NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: William L. Slayton House

other names:

2. Location

street & number: 3411 Ordway Street, NW ☐ not for publication

city or town: Washington ☐ vicinity

state: District of Columbia code DC county: _____ code 001 20016

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

DAVID MALONEY — 6-13-2008
Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
- ☒ entered in the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper: Patrick Andrus — Date of Action: 10/2/2008

Slayton House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single-family residence

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single-family residence

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern/International Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
Glass
roof Reinforced Concrete
other Plastic Skylight; Brick Chimney;
Aluminum Entrance Canopy; Brick
Garden Wall

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- **X** **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)
Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1960

Significant Dates 1960 construction completion date

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder Ieoh Ming Pei, architect
Kellog Wong, Pei's project architect and
Thomas Wright, local architect
Sam Epstein of James Construction, builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- **X** Other –.Property Owner

Name of repository:

Slayton House
Name of Property)

Washington, D.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 6,876 square feet (0.16 acres)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	320816	4311785	3			
2				4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sally Berk and Peter Sefton

Organization _____ date February 2008

street & number 2214 Wyoming Avenue, NW telephone 202 783-7546

city or town Washington, DC state _____ zip code 20008

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Danny Snyder and Tommy Breit

street & number 3411 Ordway Street, NW telephone 202-237-5560

city or town Washington state DC zip code 20008

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Description Summary:

The Slayton House was designed by world-renowned architect I.M. Pei in the International Style and is located in the Cleveland Park Historic District of Washington, DC. Completed in 1960, its triple-vault, poured-in-place concrete roof is its most distinguishing feature. The front and rear elevations are all glass, resulting in a house that is largely transparent. The side walls are made of pale red brick. The foundation is concrete. It is a simple, formally geometric house, containing seven rooms and encompassing 3,030 square feet on three levels (excluding basement). Typical of a Pei building, it is meticulously detailed, described by Benjamin Forgey, past architecture critic of the *Washington Post* as "...a little jewel, a walled split-level home defined by three long concrete vaults. It is at once compact and spacious, airy and enclosed, elegant and innovative."[1]

General Description:

The house that was built for Mr. & Mrs. William L. Slayton at 3411 Ordway Street, NW in the Cleveland Park Historic District of Washington, DC was designed in 1958 by the much-celebrated architect Ieoh Ming Pei and completed in 1960. The most prominent feature of this International Style house is its triple-barrel-vault poured-in-place concrete roof, visible above a seven-foot high garden wall that all but hides the remainder of the mostly-transparent house from the street. The garden wall is set 18 feet back from the public sidewalk, providing a landscape area as foreground to the rigorously-geometric scheme that is symmetrical in both plan and façade. The roof is supported by a series of brick walls, some embedded in the walls. The foundation is concrete.

EXTERIOR

The lot is approximately 50 feet in width and 135 feet in length for a total land area of 6,876 square feet or 0.16 acres. There is a difference in grade of 14 feet at the highest point near the street and the lowest point near the alley. This steeply-sloping lot readily accommodates a split-level plan that places the main entrance on grade at street level and the kitchen, dining room, and bedrooms at the rear; the kitchen and dining room a half-level below the main one and the bedrooms a half-level above. The house is 30 feet in width, 50.5 feet in length, and encompasses 2, 165 square feet, excluding the basement. As counterpoint to the rigorous symmetry, the entry is to the side, approached via a concrete sidewalk along the eastern edge of the property. The sidewalk is four feet wide and scored every three feet.

The front (south) and rear (north) elevations are almost transparent. The façade is one story, divided into three nine-foot wide by thirteen-foot high windows topped by concrete arches and separated by brick piers that are 12 inches wide and 2.5 feet in depth. The piers are the same width as the exterior walls, both of which are visible on, and contribute to, the façade composition. The brick piers are predominantly on the exterior of the

[1] Forgey, Benjamin. "The D.C. Pei List: Losses and Gains: Role, Results Are Mixed Beyond the Mall," The Washington Post, Sunday, October 5, 2003.

glass façade, thereby supporting the concrete vaults beyond the plane of glass, and providing a shade to the living room during summer.

At the base of the three arched façade windows are eight-foot tall sliding-glass doors, each composed of two panes and each with sliding screen doors. Two feet above the doors the springing of the concrete arch begins and the arch continues for another three feet for a total height of 13 feet at the center of the arches. The arches extend .5 feet above the roof creating a slight parapet that hides the roofing material. The doors open onto an enclosed front garden 30 feet in width and 33.3 feet in depth. There is a sundial in the garden that contains the remains of William and Mary Slayton.

The house is mostly opaque on the east and west where the walls are constructed of red brick with baked-in silicone salts that produce a rose tone and that are laid in common bond. These walls are 10.5 feet in height and are topped by a two-foot high flat frieze of concrete that is plastered and painted white. The simple, planar walls are almost identical, each punctured only twice; the eastern wall by the ground-level entrance and a second-floor bathroom oculus; the western wall by a frosted window identical in arrangement and dimensions to the entrance and an oculus identical to the one on the eastern wall. The entrance is a simple tri-partite arrangement composed of an aluminum framed frosted glass door four feet wide by 7.5 feet high; a flat, tempered-glass canopy the same width as the door; and a transom three feet in height. The oculus is two feet in diameter.

The rear elevation is two stories in height. The ground floor consists of three nine-foot wide and eight-foot high sliding glass doors with two panes in each window (identical to those on the façade). These doors open onto a patio. At the upper (bedroom) level there are three nine-foot wide windows that are seven feet in height at the springing of the arches and ten feet at the center of the arches. The bedroom windows are each a single, stabile pane the base of which is composed of two two-foot-high sliding panels. These have sliding screens.

Brick piers, 12 inches in width and 2.5 feet in depth, extend through the two stories, from the ground to the springing of the concrete arches. As on the façade, the piers are predominantly on the exterior of the windows, thus supporting the concrete vaults beyond the face of the glass and providing some shade to the windows. The levels are separated by one-foot-high wood spandrels that are set between the piers. The rear patio, which is 5.5 feet below the main entrance and accessed via a flight of nine steps, is 30 feet in width, 15 feet in depth, and paved with unfilled, honed travertine pavers, 12 inches wide and 24 inches long. The patio now continues the plane of the interior floor, replacing the original poured-in-place concrete squares that were located about 10 inches below the level of the interior floor. A three-foot wide green space extends the patio which is terminated by an 18 inch high brick wall. The property then descends another 10 feet to the alley which is accessed by a staircase of 21 steps.

The plan is a simple one, based on three ten-foot-wide modules that extend for the width of the house. Along the length of the house there are three zones that, from front to back, are: the first (or main or living room) level that is 21.3 feet in length; a service zone that is 8.25 feet in length; and a two-story zone at the rear that is 21.3 feet in length. This rear zone contains the bedrooms and library on the upper level and the kitchen, dining room, and family room on the lower level. Additionally, there is a basement under the main level that extends the entire length of the living room. The service zone contains the staircase, as well as the two bathrooms on the bedroom level, and on the lower level a bathroom to one side of the staircase and the kitchen pantry to the other side.[2] The plan is an efficient one with minimal space allocated to hallway.

Finish materials include exposed face brick walls in the living room and upper stair landing; gypsum plaster walls in the bedrooms, dining room, family room, and kitchen. The vaulted ceilings – in the living room and three bedrooms – are concrete that has been plastered and painted. The ceilings in the other rooms are gypsum plaster.

In 2002, the current owners conducted a major renovation to upgrade the systems and replace worn materials. With the exclusion of the repaving of the rear patio, no changes were made to the exterior and only minimal alterations to the interior. These changes have not compromised the original design. They include:

- Removal of a wood bookcase on the main level;[3]
- Removal of living room bar to allow for expansion of the master bathroom;
- Removal of the wall that separated the center, and smallest, bedroom from the hallway thereby creating a library and a view through the house;
- Addition of bookshelves for the new library;
- Renovation of three bathrooms, including enlargement of the master bath was enlarged;
- Reconfiguration of bedroom closets including removal of the laundry room now located in the basement;
- Replacement of wall-to-wall carpet in some rooms and vinyl asbestos tile in others w/travertine floors;[4]
- Replacement of plastic-lamenated kitchen counters with Corian;
- Replacement of the breakfast area with a counter in order to the enlarge kitchen.

The living room is 30 feet in width, 21.3 feet in length, and 13 feet in height. This space includes an entry, 5.5 feet in width by 9.5 feet in length, which is differentiated from the living room by a fireplace that opens into the living room. The fireplace is nine feet in length, 2.75 feet in depth, and seven feet in height, clearing the peak of the ceiling by six feet. The fireplace is topped by a single pane of frosted glass below which that are lights that shine on the underside of the vault. Rather than abutting the adjacent wall, the fireplace is separated from it by a three inch reveal. There is a 9.5 foot long coat closet which opens into the entry.

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[2] The main, upper, and lower levels each contain 639 square feet. The service zone contains 247.5 square feet.
[3] The bookcase is stored in the house for possible reinstallation.
[4] It was Pei's intention to pave all the floors with travertine. See Statement of Significance.

