PLACES



Forming Place, Informing Practice

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CULTIVATED LANDSCAPES: LYLE GOMES

Mankind's timeless struggle for harmonious coexistence with nature is the inspiration for my photography. My San Francisco Presidio photographs study a landscape completely redefined, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, to accommodate the needs of the U.S. Army.

I was drawn to this pragmatic place for its beauty, curious arrangement of trees and strong human presence—a presence, although quite strange at times, that never seems to be at odds with its surroundings. Unlike the natural forests that we carve up, this city woodland is woven into an urban existence. Little within the Presidio is native. Designed with utility in mind, the human element within the Presidio is often awkward, occasionally delicate, sometimes mysterious, but always practical.

Photographing the Presidio, I became interested in how, when and why those trees appeared and by whom they were planted, and found an 1883 Army document, Plan for the Cultivation of Trees upon the Presidio Reservation. As a result, my artistic process has changed: I now engage in traditional research that examines both the cultural influences and individuals responsible for a particular altered landscape. Historically informed and sensitive, I combine my artistic vision with the intellectual roots of a place.

Following my work at the Presidio, I began to research and photograph English landscape parks and gardens—a major influence on the Presidio forests and American landscape architecture. As an American whose cultural bond with nature is through preservation, I am intrigued with the attitudes of a British culture whose relationship to the land is through its cultivation. A 1998 Fulbright Scholar Award has allowed me to expand my photographic investigation of this completely cultivated landscape.

SPECIAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF ORDINARY PLACES

Photographers who choose their own subjects can bring a passion to their work that sets it apart from the high craftsmanship of assigned work. They have something urgent to show us and take pictures that are skillful but whose point is not cleverness, pictures whose subjects are not exotic but ordinary, places that are often overlooked but well within our experience.

When we consider the task of photographing a place, we can easily conclude that doing so is impossible. There are things we want the camera to do that it is always proving itself incapable of doing. Photographers with a special passion for their subject, limited by the same envelope that constricts us all, know their medium well enough to use it simply and directly, without distractions.

The point of an exciting photograph is not the data that it provides, nor its ability to duplicate our experience, but the tension between what we know and what the photograph says. Neither the significance of the subject nor the artfulness of the picture can stand alone. The test of the medium is not whether photographers fill the demands we make of them, but whether their pictures make a strong claim on our attention—thereafter coloring our understanding and experience of its subject.

With this issue, Places publishes the second in a series of photo essays in which the subjects are chosen by photographers. Our purposes are pleasure and discovery: to give readers the pleasure of seeing the simple, articulate language of photographers who have a passion for their subjects, and to call attention to new aspects of ordinary or overlooked places, or even places that have already been photographed so often that we assume, perhaps wrongly, that they are already familiar.

–Cervin Robinson



Trail Fork, San Francisco Presidio, 1990



Double Arrow, San Francisco Presidio, 1990



Cypress Triad, San Francisco Presidio, 1993



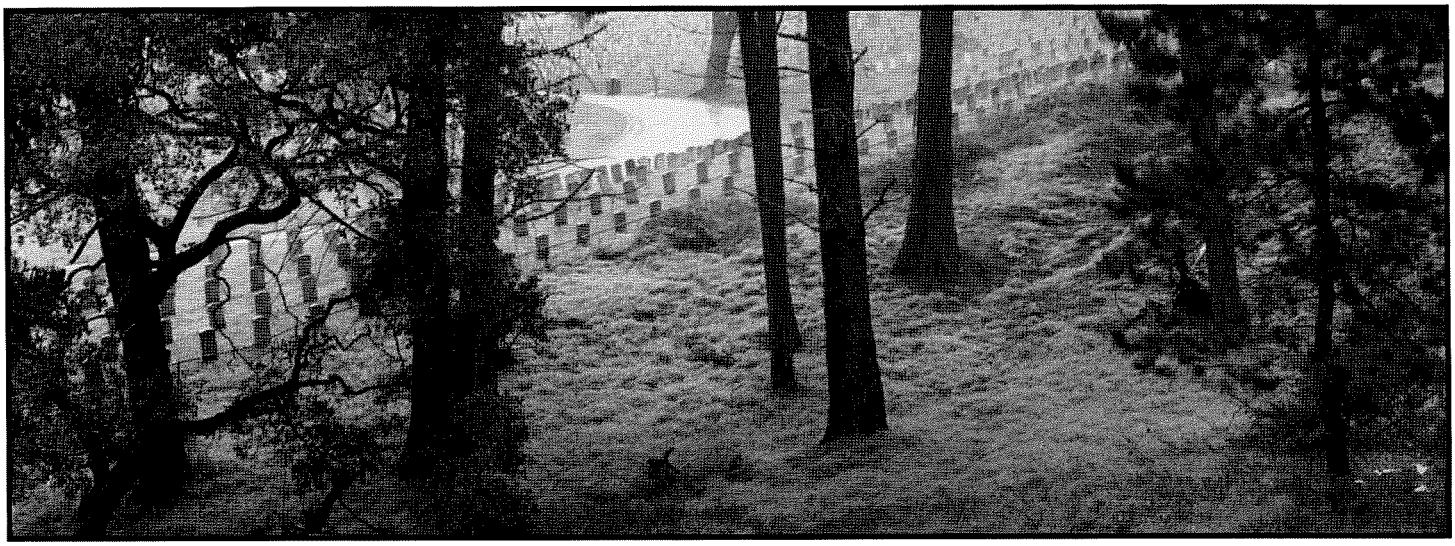
Common Ground, San Francisco Presidio, 1993

... Man is a part of nature, and nature is always claiming what he does for herself. Landscape–art welcomes man as introducing the momentous human story into the spectacle which it is her function to interpret.

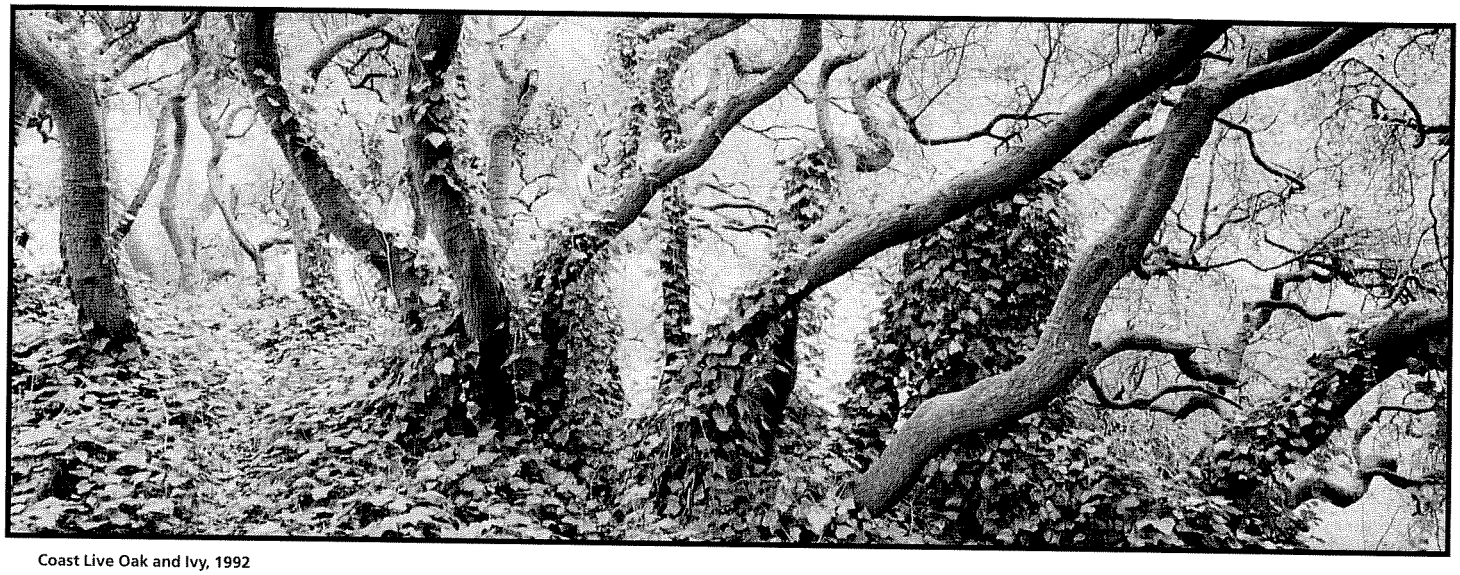
Josiah Gilbert
Landscape in Art before Claude and Salvator, 1885



Presidio Forest & Flag, 1993



Eternal Stand, San Francisco Presidio, 1993



Coast Live Oak and Ivy, 1992



Fallen Limb, San Francisco Presidio, 1992

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Places:
invite attention,
direct attention,
reward attention,
require attention.

At their best, they
sustain attention.

Places, that is to say, are constructed on the ground and in our minds through the act of paying attention. They result from the investment of human energy, from thought-filled acts of construction and perception.

The places that we make must receive ample attention, from the moment they are started to the moments when they are inhabited and remembered. Places are repositiories of thought: careful, imaginative thought that draws significance from evolving patterns; bold, penetrating thought that fosters the discovery of new relationships and possibilities; memory-laced associations that are meticulously traced through form; even imaginative leaps that thrust their singularity into an evolving fabric of conditions.

There are, certainly, ceaseless changes in how we consider things, in how we take account of our surroundings. Those changes come from continuous invention in the ways that we make things, the pressures of the economy, the patterns of thought in which we are immersed and the demands that are made on our attention.

There are also things that don't appreciably change: the dimensions of people and the sweep of their bodily movements, the nature of the climate and the movements of the sun, the basic geographic condition of the places in which we build. When attended to, these elements can instill continuity — an aspect of community — in the ways in which we build places. So, too, can the nature of the structures that are already built in a place.

Tom Chastain, guest editor of this issue, and his selected authors show how careful attention to reading the life and forms of a locale can vest a sense of commonality and fit in the practices of a place — in the ways we build, use and care for our private and common surroundings. The articles range from astute, introspective essays regarding the ways in which we think about design, and go about forming places, to descriptions of the specific ways in which the particulars of a place have provided the springboard for suitable invention. They explore how critically considered cultural and physical conditions have informed practice.

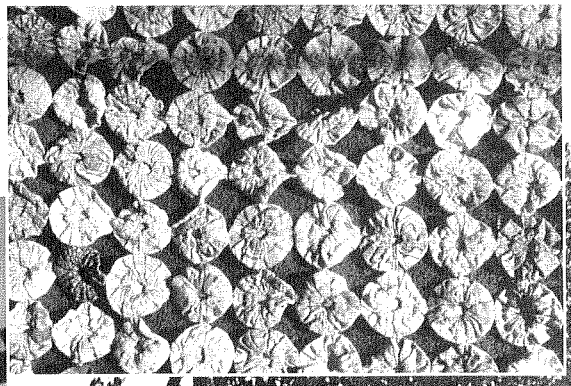
Recently, it has become fashionable, among some, to suppose that the fabric of our mental connections is now so thoroughly embedded in cyber-messages that the heavily invested construction of physical artifacts cannot keep pace, cannot tell it like it is. We think not; the piecing together of our world takes place all the time, on and off line. Architecture, the thoughtful making of places, remains the most direct, ubiquitous and readily accessible way of making bonds with the world and of sharing thoughts and ambitions about how we may live. Places that are invested with the attentiveness urged in the following articles can help us through the day — day after day, year after year — and often they are passed, intact or remembered, through generations. Places deserve our attention.

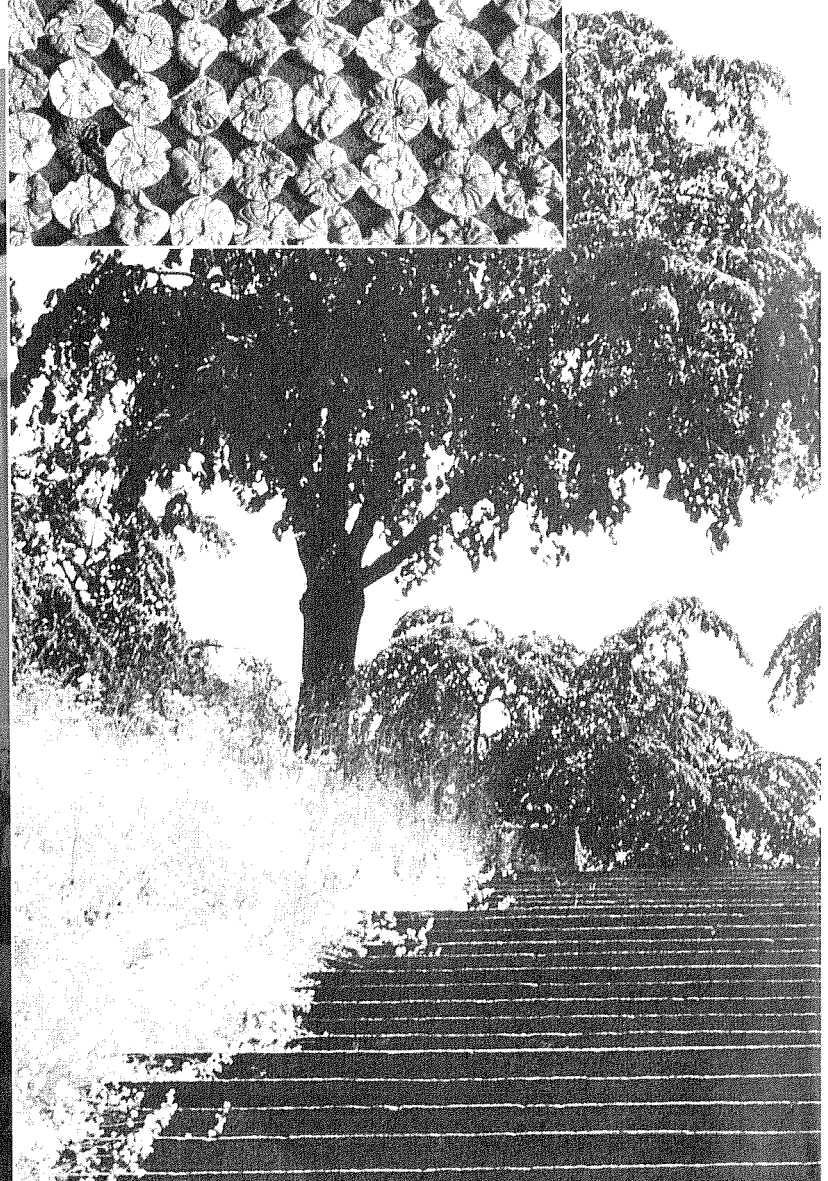
— Donlyn Lyndon

Forming Place



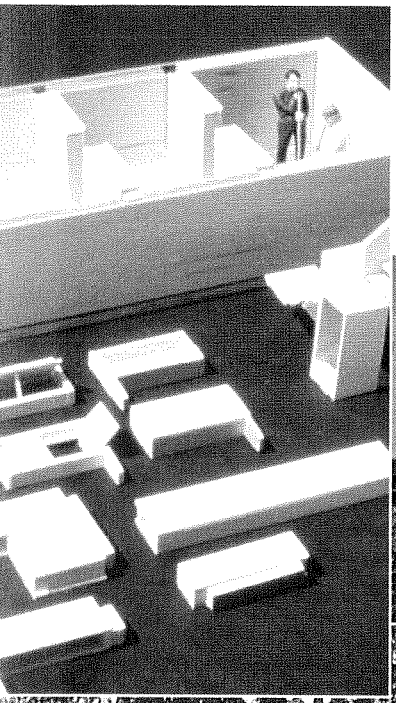


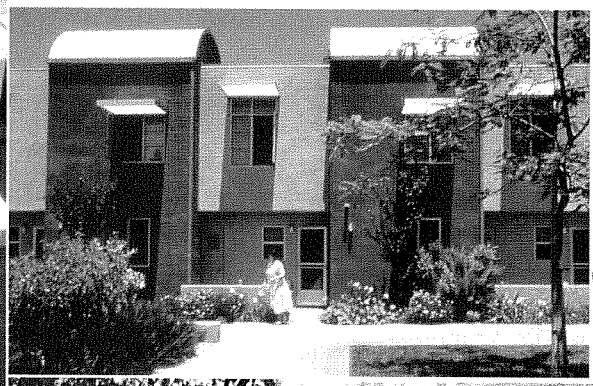


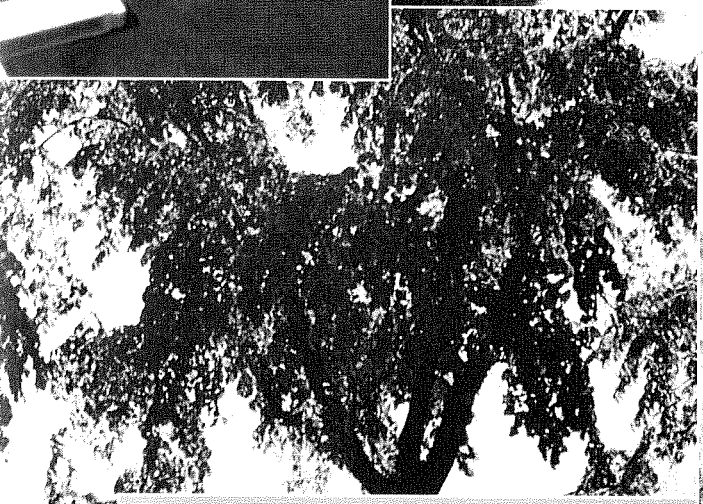


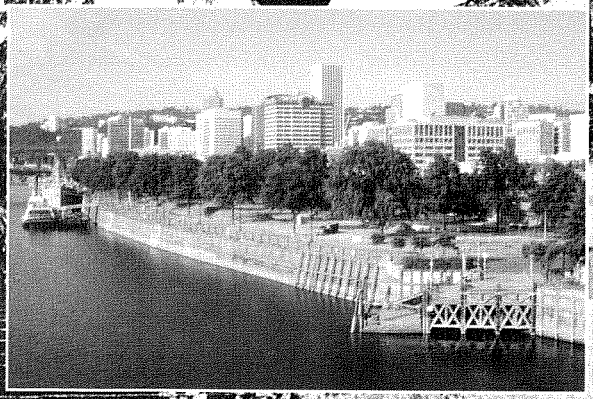
Informing Practice

Thomas R. Chastain, Guest Editor









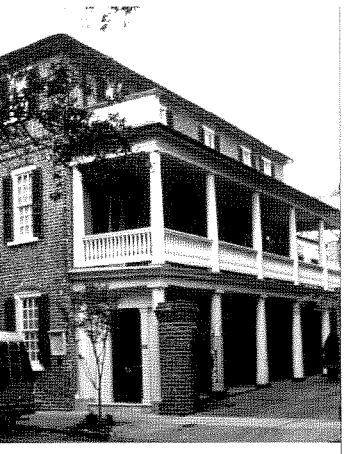


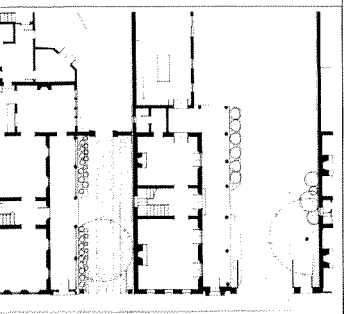
Clockwise from opposite page, lower left: **Andres Mignucci Giannoni, Jan Wampler, Jan Wampler, Jan Wampler, René Davids, Franco Mancuso, John Echlin**
Background: **William L. Porter**

Thomas R. Chastain

FORMING PLACE, INFORMING PRACTICE

The word *place* is often used to describe the larger territory in which we build. The boundary of this territory is defined by a sense of being inside — inside a region, a town, a neighborhood. The boundary is identified not by a demarcation of its edge but by the feeling of coherence among the spaces and buildings within it, which gives rise to a competence in the way a place is built and inhabited. We value such places for their qualities as extended environments and the support they give to our inhabitation. We value the feeling of being somewhere as opposed to just anywhere.





Above: **Charleston house type. Below: Typical plan of door, porch and side yard.**

Photo, drawings: **Thomas L. Chastain**

A place also provides the opportunity to participate in a collective expression as we come to know what it means to be part of a larger territory. There is a connectedness, which we often describe as a sense of place, whose meaning and authenticity flow from relationships between a culture, time and locale. We value the distinctiveness of places that emerge out of such circumstances.

The articles that follow are based on an implicit belief that the qualities of these connections can be recognized and that a place can be read.[1] We read a place to inform the way we practice and, in forming places, we produce a further reading. The process of forming–informing constitutes a practice of place — one that produces, holds and represents knowledge about a place.

The practice of place has been diminished by various forces, including a global economy whose flows of information and capital make our desires and institutions more uniform. Rene Dubos, writing twenty-five years ago, pondered this erosion of difference, stating that: "all urban areas in prosperous industrialized countries are of course becoming increasingly alike in their superficial aspects." But he was optimistic, noting that "the subways of New York, Montreal, Toronto, London, Paris and Moscow, all operate according to the same technological principles, but their employees and passengers follow the beat of different drums."[2]

Dubos's notion is that the essence of a place resides not in the physical setting of the place but in the practices of producing and inhabiting it. He also wrote: "because it is rooted both in human and physical nature, environmental diversity will persist within the political ecumenism of One World. Natural and cultural forces will overcome technological and political imperatives and continue to nurture the genius loci which account for persistence of place."[3] The implication is that the shared qualities of that practice are what persist.

Sharing in a Place

While the way we come to know a place may be largely through intuition, our actions express that knowledge concretely. Knowledge is transmitted through the ways in which we work and through the environments we make, and this sharing is the means by which a collective discourse with a place is constructed.

For a design practice, one can describe three forms of knowledge that contribute to this shared discourse with a place. First there is understanding that comes from interacting with the phenomena of a place — what can be seen, touched and sensed. Qualities of a locale's light, climate, and terrain, as well as its existing built environment, are the most direct and inescapable aspects of what is shared in a place.

Second, a discourse with a place is informed by our knowledge of how a place supports the life of a culture — the patterns of use and ways in which environment is inhabited. Third, practices share ways of articulating the knowledge of a place. Concepts like type, pattern and system generalize a place in terms that structure or constrain design actions. They articulate the rules that link instances of a form — a description of a type that not only allows designers to share the knowledge an existing place, but also provides the means to reason about its transformation.

An example of such shared knowledge can be found in Charleston, S.C., and its "Charleston house." The house is organized perpendicular to the street, with the main structure built against a side-lot line and the street line. A porch and a yard run parallel to the house, and a door provides access from the street to the porch, allowing the use of the porch to be tempered by the residents. When open, the door provides visual access into the porch area, extending the public realm; when

closed, it protects the porch from direct public view, extending the private space of the house into the side yard. Since this pattern is ubiquitous, the collective experience it provides allows for competence in the way it is designed and used. The pattern's contribution to Charleston's sense of place depends not only on its repetition but also on the recognition of how it is used.

The discourse constructed through knowledge of the sensation, use and conceptualization of place is often formalized through design codes. The intent of such regulations is to provide coherence in the way a place is developed by constraining design within a set of normative rules. Yet, the persistence of place that Dubos seeks depends on the interaction of design practice with a place, not on the standardization of design responses. A conversation with a place should be open to discoveries that are made through a dialogue between what we find and what we make. What is important is for designers to find ways to share that conversation with other designers, and with the inhabitants of a place.

Reading Places

In the design of traditional environments, the shared knowledge of a place is easily extended because the builders of the place are part of its culture. Traditional builders inherently extend the qualities of a place through direct familiarity with the processes of local production and the ways in which a place is inhabited. These experiences accumulate over time and are systematically ordered in the mind of the maker to provide a basis of acting with competence. This design competence allows for participation with the collective knowledge of the place, since it provides the means for interpretation that leads to variation.[4]

In contemporary practice, however, we can neither depend on this relationship nor take for granted that we are always intimately part of the locale in which we are building. In an essay that follows, John Habraken states that as architects have become professionals, we have become "divorced from the natural affinity we have for places that renders intervention self evident." This distancing implies a lack of familiarity with the places in which we work, and Habraken refers to the process of reading a place as a method of becoming acquainted. The intent of this reading is to locate the act of building within the shared discourse of a place.

What do we mean by reading a place? Reading is a strategy that links place to the practices that form it and argues for ways of informing the practice of further transformation. In our networked world, a basic competency of design practice ought to be the ability to observe the form and structure of any environment, to connect those observations to the ways that people live, and to make decisions about the form's significance. Two kinds of knowledge are revealed by reading: the first is descriptive, ranging from the abstracted to the particulars; the other is transformational, knowing how to move from abstract to particular and vice versa.

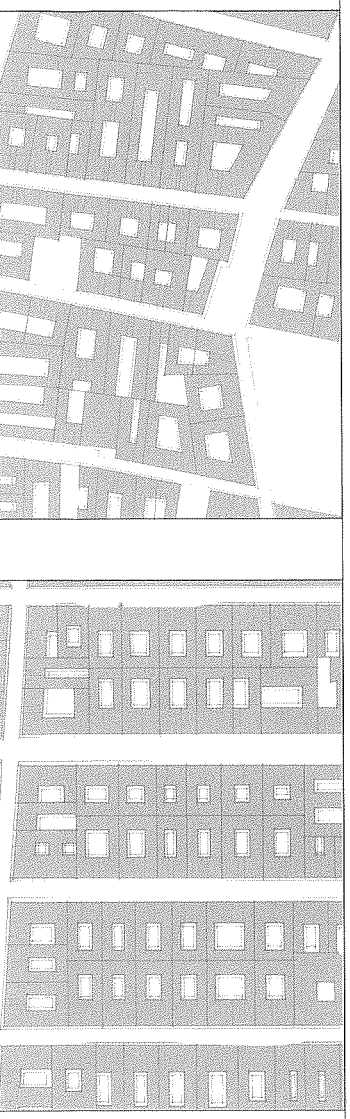
Several of the articles that follow explore various modes of reading and the implications of description for shared practice. In his reading of Portland, John Echlin describes the components that contribute to the unique and shared understanding of that city. Jill Stoner writes of recognizing a formal autonomy in the emergence of new patterns of habitation as nature repossesses the city — observations that lead her to propose new patterns of building. Renee Chow describes a shared structuring of detached houses revealed by carefully reading individual practices of habitation. Through her reading, the problem of suburban dwelling design is reconsidered as one that visualizes patterns of use as part of a continuous built-unbuilt field.

A position on the transformational knowledge produced by reading has been articulated by ILAUD (the International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design) over the last twenty years. The work of ILAUD can be characterized as a research whose products include both an understanding of the underlying structure of places as well as designs.

A primary method employed by ILAUD is that of reading through the act of design. Giancarlo De Carlo has described this method as:

the means of identifying the signs of physical space, drawing them out of their stratified layers, ordering them and recomposing them in systems that are relevant to the present. In the course of this process it is essential to "understand" but also to imagine by formulating plausible hypotheses, and this means designing. So one could say that "reading" can only be carried out by a mind that also designs.[5]

The mind that designs is a critical one — one that searches for significance in observations through projection. Rather than claim, as De Carlo does, that reading is the exclusive domain of a designer, it would be more precise to say that reading can have embedded within it a design argument — "plausible hypotheses"



Top: **District VII neighborhood fabric**

Above: **District VI neighborhood fabric**

that structure our engagement with a place. A hypothesis as a design argument focuses our attention, allows us to make claims of significance, and helps in evaluating how a place could be changed through design.

William L. Porter, writing in this issue, describes such an iterative engagement with a place in which reading leads to the construction of our knowledge of a place, knowledge that then reframes the inquiry of the design. The dynamic nature of reading and knowledge of place can also be seen in Franco Mancuso's work in Venice. His is an experience of discovering a place through a process of reading, designing and re-reading the place as layers of decisions and building are revealed. For Andrés Mignucci Giannoni, the hypothesis concerns light and shadow in Puerto Rico as a collective phenomenon whose properties and meanings are accumulated in building experience, thereby producing further readings.

Reading also includes an awareness of the knowledge and values that we bring with us. Habraken argues that as architecture is a network profession, designers and systems travel, conveying their discipline to various locales. As professionals we bring our disciplinary knowledge to problems and contexts, knowledge that includes our understanding of types and patterns that are found in many places. Rene Davids's article about his use of a range of types — some indigenous, some not — in the design of Southern California housing demonstrates this reasoning. His process shows that not all knowledge is local and, further, that the accumulated concepts and experiences that we carry with us direct our reasoning about a place.

Tale of Two Fabrics

Reading is not a simple transcription, it is dynamic; with each design action something new is learned about a place. An example of two fabrics in Budapest demonstrates the problems of reading a place too simply.

The inner neighbors of Budapest surrounding the old city of Pest, are comprised of Districts VI, VII, VIII, and IX. These neighborhoods, which are organized concentrically around the core of the old city, were developed in the nineteenth century. They share a common building type, an apartment building organized around a courtyard, through which access to apartments is provided. In plan, the dimension between the courtyard and the street edge is consistently twelve meters, with the remaining zones around the courtyard ranging from six to nine meters.

Comparing Districts VII and VI is particularly insightful when looking at how a practice extends knowledge gained from working in a place. The development of District VII began around 1840. Its urban structure, the street and subdivision pattern, is based on an access system that was established so farmers could tend agricultural lots. The subsequent subdivision of the land into building lots was influenced by this irregular form.

The relationship between the urban structure and the building type produced a variety of buildings and spaces. Today one can find courtyards that vary in range from nine to twenty-four meters wide and accommodate a diverse range of uses, including play areas, gardens, stores, work spaces and even auto repair. The organization of buildings is equally diverse, with some having linked courtyards (a few clusters are even three courtyards deep). Thus the neighborhood has a capacity for supporting many different uses while benefiting from the coherence lent by a type, which is expressed in a range of configurations while maintaining a consistent association between the public, collective and private spaces of the neighborhood. This is a place where one can observe a competence in the way a rich texture of spaces supports a culture.

The development of District VI began about 1860, twenty years later, and the area grew more quickly. The urban structure was organized in a more regularized grid with rectangular blocks. The resulting subdivision of these blocks into lots was also more uniform. The builders, extending the experience they gained in District VII, used the same building type, but the resulting structures are organized in a much more repetitive and template-like way; courtyard dimensions, for example, are similar. The buildings demonstrate far less variation and less capacity to take on a range of uses; the place appears less robust and vital, as the use is primarily dwelling.

A significant factor in the uniformity of the District's VI fabric is its regular urban structure. But we can also speculate, from looking at the both fabrics, that while the builders of District VI formalized their experience of the type they observed in District VII, their practice exhibited a more limited knowledge of the type than the builders of District VII did.

The building of District VII demonstrates a great deal of learning about the type. This knowledge includes

the potential of that type to generate different configurations and of the type's potential to accommodate use. The template-like replication of the type in District VI shows little understanding how the qualities of the type generate an architecture. If we were to extend the sense of place found in District VII today, we would want a much richer and fuller understanding of the fabric embedded in our design practice.

Extending Learning

As we are often travelers to the places in which we design, learning about the locale has become an increasingly critical process for us. But the knowledge that is required for us to extend a particular place involves information about its making and habitation, rather than its image. Extracting the layers of a place and recomposing them into relevant systems, through the process of reading, helps us describe this knowledge. The task is to extend these systems to generate new places, something that is learned through designing. Places then, with their layers of making, act as a collective memory that conserve the learning that occurs through design practice.

Jan Wampler's work in India and Pakistan, which he reports on in this issue, is an example of sustaining culture as places develop. He describes an architecture that emerges from the local rules that are extended to generate new buildings. Key to the process Wampler describes is the discourse that is produced through the application of these rules in the design of buildings. What emerges are what Wampler calls "buildings that teach" about local processes of building and habitation.

A practice of place must both induce the sharing of knowledge and extend the learning that occurs through the process of design. This first requires that we formalize what we discover about a place and articulate that knowledge as a set of general principles that give rise to a particular design expression. Such descriptions would strive to put in the hands of practitioners the material of the place — not as images, but as systems from which to generate form. The sharing is of means, not ends.

To extend learning, these discoveries cannot be static, they must be open to the discourse between design practice and the place. Designers, along with revealing what they know through a particular design, must also be able to argue for the systematic transformation of a place — articulating why and how a place can change. (This might conflict with efforts that seek the persistence of place in the preservation of its image — efforts that we may turn to because we are better at describing what is there than what we have learned.) While reading provides an approach to such a practice of place, to extend and share this learning, we need to make it a collective enterprise.

Today, with increased flows of information, traveling expertise and globalized, uniform markets, it is difficult to maintain hold of concrete, authentic and culturally bound places. We need to develop positions like reading to help direct our intervention in what is often unshared territory. Designers must help sustain the discourse within a place and help make more explicit the knowledge revealed through design.

While traditional environments benefit from the collective experience of their builders, practitioners today face a different challenge. A design practice must find ways of more directly constructing the collective memory of a place, in that the prospects for the persistence of place are tied not to the preservation of a physical locale, but with the conservation of its knowledge within our practice.

Notes

1. The articles are based on papers presented at the symposium Forming Place — Informing Practice, hosted 13-14 March, 1998, by the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, and co-sponsored by the International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design.

2. Rene Dubos, *A God Within* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 133.

3. *Ibid.*, 134.

4. Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975) Glassie offers a detail description of knowledge found within a traditional architectural competence. Particularly helpful in this discussion is Section IV: The Architectural Competence (pp. 19-40) and Section VI: The Mechanics of Structural Innovation (pp. 66–113).

