

AN HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE APPRECIATION OF DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

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For man, the dwelling house is possibly the most intimate and meaningful building in the architectural spectrum. Too often the study of domestic architecture is approached merely as a cold intellectual exercise. Buildings are discussed as if they were merely two dimensional entities where the vertical and horizontal are viewed in isolation. Little recognition is given to the building as a functioning place for living.

This article attempts to draw attention to aspects of domestic architecture which might hitherto have been given scant consideration. Singled out for discussion are the areas of privacy and display. These two concepts are explored and the findings applied to two acclaimed Johannesburg dwellings built in the 1930's each belonging to a different socio-economic stratum.

It seems that privacy and display do play an important role in the functioning of a building. It seems, too, that they assist not only in creating the ultimate character which the house assumes but also determines or, at least, influences the viewer's or owner's physical, intellectual and emotional responses to it.

Vir die mens is die woonhuis moontlik die mees intieme en betekenisvolle gebou in die argitektoniese spektrum. Die studie van woonhuisargitektuur word te dikwels as slegs 'n koue intellektuele oefening aangepak. Geboue word benader asof dit bloot tweedimensionele entiteite is waar die vertikale opbou en horisontale uitleg in isolasie beskou word. Min erkenning word gegee aan die gebou as 'n funksionele verblyfplek.

Hierdie artikel vestig die aandag op aspekte van woonhuisargitektuur waaraan tot op hede geringe aandag geskenk is. Areas van privaatheid en vertoon is vir bespreking uitgesonder. Hierdie twee begrippe word ondersoek en die bevindinge word toegepas op twee woonhuise. Die betrokke woonhuise wat in die 1930's gebou is, vind algemene erkenning en verteenwoordig uiteenlopende sosio-ekonomiese strata.

Dit kom voor dat privaatheid en vertoon 'n belangrike rol speel in die vormgewing en funksionering van 'n gebou. Dit blyk verder dat hulle nie slegs help om die huis se uiteindelijke karakter te skep nie maar ook om die kyker en die eienaar se fisiese, intellektuele en emosionele reaksies daarteenoor te bepaal of ten minste te beïnvloed.

Too often the study of domestic buildings is limited to the stylistic contribution that they make in the historical development of an architectural movement. However important the evolution of style might be this formal approach carries an inherent danger of reducing the exploration of domestic architecture to a cold intellectual exercise. For man, the dwelling house is possibly the most intimate and meaningful building in the architectural spectrum and as such might be approached in a more humanistic way. In addition, these buildings are often discussed only in terms of their facade and plan as if they were merely two dimensional entities where the vertical and horizontal are viewed in isolation.

It might be interesting to explore some of the more functional aspects of the building, those which the potential occupants might, consciously or unconsciously, consider when they are seeking out a place in which to dwell. If the owner's personal needs and aspirations (symbolised by the building) and catered for by the architect are taken into account, it might also be possible to shed some additional light on the property itself, suggesting aspects which might hitherto not have been given any special consideration.

Clearly, the most important reason for constructing a dwelling is to provide shelter from the elements for its occupants. However, co-author of the book, *Environmental psychology*, H.G. Viljoen maintains that "...the need for privacy is a basic one". In addition, this would suggest that the need to ensure privacy in a dwelling is as important as the need to provide shelter. Each has to be catered for if the dwelling is to fulfil its intended function. Nevertheless, it would be naive to assume that these two aspects alone prompt man to build a place in which to dwell. Incorporated into almost all houses from the humble to the grandiose are certain devices which symbolise 'identity'.

Whereas the first two concepts, shelter and privacy, constitute the practical and social purposes of a dwelling, a third relates more to the spiritual meaning which the house has for its owner. "Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful" (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 5) Therefore to be meaningful to the owner, the home also needs to provide a space where the dweller feels at home and where his idiosyncratic spiritual and aesthetic needs are fulfilled. He

might need to live in monastic austerity or establish himself in surroundings characterised by unbridled opulence. Whatever forms of 'display' are incorporated into the dwelling they become "a symbol of the self" (Viljoen *et al.* 1978: 180) for the owner and ones with which he is identified by others.

To what extent these requirements and concepts are able to be incorporated into a dwelling depends to a large extent on socio-economic considerations. The wealthier the owner, the greater his needs are and the more able he is to satisfy these with regard to his dwelling. Thus the manner in which these needs are fulfilled assist in determining the owner's personal identity and status in the consumer society in which he finds himself.

In order to isolate and emphasise the concepts of privacy and display it might be appropriate to elucidate some of their general characteristics before exploring them in some selected examples of domestic architecture.¹

PRIVACY

The concrete expression of privacy in buildings takes on many forms, from the most overt statement such as stout walls and high foundations, to the most subtle change of ceiling heights or floor covering or a room divided by a beam in the ceiling, and depends on the degree to which the occupants wish to reveal themselves to one another and to outsiders (strangers, business associates, guests). Viljoen (1987) suggests that "privacy is the possession by an individual of control over information that would interfere with the acceptance of his claims for an identity within a specified role relationship". A house owner may wish to display a living room filled with fine furnishings while preferring to keep private the activities of servants preparing for a dinner party. So it becomes the architect's responsibility to design a dwelling which allows for privacy but also for social interaction.

There is a basic need for man to take possession of a place and call it his own and in doing so he may devise certain strategies for demarcating his territory which will communicate his claim to others. This might take the form of a fence, a wall or even a row of stones. There is to a certain extent, a difference between the need to proclaim one's territory saying "beyond this physical boundary I am in control", and the need for privacy which is a far more intimate requisite. Proclaiming territory does not preclude others from entering the territory, provided they are permitted to do so by the owner. However, a private area is a space which actually precludes the general community. It is a place where far more con-

trol is exercised by the owners and the stranger or guest would not wittingly penetrate the space without the express permission of the occupant.

The recognition of a private space or private spaces is built into the code of common conduct of a particular group. There are also certain physical 'signposts' built into a dwelling which indicate visually that a space is private. This might be in the form of a closed door, an archway, even a beam dividing a room and is recognised almost subliminally by a member of that community or culture though it might not be understood by an outsider. The visual means of privacy and isolation need not be merely physical (fence, wall) but can also be spatial, i.e. the distance of withdrawal say, of a dwelling from the boundaries of the site. "Territoriality contributes to a sense of identity in that the possession, ownership and control of a geographical area help to define the person or group in concrete or physical terms" (Viljoen *et al.* 1987: 131). This identity (or self identity) may be seen as the other side of the coin from privacy. Certain aspects of a building may be specifically included in the structure for symbolic reasons. The concept of identity "involves a definition of the self which the individual seeks to project or claim publicly. The individual actively tries to control how others identify him by limiting their options of how they perceive him" (Viljoen *et al.* 1987: 97). Thus privacy might vary from the simple provision of shelter or partial withdrawal to definite separation and isolation; from a demarcating of territory to a tendency to exclusivity. "[...]the higher people rise in a hierarchy [...] – the more privacy they attain and the greater their protection from unwanted intrusion" (Viljoen 1987: 103).

