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September 2005
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Photo by Claus Bach

"The atmosphere as well as the architecture is fantastic; it's a real community. We have a local market, events, socials where everyone aged 3 to 83 turns up, and the 13th restaurant in the neighborhood has just opened." —Carsten Cox, page 138

Outside their homes on Throckmorton Street in Dallas, architect Edward Baum (right) and his neighbor admire the fruits of Baum's labors.



Developer Does Dallas

Diane Cheatham and Edward Baum team up to try to make the Dallas of their design dreams a reality.

Project: Prototype Infill Housing

Architect: Edward M. Baum

Developer: Diane Cheatham

Location: Dallas, Texas



If you've never been to Dallas, it's difficult to imagine anything other than the infamous grassy knoll, dusty oil wells, big cowboy hats, or buxom blonde cheerleaders trying to kick their way right through your television screen. The city's oversized image easily eclipses the actual urban landscape. While other towns might bask in their glorified—if misguided—public perception, in Dallas's case, it's a disservice. Lush, green, densely packed neighborhoods filled with single-family homes and high-rise apartment towers snuggled into gently rolling hills are not what most visitors expect to find. But driving through downtown and its immediate outlying neighborhoods, that's exactly what you'll see.

Backed by gobs of oil money and local architects and developers intent on expanding the city's architectural legacy, Dallas has a lengthy history of engaging forward-thinking planners and architectural visionaries. In a city covering a sprawling 343 square miles, where the car is king, this hasn't translated to urban-planning perfection, but it has fostered a surprisingly open-minded architectural atmosphere in a historically conservative city. Gems like Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum and Tadao Ando's Modern Art Museum in nearby Fort Worth, the Nasher Sculpture Center by Renzo Piano, and landscape architect Daniel Kiley's public park, Fountain Place, provide a solid core of signature structures that have attracted world renown. But it is the neighborhoods that branch out from the corporate-skyscraper-dominated downtown that provide the most hope for a future Dallas—ruled not by the car but by vibrant streets and the complex social fabric of a healthy city. ▶



The living room of Baum's 1650-square-foot home features a poured-concrete floor as well as many vintage finds and artifacts from his travels. The sidechairs in the foreground are by Ib Kofod-Larsen and the leather chair is by Gilbert Rohde.

Moving northwest along Maple Avenue, away from Pei Cobb Freed and Partners' 1980s prismatic Fountain Place office tower, the houses and offices become low-slung, punctuated every so often by a '60s- or '70s-era high-rise. In this way, Dallas starts to look not unlike Los Angeles. Farther along Maple, the Oak Lawn neighborhood continues the city's metamorphosis, this time into a largely Hispanic quarter. Turning right off Maple onto Throckmorton Street, architect Edward Baum and developer Diane Cheatham's most recent experiment in Texas-style urbanism comes into view.

Baum, a professor of architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington, and Cheatham, a true-blue Texan who's the president and founder of Urban Edge Developers, have known each other for years, but this is their first foray into business together. Four years ago, Baum purchased two lots for about \$80,000 each. Though some consider Oak Lawn less than desirable, Baum saw wide sidewalks shaded by fully developed trees and jumped at the chance to make his urban ideal a reality.

"I'm very interested in bringing the single-family home back to the urban infrastructure," Baum explains. "This neighborhood and these lots presented the perfect opportunity to create single-family homes that are still somewhat affordable and could tempt young families and singles into returning to the city."

Baum's inspired thinking caught Cheatham's attention, and she signed on to help get the project under way. With an architect and developer working in cahoots, equal importance was given to their individual desires, and a unique piece of urban infill began to take shape in 2002.

The two developed an approach that yielded four town houses, each with approximately 1,700 square feet of living space, that would slide easily onto Dallas's standard residential lot of 50 by 150 feet. The key to the courtyard houses, however, was the price: Each unit would be sold for around \$275,000, putting them within reach of the middle class.

For Baum's part, he looked east, to the patio houses of the Mediterranean and Asia, and then west, to the open



The house is organized around three courtyards. The largest (above) serves as an outdoor room between the living space and Baum's office, which he calls the "flex room."

floor plans of the Case Study Houses of the Eameses, Ellwood, and Koenig. For Cheatham's part, she observed the market demands of the metropolitan region: compact, one-level dwellings with covered parking, plenty of security and privacy, lots of storage, room for a guest bedroom or home office, and energy-efficiency—all with an affordable price tag.

Baum describes the project as a "replacement part" for Dallas's fractured urban form pockmarked with vacant lots throughout many neighborhoods. "Since it is based on the standard city lot," Baum explains, "it can be used to incrementally fill lots and replace existing single-family housing as need arises." He goes on to say that "much like a person's teeth, the urban fabric can be patched, supplemented, and renewed selectively. When repeated, the design belongs to the 'mat' or 'carpet' housing typology—low, tightly assembled, and porous."

