

MARGARET ESHERICK HOUSE
204 Sunrise Lane
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6775
HABS PA-6775

PHOTOGRAPHS
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MARGARET ESHERICK HOUSE

HABS No. PA-6775

Location: 204 Sunrise Lane, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

The Margaret Esherick House is located at latitude – 40.072327, longitude – 75.206324. The coordinate represents a point at the center of the building’s roof. It was obtained using Google Earth imagery, dated April 11, 2010. The Margaret Esherick House location has no restriction on its release to the public.

Present Owner: Dr. Robert and Lynn Gallagher

Present Occupants: Lynn Gallagher

Present Use: Residence

Historian: James A. Jacobs, HABS

Significance: Designed and constructed between 1959 and 1962, the Margaret Esherick House in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania is a masterwork of modern architecture and craftsmanship. Internationally renowned Philadelphia architect Louis I. Kahn designed the house at the exact moment his career began climbing to unprecedented heights of success and influence. His robust buildings emphasized structure, spatial organization, context, and the architectural separation of “servant” and “served,” and were received by critics as powerful alternatives to the, by then, ubiquitous International Style glass box. The Esherick House is one of only a handful of built residential commissions by an architect known for his, sometimes massive, institutional projects. Its sophistication has clarity of design approaching his most important projects and, because of its modest scale, issues a clear and comprehensible demonstration of Kahn’s complex ideas about the interplay of humanity and the built environment.

The Esherick House might appropriately be called a modern suburban villa that has two distinct faces. The severity and closed quality of the street facade is entirely transformed and opened up on the garden front, which overlooks Pastorius Park. Expanses of glass blur the division between exterior and interior and this transparency is heightened in the warmer months by idiosyncratic wood shutters that open up sections of the exterior walls. These shutters are just one example of exquisitely detailed woodwork found throughout the house, rendered in apitong, a type of teak. The artistic quality of the woodwork becomes literal in the kitchen where important American sculptor Wharton Esherick, the uncle of client Margaret Esherick, crafted the cabinetry. Kahn designed a studio for

Wharton Esherick in 1955 and he likely provided the introduction for his niece, a mature single woman and business owner at a time when affluent women tended to be neither. A confident woman in her own right, with a famed sculptor for an uncle and a prolific and well-known West Coast architect for a brother, Kahn likely respected her artistic opinion or at least her ability to get a sound second opinion on matters of design. Together, they created a jewel-box of a building that is a testament to Kahn's abilities and Esherick's sensibilities, one that continues to demonstrate the transcendent quality of outstanding design, craftsmanship, and stewardship.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- 1. Date of construction:** 1959-1962
- 2. Architect, artist, and landscape architect:**

Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974). Louis I. Kahn was born “Leiser-Itze Schmuilowsky” in Pärnu, Estonia, which at the time was under Russian control. His father, Leib (later Leopold), was a Latvian Jew who had been trained as a stained glass artist who also spoke a number of languages, and his mother, Beila-Rebecka (later Bertha) was a trained harpist. The two had met and married in Riga while he was on leave from the Russian army, for which Leib had been drafted, and moved to Pärnu, and later resided on Osel island.¹ While living in Estonia, Kahn was seriously burned in an accident and he would bear the scars on his face for the rest of his life. Leib immigrated to Philadelphia in 1905 and Beila-Rebecka arrived with the rest of the family in 1906. They settled in the Northern Liberties neighborhood where the family, like many recent immigrants, made a living through a variety of temporary and odd jobs. The family eventually became naturalized citizens and took “Kahn” as a new surname.

Louis Kahn's drawing talents were recognized while he was in elementary school, which set into motion a series of fortuitous educational opportunities. He was admitted first to the Public School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia, founded in 1880 to provide craft education for poor children.² He subsequently attended the city's prestigious Central High

¹ Kahn believed he was born on Osel island, and this is what appears in most histories; however, Carter Wiseman believes he was actually born on the Estonian mainland. Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 12-13. See also: Emily T. Cooperman, National Historic Landmark nomination for the “Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Laboratories and David Goddard Laboratories Buildings,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2009, 15-17. For a discussion of Kahn's career and the design of the Esherick House, see Section I:B of this report, “Historical Context.”

² The Public School of Industrial Art was a distinct institution having no association with the Pennsylvania Museum School for Industrial Art (now part of the Philadelphia University of the Arts). See University of the Arts Libraries, “UArts Name Changes,” accessed online, 22 Dec. 2010 (<http://library.uarts.edu/archives/uartsnamechanges.html>). For more information about the establishment of

School and earned a number of prizes for his drawings. After graduation, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts offered Kahn a four-year arts scholarship, but, instead, he chose to enter the School of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, at the time one of the country's flagship programs and closely modeled on École des Beaux-Arts. Kahn studied under Paul Philippe Cret, one of the nation's preeminent Beaux-Arts architects and graduated in 1924.

Kahn immediately entered the office of the Philadelphia city architect and worked on the Sesquicentennial Exposition (1926). He made his first European sojourn in 1928, returning in 1929 and taking a job in Cret's firm just months before the stock market crash. As with many architects, the economy of the 1930s resulted in Kahn's existence as an underemployed professional nomad, working at times in collaboration with George Howe and Oscar Stonorov, primarily with domestic design schemes for public programs and for periodic commissions. After World War II, Kahn took a position at Yale as a professor of architecture, teaching there between 1947 and 1955, after which he returned to Philadelphia to his alma mater. During his years at Yale, Kahn spent a year at the American Academy in Rome and, with his design for the Yale University Art Gallery (1951-53), began a twenty-year period of amazing productivity and ever-increasing national and international renown as an architect. He taught at Penn and ran a private practice at 1501 Walnut Street in Center City Philadelphia until his death in 1974.

Wharton Esherick (1887-1970). Wharton Esherick is among America's most prominent twentieth-century artists. Best known for his sculptural interior fittings and furniture rendered in wood, Esherick's work existed at the intersection of art and craft. His pieces' distinctive forms make them some of the most recognizable, and their quality and depth grew out of both an appreciation of the raw material and enjoyment of the craft. In his 1970 obituary, the *New York Times* commented: "Mr. Esherick felt that he was at his best in bringing forth the image that was in the wood itself. But the effort had to be fun. 'If you take the fun away,' he was fond of saying, 'I don't want anything to do with it.'"³ While it has been observed that Esherick was born into a family "that had little record of artistic achievement," his own life's work, that of his nephew Joseph Esherick, Jr. (1914-1998), an influential California architect, and the commission of the house at 204 Sunrise Lane by his niece Margaret suggest a passion for art and design held by later generations of Eshericks.

Wharton Esherick was born into a well-off Philadelphia family whose wealth derived from a variety of business interests.⁴ His talents as an artist became evident with his

the Public School of Industrial Art, see: John Trevor, *The Public Schools of Philadelphia: Historical, Biographical, Statistical* (Philadelphia, 1897), 201-13.

³ "Wharton Esherick, a Sculptor and Furniture Designer, Dies," *New York Times* 7 May 1970: 43.

⁴ For a discussion of Esherick's family, youth, and education, see: Mansfield Bascom, *Wharton Esherick: The Journey of a Creative Mind* (New York: Abrams, 2010), 9-19. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Esherick's education and early career is drawn from this source.

boyhood drawings, although his parents were at best ambivalent about them and his father attempted to steer him towards a more conventional education and career pathway. In the end, they relented and he was able to attend the Central Manual Training School instead of a preparatory high school. In 1906, Esherick entered the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art—founded in 1876 as an outgrowth of the Centennial Exposition and is now part of the University of the Arts—where he studied lithography, silk-screening, drawing, and illustration. This was followed by two years at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where he concentrated on drawing and painting, but also moved into woodblock, sculpture, furniture, and crafts.⁵

Esherick was initially employed as a commercial artist for the *Public Ledger* and the Victor Talking Machine Company. After he married in 1912, Esherick and his wife bought a farmhouse on approximately five acres outside Philadelphia to the north of the town of Paoli. He initially had a painting studio in the house, but as his family grew and his interests turned more towards sculpture and furniture, he moved his studio, first, to a barn on the property and, in 1926, began work on a studio complex on an adjacent parcel. He occupied this studio until his death in 1970. It is maintained as a museum and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1993.⁶

Esherick expanded, made changes, and enhanced the original studio complex a number of times without an architect's involvement. In 1956, however, when he desired to have a furniture workshop constructed, the local government required the involvement of an architect in order to receive a building permit. George Howe, an old architect friend of Esherick's, suggested Louis I. Kahn, who at the time was preparing to return to Philadelphia after a decade of teaching at Yale University. Both men were extremely dedicated to their art, and the pair eventually arrived at a design featuring a chain of three hexagons with sloped roofs and windows overlooking the valley below. The rigid geometry of the block walls was softened by a slight curve in their exterior coating of stucco, the gaps where the wall planes interlock at the corners, and a twisting sculptural chimney. The work was truly collaborative, showing the influences of both men. In his recent work on Wharton Esherick, Mansfield Bascom noted: "when the workshop was finished, Wharton worked the initials LIK and WE into the stucco cornerstone, but neither man would take responsibility for it; it was always the other fellow's work."⁷

The workshop project and the longer lasting relationship between Esherick and Kahn surely impacted Margaret Esherick's interest and desire in having her house designed by Kahn and the decision to have her uncle execute elements of the interior fittings. Early in

⁵ Gene Rochberg, ed., *Drawings by Wharton Esherick* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), (4).

⁶ See: *The Wharton Esherick Museum: Studio and Collection* (Paoli, PA, 1977), and Carolyn Pitts, National Historic Landmark nomination for "The Wharton Esherick Studio," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993.

⁷ Bascom, 214.

the design stage of her house, Louis Kahn queried Margaret Esherick: “Will the kitchen cabinets be a part of the contract? Will Wharton do any of them or any other built-in items?”⁸ Esherick’s response does not survive, but a construction drawing dated November 2, 1960 records the following: “it is intended that Wharton Esherick—sculptor and cabinet maker will make & install NIC [not in contract] items #1 to #4 inclusive.”⁹ The items referenced were for all of the major areas of finish carpentry in the house: the wall between the living room and stair, the stair and gallery railings and associated trim; the cabinets in the kitchen and laundry; the freestanding wall unit dividing the bedroom and study; and the sliding daybed over the bath tub. In the end, Wharton Esherick only executed the kitchen cabinets. Kahn generated designs for most of the other features between August 1961 and February 1962.¹⁰

It is not known why Wharton Esherick’s work was ultimately limited to the kitchen. He remained busy with the design and fabrication of furniture and sculpture through his 1970 death and perhaps did not have enough time for the numerous built-ins, even for a family member.¹¹ The kitchen’s closed off location and Kahn’s strong commitment to his own artistry at least suggests the possibility that, despite their friendship and mutual respect, the architect and sculptor could not reconcile their visions for the house. In a 1976 interview, Burnap Post, the second owner, is reported to have observed: “‘Louis Kahn visited us here many, many times. But he would always avoid the kitchen. Either ignore it completely or walk through it muttering to himself.’”¹² Kahn would have been entirely aware of the fluid quality of Wharton Esherick’s work at the outset, and either initially thought the collaboration might result in pleasing contrasts or, despite misgivings, agreed to the desires of his client to have her uncle involved. Whether decided by practical issues or artistic ones, Wharton Esherick’s stamp on the house was restricted to the kitchen.

