



1974.

On a blustery February afternoon, I arrived home to 66 Juniper Drive, Levittown, PA. New sights, sounds, and smells of a town quickly growing and alive with young dreams of middle America. It was gently curving streets lined with oak and maple, concrete sidewalks and chain link fences woven with crinkley green and white strips. Driveways were nested with trucks of plumbers and electricians, decade old Mustangs awaiting their rebirth under blue tarps and wood paneled Vista Cruisers. Oil heat, failed radiant slabs and single-paned windows coaxed the morning frost. My brother and I used to climb the large apple and pear tree in the back yard. Mom and Dad drained their bank account to reserve the \$200 corner lot. It was claimed that each distinct neighborhood of Levittown was linked to the next by a continuous network of green belts. The creek behind my house was all the adventuring I needed.

From my earliest memories, backyards were not alleys, and rowhouses were folklore-like stories told by my father. Sometimes we would take the 25 mile drive into Philly to see the zoo, or the Liberty Bell. I was a tourist there. It took many years before I would begin to uncover the jewel that had always been. Even more time would be needed to understand it.

Travels and wandering led me elsewhere, along the way logging mental Polaroids to



be dredged up later. An education ensued and my mind sprawled in many directions. The day would arrive when I felt I had exhausted my time in the New River Valley, growing cynical of the detached explorations of my colleagues. Rolling hills and abandoned barns provided the constraints, but absent was the element of accountability.

I fell in love with the opportunity that architects have in profoundly affecting the lives of people. There is no denying the extent to which our surroundings shape us.

Often reflecting on my experiences in southwest Virginia, I next found myself a stone's throw from our nation's capital. A quaint town of brick and mortar, with a heritage so thick you could slice it. The streets were of lumpy stone and the buildings shoved together leaving only thin slivers of light between. They stood shoulder to shoulder in perfect proportion to the street flaunting their structure with innocent truth. They were all beautiful and quiet. They were *of* that place. I wanted to experience each of those homes, yet I settled for glimpses of lit rooms at dusk. Each stroll was an archeological dig, uncovering the poetry of their details and craft. Yet, we have forgotten the past. We have chosen to make this the exception and not the rule. With the aid of technology and gluttonous consumption, we have opted for convenience over truth. Hence the buildings of today reveal nothing of the lessons learned or the skill that once humbly inspired.

With these feelings welling inside me, I began to formulate a thesis: a project that would, at many levels, explore the reality of today, the craft of the past and develop new directions for a housing in the ever changing urban climate. It would not be conceived devoid of context, people or place. In fact, this thesis hopes to create *place*, instill pride and build community.

In an age of mass produced housing, how does one create an architecture at the urban scale that harmoniously coexists in an environment of crafted, historic housing, while embracing a standardized set of parts and assembly, maintaining integrity and promoting the building of community?