The development of Westwood Highlands, a subdivision located in the district south of San Francisco's Twin Peaks (fig. 23), took place during the interwar period when much of the so-called Outside Lands, including the nearby Sunset District, was built up. The process of its creation testifies to the self-consciousness and sophistication of West Coast realtors at this early point in their profession's evolution.

The realty and development company of Baldwin & Howell shaped this scheme, working with one builder and one architect to see it through from land subdivision through house building and landscaping. The architect's role here was similar to Wood's at the Ford Homes, generating an array of housing types through the design and deployment of modular elements. Close study of this system reveals how the architecture itself articulated the new neighborhood's identity and its relationship to nearby tracts.

In the course of creating Westwood Highlands, Baldwin & Howell engaged in a number of practices that began to be recognized as marking successful residential developments in this period. Among the most significant of these were the firm's reliance upon the expertise it had accumulated through its earlier work in the district, its promotion of municipal improvements that aided the district's transformation, its integration of the new subdivision within the pattern of development of the district as a whole, and its marshaling of efficient and economical design and construction practices to provide new housing for a middle-class market. Baldwin & Howell's use of these tactics enabled the firm to help define the character of this sector of the city as a district of residential suburban subdivisions.
Figure 23. Westwood Highlands, in the southern part of San Francisco, is part of the “newer city” of subdivisions created during the 1910s and 1920s. The opening of a mass-transport tunnel through Twin Peaks in 1918 brought this area into the orbit of downtown. This sealed its transformation from ranchland to residential neighborhoods.

Through such activities, Baldwin & Howell acted as a de facto planner. How did this role emerge from the evolution of realtors’ practices? What were the implications for the definition of the real-estate business of the dominance of the developer within the subdivisions that this study examines? To answer these questions, this chapter looks at the construction of the professional identity of the realtor-developer of the 1920s, as well as at the construction of Baldwin & Howell’s Westwood Highlands subdivision in San Francisco.
Westwood Highlands: Background and Overview

So far as domestic architecture is concerned, San Francisco is best known for its lacy, fanciful Victorian houses and its warm, craftsmanly shingled structures in the Bay Area tradition. Perhaps the least flattering image of San Francisco housing, on the other hand, derives from the linear bands of post–World War II tract houses marking its southern hills and those of Daly City, across the city and county line, immortalized in Malvina Reynolds’s song as “little boxes made of ticky-tacky.” But between these extremes lie other forms of housing that, while neither as picturesque as the former nor as clumsy as the latter, nevertheless stamp the character of large areas of the city. Westwood Highlands lies in one of these zones.

Racecourses and roadhouses enticed nineteenth-century San Franciscans to journey westward from the city over the old toll road that ran through the pass between Twin Peaks and Mount Davidson. That 1860s road became Portola Drive in the second decade of the twentieth century, part of the city-wide scenic route. The only trace of the former amusements of this district that can be found today amidst the rows and contoured rings of dwellings spreading from the hills to the edge of the ocean is in an occasional interruption in the street pattern (fig. 24). Ingleside Terrace preserves the oval of the racetrack it replaced, and another oval at Westwood Park marks the site where a greyhound racetrack had been.

The character of the area beyond Twin Peaks began to change in the years just before and after the 1906 earthquake and fire, when those who owned the land promoted its subdivision and development. In 1911, the heirs of Adolph Sutro sold his holdings in what had once been the 4,500-acre San Miguel Rancho. The A. S. Baldwin Residential Development Company bought 725 acres and, selling some to other developers, immediately began to put residential lots on the market. First Forest Hill, then Mason-McDuffie’s Saint Francis Wood in 1912, followed by Fernando Nelson’s West Portal Park and Baldwin & Howell’s Westwood Park: each major realtor in the city carved a subdivision into the land south of Twin Peaks. Spurred by competition with rival cities, these realtors and other commercial
interests felt that “‘San Francisco’s outlying residence districts’ should be designed to have ‘the winsome beauty and strong attractiveness of suburbs across the bay and the towns of Southern California.’”

Using census data from 1910 and 1920, Margaret Goddard King calculated that the population density in the area southwest of Mount Davidson doubled in those years. A finer-grained instrument would probably show that the bulk of that growth occurred only in the last few years of the decade. The newly subdivided tracts were slow to sell until the City of San Francisco made the district beyond Twin Peaks more readily accessible to the downtown area by extending the public transportation system (the Municipal Railway, or Muni). One city supervisor stated, “Our hills must be tunnelled to open up new districts to the home seeker.”

The transformation of this district from farms and dairy ranches punctuated by raucous recreational spots to neighborhoods of suburban domesticity resulted from the combined efforts of real-estate interests and local government. The city engineer from 1912 to 1934, Michael M. O'Shaughnessy, promoted the Muni as a tool for, as he wrote, “developing the city’s growth in well-ordered and predetermined directions.” O'Shaughnessy was well acquainted with suburban development, for he had laid out two areas of Marin County, Mill Valley and Belvedere, in 1889–90, and Hillsborough, on the southern peninsula, in 1893–94. The opening of the Panama Canal heightened expectations for San Francisco's expansion and lent urgency to the desire to shape the direction of its growth. Extending Muni service to the districts west and south of Twin Peaks required boring a tunnel 2.27 miles through the hills. Although the first developers of housing in the district had expressed interest in such a tunnel as early as 1908, once planning for it began in earnest under O'Shaughnessy, realtors and developers formed the Twin Peaks Property Owners Association. The Twin Peaks Tunnel was dedicated on July 14, 1917, and on February 4, 1918 the first Muni streetcar passed through it. With Mayor Rolph serving as motorman, the guests on the car included A. S. Baldwin, a recognized pioneer “of the movement which led to the building of the tunnel.” Ironically, at the opening celebration “the Twin Peaks Property Owners Association met the crowded
streetcars at West Portal with their automobiles and seized on the gala occasion to take prospective buyers on conducted tours through the emerging residential districts of St. Francis Wood, Forest Hill, Parkside, Ingleside Terrace, and Westwood Park.

City government thus organized the creation of the transportation link that made development of the land speculators’ tracts possible. This bears out the view of geographer James E. Vance that one should see “the [street]carline as primarily a device to encourage real estate development.” The roughly $4 million cost of the tunnel was mainly passed on to new home buyers, since about seven-eighths of this amount was assessed to those who stood to gain from the venture, the property owners in the districts west of Twin Peaks. The tunnel reduced the trip downtown from more than an hour to twenty minutes. By 1923, five years after the inauguration of the Twin Peaks Tunnel, Prentice Duell could write in the *Western Architect* that “today [the subdivisions mentioned above] . . . contain the choice residences and gardens of the newer city.”

