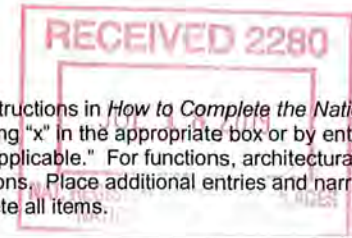


4334

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name James H. Case III and Laura Rockefeller Case House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

name of related multiple property listing N/A

#### 2. Location

street & number 2333 State Route 80 [ ] not for publication

city or town Van Hornesville [X] vicinity

state New York code NY county Herkimer code 043 zip code 13475

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Roger Daniel Mackey  
Signature of certifying official/Title

7/5/2019  
Date

DS/PA  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  
[ ] see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  
[ ] see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper  
[Signature]

date of action  
9/3/2019

**CASE HOUSE**

**Herkimer County, New York**

Name of Property

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

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**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

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**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls wood

roof asphalt

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**CASE HOUSE**

**Herkimer County, New York**

Name of Property

County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

**Period of Significance:**

1962-1963

**Significant Dates:**

1962-1963

**Significant Person:**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect/Builder:**

Willis N. Mills Jr. (architect)

Marion H. Baker (contractor)

**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

**Herkimer County, New York**

County and State \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property 31.53 acres**UTM References SEE CONTINUATION SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL UTM's**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>  1   8  </u>	<u>514177</u>	<u>4750090</u>	3	<u>  1   8  </u>	<u>514210</u>	<u>4749481</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>  1   8  </u>	<u>514377</u>	<u>4749842</u>	4	<u>  1   8  </u>	<u>514204</u>	<u>4749431</u>

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Jennifer Walkowski, Historic Preservation Program Analyst [from a draft by Emilie Gould]organization New York State Historic Preservation Office date 5/23/2019street & number Peebles Island Resource Center, PO Box 189 telephone 518-268-2137city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locationA **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street &amp; number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)**Estimated Burden Statement:** public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

CASE HOUSE

Name of Property

Herkimer County, New York

County and State

Narrative Description of Property

The James H. Case III and Laura Rockefeller Case House is a Modernist rural estate located in Van Hornesville, Herkimer County, New York. Van Hornesville is a hamlet in the southwest part of the town of Stark, and centered on NY Route 80 in the eastern part of Herkimer County. The Case House was constructed in 1962-1963 to the design of Willis N. Mills Jr. of New Canaan, Connecticut and appears to be a relatively early example of what would eventually be known as the Shed style, a Post-Modernist variation which gained popularity in the 1960s and was characterized by a juxtaposition of simple, geometric, box-like forms capped with sloped, often shed roofs, facing a variety of directions, and typically clad in flush wood board sheathing.

The 30-acre nominated property is the original parcel acquired by the Cases to construct the house and it includes all the significant historic features and associated setting. Additional property acquired after the period of significance and still associated with the estate is not included in the nomination. The nomination includes two contributing resources, a **main house** and **guest house**, built in 1963. A third resource on the property, a late nineteenth century barn that predates the residence and guest house, was not evaluated because it is outside the period of significance and its interior was inaccessible. It is a remnant of an earlier agricultural context which is not explored in this nomination. It could be evaluated for individual eligibility at a later time.

**SITE**

The Case House is a complex of two buildings, the main house and a guest house, located on the north side of the steep-walled Otsquago Creek Valley in Van Hornesville, Herkimer County, New York. It is built on an approximately 30-acre lot sold to James H. Case III in the early 1960s by his mother. The lot is a subdivision of an old farm that had been incorporated into Young's Van Horne Farms, Inc., and only a barn and apple trees associated with its prior use remain. The parcel has irregular boundaries, with a narrow access area at the south, while the majority of the land is set away from the street, giving it a secluded, private feel.

Access to the Case House is by a 1900-foot long dirt road from State Route 80, shared for the first few hundred feet with the current owners of the neighboring farmhouse. The barn is located on the west side of the road, a bit south of the house. Thereafter, the road angles up the hill, rising over one hundred feet to a plateau. At the top, it makes a 180-degree turn to approach the main house across a wildflower meadow. From the main house, the entry road continues to the rear of the guest house, which incorporates a two-car garage. A pond has been constructed west of the access road to the north of the barn. The land rises another sixty feet from the plateau to the property line.

The main house is oriented north-south. Its entrance faces north to the entry road and meadow, while the rear of the building faces into the view from the hill to the south. The guest house is offset from the main house by thirty feet and oriented east-west; it faces east at the rear of the sleeping portion (which lacks large windows)

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Section 8 Page 2

**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property

**Herkimer County, New York**

County and State

and shares in the view over the ridge. The two buildings are connected by the access road and an informal path, and a low stone retaining wall, set into the slope just north of the house, is located between them.

**CASE HOUSE**

The Case House is a symmetrical building consisting of two cross-shaped elements, mirrored in their form, connected by a flat-roofed, glass-walled hyphen. The roof of the main house is asphalt shingle, the building is clad predominantly with vertical redwood boards, and the foundation is concrete block. Typical of buildings from the mid-twentieth century, the building is functionally divided; the east unit is the living area, and the west unit is the sleeping area. The living portion was meant to be more public, allowing for entertainment, while the sleeping area was intended to serve more as the private family quarters. The one-story building is deliberately simple in design but achieves visual distinction through its massing, choice of materials, and varied rooflines. With the exception of the hyphen, the building is clad in narrow vertical redwood boards, outlined by white-painted wooden fascia. Roof overhangs are extremely shallow and the building floats above the ground on a recessed foundation, emphasizing the geometry of the wings. The hyphen is constructed of full-length windows and sliding glass doors in shallow steel frames. The main entrance is a solid wood door, painted red and centered in the north side of the hyphen.

*EXTERIOR*

The building resembles two interconnected barns, linking the building to the rural setting through not only its materials but its forms. Each unit is roughly T-shaped in plan, with larger double-height gabled blocks at the center and two smaller single-story projecting gabled blocks at the north and south. The units are mirror images of each other and connected by a single-story flat roofed hyphen. The hyphen contrasts with the living units in that it consists of large, full-height glass windows, giving a sense of transparency, set against the living area and the sleeping area, which appear more solid with minimal, relatively small window openings. A symmetrical front-gabled mass projects from the north elevation of each unit, featuring small casement windows. The music room (living portion) and guest bedroom (sleeping portion) emerge from the main block; their rooflines are lower than the main roof and line up with monitors that channel daylight into the interior of the wings. Roof pitches are maintained so that the two rooms are almost invisible when seen perpendicular to the main axis of the building; the painted fascia are the only clue to the three-dimensional nature of the house. Windows are used sparingly in both portions, and all are placed in the same horizontal level. The four-inch vertical redwood boards emphasize the building's vertical plane, making it appear more massive than it is. The main entrance to the house is through a paired set of large wood doors, centered in the hyphen between the two parts of the building. The hyphen has large floor-to-ceiling glass windows, providing a sense of transparency that contrasts with the relative solid forms of the two units. A small simple concrete pad, reached by a simple concrete walk, provides access to the entry door.

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CASE HOUSE

Name of Property  
Herkimer County, New York  
County and State

The south side of the building, facing away from the entry and public access, appears more open, although it largely mirrors the primary, north elevation in form and design. This is because interior rooms like the breakfast room and playroom in the glass hyphen are exposed with large full-height glass windows. The south elevation also features two projecting, gabled masses, one from each unit, just as the north elevation does, and an exterior patio and courtyard has been created between the front gabled extensions on this elevation. This patio consists of a flagstone pavement with a large circular pedestal which used to house a sculpture.

The center section of the east end of the living area holds a narrow deck, floor to ceiling windows, and a central sliding glass door into the living room. The deck is enclosed at the side, and the roof continues out over the windows and door to provide privacy. There are no other windows on this elevation. The redwood wall is only one-story high, and the eye is drawn to the full sweep of the roof with the monitor skylight at the top and chimney behind.

The center section of the west end of the sleeping area is extended out a few feet, like the deck on the east end of the house, but it is solid and lacks windows. There are only four windows on this elevation, all with narrow profiles. Two flank the center section and provide light into two bedrooms; the other two are placed to the far right of the master bedroom and far left of the guest bedroom. (All four bedrooms get additional light on their north or south elevations.) Another monitor skylight occupies the roof ridge and provides light into a large hall.

*INTERIOR*

As expressed on the exterior, the interior of the building is functionally divided into more public living and entertaining spaces at the east and more private bedrooms to the west. These spaces are connected together by transitional spaces in the glass hyphen including entry areas, storage, breakfast areas and a playroom. In keeping with the exterior materials, the interior materials also draw from a more rustic, rural vocabulary and include dark stained oak flooring, ceilings clad with stained wood planks, and white plaster walls with contrasting dark wood trim and baseboard. The concrete block of the main fireplace, located in the public area, is expressed, lending a stone-like quality to the space.

Hyphen

The center of the building is a larger glass interior space which houses the entry, breakfast room, and playroom; the entry is divided from the breakfast and play rooms by a bank of large storage closets, which serve as a functional room divider. On the north are the entry and two deep closets for coats and general storage; on the south, are the breakfast room (east), playroom (west), seven pantry closets, utility chase, and a hidden door to the basement stairs. There is also an enclosed set of shelves between the former breakfast room and playroom.

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CASE HOUSE

Name of Property  
Herkimer County, New York  
County and State

All the closet bases are dark stained wood (matching trim throughout the house). The closet doors are white, so that the doors appear to float above the background.

The kitchen is in the living portion and is open to the breakfast room. People can enter to either side of the kitchen through passages from the entry and breakfast room. By contrast, the sleeping area is closed off from the playroom and can only be entered from the entry.

The floor originally consisted of cork tiles; it has been replaced with square, brick-colored ceramic tiles.

Living Portion:

The living area has a T-shaped plan, with a music room (north), living room (east), dining room (south), and kitchen (facing into the glass link); in the center is a massive fireplace that opens into the living room. While divided into distinct areas by the T-shaped plan, the spaces in this area flow into each other, giving this portion of the house a more open feel. There is a steel spiral staircase in the music room that leads to a balcony area of about 350 square feet above the fireplace. The main materials in all the rooms are rough sand-finished plaster walls, oak floors, narrow steel window frames (without sills), concrete (side walls of the fireplace), and – where the ceilings slope – narrow, polished redwood boards. To the west of the fireplace a U-shaped open kitchen is located, which opens into the breakfast room of the hyphen. The kitchen has a relatively low ceiling with a central skylight from a roof monitor, a floor of brick-colored ceramic tiles, dark wood cabinetry with flush-mounted doors for a sleek, clean look, and a large pegboard (originally painted blue, now painted green) set against the long wall for flexible equipment storage.

The fireplace and monitor-lit balcony are particularly notable. The concrete fireplace creates both a massive focus and a spatial division in the living room. It is minimal in its detailing, featuring two floor-to-ceiling piers of expressed square concrete blocks. Set between these piers is an elevated slate hearth with a wide, open hearth, the back of which is lined with black firebrick. The current owners have added a closed woodstove to improve energy efficiency and have replaced the timber mantel, reusing the original nuts and bolts, with a steel replica to meet code requirements. The scale and contrasting materials of the hearth, cross-beam, firebrick, and concrete blocks make the fireplace the focal point of the space. The balcony is accessed from the steel staircase in the music room and provides a quiet space above the main floor, mostly hidden from below. It has a smaller fireplace inset into the wall, now filled with a stove. The balcony parapet continues to the sides, overlooking both the dining and music rooms. The broad overhanging plane of the balcony, with the steep gable rising above, creates a smaller “room within a room” effect around the fireplace, giving that area of the larger room a more cozy, intimate scale.

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**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property  
**Herkimer County, New York**  
County and State

Bedroom Portion:

Where the more public living area consisted of spaces that opened into each other, the plan of the bedroom area is more closed, accessed only via a small corridor at the south end of the building through the entry hall, and rooms are organized around a large, open hall. The bedroom unit is also T-shaped in plan, with the guest bedroom (north) and master bedroom (south) in the side sections; two more bedrooms are fit into the west end of the block. (At the time the house was built, the Cases had only two children.) A laundry, two full baths, and a public half-bath are fit against the interior wall against the glass link. The center hall is lit by a monitor skylight, similar to the one on the living unit. The hall is highlighted by a large hanging light fixture, which is original to the house, consisting of various cylindrical glass pendant lights in a rainbow of colors; when illuminated, it casts a vivid spectrum of light into the otherwise monochromatic room.

This unit maintains the simple finishes of the rest of the house, with dark stained wood floors, contrasting white plaster walls, and redwood plank ceiling treatments to the vaulted ceiling areas. Colored tiles in the bathrooms and the hanging light in the hall provide a few points of color, but the rooms are relatively small and meant only for sleeping. Each bedroom has a wall of storage – once again, white doors against black cases – with open sloped redwood ceilings.

Basement:

There is a full basement under the central portion of the house and part of the wings; the rest of the basement consists of two crawl spaces. Mechanical services are housed in a concrete block room under the living portion; the furnace is vented through the living room fireplace. A similar concrete block room – but with an overhead slab – is located in the basement of the sleeping unit. This room is called a “vault” on the architect’s floor plan. Perhaps, since the house was designed as a part-time vacation home, the space was originally designed as lockable storage for valuables. However, given the era in which the house was built, it is also possible that it was intended as a bomb shelter. Presently a sump pump and drain occupy the room.

**GUEST HOUSE**

Family was important to both James and Laura Case, and Van Hornesville was sufficiently remote that a guest house was made an important part of Mills Jr.’s commission. The guest house (1440 square feet) is sited thirty feet west and just south of the Case House and built into rising ground at the west edge of the plateau. It can accommodate two different families, each with its own entry, stairway, and bathroom – but the families are also brought together in a common living room and kitchen on the lower level. At the back of the building is a two-car garage, integrated into the building, which serves the entire compound. This division of functional spaces in the guest house is facilitated by the change of grade and the building’s cruciform plan.

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**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property

**Herkimer County, New York**

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While the guest house utilizes a similar vocabulary, exterior features of the guest house vary slightly from the Case House. Both buildings are geometric in form and massing, covered with narrow vertical redwood boards, have prominent monitor skylights at the roof peak, and incorporate a window wall with sliding glass doors. Other windows are narrow rectangles, like those in the sleeping unit of the main house. Painted fascia is used in both buildings for contrast. However, the windows and doors of the guest house are outlined in white trim. In addition, the window wall of the guest house opens onto an enclosed front deck with a solid parapet that floats above the ground. This deck exits north to the axis running from the north of the guest house to the south of the Case House. Whereas the Case House itself seems to rest on the ground plane, the guest house is more integrated into the topography of the land, with multiple tiers and levels visible on the sloped land.

