

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE? ■

MASTER'S DEGREE PROJECT

Cory Krygier
March 1999

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE?



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-42338-7

Canada

ABSTRACT

March 1999

Architecture: Product or Service

by: Cory Krygier

Supervisor: Professor John Brown

This document is prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Architecture Degree in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary.

This Master's Degree Project focuses on what processes, both economic and social, drive architectural practice today. The goal is to gain insight into how architecture can remain important and relevant in today's product-oriented society. The essay examines the implications of these processes on the way architecture is practiced. A key component of the essay is to understand, more clearly, the role that architects currently play in the business of building buildings, and what they must do keep from becoming a marginal service in a developer-dominated industry.

This design investigation proposes that an architectural solution can be found which will meet both market and consumer demands. In addition, the building will be an example of affordable and meaningful architecture which is accessible to the general public. The goal is also to demonstrate that architecture, when thought of as a product, is equally meaningful and important to both the architect and society.

KEY WORDS

- Architecture
- Commodification
- Consumption
- Developer
- Housing
- Industrial Design
- Product
- Professional Practice

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee supervisor John Brown for his assistance during this project and for reminding us to retain our sense of wonder in the world. I would also like to thank my external advisor, Vance Gough for accepting the challenge of advising an architecture MDP and for injecting the project with possibilities.

A special thanks goes out to my parents who have always been supportive no matter what choices I made. I believe that the roots of this project are found in the spirit and drive that both my parents embody. I would like to thank my grand-parents for their unqualified support and generous supply of food during my four years of study. Keep it coming.

I reserve the final acknowledgment for the most important person in my life, Nicki. Thank-you for your patience when I was away in Barcelona, thank-you for your unconditional love, and most of all thank-you for standing by me for the past four years. I look forward to many more years.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	I
Acknowledgements	III
Table of Contents	IV
Introduction	I
Architecture as Service	3
Architecture as Product	16
Ikea Case Study	18
Grow Home Case Study	21
The Product	25
Conclusion	33
Afterword	34
Appendix	36
References	37
Drawings	40
Basement Plan	
Main Plan	
Upper Plan	
Longitudinal Section	
Elevations	
Site Plan	
Rendered Elevation	
Interior Renderings	

Architects and architecture are increasingly becoming a marginal profession as society heads into the next century. There are several theories as to the reasons why architects find themselves in this situation. One of these beliefs claims that the problem the profession currently finds itself in stems, in part, from a tradition within the Modern movement of architecture. Architects became uncomfortable with the notion that architectural design could be a marketable commodity like a car or appliance.

Architecture is considered by many architects to be the 'mother of the arts', and is intended, through a higher social conscience, to make the world a better and more beautiful place. It is not to be used as a commercial tool responding to the popular tastes of a consumer culture. When attempts at educating the public to the higher virtues of architecture failed, architects turned to the corporations, institutions and wealthy individuals. Architects essentially ignored the housing industry, resulting in the loss of both great amounts of potential income, and the opportunity to become a more familiar and intimate part of the lives of many people. In essence, the profession alienated itself from the lives of most individuals.¹

¹ Witold Rybczynski, "Housing without Architects," in *Architecture*, (August 1997) p 79

This theory, however, reflects an architect's perception of the situation, rather than the layperson's. The marginalization of architecture, likely, has more to do with a shift in the economy from one dominated by many independent land owners, who often used architects, to one which is dominated by a few large corporations and developers who rarely use architects. This is particularly true in housing.²

In addition to this economic shift, is an apparent decline in the public's perception of the architect's value. Architects who once had knowledge of both mechanics and aesthetics, are no longer in command of mechanics; and at the same time, their knowledge of aesthetics has also been devalued, and is perceived by many to be superfluous and expensive.³

We do not live in a world which is ignorant of the presence and value of design. On the contrary, design plays a major role in the lives of many people. However, most people are not particularly interested in who designed the *K&A* table they have just purchased, nor do they care about who designed their car. They simply like the product, and purchase it on those merits alone. The problem for architects lies not in the public's poor perception of the value of good design, but rather in the public's poor perception of the value of architects as building professionals.

² Thomas Fisher, "Can This Profession be Saved," in *Progressive Architecture*, (Feb 94, vol 73) 51 p. 46
³ *Ibid.* p. 46



Howard R. Lambie: *From Architects to The Story of Product*

ARCHITECTURE AS SERVICE

In the lexicon of macroeconomic analysis, architectural practice is classified as a producer-service business. Today, the majority of architectural practice is involved in providing a service to the producers of commodities and other service-oriented businesses, such as engineers, rather than to the final consumer. The notion of architecture as a service is a long-standing tradition within the profession, and characterizes the bulk of practice today. However, there is an increasingly complex context in which architecture must be practiced.

Projects are becoming more complex as new building types emerge which require the collaboration of teams of specialists. More often, the architect is one member of a larger team required to execute a complex project. The role of the architect in these situations is often limited to designing the façade in order to make the project look good.⁴ Elizabeth Padjen observes that "once the practice of design was a subtractive process in which the architect was in charge of the whole ball of wax, peeling off pieces to consultants and contractors. Now it is additive, and the architect's role is only one of many small bits assembled along the way by any number of construction coordinators."⁵

There is also increasing competition both from within the profession and from other professions. The architect is no longer perceived by the public as the expert in the building industry. The knowledge and expertise of the architect has been undermined by an aggressive construction industry focused on providing maximum return on minimal investment.⁶

The traditional standards of architectural practice are being seriously challenged by these changes. Many architects find it difficult to remain profitable and satisfied in this rapidly changing scenario.

⁴ Robert Gouman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 9

⁵ Thomas Fisher, "Can This Profession be Saved," in *Progressive Architecture*, (Feb. 94, vol. 7515) p. 46

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 9

Two types of architectural firms, in general, survive during lean years: the large firms, which downsize during the tough times and then expand when things improve; and the small, feisty firms that are able to adapt quickly and readily into any market niche that appears.⁷ Smaller firms (20 people or less) do the bulk of projects; however larger firms (50 people or more) dominate economically.⁸ Both of these firm types fall into the category of traditional practice, as they are still generally service-oriented, client-driven practices. According to Robert Gutman, there are 10 conditions that form the context of practice today:

1. Extent of the demand for services
2. Structure of demand
3. Oversupply, or potential oversupply, of entrants into the profession
4. New skills required as a consequence of increased complexity and scale of building types
5. Consolidation and professionalisation of the construction industry
6. Greater rationality and sophistication of client organizations
7. Increased competition between architects and other professions
8. Increased competition within the profession
9. Difficulties in achieving profitability and obtaining sufficient personal income
10. Increased intervention and involvement on the part of the public⁹

The increasingly complex context in which architecture is practiced, is making it more difficult for architects to remain profitable and competitive. It is also forcing many architects to reconsider their approach to how they practice architecture because many of the fundamentals of a traditional practice are being challenged. The architect is no longer able to lay claim to being the only, or most knowledgeable, consultant in the building industry. It is within the confines of these categories that traditional methods of architectural practice are struggling to survive. However, it is not enough for the profession to merely survive; it must thrive.¹⁰

⁷ Beth Kapusta, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (Vol. 40 no. 1) p. 24

⁸ Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 4

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 97

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 28

Uncertainty underlies much of traditional practice today and disillusionment is high among younger architects. Difficulties between the architectural establishment and the schools continue to grow. The schools continue to turn out architects at a rate greater than can be absorbed into the professional ranks. The result is a downgrading in the work responsibilities and pay levels of new graduates.¹¹ Another trend amongst young architects is the declining numbers that pursue careers in architecture following completion of an architecture degree. Less than half of architectural graduates today are employed in conventional architectural practices.¹²

Contrary to what most architects may perceive, the demand for architectural services has increased over the past few decades. The public is displaying a greater interest in architecture, and related issues, than it did in the 1970's. Public opinion plays a larger role than ever before in shaping how districts are land-marked. This increased attention by building users and communities towards architecture has impacts on practice. Despite some firms realizing increases in the volume of work going through the office, there has also been an increase in the number of groups who can legitimately intervene in the design process. Consequently, the authority of the architect as the expert is both challenged and undermined.¹³

The increase in demand for architectural services has been accompanied by shifts in the types of services architects are expected to provide. Many of these new demands erode and threaten the traditional conception of the architectural practice. Clients are looking for architects who will confine their services to a specific aspect of the end product, such as design or construction supervision. The gradual loss of roles for the architect is, in part, due to a contemporary definition of the architect as someone who has a specialized technical expertise in a specific area of the building process.¹⁴ This division of expertise by the client once again undermines the traditional views of the architect as the prime consultant for building projects. In addition, architects are finding more often that competition from other professions, such as engineering and interior design, are further eroding their authority.

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE?

¹¹ Robert Glazman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 28-29.

¹² Beth Lepoutre, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (Vol. 41 no. 1) p. 27.

¹³ Robert Glazman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Competition with other industries is not a new phenomenon in architecture; it has a history that extends back centuries. Architects have been actively fending off this competition from interior designers, engineers, contractors, construction managers, developers, and others for years. However, clients no longer view protectionism within the industry as being in their best interests, and the architect is no longer regarded as the only professional who is capable of providing sound advice and good service. Any attempts architects might make to fend off competition under the guise of protectionism are bound to fail in the long run. Opening up to competition from other professions does not necessarily mean giving in to the competition, rather it should be viewed as an opportunity to expand services and interdisciplinary work between professions.¹⁵

The role that architects currently play in the construction of buildings is changing rapidly as a result of the current context of practice. Architects are still involved in the majority of major institutional and public buildings, but are only involved in approximately fifty percent of housing units and thirty percent of commercial buildings.¹⁶ However, these numbers are misleading. Where housing is concerned, architects are mostly involved as staff architects who are employed by developers or real estate companies. According to a survey in the United States, more than half of the housing industry uses in-house architects. Construction financing and real estate investment companies employ the largest numbers of in-house architects.¹⁷

The lack of architect involvement in the housing industry is a disturbing trend, since housing now represents more than one third of the total volume of new buildings each year. There are now more than one million houses built each year, on average, in the United States alone, with some years exceeding two million. Of these, the vast majority are single-family dwellings and low density multi-unit developments. These houses are mostly built by developers and home-builders with minimal input from the architectural profession.¹⁸ In Canada,

¹⁵ Beth Kapusta, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (vol. 40 no. 1) p. 25.

