

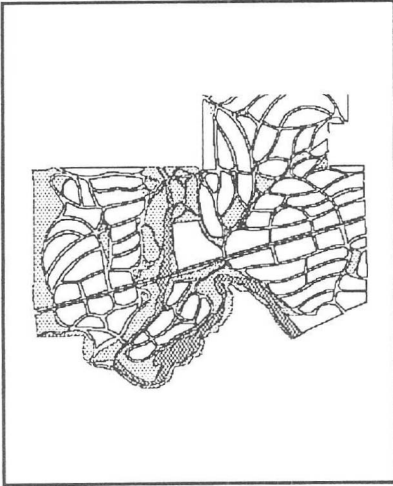
# INTRODUCTION

The suburbs are a middle ground, located between city and countryside, promising a combination of the “best of both worlds.” Ideally a union of the virtues of the urban and the rural, the civilized and the natural, they are intended to be without the vices of either. A utopian strain and a degree of naiveté is part of their history. Their location places them at two edges. Viewed from the city side, suburbs are the urban perimeter, but they are equally found at the rural periphery. The American suburbs have historically defined the urban frontier. Their character has always been fundamentally related to their position in space and to the quality of that space. Part of what makes a suburb a suburb is open space. At the heart of the suburban ideal is the promise of living within green open spaces. One of the reasons that people move to the suburbs is a desire for more personal space and an expansiveness not found amid urban congestion and density. An equal desire is for a private domain of house and lot, a combination of built and natural space, that one could call one’s own, care for, and transform. The wish rarely recognized the need for the types of open spaces left behind, the community of street and public places.

The study of suburban design necessitates an understanding of the power of cultural images, the influence of policy, the pattern of design, and the veracity of experience. Recent scholarship about suburbs has primarily focused on their urbanization, related demographic shifts, and metropolitan morphology. It has observed that many suburban areas have become city-like, offering the full range of urban services: home, work, school, shopping, recreation, entertainment, and civic life. New terminology has been coined for these emerging forms: Fishman’s “technoburb,”<sup>1</sup> Muller’s “mini-city,”<sup>2</sup> and Garreau’s “Edge City.”<sup>3</sup> In this changing landscape American sentiment in favor of single-family detached-home ownership remains strong and is unlikely to undergo significant change in the near future. However, the appeal of traditional suburban forms and lifestyles is tempered by economic and social costs and by changing social structures. Suburbs conceived around traditional households have proven to be less supportive for other groups and serve an increasingly narrow segment of the population. There are substantial costs associated with low-density suburbs: a loss of agricultural land, a decline in air and water quality, and exorbitant costs for sewers, power, and roads. As a consequence, metropolitan regions are reexamining their philosophy and attitudes toward growth. Planners and designers are responding to this evolving circumstance through changes in policy, land use and transportation planning, and site and building design.

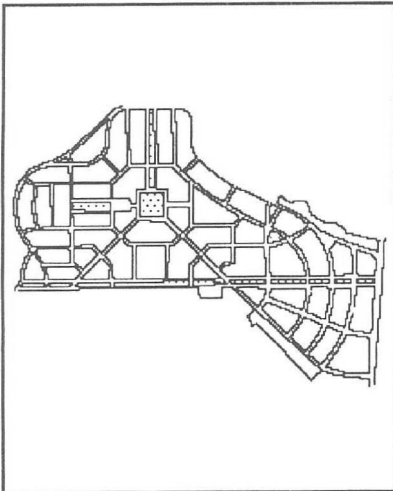
Suburban settlers have tended to assume that the periphery was fixed, that both city and countryside would remain in their current configuration. Geographical stability would prove to be illusory, however, as metropolitan

*Suburbs Timeline: 1900–1990. All plans except Vermont Hills from Keller Easterling. American Town Plans: A Comparative Timeline. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993.*



**Pre-1910  
Olmstedian Planned Suburb**  
*Riverside, IL*

Picturesque landscape style  
Streets follow landscape contours  
Parks connected by boulevards  
Linear park along river corridor  
Each yard is an estate



**1910s  
War Housing/Nolen Towns**  
*Yorkship Village, NJ*

Orderly plans. Geometry diminishes as town meets countryside.  
Squares, parks, and landmarks were civic sites linked by boulevards.

areas continued to grow and expand into rural areas. As the suburbs grew, their character inexorably changed. People were attracted to the suburbs to be in a more natural setting, yet at a certain point overdevelopment destroyed that initial appeal. People moved to the suburbs to be near the countryside, but new development often left them surrounded by more suburbs. These effects were accomplished not by a single catastrophe, but by incremental effect, making it difficult to react to such changes, on either an individual or a community basis. Suburban development proved to be a classic example of “the tragedy of the commons.”<sup>4</sup> Problems were not anticipated, and once recognized they were often beyond solution.

The physical environment is an active ingredient of our existence. Individual, family, and community life is enhanced by experiencing a variety of environments, which requires access to a diversity of open spaces. The functioning, or the failure to function, of open spaces is one determinant to the success or failure of a suburb, both as a private home and as a public community. The contemporary American suburb is seldom successful at providing “the best of both worlds.” Suburbs have developed into a new amalgam, one that not only partakes of the extremes but has an independent identity. As a combination of city and country, the suburb includes elements of their open spaces, of urban civic spaces, along with rural and natural amenity. However, their identities change in the suburban landscape. In the suburbs, the greatest time and attention has gone into enriching and embellishing the outdoor space of the private yard, at the expense of the public landscapes of street and park. These shared places can foster a sense of community. Streets are not only for cars. We have lost sight of the fact that they are also important public spaces, which should equally accommodate bikes and pedestrians. Suburban residents need not be as dependent on the automobile as they now are. This is particularly true for those who commute and those who chauffeur children on their daily rounds, as well as those who must, or will choose, to stay home if a ride is not available. Ideally, the tasks of daily life should be within walking distance—a trip to buy groceries, get a haircut, rent a video, or play baseball. Plazas and centers, from the neighborhood scale to the civic center, may be even more necessary in the highly privatized and automobile-dependent suburb. Parks are not needed in the suburbs as a relief from urban density and congestion, but they are still necessary as places for recreation and contact with natural areas. What is perhaps more critical in the suburbs is a system of open space connections. As streets in the urban environment provide the primary pedestrian linkages, creative ways are needed in the lower-density suburbs to bring together dispersed populations and open space opportunities. One reason suburbs fail to live up to their advertising hyperbole is that they fail to provide an open space system offering residents proper access to the variety of outdoor and indoor experiences. A combination of intensified densities and more extensive and inviting open space networks can be one component to enriching suburban life. Networks can facilitate access to leisure and recreational amenity, as well as to employment and local shopping and services, and can offer transportation alternatives to rush hour car commuting.

In the past 40 years suburbs have expanded, but they have also matured. Land uses and building types have evolved that were not previously planned for: the shopping mall, corporate headquarters, and highway development. Unanticipated problems have arisen, such as increased traffic, the overdevelopment of land, and the depletion of scarce landscape resources of

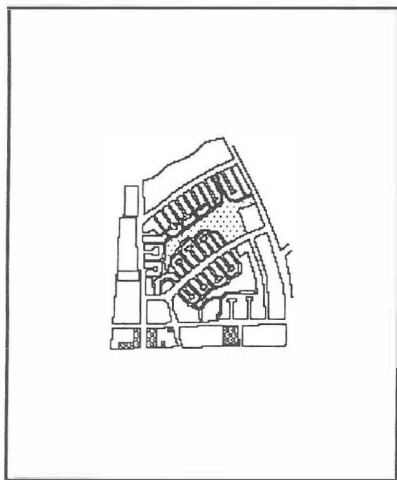
wetlands, woods, soils, and streams. The lawn, a seemingly benign personal patch of greenery, when aggregated across the landscape, pollutes through the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers. Moreover, social problems are not confined to urban political boundaries. A sense of community is difficult to sustain in our modern mobile culture.

