

Imaginative vacation houses

# STUDIO BY THE SEA

where an artist paints in seclusion and makes good neighbors of her guests

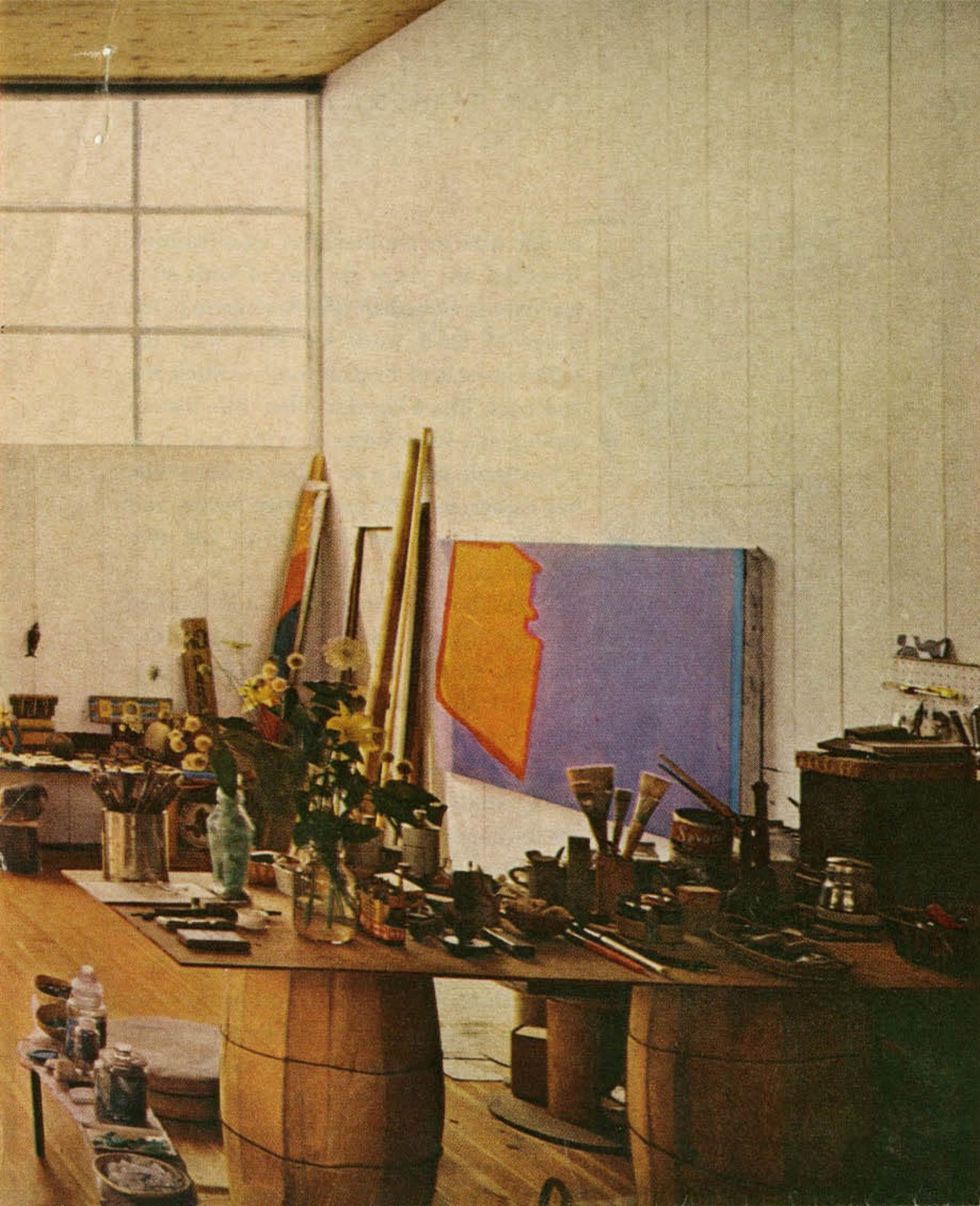
In her two-part weekend house by the ocean, art gallery director Betty Parsons has found a way to do everything she wants to do when she wants to do it. A painter in her own right, she spends the day, or most of it, painting in her studio—the working half of her retreat. In the evening, she relaxes with friends in her guesthouse, a quite separate entity. Both houses are perched by the Atlantic near Long Island's Southold, a town Mrs. Parsons likes for its antiquity and surrounding terrain. Rough and picturesque, it pleases her artist's eye.

