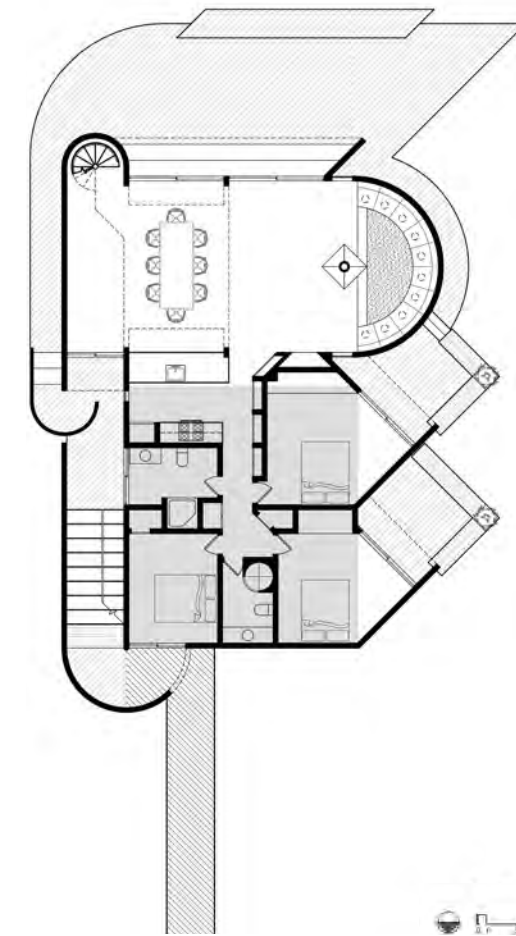




FORM FOLLOWS FOREPLAY

Chapter Seven

We have to be ready to accept massive, ever quickening change. I hope I can keep up with it, that's what I hope.
—Horace Gifford



PAGES 152-53:
**Roeder House, Fire
 Island Pines, NY,
 1969, view of the
 maxicouch from the
 make-out loft**

OPPOSITE:
**Roeder House, fur-
 lined make-out loft**

ABOVE:
**Stuart Roeder in his
 Manhattan apartment,
 1967**

RIGHT:
**Roeder House, floor
 plan**

Nine months before the Stonewall Rebellion of June 1969, the police raids on the Meat Rack cruising zone ceased when a newly emboldened population fought back. For Fire Island, the Summer of Love had finally arrived. But a fight that was nominally over sex highlighted a broader emotional and political awakening. Suddenly it was okay, even chic, to be gay, while just a few years earlier self-loathing and cultural ostracism had been the norm. Everything was happening so fast. “We have to be ready to accept massive, ever quickening change,” Gifford said. “I hope we can keep up with it. I hope I can keep up with it, that’s what I hope.”⁹⁶ This cascade of changes coincided with the mainstreaming of marijuana, acid, and a shower of colored pills, unleashing sensations that couldn’t help but influence architecture. Light broke into kaleidoscopic fragments. Space melted. Under the influence, people no longer sat, they lounged. In 1970, an enterprising bar owner in Cherry Grove figured out how to make his lights flicker to the beat of the music, a device instantly copied by John Whyte in the Pines.⁹⁷ It was the age of disco, and its erotic undulations enacted on the dance floor what had previously gone on behind closed doors and drawn shades. Expressing one’s sexual orientation was increasingly something one did in public.

No one embodied the new pulse of the Pines more than Stuart Roeder, who never lacked for friends or lovers. The public relations man for Warner Brothers made it his business to know everyone, and he entertained lavishly. Lunch for forty was a common occurrence, studded with famous film directors and fashion’s leading lights. Kenneth (Battelle), the hairdresser who gained first-name fame as a stylist for Jacqueline Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, and Lauren Bacall, made frequent visits from nearby Water Island. Diane von Furstenberg showed off her latest wrap dresses, and Geoffrey Beene would make an appearance whenever he could be lured out of his garden. There was no shortage of party favors. During one well-lubricated fete, roasting birds were briefly reanimated when an exploding oven pelted quail over the astonished crowd. Roeder was the Mad Hatter of the Pines: the writer Felice Picano recalled a dinner in which Roeder set the dining room with giant chairs, dishes, and flatware, reducing guests to childlike proportions.

