sugar
mountain
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Sub_Divide ***or*** CONNECT?

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FORWARD BY GARY MICHAEL DAULT

The Once and Future Suburb

"Suburb" is of course an entirely inadequate, unfruitfully blunt word (it sounds like a result of indigestion) for such a delicately honed, subtly balanced vision of any site for the focussed energizing of what architect Dimitri Papatheodorou characterizes as "a cohesive and beautiful development reflecting the character and compactness" of a small town. The word "subdivision," with its parcelled-out divisiveness built right into the word, will not do either.

For those of us of a certain advanced age, the idea of the subdivision was an early anathema, built, probably, upon a glance at that relentless experiment in regimentation and "netherness" (a word coined by America's prime novelist of the suburbs, John Cheever) called Levittown. Levittown, the brainchild (if that is the way to put it) of racist developer William Levitt (people of colour couldn't buy houses in Levittown), impressed its enervating snakes-and-ladders imprint on Nassau County in Long Island, New York from 1947-1951. Mostly the development was to serve as housing for GI's returning from the war. War is no fun, but it must have seemed less numbing than Levittown.

Since Levittown, despite a number of well-intentioned, increasingly inventive and diverting architectural schemes offered as step-ups from that ad hoc dystopia, the suburb-idea settled into the North American mind as an inescapable grid of rhythmically-positioned shoeboxes for living. The cliché-idea of the dreaded, repressed, indeed catatonic subdivision was deeply enough baked into consciousness that it even kept popping up in movies: see the pastel, live-in boxes in Tim Burton's Edward Scissorhands (1990), for example, and the airless, soul-destroying tract-houses in the Coen Brothers' A Serious Man (2009).

The abhorrent idea of the straightjacket-subdivision subsequently galvanized a lot of architectural dreamers, however, into reveries of alternate schemes for living: as an architectural camp-follower, it sent me into (day)dreams of what the brilliant Robert Venturi once characterized, in his ground-breaking 1966 book, Contradiction and Complexity in Architecture, as an embrace of "messy vitality over serious unity."

Though I loved the great holy fathers of modern architecture—Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, Aldo Rossi, Buckminster Fuller (why didn't people listen?), Carlo Scarpa, Tadao Ando, Sverre Fehn, Arata Isozaki, the elegant muscle-flexing of Antoine Predock—and still do (last week I bought a worshipful book by André Wogenscky called Le Corbusier's Hands), I also thrilled my way through the inhabitable fantasies of Rem Koolhaas, the galvanizing dementias of Coop Himmelblau, Archigram and Superstudio and Archizoom Associati (the latter two both founded in 1966), and—most passionately—the unforgettable and probably unbuildable architectural masques and inhabitable building-poems of the great John Hejduk.

What I yearned to see was an amalgam of Modernism's foundational and lingering logic and high aspiration, Postmodernism's formal adventuring and its dalliances with cultural memory, and Deconstructivism's gloria in language, skepticism and risk--all melded into something useful and sustaining. Above all, I wanted to stay human. Unlikely? Of course.

But then, in its modest, refined way, there's Sugar Mountain. Yet another beginning. I have aspirations for the Sugar Mountain Idea that are unlikely to be fulfilled—because they are mostly literary ideas. Right now, Sugar Mountain exists in an ecstasy of expectation.

Unassailable so far as its modelled strictures and metaphysical virginities go, Sugar Mountain is at present a virtuoso positing of potential. At this point in its pristine, idealistic ingress from concept to consumption, I am filled with an irrepressible longing to sully its so far Platonic perfections with some genially offered and probably slightly improper user-requests.
In architecture and community planning, I want something to chew on.

Not for nothing have I rekindled my early enthusiasm for Ralph Erskine's unruly essay in architectural bricolage, Byker Wall, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England (1968-74).

And I freely, even gleefully, admit to a homespun re-fondness for Sam Mockbee's Hay Bale Houses for Auburn University in Alabama (1993-94). I admire B.V. Doshi's low-cost housing experiments in Indore, India (1982). I like (most) Tiny Houses. I love the quirky, chromatically saturated, structurally unembarrassed houses Ettore Sottsass would photograph and publish in his various "Travel Notes" in gallery-magazines like Terrazzo (see Issue No. 1, Fall 1988):
"In all the places I have been to," Sottsass writes, "I have felt that someone there was designing houses, just as in a wood you can feel the presence of mushrooms."

I have always harboured a fondness for the eccentric and sometimes desperate manner in which visionary desire is sometimes able to express itself—with an intensity that novelist Robert Musil once called being "ungrounded at both ends." Here is King Surrealist, Andre Breton, in his book, Mad Love from 1937: "The house where I live, my life, what I write: I dream that all that might appear from far off like these cubes of rock salt look close up." Design, says Ettore Sotsass in his Design Metaphors (Rizzoli, 1987) "can be a state of mind, an unusual perception, a ritual whisper." Architecture too.

Here are a few soft ideas. My Sugar Mountain, my "ritual whisper"—the Sugar Mountain I'd buy into—would have a big all-season market somewhere at its centre—with piles of pineapples and bundles of dried herbs. Somewhere near the end of one of its horizontal-skyscraper streets, it would offer a small dairy farm—with cows not for eating but for milk and also for the patting of their plush noses, and for giving apples to. This alone would help keep Sugar Mountaineers honest, humble and kind. I'd like to see S.M. offer a community theatre which would work the way YouTube or Netflix work, but on a vast scale: a big hall with a big screen where townspeople could go and dial up movies and, if need be, an assortment of news channels.

It's good to watch with friends. I'd like to see the community offer a new Noah's-Ark (even if, of necessity, land-locked) adapted from, say, Le Corbusier's reinforced concrete Floating Asylum for the Salvation Army (1929), but this time designed for needy animals, not for the temporary relief of Paris's "clochards."

