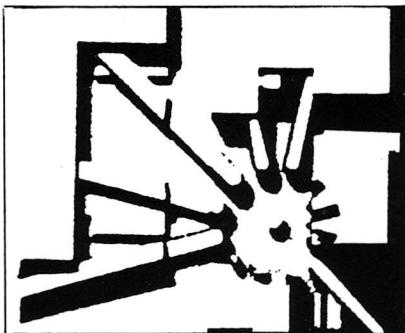


The Indigent as King

Eric Owen Moss



On New York's Lower East Side in the midst of burned out tenements and drugged out neighbors, Adam Purple, notorious Manhattan eccentric, willed his cosmological vision into existence. In 10 years Adam designed, planted, fertilized and nurtured a public garden/oasis/favela — flowers, trees, crops, and birds — an astonishing non-sequitur amongst the brick, graffiti and garbage of the neighborhood.

Beginning as a squatter in 1975, Adam has extended his garden oasis to 15,000 square feet. The garden combines a dose of '60s pop-culture and sloganeering with a colossal act of physical labor. However ephemeral the theory, the physical result is impressive. Residents of the Lower East Side can now amble in a quixotic public garden, a consequence of Adam's energy and belief.

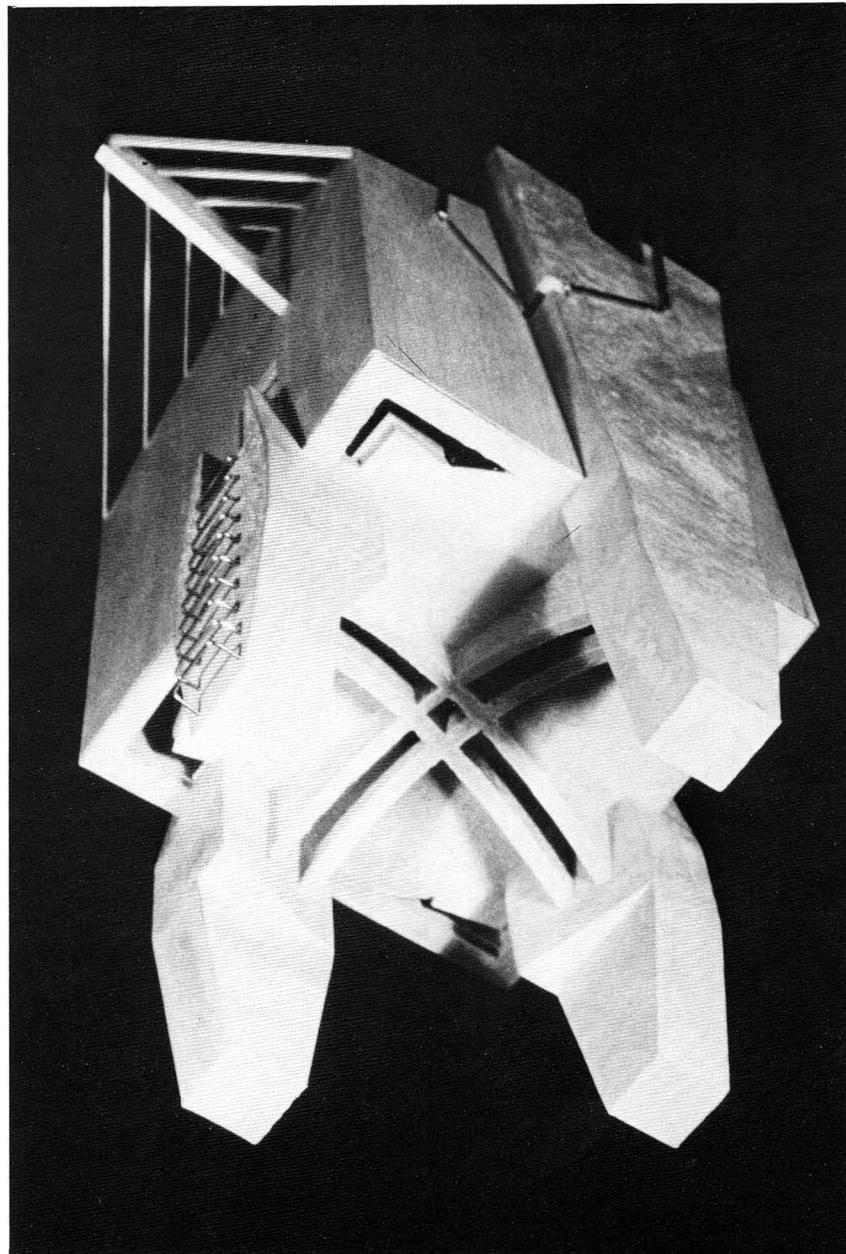
Adam conceived the garden as a series of concentric circles, footpaths two feet wide alternating with beds of planting 5'-6" in width. Each planted ring is subdivided into equal segments. Each new ring adds an additional segment. The

