GEORGE HASCUP

TEN LANDSCAPE HOUSES OF THE FINGER LAKES

ITHACA, NY

ARCHITECTURE OF THE

FINGER LAKES 10

VILLA ▪ ADRIANICA

VILLA ADRIANICA · 5

Near the mountain town of Tivoli, with its celebrated landscape of deep gorges and rugged rocks and cliffs, the emperor chose a relatively gentle but extensive site, spread across low hills facing over the plain and the road to the great city, some 50 miles away. The site faces roughly to the south; it is warmed by the winter sun and sheltered from harsh winds – a good place for a residence in the cold season. Here the emperor built a museum of architectural experimentation in the form of a palace, a loosely linked complex of buildings, some grounded in memories of travel to places emblematic of the highest cultural achievement, some realizing the most daring architectural imaginings, and some alluding to personal loss, even trauma.

Near the main entrance the emperor's lofty private residence once stood, and beyond it, in a vast enclosure, double porticoes surrounded a pool and gardens. Here the emperor could walk and converse after dinner, in a sheltered setting reminiscent – at least, it seems, to him – of the famous painted stoa (the poikile) of Athens, where the Stoic philosophers once gathered in a building that gave them their collective name. The porticoes are long gone, but the rear wall survives with horizontal channels where once the floors and roof of the portico were attached; in fact porticoes existed on both sides of the wall, creating a layered effect at the infrequent openings offering passage or views through the wall. The rich ornamentation of Hadrian's Villa has given way to an almost minimalist pattern of horizontal striations and indentations enlivening the surface.

It is this wall and, to a degree, its setting, that inspired architect George Hascup when he approached the challenge of a great house above Lake Cayuga, near Ithaca NY, a residence but also a space of culture and hospitality, and designed -- no less than Hadrian's palace, both in antiquity and today -- to promote reflection and conversation, reminiscence and planning for the future. With a series of spectacular residences, as well as more utilitarian public

and private projects of various kinds, Hascup has built a reputation as a leading regionalist architect. His work draws on a deep appreciation of the geology, landscapes, and traditional buildings of the Finger Lakes of upstate New York, and for many years he lived in a cottage overlooking the fjord-like Cayuga Lake, with its deep waters between high bluffs sculpted by a giant glacier. Hascup's practice has always been based in Ithaca, located at the southern end of Cayuga Lake; it is the principal urban community of the region and home of Cornell University, where Hascup has taught since 1973. His regionalism has always been cunningly merged with inputs from other, more distant sources: Le Corbusier (the draftsman as much as the architect) is a constant presence, while allusions to Japanese traditional as well as contemporary design and, especially, craftsmanship are not rare. And like many architects who came to maturity in the 1970s when the conception of the primeval "little hut" of Enlightenment theorist the Abbé Laugier became a key reference point, Hascup draws on ideas about fundamental and at least logically prior building types as a necessary basis, never entirely superseded or occluded, for more elaborate projects.

In the Hadrian house, a further set of experiences and process of study have left their mark. Hascup has regularly taught for the Cornell University architecture program in Rome, where he, like generations of architects and other visitors, made the pilgrimage to Tivoli for the experience of Hadrian's exceptional villa. He saw this vast and complex site in part through the eyes of Le Corbusier, whose drawings of major classical buildings or of the city of Rome itself discovered or intuited a strong geometrical substrate, reducing the ornate and pompous architecture of the empire, at least as it existed before a majestic city became a field of ruins, to an array of Platonic solids. From the eighteenth century into the present, for many visitors the image of Rome has been shaped by the visions of Piranesi, whose interest in the "magnificences" of Rome, not least its titanic ruins, culminated in remarkable images of the complexities

of Hadrian's villa, but who also admired the long tradition of Roman civil engineering and practical building.

Hascup's house draws on a similar range of interest, with its allusions to Hadrian's Villa (at least in its ruined state) as well as to the some of the basic elements of Roman construction for utilitarian purposes and for ordinary people, as we know it, say, from the harbor town of Ostia Antica rather than the lavish seaside community of Pompeii. The house stands on a gently sloping hill overlooking a stream that swells out to become successive ponds and then a small lake. The main body of the house is a tall, strongly oblong structure with a pitched roof running from end to end forming a gable, suggesting a pediment, at either end. The entrance road curves in from the opposite side of the house from the lake, and arrives at a large square parking area in front of the mighty wall, with horizontal striations and a row of windows high-up, which echoes the striated wall of Hadrian's Villa, mentioned above.

In this remote site visitors must travel some distance through a landscape of forests, fields and lakes before reaching their destination. Perhaps already as a vehicle leaves the metaled road and traverses the flat area in front of the house there is a sense of moving from one surface to another. Once out of their cars, indeed, visitors step onto an unfamiliar surface. Here Hascup has exploited a remarkable feature of the terrain: under a few inches of topsoil lies a kind of extended ledge of shale, hard and flat and extending for great distances. Shoes meet natural rock, the shaley substrate of the Finger Lakes region.

From the parking terrace utilitarian metal steps and a metal platform lead to the main entrance, sheltered by a glass and metal canopy, and at first sight unremarkable, except for the contrast with the surrounding shale. However, the entrance canopy and step are subtly set on a diagonal, in relation to the plane of the house. It might be easy here to accuse Hascup of playing a game with competing historicist and cultural allusions, perhaps by combining baroque and minimalist aesthetics in an architectural oxymoron. But the

point here is to push the visitor to experience a meeting of two axialities, one anchored in the house and projected beyond (as we will see), and one connecting the Hadrian house to another house visible from the entry platform, if the visitor turns around, through a shaft cut through the thick forest. The result is a dialogue of houses, or even a duel of architects – Hascup taking on Simon Ungers, the cosmopolitan German who was based in Ithaca for many years. Or perhaps we should see this dialogue in terms of responses to the challenge of inserting a modernist house into this remote place with its various local implications. In any case, as we will see, the diagonal axis continues into the Hadrian house, creating a point of tension between axial conditions, or even grids, and driving the diagonal angle of an important section of the house.

In its apparent utilitarian simplicity, the doorway responds to the terrace and the entry platform and canopy. It is however divided between a plain metal door and a vertical window. Such an arrangement echoes the Federal and Greek Revival doorcases, featuring doors flanked by vertical lights, that are still common in the Finger Lakes. A small rectangular window to the left of the entrance, itself placed off center toward the left, suggests an area of activity behind the wall, and provides a view of the parking area, as well as the Ungers house, from the interior. The asymmetry of the front provides an intimation of hierarchy, and indeed the kitchen is located on the short side, and the two-story great room hidden behind the almost unbroken and even forbidding expanse of striated wall to the right. For all the echoes of Hadrian's villa, indeed, the entrance prospect of the house, set in a forested landscape, suggests a Roman praetorium, a center of organization and rationality in a wild land, like the setting of Hadrian's most famous wall, built to mark and reinforce the northern frontier of the empire in the rough Northumbrian countryside. As on Hadrian's Wall and its attendant forts, the simple materials and formal elements of the Hadrian house produce an impressive effect.

In the manner of a praetorium, then, the house proj-

ects its internal geometry out into the surrounding terrain. A line of simple columns, extending into the landscape at either end of the house, establishes a powerful axis that determines important aspects of the internal arrangement of space. On the exterior, the colonnade and an adjoining path project far out into a garden space to the left of the entrance area, acting to powerfully organize the terrain, and even the surrounding woods, creating the effect of a perspectival shaft reaching back toward a large classical vase and a dark opening in the forest. The colonnade structures a rectangular lawn bounded on one side by a perennial bed, and on the other by fenced enclosures for growing edible plants and, as it turns out, easily accessible from the kitchen. The space-making function of the colonnade on this end of the building is much more marked than at the opposite end, where the colonnade edges a screened porch and then protrudes further only to die quickly away, perhaps imposing a virtual axis on the down-sloping terrain. The Hadrianic wall is ambiguous; it is the entrance façade, but it is not the front edge of the great pitched-roof shed; this lies beyond it on the line of the colonnade, and in part as a literal colonnade, and indeed slides past the Hadrianic wall on the right side to form a porch and to exit into space.

