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CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE CENTER

MISSING MIDDLE INFILL HOUSING

DESIGN CATALOG

"City and Rural Population, 1890"
Source: Library of Congress

ABOUT THE COVER ART

The Missing Middle Infill Housing cover is based on a design created by African-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois to help illustrate social and economic obstacles facing Black people at the turn of the last century. Using population data, the image represents the number of Black Americans living in various types of community settings across the country, from cities to rural areas. This pioneering use of data visualization in the early 1900s helped advance "color line" concepts developed by African-American civil rights activist Frederick Douglass in the late 1800s.

The prevalence of vacant, city-owned lots in East Garfield Park create an opportunity for neighborhood infill with attainable, missing middle housing.

A LETTER FROM CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE CENTER

Since our founding in 1966, the Chicago Architecture Center has performed the vital service of hosting conversations about architecture and design's role in shaping a better Chicago. Helping to organize the Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition was exactly that: an opportunity to bring design into larger plans and discussions about the way cities are built.

We are grateful to all the architects—local, national, and international—who gave their creativity and expertise to this competition, and also thank the hundreds of Chicago citizens and the talented jurors who shared their feedback on the initial design proposals. We applaud our city's civil servants for pursuing bold plans to revitalize neighborhoods—and for centering equity for all Chicagoans in this important work.

We hope the innovative ideas created by this competition will fuel local developers to turn inspiration into action, and encourage them to engage the design teams featured in this publication to refine their proposals and bring more middle density housing to market. To everyone involved in this initiative, thank you for your commitment to making our city beautiful, equitable, and future-ready.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Esser Gorski

Eleanor Esser Gorski, AIA
CEO & President,
Chicago Architecture Center

Acknowledgments

The Chicago Architecture Center wishes to thank the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and The Chicago Community Trust for its direct support of the Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition.

Additional assistance provided by Applied Research Estate Analysis (AREA), the Chicago Emerging Minority Developer Initiative (CEMDI), Connecting Capital and Community (3C), Gensler, MUSE Community + Design, Revolve Community Development, and UrbanAC; the City's Department of Assets, Information, and Services (AIS) and the Department of Buildings (DOB); and Competition Jurors Catherine Baker, Jackie Koo, Brian Lee, and Leon Walker.

Special gratitude is extended to Maurice Cox, Gerardo Garcia, Patricia Garza, Eleanor Gorski, Reed Kroloff, John Law, Lynn Osmond, Sage Schroeder, and Michael Wood for their extra efforts to steward this project.

Graphic Design provided by Studio J9.

WHAT IS MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING?

Chicago housing styles vary by location, with some neighborhoods characterized by single-family homes and others by large, multi-unit buildings. The Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition was focused on designing homes that are sized in between, also known as "missing middle" housing. These structures include walk-up residential buildings like two-flats, three-flats, and six-flats, as well as rowhouses (connected townhomes) and single-family houses with an accessory dwelling unit on the same site.

New missing middle housing creates wealth-building opportunities for their owners while also helping to rebuild the population of under-invested neighborhoods. The Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition took the missing middle concept a step further by collaborating with renowned architects from across North America to design contemporary homes that are beautiful, efficient, and sustainable for a wide variety of household incomes.

Foreward

The notion that cities rise and fall and rise again is not unique to Chicago. But in a cityscape built for 3.6 million inhabitants, as Chicago was at its zenith in 1950, we are now left to contend with the many challenges of that same geography being used by 1 million fewer people. The ensuing social and economic unrest that accompanied the city's slow but steady population decline also brought extended periods of disinvestment to many neighborhoods, and ultimately led to much housing stock being depreciated and demolished. Figures, of course, vary by source, but a recent study from DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies reports that the City of Chicago now possesses 8,800 vacant lots—a clear indication of just how endemic the vacancy issue has become.

Facing these realities and opportunities, the Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition was created to bring attention to one sector of housing that is needed to draw more middle class residents back to Chicago. "Middle density" housing refers to the ubiquitous two-, three-, and six-flat buildings and rowhouses that dot countless Chicago streets, providing efficient layouts and wealth generation opportunities for property owners or renters seeking accommodations that won't break the bank; "missing middle" then refers to areas where such options are in short supply. Through this competition, we asked architects to make updates to these common forms, considering advances in materials, construction technology, as well as new requisites for contemporary urban life.

Housing design and smart construction are important levers. But diverse repopulation of city neighborhoods as well as preservation of existing building stock and strategic reinvestment in city services is all needed. To be sure, city building is a layered and multifaceted task.

The Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Catalog is offered here as a free resource for communities, investors, and real estate developers. We strongly encourage them to engage the design teams featured in this publication and build the next generation of neighborhoods we need and deserve

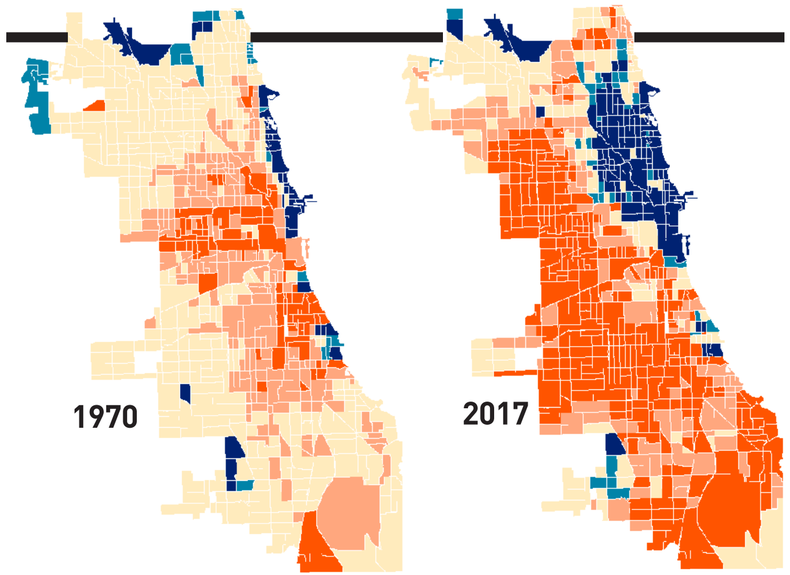
Citations:

U.S. Census Bureau. Chicago Population (1950): 3,620,962. Chicago Population (2023): 2,664,452. *https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicago-population-hits-lowest-point-since-1920/*
Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. *https://housingstudies.org/releases/Data-Highlighting-ETOD-Implications-Vacant-Land/*

Foreward (cont'd.)

Snapshot of a City
Chicago is large metropolis with a complex history. The maps to the right reveal an ever-changing city and the data behind these visualizations influences how and where investments are made.

Middle Class Households Across Chicago



CHANGE IN PER CAPITA INCOME 1970-2017

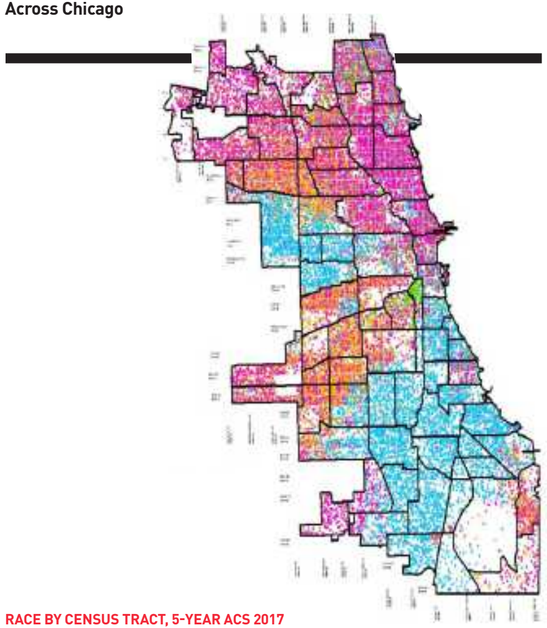
High Income 20-40% above average

Middle and Low Income 20% above and 20% below average

Very Low Income 40% below average

Source: Natalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement; University of Illinois, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

Racial Composition Across Chicago



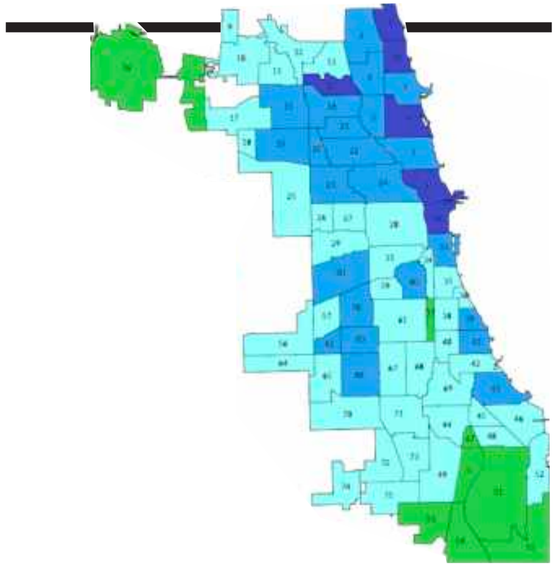
RACE BY CENSUS TRACT, 5-YEAR ACS 2017

Census Tracts: 1 Dot = 100

Asian Black Latino White Community Areas

Source: Folded Map; Tonika Lewis Johnson

Population Density Across Chicago



CHICAGO COMMUNITY AREAS DENSITY, 2020 CENSUS

People per sq. mi.

>25,000 15,000 - 24,999 5,000 - 14,999 1,001 - 4,999 <1.000

Source: The Corner Side Yard; Pete Saunders

About the Competition

The Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Competition was organized by the Chicago Architecture Center (CAC) to identify updated, affordable, efficient designs for the housing typologies most commonly found in Chicago: the single-family home, the two- and three-flat building, the rowhouse, and the six-flat building.

The competition began in winter 2022/23 with a Request for Qualifications open to all architects working in Illinois, and to an invited set of noted practitioners from across North America. The RFQ asked firms to demonstrate a consistent record of peer-recognized design excellence and innovation in their previous work. Design ability was evaluated by examining the aesthetic, cultural, functional, and technical merits of past work, as well as the quality and clarity of the submitted material.

Teams invited to the second phase of the competition were then asked to submit one 30-inch x 40-inch poster to explain their design solution. The jury identified a selection of noteworthy submissions that are included here in the Missing Middle Infill Housing Design Catalog.

The objective for all of this work is to identify architecture firms that are interested in creating new designs for "missing middle density" housing for the 21st century in Chicago.

The Jury

CAC convened an independent five-person jury comprised of industry experts from across Chicago.

Teams whose work appears in this catalog were asked to submit one poster to explain their design solution. Submissions were required to include the following elements at a minimum, but competitors were encouraged to provide as many images as they felt necessary to best present their ideas:

- **Street Views** *At least one "hero" image*
- **Interior Views** *At least one image*
- **Sections** *At least one image*
- **Floorplans** *At least one typical floorplan*
- **Other Images** *As many as appropriate*
- **Project Summary** *Not to exceed 250 words*

Jury Chair
REED KROLOFF
Dean and The Rowe Family College of Architecture Endowed Chair, Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture

Juror
CATHERINE BAKER
Founder,
Nowhere Collaborative

Juror
BRIAN LEE
Consulting Partner,
Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Juror
JACKIE KOO
Principal,
KOO Architecture

Juror
LEON WALKER
Managing Partner,
DL3 Realty

Competition Administrator
MICHAEL WOOD
Senior Curator,
Chicago Architecture Center

The 32 Selected Entries

SIX-FLATS

WINNER

ParkFowler Plus
The Courtyard Shift
parkfowler.plus
500 West Superior St., Unit 610
Chicago, IL 60654

Architecture for Public Benefit with Peter Rose + Partners
Affordable—Sustainable—Scalable
apbdesign.org
1511 East 56th St.,
Chicago, IL 60637

David Baker Architects
Make All Small Plans
dbarchitect.com
461 Second St., #127
San Francisco, CA 94107

Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO
Home Game
tatianabilbao.com
Paseo de la Reforma 382 piso 4
Juarez, Mexico City 6600

Canopy / Architecture and Design
Six Plus
canopy-chicago.com
180 W Washington St., Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60602

DNA Architecture + Design
Chicago Shuffle
dnaoffice.net
13432 Beach Ave., Suite A,
Los Angeles, CA 90292

Kwong Von Glinow
A Reconfigured Six-Flat
kwongvonglinow.com
1326 W Ardmore Ave.
Chicago, IL 60660

Höweler + Yoon
Remaking the Middle
howeleryoon.com
150 Lincoln St., Suite 3A
Boston, MA 02111

Merge Architects
Six Not So Flat
mergearchitects.com
332 Congress St., Floor 6,
Boston, MA 02210

