

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple  
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



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## Close domesticity, intimate glances.

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Throughout my artistic personal career, my projects have explored housing not so much as a collective phenomenon but rather in relation to the territory or the urban context, understood as a space for the exception, always conditioned by some kind of latency, transition or abandonment. Public housing would therefore serve very specific interests that, outwardly, escape the territories where my gaze has felt attracted and even comfortable.

Typologically, I have felt attracted by the "house" in its objectual condition, from its reiteration and seriation, as it already happened in the series "Twenty-six (abandoned) gasoline stations". In 2021 the magazine *AV*<sup>1</sup> published the series "Collecting Homes" in dialogue with other somewhat analogous series such as "Typologies" by Bruno Fontana or "Free Architecture" by Adam Wiseman. However, that same article already put on the table other views that penetrate into the domestic sphere, into the interior of the dwelling, where the experience of collective dwelling really takes place: Todd Hido's work "House Hunting" illuminates the gloom of the anodyne American suburban spaces by illuminating the inhabited interior and, for their part, Bogdan Girbovan's "10/1" and Michael Wolf's "100x100" series delve into the relationship between the repetitive collective domestic space and the way in which the inhabitant and his objects shape and qualify it.

It is surely in this introverted territory where the reflection of contemporary photography is forged in relation to collective habitation, which in turn reflects a socioeconomic palpitation derived, on the one hand, from the radical experience of the worldwide confinement of the Covid-19 pandemic and, on the other, the unavoidable crisis of public housing as a political project, unable to respond in many countries to the housing urgency strained by real estate speculation and, consequently, by the high prices of sale and rent. In both cases, society has rediscovered a need that goes beyond the right to decent housing. It is in the home where the person, the individual and his immediate family nucleus, builds his genuine identity, the sphere of his intimacy. The house counts, I insist, not only at a satisfactory level of a basic need –for protection or shelter– but as a configurator of that which makes us truly individuals who then project that experience from the private to the public and collective, to the social.

The Spanish philosopher Josep Maria Esquirol has addressed in an essay<sup>2</sup> this need that human beings have for that close and intimate place that is the home, as an explicit spatial antidote to

<sup>1</sup> "Documentos dobles", *AV Monografías*, n° 237, 2021, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Esquirol, Josep Maria. *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*. Barcelona: Acanalado, 2015.

materialism, to virtual exhibitionism, to neoliberalism, to the vacuous nihilism in short that seems to invade contemporaneity. The house —hut, refuge, shelter and existential center— is thus and par excellence, the place to which one returns, the scene of the everyday and the close, the sphere for reflection and slowness. “The more explicitly reflective life, rather than being seen as going beyond, further away, can be understood as an attempt to return to proximity,” Esquirol points out.

I like to think that the photographs taken by Magnum photographer René Burri of the interiors of the Cité Radieuse in Marseille in 1957, seven years after its construction, mark in some way the beginning of a humanist architectural photography that focuses on what defines inhabitation, which is none other than the theatricalized interrelationship between space, objects and the actors of inhabitation<sup>3</sup>. These images bring us closer to the intimacy of which Esquirol speaks, but also to the recovery of architectural realism, so closely linked to and dependent on its visual representation, as Jesús Vassallo<sup>4</sup> has analyzed.

This concern for linking the essence of the domestic space and its conceptual definition in visual terms has also been reflected in my teaching activity, enquiring architecture students to ask themselves, prior to the design assignment, how they would preview or define with images that which makes up something like the soul of the domestic space. The result of this experience<sup>5</sup> confirms, on the one hand, the analytical power of the gaze as a design tool and, on the other, the existence of a kind of vectors that underpin the perceptive and emotional richness of inhabiting, regardless of or parallel to its material or constructive definition.