There are, of course, degrees of privacy that are catered for in the home, beginning possibly with the need to shelter the family from the scrutiny of the public at large and ending with the rooms like dressing rooms, bathrooms and wc's which may exclude even other family members. Visiting strangers may be accorded only the courtesy of an opened front door or access to the entrance hall. Business associates would be accommodated in studies while guests would be admitted to reception rooms, such as living rooms, dining rooms, billiard and smoking rooms. Intimate friends of the family and members of the extended family might be allowed the freedom of the house. Servants might be required to enter rooms only to clean or to serve refreshments or meals to family and guests, but at other times would be confined to particular areas of the house.

Because of this need for privacy and to ensure the smooth running of the home, separate zones are established in the dwelling. Utility zones, kitchen, scullery and pantry are grouped together and may be separated from public zones, and the reception areas of the house. Both are separated from private zones comprising bedrooms, bathrooms, dressing rooms. To ensure isolation of these zones, and, if in fact isolation is desired, passages, lobbies and the like are employed. The more affluent the homes, the more the utility zones tend to be kept as private working spaces which guests seldom penetrate.

Passages control the movement and patterns of activity within the house and as has been mentioned, often delineate or separate the various zones in the house. Passages also establish the amount of privacy enjoyed in the rooms themselves. Usually, the further down the passage the more private they would be. (Viljoen *et al.* 1987: 82).

Verandas can be considered both public and private zones. They may be used by the family for purposes of leisure but also become areas for the entertainment of guests and may under certain circumstances be used by guests and strangers wishing to gain access to the interior of the dwelling. To ensure greater privacy, these two functions may be separated.

Access to balconies might be restricted to the family or even to certain members of the family, and so can be considered as private zones. Nevertheless, both verandas and balconies are visible to the general public unless devices such as trees, hedges and garden wall preventing this occurring or unless these spaces are orientated away from the public eye.

The walls of a dwelling are the most obvious and efficient means of ensuring privacy. Generally, the thicker they are, the more privacy they afford and this holds for the doors as well. Windows are opening up devices, the larger they are the more they reveal. Most often, windows in the public zone are the largest while bathroom and wc windows are relatively small. In servants' rooms the windows are generally small allowing more privacy to the occupants. Double storey houses possess a considerably increased capacity for privacy over single storey structures. The particular arrangement of spaces, one set of spaces above the other, allows a large house to occupy a smaller area of the stand which means that far more space surrounds the dwelling isolating it more successfully from its neighbours and the street.

The grouping of bedrooms above public and utility areas helps to remove them from the latter two zones in the home thus allowing

the family at rest to more fully distance themselves from the on going activities of the household below.

J Appleton (1975: 58) quoting Konrad Lorenz suggests that it is one of man's instinctive needs "to see without being seen": to maintain one's privacy while having the physical and psychological advantage of penetrating someone else's territory. This situation is sometimes built into houses where, say, the positioning and size of windows may keep the person within the shadow of the room virtually invisible from the stranger outside while the latter is observed approaching the owner's territory.

DISPLAY

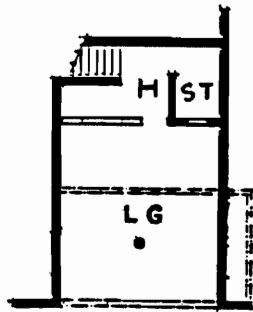
There are basically two aspects of display which need to be identified. Firstly, here are those features which in themselves are concrete components of the fabric or grounds which are singled out for attention. These might take the form of a fireplace or other built-in features, a structurally exciting staircase or even specimen plants in the garden. Secondly, there are those features whose function is in fact to reveal. In this category might be included large windows and archways which open up interiors or adjoining spaces, sweeping lawns which reveal glimpses of the dwelling or possibly special objects meant for contemplation like fountains or gazebos.

The positioning of a building on its site suggests a certain attitude towards display. For instance, a double storeyed structure facing the street and placed symmetrically on the stand might achieve a more commanding presence than a single storey house placed asymmetrically and tucked away amongst a clump of trees. Also, the way that the movement of guests is manipulated can be used to advantage in terms of display. A symmetrical arrangement of the facade and its approach could suggest a ritualistic procession while a less formally designed facade and access involves a more introverted and less theatrical means of orchestrating arrivals and departures.

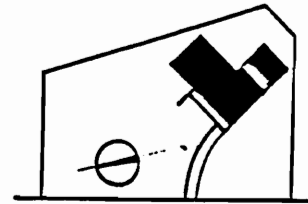
The garden in front of a house is likely to contain more display features than the kitchen garden or yard. Often the main building on a property is located in such a way as to allow a larger front garden at the expense of the back garden in order to suggest a larger property to the general public thus "[...] giving some measure of the house's stature and autonomy, at times even calling attention to its existence" (Bloomer, Moore & Yudell 1979: 3). Again, these authors maintain that "in the United States dimensions of set back (of the

KEY

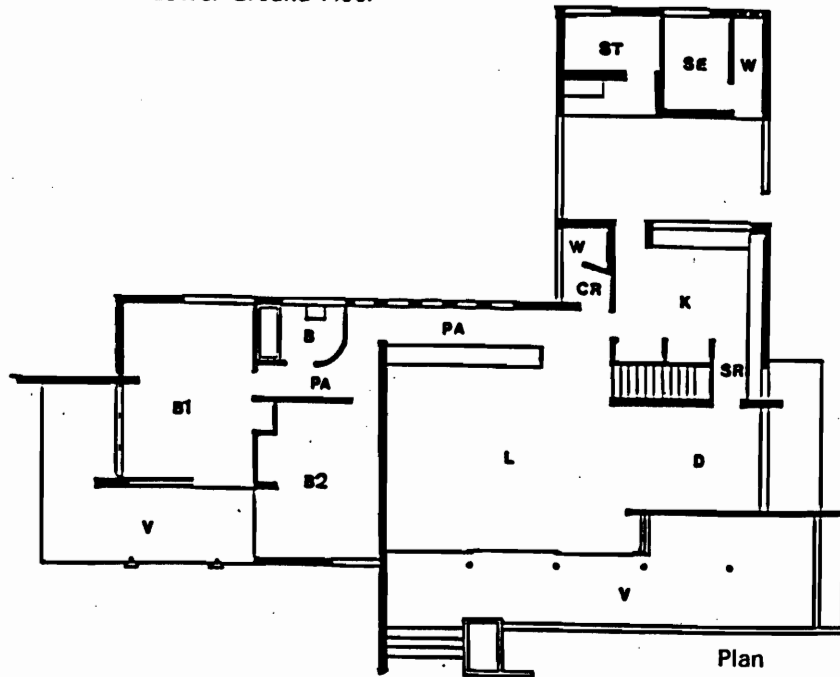
- B Bathroom
- B1 Master Bedroom
- B2 Bedroom
- CR Cloak room
- D Dining room
- H Hall
- K Kitchen
- L Living room
- LG Loggia
- PA Passage
- SE Servants
- SR Servery
- ST Store room
- V Veranda
- W w.c.



