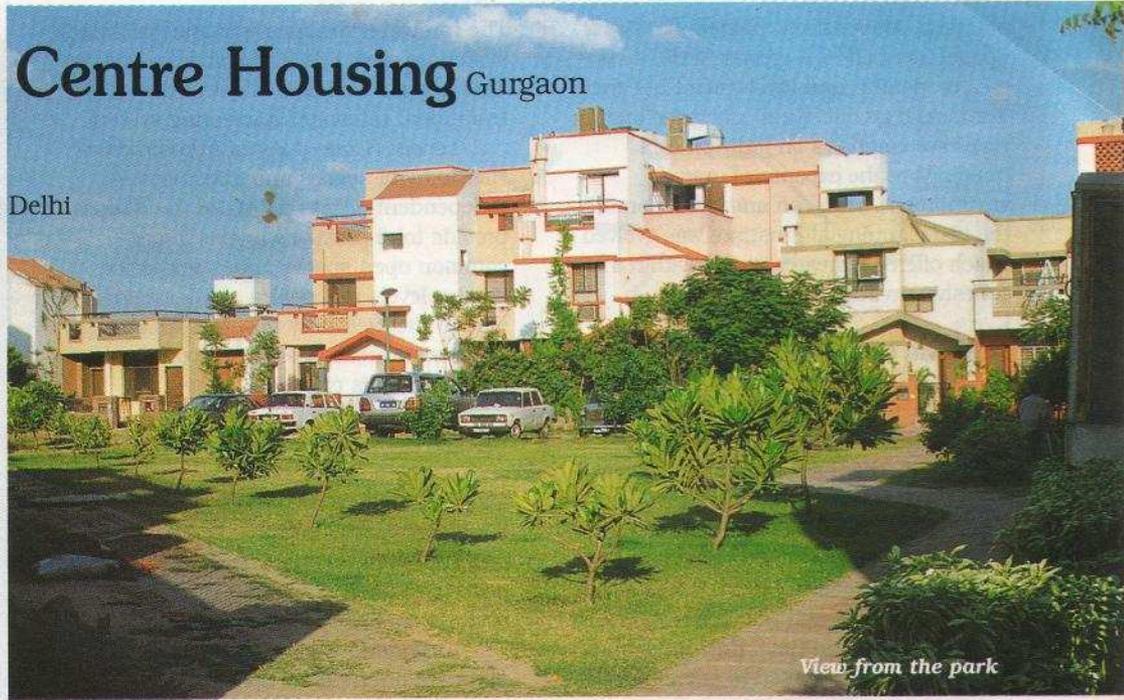


National Media Centre Housing Gurgaon

Text **Anjali Shukla**

Architects **Space Design Associates** Delhi



View from the park

The social and economic forces in the context of our cities today stress on the inevitability of an architecture based on generalisations to create our most intimate built environment, our homes. Group housing, due to its random and unplanned development in most cities, neither addresses concerns at the urban level nor satisfies the people to be housed.

