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MARK

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AUGUST . SEPTEMBER 10

— ANOTHER ARCHITECTURE —

PRESTON SCOTT COHEN CAMBRIDGE - AKIRA HIRATA TOKYO - EISENMAN ARCHITECTS SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA - MICHAEL MALTZAN LOS ANGELES - OREN SAFDIE SANTA MONICA - NEUTELINGS RIEDIJK ARCHITECTS ANTWERP - POALO SOLERI ARCOSANTI - ON DESIGN YOKOHAMA YUUSUKE KARASAWA CHIBA - WORLD EXPO SHANGHAI - LETTER FROM MAPUTO - MICHAEL SORKIN NEW YORK - DANIEL RYBAKKEN GOTHENBURG

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'I am not interested in solving anything'

— Michael Maltzan —

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CONNECTED

MICHAEL MALTZAN DESIGNED A
HEPTAGONAL HOUSE, INSPIRED BY
A DISSECTION PUZZLE.

Text **Shonquis Moreno** / Photos **Iwan Baan**



ALTHOUGH THE EXTERIOR IS INTROVERTED,
THE INTERIOR PROVIDES PLENTY OF VIEWS.



Architect Michael Maltzan grew up in Levittown, New York, but he's come a long way since then. Levittown was an experiment in low-cost, mass-produced housing that became the post-war model on which many cookie-cutter suburban communities were based. Having established his practice in Los Angeles in 1995, however, Maltzan has not been using repetition and pattern to conform to convention. He has been using them to break from convention instead.

Perhaps understandably then, Maltzan, a one-time Gehry staffer, has interspersed the design of low-cost, socially conscious projects for the homeless and the impoverished among the lush Hollywood mansions and museum commissions with which he's made his name. Recently, he has also been pushing structural innovation in order to address function in radically different ways: the Carver Apartments are a 20-sided, nautilus shell-shaped home for the homeless (see *Mark* #25, pp. 54-55); and the Star Apartments, still in the design phase, are a kaleidoscopic series of irregular boxes. These projects share a centrifugal quality, resembling a spinning gear, a coiling cluster of polygons, boxes that seem to dilate and contract.

The residence for artists Lari Pittman and Roy Dowell is a heptagon wedged 24 km north of Los Angeles among foothills, forest and a wilderness of suburban sprawl. The 2.4-hectare site was planned as a subdivision of houses to be designed by Richard Neutra, but after three

OWING TO THE EXTREME TRANSPARENCY OF THE HOUSE, ALL ACTIVITIES ARE SENSED AND SHARED THROUGHOUT THE INTERIOR.

‘I WANTED PEOPLE MOVING AROUND THE HOUSE TO FEEL LIKE IT WAS SPINNING’

– Michael Maltzan –

circular, level landings were carved out of the hillside, only one house was built, for the Serulnics, in 1952.

Although the new structure makes no overt references to the Neutra house, it provides counterpoint to its transparency. With the advent of technologies and media like Facebook, Twitter and the smart phone, which enable us to stay constantly connected, we live increasingly public lives. As artists who exhibit internationally, Pittman and Dowell are particularly exposed. Maltzan made a house that reverses Neutra's scheme, hiding its transparency on the interior. If windows are architectural eyes, and eyes are the windows of the soul, this house is gazing intently inward. It is a reversal inspired in part by ‘a beautiful metaphor for what we were trying to do’, a dissection puzzle, the goal of which is to take a Platonic form and, using geometric principles, slice it up and reassemble it to form an even-sided figure.

Maltzan, however, ended up with a seven-sided figure. Because the road spirals up and around the house as it climbs, the architect wanted the new structure to be experienced in the round as well. The walls of an even-sided figure are conspicuously parallel and, says Maltzan, ‘that has the effect of arresting the house. I wanted the house to feel like it was shifting or spinning as you move around it. An odd-sided figure means that you are always chasing the form.’ »



The placement of windows also helps to invert the façade: inside, skylights and glazed walls abound, while the exterior features few openings. Those that do exist are abstracted; they strategically isolate and frame views onto equally abstracted elements of the landscape: over the valley to a ridge line, through an oval portal into the courtyard. 'They decontextualize the context at the same time as they locate you in it,' Maltzan says.