Questioned by these solvent premises, I go through my photographic archive with the interest of finding out —not a priori, but a posteriori— if I am able to discover something of that essence of the domestic dwelling as I conceive it here. I discover it perhaps in the interior richness and in the heterodox furniture of the Carvajal House (Javier Carvajal, 1969) that contrasts with the cold brutalism of its architecture, in the fiery mestization of the Kallis House (Rudolph M. Schindler, 1946), in the penumbral and bounded condition of the experimental Muuratsalo House (Alvar Aalto, 1953), as domestic as the glazes of reflections and transparencies of the Case Study House (Charles & Ray Eames, 1949) and the Glass House (Phillip Johnson, 1949), in the abstract material warmth of the Hunt House in Malibu (Craig Ellwood, 1957), also in the almost metaphysical asepsis of the Weissenhof-Siedlung (Le Corbusier, 1927) close to the narrative constructions of Thomas Demand and certainly in the programmatic Lemoine House (Rem Koolhaas, 1996), explicitly activated by its operative functionality.

3 Rüegg, Arthur (ed.). *Le Corbusier. René Burri*. Basel: Birkhäuser, 1999.

4 Vassallo, Jesús. *Epics in the Everyday. Photography, Architecture and the problem of Realism*. Zurich: Park Books, 2019.

5 Bergera, Iñaki (ed.). *Lo doméstico, narrativas visuales*. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2017.

The domestic taxonomy of walls, floors, ceilings, doors and windows is completed by furniture, plants, carpets or curtains. The same light that activates all this towards the sensorial and the perceptive is the one captured by images. The gaze does not construct the domestic, but it preconfigures and appraises it, vivifies it, activates it and makes it real, tangible. Whether in the collective public housing or in the hunt, we inhabit because we build that "body of images" of which Bachelard speaks by looking at that vital and convergent center of coexistence that makes us individuals, family, and citizens.

"For the house furnishes us dispersed images and a body of images at the same time. In both cases, I shall prove that imagination augments the values of reality. A sort of attraction for images concentrates them about the house. Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we live in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all of our images of protected intimacy?"<sup>6</sup>.