first ring has five segments, the second six, and so on. As a ring is added, the garden's area increases exponentially. According to Adam's vision the garden will expand indefinitely, analogous, he feels, to a universe that does likewise.

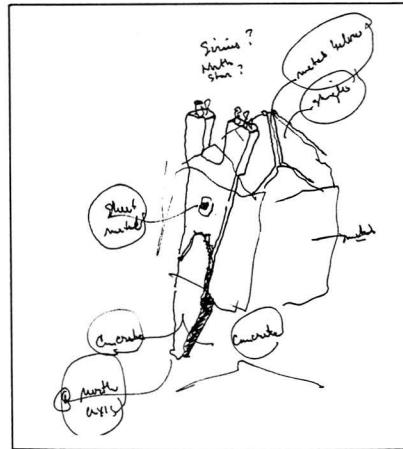
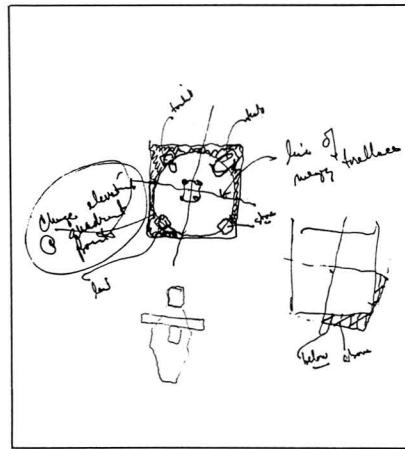
Ground zero, the center of the circle, represents the antithesis of Hiroshima's ground zero — a center of life not a center of death. Adam's center is a double Yin-Yang plan composed of purple ornamental basil and white dusty miller.

As Adam's eighth ring reached completion, the local Housing Authority determined that a substantial block of low cost units belonged on the garden site. Attempting to detour the Housing Authority's intentions, design proposals were solicited by a New York Gallery which would permit the garden to continue to grow in accord with Adam's rules, and simultaneously include the needed housing.

