

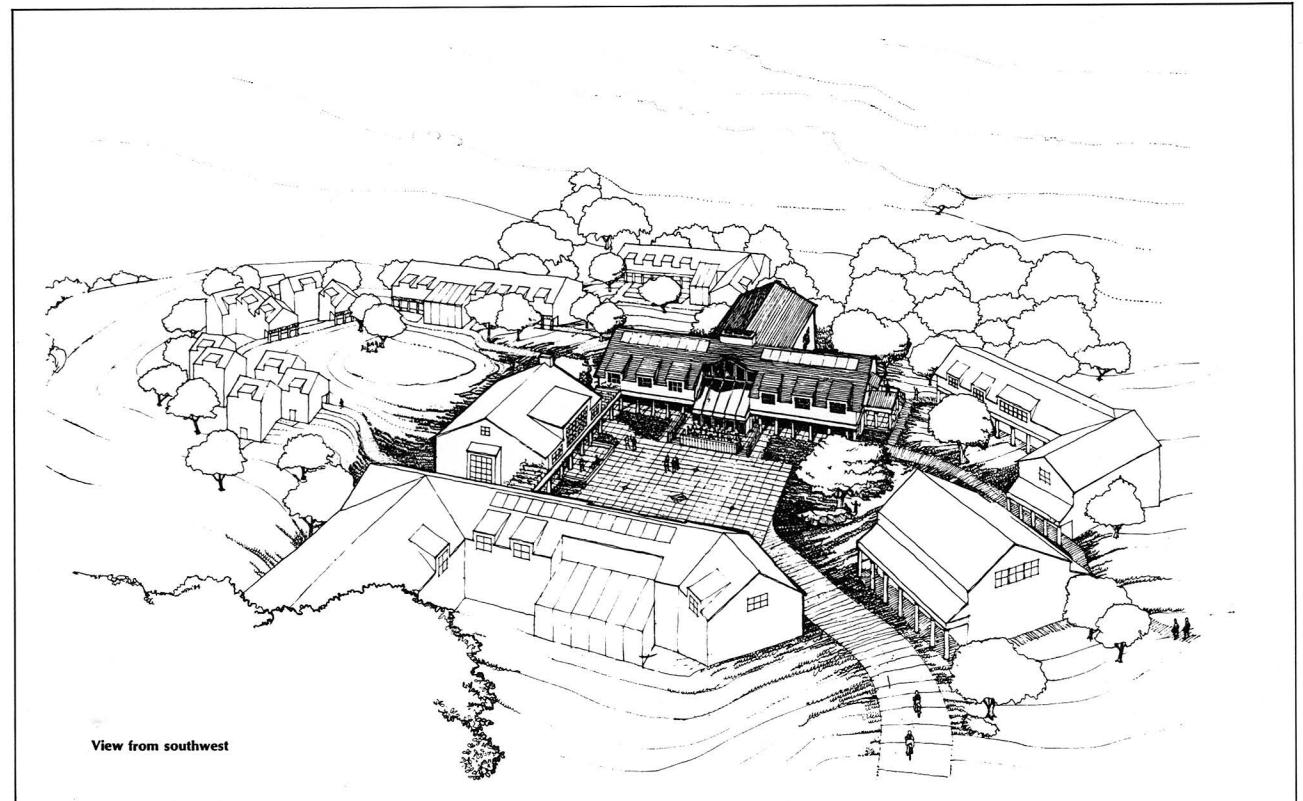
# The Architecture of Accomodation

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The design process is complex. As a teacher of architecture, one of my tasks is the simplification of this process: the development of a clear set of objectives and the design of a series of tasks which move the assigned project toward completion. At Jacobson/Silverstein/Winslow, we always hope that an actual project will proceed with the same clarity; in fact the process is complicated by the interaction of client and personal objectives. We do not simply follow a set of design guidelines to produce a building; for us, each project is a story and a struggle. An example of this process — the frustrations and rewards it contains — can be seen in our current project: the design of student housing for World College West.