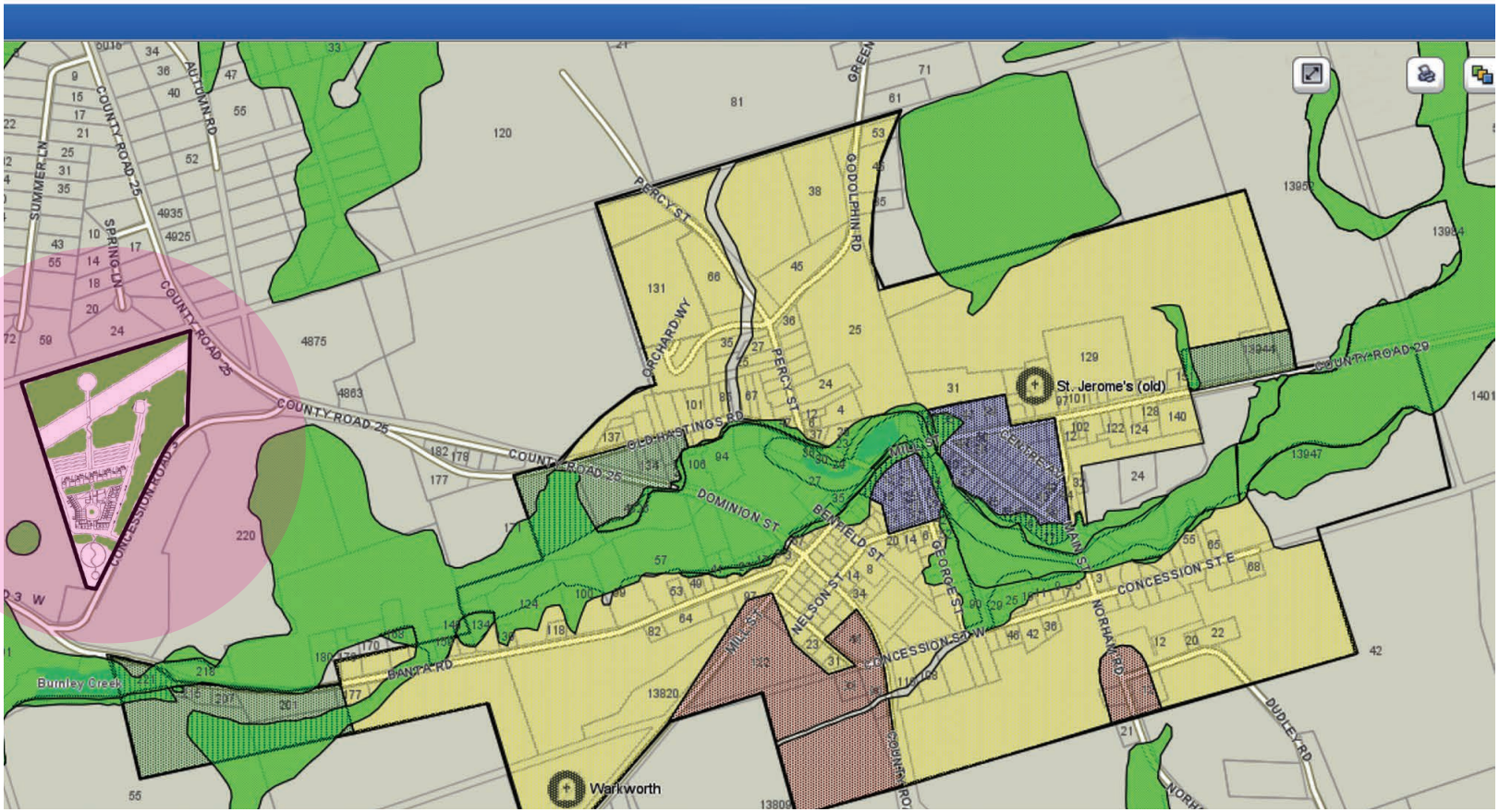
I'd like to see---and experience—a Sugar Mountain No-Reception Room: a large hall lined, like Wilhelm Reich's psychotherapeutically problematic "orgone accumulator" (orgasm enhancer), with alternating layers of copper-sheeting and plywood that would, in Reich's case, keep one's bodily energies bottled up, and in the case of Sugar Mountain, create a space in which digital devices could no longer function. This structure would serve as and be regarded as a chapel.
I could go on. I wish I could go on. I'm feeling more Sottsassian by the minute.

Well, I know, I know. All this does give off a kind of frivolous scent. And indeed, are these foregoing suggestions simply too architecturally "soft," too design-lite? I don't think they would be if they were seamlessly and committedly woven into an architecturally sophisticated, metaphysically clarified, "when-the-towns-were-white" sort of New Community.

It depends a lot on how zealously architects and planners wish to hide their bodily, autobiographical selves inside the thick (and sometimes impenetrable) walls of architectural theory and discourse. Me, I'd like to throw open a few magic casements and relax.

Gary Michael Dault, Napanee Ontario, April 18th, 2023

Municipality of Trent Hills Community Map



sugar mountain

Located in Warkworth Ontario, Rural Development Zone and Greenlands System

Warkworth Architecture: 1850-present

sugar mountain

Sugar Mountain is a hypothetical housing development on the periphery of Warkworth Ontario in Northumberland County, offering more housing per acre than a conventional subdivision. By focusing on architecture, managing the impact on the land, placing limits, and utilizing a variety of housing typologies, it is possible to create a cohesive community development. Sugar Mountain demonstrates several housing types: starter terrace housing, lofts for live-work, villas for those who can afford more floor area, co-housing, and a 'Sugar Palace' capturing a collective southern view of Northumberland's agrarian landscape. There is something for everyone. In addition to fifty dwelling units, the plan includes a Sugar Bush (reforestation), barn, small greenhouse, daycare, and modest community workshop.

On the periphery of the fourth largest city in North America exists a constellation of small towns, many of which still maintain their rural character. The villages and towns nearest Toronto are most vulnerable to the effects of urban sprawl, as witnessed over decades of development in places like Vaughan, Peel, Markham, Ajax, Pickering, etc. Further away, many unaffected small towns and their surrounding agricultural lands are currently targeted for new development.

'Urban sprawl' impacts both natural and cultural heritage, with food security at the centre of this discussion. Contrary to current Provincial Policy, there is more than enough serviced land to build new homes, of different sizes and types, without impeding on the Greenbelt and other agricultural land, and without resorting to the over-utilized housing model, the Subdivision.

The Subdivision is a primarily an effect of the automobile industry, driving a century of unbridled urban expansion into the countryside. We witness the impact on the land, the environment and on the lives of people scattered further and further away from places of work and assembly.

After the Second World War, as economies boomed and a newly found freedom was promised by the automobile, places like Don Mills Ontario were of the first large scale suburban developments paving the way to unprecedented expansion into the countryside. Whereas early prototypes, such as Don Mills, were designed with compelling community amenities including parks and footpaths connecting schools, places of worship and commercial enclaves, local access to groceries and personal services, newer subdivisions diminished these amenities and capitalized on the concept of 'leapfrogging' (the application of land speculation), to simplify for developers rapid growth on un-serviced farmland facilitated by public infrastructure dollars.

The subject of this exhibition is the future of the countryside, and in part a response to new Provincial action to build housing (subdivisions) in Ontario's Greenbelt.

To ruralize the city and to urbanize the countryside" was [...] the double agenda of urbanization. The essence of urbanization is therefore the destruction of any limit, boundary, or form that is not the infinite, compulsive repetition of its own reproduction and the consequent totalizing mechanism of control that guarantees this process of infinity.

Pier Vittorio Aureli, from The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture

In the above text we see a glimpse of 'Bad Infinity', meaning unbridled growth in a finite ecosystem: infinite urbanism, infinite population growth, infinite waste, infinite time, etc. In a closed system like planet earth, change and equilibrium form a polarity. Everything at once is in flux and eventually adjusts to a state of equilibrium or balance. In this moment, we are asked to consider an imbalance: Canadians are under-housed and/or experience significant barriers to sufficient housing. The housing market, driven by speculation, limited availability, and a lack of

housing options, has failed many Canadians, particularly young families. A conservative approach might seek to preserve a balance between urban and rural while acknowledging changes in the world, immigration, climate change, and a shrinking middle class. This exhibition refutes 'bad infinity', endless urbanism, and irreversible subdivision of the land, while suggesting an alternative model for equitable housing through consolidation and limits on the use of land.

In Canada and abroad, housing is an ill-adressed social need. We have inadequately administered the collective and humane responsibility for housing communities. We lack variety in housing (entry level, community focussed, housing for seniors, etc.) for a growing population. The established market system of housing procurement focuses on the bottom line, on profit. Many of those in position of authority (all levels of government) and procurement (the development industry) believe we have effectively only one housing option outside of dense urban centres, namely the subdivision. This is false. Continuing down the subdivision road will fail us in the end. There is ample evidence it already has. Consider the effects of commuting: the stress on family time, the cost of fuel, energy and pollution, the irreversible loss agricultural land, the cost of infrastructure on the public purse, additional roads and highways, and so on.