5. Giancarlo De Carlo, "The Island of S. Elena," in *Territory and Identity 1 — International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design* (Milan: Maggioli Editore, 1998).

About ILAUD

ILAUD was founded by Giancarlo De Carlo in 1976 and is supported by an international consortium of universities. Each year it holds a residential course in Italy attended by students and faculty from thirteen universities and a spring seminar at one of the member universities. Workshops take up various themes, including issues of territory, language and participation. The method of inquiry is through design structured around the concept of reading.

About thirty schools have been members of ILAUD, and about a thousand students have taken part in the workshop. Current member schools include the universities of Barcelona, Berkeley, Brussels, Edinburgh, Genoa, Ghent, Geneva, La Coruna, Lund, Oslo, Pennsylvania, Stockholm and Venice.

Annual reports of the ILAUD Residential Course, with examples of reading and design studies as well as lectures and presentations made during the sessions, are available from Connie Occhialini, Field Director, ILAUD, Via Giusti 5, 20154 Milan, Italy.

A discussion of ILAUD can be found in Mirko Zardini, "From Team X to Team x: International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design (ILAUD)," Lotus 95, (Milan: Elemond S.p.A., 1997).

William L. Porter

RE: READING

I see the *reading* of architecture and urban form as integral to the practice of place making. I call this essay "Re: Reading" but also mean to imply *re-reading* in the belief that repeated *readings* will yield deeper meaning in both design and comprehension.

As I view the design process, there is a cycle of reading and conjecture, which repeats until there is some degree of stability achieved in the mind. At that point, one no longer senses the need to continue to re-read the situation, or, for that matter, to offer additional conjectures.

Because this formulation juxtaposes reflection and action, and especially because it acknowledges that the conception of place grows out of active and personal engagement, I am hopeful that it may suggest ways of bridging the gap between forming place and informing practice.

The idea of *reading* has a long legacy and has been defined and refined by extraordinary people over many years.[1] Giancarlo De Carlo suggests that effective reading requires purpose, a designing frame of mind and, probably, having designs in mind, however tentative they may be. Moreover, reading has values embedded, both conscious and unconscious.

Reading requires a deep engagement of two sorts, one in some sense contained within the other, and both used over and over again. These are *engagement in the locale* and *engagement in the context*.

Engagement in the Locale

Engagement in the locale is bodily, affective and intellectual, drawing deeply and widely on the faculties of the individual. It is an active, not passive, process. I see it happening in more or less the following manner. There is a tendency activated in you that requires you to respond in some way. That tendency may be immediately resolved, or, failing that, it may arouse affect and possibly force the intellect as well back into the process. If there is still a lack of resolution, it may cause you to attempt an imaginative excursion in order to close the gap.

I am leaning here heavily on Leonard Meyer's *Emotion and Meaning in Music*,[2] in which Meyer clearly describes how to experience an artistic artifact. He quotes logician Morris R. Cohen to set the parameters of the definition of *meaning*: "anything acquires meaning if it is connected with or indicates or refers to something beyond itself, so that its full nature points to and is revealed in that connection." Therefore, meaning has to do with an object, it has to do with that to which the object refers, and it has to do with a conscious observer who perceives the nature of each and the connections between them.

If that to which the object refers is distant and different, the meaning is, in Meyer's term, *designative*. Many architectural quotations contained in contemporary buildings are primarily designative in meaning, having little other effect on the observer. Too often in writings about architecture, meaning has been associated with designative meaning alone.

If that to which the object refers is the same as itself, the meaning is what Meyer terms *embodied*. "The dawn heralds the coming of the day...the same stimulus, the music, activates tendencies, inhibits them, and then provides meaningful and relevant resolutions." All is contained within the same medium.

Meaning unfolds through cycles of reading and re-reading, through interaction with remembered readings, and through re-readings carried out in the imagination. To continue the musical example, when you hear the first passages of a musical piece, it drastically limits what you expect to hear during subsequent episodes. Meyer terms this *hypothetical meaning*. Once the later episodes occur, then the meaning shifts to *evident* meaning. Meyer calls *determinate* the meaning that is based on the complete hearing of the work and on subsequent reflection, conversation and re-experiencing of the episode in question.

To take an architectural example, if you are aware of the rhythmic placement of columns and notice that two are spaced more widely than the others are, you formulate a question. You create alternative hypotheses – or *hypothetical* meaning – that you can confirm or discredit through further observation.

Once you have looked more closely, you see that the more widely spaced columns announce an entrance or passage, and that they are marked by a deepened lintel



Stairway, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm
Photo: **William L. Porter**

above, further to accentuate the wider spacing (as well as to aid in spanning the increased distance). This is *evident* meaning.

After you have experienced the whole building and the variety of different conditions that building contains, you can revisit the same columns to assess their significance in relationship to other conditions and to the overall experience of the building. This, finally, is *determinate* meaning.

Illustrated above is an example that deals directly with both *embodied* and *designative* meaning, both of which tap the life of the individual. The meditation mound of the Woodland Cemetery, in Stockholm, occurs along a route to the Chapel of the Resurrection. The route is an alternative to the path you would follow if you were bringing a family member to be cremated or buried.

Pay special attention in the image to the stairs that lead up the mound. Notice that the slope changes as you near the top. The length of the tread is held constant, but the height of the riser diminishes. Because your body expects a riser of full height, you put more energy into the step than it can accommodate. This creates a misfit between your experience and bodily motion.

As you approach the top, you almost float, as though you could depart the earth in some way, a rather extraordinary projection of self into another state triggered by meaning embodied in the actual steps themselves. You feel that this is the place where the body is transformed into the spirit, or where the spirit leaves the body and moves toward the sky. You see the mound as transformative: both a source of life (a swelling womb) and a burial place for the body once the spirit has departed. This reading is reinforced by your knowledge of the importance of such mounds in Scandinavia and elsewhere from primitive times.

Because embodied meaning has such a direct connection to the body and psychological processes, it can serve as a platform for a wide range of potential interpretations and associations. In this design, where the embodied meaning has been powerfully coupled to potential designative meanings, the extraordinary impact is shared and there is intersubjective understanding. In buildings that merely refer and that do not forge the link with embodied experience, meaning is far more restrictive, idiosyncratic and trivial.

It seems to me that it is impossible to surface embodied or designative meaning unless you use yourself as a research tool. Unless you are sensitive to your own bodily experience, including your senses of irritation, surprise and anticipation, you cannot tap the riches of the world of expectation. For most people, there is a cloak of conventionality that masks the affect they

might otherwise experience. Many architects are fairly good at casting that cloak aside and at being sensitive to the stimulation and direction that these surprises provide, but it is not easy.

Contextual Engagement

By *contextual engagement* I mean actively bringing to mind conditions that surround or impinge upon the object of our attention. I wish to focus particularly on the human and social contexts that I believe are becoming urgently more important for practice. Two ways of tapping these contexts are *communication* and *co-construction*. The idea and, certainly, the goal of a shared universe of discourse are commonplace among us. But that goal seems nearly an impossible objective, because we cannot be sure that our own background guarantees accurate communication and shared understanding, however subtly and empathetically we behave.

Because designative meaning is so intimately connected to personal experience, I am particularly interested in embodied meaning, for its own sake, and for its connection to designative meaning. Embodied meaning is so integral to being human as to be legible to most sensitive individuals.

One of my two giants on this topic is Michael Reddy, a linguist who has presented a startling contrast to what he calls the "conduit metaphor" of communication. The conduit metaphor implies that I say something, it turns into a little package that is transported somehow to you; you accept the package and decode it. If there is any problem in communication it is because of either a problem in the transfer or a glitch in one of our versions of the code.

Reddy proposes instead the "toolmaker's paradigm," in which people live in very different worlds. Envision a circular territory cut into pie-shaped segments. Your segment may be a rocky grotto; mine a swamp. We cannot see the other's segment, and we cannot hear one another. At the center is a little machine that rotates. I can put messages into the machine, rotate it, and you can take them out.

Say I just made a tool, a strainer, from my swamp, which I find very useful. I describe it, and I tell you how to build it. I put my instructions into the machine, and you pick them out in your rocky grotto. Strainers don't make much sense in your context. You have neither the need nor, quite possibly, the materials to build that tool. Instead you try to make a tool out of your available materials and with your experience. The tool you make represents your understanding of that instruction.

You are in a constant state of constructing meaning. Over time, through a process of passing messages back and forth, understanding will increase concerning the fit between the instructions and the original swamp in which they were generated, and the lack of fit between the original instructions and their application in a new context. Through this constructive process, you and I become increasingly aware of the nature of the other's environment. And we will gradually build a larger and larger common vocabulary by means of which to increase the depth and subtlety of communication.

The second notion of *contextual engagement* is *co-construction*, strongly linked to the first, *communication*. This is an activity described by Wittgenstein, my second giant on this topic. A builder instructs his apprentice by saying, "bring me a brick." When, from among other objects, the assistant brings the object identified as a brick to the builder, the instruction stops, the communication is complete and a language is developed.[3] The artifact of the process of communication itself becomes what is meaningful between them. While co-constructing, language has become part of the construction rather than isolated from it.

The implications of *co-construction* for professional behavior contrast with what Don Schön and others have called "technical-rational expertise" in which "the professional holds specialized knowledge in matters of social importance, a knowledge of technique based on systematic understandings of objective phenomena. On the basis of this esoteric knowledge, society allows the professional to exercise social control in the domain of his expertise."[4]

Co-construction challenges this view of professionalism, and its implication of knowledge as esoteric and authoritative. When working with a diverse client

group, one builds a vocabulary of common terms to refer to a common set of experiences, in order to co-construct a meaningful world.

The expertise necessary to create places does not reside solely in our heads, but resides as well in the knowing use of places by the people themselves, who are participants in it, as well as in its making and its remaking. Criteria by which the presence of co-construction in a situation might be detected are:

1. That there be observations grounded in the personal experiences of individuals. By "grounded" I mean that the observations should be confirmed by that individual as being related to his or her bodily, affective and intellectual experience.

2. That there be plausible accounts of others. These can sometimes be created through the use of narrative or the construction of scenarios, and these in turn depend heavily upon the use of well-developed empathetic skills;

3. That there be plausible conjectures, ideas not present in the situation – similar to tentative design – but strongly related, so as to rationalize and inform what one sees, or to receive and reframe observations previously made. These can take form in metaphors, or associative or lateral thought excursions from the present situation.

4. That there should be intersubjective understandings about the important facets of the situation, including a shared view of which are the valid stakeholders in any design situation.

Conclusion

I have tried to edit the idea of *reading* and to stress that through repeated re-readings one can begin to break what may otherwise be a self-sealing pattern of professional behavior. I first discussed *engagement in the locale*, stressing the power of a strong foundation of *embodied* meaning both to increase the potential for people to construct their own meanings, relevant to their own lives and experiences, and to increase the likelihood that those meanings will be shared with others.

I then discussed *engaging the context* in two different ways. The first is through *communication,* recognizing that people construct their own worlds out of their own experience and the materials that are available. The second is through *co-construction*, where the constructive activities of designers and others are joined in a shared and creative enterprise. These views challenge how we conceive places as well as how we conceive the processes of their design. I believe that they are essential for designing in a plural world.

Notes

1. Notable among these is Giancarlo De Carlo, whose deep understanding of urban form, whose provocative buildings, whose writings in *Spazio e Società*, whose extraordinary leadership of the International Laboratory for Architecture and Urban Design (ILAUD), and whose inspiration as teacher and colleague provide a wonderfully durable foundation for further constructions, however fragile they may be.

2. Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press, 1956).

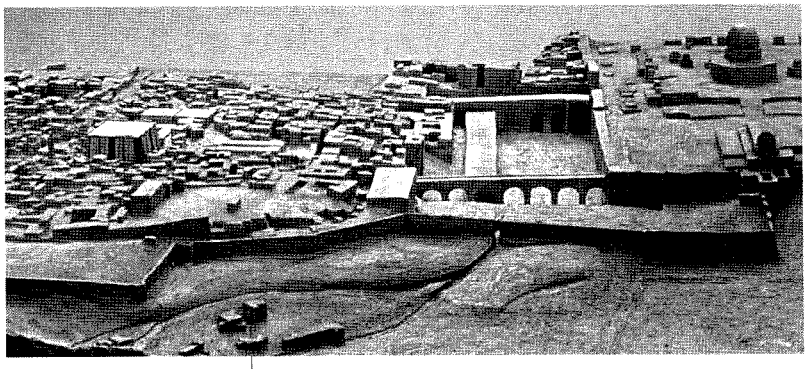
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and the Brown Books* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, Harper and Row, 1965).

4. "This technical-rational approach, which has analogs in many other professions, contains a particular view of professional knowledge and a complimentary way of framing the professional's role in relationships with clients. This view of professional knowledge is consistent with the formulation put forward by Everett Hughes, one of the founders of the sociology of professions." Quoted from Horgen, Joroff, Porter and Schön, *Excellence by Design: Transforming Workplace and Work Practice* (New York: Wiley, 1999).

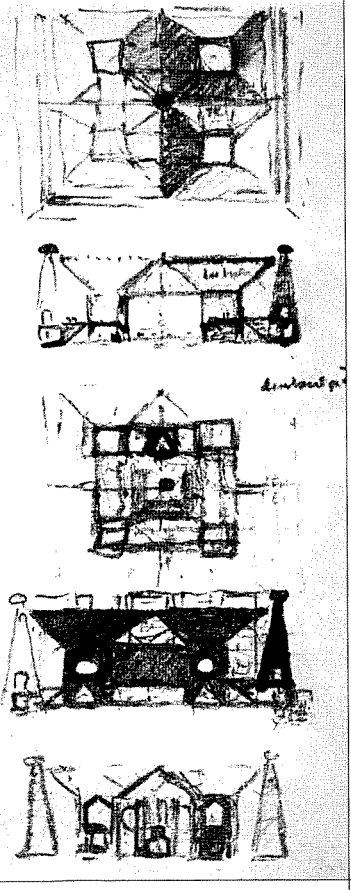
Per Olaf Fjeld

THE CAVE AND THE RUIN

Architecture is moving in many directions. Common concerns based upon social consciousness are no longer clearly articulated through the built environment. The expressions and content that lead up to an architectural decision focus more on visual aspects (how to view architecture through an established code) than on spatial awareness and understanding.



Above: **Model demonstrating relationship of Hurva synagogue to the Wailing Wall**
Below: **Early sections of Hurva synagogue**
Photos: **Per Olaf Fjeld**



Today, a two-dimensional approach is used to achieve spatial goals, and this in turn effects the treatment and perception of architecture. The elements and tools that form an architectural decision are evaluated and understood through a two-dimensional concept of physical space. Short-term commercial interests and immediate physical needs are easily incorporated into this concept, but these are not necessarily forces that direct architecture to inventiveness and long-term spatial transformation. In distancing physical reality we also distance architectural presence.

The following story describes the transformation of architectural energy that emerges from the reading and intuitive understanding of a place.

More than thirty years ago the city of Jerusalem asked Louis Kahn to design a new synagogue located on the site of an old synagogue, the Alzimmer, destroyed during the war of independence. At first he thought of building the new synagogue on top of the old ruin, but in the end he chose to build beside it. The new walls would be built from stones of the West Wall. From the very beginning, the site was loaded with energy.

The site is a very strong force in itself; one can really talk about the potential of place. The old synagogue as a ruin had a presence, an awareness that was equal in strength to any future building. It had a latent energy present within the minds of people, as part of a social consciousness, a tradition based on memory and future hopes.

Kahn thought of the new synagogue as part of an architectural sequence that would revive important human activities and events. In a way, Kahn's goal was to link the synagogue to the Wailing Wall by a series of places and institutions that would reflect the history of the city. The idea was not to make a new synagogue as a separate building, an object, but to offer a strong link between the ruin, the new synagogue and the Wailing Wall.

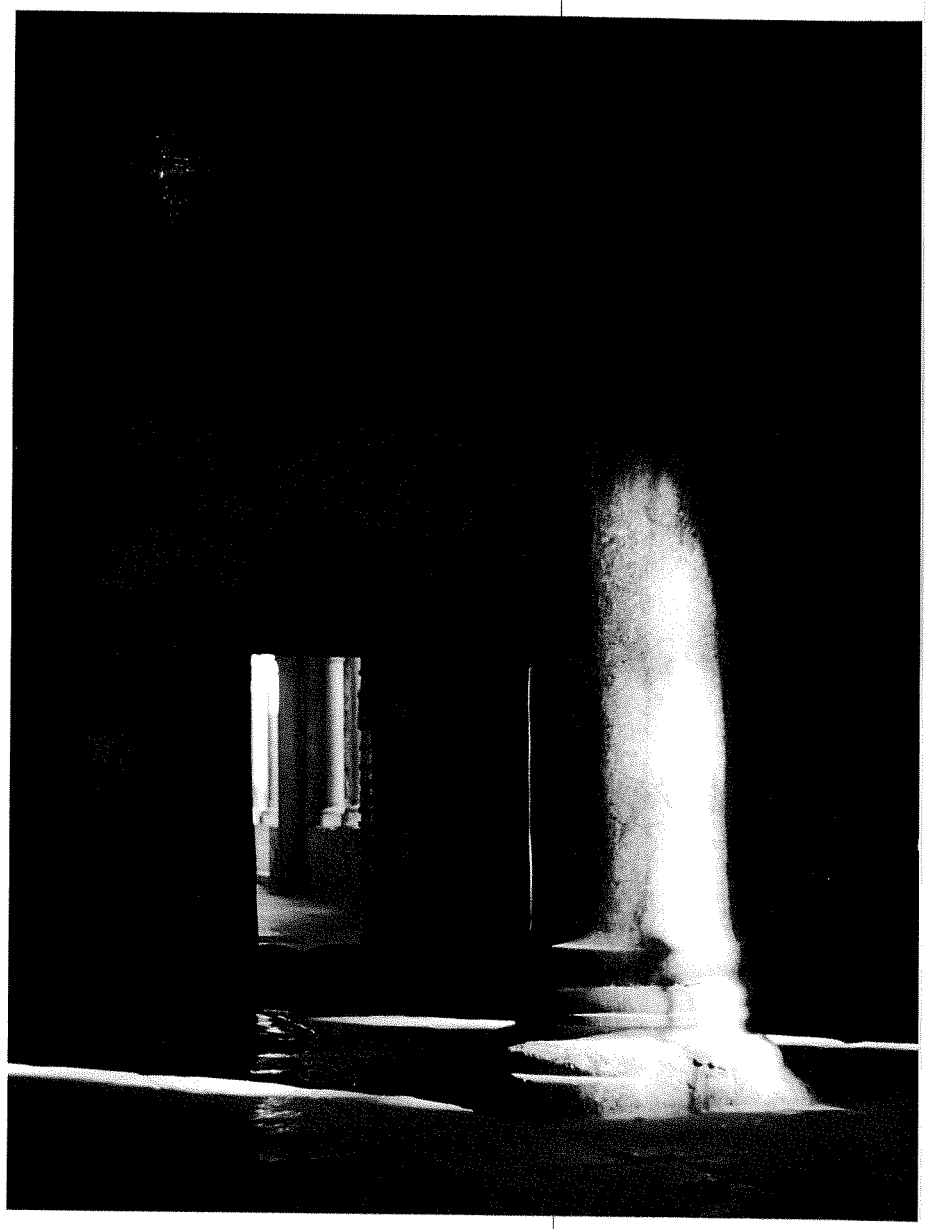
Kahn immediately gave the new synagogue a history in the same way that the ruin carried a distinct memory. He inserted his new synagogue into an already existing energy pattern. The project has an architectural identity and power of its own, but once linked to other objects of equal energy, all together they would together initiate a very strong transformation — not as a single gesture or idea in the mind of people, but, rather, as a renewed focus.

The synagogue was called Hurva, Hebrew for "ruin," and Kahn regarded the building as a ruin with an inner and outer structural shell that functioned as a sign or token of what was left behind. The inner sanctuary, made of concrete, was a place of worship. The outer areas were places of contemplation, and the synagogue's materials were chosen to acknowledge the history of the surroundings. The transformation was a ruin linked to the history of another ruin.

Daylight was the proper beginning, not something that was added or thought of at the end of the working process. The different sections in the project were a continuous discussion of light as a material.

Kahn also said: "the significance of the ruin is not the age, but the silence between the walls." It was the first time in his work he linked the idea of ruin with the word "silence." The key point is that Kahn made a very beautiful building with a spatial identity of its own, independent of the site, yet at the same time completely part of it. The "Herva" project was never built, but it still exists as a memory or part of a dream.





Above left: **Entrance to the basilica in Bethlehem**
Above: **Inside the basilica**

Kahn's synagogue has never really been out of my thoughts. As a continuation of these concerns, something happened recently that affected me very much. Circumstances brought me to Jerusalem and later to Bethlehem. There, I visited the old basilica built over a ruin, the cave that many believe to be the stable where Jesus was born. To be honest, I was in no way prepared.

It was early in the morning, about 8:00 a.m., and during the previous days I had attended some tough meetings. Extremely tired and not very concentrated, I entered the church through a hole in a very thick wall dimensioned to the height of a kneeling camel. There, once again, an architectural space struck me full force. To enter a space is always very personal. It was very beautiful and powerful room with a double set of columns touched by thousands of people through hundreds of years; smooth, tactile, an extension of my skin. The morning light entering from high above gave silence to the space. At that moment I was not separate from architecture. I did not view architecture, nor was I part of a reading; I was part of a spatial event.

The two stories begin with a ruin, a place with a history and memory. In both cases, architecture is adding a quality to an existing situation, but at the same time the new space has a life of its own. Both places are located in troubled ..reas politically and socially, but architecture can transcend these problems through space. In this sense, architectural content, by way of being specific, is a spatial translation of a continuous human dialogue open to all.

The dialogue between practice and place is supported by how a practice chooses to study a place. In analyzing aspects of setting, designers choose representations that argue for particular qualities in a place.

These representations enable practice by informing designers about certain aspects of a place, but they constrain practice through what they leave unseen.

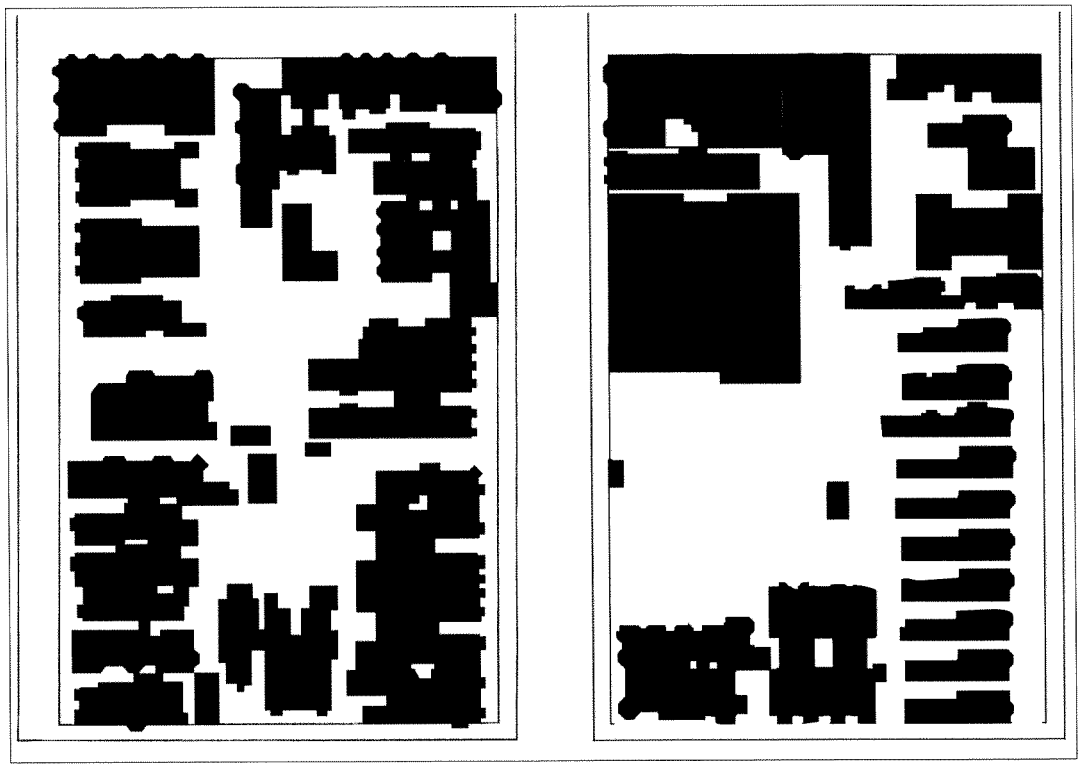


Figure 1: **Built-unbuilt plan representation of several blocks in San Francisco**

Graphics: **Renee Y. Chow**

An important attribute of any place is its quality as a continuous structure of spaces and forms that are experienced, read and inhabited. This structure is commonly referred to as a fabric. Representations that argue for the qualities of places as fabrics include built-unbuilt, hierarchic and experiential approaches.

This article illustrates and assesses how these three approaches inform design decisions, using detached houses in San Francisco as case study. It then argues for the significance of experiential approaches, particularly for suburban design. Although these approaches can employ a wide range of depictions (plans, sections, isometrics, models, etc), this article uses plan views to discuss the differences and significance of representation for dwelling.

Built–Unbuilt Representation

The most commonly invoked representation of a fabric is that of built–unbuilt space, also referred to as "figure–ground." Typically built space is rendered as the "figure" and unbuilt space is left as the background, which is then read as "ground."

In figure 1, part of San Francisco's fabric is represented as a built–unbuilt plan. From this plan, patterns and shapes emerge that are useful for both description and design. In the textures, both the overall structure of the place and the particulars can be read — boundaries and districts as well as the continuity and singularity of buildings and open spaces. Built–unbuilt representation characterizes the reciprocity between built and unbuilt space as shaped.

While the strength of the representation is in the clarity of the information, certain spatial relations are eliminated. Edge zones and connections between inside and out are not described. In the San Francisco example, the built–unbuilt plan eliminates important information about the raised plinth and transition elements, such as stairs and entry porches, that accommodate the elevation change. The footprint of each dwelling reveals a highly articulated mass, but strategies for admitting light and air to interior spaces are not revealed.

In design, the outline of spaces is configured until appropriate shapes are found for the built and the unbuilt. Too often, however, the edge between the outlined areas is translated into a wall or facade, and the volume of the built area subdivided for activities.

Hierarchic Representation

An essential quality of any environment is that of being inside – in a room, in a building, in the street, in the block, in the city. One way of describing this quality is by associating each scale of the environment with a different method of representation. For instance, the city scale is drawn as a street plan; the district or block is rendered another way, often as a built-unbuilt plan; and buildings are described with plans showing interior partitions. This has the effect of nesting, or telescoping, in which one zooms in and out for different scales of information.

Hierarchic approaches best represent the qualities of dwelling when exemplifying, that is, when the depiction of one place serves as an example for a larger area. This is useful in districts comprised of a distinct building typology such San Francisco. In *Built for Change*[1], Anne Vernez Moudon describes three scales of the fabric: the city scale is represented by the streets and other transportation networks, the district scale using built-unbuilt plans, and the house scale through a description of house types and their physical and positional variations.

The argument in the representation needs to be reconsidered when designing. Hierarchic representation argues for reciprocal relations between levels, but does not inherently organize design decisions within each level. The spatial relation of a room to a building, or a building to the street is defined, but the relation of one building to another can be overlooked.

For example, a designer would use a built-unbuilt plan to consider a building's relation to the context and design the building itself as another drawing. The interaction of the building's activities within the setting is held within the intelligence of the designer, or ignored, even if only momentarily. The separation between building and setting when designing tends to reinforce discrete and independent relationships between the buildings of a place.

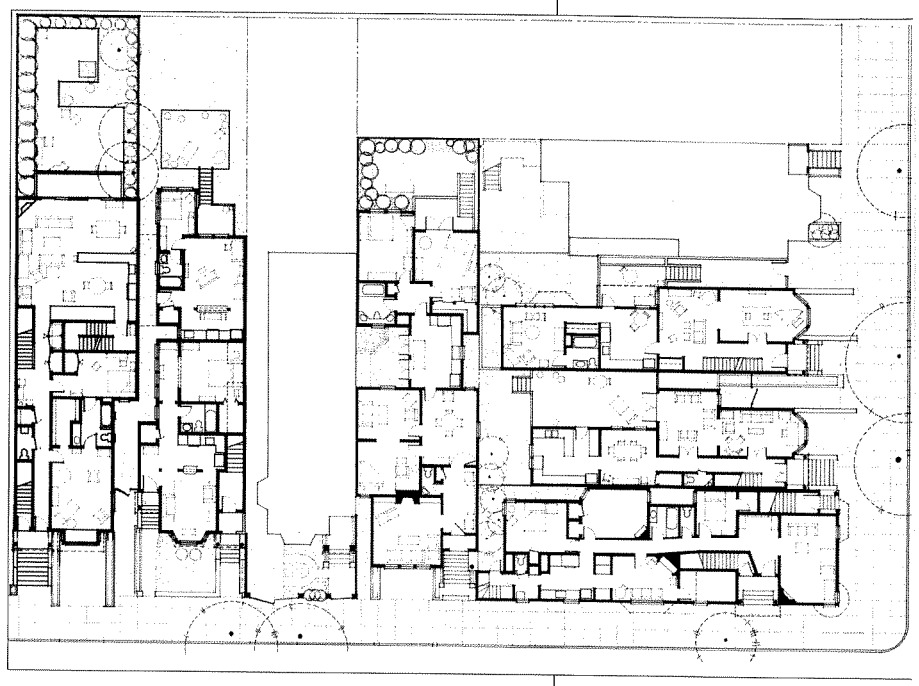


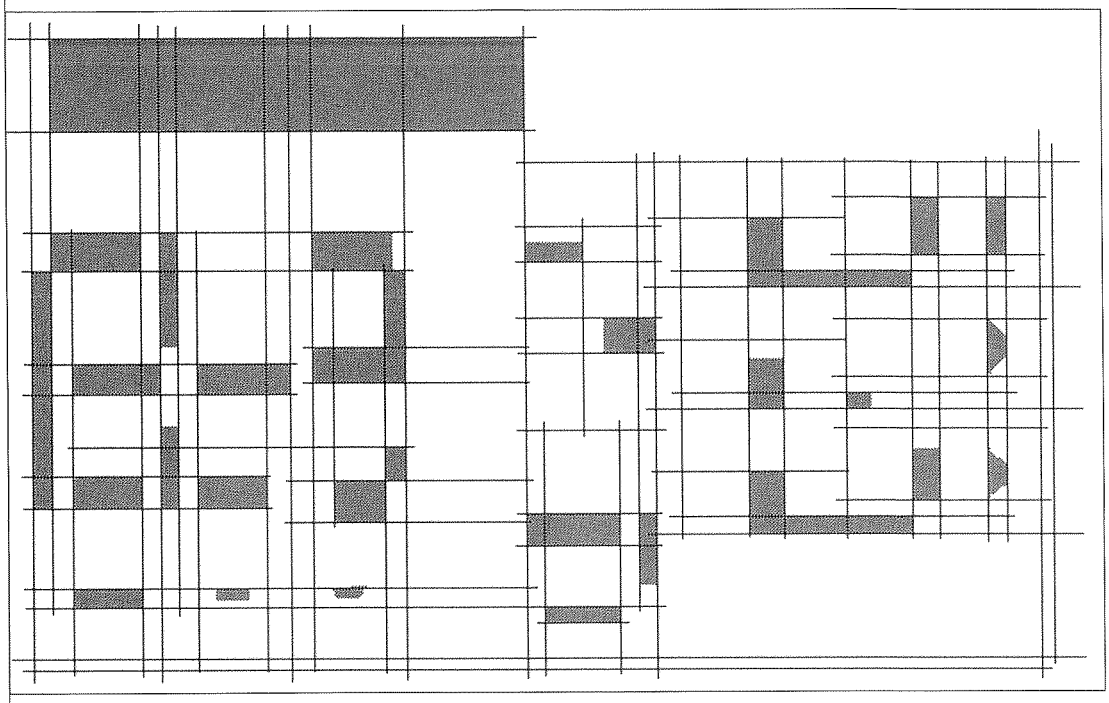
Figure 2. **Experiential plan of San Francisco**

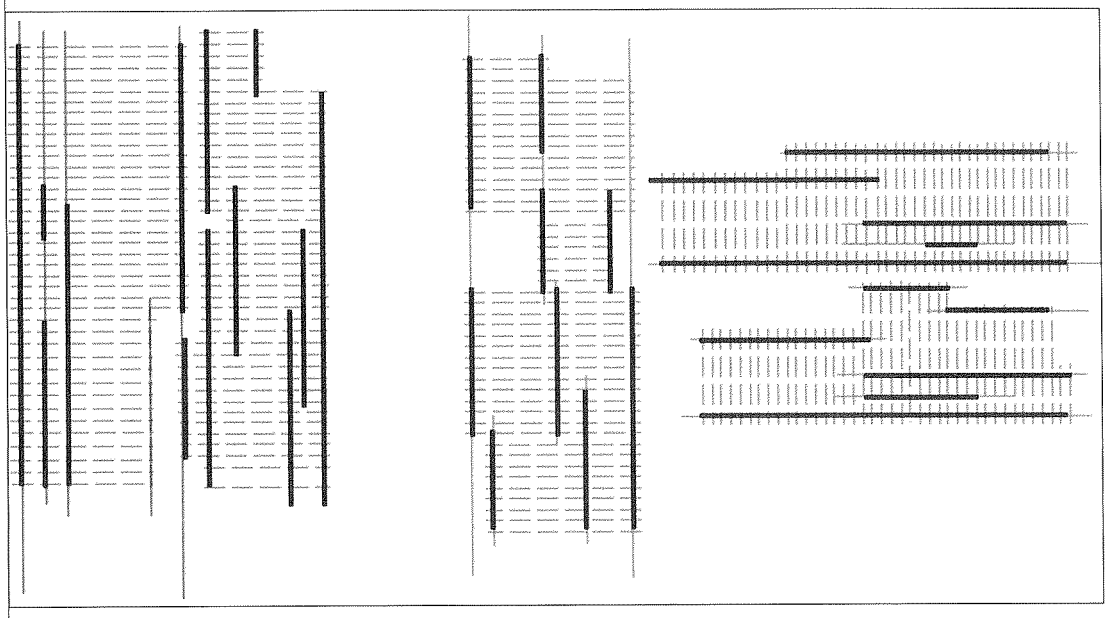
Experiential Representation

A third approach describes the experience of being within a fabric, rendering the fabric as one would dwell and move inside it. Experiential representation differs from hierarchic representation in that the continuity of the experience is described by representing the fabric at one scale (figure 2). This kind of description of places is referred to as "tissue" by Habraken, *tessuto* by Cannigia and "dwelling group" by Caminos[2].

