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An Aedicula for the Prodigal Sun

The Hoffman House, Dallas, by Charles Moore

Patrick Peters

The harsh Texas sun establishes a need for shade and diffused light that Charles Moore accommodates with cross-cultural sophistication and regionalist know-how in a recently completed Dallas home for Sally and Robert Hoffman and their daughter. Louis Kahn, in his duel with the sun at the Kimbell Art Museum in neighboring Fort Worth, sought to develop a timeless daylight solution applicable to all contexts. Moore, a student of Kahn, adopts a more modest *modus operandi*, perusing archetypes from a wide range of sources and deploying them on a case-by-case basis for the sequence of rooms and spaces that surrounds the Hoffman House's central courtyard.¹ The result is a sense of place and progression that defies simple diagramming or photographic encapsulation. According to Robert Hoffman — an architecture enthusiast since his days at Harvard and developer of a condominium project by Moore intended for a nearby site on Turtle Creek — siting, daylighting, and vertical space are essential elements of Moore's work. These qualities are in evidence throughout the house, which opens up to an uncommonly lush and serene setting.

Completed in 1988 after three years of planning and construction, the house rests in an unlikely spot near one of Dallas's most heavily trafficked intersections. However, surprisingly little noise intrudes, as the site vegetation and the courtyard plan exercise an insulating effect. Following a domestic protocol removed from the obligations of the street, the house presents no formal façade or obvious front to passersby but instead engages views of the surrounding dense growth and shallow creek below. The delicate task of siting the H-shaped house of 6,500 square feet amidst a preexisting retaining wall, trees, and recalcitrant landforms was accomplished with an agility focused on pre-

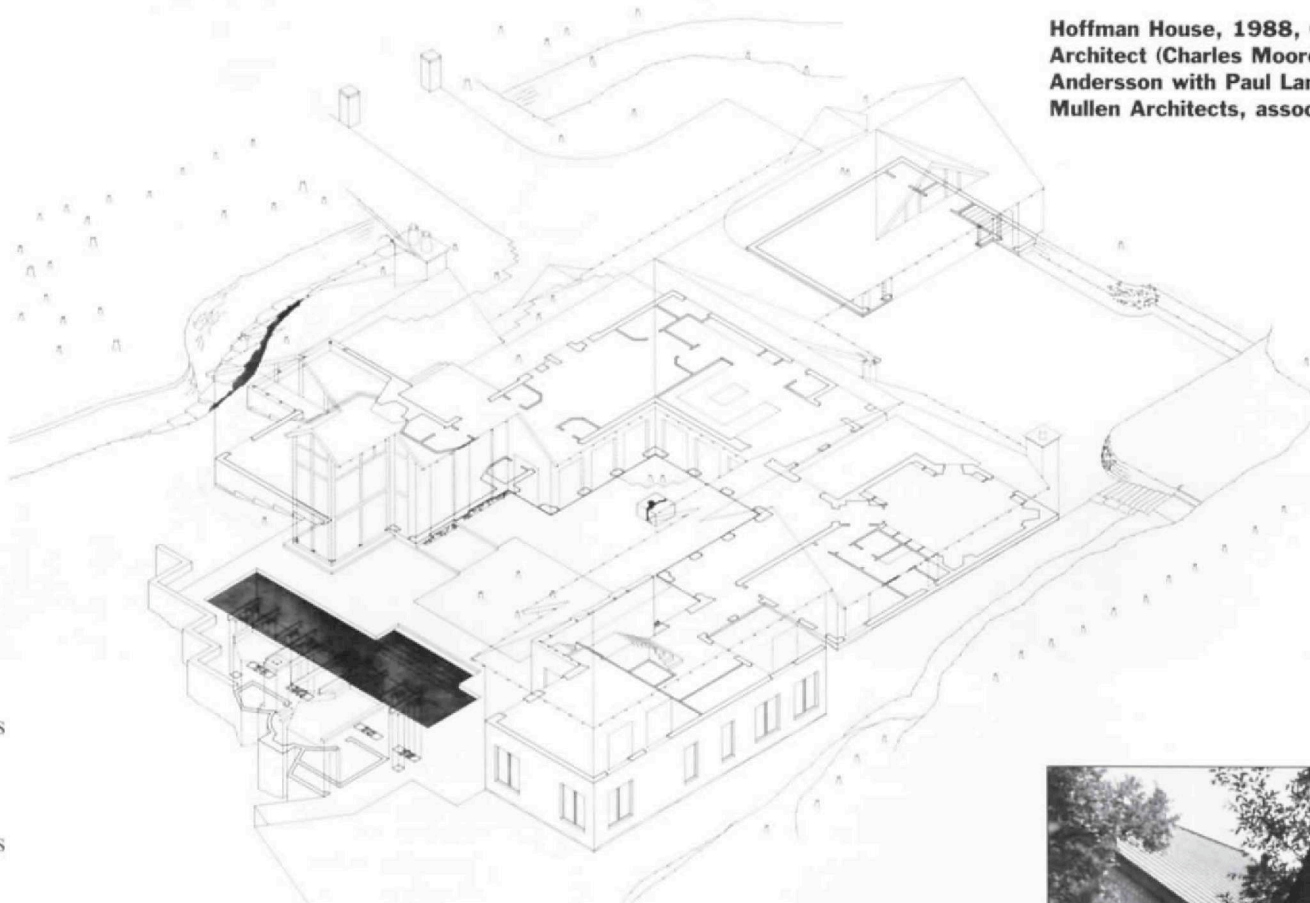
serving the site's inherent charm. The result is a finely crafted poesis attuned to Moore's conception of a landscape of repose, which will someday be extended to the design of new gardens on an adjacent lot.