¹⁶ Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 61.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Witold Rybczynski, "Housing without Architects," in *Architecture*, (August 1997) p. 79.

according to the *Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)*, home-builders account for about ninety-five percent of Canadian housing.¹⁹

There are several reasons why architects are not more involved in commercial housing. Typically, those architects who do work with developers, face low fees because the developer's profit is often realized at the back-end of a project, whereas design is generally a front-end cost. In general, architects are not willing to share in the risk of the developer by realizing their profits at the back-end of the project. Instead, many architects settle for significantly smaller percentages of a project in order to keep their offices operating. An unwillingness to share the risks of development has pushed architects to the fringes of the housing market, and for the most part, architects have not had a significant influence on the home-building industry.

Perhaps a deeper, and more elusive, reason for the lack of architect involvement in commercial housing has to do with a set of values and attitudes towards commercialism and consumerism which is entrenched within the profession. The fact that we now live in a predominantly consumer-driven society is one of the biggest challenges facing traditional architectural practice today.

Why is it that architects have been so resistant to accepting the consumer society they live in? The beliefs and biases of the profession begin in the early developmental stages of an architect's career. It is within the culture of school that students begin to define themselves as young architects. They cultivate a moral superiority by identifying clear distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. The result is that developers, engineers, building trades, and products of consumption are easily and swiftly dismissed as belonging to 'them'. The biases that are generated in school tend to stay with students as they move into professional practice.²⁰

¹⁹ Avi Friedman, "The Home of the 90's - 2: An Urban Starter," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 11.

²⁰ Beth Kapusta, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (vol. 40 no. 1) p. 26.

Part of the resistance many architects have towards the commodification of architecture stems from the Modernist view of architecture. A consumer view of architecture violates the unity of design with the technology of the program. It is therefore regarded as a self-inflicted threat to reviving and maintaining a comprehensive role for the architect in the building process.²¹

Consumerism is a dominant force acting on our environment today, and as a result, is an important factor in the production of architecture. The architect's own agenda regarding interventions in the environment have long been informed by a sense of social purpose, which is often at odds with the idea of commodification. A proper calling to architecture is assumed to be working towards some utopian ideal that is rooted in a harmonious existence in quality and well-designed surroundings for everyone. Any hints of consumerism would tarnish this ideal.²²

Post-Modern architectural theory suggests that we live in an image-saturated and commodified world, where institutions and producers of culture can no longer afford the pretense that they are outside of the forces of consumption. The world of commerce has had no problem with this notion, and is well-versed in utilizing high culture to sell products. Recently, some architects have recognized that in order to have any influence whatsoever on the image and shape of the world, they must embrace the potential benefits of consumerism.²³

Within the profession, there is often a distinction drawn between the commercial firms and the more design-oriented practices. An invisible hierarchy exists which categorizes, and looks down upon, those firms who build for profit, leaving those architects with a commitment to the social ideals of architecture as the moral victors. The situation that is created is one where the most attention and highest praise is not bestowed upon the vast majority of highly effective and competent projects, but rather to those that are considered worthy,

²¹ Robert Chuman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) pp. 93-96.
Sarah Chaplin & Eric Helling, "Consuming Architecture," in *Architectural Design*, (no. 131) p. 7.

²² Joe Kerr, "Window and the Pavement," in *Architectural Design*, (no. 131) p. 16.

either theoretically or aesthetically. These are the projects that are referred to as 'Architecture', while the other projects are simply referred to as products of the construction industry.²⁴ As well, these are the projects that are most talked about in schools, and the ones which are published by the architectural press, thus reinforcing these attitudes.

Many consumer projects are deemed to be in bad taste by the more influential members of the profession. The perpetuation of this narrow view often prevents many capable architects from pursuing practice in a broader sense. Aesthetic preferences exert control over what some architects will accept in terms of commissions, and consequently, greatly limit their capacity to take advantage of the many opportunities that commercial commissions can offer. It is the responsibility of the architect as a professional to determine if a project is not worth doing on its own merits. Profiting at any cost is not the objective, but neither is turning away commercial commissions simply because they are consumer-oriented. There needs to be a compromise between the ideals of the architect and the goals of the developer.

Architects are generally not in the habit of being able to look at the environment non-judgmentally. Practitioners, particularly younger architects, often have a utopian ideal of how the world should be and, therefore, are generally dissatisfied with existing conditions. However, our cities are increasingly composed of the spaces of consumption, and architects need to reconsider their positions if they are to take advantage of the many opportunities and insights that an architecture of consumption has to offer.²⁵

Architecture is now consumed regularly by a wide range of people. This includes a smaller group of people who prefer to hire fashionable architects to design their apartments, summer homes or offices, and a much larger group that consists of people who are generally not building owners, but who are 'architecture buffs'. These people enjoy reading about architecture, touring buildings, visiting exhibitions, and purchasing architectural drawings. The

²⁴ Sarah Chaplin & Eric Holding, 'Consuming Architecture,' in *Architectural Design*, (no. 131) p. 11

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 11

increase in the numbers of people interested in consuming architecture can be partially attributed to the increase in the opportunities to consume architecture directly. There are now several museums with permanent architectural collections, numerous architectural guide books for most major centres, many specialized galleries and bookstores dealing with architecture, and many newspapers now have regular architectural columns and sections. The defining characteristic of all of these people is that they all are looking for a personal relationship to the aesthetic dimension of architecture simply for the pure enjoyment of it. They do not want the burden of dealing with the realities of practice and of the problems of buildings as artifacts. These people are the consumers of architecture and they represent an alternative market not tied to the construction industry.²⁶

Perhaps one of the best contemporary examples of consuming architecture is *Wallpaper* magazine. Architecture figures prominently among the pages of this publication, but not as it is represented in the various trade magazines. *Wallpaper* magazine uses the power and appeal of architecture to sell products. What is more impressive still, is how the publication serves as an advertisement for a profession which is often very apprehensive about marketing and promoting itself. The magazine communicates the appeal of architecture to the public in an overtly commercial manner. Architecture has been used for years to serve as a complimentary backdrop to the marketing of products; however, the difference in *Wallpaper* is that the architectural backdrops are doing the selling. The power of the products of architecture are not lost on advertisers, and architecture is being used to sell everything, it seems, but the profession itself. Architects have been reluctant to embrace marketing programs, despite the fact that they are quite possibly one of the profession's best public relations tools.²⁷ Many architects have an out-dated attitude towards advertising which ignores the potential of the medium, and prevents the profession from prospering in a consumer-driven society.

²⁶ Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 92.
²⁷ Javier Zeller, "Advertising for a Wallflower," in *R.I.C. Update*, (Feb/Mar 98).

When discussing marketing programs in the context of architecture, the most disliked references are those that imply that architecture is a business enterprise rather than a profession. 'This is due to a perception by architects that the business side of practice begins to take precedence over the professional side, and in turn, begins to define the field. One of the major concerns of architects with regards to marketing programs is that they, as professionals, will be perceived by clients as placing more concern on the business, and less concern on what is in the clients' best interest. Viewed from this perspective, marketing programs undermine the architect's status as a professional, which is what separates architects from other building trades and services.'²¹

In the legal profession, many lawyers have mounted advertising campaigns to increase their profile in the public eye. 'This has resulted in some professionals lashing out and labeling these lawyers as 'ambulance chasers'. The question is, though: Have these marketing ploys increased business in the office? Gauging by the number of lawyers which now advertise in this manner, the answer to this question is that the ads work. A growing trend today is towards more firms getting involved in marketing programs, and the signmas that the profession attaches to these programs are changing. It is up to the public to decide what is in their best interest. As long as professionals - lawyers or architects - continue to conduct themselves in a manner which is professional, then the public will continue to support them.

The attitudes and values of architects are often at odds with the values and attitudes of non-architects and lay people. This is particularly true in housing. Architects place an emphasis on exterior appearance, interior spatial effects, and innovative uses of unusual materials and details. However, most home buyers give interior issues precedence over the exterior, and floor space is often more important than 'architectural space'. 'The majority of people prefer conventional materials like clapboard siding or brick, and are indifferent towards less traditional materials such as plywood or corrugated metal.'²²

²¹ Robert Glusman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 20.
²² Witold Rybczynski, 'Housing without Architects,' in *Architecture*, (August 1997) p. 80.

