

Bernard Rudofsky. A Humane Designer

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Man the modern is no epicurean, neither by nature, nor by aspiration. A hundred generations have passed since eating was an art and almost a religious service. But if today he thinks of these times with contempt, he has also developed a kind of deep feeling of guilt. So if he goes to dinner, he tries to curb his sensual enjoyment in a rush of repentance and self-punishment by putting on a dress of mourning. His garments are of exquisite inconvenience. The edges of his collar are digging into throat and chin, a stiff shirt and some minor paraphernalia harass his stomach while sitting, and a pair of bullet-proof shoes serve to induce nausea. Only the examination of the gastric juice could reveal what the polite guest would not dare to confess.

There are other essential and elaborate details of the self-inflicted torture. A glance at the table anticipates the pains that await the penitent. He carefully chooses his weapons, because first he has to valiantly conquer his chicken and his fish. (We do not blame the embittered knight who in self-defense cuts his way through the Gordian knot of spaghetti with his knife; but he is sure of our disdain.) Many, deluding themselves in the sureness of their equilibristic self-accomplishment, stumble over a salad leaf. And as soldiers going into battle encourage themselves by singing at the top of their voices, so an absurd and general conversation attempts to drown the clatter.

A great many will maintain that we have made fine progress since the days of our forefathers who wiped their knives in their beards or threw the gnawed bones back into the tureen instead of over their shoulders. Those were gaudy days, but we have to go back much further until we find an occidental culture of eating, for it disappeared exactly with the downfall of the Roman empire.

A rapid contemplation of the dining room of two thousand years ago may convince us of the arbitrariness and oddity of our own customs. Table manners in the antique world were rather different. In the beginning there was no supper that didn't begin with a sacrifice, and there was no worship by sacrifice that was not followed by a repast. The first dining room was the hall, serving not only as living room and sleeping quarters (the forerunner of our one-room apartment) but also as sanctuary and kitchen, because it was customary to do the cooking on the fireplace of the [domestic] altar.

At the beginning, only father enjoyed the privilege of lounging on the couch during meals, whereas mother was simply permitted to sit on its edge. The children occupied footstools or had their own table. But soon, when a special room was added and father invited guests, neither his children nor his wife were allowed to enter the dining room, a convention that survived to some degree in southern European countries and in America's bars for men only.

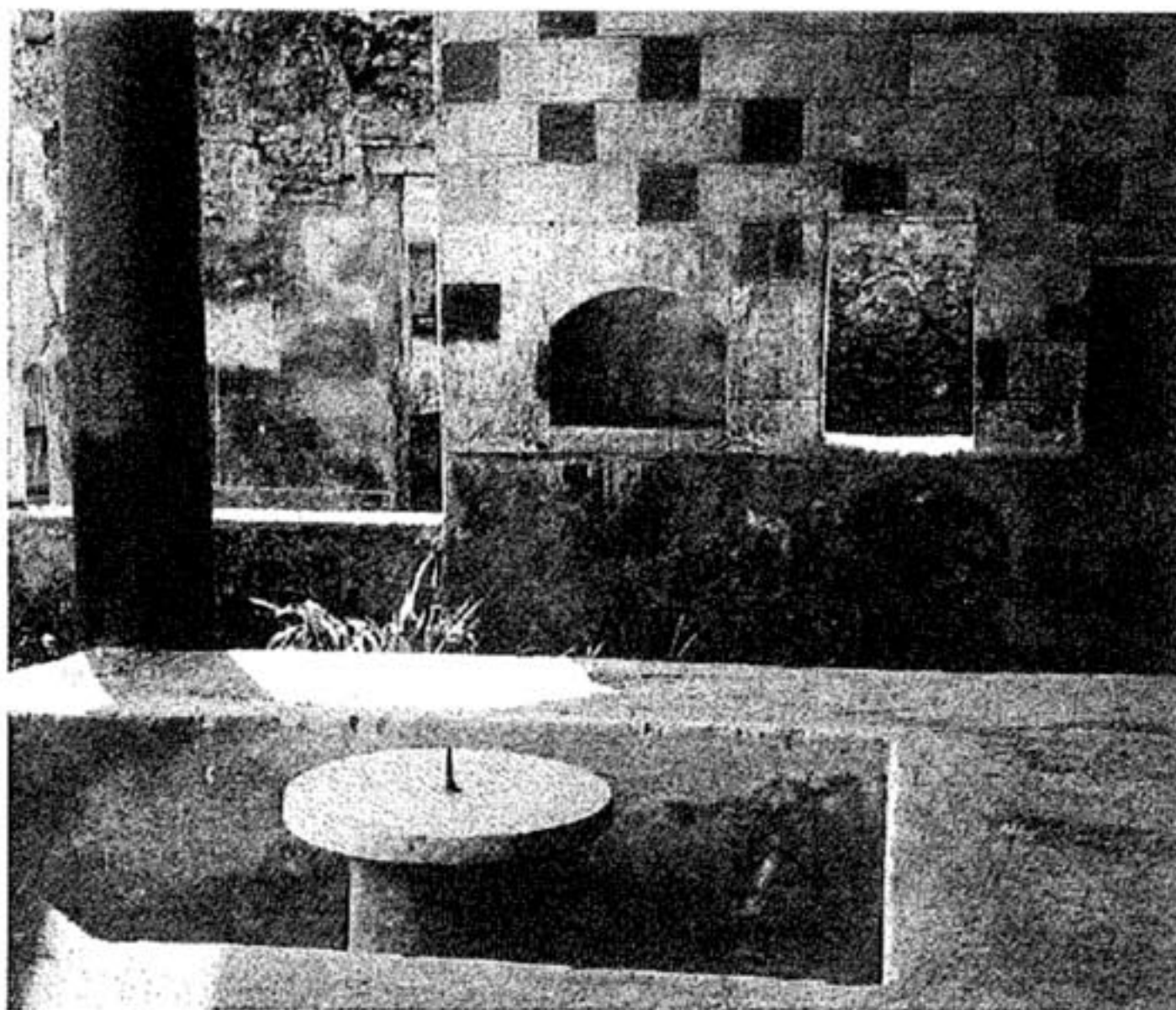
The end of this development was reached when, under the influence of the [O]rient, the use of reclining during meals became equally common among Assyrians and Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, men and women. Although it is not astonishing, it seems strange that the innumerable representations of the most famous dinner, the [L]ast [S]upper, are altogether wrong. The better knowledge of the original custom was so entirely dried up, that the portrayal of such an incident as John's resting his head on the Messiah's bosom invariably constituted an insoluble problem for every artist. Yet this gesture, inconceivable as it is by people who are used to sit at table, has been depicted a thousand times in Roman vases. The most plausible explanation for the misrepresentation in religious art is the fact that meanwhile moral values had been interpolated into the once harmless and natural usages — notably the



reclining attitude had acquired a strong flavor of immorality and was therefore unfit for pictorial use. Moral issues however are rapidly changing and our modern mentality is more susceptible to the hygienic aspect of [table manners] of old. Anyone can imagine without much medical knowledge their advantage for the human organism, but mental laziness and the lack of fantasy prevent us from adopting them.

At first thought, the idea of a business man who bathes at his host's house before going to the dining room, whose only articles of clothing consists of a comfortable gown and a necklace of flowers or a garland to hide his baldness, appears irresistibly comic. Yet what else should his procedure be called than sensible and aesthetic? Nevertheless should we ever earnestly venture to revive such undreamed of comfort, a whole world of abuse would first have to be discarded: antiquity did not know our modern arms which we euphemistically call SILVER. Orientals never convey food into the mouth with metallic instruments. He who, eating cheese, has gotten a piece of tinfoil in his mouth, may have experienced the horror a Chinese feels when using a fork. May the time come soon, when the wooden spoon of the convict will triumph on the gourmet's table.

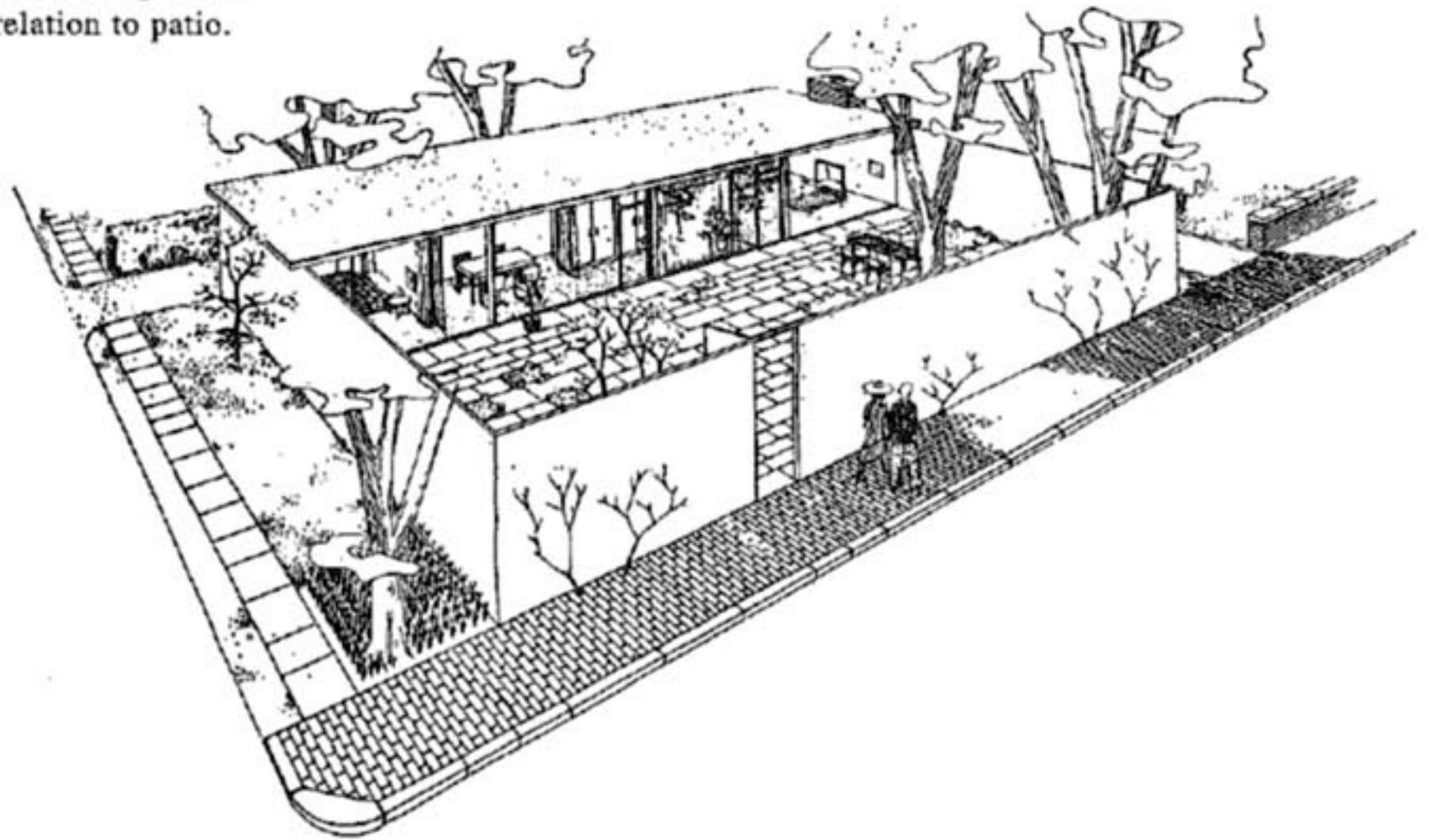
That the introduction of a more sensible technique of eating is fruitless without an attempt to restore the art of cooking, goes by itself. Says Brillat-Savarin: "The pleasure of eating is the actual and direct sensation of satisfying a necessity. The pleasures of the table are the meditated sensations that are produced by the varied circumstances of the place, the things and the persons that accompany the meal." Let us assume that the five judges in the Museum's competition, eminent scholars and gourmets as they are, were unwittingly conscious of the profound decadence of eating when they refused to choose a contemporary dining room.



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Triclinium in Pompeii, 1935 (?).*

*Rudofsky goes beyond the question of style by taking a live interest in the remnants of daily life, not the monuments: "[T]he ruined houses and gardens [of Pompeii] have exactly nothing in common with the cabalistic system of classical Orders." (BPW, p. 162.)*

House in Cambridge, Mass. (Philip Johnson, owner and architect.) It stands in an old residential district, quite near Longfellow's home. A 9-ft.-high wooden fence assures privacy and keeps out the wind. Permission to build the patio was asked after completion. Note intimacy of rooms in relation to patio.



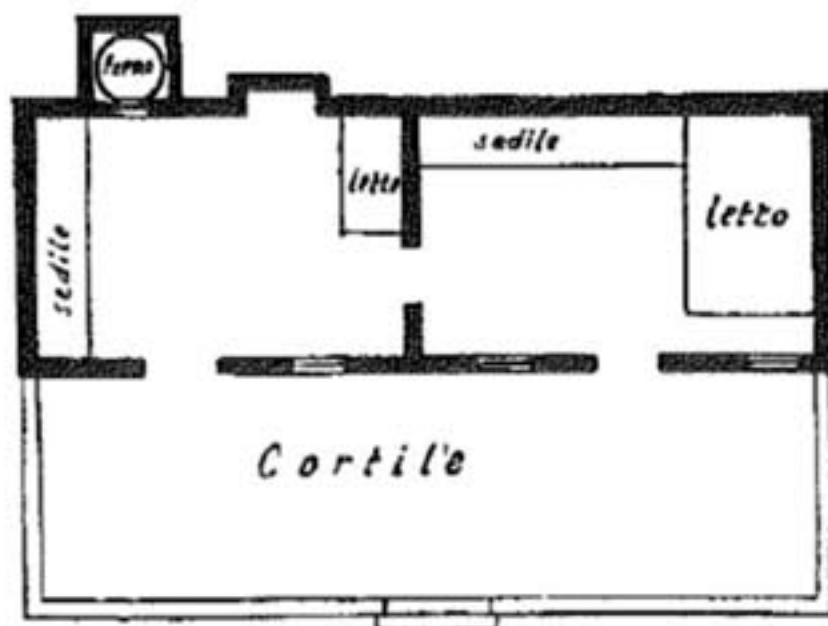
### Notes on Patios<sup>8</sup>

The first thing European settlers built in this country<sup>9</sup> was a stockade -- a form of structure which contained the elements of patio architecture. Unfortunately the life of its inhabitants was so busy they could not exploit the possibilities of such buildings. Life has been busy since, and we have lost interest in good living. Some trends of the belated modern movement in architecture have made a point of re-establishing comfort and ease of living, matters which have been deplorably curtailed by pseudo-esthetic and commercial considerations.

It would be interesting to estimate what resale value, if any, there is in the house shown [above], which was built by Mr. Philip Johnson for his own use in Cambridge, Mass. (While Boston had already, in the venerable Gardner residence, set somewhat of a precedent in patio houses, that particular example was built on a heroic scale, foreshadowing its ultimate use as a museum; it is, architecturally speaking, definitely imitative architecture.) Mr. Johnson had to defy building regulations and the sentiments of good citizens in order to accomplish his goal. The house has merits aside from utilization of an exceptional construction method. It has proved in one year of use that the existence of a patio in what we have called an unfavorable climate is not only feasible but highly desirable.

That this type of house is fundamentally sound, and is not derived from any particular building traditions or local materials, is best evidenced by comparing the Johnson house with the strikingly similar peasant's house at Patmos. There is, of course, a gap between them, geographically and culturally, yet the solution for quite different requirements is basically the same.

The patio is one of the oldest architectural contrivances. It can be found



A perfect counterpart of the Johnson house -- in a less sophisticated way -- is the peasant's house at Patmos, in the Dodecanesian Islands.

<sup>8</sup> BR43.2.