With the exception of the fireplace, the living room is one uninterrupted expanse. Originally, however, there was a wooden bookcase that separated the living room from the westernmost module. This module was used as a study. The bookcase -- which is 9.5 feet in length, 1.25 feet in depth, and five feet in height and which had up-lights at both ends -- was removed during renovation when the second-floor library was created.

From the living room, a five-foot-wide dog-leg stair in the center of the house gives access to the lower level, one half-flight (nine steps) below the living room, and to the bedroom level one half-flight (six steps) above the living room. The staircase is separated from the walls by a three inch reveal. The wrought-iron railing is composed of simple square balusters, one for each step. Over the second-floor landing there is a vaulted plexiglass skylight which was originally lit from above by roof-mounted down-lights. There are brick grills in the walls to either side of the staircase. The eastern one now functions as the return for the heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning system.

The lower level contains the kitchen in the eastern module, the dining room in the center module, and a family room with full bathroom in the western module, all of which have direct access to the rear patio. The dining room is entered directly from the stairs. The den and kitchen are entered from the dining room. The vinyl-asbestos tile floor was replaced with the same travertine that has been used throughout the house and on the patios. The white plastic laminate countertops were replaced with white Corian. Cabinets that separated the kitchen from the breakfast room were replaced with a cantilevered Corian breakfast counter. The original birch cabinet doors, however, were saved and refinished. The original 30" counter depth was maintained.

The upper level, which is supported on wood joists, originally contained a bedroom in each of the three modules. Since renovation, there is a bedroom in each of the end modules.[5] The center and smallest bedroom was deleted by removing the wall that separated it from the hallway in order to create a library. The two library walls consist of egg-crate book shelves, a signature of Hugh Newell Jacobsen, the renovation architect. The creation of the upper-level library, the most significant alteration to the house, resulted in a dynamic visual axis that extends from the exterior of the façade to the rear elevation.

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[5] The original laundry room was in the eastern-most module. Its removal provided more space for the second bedroom.

Summary Statement of Significance:

The William L. Slayton House, 3411 Ordway Street, NW, Washington, DC, is one of only three houses known to have been designed by world renowned architect Ieoh Ming Pei. The others are his own in Katonah, NY (1954) and the Tandy House in Ft Worth, TX (1969). Pei, primarily a corporate architect, but best known for municipal buildings and art museums, consented in 1959 to design a house for his friend and colleague. Slayton, who served as Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration's Housing and Home Finance Agency during the Kennedy administration, and who enjoyed architecture as an avocation, worked in close collaboration with the Pei firm in the design of his house. The current owners, in 2002, conducted a major renovation of the house under the supervision of architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, winner of numerous national awards for residential design.

With its triple-barrel-vault poured-in-place concrete roof and a transparency rarely found in urban settings, the Slayton House, located in the Cleveland Park Historic District, is blatantly distinct from its late-19th and early-20th-century neighbors. At the time of its completion in 1960, the Slayton House was one of the few private residences in Washington, DC to have been designed in the International Style. Five years after its completion, it was one of only a dozen or so private residences of contemporary design to be recognized in A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C. Because the transparency of the house unites interior and exterior, and because the volumetric aspect of the simple interior is critical to its significance, this nomination includes the house interior.

The Slayton House is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C and Criteria Consideration G (less than 50 years of age) as an elegant and assured example of a Modernist residence in Washington, D.C. and one of only three single-family houses designed by the world-renowned architect I.M. Pei. The Slayton House "embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction" and "represents the work of a master," and "possesses high artistic value." The Period of Significance for the Slayton House is 1960, the year the house was completed.

Resource History and Historic Context: 1. The Project

The Slayton House, a most individual project, owes its existence to a collaboration of spirit between two seemingly dissimilar men.

I.M. Pei and William L. Slayton met in the mid-1950s while working on urban renewal projects in the office of New York developer William Zeckendorf. Pei was then Director of Architecture and Slayton was vice-president in charge of the redevelopment of Washington's Southwest Urban Renewal Area, the largest project in Zeckendorf's office at that time. When, in 1958, Slayton asked Pei to design a house for him, Pei found it difficult to decline.[6] Pei's acceptance, however, was conditional. According to Slayton's memoirs, "...on Ieoh Ming's and my next flight together, I asked him if he would design us a house...He said he would be honored...but that I had to understand that it would have a major design

[6] Purnell, Marshall. Interview, 20 February 2006 and 25 March 2006.

feature that would be expensive."[7] And thus Washington, D.C. became the beneficiary of the rare triple-vault house and the rarer still Pei-designed residence.

2. The Architect: Ieoh Ming Pei

Ieoh Ming Pei, a worldly and world-renowned architect, has been wildly successful in both the art and business worlds. In the public mind the name "I.M. Pei" symbolizes the architectural profession to an extent rivaled only by "Frank Lloyd Wright."

Born in the Canton province of China in 1917, Pei descended from a long line of prominent merchants. His father was a banker who rose to become director of the Bank of China and governor of the Central Bank.[8] His mother was a Buddhist poet and musician, whom young Ieoh Ming accompanied on meditation retreats.[9]

Pei's family owned the Garden of the Lion Forest, among the most noted of the world-famous traditional gardens in his ancestral city of Suzhou.[10] Pei's childhood surroundings of gardens, courtyards, and walled villas made vivid impressions which became lifelong influences.

Pei's life changed dramatically at the age of ten when his family moved to Hong Kong and later Shanghai, where his father became manager of the Bank of China. During the late 1920s, Shanghai was experiencing a massive construction boom which produced many western-style buildings. The young Pei is said to have been especially intrigued by the construction of the city's skyscrapers.[11] As a high school student, he lived in the house of his grandfather, who was known as 'the King of Pigments' for his paint and dye business.[12] Designed by a French architect, the house was a nineteenth century western-style mansion to which the Pei family added traditional Chinese design elements.[13] Pei had fond enough feelings for the house and enough appreciation for its historic significance that in 2001 he protested its impending demolition for a park to government officials.[14]

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[7] Slayton, William L. Vignettes, unpublished memoir, 1990-1994, p. 247.

[8] Sixty years later, Pei's firm designed the Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong, completed 1989. Pei, Cobb, Freed, and Partners. October 2004-present. http://www.pcfandp.com

[9] Wiseman, Carter, I.M. Pei, A Profile in American Architecture, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1990. p. 32.

[10] Marino,Gigi."I'm Still Here" in Technology Review (May/June 2007). Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Cambridge, MA. Online at http://www.technologyreview.com/article/18689/page1/. p. 2. See also "Lion Forest Garden" at http://www.szszl.com/ENGLISH/intro.htm for more detail about the history of the garden.

[11] Wiseman. p. 34.

[12] Tian Tian. "I. M. Pei's Family Estate". The Shanghai Star. (March 15, 2001) online at http://app1.chinadaily.com.cn/star/2001/0315/fo5-1.html contains details about Pei's grandfather and his house.

[13] Movius, Lisa. "History Condemned :The I. M. Pei House" in China Now: Shanghai online at http://www.movius.us/articles/chinanow/peihouse.html

[14] Hewitt, Duncan. "Architect Tries to Save Family Home" in BBC News (March 19, 2001) online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1229421.stm

In 1935, at his father's urging, Pei entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There, at a professor's urging, he soon switched from engineering to the architecture program.[15] During his first year, he met the person he considers to have had the greatest influence on his work. In Pei's words,

> Le Corbusier's three books were my bible. They were the only thing I could rely on to see anything new in architecture. I cannot forget Le Corbusier's visit to MIT in November 1935, dressed in black, with his thick glasses. The two days with Le Corbusier, or "Corbu" as we used to call him, were probably the most important days in my architectural education."[16]

In 1940, the newly-graduated Pei, disenchanted with the conservative MIT architectural curriculum, enrolled at Harvard University for graduate work. With Walter Gropius as the newly-appointed dean and Marcel Breuer as a professor, Harvard was the only architectural school in America following the Bauhaus regime.[17] After spending two wartime years "figuring out how to annihilate Japanese villages"[18] for the National Defense Research Committee, Pei received a master's degree in 1945. At Breuer's request, Pei remained at Harvard as an assistant professor. During this period, he executed just one commission, the large King Wei textile machinery plant near Hangchow China,[19] and his destiny seemed an academic life. Then, to the astonishment of his colleagues, he was enticed into big city real estate development by William Zeckendorf, New York developer extraordinaire.

Zeckendorf (1905-1976) was the most flamboyant and highly-publicized real estate operator of his era. Emerging from obscurity with whirlwind high-wire transactions during World War II, the New York-based Zeckendorf became sole owner of the Webb & Knapp realty firm and in a few brief years built a nationwide empire that at its height included 20,000 apartments, 10,000,000 square feet of office space, 8,000 hotel rooms, and a myriad of other holdings.[20] The Webb & Knapp firm eventually came to include financial, construction, and design departments.

