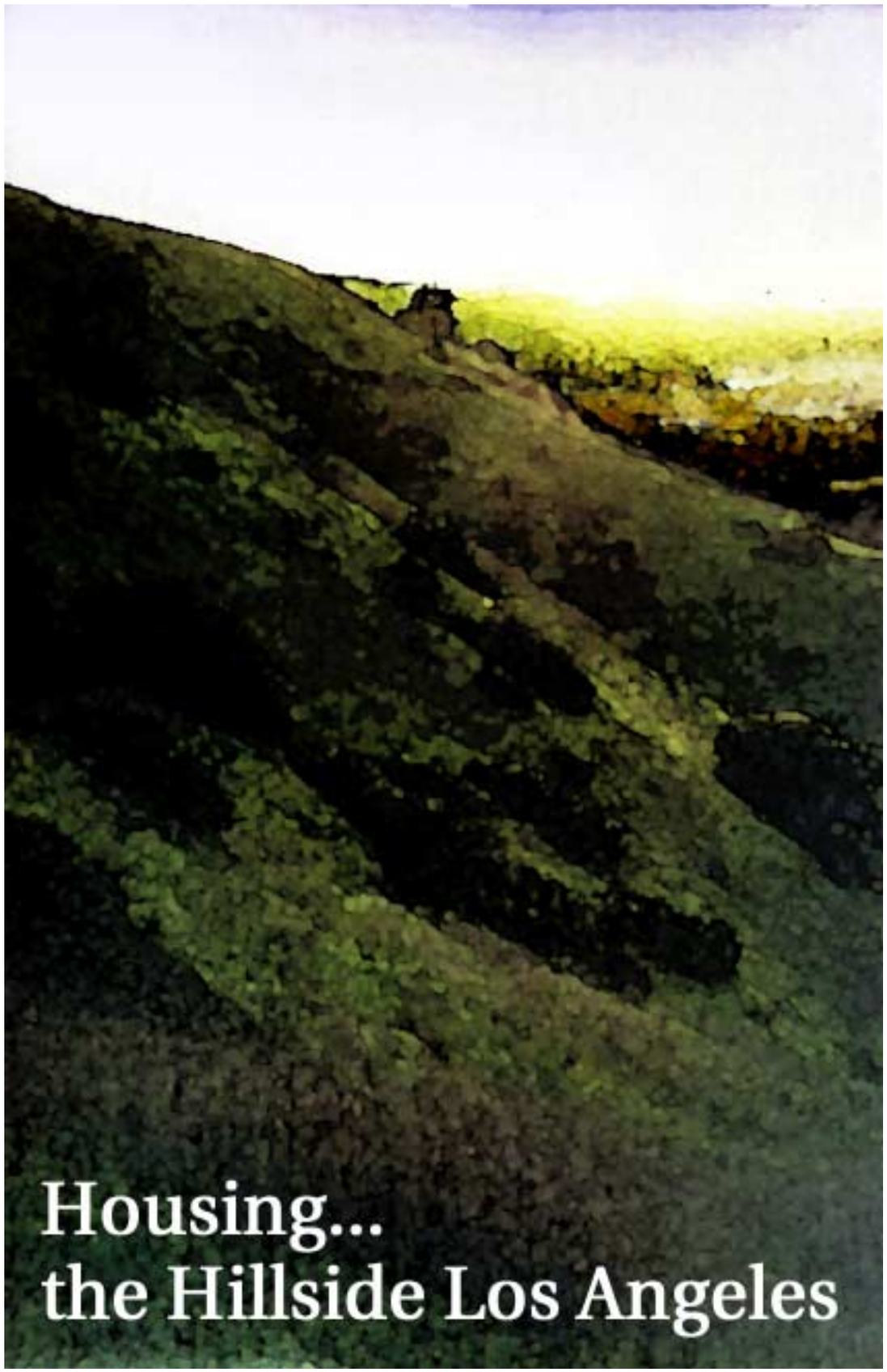

Housing...
the Hillside Los Angeles

From San Francisco south, the coastline extends in a north-south direction until Point Conception is reached at latitude 34.30 degrees; then swerves abruptly east and the shoreline begins to face almost due south. Once Point Conception has been rounded in an ocean liner, once the Tehachapi range has been crossed by train or car, even the most obtuse observer, the rankest neophyte, can feel that he has entered a new and distinct province of the state. If Southern California is entered from the east, through El Cajon Pass or San Gorgonio Pass, the impression is even more vividly sensed. On the Pacific side, the coast range turns east. The mountains no longer shut off the interior from the sea. The air is softer, the ocean is bluer, and the skies have a lazy and radiant warmth. South of Point Conception, a new Pacific Ocean emerges: an ocean in which you