This hypothetical development is a prototype and alternative to the conventional subdivision. On the periphery of, and within walking distance to the town of Warkworth, exists a relatively small triangular parcel of land, thirty-four acres in area, with an existing hydro run and Bell communication tower toward the north end, and terraced topography with southern exposure and views toward a pastoral landscape. This landscape, once forested (native) is now agrarian (settled); farm fields and agricultural architecture surround the site. Rolling hills of Northumberland are sublime, existing natural and cultural heritage will be compromised if subdivisions are further introduced in Northumberland County and eslwehere on the land.

Municipalities, our elected officials, have more power than we/they think, and should exercise it more frequently. Typically, development procurement process is unnecessarily reactionary. It goes something like this: a developer will draft a proposed subdivision plan and apply to a municipality for approval, in principle. Municipalities often endorse these proposals because they view development as in increase in tax dollars without fully considering the long-term effect on the land. Unfortunately, many municipalities submit to developer intentions far too quickly in an established practice to facilitate development, rather than to represent the real needs of communities.

The conventional subdivision is not a design type that fosters community, nor is it oriented towards building beautiful places for people to dwell. It is the most efficient model for the development industry, only. The roads and infrastructure that service the switch from agricultural land to subdivision is paid for by the us, the public. Developers prefer 'leap-frogging' over more expensive serviced land (near existing communities) and speculate on land that is purchased before it becomes serviced by roads and utilities. This is precisely why we get subdivisions and not communities. It is easier for them to build where no one lives, for the additional reason that change to established communities is often met with complex resistance by the communities that need housing. One can understand why our culture has preferred the single-family dwelling and subdivisions for decades. This practice of building further away from existing urban centres must stop.

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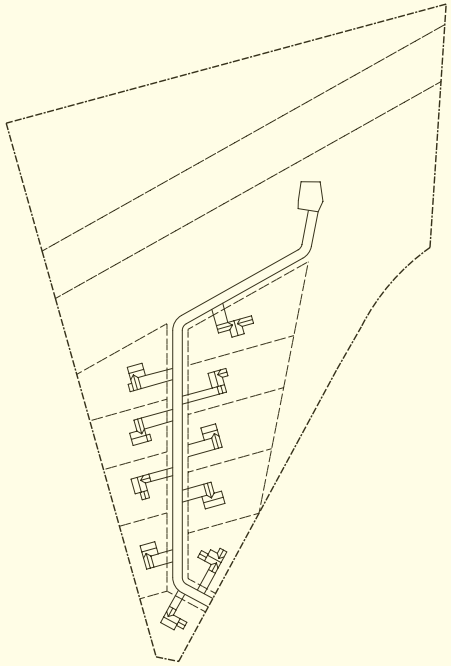
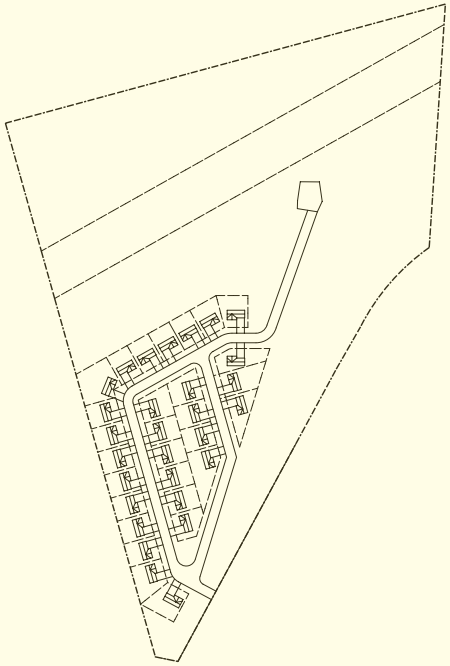
SUB-DIVIDING THE LAND



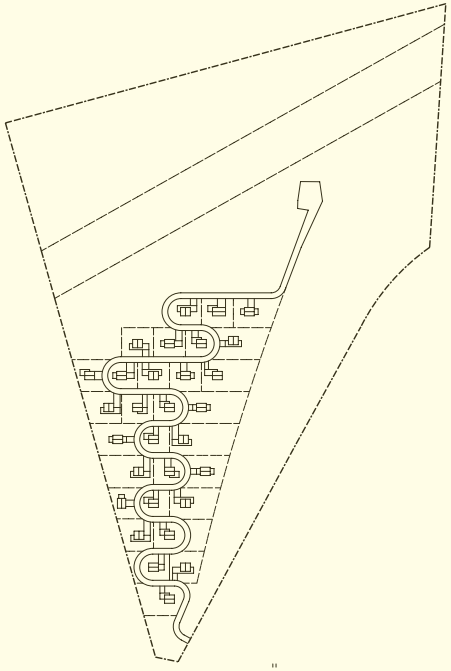
A

Subdivisions erace rural topography and natural heritage. On the Sugar Mountain site, this iteration demonstrates ten individual single-family detatched estate lots, set back from the Hydro Row, representing the North American subdivisions norm, infinitely scaleable.



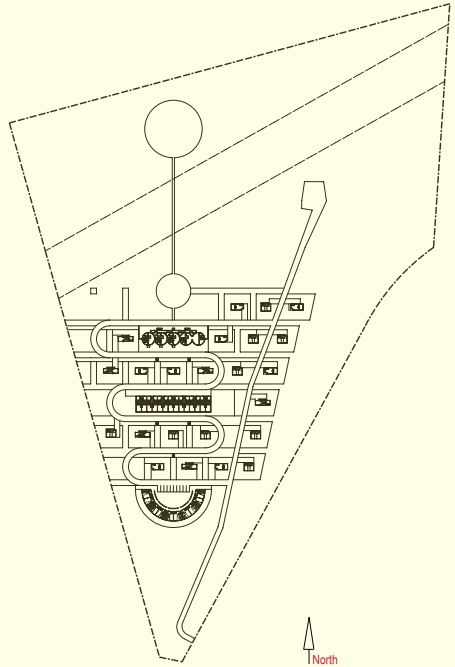
B

In this example, we see twenty-nine modestly scaled single family detached dwellings engineered around efficient road access. The design neither considers existing topography, nor orietination toward the southern exposure, ignoring potential scenic views of Northumberland.



C

The detached single-family dwelling reorients toward the sun, with promise of passive solar and a picturesque view. The morphed cul-de-sac becomes a winding pedestrian path. ‘Follow the Yellow Brick Road’ could be the slogan for this subdivision-‘vision’.



D

Following Dorothy’s lead, the imagined road takes an a aesthetic turn through new housing typologies, public spaces, promenade and patterned architectural language.

sugar mountain
SITE PLAN

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH

North

0 10 50 100 150 200 250ft.

