

A CONTEMPORARY SYNTHESIS AUGURS A FUTURE UNITY

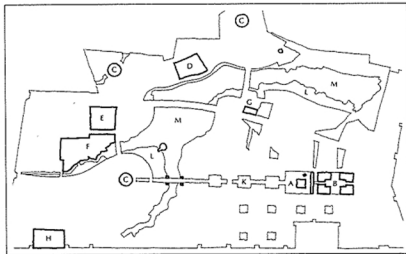
MILOSAV CEKIC, AIA
Architect



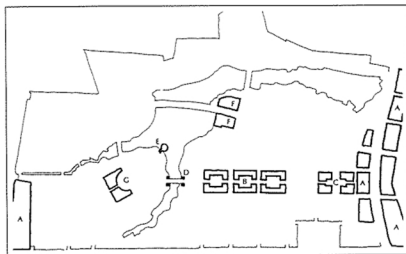
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A CONTEMPORARY SYNTHESIS AUGURS A FUTURE UNITY

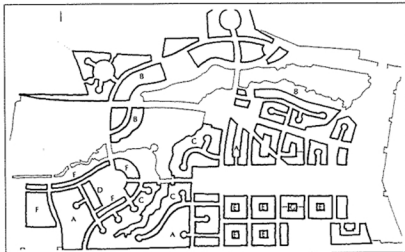
By Joel Warren Barna



Public and open spaces: A. Town square, B. Farmer's market, C. Open market, D. Church, E. Day-care center, F. Elementary school, G. Fire station, H. Tennis center, K. Courtyards, L. Park land



Commercial areas: A. Major commercial, B. Cottage retail, C. Mercado, D. Bridge retail, E. Club and restaurant, F. Restaurant pads, G. Residential commercial



Residential areas: A. Single-family, B. High-end single-family, C. Villa estates, D. Two-story single-family, E. Single-family blocks, F. Multifamily, G. Multifamily blocks

Laredo, beside the Rio Grande in South Texas, is the oldest independent city in the state. Founded at its present location in 1755, the city is unique among the towns of Texas established in Spanish colonial times in that it began not as a military garrison—a *presidio*—but as an unwallled civilian settlement. In its urban density and form, Laredo shows the influence of its colonial history and its connections with Mexico, along with sprawling edges that show the impact of postwar automobile-oriented suburban development. Today Laredo has a population of over 91,000, and an economy based in part on the expansion of *maquiladora* plants—paired Mexican and American manufacturing, assembly, and distribution facilities.

The Paul Young Ranch is an all-but-untouched, 264-acre tract of agricultural land just east of central Laredo and just south of the city airport.

The owners hope to develop it as housing for the managers and other employees of these rapidly growing *maquiladoras*. As a first step, the owners hired Milosav Cekic, a Yugoslavian-born architect who also teaches at the UT School of Architecture, to prepare a master plan for the project.

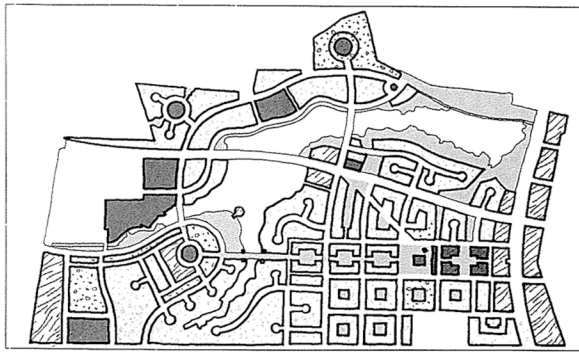
The result (which has already won Cekic a 1988 *Progressive Architecture* Award) is a radical departure from the planning principles that have shaped Texas cities for two generations, which created in all but a few cases what Cekic sees as “desolate and eventless suburbia,” places that transform their inhabitants into what he calls “slaves to mobility” and “involuntary agents of waste in time and energy.”

Cekic started with observations of urban patterns in Laredo, where, he says, compared to mostly Anglo cities, “higher densities are common, privacy fences and walls are not unusual, pedestrian and outdoor activity is high, [and] the relationship between people and their environment is more active.” He then turned to the physical characteristics of the site (with its central 7-acre lake and numerous creeks and swales) and the traffic patterns of the roads that would serve it. Combining these factors with his own historicist views on urban form (“The quality of a small town is achieved through integration of traditional town-building principles with emerging American urban patterns,” he says), Cekic created a plan that at first looks like a formal exercise but that later reveals itself to be a complexly layered, highly businesslike response to the program.