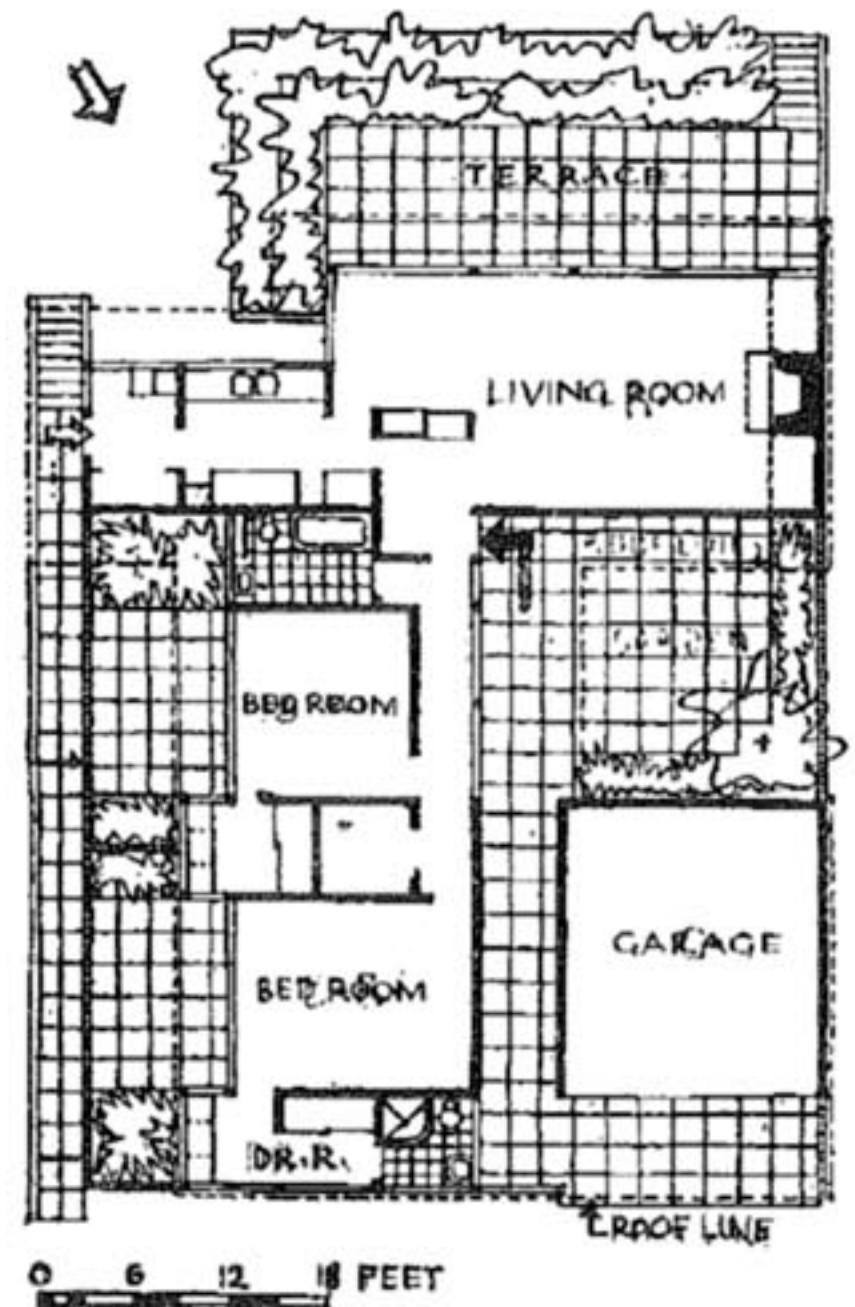
<sup>9</sup> The U.S.A.



in every great civilization. Today it is in evidence in Latin America, North Africa, Europe, and in the Near and Far East. With the anglicization of North America it became extinct in our Southern states. Of the charming examples in New Orleans, where patio houses were introduced by the French, some dilapidated specimens have been preserved by enterprising innkeepers and philanthropic societies. In California the Spanish version of the courtyard degenerated into a kind of stage setting for musicals. Today only this degenerate form of decoration comes to mind when the word patio is mentioned.

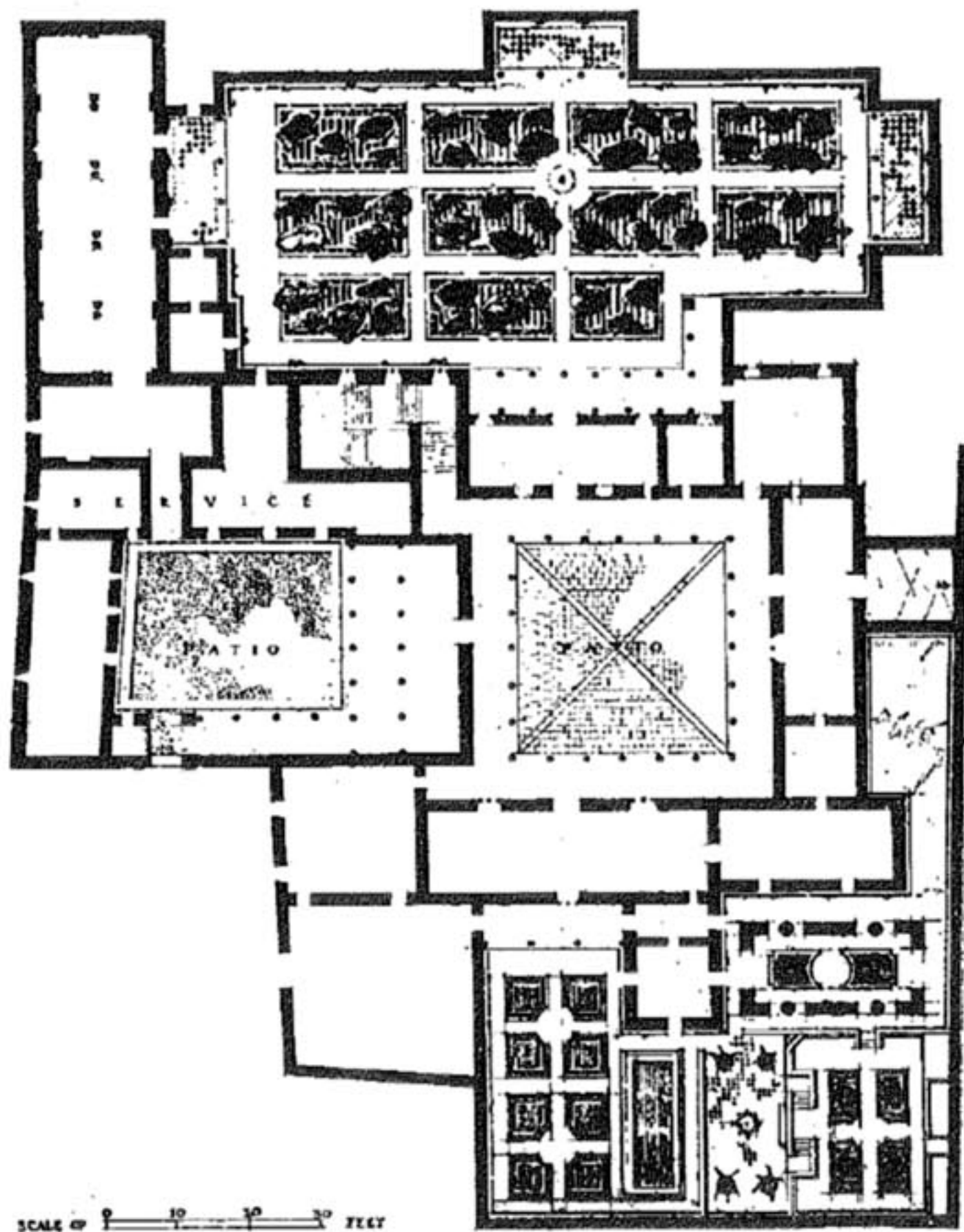
The present generation of California architects tries to re-introduce courtyards in the form of sheltered gardens, rather than as true patios - which are essentially *rooms* without ceilings. A radical development from this charming architecture is H. H. Harris' house for Mrs. Pauline Lowe, built about ten years ago. In all its disarming simplicity it represents an exhaustive study of the house for modern mankind. Mr. Harris has testified as to his efforts: "This would be my first and last executed project... it must be a summation of all I had ever thought or felt about life and architecture." The Lowe house was not his last executed project. However, seldom has an architect reached a more sincere expression of his ideals; and, looking back after ten years, the house remains one of his greatest achievements.

The significance of this modest work of architecture was overlooked, perhaps because it represented neither as a whole nor in its parts



House for Pauline Lowe in Los Angeles, by H. H. Harris and Carl Anderson. Despite its smallness this California house provides the living room and each bedroom with an adjoining outdoor room at no sacrifice in privacy.

Though the house won an award in a nationwide competition, it has, astonishingly enough, so far not been an inspiration to builders and prospective clients.



Typical Spanish example of patios and gardens used to break up the compact plan.



anything suitable for copying. The construction is stripped to its bare essentials; the austerity of the house is almost Oriental. As does the Johnson house, it lacks the outer dress to which our civilization attaches such exaggerated importance; the architecture is merely a shell for the life of its owner. And yet, while it is hardly noticeable in its unobtrusiveness, it is offensive to Western sensibilities. The patio, we are warned, is unsociable and thoroughly un-American.

Evidently the patio idea is incompatible with the customary front porch institution. The contemporary American (or Englishman for that matter) can hardly be accused of being introspective. His complete freedom from want of privacy has led to a peculiar form of dwelling: the suburban home.

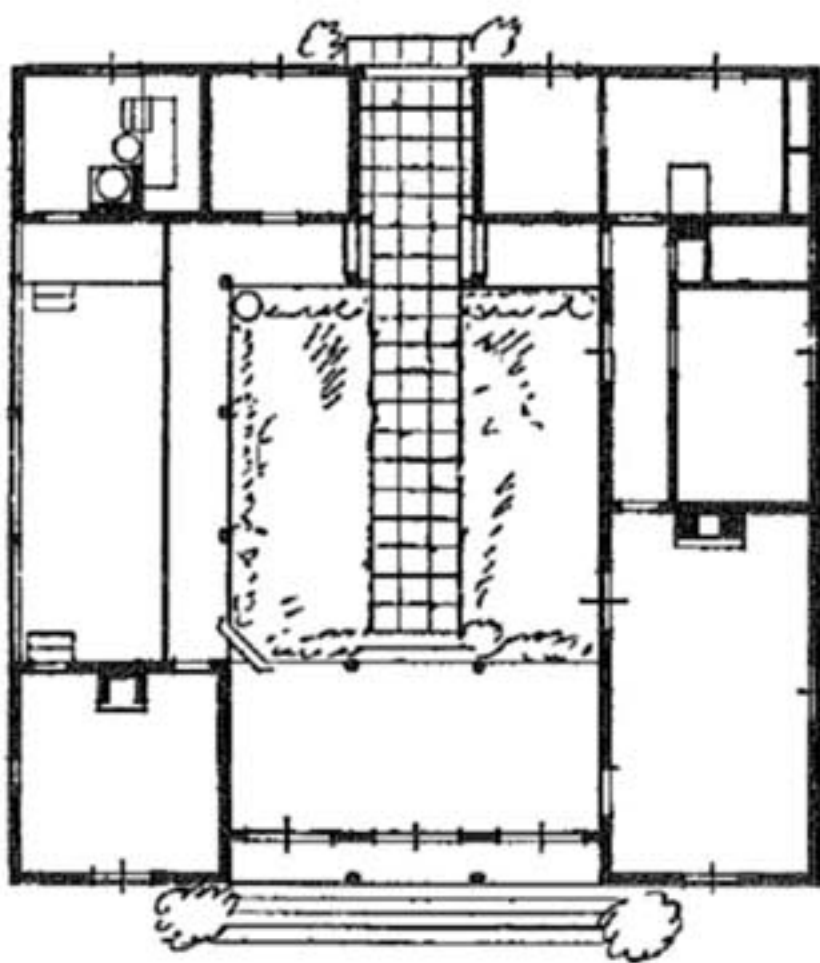
Though the suburban house was developed mainly to compensate city dwellers by providing them with the minor blessings of country life, the precious quota of land allotted to it is ingeniously wasted. The small strip which is not used up in building potentially has every chance to become a garden, were it not always split unhesitatingly into a front lawn and a back yard. The front portion, tiny and disconcerting in its hundred-thousandfold repetition, is a mere buffer between the home and the parked family car.

It has been maintained that the front porch is the perfect expression of sociability. This is true as long as the present form of crude social intercourse is considered satisfactory. However, genuinely sociable gatherings are unthinkable without intimacy.

The increasing mechanization of professional activities makes life more and more unsatisfactory to the discriminating person, and has brought about a divorce between work and recreation. It has been forgotten that under more fortunate circumstances these apparently opposite types of activity merge into one. Furthermore — commercially available entertainment has advanced to a point where it has the effect of dope rather than of a stimulant.

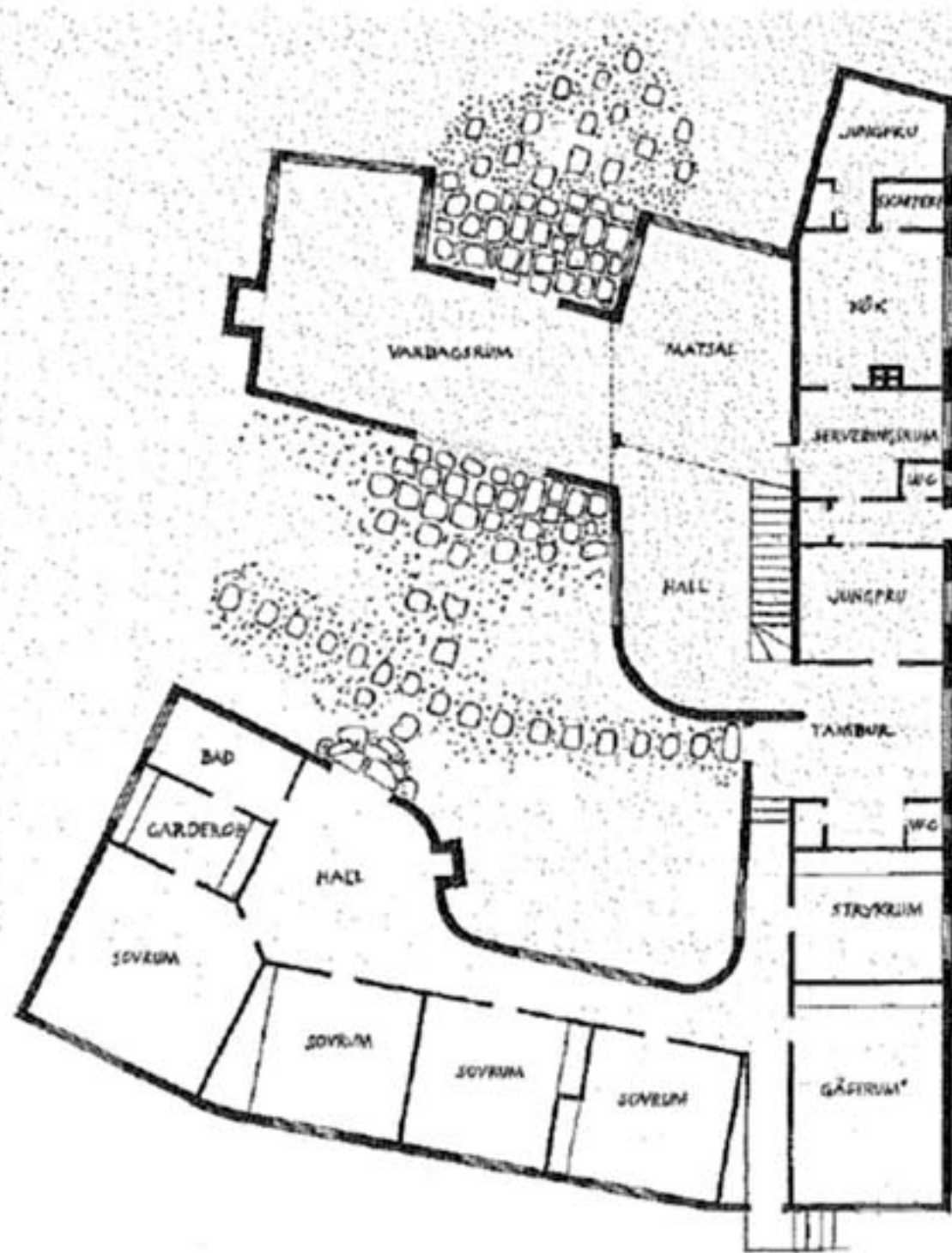
Recreative efforts at home have likewise shrunk to mere play of hardly adolescent character. The mental food supplied by newspapers and cheap magazines has not improved with the advent of radio. Considering everybody's right, if not desire, for adequate privacy, the radio has become a calamity and nuisance of the first order. Legislation has not kept pace with the need for protection of a minority of sensitive people. It is quite characteristic that the most sublime form of home-made entertainment, the making of chamber music, which is an integral part of life in some countries, is lacking here. The absence of creative musical life is an index of general spiritual poverty.

Though these things may seem to have nothing to do with architecture in the accepted narrow meaning, they necessarily come in as cultural factors which determine the way of life. The residence has been, and still is, viewed by architects and laymen alike as an inanimate thing, as if it could be detached from the life of its occupants. (This is also the way in which architectural magazines present houses to their readers.) But the vague esthetic viewpoint is not the one from which houses, furnishings, and all the objects which go with them should be approached. Neither is the economic viewpoint the only determining factor. Psychological circumstances indeed are the ones which have to be given predominant consideration. The things with which man surrounds himself are, contrary to appearances, less and less determined by practical considerations, but have become symbols of man's striving for higher social standing. The prevailing trend of sales techniques reflects this strife to perfection.



