



MORE FOR LESS



**BROADWAY
COURT
HOUSING**
SANTA MONICA
BY
PUGH SCARPA
KODAMA

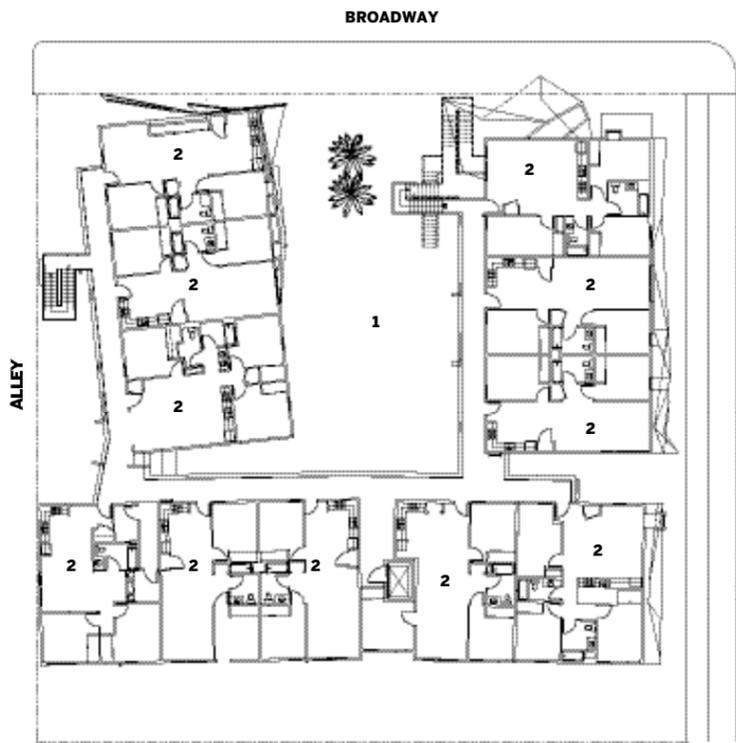
**BY MAXIMIZING DESIGN AND EFFICIENCIES,
PROJECTS ON OPPOSITE COASTS – ONE IN
BROOKLYN, THE OTHER IN SANTA MONICA –
PROVE THAT AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEED
NOT LOOK OR FEEL CHEAP**
BY MIMI ZEIGER

PHOTOGRAPHY OF BROADWAY COURT HOUSING BY MARVIN RAND
PHOTOGRAPHY OF GLENMORE GARDENS BY RICHARD BARNES

Architect Lawrence Scarpa stands in the garage below the Santa Monica apartment building designed by Pugh Scarpa Kodama, a project-specific extension of Pugh + Scarpa, the firm he helms with Gwynne Pugh and Angela Brooks. He surveys the bare concrete walls and the array of 80 carefully delineated parking spaces. Mid-day sun streams through large openings in the roof deck and brightens the subterranean space. The trunk of a lone palm tree rises from a planter, up through a hole and out of view. Although an unlikely forum, the garage happens to be the ideal place for the designer to philosophize on affordable housing. The project – Broadway Court, built for the non-profit developer Community Corporation of Santa Monica (CCSM) – twists around the Miesian adage and makes more out of less.

LEFT THE EAST FACADE OF THE BROADWAY COURT HOUSING PROJECT INCORPORATES ASYMMETRICAL PLEATS AND FOLDS AND AN IRREGULAR ARRAY OF OPERABLE WINDOWS THAT JUT OUT AND PULL BACK FROM THE BUILDING'S SURFACE, SUPPLYING NATURAL LIGHT AND VENTILATION.
BELOW CUSTOM-PRESSED BLOCKS OF RECYCLED ALUMINUM CANS ARE USED AS CLADDING AT GROUND LEVEL.





TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN
 1 COMMON COURTYARD
 2 LIVING UNIT

For Scarpa, the design encapsulates budgetary limitations and an ethical response to a social need. “We keep pushing the aspect of building responsibility,” he says. “We are good at making our projects efficient, so there is very little to value-engineer out.” In the case of the garage, the light wells save it from feeling dank and unsafe while bringing fresh air below grade. As a result, the parking structure is ventilated without mechanical ductwork, a huge cost and aesthetic savings.

