

ARCHITECTURE
OF PLACE
BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS

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INTRODUCTION BY PILAR VILADAS

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INTRODUCTION

BY PILAR VILADAS

The title of this book, *The Architecture of Place*, is a particularly apt one. Since its founding, Bates Masi + Architects has remained true to its Modernist roots, designing thoughtfully organized, elegantly detailed houses that are open, warm, and comfortable, with a considered and imaginative approach to materials, and which embody the functional and environmental issues of the present day. These houses, the majority of which are weekend homes on the East End of Long Island, address the needs and wishes of clients and the physical and historical aspects of a site, as well as historical archetypes like the pitched-roof forms of the saltbox houses that are still common in the area. The East Hampton-based firm began as an unlikely but successful partnership between Harry Bates, who was in his 70th year, and who—after founding his office in 1965, became known for the Modernist houses he designed in the Hamptons and on Fire Island—and Paul Masi, who was then in his 20s and starting out in the profession. Since Bates's retirement, Masi has directed the firm, maintaining his former partner's philosophy of "considering the totality of the project," he says. "It was interesting to talk to Harry about the evolution of second homes on Long Island," Masi recalls. "The houses became more sophisticated, but still addressed the question of how you maintain the essence of an exciting place to live."

Even though the Modernist houses of the 1950s and '60s on Long Island were much more modest, as they were often commissioned by artists, writers, and other creative types, Modernist architecture in this area—despite the rise of much larger, more traditional houses built by much wealthier people in the 1980s and beyond—never really went away. Its revival began in earnest in the 1990s and continues today, although it seems to have split into two camps. One promotes large-scale, obviously expensive dwellings that tend to dominate their surroundings, while the other favors more modestly scaled houses that are an integral part of their settings, and for which luxury is not so much a matter of ostentation, but of proportion, light, and connection to the land.

In many of Bates Masi's projects, this balance also honors the history of the land and its uses, and the historic architecture in the area, in their designs for houses. In other projects, the increasing vulnerability of the land to climate change and sea-level rise is an important factor in the design. While some houses in the area are protected from flooding by strategies like raising them on large stilts, the results can look inorganic. Instead, Bates Masi's designs take these issues and integrate them into the design. For example, their methods include flood-mitigation measures, like elevating and breaking up the forms of the house to let water flow around them, thus lessening the threat of damage from surging waters, but also recognizing flooding as a natural event. A house can also be raised above a flood plain, for example, while its design ensures that it remain an integral part of the landscape.

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And sometimes, a client's lifestyle drives the design. A number of Bates Masi's houses consist of separate but connected forms that balance community and privacy, so that three generations of a family can enjoy both community and privacy. For clients who prefer water sports and sailing, the architects design houses that offer ample exposure to sun, breezes, and water.

Materials offer another opportunity for Bates Masi to go beyond the ordinary. For example, the architects used thatch—which is still used for roofs in Europe and the United Kingdom, but which is not a common building material in this country—on the exterior of a house, albeit in a contemporary way, packed between the exposed exterior framing. “Not only does the material grow out here,” Masi says, “but it's very similar to shingling, and it's very organic. It's exciting for us to take something and give it a new identity.” And while the architects are known for their use of wood, on both the exterior and interior, that use is evolving. Wood panels become oversize shingles, or cedar siding is suspended from bronze rods or stainless-steel clips, so that the boards can expand and contract with changes in the weather. In one house, thin cedar strips of the rainscreen siding were fastened only at the center, allowing the ends to warp naturally, in contrast to the strict lines of the framework. These materials and others, like the steel panels used at the bases of some houses, are chosen for their ability to weather gracefully; making a house look brand-new and shiny forever is not the goal. These architects prefer materials that weather well and take on a beauty of their own, without constant maintenance. And in the interiors of these houses, for example, knotty white oak is wire-brushed to bring out its texture rather than being stained; clay tiles are used like shingles to cover a tall fireplace; and limestone is given varied finishes according to its use—rougher for outdoors, for example, or polished for kitchen countertops, to make it more sanitary.