Roeder’s home was actually built around an existing cottage, but Gifford sheathed this 1950s box in a dynamic diagonal wrap that gyrated toward the Meat Rack. Form followed foreplay in the “make-out loft.”⁹⁸ Lined in sheepskin with reclined edges for bodies in repose, this high place for base desires surveyed the ocean and the psychedelic swirl of the conversation pit below.

Sunlight passed through circular skylights onto a curved wall, creating a trippy light show of ovoid shapes. All bedrooms faced the Meat Rack.

Yet the Roeder residence also possessed quieter virtues, including a dining area intimately scaled by the hovering loft above, superb barrel-vaulted acoustics, a great variety of spaces, and intricate plays of light throughout. For a magazine audience, Gifford primly but not inaccurately described the home's rakish geometries as "view lines that tell you where to look from inside. They turn you away from the town side of the house, toward the sea."⁹⁹ Outside, Gifford extolled how his design choreographed the entry of Roeder's guests. "They don't walk smack up to the front door as they do at so many cottages out here," he said. "Instead, we're turning people, bringing them in, introducing them to the interesting design forms of this house in a very deliberate way."¹⁰⁰

The abstract, sculptural gestures of the Roeder residence and subsequent Gifford designs revealed an affinity with the new Brutalist movement shaped by architects like Paul Rudolph and I. M. Pei. But Gifford skillfully channeled the ponderous concrete forms of Brutalism into light and lyrical wooden structures. Dancing across the sand like divinely inspired driftwood, these houses echoed the fluidity of the cultural revolution that they housed.

BELOW:
**Roeder House
construction**

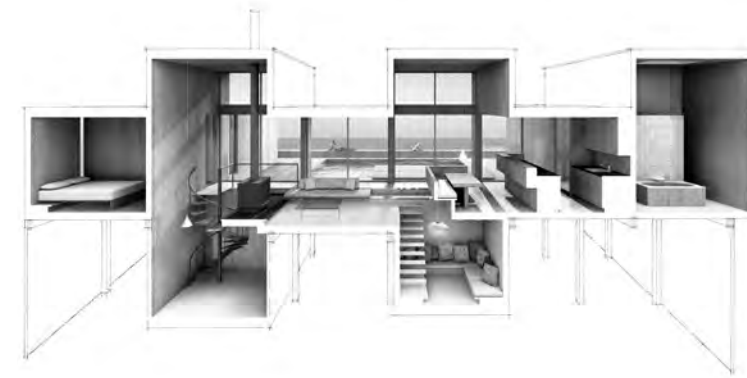
LOWER RIGHT:
**Roeder House,
approach**

LOWER LEFT:
**Men of the Pines,
1977**

OPPOSITE:
Roeder House







PAGE 158:

Roeder House, entry

PAGE 159:

Roeder House, entry and roof-deck access

OPPOSITE:

Lipkins House, Fire Island Pines, NY, 1970, approach

TOP:

Lipkins House, oceanfront exterior

ABOVE:

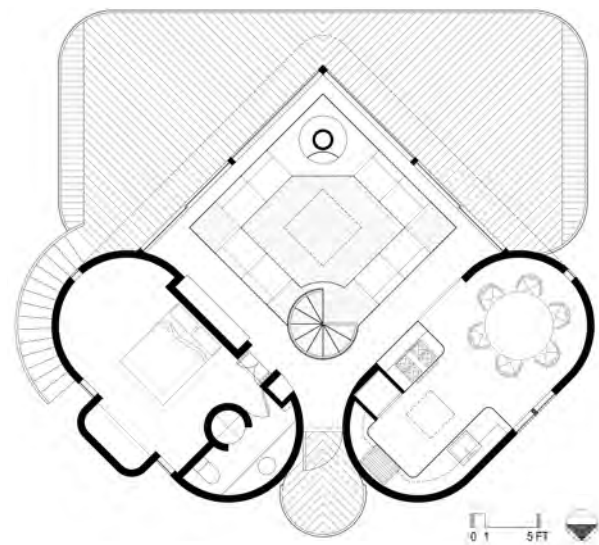
Lipkins House, cross-section perspective