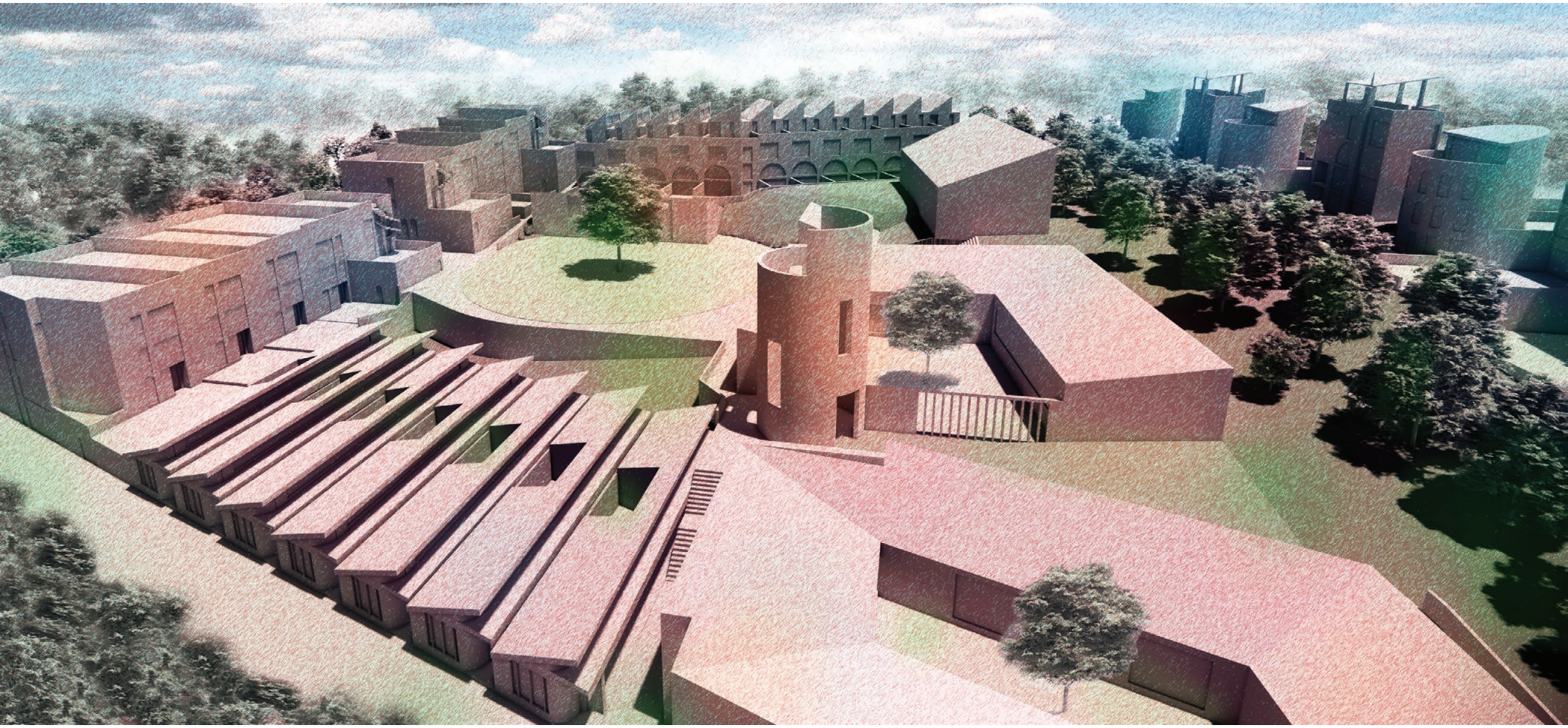
LEGEND

01 REFORESTATION (SUGAR BUSH)
02 EXISTING HEDGEROW
03 MAIN COURTYARD
04 EXISTING FOREST
05 COMMUNITY FARM
06 TERRACE HOUSES (12)
07 CO-HOUSING (7)
08 LIVE-WORK (7)
09 SUGAR PALACE (10)
10 VILLAS (14)
11 DAYCARE
12 GREENHOUSE
13 BARN
14 WORKSHOP
15 CONSTRUCTED WETLAND
16 SCULPTURE
17 PATH
18 GATHERING
19 HYDRO CORRIDOR
20 ROAD
21 BELL TOWER
22 CONCESSION ROAD 3 WEST

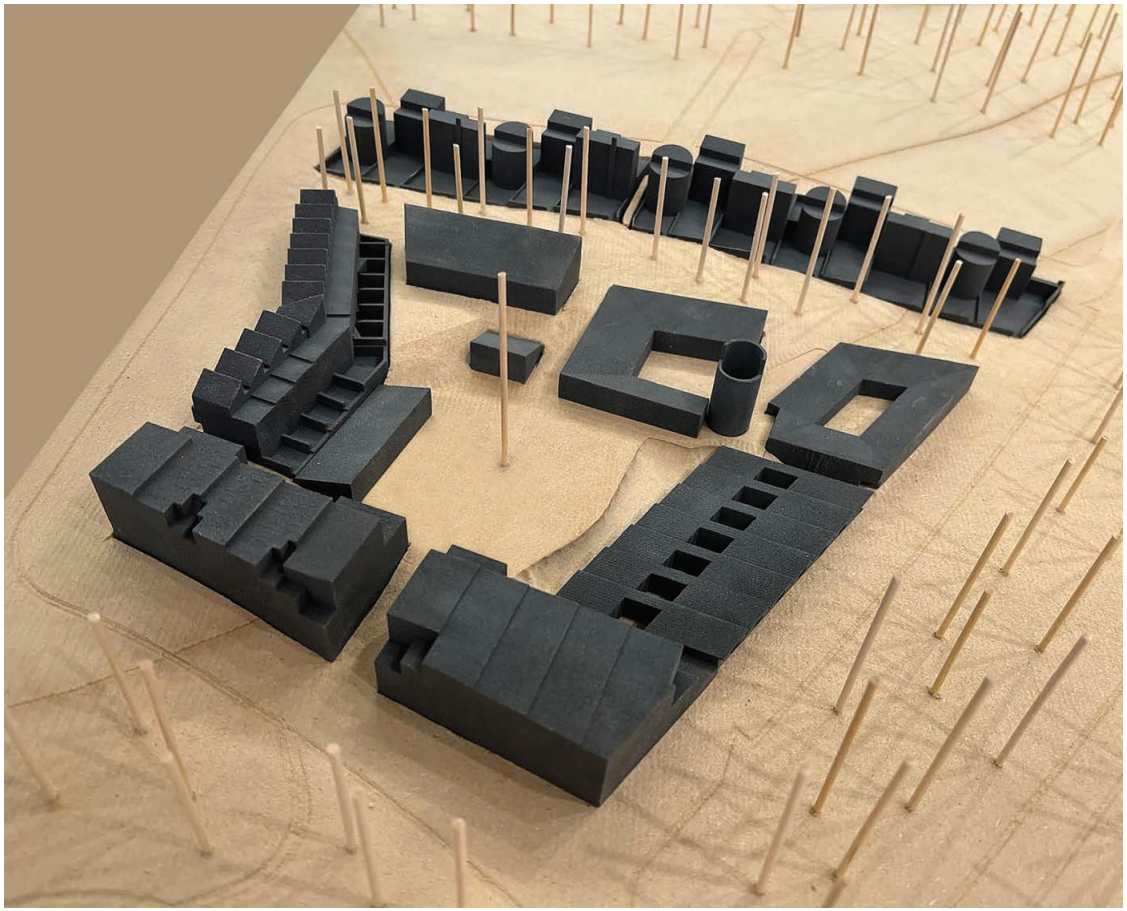
Sugar Mountain is arranged around a large courtyard, punctuated with a single Maple Tree. The remaing landscape is programmed as follows:

- Reforestation
- Community Farming
- Constructed Wetland
- Gathering/Recreation

Housing is set away from both the Hydro Corridor and Bell Communications Tower. Reforestation will aid in buffering the housing from existing site utilities.