The past century was awash with affordable housing polemics, from modernist maxims for *existenz minimum* to traditionally styled single-family homes. With each iteration, the basic problem remains the same: how to balance architecture’s price tag with making a reasonable place to live. In today’s market, the question is applicable at multiple scales, encompassing single buildings and urban development plans. Booming with new growth, such metropolitan areas as Los Angeles and New York face a demand for houses and apartments at all income levels. Market-rate loft condos are as ubiquitous in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighbourhood as in downtown L.A. Rents and real estate are high, and while low- and middle-income projects are getting built, the overwhelming need for affordable housing often eclipses the architecture. Such firms as Pugh + Scarpa and Brooklyn-based Della Valle Bernheimer succeed in creating balanced projects, but they do it by wrestling with these issues from the basement up.

Says CCSM’s executive director, Joan Ling, “It’s a challenging process. We buy properties in a very desirable area, it’s a very tight market, very competitive, and we usually pay more than we want to. Construction is extremely difficult. The City of Santa Monica is persnickety about what it wants to see, and the cost of materials has skyrocketed.” Ling’s organization





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LEFT AND ABOVE A PERFORATED METAL "SAIL" ON THE SOUTH-FACING MAIN FACADE MARKS THE BUILDING AND FUNCTIONS AS A SUN AND PRIVACY SCREEN. THE BUILDING WAS SITED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PREVAILING WINDS, AND ITS U-SHAPE, WITH CENTRAL COURTYARD, WAS DESIGNED TO ACT LIKE A GIANT WIND SCOOP.

applies for federal, state, municipal and private funding, then uses those monies to construct individual projects. Charged with a mission to create affordable housing for low-wage workers and their families, CCSM not only develops but also manages the residences. Staff live on site and are intimately familiar with the ebb and flow of daily life there. So it's no surprise that Ling turns to local southern California firms – such as Pugh + Scarpa, Koning Eizenberg Architecture and Daly Genik Architects, offices known for a wide-range of design-minded buildings – to mix a sense of place with economy.

"The relationship goes beyond architect and client. There's a mission-driven social aspect to it," she explains. "All the architects have a design sensibility that they come with. They may vary, but you hire them because you like their work and you think their sensibility will fit into the neighbourhood. We let them develop the design. We want their most creative



ABOVE ON THE WEST-FACING ELEVATION, SUN-BLOCKING METAL SCREENS ACCENT THE EXTERNAL STAIRS AND WALKWAYS. **RIGHT** IN THE LARGE CENTRAL COURTYARD, WHICH IS ANIMATED BY A SCULPTURAL STAIRCASE, A PALM TREE EMERGES THROUGH AN OPENING THAT SUPPLIES VENTILATION TO THE PARKING GARAGE BELOW. THE BUILDING EMPLOYS PASSIVE COOLING STRATEGIES THROUGHOUT AND HAS NO MECHANICAL AIR CONDITIONERS.



work. We provide them with some guidance, but we don't need to tell them how to mass a building. As affordable housing builders, cost containment is a big deal for us, but we also want to have design that will be an example of good architecture."

Pugh + Scarpa teamed with CCSM in 2000 on Colorado Court. Consisting of 44 single-resident occupancy units around a central yard, the project is an early demonstration of energy-efficient building practices: the facade sports a solar photovoltaic array, and is oriented to pick up breezes and reduce heating and cooling loads. Since then, the firm has honed its sustainability skills and employs techniques on projects across the budgetary spectrum. For Scarpa, environmental design isn't a luxury reserved for those who can afford LEED-rated custom homes. "What is green?" he asks rhetorically. "It is materials and how a building is sited. Green isn't a formal design issue; it is a matter of ethics."

The footprint of Broadway Court is similar to that of Colorado Court: family-sized apartments wrap in a U shape around a lively courtyard. Kids play soccer in the open space and hang out on the exterior stairs after school. The scheme is a typical Los Angeles building type, but the architect made modifications that increase energy efficiency and add character.