The Lipkins House conjured a discotheque on the dunes with its pulsating roofline and thrusting cantilevers. All was bared, with floor-to-ceiling glass extending across the entire coastal elevation. Control panels operated a futuristic array of blinking, multicolored lights installed by Broadway Maintenance, the clients' street-lighting company. A sunken living area led down to the "cave," a windowless den of electric blue shag-carpeted walls and oversize pillows. Rechristened the "womb" by its owners, it looked like a sex pit but allegedly functioned as its opposite—a solitary and shadowy retreat from the voyeuristic spaces above.¹⁰¹

Six Gifford homes were built in the Fire Island hamlet of Seaview, a historically Jewish enclave. Robert and Gladys Rosenthal were a young, progressive couple—he a doctor, she a genetic researcher—with limited funds but open minds. Gladys had only one requirement: "I didn't want an old house, with all its problems."¹⁰² They had long admired Gifford's nearby Rubin residence, built in 1968 for the founder of Workbench Furniture. Flush with success and eager to head off conflict-laden commissions, Gifford effectively interviewed the Rosenthals, volunteering more than most architects would dare. "You should know two things about me," he told them. "I'm gay, and I'm manic-depressive."¹⁰³ He then demanded complete design control, down to the color of the sofa cushions.

The Rosenthals were unfazed by his revelations and demands but struck by Gifford's appearance; at age forty, he was still turning heads. He rewarded their trust with a sleek composition nestled between two dunes. The Rosenthal House echoed the topography, with two tall elliptical spaces canted between a diamond-shaped, sunken living area with walls of glass. It was an exceptionally well-crafted home built by Gifford's favorite contractor, Joseph Chasas. The exposed ceiling framing formed a dazzling constellation unto itself. Cabinetry was curved with tiny pie-shaped wedges. Sliding walls transformed two triangular bedrooms for the Rosenthals' young sons into a spacious playroom. A brilliant orange fireplace punctuated the living room, and Gifford's telltale assortment of decontextualized utilitarian objects—including a sinuous wooden mold used to create toilet drains—adorned the walls.





PAGES 162–63:

Lipkins House

OPPOSITE, UPPER LEFT:

Rosenthal House, Seaview, NY, 1972, approach

OPPOSITE, LOWER RIGHT:

Rosenthal House, construction detail

OPPOSITE, LOWER LEFT:

Rosenthal House, upper-level floor plan

ABOVE:

Rosenthal House

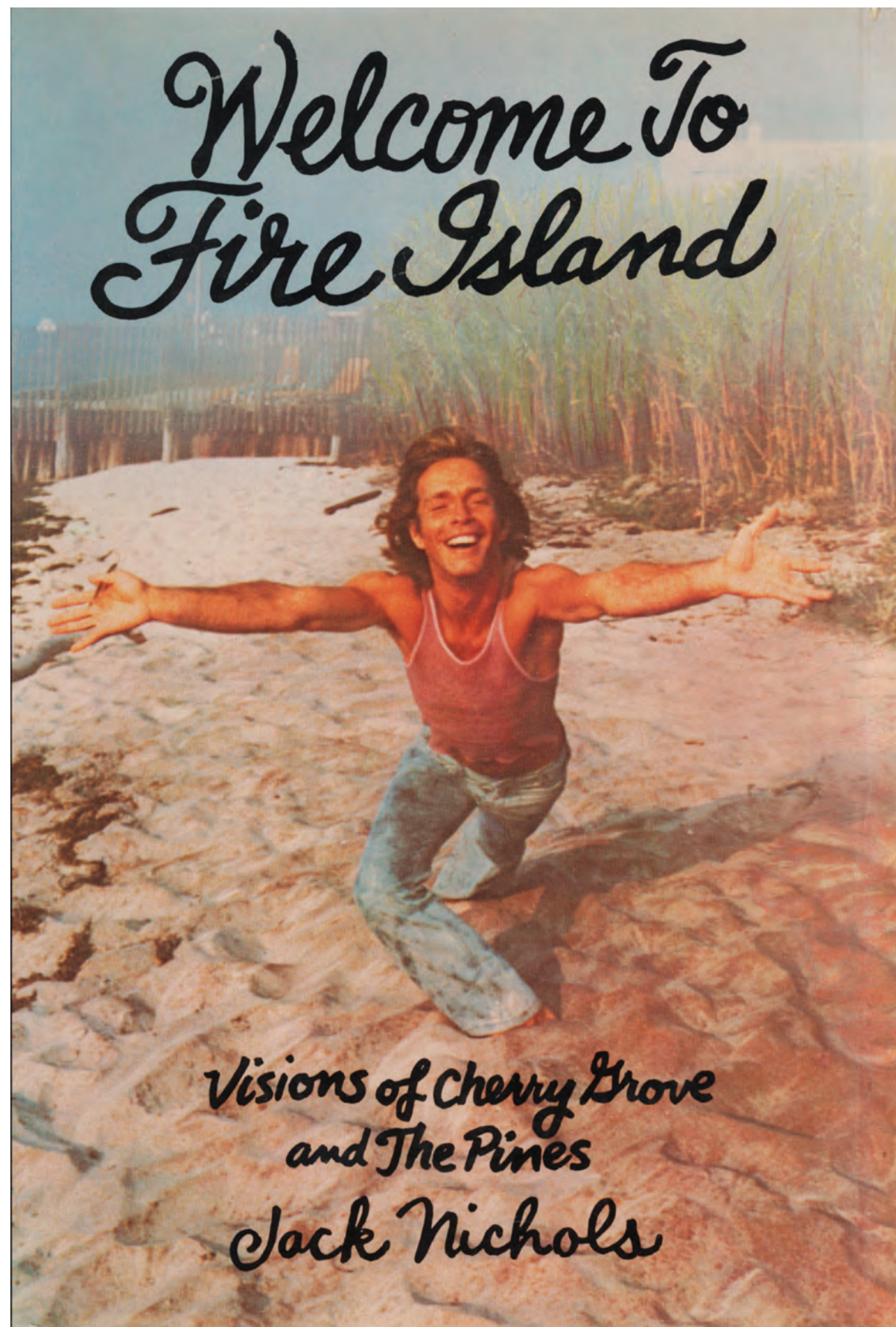
PAGES 166–167:

Rosenthal House, living room

Despite his divalike performance in securing the Rosenthal commission, Gifford's administration of the project was anything but theatrical. "He not only had a sense of design and function, but he was also very businesslike,"¹⁰⁴ Gladys Rosenthal recalled. She was impressed by the architect's frequent on-site inspections and meticulous invoices. Forty years on, the home and the Rosenthals have weathered remarkably well. "We never had to replace anything. The original carpet is still here!"¹⁰⁵

Fire Island's reputation as a testing ground for innovative architecture had been overshadowed by louder whispers about its libertine ways even before the sixties were in full swing. Sexual





OPPOSITE:
Welcome to Fire Island: Visions of Cherry Grove and the Pines, by Jack Nichols, 1976

RIGHT:
Men of the Pines, ca. 1973



liberation and its discontents were hardly unique to the Pines, of course. John Updike's suburban Pennsylvania characters lamented where "all this fucking" was taking American culture in 1971.¹⁰⁶ But an added measure of scorn or titillation, depending on the commentator, was reserved for Fire Island. Summarizing thirteen summers spent in various communities there, Albert Goldman penned his infamous account for *New York* magazine in 1972, "I Have Seen the Future, and it is Fire Island."

No, what I have seen again and again is your nice, mature, well-educated married couple entertaining other couples every weekend and making jokes about the "swinging singles" all around them. Then one weekend, after the beach and the Bloody Marys and the candlelit supper, the conversation turns to themes like wife-swapping and orgies, and somebody says: "The only things you regret are those you don't do." After that, it's mixed doubles for the rest of the night, the weekend, or the summer...Orgy is where it's all headed, and orgy is a grand old tradition on Fire Island.¹⁰⁷

And that was only the straight communities! Sexual adventurism at a Roman scale could be found in the Pines and Cherry Grove. Their shared Meat Rack was the mecca toward which all erections faced. Even the cultural divide between the two reached a humorous detente in 1976. Thom "Panzi" Hansen, a Cherry Grove drag queen who was refused service at one of John Whyte's bars in the Pines, organized a small flotilla of friends for a drag "invasion" of the Pines by boat. Donning

the most outrageous costumes they could muster, Panzi and his entourage grandly disembarked and performed a sit-in at the community's most popular bar. The spectacle inspired hilarity rather than hostility and became an annual event, fittingly held on Independence Day. The Invasion soon required the biggest ferryboat in service, which heaved under the weight of enormous high heels and entangled wigs. It remains the largest seasonal activity on Fire Island, drawing revelers of every orientation and proclivity.

