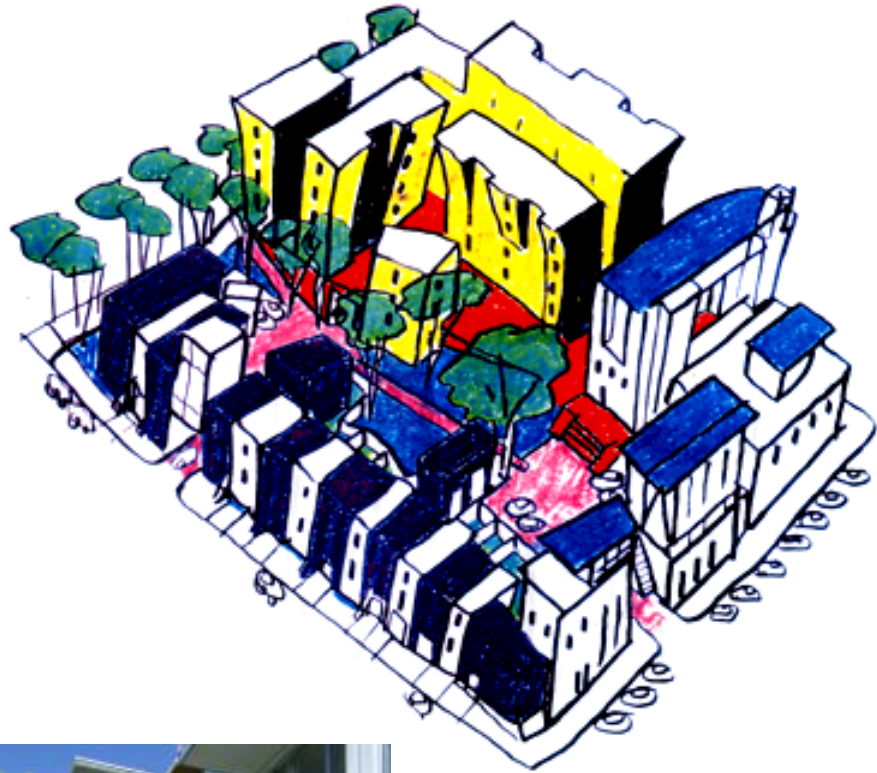




MAKING NEIGHBORHOODS an Urban Alternative



L I T T L E I T A L Y
N E I G H B O R H O O D
D E V E L O P M E N T

CONTEXT

In the early 1990's, the Little Italy neighborhood became part of the larger downtown San Diego redevelopment area.

Welcoming new development, but concerned that it would homogenize the human scale, small lot pattern and traditional working class quality of the neighborhood, community activists worked with the redevelopment Agency to prepare a 'Focus Plan' with guidelines to protect the unique character of Little Italy. A key element was to pursue a demonstration development project that would incorporate the design principles of the Plan.

In 1994, the Agency assembled a full block parcel on the neighborhood's main street - India Street - and a group of designers and developers saw the opportunity to propose a solution that embodied the physical and social goals of the Focus Plan.

In contrast to the typical superblock pattern of 1 block/1 developer/1 designer being promoted in the rest of downtown, the Little Italy Neighborhood Developers (LIND) team suggested a radical alternative - 1 block/4 developers/7 designers

THE INTENDED RESULT

A full block mixed-use development that authentically perpetuates the rich fine grained personality of the existing neighborhood - replete with the vitality of odd juxtapositions, blemished serendipity, and the values of true social diversity.



