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Spaces for Arts,
Crafts and
All Manner of Creativity

Spring Home Design

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Spaces for Arts, Crafts and All Manner of Creativity

By Sarah Booth Conroy

ARTISTS live in a garret on a carrot, according to the old rhyme. But then the garret likely has a spectacular north-facing window as well as a skylight. And the carrot is probably stir-fried in sweet butter.

Taste is a gift generally bestowed on all the senses of those fortunate enough to possess it. So it seems worthwhile to consider what artists' home studios can teach us about design as a sensual experience.

More people are working at home today at some sort of creative production, the modern equivalent of cottage industry. Part-time, full-time, the reasons for working at home are many. Much creative work takes privacy to keep from frightening away the muse. In families with small children, it often seems essential to have at least one adult at home. But most of all, the home workers can set their hours to suit their own internal rhythms, choose their dress for comfort and economy, and design their working space to please their own eye for beauty.

In the artist's eye, the first necessity in a house, as in a painting or sculpture, is space—both sideways and up and down. You don't have to be an artist to realize that space in a house is the ultimate luxury, the most exhilarating of all visual experiences.

The most expansive space of all is vertical, space to make the spirit soar. The two-story room is great drama, especially when you've entered from a low-ceilinged hall. Combine that height with a window that stretches from ground to sky, and you will feel as though you own the whole world and the sun and moon as well.

With professional advice, most houses can go up in search of space.

Space is where you find it. Painter Lowell Nesbitt found his space in a police stable in New York. He cut out the center of the building to let the space soar from

a swimming pool on the first floor to the skylight and roof garden on top. Sculptor Louise Nevelson carved hers out of an old doctor's clinic with garages adjacent. Nesbitt and Nevelson both live and work all over the house.

In Washington, carriage houses or garages are the prime sources of studio space. Often the coachman left behind plumbing and electricity. The city's large detached houses, a rare commodity in big cities, and older rowhouses often have tall, comically angled attics, big basements (the best are the so-called English with half their space above ground), or back bedrooms. Real prizes are the sunrooms, sleeping porches or simply back porches that can provide sun-lit areas adaptable to all sorts of projects from plants to pottery to painting.

The ultimate, of course, is to call in an architect and have him design a studio addition or—best of all—a whole studio-house.

Space is the most difficult commodity to add. Far easier are light and color. Even rented space can sometimes be redeemed with these necessary luxuries. Take down the curtains and pull up the venetian blinds. Paint the walls white and hang great gobs of color against them, fabrics, objects, pictures. Use photographic lights for spotlights to dramatize your favorite things, art works or antiques. Even doors can be painted or (if the landlord objects) slipcovered with fabric and staples. Paint a stripe or even a mural on a staircase, angels on the ceiling, or clouds above your bed.