Patio houses are by no means confined to subtropical zones, as this Finnish example proves; architect: Oiva Kallio. (From Guido Harbers, *Der Wohngarten*).





This house [the Wehje house in Falsterbo, 1936], with its peculiarly shaped patio, was built in Sweden and was designed by Josef Frank, architect.

Architects can find an indication of how their dream of a prosperous postwar era might disintegrate in the fact that the planning — or should we say the designing? — of houses, both custom-made and mass-produced, is slipping more and more from their hands into those of the industrial designer, who will be more successful not only because of his training in advertising methods but mostly because he is completely unburdened by any knowledge of architecture.

The first decade of industrial design was hailed as an epoch of wondrous achievement. However, unrestrained redesigning has sometimes given results just as nauseating as those of any previous industrial decade. While the shapes of tools and weapons are and probably will stay satisfactory, the streamlining of vehicles has too often been fraudulent. The former never needed advertising; the latter were restyled each year to promote sales.

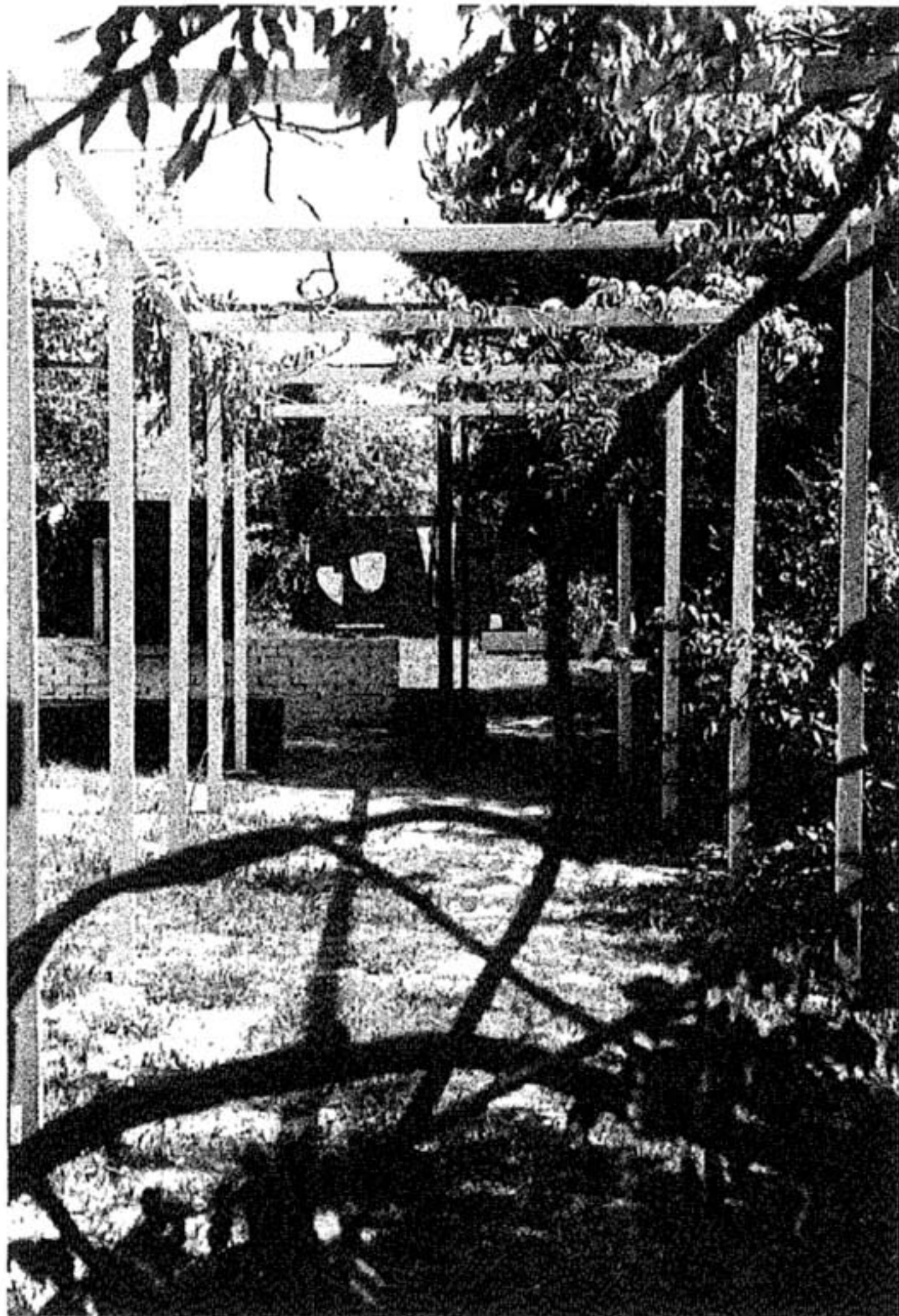
A similar development is to be expected in the field of domestic architecture. Popular and professional magazines confirm this trend. But further mechanization will not improve living standards. One need only think of the incongruity between the magical modern kitchen and the melancholy gastronomic results. Irony will have that the Arab's meal, cooked in the desert over dried camel manure, is incomparably superior. Without the necessary instinct for cooking the electric kitchen may be relegated to the importance of its cousin, the electric piano. Houses like the examples shown on these pages undoubtedly are not yet acceptable to many people. Though they were not built to advertise the means or aspirations of their owners, these owners will probably be accused of having feudalistic notions. Yet it seems to an unprejudiced bystander that, in a way, they contain the germ of a human and more civilized architecture.



Though the exterior, when built in the Spanish style, has a flavor of its own, the modern version is no less charming. The partly covered atrium shown here can be opened by means of a sliding wall. [H]ouse designed by William Wilson Wurster, AIA.



Bernard Rudofsky. In Nivola "house-garden," the pergola's white-painted wooden frame forms five perfect cubes. At its end, at left, the cooking terrace. In the background, one of the solarium's walls, 1951 (?).



## The Bread of Architecture<sup>10</sup>

Gardens, as we have known them through the centuries, were valued mostly for their intimacy and order — that is, order of a geometric kind. Both qualities are conspicuously absent in most contemporary gardens. Intimacy, so little prized today, was the key note of ancient gardens, skeletons of which have been preserved, for instance, in Herculaneum, Pompeii and Ostia. Some of these gardens were even replanted quite accurately with the help of archaeological information and furnish us today perfect and good examples of how a diminutive and apparently negligible quantity of land can, with some ingenuity, be transformed into an oasis of delight. Though they were miniature gardens, they had all the ingredients of a happy environment.

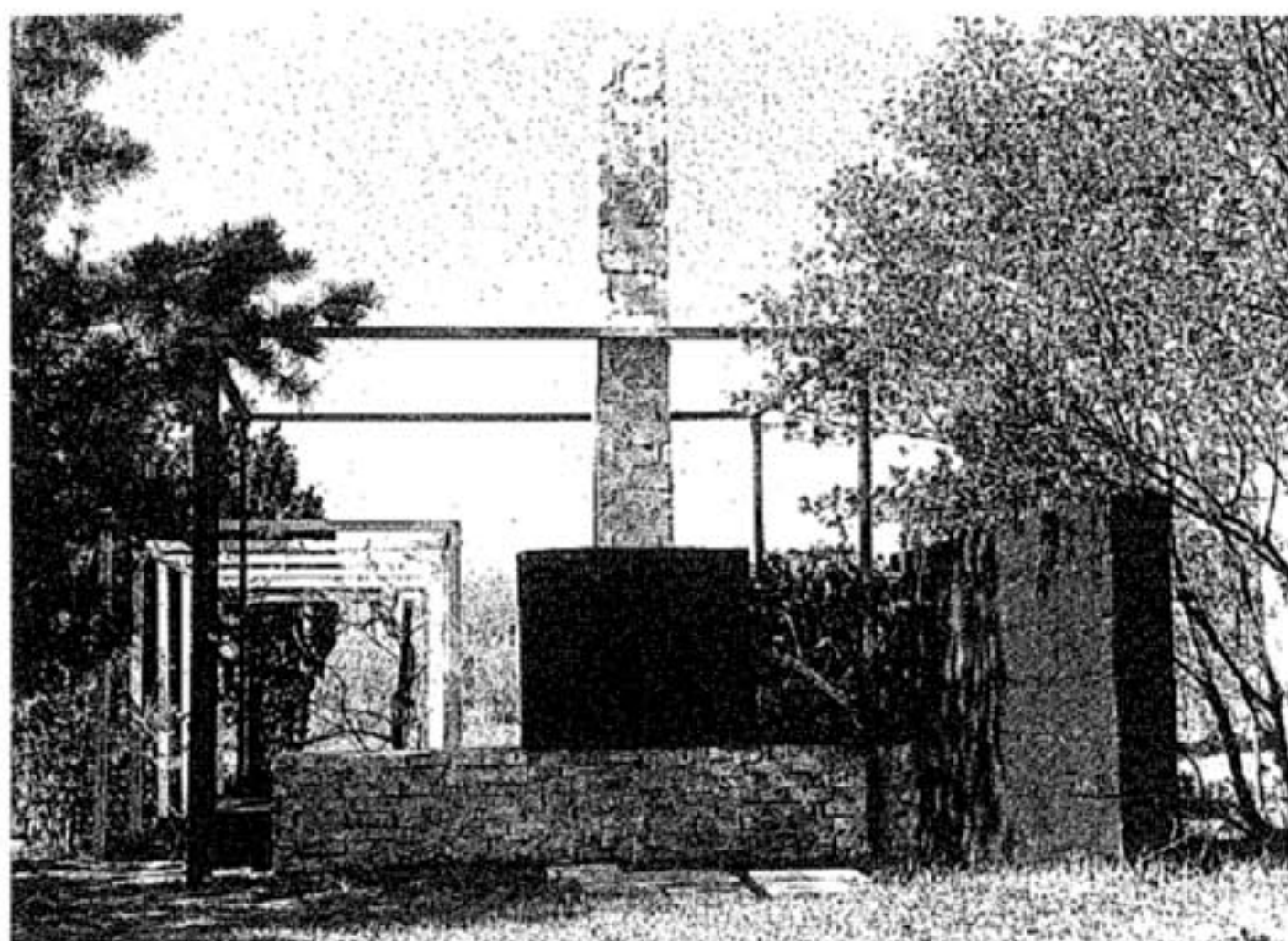
These ancient gardens were an integral part of the house; they were contained within the house. All were true *Wohngarten*, outdoor living rooms, rooms without roof, and they were invariably regarded as rooms. The wall and floor materials of Roman outdoor rooms were

<sup>10</sup> First published in shortened version as BR52.2; then in the original language and full-length as BR52.3.



no less lavish than those used in the interior parts of the house. Stone mosaic, marble slabs, stucco reliefs, mural decorations from the simplest geometric ornamentation to elaborate paintings, were employed to establish a mood particularly conducive to spiritual composure.

The vegetable element was by no means of the first importance: paradoxically, it was least in evidence. But then, some of the celebrated gardens of medieval Japan do not contain any living plant at all. One may argue that a grapevine pergola — Pompeii abounded in arbors — is esthetically more gratifying than the stoutest tree. Or that, in the absence of a pergola, there always remains in the inventory of nature that component which never fails to enrapture the more sensitive souls: the sky. The spectacle of the ever-changing sky can be truly enjoyed only out of doors; viewing the sky through even the most generous expanse of plate-glass is a poor substitute for the genuine article. It almost seems that the use of glass walls in recent years has alienated the garden. In some instances, the arrangement recalls a show-window;



*Bernard Rudofsky. The pergola, the barbecue (seen from the back), and a black cement block wall in the Nivola "house-garden," 1951 (?).*

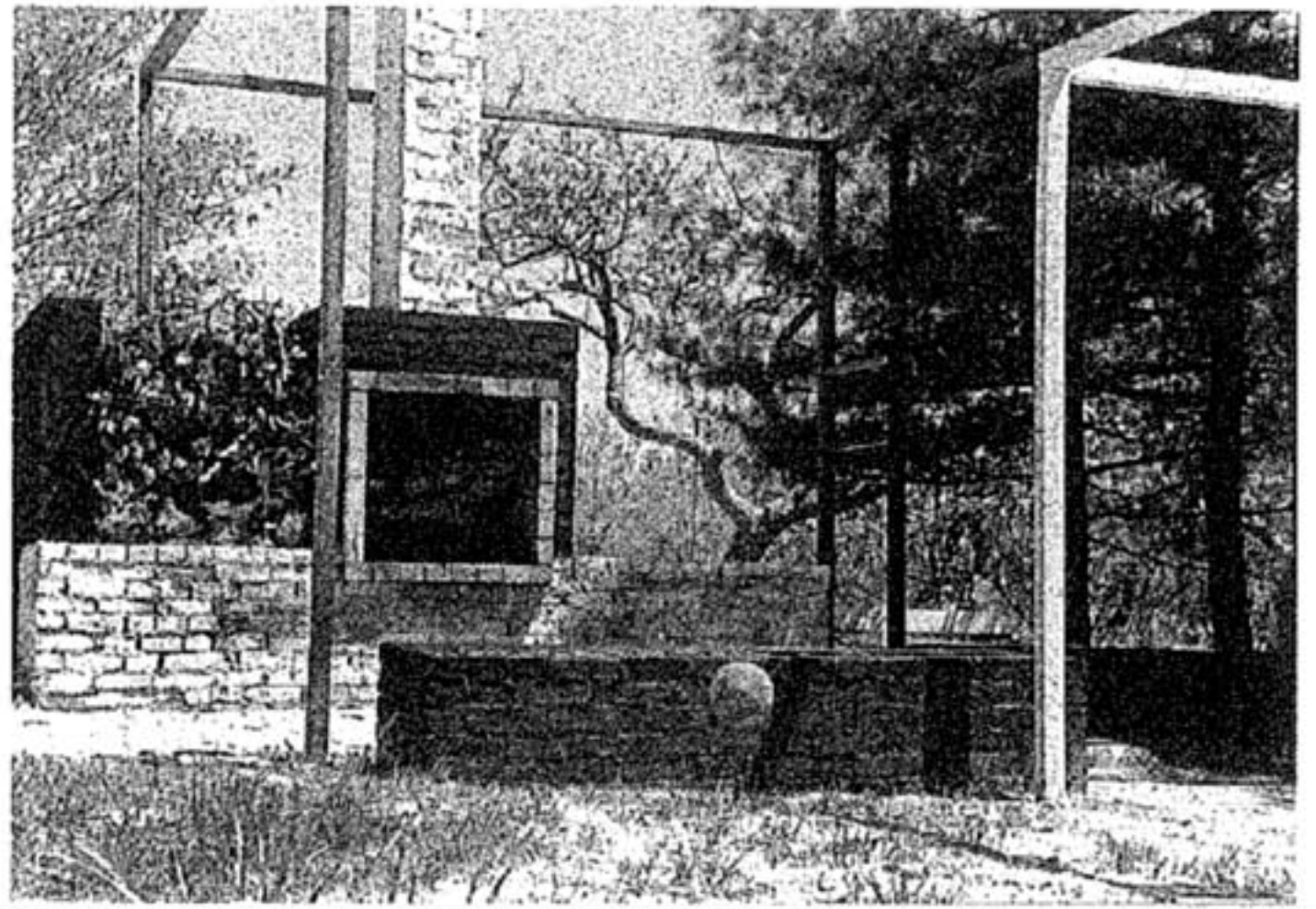
the garden has become — to borrow a word — a spectator garden. Contemplating nature from a sort of sentry box has its advantages in a harsh climate. But even outdoors, to fully appreciate the changing patterns of light, the configurations of clouds, one ought to watch the sky not in a shapeless garden but rather within four, possibly white, walls — an enclosure as definite as a frame.

A wall is the bread of architecture. Yet it has never occurred to anybody to celebrate the wall as one of the great inventions of man. No doubt, man was well along his path when he knew how to make tools and weapons, but even when he painted his first decorations, he was still living in natural caves. By erecting the first free-standing wall he arrived at a point in his evolution that was as sharply defined as when he got up from all fours and stood on his legs. Building his first wall, he became, mentally, a biped. With the wall, man created space on a human scale, and in the many thousand years that followed, he came sometimes close to the mastery of space, architecture.