A number of visual artists and writers emerged to come to grips with the new freedom. The Polaroid SX-70, the first easy-to-use instant camera, was released in 1972, to the annoyance of censorious film processors, and the camera played a central role in the sexual diary of a decade. Shapely men, lounging seductively astride the muscular architecture and glimmering pools of the Pines, graced artist Tom Bianchi's Polaroids. His subjects' nonchalance proved more shocking than the anatomy on display. Beyond their sensuality, the photos also captured the intense camaraderie of an upwardly mobile society free of the burdens of parenthood: Fire Island offered the promise of an indefinite extension of adolescence.

The literary response was more ambivalent. Jack Nichols's *Welcome to Fire Island: Visions of Cherry Grove and The Pines*, dedicated to his murdered lover, reserved its greatest appreciation for this utopia's "one ineffable grace: a virtual absence of physical violence, unless it is simulated or mutually agreed upon, as among the sado-masochists."¹⁰⁸ In perhaps the most celebrated gay coming-of-age novel, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* contained an ode to the pleasures and perils of this brave new world. It follows the exploits of two friends who hunt





PAGES 170–71:
**The annual Invasion
of the Pines by Cherry
Grove drag queens**

OPPOSITE:
**Tom Bianchi, Untitled,
SX-70 Polaroid, 1970s**

ABOVE:
**Men of the Pines,
1978**



for love but settle for sex in Fire Island Pines, “a national game preserve annually replenished by men who each summer arrived from every state in the Union via an Underground Railroad of a most peculiar sort...because nowhere else on earth was natural and human beauty fused; and because nowhere else on earth could you dance in quite the same atmosphere.”¹⁰⁹ The novel is punctuated by hilarious scenes of debauchery yet permeated by a deep sense of unease. How much stimulation could the human psyche and the human body handle? One of the two protagonists dies of a drug overdose, and the other disappears mysteriously after delivering a jaded caution to a newcomer: “Never forget that all these people are primarily a visual people. They are designers, window dressers, models, photographers, graphic artists...and their sins, as Saint Augustine said, are sins of the eye...do not expect nourishment for anything but your eye—and you will handle it all beautifully.”¹¹⁰ *Faggots*, a 1978 novel by Larry Kramer, issued a finger-wagging takedown of the decadence to be found along the Manhattan-Fire Island axis. Kramer’s hero, Fred Melish, confronts his ex-lover, who is en route to a sadomasochistic orgy with a “Nazi executioner” theme in the Meat Rack:

...why do faggots have to fuck so fucking much?!...all we do is live in our Ghetto and dance and drug and fuck...I’m tired of being a New York City-Fire Island faggot, I’m tired of using my body as a faceless thing to lure another faceless thing, I want to love a Person!...a Person who loves me, we shouldn’t have to be faithful, we should want to be faithful!¹¹¹

Paradoxically, Horace Gifford grew shy just as his architecture embodied the extroversion of a newly liberated minority. He seemed like a neurotic actor who was radiant on the stage but skittish and withdrawn off of it. And the arenas of design and seduction were the two stages upon which Gifford could form connections to the outside world. He became a rare sight at social gatherings. Most of his friendships came about as a result of his work as an architect. Sex was another matter. He liked it often, and he liked it in public. To shed his clothes was to shed the inhibitions that closed him down socially. He met his new partner Robert Greenfield at an infamous gay bathhouse in 1972.¹¹² Gifford’s robust endowment was a topic that hovered near the surface with gay men who knew him. Greenfield joked that he was going to have his boyfriend’s penis pickled so that it could be admired in posterity.¹¹³ More than one friend described Gifford as a

