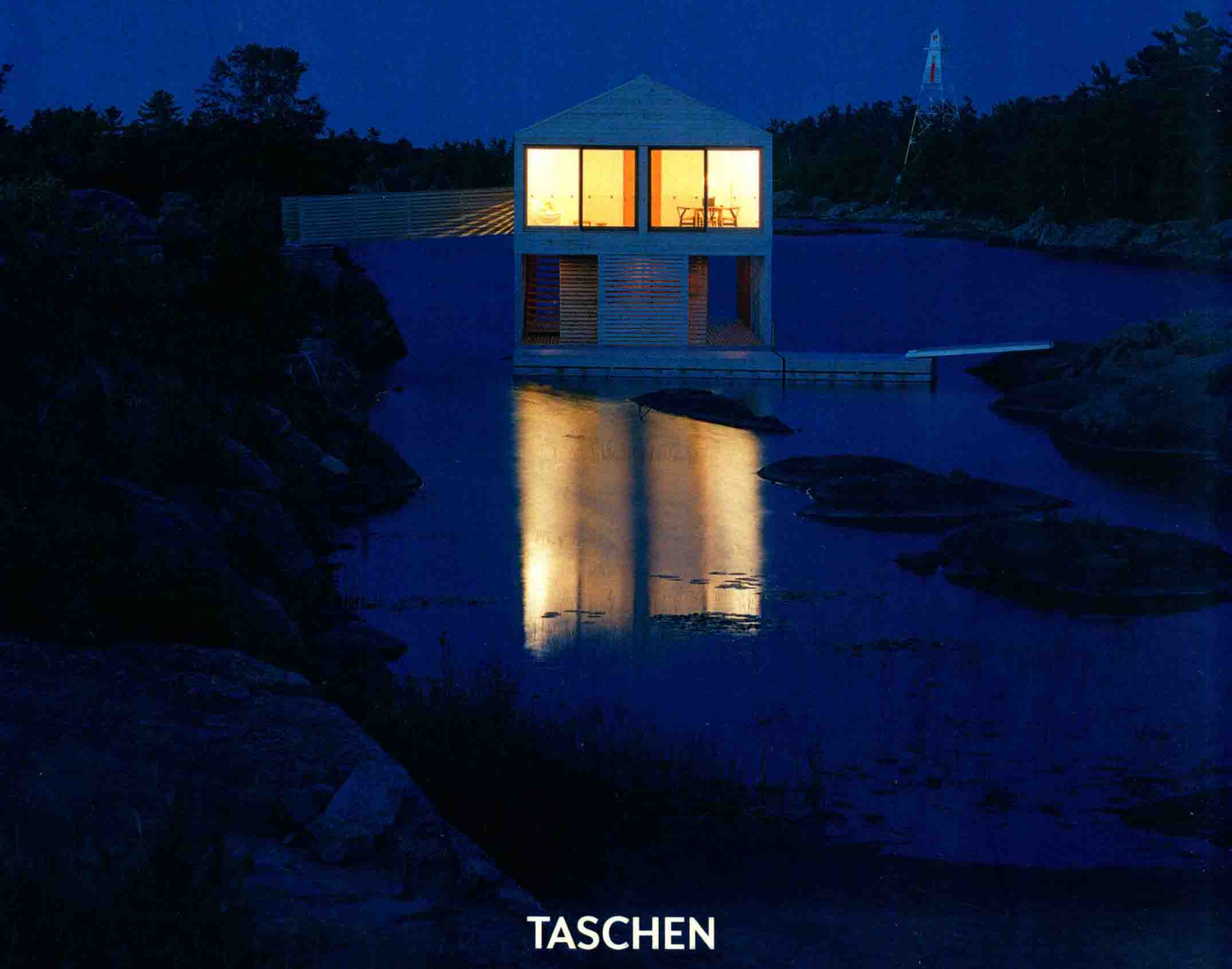


# ARCHITECTURE NOW!

# HOUSES

*Architektur heute! HÄUSER*  
*L'architecture d'aujourd'hui! MAISONS*

*Philip Jodidio*



TASCHEN



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# INTRODUCTION

## OF CASTLES AND CAVES

"The house," says the Swiss architect Mario Botta, "is intimately related to the idea of shelter. A cave carved out of the rock is like a mother's womb. This is the concept of the house that I defend. When I am tired of the world, I want to go home. There I can regain my energy to prepare for the next day's battle. As long as there is a man who needs a house, architecture will still exist... A house should be like a mother's womb."<sup>1</sup> Though there may be distinctions between a house and a home, the fact remains that the fundamental ideas of shelter, life and death are intertwined with the architecture of the commonplace in every place of dwelling, from cave to castle. The house can be a measure of civilization, wealth or, indeed, intelligence; it is a barometer of existence. Not every famous architect has chosen to design houses. I. M. Pei, for example, has always privileged civic buildings, first and foremost the museum. Santiago Calatrava, Renzo Piano or Jean Nouvel, likewise, have indulged little in the art of the private house. Other famous figures of contemporary architecture find it essential to continue to build homes, in the image of Tadao Ando for example. Builders of cities and new worlds of architecture, from Wright to Niemeyer, have again and again come back to that most fundamental of architectural acts, the design of the house. Depending on the architect and the client, a house can be at the very cutting edge of architecture, casting aside notions of the past in search of a new paradigm; it can accept the rules of urbanism while standing them on their head. It can float in the air or emerge from the depths of the earth. Where factors of cost may limit civic architecture to tried and trusted methods, some houses break all the rules, and help architecture to move forward.

## HOUSES NOW!

It should be readily apparent that this book is not about decoration, nor is it a practical guide to building one's own house. It is, rather, a search that may lead the willing reader from Patagonia (Techos House by Mathias Klotz, Patagonia, Argentina, page 271) to the cliffs of Dover Heights (Holman House by Durbach Block, Sydney, Australia, page 135) to see some of the most remarkable houses built in the past five years. By nature and definition these are exceptional houses, because most dwellings are built without architects or without imagination from one end of the earth to the other. The liberty to select a talented architect and to pay the price for excellence in design implies a degree of wealth that may be more or less