

Teaching Arch 118AC: Housing American Cultures

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If historians view the built environment as a material artifact of culture, politicians view the house as a tool for promoting particular visions of culture, and realtors view the house as a commodity to hold culture, what is the perspective of the architect? Rather than purveyor of popular culture, high culture or any singular, hegemonious culture, this class argues for architecture that support multiple and changing cultural relationships to a setting. While the design studios I have taught always argue for the relationship between the form of dwelling with inhabitation, a singular focus was not possible since no single criteria controls the design of a building. Through a unique program at U.C. Berkeley, I had the opportunity to teach the design of housing outside the studio, allowing habitation to be the proposition by which other attributes of design can be evaluated.

AMERICAN CULTURES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

In 1991, the University initiated an American cultures breadth requirement for all undergraduates. "American cultures courses approach American majority and minority cultures as parts of an interacting, pluralistic whole. They address major themes in U.S. history, society and culture and the conceptual issues relevant to understanding ethnicity, culture and pluralism and their influences upon the ways that Americans think about themselves and approach issues and problems that confront society."¹ What is unique about the program is its requirement to focus on a minimum of three cultural groups, avoiding mono-cultural, bi-polar, or hybrid views of culture. "The goal is to teach students about the U.S. in ways that take systematic account of the fact that a variety of cultural traditions and their interactions have shaped American experience."²

During the 1980's, the ethnic, cultural and racial composition of the state and undergraduate student body transformed significantly. Since 1988, no ethnic group has constituted a numerical majority of the 20,000 student population. Students felt, and statistics supported, that minority cultural and historical presence was underrepresented in many courses that addressed the American experience. There was a need to

re-create the teaching and study of disciplines areas in the American context that would connect different perspectives to one another.

As a result of this requirement, a whole array of new courses were developed within a common framework as stated by the University:'

1. The course must address major theoretical or analytical issues relevant to understanding race, culture, and ethnicity in American history or society.
2. The course must take substantial account of groups drawn from at least three of the following: African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, Chicano/Latin Americans, and European Americans.
3. The course must be integrative and comparative in that each group is studied in the larger context of American society, history, or culture.

DEVELOPING ARCH 118AC

For designers and researchers exploring links between housing and ways of living in the United States, diversity is a topic of common concern. As in the "House Rules" exhibit at the Wexner Center in 1994, the questioning typically begins with a recognition of the need to reconstitute our image of household as one mother, one father, 2.5 children and a dog. Curator Mark Robbins asked, "Can the suburban house be reprogrammed to acknowledge and reflect social change?"⁴

What constitutes a household is challenged in light of a pluralistic reality. Yet, the variety of ways in which people live has never been, nor ever will be, housed by "reprogramming" — the defining of household compositions and lifestyles — because American culture is too diverse and changing⁵. Its diversity arises from the multiplicity of ways in which we can associate with a national culture, as well as a variety of sub-groups — ethnic, racial, religious, regional, occupation, economic and stage-in-life. It is temporal because we can continually change associations to these sub-cultures.

This class begins with the assumption that one expression of culture is through the ways in which people dwell. People

make the ways they live correspond with the spaces of a house through choices, expressing their cultural values and traditions. When it comes to providing choices in housing, some think that the task of housing American cultures is solved through providing a variety of types of dwellings — a consumer's choice. This class proposes that the task is better solved through providing opportunities for a variety in ways of dwelling — a cultural choice.

There are three salient characteristics about the approach to choice by contemporary housing development: first, it is a market driven choice, interested in appealing and selling to a mass market. Second, to appeal to the broadest markets possible, it is obsessed with identifying normative lifestyles with differences in ways of living seen as variations. Third, to match lifestyles with a house, the designs are program driven. That is to say, the activities and spaces of a lifestyle are specified, the appropriate adjacencies determined, and model homes produced with options and accessories to personalize a home. This approach limits the definition of the diversity of American cultures and capitalizes upon the nature and ability of people and households to adapt to defined norms. More significantly, it sees culture as static rather than temporal, limiting every day choices and longer term changes.

An alternative view presumes that culture, if allowed, will find its place. Rather than seeing the task of housing American cultures as prescribing a precise fit of a sub-culture's activities with a house's form, dwellings need to be designed that allow interpretation in the ways that they are used. This requires thinking of how each household inhabits their home, observing how people live and occupy their homes, and studying inhabitation as a continuous expression of choice. For instance, where should each person sleep? How do they sleep, all together or separately? On what should they sleep? What other activities accompany sleeping? Are guests allowed into the sleeping area? Should one sleep in the front of the house or the back, above or below? Where should a guest or new family member sleep? Residents make choices and changes by assessing their ways of living in relationship to a house. This class studies how a house's form either constrains or enables a variety of answers to these questions.

