

# Pushing the Envelope

Hariri & Hariri Solve an Architectural Puzzle with a Villa in The Hague

By Joseph Giovannini

"The street façade is perhaps the first indication one gets of the overlapping nature of the villa," Hariri & Hariri's Gisue Hariri says of a proposed house in The Hague.



HOLLAND BOASTS MORE modern architecture per capita than perhaps any other country—contemporary architects have long been encouraged by both the private and public sectors. Rotterdam, for example, was rebuilt after its destruction during World War II, and the country's second-largest city today looks like an architectural playing field. Each major modernist movement is represented by at least one building in what

amounts to a riotous urban skirmish.

Almost a national sport, architecture served as a calling card and selling tool in a development of houses in The Hague. Planning an enclave of eight villas on a strip of land once slated as a thoroughfare, a Dutch developer invited talents emerging on the international stage to each design a freestanding, multi-story house. The project did not finally pencil out, because even in Holland, even with

high-profile designers, real estate values depend on location, location, location. The project did, however, produce highly provocative statements.

One of the most ingenious was done by Hariri & Hariri, the firm of two Iranian-born sisters, Gisue and Mojgan Hariri, who practice in Greenwich Village. The design, which is only 2,200 square feet, is a thesis about puzzling form and space together into an intricately dense composition: The ar-

chitects cleverly managed to pack four pounds of architecture into a three-pound site.

Each architectural team had to work within the outlines of a set envelope, a boxy form with a stepped rear profile. The developer, however, wanting to maximize the interior square footage, required four bedrooms, three baths and a living and dining room. Other architects resolved the dilemma of packing too many rooms into too

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# Unbuilt Houses

The architects devised innovative ways of meeting the developer's strict guidelines.

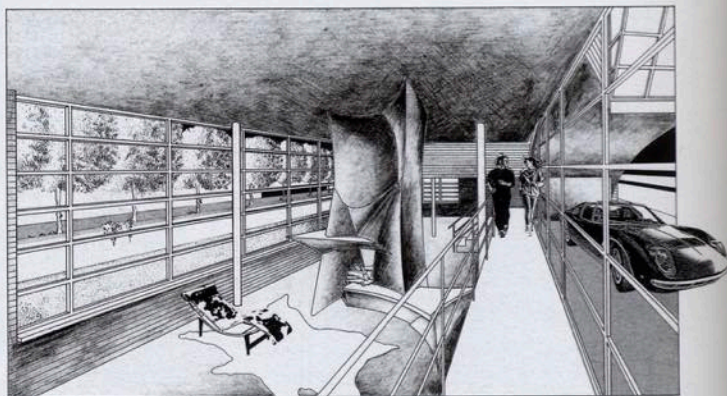
A metal-clad roof curves up off the master bedroom and allows views of the sky.



in the upper part of the three-story building. Laws in The Hague, as in most other cities, allow architectural extensions beyond the body of a structure, and the architects took nimble advantage of this handy loophole. "We broke the envelope by projecting out, cantilevering off the side beyond the permitted volume," says Gisue Hariri. "Above the ground floor, all

rectangular wall and on the ground with a rectangular foundation transforms itself several times before reaching the rear façade and the roof; the building is in continuous change front to back, top to bottom. Each room takes on its own shape, and all hover within traces of the original envelope, now vestigial.

At the front, the tall façade, *continued on page 112*



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little space by quietly dropping part of the program. But Hariri & Hariri solved the problem by cheating the site and envelope, borrowing space from the air and ground in legally correct maneuvers that tricked the eye.

The maximum footprint on the 49-by-52-foot lot was 33 by 39, all within a fixed height limit. The Hariris' first act of spatial prestidigitation was to depress the site a half