While a lot of the firm's early work was very expressive in its materials, its more recent work looks at the ways forms can support buildings, as in a design for a house with a curved back that will allow the wind to blow seeds up over the roof and onto the front of the property. The work has long been focused, with a few exceptions, on the East End of Long Island, but as its project portfolio expand to other states and countries, the nature of those places will continue to be a focal point.

And while Bates Masi is constantly exploring new forms of architectural expression, Harry Bates's influence is still very much a part of the firm's philosophy. “The materials could be very ordinary, but Harry would elevate them with details,” Masi says, calling the approach “ways to take the everyday and make a more unique experience. That continues in our work. It's something that everyone in our office gets excited about—getting to that level of detail to tell the story, and that's what we all love.”

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GEORGICA
COVE
2017

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A couple with property on a cove overlooking the ocean asked for a house that would be comfortable for just the two of them the majority of the time. However, with their love of entertaining, the house had to grow on busy weekends to accommodate their children, grandchildren, and guests. To instill the desired sense of comfort and peace, it was also important that the design blend with the pastoral setting and vernacular building traditions: predominantly shingle-style homes and barns that are often built and added to over time. Historic precedent studies revealed that referencing New England connected farms in an innovative way could achieve both goals.

Connected farms aggregated over time, interconnecting multiple buildings with distinct uses. The architectural style of the house was applied to subsequent buildings to unify the assembly, but partitions within provided the necessary separation between uses: house to kitchen, kitchen to shop, and shop to barn for instance. One volume was often offset or rotated from the next to provide greater access to light, air, and privacy from the other functions. Following that example, the program of this house is divided into owners' bedroom and office, eat-in kitchen and family room, formal living and

dining, and guest rooms. The spaces are arranged around a courtyard to create visual and physical connections between them but those connections can be broken by large sliding doors. Each structure has an independent mechanical system allowing it to be shut down when unoccupied. This allows the livability of the house to expand and contract whether the couple is alone, hosting dinner guests, or has a full house of overnight guests.

As with connected farms, a limited palette of materials and details unifies the various spaces and responds to the local climate. The cedar shingles common to local buildings are scaled up to the size of boards to cover the roof and sidewalls. Cedar screens provide privacy and filter light. A marble plinth filled with sand elevates the house above the floodplain while also creating drywells to accept storm water runoff. Oak floors and millwork throughout unify the spaces.

