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Evaluating Evaluation: Analysis of a Housing Design Awards Program

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Evaluating Evaluation: Analysis of a Housing Design Awards Program

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The process of giving design awards is widely embraced and respected by the design professions. It has, however, been left curiously unencumbered by any kind of follow-up research. Generally speaking, attempts to devise a more "scientific" or at least rational basis for understanding and rewarding good design have not been welcomed by designers. As consultants employed to evaluate a national design awards program, we had the unique opportunity to compare the evaluative frameworks of four sets of people who make value judgments about buildings: the designers of housing submitted for an award, the jury in the awards competition, an environment and behavior researcher, and users of the buildings. The results were provocative enough to raise some serious questions about design awards.

The Canadian Housing Design Counsil (CHDC) runs a biannual design awards program to promote improvements in Canadian housing design. Every two years, designers, contractors, and owners are encouraged to submit housing that has been built within the previous seven years for an award. Each submission is evaluated by a regional jury and may receive either a full Design Award or an Honourable Mention.

In 1981, an appraisal of the awards program was initiated to determine how much overlap existed, if any, between consumers' (that is, residents') and design professionals' evaluative criteria. We were retained by CHDC to examine in detail five projects in Vancouver, British Columbia, three which had received design awards and two which had been "near misses." The housing to be evaluated is identified in Table 1.

Four sets of evaluative criteria were gathered, recorded, analyzed, and compared for each development. The first were the designers' criteria for submitting their work, which were expressed in short written texts that accompanied each submission. The second set were the design awards jury's criteria, as expressed in two lengthy working sessions observed by Vischer, one a short-listing process, and the second selecting the final winners after site visits. The third and fourth sets of criteria were aimed at eliciting the residents' viewpoints. One of these was a set of generic user-needs criteria based on design guidelines developed by Cooper Marcus and Sarkissian and applied to each housing development through on-site observation.[1] The other was direct resident feedback obtained through surveys in each development, using a standardized questionnaire, administered by an interviewer after the awards process was completed.[2]

Table 1

Award-Winning Developments	*NonAward-Winning Developments*
Barclay Infill Townhouses 10 units, condominium, adults	English Bay Village 10 units, condominium, adults
False Creek Terrace 65 units, rental, adults	Meadowlands Cooperative 64 units, co-op, senior citizens
Alder Bay Cooperative 95 units, co-op, family housing	

Three Award-Winning Developments

The three award-winning developments studied are all located in inner city neighborhoods of Vancouver in western Canada. All are medium density developments, ranging from 36 to 64 dwelling units per acre. Data on each development are presented in the following order: designers' evaluation, that is, why the project was submitted; jury's evaluation, that is, why the project won (or did not win) a design award; observers' evaluation, that is, rating according to generic user criteria; and residents' evaluation, that is, rating according to project residents.

False Creek Terrace

False Creek Terrace is located on a steep sloping lot in central Vancouver. The development contains sixteen market rental units and was two years old at the time of the study. Units with separate entrances are stacked on three levels around a T-shaped, paved courtyard, which contains a small pool, fountain, and access stairway. There are five different floor plans, each containing two bedrooms. Each unit has either a private patio, balcony, roof deck, or a combination of these.

The designer felt that these rental apartments offered an inner city housing form that was a good alternative to existing apartment buildings. The desire "to defeat the traditional apartment feeling by creating a sense of community and place" is expressed through the provision of private entrances directly from the outside; private open spaces for every dwelling unit; and a "central grand stair," which is seen as "the physical as well as social link for all apartment dwellers" and is given a focus by a fountain.

The jury agreed that this development represented an original solution to high density housing design and "met all the criteria for good market housing." The jury also thought the development represented a good use of site, agreeing for the most part on its "refreshing" and different

style. Some concern was expressed for the evidence of shabby construction, but not enough to warrant not awarding a full design award.

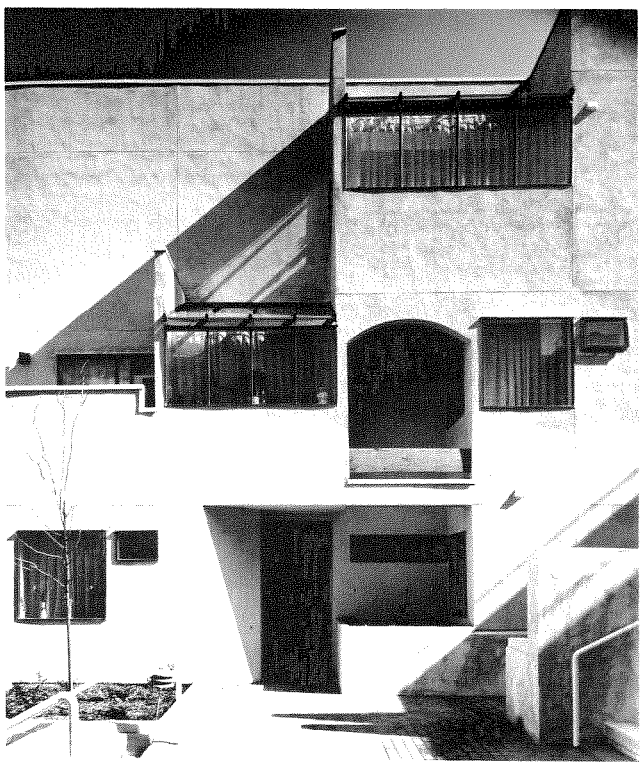
Applying generic user criteria, the site observer (Cooper Marcus) felt, like the jury, that the development fit moderately well into its neighborhood, and the site plan was easy to understand.[3] It was noted that entrances provide few opportunities for personalization; patios facing the courtyard are poorly screened; and the development has numerous security hazards, such as recessed windows, hidden spaces, and lack of surveillance of entries.

Six interviews out of a possible sixteen were completed with False Creek Terrace residents. Most residents stated that they selected the development as a place to live because of its appearance, thus supporting the designer's and jury's opinions of its primary advantage. Residents were attracted to the multi-level interiors and private entrances; the view; the California/Mediterranean image; and the fact that it was "new" and "different." Residents valued the privacy, quiet, large rooms, and the "feeling of being in a house, in your own place."

When asked about features of the dwelling unit they are dissatisfied with, respondents produced a very long list of items, which can be grouped into three categories: first, quality of construction complaints, which included noise between units, crooked walls, cracks in the ceiling, and poorly fitting doors; second, design complaints, which included a two-foot-wide unusable space in the dining room, limited storage space, no southern exposure, useless patio areas, and security problems; and third, maintenance complaints, which reflected the renter status of residents and their relative helplessness regarding standards of maintenance and management.

The difference between the jury's and the residents' evaluative frameworks are clearly separated in this case. Even the site observer, who spent two hours looking at the site in detail (the jury members spent twenty minutes there) could not

1 False Creek Terrace, exterior



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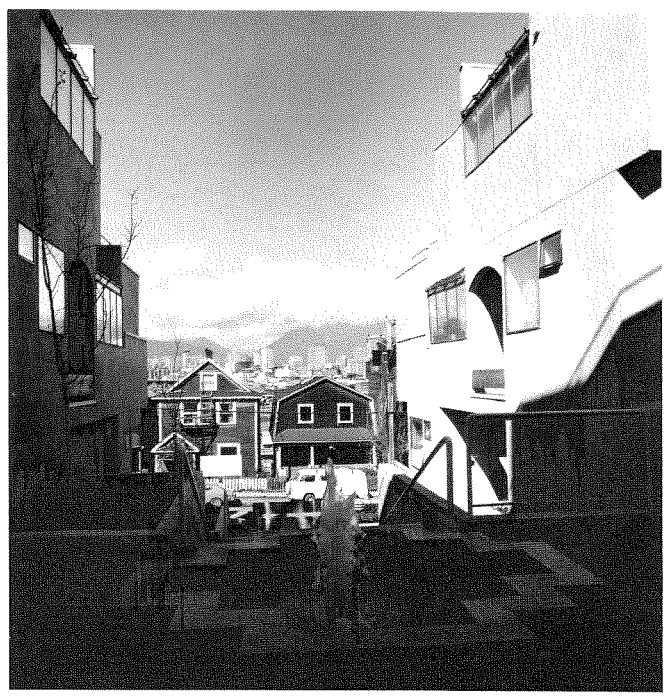

