

BOOK REVIEWS

A Book Review:

House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home, by Clare Cooper Marcus. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press (1995); 307 pages.

Rebecca S. Wood

The multifaceted character of housing is well accepted among housing researchers and educators. One of the characteristics of housing is the concept of home and the meaning a house has for its inhabitants beyond being a physical structure and providing shelter. *House as a Mirror of Self* is a creative and instructive look at the relationship between people and their living environments. In this book, Marcus presents the concept that our relationship to our homes is a reflection of ourselves and our life experiences and is, in essence, a reflection of the psyche. Through the inclusion of case studies and psychoanalytic and philosophical insights, *House as a Mirror of Self* beautifully portrays the complex connections people build between themselves and their living environment.

The format of the book progressively shows how, beginning in childhood and continuing throughout our adult lives, the close, affective connections with our physical environment are intimately interwoven into our relationships with people. The organization of the chapters in *House as a Mirror of Self* progress from early childhood experiences through those of adulthood. Each chapter contains case studies conducted by the author that serve to illustrate the psychological connection between people and their physical environments at various developmental stages. At the conclusion of each chapter, there are exercises, drawings, and questions to allow the reader to further investigate the concepts presented at each level. The final chapter explores the notion that the human spirit is constantly on a journey of discovery and that the home is involved in the process of finding a place for the soul.

The people interviewed for the case studies were young and old, rich and poor, owners and renters who lived in dwellings that varied in character from an inexpensive studio to a spacious mansion and whose location ranged from urban neighborhoods to remote rural settings. This diverse depiction of homes and their inhabitants serves to illustrate that no matter what our age, tenure, socioeconomic status, or choice of dwelling, there is a deeper meaning of home that impacts our psyche from infancy through adulthood. This deeper meaning is conveyed through our selection of housing type and

location, as well as items and materials used to personalize spaces in and around the home.

House as a Mirror of Self would be useful in a housing class that explored not only the multifaceted characteristics of housing but also the distinctions made between the concepts of house as shelter and house as home. The use of this book as supplemental reading can be instructive in teaching the symbolic and psychological characteristics of housing which are often not presented in housing texts. Although the author uses examples from Jung to explain the symbolism portrayed by housing, her discussions of these symbolic meanings are easily understood and grasped without the reader possessing a background in psychology. Overall, this book could serve a purpose of furthering the acceptance that housing is deeply and meaningfully connected to the inhabitants' self-concepts and their relationships to others and the surrounding world.

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A Book/Software Review:

HomeBuyer: The Book & Software Home Buying Kit, by Steven A. Lyons, Berkeley, CA: Stratosphere Publishing, 1995, 120 pages and a 3.5 inch Windows disk.

Sue R. Crull

Computer technology is now available to assist a consumer or student in the art of homebuying. *HomeBuyer*, a software and book combination, is a delight to use. Steve Lyons writes an easy-to-read and often humorous step-by-step guide to homebuying. Some of the topics discussed are renting versus owning, affordability, home loans, house hunting, offers, and creative home buying. Three appendices give information on real estate profit and loss, appreciation, and references and resources, including addresses and phone numbers.

This good book is enhanced by the software, the best part of this package. An easy-to-use Windows program contains three subprograms. The analysis program helps to figure affordability through payments or prices, profit and loss, and cashflow. The user can also calculate loan amount and payments and compare fixed rate and variable rate mortgages. A lists program helps to prioritize needs and desires, record information on the homes visited and record information on various lending options. The third program provides information about housing by state, including state requirements and agencies, taxes, and home values and appreciation in selected cities. The software

accommodates the user's skill: the beginner mode explains the process as information is entered; the advanced mode goes straight to the entry screen.

This package would be useful in a housing class that devoted some time to homebuying, but the book and software do not present the subject in enough depth to carry a whole semester course in housing finance. The graphics are simplistic, and the program does not print out an amortization table. However, principal and interest can be calculated for a selected number of years. The software requires an IBM compatible 386 or higher computer with a minimum of 4 megabytes of memory and Microsoft Windows 3.1. The software must be installed on a hard drive and takes about 1.5 megabyte of disk space. *HomeBuyer* sells for \$29.95 in bookstores, and a quantity educational discount is available if you order directly from Stratosphere Publishing (800-646-6456).