Urban and suburban landscapes are not independent of nature. Rather, they are part of their region's ecology. It is possible for them to maintain an ecological balance, but current patterns of development sap resources and damage ecosystems.<sup>5</sup> The design of the suburban landscape is not just a scenic amenity; it contributes to the quality of life, it can provide the structure and frame for a richer existence. It can offer access to diverse opportunities and ease the accomplishment of daily tasks. A well-designed open space system can decrease automobile use, enable people to walk more and drive less, preserve natural land, and provide connections from developed to undeveloped land. It can contribute to social interaction and community sensibility, as space is actively used and shared. It is a necessary ingredient in the fulfillment of the suburban promise.

The house and its accompanying yard are at the core of suburban ideology. In the framework of American culture, the individualistic ideal has manifested itself in a quest for a small piece of a dream: owning a home and a surrounding piece of land. Suburbs offer a response to that desire. Although some suburban communities have certainly been elitist and exclusive, the suburban ideal has at its heart a democratic flavor. However, suburbs have been less successful at providing the connective tissue necessary to create communities of individual home owners. Yards, the private landscape, have succeeded in fulfilling household functions and desires, whereas streets and parks, the public landscape, have too often been ignored or devalued. Physical connections, spaces for mobility and passages of open spaces, provide the means for weaving a landscape together. These connections provide opportunities for persons to move through space. They also provide a social context within which people can explore, play, and engage in commerce or neighboring. Successful open spaces encourage people to use them, provide rich structured and unstructured opportunities, and give order to a community.

To create a suburban landscape supportive of individual fulfillment, community life, and environmental sustainability requires a broader, more comprehensive view of open space. The suburban yard is not just an autonomous private piece of property, but part of a larger community landscape structure. The suburban street is typically conceived exclusively as a conduit for movement and rarely as a community network. Similarly, suburban parks are neglected as places of repose, recreation, and contact with nature, perhaps because these needs are seen as being accommodated in each person's backyard. There is a paradox. Open space defines the suburbs, but the suburbs also have redefined open space. Suburban society is neither urban nor rural, and the suburbs are still in the throes of constructing their own identity. As a result, suburban open space has taken on distinctive patterns and forms. This landscape is still emerging; its mores are still in flux. As the suburbs now dominate much of the metropolitan landscape, they demand our attention.

In this book we define three open space types as a way of understanding suburban open space. These are broad, encompassing categories; their names are commonplace: yard, street, and park. Each of these types is inclusive, with much overlap between them. It is important to keep in mind that



**1920s**  
**Radburn Introduced**  
*Radburn, NJ*

Open space backbone linking parks, schools

Dual "front" yards

Cul-de-sac service lane for cars

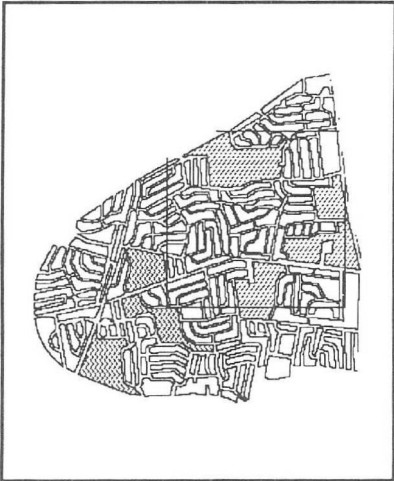


**1930s**  
**Greenbelt Towns**  
*Greenbelt, MD*

Park networks with interconnecting paths

Parking lots instead of local streets

Small yards face onto narrow walkways



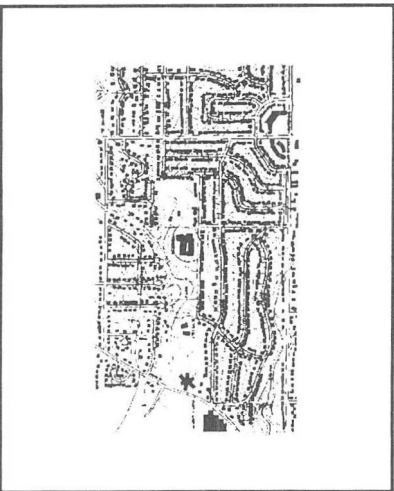
**1940s**  
**Post-war Planned**  
**Subdivisions**

*Levittown, NY*

Parks, schools, and shopping spread about the neighborhood

Continuous fabric of curvilinear streets—few sidewalks

Spacious yards



**1950s**  
**FHA Model Subdivisions**

*Vermont Hills, OR*

Isolated parks, schools, shopping  
Occasional streams or lakesides reserved

Curvilinear streets or loops and culs-de-sac, often no curbs or sidewalks

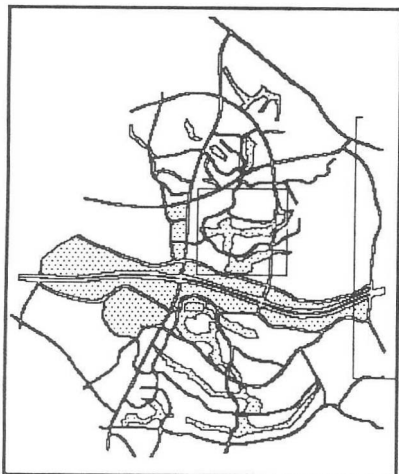
Spacious, wide yards

when we discuss open space, the reference is not only to green spaces or to nature, but includes the entire outdoor continuum, spanning the domestic private space of the yard to the public landscapes of street and park. Streets should be considered at all scales, from cul-de-sac to highway and parks in their myriad varieties, from the neighborhood tot lot thorough the grander scope of greenway systems. We emphasize the opportunities created by spaces that are aggregates of these types, the linkages between them, and their hybrid forms. Thus, along the street front, yards coalesce into continuous semipublic yardscapes, whereas backyards are defined private fragments. Driveways join yard to street, and their hard surfaces offer distinctive possibilities. Parks conjoin into park systems and networks. In thinking about open space, it is imperative that this full range is encompassed. A richness of opportunity is a sign of suburban health, its lack a deficiency.

This study cuts across disciplines and genres. It offers a historical study, but one that seeks to learn and glean from past lessons. It is a cultural study sympathetic to suburban dwellers and aspirants. As landscape architects, we have tried to bring to bear the theory and practice of other disciplines, but to emphasize our area of expertise in open space design and planning. This is not a design casebook, but it partakes of that methodology. We speak in the language of planning and design, a style that integrates words and images. Merging graphics and text, we provide examples of the application of theory to practical work. There are project plans, diagrams, and maps that demonstrate the designer's intentions as well as interpretive diagrams emphasizing key ideas. A comparative series of drawings of houses and yards runs throughout the book. These examples provide a structure to compare disparate locations. Along with photographs, they also give a flavor of daily life, a sense of how places are used and lived in. As we have dealt with open space at multiple scales, so too the graphic material ranges from domestic detail to general theory. We hope that mixture adds depth to the discussion of these essential matters.