The ochre-coloured complex fronts Broadway, a wide avenue dotted with a mix of light industrial, commercial and residential structures. The apartment building makes a bold, and somewhat controversial, impact on the street. A perforated metal screen flamboyantly bends down from the roof and folds across the facade. At ground level, Scarpa stacked blocks made of crushed aluminum cans. The brand name soda and beer insignia add colour and texture, but neighbours and residents have a range of opinions on the matter. Some see the blocks as innovative materials, while others see trash better suited for recycling than building.

The east and west facades are exposed to heavy doses of morning and

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afternoon sun. The west is shielded by walkways projecting outward, but to cut morning heat gain Scarpa created thick walls on the east side of each wing. The move fits easily within CCSM's budget. "It is just the cost of wood studs and drywall, but it creates a thermal barrier," he explains.

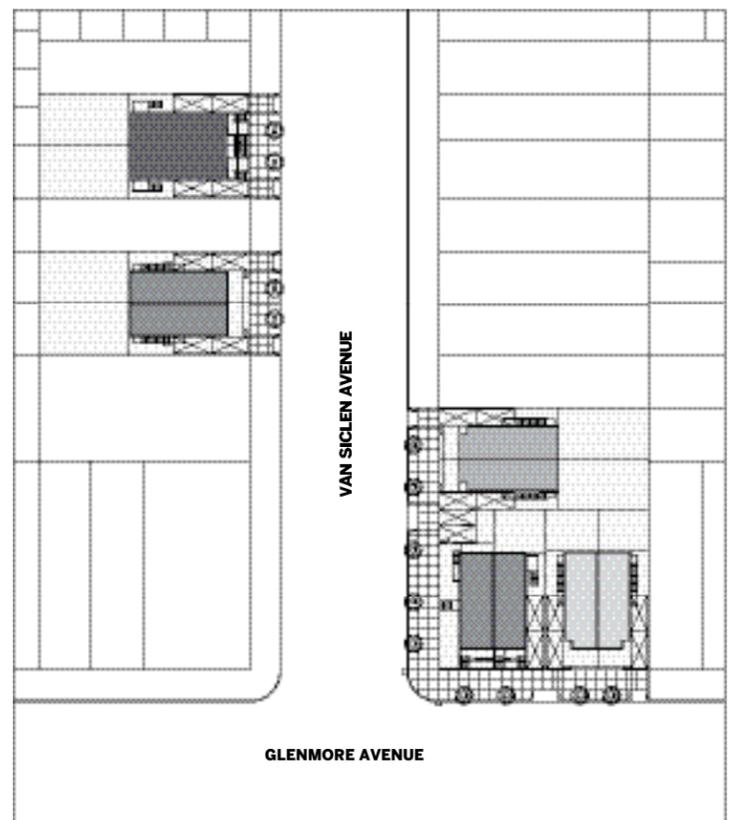
Windows cut into the undulating facades reveal wide sills lined with residents' personal collections – a homey touch that enlivens the courtyard. "I try to treat the facade as a painting or sculpture," says Scarpa. "With this kind of construction, there is a potential for it to be a Motel 6. Those buildings suffer from a lack of depth. The window variety ensures that it isn't a big stucco box." Inside, the mix of openings – horizontal, vertical, fat and thin – changes from apartment to apartment and room to room. Again, it is a detail that adds little to the construction cost, but by encouraging the self-expression of the residents – an ethnically and culturally diverse crowd – it fosters a sense of community.

The apartments at Broadway Court are simple but not Spartan. In each, a generous bathroom and a large, airy living room/kitchen serve three bedrooms. The architects chose sturdy, utilitarian and ecologically responsible finish materials: low-VOC paint, natural linoleum, recycled-fibre carpets and formaldehyde-free MDF. "We don't put a lot of frills into our units, but we get the designers to maximize light and air. Those are the luxuries we give to our tenants," says Ling.

