

HILLSIDE COURT

A study in quality design

Architectural Thesis Spring 1989
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*It is with great
thanks and appreciation
to studio 415
that I present this thesis.*

*It was a great year...
one not soon to be forgotten.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	1
Program.....	2
Thesis Argument.....	4
Conclusions.....	6
Bibliography.....	10
Illustrations.....	11

ABSTRACT

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Hillside Court is a low-cost housing proposal for modest income families. The project was approached with the belief that a quality design does not have to cost more. By minimizing the square footage and efficiently using materials and construction, the architect can make a difference in the quality of inhabitable space.

The Hillside Court project includes 10 units--8 family units with each having 1,840sq.ft; and 2 units comprised of one handicap apt. and one single bedroom apt., each having a total of 920sq.ft. The units sit on a 136.5'x210' site, directly outside the Prospect Hill Historical District on the southern face of Mt. Auburn in Cincinnati, Ohio. The neighborhood has a rich architectural fabric of 19th century townhouses, most of which are under renovation.

The design, itself, was conceived with a focus on the community rather than on the individual. The units revolve around a central community space in a way that the design encourages community interaction. The sharing of common spaces, such as parking, a playground, and a patio area, help to build a support network with the neighbors. It is conceived that this network will not only enrich the environment of Hillside Court, but also the individual families units.

PROGRAM

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The site for the Hillside Estates is located directly outside the Prospect Hill Historic District in Cincinnati, Ohio. It sits on the southern slope of Mt. Auburn, on the northern side of Boal St., and commands a panoramic view of the Cincinnati skyline. The character of the neighborhood is a mix of modest income families with children and young professionals in transition from a city apartment to a suburban house. The building fabric is 19th century Italianate townhouses, most of which are in the process of renovation. Within a 5 minute walk from the site there are 2 neighborhood parks, 1 public pool, 3 churches, 2 small convenience stores, and 4 schools.

Site 28,665sq.ft.

-total community area	15,320sq.ft.*
-total residential area	18,400sq.ft.
-total vehicular area 1.5cars/unit	11,340sq.ft.*
*areas overlap each other	

Individual Units

-8-3 bedroom units	1,840sq.ft.
-2-1 bedroom units	920sq.ft.
-2-2 bedroom handicap units	920sq.ft.
-kitchen	100sq.ft.
-living room	170sq.ft.
-dining room	120sq.ft.
-master bedroom	180sq.ft.
-bedroom	100sq.ft.
-bathroom	50sq.ft.
-1/2 bathroom	30sq.ft.
-den	100sq.ft.
-terrace	130sq.ft.

Materials

- buff brick
- concrete block
- masonry pavers
- standing seam roofs
- reuse of old foundation stones left on site

Estimated cost \$36.70 per square foot of living area

*Cost based on Means residential/tri-level economy.

No cost estimations have been done.

Special Design Considerations

- Cincinnati Hillside Development Guidelines
- The 25 foot parcel to the East of the site may be used for access onto the site, but must remain clear of any built structure.

ARGUMENT

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Housing the poor is one of the most extensive problems existing in the world today. There are millions of people, in every city throughout the world, who cannot afford even the simplest forms of shelter. A report by the National Housing Task Force, issued in March 1988, states that one million families are on a waiting list to receive public housing, and another 4.5 million to receive aid, but do not. In addition, a great majority of those receiving aid are living in substandard conditions.

The present condition of much of the housing, realistically available to modest income families, makes an unpleasant condition worse. Due to an increasing cost of living and high interest rates, those who should be able to afford a home, cannot. Instead, they must settle for what they can afford--which too often, are dilapidated buildings in need of expensive repairs. The condition of this environment intensifies the struggle to "get ahead", leaving a feeling of being defeated before the battle has even begun.

Whose responsibility is it to improve the environment? Should the environment be defined by the residents? Or, is it the responsibility of the architect? The architect is responsible for providing the best possible solution to a problem. Even if the neighborhood is not the ideal, the architect is obligated to design a solution that is rich in space and texture.