COURSE CONTENT

The intent of the course is two-fold: first, to explore how people respond to, interact with and inhabit their dwelling environment. Cultural variety and change are assumed as inherent and ongoing in the residential environment. Second, the class explores how the housing environment accommodates a range of differences between individuals and simultaneously supports a shared, collective understanding of a community. The course has three components: a theoretical understanding of residential design from the perspectives of professional practice and cultural practices; a comparative analysis of everyday routines based on student surveys of cultural patterns of inhabitation; and lastly, the design of dwelling environments that accommodate a range of cultural readings.

COURSE FORMAT AND CONTENT

This three-unit class meets twice a week, for 1.5 hours each session. The material of the class is covered as lectures in the first weekly session, supported by slides or overhead projections and punctuated by questions and discussions. The second session introduces particular skills and discusses reading and assignments. In the Fall of 1996, the first year the course was offered, the class attracted 45 students, the limit established for enrollment. About two-thirds were undergraduates whose declared majors were in areas outside architecture or urban planning. Of the remaining third, a third again were undergraduates who had declared architecture as their major and the rest were second or third year graduate students in the M.Arch program. Given the diverse audience that this course serves, two kinds of sections are conducted, teaching different skills based on the background of the student.

The undergraduate section focuses on teaching primary environmental appreciation and skills: reading and observing form in the environment, seeing the interaction between people's actions and form, and translating observations into two-dimensional representations. The seminar sessions tend to be personal narratives in relation to the topics being discussed and recognition of the similarity and differences in their responses.

The design section of graduates and undergraduates focuses on the teaching of housing design that is not solely program based, but includes systemic ways of imbedding capacity in dimensions, access and claim. Students recognize their own cultural biases in their design of house form and learn concepts for design that enable multiple points of view.

Due to the limitations for the length of articles for this publication, a description of the weekly content is summarized in the class schedule (see Figure 1.) A fuller description of each of the weekly presentations will be presented at the conference.

COURSE EXERCISES/STUDENT SKILLS

Exercise 1: Memories of dwelling- Each student draws a plan of a home and its environs that they have lived in with family members, including interior and exterior furniture and neighbors homes with written recollections of how and when each space was used on a typical day and on special events. (See Figure 2.)

Exercise 2: Definitions of culture- First, each student is asked to select four words that describes their cultural identity. Then, they write a personal narrative of their own culture and the relationship of that culture with dwelling patterns discussed in Exercise 1. (See Figure 3.)

Exercise 3: Patterns of inhabitation- In teams of two, students document three homes in which the residents identify themselves as a common cultural group. The field survey and analysis are the central components of the class. Oral and written presentations are required in which each team dis-

Arch 118AC**Schedule**

		topic	assignments
August	27	<u>Residential Design: Architectural and Cultural Practices</u>	
1	29	The American Dwelling Environment Section: Phenomena and Practices of Dwelling	Norberg-Schulz 1985 Exercise 1: Memories of Dwelling
Sept	3	Supporting Variations	Ponce 1993
2	5	Section: Discussion of Memories of Dwelling	Exercise 2: Defining Culture
	10	Defining Culture	Waters 1990 and Haidip 1994
3	12	Section: Discussion of Definitions	
	17	<u>Cultural Patterns of Inhabitation</u>	
4	19	Community and Culture Section: Patterns of Inhabitation	Conzen 1990 Exercise 3: Patterns of Inhabitation
	24	Asian Americans' California Settlement	Knapp, Engels or Fong
5	26	Section: Chinese-American Patterns	
October	1	European-American California Settlement	Conzen and GB Dept of Housing
6	3	Section: English-American Patterns	
	8	Hispanic-American California Settlement	Pader 1993 and Wilson 1984
7	10	Section: Mexican-American Patterns	
	15	Presentations: Cultural Patterns of Inhabitation	
8	17	Presentations in 104 (cont'd)	
	22	Presentations in 104 (cont'd)	
9	24	Section: Comparative Analysis	
	29	Wrap up Discussion/The American Home	Moore 1974.
10	31	Section: Yours	
November	5	<u>Designing the Residential Environment</u>	
11	7	Section: A Design Exercise	Assignment 4: Testing Capacity
	12	Accommodating Choice	Herdeg 1983, Hertzberger 1990
12	14	Section: Defining Capacity	
	19	Case Studies: Places-San Francisco and Clayton	Rapoport 1969, Hall 1966
13	21	Section: Other Design Aspects	
	26	Case Studies: Practices-Hertzberger and Schindler	
14	28	Holiday	
December	3	Toward Housing American Cultures	Read Bourdieu 1990
15	5	Section: Cultural and Professional Practices	