apparent in the houses published here. But this book is not so much about places of leisure for the very rich as it is about what is new, different and exciting in "Architecture Now." "Why is it that of all the new architecture, the stuff that seems the most interesting is houses?" asked MoMA Architecture curator Terry Riley in 1999. "It is for two reasons. The house has traditionally been a kind of bell-weather of the state of architecture. It has frequently been the laboratory where bigger ideas get tested out or where more avant-garde projects that can't quite earn the necessary consensus in the corporate or public or governmental world can more easily find a client who is also a visionary. This happens more easily in houses than elsewhere. What is happening now in architecture is really appearing in houses."<sup>2</sup> Many of the architects and clients selected here have declined to reveal the construction cost of their house—while others have been quite forthcoming. The houses here range from 36 square meters built at a cost of \$7500 (Elemental Iquique by Elemental/Alejandro Aravena, Chile, page 151) to a massive 3000-square-meter residence fashioned in the heights of Kuala Lumpur by Patrick Jouin and Sanjit Manku (Malaysia, page 235—cost not disclosed), or another similarly sized compound by Steven Ehrlich in the United Arab Emirates (Helal



1 + 2

*Tonkin Liu and Richard Rogers,  
Roof Garden Apartment, Shoreditch,  
London, UK, 2005–06*



1



2

New Moon Residence, page 18). The *parti* of this publication is to explore individual houses, as opposed to housing in its multiple incarnations. There is one apartment shown here (Roof Garden Apartment by Tonkin Liu and Richard Rogers, page 7), but its design resembles that of a house perched on the roof of a London warehouse.

In the design of houses, much as in the art of architecture as a whole, there is no one style today, no dominant trend like the minimalism that seemed to sweep through residential architecture led by such figures as John Pawson. Minimalism is still fashionable in many circles, but so is the kind of glittering complexity seen in Jouin Manku's interiors for the house in Kuala Lumpur. Computers, used in an earlier phase to fashion extravagant blobs, have become part and parcel of architectural design, from the smallest house to the largest building, and this too has changed, and in many ways liberated, the design of houses. The new "maturity" displayed by architects in their use of computers might best be summed up by Michael Meredith of MOS, a young Assistant Professor of Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (Floating House, Lake Huron, Ontario, Canada, page 307): "Computers are dumb, but they can do simple things real fast and architecture is now so complex that you can't keep all of it in your head."