Three features characterized this “newer city” and made it distinctive in relation to the familiar patterns of residential construction in San Francisco. First of all, the subdivisions built southwest of Twin Peaks were conceived as commuter suburbs. As the description of the opening-day festivities for the tunnel recounts, the promotion of the district’s development invoked both public streetcar transportation and private automobiles. Similar to other “streetcar suburbs,” the success of this area’s development depended on public transportation links; most of the subdivisions’ houses, however, included garages for the accommodation of autos as well. The remoteness of a district in which “hunting small game was still a major diversion” made it attractive once the barrier of distance from downtown was removed.

*Figure 24.* This topographical map of the area south of San Francisco’s Mount Davidson shows how traces of the district’s racetracks were maintained by oval street patterns. The street plan of Westwood Highlands reflects a smaller site and looser design than the one seen in plans for Baldwin and Howell’s unrealized Woodcrest subdivision.
Secondly, the design of curvilinear streets that followed the contours of the slopes broke with the standard “crossword puzzle effect,”21 as one writer described the grid that covered all but San Francisco’s highest peaks. These subdivisions were recognized as “among the best planned in San Francisco.”22 While sometimes developers simply adapted street plans to the preexisting pattern left by oval racetracks, they also responded to progressive opinion regarding the felicity of deliberately curved streets and their placement within the natural setting. The 1912 site plan for Saint Francis Wood, created by the Olmsted Brothers’ landscape architecture firm, reflected this family's tradition of such garden-suburb design. Developers of other tracts adapted this ideal to their own needs.

Finally, many of the subdividers working in this district created lots that were larger than the parcels common in most San Francisco neighborhoods—traditionally twenty-five feet wide. Lot sizes vary both from one development to another and within individual developments, but the presence of detached, single-family houses sitting in the middle of their lots stamps the character of the area.

The Baldwin & Howell realty company was one of the early developers who shaped the “newer city” in the district west of Twin Peaks. It was a well-established firm, founded in 1885, and one of its entities, the A. S. Baldwin Residential Development Company, had made the initial purchase of acreage from Adolph Sutro’s Rancho San Miguel holdings in 1911. Baldwin & Howell developed part of this land, beginning around 1917, as Westwood Park, one of the often-praised early subdivisions. It lies between Monterey Boulevard and Ocean Avenue, where flat terrain was conducive to the establishment of both a streetcar line and a shopping district. A planted strip that runs down Westwood Park's central axis, Miramar Avenue, bisects the main oval of the tract. John M. Punnett, an engineer, designed the scheme.23 More than a dozen different builders were responsible for the construction of single-family houses on Westwood Park’s seven hundred lots.24

By 1925, Westwood Park’s lots were completely sold, but even before that Baldwin & Howell had begun to develop an adjacent tract on the north side of Monterey Boulevard.25 The first name for this
new subdivision was Woodcrest (fig. 25). According to engineer Punnett’s proposed street plan from 1922, the 175-acre tract extended from Portola Drive south to Monterey Boulevard, east of the existing Saint Francis Wood development created by Mason-McDuffie. Mount Davidson, which reaches a height of 927 feet, rises just south of Portola Drive (see fig. 24). Punnett divided the steepest area of the site into large, irregular blocks bounded by roads that would have curved steeply right over the summit of the hill. This contrasts with the more stylized design of the southeastern part of the site, in which curving streets radiate concentrically, fan-like, from the intersection of Yerba Buena Avenue and Monterey Boulevard.

Two other records testify to the original conception of Woodcrest as a “villa site subdivision.” These are photographs of renderings for a decorative structure to be placed at the Yerba Buena and Monterey intersection, the formal entrance to the subdivision (fig. 26, a and b). Relatively simple rectangular piers embellished with wrought-iron lanterns and grills mark the formal entrance to Westwood Park at Monterey Boulevard and Miramar Avenue; barrel vaults supporting trellises span the sidewalks (fig. 27). In contrast, the projected “features” for Woodcrest, set on a roadway island, are more elaborate and classical in style. Rams and winged horses bearing urns, Corinthian columns, and benches are envisioned within the still-sylvan setting. The classicism of these sculptural and architectural civic amenities playing against organic landscape forms harkens back to the ideals of the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful movement. Architects John Galen Howard and Henry Gutterson had created more modest versions of features like these in 1912 for nearby Saint Francis Wood.

Between 1922 and 1924, Baldwin & Howell set aside the engineer’s proposals for Woodcrest and created a different street plan and subdivision name. The elegant structures designed by architect John Reid Jr. were never built; instead, very simple metal signs attached to lamp-posts at the corners of Yerba Buena, Plymouth, Colon, Valdez, Hazelwood, and Ridgewood Avenues marked the boundary of the tract at Monterey Boulevard (fig. 28). These north-south streets, corresponding to the fan-shaped portion of the 1922 plan, now curve with the topography. Hazelwood Avenue bends to the west as it
Figure 25. To take advantage of the success of their Westwood Park development, Baldwin and Howell first designed a “villa site subdivision,” to be called Woodcrest. It combined a formal, fan-like configuration of rectangular blocks with curvilinear streets that meandered over the steep slopes of Mount Davidson. This map of the design and location of the proposed scheme emphasizes its proximity to recently developed subdivisions that were already bringing acclaim to the district.
climbs the slope, looping around to Yerba Buena Avenue and becoming the northern boundary of the development. The subdivision no longer includes the northern and western portions of the 1922 site, and this reduction perhaps led to the rechristening of the subdivision as Westwood Highlands.

There are no records extant that explain the transformation of Woodcrest into Westwood Highlands, but most of the changes seem to follow from a different idea of the market for housing in this subdivision. The scale and elegance of Reid’s features, and the varied terrain of Punnett’s “villa” site plan, suggest that Woodcrest had been modeled on a prestigious enclave such as Saint Francis Wood. At the same time that Baldwin & Howell dropped those aspects of the original scheme, they decided to work with a builder, Hans Nelson, and an architect, Charles Strothoff, from their already-sold Westwood Park development. For Westwood Park, which they characterized as a “restricted residence park,” Baldwin & Howell made suggestions to buyers about the kinds of houses it would be appropriate to build, such as those illustrated in their booklet, *Attractive Bungalows of Moderate Cost for Westwood Park*. In this, as in their use of restrictions to ensure the maintenance of aesthetic and socioeconomic standards, the developers conformed to practices typical of the projects in this district and elsewhere. However, when they engaged a builder and an architect for Westwood Highlands, Baldwin & Howell decided to sell lots only with houses already constructed on them. They must have assumed that they had a good sense of the middle-class market that had been attracted to Westwood Park, and that by building from 100 to 150 houses a year they could lower costs as well as continue to serve that market. The tract’s new name, too, suggests an extension of Westwood Park, rather than a wholly different development, to appeal to a market that would be familiar with the earlier subdivision. This continuity also took advantage of the publicity that Westwood Park’s success as one of the prominent subdivisions in the “newer city” had garnered.

