

Compounded and compounded, life by life,
 These are death's own supremest images,
 The pure perfections of parental space,

The children of a desire that is the will,
 Even of death, the beings of the mind
 In the light-bound space of the mind, the floreate flare . . .

It is a child that sings itself to sleep,
 The mind, among the creatures that it makes,
 The people, those by whom it lives and dies.

AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE: FOUR NEW BUILDINGS

PHILIP C. JOHNSON AND
 EDGAR KAUFMANN, JR.

MODERN has won the battle of the styles, yet architecture in the United States today is singularly distraught. Architectural practice, always a pitiful fraction of our total building, is now reduced to a minimum by the agonies of a *laissez-presque-faire* transition from war to peace.

Besides meeting a payroll and expense account, the architect is often expected to compete with planners in analysing social needs, with publicity experts in concocting novel eye-catchers, and with philosophers in judging new aesthetic panaceas. He is shaken in his sense of scale by plans for the United Nations centre and similar concentrations. He is often somewhat helpless, since our schools of architecture have thrown out order with the Orders. Moreover, regular and critical appraisals have not been printed since Lewis Mumford was successfully sued for his honest words in the *New Yorker* in 1926.

Against this chaos, the importance of sustained individual effort

stands out clearly. Four recent works, each a major effort by a strong creative architect, are presented here: two by Frank Lloyd Wright and one each by Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer. The designs by Wright and Breuer are exuberantly articulated, while that of Mies is unsparingly uniform. It is this exceeding characterization which makes these designs outstanding examples, worthy of discussion.

The scheme most likely to be known in Britain is Wright's Museum of Non-Objective Art, scheduled to be built in New York on Central Park. It is to house a large collection of modern art assembled under the direction of Baroness Hilla von Rebay by the munificence of Solomon Guggenheim. In Wright's design a splendid low cupola of glass tubing protects and illumines a spacious circular court, around which a broad spiral ramp winds gently down to the earth. This spiral is self-supporting like a coil spring—no columns or load-bearing walls intervene. The broad ramp turns an upcurved edge to the court, while towards the city its edge becomes a high wall for pictures, lit by an inclined clerestory of glass tubes. The easy curvature of the wall and the slight angle of descent are complemented by the outward slope of the main exhibition wall. Movable exhibition screens may be placed on the ramp at will. Visitors will be able to rise or descend by elevators to any level of the continuous display space. The elevator shaft is marked at the top by a hemisphere of glass tubes. Special halls for projecting coloured light compositions and for other events are provided below street level. The business and curatorial offices are housed in an 'L'-shaped block, low and largely rectangular, which will lie further back from the street than shown in the model. This relocation will emphasize the dominance of the massy tower rising toward a street corner with clear space around. The inevitably misleading scale of a model is emphasized in our illustration by gross lighting. Yet scale is the key to this design, for by this means alone the architect tames the tense coil whose every plane belies the common practice of building. Frank Lloyd Wright never fails to create a poetic sense of space in his buildings, and the courts of this museum may be expected to illustrate this particularly.

However unconventional his museum may seem, Wright has taken an even more empyreal flight of fancy in heretofore unpublished plans for a private sports domain in Hollywood Hills,

California, for Huntington Hartford. Wright himself has compared this design to a tree. Perhaps in our era only Antonio Gaudi could truly have appreciated these free imaginative forms licensed by a daring command of structure—certainly they will dizzy most who see them. The structure is planned on a high comb of hills above Los Angeles and juts forward, inclining over the valleys below. The main three-sided mass of masonry grasps, with perfect economy of cantilever, three shallow saucers of concrete, concentrically reinforced. These are shaded by similarly shaped roofs of glass tubing. On the drawing, the lunettes pierced in two of these show the floor level at the straight edge. These two saucers are, respectively, lounge and restaurant-dance floor. Above curves a sundeck of similar form. All of these levels are reached by an elevator which follows the incline of the masonry trigon. Below, thrust out from the terraced hillside on its own base, floats the rimmed bowl that is the swimming pool. Further below to the left lies a circle with tennis courts. Visible between the two sports areas and lying above them, is the curved curb of the entrance plaza. Once and for all time Wright has stated here that his architecture can lift pure geometric forms into the free reaches of space above the earth without the slightest echo of European precedents; his Organic Architecture is proved not earthbound, and he remains the most fertile and original architect of the United States.