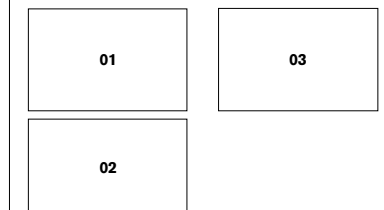
The effect is to foster unconventional contextual relationships and, thereby, experiences. Today, we navigate multiple (mental) spaces at the same time, often confusing public and private. It's these unmediated, simultaneous experiences that are expressed in Pittman-Dowell's glassy interiors. It's possible to look through the bedroom, through the central courtyard and through the living room to the mountains beyond. Inside, opaque and (predominantly) transparent walls shear diagonally and irregularly through the heptagon, partitioning it not into rooms but into a series of volumes. These give the impression that, wherever they may take place, all activities in the house are sensed and shared (if not always seen) throughout. Even solid walls feel provocative: what's going on in the bathroom, for instance, is palpably just a thin line away from what's going on in the entry and living room. In some sense then, while sheltering its inhabitants from the world's extreme connectedness, the house re-enacts this condition within.

For this very reason, although the house seems to be about form and geometry, it is actually about the qualities of the inhabitable space, the sensation of the voids instead of the frame. To a great extent, the house is an urban experiment as much as a residential one, a microcosm of much larger social dynamics. To Maltzan's delight, his clients understood that houses, while they express lifestyle, are, like architecture, first and foremost about ideas. In fact, the couple initially asked Maltzan to eliminate doors entirely. He created a front door and two others: one for the storage room and one for the pantry water closet, to ensure the privacy of guests. But the question of doors was actually a questioning of function: houses are bound by conventions – a kitchen has to be a kitchen and a living room a living room – but such values can be subverted and manipulated. True, there's still a bed in the bedroom and a bath in the bathroom, but the expectations assigned to some of Pittman-Dowell's spaces are reconsidered here: on entering the house, for example, visitors immediately face the bathroom. The house is more ecumenical in its programmatic functions: instead of designing an unfolding and hierarchical narrative of rooms, Maltzan gave preference – and presence – to the space as a whole.

Maltzan calls the roof, visible from the Serulnic residence above, the primary façade of the new structure. It is the roof that gives the clearest view to, and indication of, the intentions

of the house, the possibility of interrelationships. Of course, the house offers no solutions to the problem of adapting to an increasingly over-connected world, nor does it attempt to do so. Instead, it is a meditation on the implications of contemporary life. 'I wouldn't be interested in solving anything,' says Maltzan. 'It's more important to speculate on a condition and create connections to it.' «

