

**LEARNING FROM THE VINEYARD:
BUILDING ENVIRONMENTS EXPRESSIVE OF PLACE**

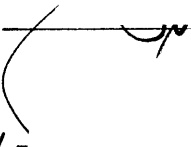
by
Cynthia Orrell Howard
B.A., Wheaton College
1968

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
June, 1977

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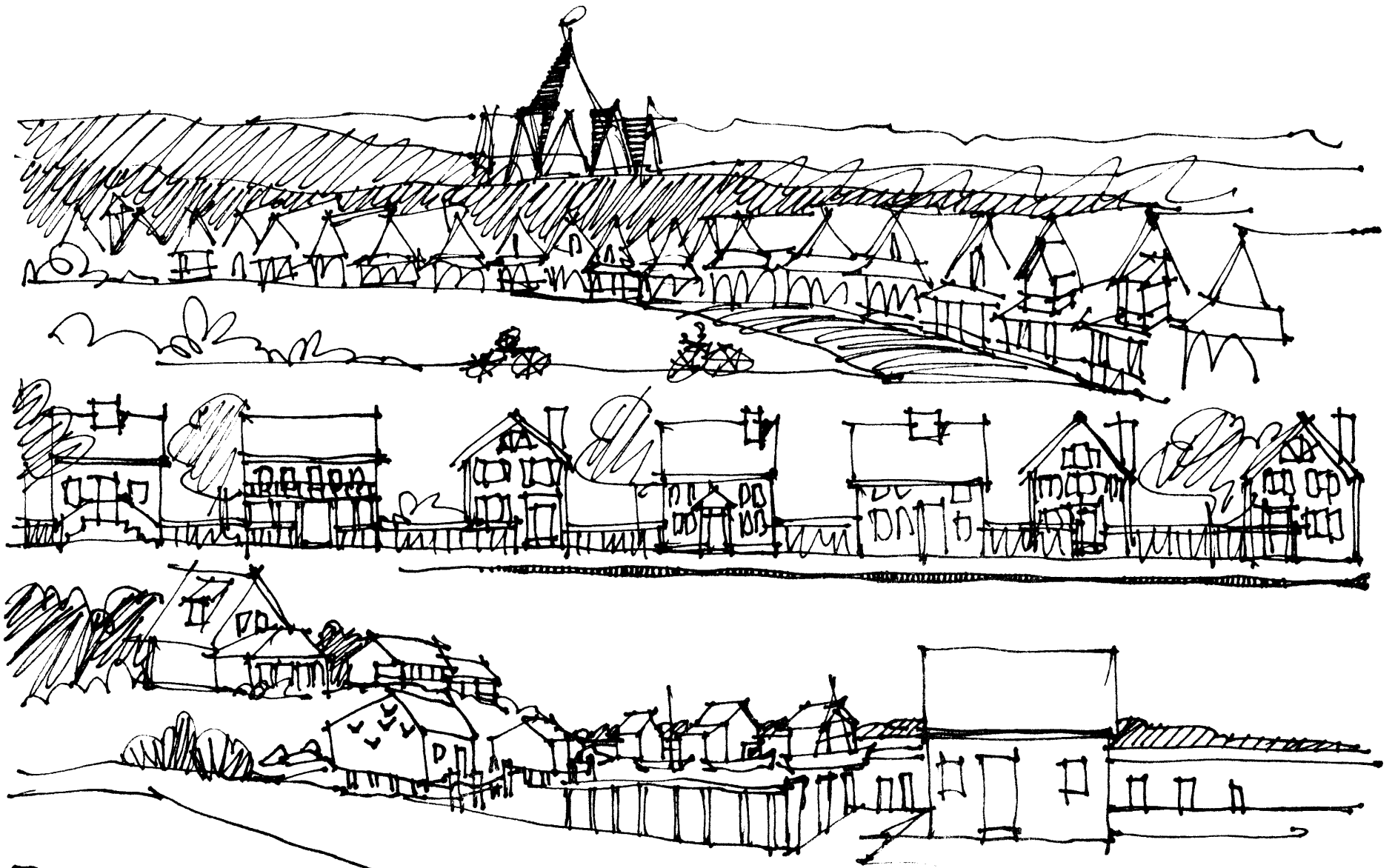
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Learning from the Vineyard : Building Environments Expressive of Place

**LEARNING FROM THE VINEYARD:
BUILDING ENVIRONMENTS EXPRESSIVE OF PLACE**

Identifying the built forms and patterns of siting which characterize Martha's Vineyard Island as a special place. To explore those sets of formal relationships which shape environments exhibiting a consistency of character; in light of their applicability for shaping new development for the Island of an equally high visual standard.

CYNTHIA ORREL HOWARD

Submitted to the Department of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, on February 10, 1977 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture.

The thesis begins with a critical look at the older man-made environments of Martha's Vineyard which characterize the Island as a special place. Factors allowing for the consistency of character exhibited in each of these built places — organization, orientation, size, etc. — are identified and explored in light of their applicability to other land types and densities. The characteristics of the single house in these various place contexts is given special emphasis.

Although some social factors are addressed in the initial exploration of the elements necessary for a built environment to exhibit a strong 'sense of place', the study primarily addresses the visual (and attendant psychological) aspects of place-making; for both traditional Island places and for new, and proposed developments.

The tradition of Island place-making, and the house in these contexts, is explored in the following:

The Formal Town:	Edgartown
The Informal Town:	Oak Bluffs
The Coastal Village:	Menemsha
The Inland Town and Rural House:	West Tisbury
The Summer House Landmarks	

ABSTRACT

New development communities on the Island are then explored in light of their success, or lack of success, in creating larger environments which exhibit a consistency of character and sense of place. Again, the critical factors of organization, orientation, size, etc. are identified in this light. In cases where lack of these qualities is noted an exploration is made of those sets of guidelines, or orienting principles which, if applied, might have allowed for more comprehensible environment and richer sense of place.

In the Plains:	Senqekontacket, Katama
In the Saltlands and Bluffs:	Lobsterville, Moshup's Trail
In the Moraines:	Waterview Farms, Pilot Hill

The thesis concludes with some observations on the traditions of Island built-places which could inform decision-makers concerned with assuring more "Vineyard-like" development for the future, as well as some general conclusions about the factors of imaginability necessary to the physically and aesthetically supportive man-made environment. The manner in which what is learned from the Vineyard might be structured into some mechanism for shaping future built-places is briefly explored and the attendant problems noted.

Thesis Supervisor: Donlyn Lyndon
Title: Professor of Architecture
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LEARNING FROM THE VINEYARD : Building Environments Expressive of Place

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Preface

‘The artist catering to the tastes and expectations of the chosen few is a pitiable creature. Artists obligations lie elsewhere. Villages, cities, regions, states, countries, continents have been turning ugly since the Industrial Revolution. Planning of large change in the provisions for physical living has been left to architects with limited sensual imaginations.’

OTTO PIENE¹

‘We no longer unconsciously achieve development in harmony with its setting, nor do we achieve structures expressive of locality.’

KEVIN LYNCH²

¹ Otto Piene, *More Sky* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), introduction

² Kevin Lynch, *Site Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), pg. 10.

In the first century B.C. Vitruvius, a very influential Roman architect, said that the task of architecture was to produce “commodiousness, firmness, and delight.” Delight — what a wonderful ambition! But how often does it occur in our built environments?

This study was done in partial fulfillment of requirements to complete my academic study for the practice of architecture. As such, it provided me with the opportunity to explore more fully the nature of the skills and sensibilities this profession might bring to the shaping of the physical environment to achieve these ancient objectives. For the most part my sympathies lie with older buildings and places and newer developments, by comparison, seem very disappointing. Why is this so?

What are the qualities of some older buildings and places that make them special; what qualities are missing in modern developments; and where does responsibility lie for those qualities of our built environments that produce a sense of delight in the inhabitant and the observer?

I have chosen to explore these questions in reference to a specific place — Martha’s Vineyard Island off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. This is a place I know and admire from five years acquaintance as a visitor. It is an island with many diverse and memorable built places: a Greek Revival whaling town, a Victorian Gothic summer community, a coastal fishing village, an inland village reflective of a long agricultural tradition, etc. Each of these places has a “quality” about it that sets it off as special and memorable — that quality of delight that Vitruvius described. What are the characteristics of each of these built places which have fostered this sense of delight, and what might be learned from them to inform new developments such that they too will share in the sense of place that distinguishes the Island? The intention of this study is to explore these questions and to document the looking and questioning so that it can be shared, and criticized, by others. It is unlikely that any new conclusions will be drawn from this research; it is an exploration. If it suggests that perhaps there are new questions to be asked, and a broader range of considerations addressed by those who shape our environments, I will consider it a success.

All too often the architect today has come to be associated in the eyes of the public with the artist — the creator of the single artistic statement that only the few can afford (and, occasionally, appreciate). This is unfortunate (though often fostered by the profession itself), for shouldn't architecture be concerned with the quality of the things — *all* the things — we live amongst? (Even the "single-gesture" building occurs in, and affects, this larger context.) This larger domain — the things we live amongst — is not just the responsibility of architects and planners, though theirs is a special role, but it affects everyone and should be subject to the criticism of the general public.³

Essentially this study is a recording of my attempt to understand what qualities of our previous building traditions — specifically on Martha's Vineyard — allowed for the development of memorable places. It is primarily a visual exploration, with some discussion of the history and social implications of the visual forms. It is a *looking* at history, not just for the sake of tracing roots — but to determine a position that signifies for the present.

The study begins with a discussion of "place" — the need each of us have to make a place in the world; how numbers of buildings work together (and with the land) to create a larger identifiable entity — a "place"; and the special role of the individual house in this context.

The study then looks at a number of places that characterize the Island and identifies the critical factors (in organization, size, house types, etc.) which seemed to have allowed for a consistency of character to evolve in their development.

This is followed by a summary of what was learned about Island traditions of place-making from the individual analyses, and what clues this might suggest for new places on Martha's Vineyard.

³ It is interesting to note that our legal system has established that a building constitutes a "general publication"; that its appearance, therefore, is "public property".

The last half of the study looks at recent Island developments and evaluates their success in creating equally memorable environments. Where lack of success is noted, the author speculates about what critical factors might have allowed for a greater consistency of character to have evolved. The critical impact of different landscape types on the development of built places is also explored.

The study concludes with a summary of what was learned from the Vineyard by a visual analysis of its old and new built places and with a description of "clues" this analysis might provide for shaping new places.

The designation of the places that are "special" to the Vineyard will vary with the person doing the observing, and the time and nature of their association with the place. I have attempted to look at the different types of environments which to me, as a visitor, seem characteristic.

Martha's Vineyard is many things to many people — a testimony to its richness as a place. For any distortions, or overlooking of critical factors that may be noted by the reader, I can only apologize and hope that the analysis that *was* done may offer new insight, and that the shortcomings stemming from the viewpoint of only one observer will be recognized as unavoidable.

Christina Onesti Howard

2/77



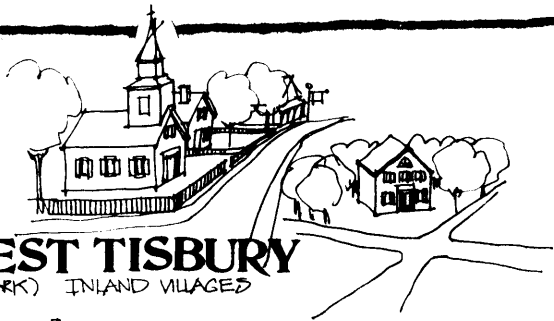
I wish to thank the many people who have been so generous with their time and ideas in the course of this study. Though often not in agreement with each other, each has impressed me with his/her special love for the Island and a deep concern for the shape of its future:

Polly Burroughs, Edgartown
Tom Counter, *Vineyard Open Land Foundation*, West Tisbury
Ed Cuetara, Architect, West Tisbury
Carolyn Cullen, *Trade Wind Flying Service*, Oak Bluffs
Barbara Nevin, *Whale Realty*, Vineyard Haven
Richard Thorman, *Island Properties*, Oak Bluffs
Everett Whiting, West Tisbury
Martha's Vineyard Commission, Oak Bluffs

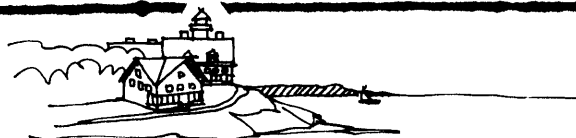
I also wish to acknowledge the support of Donlyn Lyndon, my thesis advisor during the course of this study, and to mention him and others who, though not always referred to specifically in the text, have been seminal in forming my ideas about the concerns of architecture and have provided the inspiration, indeed, a good many of the ideas outright contained in this study:

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*
Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City, Site Planning*
Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses*
Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture, Intentions in Architecture*

Sincere thanks also to MIT and the Boles Fund for funding in support of this study.



WEST TISBURY
(CHILMARK) INLAND VILLAGES



EAST CHOP
SUMMER PLACE



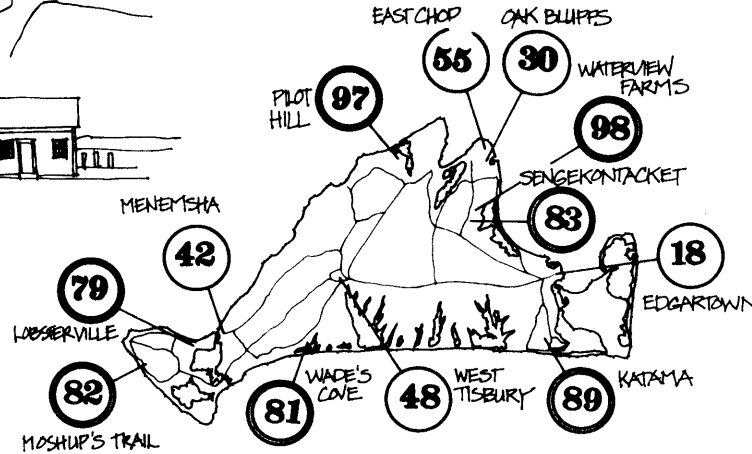
OAK BLUFFS
INFORMAL TOWN



MENEMSHA
COASTAL VILLAGE



EDGARTOWN
FORMAL TOWN



Farms



Landmarks

Summer Houses

- KEY**
- TRADITIONAL PLACES
 - NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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Country Road Houses

**ISLAND
BUILT PLACES**



I. Introduction

“Voyages without islands to touch would be epics of monotony. Whether for diversion of thought or for easing of the physical body, men demand periods, points of reference, islands fixed in the turbulence of giant waters, or, if eluding the compass, still haunting the mind.”

LOREN EISELEY¹

“Trouble is, the Island is too attractive, too close. The ferry boat that feeds it is too fat. Small ferries make for small islands.”

BOSTON GLOBE
October 26, 1976²

¹ From the foreword to *Guale, the Golden Coast of Georgia*, by Robert Hanie, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

² Page 1; article by Peter Anderson.

Most people hold Islands as special places. Islands offer a promise of escape from the mundane, and for many the crossing of water becomes the symbolic act of leaving behind all too familiar activities and problems. Martha's Vineyard's beaches, bluffs, and other land forms, more varied than those found on the mainland due to its more recent geologic origin, attract visitors and residents alike; but of equal allure are its many settled areas. Even the first-time visitor is drawn to, and admires, the Island towns and villages revealing the heritage of a way of life for three centuries shaped by close ties to the sea and land.

Yet this very attractiveness has become a source of problems. Increased mobility has brought enormous pressure for development to this fragile environment and poses an, as yet, unsolved dilemma for Martha's Vineyard and many other islands and historic areas around the country: how can they retain their unique qualities and still help fulfill the need for places of refuge without being overwhelmed by the type of development that destroys their original attraction?

Solving this dilemma is critical to the Island's future. While once nearly self-sufficient from harvests of land and sea, fishing, agriculture and services now account for only 8% the Island's income; 51% of its support is derived from the tourist industry. If it were proposed that all development cease and the Island be left forever as it is now, the problem would remain; for the Island derives 41% of its income from new building construction.³

In April of 1972 Senator Edward Kennedy, alarmed at the rate and quality of development that was occurring, took the matter into his own hands and submitted to the U.S. Senate bill S.3485, the Nantucket Sound Islands Trust Bill, an attempt to elicit federal intervention for the protection of the Island. There was federal recognition of the Island's uniqueness:

There is much about the Nantucket Sound Islands which makes them distinctive — not only because

³ From the “Survey of the Economy of Martha's Vineyard”, Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission, 1973 (n.p.), as quoted in Bonita Barrs, “Jurisdictional Allocations in Land Use Planning: The Battle for Control on Martha's Vineyard”, MCP Thesis, MIT, 1975, p. 11.

they are islands, but because even among islands their geology, their architecture, their history and their current life style sets them apart.

118 *Congressional Record* 12034

and national recognition of their vulnerability:

Of the Atlantic Islands, perhaps the most desperately in need of protection . . . is Martha's Vineyard . . . now teetering on the edge of an uncontrolled speculative explosion that could destroy in a decade the delicate balance between man and nature that has evolved there in the course of three centuries.

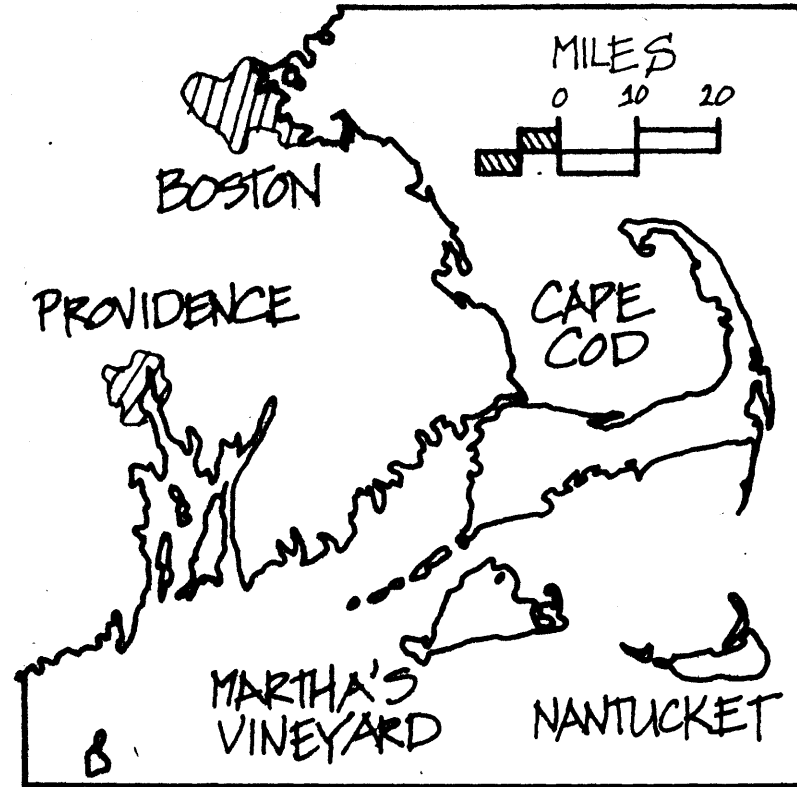
New York Times editorial, October 1971

This much-publicized bill has since died, but it left in its wake an increased concern for the quality of the Island's future and an assuming of greater local responsibility and control represented by the creation of an all-Island planning agency, the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The intervening years since the introduction of the Kennedy bill have, for the country as a whole, been marked by an increased ecological awareness and the emerging of a new land ethic. On Martha's Vineyard this can be observed in the adoption by many Island towns in their zoning legislation (and in some cases, the adoption of zoning itself for the first time) of some of the proposals put forward in *Looking at the Vineyard*, a study of Island land types and measures for their protection prepared by Kevin Lynch and Sawsaki Associates⁴ for the Vineyard Open Land Foundation.

One might speculate that the next development will be a growing awareness of the need for a "building ethic" as well; for as the built areas of the Island expand, the visual quality of the environment will be determined less by the land itself and more by the character of what is placed upon it.

The Martha's Vineyard Commission is attempting to plan for this projected growth on the Island. Determining the optimum form for development is a difficult task and must take into ac-

⁴Then Sawsaki Dawson and Demay Associates



According to the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission, three million people live within a day's drive of the Island. During the busy summer months the winter-time population of 6,000 can swell to as many as 50,000. Source: Bonita Barra, "Jurisdictional Allocations in Land Use Planning; the Battle for Control on Martha's Vineyard" (MCP thesis, MIT, 1973), p. 10.

count a myriad of factors — roads, services, drainage, taxes, etc. The Commission is looking at alternatives of various scales from 400 hamlets scattered throughout the Island to one large central town. What will be the nature of these new places, and how will their character and identity be established? The answer to this question will be critical to the future way of life for Martha's Vineyard. As the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission has pointed out, "the bulk of the Island's economy, [92%], is dependant on its *attractiveness* as a resort community".⁵ While only one of many factors that determine a sense of place ("attractiveness"), the *appearance* of these new communities will play a key role in establishing their identity.

Although the design factor may be only a part of the whole process of getting something built, it is of the same importance as the tip of an iceberg, being that part which is normally *seen* and which, to the outside world, *represents the whole*.⁶

A new land ethic spurred new protective legislation and controls; perhaps an emerging building ethic may also, although the nature of what these might be is far from clear. Each of the tools presently available for controlling the visual quality of the built environment has, in practice, fallen short of insuring a unified consistency of character and an identity of place in the built environment.

Zoning

The dimensional constraints of present zoning restrictions, while they do affect some of the qualities that shape the appearance of built places, are primarily restrictive in nature and have been shaped to a great extent by considerations of fire, safety, health and services. Zoning does not seem to be fine-grained enough to offer substantive clues to the person about to build, and thus impact a given community, as to what the shared aspirations for that place are. It is quite possible within present zoning constraints to build a "white elephant" or "sore thumb", and some have.

⁵ Barrs, "Jurisdictional Allocations in Land Use Planning: The Battle for Control on Martha's Vineyard," p. 12.

⁶ George Steven, *Remodeling Old Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1975), p. 16.

Developer-Built Communities

Another manner in which large pieces of the built environment are shaped is through developers and the "planned community." While usually subject to the same public constraints facing the single home builder, the developer has a greater responsibility, and *opportunity*, to affect the sense of place, character and quality of the environment due to both the larger size of the development and the larger-scale decisions and controls that can be imposed upon the results. In this case the developer must draw upon his own or his professional consultants' design skill, imagination and sense of appropriateness. Though many memorable places have been fashioned by this method, the public has no assurance that this will always be so.⁷

Design Guidelines

A Vineyard neighbor, Nantucket Island, has imposed upon itself a more recently created method for controlling development: historic district design guidelines. Because of its special status as a Massachusetts Historic District, the entire island is subject to strict design review by the Nantucket Historic District Commission. The design guidelines which control the appearance of new construction are derived from the 18th and 19th Century houses in Nantucket Town, the Island's only large community. These guidelines are "stringent both with regard to the large number of building features subject to review and the Commission's narrow interpretation of

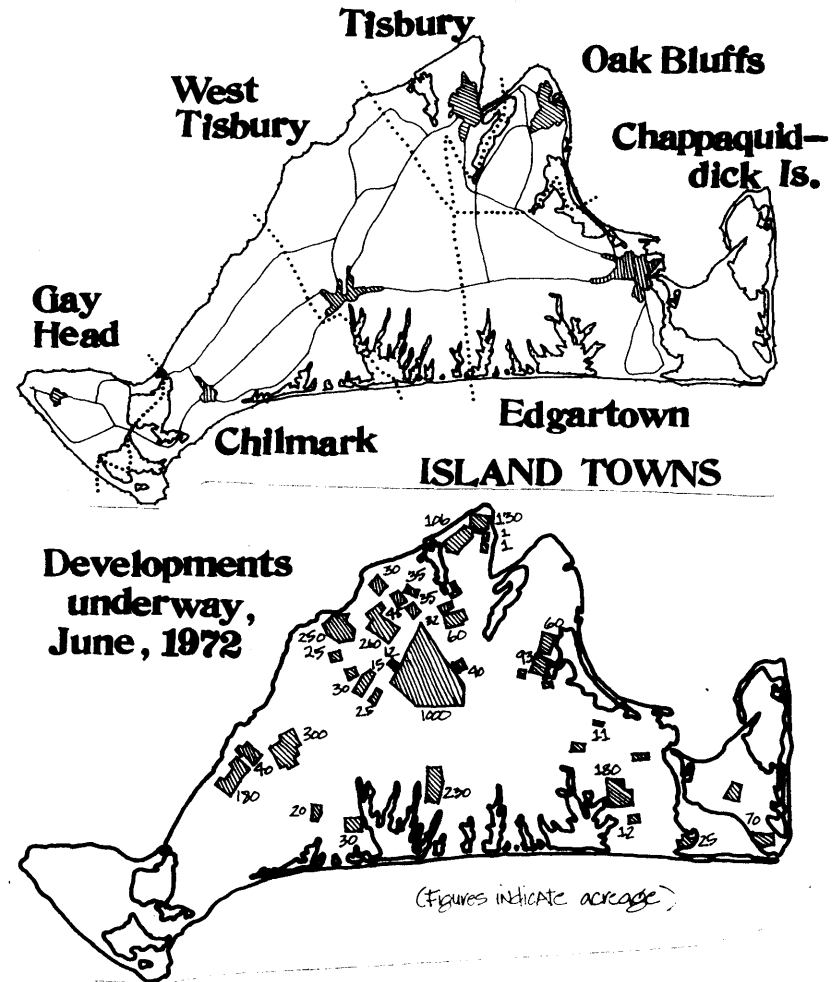
⁷ With more of the environment being shaped by developers, and now subject to local review, a serious problem has arisen. Without clear ideas of what is considered appropriate to the Island, developers are pretty much "stabbing in the dark" to come up with acceptable solutions (a time-consuming, therefore, *costly* method), and reviewers, for lack of a more sophisticated basis on which to judge appropriateness, are having to fall back on simple notions of density or height for decision-making. What seems to be needed is a more articulate "language" for communication between those who are proposing new places and those who will be affected by them.

⁸ Dorothea Haas, *Evolution of Application of Design Controls on Nantucket Island, a Case Study*, (Boston: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1976), p. 8.

what architectural styles or expressions are compatible with Nantucket's historic character."⁸ The buildings resulting from this method of design control have been criticized for their monotony and unimaginative mimicking of older styles. Further, a basic problem has arisen from the application of design criteria derived from a town, street-oriented, context to the low-density development for the open landscape of the rest of the island. An evaluation of this method for shaping new places concludes that "[w]hile these design standards are readily applicable to the restoration of century old houses, they have failed to adequately guide the design of the 120 new homes constructed annually."⁹ Design standards derived from the existing character of a place would seem to offer a solution for assuring compatible development in an historic environment, yet in practice the drafting and monitoring of these guidelines have created problems of their own. On Martha's Vineyard, where there are *numbers* of different architectural traditions from which design guidelines might be derived, the determination of such guidelines, and their enforcement, would be very difficult, if possible.

The purpose of this study is not to formulate new controls for development. Islanders have made it clear they don't want outsiders, the federal government included, telling them how to run their Island. This should be respected — the Island's future is safest in the hands of those who know and love it most. But one persistent Island notion should be challenged: the idea that because the Island managed for 300 years without design controls they aren't needed now. In earlier times the Island was an isolated two-industry (fishing and farming) community; "controls" were not needed because they already existed implicitly — there was a shared understanding of what was, and was not, appropriate. Building possibilities were also limited to the materials and methods at hand. Today the range of choice is far wider and the possibility of a home that was designed in Illinois, fabricated in Connecticut, packaged and brought over by ferry on a flat-bed truck for erection on the Vineyard, is very real.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. i.



Developments underway on Martha's Vineyard, June 1972. Source: Anne W. Simon, *No Island Is an Island*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 126. At the time of the introduction of the Kennedy bill it was estimated that the Island was only 15% developed; it is not difficult to understand the alarm generated by the amount of development indicated here. One subdivision alone accounted for 867 houses — representing more new houses than the total existing in two Island towns. (*Vineyard Gazette*, Nov. 2, 1973, p. 1.)

Aside from the necessary income new development brings to Martha's Vineyard, it is possible that these new places could in fact *add* to the character and variety of the Island. It is worth remembering that a substantial portion of one of the Island's most unique places, Oak Bluffs, was the work of speculative developers during the 1872 Island land boom, and that West Chop was a fashionable 1887 "development." It seems it is not so much the *amount* of development, but its *character*, that will prove critical.

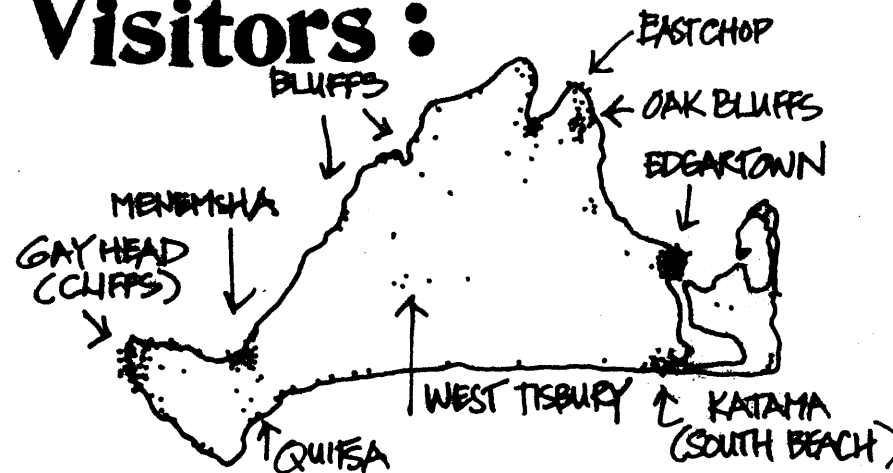
Frequently new development is looked upon with skepticism, even resentment, by Islanders, a common complaint being

that it is inappropriate to the Island; "un-Vineyard-like." In 1971 the *Vineyard Gazette* warned:

The prosperity of the Vineyard depends on rejecting, not copying, mainland standards.

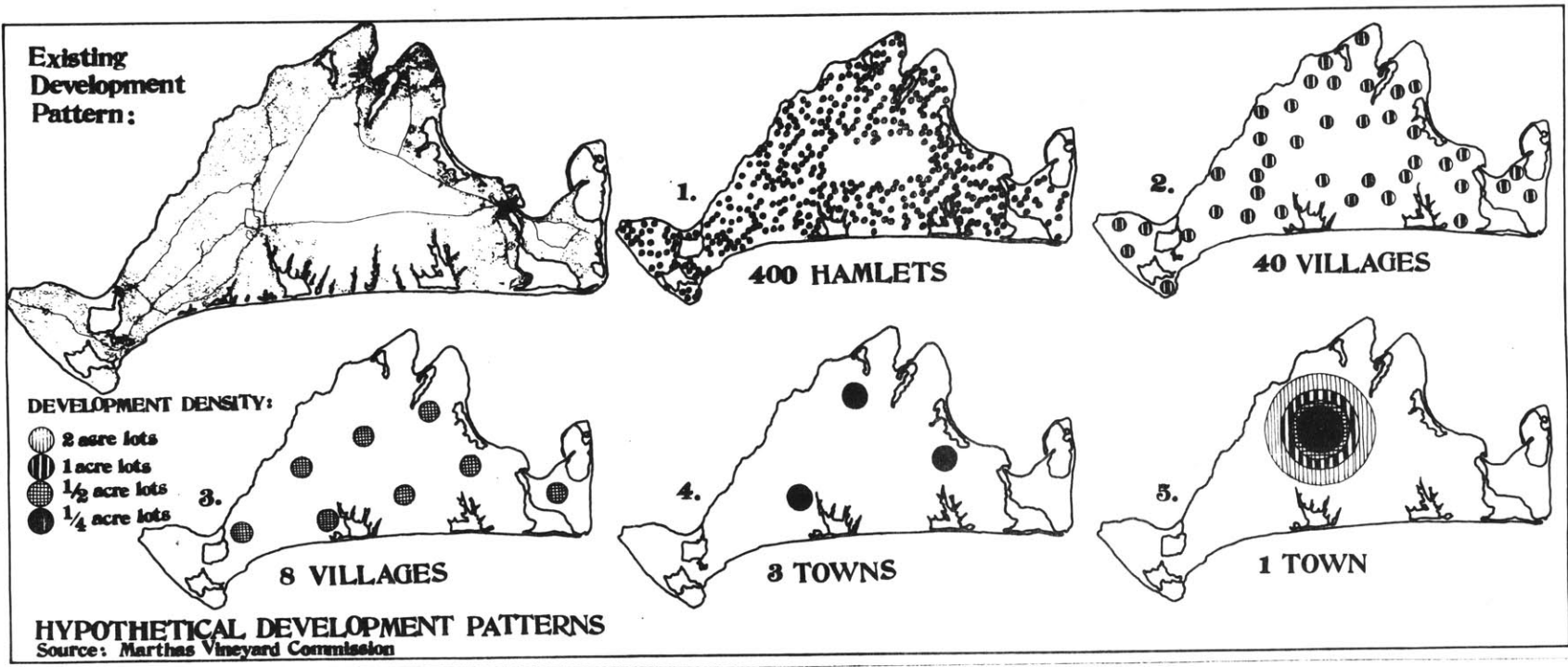
What will these Island standards be; how can they be determined? It seems logical to first look very carefully at the built places that are special to the Vineyard and to try and identify the critical factors in their organization, size, house types, etc. that allowed for the development of a certain character and sense of place — to determine what is "Vineyard-like." This is the purpose of the exploration which follows.

Preferred Places of Visitors :



SOURCE : LOOKING AT THE VINEYARD

As part of the research for *Looking at the Vineyard*, interviews were conducted with 84 summer visitors at the Oak Bluffs ferry landing. This map represents their response to the question: "What places do you like or remember best?" While not a very large sample, the interview does seem to suggest that the man-made places are as much, if not greater, an attraction to visitors as the Island's open landscapes. Source: *Looking at the Vineyard*, p. 6.

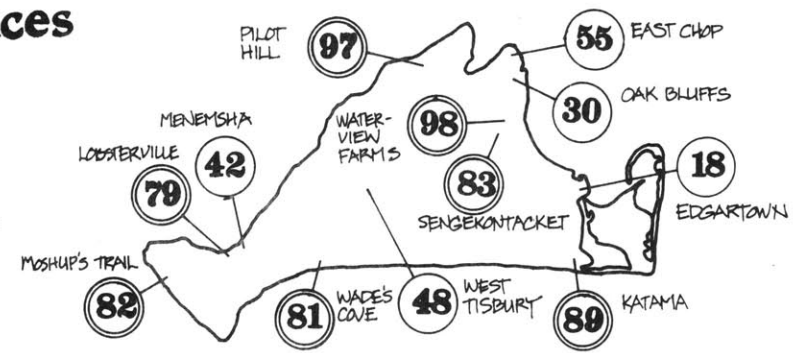


The chart above illustrates the development options being looked at by the Martha's Vineyard Commission as of October 1976. At first glance some of them appear quite frightening — 400 hamlets, or 40 villages (on an island that only has one traffic light!) They also pose some difficult questions — what makes a hamlet, or village, or town; and are they equally appropriate to the diverse land types on the Vineyard? Source: Unpublished material, used by permission of the Martha's Vineyard Commission.

Island Places Studied:

○ TRADITIONAL PLACES
 ◐ NEW DEVELOPMENTS

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II. What Makes a Place a PLACE?



One of the attributes of PLACE is that it exhibits a strong visual image and is able to be grasped by the observer as a single entity. Islands, by their very nature, have this quality.

When describing a particular place one begins by identifying its dominant features: its quality of openness and natural cover if it is a landscape, the organizing pattern (road, grid, centers, etc.) and quality of the containing surfaces if it is urban. Noting any landmarks will also help to "fix" a picture of the place in the mind's eye, as they do on the land itself.

The word "place" denotes a physical environment, but can also mean "to distribute in an orderly manner." It seems that in some measure *identity* and *order* are implicit in the word; as "to make a place for one's self in the world."

If a physical place lacks structure, seems chaotic and exhibits no special features to distinguish it from its surroundings, it will be difficult to describe its image and convey its identity to others. This difficulty is no small matter, for a sense of the structure and meaning of one's larger physical world is essential for a psychic and social sense of orientation and belonging (let alone for the aesthetic pleasure the well-formed environment affords.) As Robert Redfield has pointed out in *The Little Community*:

The environment of men is not only artificial; it is mental. In towns . . . men build their environments into their very houses and streets . . . in every community, primitive or civilized, what most importantly surrounds and influences the people are the traditions, sentiments, norms and aspirations that make up the common mental life . . . The world of men is made up in the first place of ideas and ideals.¹

Different environments facilitate this process of image-making. The special and memorable environment, the PLACE as referred to in the heading for this section, is distinguished by the strong image it conveys to the observer of shared "ideas and ideals."

Like any good framework, such [an image] gives the individual a possibility of choice and a starting point for the acquisition of further information. A clear image of the surroundings is thus a useful basis for individual growth. A vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of producing a sharp image, plays a social role as well. It can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication. A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish an harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. Indeed, a distinctive and legible environment not only offers security but also heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience.

... the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar, but distinctive as well.²

The memorable environment which can enrich the act of inhabiting and the ex-

¹ Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 29, 30., quoted in Page Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill, The Town in American History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), p. 183.

² Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 4, 5.

perience of place, as a thing in itself is worthy of analysis. Kevin Lynch, perhaps one of the first to address this larger environmental image as an area worthy of the designer's concern (himself a Vineyard resident), proposed a method for such study in his *The Image of the City*:

An environmental image may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure and meaning. It is useful to abstract these for analysis, if it is remembered in reality they always appear together.

Identity

A workable image requires first the identification of the object, which implies its distinctions from other things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is identity, not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness.

Structure

Second the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. [On one level this structure has to do with the ease with which the individual can "place" himself in it — whether it is possible to carry in your mind an image of the larger order so that you have a sense of where you are in relation to some larger pattern. This is structure of a basically two-dimensional sort — the place as a diagram. But there is also the sense of structure created by the third dimension, and by the social "dimension" — whether things are public or private and whether you can enter or not. The experience of a place is not solely a visual phenomena, but will be



One of the characteristics of the Island is its sharp division between town and country. This quality threatens to be undermined by present development methods.
Top: The Keith farm along Middle Road, Chilmark; one of the Island's most spectacular views of the land and ocean beyond.
Above: South Water Street looking towards Main Street, Edgartown.

shaped by how and where you can move through it (*how it is experienced*) and the activities and modes of behavior housed within it.]

Meaning

Finally, this object must have some meaning to the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but a quite different one from spatial or pattern relation.

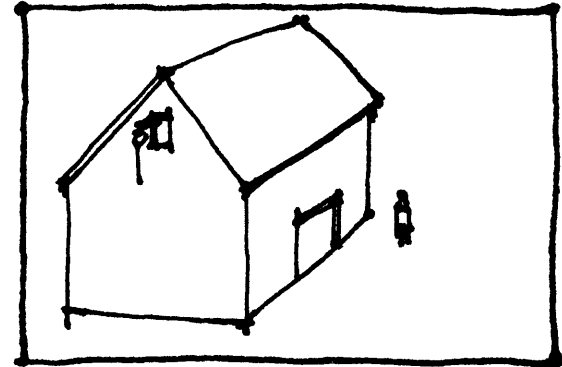
*Thus an image useful for making an exit requires the recognition of a door as a distinct entity, of a spatial relation to the observer, and its meaning as a hole for getting out. These are not truly separable. The visual recognition of a door is matted together with its meaning as a door.*³

A door will seldom only have meaning as an exit — it carries with it numbers of meanings which are established by its relationship to other things; its size relative to the building and to the human body, its shape and detail, the place it opens on to (“back door,” “front door”), etc.

This door conveys the
MEANING —

Barn

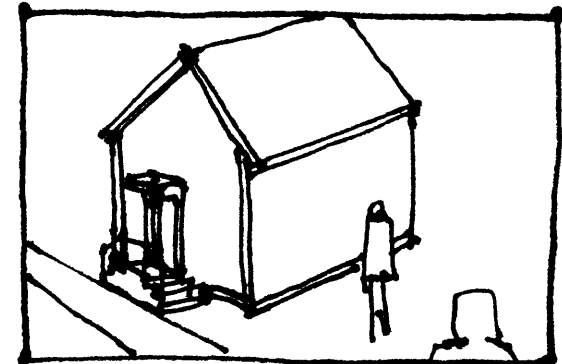
(Door for farmer,
machines & animals)



This door conveys the
MEANING —

Home

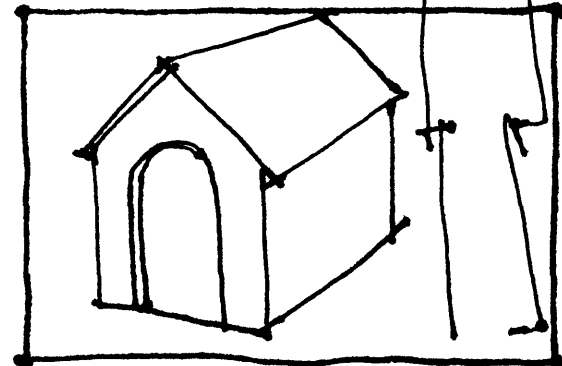
(Door for residents &
guests)



This door conveys the
MEANING —

Dog House

(Dog's door 😊!)

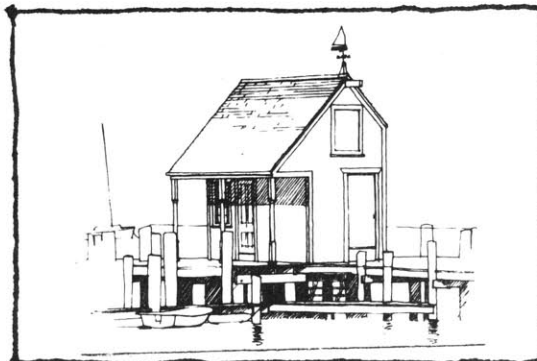


³ Ibid., p. 8.