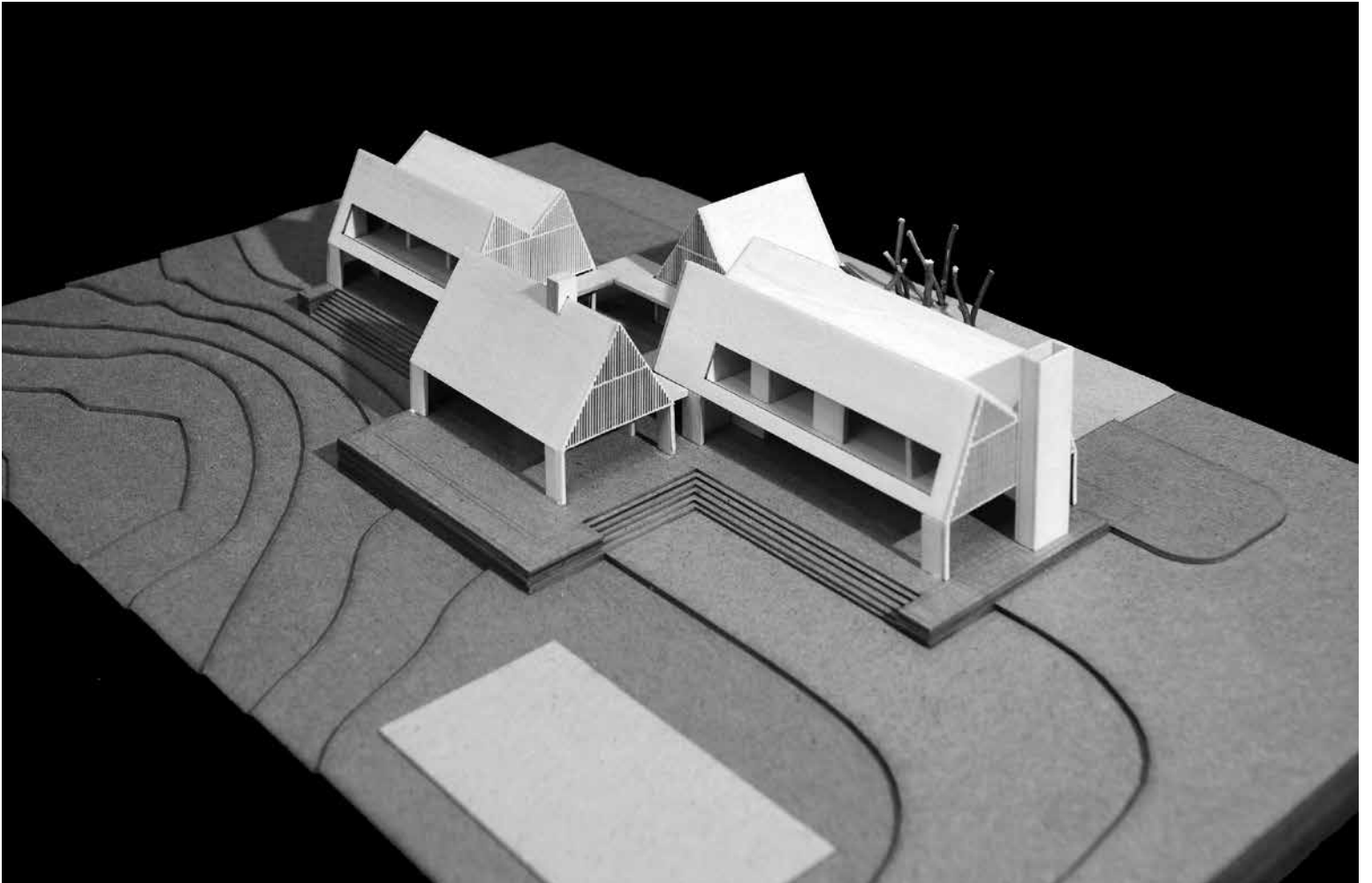
The design repurposes the historic typology of the connected farm to suit the very timely needs of the site and the family. By acknowledging the area's history and tradition of building, this home is an evolution of its cultural expression.

