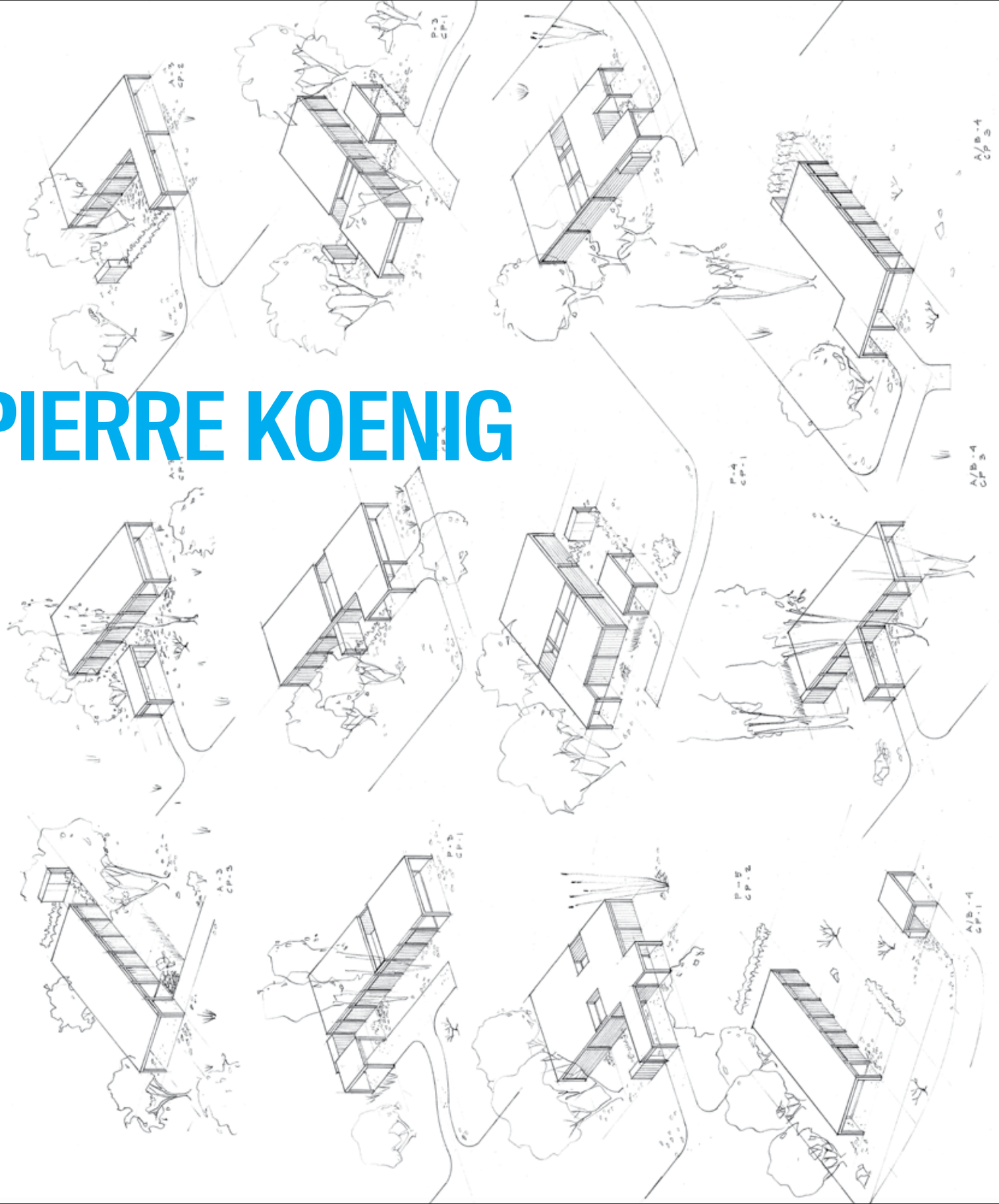
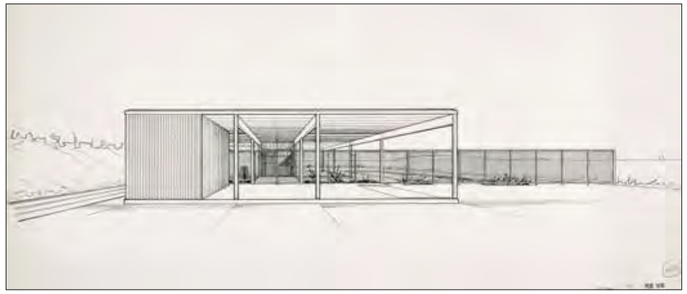
PIERRE KOENIG