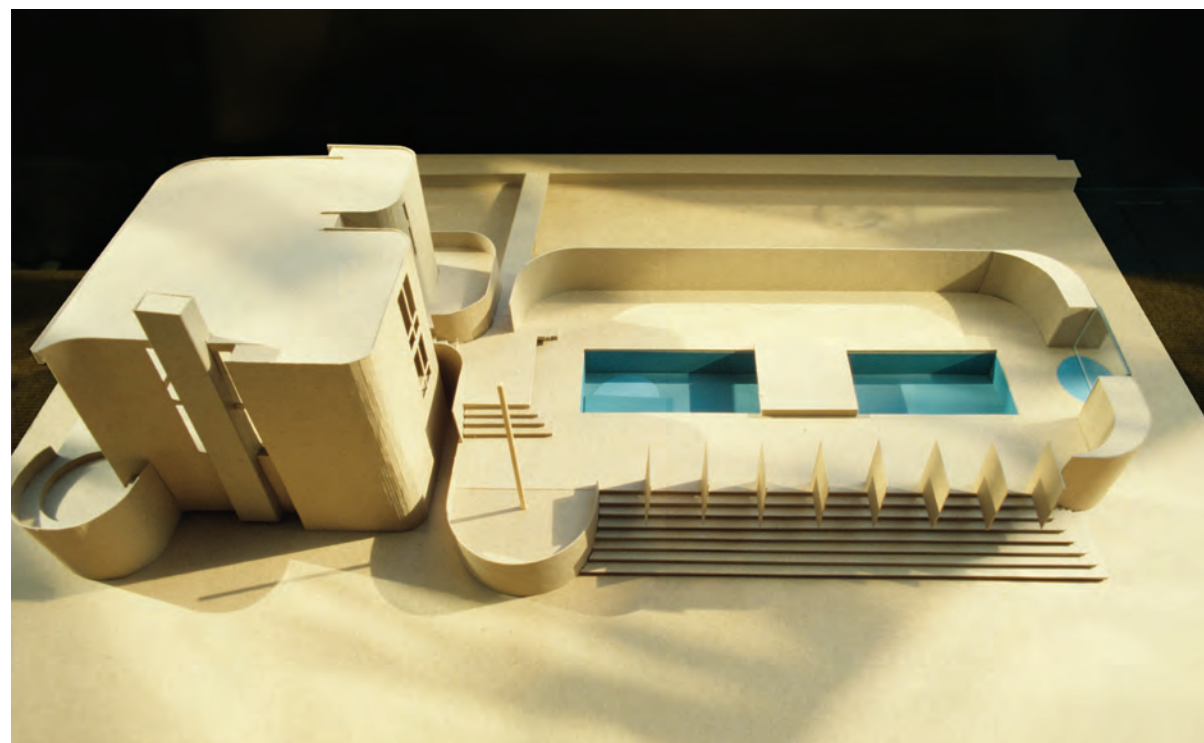


sex addict. Yet heterosexual friends and clients consistently noted his shyness. It is rather fitting that the two realms in which he excelled would coalesce into a shapely architecture of seduction.

The Graham residence was commissioned by a Pines resident who came out of the closet late in life but found his ideal beachfront property across the Great South Bay. His son Peter Graham, an environmentalist who would go on to found the eco-product empire Seventh Generation, persuaded his father to hire Gifford after an inspiring tour of his work in the Pines. Graham's expansive site, on an inlet in Eastport, New York, allowed for an elongated footprint, and Gifford elevated the house to capture views that resided above a stand of cattails. A winding approach to the home concluded with a circular drive spun around a magnificent tree. Like sheared continental plates, two semicircular decks contained a glass cube that bridged between solid shards at each end. A swimming pool, set within a circular plinth, powerfully restated the geometries of the main house.

The Sloan residence was the consummate example of Gifford's mature period. Norton and Marlo Sloan—one of many heterosexual couples who embraced the freewheeling culture of the Pines—commissioned a luxurious home whose smooth volumes appeared to have washed up on their site. Although any physical resemblance to Louis Kahn's work had receded, it still bore his "order of the castle," in which complex ancillary rooms surround a rectangular central space and endow the facade with a rippled presence.¹⁴ Curved spaces extended, cloverlike, from a lofty living room animated by the painterly slash of a diagonal stairway. Mirrors created slivers of light above the fireplace. Positioned opposite full-height expanses of glass, a mirrored wall brought the ocean view to both sides of the space. A leather ottoman bridged the conversation pit. Outside, a





