Is Urban Design on the Right Track?  
A Review of Two Large Projects in San Francisco and Stockholm

Anne Vernez Moudon

Two landmark plans provide a view into the state of urban design in the 1980s: Mission Bay, the Southern Pacific/Santa Fe railroad's 294-acre, 8000-unit, mixed-use development in San Francisco, and Sodra Station, a 23-hectare (56-acre), 5000-unit, mixed-use project in Stockholm. Located on landfills turned into railroad yards, these projects are bold attempts at urban land reclamation for much-needed residential areas in their respective cities. They synthesize the best of urban design today; in both cases the approach to the design of urban form marks a return to "premodern" urban design practices (meaning primarily eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practices, as illustrated in Benevolo's Origins of Modern Town Planning). Yet in neither project are the historical urban forms mindless reproductions of the past; they are adapted to contemporary needs and reflect a serious, nonpolemical critique of modern principles of city-making. Despite all the good design ingredients found in each project, however, I remain skeptical as to their ability to become dynamic urban districts, fully integrated into their venerable surroundings.

Assessing the Plans

The backbone of the design approach used in Mission Bay and Sodra Station consists of laying out premodern city streets and

Mission Bay Plan
Sponsor: Santa Fe Pacific Realty Corporation
Planning: Department of City Planning, City and County of San Francisco (Dean L. Morris, Director; George Williams, Assistant Director; Plans and Programs, Alec Bish, Project Director)
Consultants: EDAW, Inc. (project management; land use planning; streetscape design); ELS/Ellisam & Logan Architects (urban design); Dora Jian & Koenig

Associates (open space, landscape design); Gabriel Roche, Inc. (housing feasibility); Daniel Solomon and Associates (housing design); Carl Anthony & Associates (community services); M.Gore & Company (economics); Robert L. Harrison (transportation); Kwan-Emami (research and development design); Philip Williams & Associates (hydrology); Wetlands Research Associates (wetlands ecology)
blocks, which carefully continue the geometry of existing grids. Bold public open spaces structure the new districts with a hierarchy of boulevards, squares, neighborhood parks, and in the larger Mission Bay, a regional waterfront park. Buildings frame these opulent spaces, flashing telling images of the schemes of Cerdà, Sitte, Olmsted, Haussmann, and even Burnham. They are statements of born-again, wealthy, bourgeois urbanism. And the designs dig even further into history, with both projects boasting a prominent crescent in the John Wold's tradition—in Södra Station, architect Ricardo Flóir has secured the commission for the crescent. Have the Ville Radier and its postwar progeny, the urban renewal projects, vanished miraculously?

Unlike urban renewal projects, which recycle areas thought to be socially destitute, Mission Bay and Södra Station seek to reuse land whose previous uses have been made obsolete by technological development. Rejuvenating land uses was also a preoccupation of nineteenth-century planning: crumbling medieval walls and their related “fringe areas”—the no-man’s-land that had characterized areas between intervammor and extraordinar development—were the primary target. Today, stockholm’s railroad yards and erstwhile in-

1 Mission Bay illustrative plan. Note the scale of existing residential fabric in the southwest corner of the site, and the larger elements of industry surrounding the site (Mission Bay Proposal for Citizen Review, Department of City Planning, City and County of San Francisco, January 1987, A-19).

2 Södra Station plan, March 1986. General massing and distribution of design and building units throughout the site—names correspond to the different developers or builders (Stockholms stadbygg
dustrial waterfronts have become, in both Europe and the United States, the front lines of reclamation efforts.

**Return to Old Forms**

A quiet but promising revolution in urban design is reverting civic design and other "old-fashioned" ways of designing cities. This revolution has been eclipsed somewhat by the parallel rise of postmodernism in architecture, which it resembles in its love for historic reference. Yet the changes occurring in urban design stem less from the rejection of modern design principles, reflected chiefly in the return to festive decoration, than from a renewed love for the city, the pre-1920 city in particular. As Clara Trilling has noted, "Post-Modern buildings are usually just as unrelated to the city as the boxes of the Modern movement are." The return of the traditional city has far-reach ing impact. Such modern trademarks as isolated towers are "out," as are monolithic slabs of apartment buildings, with their single east-west orientation. The bulky forms typical of past centuries shape an unquestionably urban environment, where the street becomes once again the generic element of public space, opening up periodically into outdoor rooms, such as parks and squares.

