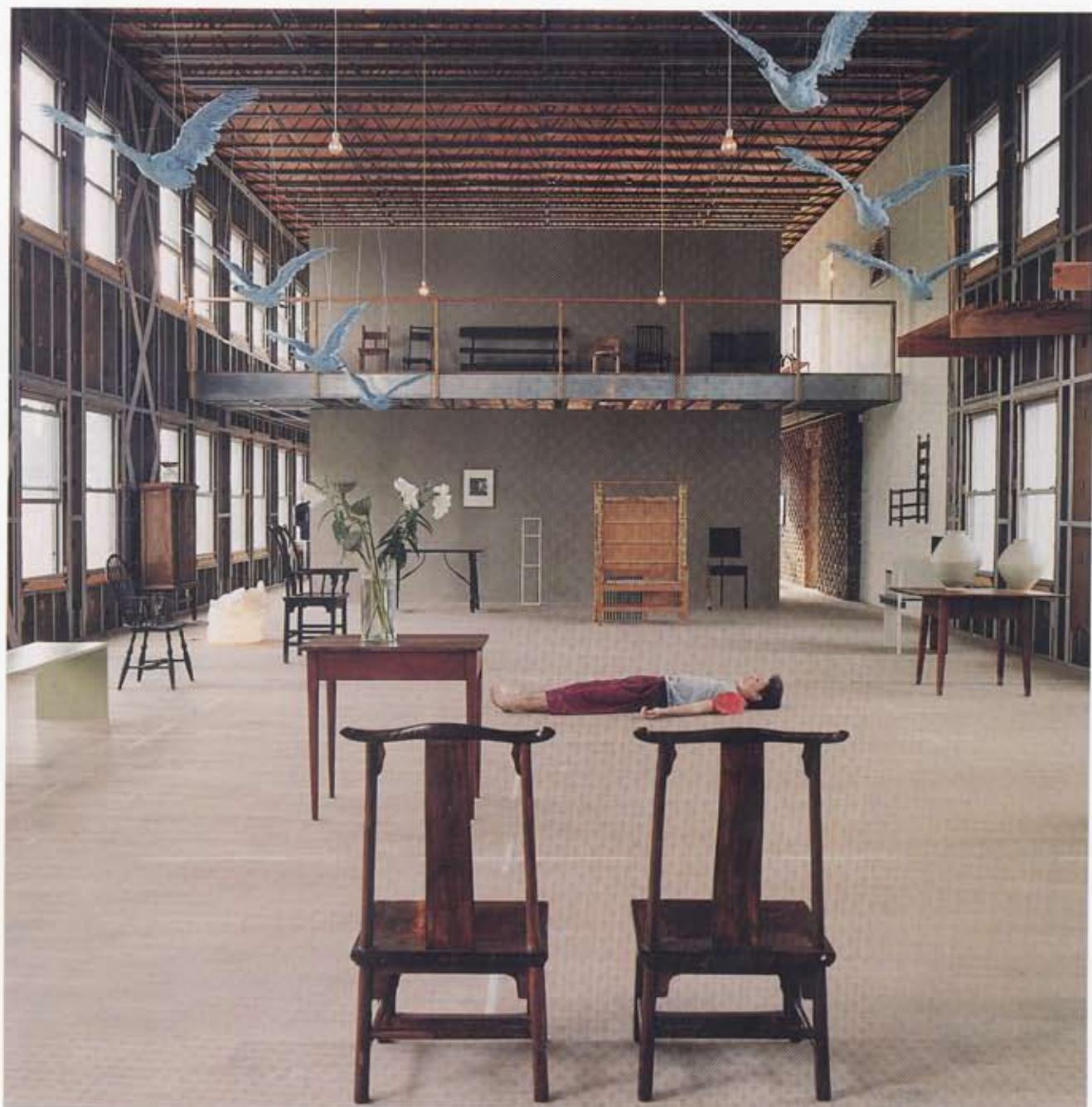


# domus

Architettura Design Arte Comunicazione *Architecture Design Art Communication*

Aprile April 1998 **803** Lire 15.000



LIFE STYLES

Scogin Elam Bray

Testo di Mark S. Morris  
Fotografie di Timothy Hursley**Casa unifamiliare,  
Atlanta, Georgia**