The prehistoric event of building the first wall was not immortalized by any cornerstone or memorial tablet. (It is this downright lack of evidence



*Bernard Rudofsky. The cooking terrace of the Nivola "house-garden," defined by a three-dimensional frame of red-painted shafts, is made of bricks (chimney, frame of the opening of the oven and bench painted white; oven painted black), 1951 (?).*



*Bernard Rudofsky. A wall, an apple-tree, a creel hanging from the branches, a masonry bench, a plaster bust of a woman constitute the elements of this inhabitable sculptural composition in the Nivola "house-garden," which changes with the shifting shadows as the hours go by, 1951 (?).*



which often makes the business of the historian and archaeologist such a source of pure conjecture.) Perhaps, the first stone-layer, in his playful mood, was intent on building nothing but a wall — tall, square, and free. The idea of using it to support a roof may have come to him much later. But even a naked, free-standing wall — for all its abstract beauty — serves a purpose. It unfailingly provides shadow, being more dependable than a tree which sheds its leaves periodically. It braves the wind, defies the beast; it is a symbol of the upright man. With time, the business of erecting a wall became an art, some-



times a secret art. We can not duplicate some cyclopic walls built thousands of years ago. We don't even know how they were built. But then, we are quite ignorant of the beginnings of architecture. The Bible tells us about the beginnings of Man. But, for the truly inquisitive mind it is so full of pitfalls that after centuries of readers' response, it still has to be explained from the pulpit. The Bible is noncommittal as to whether Adam built a house, or, even, a wall. To judge from his better-known circumstances, this is not likely. True, Adam was able to converse with the Lord. But nothing points to his having had creative ability. In the light of psychological evidence, we may assume that, to erect a wall, — moreover to build the original wall, so to speak — a man must possess *Spieltrieb*, the instinct of play. Or perhaps, we ought to say that, like any good architect, he must be possessed by that instinct. Play is the glorious substance of childhood. The passion for play arises early in the very small child. But, for all we know, Adam is the only man who had no childhood — not even an unhappy one. We imagine him a rather glum character; his early, paradisiac surroundings lacked any incitement to travail and were uncondusive to action. The initiative was with his wife.

The more sensitive souls among the readers are perhaps aware that a wall has, apart from its utilitarian and esthetic virtues, a unique quality which radiates comfort far beyond and above bodily comfort. (It is somehow understood that a wall be made of stone or baked earth; a wooden wall may serve some purpose but it is of an ephemeral quality. All the wooden buildings of time are but a memory.) To people belonging to a nomadic culture, such as the Americans, this might seem a heresy. Nomads make strong sons and weak buildings. They

*Bernard Rudofsky. The apple-tree and the wall of the Nivola "house-garden," a symbol of Rudofsky's idea of architecture, 1951 (?).*





are valorous warriors with a tendency toward destruction. This is most likely a consequence of their antipathy for the sedentary life, their lack of love for the hearth. One cannot build a hearth of wood. It has been demonstrated that it is indeed possible to live in a house of wood. Such a life creates a vigorous people, but the houses will be sooner or later crumbled beneath the assaults of the four elements, or will be devoured by insects. But far be it from us to deny the utility or, in the case of Japanese houses, the beauty of wood construction. Let us return to the eternal wall. Within the last thirty years or so, we have seen, at least in pictures, houses so transparent, so airy, so weightless in appearance, that they seemed to be poised on taking off at any moment, like a magic carpet. This impression vanished when the architects of the ethereal fraternity began to introduce into the general frailty of the construction a rustic wall. Thus, the seemingly weightless glassy or wooden houses, received at least one wall of unhewn stone, as ballast and anchor. Grave discussions ensued, and many explanations were volunteered for this paradoxical novelty. There was much talk about texture and contrast and color, but it seems that a genuine wall needs no apology.

There is no counterpart in modern architecture of the multitude of plastic elements which are the border line of indoors and outdoors, and are lumped together, not always convincingly, as "garden architecture." This sort of architecture reached perfection in the gardens of the Baroque, in the Moorish gardens of Spain, and in the house gardens of antiquity. It is worth noting that its elements were not of a vegetable sort, but rather built solidly in stone. Where trees and shrubs had been included in the design, these had shed all their individuality and had been trained to imitate architecture.

The contemporary house garden is purely a gardener's idea. Like the parlor of our grandmothers, it is the object of infinite care, but it is of poor living quality.

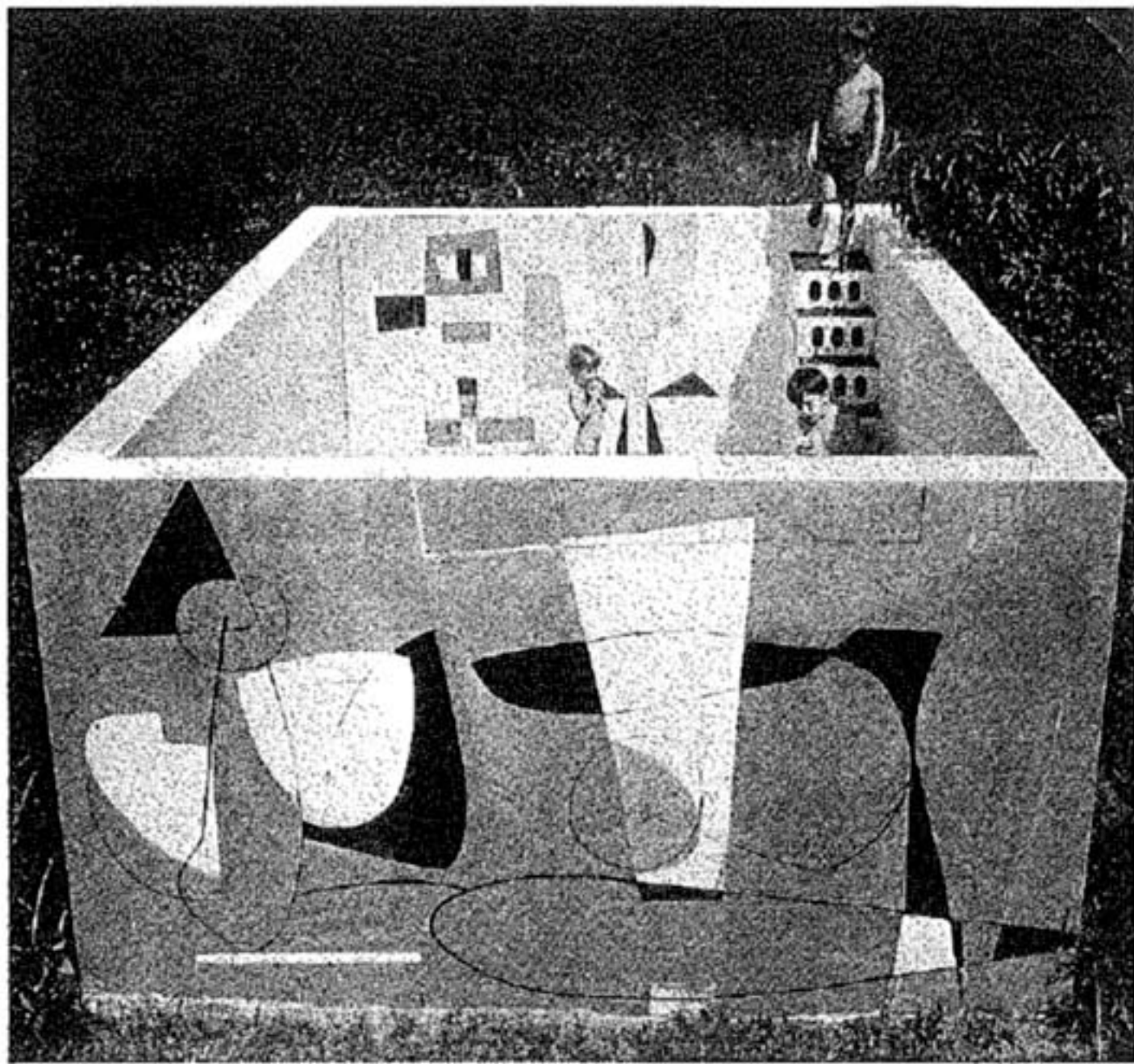
Here is an unconventional garden without gardening. The meager vegetation was left untouched. A few walls, posts, screens and pavements were carefully placed to set off the individuality, the "calligraphic subtleties" of some old apple trees, pines and bushes of beach plum. Sacheverell Sitwell<sup>11</sup> compared my Brazilian house gardens to the classical gardens of Japan. However, I believe that what I had in mind — in Brazil as well as here, in Long Island — is a kind of *fragmentary architecture*. I have always been fascinated by ruins. Not by the ivy-covered, romantic sort, but by the intimate, classical kind: the roofless houses of antiquity.

Walls. A free-standing wall, plain and simple, with no special task assigned, today is unheard of. In a garden, such a wall assumes the character of sculpture. Moreover, if it is of utmost precision and of a brilliant whiteness, it clashes — as it should — with the natural forms of the vegetation and engenders a gratuitous and continuously changing spectacle of shadows and reflections. And aside from serving as the projection screen for the surrounding plants, the wall creates a sense of order. Three abstract murals compete with the umbrageous phantasmagories.

Plants. An old apple tree pierces one of the walls, lending it (methinks) a peculiar monumental quality. The pergola is reduced to almost linear design and does not intend to be more than [absciss] and coordinate. A wisteria has taken possession of it in the space of a few months;

11 AR44.1.





*Ben Rose. In the Nivola "house-garden," the only space enclosed by walls is the solarium, accessible solely by way of stairs that ascend outside and descend inside along one wall. There are no apertures offending the integrity of the walls, so as to avoid the circulation of cold air. Half the floor is of grass, the other half is bricks, 1951 (?). See also picture at p. 164.*

bamboo shades are hung from it in summer. The wiry appearance of the poles is accentuated by bright colors.

The solarium is an ample room with immaculately white walls, a floor of red brick, set in sand, and a diminutive lawn. Wall openings were omitted to avoid drafts; the solarium is accessible by stairs only.

This room has become the favorite abode of the family. To the architect who has experimented with walled outdoor rooms in three continents, it seems incomprehensible why the sunbath is not as common as the sauna in northern countries, or why it should not become a regular adjunct to the bathroom. In any case, it would compensate for the unattractiveness of the climate.



*Bernard Rudofsky. Interior of Nivola solarium, with friend wearing wooden clogs and a tunic made of a floral fabric, both by Rudofsky, 1951 (?). See also pictures at p. 79 and 80.*



## Pocket Money<sup>12</sup>

The distance of so many years perhaps makes everything appear more pleasant than it really was. Still, if my memory is not deceiving me, I am inclined to believe that during those four years in Italy<sup>13</sup> I was having the time of my life. Only the end was marred. The thought of the impending war in Ethiopia had become oppressive and by the fall of 1935, things were going badly.<sup>14</sup> What I never believed possible happened — I was eager to get out of the country. Besides, an event occurred just then that made me — for a while at least — delightfully independent: I won a prize for a competition project.<sup>15</sup> On the very day I received the good news, I decided to spend a year in the United States and accordingly arranged to leave within a fortnight.<sup>16</sup>

The prize money was paid to me in cash. After I had bought a return ticket on an American boat and settled my modest affairs — altogether a matter of hours — about thirty thousand lire remained in my pocket. This is not a manner of speech, as you will see. I wasn't exactly surprised when the banks that I approached informed me that current government restrictions did not allow a foreigner to deposit money in an Italian bank. I also had known that it was not permissible to take Italian money out of the country. Until then however, these regulations had not affected me.

Thirty thousand lire were a considerably larger sum than I had ever before held in my hands. In those days I could have bought with it, say, three Balillas — about the equivalent of as many Chevrolets — and still be left with several thousand lire. Perhaps it doesn't sound much, but in Italian banknotes the sum was impressive. A thousand lire bill was so huge a sheet that it did not fit into any wallet. A bundle of thirty bills, folded in half, amounted to a parcel. To constantly carry such a parcel on me filled me with anguish. Yet, under the circumstances, my hip pocket was the safest place for it. Neither the unattractive bulge in my trousers — I am rather self-conscious about my clothes — nor the ever-present danger of pickpockets made me think of a better solution.

At that time I happened to live on a small island about an hour and a half by boat from Naples.<sup>17</sup> There was no hotel in the accepted sense and I had rented two rooms giving on a terrace in a stately old house that served intermittently as an inn for ambulant priests and salesmen. The four lockless doors of my rustic suite were always open, as were the doors of all other rooms, and the idea of leaving money in such a place did not appeal to me. Nor did I dare to burden a friend with the temptation of my treasure.

Instead, every morning I would board the steamer, a retired riverboat, and set out for Naples, with the hope of finding a way to salvage my new riches. Would anyone, I inquired, like to buy my lire? *Macché!* Not with the prospect of war in Africa and, most likely, an inflation to follow. Thwarted, wealthy, more nervous than ever, I returned at day's end to my island.

12 Unpublished, pseudo-autobiographic text written about 1954. Found in the personal archives (Frigilliana, Málaga). Most of the names and facts, albeit realistic, are romanticized.

13 1932–1935.

14 Mussolini invaded Ethiopia on 3 October 1935, no more than ten days after Rudofsky's departure.

15 It is the competition for the Auditorium in Rome (see Catalogue no. 10 at p. 259).

16 Actually, almost 50 days passed from 7 August when the prize was credited and 24 September, when Rudofsky left for Paris.

17 Procida.





Bernhard Rudofsky. Wasserträger (water bearers), from 4 Zeichnungen zum Aufsatz die Einkleidung, ca. 1932–33

Two days before my departure I moved my belongings to a Naples hotel. My hip pocket was still bulging with lire, and my ears ringing with the advice of friends.

"Buy gold!" one of them suggested coldly.

Even had I thought little of breaking the law, I did not relish the idea of traveling with a lump of gold. In any case, no one knew where bars of gold could be bought.

"Diamonds!" proposed another.

Nonsense. They were as bad an investment as the Roman jewelry smuggled out from the excavations in Herculaneum and sold in the dingy shops on the waterfront. You could not count on recovering more than half of their value when you tried to resell them.

"Well, what about neckties?" The charm of the game never seemed to wear off.

Ties sounded more attractive. Italian neckwear is not only handsome but also cheap. Three thousand neckties though, I quickly figured, would pose a storage problem. Moreover, with fashion raising its ugly head in the men's department, nobody could predict that my haberdashery would prove an asset in the future.

No, there was no getting away from it — each new idea wrecked itself against the rock-like fact that never in my life had I made an investment or sold anything more substantial than my professional services. Thus I was left to my own resources and with only one day in which to dissolve my pocket bank.