Although Zeckendorf constructed utilitarian parking garages, banal apartment complexes, and bland office buildings, the brash developer was also a visionary who had developed a love of architecture. By 1948, determined to become the patron of "the greatest unknown architect in the country," Zeckendorf consulted patron of the arts Nelson Rockefeller, who set in motion a search process which resulted in Zeckendorf meeting Pei. So impressed was the tycoon that he offered the young professor a job on the spot, putting into practice his belief that "...it was about time the modern Medici began hiring the modern Michelangelos and da Vincis."[21]

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[15] Between 1964 and 1984, Pei designed five buildings for M.I.T. See Wiseman. p. 66-67.
[16] von Boehm, Gero. Conversations with I.M. Pei, Light is the Key. Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2000, p. 36.
[17] According to Pei's fellow student John Johansen as expressed at the symposium, "Out of the Harvard Box," held at the Harvard Graduate School of Design on 11 October 2006, "Harvard had undergone a revolution (with Gropius as dean and Breuer as a professor)...all other schools were still Beaux Arts".
[18] Von Eckardt, Wolf, "The Architect Who Understands Social and Visual Dynamics," The Washington Post, Washington, DC. May 14, 1978, p. F1-2..
[19] "Realty Co. Hires Architect". The New York Times. New York, NY. September 12, 1948. p. R8.
[20] Wiseman. p. 47.
[21] Von Eckardt, The Washington Post, May 14, 1978, p F2.

A New York Times article announced Pei's hiring as Webb & Knapp's first in-house architect in September 1948.[22] Shortly after being hired, Pei designed the "Helix", a spiral apartment tower with terraced individual units that could easily be contracted or expanded to split levels by shifting interior walls. Although never built, the Helix' innovative design won Pei his first personal publicity[23] and attracted the attention of Le Corbusier.[24]

The first Pei design that was executed by Webb & Knapp was a three story Miesian office building in Atlanta.[25] His first major project was a massive shopping center at Roosevelt Field on Long Island.[26] While these were under construction, Zeckendorf commenced plans for the Mile High Center commercial complex in Denver, which was erected in the mid-1950s.[27] The Mile High Center was followed in 1956 by Pei's plan for Southwest Washington - known as the Zeckendorf Plan - which included the Town Center Apartment Towers, Pei's first project erected in the nation's capital. With this project, Zeckendorf launched a series of urban renewal projects in cities across the county: Chicago, Hartford, Long Island, Manhattan, Montreal, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.[28] These massive projects provided Pei the opportunity to work on large-scale planning and design projects. He has credited Zeckendorf with "teaching me everything about evaluating a piece of land. I never looked at one the same way again."[29]

By the late 1950s, Pei was overseeing an architectural staff of seventy, including such notables as Henry Cobb, James Freed, and Araldo Cossutta.[30] However, Pei - whose energy, efficiency, diplomacy, and urbanity had contributed significantly to Zeckendorf's successful competitions for large-scale projects - was frustrated by the amount of time he was forced to devote to administrative matters rather than actual design.[31] Webb & Knapp's massive projects left Pei little room for self-expression through outside projects. Pei found that his reputation as a developer's "in house designer" limited his ability to attract the type of world-class projects that he sought. Frank Lloyd Wright, then approaching the end of his life, is quoted as making especially caustic remarks about Pei's connection to Zeckendorf.[32]

In 1955, Pei and his handpicked team of architects had begun to be referred to as "I.M. Pei and Associates".[33] The firm separated amicably from Webb & Knapp in 1960, but to continued work on Zeckendorf's projects.[34]

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[22] "Realty Co. Hires Architect". The New York Times. (September 12, 1948). p. R8
[23] Interestingly, among those who praised Pei's design was Edgar J. Kaufmann, Jr., former Wright pupil, Museum of Modern Art adviser, and son of the family that commissioned Fallingwater, who cited the Helix in a New York Times photo-feature in February 1950. See Kaufmann Jr., Edgar."Light, Space, Air" The New York Times. February 5, 1950. p.157.
[24] Wiseman. p. 51-52.
[25] Ibid. p. 52.
[26] "Webb & Knapp Buys Roosevelt Field for Light Industry and Retail". The New York Times August 8, 1950. p.18.
[27] Wiseman. p. 57-58. Also see. "Offices in Denver Will Open July 1". The New York Times. May 9, 1954. p. R10.
[28] See "Pei, Cobb, Freed, and Partners Official Website. "List of Projects. On line at http://www.pcfandp.com/a.html .
[29] Wiseman, p.69.
[30] Wiseman. p. 69. On April 2, 1950, the New York Times reported on Webb & Knapp's growing architectural staff, directed by I.M. Pei, "consultant architect on special projects", in "Webb & Knapp Expands" p. 193.
[31] Wiseman, p. 69.
[32] Von Eckhardt. The Washington Post. May 14, 1978. p. F1.
[33] Wiseman p. 62.

Now known as I.M Pei and Partners, their first major project was the acclaimed National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) Headquarters at Boulder, CO (1961-1967). This was followed by the Newhouse Communication Center (1961-1964) and the Everson Museum (1968) in Syracuse, the National Airlines terminal (1970, later the TWA terminal annex) at Kennedy Airport, and a series of fifty Federal Aviation Administration control towers.[35] With such projects as the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library (1964-1979), the John Hancock Tower (1966-1976), and Dallas City Hall (1967-1977), Pei ascended to the top of his profession.

The protracted controversies that surrounded two of these projects might have destroyed a lesser architect. That these problems were resolved, and the buildings ultimately recognized as classics, is a testimonial to Pei's patience and political acumen in resolving what could have been monumental debacles. The Kennedy Library commission was awarded to the relatively unknown Pei over the most famous architects in the world. Its construction was delayed for years by opposition from elements of the Cambridge community. The project proceeded only after the selection of a new site on the Dorchester waterfront and according to a new design by Pei.[36] Concurrently, Pei and Partners' glass-clad John Hancock Tower on Copley Square became notorious for showering the surrounding sidewalks with broken glass in high winds. The firm faced ruin from the publicity surrounding several major lawsuits and only through diligent research were they able to resolve the problem with structural reinforcement and re-glazing with another type of glass.[37] These experiences were training for the ferocious campaign against the selection of a non-French citizen to renovate and design an addition to the Louvre (1983-1993).

In the face of these crises, Pei commenced three projects in Washington. The first was L'Enfant Plaza/10th Street Mall (1960-1973), intended as the centerpiece of the Southwest Redevelopment Area. Next, with Araldo Cossutta as project architect, was the remarkable Third Church of Christ, Scientist (1968-1971), Sixteenth and I Streets NW.[38] The East Building of the National Gallery of Art (1968-1978), an international icon that is recognized as a work of art on a scale with the masterpieces it houses, became Pei's penultimate achievement in the nation's capital.

Pei's firm is credited with more than two hundred planning and design projects in twenty-eight countries. The designs encompass a vast array of building types including residential, scholastic, religious, municipal, health-related, and cultural. Among the most noted projects are:

University Plaza, New York University, NY, NY (1967)
Christian Science Center, Boston, MA (1970)
Robert F. Kennedy Gravesite, Arlington National Cemetery, VA (1971)

[34] Ibid. p. 70.
[35] Ibid. p 94-95.
[36] Ibid. p. 102-104, 113-114.
[37] Ibid. p 148-153.
[38] See DC Inventory of Historic Sites. Application for Historic Landmark: Third Church of Christ, Scientist filed November 19, 1991 by Committee of 100 on the Federal City and the DC Preservation League. The church was designated a historic landmark on December 6, 2007.

Tête de la Défense, Paris (Design completed 1971)
Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation Centre, Singapore (1976)
Museum of Fine Arts, West Wing and addition, Boston, MA (1981-1986)
Fragrant Hill Hotel, Beijing (1982)
Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, NY, NY (1986)
Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center (1989)
Bank of China, Hong Kong (1989)
Carillon Tower, Shiga (1990)
Le Grand Louvre, renovation and additions (1989 and 1993)[39]

In 1990, Pei retired from his firm to pursue projects of personal interest, including the Four Seasons Hotel, Manhattan (1993), the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland (1995), and the Miho Museum, Kyoto (1996). He has designed a dozen other museums, including one for his ancestral city of Suzhou (2006).