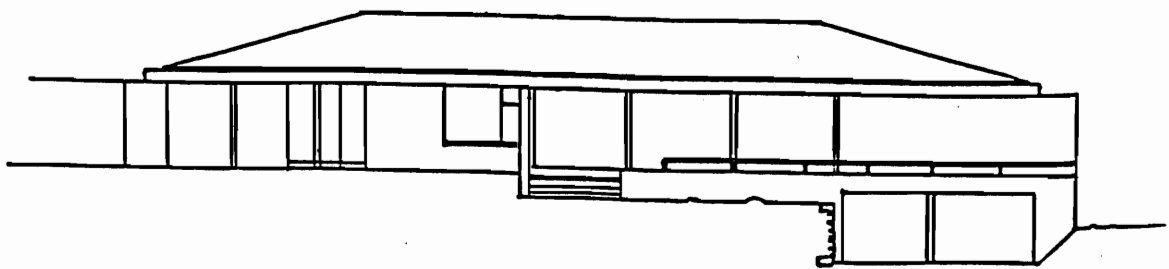
Lower Ground Floor



Site Plan



Plan



Facade

Figure 1: HOUSE COWIN

Key

- B Bathroom
- B1 Master Bedroom
- B2-3 Bedrooms
- BR Boiler room
- CL Coal
- CR Cloak room
- D Dining room
- G Garage
- H Hall
- K Kitchen
- L Living room
- LG Loggia
- LO Lobby
- LY Laundry
- N Nursery
- P Pantry
- PC Porte Cochère
- S Study
- SE Servants
- SR Servery
- SW Sewing
- T Terrace
- UH Upper Hall
- V Veranda
- W w.c.

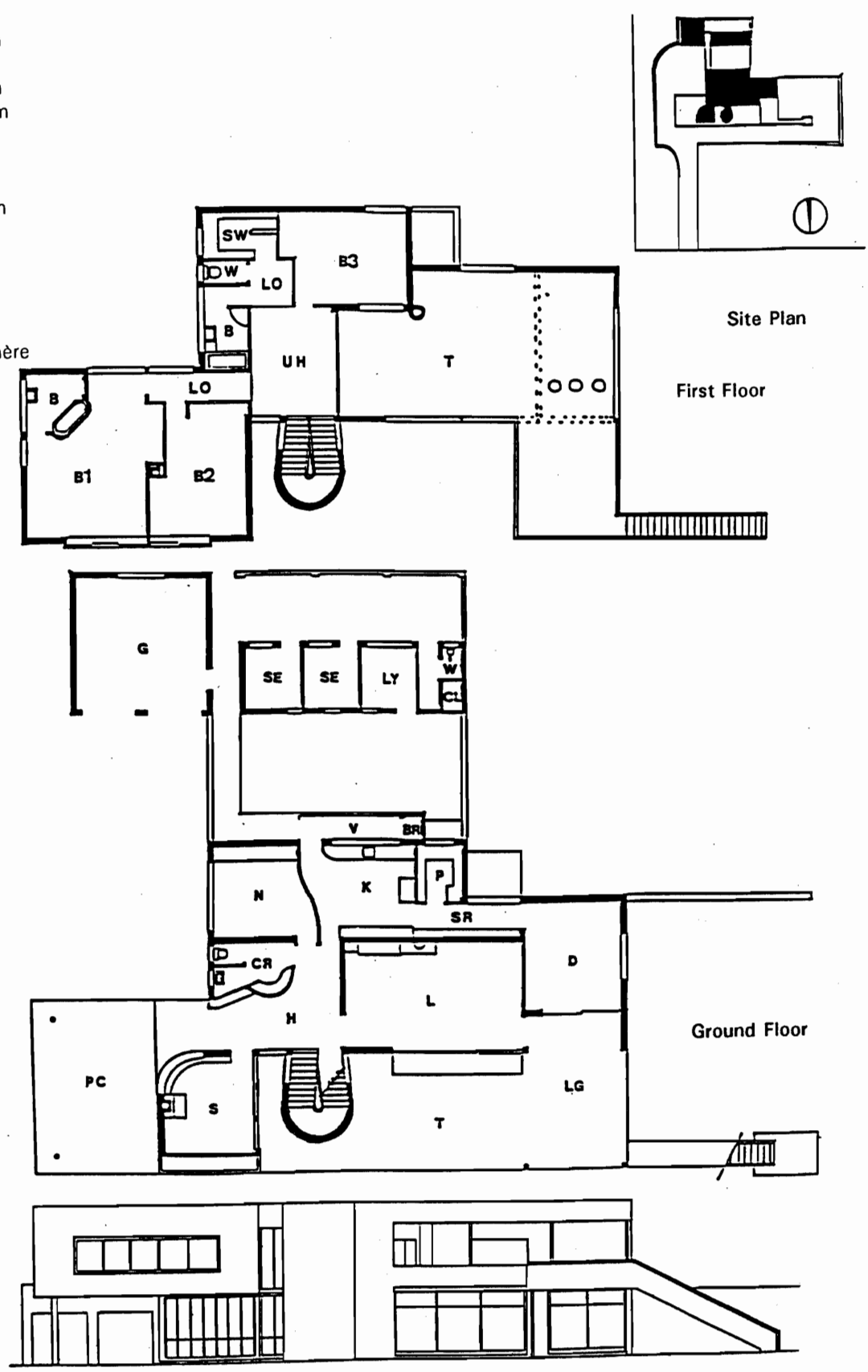


Figure 2: HOUSE STERN

building) often signal the importance of the building". There seems to be no reason why this observation should not apply in the South African context.

As a rule, features of a building which are included for purposes of display are found in those areas of the property most likely to be encountered generally by the public or more intimately by guests of the household. However thoughtfully the entire building might have been designed, the facade is generally singled out for special attention.

Bloomer, Moore & Yudell (1977: 1) suggest an analogy with the human body – "front thus becomes quite different from back, and we give attention to our fronts as we face the world which is quite different from the care we give to our backs and what lies behind us." They insist too that the "[...] most important place on the facade is the front door." A somewhat different situation arises, as we shall see, with the houses chosen for this article. In these cases the main entrances do not form part of the facade, but are situated either at the side or deep within the loggia of the house.

