Introduction

Ricardo Devesa

Relationships of Contiguity between Houses and Trees

There have been relationships of contiguity between houses and trees since ancient times; originally because trees were a source of food and energy; then formal and spatial relationships emerged, as well as meanings and mythologies. These connections eventually became explicit in architectural design, largely since the advent of modernity. This was perhaps because the house was one of the central architectural programs during that period in history; or it could have been due to a growing sensitivity regarding aspects of the environment and the landscape in relation to a project's surroundings. In any case, trees have been deliberately incorporated into modern houses since the moment they were granted status as a prominent part of spatial and environmental design.

The designs in this book all incorporated pre-existing trees into the houses from the moment the architect visited the site or learned of their existence. Thus, in many cases, this decision is present in the earliest preliminary sketches: the trees are shown in the topographic surveys of the site, situated precisely in the terrain with indications of their formal properties – diameter of the crown, height and relative position of the trunk – as well as their botanical characteristics and the specific climatic and even perceptual benefits that are offered by each species.

The attention to and emphasis on the existing trees on the site appear in the design briefs, where the architects discuss their adequation and inclusion in the houses. There are a wealth of reflections on trees' contributions to domestic life. In that sense, our starting point is the clearly established attention to trees and their active integration into houses as integral elements of domestic

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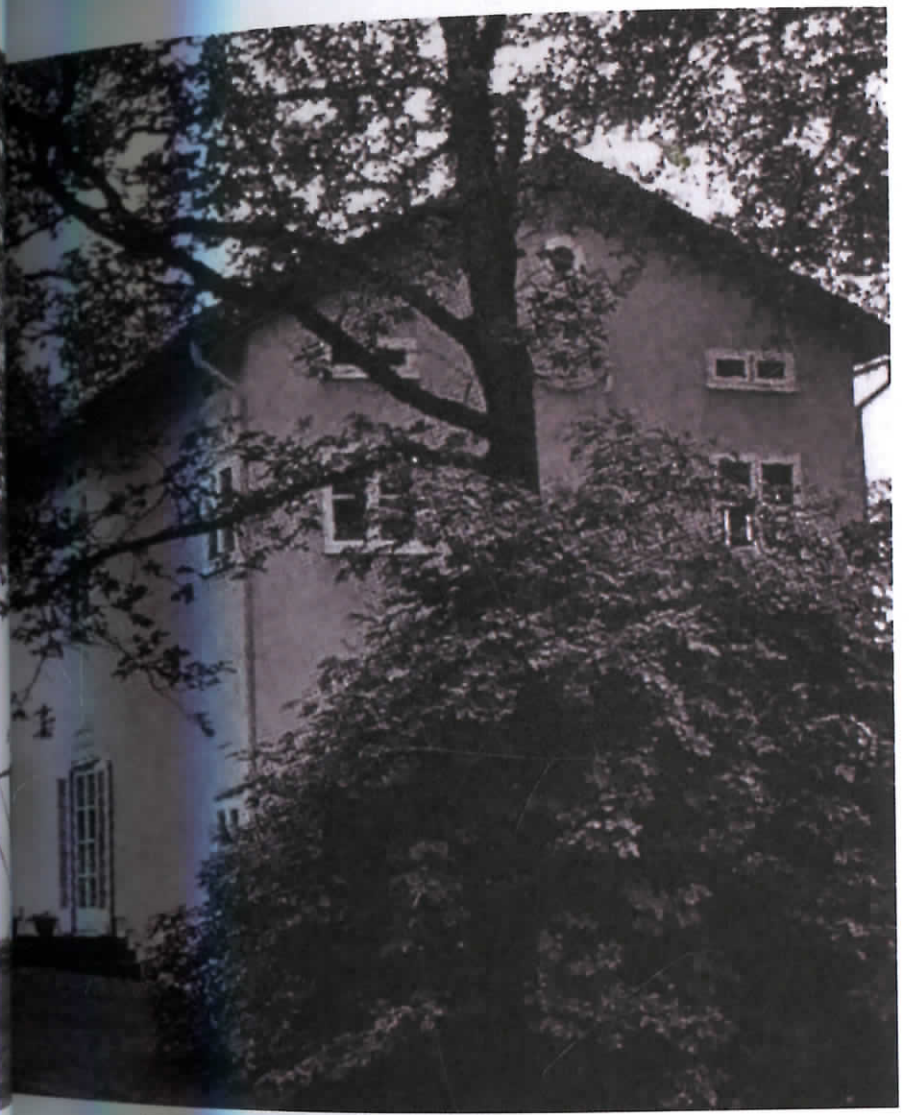
01 Farnsworth House,
Mies van der Rohe, 1951