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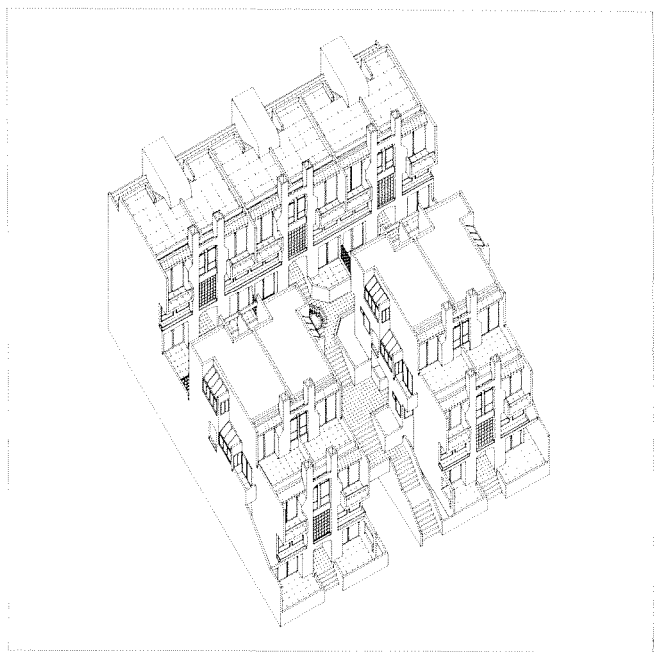

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2 False Creek Terrace, exterior section
3 False Creek Terrace, view of Vancouver from center of building
4 False Creek Terrace.
Illustrations of False Creek Terrace courtesy of James K. M. Cheng, Architect, Vancouver, British Columbia

have assessed how many complaints residents would have about construction quality. One respondent compared the difference in quality between design and construction by saying, "It's like somebody doing the Mona Lisa in crayon." Another felt that "We should be protected as consumers from this kind of bullshit." An attempt was made in False Creek Terrace to design high-quality units; however, these could not meet equivalent construction standards and still realize an adequate return on investment. A question posed by this disparity in evaluation frameworks is to what extent the design awards program should "trade off" design issues with construction quality and market realities. This project received a full design award, yet in retrospect the attractive design did not yield a high-quality residential environment for users.

Barclay Infill Townhouses

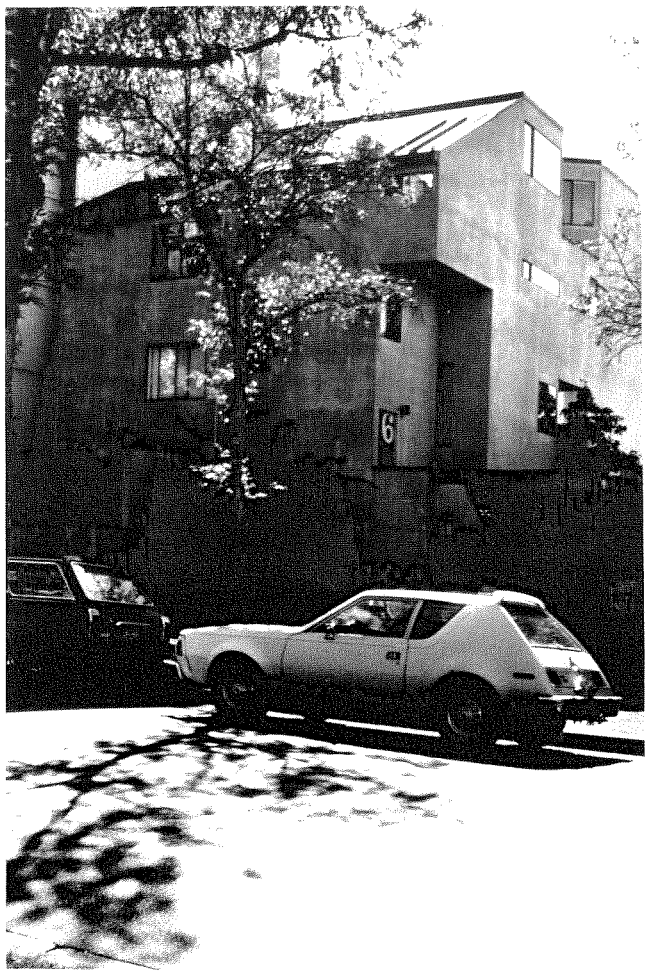
The Barclay Street townhouses are located on a narrow 48×18-foot lot between a high-rise tower and a three-story frame apartment building in Vancouver's high-rise downtown residential neighborhood. The development was two years old at the time of the study. Five upper units and five lower units are organized in a stepped configuration on three levels in which upper and lower units "share" the second (middle) story. Entrances to all units are off a small landscaped "alley," or courtyard, entered from the street.

The designer cited four primary design objectives: to provide an inner city "townhouse" alternative to conventional apartments; to overcome the limitations of a narrow site through exploitation of courtyard and zero lot line concepts; to respect the views and privacy of neighbors; and to provide a pleasing transition in scale between adjacent apartment buildings for both residents and passersby.

Although jury members differed in their evaluations of the interiors, they generally felt that this development was a good example of infill housing, contrasting favourably with local high-rise developments. They like the inner courtyard and the respect for neighbors' light and views, although some reservations were expressed regarding facade textures and colors. The development received an Honourable Mention for its excellent and unique use of a difficult and constraining site.

The observer rated favorably the exterior low-profile image, the clear visual access into the development, and the private entrances. Each unit has access to two private open spaces, each of which is screened with a wall or

5 Barclay Infill Townhouses, exterior view. Photograph by Clare Cooper Marcus



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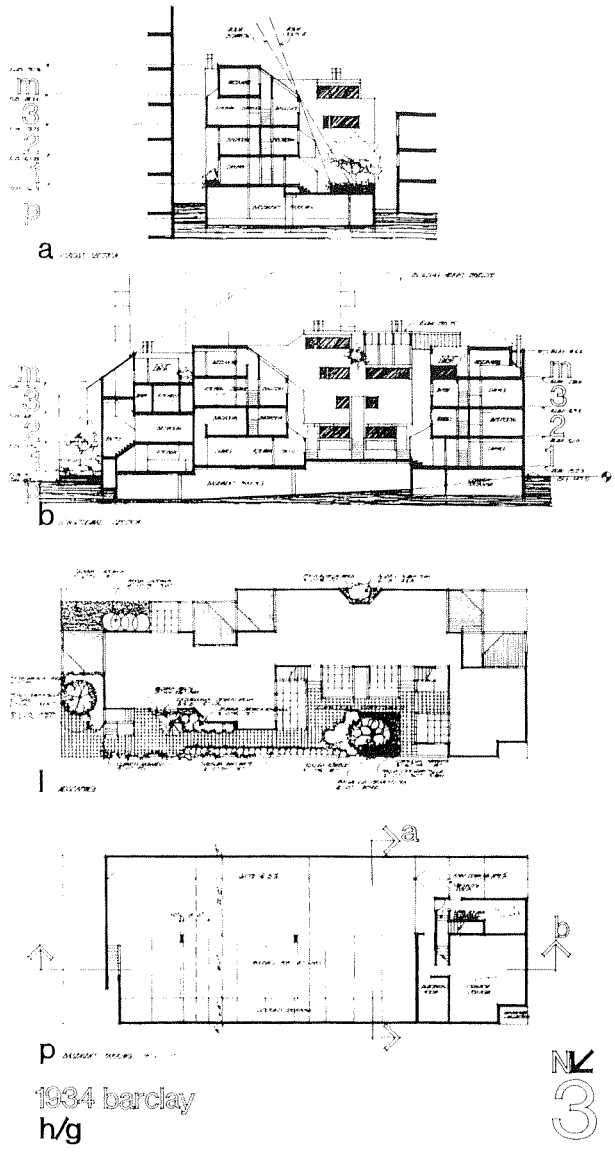

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6 Barclay Infill Townhouses, exterior view. Photograph by Clare Cooper Marcus

7 Barclay Infill Townhouses. Drawing courtesy of Robert Hassell, Architect

trellis. Some have chairs and plants to indicate they are used, but some look dark and empty. The communal open space was rated as too confined to be used for any resident activities except access, but is well-designed for easy maintenance. The interior layout of rooms was seen as ingenious with considerable variety.

