THE ALLEY: An Urban Resource
THE ALLEY: An Urban Resource
In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For The Degree:

Bachelor Of Urban Planning
And Development

A Creative Project by:
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To those with a vision,
thanks for friends.

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The alley is a distinct spatial typology within the city and particularly within the urban district. Through design, the adaptively re-used alley can create an amenity that would enhance the district as well as the spatial and economic dynamics of the urban block.

There are many design principles on which successful space is predicated. The adaptive reuse of alleys is a harnessing of these principles and an application of them to the existing urban situation. However, an examination of the existing urban environment in an urban form and contextual reference is necessary. The design will then be able to proceed beyond the simple attribute of space and into the realm of place.

Although there have been misconceptions as to the validity of alleys as space (due to the alley’s implied association with crime and sin), they are “places.” They possess the spatial characteristics to sustain and keep vital the ideas of community and neighborhood that often fail in more planned spaces. A combination of successful spatial principles and the alley spatial culture can set the premise for a successful urban space.

Looking past the sidewalks, to the often ornate and bold facades of the buildings forming the third dimension of city blocks, one finds a simple utilitarian environment of areas seemingly forgotten. The alley has a rich physical context that compares to that of the facades and is integral in its dynamic nature.

Physical planning and design greatly enhance the life between buildings. These older alleys, nearly lost through the cracks of a decaying district, offer a rare opportunity to recapture urban space. These alleys contain some of the most interesting history found within our cities. The often slow development of these areas leaves unimproved and untouched portions of the city as urban artifacts.

A key in rejuvenating the urban environment is the assessment of present resources and the advantages they hold. American urban alleys have history, culture and identity. Recognizing the resources alleys provide is difficult. The form of the urban alley is a bit more understated in America than are the streets of the same period in which alleys were common within the urban setting. In this regard, their design for utilitarian activities as well as their overall form juxtapose space, mass, and materials. It does so in a manner which is similar to the Medieval city. It is for this reason that alleys have such great potential to become places within our urban districts.

Beyond, and in conjunction with, the man-made qualities of the alley, nature plays a role in each alley making it distinct within the entire urban environ-
moment. Ambient environmental factors in conjunction with the advantageous spatial structure determine to a large degree the feeling exuded by these spaces. An alley will obtain sunlight at only a short period of the day and only in a few portions of the total space. This creates a distinct signature for that particular alley. Light angles and shadows create subspaces in the alley canyon. Wind, smells and views through the alley help create and enhance such subspaces as well. While nature was not a determining agent in the design of the alley, it certainly adds to its design interpretation. The perception of space in the alley is unique due to the dynamics of the space. However, this space is in danger.

The concept of adaptively reusing alleys is based on making the most of a present alley situation. It involves utilizing a strong base of activity found on the exterior of the block. Before the inward look can occur, there must exist possible pressure for expansion to make such a venture truly viable. It is in the alleys that expansion of present businesses, housing, and other functions can occur.

The urban alley then is the compilation of spaces in the interior block. It consists of the traditional alley right-of-way and the spaces in and between the buildings of the block. Considering vertical space, the alley also takes another dimension in this definition. This aspect gives the alley walls. The outdoor room which evolves is then subject to the character resulting from the location. This understanding of location is alley personality. The personality of the alley is the perception in reference to basic design principles and to existing conditions. Alleys provide the opportunity to take a marginal element within the district and enhance it so that it becomes an asset.

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FOUR: THE SOUTH FINDLAY REDEVELOPMENT STUDY

Thoughts on Redesigning Alley Space
Spatial Syntax Theory
Defining the Alley
Alley Personality (Understanding the Alley)
Site Design
Assessing the Challenge
INTRODUCTION AND INTENT
OVERVIEW

The space found within alleys in older urban areas presents a spatial character. Alley space is uniquely delineated from any other part of the city. Because alleys can contain such quality space, they can become infill development within the city.

Alleys are valuable and viable within a modernizing context. Modernism has been a destructive agent to the alley and its place in the urban fabric. Over time, the superblock and superstructure have replaced the demolished alleys. Designers have enlarged scale to such a degree that they have isolated the buildings and their occupants from the concept of alley. The movement toward the tower development of the superblock removes people from the intimate scale of the urban environment typified in alleys. As a result, it removes people from the concept of the district and an integrated urban environment; thus enriching the urban environment through meeting and diversity of space. People's notion of progress and forward motion has completely abandoned the history it once created for the tower and the parking garage. The alley still exists, but it is slowly being phased out of the urban environment.

The alley is a distinct typology within American cities. In the older urban areas of these cities, there is an ability for conversion into an alley-mews. This small scale district which can fit into an existing city block, can come about through the careful analysis of the alley and the application of successful design principles. A mixture of uses, people, density and scale characterizes these micro-districts. Alleys in older urban areas of American cities possess unique spatial characteristics that set them apart from other spaces providing an opportunity for infill development. Often, Americans travel abroad to experience such spatial characteristics. While these spaces exist in American cities, they are often underutilized.

The belief that alleys are antiquated monuments to urban form (which does not make them useless, but certainly a less important part of the urban fabric) is simply a misunderstanding. However, the assaults upon them by modernism and the formation of the superblock are the manifestations of this continued misunderstanding. The American alley in older urban areas does have much to offer and if appreciated can become a very powerful urban space.

By attempting to bring the alley to its highest and best use, movement beyond the alley's functional uses (i.e., garbage collection and urban services entry) occurs. The utilization of a multi-purpose district core located within the interior of an existing city block acts as an enhancement to the uses presently in the district. It is for this reason that the core will take on the character of the district and act as a focus of renewal and community
strength.

The multi-purpose district core is a physical and non-physical entity. It is physical in respect to the numerous land-uses that would exist within its boundaries and the density, i.e., the concentration of people and mass of building structures. The multi-use district core is non-physical in respect to the distinct feeling that it would exude. The adaptive reuse of the alley is a physical manifestation of the district and its community identity.

