

House on the Pedernales

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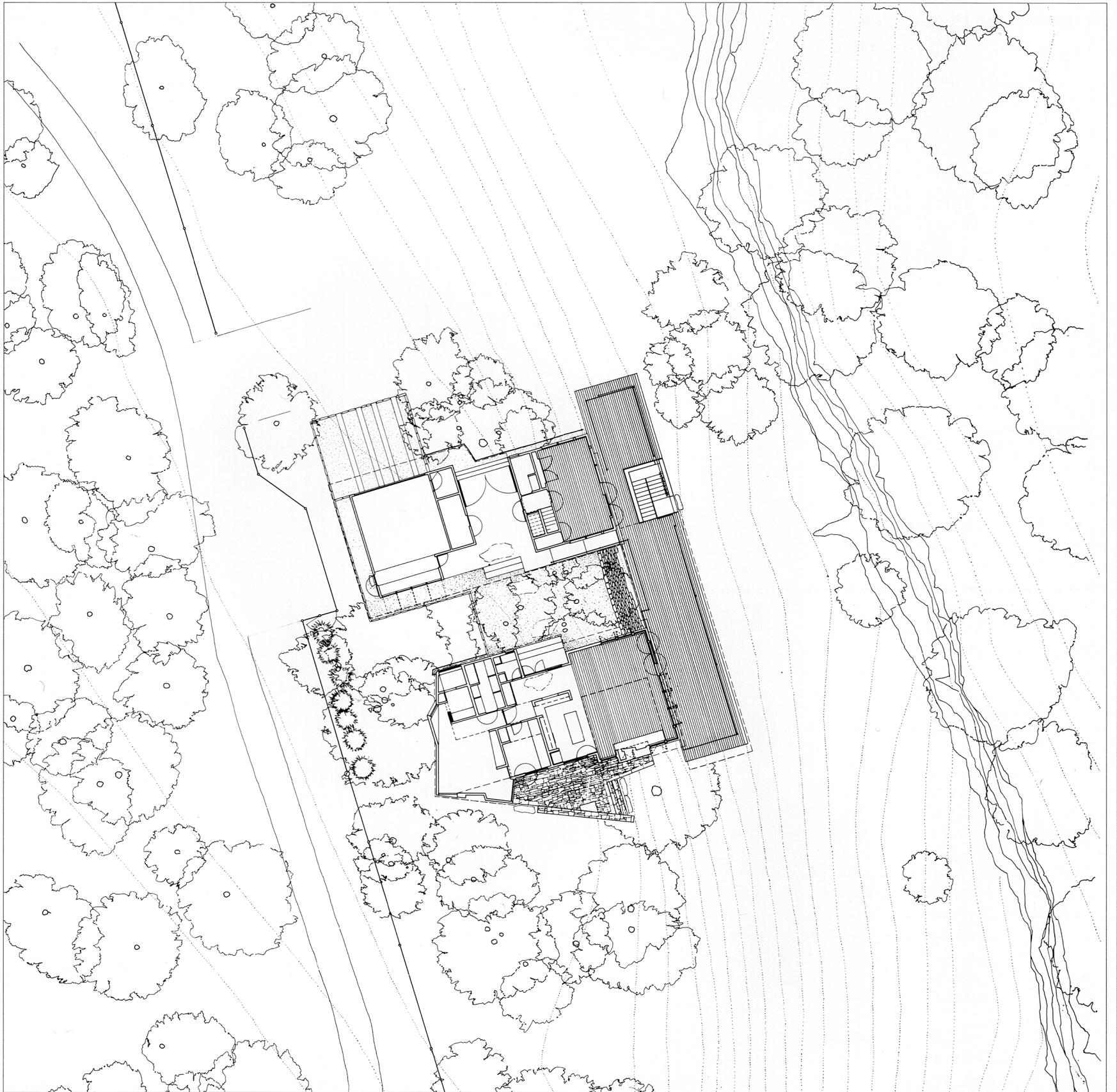
Ex-urban living

The arid limestone hills west of Austin have long resisted indiscriminate settlement. Bounded by the Balcones escarpment, these hills are the vestigial trace of the central uplift that once lay at the floor of a great inland sea. Spring-fed rivers of exceptional clarity and beauty, lined by bald cypress, pecan, cedar elm, and live oak, filter between the hills. But these dense riparian canyons are prone to quick and violent flooding, rendering them unsuitable for permanent inhabitation despite their air of gentility. The safe high ground is, in turn, characterized by a dearth of topsoil over-porous fossil-bearing bedrock. Here it is generally hot and dry, with limited vegetative cover beyond the stands of stunted mesquites, live oaks and juniper trees: exposed. Scorpions. Prickly pears. Fire ants. Rattlesnakes. Tarantulas.