Six households of the ten in Barclay Infill Townhouses were interviewed. Residents said they chose these townhouses because of their small scale and the overall appearance of the development. They liked the "townhouse feel," which derives from the small overall size, the separate unit entrances, the multilevel interiors, and the open courtyard design that generates a feeling of neighborliness. When residents were asked to identify sources of dissatisfaction, a few mentioned construction problems, including roof leaks, dampness, and less than adequate interunit soundproofing.

The designer's criteria, and to some extent the jury's, reflect a concern for the *context* of the building. The designer wanted to do something innovative and attractive in a neighborhood dominated by high-rise and walk-up apartment buildings. The jury's comments suggest that they sympathized with this objective, and furthermore, felt that it had been adequately achieved. The residents appeared to recognize the fact that this is high-quality architectural design in a neighborhood that offers little architectural variety; however, they were preoccupied with features of daily living within the development, many of which pertain more to construction quality than to architectural design. Features of the design that the designer felt were important, namely the private open spaces, the penetration of light and sun into the interiors, the provision of two-story units, and the screening of the patios from the courtyard, were also found to be important to residents. The jury awarded this scheme an Honourable Mention rather than a full Design Award; while they wished to reward the designers' sensitivity to context, they did not feel the building itself warranted a full award.

Alder Bay Co-operative

Alder Bay Co-op comprises ninety-five townhouses located on approximately two and a half acres on a waterfront near downtown Vancouver. It was built under the federally subsidized cooperative ownership program. The units are organized into six three- and four-story buildings comprising stacked two-story townhouses. These are clustered into two "enclaves," each defining a landscaped, semiprivate courtyard. Kitchen and

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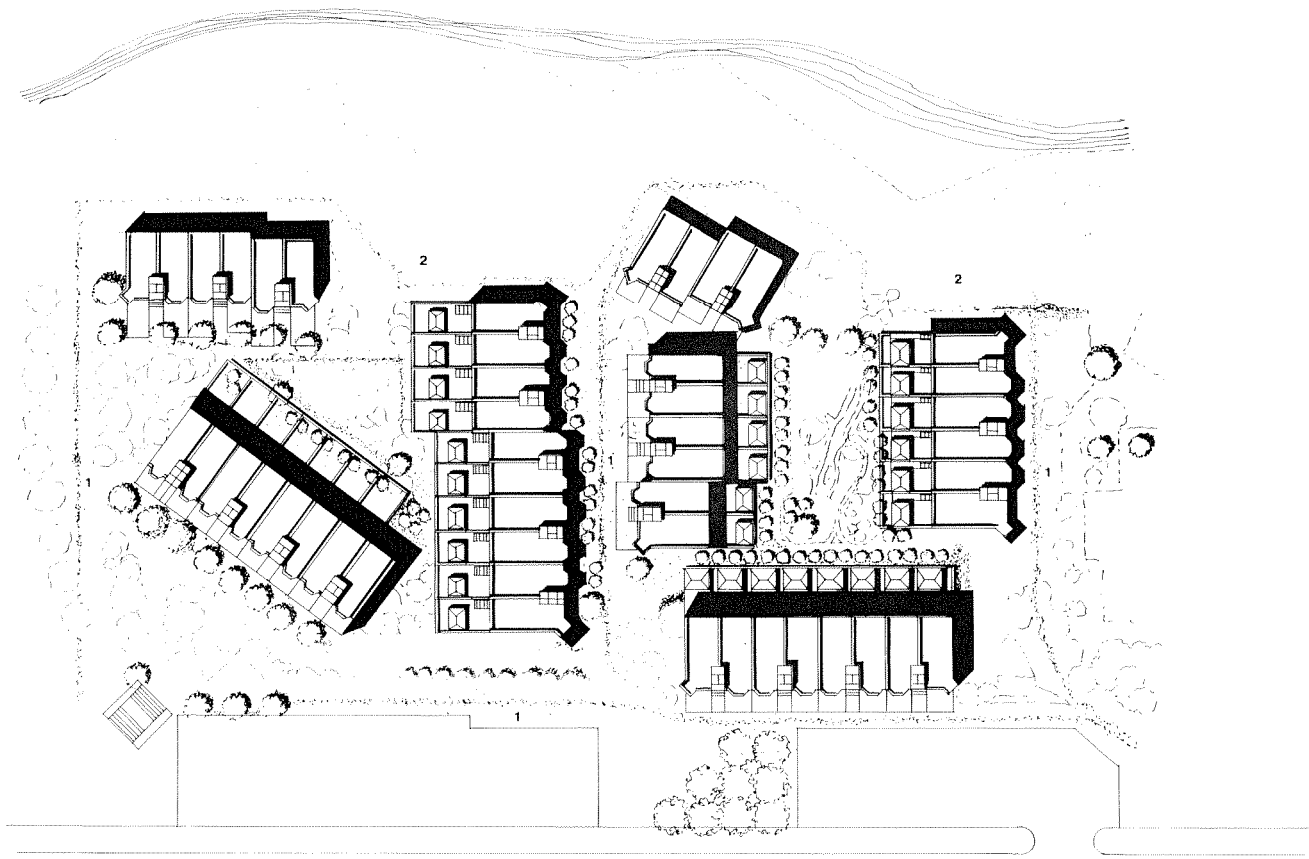
8 Alder Bay Co-operative, exterior view. Photograph by Clare Cooper Marcus.



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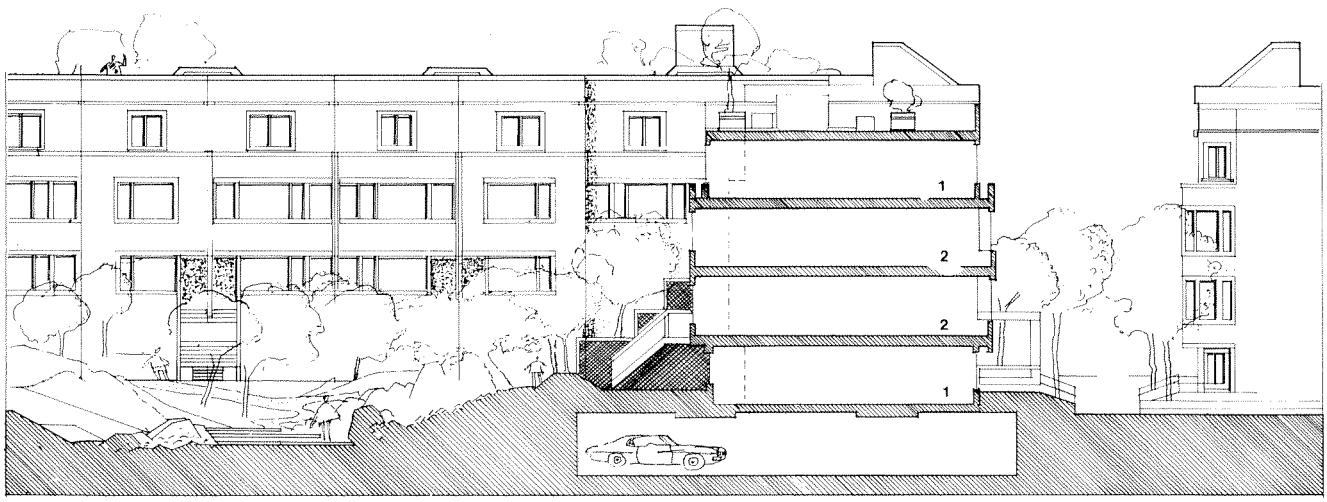

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family rooms face pedestrian streets, and living rooms face the semiprivate, landscaped courtyards. Each unit has a bay window, and these, the other windows, and the door frames are painted in bright colors to contrast with the muted darker tones of the exterior walls.