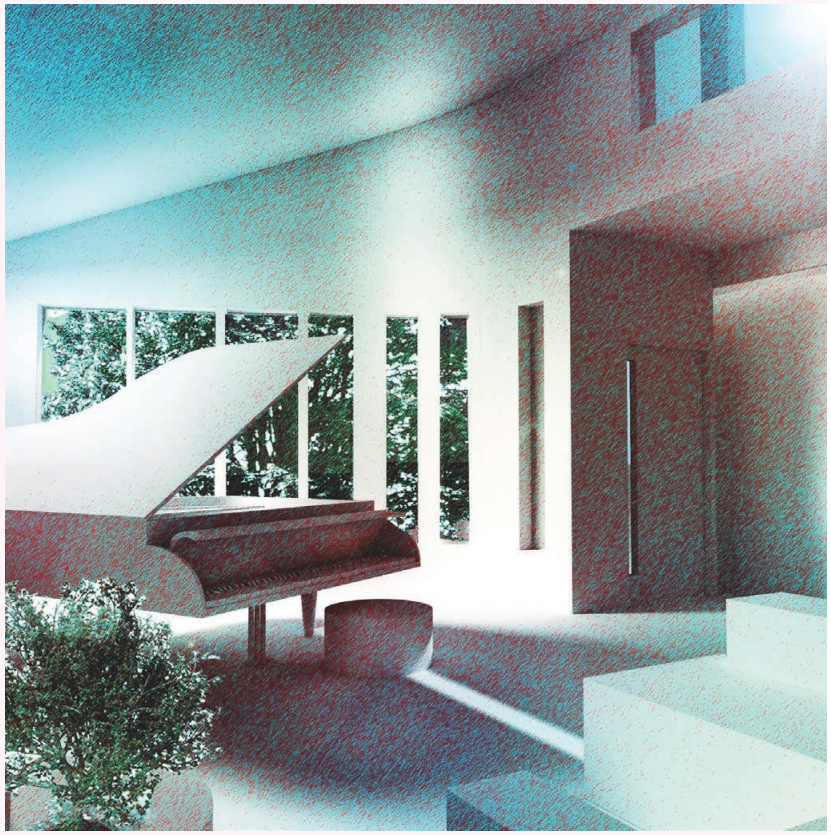
BIRD'S EYE VIEW



INSTALLATION VIEWS

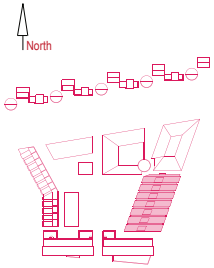
Arts & Heritage Centre, Warkworth Ontario

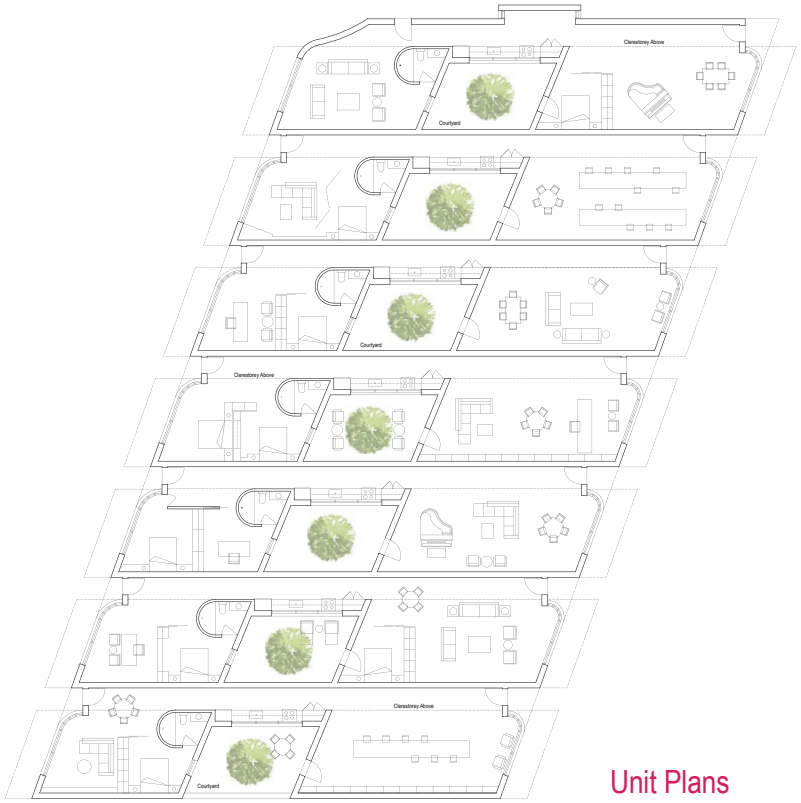
COMMUNITY COURTYARD



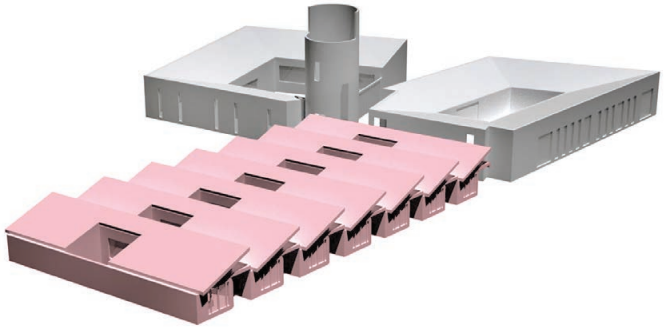
LIVE-WORK

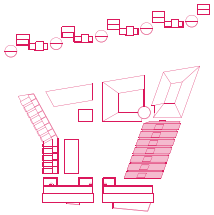
Live-Work units offer the best of both words: a place to dwell and a place to create, all in one setting. These one-storey units are accessed directly from an adjacent driveway to the east, and back onto the collective courtyard at the centre of Sugar Mountain. In addition to both east and west exposure, each unit capatures additional light and air through a private courtyard. The roof carries south-facing photovoltaic panels, and north facing clerestorey windows.



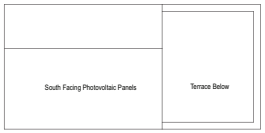


Unit Plans





LIVE-WORK



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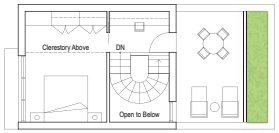

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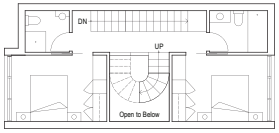

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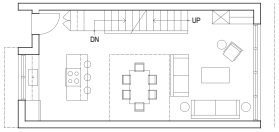

