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OF HOME BUILDERS

Builder



Builders Break New Ground

The 30th anniversary of the **Builder 100** reveals higher closings, revenues, and profits last year—and more of the same for 2013.

— INFILL STUDIES

Model Citizens Appropriate for the area and handsome, too, Shingle-style infill condos in Mill Valley, Calif., are proving themselves to be friendly neighbors.



FILLING WELL

Transit-oriented developments, traditional neighborhood projects, and the cost of land have increased demand for infill. By Barbara Ballinger

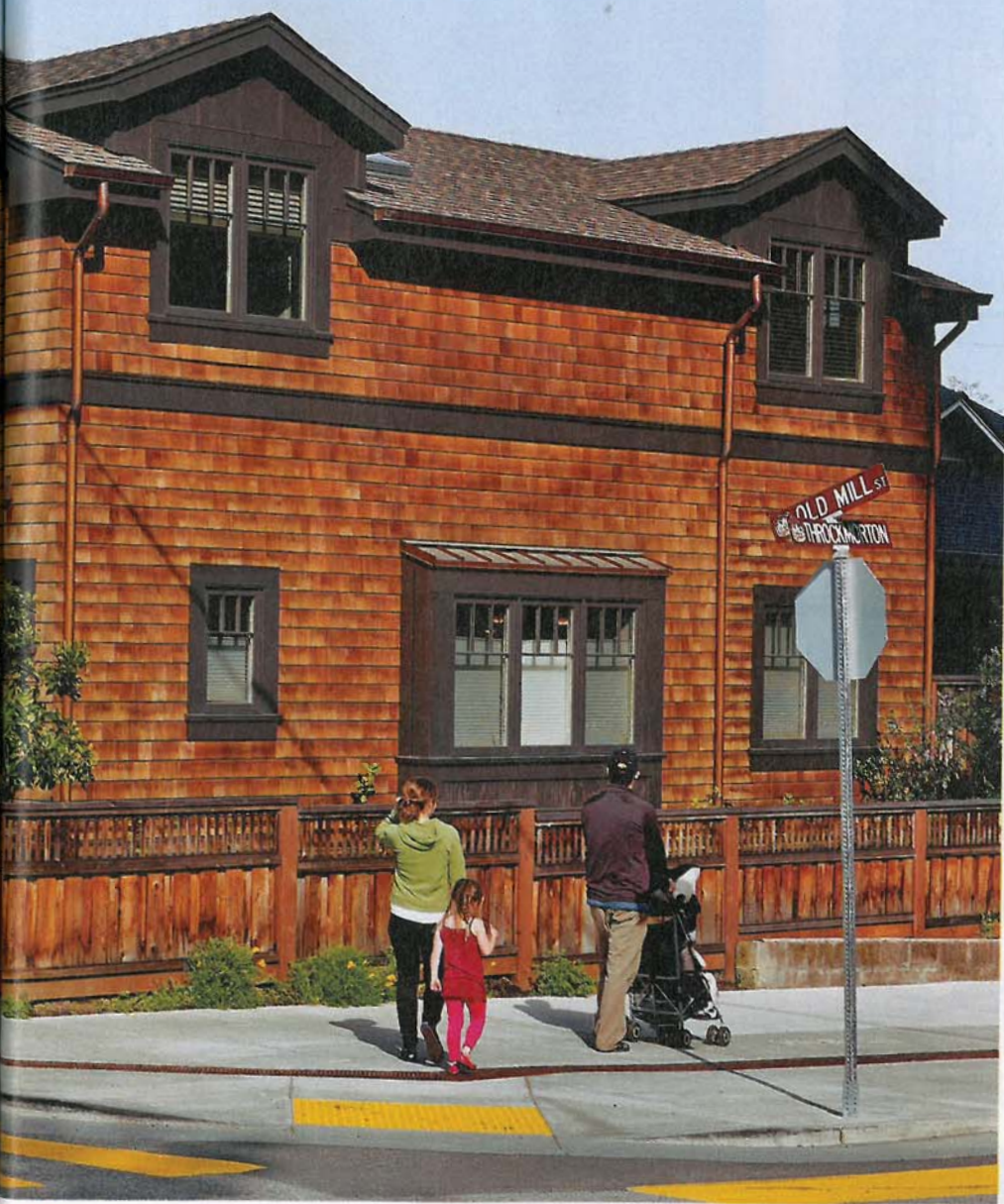
Walkability and connectivity are taking on greater urgency as America's health crisis worsens and land prices escalate. Enter a resurgence of infill. But building well isn't just about filling in with single-family houses or condominiums. It's about fitting in with what's already there. It's about a building's height and scale. Then, it's style, materials, landscaping, sustainability, and respect for historic preservation.

