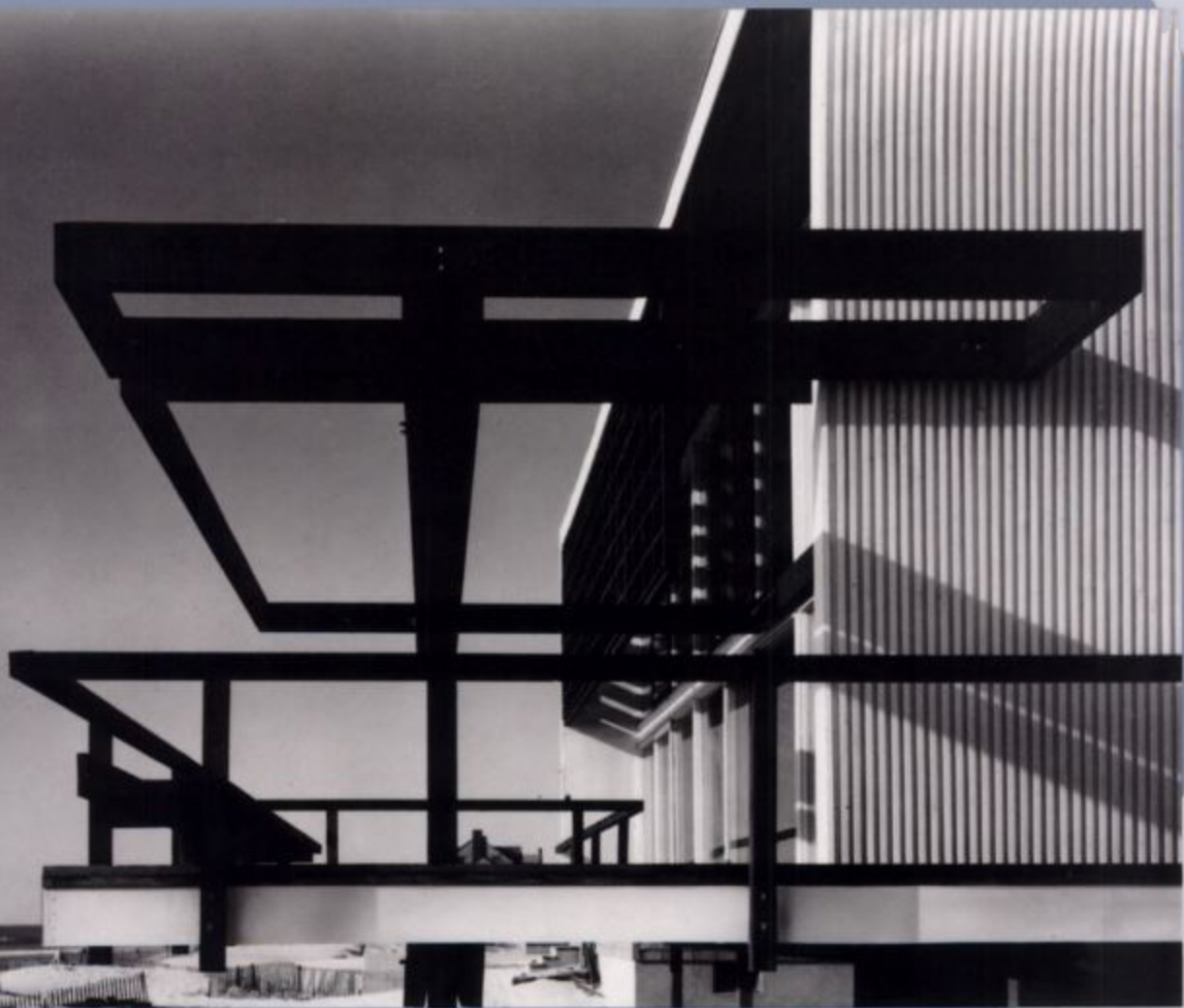


Architecture Without Rules

The Houses of Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard



David Masello

Schwartz House ("Green Farms")

Westport, Connecticut, 1984
Approximately 3,400 square feet
Herbert Beckhard, Architect/Robert Kupiec, Associate



The rear facade or principal view, the south elevation faces onto Long Island Sound. A pure glass corner (upper right) is formed in the master bedroom.
photo: Andrew Appell
1984

Though it is a near-blasphemous term in Modern architecture, this house follows a split-level plan. It made sense for Beckhard to configure the house this way, for by raising a significant section of it up in the air, he was able to ensure privacy from neighboring houses on the narrow site and to maximize views of Long Island Sound, to which the house has direct access. Privacy between guest quarters and the master bedroom suite was easily accomplished with level changes. In addition, it made sense to take advantage of the gentle slopes that characterized the three-acre site and allow the house to follow the terrain rather than try to conquer it.

This house, so named for a nearby academy and the road on which it is situated, is built on an old existing foundation. Fire had destroyed a previous large manor house and all that remained on the site was burned lumber and a foundation embedded in the ground. While that extant foundation determined the general configuration of the house, Beckhard did not feel constrained by it. An old servants' quarters building with a three-car garage remains some distance away at the front of the site. In devising the overall site plan of the house, Beckhard planted a thick grove of trees to hide that building, a rather unattractive structure that differs

wholly in style and spirit from the house. Parking remains quite remote from the house, a clear example of Beckhard and Breuer's tendency to have both owners and visitors walk to a house rather than drive right up to it.

As a result of the hilly terrain, similar to that on which the Stillman II house is sited, the front of the house rests on a base of rough stone, while the rear is at grade. Also, like the Stillman house, the main entrance is reached through a stone-enclosed stairway in which one confronts the vigorously textured stone. The rest of the house is finished in an off-white rough textured stucco, some of which carries to the interior.

An unusual and prominent feature of the house is its two porches, one that acts as an entrance plaza, and the other as an outdoor seating area and extension of the master bedroom. Both are exuberant—in shape, scale, and impact—and both are marked by window-like openings. The open-air porches serve to capture and frame outdoor space; the notion is both philosophical and literal. Beckhard has been a longtime admirer (and friend) of the late architect Louis Kahn, and he cites Kahn's notions of creating "borrowed spaces" with "borrowed light" as a personal goal in his more recent buildings. Whether or not that was a conscious decision here, the porches do accomplish all that. Space and light get trapped in a limited area; that area