6 Bachelard, Gastón. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, p. 3.

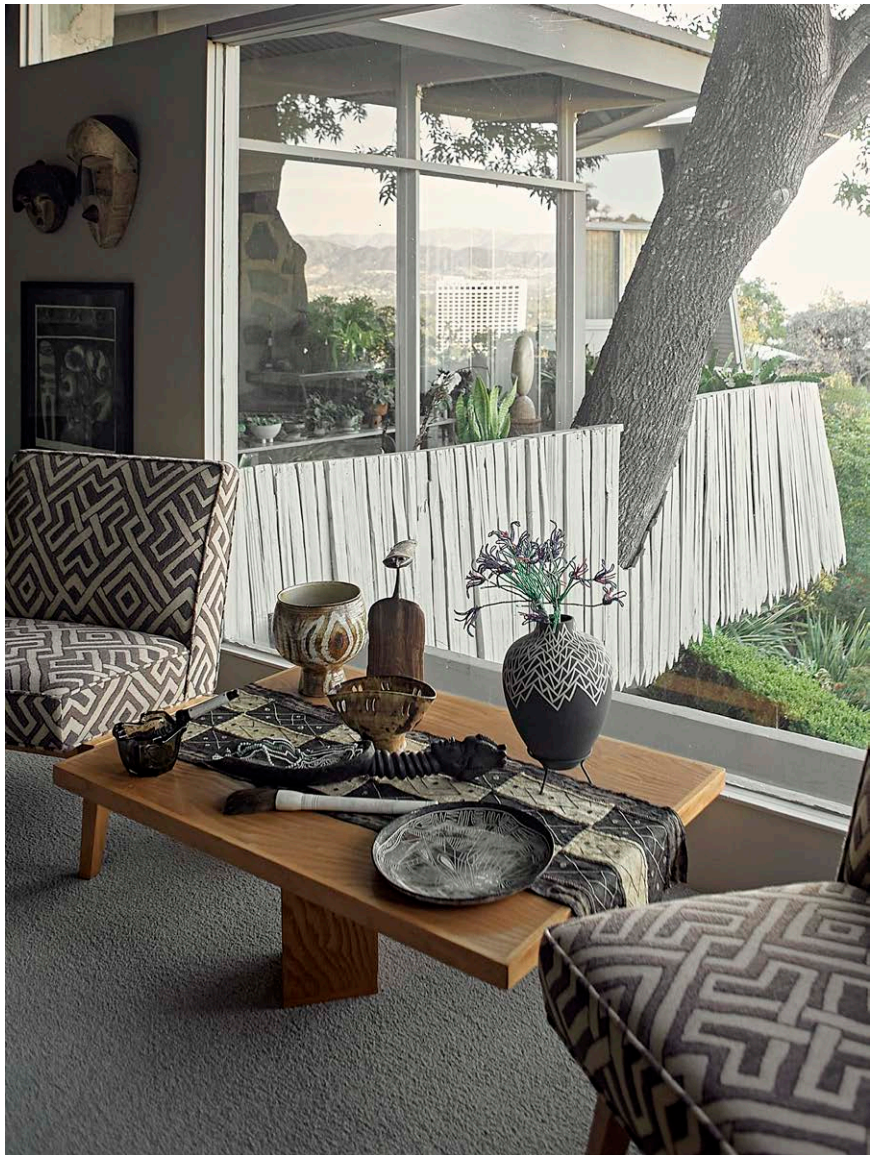




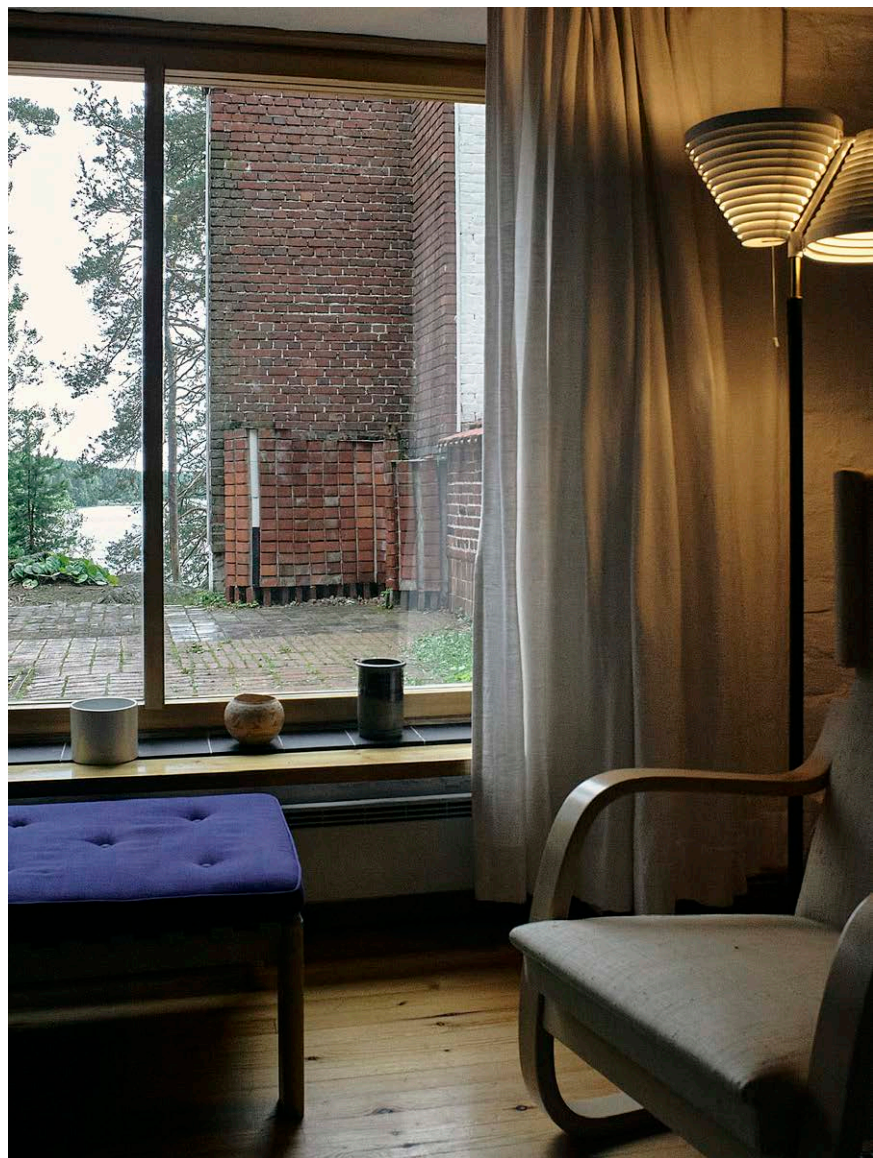


