



THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

Machado Silvetti's Glass House Project will preserve Virginian ruins

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Four years after *AN* crowned [Machado Silvetti's](#) Glass House Project as our [2016 Best of Design Award for Unbuilt winner](#), work to infill and preserve the 1769 home of a Declaration of Independence signer with glass has begun.

The ruins of Menokin, the former home of Francis Lightfoot Lee on a 500-acre [Virginian](#) tobacco plantation, is a [National Historic Landmark](#) and today is under the auspices of the [Menokin Foundation](#). Machado Silvetti's glass intervention will be a structural stabilization as well as obviously symbolic; the firm described it as providing "a literal window into the lives of those who built, lived, and worked at Menokin." The new glass envelope will unite the freestanding, but disparate sections of the house (it was at risk of crumbling until the foundation took it over in 1995), and once the project is completed in 2023, visitors will be allowed inside to explore the historical remnants. As the foundation noted, the conservation effort was aided by the extensive documentation of the neo-Palladian-style home, including the original architectural drawings and historic survey photos. Eckersley O'Callaghan is the glass engineer for the house project, which will replace missing walls, roof sections, and portions of the floor.

Of course, the foundation isn't simply just reviving Menokin without acknowledging that it sits on a plantation, or that slaves once toiled in the surrounding fields. To that end, the foundation has assembled a team to renovate the landscape to make it more conducive to visitors without disturbing the ongoing archeological excavations. Landscape architecture firm Reed Hilderbrand is working with the foundation to add new trails, vantage points, and picnic spots throughout. In 2018, Reid Freeman of Brooklyn's REID architecture, completed the Remembrance Structure, a semi-permanent pavilion over the remains of 18th-century field slave quarters. The open-ended structure was built using period-appropriate timber construction methods and wrapped in translucent fabric, lending the space an ethereal, contemplative quality. Thanks to solar-powered lighting, it also glows at night as a tribute to the former slaves at the plantation, and because the structure has no permanent foundation, it can be removed in the case of future archaeological digs at the site.



View of Remembrance Structure at Menokin (Michael Beller/Courtesy of the Menokin Foundation)

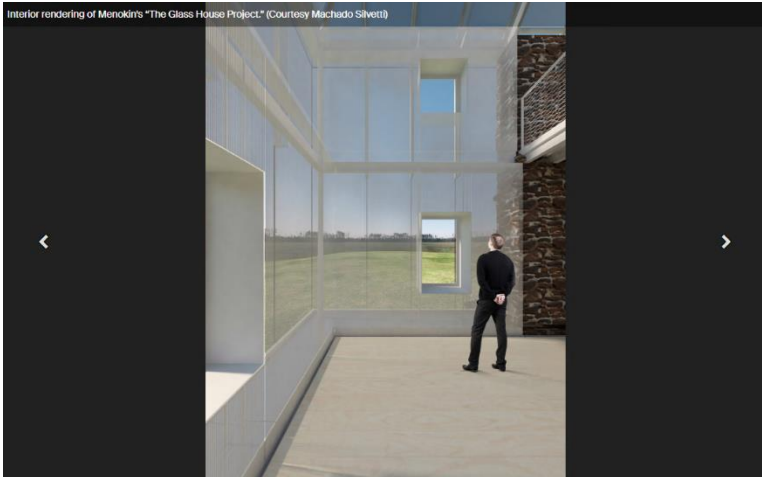
“With the Glass House Project, and all the initiatives on the Menokin site,” wrote Sam McKelvey, the executive director of the Menokin Foundation, in a statement, “our goal is making history visceral, real, and relevant, and showing people how they are a part of the continuum of stories that make up the identity of a place. Menokin links together the sweep of history—the American Indian experience, the arrival of the English in North America, the story of chattel slavery and privilege, the colonial period and the revolutionary war, the Civil War and civil rights to our own time.”



Historic Image of Menokin (Courtesy the Menokin Foundation)



Interior rendering of Menokin's "The Glass House Project" (Courtesy Machado Silvetti)



Exterior rendering of Menokin's "The Glass House Project" at night. (Courtesy Machado Silvetti)



Aerial view of Menokin, (Courtesy the Menokin Foundation)