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A Book Review:

Designing a Place Called Home: Recording the Suburbs, by James W. Wentling. New York: Chapman & Hall, 1995, 290 pages.

Shari Park-Gates and Kathleen Parrott

Designing a Place Called Home focuses on the design of suburban housing in America during the post-World War II era. Author James Wentling takes a comprehensive view of the topic, from the community and neighborhood to individual interior details. Much of what he has to say about today's suburban housing is not kind, although he offers many ideas for new solutions to housing design, especially by de-emphasizing the influence of the automobile and by giving more attention to the community and neighborhood.

After a brief history of housing in America, chapter one discusses historic building practices that could be used to improve affordable housing in suburbia today. In chapter two, Wentling examines the problems and possibilities for improvement in today's housing by considering functional, environmental, affordability, and aesthetic needs.

Chapter three addresses the issues of land use and community planning in helping develop less sterile environments and in encouraging residents to develop a sense of belonging in their community, neighborhood, and home. Many photographs and drawings illustrate the ideas and demonstrate examples of both good and bad approaches to

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the problems. In chapter four, Wentling makes a case for the match between housing types and site locations, and poses some of the problems the automobile has generated for community and site organization.

The link between building image and floor plans is established in chapter five, and the next two chapters relate both exterior and interior details to the opportunities for improvement. Integrated into this is a description of how important is the use of materials and design elements in establishing the visual images desired, within an affordable price range.

Manufactured and multifamily housing are explained and analyzed in the context of making improvements and satisfying buyer needs. The book closes with a brief introduction to the housing of tomorrow.

Throughout, many visual images help to explain the text, verbal descriptions for solutions in designing the home are clarified by the use of architectural drawings of existing projects which address the problems. Unfortunately, many of the drawings are so reduced in size that clarity is lost. In addition, a different type face and lack of paragraph indentations make an otherwise excellent volume difficult to read.

This is a volume filled with many ideas for answers to the complex challenges of designing the neighborhood, community, and home on a human scale. The author advocated designing neighborhoods and housing to facilitate pedestrian travel, personal involvement, and a sense of belonging with the surroundings. It is enlightening and worthwhile reading for builders, architects, engineers, community planners, landscape architects, interior designers, and the public at large.

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A Book Review:

Housing By Lifestyle: The Component Method of Residential Design (Second Edition), by James W. Wentling. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995, 179 pages.

Shari Park-Gates and Kathleen Parrott

With clarity and logic, Wentling has provided an operational method for organizing the design of residential living spaces. His component method of design is based on dividing the home into different areas according to their principal use. The principal use of an area is related to the natural human organization of daily residential living.

By dividing the home into universal components, the author has provided a valuable tool for the designer: a method for breaking residential design into manageable and understandable parts, synthesized into a larger whole. The major contribution of the book is this concise framework for organizing an approach to designing residential spaces. It provides an algorithm for designers to follow that should help to assure better quality design solutions in less time.

The first part of the book defines and then explains five components in the home. The explanations in the text are well supplemented with photographs and drawings, which help to crystallize the components and the recommendations concerning their application.

The components are: community, privacy, ceremonial, functional, and outdoor areas. These components are made up of rooms and spaces that work in concert to support the principal use of the area. A chapter is devoted to each of the components, which are described and illustrated in detail.

The community component is typically comprised of the kitchen, breakfast area, and family room. The privacy component may include the master suite, secondary bedroom block, guest suite, and den/library. The ceremonial component usually includes the entry, living, and dining area, while the functional component includes the laundry, storage, garage, basement and attic. The outdoor component is made up of yards, curb appeal, and neighborhood context.

Following a thorough analysis of the various components, Wentling explains how their synthesis should be modified in response to the lifestyle of the different market groups. A discussion of adaptations of the component method of design for multifamily dwellings and of future trends bring the book to a close.