LITTLE ITALY'S HEART - India Street

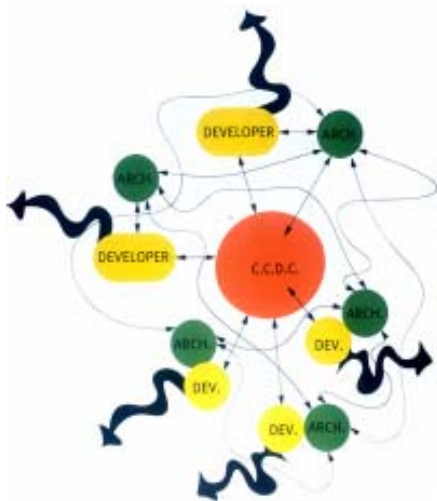


The charm of Little Italy



HISTORIC FABRIC OF SMALL LOT OWNERSHIP

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO MAKE NEIGHBORHOODS



LIND Development Team

DIVERSITY IS BETTER



LIND Block Multiple Owners

LITTLE ITALY OWNERSHIP PATTERN



One Block - One Owner

TYPICAL DOWNTOWN OWNERSHIP PATTERN



Typical Development Team

BIGGER IS BETTER

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

This is the story about building a neighborhood — a story of the competition winning entry that combined the talents of 4 developers and 7 designers on the premise that no matter how good one designer is - you can't build in enough friction and distinction to make authentically different places within a full block parcel.

The team brought lessons learned from past experience as well as advice gathered from fellow practitioners around the country on the failures and successes of large scale redevelopment. These lessons became the Goals and Principles by which the plan would be guided:

PROVIDE SURPRISES

The existing pattern of mysterious, hidden courtyard spaces found in nearby restaurants and shops would be repeated. The block would be open to the public to meander through from every street — but only after venturing through narrow passages that appear to go nowhere. This would become the most successful experiment the team made.

PROMOTE SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DIVERSITY

Although historically an Italian working class neighborhood - Little Italy is home to a diverse range of economic and ethnic backgrounds. Through variety in the dwelling unit type and size a wide range of economic diversity and lifestyles are accommodated. The variety of open space areas further contributes to the sociability of the community.

STREET EDGES - THE FIRST IMPRESSION

The public street face is the most visible expression of the character of a project. Little Italy's character is defined by the individuality of many different owner's personal expression of style. By using 7 different designers LIND achieved a variety matching the existing neighborhood character of small parcel ownership.

MAKE SPACE - THEN OBJECTS

The spaces 'in-between' - where people would meet and become neighbors - were more important than the individual buildings. As parts were refined by the individual architects from the inside-out - the landscape architect would take the pieces and massage them from the outside-in. The rule was that the connecting spaces were more important than particular parts - and buildings were modified accordingly.

MAKE MANY DOORS

All buildings would have multiple entries, front and rear, from the street and the open space. We wanted to push the belief that 'eyes' on the street and activity would thwart concerns of safety. By counting on defensible space theory to keep out the bad people we could be more gracious with sharing the open space with our neighbors and curious passersby - and it worked!

GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

Careful attention was paid to the delineation of Private, Semi-Private, Public, and Semi-Public open space to extend a sense of ownership - and care - throughout the block.

TAME THE CAR

The car would not dominate the open space or streetscape - but also not be excluded. Garages and parking areas were carefully designed to be at a human scale and sensitively integrated into the plan.



DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO



LITTLE ITALY



LIND SITE

SITE DESIGN AS MILITARY CAMPAIGN

Although the team members were all friends the competition design process took on the attributes of a military campaign with battle lines being drawn and redrawn. The Agency offered a near total write-down on land costs - so the first reaction was to grab as much land as you could.