Behind the front wall Hascup has introduced a favorite feature, a shaft or cut running through a building, letting in generous light and evoking the gorges of the region and the geometry of Greek Revival architecture. Here the shaft feature runs from end to end of the main shed, terminating at either end in a great gridded glass-block window that fills the space between the outer wall and the continuation of the exterior colonnade, which now functions as the perforated wall of the shed. In experiential terms, this implies an effect of layering, a frequent device in Hascup's buildings, as well as in the screening colonnades so typical of Roman architecture and its derivatives. The layering is subtly done, as the shaft is not entirely open. Near the kitchen it provides service spaces of different kinds, but at the other end the

columns rise through two stories, as seen from the great room, while marking off a lower space for a grand piano, silhouetted in the great glass-block window, an emblem of the cultural profile and hospitality of the owner.

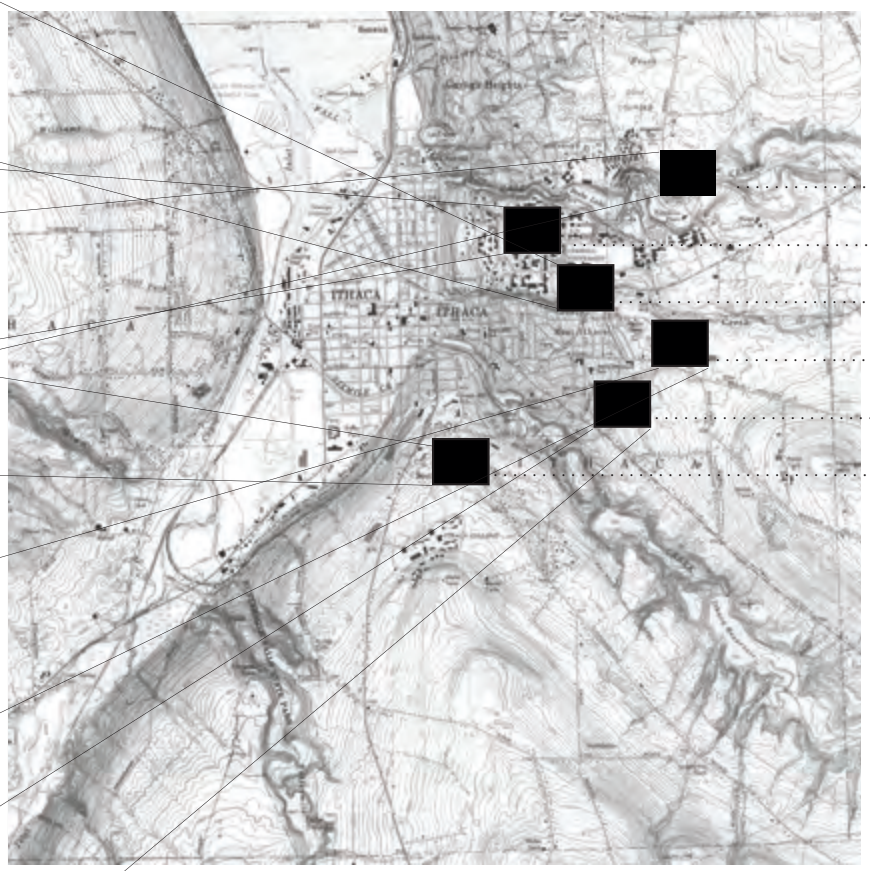
Under its gabled roof the long shed shelters the kitchen on one side and a tall space of reception, performance, and entertainment on the other. The master bedroom, placed over the kitchen, looks out through large windows to the colonnade and gardens. Guest bedrooms are placed at the other end of the great room, one over the porch. The focus of the great room varies; if no musician is playing or no speech or reading is taking place, there is a great fireplace set into the opposite perimeter wall to organize sociality. A key space of sociality is of course the dining area, which is located beyond the shed in a glassed-in, highly transparent link structure that connects to a masonry tower, and is set on a slight angle that moderates the otherwise strict orthogonals of the plan. This is of course the projection into the body of the house of the shaft of space that determined the angle of the entrance platform and connects the house to its surroundings. In addition, the dining area looks out toward the gardens and, more immediately, a generous terrace bounded by a low curving wall that injects an even more striking contrast of geometries into the site plan. It also echoes a curving terrace-like area mediating between the porch that opens off the great room and the landscape sloping down to the stream and lake.

The tower beyond the dining area rises higher than the shed and, with its projecting balcony (continuing the axis of the link building), provides a kind of belvedere, again a feature of regional nineteenth-century architecture; from the tower there are views to the stream and forest, on one side, and the gardens, on the other. Given the angle of the link structure, the tower steps forward into the landscape, providing a platform for surveillance of the environs. It may therefore seem to accentuate the praetorium motif, but in fact it accommodates a library, which in turn opens into a

study. And it evokes the towered dining rooms that were a feature of Roman villas, especially in the famous accounts of Pliny the Younger, who observes both the way architecture reaches out into landscape, and the play of views to and from the environs.

Using plain and, in many cases, off-the-shelf materials, Hascup has contrived a house full of light and spaces fit for various kinds of social interaction or, indeed, solitary reflection and work, a range of activity – and of simply being in a house – that Pliny, in the early second century CE, saw as a key characteristic of his own villas, or the house of any intellectual. Here Hascup's intellectual rigor comes together with his appreciation of the experiential and even sensuous implications of formal design decisions. The house draws on a long series of projects that Hascup has realized in the Finger Lakes in the course of which he has reflected deeply, not least in his own hand-built sauna, on the character of the region itself and its traditional architecture and way of life, while assimilating a range of more cosmopolitan influences and interests, not only from his academic work and travel but also his early experience in a major New York office. And as is often said about Palladio, whose Four Books mediated and developed many of the Roman motifs and ideas taken up by in this and his other buildings, Hascup is a wizard with ordinary materials and able to contrive remarkable effects under budget. These are the buildings of a true craftsman who is also a visionary, and who has successfully negotiated and reconciled these contrasting aspects of his own nature in an architectural oeuvre that in many ways is, or should be, a model for design professionals in the contemporary US.

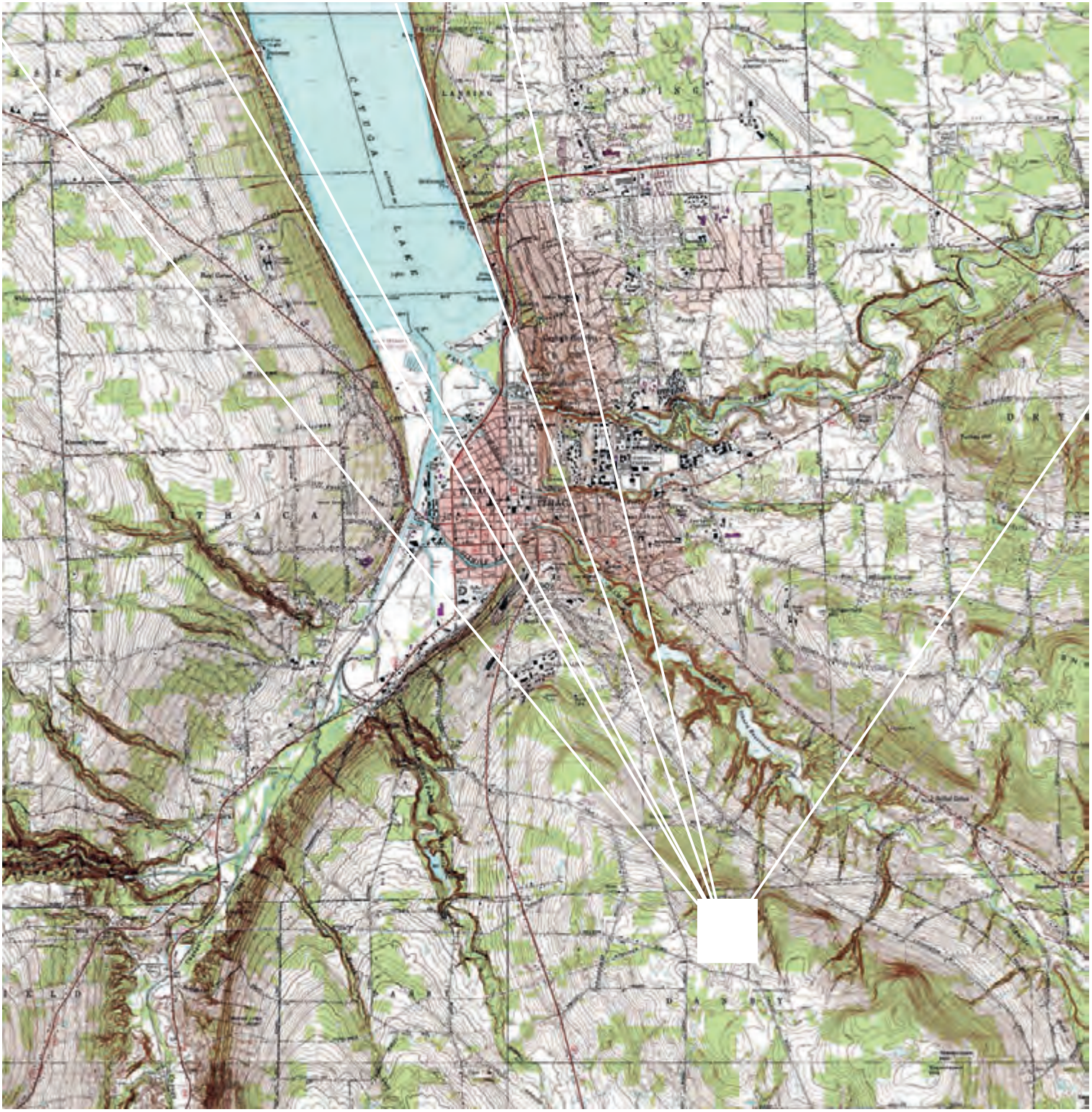
CHARLES BURROUGHS, Smith Chair of Liberal Arts and Professor of Classics and Art History at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland; earlier he was Professor of Art History and Director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Binghamton University (SUNY). In his research and publications he has focused especially on late medieval and early modern Italian architecture, visual culture, and urban and landscape design. Leading publications include From signs to design: environmental process and reform in early Renaissance Rome (MIT Press, 1990) and The Italian Renaissance palace facade: structures of authority, surfaces of sense (Cambridge University Press, 2002), as well as articles on Brunelleschi, Alberti, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Palladio, the urbanism of Pope Sixtus V, and plantation landscapes in the Americas.



