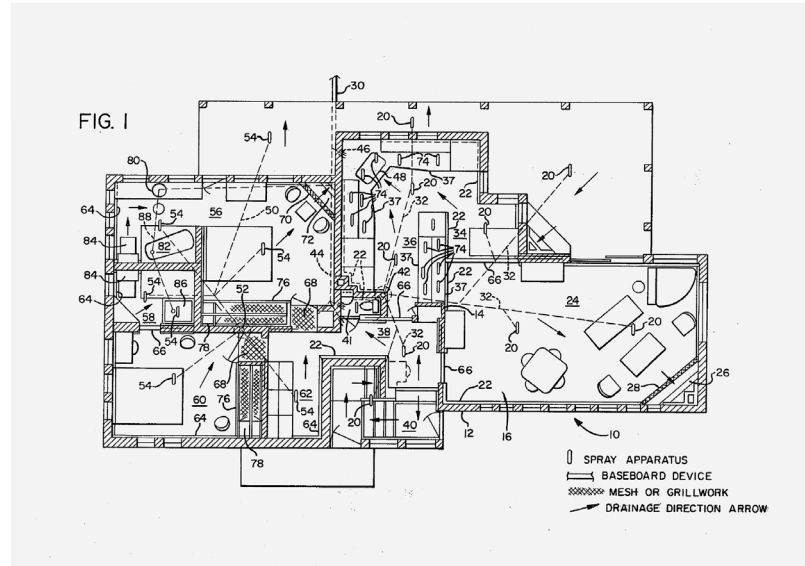




AMBIENT MAINTENANCE

HILARY SAMPLE



Frances G. Bateson, Self-Cleaning Building Construction, 1984. US Patent 4,428,085; filed April 21, 1980 and issued January 31, 1984.

This technical plan drawing is from the U.S. Patent 4,428,085 titled “Self-Cleaning Building Construction.” A desire to eliminate the arduous process of keeping a “clean house clean” led Frances Gabe (original name Frances G. Bateson, 1915–2016) to design a novel yet functional house—a house that cleans itself with the push of a variety of buttons. Bateson’s vision of reducing motion for disabled and aging people, which would allow them to better care for their bodies as opposed to their houses, resulted in her procuring 68 patents. After a lengthy four-year process, Gabe received U.S. patent number 4,428,085 for the self-cleaning building construction manifested in a two-story house design. With the flip of a switch, she could maintain a clean house.

Could we imagine what this experience would be like? The typical interior acoustic life would change in an instant: sounds associated with industrial power and commercial experiences, from an open-air locker-room shower to a mechanized car wash, are introduced. Imagine this new soundscape from shower heads, washing machines, hair dryers, vacuums, laundry room dryers, no longer unique to distinct rooms or domestic objects but condensed into an overhead ceiling device controlling all the functions of washing and drying of each particular room. While rooms would be thoroughly and broadly cleaned, Gabe’s novel thinking towards keeping household objects—such as books encased and enclosed by glass or clothes in closets with their own washing and drying apparatus—led to inventions necessary for easing the burden of contemporary life. During the bi-annual washes, she would change the construction of interior life by conflating ambient noises and performance sounds in the domestic setting of her house: a celebration of technology, environment, and women’s work distinctly heard as a new opera performance dedicated to maintenance.

About the author

Hilary Sample is an American architect, educator, and author. She founded MOS Architects and is Professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.