



Peer Reviewed

Title:

In the Shadow of a Craftsman Bungalow: Erasure, Overlay and Addition

Journal Issue:

[Places, 3\(4\)](#)

Author:

[Lerup, Lars](#)

Publication Date:

1987

Publication Info:

Places

Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/32s2f3x8>

Acknowledgements:

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe visit www.places-journal.org. For reprint information contact places@berkeley.edu.

Keywords:

urban, design, architecture, craftsman, bungalow, greene, brothers, pasadena, california, suburb, lars lerup

Copyright Information:

All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author or original publisher for any necessary permissions. eScholarship is not the copyright owner for deposited works. Learn more at http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse



eScholarship
University of California

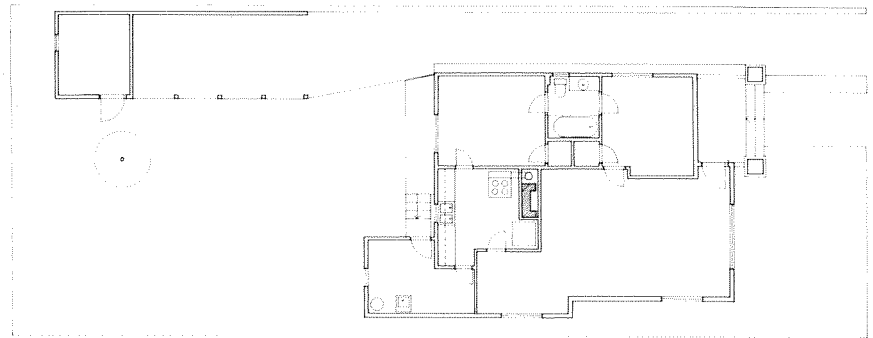
eScholarship provides open access, scholarly publishing services to the University of California and delivers a dynamic research platform to scholars worldwide.

In The Shadow of a Craftsman Bungalow: Erasure, Overlay, and Addition

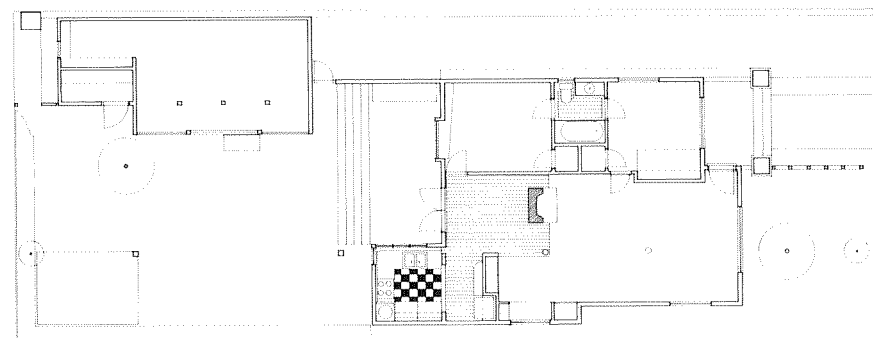
Lars Lerup

The Craftsman Bungalow was inspired primarily by the Greene brothers, who practiced together in Pasadena from 1893 to 1914, although the house form may have come originally from the Anglo-Indian “bungalow.” It became popular about 1910 and was constructed for only a comparatively short time; few were built after 1930. Yet in those few short years millions appeared, and the Craftsman Bungalow became an integral part of the lore of the American suburb.

