



### Historical Overview

This report, compiled by Dr. David Paul Pearson and Perry Dean Rogers & Partners: Architects, is meant to give an overview of the evolution of the design and construction of Baker House. This architectural work has been examined with regard to the expression of its designer's intent in parallel with other Aalto buildings and related published works on the theory, history and appreciation of Aalto buildings as well as Baker House itself.

### Historiography and Baker House

Students, scholars, architects, critics, and design buffs have been walking into, through, and around Baker House with keen interest since construction was completed in 1949. Baker House represents one of the most highly praised building concepts in the body of modern American architecture. The universal level and high degree of popular approval is rare even for a "beloved" campus building. It continues to be a subject of study and discussion throughout the various architectural communities. The list of architects and of architectural history and theory scholars who have admired this icon as a special example of the modern style is virtually without limit.

The Seniors Dormitory (as Baker House was originally called) was not only Aalto's first American project for a North American client (he designed the Finnish Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair), it was also perceived as a potential platform for Aalto's transfer to North America, just as the Cranbrook Academy had been for his countryman Eliel Saarinen. Aalto's building in Cambridge stands in a pivotal position between the two phases of his practice. It was the final design of the first phase of Aalto's *oeuvre*, which he executed with his first wife and partner Aino who died in 1949. It is also the building that introduces the major works which follow in the second phase with his second wife and partner, Elissa who also continued to run the office after his death in 1976. The Saynatsalo Town Hall, the Iron Manufacturers House, the National Pensions Institute, and the House of Culture build directly on the experiments and successes of this building. In fact, Richard C. Peters, professor emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley and a noted Aalto and Wurster (William Wurster, Dean of MIT's School of Architecture in the 1940s) scholar, stated that "Aalto's later buildings could not have emerged in the same way were it not for Baker House."

The building's mystique is well deserved. Baker House stands with the Lever House by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Philip Johnson's glass house, and the Farnsworth House, by Mies van der Rohe, as one of the earliest significant examples of post-war International Modernism built in the U.S. Even among this august collection, Baker House is a special creation for it exhibits particular Finnish design influences as well as American vernacular roots.

In the MIT archives, information from Aalto's correspondence file shows that his devotion to brick, both as an exterior and interior material, was in part aroused by a lecture on the 'brick unit' which he heard Frank Lloyd Wright deliver when he traveled to visit Wright in the Midwest. Previously Aalto had employed exposed brick for industrial buildings but never as a material appropriate for habitable structures – particularly as an interior finish. Aalto also expressed admiration for American, university brick dormitory buildings, especially those which were covered with 'ivy'.

There have been many stories and a few legends associated with Baker House, perhaps none more reliable than that related by MIT professor Lawrence Anderson to Prof. Pearson in 1974. Prof. Anderson said Aalto gave a very impressive slide lecture/presentation explaining the building and all its elements at the dormitory's opening celebration in 1949. After the lecture was completed, Prof. Anderson remarked to Aalto that he had been unaware of the history behind the building's design features. Aalto winked at him, then quickly remarked that they should go have a drink and Aalto would tell him the 'real' story. Whatever the real story may have been, it is evident that Aalto enjoyed the success at that moment. However, as is the case with most architecture, there are strong indications from the job correspondence that compromises existed in the final building state relative to the intent expressed in the design development drawings.

### Citation of sources

The investigation of material and sources for this report has led the design team to utilize the complete range of data and detail in all available archives. Sources researched include the examination of each of the construction documents generated by Perry Shaw & Hepburn and their related consultants from the archives of Perry Dean Rogers & Partners and the MIT Physical Plant archives; drawings and correspondence in the MIT archives; documents in the MIT museum; design drawings and correspondence in the Aalto Office & Foundation archives; and documents and photocopies in the Museum of Finnish Architecture archives.

### Interviews and special resources

Special interviews were conducted with two Finnish architects, Veli Paatela and Olaf Hammarstrom, who actually worked in Boston on the design, development, and construction drawings of the building and its interior. Additional ad hoc interviews were conducted in order to test the pulse of scholars within the perceived international community of architects, theoreticians, Aalto enthusiasts, and Aalto scholars.

### Determination of original scope of design and level of detail

In the scheme of design execution for Baker House, it is clear that Alvar Aalto treated this building with special consideration. It was the first major building project that he was able to complete outside Finland. His efforts from the beginning, despite the remote distance, were intense and fully founded on the level and quality of detail that had become synonymous with his name. Aalto produced the design in collaboration with a modest size staff in Boston and within his own office in Helsinki. He was able to employ people in both locations who had his best interests at heart. In spite of the fact that his visiting professorial position at MIT afforded Aalto an increased amount of exposure, he was not able to actively supervise the preparation of the construction documents in the US. This proved to be a problem in the final stages of design and construction, for there are several aspects of the original design intent that were not realized. William Wurster, his dean and confidant, assisted as much as possible where he could, but certain decisions made in Aalto's absence compromised the project. Primarily these

included the deletion of the trellis arrangement on the river facades, the change from tile to stucco cladding on the north stair facade, the deletion of the roof deck and covering trellis, changes to the lighting fixture plan/schedule, and the lack of a developed landscape plan.

Typically, the original scope of a true Aalto building in 1946 would have included the full range of Aalto motifs, finishes, and furnishings. In part, this list would include a double height skylighted volume, echelon or staggered volume planning, curvilinear accent on part of the building, raw wooden pole elements, cantilevered entry roof, textural effects on the interior and exterior to enliven surfaces, diagonal and fan-flow of space and volume etc. Baker House contains virtually the full range employed by Aalto.

Nevertheless, it must be stated that Baker House was not fully finished in true Aalto level of detail and finish. This is true in specific cases on the exterior and in the interior.

### Focus of programmatic user needs - Building Illumination

Few aspects of the environmental design of the dormitory affect the students and their needs more continually than artificial lighting. In Baker House the low level of illumination is in part due to the durable dark clay material of the interior brick partitions. However, in the interim four plus decades, design illumination level requirements have risen significantly. Furthermore, the original illumination scheme depended on a significant amount of natural light in the corridors. This light was borrowed from the lounges with full height glazing along the North wall. To increase the room count of the facility, some of the lounges were eliminated resulting in a loss of natural light to the corridor. As compounded, these deficits of illumination gives Baker House a dim quality, beyond that originally envisioned by Aalto, although it must be recognized that Finnish buildings in general are not as highly illuminated as their American counterparts. The material of the brick has however, relieving characteristics. Jordan Gruzen AIA of Gruzen Sampton Architects and resident of Baker House in 1956, stated that the warmth of the brick walls made the small scale of the dorm room interiors more tenable.

### Evaluation of finished features and unrealized details

Although Baker House is not a registered national historic landmark, it has true landmark qualities. The constant maintenance and utilization of the building as it was intended has been gratifying from the observers' point of view. MIT has continued to keep the building in reasonable condition and perform maintenance necessary to prevent severe deterioration. It exists as a continuing haven for all who dwell, dine, and study there. Perhaps having a building program that incorporates a dining facility, based on the literal meaning of the ancient colleges, holds one key to its resounding success. However many aspects of the building have exhausted their useful life, and are no longer in original condition, finish or color. This is borne out in other components of the general report. There are elements that have been replaced or eliminated by the normal maintenance process. Many of the qualities that have served it well originally as an environment however have faded, and lack the sparkle of the original in space, design, color, and environmental detail.



Designer Louis Réard, a onetime engineer with Renault, the car company, had been turning out modest knit bathing suits since 1925, but in 1946 he realized that with the return of peace, people would want to start enjoying themselves again. "Remember that no one had been to the beach in years," points out Jamie Samet, fashion writer for the French daily *Le Figaro*. "People were craving the simple pleasures of the sea and the sun. The tiny suit was named the bikini."

-- Emily Mitchell Time, July 1, 1996

1946: The UN General Assembly holds its first session in London

1946: First electronic computer completed

Jan. 10: The first radar signal is sent to the moon

Mar. 8: Helicopter first licensed for commercial use

Mar. 30: The sleeper car first used on transcontinental trains

May 7: First Black Governor appointed by the President of the United States to U.S. Virgin Islands

Jun. 4: The first facsimile sent transmitted to a moving train

Jun. 12: First transcontinental round-trip airplane flight within one day

Jul. 7: First jet airplane to land on a ship

Jul. 30: Rocket attains 100-mile altitude

Oct. 9: Electric blanket was first manufactured

Nov. 13: Artificial snow produced from a natural cloud

World War II

1939 1940 1946

Aalto designs Finnish Pavilion 1939 New York World's Fair

Aalto appointed Visiting Professor of Architecture, MIT

Aalto resumes his professorship at MIT

Aalto is commissioned to design the new MIT Seniors' Dormitory. Perry, Shaw & Hepburn are local architects

Aberthaw chosen as contractor for Seniors' Dormitory

Dean E.M. Baker publishes his ideas on the future of student housing at MIT

Final, expanded plan scheme is settled by Jan. 1948

Seniors' Dormitory opens in June

Everett Moore Baker dies in a plane crash in Egypt & the Seniors Dormitory is named Baker House

Central lounges taken on floors 4-6 to create 07, 08, 09 rooms

Amherst Alley moved north, loading dock extended, north side of building re-landscaped

Bicycle shed built

Baker House Feasibility Study

Projected date for completion of Baker House Renovation/Restoration

MIT Planning Office interviews Olaf Hammerstrom to begin to recreate History of Baker House

Original windows removed, current windows installed (1st phase)

Master's Suite created out of manager's apartment and 2 student rooms

Many adjustments and changes through later stages of construction

Aino Aalto (Aalto's wife) dies; Aalto returns to Finland

Aalto's definitive scheme for the Seniors' Dormitory is fixed; construction starts

First scheme is submitted for review and pricing.