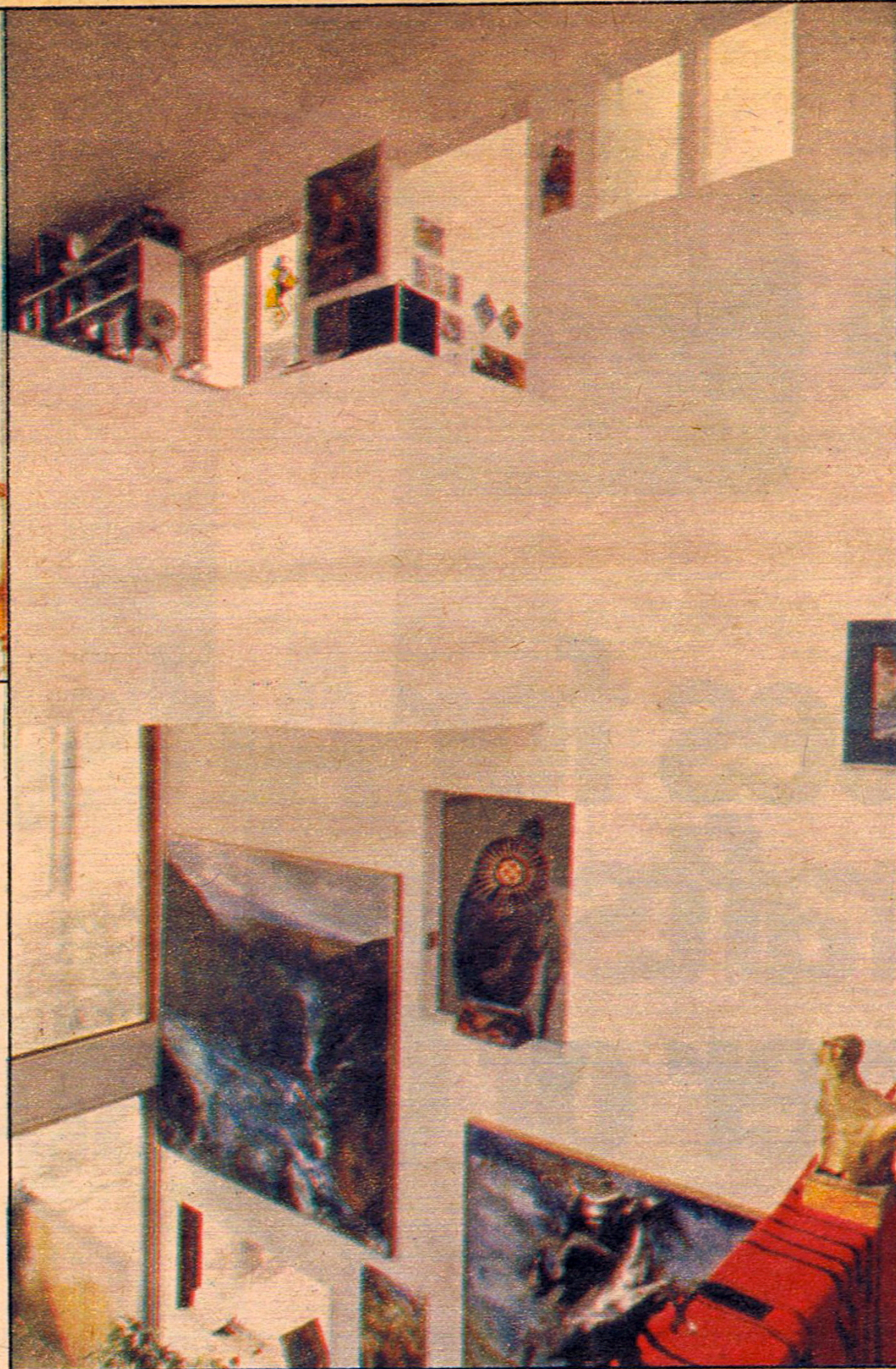
Kerstin and Reginald Pollack live in a tower surrounded by twenty acres of Virginia woods. The house is a sort of wooden sculpture, designed by Dickson Carroll, who is as much an artist as an architect.

The Pollacks discovered the house while it was being built by its owner, Antonio Vega (who lives nearby), and pitched in their help to finish it up.

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The visitor parks precariously on the hillside among Pollack's new work, which catches and reflects the sunlight. The sculpture hangs from trees, perches on tree stumps, crouches on the ground.

The entry courtyard is a massive deck, as large as a floor of the house. The visitor passes from there into the house through a rather low, almost dark hall. Suddenly then the house throws suspicion to the sky and shouts a welcome with an ascending space that rises three stories high.

There are no rooms as such, only volumes. To the north is the kitchen with a wide low window stretching along the wide counter. The kitchen and the dining areas are only one story high. The center of the great room soars all the way up to the roof, more than twenty-four feet above. Overhanging on the north is an interior balcony for the bedroom on the second level. On the south Pollack's third-level studio cantilevers out, overhanging to

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1. Kerstin Pollack's bedside table and dressing area, arranged as a collage.

2. Reginald Pollack's studio as seen from the bedroom.

3. The great room with plants, dining table, a real turtle shell, Mexican rugs, an altarpiece and a fireplace which doesn't work too well.