SITE
LANDSCAPE
PROGRAM
WALL
DETAILS
CONSTRUCTION

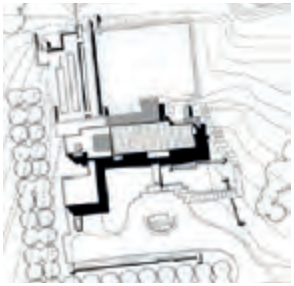
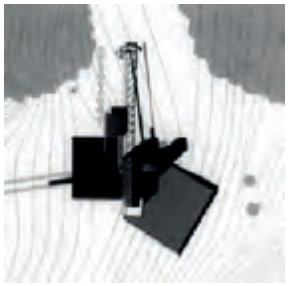
HOUSE 5

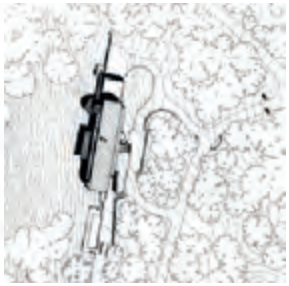
TEN FINGER LAKES LANDSCAPE HOUSES • DANBY, NY

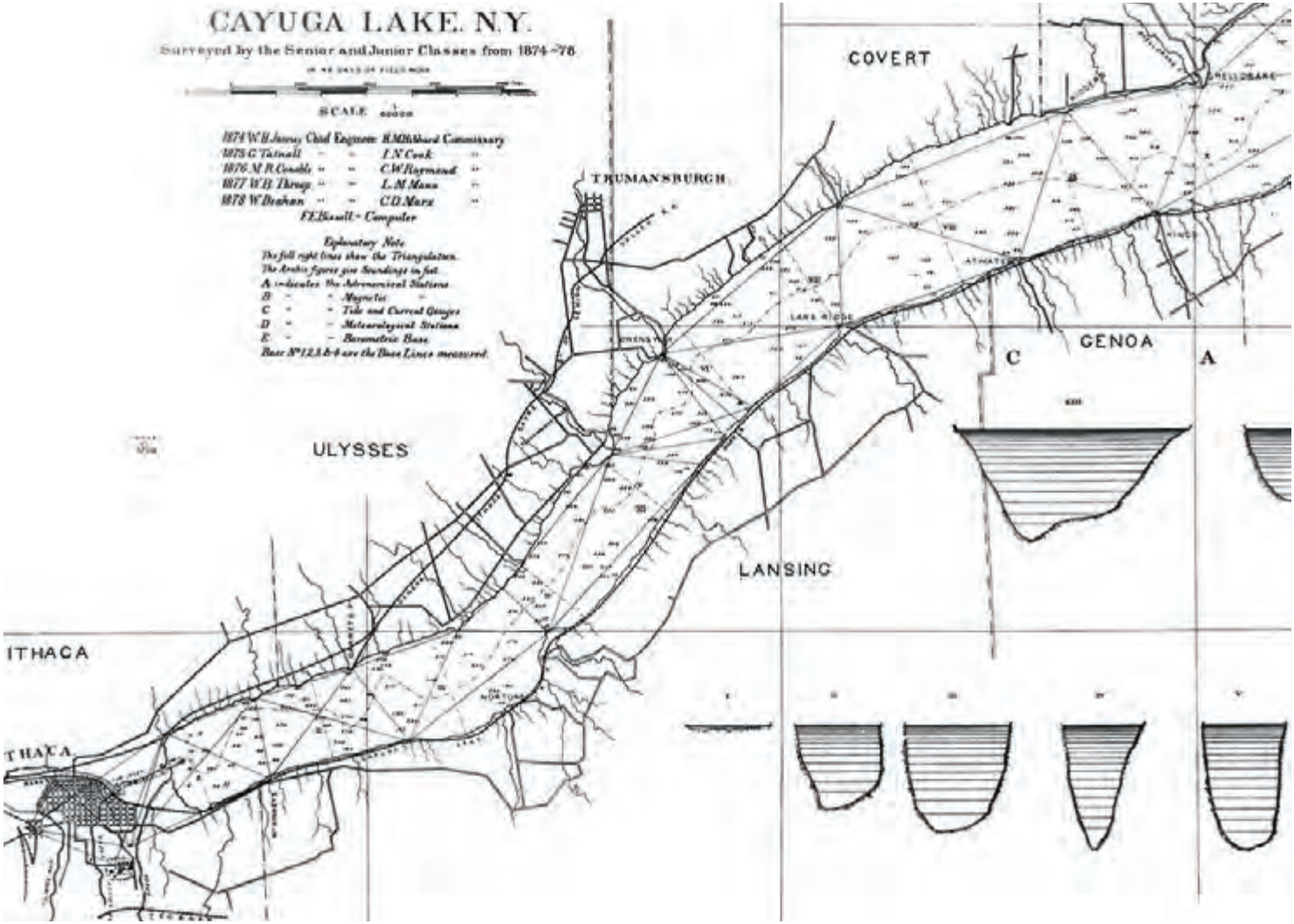

CAYUGA
LAKE
LANSING
ITHACA

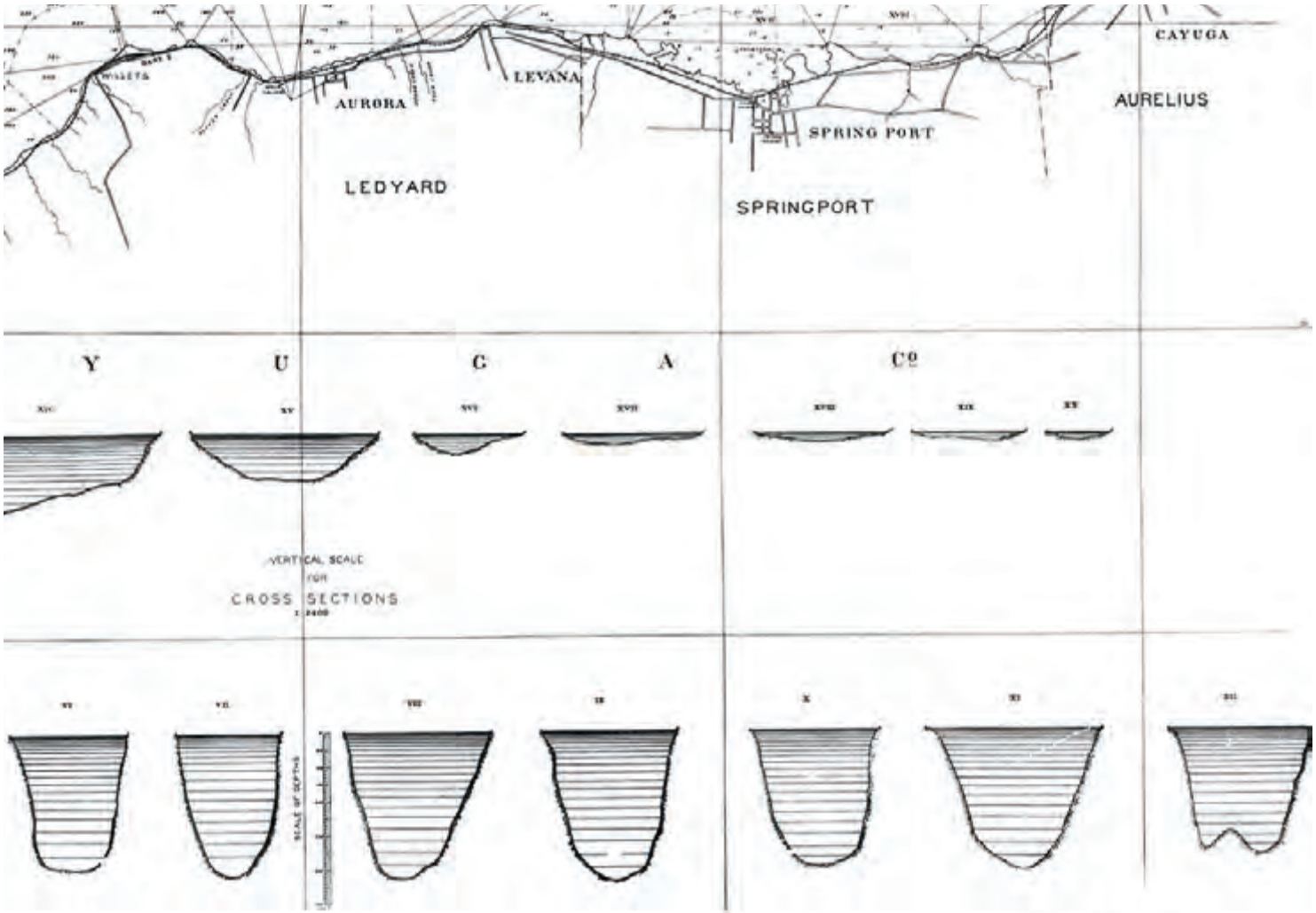
SITE

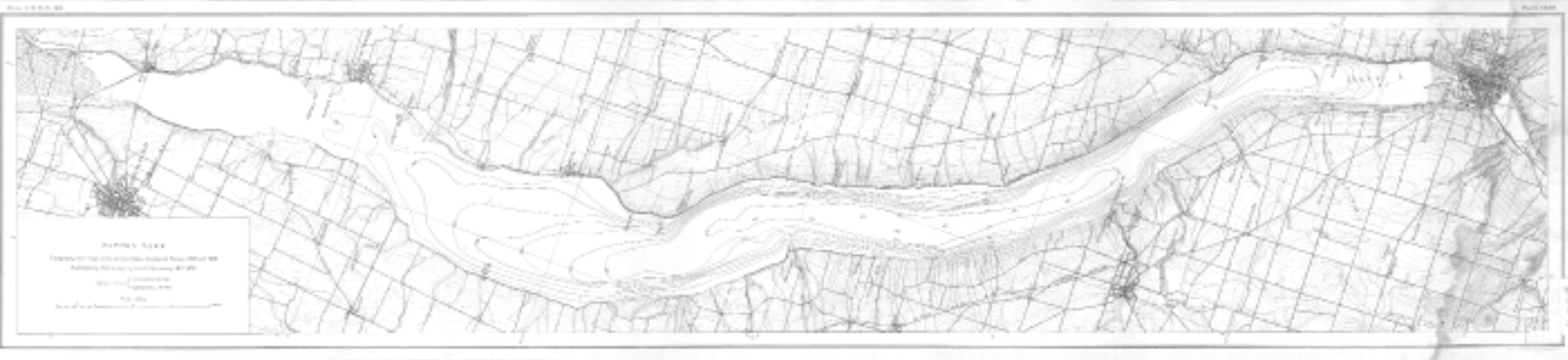
SYRACUSE
AUBURN
Seneca
SENECA
LAKE
C-A-Y-U-G-A
L-A-K-E
OWASCO
LAKE
SENECA COUNTY
SCHUYLER COUNTY
TIOGA COUNTY
BROOME CO