NADAAA
The Helix²
nadaaa.com
1920 Washington St., #2
Boston, MA 02118

nARCHITECTS
Middle Ground
narchitects.com
68 Jay St., Suite 317
Brooklyn, NY 11201

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

WINNER

Dirk Denison Architects
Chicago Switch-Flat
dirkdenisonarchitects.com
1123 W. Washington Blvd., Suite 2
Chicago, IL 60607

Chicago Design Office
Middle House on the Prairie
chicagodesignoffice.com
916 N Damen Ave., Unit 1F
Chicago, IL 60622

Civic Projects Architecture and Marlon Blackwell Architects
3-2-1 House
civic-projects.com
6100 S Blackstone Ave.
Chicago, IL 60637

Nia Architects + Yu & Associates Collaborative
American Dream on a Small Lot
niaarch.com; youacollab.com
850 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60607

PRODUCTORA
A House for Three
productora-df.com.mx
415 Washington Ave., Unit 41
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Range Design & Architecture
A Family of Forms
rangedesign.com
1757 N Kimball Ave., Unit 201
Chicago, IL 60647

Urban Lab + The Available City
Ziggy: Two-Flat
urbanlab.com
3209 S Morgan St.
Chicago, IL 60608

Studio Becker Xu
Won't You be My Neighbor?
studiobeckerxu.com
3963 W Belmont Ave., Unit 234
Chicago, IL 60618

ROWHOUSES

WINNER

Future Firm
Readymade Row
future-firm.org
226 S. Wabash Ave., Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60604

ACDF Architecture
The Rowhouses
ACDF.ca
6250 Hutchison St., Suite 201
Montreal, Quebec H2V4C5

kevin daly Architects
Much More Middle
kevindalyarchitects.com
3617 W Exposition Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016

Frida Escobedo Studio
City Homestead
fridaescobedo.com
Taller Frida Escobedo, Int. 102-3,
Calle Versalles 21, Colonia Juarez
Cuauhtemoc, Mexico City 6600

Krueck Sexton Partners
One Size [Does Not] Fit All
ks.partners
221 W. Erie St.
Chicago, IL 60654

Latent
Generation Next
latentdesign.net
1006 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 700
Chicago, IL 60605

MOS
2 in 1
mos.nyc
226 W 135th Street
New York City, NY 10030

Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects
Row House Remix
loharchitects.com
4106 W Jefferson Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90016

Valerio Dewalt Train
Unexpected Home
buildordie.com
500 North Dearborn St., 9th Floor
Chicago, IL 60654

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

WINNER

Vladimir Radutny Architects
r_home
radutny.com
116 West Illinois St.
Chicago, IL 60611

CAMESgibson
Updated Workers Cottage
camesgibson.com
137 South Taylor St.
Oak Park, IL 60302

Studio Sean Canty, LLC
All Together House
seancanty.net
156 Porter St., Unit 410
Boston, MA 02128

von Weise Associates
Middle Court Wellness House*
vonweiseassociates.com
1049 N Ashland Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622

SIX-FLATS

Six-Flats

The Six-Flat is another common Chicago housing typology that gains efficiency over its cousin, the three-flat. Typically a central stair provides access to all six similarly-configured units. Six-flats are popular among developers and occupants alike, as they can function as owner-occupied condominiums or rental buildings.

THE SIX-FLAT

Designers responding in the six-flat category envisioned six-unit condominium buildings. The design was required to fit on two adjacent standard city lots with the necessary setbacks, and a maximum of four stories. Teams had the flexibility to decide if the units would have the same configuration or vary across the building. As required by code, all units must have access to two separate stairwells for emergency egress.

COMPETITION ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- 50 x 125-foot parcel (2 adjoining standard city lots)
- 15-foot front yard setback
- 35-foot minimum rear setback (not applicable to detached garage)
- 3-foot minimum side setbacks
- 2- to 4-bedroom plans; minimum 1,200 square feet and 1.5 baths per unit
- 45-foot maximum height
- Assume flat parcel with neighboring structures of similar size
- Rear alley access

JURY COMMENT

Among many ideas that led the jury to believe that this was the most successful set of proposals in the competition was the innovation of creating a court in the center of the project, thus bringing more daylight to the units than is typical in traditional Chicago six-flats. Many of the units have intricate stacking schemes generated to promote privacy and individuality; others have plans that could be changed over time, and thus accommodate multi-generational or atypical-community living. Several of the designs propose construction systems that encourage environmental stewardship. Jurors felt these submissions were some of the most aesthetically attractive entries, too.

WINNER SIX-FLATS

The Courtyard Shift: Illuminating Living through a Reimagined Chicago Courtyard

ParkFowler Plus

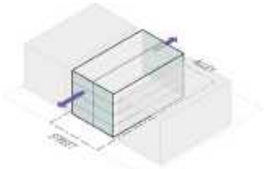
CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury's favorite of several projects that pull a courtyard to the center of the six-flat configuration in order to create public space and bring light to the interior of a building type where both are often not present. The jury commends the handsome elevations in this design. We question the need for basement bedrooms, but are very pleased by the exterior spaces for each unit, the generous daylighting, and the contextually respectful massing.

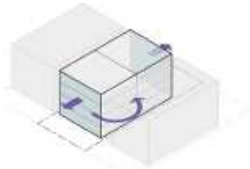
Access to natural light is one of the most basic and critical requirements for housing and quality of life. However, urban infill projects are constantly challenged with trying to provide an adequate amount of light, especially where lots are narrow and deep. In Chicago, the majority of six-flat housing stock is simply an extrusion of the site, subtracting the required minimum setbacks. The result is buildings where the greatest proportion of the façade flanks a narrow, dark alley between structures preventing rooms from gaining light or privacy and depending on the short front and rear façades for light and views.

In contrast, the well-known Chicago courtyard building typology is ideal for allowing light into a deep infill property. However, these early 1900s developments are typically found on three or more combined Chicago lots.' The Courtyard Shift revisits the Chicago courtyard to meet modern standards on a smaller property.

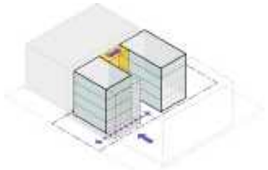
Splitting and rotating the orientation of the typical six-flat allows a courtyard to be introduced in the middle of the lot and returns the majority of the façade to the gain of light for each unit, while it also provides a reprieve between structures on adjacent lots. This design reconsiders the redundancy of units by providing a diversity of apartment sizes and arrangements for a variety of users and lifestyles. More than a singular entity, "The Courtyard Shift" can be mirrored and multiplied to amplify the open area between buildings, offering opportunities to share courtyards and strengthen communities.



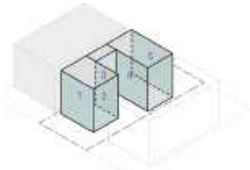
1. Typical Chicago six-flat with limited light exposure



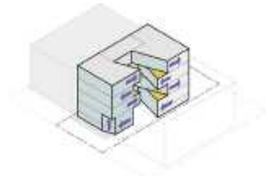
2. Split floor plate and rotate orientation



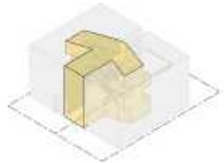
3. Push and connect courtyard To street



4. Maximize light exposure through multiple facades

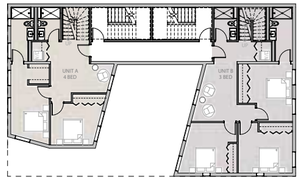


5. Push and pull to activate courtyard

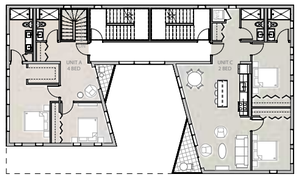


6. Multiply buildings to amplify open area

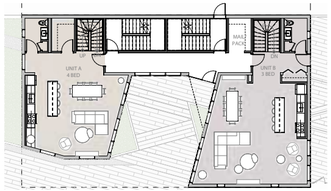
WINNER SIX-FLATS



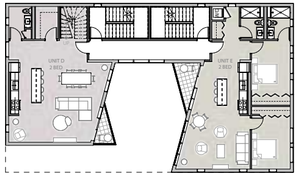
Basement floor plan



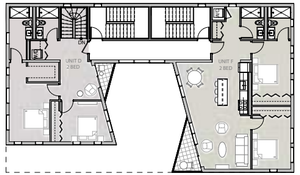
Second floor plan



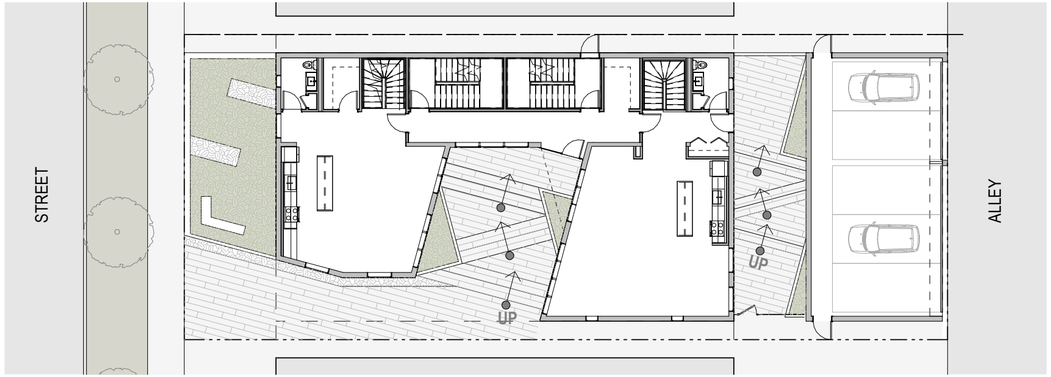
First floor plan



Third floor plan



Fourth floor plan



Site plan

Interior view

Section

SIX-FLATS

Affordable-Sustainable-Scalable: Modular Mass Timber Housing for Chicago

Architecture for Public Benefit with Peter Rose + Partners

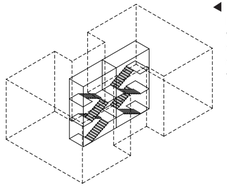
The jury was intrigued by the possibilities of prefabricated mass timber but would like more specifics to understand how this method can deliver on the affordability promised.

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

Modular Mass Timber is an affordable, sustainable, and scalable path forward, well-suited for housing needs in Chicago. With over 10,000 vacant lots and neighborhoods that remain underserved and in need of good quality affordable housing, we propose a replicable and modular mass timber system that reimagines the Chicago six-flat.

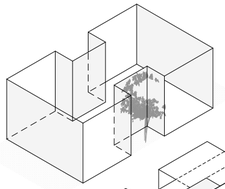
The prototype is part of an agile, carbon-positive construction process, with components produced off-site, assembled into modules locally, and constructed simply and efficiently on site. Within this efficient system, our priority is to create a beautiful, well laid out home designed and built to be loved for generations.

Courtyard view from the entry



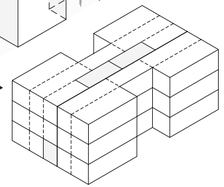
◀ LIGHT AND VIEWS

By shifting the typical six-flat stair cores to the center of the building, we liberate the front and back facades to bring abundant natural light to the living spaces. Our design also confronts Chicago's long and narrow typical lot with a generous courtyard that will bring additional light, views, and fresh air into the most recessed part of the plan.



ENTRY, GALLERY AND LANDSCAPE ▶

The circulation system is organized to create two generous lobbies in the front and back, acknowledging the shared use of both street and lane. In the units, each entrance carves out a gracious and practical place of arrival with a courtyard view and connection to landscape. Throughout the scheme, every room has a deep view of trees, vegetation,and outside.



MODULAR, SCALABLE AND AFFORDABLE ▶

The plan is based on a grid that accounts for the fabrication, transport, and assembly of each component and module. By asymmetrically dividing the floor, we create larger and smaller units and a mixed unit distribution. The design is highly scalable and replicable and can be constructed with less risk, time, and cost. It has been designed to meet the needs of all Chicago residents.

SIX-FLATS

Make All Small Plans

David Baker Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury was concerned about underdeveloped façades. However, narrowing the typical six-flat plan creates wider side yards for ground-floor units (others get decks), and the proposal employs several smart construction methodologies.

Despite the oft-quoted guidance of Daniel Burnham, we find magic in the small—incremental innovations that strengthen the fabric of neighborhoods.

This modern iteration on the traditional six-flat focuses on what people really need: a bright, affordable, accessible, and healthy home that links to nature, supports in-home work and play, and connects neighbors and communities.

SIX-FLATS

Home Game

Tatiana Bilbao ESTUDIO

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury applauded the drive to create community, especially through shared, carefully planned exterior spaces. They also felt the front façades are among the most refined of all the projects—elegant upgrades for the standard six-flat typology.

Ask yourself: what makes a place a home? A home should be a place where my needs are met, that reflects my personality, and grows with me. It should be a place where I can peacefully interact with others and be part of a community. It should be a place that accepts the changing conditions of life and its daily evolution.

