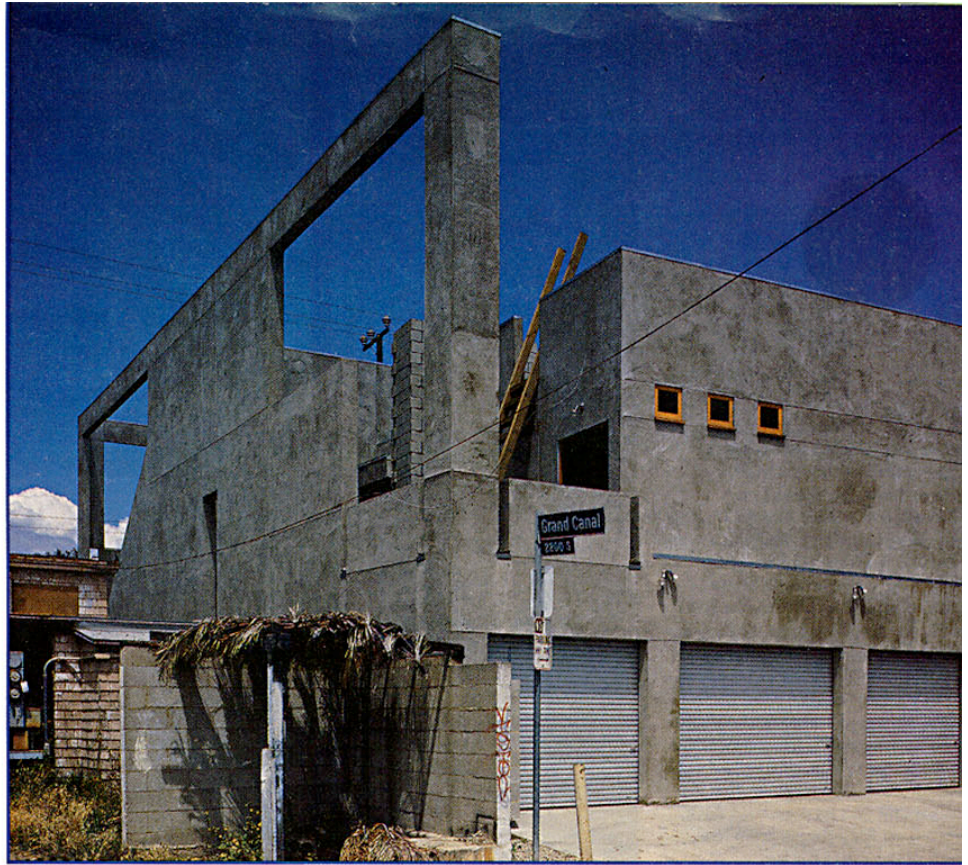


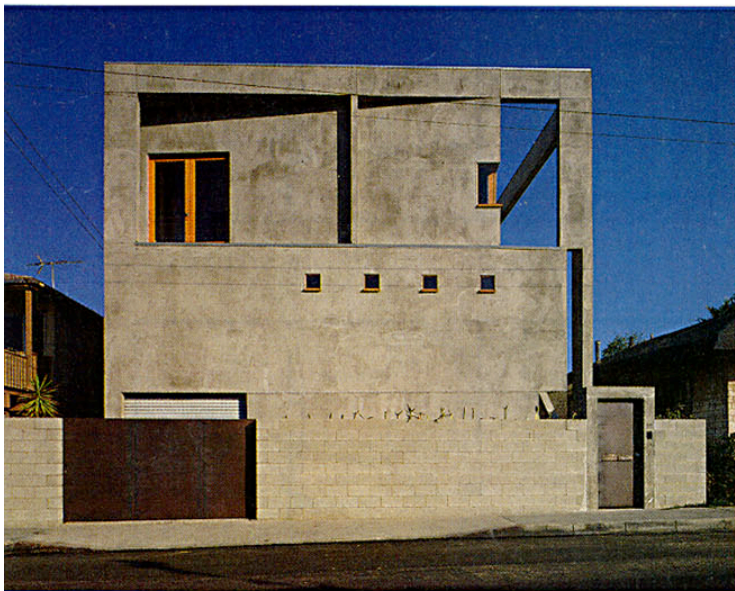
Venable Studio
Venice, California

Hertz and Rendler describe their house as a block cut open to the light. Those cuts also diagram the interior functions of the house: The diagonal cut on the west wall, for example (right), indicates a stairway leading to the rental apartment on the third floor. The vertical notch in the same wall marks the main entrance. Another indicator of the interior is the 15-degree skew of the rental unit, as seen on the narrow street-side elevation (below). The skew indicates the unit's separation from the rest of the house.



Depth in Venice

A house and studio by David Hertz and Michael Rendler engages in a seductive dialogue with its Venice, California neighbors.



FOR the Venable house and studio in Venice, California, architects David Hertz and Michael Rendler have designed a structure that closes itself off from its urban setting while finding ways to acknowledge the environment at large. The house is at once inward looking and open to the elements, particularly natural light.

The client, a sculptor and collector of Native American artifacts called for a home of 4300 square feet containing a studio, bedroom bath, and a separate rental apartment. The architects were instructed to make a clear separation between living and working areas and to ensure the mutual privacy of homeowner and tenant.

If the program was simple, the site was complex. The setting is an urban location close to Los Angeles and a few blocks from the Pacific coastline. Located in a gentrifying area, the building sits between luxury houses to the south and graffiti-splashed urban blight to the north. A patch of ocean is visible from second-story windows.