When a comparison was done between two buildings in Toronto, the result was further proof of the rift between the values of many architects and those of the general public. The buildings that were compared are located in Toronto's Commerce Court: the North building, built in 1929; and the Commerce Court West building, designed by I. M. Pei, which is heralded by architects as one of the finest buildings he ever designed. The research was done by the *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce*. The results were a list of opposites between the two buildings outlining the positives of the older north building, with its classical details and massive materials, versus the negatively perceived minimal aspects of the newer west building. The question raised by this survey is: Why, if the public prefers a certain style of building, do architects insist on producing products that do not address these desires, particularly where housing is concerned?¹⁰

Relatively little time separates us from an architecture where the application of ornament and familiarity were most important. Architects practice architecture today as if the durable rules of the past are extinct aspects of architecture. Architects continue to censor the rules which underlie many centuries of building in the name of innovation and modernity. However, this is not what the general public wishes to see when it comes to their homes.¹¹

The one style which is noticeably absent from the housing market today is Modern. Many other period styles such as Colonial, Victorian, and Craftsman, have become popular again. Even though the people buying these homes are perfectly content to furnish these traditional homes with Bauhaus knock-offs they continue to resist contemporary design when it comes to the appearance of their homes. The public has a taste for identifiable features such as a pitched roof, front porch, paneled doors, classical columns, mouldings and trim. These elements represent a desire for a set of well-understood conventions within which one can express individuality and taste. In general, home buyers prefer the traditional styles which have stood the test of time. Most people are not risk-takers when it comes to purchasing a new home.¹² According to Robert Gutman, the attitudes of architects on the style of hous-

¹⁰ Beth Kapusta, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (vol. 40 no. 1) p. 27

¹¹ Ibid. p. 27

¹² Witold Rybczynski, "Housing without Architects," in *Architecture*, (August 1997) p. 81

ing is a serious obstacle since the self-conception of architects is contrary to what housing producers and consumers expect and want from the profession. This history and tradition must be accepted by architects if the profession is to have any influence on the future of housing and building in general.³¹

Just as the values of architects often conflict with the public's, the public often has a romanticized image of the architect, and this perception pervades the profession. What occurs as a result is often idiosyncratic work where the more unusual the form, the more it is romanticized. The general public is increasingly resistant to an architectural community which places individualism ahead of attention to local culture and context. As a result, some clients are beginning to select architectural firms that will confine their services to specific features of the project such as the façade or interior aesthetics.³⁴

What is emerging out of this is a new market for façade architecture. The result is that the architect is relegated to the role of building decorator, responsible for the six inches, or so, of the building façade, and delegates the remainder of the building to other related building trades. The emphasis on appearance has something to do with a belief among many clients that a building with a distinctive appearance can excite public attention. It is a form of consumer packaging, as pointed out by Stephen Kiernan, an architect and critic in Philadelphia.³⁵ "Architecture is being applied like a wrapper to all types of buildings, which is one of the reasons why the strip mall is so uninspiring. There is a disjunction between a strip mall's fabrication, tectonic qualities and spaces, and its applied façade. This disjunction has not occurred, for instance, in industrial design, where aesthetics was never broken away from tectonics and function."³⁶ 'Façade architecture' represents a real threat to the way that architecture is both practiced and conceived. It relegates the profession to decorators, and undermines the integrity of the architect's body of knowledge.

³¹ Witold Rybczynski, "The Home of the 90's - I - Designing for Affordability" in *Canadian Architect* (August 1997) p. 30

³² Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice - A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 14

³³ *Ibid.* p. 14

³⁴ Beth Kapusta, "Reinventing Practice," in *Canadian Architect*, (vol. 40 no. 11) p. 28

Large corporations often view their headquarters as giant architectural logos. The CEO of *Proctor and Gamble* is convinced that the luxurious interior finishings of the corporate headquarters, designed by *Kohn, Pedersen and Fox*, have been important in overcoming the resistance of the managerial talent in moving to Cincinnati.³⁷ The role of the architect in this case is not to design innovative and interesting spaces, but to provide a product with a high level of finish. Traditional architectural practice is becoming more about applying decoration than about creating a higher social ideal through better architecture.

The reduced responsibilities of the architect further contribute to an already misunderstood profession in the eyes of the general public. Architects are already removed from the lives of most people and it is not surprising that architecture has remained such an unknown profession. People see doctors and dentists regularly, and at some point in their lives, most people will come into contact with a lawyer. These professions are well-represented in the print media and television. Over three-quarters of Americans live in single family homes, and a growing number are living in multi-unit developments. The architect might have been as familiar as the family doctor or lawyer if the profession been more involved in housing.³⁸ Housing represents a tremendous opportunity to those architects willing to explore new ways of practice. The buyers of production homes are not clients, they are consumers. As consumers, they are more concerned with the outcome, rather than the process, whereas the architect is often more interested in the process than in the product.

Architects have almost always had a problem defining their relationship to the mechanisms and institutions of production and consumption. It is still unclear whether architecture should strive to operate solely as a higher cultural practice, free of the whims of commercial demand, or if architecture should simply continue to provide society with the buildings it needs and demands.

³⁷ Robert Guman, *An Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), p. 18.
³⁸ Witold Rybczynski, *The Most Beautiful House in the World* (New York: Penguin Group, 1989) pp. 21-22.

It is difficult to imagine another profession where the words 'commodity and consumerism' conjure up such a derogatory meaning, even as most of the profession simply designs and builds whatever they are paid to do. This reasoning has always run counter to the realities of architectural production. This is now more true than ever as our cities are increasingly reshaping their buildings, spaces and infrastructures in order to serve the needs of their growing commercial sectors. Realistically, architects must begin to embrace the forces of consumerism in order to remain relevant as a profession in the decades to come.³⁹

12

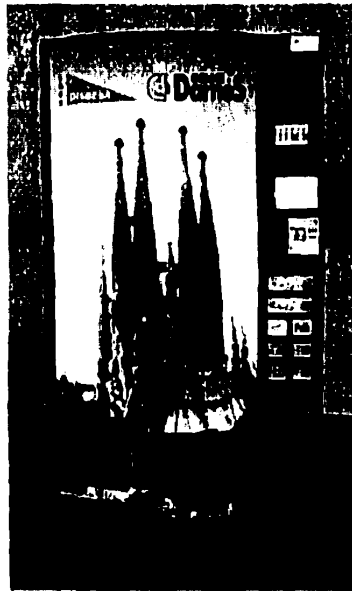
³⁹ Lee Keri, "Window and the Pavement," in *Architectural Design*, (no 131) p. 16.

ARCHITECTURE AS PRODUCT

*"If I had a couple million dollars in my pocket, the first thing I would do is go into real estate because I want to make the people who work for me happier by paying them higher salaries and I can't do that on architecture."*¹⁰

This sentiment is shared by many who study and practice architecture today. A recent graduate of an architectural school can expect to earn a low wage relative to other professions. In addition, the level of job satisfaction is often very low as firms often exploit this 'cheap labour' in an effort to keep costs down. The reality is that the profit margins in a traditional architectural practice are generally quite small, and any means a firm can use to save money is important.

16



Modeling a house in Berlin. (from *Constructing Architecture: Architecture and Design* 111)

A new approach to the way architects think about housing is required if they are to begin to have an impact on the housing industry. Housing today is viewed by the home-building industry as a commodity, much like an automobile or an appliance, and not as a unique expression of individuality. The way in which people shop for houses is more akin to the way in which they shop for a new car. Houses are presented in Show Home Parades and show suites, as finished products so people know what they are getting before they buy. This is a similar model to the way in which new cars are sold. People come down to the lot and select from a choice of style and models. When it comes down to purchasing a new house, the customer is generally presented with a list of options such as: what colour do they want the walls? which appliances do they prefer? what is their lot preference? and others. These options are added to the base price of the house, just as air-conditioning and leather seats are added to the base price of a car.

¹⁰ Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 78

For many architects engaged in traditional practice, the notion of designing houses of this sort would seem wrong. However, this has not always been the case. Prior to World War II, architects were very involved in the housing markets. They worked more closely with builders to produce improved housing through plan books, catalogues, and early forms of subdivision design. The Case Study Houses in the 1950's, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian homes, were both attempts at architecturally designed homes on a mass-produced scale.⁴¹ As housing became more commercialized and mass-produced, the role of the architect diminished. Architects were indifferent towards the generic product of the home-builders, whose products were built to satisfy post-war housing demands. Instead, architects turned their attention towards other building sectors.

Satisfying consumer demand, however, does not preclude good design innovation. It means that the innovator must anticipate consumer demands and provide products to meet these demands, as the successful developers do. Architecture does not need to abandon the service of design in order to produce consumer-housing products. Unlike architecture, industrial design is a profession which is engaged in producing objects for mass production and consumption. Industrial design is, however, a design service which is hidden behind the product. The processes which drive design, such as ideas and innovation, are very much present in the final product.

The products of industrial designers must meet consumer demands in order to succeed. This means that not only must they be functional, but they must also be aesthetically appealing in order to satisfy an increasingly design-savvy public. In addition, these products must compete on par with products from other producers of similar products, no matter how they are conceived of and produced.

⁴¹ Reed Kroloff, "On the Market," in *Architecture*, (December, 1998) p. 11

The industrial design model has implications for architects and housing. The vast majority of homes today are products of an industry dedicated to the efficient and profitable construction of homes. Design is always important, but it generally does not drive the process. To compete with the products of the developer, the product of the architect must be as good as, or better, in terms of perceived value and design. In addition, the architect's product must respond to the demands of the market in order to succeed.

Architects are in a unique position when it comes to designing better homes. Unlike the typical home-builder, the architect is trained to solve a wide range of design problems. As well, an architect is interested in more than just the profit margins, and is therefore better able to create a product which is both architecturally interesting, and affordable. The idea of innovative design solutions which are affordable for a wide range of people is one of the principle philosophies of the Swedish furniture company *Ikea*.

18

Case Study 1 - Ikea

Ikea is an excellent example of a company which has had tremendous success in all market segments. The company is well-known for its innovative design solutions in home-furnishings, and equally well-known for its affordable prices. A short examination of the company philosophy and processes reveals a model for design which may have applications for architecture.