can actually bathe and swim, an ocean that sparkles with sunlight, an ocean of many and brilliant colors. Here is California del Sur, the Cow Counties, sub-tropical California, the land South of Tehachapi.

1946, Carey Mc Williams, <u>Southern California Country</u>

The Earth

To describe with words a place so distinctive as Southern California is an intriguing task. The place captures the heart and soul of those who choose to live there unlike, perhaps, any other place in the world. It is as a human habitation, unique.

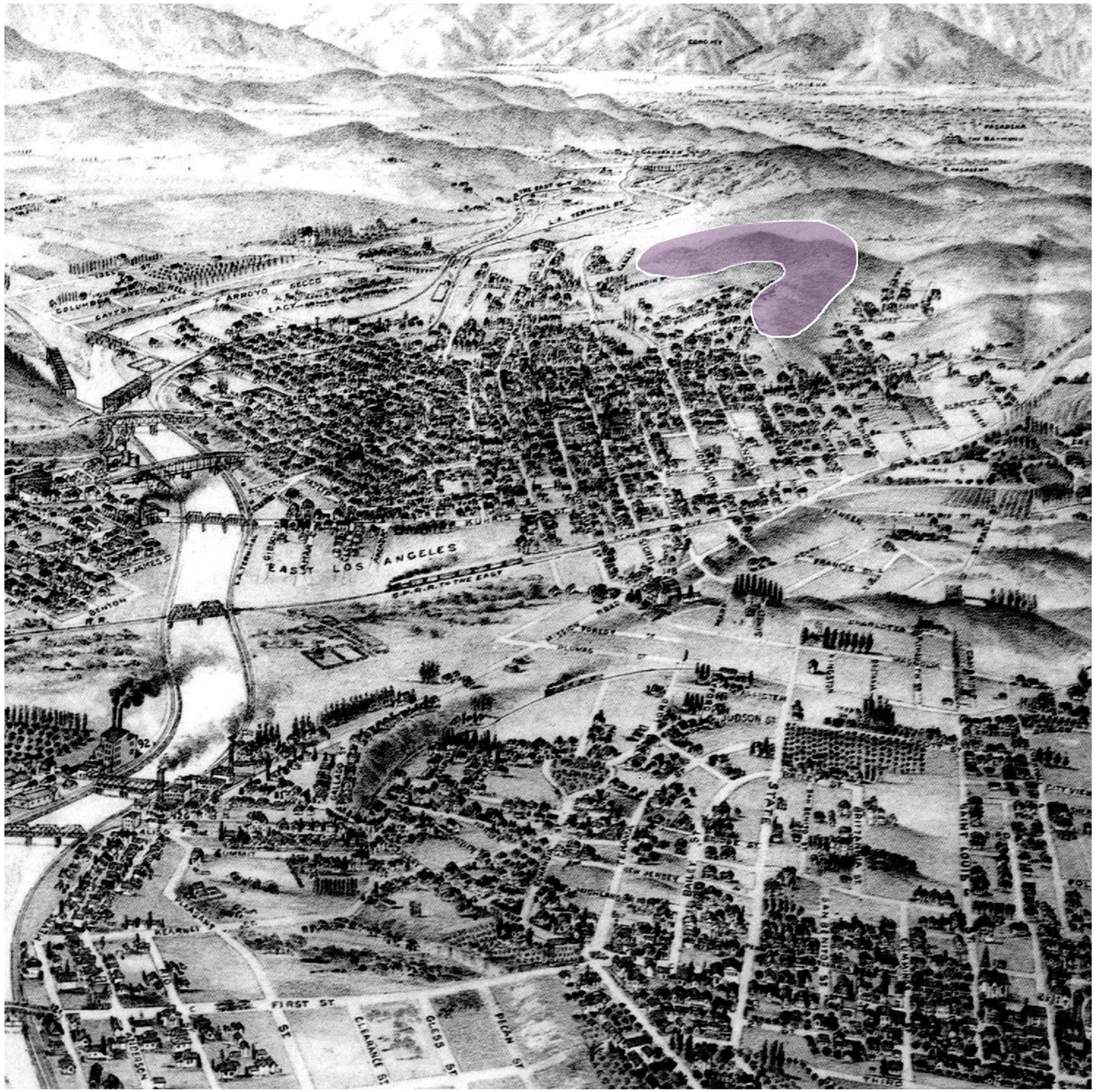
The site chosen for this study in housing the hillside is also unique. It is in the very heart of the City of Los Angeles. The hill is no more than a five-minute drive from the skyscrapers of this great metropolis. Yet, it has never been occupied by humans. There are no archeological remains, no great Victorian mansions, and certainly no Post War tract houses of concern.