The exhibition curated by Terry Riley, "The Un-Private House" (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999), called attention to a new generation of homes: "There have been fundamental changes in all of the aspects that constitute the private house," said Riley. "Changes in the family, changes in the relationship between the house and work. For several centuries, the way one defined the private house was by the absence of work. There have been changes in the notion of domesticity. Changes in the notion of privacy itself."<sup>3</sup> In 1999, Riley felt he could announce many changes that had begun to appear in contemporary house design, amongst them a change in spatial hierarchies due to work and living patterns. Almost 10 years later, very few architects would imagine describing a house in terms of a traditional living room, dining room and kitchen. Rather these are "living spaces" or "public spaces" as opposed to the private realm. Specific rooms have often been dissolved into continuous spaces available for different forms of use. Yet there is still an order of space imposed on sleeping arrangements in most cases, with the owner occupying the "master bedroom."

The number of books and magazines published about houses has expanded substantially over the years. In some cases this is for practical reasons—people looking for ideas about how to build or decorate their own home—but there is also an element of curiosity. How do other people live, in particular those who have the means to do practically anything they want. Voyeurism is of course part of the architect's imagination in designs from the Glass House in Paris (Pierre Chareau, *Maison de Verre*, 1928–31) to the Glass House in New Canaan (Philip Johnson, 1949) and right up to the present. Well, if the architect can do it, so can the reader, so come along.

## KING OF THE ROOST

In all fairness when people, even very rich ones, decide to build a house of 3000 square meters or more, they usually intend to receive large numbers of clients or friends. This is certainly the case of the house in Kuala Lumpur designed by the French furniture and interior designer Patrick Jouin and his partner Sanjit Manku (page 235). Built on a restricted site in the former embassy area of the Malaysian capital, the house is intended for the extended family of one of the country's most visible entrepreneurs. In a neighborhood whose architecture





3

*Nancy Copley, Copley Residence,  
Accord, New York, USA, 1980–2008*

3

can only be described as heterogeneous, the architects have, at the request of their client, packed as many square meters into the site as possible. Their bold design also features numerous outdoor terraces and enclosed garden areas designed by Lugano-based Sophie Agata Ambroise. Given the jungle-like vegetation that dominates Kuala Lumpur, it is not difficult to make plants grow here, but the young landscape architect has done a great deal to make the very substantial architecture melt to some extent into the greenery. Jouin and Manku have come up with a strong statement for complex forms and a décor that is anything but minimal. Jouin, best-known for his numerous restaurants designed for the French chef Alain Ducasse, has designed forms that play on materials and light, creating an original universe within the cantilevered UFO-like walls of Manku. Taking into account the extended family structure of the client, with apartments for three generations, the architects have sought a new language for a country that has little visible indigenous architectural style aside from the rapidly disappearing colonial Orientalism still to be seen in the railway station and a few other older buildings in the city. The very size of the house may be apparent in its exterior bulk, with a large parking garage and ballroom facilities for guests occupying lower level spaces, leaving what appears to be a convivial and reasonably sized house above.

Steven Ehrlich, who has built a good number of very attractive houses in California, took on another, even bigger house project in the United Arab Emirates (page 18). His Helal New Moon Residence measures no less than 3250 square meters, but again includes large reception areas. As informed visitors to the region know only too well, the latest trends in architecture in places like Dubai have tended toward massive Western-style complexes with little connection to local culture. Granted, the Gulf Emirates were only modest trading posts along the edge of the desert before the discovery of oil and gas, but they are located in the geographic heart of Arab Islam. Then, too, when an emirate like Dubai counts as much as 90 % of its population as foreign, it may be expected that local traditions will have a difficult time influencing new architecture. Ehrlich has made a substantial effort to look into Islamic forms for his own design: the reminiscence of a Bedouin tent, patterned *mashrabiyya* screens to filter the light, and a curving crescent-moon roof suggest that the residence could not easily have been built outside the Islamic world, though the *mashrabiyya* is made of cast aluminum as opposed to the traditional wood. What the architect calls “modern technology and design,” however, places the New Moon Residence firmly in the realm of Western-based thought, despite its bows to local imagery. The “Emerald City” glitz of Dubai, after all, has something to do with older cities from nowhere like Los Angeles, where Steven Ehrlich has long been based. This is not intended as a critique of the architect or his project, but as a statement of fact. It should not be surprising that an architect from Culver City should build near the waters of the Arabian (i. e. Persian) Gulf.