Infill doesn't need to replicate the surroundings, but it should reflect some commonalities. "You can have a more modern building in an older urban setting if the building behaves in a responsible way with its mass and how it relates to the street," says Galina Tachieva, partner with Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ) in Miami.

Increasingly, communities are helping by adopting form-based codes that require a sensitive development framework. The Miami 21 initiative on which DPZ consulted, for example, ensures that the city will learn from past mistakes when high-rises overshadowed homes and blocked water views.

Listening to the neighbors also is paramount. "Builders are smart to engage in a community dialogue before they finalize plans," says Mark Stapp, a real estate professor at the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University. "Too many builders fly in like pigeons, impact surroundings, then leave."

The following four projects are solid examples of infill done right.



PROJECT Old Mill Cottages, Mill Valley, Calif.

WHAT IT IS Four detached condos

BUILDER/DEVELOPER Englander Building Co., Mill Valley

ARCHITECT Francis Gough Architect, Mill Valley

Although it measured only 50 feet by 130 feet, the corner lot in the center of Mill Valley, a community of 13,000 located 15 minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge, had been zoned for four residences. Developer Peter Englander felt the neighborhood—which he lives in—was ripe for small detached condos on small lots that would cost less and require less maintenance than the area’s Shingle-style homes. Englander

purchased the site in 2008 for \$750,000, which caused a community uproar. “Many felt the site would be too dense, and that it was too close to two schools, a church, and park,” says architect Francis Gough.