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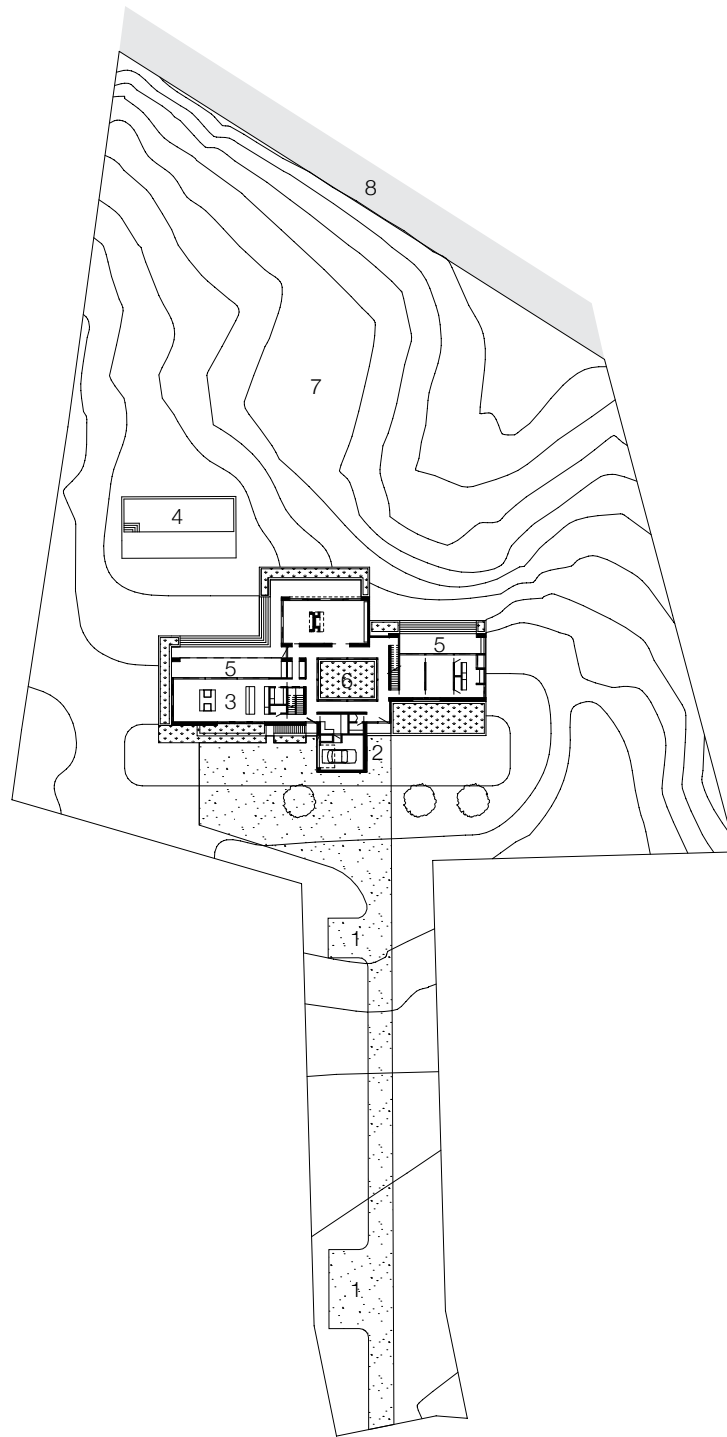