Alleys are mixed-use in nature and generally structured within urban blocks. Groups of contiguous structures approximately four to six stories in height and are usually the results of architectural activity during the pre-modern era surround the alley. The locations of the targeted alleys are also not in the city center (Central Business District (CBD)). However, the one-time thriving districts on the fringe of the CBD house the alleys. Today, these once diverse districts are in danger of becoming part of a dilapidation-modernization cycle. This does not necessarily mean that there is a replacement of raised buildings by new and larger ones; it does mean, however, that the dilapidated buildings become involved in a trend of removal from the urban district's critical mass. Replacement with the extremities of scale (either a super-large structure or an open lot) and not appropriate scale leads to a lessening of district strength and community.

PROBLEM STATEMENT
The question to be studied is, “What are the physical characteristics of alleys in older urban areas; and, how can these attributes provide a basis for economically viable urban revitalization through the transformation of alleys from utilitarian to mixed-use function?” The creative project attempts to alleviate this misconception and bring about an understanding of these unique spaces. By accessing their assets, an examination may result of how to harness such advantageous space and create positive and diverse urban space.

The process of how to enhance the existing characteristics of an urban district through alley re-use are the primary focus of this work. The alley, in the older urban areas of cities, has the ability to be converted into an alley-mews. A mixture of uses, people, densities, and scales to achieve a desirable social surrounding typify these micro-neighborhoods. Alleys in older urban areas of American cities possess unique spatial and cultural characteristics that set them apart from other spaces within our cities and thus an opportunity for such development arises. These spaces do exist in American cities but are often underutilized. The utilization of the alley-form will enhance the existing attributes of the urban district. Not only will it provide a focus regarding the statement of the present form's validity, but it will also create an expansion mechanism for various land uses.
METHODOLOGY
To analyze the attributes of the urban alley as an independent urban form a case study approach is used. An alley in Cincinnati, Ohio applies and illustrates those attributes.

**Indicators**
- spatial characteristics of older urban alleys
- cultural characteristics of older urban alleys
- the transformation from a utilitarian to mixed-use function in order to achieve urban revitalization

**Sampling**
- Sanborn maps
- aerial photography
- spatial syntax theory
- personal observation

INTENT
This study will be beneficial for many reasons. Primarily, it will provide another work to the few that exist and discuss alleys as an independent urban form. This will help bolster the position that alleys are valuable to the city and provide a resource base that has yet to be truly tapped. This work will provide a different way of looking at alleys and create a reconsideration for the future handling of alleys. It will provide another way of looking at the old districts which often surround the cores of American cities. The project intends to instill an excitement about the form which exists in older urban areas so that a movement to protect and reveal the form will result.

Thus, a number of different audiences may make use of this project. Primarily, the project focuses toward use by city planners and urban designers who have districts within their city that are aging and threatened by newer, less-sensitive development. These designers could then propose alternatives and create strong urban space at the same time. Working with the spaces found within our cities provides a means of expansion without outward movement (toward the hinterland). It also enhances the present form of urban districts without a complete overhaul.

Neighborhood groups may use the primer to conduct similar objectives as the public sector. It is at the neighborhood level that best suits such infill development. Community and neighborhood groups will understand their district better and will be better able to design for it. Between many different levels in order to enhance the local environment cooperation is expected.

The project provides the impetus toward an examination of the existing...
urban environment and the assets held within. It is for this reason that the project is for anyone with an interest in the urban environment, its form and morphology (how the form changes over time).

**EXPECTATIONS**

It is the intent of this document to produce a model for the adaptive reuse and appreciation of city spaces. These spaces are usually not linked to that form resulting from the modernist movement. There is much space within the inner city that is underutilized. The consideration of these alleys allows for capitalization upon their central design elements and thus is a prime target for redevelopment.

Alleys market themselves as an enhancement to neighborhood dynamics. The expansion is useful to districts that wish to expand either incrementally or in a non-modernist fashion. By creating an appreciation for alley space, alleys become a viable and valuable urban form to the district. This process will allow for the preservation of this significant urban form. The alley will return to the American style of old. The redesign of the alley will aid in the creation of a distinct experience.

This product will take the form of a visual primer for alley redevelopment and physical design plan. The visual primer will aid communities and districts in their understanding of alleys and their hidden assets. Communities will be able to use this study as a model and identifies whether or not their district possesses the characteristics necessary for alley redevelopment. To fit a site-specific situation, application is necessary of the principles of alley development.

“So that people will be able to make modifications as required, ideas about how and why things get their shape must be introduced” (Alexander, 1964, p.10). By creating an understanding of the system in which the urban alley operates, we will better be able to make substantive and quality changes.

**CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

The work presented in the following text breaks down into three distinct parts. Each part deals with a different stage of the alley redesign process. The process is one of evolution that begins with a description of the present form (section two) and the dynamics that make alleys unique. Disseminating the parts of the alley and how they relate (section three) is the next task in the creation of the outdoor room. Finally, the two previous chapters combine (section four) to illustrate the process of adaptively re-using urban alleys and to discover how the design itself evolved around the alley nuances (alley personality).
The Alley
In The Spatial Order Of The City
ALLEY LIFE

Despite their often bleak image, urban alleys have served to house communities of people. Alley housing in Washington dates from the 1850's when population expanded tremendously and a lack of adequate transportation slowed the dispersal of people outward from the city (Borchert, 1981). In the Washington area, there were several forms to the alley and its blocks. Despite this, there were the common elements of street-front row houses facing outward with sheds and fences at the rear of their lots. Alley houses generally faced onto the interior H-shaped alley. Access to the street was through a narrow ten to fifteen feet wide alley that usually bisected the block. The intermediate structures (sheds and fences) added to the containment of the alley housing (Borchert, 1981).

A social network developed in the alleys due to the regular interaction of people. The alley became a place of neighborhood and community in which it is possible to identify a distinct identity, common culture and the development of social institution. From this, an integration of the various elements of community can be examined (Borchert, 1981).

The community view of alleys was not one held by all. The popular media, Borchert (1981) explains, did very little to promote alley living as a positive experience. The police viewed the areas as menaces and slums. A warning of the time read, “Never go alone into the low negro alleys at midnight . . . as you value your life, for there are dens of vice in this beautiful city where murder lurks and where thieves are always on the watch for victims” (Smiley, 1894 as cited by Borchert, 1981, p. 616).