## Background

World College West is a small liberal arts college in Marin County, California. When we became involved with the project, the school was housed in former military barracks at Fort Cronkhite, California. While the setting was spectacular — beaches to the west and meadows to the east — the accommodations left much to be desired. The buildings were standard barracks construction: double loaded corridors, uniform rooms, shoebox-like forms with no concessions to comfort (no indoor plumbing or thermal or acoustic insulation). Everyone from staff to students was anxious to move to the new campus on a hillside



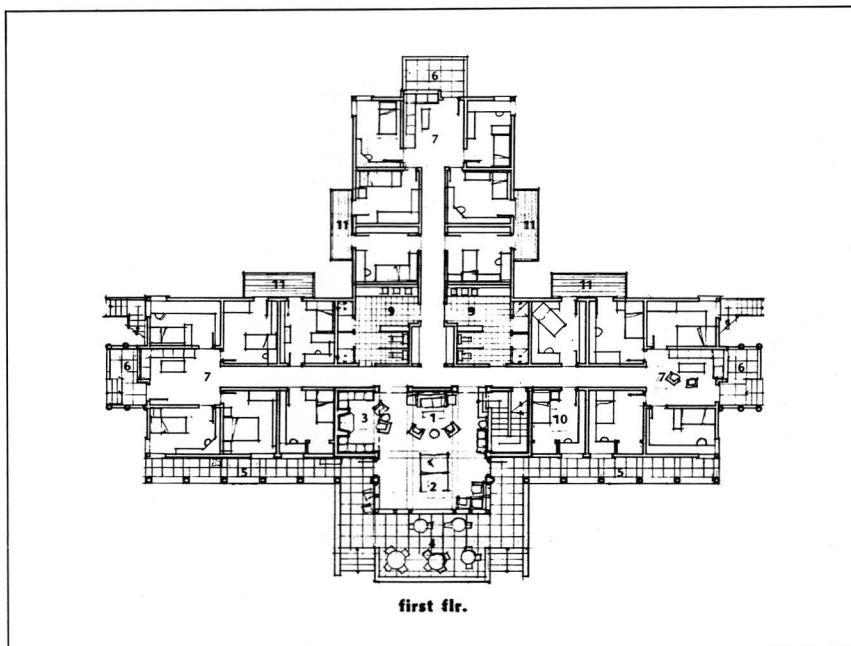
1. Aerial View of World College West — Student Housing

in northern Marin County. The beach adjacent to Fort Conkhite, would be replaced with wooded paths and sunny slopes, and construction was underway on a "campus center" — a library, classroom building, and dining commons. Housing, however, would be a replay of the barracks: a series of temporary trailers.

J/S/W was hired to tackle the housing problem. As often happens, the political situation posed more

challenges than the design problem. The architect of the first phase was not retained because of problems with both the process and the product. World College West is a school which advocates active involvement in the working of the world. The hope of the administration was that students would be heavily involved in all aspects of both the design and the building process. The original architect preferred a more conventional approach in which client involvement

was limited to early stages of program development, and "real" design was done in the office and presented as a finished product. The buildings themselves, while pleasing to the clients in many ways, exceeded the budget and presented major problems during construction. Our tasks as the new guard were to involve the students in the project, to design buildings compatible with those already on the site, and to work within a limited budget.



