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Plan Games: A Syracuse Architecture Public Exhibition

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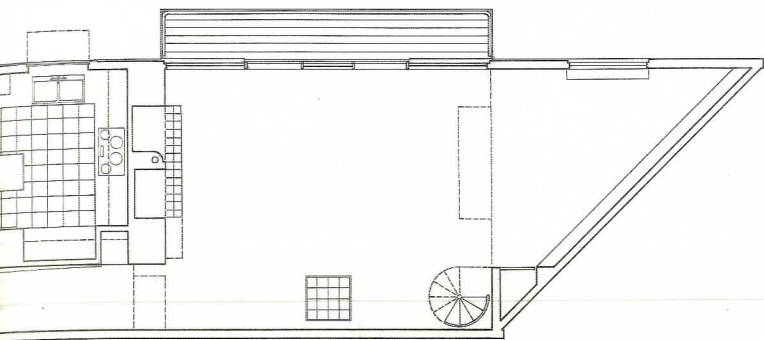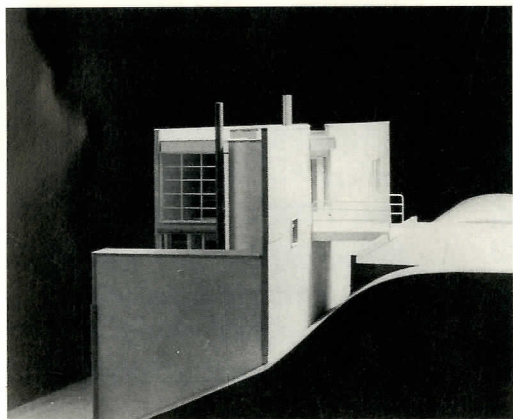
ARTHUR
McDONALD

A Syracuse Architecture
Public Exhibition
Slocum Hall
Nov. 5 – Dec. 11, 2015

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INTRODUCTION
by Michael Speaks,
Dean and Professor

This exhibition celebrates Professor Arthur McDonald's distinguished academic and professional career at Syracuse Architecture and serves as the official announcement of his retirement from the school and university at the end of this year. Professor McDonald is among the most influential and revered professors to teach at Syracuse Architecture, among the most distinguished architecture faculty at any university in this or in any country. Professor McDonald's influence as a professor and as an administrator is enormous and his legacy will live on in the work of his many students, some of whom are now professors at our school.

PLAN GAMES reminds us that Professor McDonald is also an outstanding practitioner and architectural thinker. He has maintained an office in Syracuse since 1979 and it has been the work produced in this office that has served as both theoretical speculation on and empirical evidence for the lessons he provided his students and this school over these many years. In the mind and hand of Professor McDonald the games of architecture and planning are both the most serious and the most playful of pursuits. We will miss the way he constructed and played the game of architecture, but we will do so with the confidence of players taught well and with the respect that all teachers and practitioners necessarily maintain for the rules that make it possible, desirable and absolutely necessary to play.

PLAN GAMES
by Arthur McDonald, Professor

'PLAN GAMES' is suggestive of a mode of architectural design production that involves 'RULES' and 'PLAYS.' 'DISCIPLINARY RULES' refers to formal principles related to particular architectural organizational devises and typologies. Circumstantial 'PLAYS' refers to the opportunities afforded by the particulars of program and site for invention within the 'RULES' of the plan type or 'GAME.' It is these inventive 'PLAYS' that transform the generic type (the abstract) to the relative (the empirical). In this exhibit the formal types consist of two simple means of spatial organization deploying an element and a device, the WALL and the GRID.

The WALL is used as the traditional architectural element that establishes, divides, and frames space. The material, density, and the fenestrations of the WALL become the means by which the circumstantial conditions of the project are reflected in the development of the design, the 'PLAYS.' From thin to thick, transparent to habitable 'poché', the WALL becomes the primary vertical structural element and the identity of the architectural idea for the project.