Because of the time demanded by her Manhattan gallery, she can paint only spasmodically in town, and usually at night, when "the light's never right." Weekends, consequently, are sacrosanct to work in her studio, a very simple structure consisting of one huge 30-foot-square room with a kitchen, storeroom, and bath curled in an L-shaped extension around one corner. "I wanted a great big cube," she says, "high—it's 16 feet—airy and flooded with light. I can't bear long, narrow rooms."

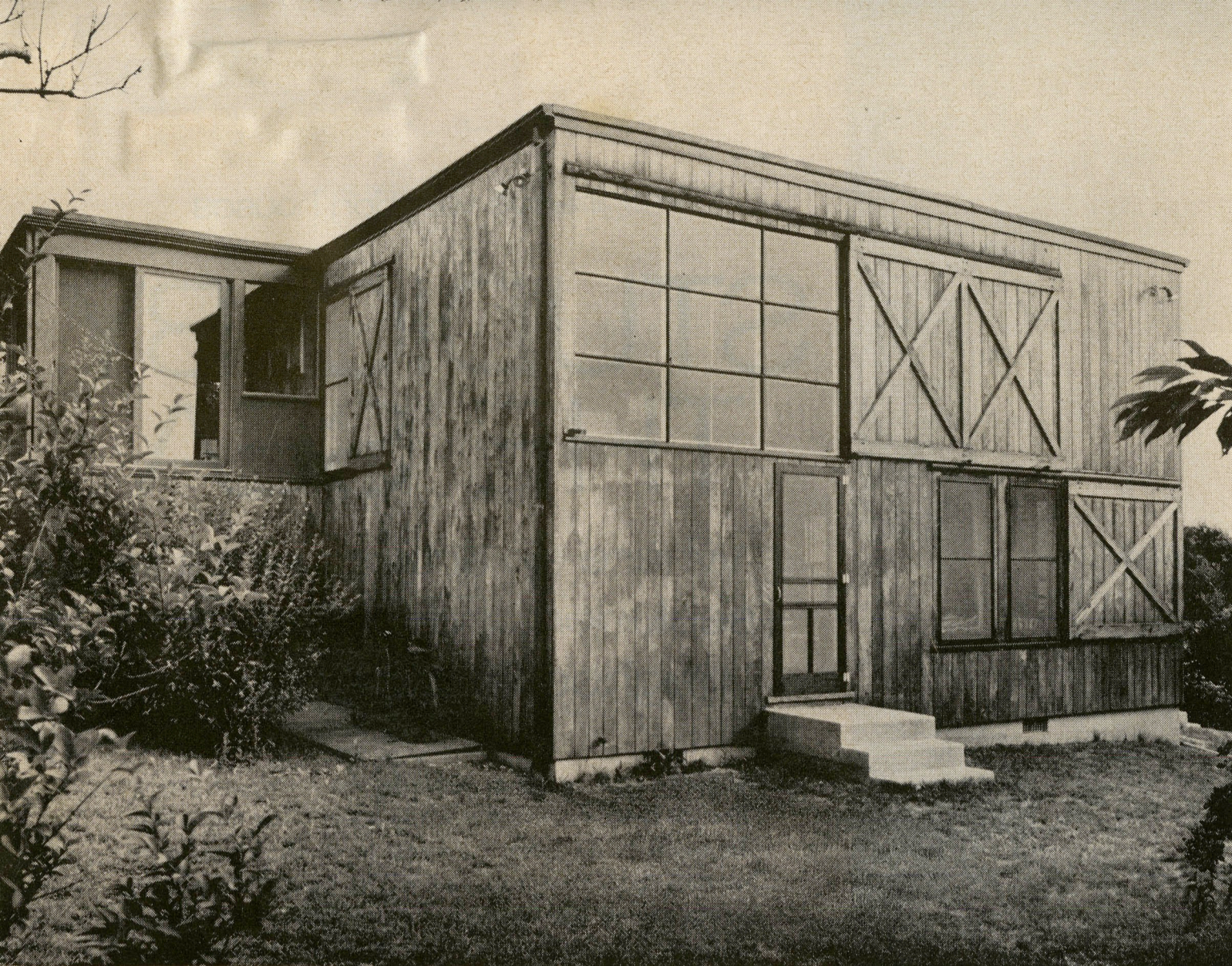
Oriented to catch the north light, the studio has one enormous "painting window" in the upper corner of one wall, 10-foot-high windows in another wall, and conventional windows over Mrs. Parsons' bed—all screened to control the light (even a painter can have too much) with matchstick blinds or white linen or both. The walls are painted white, but the pine floor and cedar ceiling ("it smells heavenly") are as nature tinted them. Although Mrs. Parsons' paintings are essentially non-objective, each one is inspired by something she has seen or experienced—a flower, a face, a spring morning. She is also a painter dedicated enough to care intensely about other painters. Many of them, Jackson Pollock, for example, she helped to make famous. A key figure in the development of contemporary art, she has sponsored practically the whole roster of American abstract painters, almost all of whom have been represented in her gallery (*Continued*)