In experiential representation, both the general character as well as particular conditions can be discerned. In particular, patterns can be read in relation to daily inhabitation from which formal typologies, themes and systems emerge.

While relationships between buildings and their settings are immediately seen in experiential representations, relationships to larger scales of the environment are limited by the base drawing size. As such, experiential representation is complementary to hierarchic representation – one emphasizes relations within a level, the other between levels.





Right: Figure 3. **The same block described by an overlay that highlights the dimensions of the fabric, or the sizes of spaces for inhabitation.**

Below right: Figure 4. **The same block described by highlighting the assembled qualities of the fabric, in this case the bearing walls, infrastructural walls and the floor joist. Since these houses are balloon-frame, the bearing walls define the spaces on all floors of the houses.**

Informing Dwelling

In the study of cities as fabrics, the suburbs have been overlooked. Perhaps this is because the act of building a community from an aggregation of individual houses appears to be such a simple problem. Yet, it should be argued that good suburban dwelling is no less complex in its demands for weaving collective and individual ways of living; it could even be considered as more complex if the outdoor landscape were well integrated.

Suburban design and development has been dominated by hierarchic approaches to representation. The design of the community is prepared as a master plan that structures a shared infrastructure, lays out transportation networks, and parcels land into smaller lots for individual ownership. Houses are placed lot by lot in relationship to a street. In some new developments, the future homeowner selects a lot as well as a house from a group of model homes provided by a developer or from an array of catalogues. In more speculative situations, an array of preselected model homes are built for a target market. Both approaches are hierarchic with the community level represented by street plans and plot plans; the neighborhood represented by built–unbuilt plans, including footprint, land-use or roof plans; and buildings by model home plans.

While house-to-street patterns are established, house-to-house relations are ambiguous. Homes tend to be designed without reference to each other. In fact,

model homes have come to be defined as houses without a particular context. Spatial relations between homes are intentionally eliminated or ignored. When model homes are designed, activities are inwardly focused and self-referential to compensate for the unknown conditions of a future site.

When houses are built on a site, they are placed as masses, spaced to avoid interfering with each others' activities. The resulting space between buildings is unusable and wasted; transition spaces and collective patterns of living are rare, resulting in a loss of shared ways of dwelling in a place. Suburban dwelling becomes a commodity whose importance as an investment dominates its contribution or connection to a place[3].

Much of the criticism of suburbs is really directed at this characteristic of the suburban fabric. There are many wonderful examples of single detached building fabrics whose experiential (house-to-house) relations as well as hierarchic (house-to-street) relations are articulated: portions of the historic fabric of Charleston, S.C., Horatio West in Santa Monica by Irving Gill, and San Francisco, to name just a few.

These examples support an argument that it is not single detached living that is the inherent problem, but its volumetric conception and development. If hierarchic representation unintentionally supports a volumetric structure, how can adding experiential representation aid in addressing patterns of waste, isolation and commodification?

Using experiential representations in suburban design addresses the potential discontinuity between discrete buildings. By taking conventional design attributes and applying them across a fabric, it is possible to use representation to explore the contribution of the part to the whole[4]. In this way, the experiential complexity of a fabric can be layered, clarifying design systemically rather than house-by-individual house.

Again, using San Francisco as an example, the dimensioning (figure 3) and the assembling (figure 4) of this fabric illustrates the continuity of the setting. The volume of the house controls neither the structure of the dimensions nor the assemblage. Instead, the dimensions and the construction of the environment move from inside to out, from house to house.

Through an overlay study of numerous single detached dwelling fabrics, I have concluded that the suburban settings with distinct breaks in the fabric at the outer boundary of the house are those that suffer most from waste of interstitial space and isolation. These correspond to the boundaries in built–unbuilt representation and in the levels of hierarchic representation[5]. By using experiential representation for the design of detached dwellings, these problems can be more readily seen and they are more likely to be addressed. Suburban dwelling design requires a spatial structuring in which some activities happen to be contained within detached houses.

For practices to contribute to the making of place, adding experiential representations further informs a dialogue about the qualities of dwelling in a place. It allows designers to see beyond the imagery of places to the ways in which they are structured as collective and individual environments.

Notes

1. Anne Vernez Moudon, *Built for Change: Neighborhood Architecture in San Francisco* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

2. See N. John Habraken, *SAR '73: the methodical formulation of agreements concerning the direct dwelling environment* (Eindhoven: SAR, 1973); Anne Vernez Moudon, "Getting to Know the Built Landscape: Typomorphology," in Karen A. Franck and Lynne H. Schneekloth, eds., *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994); H. Caminos with J. Turner and J. Steffian, *Urban Dwelling Environments: An Elementary Survey of Settlements for the Study of Design Determinants* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969).

3. Current housing production allocates much effort to defining the program for the design of model homes. Through the identification of marketable ways of living, model homes are designed to fulfill the programmatic requirements of a lifestyle. Differences in ways of living are seen as variations and are accommodated by adding "features." When a household's way of living changes, residents relocate to another house that better suits the new way of living – moving from a starter home to a family home to a retirement home. Since each house sits independent and isolated from its setting, ways of living in a place are more readily disposed.

4. I have used this overlay approach to representation as a means of description in "Sharing in a Setting," *Places* 11:1 (1997) and "House Form and Choice," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlement Review* 9:11 (1998).

5. In "House Form and Choice," the fabrics of San Francisco and Clayton, a contemporary California suburb, are compared using experiential overlays.

René Davids

ADAPTING TRADITIONAL PROTOTYPES TO CONTEMPORARY URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS: DAYBREAK GROVE

The use of historical models in design is sometimes challenged because contemporary life is assumed to be fundamentally different from that of the traditional societies that developed them. However, the persistence of social patterns of behavior is evidence of a continuing need to assess both the architectural forms that have sustained them in the past and social changes from which new ones may develop.

The Resilience of Social Patterns

For centuries in rural hamlets and fishing villages, everyone knew everyone else, people stayed close to home and members of extended families lived close to one another. Collective memory and shared experience gave meaning and continuity to the randomness of everyday life.

Today, many people have retreated into suburban tract homes and regard their neighbors with suspicion. Because the average American household moves every few years, established communities of the sort found in primitive societies are difficult to maintain. Nostalgia for the intimacy of small-town life has inspired much sentimental writing on urban issues and promotion of what Deyan Sudjic has called the "community myth."[1]

Providing opportunities for community interaction, or "building community," has become a much-discussed goal for design professionals involved in the provision of affordable housing. Their arguments are based on the assumption that the precarious lives led by impoverished people require the solidarity and support of those in similar circumstances.

Paradoxically, affordable housing is subsidized and rented to low-income families for only as long as their annual household income remains below certain predetermined income levels. Therefore, established communities in affordable housing developments can only thrive on economic failure and permanent dependency, the very conditions housing professionals should be working to eliminate.

Adding to the many narratives of loss that have pervaded urban literature in the twentieth century, Leon Krier has written that "the myth of unlimited technical progress and development has brought the most 'developed' countries to the brink of physical and cultural exhaustion."[2] Krier believes that the return to reason can only be achieved with a retreat to the idioms of the pre-industrial era.

The recent revolution in communication technology has caused other designers to question the need for physical proximity altogether because the social conditions that made it necessary or desirable have disappeared. But to insist that technology has eliminated the need for human contact is, at best, an over-simplification. Contemporary culture is complex and diverse; many who live in traditional societies use advanced technology while those in the more developed world yearn for simpler ways of life.

The impact of advanced communication technologies on contemporary life needs to be placed in perspective. Access to them is presently limited to only a small fraction of the world's population, and it remains to be seen whether computer modems, if and when they are universally available, will modify individual lives beyond recognition.

Below, opposite page:
Daybreak Grove
Photos and graphic: **René Davids, Christine Killory**





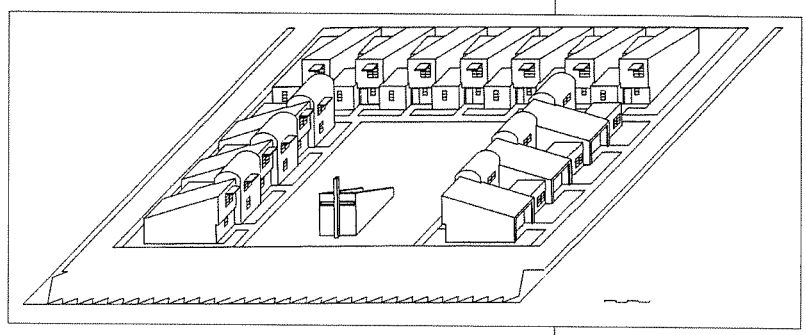
Sudjic correctly warns against the futility of attempting to recover a vanished past, but there are indications that people's desire for more social contact remains strong. The emergence of new building types, such as patient–family guest houses, which allow family members to assist with the care of hospitalized relatives, or the revival of others, such as coffee houses and farmers markets, are evidence of the desire for more social interaction at all levels of human existence. Margaret Crawford has written about the resilient urbanism that flourishes in marginal or overlooked areas of cities, from spaces under freeways colonized by street vendors to yard sales on suburban front lawns.[3]

Daybreak Grove

In the design of Daybreak Grove in Escondido, California, a thirteen-unit affordable housing project, my firm reinterpreted historical precedents to protect the privacy of the family unit, while creating opportunities for parents and children to meet and play. The project was commissioned by the North County Housing Foundation for low-income families, particularly single-parent families headed by women.

The complex was influenced by three important spatial and architectural constructs:

- the urban structure of traditional Latin American cities, where urban plazas are the focus of community life;



- the Carthusian Monastery, in which individual residential cells with attached private gardens are grouped around a cloistered court; and
- the California bungalow court, where a central space enveloped by houses is the primary organizing element.

Plazas While large plazas are no longer feasible as grand civic gestures in Southern California, scaled-down versions — *placitas* or *plazuelas* — can be adapted to evolving urban contexts. The traditional urban plaza is a void in the midst of dense urban fabric, but placitas in New Mexico are small plaza-like spaces in domestic situations adapted to the hybrid social and urban fabric that evolved as New Mexico became more culturally diverse.

This urban tradition is embraced in Daybreak Grove by organizing all units around a *placita*. The reinterpretation of the Spanish legacy of urban planning ensures the continuity of a tradition of civic values



Above: **Daybreak Grove**
Photo: **René Davids, Christine Killory**

and emphasizes its importance as a living heritage that can be passed along to succeeding generations as it is adapted to the scale and structure of contemporary neighborhoods.

The Carthusian Monastery. In Escondido, a sprawling medium-sized Southern California city with suburban fabric, the adaptation in urban form that must be made for a low-income housing complex requires considering the balance between the needs the individual family and the collective — a balance that the Carthusian monastery can provide. The monastery's potential as a model for residential design was already tested by Le Corbusier through projects like the Immeuble Villas.

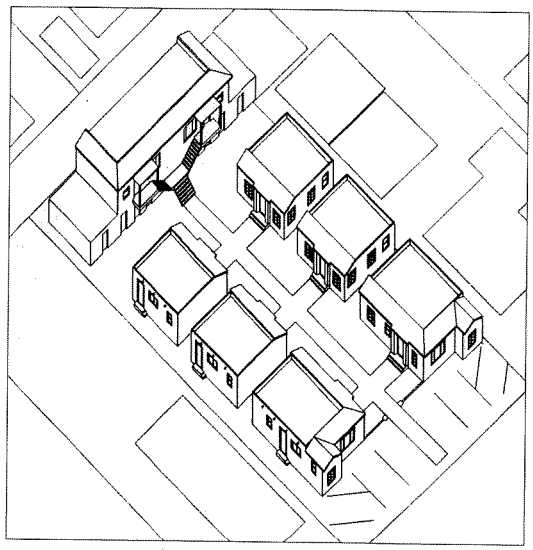
At Daybreak Grove, the typological influence of the Carthusian monastery is evident in the design of the individual units, each of which is configured around a small internal patio, providing the family with a private outdoor living space, and natural light and cross ventilation in every room. The residents are likely to be immigrants from Central and South America, and the rich variety of private and public outdoor spaces in the complex — front yard and porch, back yard and porch, common courtyard and private patio — encourage them to establish bonds of mutual support.

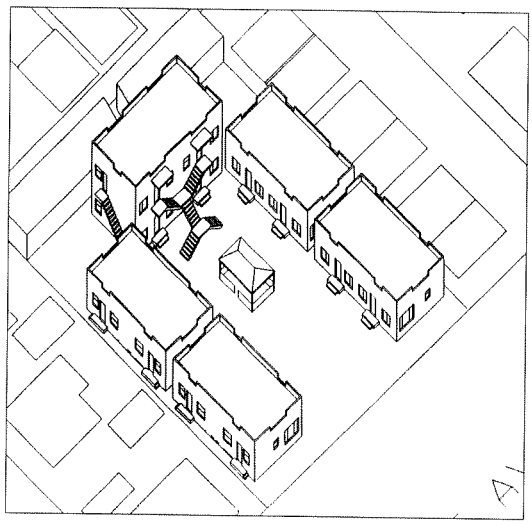
The Bungalow Court. The bungalow court is a configuration of small attached or free-standing residential units surrounding a central court which, like the Carthusian monastery, sustains an equilibrium between individual and collective space.

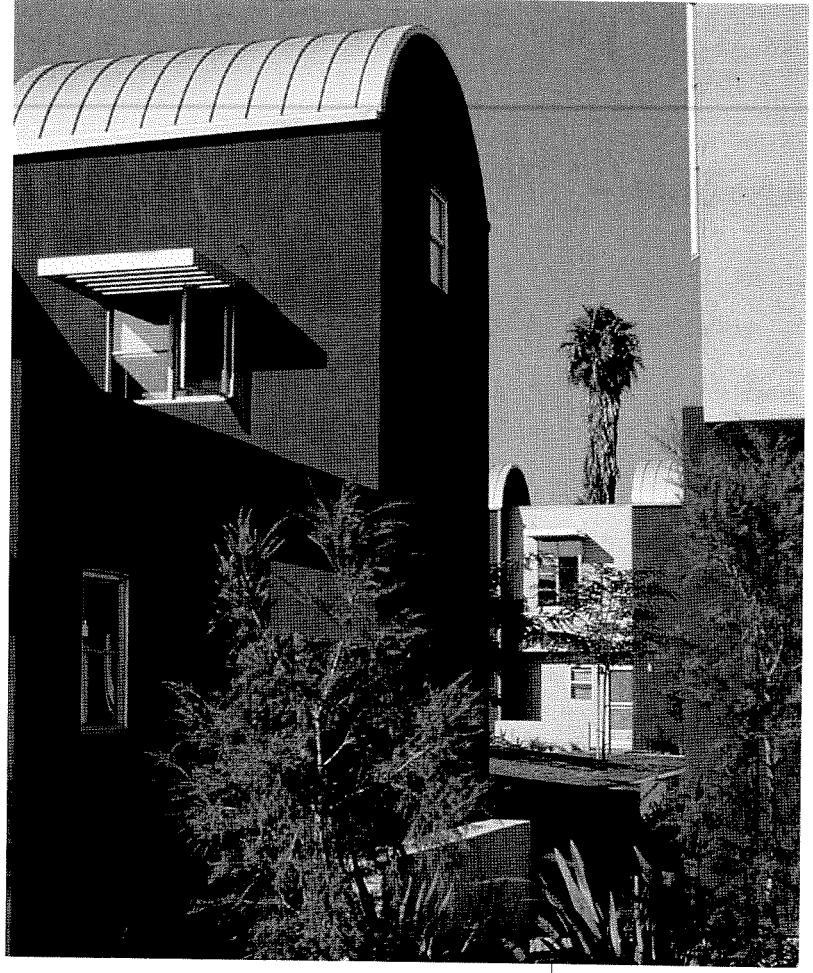
Since the early years of this century, these inexpensive living environments have fostered residential privacy and a strong sense of personal and family identity in urbanizing areas of California. The flexible size and layouts of bungalow courts allow them to be easily integrated with other housing types, including single-family homes, and adapted to a variety of urban situations, from transitional neighborhoods to established residential areas. The inherent adaptability of the type allows Daybreak Grove to flourish in an urban context otherwise devoid of distinctive residential character.

Daybreak Grove is ideally suited to its residents and location, but the historical typologies that informed its design should not be regarded as templates to be adopted in all circumstances. The same historical models might not be appropriate for other constituencies, neighborhoods or geographical locations.

Formulaic solutions should not be inflexibly applied to complex urban and human situations. Contrary to the









Left, above: **Daybreak Grove.** Photos: **René Davids, Christine Killory**

Far left: **Diagrams of two California bungalow courts.** Graphics: **Steve Gavino**

teachings of the Modern movement and the preaching of neo-traditionalists, architecture does not determine human behavior. However desirable from the designer's perspective, a particular pattern of settlement will only be successful if the cultural predisposition and the desire to adapt it are already present in the community.

Notes

1. Deyan Sudjic, *The 100 Mile City* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1992), 280.

2. Leon Krier, *Drawings: 1967-1980* (New York: AAM Editions, 1981), p. XXV.

3. Margaret Crawford, "Contesting the Public Realm: Struggles Over Public Space in Los Angeles," in *Journal of Architectural Education* 49:1 (September 1995), 4-9.

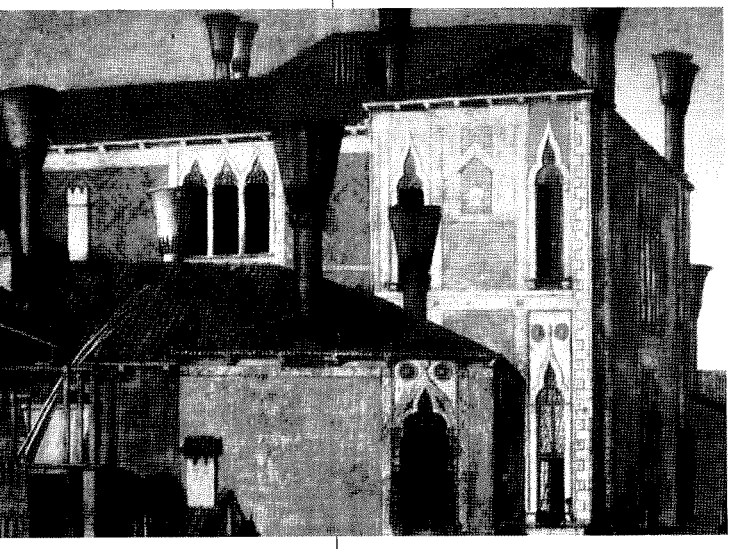
Project Credits

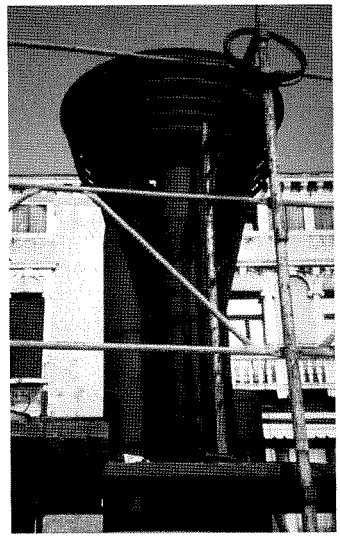
Daybreak Grove, Escondido, Calif.
Client: North County Housing Foundation
Architects: Davids Killory, René Davids, AIA, Christine Killory, RIBA (principals in charge)
Associate Architect: Studio E
Landscape Architect: Leslie Ryan

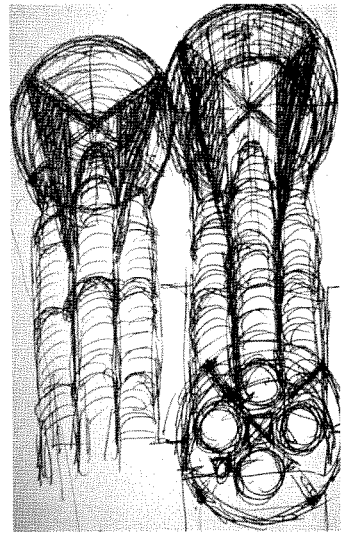
Franco Mancuso

READING, DESIGNING AND RE-READING: MY EXPERIENCE IN VENICE

I once wrote a guide to Venice and crammed it full of everything I understood about the city. I tried to see Venice as did those who, at different times and in different circumstances, actually gave form to this extraordinary city, in a setting that was particularly hostile for dwelling.







S. Lorenzo Convent reuse project. Left to right: **Venetian chimneys (from Giovanni Bellini), new chimney construction and sketch.**

Photos and graphics: **Franco Mancuso**

I endeavored to come to grips with the methods that were invented to consolidate the land, and with the technologies that were used to construct the foundations of the buildings. I looked at the actions that had been taken to shape the insulae, gradually limiting the bodies of water and gradually constructing bridges to cross the water. I questioned how and why the squares came to be, with their wells for water supply. I wondered how the problem of the dearth of construction materials had been dealt with and why reuse was the rule, with pre-existing structures and buildings reconstructed on their original bases.

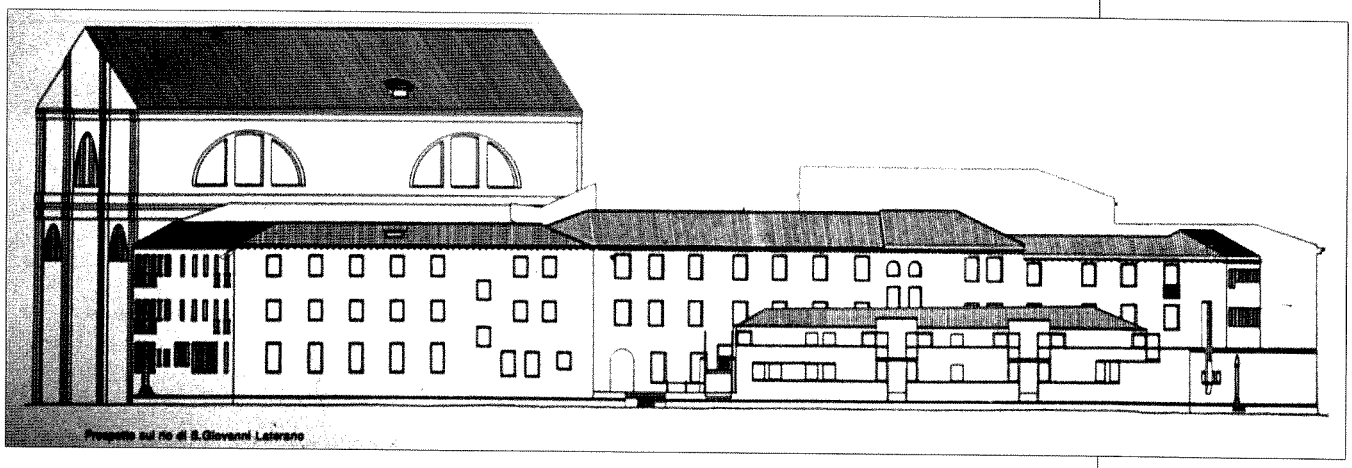
Later, the opportunity arose for me to work on two architectural projects in Venice, projects that differed in size, function and site. Into them, naturally, I poured everything I thought I had understood about the city. However, other insights, of no less importance, came to me through the projects themselves.

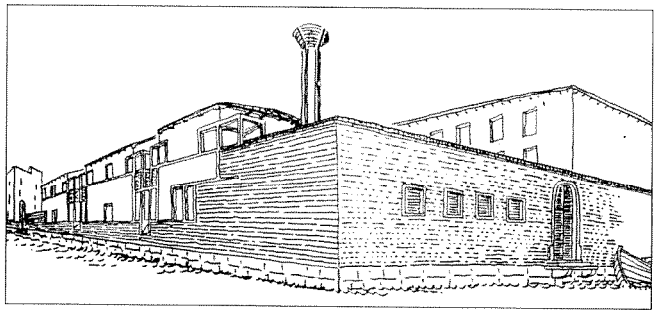
In my experience, there is no more effective or penetrating way for an architect to acquire knowledge from a site than to design a project for it. Reading a place is an endless process, and if this process is codified and transmitted, as through a book, it will be expanded, perhaps even questioned, when the time comes to design a project.

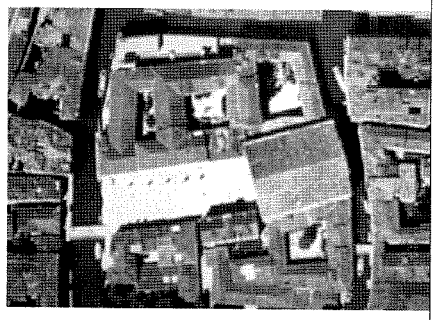
My first project called for reusing the old convent of S. Lorenzo to accommodate a retirement home. The project involved the restoration of the pre-existing structures, except for the rear building. The latter is to house a group of small living units, which will be built ex novo after the demolition of the parts of complex that are devoid of historical and architectural value.

Once renovated, the complex will host rooms, living units and spaces for related services for approximately twenty-two permanent residents. It will also accommodate services for outside users, offering temporary visiting facilities, a restaurant, a multi-purpose room, spaces for occupational activities, gardens, a health club, health care and therapeutic facilities, doctors' offices and a laundry.

Special attention was given to the design of the northern side of the building; I immediately realized the possibility of inserting some elements that derived from real understanding of the character of the Venetian urban fabric — using the foundations of the existing structure, aligning the building along the canal border and reprocessing, even in the foundation materials, the significance of the ancient monastery brick wall.







S. Lorenzo Convent reuse project

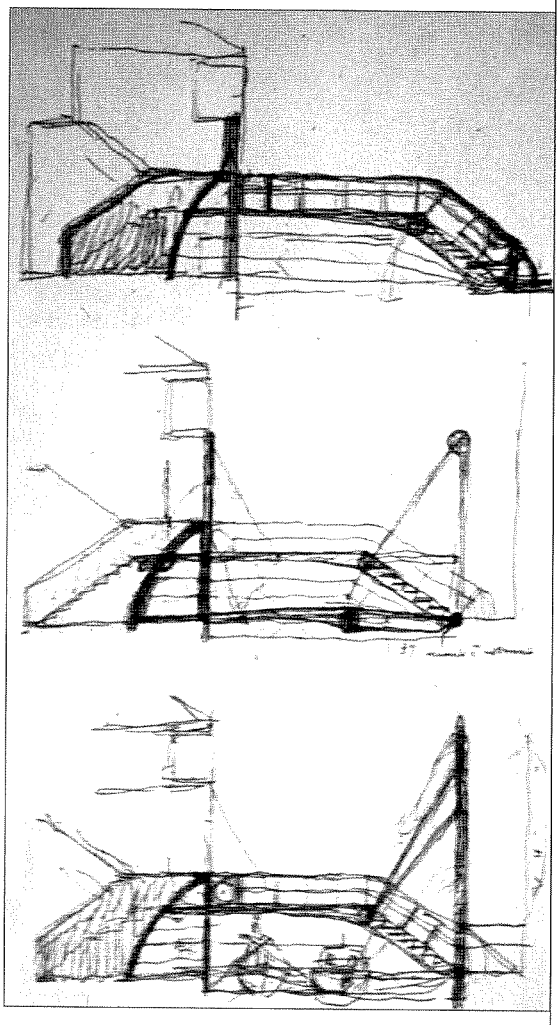
Above: **Elevation along the S. Giovanni Laterano canal**

Far left: **Model of the new building**

Left: **Aerial view of the *insula* of S. Lorenzo**

Below left: **Sketches for the new mobile bridge**

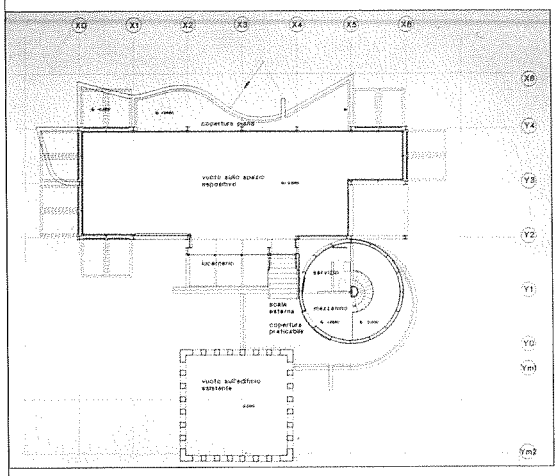
We proposed a new mobile bridge, connecting the insula with the most vital part of the city, behind the northern canal, and giving the old people living in the complex the ability to cross the canal easily when the bridge is flat. Mobile bridges have been very common in the Venitian urban fabric – even the wooden Rialto Bridge, before the big fire of the sixteenth century – and Venetian bridges have continuosly been re-invented according to the possibility of using new materials and technologies.

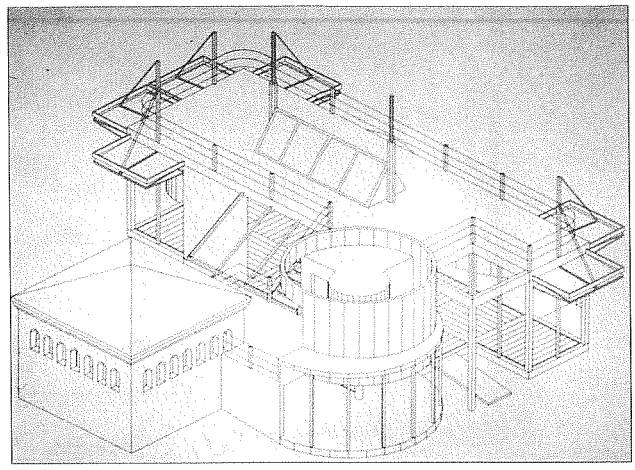


The facade is characterized by a particular conformation of openings, studied so as to solve the need, given the northern exposure, of at least partially capturing the sun from the east and the west, and to reflect the stylistic features of the building tradition in which masonry is defined by a weave of vertical and horizontal elements in white stone.

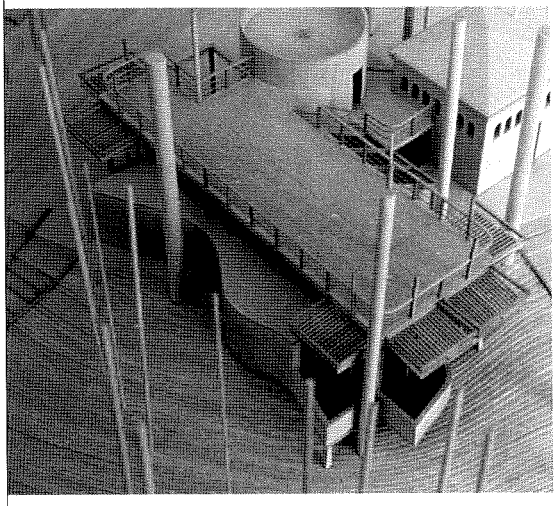
The second project is for the Korean Pavilion at the Biennale Gardens, conceived with the Korean architect Seok Chul Kim. The site of the Korean Pavilion is on the top of an existing artificial hillock full of trees, between the Japanese and German pavilions. Its elevation is approximately 4.5 meters above the Giardini embankment, and it offers a splendid view over St. Mark's Basin.

The site is occupied by a brick building that was constructed in the 1930s; it has a square floor plan, approximately six meters on a side, angled at approxi-





Korean Pavilion plan, axonometric and model



mately 45 degrees with respect to the pavilions around it. At the outset we decided to keep the brick building, which was in a somewhat rundown state. I discovered many fruitful characterstics of this very unknown and unusual place (in spite of the limitations imposed by the municipality, such as the obligation of respecting the existing trees, saving the slopes and having a building resting on supports, rather than on foundations).

The new pavilion is composed of two intrinsically connected units. The new part extends to the north of the existing building, and its planimetric configuration comes out from the position of all the existing trees. It was conceived as a transparent, light, suspended structure, resting on supports so as not to alter the present slope of the land. The tips of the supports are below ground level and fitted with stone elements to connect them with the structure of the building, as in Korean traditional architecture (but consider also that all the Venetian buildings are fitted on piles!). In this manner damage to the land and trees is avoided.