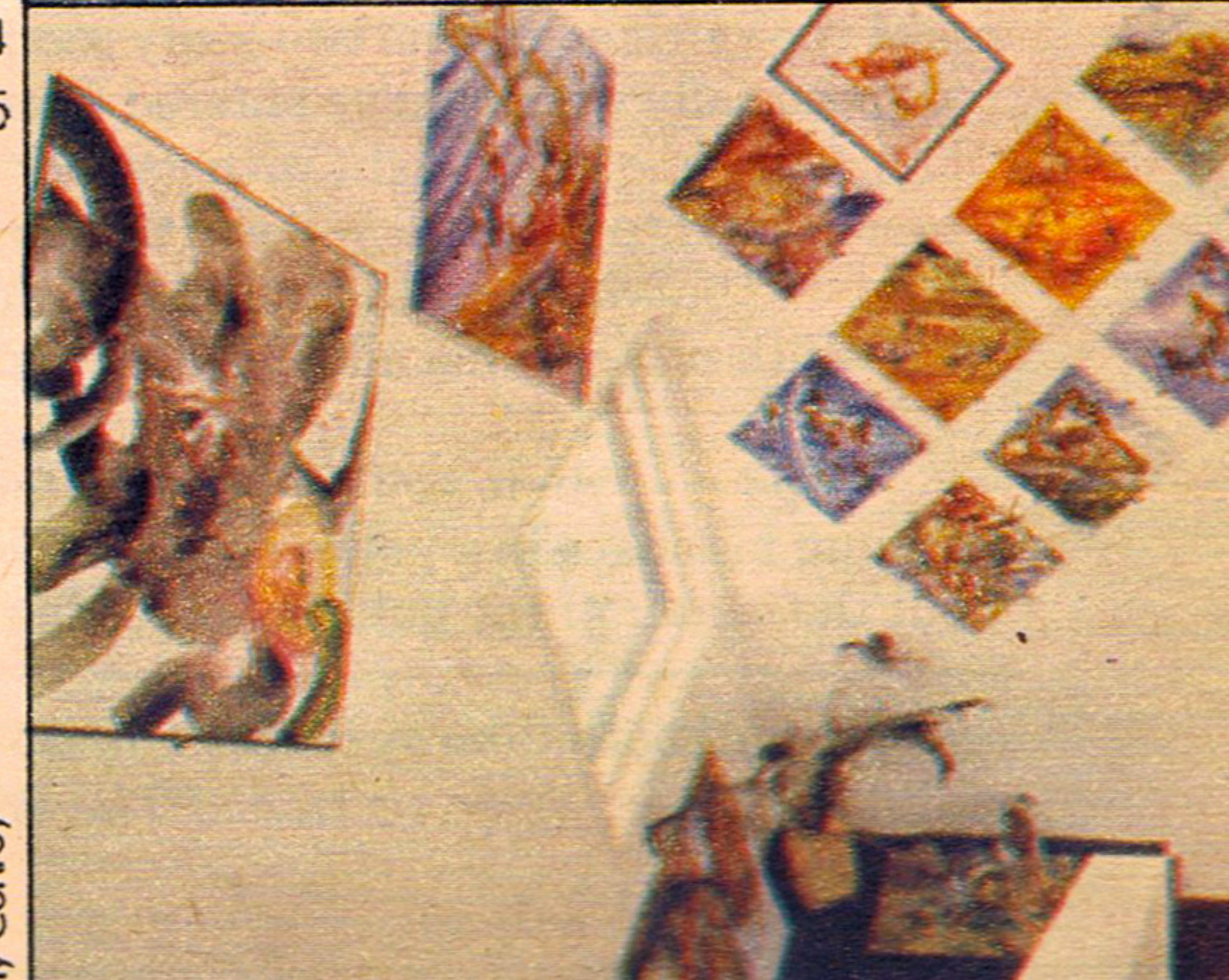
4. Pollack arranges his paintings to make a geometric design on the staircase.