I have a strong belief that the context in which one lives, the quality of the environment and the condition of the landscape, directly affects the subconscious and in turn the self-esteem of an individual. If one is

living in a "mediocre" landscape, it is too easy to settle for a mediocre lifestyle in a mediocre building. The same is true in a "rich" environment as well as a "poor". The person who grows up in the so-called "bad neighborhood" is more likely to have to "mentally" leave the neighborhood. This is where the architect can make a difference.

The objective of this thesis was to design a precedent in low-cost housing that would sympathize with the unstable economic conditions of the modest income family. In synthesizing this objective, I felt the focus needed to be on the community rather than on the individual family. The adage, "there is strength in numbers," holds true here. It is easier to overcome a problem or a crisis with the help and support of others--especially those who understand the situation.

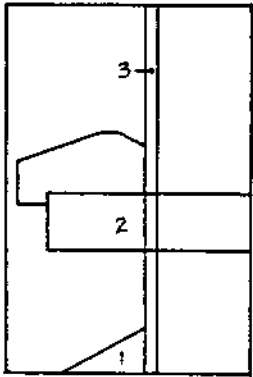
It is true that the architect has no control over the future residents; but he can program into the project many scenarios that the residents, no matter who they are, could partake in. The greater the number of scenarios, the richer the environment, the greater the likelihood of its overall success.

Hillside Court is a proposal for just such a design. It is through its architectural scheme that community interaction is encouraged. The residents are forced to share certain common spaces. They have to pass through one space to get to another. In doing so, they are participating in this community interaction.

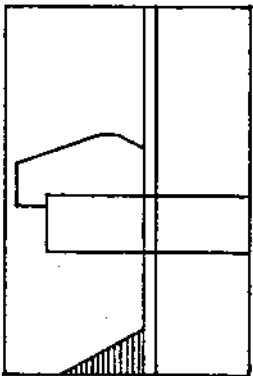
CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION

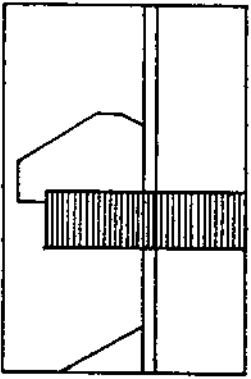
Over the course of this thesis, through an analysis of precedents and a synthesis of facts, I have concluded that the "quality" of the space is much more important than the actual square footage. On a site that is less than one acre, with a program for a population of 36, I have designed a variety of spaces that not only meet the most basic housing requirements, but also encourage community interaction.



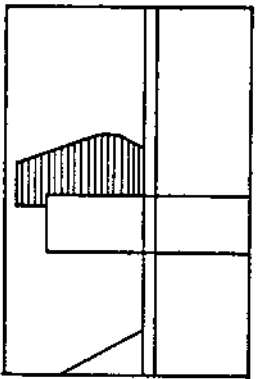
Form the onset of this thesis, the site was recognized as community property, not to be divided amongst the individual units. It was this decision that guided the location and orientation of the units. The three major components inherent to the site plan are: 1. the entrance 2. the central community space 3. the pedestrian pathway that runs the lengths of the site.



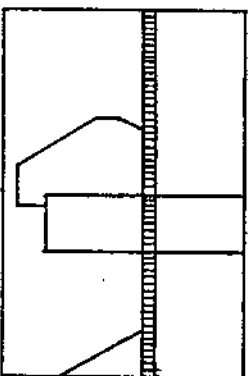
While the residents of Hillside Court are living as a community, they are still part of a larger neighborhood. For that reason I felt it was necessary to give a piece of the design back to the neighborhood. Embraced by the units, severed by the pathways sits a triangular landscape full of color and life. A small gesture, but one that would be well received in this neighborhood. In different areas around the site such a practice already exists. Two blocks north is a small public garden plot, and one block east of the site is a very small orchard of apple and pear trees. The care and maintenance of these areas have grown into a community celebration.