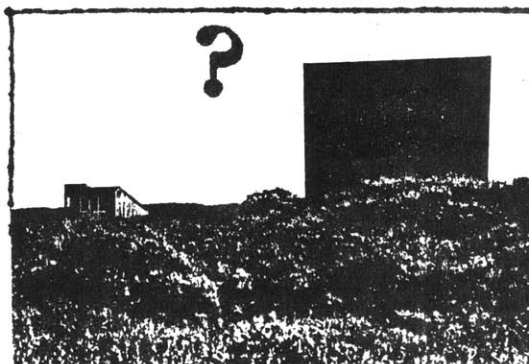
Here the door establishes the scale of the building and gives “clues” to its purpose — tool or work shed. Other relationships which can be “read” by the observer — the stone wall and tended shrubs and grass — clearly convey the image of a man-made place in the woods by the side of the road.



This building conveys quite a different meaning. Its placement along the wharf enables it to serve as a gate, marking the landside and seaside (public/semi-public) and serving in some way the traffic which passes through it. It conveys the meaning that the place beyond belongs to someone, that they control it in some fashion, and that purposeful activity goes on here. It does not say “do not loiter”, but in a gentle and delightful way it is just as effective in expressing its territoriality to the casual passerby.



What is it? Its identity — house, barn, shed?/public, private? — is unclear. No window, chimney, door or tree serves to establish its size or reason for being. The framework for understanding this building — thus its meaning — is ambiguous.

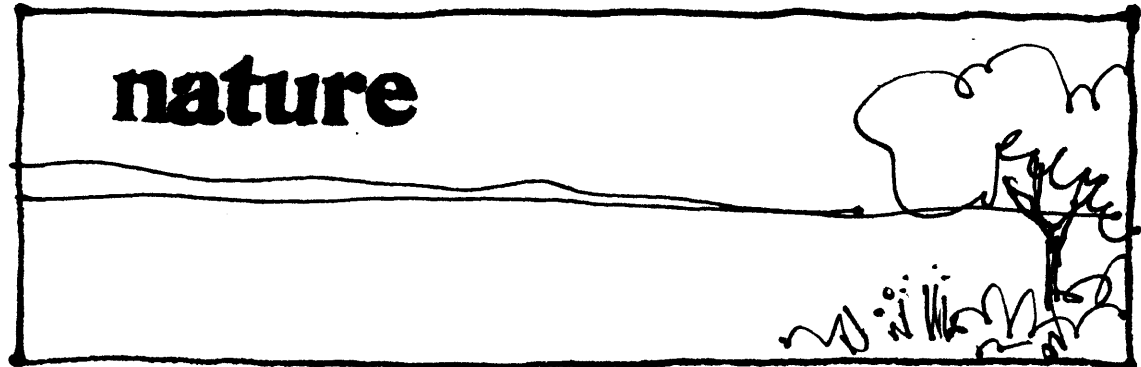


These two Edgartown houses, one on North Water St. (top) and one on Main St., illustrate how the recognition of a general framework allows the differences within that framework to carry great meaning. In both houses there is an agreement that the entry address the street and that all architectural pretensions be placed here. (The form of this decoration — classical — has remained constant for three centuries.) The much greater size and elevated placement of the entry on the Water St. house clearly conveys its status as the home of a more prosperous member of the community. It's not an entirely different “animal” — just a more boastful one!

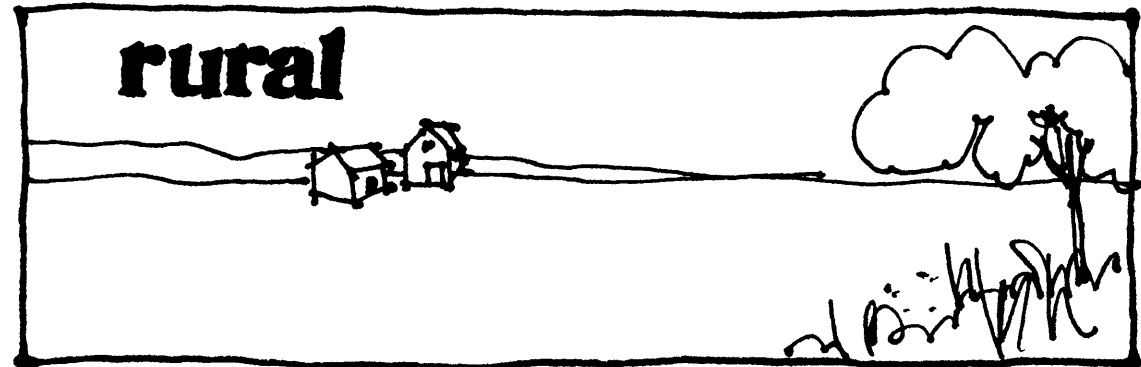
Kevin Lynch's method for analyzing an image is useful in the study of a door, a house, the natural or the man-made environment — in short, any environment that can serve as a place for man. To illustrate:

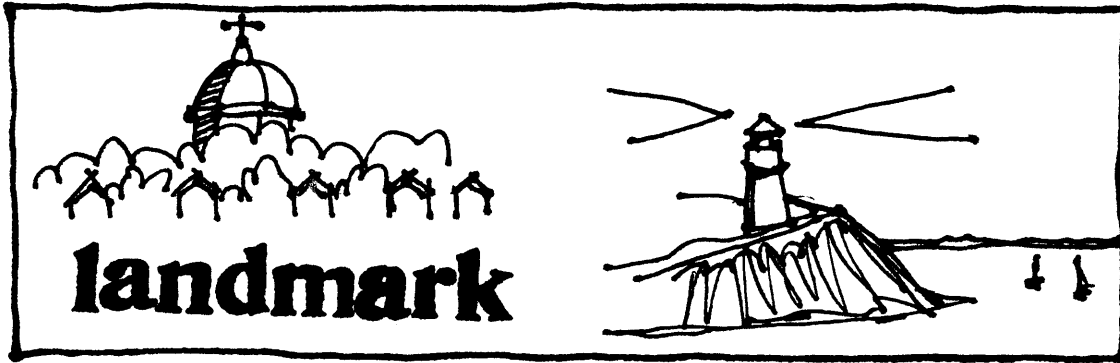
IDENTITY/ STRUCTURE/ MEANING

When the view is open as far as the eye can see (the limits which establish its *structure*) its *identity* is natural: the sea, the moors, the forest, etc. and the place conveys the *meaning* of wildness and freedom. The direct experience of unencumbered Nature is a very powerful one (and an important aspect of the Vineyard as a place).

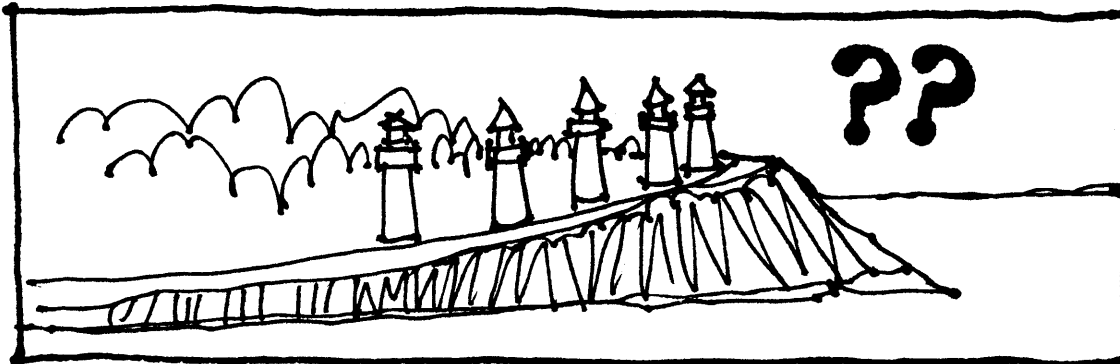


The single house on the open land changes the identity of the place — it has tamed and claimed it (visually, if not in fact). The structure of the place is established by the relationship of the building and the land surrounding it. With the land remaining the dominant visual feature the meaning conveyed is rural.





The gesture the building makes of "claiming" the land around it, by virtue of its singularity, has great power; a "landmark."



As more objects are placed upon the land, the identity of the place becomes more complex, and is shaped more by the relationships between the objects than by the land itself. It is almost a contradiction in terms to have numbers of "landmarks" in the same place.



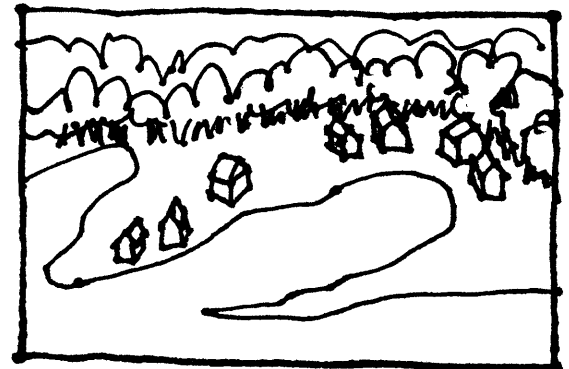
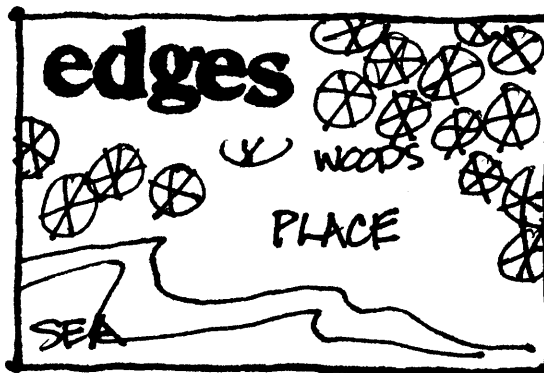
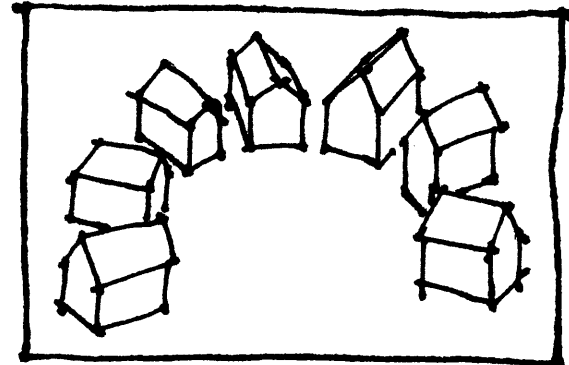
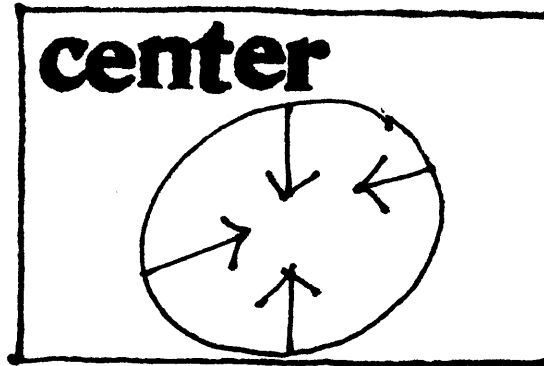
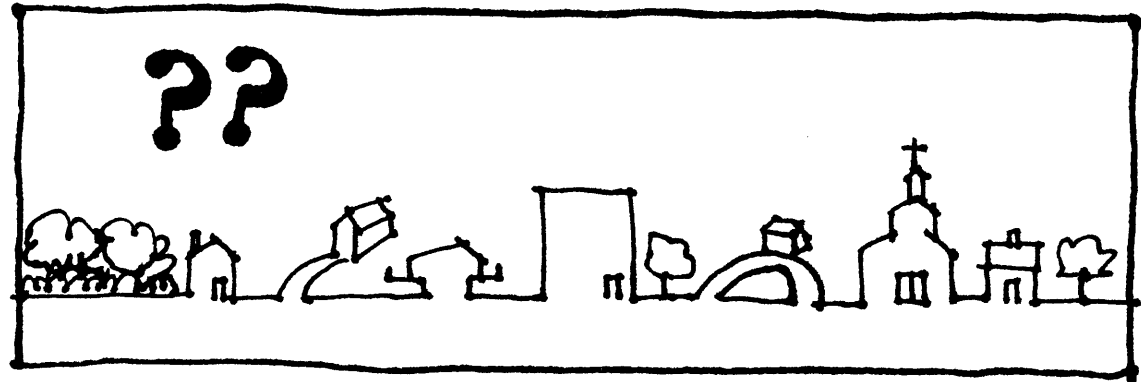
The meaning now must be carried by the objects themselves, and by the relationships we can read and understand. The differences in the environment become meaningful *because* there is a *framework* within which to differ.

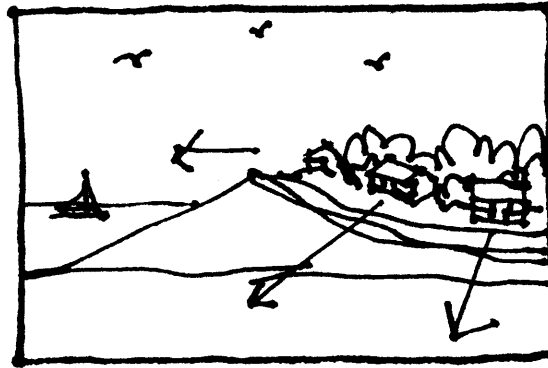
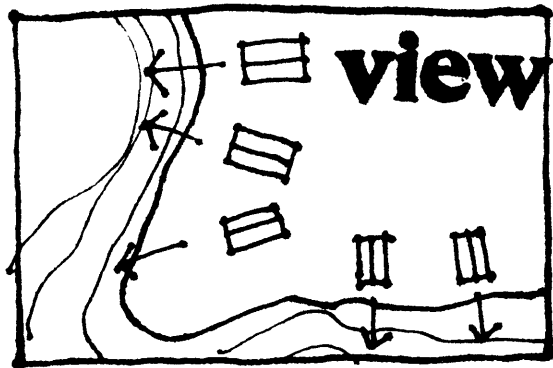
If there are too *many* differences, thus no understandable framework, the differences become confusing and lack meaning.

In this more complex environment, where the sense of place — the identity as a single entity — must be established by numbers of buildings, an ordering mechanism is needed. This can be accomplished by a number of means:

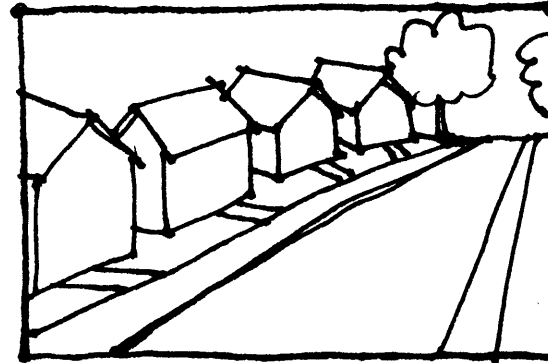
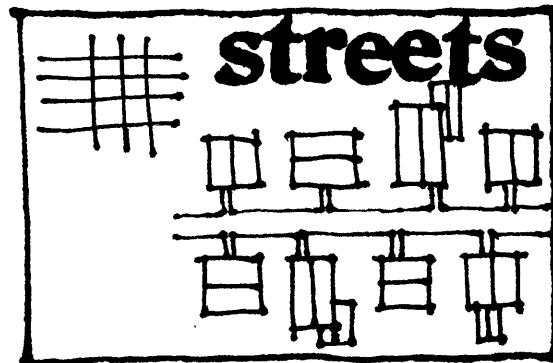
By a central focus so that the space within is claimed and defined by the grouping itself.

By recognizable boundaries, so that edges contain it as an entity.





By a shared orientation and attitude towards the land,



or to the road or street.

Other factors can establish, or help to establish, the character of a place as an identifiable entity:

- a uniformity of scale
- an orderly pattern of public/private zones
- a similarity of house types
- use of color, materials, etc.

But there are no simple formulas or diagrams to generate a "place." In a given instance many factors will effect and modify

the framework:

- density, and limits to size as an entity
- purpose of the place
- nature as a community
- shared and/or public facilities
- the characteristics of the land itself

The critical factor in the establishment of a strong sense of place is some unifying sense of character which sets that place off as special and distinct; but this does not

have to imply uniformity. There is also pleasure in change, surprise, even mystery, in the discovery of the physical world; *provided* they occur within some recognizable framework and can, in time, be apprehended.

*Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.*⁴

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

The place of the individual house in establishing this sense of place is paramount, for they are the building blocks from which the larger community of men grows:

What does it mean to build? The old German word for to build was "baun" and means to dwell. That is, to stay, to remain The word "bin" (am) came from the old word to build, so that "I am", "you are" means: I dwell, you dwell. The way that you are and I am, the way [we] are on earth is "Baun", dwelling Dwelling is the basic principal of existence.

HEIDEGGER⁵

. . . the house's situation in the world . . . gives us, quite concretely . . . the metaphysically summarized situation of man in the world.

NORBERG-SCHULZ⁶

In the following sections I have attempted to explore the image of a number of Vineyard places, and to discuss the manner of "place-making" which has enabled a consistency of character to evolve in each of them. In analyzing these frameworks I have tried to designate those factors in organization, orientation, density, size, house type, etc., which seem to be critical in establishing this special imageability,

⁵ Heidegger, "Baun Wohnen Denken" (n. p., 1954), pp. 20, 21, 35, quoted in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 31.

⁶ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 27, 28.

and to explore the potential and limitations of each of these factors as tools for shaping new places.








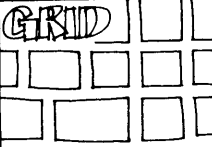
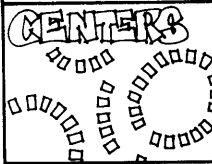
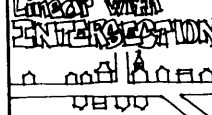
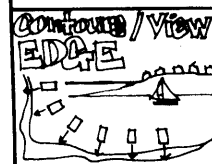
It should be noted again that this study is primarily a visual study; a looking at Island places to designate those qualities of their appearance and the experience they afford, which create a sense of place. But places also house people and activities, "ideas and ideals," and the mere duplication of an imageable visual form will not assure the creation of "place." (For example, the duplication of Menemsha's form in a condominium village may or may not produce a "place"; for certain it will have an entirely different meaning.)

Architects and planners, the "form-givers" in society, can help to prod this sense of place into being through their efforts; in the long run it will be the activities, dreams and aspirations of those who come to dwell, and shape places for themselves, that will make that form a "place," for: ". . . the essence of life is not a feeling of being, of existence, but a feeling of participation and a flowing onward, necessarily expressed in terms of time, and secondarily expressed in terms of space."⁷

What are the characteristics of special Island places, and what might form-givers learn from them to create equally memorable new built places?

⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xii.

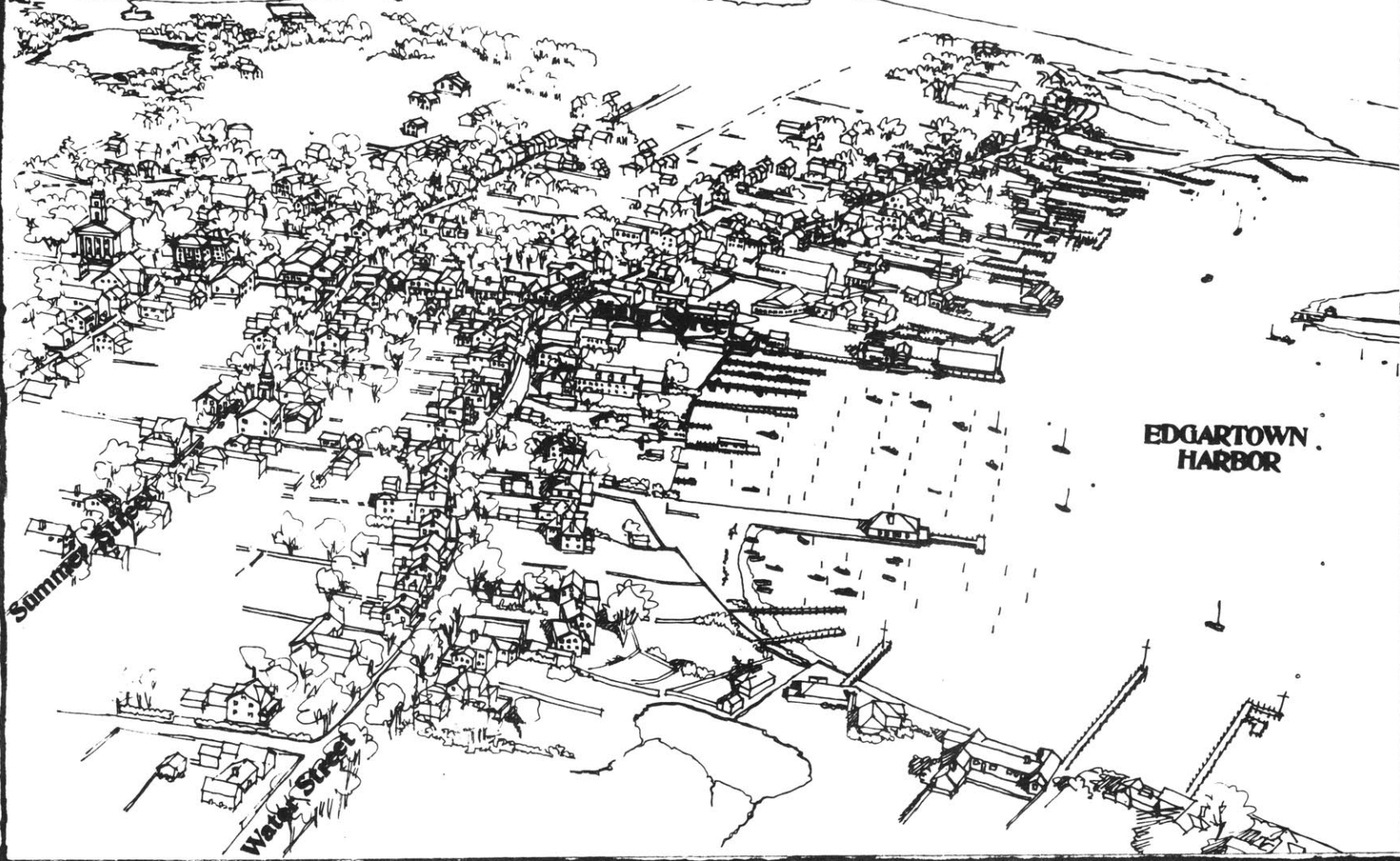
The chart on page 16 is an attempt to provide a quick reference for the material covered in the following chapters. The four horizontal divisions represent the larger organizing mechanisms which have shaped island built places. The vertical divisions are divided into three sections. The first category has to do with the characteristics of the built place; the next two sections are an exploration of the organizing mechanism — how other house types might be accommodated by the larger form, and how adaptable this method for organizing larger places is to other Island land types. The numbers indicate the pages where these issues are discussed.

FRAMES - WORK	IDENTITY	STRUCTURE						CORRELATION OF FORM TO HOUSE TYPES				ADAPTABILITY TO LANDSCAPES		
	KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACE	HIERARCHY WITHIN FORM	ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LAND	PUBLIC/PRIVATE ZONES	HOUSE-TO-HOUSE RELATIONSHIP (DENSITY)	PLACE OF THE CAR/UTILITIES	LIMITS TO SIZE/GROWTH OF FORM	FORMAL-ADDRESSING	INFORMAL-ADDRESSING	CLAIMING	CLAIMING/LANDMARK	OPEN PLAINS SALT LANDS	MORRAINE-WOODED	BLUFFS
														
 EDGARTOWN - FORMAL TOWN	19	19	23	21	20	28	26	22	73	73	27	26	26	26
	28	28	28	28	28	74	28	73			64	79	86	95
	92	74	70	71	72							86	95	
 OAK BLUFFS INFORMAL TOWN (HAMLET)	32	34	40	34	34	39	35	33	34		37	35	35	35
	40	40	70	40	40	40	40	73	73	73	64	79	86	95
	92	74	86	71	86	74						84	95	
 WEST TISBURY INLAND VILLAGE	49	50	53	53	51	52	52	50	73	73	49	79	86	95
	53	53	70	71	53	53	53	73			64	84	95	
		74	86	99	72	74						92		
 MENEMSHA / EAST CHOP COASTAL VILLAGE (HAMLET)	43	74	44	61	45	61	61	44	45		64	45	45	45
	57	92	61	71	59	74		59	59	73		79	86	95
	61	99	70	92	61			73	73	93 PHOTO		86	95	
	92	61	86	99	72			93 PHOTO	93 PHOTO			92		
	105		92		86							95		

**III. TRADITIONAL
ISLAND
PLACES:**

**A. The Formal
Town:**

EDGARTOWN



EDGARTOWN¹

‘To be born in a famous town, declared Euripides, is the first requisite of happiness.’²

‘There is never a better way of taking in life than walking in the street.’
HENRY JAMES³



¹ Many of the ideas in this chapter were inspired by the examination of Edgartown in *The Place of Houses* by Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), pp. 3-18, in which they describe Edgartown as “an old and very elegant village that is a testament to the art of building well.” (p. 3)

² Bernard Rudofsky, *Streets for People* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), p.59.

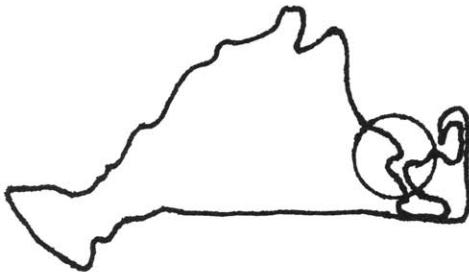
³ *Ibid.*, p. 105 (Rudofsky quoting James, no reference given.)

The oldest village on the Island and once the largest and most wealthy (whaling captains lived here; pilots lived in Vineyard Haven), Edgartown is the essence of “town” itself. Its delight as a place stems as much from its clarity as a community — expressed in its town hall, churches, stores, wharfs and clubs — as it does from the individual beauty of its famous houses. Its physical forms mark this place as a community: a place for people to dwell together; to worship, shop, entertain, meet, gossip and celebrate.

The essence of Edgartown is to be found in its streets, the grid pattern of their placement and the hierarchy in this pattern generated by the crossing of the main street into town with the street along the edge of the harbor from which the town once drew (and to a certain extent, still does draw) its lifeblood.

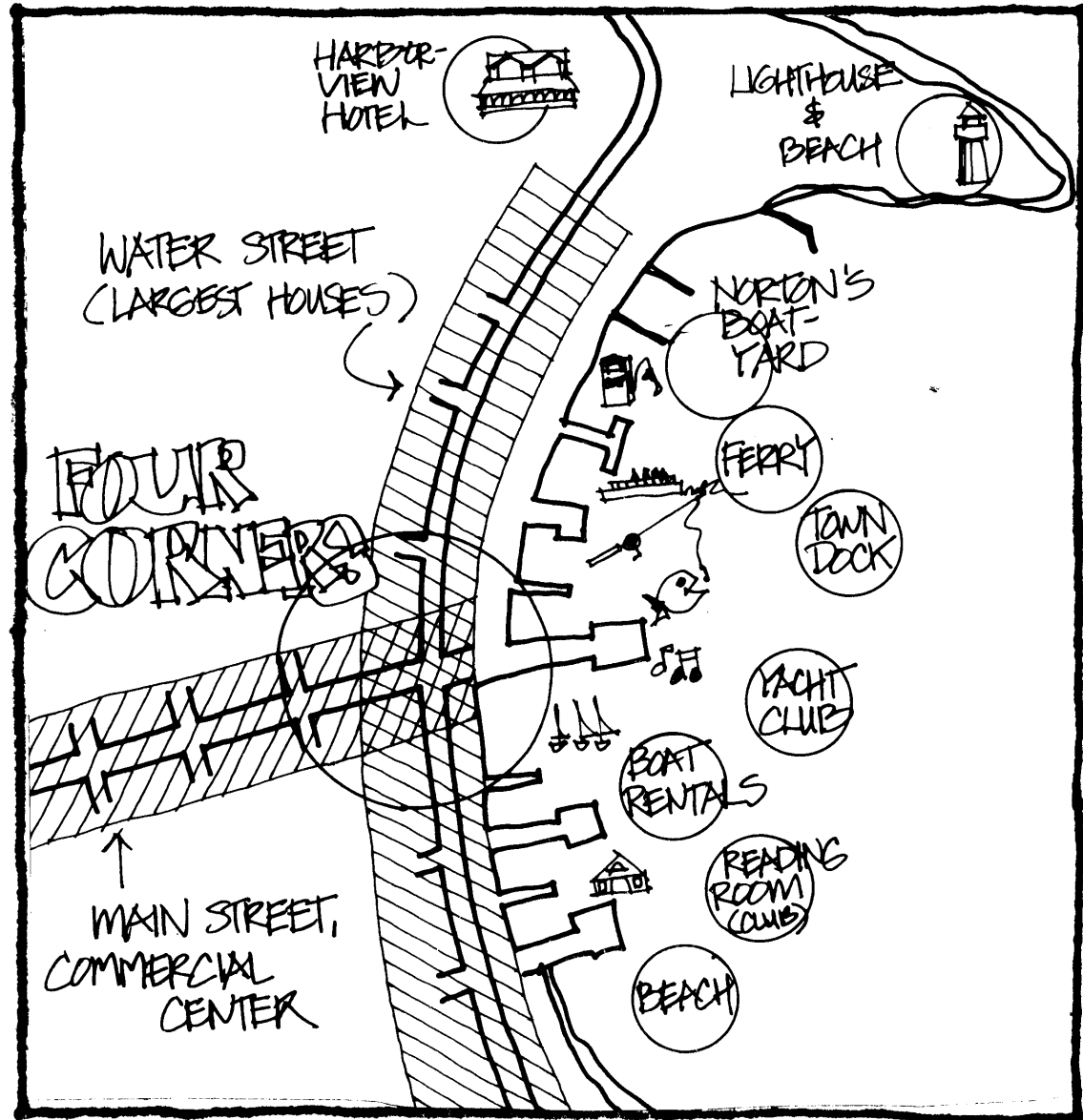
The hierarchy of these two special streets and the regularity of the larger grid framework facilitate the imageability of Edgartown by enabling one to place oneself in the larger pattern in reference to the four quadrants of the town established by Main and Water Streets. (The importance of these two streets is reflected in the naming of their intersection as a place in itself: the “Four Corners”.)

A framework which has the clarity of a diagram — like the grid — in itself is not enough to explain the identity of Edgartown’s streets. It is the attitude of the buildings along the streets — their size, setback and architectural treatment — which establishes their special image as town streets. Above all, Edgartown’s streets are formal streets; a clear boundary between

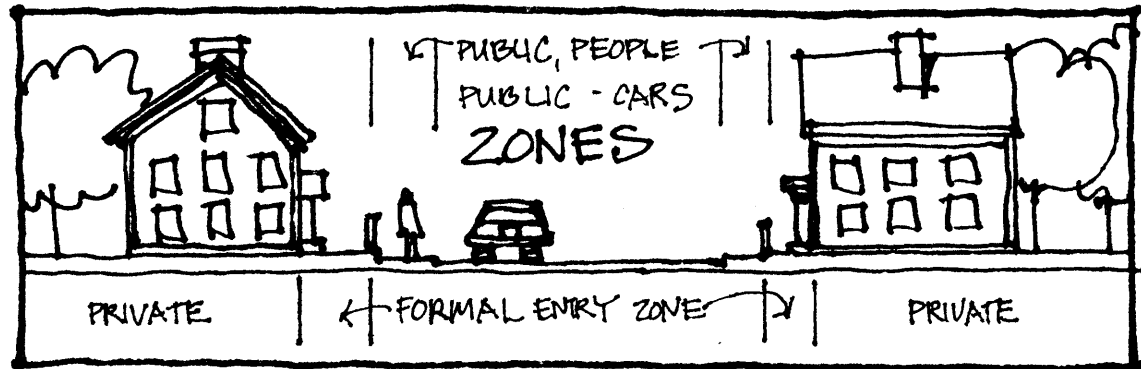


the heavily-trafficked public ways (streets and sidewalks) and the private realm of houses and yards, is established by the houses themselves. Because of the narrow setback of the houses from the public way and the closeness with which the houses are placed adjacent to each other, an almost continuous enclosing "wall" is created by the facades of the houses. (This sense of "wall" is maintained between the houses by fences and planting.) It is the "walls" on both sides of the street which provide the sense of enclosure and define the street as a place; as linear outdoor "rooms" which house the activity and life of the town.

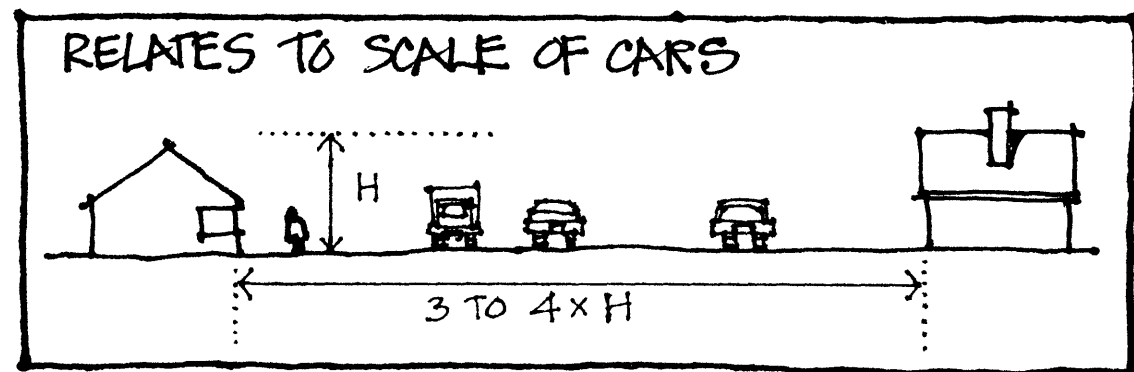
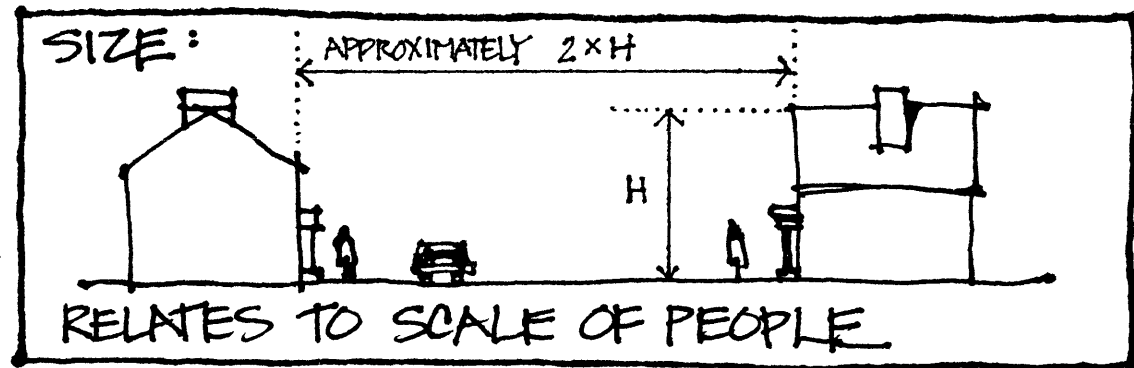
In Edgartown the width of these rooms (distance across the street from house to house) is approximately twice the dimension of the height of the houses along the street. This relationship seems to be crucial so as to enable the houses, rather than cars and the street to "read" as the dominant form in the environment and to enable the pedestrian to make some physical and visual claim to it. The smaller the houses lining the street, the more narrow the street itself must be to maintain this characteristic sense of enclosure. (Davis Lane is an example of this.) Main Street before it reaches the town green is about three times wider than other Edgartown streets, and about three or four times wider than the height of the enclosing houses. As a consequence, it reads more as a means of getting from one place to another (a traffic route) than it does as a place to be.



Zones



Enclosure



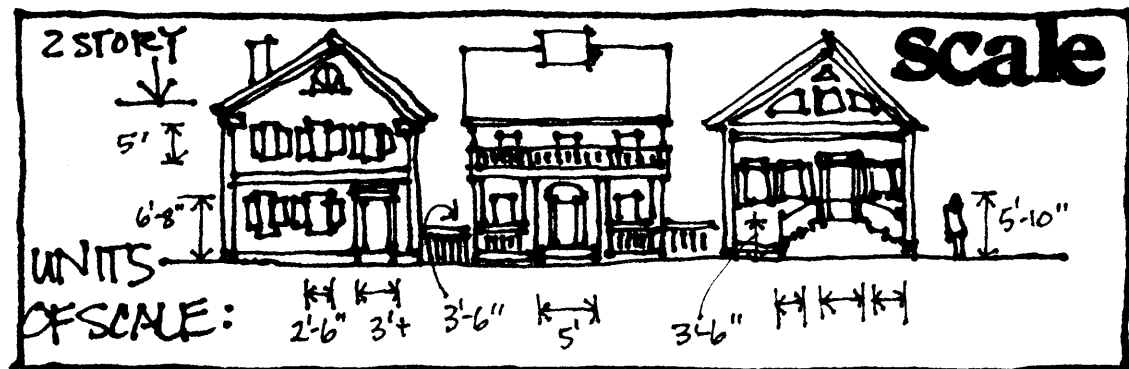
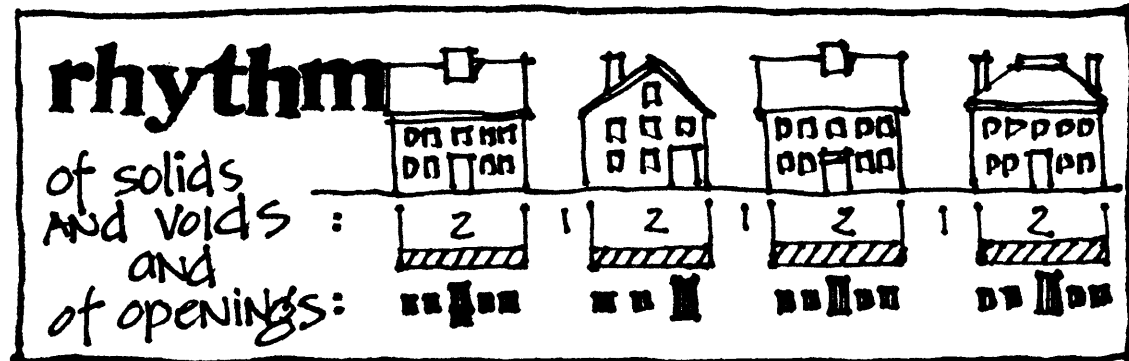
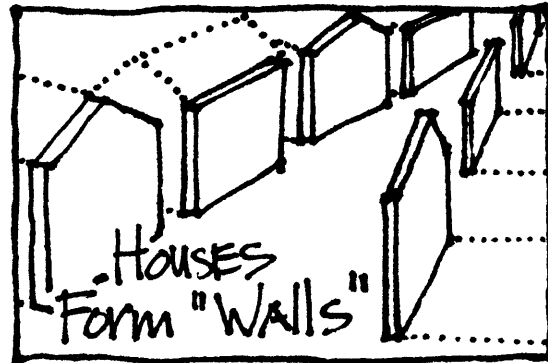
From the point of view of the town, the individual building is a mere brick in the spatial order of the street or square.⁴

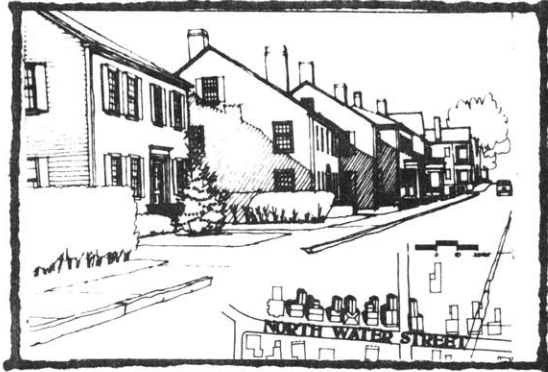
The use of the word "brick" in the above quotation implies that the houses in a town, like bricks, have some common traits (dimensions, form) which enable them to be added together to create some larger entity. This is true of Edgartown houses. In acknowledgment of the public way, each house "addresses" and puts its "best face" towards the street. All architectural embellishment is placed here where it can be seen by passersby. And in acknowledgement of the special function of the gate, threshold and door as the transition points from the public to private realms, (as well as the place from which the inhabitants greet the outside world), each house exhibits the greatest detail and care on the doorway and the fences, stairs or planting which enclose the space before it.⁵

Because of a similarity in height and size (about a 1:1½ proportion) and of distance between them, the houses establish a characteristic rhythm along the street of masses and openings. While the sidewalk edge is maintained by the continuity of fences, in moving along a sequence of houses one experiences a recurrent pattern of building masses to spaces between them. There is also an ordered recurrent

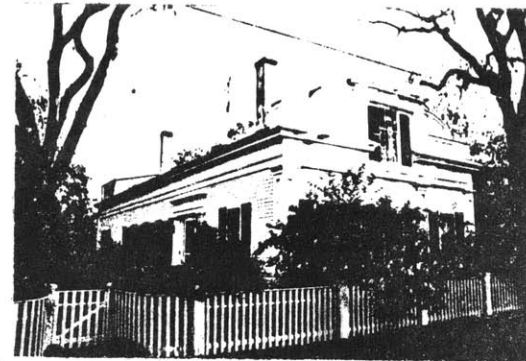
⁴Erno Goldfinger, "Urbanism and Spatial Order", *Architectural Review*, December, 1941, p. 164.

⁵"Doorways", Carter Wheelock states, "are always symbolic of the passage to another state or identity or world". *The Mythmakers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 61.

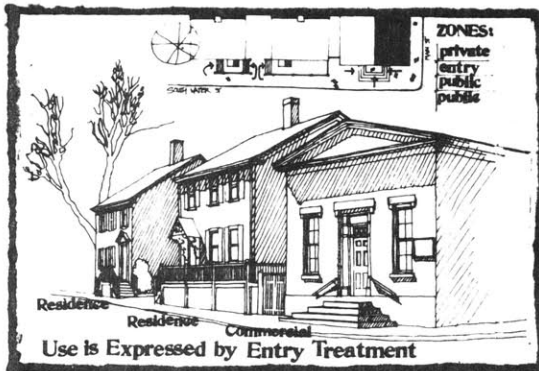




Houses along North Water Street exhibiting a regularity in height, setback, size, roof shape, distance from one another, rhythm of openings, etc. This regularity creates a framework within which the individual differences in the entry treatments become more special and more noticed. (Greater variation is found in the back — the private realm.)