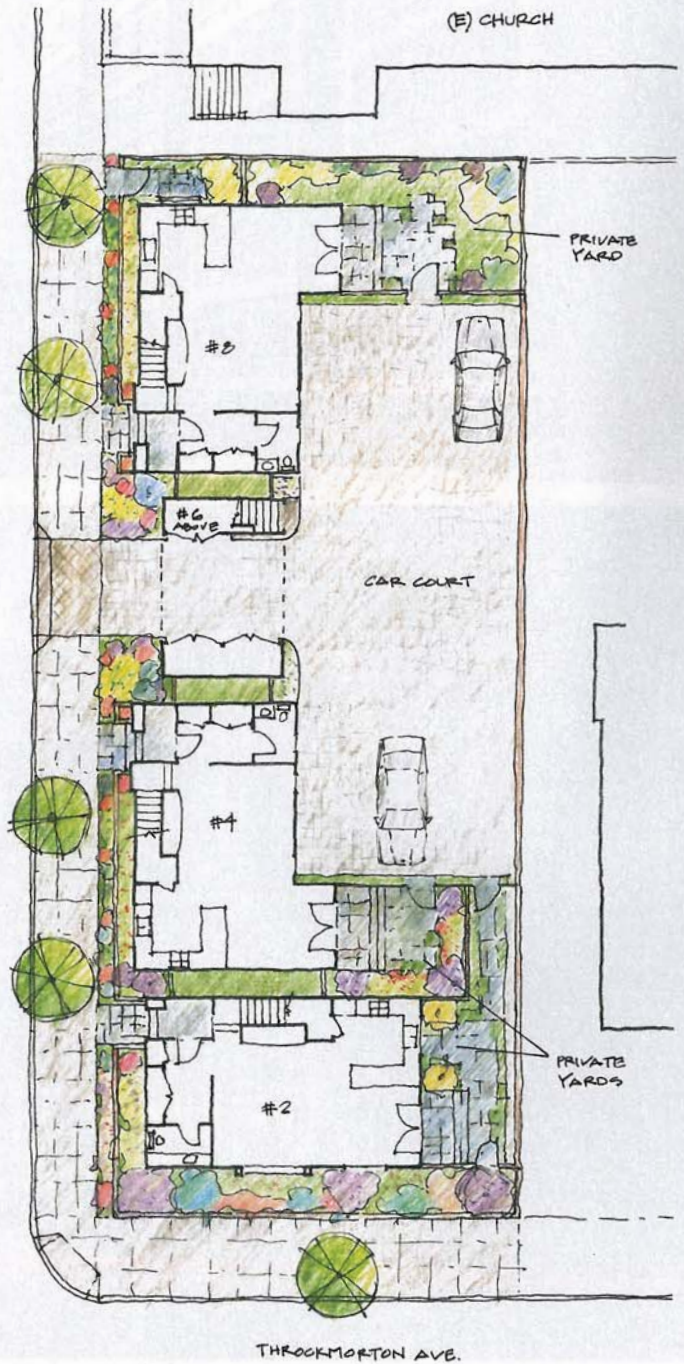
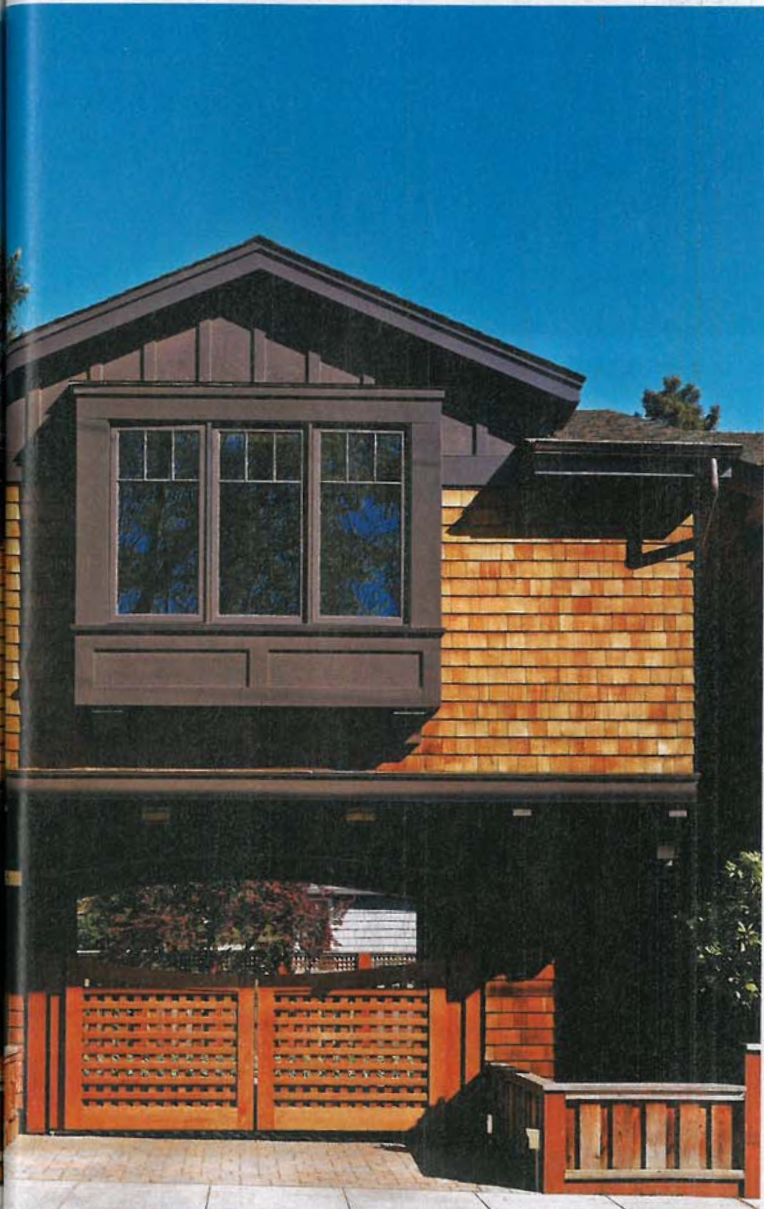
To allay concerns, the duo conformed to the zoning code, put more space between one of the units and a nearby preschool, built a fence, and designed all units in the local Shingle-style vernacular, with low-sloped, sweep-