The GRID is a plan device for mapping a geometric field. The field of the nine square GRID is abstract and equivalent, yet hierarchical. The center square is unique. Operations within the 'RULES' of the nine square, spatial program, service zones, and site conditions, including solar orientation, provide the means for moving the abstract geometric field to a plan for the architecture of the project. This method of design production mirrors, in reverse, an archeological site. The spaces and objects of the project are current and predominant and the geometric mapping of a field, the GRID, is transformed to a less obvious visual presence.

The Wall Type

W1   Floor Plan
W2   Model Photograph, Arthur Mcdonald
W3–4 Photograph, Michelle Gabel, The Post-Standard

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THE WALL TYPE
Syracuse, NY

The wooded site slopes down from the access road with a large area void of trees. The downhill easterly orientation has long views across a valley and represents a significant feature of the site. The program required economical construction systems and energy efficiency, a sense of spaciousness despite a small footprint, and the creation of a 'place' within the site that took advantage of the view.

The organizational idea of the house, in the narrow traverse section, separates the private and public spaces of the house into two distinct parts. The lower one story private spaces provide a half buried energy conserving base for the upper two story volume containing the public spaces with a higher elevation and, therefore longer views. The extended length provides the 'long dimension' in the longitudinal section and an opportunity to develop interlocking spaces in the upper volumes of the more public spaces. Consistent with the 'grain' of the site, the spaces of the house are contained between TWO PARALLEL BEARING WALLS that run in the same direction as the contours of the slope. The walls constitute the front and back facades and develop different architectural treatments reflecting the opposite attitudes of front and back, closed and open, road access and view.

The transformation of the abstract PARALLEL WALLS strategy through the circumstantial specificity of program, site and environmental conditions provided for an architectural design process in which an attempt was made for invention with simple means.

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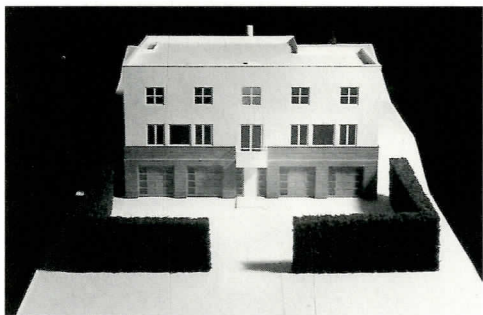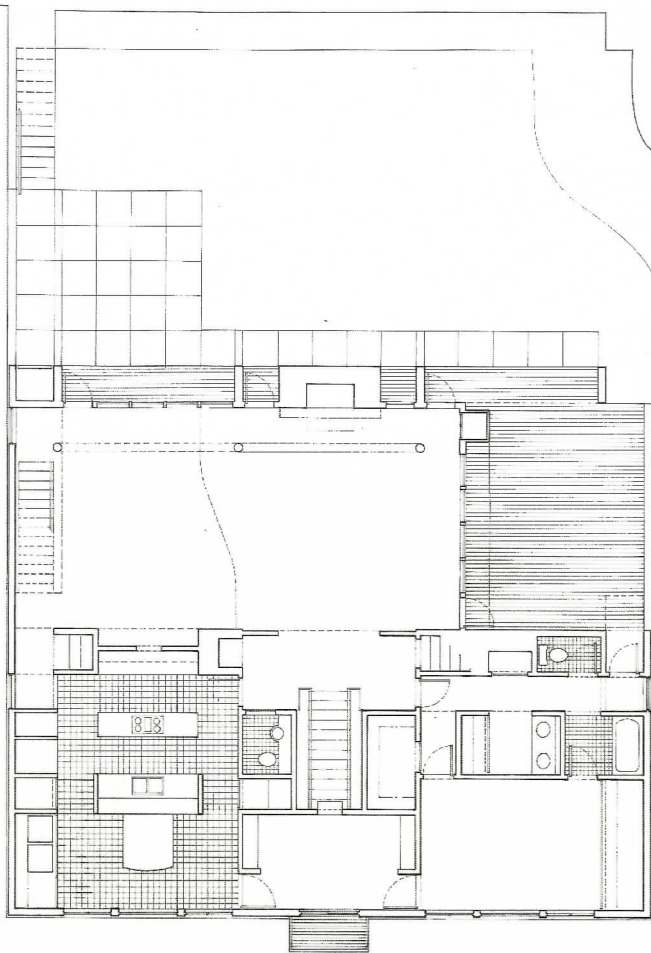
THE GRID TYPE
Syracuse, NY

