INTEGRATING OUR COMMUNITIES:
HOUSING THE CHRONICALLY ILL - A GROUP HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS

by

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INTEGRATING OUR COMMUNITIES:
Housing the chronically ill - A group home for people with AIDS

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fullfillment of the requirements of the degree Master of Architecture.
January 19, 1990
by
Clyde Rousseau

It is my belief that it is within the realm of architecture to provide responsible, dignified housing which promotes the assimilation into society of those presently excluded, and that by so doing it is possible to overcome the objections of those resistant to change. A population consisting of individuals suffering from chronic illness who are otherwise capable of living productive lives make ideal candidates for integration into communities.

The investigation of architectural form which accommodates the particular exigencies of the chronically ill is needed. These forms then require models of intervention which are integrated with their specific communities. The presence of a well integrated facility within a community would diminish the occupants' feelings of being separated from society, and provide a positive example for others.

For the purposes of this inquiry I will design a housing and care facility for a population suffering from a chronic illness, in this case AIDS, on a site within an existing community in Tucson, Arizona.

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Throughout the past century urban planning in America has changed significantly. Not surprisingly, many changes in urban planning philosophy have been coincident, or rather a response to technological innovations of the time. The technological innovations which have enabled the relative self-sufficiency of the household along with the ability to commute long distances in a short period of time have enabled the great separation between where most people live and work. Urban Planning has responded to these changes with the implementation of the “business district”, the “industrial zone”, and the “residential suburb”. These districts, zones, and suburbs were all in accordance with the supposed sociological ideals of the people who inhabited them, and fitting in to this structure was embraced by and composed a large part of the “American Dream”. Unfortunately, many Americans have been excluded from this dream.

Whether it be by readily appreciable causes such as a physical or mental handicap, or societal differences such as race or economic and educational backgrounds, the “American Dream” has been out of reach for many. The physical separation of the “haves” and the “have-nots” has further heightened and compounded the differences between the two. Urban planners have long recognized this dilemma, but the reconciliation of the societal need to integrate communities with the conflicting societal desire to maintain the status quo has been difficult. Most Americans, in principle, agree with the societal necessity of adequately providing for and assimilating into society those that are less privileged, just “not in my backyard”. It is my belief that an architecture which addresses both the needs of its inhabitants and is properly integrated with its constituents can ease the transition of integrating a community.

AIDS: the disease

In the future AIDS will not be the terminal death sentence it has been in the past. The development of new drugs which control the
symptoms of AIDS will continue to change the way we think of the disease and hence people with AIDS. A person with AIDS will have to closely monitor themselves, and their treatment will most likely take the form of some daily regimen much like that of a diabetic. People with AIDS will be able to live full productive lives as vibrant dignified members of society.

Everyone must respond to people with AIDS in the same compassionate and dignified fashion they would to those afflicted with any other serious illness. To do so we must all overcome what many see as the “scandalous origins” associates with a sexually transmitted disease. The development of drugs which inhibit the symptoms and hence most visible signs of AIDS should not lull us into dismissing the serious impact AIDS will continue to have on all members of society.

In order to make more clear the point that we must integrate all potentially productive members of society into our communities I have chosen people with AIDS as the population group for this project; specifically because people with AIDS can be productive members of society, yet have been the focus of so much unfounded rejection and discrimination. People with AIDS pose absolutely no health risk to their neighbors, and deserve to be treated with dignity as members of society.

