

...about the tracking
...of the building
...in 1938
...the building
...is still standing.



When design historian John Stuart Gordon first saw the vacant A. Conger Goodyear House in Old Westbury, a wealthy community on the North Shore of Long Island, New York, an unexpected impulse struck him: "I realized that I wanted to buy the place."

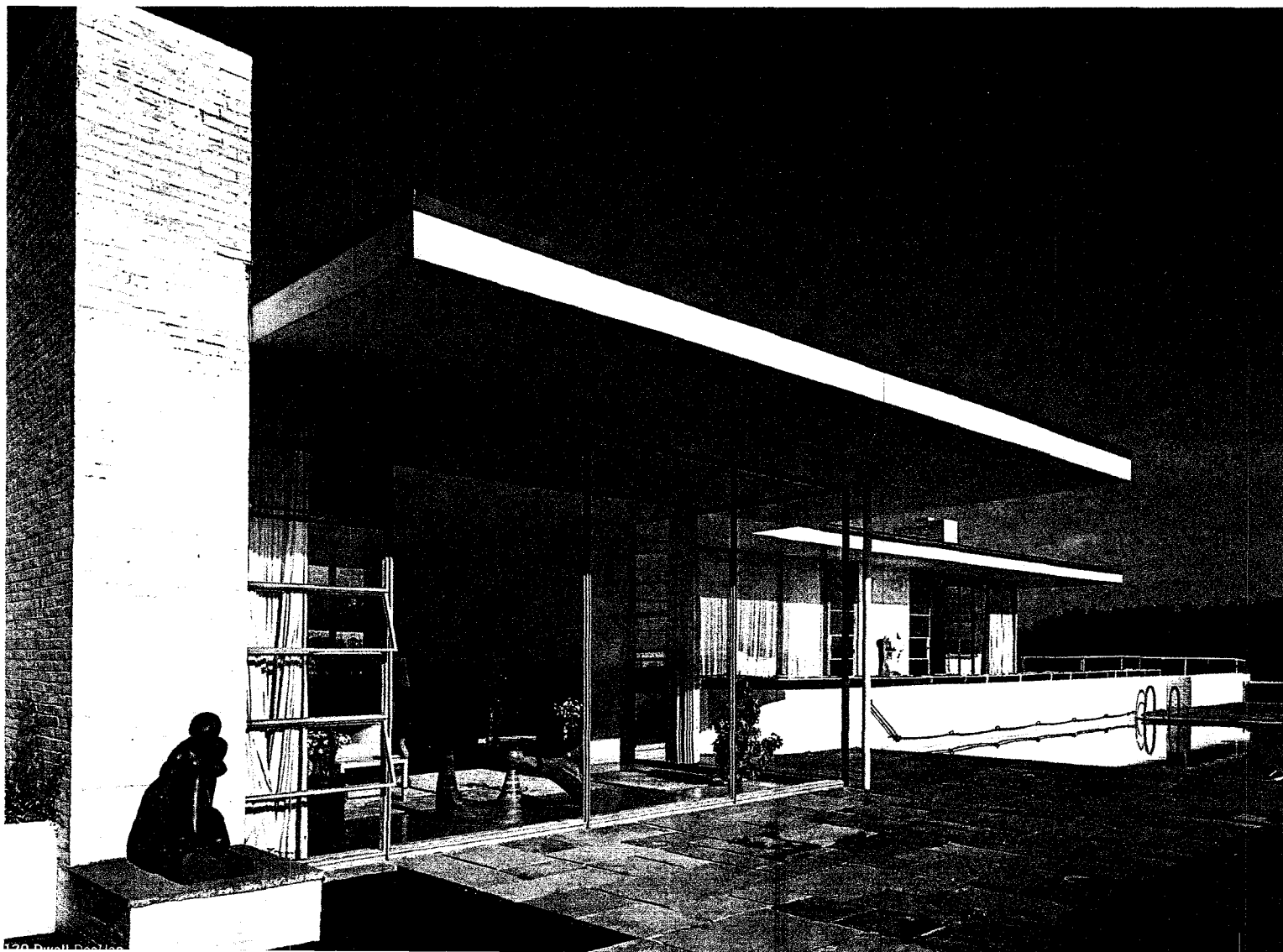
The house, designed by 20th-century American modernist Edward Durell Stone, had been empty since the late 1990s. Yet Gordon, who had first become interested in Stone through a study of an early collaborator, the interior and industrial designer Donald Deskey, could immediately see himself living there. "I remember looking at a large space and thinking, What a place to hang paintings! Then I found out that the room had been designed as the house's art gallery." For Gordon (and many others) it is exactly this transparency of purpose that marks Stone's genius as a domestic modernist. As Gordon now puts it, "His intentions are so clear you don't need to anticipate them."