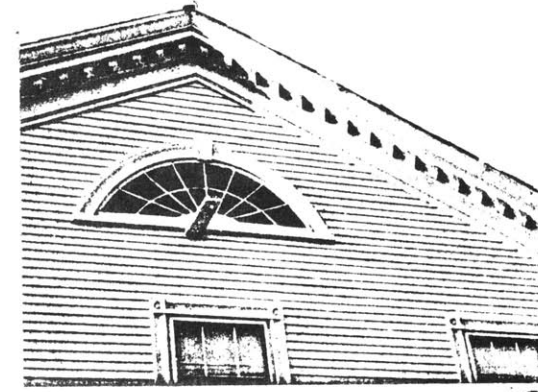
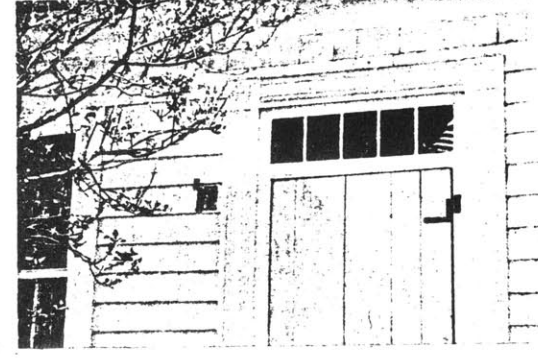
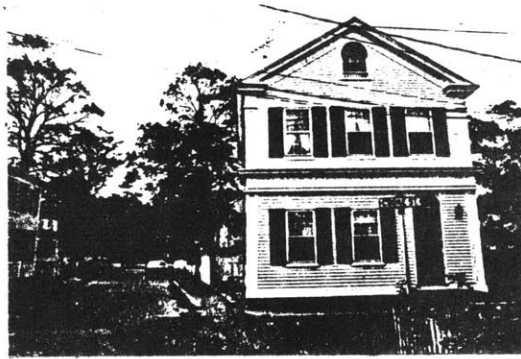
In every case the land in front of the house is claimed and marked in some fashion — by planting or fences, or by the house itself as in this house on South Water Street. While front porches are not common in Edgartown due to the very public nature of the streets (most outdoor living is done in private back yards), this house acknowledges the special open view it alone has of the harbor beyond.

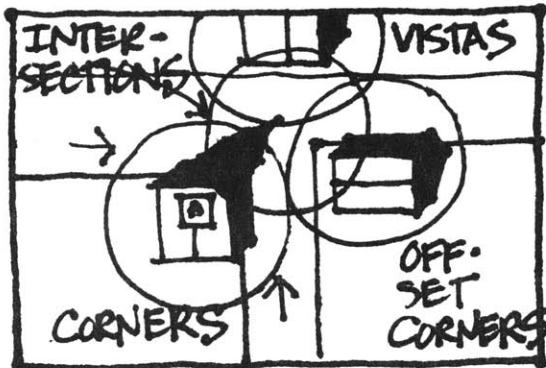
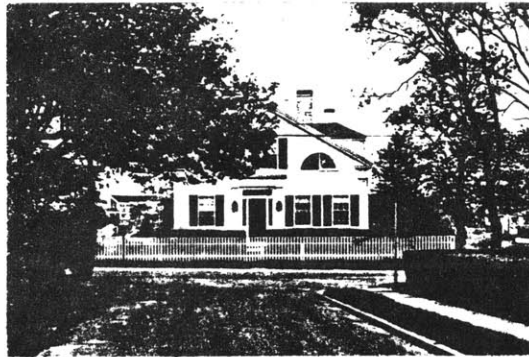
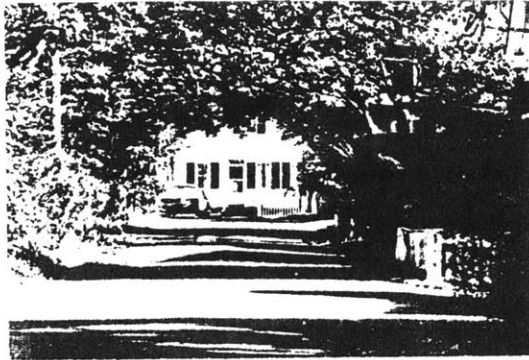


The entry treatment and manner of addressing the public way convey the use and meaning of the building. The open stairs, and their projection out into the sidewalk mark this building as one open to public access. (A bank, at Four Corners.)

Even when the entry does not address the street, the public side is acknowledged; as in this South Summer Street house with its unusual scrolled "headboard" design at the gable end (Top). The back is quite plain (Above).

(Right) These photographs of Edgartown houses, doorways and windows illustrate the variety and richness of detail found in Edgartown houses. An agreement about what a house ought to be in this place does not imply a dull uniformity or sameness.

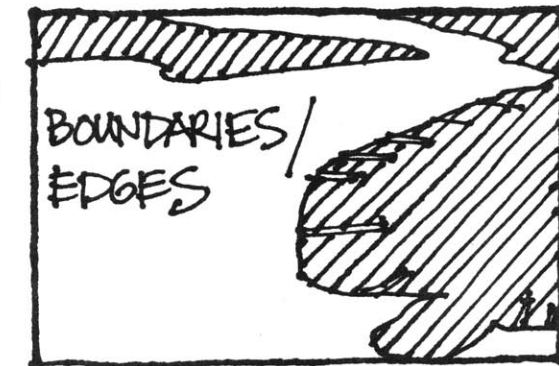




alteration of strong and weak elements on the facades of the houses themselves established by the patterns of windows and doors on the building's surface. Most Edgartown houses are 2 stories with symmetrical facades of three or four bays. All details — fences, windows, steps and doors — reflect, and relate to, the size of people using them.

The grid pattern of streets as a “diagram”, or framework, for organizing a large community generates very strong “clues” about what the individual house ought to be in that context; it naturally assumes a street-addressing form and modulates the transition from inside to outside on the public face in a very formal way in acknowledgment of the very different purposes and the proximity of these public and private spaces.

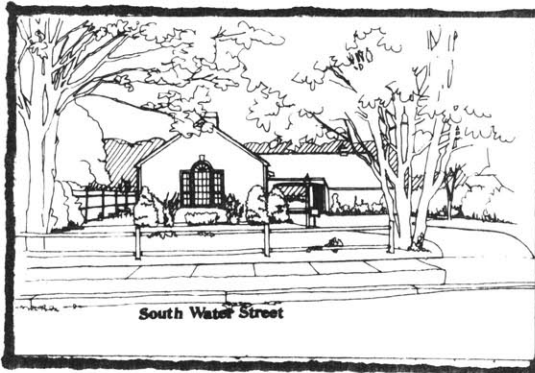
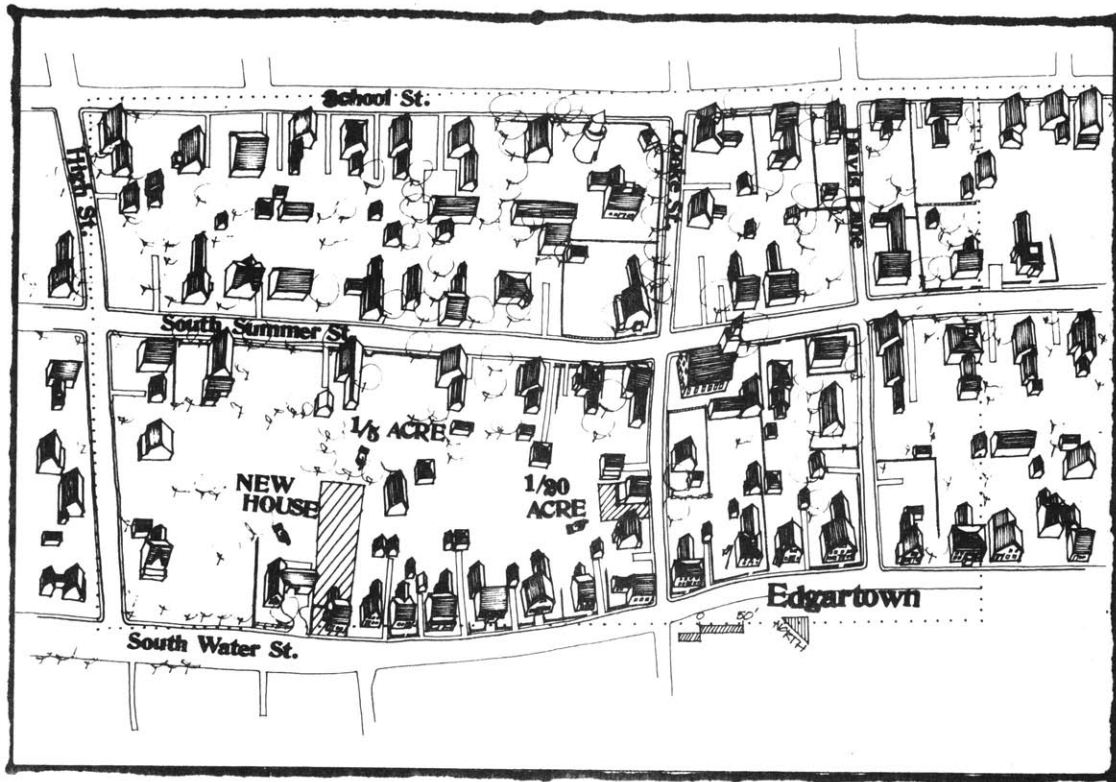
But within the grid system itself, special places occur where street patterns generate long views — vistas — and create a higher volume of traffic and people and thus seem more public — intersections. Within a grid whole streets may assume an hierarchical importance due to their function as connectors of special areas within the pattern or to special views or activities they may afford. (Main St. as both main entry into town and commercial street; Water St. due to its commanding view, and direct access to the harbor.) Churches, the old customs house (now the Historical Society), and other public buildings vary the regularity of the grid by marking corners and intersections as more public places. Off-setting the streets will also provide variety to the pattern by creating a sense of enclosure by partially closing and changing the direction of the “walls” lining the long view of the street.



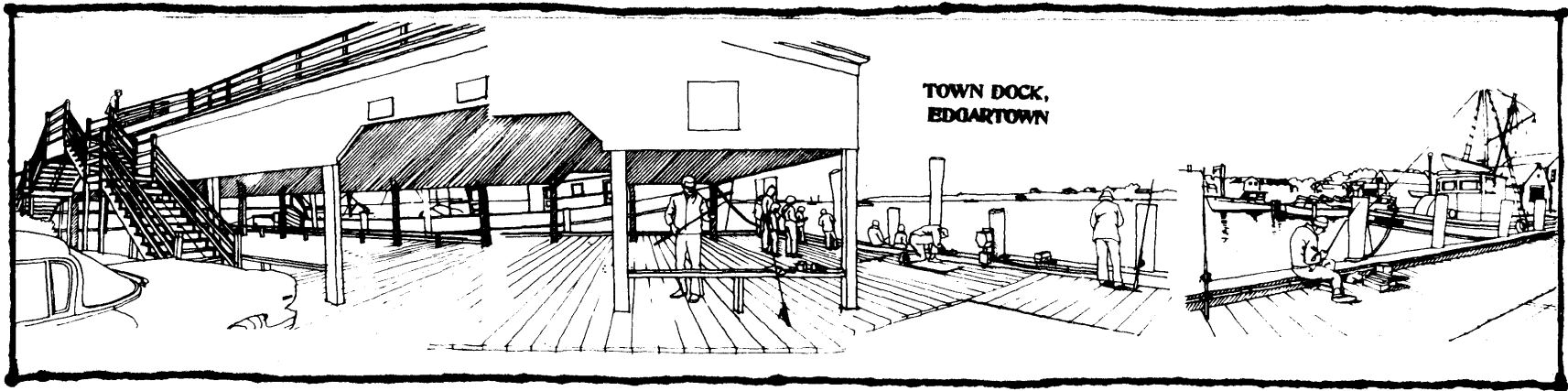
In theory, a grid pattern could house a community of limitless size; in practice differentiation in use, purpose or form (hierarchy) is needed in the pattern in order to provide reference points within the larger pattern, and to facilitate its imageability as a place; the pattern must also have some limits — edges, or boundaries — which set it off as an entity unto itself.

As a framework for generating new Island places, the grid system has many advantages. It is a man-made form, and can generate a sense of place (streets as out-door public rooms) through the imposition of the pattern itself, rather than being dependant on unique natural forms (bluffs, views, etc.) to generate its identity. As long as the walls of the street are consistently maintained by houses and fences, and the proportion of solids to openings along the street reinforces this sense of enclosure, the grid can accommodate a wide range of house sizes. In this map of a portion of the town, house lots range in size from 1/20th of an acre to 1/2 acre, with 1/5th of an acre being about average size. Within the drawn boundary, (14 acres) are 64 dwelling units; making the average density 4.5 dwelling units (d.u.s) per acre. It is important to notice that this *density* is a key factor in establishing the quality of enclosure and the character of Edgartown's streets; and thus its identity and imageability as a special Island place. (And interesting to note that this density is 12.5% higher than that allowed in existing Island zoning or proposed by the Commission for new developments.)

Some differentiation in the activities and forms in the grid pattern are almost a necessity; not only to give expression to the



This new house on South Water Street (shown in the lower left-hand corner of the map, above), has chosen to ignore a great many of the "manners" abided by by the other houses along the street. In height, setback, basic shape, and in the treatment of the entry zone between house and street, it is radically different. The entry for the car, rather than for people, dominates; and the curved driveway, parking area and enclosing shape of the house seem to create a form designed largely for the display of the parked car. While an interesting house by itself, it seems more "suburban" than "town" in its attitude, and looks sadly like it wished it were situated some where else.



shared purpose of the place, but to create a meaningful reason for residents to walk along the streets and thereby experience, and lay claim to, the larger place of which they are a part.

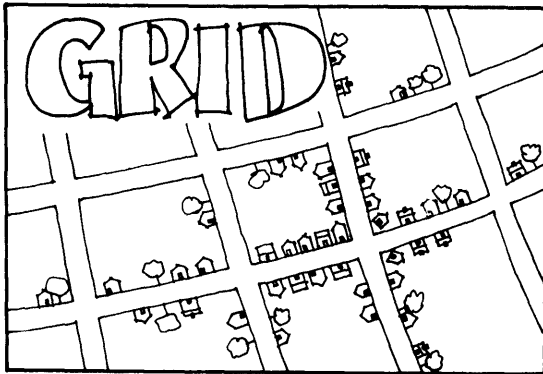
For a place to be a community of any size, some shared community life must exist and be expressed in its physical form (suburban towns seem “dead” as places for lack of this multi-dimensional activity and purpose — hence their nick-name: “bedroom communities”). The function of the town can be understood as “the preserver of the inherited order of community life”⁶, not just in a *visual* sense, but as the social setting within which an ongoing community can abide and change. The *activities*, as much as the physical forms which house them, are integral to this sense of place.

⁶ Page Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill, the Town in American History*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966, p. 55.

One of the important qualities of Edgartown as a place is its *publicness* — the fact that so much of it is accessible to the general public, so that it can be explored, experienced and claimed by the first-time visitor as well as resident. This is due to the clarity of its form — public and private places are so defined as to be unmistakable — and to the many public places where it is possible for people to generate their own purposes, and thus to make the place their own. The beaches, lighthouse, town and fishing docks, and Main Street itself, are all “public” in this fashion.


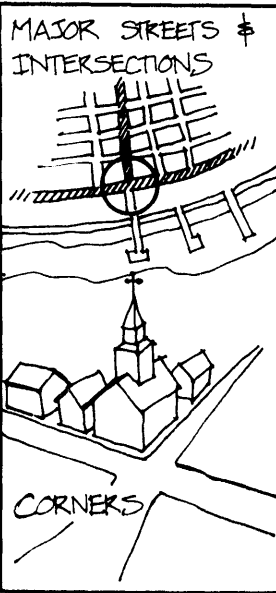

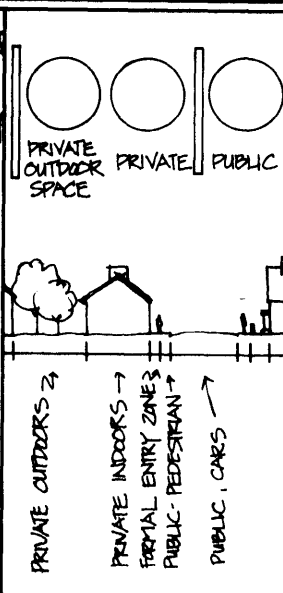
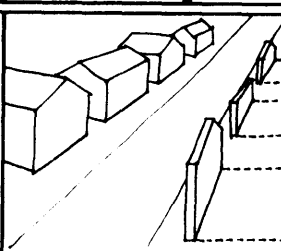
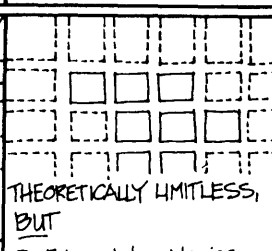
Edgartown’s town dock provides a particularly fine setting for each participant to create his/her own purpose/experience. (In fact, in form it is very much like a stage-set, and is used that way for town celebrations.) Its great success stems from the numbers of activities that are possible there: fishing, sitting and talking, just looking at the boats, waiting for the ferry, etc., and from the overlapping purposes of its users — from fishing vessel owner to

wandering tourist — each adding to, and partaking in, the experience of the other. In a microcosm it seems to reflect the essence of the town of which it is a part, as one of the Islands most memorable built places.



**Key Characteristics
IDENTITY**

FORMAL YEAR-ROUND
TOWN

Place of the Car & Utilities	HIERARCHY in Form	ATTITUDE TOWARDS LAND	PUBLIC/PRIVATE ZONES	House - to - House Relationships (Density)	Limits to Size / Growth of Form
 <p>STREETS FORM NETWORK FOR BOTH CARS AND SERVICES (ELECTRICAL, TELEPHONE, SHOPPING, WATER, ETC.) BUT, DENSITY OF HOUSES AND SIZE OF STREETS ALLOWS THE HOUSES TO VISUALLY DOMINATE OVER THE CARS.</p>	 <p>MAJOR STREETS INTERSECTIONS</p> <p>CORNERS</p>	 <p>ALL LAND CLAIMED AND MARKED AT EDGES BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE</p> <p>LAND IS DOMESTICATED, FORMALLY TENDED BY THE HOUSES.</p>	 <p>PRIVATE OUTDOOR SPACE</p> <p>PRIVATE</p> <p>PUBLIC</p> <p>PRIVATE OUTDOORS →</p> <p>PRIVATE INDOORS →</p> <p>FORMAL ENTRY ZONES</p> <p>PUBLIC - PEDESTRIAN →</p> <p>PUBLIC - CARS ←</p>	 <p>SENSE OF WALL ESTABLISHED BY HOUSES DEFINES STREETS AS PLACES</p> <p>① HIGH DENSITY IS CRITICAL</p> <p>② UNIFORM SET-BACK AND STREET-ADDRESSING ATTITUDE IS CRITICAL.</p>	 <p>THEORETICALLY LIMITLESS, BUT</p> <p>① Edges & boundaries important to imageability as place.</p> <p>② Limited size of residential community which can be serviced by central facilities.</p> <p>③ Character as a walkable place has size implications.</p>

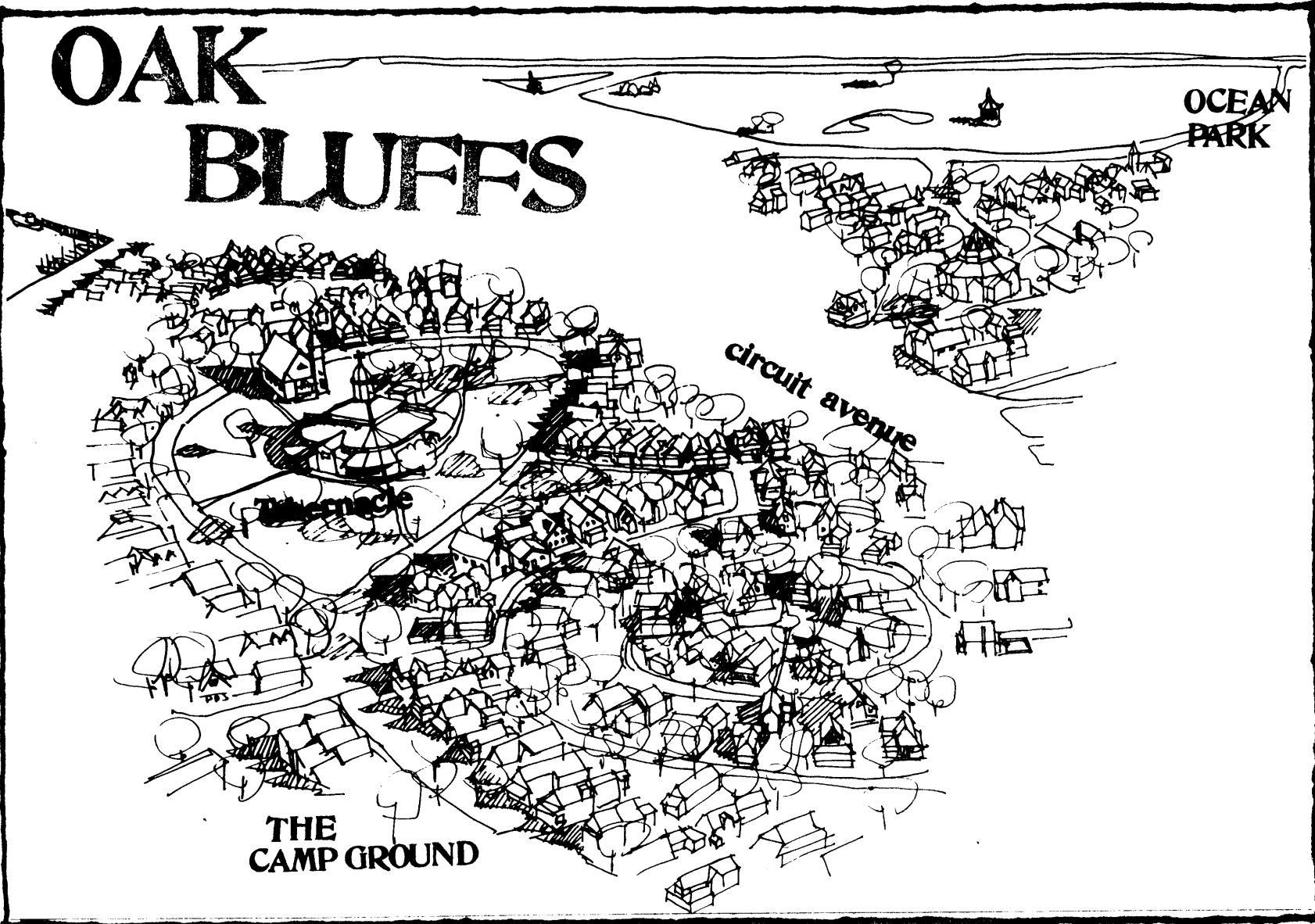
**B. The
Informal
Town :**

OAK BLUFFS

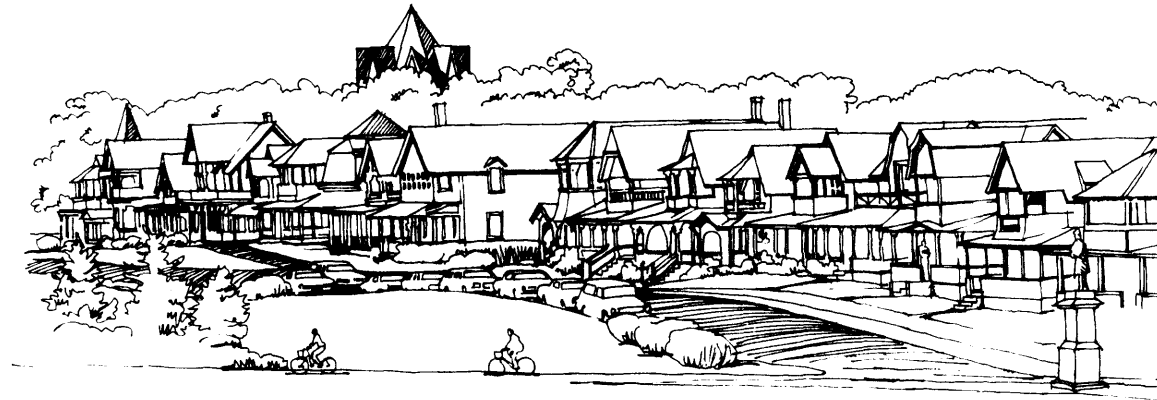
OCEAN
PARK

circuit avenue

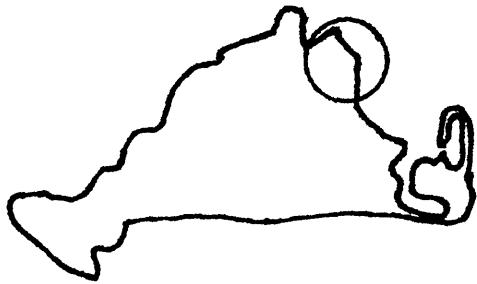
THE
CAMP GROUND



OAK BLUFFS



It was always to the steeple that one must return, always it which dominated everything else, summing up the houses with an unexpected pinnacle.¹



¹ Marcel Proust, *Du Côté de chez Swann*, Paris: Gallimard, 1954, n.p., quoted in Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974, p. 128; where Lynch comments: "The feeling and value of an imageable environment are well summed up in Proust's moving description of a church steeple in Combray, where he spent many childhood summers. Not only does this piece of landscape symbolize and locate the town, but it enters deeply into every daily activity, and remains in his mind as an apparition for which he still searches in later life."

Oak Bluffs has been drawing mainlanders to Martha's Vineyard since 1835. As a town it is unique not only to the Island, but to the entire country, for the largest and best preserved example of the religious revival meeting communities which sprang up in the 19th century, the Wesleyan Grove Camp Ground, is here.

Where Edgartown reveals the year-round way-of-life of centuries of Island living with dignity, solemnity and grace — a formal town — Oak Bluffs still retains the air of a summer community and has qualities of humor, fantasy and informality which mark it as a place to which people come having shed their worldly cares elsewhere.

The differences between the two towns — formal and informal — can be partially explained by the different architectural styles that were popular during their growth. In Edgartown the Federal and Greek Revival styles, which were classical and formal in nature, predominate. Oak Bluffs evolved during the heady eclectic period of the 19th century when fanciful borrowing and adapting of styles from all sorts of sources — Gothic, Second Empire, Italianate, etc. — was common.

But it is not just the style(s) of architecture which establishes the image of Oak Bluffs as a place, but rather the basic type of house which evolved here (and to which the elements of style were added), and the way in which they were organized in a larger framework so as to accommodate and express the shared purpose of this place as a community.

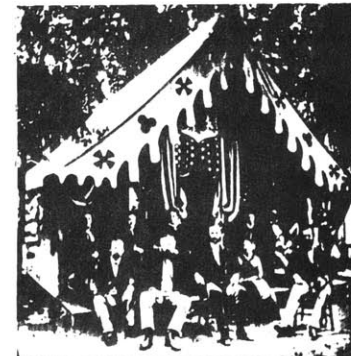
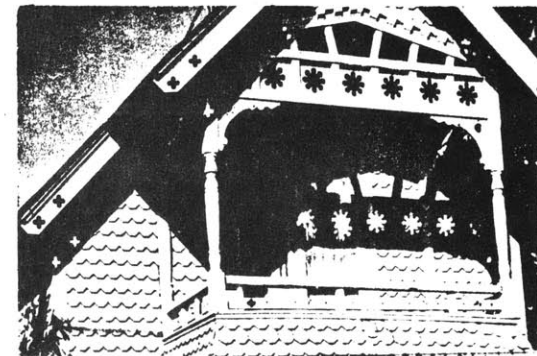
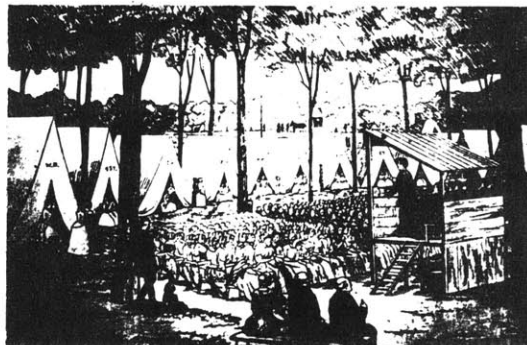
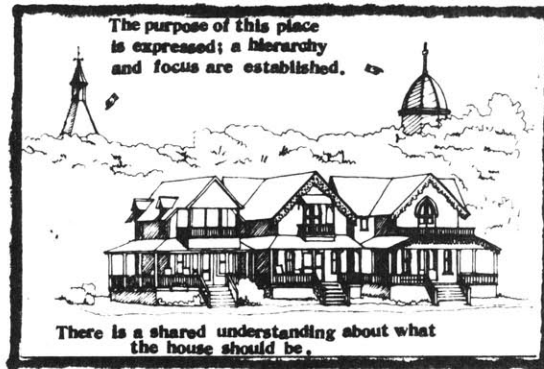
Religion established this purpose when the first Methodist Revival meeting was

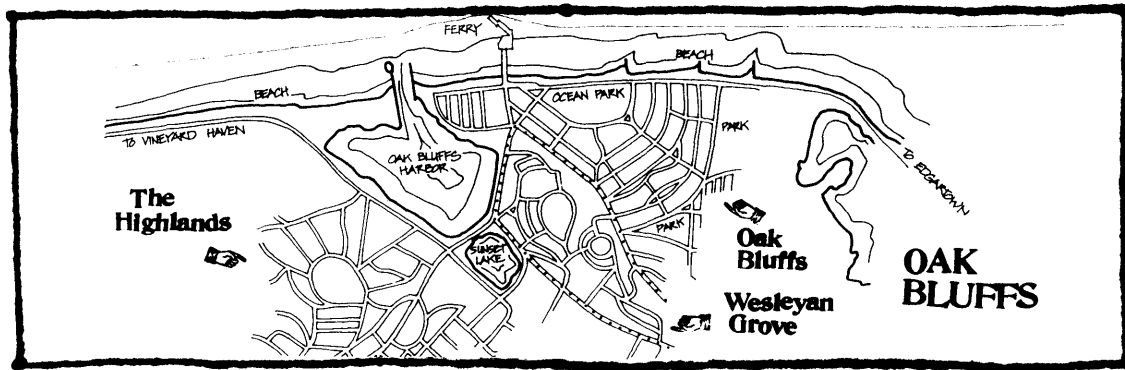
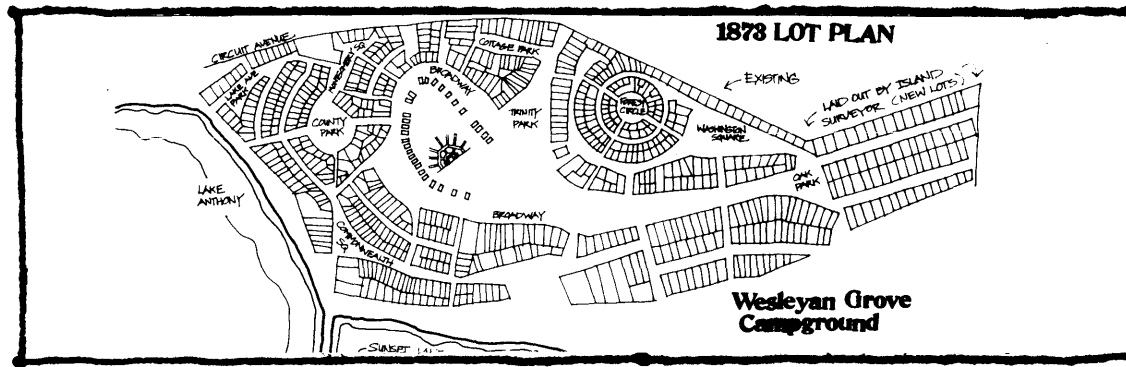
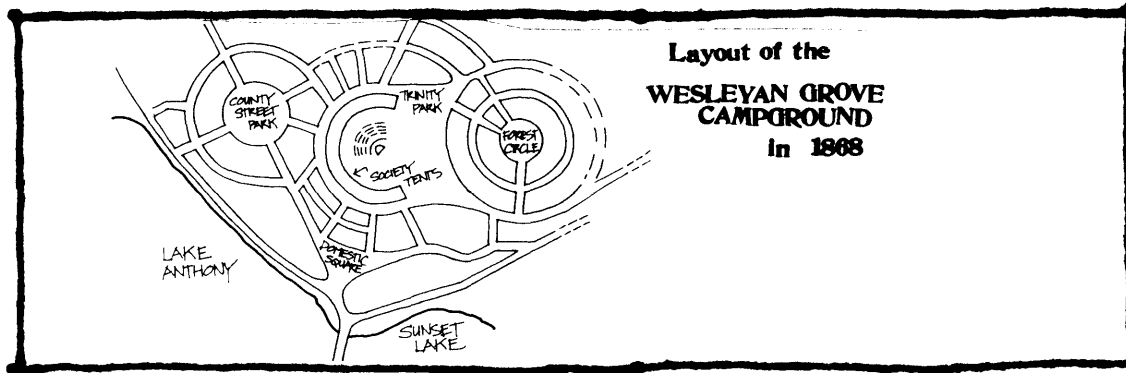
held around a preacher's tent in a half-acre grove of oaks in 1835. The preacher's stand formed the center and listeners would gather in brotherhood around it. Later, when family tents were erected for the week-long meetings, they too were placed in a circle focusing towards the meeting space. Still later, around the 1860's, the establishment of caretakers to look after the grounds year-round fostered more permanent wooden structures and returning visitors began to stay for longer periods to enjoy the gathering and relaxing fellowship found in the community. The success of the Wesleyan Grove camp ground spurred the development of another religious community to its North, the Highlands, and, in 1866 suggested the obvious to six real-estate developers who established a secular summer community (the Island's first "vacation development") to its South — Oak Bluffs.²

This first community puts its stamp on all later development, and it is interesting to note that the type of houses, parks and path systems which originally evolved to house a close-knit religious community were seen as equally appropriate (and have proved equally successful), for a purely secular vacation community.

The feeling of closeness of people gathering in common for prayers is expressed in the organization of the modest cottages around central spaces and paths. The paths have a meandering nature and seem to weave through the grounds in an often

² Originally part of Edgartown, the community broke away in 1880 under the name "Cottage City". In 1907 the whole town was renamed "Oak Bluffs".





confusing way, yet always, with a surprise, leading one back and forth from the central tabernacle which forms the heart of the community. The public nature of these central spaces and paths is supported by the houses themselves with their social spaces placed at the front of the structure in outdoor porches on first and second stories. The camp ground was not a place to retreat from others, but a place to share one's social life — a place to see and be seen. The small size of the paths and central park spaces, and the adjacency of the houses to each other, heightened this feeling of being in intimate contact, visually, physically, and mentally, with one's neighbors.

The kind of architectural display expressing differing social and wealth status seen in Edgartown is not found here. There was an agreement about the appropriate type and size for the houses: a simple rectangular 1½ story shed, from 11 to 16 feet wide and about twice as deep, always with the entrance and porch addressing the public space before it. This creates a regularity in the larger environment — a framework — within which individual differences are expressed in the detailing and colors — the gingerbread trim and articulated openings on the front facade — rather than in size or basic type. “Forty-five types of gable decoration have been counted — proving the will to variety within a rigidly ordered system.”³ And “the 2 or 3 radically different cottages in the campground suggest that the surprising uniformity of the cottage type

³ Ellen Weiss, “The Wesleyan Grove Campgrounds”, *Architecture Plus* 10:1 (November, 1973). p. 47.

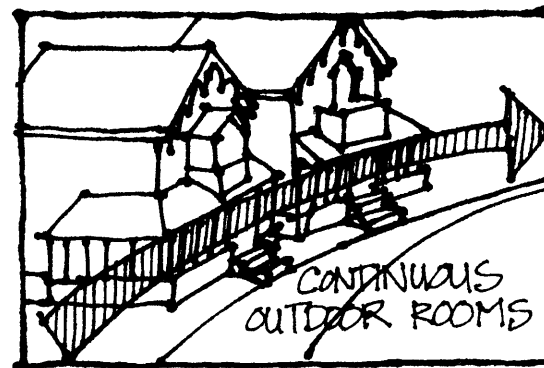
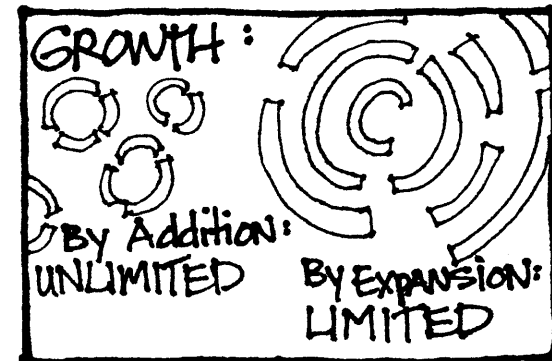
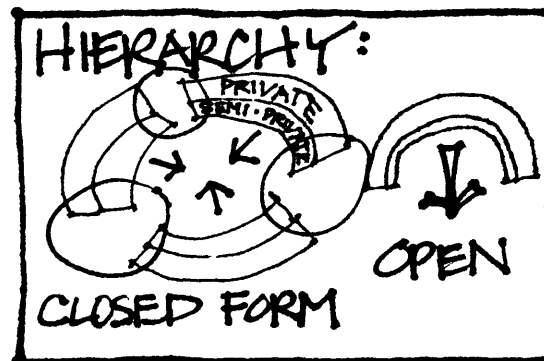
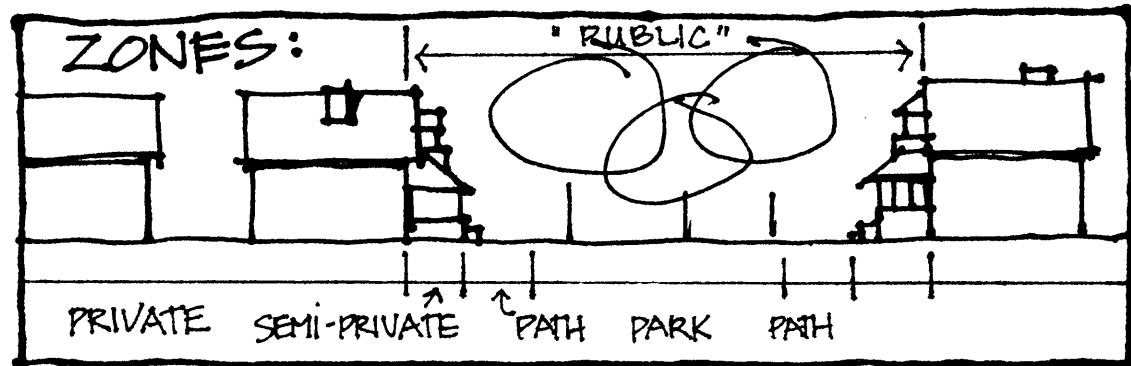
may have been a matter of consensus, reflecting deliberate unanimity of taste and purpose among the occupants, rather than fiat from higher authority."⁴ The decisions which shaped this plan over the space of half a century are, to us, anonymous; yet it seems clear that to leave future Island communities to such "chance", when today development occurs much faster and the possibilities for house types much vaster, would be risky indeed. (The landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland was hired to design the more quickly developed Oak Bluffs subdivision of 1866.)⁵

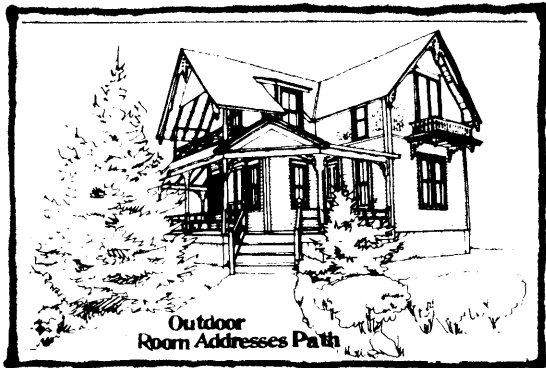
The essence of both the campground and the larger town are the lines of porches encircling lanes and parks. These living spaces belong as much to the walks and community as they do to the houses and serve to animate, "inhabit", and establish the identity of the larger place. The small scale of the triangles and circles and the paths which connect them create an intimate pedestrian environment in which these small and large spaces play back and forth against each other and the presence of any cars is visually overshadowed by the density of cottages and vegetation.

The circle is the most direct and powerful form for marking a space; one is either inside or outside, and at any point along the circumference one's relationship to the whole is always the same; thus its recurrent

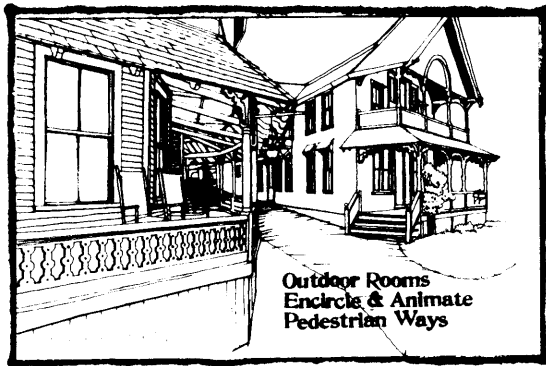
⁴ Ibid, emphasis added.

⁵ "500 lots were sold between 1868 and 1871." Ellen Weiss, "Robert Morris Copeland's Plans for Oak Bluffs", *Journal of The Society of Architectural Historians* 34:1 (March, 1975), p. 62.