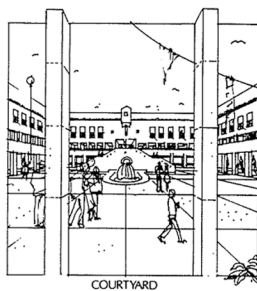
His intent, he says, was to treat the entire development as an urban quarter, a city within the city with its own center, periphery, and limit, integrating all the daily functions of urban life “dimensioned on the basis of the comfort of a walking man.”

Cekic called for the addition of two new dams that would triple the size of the lake. He set aside land with the best views and most varied vegetation as fingerlike parks radiating from the lake, while preserving for development the flattest land with the most suitable soil. He partitioned the site into three overlapping types of

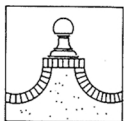
The Paul Young Ranch in Laredo, planned by Austin architect Milosav Cekic, synthesizes the best historic and contemporary planning principles to create a multilayered, multicultural urban place at peace with both the local economy and the local environment.



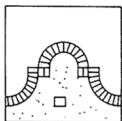
Composite map:
 PUBLIC AREAS
 COMMERCIAL AREAS
 SINGLE-FAMILY
 OPEN SPACE
 COTTAGE RETAIL
 MULTIFAMILY



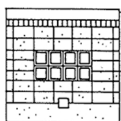
ABOVE RIGHT and LEFT: Courtyard studies; BELOW: wall detail studies



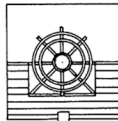
WALL



WALL



WALL



WALL

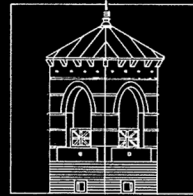
uses: public (with, in addition to the parks, a town square with an arcade, several courtyards, a marketplace, schools, a fire station, and a specially prominent site for the church, linked to the urban center by a view corridor); commercial, with the largest sites alongside the busiest thoroughfares; and residential, with both multifamily and single-family tracts.

Instead of strictly separating commercial, public, and residential uses, Cekic mixes them. He uses vertical rather than horizontal zoning, reserving the first floors of buildings in the quarter's center for "cottage retail" and offices, attempting to "reintroduce this concept as the liveliest element of the city fabric and to resolve the distance problems between home and work." He makes the smallest blocks in the city center the most complex typologically with this formula, layering single-family and multifamily housing around markets, pedestrian circulation, and public squares; the blocks grow both larger and simpler as they move outward from this center. This

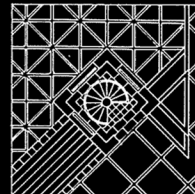
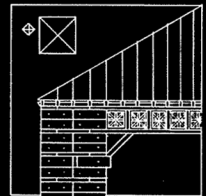