Adding insult to injury, the negative views toward alleys have manifested themselves in a no-alley trend. The move toward automobile ownership, land speculation in suburbia and cost cutting measures of the depression amplified this trend. In the 1940's, according to Clay (1978), cars became longer and flatter; those who still used the alley for vehicular parking could no longer do so due to size constraints. Perhaps the primary killer of the alley with rapid suburbanization was “superblocking” (Clay, 1978).

Lewis Mumford, observing the disappearance of the American alley, expressed his distress. “More often than not I would prefer to walk in the rear alley precisely for all those little hints of life, activity, transition which the placid visual arts of suburbia did their best to suppress or politely disguise” (Mumford, as cited by Clay, 1978, p. 13-14).

While Mumford and Clay opposed the death of the alley, many others sympathized with their position. It is unrealistic to request that alleys be treated and respected on the basis of history. However, if the alleys can be
viewed as an evolutionary space in the Medieval sense, alleys do not have to die, simply evolve. Grady Clay (1978, p. 14) exudes such enthusiasm in the following quotation:

And so the alley could once again become a special world, not so much a place for the discards and helpless but for a wider range of city dwellers. It offers one of the few urban rather than suburban or rural “retreats,” an enclave just off the busy street, a step away from the hurly-burly. The interior of thousands of city blocks, redesigned and controlled by their residents, offers land that is serviced by utilities and is close to jobs, schools, churches and such reinforcements that city families need. . . Having thus observed the problems of alleys, it is time now to shift our speculative gaze from the open fields of suburbia to these older urban blocks, and do so before they become more threatening to our cities’ health. It is time to revise rules that make difficult the re-subdivision of urban lands into more effective layouts; and to look at the hidden alleys for their potentials as good places to live.

ALLEY TYPOLOGIES
Alleys have through time taken various forms. Although they have generally been distinguished by the mid-block entry, how the alley relates to the buildings of the block is highly variable. Above, there is a description of an alley as being an “H” shape with fences and outbuildings aligned along the traditional alley right-of-way (there are also “T” type and “I” types of alleys). Alleys can, however, have only one entry into the block. The general criterion is that it services the interior of the block.

In the City of Covington, Kentucky a distinct set of alley types reflects differing original uses. The smallest type, deemed a “honey cart alley,” is one which is approximately three to five feet wide and located usually between two urban buildings. In the days before city sewerage these alleys were a means of waste removal (Hodge, 1992).

Another example, occurring as a primary access to the interior of the block, results during the period of the horse and buggy. It is ten to twelve feet wide and is often in the older districts of our cities and neighborhoods, including Covington. It was an oasis to the hustle and bustles of the street (in terms of service delivery and access to the upper levels of urban structures) (Hodge, 1992).

The final type found in Covington arose with the auto age. This type of alley
was usually in the center of the block and ran in only one primary direction. That is, there were usually entries and/or exits on one end of the block and another on the opposite end. Because these alleys came into existence during the automobile period, they are often very wide at twenty to twenty-four feet. These alleys are often in the old residential districts which surround the original CBD and lined generally with garages. These garages in many places are contiguous and form and internal wall to the alley (Hodge, 1992).

Most alleys have a distinct set of features with which define them as unique within the urban fabric:

- **traditional alley right-of-way** the portion of the interior of the urban block set forth as the city right-of-way. Very often this is only a small linear strip which traverses the urban block at mid-block points.

- **alley wall** walls which face onto the interior of the urban block. This includes not only the rear of buildings which face outward on the block, but also the walls of structures found within the interior of the urban block.

- **urban wall** walls which face onto the exterior of the urban block. The urban wall is one which must relate to the district in which it is located and is the opposite of the alley wall.

- **physiognomy** the distinct features of the alley due to the height and massing of the alley walls. Such differentiations between buildings tend to create an alley signature due to the pockets of sun, shade, and wind which result from the compilation of individual structures into alley-form.

- **urban canyon** the spaces created between two or more alley walls. The degree to which the canyon is comfortable is directly relative to the scale of the alley wall.

- **discontinted axis** traditional alley right-of-ways which do not cross through a site on a single axis.

- **split** a gap in the urban or alley wall which allows access to the interior of the block. The space which characterizes the gap is anything less than the traditional alley right-of-way found within the location.

- **break** a gap in the urban or alley wall. It is characterized by interior block access via a space less than the approximate width of the typical structure within the urban wall.
leak: a gap in the urban or alley wall which allows access to the interior of the urban block. It is generally characterized by a space in the urban wall the width of more than one of the structures typical to the urban wall.

solid space: a type of space found within alleys that has very strong alley wall with limited permeability and differentiation among the walls.

stage (receptive space): a space within the alley-form characterized by large access, visibility, and multiple levels of viewing or action.

marginal space: a space found within the alley-form that has few strong features itself. The space links poorly to other spaces within the alley, highly permeable, and often subject to change as the natures of bordering spaces change.

permeable space: space found within the alley-form that has high access from other spaces. The number and degree of access points have a large influence on the use and atmosphere of the space.

transition space: space found within the alley-form that is a means of access to and from other spaces within the alley. The length of the transition space will determine the need for uses in that space.

dominant structure: structures within the urban block which stand out from others on the block. They may stand out because of height, massing, color, or texture that is significantly different than that represented by the majority of urban block buildings.

secondary structure: structures within the urban block which serve ancillary functions to the primary buildings. These functions may include parking, carriage houses, machinery structures, etc.

SPATIAL INTEGRATION OF THE ALLEY

The alley in our urban districts offers a challenge to provide a unique environment that is unavailable in the more convenient (in the automobile-transportation sense) areas of the city. The task is to utilize the unique spatial characteristics of the alley as a drawing point.

The modernist perspective removes itself from the concepts of enclosure and identity. The modern city usually consists of freely-placed buildings resembling a scattered assembly of units (Trancik, 1988). This assembly nullifies the presence of streets and squares in the traditional sense (Trancik, 1989). There has been a distinct loss of the relationship between
built form and space. Modern urban form tends to pass off individual components or urban elements as total urban form without searching for interconnectedness amongst the elements themselves. The alley is a search for the enhancement of such interconnectedness that is already present in the older districts of our cities.