The kitchen has a sculptural character that sets it formally apart from the rest of the Kahn-designed house, but the beautifully worked materials—cherry, walnut, poplar, and copper—relate to the wood and metals used elsewhere in the house. The compact U-

⁸ Louis I. Kahn (**LIK**) to Margaret Esherick (**ME**), 16 Mar. 1960 (draft), Folder 030.II.A.34.2, Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (hereafter **Kahn Collection**). The collection is accessible through the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

⁹ “N.I.C. Schedule, Plot Location Plan, Plot Plan, Room Finish Schedule, Door Schedule, Stairway Details, Margaret Esherick House,” 2 Nov. 1960, Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection.

¹⁰ Construction drawings in Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection. Except for the room divider, which was never completed, Yukio Madakoro, a Japanese carpenter/woodworker from New York, fabricated Kahn’s designs for many of the built-ins and finish work. The cabinets in the laundry room over the washer and dryer were installed by the Gallaghers, the most recent owners.

¹¹ In the mid-1950s, the craftsman that Esherick has worked on fabricating his designs moved on and was replaced with a less “capable” one. Bascom, 208-209.

¹² Ellen Kaye, “A Rare Kahn Residence,” TODAY, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 19 Sep. 1976: 55.

shaped assemblage of upper and lower cabinets, open shelving, slide out racks, and a copper sink and drain board offered a high level of artistry to one of the principal service areas. The rather lavish installation for a workspace somewhat opposed Kahn's careful separation and articulation of "servant" and "served." The contrast might be explained by the owner and intended occupant, a well-off, single woman and business owner— independent and lacking a spouse or children, Margaret Esherick perhaps desired to give a room that she did not intend to use frequently or intensively a purpose beyond function alone. Regardless of the back-story, Wharton Esherick's kitchen provides surprising counterpoint in the house, one that augments enjoyment of a superb example of high-style, mid-twentieth century domestic architecture.

Frederick W. G. Peck (1909-1998).¹³ Frederick W. G. Peck was a prolific designer of gardens in the Philadelphia area.¹⁴ Born in Wayne, Pennsylvania, he attended Haverford College before receiving a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1933. Peck immediately entered private practice and provided the design for Pastorius Park in Chestnut Hill, which was executed by the Works Progress Administration in the mid-1930s.¹⁵ Peck served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during World War II and contributed to designs for airstrips and bases. He lectured in landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania from 1945 to 1952, and also taught courses at the University of Georgia and the Barnes Foundation, for the latter Peck had previously created a perennial garden.¹⁶ In 1952, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) installed an azalea garden in Fairmount Park near the Art Museum on a design by Peck and he was closely involved with the PHS's Philadelphia Flower Show, for which he won two medals in 1964.¹⁷ Throughout his life, Peck was professionally and socially active in a number of organizations and served on numerous boards, including the PHS and the Morris Arboretum.

¹³ See pages 16-18 in Section I:A:7, "Alterations and Additions," for a discussion of Peck's landscape plan for the Esherick House.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information on Peck is drawn from: "Frederick Peck, Landscape Architect" (obituary), *University of Pennsylvania Almanac* 44 (17 Mar. 1998), accessed online, 28 Dec. 2010, <http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/v44/n25/deaths.html>, and Emily T. Cooperman for the American Architects and Buildings Project, "Peck, Frederick William Gunster (1909-1998)," accessed online, 29 Dec. 2010, http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/75332.

¹⁵ "Pastorius Park, Revised Planting Plans," 1935, drawing attributed to Peck, accessed online at Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, 29 Dec. 2010, <http://www.philageohistory.org/rdic-images/view-image.cfm/AS-22>.

¹⁶ The Barnes Foundation, "History of the Barnes Foundation Arboretum," accessed online, 29 Dec. 2010, <http://www.barnesfoundation.org/arboretumhistory.html>.

¹⁷ Kathryn Newland for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, "Azaleas in Regalia," accessed online, 29 Dec. 2010, http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/events/azalea_article.html.

3. Builder, engineers, suppliers:¹⁸

Keast and Hood Company	structural engineers
Thomas J. Regan, Ross & Company	general contractor
Garber & Cohen	consulting engineers
Ace Lighting Fixture Company	wiring, fixture installation
Adolph Soeffing & Company, Inc.	hardware
Albermar Company	soapstone
Central Brick and Tile	ceramic tile and slate
Century Lighting Inc.	lighting fixtures
Du Bell Lumber Company, Inc.	Apitong lumber
G & M Iron Works	bronze handrails on balconies
Herman Glass Company	glazing
John J. Yohn	window sash and millwork
Kirk Plumbing Company	plumbing
Kohler	plumbing fixtures
Markolmo Brothers	grading contractor
[Mr.] Schmidt	landscaping
New Holland Planing Mill	exterior doors
Penn Crete Products Company, Inc.	stucco
Pittsburgh Plate Glass	mirrors
Products Service Company, Inc. (Pella window dealer)	Rolscreens
Ralph Auliffo	painter
Sylvan Electric Fixture Company	lighting fixtures
William Sherwood	heating contractor
Yukio Madakoro	woodworker for stair screen, pull-out bed, shoe rack

4. Owners:

1960-63—Margaret Esherick purchased the lot from George Woodward, Inc., in October 1960, although its eastern extent was not yet fixed at the time of her death in April 1962.¹⁹ The present property line corresponds with the one on Frederick Peck's landscape plan of

¹⁸ List of contractors, suppliers, and workmen compiled from documents in folders 030.II.A.34.1, 34.2, and 34.3, and 34.7, Kahn Collection.

¹⁹ LIK to Charles Woodward (CW), 6 Apr. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.34.2, Kahn Collection, for unresolved property issues. A map included with the most current deed for the house records a later transaction where Margaret Esherick swapped a strip of land on the west side of the lot for a similarly sized one of the east. See: Deed, Lynn F. Donatucci Gallagher to [Dr.] Robert F. Gallagher and Lynn F. Gallagher, 23 Jul. 1994, City of Philadelphia, deed book D 0648, 211-214, and also CW to ME, 27 Sep. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.80.21, Kahn Collection.

July 1963 created in the month following the sale of the house by Margaret Esherick's estate.²⁰

1963-81—Janet and Burnap Post purchased the house from Margaret Esherick's estate May-June 1963.²¹

1981-Present—On December 8, 1981, Dr. Robert and Lynn Gallagher purchased the Esherick House from Ann and Burnap Post.²²

5. Original and subsequent occupants:

See section I:A:4, "Owners"

6. Original plans and construction:

The Client

The earliest known documentation related to the Esherick House is a letter dated July 22, 1959 from residential developer Charles Woodward to Louis Kahn discussing the area of Chestnut Hill adjacent to Pastorius Park "where Miss Margaret Esherick is interested in building a house."²³ This interest was codified some months later, on October 1, 1959, when Louis I. Kahn entered a contract with Margaret Esherick to design "a Residence on Sunrise Lane, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia," for which Kahn would be paid 10 percent of the construction cost.²⁴ Kahn had designed a studio for celebrated sculptor Wharton Esherick, the client's uncle, in 1955 and he likely provided the introduction for the two. Margaret Esherick's life story exists only in fragments. Her father, Joseph, was one of

²⁰ Frederick W. G. Peck, "Mr. & Mrs. Burnap Post, Preliminary Plan," Jul. 1963, Folder 030.I.C.638.1, Kahn Collection.

²¹ LIK to Burnap Post, 8 Jun. 1963, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection. See also: John G. Jamison (of George Woodward, Inc.) to David Wisdom, 14 May 1963, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

²² Janet Post died sometime after 1970 and Burnap married Ann early in 1975. Personal interview with Lynn Gallagher, 10 Sep. 2009, at the Esherick House, for Janet Post's dying. She was alive at the time an article was written in the local paper about the house in 1970. Shirley Hanson, "Kahn House Called a Chalice of Light," *The Chestnut Hill Local* 19 Mar. 1970: 2. An article about the house written in 1977 records that Ann was Burnap's "wife of a year and a half." Kaye, 55.

Lynn Gallagher remembers the purchase date as July 20, 1981, but the deed uses the December date. The 1981 deed also records that the property was sold by the Posts to Lynn F. Donatucci Gallagher. A 1986 transaction concerning the property had Lynn F. Donatucci Gallagher and [Dr.] Robert F. Gallagher conveying the property to [Dr.] Robert F. Gallagher and Lynn F. Gallagher indicating that Robert Gallagher had been added to the deed sometime prior. See chain of title in: Deed, 23 Jul. 1994.

²³ CW to LIK, 22 Jul. 1959, Folder 030.II.A.34.2, Kahn Collection.

²⁴ "The Standard Form of Agreement between Owner [Miss Margaret Esherick] and Architect [Louis I. Kahn]" (A.I.A. Document No. B-121), 1 Oct. 1959, Folder 030.II.A.80.21, Kahn Collection.

Wharton's brothers and, unlike the slightly older artist, pursued a more conventional career path as an electrical engineer.²⁵ Joseph Esherick grew up in a well off household and he and his wife, Helen, were members of Philadelphia's rapidly expanding "professional middle class...while not wealthy, the family had few wants."²⁶ The Eshericks had two children: Joseph, born in 1914, and Margaret, born about five years later.²⁷ Joseph Esherick graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1937 and later became an important architect in California. Margaret's class and family background meant that she almost certainly graduated from high school, but nothing is known about her education.

By the early 1950s, Margaret Esherick was the purveyor of "modern books and educational toys" at The Fireside Book Shop in Chestnut Hill.²⁸ An advertisement for the store from *The Christian Science Monitor* in the February 14, 1951 issue, lists children's books, greeting cards, and "fiction" and "non-fiction" among its wares.²⁹ The publication of this ad in the principal publication of Christian Science suggest that Margaret Esherick may have been a follower. This association may also explain Esherick's "sudden" and certainly unexpected death on April 6, 1962 as some Christian Science adherents traditionally reject medical intervention for physical conditions and illnesses.³⁰ Margaret

²⁵ Marc Treib, *Appropriate: The Houses of Joseph Esherick* (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2008), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ The 1920 and 1930 censuses estimated her birth year as 1919, although depending on the timing of the census she could have been born in 1918. A passenger list for the ship *Lurline* arriving in Honolulu on April 13, 1949, records her age at 30. Margaret Esherick's published death notice did not list her age. See census tracts for Philadelphia for the 14th (1920) and 15th (1930) decennial censuses; passenger list for the *Lurline*, arriving Honolulu on April, 13, 1949, information accessed online, 6 Oct. 2010, Ancestry.com. This database cites RG 85 at the National Archives in Washington, DC, the "Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service," and "Esherick" (death notice), *Philadelphia Inquirer* 7 Apr. 1962: 22.

