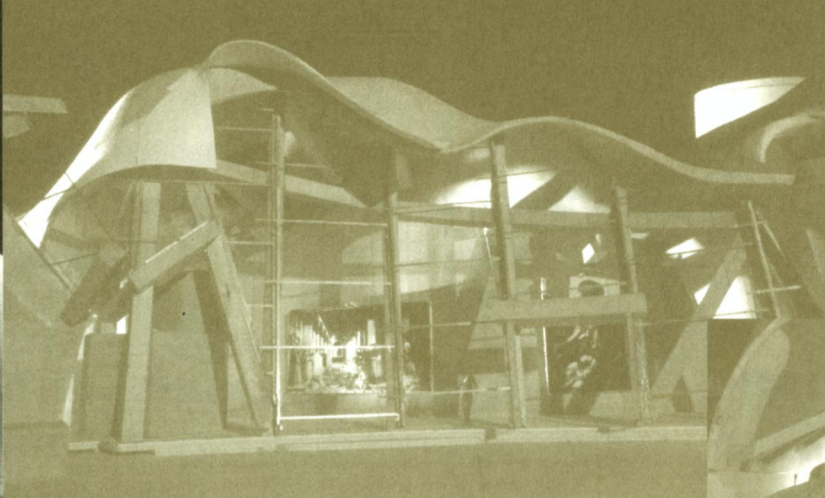
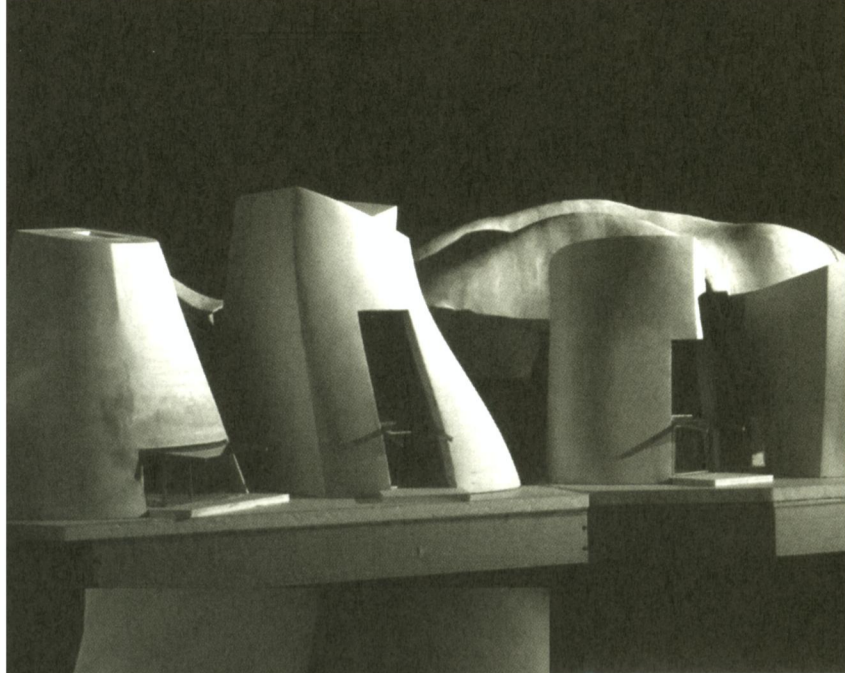
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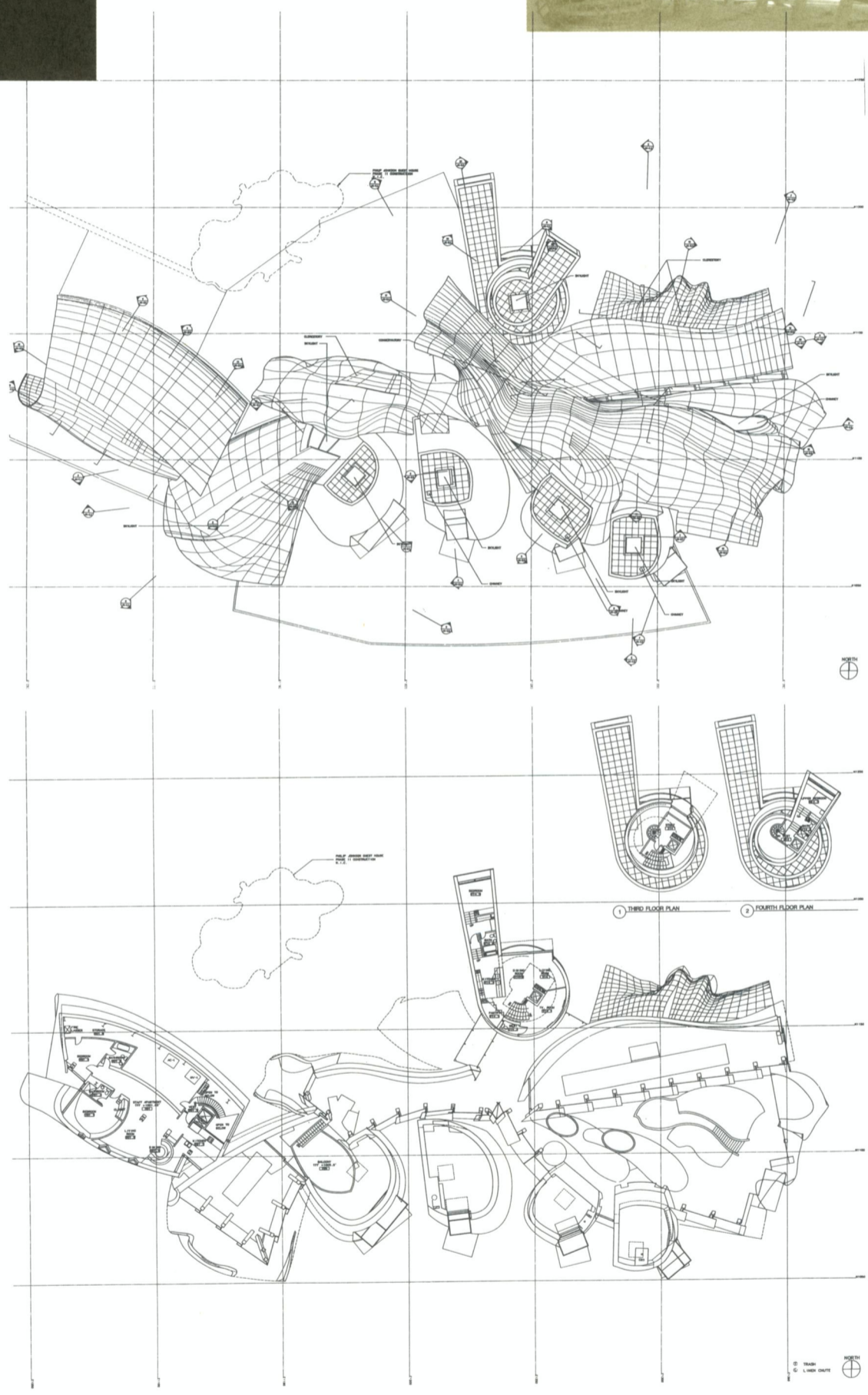
G No, no. I love what it does. Like everything else, it has been evolving. I have been evolving a way of making my language, which is a consistent attempt to escape the traps of the media that I work in. To work in plan and section is more restrictive than evolving a whole. If I can evolve the whole idea in my head – spatially, organizationally, and materially – I can move around it and through it more easily, and I don't get stuck with the crutches of the usual media. **D** Do you think the computer helps you get out of that trap? **G** No. I only used the