<http://mmaltzan.com>



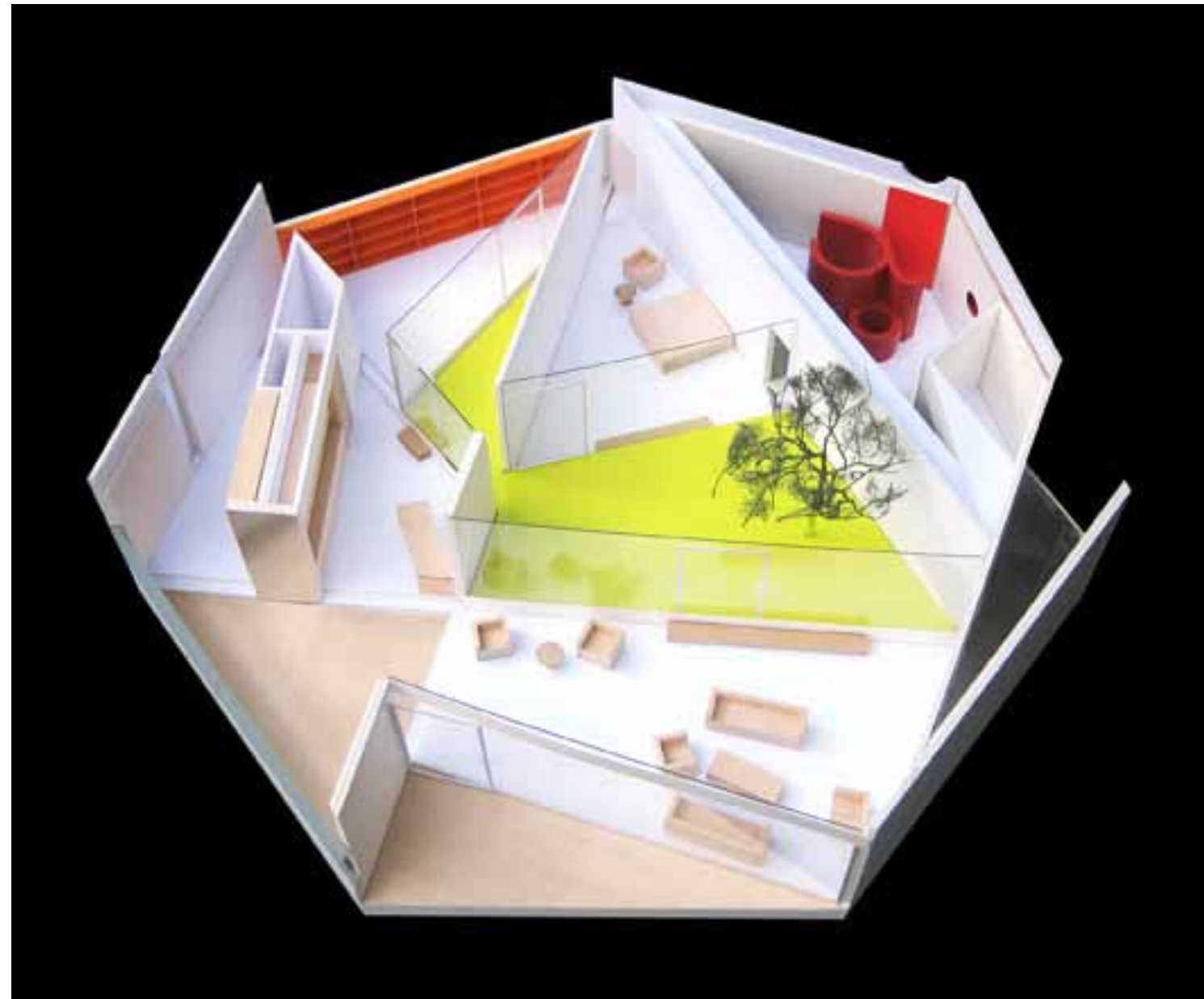
01 ON ENTERING THE HOUSE, VISITORS FACE THE BATHROOM HEAD ON – A RESULT OF THE DECISION TO MINIMIZE THE AMOUNT OF DOORS.

02 RENDERING OF THE 'EXPLODED PUZZLE'.

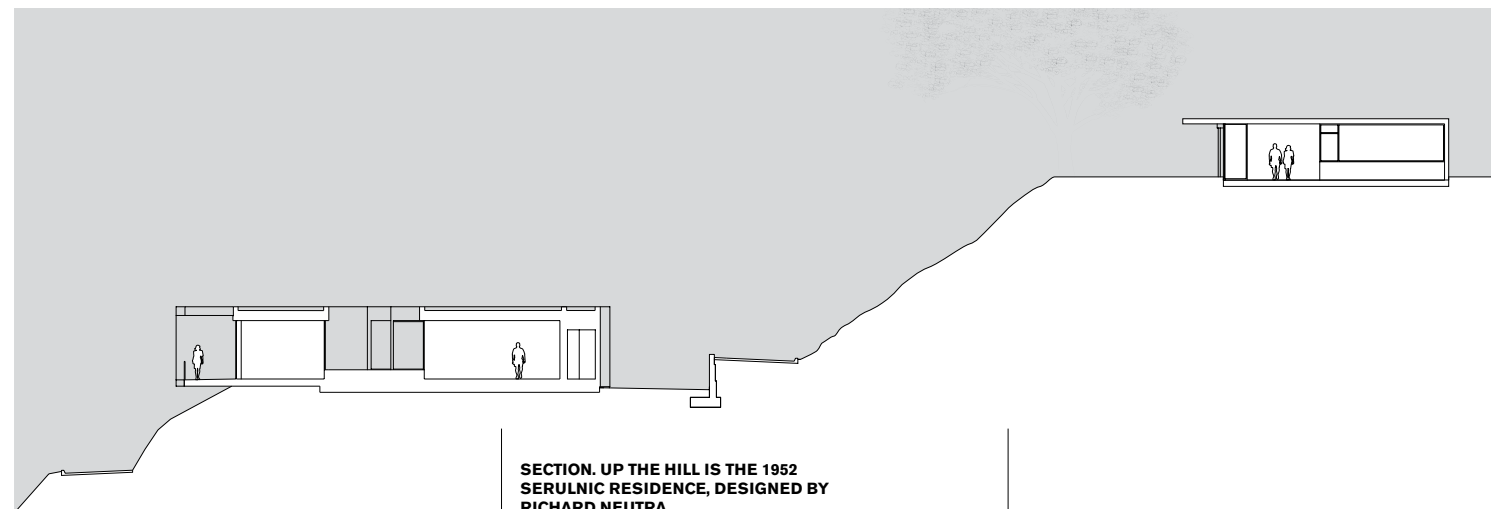
03 AN IRREGULARLY SHAPED VOID CREATES AN OUTDOOR ROOM AT THE CENTRE OF THE HOUSE.