The building is bilaterally symmetrical and has three floor levels with a split-level plan, where entry is on the second level (through the garage) and a stair leads down to the shared common living room and kitchen area, bedrooms accessed via the separate main entry landings, and stairs that rise to a balcony and separate bathroom. The first landing is the second level of the house; two bedrooms are placed on each side, with an entry to the garage. The bedrooms have plenty of closets like the main house, but the trim around these closets is broad and stained black, making the rooms feel smaller. Each stair continues to a balcony looking out into the common space and provides access to a skylight-lit bathroom. The rear two-bay garage is open, almost to the roof peak. The sloping ceiling is covered with planks, stained and finished like those inside the house but of lesser quality wood. As mentioned, the interior of the guest house is on three levels and is bilaterally symmetrical, centered on the square, concrete-block fireplace in the common living room on the ground floor. This living room has large windows which face onto a wood deck.

### **BARN (Unevaluated)**

The barn is a banked heavy-timber frame structure with two levels, both accessible from the exterior – the lower level from the south and the upper level from the north. The barn frame is constructed using mortise and tenon joints held in place with wooden pegs. The wooden posts and beams show markings of circular-saw cuts, helping date construction to the late nineteenth century. The vertical board siding on the barn is secured to the frame using wire nails, further confirming a date of construction in the last decades of the 1800s.

### **INTEGRITY**

The Case House itself has excellent integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. It is little changed since its construction in 1962-1963, although there has been wear and tear and some structural damage from the lack of roof overhangs. The guest house also retains full integrity. Both buildings were constructed as vacation properties and not used often in the winter.

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Continuation Sheet

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**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property

**Herkimer County, New York**

County and State

**Statement of Significance:**

The James H. Case III and Laura Rockefeller Case House, located in Van Hornesville, Herkimer County, New York, is locally significant under criterion C in the area of Architecture, as an excellent representative example of a mid-twentieth century Modern style summer house complex. The Case House is also notable as the first large commission by architect Willis N. Mills Jr. It was built for the Cases in 1962-1963 and recognized by *Architectural Record* in 1967 as a “house of the year.” The property consists of a main house and a smaller guest house in a complementary form and style; this small compound served as a rural retreat for the Case family and their guests for nearly half a century. The buildings have many Modern elements but also show influences from traditional, vernacular architectural forms and materials as well as Post-Modern architectural influences in their use of space, massing, and choice of materials, which the architect referred to as “a common barn-building vernacular.” The complex appears to be an early example of the style that became known as the Shed style, which combined simplified geometric masses with rustic, usually natural stained wood, finishes. Common to mid-twentieth century architecture, the main house and guest house are clearly internally divided to separate private activities, such as sleeping, from public entertainment spaces. The complex is the work of architect Willis N. Mills Jr., the Princeton-trained architect and son of Modernist architect Willis N. Mills Sr. of New Canaan, Connecticut. Willis Jr. joined his father’s firm, SMS Architects, in 1963, shortly after designing the Case House. He eventually became president of the firm and produced a number of other notable commissions during his career in New Canaan, specializing in residences and libraries. The complex remained in the ownership of James H. Case III until 2003, when it was purchased as a second home by a new buyer, who sold it to the current owners in 2017. After more than fifty years of ownership by only two families – and limited use as a second home – the building retains almost all of its original features and is an excellent example of its architect’s work and of 1960s architecture at the beginning of the Post-Modern period. The period of significance for the Case House property encompasses its original era of construction, 1962-63.

**Early History of the Case House Property**

The Case House was built in Van Hornesville, Herkimer County, New York, in 1963 on land originally owned by Owen D. Young (1874–1962), founder of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), president of General Electric (GE), entrepreneur, and benefactor of Van Hornesville. The history of the Young (Jung) family and of Van Hornesville goes back to the original settlement of the Otsquago valley by German Palatines in the early eighteenth century. Theobald Young moved into the area from Schoharie around 1722, and son Adam is thought to be the father of Jacob A. Young, the first family member definitely known to have lived on the Otsquago Creek. Jacob A. was born in 1755 and fought in various companies of the New York Regiment during the American Revolutionary War.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jacob A. Young’s military service was sufficiently limited that he was denied a pension when he applied in 1832.

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**CASE HOUSE**

Name of Property

**Herkimer County, New York**

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Peter Young (born in 1831), who became Owen D. Young's father and great-grandfather of James H. Case III, supplemented the original Young Farm with another large piece of land known as the Home Farm. That is where Owen D. Young was born in 1874 and where he grew up with his parents and grandfather. The farm provided for their immediate needs, but the family never had money to spare. Owen worked in the barn, ran his own sugar bush, trellised hop plants, and helped with the harvest of hops, hay, corn, buckwheat, and potatoes. In the process, he developed the work ethic that would enable him to become a successful entrepreneur and a love for the land of Van Hornesville.

In 1881, Owen went to the village school and, in 1887, he attended East Springfield Academy; he graduated ready for college in 1890. He was too young for a state scholarship and returned home to Van Hornesville to help his parents and teach at the Universalist Sunday School. His father's health made college unlikely – Owen was needed on the farm – but the Sunday School had a preaching affiliation with St. Lawrence University and Owen was recruited to attend by the president of that institution. He graduated in 1894 and soon left for Boston to attend Boston University Law School, graduating *cum laude* and gaining admittance to the bar in 1896. Two years later, he married Josephine Sheldon Edmonds, who he had met at St. Lawrence. Her grandfather had helped found the American Optical Company, and her father helped Owen make many useful contacts.

Initially, Young clerked in Boston with Charles H. Tyler and specialized in public utility securities law.<sup>2</sup> He rapidly progressed as a corporate lawyer, becoming a full partner within ten years. After winning a case against the General Electric Company (GE) in 1911, he came to the attention of its president, Charles A. Coffin. In 1913, he became vice-president and general counsel for GE and moved back to New York State. In 1919, at the request of the government, he created the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to combat the threat of English control over global radio communications, eventually serving as chairman of the board for both companies. He was president of GE from 1922 to 1939. Young was also successful in finance and diplomacy. He was elected a director of the Federal Reserve Bank in 1923 and served throughout the Depression, becoming chair in 1938. In 1924, he helped draw up the Dawes Plan, an attempt to resolve the instability in Europe created by German reparations, and five years later chaired development of the Young Plan, for which he was named *Time* magazine's third Man of the Year. (Unfortunately, the Young Plan's guarantees were undermined by the Depression.)

Young never forgot his parents or his debt to education and Van Hornesville. His father and mother were finally able to retire from the farm in 1903 and move into the village. In 1930, he built the stone Van Hornesville (now, Owen D. Young) Central School and a teachers' house – consolidating all the rural schools in the area and personally paying teacher salaries. He served as a trustee of St. Lawrence University to 1934 and was a member of the New York State Board of Regents until 1946. He gave more than one million dollars in

<sup>2</sup> "Owen D. Young," *Encyclopedia.com*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/owen-d-young>

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cash and gifts to the New York Public Library. When he retired from his corporate positions in 1939, Young returned to Van Hornesville to focus on the (now expanded) family farm. He led efforts for fair dairy prices in the interlude before Pearl Harbor and volunteered in Washington during the war. He spoke lovingly about the joys of farming on national radio, served as a director-of the Holstein-Friesian Association of America, paved the village road, and brought telephone service and electric lighting to the community. Local residents still remember meeting Owen D. Young as children at the post office or on the village street and being given candy and encouragement. His own children visited him often at Van Horne Farms, Inc. and all developed close ties to the community which were passed on to his grandson.

**The Client: James H. Case III and Laura Rockefeller Case**

James H. Case III acquired the land for the Case House from his mother, Josephine Young Case, who had inherited it from her father, Owen D. Young. In 1931, she had married Everett Needham Case, who became president of Colgate University.<sup>3</sup> Their son, James H. Case III, also had a long career in education. His obituary notes that he was raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Hamilton, New York.<sup>4</sup> He graduated from the Millbrook School, Princeton (class of 1957), and Harvard (PhD, 1969). He taught high school English in Winchester and Brookline, Massachusetts, before working at Harvard Graduate School of Education and becoming director of the University of Massachusetts Institute for Learning and Teaching in Boston. He next became director of teacher certification and associate commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Education. Eventually, Case became dean of the State University of New York Empire State College center at Hartsdale, New York. Empire State College was a pioneer in adult education, championing mentoring and individual studies rather than classroom education. Case retired from the college in 2000 and moved to Texas where he continued to teach at the college level as an adjunct.

His obituary notes that:

*In his personal life, Jim was well known for his love of camping, his love of literature, and his beer waffles. His friends and family appreciated his independent, helpful nature and his sense of humor, which he retained to the last.*<sup>5</sup>

The obit also notes:

*A grandson of Owen D. Young, he maintained a vacation home for many years in Van Hornesville, N.Y.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The couple had a second home in Van Hornesville for all of Josephine's life.

<sup>4</sup> "James H. Case III (1935-2015)," *Boston Globe* (November 22, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> *Boston Globe* (November 22, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> *Boston Globe* (November 22, 2015).

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When the house was built, Case was married to Laura Rockefeller (1936-2015), a daughter of Laurance S. Rockefeller, who was deeply interested in national parks and conservation throughout his life.<sup>7</sup> A biography of Laurance notes that:

*LSR's daughters, Laura, Marion, and Lucy, born between 1936 and 1941, did not choose a career in conservation but each was also environmentally minded, as reflected in their life-styles and philanthropic interests.*<sup>8</sup>

The Case House reflects an environmental perspective shared by both James and Laura Case. However, Laura's family also had a history of supporting modern art and architecture. In the 1930s, John D. Rockefeller Jr., Laura's grandfather, developed Rockefeller Center in New York City working with principal architect Raymond Hood and a young Wallace K. Harrison. In 1965, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Laura's uncle, began construction on the massive Empire State Plaza in Albany under Harrison's direction. On the domestic scale, a house designed by Marcel Breuer as a demonstration house at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1948 was purchased by John D. Rockefeller Jr. and moved to the family's Pocantico Hills estate in 1950 following the exhibit's run at MoMA.

Laura Rockefeller was raised in New York City. She graduated from the Brearley School in Manhattan and Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut. She received a BA, *magna cum laude*, in art history from Bryn Mawr College, an MA in government from Harvard University, and an MSW from Simmons College School of Social Work. She was instrumental in designing and furnishing the Case House. The Cases divorced a few years after their house was built in Van Hornesville, and Laura sold her share of the property to James. By 1971, she had married psychiatrist Richard Chasin and soon developed her own career in family and community therapy as Laura Rockefeller Chasin, serving on a wide variety of family and non-profit boards.<sup>9</sup> The house was used less and less after the couple split up. Subsequently, it passed to a second owner in 2003, who sold it to the current owners in 2017.

<sup>7</sup> They married in 1956, before Case started his senior year at Princeton.

<sup>8</sup> Robin W. Winks, *Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 117.

<sup>9</sup> "Laura Chasin." *New York Times* (November 21, 2015). [www.legacy.com](http://www.legacy.com). Among Laura Rockefeller Chasin's many activities, she served on the boards of the Children's Defense Fund, the Conflict Management Group, and the Institute for Faith and Politics, and on the steering committee of the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice, as well as the boards of Rockefeller Family Fund, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Spelman College. She was described as a radical centrist thinker and activist. She was best known as the founder and former executive director of the Public Conversations Project in Watertown, Massachusetts. She also worked closely with No Labels and the National Institute for Civil Discourse, founded after the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

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**The Architect: Willis N. Mills Jr. (1933 – )**

Willis Nathaniel Mills Jr.'s father was an architect in Stamford County, Connecticut; Mills Sr. met Thorne Sherwood and Lester W. Smith in service during World War II and founded a partnership with them in 1946. Their practice first worked on single-family houses in New Canaan and later specialized in educational projects throughout the Northeast states. Willis N. Mills Sr. became well-known for his design of Mid-century Modern homes. The house he designed at 1380 Ponus Ridge Rd. for his own family was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.<sup>10</sup> This is the home in which his son, Willis N. Mills Jr., grew up

Mills Jr. was born in 1933 and graduated from Princeton in 1955, two years before James H. Case III. However, he continued living in Princeton for a few more years to work on a graduate degree at the Princeton School of Architecture and apparently met Case through his fiancé, Elizabeth Case, James's cousin. Willis and Elizabeth married in 1956, the same year that James and Laura Case were married. After receiving his second degree, Mills worked at a practice in New Haven. The house in Van Hornesville was his first major commission, and Mills took a day off each week to design it. It was built in 1963 and was critical in establishing his reputation for residential architecture. By 1965, he had joined his father's firm, Sherwood, Mills & Smith in New Canaan.

The Case House was featured in *House Beautiful* magazine in July 1965 and recognized as one of the *Architectural Record* "Houses of 1967." Mills Jr. soon designed two other redwood houses, with similar lines, that were built in 1969 and 1975 in Dublin, New Hampshire, as well as Lyon Farm, a 201-unit condominium in the same style in Greenwich, Connecticut.

In 1972, the *AIA Journal* discussed Mills Jr.'s participation in SMS Architects (successor to Sherwood, Mills & Smith) in an article titled, "A Firm that Gained Strength Through Transition." In the late 1960s, as commissions declined due to economic recession and tastes shifted away from Mid-century Modernism, the practice went through a crisis. Willis Mills Sr. and the two other founding partners retired within a span of three years. Seven partners remained, "with too large a staff, too much space, too many barriers between the staff in that space, and in a city [Stamford, Connecticut] where traffic was becoming too messy for comfort."<sup>11</sup> By 1971, reductions left the firm with four partners – including Mills – and twenty other professionals (down from a high of sixty in the late 1950s and thirty-six a year before). SMS Architects sought out smaller, cheaper quarters in a converted warehouse in New Canaan and developed a new management philosophy to enhance communication and efficiency. Willis N. Mills Jr. served on the four-man management committee and became chief designer, reviewing each design with the partner in charge of the project.

<sup>10</sup> The Willis N. Mills House is listed as part of a Multiple Property Submission, "Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut 1930–1979."

<sup>11</sup> Bess Balchen, "A Firm that Gained Strength Through Transition," *AIA Journal* (November 1972), 27.

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The *AIA Journal* commended the practice's open plan office and flattened management hierarchy – ideas considered progressive for the time. Mills Jr. sat with the staff “out in the open,” while the doors of the other partners never closed. In addition, professional staff were offered equity ownership.