As the historical records of the site indicate, it was on the fringes of the central village of the Gabrieleno Indians; it fell first into the hands of the Spanish and then the Mexicans. It was a part of the large rancho of Pio Pico, and then finally ended up in the hands of the family of Lucille Hall. From 1909 until 1961 the land was owned by Miss Hall. She died in 1961 and left the land to the Four Square Pentecostal Church. This organization only builds sanctuaries on its land and has gone no further than choosing a site for the church. Neighbors in the lower portions of the hill have told me that on average 2-3 groups visit this hill a month. All of them come in the vain hope that they can persuade the church to build some sort of housing development on the hill; none has succeeded.

What, is it then that makes this particular parcel of land desirable? Perhaps there are many things. I, for one, have over the years grown to love this land because it has no human history in a place that is so full of history. If Southern California, as Carey Mc Williams said in the 1940s, is an "Island in the Land," then this site is an *Island in the City*. In this place where natural beauty has been all but replaced by humankind, what could be a better location to regain that beauty than this hillside?

The land described

The land is as untouched as a piece of land in Southern California can be. Besides the dirt paths and small dirt road that ring the higher portions of the site, this earth is exactly as all the hills of Los Angeles were a mere 150 years ago. There are minimal trees, mostly conifers



This late 19th Century rendering not only shows the hillside this Thesis is proposed for, it also shows the surrounding areas to the northeast and east. Many roads have been added, and several of the rail lines removed since this drawing was created.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

A contemporary house-on-a-hillside solution. Skirtwalls create the plinth upon which the house now sits. This is the base of the northeast slope of the thesis site.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

At the intersection of Avenue 28 and Griffin (site plan on page 40), there is a prime example of original dwelling meeting replacement housing.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

The southwest knoll of the site in the distance.

and scrub oaks. The rest of the hillside vegetation is either chaparral or aboriginal grasses. The earth is a rich topsoil, mounded on top of a large dome of decomposed granite. Perhaps in ancient times, when Los Angeles was a part of the Santa Monica Bay, this land was indeed an island.

The most spectacular feature of this hillside is the view. From the higher elevations (averaging 675' above sea level) the view is a magnificent 270 degrees around. One can view, in a clock wise motion, from the middle of the site:

Pasadena and the leading edge of the San Bernadino Mountains to the northeast; Silverlake, the Hollywood Hills, and the wayward edge of the Santa Monica Mountains to the northwest. Looking in a western direction, the city spreads out across the Basin as far as the eye can see. Clearly, the most significant man-made elements visible are the skyscrapers of the central business district of Los Angeles. These monuments occur in the foreground of the view. It is said that on the clearest of days you can see the ocean, though this can only be an Arcadian vision. To the southwest lie the low plateaus of the basin, Baldwin Hills, Signal Hill, and to the southeast are some of the original suburbs of Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, Downey, and Montibello.