In the end Gordon decided that the house was not a

responsibility he could take on. But his reaction remains testament to an unexpected aspect of a man whom some have criticized as a remote, elitist presence in American architecture. By turns famous and infamous for his jewel-like approach to decoration and interior detailing, Stone and his oeuvre are undergoing a dramatic reappraisal, with his works both celebrated and reviled, restored and under immediate threat of demolition.

The Goodyear House's recent history encapsulates both extremes. Built in 1938 for a lumber industrialist and art collector who also served as the first president of the Museum of Modern Art from 1929 to 1939, the house is a remarkable balancing act between the austerity of the then-developing high modernism of Mies van der Rohe and the warm, site-oriented romantic functionalism of earlier American masters like Frank Lloyd Wright.

Stone's respect for both men was perhaps to be expected of any bright young architect of the day seeking to expand his international experience. Less ▶



Stone drew an easy influence to his work, creating spaces that were as exciting as Mies's and as warm as Wright's.

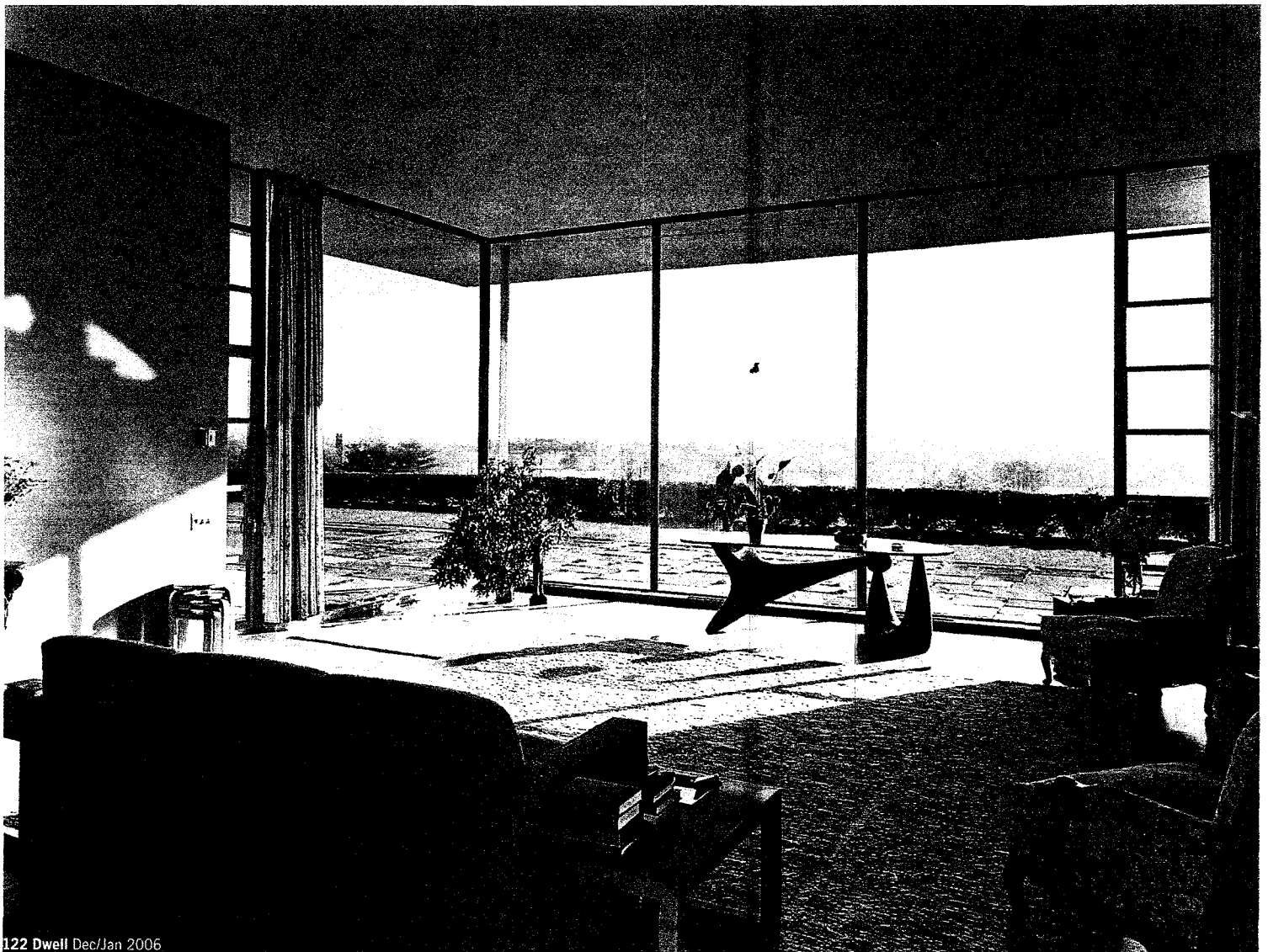
expected is the complete mastery with which Stone pulled off a melding of these two thematic approaches. Though widely held to be in complete and irrevocable opposition, he combined them with a willingness to indulge in luxury and convenience that seems classically American.