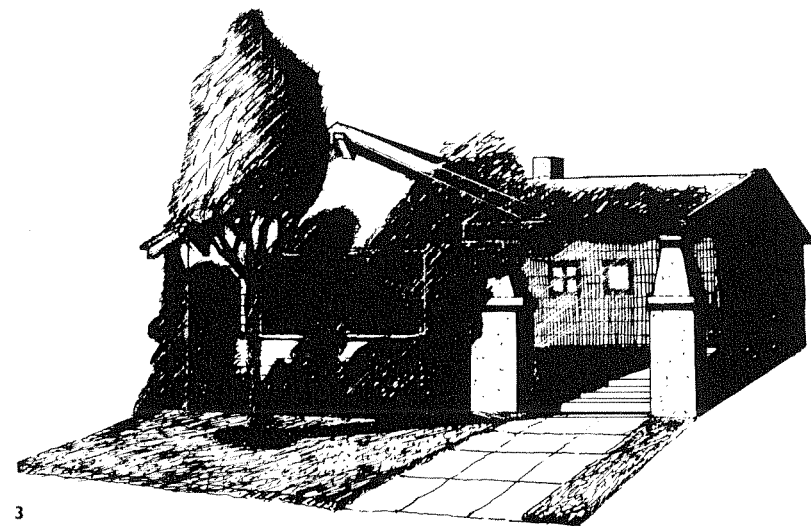
With its open, wide overhangs, front porch, and squat gabled roof, the bungalow was associated with country life. Its interior was comfortable, informal, and rustic. In the flood of pattern books and popular house magazines that appeared during the early part of the century, the bungalow’s interiors were illustrated with pictures of a man comfortably reclining near the inglenook smoking his pipe, his wife affectionately smiling from a doorway that probably led to the kitchen. In the elementary version, the plan reflected the stereotypical family, with two bedrooms, a small bath, kitchen, dining nook, and living room. The relationship to the back yard was circuitous, through an added laundry room. Over the decades many elementary bungalows went through a series of modernizations, including, if it happened after 1950, replacing or overlaying gypsum board on the original board and batten walls, improving kitchen equipment, and even replacing the wooden windows with aluminum sashes.



1



2



3

1 The old bungalow
2 The new bungalow

3 The old facade with new windows and greenery

Figures 1–3 by Lars Lerup.

As the illustrations show, the bungalow I bought in the early 1980s possessed the characteristics and the rehabilitation pattern of the type's elementary version. This particular bungalow's appeal was limited to its exterior; the interior had lost all its mythical charm to modernization and low-maintenance home improvement. I decided to divert the further destruction of the bungalow myth by a series of interventions that were not intended to restore the stylistic qualities that had been removed from the bungalow but to retrieve an aspect of the myth that may lie manifested in a certain architectonic specificity that mass production had covered up.

Erasure

With a minimal budget, tools, and the help of a student who was also a skilled builder, I began to dissect the house like an exploratory surgeon. Behind a layer of gypsum board and another of board and batten, was a burned-out chimney in a thickened wall between the living room and the kitchen. Removing the wall stripped the chimney bare and drove the first wedge between the stereotypical plan and the "new" bungalow.

Erasing this wall led to investigating the entire kitchen, first opening the opposite wall between the kitchen and the garden, previously penetrated only by a small ventilation window. In order to open a gate to the wonders of the California garden, the kitchen counter had to go, then the kitchen. The void that was left was almost

square in plan and provided a new focus to the house, with the living room on one side and the garden on the other. Then an avenue of "open" space was created, beginning with the front yard, to be followed in file by the living room, the new void, a new deck, and the garden. The original, typical plan was "lobotomized" by the avenue of unspecified use that disrupted the typical narrative implied by the living-dining-kitchen sequence.

Erasing the kitchen included also removing the gypsum board on the walls and the linoleum flooring to expose the underfloor that had not been walked on since its construction in 1923. Sanding and varnishing the underfloor was a symbolic gesture, celebrating the discovery of the "underground" of the bungalow myth.