The center of the site is the point from which all community activity stems. Physically it is divided into two levels, a hard surface and a soft surface, but poetically tied together by the threads of circulation. The lower level is defined as the car-court. It was conceived as a "room" and programmed to be used as a community gathering place. For the children it becomes a place to play four-square or basketball and for the adults it welcomes a party or a neighborhood meeting. It is a room to be used by the imagination.



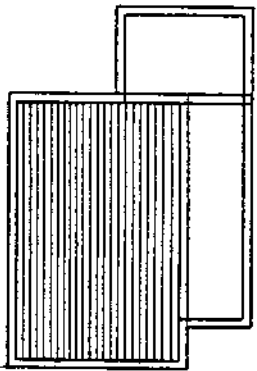
The upper level then becomes the yard. Although in plan it is directly bordered by 3 units, in elevation the units are raised--detaching the community area from any one person's possession. It belongs to no one; but instead, belongs to all. It is an area set apart from all other areas. It is enclosed by the trees, yet open to the view; it is raised above the car-court, yet tied to it by the pathways. It can be public or private--the user decides.



The third element of the plan is the axial pathway. At one level it exists as the direct link between all the units. More importantly, however, it is reminiscent of the neighborhood staircase, the unifying element of the Prospect Hill District. These staircases are the vertical connections from one street to the next. The staircase in this design has been set apart in that it has no outlet. At the top of the staircase sits one bench--under a tree. The view from this bench is the only uninterrupted view from the community area to the city below.

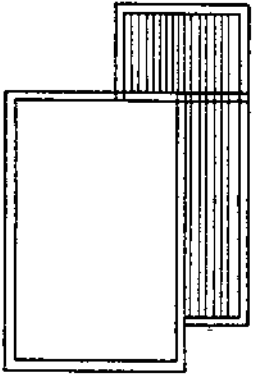
When turning to the design of the unit, I found the neighborhood character to be a great influence. The 19th century townhouse design governed the design of its 20th century successors.

Although the plan was tailored to fit the needs of its present day residents, the essence of the original design principles still remains. The overall dimensions of the new units are proportional to the context, as are the fenestrations. In a neighborhood with such a rich fabric, I felt it necessary to compliment the existing buildings, continuing that character and charm.



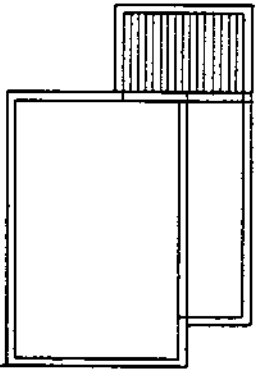
The plan was zoned into 2 areas, the living area and the service area. The living area was then further divided into a public area and a private area. Each area, public and private, was then assigned a level. This assignment was determined so that the public area had the view of the city below. This decision created a conflict in the second tier of units. Since the view of the city below can only be seen from the second level, the private area was forced to take the lower position. This created a situation where one entered on the level of the bedrooms. To resolve this, an entrance foyer was designed with the focus on the staircase. The doors to the bedrooms are out of immediate sight, thus, encouraging one to ascend the stairs.

Historically, the staircase would have been included in what I termed the support area. However, after consideration of the function of the staircase to its present day users, I felt it would be more appropriate in the living area. In this setting, the staircase is no longer a formal design element, but instead, a necessity of everyday life.



The second zone, the service area is set back and encircles one side of the living area. Included in it are such functions as the entrance, the bathrooms, the storage, and one room to be used as the owner sees fit. Since the function of this area is secondary and compliments the living area, its expression is too.

The third aspect of the housing design exists in its detailing. A color has been assigned to trim each unit. This color is a way of personalizing each unit; it begins to tell the story of the family living inside. These colors begin to tell the story of the family living within it. The address of the family becomes an esthetic issue. Rather than being apt. 2A, it is the blue unit on the street. In addition to the front porch, each unit has a private outdoor terrace. The terrace is an extension of the living area and becomes an important place of refuge for family members. The final important design detail is the standing seam roofs of the units. The view of the city is an important quality of this site and should be respected. The roofs of the lower units become the foreground to the vistas of the upper level, and thus, an esthetic element.