To build a home you should consider basic human needs. Where and how do I take care of my body? Where and how do I take care of my clothes? Where and how do I take care of others?

To build a home you should consider secondary needs, as well. Where and how do I want to create? Where and how do I want to dream? Where and how do I want to coexist?

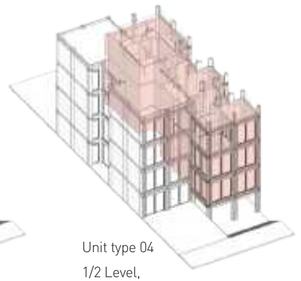
To build a home you should consider the constant changes that life brings to your personal needs and to those of the people you live with. How can your space help meet those needs? Will they change over time, and how can your space adapt? How can we create a space that adapts to the change of human life? How can we create a system that allows the process of life to accommodate itself in a changing space?

To build a home you should also consider others. How can your home be a place where your community can bond and come together? How can your home make life easier and more enjoyable for everyone?

Unit type 01
0 Level

Unit type 02
1st Level

Unit type 03
3rd Level



Unit type 04
1/2 Level,
1st 1/2 Level
2nd 1/2 Level

SIX-FLATS

Six Plus: Resilient Housing for Collective Restoration

Canopy / Architecture and Design

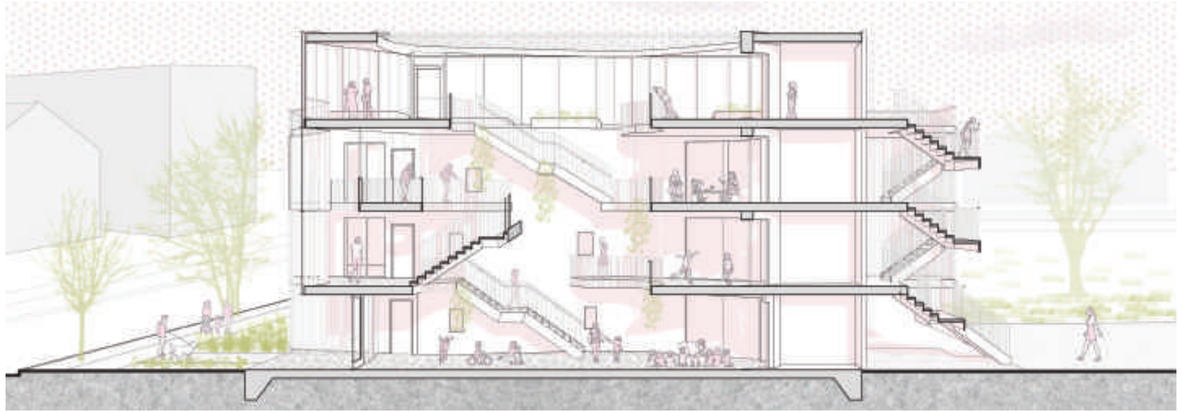
CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury commended this proposal for including a shared interior space that could act as a social incubator or small business to generate maintenance income. Questions arose, however, about the viability of the central court and cost of the louvers.

SIX PLUS is designed with climate responsiveness in mind, incorporating sustainable and social impact elements while still maintaining the unique characteristics of the vernacular Chicago six-flat building. The project offsets the two conventional stacks of living units, creating a shared front porch with a ground-floor amenity flex space and a resident rooftop garden.

These community spaces encourage social interaction and supplement the unit experience. The ground floor space can be built as a white box shell for future customization by the owners, and could be used as a co-working, socializing, or makerspace as desired.

The front and back façades are double-clad with an operable wood louver system to adapt to Chicago's dramatic seasonal variation. Expanding the primary vertical circulation to create a spacious social stair and vertical greenhouse atrium creates additional ventilation, social opportunities, and borrowed light. While the front and back porches might be most utilized in the summer months, the vertical greenhouse in the center of the building provides a sun-filled retreat during the winter months that still offers the social and practical benefits of a typical Chicago porch. This climate responsive Chicago SIX PLUS six-flat of the future prioritizes ecological stewardship and community-building, while still maintaining a nod to the classic Chicago six-flat.



SIX-FLATS

Chicago Shuffle

DNA Architecture + Design

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

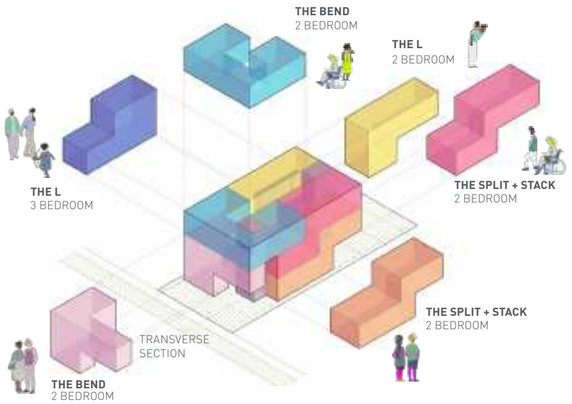
The jury appreciated the variety of floor plans, the sectional richness, the large windows, and the street façade, including a formal lobby space and ceremonial stair (about which there were some minor budget concerns).

Pattern recognition allows us to predict and expect what is coming. The future of Chicago's South Side requires patterns that are adaptable, flexible, and agile. The pattern of disinvestment in Chicago's urban areas offers an opportunity to rethink housing and encourage home ownership.

The Chicago Shuffle begins with the premise that the part can sometimes be greater than the whole.

Here the apartment flat is reconfigured into different permutations: Split and Stack, The "L", and the Bend. The units can be combined into various configurations to produce six-unit condominium apartment buildings.

The unit layouts prioritize natural light, adaptability, and a unique dwelling experience for the residents. The units are of different sizes to accommodate young families, aging-in-place, and first-time home buyers.



SIX-FLATS

A Reconfigured Six-Flat with Two Courtyards

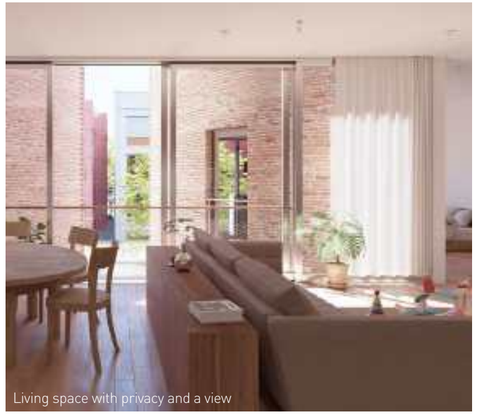
Kwong Von Glinow

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury was intrigued with the unique courtyard organization of this proposal, along with its clever take on traditional six-flat façades. There was some worry that the interior courts might not capture enough daylight.

This proposal seeks to take advantage of the 50-foot-wide lot. Very often the six-flat typology takes its cues directly from the three-flat building type by either mirroring or doubling a three-flat to create a conventional six-flat. The units then are often only 20 feet wide and very long.

Our approach reorients the units to front-and-back, rather than side-by-side, so that each unit can experience the full lot width. Two large uniquely shaped courtyards define the light-filled living spaces of each unit.



Living space with privacy and a view

A layout designed for construction efficiency

SIX-FLATS

Remaking the Middle

Höweler + Yoon

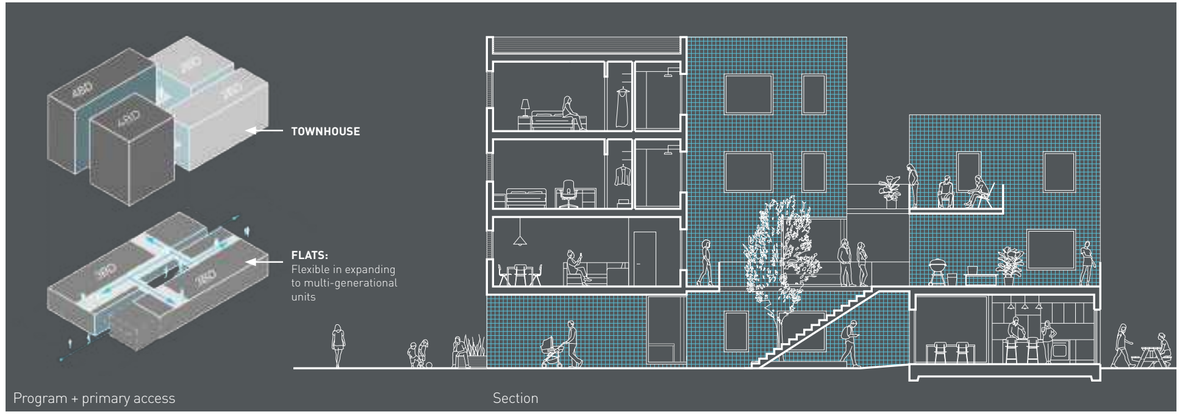
CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

A different take on the centralized courtyard scheme, this proposal impressed with its array of unit types (including one-level variations), its material innovation, and its intelligent ways of capturing daylight.

The traditional Chicago six-flat is organized by its twin stacks of bay windows. These bay windows are an interface between home and neighborhood; a source of "eyes on the street," they also offer passersby a fleeting glimpse into private interiors. Yet the bay window reflects a dated formality of front and back: front yard and front rooms for show, backyard and back rooms for family life. In the contemporary city, where home blurs with work, family blurs with community, and private blurs into public, life instead gravitates towards the middle.

Our proposal inverts the bay window into a collective portal, reaching to the street from a common middle yard. This common center frames the sense of open-ended possibility of a once vacant lot and remakes the building's collective areas into a shared threshold and gathering space.

The project is organized as a pinwheel, with four two- to three-story townhouses arrayed around the ceramic-clad middle yard. The ground floor provides two accessible units, which connect to the floors above to accommodate multi-generational families. To support residents' entrepreneurial aspirations, the ground-floor units also offer flexible spaces at the front or rear that could double as a workshop, studio, storefront, or additional bedroom. Entrances, balconies, and corner window seats embrace the middle yard, making the building's core into a place of homecoming.



Program + primary access

Section

SIX-FLATS

Six Not So Flat

Merge Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

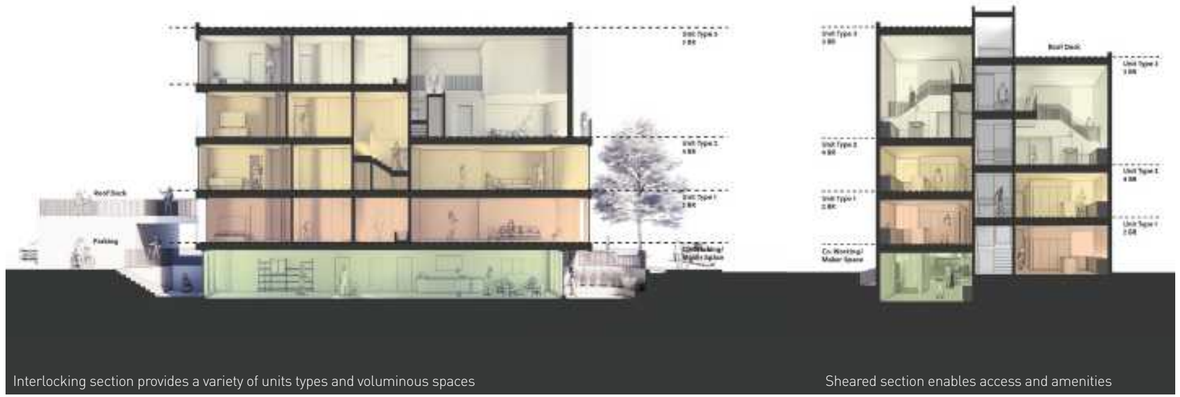
The jury appreciated the proposal's varied unit plans, sections, and façades, but also feared these deft details might drive up costs and that the architecture looks more like San Francisco than Chicago. More detailed plans would be helpful.

The six-flat may be flat, but it is not level. Or rather, on the level. The typical stack of identical flats set a partial level above grade presents a problem of access. The SIX NOT SO FLAT remedies this accessibility difficulty, unlocking the latent social possibilities of the type.

A shear in the familiar side-by-side massing increases access in several ways:

- Access for disabled residents in an at-grade ADA unit.
- Access for a broader cohort of households through a mix of three unit types. Each side of the shifted massing features a two-bedroom flat and interlocking three-and four-bedroom maisonettes.
- Access to skyline views in a shared roof deck where residents can gather.
- Access to the collaborative capacity of the resident collective in a shared multipurpose space at garden level where residents can meet, make, maintain, and store.
- Access to the connective potential of the alley in a backyard and garage-top terrace where vehicles, vegetation, and residents are equally accommodated.

From back-to-front, side-to-side, and top-to-bottom, the SIX NOT SO FLAT employs a single shift to set off a series of social transformations on the Chicago lot and landscape beyond.