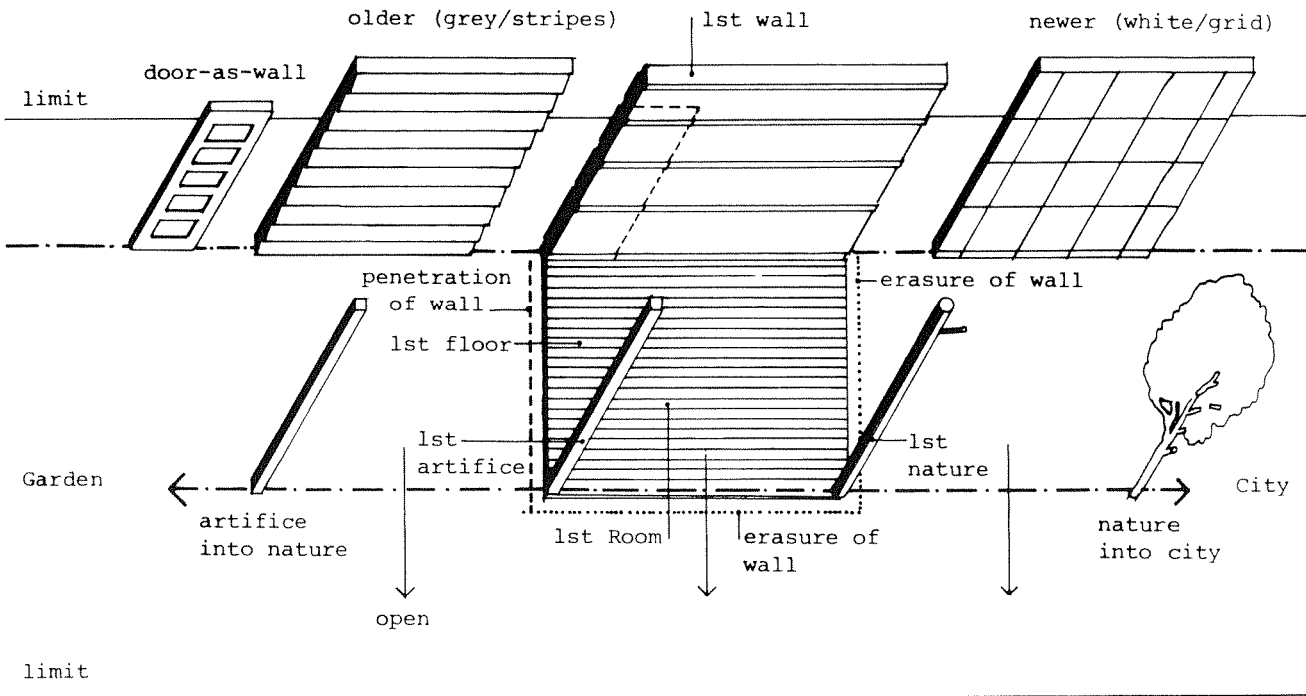
The "freeway" opened up the plan and suggested two bordering zones of more specific use. The left zone, facing the garden, suggested a series of cul-de-sacs: sitting areas, an inglenook, a service nook, and a new kitchen, compact and efficient, inserted in the old laundry room. The right zone remained intact with its file of rooms, but it suggested rehabilitating the carport into a new studio. The result is a tripartite plan, which zones use in a far freer manner than the former one had done.

Overlay

The void that was created by the erasure of the wall became the key to developing a set of "Principles for making (instant) history." Taking the clue from the horizontal

siding on the exterior, a "first" wall was defined, consisting principally of a set of ledger lines across a vertical surface. The void, the "first" room, with its "first" floor, began its spatial definition with a cover of varnished plywood, subdivided by horizontal strips of redwood that formed the principal wall of this poor man's parlor. A freshly cut trunk of red madrone replaced the demolished wall, and the chimney was refurbished by a Count Rumford-inspired fireplace, only twelve inches deep, that works miraculously. A carefully planed redwood pilaster, part of a "gate" to the new kitchen, defined the remaining corner of the first room. A rustic parlor wall, a hearth, a tree trunk, a column—a first artifice—and a rustic floor thus established the motor of the new house.

Suggested by the madrone and the redwood pilaster, an array of "columns" was established, beginning with a red plum tree in the front yard and ending with a set of real columns in the back yard. These uprights also mark the relative openness of the bordering zone. Opposite the columns stands their abstract counterpart, the wall, establishing another array that ranges from the modern abstract gridded surface to the deeply layered siding through a series of surface markings using various materials. Now it protects the more private right-hand zone. Because of these simple overlays, the bungalow had become a kind of Sweets Catalog of architectural elements—an architectonic promenade—suggesting a new architectural



