Cross Section of
Young Man at His Window

The young man is looking through the window of his family's apartment in Paris. He appears to have jumped up from his chair. His body is tense and he seems excited. Does he recognize the young woman sitting on the street corner a block away? Are his predatory instincts aroused by someone he does not know? Does he see something extraordinary happening on the next boulevard? Whatever has attracted his interest, he is keenly involved in the activity of the street while still inside the privacy of his living room.

Gustave Caillebotte's painting brings to life the relationship between the private spaces behind facades and the public spaces those facades occlude. The energy of the figure and the dominance of the window make us vividly aware of both inside and outside space, of the relationship between the public and private realms. This painting enables us to visualize the three-dimensional form of this address in the city.

Two Women on a Porch

Two women lean on the rail of a front porch in an American neighborhood, looking across a street.
lawn to the street. Are they watching children play on the street? Has some unknown person
who looks suspicious ventured into this quiet neighborhood? While securely in the privacy
of the front porch, the two women are actively engaged in the life of the street.

While the taut, uniform facades of Paris
define a strong boundary between public and
private, the traditional American neighborhood
street is more complex. It is lined with two-story
houses with porches, each of which stands as a
symbol of the individuality of the family it repre-
sents. Together, the porches and brick facades of
the houses loosely define the edges of the public
space of the street.

A cross section drawing of a typical American
neighborhood street illustrates this complexity.
In the center is the cartway of the street itself,
framed by a tree lawn and sidewalk on each side.
The facades of the houses are set back from the
sidewalk, creating a richly complex space.

Porches extend the private zone of the house into
this space, and front lawns further extend this
personal territory so that it is visually part of
the public space of the street. In spite of the overlap
of public and private space, there is no ambiguity
about ownership. Each individual's property
is clearly marked by the edge of the front yard and,
perhaps, by a picket fence or hedge.

This physical form reflects American urban
culture and its concept of the relationship
between the individual and society. We sit on
our front porches as individuals, looking across
our lawn to the street. Our porches and lawns
are part of the public space, contributing to its
character and image. With our rights as individ-
uals come responsibilities to contribute to
the community by creating, maintaining and
participating in the public realm.

The formal fronts of houses face each other
across the space of the street, as if in polite
conversation, creating the address of a group
of individuals and courted—greeting passersby.
The back yards, part of the private world of the
individual families, are screened from the public
realm by fences or by the houses themselves.
Never should a back yard face the street or the front yards of homes across the street. Just as a residential street is a collection of individual house addresses, a neighborhood, in fact the whole city, is a collection of different types of streets and public spaces—each of which itself is an address. Some of these are very small-scale residential streets; others are large-scale boulevards lined with houses; still others are small parks, while others are civic squares.

For all of these addresses, the street is the focus of the address. The front facades of houses, with their porches and front yards, always face the street. Schools and other institutions also have an address on the street, with facades facing across the street to the facades of houses. Parks and natural features, such as rivers and lakes, should also be defined by public streets, so they are connected to the whole community.

Creating an Address
When Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann built the boulevards of Paris, he created a series of dramatically new addresses. He accomplished this by cutting swaths through the city that included more land than necessary for the boulevards themselves. The additional land on each side of the street made it possible to build eight-to ten-story buildings with handsome facades. The investment in the lavish landscaping and elegant street furniture in the public right-of-way was combined with elegant architecture to create a marketable address. Many new buildings cut through unfashionable areas, but they succeeded so well that they transformed the whole city.

A superb application of this strategy of creating an address in an American city can be found in the Ghent neighborhood in Norfolk, Virginia. At the turn of the century, an entrepreneur decided to develop a new community at the edge of one of Norfolk’s many tidalwater swamps. He understood that he needed to create a great address and that the swamp lacked marketing appeal. So he dredged the swamp and installed a beautifully curving bulkhead to create a semicircular canal. Along the bulkhead he built a linear park that was bordered by a street lined with the fronts of large houses. He named the canal The Hague, gave the houses Flemish facades and called the whole community Ghent.