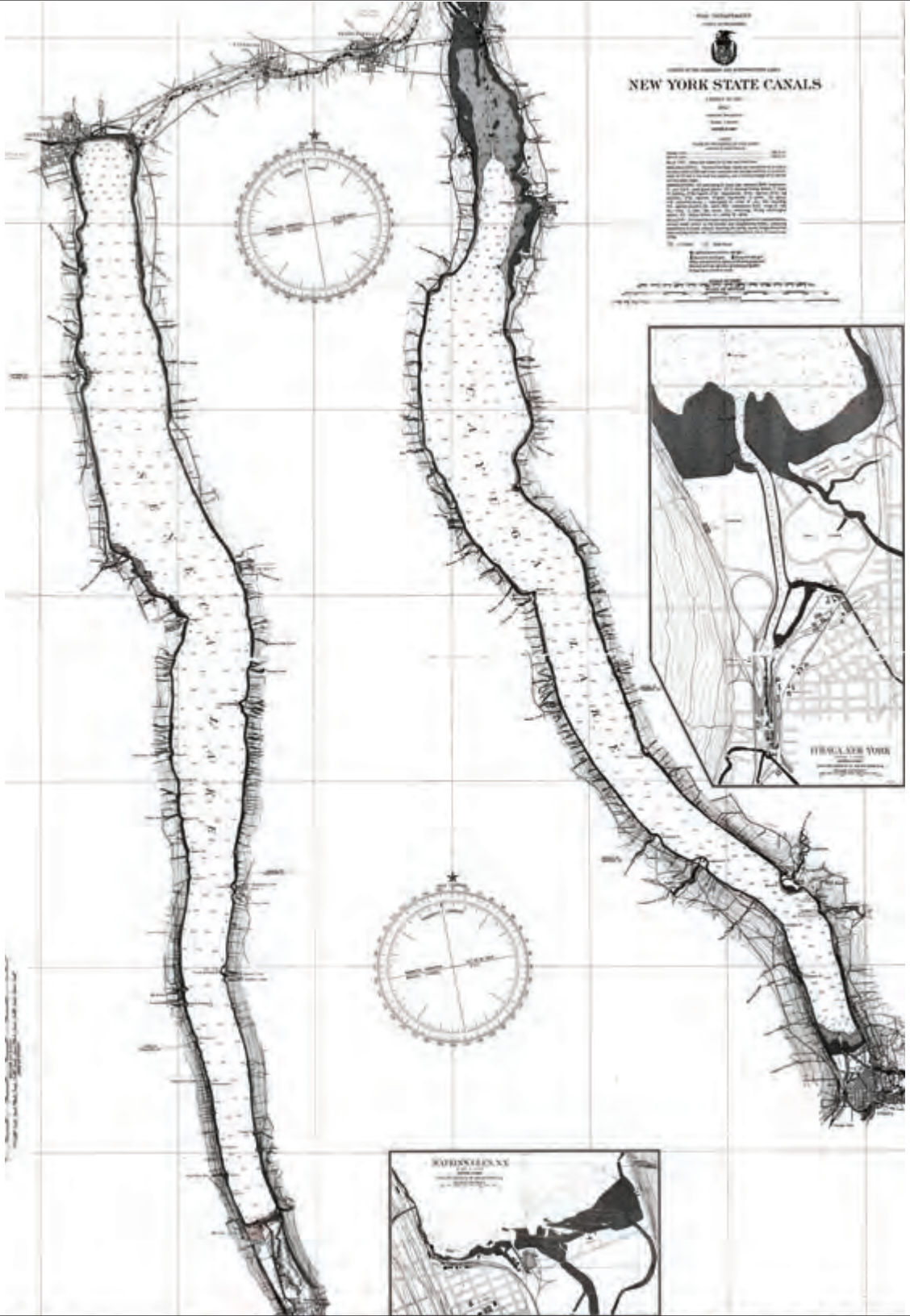



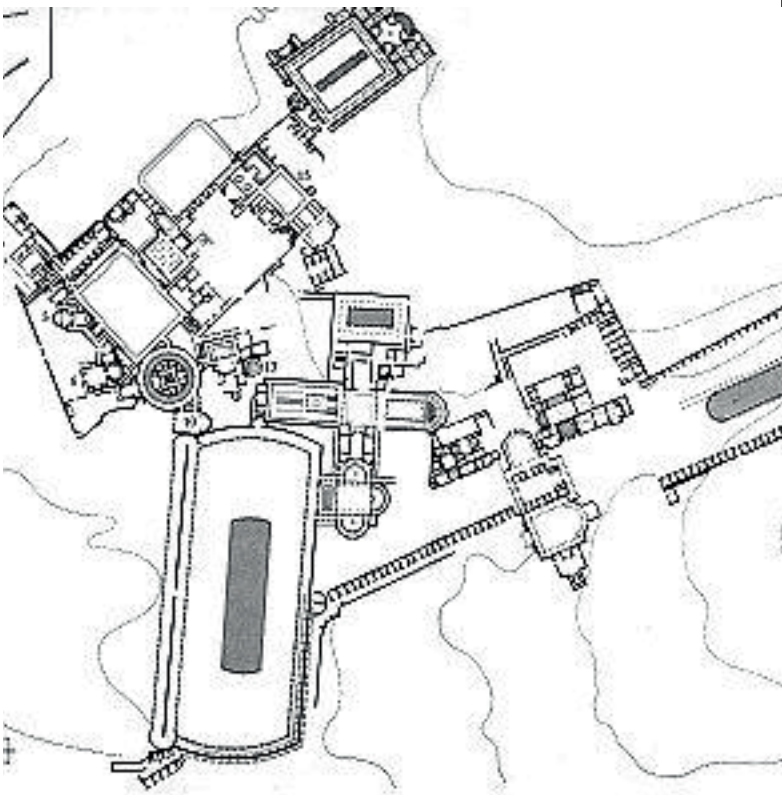


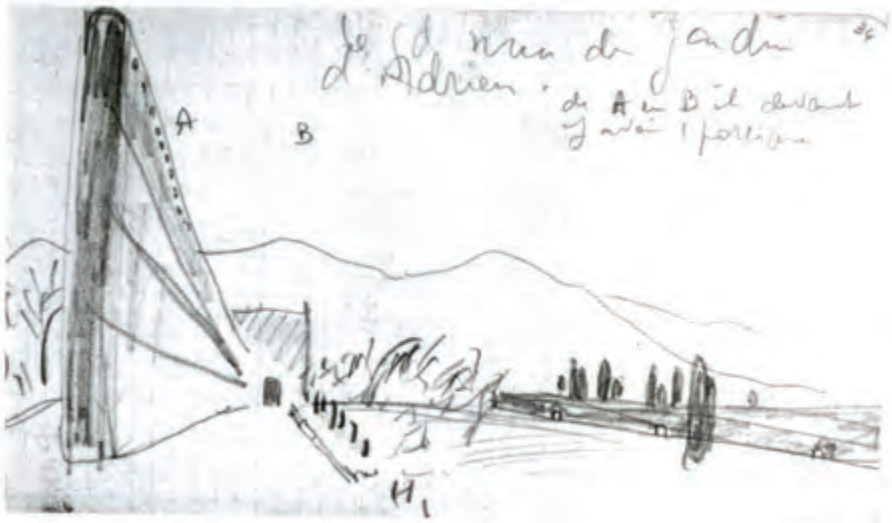

CAYUGA LAKE. N.Y.
Surveyed by the Senior and Junior Classes from 1874-'78
SCALE
1874 W.H. Searey Chief Engineer H.M. Ilsard Commissary
1875 G. Tatnall " " J.N. Cook "
1876 M.R. Cundle " " C.W. Raymond "
1877 W.H. Throop " " L.M. Mann "
1878 W. Brahan " " C.D. Marx "
F.E. Bissell - Computer
Explanatory Note
The full right lines show the Triangulation.
The Arabic figures give Soundings in feet.
A indicates the Astronomical Stations
B " " Magnetic "
C " " Tide and Current Gauges
D " " Meteorological Stations
E " " Barometric Base
Base No 1,2,3 & 4 are the Base Lines measured.
COVERT
TRUMANSBURGH
GENOA
C
A
ULYSSES
LANSING
ITHACA
ITHACA