The apparent deflection from principles of modern design and planning has resulted from a complex set of events during the last 20 years. The primary force, however, was an interest in city design that has convinced design professionals to support the nature and character of existing, individual cities as rich and varied contexts for urban design. The approaches between public and professional values has been gradual, and is still in process.

In some celebrated cases such as the town of Bologna, Italy, the West Berlin Tiergarten and Kreuzberg projects, New York’s Battery Park City, and Paris’s Le Marais, old-fashioned city design is returning in force. Yet in other instances, modernism prevails. An early competition for the Söderman- Station development yielded at least one proposal for slab-in-the-park from a team led by architect Noreen Rosenzweig. The most lavish and certainly least damaged proposal came from Leon Krier, who advocated filling the vacant and underutilized land scattered in the surrounding area of Söderman with all the program elements. Thus, allowed him to return the railroad yards to their original open-space state. The current plan for Södra Station is a compromise solution that continues to pay some tribute to modernism.

As for Mission Bay, an earlier I. M. Pei award-winning scheme boasted a neo-Renaissance design, complete with a grand axis and large open spaces carpeted with urban gardens. Intermittent towers adored a background of street-wall architecture, reaching a sculptural crescendo at one tip of the axis. San Francisco’s leaders loved this sleek, though historicized, version of Mission Beach. In the plan reviewed here they made sure that the mini-downtown was deleted, along with the marina, which extended the Old China Basin. They wanted a neighborhood compatible with the surrounding ones, and with public access to the Bay Shore. The current plan is certainly more responsive to these desires.

Negotiating with Modernism’s Legacy

The current plans of both Mission Bay and Södra Station are not, however, mere replicas of the past; they negotiate with many of the progressive principles of the Ville Radisente. The least exciting of modernism’s influences are found in the detailed land-use level of the Mission Bay plan. The plan does not achieve the intricate mix of residences and work-places that was intended. Land uses are generally segregated in large chunks of land. An attempt to re-create a typical San Francisco neighborhood core, the mixed-use axis along Third and Long Bridge streets (with ground-floor shops and residences above), fails to include office spaces, which are at the edge of
the site along an existing elevated freeway. Although no longer the high-rise mini-downtown proposed in I. M. Pei's 1984 award-winning plan, the office zone still awaits corporate-sized, mid-rise structures, the majority of whose users will not be able to afford to live in the adjacent neighborhoods. Meanwhile, corner grocery and other convenience stores, those staples of everyday urban life, are absent from most of the pristine residential enclaves. Finally, a commuter transit stop serves the office district well, but in its location at the edge of the residential areas, near the environmental vacuum of the elevated freeway, it resembles a park-and-ride suburban station more than its exciting urban nineteenth-century predecessors.

Yet excellent propositions are made to "modernize" the hierarchical block design. In both projects pre-nineteenth-century block forms have been manipulated to incorporate many contemporary ideals: for instance, a strong hierarchy of street uses assists the consolidation of superblocks, in clear reference to the Garden City tradition. Also, the historical block forms take on new functions and meanings. Consolidated blocks in Mission Bay borrow from alley developments of early nineteenth-century Washington, D.C., or Edinburgh: higher-density buildings face the main streets, while...
lower-density buildings are set around an inner-block collective space serviced by narrow lanes. But here the protected inner blocks will house not the servant classes, but the more privileged residents. Also, the inner-block open space in Mission Bay is highly structured, with neat, orderly parks surrounded by driving lanes. In Södra Station cars are allowed to intrude on only three sides of residential blocks, and mid-block open spaces take on an informal, romantic character.

The plans handle vehicular and pedestrian traffic differently. Mission Bay projects a more urban image, despite an overall density approxi-

mately half that of Södra Station's, because pedestrians share most streets with cars and only back alleys are reserved for local traffic. This traditional mix of wheeled and foot traffic is avoided in most of Södra Station.