Mowbray Arch, the street along the canal, is a truly magical address, whether experienced along its promenade or from across the water. At one end, the vista is terminated by the beautiful Chrysler Art Museum, and at the other, space is expanded through the space of Stedelijk Courtyard. It is the focus of a larger composition in which a network of parks and public gardens provide settings for major institutions and are connected to every neighborhood street and block, becoming visual as well as social anchors of the community.

This strategy can be helpful in making inner-city neighborhoods—many of which have deteriorated and become symbols of urban problems—safe, comfortable places in which people of different incomes will want to invest. We have found that by creating a series of addresses, with images based on the best, most stable neighborhoods of a city, it is possible to attract a diverse new market to the inner city. To do so, it is necessary to see the “cross section of the address” not as a two-dimensional technical drawing, but as a three-dimensional vision of the place to be created.

Creating New Addresses in Digg’s Town
Perhaps the most vivid way to understand the importance of the cross section of an address is to see examples of where it does not exist, where there is no statement of either individuality or community and no street.

We were asked by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA) to suggest ways in which its renovation budget could be used to make the most difference in people’s lives in a public housing project called Digg’s Town. These funds were coordinated by the NRHA, along with a number of other programs, including early childhood education, community policing, drug prevention and employment training.

There are 418 units of housing in Digg’s Town, almost all of which are two-story, townhouse-type units. The buildings, 40 years old,
were long, barricade-like rectangles whose front faced courts and whose ends turned a blind side to the street. Because the units did not face a street, they had no real address. There was an ambiguous "no-man's-land" surrounding them, no definition of either a public realm or a private domain of individual residents. Gangs took over and residents were afraid to come out of their house. Garbage was collected in large, communal garbage bins. These not only dominated the streetscape, creating a very messy image for this address, but also presented dangers for residents. As one person put it, "When you have garbage in your own trash can it's your trash, but when it goes to the "big bin," it becomes the world's trash, and therefore not maintained at all." Drug dealers used them as impromptu sales counters to make sure they did not have incriminating evidence on their persons when the police came by.

We worked with residents and with the city to find out how to reclaim this no-man's-land from the gangs and criminals and how to establish a safe, stable community. The residents told us, "We want to have porches, not because we need another place to sit, but so we can come out of our houses, see one another, be together and come together to deal with our problems." That is a powerful statement of citizenship.

The most dramatic change was that, wherever possible, streets were inserted through the no-man's land. The project sliced superblocks of interior courts that could not be seen from the street; now it is a series of smaller neighborhood blocks, more like the neighborhoods around it. The dimensions of these new streets were critical because of the close spacing between buildings. Wherever there was sixty feet of space, it was possible to insert a street. Much-needed parking was included, but the section could not accommodate a planting strip between the curb and front lawns. In areas where streets could not be placed, courts were defined with fences and twelve-foot-wide walls were built with curbs separating them from front lawns, thus providing a strong definition between public and private.

The major investment in the exterior of the buildings was the construction of good, full-sized porches. They have correct classical columns with balusters that provide an elegant frame within which people can sit in dignity, no matter how humble their furniture may be. Since our house is a mirror of ourselves, we should make sure we are designing mirrors that contribute to personal pride, self-image and dignity. The porches are symbols for the individual families they serve.

Small-scale, white picket fences define the edge of each citizen's property, particularly at the corners, where the front porch and homes have trampled the lawn. Taller fences create secure back yards, which are shared among the group of houses on each side but closed to outsiders — a private place for those who live around it. Individual trash bins were provided for each family, just like in a normal neighborhood.

These very simple elements create the cross-section of address in Diggs Town. Where once there were units on an anonymous wasteland, there are now "houses" with front yards, front porches and back yards with patios. The residents now have one of the most basic elements of citizenship: an address.

The impact has been remarkable. The statistics indicate a sharp drop in police calls and crime. Residents tell us that where the changes, they heard four and five gunshots a night; now
they hear a gun shot once every four or five months. Norfolk’s police chief has said that visible evidence of people taking care of their neighborhood discourages criminals from doing business there. So these simple elements of fences, porches and streets have had a major role in securing the neighborhood.

Most important is the creation of an address in which residents take pride. The community police officer has said that the most significant change is one of spirit. Once residents began to take pride in the community and gain self-respect, they also gained hope.