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SITE PLAN

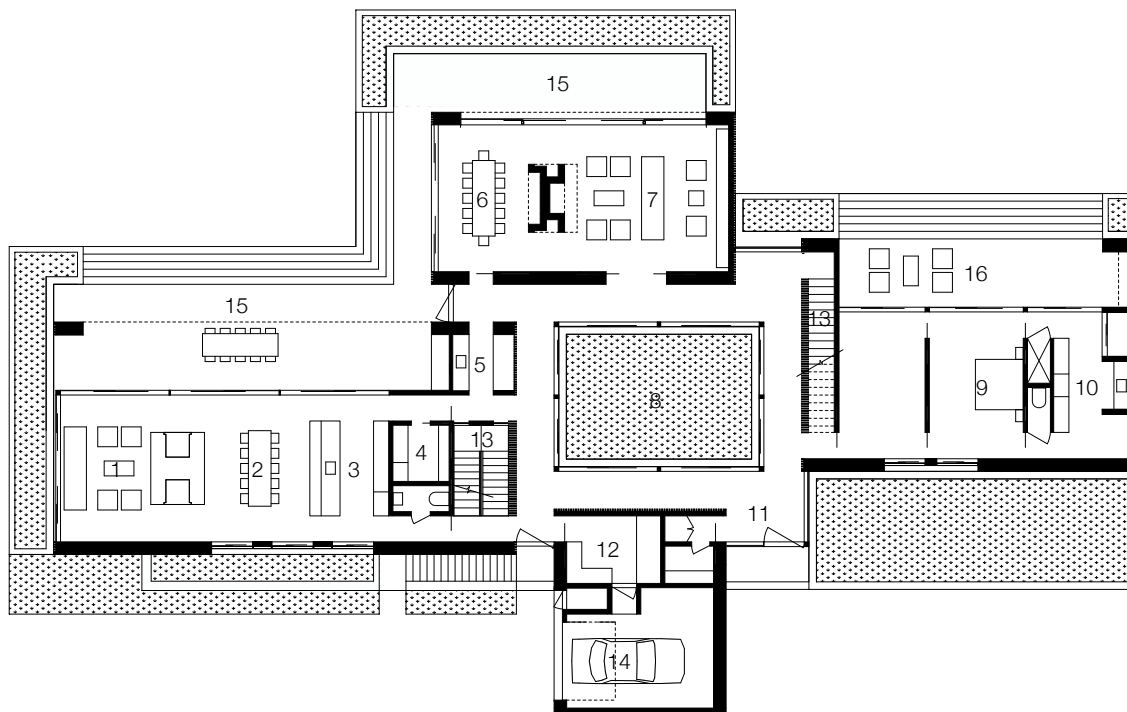
- 1. Parking
- 2. Entry
- 3. House

- 4. Pool
- 5. Terrace
- 6. Courtyard

- 7. Lawn
- 8. Pond



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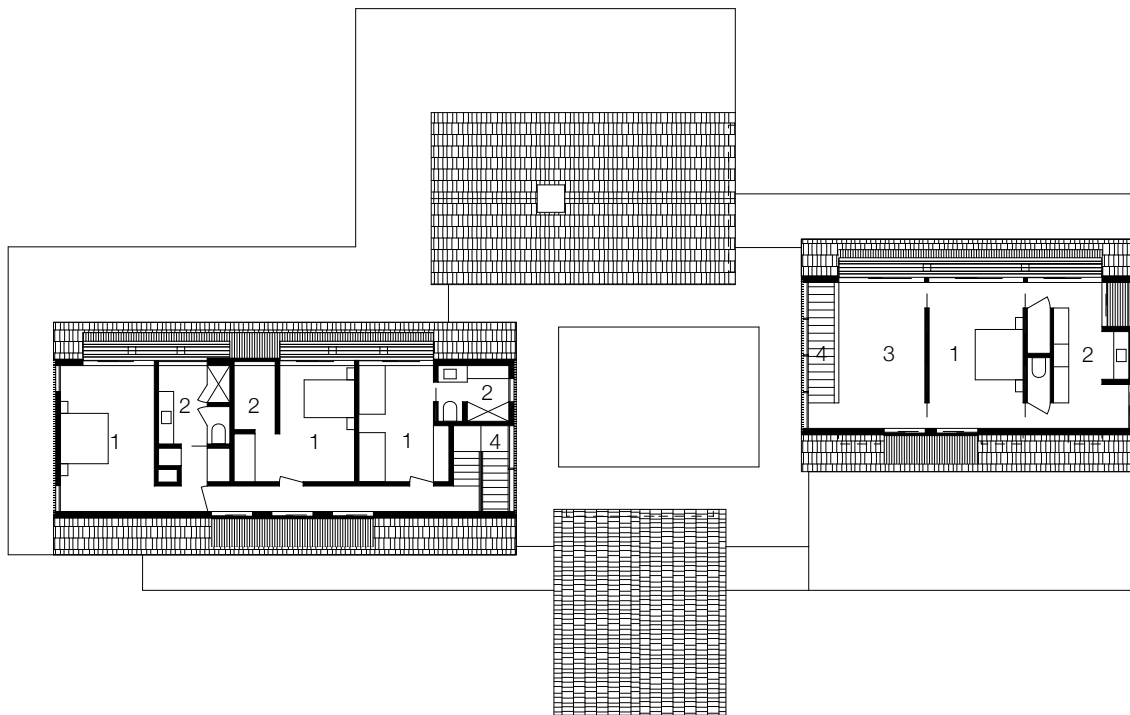


GROUND LEVEL PLAN



- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1. Family Room | 6. Dining Room | 11. Entry |
| 2. Eat-in | 7. Living Room | 12. Mudroom |
| 3. Kitchen | 8. Courtyard | 13. Stair |
| 4. Pantry | 9. Bedroom | 14. Garage |
| 5. Bar | 10. Bath | 15. Terrace |