There, a decidedly modern stance combines automobile-oriented streets with large, quiet, and bucolic inner blocks, which are aligned along a longitudinal pedes-
trian axis.

The strict distinction be-
tween front and back, private and public land in Mission Bay will facilitate the subdivision of the inner-block space into traditional, small, privately controlled gardens. But Södra Station's large expanse of open space inherited from the modern movement will require a central, collective mainte-
nance apparatus. Such large semipublic open spaces have not fared well in most American projects, but in culturally and socially more homogeneous Sweden, they have been successful: they are friendly to the host of pedestrians, who can either use the well-defined public pedestrian lanes or wander into the more private, lesser spaces of the residential inner blocks. In Mission Bay, on the other hand, pedes-

trians are kept on structured paths in the fronts of resi-
dential areas—reflecting, again, the culturally engrained need for guarded privacy, made increasingly acute by the widening gap between haves and have-nots in American society.

Local Architectural Character

What will it feel like to walk, drive, live, and work in Mis-

sion Bay or Södra Station? For all their similarities in geometry and spatial organi-

zation, these plans provide very different experiences. In a significant departure from premodern practices, which sought to impose a redeveloped architectural order on a neoclassical nature, urban designers have relied on existing ordinary buildings to define the character of the two projects. Detailed regulation of architectural form is inimical to both plans, and each refers to buildings typically found in the respective cities. The creeping homogenization fostered by the International Style may at last be checked, and the environments created are likely to fit the expectations of their users because they resemble what is there already.

Relating to the local archi-

tecture is particularly challenging in Mission Bay: the high densities required to make new residential con-

struction economically feasible are not easily fit into San Francisco's fine-grained fabric of single houses and small apartment buildings. On the other hand, Stock-

holm's primarily eighteenth- and nineteenth-century urban building stock of compact courtyard apartment buildings more easily accommodates today's large buildings. The Mission Bay plan responds with a rich assortment of residential building types. In keeping with the City Planning Code, building entries occur in regular, small increments along the streets to preserve the character of the existing fabric. Curbs and access to structured parking are restricted to break down the scale experienced by the pedestrians and the residents. The number of families using the same entry, lobby, or landing is limited, while entrance residents have a “defensible” piece of the environment.

Parking

Parking is a significant urban design problem without precedent in premodern
solutions. The Mission Bay plan, with its focus on private housing and its cup-
to-lip relationship between house and car, has dedicated virtually all of the residential
ground floor to a parking platform—podium is the
term used in the plan. The
podium limits the configura-
tion of the many non- elevator
buildings of the plan: two-
story dwellings sit atop one-
story apartments because of
the assumption that people
will not walk up more than
two stories unless the
additional story occurs
inside the dwelling. This
arrangement prevents the
larger, family-oriented units
from having direct access
to the garden level. The con-
crete slab holding the garden
level also restricts planting.
The pervasiveness of the
podium has caused San
Francisco’s urban designers
to devise stringent design
controls for what they term the
“sidewalk encroachment zone” in order to foster an
amenable pedestrian envir-
onment at the street level.

In Södra Station a less
permissive attitude toward
the car has led designers to
look for innovative solu-
tions: favorable topo-
graphical conditions allow
dwelling garages to be placed
under the main streets, thus
liberating the backyards and
inner-block open spaces for
greens.

Open Space
If open space is plentiful in
both Södra Station and
Mission Bay, the landscape
designs remain bland, some-
what simplistic, and
unconvincing; neither the
nostalgic reproductions of
untouched nature nor the
pristine, over-domesticated
greens of the Renaissance
meet the need for exciting,
colorful, public, and col-
cective open spaces. One
sees some discomfort and
indecision vis-à-vis the role
of the urban green or out-
door space, though perhaps
it is just a lack of concern or
resources. Yet, as we have
become almost exclusively
urban societies, as our
relationships to wilderness
and to agriculture have
changed radically over the
past century, what has
become of the imagery and
symbolism projected by our
open spaces?