While the grid, the all-purpose tool of the functionalists, is flexible and easily expanded upon, the system within cities contributed to a loss of spatial containment (Trancik, 1989). By adaptively re-using the alley, the recapturing of some occurs. Trancik believes that the city should be dominated by connective spaces instead of individual buildings which are integrated into a hierarchy of spaces leading to a stronger urban fabric (1986). The alley then does not seek to subvert the grid and its functionalism in the city but to act as an extension. The alley could be the extensions which offer the users of the city an opportunity to experience space and not simply pass through.

THE UNDERUTILIZED CITY

The modern urban form is one that ignores the theories of figure-ground, linkage and place. Traditional urban space today is rarely thought of as an entity unto itself. It has distinct characteristics of shape, scale and connection to other places. These characteristics, however, are often not present in modern form. What results according to Trancik is a mentality which produces, “unshaped antispase” (1986).

What has resulted from this lack of integration is the problem of lost space. The modern city as described above contains large amounts of vacant, unused land. The changing economic, industrial and employment patterns of the central city amplified greatly this disappearing mass (Trancik, 1986).
The modern movement contributed to the volume of lost space as planning and architecture of the time rarely designed the spaces between buildings (Anderson, 1978 as cited by Trancik, 1986). The idea of lost space is defined by Trancik (1986: p. 3-4): "... lost spaces are the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign — antispaces, making no positive contribution to the surroundings or users."

The modern movement has abandoned the principles of urbanism and the human dimension of outdoor space. Relating the attention paid to the individual structures of earlier architectural periods and their relation to the urban environment, the modern urban experience of space remains up to chance (Brett, 1970). Historically, the urban design models praised by urbanists (those who pursue the concepts of integration and spatial connection) are those of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. The city’s form was low and horizontal with a propensity to encourage close connection between life within the buildings and the activity on the street (Trancik, 1986).

ALLEYS AS AN URBAN RESOURCE — THE CASE OF MONTISI

As one enters the Medieval city of Montisi, it is as if one has entered another world. The movement from object (the city as part of the hillside in the landscape) to container amplifies this movement (Stoner, 1991). This is the feeling that occurs when one views the district as a whole and then delves into its form. Inside this container are the chambers; the alley-like streets are the "rooms" where a vibrancy of life occurs in this city, whereas the houses hold only the most fundamental of acts. Other activities often occur in the street; these activities do not occur within named spaces, but mostly in tiny piazzas throughout the city and within the alleyways themselves (Stoner, 1991).

The village contains, as Stoner describes, a richness of texture, color and dimensions (1991). The street is concave in nature which tends to focus attention toward the center, or the commons. There are no curbs and no distinct sidewalk (Stoner, 1991). There is no separation of uses, simply a balance through which all is enriched. It is this balance that Americans have missed in their urban environments. This is due to a misconception that the space described in Montisi is obsolete, out of our time and place and subsequently irrelevant. The American concept of balance is not to create an evolution of space, but to create a multi-purpose room which is featureless and textureless (Stoner, 1991). The alley in the American city, by distinct contrast, has the ability to create several outdoor rooms which are anything but featureless and textureless.

Lewis Mumford has a similar appeal for the Medieval style city and the
neighborhood and community that it spawned. "No town can be adequately described in terms of its two-dimensional pattern; for it is only in the third dimension, through movement in space, and in the fourth dimension, through transformation in time, that the functional and esthetic relationships come to life" (Mumford, 1961, p. 305). This philosophy on the city is in his description of the Medieval urban form.

In his description of the markets and places, a comparison to the many tiny piazzas of Stoner's Montisi as they were rarely formal and generally occupied an irregular shape. These spaces were arbitrary in nature because the needs of the surrounding buildings came first and determined consequently, the disposition of the space (Mumford, 1961).

The scale of the Medieval city is one which led to the decentralization of the essential social functions. It incidentally prevented overcrowding and needless circulation throughout the urban fabric (1961). Mumford (1961, p. 308) continues, "Small structures, small numbers, intimate relations—these medieval attributes gave the town special qualitative attributes, as against large numbers and mass organizations, that may help account for its creativity."

In his quotation, Mumford not only justifies the Medieval spatial relationship but also explains the attributes of the alley. Because the alley is primarily left-over space in the interior of the block, it too has small structures, numbers, and intimate relations. The small structures on the interior block result from a stair-stepping effect and the outbuildings contained within the block. As a result, the structural integrity of the interior becomes one of increased human scale, one of which the user can feel more a part. The lowered scale becomes one which fosters the capacity of people to meet in the block and carry on intimate relations. These relations can occur one user to another, a user to himself, and between the user and the alley-form.
The narrowness made outdoor activities more comfortable providing protection from the sun, wind, rain and winter elements. Each street, according to Mumford (1961, p. 308), had its own "physiognomy." That is, the small variations in height of the buildings and the profile of the rooftops combined with variations of doorways and window openings gave each street its own signature or character. The winding of the streets provides the individual with the possibility at every step to discover a new structure. Frequently edging the street is an arcade emanating from the open end of the shops which provides again more texture, color and definition (Mumford, 1961). Street pavement was even an art that enhanced the power of the medieval street.

Another major element important to Mumford’s medieval interpretation of the city is the neighborhood unit and the functional precinct. It is in this way that Mumford (1961) explains that the Medieval city. It is one of many little cities, each with a certain degree of self-sufficiency which formed out of common needs and for purposes to enrich and supplement the whole. Mumford, stating the threatened existence of the city due to the automobile, views the traditions of the precinct as a possible new form of development (1961).

Alley-form can then take several principles from the Medieval model. These principles are density, scale, pedestrianization, and multiple-use. Density should, as in Medieval cities, consist of a high agglomeration of built mass but at the same time contain a sequence of carved out spaces within the framework. These spaces should vary in scale generally descending from the scale of the predominant mass. That is, there should be spaces where people can relate to the alley’s structural mass on a variety of bases. The alley-form should contain units of mass intermixed at different heights and widths to provide visual and sensory diversity in the environment. By doing so, in conjunction with enhancing the character of the alley, it will become a space where people want to be and be a part of. Pedestrians will be more apt to discover the spaces as a better place to be if not simply an exciting alternative to the often sterile environments of our modern cities. However, in order to keep up the levels of activity and vibrancy associated with the space a mixture of uses will be necessary. People need to be there for a variety of reasons so that there is an increased probability of usage and, moreover, that this usage becomes more meaningful. The mixing of uses is a dynamic that tends to breed its own type of excitement and importance.

