



"The Private World of an Individual"

Architect: Violeta Autumn. **Site:** Sausalito, California. On up-slope side of a narrow, winding street. **Program:** Building to serve as residence for couple, and as architectural office and artist's studio for Mrs. Autumn, owner-architect of this residence. **Structural System:** Three-sided reinforced concrete retaining wall against steep hill; 32-ft glue-laminated beam at street-side carries all vertical loads. Retaining walls designed as vertical slabs, spanning horizontal concrete beams, which in turn span between the side walls and a central vertical buttress. Beams and walls follow 60° angle, determined by meeting of side property lines and street. Intersecting wood beams are joined with bent steel plates and bolts. **Mechanical System:** Heat and air-circulation provided by forced-air furnace at ground level; air delivered through floor registers and through openings in core of stairwell; core also acts as cold-air return duct; electric heater in bathroom for quick heat. **Major Materials:** Reinforced concrete with exposed aggregate; woods with clear waxed or satin finishes; glass. Below grade, concrete walls are waterproofed with felt and asphalt. Ceilings of 2" x 8" clear heart redwood and 2" x 3" vertical grain Douglas Fir T&G, in alternating pattern. Two-sided ornamental spandrel panels of masonite, designed and executed in casein and silver leaf by architect. Cork floors throughout. **Photography:** Pirkle Jones.

Violeta Autumn, who was both client and architect of this house, received her architectural training at the University of Oklahoma under Bruce Goff. Since graduation in '53, she has worked with many architectural firms, acquired her California architectural license, has set up her own office, performed services as delineator for many architectural firms in the Bay Area, executed several murals, and has found time to paint, which has led to exhibitions in the U.S., as well as in Israel, Spain, and Peru.

Although the remarkably versatile Mrs. Autumn has participated in the design of many buildings in other architects' offices, her own house was the first structure she executed entirely on her own and therefore saw herself at the outset of this design "as a bird must see his first solo flight—a little tense, a little cautious, yet vibrant with the excitement of self-awareness, freedom, and promise." Since then, she has finished another house in Idaho and is presently occupied with the design of some apartment houses. As a field of practice, she believes that "residential design, by its very nature, has as its basis humanity in its purest form—the individual. The close personal relationship that comes from observing, listening, understanding, and interpreting a client is an exciting seed for creative effort." While many architects find it a problem to cope with the "emotionality of clients," she has found that "it



Retaining walls, necessitated by the off-street parking requirement, double as exterior walls of the three-story house. To unify the structure with the site, it has been recessed into the hill. Its native growth of acacia, scrub oak, and laurel were left untouched, and, where disturbed, encouraged to grow back.

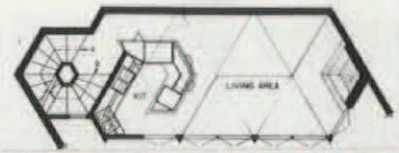




is an essential ingredient toward the real understanding of my clients and the essence of their needs, wants, and values." She sums up the qualities she believes are important in a house in these words: "A dwelling is ideally the private world of an individual, and as such must be responsive to that individual. A dwelling must function smoothly in all its physical attributes and must exist as a continuous source of interest and delight."



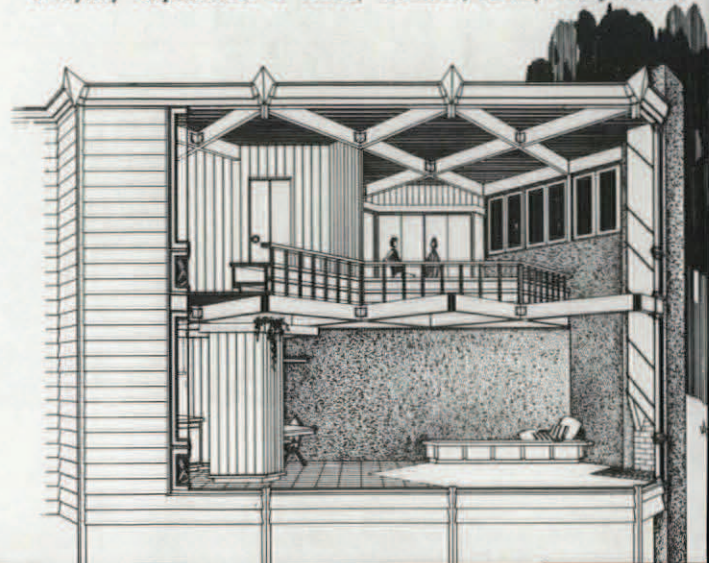
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

In her own house, a workable arrangement of the physical functions was not easily obtained because of singularly difficult site conditions. The site met the street with an almost vertical cliff. To make matters even more difficult, the property line was 10 ft back from the street, and parking had to be provided within the property. Problems of earth-moving and special bulwarking, however, were many times rewarded by the breathtaking views of San Francisco and Berkeley, linked by the spans of the Bay Bridge, and, most dramatically of all, the ever-changing sight, directly below, of "Hurricane Gulch," so named because of the strong sea breezes, often accompanied by a heavy, low-lying fog that rushes toward the sea. By setting the building into the hill, it has become part of the site and is at the same time protected from direct wind. The building was kept narrow and space was instead created in a vertical direction. "This verticality," writes Mrs. Autumn, "became a theme throughout the elements of the building, coming to a climax at the top of triangular columns, which soar upward and terminate in pointed forms against the sky." The strongly vertical, narrow sash at the face of the building, also part of this governing theme, provided the desired sense of protection and seclusion, yet permitted full enjoyment of the view.

Inside, neither large floor areas nor isolated rooms were required. Instead, areas were to be provided for different activities, along with conveniently placed built-ins and storage places. Much more important to the occupants was the continuity of design, which was to carry from the free-flowing spaces of the structure to the very smallest details. Thus the copper hood of the fireplace, for example, ascends to a height of two floors, reinforcing, with its raised seams, the general verticality of the scheme. Elsewhere, glistening polished rocks, placed by hand in the holes left in the concrete walls by the form ties, surprise and delight the eye and reassert again that this house is "not only a shelter and convenience, but an everyday experience of color, richness, form, composition."







The verticality of the scheme is further reinforced by containing the stairs within a six-sided tower. Walls are aggregate-surfaced concrete at the base of the tower; T & G redwood and Douglas fir in alternating pattern in its upper portions. Stairwell is skylighted and its central core carries air-ducts for heating and ventilation. Painting at base of stair (right) is by Violeta Autumn.