²⁸ Handwritten letter draft, undated (ca. July 1962), Folder 030.II.A.35.10, Kahn Collection, for quote. This undated handwritten letter draft describes the Esherick House and its first owner. It was likely written by Kahn or someone in his office to an editor at *House & Garden* in mid-1962 and provided background information about the house, in all likelihood for an article published in October 1962. At the end of the draft, Kahn requests "a set of photographs of the house," probably referring to ones taken by photographer Ezra Stoller for *House & Garden*. A letter to Kahn from Stoller dated July 30, 1962 mentions a memo from *House & Garden* stating that Kahn was "interested in seeing proofs of what we did." See Ezra Stoller to LIK, 30 Jul. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.34.2, and "Architectural Changes Forecast New Adventures in Living," *House & Garden* 122 (Oct. 1962): 157-163.

²⁹ Advertisement, "The Fireside Book Shop," *The Christian Science Monitor* 14 Feb. 1951: 7.

³⁰ A publication about the house produced for a planned auction included an essay that stated "But she [Esherick] only lived there a few months and died at age 43, after refusing as a Christian Scientist to take antibiotics when she caught pneumonia, in April 1961. The source for that information is not cited and the year of her death is incorrect. Julie V. Iovine (text) and Todd Eberle (photographs), *Louis I. Kahn: Esherick House* (Chicago: Wright, [2008]), np (7).

Esherick's untimely death, which "shocked" Kahn, was made all the more tragic as her new house—a project that had occupied her time, energy, and resources for nearly three years—was at last nearing full completion.³¹

The Site

The site Margaret Esherick selected for her new house was located within easy walking distance of her book store located on Germantown Avenue, Chestnut Hill's principal commercial thoroughfare, across from the Pennsylvania Railroad station (now the Chestnut Hill West station for SEPTA).³² Chestnut Hill is a neighborhood in Philadelphia having a long history extending back to the colonial period, but whose reputation as a posh residential enclave dates from the mid-nineteenth century forward.³³ Beginning with the arrival of the railroad in 1854, which linked the area to central Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill became the focus of both high-end residential construction as well as smaller scale development intended for workers drawn to the area for employment. This trend intensified with the arrival of a second rail line (the Pennsylvania Railroad) on the west side of Chestnut Hill in 1884, which allowed one of its directors, Henry Howard Houston, to begin developing 3,000 acres. Houston's efforts were continued by his son-in-law George Woodward who established George Woodward, Inc., in 1921.³⁴

The property that Margaret Esherick was considering for her house was owned by George Woodward, Inc., and located along the northwestern edge of Pastorius Park. In 1915, George Woodward spearheaded the creation of the park by offering the city nine-and-one-half acres if it condemned an additional two at the eastern edge of the proposed park, which included houses of black residents and recent Italian immigrants along Hartwell Lane.³⁵ Woodward likely sought this action to create a "physical buffer" between the spacious new single-family houses the company developed to the south of the proposed park and inhabited by affluent white families, and the comparatively modest nineteenth-century residential blocks to the north occupied by a more diverse racial, ethnic, and economic mix.³⁶

³¹ LIK to CW, 6 Apr. 1962, for "sudden" and "shocked;" "Esherick," (death notice).

³² Advertisement, "The Fireside Book Shop."

³³ Jefferson M. Moak, National Register of Historic Places form for the "Chestnut Hill Historic District," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1985, Section 8.

³⁴ For more on the Houston-Woodward family, see: David R. Contosta, *A Philadelphia Family: The Houstons and Woodwards of Chestnut Hill* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

³⁵ Joan L. Saverino, *Memories in Artifact and Stone: Italians Build a Neighborhood*, *Germantown Crier* 53 (Fall 2003): 48-64, accessed online 4 Aug. 2010 at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania website, <http://www.hsp.org/files/criermemarticlefinal.pdf>

³⁶ Saverino, 7.

A 1925 map indicates that Woodward had prevailed and the houses along Hartwell within the ultimate bounds of the park had disappeared, but the final extent and layout of the park remained uncertain at that time.³⁷ The map depicts an irregular plot bordered, roughly, by Shawnee Street on the east, Abington Avenue on the south, Millman Street on the west, and Gravers Lane on the north, which included a platted extension of Lincoln Drive and the introduction of a new street named “Crefeld.” A line of houses in the northwest corner along Gravers Lane and a single house at the intersection of Gravers Lane and Millman Street survived the block’s clearance. In the 1930s, the extension of Lincoln Drive and creation of Crefeld were abandoned and the southern two-thirds of the irregular plot became Pastorius Park. In the mid-to-late 1930s, the Works Progress Administration landscaped the park, which included an open-air amphitheater, pond, and restroom building.

The Woodwards seem to not have finalized plans for the northern portion of the block adjacent to the park until the 1950s. Houses on the lots lining the west side of Sunrise Lane are oriented to Gravers Lane, and when Esherick entered negotiations with Woodward for the property, the final subdivision of lots around what would be the cul-de-sac was not complete. Charles Woodward wrote to Kahn in July 1959, stating: “Enclosed is a blueprint of Barton & Martin’s Survey of Sunrise Lane and the land around Pastorius Park, where Miss Margaret Esherick is interested in building a house...I am sending a copy of my white print to Miss Esherick so that you and she may cut the pie that you want.”³⁸ Interestingly, Woodward thought that the house would not face Sunrise Lane, adding: “I certainly hope that it can be arranged that you will build a house for Miss Esherick fronting on Pastorius Park.” This observation and the orientation of the houses on most of the lots along Sunrise suggest that Woodward perhaps never conceived Sunrise as a typical roadway; rather, it would merely be a type of service or access road for the lots at the center of the block, which would contain houses facing away from it towards Gravers Lane or Pastorius Park.

Developer Charles Woodward appears to have had limited, if any, direct impact on the completed form of the Esherick House. Still, as the landowner during the construction of the house and head of the company focused for many years on developing the surrounding sections of Chestnut Hill in a more traditional stylistic mode, he did attempt to insert himself into the design process and appears to have wielded at least a degree of veto power.³⁹ In an April 1960 letter copied to Kahn, Woodward suggested that Esherick make

³⁷ Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 21 (New York, 1925).

³⁸ CW to LIK, 22 Jul. 1959. A letter dated February 26, 1962 from David Wisdom to Kahn suggests that even though the house was nearly completed, the final survey of Margaret Esherick’s lot and the extent of its eastern boundary had not yet occurred. Wisdom to LIK, 26 Feb. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

³⁹ Two letters, one dated February 26, 1962, regarding the garage, and another dated January 11, 1963, regarding a proposed addition to the house for Elfrieda Parker, note the need for getting Woodward’s

“the [house’s] appearance less controversial” by remedying what he felt to be the design’s “nakedness.”⁴⁰ Woodward explained:

Too many contemporary architects are disciples of the ‘bare naked’ school. Nakedness (of a house) is not beautiful when maturity sets in...I suggest that thought be given by him [Kahn] to breaking the naked line of the top of the walls (naked because the eye has no where [*sic*] to go) by a fascia board, with or without design, but colored differently than the walls of the house to give a terminal effect to these bare walls.⁴¹

There is no evidence that Woodward’s opinions influenced the design, and, despite the reservations expressed in the letter, Woodward included a somewhat more promising postscript: “I don’t want to discourage you, I think you have something, but it could be softer.”⁴² On the surface, the survival of Woodward’s letter among Kahn’s project files for the house is intriguing; however, it likely speaks more to Woodward’s role as the landowner having some right to design review rather than a critic whose opinion Esherick and Kahn would have seriously weighed. Indeed, the graphic and text documentation for the project, to say nothing of the house as built, suggest that Kahn and Esherick proceeded undeterred in a mutually agreed upon direction independent of outside forces.

The Construction

Thirteen months after signing the contract with Kahn, the architect delivered the completed working drawings, dated November 2, 1960, and the construction phase of the project commenced.⁴³ Kahn secured Thomas J. Regan of Ross & Company as general contractor for the project, and by the end of the month Regan had provided a “cost sheet” for building the “Residence of Miss Margaret Esherick” totaling \$33,800 including fees.⁴⁴ The marginal quality of the land required structural engineering for the foundations and the Keast & Hood Company was hired to devise a solution for the unstable soil.

“approval” for the designs. See: Wisdom to LIK, 26 Feb. 1962, and A.J. Webb to H. Clayton Louderback, 11 Jan. 1963, Folder 030.II.A.35.10, Kahn Collection.

⁴⁰ CW to ME, 29 Apr. 1960, Folder 030.II.A.34.2, Kahn Collection.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ All of the initial, amended, and additional construction drawings for the Esherick House are located at the University of Pennsylvania, Architectural Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection. For the design of the Esherick House, see Part I:B of this report, “Historical Context.”

⁴⁴ Thomas J. Regan for Ross & Co., “Cost Sheet of Residence of Miss Margaret Esherick,” received in Kahn’s office on 29 Nov. 1960, Folder 030.II.A.34.9, Kahn Collection. Regan was also the contractor for the concurrent design and construction of the Bernard Shapiro House in nearby Penn Valley (Narberth).

In July 1959, Kahn had requested a survey from Charles H. Woodward of the property along Sunrise Lane.⁴⁵ While the primary purpose of the request was to select a site and estimate property boundaries, Woodward explained that much of the general area was “filled with new earth subsequent to survey.”⁴⁶ In November 1959, Kahn provided Woodward with “a print indicating approximately the location of Miss Esherick’s future house.”⁴⁷ At the time, the substandard state of the land seems to not have been entirely known as Kahn also asked Woodward, “in the interest of economy, could you indicate the probable depth to which the foundations of this house will have to be placed?” Soil borings demonstrated that “the site is a problem one because of the extremely deep fill in the area. The nature of this fill is such that a stable foundation material is not present (borings indicate great amounts of cinders).”⁴⁸ Kahn had been working with Keast & Hood prior to November 1960 on this problem as sheet two of the construction drawings included a “pile location plan,” and the engineers submitted an invoice to the firm on November 11 in part for the “design of special pile supported foundations.”⁴⁹ Keast & Hood devised a system consisting of twenty, 25'-long creosoted piles dispersed at key points around the building perimeter, under the chimneystacks, and under the principal interior divisions.⁵⁰

While the overall pace of construction under Thomas J. Regan seems to have been steady once the foundation issues were resolved, a March 1961 letter from Galen Schlosser, an architect in Kahn’s firm, to Regan hints at other problems. In the letter, Schlosser strongly admonishes Regan for the poor construction of the concrete porch slabs, and frankly states that the project required more of Regan’s “personal attention.”⁵¹ Difficulties were certainly expected with a project of this caliber. The form and detailing of Kahn’s design for Margaret Esherick was exquisite, and many of the materials and construction methods were unconventional. They would have been unfamiliar to Regan and hard to estimate beforehand, which was undoubtedly the source of some of the tension. For example, on August 1, 1961, Regan invoiced Kahn’s office an additional \$260.00, stating in justification: “This charge is due to using Apitong lumber which is not end-matched.

