Title
Beyond the Frontier II

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0jf972n0

Journal
Places, 5(3)

ISSN
2164-7798

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Publication Date
1989-01-15

Peer reviewed
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Arlington Court

In recent times, many suburban
neighborhoods in close proximity
to downtown Houston have been
revitalized, becoming increasingly
desirable for new housing. As the
pressures on inner-city housing have
increased with the cost of owning a
home, multifamily housing in these
neighborhoods has become a viable
solution. Prior to the 1980s the
pattern of housing in older suburban
neighborhoods had been single-
family homes and garden
apartments. By the mid-1980s
a number of infill townhouse
projects were introduced to these
neighborhoods. The designation
"infill" refers to development that
is literally filling in with housing
of higher density between lots
traditionally reserved for single-
family dwellings. Usually between
1,500 and 2,200 square feet—
one, two, or three bedrooms—the
infill townhouse provides a less
expensive alternative to the single-
family house in the same neighbor-
hood. The infill townhouse also
provides an alternative to the trend
of new suburban tract housing
developments miles from the
downtown.

It is a clear intent of the design to
heighten the sense of space and
individual character in what are
essentially modest houses. The four
different unit plans and the variety
of interior spatial arrangements are
direct responses to the differences
in living patterns established by
a community of single individuals,
mixed couples, or retired "empty
nester" couples. A sense of overall
architectural cohesion is established.

Photos by Paul Heaster; plan by William F. Stern
by a uniform material palette of stucco, wood windows, and wood trim, along with the compositional repetitions of architectural elements. Still the variety inherent in the different unit plans is expressed to both the adjoining streets and the park-like courtyard.

The site has been planned so that the individual townhouse unit is oriented toward a pedestrian courtyard which occupies 40 percent of the site. The automobile is accessed directly to each unit from Arlington Street on the east side and an alley to the west. Thus, the front door to Arlington Court is a gatehouse through which a visitor or resident enters, proceeding through the courtyard to the residences. The handling of 36 off-street parking spaces, while reserving a sizable portion of the property as green space, was one of the considerable challenges of this project. The integration of parking into the unit makes the modern townhouse quite different from traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century townhouses.

Arlington Court expands the vocabulary of housing in established neighborhoods, increasing the density without disturbing the scale. It provides an affordable house for middle and upper-middle income groups close to the business and cultural centers of the city. The project was intended to set a pattern for future housing developments as the pressure for good urban housing increases.