Interlocking section provides a variety of units types and voluminous spaces

Sheared section enables access and amenities

SIX-FLATS

The Helix²

NADAAA

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

Easily the most complex plan of the competition, and yet another that opens a large central court around which the units rotate, this scheme excited (and at times puzzled) the jury. They nevertheless commended its mix of public and private spaces and its aspiration to create successful housing and community.

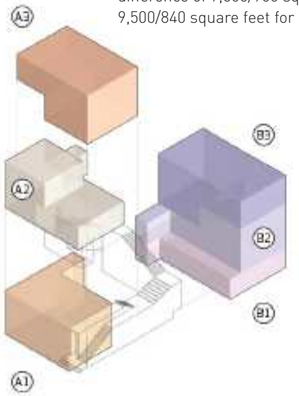
URBANISM: The doubling of plots sets up an opportunity to transform what would conventionally be two rowhouses into multiple dwellings that create a community within a single structure. HELIX² achieves this by creating an inner courtyard shared by all units, with each unit also getting its own separate terrace.

A TYPE TRANSFORMED: The proposed circulation of two traditional rowhouses is merged into a double-helical staircase that accesses all units, one interior and another exterior, which serves as the second means of egress. The rowhouses are rotated perpendicular to the street and separated to form a court, with the exterior stair providing terraces for social interaction.

UNIT 'TETRIS' LOGIC: Most units are organized on two levels in a sectional L-configuration, creating a public/private level, or allowing a separate suite on another floor for the independence of an in-law/parental suite. While the units fit into a bespoke organization, all plumbing is stacked to allow for flexible planning around units, should transformations be needed.

TECHNOLOGIES: While economy suggests wood stud framing is the most economical for a single building, if multiple structures were considered on varied sites, mass timber and modular systems allow for prefabrication and enhanced sustainable solutions.

THE REAL ESTATE PROFORMA: An apples-to-apples comparison between a conventional double rowhouse and this proposal establishes a net-to-gross difference of 9,500/900 square feet of circulation for the rowhouse and 9,500/840 square feet for HELIX².



A3 1630 sqft 4 Bed, 2.5 Bath
A2 1580 sqft 2 Bed, 2.5 Bath
A1 1750 sqft 3 Bed, 2.5 Bath
B3 1580 sqft 3 Bed, 2 Bath
B2 1670 sqft 3 Bed, 3.5 Bath
B1 1300 sqft 2 Bed, 2 Bath

Unit "Tetris" Logic

SIX-FLATS

Middle Ground

nARCHITECTS

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury commended this proposal's compact and clever planning, its smart entry scheme, simple unit stacking, and efforts to create light and space between buildings. The jury felt this scheme would work even if the corners were squared off.

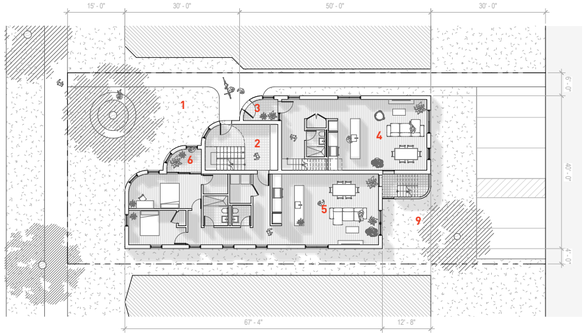
Our proposal continues the City of Chicago's work of reactivating commercial corridors by enhancing the space between home and street: a Middle Ground. Residents will come home to generous outdoor spaces, a luminous building stair, and winter gardens that reinterpret Chicago's bay windows. As such, Middle Ground connects indoor and outdoor living, and neighbor to neighbor. While the traditional six-flat locates the entry stair in the center, resulting in narrower/deeper units, our proposal maximizes front-and rear-facing rooms, emphasizing daylight and neighborhood safety.

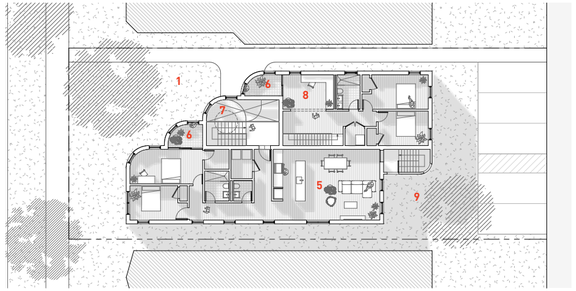
A socially resilient mix of two duplex townhouses and four flat apartments accommodates how we live today. Anticipating a variety of household types, the bedrooms are treated equally, with a third room (townhouses) and winter gardens offering the flexibility and acoustic privacy to work from home.

A separate front door to the lower townhouse further expands the range of lifestyles accommodated, while living rooms are oriented to the rear, activating this shared space with the second means of egress.

Middle Ground incorporates sustainable measures that don't require costly application or certification processes, such as cross ventilation, ample daylight, and a PV array on the roof. We illustrate the use of CLT floor and roof slabs, spanning between traditionally framed unit demising walls. Windows are standard dimensions, and exterior cladding is shown either in metal or brick.

To "come home" implies a return to the familiar. At the same time, new prototypes offer the opportunity to recalibrate housing for updated lifestyles, economic realities, and sustainability goals. We propose a Middle Ground.





1 Communal front yard
2 Entry foyer
3 Separate townhouse entry
4 Townhouses (Type B) 1,400 net sf
5 Flats (Type B) 1,200 net sf
6 Winter garden
7 Open atrium
8 Home office/ 3rd bedroom
9 Communal backyard

Ground floor/ 3rd floor (sim.)

2nd floor/ 4th floor

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Two- and Three-Flats

A mainstay in Chicago, two- and thee-flats make up a quarter of the city's housing. Often, the ground level unit is occupied by the building owner, who leases out the upper unit(s). The rental units help offset housing costs for the owner, and serve as transitional housing for families looking to move from apartment living to eventual home ownership.

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Architects were tasked with envisioning a two-or three-unit, owner-occupied building. Although not a competition requirement, the primary owner's unit traditionally occupies the ground, with additional unit(s) above that might be smaller. To maximize flexibility, design entries were expected to comply with standard residential zoning requirements and fit on a standard city lot.

COMPETITION ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- Standard city lot of 25 x 125 feet
- 20-foot front yard setback
- 35-foot minimum rear setback (not applicable to detached garage)
- Combined side setbacks of 5 feet, with no side less than 2 feet
- 2- or 3-bedroom primary unit with 1- or 2-bedroom secondary units; minimum 1,200 square feet and 1.5 baths for primary unit
- 35-foot maximum height
- Assume flat parcel with neighboring structures of similar size
- Rear alley access

JURY COMMENT

Jurors were pleased with a majority of the two- and three-flat entries. Of particular interest were the projects that devise innovative ways to capture outdoor space within the volume of the building, providing opportunities for privacy in a dense building type. Clever planning offers up interesting and unusual strategies for creating flexible spaces. And several of the projects challenge the stacked-plate hegemony of Chicago's typical two- and three-flats by suggesting effective ways to bring light and exterior spaces much deeper into the buildings than is typical in the city.

WINNER TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Chicago Switch-Flat: A Flexible Three-Flat to Support Dynamic Family Needs

Dirk Denison Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury found much to like in this proposal, particularly its clever split-section and its scheme of articulating spaces that allow for reconfiguration through simply opening and closing doors on each floor of a central stair tower. In addition to this wholly original idea, jurors praised the dense planning and mix of public and private spaces. Finally, jurors commended the architectural language for its timeless yet contemporary character.

THE THREE-FLAT PUZZLE

Owner-occupied three-flats in Chicago have long enabled families and first-time home buyers to build wealth while living within the density of the city. However, the limitations of a typical three-flat building plan impede the growth of families. When families need change, it can take time and money to modify the owner's space, losing rental income and incurring remodeling costs. The Switch-Flat provides a solution.

FLEXIBILITY WITHOUT CONSTRUCTION

The Switch-Flat enables incremental flexibility in the amount of space occupied by the owner, allowing families to grow while retaining maximum rental income. On each landing of a central light-filled stair, demising doors open and close to switch which living floor (front) connects to each bedroom floor (rear). Living units face the street and can be converted to either a studio, two-bedroom, or four-bedroom unit when linked to the bedroom floors via the central stair.

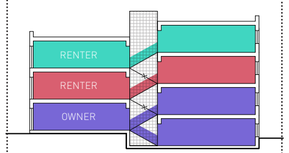
A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

The Switch-Flat allows for long-term multi-generational occupation in multiple configurations, designed for quality and durability. This scheme continues the tradition of the well-performing Chicago brick three-flat, celebrating the craftsmanship of Chicago masons with bright and airy spaces. The Switch-Flat is built to last for generations—an investment in the pride and legacy of Chicago's neighborhoods.

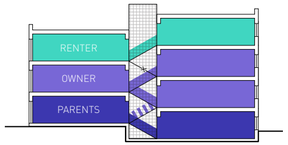
Central stair with flexible door system in 'open' position

WINNER TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

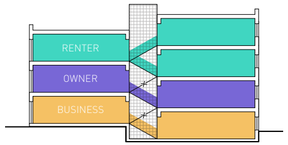
Owner occupied three-flat
Rental income: $$



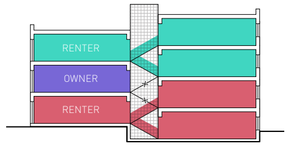
Multi-generational living
Rental income: $



Locally owned business
Rental income: $$$



Maximum rental income
Rental income: $$$$

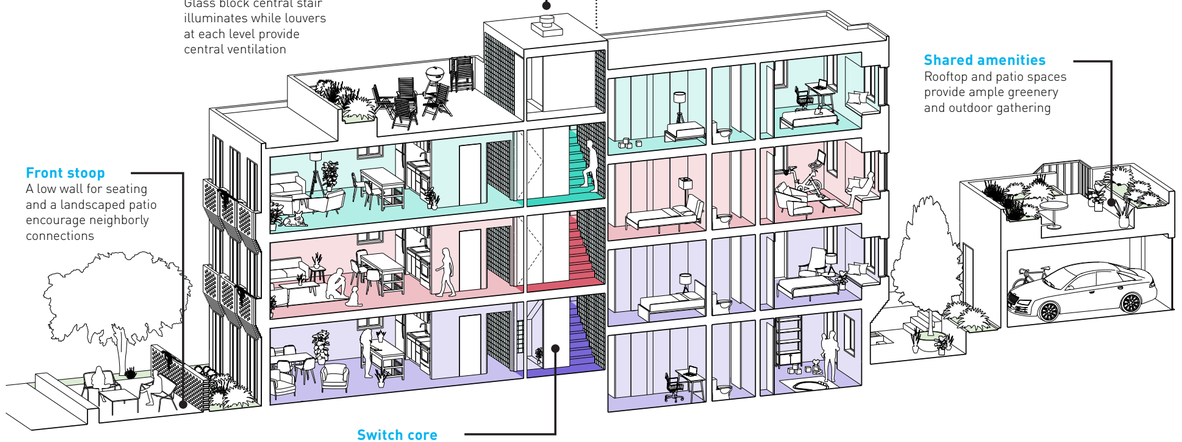


A typical owner-occupied configuration

Light & air court
Glass block central stair illuminates while louvers at each level provide central ventilation

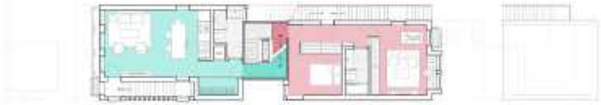
Shared amenities
Rooftop and patio spaces provide ample greenery and outdoor gathering

Front stoop
A low wall for seating and a landscaped patio encourage neighborly connections



Switch core
Doors at each stair landing open and close to provide access to bedroom floors as needed

FOURTH FLOOR PLAN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

◂ STREET-FACING LIVING SPACE WITH DOORS OPENED TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Middle House on the Prairie: Designing for Urban Bio/Diversity

Chicago Design Office

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury commended this split-entry scheme as a thoughtful way to manage multi-generational living, with one unit suitable for single-floor occupation. But the jury wanted to learn more about the construction methodologies so central to the proposal.