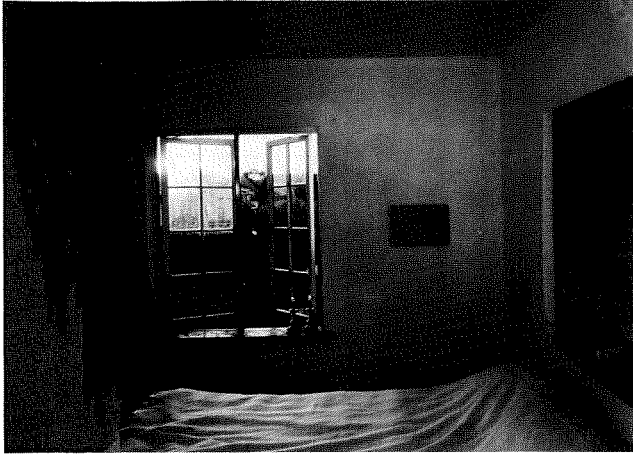
Array of Columns: rose, white column, three white columns, black column, redwood pilaster, madrone column, column footprint, red plum tree, rose.

Array of Walls/Doors: grey door-as-wall, grey siding with gridded door, wide white grid, grey grid, varnished plywood with redwood stripes, white grid, white built grid.

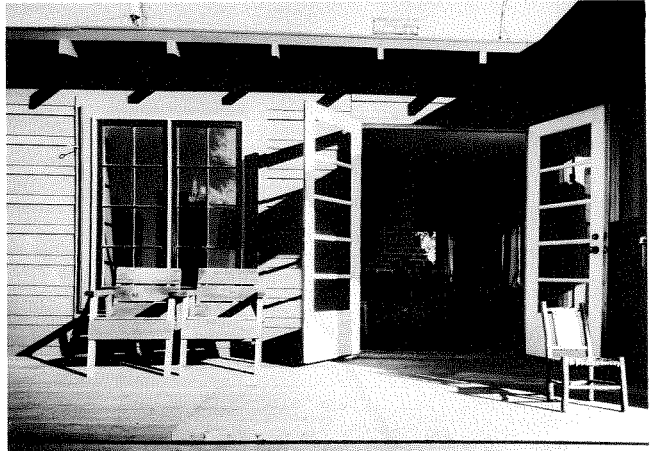
4

4 "Principles for making (instant) history"

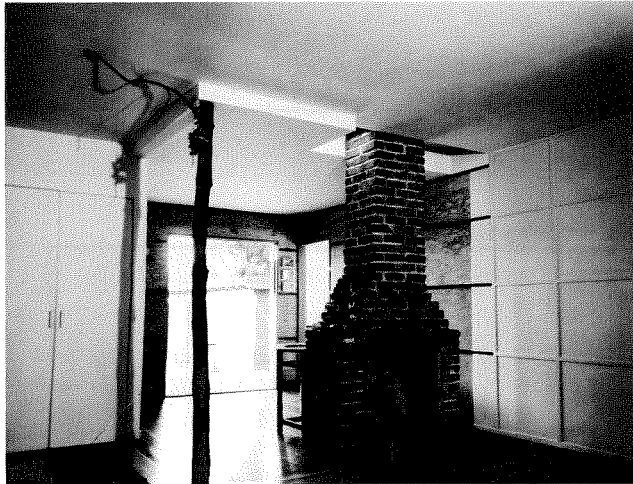
Figure 4 by Lars Lerup.