LAKE VIEW

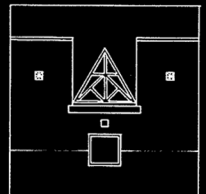
TOWER



PLAZA



PAVEMENT AT PLAZA

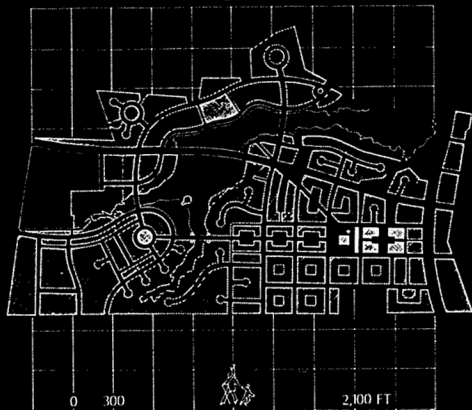


MERCADO



APARTMENTS INSIDE

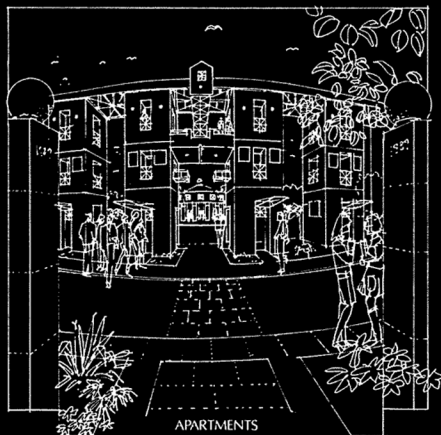
PLAN



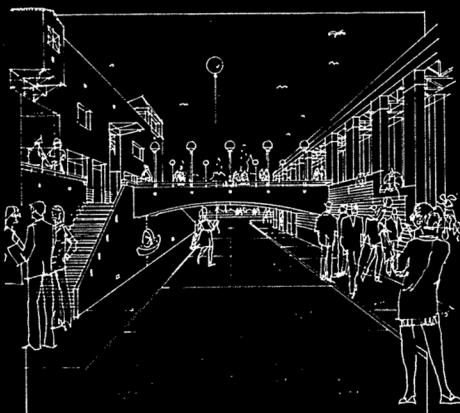
TEN MINUTES OF WALKING



TOWN SQUARE

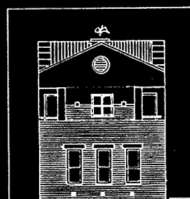


APARTMENTS

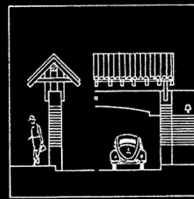


MERCADO AND ARCADE

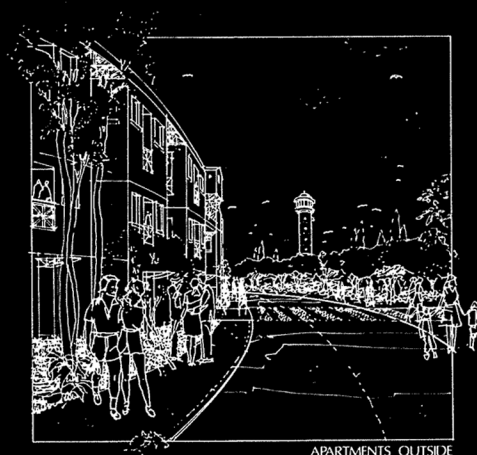
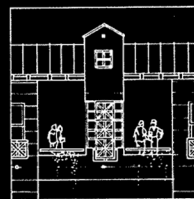
MF GATE



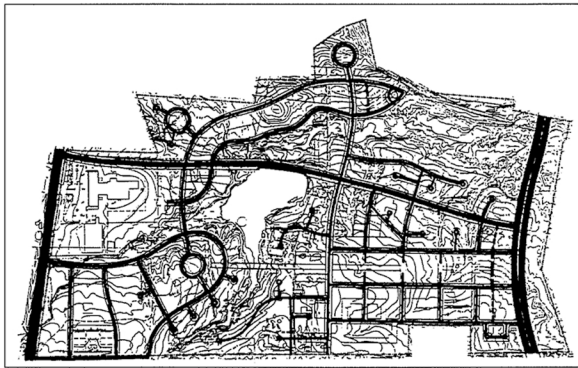
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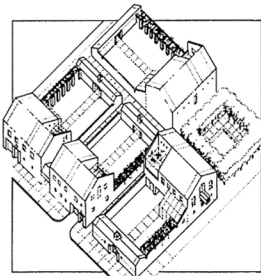
APARTMENTS



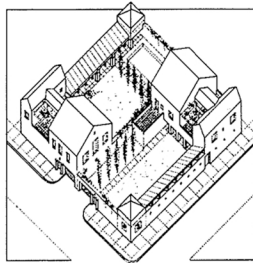
APARTMENTS OUTSIDE



Vehicular circulation



6 DU/AC DETAIL

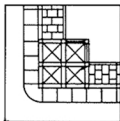


4 DU/AC DETAIL

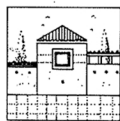
ABOVE RIGHT and LEFT: housing massing studies; BELOW: corner detail studies



CORNER



CORNER

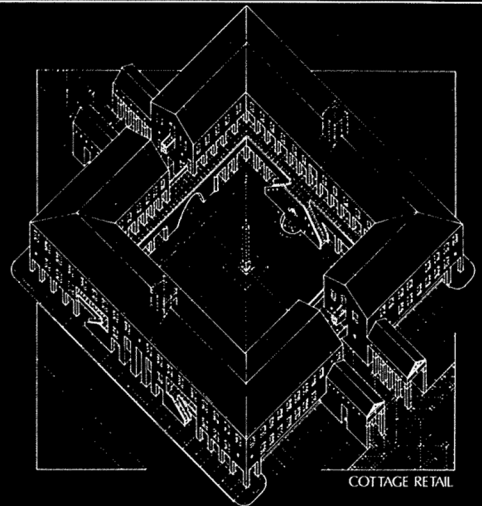


CORNER

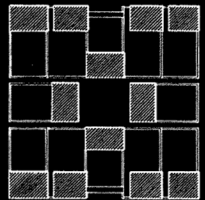
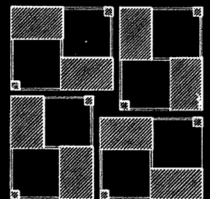
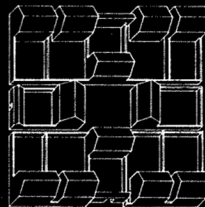


BUS STAND

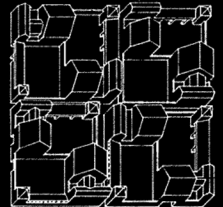
strategy allows a gradation of uses that corresponds to the different economic needs and underlying expectations behind the development: the dense, formally arranged blocks that extend the 300-by-300-foot grid from nearby downtown Laredo into the development give way as they encounter the lake shores. Buffered by public land, they are transformed to the east into larger single-family home sites and "villa estates" along more "traditionally" modern-style curving streets. Public participation, allied with density, gives way to privacy, according to the architect. The result is a development unlike any other in Texas—for now. Work, scheduled to begin on Paul Young Ranch in 1988, has been delayed. But once undertaken, it may give Texans a chance to evaluate a home-grown version of a new old-fashioned town that, like the Seaside development in Florida, seems to provide a new set of strategies for dealing with American cities and towns.