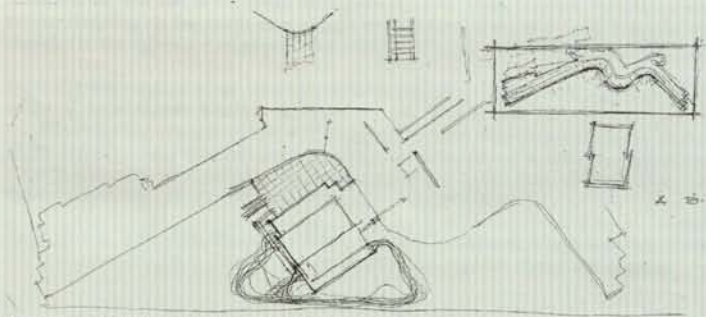


Fig. 1 Early sketch for 1947 scheme (A.A. Archive - no date)

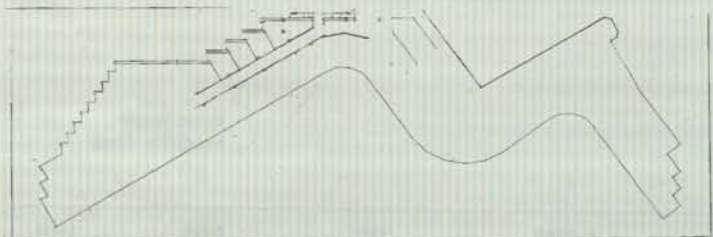


Fig. 2 Early sketch for 1948 scheme (A.A. Archive - no date)

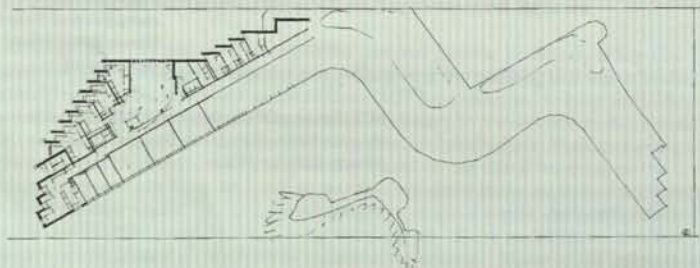


Fig. 3 1948 scheme (A.A. Archive - no date)

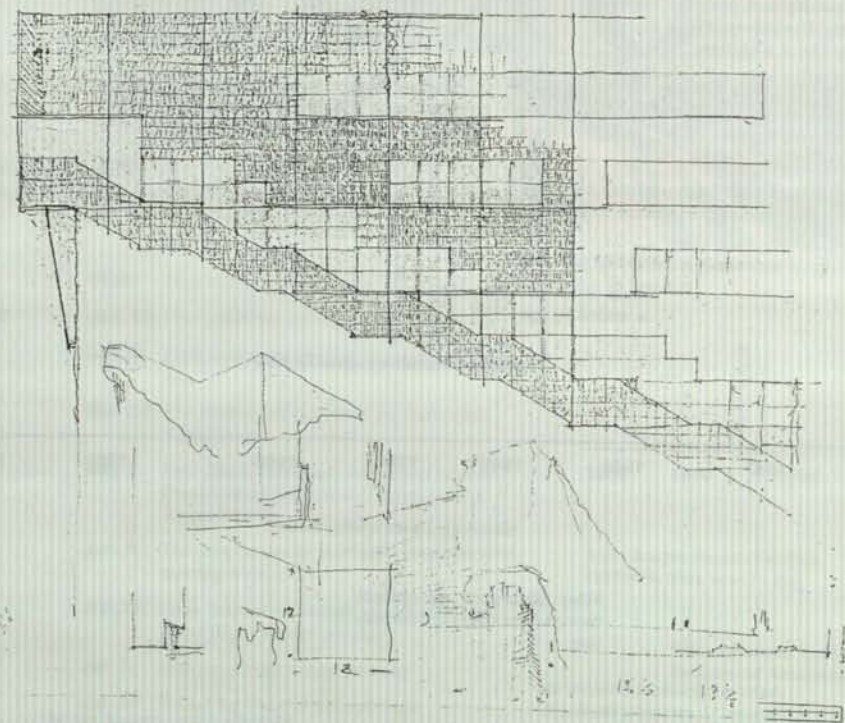


Fig. 4 Aalto sketch of North wall in Tile (A.A. Archive - no date)

## Baker House as conceived by Alvar Aalto

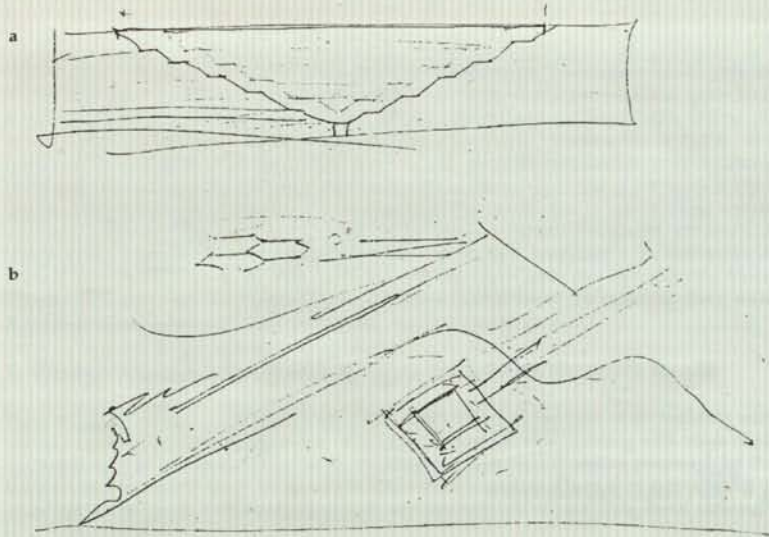


Fig. 5 Aalto sketches of North wall - Plan & Moon Garden Room section (A.A. Archive - no date)

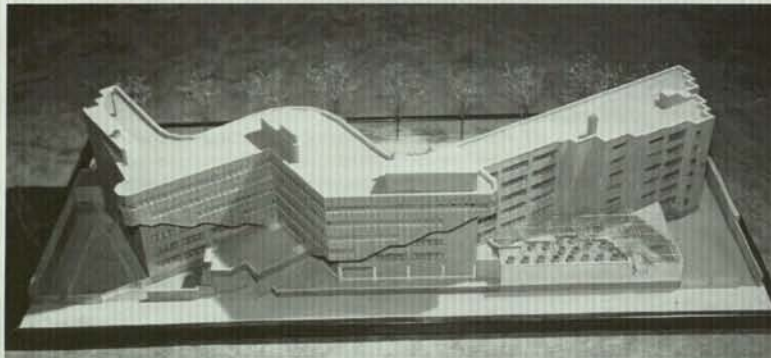


Fig. 6 North side of model showing proposed library

Aalto's design intentions can be clearly defined in nearly all cases. The documentation available enables the investigator to view the individual details and features that were intended for the complete scope of work.

### The Final Design (Commencement of Construction Documents):

Aalto's conception for the Senior Dormitory was essentially a single loaded corridor bar, bent to conform to a constricted site and to mitigate traffic disturbance; bisected by a ceremonial single story "jewel," containing the entry, and a single story library on the north side, and the two story dining pavilion on the south (Figs. 1, 5b, & 9). The single loaded corridor parti, which has a precedent in Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium, provides excellent natural ventilation in a non-air-conditioned structure, and allows all of the dormitory rooms a river view. The material of the building slab was conceived as brick from early on, with the "jewel" to be executed in a "white" material.