When comparing the modern city with its Medieval counterpart, the major difference is in the distinction of physically subdivided space and integrated space. That is, the Medieval city provided a number of integrated spaces within the city while the modern environment does not. The modern city is one in which the size is simply too large. The scales and massing of
structures in the city escalated to the point of not allowing the user to participate or even feel comfortable. The participation factor is all but null. As the city transformed to become automobile oriented it also became one that neglected the concept of district. While a building may be located in a district, it is usually not a part of it. People will come to the building in their automobile, park in the garage, and proceed to enter the building. No interaction with the city has occurred. It is difficult for the pedestrian, though there are few, to feel comfortable in a tall, glass enclosed canyon. This does not mean that such tall and large buildings are not necessary to the economic vitality of the city. It does mean, however, that such spaces need integration to the district; they must forego the strict Euclidean geometry and disconnectedness associated with an emphasis on functional privatization and the visual element rather than an element within the whole.

The alley rejuvenated could provide an urban environment with just such stimulation. While it is not expected that an adaptive alley re-use project is going to change the urban framework, it is a step toward recognizing an urban environment that people want to be in. It is an attempt to create a microcosm of the desired urban environment. Such a project as illustrated in later pages has the ability to have an incremental effect on the fabric of a district if part of an overall plan.

THE CONCEPT OF THE MEW — MAKING MODERN A PRE-MODERN FORM

Perhaps the closest example of the prospects of alleys and the example of Montisi is the mew. Mews are linear, street-like corridors that function as extensions of streets and districts in which they lie. The mew, which originally served as a utilitarian alley, provides a larger opportunity of choice for users and becomes a unit within district (Schumacher, 1978). By creating a finer grain to the urban environment, greater spatial perception and definition are instant results. Users tend to understand and, furthermore, relate to more digestible space.
The alley and mews differ slightly in their use. Mews were alleys that provided access to paddocks and stables and over time converted to a residential use. The alley is a protrusion into the center of the block, but the uses do not follow. Other than this difference, the mew and the alley (after adaptively re-used) are virtually the same in concept. The alley seems to be a more extensive possibility for interior development of the block. Perhaps the development of the alley is a series or network of mews working together to tie the interior of the block.

GASLIGHT COURT

Gaslight Court in the Old Town District of Chicago is one example of the alley-mew. Though it's small and seemingly hidden within the district, it has a great impact. Gaslight Court then is not only a physical manifestation, it is a feeling.

The feeling begins as one is walking down North Wells Street in the Old Town District. A pattern of storefronts and street intersections begins to set a rhythm in the district. Suddenly, the entrance to an alley imitates this pattern. There is a pseudo-gate at the entrance which also acts as pseudo-facade, seemingly continuing the pattern of the street. This “gate” advertised the uses inside the alley, but it could not display the feelings that would also follow. The “gate” itself was a very old grouping of wooden beams to form an upper floor wooden deck (for the second storeys of the adjacent structures). As well as displaying very old gas lamps, the rustic nature of the wood placed the alley significantly back into history.

The cobblestone began to descend as one walks into the narrow alley. A sense of removal from the street context becomes apparent. The feeling is not one of confinement but one of comfort. One is able to identify with the scale found in the space and identify with the entries which line this portion of the space. Windows from the “basements” of the adjacent buildings allow for further connection with those buildings and their uses. The windows in conjunction with the small scale brick break up the side of the alley wall so that it is not so overpowering and so that it is more visually digestible.

One moves further into the alley by a space engulfed in sunlight. At that point, the alley wall seems to spread apart into somewhat of a courtyard. The brick and stone of the stage-like space being warmed by the sun, make it a great place to see and be seen. The buildings which form the space are of varying height and width as they project a changing system of shadows as the sun moves across the sky. The trees and lamps in the space provide a softening to the alley hard scape and begin to provide character to the built form.

This second space has a number of windows and doors from three
structures that enter onto it thus making it a prime space for interaction between the structures. The floor subdivides through level changes which allows each facade of the alley wall to have their own little piece of space while acting as part of the whole. One of the walls has several porches which also overlook the stage and provide another level of interaction.

As one ventures to the right of the stage, an elevated cove is noticed. A set of stone stairs leads to a patio on the next level. This patio is private in nature as it provides sole access to three apartments that overlook the alley as well. The uses found in the alley seem to accent the character. The uses are a mixture of storefronts, offices, and residential functions. The mix provides constant alley usage. While those who live there go to work and school, those who work in the alley arrive and utilize the space. When those who work in the alley leave, the residential function takes over. The alley is truly dynamic.

A number of principles for alley design arise from Gaslight Court. The principles closely tie to the feelings experienced when passing through such a series of spaces. The first is a feeling of orientation. That is, assessing the preliminary characteristics of a space and its relationships to other spaces. A strong entry statement should lead one into a space which carries one away from the street.

The depth of the preliminary space is very important for the comfort of the user. The space should not be too deep as to either create a feeling of privateness or fear of the unknown in the user. A means of managing this is to have either a shortened entry space or an activity within the long stretch. This segments that portion of the alley into two smaller parts (thus making it more amiable to the user).

A function of depth of the alley walls creates the enclosure of the alley. As in the depth, the enclosure should neither be too severe nor too mild. The space must be adequately be spatially defined so that it may carry on an individual identity and use. Primary to this aspect of alley design is the concept of human scale.

As mentioned, the enclosure and its character bring about a specific identity to the space. This identity is primarily responsible for how a user reacts and relates to a space. Often there is a common reaction among users of space which further strengthens the identity. However, the individual reaction provides a diversity which makes the space dynamic.