The architects viewed their main challenge as providing "affordable housing that achieves a high degree of livability." As well as creating "a high quality of urban design" in keeping with the unique features of the site, the designers wanted Co-op residents to have the freedom to make alterations and adjustments to their living environment. By providing front entrances off the major pedestrian ways, the designers hoped to encourage children's and adults' use of these "streets," thus limiting social activities within the landscaped courtyards.

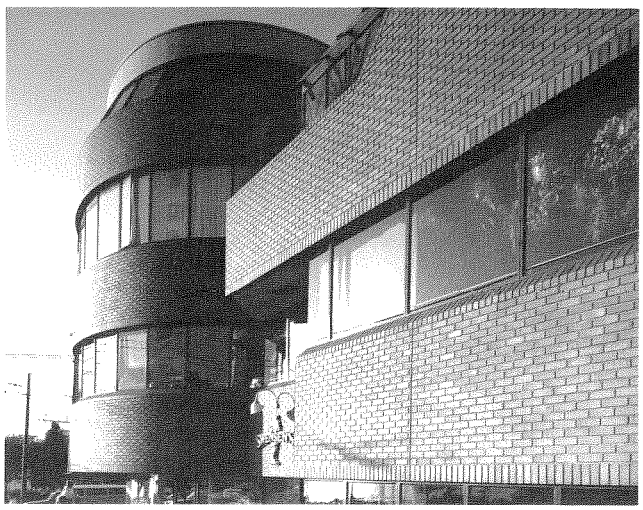
Jury members felt this development was "good architecture" either in spite of or in addition to being a good response to Co-op program constraints. They praised the lively "streetscape," the unit interior layouts, and the attractive roof decks. They were critical of the lack of privacy of the lower units, the open wooden stairwells, and the lack of designated children's play areas. Despite these criticisms, the jury concluded that this development deserved a full Design Award.

The observer rated this scheme highly on its appearance. Varying building heights and orientations, colors, materials, bay windows, and planting were combined to create a visually interesting image. Units share access stairs to their front doors, and the observer felt that these open stairwells might be perceived as back or fire stairs and that visitors might inadvertently approach a unit from its back door in the courtyard. The exterior stairs and landings were observed to be too narrow to allow personalized entries. Few of the "private" patios are screened or fenced; however, most had toys, plants, and furniture, indicating they are used. The courtyard areas were poorly rated for pedestrian use. Bark mulch spilled out on to pathways, which themselves appear more ornamental than functional. Many of the paths pass close to bedroom windows, and drapes appear to be permanently drawn. The site is only partially wheelchair-accessible, owing to steps, narrow paths, and gravel surfaces. Moreover, there are no specifically designed play areas for small children in the courtyards.

When interviewed, residents of Alder Bay Co-op were satisfied with site features such as the "view," "parklike setting," and the "siting of buildings." The design features they appreciated include the bay windows, unit interiors, roof decks, and small scale of the buildings. Resident dissatisfaction was divided between design features (open wooden stairways, unfenced patios, courtyard detailing) and quality of construction (unfinished walkways, water leakage, and plumbing noise). Residents' suggestions for courtyard improvements indicated some tension between households with and without children. Some respondents felt the areas should be redesigned for children; others felt that children's use should be deterred by installing mature planting or an ornamental garden. Both sets of comments reflect a concern with the indeterminate nature of the present space.

At least two significant questions of concern to a design awards program are raised here. First, should all members of a design team automatically receive awards? In this case, an award was apparently deserved by the architects but not by the landscape architects. Second, should special consideration be given to a scheme in which a livable and attractive environment is created within severe budget constraints? In this case, the jury felt that Alder Bay Co-op, while not strikingly innovative, deserved an award for a high-quality environment designed within

9 Alder Bay Co-operative.
Drawing by Carol Silverman
10 Alder Bay Co-operative.
Drawing by Carol Silverman



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the strict budgetary constraints of a federal subsidy program.

Two Nonaward-Winning Developments

The condominiums known as English Bay Village were selected for study because they represent a mixed-use (residential and commercial) development of a type currently being encouraged in Vancouver's downtown. Meadowlands, a senior citizen co-op, was selected for study because it presented something of a dilemma to the jury. During a site visit, jury members learned that residents were highly satisfied with the development, but the jury was not sure how much of this satisfaction could be "attributed" to design and how much to its being a *co-operative* senior citizens' community. Both schemes came very close to receiving a design award but were rejected after much discussion.

English Bay Village

English Bay Village is an example of mixed-use development in the inner city. Ten luxury two-story dwelling units are located two stories above grade over shops and restaurants. The development is on a busy street corner across from a downtown beach and was first occupied in summer 1979. The ten townhouses are arranged around two sides of a small landscaped roof garden. A covered outdoor walkway links the dwellings with an elevator. The two smaller units are located at the corner of the development, where a "turret" marks the street intersection. This creates an unusual rounded interior living space. Because of noise from the streets, enclosed sunrooms instead of open balconies are provided off the street-facing living rooms. Open sundeck spaces are provided on the roof of each unit.

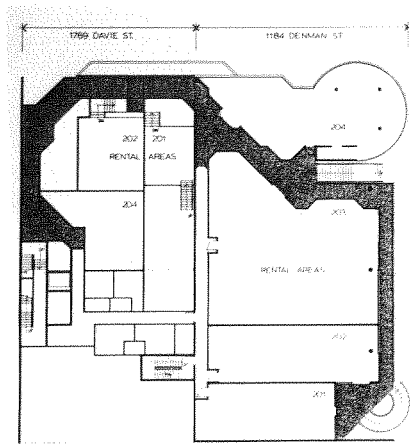
The designer felt the main assets of this scheme were good mixed-use housing "to humanize and revitalize" a commercial area of downtown and a successful solution to three "major urban problems": noise, privacy, and security. The corner turret emphasizes the street intersection and "contributes interest to the urban fabric."

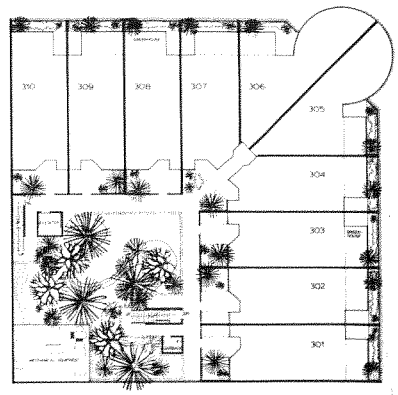
The jury commented that although this scheme has some attractive features, it is not a unique example of mixed-used design. They liked the use of materials (that is, brick facing) but were critical of the design of the commercial (street-level) component. The development did not receive an award.