*The essence of the organizational change is that individual authority is limited and that the partners as a group control the firm policies, with strong participation from all the professional staff to enhance the team spirit.*<sup>12</sup>

The article also noted that Mills Jr. was particularly sensitive to the natural and built environment, serving as co-chairman of his community's environmental commission, trustee for his local historical society, and elected member of the Wilton (CT) Board of Selectmen:

*... [He is] completely satisfied in the suburb, especially in New Canaan and vicinity, where he grew up. Specifically, he enjoys the versatility the suburb provides and the fact that people who live there recognize and value environmental qualities. ... “What we look for,” he explains, “is a dynamic balance between man's physical and spiritual needs. We regard architecture as a social art. Of course, this doesn't mean that we should refrain from finding less expensive, quicker means to produce. Quite the contrary.”*<sup>13</sup>

Within ten years, Mills was being profiled by the *New York Times* as one of fifteen “faces in a crowd” of influence-makers in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Though not at the level of some of the others cited – Fred T. Allen (chair and president of Pitney Bowes), Frederick K Biebel (chair of the Republican State Committee), and concert pianist Ruth Steinkraus Cohen – Mills was included as one of those “people whose names tend to come up again and again in conversations from one end of the county to the other but whose prominence is, well, not yet achieved.”<sup>14</sup> Mills was specifically cited in the context of his firm, which had grown substantially since 1972:

*... Willis Mills Jr., 43, a principal in S.M.S. Architects of New Canaan, a group of 18 architects that wins more design awards than any other firm in the state. With more than 800 buildings at a total value of \$500 million designed so far, the firm is a leader on the basis of volume alone. Everything from 26 area schools to the big brown A.T.&T. Long Lines building in downtown Bridgeport to the Lyon Farm condominium in the back country of Greenwich came off the firm's drawing boards. The firm, which was founded by Mr. Mill's[sic] father, also designed the St. Matthew's Episcopal Church-Wilton Presbyterian Church complex, the Stauffer Chemical company's office building now under construction in Westport and the complex of marinas, apartments, hotels and shops proposed for the Stamford waterfront.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Balchen, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Balchen, 34.

<sup>14</sup> “Power in Fairfield: Faces in a Crowd,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Mar 20, 1977, [*Connecticut Weekly*] 23:1. <https://search-proquest-com.dbgateway.nysed.gov/docview/123160226?accountid=8012>.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, 23:7.

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The collaborative nature of the SMS Architects practice sometimes makes it difficult to identify Mills Jr.'s own work. However, three other commissions in which he played a leading role were the Round Hill Community Church in Greenwich, Connecticut; Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York; and a laboratory building at IBM Poughkeepsie. During his career, he won eight national design awards and twelve regional and state design awards; helped found and was first president of the Connecticut Architecture Foundation in 1878; co-authored a book on library design in 1980; and was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1981.<sup>16</sup> Mills ceased to practice architecture around 2000 and now lives in Florida.

**The Era**

In 1963, most new domestic architecture was being built in the suburbs. Ranch houses and two-story homes still dominated residential construction. The most forward-looking sported a mid-century modern aesthetic, even though the Colonial Revival remained popular in some circles. That year, the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded its Gold Medal in Architecture to Ludwig Mies van der Rhode, demonstrating a reverence for post-war modernism among those academically trained. However, the clean lines of the International style of architecture were being replaced by a more sculptural, expressionist modernism and even Brutalist forms. With the demolition of McKim, Mead and White's Penn Station in New York City, architecture in the United States seemed destined to leave behind the past.

However, when Willis N. Mills Jr. studied at the Princeton School of Architecture, he was exposed to new trends from Europe that reconfigured historical styles. Among Princeton faculty at the time were Italian architect Enrico Peressutt, who arrived on campus in 1952 to join Jean Labatut.<sup>17</sup> In 1949, Jean Labatut founded the first Ph.D. program in architecture at Princeton, and he is credited with developing the role of the architect-scholar. Peressutt and Labatut expanded on the modern lexicon of previous decades, which emphasized the geometry, austerity, and universality of the International style. They encouraged their students to look to the past and to identify natural regional variations for inspiration. Among Mills Jr.'s classmates was Charles Moore, who designed Sea Ranch in Sonoma County, California, in the same year that Mills Jr. executed the Case house. Both Moore and Mills Jr. built on established traditions in their respective regions, mixing old materials with new and old-fashioned elements with contemporary designs in a mid-twentieth-century American vernacular.

Of course, Modern architecture was also part of the mix. Jean Labatut had been trained at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, and Mills's own father, Willis N. Mills Sr., was educated in the 1920s at the University of Pennsylvania, which modeled its program after that of the French school. One of Mills Sr.'s fellow students at

<sup>16</sup> Nolan Lushington and Willis N. Mills Jr., *Libraries Designed for Users: A Planning Handbook* (Syracuse, NY: Gaylord Professional Publishers, 1979); *American Institute of Architects College of Fellows History & Directory*, 2017 Edition, 179, 365. Mills Jr.'s father was elected a fellow in 1963. [https://issuu.com/aiacollegeoffellows/docs/faia\\_20directory](https://issuu.com/aiacollegeoffellows/docs/faia_20directory)

<sup>17</sup> Pippo Ciorra and Caterina Padoa Schioppa, "Erasmus Effect: Italian Architects Abroad" [Exhibition Catalogue], (Recanati, Italy: Quodlibet, 2013). With additional information from Cynthia Falk, Cooperstown Graduate Programs, 2017.

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Penn was Louis Kahn, a figure who would become part of Mills Jr.'s own education at Princeton. Marcel Breuer's "house in the garden," a demonstration house built at the Museum of Modern Art (1949), continued to influence domestic design into the 1960s.

As the Case House and guest house show, Mills Jr. took from a variety of styles. In combining an open plan, industrial staircases, concrete block, plate glass, and built-in storage units with symmetry, gabled roofs, vertical board siding, and a prominent fireplace, Mills Jr. was able to create a design which utilized vernacular architectural forms and materials to integrate both the modern and traditional. The Case House embraced many aspects of Modernism, but situationally grounded it in a place, as was increasingly common by 1963, especially among Princeton graduates such as Robert Venturi. Post-Modernism further developed this aesthetic by abstracting elements of the past and applying them to buildings more explicitly to create contradiction and complexity.

### The House

The Case House must be situated within this emerging architectural style, but analysis also reveals three themes that are distinctively associated with Willis N. Mills Jr.'s work. The first is environmental sensitivity – to both the natural environment and the surrounding built environment. The second is a concern with materials and the use of a limited palette of solid materials like redwood boards, rough sand-finished plaster, cork tile, and steel-framed windows. The third is the provision of separate social spaces designed to serve specific functions within an apparently open plan – main house and guest house, dining room, living room, music room, balcony, kitchen, breakfast room, playroom, and bedrooms. This concept was not new – Marcel Breuer applied a "binuclear plan" to his domestic architecture – but represented new, 1960s concepts of family life. Following what would become Post-Modern practice, each theme incorporates its antithesis – the new and the historical, the natural and the unnatural, simple construction materials used in sophisticated ways, and fragmented spaces that have an underlying unity.

The environment was a key driver of Mills Jr.'s design. The Case House sits on a ridge above Van Hornesville and looks out on the valley of Otsquago Creek; in terms of design, the façade of the house is secondary to its rear elevation. Each of the major rooms has its own cardinal orientation and its own view. The dining room looks southeast at the primary view; the living room looks northeast to the edge of the plateau above the pond; the music room looks northwest at the driveway and meadow where one enters the house; the breakfast room and playroom look into a sheltered courtyard between the two wings of the house; and the guest house sits at a right angle to the main house, looking toward it, but not fully at it.

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The built environment of Van Hornesville was also an important factor in Mills Jr.'s design. Although the Cases came from wealthy and socially well-connected families, neither wanted their summer home to intrude on the local community. The *House Beautiful* article noted the clients' instructions to Mills Jr.:

*While a great deal of space was needed, the owners were anxious to avoid anything approaching "manor house" proportions and wanted a home which would fit in with the character of the local farming community.*<sup>18</sup>

Rather than fit all family functions within one massive building, Mills Jr. drew on agricultural precedents to distribute them up between the wings of the main house and between the main house and the guest house.

*.... Cedar shingle roofs and charcoal gray redwood siding, contained within a frame of white skirt, fascia and cornerboards – described by the architect as "a common barn-building vernacular" – were deliberately chosen to harmonize with the older buildings in the neighborhood. .... The over-all massing of the buildings gives the impression of a farm complex that is comfortably at home in the countryside.*<sup>19</sup>

This farm aesthetic prevented a single building standing on the ridge above Van Hornesville from overwhelming the community and permitted the architect to create "a family place." A July 1965 article in *House Beautiful*, which called the Cases "young tradition makers," included the following image and claimed,

*The chestnut-brown house in a wild-flower meadow already has the charm of an ancestral farm.*<sup>20</sup>

Mills Jr.'s aesthetic may also have owed something to the barn at the foot of the entrance drive. Like most barns in central New York State, it was painted red.

A second aspect of Mills Jr.'s style was his use of materials – the Case House massed simple materials to create strong contrasts. This feature was particularly noted by the *Architectural Record* when the building was chosen a "house of the year."

*Unity and diversity in a large country house are achieved through individual expression of separate functions – bound together by uniformity of roof pitch, consistent use of materials, and balance of the forms themselves.*<sup>21</sup>

The two primary units of the house were redwood, stained to keep a rich color, and outlined with wooden fascia, painted white. Between them was a flat-roofed glass hyphen bisected by a row of white closets; a brightly colored red door centered the building so that the two wings appeared to mirror one another, despite

<sup>18</sup> "Case House," *Architectural Record Houses of 1967* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), 78.

<sup>19</sup> "Case House," 78. Note that the stained redwood siding never seems to have been achieved the weathered "charcoal gray" color described by the *Architectural Record*.

<sup>20</sup> "The Start of A Family Compound," *House Beautiful* (July 1965), 55.

<sup>21</sup> "Case House," 78.

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slight differences in fenestration. There were a few more strip windows in the main living spaces (to strategically frame views) than in the bedrooms (where they simply provided light) but, overall, the flat profile of the narrow, black-enameled steel frames minimally disrupted the wall surface. Five small dormers (like monitors) poked up from the roofs of the two blocks. Three along the interior edges of the courtyard lit two baths in the sleeping portion and the kitchen in living portion; the other two on the roof ridges lit the central hall in the sleeping area and the balcony in the living room. A white plastered chimney stack rose from the point where the music room met the main block of the living wing. All these structures were aligned with the lines of the guest bedroom and music room to emphasize the geometry of the building. The house foundation was set back from the exterior walls, creating a shadow line, so that the building appeared to float slightly above its site. There was never any foundation planting to disrupt the clean lines of the Case House. All of these features remain in the house as of 2018.

Inside, the predominant materials were white sand-finished plaster, white painted wood cabinets, grey concrete fireplace, black steel window and door frames, black steel circular staircase, four-inch redwood boards on the sloping ceilings, dark stained wood trim, oak floors, and cork tiles. The open concrete block fireplace in the main living room was the interior focal point of the living wing.<sup>22</sup> The original furnishings were similarly natural and “indigenous” in material and form. *House Beautiful* lauded the décor:

*Unabashedly, in the manner of today's direct young people, the Cases have mixed homely materials like concrete block and a stock iron staircase with oil-rubbed teak. Morocco-bound volumes, Shaker furniture, heirloom rugs.*<sup>23</sup>

Overall, these materials unified the floor plan, so that each functional space flowed into another.

*The high-ceilinged, expansive living room – delightfully comfortable for large-family living and entertaining – is canopied by a balcony which creates warm, intimate living space for the Cases when they are alone. The open plan of the kitchen makes it easy to cook for a crowd.*

*The Case house, when you study its plan, is revealed – certainly in its living, dining, and play areas – as a flow of interlocking spaces. These are broad, high-ceilinged places which make entertaining comfortable. But the Cases have no feeling of excessive vastness when they're alone. The balcony overhanging the fireside in the living room creates an intimately scaled “room in a room.”*<sup>24</sup>

The *Architectural Record* article similarly noted that the main house was planned as a series of social spaces unified by natural materials. The building is not transparent – the row of closets in the center of the glass link prevents a view through the house – but it feels open and unconstricted. When Willis Mills Jr. was asked to

<sup>22</sup> A stove and steel mantel have been installed in the fireplace, but all the basic materials (except for cork tiles) remain.

<sup>23</sup> *House Beautiful*, 56. “Homely” perhaps – the furnishings included a Steinway piano and Danish chairs in teak and black leather.

<sup>24</sup> *House Beautiful*, 56, 105.

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comment on how the house had developed in the four years since it was built, he particularly cited its use of space. He felt that it had aged well in:

*... the way it absorbs large groups on occasions without seeming rattlingly empty the rest of the time. The choice of solid natural materials used in a rather elemental way seems to have worn well and contributed to the character of the neighborhood.<sup>25</sup>*

The guest house associated with the Case House was constructed in similar materials and style. It was required to accommodate two separate sets of visitors and met the challenge in an interesting way. The building was built into a hillside; the change of grade placed a common living room and kitchen on a lower level and two sets of bedrooms and bathrooms on two levels above. The common living room and kitchen brought in-laws and friends together, while the separate sleeping areas gave everyone space to retreat.

Willis N. Mills Jr.'s design incorporated a different notion of family than had been popular in the 1950s; Marcel Breuer's bi-nuclear plan had started as a separation of public and private spaces but evolved as a separation of generations. Mills Jr. brought the family back together – all shared the sleeping area of the house, and the playroom was in the center of the house. Similarly, the guest house explicitly brought guests together to socialize and share. The Case House complex fully reflects 1960s ideology in giving children a stronger identity within the family and emphasizing shared experience.<sup>26</sup>

### Shed Style Architecture

While the design of the Case House falls under the broader umbrella of mid-twentieth century Modern architecture, it also appears to be an early example of what would emerge as the Shed style of architecture. This style developed in the 1960s, was most prominent in the 1970s and early 1980s, and eventually fell out of fashion by the 1990s. While not widely popular, it initially emerged as a style for second houses, such as the Case House. As the name would suggest, the Shed style is characterized by multiple shed-roof forms, which often slope in different directions, and smooth roof-wall junctions with minimal overhangs. The emphasis is on the form of the house, not the individual smaller elements. The front doors and entrances of Shed style buildings are often minimalized, contrasting with earlier housing styles which emphasized entrances with columns and porticos. Buildings are frequently clad in wood, laid vertically, diagonally, or horizontally, usually left unfinished or stained a natural color. Windows likewise received a simple treatment and were generally minimized, especially on public elevations, with larger fixed-pane windows used to highlight views. Clerestory windows, often set into tall towers erupting above the roofline, are also hallmarks of this style.

<sup>25</sup> *Architectural Record*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> The Cases' charge to their architect to avoid a "manor house" may also have reflected the decade's democratic tendency to minimize class differences. On the other hand, James's grandfather, Owen D. Young, and Laura's father, Laurance Rockefeller, had both avoided personal excess.

