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Alastair Standing's design for a boomerang-shaped weekend house makes dynamic use of colour and materials to link the spatial areas

BY LUCIE YOUNG

A private commission to design a house is an opportunity most architects relish. The New York-based British architect Alastair Standing has recently completed a spectacular example for Stephanie Lederman, a successful Manhattan artist.

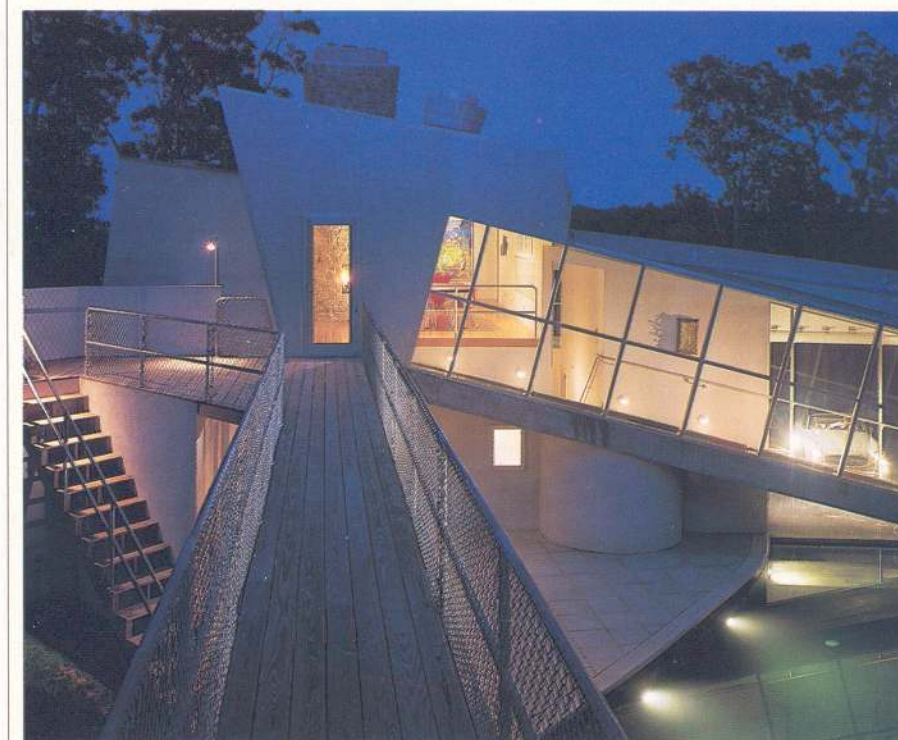
Like many prosperous New Yorkers, Lederman owns a plot of land on Long Island and was looking for the right architect to build her weekend home. After meeting Standing and seeing his work, she gave him free rein to do whatever he pleased, stipulating simply that the house should look different, have four bedrooms and a pool.

When Standing graduated from the Architectural Association in 1982, he joined Zaha Hadid's practice. He still admires her expressionist style, but considers his work more rational in approach – he first establishes ground rules and then takes each concept to its limit.

Standing's immediate response to Lederman's steep, south-facing site was to work with the slope. First he built a four-metre

high concrete wall, allowing it to curve as it moved down and around the incline. This structure forms the main exterior wall of the house and effectively determines the interior spaces. It gives the whole structure a slightly tipsy effect, with the wall leaning outwards as it turns around the bottom of the slope. The roof and windows are positioned in line with the eight-degree slope, so they also appear out of kilter. But one of the charms of the Lederman House is that everything is site-specific.

Rising above the main concrete and wood-framed structure is an aluminium-clad volume containing the living room and kitchen. This is oriented towards the harbour view. 'Its shape,' says Standing, 'is purely compositional. The choice of its lighter material is to suggest weightlessness. Each individual piece of the house has its own form and integrity.' The aluminium strips are the same as those used on traditional American houses, but placed vertically and left exposed.



The kitchen's combination of sloping wall, two-metre drop in ceiling height and angled window created a moment of doubt for Lederman. She worried that it felt like a rolling ship's galley. She decided, however, that to change any element of Standing's design, would destroy the whole.