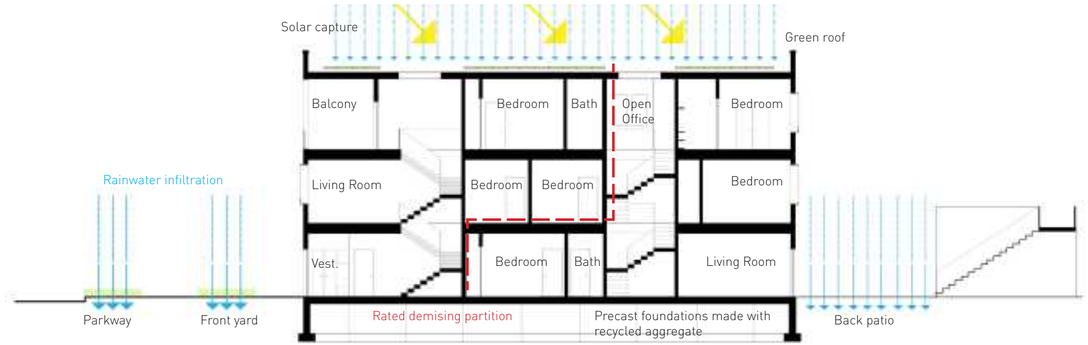
"Middle House on the Prairie" merges housing needs, ecological site design, and construction savings through modular prefabrication and recycled materials.

This contemporary take on the two-flat allows both units to have street-facing entrances and layouts that occupy the full width of the building. The split-level arrangement delivers generous living spaces, flex/home office space, private internal stairs, and enough bedrooms for evolving family configurations. Unit A (primary) offers an aging-in-place option on the ground floor, while Unit B (secondary) can act as a rental apartment, Airbnb, or independent unit for a multi-generational family.

The parkway, front yard, and back patio all host native prairie and woodland plantings attractive to birds and other pollinators. Movable planters in the patio and garage roof deck allow for the cultivation of herbs and vegetables, and the roof features low-growing, drought-tolerant plants that thrive in full sun.

The design employs fixed-dimension modules that can be fabricated off-site to increase quality control and reduce construction time on-site. House modules include stairs, vestibules, bathrooms, closets, laundry rooms, cabinetry, interior walls, and floors; landscape modules include precast foundation walls, precast pavers, outdoor planters, green roof trays, and solar panels. With additional reclaimed building materials and no basement, we further limit any disturbance to the existing site ecologies.

"Middle House on the Prairie" offers a socially-sensitive housing typology that contributes to a more healthy, more equitable Chicago.



TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

3-2-1 House

Civic Projects Architecture and Marlon Blackwell Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury appreciated how this project's clever circulation addresses the traditional three-flat's opportunities to build homeowner wealth through rental or sale of secondary units. The jury also commended the inclusion of multiple exterior living spaces.

The 3-2-1 House examines the possibilities and opportunities inherent to the three-flat building and reframes what this typology can be to provide a new model for "missing middle density." Rather than be content with the prototypical configuration of this typology, the 3-2-1 House explores the possibilities of the building section to generate units with distinct orientations to maximize access to light and views on the narrow lot. This unique configuration allows for multiple two-story units within the same building, and features three different unit types.

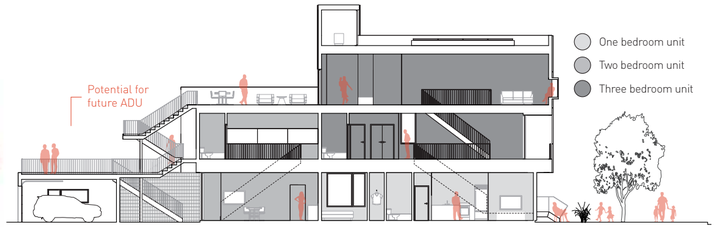
By providing a range of unit types, the 3-2-1 House supports long-term residency and socio-economic diversity. The variety of units allows ownership at different economic levels, and the owner can occupy the appropriate unit, at the appropriate time in their life, while utilizing the remaining units for a variety of wealth-building and wealth-sharing opportunities. The range of units also allows for the residents to stay in place and build deeper community connections.

The 3-2-1 House fully addresses the context of vacant lots within the neighborhood by utilizing the sides of the homes to create communal open space between potential adjacent buildings. In order to welcome residents "back home" the configuration affords for separated individual entries, allowing each unit to have its own identity and eliminates the need for an interior exit stair. The building massing is pulled away from the property line on the ground level to create a side yard garden for circulation through the site, and each unit has its own garden space. The garage roof can be shared by all residents or become a future accessory dwelling unit.

Third floor

Second floor

Ground floor



Section

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

American Dream on a Small Lot

Nia Architects + Yu & Associates Collaborative

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

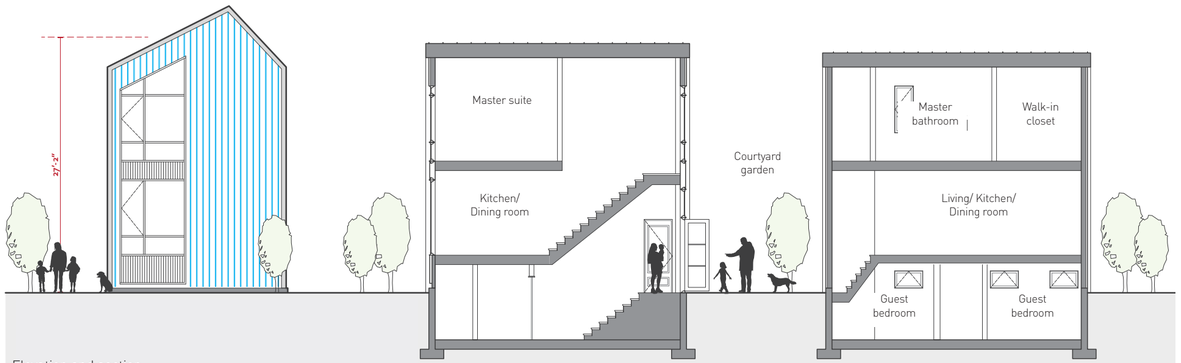
The jury was interested in the chamfered plans that create internal courts, but concerned they are too small. The jury applauded the amount of privacy allotted to each unit but wondered if pushing bedrooms to basements is necessary.

The American Dream is the ideal that every individual, regardless of social class, ethnicity, age, or gender, should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative. The American Dream promises freedom and equality that make our lives better, richer, and fuller!

Our proposal looks to usher in a new era of inclusive growth, offering the prized American Dream of full home ownership, even within a confined urban lot, and with the ultimate goal of building communal wealth.

After studying the traditional configurations of the Chicago two-flat and the courtyard building, we arrived at our vision for a bold two-unit typology that acknowledges the efficiency of consistent unit layouts and the importance of protected outdoor space. Instead of stacking the apartments, though, our design pulls the two identical units apart, siting them toward the front and back of the lot in a move that emphasizes the feel and look of single-family homes. We then started to rotate the buildings to offset the courtyard frontage, resulting in a private garden for each unit. As we refined the concept, we also adjusted and addressed the building massing to present a distinctive design that fits within a standard urban lot.

It's a statement; it's our way of announcing a new affordable residential typology that bestows the inclusivity of complete home ownership; it's our "welcome back home" to current and former Chicago residents and the opportunity to achieve equitable long-term growth.



Elevation and section

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

A House for Three

PRODUCTORA

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

Jurors applauded the familiar and likeable form of this proposal: it clearly looks like a house and as such likely would appeal to buyers. But the clever back-to-back planning, board and batten siding, and rooftop terraces also engendered praise (and debate).

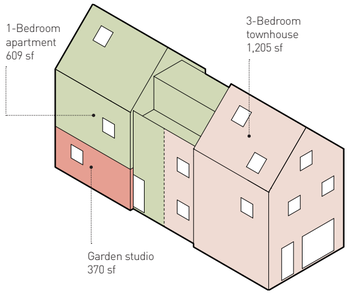
This proposal consists of a three-flat residential project on a standard city lot of 25 x 125 feet. It is envisioned as an owner-occupied building with two rental units, as established in the competition brief.

The deadpan simplicity of the pitched-roof silhouette evokes the generic house shape, making the project recognizable as a socio-cultural typology: a house as if drawn by a kid.

By organizing the massing in such a way that the volume is read as a single-family residence, the project feels in tune with the scale of the neighborhood and integrates harmoniously within the existing urban context.

The volume is clad with a standing seam metal roof in a terra-cotta color and a traditional board-and-batten façade with different vertical intervals and two different hues of red to reduce the visual height of the volume.

The bright red tones set the project apart, acknowledging one of the most precious characteristics of our organically grown urban neighborhoods: architectural freedom, diversity, and vivid expression of individuality.



Ground floor

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

A Family of Forms

Range Design & Architecture

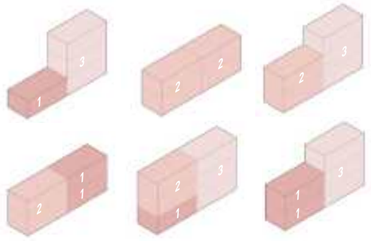
CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

This proposal offers possibilities for unit flexibility and elevation flexibility, thus bringing extra opportunities for wealth creation and even intergenerational living, given the possibility of single-floor residences.

Chicago has a rich history of two-and three-flat housing that serves a unique market niche and provides opportunities for wealth creation. These types of buildings were especially popular during the early 20th century and could be found in many neighborhoods throughout the city. However, recent trends have led to a decline in this building stock, primarily due to the high cost of delivering them to market.

Our proposal addresses this issue by introducing a new family of forms that responds to current market forces, provides user comfort, and enhances the character of the neighborhood.

The 1, 2, and 3 bedroom units can be arranged in a number of configurations on a typical Chicago lot. This offers flexibility in responding to market conditions, neighborhood scale, and personal preferences.



Unit variation

TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Ziggy: Two-Flat

UrbanLab + The Available City

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

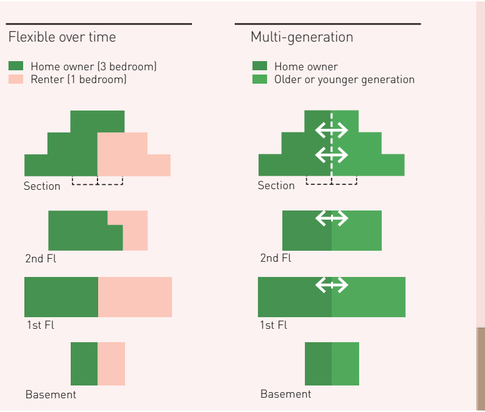
The jury commended this back-to-back layout because of its simple, practical arrangement of spaces that yield an eye-catching form, large amounts of private exterior space, and possible savings in construction costs.

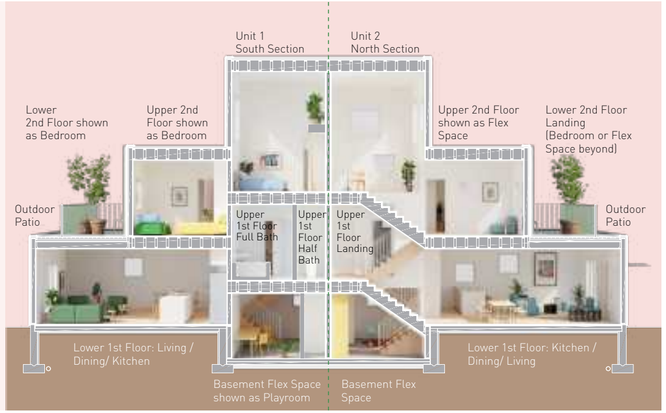
Typical Chicago two-flats are composed of two units stacked one on top of the other. This organization forces a choice between living on the lower level for ease of access and a direct connection to the landscape, or living on the upper level for more privacy and quiet. ZIGGY resolves this dilemma with two identical homes next to each other. This allows the homeowner and their renter (or extended family) to enjoy the benefits of both the lower and upper levels. ZIGGY goes further and proposes a stepped design that supports a variety of spaces: horizontal and vertical, open-plan and delineated rooms.

ZIGGY provides both residences with ground level access and outdoor space, private patios, and good light and ventilation.

ZIGGY is flexible over time: by putting up or taking down non-structural walls and thresholds, the homeowner can choose two identical units, or expand into the rental unit, or open at points to create a multi-generational home with connection and privacy for all generations.

ZIGGY is simple wood-framed construction that can be stick-built or panelized off-site and assembled quickly on-site. The site-extruded metal façade can be a variety of colors per the homeowner's taste. The many windows are a variety of sizes; the larger ones frame views of the sky and the neighborhood, the smaller ones are operable and located to allow cross ventilation that passively evacuates heat in the hot summer months. ZIGGY is 19 feet wide x 70 feet long x 32 feet tall.





TWO- AND THREE-FLATS

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

Studio Becker Xu

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

By separating the units at grade, this proposal creates interesting possibilities for shared space. It also gives each unit a chance for a separate identity.

This design for a two-unit urban home redefines the standard over-under relationship found in the typical Chicago two-flat and proposes the friendly alternative of living side-by-side with your neighbor.