In 1983, Pei was awarded the esteemed Pritzker Prize for Architecture. The citation perhaps best summarizes his career:

> Ieoh Ming Pei has given this century some of its most beautiful interior spaces and exterior forms. Yet the significance of his work goes far beyond that. His concern has always been the surroundings in which his buildings rise...His tact and patience have enabled him to draw together peoples of disparate interests and disciplines to create a harmonious environment.
>
> He has refused to limit himself to a narrow range of architectural problems. His work over the past forty years includes not only palaces of industry, government and culture, but also moderate and low income housing. His versatility and skill in the use of materials approach the level of poetry.[40]

3. The Client: William L. Slayton

During a varied and vastly interesting career as a planner, urban renewal specialist, and corporate executive, William L. (Bill) Slayton collected a coterie of architects, planners, urbanists, and real-estate agents with whom he frequently lunched (and imbibed) at downtown Washington restaurants. After his retirement in 1983, Slayton regularized the practice of lunching to three or four times a week, tagging his merry men (and there were only men) "The Slayton Irregulars." Years after his death, this group continues to meet regularly and most have fond memories of not only Slayton but the house where he entertained often. Donald Myer, Assistant Secretary of the United States Commission of Fine Arts from 1970 until 1997, says of the house, "One of the few spectacular, architecturally significant houses that, with its original builder/owner, was part of my life."[41]

Slayton (1916-1999) born in Topeka, Kansas, began his career in the political arena. His first job after graduating in 1940 with a BA from the University of Chicago was as secretary to alderman Paul H. Douglas, a democrat

[39] See "Pei, Cobb, Freed, and Partners Official Website. "List of Projects. On line at http://www.pcfandp.com/a.html
[40] http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/glk?http://www.pritzkerprize.com/pei.htm
[41] Myer, Donald Beekman. Interview, 27 February 2006.

who later became a senator from Illinois. The following year, he married Mary Prichard and together they had two daughters, Mary Elizabeth and Barbara Jean. After receiving a master's degree in public administration from the University of Chicago, Slayton went on to a series of jobs in planning and urban renewal. From 1944-1947, he was an analyst for the Milwaukee Planning Commission. From 1948-1950, he was associate director of the Chicago Urban Redevelopment Study, where he helped produce a two-volume seminal work on the topic. In 1950, he was field representative in the Division of Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment for the Housing and Home Finance Agency in Washington, DC. Less than a year later, he left the public sector for the non-profit National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, serving for five years as associate director.[42]

His first and only job in development came in 1955 when offered the position of vice-president of Webb & Knapp, the real-estate company owned by William Zeckendorf. Slayton was a logical choice for Zeckendorf who had two years earlier won the contract to redevelop 500 acres in Washington's Southwest Urban Renewal Area.[43] It was in Zeckendorf's office that Slayton met I.M. Pei who had been the in-house architect since 1948.

Unfortunately, the project in Southwest Washington was fraught with problems. Surrounded by massive bureaucracy and financing difficulties, it contributed in the late 1950s to the decline of Zeckendorf's empire. After Pei separated amicably from Zeckendorf in 1960, he hired Slayton as his urban renewal consultant. Slayton later credited his affiliation with Pei and the other architects in his firm for his heightened understanding and appreciation of architecture. "Being made a partner of I.M. Pei and Associates and working hand in glove with Ieoh Ming, Harry Weese, Harry Cobb, Araldo Cossutta, and other architects and planners in...Southwest Washington, Society Hill in Philadelphia, Lower Hill in Pittsburgh, Hyde Park in Chicago, Golden Gateway in San Francisco...was an exhilarating experience."[44]

During the year that Slayton was in Pei's employ, he awaited confirmation of the job that was to give him national recognition. In 1961, President Kennedy appointed him Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration, a position he held until 1966. While Commissioner, Slayton instituted regulations requiring redevelopment agencies to ensure that adequate relocation housing was available; implemented rules to combat racial discrimination in relocation housing; and stiffened building enforcement codes in urban renewal agencies.[45] He also promoted historic preservation within the urban renewal areas. As a result, there is now a law that permits the use of federal urban renewal funds to move historic houses that cannot be preserved in their original location.[46] And, having worked with several of the country's best architects, Slayton promoted

[42] Kennedy, John F., Presidential Library and Museum. http://www.jfklibrary.org/fa_slayton.html visited April 16, 2006.
[43] Wiseman, p. 57.
[44] Slayton, p. 247.
[45] Levy, Claudia, "William Slayton Dies, Urban Renewal Pioneer," The Washington Post, August 10, 1999.
[46] Von Eckardt, Wolf, "A Historic House Snatched from the Jaws of Bulldozers," The Washington Post, November 6, 1966, p. G9.

good design for urban renewal projects.[47] He is counted among those Kennedy appointees who were responsible for a new awareness of aesthetic responsibility.[48]

From 1966-1969 Slayton worked for Urban America, Inc, and while there created the National Urban Coalition. A year later, he moved to the American Institute of Architects where he remained until 1977, serving as executive vice-president, supervising the construction of the new AIA headquarters, and instituting a program of equitable hiring in architectural practice.[49]

In 1978, Slayton received yet another political appointment when he became Deputy Assistant to the Secretary of State for Foreign Buildings, responsible for the design and construction of embassies and other federal facilities abroad. During his tenure, chanceries were built in Cairo, Lisbon, Kuala Lumpur, Sri Lanka, Moscow, and elsewhere.[50] This job – his final one - lasted a few years into the Reagan administration, ending in 1983. In retirement, he returned to the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials where he had worked more than thirty years earlier, to do part-time consulting work.[51]

Slayton's affiliations included serving as treasurer of the Potomac Institute, chairman of the National Housing Research Council, and as a board member of the Washington Planning and Housing Association, the local chapter of Lambda Alpha International, the National Housing Council, and Arena Stage. His honors included the highest award of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials and an honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects.[52] Suffering from macular degeneration in his later years, he became director of the Washington Ear, which provides recordings to the visually impaired.[53]

In 1999, after almost sixty years of marriage, both Slaytons died – Bill in August and Mary in September. At Bill's memorial service, held at the Slayton House, Pei spoke of their long friendship, of the projects on which they had collaborated, and of Slayton's passion for architecture.[54] Like Pei, Slayton was highly intelligent, energetic, productive, suave, and a bon vivant. It was only logical that they should have been life-long friends and, together, to have produced an architectural tour-de-force.

4. Creating the Slayton House

[47] Von Eckardt, Wolf, "FHA Seeks Better Home Design," The Washington Post, January 19, 1964, p G8
[48] ."Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture." Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space, June 1, 1962.
[49] Purnell, Marshall. Interview, 20 February 2006 and 25 March 2006.
[50] During Slayton's appointment, the United States Embassy in Paris was renovated by Hugh Newell Jacobsen who, decades later, renovated the Slayton House.
[51] Maffin, Constance and Robert. Interview, 26 February 2006.
[52] Myer. Interview, 27 February 2006.
[53] Levy. The Washington Post. August 10, 1999.
[54] Ellison, James. Interview 20 August 2006.

When Slayton approached Pei to design his house, he, his wife, and two daughters were living in a small rambler in Kensington, Maryland. The commute to his office in Southwest Washington convinced Slayton that he should move into the city.[55] After conducting an exhaustive search and rejecting the cookie-cutter Colonial Revival houses that dominated the market, the Slaytons realized that, to have the house they wanted, they would have to build it.

Mary Slayton did most of the shopping for a vacant lot, seeking Pei's opinion during his visits to Washington to supervise the project in Southwest. Pei was dissatisfied with most of the lots he was shown. On at least one occasion, it was the context rather than the lot itself that dissuaded Pei. As Slayton described I, the lot:

> ...was fairly large, sloping, and overlooking the reservoir...the houses on the street—large brick ramblers, designed by builders, absent any redeemable architectural features. [Pei remarked] "Here I feel the heavy hand of conformity. I can't build you the kind of house you want here."[56]

However, Pei was interested by a lot they showed him in Cleveland Park. While its 45-degree slope to the rear and adjacent houses discouraged the Slaytons, Pei, after ascertaining that Cleveland Park was, indeed, the neighborhood in which the Slaytons wanted to live, remarked "I can build you any kind of a house here. This is the lot you should buy."[57]

Pei interviewed the Slaytons at great length about their requirements and desires for the house. As Bill Slayton wrote in his memoirs:

> It became quite clear to me that I wanted a major area for entertaining...a house designed for entertaining would be a great asset in Washington...we accepted the trade-off of smaller bedrooms for a larger living room...we wanted a room that could serve as a guest room as well as a family room...it took a good many hours of discussion with Ieoh Ming to bring this out...

"We did [the design] on the backs of envelopes," Pei said, "traveling from city to city."[58] Pei appointed Kellogg Wong, a young, newly-arrived associate, to manage the project.[59] After considering seven schemes, Pei, Wong, and Slayton settled on the simple *parti* of three ten-foot wide modules topped by barrel vaults. While Pei has demurred in accepting credit for the design of the house and, in fact, accords credit to Wong and Slayton, there

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[55] It is likely that Slayton was also motivated to move to the city by the belief that residency in Washington would be good for his career.
[56] Slayton. p. 247.
[57] Ibid. p. 249.
[58] Cannell, Michael. I.M. Pei, Mandarin of Modernism. New York: Carol Southern Books, 1975.
[59] Born and raised in Rosedale, Mississippi, Kellogg Wong was just 31 years old when he became project manager on the Slayton House. Holder of an undergraduate degree in architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a masters degree from Cranbrook Academy, he came to Pei after two years in Houston working for an architect/engineering firm and remained with Pei and Associates for more than forty years, working on projects both domestic and international.

is no question that Pei was the designer.[60] As Slayton wrote, "Pei provided the original drawings on the triple-arch design...and we liked it (sic)."[61]

Pei's legendary attention to detail is illustrated by the number of iterations the elegantly simple design passed through. Wong has provided seven sketches from among the several dozens that were produced during the schematic phase of the project. The first was a hard-line drawing by Wong depicting a five-bay scheme that would have necessitated 6-foot wide bays, an impractical approach. Succeeding free-hand sketches are all by Pei (see Continuation Sheets).