*Casa Carvajal*, 2019. Javier Carvajal, Somosaguas, Madrid, 1969





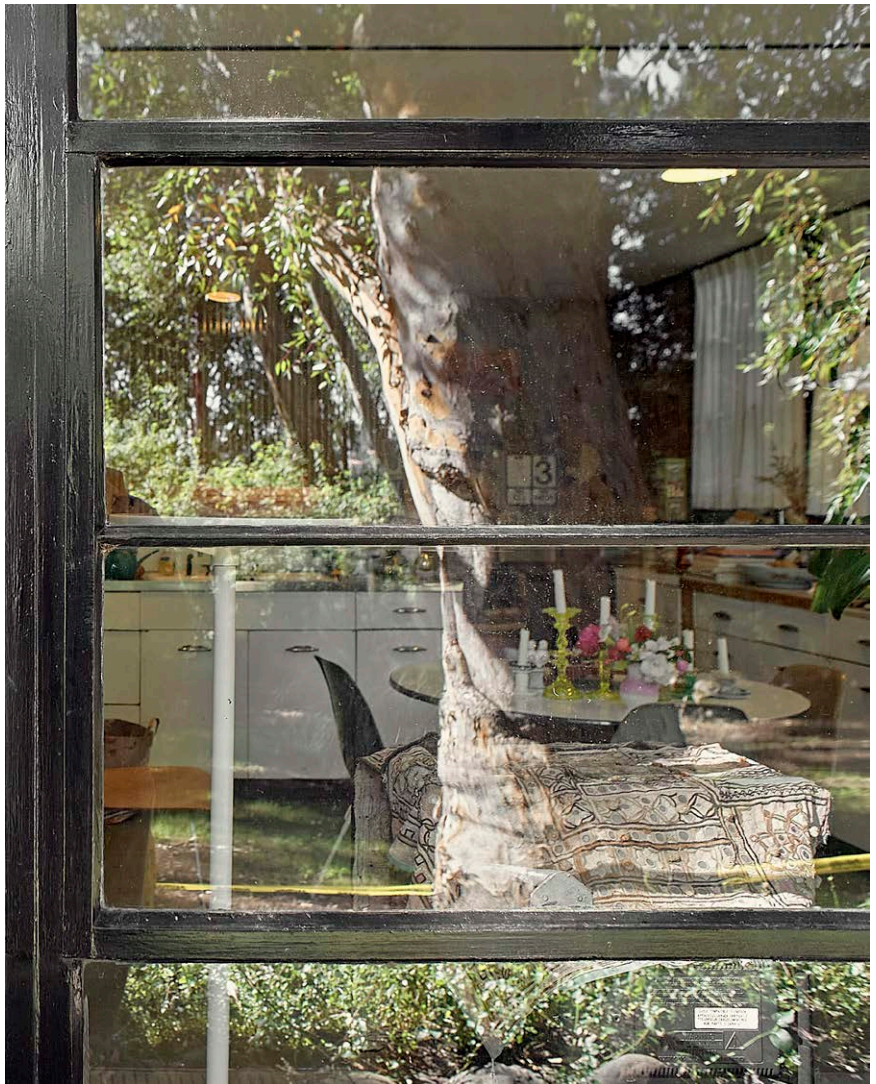
*Kallis House*, 2012. Rudolph M. Schindler, Los Angeles, 1946