Finally, there are two more alley design attributes that attempt to relate a space to other alley spaces or exterior spaces. The first is focus. It is an assessment of what influences impact upon a space. This impact may take
the form of a building, adjacent space, or an activity found within either. Creating linkage to such influences is the last design theory. Spaces within an alley system will never act alone. They will always be a part of a spatial sequence and react dynamically within that sequence. The linkages between these spaces are integral in maintaining the network and its overall feeling of place.
The Alley and Appropriate Principles of Design
SETTING THE GROUND PLANE (Figure-Ground)
The following grouping of design principles illustrates the two-dimensional nature of the urban district and in particular, the alley. The grouping provides an analytical basis of the relation of urban objects to one another. The alley exists in an already formed urban spatial system and it is important to determine its place within that system. The concepts which follow help gain a perspective of the nature of the alley's placement and interaction within the system.

Order is an attempt to establish a hierarchy within a spatial system. In terms of the urban alley, order refers to the convex spaces between buildings and their relationship to one another. Order is an extension of the hierarchical order. In viewing a hierarchy, often only a single element is taken into account. Order tries to view the alley one step further as it not only examines the space between buildings, but also the space within.

A spatial grouping within a district will exhibit characteristics unique to that location. Arrangement is the way in which the grouping behaves in reference to the overall order. The urban block and immediate environs offer varying arrangements among spaces. From linear, radial to random, the spatial grouping found in the interior of the block can differentiate tremendously within a limited scale.

The unity among a spatial grouping is reflected in its fit. Simply put, unity is the fitting together of parts so that nothing else could be added for the better. The built form which surrounds the alley often dictates the unity of the location. Infill development or removal of an element among the grouping many times results in unity.

The appropriate harmony among elements is symmetry. Alleys seem to fluctuate as to whether they exhibit this principle. Symmetry in the alley disappears with the individual design of the defining building and appears on varying scales. The divergence from a strong symmetry strengthens the individuality of the alley and the subsequent personality.
Closely related to symmetry is the concept of balance. It is a single center of interest for an entire spatial grouping. In this way, a space may not only carry an individual spatial identity, but also be a part of a unified spatial construct.

The lines of force exuded from a space to other spaces within the system are referred to in terms of axiality. Such lines within alleys generally emanate from alley entrance or alley walls. The lines which result from the alley walls offer the greatest potential revealing nuances of the location while entry lines tend to accent a larger framework of contextual issues.

The degree of depth and frequency of deviation from an axis is rhythm. Alleys provide themselves a uniqueness in that there is a great variation in both depth and frequency in each alley. These variations provide public uses and private uses, and separation without confinement in the alley context. The non-standard rhythm often revealed may become the basis for multiple use at the location.

RAISING THE WALLS (Space-Mass)
As the title might indicate, the principles which follow are an analysis of the third or vertical dimension of the alley and the spaces it comprises. The vertical and massing aspect of alleys is extremely important as it creates the primary basis for spaces within the alley. While the previous analysis determines the urban spatial system, space and mass offer another means of defining space. This spatial definition is more readily apparent than the two-dimensional analysis above.

Scale is the relationship of size between units found within a space. Generally, it is the relationship between the vertical dimension and the horizontal dimensions and the objects found therein. Scale in an alley can vary; it often encompasses an entire range from extreme to extreme. In the built environment, scale is the relationship between two or more forms. When the human element comes into play, scale (now referred to as human scale) becomes the relation between built form and the human figure.
Proportion is the examination of a location's breadth/length. Alley spaces will often exhibit spaces that tend to be long and narrow. The removal of a structure from a group will open up an alley space. The walls which create the volume become important in spatial proportion. A wall may be the dominant input to a space and thus determining spatial proportion relative to itself.

Important to a site are the environmental factors to which it is subjected. The forms, as they obstruct sunlight onto the site, help create a differential of spaces within the alley. The result is an intermixing of warm and cool spaces. The activities which ensue in each directly relate to the space's degree of warmth.

The mass/volume of structures that are in the alley space or define it plays an integral role. This attribute determines the dominance of a structure over a space or group of spaces. Various floor-to-air ratios contribute differently to a space. In addition, the cumulative aspect of multiple structures creates increasing complexity of space.

When looking at urban volume, the holes which occur in the volume become just as important. Permeability refers to the degree of access a site has. This access occurs through a gap in a non-contiguous set of structures, windows looking into the site, or doors which open onto the site.

**ADDING THE DETAILS (Character)**
Perhaps the most important delineator of space is the character. It is the character that distinguishes one space from another because of the unique spatial circumstances which govern its situation. The details not only set a space apart one space from another, but also work to instill an identity to the site. Then, the site has its own specific value and place among other spaces.
The ease in determining the edges of the alley and their relationship to the space is the sense of outline. The stronger the sense of outline in the alley that there is, the stronger the perceived space those results.

**Movement** is how and to what degree of ease a user moves through a space. Alley design has specific interest in wayfinding and linkage to other spaces. Providing good movement in the alley is a means of extending freedom and ease to the user.

The character of a site often derives from a dynamic which yields a force/emphasis. The force or emphasis may take the form of a strong visual contact, physical connection, and/or design similarity as it emanates from the urban dynamic.

**Texture**, in reference to alley design, can take two forms. The first form of texture (the macro-concept) reflects on the jaggedness of the alley and how the alley wall relates to the traditional alley right-of-way. The degree of depth from the right-of-way varies and contributes to the creations of "rooms." The micro-concept of texture is the feel of an alley wall or piece of that wall. The greater the texture of an alley wall leads to a more digestible space and subsequently a space with greater spatial merit to the user.

The **contextual form and materials** of the alley should reflect those of the district in which it is. The alley identifies as part of a bigger picture resulting from the form and materials of the district. Contextual form largely looks at the unit scale of the alley and its relation to the district. The unit scale should be representative of the district as to create further ties.
The personality of the alley is a compilation of all of the design traits. It is an examination of what uses exist in the space and who uses the space.

ALLEY PERSONALITY

The most important result gained from the analysis of the basic design elements is the concept of personality. The personality of the urban alley, as mentioned above, is the cumulation of the basic design elements and the conditions that presently exist around them. Alleys differ from many other types of space that when they are adaptively re-used, it often can project a potential use and character onto the surrounding built mass. This usually occurs in other types of space in reverse fashion.

The alley personality becomes the manifestation of the district. It is, in fact, one of a series of experiences. Therefore, once the personality of the alley has been discovered, it may be recognized as a true part of the district. The alley espouses many of the characteristics of the district and vice versa. The personality, then, provides the impetus for alley design into a strongly integrated district space (or series of spaces).