⁴⁵ CW to LIK, 22 Jul. 1959.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ LIK to George Woodward, Inc., 12 Nov. 1959, Folder 030.II.A.9.4, Kahn Collection.

⁴⁸ A review of prior soil borings included in Nicholas L. Gianopulos (Keast & Hood Co.) to LIK, 26 Jan. 1960, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁴⁹ Gianopulos to LIK, 11 Nov. 1960, Folder 030.II.A.34.7, Kahn Collection.

⁵⁰ For plan and sections of foundation, see construction drawing sheet 2, 2 Nov. 1960, Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection; Regan to LIK, 3 Jan. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection, for length of piles.

⁵¹ Galen H. Schlosser to Regan, 22 Mar. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.9.24 (second copy in Folder 030.II.A.34.1), Kahn Collection.

Your specification that each joint must occur over a joist and no piece used less than four foot [*sic*] in length.”⁵² This invoice was apparently ignored because Regan resubmitted on October 9, adding the following: “Architect changed specifications.”⁵³ Regan faced a monumental task translating what existed in plan, and in Kahn’s mind, into something tangible, and the slow progress and sometimes unfavorable outcomes might have been more fully excused had it not become apparent that Regan’s oversight of the project became lax, and sloppy, as the year progressed.

Margaret Esherick had hoped to be in the house sometime in June 1961, but construction lagged on into the fall.⁵⁴ Itemized punch lists from early October 1961 record scores of things left unfinished by Regan or his subcontractors, such as sanding and finishing the interior woodwork; fixing non-functioning electrical outlets; installation of various types of hardware; caulking; repair of plaster surfaces; and general cleaning and detailing.⁵⁵ Despite its unfinished state, Margaret Esherick was likely occupying the house by the middle of October when correspondence related to the construction ceased being sent to her previous residence at 186 E. Evergreen Avenue and was being directed to 204 Sunrise Lane.

Most of the work outlined in the October punch lists was never addressed by Thomas J. Regan.⁵⁶ Kahn informed Regan that he was removed from the project on November 22, 1961, observing:

In view of your failure to satisfactorily complete the above work within the reasonable time set for you to do so we hereby terminate such contract. This is to advise you that we are in the process of securing another contractor to complete the work and that the cost of such completion will be set off against any sum due you.⁵⁷

This action was legally echoed on December 5, 1961 by Margaret Esherick’s attorney, stating:

⁵² Regan to LIK, 1 Aug. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁵³ Regan to LIK, 9 Oct. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁵⁴ In separate letters, Galen Schlosser and Thomas J. Regan note that the house needs to be complete on or about June 1. Regan to Philadelphia Gas Works, Builder’s Division (Attn: Mr. Thomas Loftus), 17 Mar. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection, and Schlosser to Regan, 22 Mar. 1961.

⁵⁵ “Punch List #1,” 2 Oct. 1961, and “Punch List #2,” 10 Oct. 1961, folders 030.II.A.34.4 and 030.II.A.34.6, Kahn Collection.

⁵⁶ A three-page “List of Items in Contract Left Uncompleted by General Contractor and Presently Being Finished by an Independent Carpenter,” dated 29 Dec. 1961 reveals that most of the things on the October punch lists remained unfinished. Folder 030.II.A.34.4, Kahn Collection.

⁵⁷ LIK to Regan, 22 Nov. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.3, Kahn Collection.

as you know, I represent Margaret Esherick with whom you entered a contract to build a home on Sunrise Lane. On numerous occasions, I have been called by both Miss Esherick and the architect relative to their inability to get you to finish up the work...There is no question in my mind that you [are] in default on the contract.⁵⁸

Work at the house limped on into 1962, mostly finishing and detailing, but also such significant items as a multifunctional room divider for the bedroom.⁵⁹ In a cruel twist of fate, Margaret Esherick never saw her house truly finished. On April 6, 1962, she unexpectedly died, casting a pall over the superb modern villa so brilliantly conceived and nurtured by architect and client. Instead of the relief and satisfaction that should accompany a project coming to full fruition—even one, especially one, fraught with difficulties—Margaret Esherick’s house sat empty and lifeless.

Lingering physical and financial loose ends were left to Kahn, Woodward, the estate executor, and various contractors and suppliers to sort out. Kahn’s letter to Charles Woodward on the day of her death about the still unresolved issue of the property line provides an apt summary of the situation. Kahn wrote: “We had asked for a survey showing the exact relationship of the house to the lot lines. Miss Esherick’s sudden death this morning has shocked us and left us at a loss to know what is now required. We will get in touch with you when we find out what must be done.”⁶⁰ Some time passed before a new owner was located and all aspects of the project were resolved; however, efforts were made in the months following her death to bring closure to the contracted parts of the construction. A “Final Punch List of Contract Items to be Completed,” dated May 28, included twenty things needing attention as well as six things not under contract.⁶¹ An undated “Final Accounting for the Estate of Margaret Esherick” from Kahn’s office, likely dating from the months after her death, recorded that \$34,899.19 had already been spent on the project and presented a itemized list of standard design fees and extra work totaling \$6,642.27 to be paid out of her estate.⁶² Assuming these were paid as requested, the total cost of the house was \$41,541.46, exclusive of land, nearly \$8,000.00 more than the initial construction estimate.

⁵⁸ H. Clayton Louderback (Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell & Hippel) to Regan, 5 Dec. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.80.21, Kahn Collection.

⁵⁹ See construction drawings for the room divider in Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection.

⁶⁰ LIK to CW, 6 Apr. 1962.

⁶¹ “Final Punch List of Contract Items to be Completed,” 28 May 1962, Folder 030.II.A.34.4, Kahn Collection. See also: “Notes on Incomplete Items, Margaret Esherick House,” 18 Apr. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.34.4, Kahn Collection.

⁶² “Final Accounting for the Estate of Margaret Esherick,” nd [1962], Folder 030.II.A.80.21, Kahn Collection.

7. **Alterations and additions:**

With the exception of the carport and landscaping, there have been no significant alterations or additions to the Esherick House. As built, it closely followed the construction drawings completed in November 1960, but for two notable departures. First, the slender chimney for the living room fireplace, which, as built, was not connected to the house above the firebox. It had been designed as an extension of the wall, connected to the house by two operable windows and enclosing a sizable interior ledge above the firebox. It is not known when or why the detail was altered. Second, the foyer and dining room were conceived as a single large space. A 1961 letter to the general contractor called for the “addition of [an] 8’-4” partition in the dining area leaving 2’-4” openings to ceiling on each side.”⁶³ The room divider on the second floor that would have created separate bedroom and study spaces was in the design stages at the time of Margaret Esherick’s death and never completed.

1962-63—Within months of Margaret Esherick’s death, Kahn’s office designed a major addition to the house for a prospective buyer that would have dramatically changed the character of the house. In July 1962, Louis Kahn began developing a concept to enlarge the house on its north side, abutting the service areas, for Elfrieda Klauder Parker and her mother, Freda Klauder.⁶⁴ Parker was either widowed or divorced, although likely the former as some of the later drawings refer to a house for “Mrs. C. Parker.” At any rate, it is intriguing that Kahn would have been working, again, on the same house with an unconventional client. The two women signed a contract with Kahn on December 3, 1962 to “make additions and alterations to the existing residence (formerly known as the Esherick House)”⁶⁵

Kahn’s design for Parker went through many manifestations, but the basic elements remained the same. The scope of the new project was relatively ambitious, and sought to increase the size and functionality of what was, essentially, a one-bedroom house designed for a single woman. A “Preliminary Estimate” dated August 10, 1962 proposed a cost of \$19,000, almost half the cost of the recently completed house, of which \$15,000 was for the actual addition and \$4,000 for terraces and exterior walls.⁶⁶ In plan, the proposals provided for a two-story addition with a garage, storage, and some sort of entry/stair hall

⁶³ Schlosser to Regan, 6 Mar. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁶⁴ See elevations and sections dated 30 Jul. 1962 in Folder 030.I.C.638.1, Kahn Collection. Ten days later a “Preliminary Estimate [for] Mrs. Parker’s Addition” had been generated by a contractor, R. V. Lorenzon. R. V. Lorenzon, “Preliminary Estimate [for] Mrs. Parker’s Addition,” 10 Aug. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.35.10, Kahn Collection.

⁶⁵ Architectural contract between Elfrieda Klauder Parker and Freda Klauder, and Louis I. Kahn, 3 Dec. 1962, Folder 030.II.A.80.73, Kahn Collection.

⁶⁶ Lorenzon, “Preliminary Estimate [for] Mrs. Parker’s Addition,” 10 Aug. 1962.

on the first floor.⁶⁷ The second-floor plans alternated between two bedrooms and a single large studio-bedroom, both schemes also featuring a bathroom and dark room.

Kahn seems to have struggled most with how to visually relate the addition to the existing house. In general, Kahn imagined the addition as a spatially and functionally independent entity positioned 10'-0" from the service end of the house. The resulting court remained open at the back in the various schemes, fully separating the existing and new portions on the garden front facing the park. On the street face, most of the versions of the design have the wall of the addition continue across the court to meet the front wall of the existing house, elongating the house significantly as viewed from the street. Behind the wall, Kahn toyed with how and where to connect the two; most commonly there was a glazed connection utilizing the utility room door and transforming the small closet in the bedroom into a corridor connecting across to the second floor of the addition. The proposed addition never appears fully resolved in elevation and would have certainly detracted from the strength and resolution of the original design. In the end, Parker felt she had to pull out of the project because of delays related to settlement of Margaret Esherick's estate. She wrote to Kahn in 1964:

We must both remember that I wanted to buy the Esherick house in the spring of 1962; that I stood with money in hand, impatiently waiting for settlement for almost a year. It was procrastination, vacillation and inaction of others which caused reconsideration and changes in plans. Otherwise mother and I, long ago, would have been happily living in the Esherick house.⁶⁸

Whatever the truth of the situation, Elfrieda Parker's patience wore thin waiting and she terminated the project sometime during the first few months of 1963, although she remained determined to have Kahn design a house for her at another site, a project that also fell through.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See drawings for the "Addition for Mrs. Parker, Chestnut Hill, PA," Folder 638, items 030.I.C.638.1-638.19, and additional drawings in Folder 030.I.C.638.1.