In addition to working with CCSM, Scarpa is a founding board member of Livable Places, an L.A.-based non-profit that develops affordable, community-driven real estate and advocates green building practices. As a developer, he has the freedom to better define the parameters of any given project. Livable Places targets a tenant group comprising teachers, nurses and policemen, "hard-working, normal people who can't afford to live in Los Angeles," he says.



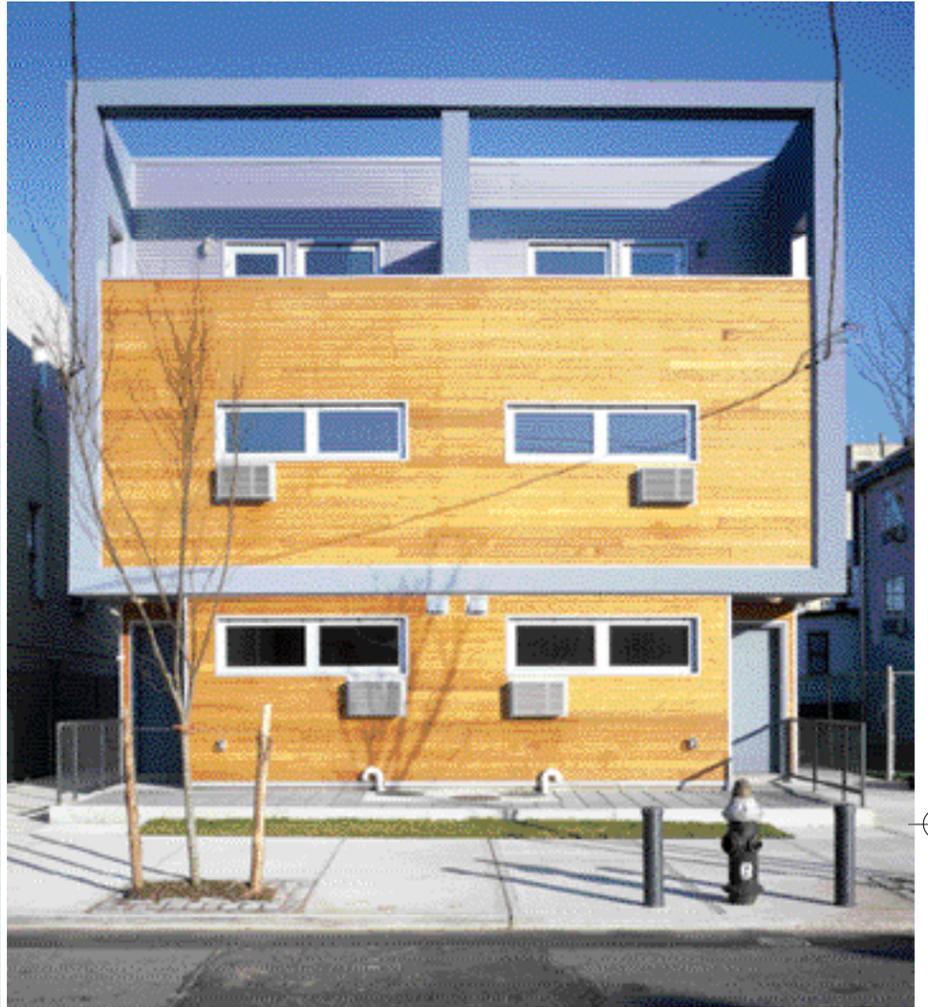
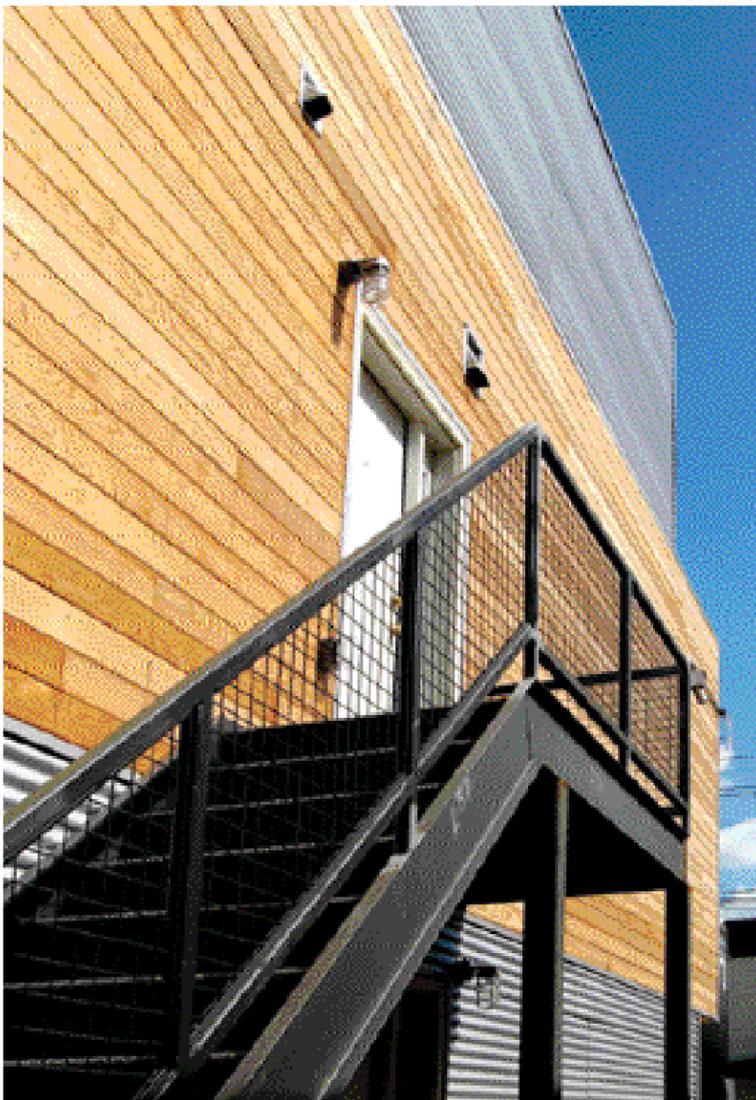
ABOVE FOUR ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS COLLABORATED ON THE DESIGN OF FIVE SEMI-DETACHED TWO-FAMILY HOMES IN THE EAST NEW YORK SECTION OF BROOKLYN, ON THE CORNER OF VAN SICLEN AND GLENMORE AVENUES IS A HALF-BASEMENT PLAN BY DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER. FLANKING IT ARE SLAB-ON-GRADE PLANS BY BRIGGSKNOWLES AND LEWIS.TSURUMAKI.LEWIS.