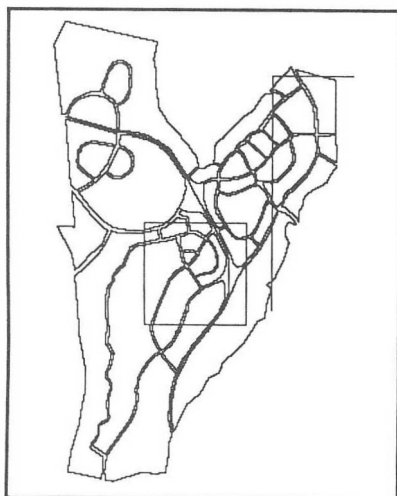
Throughout the text are case studies of places conceived in each decade since the 1920s. We begin in the nineteenth century and discuss the formative impact of early designs, but our focus is on the automobile suburb, for how to design in response to the automobile is surely one of the questions of the twentieth century for all forms of settlement. All too often design has been exclusively for the accommodation of the automobile, with little recognition of the automobile's (and the road's) effect on people, places, or resources. Our emphasis is on the planned suburban community, although there are lessons here for even the most modest subdivision and for communities of all sizes. Our analysis ranges from places where dozens dwell to areas for tens of thousands. We look at places in all regions of the nation. We explore those that have acted as positive models and those that have provided negative lessons. We look at the familiar and the ordinary, as well as places that are part of the canon of modern community design. We have tried to be observant, approaching old places with a fresh eye and new places with an eye to their improvement. Our intention is not to extol the superiority of the suburban way of life over the city or rural environment, nor to bemoan the opposite. Each type of settlement has rich possibilities. In a critical review of the strengths and weaknesses of a century of suburban planning, we argue for specific measures, particularly for effective open space planning, that will make the suburbs, both existing and new, deliver on their promise of providing the "best of both worlds." Well-conceived





**1960s**  
**The New Towns**  
*Reston, VA*

Connected recreational networks  
 Loop and cul-de-sac streets  
 Multifamily housing with common space linked to networks  
 Private yards abutting recreational networks

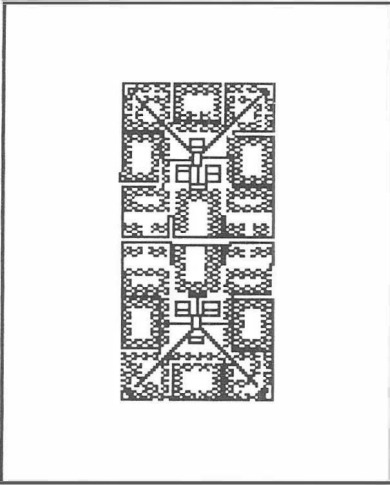


**1970s and 1980s**  
**Master Planned Communities**

*Rancho Santa Margarita, CA*  
 Themed recreational networks displaying a corporate image  
 Loop and cul-de-sac streets  
 Gated neighborhoods introduced  
 Fenced yards separated from common spaces

open space systems connecting yard to neighborhood to suburb to city can provide a network in the suburbs for socialization, recreation, education, and mobility. The struggle for those who design, build, finance, and legislate is to help suburbs reach their potential.

In Chapter 1 we begin with a discussion of the suburbs and suburban open space and try to sort out the complexities of language and history. Chapter 2 is a discussion and critique of common suburban open space types: yards, streets, and parks. Particular attention is paid to those aspects of the landscape that act as connectors, whether driveways or open space networks; to the aggregate collections of yards into yardscapes and streets into streetscapes; and to the neglected places. Many of America's best designers have responded to the suburban challenge. In Chapter 3 we proceed to examine three designs by some of America's greatest designers: Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's plan for Riverside, Illinois; Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's Radburn plan; and Frank Lloyd Wright's unrealized proposal of Broadacre City. Each offers valuable lessons in the creation of park and parkway systems, the relationships between houses, cars, parks and the rural landscape within the context of suburban design. Following this historical introduction we proceed in Chapter 4 to look at the first great wave of post-World War II suburbanization, the impact of the Federal Housing Administration on housing policy and design, and the development of Levittown, perhaps the archetypal suburb. Levittown's initial plan is considered, as well as how residents became the cobuilders of that community. Chapter 5 discusses a series of reactions to the excesses of suburbanization and a resurgence of community planning in the 1960s. During that decade "open space communities," planned communities that included commonly held open space, became popular. These were cluster subdivisions, planned unit developments (PUDs) and the New Towns of Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland. Throughout the book our focus is on a comprehensive look at the open space patterns and systems in these communities. Chapter 6 discusses the next generation of development trends, master-planned communities (MPCs). Developers of MPCs used the planning lessons of the New Towns era and, in an increasingly competitive market, blended sophisticated marketing strategy into the design process. We examine the full range of MPCs, from "technoburbs" such as Irvine, California, to the "ecoburbs" of Village Homes in Davis, California, and The Woodlands of Texas. Chapter 7 considers the designs of Miami architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, along with those of California architect Peter Calthorpe. The work of these designers, sometimes called neotraditional communities, represents the current condition of thoughtful suburban design development. These designers have consciously turned to the careful study of traditional communities and suburban designs of the past to learn valuable lessons. Having rediscovered Ebenezer Howard's brilliant insights into the suburban condition, they attempt to ameliorate the effects of unregulated suburban sprawl, to foster the sense of community that is often advertised but not always present, and to conserve scarce human and natural resources. We document and evaluate these new strategies. In the concluding chapter we examine the retrofitting of Bellevue, Washington, and how that community is both becoming more urban and simultaneously seeking to incorporate nature within its midst.



**1990s**  
**Traditional Neighborhoods  
and Pedestrian Pockets**  
*Pedestrian Pockets*

Public open space includes streets that connect centers and parks

Pedestrian-friendly streets directly connect civic spaces

Yards are small; front porches overlook streets

The suburbs of the late twentieth century have evolved from bedroom communities served by and serving a central city to minicities in their own right. Suburban planning strategies are responding to this fundamental change. The suburban middle ground, between city and country, was once at the periphery. It is now at the core of our concerns. The historical polarization between city and country, humans and nature, is outmoded. The suburb is part of the continuums of both urban life and nature. A comprehensive view is needed, one that looks at all scales of open space, from yard to street to park. The physical environment, our habitations and settlements, should aspire to enrich the human condition, providing opportunities for self-fulfillment, community life, and connection to the natural world.