Ikea has been likened by some to the *McDonald's* of the furniture world because of the success it has had with the general public. The products reflect a basic philosophy of simplicity, clarity, usage, and a sensitivity to the domestic.⁴² *Ikea* has consciously decided to respond to the furnishing needs and desires of a mass market, rather than create well-designed furniture for a small segment of society. They believe that it is relatively easy to design a beautiful table that costs a lot of money, but that it is a challenge to make an equally

⁴² Iiva Douglas, "Towards a new Functionalism," in *Canadian Art*, (Fall 1990, vol. 7, no. 3) p. 91

beautiful table at an affordable price. The challenge *Ikea* presents to its designers is to create home furnishings which combine good design, good function and good quality, with prices that are low enough so that many people can afford them.⁴³

The company differs in its design-consumer relationships in how it is able to satisfy the needs and wants of the greatest number of people. In addition to achieving this, the company also manages to respect the consumer's status as an actual user of goods. In modern society, the relationship that emerges between the individual consumer and the marketplace is often confrontational. People feel that they pay too much for too little, or get pulled in by false expectations. *Ikea* challenges this relationship by giving the customer credit for being an intelligent, and discriminating individual.⁴⁴

The design process at *Ikea* begins by designing the price. This is not done, however, at the expense of quality or style. Price imposes a rigour on the designers to work closely with manufacturers and suppliers in order to pool expertise and to work things out for a lower cost. The consumers also do their part to keep prices low by participating in the final assembly of the product. This enables *Ikea* to ship the product flat, thereby reducing shipping costs.⁴⁵

Each of *Ikea*'s products reflects a conscious effort to produce well-designed products in every sense of the word. However, the consumer is not made fully aware of the design process that is concealed behind the showroom product. What they are aware of, is that what they are purchasing is a good quality, aesthetically appealing piece of furniture which reflects their individuality.

The products of the housing industry today share some similarities to the *Ikea* product in terms of process. They are both concerned with costs and affordability, and, to a certain degree, with quality. Most home-builders realize that they are serving a specific market,

⁴³ "Our Vision", in the *Ikea Web Site*, (www.ikea.com/content/about)

⁴⁴ Riva Douglas, "Towards a new Functionalism," in *Canadian Art*, (fall 1990, vol. 7, no. 3) p. 93

⁴⁵ "Our Vision", in the *Ikea Web Site*, (www.ikea.com/content/about)

and they target their products accordingly. Perhaps the biggest single difference between the *Ikea* approach to product conception, and that of the typical home-builder, is in the importance they assign to design. At *Ikea*, design does not take a back seat to cost considerations; rather, all of the components leading to the development of a new product are seen as integral components of a larger design process. Housing today is price-driven, which does not allow much room for the fees of the designer. The way in which the housing product is conceived of is not as a whole process, but rather, as a series of components that are dealt with separately. The design is only a small component with a fixed budget. This model does not easily accommodate new ideas or innovations on the design side.

Architects generally assign a higher level of importance to the design aspects of a project than do builders. However, design is often viewed as a component of the building process. At *Ikea*, the whole process of creating the product is encompassed by the design process.

Despite the company philosophy that both good design and affordability are important, it seems that price is given the highest priority. Although this may make the product more affordable for a wider range of people, it may also limit the range of design solutions that are possible. The design of a house is significantly more complex than the design of a table, and as a result, must be a more flexible process. Affordability is important, but not at the expense of architectural space, for example. The line between price and innovation is not as clear in house design. However, the model works well for *Ikea*, and presents some interesting ideas for architects to consider.

The application of the *Ikea* process of product design to architecture provides an alternative model for practice, particularly where housing is concerned. By conceiving of the house as a design service hidden within the product of the house, the architect is then free to explore ideas within the parameters of a product, which then must compete openly with similar products. Perhaps in this context, the architectural product of the house could be

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUCT OR SERVICE?

both a satisfying undertaking for the architect, as well as a viable product in the consumer housing market.

Case Study 2 - The Grow Home

The *Grow Home* concept emerged out of the Affordable Homes Program within the School of Architecture at McGill University. The search for an architectural solution to affordable housing formed the basis of the idea leading to the creation of the *Grow Home*. Principal designers Avi Friedman and Witold Rybczynski felt that there was a gap between architects, housing, and the needs of the public. Rybczynski outlines that "as architects we thought it was worth taking a look at the product again."⁴⁶ The *Grow Home* represents an interesting shift in thinking about how architects can approach housing in general, as both a product, and as architecture. The designers of the home set out to make housing affordable through better design.

The *Grow Home* is, in part, a response to the overwhelming domination of the housing market by developers and home builders. The house became an industry product back in the 1940's when developers recognized that what people wanted was a well-crafted, well-priced home; and as a result, the client of the architect became the customer of the developer.⁴⁷

It was generally, and still is to a certain degree, more expensive to commission an architecturally designed home, than to purchase the developer product. However, the house which provides the best perceived value is most likely to determine how the purchaser will behave. Although the *Grow Home* was largely driven by market research, it was important that the house represent good perceived value to the consumer.

⁴⁶ Patricia Leigh Brown, "Can Small be Cheap and Also Beautiful?," in *New York Times*, (Thurs. June 4, 1990) p. C-1

⁴⁷ Avi Friedman, "The Home of the 90's - 2: An Urban Starter," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 32

Rybczynski cites an "affordability gap" for many prospective homeowners, especially those buying for the first time, as a major obstacle to home ownership. The gap is the result of a discrepancy between how much the price of the home has risen over the past twenty years, and how much the average wage has increased over the same time period. However, the increase in this gap cannot be attributed solely to inflation. A United States task force on housing suggests that one factor contributing to the increase in house prices is the steady increase in the physical dimensions of the house.⁴⁸ The median size of a new home in the United States today is about 1850 square feet, up from about 800 square feet in the 1940's. However, since the 1940's, the average family size has decreased.⁴⁹ Houses designed for today's lifestyles would have an immediate and significant impact on affordability. A smaller house does not represent a reduction in actual living space standards because families are now smaller.⁵⁰

Value was identified as being one of the key motivators for a consumer purchase. A consumer is more likely to purchase the product with the highest perceived value. The idea of the *Cirrow Home* was to combine a smaller-sized house with a high degree of finish and workmanship. The findings of the market research conducted by Friedman and Rybczynski are corroborated in a report by the *Angus Reid Group*, called the 1996 Canadian Home Buyers Study. This report surveyed potential home-buyers in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal. Questions in the survey cover everything from the length of time required to make a decision on a purchase, to what type of house is preferred in each of the four cities. Included was a section analyzing the trade-offs in the home purchase decision. It was found that people, in general, preferred a slightly smaller house with a higher finishing quality, rather than a larger house that did not have good finishing quality.⁵¹

In keeping with the findings of the market research, the *Cirrow Home* has a modest 1000 square foot plan on two levels. The smaller size has an immediate impact on price, as would be expected. Further reduction of costs required consideration of three factors: Area, Com-

ARCHITECTURE: PRODUTOR SIRVICH

⁴⁸ Witold Rybczynski, "The Home of the 90's - I: Designing for Affordability," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 26.

⁴⁹ Patricia Leigh Brown, "Can Small be Cheap and Also Beautiful," in *New York Times*, (Thurs. June 4, 1990) p. C-1.

⁵⁰ Witold Rybczynski, "The Home of the 90's - I: Designing for Affordability," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 27.

⁵¹ Angus Reid Group, "Trade-offs in the Home Purchase Decision" in *The 1996 Canadian Home Buyers Study*, p. 26.

plexity, and Quality. As identified in the market research, quality is perceived as more important than area, and architectural complexity is generally expensive relative to simplicity. The approach taken, therefore, was to reduce space and complexity in favour of a high level of finish and quality. The design strategy was to provide an efficient layout of services, an optional basement, compact and uncomplicated volumes, and small spans, while at the same time providing a high level of amenity. In addition, a smaller and more efficiently designed house would reduce the costs of land servicing, financing, overhead and profits.⁵²

Along with the costs of materials and the size of the house, construction methods and efficiencies were also considered. The work of several trades such as electrical, plumbing, and bricklayers were designed for completion in one day or less.⁵³ This minimized labour costs for expensive sub-trades, and had the benefit of more predictable scheduling, which further increased construction efficiencies.

Another cost-lowering measure was to introduce the basic *Grow Home* unit, as a 'no-frills' plain model. The buyer could then select from a list of options to add to the house for an additional cost. The base unit consists of a two-storey house with one bathroom, a kitchen with three appliances, a washer and dryer, and no partitions on the upper level. A basement is optional, as is a garage, porch, dormers, and more. This approach is similar to the marketing practices of many builders who customize the houses with a variety of options to suit a specific target market.⁵⁴

In a fashion similar to *Ikea*, where the customer assembles the product, the buyer of the *Grow Home* is left to do part of the finishing work. This concept is known as "progressive completion."⁵⁵ This allows for the owner to invest both time and money, over a number of years, or as it becomes possible, to improve the house.⁵⁶ This idea is not a new one. In Europe, people are familiar with buying an unfinished house and adding components later. However, North Americans are not accustomed to this method of purchasing a new home.

⁵² Witold Rybczynski, "The Home of the 90's - 1: Designing for Affordability" in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 28.

⁵³ Avi Friedman, "The Home of the 90's - 2: An Urban Starter," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 33.

⁵⁴ Patricia Leigh Brown, "Can Small be Cheap and Also Beautiful?," in *New York Times*, (Thurs. June 4, 1998) p. C-12.

⁵⁵ Avi Friedman, "The Home of the 90's - 2: An Urban Starter," in *Canadian Architect*, (August 1997) p. 33.

