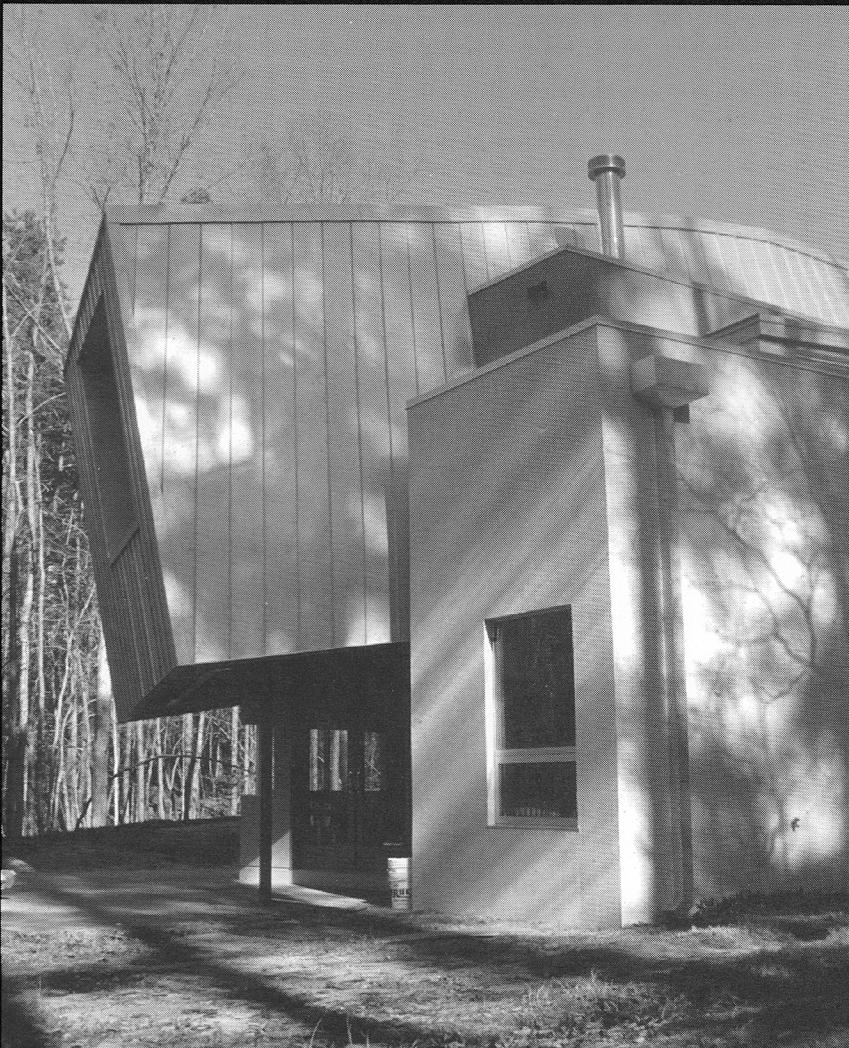
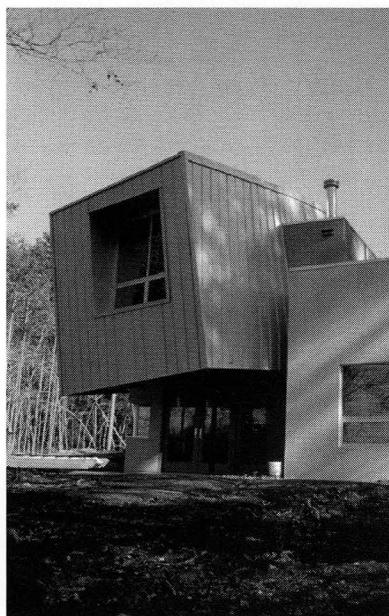


No Place like (the) Home
Michael Hughes

Who are you talking to? *No one.* What are you doing? *Nothing.* Where are you going? *No place.*