Sponsor

The proposed sponsoring group of this project is the Tucson AIDS Project (TAP). TAP is a community based volunteer organization which provides AIDS education and coordinates support services to people with AIDS in Tucson, Arizona. TAP is a largely volunteer run organization which depends upon private donations and state or local funds for its operating budget. It is through discussions with Mr. Craig Snow, the Director of TAP, that a site was chosen and a program formulated.
Site Description

The site selected for this project is within the West University Historical Neighborhood of Tucson, Arizona. The neighborhood is largely comprised of two-bedroom bungalows of assorted style and vintage built upon 55' x 150' lots. Most of the existing houses in this area were built between 1910 and 1930. However, there is a lot of discontinuity within the prevalent typology. There are a number of larger homes interspersed within the fabric of small bungalows. Over the years, it has not been uncommon for alternative uses other than housing to function within the existing structures of the West University Historic Neighborhood. Among the alternative uses in the immediate vicinity are fraternity and sorority houses, daycare facilities, satellite branches of University-related departments, professional and medical offices, and an out-patient mental health group home. Due to the proximity to the University of Arizona, the area is inhabited by a large number of affiliated students, professors, clerical workers, etc. The neighborhood is also home to a growing proportion of professional people that are attracted to the unique and attractive housing stock in this once neglected "downtown" area.

The area surrounding the site is comprised of blocks of 14 building lots broken into smaller parcels of three or four lots by interstitial alleys. The site selected within this community consists of three contiguous 60' x 130' lots which presently have two fire-damaged houses built upon them. (see facing page) Both of the houses have suffered extensive damage and have been unoccupied within the past decade. The area is comprised of mostly original structures, but there are several newer interventions. These most often take the form of two or three-storied "developer" apartment buildings. While these structures comply with local zoning regulations, they pay little attention to local building traditions or community integration. An example of one of these structures is shown in the right middle-ground of the drawing on the facing page.
Local Characteristics

The local built characteristics in Tucson are a result of many varied influences and are a reflection of the climate, inhabitants, and economy. The photographs on the facing and following pages of buildings in Tucson are shown to provide a sample of local built characteristics.

The building shown in #1 is an early example of worker housing. This structure is strongly influenced by Mexican village traditions and is made of adobe bricks which have been stuccoed. Note that the building comes out to the lot line with entrances opening directly onto the sidewalk covered by a shed awning. The flat roof with a parapet along with the attic vents are suitable for the climate and an often repeated feature in Tucson.

The house shown in #2 is characteristic of the territorial style. It too is made out of adobe bricks which have been stuccoed. Note the beams which have been sawed off flush with the exterior bearing walls which support the roof. The ironwork which surrounds the window openings is derived from the need to keep out animal and human intruders, while still allowing the windows to be open for ventilation. In this and later examples the ironwork goes beyond its utilitarian origins and begins to assume a decorative quality.

The house shown in #3 and #4 was built in the early 1940's, but is strongly influenced by local building traditions. Low walls at the property's edge define boundaries and raise a platform for the house to sit upon. This is useful in Tucson which is in a large flat desert valley prone to periodic flooding when there are heavy rains. The low walls are also used to define the driveway which leads to the main entrance. The house shows influences of the territorial style in its high bearing walls with ironwork at the window openings but is less true to any particular "style". The house is built out of masonry which has been stuccoed to recall earlier adobe structures. The use of manufactured masonry rather than adobe is a reflection of the increasing industrialization of the region. The indigenous desert vegetation used for landscaping is a successful compliment to the architecture of this home.
The houses on the facing page were all built in the 1940’s, and are an adaptation of the California bungalow tradition. This type of housing is quite common as a result of the fast growth Tucson experienced in the post-war years. The bungalows of this period were built in many different styles including but not limited to Pueblo Revival, Mission, Craftsman, Spanish Eclectic, Tudor, Streamlined Moderne, and Victorian. However, despite the wide stylistic range of these houses, most do share a few characteristics such as masonry bearing walls.

I have chosen to show these four bungalows because I feel they are most characteristic of the “vernacular” style, for lack of a better term, which developed in Tucson. Notice the solid planar massing with “punched” openings that all four share. The high masonry walls of the exterior allow for an adequate interior ceiling height along with space for a short attic, useful for ventilation, and then continue up to form a parapet for the flat roof. The modernist tradition is strongly evident in their simplicity and expression of materiality. Exterior massing setbacks coincide with interior room arrangement, which in turn set up spaces for porches and entrances.