*A workshop as much as a house, the studio is furnished simply, almost monastically. Mrs. Parsons has no great interest in furniture, as such, unless it has a "story." But she loves shapes—things like barrels and baskets and fishermen's cable spools—and uses them as furniture. For ornament, she likes natural things—steer hides, driftwood, and pretty flotsam and jetsam she finds on the beach.*

NAAR





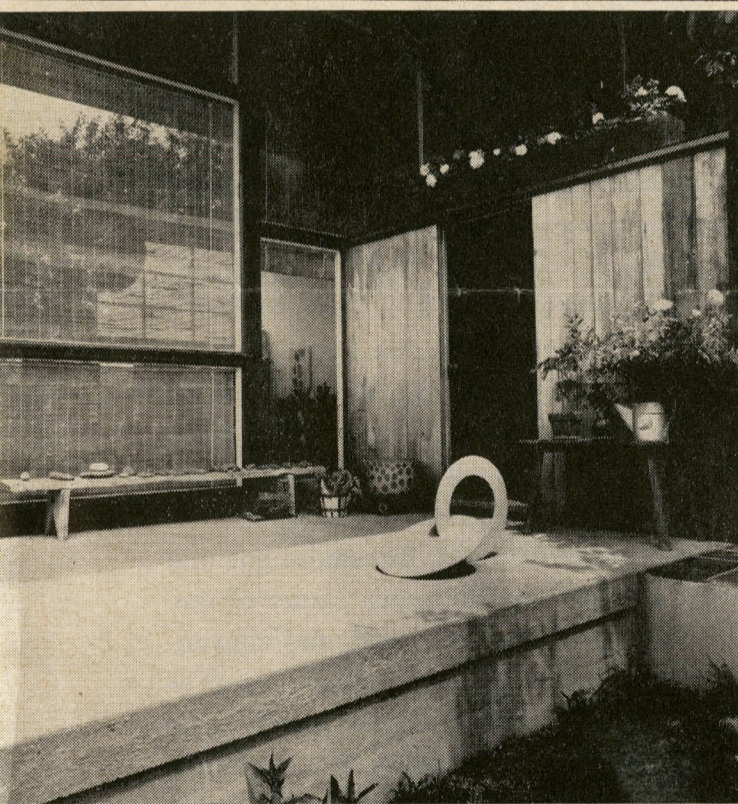


at one time or another. Her own training involved ten years in France with such teachers as Bourdelle and Archipenko, ten years of hard work leavened with the deliciousness of French food—which she can cook like a Cordon Bleu. She has an enologist's knowledge of wine, and it is a fortunate guest who is bid to her table, her casseroles, her pasta with herbs, and a miraculous salad dressing of her own invention.

