

## The Moreland Residence

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Located in an established neighborhood of conservative privilege and aggressive vegetation in Baton Rouge Louisiana, this project investigates the unmapped boundary between two parallel versions of the domestic landscape. These versions segregate the role and utilization of vernacular traditions into two primary categories: the symbolic and the spatial. This basic dichotomy structures a study of the semantic ambiguities surrounding contemporary notions of contextual propriety and normative form. Foregrounding Spatial strategies the project attempts to undermine superficial regionalism by celebrating the social and environmental lessons evident in the architectural culture of our recent past.

The extreme climatic conditions of southern Louisiana exert unique, often uncompromising, demands on inhabitation. When temperature and humidity levels hover consistently in the 90's ambivalence toward shade, orientation, and breeze is not an option. The challenges posed by high levels of heat, humidity, rain, and sun have inspired inventive architectural solutions. For instance, the familiar dogtrot and shotgun houses imported from Haiti and the West Indies, cross-pollinated with Creole and Acadian influences exhibit evolutionary, pragmatic wisdom in their cross-ventilation and shading strategies. These strategies take the form of porches, balconies, and big roofs with extended overhangs; all of which developed in response to the blunt realities of a particular time and place.



No less pragmatic, however, was the advent of air-conditioning which enabled the development of an alternate vernacular freed from climatic imperatives. As a result Mechanization replaced spatial responses to the demands of solar orientation, scale, and dominant wind patterns. Thus, The iconic porch column, relieved of its function of support for broad roof overhangs and other

deep shaded transitional spaces, could be applied directly onto the surface of the building as a symbolic motif. This collapse of the porch as a climatic spatial element into an applied semiotic element exemplifies the predominate role now played by vernacular forms in contemporary construction. The popular success of this metonymic gesture registers subtle but significant social and cultural changes. The reclassification of the porch as symbol rather than necessity alters the associated social traditions rooted in these ambiguous, interstitial spaces. This clarified boundary between interior and exterior has had a profound effect on the character, scope, and location of outdoor activity.

A short drive through a series of diverse neighborhoods around Baton Rouge reveals these changes in stark contrast. At first glance, obvious distinctions, closely linked to the politics of race and income, emerge in terms of the qualitative level of infrastructural maintenance and domestic scale. Upon closer examination comparisons between new and old neighborhoods expose radical disparities in the way people occupy outdoor space.

The streets where houses do not have air conditioning are crowded with activity: Cars are washed in front yards, children playing along the sidewalk spill out into the street and adults gather on rickety porches in search of shaded relief. Notably, these adults are doing nothing: At least nothing requiring physical activity or extended movement. Some might be talking or eating, but most are simply sitting. This familiar, almost quaint, response to the heat engenders long, languid spells of exquisite nothingness. Thus, the functional primacy underpinning the spatial porch enables a cultural tradition of social gathering in or adjacent to, the public space of the street.



The Moreland Residence combines the linear quality of the local “Shotgun” house typology with the side entry found in the Charleston Single House. The axial circulation links a sequence of distinct programmatic elements across the length of the site. Along this path, a series of articulated thresholds modulate programmatic transitions as the formal procession moves from the buildings more public character of the west elevation to the relatively private east side. More boundary than object, the main building volume sits tight to the north property line, maximizing the size of the south courtyard.

Organized around a series of outdoor rooms, gardens, and courtyards the project provides a range of outdoor living areas aimed at reclaiming languid traditions. The spatial and experiential organization blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior. Programmatically, this blurring embraces the contingencies of climate to expand the functional limits of domestic space. Serving as a constant reminder and enticement the interior realm features a series framed vistas highlighting the patterns of light and shadow cast by the surrounding trees while an abundance of operable doors and windows provide cross ventilation and constant enticement.

Five significant outdoor spaces organize and animate the project. Moving from West to East, the arrival sequence passes through the front yard, under the large two-story roof overhang and into the entry vestibule. Similar to a front porch the entry vestibule and outdoor dining room combine to provide a transition between the public street and the domestic realm as well as between indoor and outdoor habitation.

Through the front door the axial circulation sequence derived from the shotgun house continues into the main public core where the double height LR/DR volume occupies the center of the house. Large transparent planes of glass on the north and south allow the interior space to visually extend beyond the walls of the building and into the adjacent outdoor spaces.



To the east end of the house the axial circulation sequence moves back outside, along the edge of a private garden dominated by a single Pecan tree, and through the back gate. Defined by the house, fence, and shed the full effect of this meditative space is experienced from inside the stacked bedrooms where expansive windows frame the tree trunk and canopy. Morning sun casts evocative shadows into the rooms while afternoon shadows are projected against the simple, corrugated shed.

Back In the center of the house a staircase rises to the second floor bridge leading to the final outdoor space. Adjacent to the library/study two magnificent Oak trees encapsulate the balcony and filter the setting sun. Dominating the west elevation this subtracted element in the main volume of the building both foreshadows and concludes a spatial sequence inspired by the simple act of sitting outside.