A HOUSE FOUR ALL SEASONS:
A suggested habitation model for Great Barrington

by
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ABSTRACT

Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

A naturally beautiful setting combined with four distinct weather seasons dictates a lifestyle for this small South Berkshire town's residents and visitors alike. This thesis proposes that it is desirable and possible for a dwelling to be unique to an area, and as such, to reflect and embody specific aspects of that area. A dwelling of this type could easily become the cornerstone of a recognizable new neighborhood, one which Great Barrington is in dire need of.

In this thesis I have isolated the topography, climate, and mode of life which are specific to the Berkshire area and especially to Great Barrington. These extracted qualities specific to Great Barrington are used to generate a design for a single family house in this South Berkshire town. Through this residential model of the single family house it is suggested that one's physical habitation is able to both directly and indirectly reflect and relate to the ever changing seasons and weather. It is this ability of the single family house to form and foster relationships with its environment which makes Great Barrington a special place to be in; a place all of its own.

Thesis Supervisor: William Hubbard
Title: Assistant Professor of Architecture.
Thank You:

To Bill Hubbard. For your constant, consistent, and quality design criticisms. For your enthusiasm. For your friendship.

To Maurice Smith. For planting the seed of a design philosophy which (apparent or not) grows within me.

To my family. Your love, guidance, and support has been unending.

To my comrades in 10-482. For your support, friendship and encouragement.

To Ellen. For your patience, help, intelligence, and love. Needless to say, M.I.T. (you remember, M.I.T., P.H...) would never have happened if not for you, my best friend.

This document is dedicated in loving memory to Grandpa. You serve as a daily inspiration to me.
... But the scene
Is lovely round; a beautiful river there
Wanders amid the fresh and fertile meads,
The paradise he made unto himself,
Mining the soil for ages. On each side
The fields swell upward to the hills; beyond,
Above the hills, in the blue distance, rise
The mountain-columns with which earth props heaven

MONUMENT MOUNTAIN (the introductory stanza)¹
William Cullen Bryant

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NOTE
All quotes cited in this document,
with the exception of those by J.B.
Jackson, are by poets and novelists
who have lived in and around the
Great Barrington area. These quotes
are included as an illustrative
sampling of people who have been
affected by the dynamic landscape
and everchanging seasons of the
South Berkshires.
... two underlying assumptions of the entire plan: that Great Barrington's basic resource is beauty and that its most important land use is residential.

TOWN PLAN, Great Barrington, Mass

Great Barrington, Massachusetts, is a small town of 6,850 people. Situated in the southwestern corner of the Commonwealth, this town is equidistant from both Connecticut and New York State. Its location offers an attractive place for habitation as it is within easy commuting distance to either Boston or New York City. This desirable location serves to influence many people in their residential relocation plans. Location however, is not the only favorable distinction which draws people to the Berkshires: Its naturally beautiful setting, cultural affluence, numerous recreational resources, and a distinctively peaceful environment draw a great number of visitors to the area each year. Something new has been happening with these visitors of late though: Many have made the decision to call the Berkshires, and especially Great Barrington, their summer and full time home. It is this constant influx of "city people" that has many Great Barrington locals genuinely concerned.

This concern stems from the residential development produced by and for these new residents. Presently, there are no residential models, visual or sensual, which suggest what this changing Great Barrington is all about. As a result of this, many people unfamiliar with the Berkshires and drawing upon knowledge attained in previous settlement, are quick to locate their California ranch "dream home" among the rolling South Berkshire mountains. Often situated on three to four acres of private land, these haphazardly located residences are quickly forming a residential fabric which is quite foreign to Great Barrington proper. Also there is currently a great shortage of housing in the South Berkshires. This shortage affects not only those people looking to relocate to this area, but also, and often more severely, the younger native generations who are looking to establish their own roots.

