

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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# Louis Kahn Remembered

The Architect's Inspired Korman House Is Restored in Pennsylvania

Restoration Architecture by  
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**L**OUIS KAHN WAS WELL known for his monumental civic and institutional architecture that combined a profound poetic sensibility with a strict use of geometry and materials. The open court of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, framing the Pacific Ocean; the magical light of the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas; and the great library at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire come to mind as some of the best examples of his work.

Kahn designed houses only reluctantly, and the Korman House in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, was no exception. The client, Steven Korman, a home builder near

**ABOVE:** Considered Louis Kahn's finest residential project, the cypress-clad Korman House, in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, was completed in 1973, just before his death.

Philadelphia, asked Kahn five times before he accepted the commission. Kahn was over 70 and in the midst of the construction of the National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This was his last house, and it is a masterpiece that synthesized many of the themes of his career: the creation of space with structure and light, the clear distinction between materials, and a deep sense of order. Steven Kor-



Eastern light floods the living room, in which oak-framed windows overlook fields at the rear of the house. Harriet Pattison did the landscaping. The oil is by Elaine Kurtz. Steinway piano. Dolma carpet. Armani Casa table.



The house is an elegant series of sturdily built pavilions of wood and glass, at once a rustic camp and a half-timbered house.

ly rolling meadow and forest, the Korman House is a model of rigorous restraint that enhances one's experience of the beauty of the site.

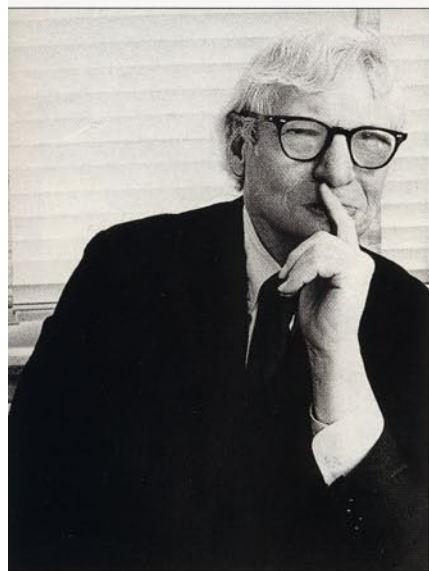
Kahn spoke mysteriously about architecture, often using such gnomic utterances as “silence and light” or a “treasury of shadows” or asking what or where a brick wanted to be. His work was thoroughly modern but based on classical principles of symmetry and proportion. As with Palladio's buildings, the simplicity of his architecture was

animated through the changing light and seasons, and, like minimalist sculpture, the forms shifted as one walked around them in space.

Recently restored by Joan Pierpoline, of studio IntraMuros, and redecorated by Nicholas Cardone, with perfectly scaled and toned furniture, the house is radiant once again.

It is set in a vast open field, surrounded by forest, that for Kahn recalled the “African savanna.” This Serengeti on the Main Line was a metaphor of