Unfortunately, neither project offers a rich
detailed set of ideas in tune with its size and
importance.

Mission Bay differs from
Södra Station in its extensive
network of open spaces and
in its prized waterfront. The
many small urban parks
will serve their community,
but their weak relationship
to the main streets overlooks
the need for linkages. Even
the obligatory jogging trail
appears in a lonely, monu-
tmental setting. Perhaps
most objectionable is the
treatment of the waterfront
park and the China Basin
Canal, a remnant of the
area’s swampy origins.
Both spaces take on a
romantic character that
crashes, rather than con-
trasts, with the urbanity of
the parks. The China Basin
Low-rise walk-up prototype: stacked flats

Low-rise walk-up prototype: family units over flats

Low-rise walk-up prototype: duplex units over flats
Canal might be better in the neighborhood as a Venetian canal than as the weepy, anachronistic pond.cum, houseboats that is intended. And while an urban wild is a good idea in San Francisco, it would need to be a sizable "park" to have the desired impact. Finally Mission Bay's streets do not receive the detailed design attention they warrant. How will cafes, bus stops, newspaper stands, street vendors, benches, and so on, be accommodated? Streets are the most public and dynamic part of an open space system, demanding careful and innovative approaches to their design.

Principles of open space design for Sidra Station are even less explicitly documented than for Mission Bay. The collective greens in the inner residential blocks are likely to cater to children and families because of their easy access and protected character. But the pedestrian spine may actually compete with the street as a draw for pedestrians, leaving the latter in the mercy of cars.

Taking Stock

Can we feel confident that the blend of old and new city-making techniques in these two projects is a step in the right direction for contemporary urban design? Have the principles of urban and architectural form been mastered to support a person-oriented, community-minded urban life? Are the remaining issues only technical—parking, pollution, refined approaches to land uses, etc.? I suspect that urban design practice of the late twentieth century will look to our descendants like no more than skillful stage-making: the forms and images are strong and enticing, but the play is shrill. We may have learned, once again, how to design cities, but we have a long way to go to make them. That people are no longer packed in enormous, look-alike casements covering acres of urban land is a credit to the new plans. The smaller buildings, the more varied, tradition-bound architecture, the friendlier streets and open spaces all contribute to a better urban environment. Yet, for all their good design, the new residential environments will remain "projects"; houses and neighborhoods will be built, run, and maintained by large institutions, as if they were hotels or convention centers.

Diversity and Aging

Two issues that are essential to the livelihood of residential environments have not been properly addressed in these projects: diversity and resilience. These two qualities are best ensured in a fine-grained urban fabric. Units of land ownership must be small to decentralize the control of design, building, and management decisions. Yet in Sidra Station the units will range from 130 to 500 dwellings and in Mission Bay from 200 to 500 dwellings—unusually large chunks of residential development by either city's standards. This means that one to five of the superblocks planned will be controlled by a single entity at a time, whether private in the case of San Francisco or quasi-public in the case of Stockholm. The tight web of design regulations that urban designers have tailored to inject variety and individualization may counteract some of the impact of the development's oppressive scale. But a tract-like appearance will be difficult to avoid since within each unit of development the same aesthetic and spatial characteristics are likely to predominate, even if the scale of the buildings is reduced. Furthermore, because of the large development parcels, the projects will mature uniformly, unlike ordinary neighborhoods, where each building, each garden, each next-door cranny, is subjected to a different treatment and modified according to the varied needs of different owners and users.

Since World War II the development of most large tracts of centrally located urban land has been granted by city management to large developer-builders specializing in such projects. This is in contrast to premodern projects, in which both implementation and management were by ordinary developers and builders, who operated
within a pattern of land ownership usually based on parcels of 100 by 150 feet, or smaller. Over the years this fine-grained framework for building and land ownership has permitted the fabric of cities to change and to adapt in different ways, at different paces, from property to property, within, and sometimes in spite of, the overall project design.