The building itself is made of steel and glass, and is conceived in such a way as to ensure maximum transparency: we put in practice the idea that the pavilion should be open and permeable, so there is a view from the inside, over the basin, and from the outside, of the trees and vegetation.

Unlike the other pavilions, which are usually protected during the winter by temporary closure systems, the Korean pavilion will be equipped with an external protection system that is an integral part of the building and makes opening and closing operations fast and efficient. The system is based on external folding wooden elements, which hang on external cornices, as in traditional Korean architecture.

At the same time the effort of emphasizing the visual projection towards the water comes from the shape of Venetian shape of traditional houses and palaces, which open with transparent frames, balconies and loggias (where possible) towards water bodies — canals, basins and the lagoon itself. The flat roof is accessible (via two small stairways, one internal, the other external); it offers a place for open-air exhibitions that require more vertical display space and acts as a large balcony opened again to the basin.

Finally, we decided to test the use of wood for the balcony, the wave-like wall and the external locks. Wood is very common in both Venetian and Korean building; wood ensures an organic relationship with the surroundings.

The building will take on two distinct configurations during the year. Open, it will appear lighter and more transparent due to the impulse of the perimeter closures placed in a horizontal position, held in place by cables. Closed, it will take on the appearance of a building that belongs to the garden, that fits in perfectly with the trees and vegetation that surround it.

In Venice (and, I think, everywhere) the context obviously offers many suggestions. But in order to penetrate deeply into the richness of a place, you must be involved in a real design process.

Project Credits

S. Lorenzo Convent, Venice
Client: Municipality of Venice, Edilvenezia
Deisgn: Franco Mancuso (architect), Francesco Bono (engineer), with Alessandro Calafati and Clara Madeira De Andrade
Date: 1995-99

Korean Pavilion, Biennale Gardens, Venice
Client: Korean Culture and Arts Foundation
Architects: Seok Chul Kim, Franco Mancuso, with Alessandro Calafati, Chang Geun Park, Jin Young Choi, Seok Woo Kim
Date: 1994-95

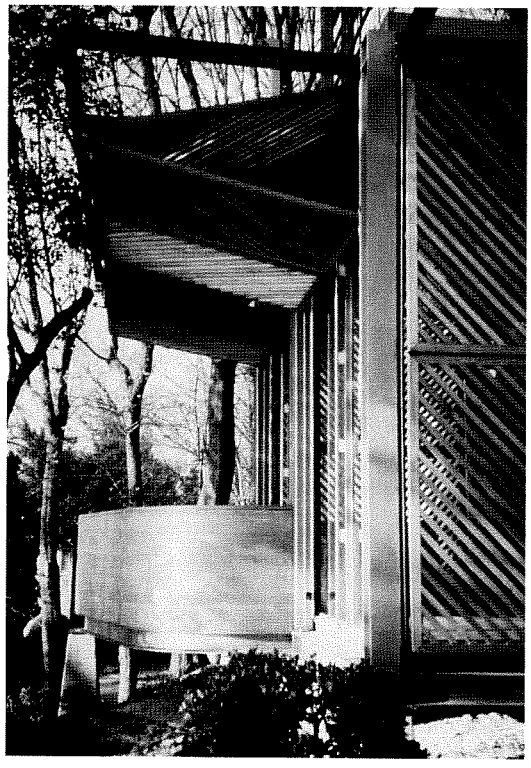


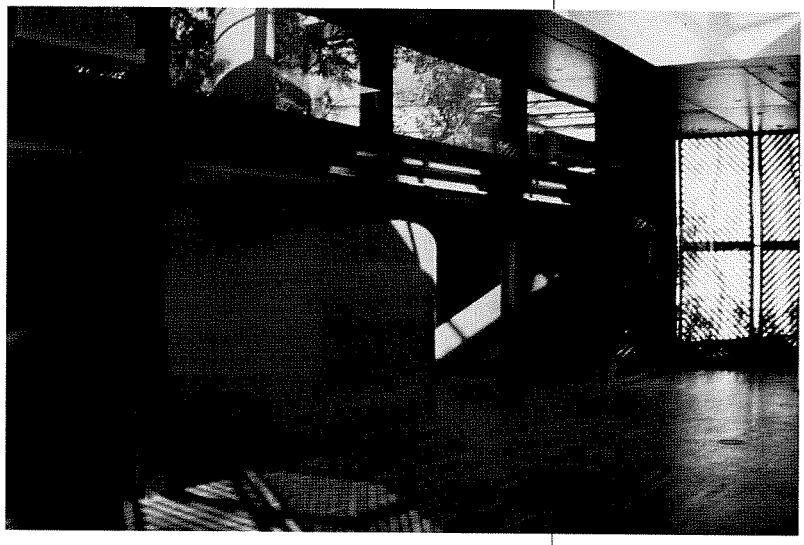
Korean Pavilion

Left: **View from the entrance side**

Below left: **The external wooden elements, opened**

Below right: **The curved wall as seen from the inside**





This happened to me repeatedly. When I insisted on the idea of a bridge as a natural and logical means to connect the insula to the nothern side of Venice, I discovered, working at the archives, that a bridge had once existed exactly in that place (it had been demolished for the purpose of isolating the old monastery). Or, when working on the idea of a mobile structure, I went back to the history and uncovered the meanings of the many mobile bridges that have existed in Venice. Or, when working on the design of the north side of the insula, I learned the role of the brick walls facing the canals or the lagoon as important ingredients of the urban scene. We understood the importance of the height of a place, in a city as flat as Venice is, when we realized that the Korean pavillion could be conceived as a real balcony toward the basin. And our reading is revealed in many minor elements: the shape of a chimney, the size of the stripes in white stone on the frame of the windows, or the plaster along the facades, to name a few.

I saw that there is no Nature,
That Nature doesn't exist,
That there are hills, valleys and plains,
That there are trees, flowers and grass,
That there are rivers and stones,
But that there is no whole to which all this belongs,
That a true and real ensemble
Is a disease of our own ideas.

—*Alberto Caeiro*

One: How holding fixed values no longer works with global pratice

Visitors. Teachers in architecture schools take students out to observe everyday environments. Environments are read to extract meaning from them, which is expected to guide intervention sympathetic to what is already there. Inevitably, this act assumes we are visitors, coming in to acquaint ourselves with something unfamiliar. Even when we take students to an environment they already know, we do so to help them see it afresh. While the purpose is to penetrate and understand, the act itself implies detachment. We are divorced from the natural affinity that renders intervention self-evident and is the source of true vernacular.

This divorce comes with the professional condition. We expect to work in places we have never been before, and to judge work from places we have not visited. We belong to a network organization, which is itself part of a broader and thoroughly networked culture. The knowledge and skills we share are applied all over the world. With them go our preferences in lifestyle and taste. Those sensitive to the dilemma our condition brings turn to reading environment as a means to connect.

Network institutions and local architectures. As a network profession we serve network institutions as much as local forces. The relation between architecture and network institutions is far from straightforward.

In history, for instance, commerce and religion formed network organizations but did not necessarily bring their own architecture. Storehouses, hostels and roads were most easily produced by local builders for local money following local style. When commerce bore arms however, the network brought its own architecture, which was distinct from local vernacular and often influenced it. Warehouses and bastions of the crusaders are still standing in Acre and those of the seventeenth-century Dutch trading companies can still be found as far as Taiwan, South America and Ceylon.

While Islam's practice and teaching were uniform to all subjects, the architecture was not. Think only of the Indonesian, tin-roofed barn mosques, the mud-brick, castle-like structures in mid-Africa, the monumental gates of Samarkand's courtyard mosques or Sinan's domed spaces.

Within the larger Christian realm, the Roman Catholic Church was a networking institution if there ever were one. It had to be because, without territorial power of its own, it needed to maintain its hierarchic organization across a politically fragmented Western world. It imposed doctrine but not an architecture. The Gothic cathedral has little in common with the Italian basilica and, for that matter, Bernini's exuberance is not Bohemian baroque.

Art and technology traveling. When power and lifestyle combine, art and architecture travel with them. Roman political and military dominance brought extended roadway infrastructure and codified town building to far-flung cultures, demonstrating an entire way of life including its architectural and artistic taste. Tying into the empire's network, local elite often preferred Greco-Roman styles when building and decorating their houses.

Classicism, from Palladio on, spanned a politically and territorially diverse world. It was a true network architecture, producing similar appearances wherever applied in whatever materials available, including eighteenth-century Neoclassicism, then continuing into the nineteenth. Thanks to printing, architecture could now be known without actually visiting a site; it was passed on to the far corners of a Western European culture by a steady stream of pattern books. But it was part of a broader network culture maintained by

an international elite that shared an education in Latin and Greek and a view of history, and which wielded economic and political clout. Architects were part of this network, as were scholars and lawyers, but nobility, commerce and politics were at the center.

Amsterdam's seventeenth-century town hall, designed by Jacob van Campen in the classicist Baroque manner, is a case in point. Compared to his competitors, van Campen was not only more talented but also better educated and better traveled. Selected by a council formed by members of the city's most powerful trader families, his design fits in an international culture. The town hall was placed in the middle of an urban fabric with which it had little in common. The same town council that commissioned the building extended this centuries-old fabric, with three monumental concentric canals without altering its basic properties. Today, the town hall still stands as a masterpiece; the fabric still is a marvel of urban culture. One is a network product, the other is rooted in local typology.

Professionalism takes off. With Modernism we see professionalism acquire power. Not only engineers and architects, but also lawyers, administrators, medical doctors and educators came into positions of influence and dreamed of a world that could be remade by imposing their ideals. The International Style reflected the aspirations of that professional culture as much as did global accounting principles, medical practice, science and agricultural methods.

The neat distinction between the monumental building and everyday urban fabric was still possible in seventeenth-century Amsterdam but soon faded. Buildings spawned by network institutions came to serve everyday life: schools, hospitals, hotels, airports, railroad stations, office buildings and convention centers represented not only new functions (often supported by network organizations of their own), but also a more general professional culture.

Designers struggling to define new typologies for new functions applied what they invented globally. Their ambition to reinvent the world was not limited to the single building. Urban fabric too became a global product. Modernist mass housing, developed by a confident bureaucratic and technocratic class, proliferated independently of political or economic context. Communist and capitalist governments, in rich as well as poor countries, relied on the counsel of their experts who brought them the same solutions under the banner of progress, often sharing with them the ambition to shape a new world.

Retreat. The Postmodern generation took the network nature of the profession for granted, but the search for a collective signature was abandoned. A desire for self-expression and artistic autonomy replaced the quest for a shining new world. The rejection of the International Style, usually argued on artistic grounds, was also an admission that the world is simply too large and too diverse to be captured by a single convention.

The result for the profession, however, was an increased self-centeredness. Status, no longer measured by the norms of a broader culture, is now an internal affair. We want to be recognized by our peers: they are the network. The site of intervention is primarily context for a job that must earn such recognition.

One would expect that the transition from Palladian internationalism, restricted to a handful of building types executed in a codified style, to a practice dealing with all aspects of the built environment at any place of the globe, would have triggered a thorough and explicit examination of the knowledge, tools and methods needed for the new and so much more ambitious and complex task. It did not. The profession's self-centered attitude perhaps explains the remarkable fact that neither architectural theory nor architectural education so far has asked what the extended claim of operation means for the role of the profession, the tools it applies and the knowledge it needs. Both the Modernist ambition to shape a new world and Postmodernism's fixation with individual expression avoided issues of method and epistemology. Consequently, we still explain ourselves in terms of a threadbare Palladian professional image.

Two: How in everyday practice architecture will have less and less to do with discreet buildings.

Systems, traveling and locally applied. In contrast to design professionals, who are still wrestling with an exclusive ideology, manufacturers and suppliers are not compelled to condition their involvement as a matter of self image. Materials and utility systems already penetrate into the far corners of the world. In the barriadas, electric wiring, plastic plumbing, corrugated roofing, plywood, cement and steel reinforcement rods are commonly applied. Sophisticated manufacturing, which requires large investments in money and research, feeds informal environments everywhere.

Environment has an autonomy of its own, meaning that it is too extensive, too complex and too much tied into human existence to be controlled by any one profession or power... Those who study vernacular and historic fabric so far have been operating at the margin, ...but their work can help us escape the professional cage and may well contribute to a general codification of environmental form.

The affluent parts of the world now enter the next stage: more comprehensive subsystems are emerging. Steel and concrete skeletons are fleshed out to form internally flexible base buildings. They combine with interior fit-out systems, roof systems and facade systems to make a building. These new subsystems not only are technically defined but also perform a particular environmental service. Traditional utility systems like electricity and plumbing as well as security and control systems are broken down to be part of them.

In the building economy, the percentage of value added by system manufacturers has been increasing steadily in the last two decades. Value added by the local contractor is steadily decreasing. Architecture has already become the judicious composition of available hardware systems.

It is now recognized that self-stable subsystems, that is, systems minimally dependent on other systems, speed construction and boost variety and adaptability. "Open building" is now an emerging international network of researchers and systems designers seeking to improve conditions for self-stable systems. Interface must be simplified and codified, hierarchical relations must be better understood. Big as well as small projects will increasingly combine such progressively autonomous subsystems, purposefully designed for adaptation to local preferences of look and feel.

Disappearance of the building. Systems travel easily because they do not predetermine type or pattern. Yet, self-stable subsystems eventually will change architecture. Martin Pawley recently pointed out how in the City of London buildings retain their historic facades behind which a new fabric is built, a phenomenon that is heralding "the end of the single building as the basic unit of the urban environment, and the beginning of the rule of general purpose serviced floor space."[1]

Just as facades in historic environments are conserved while the buildings behind them change, in other parts of the world big buildings will receive new facades as well as new interior fit-outs while their base structure remains. Over time, thanks to the practice of independently applying subsystems, the building as an integral unit of function and identity will disappear. Parts of the building, like the London facades, may jointly form an infrastructure of urban scale. Other parts, like the fit-out system applied for a specific inhabitant, will be much smaller and more transient than the building's frame.

The fine-grained large project. One consequence of this new "open building" hardware is that it will no longer be necessary or advantageous for large projects to be repetitive and similar. The large project will become truly fine-grained, containing smaller, independent acts of inhabitation.

In a traditional neighborhood, a hundred houses may all be variations within a chosen theme, responding to inhabitants' preferences. Already, in upscale apartment building and in most office buildings, individual units of occupancy are similarly varied. The large building becomes a three-dimensional neighborhood, providing a new urban fabric.

This fine-grained approach to the large project will eventually be commonplace. Environmental intervention will no longer be measured by discreet buildings identified by their unified design. We will see large fields of base building to be filled in after completion as inhabitation demands, and cladded with a collage of different facades mediating between inside and outside, public and private. More and more functions that we now think of as requiring a special architecture will be accommodated within the continuum of the large project, their identity no longer expressed by an entire building but a partial facade, an entrance or only an inside public space. The multi-functional building, as it is now called, is merely a transition stage towards a true continuum of three-dimensional fabric, accommodating inhabitation that need not be predetermined.

The design act dispersed. The large, fine-grained intervention, produced by partial systemic acts, each with their distinct cycles of renewal and change, spells the end of the Palladian tradition. In everyday practice, architectural design will have less and less to do with discreet buildings.

The large project, so far, reveals the controlling hand of a single designer, and hence shows repetition. But architectural intervention will increasingly coincide with self-stable, systemic levels to serve ongoing inhabitation.

Already, for the majority of very talented designers who leave the world's schools to work in large firms, tasks are inevitably partial. But with the newly emerging systems, the partial act will acquire new autonomy, as design becomes less centrally dominated and more immersed in environmental fabric itself.

Eventually this more sophisticated reality will sink in, and schools may begin to address the needs of the new breed of designers to enable variety within user's preferred conventions. In short, the task of architects will be to help cultivate an environmental fabric.

Three: How inhabitation takes care of its own

The majority of the world. Our network is our cage. We visit the same universities to study, the same hotels and conference halls to meet, the same office buildings to negotiate, the same architect's offices to work. The environments we observe and make pictures of are those designed by co-professionals.

I once remarked, at a seminar on typology among Asian architects in Korea, that the Seoul middle class seemed to have spawned a new residential type: applying traditional elements like the compound wall, the gate and the blue-tiled roof while accommodating the nuclear family with the car, the modern equipped kitchen and air conditioning. "Where could this be seen?" some asked. From a window in our high-rise conference site I pointed to what I had found at a pre-breakfast walk: a compact, low-rise fabric below. "Oh," was the response, "but that's not architecture!"

Precisely.

That present practice lays claim to every possible aspect and function of the environment as worthy of architectural attention does not mean we design all that is built. The amount of new environment untouched by the architectural network far exceeds what is designed by it. From the profession's perspective, it is called "informal" or "vernacular." And it is very prolific. Ranging from the *barriadas* in Latin America and other expanding economies in the world to well-to-do neighborhoods with expensive villas in those same countries, new typologies emerge in response to new circumstances and inhabitants' aspirations.

Do architects operate there? They do. But those who work for the rich feel embarrassed to admit following their preferences. And those working for the poor are ignored and their reports not read. Well informed on what aspires in the professional world, these colleagues, for reasons of their own, help cultivate new environmental species.

(And may well be a role model for coming generations.)

Autonomous environment. Environment has an autonomy of its own, meaning that it is too extensive, too complex and too much tied into human existence to be controlled by any one profession or power. This autonomy is manifest in historic fabric as well as in latter-day informal or vernacular environments.

Those who study vernacular and historic fabric so far have been operating at the margin, partly because many of them have turned away from a practice they find destructive, partly because the profession at large cannot see what their research has to do with the new and large projects it covets, partly because other fields, like geography, have engaged in these studies. But their work can help us escape the professional cage and may well contribute to a general codification of environmental form.

In the past, architects often have drawn inspiration from autonomous environment, observing it and transforming it by artistic selection and discipline. But the Modernist tradition rejected the historic and the vernacular as possible sources, and after Le Corbusier the industrial landscape no longer promised a better world.

Human nature seeks variety within a framework of conventions. A truly global profession must be capable of respecting conventions other than their own and stimulating the variety they imply. This calls for cultivating environmental form, rather than producing or inventing.

Indeed, the autonomy of the environment is not divorced from professional intervention. No one will claim we are in full control of what we are involved with ourselves. By now, professionally produced environments across the world — urban, suburban, industrial — are subject to such raw and calculated proliferation that they can no longer nourish us. Yet we are drawn into them more and more.

Repetition. Sameness and repetition can be observed in most of formal architecture regardless of place and circumstances. It is, after all, the result of implicit assumptions nurtured by the professions — architects, builders and developers — who, for good reasons, prefer proven ways to reduce risk.

Designing, as well, is drawn into this self-protective convergence. The architect's compulsive desire to do things differently from other architects seldom challenges the network's limited typology or its state-of-the-art procedures and technology. Doing so might well prove suicidal. Moreover, architecture, like all human institutions, tends to seek variety within the framework of its own conventions. Hence the architectural canon just underneath the Postmodern, pluralist skin remains surprisingly limited compared to the rich variety of actually present environmental species.

Cultivation. Indeed, human nature seeks variety within a framework of conventions. A truly global profession must be capable of respecting conventions other than their own and stimulating the variety they imply. This calls for cultivating environmental form, rather than producing or inventing.

If we must operate everywhere all the time, having undergone the same kind of education, reading the same magazines and visiting the same web sites, what of the knowledge and skills we share among our fellow professionals is generally applicable to nurture the peculiar?

The agriculturist and the botanist may offer useful models. Professionals in these fields seem to have figured out how to marry general knowledge with local cultivation. The former allows them to be effective with the latter. We must likewise be able to compare environmental form effectively and to determine a new species when we see one, to be able to decide what varieties may best perform in what circumstances, to be able to make them bloom.

This requires thorough knowledge of environmental form — its morphology, its mutations, its behavior. This knowledge must utilize general concepts of environmental structure, such as types, patterns, systems and territorial and morphological hierarchy.

The local and the network. The world we must study may already be very different from what we think. The distinction between formal and informal, for instance, is one drawn from our peculiar perspective. Reality is less clear cut, partly because society is becoming more informed, partly because ways of building are becoming more sophisticated.

We tend to assume, for instance, that geographic location equates with environmental type. That notion may be outdated. The same networked form may appear in different locales; consider the "California-style" suburbs that are preferred by well-to-do middle class in far corners of the world. Different network institutions may spawn their own architectures (businessmen living in California-style suburbs prefer Hilton-style opulence when they travel.)

Local environment must accommodate buildings that are nodes in worldwide networks, like hotels, banks, convention centers, airports, factories, schools and hospitals. Conglomerates of such nodes raise new questions of environmental coherence. The local is becoming more pluralistic and less homegrown.

On the other hand, network institutions may blend in with local fabric, like they have in the past. One of the most attractive international hotels in Amsterdam is located in a handful of interconnected seventeenth-century canal houses newly fitted out inside. To the chain's advantage, Amsterdam bylaws did not allow it to tear down the old buildings to build their standard type. A preference for local ambiance is often found among vacationers seeking sunshine at the Mediterranean, spawning instant vernacular environments of which Port Grimaux was noted with embarrassment in architectural circles but many others, less architecturally ambitious perhaps, remain unnoticed as is their purpose. Environmental coherence need not be pseudo-vernacular, but these examples show that architecture serving network society, including banks, hotels and sports facilities, will go with what is local if that is found advantageous.

Network inhabitants. Inhabitants of the local – and all inhabitation is local – function in networks, too. A single person may constitute a node in more than one active network (religion, hobby, work, relatives). This may not only reduce the time that person actually spends at home, but also divert her attention from local affairs when there (if she is reading books, surfing the web or telecommuting). Does such partial presence in body and mind make for a different environment? The situation was already very familiar to us before the Internet, but in past millennia, a few saints, scholars and warriors excepted, local time was devoted to local affairs.

Moreover, my neighbor and I may find no overlap comparing the networks into which we are locked. We may share neither religion, nor race, nor work, nor hobbies. If sociocultural coherence is low, what does that mean for the environment we share? Must our homes express such differences as true nodes in different networks?

Perhaps, on the contrary, formal coherence may be even more important because environmental preference is what brings us together. Just because we can easily relocate, sharing environmental coherence may be more important than ever. But then again, such coherence does not signify shared experience and need not be rooted in local formal tradition. Our common preference may be for an imported or recently (designer) invented environment.

Notes

1. Alberto Caeiro, "On an incredibly clear day," in *The Keeper of Sheep*, (translation Richard Zenith).

2. Pawley writes:

"Our growing culture of internal change behind retained facades is doing more, for it is beginning to herald the end of the single building as the basic unit of the urban environment, and the beginning of the rule of general purpose serviced floor space.

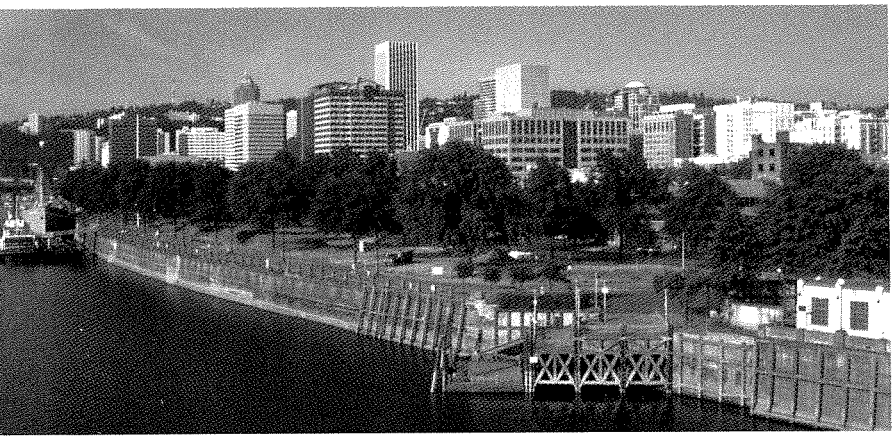
"Take the nineteenth-century facades of the derelict banks in London's Old Broad Street, for example. That part of the City will still be present in a hundred years. But behind these same facades there will be no more wooden floors or high clerk's tables, nor even any party walls. Instead there will be glass partitions and levels of office floors with a central atrium, cruising over the old divisions between properties."

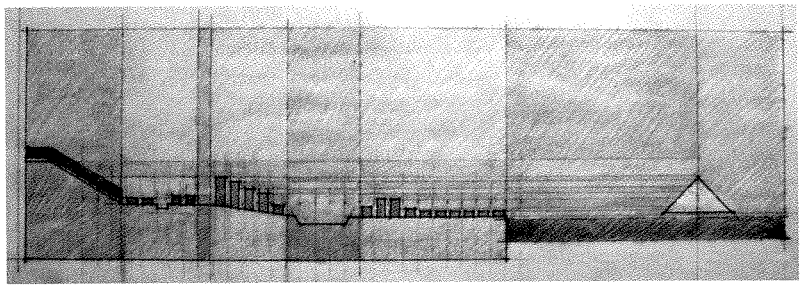
See Martin Pawley, "Polemic: The Age of the Serial Identity Building," in *World Architecture* 65 (April, 1998), 26.

John Echlin

READING PORTLAND: THE CITY AS A VERB

Towns and regions crystallize around the experience of making and inhabiting. Perhaps it is experience — verbs and not nouns, activities and not names — that is, or should be, the force that shapes residential living. — Keller Easterling[1]





Top: **Tom McCall Waterfront Park**
Above: **City–landscape dialogue**
Right: **Pearl District**
Photos and graphics: **John Echlin**

To me, Portland is the perfect counterpart to the Italian "city as laboratory." It possesses a coherent urban structure in dialogue with its natural setting, and its politics and traditions have encouraged an active public involvement in shaping itself. In a personal reading of Portland I will try to distinguish a few key qualities and experiences that make this city unique.

The natural setting. Portland faces east, toward the rising sun over the Cascade Mountains, unlike other West Coast cities, which face west, toward the Pacific Ocean, the setting sun and promises of riches beyond. There is a spiritual link with Mt. Hood, the volcanic pyramid to the east, which the original pioneers recognized as the gateway to their promised land.

Portlanders rise early and work late, being more like their industrious Eastern ancestors than their laid-back West Coast neighbors. The Willamette River, Portland's original economic reason for being, both divides the city and joins it as a major public open space. The former waterfront commerce along the river has been replaced in recent years with public parks and housing that aspire to equally dense activity.

The urban growth boundary. Like Italian cities (such as Pistoia, which was captured in the 1400s by the Florentines, who proceeded to build a wall around the city to contain the inhabitants) Portland has set an artificial man-made limit to its outward growth. In the 1970s, Oregonians created a law requiring all cities to draw a line around their perimeter in order to separate and protect farmland. The effect on Portland has been to concentrate development energy within the urban core, where infill, reuse and redevelopment are vital means of transformation.

The Portland block. Compared to other American cities, Portland's block structure inverts all the rules. It is deceptively simple, with 200-foot by 200-foot (one-acre) blocks separated by forty- to sixty-foot-wide streets. The effects are complex. These compact urban building blocks yield a larger proportion of public space (streets) to private space (buildings), as well as a higher surface to volume ratio than the typical American gridiron. As a result, like in Medieval cities, there are more edges and surfaces to inhabit, an emphasis on corner and intersections, and a downtown that though dense is surprisingly light and airy. All of this contributes to Portland's well-known pedestrian-scale experience.





Downtown Portland street.

Portland buildings. Buildings built in Portland before World War II took full advantage of the city's natural setting, its climate and the constraints of the urban block. Buildings were generally simple, box-like forms with large window openings, permeable ground-floor shops activating the sidewalks and prominent cornices framing the public space of the street.

Terra cotta became a favorite building material, providing bright highlights and a shimmering quality to downtown spaces, especially during Portland's dark and rainy winter. A successful Modern reading of this tradition is the Commonwealth Building (Pietro Belluschi, 1947), which has as much to do with reinterpreting Portland as it does with the international and technological aspirations of the time.

Misreading. Misreading can provide important lessons in reading. The Portland Building (Michael Graves, 1980) is primarily an architectural manifesto, fitting neither place nor purpose. To outsiders, its impact on architectural debate at the time was tremendous. Portlanders, however, have had to learn to live with it. As Randy Gragg, design critic for the *Oregonian* put it, "It may be a monstrosity, but it's our monstrosity."[2] This points out the virtue of a strong, dynamic urban structure: A bad building does not destroy a city.

Public involvement. In terms of shaping and reinventing the city, Portland's greatest successes are its neighborhoods and open spaces. The Pearl District, for example, a formerly exclusive warehouse and industrial area on the north side of downtown, has been transformed through liberalizing the zoning code and allowing residential and commercial uses to co-exist alongside industry. Historic tax credits have allowed many buildings to be converted to new uses. Combined with infill projects and rooftop additions, the Pearl neighborhood is full of surprises and accidents that create a vibrant experience that would have been impossible had it been torn down and built anew.

Pioneer Square. Pioneer Square is the public heart of downtown, equal in spirit and life to any piazza in Italy, yet it is a fairly recent creation. In testimony to the rapid evolution of American cities, it is already the fourth use on the same block in the last one hundred years. The site was originally occupied by a residence,



Pioneer Square.

then by the city's grandest hotel and center of social life, then by a parking lot. A scheme to build a parking garage on the site in the early 1980s precipitated a huge public outcry. In a rare case of overcoming urban amnesia and returning the site to its role as a public place, the idea for Pioneer Square was born.

This one-acre outdoor living room acknowledges the frame and scale of buildings surrounding it by creating a large but subtle gesture: an amphitheater open in the middle, allowing pedestrian circulation to cross through diagonally and activate the space even when there are no structured uses. Smaller-scale devices and collaborations with artists — structures, columns, canopies, walls and sculptures — occupy the edges and allow a variety of spaces for the imagination to engage in. It is so successful that at virtually any time of day or evening, during any season or change of weather, there is some activity to see, hear or join in on and feel a part of the city.

Tom McCall Waterfront Park. An equally interesting but even more remarkable feat of reuse and reinterpretation of public space is the city's waterfront park.

An expressway, built in the 1940s to carry traffic around downtown, had obliterated the original 1800s commercial waterfront district. Like Pioneer Square, the land dedicated to automobiles by the previous generation has been returned to public use.

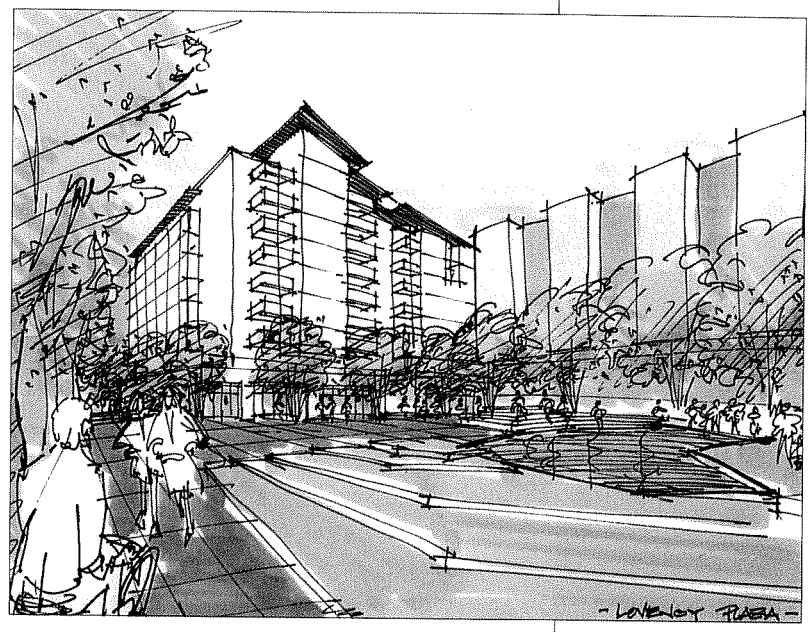
What is remarkable here is not so much the physical transformation of the space, but the memory of the waterfront and the power of the vision to imagine the river as a great public space. It is ironic to experience the park today, remembering the dense commercial harbor it once was, reflecting on how that history was lost to bulldozers and progress, and realizing that it could not have been a generous, inviting, green open space had it never been a freeway. What will it be like in another hundred years? Such is the tremendous transformational power of American places, which emphasize actions and not things.

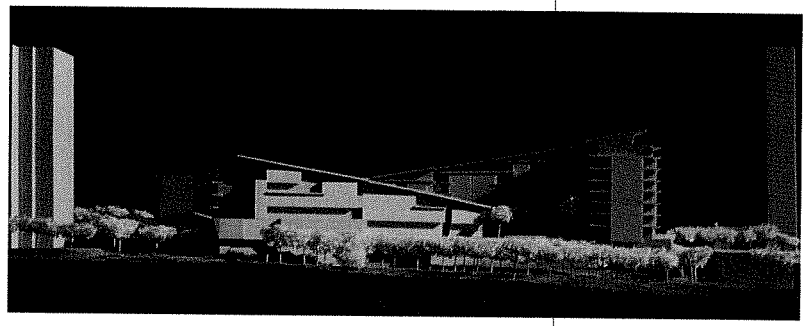
Lovejoy Park competition. Designing provides an opportunity to learn something about places and is inherently a more active form of reading. In this case our office had the opportunity to participate in a recent housing competition adjacent to Lovejoy Park, a notable open space with a fountain designed by Lawrence Halprin in the 1960s.