These four houses were also chosen for discussion because of their integration of local stylistic characteristics. Note the shed roofed porches on the houses shown in #3 and #4 (the shed roofed porch on #2 is a later addition) and the masonry pier supports of the porch roof of #4.
The buildings shown on the facing page were chosen to illustrate the different scale and type of buildings within the area of the chosen building site.

The building shown in #1 is the Alpha Phi sorority house which is built in a Spanish Revival style, and is sited in an area of smaller single-family homes. The building houses approx. 70 women during the academic year.

The building shown in #2 is the main entrance of the Sam Hughes Elementary School. Notice the planar, solid massing of this masonry structure. Familiar elements such as attic vents, and decorative ironwork are again seen here. Notice the way the second floor reaches up to enclose an office which is in turn afforded magnificent views across the Tucson area to the surrounding mountains which enclose this desert valley. The way in which the second floor is architecturally expressed as a tower as well as incorporated into the massing of the main entrance building of the school has precedence in the Spanish Mission style.

The single-family house shown in #3 is an example of the Spanish Revival style common to the area though more of a stylistic import from California than the houses cited in the previous pages. Note however the attic vents and decorative ironwork.

The house shown in #4 is an example of an existing building in the area of the building site being adapted to a new use. Here a relatively nondescript large brick house which is now inhabited by the Sigma Nu fraternity.
The buildings and elements shown on the facing page are examples of more personal reinterpretations of local building characteristics. The attic vent grill shown in #1 is made of steel re-bar and painted in bright contrasting colors, whereas the ironwork grill shown in #2 is more in keeping with the pueblo revival architecture of the house.

The high lot-line front garden wall shown in #3 is a recent addition as is the second floor “tower” porch, both of which are very much in keeping with the structure’s immediate surroundings. These interesting additions give interesting yet complimentary elements of both privacy and openness.

The bungalow shown in #4 is a curious amalgam of local characteristics, yet has a uniqueness all its own. The lava rock lot-line low walls are a common element in the area. What is unusual is the way the same lava rocks are used as both a foundation material and in the piers which support a shallow arch spanning the front porch. Notice too the hipped roof with its attic dormer which houses a vent grill rather than the second floor window one would expect.
Building Program

It was determined that the facility should house eight households whom are coping with the AIDS virus and want to live in a group setting. Space for medical services and client counseling should also be integrated within the project.

After consideration of the building program, the intended population group, and the site, I came to the conclusion that I would not be designing a big group house, or an institutional medical facility, but rather a relatively self-sufficient community - or village. This idea became a powerful metaphor which influenced many aspects of the design process and helped form my two main intentions.

The first intention I formed was to present a positive image to the community in which the building is to exist. With the advent of drugs which inhibit the physical symptoms of AIDS there is absolutely no reason why people with AIDS cannot continue to live their lives as members of society. Hence the form I wanted the building to take would be assertive, its presence should not be apologetic. "Dignified and strong in character along with a sense of belonging" should be an appropriate way of describing both the building and the people who will inhabit it - a good neighbor.

The second intention I formed was to provide an environment within the building which is sensitive to the particular exigencies of someone that suffers from a chronic illness such as AIDS. People with a chronic illness need to closely monitor their health. In order to better gauge the need for an adjustment of their medication they need to "stay in tune" with their natural rhythms and cycles. I believe that an architecture which heightens the occupants' awareness of the cycles of the natural environment would enable them to relate their human cycles to the larger reference of nature. Within the project I wanted to have as many spaces as possible open to or oriented to the natural elements. The architecture should provide protection from the extremes while allowing the occupants to participate in the moderation of their micro-climate.
The main entrance opens into a skylight covered space which leads to the ambulatory encircling the main interior courtyard. The main courtyard is the focus of the more public aspects within the project.