## MY PLACE OR YOURS?

Two houses published in this book, one built in the United States and the other in Japan, take very personal approaches to nature and to tradition. The first of these, the Copley Residence (Accord, New York, USA, 1980–2008, page 119), is the fruit of almost thirty years of work on the part of an atypical architect, Nancy Copley. “The inspiration of my house,” she says, “grew from this beautiful sloping land enriched with strong oaks, hickories, beech and the sculptural forms of boulders. I developed a form that complemented the land and vertical lines from the trees.” Although the wooded setting is indeed rustic, and Copley has worked much of the stone herself, this is by no means a rural cabin. Original, and





4

Zhang Lei, *Brick House 01*,  
Gaochun, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China,  
2006–07

4

indeed quite beautiful, the house does from some angles bring to mind the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, a kind of reference to American architectural tradition that has become rare in these times of computer-assisted design. This house is of its place and time, not a throwback to Wright though, while it is also of the land, the earth that has inspired generations of American artists, architects and writers. More so than most contemporary houses designed by architects in the United States, this is an American house in the most positive and meaningful sense of that term.

A world or more from Accord, New York, the very unusual Terunobu Fujimori, a Professor at the University of Tokyo's Institute of Industrial Science, conceived the Charred Cedar House (Nagano City, Nagano, Japan, 2006–07, page 171). Perhaps echoing the sentiment expressed by Mario Botta at the beginning of this text, he likens the interior of this house to a cave—the place of origin in many senses, the first sheltered “home” of men, as in Lascaux, the specific example cited by Fujimori. Known for his quirky and usually tiny teahouses, Fujimori has come on to the Japanese architectural scene like a breath of fresh air, reinterpreting tradition in essentially modern ways despite the “rustic” appearance of his work as seen from many angles. There is, too, a teahouse perched at one end of this residence in a way that might evoke a smile, just as the three *hiroki* tree trunks that emerge from the ceiling of the residence have a comical side, even as they speak in a figurative sense of the roots of architecture.