2. First Floor Plan of First Residence

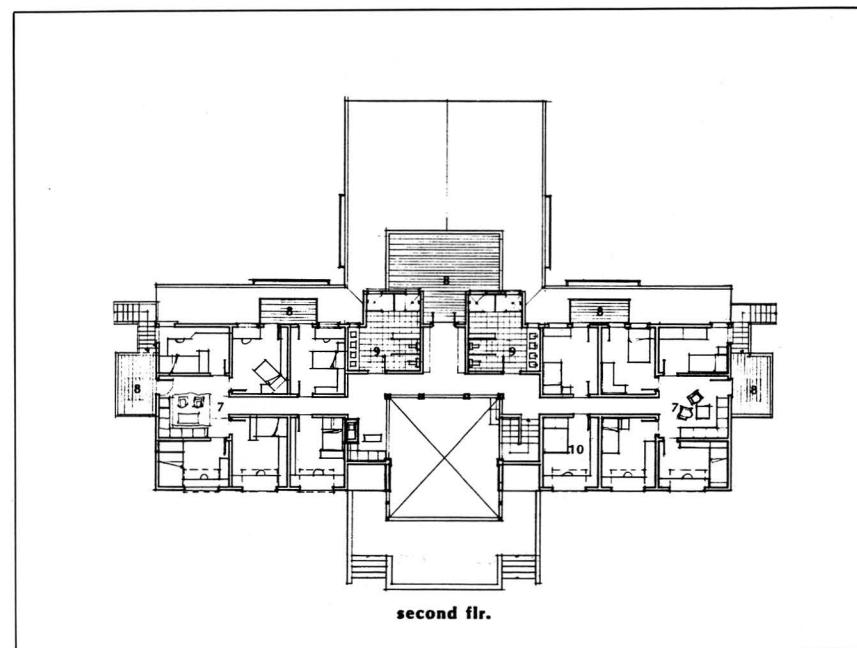
#### Office Philosophy

This seemed to be an ideal job: as an office, our highest value is creating a building which expresses the client. The interactive process is the basis of all of our work. The challenge of designing within a context allows us to see each building as a part of the fabric which makes up the environment. Working within a budget seems to be our fate. The detailed aspects of the design also suited our background and philosophy. The buildings were to be passive solar. The gardens would be an "edible landscape" supplemented by native plants. Automobiles would be limited

to a drop off area, and an extensive path system for bicycles and pedestrians would be developed. Where possible, students would be involved in the actual building process. Each of these issues had been important in our past work. World College West offered an opportunity to integrate many concerns in a single project.

#### Major Objectives

We began, enthusiastically, by holding a series of meetings with students, staff, and administration. The immediate task was to design housing for fifty students, but future



3. Second Floor Plan of First Residence

plans included housing for four hundred students, recreational facilities, and a student commons. The area available for construction was large and our first task was to create a site plan which expressed the students' life at W.C.W. The meetings produced a list of major objectives: 1) maintain open space and preserve as many trees as possible; 2) create housing which expresses the experimental nature of the college — solar buildings, innovative construction techniques, interesting forms; 3) provide a variety of housing alternatives — recognize that students' needs and values change over their years in college; 4) provide a private room for

every student with an individual character; 5) strongly relate interior spaces to the outdoors; and 6) allow for personalization of spaces, in rooms and buildings.

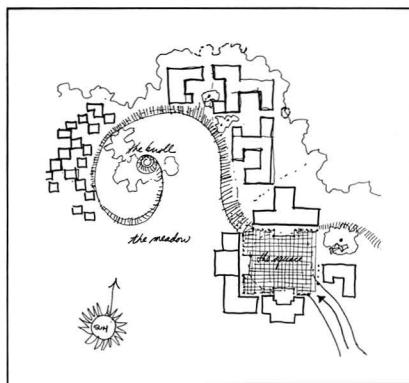
Also, a variety of less specific goals evolved from these discussions. The building site is on a hill partially visible from the freeway; buildings should be concealed as much as possible from that vantage point. The architectural history of the area (regional farm buildings) should be a consideration in the development of forms. And, the ideology of the college — learning as life experience — should be expressed in the design.

## Tasks

Our strategy was to turn these objectives into a series of patterns. These Patterns, combined with a series of patterns from *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander, Murray Silverstein, Sara Ishikawa et al., produced by pattern language for the project — our tool for the presentation of concepts without specific architectural forms. Patterns were developed, presented, modified, and expanded quickly as we used them to explain our evolving design concept to the clients.