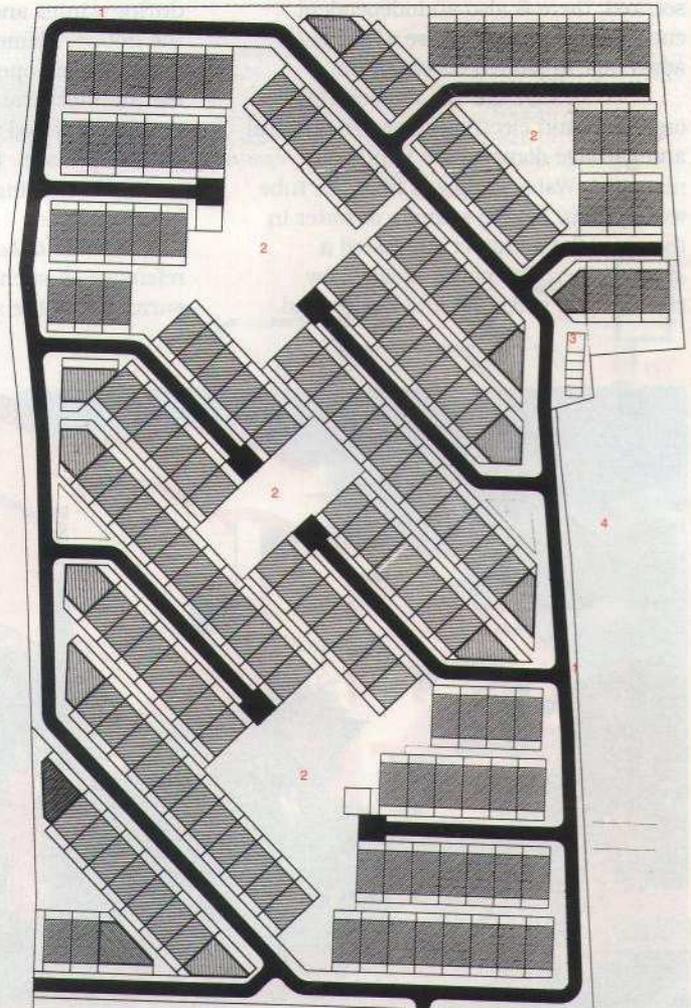
In this scenario, the unusual and atypical mode of organization of the National Media Centre (NMC) housing in Gurgaon, situated close to the Delhi-Haryana border on the national highway NH-8, makes it stand out as a "different" project. This is specially true when we consider that the relationship and genuine dialogue between the architect, Vinod Gupta, and the members of the society has created a unique and conducive environment.

The NMC housing has a modern aesthetic but a traditional flavour in its sense of place. The word 'traditional' here is reflective of a feeling of community, trust, and an involvement with the creation and growth of the inhabited space.

Organization, Funding, Mode of Delivery

As exemplified here, in the urban context of a cosmopolitan city the economical and professional proximity of people makes them more united as a group. The inhabitants of the NMC housing are a cohesive group of people who are like-minded, have a keen understanding amongst themselves, and have mostly similar concerns.

There are 180 houses and what initially started as a group housing scheme later got converted into a plotted development. The architect felt that though group housing offers advantages of a centrally organized construction, unified security, and common facilities, the zoning and fire regulations when overlaid result in an inflexible and uninteresting



- 1 CAR PARKING
- 2 PARK
- 3 SHOPS
- 4 DLF LAND
- 5 COMMUNITY CENTRE

SITE PLAN



planning. Alternatively, plotted development offers a greater flexibility, greater identity, and involvement but there is a lack of architectural coherence and an excessive emphasis on individual buildings at the expense of overall environment. Thus, an amalgamation of the two planning alternatives was evolved which offered a greater variety within a cohesive environment.

Analysis of the Overall Planning

Physical Infrastructure: Circulation realms are characterized by a clear distinction between vehicular and pedestrian movement. The main circulation system is a ring road around the site and provides access to the cul-de-sac roads leading to each plot. Parking is limited to the main ring road but there is a resistance to this and the true response will only be seen in time. Entrances and access points are limited to one main entry into the site which is totally secured, there is also an independent entry access to each house which is an advantage in plotted development.

Services for the site are centrally organized and electricity, sewage disposal and garbage disposal are jointly managed. Water supply is from the tube well system. Due to scarcity of water in the area, the architect suggested a system where the paved areas allow rainwater to percolate into the ground.