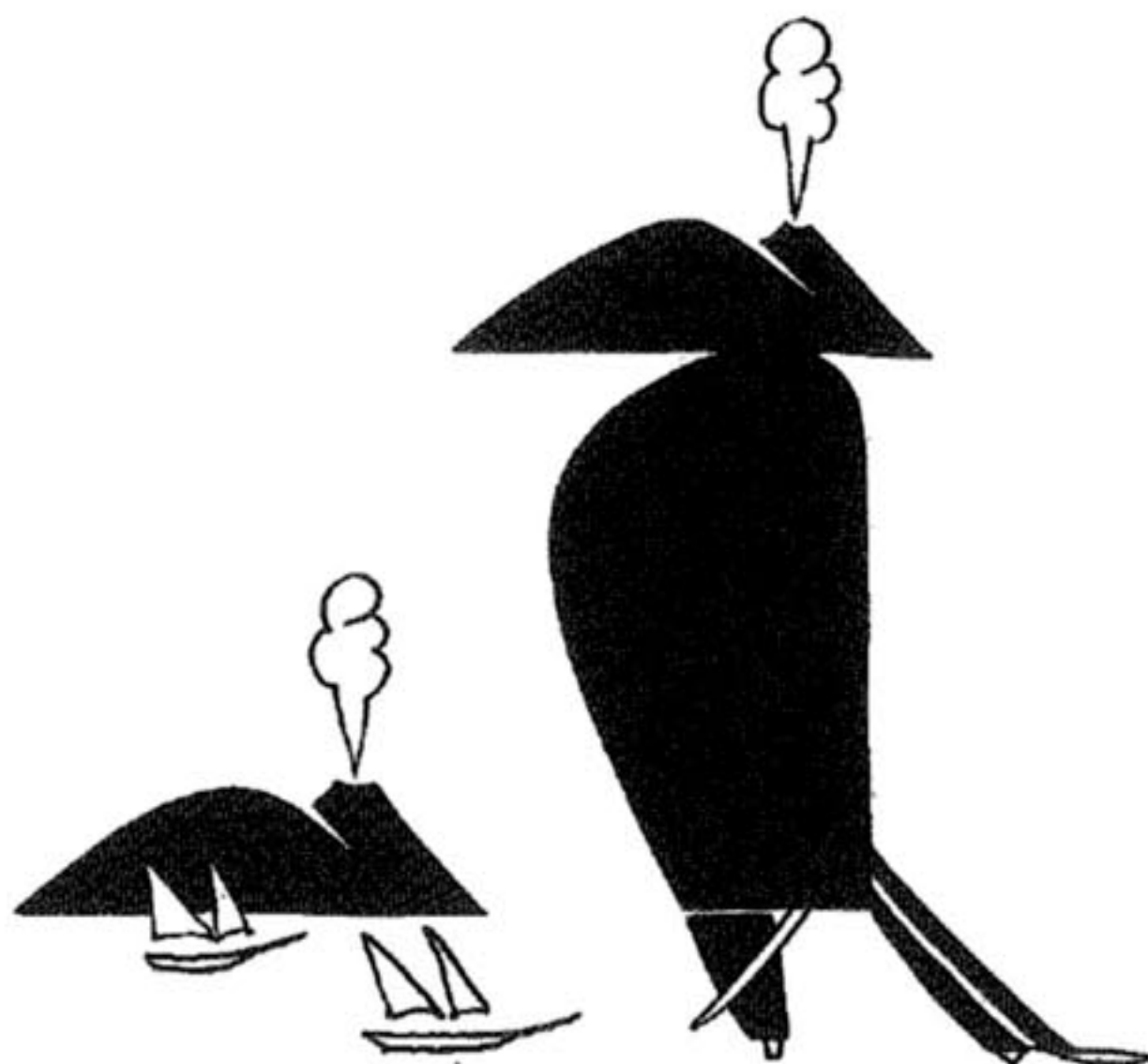
The next morning I woke with the belated realization that I ought to spend the money. For the first time in my life, I reflected, I was able to shop to my heart's desire. Alas, not for a moment had it occurred to me that I might be unprepared for such debauchery. However, once resigned to spend my earnings, my good spirits returned and, somewhat to my surprise, I found myself looking forward to a novel experience. But what was I to buy? An innate thriftiness had narrowed my view on the amenities of life. Not that I was a paragon of virtue then; I wasn't. Yet the only luxury I indulged in was travel of a leisurely kind — so leisurely that I had ended up by living permanently in foreign countries. I also liked to eat well and still do. If anything, a little more so. By European standards, all this was no more luxury than a long row of balmy days. But just to give you an idea how different my require-



Bernhard Rudofsky. Pizzaiuolo — antico caprese (old-fashioned Caprese pizza street vendor), from 4 Zeichnungen zum Aufsatz die Einkleidung, ca. 1932–33



Bernhard Rudofsky. *Vesuvius and Carabinieri*, from 4 Zeichnungen zum Aufsatz die Einkleidung, ca. 1932–33



ments were then — the mental climate of southern Italy had probably a good deal to do with it — I had not used a watch in several years. I did not even own one.

A watch was the first desirable object that came to my mind. A watch, I mused, is probably a crying need in the New World. (Did American clocktowers strike the hours?) Over there, time is money, I reminded myself. In short, the acquisition of a timekeeper seemed eminently reasonable to me.

During breakfast, I began to wonder what to look for in a watch. Although I did not know, I wasn't much worried about my ignorance. Naples harbored a truly reliable watchmaker: Hofer's Swiss Watch Shop across the Royal Palace in Piazza San Ferdinando. It was still early and I decided to walk there; I hoped to receive stimulation from the shop windows I passed on my way.

The only person visible in the shop was Mr. Hofer himself. I had met him socially several times, and we had spent pleasant hours discussing St. Francis, the Seraphic Brethren and other non-chronometrical topics. It came back me now that once I had felt the need to justify my watchlessness and, in defense, had made disparaging remarks about what I called the hoarding of time. Touching my hip pocket for reassurance, I entered.

After a perfunctory Good Morning and a handshake, I asked bluntly: "Which is your most expensive watch?"

Had I drawn a gun, the effect on Mr. Hofer could not have been more startling. He squinted at me as if to make sure I was the same man he knew. He did not ask whether the watch was intended for my own use. Silently, he reached into a drawer and produced a wristwatch, dangling it between forefinger and thumb.

It had a pleasant face. The case was of dull steel on a light gray leather strap. I reached for the watch, turned it from one side to the other and caught myself examining the quality of the leather band. How does one tell an expensive watch from a cheap one, I thought in desperation. "This is a Patek Philippe." The watchmaker spoke with what I took to be disdain — whether aimed at me or at the watch I could not say. The name meant nothing to me. But when I heard the price was two



thousand lire, I breathed a sigh of relief, fastened the watch to my wrist, paid and departed in a hurry. It all was over as quickly as a hold-up.

My next objective was a camera. The old-fashioned accordion-type Zeiss, a birthday present from an uncle, had simply vanished some day — to put it nicely — and since it was a clumsy affair, I never regretted the loss. I was not particularly fond of taking pictures, but the prospect of seeing a new country made me wish to own a camera again. Though not a regular customer, I was in good standing with the Fratelli Labarbera; I bought an occasional roll of film or ordered some wretched little enlargements with machine-fringed edges for undemanding tourist friends.

I turned into the busy Via Roma and crossed over the proper lane; sidewalk traffic was one way then. Near the Galleria I nimbly ducked one of my economic advisers (diamonds, indeed!) and found the youngest of the brothers in front of their store, directing the *mise en scène* of a window display. I allotted myself all of ten minutes for my purchase. The effusive greetings and polite inquiries into my health, the charming talk that I had learned to enjoy in the course of four years, irritated me on that day. Impatiently, I cut short the preliminaries and shifted the conversation to Labarbera's merchandise. I asked to see the latest Leica model which, crowning a tomato-red cushion, formed the main attraction of a showcase.

The little camera felt cool and heavy in my caressing hands and, breaking protocol, I asked its price.

To the foreigner, the thoughts of the Italians, but especially of southern Italians, are obscured by an over-elaborate ceremonial. It is a sort of verbal moat, to protect themselves against the barbaric artlessness of invaders from Alaric to Cook's. Among the unwritten laws of this ceremonial is what might be called the oblique approach to all matters requiring great delicacy, such as matters of money. Who but a fool would claim for himself the right to decide a man's or an object's worth in cash? Bargaining, that source of endless exasperation to the foreigner unaccustomed to native ways, is to him more than a cerebral sport. Bargaining is the everlasting dispute on the true value of things. It was, I knew, ill mannered on my part to reduce the pleasant performance of trading a valuable object to something like buying a toothbrush. The proper procedure would have been for me to ask Labarbera to send me the camera on a three months trial, let the matter rest, and expect a bill to be submitted not before the first day of the coming year. As I said, I was well aware to have broken the rules. I could easily guess his thoughts when, in answer to my question, he emitted a little groan: "Two thousand four hundred."

Labarbera was quick to bridge the awkward situation. "Signor architetto," he said, upholding his palms in a gesture of supplication, "Surely you don't want to buy this camera." His voice was apologetic as though it were he, not I, who had committed a *faux pas*.

My silence was more eloquent than an affirmation.

"In that case," he said, "the price will be only two thousand lire."

I glanced furtively at my watch. It was the first time I consulted it and I had anticipated this moment as something more pleasurable. Instead, I realized with a growing vexation that I was fighting not only against money, so to say, but against time as well.

I had set out to spend money, an intention most noble, I believed, by my newly adopted ethical and economical standards, and here was this foolish man sabotaging my efforts with every word he uttered. I fore-



*Bernhard Rudofsky. Spaghettiesser (spaghetti eaters), from 4 Zeichnungen zum Aufsatz die Einkleidung, ca. 1932-33*



saw that the moment I declared to pay *in contanti* — in cash — my chances of spending would dwindle still further. I decided to skip the point and merely said: "I also want a leather case for the camera." Labarbera nodded. "That, of course, is included in the price."

"And a yellow filter, please," I continued, ignoring his inopportune remark.

"Yes," answered Labarbera, warming to the extravagance of our dialog, "and you will want this book on how to use your Leica. What else? Ten rolls of film. *Ecco*. All yours for two thousand lire," he beamed. While the shopkeeper put down my address, I stepped into a corner, extracted my bundle and detached two bills from it.

"Do me the favor to send the package without delay."

It was now ten thirty, the hour, so I had been told, when Stiringhilli & Sons opened the doors of their establishment. Stiringhilli e Figli, Palazzo Gioia, were to Naples what Poole is to Saville Row. The gaiety of their name (pronounced correctly, that is, with the six short i's, clear as bells) was in piquant contrast to the mournful pomp of their premises.

I remembered how once, when accompanying two members of the Neapolitan *jeunesse dorée* to a fitting, I had marveled at the gilded elevator which ascended so slowly that I had the sensation of receding in time — a sensation that increased as I landed, some seventy feet higher, and two centuries earlier, at the third floor. Had it not been for the reassuring smell of slightly singed ironing boards, I could have believed I had arrived for an audience with, and most generously conceded by, the first Bourbon ruler of Naples, His Majesty Charles the Third, King of Spain, the Indies, etc. etc.

My visual memory has always been stronger than my ability to memorize a sonata, a poem, or even a few words. While the gilt-edged contours of the tailor's kingdom are still clearly engraved in my memory, the recollection of my verbal encounter with old Stiringhilli is very faint. The gist of the talk consisted of my request for two suits, possibly a topcoat, three fittings, and delivery within thirty hours. The tailor monarch received the enormity of my demands not so much as a challenge to his art as the impertinence of an intruder and parried the insult by naming an exorbitant price.

I am ashamed to say that this time I felt that luck was on my side and that I should have to act fast in order to prevent my opportunity from slipping. Before Stiringhilli had a chance to repent his impudence, I ripped off my coat and delivered myself into the hands of his fitters. (The coat and one of the suits have withstood the wear of nineteen years — more than can be said of the tailor and his house. Stiringhilli was last seen in Sorrento; he never returned to Naples after his premises were bombed out.)

After a lunch which set me back by two hours and the puny sum of eight lire (I kept the records of the great splurge), I hired a *carrozza* to take me to the Naples branch of the Olivetti Typewriter Company. Although until then I had paid no attention to their products, the showroom had always held a great fascination for me. It was a most incongruous affair, in pitch and harmony comparable to a birdhouse in some severely modern zoo. Suspended from the ceiling by invisible metal threads, an enormous white plaster angel, the work of an avant-garde sculptor, floated head down through tidy space. On the marble floor and on several low glass tables stood typewriters in various colors — red, blue, white and yellow. Their only flaw, from my newly acquired point of view, was the fact that they were probably less expensive than American ones.



The crystalline transparency of the shop revealed a lone clerk, visibly bored, talking into a maroon-colored telephone receiver. My entrance left him undisturbed. While I inspected the gay exhibits, I was privy to what I gathered to be an amorous, though wholly dispassionate, conversation. The young man followed me with his eyes, repeatedly shook his head and contracted his brows, whether in reference to his girl or to my unwelcome presence, I had no way of knowing. Only when I tried to remove a typewriter from the display, did he put the receiver down and walk over to me.

Mindful of the conservative *Stati Uniti* whither I was soon to depart, I had chosen a featherweight black portable model. In order to avoid any time-consuming complications, I was perfectly willing to pay less than the market price.

"Would you like to try the touch?" the man asked while inserting a sheet of paper.

"No, thank you." I had never used a typewriter.

By now, the singleness of purpose that had filled me earlier in the day became blurred. However, my haziness was quite different from being tired. In the back of my mind, I sensed that I had come to the end of a chapter in the course of my life. With a timepiece strapped to my body, life would never be the same again. I was no longer a free man. I would have to insure my watch and typewriter. Suddenly it came to me that I was buying insecurity.

"Any types changed?" said the clerk.

"Beg your pardon?"

"You do perhaps need a cedilla..."

"Oh."

I had not suspected that there were language barriers among typewriters.

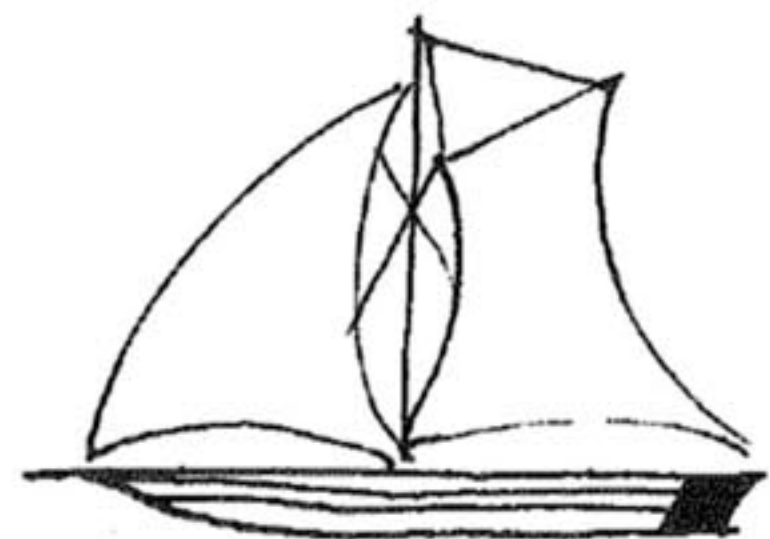
"No, thanks. Just the bill, if you please."

As he was about to hand me the sales slip, Boltraffio, the Olivetti branch manager, returned from his noon meal and greeted me with the Neapolitan rapture which is de rigueur for even the most superficial acquaintance such as ours. Elegantly snatching the bill from the clerk's hand, and with a sigh that I interpreted as a silent apology, he calmly subtracted (for reasons he did not bother to disclose) thirty per cent from the sum of the purchase.

On informing Boltraffio that I was leaving Naples the following day and that I wanted the typewriter delivered at my hotel immediately, he correctly guessed that I was going abroad. A practical man and one who had lived in the States, he thought nothing of inquiring whether I was well provided with American money. Tolerably, I told him, and added that I was worried about my disproportionate reserve of lire.

This remark put an end to my squanderings. Boltraffio not only had a robust faith in commercial intercourse; he also happened to have the right connections. The liquidation of my pocket bank was less a business transaction than an amputation. Indeed, when it was over, I felt much like coming out of an anesthesia; normalcy rushed in almost audibly. Before long, I stopped touching my deflated hip pocket.

I walked lightly, with the soft bounce of the convalescent. Neapolitans spilled from fragrant alleys into the broad seaside promenade, and my curiosity, which for an entire waking day had been riveted to consumer goods, shifted back to people. At an outdoor caffè I found a vacant table, comfortably settled down in a wicker chair and ordered a Carpano. Then I waited until it was time to go to my next fitting.



Bernhard Rudofsky. *Vessel*, ca. 1933.



*Bernard Rudofsky. Paper lamps, 1955.*





### 1. The initiation

While the "City of Osaka" was still circling in a good-bye curtsy over the bay of San Francisco, the three Japanese stewardesses were handing out the first of the new amenities which I was soon to take for granted — little oblong baskets in each of which lay a snow-white, steaming-hot towel, twisted into a sausage. It was but a smaller version of the sort of towel which barbers apply to the skin after shaving. At the airfield the temperature had been near freezing, and the warmth that evaporated from the cloth felt delicious to hands and face. The next day, in the tropical latitudes of Hawaii, the towels came from the refrigerator, cold as icicles. For three months, in cafés and restaurants, at friend's houses and in inns, cold and hot towels were to be a permanent welcoming feature. I wondered how I could ever have gotten along without them, and why I had never heard of them.

There can be no question that the Japanese have an innate talent to make life pleasant. Before I had spent 24 hours in Japan, I had made the acquaintance of many more conveniences than I had anticipated. The pleasure taken in these discoveries was offset however, by increasing doubts about my being properly prepared for this visit. What I did not know then — and what every conscientious visitor comes to recognize sooner or later — is that Japan has much more to offer than all the books put together can convey. Besides, one might argue, every epoch has its particular viewpoints, and what seems of major importance to us, may never have caught the interest of former generations.

Today, we are no doubt fairly well instructed in the more intimate aspects of every-day life in Japan; information has become easy to come by. The current popularity of things Japanese released torrents of publications on any subject from Ainu culture to Zen philosophy. To come across Japanese magazines in the U.S. is not uncommon anymore, and Japanese moving pictures are by now as familiar as Italian ones. To top it all, and to give Americans a tangible taste of Japanese atmosphere, the Museum of Modern Art in New York built in its garden a museum version of a Japanese house. In short, Japan is the rage. In Japan, the situation is, if anything, reversed — the craze is for everything American. Ever since 1853, when an American fleet dropped anchor at the mouth of what today is called Tokyo Bay, putting an end to Japan's splendid isolation, the Japanese have been westernizing their country unrelentingly. Most of this process is unavoidable and —

<sup>15</sup> The first three parts were published on *Domus*, respectively BR56.1, BR56.2, and BR57.1. The fourth part, as well meant for *Domus*, stayed unpublished. All of them are unpublished in the original English version. Found in the personal archives (Frigiliana, Málaga).

everything considered — logical. There is, however, a studied lack of discrimination in their acceptance of Western culture. Perhaps most bewildering and slightly alarming to the outsider is their self-denial of some of their most precious patrimony. It is a major puzzle, all the more as they are a notoriously proud nation. "Whatever you do, don't expatiate in the presence of Japanese of the new school on those old, quaint and beautiful things Japanese which rouse your most genuine admiration," warned Basil Hall Chamberlain as long as 80 years ago; "speaking generally, the educated Japanese have done with their past. They want to be somebody else and something else than what they have been and still partly are."