02 Snellman House,
Gunnar Asplund, 1917

03 Eames House,
Charles and Ray Eames,
1948



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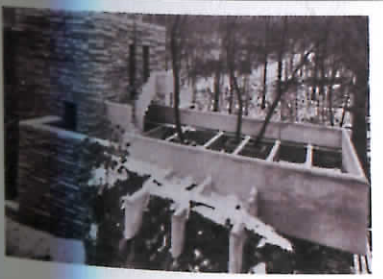


04 Kaufmann House,
Frank Lloyd Wright, 1937

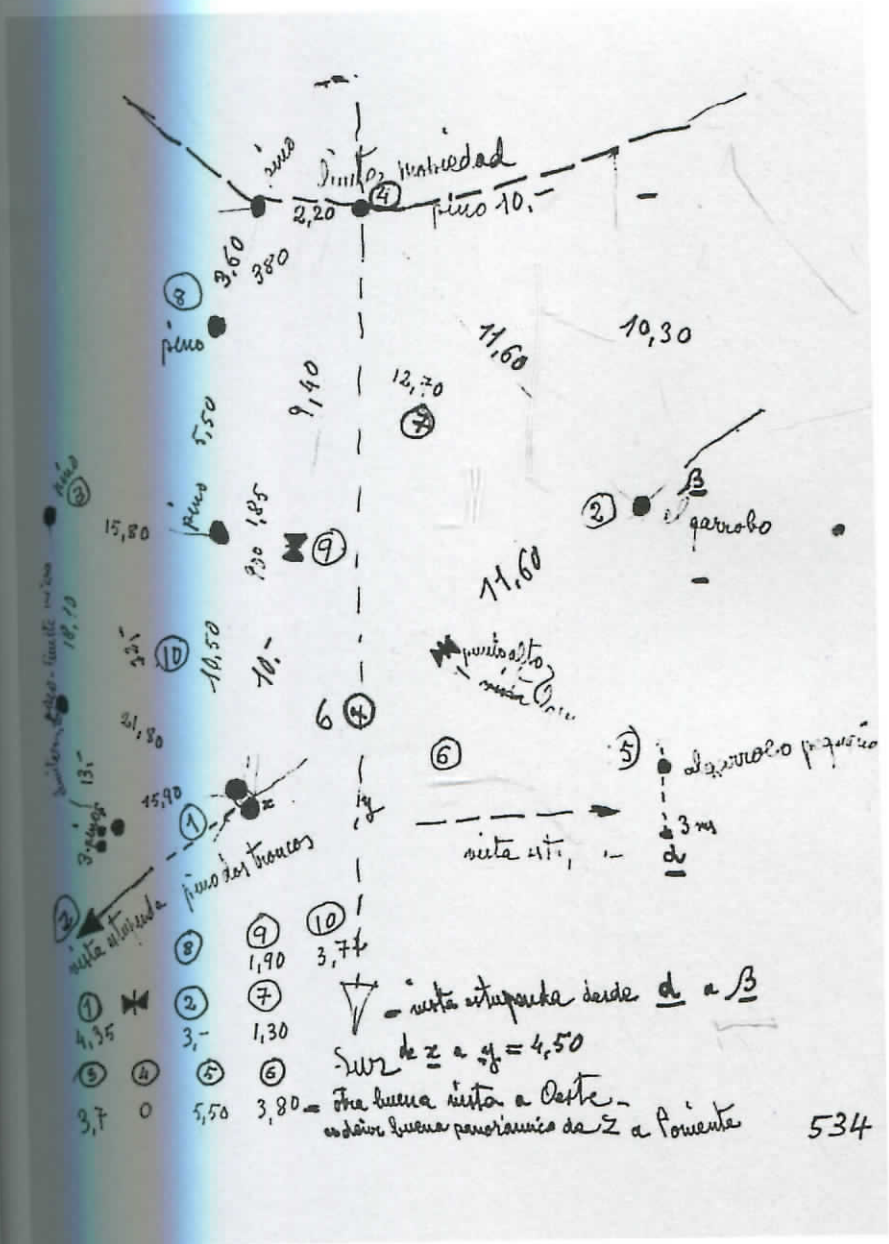
architecture, an interest that has been shared by a large number of contemporary architects.