- ARCHITECTURE RESEARCH OFFICE
- DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER
- LEWIS.TSURUMAKI.LEWIS
- BRIGGSKNOWLES



**GLENMORE
GARDENS
BROOKLYN**
BY
DELLA VALLE
BERNHEIMER WITH
ARCHITECTURE
RESEARCH OFFICE,
LEWIS.TSURUMAKI,
LEWIS, AND
BRIGGSKNOWLES



LEFT DETAIL OF THE EXTERIOR STAIR ON THE SLAB-ON-GRADE PLAN BY DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER. **ABOVE** VIEW OF THE FRONT OF THE SLAB-ON-GRADE PLAN BY LEWIS.TSURUMAKI.LEWIS. THE FOUR ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS USED A COMMON MATERIAL PALETTE – RECYCLED CORRUGATED ALUMINUM, FIBRE CEMENT PANELS AND CEDAR SIDING – TO WRAP THE FACADES.

Architects Jared Della Valle and Andrew Bernheimer are relatively new developers. In 2005, the City of New York Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) issued a request for proposals (RFP) under New Foundations, a program that looks to build housing for middle-income families earning up to US\$70,000. As part of the initiative to construct homes in neighbourhoods sorely lacking ownership opportunities, the city provided land to develop Glenmore Gardens, in East New York, Brooklyn. The project scope included five semi-detached homes, each broken into two owner-occupied units and two rental units (to provide additional housing and to offset the mortgage). In the RFP, Della Valle Bernheimer (DVB) saw a chance to take on a new role and tackle issues outside its purview of experience. The firm joined with E. T. Partners LLC and CPC Resources, Inc. to form the development group Just Green Resources, and was awarded the commission.