Alley development is the tie between several integral urban concepts. The first of which, the district, is perhaps the most tangible. The alley provides a tremendous element within the urban spatial framework that has the capability of integrating lost spaces of the district into a more cohesive spatial unit. The alley can then bring the principles of the Medieval spatial evolution (that of spatial sequences) and the mews into combination. They then mesh with alley form and personality to create alley design and adaptive alley re-use. The re-use of the alley becomes an evolution of space, form, and use.
The South Findlay Redevelopment Study
THOUGHTS ON REDESIGNING URBAN/ALLEY SPACE

The two previous sections of this text set the stage for the final application into an alley design. That is, it is here where the design theories specific to alleys will be combined with the basic design principles expressed immediately before. The district utilized in this study will be Over-The-Rhine in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Over-The-Rhine is an old German settlement in Cincinnati that has over the years maintained the structural integrity of its built environment. The district, because of its age, is one of the few that remain strong and have a predominant alley system. However, before the process of alley design may begin, another process of identifying the appropriate alley(s) within a district for development is necessary.

SPATIAL SYNTAX THEORY

The means of discovering the spatial integration of the mass and spaces within a district can be viewed through the use of spatial syntax theory. It is a process in itself and analyzes the district in terms of its two dimensional spatial characteristics. A series of maps must be created to determine certain characteristics of the space in the district and to determine the spatial strengths of the district. The maps shown on the following pages attempt to express the attributes of connectivity, linkage, and force to form an urban suitability of the district. The urban suitability is then utilized much like a suitability of natural systems in that it combines all of the attributes and locates the strongest site for alley re-use.

\[1\] Spatial Syntax Theory was developed by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson of the Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning, University College London. Their work is more specifically explained and applied in their text, The Social Logic of Space.
a) the figure-ground map: allows one to gain an understanding for the relationship between the built environment and the space in which it exists.

b) the structural base map: the map, derived from the figure-ground, should be simplified in terms of structural shape in order to not get engulfed in minutia.
c) the convex space map: the spaces left over in conjunction with the built structures are mapped to express the convex spaces of the district (convex spaces are the largest possible spaces in which a tangent can be drawn on the exterior of the space without passing through the space itself).

d) the axial map: the longest straight line that can be drawn through the spaces denoted in the previous map.
e) the y-map: a small circle is drawn in the center of each convex space and lines of permeability are then used to "connect the dots" or any adjacent spaces (note: these lines must pass through space and may not pass through built mass — it is as if one is walking from one space to another).

f) the axial link index: each line on the previous map represents a relationship between two convex spaces and a figure can be drawn to represent the number of spaces beyond two that an axis through that space will pass (if the axis only passes through two, the numeral above the link will be 0).
The Alley: An Urban Resource
g) The axial space index: each space in the system will be axially linked to a certain number of other convex spaces, perhaps in several different directions.

h) The building space index: the number of buildings that are both adjacent to and directly permeable a convex space.
i) the axial line index: the number of convex spaces that any given axis transverses.

j) axial connectivity: the number of other axis that a given axis intersects.
k) urban suitability: the mapping of the prime areas in the previous five categories — f,g,h,i,j (prime areas in each were determined by finding the highest value in each and including in the final suitability only those areas which possess values greater than half of this largest value — a number of areas will be located on this map, but only a few will be intersected by a majority of the factors which are taken into account — the darkest areas below are thus the most prime).

A definite drawback of the Hillier and Hanson method of spatial syntax is that it does not take into account the cultural assets of the district in which such a project is to be located. As a result, a cultural supplement to the spatial syntax system is necessary. Overlaid onto the urban suitability map is a map of cultural features in the landscape of the district. A determination of strong spaces in relation to the cultural features then occurs.

The map reveals that the block just south of Findlay Market in The district is one of the strongest and most integrated. The market is a resource for the entire city let alone the district of Over-The-Rhine. To the east of this block lies a supermarket which services the district as well. A community center and a series of churches also envelop the block. This block also acts as the point of juncture for the predominant residential and commercial uses to the south and east and the warehousing of the northwest where many people in the district work.
The Alley: An Urban Resource
DEFINING THE ALLEY
The alley as defined in the Preface and in Section Two is more than the traditional alley-right-of-way. In the case of the study block, from this point on referred to as South Findlay, the alley is any space within the delimiters of Race Street on the west, Green Street on the South, Vine Street on the east, and Elder Street on the north (the Elder Street which is farthest north so as to include the market in the study area). Any space within these boundaries that is not built upon is then the alley. The attributes of South Findlay are expressed in the drawing on the following page which utilizes the terminology determined in Section Two of the text.

The Alley Defined

The Alley: An Urban Resource
ALLEY PERSONALITY (UNDERSTANDING THE ALLEY)
The following illustrations are utilized to express the personality that can be pulled from the urban alley. The personality is a combination of alley functionalism, the basic design concepts and current alley conditions. The personality for each space within the alley, the alley itself, or even an alley system will be different from any others. After the personality of the spaces has been perceived, a movement toward the design of the spaces can occur.
1. Mixed-use Potential.
- a very tight space (total width approximately 12-14')
- when the two alleys come together, there is a perceived widening of the space
- the building to the east is residential; west is expired industrial; north is commercial on the first floor with storage on the upper floors
- this would be a good mixed-use hub because of the variety of spaces that exist both inside and outside of the built structures

2. Enhance the Norm.
- premier space in block to attract users to the alley system (proximity to market)
- point to also lure activity that occurs around the market as well as the people themselves (extend the businesses)
- this portion of the block because of the market provides the greatest hallmark (the market tower)
- it is here that there is a vibrance of color and texture from the bricks, awnings and even the fruit
- there really isn't much to do here, just make the most of a good asset
- very public feel

3. Residential Plaza.
- primarily a residential area on all levels
- large welcoming space at foot of buildings
- probably would be good for a low-key plaza for residents
- because of the residential nature, professional offices would be a good blend of activity

4. The Great Lot.
- large parking lot paved over with black asphalt (very little character)
- a few trees form an organized line within the parking lot
- this space is an incredible stage for activity as numerous windows and door openings enter into the space
- the space ties in well with the other spaces, but simply lacks an identity