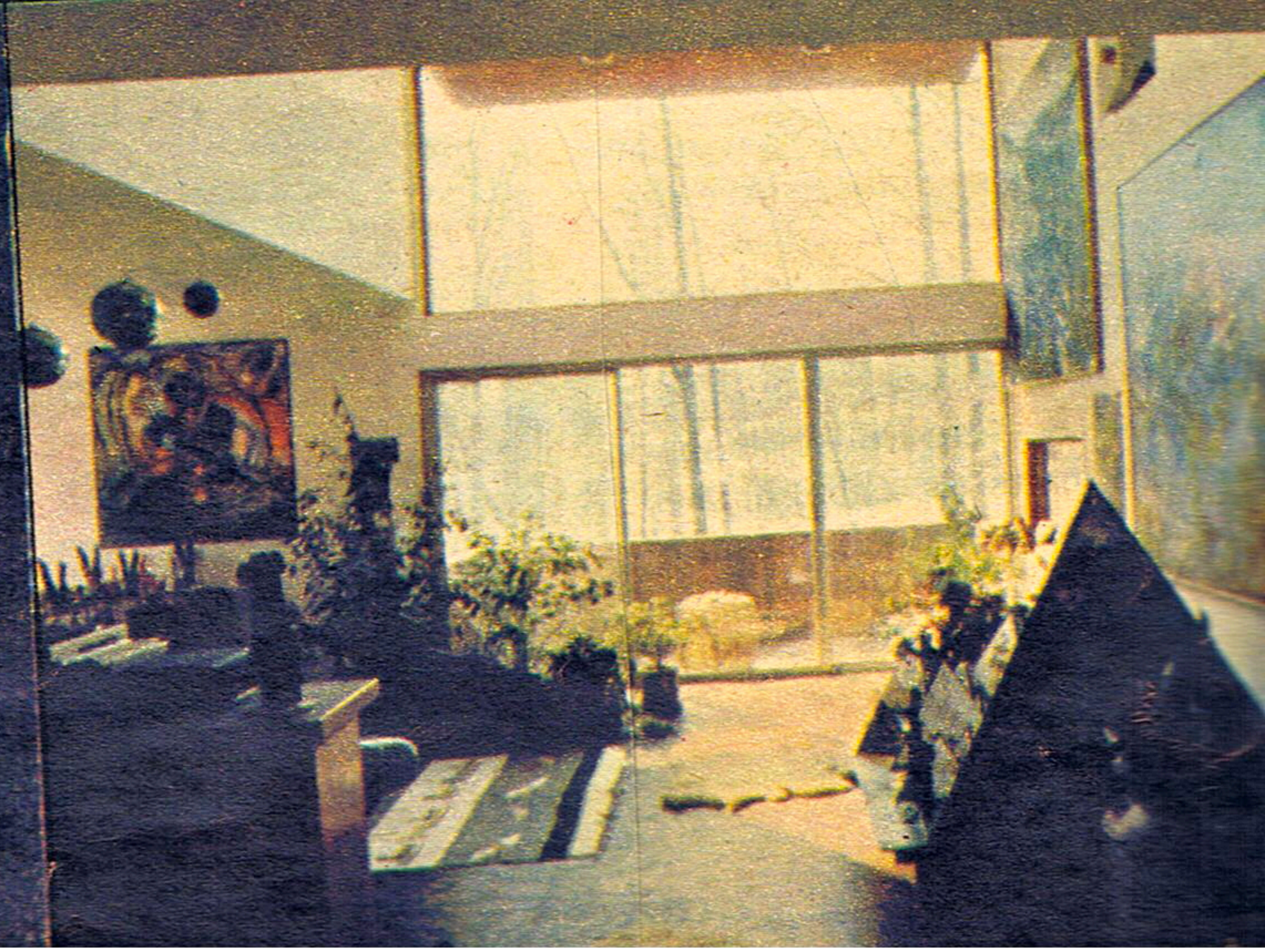
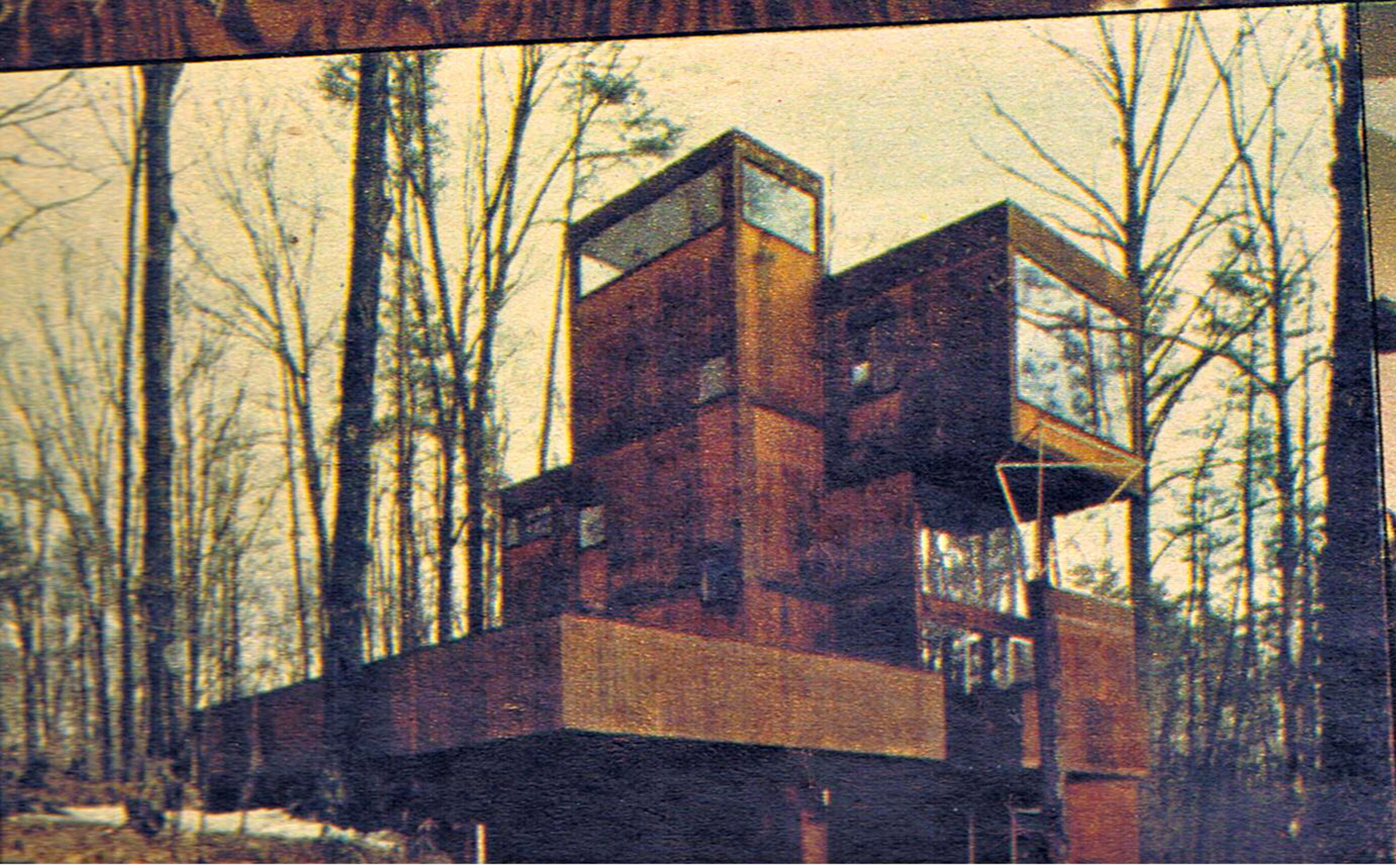
5. The multi-level house, like building boxes carefully stacked, is an architectural sculpture by Dickson Carroll.