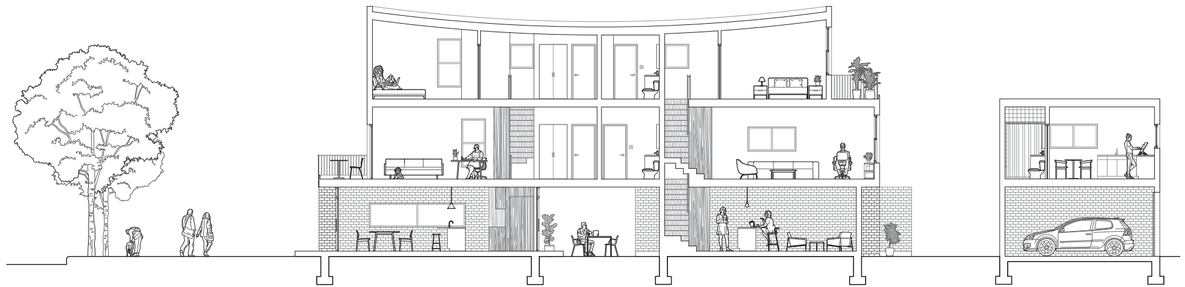
Historically, in the two-flat typology, one home is elevated off the street, thereby reducing access and identity—two factors that can contribute to the pride of home ownership. Taking advantage of the 125-foot length of the standard Chicago lot, this duplex organizes vertical units around a shared outdoor space at the center of the lot to create one building with two distinct identities.

Detached ground floor footprints for each unit allow for separate entries, creating the feel and identity of two stand-alone residences sharing a single lot.

New shared place between units is at once a meeting ground for cohabitants—functioning as an open-air foyer, sheltered porch, and communal dining room—as well as an articulated commons for extended neighbors and multiple scales of engagement. The domestic realm transitions fluidly into the urban via an expanded gangway that enhances connections to the community.

While the ground floor is pulled apart to encourage interaction between residents, the building conjoins on the upper floors to provide more private programming. A central core of circulation and bathrooms allows for flexible floor plans in each unit, maintaining efficiency of construction while accommodating variability—street- or yard-facing, second- or third-floor balcony, one bedroom or two. This individual choice fosters a renewed sense of ownership, empowering homeowners and renters alike to define one's own mode of living.

"It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful day for a neighbor... won't you be mine?"



Cross section through duplex (with optional ADU)

ROWHOUSES

Rowhouses

Peaking in popularity during Chicago's rapid growth at the turn of the 20th century, rowhouses are defined by their connected, shared structural walls. Buildings could consist of a few homes or stretch an entire block. Rowhouses offer some aspects of single-family living, with increased density that makes them suitable for many urban neighborhoods.

THE ROWHOUSE

The rowhouse category tasked teams with designing a series of updated, adjoining homes. Where traditional rowhomes maintain a consistent and continuous street wall, designers had the ability to stagger units to create more variety and open space. While rowhouses can be repeated for long stretches, the competition entries worked with a typical four-lot configuration.

COMPETITION ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- 100-foot wide (minimum) x 125 deep parcel (minimum 4 contiguous standard city lots)
- 12-foot minimum front yard setback
- 35-foot minimum rear setback (not applicable to detached garage)
- Combined side setbacks of 5 feet, with no side less than 2 feet
- 3- to 4-bedroom plans; minimum 1,200 square feet and 1.5 baths per unit
- 38-foot maximum height
- Assume flat parcel with neighboring structures of similar size
- Rear alley access

JURY COMMENT

The jury found much to like in this category, ranging from innovative construction strategies to clever interpretations of existing technologies. Several proposals introduce thoughtful schemes for growth and/or intergenerational living. Others are targeted toward creating spaces that could support local and hyperlocal communities. This is reinforced by a number of proposals with unique and thoughtful site strategies, including several that offer distinctive ideas for site development and open space. Several architects propose lively street façades, while others offer unusual building forms created to support private, semi-public, and public space.

WINNER ROWHOUSES

Readymade Row

Future Firm

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury was intrigued with the notion of repurposing existing—and highly affordable—systems technologies to drive down construction costs, create plan and section flexibility, and invite future opportunities for modification. Interiors benefit from large, open volumes and plentiful daylight is pulled from above. Construction time and, therefore, construction costs, could be reduced significantly, and the jury appreciated the attention to energy savings, as well.

Last century, Chicago innovated by creating very tall buildings. Now, structural innovation can produce very long buildings—landscrapers—creating affordable housing for all.

Readymade Row repurposes a cost-effective, industrial building system typically used for warehouses to create affordable and unique rowhouses. The "off-the-rack" system is deployed to create a very large and long envelope.

Each steel truss is oriented in the long direction on a Chicago lot, creating an "instant" twenty-five foot wide rowhouse. At ground level, simple tall storefronts create a contemporary façade.

The proposal is designed to fit on a block of standard Chicago lots that are 25 feet wide and 125 feet deep. The building is set back from the street approximately 24 feet. The first 15 feet is reserved for a shared front yard. This zone will be an active shared space with kids playing football or young professionals relaxing in the sun.

The interior of each building has a flexible and open floor plan. Utilities, storage, and vertical circulation line the walls. On the second floor, the primary bedroom looks out over the front yard. Two additional bedrooms are on the other side of the atrium to maximize privacy. On the third floor, under the slope of the roof, a home office is at the front and a playroom at the back.

Maximum Flexibility
Each owner can create variation in an open plan with different possible sections.

Light-Filled
Rowhouses can be dark. Four skylights and an atrium create a light-filled central court that makes even a gray Chicago winter day feel bright.

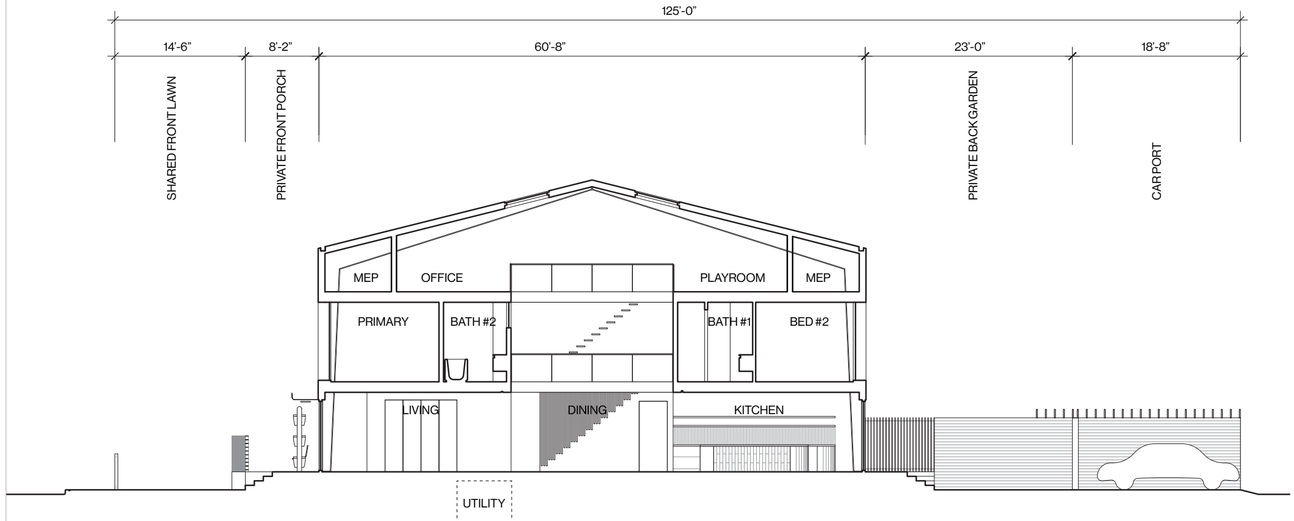
Mass Production
Readymade Row takes advantage of the efficiencies created in large-scale industrial buildings to create many houses at one time.

Slab on Grade
Excavation is expensive. Insulated slab on grade reduces these costs. A simple epoxy coating also creates a beautiful finished floor.

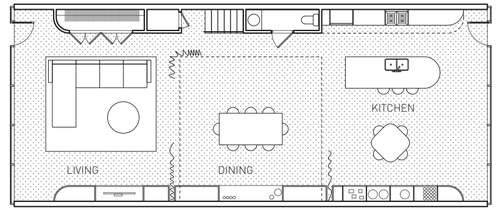
Geothermal
Upfront cost for this system is usually substantial. Geothermal wells are shared across the project to reduce costs.

"District Cooling"
Downtown, we save energy using district cooling; the underground utility trench at Readymade Row allows each unit to share the energy.

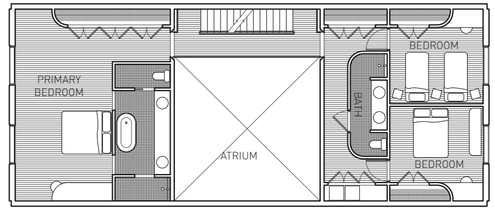
High Performance
Insulated metal panels have a high R-value and are easy to air seal. This means lower energy costs for residents and a lower impact on the planet.



WINNER ROWHOUSES



Level 1



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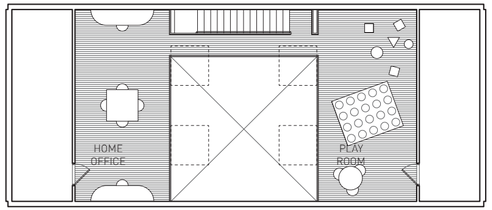


Level 3

The Rowhouses

ACDF Architecture

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

One of several examples that proposed greater density on the site, the jury appreciated the spatial and visual variety of this proposal, as well as its underlying assumption that value can be wrung from more sources than just efficient construction.

Quality and affordable housing should be less resource-intensive. Efficiency shouldn't be conceived only from a monetary standpoint; it is found through the sparing use of available land and the mindful management of both human and material supplies. This proposal suggests subdividing each individual parcel in two, as the size of the typical plot can comfortably host two rowhouses. While minimizing inherent costs—reducing the amount of exterior wall, for instance—smaller footprints will help soften the spike of property values and prevent the eventual displacement of residents, as the filled vacant parcels will raise overall land value.

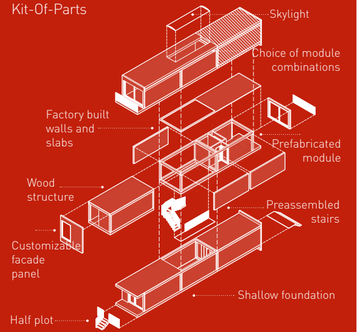
Providing beloved attributes of suburbia will encourage people to reinhabit the inner city. Consequently, rowhouses should be contiguous yet autonomous, so occupants can enjoy ownership without a disturbing neighbor living above and overlooking their living room. Direct at grade access to the street and a separate outdoor space at the back are provided for all dwellings. Their interior organization is centered around a private indoor courtyard that houses vertical circulation, bringing natural light and sky views to the middle of the living areas.

To accelerate the pace of unit delivery while keeping their cost low, the use of environmentally conscious prefabricated wood modules is employed. These elements should be produced locally, then transported and stacked on site, reducing construction disturbance. Personalization can be achieved by the combination of prefabricated façade panels bringing a greater sense of belonging and identification to their occupants. The different configurations of modules allow for flexibility throughout the lifecycle of homeowners.

First floor

1. STREET
2. FRONT YARD
3. FOYER
4. LIVING
5. ATRIUM
6. DINING
7. FLEX SPACE
8. KITCHEN
9. BACKYARD
10. BEDROOM
11. W.C.
12. ALLEY

Kit-Of-Parts



ROWHOUSES

Much More Middle

kevin daly Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury was delighted by the remarkable and varied amount of public space created in this proposal, as well as the several possible unit sizes, suggesting something closer to a community rather than a mere development.

The core of our proposal is to preserve a mid-block void, creating opportunities for participation, improvisation, and expansion. This flexibility allows our starter home to grow into a forever home.

The Premise: A bare bones, three-story rowhouse stands as the minimum-viable solution to the problem of the starter house. The three-bed, three-bath, 1,300-square foot starter configuration can be a single-family home or be subdivided into a two-flat, creating an in-law unit or home business space at ground level.

More Middle: The narrow module of the starter home allows for a bonus fifth rowhouse to be added to the typical four-parcel site, creating a five-home elevation at the street. Alternating homes are pushed back slightly, producing enclosed front yards and variation at the street.

Growth & Equity: This alternating, staggered plan continues at the rear of the site, with rental units in carriage houses providing opportunities for wealth building, as well as additional parking between garages. The building line of each rowhouse extends fully to the rear setback, creating a template for future infill.

By leaving the middle of the site "missing," we create the opportunity for future improvisations for each building owner: gardens, screen porches, and rental units transform each starter home into a permanent solution.