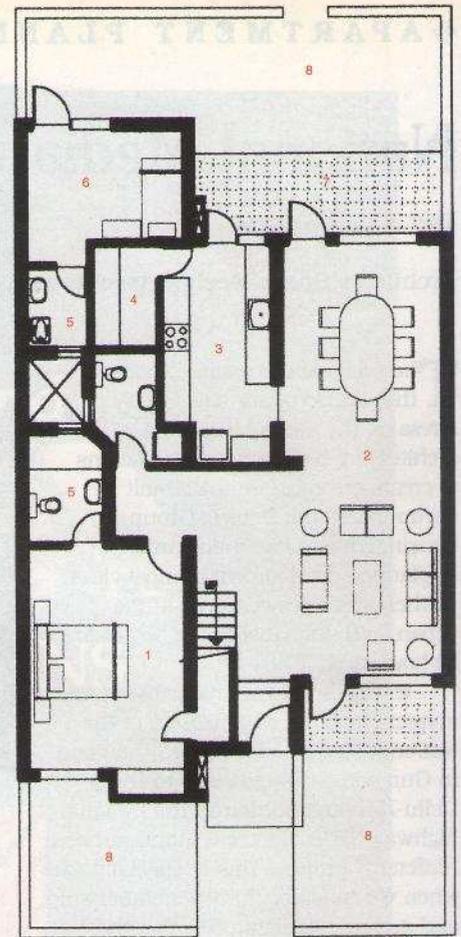
The rainwater drains are connected to a system of soak pits in the green areas. This is a modern equivalent of the traditional rainwater harvesting system.

Levels, Scale of Social Infrastructure: Hierarchy of spaces and entrances — Independent access points to the houses provide total privacy whereas larger common open spaces act as nodes for greater levels and scales of interaction. Due to the hierarchy of vehicular and pedestrian areas, a safe and conducive environment is created.

The nature of open spaces is such that the houses themselves 'make' or enclose them. This makes them private and accessible to residents only and are hence well-maintained. These parks are also kept from becoming dead spaces as pedestrian short cuts make them inclusive in the overall circulation system.

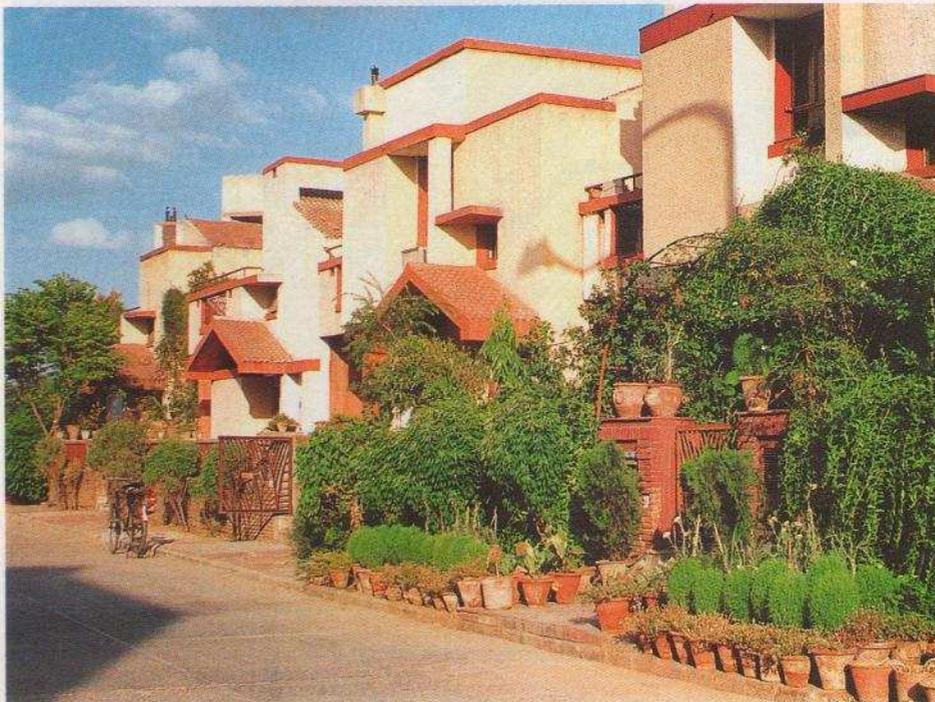
Attitude to Climate: Most of the plots are oriented on the north-south axis which brings in the sun only during winter and only on one side of the house. Elements like sunshades and recessed openings form a part of the architectural design language. The roof is insulated with earthen pots laid in mud *phuska*. Evaporative cooling and solar heating systems have also been provided.