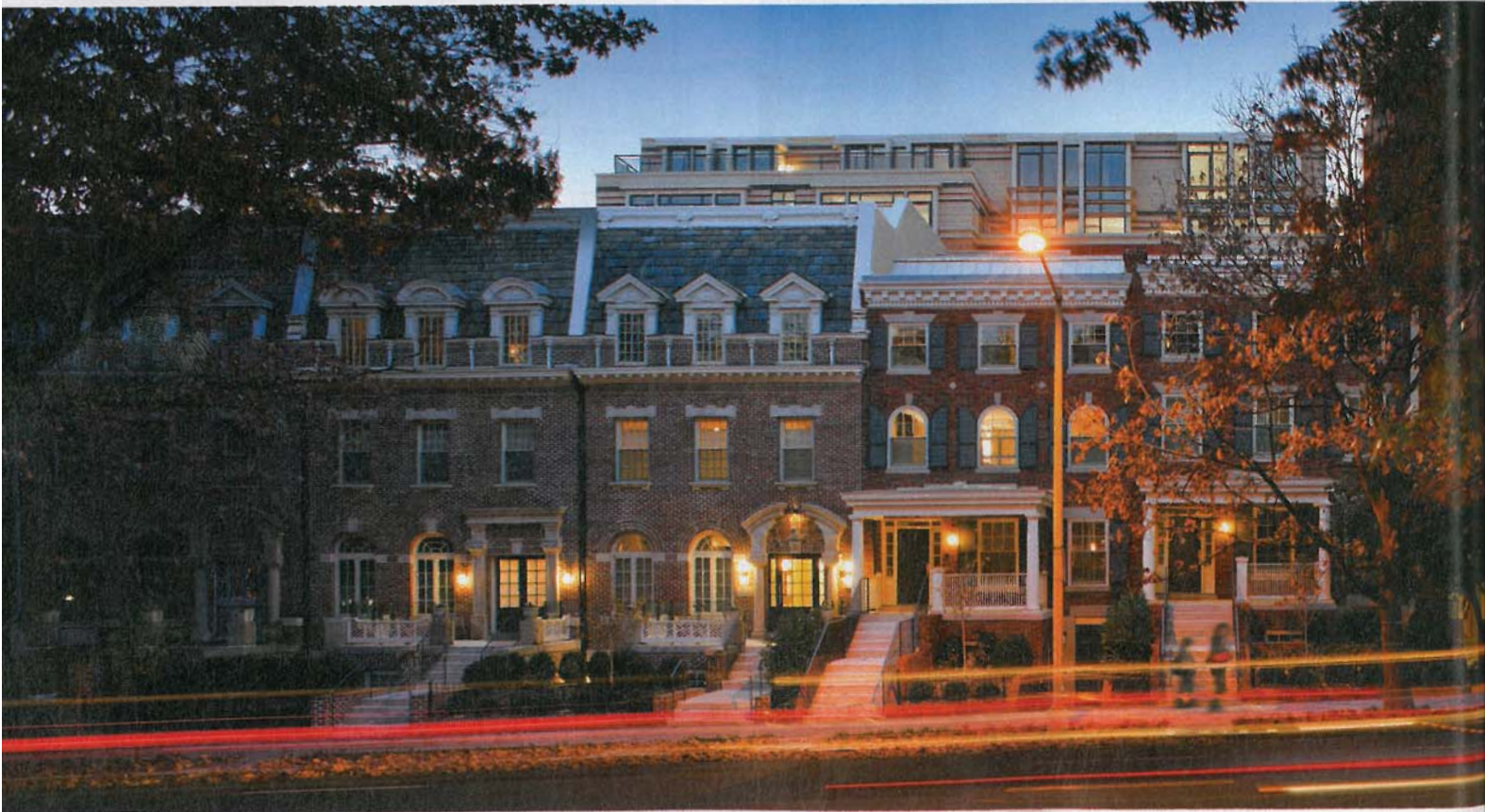
ing rooflines, extended eaves, and large brackets. The changes appeased those who initially did not support the project.

There are three 1,500-square-foot, three-bedroom condos that are market rate; the fourth is a 500-square-foot, one-bedroom affordable unit, per city quota. The plan placed parking spaces at the rear, and gave each condo its own garden. Englander says, “We wanted to put our names on something we’d be proud of.”



Parking Validation Gates lead into a car court that's deliberately concealed from the streetscape. Each condo also has a small outdoor space.





PROJECT Woodley Wardman
Condominiums, Washington, D.C.