A typical advertisement for Westwood Highlands (fig. 29) reflects some of these appeals to prospective home owners, referring both to Westwood Park (“now all sold out”) and to Westwood Highlands
Figure 26, a and b. Elaborate designs for an entrance feature attest to the conception of Woodcrest as an elite enclave. The classical vocabulary of these Beaux Arts structures, set off against the organic forms of the landscape, links them to turn-of-the-century City Beautiful ideals.
Figure 27. The features that mark the entrance to Westwood Park establish a formal boundary by using simpler elements than those conceived for Woodcrest. Instead of relying on historicist imagery, these features combine spare, geometrical piers and barrel vaults with ironwork grilles, lanterns, and trellises. They define the entrance to the main axial boulevard of the subdivision.

("Moderate Prices—much less than it would cost you to build such a home"). The ad’s photograph of houses on Plymouth Avenue prominently features an auto, but the text assures the reader of easy access by streetcar as well.

In 1927, most of the Westwood Highlands houses sold for $9,500 to $12,000, with monthly payments around $70. This was about twice the national average cost for a new single-family house and twice what San Francisco streetcarmen’s families, for example, could afford. In the area’s subdivisions in general, home buyers seem to have moved from the Mission District, “where accelerating development threatened the suburban ambience.” They were predominantly skilled workers, lower-middle-class businessmen, and pro-
Figure 28. When Westwood Highlands supplanted the proposed Wood-crest development, plans for an elaborate entrance feature were set aside. Instead, simple metal signs attached to lampposts at street corners along Monterey Boulevard marked the boundary of the new subdivision.
Our Best Advertisement is —

WESTWOOD HIGHLANDS

Better than pages of printed claims are the hundreds of modern, artistic, well planned and honestly built homes that comprise not only "Westwood Park" (now all sold out), but also "Westwood Highlands," most popular of moderately priced Home Tracts in all San Francisco.

Large Lots—none less than 50 feet front.

Pleasing Architecture—the work of Charles Strother.

Ideal Floor Plans—the result of careful planning.

Sound Construction—built to a standard, not a price.

Lawns and Flowered—included with every home.

Excellent Transportation—by cars and automobiles.

Moderate Prices—much less than it would cost you to build such a home.

Easy Terms—Modest Cash Payment and Terms like Rent.

All of these important details are represented by the slogan:

"Built By NELSON BROS."

Home seekers are welcome at "Westwood Highlands" at all times. It makes no difference whether you are contemplating the immediate purchase of a home or not. Come out and look around and ask us questions. "Home Building" is our hobby. We are always glad to give home seekers useful and helpful information without any obligation on their part.

NELSON BROS.

950 MONTEREY BOULEVARD  Phone RANDOLPH 3391

Figure 29. This March 1925 advertisement for Westwood Highlands from *Home Designer and Garden Beautiful* reflects the middle-class appeal of the new subdivision. An ad for Nelson Bros., it nevertheless creates the impression that the prospective home buyer would establish a relationship with the architect and the home builder. The developer of the tract is not mentioned in the ad at all.
Baldwin & Howell, as the real-estate developer, seems to have played the major role in shaping Westwood Highlands. To the extent that the subdivision can be seen as a unity, however, the contributions of the builder and the architect must be considered as well, for they articulated the developer's scheme. The blurb quoted above (see fig. 29) is, in fact, an advertisement for the builder: “Built by Nelson Bros.” It also mentions the architect: one of the listed features is “Pleasing Architecture—the work of Charles Strothoff.” The ad does not, in fact, refer to Baldwin & Howell at all. Instead, it highlights the individuals with whom prospective home owners would interact were they themselves commissioning the construction of their houses; it deemphasizes the relationship to the corporate realty firm that purchasing a house at Westwood Highlands actually entailed. Unfortunately, few records remain concerning the working relationship among these individuals, or about this part of the builder's and architect's careers. A somewhat clearer picture emerges, however, by combining such information as does exist with an examination of built form.

Little is known of the career of Hans Nelson, the builder. According to the February 1927 article in *Building Age* that featured his work at Westwood Highlands, he arrived in the United States in 1908 from Sweden. After taking up carpentry, he entered the construction business with a brother in Colorado. Nelson moved to San Francisco in 1911 and built his first houses in the Richmond District. In 1918, he began building houses in Westwood Park for Baldwin & Howell, sometimes working with his brother as Nelson Bros. He lived in Westwood Park during the first half of the 1920s, at 1375 Plymouth Avenue, and in Westwood Highlands, at 460 Yerba Buena Avenue, from 1928 to 1939. Hans Nelson died in the mid 1950s.

Charles F. Strothoff, the architect for Westwood Highlands, was born in 1891 or 1892 in San Francisco. He received his training at the Wilmerding School of Industrial Arts, a building-trades school established by a wealthy San Francisco merchant and administered by the regents of the University of California. The school had been created “to teach boys trades, fitting them to make their living with
When the school opened in 1900, it offered training in carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing, architectural ironwork, clay modeling and artificial stonework, wood carving, cabinetmaking, and architectural drawing. Strothoff, like Albert Wood, developed his architectural skills through a combination of vocational education and apprenticeship experiences.

For at least one year, 1912–13, Strothoff served as a draftsman in the office of architect Albert Farr. Farr had established his practice in San Francisco in the early 1900s; at the time Strothoff was working for him, the house that he had designed for Jack London, Wolf House, was under construction in nearby Sonoma County. Farr specialized in domestic architecture with a Tudor or Georgian character, and his designs often reached the baronial in scale. By the 1920s, he enjoyed a well-established reputation as a designer of period houses.

Strothoff’s early career seems to have followed Farr’s in its focus on domestic projects, if on a more modest scale. Later, he worked for public institutions, serving as executive director of the Richmond Housing Authority, across the bay. The nature of Strothoff’s employment reflects the trend in this period toward residential architects working for large developers and state agencies. He also worked for the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department and for Contra Costa Junior (now Community) College. Charles Strothoff died in 1963; he had been a member of the American Institute of Architects since 1944.

A few photographs from a Westwood Park photo album from the 1920s illustrate the work that Nelson and Strothoff did for Baldwin & Howell in that project, separately and together. The house they collaborated on, 185 Westwood, is least characteristic of the district, for it is in a colonial revival style with wooden clapboards (fig. 30).