Our entry offers not only an interpretation of this site but also a reading of Portland as a whole. Two L-shaped wings dimensioned to the size of Portland's block pattern interlock on the site and enclose two internalized, semi-private courtyards. The sloping roofs reflect the distant profile of the Cascade mountains and suggest the idea of a house. At Lovejoy Plaza, the taller wing projects forward, entering into dialogue with the open space and activating its eastern edge.

Our reading attempts to interpret the forces that shape this particular place, making the building spaces both inseparable from and activator of this part of the city. It is architecture that informs rather than creates forms, that offers distinct choices and spaces to imagine. Or, as Walt Whitman wrote:

> *all architecture is what you do with it when you look upon it, (did you think it was in the white or gray stone or the lines of the arches and cornices?)*[3]





Lovejoy Park competition model and sketch.

Notes

1. Keller Easterling, *American Town Plans, A Comparative Timeline* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), 12.

2. Address to the City Club, Portland (16 June 1997).

3. Walt Whitman, "A Song For America," from *Leaves of Grass* (London: Everyman Press, 1996), 37.

Project Credits

Lovejoy Park Development Competition
Developer–sponsor: Phoenix Properties
Design Team: Kent Davis, John Echlin, John Eidman, Patricia Gardner, Garry Papers, Eric Philps, Alan Slusarenko
Date: June, 1998

Andrés Mignucci Giannoni

INHABITING SHADOWS: OBSERVATIONS ON THE TROPICS AS PLACE

Puerto Rico as home and place serves as the grounding context for our work. We read the places in which we live and work as concrete entities, natural or built phenomena that we experience directly. We observe particular instances that, collectively, build our knowledge of our environments as places.



Above and right: **Light and shadow articulate a street (Calle Luna) and square (La Baradilla) in Old San Juan**
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

The cumulative reading of these systemic particulars is what allows us to generalize and learn. In understanding our place, we move from the local to the general in an attempt to make sense of our experience, especially as it translates into built work.

Through observation and practice we explore a partial reading of our home, Puerto Rico, as place. Puerto Rico must first be understood as an island, a Caribbean island — latitude 18 degrees north, longitude 66 degrees west, 3,435 square miles, a mere 100 miles by 36. We are part of the Greater Antilles, the last island before the archipelago arcs into the lower Caribbean islands. Culturally we belong to the Hispanic Caribbean with Cuba and Santo Domingo as geographical, historical and cultural siblings.

Light, sunlight, is ever-present in the tropics. The popular image of the tropical island, fostered by media and advertising, undoubtedly revolves around the sun, the light, the sea and that marvelous use of color.

However, much more central to our notion of the tropics as place, particularly as habitable place, is light's counterpart, shadow. In the tropics, we inhabit shadows.

In architectural terms, Venezuelan architectural historian Alberto Sato put it succinctly when he wrote, as a correlate to Le Corbusier's axiom, that "in the tropics the masterful manipulation of forms produces shadows."

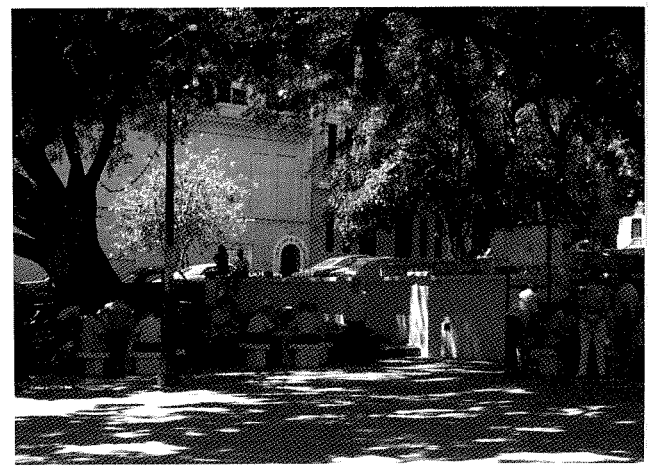
We first experience shadows as part of our understanding of place in the way we that move through and inhabit the city. We move through narrow streets where we can walk primarily in shade. At intersections, we are exposed to the light from above. We proceed once again into the next shaded street section; then, a large pool of light is seen at the distance, and a plaza opens in our path. Within the plaza, canopies and awnings, built and natural, shelter us from the sky.

Onto the next shaded street. midblock, a glimpse through the metal grille into the *zaguán*, an open hallway that leads inside a building. Here the shade is darker than outside, and our eyes must adjust. At the end of the hallway there is a brighter light, a patio. Around the edge of the patio, a portico mitigates the light before we are finally inside.

This reading, the way we move through the streets of Old San Juan, is for many people a daily act. As such it is a silent act of inhabitation, not analyzed or discussed, yet it reveals clues about our understanding of place.

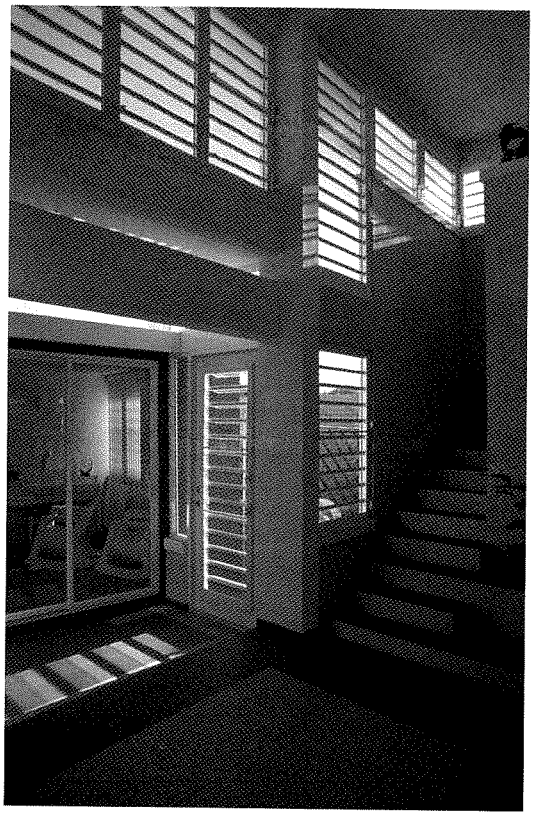
Public–private relationships are relative, not absolute. They are referenced by the particular level at which they operate — landscape, city, district, neighborhood, block, house, room. Alternating light and shadow create or signal thresholds between the public and the next, more private realm. Although not obvious at first glance, nor taught or recognized overtly, light-shadow relationships are charged with meaning about territorial control, supporting an implicit understanding deeply embedded in our experience of place.

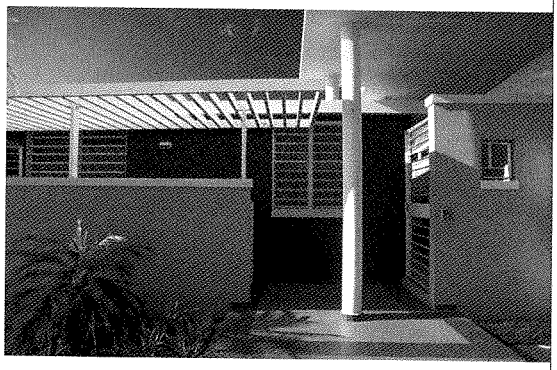
Light-filled elements, the most public parts of the city — intersections, plazas and patios — appear as identifiable spatial events within the fabric. The continuity of the building fabric and the shaded street provide the reading of the larger structure. To a certain extent the street belongs more to the block than it











Above left and right:
Casa Zenobia Medina
Below left and right:
Casa Vivas
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

does to the squares, plazas and patios. These are outdoor rooms; the plaza at the level of the city, the patio at the level of the house.

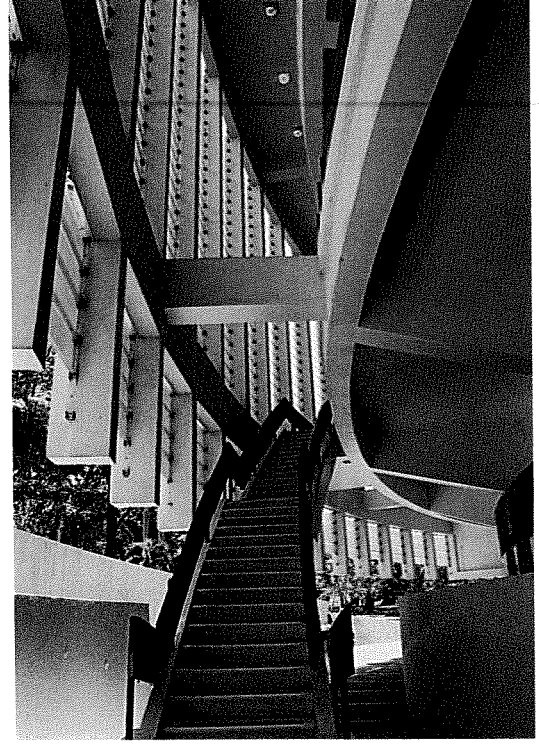
Inside and Outside

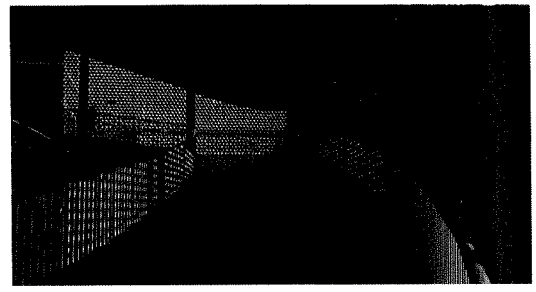
In our work, the idea of the outdoor room serves to keep in check the scale, spatial definition and habitable quality of exterior spaces, both in personal projects like our own house and private projects like the house for Zenobia Medina in Santurce. The exterior yard is not the residue of the building's position on the lot but a conscious and deliberate appropriation of exterior space as living space integral to the building.

The tropics, the real tropics, is a place where inside and outside are defined not by what separates but by what covers. Interior covered rooms are treated as if they were outdoors, at once continuous and contained.

In the tropics, the habitability and intimacy of open spaces, be they at city scale or house scale, require degrees of shade. Not one degree but many; plural, not singular. Here the wall between inside and outside acquires dimension, mass. In many instances the wall itself is habitable; in others it is veiled in gradients of light through the manipulation of screen elements that, like accretions in the wall, filter the fierce outside to allow (relative) coolness within.

At the Casa Vivas, the original prefabricated concrete house is wrapped in trellises, screens and covers to mark the movement from the outside in. The house's original orientation to the street is transformed into a sequence of spatial thresholds through the side yard, which articulates the way we move from outside to inside and from front to back. These thresholds, which have varying ceiling heights and degrees of opaqueness and transparency, offer clues about the hierarchy of the territories that comprise the house.



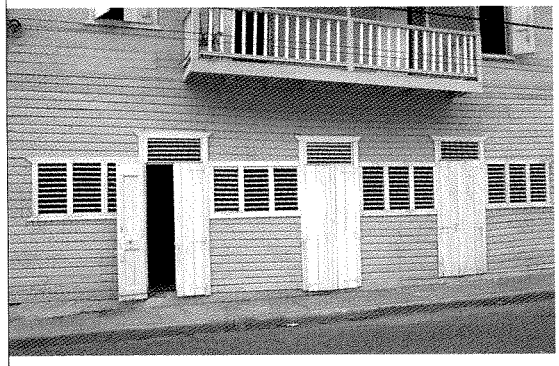


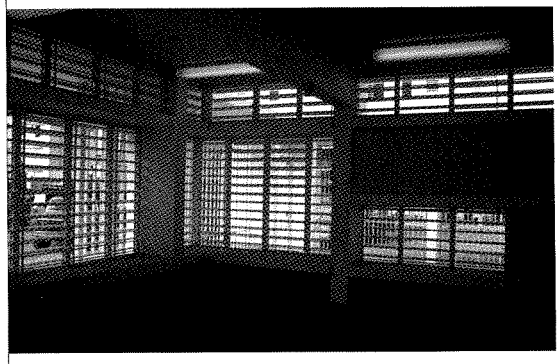
Above right: **Anfiteatro Estudios Generales, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras (Toro Ferrer, Architects).**
Right: **Student Center, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras (Henry Klumb, Architect).**
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

The Wall as Filter and Screen

In the tropics, the climatic balance between inside and outside has rendered the wall an element of privacy, a screen and a filter of light and air. Layers of spatial thresholds mitigate and enrich the transition between inside and outside, as in the works of master architects like Henry Klumb and Toro Ferrer in Puerto Rico and Carlos Raul Villanueva in Venezuela.

The work of these architects is based on a number of compositional strategies, such as clear articulation between the primary structure and elements of closure; transparency and continuity between inside and outside; and the use of mechanisms for cross ventilation and natural light. This grammar includes the use of elements like jalousies, awnings, brise soleils and deep overhangs; form manipulations such as varying ceiling heights; the use of interior courtyards; and orientation and siting strategies to balance light and shade, convection and cross ventilation.





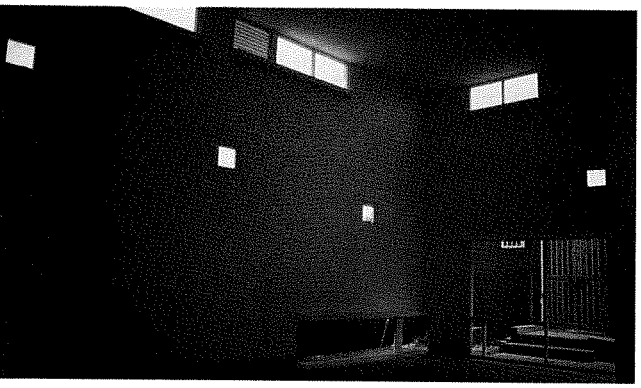


Top, bottom: **Continuity of light and ventilation elements in traditional architecture, Dominican Republic.**
Center: **Screened light in Head Start school, San Juan.**
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

Most of these elements were commonplace in building construction at the turn of the century as a direct result of health and building codes. These codes, which generally remained in place until the 1940s, established design parameters as a response to population growth and the increasing density of our cities and towns. These requirements produced an extensive repertoire of mechanisms for the control of light and ventilation. This tradition, part of a shared understanding of building in the tropics for years, has been all but lost due to the importation of foreign materials and building technology, particularly from northern, temperate climates, resulting in an architecture that is primarily closed and singular.

The wall of a building can yield various qualities of light, depending on the relation between the solid mass of the skin and the elements that filter light and provide





Above left, left: **Lamar 557**
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

ventilation. In the works of the pioneering masters of the Modern movement in the tropics (which includes not only the Caribbean Islands but also Venezuela and Brazil), the wall is fundamentally treated as a screen that is clearly differentiated from the structural members that support the building. The light, soft and diffused, takes over as it does an open field.

In a number of traditional buildings, like the Dominican variations of the strip window, light is continuous as a band set against the wall plane. Here the window module clearly reveals the wood-frame support of the building.

These examples relate primarily to frame structures, in which columns and beams carry the structural load while the wall can be either open or closed according to requirements of privacy, security and shelter.

In contrast, in this part of the world, where walls are primarily built of a continuous surface material like concrete, the screens work as secondary or tertiary assemblies that clearly articulate the hierarchy between the primary elements of structure and closure. In other instances it is the space between elements, the calibrated gap, that filters the light and contains it as solid as though it was material. Such is the stair and the roof over the terrace in Lamar 557. Metaphorically, the light is constructed as precisely and measurably as any building element.

Architecture at the Urban Scale

There is a correlation between interventions at the building scale and the manner in which they aggregate into larger contexts. Our perception of the environment, city or landscape is dependent as much on the contribution of specific, local interventions as it is on the overall pattern of organization.

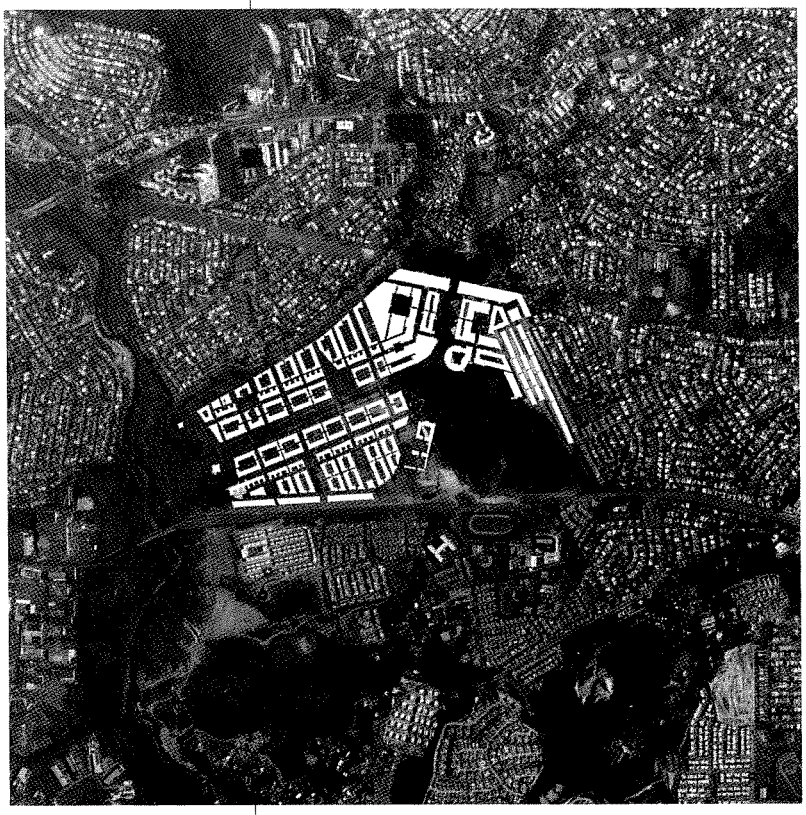
In traditional towns like Old San Juan, or in island towns like Ponce and San Germán, we read urban structure, and the rules for its constituent elements, through the continuity of the building fabric.

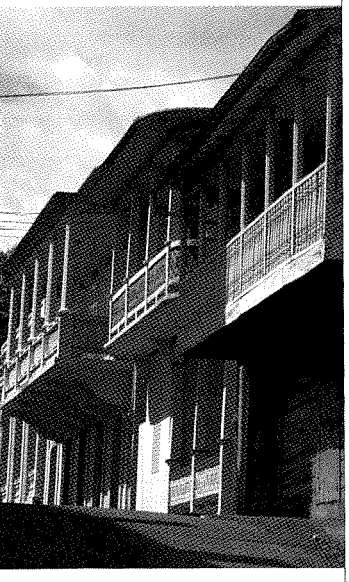
Beyond the original seed of Old San Juan, the city grew in a linear pattern along Ponce de León Avenue, which served as a conducting thread between contained settlements: San Juan, Puerta de Tierra, Miramar, Santurce, Hato Rey and Rio Piedras.

Despite being five hundred years old, San Juan, like most Latin American capitals, consolidated as a city in the postwar years, particularly during the 1950s and '60s, years of intense development and growth. Anchored by the ever-increasing number of cars, San Juan grew in units of self-contained suburban developments. During these years, the developer was the primary catalyst for growth, the planner was the organizer of land-use patterns, the traffic engineer was the determinant of urban structure and the civil engineer was the lead designer of the housing stock.

In these new developments the building fabric no longer reveals the urban structure; the old rules do not hold. Between suburban housing units lay unbuilt interstices, which further increase the discontinuity of the city and decrease our experience and understanding of it as a meaningful, coherent place. Shadows no longer establish thresholds.

Urban design projects like Comunidad Río Bayamón concentrate on how we can re-introduce degrees of continuity between urban components, how we can suture parts of this discontinuous city structure together. The project builds, on a large site, a new city center to serve already existing suburban developments. The new center, with living and work places, a station on the regional transit network and an ambi-





Top: **Comunidad Rio Bayamón**
Above: **San Germàn**
Photos: **Andrés Mignucci Giannoni**

tious system of public spaces, re-balances the relationships of the immediate context and acts as a binding, ordering structure.

At an urban scale we attempt to introduce shadows as an element of continuity within districts. Here the landscape is recognized as our natural awning. The green is not on the ground but above, hovering between us and the sun. Public plazas and parks, light events, are threaded once again by the more continuous world of the shadow.

The terms "shadow" and "shade," encompassed in Spanish by a single term, *sombra*, invoke two complementary qualities intrinsic to our understanding of the tropics – quality of light and quality of comfort. Architecture, as a context for meaningful inhabitation, cannot be measured exclusively by formal aesthetic notions; one must consider how it relates to primal human needs and desires. The direct, personal experience of place as a measure of habitability, important in any context, is even more so in extreme environments. The tropics, therefore, cannot be perceived or experienced with detachment. It forces us to feel, to experience directly. The tropics pressure the senses to sense.

How can we be faithful to the nature of the place in which we live and work? Our observations on the tropics, particularly Puerto Rico, serve as a point of departure from which we project an architecture that is at once new and at the same time continuous with the spirit of the place. Design strategies like the use of light and shade thresholds, the design of the wall as filter and screen, and the creation of outdoor rooms constitute instruments for translating observations and experiences of our context, as place, into a practice that builds and carries on this understanding. Our work aspires to be not a special exception but part of the ordinary fabric of our home.

Project Credits

Casa Zenobia Medina, Santurce, Puerto Rico
Architects: Andres Mignucci Giannoni, Architecto
Client: Zenobia Medina
Dates: 1991-1992

Casa Vivas, Bayamon, Puerto Rico
Architects: Andres Mignucci Giannoni, Architecto
Client: Samuel and Hilda Vivas
Dates: 1993-1994

Lamar 557, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico
Architects: Andres Mignucci Giannoni, Architecto
Client: Zenobia Medina
Dates: 1994-1995

Comunidad Rio Bayamón, Bayamón, Puerto Rico
Architects and Urban Designers: Andrés Mignucci Giannoni Arquitecto; Héctor Arce, Arquitecto; Miguel A. Carlo y Asociados; Agrait Betancourt Arquitectos
Urban Design Consultants: Koetter, Kim & Associates; Andrés Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Architects & Town Planners
Client: Departmento de la Vivienda, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
Dates: 1990-1992

Jan Wampler

CARETAKERS OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD: BUILDING THE ORDINARY AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

Architecture is the only profession that can look after the built world. Certainly there are other professions actively looking after the problems of the natural world and the effects of development, but architects are the professionals best situated to care for the built world in a direct way.

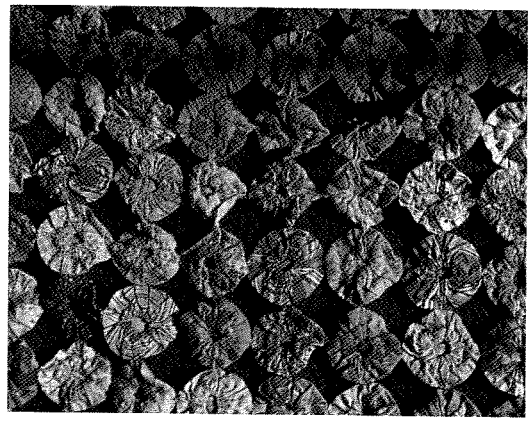
Unfortunately, much that has been built in recent years is neither a contribution to the physical world nor even concerned with it. In fact, many architects have contributed to the problem by designing buildings that do not fit with the culture or landscape and do not make places. We must take a stronger role in shaping the physical world, particularly by developing a body of knowledge to help us understand what we build and its effect. This concern should include issues of sustainable development at all levels of building — from resources, materials and land to the most important level of all, patterns of culture.

The expectation that the population of the developing world will double during the next fifty years suggests that there will be great strains on the world's resources. It also suggests the scale of damage that could be done to the natural world.

In many parts of the world, the land available for development has already been used, leaving little room to build. Moreover, the development has had little regard for its neighbors; the space between built objects has been overlooked. This has produced a blight that affects not only the landscape but also the culture of places.

What is the process for changing the course of architecture?

Perhaps the best metaphor for this new way of designing is to build in the way that American quilts were made. Ordinary people working with simple, direct rules and using local resources produced perhaps the first American architecture. The results were thousands of designs, each different but each following simple, sustainable patterns. Some of the quilts were ordinary and some extraordinary; all were in harmony with the forces around them.



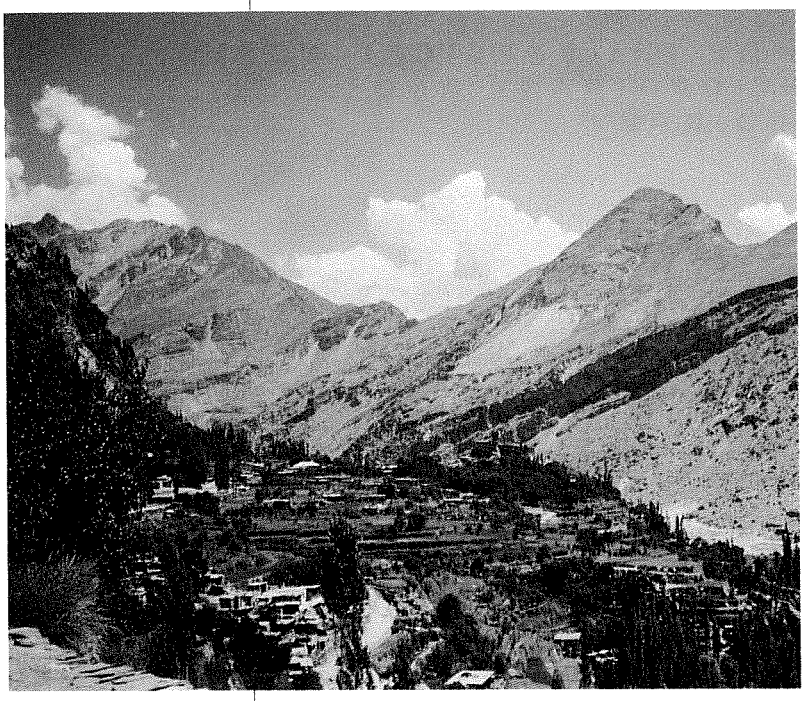
An American quilt, an example of the ordinary and extraordinary
Photo: Jan Wampler

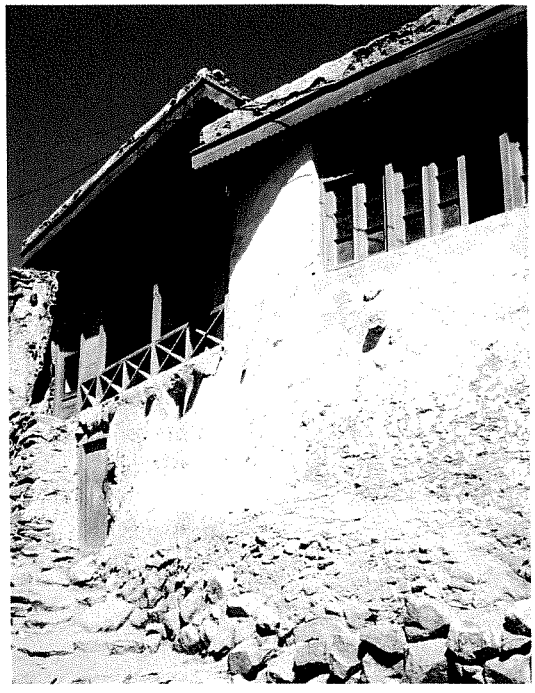
This analogy can be applied to architecture today. There are two basic kinds of architecture to consider, the ordinary and the extraordinary.

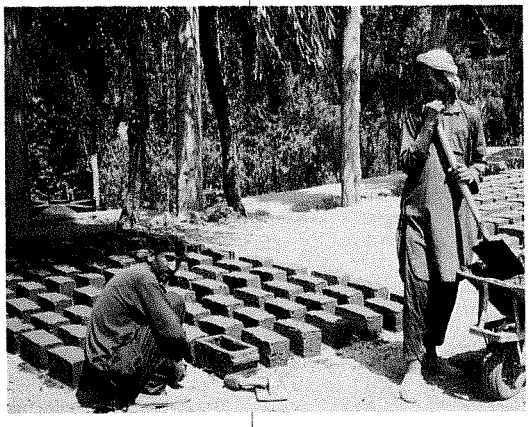
Ordinary buildings make up the texture of the world. They learn from the land, local construction practices, local resources, the thoughts of people using them and the care of space between the neighbors. Generally, ordinary architecture has carefully observed the patterns of the place in which it is built. It learns from the past and at the same time improves past work. It is a constant changingly process, but is always concerned about the place in which it is built — the resources, materials, land and culture.

Extraordinary buildings are special and teach the community new ideas about architecture. Special buildings can incorporate the same concerns as ordinary buildings, but they become extraordinary in the concepts they embody and the information they impart. These buildings can make special places for the culture and, therefore, be used by all people. They can provide new information and teach new ideas while relating to the traditions of the place and its culture; they are in harmony while improving the quality of life.

In designing a new architecture, the knowledge of the place must always be in the back of the architect's mind. Without these references the architecture will









Top left: **Hunza Valley, Pakistan. Terraced land below glacier and mountains**

Top right: **Hunza Valley, Pakistan. Ordinary housing made from local resources.**

Above left: **Hunza Valley, Pakistan. Local materials and methods of construction.**

Above right: **Tsinghua University, Beijing, China. A dance pavilion in a park, an example of placemaking using both ordinary and extraordinary architecture.**

Photos: **Jan Wampler**

be out of place. Following are some thoughts about a process of building both ordinary and extraordinary architecture. They serve as the beginning of the architect's acting as caretaker of the physical world by offering a process for our profession. They will be the beginning of building a new texture of joyful, livable places in harmony with the forces of the times.

1. The process starts with earth texture. "Earth texture" means everything that relates to the earth: land, sun, rain, wind, trees, rocks and buildings. They are the beginning of the design process. There must be a respect for all of these; there has been in any culture, in any time, that we admire.

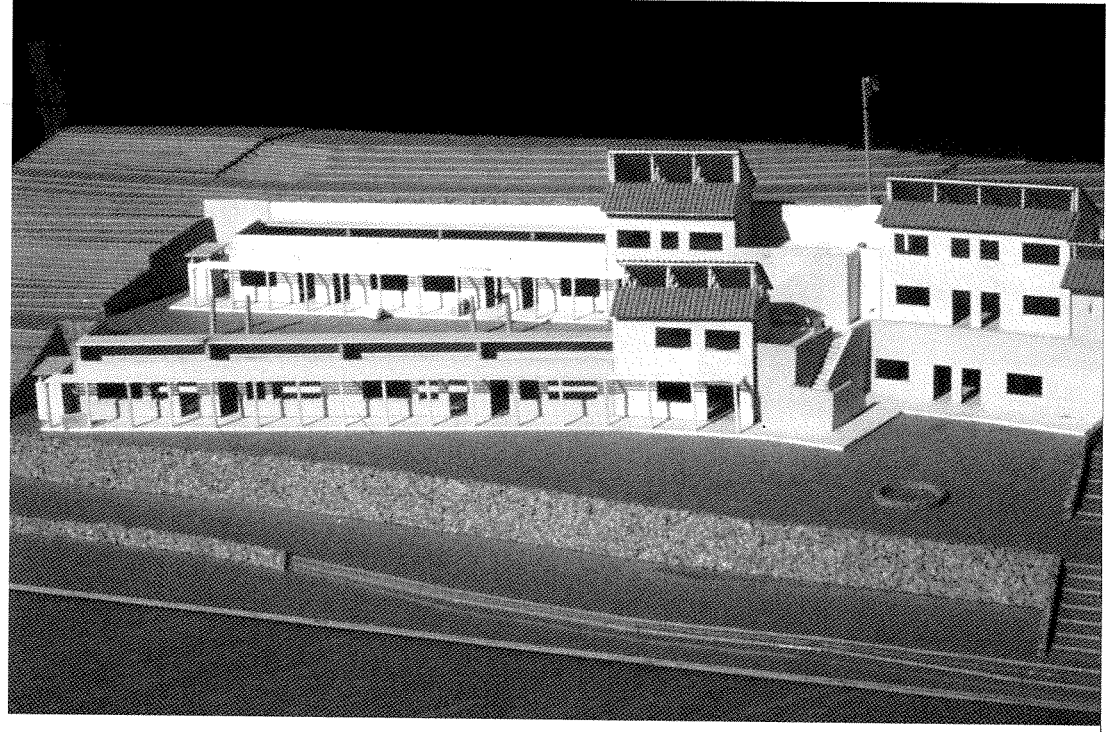
2. We can not imitate the forms of the past. Imitation neither respects the past nor helps the future. Instead, we must understand the principles of the past and translate them for the present.

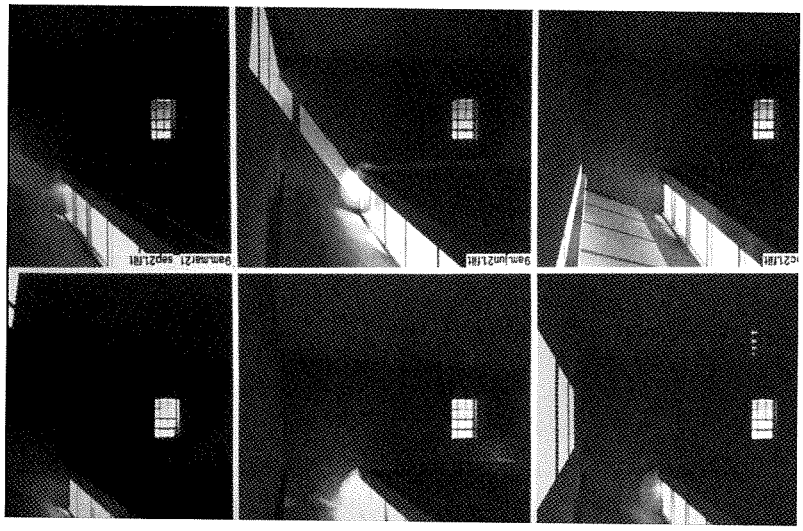
3. New technology and materials, if they are local or useful, should always be considered. If the new way works, use it; if not, disregard it.