South side of model showing wall trellises

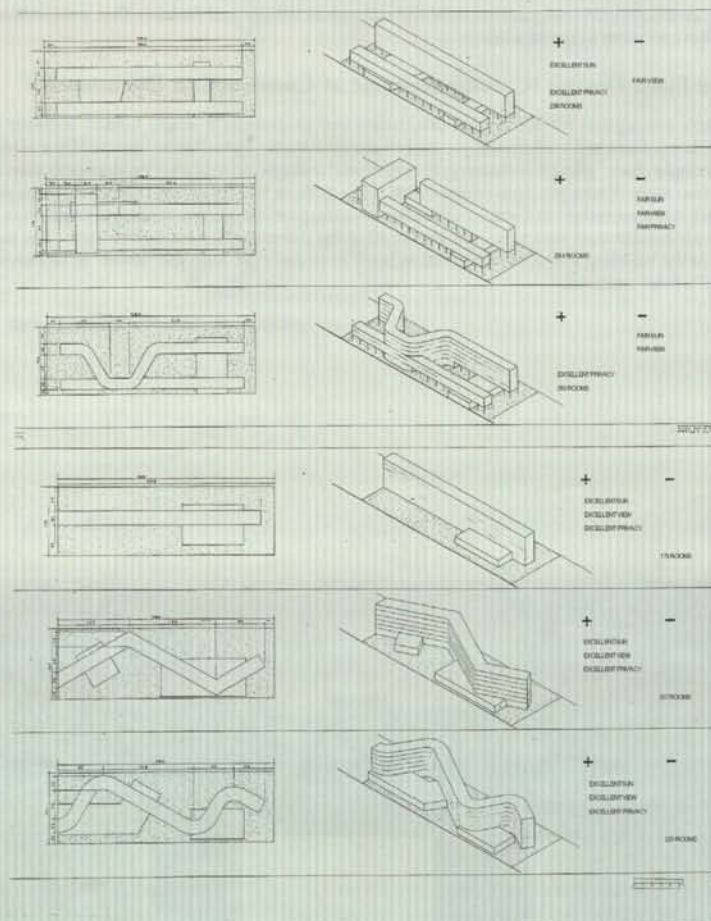


Fig. 7 Aalto's analysis of the building form on the site - Considering the number of rooms, amount of sunlight, quality of the view and amount of privacy (These diagrams are all from the A.A. Archive)

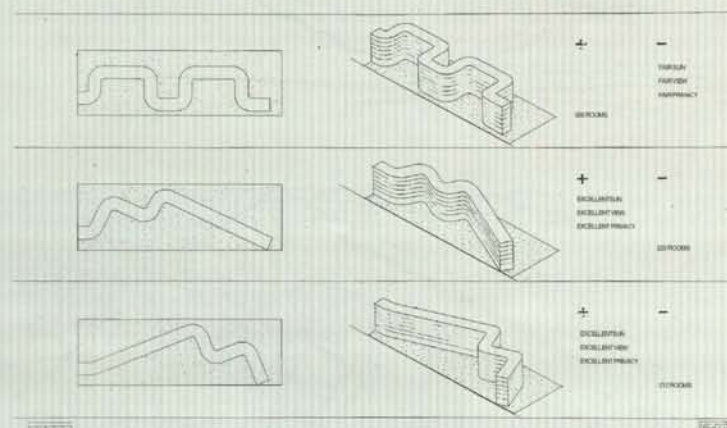


Fig. 8 Aalto's analysis of the building form

"My present idea is for the [trellis] poles not follow the lines of the windows. Instead they would be placed partly in front of the windows, in the corners so that the green trailing plants would form a soft transition from solid wall to window. This would also mean softer light inside, i.e. also contribute to the softening of the transition from the (bright) opening to a shaded (inside) wall. The trailing plants would simultaneously act as blinds on the outside." "The white trellis network is absolutely compulsory in achieving definitive architecture for the building." "The hovel will be bare without it."

-Alvar Aalto 1948

"As I see it, the great side toward the south should have a quiet rhythm so that all eyes turn to the pavilion with its trellis and captivating charm."

-William Wurster 1947

The first floor of the building was originally conceived entirely as common space, with an expanded dining function, seating areas and a library. In the dining pavilion, the upper level guard rail was not originally conceived to be open. Aalto intended this to be a 1/2 height wood capped wall, painted white, to maximize the reflection of light from the skylights. The ceiling at the upper level of the dining pavilion was originally scheduled to be a natural finish pine slat ceiling, which was included in the detail drawings as late as February of 1949, four months before the completion of the building. The north stair of the building was to have been clad in terracotta tile; this design held until the building was well advanced in construction, when the present stucco finish was chosen as a substitute. The roof trellis or pergola and the trellises at the curved portions of the south elevation and over the Moon Garden Pavilion were also integral parts of Aalto's conception of the building; these were deleted as a cost saving measures during the course of construction.

### 1. Design Intention: the aluminum pole trellises on the south facade

From the outset of the conceptual design phase Aalto sketched the form of the building with areas of climbing or trailing vegetation. The intent to clad the new building with vines obviously required an architectural solution. A series of trellis type elements proposed for the brick facades was the method for accomplishing a bucolic quality. There is an extensive list of drawings in the Aalto Archives dealing with various methods of providing metal vine-support trellis elements.

In a letter to his resident architect Veli Paatela, dated July 13, 1948, Aalto exhibited concern for the inclusion of the trellis that was to be located on the curved parts of the facade. He cited the harshness of the sunlight in the rooms as his reason for continued preference of the trellis. "The white trellis is absolutely compulsory in achieving definitive architecture for the building." (Aalto to Olaf Hammerstrom, 8/16/48). Upon examination of all the documents, however, it also seems likely that Aalto wanted to soften the polygonal or segmented version of the curves in those three areas of the facade. In many early versions of hard and soft pencil studies (see AA archives #42/102,104,105,106,128,129) he was able to control the curve as a radius, but by the high point of the design development stage, the curved walls are shown on drawings as a series of straight-line segments. In spite of the fact that the constructed segmental walls forming the curves as constructed are a testament to the mason's skill, the overall effect is not precisely resolved and therefore somewhat crude. According to communications with his representatives, Aalto was not altogether confident about the masonry work. These facts most assuredly kept Aalto concerned about his original "white metal" or aluminum trellis feature and the subsequent concealing vines that would grow on them (see quotes on page 12). The vine carrying facade trellis was eliminated before construction, leaving the textured brick surface to stand alone. No Aalto building previously had incorporated any final element more extensive than a small limited-area facade trellis. The advisability of the trellis elements might have been in question from the beginning because the plant material would have required significant maintenance to keep it under control, but clearly Aalto had no such fear.

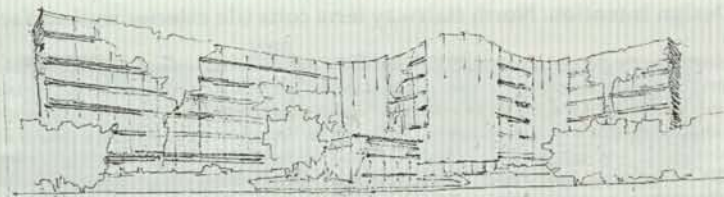


Fig. 9 Aalto sketch of South Facade showing trellises and vines (1947)

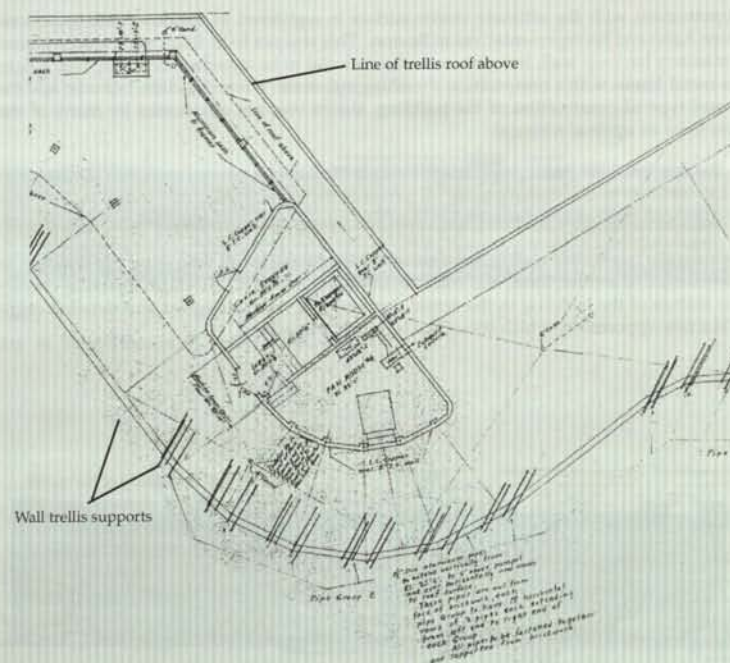


Fig. 10 Detail of PS&H/Aalto roof plan - showing roof and wall trellis (10/2/47)

## 2. Design Intention: North stairway terra cotta tile exterior wall surface

It is clear from the detail documentation found at the Aalto Foundation and MIT and PDR&P Archives that several alternatives were pursued in 1947-48 for the cladding of the north stairway exterior wall (Figs. 4, 11, 13, 14). The first of these was natural finish aluminum panels, with aluminum windows. According to Paatela, Aalto, though intrigued with the idea of using aluminum, was disturbed at the contrast between the dark brick and the bright, silver metal. Consequently, Aalto then specified that a textured, terra-cotta tile surface be utilized to clad the stairway projection. Stucco was also drawn up as an alternative (and ultimately executed), yet there is no evidence that either the design team or Dean Wurster ever thought that stucco was a desirable material to be used on that part of Baker House (See quotations below).