Attitude to Landscape: With no reference as such in the landscape surrounding the site, this inward-looking

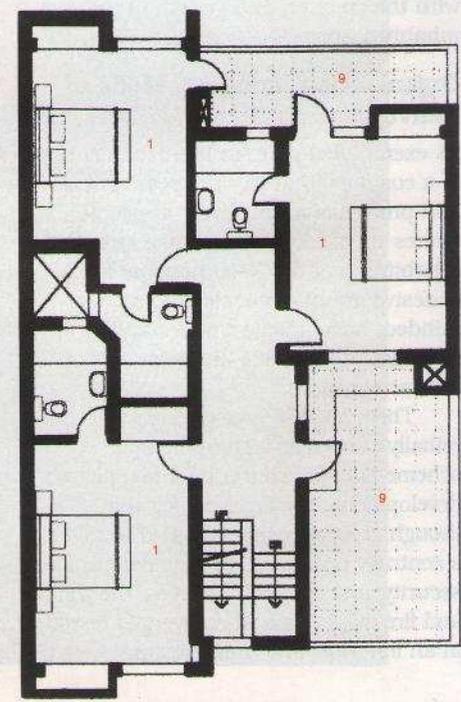


GROUND FLOOR PLAN (TYPE C)

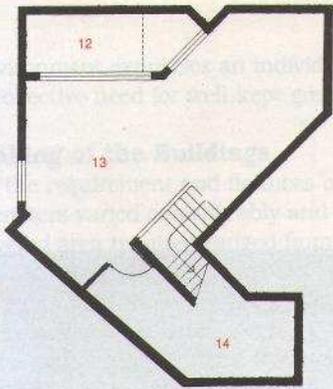
- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 1 BEDROOM | 4 STORE | 7 VERANDA |
| 2 DRAWING-CUM-DINING | 5 TOILET | 8 GARDEN |
| 3 KITCHEN | 6 SERVANT'S ROOM | 9 TERRACE |



Street view

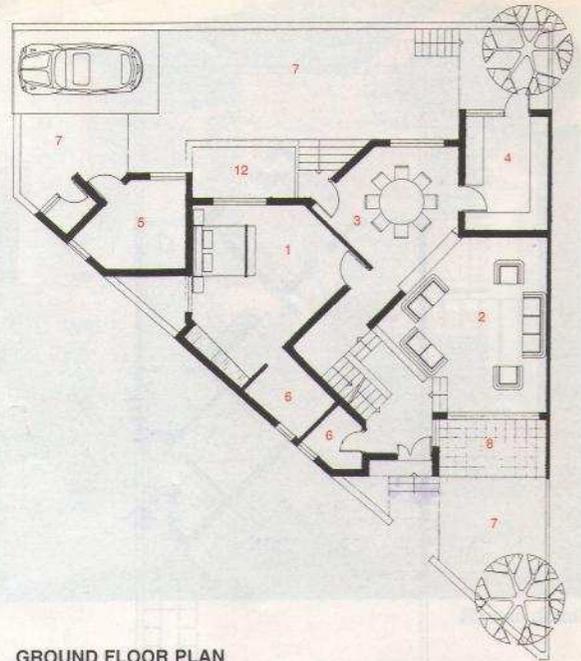


FIRST FLOOR PLAN (TYPE C)



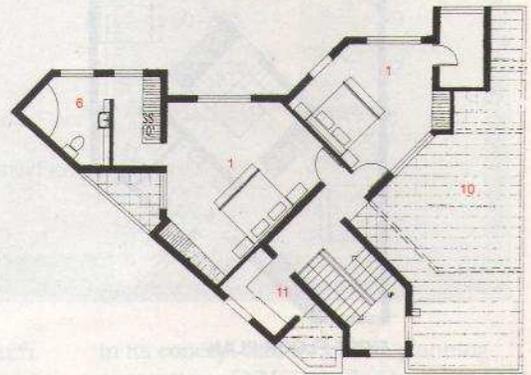
CORNER HOUSE (NO 178)