The house is an infill project on a block originally developed with single-family bungalows and later redeveloped with apartment houses in clashing commercial styles. A three-story apartment building is planned to the immediate west of the Venable site. The long narrow slope of the site challenged the architects (who attended Southern California Institute of Architecture and who maintain separate practices) to introduce light and air into a project hemmed in on both sides by projects built to the property line. The solution, in

Venable Studio

The house is entered through a narrow courtyard and a glass door in a curtain wall (right). Inside is the living room and, through a set of double doors, the two-story studio (below). The studio is featureless except for four punched openings in the north wall and a wedge-shaped skylight. A set of stairs leads to a mezzanine that offers a viewing platform for Venable's large wall-hung sculptures. The plan (below right) shows the tripartite division between the public living area, the semi-public studio, and the private master suite and terrace. The rental unit has its own roof deck, walled off for privacy from the deck of the main house.

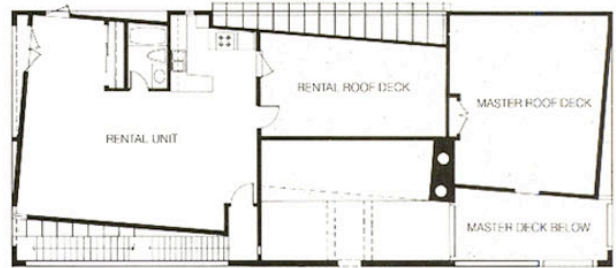


Rendler's words, is a "box that has been cut open" to provide light and selected views of a landscape of mixed pleasures.

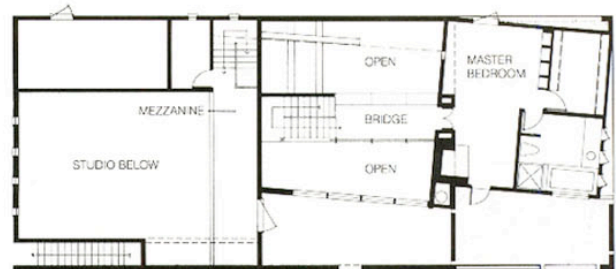
Inside, the composition is fundamentally a tripartite scheme, with studio and living quarters pushed to opposite ends. At the center are the entrance, living room, kitchen, and stairs. From the street, the front elevation is fortress-like and forbidding. The visitor is confronted with a barren wall with three tiny windows. The only eccentric feature is a concrete box at the third story—the rental unit—that has been twisted 15 degrees off axis. A narrow courtyard that leads to the entrance manages to avoid claustrophobia, thanks to the light and sky visible through "cut outs" in the outside wall.

