

The Museum of Modern Art

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"THREE HOUSES" EXHIBITION TO OPEN AT THE MODERN

An exhibition of three architectural models with related drawings and photographs will be on view in the second-floor Goodwin Galleries of The Museum of Modern Art from April 21 through May 20. Drawn from the Architecture and Design Collection, these are innovative designs by Paul Nelson, Buckminster Fuller, and David Jacob. This exhibition, entitled THREE HOUSES, is being directed by J. Stewart Johnson, Curator of Design.

Paul Nelson's "Suspended House" was designed in 1936-38 and represents a Utopian conception of housing, predicated on a vision of a way of life that would make it possible for the occupants to share far more of their life communally than is usual in conventional families. The basic structure is a light metal cage, from the roof of which are hung various rooms devoted to relatively private activities: sleeping, dressing and study. These are connected by ramps and lead downward to a middle level of large open space, intended for shared living activities. Below these, on the ground level, are the service areas of the house which are reached by a staircase.

One of the most striking aspects of the "Suspended House" is the architect's integration of art into the scheme. Joan Miró and Fernand Léger both painted murals in the model and Alexander Calder contributed two sculptures to it. These works supported the architect's conviction that art should be an intrinsic component of the ideal house, rather than a later addition to it.

Buckminster Fuller's so-called "Wichita House" (1945-46) was developed at the end of the Second World War. Its original conception was that of a light-weight, prefabricated structure to house military personnel, which he called "Airbarac." It could easily be transported to a desired location and there be quickly assembled, and could be used in every climate from the tropics to the Arctic. With the coming of peace, the designer developed the basic idea into mass-produced housing that would take advantage of all of these virtues and would make it possible on the one hand for thousands of veterans to obtain inexpensive, comfortable houses and on the other for war industries to easily adapt to the peacetime needs of the country.

The "Wichita House"--so named because it was intended to be manufactured by the Beech Aircraft Corporation in Wichita, Kansas--contains an entry, living room with fireplace, kitchen and laundry, two bedrooms and two baths, and was intended to sell, fully equipped, for \$6500. Its components could be assembled in two days. The upper and lower portions of the round aluminum structure are divided by a continuous band of plexiglass windows, made possible because the roof and walls, rather than being built up in the conventional manner from the foundation, are hung by cables from the center mast, somewhat like an umbrella.

David Jacob's 1970 "Simulated Dwelling for a Family of Five" is a sketch model in which the architect attempts to reformulate the conception of what a building shell should be. It is intended to provide the basis for the development of an alternative to the conventional modular box, to provide a place that protects but does not confine, that identifies but does not isolate the occupants and their functions within the house.

This conceptual model is a continuous shell. In this configuration it does not close on itself. Although it is far less explicit than either the Paul Nelson or Buckminster Fuller models--both of which are fully worked out in terms of areas devoted to specific functions--it is intended to suggest a sequence of entry, living, dining, and individual spaces ascending helically around a central stair and elevator.

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