

Prairie Avenue Housing

Chicago, Illinois

Paul Wilhelms

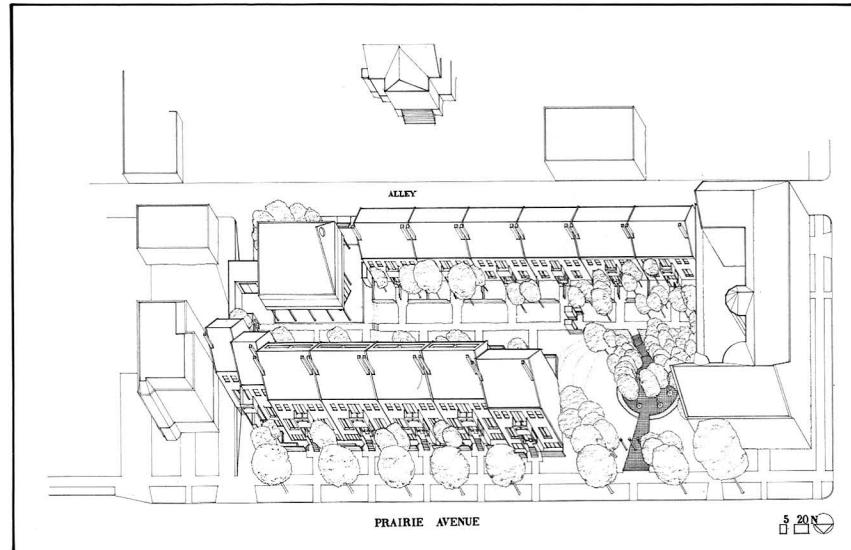
Critics: William Miller
Richard Wagner

"Every new architectural work is born in relation—no matter whether of continuity or antithesis to a symbolic context created by other works."

Manfredo Tafuri
*Theories and History
of Architecture*

The site for this infill housing project is a vacant lot in the Prairie Avenue Historic District adjacent to H. H. Richardson's Glessner house. This fashionable neighborhood has been radically altered; however, the streetscape has been reconstructed and the few surviving houses are in various stages of restoration. The program called for twenty-four dwelling units (each with its own outdoor area), 8,000 square feet of commercial office space, community hall, a major outdoor public space and on-site parking for thirty-eight cars. The small site and typical set-back requirements dictated a dense, highly structured organization. Many of the programmatic requirements were the antithesis of those that had made South Prairie Avenue a prestigious neighborhood a century ago when it was comprised entirely of grand, freestanding houses. One of the main issues, therefore, became how similar characteristics could be incorporated into the design.

The requirements for parking and offices were the most difficult



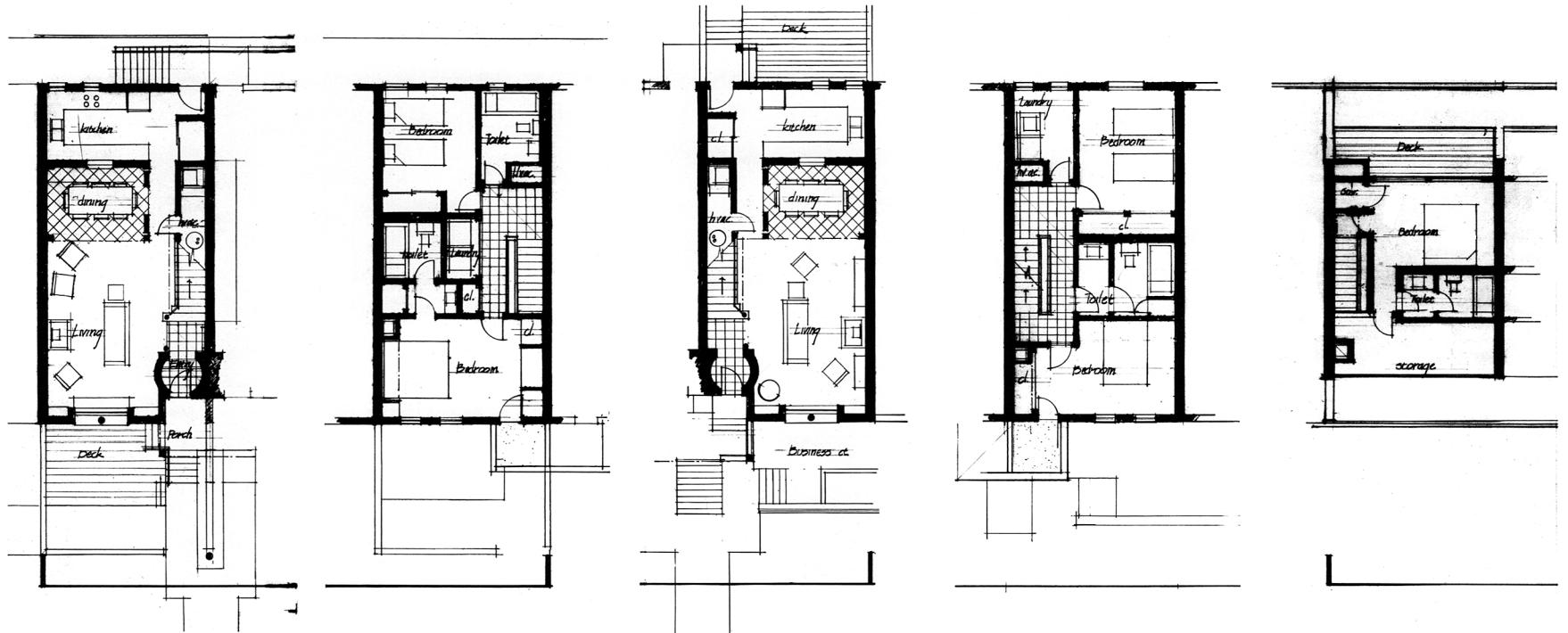
elements of the problem within this context. Thus, they are set partially below grade and made unobtrusive as possible. Circulation is kept discrete from the residential areas by providing parking entries and exits only on the south edge of the site. The office space, located below the eastern row of housing, is approached from Prairie Avenue. The semi-public spaces of the courtyard, walkway, and community building are reserved for