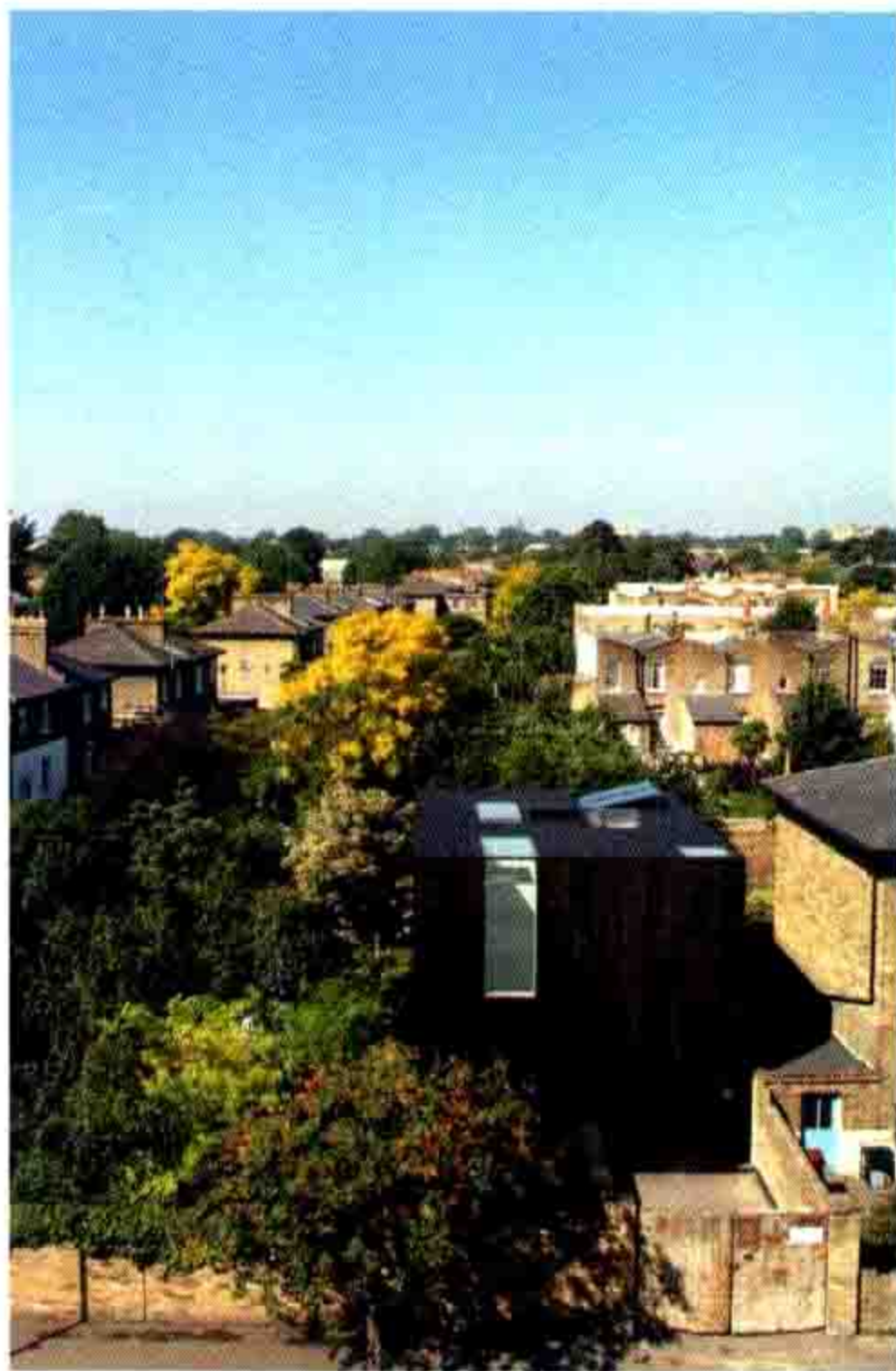
With his Brick Houses (Gaochun, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China, 2006–07, pages 395–401), the Chinese architect Zhang Lei explores the tradition of the courtyard house, a quintessential building type that he succeeds in rendering thoroughly modern while also using local materials (red bricks) and achieving an astonishingly low 80 euros per square meter construction cost—a feat even by standards of a country of plentiful labor. The ways in which Nancy Copley, Terunobu Fujimori and Zhang Lei look into the traditions of their respective countries is both instructive and indicative of trends in contemporary architecture. Rather than attempting at any cost to impose a standardized Western-derived model on houses that they conceive, these architects have looked into the past to discover surprising “modernity” and intelligence in its architecture. Naturally, this type of approach does not appeal to every client, but the reference to the past, or to the “rootedness” of a house in history and in its place, is an essential factor that is often swept aside by computer-generated objects in contemporary architecture.

## TWISTING THE COOKIE CUTTER

A number of the architects and houses featured in this volume engage the very substance of design to question rules, regulations and typologies, in a sense to reinterpret the house. David Adjaye's Sunken House (London, UK, 2007, page 10) certainly defies convention in excavating the entire site to basement level and then placing a cube entirely clad in stained garden decking within this space, leaving room for patios, also covered in decking. This orchestration of spaces and materials questions the concept of the ground on which a house is built, and the typology of the basement and of the patio. This might be termed the ultimate patio house if the austerity of its form and rather radical approach did not make it a challenging object, quite the opposite of the traditional patio house, a suburban fixture in the United Kingdom and in many other countries.

For somewhat different reasons, the architects Seiji Kamayachi and Masafumi Harigai also fully excavated the site of their G House (Yokohama, Japan, 2005–07, page 249). Located in a suburban development area, their site had in fact been artificially elevated to bring it





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7

to street level. By excavating they re-established the true ground level before building the house. They then proceeded to imagine a house that fully respects the “cookie-cutter” alignments and forms of neighboring houses, while essentially turning the rules on their head—leaving a vast part of the upper area of the house as a huge empty room. Though the house might appear from the outside to be fully traditional, despite sitting low on the land, its dark profile and luminous band of glass at the base, a more likely location for concrete than glazing, signal a critical attitude even for passersby. The significant place given to an undifferentiated open space within the house might also spring from the increasingly fluid use of residential architecture—and the desire not to limit the client's use of space. Japanese traditional architecture, with its sliding screens, might also be a source for this surprising openness, but there also seems to be something of the impact of new life styles on residential architecture.