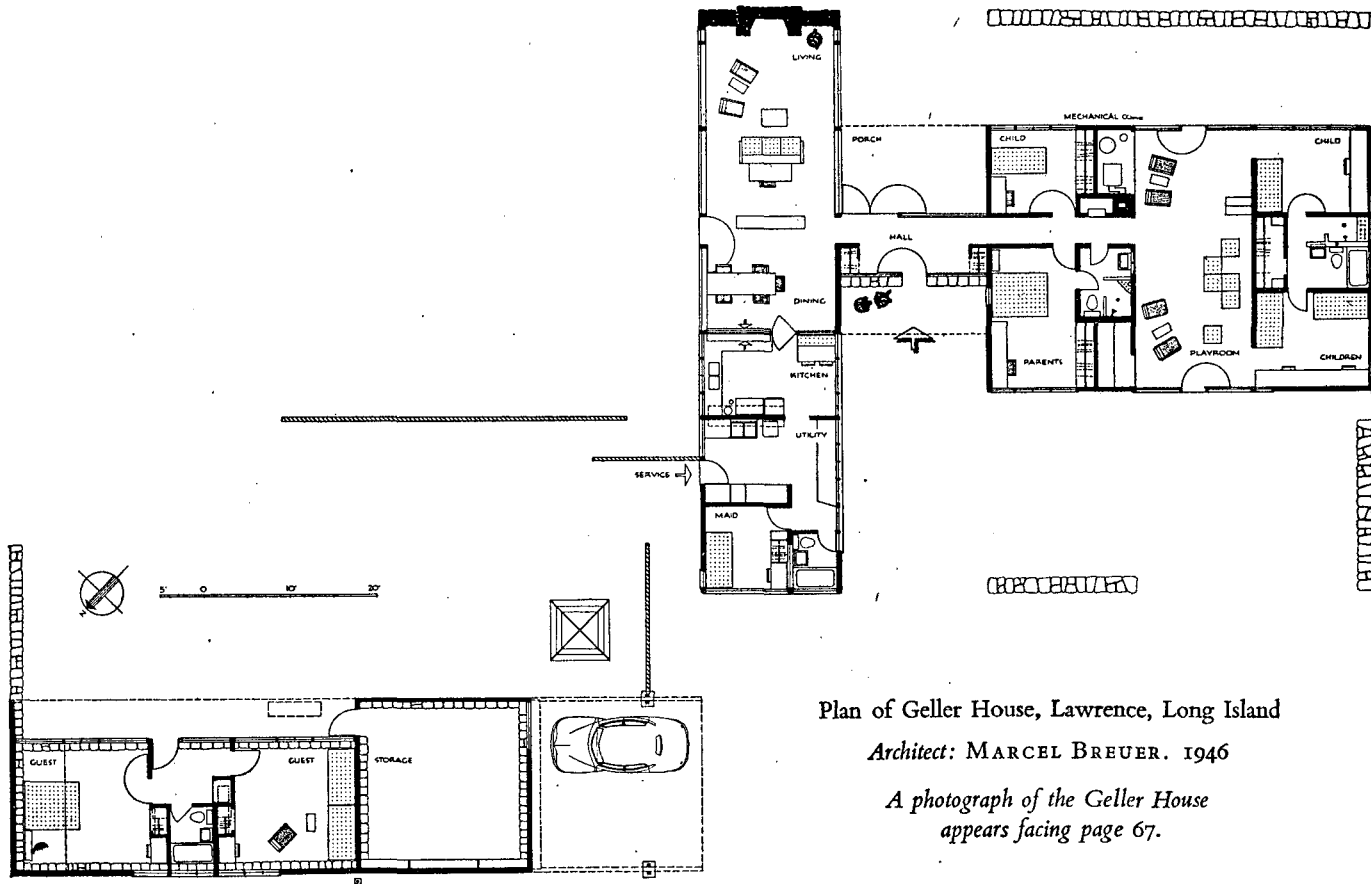
The Administration and Library Building by Mies van der Rohe (whose complete work is being shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this autumn) is a principal unit of the campus he has designed for the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he heads the Department of Architecture. The campus, when complete, will have seventeen buildings designed and orientated by Mies and will be one of the major monuments of modern architecture in the world. The common practices of building, so daringly flouted in Wright's works, form the point of departure for Mies. Yet his is a long voyage from the usual uses of a steel cage, brick curtain walls, and metal sash, to the perfected precision of the building illustrated. Plan articulates the forms of Wright's and Breuer's works, but it is structure that articulates each detail of the Mies building. He finds beauty in fastidious proportions and nice joints, and abides by rectangles disposed with monumental symmetry. Monumentality is emphasized by