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The Shed style is sometimes associated with the Post-Modern architectural movement, most likely because of its association with architect Charles Moore (and Mills Jr.'s Princeton classmate), widely acknowledged father of Post-Modernism. One of the most popular and most influential examples of the Shed style was the Sea Ranch development, a community of second homes outside of San Francisco sited and designed by Moore that started construction in 1964. Sea Ranch integrated the buildings into the ocean landscape, carefully siting the buildings to maximize the views. Buildings contained many different shed roofs and projections, and small window openings contrasted with larger plate glass windows. The buildings were clad in wood shingle and vertical wood boards. Even the noted Vanna Venturi House, designed by noted Post-Modern architect Robert Venturi for his mother between 1959 and 1964, can be understood as a precursor of the Shed style, with its emphasis on broad geometric forms and use of two shed roofs. Emphasizing the buildings' attachments to the landscape, Shed style buildings were built with various floor levels, hugging the terrain and topography.

The Case House appears to share many similarities with buildings of the Shed style. While it was designed and built in 1962-63, at the very dawn of the Shed style movement, the design of the complex appears to have tapped into this emerging contemporary architectural movement, rather than serve as a copy mimicking earlier examples. While the house and guest house are both bilaterally symmetrical, in contrast to the usual asymmetry found in typical examples, the focus on form and massing, details, and materials appear to share many commonalities. The buildings reflect a careful consideration of the landscape and setting, like those at Sea Ranch. Like those at Sea Ranch, not only were the views highlighted by the use of large windows, but the buildings, especially the guest house, reflect the same multi-level design which integrated the building into the topography. The buildings feature minimal roof overhangs, which emphasize the geometry of the buildings, which is further augmented by the use of contrasting fascia and trim. While the forms are gabled and not true shed roof elements, the emphasis on the simple steep slopes of the multiple gables and the use of tall clerestory skylights seems to obtain some of the same effects that architects such as Moore and Venturi sought with the Shed style. While the entrance is not hidden, it is modest in its design and is highlighted only by the color of the doors. The majority of windows, especially those in more private spaces, are small, contrasting with large floor-to-ceiling glass panes which highlight the views. Perhaps the most striking similarity that the Case House shares with Shed style architecture is the use of simple vertical redwood sheathing. While the house is decidedly Modern in its form, materials, and concept, closer examination reveals a suggestion of the Post-Modern Shed style architecture that would soon become the trend.

**Case Family Reflections**

The Case House is recalled with great affection by the children of James Case and Laura Rockefeller Chasin. Peter Gill Case believes that it influenced his own vocation as an architect:

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*I am exactly as old as this house, and while I hope the house is approved to be on the register, I regret that I am now also eligible to be considered historic.*

*I am an architect, as was my cousin Willis Mills, and consider growing up in this house one reason I took to the profession.<sup>27</sup>*

Case remembers two elements of the house with special affection – the fireplace in the living room and the breakfast table in the link.

*The hearth and the kitchen table were the two focal points of our home. As young children, we nestled in the wing of the fireplace under the mantle [sic] with pillows and blankets, even with fire roaring. The low-roofed living room (a den within a living room, one might say) was an intimate space despite having only a single wall. It felt comfortable with 2 or 12 people. Likewise, the kitchen table was set in an "exposed nook"; with a view through ceiling-height glass to the patio, the giant elm and the hills across the valley. The large round table (seated eight, 4'-6" - 5'-0" in diameter) anchored the kitchen but was not really in it, and just beyond the partition was the playroom (where kids were heard, but not seen). Sitting at the table, the walls were either glass or solid but not both (which never seemed odd to us) and lent a sense of orderliness to the space. Like the hearth, the kitchen table was a calm and lively space.<sup>28</sup>*

Willis Mills Jr.'s design supported the Case family and gave the children a sense of identity and support as they were growing up. In retrospect, it lived up to the Jim and Laura Case's goal of creating a happy "family place."

## SUMMARY

The Case House complex was designed and built in 1962-1963 for James and Laura Case on family land in Van Hornesville in rural Herkimer County. The architect was Willis Mills Jr. of New Canaan, Connecticut, and the buildings were subsequently recognized in *House Beautiful* and the *Architectural Record* for their design. Mills Jr. gave the Cases "a family place" that incorporated emerging trends in architecture. He was sensitive to the physical environment and to the building traditions of Van Hornesville. His choice of materials blended natural materials with elemental industrial ones; the color palette was limited to white, shades of grey, black, dark brown, and red. The open floor plan – and site plan for the two buildings – balanced function, family, privacy, and hospitality. The Case House fully deserved the recognition it received in the 1960s for innovation – and the recognition it continues to receive as a model of 1960s design.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication, Peter Case to Emilie Gould, March 15, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication, Peter Case to Emilie Gould, April 1, 2018.

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NOTE: Additional information contributed by the current owner from her own research and by Peter Gill Case, son of James Case III and Laura Rockefeller Chasin.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is indicated with a heavy line on the attached maps with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the lot historically associated with the nominated building during the period of significance in 1962-63. While James Case continued to own and utilize the property until 2003, adding additional property to his holdings, the nomination boundary reflects the original parcel of land associated with the house and guest house.

UTM References (Continued)

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6	513979	4749476
7	513989	4749541
8	513989	4749913

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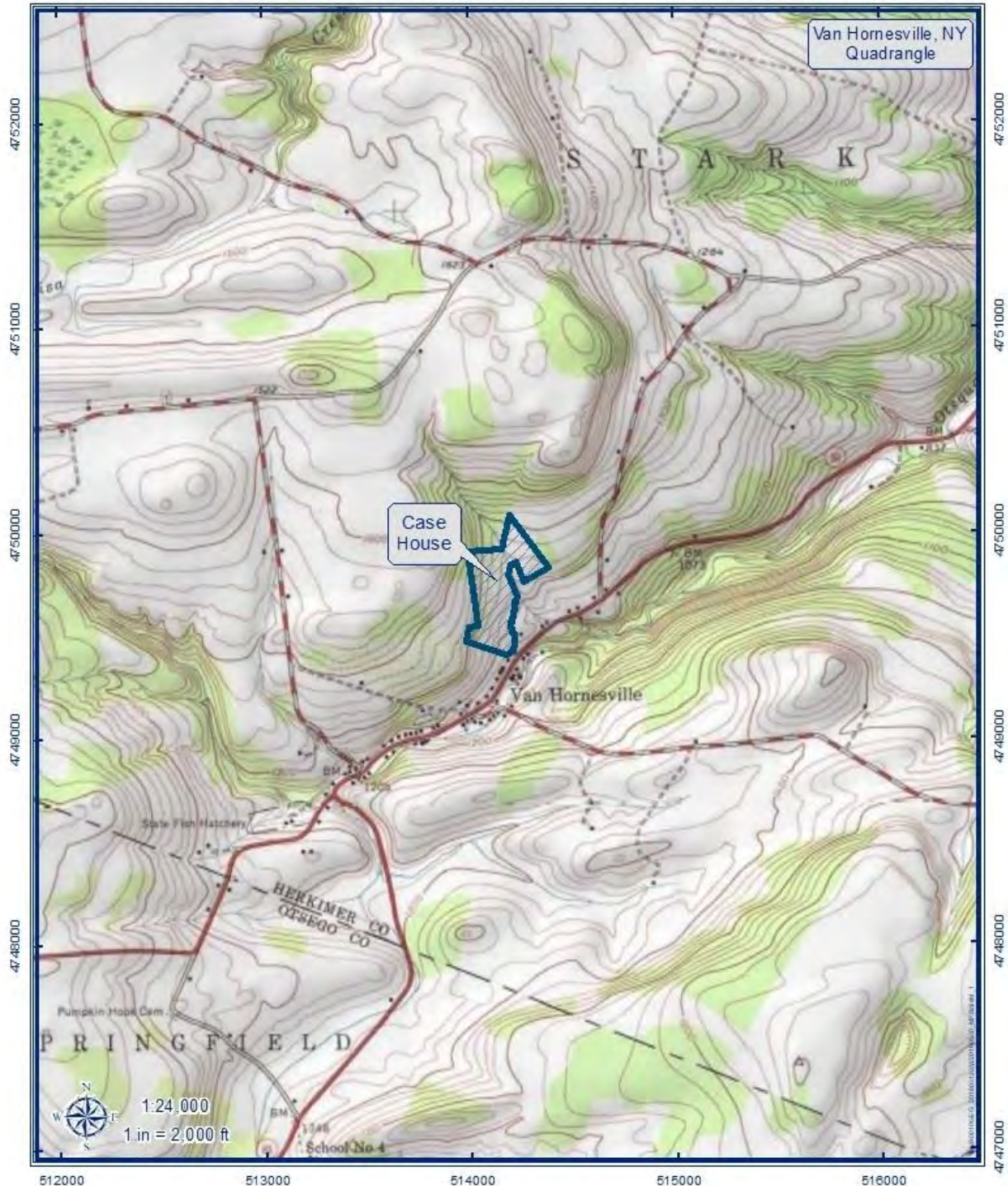
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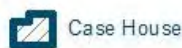
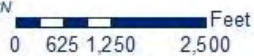
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Name of Property  
**Herkimer County, New York**  
County and State

Case House  
Van Hornesville, Herkimer Co., NY

2333 State Route 80  
Van Hornesville, NY 13475



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



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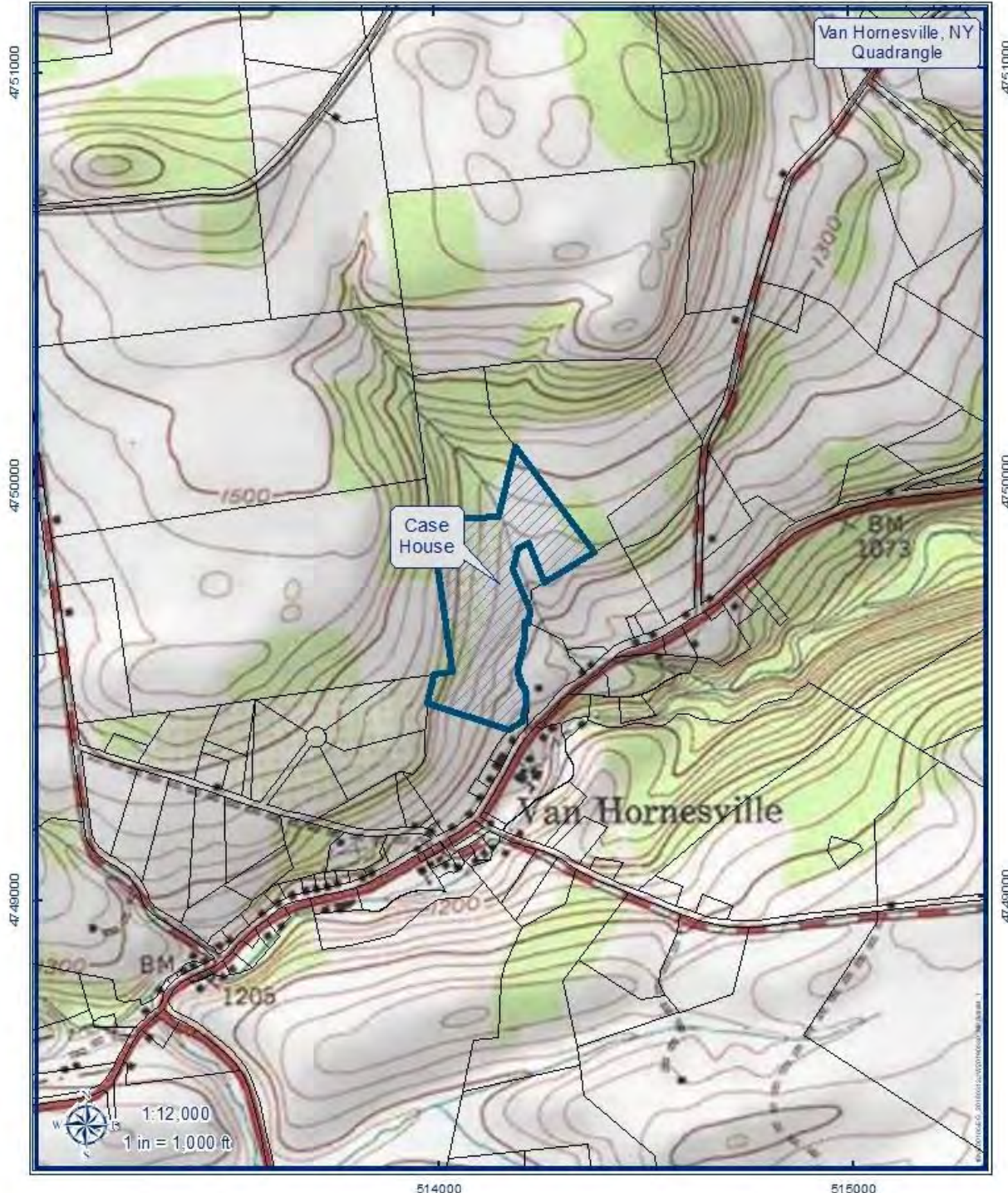
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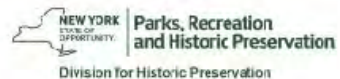
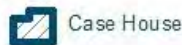
**CASE HOUSE**  
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Case House  
Van Hornesville, Herkimer Co., NY

2333 State Route 80  
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Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