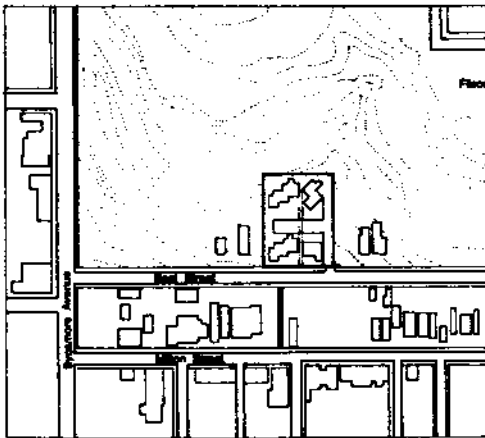
Understanding how people will actually use a space was an important part of the thought process. What a designer wants to do in a project is not always what is best for the user. At this point a reevaluation of the situation has to be considered. Hillside Court is the product of just such an evaluation.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

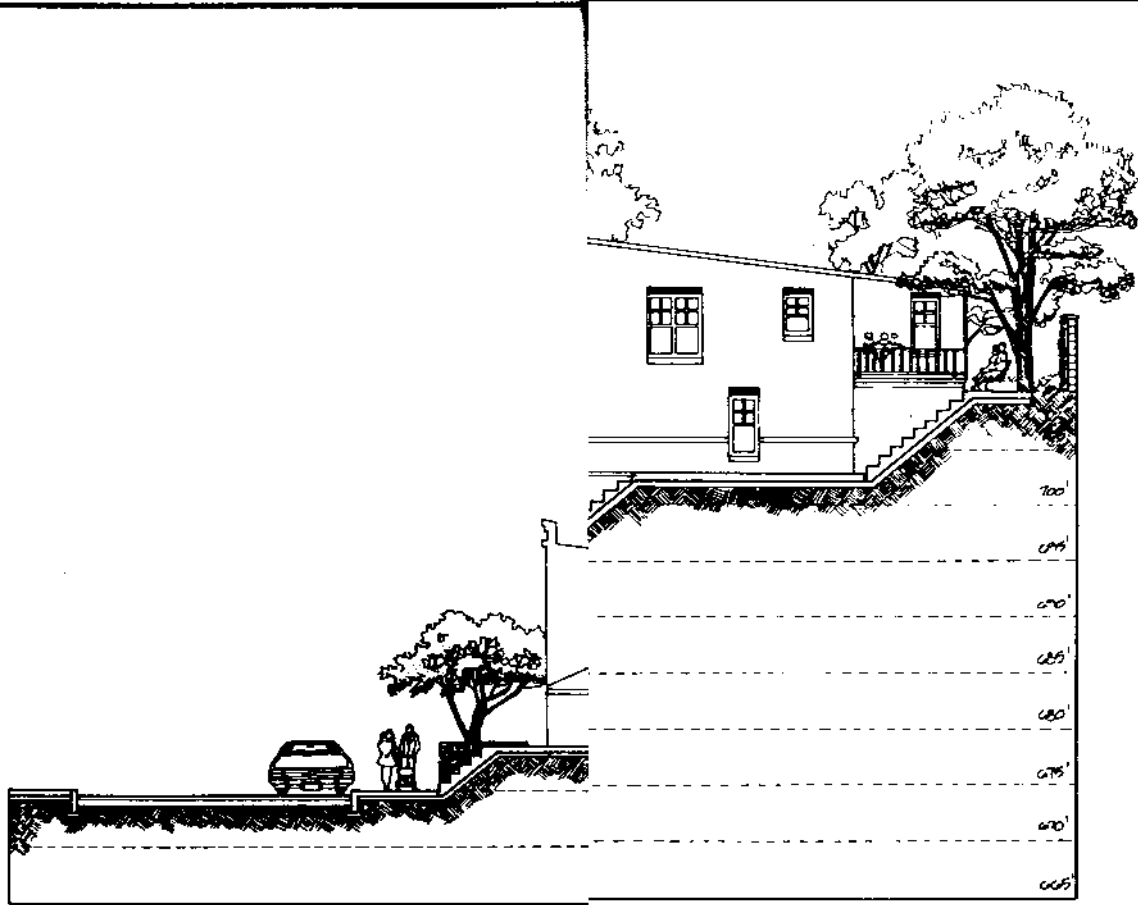


Context Map

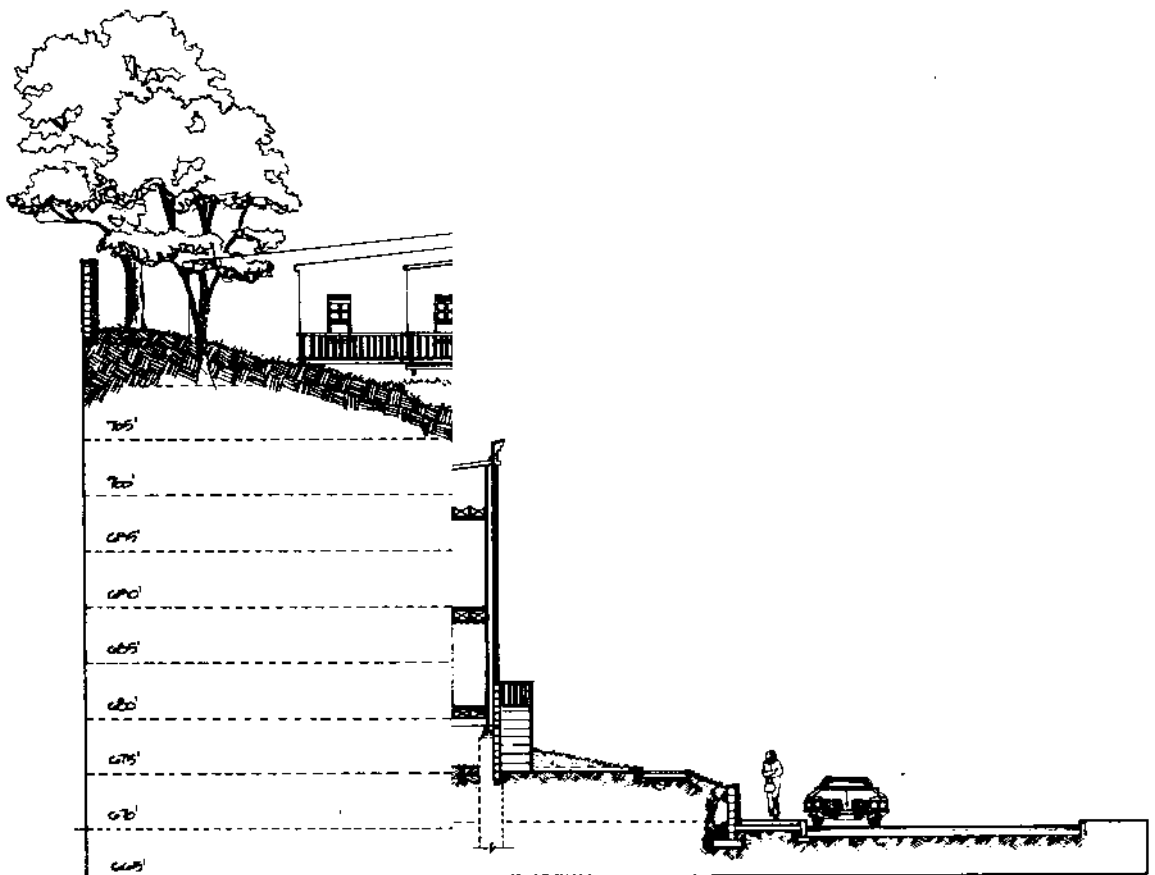
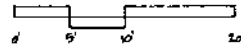


