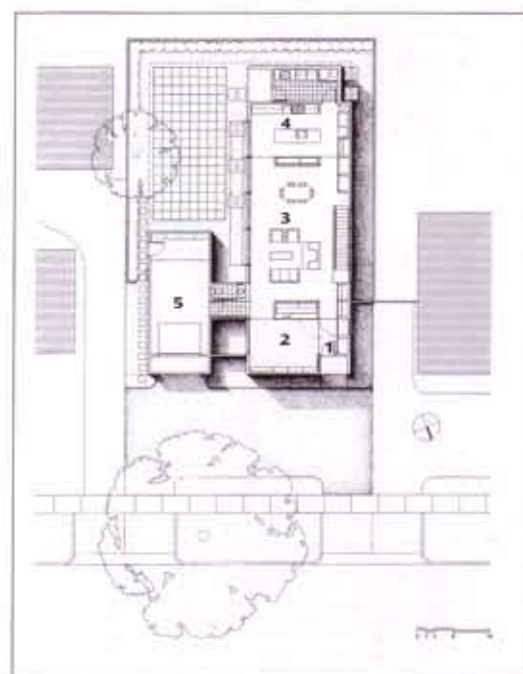


THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

The Un-Private House



Upper-level plan



Ground-floor plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Work space
- 3 Living/dining area
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Garage
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Master bedroom
- 8 Dressing room/corridor

Designed by Francois de Menil for a single woman, the 3,480-square-foot, white stucco Shorthand House was constructed in 1996–97 on a site in a relatively dense Houston neighborhood. Anticipating the day she would no longer be working full-time, the client chose the site because it would allow her to walk more and drive less as she went about her daily routines.

The house is composed of a two-story volume, which runs the length of the lot, and a single-story garage. A blind passage connects the two, giving the entry facade a discreetly composed presence and creating an L-shaped plan that screens a landscaped courtyard from the main street. Bedrooms on the upper level of the house accommodate the owner and her friends or her adult children who might be visiting. In both the bedrooms and the living areas below, the few window openings facing the street or the neighbors are balanced by the continuous glazing facing the light-filled landscaped courtyard.

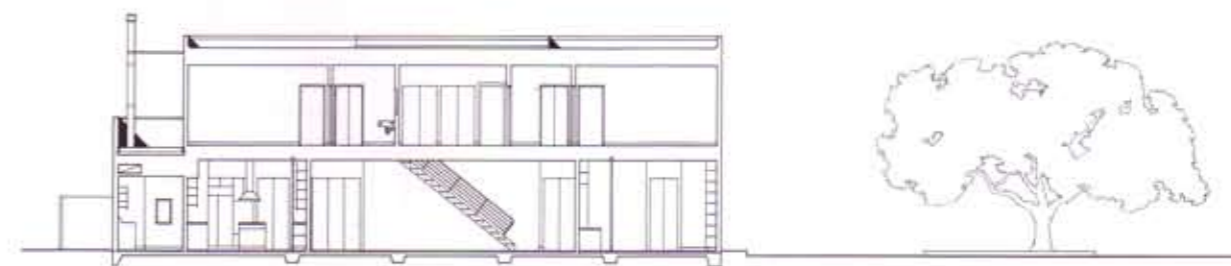
In describing the name given to the project, the architect has said, "The Shorthand House seeks to introduce basic spatial awareness and potentiality to the

suburban domestic environment by translating the linguistic rules of shorthand [a system in which the client was well versed] into a flexible system of symbolic architectural references." In one sense, de Menil's efficient, architectural shorthand is achieved by using an essential element rather than walls to express the function of a room: a table defines the dining room; a hearth defines the living room. In addition, a series of moving partitions and doors, mimicking the gestural characters of shorthand, transforms the open spaces of the house for different functions. An open sitting area, for example, quickly becomes an enclosed work space; a hallway becomes a dressing room. Thus, the apparent boundaries of each room are flexible, and the owner can adapt the architecture to her current needs. The architect concludes, "Because the occupant must physically engage the house in order to alter the spatial condition, she is, of necessity, simultaneously engaged in understanding the meaning and experience of space and architecture."

Principal facade



View into interior from courtyard



Longitudinal section

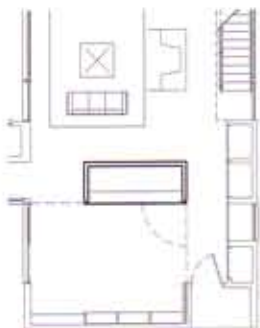


View into bedroom (above) and work space (below) from court

Right: View of living/dining area from work space



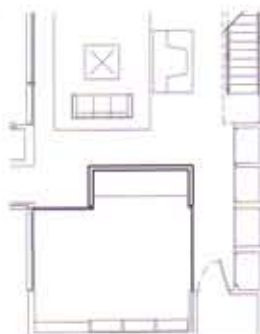
Work space with movable panels retracted



Plan of work space with movable panels retracted



Work space with movable panels extended



Plan of work space with movable panels extended