WHAT IT IS 39 condos, with 16 in four
historic townhouses and 23 in a
seven-story new tower to the rear

ARCHITECT Bonstra | Haresign Architects,
Washington

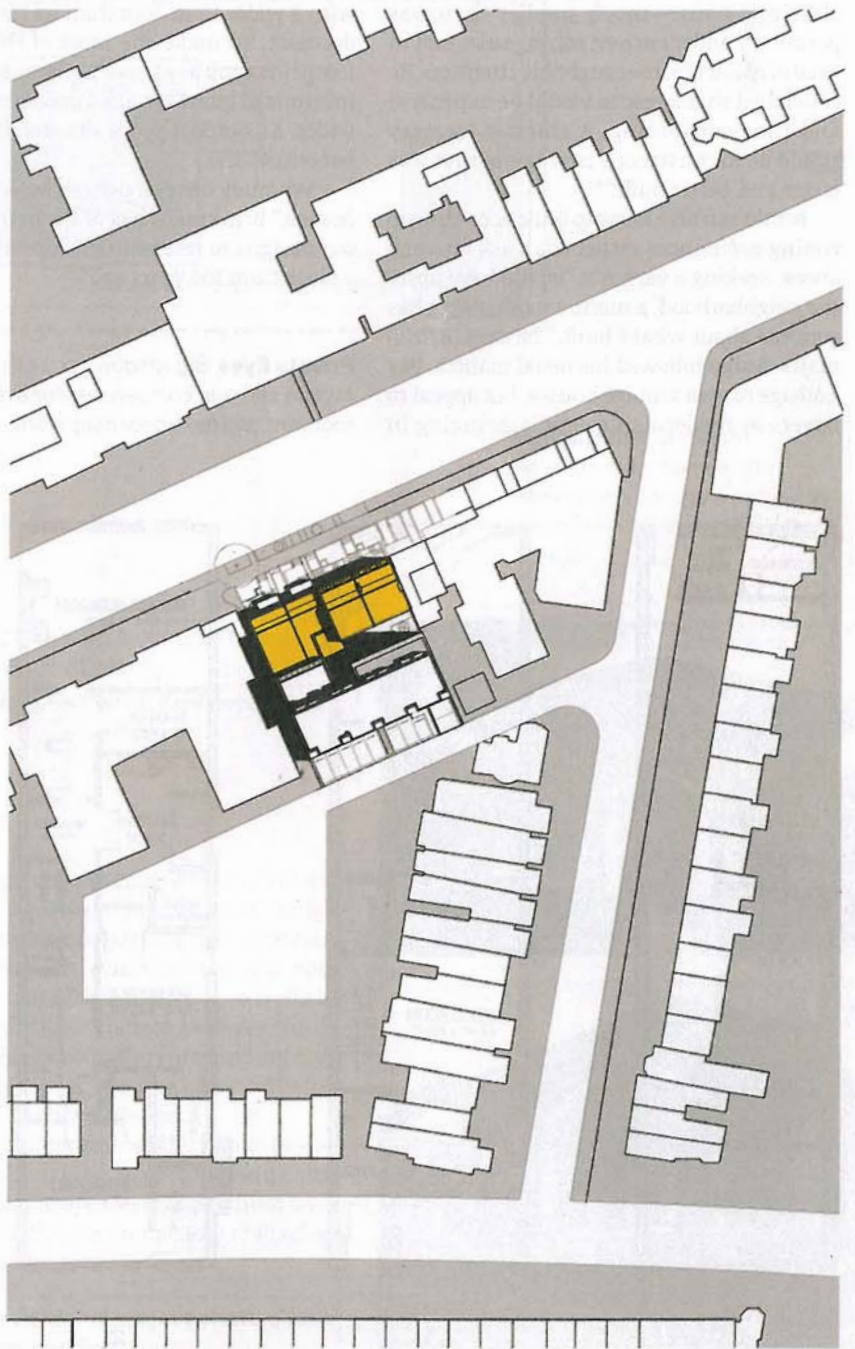
BUILDER Murillo/Malnati Group, Washington

A historic site along bustling Connecticut Avenue near the National Zoo and a subway stop led to a novel solution of how to retain old elements and add new ones while keeping each distinct. To achieve the required density for 39 condominiums, the architect and builder carefully restored the façades of four townhouses dating from 1911 to 1922, gutted interiors to include 16 units, and erected a seven-story tower to the rear with 23 additional condos that are barely visible from the street.

A courtyard with a garage beneath offers a link among the existing and new structures. "It was important to area historic preservation groups that the new building not overpower the townhouses and fit with buildings to the north," explains architect Bill Bonstra. "We did a lot of sightline studies from across the street."