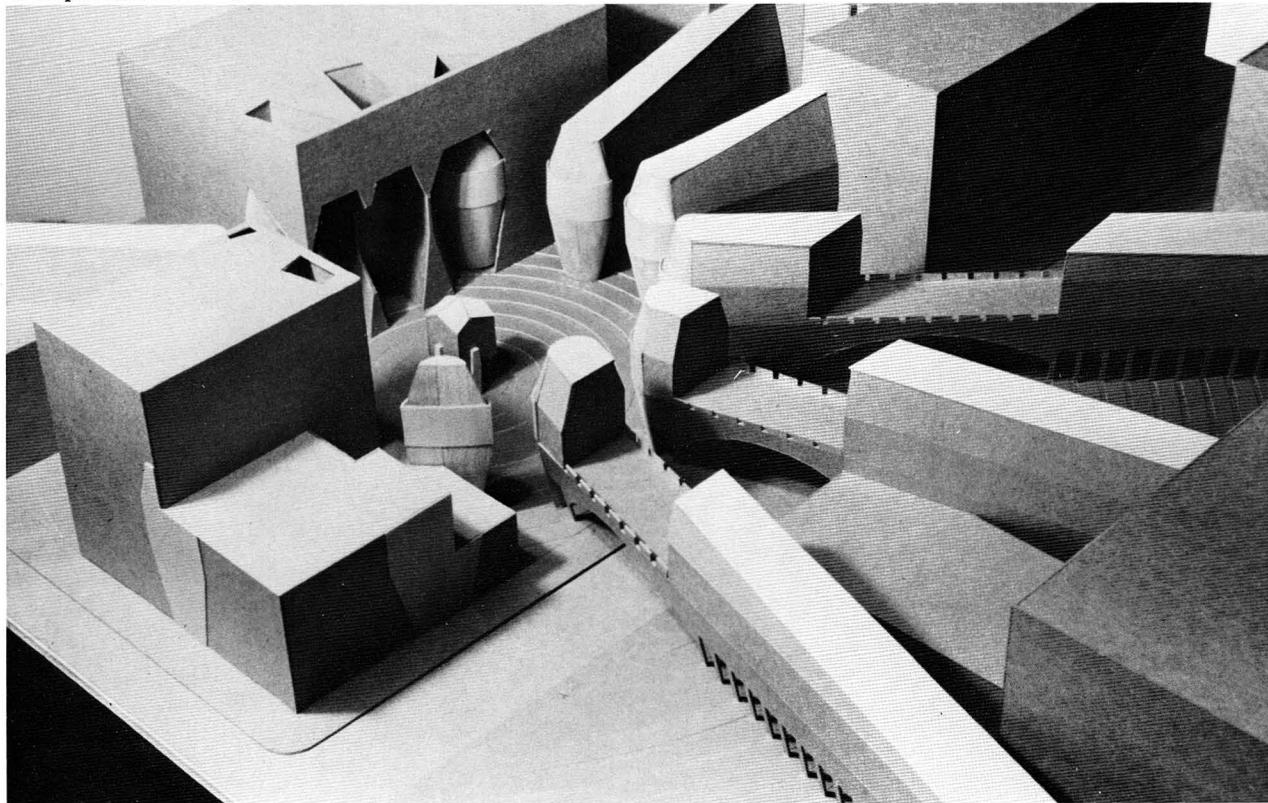
I proposed demarcating the original garden — the perimeter of the eighth ring — with 12 bollard-towers 55 feet tall, from which the housing units would grow, raised on legs above the system of concentric walks and planting. The apartment blocks, are positioned as radii from the Yin-Yang center, spaced at 30 degree plan intervals. Where existing tenements interrupt the radial order, a carved analogue is designed, a sectional inverse of the slab apartments. These inverse buildings would be cut



Worm's eye view of apartment.



Conceptual sketches of apartment.



Model showing site.

out of rehabed masonry tenements. Where the street intervines, a bridge link is incorporated and the apartment blocks continue.

The buildings reiterate and extend Adam's conceptual laws, designate the position of the original garden and allow the garden to grow as planned. Dual manifestations of the apartment type — the block, and its carved out inverse — embody the Yin-Yang principle. On the perimeter wall of the apartment

buildings enclosing the two block site, a projected sectional slice through each apartment block is etched in the masonry, a distorted signification of the special presence within the site area.

Adam's consistent attempt was to correlate the conceptual order of his garden with his cosmological ideal. The 12 column points that originate the housing blocks represent the months of the year and the hours of the day. The

column positions from a conceptual sundial. The XII, due north — the only column without a building — is positioned 15 degrees off the city grid, establishing an accurate cardinal points reference for the solar clock. The rigor of the city grid (and the concomitant placement of the old masonry tenements) remains a pragmatic force in determining the plan organization of garden and apartments. The cardinal points orientation, older and newer, has a transcendent conceptual role.

Adam Purple, the constructive indigent, creates from the city's discards. In so doing, he comments on what the city disowns, and suggests different priorities.

As a final elaboration on housing in the garden, I propose the construction of an indigent way-station, the archetypal house of Ismael, which will be built at the ground-zero center, lifted over the purple and white Yin-Yang. This house, a single room, will be maintained by the New York Department of Parks, and will accommodate a new indigent boarder each night.