In fact, the Angus Reid study reports that people, in general, and particularly in Calgary and Vancouver, prefer to pay more for a finished home, rather than having to upgrade the finishes themselves. It was presumed that these people lead busy lives and do not want to buy a new house that requires a significant amount of work to complete.⁵⁰

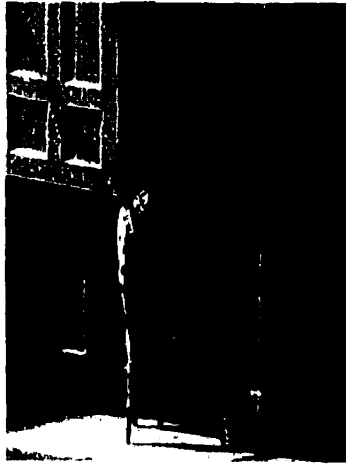
Perhaps the biggest challenge in designing the *Grow Home* was: Can affordable housing be done in such a way so that the final product is attractive to the potential buyer? In a similar fashion to the approach *Ikea* uses in product design, the designers of the *Grow Home* identified that both price and design were important. However, unlike *Ikea*, the designers of the *Grow Home* opted for a traditional appearance, citing that the average person's taste in houses is generally conservative. At the same time, however, the designers also state that consumers, and especially young ones, are generally well-educated, more demanding, and more open to good design. These are the same consumers who shop at *Ikea* because of the aesthetic qualities of the furniture, as well as the price. The designers of the *Grow Home* present a product which is well-conceived of in terms of materials, site, and construction efficiencies, but one which does not push the envelope on good design or creativity. The *Grow Home* is well-designed in terms of practical achievements, but not in terms of architecture.

24

The emphasis that is placed by the designers of the *Grow Home* on quality of finish is at the expense of architectural space. The designers of the *Grow Home* argue that architectural space is expensive, and, while there may be some truth to this, it is not always the case. Architectural space can be conceived of economically and competitively, without sacrificing quality. However, the *Grow Home* is designed to fill the needs of the low-income home-buyer, and as such, is successful in presenting a product that satisfies market demands.

⁵⁰ Angus Reid Group, "Trade-Offs in the Home Purchase Decision" in *The 1996 Canadian Home Buyers Study*, p. 25

THE PRODUCT



Terence Conran, *The Essential House Book: Getting Back to Basics*

Home is the heart of life ... the place you live in has to accommodate a broad range of activities from sleeping to cooking, washing to relaxing ... But a home is greater than the sum of its parts and getting the practicalities right is only half of the story. For most people, the special significance of 'home' lies at a deeper level. Home is where we feel at ease, where we belong, where we can create surroundings which reflect our tastes and pleasures. Creating a home has a lot to do with discovering those elements that convey a sense of place."

The notion of 'home' conjures up different values and ideas for different people. There are a large range of types and styles of developer-built housing on the markets today each one catering to the needs, wants and desires of a particular group of people. In general, these houses competently address the practicalities of the house as a building type, with all the expected programmatic requirements included. However, the spaces are predictable and generally uninspiring, as are the streets they are located along. There is little that conveys a sense of place.

The product presented here is intended to represent both the application of the idea of architecture as product, and the concept of design as a service hidden by a product. It represents one of many possible solutions for a particular market segment. In contrast to the product of the developer, which is found in most suburbs and many inner-city neighborhoods, this home places a premium on architectural space as a vehicle to a better and more vibrant lifestyle. Frank Lloyd Wright, wrote in his book *The Natural House* that "whether people are fully conscious of this or not, they actually derive countenance and sustenance from the 'atmosphere' of the things they live in or with. They are rooted in them just as a

¹¹ Terence Conran, *The Essential House Book: Getting Back to Basics* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1994) p. 11

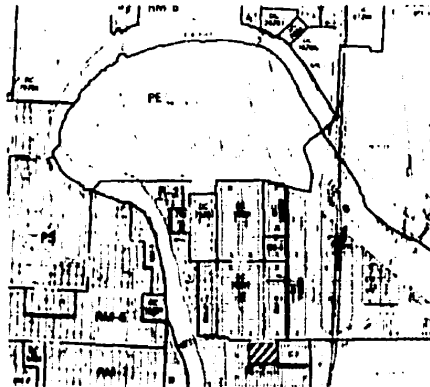


Figure 1 - Site of Erlton Townhomes



Figure 1a - Aerial Photograph Showing Site and Environs

plant is in the soil in which it is planted.”³⁴ In these homes, the fundamentals of light and space, a connection to the outdoors and flexibility of design combine with the pragmatic components of the house to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

As this is a consumer home, it must compete in an open market with other products in its category. This means that every design decision has implications on how competitive the product will be. In traditional architectural practice, the decisions of the designer are not generally considered in relation to how the product will compete. More often, the designer is concerned with providing the client with the building that they desire. When considering the home as a product, the marketability of the product is as much a part of the design process as is the architectural space.

One of the first decisions a new home-buyer encounters is what area of the city to purchase a house in. As the City of Calgary grows, so too does the perception that living in the inner areas of the city is expensive. The most affordable housing type in these areas is the condominium. However, this type of housing is often located within a larger complex and is more akin to an apartment than a house. This is forcing new home-buyers, who would otherwise prefer to stay in the inner-city areas, to move further away from the city centre where housing is more affordable, and to where they can get a higher perceived value for their dollar.

The location for this proposed housing development is the inner city area of Erlton. This area is currently undergoing significant gentrification with several medium- and high-density projects currently under construction. (Figure 1 and 1a) Lower-density projects are also underway which are aimed at the luxury home-buyer market, and are priced accordingly.

³⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (New York: Horizon Press, 1954) p. 135

Location is one of the most important considerations of new home-buyers in Calgary. The Residential Home Buyers Survey, done by *Angus Reid*, reveals that a significant number of people are willing to pay up to five percent more in order to live in a preferred location.⁵⁹ (appendix 1) The Erlton area is close to major transportation routes, including public transit. As this is an established neighbourhood, it is surrounded by many amenities including schools, grocery stores, restaurants and shopping. The proposed site is within easy walking distance to Fourth Street, the Elbow River and its pathway system, Lindsay Park, the Stampede Grounds, and downtown Calgary.

Location is significant for these homes, as they are targeted towards groups of buyers that would prefer to live close to the city centre. The home is designed for several market segments, including young couples, single professionals, new families, single-parent families, and entrepreneurs. The home is lifestyle-oriented, and will attract the type of buyer who is looking for an alternative to the suburban product and the inner city condominium. The flexible floor plan will accommodate a wide range of lifestyles, from the couple that likes to entertain, to the person working out of their home, where a central location is important.

The fundamental decisions in the design of these homes were driven by a few basic concepts. The first decision was to achieve affordability in architecture through an efficient use of resources. Maximizing material and labour efficiencies was important. For example, all of the floor spans in the homes are kept short, and the most efficient spanning members are used.

Another basic concept in the design of these homes, is to maximize the perceived space of each unit and reduce actual space. While physical space has real cost implications, perceived space is much less expensive. An increased perception of space is achieved in these homes by maintaining strong visual connections through the units, varying the ceiling and floor heights, and by utilizing an open concept floor plan. Light is also used as a means of

⁵⁹ Angus Reid Group, "Trade-Offs in the Home Purchase Decision" in *The 1996 Canadian Home Buyers Study*, p. 26

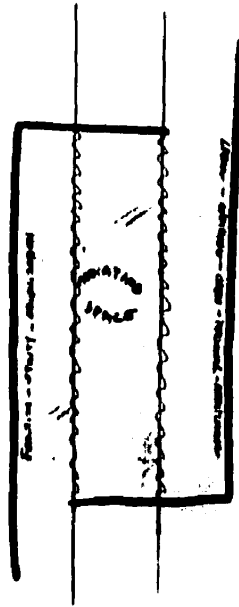


Figure 1 - Parti Sketch

increasing the perceived space of the homes. Daylight penetrates into all areas of the units, reducing the need for artificial lighting, while creating an open and spacious atmosphere in the home. Each unit is approximately 1200 square feet, which is about 300 square feet less than the average home in its price range. The units have a frontage of sixteen feet, and a depth of forty-five feet.

The parti used to organize the design of these units, shown in figure 1, illustrates how the two relatively long party-walls form the sides of each unit become an 'L' shape to enclose the unit at the front and the back. The programmatic requirements of the houses are organized along these elements according to whether they are functional or lifestyle elements. The closer an element is to the party-wall, the more it is about either function or lifestyle. The space in-between the two 'L's is considered mediating space and contains programmatic elements which are both functional and lifestyle-oriented.

Along the functional 'L' are the main entry foyer, the stairs to the upper level, a powder room, and the functional requirements of the kitchen, such as the fridge, sink, countertop and pantry. Most of the circulation within the units occurs along, or close to this side. Along the lifestyle 'L' is the dining area with a sky-lit ceiling, the fireplace, and the great room. An island is located in the kitchen in the mediated space between the two 'L's. The island is located in this area because it is used for both food preparation and eating, and is therefore about function and lifestyle. The island extends into the great room and is integrated into that space by becoming an end table or shelf. This organization is reflected in the main floor plan shown in figure 2.

The ceilings are nine feet high over the great room, and rise to ten feet over the kitchen and dining areas. A sculptural fireplace and a window wall at the front of the unit dominate the main living area. The kitchen is spacious and open with generous cupboard and pantry space.