Despite this largesse, she is fond of saying, "I have no time to be a gracious hostess, so guests must fend for themselves. I stock the larder with whatever they fancy, and let them do their own cooking. Sometimes I ask them to lunch at the studio, and if I'm lucky, they ask me to dinner. The rest of the time they do anything they like, and so do I, which is paint. It's a very pleasant arrangement."

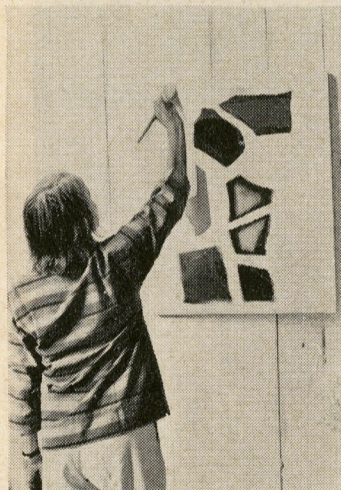
Since Mrs. Parsons built the guest-house only to have people near her, her depreciation of her hostmanship must be taken with a grain of salt. She took great pains to build a house that would be both comfortable and handsome. It includes a big living-dining room, a large bedroom, a kitchen and bath, a fireplace for cool nights, an oil heating system (like the studio's) for cold ones, and a roof deck reached by a wonderful outdoor staircase with the bravura of a flying buttress. In the living room, one entire wall is banked with shelves containing an art library, a bound collection of *Dial* magazines dating back to 1923, and a potpourri of Pre-Columbian sculpture and American Indian toys, masks, and artifacts.

The guests (usually limited to a quartet) find that they don't fend for themselves nearly so much as they fend