It is not quite a *Rebel Without a Cause* view, but it is a substantial one all the same.

The hillside forming the site for this Thesis is composed of two prominences. These, in turn form the capping ends of a U-shaped piece of earth (see site plan on page 40). The lowest elevation of the site occurs at 575' and ends at 725' above sea level. The slope varies from 30° to 45°. The land is dry; however, there are abundant natural springs that shed their water in the rainiest of years until June; otherwise they will flow until late February. Because of the formation of the land, (a U-shaped bowl) and location within the Basin, the site is subject to the prevailing west-to-east flowing ocean winds. These winds begin daily around noon and continue until dusk. Seldom is the air stagnant. The other significant air movement occurs during the fall and winter. This phenomenon is known as the Santa Ana winds. These winds are generated when a high pressure system forms over the western United States forcing the natural movement of air to reverse. During this condition the wind will begin over the deserts to the east of the basin. These hot winds blow across the basin from east to west. Generally the downtown area of Los Angeles experiences its worst air quality during this weather condition. This weather phenomena also creates the necessary circumstances for the wildfires that Los Angeles is so famous for.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

From the 575' elevation this view is taken from the northern face of the bowl looking southeast.

As a result of the site being so close to the Downtown area, it is surrounded by a number of streets and highways, making it remarkably accessible. The site has several links to Downtown. One reaches the shopping district by way of North Broadway, a major thoroughfare, passing the south eastern side of the hill. Passing to the northwest and northeast is the Pasadena Freeway. There is a freeway exit at Avenue 43. This exit intersects Griffin Avenue which boarders near the base the lower elevations of the site. Passing to the west and south is the Golden State Freeway. There are exits at North

Photograph by Michael Vallen

Looking to the southern end of the site this photo is taken from the lowest portion of land used in this Thesis. The elevation is 575' above sea level, Downtown is to the right.

Broadway and Avenue 28. Both of these streets intersect Griffin Avenue. There are ample arteries of public transportation as, Griffin Avenue and North Broadway, are heavily traveled roads of the Southern California Public Transit System.

The surroundings

The hillside is surrounded by single family homes. These peripheral areas were developed well before the turn of the 20th century. The district just to the northeast, Highland Park, was among the first annexed suburbs of Los Angeles in the 1880s. As a result of this early development, there is a rich heritage of Victorian and Spanish Colonial dwellings in the areas near this hillside. The largest single influence on the built environment, however, took place after the end of the first World War and continued into the early 1970s. A great deal of the existing housing stock was built between 1920 and 1930. For the most part these are a mixture of stylized "craftsman" bungalows on 50' x 150' lots.

Currently, the single family residence is being replaced. This phenomenon is not uncommon around the country as the ages of dwellings reach beyond their expected lifespan. As the dwellings reach a point of decay where renovation is not a likely prospect they are sold. Typically, these properties are bought by turn key developers. They are speculative builders, whose motivation is primarily profit. In place of the historic context, these speculators build six and eight-unit wood frame stucco skinned apartment buildings. The construction of these buildings, though they meet code requirements, is questionable. The effects on this neighborhood are devastating as this type of haphazard building occurs with little or no forethought beyond the profit motive. For many years this was a neighborhood, known as Montecito Heights, it was a suburban community of the City of Los Angeles. Families built or purchased homes maintaining them for two or more generations. The area has never been one of great wealth. Rather, it is a workers community. The density of the neighborhood responded to the urban plan. Each house had a frontyard, a backyard and a garage. There was a place for the children to play, in the street or the yard, safely. The car(s) also, had a place to be kept. The streets, the urban space, were comfortable even hospitable. By removing the one organizing element from the environment, the single-family house, the focus of the community as a whole entity is distroyed. This blatant disregard for planning and humanity is swiftly resulting in a blighted environment. There is no room along the streets to store the abundance of cars now present because of the five through eight-fold density increase. Typically these "replacement" dwellings are built to the extends of the property lines. This, in turn, eliminates both front and backyards from these new habitations. Children are left with little chance to socialize. Where once there may have been a beautiful garden, now there is a living room. These units are not owned, so that now, the inhabitants of this area have no distinct connection to the place. This only results in a further lack of concern for the dwelling, the neighborhood, and even perhaps for oneself.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

