



The Infill House

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The paradoxical question posed by this issue's theme, namely, can any system of design values be relevant in a multicultural world, is cleverly constructed for the way in which it places the consideration of design squarely within the context of topical social issues. The scope of the discussion is expanded beyond that of a more narrow formalist discourse and instead implies the consideration of the built object's end-users, that is, those persons who experience buildings as part of the environment within which their lives unfold.

From our point-of-view outside of the academy, the validity of using generally accepted canonical architectural texts (both written and drawn) in architectural education in order to appreciate the fluidity of design values throughout history seems obvious, if for no other reason than to provide some cohesion to the profession via some shared body of knowledge; whether one accepts or rejects the value of these texts is a personal matter. Ultimately, designers must come to their projects with some frame of reference for the decision making process; as practitioners, we believe that a clear understanding of our

client's needs and wants contributes significantly to a project's operative system of values.

The infill house was designed specifically for placement on the narrow building lots of Northern Pennsylvania's small cities, where the nineteenth century housing stock was developed largely by the dominant coal and lumber industries on sites as small as 25' in width. The resulting urban fabric is a fairly dense pattern of two-story homes with front porches. Conforming to this typological antecedent, the infill house synthesizes the essential characteristics of the local housing stock, and is intentionally architecturally anonymous.

Because the narrow lots encourage a simple structural solution, the infill house is well suited as an affordable housing unit. Our local governments are viewing the infill house as a means of reconstituting the integrity of their urban fabric, re-investing in their existing infrastructures, re-building their tax bases, and re-populating their neighborhoods with young families who are particularly attracted to the services cities offer; furthermore, in terms

of sustainable development, the project suggests an alternative approach to creating new housing in this mountainous region where suburban sprawl is consuming precious farmland. Two units, one of which is adapted for accessibility for the wheel-chair bound, are currently under construction in a pilot project.

The affordable infill house project is an exercise in architectural reduction informed by an investigation into local urban housing typologies. As a design methodology, that is to say as a point of critical determinancy, our work proposes to re-present aspects of the architectural lexicon of the Pennsylvania landscape to a region which, because of its heavy-industrial history, has a cultural ambivalence towards its own past, and which therefore does not consciously connect a tradition of the past with a vision of its own future in the articulation of a culture of continuity.

In seeking to redress this state of cultural dis-connect which we perceive as fairly endemic in the older industrial parts of the nation, we look particularly to the natural beauty of the landscape, and to

the built forms that seem to populate it in a timeless way, resonating with the imagery of the old Pennsylvania typologies: barns, covered bridges, corn cribs, fieldstone hedge-rows.

The pondside house draws on the same language of forms found in the infill house, particularly as seen on its roadside elevation. The house is visible on its sloped wooded site from a distance, and is intended to evoke memories of the area's more enigmatic and rapidly disappearing historical structures; at the same time a certain modern aesthetic is introduced through the abstract and reductive nature of the agrarian archetypes which the house recalls.

As illustrated by the infill house and the pondside house, we see our architectural project in the longer term as an exploration into the reweaving of a local architectural culture, knitting the warp of traditions to the woof of progressive aspirations in an effort to re-establish a bridge of thematic architectural continuity across the interlude of an unsustained industrial era.