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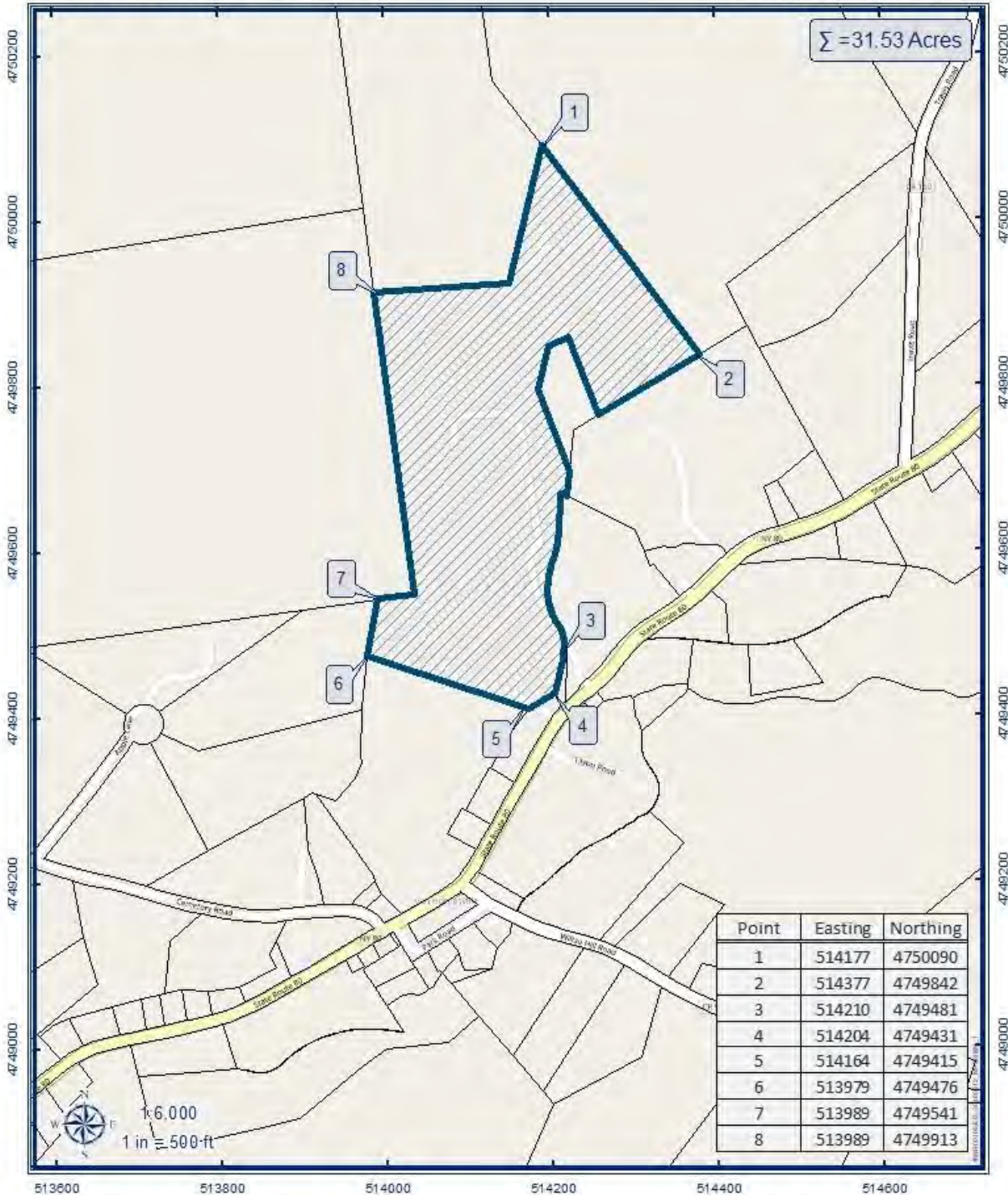
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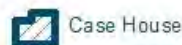
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Van Hornesville, Herkimer Co., NY

2333 State Route 80  
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Units: Meter

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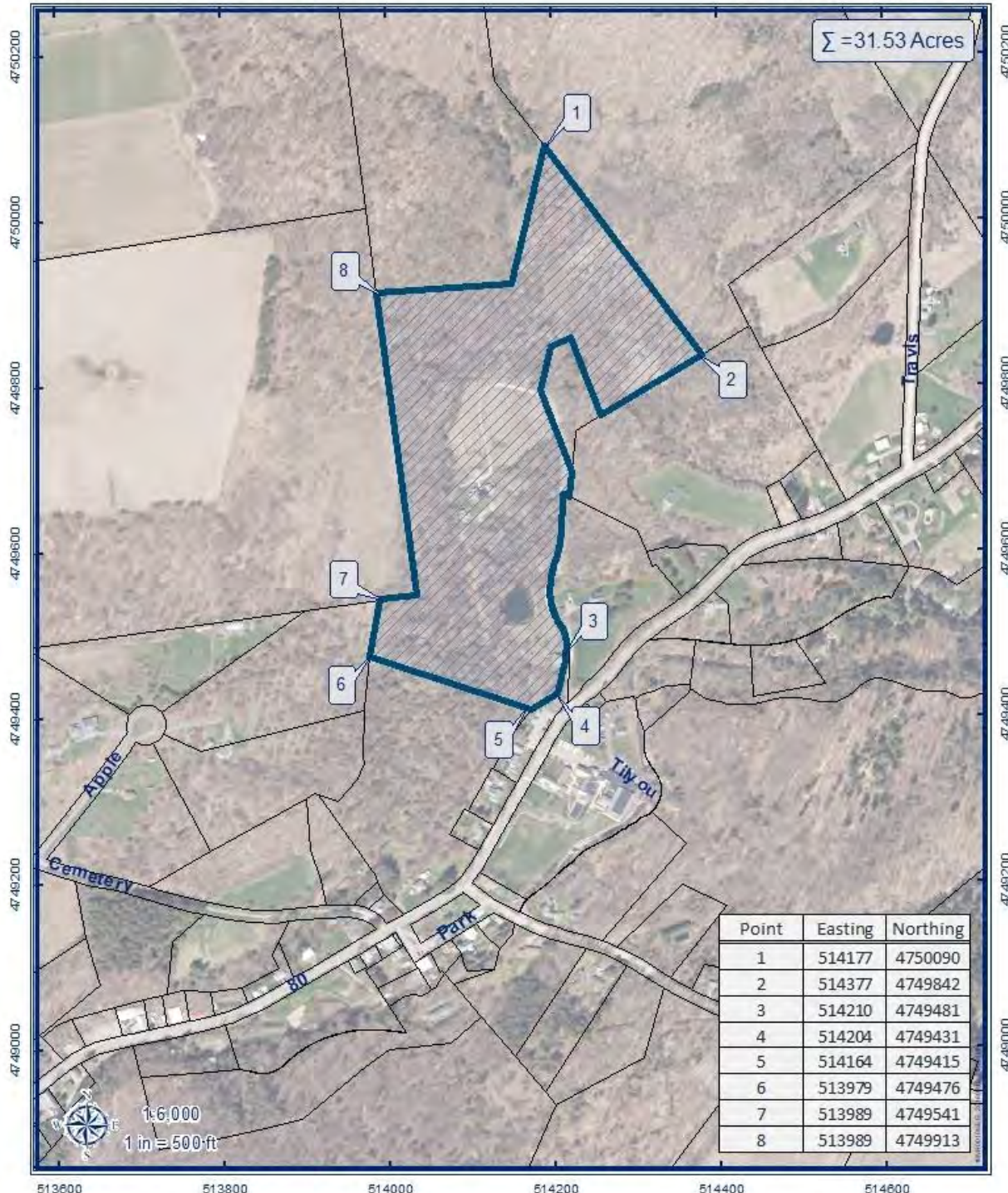
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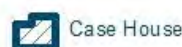
Name of Property  
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Case House  
Van Hornesville, Herkimer Co., NY

2333 State Route 80  
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Additional Information

Photo Log:

Name of Property: Case House  
City or Vicinity: Van Hornesville  
County: Herkimer County  
State: New York

*Description of Photograph(s) and number:*

Photo 1 of 15: Looking south from driveway, showing north elevation of Main House  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, May 2019

Photo 2 of 15: Looking south, showing house and guest house  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, May 2019

Photo 3 of 15: Looking northeast from guest house deck, showing south elevation of Main House  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, May 2019

Photo 4 of 15: Looking southwest at guest house  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, May 2019

Photo 5 of 15: Guest house, looking south  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, May 2019

Photo 6 of 15: Interior, Main House showing fireplace and music room  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 7 of 15: Interior, Main House showing living room, looking northeast  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 8 of 15: Interior, Main House showing dining room with balcony, looking northeast to living room  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 9 of 15: Interior, Main House showing kitchen, looking northeast  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 10 of 15: Interior, Main House, hallway in private east areas showing original light fixture  
Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 11 of 15: Interior, Main House, view of guest bedroom looking west

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Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 12 of 15: Interior, Guest House, view of living room looking west

Photographed by Doreen DeNicola, September 2017

Photo 13 of 15: Interior, Guest House, view of stair and balcony from north side of living room, looking west

Photographed by Richard Walker, June 2019

Photo 14 of 15: Interior, Guest House, second level landing from northeast garage entrance

Photographed by Richard Walker, June 2019

Photo 15 of 15: Interior, Guest House, second level northeast bedroom, looking northeast

Photographed by Richard Walker, June 2019

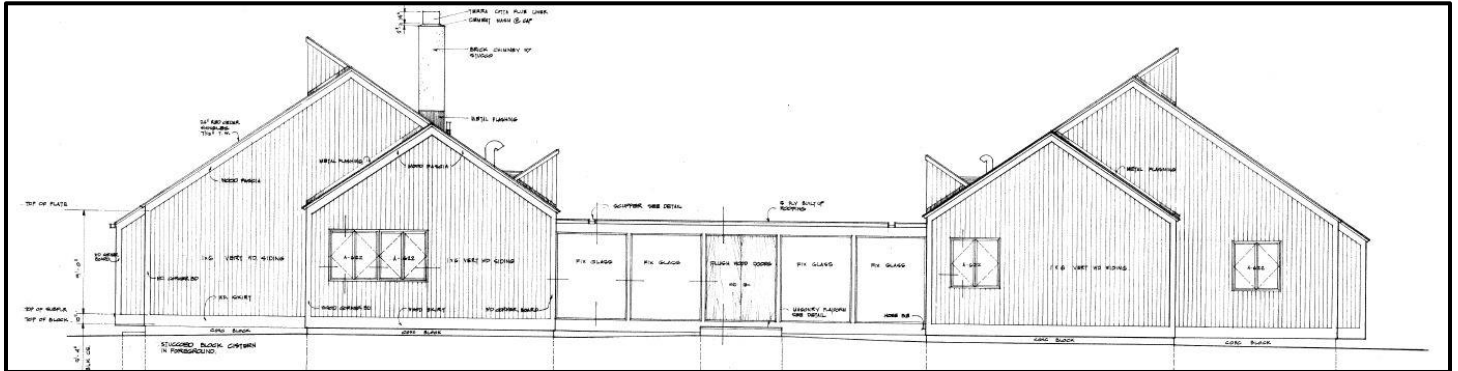
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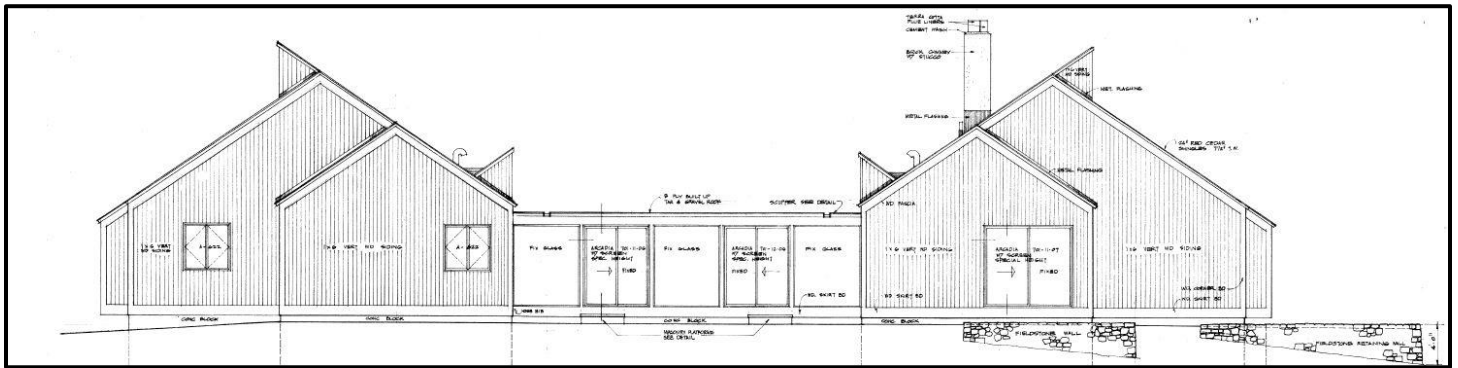
Name of Property  
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**Figure 1: North Elevation (Architect's drawings, 1962)**

Main entry is at the center.



**Figure 2: South elevation (Architect's drawings, 1962)**

This elevation opens to the view.





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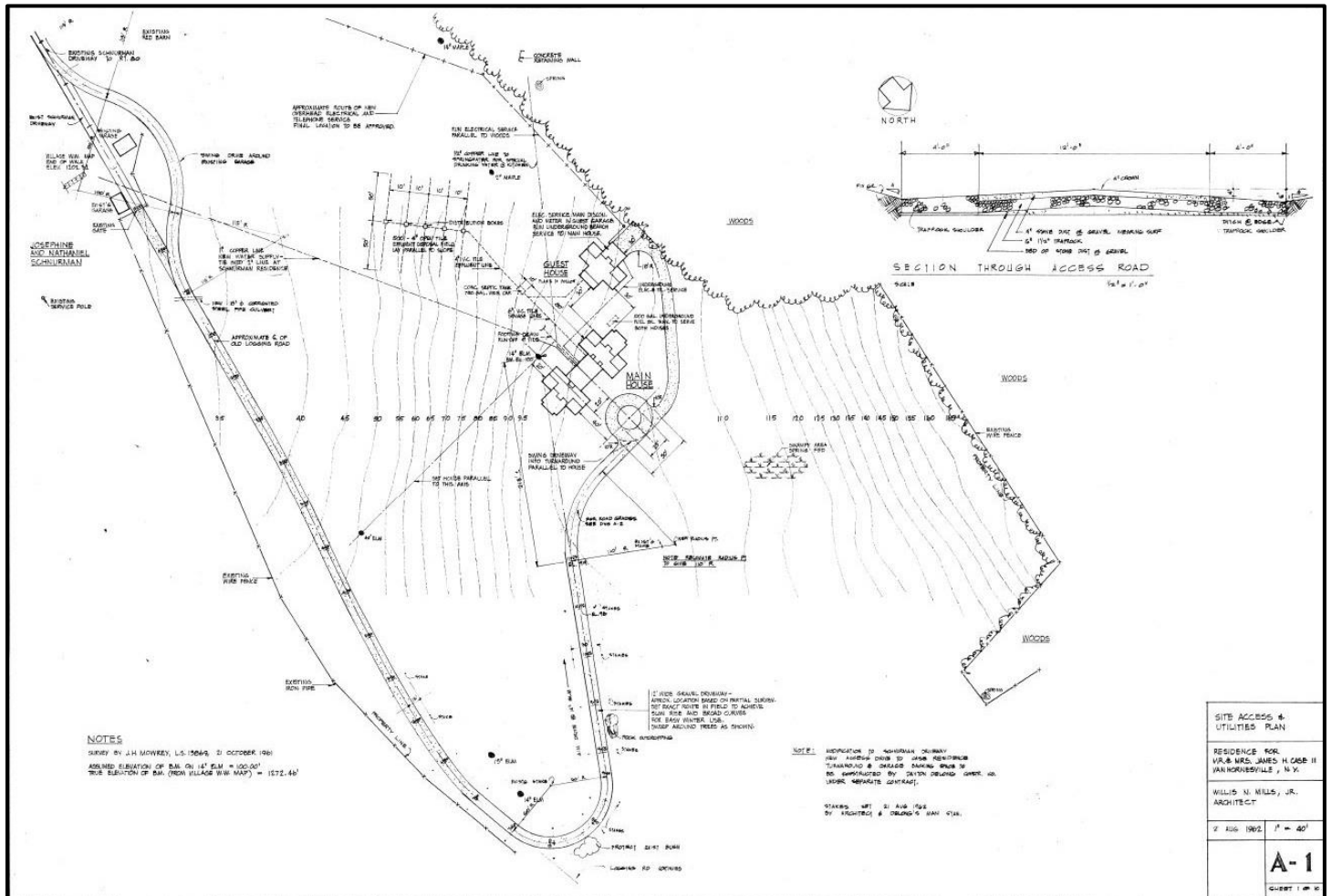


Figure 5: Site Plan (Architect's drawings, 1962).