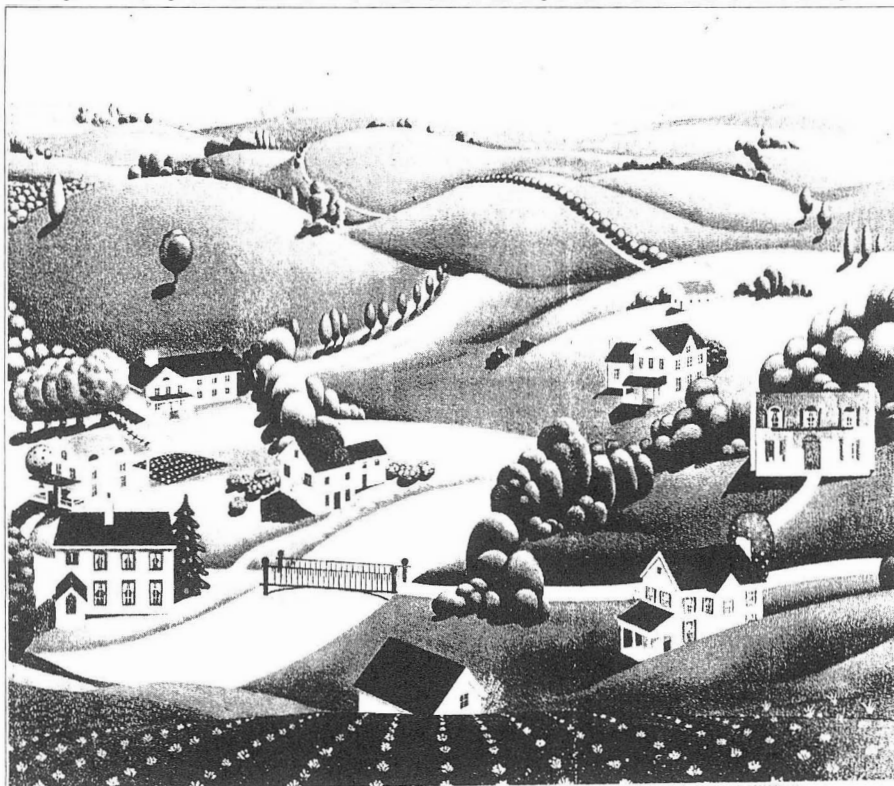
**NOTES**

1. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), p. 17.
2. Peter O. Muller, *Contemporary Suburban America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981).
3. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).
4. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (13 December 1968):1243–1248.
5. Anne Spirn, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Michael Hough, *City Form and Natural Processes: Toward a New Urban Vernacular* (New York: Routledge, 1984); and Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1992).

tute a “middle landscape,” which mediates between a polarization of places and ideas.<sup>4</sup> In the American vernacular of place types, the suburbs are a place distant from, but accessible to, downtown, where “Main Street” meets “Four Corners.”

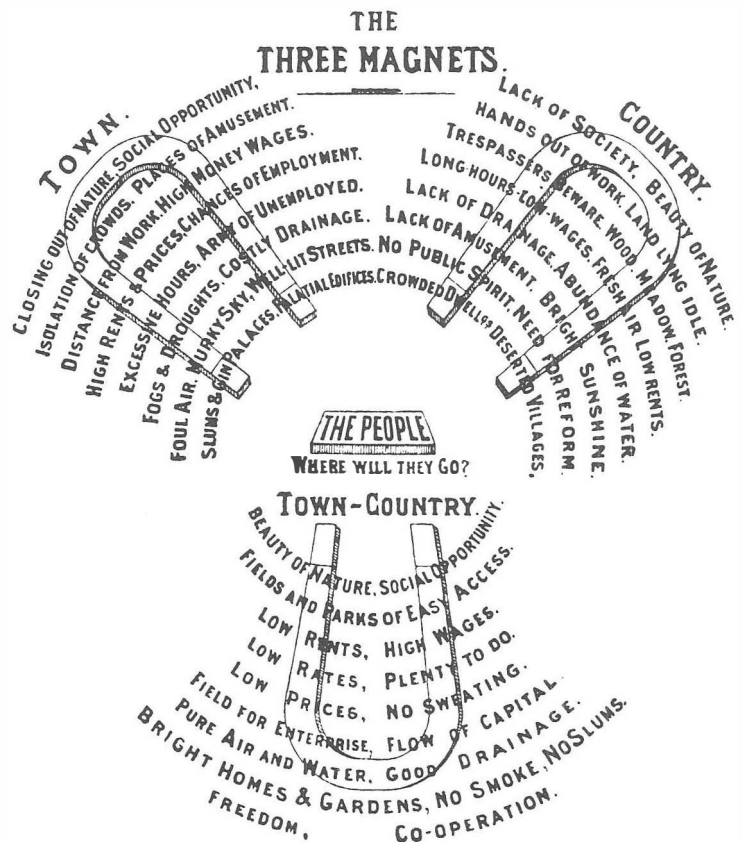
While sharing common ingredients, each suburb manifests its uniqueness. Specific places gravitate toward the sharp intensity of either end of the city-country cultural spectrum, but most occupy a comfortable middle position. For each locale the reading of the suburban spectrograph will be distinctive, and one should be cautious about generalizations and oversimplifications. The roots of the suburban idea share much with the classical villa. In many ways, the villa is a suburb ideologically concentrated within a single property. The term *villa* referred to an entire estate—buildings and grounds—not just a single structure. So too *suburb* is an inclusive, not purely an architectural, term. Classical ideology emphasized the role of the farm and a domesticated landscape. In the eastern United States the model of the “gentleman farmer” is part of this heritage. In the American West, it is the ranch with its expansive territory, frontier ideology, and sprawling architecture—miniaturized and captured in the “ranch-style” home. Garden cities, greenbelt towns, PUDs, New Towns, and neotraditional communities all seek, in some variant, an ancient promise, the classical ideal of a golden mean, the best of both worlds, an equal opportunity for cultural connectedness and pastoral privacy. The cultural formulas are occasionally articulated, but the realities are enacted at all levels and in everyday events: the drive home, the walk to school, the trip to the store, the chance encounter with neighbors.

## WELLINGTON. THE KIND OF NEIGHBORHOOD YOU THOUGHT DISAPPEARED A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.



Wellington, Manassas, Virginia.  
Advertisement, The Washington Post, 8 July  
1989. Wellington by Kettlet & Scott.

Advertising reveals fundamental appeals. Motivated by a desire to sell products and services, advertising is an enticement, a commercial aphrodisiac, selling entire “project personalities” and lifestyles.<sup>5</sup> In real estate advertising the messages can be subliminal, but they are often a direct, even forthright, reflection of desires. (Advertisers also use code words and images for neighborhoods that are exclusive by race, religion, ethnicity, or social class.) Advertising confirms the polarities that form the basis of suburban appeal. Many communities claim to offer “Country living, close in”; Forest Heights in Portland, Oregon, is “Away from it all, 4 Miles to Town”; Wild Harbour Estates, North Falmouth, Massachusetts, is simply “A best of both worlds community”; and at Conashaugh Lakes, Pennsylvania “Your neighbors aren’t neighbors—they’re trees!” At the extreme, where communities are designed with themes, the boundaries are blurred between promotion and property, design and lifestyle. The tenor of the times is clear in communities where “nature is protected from man, and man is protected from man”; or in Reston, Virginia: “For times like these . . . designed to combine the best features of living in the city, country or suburbs and claiming to have in fact become much more.”<sup>6</sup> Garden City pioneer Ebenezer Howard used the imagery of three magnets pulling upon “the people.” “Where will they go?” he asked. The Town and Country magnets had positive and negative poles and a corresponding list of virtues and vices. The Town-Country magnet defied science and had only positive poles—it was a new artifact. Reminiscent of Howard’s magnets of a century ago, Reston offers “the convenience of the city without the pollution or the noise. The tranquility of the country without the feeling of isolation. And the recreation of the suburbs without the unpleasant sprawl.” The new town of Columbia, Maryland, lauded itself as “a city built to be enjoyed . . . not perfect, but a few steps



*The Three Magnets. Garden City Diagram.*  
 Ebenezer Howard, 1902. From F. J. Osborn,  
 ed., *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*,  
 Cambridge: MIT Press 1965, p. 46.

removed from the crush and bother of today's living. It's trees and parks and lush fields and beauty and just about everything you've always wanted your own city to be." The advertisements appeal to deep desires. Wellington, near Old Manassas, Virginia offers "a neighborhood like they used to make" just 30 minutes from Union Station, Washington D.C.. Here, "as the end of the century approaches," you are asked to "revisit the beginning of it," along its newly constructed Main Street. Fulfilling a nostalgic desire for a rewritten past, at The Woodlands near Houston, Texas, "you will feel peace and be reminded of the neighborhood you *might* [author's emphasis] have grown up in."