Beside the attention given to the front door and entrance space, other features are displayed which reinforce the importance of the facade. Windows of the front rooms are often larger and more impressive than those used on the sides and rear of the dwelling. Leisure areas such as verandas and balconies may be located on the facade where they speak of the leisurely lifestyle of the occupants.

French doors and sliding glass doors become features of the facade where they link important interior spaces with the more important aspects of the garden. This arrangement may integrate and reinforce the impact of interior and exterior display areas.

Impressive features on the facade suggest or encourage the anticipation of impressive display areas within the dwelling.

More often than not the public zone of a dwelling is made more impressive than the private or utility zones and features are incorporated which give a favourable impression of the interior to guests. Size may play an important part in this exercise. Often the larger the spaces, the more impact they have on the viewer. "[...]the mind and body, the spirit and even the self esteem of a man, seem to expand and acquire vigour under the simple influence of elbow-room" (Kerr 1972: 74). On the other hand, more intimate spaces, those which relate more closely to human proportion might be chosen in order to create a pleasing, comfortable impression on persons occupying the rooms.

The way in which rooms present themselves and how they relate to other spaces in

the dwelling may also enhance the general impression created by the home. Glimpses of living room, dining room or study experienced from the hall, for instance, may be enticing and increase the desire for further exploration of the spaces beyond.

Handsome fixtures like staircases, fireplaces and wall cupboards may be powerful display features and may add texture and richness to the spaces that they occupy. They create focal areas for the interiors around which much of the family activities centre. Bloomer & Moore (1977, 2: 3), single out the fireplace as an area of special importance where "a favourite painting might go over a mantle on which specially prized objects are placed, and the family's best rug and fanciest furniture are generally nearby. The formal attention to detail is likely to be richer here than anywhere else in or on the house except perhaps the front door, which opens the way to all this."

As the importance of the room diminishes in the hierarchical order of spaces in the house, so the space allotted it and the attention lavished on it diminishes. To take the example of the fireplace or built-in display fixture, the living room fireplace would most probably be more lavish than the one found in the dining room while, the size of the living room might exceed that of the dining room and the master bedroom that of the guest bedroom.

Utility zones (kitchens, pantries, serveries), however well designed and appointed, are not generally considered display areas, although they may, if particularly pleasing and functional, add to the status of the dwelling. This concept applies to a lesser extent to the bedrooms and bathrooms of a home. However, a master suite may be more impressive than lesser bedrooms and bathrooms thus establishing a domestic hierarchy instead of a public one.

APPLICATION

Let us turn now to some actual examples, one fairly modest home, the other more expensive, and explore them in terms of some of the concepts mentioned above. Although this approach is applicable to any dwelling, it was important to select two houses whose aesthetic and structural merit had already been established. These aspects then would not be in question and would therefore not have to be discussed.

The two properties chosen are House Cowin (also known as Casa Bedo) designed in 1936 by Douglas Cowin of the firm Cowin and Ellis (Van der Waal 1987: 241) and House Stern designed by Martienssen, Cook and

Fassler in 1934/35 (Van der Waal 1987: 238). Both houses were designed in the decade before the Second World War which was an exciting period in South African architectural history.

HOUSE COWIN (figure 1)

ENVIRONMENT

The suburb of Waverley was included in the expanded boundary of Johannesburg established by Proclamation 13 (Admin) of 22 November 1902 (Van der Waal 1987: 96). It lies to the north east of the city centre and is considered a prestigious suburb. The township is laid out in a grid system with streets orientated roughly from north to south and east to west. On the perimeter where other suburbs are located, the streets sometimes deviate from this rigid arrangement and traverse the area at different angles. House Cowin lies on one of the latter roads. Broad and tree lined, this thoroughfare was, when the dwelling was constructed, relatively quiet and situated far from the growing metropolis.

The stand on which the house was built was a portion of a much larger property. This sub-division did not adhere to the generally rectangular partitioning of the land. The result was an irregularly shaped, five sided stand with its largest side exposed to the street.

Houses in this suburb varied from impressive double-storey structures (some designed by such architects as Sir Herbert Baker) to relatively small bungalows. House Cowin may be seen as belonging to the latter category as it has only two bedrooms and the accommodation with the exception of the living room is in fact modestly proportioned. However, because of its innovative design "[...] it became

probably the most influential house of its era" (Herbert 1975: 147) enjoying a status unrelated to its size.

RELATIONSHIP OF DWELLING TO STAND

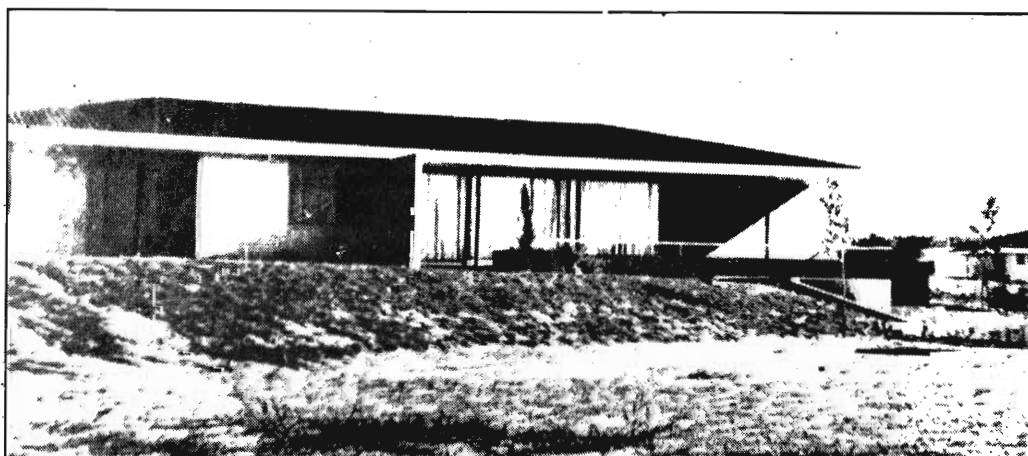
The appropriate arrangement of main building to outbuilding and both to the site plays an important role in establishing the quality of a dwelling. If the needs of both privacy and display are successfully met, the whole becomes a pleasing and satisfying place in which to dwell.

The house is situated towards the rear of the stand thus maximising the impact of the front garden space from the street. This conscious display of garden at the same time means that privacy is ensured, given the limitations of the stand size. The area allocated for the kitchen garden is kept to a minimum and is sheltered from the street by the outbuildings and a roof high garden wall stretching from the main bedroom to the boundary fence. The house and outbuildings thus form a V-shaped barrier between front and back garden.