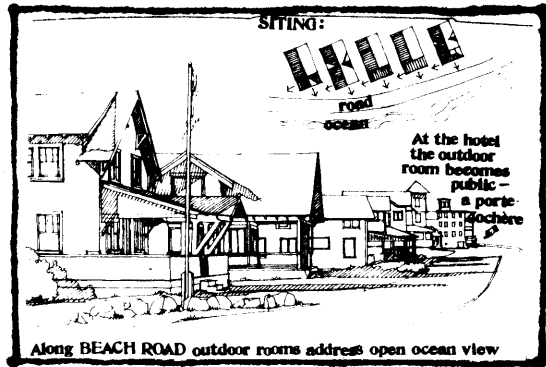




Outdoor Room Addresses Path



Outdoor Rooms Encircle & Animate Pedestrian Ways



Along BEACH ROAD outdoor rooms address open ocean view

meaning throughout history as a symbol for "oneness". Concentric places always project a strong "spirit" of their own.⁶ As an organizing form, the concentric pattern has a natural hierarchy at its center and, less powerfully, at the corners of radiating paths. The distance across the circle can vary with the nature of its focus: 80' at Forest Circle; 350' at Trinity Park, which houses the great iron Tabernacle of 1879 (130' across and 100' high to the top of its cupola) serving as the monumental center for the whole campground; to 1,000' across at Ocean Park where the semicircle of houses focuses on the whole sweep of the open ocean it addresses. As a form, the circle can grow outwards by adding more rings of houses around the initial circle, but the numbers of rings are limited by the separation one can have with the central space and still maintain some identity with it. In the campground the initial center, Trinity Park, did not expand beyond the distance within which the preacher could be heard and the numbers of people living around it, accommodated. As it grew, new parks — County Park, Forest Circle — were created to provide centers for the larger population.

As an organizing framework a system of centers and parks has many of the same advantages as the grid pattern in that it also derives its identity as place from a man-made form and, conceivably could be placed in any landscape type (in semi-circular form where there is an edge to re-

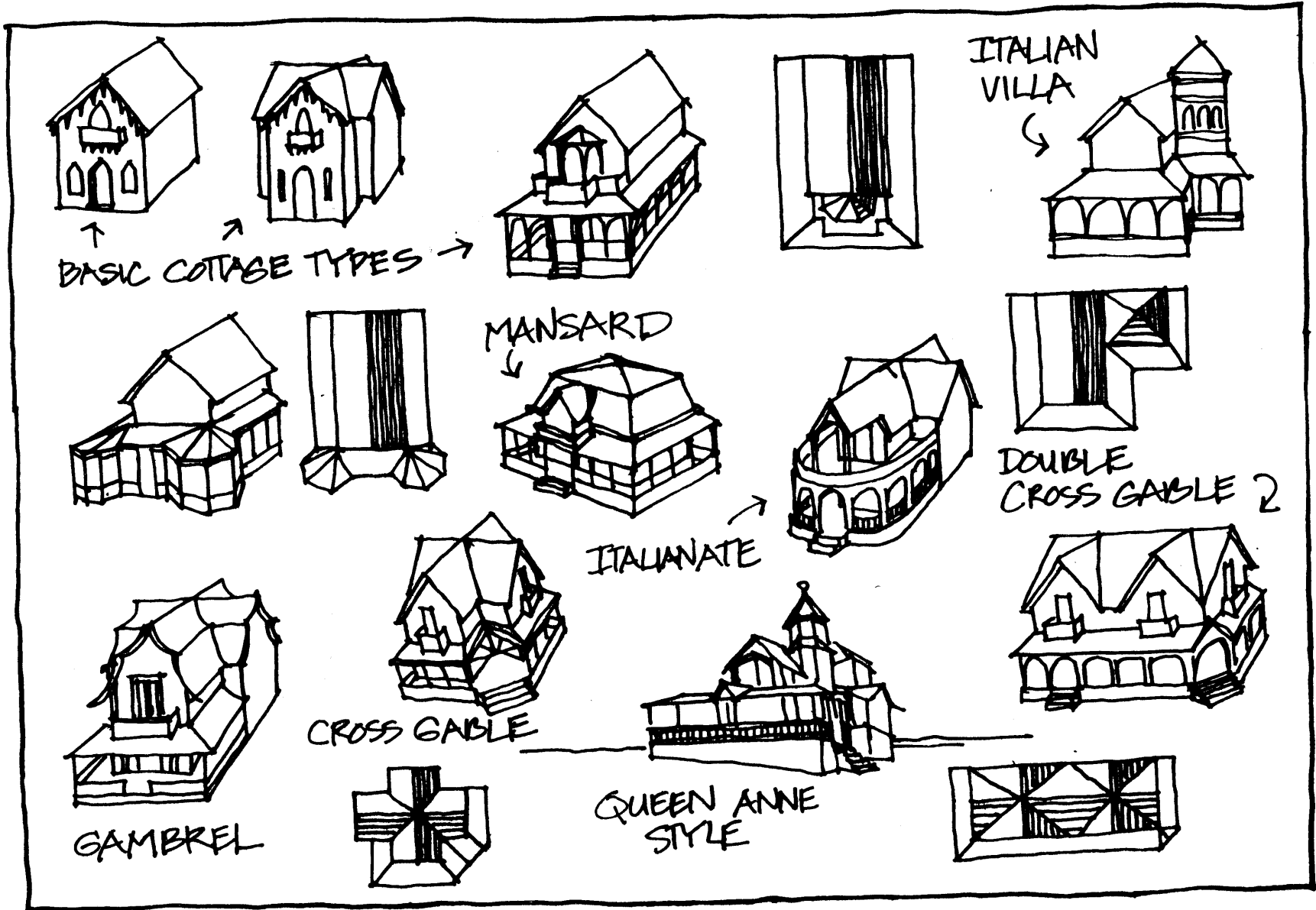
⁶ "The spatial sense [of the concentric form] is one that detaches the person from the 'outside' world, and pulls him towards its 'core' ". Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 39.

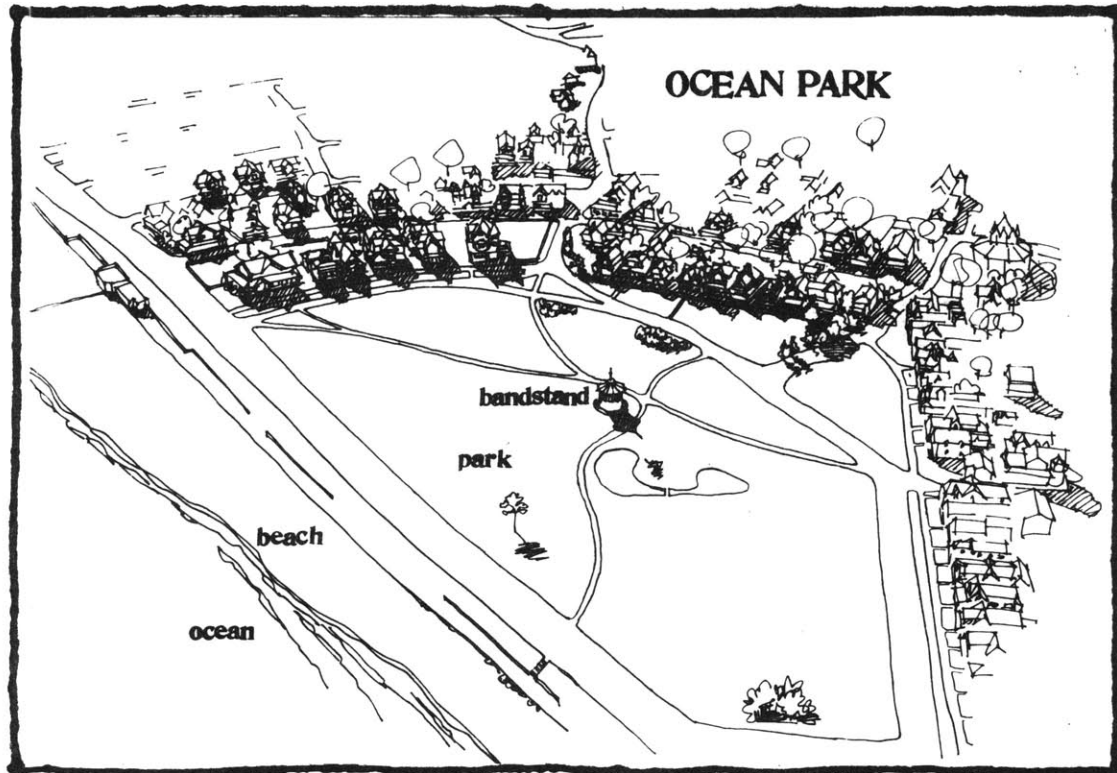
From 1864 to 1905 virtually all of the cottages were constructed in the same way — "Bath House Construction" as it is known to Island carpenters today — and in the same design of rectangular shed always with the gable end to the front. In many respects the design of the earlier tents was imprinted on the cottages: the scalloped borders of the canvas tents are recalled in the "gingerbread" in the cottage eaves; the arched openings of the tents are reflected in double arched doors and the narrow arched windows; even the pitch of the roofs echo the original tent shape. This "sense of specialness [the community] had from its inception — the white-tented 'celestial city' in the words of early description — was not lost in the era of cottage construction. This is the triumph of the cottage type, that it could keep the quality of tents-in-the-woods magic without making [it] look like a . . . 'shanty town', as one critic felt it might."⁸

The other triumph of the basic cottage type was (is) its adaptability to other styles without forfeiting its basic identity established by the central gable, and the addressing front facade with its wide, welcoming porch. The Gothic style was felt to be the most "religious" of the many styles of the second half of the 19th Century; thus its preponderance in Oak Bluffs. But other styles: Italianate, Mansard, gambrel-roofed, etc., were equally well housed in the cottage form. The basic cottage was also quite adaptable to larger structures; by addition, such as the single and double cross gable types; by extension of the porch (the Italianate and Queen Anne examples); or by addition of towers or other volumes to the basic cottage form (Italian Villa and Queen Anne examples). The houses in Oak Bluffs provide a virtual catalogue of shape possibilities inherent in the simple cottage form yet, from the most simple to the most grand (compare basic cottage to Queen Anne), there is a commonality which proclaims that each is sharing in the tradition of this place.

⁷ Ellen Weiss, "The Wesleyan Grove Campgrounds", p. 48.

⁸ Ibid





Ocean Park

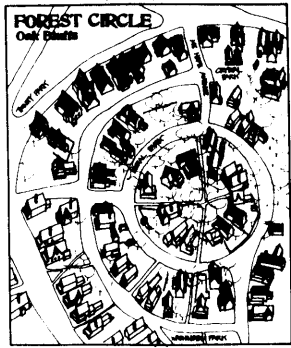
spond to such as bluffs or pond; as a circle where the major focus must be created by the houses themselves.) Unlike the grid, which makes greatest sense for quite sizeable communities, centers as organizing form can create an identity of place for as little as 12 houses (Forest Circle) and as the community grows, expand and then spawn new centers.

Like Edgartown, Oak Bluffs has many public places where it is possible for both the larger community and the general public to create their own activities and purposes and thus claim the place as their own. The beaches, ferry landing, parks, and newly dredged harbor with its boat slips, all provide this opportunity.

The organizing form of houses encircling parks heightens this sense of participation by providing a "stage-set" and audience focusing on the inner activity; for the houses there is always plenty to see, and in a sense each resident can claim the whole central space as his own "front yard".

These central spaces provide opportunities for shared worship, entertainment and celebration. They house community activities and traditions and enable the shared participation from which the identity of a community grows.

The Tabernacle, as the largest auditorium on the Island, accomodates all-Island concerts, meetings and graduations as well as the campground's Wednesday night sings, Sunday service, and the annual Illumination Night celebration which has commemorated the closing of the camp meeting for 100 years.

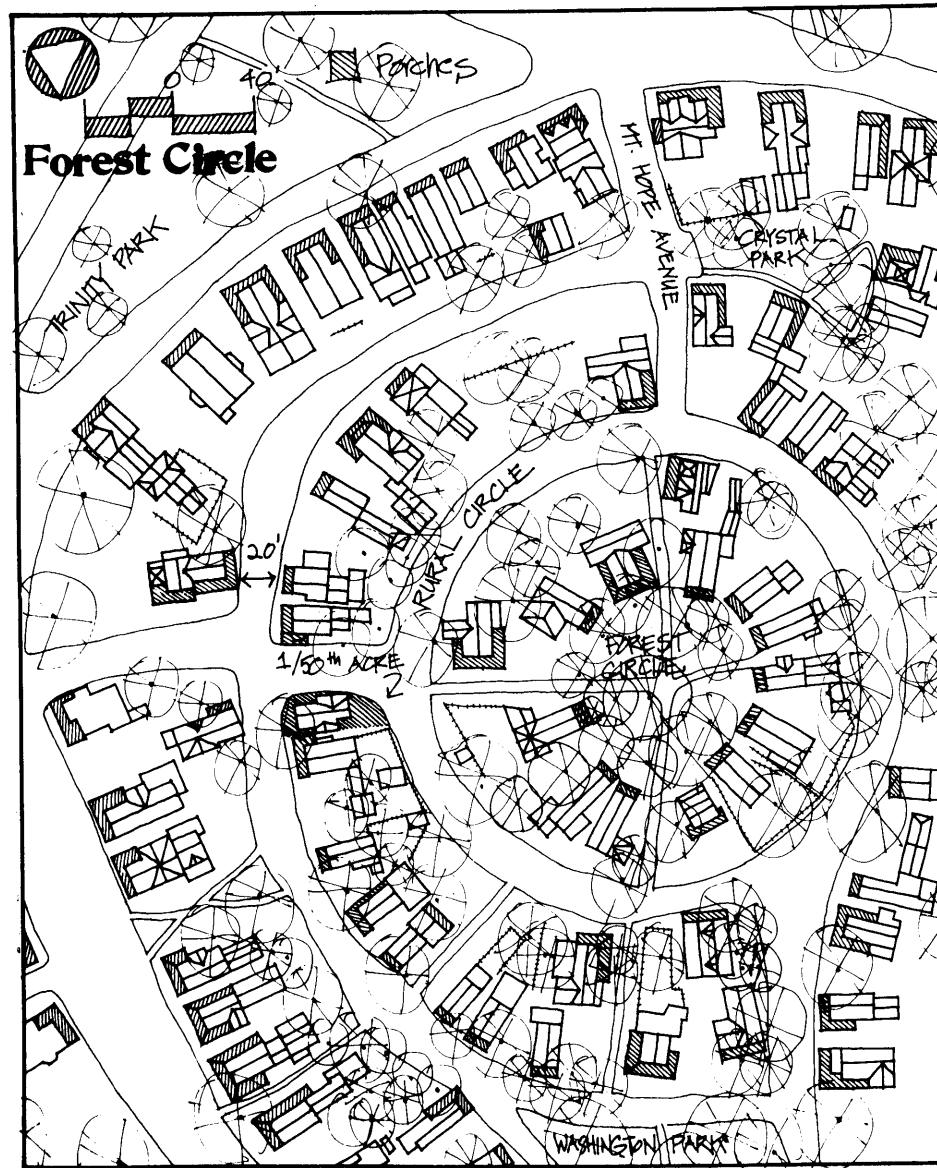


For the secular Oak Bluffs development the bandstand (as well as the beach and ocean beyond) provides this important focal point; the Vineyard Haven band plays here weekly during the summer and it has even accommodated an infrequent political demonstration.

Like Edgartown, the density of the houses is a critical factor in the imageability of the environment. In the campgrounds this density is quite staggering by today's standards — 16 d.u.s per acre, or 1/16th of an acre per house.⁹ (This is *four times* the density allowable under present town zoning restrictions!)¹⁰ A lesser density would erode the sense of place generated by the centers and narrow lanes. If the houses were further apart, the sense of enclosing wall defining the spaces would be

⁹ Ibid., p. 49. Some 320 cottages remain in the 20 acres of the original Wesleyan Grove Camp Ground.

¹⁰ The present minimum allowable lot size is 10,000 square feet, with a required 80' of street frontage and a minimum 20' setback from the street.





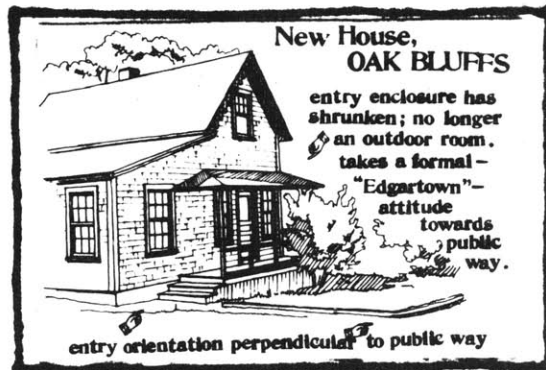
lost. If there were more land per house back yard living would be a logical outcome, and this would take away from the spirit of the parks and lanes as shared outdoor social spaces. It is not only the small amount of private land per house, but the small sizes of the houses themselves which establish the intimacy and imageability of this special place.

As a form which might provide clues for new Island places, it has many advantages. The present cost of construction and required minimum lots sizes have effectively "zoned-out" all but the very rich; a new community of the density and scale found in the camp grounds would enable a wider variety of people to make places for themselves here. With growing alarm about the costs of services and the loss of open land to new development, such a scheme would cut down on the amount of road per house, allow for underground wiring and common sewerage facilities, and concentrate a large number of new buildings in a small land area.

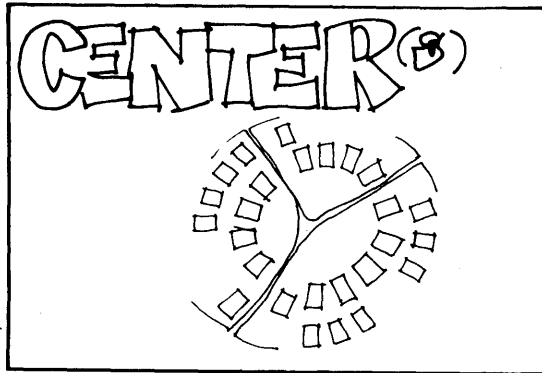
Of course, not everyone wants to live in

such a place — particularly year-round inhabitants. It seems best suited to summer living — where all you need really, is space to store bathing suits, sleep, entertain and share with others the special joy of being on an island in the summertime; as a built place which supports this special sense of dwelling, the organization of Oak Bluffs is without peer.

Above: seven of the twelve houses surrounding Forest Circle. (All twelve are included in the photo panoramas at the end of this study.) The first six houses are basic Camp Ground cottages; the seventh, one of the three or four houses in the community that are radically different. If it is remembered that the houses are not in a straight line, as they appear here, but are experienced in a circle wrapping around the enclosed space, it can be seen how the facades of the first six houses create the continuity of a wall with the porches growing out from the wall and "inhabiting" the inner space with people and activity. The last house disrupts this sense of wall by its smaller size and different roof direction. By elevating the entrance and tucking the porch into the volume of the house, rather than projecting it out like its neighbors, the house seems to take an unfriendly attitude; it has forsaken an opportunity to add to and participate in the special image of the place of which it is a part.



This new house makes a number of references to the building traditions of Oak Bluffs: 1½ stories high, with the gable-end addressing the public way. Its "porch", however has shrunk and is no longer a place to be inhabited, but a shelter for entry alone.

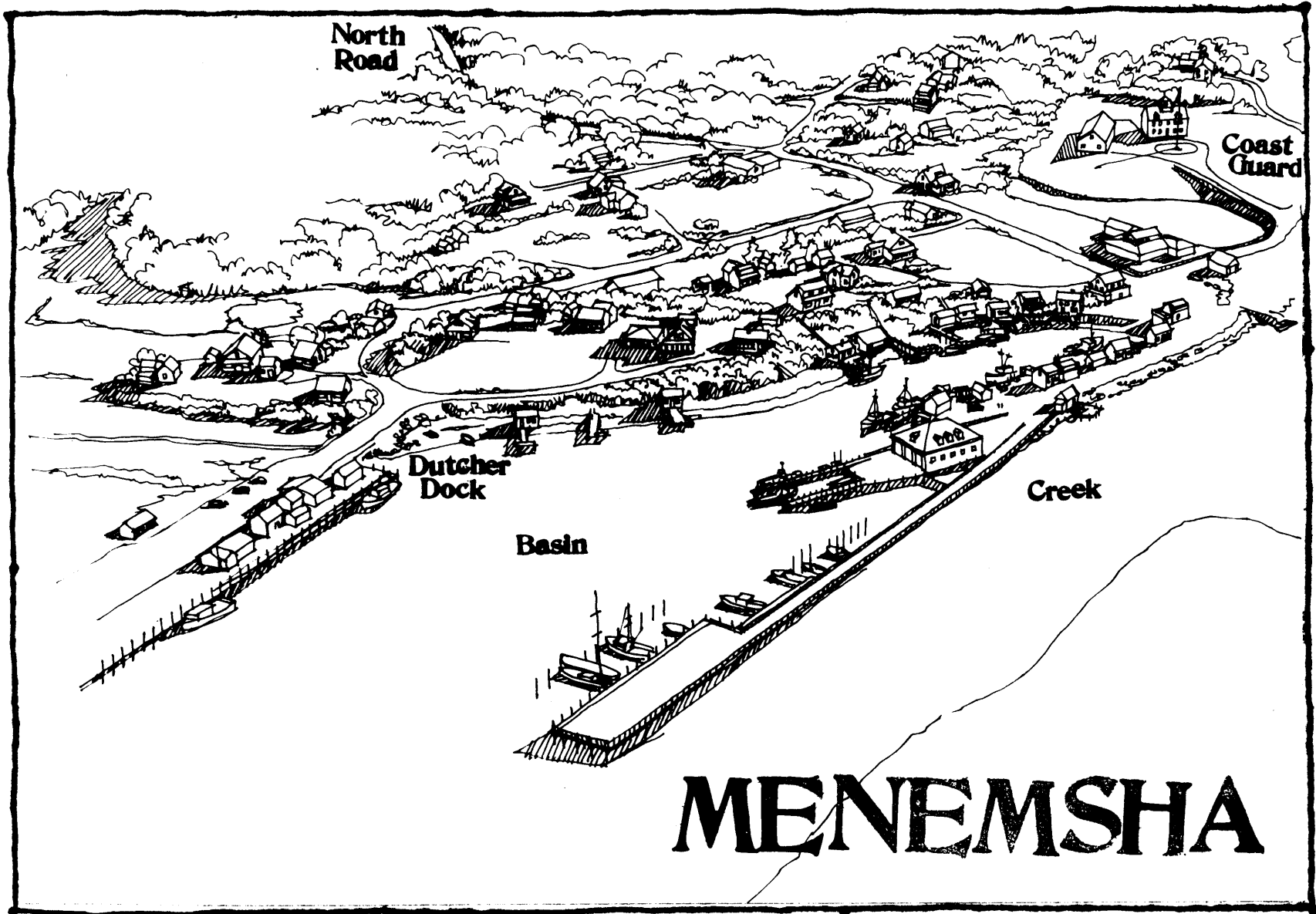


INFORMAL (SUMMER)

TOWN
OR
HAMLET

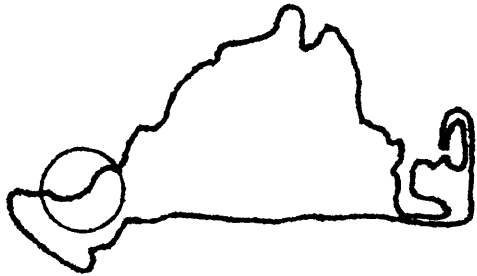
HIERARCHY in Form	ATTITUDE TOWARDS LAND	PUBLIC/PRIVATE ZONES	House-to-House Relationships Density	Place of the Car & Services	Limits to Size / Growth of Form
<p>AT CENTER</p> <p>OR (Less Powerfully,) AT ENTRY</p>	<p>PUBLIC PATH PUBLIC PARK</p> <p>OTHER THAN LAND HOUSES SIT ON, ALL LAND IS BASICALLY PUBLIC. FENCES AND FORMAL TENCED YARDS NOT SEEN.</p>	<p>PRIVATE ROOMS PUBLIC</p> <p>PUBLIC SEMI-PUBLIC PRIVATE</p> <p>PORCHES (SEMI-PUBLIC SOCIAL SPACES) CREATE CONTINUOUS OUTDOOR ROOM ENCIRCHING PARKS</p>	<p>SENSE OF ENCLOSURE DEPENDS ON DISTANCE...</p> <p>between houses being less than width of path.</p> <p>Consistency of porches to create continuous "open room" around public paths.</p> <p>6-20' 11-20'</p> <p>SMALL SCALE OF HOUSES AND PATHS CREATES INTIMACY. HIGH DENSITY IS CRITICAL TO SENSE OF PLACE.</p>	<p>CARS ARE EITHER ACCOMMODATED OUTSIDE THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT, ALONG STREETS AT BACKS OF HOUSES, OR IN EMPTY "LOTS".</p> <p>DENSITY OF HOUSES ALLOWS FOR UNDERGROUND WIRING, AND ECONOMICAL CONSOLIDATION OF OTHER UTILITIES.</p>	<p>SELF-CONTAINED FORM CAN NOT GROW EASILY. LAYERS CAN BE ADDED, BUT LIMITED BY MAINTENANCE OF CONTACT WITH CENTER PLACE.</p> <p>SIMILAR UNITS CAN BE ADDED:</p>

**C. The
Coastal
Village:**



MENEMSHA

MENEMSHA



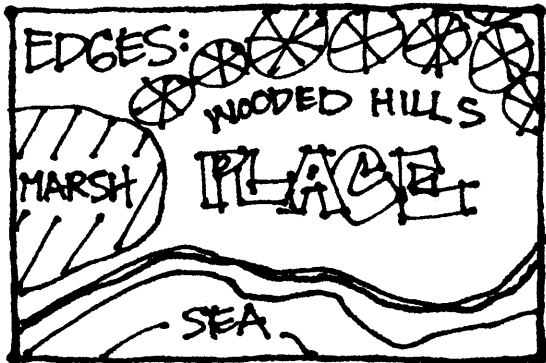
43

Menemsha is one of the places most loved by visitors to Martha's Vineyard¹, perhaps because, of all Island towns and villages, Menemsha seems most "island-like": without the sea, and fishing and lobstering, Menemsha would not exist.

Compared to other Island communities, Menemsha Village is quite new. It was originally settled in 1905 when a basin was created by the dredging and riprapping of Menemsha Creek and the location became attractive for fishermen. (Though no evidence of it remains today, Lobsterville was once the most important Island fishing village.) The 1938 hurricane wiped out many of the houses of this first community, thus most of the present village is less than 35 years old. Yet Menemsha conveys a sense of place and history as old as the Island itself, due to the long Island tradition of harvesting the sea which remains ever present in the village.

Unlike Edgartown and Oak Bluffs, where man-made forms — grid, centers — provide a framework for the identity of the community, Menemsha is shaped by the land itself. Even before the houses were there it was a defined place — a low-land clearing at the bottom of wooded hills bounded by creek, sea and salt marsh. These natural forms of containment established the subsequent community as a single imageable entity and the experience of entering Menemsha — the winding drop of 250' through wooded hills to reach open salt lands with the sweep of the sea beyond it, if by land; or slipping through the narrow

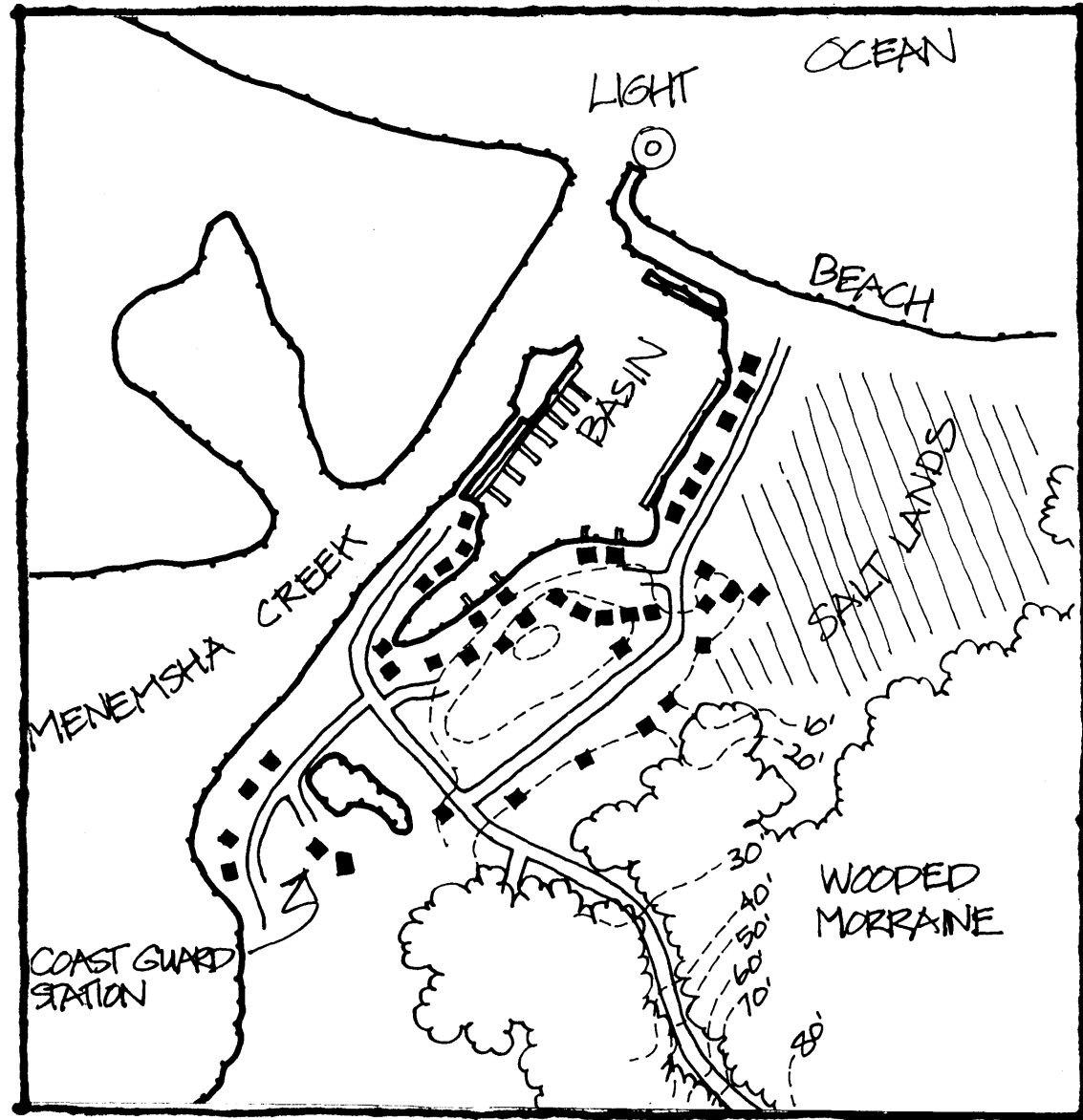
¹ From the study *Looking at the Vineyard*; see map on page 5.



cut in the coast to enter the large sheltered basin, if by sea — is first of all an experience of the land.

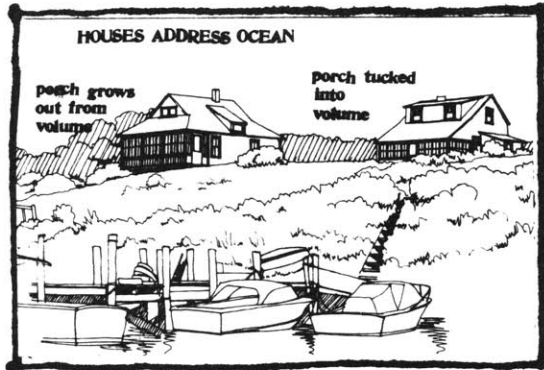
But the land gives purpose as well as shape to Menemsha. Most of the activity of its residents and visitors relates to the sea, and like the town dock in Edgartown, many activities and purposes overlap and heighten the sense of participation for all: commercial fishboats and fishermen cleaning and selling fish; day fishers, young and old at the end of the jetty; yachtspeople; tourists; bathers; the Coast Guard; etc. While the land generates these activities, they, in turn, provide the means by which the land is experienced in a rich multidimensional way: the sea as source of food, place to fish, swim, or sail. The “publicness” of all these activities is what makes Menemsha such a memorable experience as a place.

In many ways Menemsha is similar to Oak Bluffs where, except for the land the house actually sits upon, the land is left natural and unmarked by the formal signs of ownership (fences, landscaping) seen in Edgartown, and thus seems public in some



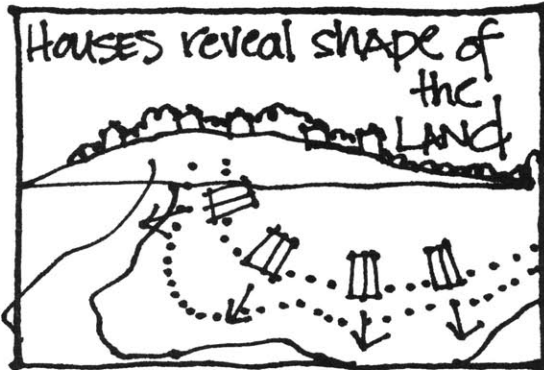


**MENEMSHA
from Dutcher Dock**



fashion. The houses, too, are similar. Where Oak Bluffs cottages have addressing fronts with porches encircling and animating the shared parks, Menemsha houses have porches which address the open ocean and changing views afforded from the land. In their various orientations they reveal the character of the land and almost seem to be swallowing up the salt air in their wide front porches.

houses to land becomes meaningful only when there are vantage points from which the line of houses can be seen and experienced, as from Dutcher Dock or from the wharf across the Basin. If the land were densely wooded, or if there were no viewing point far enough back for the houses to be experienced as a group, the relationship could not be detected. It would also be difficult to perceive if the houses were so far apart as to lose connection with one another, or if the houses were so different in size and shape as to create a roof-line "contour" too erratic to relate to the quality of the land below.



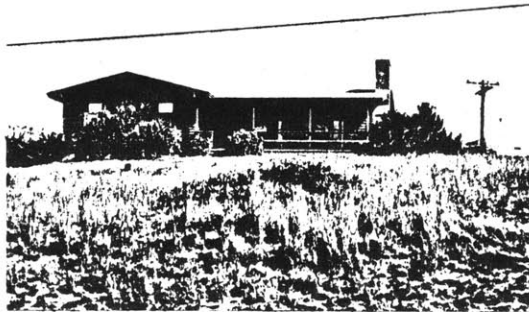
The photograph² above is a portion of the village as seen from Dutcher Dock, a bulkhead named for an Island journalist. Off to the right of this view are the Basin, the fish stores and great numbers of commercial fishing and pleasure boats. The beach is directly behind the viewer, and off to the left are salt marsh, sea edge and, in the distance, the Elizabeth Islands. By the various orientations of their addressing fronts, the houses reveal the character of this larger place and, in their siting along the contours of the hills, accentuate the shape of the land. This relationship of

This is for most, a summertime place; and for year-round residents livelihood means hard work and harsh elements. Among both groups there seems to be a shared understanding that "fancy duds" — grand Classical doorways, gingerbread, even paint — are not wanted. Except for the Coast Guard station, (moved from Gay Head when the Cape Cod Canal opened), high on the hill behind the village, which serves as a landmark for Menemsha from the sea, there is a remarkable similarity in

² A larger copy of this photograph of Menemsha is included at the end of this study.

the houses: all small, simple gabled boxes with weathered shingle siding. Despite the relative simplicity and plainness of the individual buildings, when sited closely together as they are along Dutcher Dock and around the back of the Basin, or along the 10' contour of the hill, (photo), they create a larger place with great richness, almost fantasy, due to the density and size of the grouped buildings.

Although the "built forms" of Menemsha have captured the imagination of many, and have served as design inspiration for a number of new Island developments (Waterview Farms³ and the condominiums at Sengekontacket), the special appeal of Menemsha as a memorable Island place stems not just from the style of houses, or even their grouping, but from the "fit" between houses, land and activities in this busy coastal village.

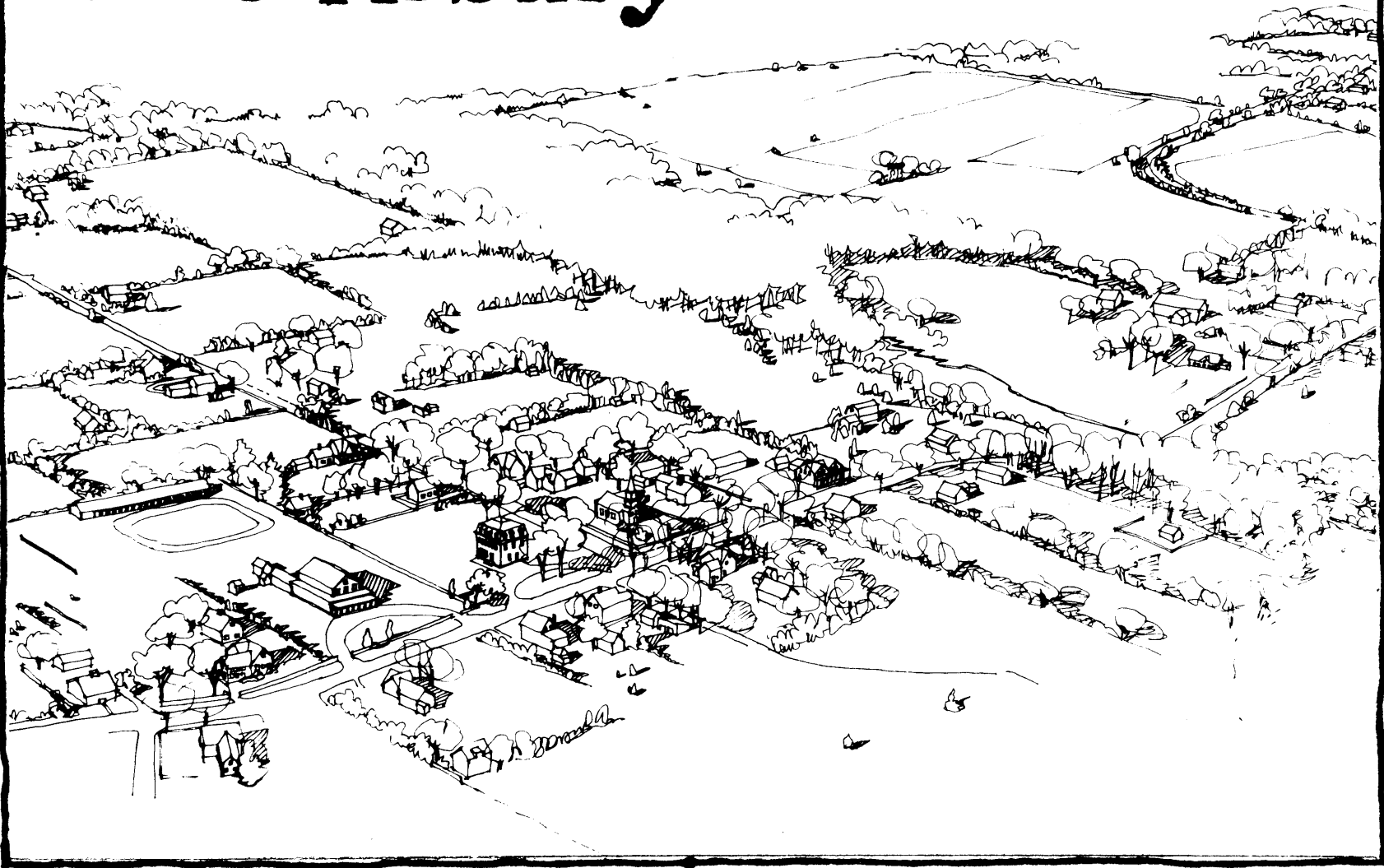


This photo is of a new Menemsha house. In a place where there is a very strong shared tradition for the form of houses, departure from that tradition is usually done only when some difference in the building's purpose is being expressed, such as public buildings like churches and town halls, or special function buildings like lighthouses. By differing from some standard they express their different meaning and assume the status of landmarks in the community. This house seems to have very little to do with its neighbors and has assumed the position of a rather "rude" landmark by virtue of its radically different appearance and its prominent location at a key corner in the town.

³ Discussed in greater detail in chapter IV.

**D. The Inland
Village :
&
Rural House:**

West Tisbury

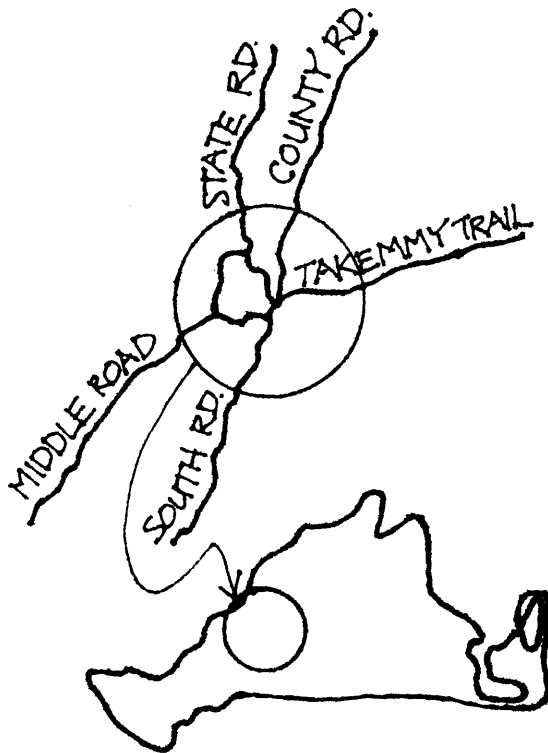


WEST TISBURY

‘The primary partnership made up of several households . . . is the village . . . while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it continues to exist for the good of live.’
ARISTOTLE¹

‘The old farm community which stretches across the Island from Lambert’s Cove on the north shore to Tisbury Great Pond on the south shelters Alley’s General Store and post office, [and] fairgrounds for the annual agricultural fair jamboree, complete with a ferris wheel and dart-throwing; there is a quiet shady street of houses . . . and a pond where a pair of swans faithfully produce an eye-catching flock of small cygnets each summer.’