⁶⁸ Parker apparently did not receive a reply to her June 30 letter and sent a follow-up on July 20, 1964 asking for a statement of what she owed for the design work on the addition to the Esherick House, and, in doing so, terminated her involvement with Kahn's firm. Elfrieda Klauder Parker to LIK, 30 Jun. 1964, Folder 030.II.A.80.73, Kahn Collection; Parker to LIK, 20 [Jul] 1964 (month incorrectly noted by Parker; actual month known by postmark), Folder 030.II.A.80.73, Kahn Collection.

⁶⁹ Although Parker had walked away from the Esherick House, she remained seemingly patient for and intent on "hav[ing] the joy of living in a house designed by you [Kahn]." Almost one year later, on May 6, 1964, Kahn went with Parker to visit property for an entirely new house; however, within months this second project was also scuttled whether for Kahn's "procrastination" or for Parker's "vacillation." Parker to LIK, 30 Jun. 1964, for quotes; notation for "New Site of Lynwood Rd. cor. Ravine Rd. Chestnut Hill, Pa.," 6 May 1964, Folder 030.II.A.35.11, Kahn Collection, for the visit to the new site.

1963-67—Janet and Burnap Post purchased the Esherick House in late May or early June 1963.⁷⁰ Kahn sent them copies of the construction drawings on June 8, 1963, writing:

I am sure that I need not explain my interest to preserve the design principles and details of the building. I therefore want to help you complete the building and its site development. You have expressed appreciation of the architecture of the house, and I am pleased that you have acquired it rather than one not in touch with its art.⁷¹

His comments indicate that, in contrast to his recent experience with Elfrieda Parker, the Posts planned to occupy the house without making changes. Burnap Post responded on June 11:

Thank you for the working drawings of what we trust will soon be known as the Post, rather than the Esherick, house...I want you to know that Janet and I share a strong conviction that an artist has inherent rights to his creation...we would very much like to talk with you about many aspects of this house and its setting and future.⁷²

The execution of the landscape and the construction of the garage were the Posts priorities for the house.

As purchased by the Posts, the property was graded, but unplanted at the front and backed up to trees and thick vegetation buffering the house from Pastorius Park.⁷³ Only a month after their purchase, Frederick W.G. Post, a prolific Philadelphia landscape architect, had completed a “preliminary” landscape plan for the property.⁷⁴ It is not known whether Kahn had suggested the landscape architect or held an opinion of his work. Peck was at the height of his career at the time and, three decades earlier, had designed the adjacent Pastorius Park. Even without Kahn’s input, the choice of Peck was a logical one.

Kahn’s earlier design development sketches and working drawings for the Esherick House included ideas about outdoor spaces and the immediate landscape around the house that were largely rectilinear and orthogonal to the footprint of the house. Of these ideas, only the court slightly below grade from Sunrise Lane emerged in Peck’s plan as the grade change required some sort of intervention. Peck called for a court at the front of the house

⁷⁰ LIK to Burnap Post, 8 Jun. 1963, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection; Jamison to Wisdom, 14 May 1963.

⁷¹ LIK to Post, 8 Jun. 1963.

⁷² Post to LIK, 11 Jun. 1963, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

⁷³ See image dated 1961 in: *The Work of Louis I. Kahn* (La Jolla, CA: La Jolla Museum of Art, 1965), np (14).

⁷⁴ Peck, “Mr. & Mrs. Burnap Post, preliminary plan,” Jul. 1963.

defined by a retaining wall and a large, rounded terrace at the rear. These front and rear features were connected by a walkway extending along the west side of the house, curving around the outside edge of the terrace and linking up with rectilinear walkways connecting the utility room and kitchen doors with the driveway and anticipated garage. Peck's plan also called for a parking area at the front of the house parallel to Sunrise Lane at the top of the retaining wall. The plan retained a number of existing trees and introduced new plantings in the front court and around the perimeter of the house. Peck's plan was largely executed as designed.

Peck's plan located the garage roughly in the location where Kahn positioned it on site plans created as the Esherick House neared completion. In February 1962, Margaret Esherick had asked Kahn to "furnish her a sketch of a future 2 car garage."⁷⁵ The issue of the garage location had been entertained at least two time prior to this request. A sketch site plan and elevation located a one-story, two-car garage and storage rooms in a separate building about 10'-0" from the house and lined up with the street facade.⁷⁶ This sketch likely dates from the fall of 1960 as it is labeled "future garage and storage" on the plot plan dated November 2, 1960.⁷⁷ In October 1961, Kahn's office revised the plot plan, providing two possible locations, both pushed further back from the street face of the house.⁷⁸ No detailed designs for a garage are known to have been produced prior to Margaret Esherick's death.

Peck's initial landscape plan dating from July 1963 positioned the garage relatively far back on the lot to the northeast of the service side of the house, one of the locations earlier considered by Kahn.⁷⁹ In March 1965, Burnap Post wrote to Kahn asking whether plans had been previously drawn up for a garage, explaining:

several architects who have visited the house have said they thought that rough plans for a separate garage/storage structure had been drawn. If so, we would be interested in discussing them. Storage space for implements and terrace furniture has become increasingly desirable...Knowing how busy you are with major projects, we feel somewhat presumptuous about bringing this up. In view of your interest in the house, however, we are sure you can understand that we would want to turn to your office first.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Wisdom to LIK, 26 Feb. 1962.

⁷⁶ Folder 520, Item 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection

⁷⁷ Construction drawings, sheet 1, Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection

⁷⁸ A site plan dated 24 Oct. 1961 depicts two possible garage locations/orientations. Folder 030.I.C.520.1, Kahn Collection. See also: A.J. Webb to ME, 24 Oct. 1961, Folder 030.I.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁷⁹ Peck, "Mr. & Mrs. Burnap Post, preliminary plan," Jul. 1963.

⁸⁰ Post to LIK, 16 Mar. 1965, and reply from Wisdom to Post, 30 Mar. 1965, both Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

Kahn met with the Posts at the house later in the spring and discussed the “garage problem,” but nothing more came out of Kahn’s office.⁸¹ In an August 1966 letter to Kahn, Burnap Post somewhat cheekily observed, “Mrs. Post says she ran into you at Frank Clements’ bar and grill a week or so ago and was tempted to ask you to join her, but was afraid she’d be keeping you from some major design project, like our garage.”⁸² It is hard to tell from the correspondence whether Janet and Burnap Post were actually annoyed by Kahn’s disinterest or, as cordially stated, that they understood that Kahn’s office was at that time consumed with massive projects. In September 1967, Post wrote a final missive on the topic:

in view of the major works in which you are involved, we assume that the garage is a completely dormant project. At this point, we would like it to remain so, and thought we should let you know that it should not be considered part of your office’s backlog. You will probably be relieved to hear this.⁸³

In need of shelter for their cars and additional storage, but wanting to remain sensitive to a house designed by one of the most important architects practicing at that time and locally based, the Posts scaled back their garage plans. Around 1967, they hired William Washburn to design an open carport for one car with additional storage.⁸⁴ It was constructed very near the location suggested on Peck’s landscape plan.

B. Historical Context

Louis I. Kahn: An Icon of Architecture

Louis Kahn is, without question, one of the greatest architects of the twentieth century. His notable impact on the trajectory of world architecture in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s grew from an array of interests and sources: a preoccupation with primitive and enduring architectural forms; the celebration of mass and load; the careful consideration of light and its effects on users; and a process of design intensely sensitive to divining the relationship between function and its representation in space and form. These concerns resulted in an unconscious and, perhaps, inadvertent critique of International Style modernism, a viewpoint that has been a principal interpretation of much of Kahn’s career and work. This interpretation began with period criticism and has remained a mainstay of the steady flow of Kahn scholarship. Vincent Scully, who grappled with the importance of Kahn’s work early on, smartly articulated Kahn’s outlook and background in an exhibition catalog for a 1965 show at the La Jolla Museum of Art:

⁸¹ Post to LIK, 5 Jul. 1965, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

⁸² Post to LIK, 12 Aug. 1966, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

⁸³ Post to LIK, 29 Sep. 1967, Folder 030.II.A.56.29, Kahn Collection.

⁸⁴ Lynn Gallagher to author, electronic correspondence, 16 Sep. 2010, copies in HABS fieldnotes.

[Kahn's] architecture is healing the breach that has existed between present and past throughout the last generations. Kahn is bringing everything back in comprehensible terms. Weight in buildings, symmetry, masonry, masses, complex geometric constellations, were all anathema to the progressive architects of thirty years ago...Other architects, it is true, have contributed to this development, among them Le Corbusier, Aalto, and in his own way, the late Frank Lloyd Wright. But Kahn's architecture is unique. Its roots, which Kahn, no revolutionary, has never disavowed, lie in the Beaux-Arts tradition, which Kahn has now managed not so much to renew as to recreate. He was never an apocalyptic architect. He has always loved this world. His buildings therefore seek permanence and solidity.⁸⁵

When Beaux-Arts trained Kahn began his professional career he faced not only economic trauma, but also growing artistic upheaval as European or International Style Modernism began its architectural ascent. In time, it would not just become the dominant vein of modernism, but for a time comprised a majority all non-residential architectural output. This occurred, in large part, because its underlying theories and approaches to design replaced Beaux-Arts pedagogy and revolutionized architectural education. Kahn kept a distance from what became conventional modern design in postwar America, but this distance was not an explicit and conscious reaction to it. Rather, it was the natural outcome of a maturing design philosophy that approached architectural problems and their solutions in an idiosyncratic manner. David Brownlee and David De Long have observed that during the later, and most productive period of his career, Kahn "reformulated [earlier] concerns, subsuming them within a new understanding of the nature of architecture, and in doing so he established a more rigorous criteria for success. And by those standards he succeeded again."⁸⁶ His thoughtful and often tortuous design process demonstrated that, although a notable experimenter and innovator, Kahn was, as noted in *The Washington Post* at the time of his death, "first and foremost an artist."⁸⁷

Kahn's place as a paradigm shifter in modern architecture was launched with the Yale University Art Gallery (1951-53) in New Haven, Connecticut as it provided an introduction to Kahn's ideas about structure, mass, and geometry as a departure from prevailing architectural convention. It was followed by the modest, but significant Trenton Bath House (Jewish Community Center, Ewing Township, New Jersey, 1955), with which he further explored light, volume, and the division between "servant" and "served." Kahn's national and international renown as a brilliant practitioner was secured

⁸⁵ Vincent Scully, Jr., "Introduction," *The Work of Louis I. Kahn* (La Jolla, CA: La Jolla Museum of Art, 1965), np (3).

⁸⁶ David B. Brownlee and David G. De Long, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991): 20. For a summary of his career and contributions, see also: Romaldo Giurgola and Pamille I. Berg, "Kahn, Louis I.," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, Volume 2*, ed. Adolf K. Placzek (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 537-546.