Outbuildings and house are joined by two high walls creating a private backyard. This paved area encapsulates household tasks undertaken there, screening them from the rest of the garden and the public zone of the house.

The facade of House Cowin is placed at an angle of 45° to the street. In terms of display this arrangement emphasises the general character of the structure. The dwelling has a long, low profile and setting it at an angle increases the perspectival impact of the facade giving the illusion of a much longer building.

The house is orientated with its facade towards the northwest, parallel to the shortest



HOUSE COWIN : Facade R.A.U. archives

back boundary of the site so that the buildings are in tension with all the other sides of the stand. This dynamic interaction of buildings increases its visual impact.

The property was originally surrounded by wire mesh fences and a low front wall. Subsequent planting of trees and shrubs rendered the home more private and defined the owners' territory more forcefully.

THE FACADE

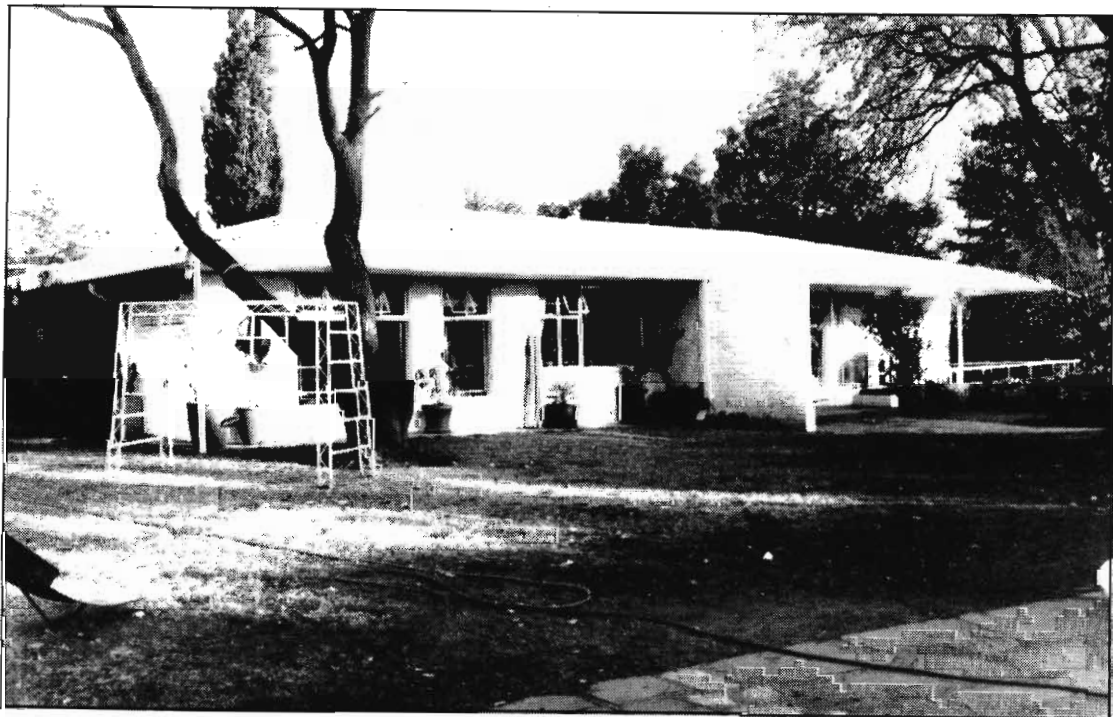
The more visually pleasing and harmonious the facade of a dwelling is, the more it satisfies the requirements of the owner and the more he identifies with it and is able to accept it as a symbol of self.

The facade possesses a strong, horizontal, earthclinging character. Because all the important rooms are situated in front of the house, the building spreads laterally across the site. The fact that the roof has a low pitch and terminates in exceptionally broad eaves contributes to the general horizontality of the building. This is reinforced by the unusually deep fascia board which runs unbroken across the entire building. The walls are relatively low and the loggia is located below the general level of the house sinking to street level in the garden. The roof high garden wall to the east and the extension of the dining

room wall to the west adds length to the building. The inclusion of all these features has created the impression of a much larger house than in fact is the case.

By setting the house at an angle to the street, the architect has thrust the significant public areas (living room, dining recess and veranda) forward. By cutting the driveway into the general slope of the garden and setting the public zone above the loggia, these spaces rise above the approach to the house and so proclaims their importance. The roof is seen hovering dramatically over the structure while glimpses of the living room are seen through the wall of glass stretching across its front. By those seemingly simple devices the architect has given this small house a visual impact normally associated with houses of more exalted status.

Although there is no evidence of such decorative features as plaster mouldings and intricate fretwork on veranda columns and balustrades as was the case in many Victorian homes (see Van der Waal 1987: 17, 94), attention is drawn to the entertainment area by means of structural devices. A striking texture is created by shuttering the concrete walls of the loggia and dining recess with corrugated iron which creates a strong textural contrast with the plate glass wall and sliding doors of



HOUSE COWIN : North east corner S Sher (restored)

the living room. As Herbert (1976: 147) has indicated the important features, "a pure demonstration of Miesian aesthetics", "are concentrated on the front of the house, while [...] the rear portion of the house reverts to a normal loan bearing construction."

The arrangement of house on the stand works equally well for the private areas which are situated as far from the entrance and driveway as is possible. In addition, a wall projecting from the end of the living room screening the window of the smaller bedroom. This room in turn screens the sliding glass doors of the master bedroom. The wide overhang of the eaves and the bedroom veranda also assist in making this area more shadowy and thus more private.

INTERIOR

Preparation for entry into the house begins at the front gate. Moving along the curve of the driveway, the bank on either side rises and the sense of enclosure increases until the loggia is reached. By creating this passage towards the entrance the architecture has ensured that there is a strict control over persons seeking access to the house. The garden on either side of the drive and the veranda above are not readily accessible and are entered only via the house and by implication with the permission of the owner.

The architect has designed the loggia as a low, dark, cave-like space without windows. At the end of this deep shelter the front door is located which leads into the tiny entrance hall. Leading off the entrance hall is a tiny store room which might house garden equipment and furniture or the like, keeping it hidden from sight. The stairwell is narrow and high and the stairs lead, uninterrupted by a landing to the space above. This restricted space is important in the sequence of spatial events which take place in this area of the house. The reason for it is that it reinforces the impact of the dramatic opening up of space into the large living room making this use of space seem even more lavish. This awareness of space is again augmented by the inclusion of the wall of glass and sliding door which allows space to flow visually onto the veranda and thence to the garden. The east wall of the living room extends beyond the house to the garden reinforcing the link with the exterior while creating a strong barrier between the public and private space of the dwelling.