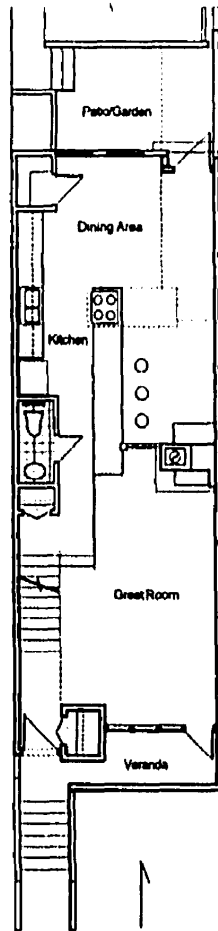


Figure 2 - Main Floor Plan

A connection to the outdoors is an important consideration in the design of these units. The garden behind the house is connected to the unit through a common wall which extends from the dining area to an outdoor patio. The garden is an extension of the house, and is designed to be an outdoor room. At the opposite end of the unit, off of the great room, is an outdoor veranda which faces the street, and is a more urban extension of the home. A strong visual connection through the unit from front to back connects the two outdoor spaces and enhances the sense of spaciousness.

The organizing elements on the main level continue to the upper level of the units where the bedrooms and main bathroom are located. The master bedroom includes a large walk-in closet and an ensuite bathroom. The ceiling over the master bedroom climbs from nine and a half feet at the entrance to a maximum height of twelve feet. The main bathroom is treated as a lifestyle space, and as such, is located along the lifestyle 'L' of the unit. The bathroom is a unique space that combines function with luxury and style. A large window connects the bathroom to the outdoors, while also providing an abundance of natural light. (figure 3)

The second bedroom is a more intimate and modest space than the master bedroom. It is the most conventional room in the house and can be used either as another bedroom or as a home office. Windows on two walls of this room open it up and provide ample natural light.

Each unit also has an attached single-car garage on the lower level, as well as a basement which can be finished at the time of purchase, or at a later date by the home owner. The garage is located five feet below grade, partially screening it from the street. Also located in the basement is a small utility room containing the furnace and hot water tank for each unit.

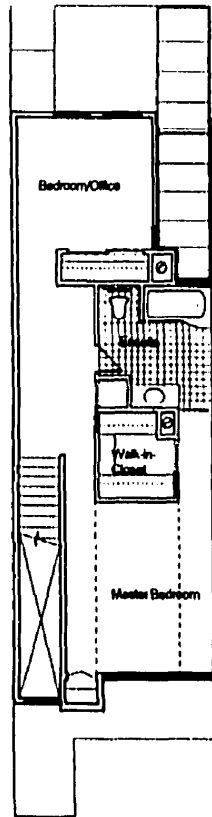


Figure 3 - Second Floor Plan

Each unit comes with a full complement of appliances including a fridge, stove, dishwasher, washer and dryer. In addition, the interior finishes of each unit include features such as hardwood floors, single-surface countertops, and other high quality products. The exteriors of the units are comprised of a number of materials including brick, wood, stucco, and glass. Construction of the homes is conventional wood-frame with a concrete foundation.

In order to be competitive, the product must also be accompanied by good service. A design consultation will be offered in order to best configure the home to the personal needs of the owner. Although major structural components cannot be altered, there is flexibility. For example, the kitchen can be enlarged, depending on the owner's requirements, or the owner may opt for a unique design for the fireplace. The open plan accommodates a wide range of options and finishes.

Each unit will sell for between \$150,000 and \$175,000. This is based on a construction cost of between \$90 and \$110 per square foot. The price varies depending on the level of finish desired. It is also reflective of the constant fluctuation in the cost of building materials. Included in this cost is the profit, which is approximately ten percent for each unit. Current land costs in the Erlton area are approximately \$140,000 for a typical fifty-by-one-hundred twenty-foot lot. This number is based on the average sale price for a typical house in this area in 1997 and the first two months of 1998. The resulting land cost for each unit is approximately \$45,000 to \$50,000.

The homes represent good value to the buyer on several levels. The unique architectural spaces are not done at the expense of quality finishes and amenities. The spaces are possible because of a practical and functional design idea. Unlike the *Grow Home*, which chooses quality of finish over architectural space, this home incorporates both. However, like the *Grow Home*, these houses have a smaller floor area than most typical developer-homes in the same price category. The reduced floor area means that each unit has a

smaller footprint, which in turn, reduces the land cost per unit. Reducing land costs is critical to making these homes affordable in an inner city neighborhood.

In addition to the belief that an architecturally designed home can enhance day-to-day life, is the belief that good design is also a good investment. Record real estate prices have been achieved by a partnership of architects in Sydney, Australia who have recently completed and sold out a major condo development. Sydney, like many North American cities, is being overrun by speculative property developers interested only in maximum return for minimum investment. The success of recent architectural projects has caught the attention of big time developers who are realizing that good design is actually an added selling feature, not a pointless waste of money.⁶⁰

As well as being a good financial investment there is another longer-term benefit to a well-designed home. Owners are more likely to remain in a home that meets their needs for a longer period of time, and as a result, will realize a significant appreciation in the property value. As well, the longer a person lives in a particular home, the more equity they will build up in that home. When they do decide that it is time to move, they will have the money to choose the neighbourhood they wish to live in.

31

Many people are forced to move to another house before they can realize some of the longer-term financial benefits of home ownership because the home no longer meets their needs. Many inner city condominiums are relatively small, and offer little or no flexibility.

The proposed Erfton townhouses are designed to accommodate a growing family. For example, a couple may purchase the home when they have no children. At this time, the second bedroom on the upper level may be an office or a study. When the couple has their first child this room may be converted into the child's bedroom, and the office could be moved to the basement.

⁶⁰ Maggie Alderson, "Basic Instinct," in *Wallpaper Magazine*, (no. 14) p. 59

The goal of these homes is to demonstrate that architecture can be affordable, and that the housing industry can be a forum for meaningful architecture. Conceiving of architecture as a product presents the designer with an array of challenges, all of which are encompassed within the process. The process is design-driven and product-oriented, with the result being a home which is competitive on the open market, and which can make a difference in cities which are dominated by banal and ordinary houses.

CONCLUSION

Architects, in general, have made a choice, both consciously and unconsciously, to turn their focus away from the housing industry. As a consequence the industry has been left to the developers and home-builders. In order for architects to regain a role in housing, the profession must choose to do so. Recognizing that a developer house is now a commodity is critical to regaining a significant place in the housing industry. The question for architects is: Do they want to cater to the demands of a product-oriented society? And, is there a way that they can produce consumer housing without sacrificing the ideals and values of the profession?

Commodification implies that there is a substantial quantity of a particular commodity available to a wide range of consumers. Using this definition of commodification, the house has become a commodity, much like an appliance or an automobile. Developers now build houses in mass quantities to suit every possible market demographic in almost every city in the world.

The single family house or small multi-unit projects that some architects develop do not represent architecture as a commodity. These projects do not fulfill the basic requirements of a commodity, because they are not readily available nor are they produced on a mass scale. However, they do embody an approach to professional practice where the service of design is partnered with the realities of product design. These products, though not commodities themselves, must compete in the same markets as the product of the home-builders.

The opportunity exists for architects to take an active role in shaping the housing industry today. The architect is well-positioned to compete in a product-based housing industry where good design is critical to selling houses. This thesis proposes a way of thinking about how architecture is conceived of in an increasingly consumer-driven society. The idea that architecture can be treated as a design service, concealed behind the final product, is one which has roots in industrial design, but one which holds great potential for architects and housing.

AFTERWORD

Pursuant to the discussion put forward in this thesis, I believe it is now important to step outside of the argument and make some observations and critiques, some of which were discussed during the defense.

Two logical extensions of the idea of architecture as product are mass production and commodification. The idea of commodifying architecture presents some serious challenges for architects. To be a true commodity, a product must achieve certain numbers, as mentioned. Achieving these numbers requires not only foresight and motivation, but great attention to the business aspects of the venture. If the scope of the endeavor is large, it will undoubtedly command most, if not all, of the architect's or developer's time. Perhaps this is another reason why architects are not as successful as developers in the housing industry.

The architect, unlike the developer, is interested in more than just making money. This is part of the reason why he or she has invested a great deal of time and effort in becoming an architect, as opposed to simply becoming involved as a developer with little or no formal training. If the business side of the operation is commanding most or all of the architect's time, then the process of building is less about architecture and more about business. The idea of practicing architecture as product in this scenario may not be appealing or rewarding for an architect.

Further investigation of various organizational structures may reveal other models which architects could adapt to producing architectural product on a mass scale. In particular, developing a corporate structure where the architect has as much time as possible to concentrate on new ideas and design. An organizational structure of this sort would be valuable, even critical, to the ultimate success and happiness of those practicing architecture in this manner.

If the architect was able to succeed at building homes on a scale similar to the home-builder, there would come a point at which the product of the architect would become the same as that of the developer. Though physically different, and perhaps better, the

proliferation of the product would render it as generic as the homes we now see in most new subdivisions. It may be that we need the banal suburban product of the developer in order to provide contrast to the more interesting product of the architect. After all, even *Ikea* has the *Brick* to provide the contrast between banal and interesting.

Perhaps the idea of designing architecture as though it is a product is more appropriate to architects on a smaller scale, where they can remain involved in designing good buildings and improving the cityscape little by little. I believe that architects are well-positioned in the housing industry to make significant changes to the housing landscape, whether it happens one house at a time, or on the subdivision scale. However, the larger the scope of the projects, the less time an individual architect is likely to spend on design. Once again, the *Ikea* case study seems an appropriate model for finding the critical balance between design and business.

There is another potential outcome to the commodification of architecture. This is the possibility for *Celebration*-like enclaves in various parts of a city where an architect or architect/developer might have built numerous housing units. These areas could become little 'Disneylands' that architects create to satisfy their egos and make money. Although the possibility for this exists, the question is: Would this be a bad thing?

