



Gene Bavinger stands on the suspension bridge before his house. Son Bill (under Gene's arm) is seated at ground level of house, indicating home's height. Bridge crosses spring-fed stream, seen at the lower right.

the house that gene built

"When Nancy, Gene and Bill Bavinger came to me as an architect for their new home, they had several unusual requirements which were both challenging and inspiring," Bruce Goff, chairman of the O.U. School of Architecture, speaking . . .

"First of all, they disliked the idea of living in the usual conglomeration of little boxes with holes cut in for doors and windows. They already had one of those and found it too restricting for their way of life."

The Bavingers outlined other ideas they had for their proposed home, but the basic idea was always the same: They wanted a home designed specifically for them and their way of living.

With these and other considerations in mind, Goff delivered a design that incorporated the Bavingers' ideas. Gene Bavinger, '46fa, assistant professor of art, built the house himself with the aid of student labor. Robert H. Rucker, O.U. landscape architect, took on the assignment of planting the grounds, both indoors and outdoors. Many others associated with O.U. assisted, including Lowell Jackson, '43ed, assistant professor of industrial education, who supervised the cabinet craft.

How well the challenge and inspiration of the proposal outlined to Goff has been met, is indicated on this and following pages. For alumni who want a personal view, the Bavingers hold openhouse Saturdays and Sundays.

near norman, the bavinger house shows what imagination can create with rock, wood and water—and work.

photographed by john crane



Bill Bavinger feeds fish in the indoor pool. The pool is at ground level a few yards from the house's main entrance. Parents' bedroom is suspended above pool. Plantings hug wall.

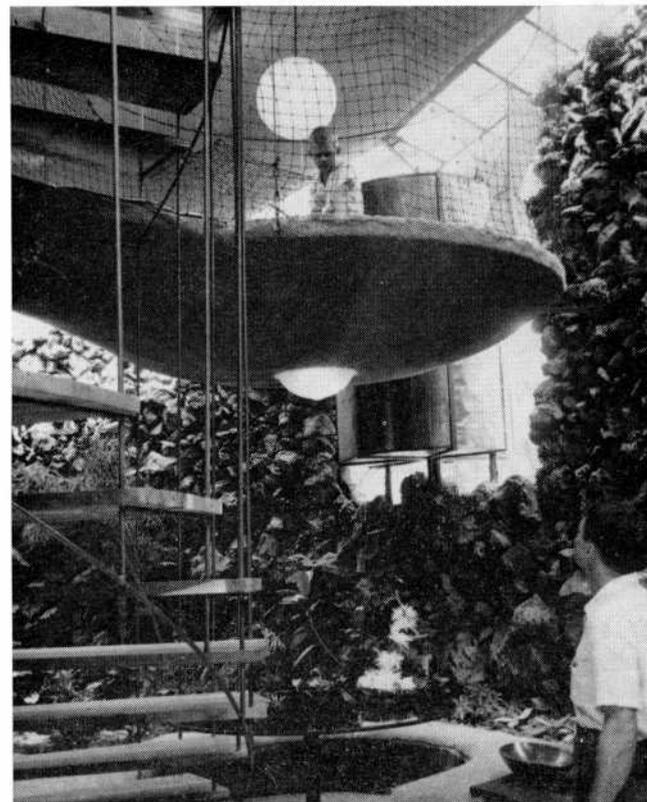
outdoors brought indoors in ground level planning

The Bavinger home is reached by driving east from Norman on Highway 9. Less than 5 miles from Norman's city limits, a small sign indicates that a turn north, on a red-dirt road leading through Jack Oaks, will bring you to your destination. A short distance from the highway, the sharp top of the cone that is the first view of the unusual home is visible.

The approach to the main entrance of the house is over flagstones. They continue inside through a glass wall. Planting areas follow the perimeter of the stone wall. Just beyond the flagstone entrance is a fish pool and beyond, continuing a circular line, is the dining area. A kitchen is separated from the dining space by cabinets. To prove you have been walking in a continuously curving line, it is only a short walk from the kitchen, through an irregular "door" in an inner stone cone, to return to the main entrance.