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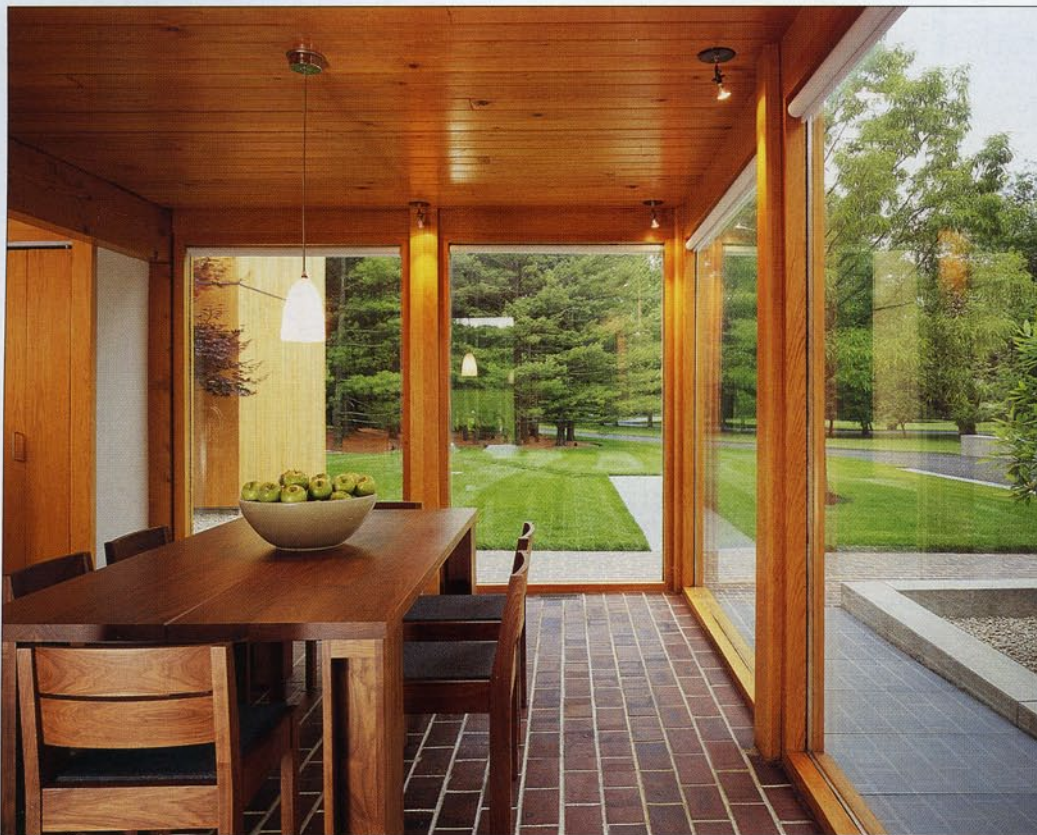


man explains that he admired Kahn's work for its simplicity, desiring a house that had integrity without ostentation. Korman had three sons, and today his eldest, Larry, and his wife, Korin, live in the house that Larry was raised in. In contrast to the typical McMansion that could have been built on the 80 acres of gent-



Built for Steven Korman, his wife and their three children, the residence was designed by Kahn to reflect the family's needs. ABOVE LEFT: The balcony off the master bedroom.

FAR LEFT: A 1971 Hans Namuth portrait of Kahn. LEFT: The dining room expresses Kahn's interest in using distinctive materials and exploring both order and asymmetry.



**LEFT:** For the breakfast area in the kitchen, Kahn created an intimate, low-ceilinged pavilion that—in a principal theme of his architecture—connects to the environment.

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his chosen task to distill architecture to its essence, imagining the house as a primal shelter. Kahn spoke of the room as the beginning of architecture, and the Korman House is an

elegant series of sturdily built pavilions of wood and glass, at once a rustic camp and a half-timbered house set between three enormous fireplaces.

One approaches the house down a long curving driveway,

with a glimpse of what appear to be three wooden towers rising between the trees to greet the visitor. Through the kitchen breakfast pavilion are views of the field beyond. Kahn's love of materials is immedi-

ately evident in the cypress walls, oak windows and Douglas fir columns and beams that frame the house.

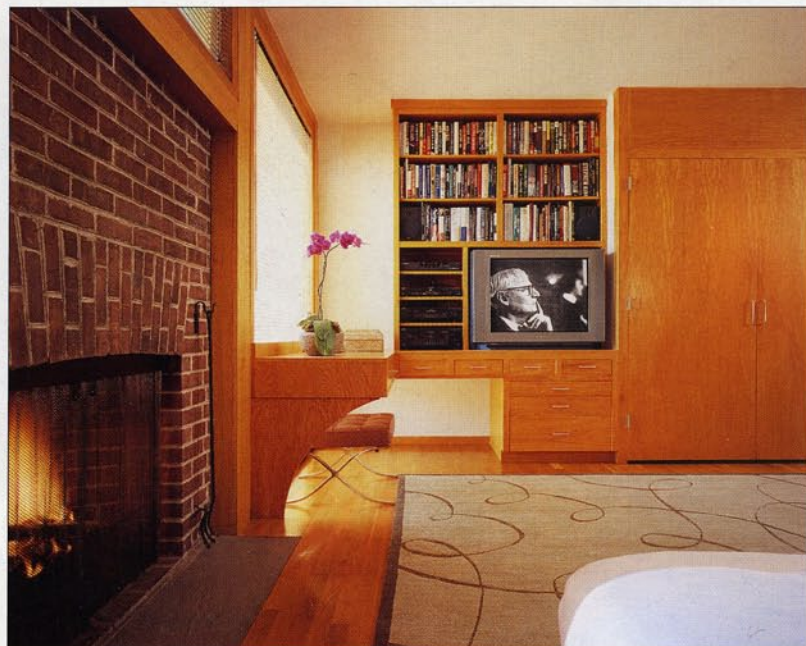
To the left of the vestibule, the light of the meadow dramatically pulls one into the double-height great room that embraces both the living and dining areas, separated by a low oak partition and anchored on both sides by large brick fireplaces. The dining area is a room within a room, an inglenook that is more of a cave from which to view the distant horizon of the forest edge. Walls are wood or plaster set within structural frames of fir. Great architecture always holds surprises, and Kahn does not disappoint: Both fireplaces are off-center. One can