The Lot as an Instrument of Urban Design

Ironically, large, premodern plans and projects were attempts to simplify an urban landscape that at the time was perceived (perhaps correctly) as "unorderly" because it was made of so many small units that until the end of the nineteenth century, such efforts did not go beyond the control of facade detailing, followed, in some cases, by the actual building of facades. Since then urban design and planning have pursued a course of increasing uniformity of the urban landscape. In the process they have come to advocate the elimination of the private lot as the primary cause of urban chaos and blight. The "smart" lot campaign has been so successful that many designers and planners today are unaware of the influence of the lot on urban form and design; plating and subdivision design are now regarded as unglamorous, technical tasks, and are left for the engineers. This is why recent calls for design diversity, and their accompanying regulatory apparatus for fostering a return to an architecture of lots (the Mission Bay plan reliance on building types is particularly explicit in this regard; see "Notes on Battery Park City" this issue), have been met with an institutional vacuum. Public-sector designers and planners are unable to provide fine-grained ownership structures and are unwilling to enter the maze of ordinary developers and landowners, who, nonetheless, continue to build and manage the greater share of our cities. In the name of efficiency, they turn to large entities that may or may not have had prior experience in large-scale building and management. Yet, while such practices may have been attractive in the past under the guise of innovation and economies of scale, experience has shown that extremely unresponsive environments have resulted.

Units of 100 or more dwellings are common in post-war or housing in Stockholm, where a relatively homogeneous population has, in the past three decades, adjusted to a highly regulated life-style. Yet some 30 percent of Stockholm's residents still own or reside in houses, which is considered a privilege. Furthermore, Stockholm has a history of quasi-public management of projects with thousands of dwellings. Successful in such new towns as Vällingeby, this practice has been tarnished by recent problems: for instance, for many of the dwellings of the 1960s million-unit program, three times the initial investment is now being poured into necessary "modernization"; and even Daltom, a 1970s low-rise, high-density project, is plagued with a variety of use and maintenance problems. For Americans, and San Franciscans specifically, units of ownership have traditionally been much smaller. In the United States there is little experience in managing large, dense urban projects successfully over a long period of time. (See "Notes on Battery Park City," for a discussion of exceptional conditions in Manhattan.) Therefore, few, if any, precedents warrant the scale of development proposed in San Francisco and Stockholm.

Other aspects of the plans will hinder the graceful aging of the districts. Both plans exude a self-contained, self-sufficient, which reflects the power of institutional forces, but does ill for a lively future urban environment: the overly packaged, tightly dimensioned spaces leave little for the imagination. There will be no surprises, no left-over or unclaimed spaces. Within a few years of construction, both projects will be denser (in buildings and in people) than most existing neighborhoods in their respective cities. Yet the
same density would take decades to achieve if deve-
lopment were to occur without the benefit of a plan.

**Institutional Shortcomings**

City-making issues are, at this point, less architectural than institutional. The out-
dated decision-making processes and mechanisms that govern Mission Bay and South Beach remain essentially unchanged since the era of the infamous urban renewal and large modern development proj-
ects. South Beach is the latest case in Stockholm’s 50-year, bold and systematic urban planning and building fiesta. Conceived in the early 1980s, it is being built itto (planned completion for 1991) by several quasi-public developers and housing corporations, under the strict control of the City of Stockholm Planning and Real Estate Offices. The project’s development machinery is a direct de-
cendant of the modern, large-scale, centralized city-

making organizations that plagued the post–World War II reconstruction of European cities as well as the ill-fated redevelopment schemes in America in the 1960s.

Mission Bay’s development is more reminiscent of eighteenth- and nineteenth-
century practices: its plan, complete with strict design regulations, is directed at a primary private-sector land-

owner.” A subject of controversy since the mid-1970s, the plan has been negotiated by the landowner and the city’s Board of Supervisors, in conjunction with the De-
partment of City Planning and the City Planning Commission. The project lies outside the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Redevelop-
ment Agency—the only agency with a lasting track record of neighborhood development. But it does follow the Planning Department’s much-
acclaimed Downtown Plan and meshes with the city’s aging, but politically powerful Urban Design Plan and the Planning Code regulating residential zoning. If Mission Bay’s multifaceted planning process contrasts with South Beach’s top-
down decision process, it is only a reflection of a complex set of public and private forces attempting to find a common ground, and not an antidote for the large institutional and corporate entities in charge. In neither case do the design and management decision-
making structures provide an institutional framework that is responsive to the needs for diversity and change of neighborhoods.