⁸⁷ "Louis I. Kahn" (obituary), *The Washington Post* 24 Mar. 1974, sec. C: 6.

with the Richards Medical Research Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This building was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2009; nomination preparer Emily Cooperman demonstrates that the project “marks the first full expression of several core ideas for which Kahn has become recognized as significant in the history of modern architecture.”⁸⁸

A series of major projects followed that express the further evolution of Kahn’s ideas and cemented his place as one of the great architects of the twentieth century, including: the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California (1959-65); the Library and Dining Hall at Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire (1965-72); the Kimball Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (1966-72); the Yale Center for British Art (1969-74, completed by Pellechia & Meyers), and, outside the United States, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India (1962-74), and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962-83, completed by David Wisdom & Associates. For each of these commissions, Kahn unflinchingly approached individual functional requirements through a set of common conceptual filters, creating individually stunning and successful buildings and complexes, that are instantaneously recognizable as Kahn. He was as deeply thoughtful about and committed to the few residential commissions he took on and saw to fruition.

Kahn’s Residential Commissions

While Kahn’s comparatively few completed residences are frequently lost among the large-scale institutional works for which he is best known, housing was a major part of his early career and greatly influenced his embrace of modern architecture. Unemployed for a number of years in the early 1930s, Beaux-Arts trained Kahn began thinking about modern architecture in the United States, establishing the Architectural Research Group as a “center for the discussion of modern architecture” with a group of other unemployed architects.⁸⁹ The group considered the deeper implications of modern design, focusing particularly on its application for housing such as that coming out of Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s and notably replicated in the United States with the Carl Mackley Houses in Philadelphia (1933-34, Oscar Stonorov and Alfred Kastner). During the 1930s, Kahn worked for various local and national government entities on various housing schemes including the Jersey Homesteads in Roosevelt, New Jersey (1936-37 with Alfred Kastner). This was followed by work with George Howe on various multiunit wartime defense housing schemes, including Pine Ford Acres (1940-42), Pennypack Woods (1941-43), and Carver Court (1941-44, with Oscar Stonorov). It was around this time that Kahn completed his first private commission for a single-family house—the Oser House (1940-42). The war eliminated private residential work and, while he designed a number of houses and additions in the late 1940s, they were only preludes to what he would later achieve as his work matured.

⁸⁸ Cooperman, 17.

⁸⁹ Brownlee and De Long, 25.

Residential commissions are, because of their small scale, seemingly ideal situations to test architectural methods; however, Kahn seems to have utilized such projects not so much as proving grounds (with the implied possibility of failure), but as a learning exercise where the net outcome, even in an unbuilt project, was a positive one. In his consideration of Kahn, Carter Wiseman offers that the architect saw residential commissions as a means of experimentation, “as opportunities to explore geometric and spatial relationships, the juxtaposition of materials, and the role of landscape in his architecture.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Kahn seems to have so invested himself and his evolving ideas in residential projects that, as observed by David Dunster, “in each there seems to be a larger-scaled building trying to escape from the confines of the client’s budget.”⁹¹ The issues of budget limitations affect all types of commissions, but Dunster’s comment shows an understanding of the mental and time resources that Kahn seems to have invested in all his projects, big and small.

The success of Kahn’s residential projects required patience by the clients, a patience born out of an understanding and acceptance of Kahn’s design process. For example, Doris and Normal Fisher worked with Kahn for seven years in the 1960s on a house in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. Although these years were some of Kahn’s busiest, the drawn out design process was not because of inattention; he developed five different schemes for the house and there were a number of changes that occurred during construction.⁹² Elfrieda Klaunder Parker, who considered purchasing the Esherick House after Margaret Esherick’s death and also having an entirely new house designed by Kahn, recalled what he said about his process in a 1964 letter to Kahn: “as you explained, your way of working is a slow process of designing and refining from time to time, before the best is arrived at—the Esherick house being an example.”⁹³ Kahn’s need for residential clients who truly believed in his design genius was not unique, Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, for example, both established strong ties with various clients; however, Kahn seems to have been more successful in maintaining relatively harmonious architect-client relations despite the fact that he could be just as strong willed with regard to his concepts as the others.

Evidence from early in the project suggests that Margaret Esherick planned to be closely involved and that she and Louis Kahn had a friendly architect-client relationship. The cover letter dated December 17, 1959 accompanying the architectural contract between the two indicates both a casual familiarity, “Dear Marg,” and at least superficial

⁹⁰ Carter Wiseman, *Louis I. Kahn Beyond Time and Style: A Life in Architecture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 16 (caption).

⁹¹ David Dunster, *Key Buildings of the Twentieth Century, Volume 2: Houses, 1945-1989* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1990), 52.

⁹² For a discussion of the design development of the Fishers’ house, see: Pierson William Booher, “Louis I. Kahn’s Fisher House: A Case Study on the Architectural Detail and Design Intent,” thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2009, Chapter Two.

⁹³ Parker to LIK, 30 Jun. 1964.

acknowledgment of a unknown thought about the project, “I think it is a good idea!”⁹⁴
Esherick replied five days later in one of her few surviving letters related to the project:

I trust I will see you before you depart for Africa—I have a couple of suggestions to make about partitions and a window. Have you heard anything from Hartshaw[?] I’d be most grateful to see this house get underway—I have to move out in May and I sure expect to have a house to move into. Let me know when we can get together. Sincerely, Marg⁹⁵

In 1970, the local Chestnut Hill newspaper ran an article on “the house Kahn designed at 204 Sunrise Lane.”⁹⁶ The article’s writer interviewed Kahn for the piece and in response to the query about the “considerations that went into the design,” the architect noted “beauty and logic,” “the character of the community,” and “economy.” He also commented on the involvement of Margaret Esherick, reportedly stating: “it was a pleasure to collaborate with her...[a building] reaches excellence when the client knows what she wants and the architect knows how to interpret it.”

Their warm relationship and cooperation was undiminished two years into a project whose execution was seriously delayed; indeed, Esherick was exceedingly grateful to Kahn for his role when aspects of the construction phase go awry, as expressed in a July 1961 letter:

Dear Lou

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$3000—to be used at your discretion in the payment of Mr. Regan[’]s bill.

I’ll be back Sunday evening and will check with your office Monday.

May I just add how sorry I am that this has turned into such a mess for your sake even more than mine. I appreciate so much all you and your office have done to keep this job going as smoothly as it has. I know what it means to you in time and effort and I am most grateful.

Sincerely, Marg⁹⁷

Kahn and Esherick’s apparently low-drama and cooperative architect-client relationship might have been exceptional among the most famous modern architects. However, Alice T. Friedman demonstrates that well-off, independent women in mid-century America were frequently drawn to modern architecture because of its reconsideration of domesticity. She writes in *Women and the Making of the Modern House*:

individual women clients proved to be such effective catalysts for creativity in modern domestic architecture [because] the conviction shared by modern

⁹⁴ [LIK] to ME, 17 Dec. 1959, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

⁹⁵ ME to LIK, 22 Dec. [1960], Folder 030.II.A.34.2, Kahn Collection.

⁹⁶ Hanson, 2.

⁹⁷ ME to LIK, 13 Jul. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.80.21, Kahn Collection.

architects and their women clients [held] that the essence of modernity was the complete alteration of the home—its construction, materials, and interior spaces.⁹⁸

While Margaret Esherick's self-assurance and confidence were not uncommon among affluent women in mid-twentieth-century America, they were undoubtedly bolstered by her status as a single woman and as the owner of a business. Esherick's successful working relationship with Kahn would have been a logical outgrowth of both her character and her relatively unconventional life. Yet, with a famed sculptor for an uncle and a prolific and well-known architect for a brother, Kahn likely also held respect for her artistic opinion or at least her ability to get a sound second opinion on matters of design.⁹⁹

In the end, Kahn believed the success of his buildings, even the most modest like the Esherick House, was determined by locating the correct form for the project at hand, a goal that assured the long-term relevance of the building to future occupants. As explained by Vincent Scully in 1987: "if...the original form was the right one, the whole thing, however modified by Design, will still hold together in the end."¹⁰⁰ This retrospection, by a respected scholar who was one of Kahn's principal supporters at the time his fame as a designer was growing, was echoed by Kahn in 1970.¹⁰¹ In a "conversation" with Doris Fisher, a client for another of his key residential works, Kahn observed: "a house is only good if the tenant who lives in it after the original owner is comfortable."¹⁰² Various articles and interviews with the occupants during only two periods of ownership since the house's completion and Margaret Esherick's unexpected death attest to the success of the dwelling's form, and design. Lynn Gallagher's thoughts in a 2009 interview at the house near the end of her and her husband's ownership expressed the life-changing nature of being owner/occupant/steward of the house. She explained that living in the Esherick House: "changed our lives...[we] stepped into another world and learned to love it... You can't be depressed in this house."¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 16.

⁹⁹ In an April 1961 letter, Margaret Esherick's brother, Joseph, provided her with specifications about the towel bar and fittings for the bathroom as well as a variety of lighting options, which she forwarded on to Kahn. Joseph Esherick to ME, 5 Apr. 1961, Folder 030.II.A.34.1, Kahn Collection.

¹⁰⁰ Vincent Scully, "Introduction," *The Louis I. Kahn Archive: The Completely Illustrated Catalogue of the Drawings in the Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commissions, Volume 1, Buildings and Projects, 1926-58* (New York: Garland, 1987), xix.

¹⁰¹ Vincent Scully's *Louis I. Kahn* (New York: George Braziller, 1962).

¹⁰² Louis I. Kahn, "A House within a House," trans. and ed. by Melissa Steeley and William Whitaker, University of Pennsylvania, Architectural Archives, as transcribed in Booher, 83.

¹⁰³ Lynn Gallagher, personal interview with the author at the Esherick House, 10 Sep. 2009.

Volume and Mass

Most of the extant correspondence about the design and construction of the Esherick House dates from after completion of the working drawings in November 1960, making understanding of its design evolution less straightforward. Still, a series of sketches and drawings provide some understanding of its conceptual development. The surviving drawings record Kahn's preoccupation with how such things as mass, light, and function contributed to the creation and organization of space, and a concern for understanding present links to past building precedents.

Early sketch plans show that Kahn initially considered a design variation based on pavilions—with dominant structural piers providing spatial definition in addition to support—most clearly represented by the Trenton Bath House, but also utilized for two unbuilt residential projects (the Adler and DeVore houses, both ca. 1954-55). Structural columns defined the major spaces and outlined a plan having a character similar to a traditional double-pile plan, featuring a central passage that extended unimpeded through the house. The plan was more conventional and compact than his other contemporary residential designs, a necessary approach because of the relatively small lot and also, seemingly, a reference the historic colonial and federal period houses abundant in Chestnut Hill. The square spaces delineated by the columns on the house interior were echoed by a forecourt at the front and a patio/pavilion at the rear.