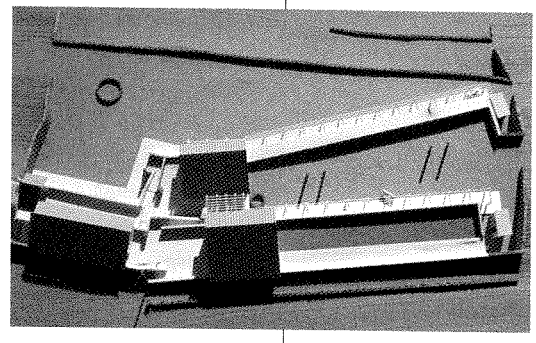
4. We must understand the space between buildings, not just the buildings. We no longer have the luxury of building without considering our neighbors. The collective act must always be respected.

5. Remember that all architecture is a life form. It grows and changes over time. We can not freeze it; instead, we plant the seeds for growth. People will modify it according to their needs, and with great energy. Always respect people's talent and build with them, not for them.

6. Finally, and most importantly, we have two responsibilities, first to the collective society and second to ourselves as makers. Do not fear making creative statements, but make them







Left, below right: **Model of new school. The new community place is in the center. The building is built into the terraces and faces south.** Photo: MIT **Pakistan Workshop**

Below left: **Computer image of sun control.** Photos: MIT **Pakistan Workshop**

within the limitations that you find. This is truly creation.

Two projects illustrate these points and try to follow their spirit. The first is in Pakistan and speaks to the extraordinary building, the second is in India and speaks to the ordinary. Both speak about making joyful, livable places.

Hyderabad, Pakistan: Building the Extraordinary

Public spaces and schools are essential elements of a community for the communication of thoughts and ideas. This project, done 1995-96 with the cooperation of the local community of Haiderabad, Hunza Valley, Pakistan, and the Aga Khan program, offers both an educational program and gathering place for the community. The design was done with the people of the culture, both reinforcing the sense of community and providing a new place for interaction.

The site for the Dawn Public School is in the northern mountains of Pakistan. The land is terraced and south-facing, just below a road looking over the valley.

The design of the school was influenced by the landscape, which is naturally terraced for growing food and is irrigated from mountain glaciers. Channels cut into the stone of the mountains direct the melting ice into the fields below. By designing the school to be built on successive levels and connected to the back terraced walls, the building fits with the land. Water moves through the terraces and into the main place of meeting.

The result is a building that has a relationship with its surroundings: the landscape helps and protects the school, and the school helps to define and give life to the landscape.

Thermally, placing the buildings against the back faces of the terraces and giving them thick earthen roofs

helps with heat retention and protects them from exposure to cold northerly winds from the mountains. The only exposed facades look south to the sun's warmth and provide light, which is needed badly in a place where winters are cold and resources for heat are limited. (Schools are closed in the two cold months since they can not be heated.) In the summer, these facades can be shaded from direct sun with trellises, and the openings offer light and ventilation.

The existing angles of these terraces also provide rich opportunities for the architecture. A slight shift in the angle of the building hints at a focal point with zones branching out from it. This focal point, which is also the only area with sloped roofs and a multistory structure, serves as the main entrance, the place where the building melds with the village. There is vertical interaction at this point as the entrance connects with the different levels of the building and terraces of the landscape. And as a celebration of the cascading landscape, water collects in pools at the various levels. When school is not in session, this space is used as a central place for villagers to attend classes and meet about community matters.

In the horizontal wings of the school the classrooms are located on two levels. Each has its own south-facing terrace, bringing as much light and sun as possible to the classrooms through skylights and openings.



Below: **Aegiali, Amorgos, Greece. An example of ordinary architecture, built on the traditions and cultures of the place; buildings that learn.** Photo: **Jan Wampler**

The building, designed from ordinary ideas in accordance with the land and culture, is also teaching new ideas of architecture and community. New materials are used to provide better insulation from the cold. Openings are designed to take full advantage of the sun and light. Thus, the building becomes extraordinary by teaching new ideas about community, place and architecture.

Referring back to the American quilt, perhaps this method can produce a rich texture of architecture and places. Like the quilt, the rules are simple and made from local resources. A wide variety of designs can then be made. And from this approach a new architecture, both ordinary and extraordinary, can truly become an architecture of all.

Gujarat, India: Building the Ordinary

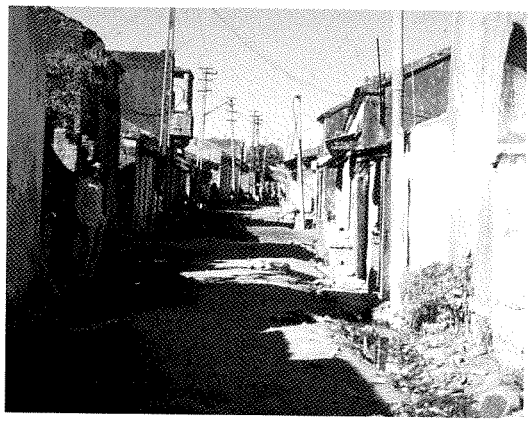
Since 1996, a joint Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Aga Khan Housing Board of India team has been working in seven villages in Gujarat, India. The overriding objective was to improve the quality of life in the rural villages of Gujarat through interventions and enhancements to both existing and new housing environments.

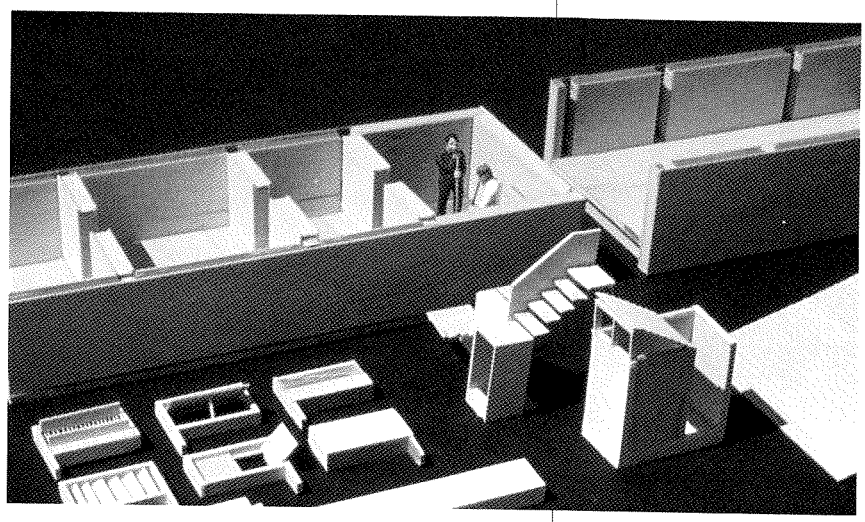
The following criteria were established to accomplish this goal:

1. Provide housing of equal or higher quality than now built, for equal or less economic investment.
2. Improve existing or new housing by designing a new architectural vernacular of components, what we called a "Kit of Necessities."
3. Increase the amount of housing without using more agricultural land.
4. Include the villagers in the planning, design and construction in a participatory way.

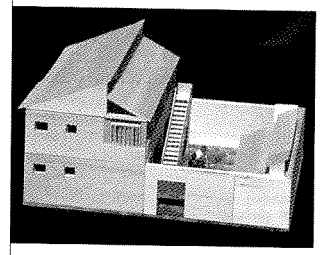
In order to improve the general built environment, three other elements were singled out for attention:

1. Improve the use and quality of public spaces as generators of community.
2. Establish principles for the design of public build-









ings in villages, focusing first on health centers and later on schools and other building types.

3. Establish programs of education at all levels, starting with day-care centers, to educate people to the issues of housing and community.

The first part of the work was a presentation of village and house plans, consultation on technologies for materials, light and ventilation, and discussions about health issues. The second involved a workshop, which produced proposals for generic design solutions (the Kit of Necessities) for houses and public space.

The kit consisted of ways of arranging space efficiently and economically using local materials and technologies for building elements, such as stairs or openings for light and ventilation. It included various designs for windows that could be inserted in walls; latrines that could be placed in different locations; additional floors that could be added, with stairs of three different designs; and roofs modified to include a clerestory window. Special attention was paid to designs for kitchen areas and toilets.

Models illustrated how houses could be modified to provide better light, ventilation, sanitation facilities and increased space by adding an additional floor. The models were designed so that non-architects could assemble them, enabling residents to design their own homes. Villagers indicated their preferences for window type, location of windows in different rooms, kitchen location, and orientation of the clerestory relative to the front of the house.

We selected fourteen clients and analyzed their needs. We then developed prototypes for them to improve their existing homes by modifying and expanding the plans and by selectively applying the Kit of Necessities.

Design solutions were presented in plans, sections and selected house models. These models are similar to the original Kit of Necessities models, although they were designed to be changed quickly to give the residents an understanding of the designs. Similar to American quilts, many different patterns could be designed.

In the Gujarat example, the ordinary was built, continuing the traditions, resources, culture of the past and using the technologies of the present where they apply. In this way the culture of place will continue.

Project Credits

Pakistan Workshop
Faculty: Jan Wampler with Les Norford and Hasan-Uddin Khan. Students: A. Cabré, B. Brady, M. Christodoulides, S. Ventura

India Workshop
Faculty: Jan Wampler with Les Norford and Hasan-Uddin Khan. Students: D. Ali, Z. Ansari, A. Cabre, R. Chaudhry, R. Clocker, P. Dutta, S. Farrell, W. Lackey, M. Mani, E. McHugh, D. Miovic, M. Palasthira, J. Turkel, I. Vassilev, S. Ventura, R. Ziesmann

Upper left: **Gujarat, India. A typical village, where ordinary architecture informs solutions for improved and new housing.** Photo: **Jan Wampler**

Lower left: **Meetings held with residents of the villages to test the "Kit of Necessities."** Photo: **Aga Khan Housing Board of India**

Upper right: **The "Kit of Necessities," basic design elements for making improvements to existing and new housing**
Photo: **MIT India Workshop**

Lower right: **Finished house design.** Photo: **MIT India Workshop**

Jill Stoner

THE FALCON'S RETURN

There are peregrine falcons uptown, downtown and midtown.
They zoom through the canyons of Wall Street and perch
on the gargoyles of Riverside Church.
A pair hunts pigeons and blue jays around the
grounds of the New York Public Library.
And two chicks recently hatched in a nest on the Brooklyn Bridge.

New York Times, *June 18, 1995*

In 1972, the peregrine falcon was one of this country's most endangered species; none were known east of the Mississippi and only a few survived in the west. Pesticides (most notably DDT) in the birds' natural habitats had contaminated their food, causing eggshells to thin and crack, and embryos to die before hatching.

More than two decades ago, wildlife biologists began gathering pairs of birds from the wild and resettling them in urban locations — ledges of high-rise buildings that approximate the birds' natural habitat. The city is a cleaner place for the peregrines to live and breed; urban pigeons, after all, were never contaminated by DDT.

Tall buildings are ideal for peregrines; they fulfill the birds' natural preference for cliffs and mountain peaks. Nesting places have included the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge, Boston's Custom House and the Fisher Building in Detroit. A business executive who would never consider a wilderness expedition might now be treated to the spectacle, right outside her conference room window, of a wild falcon swooping down on a pigeon at 200 miles per hour. At least fifty U.S. cities have participated in the recovery program. In 1991, the peregrine falcon was removed from the endangered list, and by 1993 its population numbered 900 pair.[1]

If we did not know better, we might think the birds had studied contemporary literature and adapted our metaphors of urban canyon and urban jungle for their own use. But, in fact, their reappropriation of bridge, rooftop and ledge is literal, not metaphorical; it is related to the physical elements of height, distance, airspace and foothold. The falcon perceives a reality from which our metaphors spring. Its unconditional acceptance of an architecture that we now choose to condemn as inhospitable and unnatural raises interesting questions about the current states of culture, nature and the city.

The Indo-European root of the word *culture* is *kwel*, which means "to revolve" and which also gives us the words *cultivate*, *cult* and *circle*. This etymological reading gives us a fresh sense of the relationship between nature and the contemporary city; outside the linear timeline of history, culture is cyclical and self-perpetuating.

The word *nature* comes from the root *gene*, which means "to give birth" or "to beget"; the root of the words *city* and *civilization* is *kei*, meaning "to lie down." Though we often imply that culture is nature's opposite, it is, rather, civilization that is defined by the human-to-human relationships that are outside of nature — in other words, within the household, the place of lying down. Into this more self-contained realm we have appropriated and domesticated selected elements from nature, certain animals and plants. Groups of these domestic households form the city, which attempts to hold the forces of nature at bay.

Meanwhile, other aspects of nature have been carefully isolated and cloned as urban commodities. This is a nature that tempers the reality of the wilderness with the safety and status of a four-wheel-drive vehicle, a nature that bottles spring water and makes it available on any city street, a nature that is processed by the capitalist infrastructure of nature companies and green industries. This is a nature no longer in opposition to civilization, but consumed by it.

Ironically, we are outside the nature we have constructed. History reveals to us various types of exile, but until now exile has always been the result of one group or force acting upon another. The unique con-

dition of the late twentieth century is that we who have perpetuated the landscape of exile and we who are exiled are the same.

The loneliness of humans as a species is exemplified in the architecture and planning of American cities; in much of the dystopian fiction of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of alienation is shaped by an urban experience. The city, constructed to protect us from the alienating forces of nature, has now turned on its creator. So thoroughly have we managed to exclude the perceived other — weather, animals, wilderness — so thoroughly have we civilized the city, that we have shut out ourselves as well. This should not be surprising. Why should we assume that we, as products of nature, would be able to thoroughly wean ourselves of its rhythms and textures?

When we speak of nature in the city, we are usually referring to green parks. This urban landscaping is no more natural than urban pets, which are conditioned to sleep on couches, eat supermarket food and wear coats when it rains. Other urban creatures, such as rats, pigeons, raccoons and cockroaches, are loathed for different reasons; all are the subjects of relentless extermination.

Zoos are among our most ironic permutations of nature. In some, like the pioneering San Diego Zoo and the redesigned Bronx Zoo, the recreation of a wilderness appears so vast and complete that the animal can completely loose itself within. Yet who is the winner here? Not the animal, who would surely rather be back in Africa with hundreds of square miles instead of merely acres to roam. Not the spectators, who often complain that even with binoculars they fail to catch a glimpse of the animals.

The same institutions that engender the infrastructure of skyscrapers, parks and zoos also reorganize fluid time into a series of spatial moments that we have come to call history. Within this timeline are acts of building, all in some sense a confrontation with the authority of nature. Yet the authority we now confront in America is that of the megalopolis machine. Here we turn to the lesson of the falcon: the contemporary city, born of the forces of corporate capitalism, is now our own second nature.

First imagined as transparent objects, modern skyscrapers eventually became just the opposite, reflecting back the city with a force that asserts their static power, their mute resistance to nature. With high-speed elevators, plate-glass windows and absolute climate control, they defy both time and the weather; their weighty mass rejects the earth and all its messiness. Yet these buildings are paradoxically becoming more earthlike; in their very numbers they form a new urban topography of cliffs and canyons that the falcons find so welcoming. Is this landscape really any more inhospitable than the mountains and forests that confronted the first builders with their bulky, stark and homogeneous vastness?

Suppose we were to declare a moratorium on new buildings in the city and to manipulate the fabric that is already woven — that is, to approach the urban landscape as we once approached the natural landscape, as raw material to be taken apart and put together again in a different form.

Penelope unraveled part of her half-completed shroud for Laertes every evening, for to finish it was to succumb to the suitors' demand for marriage and to lose her hope for Odysseus' return. Like making lace from whole cloth by pulling carefully on a few well-chosen threads, urban architecture by subtraction can suspend both the program of permanence and the desire for completion. To unravel and reweave pieces of the city, specifically the taut skins of buildings, is to welcome the texture of uneven edges; to cultivate the steel and glass surfaces of this modern terrain is to take on the metaphor of second nature.

Thus we combat our urban exile, not by leaving the city, but by penetrating its surfaces and operating on them. "To make a field," writes John Berger, "one must enter into it."[3] Such subjectivity assumes that we open ourselves to the speech of the city, that we listen to buildings and roads the way the Aboriginal listens to bushes and rocks. How do regain such an antediluvian innocence? Who of us will write the urban equiv-

alent of Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*? Who will engage the poetic suspension of disbelief that permits a savanna for giraffes under the urban freeway.

Rome is overrun with cats; Venice is sinking; acres of weeds are growing in whole blocks of Detroit, left empty since the riots of 1967 for nature to reclaim. These examples reflect some of the limits of human authority, limits on the degree to which cities can become civilized. They stand in contrast to utopian visions of the perfect city, acknowledging the contingencies of overlap, simultaneity and bricolage, of mess and contradiction.

Like the semantic paradox of the "cozy pub,"[3] uncivilized cities can begin to express the human need for intimacy. It is not so much person-to-person intimacy that our cities now lack, but rather the complex intimacies we once felt with the wilderness forces of animals and the weather, emotions that once engendered our myths and our art: our culture.

History itself has weight, and the unburdening of culture from history is one of the best understood missions of Modernism. Ironically, it is now Modern buildings that weigh the city down. Their weight is the composite result of physical and economic qualities; the first, at least, falls into architecture's realm of concern. Liberated from the freeze-frame linear matrix of history, architecture can cast itself into a mode of thought in which culture lightens the city's burden, in which urban buildings can be transformed from the unequivocal, opaque emblems of postwar capitalism into enigmatic transparencies.

To read the city as second nature is to return culture to the city.

Notes

1. The peregrine falcon recovery program began through efforts of government and private agencies soon after the ban of DDT in 1972. In that same year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service formed teams of biologists from the public and private sector to collaborate on protection strategies and The Peregrine Fund, a private organization, developed a major propagation facility in Idaho. In 1974, scientists from these organizations joined forces with those of state wildlife agencies and began releasing captively produced young falcons out into the wild. Municipal organizations, such as the Chicago Peregrine Release and Restoration project, would later add their support to the effort.

By 1991, reintroduction of the peregrine had ended in the east, and, in the west, only a few re-introductions are still taking place. In all, as the result of reintroduction efforts, more than 4,000 peregrines have been released to their former habitat.

2. John Berger, "Field," in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

3. "Pub" is short for "public," while "cozy" suggests intimacy.

In context of this discussion about forming place, I would like to propose a few observations about two concepts that seem to be central to the issue. The first concept is reading, the second is geometry.

Reading is not the same as analysis or survey. The notions of analysis and survey are both based on neutrality. Their results are credible if their approach and development have been made in a vacuum of values; value judgments, if necessary, come later, when the analysis and – or the survey are accomplished.

The notion of reading, on the contrary, is based on commitment, and this implies values. I like to say (paradoxically, of course) that reading, to really be sharp, needs to be sectarian, meaning that while reading, one has to hold in mind how what is being read could be transformed. In other words, "reading" means to explore and comprehend specific situations of the physical space with a designing mind.

Everything is recorded in physical space in the form of layers of signs. Some layers are buried, or worn out, or so thin as to have become almost invisible; some are hidden and some are altered and even forged; but they are all there. If we were able to detect and decode every layer, we could understand the essence of the physical space we want to re-design: past, present; strength, weakness; attitude or reluctance to change; potential, future. But we are no longer able to do so, and reading is a means for recovering that skill, a skill that gives us the capacity to penetrate the meaning of a space in order to transform it into a place that is significant in our present time. The process of de-structuring and re-structuring imprints the method of design which, if related to reading, must be tentative. The solution is reached through a sequence of endeavors that tempt the problem and push it to reveal its real substance.

The second observation is about geometry. Geometry was in the past a fundamental tool for architectural design. It doesn't seem to be so anymore. Most architects ignore geometry and organize the components of their projects casually. A minority tries to theorize the abandonment of geometry and maintains that architectural design should be instinctive and, therefore, without rules; otherwise, architecture loses its freshness and becomes conventional. Finally, a few architects recognize that geometry is an essential reference for architectural design but maintain that it is no longer possible to use Euclidean geometry; therefore, they argue, it is necessary to look at other, more complex, geometries (relativity? quantum physics? Brownian motion? Which, it is not said) in order to attain spatial configurations as complex as those that appear in contemporary society.

I do not like the tendency to expel geometry from architecture: I believe that it is an incompetent and, above all, vain attitude. I instead share the idea that the society in which we live is very complex and that, to be able to express in spatial terms its intricate events and its contradictions, architecture should refer to a complex geometry. But I also believe that the complexity of geometry cannot but be a particular version – a complex one – of Euclidean geometry.

Architecture is perceived through the human senses, for the simple fact that it is an extension, and at the same time a field of action, of human senses. This field of action can be described and represented only by a geometry that the human senses can perceive. Other geometries, those that refer to the fields of the infinitely small or infinitely large universe, cannot produce descriptions and representations that the human senses can perceive; therefore they have no use in architecture.

But how to attain a geometry that matches the complexity of contemporary society starting from Euclidean geometry? I believe that it is possible to start from Euclidean geometry and overlap, intertwine, layer, its rules and figures so as to obtain a tool that describes and represents a complexity similar to that of our contemporary society. This complex tool can still be used in the field of human perception and produce configurations that, although complex, are perceivable. It also allows to bring in the compositional game of proportion, which has almost disappeared from architecture but is still a very effective means for defining configurations that are balanced, not aggressive and able to be shared.

Charles Buki

SHADES OF GRAY

We baseball enthusiasts in the nation's capital are voyeurs. We drive thirty miles to arrive at Camden Yards, past the Inner Harbor, past the RTKL skyline forty stories above. We peep into blue-collar Baltimore, but not quite all the way to Lafayette Courts, which is six blocks further east.

Along the way, road signs highlight the collection of frypits, burgerworlds and gas stations in the bedroom communities between Baltimore and D.C. Commuter traffic reminds us of the spit-and-tissue paper townhomes that besot Prince George's County.

It is easy to dismiss all this as crass, though it is. Or typical, which it is. But doing so fails to see the rest. Ignoring the rest risks agreeing that the "in-betweens," as Leon Krier called them, are forever destined to be nowheres. Cut down the oak trees, pave Oak Lane. Tear down Lafayette Courts, build Pleasant View Gardens.

Dismissing these suburbs as banal fails to see the real people living in them. It fails to understand that real people happily raise children in them, look forward to coming home to them and, most of all, have chosen to plant roots there instead of in nearby Baltimore.

Nearby Baltimore. Lafayette Courts. The gospel according to Le Corbusier. In Scotland they refer to them as "estates." Camillo Jose Vergara calls them "the new American ghetto." Yards away, 45,000 middle-class, white baseball fans crowd Camden Yards and then Pickles Pub for one last beer before heading to their townhomes in their minivans, past the Bedding Barn, never seeing the pleasant views of Lafayette Courts and the black families living there.

Lafayette Courts as Pleasant View Gardens avoids the issues. It overlooks that the row houses of Baltimore are not what works: People work. Architecture can be irrelevant when people don't have work. Forgetting this is laughable, convenient.

If public housing works when residents have jobs, do monoliths need architectural improvement to become worthy places? Are our better angels in the hallowed ground of geometry, form and architectural codes, or in the sense of fair play that creates opportunity?

And if the architecture of low-income housing can become meaningless in the absence of hope, if the architecture of the suburbs can become meaningless in the presence of prosperity, then how much architecture should we concentrate on making? Where should poor people go anyway?

It is all about memory. When buildings are tall and isolated, and the people inside them are black while Orioles fans are white, the only connections we seem to have are the demolitions that recur every twenty years or so and the glad-handing that accompanies ribbon cuttings. The binding glue of denial and optimism is a powerful cocktail. HOPE. HOPE VI. HOPE NUMBER SIX. High rise, low-rise. Isolated, integrated.

The effort is admirable all the same. To even try to make a pleasant view must be worth something. There is reweaving. The quarrel is not with the design or with the intentions. To find fault with what's on paper is to misunderstand what hope is all about.

Yet, while Pleasant View Gardens is a design success, it is as much a nonplace as ever—because the in-between nonplaces along the interstate are full of happy people planting roots in townhomes, people who have never heard of this place and never want to. Because at the intersection of Central Avenue and Fayette Street a few dozen unemployed black men still spend their days. Because Little Italy is both eight blocks and a million miles away. Because there are no Pleasant View Gardens residents at Pickles Pub. Because Pleasant View Gardens does not have a pleasant view. Renaming, after all, is just renaming.

Pleasant View Gardens is a design success because there are now streets and alleys in place of superblocks, beginning with the menacing Post Office to the west. It is a design success because high–rises are out of fashion these days. The convenience of forgetting lures us to think that science is a replacement for virtue. Public housing redesign always works on paper, just one more technical solution. Photograph it now, so that when it is razed in a couple of dozen years, there will be a way to remember what it looked like, how we felt, what we forgot. Convenient memory.

Lafayette Courts



Above: **Residents watch implosion.** Photo: **R. B. Chapman,** HABC

Right: **Lafayette Courts at the start of implosion.** Photo: ***Baltimore Sun***

Background: **Figure ground of Lafayette Courts and vicinity.** Graphic: **Torti Gallas/**CHK

Opposite page, right: **Pleasant View Gardens row houses.** Photo: **Torti Gallas/**CHK

Opposite page, bottom: **Pleasant View Gardens ribbon cutting.** Photo: HABC

Opposite page, background: **Figure ground of Pleasant View Gardens and vicinity.** Graphic: **Torti Gallas/**CHK

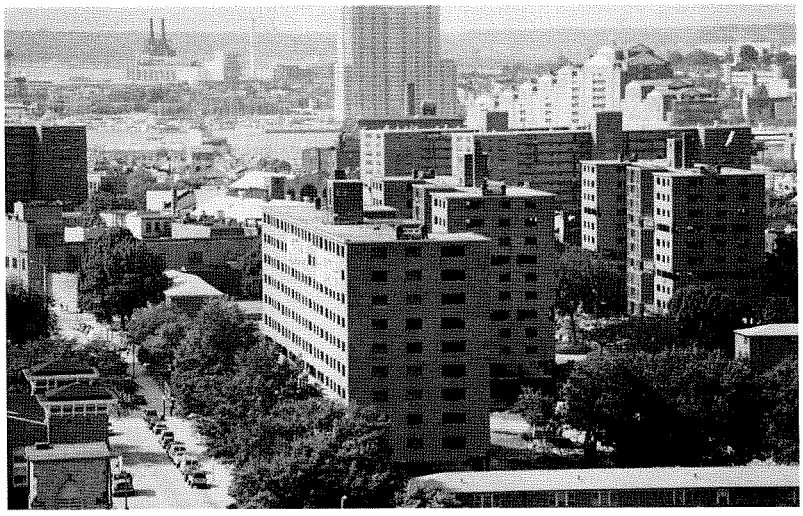




Pleasant View Gardens



A HOPE VI
CASE STUDY



Lafayette Courts, looking south, with Baltimore's Inner Harbor in the distance. Photo: HABC

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development established the HOPE VI Urban Demonstration Program in 1993. The program responded to research showing that the physical and social conditions in public housing were creating severe distress for the people who lived there.[1] While physical shortcomings were not the sole source of public housing's woes, it was widely acknowledged that existing projects were inappropriately designed and poorly managed.

The HOPE VI program was created for the purpose of revitalizing severely distressed or obsolete public housing developments. This program has been a principal element of the Department's efforts to change public housing rules in order to achieve efficient development, sound management, good design and strong incentives for resident responsibility.[2]

The HOPE VI program called for locally initiated proposals that included: demolishing obsolete public housing, redeveloping those sites with replacement housing that would minimize concentrations of very low-income tenants, and providing Section 8 vouchers for public housing residents displaced by demolition.

The transformation of Lafayette Courts into Pleasant View Gardens, a project that has reclaimed one of Baltimore's most troubled public housing projects, has become one of HOPE VI's most visible accomplishments.

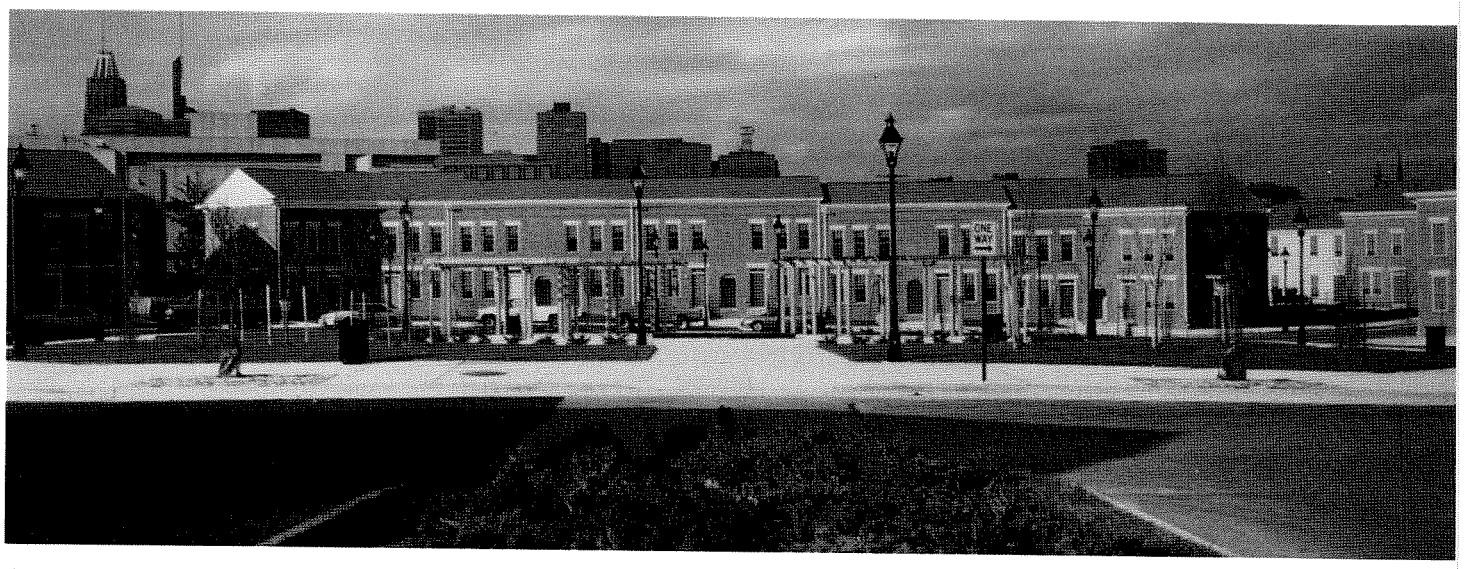
This project in particular is also an offspring of former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros' love affair with the New Urbanism, and a signal demonstration of the Congress for the New Urbanism's effort to demonstrate its concern for rebuilding inner cities. In fact, the neighborhood plan and house designs for Pleasant View Gardens embrace many of the principles that CNU prepared in 1996 for HUD's Homeownership Zone program, another inner-city initiative.[3] These principles have been incorporated in many other HOPE VI projects.

One of the most jarring aspects of seeing Pleasant View Gardens for the first time is the fence—a tall, wrought-iron fence that separates it from the surrounding neighborhood. Pleasant View Gardens is a tiny residential island in a sea of gritty Baltimore urbanism. To someone who has railed against gated communities, this is a saddening sign of the times, vaguely disturbing, undemocratic.

Passing into the neighborhood, therefore, one feels like an intruder and almost expects to be greeted by suspicion, if not outright hostility. Then a subtle awareness begins to seep in—this place feels like Baltimore. The streetscape is spartan. The brick townhouses come right up to the sidewalk. Their concrete steps echo the famous marble steps of old Baltimore. There are no front yards, no street trees, but that is Baltimore's classic urban pattern.

On a chilly winter day there are few people on the sidewalk, but a curious eight-year-old sidles up on his Rollerblades to check me out. Down the street, the houses suddenly open up to surround a commons. This is obviously where the action is, and a group of adolescents hang out in the park under the watchful eye of a few adults from the surrounding stoops.

I am pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm with which my request to include them in my pictures is received, and amused by the speed with which they form an elaborate group pose, complete with gestures from rap and hip-hop videos. These kids are comfortable, proud of where they live and happy to



demonstrate their ownership to an obviously out-of-place outsider with a camera. I doubt I would have received a similar reception in Lafayette Courts.

An important element of HOPE VI is a commitment to including residents in the process. Former tenant-association president Linda Love is satisfied that the design team fulfilled that promise. "We really enjoyed working with CHK. They were just as nervous as we were at the beginning, but we were able to establish a good relationship. They asked us what we wanted, and we told them 'single-family homes, back yards, more control and a police substation.'" Sounds like a fairly simple program.

Another important element of HOPE VI is a strategy aimed at helping residents become self sufficient. This is where Love's enthusiasm flags. Other HOPE VI projects have hired tenants and contracted with tenant-owned businesses for services, but tenants of Pleasant View Gardens are still waiting for jobs. "The goal was to include residents [as employees] in the Boys and Girls Club, the day-care facility, in management. They're doing it at Lexington [another Baltimore HOPE VI project] but they're not doing it here," she says.