This is the second edition of an earlier book of the same name. Many of the drawings in the second edition were executed by computer, while the first edition contained hand-drawn illustrations, which seemed less sterile: nevertheless the second edition still contains valuable information, which is thoroughly presented.

The book is easily read and well organized, and enjoyable for anyone with an interest in housing. It also works well as an introductory text on housing design.

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A Book Review:

Housing Policy in Britain and Europe by Gavin McCrone and Mark Stephens. London: UCL Press, 1995.

Joseph Laquatra

Teachers and students of housing studies know that housing policy is a complicated topic that can be approached from a number of perspectives. *Housing Policy in Britain and Europe* (by Gavin McCrone and Mark Stephens, UCL Press, London, 1995) examines Britain's housing policies and compares them with five other European countries to determine changes that may be required because of the new economic union. The five countries—France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain represent the European Union (EU) economically and geographically.

For those with no prior knowledge of housing policies in Europe, this book serves as a useful primer on the subject. Although the writing is in the British style and is sometimes difficult to follow, this is not a major detraction. Far more difficult for readers is keeping track of the acronyms for government departments and programs in the six countries, and constant reference to the three-page list of abbreviations is necessary. But as bothersome as this task can be, it provides an interesting look at the extensive housing bureaucracies in the countries examined.

The book begins with a broad look at the housing situation in Europe, first by describing influences on housing demand and supply, and then on differences in housing tenure across the 12 member states of the EU. It presents an interesting description of three sub-sectors that exist in tenure variation: owner-occupied, private rented, and social rented. Hybrid tenures that combine elements of the three also exist in some countries and are attributed to policies such as rent control and housing allowances. Very familiar to U.S. housing researchers is a discussion of housing quality and the difficulties of comparing this feature across countries that use different standards for its measure. The book continues with separate chapters for each country studied, and the chapters are full of statistics on housing allowances, low interest loans, and other types of assistance programs. These are contrasted generally among the countries studied and particularly with Great Britain, as attention is paid to impacts of European integration on various programs. Readers learn, for example, about the evolution of Spanish housing policy under the Franco dictatorship to its present condition in a democracy. One of Spain's unique features is its virtual lack of a social rented sector, because of an original subsidy focus toward owner-occupied dwellings, through developers. The authors express concern that Spain's policy cannot be responsive to low-income households at this stage of its development, even as it experiences a reappearance of shantytowns that are home to Gypsies and North African immigrants.

Following a discussion of housing policies in individual countries, McCrone and Stephens examine the issue of unified European housing policies, especially with re-

gard to a single mortgage finance market. Arguments for such a system have been based on assumptions that a single market will result in price reductions from greater efficiency and economies of scale, conclusions the authors refute as based on flawed analyses. While they predict an increase in financial activities between and among European countries, barriers posed by institutional, cultural, and legal factors are likely to hamper the creation of a single mortgage finance market in the short term.

The final two chapters consider specific economic issues that affect housing markets, especially as they are likely to pertain to the United Kingdom: residential mobility of the labor force throughout the EU; budgetary pressures on individual countries and their impacts on housing policy throughout the Union; household debt; and housing finance. Of these issues, household debt represents a big concern in Britain because it has the largest household debt of any EU member. In addition, a large increase in mortgage borrowing during the 1980s at variable interest rates puts British households at greater financial risk from interest rate changes than are households in other EU countries. To guard against potential economic shock, reforms to Britain's housing finance system are recommended that would encourage widespread use of long-term fixed interest rate loans.

The book concludes with policy recommendations for each of the housing sectors, with an emphasis on balance among the owner-occupied, private rented, and social rented sectors. The health of these sectors in Britain especially, but throughout the EU countries, is stressed as being essential to the growth of the economy in an integrated Europe.

Overall, the book provides an interesting look at European housing policies at an important time. Its comparative approach allows readers to grasp the complexities of financial interactions among EU member states, which have varying policies for each of their housing sectors. For graduate level courses that focus on housing economics or housing policy, this book would add an interesting dimension to discussions about government intervention in housing markets and the role of housing in a country's economy.

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