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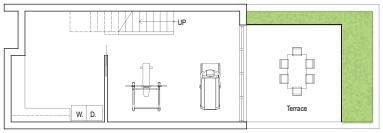
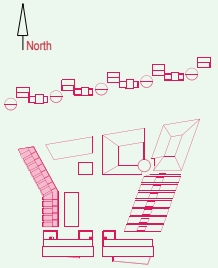
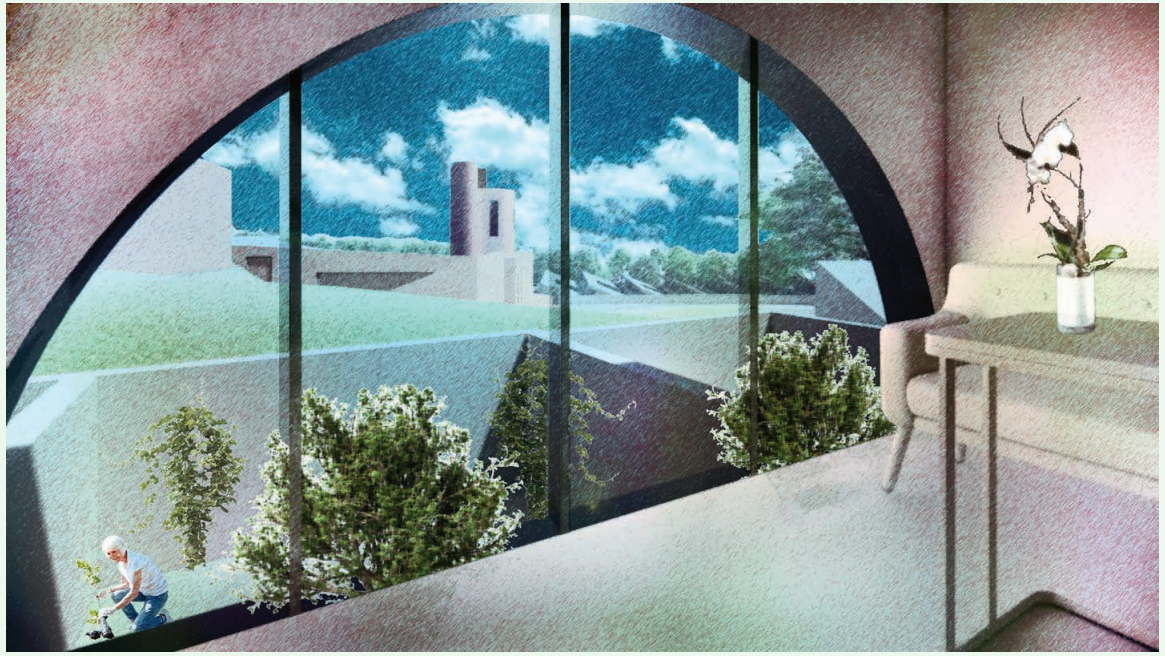


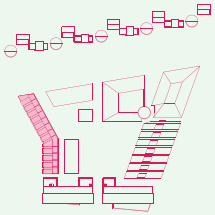
Unit Plans 00



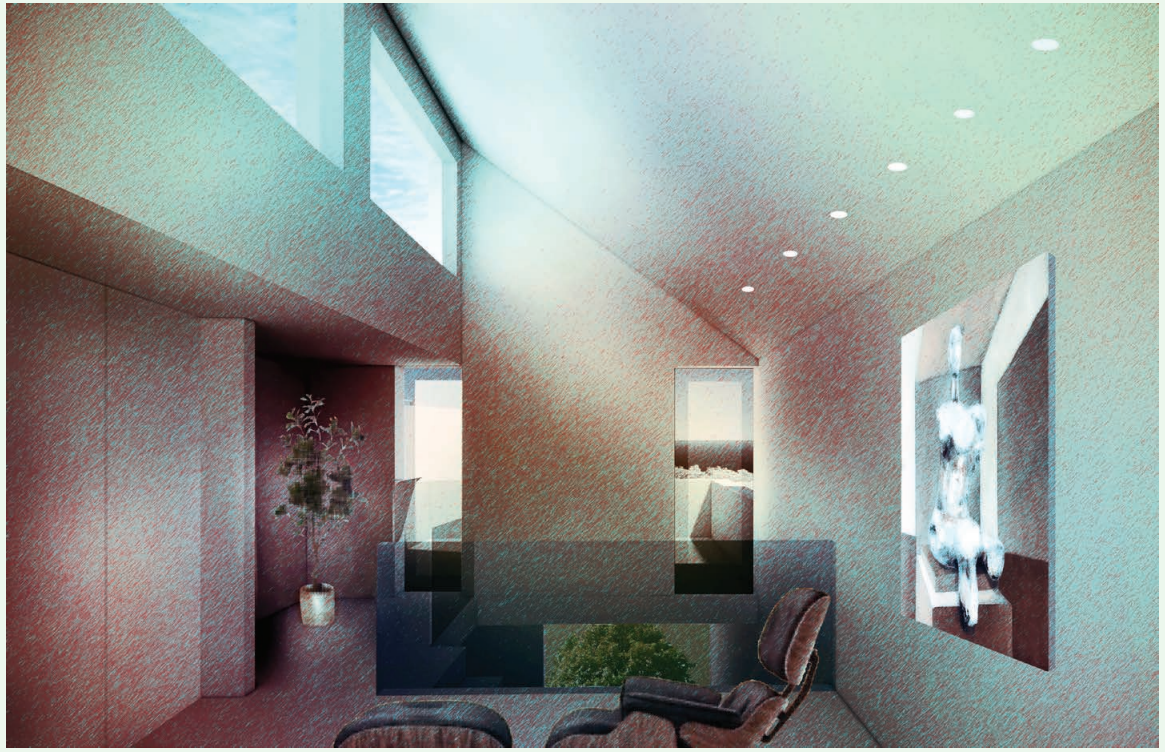
TERRACE HOMES

Oriented along the solar axis (east-west), the Terrace Houses share common walls and afford effecient living accommodation. These units are designed around an interior atrium, inter-connected floors, topped off with a large transom window for ventilation and additional ambient daylight, a roof terrace, and a south-facing roof clad with photovoltaic panels. Intentionally compact by design, this unit offers modest but functional living areas, in addiition to terraces at both the roof level and walk-out basement.



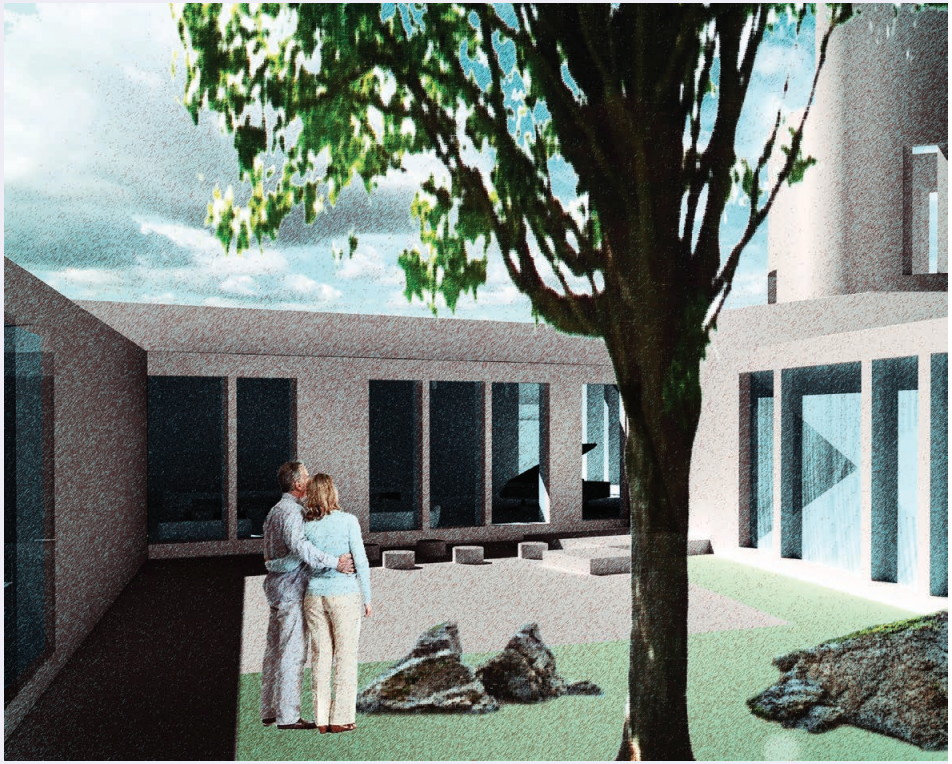


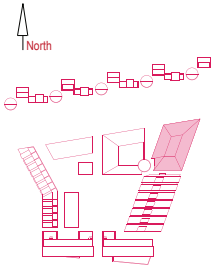
TERRACE HOMES



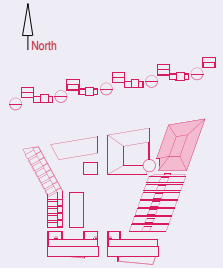
CO-HOUSING

Six one-bedroom suites and one two-bredroom unit form a collective courtyard dwelling, featuring ample shared living, dining and social spaces. The design represents a community withing a community adjacent to other diverse housing options, all framing a central collective courtyard. The co-house courtyard is puncuated by an individual sugar maple tree.





