



# Improvisations on the Land: Houses of Fernau + Hartman

*Richard Fernau, Laura Hartman, Thomas Fisher, Daniel Gregory*

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A generous look at the San Francisco Bay Area architects' pioneering approach to sustainable houses, ranging from the vineyard regions of California to Telluride, Colorado; the rugged ranch lands of Montana and the picturesque hamlets of the Hudson Valley and Martha's Vineyard.

Since its formation in 1981, Fernau + Hartman has become renowned for its imaginative expansion of the possibilities of site- and region-specific architecture. Leaders in these concepts, as well as in sustainable design long before its currency today, Fernau + Hartman's houses maximize the connection between the natural and built environments, intensify the experience of place, and invite an open, playful, and inventive approach to life. A Newport Beach weekend house has flexible sleeping quarters and almost everything else (spaces for cooking, eating, showering, and bathing) is outdoors; a house made of alternating indoor and outdoor rooms climbs up a Sonoma County hillside; and an island house inspired by the fishing village of Menemsha is composed as three independent gabled "sheds" docked at a central screened porch featuring a fireplace and dining table.

With essays by Beth Dunlop, Laura Hartman, Thomas Fisher, and Daniel P. Gregory, *Improvisations on the Land* creates a multifaceted portrait of the firm's history, philosophy, and practice—revealing as much about their process as the finished houses themselves. Models, axonometric drawings, floor and site plans, elevations, and photographs of vernacular structures—from a collapsed barn in Montana, to Colorado mining compounds and a louvered colonnade in the Sacramento River Delta—contribute to a full appreciation of Fernau + Hartman's work, how its sense of spontaneity and joy provides the antidote to so much of the self-conscious architecture that surrounds us, and results in houses that push the possibilities of residential design today.

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