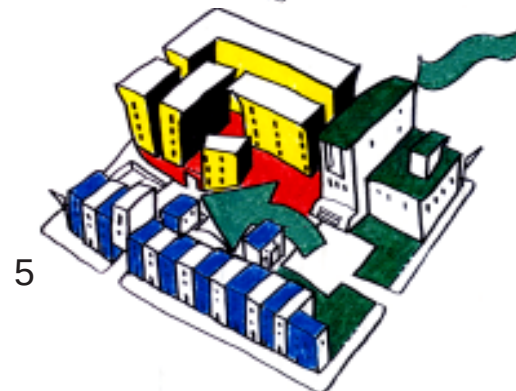
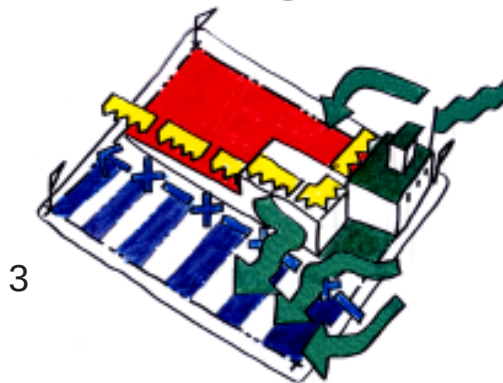
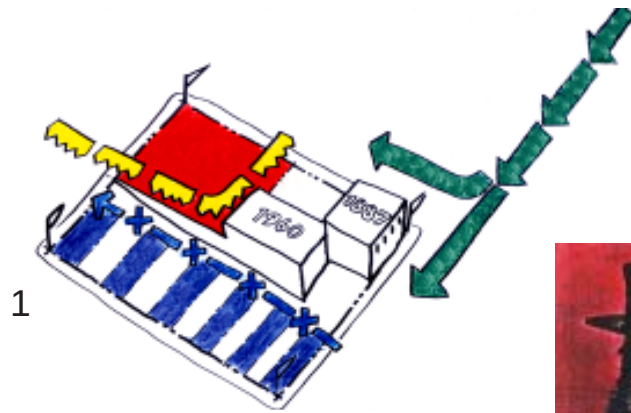
All at least agreed that the block should not be designed by one architect and that the buildings should be small to match the existing neighborhood scale.

Red and Blue had teamed up first laying claim to certain strategic parcels. Red took the prominent corner and directed his architect to design a 4 story apartment with retail on the main street over a parking garage, the status quo prototype. Blue took the long frontage on Kettner to build rowhouses with garages and granny flats off an alley down the block center. Blue would get more property in return, for keeping his buildings low enough for Red to see over them to the bay view beyond. All seemed calm.

Then the two invited the Green development team to finish the remaining quadrant, expecting demolition of the existing buildings there to provide a building site.

Green initially occupied the remaining property, but chose to rehabilitate rather than demolish the historic building on the corner. They began designing on the remaining property. But, Red decided his parcel was too small and attacked, coming over his ramparts (black arrow). Green flanked and in the compromise that followed, a Green architect was contracted by Red to design part of his project. But still the Green developers had no land for new buildings and certainly not enough land to demonstrate a traditional perimeter block. So, Green attacked Blue's holdings forcing the alley to the side and drove onward to Kettner where Blue dug in, threatening to walk out if Green tried to advance further. The odd site configuration which developed was the result of conflict, bluff and compromise.

The site design was in this state when the team won the competition.





THE BATTLE RAGES ON

During negotiations with the redevelopment agency, planners there questioned the lack of open space. Green, feeling the right moment, rushed the block center against strong objections from the Red Developer, preparing private drawings and gaining the support of the Agency. Red had no choice but to pull back. In the ensuing battles, Blue agreed to eliminate the alley taking garage access from the street. A common central park was created for toddlers and more importantly for unit separation, light, ventilation, and privacy. Green had accomplished a kind of perimeter block and each developer had ample space to build their idea of good urban housing.

The Green buildings are four; the aforementioned design for the Red developer, the rehabilitation of the historic Harbor Marine building, three story loft apartments, and components of the ideal perimeter block.

While Green searched for the best performing design for these two buildings, two classes emerged. We liken these buildings to the ironclads of the Civil War, an entirely new class, highly capable of defeating the status quo.

One is the Monitor, new and efficient, containing 4 normal sized units. The second is the Merrimac with 4 large units made of numerous suites flexible enough for many family types.