BASEMENT PLAN

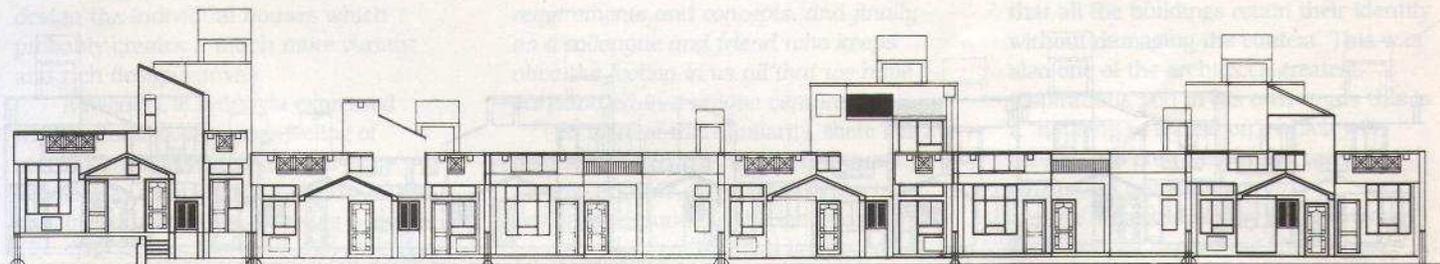
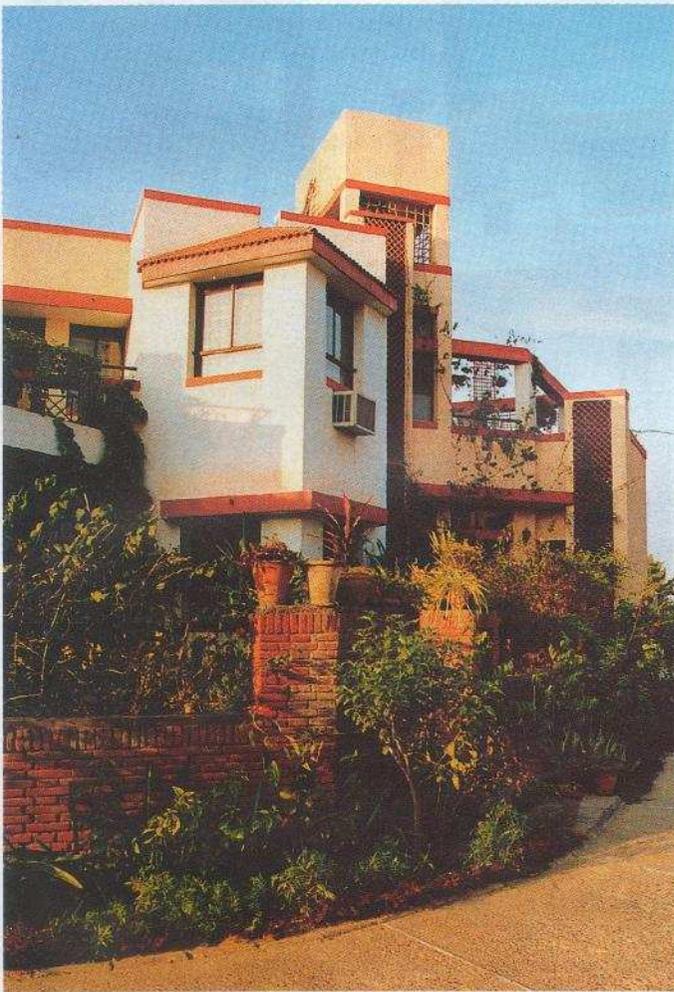