The living room space flows into the dining recess where the large window stretching across the entire west wall expands the space in that direction. However, a solid concrete wall screens the dining recess from the front

garden and driveway directly beneath ensuring that activities in the dining area are not observed from the street. This would suggest that the partaking of a meal is a somewhat more private act than sitting at leisure in the living room.

Directly in front of the tiny lobby at the top of the entrance stairs is a tall unit which divides a passage space to the private zone from the actual living room. Because this fitting rises up to door height, space still flows from the passage to living room but visually divides them. The unit comprises cupboards and a glass fronted display area above an electric heater. These features may be seen as an updated version of the fireplace and mantelpiece and become an area of focus in the living room where family and guests might gather in winter and where family treasures might be seen on display. Similar display units are found below the dining recess window although a heating device is not included.

Doors from the lobby and dining area form a link with the kitchen. The juxtaposition of public and utility zones are unavoidable in a house of this size, but the possibility of cooking odours and general noises emanating from the kitchen are as likely as they are undesirable. An attempt to minimise this problem was made by creating a servery between the kitchen proper and the dining recess.

A low room divider with display shelves is positioned at the entrance to the stairwell. Although not indicated on the original plan, the lobby defined by this fitting has, in other versions of the plan, a curtain which can be drawn around the lobby (see van der Waal 1987: 241). This would lessen the contact with the kitchen and also screen the cloak room and wc which lead directly off the lobby. Although convenient to the public areas and the kitchen the proximity of this private area of the house to the living room is problematic and might indicate a certain flaw in the design of the dwelling (see Herbert 1975: 146).

As has been suggested, the private zone of the house is most successfully isolated from the rest of the house. Access to this zone is via the 'passage' in the living room. A change in floor levels between public and private areas subtly reinforces the division while the strong presence of the dividing wall is a much more powerful agent.

A short L-shaped passage gives access to the two bedrooms and bathroom. The main bedroom is situated at the end of the passage giving it a modicum more privacy over the second bedroom. The main bedroom is also larger than the other, establishing a domestic hierarchy.

The larger bedroom is divided into two distinct areas, one used for dressing, the other for sleeping. This is achieved by constructing a low fitting across the room while keeping the functions of each area separate. Had they been completely separated by a floor to ceiling wall, each would have become distressingly small. There are built in cupboards in each bedroom and these are arguably the most personal and private spaces in the house. The two 'windows' in the sleeping area are very different in character. The east window gives visual access only to the garden while the other, in the form of a sliding glass panel, opens up the space between bedroom and veranda and allows passage to the garden adding another prestigious feature to the master bedroom. The east wing of the L-shaped veranda is screened from the back garden by the roof high garden wall and is found to be even more private and secluded than the north wing which faces the street and is visually accessible from the smaller bedroom.

Although there is only one bathroom in the house, the size of the family which might occupy it would not place undue strain on the privacy of each family member. However, the positioning of the wc in the public zone of the house is far from ideal.

The servants quarters comprising bedroom and wc/shower lead off the walled kitchen yard so that there is no provision made for any private outdoor area for the occupant. However, these rooms are well sheltered from the street. Built of the same material as the main house and designed to be in keeping with it these quarters are in fact a great improvement on many of the outbuildings constructed at this time.

HOUSE STERN (figure 2)

ENVIRONMENT

Incorporated into Johannesburg by the same 1902 proclamation, Houghton lies closer to the city centre than Waverley. Stands are generally larger than those of Waverley, streets and pavements are broader. The area in which House Stern is situated was also laid out in the grid formation with streets running in roughly the same directions as was the case in the previous example. Because of the size of the stands, the population per square kilometre was considerably smaller, Houghton would therefore be, by implication, quieter and more exclusive than Waverley.

Almost without exception, the dwellings in this area are prestigious buildings. Some

achieve this status through sheer size but many are among the finest examples of domestic architecture to be found in the city. House Stern, designed by the team Martienssen, Fassler and Cook, falls into the latter category. It has, together with House Cowin, been described by Gilbert Herbert as being "at the very apex of achievement" in architectural design of its time.

RELATIONSHIP OF DWELLING TO STAND

The stand faces due north onto the street where the site slopes down towards the pavement. A terrace has been created by cutting and filling to accommodate the house and outbuildings. This level area extends to the west of the house to create a large rectangular upper garden bordered on the south side by a high garden wall and sloping rough stone retaining walls to the north and west. The house and extended garden wall successfully mask the kitchen garden from the terraces, north garden and the street.

The driveway moves straight into the property parallel to the east boundary and some distance from it so that it runs directly through the porte-cochère. It also runs past the latter to a large parking area in the front of the double garage. Parts of the drive and parking area are curved to facilitate the manoeuvre of vehicles.

For the size and quality of the house, the entrance gates and boundary fences are singularly unimposing. Simple, waist high columns demarcate the entrance while the visually insubstantial wire fence presents a weak barrier between street and garden. Early photographs of the home show the beginnings of a privet hedge which would have acted more efficiently as a screen.

The house is situated in the southeast quarter of the stand allowing a large expanse of garden to the north and west. The arrangement not only gives the impression of a large and prestigious property but also ensures a maximum distance of house from street and the neighbouring property to the west. The general structure of the house and outbuildings is aligned to the boundaries of the stand with the exception of the few curved features. The house has a formal and harmonious relationship to the stand which eases the tensions created by the asymmetrical character of the structure and its asymmetrical placing on the site.

Although the dwelling, outbuildings and garage are separate units they are linked by the walled backyard and covered walkway from the house to outbuildings. The isolation of the kitchen yard is similar to the arrange-

ment at House Cowin though the area incorporated is far larger. In addition, the servants' quarters are more private than the previous example as they are entered via their own courtyard to the south of the outbuildings. Their windows, although they face north, look onto the kitchen courtyard and thus lose a certain amount of privacy. These quarters are tucked behind the bulk of the house and so are completely sheltered from the street. Like House Cowin, the outbuildings are designed in the same style as the house and so harmonise with the dwelling.

THE FACADE

Because all the important spaces in the house are concentrated on the north side and because the most exciting architectural features are found here, the facade possesses an exciting and powerful presence. There is a lively inward and outward movement of planes where solids and voids alternate and integrate resulting in a dynamic and highly individualistic design. For these reasons and the fact that the double storey structure is more costly to build than a single storey, the building becomes a telling symbol of the status of its owner.