The completed homes resemble a hybrid of the classic California ranch house and early Eichler designs. Nothing about them screams "Look at me," though they are

definitely good neighbors. Walking down Throckmorton Street, the sidewalk is cracked and worn, but as you reach Baum's homes, the newly poured concrete glistens and the tongue-and-groove cypress-siding exterior provides evidence that this cavity has been elegantly filled.

In order for the houses to remain within reach of the middle-income person, Baum and Cheatham approached the project with an off-the-shelf philosophy. To demonstrate the opportunity for consumers to take advantage of the low prices offered at massive retailers like Home Depot and Lowe's, Baum and Cheatham made a conscientious effort to purchase everything they could from big-box retailers like these. The catch, however, was that the homes were constructed by skilled professionals. "By saving so much on materials, we were able to spend a bit more on quality craftsmanship," Cheatham explains. "It's not a bricolage by an amateur or naïve user," Baum continues. "Here the flexibility of the market system and the construction system have been used to build quality dwellings at comparatively low costs." ▶



Stepping behind the carport doors—covered gracefully by slightly slanting roofs to keep the sun and rain out but let the fresh air and light in—and into the foyer of Baum's unit, this off-the-shelf philosophy becomes more evident. The hallway stretches the entire length of the house, and from the front door you have an unobstructed view all the way to the bedroom. Running the length of the hallway are 80-inch-tall closets from Home Depot that provide the home's storage space.

In the kitchen, just off the foyer, cabinetry, sinks, and hardware all come from Home Depot as well, while the counter provides a unique spark. "We chose a bamboo countertop to add some pop to the space," Cheatham explains. "It is high quality and very ecological. Again, by saving in one area, you can splurge in another."

The extra bedroom or office that Cheatham signaled as a key market demand—the "flex room," as Baum calls it—lies just off the main hallway. The room, and the rest of the house for that matter, has no traditional doorway. Instead, a 13-foot opening, which can be sealed off by a sliding screen consisting of six standard 80-by-32-inch doors fastened together by metal mending plates at the top and bottom, serves as the entryway. Similarly, the master bedroom appears open to the rest of the house unless the door, which is a nontraditional width, is pulled from the weight-bearing wall separating the bedroom and the bathroom. All of this is key to Baum's idea of creating a smart open living plan.

Upon completion in August 2003, all of the units sold in a matter of weeks—and the residents, including Baum, couldn't be happier. "They're just simple little wonders," ►



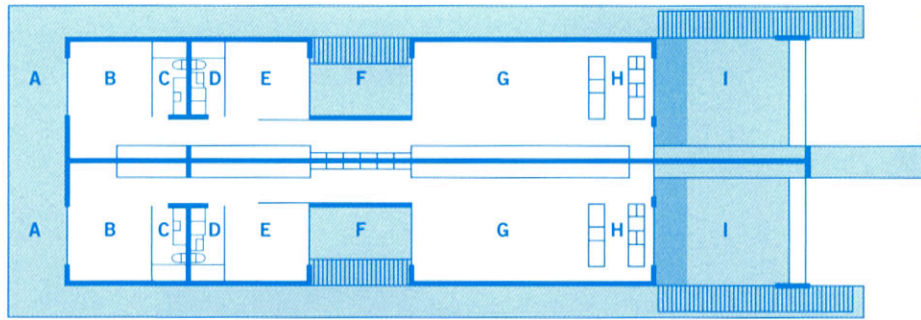
Baum uses his "flex room" as his architectural office (below), but in the other three units adjoining his, the same space has been used as an extra bedroom and a TV room.

The view from the front door to the bedroom (opposite page, upper left) showcases the large amounts of storage space necessary to attract homebuyers.



Floor Plan for Two Identical Side-by-Side Units

- A Backyard
- B Master Bedroom
- C Master Bathroom
- D Bathroom
- E Flex Room
- F Courtyard
- G Living Room
- H Kitchen
- I Carport



Baum relates. "They're minimal but capable of maximum living potential. We're hoping to see them all over the city. A diverse housing stock is key to a city's vitality."

The real question is whether housing alone can reinvigorate a city, making it a place people want to live in again. Baum clearly believes it's one part of the equation but likes to tell a story that relays his true feelings and the often overwhelming complexity of city planning. "A while back, Andrés Duany [of New Urbanism fame] was in town and city leaders asked him, 'What can we do to bring people back to inner-city Dallas in meaningful numbers?'" Baum smiles slyly before continuing. "Duany said to them, 'You can hire me and pay me thousands of dollars for advice and plans that you'll never use. Or,'" and at this point Baum can't help but chuckle knowingly, "you can build two elementary schools and a high school right downtown and staff it with good people and the rest will take care of itself." If Dallas ever does take Duany's advice, Baum and Cheatham have just the plan to house any returning urban expats. ■

Baum's bedroom (above left) features his many photos and other memorabilia (below) collected over his years of teaching and working throughout the country.

The kitchen (above) is lit with plenty of natural light from the open-air carport directly in front of it. All appliances and cabinetry are off the shelf from various big-box stores.

The backlighting Baum included above the storage units lining the hall (opposite page) is revealed at dusk. The lighting provides a warm glow throughout the house.