The scheme was submitted and chosen the winner, but not without a counter charge from the redevelopment agency to reconfigure the buildings to create a large central open space as a safe playground for the family apartments. The team's landscape architect brokered truces between warring architects to force them to redesign the shared spaces and edges between their buildings. In 1996, the agency's lawyers drew up the cease fire agreement, recorded the final property borders and construction began.



DESIGN PRINCIPLES

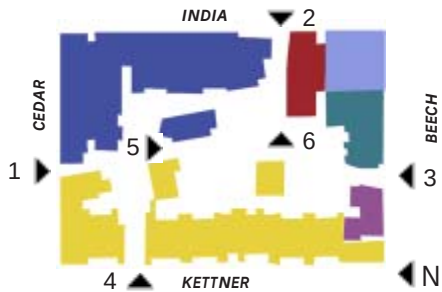
As the battle raged the parties developed a 'Geneva Convention' - rules or guiding principles that the designers agreed to follow:

SURPRISE - THE GAPS

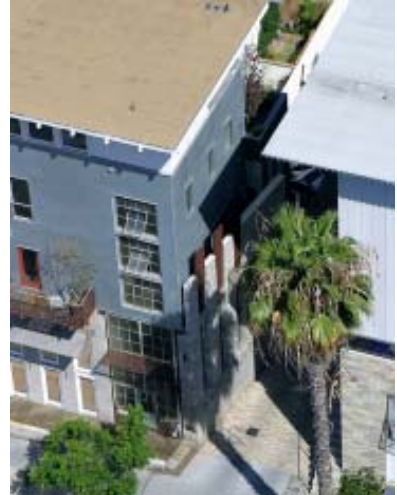
The existing pattern of mysterious, hidden courtyard spaces found in nearby restaurants and shops would be repeated. The block would be open to the public to meander through from every street — but only after venturing through consciously designed narrow passages that did not appear to go anywhere. The curious pedestrian would be rewarded for venturing in by finding places to sit and relax — eat lunch and watch the neighborhood children play. A break in the street façade — a glimpse in between to the sky — focuses attention on the distinct personalities between buildings.



1



2



3



3



4



5



6

SOCIAL SPACE AND DIVERSITY

Through variety in the dwelling unit type and size a wide range of economic diversity and lifestyles could be accommodated. The variety of open space areas further contributed to the sociability of the community.



OUTDOOR MOVIES IN THE AUTOCOURT



GRILLING IN THE COURTYARD



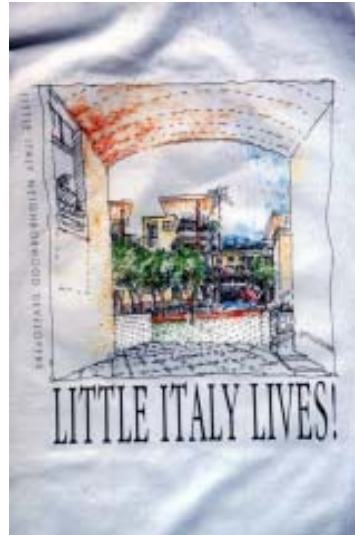
OUTDOOR CAFE ON CEDAR STREET



SAVING A BIT OF NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY



PARTIES IN THE COURTYARD



DESIGN PRINCIPLES

All parties bought into the fundamental premise — that differences of opinion between individuals with separate vested rights might yield a more real living environment than one shaped by a single entity trying for variety.

STREET EDGES

The street edge would be the most revealing about the different personalities of the buildings. The architects proceeded independently with minimal collaboration to insure the intended authentic small lot development pattern.