ANNE SIMON²



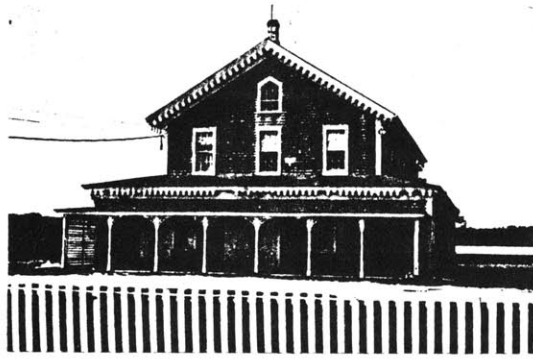
¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (New York: Loeb Classical Library, 1932), pp. 7, 9, quoted by Christopher Tunnard, *The City of Man*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), p. 9.

² Anne Simon, *No Island Is An Island* (New York: Doubleday & Sons, Inc., 1973), p. 219.

Where Menemsha’s identity grows from the Island tradition of harvesting the sea, West Tisbury, the second-oldest Island town, serves as the center for the Island agricultural community. Though the amount of land still devoted to the raising of sheep, cattle, corn, potatoes, rye and hay, has dwindled; and West Tisbury has lost over the years many of the buildings which supported this activity: 2 churches, 4 schoolhouses, a lumberyard, a brick kiln, 4 grocery stores, a slaughterhouse, tavern and gristmill, 3 ice cream parlors, and some 30 barns³, its agricultural origins are still strongly expressed and give identity to the surrounding community. Though many of the old farms are now summer homes, with their fields used for horses rather than cattle or crops, and a new laundromat serves as much as a place to casually meet one’s neighbors as the now-gone lumberyard and gristmill once did, the people of West Tisbury are particularly proud and protective of the farming heritage of their town and the way of life it typifies.

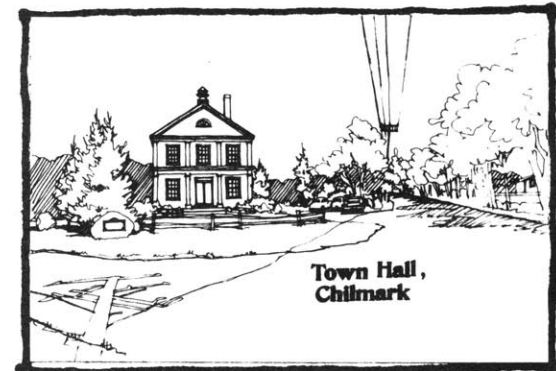
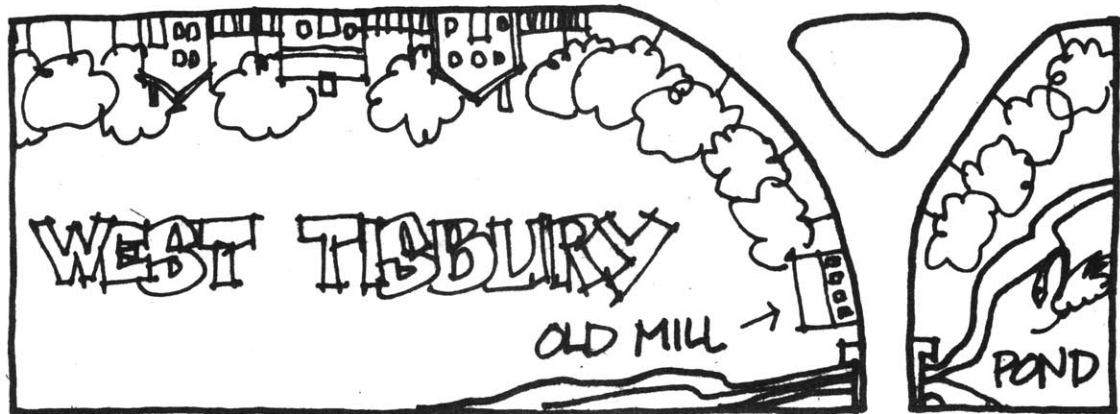
The identity of the larger community stretching out along the roads which converge in the center of West Tisbury Village is expressed in its many public buildings and the community activities they support: a church, a grange (top right), an old school, a library, town offices and a general store and post office. Each is important to the sense of place of the village in that they provide needed services and the opportunity for residents to casually meet on a day to day basis; they serve as gathering places and help to localize a center for the larger community.

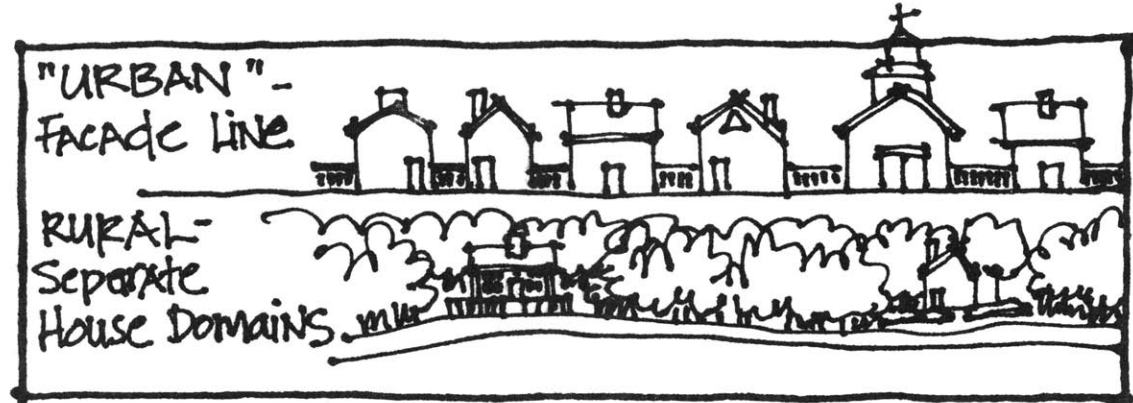
³ Ibid.



Like the importance the intersection assumes in the grid pattern by virtue of the greater volume of traffic and meeting it accomodates — and therefore its more public nature as a place — the rural village grew up at the junction of Island roads. Public buildings mark the place as special, especially at corners, and the design of the buildings and the attitude of the houses towards the land and street is more formal and domesticated — tended lawns, planting and fences establish clear public/private boundaries — then on out lying roads in recognition of the more public nature of this place as a cross roads.

The marking of the intersection as special can be seen in the village of Chilmark as well. As it is approached from the south, (photo, right) along the winding road through the heavily wooded moraines, one suddenly comes upon this white-faced building with its green grass and picket fence. At the intersection itself (sketch, page 50), the Town Hall of 1897 orients to the center of the intersection, rather than to either road, in recognition of its special role within the larger pattern. (This





is also done by 2 of the buildings at Four Corners in Edgartown.)

As the density of the community thins out along the radiating roads, the quality of the land and houses becomes more "rural" than "village". Though the houses still address the road as the element which ties them to the larger community, they read as separate places unto themselves, unlike the town or village where the houses and fences are so situated as to define a continuous enclosing edge. This distinction between parts of the environment — the rural and the town or village — is very real on the Island, and for most people, has great symbolic and aesthetic significance.

The residential environment is shaped by three components: the land itself, domesticated or wild; the roads; and the house and its site. "In order to achieve rural quality in a residential environment it is necessary to preserve and have as the dominant visual feature the land formed by nature. The residential environment must be small in a visual sense and be in intimate contact with undeveloped land. The houses must be so sited that they provide

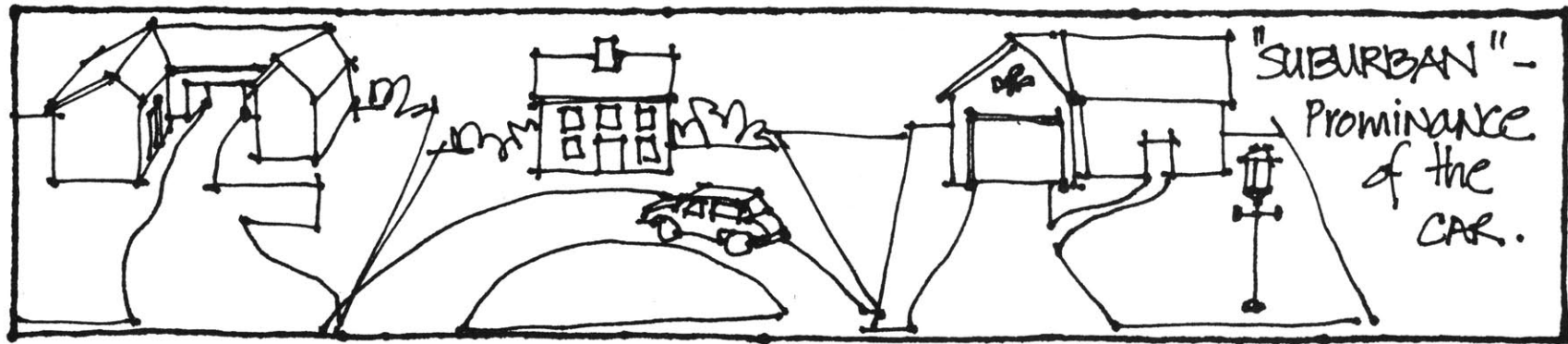
a sense of privacy and appear to be unrelated to the adjacent houses. The road and roadside should be visually similar to the minor roads found in rural areas."⁴

The distance necessary between houses in order for them to seem visually unrelated to the adjacent houses will vary with the quality of the land. One study has determined that on flat and open land this distance must be at least 2,000 feet; if vegetation and topography provide visual barriers, 600 feet.⁵

Suburban houses and one or two-acre lot zoning patterns create an environment which falls somewhere between the village or town and truly rural environments which characterize the Island. The houses are not far enough apart to read as separate domains, nor close enough to create the continuity of facade line and sense of

⁴ Peter Abeles, "Design Techniques for Development of Rural Characteristics of Suburban Residential Areas" (MCP Thesis, MIT, 1958), Abstract.

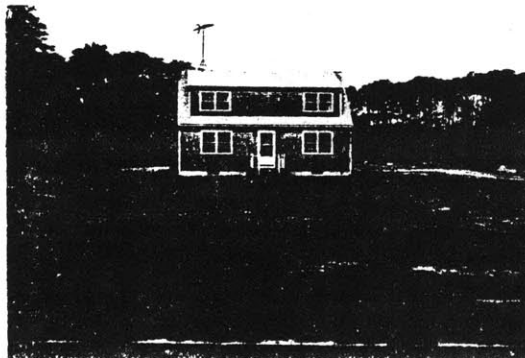
⁵ Ibid., p. 46.



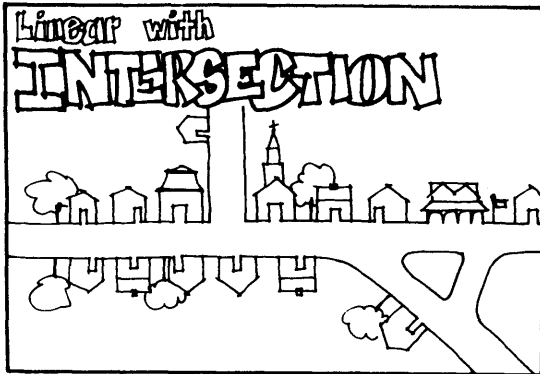
closure seen in Edgartown and Oak Bluffs. The traditions that the house address the public way, mark this edge in some fashion, and that the doorway serve as focal point of the facade, are also undermined in the suburban environment where the car has a prominence in the siting and design of the houses not found in traditional Vineyard places. Each of the houses above disrupts the continuity of the street with its driveway, and these private "streets", the prominent position of the parked car, and the large garage doors, visually overpower the doorway as the addressing and welcoming element of the house.

Unlike Edgartown, Oak Bluffs or Menemsha, whose whole "world" can be explored on foot, West Tisbury from the beginning has extended over a distance which necessitated other modes of transportation to tie it together — at first probably oxen, horses, and buggies, now automobiles. The issue of the increasing volume of cars on the Vineyard is very real, and though one brave soul has suggested banning them altogether (Island hearsay), their presence is likely to continue. The new roads and

houses they and their owners are likely to generate on the Island need not necessarily erode the existing character of the Vineyard for, as the village of West Tisbury illustrates, roads can serve as important physical and psychic links for a sense of community, are the places from which the houses are seen and, when the edge between private and public places is maintained and marked, can heighten the act of dwelling within the framework of a shared sense of place.



Rural houses relate to the road — the place from which they are most often seen and by which they are approached and entered. The fences, planting, and distance from the road (setback) not only serve to mark and define the edge between public and private, but they "frame" and heighten the act of entering the house and increase the sense of welcome expressed in the prominent doorways. This new West Tisbury house seems lost in its playing-field sized front lawn (is it public or private?), and, from the road, it appears so small that any gesture of welcome it might express is lost.



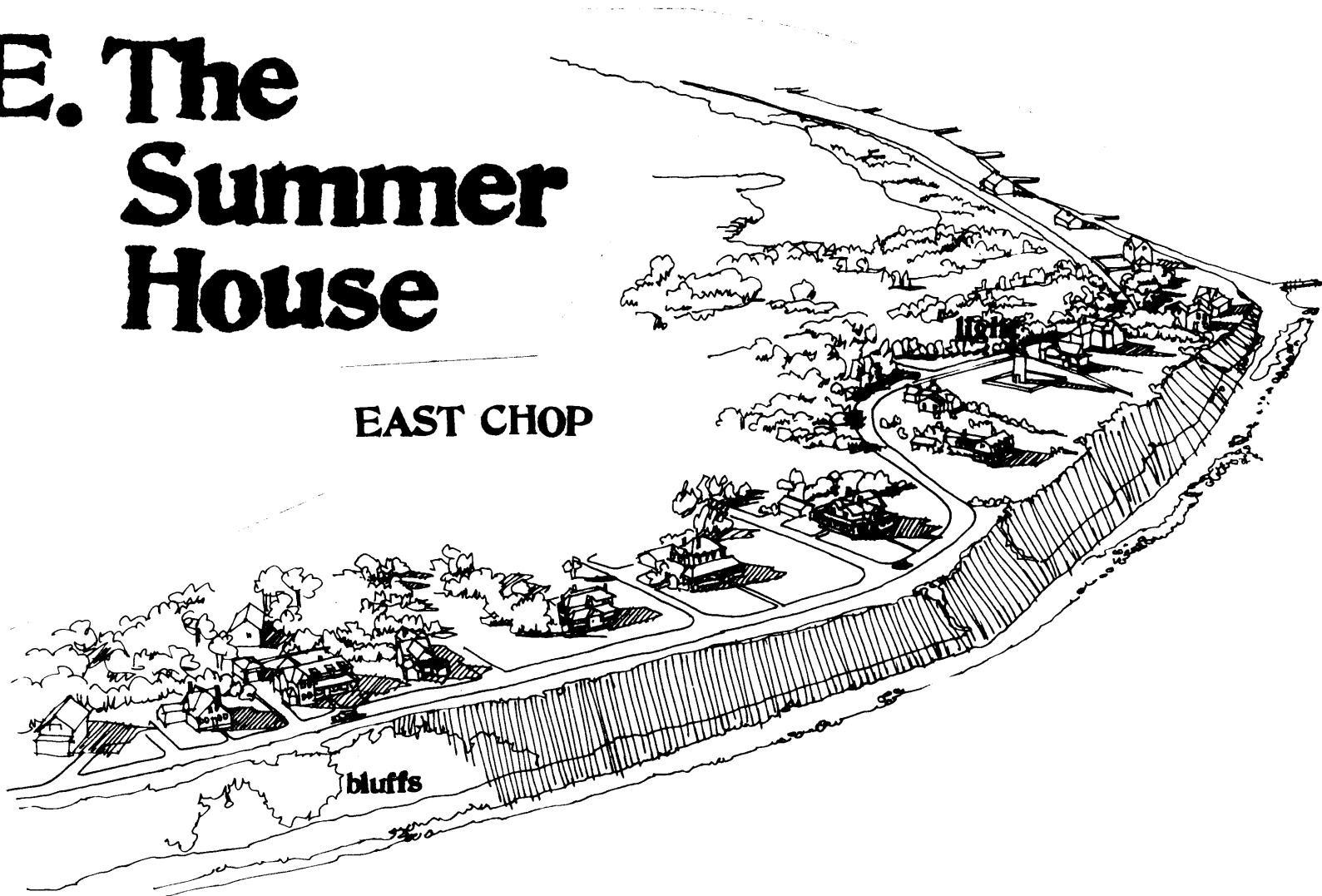
**Key
Characteristics
IDENTITY**

INLAND
VILLAGE

HIERARCHY in Form	ATTITUDE TOWARDS LAND	PUBLIC/ PRIVATE ZONES	House-to- House Relationships (Density)	Place of the Car & Services	Limit to Size / Growth of Form
<p>INTERSECTIONS FORM CENTER FOR LARGER COMMUNITY ON OUTLYING ROADS, DUE TO GREATER DENSITY OF ROADS, PEOPLE, AND, THEREFORE, THE MORE PUBLIC NATURE OF THIS PLACE. Important community buildings and activities naturally occur at this highest density of traffic and meeting.</p>	<p>FORMAL WHERE HOUSE'S LOCATION IS VERY PUBLIC (IN CENTER OR NEXT TO ROADS) ... PRIVATE LAND IS TENDED AND MARKED WITH FENCES OR STONE WALLS. FARMS AND HOUSES ALONG PRIVATE LANES LEAVE LAND LESS DOMESTICATED.</p>	<p>PRIVATE PUBLIC ZONES RELATE TO ROAD (THE PLACE FROM WHICH THE HOUSES ARE MOST OFTEN SEEN & EXPERIENCED.)</p>	<p>IN CENTER, ROADS BECOME "PUBLIC ROOMS" (LIKE EDGARTOWN) ACKNOWLEDGES MORE PUBLIC NATURE OF CROSSROADS OUTLYING ROADS ARE LESS PUBLIC - "RURAL" HOUSES ARE FAR ENOUGH APART TO READ AS SEPERATE PLACES.</p>	<p>ROADS AND CARS SERVE AS LINK FOR LARGER COMMUNITY, AND AS NETWORK FOR UTILITIES; YET PRESENCE OF CARS IS VISUALLY OVERPOWERED- IN CENTER: BY DENSITY AND TYPE OF HOUSES ON OUTLYING ROADS: BY DENSITY OF NATURAL VEGETATION & SMALL SIZE OF ROAD</p>	<p>CENTER CAN BECOME MORE DENSE, BUT LIMITED BY CAPACITY OF CENTER TO SERVE AS PLACE TO KNOW NEIGHBORS, SHOP, AND CELEBRATE. (TO BE PERCEIVED AS PART OF COMMUNITY, NEW HOUSES SHOULD BE ROAD- ADDRESSING.)</p>

E. The Summer House

EAST CHOP





I say Mother. And my thoughts are of you,
oh, House.
House of the lovely dark summers of my
childhood.

MILOSZ¹

Photographs of Island summer houses at East Chop (above), overlooking Vineyard Haven Harbor (top right) and along Starbuck Neck Lane in Edgartown.

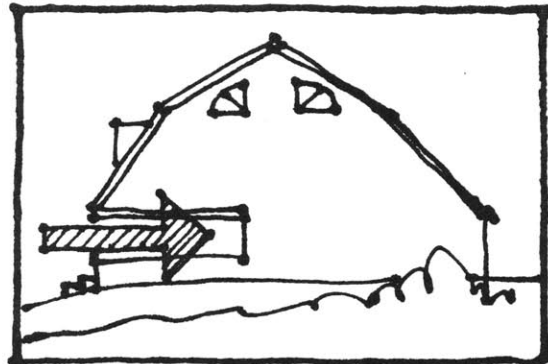
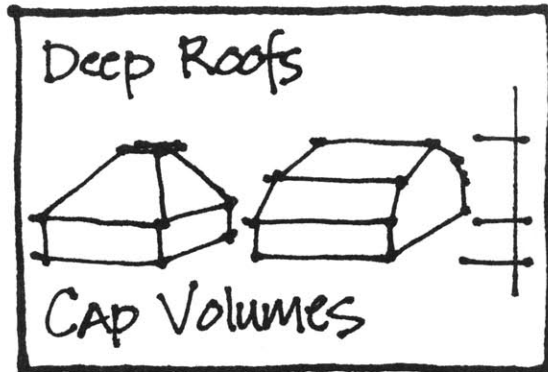
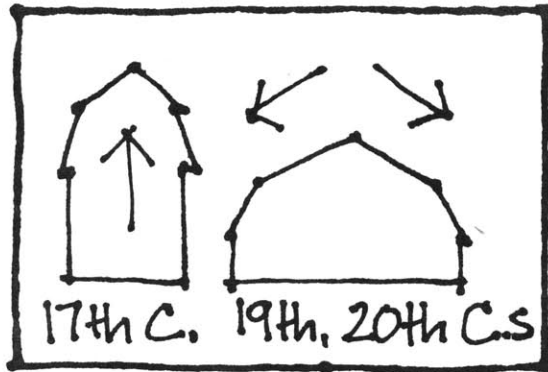
¹ The poem entitled *Melancolie* (Melancholy), by O.V. de Milosz (n.p., n.d.), quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 45.



The Island's history as a popular summer resort can be said to have begun with that first Methodist gathering under a shady grove of oaks in 1935 that marked the beginning of the Wesleyan Grove Camp Ground. But the attractiveness of the Vineyard for these early revival meetings — its sheer beauty, the pleasant psychic dislocation that comes with being on an island, and the welcomed distance from potentially marauding mainland rowdies — immediately became attractive to others as well, and “summer people” have remained a very visible part of Island life ever since.

The great success of the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company with their speculative subdivision community in 1866 prompted planning for an even larger summer town in Katama, outside of Edgartown. Although the 1873 depression halted this first Island land boom and the Katama community came to an end with the selling of its grand Mattakeesett Hotel in equity in 1879, the halt was only temporary. In 1887 the West Chop Land and Wharf Company founded a successful summer community at West Chop which, like East Chop and Starbuck Neck Lane in Edgartown, remains today as one of the Island's most memorable built places; especially as experienced from the water.

Martha's Vineyard was no exception to the country-wide boom in development of fashionable seaside resorts in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, and its shores are rimmed with this new fashion of house — the Shingle Style; a style particularly well-suited to the new purpose and style of living it housed, yet in many attributes in keeping with the older building tradi-



tions of the Island.

In order to understand the character of the places discussed in the previous four chapters it was necessary to begin first with a description of the larger environment — the framework in which the houses were organized and the manner in which the larger purpose of the community was housed. In these contexts the individual houses are the “bricks” creating a shared identity: Edgartown as a year-round community; Oak Bluffs as a summer, gathering-for-celebration community; Menemsha as sea-town; West Tisbury as a farming community. When describing “summer house places” it is possible to begin with the individual house, for in many ways they are places unto themselves.

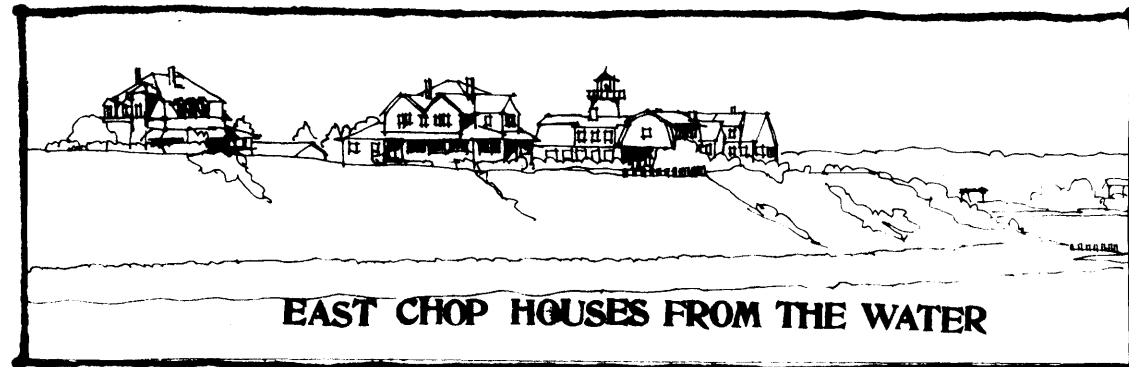
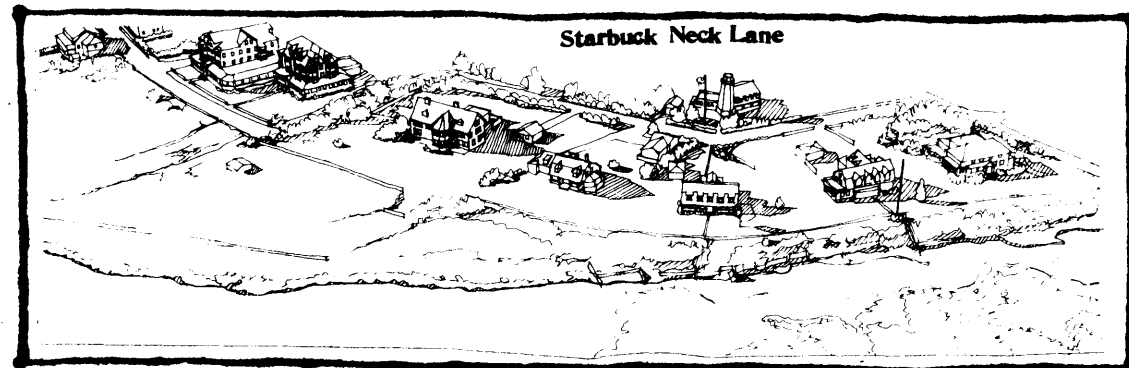
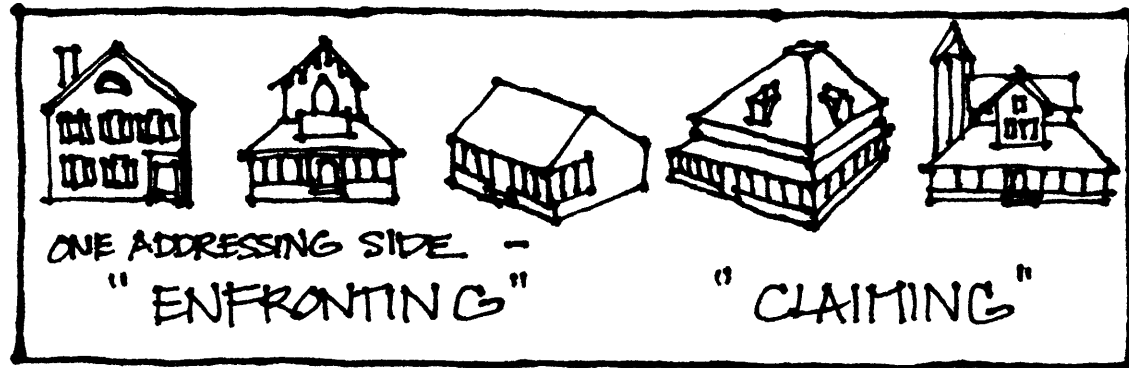
In purpose the summer house is not so neighbor-dependent; it houses a single family and friends on vacation (their reference as “family compounds” conjures up this singularity). In their form and appearance they also have attributes of singularity. The houses found in the Island towns and villages previously discussed have one side that addresses — a definite public “face” they show to the world (street, road, sea) — and this facade is most powerful when framed for view by adjacent houses enhancing the sense of wall; they have the quality of “enfronting” their environment.² Shingle Style houses

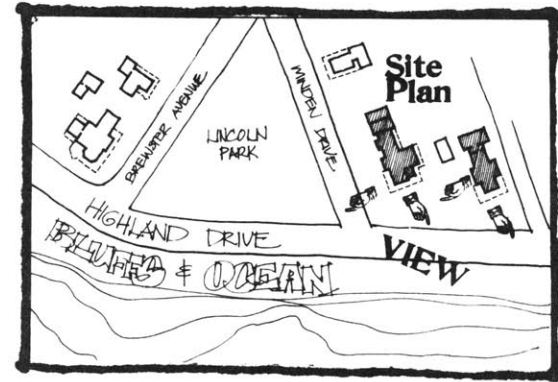
² A term used by Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon in their *The Place of Houses* to describe the various ways of fitting the house to the land: “merging”, “claiming”, “enfronting”, “surrounding”; (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), pp. 188-207.

claim their own place on the land. The grand volumes of their deep capping roofs appear to be hugging the land around them, and though these houses have the same roof forms found in earlier architecture, the roof shape and relative size of the roof to facade is low and horizontal when compared to older Island buildings. Though the Shingle Style has often been called a "Colonial Revival" style because of its use of many of the same architectural elements seen in 17th and 18th Century buildings (small-paned and Palladian windows; hipped, gable or gambrel roofs; and of course, the "skin" of shingles covering both roofs and walls), the style is characterized by a particular mixture of classical elements and casual adjustments made to older forms to house the more informal purpose of these summer house domains.

In earlier styles, emphasis is placed on one face of the volume, in the Shingle Style it is on the four-sided volume itself into which are tucked, or out of which grow, the porches, dormers, bays, towers and turrets which serve to animate the volume and the purpose housed within. Towers especially emphasize this claiming attitude of the house and seem almost to be "pinning" the house to the land and marking the spot in much the same fashion as lighthouses; at Starbuck Neck Lane, a tower marks a center for the houses circling the land around it.

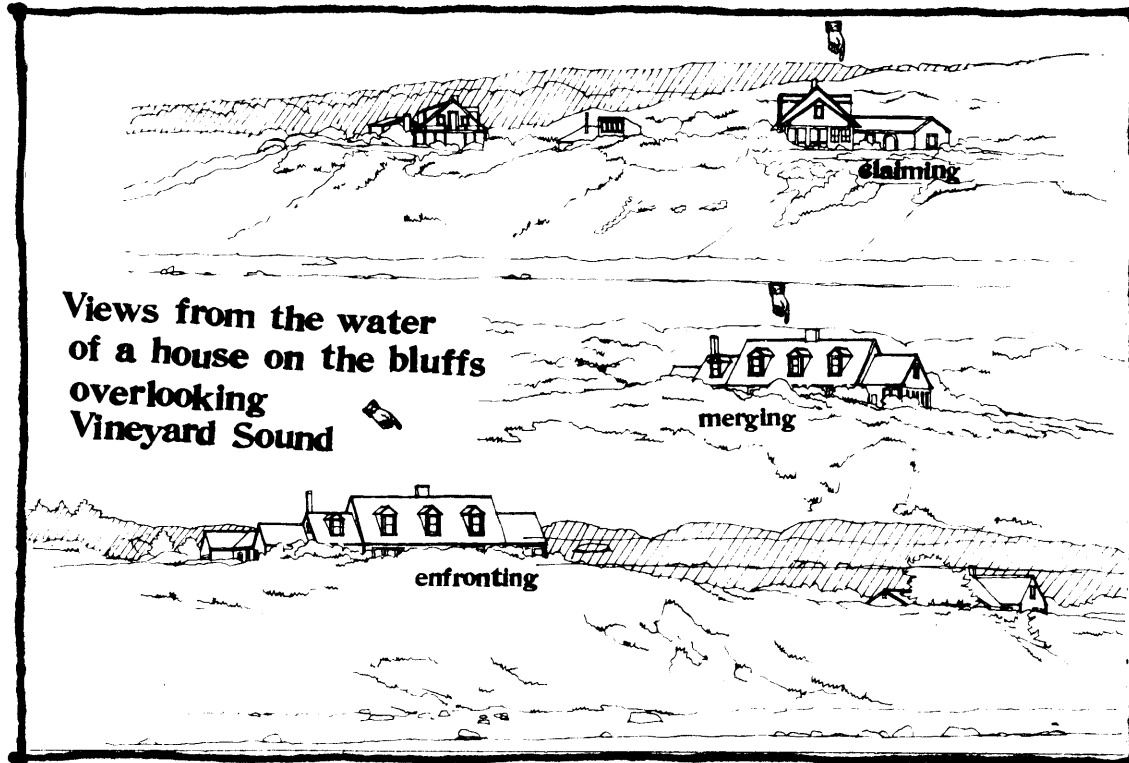
Though the houses seem to have four equally powerful "faces" by virtue of the capping roof shapes, and thus are meant to be experienced from all sides — as single house domains — special qualities of the land, sea edge and views are acknowl-





Though the first two houses above address the harbor their deep roofs make the act of *claiming* the land predominate over their enfronting attitude. They appear as separate objects on the land but by a similarity in size, shape and orientation, they mark and reveal the quality of the sloping land edge. The new house, by contrast, *enfronts* the view with its long low facade. Its most important feature is this single face, with its roof serving not to cap the total volume, but to frame the edge of the addressing side of the building. In its attitude towards the land it has more in common with the houses along Edgartown's streets than it does with its neighbors.

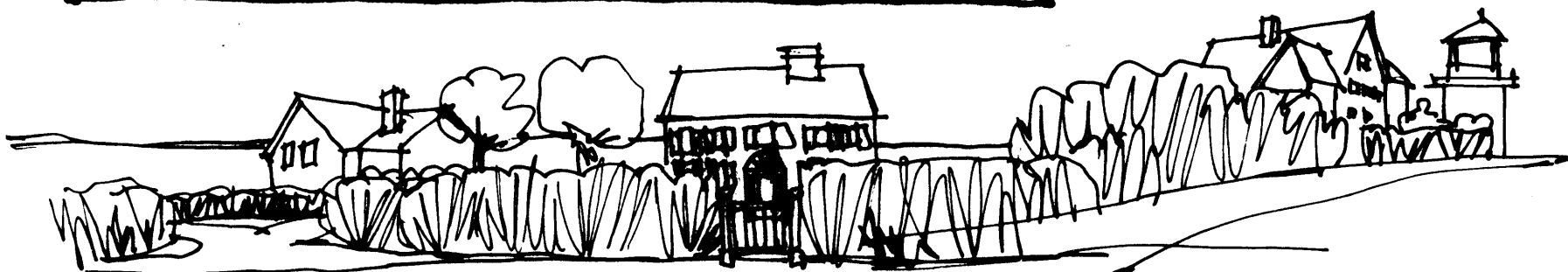
edged by the outdoor rooms tucked into one or more face of the volume. The porches and verandas (open, glazed or screened) of these summer houses, like the similar but smaller scale porches of Menemsha houses, serve to announce the house to the world; while the houses along Edgartown streets announce themselves in a formal — “bowtie” — sort of way, the informal wide porches of these sea-side houses speak just as eloquently — but of “sneakers and sunburns”. When experienced as a group, as along Highland — East Chop Drive, these porches serve to animate and heighten the changing views of sea and shores beyond. Though the houses appear as single objects, they read as a “family” on the land by their similarity in size, proportions, materials and orientation to the sea. The left house in the plan above acknowledges its neighbor further by its offset siting affording the largest view to both houses, a neighborly attitude also seen in houses along Beach Road in Oak Bluffs (page 35). In so doing, it participates in the sense of *shared* place that characterizes all of the Island's memorable man-made places.



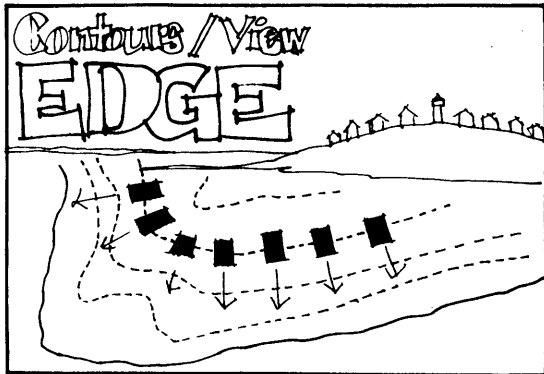
Views from the water
of a house on the bluffs
overlooking
Vineyard Sound

Built places convey a meaning to the observer which is shaped by the manner in which the observer can *experience* that place. From the water the changing points of view reveal the many qualities of this summer house: it encloses a private space on the land, succeeds in merging with the quality of the landscape, yet at the same time boldly addresses its commanding view on the bluffs.

East Chop is experienced as a place not only from the water, but from the road as well.



East Chop houses, from the road



COASTAL
VILLAGE
OR
HAMLET

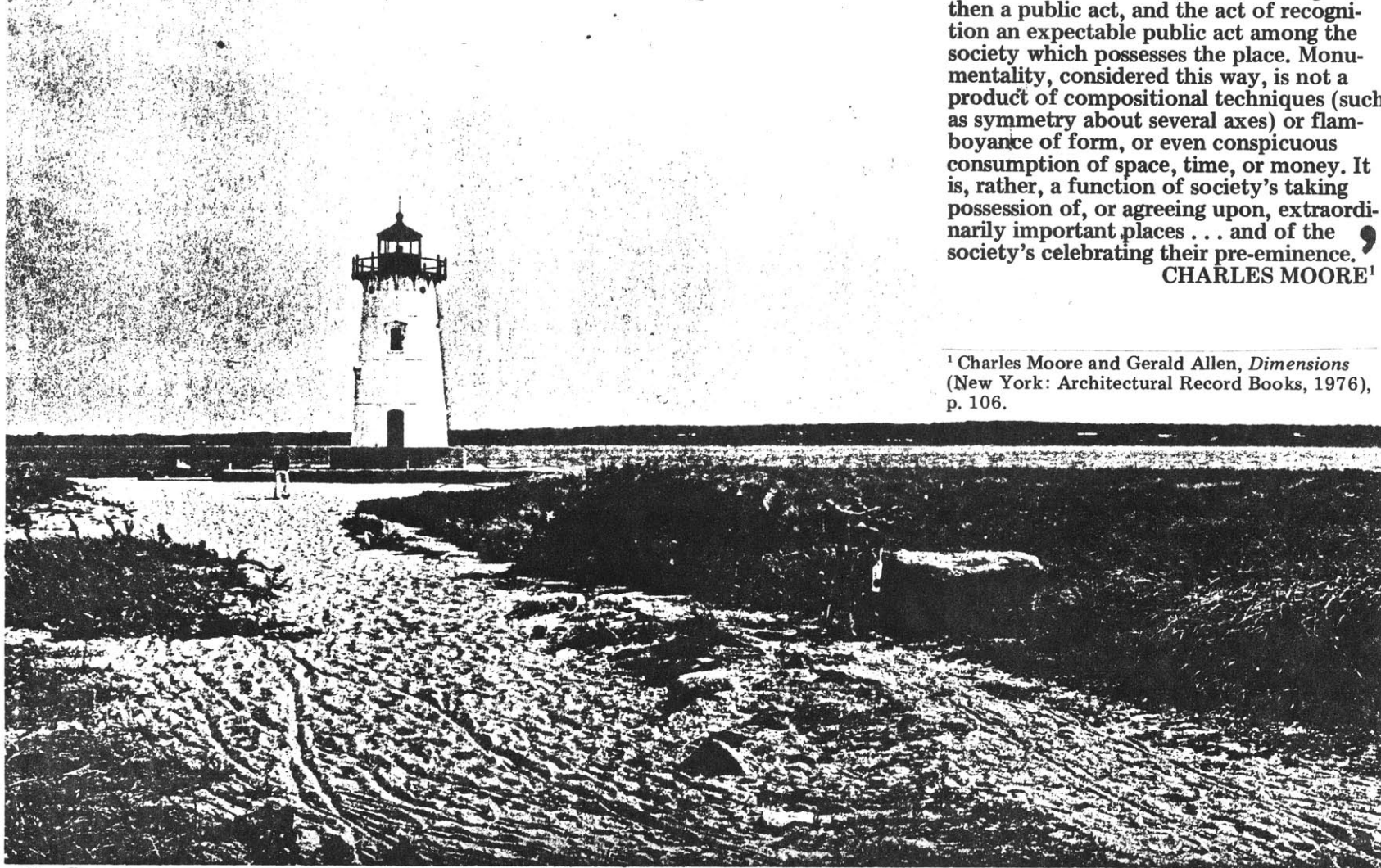
HIERARCHY in Form	ATTITUDE TOWARDS LAND	PUBLIC/PRIVATE ZONES	House-to-House Relationships Density	Place of the Car & Services	Limits to Size / Growth of Form
<p>ENVIRONMENT IS GENERATED OUTWARD TOWARDS THE EDGE AND VIEW</p> <p>THE HIGHEST, OR MOST PROTRUDING PLACE ALONG THE EDGE ASSUMES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE. IN RECOGNITION OF ITS HIERARCHICAL IMPORTANCE ON THE LAND, SUCH A PLACE SHOULD REMAIN PUBLIC IN SOME FASHION.</p>	<p>ADDRESSING - INFORMALLY (PORCHES) - TOWARDS THE VIEW.</p> <p>LAND IS USUALLY LEFT WILD, OR AT MOST, PRIVATE LAWNS AND TENDED SHRUBS AROUND BASE OF HOUSE. FENCES ARE NOT SEEN; IF BOUNDARIES OF PRIVATE LAND ARE MARKED AT ALL, IT IS USUALLY WITH LOW BUSHES. LARGE TREES OR PLANTING NOT NATIVE TO THIS LOCATION ARE SELDOM SEEN.</p>	<p>PRIVATE (Porches) SEMI-PRIVATE</p> <p>PUBLIC</p>	<p>DENSITY ALONG EDGE CAN VARY. COULD BE VERY DENSE (LIKE CAMPGROUNDS), WITH ADJACENT PORCHES FORMING A SEMI-PUBLIC SOCIAL SPACE WRAPPING AROUND THE EDGE OR COULD BE VERY OPEN. THE CRITICAL FACTOR IS FOR THE HOUSES TO HAVE A SIMILAR ORIENTATION AND ADDRESSING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EDGE. (SIMILAR TYPE AND SIZE IN THE HOUSES ALSO HELPS TO TIE THE EDGE OF THE LAND TOGETHER.)</p>	<p>ACCESS OF CARS & UTILITIES OCCURS ALONG STREETS WHICH RELATE TO SHAPE OF EDGE. ROADS ARE IMPRINT TO THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PLACE AS THEY ARE THE LOCATION FROM WHICH THE HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE SEEN AND EXPERIENCED.</p>	<p>THE SIZE IS LIMITED IN ONE DENSE VERY MUCH LIKE CENTERS (ONLY IN REVERSE) IN THAT WATERS ARE LIMITED BY THEIR CONNECTION TO THE EDGE. LIMITED ALSO BY THE LENGTH OF THE EDGE, THE TYPE OF VEGETATION AND TOPOGRAPHY (WHETHER THE HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE SEEN), AND BY THE VANTAGE POINTS FROM WHICH THE EDGE IS SEEN (USUALLY ROAD AND OCEAN.)</p>

F. LANDMARKS

... to be of any interest to most of the people who view it, a monument must mark a place of more than private importance or interest. The act of marking is then a public act, and the act of recognition an expectable public act among the society which possesses the place. Monumentality, considered this way, is not a product of compositional techniques (such as symmetry about several axes) or flamboyance of form, or even conspicuous consumption of space, time, or money. It is, rather, a function of society's taking possession of, or agreeing upon, extraordinarily important places . . . and of the society's celebrating their pre-eminence.