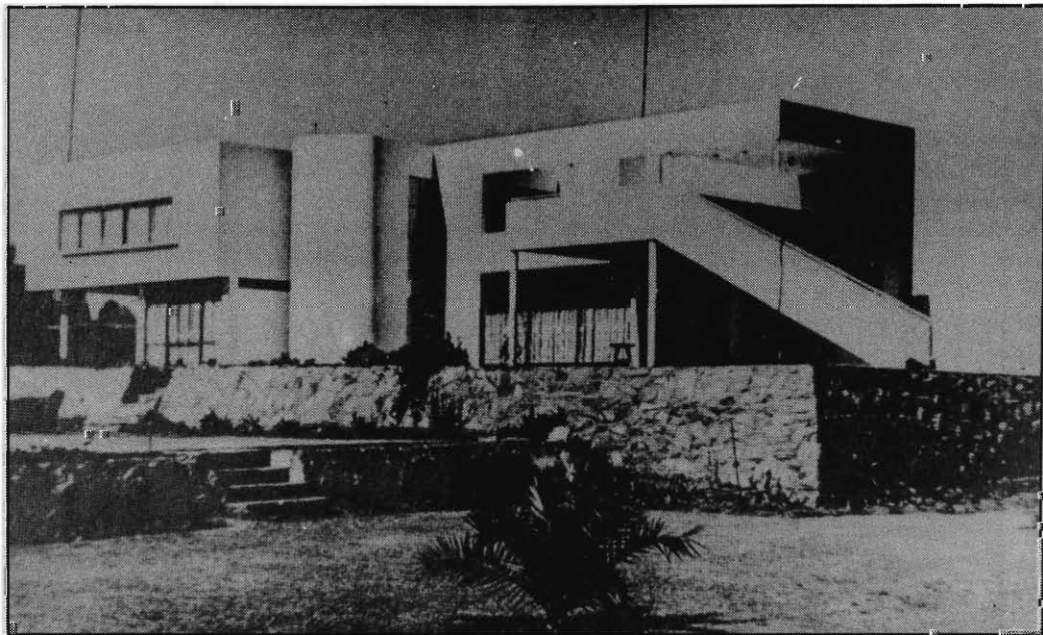
Possibly the most dominant feature on the facade is the horse-shoe shaped stairwell which rises the full height of the building. It contrasts strongly with the basically angular design and holds together the diverse elements of the building. With the flight of stairs from upper terrace to the garden it physically

and symbolically links the public zone of the house with the private spaces above.

The windows suggest a very clear distinction between public and private zones of the house. All the ground floor rooms on the facade have floor to ceiling windows. These offer the least resistance to visual penetration and those in the living room and dining room slide open linking interior and exterior. The study is the least private of the front rooms as it is placed next to the entrance drive where the interior is clearly visible to people arriving at the home. Less exposed is the living room merely because it is further away but the dining room despite its floor to ceiling and wall to wall glass doors is least visible from the driveway. It is recessed within the shadowy space of the loggia. The inclusion of large paned sliding doors might have been considered important status symbols in this period. This is an instance where the owner has accepted the triumph of display over privacy.

Although the structure containing two of the bedrooms is thrust out beyond the rest of the house, the windows are vertically narrow thus keeping activities within the rooms relatively free from public scrutiny. The third bedroom is isolated behind the deep upper terrace so that there is little chance of its occupants' privacy being violated from the ground level. However, only drawn curtains could prevent visual access to the room to those occupying the terrace itself.

The exterior of the House Stern is even more austere and unified than that of House



HOUSE STERN: North west corner (R.A.U. archives)

Cowin. Instead of a variety of wall textures, this house has a overall covering of smooth whitewashed stucco with no extraneous decorative features whatsoever. The visual interest comes only from the stark structural elements themselves and the changing play of light and dark on their surfaces.

INTERIOR

Ground floor

The porte-cochère forms a deep but loosely defined space between exterior and interior. This is a facility not normally included in houses of this size, but is generally found in very large homes and some of the better hotels. It is thus a most prestigious addition to the house as well as being thoroughly practical.

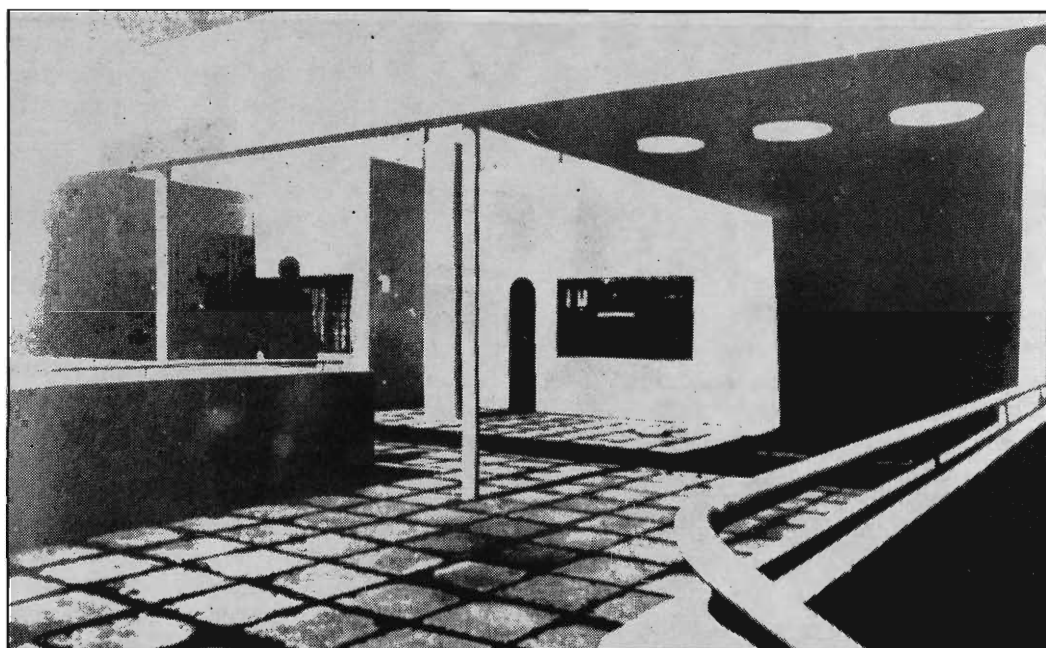
The entrance porch leading off the porte-cochère is separated from the latter by a change in floor covering and a rise in floor level although they share the same ceiling height. This is a subtle reminder to the visitor that he or she is approaching the owner's 'stronghold'. The study is so positioned that it masks the entrance porch and entrance door from the street. This makes the meeting of guests and their welcoming into the home a more private act than if the entrance had faced the street as is the case with most dwellings.

The large rectangular entrance space has been subdivided to include a cloakroom and guest wc. The curved dividing wall masks the entrances to the cloakroom, day nursery and,

more importantly, the kitchen when the house is entered. The juxtaposition of kitchen entrance with the public zone of the house occurs in both the examples chosen. This might be seen as the breaking down of barriers between utility and public functions of the home which would later develop into the open-plan homes designed in the second half of the century. This arrangement would certainly not have occurred in houses belonging to this economic category in the Victorian and Edwardian periods where these zones were kept as far as possible from one another and was generally achieved by introducing passages or at least lobbies as dividing spaces (see Hickling 1991: 78, 87). In House Stern there are no passages as such mainly because the large hall gives access to all the spaces on the ground floor with the exception of the dining room. The space gained by this means was therefore available for incorporation into the more important rooms, making them the more impressive.