computer for cost control and to define the stuff so it can be built. I found it invaluable. **D** In the slides, there is an orange sort of drape that was modeled on the computer, no? **G** Yes, that was put into the computer, but it was digitized from the model. We made the model first and then took it into the computer, and the shapes on the model look better than the computer drawing. As seductive as those images are, they're not as good as the real thing in the model. I've never liked those net images because they don't tell the truth – its like seeing the structure uncovered.

There's no clarity to it because it's telling a lie; it's telling you something else. **D** Would you say the computer was used to quantify a pre-existent image or used in a new way to investigate a new expression? **G** Mostly for the first reason, but I developed the little horse's head piece on the computer. **D** You call it a horse's head? I thought it was an elephant or a mammoth.



12.36



G Call it whatever. Call it a prehistoric horse. Let me tell you how that happened, then you'll understand. The whole building was in the computer. The model for it was red velvet folded and covered with wax that hardened to create a solid form. I was manipulating the form with the waxed velvet. When it got to where I liked it, we digitized it – we put it in the computer.

D You really draped and folded red velvet and then covered it with wax? **G** Yes. We didn't know how to do it, you see. This was a new thing for us, this Leibniz fold stuff. I got turned on to it by some work of Klaus Sluter that I was looking at. Sluter was a 14th-century sculptor who did beautiful folds of drapery in marble. The work is very minimal, very architectural.

I can't. I can't!" He made me sit down with him, and I remember I stayed there for four minutes. It was like putting my hand in the fire and seeing how long I could stay there before pulling it out. It was that kind of experience. I sat there, and I couldn't stand it. I was pissed off at the images and I said, "Move this up a little, move this here, change this, move this," and then I got the horse's head. So some of the design process came from manipulating the computer. That's what I'm trying to say. In the end we not only used it to define a pre-existing form. We also moved forward with the shapes. When I realized I could do that, I also realized I'm going to have to do it again. **D** It's really interesting that you move from a 14th-century sculptor to a late-20th-century technology in one project. Is this project more than a new form of expressionism?