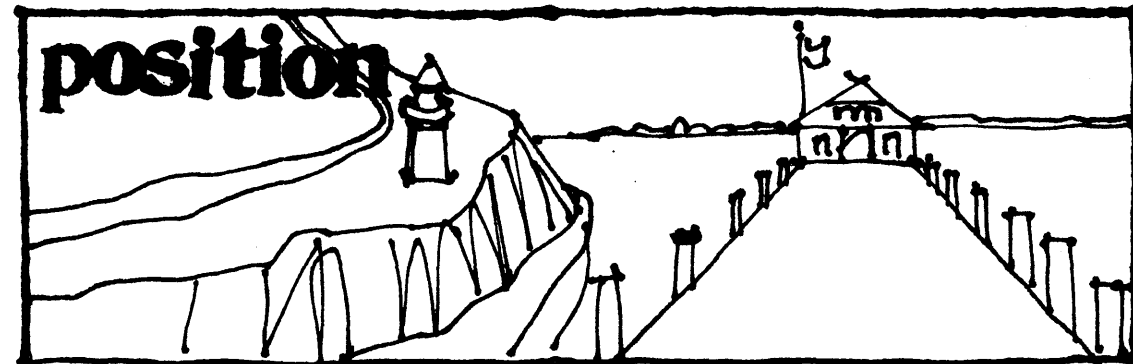
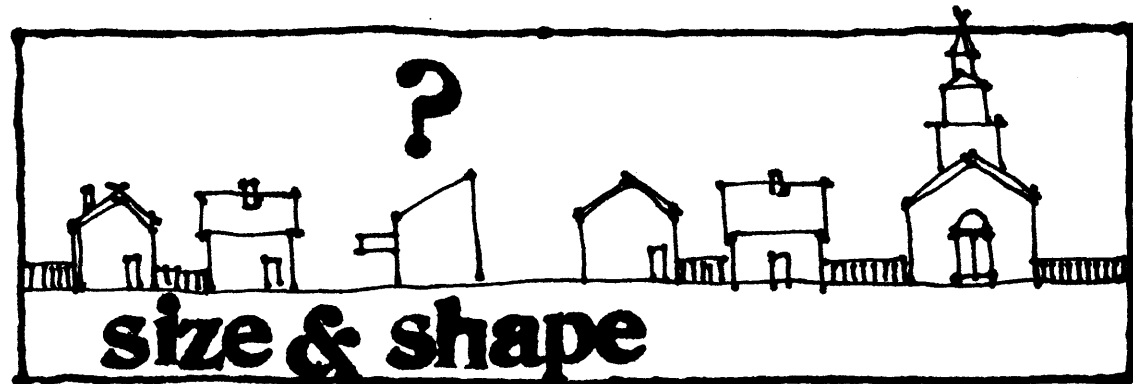
CHARLES MOORE¹

¹ Charles Moore and Gerald Allen, *Dimensions* (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1976), p. 106.



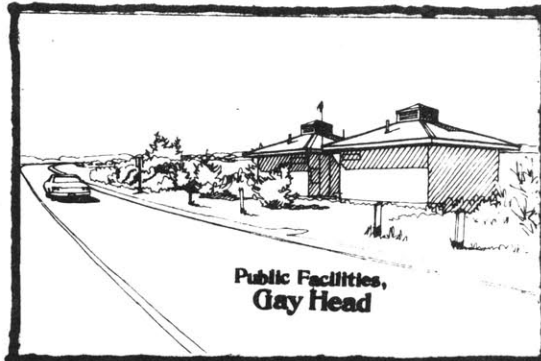
Landmarks, both physically and visually, provide reference points for the shared dwelling of a community. By their housing of special, usually public, functions, and by their differing physical form — taller, larger, or more unusually shaped or elaborately detailed than residential dwellings — they give expression to shared traditions, values and aspirations. By their siting landmarks establish a position of preeminence on the land or within the organizing pattern, and in doing so reveal, and heighten the observer's awareness of that environmental context. (Lighthouses, for example, by their function as beacons for ships at sea, and by their location at high, prominent positions along the edge of the land, intensify the sense of here/there experienced at the place.)

As mentioned in the discussion of "Place" in chapter II, a building is able to serve as a landmark only when there is enough consistency of some kind in the environment around it to enable the particular use, form and/or position of the building to be perceived as different, and therefore, meaningful in some fashion. In rising above the nearly uniform height of houses in Edgartown, the church spire becomes a landmark. In the campgrounds at Oak Bluffs the Tabernacle is marked as special by its differing circular shape and greater size relative to the cottages surrounding it. The power of a lighthouse as landmark stems as much from the contrast it presents to the unencumbered landscape as it does from its function and unusual shape (compare the same form in another landscape — the "tower house" along Starbuck Neck Lane in Edgartown; sketch, page 58, or photograph, page 66).

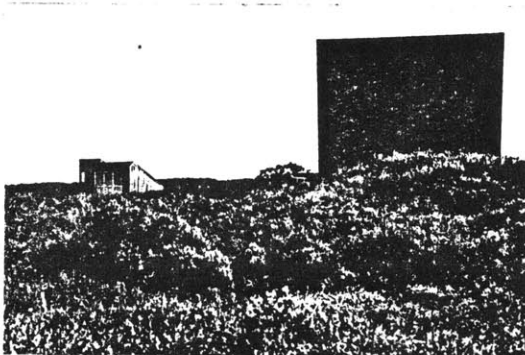




In the middle of all distance stands this house, therefore be fond of it.²



In most cases Landmarks are public and derive their position of importance from this aspect of their meaning. But private buildings may also assume the status of landmarks by powerfully claiming the open land around them and conveying an identity which holds a meaning for the observer, as do many of the old farms on the Vineyard. Though they are private domains, the Island heritage they symbolize holds great importance for both Island residents and visitors alike.



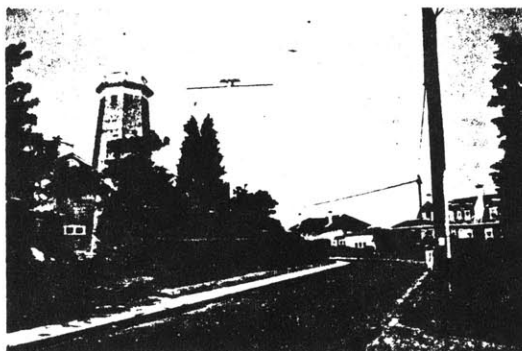
Unusual form, size or siting in a building will attract public attention, as does the "billboard" front on a wharf building in Vineyard Haven where the reason for the shape and purpose of the building are understandable, therefore, meaningful. The unusual pavilions at Gay Head are also understandable as welcomed public facilities, and the singularity of their shape seems in keeping with the singularity of the purpose they house.

²"In der Mitte aller Ferne steht dies Haus drum hab es gerne", H. Broch, *Gedichte* (n.p., 1953), p. 68, quoted in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 31.

Though special features on the land, or the open landscape itself, often serve as reference points — “landmarks” — a landmark is most often thought of as a building or object that marks a special position in the landscape; its power stemming as much from the *land* as from the object itself. So, for example, a single house in the unencumbered landscape can become to the observer a landmark by virtue of its relationship to what is around it. The same building when the land is built up with other houses may or may not be a landmark, depending upon its *relationship* to the other houses, and again, to the land, and to the manner in which it is experienced in its context: whether it occupies a special view, is higher or different in form or use, or whether it marks a position of passing into or through something in the larger place.

Because landmarks have the power to mark the land as special and to provide reference points for orientation to and experience of the larger place, their act of marking is an act of celebration of a shared — *public* — position of importance, and, implicitly, must convey some publicly understandable *meaning*.

These new buildings by their unusual shapes gain the attention normally reserved for public landmarks. Yet their purpose is not public, nor in the house in the photograph (seen from Light House Road), readily understood. It is difficult to guess whether they are meant to be public or private, landmarks or houses, and though, “of a sort”, they *do* succeed in becoming “landmarks”, the sense of place they generate is clouded in ambiguity. (pg. 65)



IV. ISLAND TRADITIONS OF PLACE:

Beaches, moors [and] gently rolling uplands with kettle bottom ponds give way to flat glacial outwash plains streaked with great ponds, superb harbors and estuaries rich with marine and bird life.¹

Her towns are as quixotic as her varied landscape. They are concise deposits of often conflicting cultures. Edgartown, the whaling town, is crisp, white colonial clapboard; Menemsha, a fishing village . . . a less pretentious collection of weather-beaten shacks. At West Chop stand the bulky Newport mansions — the grandeur that was Boston; and nearby at Oak Bluffs, is one of the most delightful assemblages of Victorian gingerbread.²

Summer People have been attracted to the various sections of the Island because of their particular flavor. Casual Menemsha has her collection of artists, Freudian psychiatrists, and ritualistic liberals. Edgartown is noted for her New York yacht club sophisticates, and Oak Bluffs still has its Protestant ministers on holiday, as well as a considerable [Black] population. Out on the lonely moors of Chilmark roam the intellectuals.³

¹ Bonita Barrs, "Jurisdictional Allocations in Land Use Planning; The Battle for Control on Martha's Vineyard" (MCP thesis, MIT, 1973), p. 12.

² Maude Dorr "Will Martha Get Raped?", *Progressive Architecture* 47:6, June 1966, p. 171.

³ Ibid.

Each of these descriptions succeed in evoking the character of Martha's Vineyard and her many diverse places — one by describing the quality of her landscapes; another by her houses; and the last, by the people who inhabit them. All of these factors — the land itself, the form of the built environment, and the people and activities they house — interact to create a memorable sense of place. Just as maps or plans can convey to the reader only a partial understanding of the locality described, the following description of the traditions in the physical forms of Island places can not truthfully be said to be describing “Island traditions of *place*”, but rather, just one of the many (perhaps most) important factors which combine to produce this quality.

“The words *site* and *locality* [and *place, town, village*] should convey the same sense that the word *person* does: a complexity so closely knit as to have a distinct character, worthy of interest, concern, and often of affection.”⁴ What I have attempted to observe is one aspect of this complexity: how the physical forms of Island towns and villages have served, visually and by the experience they afford, to “house” the sense of place which evolves through the interaction of the environment and its users. Though this is just one of the factors that have shaped (and will shape) places, it is one over which we have some control.

[In] the 1960s . . . imposing a shape on things was under attack on social grounds, and form-givers . . . were labeled as cultural dinosaurs. The presumption was either that good things shouldn't have any shape (in the same way a good society would not need any government) or that the shape of the environment would come, without midwifery, out of the interaction of users and makers.⁵

Today there is a recognition that the growth of the built environment cannot be left to chance, a growing appreciation

of unique built places, and a new understanding that architecture is not a private art, but is shared — society's way of making sense of things, its past, present, and future. We would do well to learn from the Vineyard.

That Island places have come to be associated so distinctly with groups of people and ways of life — have come to have “personalities” of their own as places — is due to a consistency of character and sense of identity imparted to a great deal by the appearance and experience of the place.

People put the earth within them in the land they find, place the landscape within them on the landscape without, and both become one.⁶

An environment which *facilitates* the observer's attempt to formulate a sense of what that place is all about — to “place” himself in it — is a pleasurable experience, similar perhaps to making a colorful new acquaintance. On “meeting” Edgartown for the first time one might characterize it as a “black-tie” sort of place; Oak Bluffs: a “clam-bake”. Though with longer acquaintance one would realize Edgartown has her frivolities and Oak Bluffs her seriousness, these first strong impressions provide the important sense of identity which stimulates further exploration, and from which greater understanding can grow.

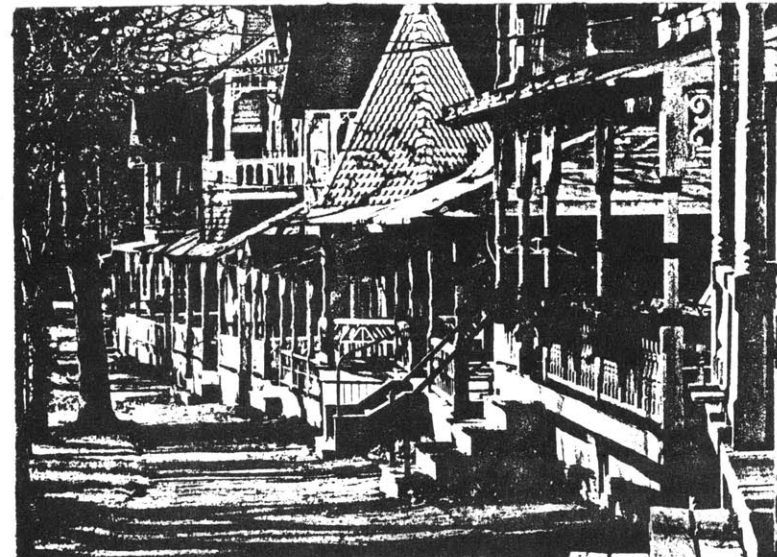
⁴ Kevin Lynch, *Site Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971) p. 10.

⁵ Charles Moore and Gerald Allen, *Dimensions* (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1976), p. 11.

⁶ R. Schwartz, *Von der Bebauung der Erde* (n.p., 1949), p. 59., quoted in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 39

Contrast between the man-made & the natural

The most memorable — and characteristic — sense of place imparted by the Vineyard is not established by any one of her towns or villages or by any one of a number of her unique landscapes; but rather it is the sense of *contrast* between the truly natural landscape and the man-made places. The intensely inhabited parks and streets and overlapping activities of its dwelling places in juxtaposition to the solitary experience of the unclaimed forest, marsh, moor, plain, pond, bluff and sea, is perhaps the most distinguishing tradition of place on the Vineyard.





Shared attitude towards the land

One of the critical factors allowing for the “consistency of character” seen in each of the Island places studied in the last chapter is the shared attitude among the houses about *how the land should be tended*.

If a house along an Edgartown street, for example, were to leave its yard unmarked by fences or hedges and unmowed (as is found in Menemsha) it would diminish the sense of place of the street not only by disrupting the edge defined by fences, but by taking an informal posture towards the land which denies the publicness of its location. The sense of the larger place as an entity would be weakened by such an anomaly.

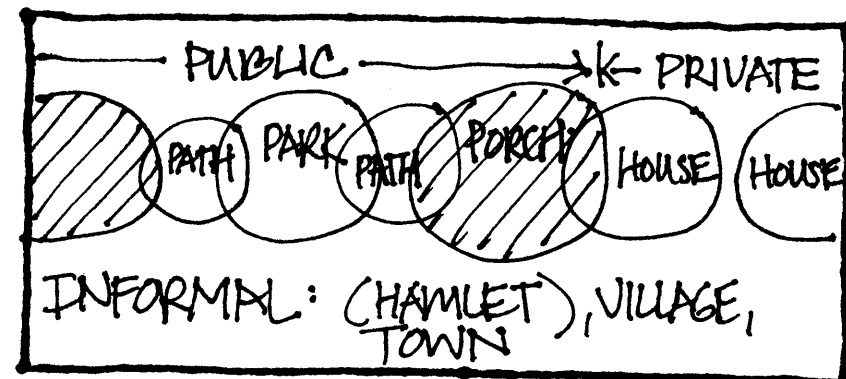
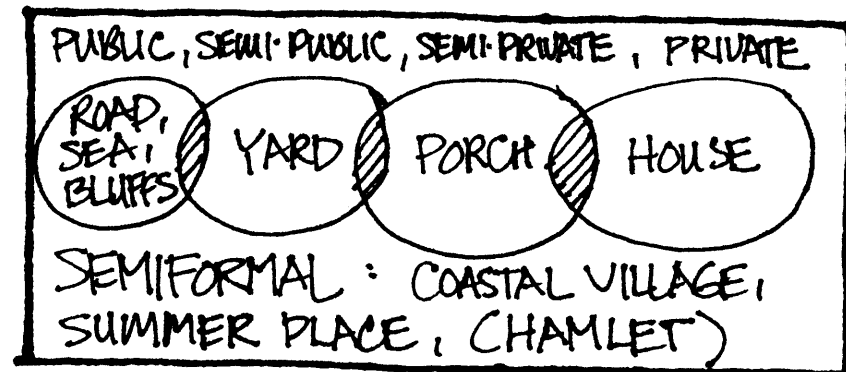
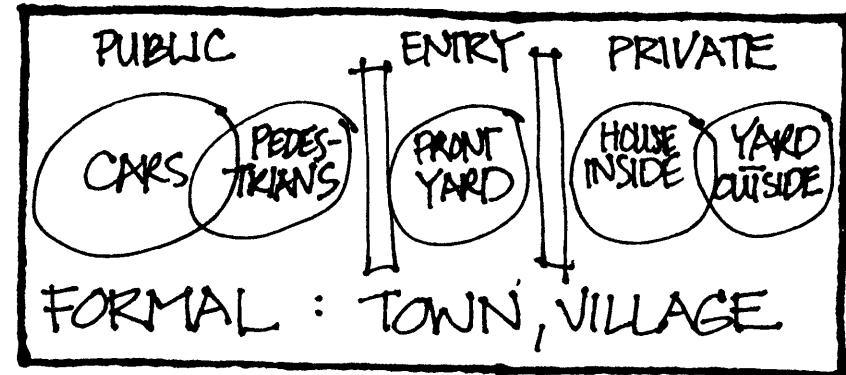
The formal attitude towards the land seen in Edgartown — that it be tended, domesticated and marked — appears to be a traditional way of claiming a private domain on the land along public roads. Houses along South, Middle and North Roads mark the land this way; the same type of house back from the road, in the outwash plains for instance, would leave the land unmarked and possibly untended. East Chop is less public (there are cars, but no sidewalks). Here the houses tend the land (grass and often shrubs around the house itself), but the street edge and property boundaries are left unmarked. White fences and mowed lawns on the hills of Menemsha would seem silly (what is there to fence in/out?), and in the campground the idea of fencing in a private yard would seem not only antisocial, but so unnecessary when all the community parks can be used as one’s own.

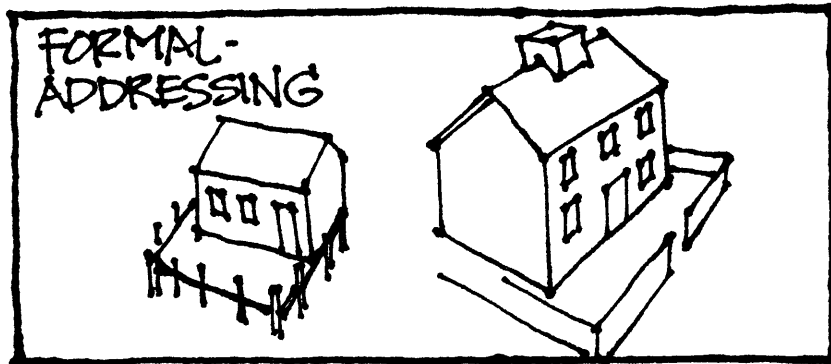
Clear public/ private zones

One of the reasons Vineyard towns and villages are such memorable places is that their organization enables even the first-time visitor to easily “place” himself in them — the place of the visitor (public) and inhabitants (private) is conveyed clearly by the houses themselves, and expresses to the observer a great deal about the nature of the place as a community.

In Edgartown the public place is the sidewalks and streets — the linear “outdoor rooms” of the community. The houses frame this place with their fences, and their embellished front facades and elegant doorways acknowledge this transition zone between public and private worlds. East Chop houses relate to the road and sea (public) but their greater distance from the road establishes the privacy of the house’s domain. The private domain of Menemsha houses can be recognized by their hill-top siting or by individual docks and stairways at the water’s edge. At Oak Bluffs the houses frame the public places by their positioning and shelter their private worlds with porches which participate in the public world as much as they do in the private. This happens not only in a one-dimensional way — from house to porch to path to park and to porch again, but the adjacency of the porches create a continuous semi-public zone wrapping around the public spaces.

The houses themselves, and the framework of their organization, work together to create this clarity of place.





Agreement about form of houses




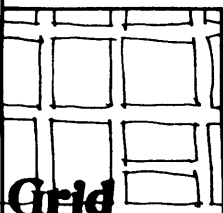

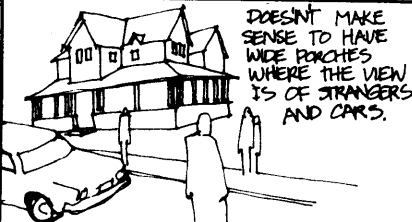

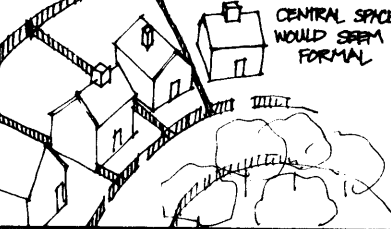






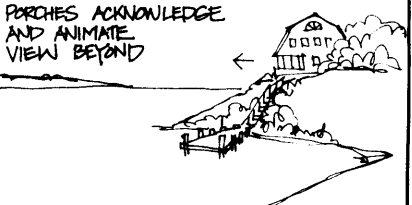
It is an oversimplification, but hopefully not a distortion, to say that traditional Vineyard houses fall into three types, all in some measure formed from the simple gabled box which from earliest times proved serviceable for functions as diverse as barns, houses, churches and fishing shacks.

In its simplest form the shape remains an enclosed box with one of its faces gaining preeminence as the entry — “addressing”-side. The house is “formal” in that all private living is housed within.

The second type of house is informal in that some of this activity moves into outdoor rooms where it can be seen by others. In this case the box has porches tucked into or growing out from the basic volume. The shape is often spread out and becomes lower and wider, or boxes are added together; but one face still has predominance — it still addresses its environment although porches give this gesture an informal character.

The third type differs from the first two in that one side of the volume no longer predominates. It appears to claim the land rather than address it. These houses are often of greater size and built from numbers of boxes added together so that there are “faces” on all sides, or the box is lower and wider with a deep hipped or gambrel roof with grand sweeping planes which seem to anchor the house to the land.

The gesture the house makes towards the land — formal, informal, claiming — works with the larger organizing framework to enhance this sense of place.

Correlation of Framework to House Types	 Addressing-Formal	 Addressing- Informal	 Claiming
 Grid	<p>FORMAL FRONTS ACKNOWLEDGE PUBLICNESS OF STREETS.</p>  <p>HOUSE FRONTS CREATE "WALLS" DEFINING STREETS AS PLACES</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>  <p>DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO HAVE WIDE PORCHES WHERE THE VIEW IS OF STRANGERS AND CARS.</p>
 Centers	<p>CENTRAL SPACE WOULD SEEM FORMAL</p> 	<p>PERHAPS</p>	<p>YES</p>  <p>CENTER IS CLAIMED BY HOUSES AS AN EXTENSION OF THE SOCIAL SPACES OF PORCHES.</p>
 Inter- sections	<p>FORMAL FRONT ACKNOWLEDGES PUBLIC NATURE OF PLACE AS CROSSROADS</p>  <p>PRIVATE PUBLIC</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>PERHAPS</p>  <p>ONLY ON OUTLYING ROADS - IF THERE IS SOME VIEW FOR THE PORCHES TO ADDRESS</p>
 Edges	<p>UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES</p> 	<p>PERHAPS</p>	<p>YES</p>  <p>PORCHES ACKNOWLEDGE AND ANIMATE VIEW BEYOND</p>

Shared (public) places & Activity

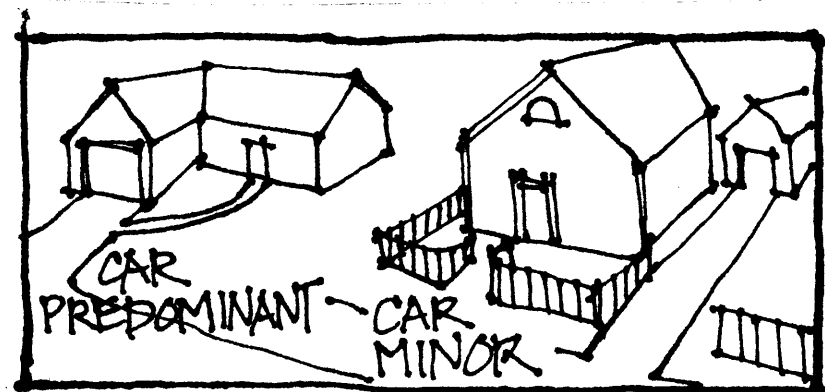


Other than Ocean Park and other parks laid out by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company, none of the public places mentioned as being so important to the sense of place of Island towns and villages was developed because someone thought it made good "design sense"; each of them evolved out of the nature of the land itself (Menemsha's jetty, wharfs and beaches), the purpose of the community (the Tabernacle, West Tisbury's Grange), or through fulfillment of utilitarian needs (East Chop's lighthouse, Edgartown's town dock.) Yet in a design sense without these "landmarks", the activities they afford and the community values they symbolize, the sense of place would be much diminished, if not lost.

In the few cases where new development occurs in very large parcels, some developers have recognized the need to generate a focus — a center and identity — for the larger community of dwellings, but more often development occurs in piecemeal fashion and too swiftly to provide the opportunity for residents to explore and give expression to their commonality. In the planning of new places for the Vineyard (the Commission's "hamlets", "villages", "towns", or others), the design of these centers (and the designing of *how* to design them) will be critical to their success in establishing a sense of place of their own.

Minor place of the car

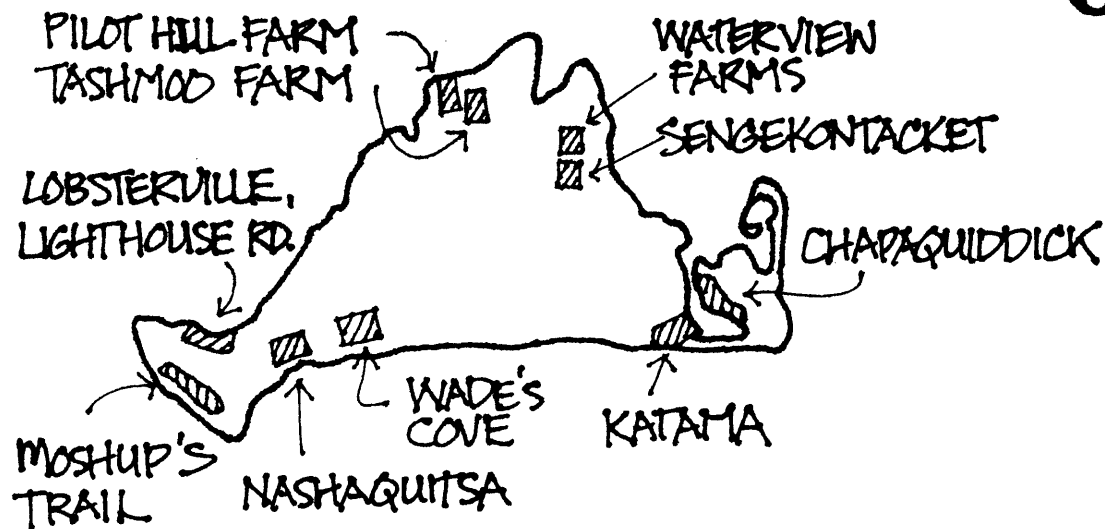
One of the distinguishing features of the Island is the minor visual presence of the car; one of the distinguishing features of most new mainland residential developments is its prominence. This is probably an important aspect of the Vineyard's appeal to summer people as an escape from their winter work-a-day environments, and one of the many "Island-like" qualities of which Islanders are proud and justly protective. As design can solve the problem of accommodating the undeniably necessary vehicles without allowing them to establish the character of a place (through siting or by providing for a density of houses which can visually predominate over the presence of streets and cars), it seems a shame to allow the kind of development which could exist anywhere/everywhere to occur on an Island with such a heritage and distinctive tradition of place.



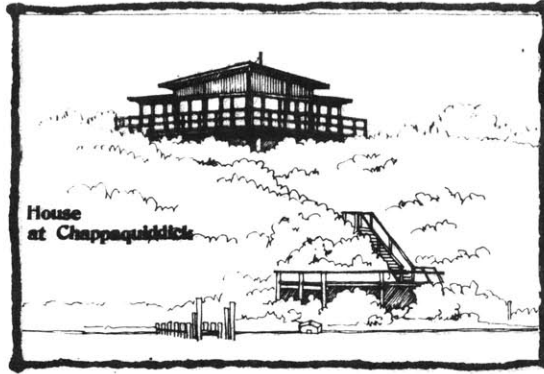
V. NEW DEVELOPMENTS

' It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible. '

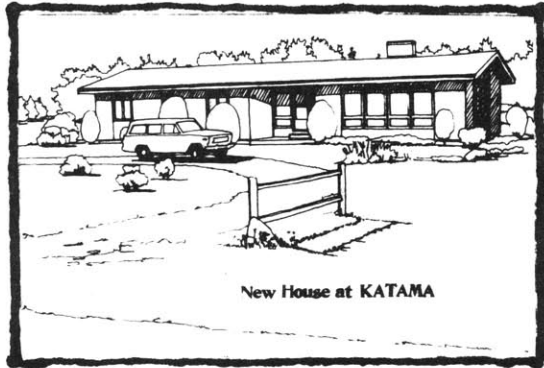
Oscar Wilde¹



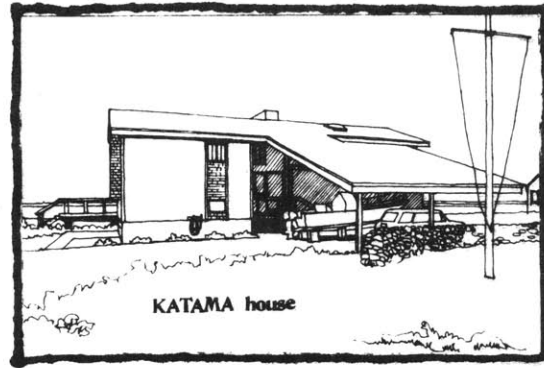
¹ Quoted (no reference) in Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1966), p.3.



House
at Chappaquiddick



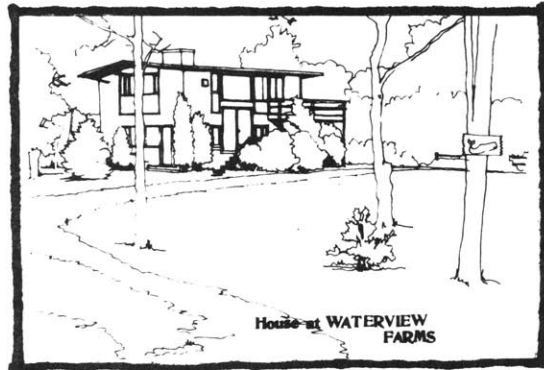
New House at KATAMA



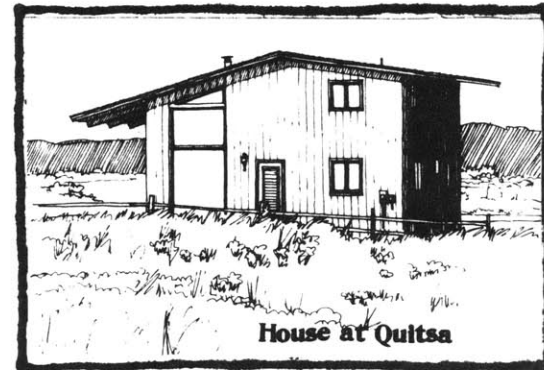
KATAMA house



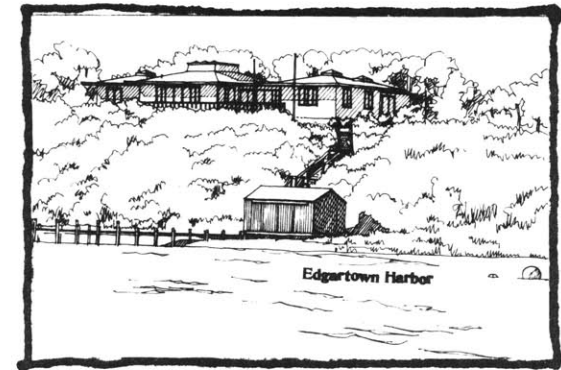
New house
along
Moshup's Trail



House at WATERVIEW
FARMS



House at Quitsa



Edgartown Harbor

New House Types ...

In "Towards an Imageable Structure for Residential Environments", a 1958 MIT thesis, the author noted that for the country as a whole "[t]he form of the contemporary American home has come a long way since the New England balloon [and post and beam] frame houses with their thin membranes and grand volumes. Although the materials may often be the same, the over-all size of house has been enormously reduced. Servants quarters are no longer necessary and the living area has amalgamated the dining and living room and reception rooms. In addition, the single story house has become widely popular, so that roofs have lowered and the plan has tended to spread . . . larger areas of glass and deep roof overhangs have broken up the volume which formally was so strong."²

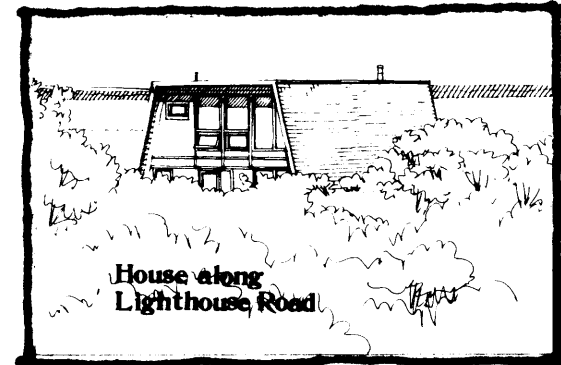
New "suburban" house forms have a different attitude towards the land; with their prominent garages and driveways

² Donald Appleyard, "Towards an Imageable Structure for Residential Areas" (MCP thesis, MIT, 1958), p. 162.

they are neither truly rural or urban, and the house's relationship to outdoor spaces, previously formalized in the porch or fenced and tended front yard, is now difficult to grasp as an image. Prepackaged industrialized buildings make it possible to erect "catalogue" homes in virtually any location and houses which have more to do with California bungalows and warm dry climates than they do with Vineyard weather, land and tradition, are springing up indiscriminately on Island moors, woods and bluffs, and eroding the different identities and sense of place of these unique landscapes.

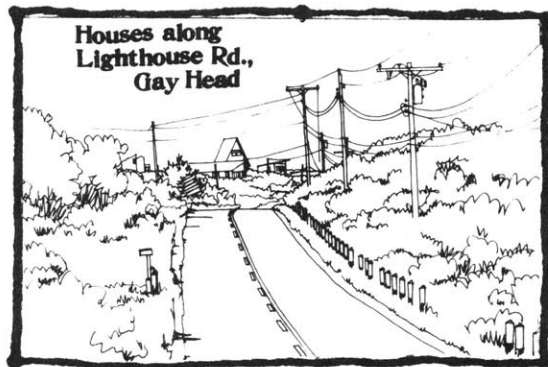
As the demand for vacation homes increases and the pace of development quickens, land formerly uninhabited, and by traditional wisdom thought to be uninhabitable due to flooding, erosion, and hurricane threat, is succumbing to development.

While the low salt lands along the beach south of Menemsha were once the site of a fishing village — Lobsterville — the community was a temporary one and occupied



the location only for the ease with which the Noman's Land fishing boats could be taken in and out of the surf and only for the duration of the summer fishing season. Today Lobsterville is built up with vacation and year-round homes which as a group have neither the consistency of purpose of the older fishing village nor the consistency of form of earlier summer communities such as West Chop.

In New Places



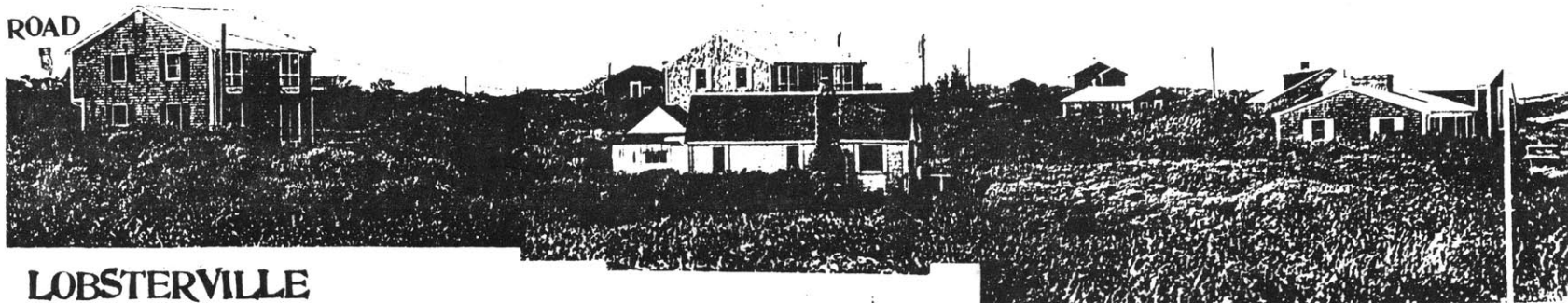
There is very little sense of place in this new Lobsterville. The forms of houses and their siting reveal little or nothing of its place in Island history, and the chaos of new roads to private dwellings in the rolling grassy dunes carves up the formerly wild land in a piecemeal fashion. The sense of some organizing framework is missing. Though most houses address the sea view, for some the view is blocked by other houses; some address the road. In their size, shape, color, materials and in their treatment of the land around them as well as in their addressing attitude, there is little agreement or consistency. While the same houses and arrangement might "work" in the wooded moraines where the dense ground cover would enable each house to read as place unto itself, in the salt lands, where the house will be seen first of all as part of a group, some organizing agreement about form and house type is needed to establish the sense of place of Lobsterville as an entity.

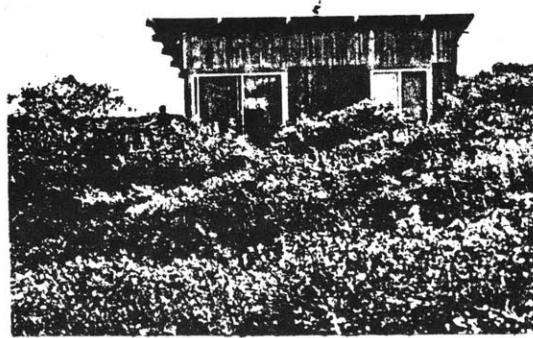
The houses are not far enough apart or large enough to have a "claiming" attitude by virtue of grand ground-hugging

roof volumes, to enable them to read as separate places, yet they are not close enough to act together to define some sense of place/space by their enclosing forms.

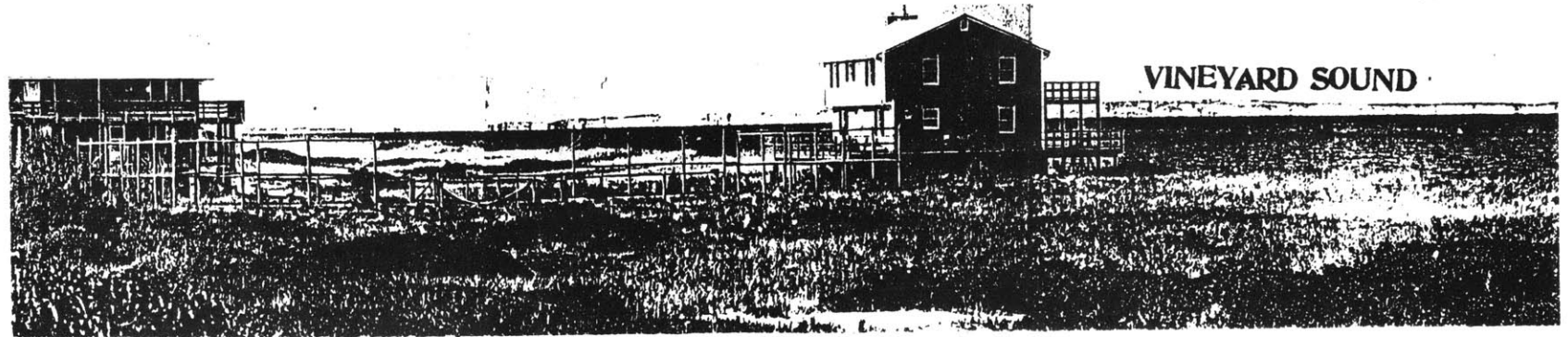
The lack of success in creating this sense of place seen in Lobsterville is not a unique problem, but is one confronting most new developments on the Island (and elsewhere) and is frustrated by:

1. Being in many cases in previously undeveloped land types for which there is no Island precedent;
2. Being comprised of new house types which are likely to be more open, have cantilevered decks and be raised up off the land or address the land in new ways; and
3. Being, more often than not, comprised of houses ("packaged" or designer-built) which are planned off Island and without adequate knowledge of, and attention paid to, the



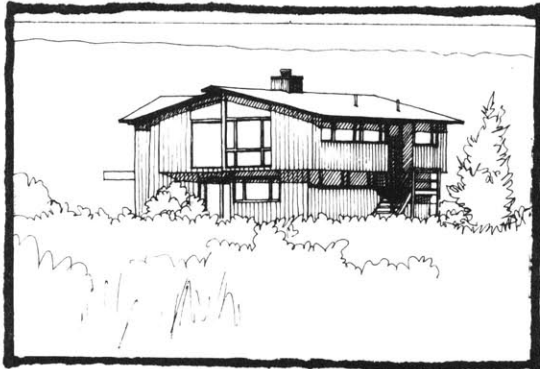


Lobsterville



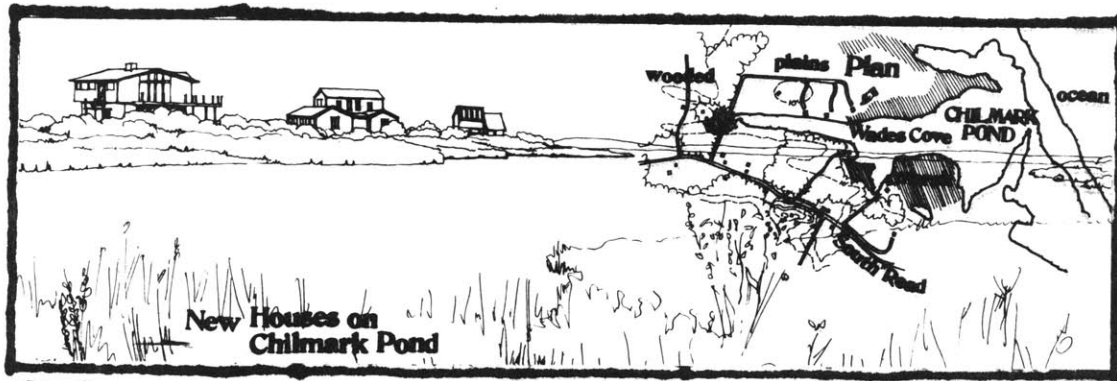
immediate characteristics (of both land and house traditions) of the houses' intended place; and

4. Often evolve without any "planning" other than zoning restrictions per se, as they develop by the erratic sale of individual lots by private land-owners. First owners may have a sense of what is appropriate to that land context, but they have no assurances that future residents will share this sensibility.