It would be foolish, however, to credit this change on the physical environment alone. There are also a number of social programs that have been coordinated with the physical changes. The physical form provides a framework that enables residents to re-establish a neighborhood.

Creating New Addresses for Public Housing

Generally, public housing projects do not have the richness and clarity of urban structure found in a neighborhood like Ghent. Although Diggs Town now has a series of neighborhood streets and courts as addresses, it is still a bounded project and not part of a mixed-use, mixed-income community in the same way that the various neighborhood streets of Ghent are. The challenge, then, is to find strategies that can enable public housing projects to become part of larger, stable, mixed-income neighborhoods. In Norfolk, the city established a citizen task force, led by two city council members, that suggested several ideas.

The first step is to expand the boundaries of the planning effort to identify both strengths and weaknesses in the larger community. Positive elements, such as churches, schools, community centers and civic buildings can be used as a means to create new addresses. By establishing partnerships with the institutions and with both private and nonprofit community-based developers, a comprehensive revitalization can be accomplished in which the public housing is only one of many components.

Focus on the institutions as anchors and create a framework of public space that makes them the visible focal points of the community. Always bound these open spaces with streets and make sure the churches and schools have a dignified setting.

Build new housing along these new addresses that have been created with houses or apart-
ments that have the character and image of a
good local neighborhood.

Add infill development on vacant and deteriorated properties with buildings that are consistent with the image of the community.

Remodel the remaining public housing structures to have the essential elements of a good address with streets, porches, front yard amenities and well-defined back yards.

Bicentennial Place: A New Address to Revive an Old Neighborhood

Bicentennial Place is a new block-long street in Fairfax, an aging Victorian neighborhood on the Near East Side of Cleveland, Ohio. It connects two existing blocks that have a mixture of recently constructed infill houses and rehabilitated and restored nineteenth-century homes.

Along this street, new houses have been fitted carefully onto a sequence of empty lots.

The houses on Bicentennial Place (the name celebrates Cleveland’s two-hundredth anniversary) demonstrate the many housing programs the city offers to encourage the revitalization of troubled neighborhoods. They serve as model homes for a sales program that will offer houses scattered throughout Fairfax at a wide range of prices.

The new street has exactly the same cross section as the historic streets. The twenty-four-foot-wide curbs permit parking on both sides and slow moving, two-way traffic. This is narrower than current city standards but was approved because of the low volume of traffic and the fact that it is based on the existing streets in the neighborhood. There is a three-foot-wide tree lawn between the sidewalk and the curbs.

The houses are set back ten feet from the sidewalk to permit a small front lawn and an ample front porch. The front facade of the new houses line up to create the edge of the public space.

The cross section does not include alleys (most of Cleveland’s traditional neighborhoods do not have alleys), so access to garages must be from the street. The key, therefore, is not to interrupt the continuity of house facades with garage doors, a problem whose difficulty was compounded by the narrow forty-foot-wide lots. Therefore, the front-loaded garages are set back twenty feet behind the front facade, with a maximum ten-foot-wide driveway interrupting the front yard.
While developing the master plan for Bicentennial Village and the detailed house designs, we engaged in a broad-based public process with extensive participation by the many block clubs in the neighborhood. We learned that there were many vacant lots on which terrible things took place and, therefore, that the area was perceived to be unsafe.

But when people talked about safe streets, they talked of windows and porches overseeing the activity of the street. A woman said, “I love my porch because I am a nosy neighbor. When I sit on my porch, I knew what is going on in the street. And I know that when I am not sitting on my porch, there are things that are going on in the street that would not be going on if I were sitting on my porch.” To which a man in the meeting replied, “The best security system is a nosy neighbor.” Therefore, when we developed a pattern book to make sure the essential elements of good street were incorporated in the design of houses, the primary criteria were to serve the interests of nosy neighbors.1

The new street has another important community purpose. In this part of Fairfax, the blocks are extraordinarily long—1,200 feet, instead of the more conventional 500 to 700 feet. However, we know from Jane Jacobs and other observers of neighborhood life that short blocks are better for building communication among neighbors than long blocks. Bicentennial Place connects the people of several streets and creates a shared focus for them.2

The three-dimensional character of the cross section is typical of Victorian neighborhoods. New houses without the essential qualities of the adjacent historic ones would not succeed in creating the address. The pattern book we developed calls for houses that will both harmonize with and enhance the existing houses. It calls for steeply pitched gable roofs facing the street and full-size porches with some decorative elements.

