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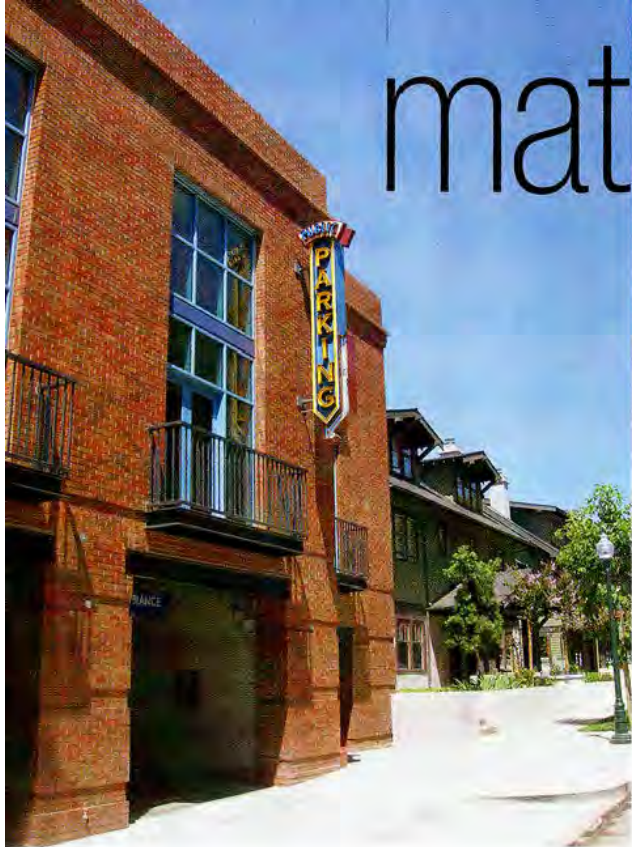
California:
Out There



matters of design

the case for courtyards

How Moule & Polyzoides fought Southern California sprawl—and won



Polyzoides has been making a case for a third option, and 7 Fountains is exhibit A. Taking 1920's and '30's garden apartments as a model, Elizabeth Moule and her husband, Stefanos Polyzoides, have constructed a mid-density residential complex built around meandering courtyards. The location, on North Harper Avenue between Fountain Avenue and Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, is on a block with some of the finest examples of vintage garden apartments.

Despite the success of this particular project, Moule and Polyzoides often serve as lightning rods for controversy. As founding members of the Congress for the New Urbanism, they've taken on the notions that design must defer to car culture, that buildings are disposable, that style is anything less than a tool for forging meaning in context. The staff of 27 includes 10 architects, but half the firm's work is urban planning, which is how the partners found themselves on hand when Governor Haley Barbour convened the Mississippi Renewal Forum last October.

Whether in hurricane-damaged Biloxi or traffic-choked L.A., Polyzoides says, "Society is impoverished when it comes to housing choices. Greater

variety is good." His other main point is that well loved projects age well. "There's livability and value to be gained by permanence," he explains. Many developers—and even some banks—do not share his belief, using a shorter investment timeline to justify building cheaply. For lack of other financing, he and Moule occasionally finance their own projects.

So far, the strategy has yielded measurable rewards. Though less densely populated than a high-rise, 7 Fountains makes up the difference by attracting tenants willing to pay more—\$4,000 to \$5,500 per month—for amenities such as beamed ceilings, underground or private parking,

and those seven fountains burbling in the tile-paved courtyards.

In person, it's easy to see the appeal of neighbors gathering there at dusk to drink pinot as logs blaze in an outdoor fireplace flanked by teak sofas. Tenants tend to be entertainment-industry insiders or creatives, people who appreciate the architects' insistence on planning around mature trees and installing wood window frames. Roofs are topped in barrel tile.

An even larger Moule & Polyzoides courtyard development, Mission Meridian Village, takes its aesthetic cues from a very different location, South Pasadena. Sensitive to neighbors—tidy bungalows with magnolia trees and

IT'S EITHER A VERY OLD IDEA or a very new one. Architecturally, the idyllic apartment complex 7 Fountains is *Melrose Place* on steroids—even if it may not rate as highly on interpersonal drama. However, what looks like a Spanish-style slice of Hollywood nostalgia is, in reality, much more than a stage set. This in-fill experiment actively flouts Los Angeles prejudices against multi-housing schemes.

With the most desirable zip codes already chockablock, new high-rises would seem a logical solution to maximize density. And there's currently a vogue for towers in places such as Miami, thanks to the glamorizing effect of the European modernists. In L.A., however, new high-rises would come at the expense of the indoor-outdoor dream of the good life. None other than Frank Lloyd Wright helped to give the city its low-rise landscape of garden suburbs.

Fortunately, Moule &



Clockwise from top: Lofts and parking in a commercial vein and town houses in the bungalow vernacular at South Pasadena's Mission Meridian Village. A model showing how the two building types relate to the neighborhood's mixed character and massing. The central courtyard of the loft section.

immaculate lawns—the project mixes craftsman-style town houses with apartments and stores in a redbrick commercial vernacular to create density of both people and plants. (Around 40 units per acre.)

Town houses of 1,400 to 1,800 square feet went for an average of \$625,000. The 900-square-foot loft-style units sold in about a week for prices in the

vicinity of \$375,000. In the brick building's retail component, along the most urban edge of the site, all 5,000 square feet have been leased.

Yes, this quaint "village" may hide an underground garage to rival the local mall, with separate zones for residents and the public. But Moule & Polyzoides was willing to sac-

rifice two precious parking spaces to make room for the roots of a young sycamore that arches over the courtyard above. In that way, the design is a memory of Southern California's early promise as an Eden on the one hand and a canny investment on the other. Density plus charm equals quality.

—Craig Kellogg



Clockwise from top left: The sycamore rooted in Mission Meridian Village's underground garage. West Hollywood's 7 Fountains. The development's courtyard fireplace.