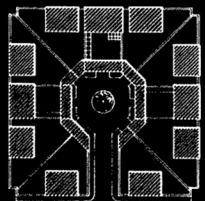
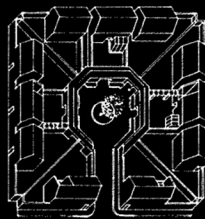
COTTAGE RETAIL



6 DU/AC BLOCK



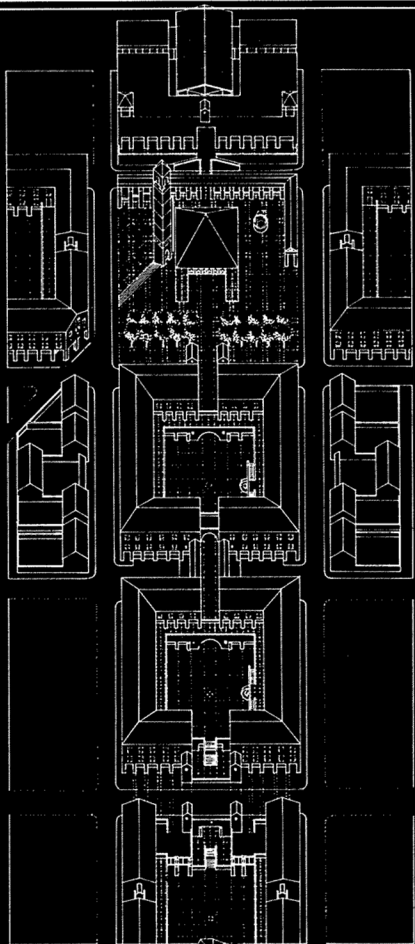
4 DU/AC BLOCK



CUL-DE-SAC BLOCK

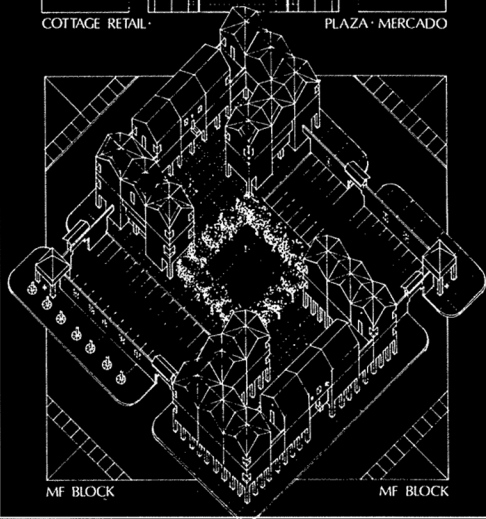


CLUB



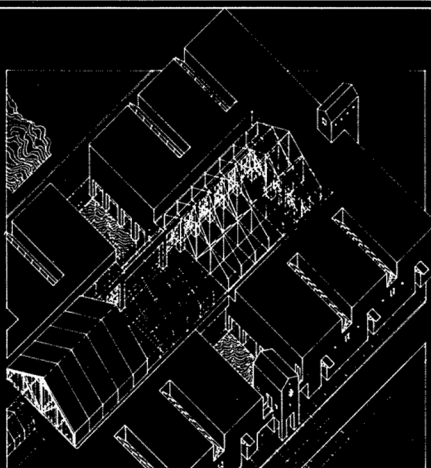
COTTAGE RETAIL

PLAZA MERCADO

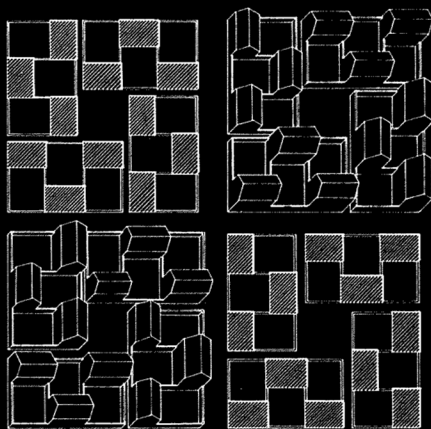


MF BLOCK

MF BLOCK



MERCADO



6 DU/AC BLOCK

6 DU/AC BLOCK



TOWER

SF + MF BLOCK