[CONTEXT]ual Transfer of [IDEA]s

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"Our farms are in danger of becoming subdivisions or shopping malls. We can’t sit back and take our farms and the food supply for granted"

- Dan Glickman
  U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

We must think INCREMENTALLY
- Street by street
- Block by Block
- Neighborhood by Neighborhood
- Town by Town
- City by City

It gives us an IDENTITY
I believe that we are losing our identity. The identity of who we are, what we do, and most importantly where we are from. Today’s world consists of instant gratification, the ever-present need to “get it now”, have it “done yesterday” and of course the ability for “one stop shopping.” We work more so that we can have more “stuff”, bigger cars and even bigger homes because after all “bigger is always better” right? All of these trends in our lives lead to a result. We spend more hours working, less time with family and even less time in our community. This doesn’t just affect one person either. It affects our society as a whole. Our current trends have lead to urban sprawl, degradation of city centers, less sense of community most importantly the continued loss of rural farmland.

This thesis is a study of sprawling suburban development, which is characterized by oversized front yards, wide, featureless streets, and inhospitable house fronts dominated by huge garage doors. It is through studying of these current trends that I look to design the single-family home with an approach to a more responsible way of developing these areas that are in danger of loosing the sense of who they are. The result will consist of redefining development, designing with the neighborhood, community and user in mind. The test of the contextual transfer of ideas will aim at accomplishing these goals.

[ABSTRACT]
BACK AT THE START OF THESIS YEAR I WAS PLAGUED BY KNOWING I NEEDED A THESIS TOPIC BUT DIDN’T KNOW HOW I WOULD COME ABOUT ONE. AFTER SOME TIME REFLECTING ON WHO I WAS AND WHERE I AM FROM I CHOSE TO LOOK DIRECTLY AT WHAT I WAS. WHAT I FOUND WAS THAT I AM A PRODUCT OF SUBURBIA AND THE CONTINUED OUTWARD EXPANSION OF URBAN SPRAWL. HAVING ALWAYS LIVED IN A SUBDIVISION, I KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT DIDN’T FEEL RIGHT ABOUT IT. MY FAMILY ALWAYS KNEW OUR NEIGHBORS GROWING UP BUT AS WE MOVED THINGS BEGAN CHANGING. THE SUBDIVISIONS BECAME MORE MONOTONOUS IN THEIR DESIGNS AND SO DID THE SENSE COMMUNITY. SO IT WAS DUE TO THIS PERSONAL OBSERVATION THAT I LOOKED TO UNDERSTAND THE ARCHITECTURE OF A SUBURBAN HOME AND HOW I CREATE A DESIGN SOLUTION THAT BETTER ADDRESSED THE CONTEXT OF SUBURBIA.

-Poorly planned development threatens our environment, our health, and our quality of life

INITIAL [THOUGHTS]

"ASPHALT IS THE LAST CROP YOU’LL GROW ON THE LAND”

-Bill Gay
WHY??

- Under current conventional development scenarios, the first 5% of development can ruin 50% of the landscape.
THE PROCESS

CONTEXTUAL TRANSFER OF IDEAS
- THESIS TOPIC / IDEAS

COMPONENTS OF THESIS IDEA
- VIBING
- CONNECTING
- MATERIALS
- FURNISHINGS
This is the graphic process I developed to address my thesis. It was done so that I could work towards testing what I was researching and developing independently of creating just another building. By using the individual components, I was able to assemble the final test based on what I had learned throughout this process.
...“This is a fundamental view of this world. It says when you build a thing, you are not merely building the thing in isolation, but must also repair the world around it, within it, so that the larger world at that one place becomes more coherent and more whole; and the thing which you make takes its place in the web of nature, as you make it.”