As Robert Wood noted 25 years ago, suburbanites may be re-creating and reconfiguring, not small cities, but small town and village life.<sup>7</sup> Too often we look to a suburb and are disappointed because we do not see a "city." Our images are conditioned by expectations. If, more modestly, we look for an updated town or village, or accept the suburb on its own terms,

Forest Heights, Portland, Oregon.  
Advertisement, *The Oregonian*, 5 July 1992.

# AWAY FROM IT ALL,



## 4 MILES TO TOWN.

Only Forest Heights is this close to town yet a Walden world of its own. One acre in three is being preserved in natural areas, hiking trails—and get-away places like Mill Pond park (shown). The best builders in town are crafting beautiful homes here. Or, choose a lot and have your own dream built. (Ask about direct financing on lots.

Very easy.) Forest Heights is the creative expansion of Portland's close-in west hills, the heights. Just possibly the best place to live *anywhere*. *Entry on NW Cornell Rd where NW Miller and Cornell meet. From town take west Burnside to Miller. Turn right. From Sunset Hwy or 217 take East Barnes Rd to Miller, turn left.*

FOREST  HEIGHTS

Forest Heights Realty, Gary Locker, J.R. Figurski — 297-1919



People are still heading for the suburbs to fulfill their dreams, but no longer are they dreaming of a private house.

Today people would rather spread up than out. They'd rather get above it all and make their home in an apartment.

These are people who think being tied down to a house with all its headaches is crazy. They think that having more than one child in a family

is too big a family. And they believe the right time to get married is after you've had enough time to discover yourself.

And because these people have completely different values and life styles than people who own houses—they have more time and money to spend as they choose.

We write the only regularly published national magazine specially designed for apartment people.

Our name is Apartment Life and

our February/March issue will deliver 500,000 copies to the fastest growing segment of the home market—the apartment market.

And by chance, if you don't know that much about us, we're published bi-monthly and our parent company is the Meredith Corporation.

So if you want to talk to people who live in apartments, you should talk to us.

We're in on the ground floor.

# The suburbs are spreading up.



## Apartment Life

The magazine for 20 million Americans.

Apartment Life, 750 3rd Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017



Issue on sale

*"The Suburbs Are Spreading Up"*  
advertisement for *Apartment Life*  
November 1974, in *New York Magazine*.





"Dream Houses."  
*The New Yorker*, (cover), 20 July 1946.

able life for themselves and their families, and the anticipated peacefulness of outdoor living, but mainly they came for a house and not a social environment."<sup>20</sup> Studies such as Gans's suggest that people had few illusions about suburban life as idyllic.

Postwar suburbs generally pleased their residents but displeased the planners. There was an extreme divergence of popular, professional, and intellectual opinion. Critics maligned, while the building industry played the role of booster. Fortunately, in recent years we have gone beyond simple polarities and irrational critiques to examine the suburbs in their full complexity, as both an emergent settlement pattern and as a distinctive way of life. Suburban development often destroyed the landscape that attracted early

# 2

## MEANINGS

### Yard, Street, Park

**A**t the core of the suburb is the residence, the ideal of the single-family house on its own, individual, private lot. The house sits at the center of the property facing, yet set back from, the street. The driveway links street to house, passing through a front yard of green lawn and ornamental plantings. To the rear lies the backyard, often fenced, replete with patio or deck, outdoor furnishings, recreational equipment, and vegetable garden. Collectively, suburbia is the multiplication of this basic module, landscape building blocks strung together along winding streets. Even in higher-density and clustered-housing suburbs, attempts are made to retain the fundamental individualized unit of house and garden.

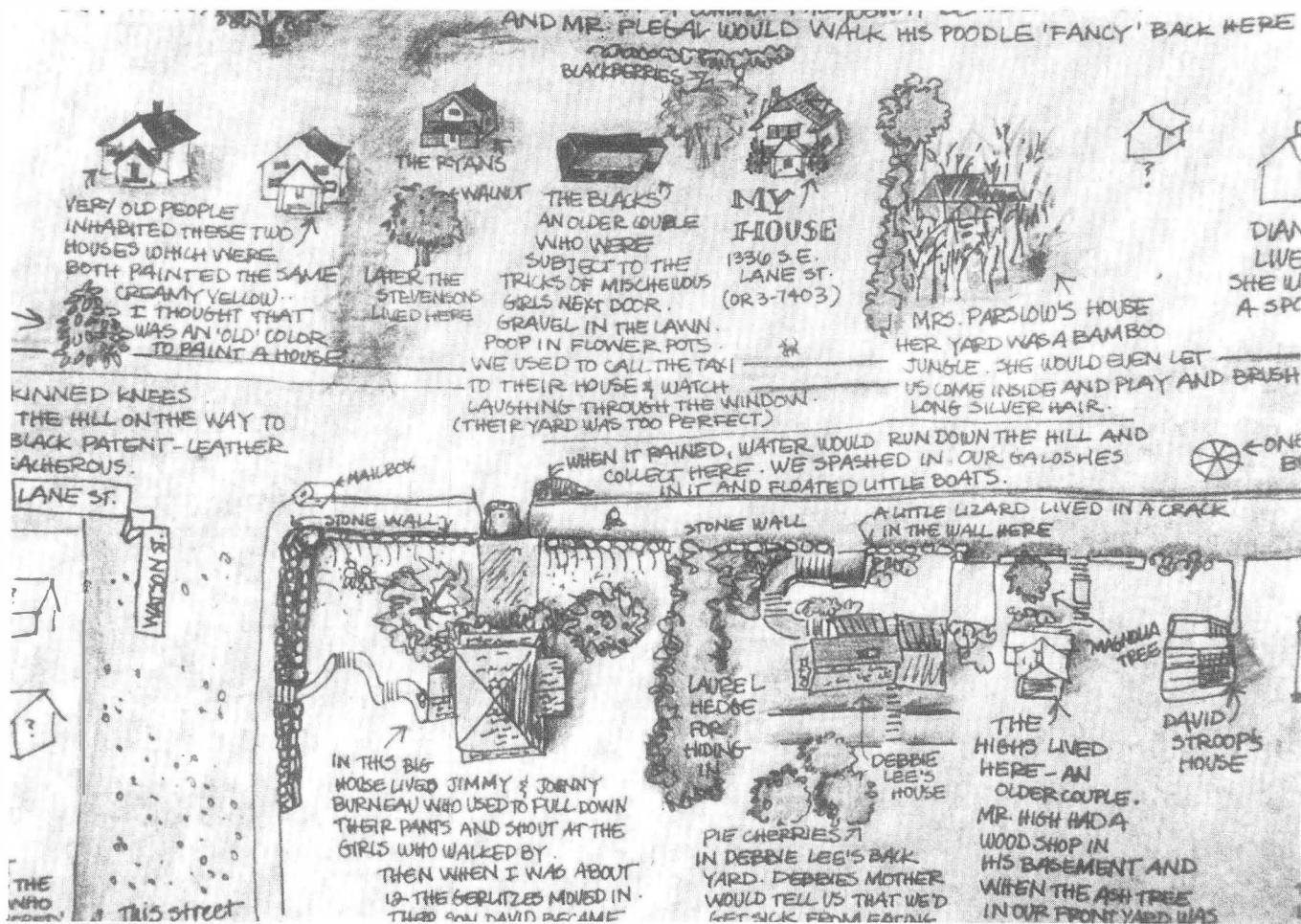
*Murrayhill, Beaverton, Oregon.*  
C. Girling.



