

New Suburban Hope

One of the oldest and most elemental of house types, the court or patio row house, is becoming increasingly popular in its modern form
SMH 26.10.1964 in all Western countries.

THE reasons for this trend here and elsewhere are the same.

Until recently in Australia, time off was largely spent in activities around the house, particularly in gardening.

However, complex social changes, stemming from prosperity and more leisure time, have increasingly created opportunity for recreational and cultural activities outside the home for all the members of the family.

As a consequence there has been a demand everywhere for labour - saving, low-maintenance houses with small gardens which nevertheless retain the peace, privacy and charm of the traditional cottage.

Australians are usually only given the choice between a traditional free-standing family bungalow with a large area of yard space in the front, at the back and along the sides of the house, and the unsatisfactory alternative of a flat or home unit in a multi-storey block where they enjoy no private ground space at all.

The former type of development is becoming increasingly expensive in land, services and transport costs; flats are expensive from the point of view of building and equipment costs and are generally unattractive to families with children.

This problem was successfully solved under the conditions prevailing last century by the English type of terraced houses, but these suffered the disadvantages of a ground plan that was small in area and developed in depth rather than width, so the houses tended to be dark inside with the bedrooms on an upper floor.

This arrangement could

— By —



DONALD GAZZARD
Partner of Clarke Gazzard and Partners.

Mr Gazzard was awarded the first Wilkinson Award for the design of a courtyard house at Hunter's Hill.

be inconvenient and result in additional work for the housewife; furthermore these old terraced houses rarely made adequate provision for the motor car.

The recent resurgence of nineteenth-century terrace house areas such as Paddington, of houses being altered and modernised, is evidence that the basic advantages of this type of dwelling are being appreciated in older houses in the absence of any more modern versions.

For Present Day

Modern single-storey grouped or terraced patio houses can provide the most satisfactory and economical alternative for family living, provided they are designed for present-day conditions.

The area of land need-

SURVEY OF BUILDING

ed for each house can be reduced from the normal 8 or 10,000 sq. ft. for conventional detached houses to from 2½ to 3½ thousand sq. ft. for patio houses of equal size. A 10 or 15ft reduction in frontage correspondingly reduces the length of road and services needed per house.

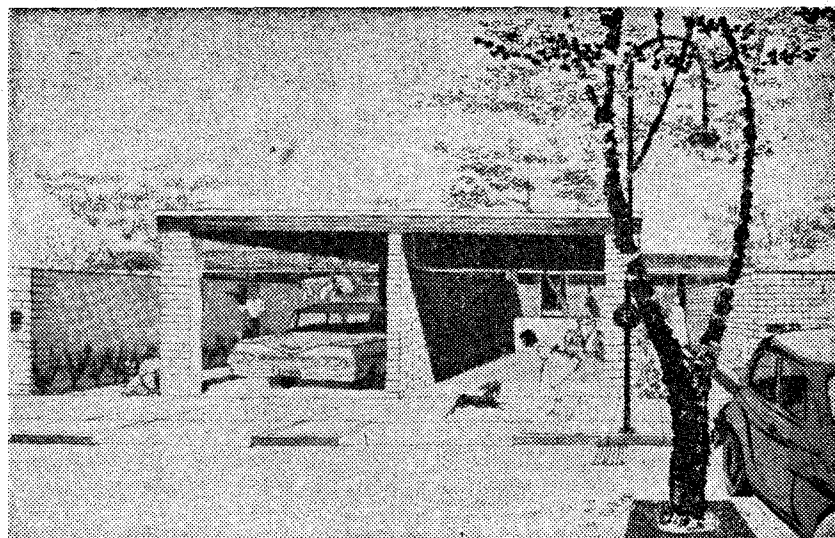
From the community's point of view this could restrain the sprawling expansion of our new suburbs and the increasing cost of providing services for them.

When the site area is reduced, the elementary needs of family life, for privacy, safe areas for children to play, for sitting in the sun and for cultivating a few plants, demand walled or well-fenced private courtyards of between 1,000 and 1,500 sq. ft.

In addition, all new patio house types must incorporate garages or carports with walled service yards where clothes can be dried, cars mended, boats stored and all that untidy, but necessary personal litter can be screened from public view.

Private spaces properly enclosed are a prime requirement for visual order as well as for privacy—the lack of either one mars this type of house as an environment for looking at or living in.

The design possibilities of this type of housing have not even started to be plumbed as there are innumerable ways of arranging the interiors within fixed party walls.



Sketch of a typical entrance from the street for the Housing Commission of N.S.W. patio housing project at Riverwood.

The original Radburn layout in New Jersey, 1928, is still the most ideal arrangement for such houses and achieves the kind of environment that many families are seeking.

Parking, service courts and kitchens are on the car side of the house; living areas, private garden courts and any common community open spaces are on the other.

Safe Paths

Pedestrian paths can safely link these sides of the houses to schools and shopping centres through these open spaces without crossing any major roads.

There is great need for increased and continuing experiment with house types and layouts such as these for good family living.

There have been some pioneering experiments with patio, town or cluster housing attempted in Canberra and Sydney.

The Housing Commission

of N.S.W. currently is considering a project group of 40 such patio houses.

However, there has been little other experience in Australia, as yet, of a subtle site planning and design complexities of this type of development.

Both the townscape and the landscape can benefit by the development of these modern versions of what the Americans called the row house and we call the terrace house; for in joining the houses in thoughtful ways, architectural unity and more interesting urban spaces can be restored and in massing the architecture more tightly, more natural open spaces can be preserved for communal use.

To avoid possible monotony because of repetition, all the elements of architecture must be skilfully exploited — changes in level, setbacks, varying heights, wing walls, balconies, doorways and window treatment.

It must be a rich plastic

arrangement and much more than an arbitrary change in the colour of the paint or the roof tiles.

A street architecture will then be created with a sense of mystery on what lies beyond the walls of the projecting courts; residents should be able to feel that their housing group has a unique "sense of place" depending on its location and topography.

Large suburban lots do not automatically ensure the kind of romantic Arcadian environment to which all twentieth-century suburbs have aspired. The ideal is becoming increasingly tarnished and in bondage to a motor mower.

Single storey patio or row houses of the appropriate size are ideally suited to all Australian families with or without children, where the family does not wish to cultivate lawns and gardens over a certain size but wishes to enjoy all the other characteristics of the detached house.