The development of real estate in this area is at an all-time high. Great Barrington, like the rest of its small town neighbors, is not large enough to warrant, or afford, a paid (i.e., professional) planning staff. As a result of this, aside from the building permit and zoning review process, there are very few documented, suggested paths which residential development is encouraged to follow.

The state of confusion in which this small town now finds itself is clearly illustrated by the a two year moratorium which the town fathers recently placed on condominium
development within the town borders (effective 1985 through 1987). As this suggests, there is presently an increasing sentiment towards NO GROWTH in this South Berkshire town. I feel the underlying driving force of the no-growth idea stems from the growing lack of identity which the residents of Great Barrington, particularly those lifelong residents, feel that they have with their rapidly and randomly enlarging town.

As a nineteen year resident of Great Barrington, this author can not perceive any continuing built or formal sense of identity within the town proper. It has become apparent that the mere duplication of established residential layouts and patterns does not guarantee the formation of a town-recognizable neighborhood. The neighborhood whole must encompass and reflect the individual, including lifestyles, personalities, and thoughts. One should also look to the intangibles, such as town folklore and literature, daily life patterns, and microclimate specifics as important parts contributing to the whole of the neighborhood, and ultimately to the town. In his book, DISCOVERING THE VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE, J.B. Jackson proposes a similar argument:

...Actually not a law, but a set of habits and customs accumulated over the centuries, each the outcome of a slow adaptation to place-to the local topography and weather and soil, and to the people, the superfamily which lived there; a special accent, a special way of dressing, a special form of greeting; special dances and holidays-all the picturesque idiosyncrasies that are the stuff of tourist folklore, and then some: passwords and gestures, taboos and secrets--secret places and secret events that exclude the outsider more effectively than any boundary. Strange how many of these customs, these ways of identifying an inhabited landscape and its inhabitants are sensory: the unmistakable taste of a local dish or a local wine, the smell of certain seasons, the sound of a local song! ... Sensations such as these are never entirely forgotten; not that they are much thought about, but they remind us that we are where we belong - and equally important, I think: they are not shared with outsiders.
I suggest then, that the crucial element in identifying a town recognizable neighborhood is the individual house. One's house (hopefully home) provides each individual with an opportunity for a continual, common based daily experience. Our first thoughts in the morning are formulated IN our house. Our first external vision is usually OF our house. Comparisons which we make are usually tied TO our house. A Town's Unique Identity Can Be Directly Related To It's Houses.

Great Barrington is truly at a crossroads of its evolutionary cycle. It is not too late to preserve the desirable quality of life that the town currently enjoys. The first step is to examine, and then re-examine, the fundamental quality components present in daily life. This examination process can, and certainly should, start at the single family residence, for it is here that we are all most familiar. It is in and around our house where we live the majority of our lives. The individual house must then not only be habitable, but it must also foster and reflect a sense of specificity. This specificity should reflect not only the individual, the landscape, and the climate, but ultimately the community which makes residential Great Barrington so unique.
THOUGHTS ABOUT GREAT BARRINGTON

O God! When thou
Dost scare the world with tempests, set on fire
The heavens with falling thunderbolts, or fill,
With all the waters of the firmament,
The swift dark whirlwind that uproots the woods
And drowns the villages; when, at thy call,
Uprises the great deep and throws himself
Upon the continent, and overwhelms
Its cities— who forgets not, at the sight
Of these tremendous tokens of thy power,
His pride, and lays his strifes and follies by?
Oh, from these sterner aspects of thy face
Spare me and mine, nor let us need the wrath
Of the mad unchained elements to teach
Who rules them. Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works,
Learn to conform the order of our lives. 3

William Cullen Bryant
Town Clerk of Great Barrington, 1815-1825

In order for a group of people
to feel unified and confident
together, there needs to be some
common bond among them. I
suggest that it is possible for this
bond, on the small town scale, to
embody the feelings and aspects of
life particular to a specific group of
people. Through this thesis I propose
that the single family house, seen
again and again, is an appropriate
model of embodiment for the people
and town of Great Barrington.