Koenig applied to steel-house construction. On each detail sheet, he would write the name of the building and apply a date stamp. Although some, until they appeared on another building, were customized for a particular job (for example, nos. 187 and 300, which cross-reference each other), many were designed to be universal in their application. Koenig similarly produced standard notes and specifications, making changes where necessary to suit the specific job—such as substituting "LA County" for, presumably, "LA City."[19] There was nothing in these requirements that was neither sensible nor expected.

Unlike the Seidel Associates House, which was colored to blend with its wooded-canyon location, the Oberman House, on its exposed site overlooking the ocean, was made to stand out. Koenig's publicity statement, which informed the first article on the house in *Arts & Architecture,*[20] states, "The color scheme, interior and exterior, is white with white on white Terazzo floors throughout."[21] He later added a handwritten note: "white drapes–white rug–gray couches." To this, he could have added the two black Ludwig Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chairs that he ordered from Knoll Associates in New York on behalf of the Obermans, at a cost of $990.[22] "All furnishings," as *Arts &*

Fig. 6.6.
Mayer, Janet, and Bill Oberman at home, ca. 1962. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 6.7.
Oberman House, view from north, 1960.

Fig. 6.8.
The Oberman House with Catalina Island in the distance, 1962. Photo by Leland Y. Lee.

Architecture pointed out, "were selected by the architect."[23] Despite the monochromatic specification, color was allowed. "Blue enameled steel cabinets, and areas of walnut," as well as red side chairs would, according to the draft publicity statement, "add contrast to the interior."[24] At the bottom of the statement is another handwritten note: "Color achieved from mood of sky–sunsets etc."

When it came to the publicity shots, things did not bode well. In his absence from the office, an assistant made these notes in Koenig's logbook for 9 July 1962: "Janet Oberman called—raised Hell about having a model (she was calling model)! Also about man bringing furniture."[25] And, on 13 July: "Jan Oberman: Doesn't want to feed pool people—never talked to her about pictures. Salazar brought friend! (Also wants construction shots). I asked her if she wanted to call off picture taking! She said no—she wanted the photos—great prestige for her."[26] Janet Oberman got her construction shots, taken by Modernage Photo Service, showing the steel frame, decking, and footings. For *Arts & Architecture,* Leland Y. Lee went to the house twice. On one occasion he photographed a male model, perhaps Salazar or his friend, standing in his swimwear at the far end of the pool. It was a foggy day with almost no visibility, but by using infrared film, Lee cut through the haze to reveal Santa Catalina Island clearly in the distance (fig. 6.8).

On 26 July 1967, Kurt Meyer, of the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects' Los Angeles Fiesta Committee, wrote to Koenig to say that the "Palos Verde House has been honored with an Award."[27] This was on the occasion of the 186th birthday of the City of Los Angeles, and the Oberman House was named, along with the Eames House and Craig Ellwood's Rosen House, on the list of Architectural Grand Prix awardees.[28] The five judges—who included the architect John Merrill of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Samuel Hurst, dean of architecture at the University of Southern California (USC); George Dudley, dean of architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles; and the *Los Angeles Times* architecture critic Art Seidenbaum—declared

Fig. 9.1.
West House, view from southwest, 1969.