ROWHOUSES

City Homestead: Adaptable Infill

Frida Escobedo Studio

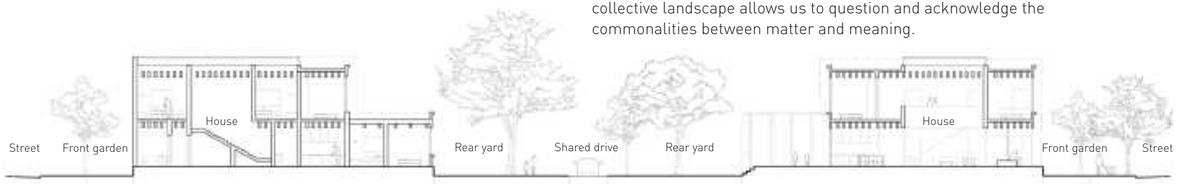
CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury appreciated this proposal's attempts to extend the rowhouse typology as a vehicle for creating caring and a care-giving community through creative use of public and semi-public spaces. The jury also commended the beautiful drawings.

Chicago is characterized by tensions and juxtapositions, a context encompassed by more than just the built environment: it is activated and transformed by its inhabitants. Its architecture has shifted and evolved, a localized form of organization and expression. Building on the sociological concept of "global care chains," we see domestic labor as the most vulnerable part of the chain. During the pandemic, we incorporated every aspect of our lives into the private realm of our homes. Millions of women shouldered an increase in care responsibilities, underscoring our failure to recognize the actual economic weight of caregiving and domestic work. A new housing model is an opportunity to revise the local and global narratives around the social and economic costs of caregiving.

We imagine an environment shaped by its occupants, a new model of affordable, sustainable development to help the community flourish in the South and West Sides of Chicago.

As abandoned buildings are bulldozed, brick—an iconic element of Chicago's architecture—becomes an abundant resource. We propose using this demolition debris to create a series of structural shells, with a spine to be built on as a means for flexibility and expansion. Wood interior framing extends to the exterior as an easily modified platform for gathering and habitation, adaptable to occupants' changing needs. This new typology generates shared space, a common ground which can be appropriated by the local community. The interweaving of this collective landscape allows us to question and acknowledge the commonalities between matter and meaning.



Longitudinal section


Axonometric section: view from rear yard


Interior view
Flexible space: caregiver bedroom


Interior view
Flexible space: workspace

ROWHOUSES

One Size (Does Not) Fit All: A Flexible Development

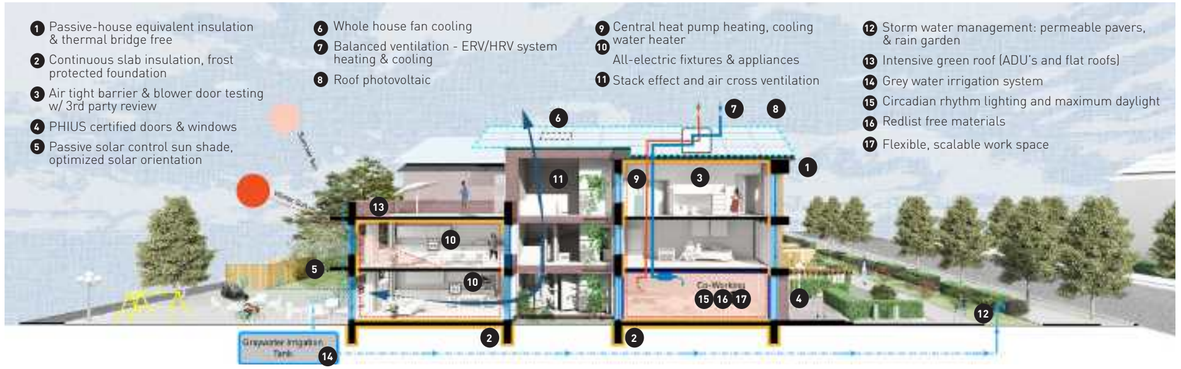
Krueck Sexton Partners

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

While concerns abide with the visual character of these units, the jury commended the creation of shared public space, the use of biophilic environmental strategies, and the open vertical character of the interiors.

Although rowhouses efficiently increase housing density, a one-size-fits-all approach fails to accommodate unique family living arrangements and economic situations. By creating three rowhouse widths, this urban kit of parts envisions a cohesive, vibrant development that embodies the diversity of Chicago's population and allows its residents to leverage their home and block as economic assets.

The multiple-width modules enable density and land-use "elasticity," allowing shared outdoor spaces and existing structures to become integrated assets that preserve neighborhood character and history. The development's financing structure can incorporate vacant homes within the proforma as "+1" assets; whereas the cost of renovation can sometimes exceed the value of a renovated home, a +1 development allows existing units to be redeveloped with common amenities such as daycare, community spaces, yoga studios, or even a rentable bed and breakfast with profits going back into the neighborhood. The linear, semi-private front yard is separated and activated by layers of vegetation, pocket gardens, and shared mailboxes that create a rich functional space. Responding to opportunities of the post-Covid era, the ground floor layouts provide residents with accessible, street-facing multi-purpose rooms for work or play. Each unit is anchored by a central stair and an air-and-light atrium that separates adjacent spaces and promotes a mix of living scenarios. The core passively facilitates natural ventilation, daylighting, and stack-effect cooling, while active sustainability components supply renewable energy. Designing for diverse needs enables a bustling, urban ecosystem in which a community can thrive and share in Chicago's prosperity.



POCKET PARK SECTION

ROWHOUSES

Generation Next: A Lifetime on One Block

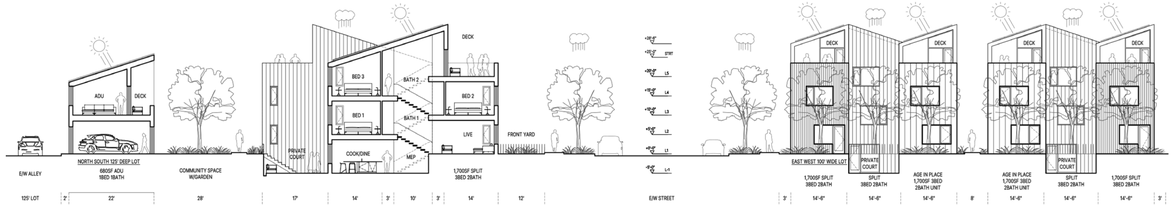
Latent

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury appreciated this proposal's attention to inter-generational community-building through its incorporation of accessory dwelling units and site strategies intended to create shared public space. More work is needed to refine the elevations.

The best stories of a neighborhood come from the people that have lived on the block for generations. They know the trees, give the local gossip, and understand the politics of place. Increasingly, the opportunity to live in Chicago and thrive in place with chosen family and friends is unavailable. Generation Next is a rowhome concept that imagines a future of shared wealth and space using three unique dwelling types: split-level rowhomes, aging-in-place rowhomes, and coach house ADUs. Each home offers a unique type of private outdoor space ranging from roof decks, sunken courts, or at grade patios. This frees the remainder of the rear yard for shared community use that can expand over time.

Made possible by the recently revised building code, six rowhomes have been arranged on the site to create a central pathway to access the aging-in-place units and ADUs. This pathway connects a series of outdoor spaces that range from still, formal, and neatly presented front yards to a communal, active, and social backyard. The building massing and roof line shifts and creates variation over several blocks without changing the floor plan. In this future of community wealth, a resilient block employs sustainable practices to protect environmental, financial, and social equity for generations.



Section

Living room at front entry

Sunken courtyard for split level unit

ADU balcony to shared backyard

ROWHOUSES

2 in 1: Missing Middle Infill Housing

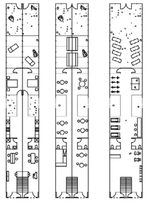
MOS

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

While this is one of several designs to pack greater density on the site, the jury found this proposal to be the most urban in character; a handsome building that fits the needs and look of Chicago and that benefits from advanced construction systems.

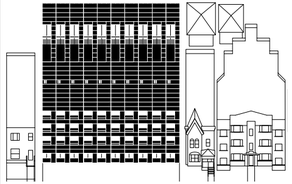
1 lot. 2 rowhouses. Adaptable to multiple lots. A lot. A larger lot. Another lot. Modular Construction. Ceramic panels on a lightweight structural frame. Everything arrives on trucks. Stacked. The roof collects rainwater and solar. Terraces, front and back. Ventilation. Light. The ground floor can provide additional revenue, a small store, an architecture office, a studio, a coffee shop, or another apartment. The second floor is the apartment, living, kitchen, bathroom, a small office. The third and fourth floors have bedrooms, shared spaces, a media room, a ping pong table or a library, or karaoke, or an indoor garden.

They can have two bedrooms, or six. 2 in 1 addresses housing through incremental development, variable mixed-use, middle-scale, low-rise, high-density that is economical and flexible.



The ground floor can provide additional revenue, a small store

Terraces, front and back



A larger lot

An architecture office, a studio, a coffee shop, or another apartment

Ventilation light

ROWHOUSES

Row House Remix

Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury was intrigued by the inventive planning module of this proposal and by its re-imagining of community and public space. The innovative approach, though, also conjures questions about the design's resulting complexities and potential impact on costs.

Found throughout many of Chicago's neighborhoods, the rowhouse typology is a key component of the city's architectural character, culture, and legacy. Our proposal seeks to revitalize this typology by making it more adaptable to current societal needs and ways of living. Row House Remix offers innovations in the following areas:

COLLECTIVITY: Rowhouses are distinctly individualistic and repetitive. Our proposal offers a new model that is communal, multifaceted, adaptable, and distinct. This is accomplished by threading unit footprints together to create shared open spaces and access points between units.

URBAN FORM: By creating a more porous sequence of semi-public spaces along the street that extends through the property, this proposal makes the neighborhood block more connected and pedestrian-scaled.

ORGANIZATION: The project maintains the modularity and efficiency inherent to the typology, while making the party wall more nimble by allowing it to move across typical boundaries and capture shared infrastructural cores.

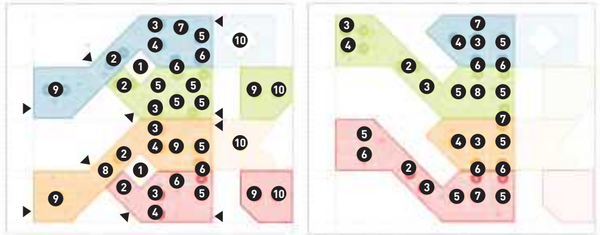
FLEXIBILITY: By transforming typical rowhouse access from the street edge to the middle of the block, unit flexibility and customization is encouraged.

PROGRAMMATIC INNOVATION: Learning from both historic and emergent project types in Chicago, our proposal offers the opportunity for a mix of spaces that allows income generation, as well as myriad communal or shared uses.

AFFORDABILITY: While maintaining an efficiency with regard to elements that have the highest impact on construction costs, we have designed the project to be accessible to a wider economic range of potential residents.

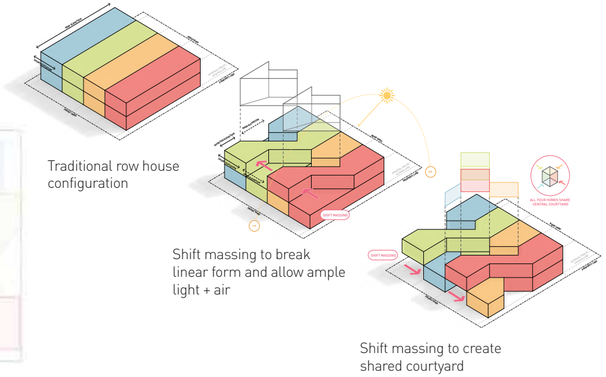
1. Shared courtyard
2. Light atrium/ vertical circulation
3. Living
4. Eating
5. Sleeping
6. Bathing
7. Working
8. Flex/ hybrid program
9. Potential income generation
10. Parking

▶ Entry



First floor

Second floor



Traditional row house configuration

Shift massing to break linear form and allow ample light + air

Shift massing to create shared courtyard

ROWHOUSES

Unexpected Home

Valerio Dewalt Train

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

The jury appreciated how a simple, single move—the overlap—allows this design to produce a variety of generous interior and exterior spaces. However, the jury was concerned about the amount of glass and its effect on energy use.

As we reinvest in Chicago's South and West Sides, we must do it in new and unexpected ways. It is unexpected to have eight, 2,000-square foot, three-story rowhouses on four standard lots. It is also unexpected that each rowhouse includes a generous 17-foot x 32-foot living, kitchen, dining space, with three bedrooms, three baths, a study alcove, in-unit laundry, and one garage space.

To maximize density and access to light, the design interlocks "T"- and "L"- shaped rowhouses. The interlock creates generous living spaces for each. The "L's" have 17-foot x 28-foot private gardens and the "T's" have 17-foot x14-foot gardens. The "T's" also have large balconies on the second floor and 300-square foot skydecks on the third floor.

Four homes face the street, while the other four face a wide rear yard. Generous 7-foot wide passages on both sides allow residents to walk from street-side to the rear yard and back. A secure, shared outdoor deck is located above the garages, accessed by two stairs.