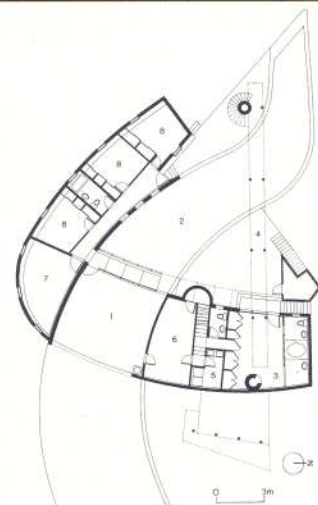
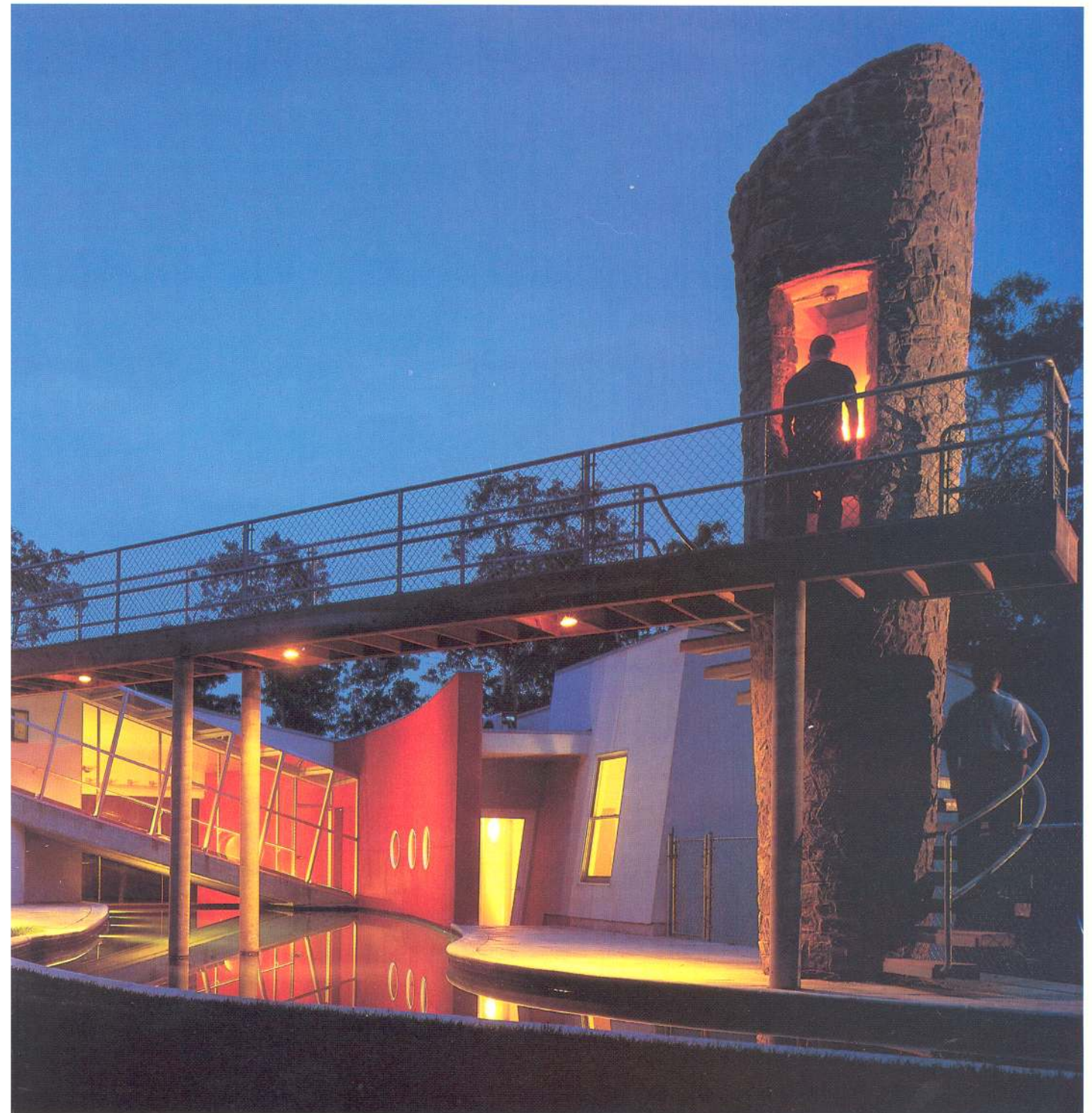
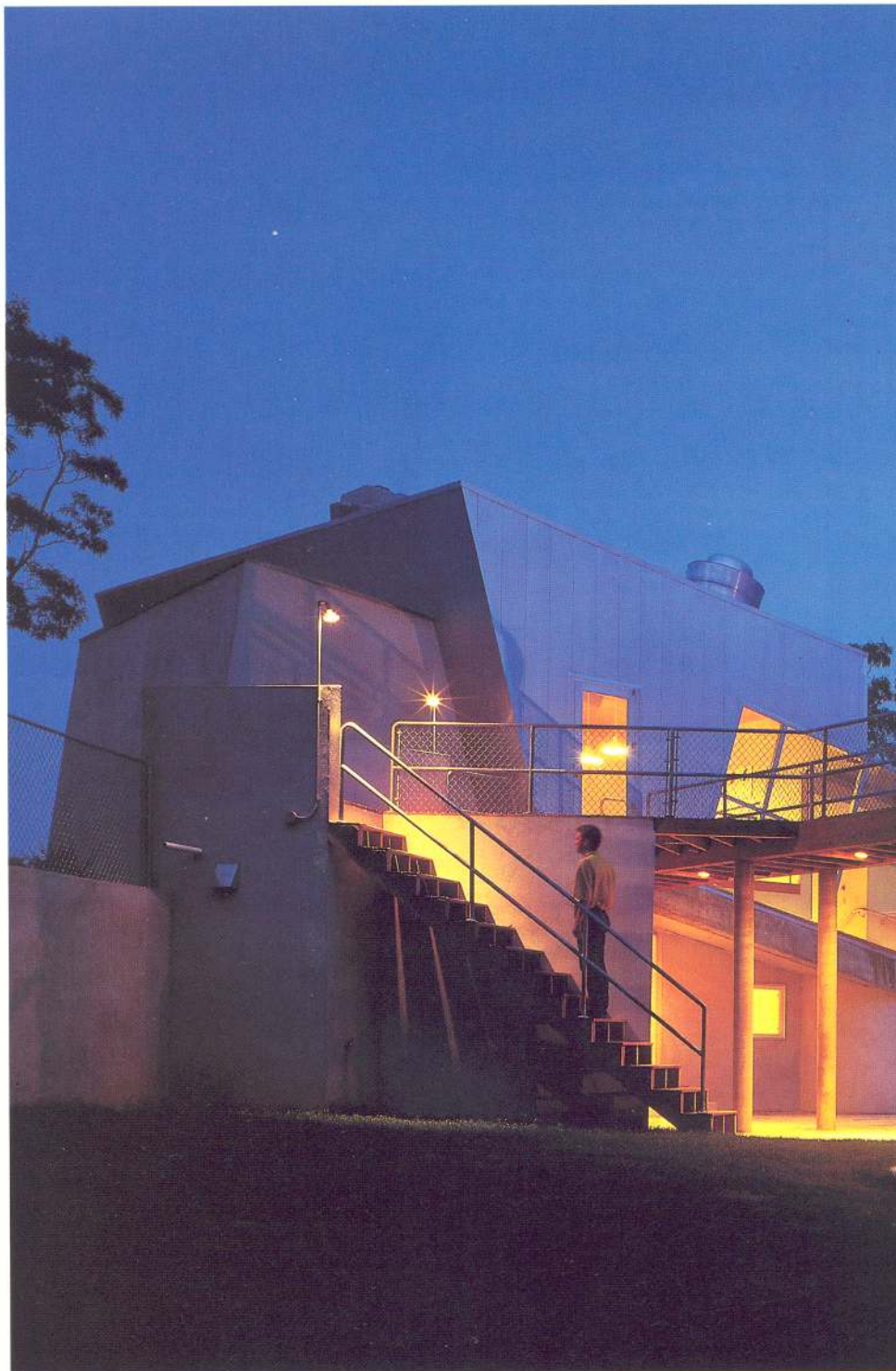
One of the house's compositional keys is enclosure. 'Typically the modern house is a cube because it is the cheapest form to build,' says Standing. 'What we have done is let out the form.' But he has maintained a sense of wholeness. While the two tails of the boomerang-shaped house don't physically touch, they are linked by a raised walkway which symbolically completes the form. It also links the two granite chimney stacks. The larger - shaped like an inverted cone - is a compositional lynch-pin 'bolting' the aluminium volume to the curved wall and visually bridging the gap between interior and exterior spaces. You can walk along pressure-treated Douglas fir boards from the winter hearth at the core of the house, outside across the bridge, to a barbecue area in the small chimney.