This view is looking east on Avenue 28.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

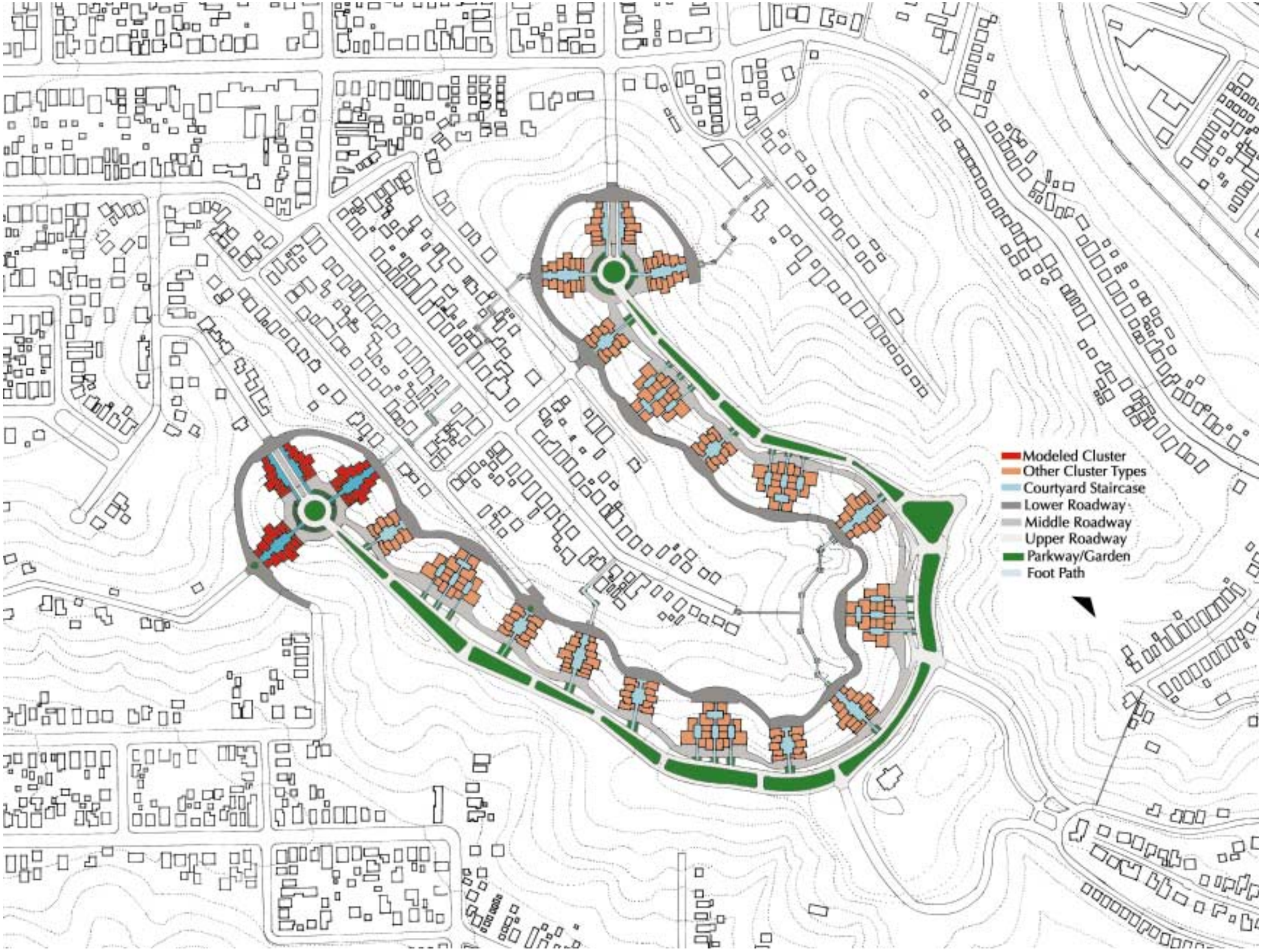
A typical "replacement" dwelling.