The site observer noted that the development presents a luxury rather than a "homelike" image. On the upper courtyard level the arrangement of the units is simple and pleasing. Unit

entrances are private and clearly defined; however, the main entrance—at ground level within a shopping arcade—is hard to find, possibly for security reasons. The conflict between security and accessibility is a problem in any mixed-use development, and it is not resolved explicitly in this particular design. Most of the individual entrances are secluded from casual surveillance, as are the roof deck doors; dwelling security may therefore be a problem. The units are well supplied with private open spaces, and the semiprivate courtyard is attractively landscaped for ornamental rather than functional use.
Four households were interviewed. For most residents, the amenities of its location were strong factors in their decision to move here. The secluded quality of the landscaped inner courtyard was seen as an attractive contrast to the bustling active street life outside. Dissatisfactions included the difficulty of moving furniture in to the units and the lack of security. Regarding dwelling unit design, what residents liked about their units appears to outweigh substantially what they dislike.

In summary, in terms of the three "major urban problems" mentioned in the designer's submission, residents concurred that privacy is adequate and that noise is controlled. How-





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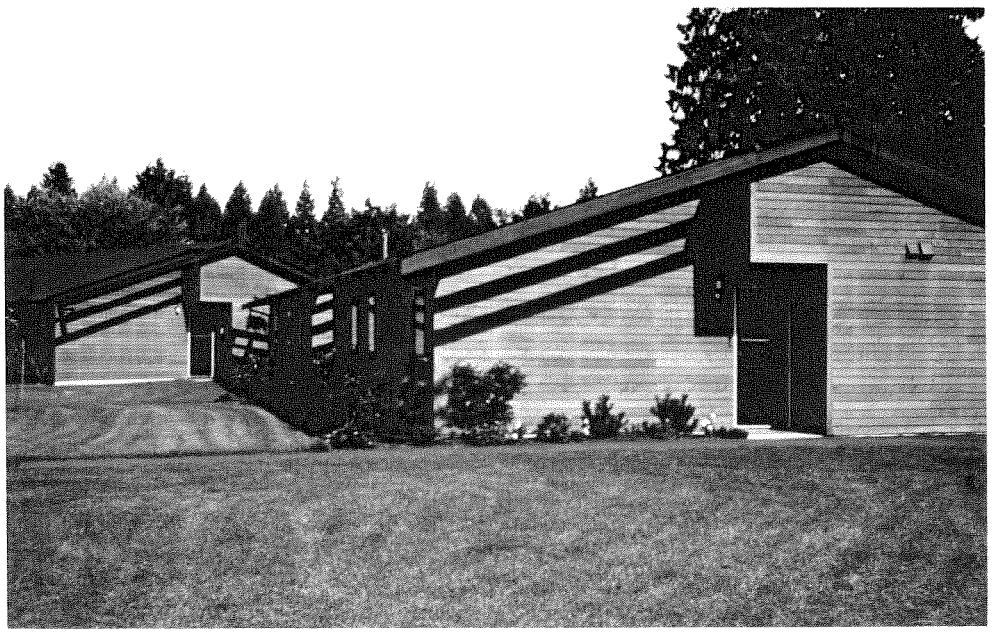
11 English Bay Village, facade
12 English Bay Village, plan.
Drawing courtesy of Henriquez and Partners, Architects, Vancouver, British Columbia



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ever, lack of security in the residential part of the building is the single biggest deficiency of the design from generic and specific residents' viewpoints. The jury mentions this but does not single it out as a major factor in their decision. The designer was aware of it but believed he had solved it adequately.

Meadowlands Co-operative

Meadowlands is a low-density senior citizens co-op housing development located in a semirural suburb of Vancouver. The project comprises sixty-four single-story units clustered into sixteen side-by-side quadruplexes on 5.8 acres. A centrally located community building contains community rooms, laundry, and mailboxes. The dwellings have private front entrances and semi-enclosed back patios. The front entrances face vehicular access and parking, and the back patios face a perimeter fence and forested areas beyond. The units have similar layouts in that the living rooms and kitchen/dining areas face the back patios and surrounding woodland.

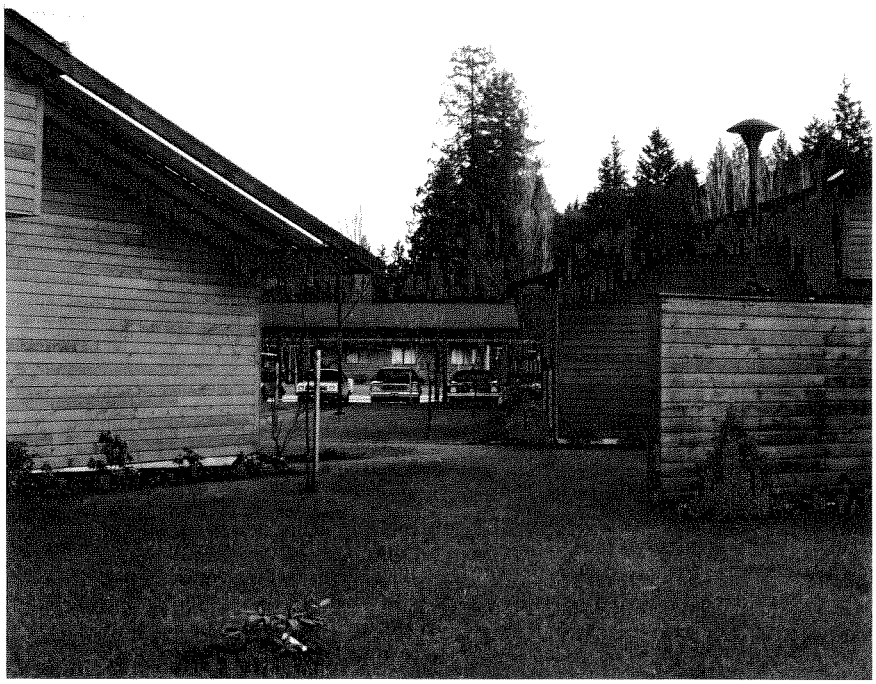
The chief merits of this scheme, as perceived by the designer include the importance of consumer participation in design, the concept of a "retirement village," the provision of "a bit of a garden" to all

13 Meadowlands, exterior. Photograph by Clare Cooper Marcus
14 Meadowlands, exterior
15 Meadowlands, exterior

residents, and opportunities for residents to experience companionship without losing their independence.

The jury expressed considerable confusion regarding this development. They recognized that the residents were very satisfied and that the design of the development met its stated social objectives; however, they had serious reservations about the aesthetics of the design. Jury members felt that the site planning was poor and that residents suffered from a lack of privacy. They criticized the design of the living room, the window shapes, and the use of trelliswork on the exterior and compared the development to "a Nissen (Quonset) hut with decoration on the sides." It did not receive a design award.

Though there is a little variety in terms of building facades, the observer felt that the positioning and orientation of buildings on the site creates considerable variety. The cladding material of stained cedar seems appropriate to its semirural context. The site is flat, and all buildings are wheelchair-accessible. The arrangement of buildings on the site, clustered around the one entry road and several parking areas is easy for visitors to grasp; front entries are clearly designed and distinct from back