As the design evolved, Kahn abandoned the columnar system and its associated pavilions in exchange for solid expanses of load-bearing masonry wall. Kahn's pavilions were generally single story volumes linked together, and spreading generously over the landscape. In moving beyond the conceptual stage, he may have had difficulty reconciling the program for a relatively compact two-story house demanded by the site or the client with the expansiveness embodied by his pavilions. This stage of the design process was an outgrowth of Kahn's "distinction between ideal form, or what a building 'wants to be,' and design, or what actually emerges as a result of specific circumstance."¹⁰⁴ With the Esherick House, Kahn moved away from the columnar articulation of space primarily through volume to one defined by mass and light modulation. The thick walls of the now compactly devised Esherick House appeared even more massive or "exaggerated" through inset porches/balconies at the front and rear entrances, and the sense of depth resulting from the use of shuttered recesses and built-in bookcases at the wall openings.¹⁰⁵ The combinations of glass, shutters, and fixed wood panels in the wall openings of various shapes both allowed for control of privacy, light, and ventilation as well as an expression interior space and function on the exterior elevation.

¹⁰⁴ Brownlee and De Long, 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 68. See also: "Louis I. Kahn Esherick House: Process of Development," typescript of exhibit introduction, [1986], Architecture Archives, University of Pennsylvania; Robert McCarter, *Louis I. Kahn* (London & New York: Phaidon, 2005), 160-62.

Servant and Served

Kahn designed the Esherick House at the same time he was working on the Alfred Newton Richards Medical Research Laboratories at the University of Pennsylvania, the building that most strongly demonstrates Kahn's concern for visual expression of function, of "servant" and "served" spaces. With Richards, Kahn positioned utility chases and vertical circulation in unadorned brick towers that contrasted with the generously glazed laboratories and offices elsewhere in the building.

The early sketches for the Esherick House isolated the service and utility areas inside two thick-walled and windowless extensions on one side of the house. A simple line drawing on one of the sheets of sketch plans indicate that he considered letting these extensions rise above the roofline, echoing both the chimney stack on the other side wall as well as Kahn's use of the utility towers at Richards. Over the course of the design phase, the extensions and the screened exterior utility area between them were integrated entirely into the mass of the building. Yet, he continued to explore ways to express the "servant" and "served" areas or, more broadly, function on the exterior of the compact two-story box.

The eastern ends of both the north (street) elevation and south (garden) elevation are blank walls, providing no glimpses into the stacked service and support areas and rendering them, to a certain extent, invisible on the house's principal faces. Elsewhere on these elevations, Kahn used the wall openings and assemblages of glass, shutters, and fixed wood panels to denote the size and function of the spaces. On the north, T-shaped "keyhole" openings, among his most recognizable design conventions, flank the recessed porch/balcony. He was experimenting with variations on the keyhole openings more-or-less simultaneously with three other projects, the Tribune Review Building in Greensburg, Pennsylvania (1958-62) and the unbuilt schemes for the Fleisher and Goldenberg houses (both 1959). The keyhole openings at the Esherick House created a relatively closed face, while allowing the resident to manage light and ventilation and also maintain privacy. To the right of the inset porch and balcony, the tall shuttered opening topped by a broad expanse of glass to the right of the recess denotes a grand double-height space (living room) while the arrangement of glass, shutters, and fixed wood panels to the left indicates more intimate areas on two floors (entry, bedroom/study).¹⁰⁶

Kahn abandoned the keyhole openings on the south elevation, instead employing large expanses of glass to open the interior spaces out to the rear garden and park beyond. The more generous openings are still arranged in a way that subtly expresses the variations between their double- or single-height spaces on the exterior. To the left of the recess, two large, fixed windows are arranged one over another. These are flanked by two, two-story openings in the wall each containing four pairs of shutters vertically arranged. This organization is essentially repeated to the right of the recess; however, the suggestion of a

¹⁰⁶ For more on Kahn's organization of space in the Esherick House, see: Klaus-Peter Gast, *Louis I. Kahn: The Idea of Order*, trans. Michael Robinson (Basel & Boston: Birkhäuser, 2003), 45-51. While the conclusions made from his method of plan analysis have been questioned, Gast's observations on functional hierarchy in the Esherick House are straightforward.

double-height space is eliminated through the shortening of the second-story window and insertion of two fixed wood panels and a recessed shuttered opening. The components of the second-story opening repeat those used in the same room on the front.

These featureless expanses of stuccoed wall denoting (or denying) the service areas on the north and south elevations gives way to an assortment of openings on the east elevation. The comparative haphazardness of the east wall, in itself, may have been used by Kahn to suggest a difference in function as he developed a more regularized scheme for the wall during design development.¹⁰⁷ While seemingly random, the location and form of the window and door openings can be interpreted vis-à-vis interior function. Casement windows, the only operable windows in the house, are used only in spaces that might be considered “service”—a double casement in the kitchen and a single one in the utility room, powder room, and bathroom. The three instances of openings filled with fixed glass and operable wood shutters occur in the sitting/bath area and the dressing room, not exactly “service,” but both wholly private. The fireplace is flanked by two: one having two fixed glass panels arranged vertically and separated by a wood shutter, and another with a lower glass panel and an upper shutter. The latter is truncated and raised up because of the presence of the bathtub/daybed at floor level on the interior. The other three-part arrangement of glass panels and shutters opens into the dressing room.

Historical Precedent

Its out-of-the-way location notwithstanding, Louis Kahn’s house for Margaret Esherick can hardly be overlooked among both the conventional and more overtly historicist dwellings lining Chestnut Hill’s leafy streets. Its solid, blocky form, its lack of a pitched roof, and, from the street, its unadorned wall planes broken up only by windows and openings having unfamiliar shapes and relationships place the house well outside the predominant domestic architecture found in most affluent American neighborhoods. Looking more closely, however, elements of its design demonstrate Kahn’s understanding of the appeal and usefulness of architectural precedents. His interest in geometrical relationships in the creation of space, for example, or a desire to frankly express structure place his buildings within a continuum of architecture and construction extending back in time for millennia.¹⁰⁸ The square module evident in the plan development of the Esherick House and the sense of mass inherent to its load-bearing block walls position the design within Kahn’s larger body of work and his utilization of ancient forms and sources. Indeed, in his seminal work on Kahn, published in 1962, Vincent Scully explained that one of the strengths of Kahn’s work was in “healing the breach between the present and the near no less than the distant past,” a simultaneous commendation of Kahn’s approach

¹⁰⁷ Folder 520, Item 030.I.C.520.18, Kahn Collection.

¹⁰⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Kahn’s relationship with historical precedent, see: Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Louis Kahn’s Situated Modernism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), in particular Chapter 5.

to design and a condemnation of modern architectural theory's professed rejection of the past.¹⁰⁹

More intriguingly, the Esherick House displays characteristics that indicate Kahn was also thinking about more recent and local traditions as well. Elevation sketches made in 1960 during design development indicate that Kahn considered leaving the block walls exposed on the exterior in a manner similar to the exterior of the Tribune Review Building and the sanctuary interior of his contemporary First Unitarian Church in Rochester, New York (1959-69). By the time the construction drawings were completed in November 1960, the specifications called for a layer of stucco over the blocks, a material frequently appearing on houses in Chestnut Hill. There is no documentation explaining why Kahn specified stucco. It might have been his decision alone or reflected the input of Margaret Esherick. It is also possible that the stucco was a compromise with Charles Woodward, a major landowner and residential developer selling Esherick the lot for her house, as he had previously suggested ways to make the exterior look "less controversial."¹¹⁰

Possible inspiration for the house's floor plan and some of its features and details reach even further back into the area's past. During design development, Kahn considered an implied central passage extending completely through the house from front to rear and a double-pile arrangement of rooms not unlike large gentry houses of the colonial and early national periods. The similarity was reduced in the final plan, but it did retain a double-pile arrangement with balanced spaces on either side of the center axis through the house and a center passage from front to back along the second story hallway/balcony. Among the house's notable elements, the many openings fitted with operable wood shutters, and traditional door construction with floating panels relate closely to the architectural elements and construction methods used in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses in the Philadelphia area.¹¹¹ The rusticity of the oak beam supporting the balcony over the living room and its intersection with plaster wall might have also been a reference to colonial-era construction.¹¹² Lacking detailed documentation, it is impossible to know the degree to which Kahn was directly addressing traditional and conventional building methods, materials, and spatial arrangements with the design and construction of the Esherick House. Whether conscious or unconscious, whether real or a later interpretation, the relationship of certain elements of the Esherick House to the historical domestic design of Philadelphia and Chestnut Hill did fit within Kahn's larger understanding of architectural precedent and modern buildings.

¹⁰⁹ Scully, *Louis I. Kahn*, 44.

¹¹⁰ CW to ME, 29 Apr. 1960. William Whitaker, Curator of the Architectural Archive at the University of Pennsylvania suggested that the stucco may have been a way to better relate, through materials, the modern house to the housing stock of Chestnut Hill.

¹¹¹ Booher, 84. In his thesis, Booher offers that Kahn may not have just been contextualizing with the woodwork in the Esherick and others houses, but that, for example, Kahn may have thought that the true form of a "door" required rails, stiles, and floating panels (see 84-86).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 108.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The compact house with two distinct faces can be categorized as a modern suburban villa. The severity and closed quality of the street facade (and the west elevation, seen fully on approach) is entirely transformed on the garden front, which looks out onto Pastorius Park. Expanses of glass blur the division between exterior and interior, and the division between the two is further reduced in warmer months by wood shutters that, when folded back, fully open up portions of the exterior walls. The Esherick House stands boldly among the older and more conventional housing stock in the area, yet does not look out of place; indeed, its sophisticated design and sensitive engagement with the site makes it difficult to imagine any other building on the property.
2. **Condition of fabric:** Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** 44'-1" x 31'-6"
2. **Foundations:** Reinforced concrete underpinned by twenty creosoted wood piles. The crawl space below the house is entirely floored in concrete.
3. **Walls:** The principal exterior walls are concrete block covered in stucco.
4. **Structural systems:** Load-bearing block walls
5. **Overall organization:**

Except for the operable casement windows in the east wall, all of the other windows in the house are fixed panes of glass. Natural ventilation and light are provided by shuttered openings recessed in the wall and appearing in various sizes and configurations throughout the house. The shutters are constructed either of single pieces of Apitong or multiple pieces fitted together to form a flush surface. They hinge outward and the openings are fitted on the interior with special screens ("Rolscreens") that roll down from the top in tracks.

North: The Esherick House has two principal facades. The north elevation is the street face of the house.¹¹³ Compared to the garden face (south elevation), which is oriented to Pastorius Park, the north is relatively closed. Although not symmetrical, the facade has a balanced and formal character. A recess located to

¹¹³ The Esherick House is turned 45° to the cardinal directions. The "north" elevation actually faces northwest. Kahn's construction drawings used "north," "south," "east," and "west" for the four elevations and these were retained for the HABS documentation.

the right of the wall's center is approximately five and one-half feet square contains the entry porch on the first floor and a balcony directly above.