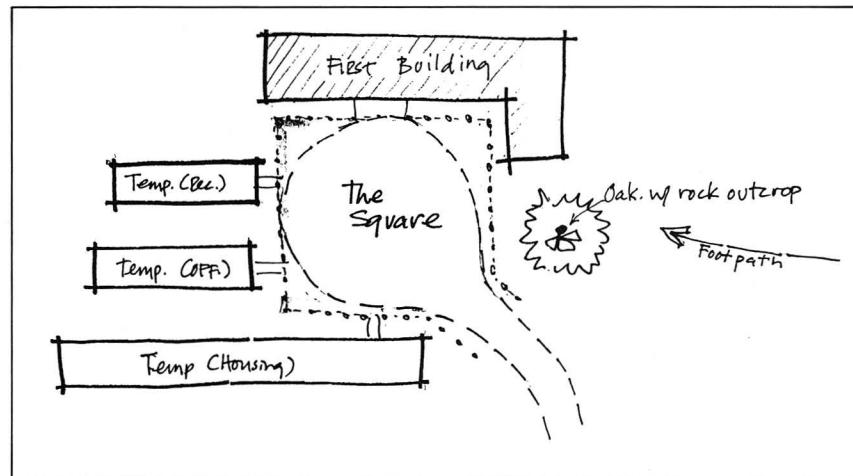
## The Concept

The "Spiral Path" became a metaphor for the process students follow through the college. At the origin "The Square" is the focus of pedestrian activity and the center of freshmen living spaces. Further along the path "The Meadow" evolved from our desire to maintain open space while preserving existing trees. "The Solar Core" responded to the desire for a technically advanced building attuned to the environment and also allowed students to be involved in the construction of a common area. "Progression of Places" defined the qualities of the spaces required for each living group and became the basis for our site plan.



4. Diagrammatic Sketch of Complex

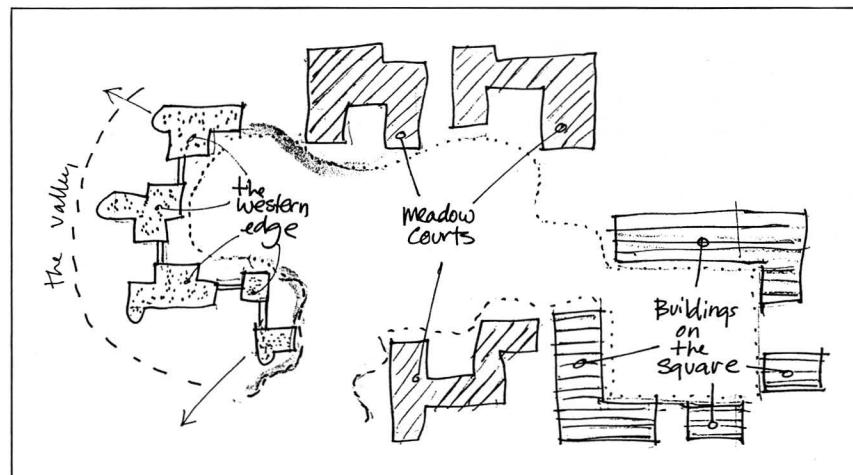
The strongest natural feature of the site was a small knoll topped with a cluster of oak trees; it seemed to be a



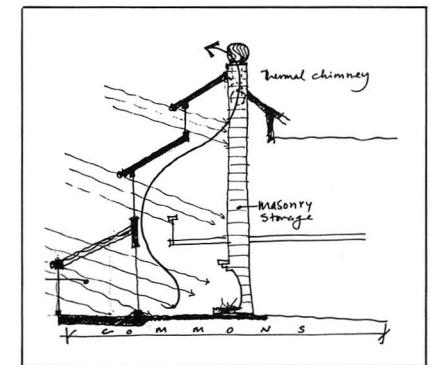
5. Diagram of The Square

natural destination. In contrast, the strongest manmade feature was an asphalt turnaround, sixty feet in diameter, already installed at the entry to the site; we began to see it as the origin. The process through the college is not linear: we saw it as a spiral path in which progress toward the destination is slow and proceeds through a series of events before achieving the end. Our site plan strategy was to organize the site to reflect this process. Freshmen would gather at "The Square" where they would begin the process of becoming part of a community. While each student would have an individual room to allow privacy, common spaces would be designed to encourage interaction. Students could meet in a

variety of places, from the shared commons for each "family" of six students to the "Square," the active center of the community. From the "Square" a view of the knoll would lead one deeper into the site. A large meadow was kept open and the path would skirt its edge to the junior housing in "Meadow Courts." (Sophomores spend the year abroad). The "Courts" represent a shift in orientation: they focus outward into the woods and are entered from small courtyards enfronting the meadow path. Life here is seen as quieter, more contemplative. As the meadow path winds behind the knoll the senior cottages begin. Built like small houses and equipped with kitchens and living rooms, they offer the most idiosyn-