APPENDIX

TRADE-OFFS IN THE HOME PURCHASE DECISION: NEW HOME BUYERS

STATEMENT		VANCOUVER	CALGARY	TORONTO	MONTREAL
You preferred to get the size of house you wanted and upgrade the finishing quality when you can afford to	Mean	5.1	5.7	6.5	6.1
	TopBox (%)	30	32	43	44
	LowBox (%)	38	29	23	24
You preferred a slightly smaller house with the finishing quality that you wanted rather than a larger house that did not have the finishing quality you wanted	Mean	5.6	6.1	5.9	5.9
	TopBox (%)	39	38	37	42
	LowBox (%)	31	28	31	27
You paid a little more than your original budget because the house had the finishing quality you wanted	Mean	5.9	6.1	5.7	5.9
	TopBox (%)	42	40	37	42
	LowBox (%)	26	23	31	27
You paid a little less than your original budget and decided to upgrade the finishing quality yourself	Mean	3.7	3.3	4.4	4.7
	TopBox (%)	18	14	23	27
	LowBox (%)	57	66	46	45
You were prepared to pay up to 5% more than your original budget to live in your preferred location	Mean	7.0	6.7	6.6	6.1
	TopBox (%)	55	49	48	46
	LowBox (%)	17	20	21	28

1 = completely agree

10 = completely disagree

TopBox = a score of 8, 9 or 10

LowBox = a score of 1, 2 or 3

REFERENCES

- Alderson, Maggie. "Basic Instinct." Wallpaper Magazine, no. 14, 59-61.
 Angus Reid Group. *The 1996 Canadian Residential Home Buyers Study: Attitudes, Behaviors, Motivations and Preferences*. 1996.
- Ballast, David K. *The Architect's Handbook*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1984
- Benedikt, Michael L. "Less for Less Yet: On Architecture's Value(s) in the Marketplace." Harvard Design Magazine (On-Line). www.harvard.usd.edu/hdm.
- Brown, Patricia Leigh. "Can Small be Cheap and Also Beautiful?" New York Times, Thurs. June 4, 1990, C-1, C-12.
- Conran, Terence. *The Essential House Book: Getting Back to Basics*. New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1994.
- Cuff, Dana. *Architecture: The Story of Practice*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991.
- Chaplin, Sarah & Eric Holding. "Consuming Architecture." Architectural Design, no. 131, 6-9.
- Douglas, Eva. "Towards a new Functionalism." Canadian Art, fall 1990, vol. 7, no. 3, 92-95.
- Duffy, Francis. "Architecture and Practice: Future Directions." The Architectural Review, v. 198, n. 1182, 1995, 81-83.
- Fisher, Thomas. "Can This Profession be Saved." Progressive Architecture, Feb. 94, vol. 7515, 44-49, 84.
- Foot, David K. and Daniel Stoffman. *Room, Bust and Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift*. Toronto: Words on Paper Inc., 1996.
- Friedman, Avi. "The Home of the 90's-2: An Urban Starter." Canadian Architect, August 1997, 32-33.

Gutman, Robert. *Architectural Practice: A Critical View*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988.

Hubbard, Bill Jr. *A Theory for Practice: Architecture in Three Discourses*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996.

Ikea Web Site. "Our Vision." www.ikea.com/content/about.

Kapusta, Beth. "Reinventing Practice." *Canadian Architect*, vol. 40 no. 1, 1995, 24-28.

Kerr, Joe. "Window and the Pavement." *Architectural Design*, no. 131, 16-19.

Kroloff, Reed. "On the Market." *Architecture*, December, 1998, p. 11.

Lewis, Roger K. *Architect? A Candid Guide to the Profession*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985.

Lyndon, Donlyn and Charles W. Moore. *Chambers for a Memory Palace*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994.

Norman, Donald A. *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Picardi, Gennaro. "The Vulnerability of an Architect." *The Architect's Journal*, vol. 203, no. 5, 49-51.

Rybczynski, Witold. "The Home of the 90's - I: Designing for Affordability." *Canadian Architect*, August, 1997, 26-31.

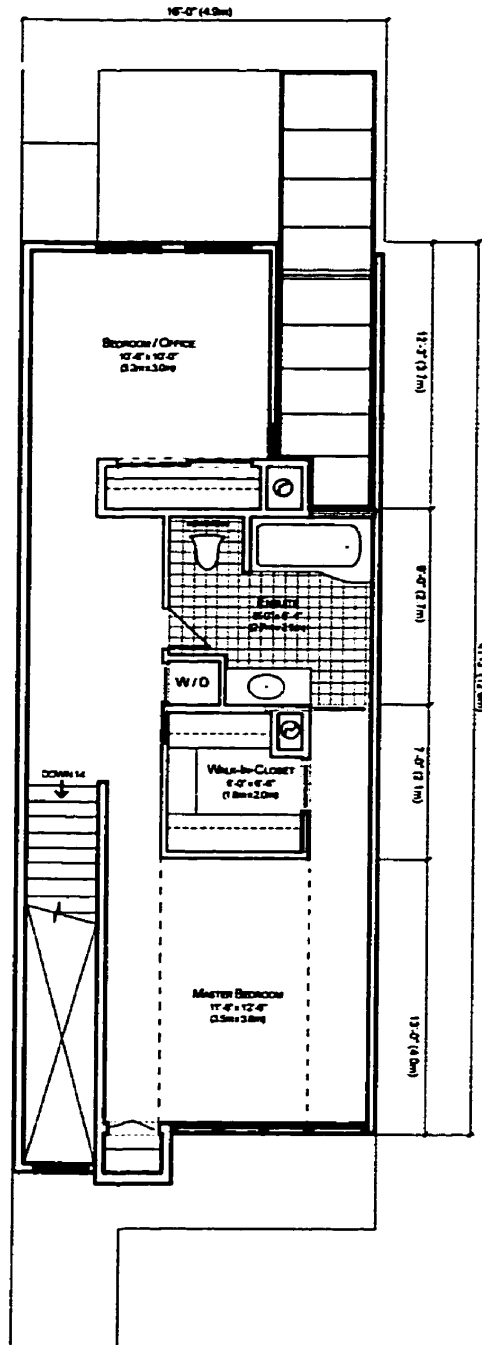
Rybczynski, Witold. *The Most Beautiful House in the World*. New York: Penguin Group, 1989.

Rybczynski, Witold. "Housing without Architect." *Architecture*, August, 1997, 78-81.

Sparke, Penny. *Consultant Design: The History and Practice of the Designer in Industry*. London: Pembrige Press Ltd., 1983.

Stanley, Thomas J. and William D. Danko. *The Millionaire Next Door: The Surprising Secrets of America's Wealthy*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996.

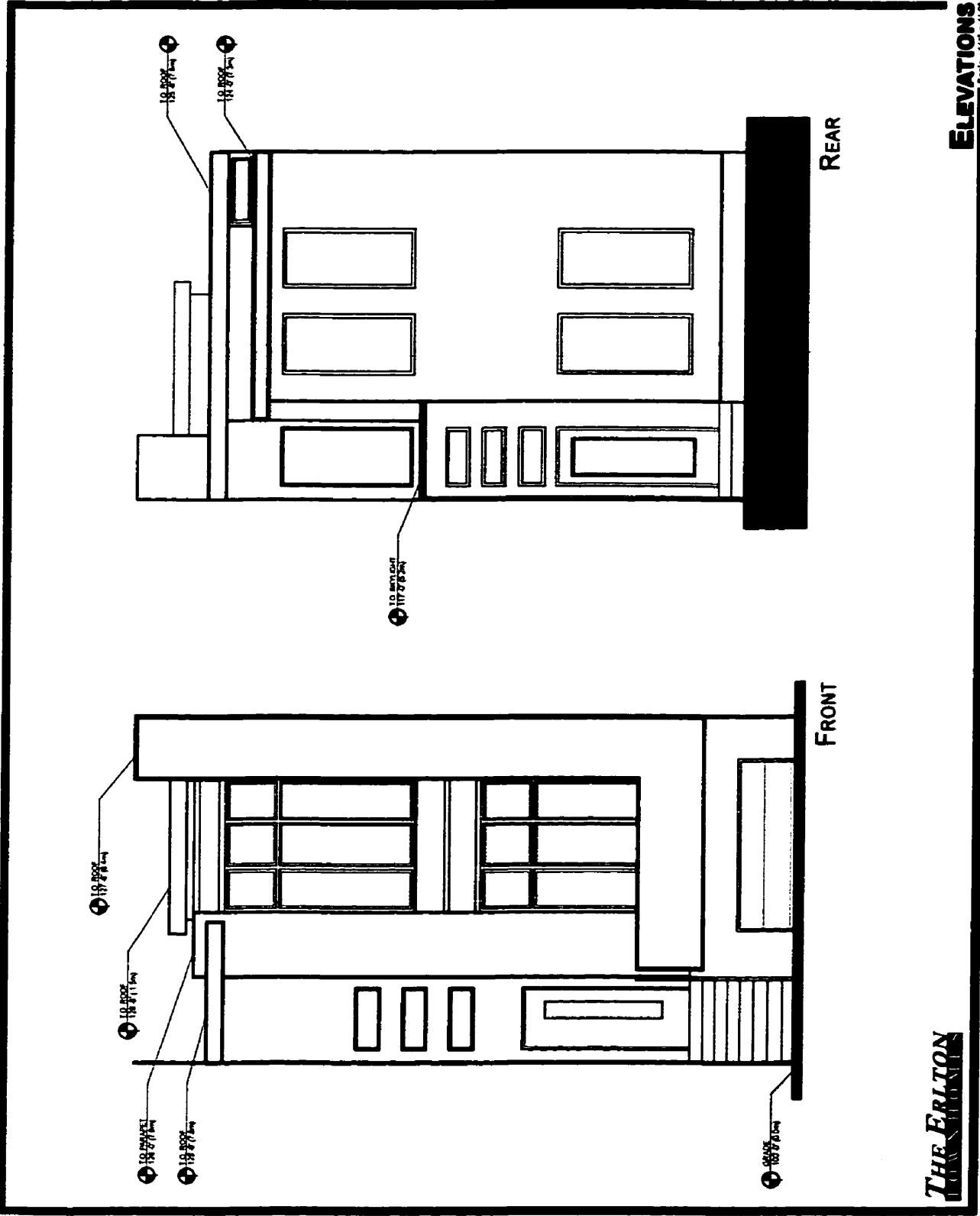
- Steiner, Dietmar. "Standard Houses: The Standard of Houses." Domus. No. 767, Oct. 1997, 18-31.
- Stewart George C. *Real Estate Buying/Selling Guide for Alberta*. North Vancouver, B.C.: Self-Counsel Press, 1996.
- Stiller, Adolph. "The House as Merchandise: Stages Along the Way to Production." Domus. No. 767, Oct. 1997, 10-13.
- Venturi Robert, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenor. *Learning from Las Vegas*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1972.
- Wigley, Mark. *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. *The Natural House*. New York: Horizon Press, 1954.
- Zeller, Javier. "Advertising for a Wallflower." RAIC Update, Feb/Mar 98.