Suburban open space types can be categorized by the configurations of the three basic environments of yard, the private area of each household; street; and park, the collective open space environment. These are broad categories with many subsets and combinations. Their patterns of use and meaning are complex and open-ended, subject to personal, regional, and cultural variation. In addition to these three types we look at aggregates of the types, linkages and connections, and hybrids. Specifically, semi-public front yards coalesce into collective yardscapes, whereas backyards typically retain their individuality. Driveways, linking house to street, constitute a largely unexamined open space. Parks can be orchestrated into park systems, and there are greenway connections as well. Hybrid types of these elements also exist. Some spaces cannot easily be categorized, and we do not even have a vocabulary for them. All of these components are part of open space systems.

Suburban spaces are each given some measure of *suburban* distinction according to how they occupy the middle landscape and how their position straddles the city-country, human-nature polarity. On one side of the equation there is an association with nature. The character of this world is soft, green, and vegetated. On the other side are the hard surfaces of the city and artifice. Materials, sensations, and associations all combine to create distinctive combinations and types of yards, streets, and parks. These types each have a symbolic meaning and an ideological function, but they are experienced at a more personal level as the setting for each individual's environmental autobiography.<sup>1</sup>

House and neighborhood.  
Environmental autobiography by Sara  
Geddes. Collection of Kenneth Helphand.



## YARD

The garden joined with a house forms a fundamental building block of settled society. In suburbia they are an inseparable pair. At this intimate scale the personal and daily relationship to landscape is defined. It is here that the overwhelming quantity of open-space time is spent. It is also here, where building and outdoors meet, that the professional domains of landscape architecture and architecture overlap. In the European tradition *garden* refers to the whole of the private space around a house, whether it is a modest cottage or a grand estate. In America this land is typically called the yard.

Landscape historian Paul Groth has charted the distinctive meanings of the lot, yard, and garden. The lot is demarcated real estate, the yard an enclosed area for a specific function, and the “garden implies care, commitment and watching as well as enjoyment.” The three terms “constitute a hierarchy of care.”<sup>2</sup> Groth makes the case that Americans own lots, within which they create yards, which they then in turn adorn with “gardens.” Together, the American yard and garden manifest personal care and commitment, albeit not always of a horticultural variety.

Gardens are idealized landscapes, places mediating between the imperatives of nature and culture. Gardens are frames, settings for activity and behavior. They are mirrors, reflections of a culture’s values and attitudes. They are places of ideals, aspiration, and life’s necessities. The most profound garden idea is that of paradise. Even in the seemingly prosaic suburban yard/garden, Edenic characteristics are present: peacefulness, innocence, an idealized nature, a place where the world is both useful *and* good to look at. The house is a symbol of self, household, and family identity; so too are our yards.<sup>3</sup> The home ground represents desires, ideals, and aspirations.



*“Watering” Phillips Ranch, California.*  
Joe Deal, *Southern California Photographs*  
1976–1986. Albuquerque, University of  
New Mexico Press, 1992.

RESIDENTIAL YARD TYPOLOGY							
Social Class	Planting	Work	Household Activity	Social Activity	Symbols, Artifacts	Car	Boundary
<p>Lower Income</p> <p>↑</p> <p>Lot</p> <p>Multi-purpose areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsistence</li> <li>Farming</li> <li>Farmyard</li> <li>Utilitarian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landscape as a work place</li> <li>Agricultural work</li> <li>Automotive work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functional</li> <li>Outdoor housework, e.g., clothes drying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal, unstructured activity</li> <li>Play all over</li> <li>Makeshift equipment</li> <li>Inflatable pool</li> <li>Dropping in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unconscious, not "designed"</li> <li>Vernacular expression</li> <li>"Designed" by individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ubiquitous</li> <li>Worked on, yard as supply area</li> <li>Designated area</li> <li>carport, driveway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functional fencing</li> <li>Chain link</li> <li>&gt; visibility</li> </ul>
<p>Middle Income</p> <p>Suburban Lot</p> <p>Developments</p> <p>Designated areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Backyard vegetable garden</li> <li>Front yard public garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Home" work not essential</li> <li>"Work" as recreation</li> <li>Household work inside</li> <li>Do-it-yourself</li> <li>Hobbies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indoor housework</li> <li>Garden "work"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play areas structured</li> <li>Purchased play equipment "sets"</li> <li>Outdoor furniture/party equipment</li> <li>Above-ground pool</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conscious symbolism</li> <li>Status symbols</li> <li>User designed</li> <li>No gardener, cut your own grass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-car garage</li> <li>Multi-purpose driveway</li> <li>2-car garage, electric garage-door opener</li> <li>Single-purpose driveway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wooden fences</li> <li>Hedges</li> </ul>
<p>Upper Income</p> <p>Single-purpose areas</p> <p>Estate</p> <p>↓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialized gardens (flower gardens, rose gardens)</li> <li>Gardener's aesthetic</li> <li>Greenhouse</li> <li>Gentleman farmer</li> <li>"Hobby farm"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little work by owner</li> <li>Garden staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual predominates</li> <li>Supervision of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal, structured activity</li> <li>Segregated "courts," "fields"</li> <li>Pools</li> <li>Garden buildings</li> <li>Invitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional design</li> <li>Professional maintenance</li> <li>Gardener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-car garage</li> <li>Heated garage</li> <li>Garage building</li> <li>Entry drive</li> <li>Chauffeur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Security system</li> <li>House hidden from street</li> <li>&lt; visibility</li> </ul>

Residential yards: social class and function.