6. Diagram of The Spatial Progression



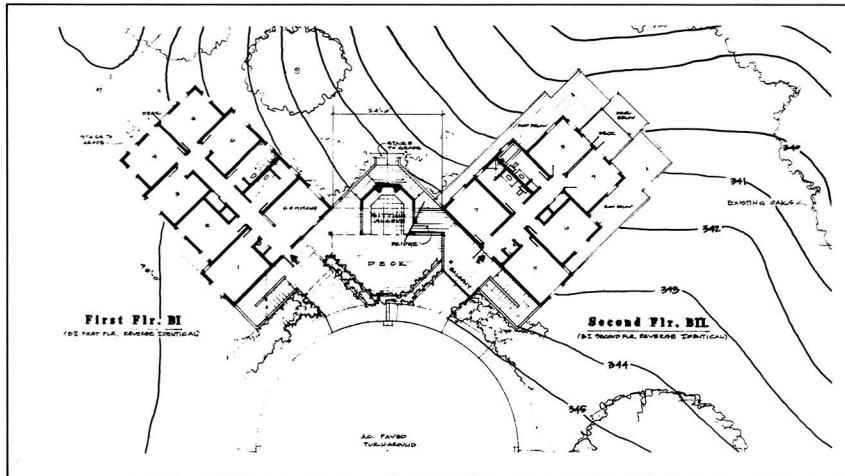
7. Diagram of The Solar Core

cratic housing. Students living here may raise and cook their own food, control the thermal aspects of the building and experiment with a variety of lifestyles. They have almost reached the end of the path which winds to the top of the knoll and a view of the world beyond. The Concept.

## The Reality

The Reality: the site plan lies in the future. Our immediate task is the design of a building, preferably prototypical, to house students nine months from now. The administration, while enthusiastic about student and staff involvement in theory, has not received the financing they had hoped and now want a much lower budget strategy as quickly as possible. Many of the patterns which reflected ideal conditions can only be included in skeleton form, and student/staff meetings in which philosophy of design was an issue have been replaced with meetings with the planning board dominated by concerns of the alignment of plumbing walls and the shaving of square footage.

The building we designed for fifty students with a large solar commons must be reduced to house twenty students as efficiently as possible. The arcades, the greenhouse, the "Square" must all be delayed or minimized. The basic patterns — private rooms, family scale living



8. First Floor Plan of Student Housing

groups, small bathrooms, relation to outdoor space, personalization of spaces — have become even more important as we struggle to make the building tighter. We aim for efficiency. Our objectives have been redefined.

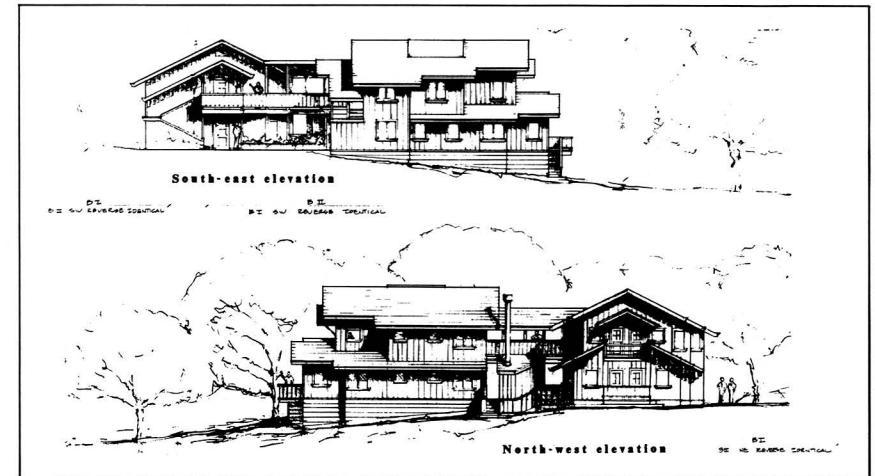
Our first attempt to maximize utility and minimize budget produces a tight building. By breaking the structure into two pieces, we have created a grand entry with stairs at the sides, a south facing deck, a bridge, and a "cave" complete with fireplace. The potential contractor praises us, but the planning committee states the obvious: the building too closely resembles the barracks that the college is trying to leave behind. The outdoor spaces may be wonderful, the rooms may be fine, the buildings may even look somewhat "vernacular," but as objects they look more like the past than the future.