The HOPE VI agenda is an ambitious one. Pleasant View Gardens clearly represents a vast improvement for the residents who formerly inhabited Lafayette Courts, but it came at a significant cost: some $105 million for 338 units of housing and related infrastructure. And the scale of HOPE VI is dwindling, from a high of 20,000 units in 1993 and 1994 to 7,000 units in 1999. There is not enough money or political will to make the commitment necessary to rebuild all the



Lafayette Courts in the country, and it is unclear whether local communities can undertake transformations like this on their own.

The articles in this "place debate" examine the transformation of Lafayette Courts, and HOPE VI's potential for influencing national urban policy, from several perspectives. Cheryl A. O'Neill, principal designer for the project, explains the reasoning behind the design, and Daniel P. Henson, III, executive director of Baltimore's housing authority, reports on the project as a matter of public policy. Jeffrey L. Soule considers Pleasant View Gardens as an element of a comprehensive, city-wide neighborhood investment strategy, and Charles Buki considers it as an element of regional identity. Witold Rybczynski, a frequent commentator on urban housing and on the New Urbanism, offers a critique of the design.

Top: **Central square, Pleasant View Gardens, looking west, with downtown Baltimore skyline in the distance**
Photo: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

Above: **Central square, Pleasant View Gardens**
Photo: **Christine L. Saum**

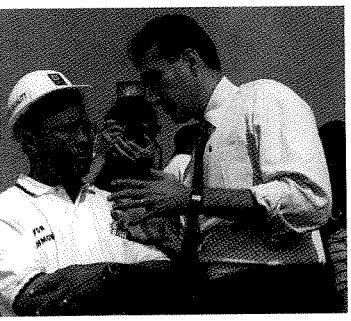
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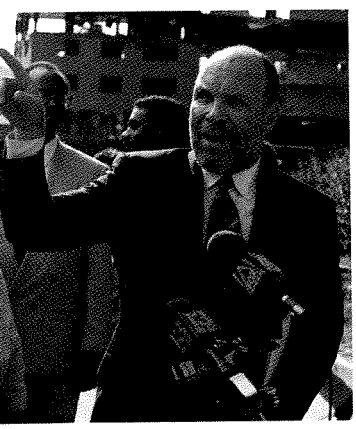
1. In particular, the National Commission on Severely Distressed Housing, established by Congress in the late 1980s, documented that public housing and community development policies were incapable of dealing with increasingly dysfunctional urban neighborhoods.

2. Office of Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Principles for Designing and Planning Homeownership Zones* (Washington, D.C.: 1996).

3. The Congress for the New Urbanism has been asked to prepare similar guidelines for HOPE VI projects. Excerpts from a draft of those guidelines appear in the CNU Forum pages, elsewhere in this issue.







Top: **Former tenant-association president Linda Love**
Center: **Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and former HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros**
Bottom: **HABC director Daniel P. Henson III**
Photos: HABC

In Baltimore City, the lives of public housing residents and those of residents in surrounding neighborhoods are undergoing significant change. Our worst housing is being systematically transformed into some of our best. The city is reweaving its social fabric, making it stronger, more vibrant, more sustainable.

This is being accomplished with low-income public housing residents driving the thinking and working hand in hand with various private-sector players, who are typically shy of public housing. Through the federally funded HOPE VI Program (also known as the Urban Revitalization Demonstration), Baltimore's four most troubled communities—with eighteen high-rise, brick monoliths from the past—are some of the hottest development sites in the city.

All four sites are just blocks from Baltimore's world-renowned Inner Harbor. Two sites, comprising eleven high-rises, have been cleared; one (Pleasant View Gardens) has been entirely rebuilt and the other is just popping out of the ground. A third site is being readied for implosion in July and the last recently was awarded federal funding. Together, the four sites represent a half billion dollars in neighborhood revitalization.

In 1991, Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke convened a task force to recommend solutions for our troubled family high-rise communities, which were consuming enormous amounts of public resources. In July, 1993, the task force concluded (for the first time ever in Baltimore) that certain public housing developments should be demolished because it made no sense to rehabilitate them. Lafayette Courts alone was costing HABC nearly $1 million per year in elevator repairs.

Together, the four developments represented the state's single largest concentration of poverty, with nearly 85 percent of their residents on public assistance, compared to 60 percent, on average, in the rest of the city's public housing. Average income was under $6,000 per year, significantly lower than the average for the rest of the city. Crime was off the charts.

The four developments comprised a total of 2,551 units on 63 acres. The city's plan was not only to rebuild quality housing but also to reduce the on-site population density dramatically by building smaller communities elsewhere. More than 1,000 units are being replaced through small, mixed-income, infill and renovation projects scattered throughout the city and many residents are opting for Section 8 vouchers.

Our relocation strategy includes several programs that help residents move to surrounding suburbs. One program, called Moving to Opportunity, will monitor the progress of 243 families for five years. Half the families are in a control group, with little social or placement assistance compared to the target group. Initial findings show that job acquisition and retention, as well as education benchmarks for children, have improved for the target group.

The thrust of the program was to make public housing safe and pleasant, and to provide opportunities for social and economic advancement. Residents of our four revitalized communities will have opportunities to become better educated on-site, access to on-site day-care and recreation services, job-search assistance, computer skills enhancement and opportunities to begin their own businesses.

As the developments are rebuilt, HABC has partnered to provide construction-training programs, such as "Step-Up," which has become a national model. Hundreds of residents work at attractive wages and side-by-side with skilled union workers in twelve skills areas, such as plumbing, carpentry and tiling.

Lafayette Courts

Designed in the 1940s and built in the early 1950s, Lafayette Courts' six high-rise towers were aimed at eliminating urban decay. Unfortunately, all of the towers were built to the absolute minimum of standards, as if public housing residents would not need air-conditioners, washers and dryers, could not afford televisions or hair dryers, or would not need more than 650 square feet of living space. Engineering reports estimated that systems upgrades would cost some $10 million per building.

The project began declining in the 1970s, and by the mid-1980s, Lafayette Courts and its three sister devel-

opments were deemed the state's worst housing problem. By 1990, the nightly news documented all-too-regularly not only the buildings' decline but also the residents' despair. Drug dealers were so entrenched that maintenance workers took their lives in their hands when they attempted to make repairs. Machine-gun-toting drug dealers controlled the buildings, charging residents to enter their own units. During one drug raid gone bad, ten police officers were pinned down by automatic weapons fire for an entire evening until a tank was brought in from Washington, D.C., to extricate them.

Today, Pleasant View Gardens' 228 garden-style townhomes stand as some of Baltimore City's best mixed-income housing. A new day-care center, recreation center, community center and senior mid-rise buildings are interspersed with twenty-seven townhomes sold to former public housing residents. A new mini-medical center has moved in and housing for very young mothers is nearby. Working role models, not bold drug dealers, live next door.

At Lexington Terrace, ten blocks west, one-hundred homeowners will soon live at the new Townes at the Terraces. A business incubator will be housed on site, just across the street from the 26,000-employee University of Maryland Medical Systems complex. Some obvious linkages have already been established, such as on-site GED and college tutoring services and a medical transcription training program.

When the 758 units of Murphy Homes fall just a block north of the Terraces, Baltimore City will be just one development shy of a decade-long dream to eliminate its most troubled housing. Along with the vanishing bricks and mortar of the high-rises, so symbolic of failed policies of earlier years, go the stigmatized cages of despair that gave little chance for economic or personal empowerment. The social transformation may take slightly longer, but crime statistics and quality-of-life issues are underscoring this new dawn in Baltimore's public housing communities, which to many observers have disappeared through blending with the surrounding communities.

Jeffrey L. Soule

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Even the crankiest critic of HUD's HOPE VI program would be impressed by Pleasant View Gardens' attractive architecture and streetscapes. The new neighborhood boasts pattern and detail straight from the Congress for the New Urbanism canon: a central park, tree-lined streets, rear alleys and design details that reference historical row-house architecture. (No front porches, though, and no corner stores.) The success of this attention to form will largely depend on the caring it calls forth from its residents. Will this new community develop and maintain a civic infrastructure to complement its physical organization?

This project also combines many intriguing elements that point to a more comprehensive view than HUD and its public housing partners have typically demonstrated in the past. It has been conceived with attention to employment opportunities and incorporates a job-training center, health care, elderly housing and recreation. It is sited next to public schools and Baltimore's central post office, which, one hopes, would provide some residents opportunities to walk to work. Planners have long hoped to see economic development officials talking to housing authorities, though most of the promise is yet to be realized.

On the surface, we learn from Pleasant View Gardens that given enough money, about $105 million, you can replace ugly, dysfunctional, public housing with 338 units of attractively designed public housing and related facilities. Beneath the surface, though, this project provokes two basic questions: Are we being truly comprehensive in our planning, and are we ensuring that implementation of these objectives is sustainable, both financially and physically? The specifics apply to Baltimore but the issues speak to HOPE VI projects elsewhere.

The quality of Pleasant View is a jarring contrast to the very harsh surroundings. The perimeter of the project is fenced attractively, and the sad brick-and-asphalt housing, vacant lots and abandoned commercial buildings on nearby blocks call for acknowledgment of their plight. Though it is possible to walk to adjacent facilities, the surrounding environment is not inviting enough to tempt one to do so.

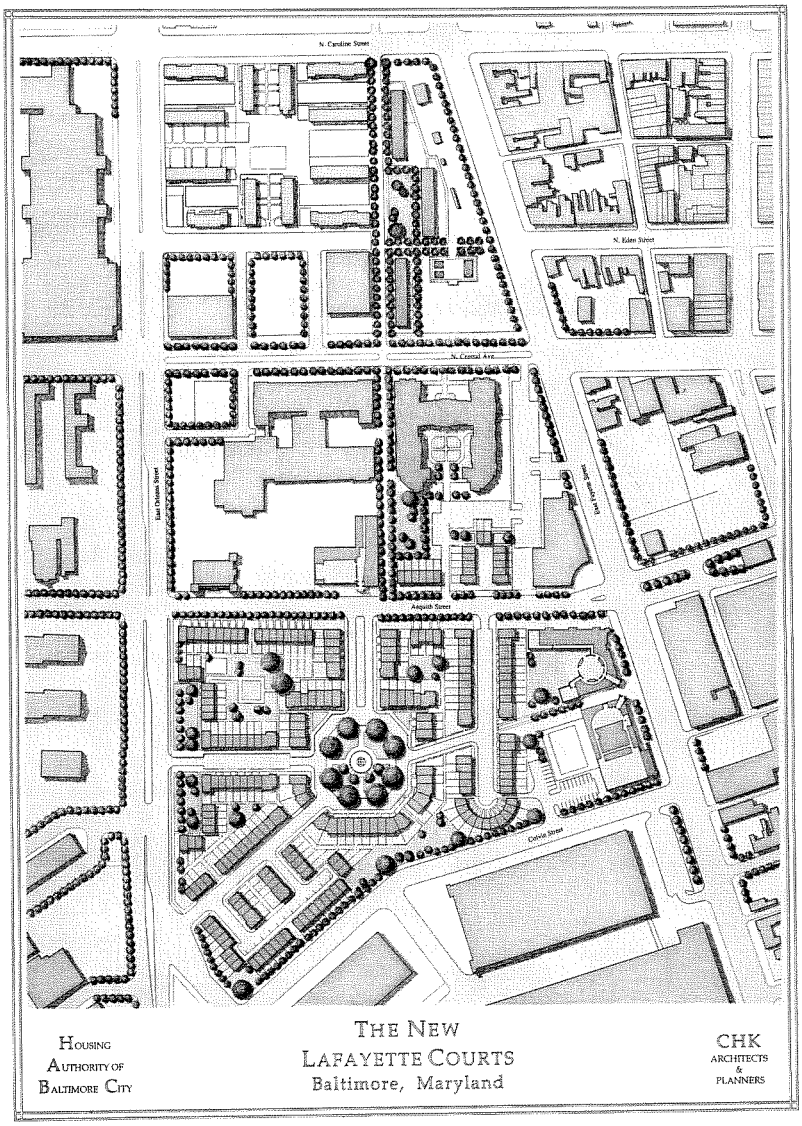
The redesign of Lafayette Courts aimed both to solve practical needs and to create a design imbued with the more profound qualities of a work of art and sense of place. The project was developed in conjunction with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) and Lafayette Courts residents in accordance with the goals established by HUD's HOPE VI program.

At this early stage in its evolution, HOPE VI was focused exclusively on highly distressed, inner-city public housing projects, providing funds for demolishing them and constructing new housing. The program sought to improve residents' quality of life through better housing and neighborhood design (including reduced density) and expanded social programs, especially increased job training.

HABC, led by Executive Director Daniel P. Henson III, regarded Lafayette Courts as the first step in an ambitious plan to remove and rebuild all of Baltimore's high-rise public housing developments. Because the towers seemed out of place in a city overwhelmingly composed of row houses, and because the projects failed to provide decent housing for families, Henson has been a strong proponent of removing them and replacing them with neighborhoods.

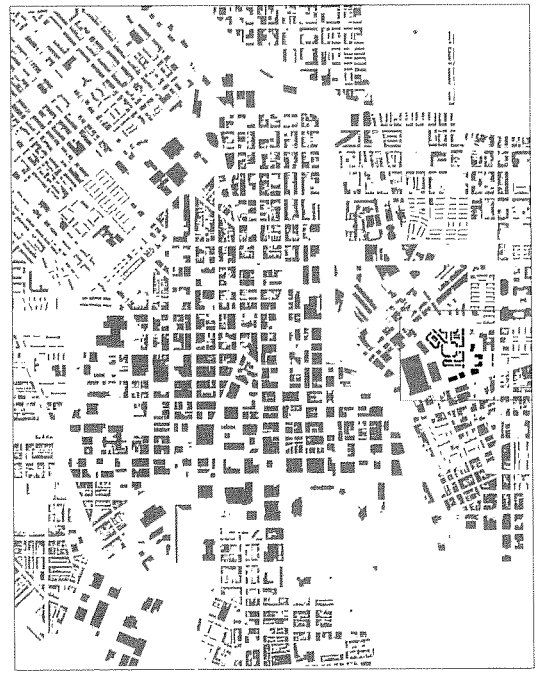
HABC further stipulated that the Lafayette Courts high-rise towers be replaced with low-rise row houses. Residents agreed, finding that row houses not only offered amenities like front doors, back doors, private rear yards and more privacy, but also helped eliminate the stigmatization of being in public housing by providing "houses just like everybody else has," as resident Janice Bagwell put it.[1]

Below: **Pleasant View Gardens site plan**
Below right: **Downtown Baltimore figure ground, including Pleasant View Gardens and surroundings**
Graphics: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

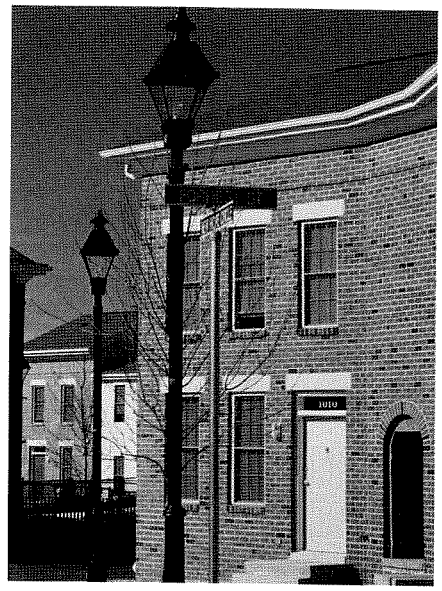


Refining the Row House

The Lafayette Courts master plan was an investigation of the use of a repetitive housing type, the row house, to create a neighborhood with a strong sense of place.







Above left, above: **Pleasant View Gardens row houses** Photos: **Torti Gallas/CHK** Below: **Typical row house floor plan.** Graphics: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

Baltimore's residential neighborhoods, with their heritage of row house construction, were an inspiration. The richness of neighborhoods like Fells Point, Little Italy, Mount Vernon and Bolton Hill is established by the quality of the houses, the repetitiveness of the type and the subtle differences between individual homes.

While the features of the traditional Baltimore row house provided the pattern for the new homes, adjustments were made to accommodate modern living conditions.[2] The typical fourteen- or sixteen-foot-wide house, for instance, was modified to b eighteen or twenty feet wide, creating larger ground-floor living spaces. Similar adjustments were made in the pattern of external facades. The strict cornice line, repetitive window pattern, planar quality and front stoop, all dominant features of Baltimore houses, were all retained. However, building heights were set at two stories (lower than most older row houses) and roof profiles were modified with pitches, giving the units a more impressive mass on the street and permitting the use of relatively low-maintenance roof systems.

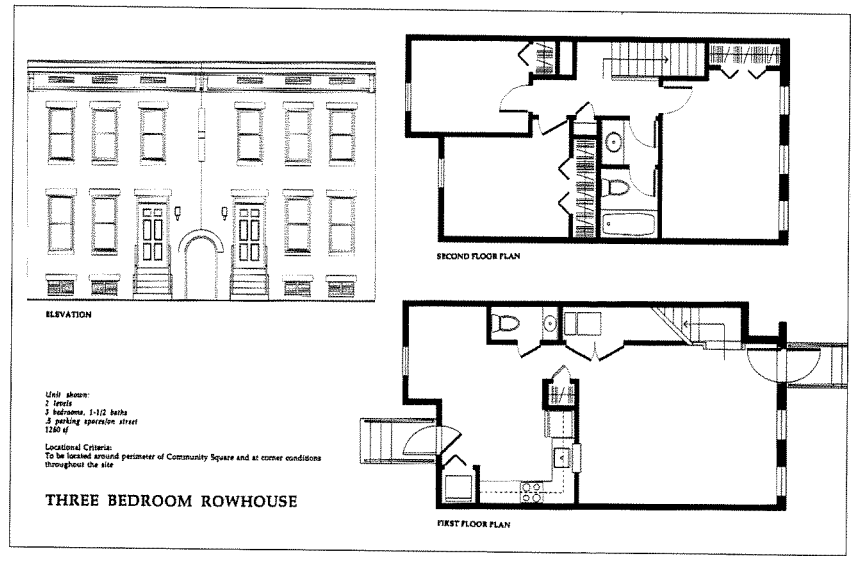
Modest variation within the house types helps to diversify the community; variants include end units and two-, three- and four-bay houses. Larger houses tend to be arranged around larger open spaces and smaller houses on smaller-scale streets, with the thought that larger families should have closer access to open spaces and that yards should be sized proportionately.

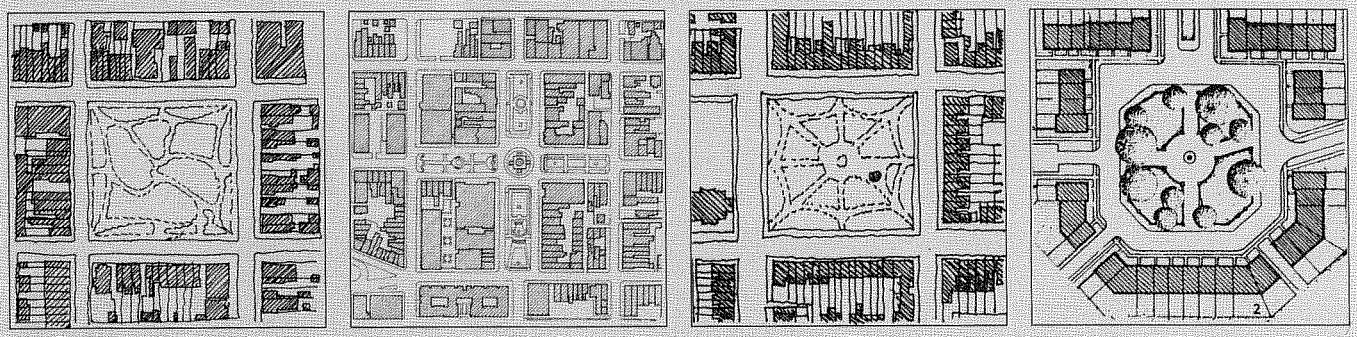
The use of two-story structures reflected a desire to keep construction costs low as well as changes in the use of residential space. In older row houses, the proportion of shared space to private bedroom space was one-third shared, two-thirds private. Today, it is appropriate to have a more even balance. Thus a third floor, which would generally have been bedroom space, was not incorporated into the design of these homes.

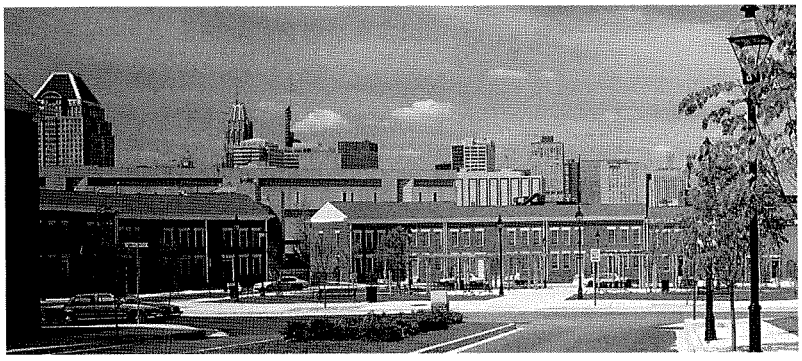
Neighborhood Streets and Spaces

The variation in architecture was enhanced by the variation in the character of the streets and spaces around the central square—axial streets, modest setbacks, such as that created along busy New Orleans street, and different relations to topography. These all further intensified the architectural variety, creating distinctive local settings.

The residential square, a semi-enclosed urban room surrounded by continuous row houses, also has a rich tradition in Baltimore, occurring with great frequency







Top: **Baltimore residential squares.** Left to right: **Lafayette Square, Mount Vernon Place, Union Square, Pleasant View Gardens.** Graphics: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

Above: **Pleasant View Gardens main street and square** Photo: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

as a defining neighborhood feature. Subtleties are found in shapes and sizes—including the stately quadrangle of Union Square, the unique cruciform of Mount Vernon Place and the linear boulevard-like character of Eutaw Place.

This spatial type provided a key strategy for the master plan. A square was located near the center of the site, away from heavily trafficked streets at the perimeter and on axis with the entrance to the community building, the one structure left remaining for both practical and emblematic reasons. Enclosed by house fronts, the square has sufficient spatial identity to provide both a usable community amenity and a recognizable feature that locates the site. Baltimore's skyline, visible from within the square (one of the more dramatic benefits of removing the towers) furthers this strategy, visually linking the neighborhood with the larger city.

The main square is equipped with many benches and a small loggia; the benches provide places for sitting and casual conversation while the loggia, insisted upon by the residents, is a piece of architecture that can be the setting for more formal community rituals such as fairs or even, as one residents proposed, a wedding. Neighborhood children have already commandeered the lawn at the center of the square as their play space.

Streets radiate from this center; they are oriented to the geometry of adjacent grids and to create links to significant neighborhood structures, such as the Bel Air Market and the tower of a nearby fire station. The streets are narrow in section, in contrast to the broad square, and also have a high degree of spatial enclosure. (The dimensions were possible because the city allowed reasonable right-of-way widths.) Yet the streets demonstrate variety through their relation to the topography and differences in length, breadth and orientation; these variations help identify and individualize the minor places in the plan.

These new community open spaces were complemented by a commensurate number of new public buildings. A new day-care and recreation center, sited on one of the more prominent edges of the site, offers services to Pleasant View residents and the city as a whole. The community building, the one building from the original development that was saved, is enlarged and given a new status with the addition of a tower and its prominent siting on axis with the square. This building is home to the new social and employment programs that are aimed at improving the quality of the lives of the residents.

A limited amount of commercial use was located in the new development, in part because of existing retail areas near the site, such as the Bel Air Market and a new drugstore on Fayette Street. Space in the recreation center was originally reserved for a fast-food restaurant, but for a number of reasons it was not built.

The plan also incorporates a strong defensible space strategy. Public open spaces (the streets and square) are clearly defined and scaled so they can be supervised by individuals; private exterior spaces are related to house forms so they can controlled by individual families.

Notes

1. *Baltimore Sun* (18 August 1995).

2. One reason we were able to take these design approaches is that for HOPE VI projects, HUD eliminated its design guidelines, such rules for bedroom sizes and provisions against closet doors and air conditioning. Plans are still reviewed by local and state housing officials, and HUD, if the project involves funding from other sources.

Lessons

In physical terms, one can easily say Pleasant View Gardens fulfills the HOPE VI program's goals. The project also resuscitates and convincingly realizes some tried and true, and entirely reasonable, patterns of city building. The wholesale building and rebuilding of the city is not a healthy practice, but the new plan, by reviving an urban pattern based upon streets and house lots, offers a flexibility that the high-rise towers did not.

Another important aspect of the HOPE VI process is the requirement that residents and the surrounding community be involved in the planning. That is necessary for making the process a positive one—and for making it work. In this project, there was not as much participation from the broader community, a problem that occurred in part because Lafayette Courts was so physically isolated. Wider participation would have helped link the project better to revitalization efforts in nearby neighborhoods, such as historic Jonestown, where the Baltimore Development Corporation has recently initiated a revitalization program.

In certain respects, Pleasant View Gardens raises questions about the efficacy of the row house type. The emphasis on reducing density and providing every household with a yard mandated a relatively expensive building type—row houses require more perimeter construction, foundation work, roof work and street infrastructure per unit than stacked house types. It may be that if the typological range were more diversified—some stacked units, some separate—there could have been more variety or better quality. An unfortunate legacy of tower projects is that they disavow the validity of any type of apartment construction, and that may be one of the drawbacks of this program. Fortunately, subsequent projects in Baltimore are trying other approaches, so it will be possible to compare the outcomes.

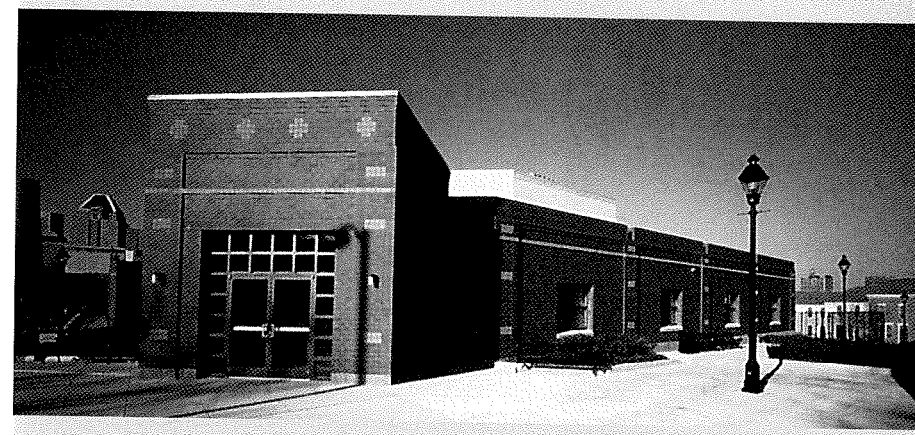
Some critics argue that the financial investment here is too great. Yet it is not so different from the investment that is made in new communities, built largely for the middle class, at the edges of metropolitan regions, where new infrastructure and new housing go hand-in-hand. The imbalance between inner-city and edge–suburban construction reflects powerful realities about class distinctions and our social values. Pushing the balance in the most minute way toward rebuilding the city is a positive step. Pleasant View Gardens should not be a model for affordable housing; it should be a model for the way we build communities.

Top: **Recreation center**

Center: **Senior housing**

Bottom: **Community center**

Photos: **Torti Gallas/CHK**







opments were deemed the state's worst housing problem. By 1990, the nightly news documented all-too-regularly not only the buildings' decline but also the residents' despair. Drug dealers were so entrenched that maintenance workers took their lives in their hands when they attempted to make repairs. Machine-gun-toting drug dealers controlled the buildings, charging residents to enter their own units. During one drug raid gone bad, ten police officers were pinned down by automatic weapons fire for an entire evening until a tank was brought in from Washington, D.C., to extricate them.

Today, Pleasant View Gardens' 228 garden-style townhomes stand as some of Baltimore City's best mixed-income housing. A new day-care center, recreation center, community center and senior mid-rise buildings are interspersed with twenty-seven townhomes sold to former public housing residents. A new mini-medical center has moved in and housing for very young mothers is nearby. Working role models, not bold drug dealers, live next door.

At Lexington Terrace, ten blocks west, one-hundred homeowners will soon live at the new Townes at the Terraces. A business incubator will be housed on site, just across the street from the 26,000-employee University of Maryland Medical Systems complex. Some obvious linkages have already been established, such as on-site GED and college tutoring services and a medical transcription training program.

When the 758 units of Murphy Homes fall just a block north of the Terraces, Baltimore City will be just one development shy of a decade-long dream to eliminate its most troubled housing. Along with the vanishing bricks and mortar of the high-rises, so symbolic of failed policies of earlier years, go the stigmatized cages of despair that gave little chance for economic or personal empowerment. The social transformation may take slightly longer, but crime statistics and quality-of-life issues are underscoring this new dawn in Baltimore's public housing communities, which to many observers have disappeared through blending with the surrounding communities.

Jeffrey L. Soule

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Even the crankiest critic of HUD's HOPE VI program would be impressed by Pleasant View Gardens' attractive architecture and streetscapes. The new neighborhood boasts pattern and detail straight from the Congress for the New Urbanism canon: a central park, tree-lined streets, rear alleys and design details that reference historical row-house architecture. (No front porches, though, and no corner stores.) The success of this attention to form will largely depend on the caring it calls forth from its residents. Will this new community develop and maintain a civic infrastructure to complement its physical organization?

This project also combines many intriguing elements that point to a more comprehensive view than HUD and its public housing partners have typically demonstrated in the past. It has been conceived with attention to employment opportunities and incorporates a job-training center, health care, elderly housing and recreation. It is sited next to public schools and Baltimore's central post office, which, one hopes, would provide some residents opportunities to walk to work. Planners have long hoped to see economic development officials talking to housing authorities, though most of the promise is yet to be realized.

On the surface, we learn from Pleasant View Gardens that given enough money, about $105 million, you can replace ugly, dysfunctional, public housing with 338 units of attractively designed public housing and related facilities. Beneath the surface, though, this project provokes two basic questions: Are we being truly comprehensive in our planning, and are we ensuring that implementation of these objectives is sustainable, both financially and physically? The specifics apply to Baltimore but the issues speak to HOPE VI projects elsewhere.

The quality of Pleasant View is a jarring contrast to the very harsh surroundings. The perimeter of the project is fenced attractively, and the sad brick-and-asphalt housing, vacant lots and abandoned commercial buildings on nearby blocks call for acknowledgment of their plight. Though it is possible to walk to adjacent facilities, the surrounding environment is not inviting enough to tempt one to do so.



Lafayette Courts implosion. Photos: ***Baltimore Sun***

A great opportunity for reaching out to the surrounding area would be to redesign the Old Town Mall, a once-attractive commercial street that was closed to cars and has become a dirty, depressing and largely unvisited pedestrian mall. Some work is under way, including the recruitment of a supermarket, but to date there are no plans to reopen the street to cars. One of Baltimore's seven original public food markets is also located here. Recently reduced in size, Belair Market still needs to serve the residents of Pleasant View Gardens and others in the immediate area.

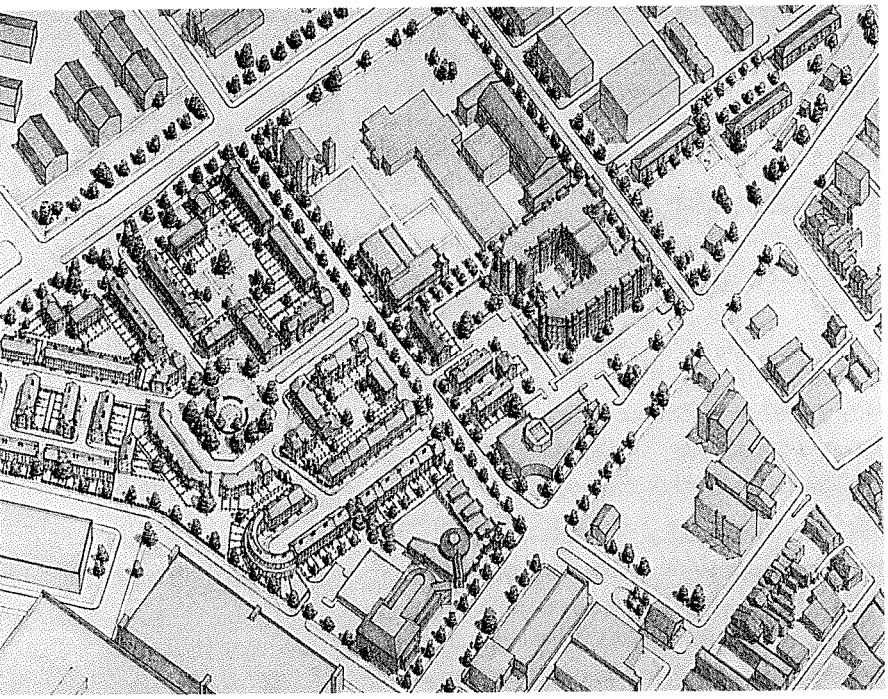
So, is there a bigger view of the city operating here? What are the plans for the public markets, critical elements of the city's identity and civic infrastructure? Will the Baltimore Development Corporation work with the housing authority to attract employment opportunities to the general area—and put hope behind the training?