CAYUGA
AURORA
LEVANA
AURELIUS
SPRING PORT
LEDYARD
SPRINGPORT
Y
U
C
A
Co
VERTICAL SCALE
FOR
CROSS SECTIONS

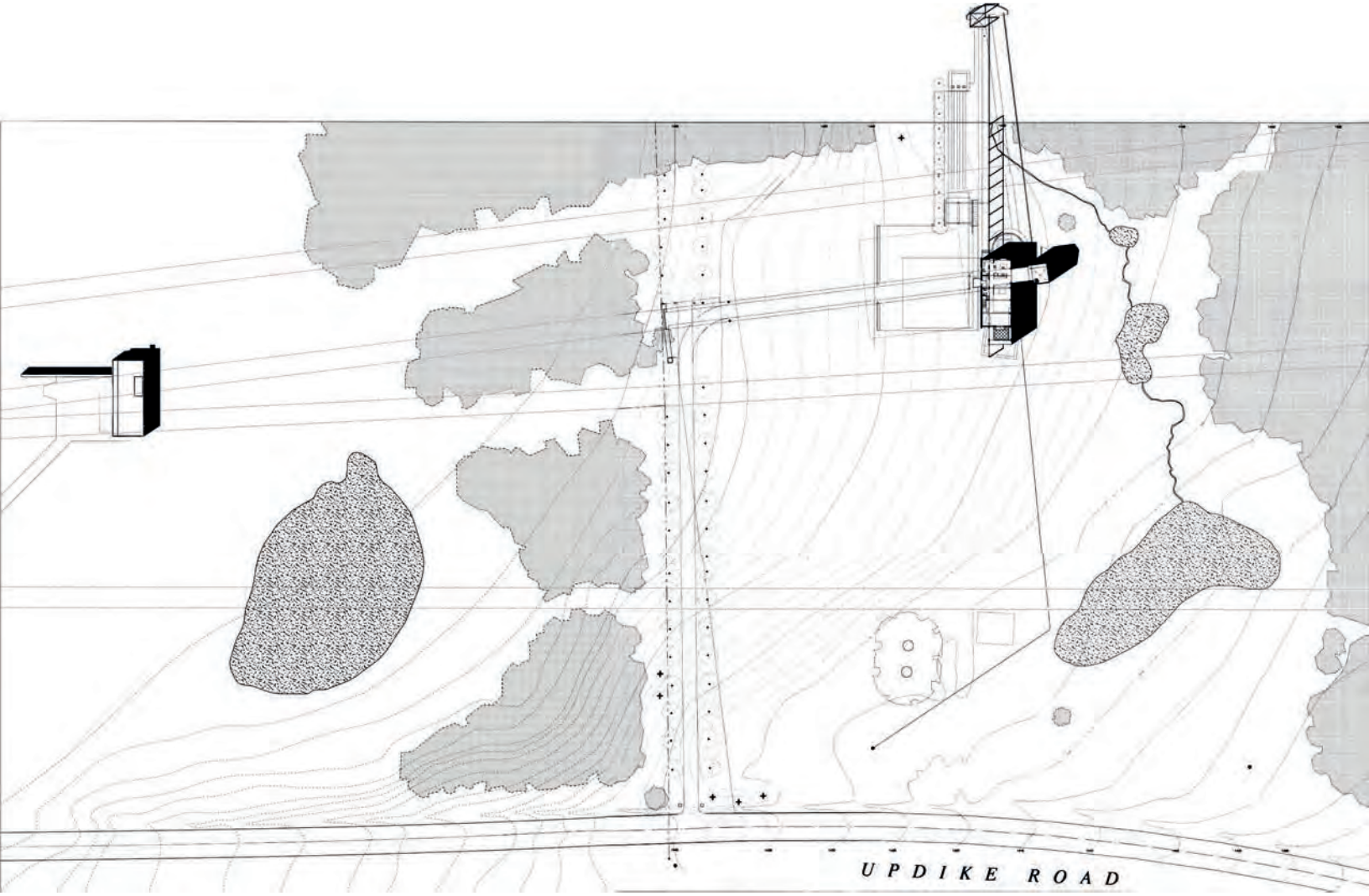



NEW YORK STATE CANALS