Nelson built one of the most prominently placed houses in the subdivision, 591 Wildwood, at the intersection of Wildwood and Miramar Avenues, the center of the tract (fig. 31). At this point, a circular landscaped island in the middle of the intersection punctuates the planted mall that runs the length of Miramar Avenue. The four houses fronting the center all have their entrances at the corner, facing
THREE SUBDIVISIONS AND THEIR BUILDERS

Figure 30. 185 Westwood, Westwood Park, under construction. Hans Nelson, builder, and Charles Strothoff, architect, were among the many builders and architects working at Westwood Park. They collaborated on the construction of this house before Baldwin and Howell hired them to design and build Westwood Highlands.

the street intersection, with two wings branching off at right angles, as in the one built by Nelson illustrated here. Although each is designed according to a different style within the broad repertory of Mediterranean revival, their disposition in relation to the public space provides unity and underscores the formality of the scheme.\textsuperscript{42}

Another house designed by Strothoff, more modest both in scale and style, is a stucco cottage (fig. 32) in which details such as window and entrance shapes, roofline, and applied decoration serve to individualize the box-like structure.\textsuperscript{43} Nelson, too, built houses like this one.

Baldwin & Howell used their achievement at Westwood Park, and the experience gained there by Nelson and Strothoff, to plan and build their new subdivision, Westwood Highlands, in its entirety. This represented an innovation in subdivision development in the
district. By the mid 1920s, the ground had been well prepared for such an initiative. As already noted, the principal real-estate developers of the district had first worked with the City of San Francisco to create the infrastructure to bring the rural West of Twin Peaks District into the suburban orbit of downtown. The array of early subdivisions, shaped by a number of major developers, established a vocabulary of practices in the district that included curvilinear street plans and detached single-family dwellings set on landscaped lots. The middle-class market for housing in the district had been attracted to Baldwin & Howell’s Westwood Park, which had completely sold; and this market provided the impetus for continuing development at Westwood Highlands.

In undertaking such a project, however, what features did Baldwin
Figure 32. 25 Northwood, Westwood Park, under construction—another example of architect Strothoff's work at Westwood Park. Nelson, the builder, constructed similar modest, stucco cottages. Both men contributed to the eclectic character of the subdivision's houses.
WESTWOOD HIGHLANDS

& Howell seek to recreate? One of the familiar notions they applied to Westwood Highlands was the use of a curvilinear street plan suited to the topography. Also, a sense of the identity of the new neighborhood was established by the installation of signage at the intersections along Monterey Boulevard. But a closer look at the built forms of Westwood Highlands, taking into consideration the role of stylistic elements and analyzing the organizing principles of the new subdivision, illuminates the concepts that guided the design of this project as a totality.

The Role of Style

The houses that Strothoff and Nelson designed and built for Westwood Highlands share features with the examples of their earlier work discussed above, with the exception of 185 Westwood (see fig. 30). The purchasers of this lot had been able to choose the house style they desired, in this case Dutch colonial, which was not possible for the home buyers in Westwood Highlands. This style is an anomaly in Westwood Park, where stucco and simplified Spanish colonial or English styles predominate. While it would have been possible for the developers to accommodate such diversity in Westwood Highlands, too—programming anomalies, as it were, into the design of the subdivision—in fact they did not. Instead, they chose to balance diversity of surface design with unity of materials and plan. They restricted the materials to stucco, sometimes embellished by wood or brick. Against this backdrop, Strothoff was then able to orchestrate a great variety of details drawn from Spanish colonial revival, Moorish, mission, classical revival, and other styles that fuse to form the Mediterranean revival character of the district.

There certainly were precedents for such an approach in the patterns of residential building in San Francisco. The decorative inventiveness of Victorian builders had also been spun over an underlying unity of construction materials. Although that particular fabric and its embellishment were spurned in the 1920s, the two periods share a similar logic in their attitudes toward the relationship between unity of materials and diversity of surface design. For the builders of the 1870s-90s period, of course, wood was used throughout, for framing,
THREE SUBDIVISIONS AND THEIR BUILDERS

sheathing, and ornamentation. The horizontal bands of flat wooden siding served as a field against which contrasts of texture, shape, and light and shadow could play; they were both the protective skin over the underlying structure and the ground for eclectic ornamental figures. At Westwood Highlands, the houses are wood-framed, but stucco is used as cladding. Nevertheless, stucco serves the same role here as wood had earlier, both within each building, where it bridges structure and surface detail, and within the tract as a whole, where its consistent planar use balances the multiplicity of ornamentation.

Historicist details, then, serve to individualize each house and to create an overall sense of variety within the subdivision. Windows, entrances, porches, rooflines, and applied ornamentation are treated as expressive and pictorial features. But while they define the appearance of the tract, they do not reflect or convey its underlying organization. In earlier tracts such as Westwood Park, control over the composition of the whole was exercised by restrictions that established price, size, and setback guidelines. If the home buyer selected a period style, as was the case at Westwood Park’s 185 Westwood, the builder or architect could design a house that both fit the guidelines and conformed to that style in massing, orientation, and materials as well as in details. At Westwood Highlands, in contrast, Strothoff determined the subdivision’s composition, probably according to economic goals and constraints set by Baldwin & Howell. The architect did not use stylistic elements at all to generate the overall organization of the project. The detailing functions only to vary the patterns that he established through other means.

The approach that Strothoff took, then, is reminiscent of that used by Wood in the Ford Homes. As there, it is necessary to look beyond the stylistic treatment of the houses to locate the generating principles that organized the design of Westwood Highlands.

The Principles of Organization

Strothoff seems to have manipulated three significant elements to organize Westwood Highlands: the repetition of modules, the treatment of corners, and the hierarchy of streets. The abovementioned article on
the subdivision in *Building Age* discusses the division of streets into price areas as one of the tract’s features. Restrictions, imposed by the realtor, that established a minimum price for houses on each street enforced this kind of system in a development such as Westwood Park. But in Westwood Highlands, where no lots were sold without houses already constructed on them, the developers executed their own edicts. The largest houses, on somewhat larger lots, can be found along Yerba Buena Avenue, Plymouth Avenue, and Monterey Boulevard, although the majority of houses on these streets are medium-sized (see fig. 29). Lots decrease in size as the slope increases; the views that these sites afford may have offset some of the impact of this reduction on cost. The most modest houses are located at the eastern edge of the development, on Ridgewood Avenue (fig. 33). This price-driven pattern also reflects the distance from the streetcar and shopping district on Ocean Avenue of the lots on the north and east.

Anne Bloomfield noticed this kind of hierarchy in her study of The Real Estate Associates (TREA), one of the largest developers in San Francisco in the 1870s. She observed that TREA built “a few larger and several medium-priced houses on the more important streets, slightly less expensive houses on the side streets, inexpensive houses on interior streets.” Although she does not pursue the connection in greater detail, Bloomfield suggests that “perhaps unconsciously, TREA was following principles of Georgian town planning by providing for a whole community.” The practice of organizing wealth spatially was, thus, a familiar one within the community of San Francisco developers, and the system used by Baldwin & Howell fits within this pattern.