Pleasant View Gardens, for all its positive aspects, cannot be replicated because it is simply too expensive. With public dollars dwindling, we must be more strategic in our approach to reinvesting in cities. HOPE VI can be credited with demonstrating concepts of community and pedestrian scale that urban designers have long advocated, but its impact on housing policy will be slight without comprehensive changes in federal investment policies and in local economic development and education policies.

One issue relates to the long-range plan for each city. Once the decision is made to remove inferior public housing, shouldn't we look comprehensively at the future land use rather than assume we must replace housing with housing on the same site? Shouldn't we consider balancing new construction with renovation?

Baltimore, with at least 20,000 vacant houses, needs to put some of those units back in use as a complement to new construction. The Historic East Baltimore Corporation has balanced historic preservation and renovation with strategic demolition and new construction; a similar approach could help stabilize declining neighborhoods throughout the city. Healthy, attractive neighborhoods should get attention before they fall into trouble. Public dollars should be spent strategically to create mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhoods, rather than attractive but unsustainable enclaves.

What will Pleasant View Gardens look like in five years? In ten years? Unless the underlying issues of segregating uses and incomes, civic responsibility, education, economic opportunity and comprehensive planning are addressed along with site design, history may repeat itself at Pleasant View Gardens. Even worse, the rest of the city may continue on the long, painful course of managed decline.



Pleasant View Gardens, axonometric view of site plan
Graphic: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

It is a measure of the absolute failure of previous federal public housing policy that a project as modest and unassuming as Pleasant View Gardens in Baltimore is publicly hailed as a national model and given an award for excellence in urban design by the American Institute of Architects.

Pleasant View Gardens represents the first generation of public housing projects completed under HOPE VI, the $1.5 billion program launched in 1994 by then Secretary of Housing Henry Cisneros. HOPE VI, which is being implemented in thirty-six cities, involves the demolition of 1950s-era, high-rise public housing and its replacement with single-family homes, usually townhouses.

It is an exaggeration to call Pleasant View Gardens a model; after all, comparable projects have been completed in Atlanta, St. Louis, Chicago, Pittsburgh and Seattle. Still, there is no doubt that the Baltimore project represents an important experiment in the vexing problem of housing the nation's poor.

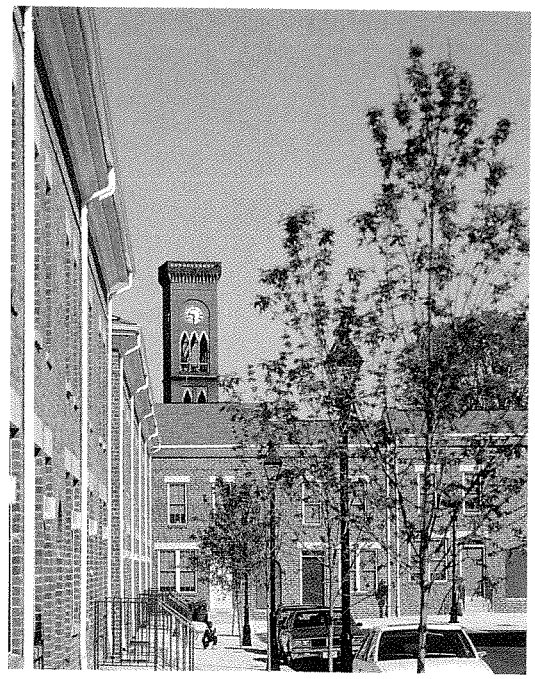
Pleasant View Gardens is located on 21.5 acres, immediately east of downtown Baltimore. Until a few years ago, this place was called Lafayette Courts and consisted of six identical, high-rise slabs and seventeen low-rise buildings, arranged on a superblock in approved Bauhaus fashion. Lafayette Courts was built to replace dilapidated rowhouses; eventually, it, too, became dilapidated, and worse: violent and dangerous, one-third of its units abandoned. In August, 1995, the entire project was demolished. Pleasant View Gardens took its place.

My first impression of Pleasant View Gardens was, well, pleasant. The two-story, predominantly brick, sixteen-foot-wide rowhouses line the sidewalks, as is common in Baltimore. There are even stoops. But they are concrete, not marble or limestone, as is typical elsewhere in the city. Other construction details are simple, too, often crude; there is nothing fancy about this housing. The simplified Georgian vernacular of concrete lintels, vertical windows and paneled front doors is attractive. Still, the repetitive street facades, entirely brick, are a little monotonous. The rear of the houses, a mixture of brick and vinyl siding, is livelier.

Although these rowhouses have been described as traditional, the layout of Pleasant View Gardens is not a conventional street grid. The project contains a short boulevard, an octagonal square and a sort of mews. In addition, there are several small, and one large, common green spaces in the backs of the houses.

I find the variety of streets unconvincing. The scale of the houses at Pleasant View is too small to successfully define the square; the boulevard strikes me as a little pretentious. It all reminds me of Seaside, Fl., whose assortment of urban street types, one of each, jammed into a tiny resort village seems more like a contrived urban sampler than a cohesive plan.

The common green spaces at Pleasant View Gardens, on the other hand, are successful. It was a drizzly, January morning when I walked around, and not many people about, but I could imagine that these places are active on summer evenings and weekends. Incidentally, that a stranger could walk around an American public housing project in 1999, taking photographs and feeling entirely comfortable, is a measure of what has been accomplished at Pleasant View.



View of street edge and corner along main square, looking south. Photo: **Torti Gallas/CHK**

Accomplished at a price: Lafayette Courts contained 807 units; Pleasant View Gardens contains only 228 rowhouses. It is true that the project now includes 110 apartments for elderly in a four-story building, a day-care facility, a recreation building, a community center and an outpatient clinic operated by the Greater Baltimore Medical Center. Nevertheless, the majority of the site is devoted to single-family housing. It achieves a gross density, according to my calculation, of about nineteen units per acre, half the previous density. This is still higher than, say, Kentlands, which has a gross density of only about thirteen units per acre. But Kentlands is a suburban community, with large houses and lots, and with a third of the site devoted to open space, including a lake.

It is not clear that the low density of Pleasant View Gardens is a good thing. Walking around, I felt that the spaces were a little too loose, a little too open; some of the streets were too wide. Higher density and greater compactness would have helped.

The Congress for the New Urbanism deserves much of the credit for the turnaround in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's approach to public housing that led to the HOPE VI initiative, and to projects like Pleasant View Gardens. The rejection of Modernist urban design principles and the emphasis on neighborhoods with traditional streets and houses is standard CNU fare. So is the traditional architectural style of the modest homes (whose average cost was about $100,000), which resemble low-priced starter homes in the conventional housing market.

Public housing has often been a vehicle for stylistic architectural experiments—in Germany and France it still is. Fortunately, that is not the case here. Pleasant View Gardens, like many private-sector Traditional Neighborhood Developments, is imaginatively planned but it also exhibits a resolute adherence to conservative, well-known—and well-liked—domestic typologies.

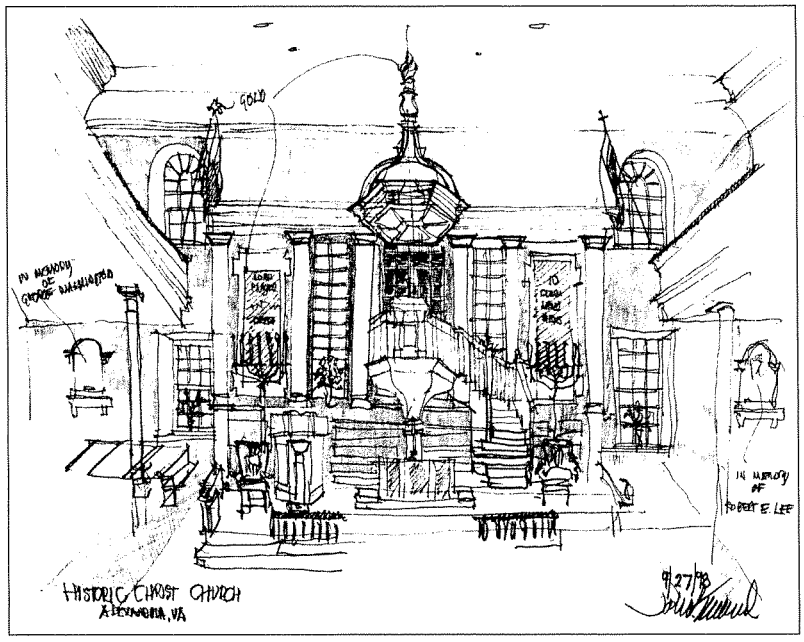
The future residents told the architects that they wanted "houses just like everybody else has." But Pleasant View Gardens is hardly an ordinary neighborhood. There is a police substation in the community center and video cameras attached to the eaves of the houses. The centerpiece of the project is not a church but a city-run community center, staffed by city workers, where there are classes in job training and future homeownership. There are rules about garbage—a wheeled plastic container stands in each backyard. Tenants are responsible for maintaining these back yards. These tenants are carefully screened by the Housing Authority of Baltimore City to achieve a mix of welfare and working families. In other words, there is a recognition, finally, that housing the poor involves more than providing shelter. It is an expensive recognition, of course, but one that forms the important foundation of the HOPE VI strategy.

The other important goal of HOPE VI projects is to break down the concentration of poverty typified by previous public housing projects. Pleasant View Gardens has moved modestly in this direction (several future projects in Baltimore will include an aggressive mix of public and market housing). Twenty-seven of the rowhouses have been sold, at subsidized prices, to qualifying low-income buyers. The plan is that as tenants' financial situations improve they, too, can become owners and purchase their homes. At that point, the promise incorporated in the neighborhood design of Pleasant View Gardens may begin to become a reality.

American Institute of Architects
Committee on Design

Berent Groth

A Cross Section in Time: Transitions



Christ Church, Alexandria, Va.
John Kirkland

The year is 1779. The thriving colonial village of Bellhaven is incorporating as the town of Alexandria. Streets in a simple grid are alive with activity to and from an amorphous tidal river. In the new order emerging after the storm of the revolution, an ambitious and enveloping new capital will be conceived in the safety of the marshy confluence upstream. L'Enfant, his visionary plan palpably near, shares with Jefferson an inkling of the burgeoning giant's continental horizons and history to come.

In Paris, the message of Voltaire and Rousseau has caught up with the ancien regime. The Louvre, left behind by the monarchy for safer Versailles, stands grandly complete in its second stylistic iteration. Sainte-Chapelle is a five-hundred-year-old delight. Much grand urbanism has shaped this city: the Marais district is a marsh fully transformed; the Place de Vosges is an established, accomplished residential square. The river, flowing around ancient Roman beginnings under Ile de la Cité, connects and separates a mature metropolis of half a million on the threshold of a great upheaval.

Across the Atlantic, the ruins of an equally sized city on Lake Texcoco have, for two cruel centuries, provided building materials and foundations for an expansive new capital emerging in a foreign language and European mold. The Catadral Metropolitana, begun in 1570, rises ambitiously atop still-buoyant soils. We are in the golden age of Baroque architecture in the center of New Spain. Though events of North America and France will soon disrupt the world of the Spanish Bourbons as well, the colonial empire's northern strongholds still extend to California and Florida.

Only forty kilometers away from bustling Mexico City, Teotihuacan is nevertheless stunningly removed from the world of change. The Pyramids of the Sun and of the Moon stand splendid and immutable over the great expanse of this ancient and ultimate grand axis: the Avenue of the Dead, immense, monumental and dry. Created under a harsh order and by half a millennium of unthinkable toil, they have been strangely deserted for a thousand years.

AIA

The Committee on Design's 1998 program concluded with a three-day meeting in Alexandria, Va., and Washington, D.C., October 15-18, 1998. The committee continued its exploration of "Cross Sections in Time and Space," and also debated the contentious topic of design review.

Earlier meetings, in Florida and Paris, were discussed in previous Forum reports published in *Places*.

The Committee on Design's 1999 program will take up the theme of collaborations, with meetings in Cincinnati and Los Angeles. For information about these and other upcoming AIA programs, contact AIA at 800-242-3837.

Steven M. Goldberg, FAIA

A Cross Section in Space: The Ronald Reagan Building

Context and design guidelines provided a highly defining framework for the Ronald Reagan Building, completed in 199[x] in the city's Depression-era Federal Triangle district.

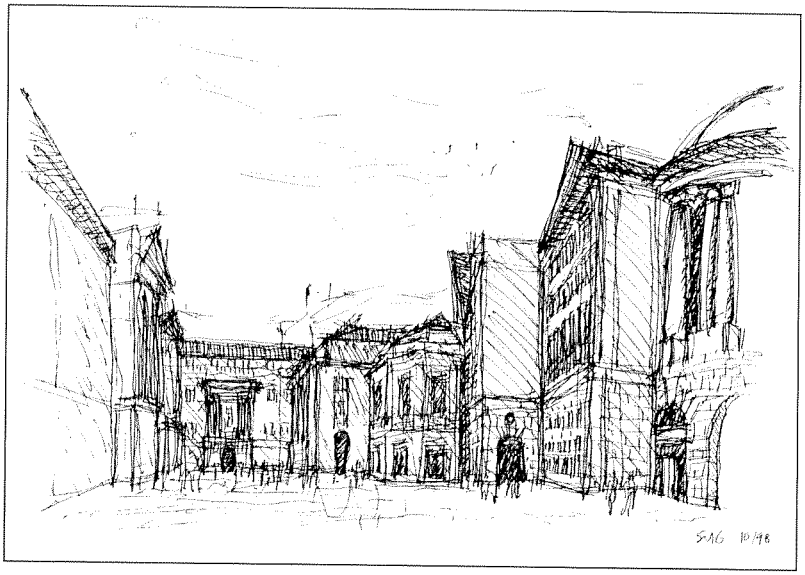
The concave gesture on the Fourteenth Street facade breaks the rectilinear rhythm of buildings on that street and, in concert with and contrast to the rectilinear facade of the Department of Commerce building across the street, creates an urban room. The cross section created between the two buildings is heightened by the play of light on the south-facing curvature and the dark and shaded north-facing colonnade.

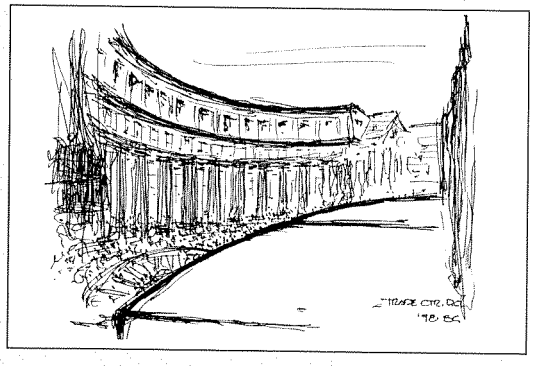
Reminiscent of Borromini's Oratorio dei Filippini, the exterior concavity also gestures to the interior atrium, where the cross section encompasses public spaces at grade and below. The atrium extends axially to a civic plaza and further to the building's monumental south entry. (If only the lower-level cafeteria could have been located on the main level adjacent to the civic plaza.)

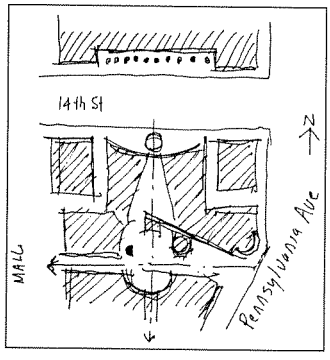
In the plaza, the architect masterfully plays the new building off the old building to the south. The introduction of a diagonal, a modernist gesture, and a corner rotunda again provide a counterpoint to the orthogonal building to the south, creating another but more dynamic and active public room, similar to but the inverse of the one on Fourteenth Street. Within this civic space is inserted a classic pavilion, where the public realm is extended to the *piano nobile* and a commanding view is offered.

As one enters the plaza from Pennsylvania Avenue, a bronze marker (by sculptor Martin Puryear) hints at the yet hidden perpendicular axis of the atrium and continues the cadence of arched entries to the one that breaks through to the Mall. The flat face and curved profile of the sculpture play against the polygonal form of the pavilion, the curved convex back plays against the gently bowed facade of the Woodrow Wilson Center. Solidity contrasts with the voids of the arches. It is a superbly placed and scaled work of public art.

The Modernist diagonal and sculpture are combined with the classical pavilion and rotunda. The subversive detailing, flattened and abstracted classical elements, are played against its older neighbor, all reinforcing the cross section in time and space.







Ronald Reagan Building
Above, left: **Steven M. Goldberg, FAIA**
Far left: **Berent Groth, AIA**

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Rebuilding Communities: HOPE VI and New Urbanism

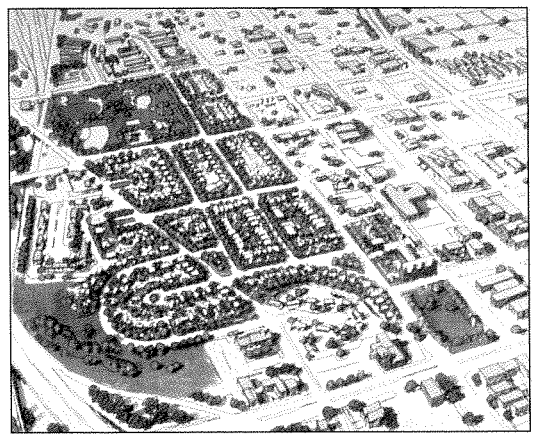
Across the nation, cities large and small are transforming public housing through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's exemplary HOPE VI program. The program provides leadership by challenging communities to rebuild themselves by revitalizing their neighborhoods. This means paying attention to the quality of the built environment, as well as increasing economic opportunities and meeting the social needs of residents.

Since the inception of HOPE VI, the Congress for the New Urbanism has been a partner with HUD in this successful revitalization effort. The HOPE VI program provides a unique opportunity to incorporate the principles of the New Urbanism in urban environments on a large scale. On January 14 and 15, 1999, New Urbanists, public housing officials, architects, planners, developers and residents came together at HUD's Rebuilding Communities: HOPE VI and New Urbanism conference in Baltimore to discuss how to design the types of environments that support healthy communities. The conference was organized around fourteen Principles for Inner City Neighborhood Design developed by the Congress for the New Urbanism's Inner City Task Force.

The design principles are derived from the Charter of the New Urbanism and from planning and design practices that have proven effective in inner-city neighborhoods. They reflect the unique circumstances that affect the design and implementation of projects within existing communities and have been used in the design of several HOPE VI projects. They are proposed as a set of working principles to be further tested and refined through use.



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2

Infill Development
Reclaim and repair blighted and abandoned areas within existing neighborhoods by using infill development strategically to conserve economic investment and social fabric (1, 2).

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email: cnuinfo@cnu.org



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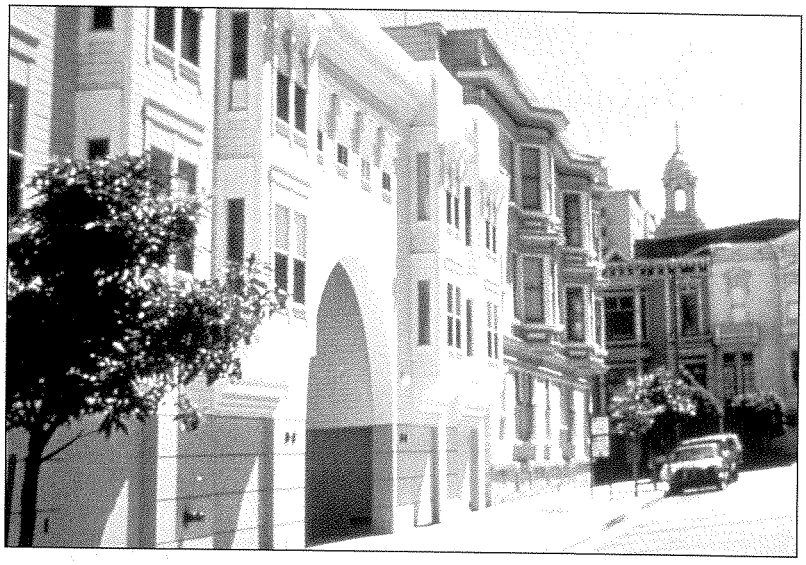
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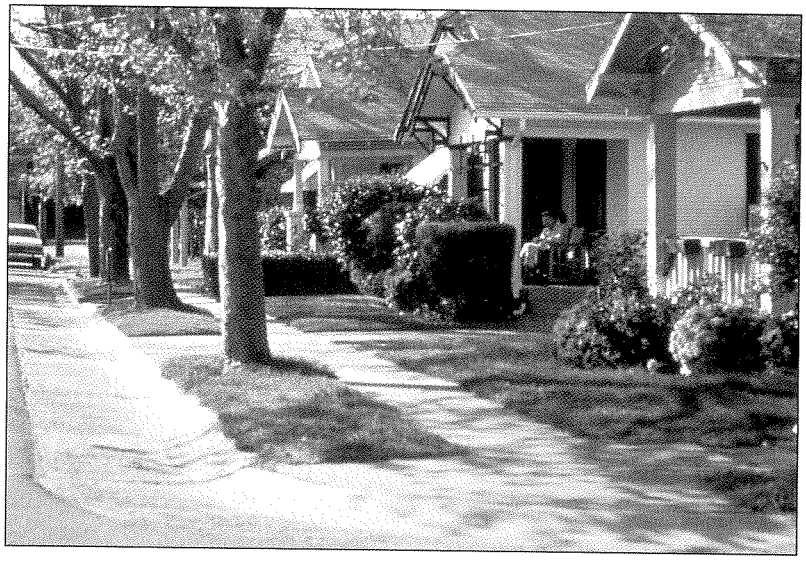
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Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are compact, pedestrian friendly, and mixed use with many activities of daily life available within walking distance. New development should help repair existing neighborhoods or create new ones and should not take the form of isolated projects (3).

Diversity

Provide a broad range of housing types and price levels to bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction—strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community (4).

Economic Opportunity

The design of neighborhood development should accommodate management techniques and scales of construction that can be contracted to local and minority businesses. (5, 6)

Local Architectural Character

The image and character of new development should respond to the best traditions of residential and mixed-use architecture in the area. (7)

Safety and Civic Engagement

The relationship of buildings and streets should enable neighbors to create a safe and stable neighborhood by providing "eyes on the street" and should encourage interaction and community identity. Provide a clear definition of public and private realms through block and street design that responds to local traditions. (8)

1–2. Urban Design Associates

3. Urban Design Associates
4. California Local Government Commission
5–6. Urban Design Associates

7. Dan Solomon
8. California Local Government Commission



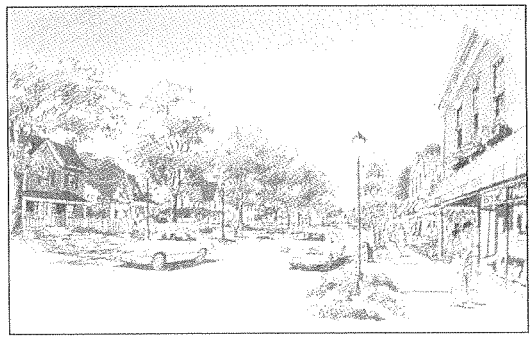
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9–10. California Local Government Commission
11. Shelley Poticha
12. Urban Design Associates

Citywide and Regional Connections

Neighborhoods should be connected to regional patterns of transportation and land use, to open space and to natural systems (9).

Streets

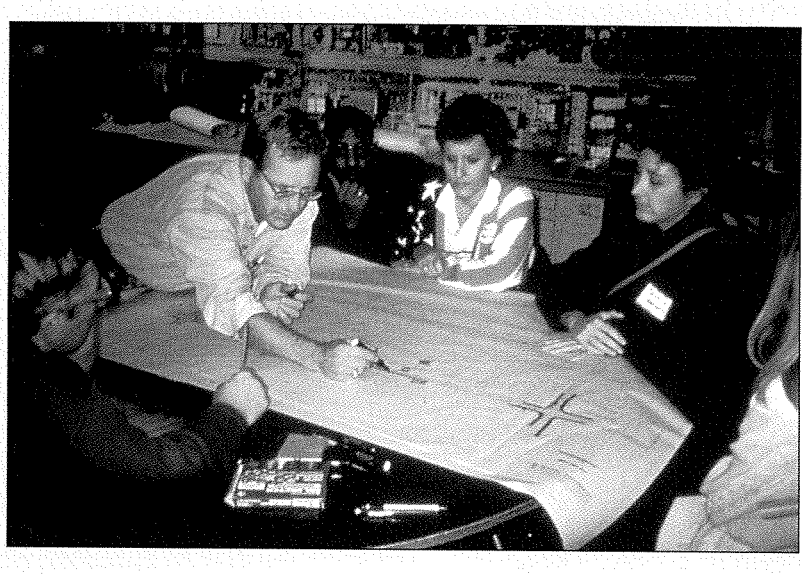
The primary task of all urban architecture and landscape design is the physical definition of streets and public spaces as places of shared use. Neighborhoods should have an interconnected network of streets and public open spac (10).

Public Open Space

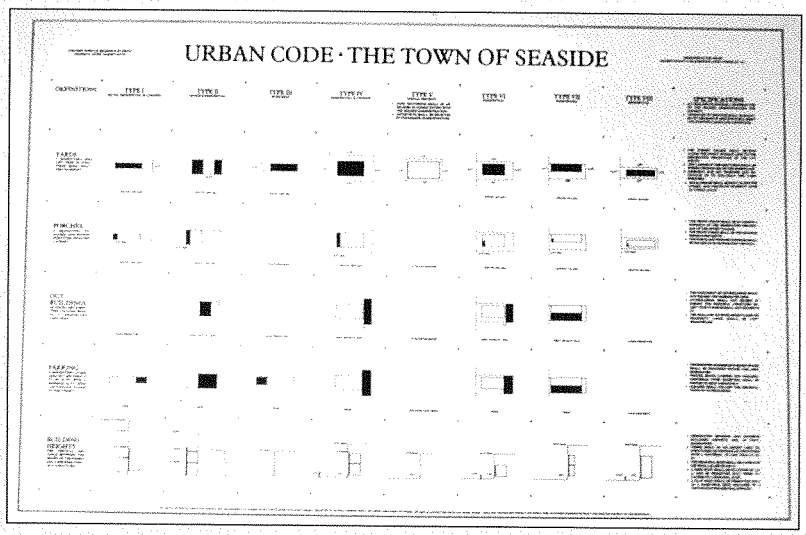
The interconnected network of streets and public open space should provide opportunities for recreation and appropriate settings for civic buildings (11).

Mixed Use

Promote the creation of mixed use neighborhoods that support the functions of daily life: living, retail, employment, recreation and civic and educational institutions (12).



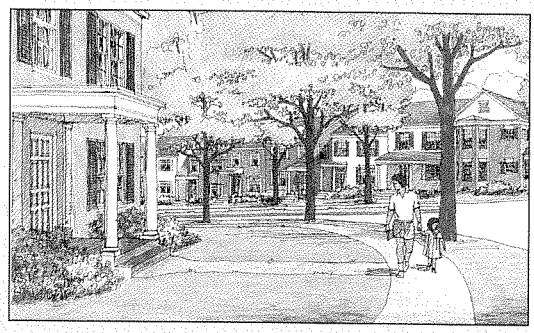
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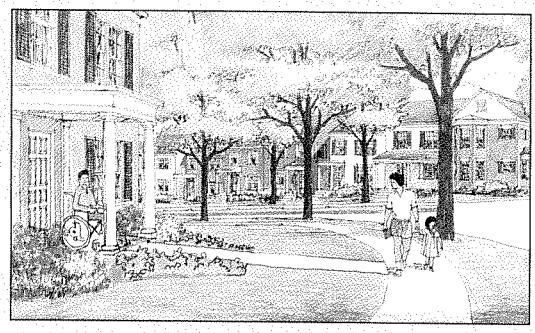
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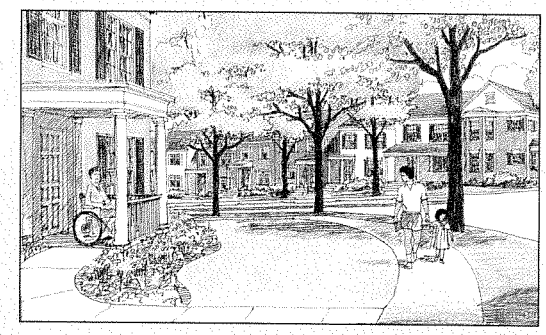
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13. California Local Government Commission
14–15. Duany/Plater-Zyberk
16–18. Urban Design Associates

Citizen and Community Involvement

Engage residents, neighbors, civic leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, developers and local institutions throughout the process of designing change for neighborhoods (13).

Design Codes

The economic health and harmonious evolution of neighborhoods can be improved through graphic urban design codes that serve as predictable guides for change (14).

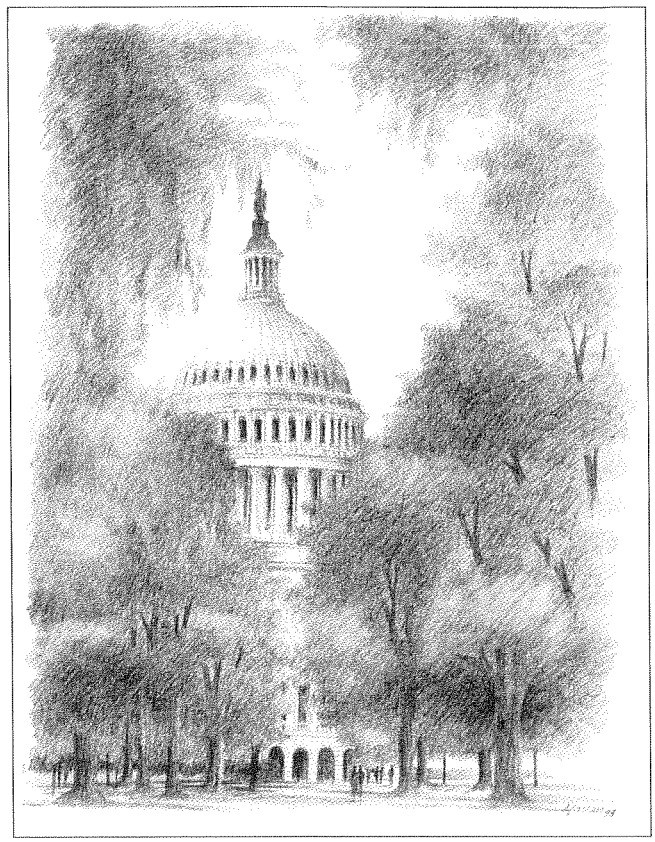
Dwelling as Mirror of Self

Recognize the dwelling as the basic element of a neighborhood and as the key to self esteem and community pride. This includes the clear definition of outdoor space for each dwelling by providing porches, front lawns and back yards where appropriate (15).

Accessibility

Buildings should be designed to be accessible and visitable while respecting the traditional urban fabric (16, 17, 18).

Design Review Dialogue



U.S. Capitol
Hany Hassan, AIA

The central issue for the conference was design guidelines. How much individual expression is hampered by constraints? What rights do communities have to determine the character of their architecture? What kinds of constraints seem to spur creativity and which are repressive?

In a session chaired by Jonathan Barnett, FAIA, there seemed to be consensus that some level of consistency was important in Washington D.C. The most important single guideline is the height restriction, which establishes a constant plane and makes it possible to create room-like urban spaces. It also encourages underground parking and service areas in a scale that is similar to some of the designs we visited in Paris. In the case of the World Bank by, Kohn Pedersen Fox, it spurred the architects to invent a new floor system to reduce the floor-to-floor height as a means of building the required floor area on a small site.

In the final meeting, Al Cox, Alexandria's city architect, told us that all over the country, community groups are being formed by citizens to protect their communities from the work of architects. How can we address this? Clearly there should be some criteria and conventions established that can ensure that designs in existing towns and cities are in harmony with the inherited context. In many cases, the role of determining such guidelines has been taken away from architects. We need to restore our traditional role of doing so.

Raymond L. Gindroz, FAIA. Gindroz, principal of Urban Design Associates in Pittsburgh, Pa., chaired the Committee on Design in 1998.

Although Washington is the seat of our nation's government, the review process should be neither a political process nor a platform for stylistic dogma. It can be a forum in which the broader goals and urban agenda, zoning and planning issues can be brought to light. The criteria for approval needs to be clearly understood and adhered to for fairness and openness.

Wendy Evans Joseph, AIA. Joseph, an architect based in New York City, will chair the Committee on Design in 2001.

The final conversation among committee participants addressed the complex issue of the design review process. Jonathan Barnett, FAIA, George Hartman, FAIA, Philip Esocoff, FAIA, and Jerri Smith, AIA, took part. Barnett began by remarking that D.C. is a special city because it has an urban design; it's not just surveyed and planted. Hartman continued, " . . . the real triumphs of the review boards are the drawers of unbuilt project plans. With accompanying slides that contrasted buildings on Pennsylvania Avenue under parallel design procedures, Hartman remarked, architects who are not sympathetic to design review tend to leave their worst work in Washington.

Esocoff admitted that he was at one time hostile toward review boards, but now he appreciates their contribution to the city. Reviews challenge architects to confront the question of individual rights vs. community responsibility and beg the question of buildings: Do they uphold public interest or merely show off? One final comment was that design review should slow down the construction process, and a review panel must respect the built environment enough not to yield to extraneous pressures.

Karen Devine. Devine is a staff writer with the American Institute of Architects