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

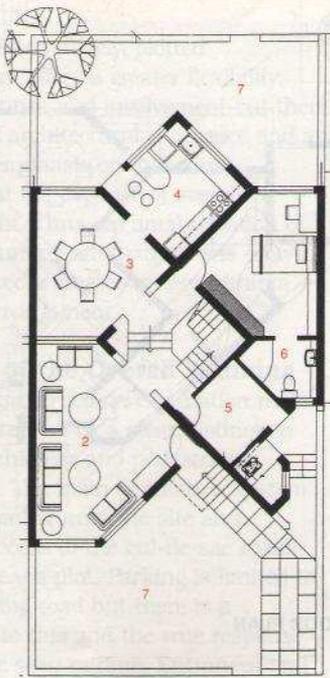
- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 BEDROOM | 8 VERANDA |
| 2 DRAWING ROOM | 9 CAR PARKING |
| 3 DINING | 10 TERRACE |
| 4 KITCHEN | 11 PANTRY |
| 5 SERVANT'S ROOM | 12 SUNKEN COURT |
| 6 TOILET | 13 HALL |
| 7 GARDEN | 14 STORE |



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

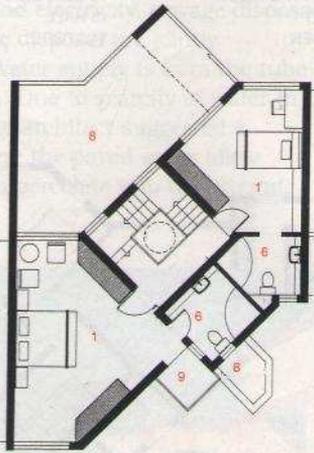


FRONT ELEVATION (BLOCK NO 12)