CHAPTER 9

MIDCAREER STEEL HOUSES

On 21 June 1971, Pierre Koenig was elected a member of the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects.[1] In as much as this gave him recognition as a senior member of the profession, it also implied that there was a younger and perhaps more forceful generation of architects emerging in Los Angeles. The Case Study House architects, as Reyner Banham later noted, were fast becoming yesterday's heroes,[2] and a new generation, led by Frank Gehry, was starting to make its mark. Inspired by artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Gehry's use of common or found materials eventually manifested itself in 1978 in the fragmented architecture of his own house in Santa Monica. Here, Koenig's favored material, profiled metal decking, found itself used in a context wholly unimaginable to him. Such fragmentation became, in the 1980s, the mise-en-scène of Los Angeles architecture, although sometimes, as at the Kate Mantilini restaurant in Beverly Hills designed by Morphosis and opened in 1986, it was hidden behind an elegant colonnaded steel facade that could easily have been attributed to Koenig.[3]

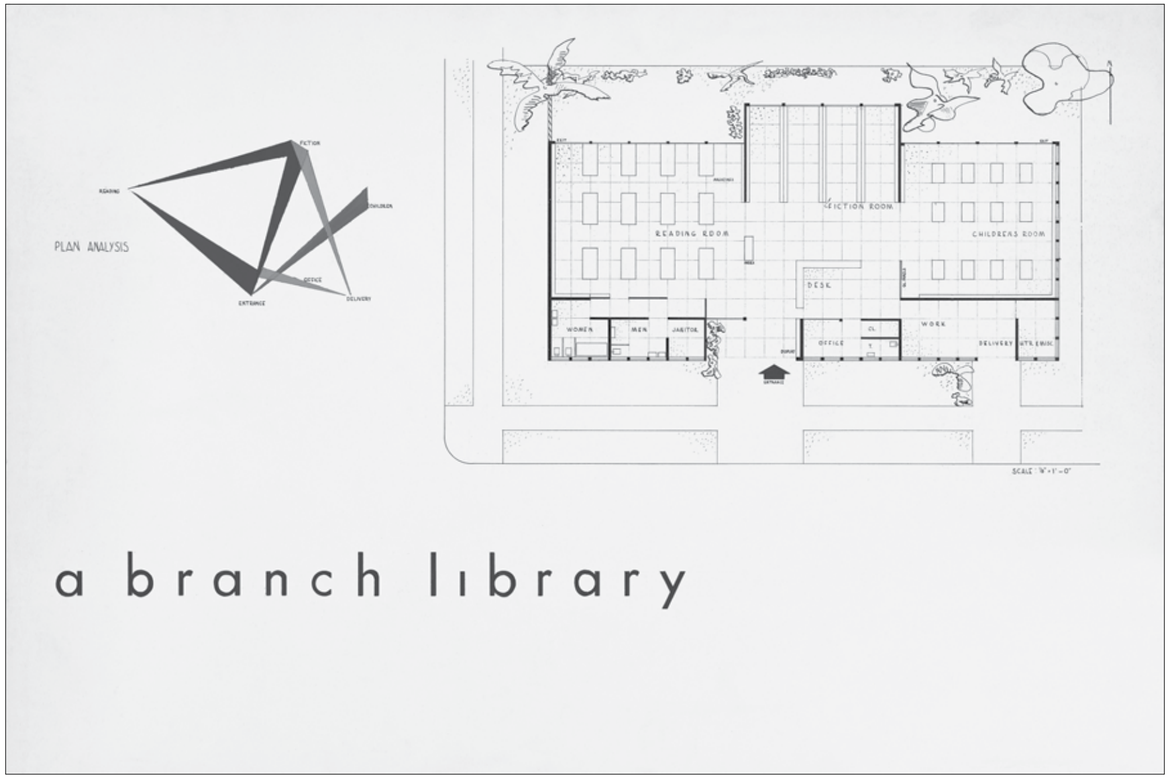
Meanwhile, Koenig continued working in practice and as an associate professor at the University of Southern California. The period signified, to some extent, the start of a consolidation in his work that came to a conclusion, in the late 1980s, with the building at 12221 Dorothy Street of his second house and the rebuilding of Case Study House 22 at the Temporary Contemporary Museum in Los Angeles. With these two buildings, his career was to take off again.