This thesis will explore the role
of the single family house not only
acting as a unifying model of
residential living, but also as a built
quintessential Great Barrington with
all of its local color. This thesis
presents itself as an opportunity for
the author to begin to come to a
realization of what is appropriate for
residential Great Barrington. This
small South Berkshire town prides
itself on a feeling of intimate
neighborliness and togetherness. The
haphazardly located residences
mentioned in the previous section do
not contribute to this small town
neighborly mystique. While these
scattered 3-4 acre single family
residences do indeed serve a very
real need to their inhabitants, they
do very little for the town whole. I
suggest that there is a more sensible,
responsible answer which begins to
address the current housing dilemma. The formation of a new livable neighborhood is one possible avenue to explore in the extension of residential Great Barrington. It is obvious that a neighborhood is only as successful as the compilation of it's many and varied components. Since this is an architectural thesis (as opposed to a planning, urban design, or landscape architecture thesis) the majority of attention will be given to the architectural aspect of a neighborhood, the architecture of it's components, ultimately the architecture of the single family house.

The Berkshires are typically thought of in terms of natural landscape and specific earth patterns. Mountains, lush farmland, hilly expanses of rocky terrain, manicured lawns, abundant deciduous trees, and many evergreens are always visible to the Great Barrington native and visitor alike. Thus, the Berkshires, and especially Great Barrington can not be isolated in thought from the natural setting in which they occur. This area is totally dependent upon its contextual natural landscape and weather. This realization of dependency on the landscape is not new. For many years this area has been a popular refuge and haven for a very active assortment of artists (visual, verbal, and spiritual) who have sought the peaceful and naturally dynamic surroundings of the Berkshires. Life in this town does indeed revolve around the landscape and the weather. I believe that one's awareness of the vital role which the changing seasons and weather have on life in Great Barrington may serve to directly generate a model and form of habitation and inhabitation which is unique to and an embodiment for the people of Great Barrington. The manifestation of this rediscovered acute seasonal awareness could easily be exhibited in the image of the single family house. The concept of keying inhabitation directly to a microclimate/landscape is not a new one.

Frank Lloyd Wright did this to a degree in the beginning of his Usonian projects and in most of his residential projects. Joe Esherick has also done the same (in a very different form) in his residential projects at Sea Ranch in California. Undoubtedly countless other designers have attempted some form of this landscape sensitivity in their works for places the world over.

This thesis, however, is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of these various attempts and projects nor is it meant to be a survey of the
existing condition followed by a design composed solely of a reinterpretation of existing architectural elements. In this thesis, the author is attempting to make an inquiry as to what is appropriate for this particular area. Although the author does recognize the existing condition of residential Great Barrington (forms, elements, and uses), it is not playing a major role in this design evolution simply because the author does not wish to become clouded and biased towards what already exists. Also, it would be impossible for this author to discount his nineteen year association with this unique town. Undoubtedly, many small town biases and preconceptions will be exhibited in this design. For these, the reader is asked to maintain extraordinary patience. It is through his extended familiarity with this South Berkshire town that the author has experienced the four distinct weather seasons with some of their infinite variations. These experiences have led him to believe that there is no better, more consistent generator of architectural form with which the people of this town are more familiar than the changing weather/microclimate in which they live. The presence of the four distinctly different weather seasons and the impact each have on daily life is perhaps the main drawing point of the Northeast, and particularly Great Barrington. For those unfamiliar with the everchanging climate of Great Barrington, here is a small sampling:

**AUTUMN/FALL** is perhaps the most pleasant of all of the seasons in Great Barrington. Lasting from September thru Thanksgiving, Fall provides crisp, cool air (still with the possibility of 80° temperatures) which causes the many deciduous trees to explode into a bouquet of vivid reds, crisp oranges, yellows, and muted purples all offset by a deep blue cloudless sky. . . . . crisp morning walks, painting store windows on Main Street at Halloween, raking leaves then scattering them by diving into the just made piles, the Fall Foliage parade, native fresh apples, cool “sleeping” nights, the first frost, looking out over the landscape from atop the ferris wheel at the Barrington Fair, Saturday afternoon football games at the high school, collecting chestnuts at the neighborhood tree . . . .
WINTER is probably the most talked about Berkshire season. It is usually characterized by an often harsh pattern of weather. Bone chilling humid cold combined with rain, sleet, ice, and snow are the backdrop for this time of year. The days are short but the sun is beautiful. For many true North-Easterners, the winter is wonderful.

snow angels in fresh powder, sitting by a roaring fire with chestnuts exploding watching the snow falling outside, snow skiing at Butternut (both on the slopes and in the woods), watching the rain turn the fresh powder into crust, deep wet cold slush, the sound of the thick Lake Mansfield ice cracking, Christmas caroling around the old neighborhoods.

SPRING truly seems to be the season of re-born in the North-East: Everything outdoors starts to grow once again. The snow, at long last, begins to melt. The ice finally begins to melt. Although beautiful, the spring is an incredibly frustrating season: One may look at the yard out the window but one may not play on it! The ground is always wet and cold, the ice on the pond is unsafe, the roads are still full of the sand which made the not so quickly forgotten winter bearable.

wet feet, the wonderful smell of trees and grass growing, watching the ice jams on the Housatonic and Green Rivers, frozen ground right under the thawed out grass, playing outside after dinner, the inevitable spring sore throat and stuffy nose, taking the snow tires off of the car, the Memorial Day parade, wondering if mud is really easier to drive in than snow.

SUMMER brings the beautiful weather back to Great Barrington. Summer also brings an incredible number of tourists to Great Barrington. The days are finally long enough to do "stuff" after dinner. July and August are often hot, humid, and hazy. Dog days are common.

the smell of freshly cut grass, heavy evening fog, the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood, the dew on the grass, playing golf at dusk, swimming all day long, the cool morning air, lining up for the freshly picked butter and sugar corn at Taft Farm, Shakespeare at The Mount, 80° at midnight, ice cream melting all down the cone.
By their very human nature, people will always complain about the weather. This happens everywhere, in every climate. This thesis makes an attempt at turning these common day complaints into something useful for residential Great Barrington. Complaints are very interesting things in their own right. To this author, it seems that people complain most about things with which they are most familiar. People complain, now seriously complain, about the things over which they have very little control. People in Great Barrington seem to seriously complain about the weather. When consideration is given to the great assortment of weather complaints that one hears continually around town, it becomes apparent, and not surprisingly, that the underlying pattern after which the people of Great Barrington fashion their daily lives is the place in which they live. The natural landscape, inseparable from the South Berkshire microclimate, truly separates this unique town from all others in the world.

Imagine if you will a lifestyle which revolves (both formally and informally) around the seasonal weather. Hot, cold, rain, snow, fog, humidity, etc. To the author, it seems logical that a lifestyle which not only reflects, but also reinforces this constant and vibrant seasonal change would not only be exciting and interesting, but also extremely self fulfilling. A house suitable for this lifestyle, one which changes with the seasons, is not an outlandish idea. A house which reinforces this seasonal lifestyle would be an intriguing dwelling; a home. A house such as this can take many shapes and sizes and forms. This house type seen again and again, complete with it's many shapes, sizes and forms, constitutes the core of a recognizable model of embodiment for the people of Great Barrington. As the TOWN PLAN for Great Barrington suggests,

"The richness of spatial experience depends on the environmental patterns which one perceives. Such richness requires development in people's minds, as well as on the land. Whatever is planned here should work with these patterns and principles. Whoever lives here should daily be aware of them." (pg 75).
A HOUSE FOUR ALL SEASONS, part one

Summer, be seen no more within this wood;  
Nor you, red Autumn, down its paths appear;  
Let no more the false mitrewort intrude  
Nor the dwarf cornel nor the gentian here;  
You too be absent, unavailing Spring,  
Nor let those thrushes that with pain conspire  
From out this wood their wild arpeggios fling,  
Shaking the nerves with memory and desire.  
Only that season which is no man's friend,  
You, surly Winter, in this wood be found;  
Freeze up the year; with sleet these branches bend  
Through rasps the locust in the fields around.  
Now darken, sky! Now shrieking blizzard, blow!  
Farewell, sweet bank; be blotted out with snow.