-Christopher Alexander
A Pattern Language
Transfer of ideas was looking at the context of three settings: rural, suburban and urban. The thesis concept was that there are certain ideas found in all three contexts that could potentially be transferred to a different setting. How could the idea of view in an urban setting transfer and still maintain the idea in a suburban setting. There were also ideas I found that would not transfer. Things like urban density, hard-scape, rural expanse, and vanishing horizons.
These diagrams show my interpretation of the context of urban infill. The plan illustrates the limited sightlines and direct connection to the individuals surroundings. The street section is an illustration of typical mixed use street environment and how users and occupants experience their surrounding context.
These diagrams show my interpretation of the context of a typical suburban culdesac. The plan illustrates the sight-lines and connection to the neighboring houses. The street section is an illustration of this environment and how users and occupants experience their surrounding context.
These diagrams show my interpretation of the context of a typical rural plot. The plan illustrates the sightlines and direct connection to the users property and surrounding landscape. The section is an illustration of this environment and how users and occupants experience their surrounding context.
TOPIC: COMPONENTS

- Views
- Connecting
- Materials
- Furnishings

Components of thesis idea
Views were a very important component of the thesis topic. The idea of view is very different in an urban context as compared to a rural context. Urban densities rarely afford much more than the view of what is across, up or down the street. Many times the best views are strategically planned so the occupant recognizes it. They are usually framed or directed at a focal point. In rural settings views of a horizon or panorama are afforded just based on the vast amount of space. Unfortunately the trend in suburban homes has been to focus on putting windows in but not creating pleasing views. The result is often unwanted focus on something less than desirable.
CITY MARKET

PUBLIC MARKET

WHERE YOU GO FOR GROCERIES

HELLO NEIGHBOR

NEIGHBORHOOD INTERACTION
Community[Connection]

Connection to community is vital in having a diverse and vibrant context to live in. In urban context the city is for the most part your living room. You meet people in public, eat in public places and shop on streets and markets. Most of the connection is made on foot or public transit. In contrast to that a rural connection to community is found within neighboring homes and farms. People helping people. The connection to the community is more seasonal, in that its more focused around social activities as fairs, festivals and seasonal markets. Suburban connections are made when there is a park, school or other public area in which people gather. The use of the automobile is prevalent in getting to many of these places due to location of developments in relation to an attraction.

County Fair

Farm Market

People see people

Seasonal Social Interaction
Material application can be a useful tool that expresses the functions of a building. For instance, the choice of using a sampling of hardwoods can communicate the softness and warmth of the material, which can then express the use of the space. The application of corrugated metal as a siding material, this communicates to individuals that the spaces covered by this are of a more utilitarian use which derived from the functional use of barn siding found in a rural context or a warehouse/factory in an urban context. Material honesty is a powerful tool in visually expressing what is happening within a building or how a user interacts within those spaces.
SPATIAL DEFINITION
FURNISHINGS have the ability to completely connect an idea. The ability to draw from design cues such as sight lines with a room or spatial division allows a more complete feeling of space. In an urban context space is usually limited so utilizing built in or modular furnitures is almost a given. It allows the user to maximize space. Room dividers and partition screens also are taken advantage of.

SIMPLE COMFORT
Small Town Living

Suburban Neighbors

Rural Landscape

Context Studies
Williamston is located along the I-96 corridor approximately 35 minutes east of the city of Lansing at exit 117. The city is still within the Ingham county limits. At the core of Williamston is the historic downtown centered around the intersection of Grand River Ave and North Putnam St. The architectural fabric consists of turn of the century Victorian and 2nd Empire storefronts. This intersection is also the only stop light in town. Items of interest in town are the historic antique charm that the city promotes, the red cedar river, the Brookshire golf course and the 1920’s movie theater that still shows movies for $2.25. Williamston has 2 drug stores, a grocery store, hardware store, auto parts store, 3 upscale restaurants and various other ice cream and pizza shops.

The schools are ranked class C within Michigan. The schools are located 2.5 miles from the center of Williamston. They are easy walking distance for most of the city of Williamston as is the community center and football fields. The mid Michigan region is predominately farm country, due to the soil consistency and abundance of level, cleared land.