5



7



6



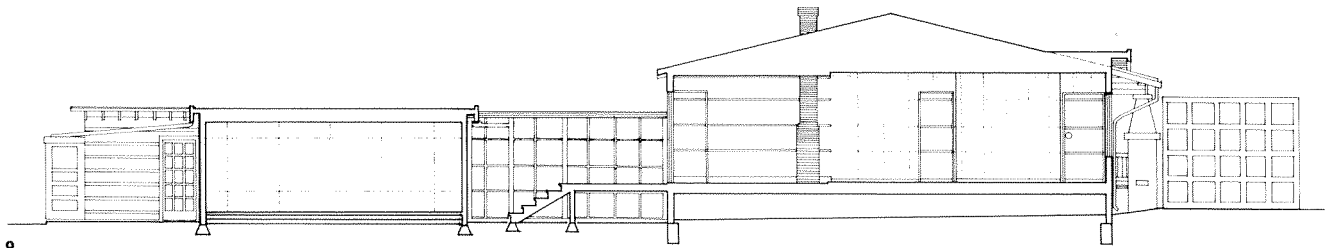
8

**5, 6 A room behind the wall and the
“first” room**

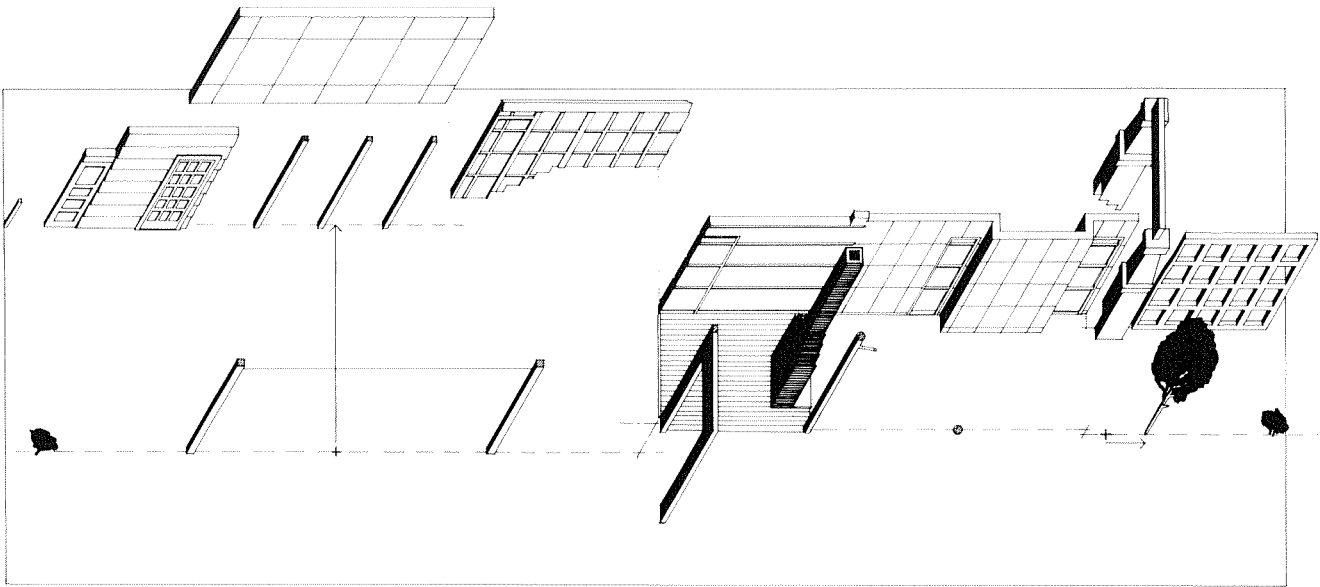
Photographs by F. Namdar

7, 8 The back and the front

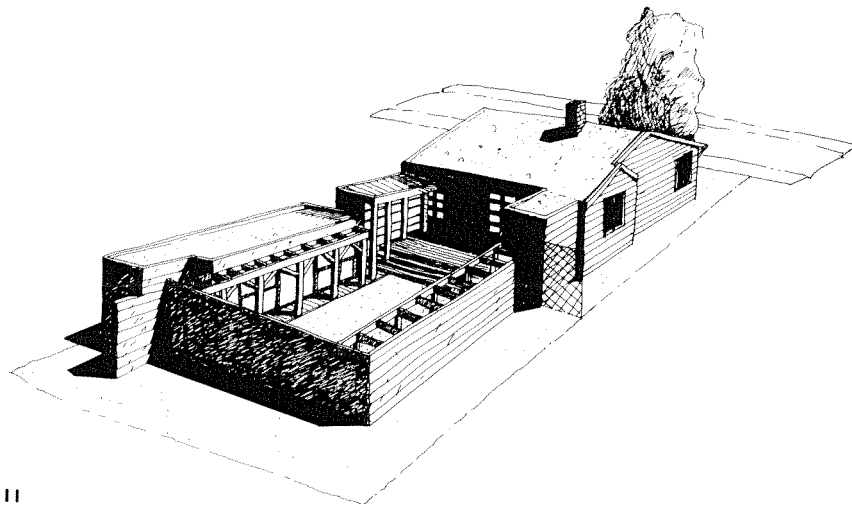
Photographs by F. Namdar



9



10

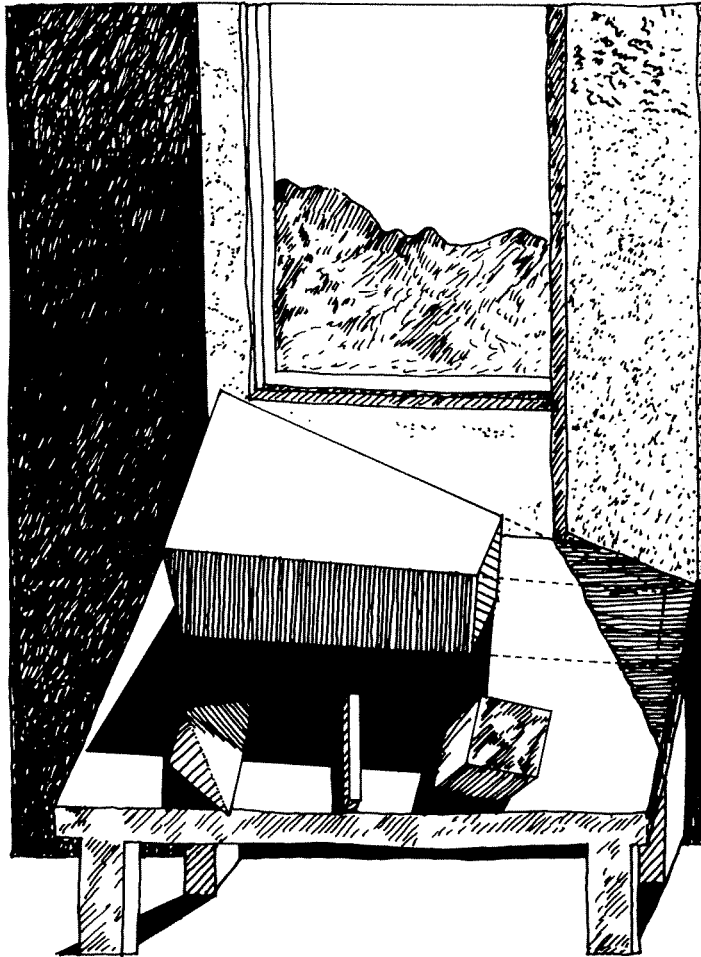


11

9 Section of the new bungalow
10 Columns and walls of the new bungalow

11 "If I had the money"

Figures 9–11 by Lars Lerup.



12

12 Addition

13, 14, 15 Views of the addition

Figures 12–15 by Lars Lerup.

narrative in which the history of materials from timber to finely manufactured glass was prominently overlaid on the “shattered” family narrative of the typical plan: form across function.

The “principles for making history” suggested further development of the tripartite zone that would be built “If I had the money”: arcades, a link with the studio, an inner courtyard.

Addition

The new house seems to have recovered some of the ambience of the bungalow myth in its fundamental materiality, which had been hidden behind the skip-troweled gypsum board and the linoleum floors. The house had been brought back in history.

The next challenge was to add a new dimension to the house that would bring it into the here and now, a modern coda that has its roots more or less obscurely in the house but suggests its own specificity and presence.

In previous work I had dealt extensively with the notion of shadow constructions, inspired by the thick and mysterious shadows cast by the buildings in De Chirico’s paintings from the early 1900s. The result was a highly complex “addition” to a house in Paris, referred to as the Love/House. It was the result of highly technical transformations derived from an existing house. The additions to my bungalow were intended to follow similar principles but in a far less structured manner.