COLLECTED SONNETS of Edna St. Vincent Millay  
sonnet XLIII

The people of Great Barrington  
deserve a type of habitation which is  
suitable to their climate and to their  
adapted way of life. As has been  
previously presented, I think that  
the local microclimate provides a  
grand stepping stone off of which to  
launch/base this design exploration.  
Through this inference, the author is  
not rejecting the validity of the  
current existing housing types and  
forms. This author is merely  
suggesting that there is another  
vantage point from which to view the  
concept of the Great Barrington  
house. The landscape provides some  
vital clues about what habitation in  
this area is all about. A good place to  
start this line of thinking/reasoning  
is at the base. The foundation. Its  
time to go back to the natural  
landscape.

The Berkshires are often  
thought of as a region of rolling hills  
and verdent pastures. From the air,  
this description appears to be very  
accurate. If compared to the jagged  
upheavals of the Rocky Mountains of  
the western part of the country,  
Great Barrington's Appalacian  
mountain range is indeed gentle and  
rolling. It is not until one begins to  
interact, one-to-one, with the  
landscape that the true ground  
makeup is revealed. The Great  
Barrington ground level landscape is
full of jutting rocks. Quartz rock, marble, and limestone formations may all easily be found by the curious observer. Underlying "ledge" (actually talcose, gneiss, and mica-slate) is found throughout the forty-five square miles of town land. The stone walls which surround most farm pasture and farm land serve as reminders of what is directly under foot in this area. It is a curious observation that in most of the residential areas in town, there are very few recollections of what the true landscape is made of; the ledge has been removed, the stone walls have been displaced, and the rock outcroppings have been tamed. I can imagine a place where these natural physical landscape attributes are preserved and transformed to usable, livable, forms.

It would be in such a place that one's physical habitation would be able to indirectly and directly reflect and relate to the changing seasons and weather which makes Great Barrington such a special place to be in. Ones house could foreseeably play an active role in the ever changing landscape in which it is placed. Seasons change, weather changes, people change, lifestyles change; why can't ones house reflect these changes? I believe that it should. I suggest that it can.
A WORKING METHODOLOGY

...The sunlight of imagination is the slanting ray of early morning or late afternoon... The literal sunlight belongs to the broad noon of common day.

THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES
Nathaniel Hawthorne

This design is based primarily on use oriented principles. To begin this exploration, the author made some basic assumptions, through observation, on how people (in this case, the inhabitants of Great Barrington) perceive and use individual space. The process used is a simple one. A design base was formed by imagining daily life as it is typically lived through by a Great Barrington inhabitant. An example of this process would be to envision an inhabitant arriving home from food shopping with a car load of groceries. Questions should be asked about the architectural implications of this common action. Such questions might include: Where is the car parked so that it is convenient to unload? When unloading, where do all of the grocery bags go? How is access to the kitchen achieved and what is the carrying route? etc., etc. These activities cannot be thought of as separate from the microclimate in which they occur. Thus, one must also consider the implications that each weather season has on the particular activity (rain, snow, sun, ice, wind, etc.). When analyzed from the viewpoint of a user, these everyday activities provoke some powerful architectural implications.
The diagramming of various activities of Great Barrington life proved to be a crucial and useful step in the evolution of A House Four All Seasons. Each daily life scenario was recorded, briefly interpreted, and quickly diagramed for its architectural implications. These diagrams soon evolved into valuable reference tools for use later in the design process. They can be found scattered throughout the remainder of this document.