Progetto: Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, Inc. – Mack Scogin  
 Architetti responsabili: Merrill Elam, Lloyd Bray  
 Collaboratrice: Susan Desko  
 Strutture: Pruitt Eberly, Inc.  
 Impresa: Welch Tarkington, Inc.  
 Committenti: Linda e Tod Chmar

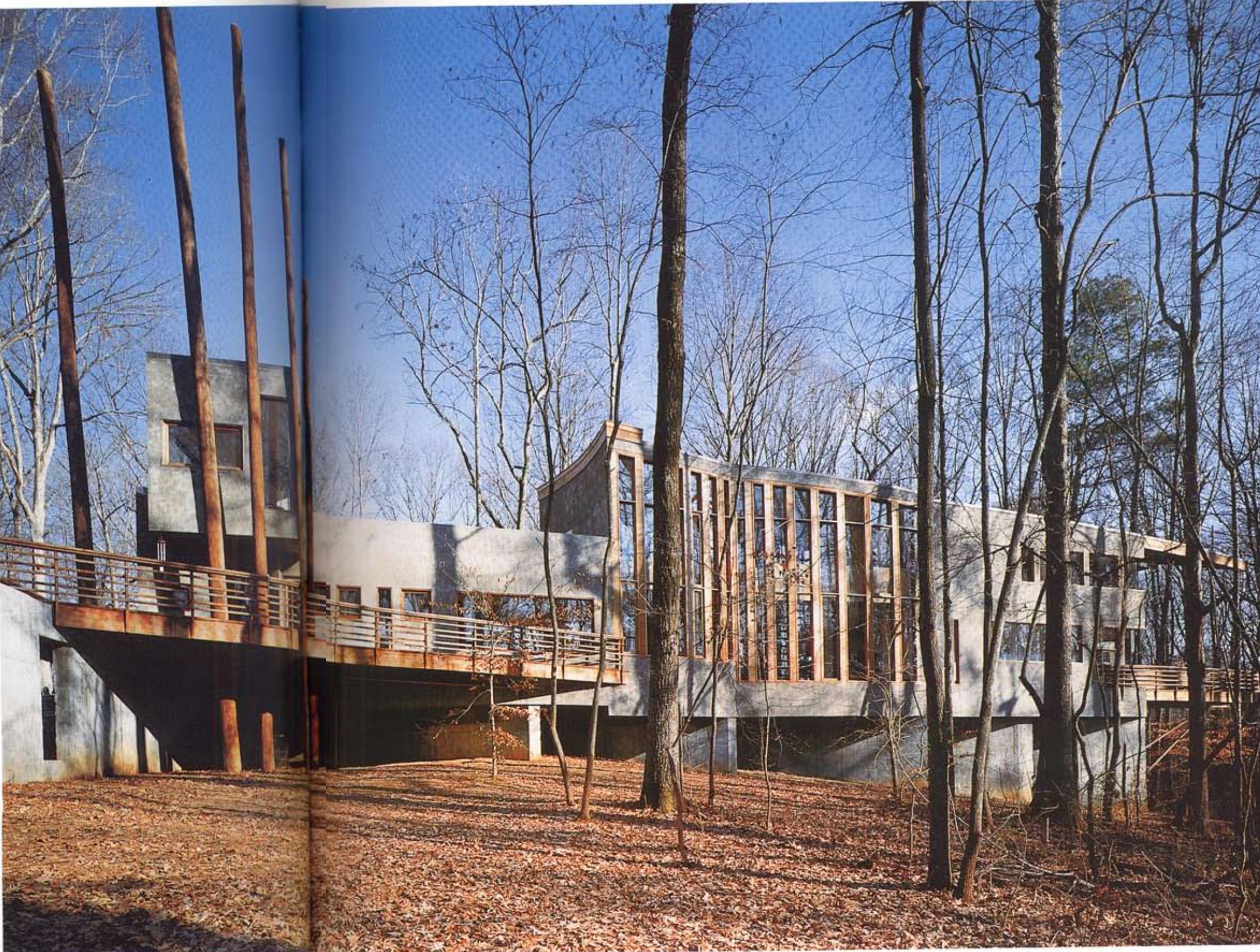
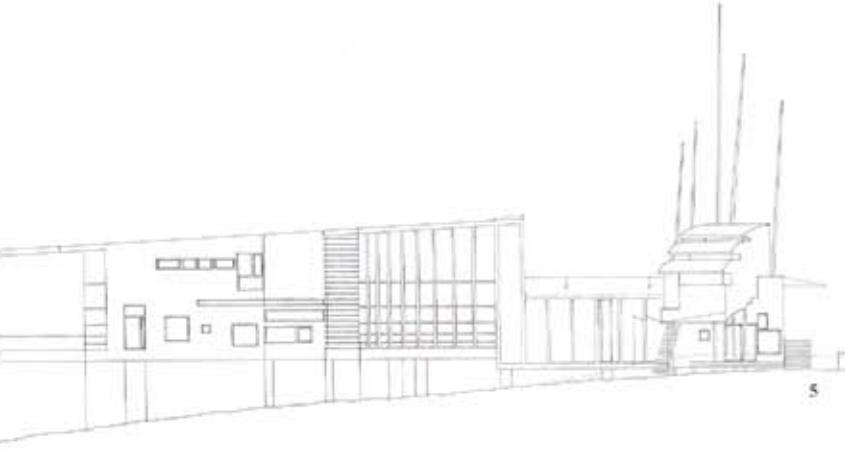
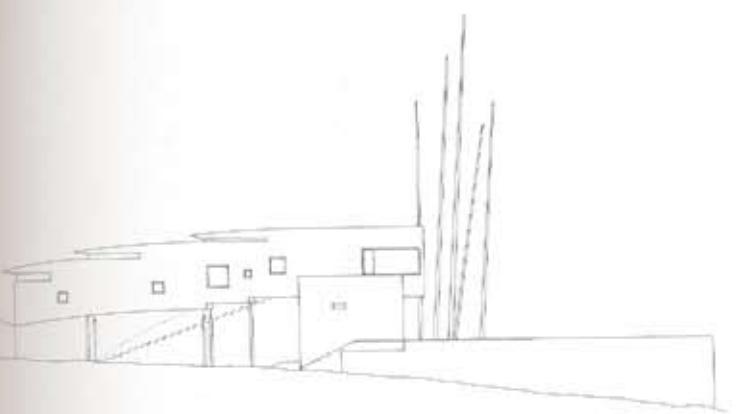
**Una capanna tra gli alberi che ha origine unicamente nelle linee e nelle tracce della natura. La casa libera cerca in se stessa la propria fondatezza e la propria motivazione, scaturisce dai processi autonomi dell'architettura e dalla critica a essi immanente. Da qualche parte, tra terra e cielo, si forma lo spazio, come se soltanto là si potesse trovare il luogo dove vivere. Adagiato tra le forze della natura si dispiega lo splendore della libertà vissuta, raccontando storie misteriose e senza tempo.**