1

VILLA MARIA

KETTNER ROW



3 KETTNER ROW
for sale rowhomes

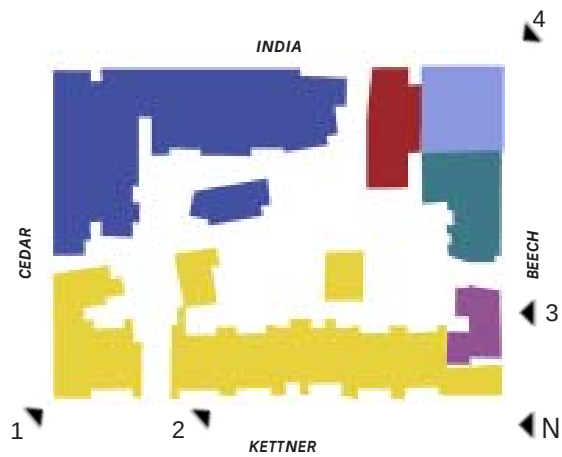
DUTRA-BROWN BUILDING
Live/Work rental lofts

MD-BLOCK ACCESS
to Autocourt and Open Space

THE MERRIMAC
Live/Work rental lofts and
owner occupied office



2 KETTNER ROW



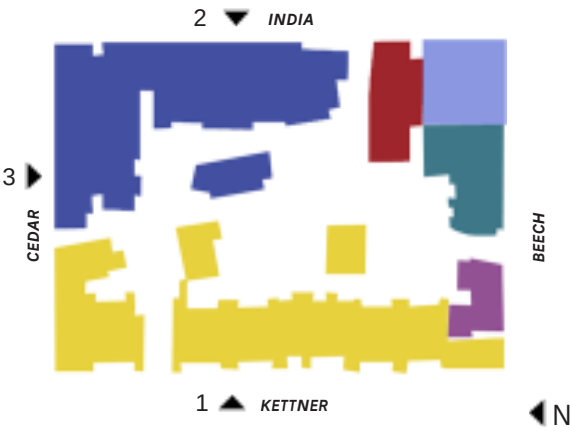
HARBOR MARINE SUPPLIES
Retail sales and Studio Apartments



LITTLE ITALY LOFTS
Mixed-use retail,
rental lofts & owner
occupied residence

VILLA MARIA
Mixed-use apartments and retail

DESIGN PRINCIPLES



1 VILLA MARIA beyond KETTNER BOULEVARD FACADE KETTNER ROW

STREET EDGES

The street edge would be the most revealing about the different personalities of the buildings. The architects proceeded independently with minimal collaboration in the hopes that distinct architectural character would emerge.



INDIA STREET FACADE 2 HARBOR MARINE SUPPLIES LITTLE ITALY LOFTS MID-BLOCK ACCESS



3 VILLA MARIA APARTMENTS RESTAURANT WITH SIDEWALK CAFE MID-BLOCK ACCESS KETTNER ROW CEDAR STREET FACADE



KETTNER ROW

DUTRA-BROWN beyond



BLOCK ACCESS

VILLA MARIA APARTMENTS WITH SHOPS AND RESTAURANT

SIDEWALK CAFE



DESIGN PRINCIPLES



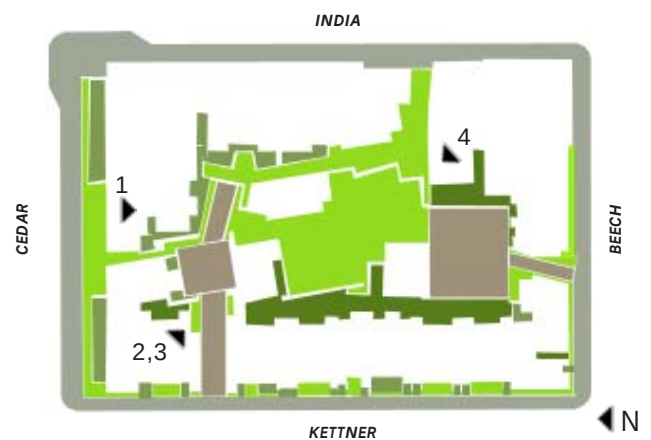
1

SPACES IN-BETWEEN

The spaces 'in-between' - where people would meet and become neighbors - were more important than the individual buildings. As parts were refined by the individual architects the group would regularly meet at the neutral ground of the landscape architect to compare progress - often going away with modifications to enhance the space in between.