Special attention was given to both the seemingly typical days and to the special days which occur during the course of a year. "Special days" are those which happen mostly every year, but probably not on a regular daily basis. Holidays would obviously be included in this category. Other special days for Great Barrington might include the first snow of the season, a record high outside temperature, after the big Lee-Monument football game and peak fall foliage weekend.

This ongoing diagramming exercise clearly illustrated to the author that the everchanging seasonal weather both defines and creates a lifestyle specific to Great Barrington. These daily life scenarios which take into consideration the Berkshire weather patterns, are the key to the generation of a design for a four seasonal family house. For it is the ability of this house to reflect and respond to the ever changing Great Barrington landscape that ultimately will prove or reject its validity as an appropriate habitation model.
A third definition of landscape beauty therefore suggests itself: a landscape is beautiful when it has been or can be the scene of a significant experience in self-awareness and eventual self-knowledge.

VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE

In order to place this design exploration within a realistic context, a brief infrastructure parameters were developed. The size of the residential ownership lot was set at three-quarters of an acre in area (32,670 sq. ft.). The design lot is rectangular in shape with street frontage of 163.35 feet and a lot depth of 200 feet. The site fronts a 24 foot wide primary residential street, separated from a 3 foot wide sidewalk by a 12 foot wide grass buffer. The sidewalk abuts the lot property line. In a neighborhood situation, this places the block depth between the primary residential streets at about 400 feet, a block size dimension which can easily be found in the older established neighborhoods of Great Barrington.

Once size and dimension parameters were set, consideration was given to the relationship between the natural landscape and the model of habitation to be placed upon it. In order for a house to be able to directly interact with a specific landscape, a formal interaction between the two needs to be introduced. In this design exploration, a specific foundation system was developed to provide the potential for direct landscape interaction. The local generating reference for this system is the fieldstone wall; a common element of the Great Barrington landscape. The foundation system involves a series of parallel walls piercing the landscape (one may think of them as knife edges) over which a light wood frame structure may span. This foundation system allows for easy transformation of support configurations, independent support conditions, cantilevering floor plates, and floor plates horizontal glazing at the perimeter; all three of which allow for direct interaction with the landscape. The foundation system is viewed as a crucial element in this design exploration, for it is here that the untamed landscape must be transformed to receive and support a model of habitation.
The following pages roughly document the evolution of the design process. The design undertaken in this exploration gradually evolves into a house which adapts to the changing seasons through the implementation of two very different use areas: A cold weather use area which actively and passively transforms into a warm weather use area. It is the interplay between these two design components which brings vitality to the design, and ultimately, to the house.

The specific design process of the preliminary house consisted of a series of 1/16 inch models and sketches. They proved to be indispensable in the evolution of the final design and are presented herewith.
FIRST PASS
15 October, 1987

- a very schematic beginning
- all rooms are registered along the
  East-West axis
- there is very little interaction
  between the house and landscape
- the garage placement is playing
  major role in this scheme
- the 12° shift in garage opens up the
  site to automobile
- the house is placed its own height
  away from the sidewalk
- life in Great Barrington is
  experiential, this needs to be much
  more clearly illustrated
SECOND PASS
22 OCTOBER, 1987

- there is much wasted space on the South side, are rooms placed prudently?
- the house is split apart by the access
- an outside stone wall can easily be transformed into an interior masonry partition
- there is no perceived difference between the North and South sides
- the main stairs hide behind the chimney, why?
- some rooms are placed in very curious places
- the scheme is much too full of sameness
- the garage has gotton shifted 12° to the South, this has effectively regained ownership of the Southern side yard
- 1st attempt at upper level, this needs much more work

Sketch - Kitchen

Floor Plans

View from the Southwest

Sketch - Garage, Rain Scenario
THIRD PASS
3 November, 1987

- the masonry has finally begun to get inside
- the spaces are getting simpler
- areas are achieving a better understanding of what and where they are, a house which changes with the seasons is beginning to read
- the summer room/winter room relationship is still a bit ambiguous
- inside/outside relationships are not getting expressed to their potential
- it is time to look at the roofs and the manner in which they respond to different locations/conditions