This house was designed for a professional couple on a sloped site. In addition to normal programmatic requirements, the house had to accommodate a home office and bedrooms for four young adults who do not live here on a permanent basis. It was desired that the house provide a sense of intimacy for the two primary occupants during most of the year. In the traditional manner of base, middle and top, as read in the front façade, the design allocates the middle level for the primary living spaces and master bedroom suite, all of which are on grade with the private garden at the rear. The base level contains services and the consultation office. The quarters for the young adults are on the top level with a library/entertainment space. The circulation sequence from street to garden provides an opportunity to experience the sloped condition of the site and the transition from public to private.

The a-B-a-B-a-B-a grid developed the nine square into a "mapping" strategy for locating hierarchical program spaces and narrow bays for circulation zones and service elements; the served and service elements of the house. The geometry of the grid included the garden off the main public spaces. All are tied together by means of the grid.

Another intention in the design of the house was an attempt to resolve the conflicting issues of the public and private realms of the site context. Therefore, the design process considered the relationship of opposites, influencing the formal and programmatically organizational strategy of the grid.

Street vs Garden
Urban Wall vs Terra Firma
Front vs Rear
Vertical vs Horizontal
Rational vs Picturesque
Formal vs Informal
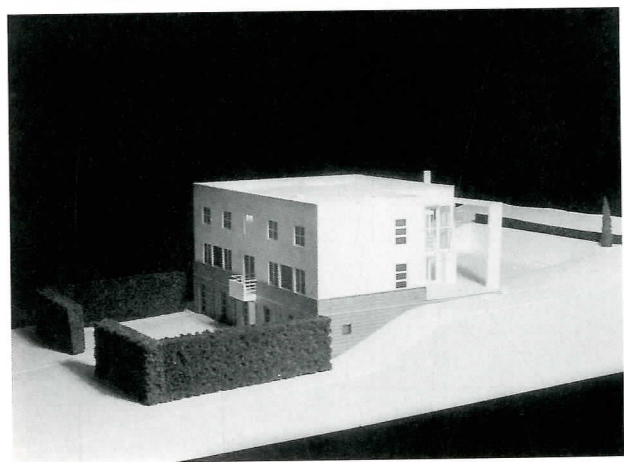Poché vs Open Plan
Bearing Wall vs
    Columnar Structure
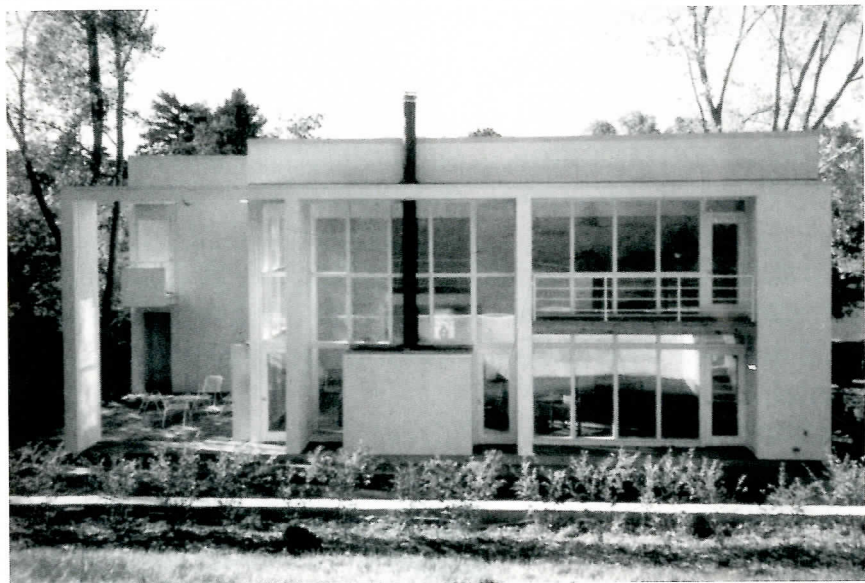
The Grid Type