For the young office, development challenged the designers to take what they learned building higher-end homes and boutique condominiums and apply it to a low-cost model. “The typical career path is that you do kitchens, you do family and friends’ stuff,” says Bernheimer. “We wanted to do bigger and different kinds of projects. So when we saw this RFP from the city, we thought we would respond to it. We wanted to prove that architecture is good for affordable housing. People consider architecture a luxury; it shouldn’t be. It should be available to lots of people.”

If there’s any whiff of opportunism here, it’s quickly waved away by how the architects/developers assembled their team. The firm brought in three other offices as collaborators: Architecture Research Office (ARO), BriggsKnowles Architecture+Design, and Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis – innovative practices, quickly rising on the design scene. “The inefficiencies of four architects were mitigated by the efficiencies of our process,” says





ABOVE FRONT FACADE OF THE SLAB-ON-GRADE PLAN BY DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER. EACH SEMI-DETACHED HOME INCLUDES A RENTAL UNIT ON THE BOTTOM FLOOR.
RIGHT HALF-BASEMENT PLAN BY ARCHITECTURE RESEARCH OFFICE (AT RIGHT) AND SLAB-ON-GRADE PLAN BY DELLA VALLE BERNHEIMER (AT LEFT). SIMPLE SHIFTS IN THE USAGE OF MATERIALS GIVES EACH HOME A DEFINING LOOK.



Bernheimer. “We learned from each other, since the overlaps were in the right spots.” The group worked with charrette-like intensity to develop a language for the scheme, then paired up to design two house types. One, built slab on grade, stacks the owner’s two-storey unit above the rental. The other is based on a stoop typology: the rental unit drops a half-storey below grade, with the owners a half-storey above. The floor plans for the owner units are clear-headed responses to what a family needs: good-sized bedrooms, open kitchens and living areas, and plenty of light and air.

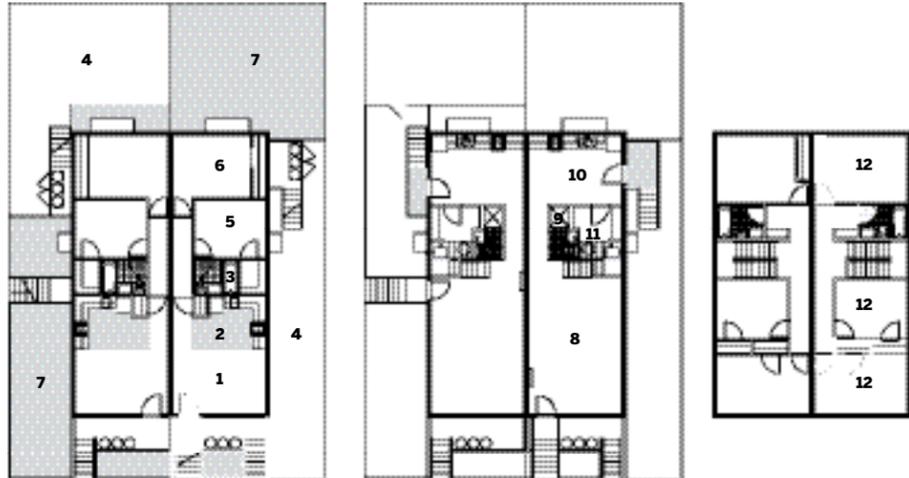
Glenmore Gardens’ design hinges on what Bernheimer refers to as “identity,” that the five buildings read as an ensemble but that each is unique. By stressing individuality, DVB not only critiques the developer/contractor model – which, citing efficiency and tight budgets, often generates homogeneous blocks of row houses – but also empowers the residents, giving them a design with some personality. Over 2,000 families applied for the few units, so it was important to the architects that the lucky owner could point to his house and say, “That one is my home.” To achieve this, the team decided on a common material palette – 90 per cent recycled corrugated aluminum, fibre cement panels and cedar siding – which each firm used to wrap a facade, with DVB doing two.