Sketch - Trash Cans, Rain Scenario

View from the Southwest
FOURTH PASS
9 November, 1987

- inside/outside continuity is working better
- the travel through the house into the cold weather use area is heightened by the passage between the mass walls
- the masonry is getting back outside, the kitchen is now "wrapped" in mass
- the dubious heavy masonry on the North summer room wall is lessoned, the ambiguity between the warm and cold sections is resolving itself
- the mass gets up in the air and into the upper level
- the front porch roof is troublesome
- a seasonal dining room is introduced the dining room effectively moves outside in the warm weather - why force people to move to a different room to eat, why not just transform the room to suit the needs of the people?
- the upper level gains a bathroom
FIFTH PASS
16 November, 1987

- addition of masonry floor in the kitchen, the removal of mass from the living room
- the transition between the kitchen and the garage is working better
- the Northern mass does not support the upper level above, the balcony above is now held up by light
- the front porch roof is working better, the garage roof has gone flat
- the upper level is a bit more sensible
- the framing system is beginning to get resolved, the summer spaces are light wood frames over a series of parallel knife edges, the winter space is contained by mass, the earth. Why is the change in material the only difference between these two systems?

Sketch - Dining Room, Christmas Day

View from the Southwest
the summer room extension is a bit more reasonable now, it is beginning to relate to the inner house. Access from the house to this space is along the major axis of the house. This outdoor area literally disappears in the winter (it will fill in with snow) and become part of the landscape.

- the introduction of a 12° shift between the two framing systems seems to be successful; the two systems are perceivably different in both plan and section
- the house is working well in section now
- the support conditions are much better defined
- the garage roof and the porch roof become one, they are constructed from the same post and beam framing system, they may be infilled where appropriate
Sketch - Fireplace, November

Sketch - Cellar

Schematic Section

View from the South

View from the Northwest

View from the Northwest

A cold November night - we need more wood.

I'm glad the fire is close!
A HOUSE FOUR ALL SEASONS, part two

... Even before that final initiation, however, I had had an uneasy sense that the New England of fiction bore little - except a vague botanical and dialectical - resemblance to the harsh and beautiful land as I had seen it. Even the abundant enumeration of sweet-fern, asters, and mountain-laurel, and the conscientious reproduction of the vernacular, left me with a feeling that the outcropping granite had in both cases been overlooked. I give my impression merely as a personal one; it accounts for "Ethan Frome," and may, to some readers, in a measure justify it.

ETHAN FROME
Edith Wharton

It is possible for one's house to reflect change in seasons, weather, and lifestyle. This design illustrates one example of a dwelling which exhibits this sensitivity to the everchanging contextual surroundings. The effect which this sensitivity has on inhabitants is two fold: it provides guidance and direction to the inhabitants and encourages active participation by the inhabitants. In other words, implications of architectural decisions may cause the dweller to query about the immediate built surroundings as well as landscape. This questioning may result in discovery of insightful knowledge about life in Great Barrington. Additionally, the dweller may play an active role in the seasonal evolution of the habitation through the deployment of a variety of movable house components.
1. Outdoor Extension
2. Living Room
3. Rear Deck
4. Bath
5. Laundry - Pantry
6. Sitting Area
7. Kitchen
8. Breakfast Porch
9. Rear Entry
10. Two Car Garage
11. Dining Room Extended
12. Dining Room Proper
13. Entry
14. Front Porch

Main Level Plan
Upper Level Plan

1. Living Room (below)
2. Slack Space - Sitting Area
3. Bath
4. Bedroom
5. Bath
6. Master Bedroom - Sleeping Area
7. Master Bedroom - Sitting Area
8. Bedroom