Note the steep grade in front of the house and its orientation to the ridge. The access road was originally intended to bypass the barn (labelled "garage") near State Route 80. This bypass and the circle next to the house seem never to have been built.

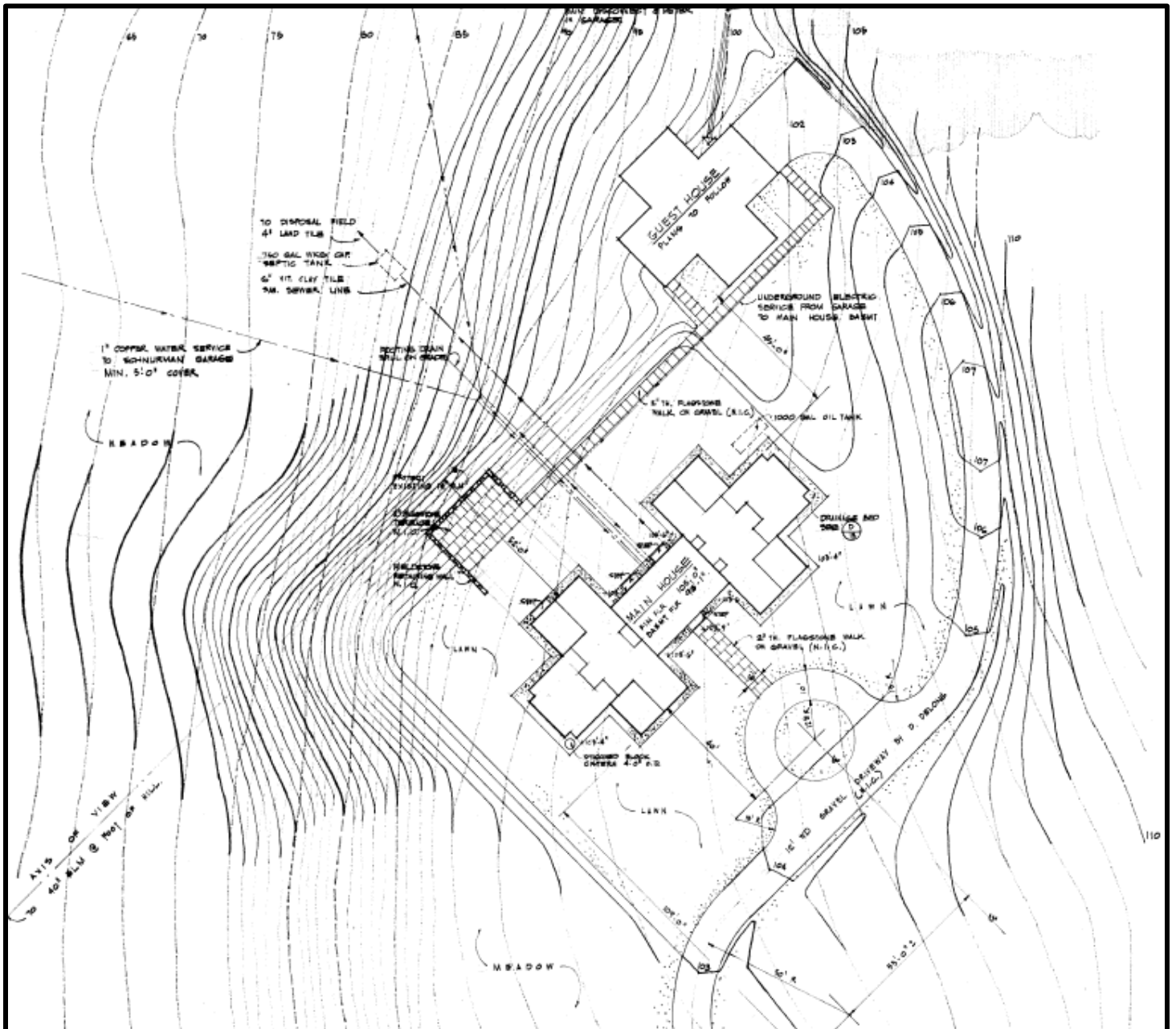
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**Figure 6: Detail, Site Plan (Architect's drawings, 1962).**

This detail shows the relationship between the main house and guest house, and reflects the dramatic topography of the buildings.

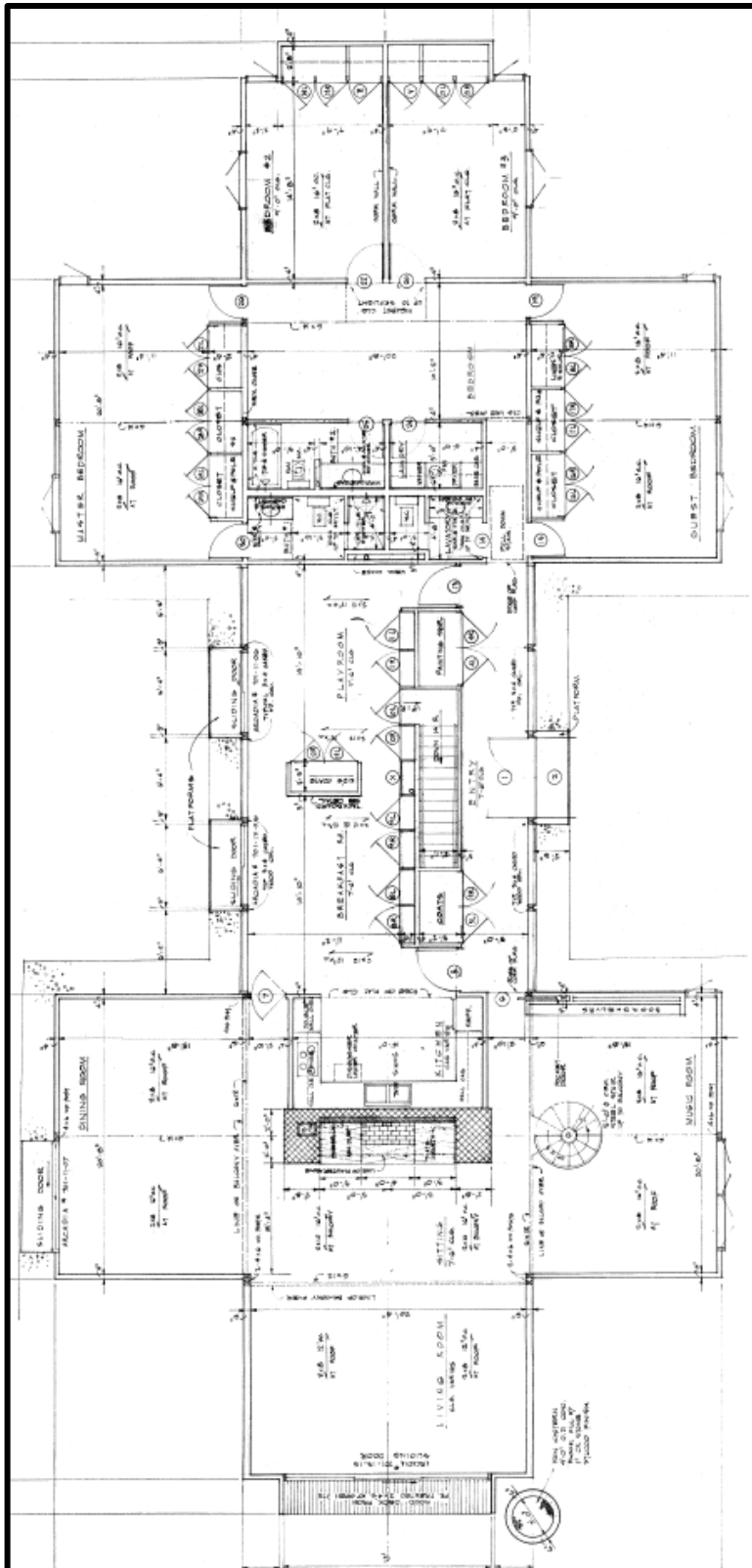
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**Figure 7: First Floor Plan (Architect's drawings, 1962).**

Note the two halves of the building, linked by the hyphen. Visible here is the large fireplace wall separating the kitchen and living room spaces (toward the bottom), the bank of closets which divides the entry area from the breakfast room and play room (center), and the smaller, more private bedrooms and bathrooms (toward the top).

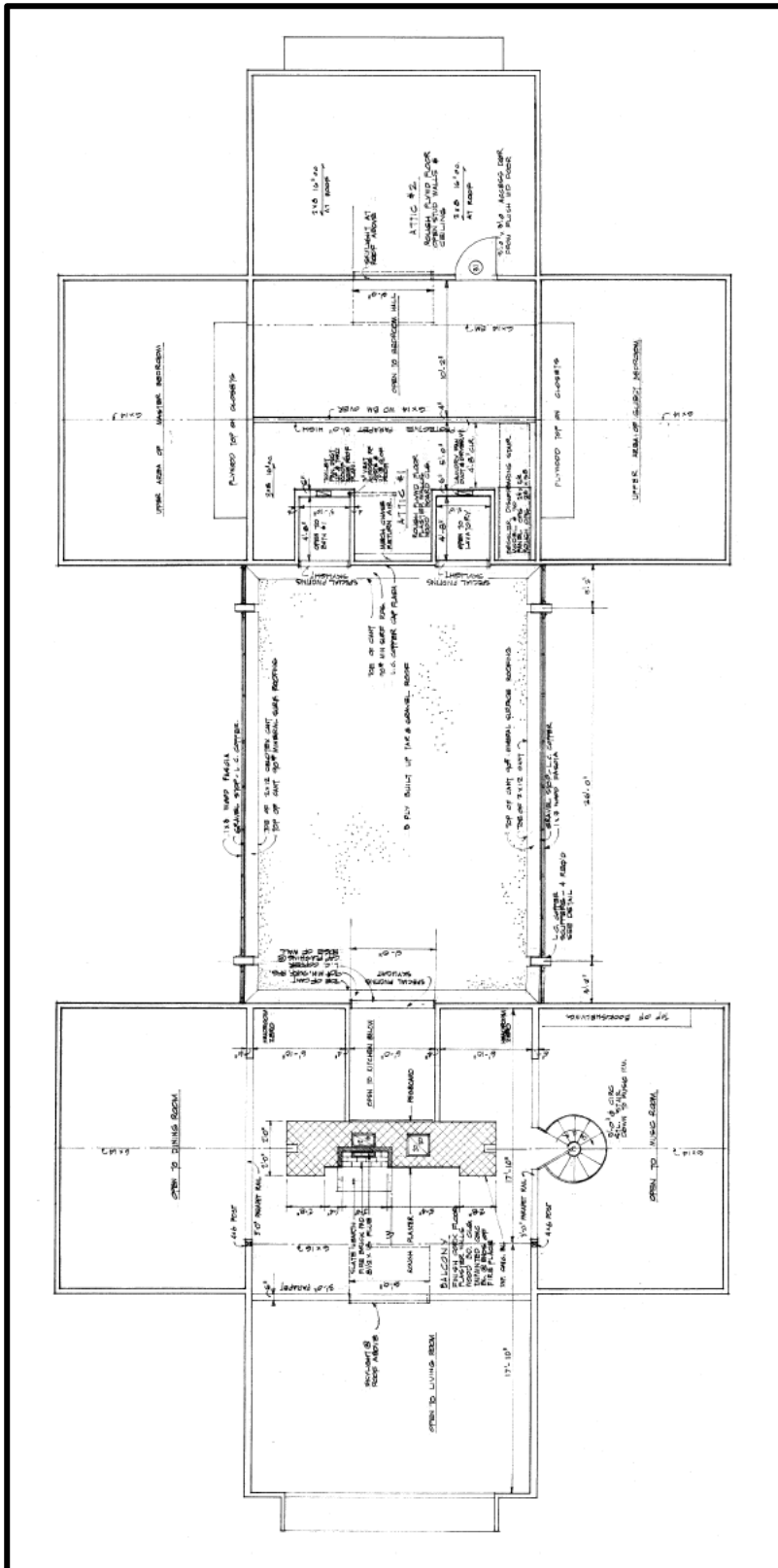
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**Figure 8: Upper Floor Plan (Architect's drawings, 1962).** Note the two halves of the building, linked by the hyphen. Visible here is the large fireplace wall separating the kitchen and living room spaces (toward the bottom), the bank of closets which divides the entry area from the breakfast room and play room (center), and the smaller, more private bedrooms and bathrooms (toward the top).

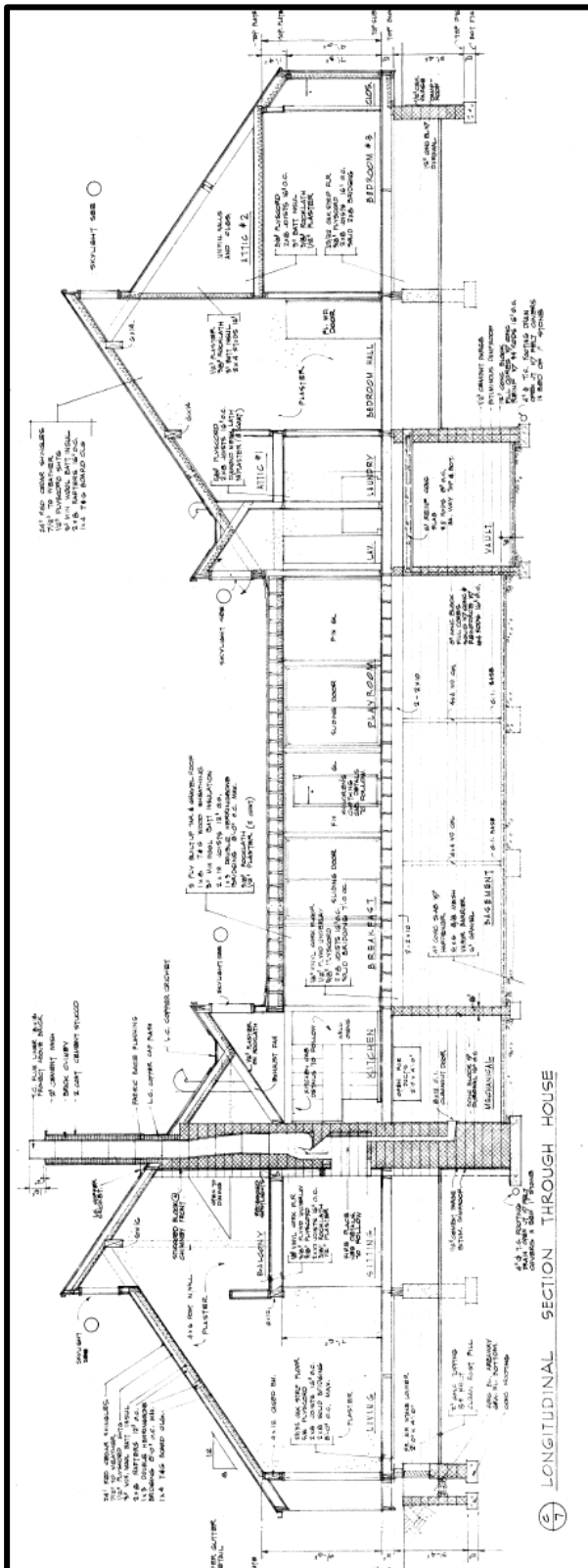
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**Figure 9: Longitudinal Section through House (Architect's drawings, 1962).**

This section, cut through the center of the house, shows the spatial relationships between the two components and the hyphen. It also shows the balcony and attic spaces of the upper level as well as the many skylight towers.