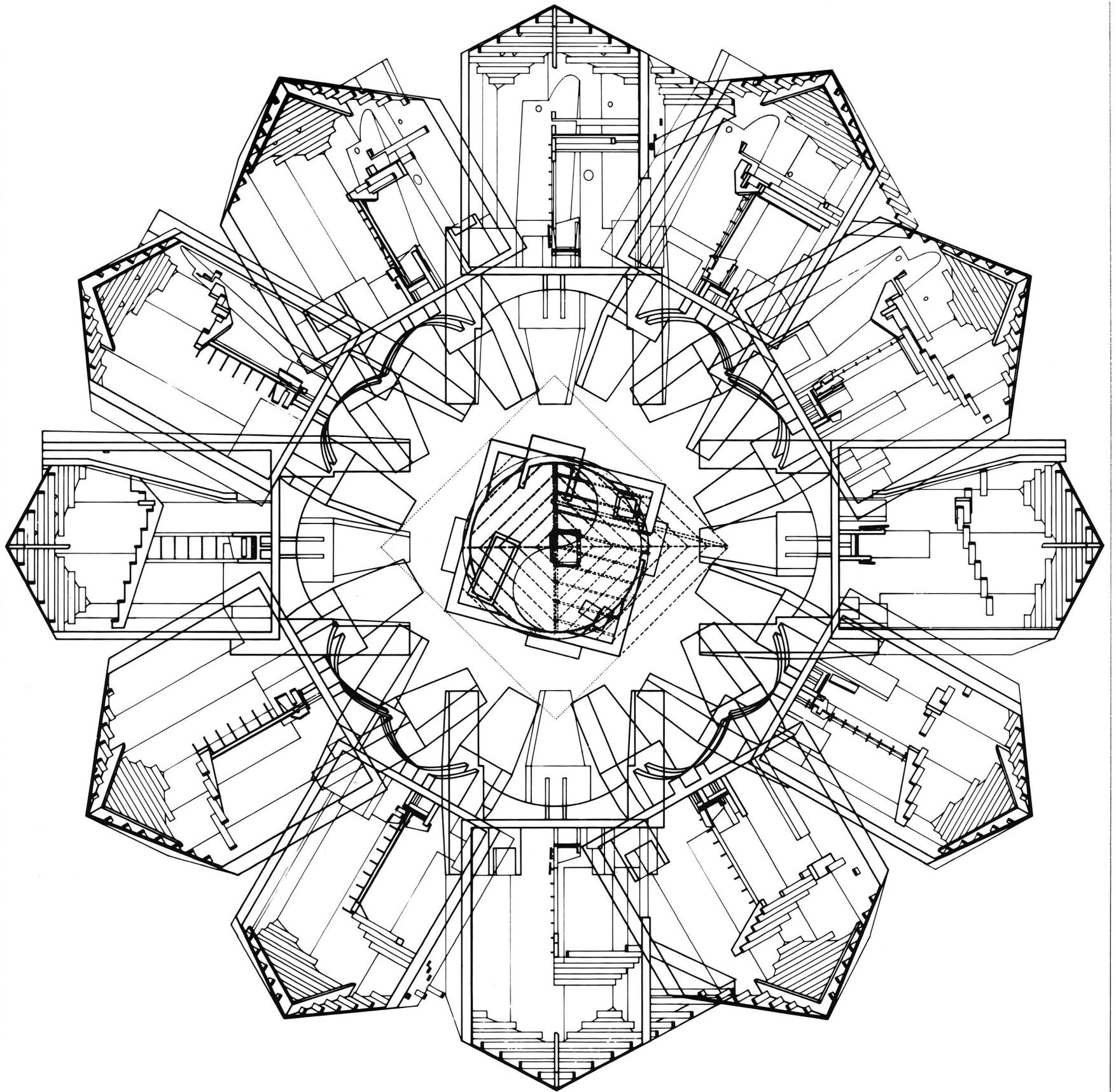
The room is supported on concrete legs located at tangent points to the Yin-Yang circle. The form of the legs is a flat analogue to the rounded towers.