Unit Plans



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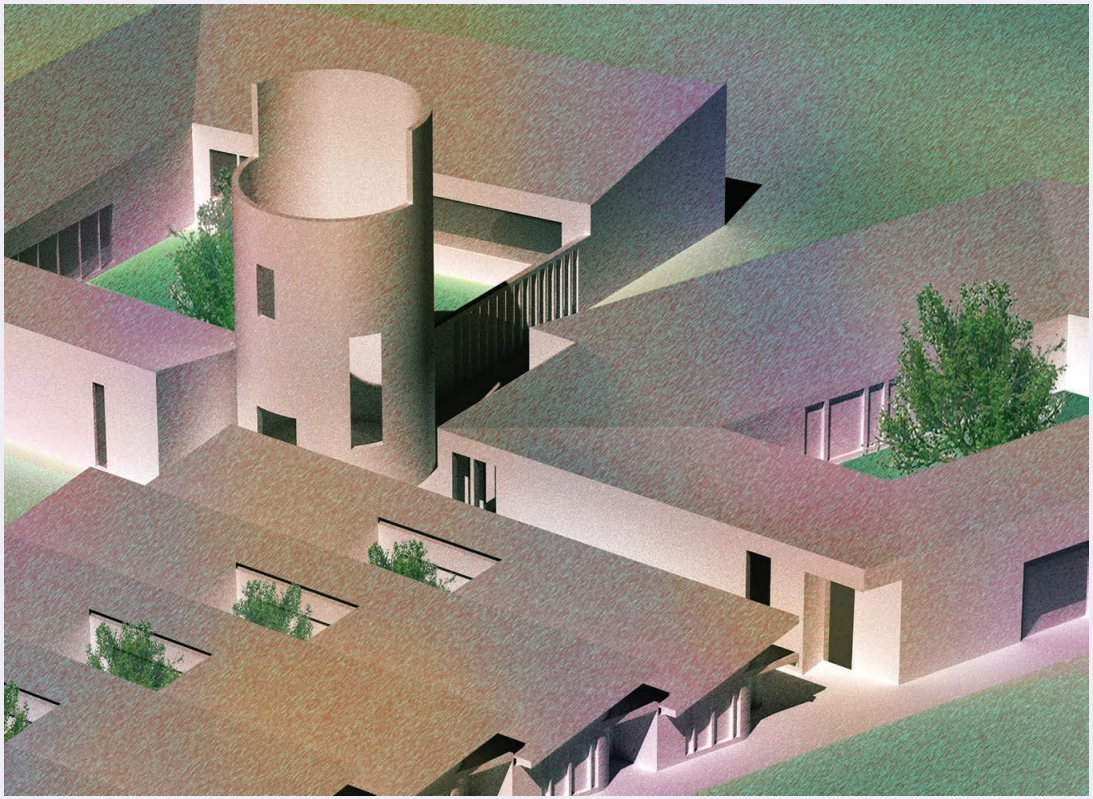
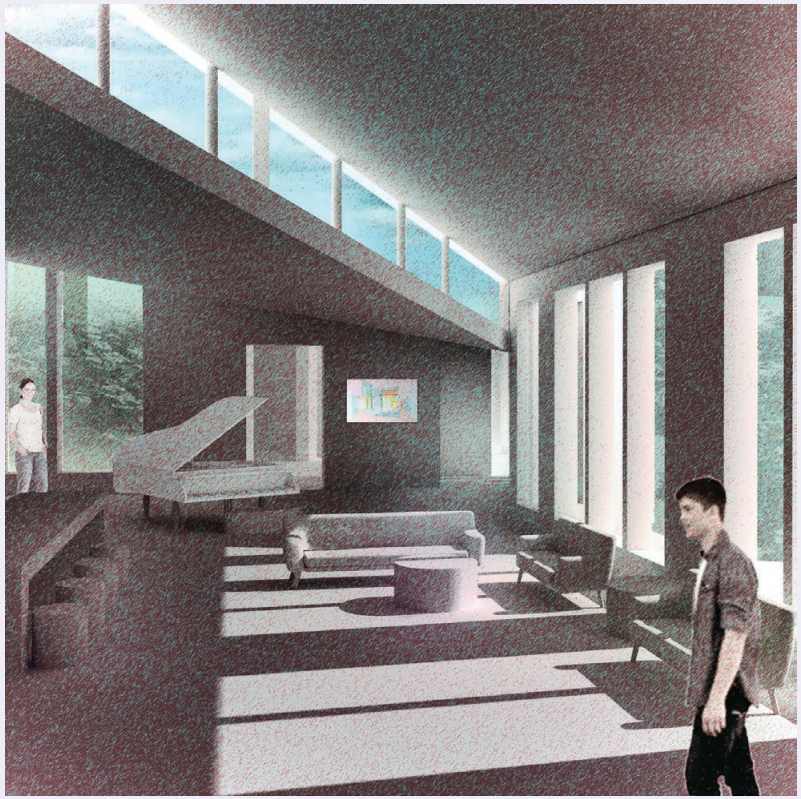
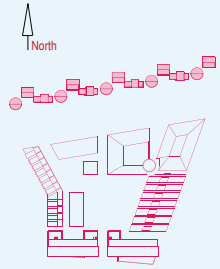
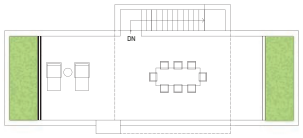




THE VILLAS



Placed at the top of Sugar Mountain, along the northern periphery of the site, the Villas command views over an existing farm hedgrow and proposed central courtyard, towards the agrarian landscape. Three distinct unit types, each with its own generous garden open up to the beauty of the rolling hills of Northumberland County.