Corner lots in Westwood Highlands are also an aspect of this hierarchical pattern, for often, though not always, they are larger than inside lots. This, too, follows earlier practice. But whereas in the nineteenth century larger corner lots became the sites either of grander residences or of stores, they serve another function in this 1920s subdivision. Houses situated at corners are frequently designed so that their entrances, set diagonally, face the intersection (fig. 34). This focuses attention on the street as a public, formal space. Aside from the familiar arrangements of lawn, walkway, and porch, this is the
Figure 33. A two-module type, on Ridgewood, between Joost and Mangels, Westwood Highlands. The simplest configuration of modules that architect Strothoff orchestrated sets a narrow, recessed entrance module next to a broader module that includes shallow bow windows above a street-level garage. Variants of this type on streets that are less steep are somewhat more ample; fully detached, they are set further back from the street.

major device used to express the relationship between the houses and the street, for there are no amenities such as malls or planted islands at Westwood Highlands. This orientation also provides continuity between the two sides of a block that meet at a corner. The corner acts less to anchor or conclude a horizontal row of houses on a street than to produce a flow of movement around the corner. Perhaps this softening of the corners was intended to underscore the curvilinearity of the street plan, although it also occurs at intersections where the streets are roughly perpendicular to each other. By deemphasizing the unitary quality of a single street, it suggests continuity within a larger neighborhood scheme.

The use of a house plan that permits the entrance to face the
intersection is not unique to Strothoff’s designs for Westwood High­
lands. One of Nelson’s houses at Westwood Park, 591 Wildwood, has
already been discussed as one of four that are configured in this way
to contribute to the formality of the public space they define (see fig.
31). This seems to be an urbanistic application of the “bent” house
that one historian has called “the single most important nineteenth­
century innovation in American domestic architecture.”48 Deriving
from pattern books of the 1840s, the bent house is composed of two
perpendicular wings whose junction occurs at the entrance. An influ­
ential picturesque house type, the irregularity and segmentation of its
parts permitted later designers such as Strothoff to pivot the wings to
adjust to peculiarities of site, such as corners.

Figure 34. 250 Hazelwood, Westwood Highlands. An important strategy
for organizing the design of this subdivision was to orient the entrances of
corner houses toward the intersection. This adapts a nineteenth-century
picturesque type, the “bent” house, to create a site plan that integrates
individual houses with the street and surrounding houses. The entrance
module becomes the hinge of the ell-shaped composition, the angle soft­
ened by substituting steps and a small patio for the meeting of wall surfaces.
The third important element in the organization of Westwood Highlands bears on the earlier discussion of the relationship between unity and diversity. The overlay of decorative detailing individualizes houses that are otherwise unified by their construction materials. Repeating elevational modules in a variety of combinations also achieved this balance. As in the earlier analysis of the Ford Homes, the term *module* refers to units of the public facade of the house. Here, all of the houses present on their street side an entrance, windows, and garage doors. But Strothoff orchestrated these units in a variety of configurations so that the order they confer is muted by a sense of diversity.

The smallest configuration consists of two modules, in which a narrow entrance module is juxtaposed with a broader module containing windows set above a street-level garage (see fig. 33). The largest houses encompass four modules, with a window module being repeated so that the facade reads garage module/window module/entrance module/window module (figs. 35 and 36). The widest range of variations is found among three-module types (figs. 37 and 38).

Often the garage module, and occasionally the entrance module, is recessed. Visually, variable elements such as bow windows, entrance hoods, porch parapets, and wall angles create projections and reces-

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**Figure 35.** A four-module type, on Yerba Buena, between Brentwood and Hazelwood, Westwood Highlands. Repetition of the window module is the typical device used to create the four-module type. In this variant, small windows are set over the recessed garage module, the entrance is angled, the large window module follows, and the front wall plane is extended to embrace an arched gateway that leads to the back of the house.

**Figure 36.** A four-module type, on Hazelwood, between Yerba Buena and Brentwood, Westwood Highlands. The four-module type is also characterized by the dramatic articulation of surface planes. The examples seen here are on relatively narrow lots at the northern boundary of the subdivision. Each break in the wall surface is emphasized; the compression of tall, narrow modules, sharply defined by light and shadow, creates a syncopated visual rhythm.
sions that yield contrasts of light and shadow. These accentuate the divisions between modules and heighten the individuality of each dwelling. Organizationally, modules allow for both a range of house sizes and the sensitive adjustment of each house to its site. Their flexibility can accommodate the narrow lots along steep Ridgewood Avenue, where two-module types are found, as well as more generous lots such as those along Monterey Boulevard, where larger houses are sited (fig. 39).

Also interesting is the way in which corner houses are treated. We have already noted that they are often placed so that the entrance faces the intersection. The modular organization of these houses allowed Strothoff to pivot the units around a corner without disturbing the underlying principles of composition. The house located at the intersection of Hazelwood and Brentwood Avenues, for example, where the block ends in an acute angle, has been dramatically segmented to fit its site (fig. 40). Other solutions that make use of the bent-house form can be found at the intersection of Joost and Hazelwood Avenues, where four-module types pivot around the corner (see fig. 34).

Although it is veiled at first by the overlay of individualized detailing, the pattern of modular types and their variations emerges as Westwood Highlands is observed more closely. Further study of other neighborhoods built in the 1920s might well reveal similar configurations, even where many builders were involved. In other areas of the West of Twin Peaks District, for example, it is possible to notice both familiar modular arrangements and corners where houses are sited in

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**Figure 37.** A three-module type, 325 Colon, Westwood Highlands, 1927. The typical three-module type juxtaposes the main window module with the entrance and sets smaller windows above the recessed garage. Photo taken in 1927.

**Figure 38.** A three-module type, on Hazelwood, between Los Palmos and Brentwood, Westwood Highlands. In this variation, the superimposition of windows set above garage doors, familiar from the two-module arrangement, projects forward from another window module. The entrance, reached by stairs, is placed like a hinge between the two.
Figure 39. 944 Monterey, Westwood Highlands. Modular design allowed the architect to accommodate houses to varying lot sizes. By adding major or minor window modules, he created stretched-out versions of the basic house types for larger lots. Here, an extended design includes another window module and the enlargement of the entrance porch to create a patio.
Figure 40. A corner house at intersection, Hazelwood and Brentwood, Westwood Highlands. Modular design allowed houses to be configured on unusual sites. This block ends in an acute angle and the house is pivoted dramatically to fit the space. The garage is located under the entrance module, but the garage doors are at a right angle to the entranceway, in the ell created by flipping the second window module so that it is perpendicular to the rest of the mass.

a similar way. It may be, as discussion of Bloomfield's study suggests, that there was among builders and designers in San Francisco by this period a common body of practice that Strothoff drew on when he was faced with the task of providing designs for an entire subdivision's houses.