The entire district, Montecito Heights, is predominately Hispanic and Vietnamese American. However, as with many regions in Los Angeles, there is certainly a large racial mixture. At the base of the site, along Griffin Avenue, is a high school, and an elementary school. Additionally, there are an assortment of churches, synagogue, and other religious assembly halls near the site. The area also has an assortment of retail establishments as well as light manufacturing developments.

However idyllic the site itself may seem it is a real place with history, people and an ecology that must be understood. To ignore the historic and current development of the areas below the site would be a mistake. Therefore as this design solution progressed, these facts were always considered. The language of the architecture, the attempts at modifying the land, and the actual space creation, are all the direct result of these critical site-specific regional attributes. With these rules and facts I could begin with enlightened limitations.

Photograph by Michael Vallen

From the southern tip of the bowl, this view is looking to the east.



The site plan in its final conception. The cluster on the west most circle is the one which is developed in detail (and digitally) for this Thesis. Other clusters were developed schematically, however, they are not shown in this document.

A Way of Living

A critical driving force behind the program of this project is density. This coupled with responsible architectural solutions, meaning well built, or crafted homes and an architecturally demonstrated sensitivity to climate, history and the life-styles of the future inhabitants. It was my desire to achieve a density at least equal to the existing density of the neighborhoods surrounding the site. These foothill neighborhoods are comprised of mainly 50' x 100' single family building lots. On these lots are homes that on average cover about 40% of their available land. As noted previously there are many other kinds of structures; schools, churches, small civic buildings and light manufacturing operations. The average block is composed of 16 houses. In my effort I intended to provide at least a comparable numbers of dwelling units within a similar area of land. To achieve this I had to understand the logic behind block layouts, and the different strategies one might employe in planning urban blocks. After careful consideration of several different strategies, including zero lot lines, "z" lot lines, the typical 50' frontage by 100' depth, I developed a slightly different approach. This approach, as it turned out is a combination of several different planning methodologies.

In our current age we can not simply continue to build in the ways of the past. Although we are only occupying a small portion of the available land in this country we are increasingly finding ourselves on a continual spread outward away from the origins of our cities. This is damaging the land, as well as our lives. Much discourse has evolved as a result of these momentary trends. At one end of the spectrum, we have the socially and environmentally aware who advocate the habitation and increased densities of our inner cities, on the other we have the speculative builder/developer who follows only what the market will bear. Neither, however, seems to consider at what cost to our health and our environment their various strategies will impose harm.

To achieve a harmonious balance, I developed and followed simple rules. Based on these rules I determined a specific set of goals that were met in the following way:

No land is used unnecessarily.

No single homeowner needs or requires tremendous land resources.

Everyone enjoys material equality regardless of income level.

Ownership is paramount to the success of the development.

All space types are considered of equal value.

Unit value is determined by amount of space.

Additionally, I set out to test and express architecturally what I have written as a Manifesto. It is my desire to use craft in dwelling and to search for meaning in dwelling. Abstraction is the intentional use of repetitive elements to define living spaces. A result of the abstraction is also an architectural language, this language is the paint that is used to express architectural intention the canvas is called 'site'. I have purposely chosen limitations which may seem arbitrary or highly restrictive, however, they are the guiding forces of this proposal. I have set out to develop this Thesis with a minimum use of building material. The resulting forms set the stage for self determined meaning in dwelling.