5. Activity All Around.
- another tight space
- tends to allow for more comfort because of the multi-level porches which enshroud the space
- there seems to be a strong spatial connection between the commercial buildings to the north and the residential structures to the south
- the porches combine wood and brick to lighten the view
- this would be a good space because of the multiple-level activity to bring people together (perhaps an upper level bed-n-breakfast)

6. The Space that Wasn't.
- a large gap in the urban wall
- more asphalt (but with a tinge of rusty chain link fence)
- tends to take away from the "great lot" effect and make it seem sterile and undefined as it becomes more a part of Vine Street rather than a part of South Findlay
- the gap needs to be reduced (this would be a good area for infill)
- the space certainly seems more welcoming to cars and trucks than pedestrians

7. The Old Homestead.
- stores like the urban wall of the space
- behind the stores is very private space because of its tightness and residential function (in the other tight spaces, there was a very definite mix of uses -- here there is not)
- keep the space private residential and maintain the small playground for the children which live here
- this space has a dominant family atmosphere
The Alley: An Urban Resource
The development of Glass Alley attempts to pull the economic activity of Findlay Market into the South Findlay Block. Some of the concepts illustrated:

* creating an image. The creation of a uniform signage theme helps users identify with the project and assist in creating desired movement from forces outside the site.

* filtering through. The stores located adjacent to the market are provided with an opportunity to have a second entrance on the alley for pedestrians or the lower level stores could be subdivided to incorporate small shops into the alley.

* stepping up. A major objective in alley re-use is to create increased access to upper levels; the use of a common elevator and/or deck system allows for access to numerous structures (such construction increases public space in the alley).
Filling in the interior of the block that was previously marginal space allows for many opportunities:

- Raising the green space creates extensions to the existing alley system and maintains containment and provides enclosure.
- Providing focus. Design of marginal space should work to support existing alley amenities (e.g., creating linkage with the market and other alley spaces).
- Growing inward. The utilization of secondary structures (gateway statements, atiums, and decks) supports public space and public uses (e.g., central mail services and a transit stop at the atrium on the Green.

The Market Green

The Alley: An Urban Resource
View south into the Market Green

The Alley: An Urban Resource
infill structure to close leak
ASSESSING THE CHALLENGE

With the design concepts in place, it is time to assess the challenge that has been taken on. That is, we seek to determine the design that has resulted and its impending results. Perhaps the best way to develop the assessment is to compare how the basic design concepts affected the creation of outdoor rooms. As discussed earlier, the creation of outdoor rooms is directly related to the concepts of spatial sequencing. The results of orientation, depth, enclosure, identity, focus, and linkage are elements within a sequence.

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<th>Order</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Depth</th>
<th>Enclosure</th>
<th>Identity</th>
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The comparison in the matrix reveals many important findings. The findings result from taking the design apart and identifying the issues that dictated the basic design. The concepts and issues pulled from the matrix are then applicable to all alleys and not simply the study alley.

Findings:

- The first order design concepts (those dealing with figure/ground) provide the base for the resulting design. Beyond two-dimensional aspects, these concepts have little effect on the design. Providing a "base" urban environment within which to work is certainly essential.

- The second order concepts (space/mass) begin to have a much larger effect on the design. Whereas the first order set the parameters for space, the second order literally builds upon this and begins to create total alley form. Thus, the second order's effect on the outdoor room is more substantial.

- The enhancement of space (character) seems to also have a significant
role in the design of the alley. It is with these elements of design that the alley becomes a place or the room gains a self identity.

- The primary layout of the alley has already occurred. What remains for the designer is to simply enhance what already exists. This, according to the matrix, can occur most effectively through the second and third order design concepts. The third order (character) seems to have a comprehensive tie to all facets of the outdoor room.

- The largest areas of effectiveness were seemingly those of depth, enclosure, and identity. It is for this reason that the design of alleys should focus primarily on these attributes. Incremental or localized alley redevelopment should remember these as foci. They will provide the most "bang" for the effort.

- The orientation is primarily taken care of by the existing block structure and building layout. Depth, enclosure, and identity are affected by the attributes of the second and third order design concepts. Focus and linkage tend to result from the advantageous development of depth, enclosure, and identity.

**What does this all mean?**

- **That which exists is not always bad.** Alley redevelopment allows or the use of presently existing resources. Adaptive alley re-use is a means of preserving an interesting urban form while also maintaining the spatial integrity of the urban district.

- **Alleys are outdoor rooms.** Alleys are a sequence of encosed spaces or rooms that have their own identity and purpose within the spatial arrangement. The concept of purpose, or more specifically personality, should be the primary objective of alley redevelopment. That is, if the personality of the alley is truly perceived, the design is ninety percent complete. This work represents that ninety percent as the other ten percent tends to be truly site and design specific.

- **The space within alleys is flexible.** Alleys provide the designer with a variety of spaces within the system. Some of the space may be appropriate in dimensional aspects for certain uses while other spaces may seem too expansive or tight. The interesting thing about alleys is that the spaces are actually flexible and are able to be manipulated. To alleviate some of the discomfort of some alley spaces, a simple set of solutions may be prescribed. The first is that sun is a substitute for space. When sun is shone into tight environs, it tends to make the user more at ease and more comfortable with the space. The alley is no longer a tight, cold dungeon. The second solution to alleviate the feelings of tight, long spaces is the idea of spatial perception and digestion. If a space is too long and thus uncomfortable for the user to even enter, then harmony results from the inclusion of activity or uses in the space. The user then is not forced to look through a
space, but is forced to examine the subspaces for their uses and feel more comfortable in entering a space with recognizable uses.

- **Identity comes on a variety of scales.** The concept of alley personality is really what it is all about. The district has its own personality; the urban block has its own personality; the alley has its own personality. Even though all three have distinctive personalities, they share common elements among them to tie them all together. It is this tie that makes alley redevelopment successful. Personality is a culmination of various community identities into a comprehensive design agenda. Alley personality enhancement (design) must find itself rooted in the small scale cobble-stone to the larger district contextual form. Understanding the alley is understanding the block which is understanding the district.
Figure 2.1 Adapted from:

Figure 2.9 Taken from:

Figure 2.18 Taken from:
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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