the great scale of the building, whose bays are just three times as large as the usual ones—sixty-four by twenty-four feet. It is hard to realize that the glass panes over the doorways will be the largest sheets in this country—eighteen feet high—and that on entering, a visitor will face a space 200 feet by 200 feet and thirty feet high with only a dozen free-standing columns in sight. This serene building has as its foci of interest a small quiet inner garden court and two large balconies, one of which shows on the west elevation drawing, while the other is cantilevered over the entrance lobby. The impeccable performance of each of the structural elements, the mastery with which they are juxtaposed, the harmonious command of shape and space, make this design a great deed of virtuosity and an exemplar of reticence, thoroughness and clarity.

Marcel Breuer's recent house on Long Island for the Geller family is an ambitious and often perplexing work by a man who, after having been a leading architect in Germany, Switzerland and England, has become one of America's best-known architects. Breuer has combined in this house the brilliance of the Bauhaus planning methods with the spread-out characteristics of the American ranch house. As the Swiss critic, Dr. Sigfried Giedion, puts it, 'Breuer has become thoroughly Americanized'.

The basic characteristic of the Geller plan is its 'zone' arrangement. The entrance is in the middle of the composition on a sort of bridge between two rectangles that are placed perpendicular to each other. To the right of the entrance are the sleeping apartments and the children's room and playroom, isolated to prevent disturbance to the activities in the main part of the house. The main block contains the servants' wing at one end and, isolated at the other, the living room, with windows on both sides. Articulation in planning can be carried no further. Every function is succinctly expressed in the plan.

On the exterior, the composition is dominated by an extremely long reverse shed roof line. The matched board siding of oiled cedar makes a pleasant vernacular appearance which contrasts with the crisp symmetrical window divisions and bright red doors. The one-story zoned, articulated plan was first introduced by Breuer some ten years ago and has since been much admired. It may well become the prototype for many suburban houses in the next decade.



Plan of Geller House, Lawrence, Long Island

Architect: MARCEL BREUER. 1946

*A photograph of the Geller House
appears facing page 67.*

E. E. CUMMINGS

POEM

to start, to hesitate; to stop
(kneeling in doubt: while all
skies fall) and then to slowly trust
T upon H, and smile—

could anything be pleasanter
(some big dark littè day
which seems a lifetime at the least)
except to add an A?

henceforth he feels his pride involved
(this i who's also you)
and nothing less than excellent
E will exactly do

next (our great problem nearly solved)
we dare adorn the whole
with a distinct grandiloquent
deep D; while all skies fall

at last perfection, now and here
—but look: not sunlight? yes!
and (plunging rapturously up)
we spill our masterpiece