Disappointment with the ultimate stucco surface is registered in various communications between Aalto and his representatives in Boston. This was not to be Baltic style stucco placed on a masonry back-up wall, but was instead a material to be stretched as a skin over a light gauge metal frame, with a composition sheathing substrate. Given the date, latitude, and the scale and type of construction of the building, stucco was not envisioned by many of the players to be an optimal material.

From the original 1949 photograph made by Ezra Stoller, one can see evidence of distortion and discoloration in the stucco panels. It presents the same appearance today, though in a more advanced state of deterioration.

Recladding the north stair wall in the terra cotta tile will allow all who enter the building to see the mixture of texture, form, and color as Aalto envisioned it. To realize this most characteristic feature of the building in the actual material that Aalto designed and detailed originally is a rare opportunity which should be seriously considered.

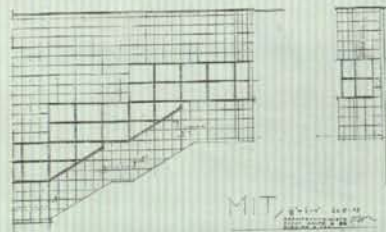


Fig. 11 North facade study (A.A. Archive - 5/22/48)

*"The success of the beauty of the north facade of the building depends upon this great hanging stairway. Stucco is a shoddy material in this climate. We have dirt, soot and freezing weather, and all of these will bring eternal upkeep...The fine quality of the building will be reduced and the creator's thinking negated."*

To: James Killian, Jr., President, MIT  
From: William Wurster, Dean, School of Architecture  
Nov. 22, 1948



Fig. 12 North elevation (ESTO - 1949)

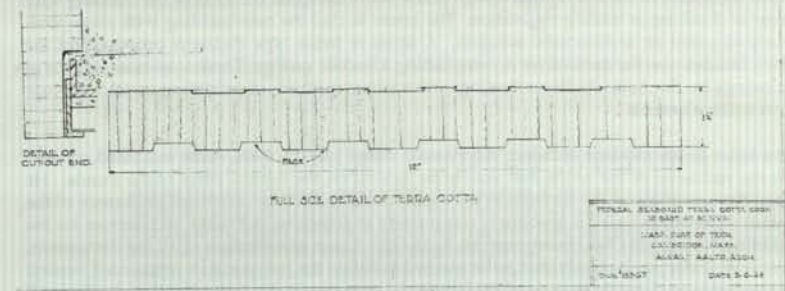


Fig. 13 Striated terra cotta tile - shop drawing (3/4/48)

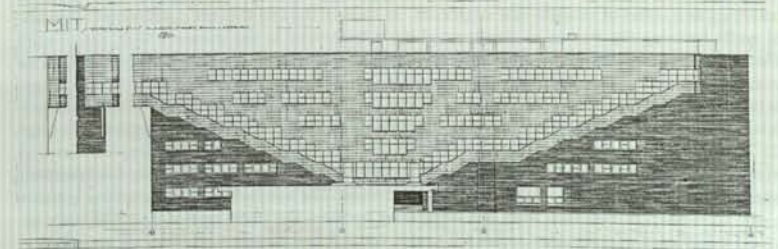


Fig. 14 North wall elevation showing tile cladding (A.A. Archive - no date)

### 3. Design Intention: Roof deck and trellis

One of the humanizing aspects of Aalto buildings in both phases of his career is the inclusion of raw wooden pole trellises. In some form this Aalto motif appears in the scheme of design development of nearly all his buildings. Prior to Baker House both the Villa Mairea of 1936 (figs. 15,16) and the Finnish Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair each contained this uniquely Aalto design element. More than a dozen Aalto buildings encompassing nearly all building typologies display some version of this rustic roof top or terrace covering feature.

From the beginning of the design development phase the roof trellis (and therefore its corresponding deck) is shown clearly near the center of the roof with satellite areas at the extremities. (see figs.17-19). Throughout this phase the trellis is continually exhibited as the crowning rustic element. Even past the end of that phase (see AA archive #42/215) Olaf Hammerstrom's rendered drawing of the elevation shows the full trellis elements. In the case of Baker House, the drawings show the roof trellis profile in a more tailored, less woodsy aesthetic. It may have been designed in aluminum to match the proposed white metal wall trellis and the aluminum windows. While there are some design phase elevations and construction documents without any indication of this element, it is clear from the great majority of evidence (including the contractor's cost estimate sheets) that this was an integral part of Aalto's design intent.



Fig. 15 Villa Mairea Exterior canopy support



Fig. 16 Villa Mairea Natural wood roof trellis

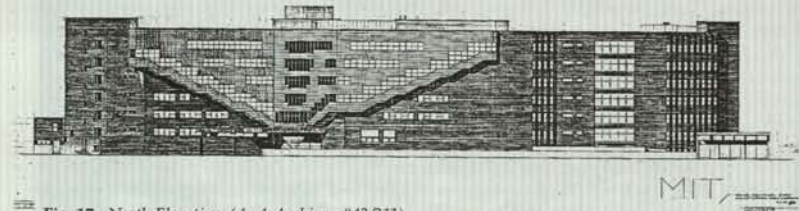


Fig. 17 North Elevation (A. A. Archive - #42/211)

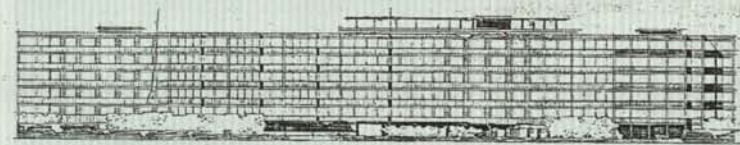


Fig. 18 South Elevation (A. Archives - #42/110)

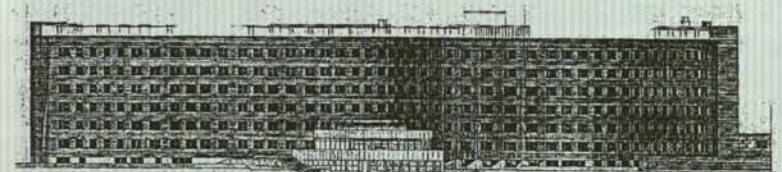


Fig. 19 South Elevation (A. Archives - #42/213)

#### 4. Design Intention: The double-hung windows

The saga of the window material and design is one of great complexity. Due to the relative newness of aluminum windows many hours and a significant amount of thought and communication was given to selection of the type and manufacturer of the windows. Through the summer of 1947 and into February of 1948 it seems that an aluminum window was the preferred choice (of at least PS&H and MIT). This conclusion is based both on the evidence of the working drawings, and on the minutes of design meetings of April 9 and 10, 1947 (with Aalto present) to review building finishes, in which aluminum is stated to be the preferred choice if the cost can be kept in line. The cost cutting processes, and lack of aluminum window manufacturing flexibility, most likely determined that wood windows be the final selection. The aesthetic evaluation of this decision is virtually impossible to determine in any absolute way; both Veli Paateli and Olaf Hammerstrom recall that that wood windows were Aalto's final choice; but the documentary evidence more strongly supports aluminum as the final design intent.

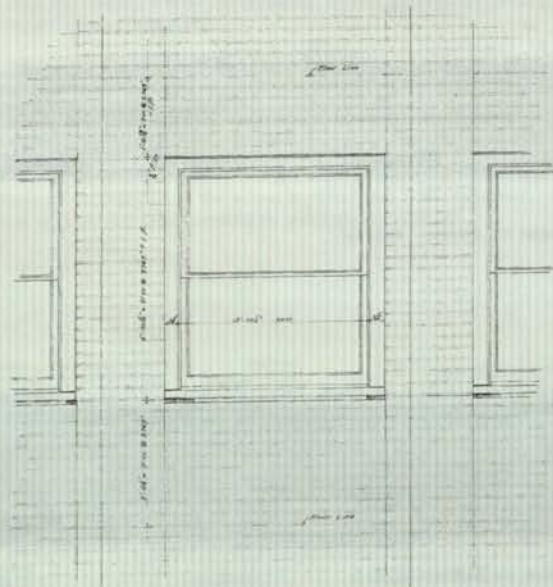


Fig. 20 West wall elevation detail (PS&H/AA Drawg.#204 3/9/48)