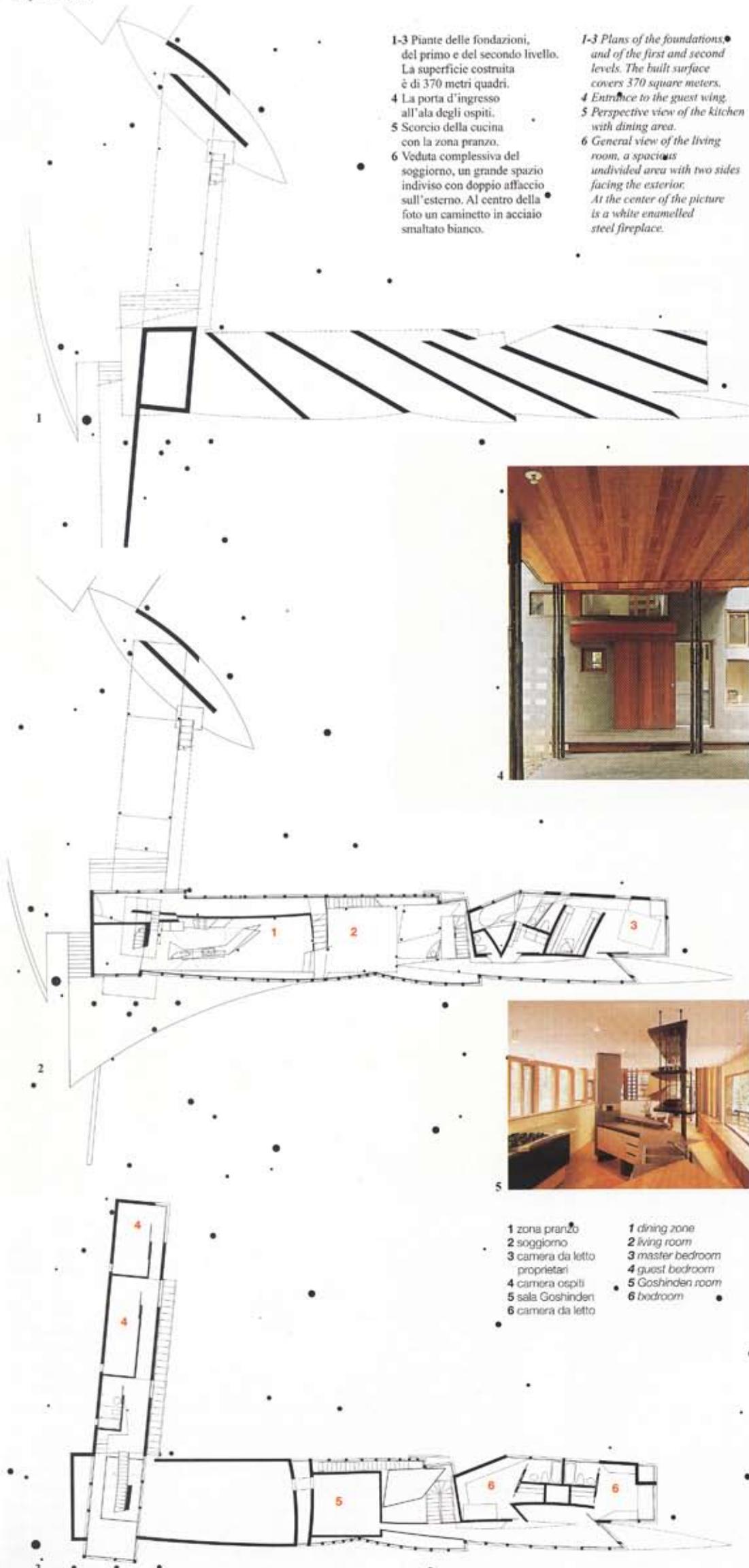
**The hut in the midst of the trees, developed solely from the lines and traces found in nature. The free building seeks its raison d'être, its grounding, in itself. Composed from the autonomous processes of architecture and their immanent critique. Somewhere between earth and sky, space forms. As though one first had to find the place where one will live. Embedded in the forces of nature, the luxury of actually experienced freedom spreads itself and tells mysterious stories of timelessness.**

- 1 Piantimetria.
- 2 Veduta da nord-est. La casa si trova in mezzo a un bosco e per la sua costruzione sono stati abbattuti meno alberi possibili.
- 3 Il fronte ovest. L'edificio che sorge su un terreno in pendio è sollevato dal suolo da una serie di setti in cemento.
- 4, 5 Prospetti nord ed est.