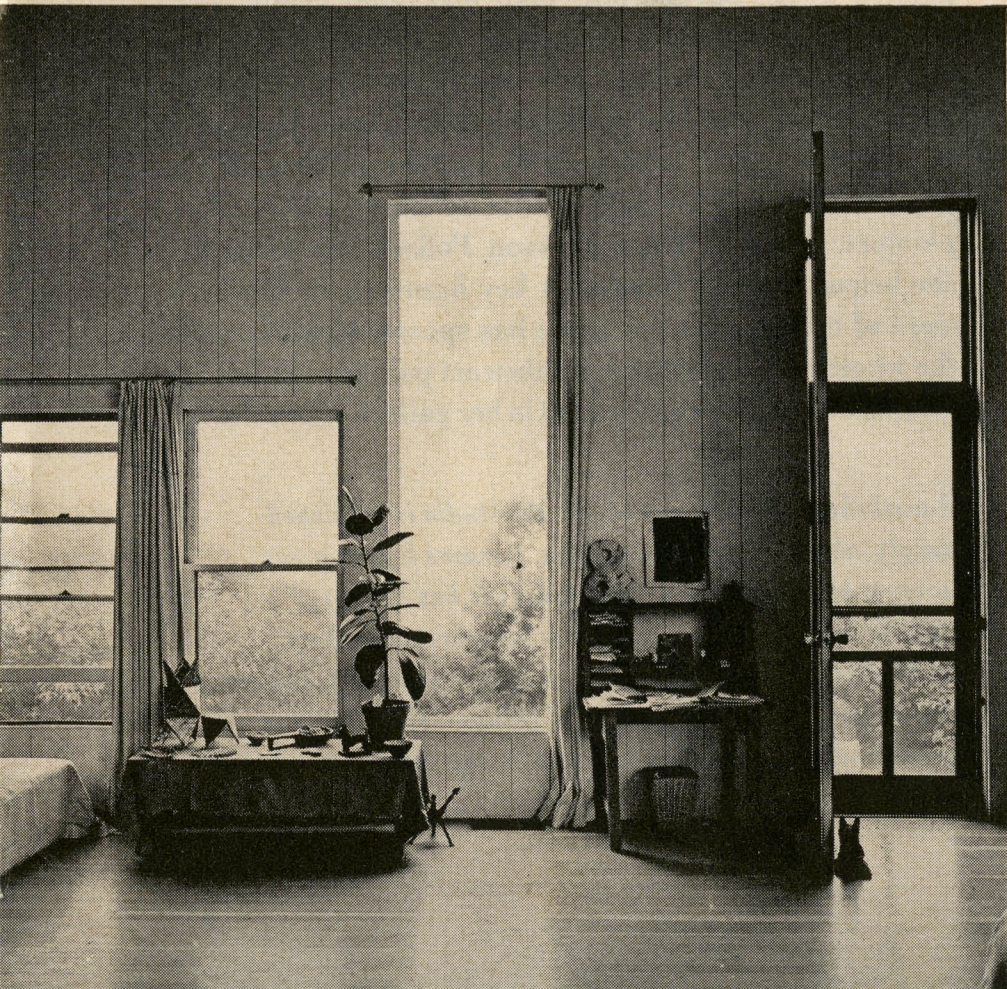


*Studio is a very simple structure that can be shut up tight as a drum. All windows are protected by cross-braced sliding doors.*

*On the dining deck (used mostly for breakfast), LEFT, a steel construction by Jonathan Porter is a permanent bright orange ornament. Planter over kitchen door holds another kind of color—geraniums and petunias—and indoors, RIGHT, Mrs. Parsons works with a third.*

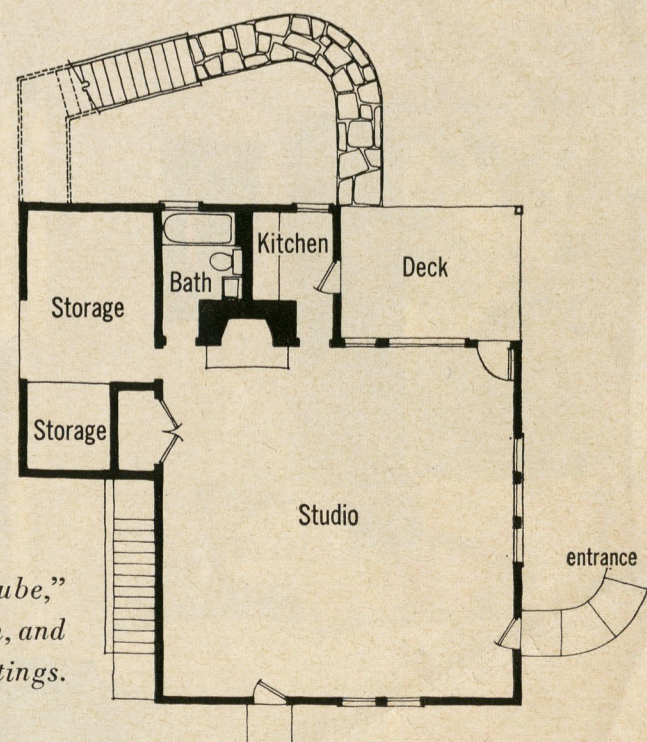


*Mrs. Parsons' desk she found in New Mexico. Of piñon wood, it is an example of a craftsmanship she particularly likes—American Indian.*