6. The principal room, looking south through a maze of Christmas tree balls and three-dimensional painting/sculptures.

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protect the big living room windows and deck. Below the main floor, in a daylight basement quite separate, is another Pollack workroom.

Kerstin Pollack works as assistant secretary of the National Academy of Engineering. Reginald Pollack will show his new paintings April 4-29 at Jack Rasmussen Gallery, 313 G St. NW.

The large glass areas, oriented east and south, bring in so much heat that the heating bills have not been high.

The Pollacks treat the whole house as a sort of giant collage. Most of the floor space, and all the walls are taken up with Pollack's remarkable outpouring of work. As a consequence there are few formal places to sit: a two-person black furry sprawler-lounge in the kitchen and chairs that go around the tables in the kitchen and dining room.

The Pollacks helped burn in the grain and then lacquer the plywood floor on the main floor. Across one wall is a platform that now serves as a dais for Pollack's smaller three-dimensional pieces. Sometimes it is a bed or a Japanese dining table. Mexican rugs and serapes and English supersized Christmas balls hang from the balconies.

In the bedroom area, Kerstin Pollack hangs her pocketbooks and belts as though they were art objects and arranges small chests of

drawers with bits of beauty such as a fine fabric rose sticking out.

Above a kitchen window is an arrangement of old cooking tools, baskets, animal skull and horns, pretty olive oil tins, a chain of beads, and a bread sculpture. Kerstin Pollack, a cook famous among her friends for her native Scandinavian specialties, says, "Everything has a place. That's the way to live in this sort of house."

Reginald Pollack loves to work at home, with only the deer and rabbits for distraction. In times past Pollack has made art of laser beams, theatrical productions, books and food. Here, at home with his wife, he has made an art object of a house.