Figure 1. Class schedule listing lecture and section topic with corresponding assignments.

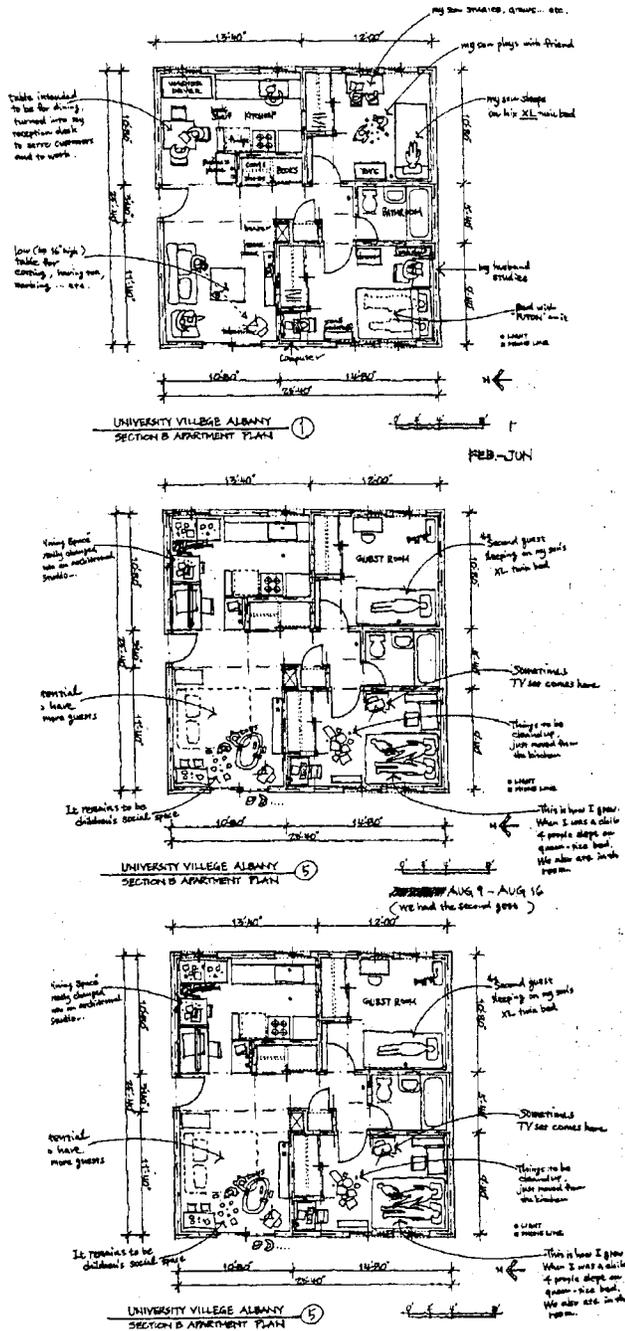


Figure 2. Exercise 1: Memories of Dwelling. This student, her husband and son live in graduate housing on campus. In these plans, she shows how her family from Japan lives in their unit. As a result of this exercise, she became interested in the various ways that students from different countries and heritages occupied these small apartments, see Figure 4 and 5. (student: A. Suzuki)

discusses the commonalities and differences in the activities they observe. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

Exercise 4: Accommodating Choice- This last exercise has two objectives: the first is to observe the relationships of different design attributes that an architect considers in the design of a house — dimensions, access, light, assemblage and claim. The second objective is to project criteria for