Certainly, the modular framework has been useful retrospectively in allowing historians to analyze the physical elements of community design. In her study of San Francisco's Alamo Square area, Anne Vernez Moudon locates modular elements that create a stable, repetitive underpinning for the diversity of individualized decorative embellishment characterizing the Victorian houses found in this neighborhood. Influenced by both the urban rowhouse and suburban models,
and evolving over time through Stick, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles of detailing, the elevations of the houses are, nevertheless, composed of vertical divisions into entry, window, and recess modules.49 This aspect of Moudon's analysis is suggestive here, since Strothoff was manipulating similar modular elements. To what extent his self-conscious use of modular design came out of an awareness by Strothoff of specifically Victorian practices cannot be ascertained. His use of recessed modules is provocative, however. The need to maximize access to light and air within the constraints of box-like houses built close together on narrow urban lots accounts for the presence of such modules in the earlier structures.50 Strothoff, designing predominantly detached houses on larger lots, was not working with the same constraints, but he maintained this traditional element and, in many of his compositions, enlarged it and adapted it to new uses by locating the garage within the recessed module. Strothoff also seems to have seen the possibilities inherent in modular organization as double-edged; he used modules as instruments to create both order and diversity.

The modular treatment of the facades at Westwood Highlands also reflects to a certain extent the pattern of interior planning (figs. 39 and 41). Public spaces are grouped toward the front of the house or the corner; the main window module corresponds to the living room. Bedrooms are clustered at the rear of the site; a bedroom is placed over the recessed garage module. The prominence of the garage, especially when it is set at the building line, underscores such spatial differentiation of public and private functions at a point in time when these were changing. As one scholar of the automobile's impact has observed, the garage moved to the front of the house and became attached to it when the backyard replaced the front porch in importance.51 This reconfiguration shifted social interaction to the private sphere, while the space that formerly bridged the public and private domains, the porch, was ceded to automobile storage.

Most of the houses contain two or three bedrooms. A series of plans for the most prevalent three-module type, consisting of entrance, window, and recessed garage modules, shows the way in which variations in size could be achieved within a basic format. Rooms could be
Figure 41. Two-bedroom plan, Westwood Highlands. The modular character of the facades reflects the modular arrangement of the interiors. This plan for a compact, three-module-type house (entrance/window/recessed garage) clusters the public spaces toward the front and groups the private areas at the rear.
added on at the rear, increasing the number of bedrooms, without affecting the configuration of modules on the facade; by shifting the space of the breakfast nook laterally, the kitchen, the hall, and the nook itself could be enlarged, and this also increased the size of the entrance module, transforming the stoop into a porch. Plans for larger corner houses reveal similar clusters of functional spaces, although the orientation was altered (see fig. 39).

The houses generally have full basements, part of the high base that includes the garage. This base mediates between the slope of the lot and the main floor, although in some cases there are also interior stairs between the public and private areas (see fig. 41).

All houses include a separate dining room and a fireplace in the living room. Ventilation and the quality of light received attention, for each bedroom usually enjoys at least two exposures; when the living room faced north, small windows flanking the fireplace on the west wall were also provided. Other interior amenities, such as wood or plaster moldings, built-in cabinets, and coved ceilings, can be glimpsed in photographs taken in the 1920s (figs. 39, 42, and 43).

Strothoff’s charge, then, had been to design a coherent yet varied neighborhood of houses, and close analysis of these structures makes it possible to recover the principles he used to generate them. His work at Westwood Highlands exemplifies the trend in architects’ involvement with housing traced in chapter 2. He designed an aggregate of houses for a real-estate developer who, in turn, had been responsible for the transformation of this sector of the city into enclaves of suburban dwellings. Baldwin & Howell were able to draw on this longstanding involvement in their city’s physical evolution when they undertook the development of their Westwood Highlands subdivision.

The realty firm of Baldwin & Howell had been founded in 1885; by the time they built Westwood Highlands in the 1920s, the business of real-estate had achieved the identity of a profession. The process of professionalization of real-estate enterprises—a process to which Baldwin & Howell contributed—began in the late-nineteenth century; by the 1920s, there was a national organization, with its own publication, that had working relationships both with other profes-
In this delightful home of Mr. William Griffis the large “studio” window is the principal feature on the front of the building. To the right is shown another view of this window from the living room side.

**A MODERN HOME IN WESTWOOD HIGHLANDS**

*Figure 42.* 225 Valdez, Westwood Highlands. The character of interior spaces can be seen in this spread from the March 1925 issue of *Home Designer and Garden Beautiful*. As in the Nelson Bros. advertisement in figure 29, here, too, the builder and architect are acknowledged but no mention is made of the developer.
Figure 43. Interior of 944 Monterey, Westwood Highlands, 1925. The expansiveness of this entrance hall reflects a stretched-out design that incorporated a patio beyond the door at the left. The dining room and breakfast nook are off the hall to the right. The hall terminates in the living room.
REALTORS: THE PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

The history of dealings in land in the United States is primarily one of speculation in undeveloped areas, entailing high risks, the lure of extravagant profits, and the potential for abuse by “land sharks.” Arranging property transfers in settled communities, the real-estate agent traditionally served merely as a go-between, collecting commissions on transactions between buyers and sellers. By 1922, however, there was a transformation in the activities of such businessmen. One writer defined the new real-estate professional vividly and succinctly:

The Realtor of today represents America’s best type of citizenship. He is a thinker, a planner and a builder. His studies are those of development and his aims are those of the altruist. He believes in better habitations, better cities and more productive farms. He holds no brief for capital or labor, for class or faction, but he possesses a firm and an active faith in his community, his country and in the imperishable qualities of the commodity in which he deals.

While the boosterism of Babbitt is surely one aspect of this picture, another is its representation of the realtor’s appeal to community de-
velopment as disinterested. The latter reflects the newly profes­sionalized identity that had been forged over the preceding thirty years.

The mechanisms that real-estate businessmen used to construct this new identity as professionals were those employed in other profes­sional projects, as they have been analyzed by Magali Sarfatti Larson in *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*. Studied retro­spectively, such developments as the formation of a national associa­tion, the definition of ethical procedures, the transmission of expertise through the education of new practitioners, and the grounding of that expertise in claims to scientific theory can be seen as steps leading consistently toward a group’s redefinition as a profession. Larson de­velops this analysis of professionalization primarily in relation to med­icine, law, and engineering, but it applies to realty (and, as we have seen, architecture) as well. Like other professions that have emerged since the turn of the century, realty modeled itself on the paths that medicine and law had already trod to achieve market monopoly and social status. Nor were contemporaries unaware of this process. Economist Richard T. Ely articulated the self-conscious development of the profession in exactly these terms in his contribution to one of the early texts on real-estate practice published in 1925. There he ob­served that “as the real-estate business develops into a true profession, the experience which men have had formerly in law and medicine will be duplicated, for this business is following along those lines of develop­ment which have made those other occupations real professions.”