This project is intended for the sole use of clients of the Tucson AIDS Project which lessens the concern over separation of the residents versus those there for other reasons, but the accommodation of the residents' privacy is a high priority. The two paths west of the main courtyard lead to the resident quarters of the building. The paths are separated from the ambulatory by a small patio.

The residents are given two additional means of entrance to the project other than the one opening off of the entry courtyard. One directly into the resident living area, and the other is on the west side of the studio space. The residential apartments are organized around and open off of a series of paths and courtyards rather a single larger open space in order to give the impression of a system of "village"
Building Overview

The birdseye perspective on the facing page shows how the various components of the project work together. A low wall encompasses the site which rises up to enclose courtyards for the residents on both the east and west of the site. The low wall is broken on the south elevation to allow the driveway to reach the main entry. A pergola supported by masonry piers reaches out of the entry courtyard to span the driveway as a welcoming gesture. The main entrance as well as the office/reception area open up off the entry courtyard.

Another pergola acts to enclose the western leg of the ambulatory to provide an additional level of privacy to the residential quarters. The residents have access to the resident living area from this patio in order to avoid any other gathering which might be going on in the main courtyard.

The counseling rooms on the east face a low walled courtyard which affords privacy with a sense of openness.

The architecture which defines the system of paths and courts of the resident quarters is reinforced with the paving patterns. The paving patterns help define individual areas, and also give a sense of continuity between different areas.

The informal asymmetrical interior courtyard to the west reveals the private character within and is the culmination of a journey through the “village”.
Resident Quarters

The residential apartments open off of a series of open-air paths and courts. By exposing the interior circulation of the building to the elements a heightened awareness of the cycles of the natural environment will be fostered in the occupants.

The bearing walls are made of concrete block which is mortar-washed and painted rather than stuccoed in order to impart a greater sense of materiality. Window and door openings have pre-cast sill and lintels. The windows are wooden double-hung sash, and the doors are metal pre-hung security doors. The attic vents are formed by leaving out an 8” x 8” block with a metal plate lintel to support the next course of block; the grills are made of 3/8” re-bar welded to a metal plate and attached to the concrete block with expansion bolts. The shed porch roof is attached to the bearing walls and is supported by a wooden post. The Porch is roofed with standing-seam galvanized metal.

The “tower” shown in the facing page is a bathroom within one of the apartments. By articulating the residents’ bathrooms as towers high natural light and good ventilation is obtained on the inside while providing “landmarks” within the “village”.

Resident Apartments

Given the population group which is to inhabit this building of eight households (a household consists of either a single person or a couple) the attempt was made to reconcile the conflicting goals of making the units as self-sufficient as possible without losing sight of the fact that this is a place for people whom want to live in a “group” home. An elusive balance between communal and individual living quarters needed to be found. It was my belief that the individual units should allow almost total privacy if so desired, yet not be so spacious or luxurious as to lose sight of the nature of this project.

The residential apartments all have approximately 450 square feet of interior living area. The intention when laying out the individual units was to make each unit equal in terms of ability to accommodate the same living functions, yet impart a sense of uniqueness. To allow for the greatest degree of flexibility regarding interior living arrangements there are no interior walls within the units other than those of the bathroom. Rather, the attempt was made to provide spaces within the apartments which have a suggestion of being separate without the physical barrier of interior walls.

It is hoped that the best match between individual personalities and apartment unit can be achieved. Some units have more outside space; these would better suit people who possibly are interested in growing things. Other units overlook the more public areas of the village and would possibly be better suited for those interested in the administration of group activities.
The private bathrooms within each unit are articulated as towers in order to give high natural light and good ventilation to the interior while providing "landmarks" within the "village". The bathrooms were given special attention because this is where the residents will most often confront their human frailty.

Glass block panels within a metal frame face north, east and west to allow in natural light. Three inch square metal posts on the northeast and northwest corners of the towers along with the masonry bearing wall which rises to full height on the south hold up a metal pan roof. Between the glass block panels and the metal pan roof there are metal louvers which act as a screen for a continuous vent which can be manually opened or closed from the inside.