Because his firm's architectural vision is "contextual modernist" and the historic guidelines encouraged visual uniqueness for old and new (rather than straight replication), Bonstra abstracted the four townhouse façades for the tower's front. Four vertical rows of bay windows, modern dormers, staggered building tiers, and a light color brick with dark accents recall the townhouse patterns. Units now run horizontally across the gutted townhouses. "The layout resembles a jigsaw puzzle, which allowed more open, varied plans of multiple levels," says developer Julio Murillo.

Opposites Attract The verticality and separation of the old townhouses was replicated, yet not slavishly copied, in the glass bays of the new tower.



Opposite page: Maxwell MacKenzie; Site plan: Courtesy Bonstra | Haresign Architects

PROJECT DePaul Residence, Chicago
WHAT IT IS Single-family detached home
BUILDER AND ARCHITECT Environs Development, Chicago

When Kenneth F. Brinkman hunts for potential infill sites, he looks for structures that don't fully utilize their capacity or property. An old brick working-class row house—much smaller than was permitted under current zoning rules and in need of major repair—caught his attention. He concluded that a rescue would be expensive and time-consuming. A smarter strategy would be to construct a new house that was larger and better built.

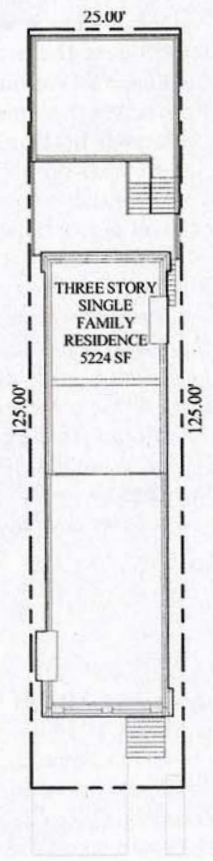
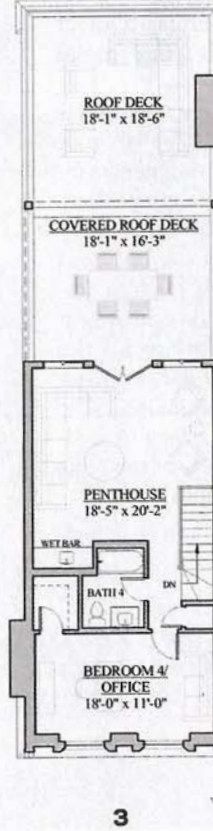
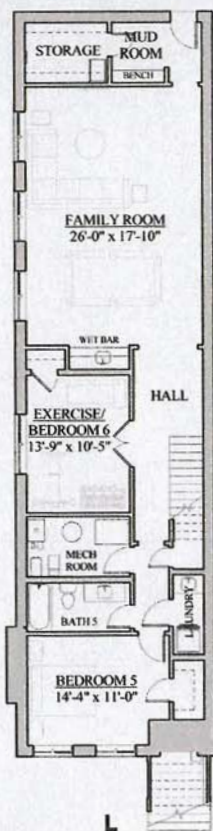
Brinkman also knew to build according to zoning ordinances rather than ask for variances. Seeking a variance “would have upset the neighborhood, a mature market that has concern about what’s built,” he says. Brinkman’s design followed his usual mantra: Pay homage to area vintage houses, but appeal to buyers by modernizing details, bringing in