SYRACUSE NEW YORK



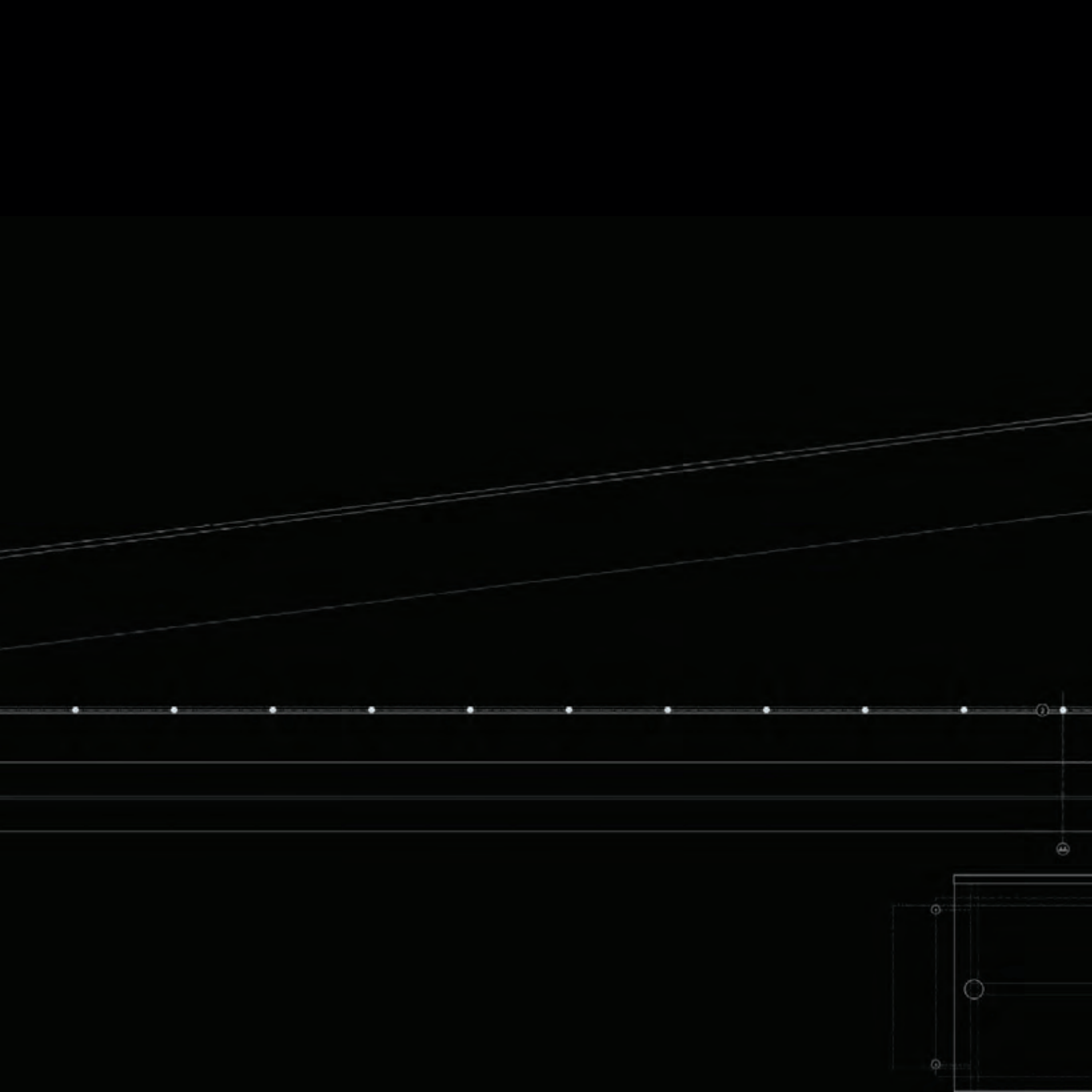


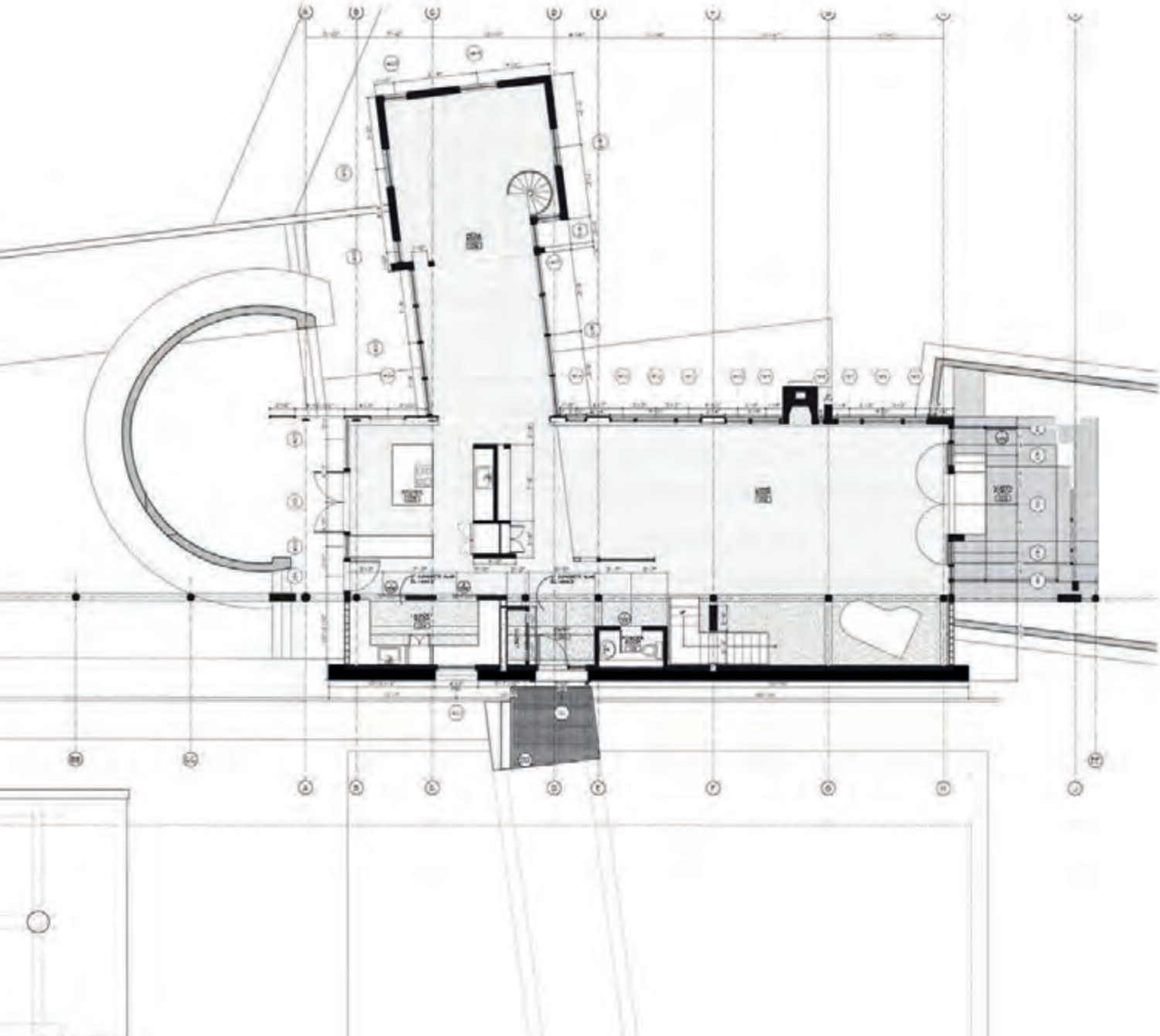
411 *Ambulatory Wall and East-West Terrace, sketch by Le Corbusier (1911)*