INSPIRED BY GEOMETRIC ARRANGEMENTS OF INTERLOCKING POLYGONS, THE NEW RESIDENCE TAKES THE FORM OF A HEPTAGONAL FIGURE WHOSE PURITY IS CONFOUNDED BY A SERIES OF INTERSECTING DIAGONAL SLICES THROUGH SPACE.



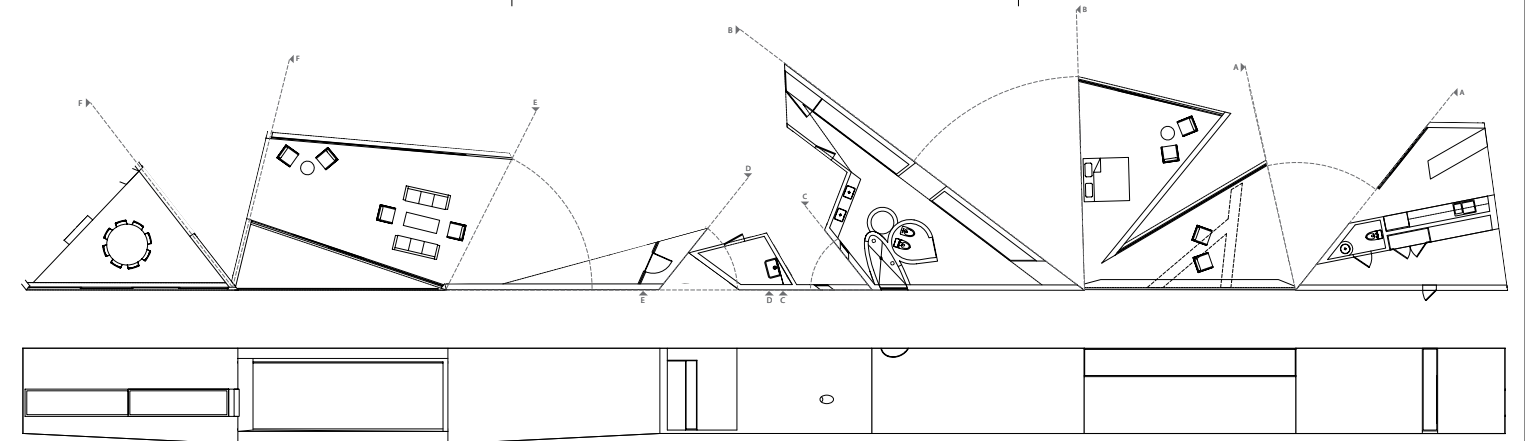
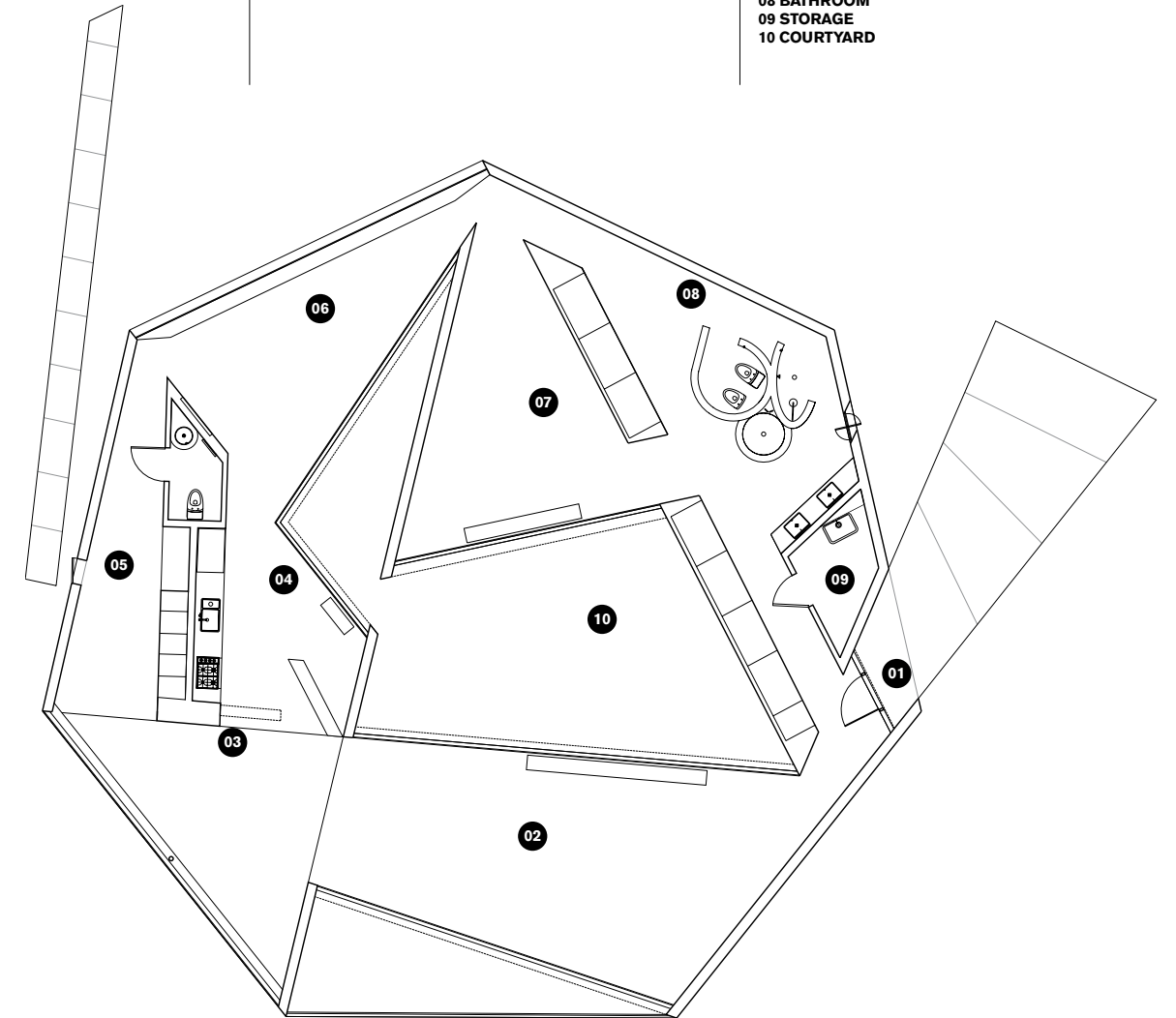
MODEL.
MODEL PHOTO AND DRAWINGS MICHAEL
MALTZAN ARCHITECTURE



SECTION. UP THE HILL IS THE 1952
SERULNIC RESIDENCE, DESIGNED BY
RICHARD NEUTRA.

PLAN.

- 01 ENTRANCE
- 02 LIVING ROOM
- 03 DINING ROOM
- 04 KITCHEN
- 05 PANTRY
- 06 LIBRARY
- 07 BEDROOM
- 08 BATHROOM
- 09 STORAGE
- 10 COURTYARD



UNFOLDED PLAN AND ELEVATION.