You would do well to remember this warning; the average Japanese gets insulted when you praise the old — and often eminently sensible — ways of his country. His loyalties are by now firmly set. Like the American whom he imitates, he is determined to tolerate noise, dirt and ugliness if they are the price he has to pay for what he takes to be progress; he even finds moral strength in them. "That's the joy of living in Tokyo," says a young student and war veteran in Osaragi's new novel, *Homecoming*, "everything is gone, all the lovely ancient things Japanese get sentimental about have been destroyed. That's the strength of Tokyo today." The sympathetic visitor finds himself in an awkward position; if he wholeheartedly admires the racial wisdom of Japanese as exemplified in their traditional ways, he can not help being appalled by the hotch-potch of their modern life.

This frantic desire to abandon everything reminiscent of the Old Japan seems a tragic mistake. It is especially dismaying to the architect. "I implored them," recalls Walter Gropius from his recent visit to Japan, "not to discard the great spirit of their traditional architecture, for I felt that it is still full of new potentialities for a modern way of life." Much what the Japanese consider anachronistic, to us is still music of the future. We cannot but envy them those achievements which no concerted efforts of our own have been able to approximate: prefabrication and modular coordination; soft floors and minimum furniture; fully built-in storage; disappearing walls and windows; fenced-in houses and gardens. Taken for granted for hundreds of years, they now have gone into decline.

The pleasant surprise of a visit to Japan is to discover that, in spite of all changes, some of her traditions are still alive. As one gets away from the big cities, from the crowded shrines and temple districts (few tourists have the desire or the time to do so), one comes to know the rural Japan — an archaic world perhaps but surely an authentic one. So much has been said and written about the poverty of Japan that one looks with amazement at the prosperous and beautiful farmhouses. All peasants have style, said Sainte-Beuve, and this certainly holds true for Japan. In many ways, her rural architecture is a most up-to-date glossary for the inquisitive student. Indeed, the culture of the farmer has been called the true key to all Japanese culture. Unfortunately, life behind the paper screens is not easily disclosed to the tourist. Even the most observant sight-seer cannot hope for more than a few rapid glimpses, unless he is one of the lucky few to find entrée to a Japanese family.

The less privileged traveler has a second-best opportunity to observe the vestiges of traditional life in a Japanese-style inn. It is remarkable as institutions go. Far from being primitive, an inn offers comfort of a kind that has, at least to us, a distinct utopian flavor. It is of course particularly suited to the demands of the Japanese, a people addicted



to travel for many generations. The habit originated probably with their religious pilgrimages; it was sustained by the attraction of innumerable health resorts and, in the course of time, they seem to have acquired, as it were, a self-perpetuating curiosity and enthusiasm for natural scenery. So highly have they developed the art of traveling (remember: art means to omit) that, unlike us, they do not depend on travel baggage. Many a tourist takes with him no more than he can comfortably carry in his pockets. In other words, the Japanese travel light, and so ought you.

To most occidentals, a native inn is about as far a point of penetration into Japanese life as they can ever hope to reach. It ought to be added that it is both an enjoyment of the highest order and a test of one's critical faculties. Unlike a Japanese hotel, an inn is inconspicuous. The best of them are not listed; they open their doors to people with proper introduction only. In this respect, they resemble exclusive clubs—with this difference: one may stay in them an entire week without ever coming face to face with a fellow-guest. There is of course no *table d'hôte*; all meals are taken in one's rooms. Privacy is all-important; every cranny of the garden, every corner of a room is artfully screened from the eyes of strangers. Admittedly, this amounts to a sort of confinement, if a most exquisite one.

If you are a novice, there is adventure for you in store. But even when you have come to take for granted the daily routine of meals and baths, its charm never seems to wear off. Life at an old-style inn begins with what I shall call your initiation. The maid who showed you to your quarters — she will be your faithful companion till the end of your stay — insists that you take off your clothes at once and get into a native gown. When you come back to your room, after having had your first Japanese bath (which, quite likely, was in itself a shattering experience), your belongings have been put out of sight. The ties with the life you have always known are drastically severed. What you probably experience in the unaccustomed environment can be described as nothing short of a loss of identity. Your first impulse may be to look around for a mirror to seek comfort in the familiarity of your own reflection but, alas, you have difficulty finding one. Like all shiny objects, it is hidden by a cover.

Yet this sort of self-induced amnesia is curiously gratifying. It is like taking part in a play or masquerade where one is allowed to transcend — if only for a few hours — the boundaries of his personality. Here, the masquerade lasts as long as you chose. If you happen to stay at an honest-to-good inn of a hot spring, you may perhaps never get a chance to wear your western clothes; you are expected to dress according to your new environment. In fact, some innkeepers do not like you to wear your own clothes. Although the national costume is disappearing from the scene and the Japanese have taken for various reasons to Western clothes, they nevertheless consider them unclean. They would not tolerate them next to their skin and, even in the hottest weather, wear long underwear. Moreover, to wear occidental dress in a Japanese house is the height of inconvenience. For it is obvious that our system of suspenders and garters, of buttons and zippers makes no allowance for bending and stretching. To sit in tailored garments for any length of time on the floor, buttocks level with feet, is next to impossible.

It is the innkeeper's business to provide you with clothes. They are changed daily, as are your bedclothes. Depending on place and weather, you are issued a *yucata* (summer kimono), a wide-brimmed straw hat,





*Bernard Rudofsky. Guest clothes drying in the courtyard of an inn, 1955.*

an oiled paper umbrella and a peculiar wash towel — about which more in a later article — that doubles as headgear. Shoes of any kind are taboo in the house; they are taken off and stored away before you enter it. In return you are provided with an assorted line of footwear for all occasions — slippers for the corridors; sandals for the toilet; clogs for garden and beach, and especially high ones for walking in the rain. In your rooms you remain barefoot.

In mountain and seaside resorts where there is no lack of social contact, one meets his fellow-guests in their *yucatas* on boats and buses, in the streets and on beaches. Apart from the fact that male and female garments are distinguished by typical designs, all guests of an inn dress alike. This uniformity is remarkably democratic — comparable to the garb of ecclesiastical orders. Besides, to the foreigner in distress it may turn out a godsend: In case he gets lost and is unable to ask for directions in Japanese, everybody will know where he is staying and help to get him back to his inn. It would be hard to imagine a similar state of affairs in Western countries — just try to picture, say, some tourists in the streets of Venice whose dress would at a glance tell the knowing whether they are staying at the Excelsior Palace or at the Pensione Smith. Come to think of it, it is not so long ago that Italians themselves wore costumes which immediately identified them as citizens of a certain town, or as peasants of a particular valley. (By the way, a *yucata* is not blatantly marked with the inn's name or address; its provenance is recognizable by a specific pattern only.)

The subject of clothes may seem far removed from matters discussed on the pages of this magazine, yet it is inseparable from good architecture. Any truly modern architecture, i. e. something more intelligently conceived than our ephemeral fashions of building and



furnishing would have to take dress into consideration — at least the utilitarian kind. Although the use of guest clothes has never been contemplated in our civilization, I once came quite near to putting it to a test. I was then designing, together with Gio Ponti, an albergo for Anacapri, an advanced version of a hotel which, although as native as ginestra, incorporated a number of outlandish conveniences.<sup>19</sup> Each guest has a small house to himself; the case in point, however, is that the foyer of each house was to contain a closet with an assortment of robes, coats, sandals, hats and umbrellas, provided by the management and created by the architects. To an Italian this was then, and probably still is, quite an absurd idea. It might seem perhaps less so if he considers that only a few hundreds years ago, when European inns were not equipped with tableware, each traveler had to carry with him his own spoon, fork and knife.

In connection with clothes, another utopian-archaic institution ought to be mentioned: the Japanese bed or *futon*. It is of the disappearing kind, far ahead of any of our own cumbersome contraptions. It consists of several comforters of silk or cotton laid on the mat-covered floor which in itself is almost resilient enough to provide a suitable sleeping surface. When not in use, these are folded and stored in a closet. In all, the bed is made or put away, together with the standard accessories of lantern, incense burner, ash tray and water jug, in three minutes flat — I clocked the time. Thus, although the Japanese house has no bedrooms in the accepted sense, it can sleep more people than any Western house of equal size. The advantage becomes apparent when one considers that about half the space of our houses is generally given over to bedrooms. (The same applies to dining: there is no dining room proper in a traditional Japanese house. Instead, a large table for all, or several individual tables, are brought into the room of one's choice.) Of course, the thought of sleeping on the floor may be repulsive to a non-Oriental. It may never enter his mind that there is a world where floors are as clean as the table from which he eats. It is true though, that irrational sentiments may outweigh practical considerations; although the modern bed is the mere vestige of a formerly more massive piece of furniture, its symbolical significance remains undiminished. The poorest Neapolitan family living in a *basso* would not dream of parting with their collection of monumental beds in exchange for more room. To them, life without a bedstead is probably as unthinkable as after-life without a grave. Yet, with chamber pots going out of fashion, and cleanliness supposedly on the increase, what good reason is there for still putting a mattress on four legs, except to separate us from our dirty floors?

The Japanese bed speaks for itself. Once you have slept on a *futon*, you may speedily revise any preconceived ideas of yours. The low altitude has no adverse effect on the quality of sleep; on the contrary, the unusual perspective is downright stimulating. Far from appearing dissolute, the nocturnal arrangement with its air of improvisation, has a distinct poetic touch. This suggestion is carried further by a mosquito net of sumptuous dimensions. The net is in the form of a chamber, with a flat ceiling and four walls, the immateriality of which is enhanced by their being shaded off in blue.<sup>20</sup> In a way, this bed, with or without its canopy, is the one voluptuous — if inconstant — nook in an otherwise austere environment.

19 See Catalogue no. 25 (p. 272).

20 See picture at p. 173.





Bernard Rudofsky. Decorative aperture with grilles of bamboo and reeds in a guest room of a legendary inn of 1614 in Kyoto, 1955. The shōji windows here pictured belong to the Sumiya in the quarter of Shimabara. "This is the only remaining two-story wooden ageya building, a place to which geisha were summoned to sing and dance or otherwise entertain, popular in the Edo period" (Takeji Iwamiya, Kazuka Takaoka, Katachi. Classical Japanese Design, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999, p. 26-27). The design of its shōji are different in each room.

## 2. On shoji

"Perhaps in nothing are the Japanese to be more admired", wrote a British diplomat, Sir Rutherford Alcock, "than for the wonderful genius they display in arriving at the greatest possible results with the simplest means, and the smallest possible expenditure of time and labor or material". Although by far not as poor as they like to consider themselves, the Japanese are a most thrifty people. Frugality is plainly written all over their domestic architecture. Often, it is impossible to tell — from the outside, at least — whether a house belongs to a rich man or a poor one. Frugality has also been the source of some of their most delighted inventions. They have a fine way of meeting a problem head on and never are their imagination and sensitivity as brilliantly shown as in their approach to most elementary matters.

Take light for example — simple, free-for-all daylight, a general commodity dating from the first day of creation. Mankind — at any rate, the healthy sort — always craved light; so much so as to deify it in their sun and moon gods. No doubt, some of these inherited pagan emotions can be accounted for the Italian's urge to celebrate in song the incomparable sunlight of his country. In the past, man's necessity to take the most of natural light has always been a challenge to his ingenuity. Perhaps nowhere has he met this challenge as persistently as in architecture.

People with a natural affinity for the warmth and light of the sun are on the horns of a dilemma when building a house, for the more solid they make its walls, the more they shut out the daylight. Not without some justification has the history of architecture been defined as the vagaries



of wall openings, and the nobility of a house been measured by the size of its windows. In fact, our proudest claim to a modern architecture rests with these recent houses from which opaque walls have been completely omitted. Yet irony will have it that our spectacular ways with glass walls and artificial lighting have made us forget all about natural light. Many a transparent wall has lost its *raison d'être*; on the brightest of days, the lights are turned on in our glass palaces. The combination of daylight and artificial light is hideous and harmful to the eye, yet, accustomed as we are to colored light, colored goggles and tinted windshields, we do not seem to mind. We simply have become indifferent to the qualities of unadulterated daylight.

To savor light and shadow within four walls, one must go to Japan where translucent walls were common at a time when Europe still built her houses as ponderous as fortifications. As most everybody who is interested in architecture knows, the equivalent for the outer walls in the traditional Japanese house are sliding paper screens called *shoji*. *Shoji*, and the matchless light they spread, have been described minutely and enthusiastically by many a foreign traveler, yet only a Japanese seems to be able to put into words their almost magical charm. "Our ancestors," wrote a great contemporary novelist, Junichiro Tanizaki, "came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's ends. The beauty of a Japanese room depends upon a variation of shadows. The light from the garden steals in but dimly through paper-paneled doors, and we do our rooms in neutral colors so that the sad, fragile, dying rays can sink into absolute repose..." Note that the emphasis is on shadows, not darkness.

The filtered light which pervades a Japanese room is unlike any we know. So is the rice paper that is used for *shoji*; it resembles our paper in name only. "Western paper turns away the light," says Tanizaki, "while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree."

Apart from the mellow light which they seem to emit rather than to transmit, *shoji* have other virtues born of necessity. For one thing, they are incomparably cheaper than glass windows and much easier to repair. For another, they do away with window curtains. Not counting economical considerations, curtains are often the bane of an otherwise attractive room. Their bulkiness, their inherent shapelessness and uncontrollable messiness (What is more hideous than the current habit to sew permanent, stylized folds into curtains!) defeat the best intentions of the architect. It was probably this unmanageability — if only unconsciously felt — of all curtains, binds and shades that made *brise-soleils* such an immediate success in countries where the sun is an element to be reckoned with. At any rate, window curtains mar the best of contemporary interiors and inevitably communicate to them an air of dowdiness.

It goes without saying that *shoji* conceal everything within the house from the gaze of passers-by. To be sure, this is an advantage only to people who care for privacy. The average American, forever preoccupied as he is with his neighbor's approval, prefers life at home to be as transparent and public as that of a mannequin in a shop window. Some of his celebrated modern houses are veritable hyperboles of architectural understatement and amount to little more than magnificently appointed pillories.

Among the defects of *shoji* are to be counted less their inadequate insulation against outside temperature than their vulnerability. The

first is somewhat compensated by the remarkable resistance which the Japanese seem to have against cold. Foreigners recall with amazement (and shivers running down their spine) the wintery spectacle of Japanese families at home, serenely watching the falling snow, with the outside doors and screens of their rooms thrown wide open. In the way of explanation it ought to be added that their winters are generally mild, and that the fury of the winds is broken by strategically placed garden walls and fences. Last, not least, that they are wont to sit around a brazier, well covered with quilts and quilted garments.

The daintiness of the paper screens is another problem altogether. Tough as rice paper is, shoji are all but indestructible. For years, the children of American occupation soldiers were the terror of Japanese housewives. Japanese children, notoriously well-behaved, sometimes poke holes, too, and wherever much manual work is being done as in farmhouses, shoji come in for a great deal of wear and tear. The professional paper-hanger, or whatever he is called in Japan, does a superb job in invisible mending (— "the Sheets being so curiously glewed, that no Man can discern where they are conjoyned" wrote Montanus, a European visitor in 1670). In poorer houses, the mending is ceaseless being done by the inhabitants themselves; it is exactly this amateurish and rough kind of patchwork that merits special attention. Indeed, whereas much has been said and written about the immaculate beauty of shoji in teahouses and other elegant precincts, nobody has so far paid attention to those dazzling compositions which originate from mending the paper screens. The poorer the dwelling, the more numerous the patches. As the net result of this perpetual repairing, every peasant owns a glorious collection of abstract collages. The variety and discoloration of rice paper, the occasional recourse to newspaper or wrapping paper, produce compositions that are beautiful to behold. When you remember that these patched shoji are actually luminous screens, akin to stained glass windows, you may get an inkling of the exquisite detail found in even the most humble sort of Japanese architecture.