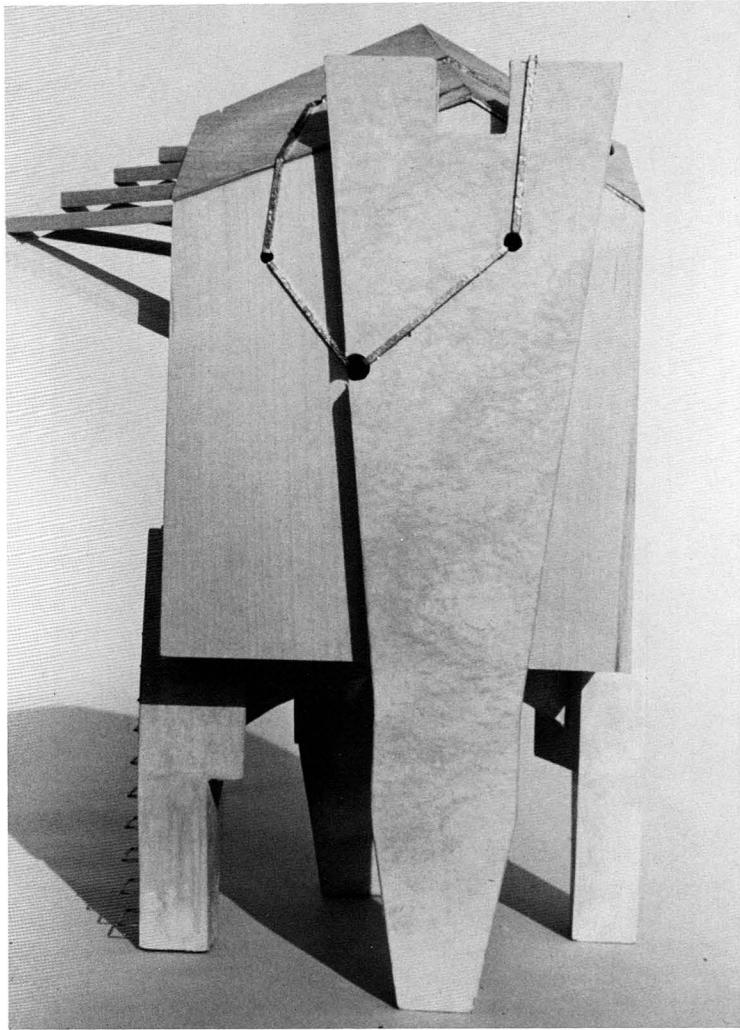
The concrete-column capitals turn 15 degrees in plan, placing the beams supporting the concrete floor of the house on the cardinal points. These beams curve in elevation, the same radius as that of the Yin-Yang circle.

The structure itself is a 13-foot concrete square in plan, floor and walls aligned with the city grid. Walls and roof are plywood. A theoretical pyramid roof is turned in plan to the cardinal points. This hypothetical roof is clipped off at the wall lines of the house which remain on the city grid, creating a hybrid roof and wall type. The theoretical roof becomes tangible beyond the walls only when it appears as a trellace-canopy over the east wall entry to the room.

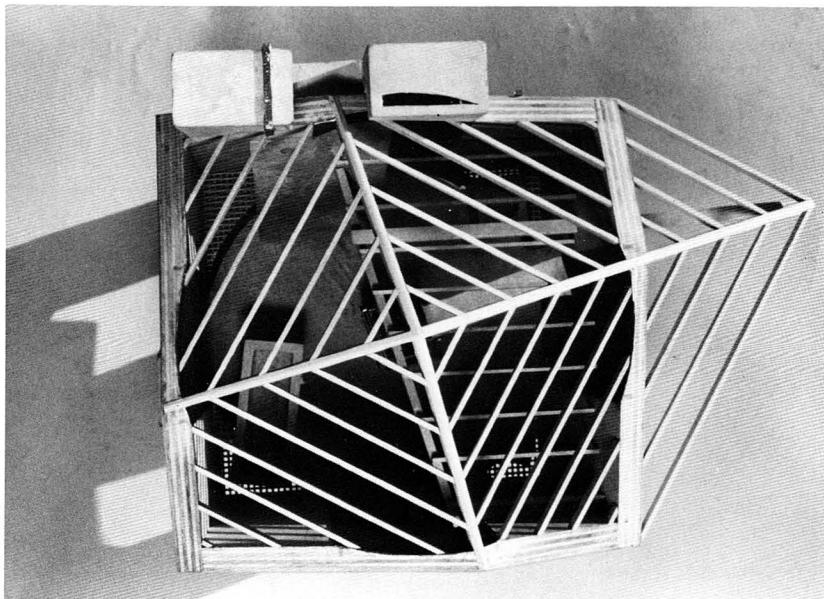
The ridge beam lines of the roof restate the cardinal points order of the solar clock columns as do the floor beams.