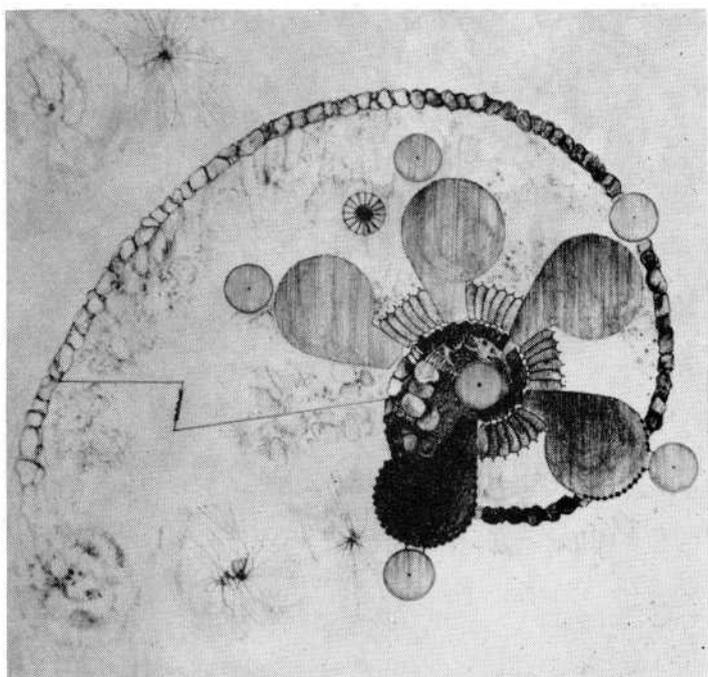
Prominent features of the lower level: the vast array of plants; the antique mirror-topped dining table; the stepping stones that provide a bridge across the fish pond to the dining area, and the convenient arrangement of the kitchen. Perhaps the most prominent of all is the feeling of never-ending space.

By walking across the pool on stepping stones, the dining area is reached. Bill sits in his play area suspended above the dining table. The stairs, spiraling upwards, follow the inside cone of stone.

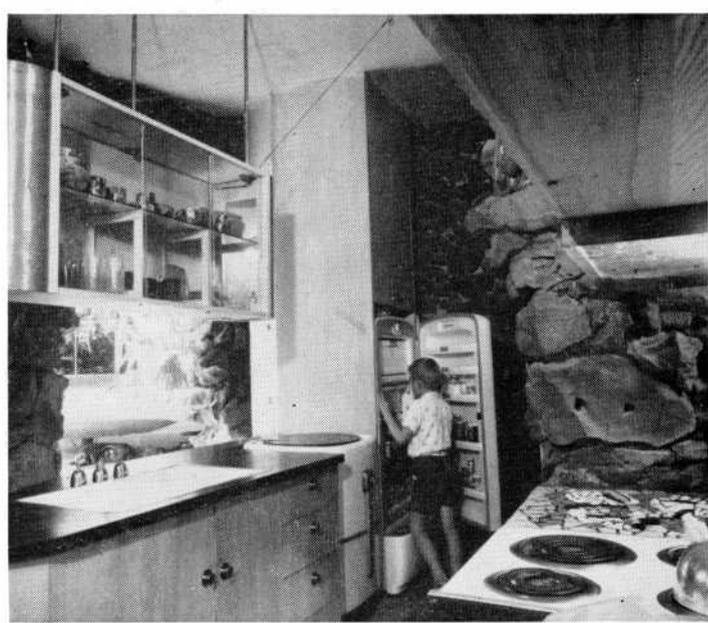




Close-up of antique, mirror-topped dining table shows the built-in seats, gold carpeted, and reflection from the stone wall. Plantings continue around outer, 200-ton stone wall.



Architect's sketch helps explain plan of house. Clockwise, main entrance is where broken line occurs. Larger note-shaped areas are: 1) living area, 2) parents' bedroom, 3) son's play area, 4) son's bedroom, 5) father's studio and guest bedroom. Fish pool is located under parents' bedroom, dining area under son's play area, kitchen under father's studio. Drawing indicates spiral stairs. Circles are copper closets, with two completely inside, one in the wall, and two outside. Architect describes interior as, "continuous flow of space wherein neither walls nor floor and ceiling are parallel."

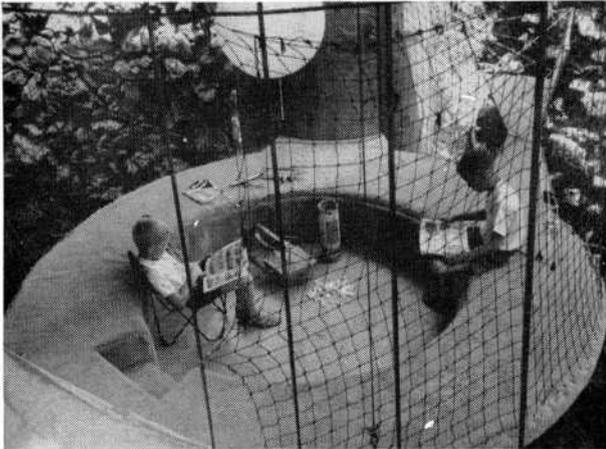


Kitchen is designed for efficiency. Suspended copper cabinets hold dishes. Sink, stove, washing machine, refrigerator are compactly placed. Beyond sink is jagged hole in rock center cone that leads back to main entrance.