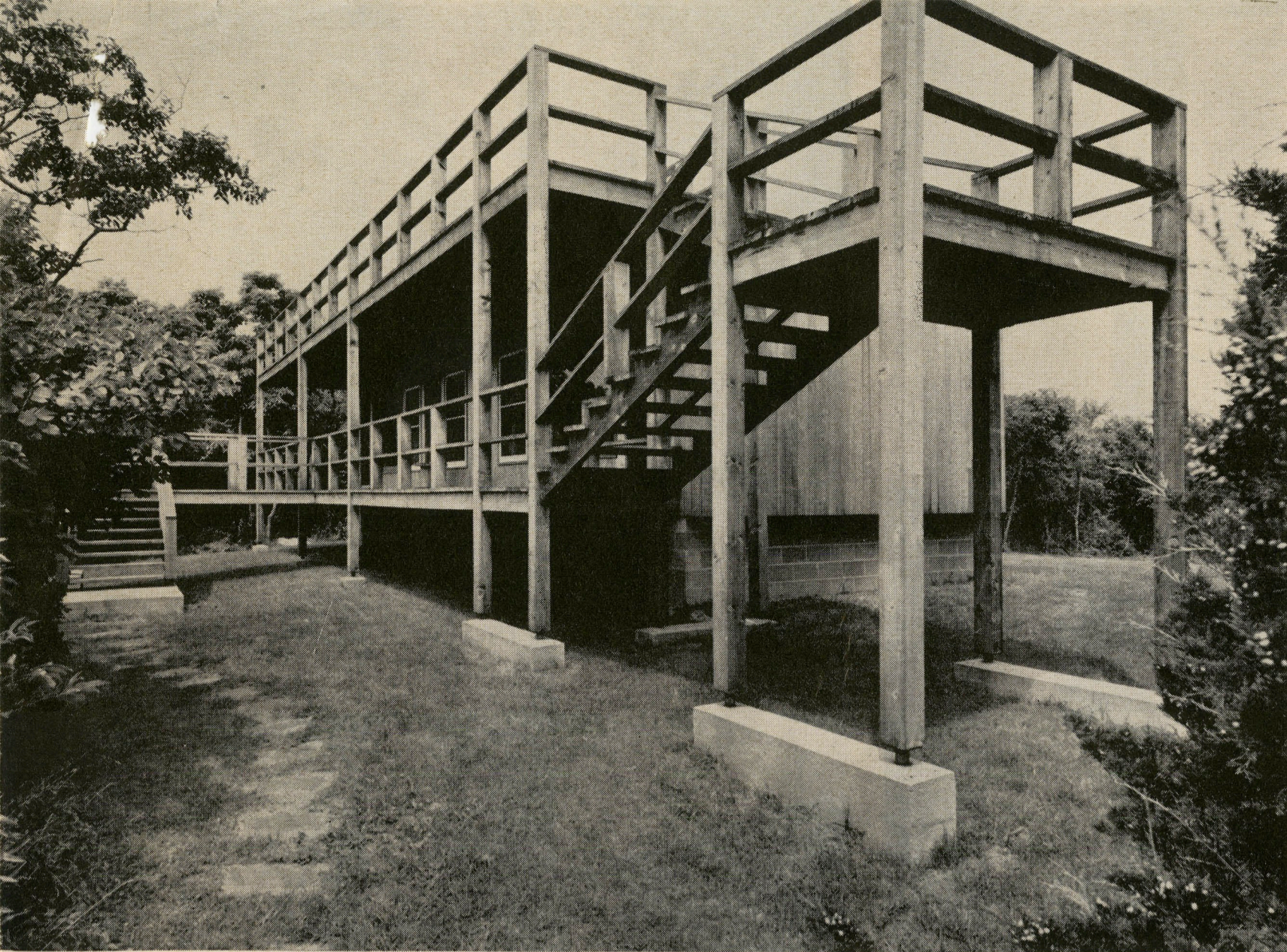


## The studio is one big cube

*Studio, in plan, is Mrs. Parsons' "one big cube," plus a covered deck, kitchen, bath, and storage areas for food, clothing, and paintings.*







## A Parsons weekend: guest's eyevue

Two of Mrs. Parsons' best friends and constant visitors are art critic and historian Lawrence Alloway and his wife, Sylvia, a painter. Their feeling for her is a dotting blend of affection, wonder, and amusement.