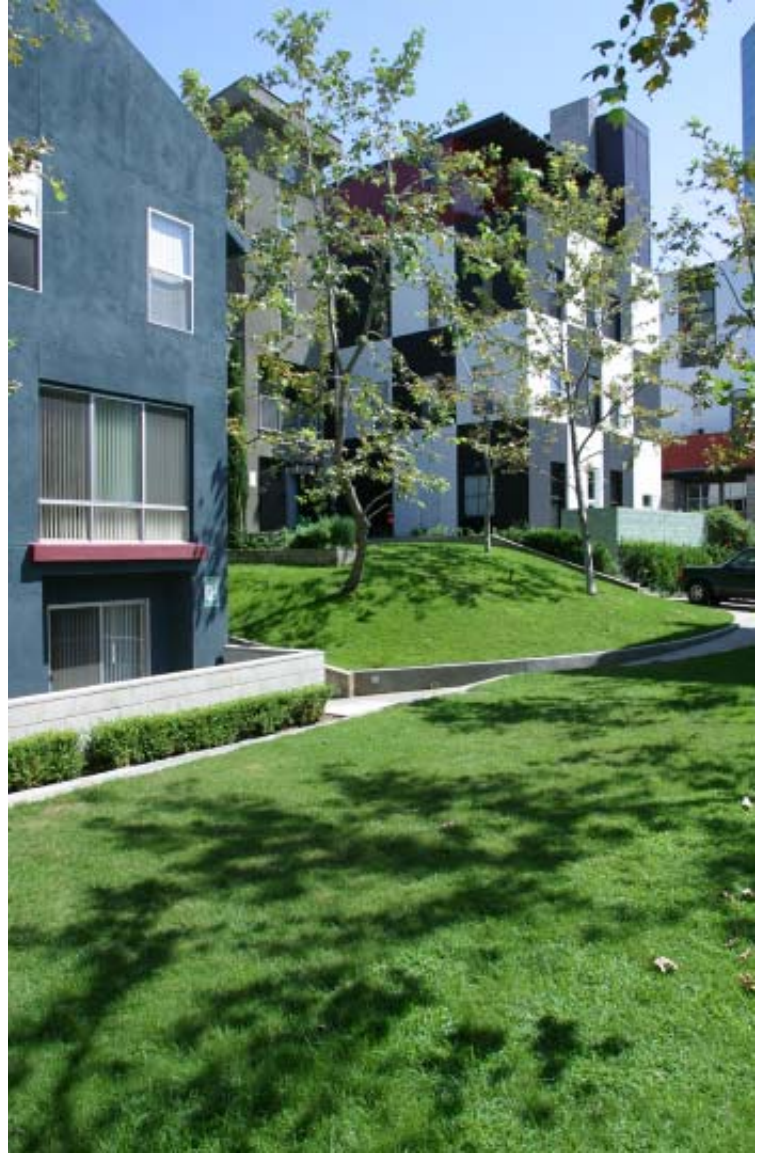


2





3



4

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

MANY DOORS

All buildings would have multiple entries, front and rear, from the street and the open space. We wanted to push the belief that 'eyes' on the street and activity would thwart concerns of safety. By counting on defensible space theory to keep out the bad people we could be more gracious with sharing the open space with our neighbors and curious passersby.





DESIGN PRINCIPLES

GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS

Careful attention was paid to the delineation of Private, Semi-Private, Public, and Semi-Public open space. The private rear yards of the rowhomes have individual gates yet are separated from the play lawn with a tall vine covered wall for maximum privacy. Individual entries to homes and apartments were defined by low walls and stoops to stake-out a zone of semi-private space. Low walls along the street edge separate the public sidewalk from the semi-public streetscape plantings.

OPEN SPACE 'OWNERSHIP'

The degree of responsibility taken to care for outdoor space is directly related to the degree of perceived ownership of the spaces. The site plan design evolved in response to the real and implied ownership of the 21 different properties.