Text by Mark S. Morris  
Photographs by Timothy Hursley**Single-family house  
in Atlanta, Georgia**

Project: Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, Inc. – Mack Scogin  
 Architects-in-charge: Merrill Elam, Lloyd Bray  
 Collaborator: Susan Desko  
 Structural engineering: Pruitt Eberly, Inc.  
 General Contractor: Welch Tarkington, Inc.  
 Clients: Linda and Tod Chmar





il locale, con i dorsi di compensato ricurvo contrapposti allo scintillante pavimento di assi. In alto galleggia la misteriosa sala Goshinden, cui si accede dalla più lontana delle due scale che paiono farle da collegamento. Qui l'altare e lo spazio di meditazione sono collegati a un terrazzo, oltre una porta punteggiata di luce solare, attraverso un ponte, minuscolo ma essenziale dal punto di vista rituale. Questa porta è divenuta un'icona per i progettisti. In parte il fascino della porta nasce dalle casuali istruzioni di praticarvi dei fori con il trapano impartite da Scogin a un operaio. Il giocoso, forse inatteso risultato ha dato alla sala Goshinden una porta traforata/trascendente: un manifesto; un'assonanza che sposa l'architettura di casa Chmar al suo programma spirituale. I raggi di luce che piovono nel sacello attraverso la stretta passerella sono simultaneamente un effetto architettonico e un tropo metafisico: la soglia dell'illuminazione.

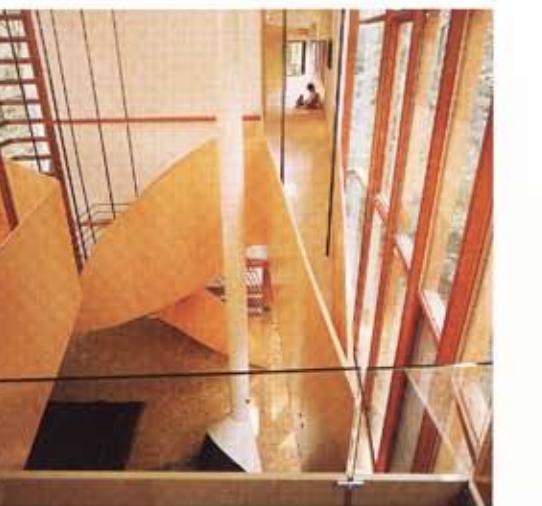
Puntata in direzione della sala Goshinden c'è una piattaforma simile alla prora d'una nave, forma che ricompare fuori della camera da letto principale e ancora nell'alzato della scala del soggiorno, forse richiamandosi alla nave di Kami-nari, il dio del tuono giapponese che viaggia attraverso cielo e terra. I pavimenti della casa sono suddivisi in zone sacre e profane e i punti di intersezione sono implicitamente a forma di nave. Toccando appena il suolo, casa Chmar è un veicolo di proiezione verso le profondità astrali. L'anagramma è una venerata forma di magia, collegata con le geomancie. 'Chmar' è l'anagramma di charm, 'incanto', qualcosa che dà piacere oppure qualcosa che si ritiene dotato di potere magico. Casa Chmar si adatta a entrambe le definizioni e in generale sfuma la distinzione tra le due. Il piacere, uno dei tre requisiti dell'architettura, in questa casa è anche incantesimo.

1 Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria libri X*, libro X, capitolo IV; trad. ingl. *The Ten Books on Architecture*, London, II ediz., 1755, p. 216.

"If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" Anon.