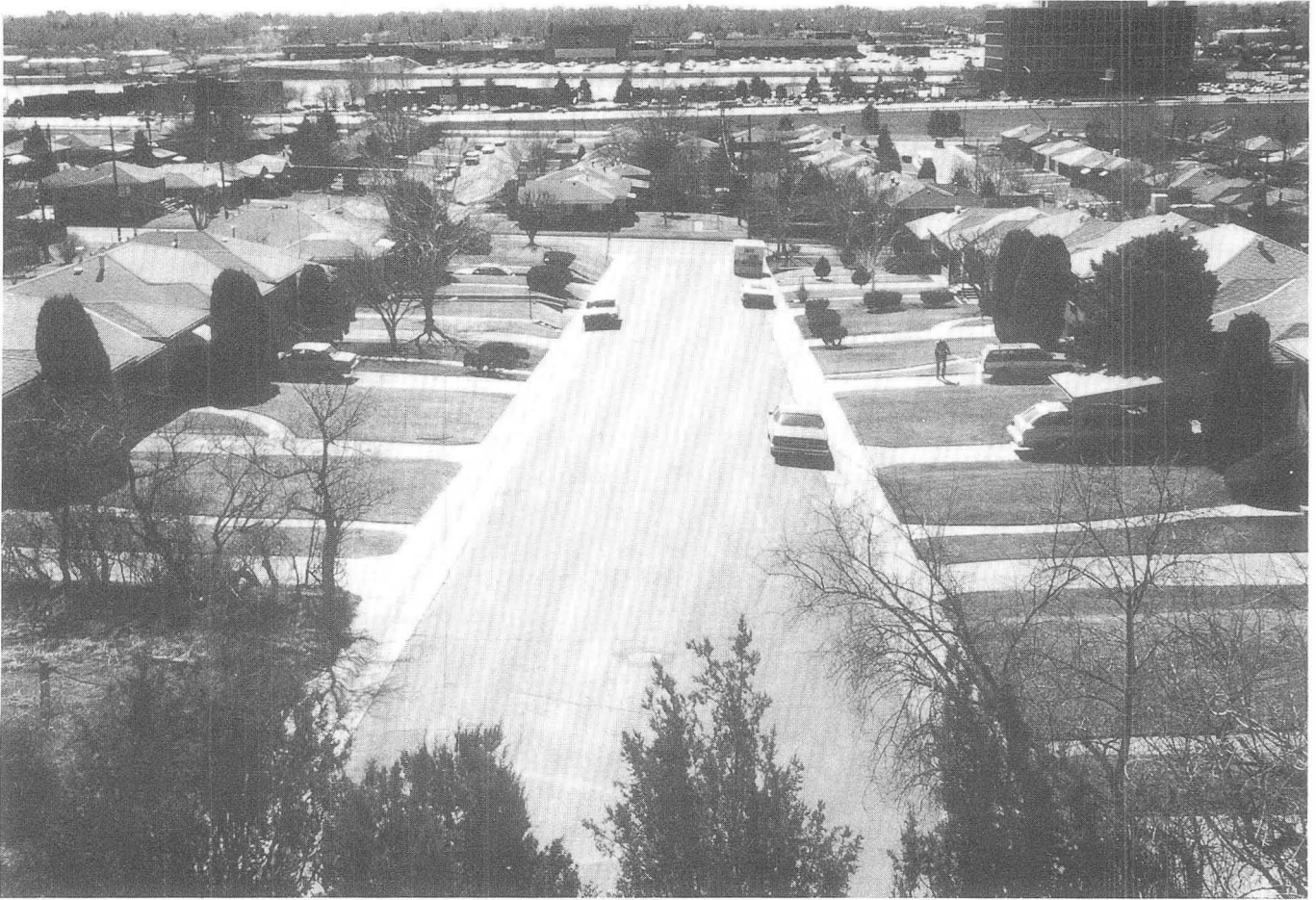
Kenneth Helphand.

teams of trucks descend on the scene during the day. Gardeners unload their equipment, pools are cleaned and monitored, and cleaning persons attend to their various tasks.

The yard provides a sense of proprietorship and ownership, as seen through the window or in surveying the bounds of one's modest estate in a walk around the house. The yard affords some measure of psychological security and a sense of privacy from both intrusion and observation. From the house, access to the yard is through front, rear, side, and garage doors. The front is the ceremonial entry and is often used only for formal guests, whereas residents typically use a kitchen or side door. These entryways become repositories for toys, tools, bicycles, clothes, shoes, boots, recyclables, and household ephemera. The important linkages to the wider world cut across the front yard.

Yards coalesce into collections of front yards and backyards—yardscapes. In the aggregate, the front yard joins the street and creates a collective open space that is both personal and collective. To the rear, the more privatized backyard *may* form part of a common park system or at least serve as access to one, but rarely does. However, there is sometimes a linkage to an alley network. Yardscapes are part of the community open space system. Part of the front yard is subject to civic regulation in the form of easements. When we speak of living along a street, we mean not just the road, but also these yardscapes.





*Yardscape, Denver, Colorado.*  
Kenneth Helphand.

## DRIVEWAY

There is an autonomy to each house and yard entity, yet each is connected to a larger network. Front walks once provided direct access to sidewalk and street; they now lead to a driveway, one of the American landscape's most ubiquitous, yet neglected, spaces. The driveway may be among the most representative of American open spaces, performing both pragmatic and symbolic functions. The driveway sits at that juncture between the equally assertive imperatives of the traditional stability of home, neighborhood, and community, and the modern mobility of the automobile, speed, and travel. At a deeper level, driveways link the symbolic rootedness of place, the comforts of family, and the security of individual plots of land with the street, dreams of movement, the freedom of the road, and the release of speed. Driveways link the hard surface of the technologically engineered roadway with the soft domain of lawn, carpet, and sofa.

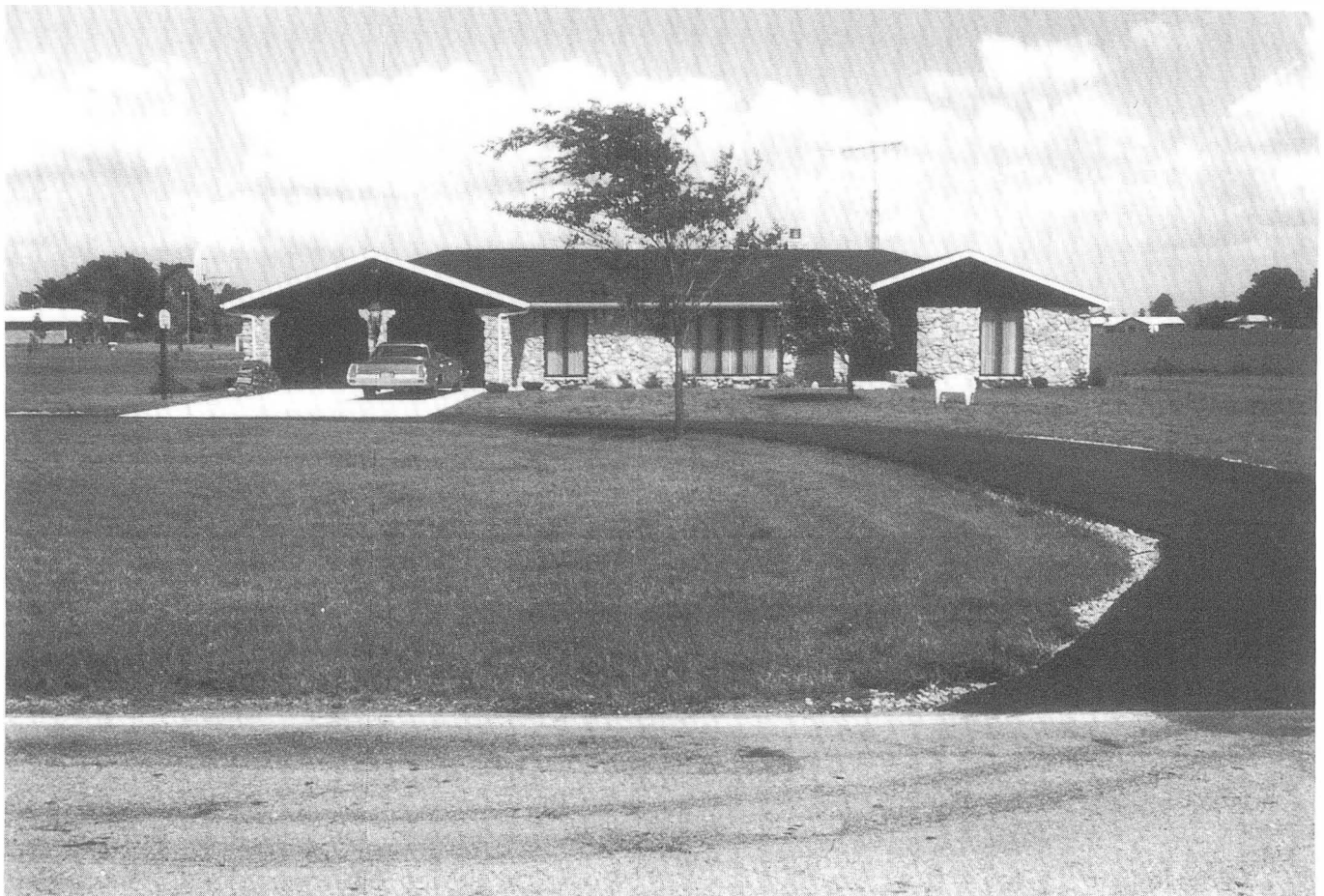
Driveways originated with the advent of cars, which had to drive across the yard to a garage in the rear. Both garage and driveway progressively moved closer to the house. What were once the outbuildings to a main house gradually became absorbed into a single structure encompassing all functions. Plumbing, housework such as laundry, and storage—all once outdoor or outbuilding functions—are now subsumed under a single all-