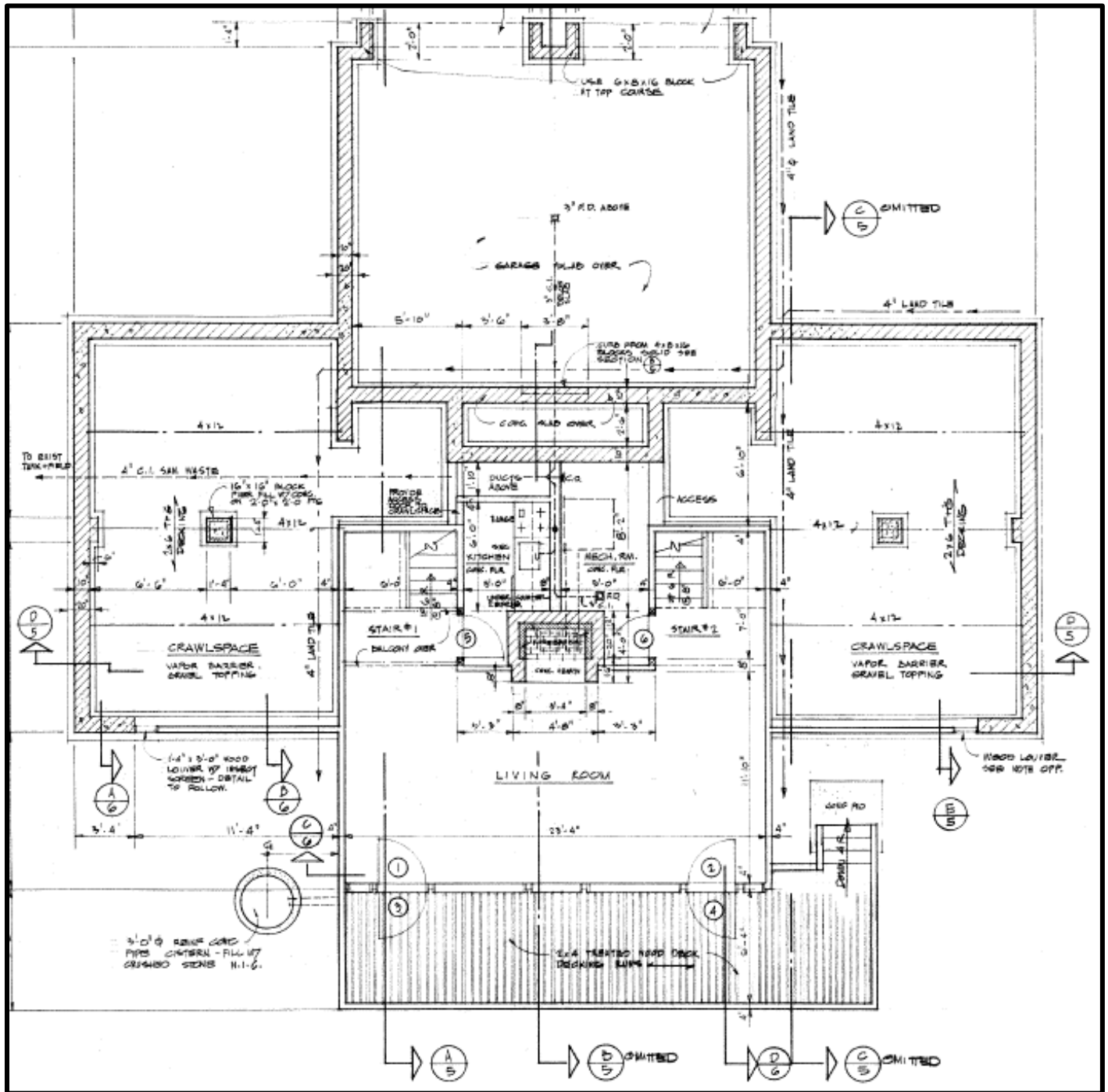
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**Figure 10: Lower Level Plan, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).**

This level provides access to the shared living room and kitchen areas, accessed via a stair down from the entries.

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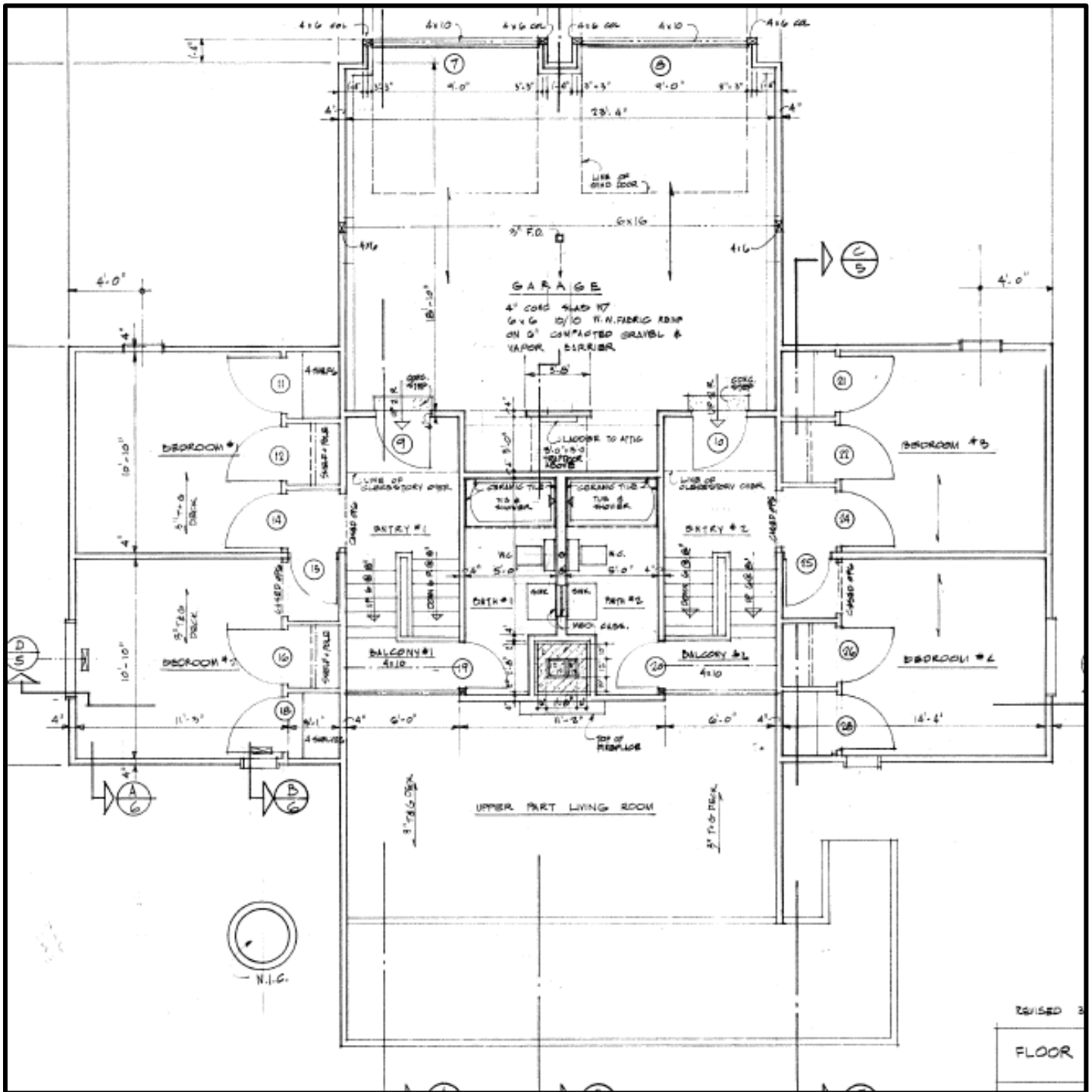


Figure 11: Upper Level Plan, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).  
Note that this level contains bedrooms and the garage access (at top).



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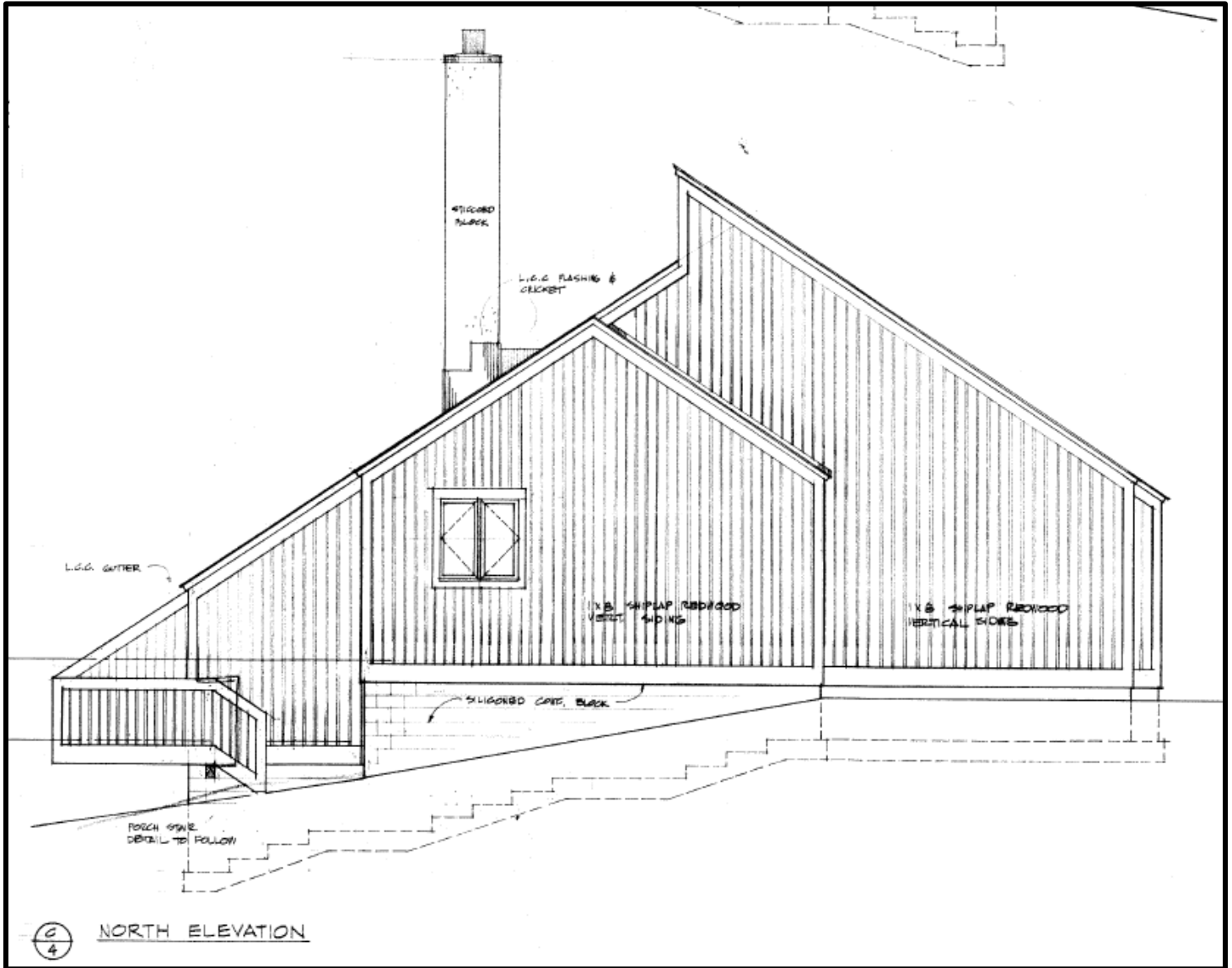


Figure 13: North Elevation, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).

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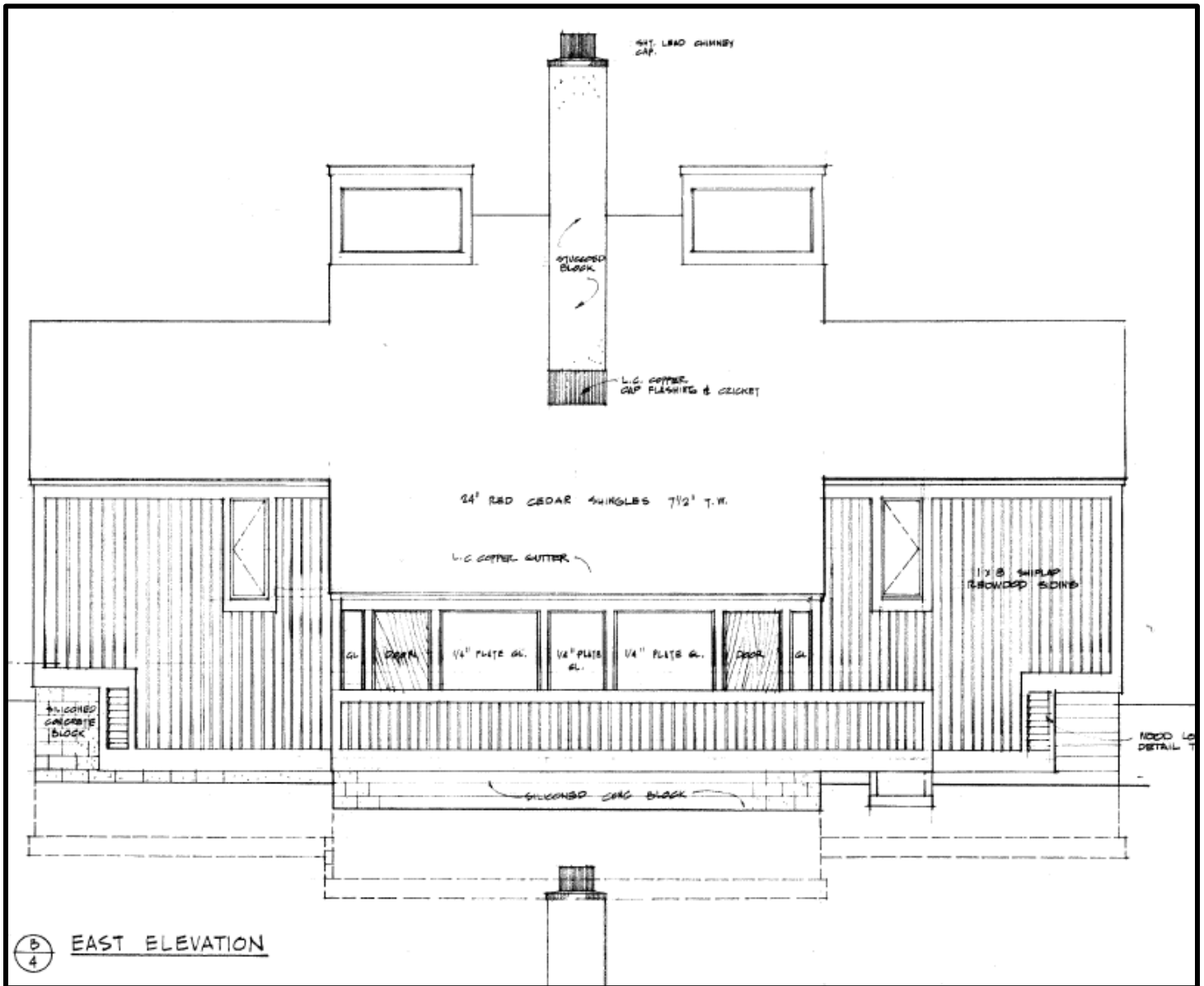


Figure 14: East Elevation, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).