*Muuratsalo Experimental House, 2011. Alvar Aalto, Muuratsalo, 1953*



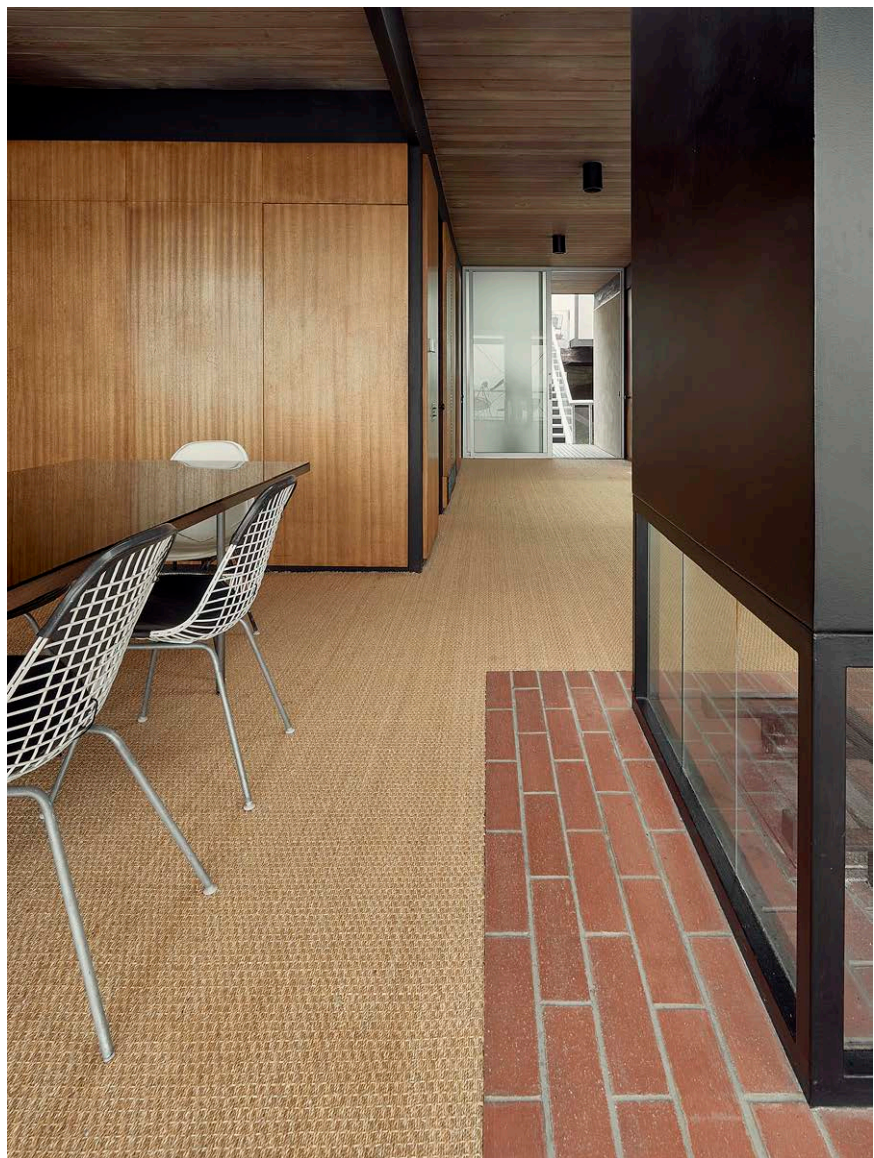


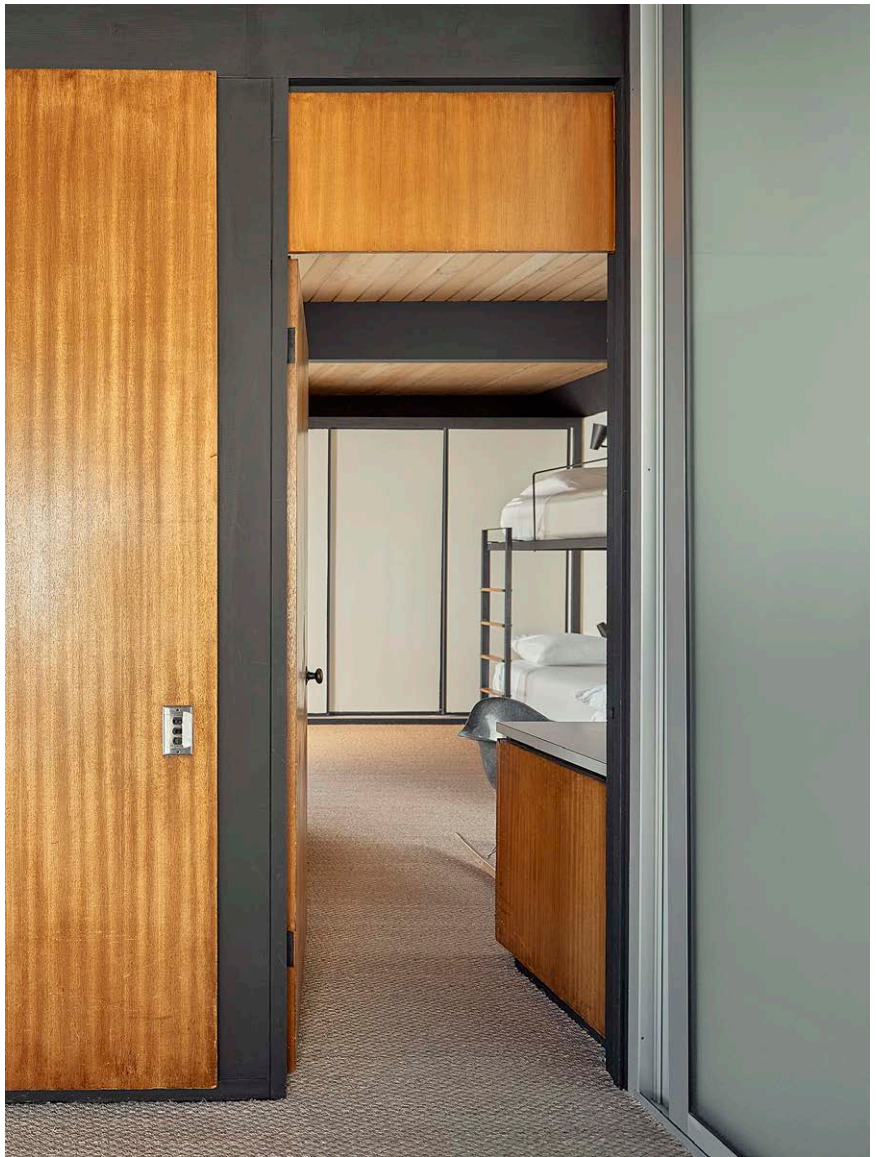