THE ERLTON
TOWNHOMES

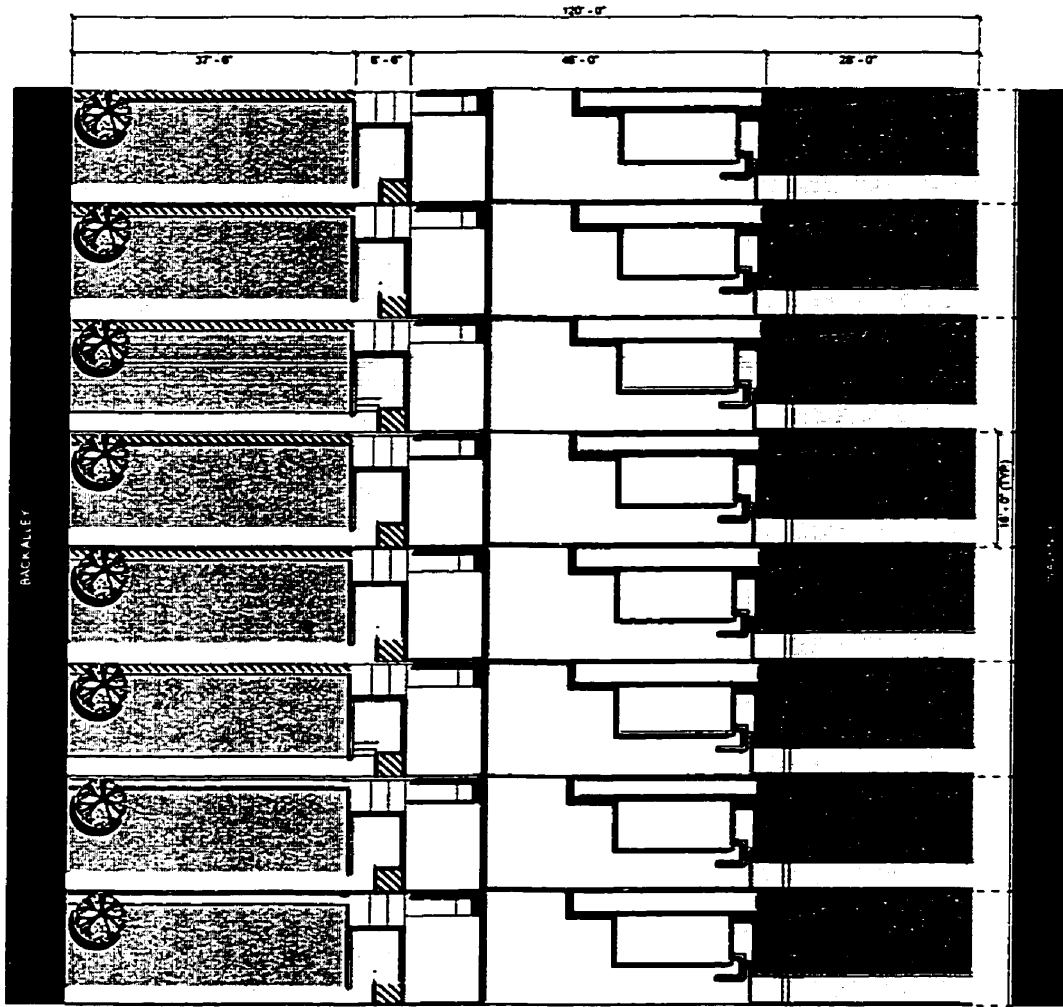
UPPER LEVEL PLAN





Scale: 3/16" = 1'-0"

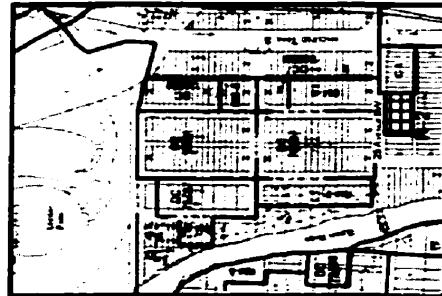


THE ERLTON
ARCHITECTS

ELEVATIONS
Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"



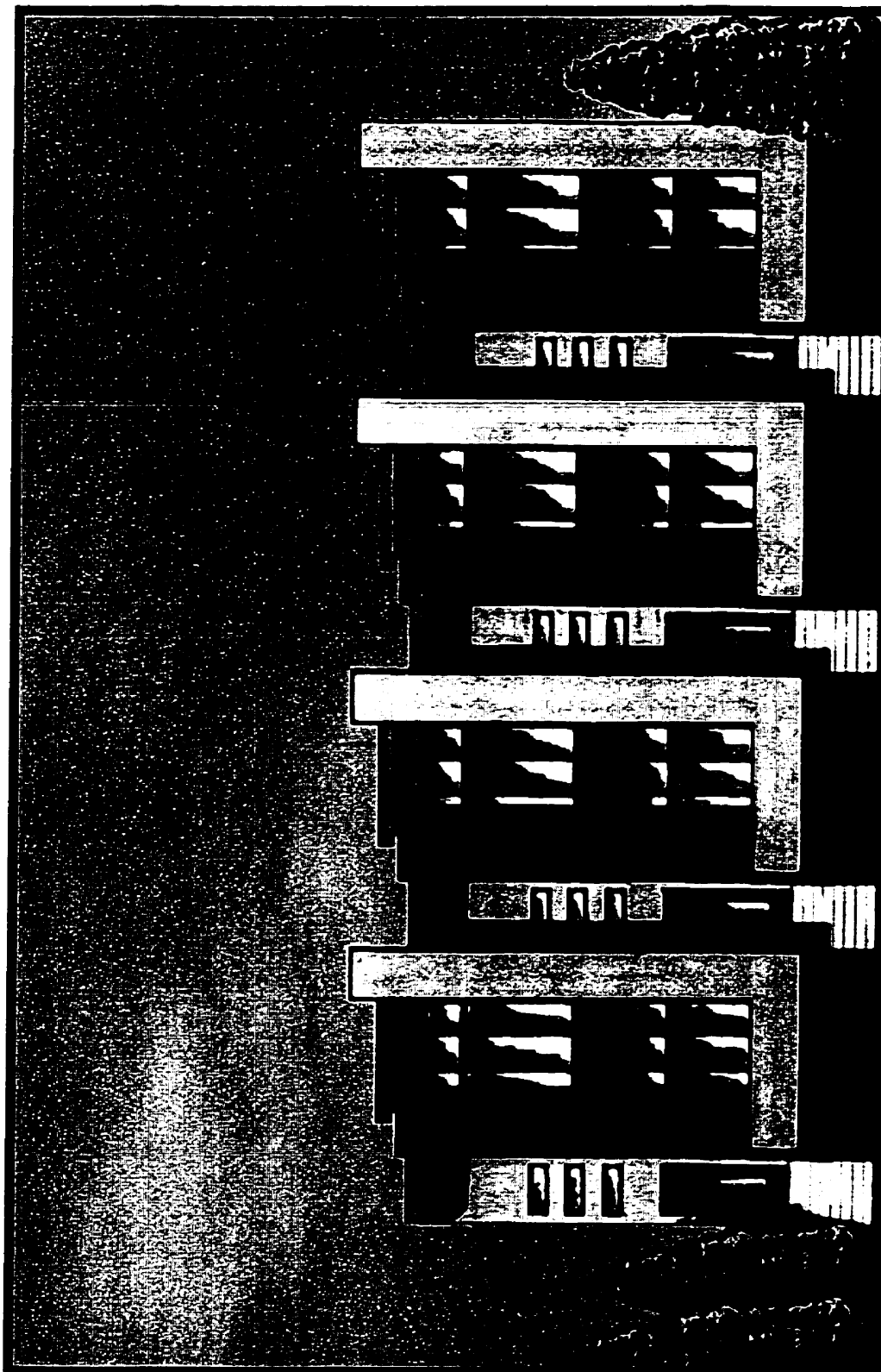
-  GRASS
-  CONCRETE
-  ASPHALT / GRAVEL
-  PAVING STONE / DECKING
-  PLANTER



LOCATION MAP

THE ERLTON
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

SITE PLAN
Scale 1/16" = 1'-0"





THE ERIKSON
TOWNHOMES