Horizontal banding of the tile patterns provides a reference for the ever changing pattern of the sun. By providing an interior space within each unit which allows the occupants to register the patterns of the sun, and to control the ventilation, a heightened awareness of the natural cycles of nature will be fostered.
Resident Living Area

The resident living area is intended to be the focus of the communal activities of the village. This is the place where meals are prepared and eaten, a video is watched, a game of cards is played, a fire is burned on a Winter evening, and mutual friends are entertained.

The architecture of the room allows maximum flexibility in living arrangements within a great hall. The room spans the main courtyard of the project from the more private residential quarters to the west to a courtyard at the property edge on the east. The room is covered by a hipped roof supported by large wooden trusses with clerestory windows at the peaks of the western-most and eastern-most truss. The changing altitude and angles of the sun are registered by the shadows cast from the truss members.
Resident Studio Space

The studio space located at the northwest corner of the site provides space for the residents to pursue individual activities in a group setting.

The first floor has a studio space which opens up to the courtyard to the south. This room has a loading dock which allows for the delivery of materials, or to facilitate the transport of large objects. Also on the first floor is the laundry room, and the staircase which leads to the second floor studio space.

The studio space on the second floor opens up to a patio to the north, and has a spiral staircase which leads to the Mirador on the third floor. The assymetrical trusses over the second floor studio space provide visual interest and focus attention back on the internal courtyard.

The Mirador is accessed through a hatch door which can be closed and walked upon. The Mirador affords a 360 degree view across the flat desert valley of Tucson to the surrounding mountain ranges.
The public areas of the project accommodate many different functions. The office/waiting room which opens off of the entry courtyard will be staffed by the Tucson AIDS project. This is where the activities of the project will be administered. A “nursing room” is linked to the office by a hall. This room can be used to administer medical care to the residents of the project, and possibly other clients of the Tucson AIDS Project.

The three small rooms which open off of the ambulatory surrounding the main courtyard to the east are for mental therapy and counseling, or other non-medical administering purposes. These rooms look out onto a small courtyard to the east bounded by a low wall to afford privacy. This small courtyard is accessible through another opening off of the ambulatory for maintenance purposes.

The main hall to the south of the main courtyard is for larger group activities such as lectures, classes, or ceremonies. The main hall could also be used on an informal basis by the residents of the project when not occupied by more organized activities. The ambulatory which surrounds the main hall has openings which are secured by decorative ironwork, and have wooden shutters on the inside to allow for the control of privacy, or moderation of breezes. The exposure to and involvement with the moderation of nature will foster a heightened awareness of the natural environment.
Somewhere

Someday
Somewhere

We'll find a new way of living
We'll find a way of forgiving
Somewhere

There's a place for us
Peace and quiet and open air
Wait for us
Somewhere

There's a time for us
Someday there'll be a time for us
Time together with time to spare
Time to learn
Time to care
Someday
Somewhere

We'll find a new way of living
We'll find there's a way of forgiving
Somewhere

There's a place for us
A time and a place for us
Hold my hand and we're half way there
Hold my hand and I'll take you there
Somehow
Someday
Somewhere

From "West Side Story"
Written by L. Bernstein, S. Sondheim

The exterior perspective shown on the facing page shows the south front and east side of the project. The main hall rises up out of its protective ambulatory to proclaim the public nature of this building. The pergola extending almost out to the sidewalk is a welcoming gesture for visitors, as well as those who live here. The entry courtyard gives a clue to the passerby of the types of spaces which must be within. The low walls and massing of the project speak of the local building characteristics while the painted concrete block and standing-seam metal roofs project an appropriate contemporary feeling in their materiality. The building is grounded both physically and spiritually in the local community. It is full of pride and self-assurance in its solid and thoughtful presence - a good neighbor.
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