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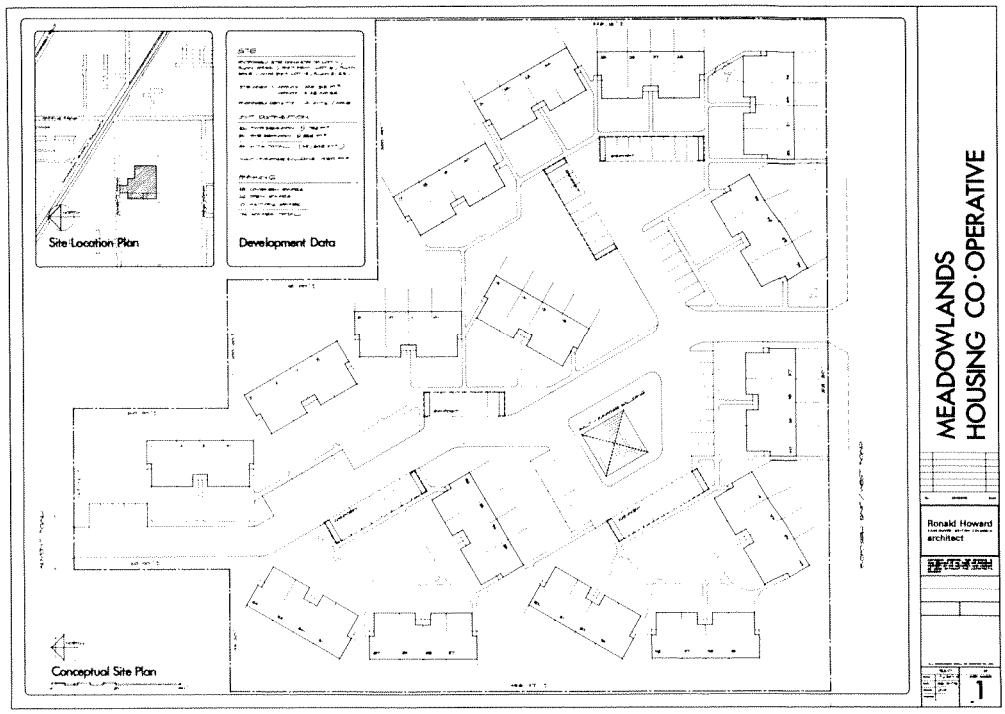

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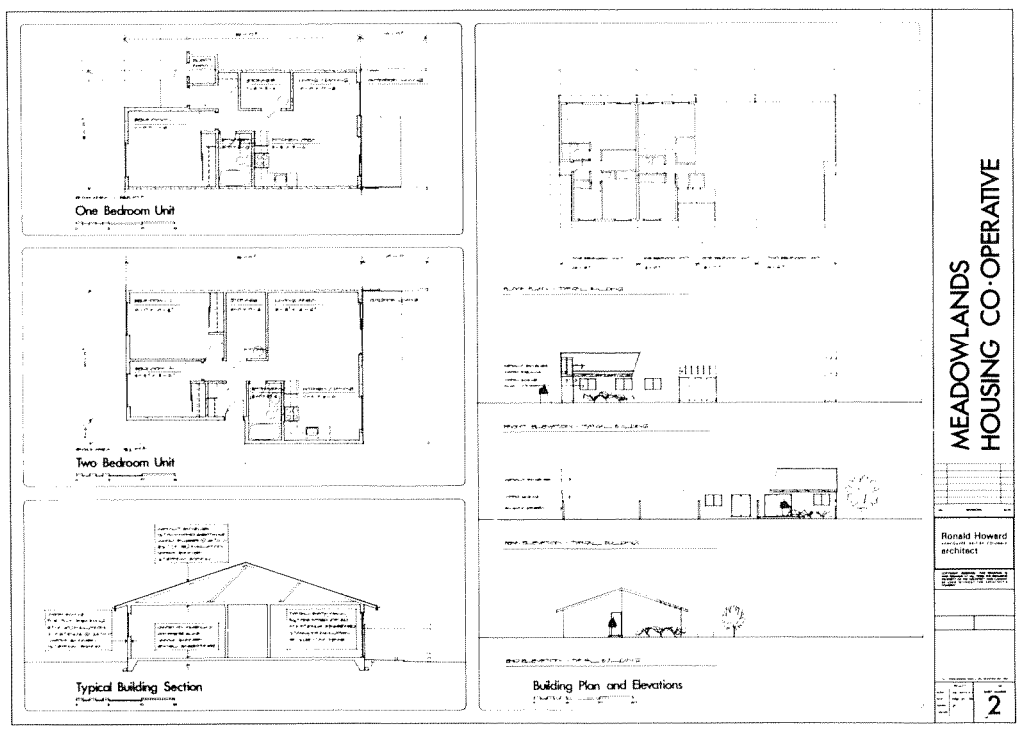

16 Meadowlands, site plan
17 Meadowlands, building plan Photographs and Drawings of Meadowlands courtesy of Howard/Yano Architects, Vancouver, British Columbia

entries. Residents have the opportunity to personalize their front entrances and have done so extensively. The back entrances have sliding glass doors that open onto enclosed patios, which most residents have highly personalized with flowers, vegetables, shrubs, and garden furniture. None of the pedestrian pathways is close enough to windows or patios to violate the privacy of residents. Most of the front entrances are visible from other dwellings, and as residents are home much of the day, surveillance is good and the site feels safe.

Sixteen interviews were completed at Meadowlands. They show that Meadowlands residents are a very satisfied group. They appreciate the social aspect of living in Meadowlands—the support, safety, and cameraderie—and consider themselves fortunate to have this housing option. Residents like the "design for older couples," with no steps and easy access to the unit, the "staggered and well-spaced units," the small garden and maintenance-free layout, the quiet, both back and front entrances, and "no one above or below you." Many residents expressed appreciation for the layout of the grounds ("like a garden city") for the community center, the feeling of safety, and the fact that "the units are well built and well insulated."

Residents had very few complaints about the development, mostly "cold floors" and uncomfortable unit layout, with bedroom windows facing the front and the living room facing the patio. Some felt the location was "isolated." From most residents' point of view, the development deserved a Design Award; many were sorry that it did not receive one.

Although the residents did not mention specifically the positive effect of their involvement in the design process, this may be one of the reasons for their high level of satisfaction. Consumer participation in design was one of the designer's criteria. The jury recognized the satisfaction value of consumer involvement in design but did not feel this should outweigh the lack of innovation they perceived in the architecture.

Jury criticisms regarding poor site planning, lack of privacy, window design, and the shape of the living room were not upheld by either the observer's or the residents' own evaluation. The jury's comment regarding the unattractive trelliswork on the exterior is validated by the residents, but for different reasons. The residents do not feel they are living in wartime housing with decoration, but they do object to the lack of a rainproof roof over their front porches. The residents share the site observer's high evaluation of private open space, the attractive appearance of the development, and the feeling of security.

Comparison of Evaluative Criteria

The major findings from the four evaluations as applied to each project are summarized in Table 2 (see pp. 83–85). This table shows that there appears to be a certain amount of overlap among the evaluative criteria used by designers, jurors, the observer, and residents. All four sets of criteria show some interest in the appearance and overall look of the development and in some aspects of livability. The observation criteria tend to anticipate residents' responses, with the exception of "quality of construction" issues, which were raised repeatedly by residents but failed to be included to any significant extent in any of the other evaluative frameworks. The jury's criteria anticipate some of the more pronounced residents' concerns but show a greater overlap with designers' criteria, perhaps because jurors read the entrants' written submissions and undoubtedly have the same professional value system. In terms of the jury's decision-making process, their criteria are better predictors of the designer's aspirations than of residents' reactions.

The designers show some variation in what they consider to be the important features of their designs. Some emphasize consumer involvement, user needs, and social-behavioral solutions; others emphasize size, innovation, context, or visual image. This variation in priorities suggests in part that the objectives of the awards program are not perceived similarly by all entrants. The designers varied in how extensively they identified their aesthetic, economic, and social objectives. In future awards programs, it would be advantageous if the designers identified how each of these objectives were met in the housing design they submitted. They should also describe the constraints and difficulties they had in implementing their concept and illustrate these with support material from their subconsultants, clients, and, if possible, the residents themselves. This may discourage some designers from entering; on the other hand, it would allow the considerable thought behind many designs to be made more explicit.