Viewing the courtyard and entrance from inside, the visitor sees a panoramic view of the west wall, set off by a dramatic slice of light that recalls the use of light in courtyards in the houses of Tadao Ando. Inside the living room is a massive, almost ceremonial fireplace of poured-in-place concrete, set in a chimney stack of concrete block. The centrality of fireplace and chimney, both structurally and psychologically, is reminiscent of the use of these elements in the 19th-Century American house.

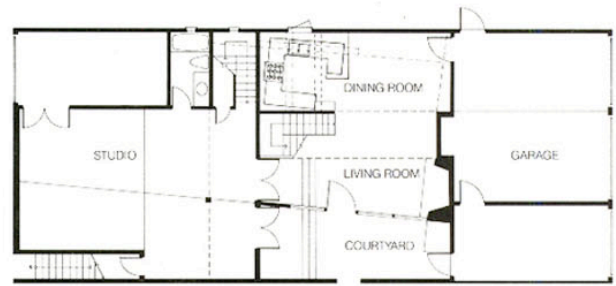
Solar techniques dictated the treatment of light. Heat loss through the glass curtain wall, for example, is offset by the solar gain in the concrete floor. But reliance on solar energy hardly diminishes the pleasure that architects Hertz and Rendler have taken in exploiting



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

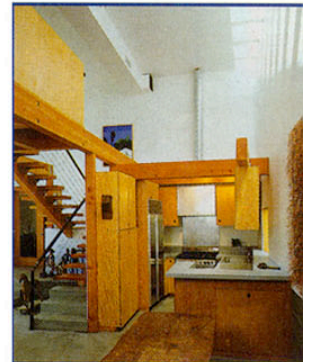


SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

N ← 20/6m



the behavior of light. Sunlight has a "surface active" role in the house, raking across the walls and making the house a giant sundial. Constantly shifting shadows indicate the movement of time. The play of light and shadow is one of many polarities explored in the house; themes of open versus closed, public versus private, and work versus leisure also appear. In the end, it is an internal dialogue; in a harsh urban environment, the house offers an added sense of refuge. Says Hertz, "It's a monastic house." **Morris Newman** ■

The author, a former real estate editor of the Los Angeles Business Journal, is a freelance writer in Los Angeles.

Project: Venable Studio, Venice, California.

Architects: David Hertz and Michael Rendler (Kim Colin, Stacy Fong, James Meraz, Eric Ruffing, Nelsen Valentine, assistants).

Client: Susan Venable.

Site: a 40' x 100' lot among homes and apartment houses near the Pacific Ocean.

Program: an artist's studio, work room, and presentation gallery, with living space and a rental unit, totaling 3804 sq ft.

Structural system: wood-frame and stucco walls; truss joist upper floors; masonry fireplace.

Major materials: raw stucco exterior, trowel-burned concrete slab floor, board-formed exposed concrete, concrete block, Douglas fir doors and windows, plywood cabinets, exposed 6" x 12" fir beams, galvanized sheet metal, rusted steel, Syndecrete lightweight concrete countertops, sinks, shower stalls.

Mechanical system: forced air.
Consultants: Syndesis and Susan Venable, landscape and interiors; Michael Rendler and Gordon Polon structural; Computer Aide and Michael Rendler, mechanical.
Contractor: Robert Halderman.
Costs: \$300,000.
Photos: Tom Bonner.

At the center of the living room is a set of stairs (above left) with Douglas fir treads, steel T-section handrails, and plate steel balusters. Behind the stairs is the kitchen (top) with Douglas fir plywood cabinets. A wedge-shaped skylight throws light shadows on the east wall. The countertops (above) are made of "Syndecrete," a special concrete developed by Hertz, who claims the material has twice the strength and half the weight of conventional concrete. The material also holds pigment well.