The sketch of the façade shows the three-bay scheme indicating that Pei had contemplated placing the entrance in the western bay of the façade. An elevational sketch drawing of the east façade demonstrates the separation of public and private spaces; what Breuer called the bi-nuclear house plan. Interestingly, in this early plan, the front portion of the house, i.e. the living room, was taller than the rear portion. A fourth sketch, which is also an elevational drawing of the east facade, shows the roofs of both front and rear as the same height but the link between these two elements, what later became the entrance and may well have been intended as such in the sketch, has a lower roof. As executed, the roof has a single height, further reinforcing the simplicity of the design.

A fifth sketch is a plan for the ground floor that would have combined the dining room, kitchen, and family room into a single space. This scheme would not have provided the guest bedroom that Slayton claimed he needed for his parents. In response, the plan was modified to provide a separate family room. Eventually, the dining room, kitchen, and family room all became discrete spaces, reinforcing the over-arching tri-partite scheme. A sixth sketch is a plan that would have placed the master bedroom on the main floor next to the living room in order to separate the parents' bedroom from those of the children. This scheme, according to Wong, was quickly abandoned in favor of a clearer distinction between public and private spaces. The last sketch is a plan of the bedroom floor as finally executed.

Although Slayton, Pei, and Wong were in frequent contact while design and construction proceeded, it was necessary to enlist yet a third architect in the project. Tommy Wright, a local architect and close friend of Slayton, was retained to supervise the day-to-day operations, to adjust the design and engineering to satisfy

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[60] The mystery of Pei's refusal to accept credit for the design of the Slayton House was resolved during an interview with him at the National Building Museum on 17 January 2008. The interview was part of a talk by Barry Bergdoll, architecture curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, that was presented in conjunction with the exhibit "Marcel Breuer: Design and Architecture." Pei, who had been both student and close personal friend of Breuer, repeatedly stated that Breuer had made a big mistake in accepting commissions – of which there were approximately sixty – to design houses "As a result," said, Pei, "he became known as a residential architect. Some of his houses during that period are among the most pedestrian of his designs." It was evident that the career path of his friend was one that Pei, early in his career, had determined not to follow.
The exhibit on Breuer's work further elucidates Pei's contention that Breuer had made a mistake in accepting house commissions. The exhibit demonstrates that the larger, usually cultural or religious, buildings that Breuer designed were far more innovative than the houses and, in fact, were ground-breaking in their use of concrete.

[61] Slayton. p. 255.

requirements peculiar to Washington, and to follow the construction through to completion.[62] The fact that he had a team of architects motivated Slayton to brag that he had "a Wright architect and a Wong architect."[63] Because Slayton believed that it is "desirable to have a house that has a private formal garden" in an urban neighborhood, Pei designed a walled garden that would separate the house from the street. To "permit the lack of interruption of the wall and gardens in the front," Pei gave the house a side entrance.[64] However, recently adopted zoning regulations required a detached house to have a minimum side-yard setback of eight feet. If even this minimum clearance were maintained on one side, Slayton's house would be too close to the opposite lot line for convenient access to the side entrance. Narrowing the house would have created rooms with less than what Slayton called the "essential minimum" ten-foot width. Furthermore, Pei could not have compromised the width of his repeating vaults, without sacrificing the soaring living room ceiling that gives a monumental quality to a modestly-sized house. According to Slayton, Pei therefore suggested sliding the entire house two feet west. Armed with an architectural model and plot map, Slayton appeared before the Board of Zoning Adjustment on November 19, 1958 and obtained a variance permitting him to build with a west side yard just six feet wide.[65]

The narrow lot dictated a compact house, one in sharp contrast to not only the more commodious neighboring houses but also to most contemporaneous Modern houses, which were usually one-story and sprawling. The

[62] According to Slayton's friend Jim Ellison, "Tom Wright was one of Bill's closest friends and at that time served as the legal conduit for Pei's practice of architecture in the District of Columbia". However, he adds, "The design and detailing of the house was all Pei".

Wright (1919-2006) was yet another of the fascinating characters associated with the Slayton House. Born at the Grand Hotel in Rome, where his mother had started a branch of the American Red Cross, Wright spent most of his life in Washington, DC. He received a BArch from Harvard in 1941 and an MArch from Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1950. During a practice that spanned almost a half-century, he designed private residences, public housing, detention facilities, schools, restaurants, and – probably as a result of his affiliation with Slayton -- chanceries in Oslo, Strasbourg, France, St Petersburg, Togo, Guinea, Nepal, Caribbean. He advocated for citizen participation, planning, and management and was active in a large array of architecture and planning organizations in the nation's capital.

[63] Slayton. p 249.

[64] Zoning Appeal Number 5297 in Minutes of the District of Columbia Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) for November 1958, p. 17 on file with the BZA at 441 4th Street NW, Washington, DC 2001

[65] "Bids and Proposals". The Washington Post,. November 7, 1958. p. C12 included the public notice of the hearing on Slayton's variance request, to be held at the District Building on November 19, 1958. Pages 17-22 of the Minutes of the BZA present a full transcript of the Slayton hearing. The BZA calendar was crowded with more than 30 cases. Slayton's memoir notes that Pei came to the hearing, which began at 9:30 AM, but had to leave before Appeal Number 5297 was called. Slayton spoke on his own behalf, stating that his plan required a side entrance. With the minimum 8 foot clearance on the west, his east side yard would be just 9 feet, 8 inches wide, too narrow for easy access to the entrance. Although shifting the house two feet would leave the west side yard just 6 feet wide, it would create an access path 11 feet, 8 inches wide on the east while retaining more than the lot's aggregate minimum setback of 16 feet. Slayton noted that he had the last undeveloped lot in an older neighborhood where many houses had been built closer to their lot lines than 6 feet. In addition, his house would have additional separation from its neighbor to the west because it would be set considerably further back from the street. Slayton also pointed out that as a matter of right he could build either a semi-detached house with a party wall that essentially abutted the lot line or a pair of semi-detached houses with a smaller setback. He received the variance with no objections from anyone, including his neighbor to the west.

efficient Slayton House is tri-partite in both plan and section. It clearly differentiates the public space at ground-floor from the private spaces on the upper and lower levels at the rear of the house. In section, the ground floor contains dining room, kitchen, and family room; the entry level contains the living room; and the upper level contains the three bedrooms. In plan, the dining room, kitchen, and family room each occupy a clearly differentiated 10-foot bay. The same is true of the bedrooms. This logical and flexible division of space pleased the Slaytons. In a newspaper interview, Bill Slayton spoke favorably of the steps saved by locating a laundry nook on the sleeping level.[66] As Wong states, "We did not sacrifice functional requirements in order to achieve architectural goals".[67]

During the design development phase, Pei and Slayton usually agreed on materials. They preferred more industrial finishes while Mary Slayton preferred warmer colors and more traditional residential effects. As a result, the floors -- other than in the kitchen and bathrooms -- were carpeted rather than finished in the travertine or teak that Pei preferred. Wong recalls the many consultations between Pei, himself, and Slayton, and noted "When it came to the design of the kitchen, Mr. Pei had the wisdom through his experience with his own wife that the kitchen was Mrs. Slayton's domain. Whatever she wanted she got".

After construction bids were received, further adjustments were required to lower costs. Two feet were cut off the rear of the house to reduce its square footage, air conditioning was eliminated, and Slayton even foreswore spending $250 to bury the power line in the front garden. Even with these adjustments, the work of the James Construction Company cost $45,000, which, with $6,900 for lot and $5,000 in architectural fees, bought the cost of the house to $56,900.[68] In contrast, a three bedroom Colonial Revival house in the same neighborhood cost $24,500 in 1959.[69]

When, in 1960, the Slayton House was completed, Pei was scarcely a household name despite the fact that he had won two AIA awards for his work in Denver,[70] His modernist dwelling in Washington generated no advance notoriety. In fact, by 1960, the modern, ahistoricist house was hardly a new phenomenon. Such houses began to appear in the Washington area as early as 1937. In the early 1940s, an enclave was constructed in the Palisades area of Northwest Washington and another in Northeast Washington. But these were rare instances. Instead, most modernist houses were constructed in the suburbs where vacant land was more readily available. And, although in the years following World War II, the area was the recipient of Modern houses by such nationally-known architects as Walter Gropius, Charles Goodman, and Clotheil Woodard Smith, this had little impact on the popular housing market which continued to be dominated by the Colonial Revival house in both city and suburb.