Uncomfortable with this design, we are struggling to accommodate both the complaints and the budget. Caught between the administrators who urge minimum upgrading and the planning board which continues to want a building which is expressive of forward thinking, we strive to design a building that satisfies everyone. Unlike the site planning process which seemed to move continually forward, the design of this building moves in fits and starts. We

juggle objectives and priorities, constantly redefining the tasks necessary for completion.

The building expands and contracts, each force producing a new response. The resulting structure is barnlike, having a roof which steps back to express the form of the rooms within. Each room has special windows, and many have space for a loft in the roof. We retained the entry court but have designed a future solar greenhouse to be built by students as its central feature. The "Arcade" is present only in vestigial form, but the "Entablature" remains. Rooms do have individual character and will be personalizable.

Are we satisfied? Not entirely. Some of our design objectives have been met, but too many have been postponed to an uncertain future. The



9. Student Housing Elevations

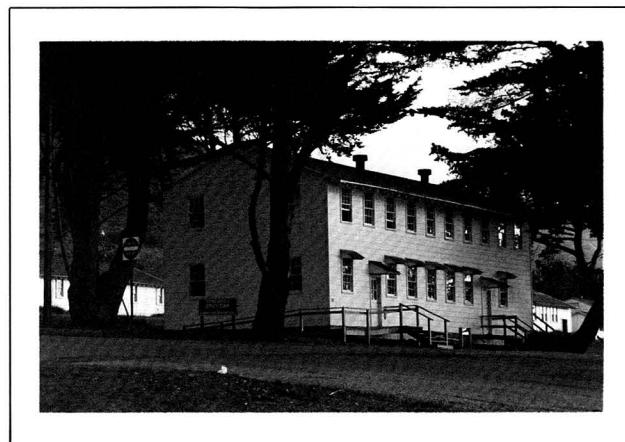
buildings will have some wonderful places and some that are merely serviceable. Perhaps most disappointing is the difficulty of linking this new structure with the existing temporary buildings. The lively arcade we imagined will wait for future development. And the ideal of designing a prototypical building which can respond to site and user specific needs has been abandoned in the interests of economy. We have been almost too accommodating.

Every building is a learning experience. The methods we learned in school, the methods we now teach, are still at the base of our process. The major difference between school and reality lies in the human component of the process. Real clients are not static. Their needs, goals, hopes budgets all change as the design

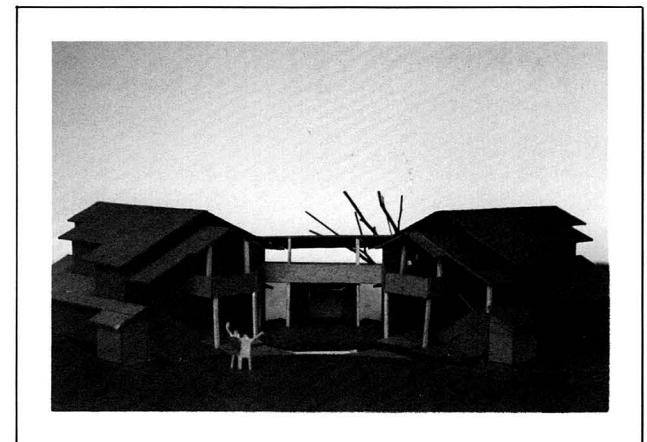
evolves — often in direct response to the emerging design. We have both more and less influence than we ever imagined.

As we look back on this project in years to come, the process will once again seem clear; in retrospect our objectives will be apparent, unclouded by the tasks of the moment. This building will become a part of our personal history, and a part of the environment we design in response to. Its power will lie in the way it responds to its users and becomes a part of their experience.

The story of World College West is still being written. Its conclusion will only come when the buildings are inhabited.



10. Existing Housing of World West College



11. Perspective of Housing (Southern View)