The jury had been instructed that the theme for this year's awards program was "housing alternatives." It is not surprising, therefore, that jurors show a fairly similar set of concerns for all projects. Although consensus was not instantly achieved on each submission, the

jury was consistent in its evaluative approach. The jury felt that its mandate was to evaluate each submission as "architecture" and therefore responded most strongly to the exterior form and appearance of the development. They were reluctant to take into account either quality of construction or use livability in their *final* decisions, although these factors figured largely in their deliberations. The jury did not seem to attach as much value as did the designers to the importance of responding to user input. The data suggest that, from the jury's point of view, the critical factor in making an award is architectural (as opposed to social or technological) innovation. The Barclay Infill Townhouses appear to be valued because they are an innovative response to their context. Alder Bay Co-operative is considered an achievement because of the stringent budgetary constraints under which it was designed. False Creek Terrace's merit seems to lie exclusively in its attractively different exterior appearance. Meadowlands is too plain: its socially innovative design process did not rate. English Bay Terrace, although ambitiously innovative, is not attractive enough to make the final award-winning selection. The jury's emphasis on innovation can be attributed partly to a pervasive value in the architectural profession—rewarding forms and ideas that are new and nonderivative—and partly to the specific theme of the awards program.

The site observer attempted to balance the design criteria employed by jurors—appearance, form, and aesthetics—with criteria pertaining to livability. Many of the observer's conclusions were borne out by residents' responses. This is attributable to the fact that the observation criteria were derived from post-occupancy evaluations of almost one hundred multifamily housing schemes and formulated as design guidelines for livable housing. They are therefore useful criteria for judging livability in the absence of resident opinions. If, as demonstrated here, a structured evaluation taking two or three hours points up similar issues to a resident survey that takes two or three days, then the technique may have some applicability to other awards programs. In fact, the organization responsible for this awards program accepted the observation criteria used in this study for use in site visits by future juries.

The observer's evaluation resulted in a rank ordering of the five schemes that is the reverse of the rank ordering that may be inferred from the jury's comments. The two highest-scoring designs by the observer were Meadowlands and English Bay Village. If the observer's criteria alone were applied, these two nonaward-winning schemes would have won awards; Barclay Street Infill would have been a possible award winner. Alder Bay Co-operative and False Creek Terrace would not have won awards. Clearly, here is a conclusion that needs further study: a set of observation criteria based on critical design issues for *residents* results in a different rating of housing schemes from the judgment by a jury of professional designers. This raises some critical issues about design awards. Are they primarily to reward design in terms of aesthetics and physical form—a "peer review" process—or should they also reward design in terms of livability for the residents? Is there, in fact, a truly aesthetic architecture without some "quality of life" for the users of the building?

On the other hand, residents' criteria alone do not do justice to the broader social and aesthetic goals of good architecture. Residents' criteria, as they emerged during the interviews, show a preoccupation with "how the building works." This is only partly a design issue; it is also a construction and maintenance issue. Residents' concerns reflect the gap between where the designer's responsibilities end and the builder's take over. To some residents, for example, those at False Creek Terrace, the architect was at fault in not insisting on better quality construction. The jury scarcely mentioned construction quality, suggesting that they perceived the architect's responsibility to end with the completion of the design. The maintenance of a building clearly passes to the building's owners on completion of a building, but the quality of construction, and indeed design, can significantly affect the amount and type of maintenance that is subsequently required and thereby the amount of satisfaction experienced by residents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The review of the four sets of criteria suggests that there are three fundamental evaluative approaches to which a design awards jury should be addressing itself: appearance, construction quality, and livability. First, does the development look interesting and attractive? Is it aesthetically and functionally appropriate to its context? Second, does the building work? Is it well-built? Third, is the development enjoyed and appreciated by the people who are living there? Does it fulfill their day-to-day social and psychological needs? These three approaches overlap somewhat, but to apply only one at the

expense of another is clearly insufficient.

The findings from this study suggest that meeting user needs is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for good design. Similarly, a well-built building "that works" is also a necessary but not a sufficient condition for good design. A building must also look good: it must be attractive and interesting, it must respond to its context, either by blending in or by standing out, and it must make some kind of contribution to the urban fabric. A good-looking appearance is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a good design. Our findings indicate that the jury placed more emphasis on this criterion at the expense of the other two; and users placed more emphasis on construction quality and livability at the expense of aesthetics.

The problem the designer has is balancing the three requirements of his or her design: appearance, quality of construction, and livability or delight, firmness and commodity! It may be necessary to compromise on the elegance of a design detail in order to maintain or enhance the livability of a dwelling unit. Similarly, and more commonly, it may be necessary to use inferior construction methods or materials in order to make the housing affordable, which is a precondition for livability. One aspect of the design process that has a significant effect on these trade-offs are the codes, standards, permits, and inspection processes that all buildings must submit to. These obviously exert a considerable influence on the form, details, and overall quality of the environment. Although the designer may exercise an heroic role in defending his or her design concept—its appearance, livability, and quality—this does not, by and large, come to the attention of users or to the jury. As most of these struggles and confrontations result in a series of small compromises, the combined effect of which on the final product is difficult to estimate, the design awards process should perhaps take this into consideration.

This design awards program specifies that the housing submitted should be built and occupied. This implies an interest in the consumers' perspective. If the jury were exclusively concerned with appearance, the buildings submitted for consideration could be hypothetical schemes. Thus some modifications in the review process should be considered so that resident feedback in the selection process is ensured. Although the program administrators made a point of mixing planners and contractors with architects and landscape architects on the jury, one of the interesting aspects of the decision-making process was how the nondesigners deferred to the members of the design professionals. It was the nondesign members who expressed most the concern for livability, but if they were instructed during the discussion by, say, an architect, that something they did not like in the design was unavoidable for obscure architectural reasons, they tended to accept the designer's judgment.

It should be mentioned that the Canadian Housing Design Counsil did in fact make a serious attempt to incorporate some of the findings from this study (undertaken in 1981) into subsequent design awards programs. Their major change was to oblige the awards jury to make more in-depth site visits. The jury is now required to interview managers and residents in each project in order to ensure that projects ultimately selected for awards are also liked by the people living in them. Consideration was given to the possibility of supplying the jury with written testimonials by residents, but this was rejected by the Counsil as too cumbersome to administer properly. In order to make more thorough site visits, however, the awards jury is obliged to select a shorter "short list" of projects to be visited. The short list is further curtailed by the requirement that all jury members visit each project, whereas previously each visit was only made by two jury members.

Certain key questions remain. Some are listed below, so that they may initiate a debate in the pages of *Places*.

How extensively should criteria for submission be formulated and communicated to designers?

Should the jury be given specific guidelines, or should they look for a shared consensus to emerge from the group process, even if this results in some jury members dominating others?

How much detail should the jury go into in order to determine the "worth" of a submission? For example, should they consider the "history" of the design, the construction quality, the opinions of residents, and the marketability of the housing itself?

How should a design team be treated in an awards program? For example, should a construction firm receive an award when it is primarily *design* that is being evaluated? Should the landscape architect receive an award in a scheme where the landscape design was deemed to be the weakest element of an otherwise prize-winning scheme?

Should different standards be applied to subsidized and unsubsidized housing?

Is it desirable to trade off the number of submissions evaluated with the detail with which each evaluation is carried out?

Do design awards programs in fact (when all is said and done) provide an incentive for better housing design? And does "better" equate with "more livable"?

NOTES

1 C. Cooper Marcus and W. Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Low Rise Family Housing* (University of California Press, 1986).

2 For a more detailed description of the methodology, see J. C. Vischer and C. Cooper Marcus, "Design Awards: Who Cares?" in *Knowledge for Design*, proceedings of the 13th annual conference of the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA), Polly Bart, Guido Francescato, and Alexander Chen, eds. (College Park, MD: EDRA, 1982).

3 At the time of the site visits, Cooper Marcus did not know what the designers submission had said; what the jury had said; or what were the residents' views. Nor did she know which schemes had won awards and which had not.

Postscript by Clare Cooper Marcus

In May 1985, as we were completing this article, I was asked to be on the National Jury for CHDC's 1985 awards. Switching hats from researcher-observer to jury member, I was able to gain another perspective on the awards process.