encompassing roof. So too with the automobile, presenting an interesting historical parallel. In the late Middle Ages, people and animals, previously housed under a single roof, were segregated into separate buildings. The car, once kept outside in a barn or separate garage, now often shares a common roof. It has become part of the family.

Early driveways were just ruts, with strips of intervening grass, leading to the garage at the rear of the lot, often located off a service alley. At first, the car was a modest intruder into the yard. As the garage moved in proximity to the house, so too did the driveway. Driveway materials have changed in corresponding fashion as its importance and role have increased. The driveway was surfaced, first compacted by tires—then gravel was added, then asphalt or concrete—now displaying the occasional opulence of pavers or brick. So too its location became progressively more important, its scale increased, and its role expanded. A typical driveway for a two-car garage is 800 to 1,000 square feet. By comparison, the average new suburban home is almost 2,000 square feet. The modern driveway has joined the ensemble of house and garage in a unified structure, assuming the role of primary vehicular and pedestrian entry to the house. The front walk from street to house is gone or replaced by a walkway from driveway to front door. Our homes are now made up roughly of one-third family space of living room, dining room, kitchen, and family room, one-third the private realm of bedrooms, and one-third automobile space.

*Home, Muncie, Indiana.*  
Kenneth Helphand.





*Driveway, Springfield, Oregon.*  
Kenneth Helphand.

Driveways are one of many American “hybrid” spaces, places designed primarily for a single function, but which garner myriad secondary functions. In many ways driveways are actually paved portions of front yards that act as personal plazas and courtyards enclosed only at one end—a kind of front yard patio. They have assumed many traditional front yard functions. They are part of the symbolic field upon which the dwelling resides, indicators of social class and identity, and informal recreation spaces. Driveways are visible to passersby. As extensions of the road they are accessible to other vehicles, for service and turning around, yet they are in private ownership and used for family functions. As the primary, or even the exclusive, pedestrian and vehicular entrance to the home, the driveway is, for those looking in the other direction, toward the street, a gateway to an almost infinite national network. One indicator of its significance is that when it snows, it is the driveway that is the first place to be plowed, so one “can get out.” Driveways are also parking places, workplaces, and storage places, where cars and other large mobile possessions, vehicles of leisure and affluence, are stored, tuned, displayed, and groomed. It is here that recreational vehicles, trailers, and boats hibernate for the winter, lying dormant awaiting their warm-weather lives of mobility.

Driveways are social spaces for meeting neighbors, commercial grounds for garage sales, recreational areas for children, and the places where building projects spill out of basements and garages. They are miniature fields for soccer, hockey, or baseball. Garage doors are strike zones for pitchers and surrogate partners for tennis practice, (perhaps one reason glass windows are now rarely used). The pole supporting a basketball hoop or a backboard above the garage is so common that it is an almost standard issue item for the American home. In the city, basketball is a playground game and a public event, but in the suburbs it is a driveway game and largely a private affair.

The driveway is itself a middle landscape, where our urge to be on the move, our infatuation with mobility and technology, coexists with our desires for stability and the modest pleasures of personal and community life. Driveways have begun to assert their own identity as distinctive units in the domestic and community landscape. They increasingly dominate street-

scapes as front yards diminish to vestigial landscape relics and the street floods over its levee of curb and gutter toward the house. The trends are revealing. There is an ever-increasing frequency of looped driveways, and not only in upper-class developments. Here the driveway becomes the main element of the front yard, and the automobile's position as icon and status symbol is displayed to an even greater degree than in the conventional arrangement. The driveway itself becomes a status symbol. Many homes are now built with three-car garages and huge accompanying driveways. Others have storage slabs to one side for wheeled or marine vehicle storage. Gradually, the front yard is becoming paved. In the battle between street and house, the street is winning. Automatic garage door openers make it convenient to enter the house directly from the road, never going outside, forging even the most modest chance encounter with neighbors as one exits the cocoon of the automobile.

A central distinction regarding open space is that between public and private domains and the subtle gradients between them. These distinctions occur primarily in the transitions between house, yard, and street; between households, neighbors, and the public. Legal (*de jure*) and informal (*de facto*) mechanisms of physical design and cultural habit articulate a broad spectrum of public to private relationships. There are explicit messages: Keep Out, No Trespassing, Armed Response, Beware of Dog, or Welcome.<sup>17</sup> There are also subtler messages, where physical form acts as the clue that signal divisions through the spatial positioning of hedges, fences, gates and the sheer length of the walk to the front door. Visibility is legally regulated.



Riverpointe, Eugene, Oregon.  
Kate Van Rooy.



*Subdivisions (aerial), Miami, Florida.*  
Kenneth Helphand.

survey system of township, section, and range. Curves also conform to a picturesque aesthetic ideal harking back to an eighteenth-century aesthetic and Hogarth's serpentine line of beauty. They are also evocative of entry "drives," adding an elitist and aristocratic pretension associated with the Romantic suburb. As Lois Craig has noted, "In America the grid is the more public pattern than the curvilinear . . . the curved line reads as opposition, as defiance, as signifying domains of leisure and privacy."<sup>21</sup> Thus, new designs that combine these shapes are not just formal exercises, they are also seeking to combine the suburb's ideological polarities. Not surprisingly in the 1980s and 1990s, as the urban aspect of suburban life is asserting its imperative, the grid has returned. Charles Wolfe urges planners to "utilize the street as a legal and planning tool to structure neighborhood form and appearance. Yet [it] must assure a functional, continuous layout that integrates vehicles and pedestrians and must avoid neighborhoods that turn inwards on themselves. Given these considerations, the gridiron, so maligned in the recent past, may have a new life."<sup>22</sup>

Each street is part of a road hierarchy stretching from housing unit to local street, to collector, to arterial, to highway. The suburban neighborhood ideal has been to create streets that provide access but minimize through traffic. This may be the aspiration, yet as street scholar Donald Appleyard noted, the hierarchical arterial concept intended to minimize