PUBLIC

This is ours - we all use - we all take care of it

SEMI - PUBLIC

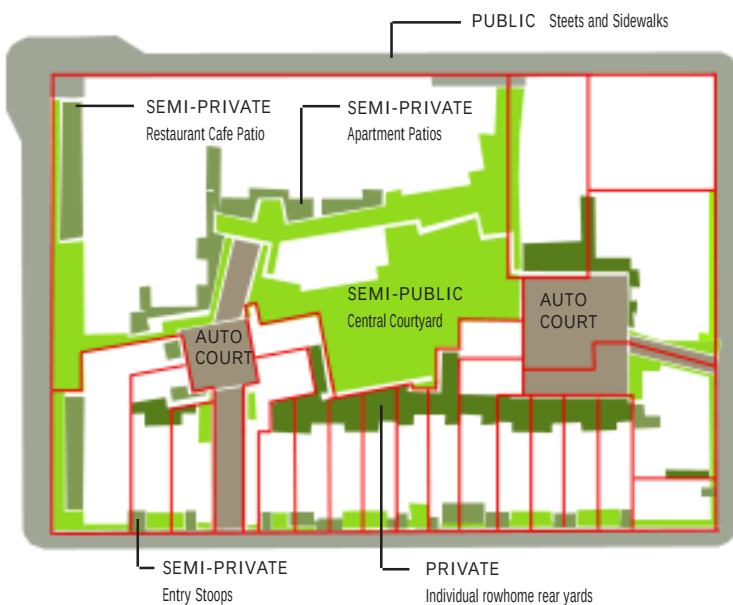
This is ours - but it's right next to mine. We all use. I help take care of it.

SEMI-PRIVATE

This is mine. You can see it - but cannot use it. I take care of it.

PRIVATE

This is mine. You cannot see it or use. I take care of it.



OPEN SPACE OWNERSHIP

Private gardens for rowhomes



Semi-private entry to Villa Maria



Public sidewalk and semi-private stoops



Semi-public and semi-private gardens



Semi-public open space and semi-private patios



Private gardens



Private gardens



TAMING THE CAR

The car would not dominate the open space or streetscape. The final design incorporates two internal parking courts with access to the off-street rowhome garages below granny flats, the underground parking for the family apartments, and surfaced parking for the live/work lease spaces. Along Kettner Boulevard half the rowhomes have narrow single car garages to maintain the pedestrian scale. These garages were designed with extra ceiling height for optional owner installed car lifts to accommodate 2 vehicles.



AUTCOURTS DOUBLE AS PLAZA ENTRIES TO HOMES



1 CAR GARAGE IS MORE HUMAN SCALED



FITS 2 CARS WITH A HYDRAULIC LIFT



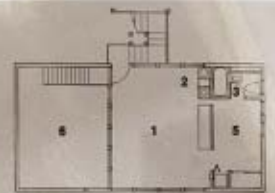
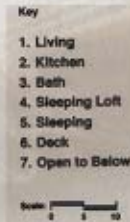
HARBOR ARMS APARTMENTS HARBOR MARINE SUPPLIES



Built in 1887 and occupied by Harbor Marine Supplies since 1955, the renovation of this corner building preserved a cherished piece of Little Italy's fishing history. The building provides 4 apartments above the marine supply business.