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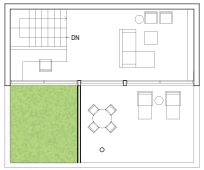

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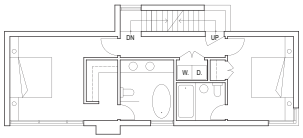

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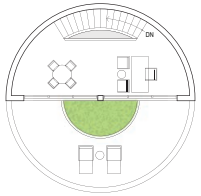

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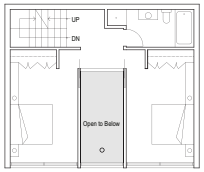

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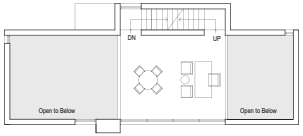

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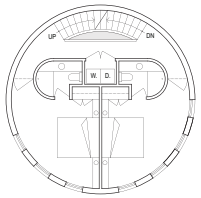

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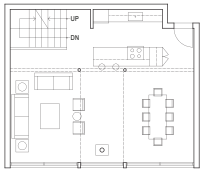

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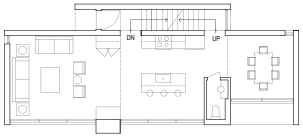

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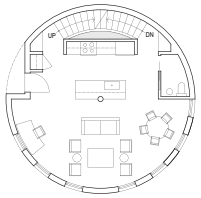

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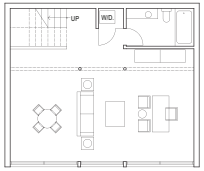

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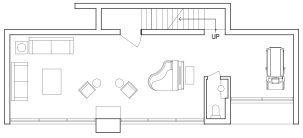

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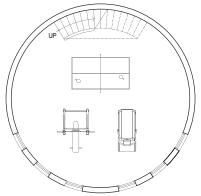

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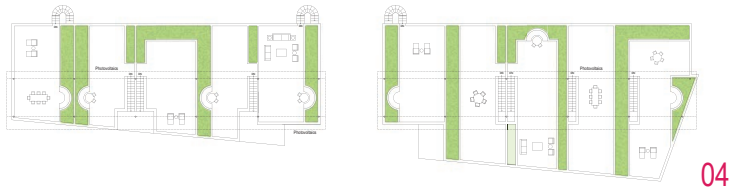
Unit Plans A: CRIB B: COOP C: SILO

THE VILLAS



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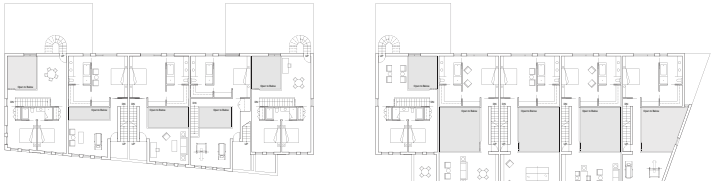

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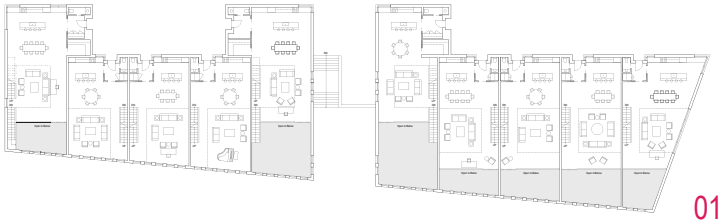

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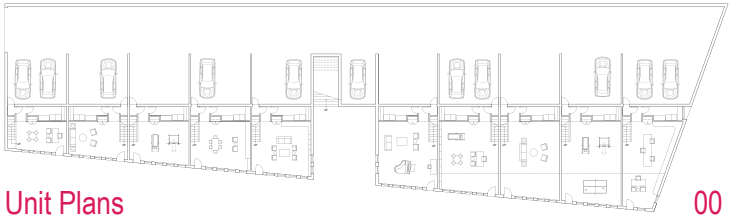

Unit Plans

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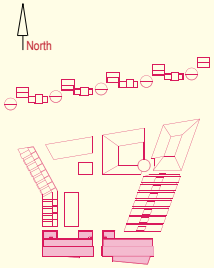
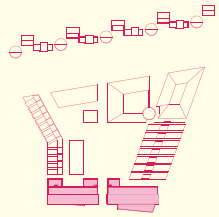
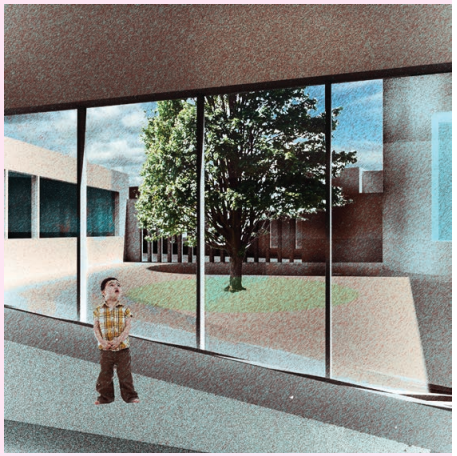


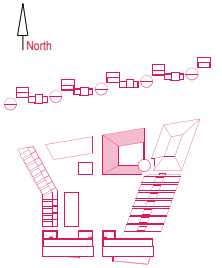
SUGAR PALACE

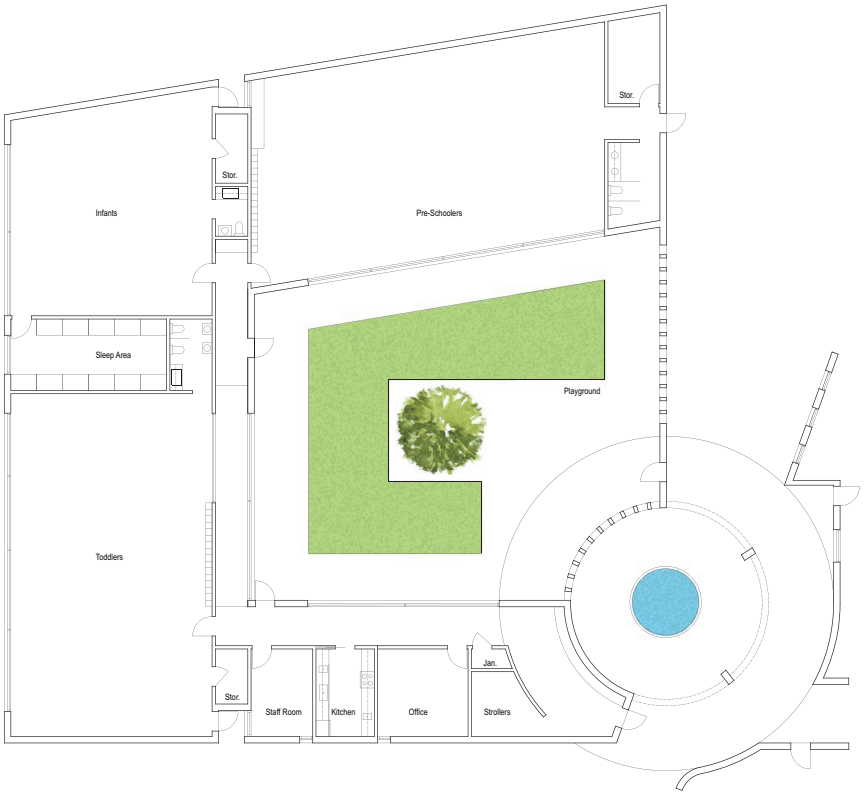
At the southern edge of Sugar Mountain ten individual houses overlook the constructed wetland with views to the agrarian landscape beyond. With generous interconnected floors flooded with natural light, each house contains several bedrooms, living and work areas, with direct access to parking below. Topping off the homes are roof terraces supporting a large photovoltaic canopy, an off-grid energy resrouce and sun-shade device.



SUGAR PALACE







DAYCARE

INTERGENERATIONAL LIVING:

A contributing factor to happiness and longevity is socialization. Warkworth has a vibrant social mix between long-time residents and newcomers, between elders and young families. The daycare is a needed comunity service, plus a vehicle for fostering connection.

sugar
mountain

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