**House Chmar is predicated** on a cross-cultural New Age sensibility that goes largely unaddressed. Contemporary criticism prefers to note the house's tectonic effects and programmatic peculiarities, but avoids the ritualistic aspect of the house. The house is typically viewed in conventional terms, but it is decidedly unconventional. When Mack Scogin presents the house in an academic lecture, he lingers over its annotated plan full of radial vectors and super-imposed arcs, but only reluctantly discloses the drawing's inception. Just what are those whirling-dervish graphics slipping through, grazing tangentially or momentarily defining some contour of the house? If the traces were described as mere appropriation or graphic condensation, few in the audience would question the device. But the circles and rays are not extraneous, they

represent a serious metaphysical survey of the site. Architect as geomancer may seem strange, but only in the late twentieth century West. Biometric oscillations, telluric currents and etheric presence inform much of Eastern building and have been incorporated by European and American architects working in Asia. Such sensitivities do not remain entirely oriental. Feng Shui masters are increasingly on call in Manhattan, consulting on office design and easing international business relations. And, after all, geomancy is nothing other than divination by means of lines and figures or by geographic features. On first glance, clusters of carefully marked tree trunks in the House Chmar plan appear to sponsor imaginary circles and arcs, radians from these circles strike across the three superimposed levels of the house to achieve an obscuring density. Arcs with larger radii seem to focus on points beyond the Chmar property. The effect is a landscape fecund with auric vibration inflecting relentlessly on the geometry of the house.



1



2

Indeed, invisible lines make up the preponderance of the House Chmar plan. Leon Battista Alberti devotes a chapter on dowsing in his Ten Books on Architecture: "In the Morning extremely early, when the Air is perfectly clear and serene, lay yourself flat with your Chin resting upon the Ground: Then take a careful survey of the Country all around you, and where- ever you see a Vapour rising out of the Earth, and curling up into the Air like a Man's Breath in a clear Frost, there you may be pretty certain of finding water".<sup>1</sup> Did Scogin, Elam and Bray use this procedure at the site? Are the mysterious radii points of emanating vapor? On the one hand, if the tree trunks are removed from the plan, the circles and radians are revealed to be extensions of arcs that describe the bowing walls of the house or the meandering driveway. In this instance, the tree trunks are retained to add depth and interest to the plan and give it the cache of the mesmerizing photographs of particle accelerators. On the other hand, trees are central to the house's environmentalist identity and cannot be removed from the drawing without consequence.

The genesis of the House Chmar starts with a tree falling in the woods outside Atlanta. Only then could the house be

raised in this gap, elevated on cement piers so as to disturb the land as little as possible. Lifted off the ground into the canopy, the house is emersed in the trees. On the exterior the windows are framed in redwood and mimic the banded rhythm of the forest. The dark hardwoods and golden-hued plywood panels of the interior offer up rooms that look almost unfinished. The public spaces of the house are quiet homages to Wright and Aalto from the Fallingwater corner windows to the thin-gauge Villa Mairea columns. A white enamel steel fireplace shoots through the living room like a lone birch straining for sunlight. Four Eames swivel loungers complete the room, their molded plywood backs a counter point to the shiny strandboard floor. Hovering overhead is the mysterious Goshinden room, accessed by the more remote of the two stairs that appear to reach it. Here the altar and meditation space link through a door bulleted with sunlight to a roof terrace by a small, but ritually essential, bridge. This door has become an icon for the firm. Part of the door's prestige arises from the fortuitous instructions given by Scogin to a workman to drill holes in it. The playful, perhaps unexpected, result gave the Goshinden room its holey/holy door: a homophone that marries the architec-



1 Veduta degli ambienti al primo piano letti in relazione al soggiorno al livello inferiore.

2 Scorcio della sala Goshinden al livello superiore. Sullo sfondo la porta forata che attraverso un piccolo ponte mette in comunicazione lo spazio di meditazione con la terrazza esterna.

3 Dettaglio dell'altare nella sala Goshinden.

Pagina a fronte: particolare dell'angolo del soggiorno con la scala caratterizzata dall'alzato di forme ovoidale.

1 View of the first floor rooms seen in relation to the living room on the lower level.

2 Perspective view of the Goshinden room on the upper level. In the background is the perforated door which, by means of a small bridge, connects the meditation space to the outside terrace.

3 Detail of the altar in the Goshinden room.

Opposite: detail of the living room corner and the staircase characterized by its oval risers.