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Syracuse Architecture

Founded in 1873, the Syracuse University School of Architecture consistently ranks among the best schools of architecture in the nation. The reasons most often cited are our committed and diverse faculty, our number and variety of study abroad opportunities, and our nationally-accredited professional degree programs which provide students with the technical skill and the cultural knowledge necessary to practice in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Exhibition Notes

Arthur McDonald and the Syracuse Architecture Exhibitions Committee— Jonathan Louie (Chair) and Molly Hunker—would like to thank Dean Michael Speaks, Associate Dean Julia Czerniak, Benjamin Farnsworth (Publications Editor), Common Name (Graphic Design), and the student exhibitions team:

Gabriel Boyajian, Ismael Gerardo Segarra Jr, Waralee Kaewkoon, Thomas Kuei, Yuxuan Liu, Tanvi Sanghvi, Geraldine Vargas, Ryan Williams.
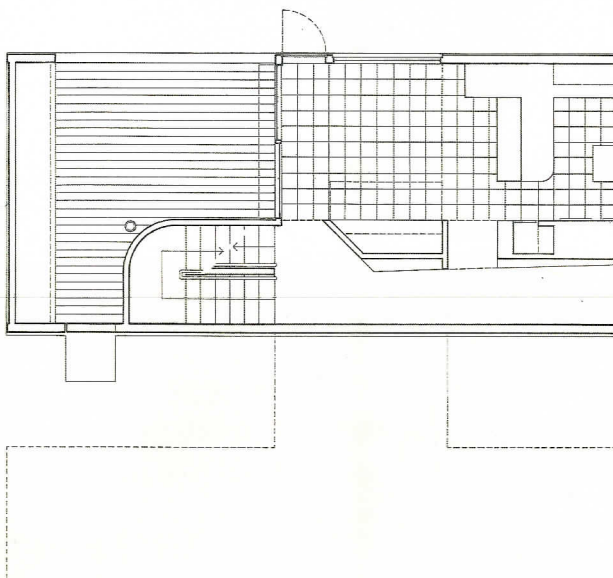
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PLAN GAMES:
Disciplinary Rules and Circumstantial Plays

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Some Built Projects by Professor Arthur McDonald, Architect

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Opening Reception:
Nov. 5, 2015
5.15PM – 6.45PM

Gallery Talk:
Nov. 12, 2015
5.15 PM – 6.00PM

Members of the
public are welcome
to attend both
the exhibition and
gallery talk.

Arthur McDonald received
a bachelor of architecture
degree from Pratt Institute
and a master of architecture
degree (Urban Design)
from Cornell University
where he received the
Eidlitz Traveling Fellowship.
After several years of
professional practice as
a registered architect in
New York City, including a
position as project architect
with Ulrich Franzen &
Associates, he joined the
faculty of the Syracuse
University School of
Architecture in 1974. He
has continued to practice
architecture in Syracuse
since 1979.

McDonald's teaching
and research interests lie
in architectural and urban
design, urban housing,
the history and theory of
urban planning, and the
theoretical underpinnings
of the modern movement.
He served as head
of the Undergraduate
Program here at Syracuse
Architecture from 1982
to 1989, Chair of the
Graduate Program from
1996 to 2002, and Interim
Dean of the School from
2002 to 2004.