One instrument for realizing the professional project was organiza­tion. There were efforts to organize real-estate businessmen into local associations as early as 1847, but until the 1880s all were short-lived. The severe depression of the 1890s undermined the first attempt, in 1891, to create a national organization. As soon as the economic tide turned, however, the initiative was renewed, and in 1908 the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) was founded. The need to distinguish qualified and honest brokers from unscrupulous “land sharks” had been the spur to organization, and this remained a concern of NAREB. In 1916, the new term *realtor* was adopted to signify a member of the organization; although the attempt to copy­right the term failed, in several states it was registered under trade-
mark laws. An identifying emblem was adopted in 1923. All three mechanisms, the national organization, the title, and the emblem, were designed to indicate respectable practitioners to the public and to other realtors.

One of the first issues that NAREB tackled at its yearly conferences was a code of fair practice. By 1913, a draft ethical code was formulated, following the practice of other professions. As one student of the professions has observed, ethical behavior was a “prerequisite for being trusted to control the terms of work without taking advantage of such control.” Following the passage of the code in 1915, the public was to be assured that members of NAREB would operate in an honest manner. The ethical code underpinned the formation of “a relationship of trust and confidence between principal and agent” that the author of an early realty text saw as critical to “the elevation of the real estate business to the plane of a profession.” It served as an additional way of defining proper practice in contrast to unscrupulous activity, and as a mechanism to police the profession. State licensing laws were urged to enforce the code, and in 1919 California and Michigan became the first states to establish regulatory licensing systems.

NAREB members used their yearly meetings to discuss and resolve issues of shared concern. Between meetings, the magazine of the organization, the National Real Estate Journal, provided a venue for debate and information. This organ, which began publication in 1910, was an important unifying element for the profession, framing the ideas that guided its activities. The basic procedures governing modern real-estate methods were formalized through the discussions conducted in these two arenas during the decade from 1910 to 1919. These consisted of the principle of exclusive agency, the use of written agreements and multiple listings, and cooperative selling. Thus were established a body of practice as well as an ethics of practice that all realtors could reliably be expected to uphold.

Other practices evolved in the early decades of the century that affected the activities of those realtors specifically involved with community development. Such devices as deed restrictions, one scholar has observed, constituted a new form of “knowledge about the shap-
ing of residential space.” The construction of these new strategies differentiated developers from other actors in the housing-provision arena and helped define their professional identity.

Characteristically, professions emphasize the scientific or theoretical basis of their expertise. This reflects the value that modern society places on cognitive rationality, especially as the basis for establishing an endeavor’s legitimacy. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, realtors’ practices followed this pattern, as reflected in their concern with developing a mathematical method for determining the value of property. Discussions of competing systems took place at national meetings in an effort to base valuations on objective criteria. Efforts to compile data on real-estate values in order to establish patterns to aid appraisals and the prediction of future values began in 1907. By 1913, realtors often received fees for their appraisal services, an acknowledgement of their role as consulting professionals, akin to doctors and lawyers.

All these strategies of the professional project—the creation of a professional association, the delineation of ethical and procedural norms, and the claim to a distinctive body of knowledge—were means by which realtors, like other groups, attempted to establish control over the market for their services. The development of ways to standardize “the production of the producers” of these services was also important for this goal. Larson uses this formulation to describe the transmission of skills and knowledge to new members. As early as 1904, the Real Estate Board of Brokers in New York City presented the first series of lectures on real estate. The first university courses were offered in 1905 at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce of the University of Pennsylvania, at the University of Pennsylvania’s Evening School in Philadelphia, and at New York University’s School of Commerce. Educational issues were a major concern following the founding of NAREB. A 1915 study acknowledged the inadequacy of available texts bearing on real estate; a review of the forty relevant titles in the Library of Congress revealed that fewer than a dozen were worthwhile. World War I intervened before this problem could be redressed, but in 1923 NAREB sponsored the publication of nine new texts by Macmillan. In the same year, there
were conferences to discuss the needs of real-estate education and construct a two-year standard course. A related development entailed the creation of the first research body in the United States for the economics of real estate, the Institute for Research in Land Economics and Public Utilities, founded in 1920 by the above-quoted economist at the University of Wisconsin, Richard Ely; from its inception, it maintained a working relationship with NAREB, and in 1924 Ely became an economic adviser to NAREB.67

Larson elaborates on the overall importance of the educational system as a route toward professionalization and on the flexibility of the system of higher education in the United States that enables new fields to gain credibility through university affiliation.68 For NAREB, the relationship with the state seems to have played an equally crucial legitimizing role. We have already noted that NAREB turned to state governments for enforcement of the code of ethics through licensing agencies. The state provided “the appearance of neutrality necessary to guarantee the ‘objectively’ superior competence of a category of professionals.”69 This may have been deceptive for, as Weiss notes, NAREB members often administered the state agencies that enforced licensing laws.70 Nevertheless, by accepting NAREB’s criteria for competence, the state affirmed the organization’s definition of real-estate practice.

During World War I, the profession also received recognition from the federal government, when realtors served in the Real Estate and Commandeering Division of the United States Housing Corporation, the Office of the Alien Property Custodian, the Shipping Board, the Bureau of Industrial Housing and Transportation of the Department of Labor, and the Real Estate Division of the War Department. Realtors within these bureaucracies contributed to the war effort by performing appraisals, providing data on housing supply and costs, managing real estate and mortgages, acquiring land and buildings, and organizing the construction of housing. Whereas direct government construction of much-needed housing for war workers was urged by some planners, architects, and engineers, realtors promoted government aid for the “private financing of private builders.”71 The United States Housing Corporation’s Real Estate Division “estab-
lished a special federal mortgage loan program to stimulate private construction of moderate-cost housing for war workers, supplementing the government housing construction program of the USHC directed by city planner F. L. Olmsted, Jr. When the federal government did build housing projects, it attempted to turn them over to private developers as quickly as possible at the conclusion of the war. The war-housing effort was considered “an experiment that it was hoped would become a model for private builders after the war. In particular, the hope was that big construction concerns would emerge that could tackle vast projects in their entirety, as opposed to developers who merely put in the infrastructure before selling the land plot by plot.” Realtors also exerted their influence in the extensive “Own Your Home” campaign that was launched after the war and was widely publicized as having the support of the Secretary of Labor. The involvement of NAREB members in government service in this period resulted in the relocation of its headquarters from Minneapolis to Washington, D.C., in 1918. The organization also briefly established a research bureau there, in 1920, to conduct fact-finding for the support of legislative work and lobbying.