PAGE 174:
**Graham House,
Eastport, NY, 1978**

PAGE 175:
**Graham House,
Gifford model**

ABOVE:
**Sloan House, Fire
Island Pines, NY,
1972, view from ocean
side**

LEFT:
**Sloan House, Gifford
model of 1980 addition
for Calvin Klein**

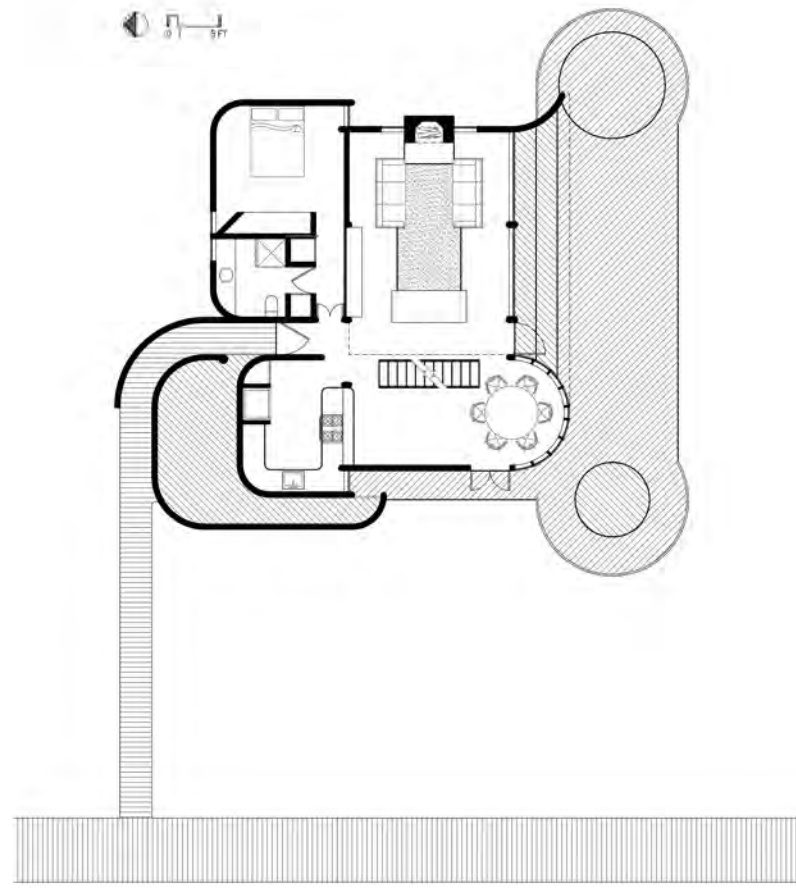
OPPOSITE:
**Sloan House with
ramp to beach**



lazy-Susan lounge rotated to catch the best rays for the sun-worshipping Marlo Sloan. Upstairs, a DeStijl-like composition of bunk beds housed the Sloans' four young children.

The hard-living Sloans divorced a few years after the house was built, and Calvin Klein became its new owner in 1977. At the height of his "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins" success, Klein acquired the lot to the rear of the home and hired Gifford to design a pool, a gym, a "pool boy's" quarters, and a garden. Gifford and his intern Ronald Bentley ventured to Fire Island by seaplane with Klein in March of 1980, braving the frigid waters to survey the property. Gifford lined the pool in black, with a mirror at one end to extend its apparent length. Doors to the east of the pool pivoted to expose a grand stair that led down to a grove of mature trees, helicoptered in for instant effect.

Calvin Klein's daughter Marci had been kidnapped in 1978, and he was obsessed with security and privacy. Tall fences outfitted with security systems transformed the former Sloan residence into a compound rather than a house tucked into the dunes. And celebrities were not the only ones to screen themselves off from prying eyes. An increasing number of private swimming pools required fences. Others residents blocked off gardens filled with non-native, flowering plants to keep out the deer that once roamed with impunity. Such developments began to erode the open, free-flowing qualities that had made the Pines such a public space for private architecture. A certain intimacy was lost, but the Pines entered the 1980s as a renowned resort with an impressive architectural pedigree to match.



ABOVE:
Sloan House, floor plan

LEFT:
Sloan House

OPPOSITE:
Sloan House, living room with ocean view



ABOVE:
Sloan House, living
area

LEFT:
Sloan House, dining
area

OPPOSITE:
ABOVE: Calvin Klein
at Sloan House,
1977; BELOW, RIGHT:
Sloan House, master
bathroom; BELOW,
LEFT: Sloan House,
children's bedroom