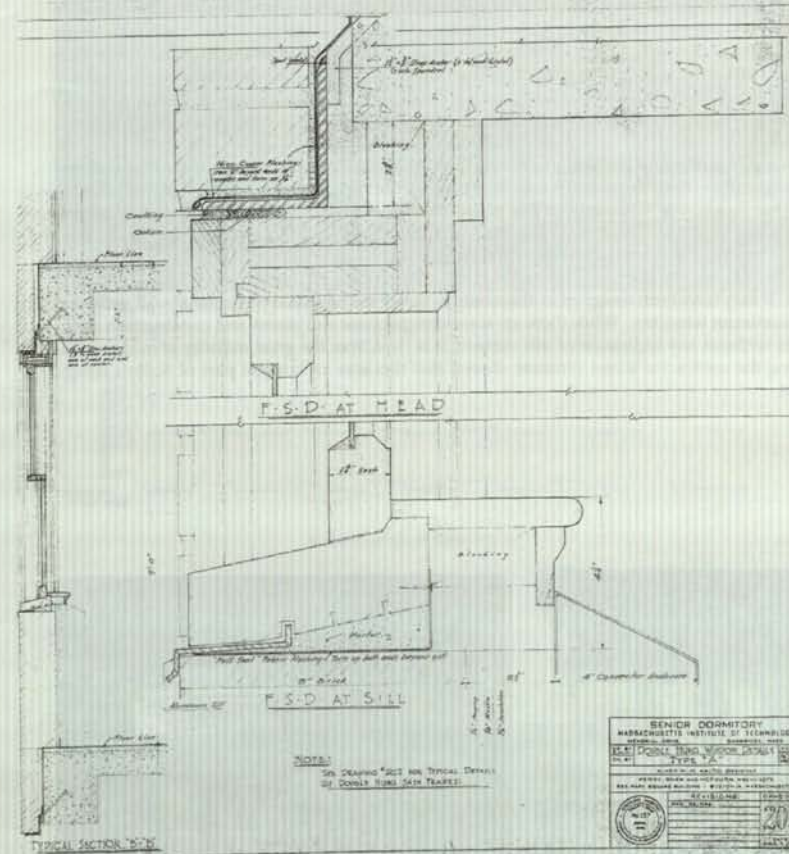
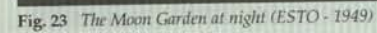
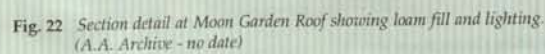


Fig. 21 Section detail of (PS&H/AA Drawg.#204 3/9/48)

In addition to the levels of illumination derived from the fixtures themselves, there is the further matter of aesthetics and performance to be considered in the evaluation of the light fixtures. Except for a limited number of installations, it seems that very little of the original interior fixtures were Aalto designed fixtures. One of the qualities most often noted about any Aalto building is the completeness and sympathy of the design, including the fixtures and furnishings. Of all the communication regarding the quality of the buildings features, furnishings, and accessories, the lighting fixture equipment seems to have occupied less attention than any other aspect. The minimum number and location of actual Aalto designed fixtures supplied to the building seems to have virtually evaporated. Unlike some other design features there has apparently been no attempt to maintain or upgrade the original lighting fixture schedule. With the exception of the flush glass lens units found in the ceiling of the dining commons, the entry lobby and other locations around the building, most of the interior lighting fixtures lack harmony with the Aalto design aesthetic, provide insufficient light levels, and should be considered for replacement. On the outside of the building the copper lanterns at the Master's Suite entries and the Moon Garden Room entries are original, as are of course the bank of Aalto designed lights over the skylights at the Moon Garden Room.



## 6. Design Intention: The dining commons or 'Moon Garden Room'

The clear development of this nearly free standing articulated white mass is probably the most representative signature Aalto element in the Baker House complex. It is clear from correspondence and level of detail devoted to the drawings in the Aalto archives that it was to be and is the qualitative centerpiece of the design. In architectural concept and execution it contained nearly the full range of signature elements as developed by Aalto at that time – the mid point of his career. These consisted of externally illuminated skylights, double-height balconied volume, straight-run open stair, shaped hardwood railings, baluster caps and mullions, and exposed interior brick wall surfaces. The fenestrated southeastern facing wall of the pavilion originally contained concrete-clad, steel columns with wood grillage designed to break up the direct sunlight and reflected light from the surface of the Charles River. These conical-shaped elements disguised the gussets welded to the upper third of the pipe columns for strength. Aalto included an aluminum valence on the exterior edge of the pavilion to aid in breaking up the sun's glare in the interior. The final design intent appears to have included a slatted, natural pine ceiling (fig.28) and a solid parapet wall with a wood cap instead of the present open mild steel railing.

Aalto configured the exterior of the dining commons to contrast in color and texture with the main bulk of the dormitory. Several design drawings and at least one model indicate trellis elements in at least two locations on the upper roof and above the outer terraces of the pavilion (Fig. 24). The roof itself, originally covered with loam and planted, gave the crisp light gray limestone mass the rustic effect that Aalto so often sought in his buildings. This material has subsequently been replaced with a built up roof.

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Fig. 24 Baker House model 1947 showing Wall and Moon Garden Trellises



Fig. 25 Moon Garden Room (ESTO - 1949)

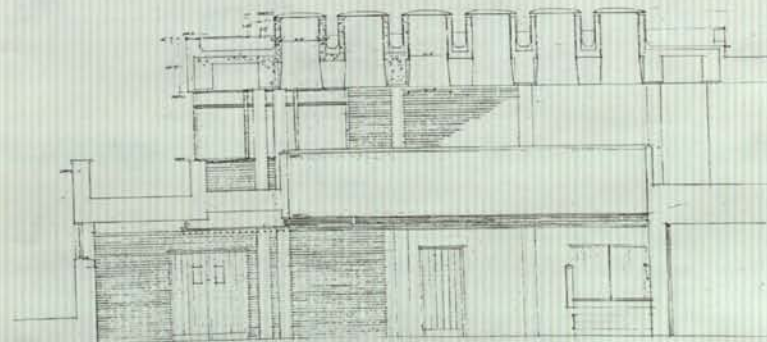


Fig. 26 The Moon Garden Room section

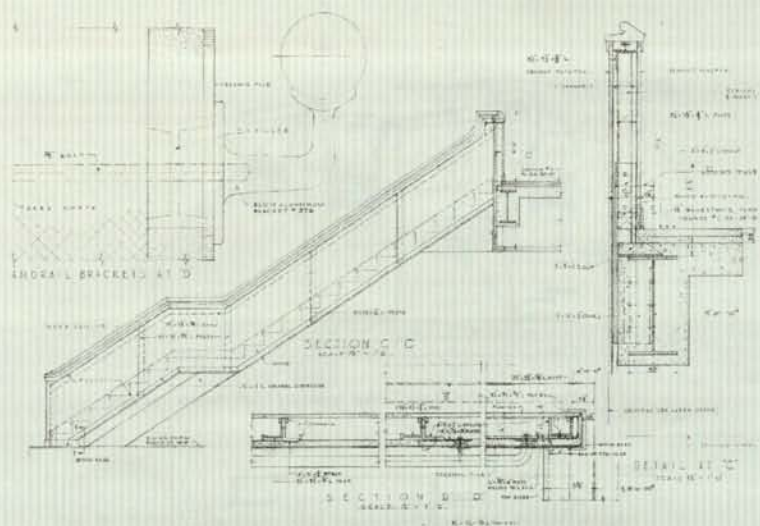


Fig. 27 Drawing showing solid railing (PS&H/AA)

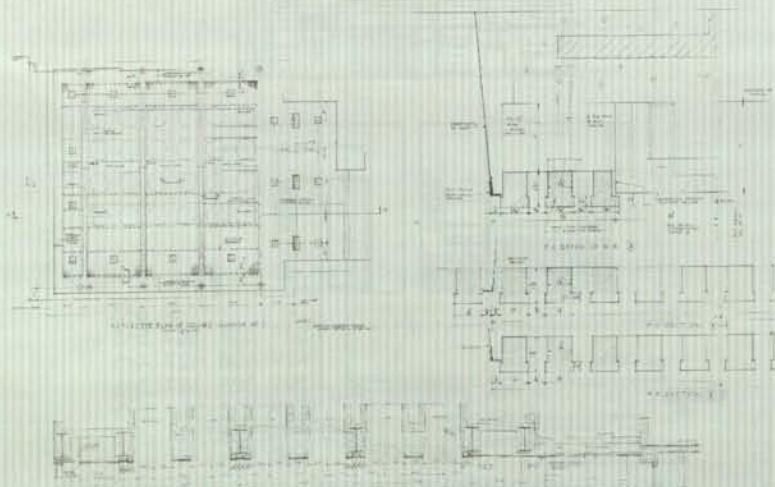


Fig. 28 Wood ceiling (PS&H/AA Draw #192)



Fig. 29 Moon Garden Room - upper level (ESTO - 1949)

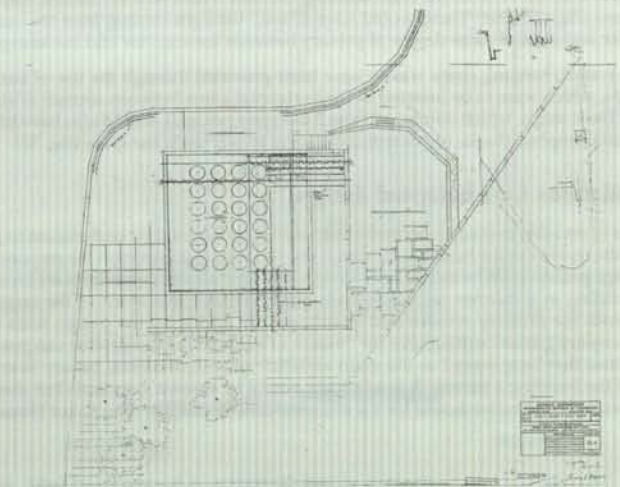


Fig. 30 Moon Garden Room sketch (A.A. Archive - 1947)