Case Study House, 2012. Charles & Ray Eames, Los Angeles, 1949





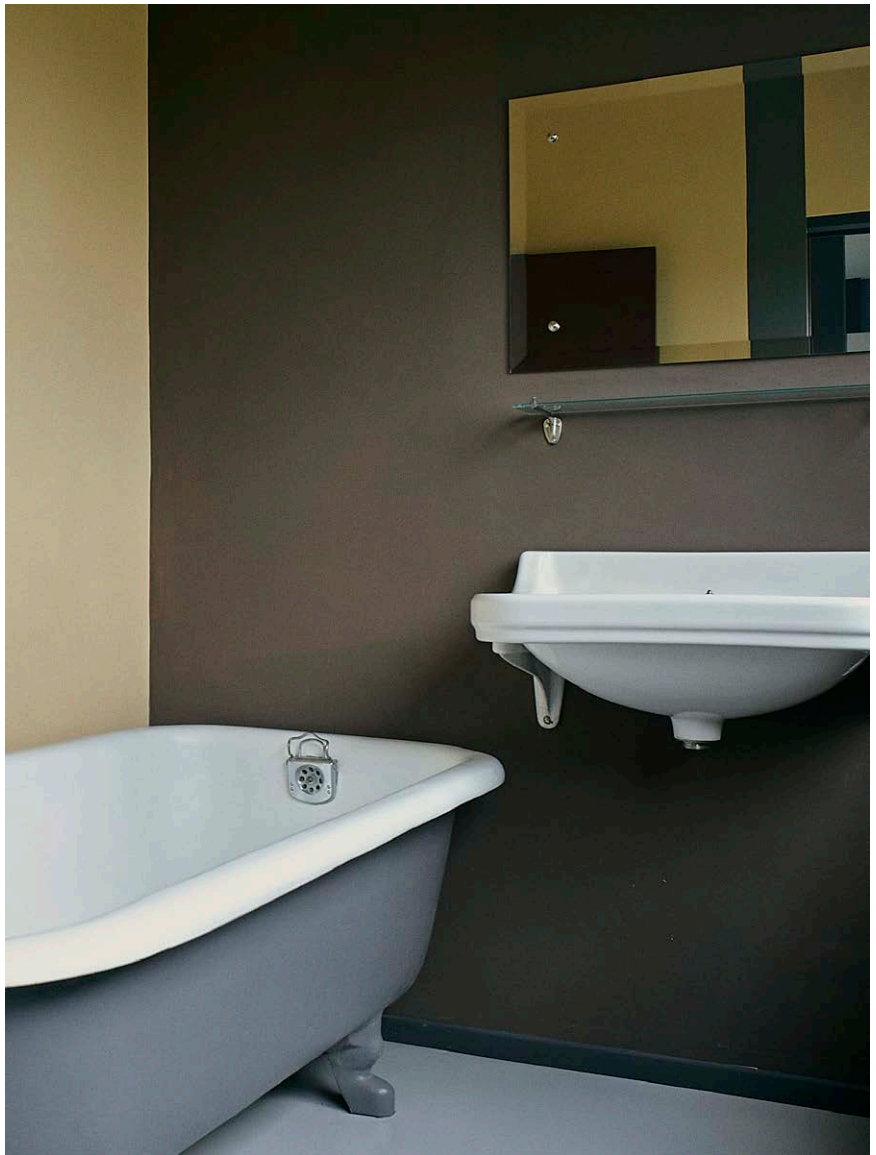
*Glass House*, 2012. Philip Johnson, New Canaan, 1949