Part of Standing's expressionist skill is his dynamic use of materials and colours to connect the different spatial areas. The steel-shuttered garage doors open on a horizontal track. When closed, they complete the façade and seal off the house from the road, but when they are open, the black asphalt drive appears to run right through the house and out the other side. In reality, it stops at the glass-encased entrance ramp. Its apparent continuation is actually the squiggly-shaped, black-bottomed swimming pool.

'Tiling your swimming pool in blue makes as little sense as black,' says Standing. As a small concession to tradition, a pool-like, blue-tiled floor runs inside the guest wing. 'We needed it because people are constantly coming in from the pool to use the bathrooms,' says Standing.

The most successful rooms in the house are those in which all the rules come together. In the master bedroom, for example, the base of the large chimney creates a small fireplace. Overhead the wooden bridge is visible and two of its concrete columns step inside to frame a view out to the pool. 'With all these functional elements interacting, there is no need for any decoration,' says Standing.

Oddly, the least successful room appears to be Lederman's studio. Its five-metre high walls and solitary overhead window give it the appearance of a gloomy cell. But Lederman couldn't be happier. 'Why should I want a view?' she says. 'I paint under fluorescent light. I don't want the outside world. It's all in my head.'



Previous page: the house viewed across the pool from the barbecue area. Above: the Lederman House is a tour de force of dynamic interconnections. This rear view shows the open private face of the house with its entrances and exits. Right: the elevation shows its closed

public face. Left: the plan shows the boomerang shape and sweeping curve of drive and pool. KEY  
 1. Garage  
 2. Pool  
 3. Master bedroom  
 4. Walkway  
 5. Laundry room  
 6. Painting studio  
 7. Office  
 8. Guest bedroom