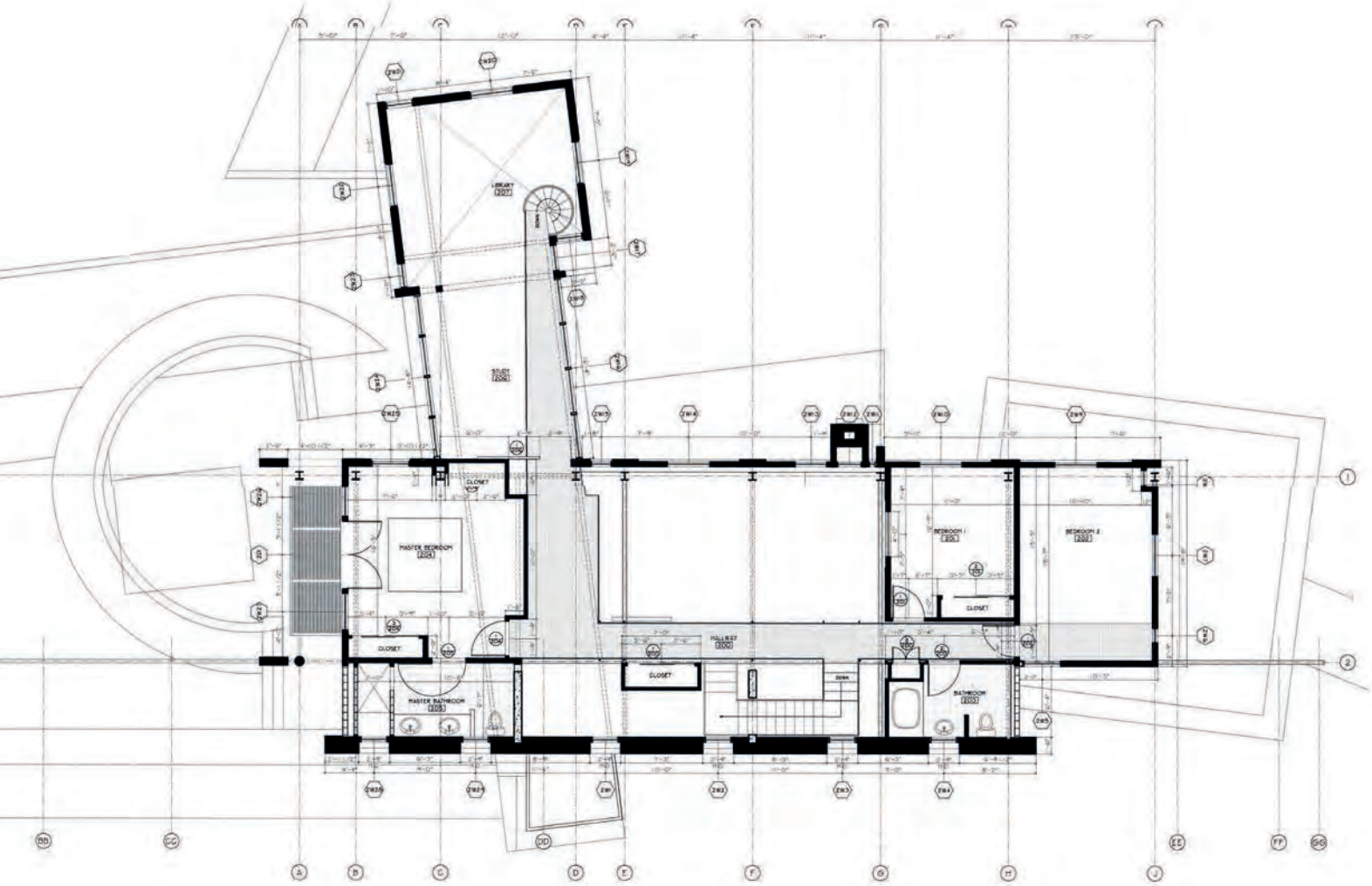

UPDIKE ROAD

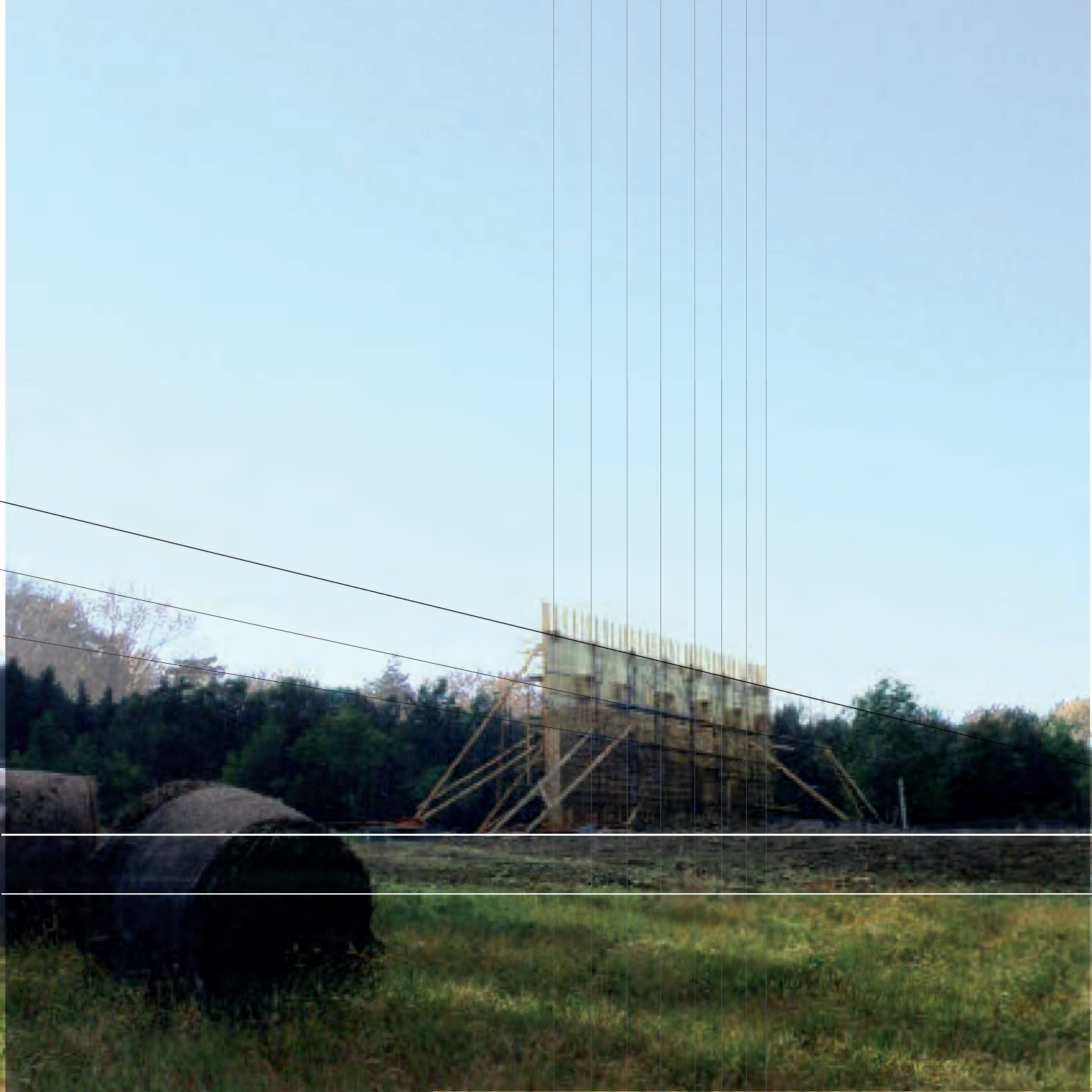
Upslake Rd

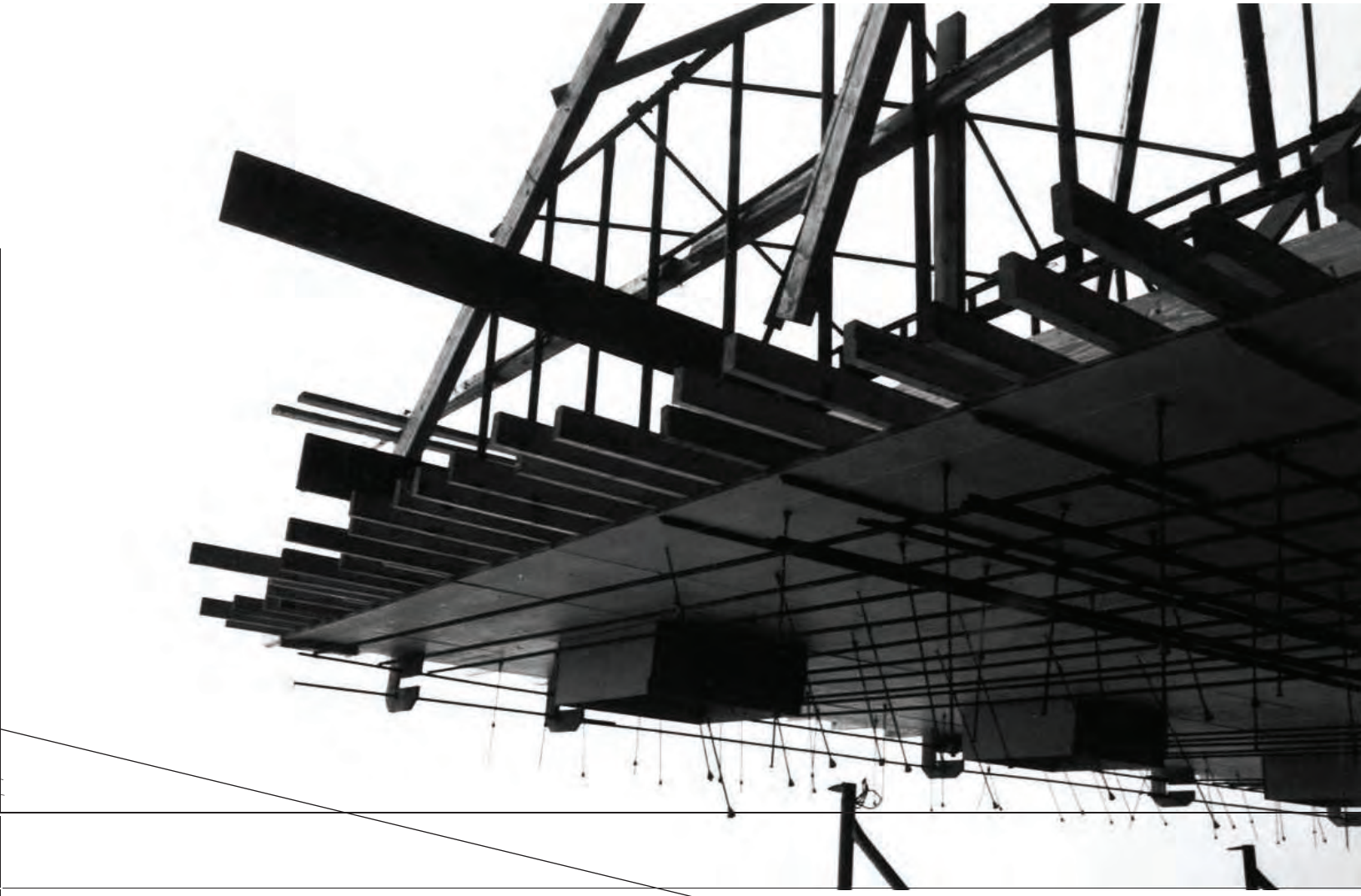
Upslake Rd

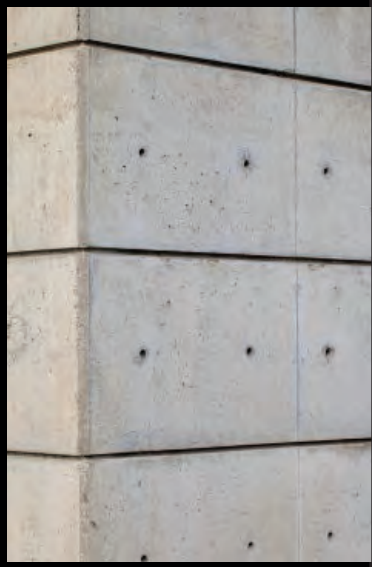