An important aspect of an environment which exhibits a strong sense of identity is its ability to convey not only a sense of what it *once was*, of what it *is*, but also, of what it *might become*.

In the two new houses on the right at Wades Cove on Chilmark Pond (sketch, below) there is a commonality in materials (weathered shingle with painted trim), in shape (both built from collections of sheds and gabled boxes), and of attitude towards the land (sitting securely on the ground and addressing the water's edge).

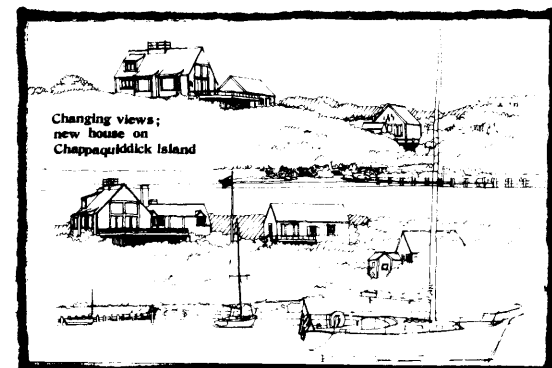
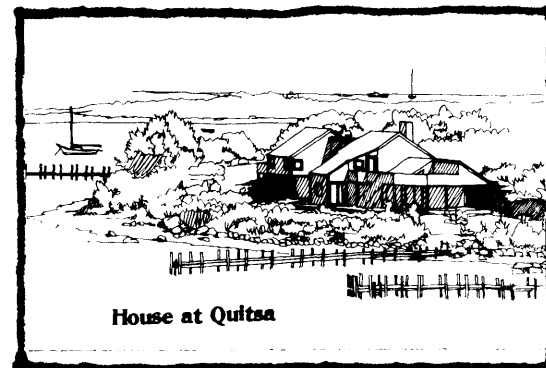
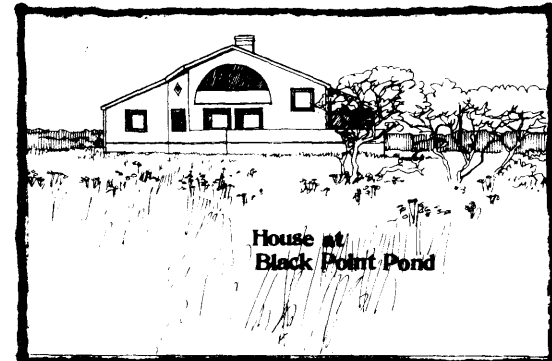
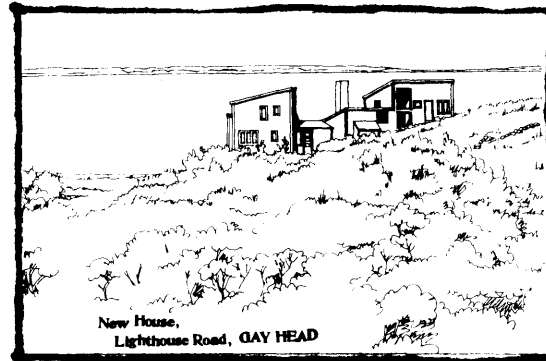
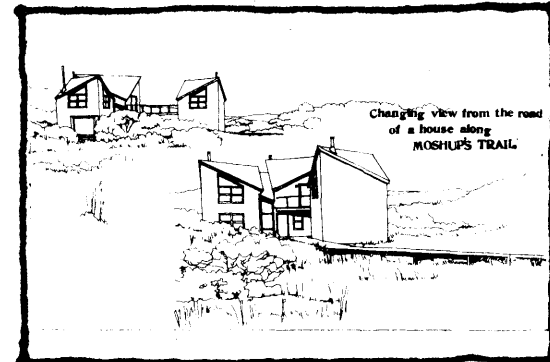
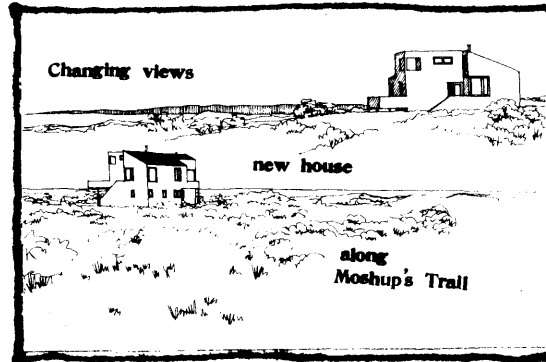


One might have predicted that future houses would build on this identity. Yet the third house is entirely different in its materials, color, roof shape and with its elevated decks which wrap around the volume and seem to address all sides, it has disrupted an evolving sense of identity and, if more development were to occur, has paved the way for other idiosyncratic houses which are likely to give the Cove not a sense of place, but of hodge-podge confusion.

This does not mean that new house types in and of themselves are inappropriate to the Vineyard. It is possible that new styles can create truly memorable new places of their own, as the Shingle Style did in West Chop.

New houses of a decidedly modern style have recently grown up along the formerly undeveloped coastal road of Moshup's Trail in Gay Head. As the land is only sparsely developed at present, these unusually shaped buildings are often the only object to be seen in any one view of the open rolling salt lands, and thus appear to sit on the land like pieces of modern sculpture. As more houses appear the character of the open land will be drastically altered as will the experience of these houses when they are in a built-up setting. If the present houses spawn a "language" for the new development they may be able to generate an identity for the growing presence of man on the land. Unfortunately, it is more likely (for it is already happening further along the road) that new development will have as little in common with these modern houses as they themselves do with older Island styles.

New houses can seldom convey the same meaning as old houses, simply because they are new; even an exact reproduction can be detected as a copy. Instead new houses can participate in the sense of place of their setting by making references to and borrowing from older styles where appropriate while at the same time adapting these forms to best suit the new life style or purpose they house, as do these four new houses. By their use of materials, sweeping roof shapes and/or gabled box shapes and porches, they remind one of older Island houses, yet each is clearly a contemporary home, "... like any worthy piece of architecture [each] speaks as vividly of the particular [this house, for this use, in this landscape] as of the general [the Vineyard house]. It is this combination of the particular and the general, the original and the traditional — that makes [a] building worth revisiting . . ."³, and worthy of our affection.



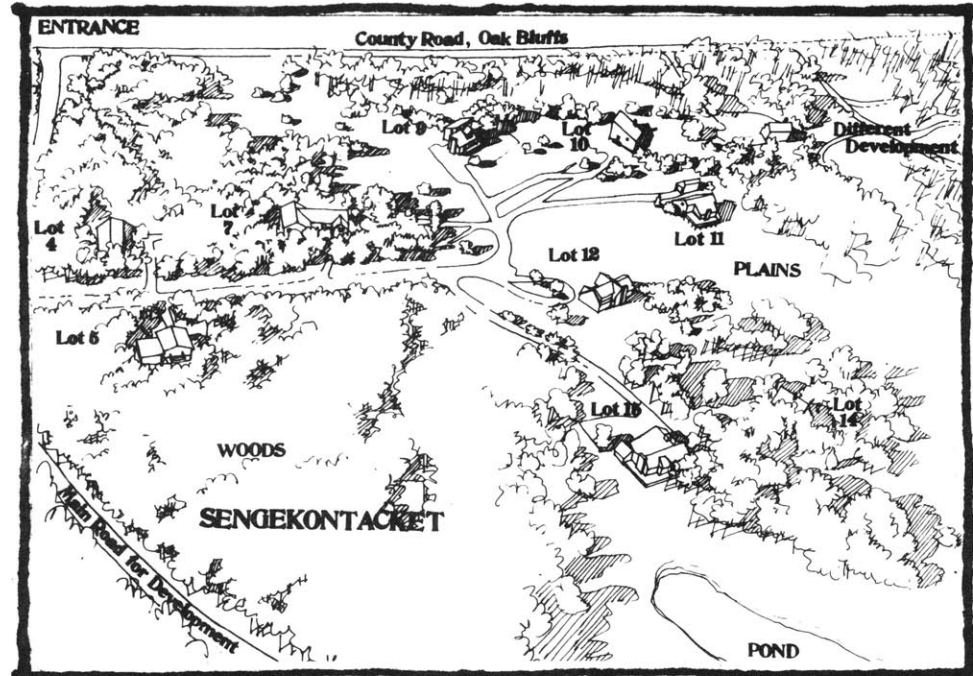
³ Charles Moore, and Gerald Allen, *Dimensions* (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1976), p. 29.

Sengekontacket

6 The designers of many of our modern villas . . . aim at diversity, but they achieve monotony, not only a monotony of spirit, but an actual formal monotony, for variety of the nondescript makes no more impression on the mind than does a heap of stones all cut fortuitously to different shapes.

GOOD AND BAD MANNERS
IN ARCHITECTURE⁴

⁴ A. Trystan Edwards, *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture* (London: J. Tiranti Ltd., 1944), p. 164.

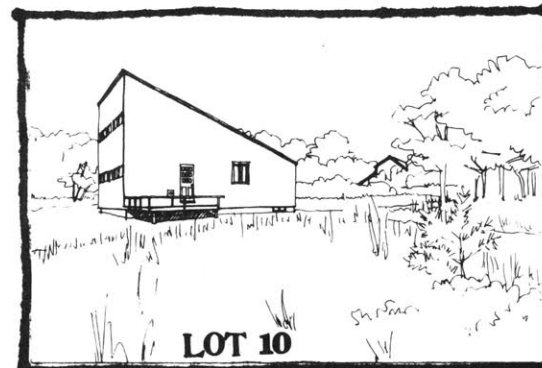


new houses at SENGEKONTACKET

Sengekontacket, a planned vacation home community located halfway between Oak Bluffs and Edgartown on the site of an old Indian village on the shores of Sengekontacket Pond, provides a good case study of the methods by which many new Island developments are being designed. One portion of the 93 acre development in particular points up the problems encountered when the two-dimensional master plan, which may work well on paper, is translated on the site into a three dimensional place by individual homeowners and builders.

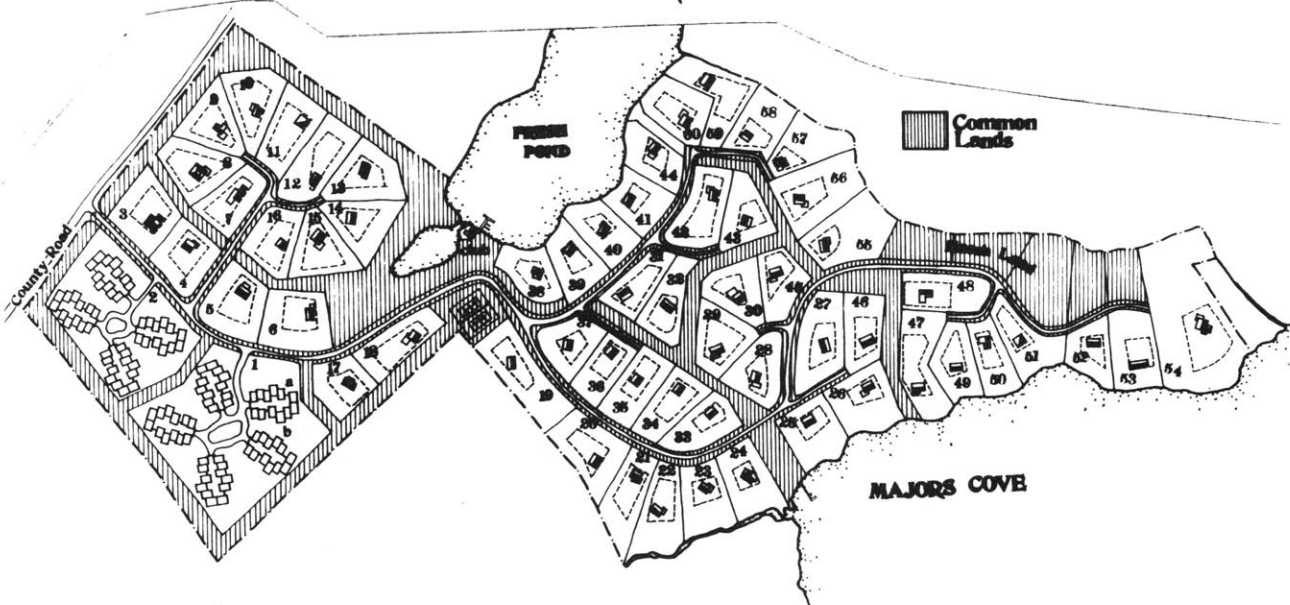
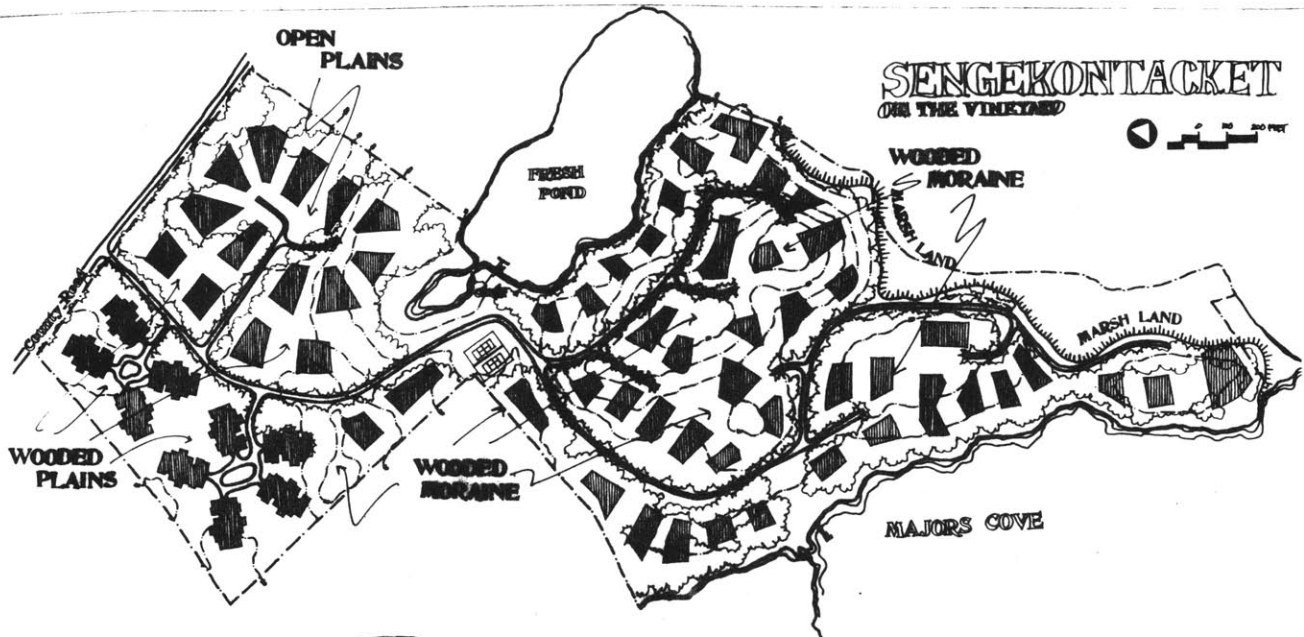
The Sengekontacket design was a fairly standard, perhaps better than most, solution calling for 58 single-family homes, most on 1½ acre lots, condominium units for 5½ acres of the site, community tennis courts, clubhouse and beach, and a liberal threading of "green belts" throughout.

Except for the condominiums at the entrance to Sengekontacket the solution for parceling the land for dwellings is uniform throughout the site: square or pie-shaped lots rimming a major entry road which



ET





forks into two dead-end roads off of which radiate short roads providing access to the individual lots. Within the private lots the designers have taken care to indicate a sub-area beyond which the owners are prohibited from building. This additional design constraint on lot development appears to have been done in an attempt to shield neighbors from each other's view and to allow the land to remain the dominant visual feature of the community. However, the uniform application of this pattern throughout the site fails to take into account the differing visual character of the land. In the wooded moraines ground cover does provide a visual barrier allowing the houses to read as separate places; the same design in the open view of the plains in the upper left hand corner of the site (maps, page 85; photo pages 83, 84), produces an entirely different identity. Here the houses read as a group on the land; some organizing mechanism is needed for them to establish an identity for the clearing in the woods which they all inhabit.

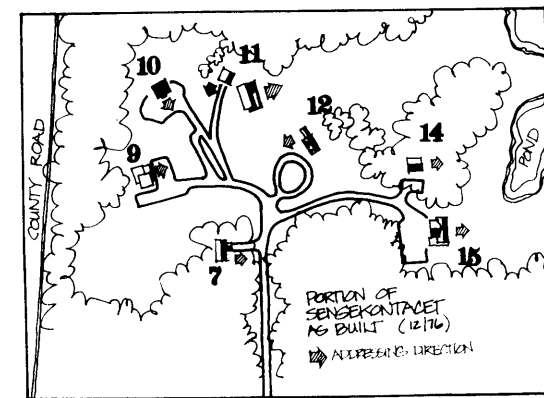
The design offers few clues as to what this organizing mechanism might be: the size and shape of the lots prevent the houses from orienting to the road and establishing a place by the enclosure of their front facades, nor does it allow the clearing to remain open as a shared central space. The pattern itself has an ambiguity about front and back, public and private spaces, as can be seen even in the hypothetical placement of houses by the designer. Should lots 13, 14 and 15 address the view of the pond or the open field? Is lot 11's "front yard" public or private; and lot 12's "back yard"? Does the design give any clues about whether the land should be tended

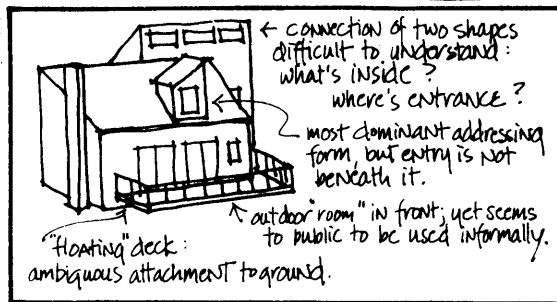
or left wild? And finally — how do cars fit into the pattern and what will happen to the sense of place (and open quality of the field) when 10 private "streets" are added to bring the car to the house?

For the development as a whole there seems to be little in the design which might generate some identity and express to inhabitants and visitors alike the purpose of Sengekontacket as a place. Beyond the token existence of tennis courts and the small clubhouse by the pond, (which in the parceling of the land have no hierarchy in form, but simply take up the space of yet another house lot), there is little to tie the place together. The beach along Major's Cove might have served as this focal point, but in the design only a small portion is left public and the rest parceled up into higher-priced house lots. On the plan (bottom, pg. 85) the darker areas of "common lands" weaving through and around the whole site look as if they might provide this unification for the larger place, but in fact it is practically impossible to tell where these common lands are when one is on the site as it is heavily wooded and few, if any, of the private lands bordering these paths have any edge definition. Instead of acting as common lands tying the community together, they've become merely more "buffer" between neighbor and neighbor.

With the framework providing so few clues about what the house ought to be in this design (how, what, it should address; how to handle car access to the house; relationship to neighbors, road, land and common lands), it leaves the way open for the individual owner to make his/her own decisions. While this freedom would seem

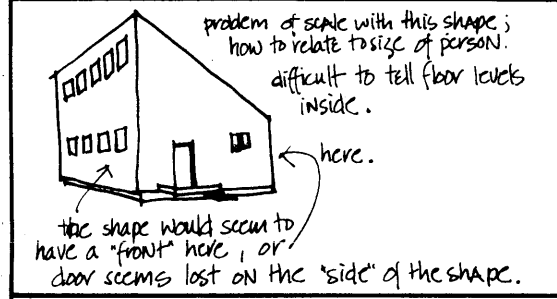
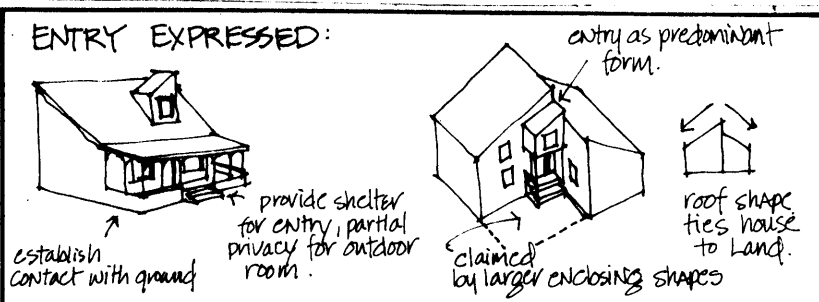
to be welcomed, in practice the resulting cacophony of no two houses alike tends to give the development a "littered" look and precludes the kind of house-to-house relationships which in older Island environments are so critical in the creation of their larger sense of place and "Vineyard-like" identity.





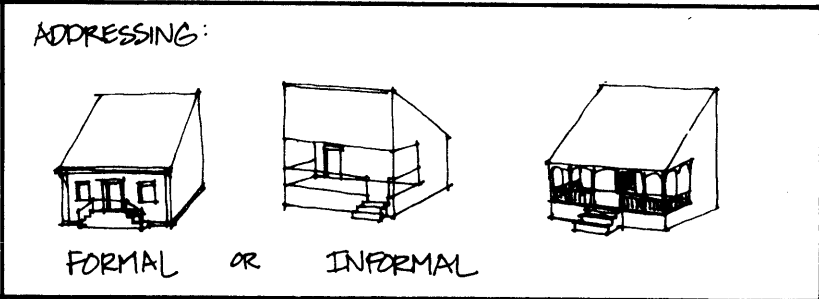
LOT 9

AMBIGUITY OF ADDRESSING ATTITUDE-FORMAL OR INFORMAL?
ENTRY NOT EXPRESSED.



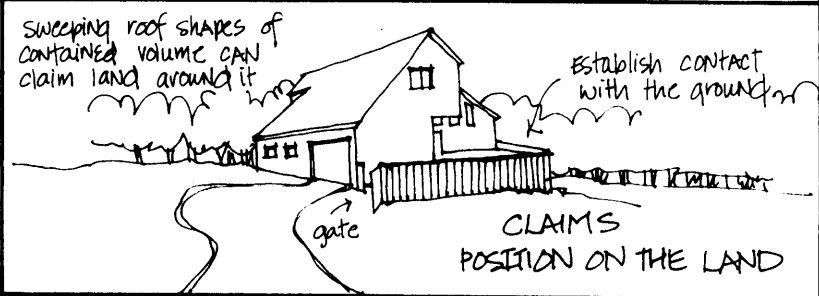
LOT 10

THE ENTRY IS OVERPOWERED BY THE BLANK FACE OF THE STRANGELY-SHAPED VOLUME



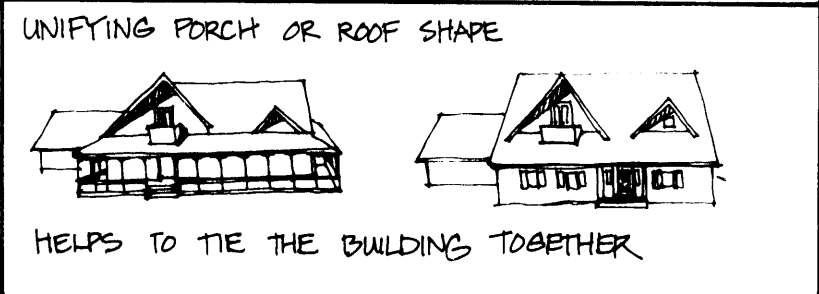
LOT 11

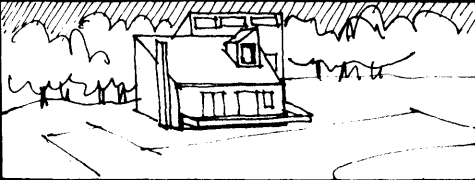
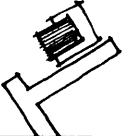
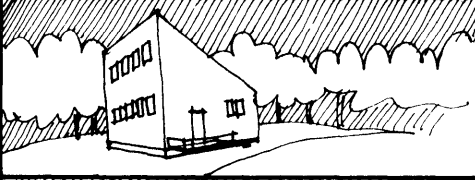





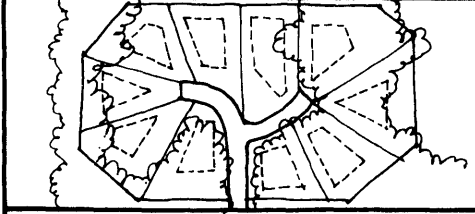
LAND BETWEEN THE GARAGE AND HOUSE SEEMS "LEFT OVER"- THE HOUSE MAKES NO CLAIM TO IT.



LOT 12

THE ENTRY IS LOST IN THE JUMBLE OF COMPETING FORMS ON THE FACADE OF THIS HOUSE



		TREATMENT OF LAND	TREATMENT OF CAR	HOUSE TYPE	ADDRESSING ATTITUDE	OUTSIDE/INSIDE TRANSITION
SENKEKONTACKET, LOTS 9, 10, 11, 12	HOUSES	 LEFT NATURAL - HOUSE SITS ABOVE LAND OPEN PLAINS	 DRIVEWAY	AMBIGUOUS - CLAIMING? ADDRESSING?	AMBIGUOUS - (ENTRY DIFFICULT TO LOCATE)	FRONT DECK PROJECTS OUT FROM VOLUME
		 LEFT NATURAL, HOUSE SITS ON LAND OPEN PLAINS	 NOT CLEAR	CLAIMING	FORMAL ROAD-ADDRESSING	DECK AT REAR
		 LEFT NATURAL, HOUSE SITS ON & ABOVE THE LAND HILLY THICKETS	 OWN ROAD & GARAGE	(ATTEMPTED) MERGING	GARAGE ADDRESSES ROAD, HOUSE FACES AWAY	DECK AT REAR
		 DOMESTICATED - TENDED LAWN AND PLANTING WOODED PLAINS	 PRIVATE FORMAL ROAD	ADDRESSING	FORMAL ROAD ADDRESSING	ON FRONT - ON SECOND STORY
		CONSISTENCY AMONG HOUSES:	NONE	NONE	NONE	TWO SIMILAR
SITING		NOT CRITICAL (PLAINS)	NO CONSISTENCY	NO CONSISTENCY	NO CONSISTENCY	AVERAGE .8 d.u.s PER ACRE (1+ ACRE LOTS)
	RELATIONSHIP OF HOUSES TO:	CONTOURS	VIEWS	WOODS	ROAD	DENSITY

Katama

Most often when a designer says to himself that he is being "flexible", in reality he is being only vague. By failing to define structure or allocation, he is simply shifting the responsibility for decision to other individuals, or to the play of circumstance. This may enhance immediate choice for the first users, but not future flexibility. As often as not, the failure to decide opens the door to the multitude of small decisions, to a scattered exploitation of resource, that leads to inflexibility rather than the reverse . . . Chaos, or lack of structure, is not flexible per se.⁵

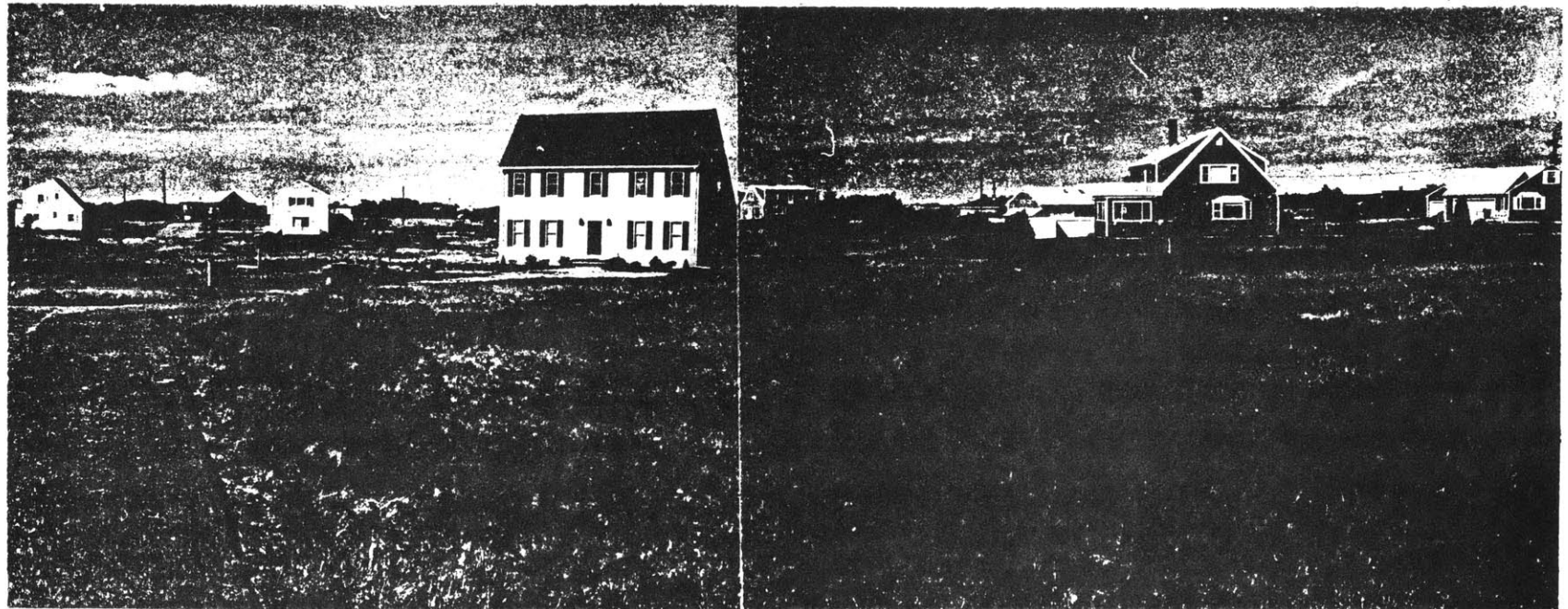
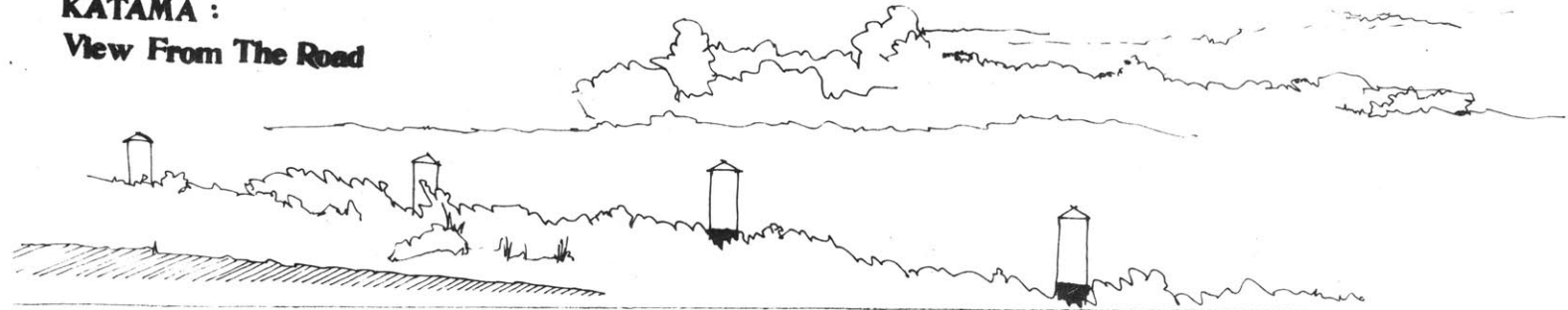
Katama is a vacation and year-round community which has grown up within the last few decades on former farm land down harbor from Edgartown. The site of the short-lived 1872 Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company speculative summer community, the land of Katama is flat glacial outwash plain bordered by harbor and saltmarsh, with a wide view of the barrier beach to Chappaquidick and the open horizon of the ocean beyond. The whole

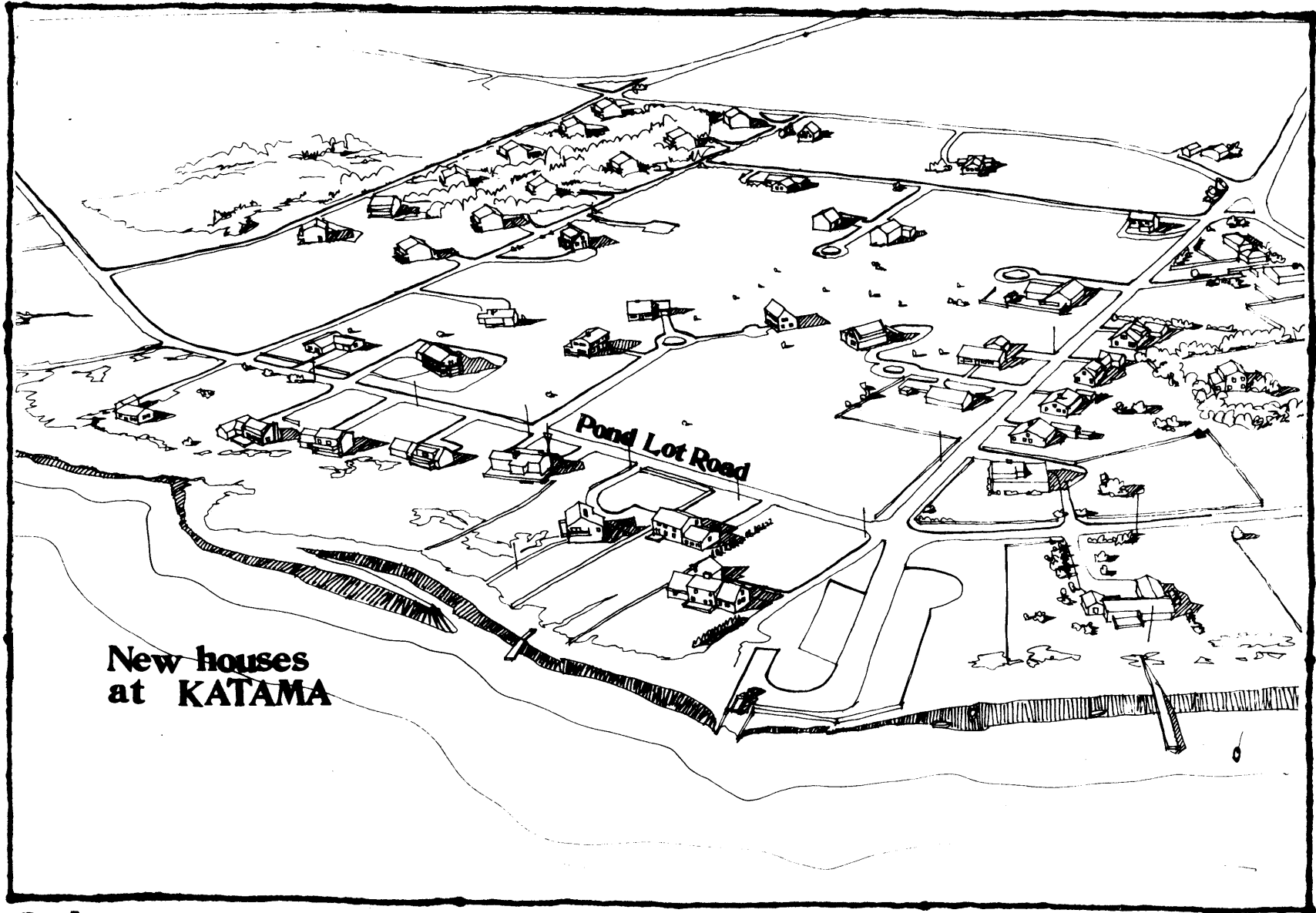
⁵ Kevin Lynch, "Environmental Adaptability", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 1958, p. 17.



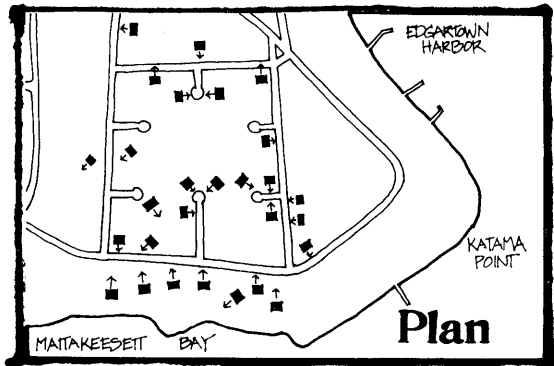


KATAMA :
View From The Road





New houses
at KATAMA



sweep of this land can be taken in in a single view, thus the new development (*any* development) has a powerful impact on the visual character and experience of this coastal place.

In older Vineyard places the house units — their qualities and quantity and their compositional interrelationships — are the most important design element in the residential townscape. The framework of their organization, whether it be grid, centers or edge of the land itself, is the design mechanism by which the individual units become space defining or enclosing elements creating some larger sense of place.

At Katama the houses are organized along a series of streets which form one large “super block” with deadend cul-de-sacs radiating towards the center of this square of land. Unlike Edgartown, where the density of streets and houses is high enough to enable the dwellings to create enclosing “rooms” which relate to the scale of pedestrians and clear public and private zones are established by their layout, the streets at Katama seem to promote a confusion of orientation of the houses and of

public and private places in the larger environment.

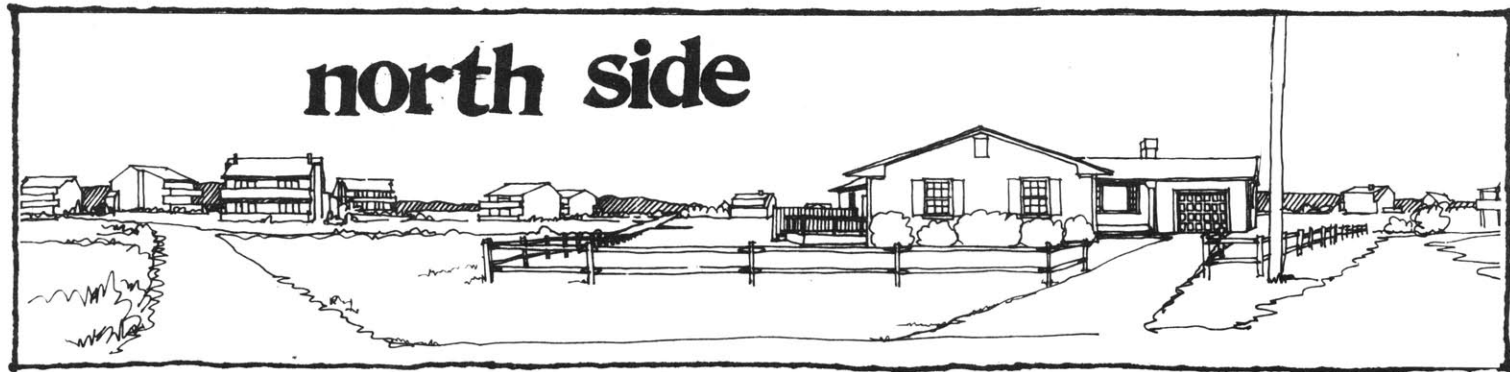
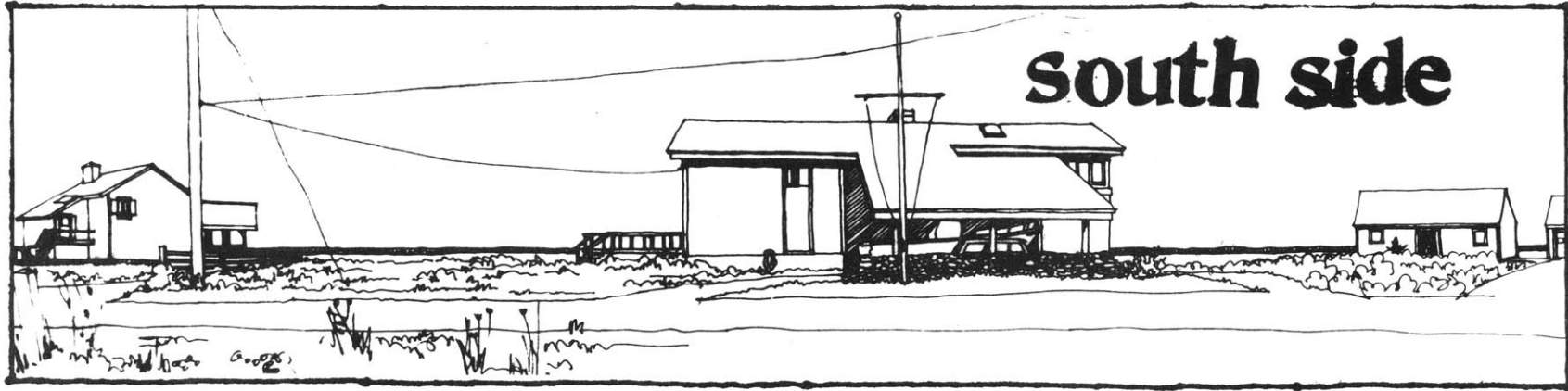
Because the flat land provides no barriers to long views, and the streets are the place from which the environment is most often seen and experienced, the backs and sides of houses around cul-de-sacs in the distance as well as fronts of homes in the foreground, can be seen along any of the four sides of the larger square. It is difficult to tell what the houses are orienting to from almost any position except the plan view seen from the air. (See pages 89, 90.) The establishment of private spaces for the houses, and the act of enfronting public ways which is such a distinguishing characteristic of Island towns and villages, is frustrated by the layout of the streets. There are few strong clues about what the houses should address. Although the edge of the water and the magnificent ocean view it affords is the strongest feature of the community (and might have provided a shared center and identity for it), this land has been parceled up into private lots, and this special edge has little reflection in the larger organizing framework of Katama. In fact, the houses along the edge block most of the view of the sea from the road, and in their form make little acknowledgement of their special position in the land. (Compare the streetscape along the water — south side of Pond Lot Road — with the landward, north side; photos pages 93, 94.) It is quite possible to drive through Katama with little awareness of the special beauty of this coastal place.