## 7. Design Intention: Landscaping and plant material

In spite of the best intentions to maintain a natural and non-invasive landscape surrounding the building, the landscape profile is tired and ragged. Olaf Hammerstrom, Aalto's on-site assistant from 1948-49, has stated that William Wurster, the Dean of MIT's School of Architecture at the time and a prominent architect in his own right, took over the unassigned and uncontracted task of landscaping in the final days prior to occupancy. To date no landscape proposals have been identified in any of the materials examined. Although we did hear, from Mr. Hammerstrom, that the more elaborate planting scheme initially proposed by the MIT Grounds Department was changed to the very simple executed scheme by Dean Wurster. During the life of this building landscape changes have been undertaken to augment the entrance side of the building. This has resulted in a complicated, heavy accumulation of plant growth which is out of character with the simplicity of the original ad hoc design. There is a significant need to provide an appropriate setting for the building through a comprehensive restoration and interpretive redesign of the entire site. One feature that has been deleted is the loam on the Moon Garden Roof (Fig. 31). MIT may want to consider putting this material back and letting plants grow over the top of the parapets, as Aalto originally intended.

## 8. Design Intention: Millwork Screens, Tack Strips and Details

The trefoil sheet metal pipe covering in the main lounge were originally to have had natural Brazilian pine accent strips (Figs. 33, 34). The upper level student lounges (floors 2-6) were all originally to have been set off from the main building corridor with a series of slatted, stepped millwork screens (Figs. 35, 36). These would have filtered the light coming from the lounge into the corridor and created some degree of privacy between the corridor and the lounge.

In the student rooms, hanging space was to have been provided through the use of natural birch tack strips, which were to be inserted in the horizontal joints between courses of structural clay tile. These strips, which numbered from 5 to 9 rows per wall, would also have added a strong horizontal emphasis to the rooms and could serve to help unify the space (Fig. 32).

### Recommendations for a balanced design

The eight areas of revision and addition previously mentioned should be undertaken to provide a clear Aalto quality to the building. Through the process of reclamation the responsive, restorative design process must be monitored to insure that the Aaltoesque qualities are brought back to the building in a manner consistent with the intent and true spirit of the original. Consultation with the primary sources and quality control efforts by the design team will provide the necessary guidance to achieve the balance of a true living design that can possess the Aalto qualities that have served as the main armature of environmental beauty over the half century of the building's tenure. It is relatively young by eastern standards but there is no more appreciated or effective house for the students on any campus than Baker House.

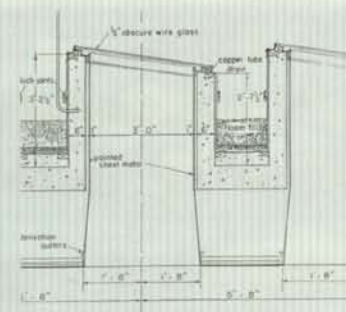


Fig. 31 Detail of Moon Garden Room roof (A.A. Archive - no date)

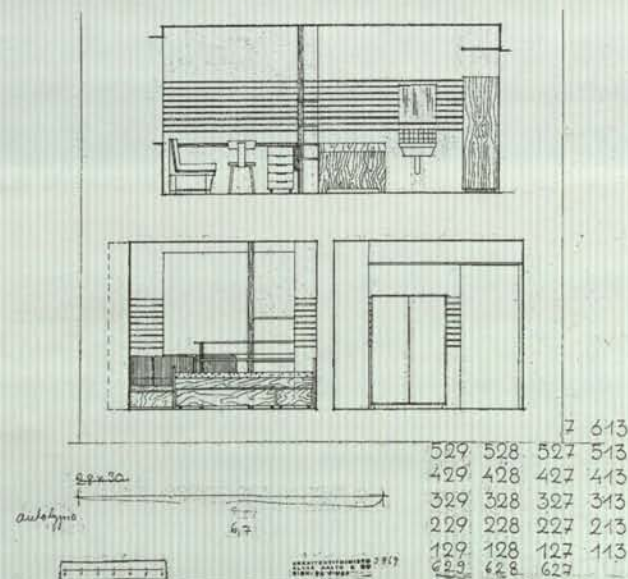


Fig. 32 Room tack strips (A.A. Archive - no date)

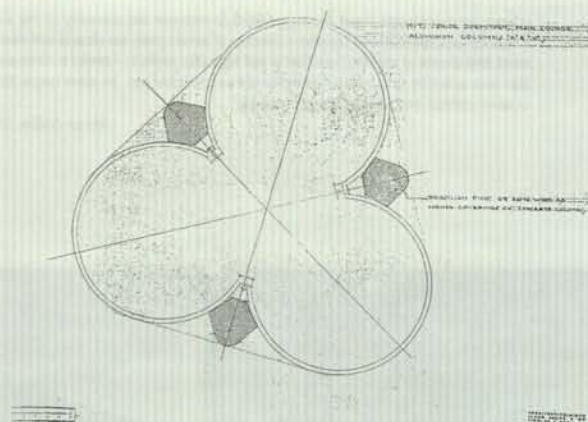


Fig. 33 Trefoil Column covers - main lounge plan detail (A.A. Archive - no date)

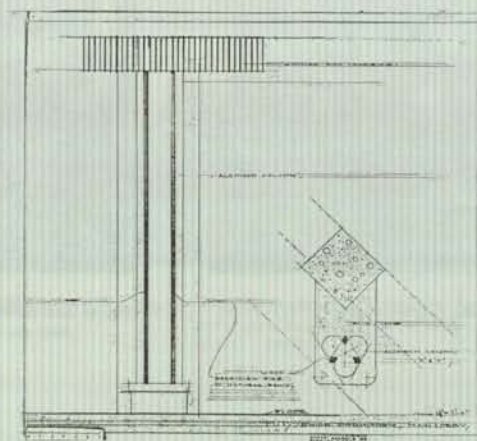


Fig. 34 Trefoil Column covers - main lounge (A.A. Archive - no date)

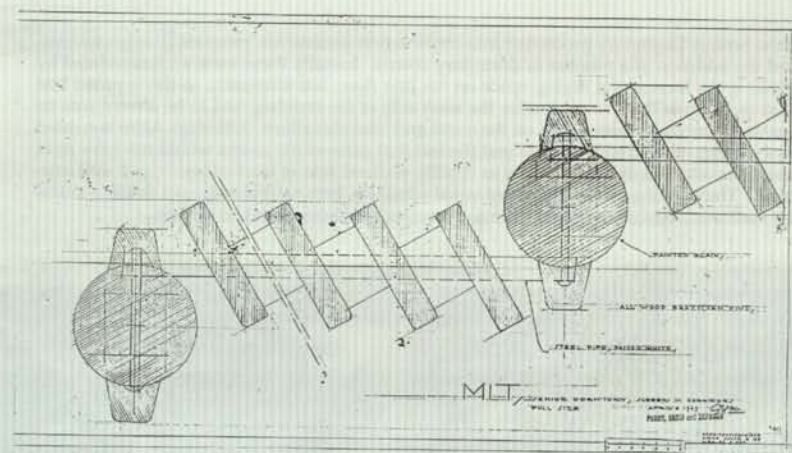


Fig. 35 Lounge screen detail (A.A. Archive - no date)

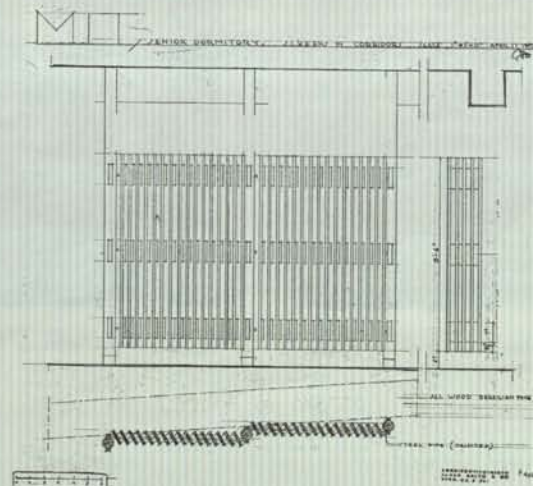


Fig. 36 Wood lounge screen A.A. Archive - no date)

## Baker House as Built, June, 1949

As the Seniors Dormitory proceeded into construction documents, program changes necessitated the addition of a number of dormitory rooms. Initially these were accommodated by shrinking the lounge and dining space on the first floor, but ultimately, as the required bed count went up to 360, the design for the west side of the building had to be altered into its present shape, and rooms added on the north and west elevations. Although Aalto lamented the shrinking of the common areas and the fact that some of the rooms would not have river views, he conceded that the scheme as finally realized was at least cohesive and well integrated. The building had single glazed wood windows, both natural and paint finish, a stucco clad north stair, light colored metal trim and stuccoed penthouses, and no trellises.