The plan serves as a partial map of Moore's architectural peregrinations. In diagram, the open court is that of Alvar Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52) but depends also on the indoor-outdoor continuity of a much-admired house in Cuernavaca.² One must look to the Japanese-inspired courtyard houses of the California architects Charles and Henry Greene, however, to find a comparable example of interior-exterior integration in America, and particularly to their designs for the Bandini House in Pasadena (1903) and the Hollister House in Hollywood (1906) to find an interpretation of the open courtyard type that corresponds directly to Moore's design.³ But Moore departs from the basically uniform disposition of spaces and fenestration that marks the Greenes' courtyard houses and fashions instead a complex series of windows and concealed skylights that choreograph cyclical patterns

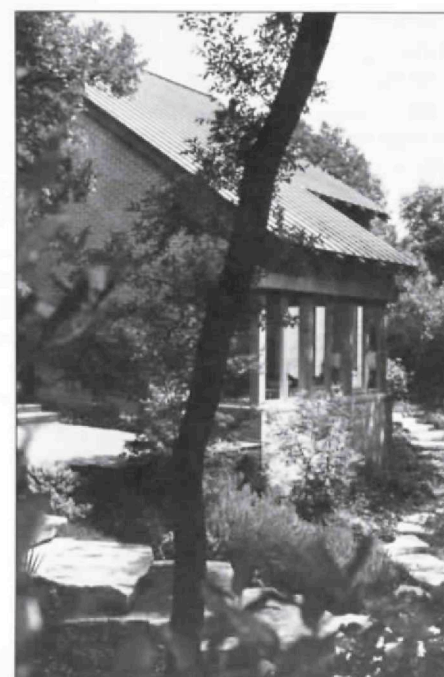
of daylight through an equally varied series of spaces, "making sense" by allowing for "light and space, for order and clarity, for reverie."⁴ In the living room and the dining room, tray ceilings derived from an appreciation of the Kimbell's light diffuser and Sir John Soane's breakfast room at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields impart a luminous mantle. In the living room, as throughout, the spatial benefits of bilateral ambient light that Moore graphically demonstrated in *The Place of Houses*⁵ are used to admirable effect, while focused down-lighting is used only to highlight pieces from the Hoffmans' collection of 20th-century art. In this way, daylight connects indoor and outdoor spaces, providing views across adjacent spaces, through rooms, and into hidden gardens beyond. A continuous surface of Pennsylvania Lilac paving stone at the entry and screen-like layers of window and wall further this effect. "Seventy-five steps from the front door to the master bedroom" indicates the extent to which Hoffman takes measure of his house.

The presence of water in three specific places evidences another of Moore's

Hoffman House, 1988, Charles Moore, Architect (Charles Moore and Arthur Andersson with Paul Lamb), architect; Mullen Architects, associate architect.



Drawing by Patrick Peters



Photograph by Patrick Peters

View from creek.

longstanding fascinations,⁶ as does the appearance in the pool court of an aedicula (sans shrine) of native trees purchased from the Texas roadside. The aedicula form, which recurs in many of Moore's early houses, is also recalled by the complex ceiling trays of the living room and dining room. These were executed with the help of Dallas architect John Mullen, a graduate student during Moore's tenure at Yale, who was responsible for construction documents and supervision. Mullen's sympathy for Moore's intentions is evident in the deft, craftsmanlike resolution of these and many other unusual features. Similarly adroit is the interconnection of interior and exterior rooms, enhanced by landscape architect Howard Garrett's spatial use of vegetation. The success of Moore's collaboration with both client and professional colleagues confirms his own conviction "that enlisting human energy is the key (or a key, anyhow) to making buildings in which people feel they belong."⁷ In this, his first house in Texas to be built from scratch, Moore seems very much at home. ■

Notes

- 1 Eugene J. Johnson, "Performing Architecture: The Work of Charles Moore," in Eugene J. Johnson, ed., *Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects, 1949-1986* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), pp. 58, 61.
- 2 Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), pp. 167-68, figs. 28, 29.
- 3 Duncan Macintosh, *The Modern Courtyard House*, Architectural Association Papers no. 9 (London: The Architectural Association, 1973), p. 11.
- 4 Charles Moore, "The Yin, the Yang, and the Three Bears," in Johnson, ed., *Charles Moore: Buildings and Projects*, p. 15.
- 5 Moore et al., *The Place of Houses*, pp. 98-99.
- 6 Johnson, "Performing Architecture," p. 60.
- 7 Moore, "The Yin, the Yang, and the Three Bears," p. 20.



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Conservatory in living room.



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Tray ceiling and fireplace in living room.