The main door, not immediately evident on approach, opens into the house from the left side of the porch. The broad single door is crafted of Apitong and is divided into two different-sized panels by the middle rail, with the smaller of the two at the bottom. This general arrangement of large over small panels is repeated for all of the doors that use traditional building techniques—stiles, rails, and floating panels made from Apitong. The upper and lower panels of the front door are composed of four equal-sized boards fitted to form a flush surface. The balcony doorway contains a pair of tall and narrow doors, each having one large and one small panel composed of a single board.

The recessed portion of the street elevation is flanked by T-shaped or “keyhole” openings, each with different overall proportions and arrangements of fixed glass, operable shutters, and fixed wood panels. The one to the right opens onto the double-height living room; the presence of the double height space is indicated by the thin vertical portion of the T, which rises nearly three-quarters up the wall to meet the larger rectangle of the horizontal portion of the T. The vertical is fitted with two shutters one over the other and the horizontal contains a single large, fixed piece of glass.

In contrast, the keyhole on the left takes in rooms on two levels—the entry on the lower level and the bedroom on the upper level—and its elements are arranged in a manner that acknowledges the interior divisions of space. The overall keyhole opening to the left of the door has dimensions and an arrangement of glass, shutters, and wood distinct from the living room and acknowledges the presence of two one-story spaces. The vertical portion of the T stops at the second floor and is fitted with glass over a shuttered opening, which comprises a single, independent functional unit for the entry. On the second floor, the part of the opening that might be considered the “horizontal” of the T is much larger and squarer than in the living room and features a variety of component elements. The width of the glass and associated shuttered opening and wood panels are distinct from the ones in the vertical below and comprise a second functional unit serving a separate room above. The flanking pairs of shutters that fill the remainder of the horizontal provide visual association between the room inside (the bedroom, originally intended as a study) and other important areas of the house.

In addition to the major keyhole openings on the street front, the T motif appears elsewhere on the façade. The combination of glass and recessed shuttered opening in the bedroom reads as T within the T. It more literally appears in such details as the bronze railing on the balcony and the “doubled” T form of the concrete floor and ceiling of the balcony.

South: The south elevation faces the rear garden and a stand of trees and undergrowth screening Pastorius Park. The elevation has the same overall form and balance as the street front, but is far more open and achieves a greater sense of symmetry. A porch and balcony are contained within a slightly shallower recess in the wall than those at the front. The openings in each contain double doors of the same design as the ones on the north-facing balcony, and the concrete floor and ceiling, and bronze balustrade, are also the same.

The keyhole openings on the north front, which limited views into the house from the street, were not necessary on the more private garden front. Instead, large expanses of glass and flanking shuttered openings create strong indoor-outdoor links. As with the dimensions and arrangement of elements in the keyhole openings, the openings on the south also convey the division of space on the interior. To the left of the inset porch/balcony, two massive, fixed windows are arranged one over another. These are flanked by two, two-story openings in the wall each containing four pairs of shutters, vertically arranged. While the general pattern is repeated to the right of the recess, the presence of divided space on the interior is expressed by the separation of the lower (dining room) and upper (bedroom) windows. This is accomplished with the same arrangement of shuttered opening and fixed wood panels as on the north side of the bedroom. The use of the same window arrangement for two important rooms (the bedroom on the south and the planned study on the north), but ones both physically and socially screened from the rest of the house, are another instance where exterior features provide clues to interior spatial divisions and a hierarchy of function. In contrast, the floor-to-ceiling glass of the living and dining rooms provide a high degree of transparency for the most public spaces in the house.

West: The west elevation is simple and austere. A firebox extends outward at the center of an otherwise featureless wall. The chimney extends slightly further out from the firebox and rises to its termination above the roofline independent from the wall. A fixed window, slightly wider than the chimney, rises from a point just above the firebox to a point just below the line of the parapet.

East: When compared to the restraint, order, and balance of the other three elevations, at first glance the east appears somewhat chaotic. The featureless expanses of stuccoed wall on the north and south elevations in the stacked service and support areas gives way to an assortment of openings. As on the west, the wall is anchored by a chimneystack at center. It primarily services the fireplace in the sitting area on the second floor, although a flue extends down to the utility room on the first floor to vent the furnace. A rectangular niche reduces the mass of the chimneystack at ground level. Above the firebox, the chimney with flues rises unattached to the house, although closer to the east wall than the chimney on the west.

There are two doors on the first floor, the one to the north of the chimney stack opens into the kitchen and the one to the south opens into the utility room. Both utilize a similar construction as the other exterior doors with rails, stiles, with one large panel above the middle rail and a smaller one below. The flush, floating panels for these doors are each composed of three boards. The space for the left-hand board of the upper panel in both doors is fully glazed. A metal mail slot is oriented vertically in the board directly below the glass of the utility room door.

Casement windows, the only operable windows in the house, are used only in “servant” spaces—a double casement in the kitchen and a single one in the utility room, powder room, and bathroom. Three openings on the second floor are fitted with vertical groupings of fixed glass and wood shutters. Elsewhere in the house, these combinations appear in the “served” areas. On the east wall, they open onto the sitting/bath area and the dressing room, which at times might have “servant” functions, but are more appropriately thought of as private living areas. The fireplace in the sitting/bath area is flanked by two openings having vertical arrangements of glass and shutters. The one closer to the bathroom features two glass panels separated by a shuttered opening; this arrangement is also repeated in the dressing room. To accommodate the bathtub/daybed on the other side of the fireplace, the second opening is set slightly higher in the wall and contains only an upper shutter and lower glass panel.

A concrete pedestal next to the kitchen door is another place where the T motif appears. The T-shaped concrete pedestal adjacent to the kitchen door continues that motif on the east side of the house. It first appears in a 1960 sketch showing the still-unresolved organization of the west elevation. While the pedestal may have been conceived for purely aesthetic reasons—perhaps tying the most individual of the four elevations to the others, it does have a practical function—a place to set packages while unlocking the kitchen door.

6. **Roof:** The flat roof is surrounded on its perimeter by a low parapet wall capped with lead-coated copper and sloped towards a single drain near its center. The roof is carried on 2" x 12" joists.

C. **Description of Interior:**

1. **Plan:** The floor plan is one of the more conventional elements of the house. The principal spaces (living room, dining room/foyer, and bedroom) are doubled squares, which is the shape with which Kahn often began his design process. Still, the symmetrical disposition of these spaces to either side of a central circulation corridor containing the stair and most of the exterior doors is a clear nod to the plan and function of traditional double-pile houses. The service and support areas are contained within the overall envelope of the house, in plan they are set off,

with their own (horizontal) circulation pathways, not unlike a service ell. With the Esherick House, Kahn altered and refined a familiar American domestic plan for modern life and artistic expression.

2. **Flooring:** The floors throughout the house are Apitong, a hardwood native to the Philippines. The cloakroom and powder room floors are paved with slate. The portion of the utility/laundry room along the exterior wall is concrete.
3. **Wall and ceiling finish:** The walls and ceilings are primarily finished in plaster. The ceiling under the balcony/passage overlooking the living room is finished in Apitong. The master bathroom shower is entirely tiled, and the dividing wall between the shower and the rest of the room is also tiled.
4. **Doorways and doors:** On the first floor, the openings for the laundry/utility room and the powder room are fitted with flush wood hollow core doors typical of the period. The two in the laundry/utility room are pocket doors, and the powder room is hinged to swing outward. The door between the dining room and kitchen is a swinging door with an arrangement of two panels of differing dimensions set in stiles and rails similar to the exterior doors. The door under the stair is a simple swinging door composed of four vertical boards.

The doors into the master bedroom from the balcony are fitted with pocket doors having an arrangement of flush panels set in stiles and rails similar to that used elsewhere in the house. The large set of double pocket doors into the bath/sitting area, the two doors into the toilet/shower area, and the pocket door into the small closet are all flush wood hollow core doors.

5. **Trim and woodwork:**¹¹⁴ The basic door and window trim throughout the house are simple, unmolded boards common to the era. There are built-in bookcases made of Apitong with adjustable shelves along the north walls of the entry and living room. The fireplace surrounds and hearths, and the powder room and master bathroom vanity tops and backsplashes are alberene, a type of soapstone.

Natural ventilation is provided by shuttered openings in the walls that appear in various sizes, shapes, and configurations throughout the house. The Apitong shutters swing outward and the openings are fitted on the interior with special screens (“Rolscreens”) that roll down from the top in tracks. They are secured when closed with bars that pivot.

A straight run of stairs rises up to the second floor at the center of the house along the dining room’s west wall. It is located in a circulation pathway through the house that links the front and rear doors on both levels. The stair is partitioned

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of Wharton Esherick’s kitchen, see Section I:A:2 of this report, “Architect, artist, and landscape architect, 3-6.

from the living room by a screen composed of Apitong planks. As designed, the screen was divided vertically into two sections, each composed of three Apitong planks fitted together to form a flush surface, separated by a narrow gap. As constructed, the top plank of the upper section is also separated by a gap. The balcony is carried on a single rustic beam roughly meeting the smooth plaster wall. The balustrade is constructed in a similar manner as the stair screen below, except with two planks arranged vertically to form a flush surface between vertical supports.

The owner suite included a sitting area off the bedroom positioned between the dressing room and the bathroom. The space can be closed off by sliding doors, and featured a fireplace and a bathtub that could be transformed into a daybed by sliding a built-in padded seat out over the tub. There is a cabinet with sliding doors positioned behind the bathtub/daybed. The adjacent dressing room is fitted with angled shoe racks, and extensive shelving, hanging rods, and a lighted dressing table with cabinets that was fitted with a sink during the Gallagher occupancy.

- 6. Mechanical:** The Esherick House was originally constructed with modern plumbing, electrical, and heating systems. The kitchen has all electric appliances and the water heater and furnace are gas fired. The only major change has been the introduction of air conditioning to the forced air HVAC system

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording of the Esherick House was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the National Park Service. Support and access provided by owner Lynn Gallagher. The documentation was undertaken in 2009-10 by HABS under the direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief of Heritage Documentation Programs, and Catherine C. Lavoie, Chief of HABS. The project leaders were historian James A. Jacobs and architect Robert R. Arzola. The measured drawings were completed by Maryellen Strain Wikoff, architect (Wilmington, Delaware) with fieldwork assistance provided by architecture technicians Michelle Lynn Coble (University of Notre Dame); Christopher Allan Johnson (Kent State University); William Cooper Koning (University of Colorado); Kristina Simcic (Temple University); and Ian Arthur Thomas (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee). The project historian was James A. Jacobs and HABS photographer James Rosenthal produced the large-format photographs.