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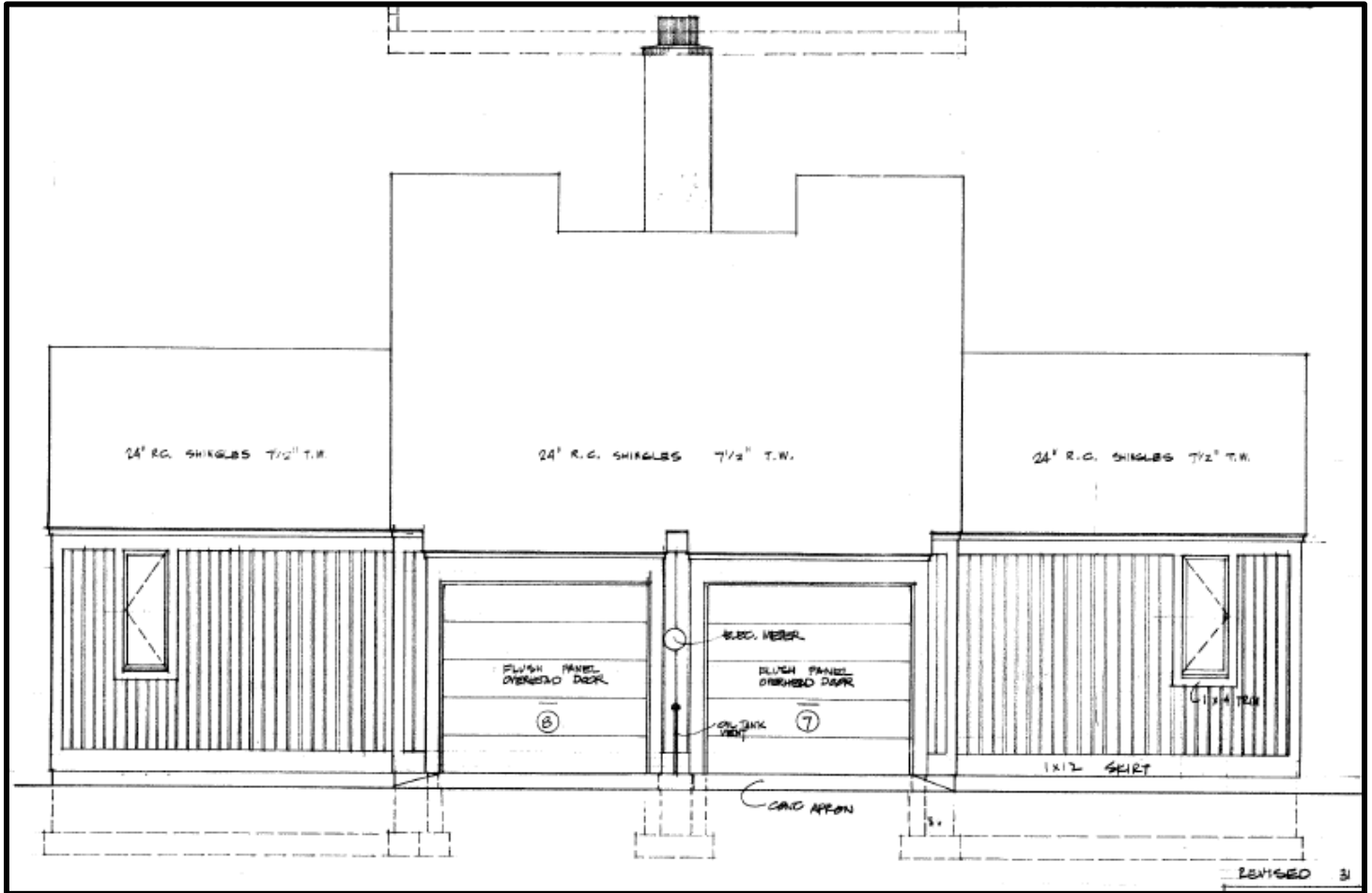


Figure 15: West Elevation, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).

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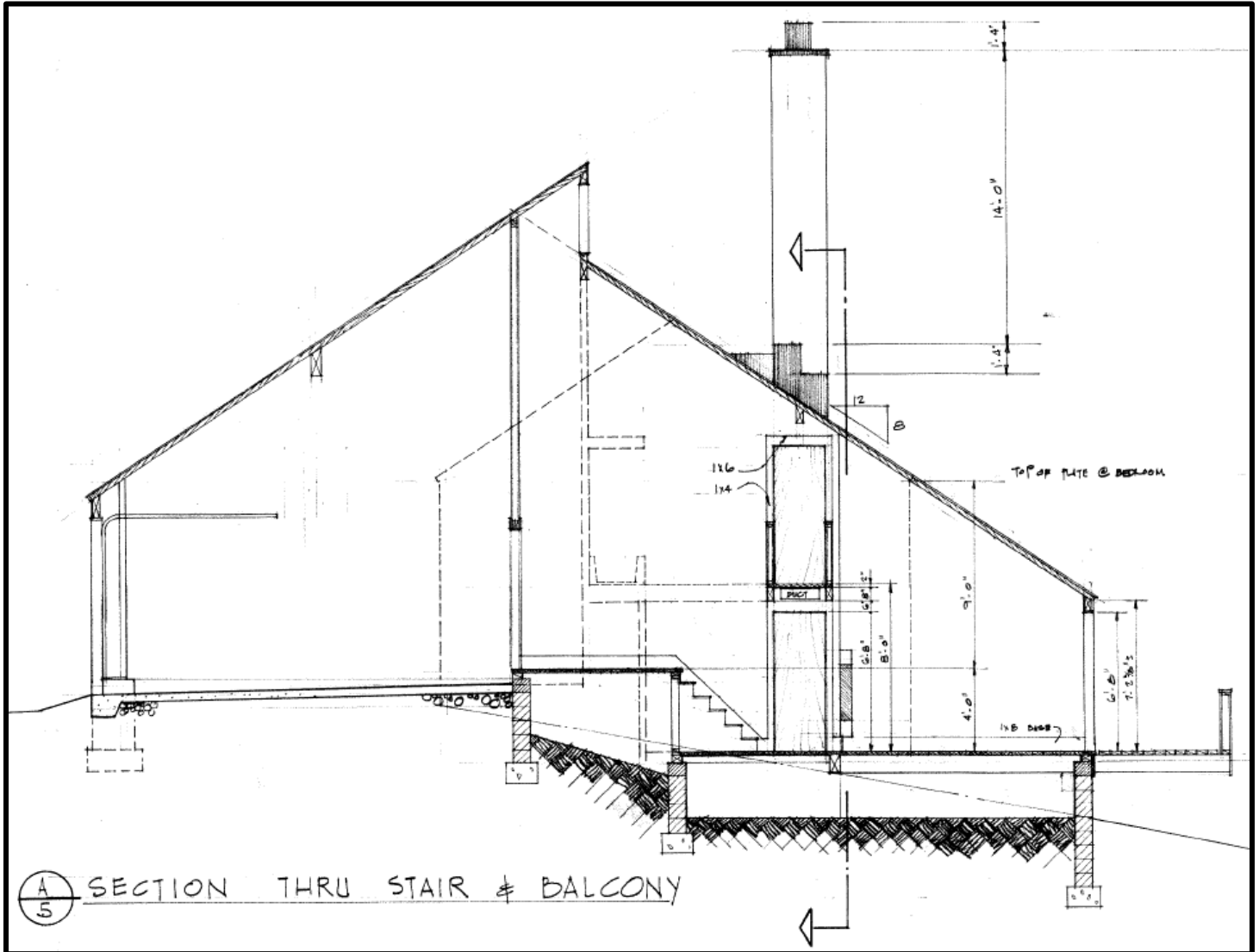


Figure 16: Section through Stair and Balcony, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).

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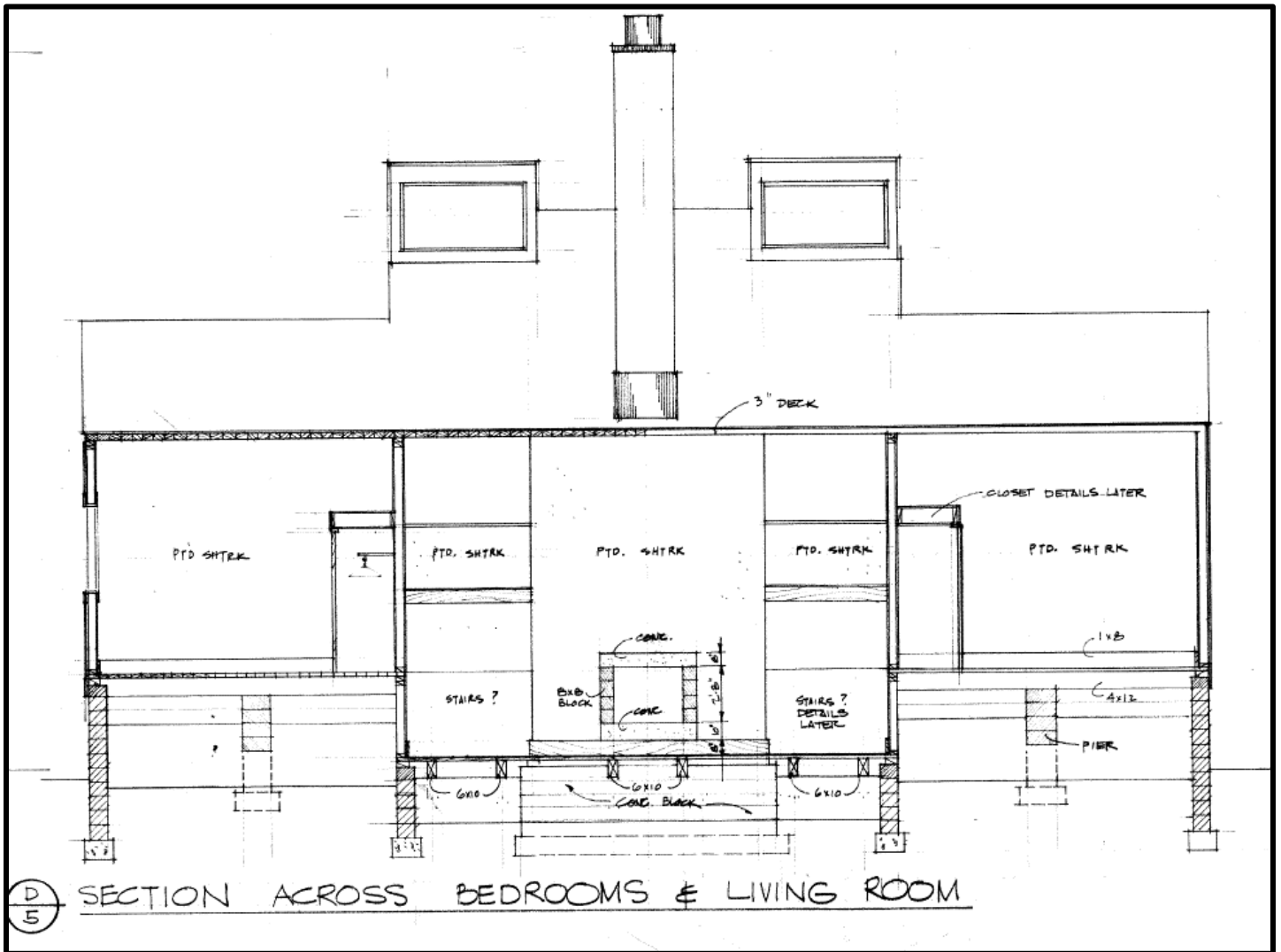


Figure 17: Section Across Bedrooms and Living Room, Guest House (Architect's drawings, 1962).

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Figure 18: House Beautiful (July 1965), 54.

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Figure 6: House Beautiful (July 1965), 56.

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Figure 7: House Beautiful (July 1965), 54.

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Figure 8: Willis N. Mills Jr., 1965. House Beautiful (July 1965), 64, (Photo credit: Eugene Cook)

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Figure 14: Family photograph of unidentified man, James Case III, Willis Mills Jr., and Everett Case, late 1980s. (Courtesy of Peter Gill Case)































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 7/18/2019      Date of Pending List: 8/9/2019      Date of 16th Day: 8/26/2019      Date of 45th Day: 9/3/2019      Date of Weekly List: 9/6/2019

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      9/3/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary  
Comments:

Recommendation/  
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

**ANDREW M. CUOMO**  
Governor

**ERIK KULLESEID**  
Acting Commissioner



14 July 2019

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following three nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

James Baldwin Residence, New York New York County  
James H. Case III and Laura Rockefeller Case House, Van Hornesville, Herkimer County  
Innisfree, Millbrook, Dutchess County

The James Baldwin House nomination was prepared by the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project team as part of New York's Underrepresented Properties Grant for LGBT properties in New York City. As part of our reporting requirements for this grant, a slightly earlier version of the nomination was submitted to NPS and reviewed by Jim Gabbert of your office. Jim provided positive comments on this draft, which was subsequently revised and presented to the State Review Board.

The New York SHPO would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Barbara Wyatt of your office, who provided substantial advice and guidance to the consultant who prepared the nomination for Innisfree, an important example of modern landscape design. Barbara helped the consultant to conceptualize and organize the draft and provided instructions on counting landscape features.

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office