Since our 1981 study, the process has changed in a number of significant ways. Entries are submitted initially at a regional level and viewed by regional juries. Certain awards are given at this stage, which is important in a country with such vast regional differences (and loyalties) as Canada. Regional juries then select a number of schemes to go forward to the National Jury. An attempt is made at this stage to compare entries within categories (high-rise, conversions, multifamily, special housing, etc.) and not to let any one or two regions dominate the awards. (By sheer weight of numbers, British Columbia and Ontario come close to doing this.)

In view of the questions we have raised, the following points about the current awards program should be noted. Each regional jury visits every submitted scheme in its region, but these are still largely the brief walk-through visits as documented in the 1981 process. However, one CHDC member was present at *all* regional juries and thus had visited all the sites considered by the National Jury. His input to the National Jury was invaluable, though that jury concluded that two people would have been better, in order to effect a dialogue; site visits are still essentially looking at form and aesthetics; future site visits might incorporate a point or scoring system to effect some simple yet systematic ranking of schemes on context, livability, and construction as well as on form. Overall, the process *still* hinges on judging design from photographs. It is hard to see any other way of dealing with nationwide awards in a country the size of Canada. The cost of having the entire jury travel to every region would be prohibitive. Solutions include returning to a regional awards system only, so that each local team *can* visit each site and perhaps compare entries on a more systematic basis than a quick walk-through. The issue of form versus livability still remains. Finally, a suggestion of one 1985 jury member—Ray Spaxman, city planning director of Vancouver—bears thinking about. Each entry was accompanied by a detailed text answering specific questions on the project posed by CHDC. Spaxman suggested, "Next time, have the jury on the first round *only* read the text so as not to be 'seduced' by the photographs. . . ." How many designs would stand up if we had to communicate their merits *only* in words?

Table 2 **Evaluative Criteria**

False Creek Terrace

Designer's Criteria
Innovative rental housing alternative
Maximize views, light, and privacy of unit interiors
Privacy of dwelling entrances
Sense of community through shared exterior access
Architectural images of Mediterranean hill-towns and Georgian townhouses

Jury's Criteria
Positive Features
Contextual fit into neighborhood
Good use of sloped site
Attractive shared exterior access
"Extremely interesting design" . . . "ingenious" . . . "refreshing"
Well-designed interiors; "homey" feeling

Negative Features
Design "unduly complicated"

Observer's Criteria
Positive Features
Fits into neighborhood (size, massing)
"Readable" site layout
Attractive roof deck
Units sensitively oriented to light and views
Positive use of sloped site

Negative Features
Too much facade variety
Color and materials not "homey"
Some entries not private
Patios not private and face north
Communal open space not designed for use (e.g., sitting, socializing)
Numerous potential security hazards

Residents' Criteria
Positive Features
Attractive exterior image
Views to downtown and mountains
Interior layout and size of rooms
Privacy for upper units
Roof decks and upper level balconies

Negative Features
Poor quality construction
Poor upkeep and maintenance
Visual intrusion into lower units
Patios not private and face north
Security problems in lower units

Barclay Infill Townhouses

Designer's Criteria
Low-rise alternative in high-rise neighborhood
Provision of private open space
Front and back entries
Access courtyard to offset density
Choice of views from dwellings
Concern for light penetration into interiors

Jury's Criteria
Positive Features
Good low-rise/high-density solution
Exterior image simple and uncluttered
Respect for neighbors' light and views
Variety of private open spaces

Negative Features
Exterior image "boxlike"
Entrance "mundane"
Poor landscaping

Observer's Criteria
Positive Features
Appearance is unobtrusive and "homelike" compared to adjacent high-rise
Shared access from street is clear
Back/front unit entries clearly differentiated
Some patios well screened for privacy
No ambiguity between public and private space
Ingenious interior layouts

Negative Features
Shared landscaped space too small to be usable
Some windows and patios very close to public accessway
Site feels "crowded"

Residents' Criteria
Positive Features
Privacy and clarity of shared accessway
Well designed for security
Interior layout and dwelling size
Some usable private open space
Shared courtyard/accessway

Negative Features
Some patios lack privacy and sun
A few structural problems
Some leaking roofs/structural problems

Table 2 (cont'd) **Evaluative Criteria**

Alder Bay Co-operative

Designers' Criteria
Liveable affordable housing
High quality urban design
Bay windows and facade color to create "familiar urban quality, reminiscent of earlier architectural mode"
Front entries oriented to pedestrian streets to encourage use
Courtyards designed for visual access
Interior layouts designed for flexibility and spaciousness

Jury's Criteria
Positive Features
"Good design" considering budget constraints
Lively "streetscape"
Attractive unit interiors
Roof decks

Negative Features
Lower units lack privacy
Lack of designated play areas
Shared exterior access stairs unattractive

Observer's Criteria
Positive Features
Visually interesting images
Convenient access to adjacent park and boardwalk
Public to semiprivate (site) transition moderately well handled
Kitchen attractively oriented to pedestrian streets

Negative Features
Ambiguous back/front entries
Narrow and unattractive access stairs
Unclear site circulation and access
Patios lack privacy fencing
Poor courtyard design, not landscaped or detailed for real use
Some windows lack privacy
No play areas on site
Some security problems

Residents' Criteria
Positive Features
Access to adjacent park and play areas
Attractive bay windows
Sense of community
Good views
Pleasant dwelling layout
Roof decks

Negative Features
Courtyards not designed for children's play
Confused pedestrian circulation
Some poor construction features
Exterior access stairs unattractive, unsafe
Unfenced patios
Poor soundproofing

English Bay Village

Designer's Criteria
Mixed-use (housing/commerical) to "humanize and revitalize" downtown
Design to solve recurring urban problem of noise, privacy, and security
Turret design to add interest to urban fabric and marks street intersection
Energy-saving sunrooms

Jury's Criteria
Positive Features
Exterior design is bold and corner location handled well
Street life enhanced by commercial uses
Good use of materials

Negative Features
Commercial uses not well designed
Resident/commercial access not well handled

Observer's Criteria
Positive Features
"Elegant" luxury image
Housing site plan simple and pleasing
Unit entries private and clearly articulated
Private open spaces well screened and oriented to sun
Orientation to quiet, upper level courtyard offsets urban, high-density location
Living areas oriented to sun and view

Negative Features
Shared entry at street level difficult to find
Courtyard landscaped for ornamental rather than functional use
Lack of surveillance of entries may create security problems

Residents' Criteria
Positive Features
Downtown location
Tranquility of upper level courtyard
Interior size and layout
Sunrooms
Adequate privacy

Negative Features
Poor security of units and underground parking
Sunrooms not energy conserving (not double-glazed)
Shared entry at grade difficult to find
Security problems in garage and on roof

Table 2 (cont'd) **Evaluative Criteria**

Meadowlands Co-operative

Entrants' Criteria
Involvement of residents in design process
Residents able to maintain independence while having potential for companionship
All residents have a "bit of a garden"

Jury's Criteria
Positive Features
Development meets its stated social objectives
Design meets financial constraints
No steps for elderly to climb

Negative Features
Design not innovative
Building forms too mundane
Poor site planning
Lack of privacy
Poor detailing (e.g., window shapes, exterior trelliswork)

Observer's Criteria
Positive Features
Wheelchair-accessible housing in suburban setting
Materials, color, and "cottagelike" image creates homelike environment
Variety of orientations compensate for identical building forms
Front/back entries clearly designated
Opportunities for exterior personalization
Patios subtly designed and oriented for privacy
Centrally located community building
Good surveillance potential for security

Negative Features
No sidewalks on access road
Residents may prefer kitchen oriented to street rather than patio
Porches are not roofed

Residents' Criteria
Positive Features
Affordable housing
Well-spaced units
Tranquil setting
Secure feeling
Patios for gardening and sitting
Better than apartment living
No steps, good accessibility

Negative Features
Uncomfortable unit layout, with bedrooms facing front
Unnecessary speed bumps on road ("old people aren't racing")
Cold floors
Porch not roofed