**Conclusions**

**Icons Versus Control**

In both South Beach and Mission Bay, urban designers have questioned old models and ideals and have probed the indigenous forms of their cities. Correcting many past design mistakes, they have adapted familiar forms to contemporary needs. But icons are only one side of the formula for making good environments. Building practices and management structures are the other side. Good design cannot exist without the support of appropriate clients. Un-

fortunately, urban designers in both cities have moved ahead in the face of es-

sentially unchanged and out-of-date planning and management structures; the designs have created discrete, decentralized environments, but the building and man-

agement techniques relate to megaprojects.

Buildings, neighborhoods, cities are more than physical representations of our societies. They are long-

lasting tools for better living. How environments as tools will be handled over time must be an integral part of our plans.

The building of urban districts in recent decades has taught us to calibrate and refine our policies to reduce the adverse impact of planned, large-scale development. We now value mixed land uses. We are integrating different income groups by subsidizing families in need and are providing dwellings of different sizes and characters to encourage families with different structures to live close to each other. In Mission Bay private developers are required to make room for affordable housing and to provide small retail and service facilities, which are unlikely to come to expensive new develop-
ments without appropriate incentives. The time has come to accommodate small developers and owners and to ensure their participation in the making of planned residential districts. In San Francisco this means the inclusion of developments of less than 100 units—the kind commonly found in the city today. It may be more difficult to find small developers in Stockholm, where municipal housing companies and quasi-public housing cooperatives are so large. But the impact of the cooperatives’ scale could be reduced if they were given scattered sites within the district and required to use different architects and autonomous management structures to run and maintain each property. In both Stockholm and San Francisco, small districts could be sprinkled with smaller lots that would appeal to other types of developers and owners. In operational terms, the units of development and mainte-

inance can be broken down into the sub-100 or 200-foot frontages
could be accommodated to introduce a new, yet still congruent scale of develop-
ment in each city.
The costs for such proced-
ures need not be high; the specific controls established can serve 100 developers as
well as three. The only added
costs is to negotiate agree-
ments and monitor the
work of a greater number of
outlets as development takes
place. But the long-range
benefits are apparent,
naturally in the light of
umerous costs of delayed
maintenance and adaptation
now being paid for the
"modernization" of large
housing projects built after
the 1950's. Decentralized
ownership and management
will not only install more
design diversity, it will also
create environments where
owners and residents
cooperate easily in the
management of the
properties, making changes
as they go without major
capital requirements.

Weaving in the Time Element
Institutional shortcomings
aside, more can be done in
the realm of design and
planning to leave room for
change. Pedagogs, verandahs,
and large balconies, which
are typically tailored by
residents to suit their needs,
could be required details in
projects where the points of
development and owner-
ship remain large. Roofs can
be designed to facilitate
expansion, and front yards
along the main streets, while
the parcels along the side
streets are left undeveloped
at first.
Designers and planners need
to become skilled at weaving
into their plans the time
element so important to the
quality of cities. Such skills
will require detailed, critical
knowledge about the history
of city-making, something more
than a selective mem-
ory for past icons.

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the Mission Bay Plan.