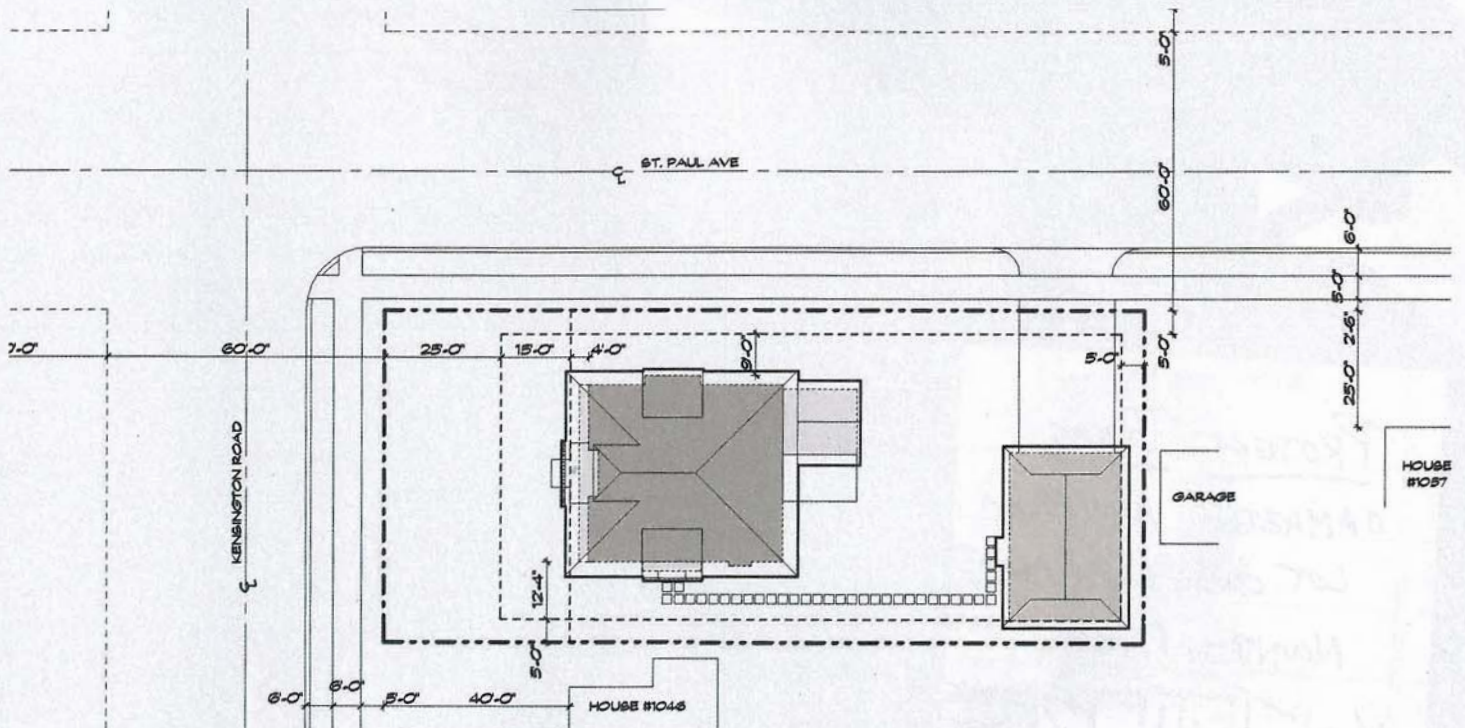
more light, and adding outdoor space.

His DePaul residence incorporates a classic brick and limestone façade punctuated by a repetition of windows, but ones that are larger, surrounded by simpler frames, and paired with a wider front door than its historic predecessor. To make the most of the narrow footprint typical of row houses, Brinkman minimized interior walls to make rooms look wider. An outdoor space sits atop the garage but out of view.

“We study historic pattern books and area homes,” Brinkman says of his firm. “I want our designs to resemble the nicest house on a block from 100 years ago.”

Private Eyes Big windows on both the façade and rear compensate for a narrow footprint and next-door neighbors.





Garage Bond To match the area's older homes, the Kensington's garage was built as a detached unit in a rear corner of the lot.

PROJECT Kensington, Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.

WHAT IT IS Single-family detached house

ARCHITECT Visbeen Architects, Grand Rapids, Mich., and Chicago

BUILDER Insignia Homes, Kentwood, Mich.

Since Visbeen Architects began working on infill, the firm has learned that the best compliment is to hear neighbors say, "That house looks like it's always been there." One of the ways architect Wayne Visbeen's new, single-family Kensington home conveys an aged patina is a scale that matches the surrounding 1920s houses.

After a Tudor-style house on the site was torn down and condemned, the property was purchased by a couple who wanted to build a green house. Visbeen's design is a 3,500-square-foot Craftsman-inspired, Four-square plan that he right-sized for the corner lot and neighborhood by making sure the façade aligned with the adjacent homes.

Other design choices contribute to its classic pose: off-white painted stucco, taupe-stained cedar shakes, columns supporting an eyebrow arch, windows without shutters, and a rear detached garage—a tradition from decades ago. Visbeen believes the design also appealed to the surrounding community because it was one of Detroit's first LEED Gold-certified houses.

Both architect and builder aim to be good neighbors by trying to avoid seeking variances, displaying renderings on a front lawn, and keeping the site and nearby roads clean during construction. **B**

Q For additional project photos, visit go.hw.net/filling-well.