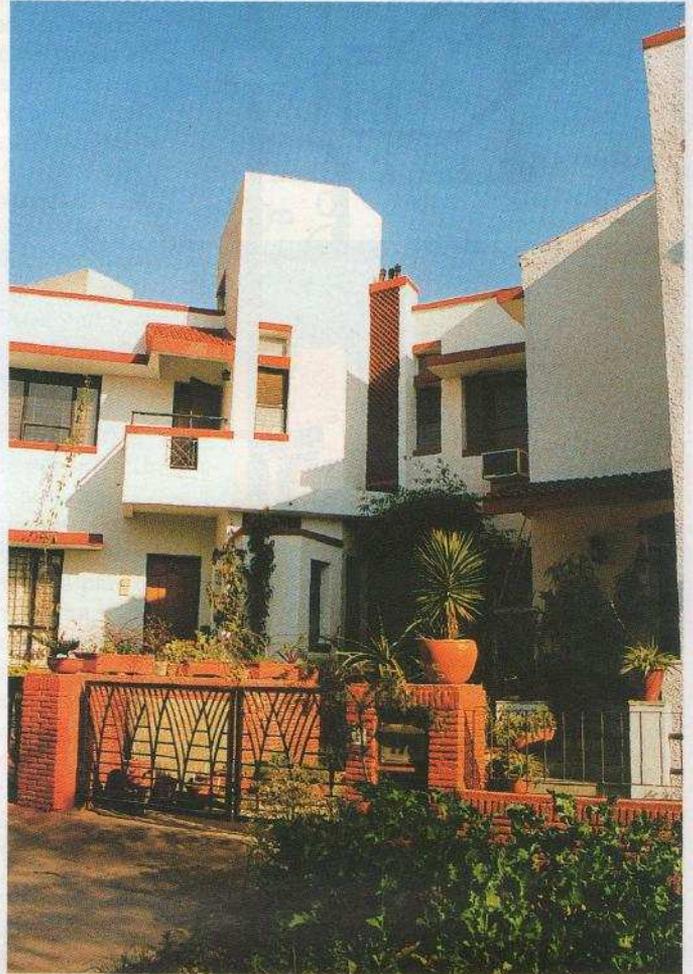


GROUND FLOOR PLAN

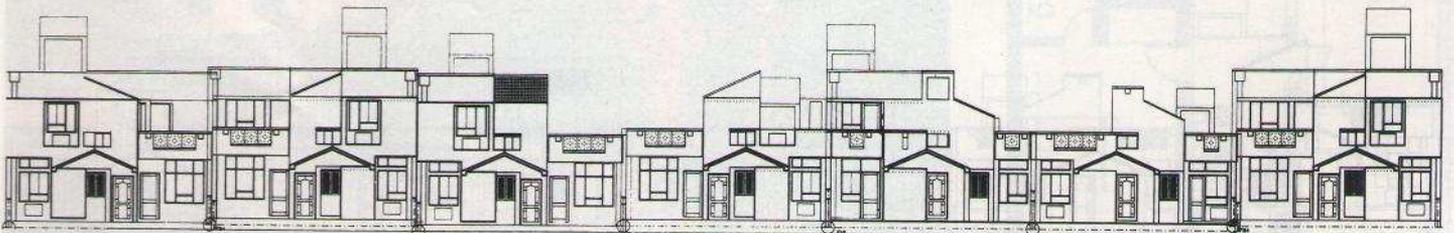
- 1 BEDROOM
- 2 DRAWING ROOM
- 3 DINING ROOM
- 4 KITCHEN
- 5 SERVANT'S ROOM
- 6 TOILET
- 7 GARDEN
- 8 TERRACE GARDEN
- 9 BALCONY



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



CORNER HOUSE (NO 179)



FRONT ELEVATION (BLOCK NO 26)

environment expresses an individual and a collective need for well-kept greenery.

Making of the Buildings

As the requirement and finances of the members varied considerably and the covered area required ranged from 70–300 sq m, the architect prepared a questionnaire to survey the needs of the members. After a detailed survey of the perceived needs, as many as 35 plans were evolved to account for the variations desired. The corner irregular plots and park facing plots were specially custom designed. Each plan was developed as it might look eventually and the owners then decided how much they wanted to build initially.

The expandable houses were designed for phased development which could be completed as and when the means permitted. The expansion perceived in incremental stages of 700–1200 sq ft to up to 2400 sq ft. The number of bedrooms on the ground floor and first floor affords variation.

There was an attempt to maintain a certain architectural quality in all the various house designs that was to have a clear circulation, habitable sizes of rooms with a furniture layout proposal, smooth flow of all living spaces, easy serviceability of kitchen and toilet areas (though most toilets are ventilated into shafts), a direct relationship with the outside open spaces.

An antecedent to this project can probably be found in a similar project by Swiss architect Rolf Kellar called Seldwyla in Zumikon near Zurich, Switzerland. Here, the architect set out to create a new type of housing environment more conducive to the growth of a community. After an active dialogue with future residents, he drew up a master plan which specified the routes, communal elements, plot lines, and broad rules of building control lines, roof lines and elements. Four to five other architects were then involved to design the individual houses which probably creates a much more variant and rich design canvas.

A resident at Seldwyla expressed what epitomises this deep feeling of security, involvement, trust and satisfaction amongst the residents of NMC housing as well, in the following words.

‘The story of ‘group living’ is a story of ‘us and our architect’. There is scarcely



Facade detail

UNIT TYPE	BUILT-UP AREA	NO OF PLOTS
3 Bedrooms/Floor	130–230	44
2 Bedrooms/Floor	130–230	33
1 Bedroom+Servant Unit – Duplex	130–230	7
Basement+2 Bedrooms/Floor	205–285	25
Duplex Unit with Garden	145	5
3 Bedrooms/Floor Unit	90–230	30
Corner Plot – 2 Bedrooms/Floor	130–230	12
Corner Plot – Basement+2 Bedrooms/Floor	190–280	6
Corner Plot – Basement+3 Bedrooms/Floor	190–205	2
Special Plots	145–360	16
TOTAL		180

any type of building assignment in which the architect, from the outset, plays such an important role. First of all as a promoter, as a consultant on legal and economic aspects, then as planner, as a helper in the elaboration of the owners’ requirements and concepts, and finally as a colleague and friend who keeps alive the feeling in us all that we have participated in a unique venture.”

In spite of this similarity, there lies a distinct difference in the architectural design concepts of the two architects. Seldwyla responds to the landscape and topographical context and is created as an artificial village, a piece of art complete

in its concept and form. The planning conception of NMC housing is an attempt to capture the transient, ever-changing nature of an old city like Jaipur, which has a very clear and rigid underlay of a grid-iron but grows with time in a way that all the buildings retain their identity without damaging the context. This was also one of the architect’s greatest inspirations and in his own words this is a “housing in transition”, which will continue to grow and evolve within a certain set framework.