The house incorporates the gliding surfaces, glass walls, and diamantine detailing of Mies with a low-slung plan that features the wide overhangs and patio-like informality of Wright's best Oak Park houses. The result is something at once complex and uncluttered, spectral and earthy, a structure as precise as a Baroque minuet though still nothing less than a home.

And so it remained until the 1970s, when the Goodyear family donated the house and its 100-acre estate to the New York Institute of Technology for use by the school's president. However fitting the recipient may have seemed, the school sold the property in 1997 for development. In 2001, the house was slated for demoli-

tion by the buyers, the Wheatley Construction Company, whose Wheatley Farms subdivision had already gobbled up most of the original grounds.

Alerted to the situation, the World Monuments Fund (WMF), which had just listed the building as an endangered site of international significance, worked to preserve the house with the help of Philip K. Howard, chairman of the Municipal Art Society of New York. A last-minute call to the mayor of Old Westbury delayed demolition just long enough for the WMF and the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, along with the Barnett Newman Foundation, to enter into a partnership to purchase, maintain, and restore the house until a buyer could be found. That buyer was located this July, and the Goodyear House, now under a covenant that protects it inside and out, has at last been recognized as a seminal work of a 20th-century aesthetic too often overlooked in the seemingly unending zombie march of tract homes. ▶



Ten Things You Should Know About Edward Durell Stone



1 / Edward Durell Stone was born into one of the founding families of Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1902.

2 / Stone received five honorary degrees but never graduated from college. He attended the University of Arkansas and took classes at Harvard but notably failed "Theory of Building Construction."

3 / From 1930 to 1932, Stone worked under the direction of Associated Architects at Rockefeller Center, on Radio City Music Hall and Center Theater.

4 / In 1933 he designed the Richard H. Mandel House in Bedford Hills, New York, with Donald Deskey. The house was unique in its design and collaborative effort.

5 / During World War II Stone was a major in the U.S. Army, serving as chief of planning and design for the Army Air Corps.

6 / When he entered private practice again, Stone returned to what he called his "hair shirt period," using natural woods and stone and very much looking to Frank Lloyd Wright, who became a close lifelong friend.

7 / Stone's big break came in the '50s, when he was asked to design the American

embassy in New Delhi, India (1956 to 1959), and the United States Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. It was during this period that he created his own aesthetic, combining modernism with elements of neo-classicism, regionalism, and decoration.

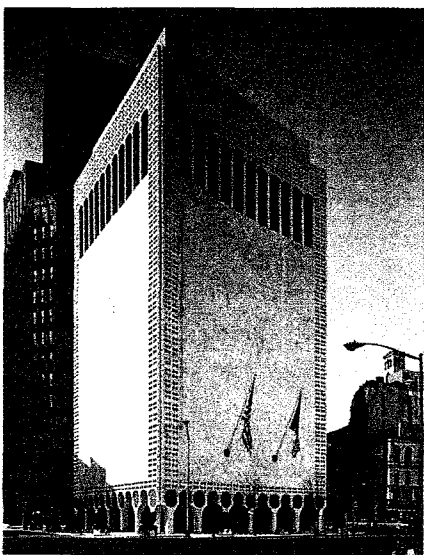
8 / Stone had three wives—Orlean, Maria, and Violet—whom he married in 1931, 1954, and 1972, respectively. Maria is the most closely identified with Stone's professional life, and it has been suggested that her tastes paved the way for Stone's experiments with decorative elements. Frank Lloyd Wright, speaking of the New Delhi embassy, said that it should be called the "Taj Maria."

9 / Stone's later works include the building at 2 Columbus Circle (1964), originally the Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art. The building's current owner, the Museum of Arts & Design, plans to reconstruct the façade and do interior work. The new design for the museum is by Allied Works Architects along with Handel Architects.

10 / Stone's last major commissions include the Standard Oil Building (1974; now the Aon Center), Chicago's second-tallest building, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. (1971). Stone died in 1978. ■



John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts



2 Columbus Circle