The house and garage on Dorothy Street, into which he had moved both his family and his office at the end of 1959, must never have been quite satisfactory. Even before he demolished it to build a new steel house on the site in 1985, he made a number of attempts to improve it. In 1966, he drew up two schemes for a small addition fronting the alleyway at the rear of the site. Both schemes were to provide a carport at street level with the possibility of one floor of accommodation above. The first scheme, dated 19 January 1966, was for a simple steel-frame structure measuring 30 by 20 feet made up of three parallel frames, comprising 5-inch H-section columns and 12-inch I-section beams, spanning the longer distance.[4] An upper story is shown in dotted line on the elevations and annotated "future 2nd story."

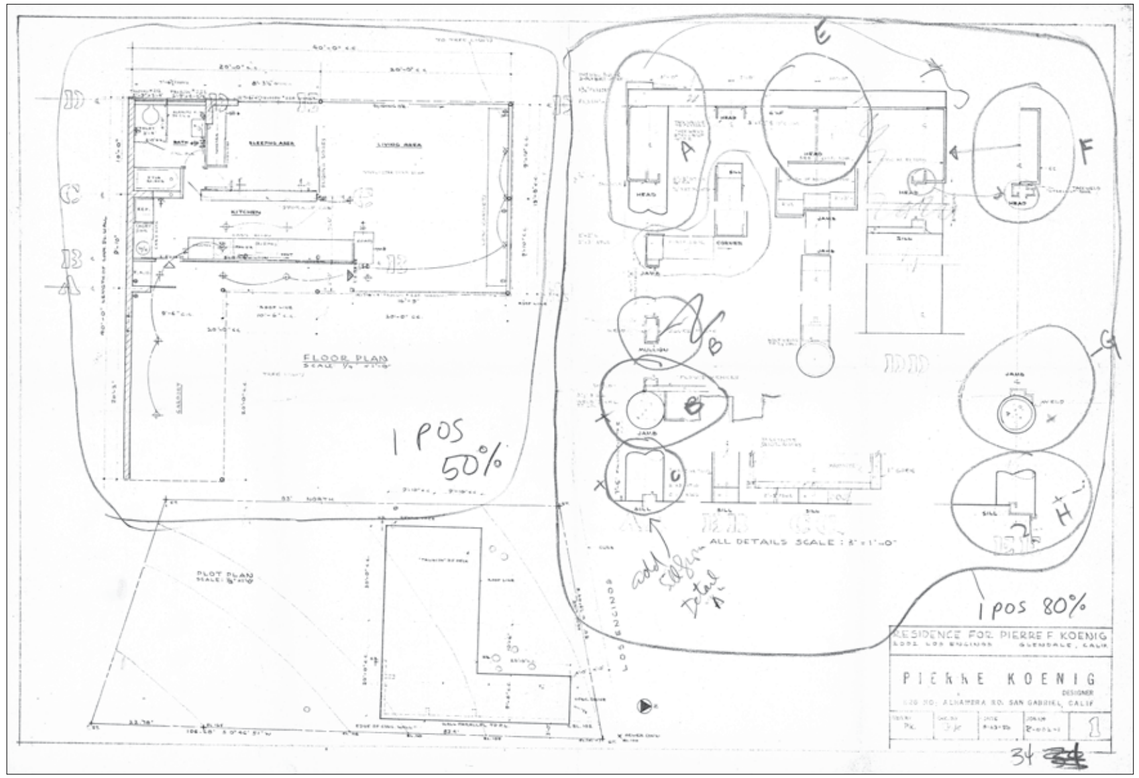
The second attempt at designing the carport came six months later, in July 1966, and suggested a much more sophisticated building (see pl. 75). Using the same site and the same overall dimensions, Koenig now proposed a two-story, six-bay structure made up of what he called "basic units," using "L" (for lower) and "U" (for upper). Each unit was framed by 2-by-2-inch square-section hollow pipe columns, so that when four units came together, there was a cluster of four columns at the meeting point. A laminated-timber floor, supported on 6-inch C-section steel beams, separated the lower and upper units, and the roof was finished with an 18-gauge galvanized-steel deck. The frames were not welded but bolted together, one bay on each level on each side tensioned with steel cross-bracing rods a half inch in diameter. What this represented was an experiment,