For more informal dining, space between main dining area, at left, and kitchen, above, has been provided. Windows in wall are irregular in shape. Suspended area at top is son's bedroom. View is from father's studio.



Gold-carpeted bowls serve as "rooms." This bowl, slightly off ground level, is living "room." Copper closet is in center background. Main entrance is at extreme upper left.



Bill Bavinger's play area gets a workout. Closet in the background contains his toys, hides a television set. Bill's bedroom, below, shows the recessed bed and the clothes closet. Parents' bedroom also has fiber glass curtains, netting.



suspended and spiraling, rooms take bowl-like shape

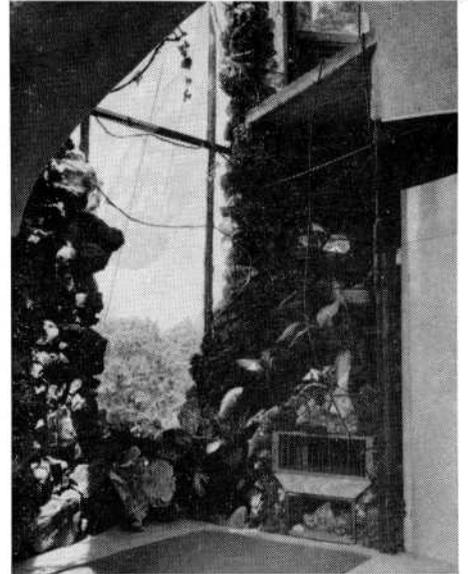
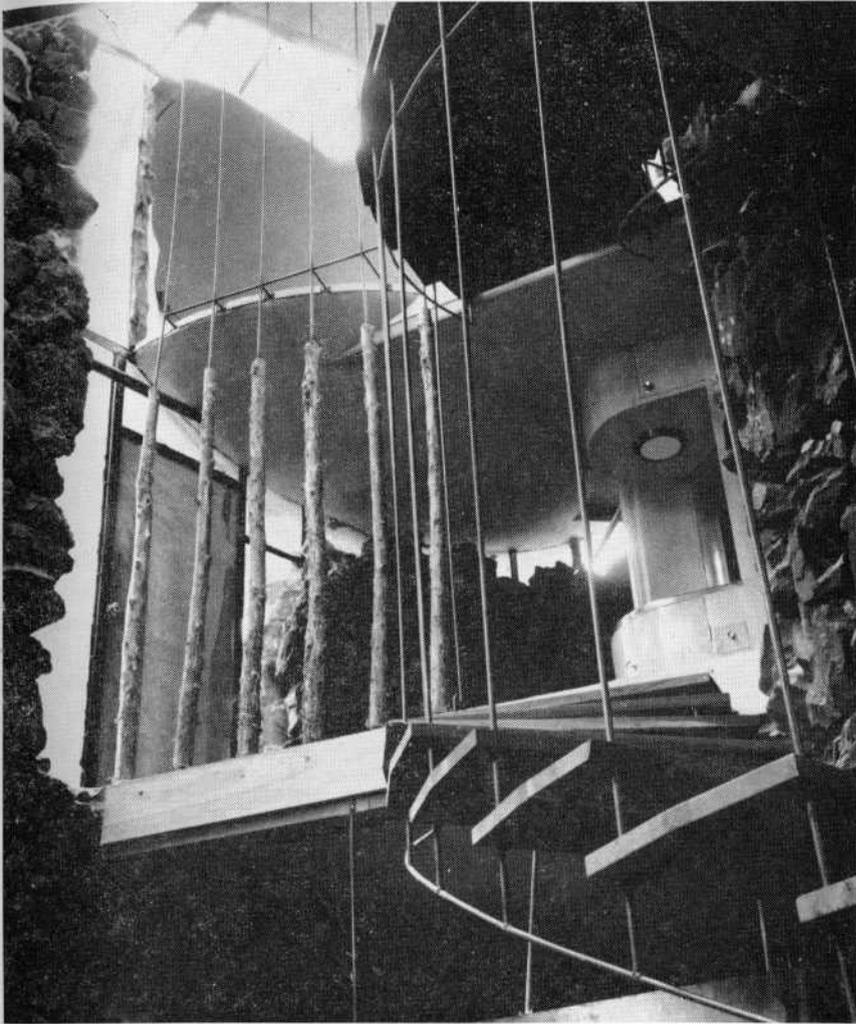
There is an impression about the house that makes it seem to be alive—in constant movement. Because of its upward spiral and curving base, nothing seems to end.