Should the city fail to maintain the structure, its wooden walls and roof will disintegrate leaving the concrete columns, platform and beams as Adam's exegesis.

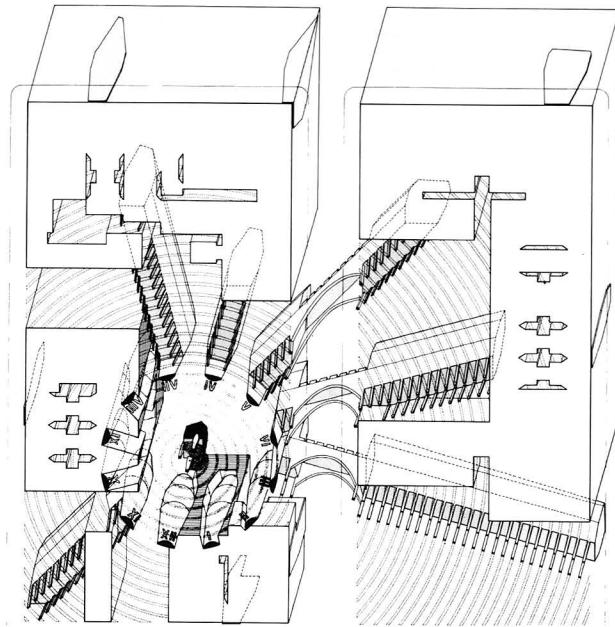




Model of apartment.



Aerial view of apartment.



Worm's eye view of site.

The house is entered from the east, up the ladder-column, through a rectilinear puncture in the wood wall. Here the indigent of the day finds a wooden chair located at the center of the room. The corner posts of the chair are oriented to the cardinal points. The legs penetrate the concrete floor so the chair cannot be moved. Two chair legs hold the rungs of a ladder which leads up the chair back to a sleeping loft above where a mattress is tossed. The chair is painted purple, acknowledging Adam and his regal guests.

Toilet, sink and bathtub — concrete extensions of the floor — are attached at the corners of the room, positioned without particular plan orientation. On the north wall is a concrete fireplace whose stack is formed by vertically extending the north column supporting the concrete floor.

An internal copper cylinder repeats the ground zero circle. The metal cylinder slices the wood walls at their plan mid-points, extending vertically, cutting the roof and creating four skylight slits. In the corners of the room, the copper cylinder forms a curved wainscoat which secures the utilitarian apparatus. Between this curved metal plain and the right angle corners that enclose the

room, wooden grills ventilate the space, and allow the scent of the Yin-Yang flowers to penetrate the room from the garden.

King Cepheus is a seven-star constellation whose head is about 12 degrees from Polaris, the north star. Some students of the cosmos believe that the stars on the west side of Cepheus will successively become the north star as the earth continues to tilt on its axis over milleneum. In celebration of this constellation King and its north star/cardinal north co-ordinates, the north wall and roof panels of the Indigent House are punctured with round windows whose position and size are analogous to the stars in the Cepheus Constellation. These wall and roof cutouts compound the cosmological essence of the building, re-affirm the kingship of its occupant and, surprisingly, relate the essential building form to the abstract configuration of the constellation. The Cepheus constellation appears in the sky as an up-side-down abstract of the house with peaked roof. Rightside up, the very elevation of the House of the Indigent King.