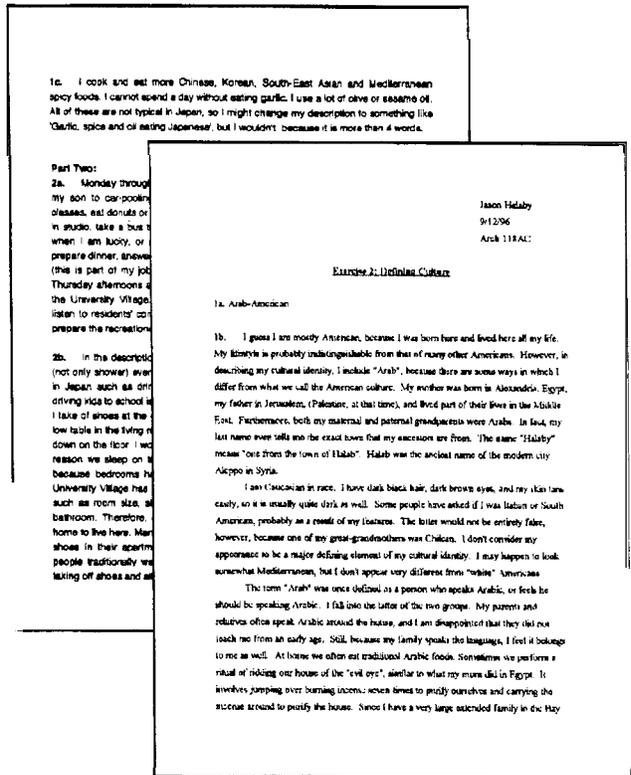


Figure 3. Exercise 2: Defining Culture. Two examples of explorations into identifying cultural patterns of living. (students: J. Halaby, A. Suzuki)

houses that support a range of cultural choices about how households occupy their homes. By comparing one of student's documented houses with a given house through a series of graphic overlays, the houses are compared attribute by attribute. A final paper is required to discuss the successes and failures of the dwellings to accommodate a range of patterns. (See Figure 6.)

STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF THE CLASS

Through mid- and end-of semester evaluations as well as personal conversations, a majority of the students responded enthusiastically to the material presented. While many of the undergraduates initially signed up for the class only to fulfill their graduation requirement, they expressed appreciation for the complexity of design. While some expressed specific interest in seeing how other people live, both through lecture and through their own documentation, others were fascinated about house design itself. The class seemed to have made a personal connection between the ways in which people live with the discipline of architecture. The three undergraduates who responded negatively in the written evaluations thought the entire American cultures requirement was unnecessary. Of the design students who took the class, about half used the approaches they learned for part of their final theses, and three have used the systemic approaches almost entirely as the proposition of their theses for the design of housing. Longer

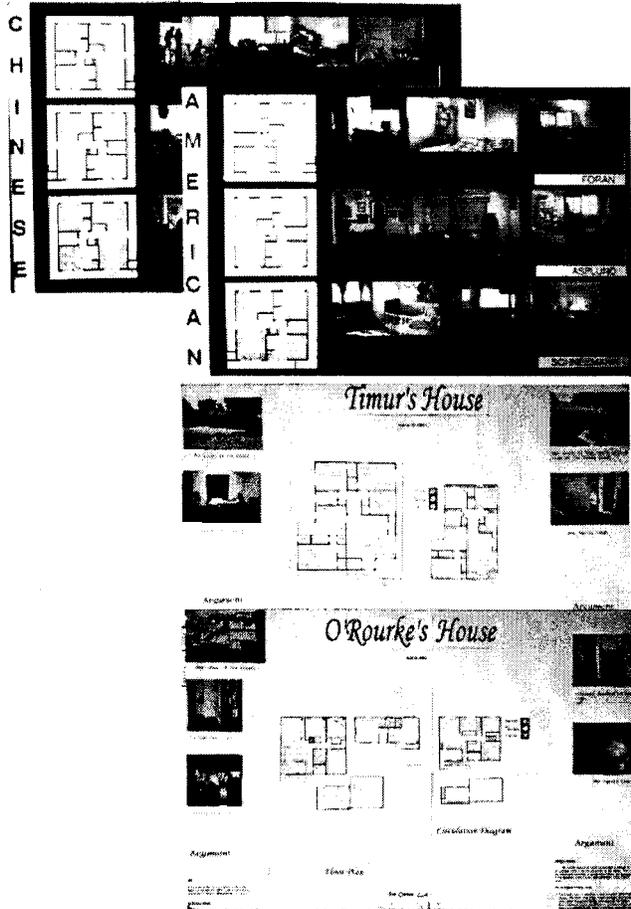


Figure 4. Exercise 3: Field Documentation. (students: S. Shih, S. Schneeman)

range evaluations and influences cannot yet be assessed until the course has been taught for a few more years.