After completion, the Slayton House not only attracted attention but aroused curiosity in the popular press. In August 1960, the Washington Post reported that the Slayton family would soon move into a

[66] Willmann, John. "Asiatic Split Level. Tri-Arch House Being Completed in District". The Washington Post. August 20, 1960. p. B1.
[67] Wong, Kellogg. Interview, 23 February 2006
[68] Slayton.
[69] Classified Real Estate Advertisement: 3429 Porter Street NW. The Washington Post. June 15, 1958. p. D9.
[70] Pei, Cobb, Fried and Partners, Architects http://www.pcf-p.com visited May 1, 2006.

new "tri-arch home", described as an "Asiatic split-level", which the accompanying photograph showed as complete except for the front wall of the courtyard.[71] On April 1, 1961, when Slayton assumed his position as Federal Urban Renewal Commissioner, the Post ran another photograph of his noteworthy house under the headline "A Man in the News Lives Here".[72] In 1962, the Slayton House was featured in a select group of residences on what the Post termed a "New Frontiersman" home tour for charitable fundraising.[73]

Recognition by the architectural profession was not far behind public attention. In 1964, the Architectural Record cited twenty houses around the nation for "trend-setting features and architectural creativity". The Slayton House was one of the two Washington area representatives. Interestingly, the other award-winner, the Robert Shorb House in Bethesda, was designed by Hugh Newell Jacobsen, who decades later would be selected to renovate the Slayton House.[74] In 1965, the American Institute of Architects' A Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C listed the five year old Slayton House as one of only four noteworthy modernist individual residential projects in the city.[75]

Decades later, Slayton recalled the thrill of experiencing his new house for the first time:

> It was just toward dusk – the "purple light" time of the day...I got out of the car, we walked across the debris strewn front garden, and entered the living room. The framework was removed, the honeycombed ceiling was exposed, but the space was there! It was then that I experienced for the first time the emotion of the three dimensional space. It was a strong, personal, highly emotional reaction. I can still remember that incredible feeling of that space. The architect has that advantage. He (she) can envisage the space without being in it. I had to be in it. But it was that moment that made me realize that I had been right; the house was all I hoped it would be; it was, through Ieoh Ming, something that I had created and for which I had an intense emotional attachment."[76]

5. Renovating the Slayton House

[71] Willmann. The Washington Post. August 20, 1960. p. B1
[72] "A Man in the News Lives Here". The Washington Post. April 1, 1961. p. B12.
[73] "New Frontiersman Open Their Doors". The Washington Post. September 18, 1962. p. B7 and "New Frontier's Domestic Front". The Washington Post. September 26, 1962. p. D6. . Besides the Slayton House, New Frontiersmen with homes on the tour included then-Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach at 3141 Highland Place NW and Assistant to the Solicitor General Steven Pollack at 3314 Newark Street NW. The tour included the homes of several other prominent political figures not part of the Kennedy Administration, including attorney and Hubert Humphrey operative Max Kampfelman at 3154 Highland and Gilbert A. Harrison, editor of the liberal New Republic Magazine, at 3556 Macomb Street.
[74] "Two Area Homes Chosen". The Washington Post. March 14, 1964. p. E1.
[75] The other houses and architects cited were the Winthrop Faulkner House, 3530 Ordway Street (1964 by Win Faulkner), Berliner House, 2841 Tilden St, (1958, Charles Goodman), and Bending Lane Houses, 4800 Reservoir Road and Bending Lane (1960 by Grosvenor Chapman).
[76] Slayton. p. 257.

In 2002, the current (and second) owners conducted a comprehensive renovation of the house under the guidance of internationally-recognized architect Hugh Newell Jacobsen, who had sought the commission. Almost a quarter century earlier, Jacobsen had been quoted as saying "Pei is undoubtedly among the world's three or four greatest living architects," a conclusion he may have reached as early as 1959 as he watched the Slayton House being constructed and "...thought it quite exciting to see a house in Washington being constructed of reinforced concrete."[77]
Jacobsen's propensity for repetitive modules and pure geometry made him a fitting choice for the design and supervision of the renovation. His body of work is not dissimilar to that of Pei, about whom Benjamin Forgey, recent architectural critic for the Washington Post, wrote "Pei has characterized himself as an architectural conservative who has built upon the Modernist tradition. His varied buildings are typified by bold forms, geometrical daring and crisp clarity of layout...he has "elevated the use of materials to an art.""[78]

Jacobsen, who received his B.Arch from Yale University in 1955, worked for a year as an architect/draftsman in the office of Philip Johnson followed by two years with the prominent Washington, DC firm of Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon. Since 1958, he has been in solo practice in Washington.[79] His projects have been built and published world wide, winning one hundred fourteen design awards including six National Honor Awards from the American Institute of Architects and 20 awards for excellence in house design from the professional journal Architectural Record.[80]

Jacobsen agreed with the current owners of the Slayton House that Pei's design should be respected to the greatest extent possible. No alterations were made to the exterior and only minimal ones to the interior, the most significant of which was the removal of the wall that had divided the center and smallest bedroom from the hallway, opening that space to the main living area below. Forgey commented that "Jacobsen's treatment of the Pei house is wonderful proof, I think, of how to deal with buildings of this vintage. Actually, now that the bedrooms are no longer needed...he helped the house become what it wanted to be."[81] According to Jacobsen, when the renovation was complete, his wife commented, "This is the best thing you've ever done."[82]

6. Conclusion

The Slayton House is significant not only for its architecture but also for its structure. The poured-in-place concrete arched roof was an important technological innovation. Although a quarter-century earlier, Le Corbusier had constructed such a house outside Paris, known as the Petit Maison de Weekend (1935), and more than a decade later, the similar Fueter House, North Africa, 1949, the Slayton House remains the pre-eminent residential example in the United States.

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[77] Jacobsen, Hugh Newell, interview, 22 February 2006.
[78] Forgey, Benjamin. "I.M. Pei Awarded Pritzker; $100,000 Prize for Architectural Excellence," The Washington Post, Tuesday, May 17, 1983; page B1.
[79] Great Buildings On-Line. http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Hugh_Newell_Jacobsen.html visited May 3, 2006.
[80] http://www.hughjacobsen.com visited May 3, 2006.
[81] Forgey, Benjamin. Interview, 30 January 2006.
[82] Jacobsen, Hugh Newell, interview, 22 February 2006.

The house occupies a unique position among the work of Pei whose fame rests upon large corporate, cultural, and governmental projects. One of only three houses designed by Pei, the Slayton House is an intimate building, the antipodes in scale to the Kennedy Library and Miho Museum. Pei's preferred planning unit has traditionally been the urban super-block, campus, or mountaintop; yet he was clearly accomplished in the design of domestic architecture when Slayton approached him with the commission for a house. His design for Manhattan's Kips Bay Plaza public housing project in 1956 not only pioneered the construction techniques used in small scale on the Slayton House, but also showed his concern for quality of living space. The honey-comb poured-in-place concrete walls, which function as structural components and permit installation of window glass behind the surface plane, provide the residents greater illumination as well as greater privacy.

Pei's Society Hill project in Philadelphia, (1957-1964), while known for its sleek towers, also includes thirty-seven (later increased to sixty-four) brick townhouses. These townhouses are separated from the street by walled mini-forecourts which integrate exterior and interior in a manner reminiscent of the Slayton House. As Pei has noted "architecture and the garden are one. A Western building is a building, and a garden is a garden. They're related in spirit. But they are one in China."[83]

Concern for living spaces is an especially bold thread running through his early development as an architect. His first public recognition was for a house design. In May 1945 the New York Times noted that second place in a Pittsburgh Paint and Glass Company home design contest had gone to I.M. Pei and Frederick G. Roth of the Palmer Physical Laboratories in Princeton, New Jersey.[84] Further, Pei's 1949 Helix apartment house was not simply an exercise in elegant manipulation of materials and geometry but, as Pei noted, its spiral construction was intended to provide each resident "great variety in living space" through staggered level floor plans and moveable walls to facilitate re-subdivision of their space.[85]

Pei's work has dealt with highly microcosmic elements of residential design. In the early 1950s, the New York Times Magazine illustrated three feature articles with Pei interior designs, including a "childproof living room" with wall-mounted record player,[86] a backlit plastic panel wall from Pei's own apartment,[87] and even a Pei-designed coffee table with marble top and golden-brass square tube frame which had a companion armchair.[88]

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[83] Barboza, David. "I.M. Pei in China, Revisiting Roots". The New York Times. October 9, 2006. Online at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/09/arts/design/09pei.html

[84] "New Yorkers Win Mention". The New York Times. March 13, 1945. p. R1. The Times characterized the award -winning designs, including the $2,500 first-prize flat-roofed "California-type" dwelling by Jean and Norman Fletcher, as being in the "severe" or "simple modern style".

[85] The Helix attracted much press attention when Zeckendorf unveiled Pei's design and many articles touted the advantages of its flexibly sized and elevated individual living spaces, See the New York Times' articles "Economy and Flexible Layout Stressed in Proposed Spiral Apartment Building", December 25, 1949 p. R1, and "Circular Apartment House Patented". January 15, 1955. p. 15, as well as the Washington Post's "Apartments in Spiral Planned by NY Firm". January 15, 1950. p. R8.

[86] Pepis, Betty. "Home: Where Children Play". The New York Times. January 11, 1950. p. 169.

[87] Pepis, Betty. "Shedding Light". The New York Times Sunday Magazine. June 15, 1952. p. SM42.

[88] Pepis, Betty. "The Golden Touch". The New York Times Sunday Magazine. April 5, 1953. p. SM38. Pei's coffee table and armchair were manufactured by the Barker Furniture Company.