Street Elevation

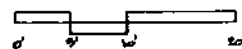




Site Section "A"



Site Section "B"

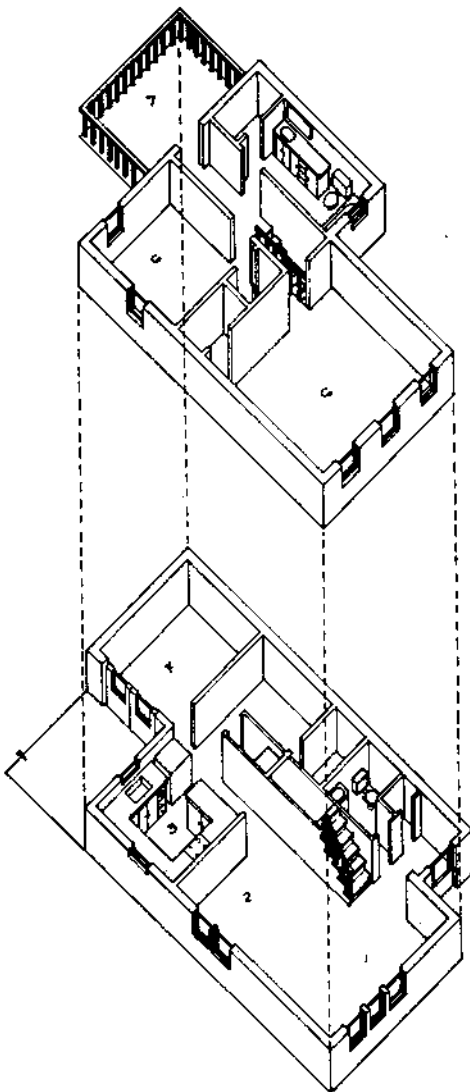




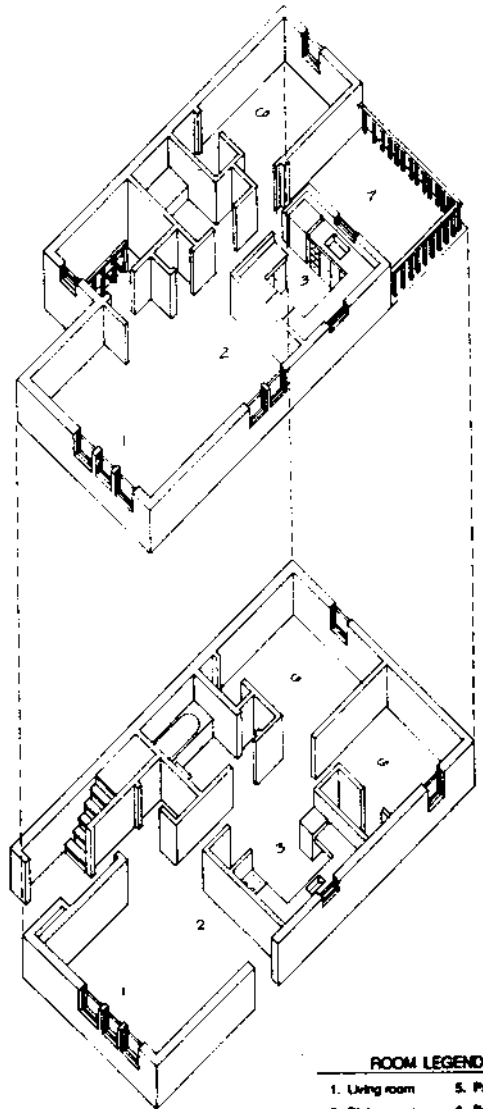
South Elevation



Northeast Perspective



First Level Unit



Handicap Unit/Apt.

ROOM LEGEND

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 1. Living room | 5. Patio |
| 2. Dining room | 6. Bedroom |
| 3. Kitchen | 7. Terrace |
| 4. Den | 8. Garage |