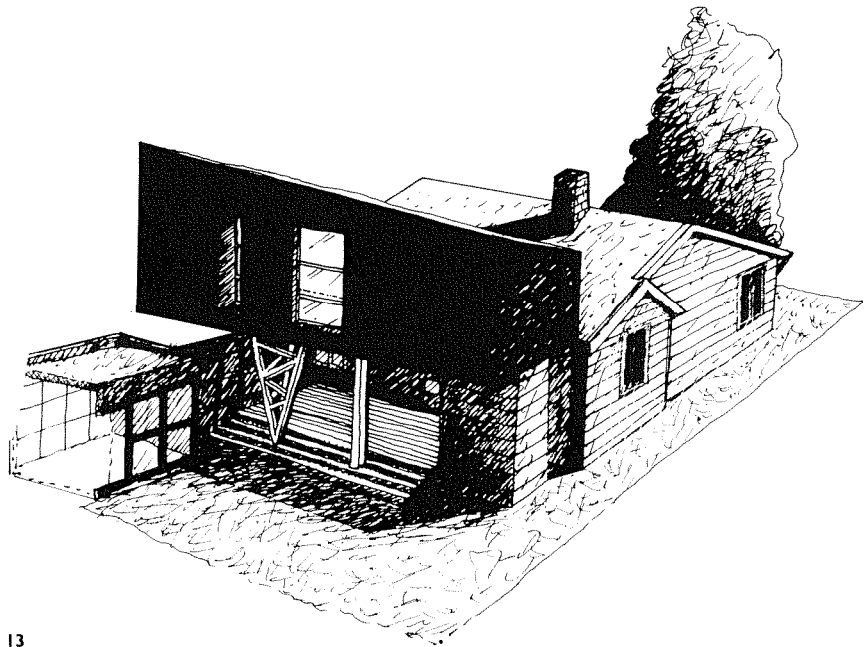
In the back yard the mythical “shadow” cast by the bungalow led me down a semirational path in which three elements from the “first” room in the house were displaced and put through a kind of platonic transformation, much the way shadows are transformations of their parent bodies: the madrone trunk became a red column, the fireplace became an inverted yellow pyramid, and the room became a

cube that coincides with the new kitchen. These were the bearings or stakes in the past. On these was perched a black, racked box simulating a fleshy shadow. The battered sides were derived from the existing slope of the predominately side-gabled roof. The color *derived* not only from shadows but also from the gray with which the entire exterior of the bungalow had been painted.

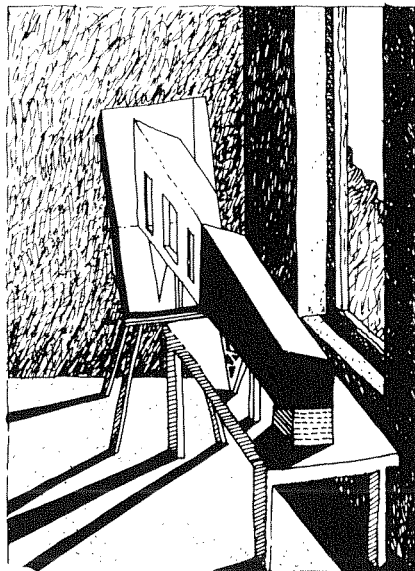
Since the addition is a dream-house in a double sense—it is both a place to sleep and it is not yet built—the interior has remained underdeveloped.

Finally

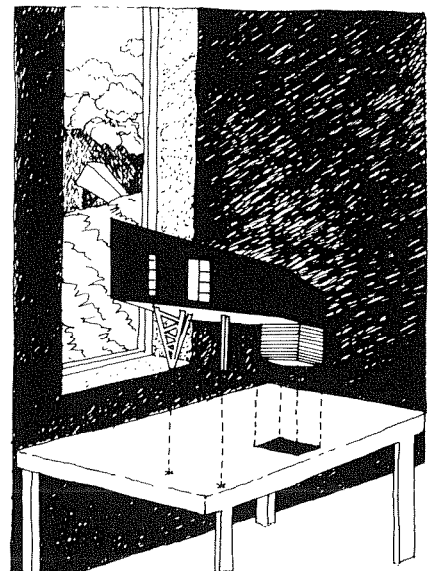
This exercise in recent construction and planning for the future is part of a larger project that I have called “planned assaults on the single family house,” which has resulted in a series of tripartite plans and houses challenging stereotypical conceptions of the house. The example of the bungalow suggests a double action back into the past and forward toward the future. By erasing and overlaying certain architectonic concerns in the elementary craftsman bungalow a new fundament of architectonic materialism may be achieved, and by adding to the house, just at the border, outside the orthodoxy of the type, a certain freedom of expression may be achieved simultaneously. This, I suggest, is a way to reclaim the past without losing the future.



13



14



15