As observed, many of the owners have started expanding their houses and it is yet to be seen how much of the



Street view

restraint and control over the elevation, form and finishes exercised by the architect would hold out to maintain the distinct character and 'sense of place' of this environment. As is evident, a very delicate balance exists which, from the feedback of the residents, is respected.

Only passage of time would show

the success or failure of this interesting and unique concept in group housing design which leaves us with a few thoughts and questions. How feasible is this kind of an involvement and commitment from one architect for a single project? And also, in how many situations can such a design framework be adopted considering the numbers

usually related to group housing.

As an attempt to improve housing environments, the NMC housing project shows us another way to build and build better. The pride which the residents of this colony share towards it may lead to its growth and evolution as as the interaction and involvement of the community. ☛

Client National Media Centre Co-operative House Building Society Ltd

Design team Vinod Gupta, L P Singh, Anita Narula, Harvinder Singh, Alka Arora

Consultants Kirti Consultants (structural), Electrical Consulting Engineers (electrical), R K Gupta and Associates (plumbing), Parivartan (landscape)

Contractors Lakshmi Builders and Competent Construction Company

Built-up area 35,000 sq m

Cost Rs 17 crores

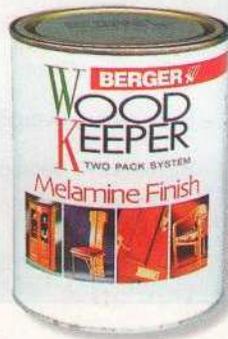
Year of completion 1996

The author is a graduate from the CEPT, Ahmedabad, and is practising architecture and interior design in Delhi. She is also a visiting faculty at the TVB School of Habitat Studies, Delhi.

PRODUCTS

439 Melamine Finish

Berger Paints India Ltd recently launched Wood Keeper Melamine Finish. This coating is claimed to be highly durable and has protective as well as aesthetic advantages. The finish seals the surface, claims Berger, to protect it from heat and liquid stains minimizing maintenance. Packaged as a cold catalyzed system, with its two components, base and hardener, the finish comes in two styles — matte (Rs 212 per litre) and glossy (Rs 192 per litre). For further details contact *Berger House, 129 Park Street, Calcutta 700 017, Phone 033-2299724, 2296005/06, Telex 021-5482, Fax 91-33249-9729/9009.*



manufactures stainless steel knobs, plates, hooks, door stoppers, hinges and various other door, window, cabinet and bathroom accessories. The company is in the process of obtaining ISO 9001 certification for its products. For further information contact *The Cavalier, C-99, Mayapuri Phase II, New Delhi 110 064, Phone 011-5404189, 5404742, Fax 5400463.*

441 Instant Water Heater

Brick-tech systems have launched an instant water heater called Mini-Volcano. This cheap (2p/litre of hot water) and quick system claims to provide hot water with minimal environmental damage while saving electricity as well as trees. The prime advantage of this product, claims the company, is that it is totally mobile, easily assembled and installed.

As it is compact it can be made to fit anywhere. It is durable, being made of stainless steel, and long-lasting as it works on the principle of kerosene fuel combustion. Its possible applications are in slums, household kitchens, mountainous areas, campsites in war zones for armed forces and in hospitals. For more details contact *Brick-tech systems, R-289A, II floor, GK I, New Delhi 110 048, Phone 011-6489463, Telefax 6489462, Mobile 9811150968.*



440 Stainless Steel Hardware

The Cavalier, a Delhi-based company catering to building, designing and architectural needs in the US, UK, Australia, Singapore and Japan, has started supplying its high quality stainless steel architectural hardware products to the Indian market. The company's range of stainless steel lever and pull handles conform to AISI 316 being available in both hollow and solid forms. These are supplied in either satin or polished finish and in concealed or face-fixed arrangements. The company also