"Spending a weekend with Betty is one-third exhilaration, one-third serenity, and one-third Brillat Savarin food. Unlike most gourmet cooks, she likes to cook *with* people. 'You do this and I'll do that.' But she always chooses the wine herself. In fact, the first job she had when she came home from France was as a wine taster for a big California vineyard, and she has probably put them on the map.

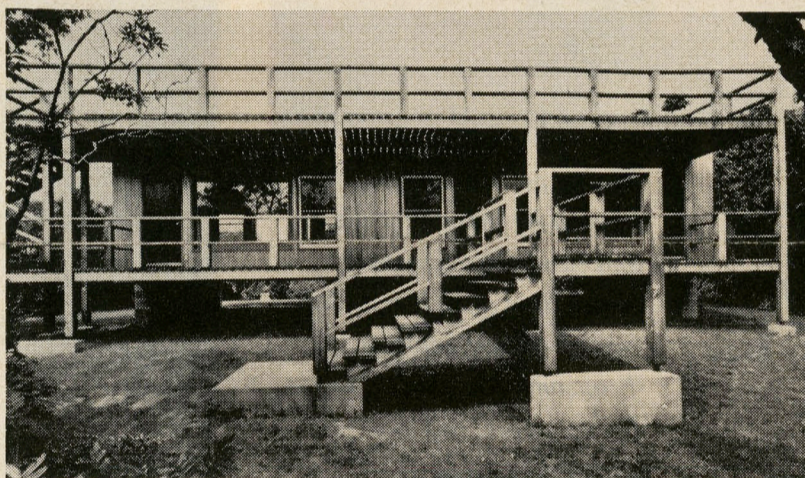
"The guesthouse is a lovely place to stay—simple, but very comfortable, and the kitchen works like a dream. We spend a lot of time on the roof deck, sunning and reading and bird watching, and on rainy days we polish the living room floor, which is made of old wooden paving blocks, laid on end. They have that beautiful kind of patina that only comes with age.

"Betty is a wonderful hostess because she has an instinct for letting you alone when you want to be, and popping in full of ginger just when you feel like company. She's marvelous to take walks with—like that man in *As You Like It* who found sermons in stones and tongues in trees. She doesn't just look at a flower, she *absorbs* it, and the next thing you know, she's painting it. It may not become a flower on her canvas, but it's always evocative, always fresh. She paints whatever she has looked at last."

for Mrs. Parsons' painting. She would rather paint than anything, yet she is always suggesting a picnic or a visit somewhere to amuse her guests, and only when she is gently dissuaded from these pleasures will she work.

But there are interludes of play. She loves the sun and the sea, swims like a fish, and has a private rock ("like a hippopotamus coming out of the water"). An ardent beachcomber, she scavenges for beach glass—odd fragments of old bottles and jars polished by sand and water until they look like jewels—and bits of driftwood which she paints to look like brilliantly colored little pieces of *pietra dura* and gives away as mementos.

Then back to work. Her "serious" paintbrush is rarely idle during the summer or even in the winter (the houses are open twelve months a year). Over the years, here and abroad, she has had a dozen one-man shows, participated in ten group exhibits, and is always preparing for the next *vernissage*. She has a following to satisfy, and with her two houses and the way she runs them she can do it, for she works and plays in tandem.



Guesthouse has a façade-wide veranda, ABOVE, that terminates at one end in an outdoor staircase, TOP, leading to the sun deck. Halfway up, stair landing makes a fine lookout.



Book wall in guesthouse living room is half library, half museum. Desk in corner was once a Yankee schoolmaster's.

## The guesthouse is captained by its guests

In the guesthouse plan, the living-dining room with its open kitchen is separated from the bedroom by the entrance hall and adjoining bath.