*"Some few weeks ago, I got the suggestion to improve the economy of my Dormitory. There are possibilities of a simpler economy; if we are poor, we should not make a mixed work and dream of architecture that is not logically perfect. I prefer a clean shirt. I find this new solution much better than the old one patched up. In some ways, the new one is more correct and more uncompromised."*

-Alvar Aalto, 1947

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Fig. 40 View from southwest (MIT archive - c. 1952)  
Showing new trees and planted berm



Fig. 41 View from southwest (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 42 East elevations, Southeast corner (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 43 East elevation, Northeast corner (ESTO - 1949)  
Note absence of site walls and landscaping

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*"It is not agreeable to try to perform a patchwork. The architectonic side suffers in some funny way by placing rooms on the other side of the corridor in the long wing."*  
-William Wurster, 1947



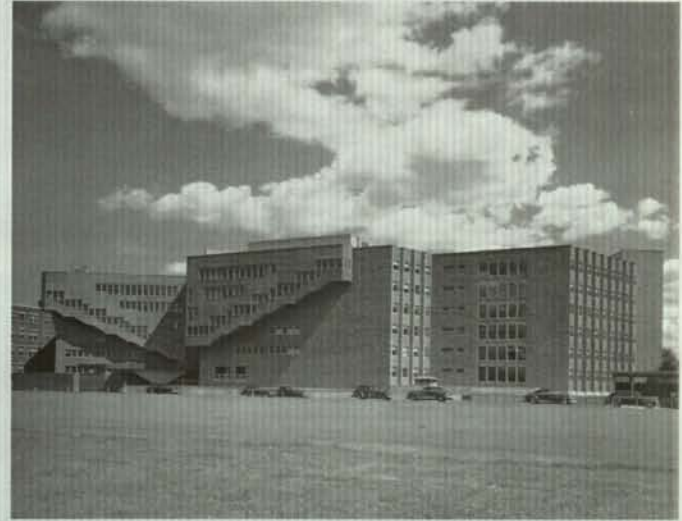
**Fig. 44** View from Northeast (ESTO - 1949)



**Fig. 45** View from Northwest showing Entry Pavilion and original location of Amherst Alley (ESTO - 1949)



**Fig. 46** View from Northwest rooms and loading dock (MIT archive - c. 1952)



**Fig. 47** General view from Northwest (MIT archive - c. 1952)



Fig. 48 Entry Lobby from West (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 49 Approach to Entry (ESTO - 1949)

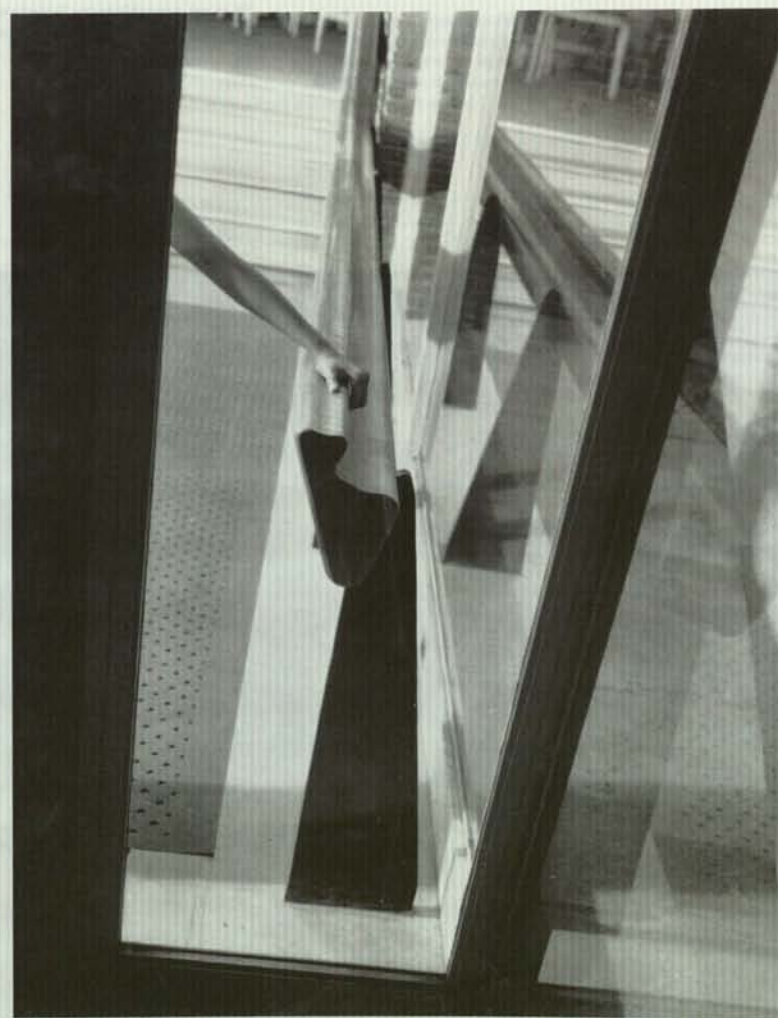


Fig. 50 Handrail at West side of Entry Lobby (ESTO - 1949)

Furniture in the building was entirely of the Aaltos' design; the lounge furnishings, dining furniture and chairs were fabricated by Artek in Finland, and the beds and built-in pieces ("elephants," "armadillos," "giraffes," and desks, lounge screens, and privacy screens) were fabricated locally. Interior colors were generally light and neutral, except for the use of brightly colored fabric in the first floor lounge. Window treatment in the rooms consisted of natural finish wood slat blinds. The handrails in the main lobby and the stair up the enclosed north stair are not original, except for the massive wood rail at the west side of the lobby which was personally designed by Aalto. (See notes from Olaf Hammerstrom interview).



Fig. 51 Entry Lobby and desk, note original round section handrail (MIT archive - 1949)

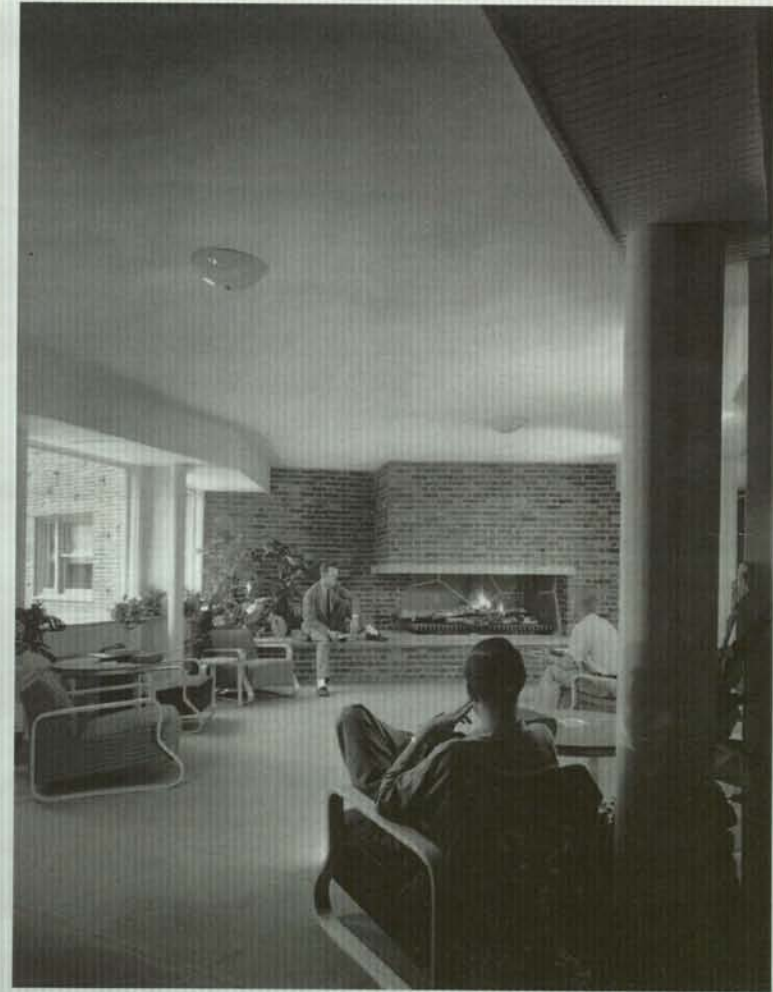


Fig. 52 Main Lounge (ESTO - 1949) All furniture is Aalto designed, made in Finland by Artek.

*All furniture is Aalto designed, by Artek.*



Fig. 54 Moon Garden Room from Northeast corner (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 55 Typical upper level hallway (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 56 Moon Garden Room with basket trellis (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 57 Typical upper level lounge (ESTO - 1949)

All furniture and built-ins designed by Aalto.