SUMMARY

The ability for students to recognize their own voice — in this class through the ways in which they live — and how it is the same and different from others is the first lesson that all students take away from the class. I was intrigued at how many students began with the assumption that they had no culture or that their culture was an absence of culture. They had to be convinced that their choices about everyday ways of living are based on traditions, habits and desires that they contribute to defining one's culture. In recognizing their own patterns, they began to see similarities and differences with others. While the undergraduates became competent in analysis of house form and choice, the design students acquired competence in design of form that enables choices. In the design studio, a broad discussion about inhabitation and cultural multiplicity can be briefly covered, but the task of the design studio setting is to produce a built environment in which many criteria must be taken into equal consideration. In teaching Arch 118AC, the teaching of housing design is taken out of the studio, allowing the inhabitation to be the

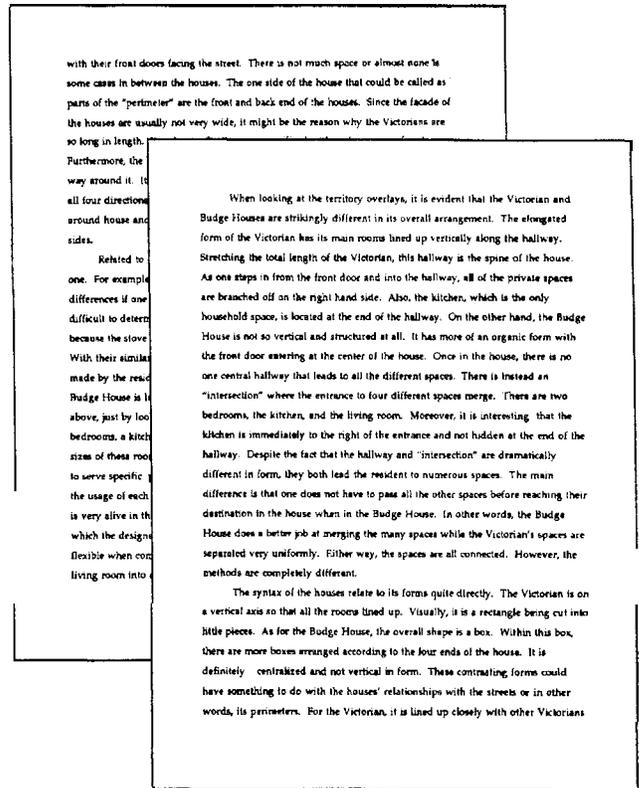


Figure 5. Exercise 3: Examples of the boards presented to the class. (students: A. Suzuki, S. Schneeman, S. Shih, K. Chen; R. Chao, D. Huang)

proposition by which other attributes of design can be evaluated. It is my hope that teaching the class will have a long-term effect on the physical environment — that those who design it will consider the house as support for cultural differences and changes and that those who dwell in it will choose their housing more competently, demanding more of their physical environment.

NOTES

- ¹ Brochure from the American Cultures Program at University of California at Berkeley. This program is also discussed by R. Davis in "Writing Multiculturalism into Architecture Curricula," *JAE* Vol 4, No 1 (1993).
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ A. Busch. "suburbia and suspense," *Metropolis* (October 1994): 116.
- ⁵ M.C. Waters. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- ⁶ A. Rapoport in "Forward," *Housing, Culture and Design: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by S. Low and E. Chambers (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) talks of "congruence" between lifestyle and the environment. E. Pader in "Spatiality and Social Change: Domestic Space Use in Mexico and the United States," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 20, No. 1 (1993): 114, writes "that the ways in which people use and organize their spaces are dynamically implicated in the enculturation process, in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of one's 'intelligible universe'."