A third project with a radical design concept is the Wall House (Santiago, Chile, 2004–07, page 157) by FAR frohn&rojas. The architects chose to conceive this residence as a series of wall layers made of progressively lighter or more translucent materials. The inner core of the house, containing bathrooms, is made of concrete that is surrounded by bands of wood, where the kitchen, bedrooms and a dining area are enclosed, and finally the visible skin is made of high-insulation polycarbonate panels. In a sense, the ancient idea of the cave seems to be at play here, at least in the positioning and the choice of materials. The innermost concrete heart of the house is its most solid and ultimately protective element. Living spaces given to change and movement are built of wood and the final layer of outside covering, a skin in an almost physiological sense, is translucent plastic. The anthropomorphic aspects of this layering would seem apparent, with bones, organs and skin being the parallels for the architectural choices made. Perhaps, most fundamentally, the architects have made a conscious decision to allow the walls to dictate the plan, which is quite the opposite of the usual procedure, where plan dominates. It is encouraging to see that despite centuries, if not millennia of residential design, some young architects still feel that they can change the way a house is designed. Undoubtedly, contemporary life styles and aesthetics are also factors in the liberty that Frohn and Rojas have claimed with their Wall House.

## THE IMPRINT OF NATURE

The rapport between the house and nature is a particularly rich field of inquiry for today's architects. There may be as many approaches to this issue as three homes in this book or more, but three examples of a kind of sublimation of the rapport with landscape and nature can be cited as innovative and significant. The Sakura residence by Mount Fuji Architects Studio (Meguro-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 2006, page 315) continues a long Japanese tradition of seeking to integrate nature into fundamentally urban environments. For the Japanese, a ray of light or a passing breeze that enters a house are seen as manifestations of nature, more than any potted plant. *Sakura* is the Japanese word for cherry blossom, and as any spring-time visitor to Japan will notice, the *sakura* is everywhere present, as an enduring symbol of nature and its regeneration. In the densely built Meguro-ku residential area of the Japanese capital, Mount Fuji Architects imagined a screen around this house, to give it a sense of removal from the crowded city. Using an Ise paper-stencil pattern traditionally used for the manufacture of kimonos, with a technique more than a thousand years old, they punched tiny holes in a steel screen, creating an “artificial forest” of cherry blossoms. This is at once a reference to Japanese tradition of course, and a sublimation of nature in an apparently chaotic urban setting.



5 + 6 + 7  
David Adjaye, *Sunken House*,  
London, UK, 2007

8  
Buro II, *Living among the Hares of Flanders*,  
Roeselare, Belgium,  
2004–05



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Bringing patterns into the house in the day and letting points of light escape at night is a subtle and poetic integration of the earth into a city environment otherwise made of asphalt, glass and concrete.

The Flemish architects Buro II have taken a very different approach to a house they call *Living among the Hares of Flanders* (Roeselare, Belgium, 2004–05, page 11). Building a modern wooden form that recalls local architecture and sits on the site of a former barn, they have sought to “transform space by means of memory, so that architecture becomes an extension of the built environment, seeking a return to the autonomy of landscape.” The apparently blank wooden form as seen from certain angles is broadly glazed at the ends, and its interior is decidedly modern, with none of the picturesque rural touches that one might expect in such a location. The willful contrast between interior and exterior and the acceptance of the formal typology of the barn mark a different way to approach contemporary residential architecture in a natural setting that has clearly been formed by man through ages of farming. Nature, here too, is man-made in a large sense, but the architects have chosen not to impose a thoroughly alien object on such an environment, as many of their colleagues may well have chosen to do.