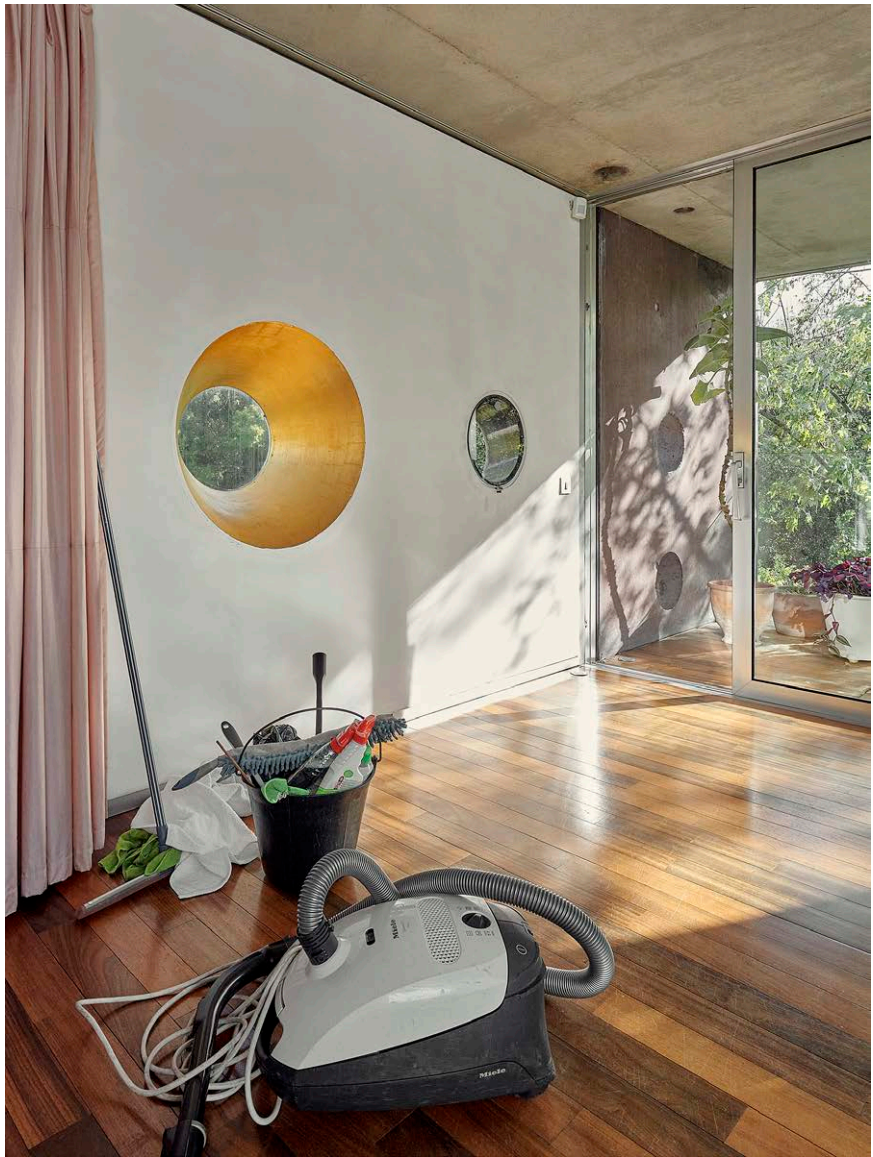


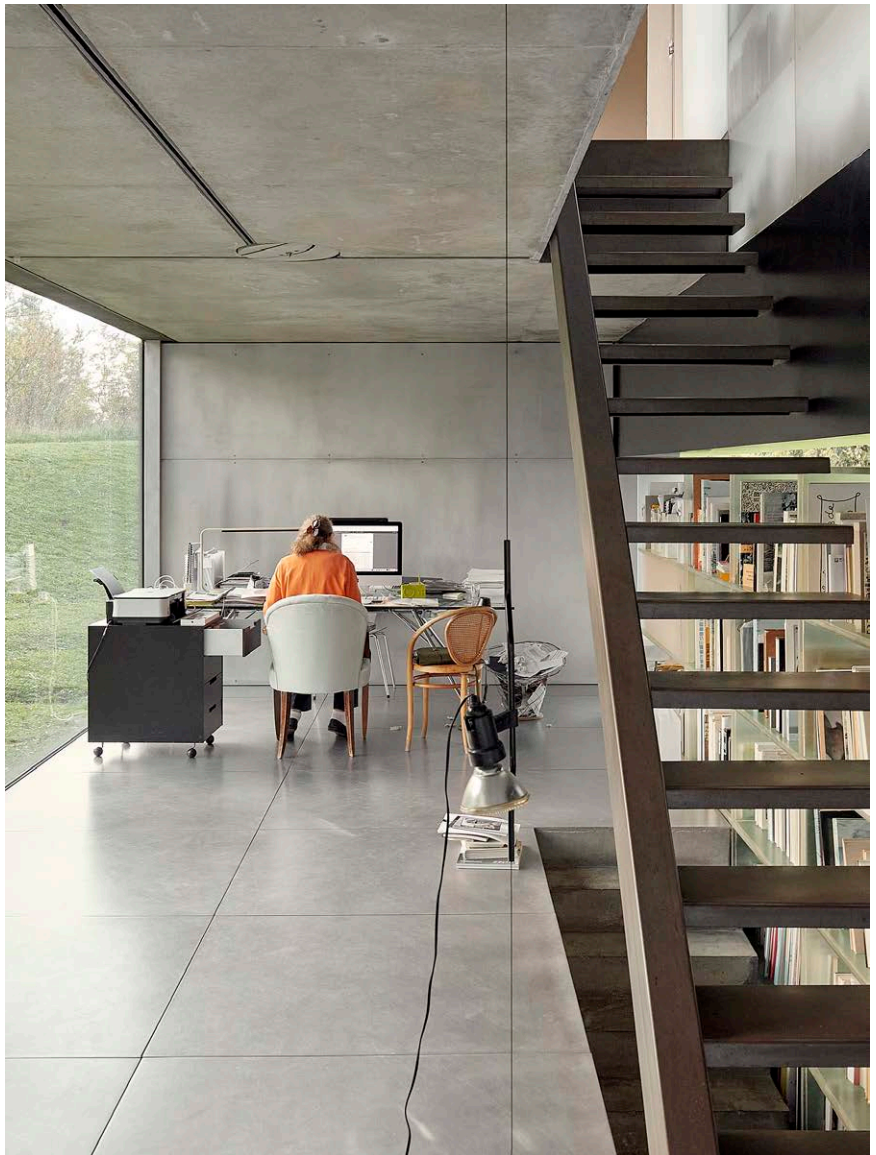
*Hunt House, 2012. Greg Elwood, Malibu, 1957*





*Weissenhof-Siedlung, 2013. Le Corbusier, Stuttgart, 1927*





Casa Lemoine, 2023. Rem Koolhaas, Burdeos, 1996