More space was given to the entrance hall by building the staircase out onto the terrace. The horseshoe shaped stairwell, apart from being an aesthetically pleasing structure, provides a maximum of privacy when in use. By placing the window next to the house the rounded outer shell ensures visual protection from the north side.

The study is not an isolated space conducive to secluded reading and studying. Placed closest to the porte-cochère and entrance hall, it occupies a place of prominence. It has floor to ceiling windows to the north



HOUSE STERN: Upper terrace (R.A.U. archives)

which may suggest that the intellectual and business pursuits of the occupants were of significant and the visual evidence of these activities needed to be displayed to visitors. It also means that should business meetings be held there, family life could continue, uninterrupted, in the rest of the house. The room is fitted with bookcases extending along the curved outer wall between the door and the fireplace. A safe is built into this area.

The day nursery while adding status to the house may be viewed as a private place for the younger members of the household. Here their pursuits, often accompanied by visual and auditory chaos, could take place without censure and without undue discomfort to the other occupants of the house.

Kitchen and pantry are pushed to the rear of the house. Included in the utility complex is a servery which, while reasonably isolating kitchen noise and odours from the dining room proves convenient and allows privacy to servants setting, serving and clearing table in the dining room.

The semi-opaque glass screen between living room and dining room prevents clear visual penetration into the latter, but one is nevertheless aware of the space beyond. Although living room and dining room are closely linked there is a deliberate attempt to isolate the one from the other when necessary. (This can be contrasted with House Cowin where no barrier is introduced between these spaces). The sliding doors onto the loggia make possible the use of the loggia for *al fresco* meals extending the facilities offered by the house.

Passing through the entrance door with double doors to the living room open, the impressive expanse of space through hall, living room and loggia can be seen. This arrangement ensures that the interior spaces are seen simultaneously with the exterior space, reinforcing the link between indoors and outside. However, the change in flooring material in each case helps to define the three distinct spatial entities. The living room is large and airy with floor to ceiling windows and sliding doors occupying most of the north wall. By opening up the glass doors to the terrace the entertainment area of the house is substantially increased. Because there is only a shallow step from terrace to garden and because there is no parapet wall defining the terrace, the latter flows easily into the garden allowing a freedom of movement from one area to the other.

In keeping with the design of the house the chimney breast and fireplace are positioned asymmetrically on the south wall of the living room. A tiled hearth extends from the end of the fireplace to the east wall with a semicircu-

lar chimney breast rising above it. A mantelpiece, bookcase and cocktail cabinet are incorporated in this feature, probably the most important display area in the home.

Upper floor

The grouping of the bedrooms above the public and utility spaces of the house greatly increases the privacy of the family and they are more fully able to distance themselves from the day to day activities in the busier zones of the house.

With persons occupying the upper floor and looking out of the windows, there is a certain superiority of position or place in relationship to those below. In addition, there is the possibility of heightened aesthetic experience of the surroundings (the garden is seen from a different and more intriguing angle and the vista across the garden and beyond is enhanced) as the upper floor is used most exclusively by the family, these privileges are denied outsiders.

In House Stern the staircase leads to a large rectangular upper hall, not much smaller than the entrance hall. The space is meant to be an alternative gathering place for the family "although its western orientation would prohibit its comfortable use in the summer-time" (Herbert 1975: 126).

With its wall of glass to the west the upper hall was designed to relate to the upper garden terrace forming a private recreation area for the family. The terrace has a roofed area for more sheltered leisure pursuits and a large expanse exposed to the sky. However, the heavy beams and solid parapet walls define the space quite clearly and provide a certain amount of privacy from the street. People moving about on this terrace through they may be sheltered from public view can observe those below with ease.

The dramatic staircase from the upper terrace to the garden is one of the most exciting display features of the house. Despite its prominence it is situated away from the entrance area of the house and is one of the elements in the design which carries a subliminal message. It leads to a private area and no polite guest, unless invited to do so would use it to gain access to the house.

The two front rooms and the bathroom, wc and sewing room complex are separated from the upper hall by small lobbies. The change of floor covering from hall to lobbies drawing attention to the distinction between the leisure area and those which merely give access to other spaces on the upper floor. The back bedroom leads directly off the upper hall reducing its privacy. It is interesting to note that the latter bedroom is the only

room in the house where the architects have specified burglar bars for the windows as it is particularly vulnerable due to the easy access to it from the ground floor. A rather more sinister aspect of privacy has been catered for.

Like the master bedroom in House Cowin, the one in House Stern enjoys the north east corner of the house. (This position is often given to the main bedroom because it enjoys early morning sun, is sunny during the day in winter and is shielded by the rest of the house from the hot afternoon sun in summer). The room is large and like the other bedrooms has a set of built in cupboards. The narrow area could be used for dressing (as it does not have a separate dressing room) while the rest is devoted to the 'sleeping space'. The room is built en suite with a bathroom but no wc – "an omission perhaps occasioned by the difficulty in dealing with a soil pipe from a position suspended above a porte-cochère!" (Herbert 1975: 123). Here we witness again the triumph of display over privacy.

Conclusion

By establishing territorial limits within the community that surrounds a family or individual and by excluding, when necessary, physical and visual contact with outsiders, persons are more able to dwell in a state of ease. For the smooth running of a house hold and to ensure privacy within the family circle, appropriate zoning of the interior of a house is desirable. So it would be reasonable to assume that devices which ensure these requirements need to be carefully considered and consciously taken into account in the planning or choosing of a home if the building is to successfully play its role as a dwelling.

Display elements might also feature prominently in the appraisal of a building. There seems to be a need for man to be surrounded by certain physical conditions and symbols which enrich his life within his dwelling. It needs to be understood that these features, to a certain degree, define the life style of the occupants and assist in identifying them as

individuals. They help to establish these individuals' position within a social context.

Of course, the concepts of privacy and display cannot be seen in isolation. There are many other factors which are of equal importance – the structural principle and materials employed in the house, its stylistic characteristics and historical context to name but a few. These too need to be taken into account if an holistic understanding of the building is to be gained. Nevertheless, the concrete manifestations of both privacy and display do seem to play an important role in the functioning of a building. They assist in creating the ultimate character which the house assumes and in determining, or a least influencing, the viewer's or dweller's physical, intellectual and emotional response to it.

NOTE

1. The ideas or principles propounded in this article pertain more specifically to the times in which the two houses chosen for exploration were built. The concept discussed may or may not relate to the dwellings belonging to other historic periods or different economic categories.

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