inhabitant use and pedestrian traffic.

The principal masses are composed so as to acknowledge both the existing buildings and defined exterior spaces. The housing units form walls, which bend on the south to allow a view of the Keith house, and which end short of the north boundary to create a small plaza. Along the alley the units stop short of the southern edge to provide space for the community

center and to give a view of the Clark house. The development of the exterior elevations and the location of building types are based on their potential role as visual elements on the site. The living units have a typical row house plan which segregates public and private spaces vertically. On the exterior the composition is a simple pattern using repeated elements. Details, such as the gate post, porch rail, door, and column, are developed for variety. The buildings sit on a rusticated concrete base, which pulls away in places to define entries to the offices and the outdoor areas of the living units. The housing is clad in granite with roofs of slate. In contrast, the community center has a more public presence, a more modern image, using glass and porcelain, and is sited as a freestanding object.

1. Southeastern view
2. First floor plan, two bedroom
3. Second floor plan, two bedroom
4. First floor plan, three bedroom
5. Second floor plan, three bedroom
6. Third floor plan, three bedroom
7. View through courtyard looking east
8. North-South section
9. View from Prairie Avenue
10. Courtyard elevation
11. Prairie Avenue elevation



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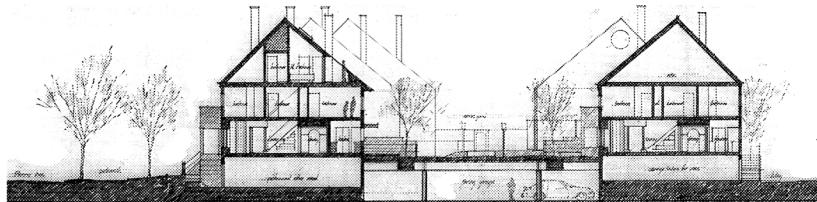
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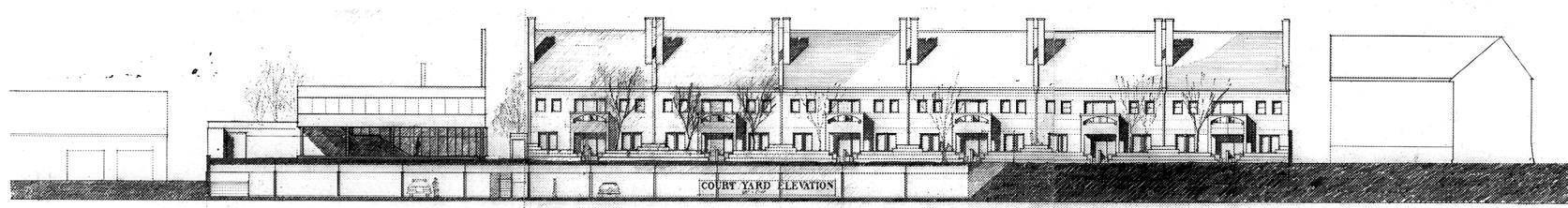
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