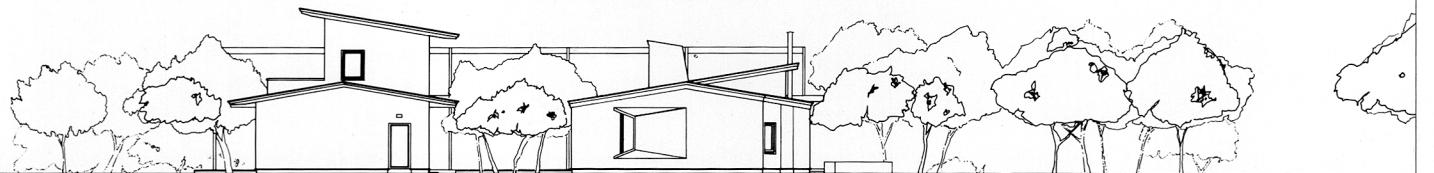
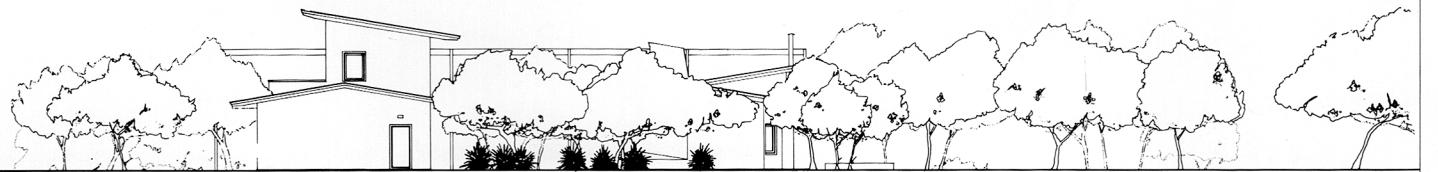
Ever inhospitable, this region of central Texas remained one of the last to be electrified in the twentieth century. However, increasingly over the past fifteen years it has become a landscape of intense desire; the ex-urban dream of safety in nature. Superimposed upon this is a dream of appearance; the starter-mansion.

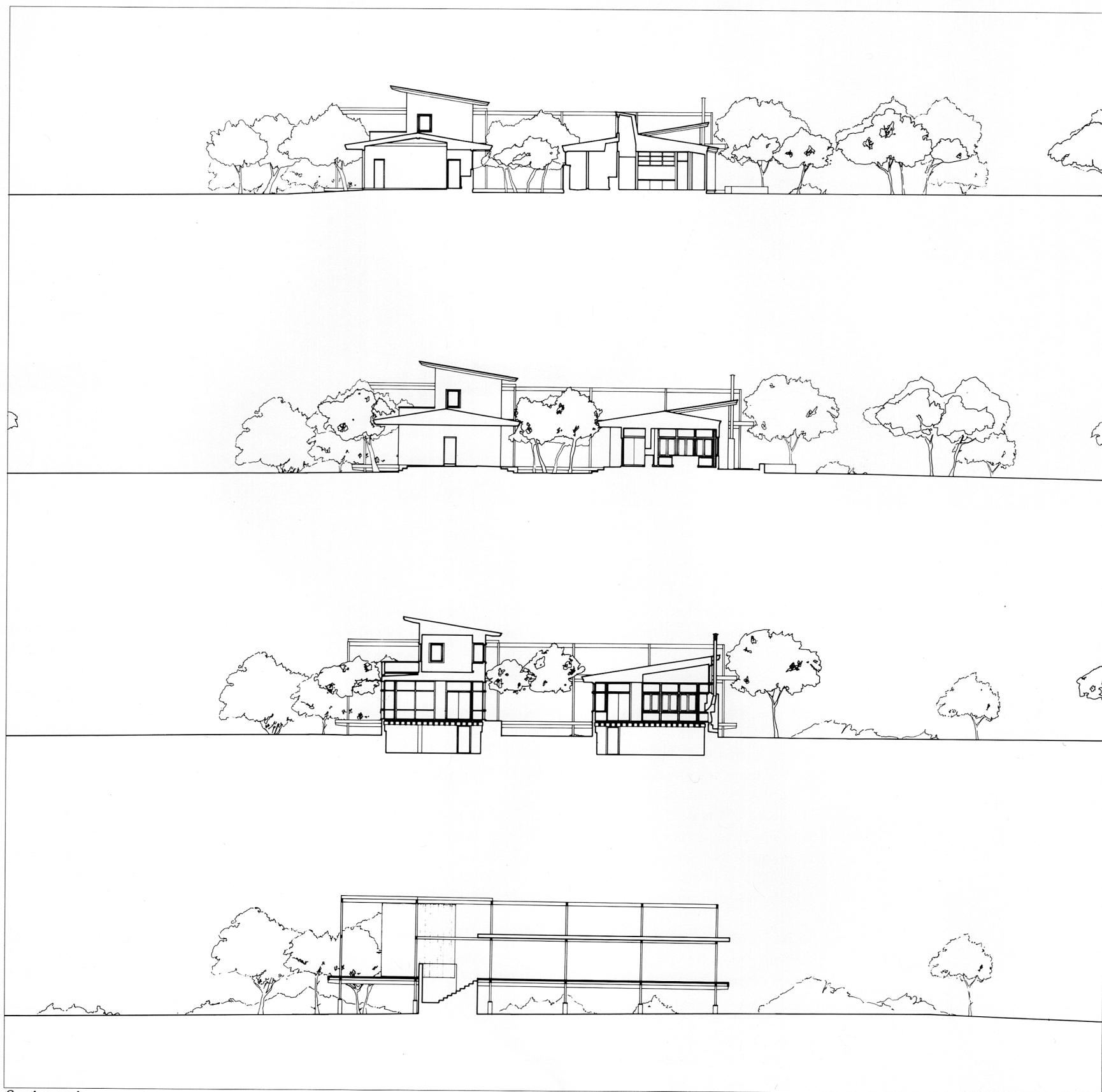
So here is our contra-proposal oriented to soil, sun, breeze, and trees: an apparatus for living with the land. Extending into the breeze and the canopy line of live oaks: a porch, 90' long, enclosable by a curtain. Attendant to it: two buildings: first, the house: 1900 sq.ft., the plan and section altered to produce a constant draw of the southeasterly breezes. Second, a garage/breezeway/screen porch/library block: operable in the south and north sides to control the microclimate of the courtyard. Finally, an upper deck for the moonrise.

The house makes habitable and intensifies the general sectional order of the landscape: cedar to stone to river. Here the vicissitudes of social occasions are played out under the searing sky, between the trees, and in several kinds of shade, breeze and prospect.



Site plan





Section series