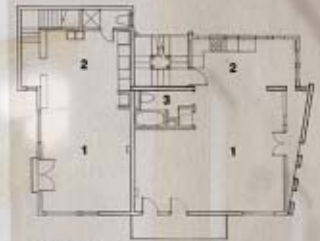
The Dutra Brown Building San Diego, CA USA



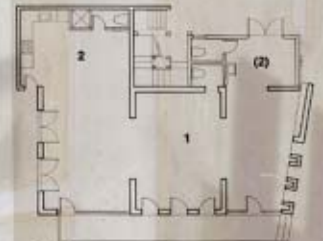
Third Floor



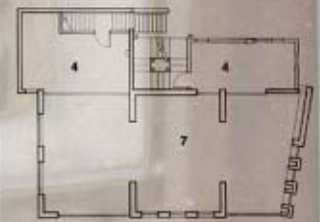
Second Floor Mezzanine



Second Floor



First Floor



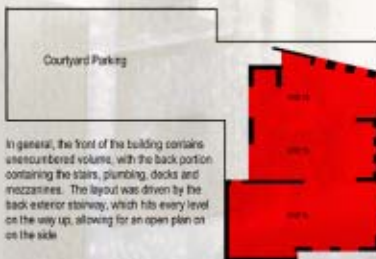
First Floor Mezzanine

The structure is reminiscent of the old storage buildings that line the railway tracks a block from the site. It is poured concrete, concrete block, and metal clad; with a quaint tiny grandmothers cottage perched on top. It is a three-story structure, with the first and second stories having 20' bays. The third story is 10', bringing the total height of the building to 50'.

In general, the front of the building contains unencumbered volume, with the back portion containing the stairs, plumbing, decks and mezzanines. The layout was driven by the back exterior stairway, which hits every level on the way up, allowing for an open plan on the inside. It is a simple structure. It lets in light. It sits comfortably in the neighborhood.



Block



Parcel



Second Floor Interior



Ground Floor Interior



Rear Exterior



Second Floor Interior

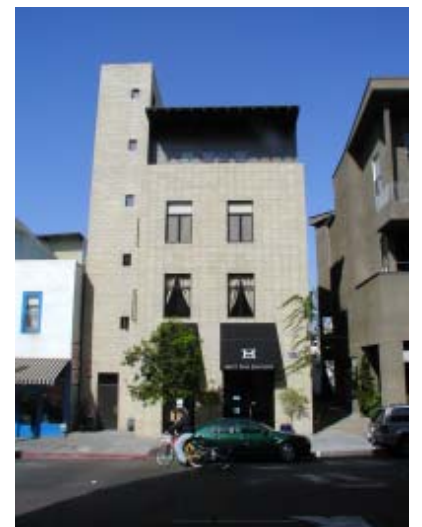


LITTLE ITALY LOFTS

Live/Work Lofts
Retail Storefront
Owner Occupied Residence



The odd composition of the final Plot Plan reminded us of docked fishing boats. The last building completed (the lighthouse at the end of a long road) is finally realized.





THE MERRIMAC BUILDING

The Merrimac prototype at LIND demonstrates how simple buildings without the infrastructure of parking garages, elevators, hotel corridors and security systems are less expensive to build and require less density to offset costs. Lower density translates to better light, air, open space, unit identity and privacy. Parking on the street and in open courtyards keeps the surrounding public space occupied and secure.



Kettner Row



This project contains a series of sixteen rowhouses meticulously placed into an irregular site in a blighted area of downtown San Diego. The site, long considered as unfeasible by traditional developers, was viewed as an opportunity by a local architect and resident of downtown San Diego. As the architect and developer, the project was conceived to create a convertible living environment whereby portions of each home could easily be sectioned off as a rental, office or loft space thereby allowing the owner to expand or contract their family or business as needed. Each entry level, free simple home creates its own identity in a sensitive dialogue with the urban environment. Hedges, stoops, upper floor balconies, large picture windows and roof hats create a metaphor of homes of the past. Each unit has an outdoor space that enfronts either a motor court and central garden or an urban forest. These features enable a century old housing tradition of rowhouses to be in harmony with the urban environment and the automobile. All units are bathed in natural light by means of oversized windows and skylights. The 15' wide x 80' long lots enable narrow units to have natural ventilation and a connection to the outside. The varieties and dynamism of the four housing types in this project (granny flats, rowhouses, triplex and live-work lofts) allow for differences in lifestyles, economics and housing tastes - Convertible Housing.