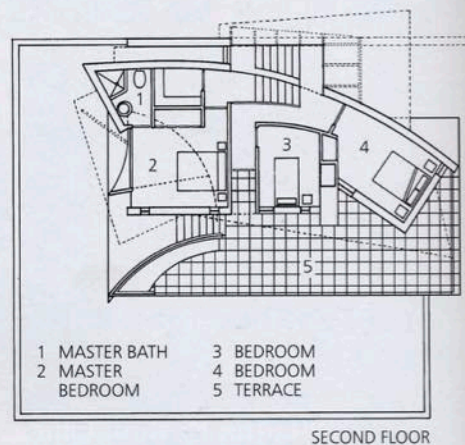
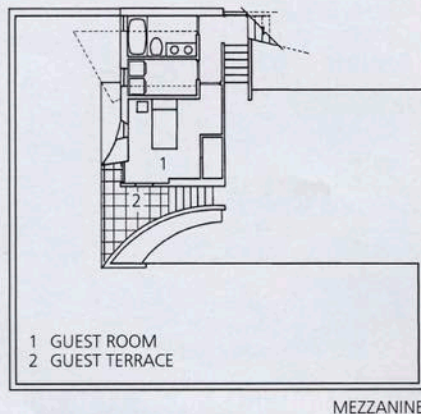
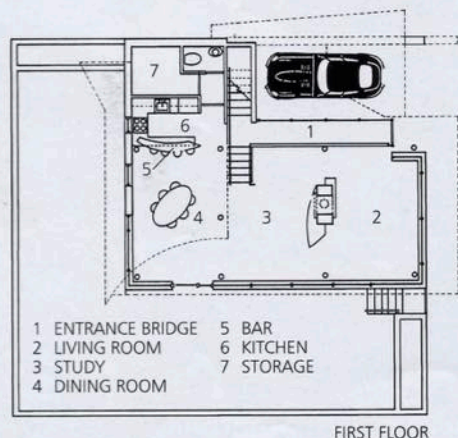
level, creating a low basin of grass within which the house effectively extends itself down an invaluable three feet. The living room, dining room and kitchen were then placed on this lower plateau, where they open generously to the partially submerged yard. The retaining wall at the edge of the yard acts simply as a fence.

The Hariris' second sleight of space involved extending architectural projections beyond the façades and roofline

the rooms borrow volume from the roof."

Like many sites, the property has a complex nature, with different views and exposures (it faces a thoroughfare at the front and a canal at the rear). The architects' strategy of responding to the site was to break the building into parts that they could layer together horizontally and vertically in rich sculptural juxtapositions. A design that starts on the façade with a

**ABOVE:** The entrance bridge, which is level with the carport and down three feet to the living area. **BELOW:** Floor plans depict the villa's interlocking volumes.





## DATEBOOK

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### A Great Walk of Art

Coalition for the Homeless will present the 8th Annual **ARTWALK NY** in October. The event, designed to appeal to the serious collector as well as the casual art lover, honors Jeff Koons and features tours of artists' studios and a gala reception and auction. ABC News Anchor Peter Jennings is the event's chairman.

**Saturday, October 19, 2002**

**11am: Jeff Koons Interview at The Great Hall at Cooper Union**

Peter Jennings interviews the artist about his life and work

**2-5pm: Studio Tours**

27 artists open their studios for walking tours

**Thursday, October 24, 2002**

**6:30pm: Gala Reception and Auction at Gagosian Gallery, Chelsea**

The Gala will showcase a live and silent auction of 90 artists' works as well as exclusive luxury lots. Highlights include a **Rado Time for Art** package: the limited-edition Rado Carpe Diem Watch combined with first-class travel to Switzerland, deluxe accommodations and VIP access to Art Basel 2003.

The live auction will culminate with the extraordinary opportunity to purchase one of the first **BMW Z4** roadsters to be sold in the U.S. The all-new Z4 is a modern interpretation of classic roadster features; its combination of high performance and eye-catching design makes it a true work of art.

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ARTIST JEFF KOONS

Photo: Robert Mapplethorpe



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## Unbuilt Houses

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parallel to the street, establishes a baseline beyond which the architects choreograph the rest of the house. The cutouts in this wall frame the interior as though it were a pictorial composition. One of the apertures features the profile of the car, parked in a carport. Its streamlined volumes contribute to the overall architectural collage. "We tucked the car into the building so it becomes a piece of sculpture and a part of the living room," says Gisue Hariri.

Just beside the car, at the corner of the house, the front door leads to an open corridor that runs the length of a loft-like space. The end of the bridge splits, leading to a staircase on one side and, on the other, stepping a half level down to the living room and study, which are divided by a faceted chimney. The ceiling also splits into two levels, low over the dining area and kitchen, high over the living room and study, hinting at a split-level organization in the rooms above.

Back at the front landing, following the half-stair up to a guest room, the stairway turns, surprisingly, out beyond the front envelope into a glass cage that projects toward the street in a teasing display. Soon enough the stairway ducks back into the main body of the house, to a pair of bedrooms. A last half flight up ends at the master bedroom, which itself has a split-level roof twisted off the floor plan, allowing views directly up to the sky. "The house gets more fragmented the higher you get," says Gisue Hariri.

Each bedroom and bath is articulated in unique forms—curved, straight, angled—that together make a sculptural composite legible not only from the outside, where they break through the conceptual envelope, but inside, where they seem suspended, as in a fishbowl. The architects have designed each room in contradistinction to the others, creating a collage of contrasting elements. The chimney pierces all levels, like a skewer through a kabob, holding the composition of parts together in a complex whole.

The architects have transformed an exercise in economy into a feat of baroque spatiality. A sense of control is balanced by a sense of freedom. "The developer had a strict program," says Gisue Hariri, "but he also wanted something experimental—it had to look like architecture." □