Notes
1 Leonardo Benevedo, The
Origins of Modern Town
Planning (Cambridge: MIT
Press, 1971) [1963].
2 Jule Thirlberg, "A Future
That Looks Like the Past," Atlantic
Monthly (29 July 1981):
28–34.
3 Environment is the public
dissemination of modern
schemes. Many modern
projects built between the
1940s and 1960s in Europe
and the United States remain
partially occupied. More
subsidies to their tenants,
while older projects have lost
waiting lists (the latest
counts are found in France,
Sweden, as well as Newark,
New Jersey, and Kamas City).
Parallel is this is the public
endorsement of historic
preservation. Studies
influenced by the rise of the
social sciences in design and
planning have shown the
problems associated with
some of the stigmas of modern
design: the negative effects
of high-rise buildings on middle-
class families, particularly
when low-rise housing types
prevail in the community; the
impossibility of using and
maintaining the large open
spaces; and the destructive
social effects of automobile-
dominated streets (Oscar
Newman, Defensible Space,
Crime Prevention Through
Urban Design (New York,
Macmillan, 1973)); and
Community of Interest
(Randall B. Cwynar, N.Y.: Anchor
Press/Doubleday, 1980); Clare
Cooper, Mautz, Easter Hill
Yale (New York: Basic
Books, 1975); Jane Jacobs,
The Death and Life of Great
American Cities (New York:
Random House, 1961);
Donald Appleyard, Liveable
Streets (Berkeley: University

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to describe the value of old
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W. Kovats, The Urban
Millennium (Carbondale:
Southern Illinois University
Press, 1983); Spier Kostof,
"Cities and Turf," Design

4 "In the future, the public
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Press, 1983); Spier Kostof,
"Cities and Turf," Design
Urban Design, edited by Ann Fer bee (Parchase, N.Y.: Institute for Urban Design, 1982)); others have eventually rejected once-accepted approaches to city design (Peter Hall, God’s Own Junkyard (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966)).


5 Some of these issues are now being reconsidered in the current revisions of the plan. Lower-density housing (deemed more marketable and less expensive to build) will reduce the size of the parking podium to the building footprint, thus freeing more space for gardens and greens.

6 In Skopí, a project preceding Siedra Station, Stockholm’s planners avoided the first-level parking platform by integrating housing and parking structures that look like market halls within the residential abode of each block. A few of these structures actually house a market facility on the ground floor.

7 In the current revision of the plan a street and a plaza are being added along China Basin, making it readily accessible to the public. Street hierarchies are redefined to accentuate actual and perceptual links between public spaces made the project and the waterfront—an important issue in what could be the only site in San Francisco that, because of its finances, does not relate immediately to the waterfront (fig. 8).

8 Efforts to unify city form precede the Age of Enlighten- ment. The reasons and mechanisms used for controlling city-making have changed over the course of history, sometimes repeating themselves. J. W. Knott, The Urban Millennium (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985). The condemnation of the private lot as a hindrance to proper city planning can be traced to the end of the twentieth century. I have discussed similar attitudes during the Garden City movement in “Planning Versus Planning” (Landcape 29:1 [1986]: 30–38). Jacques Lacan, “The Terrain of Architecture” (L’oue Internationale 36[1982]: 5–9) extends the discussion into modern times. Quoting Le Corbusier’s characteristic extremism, “there can be no modern planning without the unification of the land,” Lacan exalts the evolution of planning thought which led to the elimination of the lot. While a number of Le Corbusier’s contemporaries rejected the principles of modern architecture, they called for “improved Haussmannism,” whereby the city block and the street layout became the basic units of planning. Lacan shows how “to see the block as the most important unit in planning operations means revolutionizing the form of property.”


10 After an aborted attempt to develop a plan privately, the primary landowner decided to “sell” the city to develop an acceptable plan, which is now being submitted for citizen review. The city has recently contracted a prominent law firm to work out a development agreement with the landowners. The latter, who have yet to approve the plan, have hired John Kriken, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill’s partner in charge of urban design, to critique the city’s document. This critique is now being discussed and incorporated in a revised version of the plan.

11 This device has been used recently in the development of East Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the rededication plan calls for relatively small parcels. The plan, now some six years old, has attracted a number of commercial and office developers, who have both rehabilitated and built anew a variety of vital projects. It will take another 10 years to complete the plan, at which point the East Cambridge area will have undergone close to an ordinary process of development and will still be integrated, once again, into the Cambridge and Boston metropolitan area (MIT: Ford and Center for Urban Studies, Race Course for Research and Development, Lessons from Local Experience, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1983). See also “Notes on Battery Park City” (this issue), and John J. Kriken, “What’s Wrong with Small Projects?” (Urban Design Review 8 [June 1983]: 2–3).