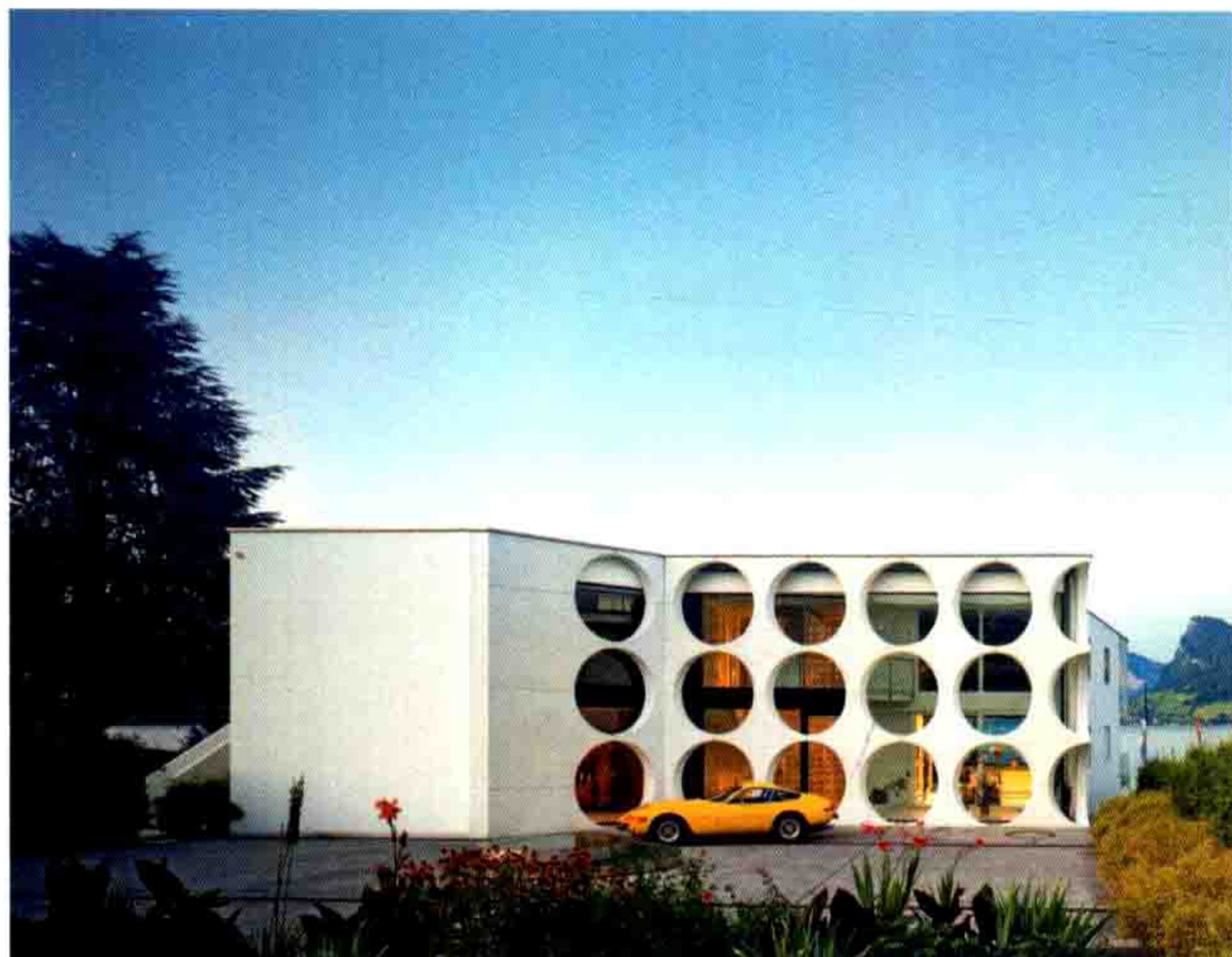
Another Japanese house, albeit in a more natural setting than the Sakura residence, Sou Fujimoto’s House O (Chiba, Japan, 2007, page 177), interprets the client’s desire to “feel the nearby ocean.” Fujimoto, one of the rising stars of Japanese architecture, has sought in this case to create “various oceans”—“a panoramic view of the ocean, the ocean seen from recesses of a cave, an enclosed ocean and a place that seems projected above the ocean.” It is interesting that here again the idea of the cave reappears in the description of a house, imagined by Sou Fujimoto as something “primitive, in between natural and man-made.” Beyond the poetic imagery evoked by the architect, House O has a deliberate emphasis on the continuous use of space, with one function folding into the other freely. In the search for nature in the form of “various oceans,” in the development of spatial continuity, and in the reinvention of the very forms of the house, Fujimoto can be said to be on the cutting edge of house design.

## BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

The French speak of “*une vue imprenable*”—literally a view that cannot be taken, or taken away from its “owner.” So often houses are built in locations that offer a view. For those who are sensitive to nature, a mountain view or an ocean vista offer the spectacle of constant change with the hours of the day and seasons of the year. To escape from the view into a house with its intimate spaces and inevitably closed vistas (the cave), the owner need only look forth from a balcony to see a version of the infinite. Making use of views and integrating them into the very conception of a house is a rewarding part of an architect’s task in these instances. Rather than the full protection of the cave, the house with a view exposes its fragility to sometimes hostile elements. The kind of bareness to the elements offered by a spectacular view is particularly well suited to modern architecture, with its resistant materials and capacity to glaze large surfaces, even opposing the winds.

The house in Guarujá (São Paulo, Brazil, 2004–06, page 75) by the Rio architects Bernardes + Jacobsen combines the kind of luxuriant natural setting only available in a climate like that of Brazil, with a view of the Atlantic from the heights of a steeply sloped site. This house underlines to what extent house architecture is influenced by climate. The outdoor terraces that render exterior and interior almost





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indistinguishable in this house would be impossible in many climates, no matter how attractive the view. The ambiguity between interior and exterior, long practiced in Japan, is a popular theme in contemporary architecture in general, but it would be difficult to practice it in a more logical and complete way than on the wooden terraces of this house.

The 400-square-meter Holman House (Dover Heights, Sydney, NSW, Australia, 2003–05, page 135) sits atop a 70-meter cliff and accentuates the views and the apparent danger associated with this situation by indulging in volumes that are cantilevered out over the void. Large window surfaces and, indeed, the capacity to allow architectural volumes to jut out over the cliff are typically modern gestures, fully assumed by the architects Durbach Block in this case. The idea of danger must surely come to mind to those who view this house from the edge, or for those who may be forgiven a moment of dizziness within. There is a euphoria associated with walking the edge, in both a literal and a figurative sense. The Holman House affords its owners just such a sense of euphoria, no small feat in the world of contemporary architecture—a case of symbiosis between a house and its environment.

The Swiss architect Philippe Stuebi managed to combine the virtues of a large, luxurious house (700 m<sup>2</sup>) with a pure mountain lake view in his house on Lake Lucerne (Switzerland, 2005–07, page 367). Glass brick balconies offer views not only of the lake but also of the Rigi and the Bürgenstock, while the large round openings on the entry side of the house frame Mount Pilatus. As opposed to a dense urban environment with its constraints in terms of noise, pollution and neighbors, a house like this one embodies a luxury that has less to do with expensive materials than with open vistas, a sense of being alone with or against nature. Ultimately, such views must convey a far greater sense of mortality than a primitive cave might. The cave, born of the earth, might seem eternal in and of itself, while a house on the edge of the void must forcibly be as ephemeral as the setting sun.

Shoei Yoh conceived his residence, Another Glass House between Sea and Sky (Nogita, Shimamachi, Fukuoka, Japan, 1991–2004, page 34) more than 15 years ago, and yet his continued interest in the location, recently embellished by cherry trees, has given him the will to continue transforming and improving it. Essentially a composition of suspended concrete slabs and glass, Yoh's house is glazed from floor to ceiling and only silicone joints are used, accentuating the impression of complete transparency. The house literally hangs over a cliff. As he says, it "isn't an ordinary house to dwell in, but a sailing boat, floating between sea and sky." Even the photos of this house clearly express its floating nature, solid enough to withstand strong winds and a recent earthquake, but also immensely fragile. The Japanese are sensitive to the poetic implications of such fleeting expressions of nature as the falling cherry blossom. Modern in plan and concept, the Yoh house is also, contrary to what it might seem, an expression of Japanese tradition.

### TREE HOUSES AND PLASTIC HOUSES

As opposed to daring to hang over the edge, or to seeking in a sense to dominate the force of nature, other houses accept their setting, blending into it in many ways. Theirs is a proximity to nature that is not related to infinite views, but to the green of the forest for example. One of the more surprising and humorous interpretations of this theme is seen in the Silicon House (La Florida, Madrid, Spain, 2006, page 347) by SELGASCANO. The residence of the architects, this house was built with an almost fanatic respect for living trees on the site,