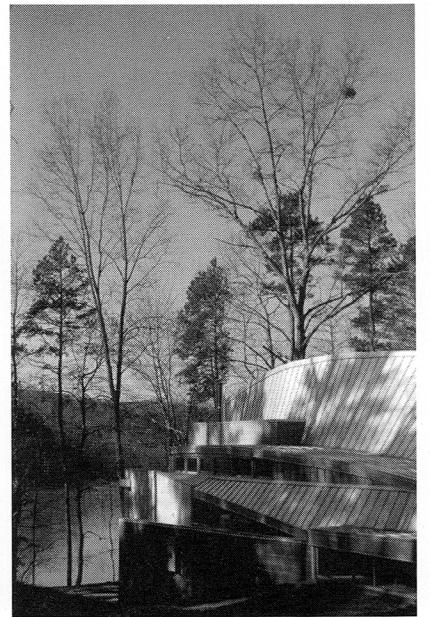
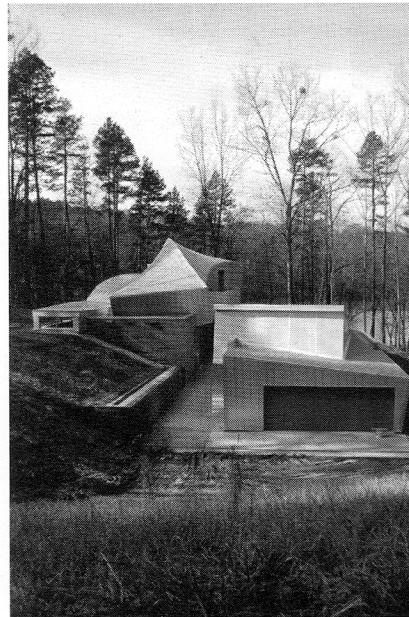
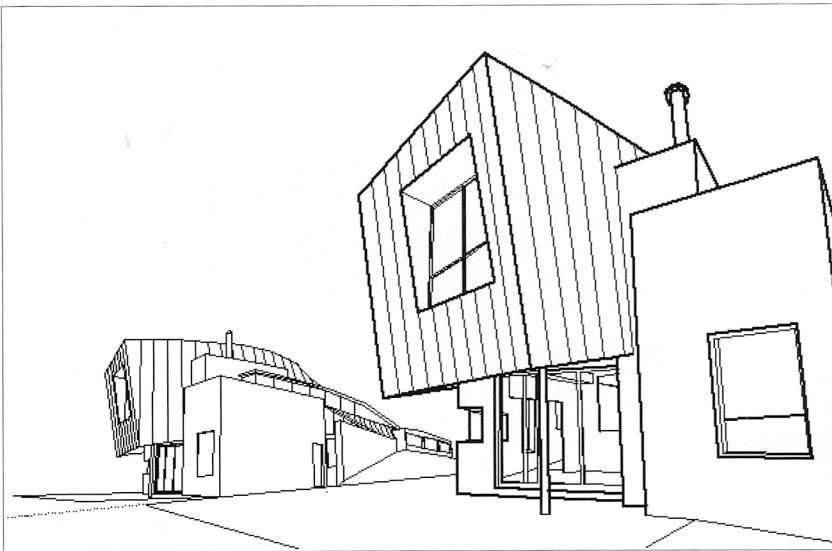


Does anyone ever get away with this kind of denial? The message is all too clear, you might as well say, "I'm hiding something." Clearly, this No one is precisely the person your girlfriend, parent, and/or spouse dislikes most. Or, more specifically, No one is the person your guilt ridden conscience believes they would dislike were they to discover your desire to go No place with No one to do Nothing.

No place fascinates me. I would say I've never been there, but this would immediately implicate me in some sort of cover-up. Such is the perversity of denial. Clearly, for all the effort expended on efforts aimed at deflecting our attention, no one believes nothing exists no place. Yet, somehow the suspicion remains. Unfortunately, the lack of place remains inaccessible, for admission would legitimate and locate an impossibility.

Invoking the camouflage of negation requires an exquisite coordination of intonation and environment to come together flawlessly. Internally, the necessary attention to detail verges on maniacal paranoia, yet, outwardly, the scheme demands nonchalance. Recourse to denial immediately identifies your failure, as it suggests broad truths in direct proportion to the specifics it succeeds in hiding.

This is not a Pipe.



Asked to design a retirement home on a heavily wooded site in northeast Georgia, this project has developed as a critique of contemporary cultural and spatial responses to aging. The program—a single family residence constructed of low-maintenance materials with all major functions located on the ground floor for potential handicap accessibility—prompted my initial fear of, and subsequent fascination with, retirement in terms of repression and mortality. In a traditional, macro view of life beginning with birth and followed by school, job, marriage, and ultimately death, retirement can be, paradoxically, both the goal and culmination of life: by definition a time to literally and/or figuratively go away.

The term Retirement Home conjures frighteningly benign images of contemporary geriatric architecture in which insipid hours are spent playing bridge in a “tastefully decorated activity room” beneath a “warm, light-filled atrium.” Banality camouflages the aging body much the way the vulgarity of a satin-lined casket draws our attention away from the reality of death: so plainly exhibited yet desperately repressed beneath the layers of formality, opulence, and flowers. In comfortable surroundings, life passes easily.

Formally, this withdrawal into the Georgia woods represents a tacit denial of spatial repression in favor of confrontation. Here the allegory of aging is expressed through an ambiguous relationship between architecture and ground. The story, as told by this building, attempts to provoke a recognition of death, and more specifically, a conscious action in response. Is it, as an indication of the bodies within, rising from or sinking into the ground? Is retirement rebirth or reinterment?