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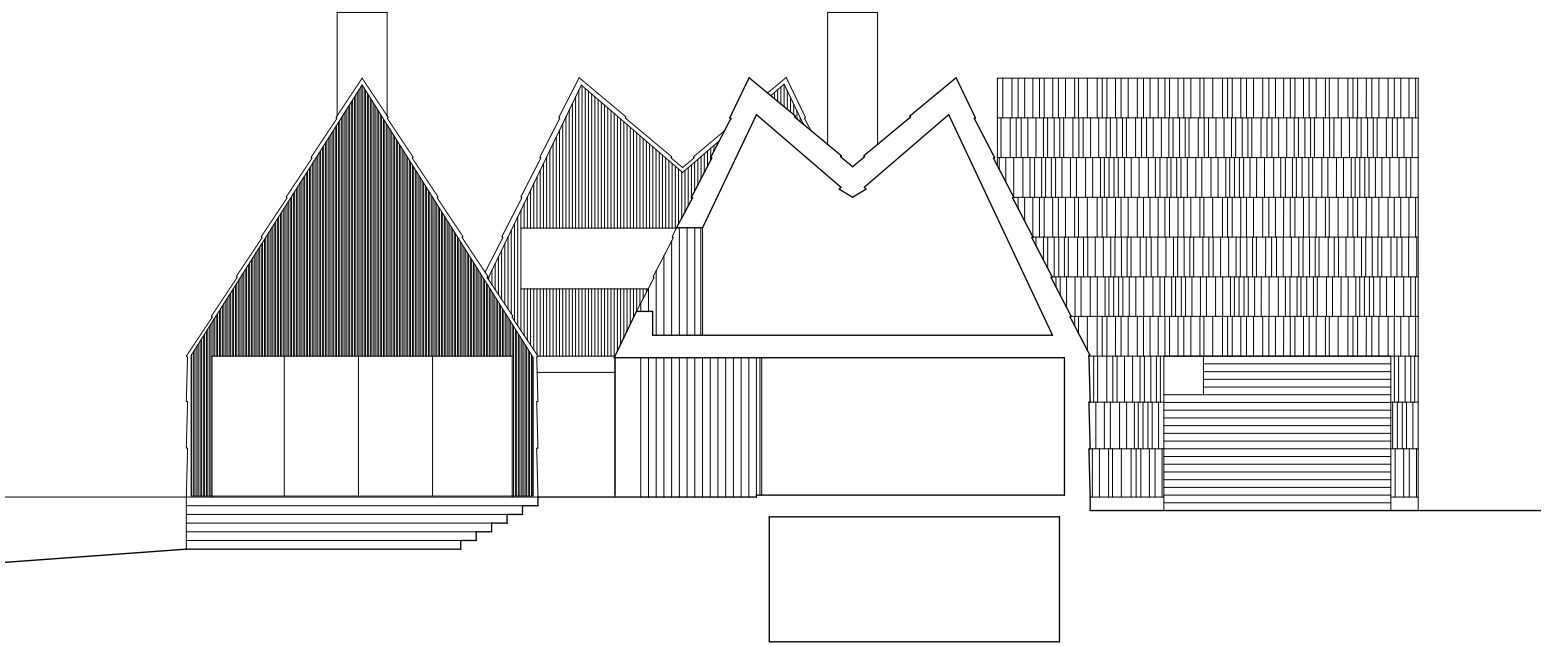


UPPER LEVEL PLAN

- 1. Bedroom
- 2. Bath
- 3. Lounge
- 4. Stair



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Overlap of multiple structures.

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A photograph of a modern architectural complex. In the foreground, a low concrete wall contains a planter with tall green grasses. Behind it, a large pavilion with a steep gabled roof and vertical slat siding is visible. The pavilion has large glass walls and a small set of stairs leading to its entrance. To the right, a two-story building with similar vertical slat siding and a large glass-walled ground floor is partially visible. The background shows a grassy field and a clear blue sky with a few clouds.

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Plinth elevates structure above flood plane.

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Assignment of individual functions to independent volumes allows scalability of the home.

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