Each period in the history of architecture has had its own particular analogies between architecture and trees. The architects of each period have forged different formal and symbolic links between natural and architectural elements. Vitruvius situated the origins of architecture in the chance event of a fire caused by tree branches rubbing together. In the late 19th century, with the rise of new relationships between architecture and nature, various new articulations and reconsiderations emerged regarding vegetation and the built environment.

In early modernity, there was a rash of designs which, unprecedentedly, connected houses and trees. Some paradigmatic 20th-century houses are exemplary in terms of their defining relationships with trees. Examples include the Snellman house (Djursholm, Stockholm, Sweden, 1917) by Gunnar Asplund; the Villa Mairea (Noormarkku, Finland, 1937) by Alvar Aalto; the Kaufmann House (Bear Run, Pennsylvania, USA, 1937) by Frank Lloyd Wright; and the Farnsworth House (Plano, Chicago, USA, 1945), by Mies Van Der Rohe.[1] In other cases, a group of trees was the determining factor in the design, such as the row of pre-existing eucalyptus trees at Charles and Ray Eames's house in California (Pacific Palisades, USA, 1948).

As we have said, this interest in annexing the trees already on the site is often reflected in the earliest sketches or in the site plans, which detail their positions and characteristics. Drawings that are well known for this characteristic include those by Josep Antoni Coderch for the Ugalde house (Caldes d'Estrac, Spain, 1951); those by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for the Villa La Roche (Paris, France, 1923), which will be analyzed in depth in the corresponding chapter; and those for the extension of the Huarte house (Formentor, Mallorca, Spain, 1968) by Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza.

Occasionally, the trees on the site are harnessed for the construction of the house, as was the case, for example, in the Elza



05 Notes on the site for the Ugalde House, José Antonio Coderch, 1951

Berquo house by Vilanova Artigas (São Paulo, Brazil, 1967), where the architect used the tree trunks as pillars for the courtyard, or in John Lautner's Pearlman Mountain Cabin (Idyllwild, California, 1957). In contrast, other architects have suggested phenomenological rather than compositional relationships with trees. Alison and Peter Smithson were pioneers in this regard, as we will see later.

The very concept of the house is transformed following the connections with the trees that arise. The connections between the two become an opportunity to forge a dialogic relationship between apparent opposites: artificial versus natural; interior versus exterior; what is pre-existing on the site versus what is created by the architecture as an inhabited place; even permanence versus transitoriness. Rethinking houses based on trees is, thus, the aim of this research - specifically, looking at the effects of incorporating trees on the idea of place, on time in architecture and, finally, on extending the domestic sphere into the outdoors.

How Do Houses Change as They Incorporate Trees?

We define a house as a building that encloses habitable interior spaces that can accomodate a private domestic program. However, houses combined with trees cannot be limited solely to isolated indoor spaces. Their province is expanded to incorporate the adjacent outdoor space. In that sense, the outside cannot be detached from the experience of habitation. The house concept is expanded when connections are forged with the elements that characterize the site - in this case, trees. By this, we do not mean that architects should place as much attention on landscaping as on the interior spaces of a house. The ties you can forge between houses and trees extend beyond the design of a garden. The correspondences between the two are deeper and more complex on a formal, spatial, symbolic and perceptual level, as we will see in the case studies later. Ultimately, the network of connections,

06 Elza Berquo House, Vilanova Artigas, 1967