East New York is a ragtag mix of detached homes with a smattering of low commercial buildings – brick, concrete block, wood clapboard or vinyl siding – and the Glenmore Gardens project’s distinctive designs respond to the surrounding neighbourhood. Cedar and corrugated aluminum, used both horizontally and vertically, reflect neighbourhood textures and rhythms. Window openings are at a similar scale to those of adjacent properties. Small details, such as reveals or a change in a material’s orientation,



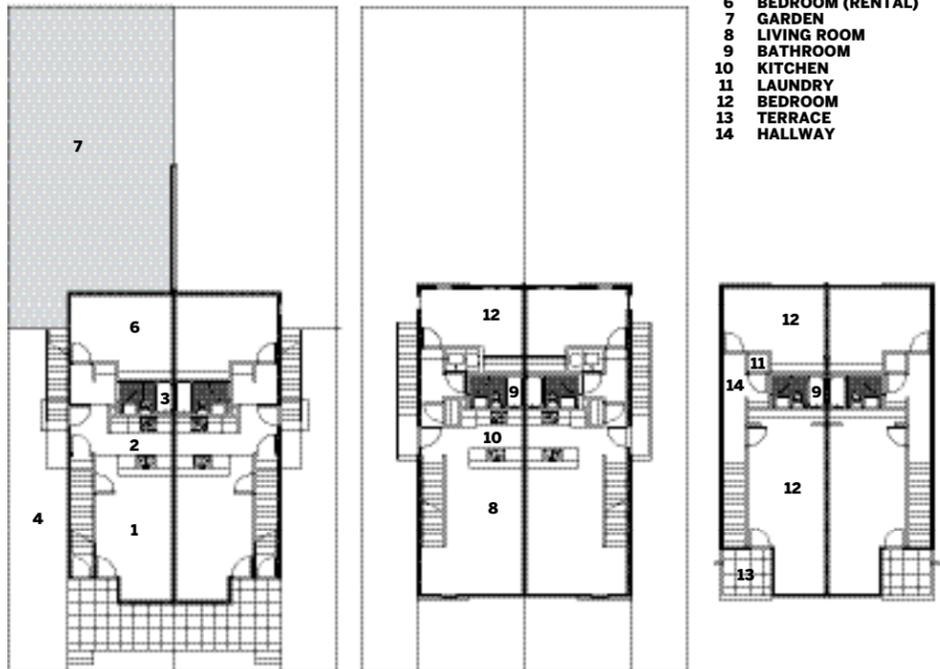
GLENMORE GARDENS
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HALF-BASEMENT TYPICAL HOUSE PLAN



LEVI:
 ONLY ONE KEY FOR BOTH SETS
 OF SCHEMATICS. PLS. MOVE UP
 AND OVER SO IT RELATES BETTER
 TO THE HALF-BASEMENT PLAN

SLAB-ON-GRADE TYPICAL HOUSE PLAN



- 1 LIVING ROOM (RENTAL)
- 2 KITCHEN (RENTAL)
- 3 BATHROOM (RENTAL)
- 4 PARKING
- 5 HOME OFFICE (RENTAL)
- 6 BEDROOM (RENTAL)
- 7 GARDEN
- 8 LIVING ROOM
- 9 BATHROOM
- 10 KITCHEN
- 11 LAUNDRY
- 12 BEDROOM
- 13 TERRACE
- 14 HALLWAY

add an almost historical richness without any overt reference.

Glenmore Garden is part of New York mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan, initiated in 2003, to build 165,000 units over 10 years. Priced at US\$7.5 billion, it is the largest municipal affordable housing undertaking in U.S. history. It exemplifies the overwhelming demand placed on the country's cities. Says Bernheimer, "You have a captive audience. So many people want housing so badly that it almost didn't matter what we designed – a luxurious position for an architect. [The homebuyers] would have moved into something that looked traditional; they would have moved into something that looked contemporary. On the other hand, you can't be so insensitive to what people really want." Within this context, architecture fights against its own irrelevance. When firms advocate the importance of design by building good, efficient housing, they demonstrate the potential for creative freedom and development opportunities, tempered by responsibility.