The Slayton House is not included in any list of Pei's oeuvre complet, including the Pei and Partners web-site yet it is, like the Luce Chapel, one of Pei's most innovative and intriguing works of the 1950s. Both were initiated as independent commissions while still working for Zeckendorf and, unconstrained by corporate demands, Pei produced two of his most expressive works. The Luce Chapel (1954), which is also his first church design, is composed of four soaring concrete leaves that to some evoke praying hands, an unabashed break with traditional church architecture. The Slayton House, his first attempt to design a single-family house that met the needs of a specific family other than his own, exhibits a brazen indifference to traditional residential architecture. While he often deferred to the Slaytons in the design of their house, he was also accorded, through collaboration with a kindred spirit, the opportunity for bold self-expression.

Thus the house is significant not only as the work of a master but as one of the most intriguing collaborations of client and architect in twentieth-century America. This collaboration exemplifies a phenomenon that Pei noted in his 1983 Pritzker Prize acceptance speech, "...from the commissioning to the completion of a project, there are also the many individuals for whom architects work, whose contribution to quality is frequently as crucial as that of the architect."[89]

[89] Great Buildings On-Line. http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/glk?http://www.pritzkerprize.com/pei.htm visited May 1, 2006.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries of the Slayton House, located at 3411 Ordway Street, N.W., are synonymous with the boundaries of Lot 0849 in Square 2065 in Washington, D.C.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries of the lot are unchanged since purchased by the Slaytons in 1959.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

William L. Slayton House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information is common to all photographs:

William L. Slayton House
3411 Ordway Street, NW
Washington, D.C.
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007
DC Historic Preservation Office (DC HPO)

1) Exterior View looking north
1/5
2) Interior view from 2nd floor library looking south across living room to front yard
2/5
3) Interior view from living room looking north to 2nd floor library
3/5
4) Interior view looking to west wall in living room
4/5
5) Interior view of fireplace in the eastern module of the living room
5/5

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

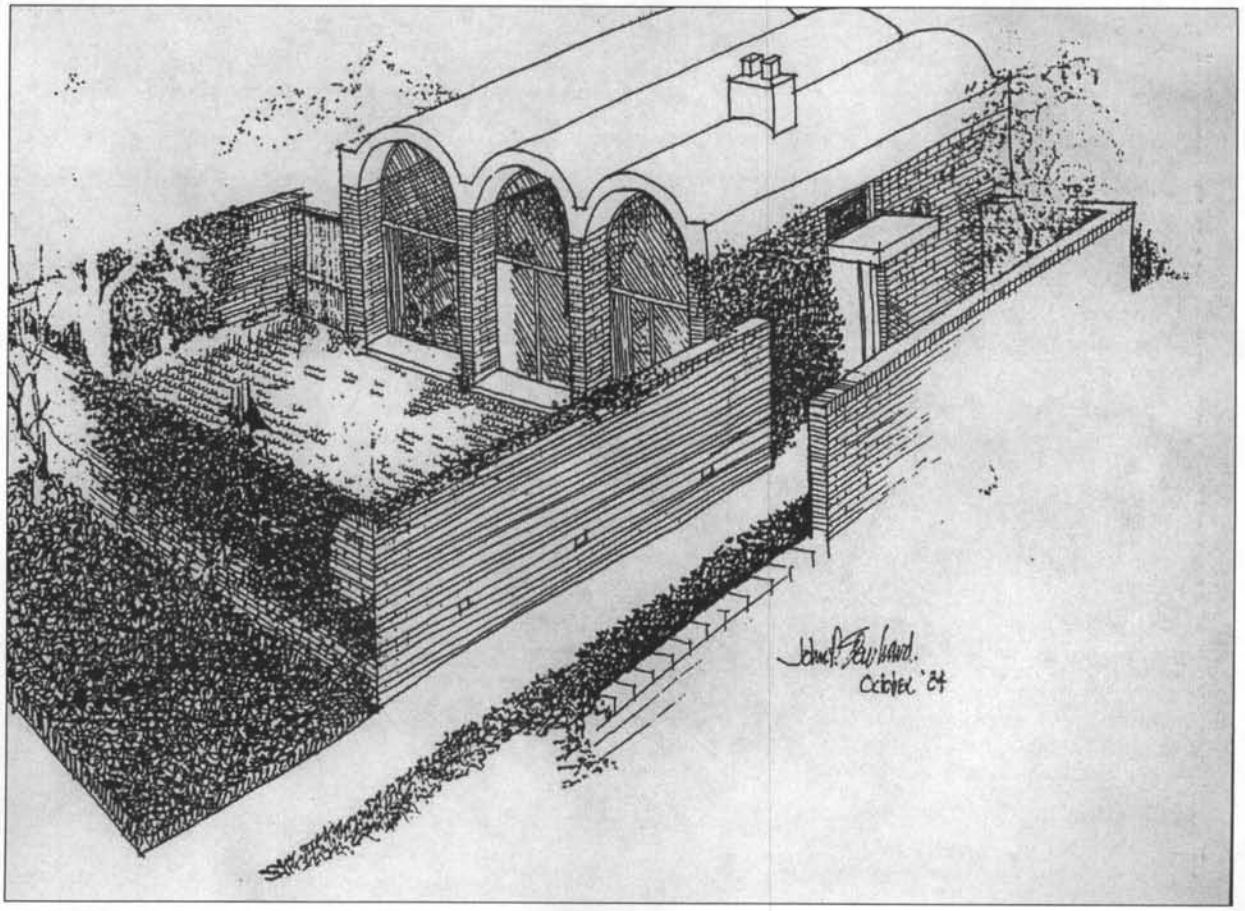
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Slayton House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

HISTORIC IMAGES



Slayton House, axonometric drawing, John Eberhard, FAIA, 1984

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

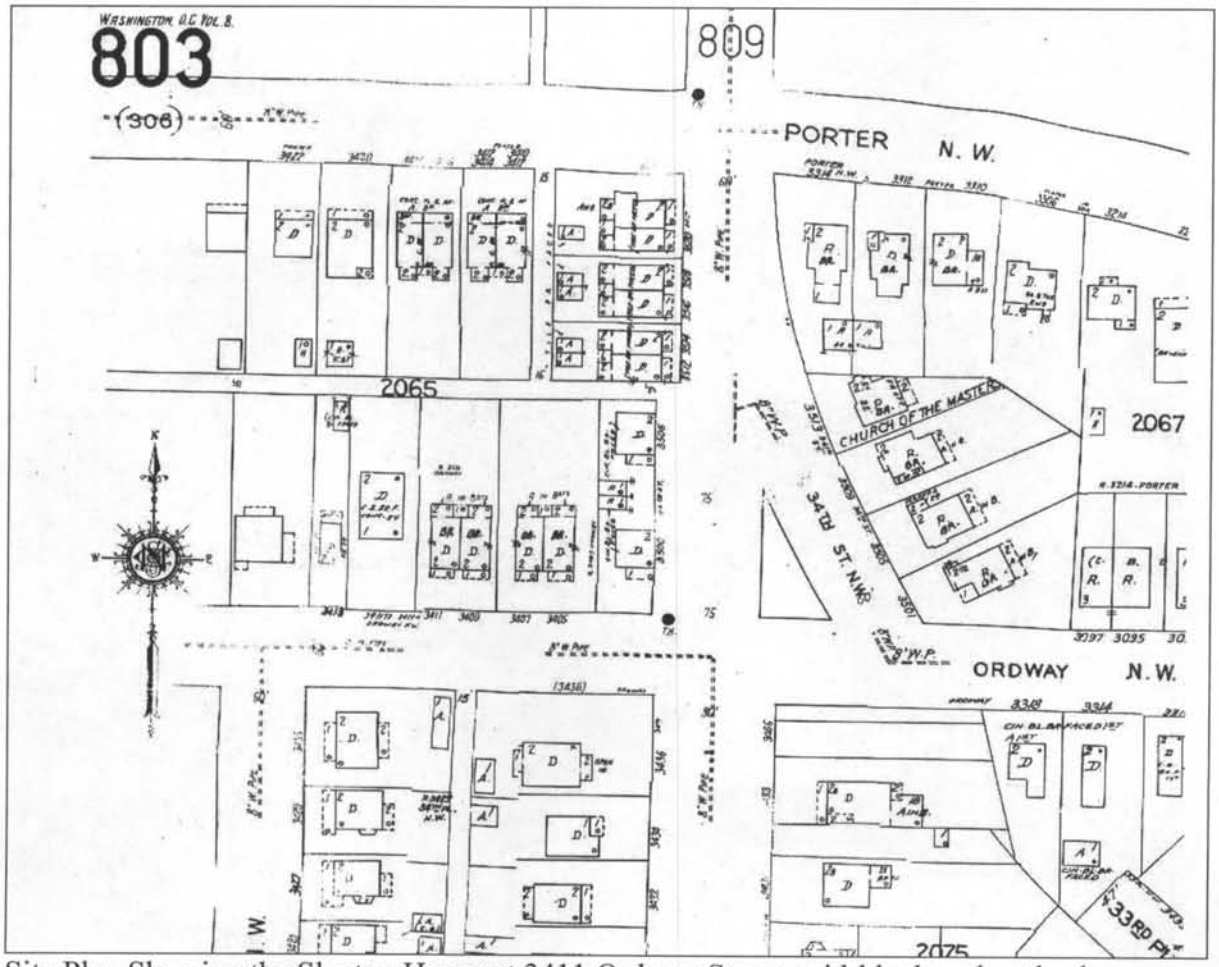
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Slatyon House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