Construction is concrete block demising walls with eight-inch precast concrete plank floors and a concrete topping; the floor to floor height is 10'–6". HVAC furnaces are located on the second floor with rooftop condensers. Window systems are economical aluminum storefront-quality grade with operable hopper vents.

The unexpected outcome is a new modernist paradigm for light-filled urban rowhouses, places where families thrive.

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

with Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Single-Family Homes

Single-Family Homes can vary widely in style and scale. Bungalows account for one-third of Chicago's single-family homes, and tend to occupy the lower-density neighborhoods at the city's periphery. Other common types are the efficient workers cottage, and the taller greystones and Queen Annes found in denser parts of the city.

THE SINGLE-FAMILY HOME

Submissions in the single-family category envisioned detached homes on a single standard city lot. There were no restrictions placed on the number of floors. The challenge to make single-family homes more affordable to working class families was a key driver for the competitors. To help meet the goals of missing middle density housing, teams were encouraged to submit ideas for an accessory dwelling unit in the rear yard, as an optional design element.

COMPETITION ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- Standard city lot of 25 x 125 feet
- 20-foot front yard setback
- 35-foot minimum rear setback (not applicable to detached garage)
- Combined side setbacks of 5 feet, with no side less than 2 feet
- 2- to 4-bedroom plans; minimum 1,200 square feet and 1.5 baths
- 30-foot maximum height
- Assume flat parcel with neighboring structures of similar size
- Rear alley access

JURY COMMENT

Perhaps the most iconic housing typology, the single-family home is all too often the least affordable, and particularly so in urban neighborhoods. Given its ubiquity, the jury was surprised at how few single-family schemes were submitted, as it's a category that can readily accept adventurous ideas. Of the submitted designs, jurors admired the attention given to sustainability, and found the sectional quality of most of the proposals interesting. But, there remains a needs for greater variety, more challenging site strategies, and better attention to building technologies that could result in easier construction and thus lower costs.

WINNER SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

r_home

Vladimir Radutny Architects

CLICK TO READ FULL ENTRY

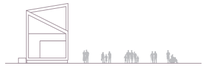
The jury appreciated the simplicity and flexibility of the proposal, which could yield savings during the initial build phase as well as changes over time by utilizing prefabricated building technologies that enable accelerated construction timetables. High ceilings make the spaces seem larger without additional cost. Jurors also appreciated the attention to active and passive energy systems.

IMAGINE...

A home for today, built for tomorrow.
A home founded upon a sensibility to its city and to our planet.
A home designed to support a growing family and aging in place.
A home whose desired function you determine over time.
A home instilled with your sense of authorship and DIY influence.
A home where architectural fundamentals define domestic space.

ENVISION...

A new living paradigm of building, buying, and inhabiting Chicago.



DESIGN

Two floors, 1,800 ft²

Owner determined living

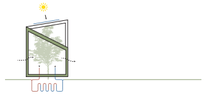
Supportive of growing families

Supportive of aging in place

Planned for future ADU

Accessible & affordable

Architecturally distinct



SUSTAIN

Form offers solar benefits

Naturally lit & cross ventilated

Air-tight thermal envelope

All electric home

Geothermally heated & cooled

Shaded via planted feature tree

Low, consistent energy costs

BUILD

Prefabricated components (SIPs)

Reduced construction scope

Simplified form & construction details

Built with precision & high quality craft

Minimized labor & construction waste

Targeted 3-month construction schedule

Durable, low-maintenance materials

CONFIGURE

Multiple planning strategies available

0-4 bedrooms, 2-3 bathrooms

Easily increase amenity as desired

Promotes DIY authorship

Varied material options

ADU ready

Increase equity and value over time

DEVELOP

Designed for a typical Chicago lot

Adaptable for various lot sizes

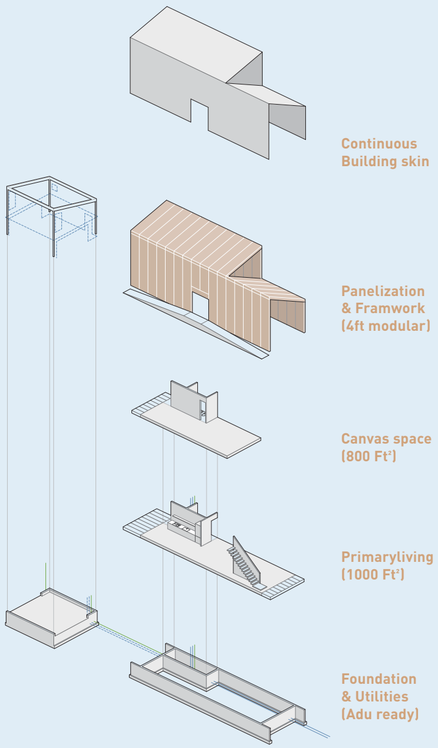
Repeatable construction

Economy of scale in building multiples

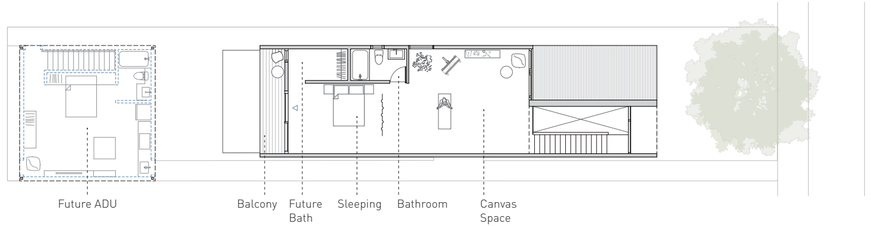
Reduced construction timeline

Enlivens community streetscape

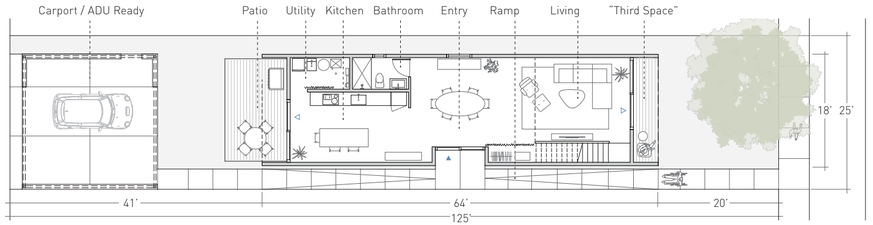
Appeals to a diverse range of lifestyles



Base model Component diagram



Second floor plan



First floor plan

Site section

Updated Workers Cottage

CAMESgibson

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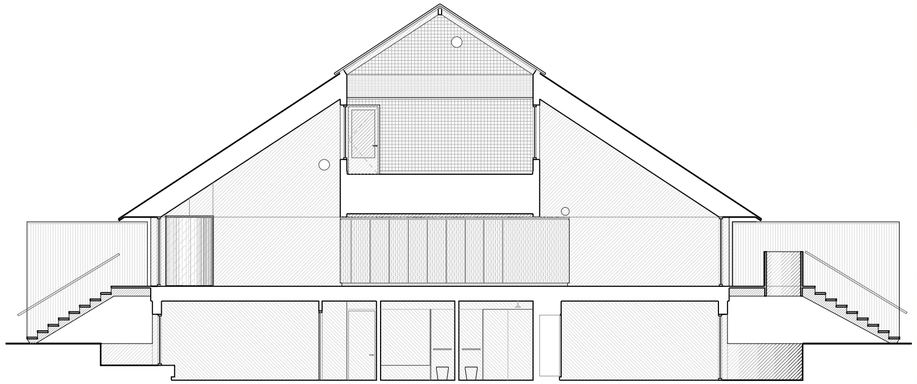
This project offers a large front porch, as well as high public-room ceilings, borrowed light, and additional plan area by re-imagining the section of a traditional Chicago workers cottage.

This house is an update to the Chicago Workers Cottage. Developed at the end of the 19th century, it was a simple framed building with a pitched roof and a partially submerged basement. This house reorders the precedent by rotating the ridge line perpendicular to that of an original. For the exterior, this produces the appearance of a smaller house and allows for more natural light in both the front and back of the lot, while still accommodating 2,370 square feet (with 246 square feet of unconditioned attic space.)

The resulting new massing and organization logic mimics the modest double lean-to shelters built by indigenous peoples in the northern regions of this continent.

Consisting of spaces under two sloped roofs separated by a gap, these primitive structures allowed for a central fire for cooking and human comfort, with a garden in the attic, the kitchen, bathrooms, and utilities occupy this same zone in this updated workers cottage. As it was in those shelters, habitation on the main floor is focused inwards, towards an elevated winter garden. This is balanced by an openness to the street and alley created by cascading stairs at both the front and back porches.

Private quarters are located on the lower floor in a conventional layout with three bedrooms and two full bathrooms. Alternative versions allow for two large or four small bedrooms within the same building volume. These sleeping spaces open up to small exterior spaces under the porches.



Section

Winter garden

Living room

Primary bedroom

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

All Together House

Studio Sean Canty, LLC

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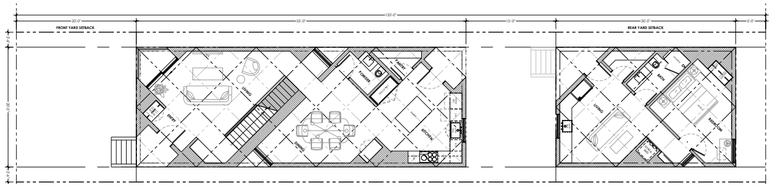
The unique section and shifted plan of this proposal create dynamic interior and exterior spaces, as well as forms that distinguish it from traditional Chicago houses but that still respect traditional urban patterns.

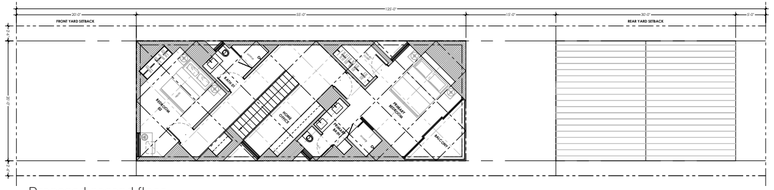
All Together House is a single-family home plus accessory dwelling unit (ADU) proposal that investigates dual occupancy over time. On a standard city lot of 25 x 125 feet, the main house is recognizable by an inverted cottage roof profile. Inside, the plan collapses two guiding orders into one. The combination of a 45-degree and 90-degree grid maximizes poché, niches, and storage while keeping rooms orthogonal. The current proposal privileges the 45-degree grid and anticipates expanding on the scheme's dual order for the next phase. This arrangement allows for distinct dining and living spaces—separated by the diagonal staircase—while maintaining an open floor plan and maximizing views on both influx and corner lot sites. Moreover, the second floor layout includes a shared workspace that can accommodate the conversion of a stand-alone unit at the front or back as an internal ADU.

We also imagine a detached coach house for future multi-generation living. At 700 square feet, the two-story ADU anticipates added density and communal living. The coach house ADU's flat roof complements the main house's inverted cottage profile by adopting the parody of siblings. Read together; the two buildings are a contemporary nod to the classical two-and three-flat apartments linked to the early 20th century immigrant population. Thus the All Together House two-phased approach is suited for both ownership and local developer models, encouraging inclusive growth and community development for former, current, and future Chicago residents.

Exterior perspective at rear lot



Proposed first floor



Proposed second floor

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

Middle*Court: Wellness House

von Weise Associates

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The jury applauded the proposal's deference to traditional Chicago urban patterns; its introduction of a courtyard that brings light and air to the interior; and its embrace of active and passive energy systems.

This project takes a typical Chicago single-family home as a starting point and improves it with increased natural light and access to nature and the outdoors. By keeping the standard front setback and elevated first floor of this typical typology, we maintain the streetscape of the existing neighborhood and create privacy for first floor uses. We then insert a raised courtyard at the center of the plan. This courtyard provides usable access to the outdoors at grade while still maintaining privacy and separation from the street in the front of the house. We load the circulation and services along one side and organize the living spaces and courtyard off of this axis. This results in increased natural light and improved ventilation. The front living room/flex space and the kitchen/dining/family room have windows on two sides, access to ventilation, and views of plantings.

This simple parti diagram alleviates the dark middle spaces of the typical Chicago plan and increases light and ventilation to all spaces.

To offset for increased windows and more building envelop, the house will have an extremely efficient envelope meeting Passive House standards. A photovoltaic array will power the all-electrical heatpumps and on-demand water heaters.

As primary drivers of human wellness, natural light, ventilation, and engagement with nature are as important in affordable housing as higher-end homes. In this way, our project provides social equity in a tangible daily manner for all occupants. The wellness we bring to more affluent clients' homes should be available in all Chicago homes.

For additional information and inquiries, please visit: architecture.org/missingmiddle