It was Lafcadio Hearn, an American writer whose infatuation with Japan led him to become a citizen of that country, who wrote (in 1894): "Devoutly I pray that glass may never become universally adopted in Japan — there would be no more delicious shadows." During the past two generations, the use of glass windows has of course become as common as elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the Japanese have not become entirely resigned to glass. Usually, they retain their beloved paper screens and, as a concession to modern times, insert into them a narrow strip of glass panes on a level with the line of vision of a person seated on the floor. Those who can't altogether avoid using glass throughout their houses have struck a sensible compromise by covering their glass windows with shoji-paper. Thus, the rawness of the light is softened, and the intimacy of the room preserved. (It is common for Japanese intellectuals to denigrate any relapse into old customs as sentimental or reactionary; it may be reasonably assumed however, that among unsophisticated people the hankering for shoji, or a passable substitute, springs from a need that is more elementary than hitherto realized.)

The Japanese go about this business of improving their glass windows with typical gusto. Far from being content to cover the glass panes with paper of equal or identical size, they playfully apply it in round and oval shapes, in dots and stripes, criss-cross or in free patterns. This enables them to look out of a window without being seen. The



appearance of these doctored windows is as handsome as the result is practical.

Their ways with broken window panes are equally amusing. Trifling as the subject may appear to you, it throws an interesting light on the temperament and character of a people which has often puzzled us. Thrifty by nature and circumstance, a Japanese of the poorer sort wouldn't dream of replacing a cracked window pane if he can help it. Instead, he mends it in his own pretty ways, that is, where we would simply close the cracks with tape, he sprinkles them with rows and clusters of beauty spots, judiciously graded for size and meticulously applied for artistic effect. One is inclined to suspect that, far from considering a broken pane a misfortune, the Japanese welcome it as an opportunity for exercising their decorative talent. In other words, what elsewhere would inevitably be turned into an eyesore, he is able to transform into something utterly delightful.



*Bernard Rudofsky. Stairway leading to a Japanese temple, perhaps Myogi, 1955.*



### 3.

Of all the ancient arts practiced and prized by gentlemen none has been more subjected to change than the art of traveling. The tourist industry made a clean sweep of one of the most ingenious human activities, the intelligent pursuit of adventure, and reduced it to a sort of itinerant euphoria. Much as modern mass communications helped to weaken the barriers of national prejudice, they have taken the edge off the happier moments of travel. The element of surprise, the exhilaration which comes from personal discovery, are missing; what takes their place is pure and simple recognition. The tourist who gives a cursory glance to the façade of Notre Dame, is perfectly satisfied that it looks more or less what he expected it to look. Or, such minimal recognition may even fall behind his modest expectations. It happens that that powerful medium of communication, photography, has succeeded in creating illusions which reality does not always live up to. Although photography has taught us a new way of seeing the world around us, it has rubbed off the fine bloom of mystery which clings to every thing in creation; the very familiarity of the photographic image spoils what little has remained of the pleasure of surprise.

To illustrate my point with a Japanese example — the so-called Katsura Detached Palace near Kyoto, a tourist attraction of the first order, was at the turn of the century for all practical purposes non-existent. Murray's *Handbook for Travelers to Japan*, 1901, a respectable scholarly little opus, dismisses it in a single sentence: "The building is a ramshackle place, not differing in style from any ordinary Japanese house." One generation later, Bruno Taut launched it into world fame by heaping words of extravagant praise on it. It may seem strange that the Japanese had to wait for a German architect to explain for them the superior qualities of their *Shoin* style — how come they had been blind for so long to the charm of their best architecture? The reason they advance for this oversight is most peculiar. "However highly our architects and art lovers may have admired them," writes Horiguchi in *The Katsura Imperial Villa*, "they have been unable to express themselves as to be understood by our young people of today."

Today, the Katsura Villa is a household word. Considering the short time that elapsed since its discovery, the literature that deals with it is staggering. Every one of its dark corners has been explored; every single pebble of its garden has been documented. Embarrassed by so much fuss, some level-minded Japanese are now trying to reduce the over-inflated reputation of the Villa to a more befitting one. Moreover, its promotion to an architectural monument *par excellence*, and the cumulative effect of its having been described, discussed, and depicted in such an exhaustive manner is that, when confronted with it at last, one has the feeling that one could walk blindfolded through its buildings and gardens. They have, as it were, a quality of *déjà-vu*.

For this very reason, the more gratifying experiences of the traveler in Japan are, as a rule, linked to its unadvertised attractions. Street decorations, put up in a hurry for the brief duration of a festival, signboards and billboards, are often sources of unmitigated delight. So far, however, they have not found the recognition they merit. Hundreds of books have been written on Japanese gardening; on *bonsai*, the growing of dwarf trees; on *bonseki*, the composing of miniature landscapes on lacquer trays; on the still more esoteric art of arranging flowers, called *ikebana*; but I have yet to come across a writer who has mentioned such an equally fascinating subject as the traditional Japanese window display.



Of course, it has been said over and over again that it is impossible to judge Japan and Japanese art by Western standards; that the two races are unable to think in the same terms. But then, does anybody flatter himself to be able to think of Greek art in terms of the ancient Greeks? Or, for that matter, do Europeans and Americans ever see eye to eye on art, if only on the art of living?

Americans are perhaps least equipped to project themselves into other people's thoughts. As the anthropologist Ruth Benedict says in her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, "the study of comparative cultures cannot flourish when men are so defensive about their own way of life that it appears to them to be by definition the sole solution in the world." It is, one feels, much easier for a European to enjoy Japan than it is for an American. One might go further and say that there exist certain similarities between the Japanese and the Italian people and their countries which, though fortuitous, are nevertheless striking.

Both are sea-faring nations. Both have developed their agriculture almost to the point of horticulture. Their craftsmen are unrivaled in their respective continents. Topographically, Japan and Italy resemble each other in several respects. Few of their regions are very distant from the sea; their lake districts and volcanic mountains are equally celebrated. The islands, promontories and sweeping beaches that make up the *Inland Sea* recall the bays of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Moreover, the towns and villages in that part bear such euphonic names as *Uno*, *Sone*, *Tomo*, or the downright Neapolitan-sounding *Aioi*.

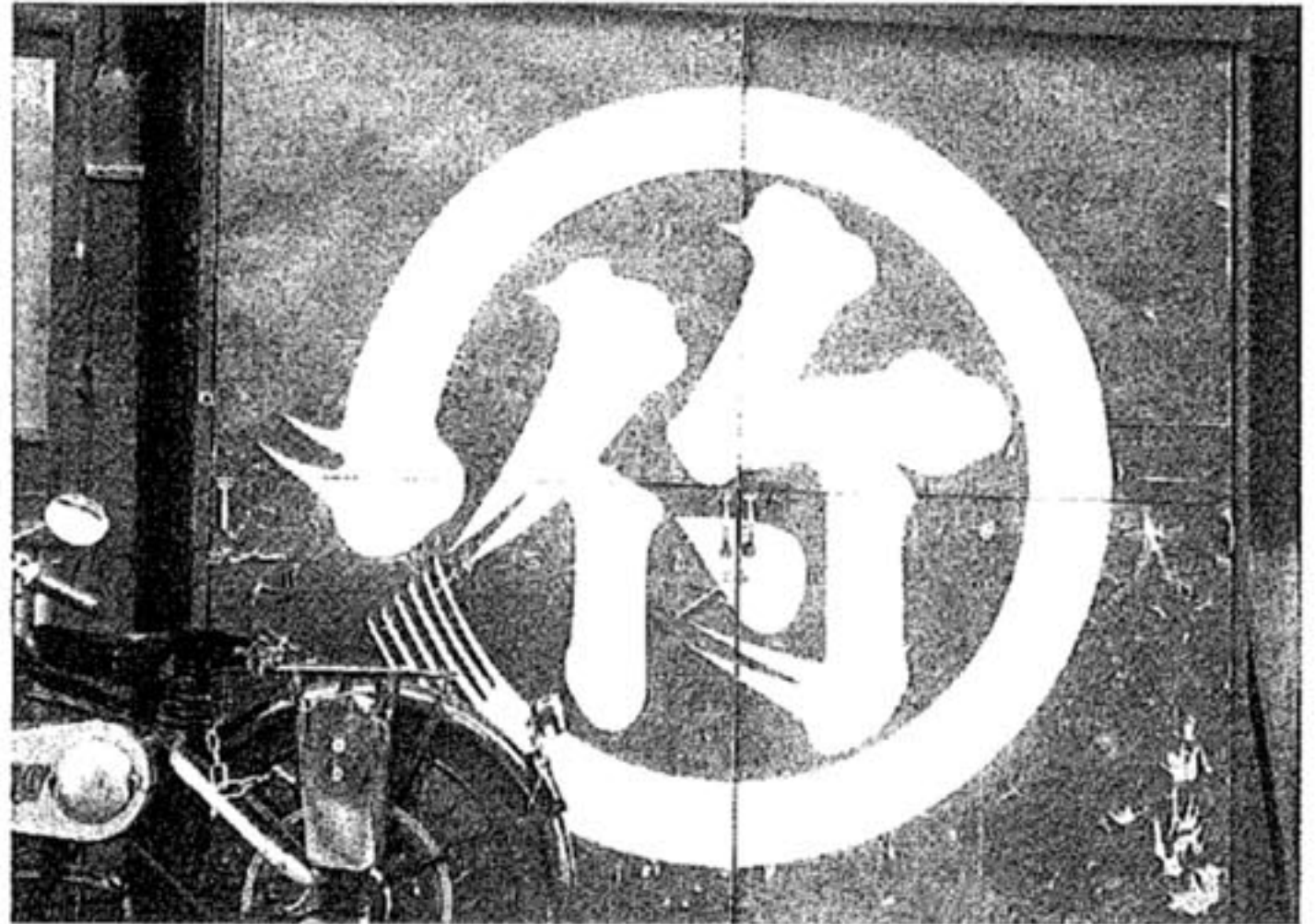
Walking on an August day along the shores of the Inland Sea, on narrow paths flanked by crude stone walls, among fig-trees and medlars (which, by the way, are native to Japan), olive-trees, white and pink oleander, one easily falls victim to the illusion of being somewhere near Sorrento. This optical illusion is supplemented by an acoustical one. Through the milky haze that hides the calm sea drift the long-drawn cries of fishermen, sounding exactly like those of their colleagues in Mergellina. The catch includes *calamari*, *seppie*, *vongole*.

Not to confound matters any further, I shall stop comparing. At any rate, the last thing I want to insinuate is that Italian and Japanese architecture are similar. Far from it. The Western house is an all weather, the year round house. The traditional Japanese house on the other hand, is a warm weather affair that barely manages to permit the inhabitant to struggle through the winter. Essentially, it is a platform, raised a few feet above ground, plus a roof. (The rows of wooden platforms put up near shrines, on look-out points, on beaches or wherever people get together, are the simplest type of this architecture.) The eaves — some are as wide as eight feet — permit to keep the house completely open during the rainy season. When summer comes, the Japanese literally throws open his house to the winds and the sun. He removes the outer walls of the house and stores them away for the duration of the warm weather. In winter, there being no adequate heating system, the house is cold. The Japanese brilliantly solves this problem by simply ignoring the cold.

Since these notes are intended to be no more than footnotes, it may be permissible to dwell on the lesser categories of architecture. So much stress has been laid on the delicacy of Japanese constructions, on paper walls and straw roofs, that many a reader may ask himself how all the fragile treasures of old, the paintings and scrolls, the costumes and lacquerwares could have survived the conflagrations,

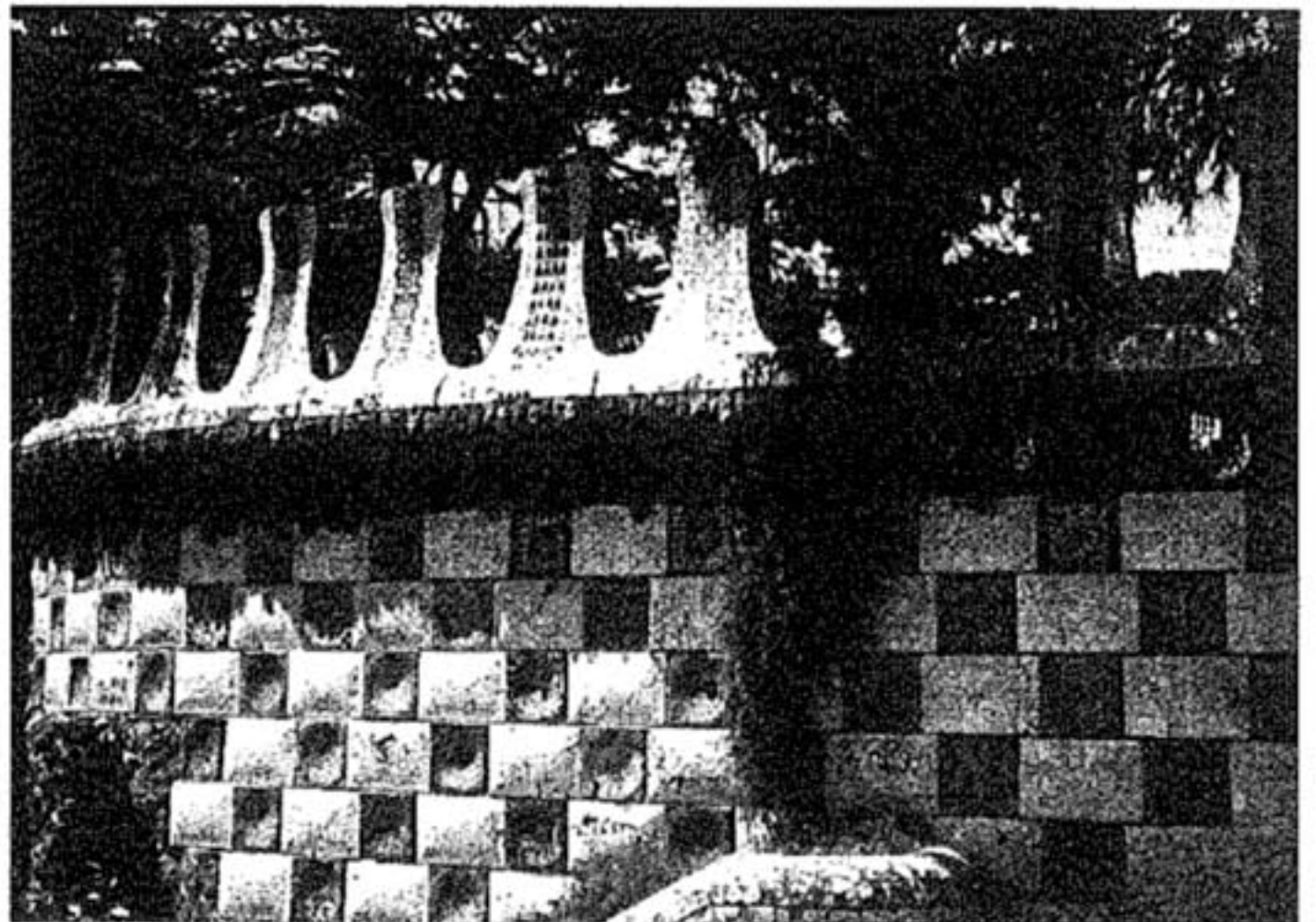


*Bernard Rudofsky. Japanese shop-sign, 1955. Rudofsky had both an ability to recognize beauty in trivial and everyday matters and a tendency to assign an aesthetic value to the spontaneous creations of entire civilizations. In the original edition of this article, an image similar to this one bore the following caption: In Japan writing is an art, therefore every Japanese is a graphic artist.*



*Bernard Rudofsky. Decorated masonry wall of a Japanese storehouse, perhaps on Shodo island (?), 1955 (?).*

The wall decoration of the solid structures of the storehouses or treasuries where the Japanese keep precious objects — paintings, garments, lacquerwork — so as not to store them in their fragile houses has a distinctly Italian flavor.



floods and earthquakes which the chronicles record. The answer to this is that the Japanese build fire-proof structures, solid enough to withstand at least the kind of God-sent disasters.

These buildings are one- or two-storied strong-boxes, made of thick walls and partly covered with a sort of rustication which gives it a strong Italian touch; they remind one vaguely of provincial palaces. Some look like elegant stage sets for, say, *Romeo and Juliet*, designed in a transmuted Renaissance style. This building type originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and, for all one knows, may have been inspired by examples from abroad. The storehouses represent a curiosity rather than examples of outstanding design. If they prove anything at all, they show that the Japanese form language has a much larger vocabulary than is generally known.



Bernard Rudofsky. *Display of Japanese goods, 1955.*



4.

The Japanese bath would be a most fascinating subject to write about in a journal dedicated to *amplioris fortunae domus*, were it not for some unfortunate circumstances that make it all but impossible to treat it in unprejudiced way. There are proved and approved methods of washing a shirt or a pot but when it comes to cleaning the human epidermis, we are apt to disagree on aims as well as needs. We do not even shrink from denouncing practices which deviate from our own. This is especially true of the English-speaking nations who suffer from the delusion of having developed their bathroom to a singular perfection.