Upper Level
During the cold winter months of the year, the house is able to be closed down around itself and focus life within in the kitchen and sitting area. This section of the house rises up solidly from the landscape and is firmly supported by the earth. The stone walls of the field are transformed and extruded to provide a partially encircling containment. Heavy masonry forms the floor and walls. Earth gets excavated out from under the heavy floor to receive the cellar and mechanical room. This winter use area enjoys a focused southern exposure. The kitchen and sitting area are enjoined by a large fireplace. A bathroom and laundry/pantry are located directly off of this area as is the access to the easterly screened-in breakfast porch. The back stairs to the upper level simplify daily life, especially during the cold winter months.
Section Through Garage

Sketch - Kitchen, A hot August evening
The remainder of the house is wood framed and is supported by the stone knife edges which pierce through the earth below. The wood framing is light and springy, one can sense the circulating air. Memories of warm weather use experiences filter through the inhabitants mind. Suddenly one of the masonry supporting walls finds itself passing through the floor plate and into the interior of the house. Its presence is a reaffirmation of the solid support below. The living room and dining room, the most public rooms of the house, are located to the west. Fronting the street, they are open to partial public scrutiny and observation. It is during the warm months of the year that use of these rooms is maximized. Removable partitions in the dining room transform it from the formal winter dining room to the light airy summer dining porch. Outer panels of wire screen provide protection from insects, while allowing for desirable air circulation. The living room is contained by a cathedral ceiling. Life is able to move freely from this room directly into the landscape. The cantilevering northwest corner of the house may be fully inhabited as a result of this room extending into the landscape.
Sketch - Living Room, Christmas

Section Through Living Room
Sketch - Structure

The diagram shows the concept of the proposed support for the structure.

Section Cut Locator

Section Through Dining Room

The house extends out to form a seasonal eating area. It is not to be a part of the lower, higher porch floor.
The structural material used is not the only implied difference between the two use zones. The masonry winter use area is made distinct from the rest of the house by a 12° shift in plan; this shift does not constitute a change in direction, it dictates a perceivable change in movement which acts to reinforce the change in material. The upper level of the house is structurally aligned with the light wood framing system below. As such, dependency on the shifted masonry below is always for support, never for form. Each is allowed to have its own life. Tension is created when these systems meet. From within the shifted kitchen, an inhabitant is reminded (visually and sensually) that something different is happening above. The shift in support axis is dramatically felt here. One moves through this shift. Movement has a direct relation to material and use.
This concept of habitation as experiential, as suggested in plan and section, follows through to the outside of the house. When viewed from the Southwest, the garage roof provides the starting point of transition from landscape to dwelling. It belongs to the same form and use family as the front porch roof, and as such, reaches out to the landscape. The south facing roof overhangs to block out unwanted summer sun while admitting the lower angled winter sun. This roof merely covers and shades the southern exposure. The steeply pitched north facing roof, on the other hand, acts to totally contain the entire north side of the house.
The shifted structural grids, most noticeable in the kitchen ceiling perimeter, allows for limited light penetration through the resulting voids. This greatly emphasizes the previously mentioned structural tension.

Vertical ascent within this house is prompted by visual clues; one always is able to ascend toward the light. Both stairways are naturally illuminated from above. A perceived change in structural material combined with the influence of overhead natural illumination allows vertical movement to be experiential in nature.
The deep setback in the upper level western facade serves two purposes: It announces that the dwelling entrance is directly below and it lets the late afternoon sun penetrate deep into the middle of the house. The ever changing quality of light is very important to this dwelling. A large three dimensional roof monitor, projecting through the north facing roof into the upper level slack space, lets in reflected northern light which illuminates the living area.

West Elevation
View from the Northeast

Sketch - Kitchen, Cellar
A hot August Landscape Interaction
As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab's many of the mariners did run from him in terror of dismay.²

MOBY DICK
Herman Melville
END NOTES

1 Great Barrington Planning Board, *Town Plan, Great Barrington*, 81.

2 Planning Board, x.

3 Planning Board, iii.


6 John B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 64.


Good night.