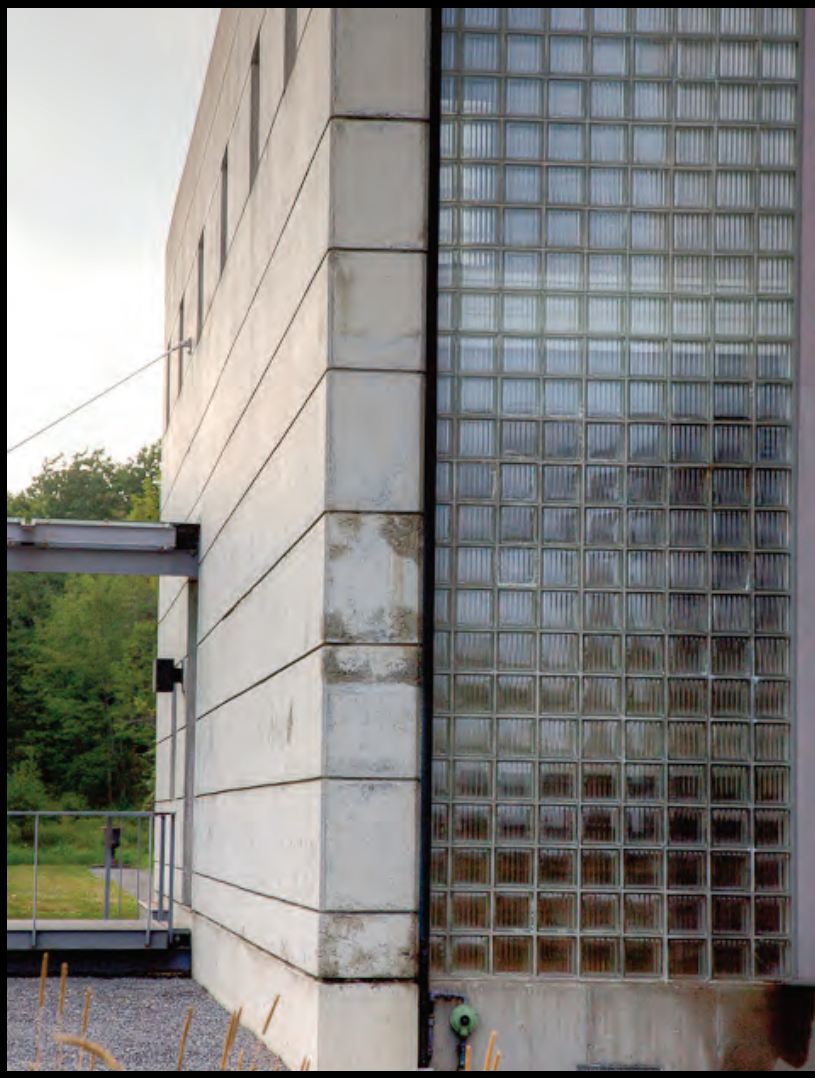


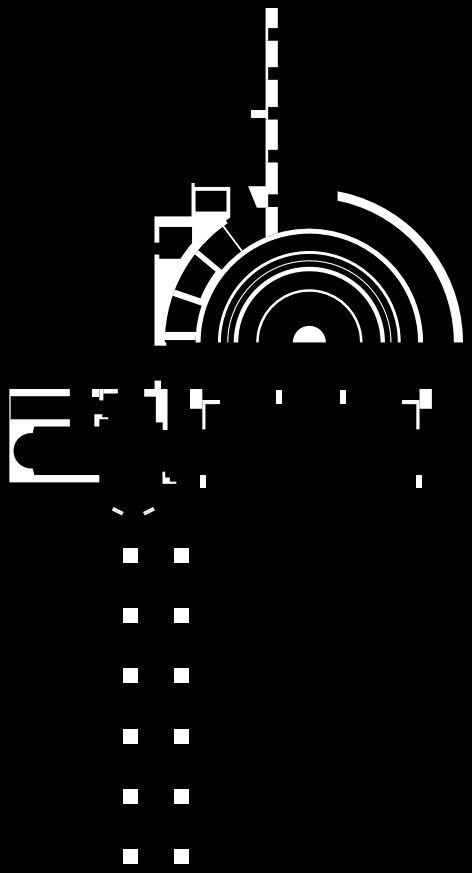

LIBRARY
MASTER BEDROOM
CLOSET
MASTER BATHROOM
HALLWAY
BEDROOM 1
BEDROOM 2
BATHROOM
DOWN











Canopus and Serapeum, Hadrian's Villa
Tivoli, Italy 118-138 AD