Fig. 53 Typical triple room (ESTO - 1949)

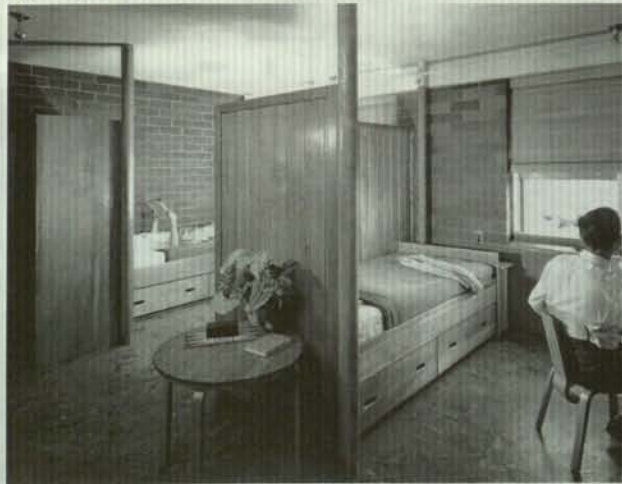


Fig. 58 Typical double room (ESTO - 1949)



Fig. 59 Typical single room (ESTO - 1949)

## Baker House as it Exists Today

There have been few major architectural changes to Baker House since 1949. The most prominent change came in 1962 with the infill of the central lounges on floors 4-6 with additional student rooms. The Master's suite was enlarged and reconfigured in the early 1950s, and the country kitchen was added next to the lower entry of the dining area about fifteen years ago, with little effect on the function or appearance of the building. On the building's exterior, the wood windows (except in the dining pavilion) were replaced between 1972 and 1975 with single-glazed bronze anodized aluminum units in approximately the same configurations as the original windows. A large light of glass in the entry lobby recently broke and was replaced with two smaller lights glazed with a bronze anodized aluminum mullion. Planters were added in front of the building in the early 1980s, and the painted elements on the building's exterior (stuccoed rooftop penthouses and metal door and window trim) have been repainted in a darker color. The barbecue on the river side is a recent addition.

Most of the building's original lighting has disappeared and has been replaced by various types of fixtures incompatible with the building design. The wooden handrails on the east side of the entry lobby stair have been replaced with new wood rails of an unsympathetic design. Most of the Artek furniture in the public spaces has also disappeared, but the room furniture has held up, and is presently being restored. The screens that were originally used in both the lounges and the student rooms have been removed, and have not (at present) been located. With the exception of a few remaining Aalto couches, the present lounge and dining furniture is inappropriate to the building design. The wood roll-up blinds have largely disappeared and have been replaced with white shades, which have a jarring effect on the exterior appearance of the building.

Five of the tutor apartments have each been carved out from 2 double rooms on the west side of the west lounge, on floors 2-6, a sixth has been built from a double and two singles on the first floor. The chase wall on the east side of each west lounge has been opened and rebuilt with an unsympathetic rough brick. Floor finishes have been changed on both levels of the moon garden pavilion, carpet has been added in many of the corridors, and the doors between lounge #1 (upper level moon garden room) and the main lounge have been eliminated. Finally the building has been fully sprinklered with the majority of piping being left exposed and there have been miles of electrical and telecommunications wiring added throughout the corridors and the student rooms.



Fig. 60 Entry Lobby



Fig. 61 View from southwest



Fig. 62 View from roof



Fig. 63 Detail of north stair



Fig. 64 Detail of Entry



Fig. 65 Main Lounge



Fig. 66 Moon Garden Room details

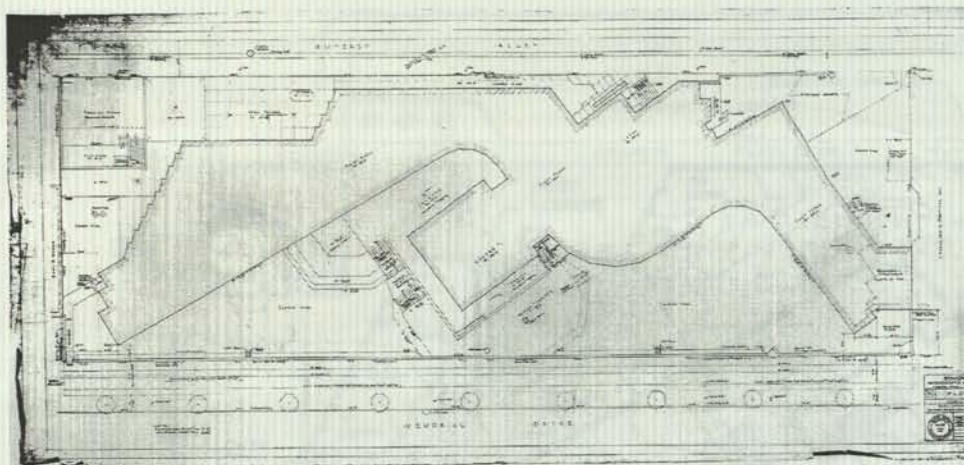
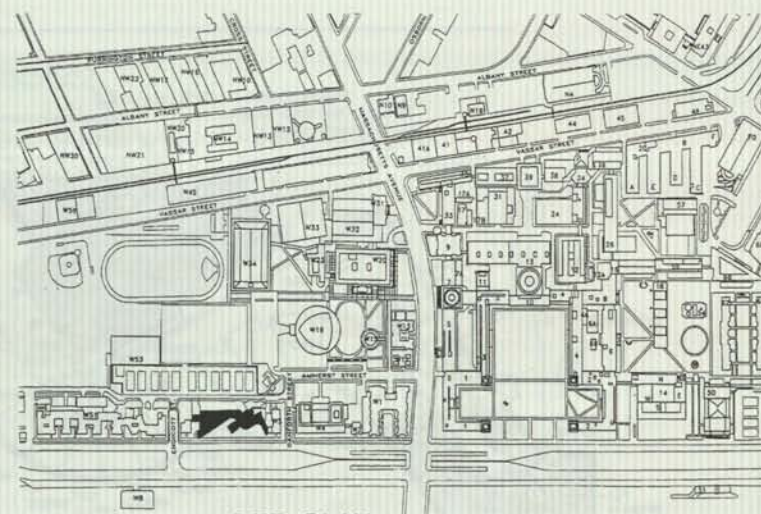


FIG. 49 1948 PLOT PLAN



SITE PLAN

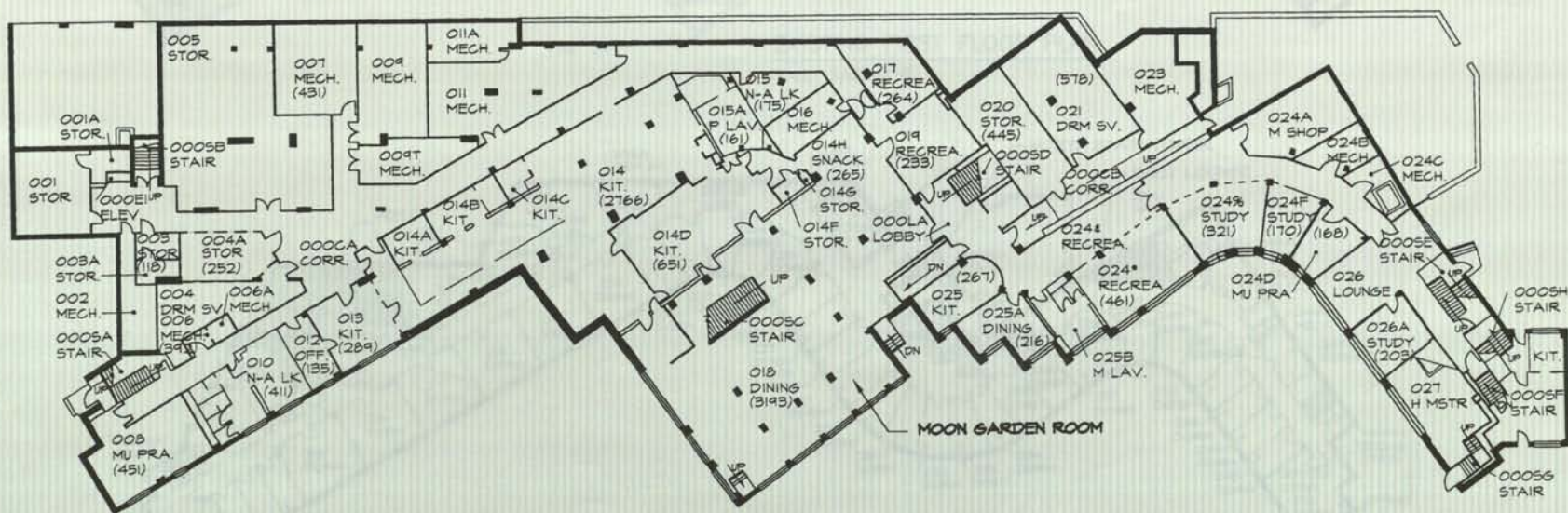


FIG. 50

EXISTING GROUND FLOOR PLAN

SCALE: 1/32" = 1'0"





SCALE:  $1/32"=1'-0"$



SCALE:  $1/32'' = 1' - 0''$