**Williamston, Michigan**

**City**
- 3,441 people
- 1,470 households
- 33.3% have children under the age of 18
- median income for a family is $51,014

**Townships**

**Williamstown**
- 4,834 people
- 1,692 households
- 40.0% have children under the age of 18
- median income for a family is $86,169

**Locke**
- 1,671 people
- 571 households
- 39.2% have children under the age of 18
- the median income for a family is $62,422

**Leroy**
- 3,653 people
- 1,329 households
- 39.5% have children under the age of 18
- the median income for a family is $50,417

**Wheatfield**
- 1,641 people
- 570 households
- 40.5% have children under the age of 18
- median income for a family is $70,078
Vanetter Road, Williamston MI

- Walking distance from schools
- Sidewalks on school side
- Parcel has potential to become suburban development
- Tree lined two lane road
“Always design a thing by considering its next larger context”

A chair in a room,
A room in a house,
A house in an environment,
An environment in a city plan.

Eliel Saarinen
FRAMED VIEWS
VIEWS created in the sub-urban test were focused on the landscape found within the site. The direct relation of the building site to the surrounding property does not allow for panoramic or horizon views found in a rural context but also provides more opportunities for views than in an urban context. Framing views that orient the occupants towards fixed points selectively manicured and landscaped achieved a more complete idea that was carried out throughout the home.
PRIVATE GARDEN/PATIO      STREET COURTYARD
Connection to the community is an idea that is found frequently in older neighborhoods when homes were built with expansive front porches. These were used not only for social interaction but also for shade and relaxation prior to central air. The idea of a social front to a home lead to the development of a semi cover courtyard that allowed for both relaxation and social interaction, while maintaining a visual separation from the street. Prominant in suburban context is the backyard patio environment that allows for more separation from the street. The private garden/patio at the rear of the home allowed for this connection to become an extension of home.
Material application can be a useful tool that allowed me to better express the functions of a suburban home. For instance, the choice of using a sampling of hardwoods enabled the softness and warmth I was looking to express at the heart of a home. By orienting in a vertical fashion, I was able to visually emphasize the central living spaces. Another decision that expressed the function of the home was the application of corrugated metal as a siding material. This communicates to individuals that the spaces covered by this are of a more utilitarian use which derived from the functional use of barn siding found in a rural context.
DINING SET
FURNISHINGS that I developed for the test were partition screening and a dining set that carried the same language as the partitions and the visual sight lines found within the house. Materials were used that complimented or contrasted the finishes of the context that they were designed for. Two types of panels were designed; one with horizontal wood slates that had minimal transparency, and one with glazing that was translucent to allow for privacy yet provide lighting opportunities. The dining set explored the usonian concepts of creating spaces within spaces by using visual separations.
Suburban Home
CONCEPT DIAGRAMS
FIRST FLOOR AXON
SECOND FLOOR AXON

SUBURBAN HOME
PRELIMINARY SECTIONS
SUBURBAN [HOME]

EAST/WEST SECTION
PRELIMINARY PERSPECTIVES
FINAL PERSPECTIVE
CONTEXTUAL TRANSFER OF IDEAS didn’t become a solution to solve a problem. It also didn’t become just another project. What I found was that I had developed a method in which I could justify the decisions made throughout the design process. In the end I was looking to create a more cohesive form of architecture that I felt would be more appropriate for the suburban context as opposed to the current “cookie” cutter homes that are found throughout suburban developments. I may have looked to transfer concepts that were at times rather broad but this allowed me to study the individual possibilities of the concept without being committed to a building design. This exploration also allowed for in depth study of materials and the various applications along with the design implications achieved in choosing particular materials. The most important concept that I attempted to transfer was that of community connection. The personal interaction of individuals within a community was central in the organization and approach to designing a more diverse suburban home. After all in the end a house is still a house but people make it a home. The same is true for development; PEOPLE make a sense of community.

FINAL REFLECTION
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