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**ABOVE:** The central, freestanding fir-and-oak stair leads from the entrance hall to the five bedrooms. Views of the pool and the tennis court can be seen from the landings.

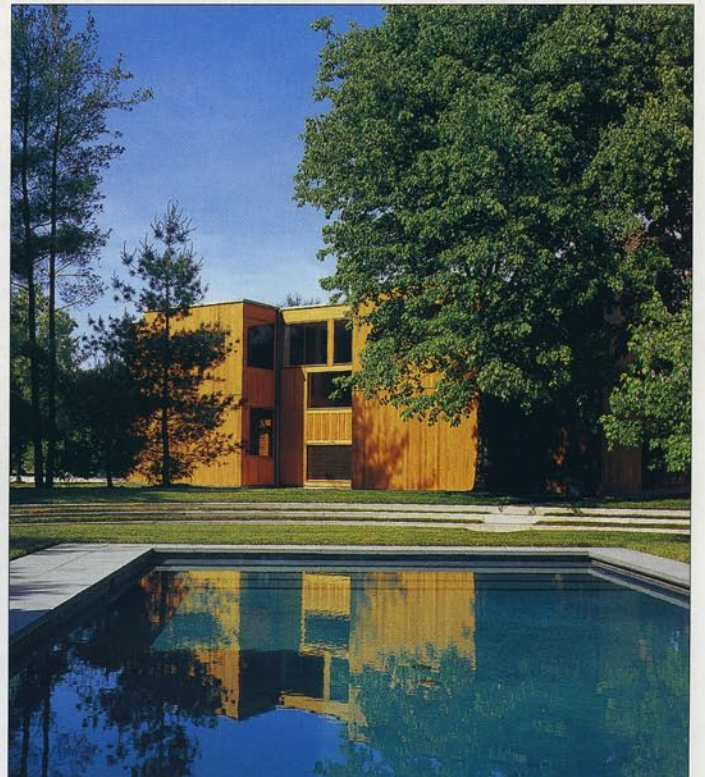
Joan Pierpoline, of studio IntraMuros, completed the restoration of the 6,600-square-foot house. **RIGHT:** The master bedroom. Tufenkian Tibetan carpet.





**ABOVE:** On the northeast façade, the articulated chimneys soar over the gridded wood structure, in contrast to the more horizontal frame. The sculpture is by Paul Sisko.

**RIGHT:** Three elongated, arching steps separate the southwest “block” of the house, containing the bedrooms and the central stair, from the swimming pool.



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sit in the inglenook to enjoy the fire, while the large-scale fireplaces illuminate and warm the entire great room. Kahn and landscape architect Harriet Pattison brought the lawn directly up to the large panes of glass that create immediacy to the meadow, a literal extension of the interior.

At the heart of the house is a magnificently detailed fir-and-oak stair that gives the Shakers a run for their money. Due to its marvelous scale and materiality, and because it has numerous places

to stand and linger, it became the family center, rather than a stair simply to run up and down. Upstairs are four modest bedrooms and a master bedroom whose focus is another huge fireplace that is set back to lighten its mass and allow for views of the outside. Alongside is a small balcony under a wooden trellis that looks out over the fields and forest. From this perch, one can imagine a lion or a hyena emerging from the savanna, confident of the security provided by this house so firmly rooted in the earth. □