Let it be said at once that bathing has little to do with plumbing. The *thermae* of the ancients and the ornate pools of the Middle Ages did very well with a minimum of pipes and valves, and so do the Turkish bath and the Sauna. As far as the Japanese are concerned, they are of course in the enviable position of having plenty of running hot water available; indeed, no other country in the world is as blessed with



natural springs as is theirs. There are over 1100 medical thermae in Japan and, so far, nobody has taken the trouble to count the non-medical ones. To be sure, in some parts of Japan, flowing water, hot or cold, is scarce. Yet, do the people who live in them bathe less than the others? Far from it. Some, in fact, bathe several times a day. They go without a meal rather than without a bath.

It has been said that the Japanese bath is primarily a ritual, yet it is doubtful whether the Japanese will agree on that. The word ritual applies more correctly to their type of cleanliness. Indeed, there is a world of difference between their and our concepts of being clean. With us, this is a temporary state, a relapse from uncleanness. With them, cleanliness is a sort of permanent state of siege in defense against dirt. The best known example of their notion of cleanliness is the custom of taking off their shoes on entering a traditional house. While we concentrate on inventing and perfecting techniques of cleaning our floors, the Japanese solve the problem by not dirtying their floors in the first place.

A similar daintiness prevails in matters of personal hygiene. For instance, their militant sense of cleanliness includes the olfactory; the absence of unpleasant body smells among the Japanese can be definitely ascribed to their choice of food. "To a Japanese," writes Ichiro Kawasaki (in *The Japanese Are Like That*), "Westerners have a strong body odor which is quite nauseating. The body odor of the average American or Englishman is undoubtedly the result of a heavy meat diet. We find it most curious to read advertisements in Western papers and magazines about lotions and medicines, the use of which will prevent the wrecking of romances and will enhance the user's happiness." For the foreigner in Japan, there is some comfort in the knowledge that he can make himself more attractive by sticking to native dishes. Thus, he too, may be able to achieve that exquisite state of being no more fragrant than a lily.

Few among us know that in Japan the bathtub is also a provider of warmth. The traditional house, perfect as it is for the summer, becomes an icebox in winter, and its inhabitants, hardy though they may be, suffer from the cold. The *kotatsu*, a sort of brazier, affords them no more than a glimmer of warmth and, for want of a better heating system, they take turns thawing themselves out in a tub of hot water. It is not uncommon for a farmer's family to bathe five times a day. The Japanese enters his bathtub perfectly clean. To us this may seem as absurd as sitting down to a meal being perfectly sated. Yet their custom appears strange only because it never occurred to us to separate the performances of cleaning and bathing, just as we never bothered to have separate rooms for bathing and defecating. No doubt, the Japanese custom can be traced to an innate thriftiness; in places where water was scarce, and fuel expensive, it became necessary to re-use the same bath water several times. For the fastidiously clean Japanese, this meant that they had to cleanse themselves before entering the tub. In time, the custom was elevated to a principle, and anybody who soaked in his own dirt, was looked upon as filthy.

Westerners, to whom the niceties of plumbing are far more important than bathing itself, are apt to look down on the Japanese bath. Those, however, who had any actual experience — travel books recommend to try the Japanese bath at least once "as an adventure" — are apt to change their mind. A recently published guide book (*Mc Kay's Guide to the Far East* by E. C. Gellhorn) points out that people who have become accustomed to the Japanese way of bathing, "consider,



with the Japanese, any other system repulsive." In order to get an idea of the actual procedure, let us follow it step by step.

The principle bath is taken before dinner. (It ought to be understood that this disquisition on Japanese balneology applies to the traditional house only; the westernized house retains very few usages of the old way.) Since an average household may have only one small tub that accommodates a person at a time, precedence is scrupulously observed. First comes the guest, then the host and his sons in the order of age, then the female members of the family and, lastly, the servants. In the country, the privilege of a bath may be extended occasionally to one's neighbors.

One goes to the bath clad in a single garment, a *yucata*, or bath kimono. The bathroom is usually located at the end of a corridor, facing a small garden. It is entered through an austere dressing room containing several undersized laundry baskets in which one leaves his kimono. At an inn, there may be several dozen of these baskets on shelves along the walls.

The bathroom is simplicity itself: no mirrors, wash-basins or showers, and of course never a toilet seat. Aside from the tub, it is furnished with one or several wooden buckets and low stools. Into the wall are set faucets for hot and cold water. There are no bath towels in our sense; a spidery little piece of highly absorbent cotton cloth, small enough to be hidden in one's fist, serves as face-cloth and sponge, and when wrung out, as a rather wet towel. To most non-Japanese it is a source of exasperation yet, in all fairness, it ought to be said that it works very well.

By repeatedly soaping, scrubbing and drenching himself with buckets full of hot water, the bather achieves the state of purity required for entering the tub. The novice may be surprised to find the tub filled to the brim. It is a typical Japanese gesture of grandeur; whether it symbolizes abundance of water, or whether it simply serves to skim any impurities from the surface, it is and remains impressive. Whenever I plunged into the tub, displacing gallons of more or less precious hot water, I could not help wondering whether Archimedes bathed *à la japonaise*. At any rate, one may splash to one's heart's content, for the entire bathroom floor is an oversized drainboard made of hardwood which permits the water to run off thorough the joints.

Such a meticulous method of cleansing takes time, and large families have to use the room simultaneously. An exception is always made for guests whose desire for privacy is respected if not quite understood. Nevertheless, a foreign couple may feel self-conscious and no little adventurous when mounting a matrimonial bathtub for the first time. Unlike Western tubs and bathrooms, their Japanese counterparts are not standardized. The two dozen or so bathrooms which I came to use during a three months visit to Japan stand out quite distinctly in my memory. They run the gamut from an iron kettle — of the kind which cannibals use for boiling missionaries — to a superb wooden tub in a gubernatorial mansion that had been especially installed for a visit of the emperor. In Japan, the bathroom lends itself to variations more than any other room; it is ideally suited for the exercise of the Japanese imagination.

The most common form of the tub is a square wooden box with a cover to keep the water from cooling off too rapidly when not in use. A wood-burning metal stove with a stove pipe is built into one side of the box. This may sound Spartan but, actually, it is an unthought-of



refinement over our equipment. The quality and processing of wood in Japan being what it is, wood counts among the noblest materials. The velvety smoothness of a wooden bathtub's surface is the nearest to *peau d'ange* and, once a person has gotten used to its caress, the touch of an enameled metal tub seems unpleasant.

In this wooden tub the bather sits or crouches immersed to the chin. The water's temperature is near 50° Celsius, and as long as he keeps quite still, the hot water does not hurt. The trick is to get in and out of the water fast and with the greatest economy of movement. It takes some time though, to acquire the ease with which the Japanese glide into the water without rippling its surface.

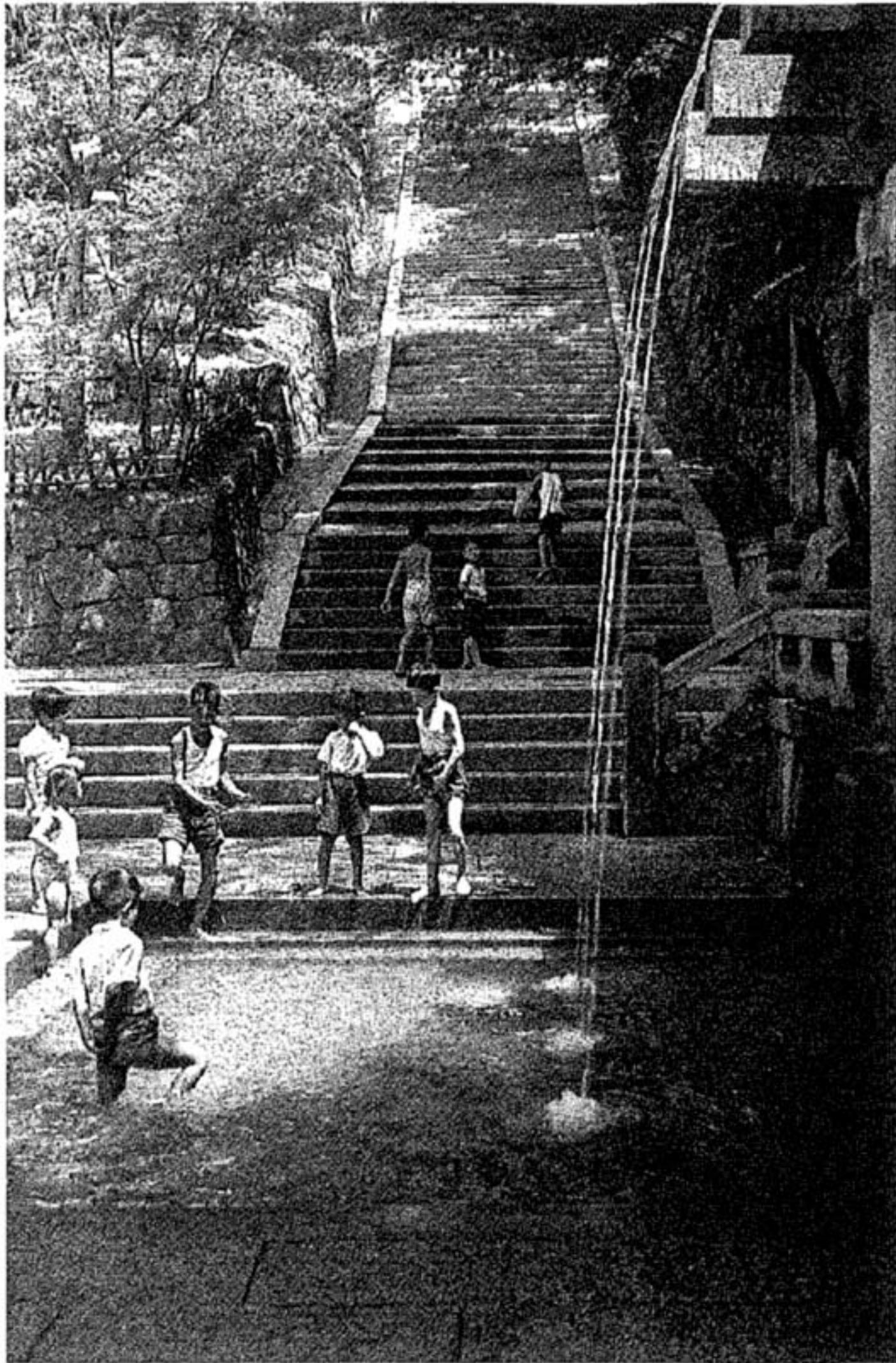
The variety and size of tubs and pools one comes across in watering places is spectacular. If a brimful tub is at first an astonishing sight, so much more are the tubs that are continuously flowing over with hot water. There are basins cut from a single block of stone; bathtubs in the form of a rowboat or of a lute; pools lined with minute mosaic rather than tiles. Into these pools water is cascading over rocks green with moss or multicolored by mineral sediments. Sometimes, the splendor of these nymphean retreats is topped off by an equally splendid view — anything in the way from a classical *trompe-l'oeil* garden to a sweeping panorama of mountains or islands. At one country inn, I enjoyed a view over five provinces from the tub. Yet even in the lowliest house, the bathers do not want to miss the environs. The poor man, for lack of a garden view, puts his tub where he can overlook the bustle of the street, and thus bathes in full view of passers-by, without embarrassment to either.

There is one sort of Japanese bath that is in a category of its own: the outdoor pool. It is quite unlike the aseptic American-style swimming pool with its shining tiles and diving board. It pretends to be a natural setting, that is to say, it is about as natural as any typical Japanese garden is ever meant to be. In essence, it is a miniature gorge gushing forth with steaming water, with nooks and arbors, with little bridges formed by single slabs of stone. The adjoining dressing- and wash-rooms are well hidden by rocks, trees and shrubs; in short, the idyllic arrangement is right out of one of the classical Japanese romances. To lie at night in the scalding-hot embrace of the water, the darkness scarcely lessened by some stone lanterns and the light of a thin moon, is an experience unknown in our latitudes.

The reactions of foreign travelers to the Japanese way of bathing vary very widely. An officer of Commodore Perry's history-making squadron recorded in his diary (subsequently published in book form) a visit to a bath house in searing words: "Girls of seventeen, old women, young men, old men, were squatting on the stone floor, without rag enough to cover a thumb nail... they invited us to join in and take a wash — but I was so disgusted with the whole breed, with their lewdness of manner and gesture, that I turned away with a hearty curse upon them." A contemporary writer, Lady Katharine Sansom, takes the broader view of promiscuity in the bath. Describing life at a famous resort, she recalls that "an unknown Japanese lady, delicate and charming, walked half round the bath to offer soap to my husband and myself." Moreover, it does not occur to her to deny the sensuous pleasures derived from hot water. "You sink in at last slowly, with a sigh of luxury, and your bathmates smile and bow gently at you..."

The low-keyed elegance that characterizes the bath equally applies to the privy. Here, Japanese aesthetic sense scores a major triumph. As these pages are no place to indulge in the more private matters of





*Bernard Rudofsky. Fountain in a Japanese temple (?), 1955.*

hygiene, the short description of a well-appointed privy in a high-class inn will have to do.

The door to a privy — or rather to its spacious ante-room — can be easily recognized by a special kind of sandals in front of it. Into these one changes from the kind that is worn on the highly polished wooden floor of the corridor. The presence of one or the other kind of footwear at the door tells whether the toilet is occupied. (In all the mat-covered rooms one goes of course barefoot.) The privy itself is quite small. There is no throne — merely an oblong opening in the floor, lined with porcelain, the lever for the flush to be worked by foot. The entire mechanism, pipes and box, are invisible. Both, the floor and the sliding door, are of black lacquer. A small window, placed very low, opens on a fenced-in garden, not much bigger than the privy, but it is a garden nevertheless. Although it can be seen through this one opening only, it is a perfect work of art.

A built-in low cabinet of excellent workmanship, about a foot high, is facing the visitor. On its shelf stand lacquer boxes with two sorts of



paper, one of which is so ethereal that it will float in the air like a fluff of down. A small glazed vase holds a twinge of jasmine. From an incense burner rises a spiral of bluish smoke with no more than a suspicion of a scent. A paper fan, exquisitely painted in a few rapid brush strokes, completes the still life; the fan is not for display but is meant to be used. Where on earth does man go about his most humiliating business in such a glorious way?

Alas, the days of this quaint civilization are counted. Japanese cleanliness is giving way to our indifferent, Western notions of hygiene. The classical Japanese privy, that formidable bulwark against the engulfing ugliness of the commonplace, is crumbling. A passionate defender of tradition, the novelist Junichiro Tanizaki, lamenting the progressive barbarization of Japan, finds (as his translator expresses it) "the most poetic of all spots in the Japanese house, the shady, moss-grown toilet, invaded by tiles and shiny new appliances..." And Edwin Reischauer, the Japanese-born Harvard scholar, writes of the Japanese: "They have been throughout history one of the most washed and cleanest people in the world, and only recently has the bathtub and shower mania of us Americans... pushed them into second place". Evidently, nobody takes first place anymore. Before long, the ethical concept of body cleanliness will have vanished forever.

Among the teahouses and sundry structures that dot the gardens of the Katsura Imperial Villa there is a nameless pavilion referred to, simply, as the covered waiting bench on the east side of the Cycad Hill, where people invited for the tea ceremony wait until they receive the summons to proceed to the teahouse proper. This modest building contains a windowless little room, no more than five meters square. Its floor is covered, in the manner of a dry-garden, with earth and several unwrought stones. Tetsuro Yoshida in his *Japanische Architektur* calls it a *Zierpissoir*, an ornamental or mock latrine. It is, and never was, intended for the grosser kind of use. It is meant for meditation only.

### First Things First <sup>21</sup>

A problem, the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, is, literally, a thing thrown or put forward, hence, a question propounded for solution. The thing thrown forward by the Committee is man as problem solver.

As it is, I never looked upon man as a *problem solving animal*, as the chairman does in summing up this conference's purpose. Besides, we are rather careless in the uses of the word problem. Do we not sometimes see problems where there aren't any, or talk about problems when actually we are dealing with chores or nuisances? Moreover, problem may be just one of the things men are not equal to cope with. Indeed, I suspect that the talent for solving problems is pretty much limited to non-human animals.

Our tendency to sympathize with the bungler rather than the alleged problem solver merely adds to the confusion. To wit, the most spectacular misfits, the Oedipuses, Hamlets and their likes, are memorialized in myth and history. But then, they are far more interesting than well-adjusted people. It is, I believe, his very inability to solve problems that makes man truly human. Imagine how dull our lives would be had we stumbled upon some universal formula for disentangling the maze

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished lecture delivered at the IDCA Aspen, 1961. Found in the personal archives (Frigiliana, Málaga).