Because there will be a wide range of house designs (with a range of prices so that various income groups can afford them), it is essential to create a unified character and imageable address in which the differences are easily absorbed.

Houses by Habitat for Humanity have been modified from the standard model to have these essential elements. They will stand side by side with market-rate houses and restored Victorians as respectable members of the community.

Also part of the master plan are a series of village greens and street corners that combine residential uses with retail and institutional uses. These are anchored by landmarks such as churches and located at key intersections. Emmanuel Place will be developed by Emmanuel Church and includes church-sponsored housing over...
address has a different range of home types, but within the town you will find apartments renting for $650 a month across the street from large, $300,000 houses, which in turn are adjacent to small cottages, which are on the very same street as modest townhouses.

Our role, after the master plan was done, was to develop design guidelines that would ensure both quality and harmony among these various housing types. Many of the houses and town-

ground floor space that is a mixture of retail and church educational programs. The image in the drawing indicates a new address based on the architectural character of the church.

Celebration: Traditional Addresses for a New Town
The images of the neighborhood street are an integral part of the success of Celebration, the new town being developed in Orlando, Florida, by The Walt Disney Company. Celebration is a landmark project because it challenges some of the most negative and destructive aspects of the way communities have been built in the past 50 years.

By providing a wide mix of types and price of housing in one small area, the town has demonstrated that mixed-income communities can be revived as part of American culture. The reason people are accepting this in Celebration is because of the quality of the address and the sense of community it represents.

The first phase is a village with 800 apartments, townhouses and houses. The master plan, by Robert A.M. Stern and Cooper Robertson Partners, creates a series of beautiful addresses, each with its own character and identity. Each house is being built by merchant builders with their own standard plans and elevations. The Celebration pattern book, like the traditional ones on which it is modeled, establishes patterns for building good houses and a good neighborhood. It is meant to be seen as part of marketing the development rather than a regulatory tool that inhibits the builder.

The focus of Celebration’s pattern book is the creation of neighborly streets and public spaces. There are community patterns and architectural patterns. The community patterns establish setbacks and placement of key architectural elements, such as the central volume of the house, which contains the front door; porches (if appropriate) and landscape elements.
Although the cross sections vary for each type of community space, they are coordinated to establish a harmony of scale and style among the different addresses. The more expensive homes might be larger, but the scale of the parts of the house would be similar throughout the smallest houses. It is the harmony among the elements that create the community space—the address—that makes it possible to have a great diversity of type and size of house.

The architectural patterns include six architectural styles that are based on architecture indigenous to the Southeastern U.S. and provide the essential elements necessary to create a good neighborhood address. For example, windows are carefully designed to be dominant on facades so that they can serve as symbols of human presence and in “eyes on the street.” The detail of cornices is specified to the height of houses and the profile of the roof define the boundaries of the space. Porches not only provide comfortable places to sit but also represent the individual families that support the street.

A Revival of American Urbanism

Celebration's marketing a success indicates that the creation of a sense of community is regaining importance in American Life. Home buyers are paying more for a smaller house because they say they want to be part of a community, not simply owners of a house in an anonymous subdivision. This sense of community is most visible in the character of the neighborhood streets, squares, parks and of the town.

In Fairfax, restoring the now ruined image of its neighborhood streets has been the means of bringing together the residents and leadership of the community in an effort to re-establish Fairfax as a mixed income and vital community.

In Digg's Town, the transformation of barren spaces into a series of neighborhood streets and courts has enabled residents to come together to deal with the community's problems.

These three efforts are in very different regions of the U.S. and involve people from a wide range of economic and social conditions. Yet, the image of a comfortable, safe and sociable neighborhood street, park or square is central to their success.

In each effort, the focus of the design effort was to create an address that appeals to a wide range of people—to encourage them to take a risk and move back to an urban neighborhood like Fairfax, or to become part of a new town like Celebration, or to think differently about a public housing project like Digg's Town.

Gustave Caillebotte's painting helps us understand the complexity of such spaces and therefore how to create the cross section of wonderful addresses.