The Lot

The existing lots of the lower foothills are arranged with the short end facing the street, the front of the house acknowledges the street, this proposal alters this tradition. This was accomplished by adopting a modified zero-lot-line solution, which allowed the houses to be attached. Due to the steepness of the slope each unit sits atop the other in a overlapping repetitive fashion. A typical zero-lot-line solution would be the rowhouse tradition found in cities of the Eastern United States. In the traditional Southern California setting, the front of the house faces the street. Typically the longer, and private portion of the house faces the longest side of the site. In my solution the entrance, the kitchen and a bedroom face the 'street.' Additionally, the 'front' of the house no longer faces the street, instead, it faces the view, or the 'private' long side of the lot. In essence I have turned the building 90° from tradition. Lot sizes vary from the smallest of 24' x 58' (approximately one half of a typical lot) to the largest of 34' x 110'.

The Dwellings

There are four or five unit types in the designed cluster, depending upon how the planning is interpreted. Ideally this provides a range of dwelling sizes, rather than types, meaning that each unit could be seen and understood in relationship to the others as similar. There is, as a result of this approach, a reading of one unit to the other through out the project. Of the four or five types there are:

Unit 1

a junior one-bedroom one bath, it is approximately 650 square feet in area, is one floor, has a outdoor garden space adjacent to the living and dining areas of the unit.

Unit 2

A two bedroom one bath or one bedroom with home office, it is approximately 1,000 square feet in area, is tri-level, has an interior fireplace, breakfast patio, rooftop terrace, and garden.

Unit 3

A two bedroom two bath or one bedroom with home office, it is approximately 1,400 square feet in area, is tri-level, has an interior fireplace, breakfast patio, rooftop terrace, and garden.

Unit 4

A three bedroom three bath with/without mother-in-law suite with bath, or a three bedroom with home office, the base house is approximately 2,500 square feet, is tri-level, has an interior fireplace, breakfast patio, rooftop terrace, skyroom, garden, and library.

Unit 5

The mother-in-law suite of Unit 4, is a one bedroom one bath unit, it is 800 square feet in area, is one level, balcony and balcony garden.

It is intended that each of the programmed units are owner occupied. Each replaces the atypical suburban house currently found at the edges of American cities. Unit cost is determined by size, not strictly by finishes or other elements. Each of the spaces is built of the same materials so that if the smallest unit is trimmed in mahogany and has granite kitchen counters, then so does the largest unit.

The Parklands

By rethinking the planning and division of land, it is possible to leave a large portion of the land arable. As the view is one of the most significant attributes of the site, then physical space between the clusters is desirable, almost mandatory. There were two approaches considered to the space between the clusters, one was to leave the land "untouched", the other was to develop a system of gardens connecting the upper and lower roads with winding paths and citrus orchards. The option using gardens and connecting pathways is described in a later section of the text.

Visibility of the hilltop is crucial. Therefore no building was planned for this area, instead in congruence with the road system, a park was laid out in a generous median strip. This is to be used for exercise, demonstrative gardens, picnics and contemplative thought. Upon maturity, the gardens will transform this now barren hill into a lush paradise, always harkening back to the original myth of the Arcadian Southern California garden.

The Roads

Access to the dwelling unit is critical. In most contemporary suburban dwellings direct access is provided from the car to the kitchen, via a garage. In the interest of economy and health, this attitude was abandoned and another approach considered. This feature of the thesis is a dialogue about travel, both on foot and by vehicle. In planning for a time when the car will always be a small object, garage spaces are purposely planned smaller than they currently are. Instead of a minimum 20' depth for the garage, I have instead provided only 16' or less of depth per car. All parking is off-street, including all visitor parking. Vehicle storage occurs at the under side of Unit 1 and Unit 4/5. The garages are actually car ports, rather than enclosed garages. Each of these garage has, in addition to vehicle storage, limited unit storage bays. Two roadways are provided for vehicular access to the units from the top and bottom of the cluster. Both of these roads are for slower (15 m.p.h.) travel. Atop the hill is a split road with a generous median, each split handles one-way traffic. The median is the location of the aforementioned demonstrative gardens. There is visitor parking allowed on the upper and lower level roads at specific locations. Adjacent to these parking locations are the formal upper and lower entrances to the clusters. These entrances either cross over the middle road by way of a bridge, or occur at the lower level through a gate at the base of the staircase courtyard.