PLATES

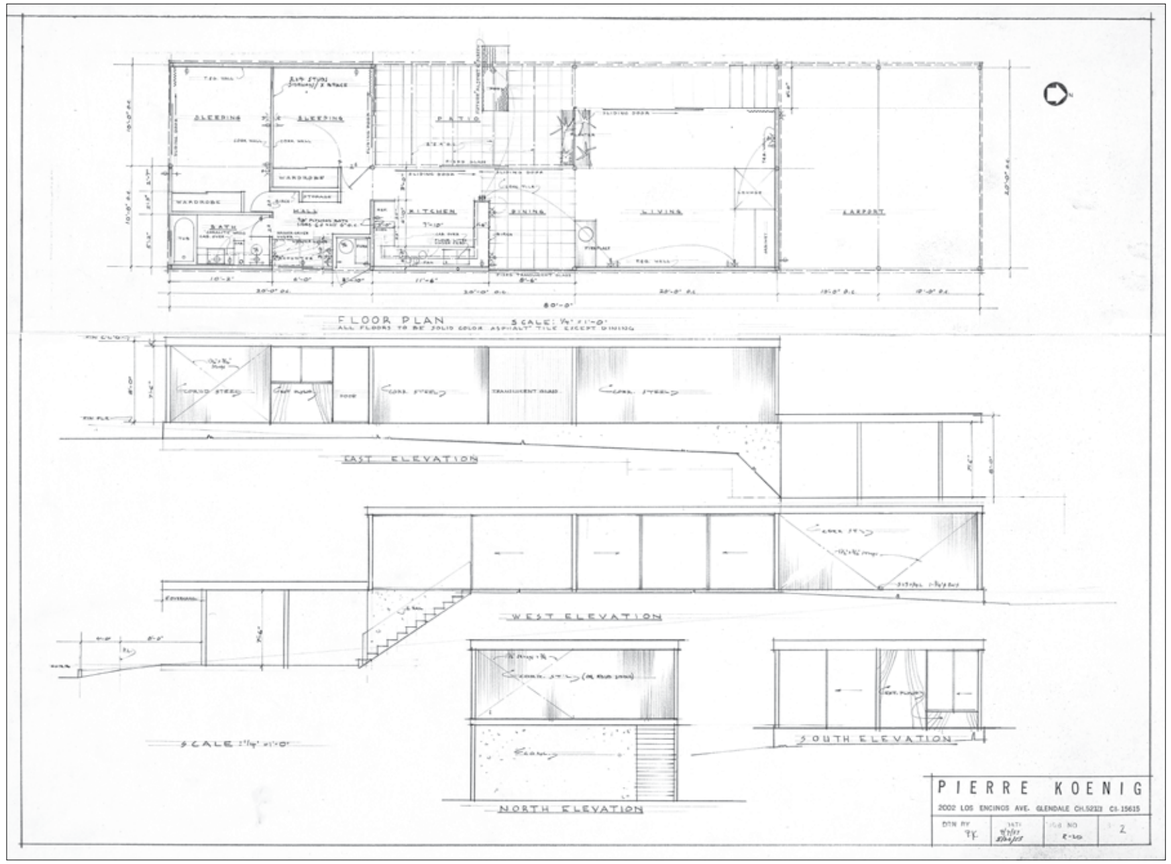
Pl. 1. *A Branch Library,* plan analysis, plan, ca. 1948–49.



Pl. 2. Koenig House 1, Glendale, plan, details, plot plan, 23 August 1950.



Pl. 3. Lamel House, plan, elevations, 4 April 1953.



Pl. 4. Scott House, plan, ca. 1953.

Pl. 5. Scott House, details, 21 September 1953.

Pl. 6. Scott House, fireplace details, 21 September 1953.