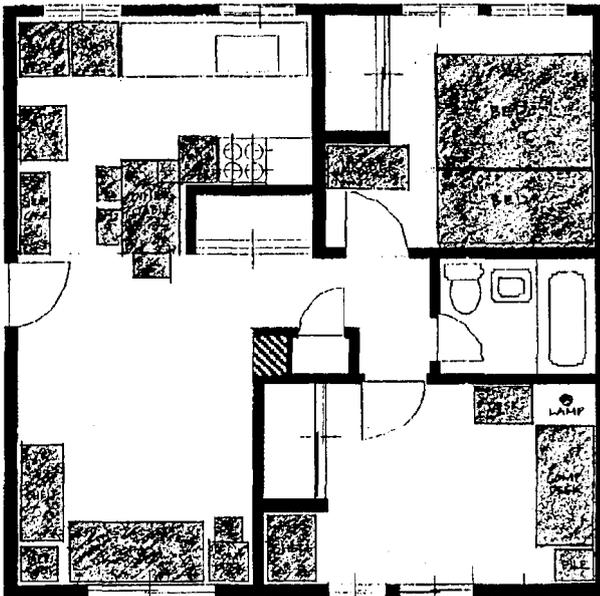
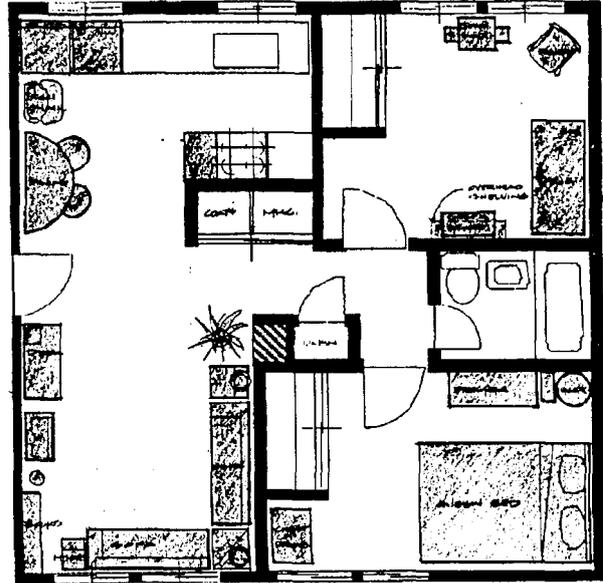
Arch 118AC interview

Introduce yourself and your partner, describe the intent of the project, ask permission to photograph. If someone should ask, this material will only be used in class. Nothing will be published without obtaining their permission first.

- When was the house built?
- How long have you lived here? *1 1/2 YEARS*
- How many people live in the house and what is their relationship to each other? their ages?
3
STEVE - HUSBAND / FATHER
JENNIFER - WIFE / MOTHER
CAROLINE - DAUGHTER
- Do you own or rent the house? *RENT*
- Who do you consider to be your community?
*LOCAL NEIGHBORS, CHURCH FRIENDS,
SCHOOL FRIENDS*

When and where do you meet them?
*COURTYARD, INDIV. APARTMENTS, CHURCH,
SCHOOL*

- What is a typical day in your home like?
STEVE - LEAVES HOME @ 8:30 - RETURNS @ 9-11:30
THEN EAT DINNER, CLEAN UP, SPEND TIME
W/ DAUGHTER / FAMILY, GO TO BED
JENNIFER - UP @ 7:30, SOMETIMES DO FAMILY DEVIATION
TOGETHER, AFTER STEVE LEAVES GIVES CAROLINE
A BATH, B'FAST, MAYBE WATCH A VIDEO,
THEN MAYBE GO INTO COURTYARD SO CAROLINE
CAN PLAY W/ NEIGHBOR KIDS, THEN A NAP.
(FOR BOTH). AFTER LUNCH IS SIMILAR. THEN
DINNER. ON RARE OCCASION STEVE IS HOME
@ DINNER TIME & WE EAT TOGETHER.



Arch 118AC Interview

Introduce yourself and your partner, describe the intent of the project, ask permission to photograph. If someone should ask, this material will only be used in class. Nothing will be published without obtaining their permission first.

- When was the house built?
- How long have you lived here? *1 year & 10 months*
- How many people live in the house and what is their relationship to each other? their ages?
*3. I, my wife, and daughter (29, 29, 2 years & 8 months old
respectively)*
- Do you own or rent the house? *rent*
- Who do you consider to be your community?
U.C. Village (& our church people)

When and where do you meet them?
*Every Wednesday, Friday night & all Sunday
At Church or at home*

- What is a typical day in your home like?
*During day time, usually nobody's at home except wife
All family members gather around dinner time and have
dinner together. After having dinner, we play with our
daughter in the living room with watching TV.
Some time I study in the study room.
Sometimes church friends visit us ~~at night~~ and have
dinner in the living room.*

Figure 6. Exercise 4: Accommodating Choice. Example of written conclusion comparing ways in which capacity is imbedded in the Budge House by Moore and one of the documented houses from the previous exercise. (student: R.Chao)

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