Five living areas in the shape of bowls are suspended around the center stone coil and are at graduated levels. The first of these is the living area, the second is the parents' bedroom, the third is son Bill's play area—which opens across the stairway into a passage connecting the bathroom and the door opening onto the suspension bridge—the fourth is Bill's bedroom, and the fifth is Gene's studio. A ladder leading to an observation platform is located just off the studio.

Stairs leading to the various levels spiral upwards also, as does the outer wall of the house itself.

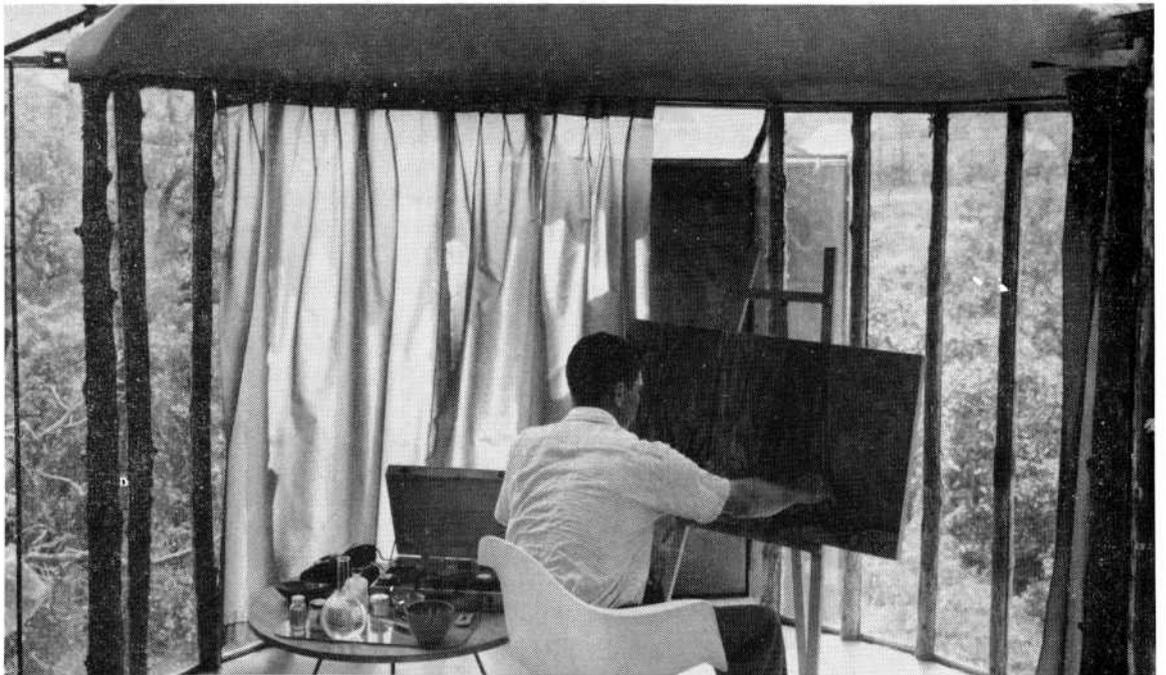
The wall, consisting of 200 tons of native sandstone, is, in the words of Goff, "a continuous wall 180 feet long, which takes the form of a logarithmic spiral crawling up out of the ground near the entrance and coiling around a steel pole from which the entire roof, the interior stairs and living area bowls and the bridge are suspended."

It took Gene and his wife, Nancy Blackburn Bavinger, '46fa, five years to complete the house. From the enthusiasm they indicate in their new home, it was worth it.



At right of artist's studio and on the same level, a guest bed has been recessed. Ladder leads to observation deck atop the spiral house.

Bathroom is just off Bill's play area. Door at left opens onto the suspension bridge that crosses spring-fed lake (see photo page 5).



Gene and his wife, Nancy Blackburn Bavinger, are both artists. (Both graduated from Oklahoma University with art degrees in 1946). Naturally, a studio was a necessary part of their home. The semi-circular studio is glass with cedar frames.