In Edgartown the streets tie the town together — both visually and socially. They are the places from which the environ-

ment is explored and experienced largely because there are services and activities in the larger place which provide a reason for walking. As there are no places to go to in Katama except “home”, no sidewalks and little opportunity for moving through it anyway (since most roads lead to dead ends), Katama, by contrast, seems to be a one-dimensional — “bedroom” — community of individual homes which have little of the common public life which might give it an identity and sense of place of its own.

In a sense the cul-de-sacs are not really public at all, but are the shared territory of the small number of houses to which they provide access. This might have provided an opportunity for the smaller group to claim the street as a shared focus and to establish some sense of place around them through similarities of house type, setback, planting and perhaps even some “gate” or entry-marking device to set the smaller group off as separate and distinct in the larger place. However, no mechanism for this shared agreement about form existed (exists) in the development process of Katama, and the lack of any agreement about what is and is not appropriate among residents has produced not only a lack of community identity, but in some cases, as interviews with homeowners have indicated, in outright animosity between neighbors.

The initial large-scale planning and design — the framework — for development can facilitate or frustrate creation of an identity and sense of place for the built environment by setting down, or failing to set down, clear parameters for public and private spaces and strong clues about the

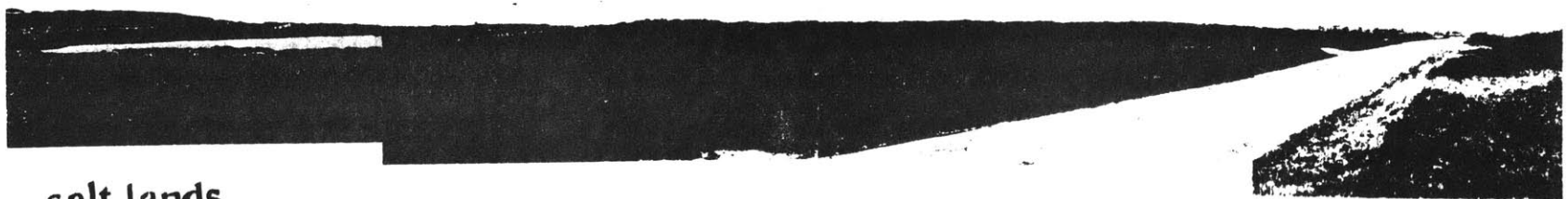
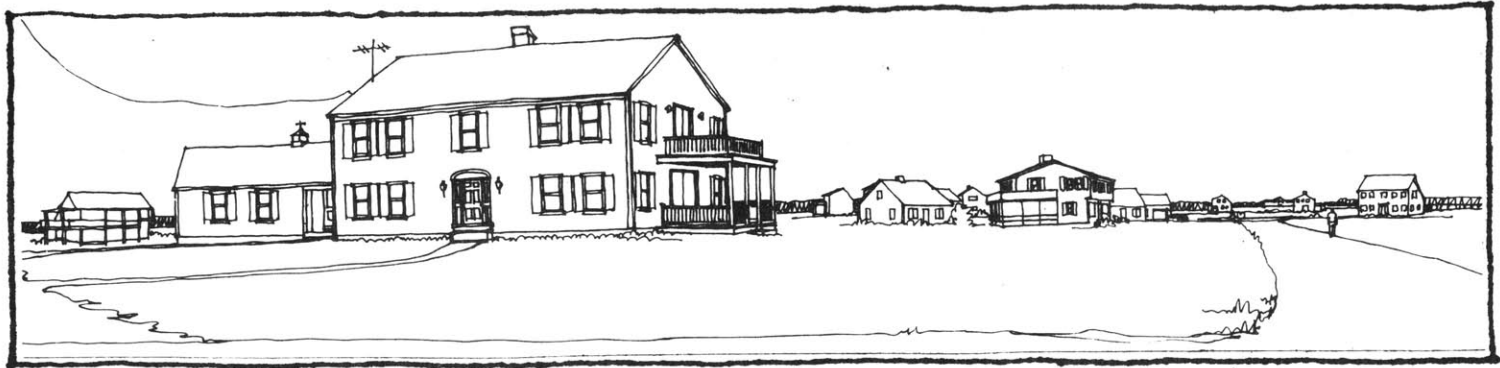


KATAMA

open plains

93

Pond Lot Road



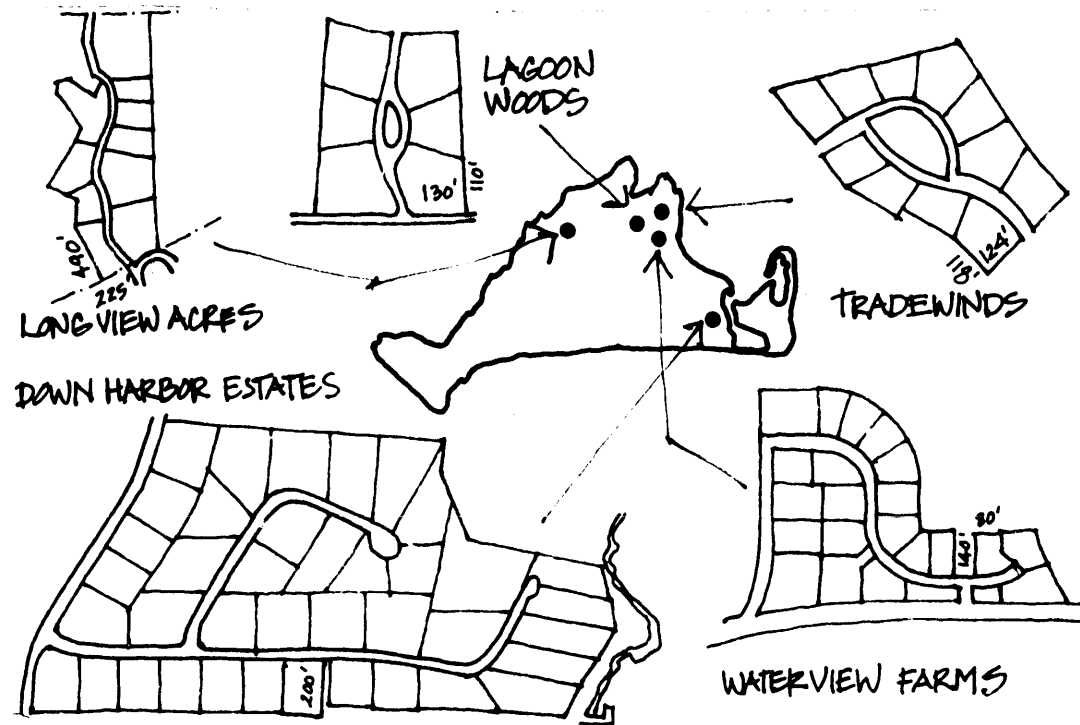
salt lands

open plains

purpose of the place and how the individual houses might participate in and reinforce this purpose.

The most often seen design for recent development on the Island, ½ acre or larger lot subdivisions rimming access roads, leaves many crucial design decisions unanswered; by allowing great “flexibility” within each lot as to setback, car access, house type (addressing, claiming; formal, informal), treatment of the land, etc., it leaves the identity of the place open to the myriad of individual interpretations which are likely to make the development of some overall identity impossible. To a certain extent order in a large composition implies a harmony and repetition of basic units or pattern to make comprehension possible. While on paper such plans do have a repetition of basic parts — the lots — on the land it is the houses and streets (and “private streets” — driveways,) rather than often unmarked property lines, which impart a sense of order and place. The subdivision does little to suggest a regularity of their placement. As a method for dividing up the land, subdivisions have been applied alike to plains, bluffs and woods, and by not acknowledging the very different visual qualities of these landscapes, tend to obscure their unique identities.

Large lot subdivisions seem to have gained a measure of their popularity on the Vineyard from the recent alarm at the amount of new development — from a not quite rational notion that more land per house will somehow mitigate the impact of additional building on the land. But in fact, the large amount of land required for new dwellings not only prevents the develop-



ment of “Vineyard-like” places where houses are close enough together and to the road to create larger spaces which evoke visual and emotional qualities of their own, but it requires greater amounts of roadway and overhead utilities which visually dominate any sense of “country” which is thought to be gained from requiring more land per house. The resulting communities have no tradition on the Vineyard, being neither genuinely rural, nor genuine town or village. Except for the condominiums at Saugekontacket (right) which cluster dwelling units into

one large volume, most new developments have also overlooked another Island building tradition: the grand old hotels which once dotted its shores. This solution not only allows most of the land to remain wild, but the building itself can serve as both identity for the inhabitants, and as an impressive landmark on the land.

The above chart is derived from material published in Maude Dorr, “Will Martha Get Raped?”, *Progressive Architecture*, June 1966, p. 177, in which it was noted that “[m]ost [developments] are using all the available property for subdivision.”

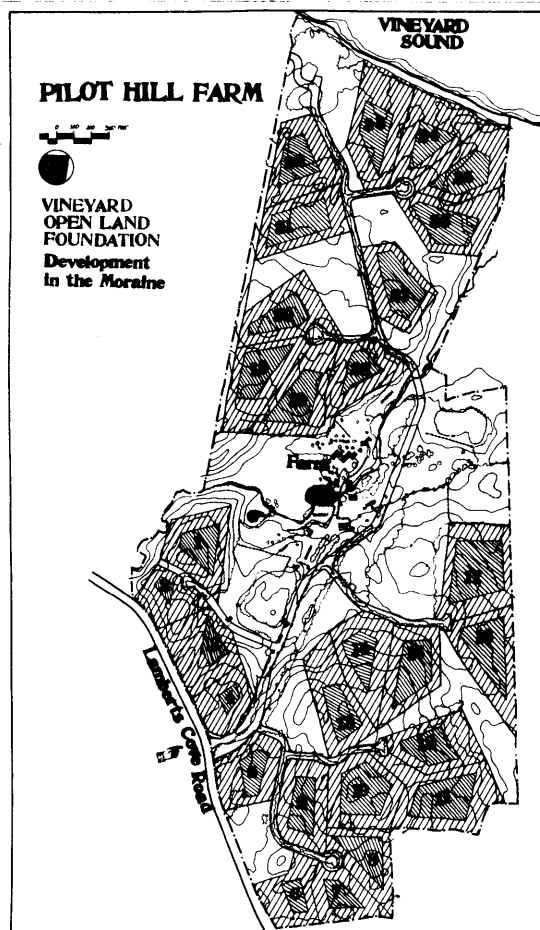


This new house at Tashmoo Farm may have more land than that seen in a suburban development, but its private driveway, the prominent position of the garage and the token "Colonialism" of the house itself all evoke the image of suburbia. It speaks little of Island traditions or of the old sheep farm in which it is situated.



Drawing of Sengkontacket condominiums used by permission of the architect, Claude Miquelle, Melrose, Mass.

Pilot Hill



As pressure for development has increased, many of the Island's farm lands whose very names reveal a sense of its history, such as Pohognut, Watchee, Scrubby Neck, Deep Bottom, Quansoo and Quenamies on the south shore, and Tashmoo and Pilot Hill on the north, have been threatened with pressure for development. Their future presents a special problem to Islanders for farming is no longer profitable and in some cases owners are being forced to sell portions of their land just to meet the increasing tax burden they bear. These open farm lands have been a part of the Island's landscape and identity for centuries, yet the Island can not afford to purchase them for common land, nor can it rightfully prevent owners from reaping the benefits their development potential now presents to them.

It poses a dilemma — but one which an innovative local group, the Vineyard Open Land Foundation (VOLF), is attempting to solve. VOLF is dedicated to the preservation of the rural qualities of these Island lands and is able to act on that goal due to its status as a non-profit charitable trust, which allows it to develop land at a much lower density than would be possible otherwise. The preservation of the existing farm buildings, fields and (it is hoped) animals and some farming activities, are an attempt to maintain the identity and history of the land (and provide an identity for the new residential community).

As to the character of the new *residential* community which is planned on the former farm lands, it is VOLF's "intent . . . that the structures and activities of man be humbly combined with the [p]roperty so that man's presence is a mild enhance-

ment to the dominant natural and agricultural features of the [p]roperty"⁶. To this end an Architectural Control Committee is charged with reviewing and approving all building and landscaping to insure that "development be done unobtrusively and in a manner which accents the desired rural environment."⁷ While all these goals are worthy, the mechanisms for achieving them seem rather vaguely spelled out (what "accents the rural environment" has been widely interpreted on the Vineyard so far). What the final form of *houses* will be in this new place seems to be up to the good sense of the owners and skill of the reviewers.

While VOLF's efforts are certain to produce places better than most simply by enabling the preservation of so much of the land itself, it seems to offer few clues for the higher density conventional developments which will continue to be seen on the Island; for in these places the houses and streets will of necessity play the dominant role in establishing their identity.

⁶ "Declaration of Restrictive Covenants" for the Pilot Hill development, Vineyard Open Land Foundation, p. 8.

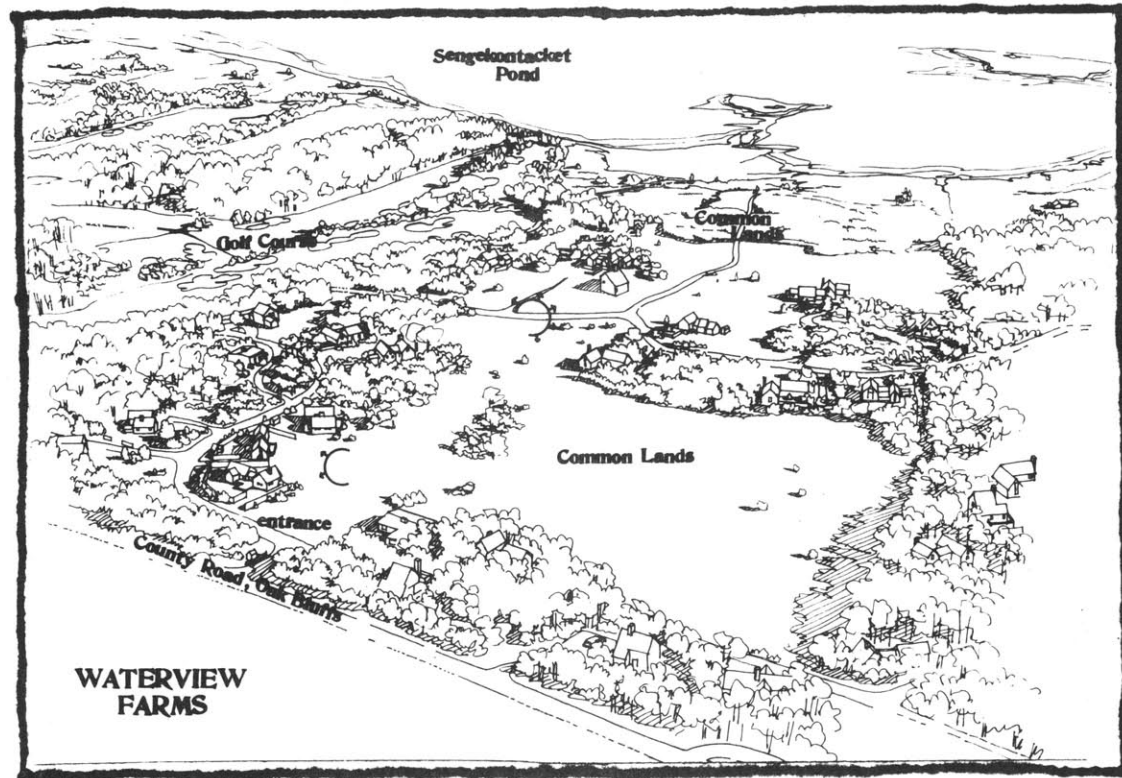
⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

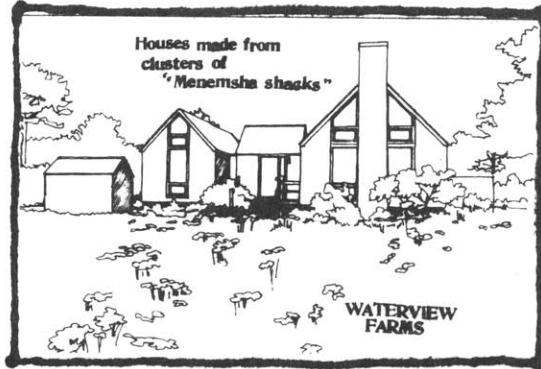
Waterview Farms

In this light one new development — Waterview Farms on Sengekontacket Pond in Oak Bluffs — offers an interesting case study of a developer-built community where specific “guidelines” for the appearance of new houses were enacted to insure an over-all character and identity for the community.

Waterview Farms is owned by Island Properties, Inc., one of the largest land holders on the Island; the existing portion of Waterview Farms, shown in the aerial view above, represents “phase one” of a five-phased development which will eventually house over 800 single-family homesites clustered around various community recreation facilities (golf courses, stables, small airport and landing field, beaches, etc.) and open spaces. (The extent of the eventual development is shown in the plan at right; phase one occupies the middle portion of the site.)

The first plans for Waterview were innovative in a number of ways and reflect the concern that Island Properties owner, Dr. Alvin Strock (a Vineyard resident since 1953), had for the preservation of the Island’s resources: “When it became obvious that growth would destroy the way of life on the Island”, he explained, “we were determined to set an example. We set aside waterfront areas, established view easements, used clustering to create





open space and established wetlands restrictions even before there was any legislation."⁸

Despite these innovative land-parceling measures, the plans for the house arrangements ended up being surprisingly similar to most other "subdivision" plans (see page 95 for comparisons): generously-sized individual lots rimming access roads and numerous off-shooting cul-de-sacs. The community facilities and open spaces have remarkably little to do with generating the form of the housing community around them; although they may be able to generate centers in a psychic sense, the opportunity for these shared spaces to provide a formal center and to establish a hierarchy and thereby generate "clues" as to what the form and orientation of the houses might be, has been ignored in the overall layout of the plan. In addition, the size of lots and organization around cul-de-sacs has been applied uniformly to a

site which has a number of very different landscape types: flat dense woodlands, partially wooded rolling moraines, open fields, and open salt lands. In phase one, while most houses in the woods or edge of clearings read as separate domains, in the open fields they appear uncomfortably close. (Photo page 100.) By their adjacency the houses begin to partially enclose the open field, but there remains an ambiguity about whether this place is "back-yard" or true common land for the larger community. An organizing framework which responded more specifically to the different visual qualities of these land types (and to the different recreational facilities throughout the site) would help at the outset to reinforce the different *places* that are meant to comprise the larger community.

Like Katama and Sengekontacket, the organization of lots and roads does not provide many clues about what the *house* ought to be in this place (formal/informal, road-addressing/claiming), nor does it have enough built-in constraints (in density and layout) to insure that the sum of

⁸ William E. Dorman, "Strock Strives for Balance in Vineyard Development", Boston Globe, July 18, 1976, pp. E1, E2.

WATERVIEW FARMS



WATERVIEW FARMS

all the houses will add up to some entity with a character of its own (a street, a center, etc.)

At first there were no restrictions on the form of houses or the treatment of parking and private yards, as there are in few new developments, but the un-Vineyard-like appearance of first homes (see one example, page 77) alarmed the developers. They subsequently engaged an architect to design a contemporary house which is derived from "the clustered roofs

and volumes of Menemsha" and a system of fences derived from the "gardens and backyards of Beacon Hill", and required all new houses to maintain this aesthetic.⁹ The resulting similar appearance of new houses has helped to visually tie Waterview together as a single community, but as a long-term solution it has limitations. The developers themselves have recognized that not all residents will want to ac-

⁹ Interviews with the architect, Ed Cuetara.

cept virtually the same ready-made house, and that 500 acres of "Menemsha houses" would not only be awesome, but *awful*.

And by taking on the responsibility for the design of houses the developers have more control over the end product, but they also assume more work, and responsibility for which they are as likely to be criticized as commended and compensated.

VI. CONCLUSIONS:

Though the art of building genuine new places is still fledgling on the Vineyard (indeed for the country as a whole — witness the mixed success of “new towns”), the solution seems to lie somewhere in between absolute responsibility on the part of the developer for the final shape of the environment, and absolute freedom for the individual homeowner to create his own brand of “castle” at the expense of a larger image of shared place and community. Learning from the successes of older Vineyard places, this solution would seem to lie in the creation of tighter “frameworks” of organization which would not only offer more clues (and constraints) to the individual builder, but would reflect more sensitively the nature of our *experience* of buildings in the different land types found on the Island.

Learning from the Vineyard

‘Quality experience is indispensable in the heritage of mankind.’

Henry Beetle Hough¹

‘Design can clarify [the] character [of a place], build new connections and develop deeper meanings.’

Kevin Lynch²

¹ Quoted (no reference) in Anne Simon, *No Island is An Island* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1973), p. 186.

² Kevin Lynch, *Site Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1961), p. 11.

For residents and visitors alike Martha's Vineyard is a special place whose towns and villages merit revisiting, affection, protection and, for those who will shape new built places on the Island for future generations, close study as well. Standard mainland solutions (or *lack* of solutions) are inappropriate; imaginative new methods of planning are needed to maintain the Island's unique identity — not just to protect her visual character, but to encourage meaningful new social entities. This challenge to Islanders is a new and difficult one, for “[t]he conscious remodeling of the large-scale physical environment has been possible only recently, and . . . the problem of environmental imageability is a new one.”³ The magnitude of this new problem has prompted some drastic recommendations — stopping all new development or banishing cars from the Island, for example. The island of Bermuda controls the rate and quality of development by only allowing residents (of two years or longer) to build new homes — and then only for their own occupancy — thereby attempting to assure “developers” of having a sense of what is appropriate to that island. Such deceptively “simple” solutions fail to address the physical, social, economic and legal problems surrounding the issues of private land development, are unlikely to solve the real problem of shaping imageable new places, and are probably equally unlikely to meet with approval by Islanders themselves. More complex solutions are needed for Martha's Vineyard.

The most distinguishing features of traditional Island towns, villages, summer places, farms and country road houses — the qualities that establish their *character* as special and memorable *places*:

- The contrast between the man-made and natural environment,
- The shared attitude towards the land among the houses,
- The expression of clear and consistent public and private zones,
- The agreement about the form of houses in a given place,
- The public places and the activities they afford which give identity to the larger place, and
- The minor visual presence of the car and utilities,

³ Idem. *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), p. 13.

cannot be assured in new developments by the mechanisms which presently shape the built environment.

As the qualities which set off each traditional Island place as special and memorable — the qualities which allowed for their “consistency of character” — are qualities of *relationship among groups of houses*, the architect or homeowner responsible for a single building has little control over the larger framework of the place in which he/she participates. If a new house is being placed in an already built-up location where traditions are established by other houses, there is an opportunity (and responsibility) to acknowledge these precedents and the existing identity in some fashion. However, in new developments there are usually few constraints on the design of individual houses which could insure each new private place of adding to and participating in some commonly shared image of the character of the emerging community. The sense of tradition, of insular community life, and the slow pace of change in older Island communities assured the development of this over-all identity in the past. These forces no longer exist. The responsibility for developing a larger identity cannot be left to the builders or architects of single houses for, as recent development has shown, the accumulation of private houses on the land under present development constraints has failed to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts — an imageable *place*. New tools are required.

Existing zoning regulations also fail to address those traits in the physical environment which will allow for the sum of its parts to add up to some imageable whole. The characteristic contrast between high density man-made places and the natural landscape on the Island is undermined by zoning regulations which require sizeable amounts of land per house (usually allowing only 1/3 of the land to be built upon), and setbacks from public ways and adjacent buildings which prevent the kind of house-to-house and house-to-street relationships which are such important characteristics of older Island places.

Though “the Island's history clearly points to the advantages of tight development, public opinion is far behind. Many people think the salvation of the land lies . . . in the privacy of the suburban-type plot. Any construction more dense than

this usually arouses immediate alarm."⁴ Zoning gives no clues, nor poses constraints, on how the land should be tended and public/private zones established. Though it does provide some dimensional constraints on size of houses, it provides no prescriptive guidelines on the type (formal, informal, claiming) which might be appropriate to the different contexts on the Vineyard. As a tool zoning traditionally has had as its objective the prevention of private abuse of land at public expense, and has required community approval for its enactment. It seems unlikely that zoning in itself could become a more prescriptive design tool for shaping new places; first because the design elements which might ensure a consistency of character in new places are likely to be difficult to codify, and secondly because constraints on the private use of land seem to be presently viewed as an almost "un-American" restriction on personal freedom and as a "taking" of some of the value of private land (by limiting possible uses of it).

New tools for shaping new places *do* imply new constraints on the use of land. As the residential units are the most important design elements in the residential townscape, and are the "bricks" from which the identity of the larger environment is shaped, to devise new tools for shaping new *places* of necessity requires new means for shaping houses and private land in those places. If new constraints on private land-use were structured so that owners understood them as a form of *protection* of the value of their land by assuring the character and quality of the surroundings, it is possible that the aspect of "taking" normally associated with legal restrictions might vanish. For this to occur two difficult tasks must be accomplished:

1. Appropriate design criteria and instruments for their implementation must be established, and,
2. They must meet with wide-spread public understanding and support.

This implies not only that new skills will need to be developed to deal with the problem of environmental imageability

⁴Maude Dorr, "Will Martha Get Raped?", *Progressive Architecture*, June 1966, p. 173.

and the conscious remolding of the large-scale physical environment, but that a new "language" for describing the built environment as *place* is necessary to enable communication and critique of alternatives between those who are proposing new places and those who will be affected by them.

This is the awesome challenge facing the Martha's Vineyard Commission as the elected body of Islanders and planning professionals which has been entrusted with review and approval of future development on the Island. Not only are there few models elsewhere of mechanisms for insuring new development compatible with an historic environment (witness the limited success of Nantucket's Historic District Guidelines), but for the country as a whole, as the mixed success of "new towns" illustrates, the art of shaping entirely new places is still in its infancy.

The Island is fortunate in that it has so many exceptionally successful built environments from which to learn, from which to forge new tools and, perhaps, give shape to a language for discussing the nature of places as *places*.

The purpose of this study has been to uncover some of the characteristics of traditional Island places which, visually and by the experience they afford, have in the past served to house the special sense of dwelling seen in memorable built places. It has been my hope that these observations may assist the Commission in its future work, may enable others to look at Island places with more critical eyes and greater appreciation for their structure, and may suggest a greater number of criteria to consider in the shaping of places than are currently addressed by zoning or development practices. Perhaps foremost, it is a plea that future places be shaped less in the two-dimensional plan view and become more responsive to the ways in which places are experienced by people. ("Architecture has many more than three dimensions."⁵)

I have made observations about Island places which I hope will suggest some of these criteria and may suggest objectives

⁵Charles Moore and Gerald Allen, *Dimensions* (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1976), p. 3.

as well. But as it was beyond the scope of this study to consider the myriad of political, economic, legal, social and environmental considerations which must enter into the planning process, this learning from the Vineyard cannot conclude with specific *means* by which environments expressive of place may be shaped in the future; though I hope it has uncovered factors which should be given very special consideration as new means take shape.

I confess outright an appreciation for older places over recent Island developments, and a conviction that, though it is entirely possible for some talented designer to shape a memorable new place which makes absolutely no references to the older traditions of the Island, it is these older environments which offer the best clues for shaping new places. Emulation of the things we are familiar with and admire is a proven method for establishing a meaningful identity for the built environment, for “[o]ne of the oldest traditions in architecture is tradition itself”⁶:

... if a tradition — any tradition — is taken for the framework for a particular design, then part of it will fit and part of it most probably will not, and will have to be modified. If . . . the chosen tradition has extensive associations, then the ways it fits and the ways it doesn't each take on an unusual importance.⁷

About halfway through this study I came upon an old plan by the landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland for the short-lived summer community founded at Katama in the last century. I admire it tremendously, especially when compared with the plan of the community that now exists at Katama (pages 91, 92), or with a later never-realized plan (opposite).

In his design, in many respects like other Vineyard places yet so responsive to the specific character of the land at Katama

⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

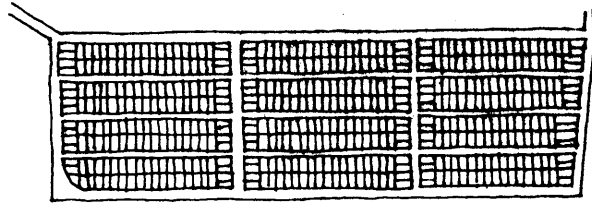
as to be unique, Copeland has succeeded in producing a plan which itself conveys a remarkable sense of place. Perhaps the best way to conclude these observations on those qualities of Vineyard towns and villages which have enabled them to be, both visually and by the experience they afford, expressive of place, is to analyze the Copeland plan in light of these criteria:

PUBLIC PLACES (ALLOWING PUBLIC ACTIVITIES) ARE NEEDED TO ESTABLISH AN IDENTITY FOR A COMMUNITY

The site at Katama is very flat and open with no special features except the water view around its edge. As the community Copeland has planned for is very large it would have been impossible for every house to relate to the water as the focus for the community. Consequently, Copeland has designed parks throughout (and has varied their size and shape to provide a hierarchy of entry, center and edge) which give a focus and identity for each house in the larger group. All of the water's edge remains public, and the quality of this edge as a place is actually heightened by the addressing attitude of the houses set back from it. It is not hard to imagine that this seaside promenade and the parks throughout the site might have become an attraction for non-residents as well, and the truly public nature of these shared places not only heightens the sense of participation for the houses around them, but would enable the land of Katama to remain part of the larger identity of the Island. (As it is now, Katama seems to be almost a residential “no-man's land”; there are no true public places and even the water's edge has been cut off by private house lots.)

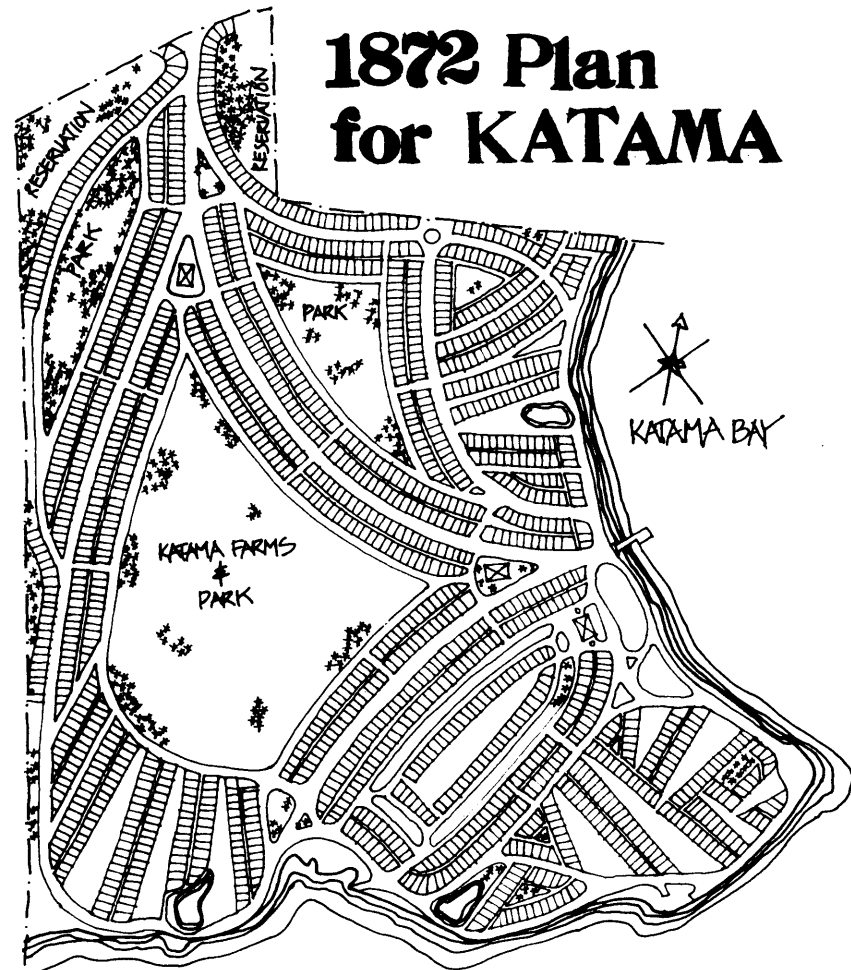
A FRAMEWORK FOR THE SITING OF HOUSES SHOULD ESTABLISH THE IMAGE OF THE LARGER PLACE

Copeland has used streets (like in Edgartown), centers (like in Oak Bluffs) and the edge of the land itself (like in Menemsha or at East Chop) to structure the framework for the larger place. Unlike the uniform monotony of the grid design on page 106, his design establishes connecting streets as places in themselves by providing the variety to the pattern and places within it which give reason for walking through and experi-



Above: a 1950's high density grid proposal drawn up, but never realized, for development of farm lands at Katama. Source: Maude Dorr, "Will Martha Get Raped?", *Progressive Architecture*, June 1966, p. 178.

Right: Robert Morris Copeland's plan for the new summer community proposed by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company in 1872; also never realized. Source: Ellen Weiss, "Robert Morris Copeland's Plans for Oak Bluffs", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 34:1, March, 1975, p. 65.



1872 Plan for KATAMA

encing the larger place. The pattern of the streets radiating from the central, and largest, park to the water's edge creates an imageable identity for the community as a whole, and though there are a great many houses in it, each has a unique position in the overall pattern. This "framework" which Copeland has designed for the houses and larger place seems to have been generated very much by considerations of how people will move through the site, what will provide reasons for doing so, and how the houses will reinforce this *experience* of the place. The residential units and public places are the "bricks" from which his design is structured. By contrast, most new developments are generated without consideration of the residential units at all (their type and placement within large lots of land being left to the homeowners), but rather, simply parcel the land into uniform lot sizes around streets which connect private realms but fail to become places of consequence in their own right.

THE FRAMEWORK SHOULD PROVIDE CLUES ABOUT THE TYPE AND ADDRESSING ATTITUDE, TREATMENT OF LAND, AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ZONES OF THE HOUSES

Clear public and private zones are established by the siting of the houses and streets. The lack of "backyard" space and the narrow lot shapes give strong clues about the type of house appropriate to this place (really *constraints* in that it prevents many alternatives): the houses could be expected to naturally take an informal addressing (open front porches) attitude towards the public paths and parks in front of them. With many parks which serve as shared "front yards" one could imagine that a fenced and formal treatment of the land would not be seen in this place. Though the design itself, unlike modern subdivisions, limits what can and can not be done by the individual land owner, the forfeiture of some alternatives implicit in the design is an essential factor in ensuring the consistency of character which will enable the community to develop into a whole greater than the sum of its parts — a *place*. Like older traditional built places on the Island, in Copeland's plan

HIGH DENSITY OF HOUSES IS AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF THE IDENTITY AS PLACE, AND MAINTAINS THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE MAN MADE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS WHICH CHARACTERIZES THE VINEYARD.

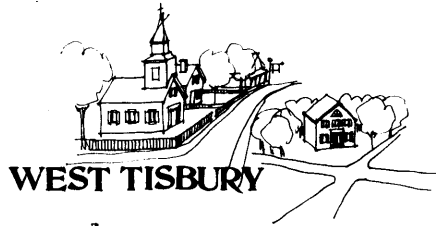
In one "new town" in Virginia the developer sought to establish an identity for the site by erecting a phony "old family farmstead" and manufacturing a false history for it and the land.⁸ While his actions are patently questionable, they attest to the importance people attach to a sense of place and tradition in their physical environments. It should not be necessary to manufacture bogus places for the Vineyard, for to many she is tradition itself. The mere duplication of old forms can not solve the problem of designing truly contemporary new places for new people and purposes. But as the new tools which must be developed to oversee this process take shape, the traditions and places we admire should be looked at critically for the things they may teach us.

To make a place is to make a domain that helps people to know where they are and, by extension, know who they are.⁹

It is my hope that the observations contained in this study may aid this process of shaping new Island places so that they too will share in the sense of dwelling, which has come to characterize Martha's Vineyard as such a special place for Islanders, summer people, and visitors alike.

⁸ Thomas Grubisich, "New Town Dream Alters", *Washington Post*, January 2, 1977, pp. A1, A14.

⁹ Moore and Allen, *Dimensions*, p. 51.



WEST TISBURY



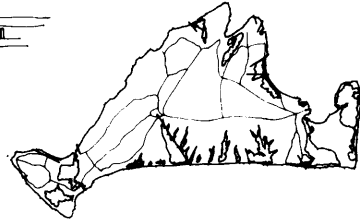
EAST CHOP



OAK BLUFFS



MENEMSHA



EDGARTOWN



Farms



Landmarks

Summer Houses



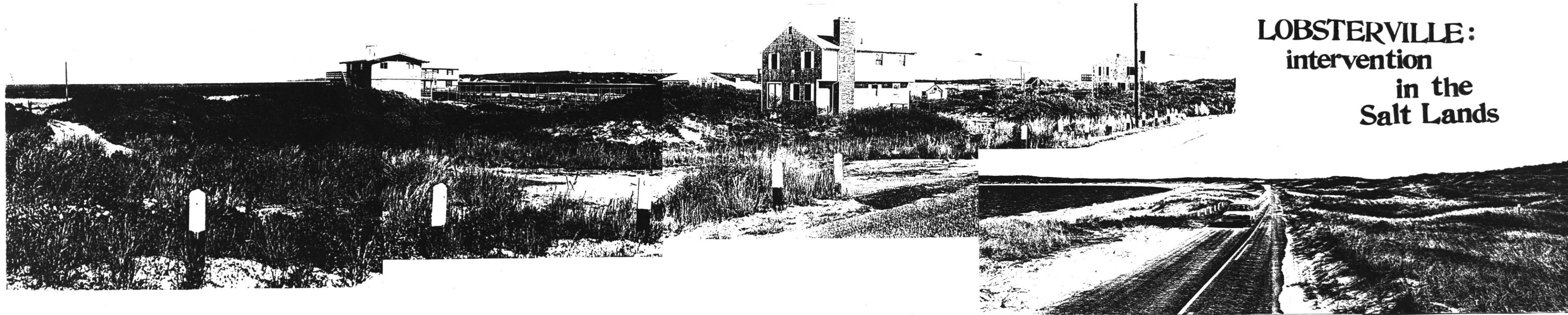
Country Road Houses



‘ Planning, forming architecture, should start before designing it. Architects, artists, architect-planners, artist-planners, land planners, ecologists, the community involved can get together before “building” starts. The purpose of creative activities is not to have more buildings . . . but to have more people who enjoy being human.’¹⁰

¹⁰ Otto Piene, *More Sky* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), p. 9.

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**LOBSTERVILLE:
intervention
in the
Salt Lands**



**MENEMSHA
from Dutcher Dock**

ROAD



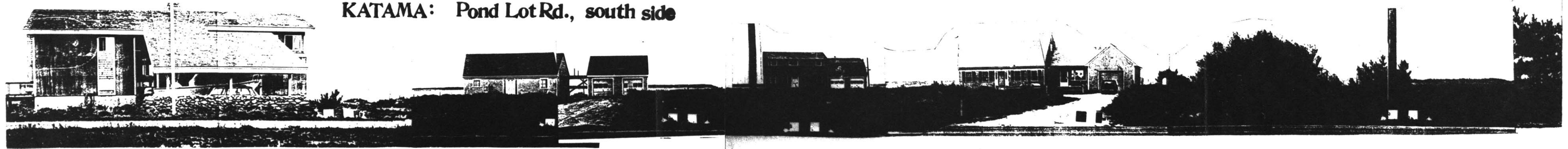
VINEYARD SOUND

LOBSTERVILLE

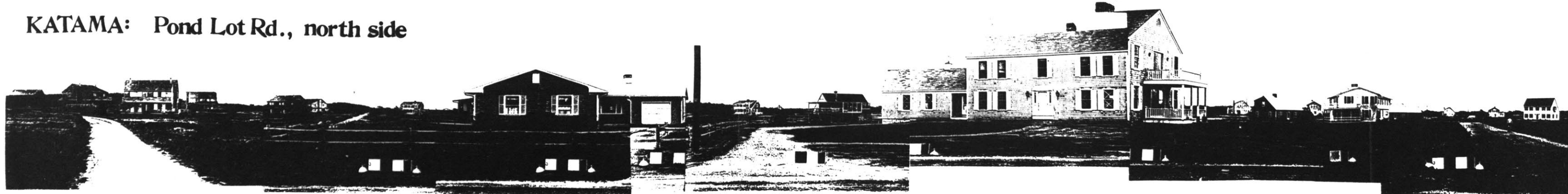
new houses at SENGEKONTACKET



KATAMA: Pond Lot Rd., south side



KATAMA: Pond Lot Rd., north side



**KATAMA
Pond Lot Rd.
north side**

FOREST CIRCLE



Methodist Camp Ground, OAK BLUFFS

WATERVIEW FARMS



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