SITE MAP



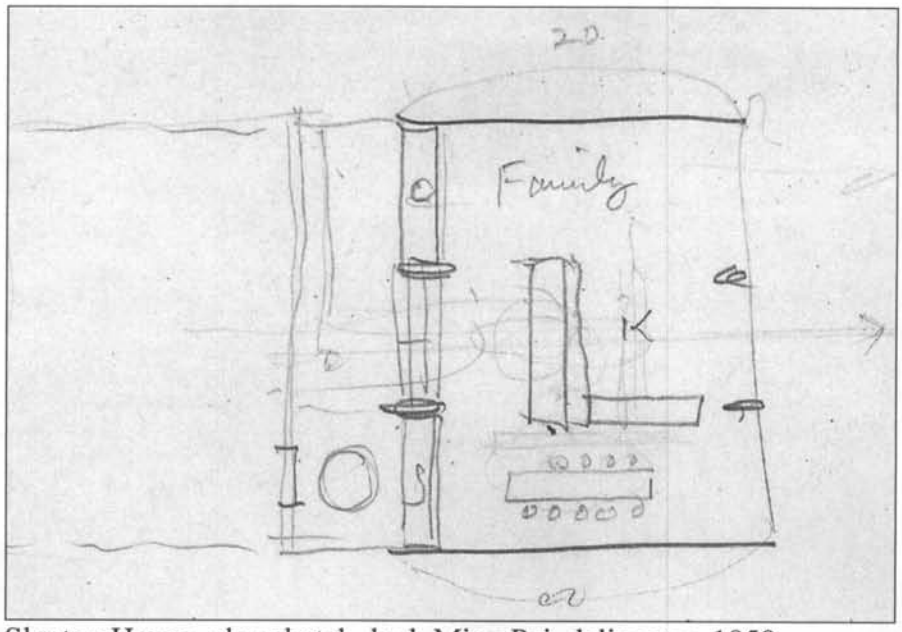
Site Plan Showing the Slayton House at 3411 Ordway Street, mid-block and set back from other houses on the street
(From 1999 Sanborn Map)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

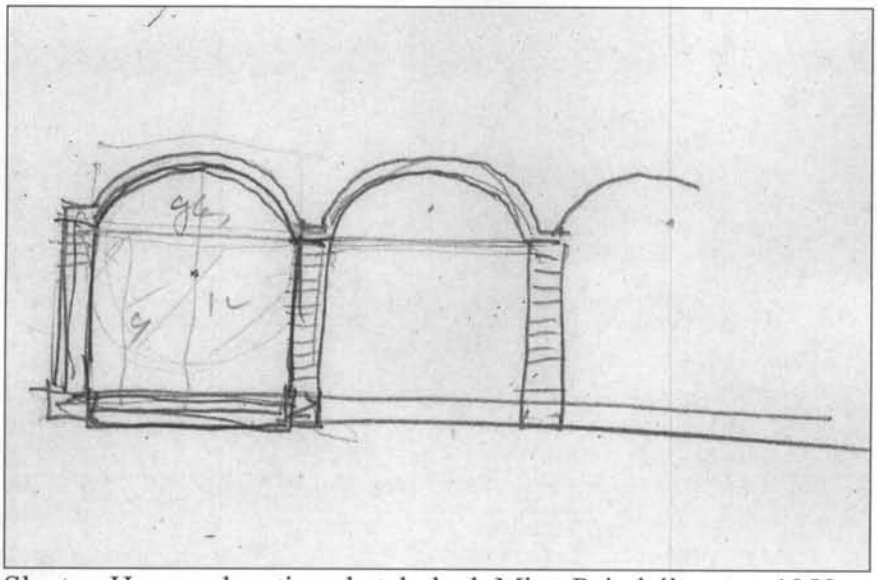
Slayton House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

HISTORIC IMAGES



Slayton House, plan sketch, leoh Ming Pei, delineator, 1958
(Courtesy Kellogg Wong)



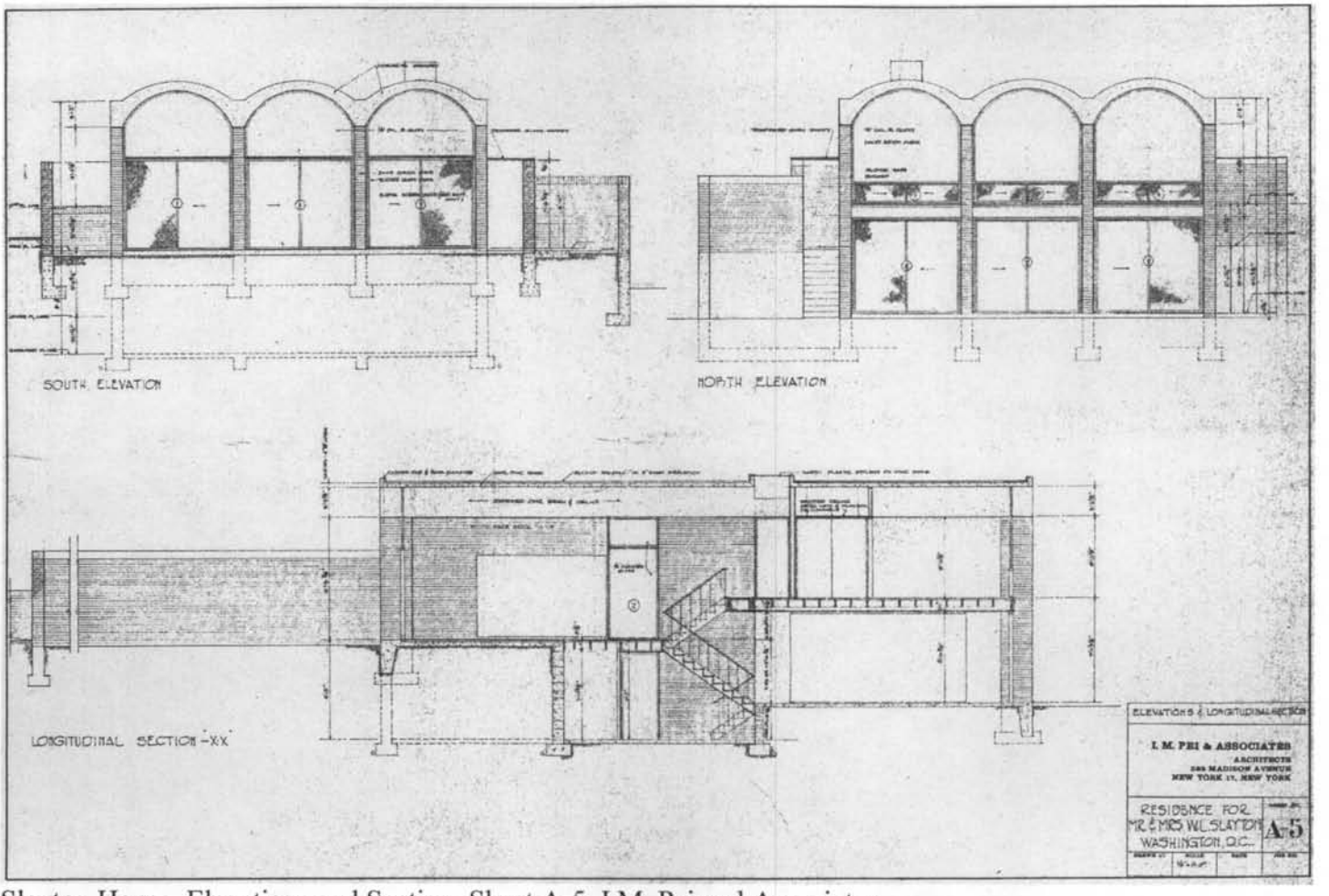
Slayton House, elevation sketch, leoh Ming Pei, delineator, 1958
(Courtesy Kellogg Wong)

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Slayton House
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

HISTORIC IMAGES



Slayton House, Elevations and Section, Sheet A-5, I.M. Pei and Associates

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Section number _____ Page _____

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 08000956 Date Listed: 10/2/2008

Property Name: William L. Slayton House

Multiple Name:

County: State: Washington, DC

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus 10/2/2008

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

The nominated property is less than 50 years old, therefore National Register Criteria Consideration G applies, but it is not checked in Section 8 (Statement of Significance) of the form. The form is amended to note that the property is being nominated as meeting National Register Criteria Consideration G.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

William Slayton House
Washington, DC
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007
DC HPO
Exterior view looking north
1/5

William Slayton House
Washington, DC
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007
DC HPO
Interior view from library looking south to front
2/5

William Slayton House
Washington, DC
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007
DC HPO
Interior view from living room looking north to 2nd floor library

3/5

William Slayton House
Washington, DC
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007
DC HPO
Interior view looking to west wall in living room
4/5

William Slayton House
Washington, DC
Richard Williams, photographer
November 2007

DC HPO

Interior view of fireplace in eastern module of living room

5/5