

Tectonic Gardens: The Joy House Project

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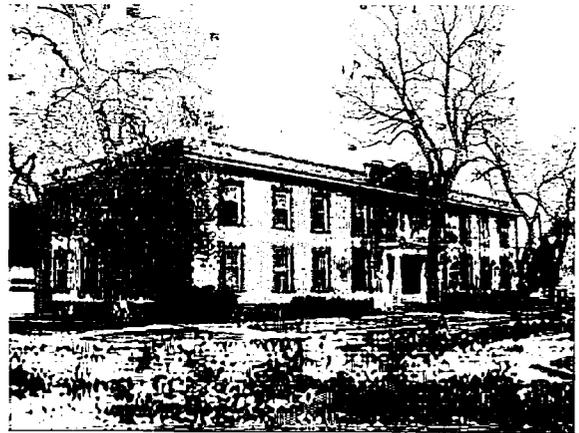
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The Tectonic Gardens initiative focuses on small, unremarkable, and often forgotten places adjacent to the lives of underserved people. Located in the boundary between architecture and landscape the project seeks to create experiential delight out of small-scale design opportunities. Through the adaptive re-use and recycling of leftover urban space tectonic gardens augment and enhance existing building infrastructures with new, primarily outdoor, spaces That provide pragmatic functions, promote play, and exhibit a social and environmental conscience.

The Joy House, one of seven buildings operated by the nonprofit Providence Network, provides up to two years of

temporary shelter and counseling for women and children affected by domestic violence.



The client's programmatic requirements were initially limited to pragmatic code compliance issues. Specifically, the Providence Network wanted to establish a daycare facility in the SW corner of the building and had hired a local contractor to renovate and upgrade the interior. As part of a larger renovation financial provisions of \$14,000 had been set aside for a fire egress ramp that was required

for daycare facilities to meet minimum fire-safety standards established by the state licensing commission. An agreement was reached between the Providence Network, the general contractor, and the University in which the design/build team would be the subcontractors in charge of the design and construction of the ramp and surrounding landscape

Given that the existing building filled nearly the whole site, the space available for the project was limited to a 9ft x 100ft alley-like strip adjacent to a 10ft x 24ft deck located on the North side of the building. Filled with toys, bikes, and debris the Joy House residents felt that the north side of the site was not a safe place for the children to play in its current condition. As a result the front porch and sidewalk on the south side of the building served as the de-facto playground. However, due to the nature of the shelter and the recent experiences of the residents, there was significant apprehension about the exposed, public nature of the sidewalk. Concerns regarding the potential for harassment by fathers and ex-spouses conflicted with the mother's desire to allow the kids to play.

Over the course of 12 weeks a group of graduate architecture students and one professor undertook all aspects related to the design, planning, coordination, material specification, and construction of a new courtyard at the Joy House Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence in downtown Denver, Colorado.

The design strategy extends the limited interior, public space within the 14-unit, 3-story apartment complex creating a much-needed social space for the shelter's adult residents and a protected play area for their children. The initial programmatic requirement of a fire egress ramp was expanded to include a variety of outdoor seating areas, play space, privacy screens, a bbq, and storage facilities. Infrastructural provisions for a planned second-story balcony, depicted in the model images, were included in the completed project such that the balcony can be easily installed when funding becomes available. The project, as constructed, evolved into a tectonic garden that challenges singular definitions of pragmatics and function while blurring the boundaries between architecture and landscape, design and construction.