By 1922, NAREB had consolidated its constituency through the establishment of norms of practice and had successfully provided expertise during the war mobilization. Based on these early experiences, the association reorganized its constitution in 1922 to tighten its administrative structure and to create seven specialized divisions. These divisions articulated the diversity of emphases that had developed within the profession. One of them was the Home Builders and Subdividers Division, which eventually broke off from its parent organization and became the National Association of Home Builders. However, housing and the creation of residential subdivisions were important concerns for realtors throughout the process of professionalization; this history and its implications require a closer look.

Realtors as Community Builders

One of the significant features of the 1922 description of realtors quoted earlier is the writer’s emphasis on the disinterested role of the
realtor as a community developer. Among the developers encountered in this study, Taylor explicitly referred to his work as community building; Baldwin & Howell contributed to the transformation of a formerly rural district by means of, among other devices, the firm’s support for the construction of new municipal infrastructure. To the extent that realtors identified themselves with the city-building activities of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, this further enhanced their professional project.

During this period in which corporate capitalism and the state reached new accommodations, the concepts of rationality, efficiency, and the public interest were forged into a single dominant ideological construct that was used to define new political, social, and civic institutions. Both established and emerging professions embraced this construct since the concepts of rationality, efficiency, and the public interest allowed social practices to be conceived as scientific data that could be manipulated by disinterested experts who commanded all of the force of objective truth for which modern society reveres the activities of natural scientists. On the one hand, this ideology transformed complex and potentially divisive social issues into seemingly objective realities that could be quantified according to scientific procedures. On the other hand, it presented those who used these procedures as neutral facilitators of objective processes.

The city embodied many of the conflicting interests that had to be reconciled, not only politically but also physically, in order for the corporate economy to continue to grow. Many of the professions that emerged in this period, including city managers, planners, engineers, and social workers, saw their role as contributing, within the framework of their particular expertise, to this process of reconciliation that would lead, they felt, to greater social progress. The city, in other words, was a focus for the energies of many kinds of professionals who were striving to create a more efficient environment for general social and economic development by applying rational solutions to its problems.

We have already noted that one of the bases of the realtors’ professional project was their claim to cognitive rationality in their role as appraisers, developing scientific methods for the determination of
property values. By embracing the task of city building, becoming “architects of the fortune of cities,” as one 1892 editorialist expressed it,76 realtors also laid claim to professional status by virtue of their promotion of rational and efficient means for civic improvement in the public interest.

By the 1880s, local real-estate boards supported infrastructural development, such as the laying of streetcar and railroad tracks, and the civic encouragement of new industries and population growth that would promote the expansion of their cities.77 The Twin Peaks Property Owners Association in San Francisco (encountered in the discussion of the development of Westwood Highlands), formed in the second decade of the twentieth century, is an instance of an ad hoc organization of realtors created to support municipal construction of public transportation. Once the national realtors’ association was formed, it, too, spoke out in favor of efforts that were instrumental for urban expansion. For example, a resolution at the 1911 NAREB meeting urged all levels of government—federal, state, and county—to undertake the paving of roads to meet the needs of autos and, by extension, of suburban growth.78 Although individual real-estate ventures would profit by improvements such as these, the profession voiced its support for them in terms that embraced the well-being of the entire community. But what is of particular concern here is the way in which realtors addressed issues of housing and subdivisions.

In The Rise of the Community Builders, Marc Weiss notes the range of subdividing activity that real-estate men engaged in. At the disreputable end of the scale were the “curbstoners,” speculators in “vacant, unimproved lots heavily encumbered with private debt and public tax and special assessment obligations.”79 Often these were not licensed realtors, and the drive toward professionalization was in part an effort to eliminate such individuals from the field. Established realtors who did not engage in such fraudulent practices could be involved with subdivisions either as brokers, who sold lots on behalf of the subdivider, or as subdividers themselves. The general practice was to sell unimproved lots.

In the course of the 1920s, the trend toward realtors taking responsibility for the entire development of subdivisions, from infrastructural
improvements through house building, deepened. Realtors who had pioneered community development had found “that combination lot-house sales were more stable, profitable, and marketable than just pure lot sales.” B. E. Taylor’s discussion of his sales of houses in order to sell lots reflects this trend. By the time such experiences became more generally influential, a body of discussion and practices had evolved that the wider community of realtors could draw upon.

At its 1892 meeting, the first, short-lived national association, the National Real Estate Association, discussed the importance of encouraging home ownership and the development of planned communities as a way to lower costs for buyers as well as to improve living conditions through amenities such as parks and playgrounds. Such topics were of interest to NAREB as well, and its 1910 meeting “centered on practical methods for laying out new home areas.” By this date, subdividers were urging each other to develop plans that included modern improvements, that used contoured streets to take advantage of local topography, and that made use of trees and park spaces.

Realtors’ discussions of subdivision design and standards in these early years were lent weight by their ability to point to models that could be emulated. Edward H. Bouton’s Roland Park in Baltimore, begun in 1891, was the first community singled out as setting a standard. Another influential subdivision was J. C. Nichols’s Country Club District in Kansas City; Nichols himself addressed NAREB’s 1912 meeting and gave a report on his work. For realtors, Hugh Potter’s River Oaks in Houston was “the country’s third nationally noted planned residential community.”

These model subdivisions are significant for three reasons. First, it is noteworthy that realtors created these developments; they served as models just as much for the way their processes of development had been organized as they did for the design principles put into practice there. Other professionals involved in suburban development, including architects and landscape architects, championed designers who introduced such principles as contoured streets, landscaping, and park spaces. Realtors, on the other hand, pointed to the developers who harnessed these principles in works on the ground. Bouton, for exam-
ple, had worked with landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. at Roland Park and at Forest Hills Gardens, for which Bouton was also the developer. Design professionals saw Olmsted's work as the key shaping force for these projects. But within the realtors' community, Olmsted's ideas were viewed through the process of development organized by Bouton as the developer. For the realty profession as a whole, such concepts as garden-suburb design and neighborhood unit planning became accepted as standards of the period, incorporated into the general body of notions that were identified as modern and progressive, because of their successful implementation in realtors' model developments.

Second, through such built form and in the writings and reports of the projects' developers, these model subdivisions yielded a set of principles for community building. This extended the body of knowledge on the basis of which realtors as a profession could claim expertise. Roland Park developer Bouton organized informal discussions during the 1920s at his home, to which he invited Nichols and Potter, among others, to exchange information and new ideas. In more public arenas, articles and discussions about residential subdivision development proliferated during the 1920s at annual NAREB meetings and in the pages of the *National Real Estate Journal*, especially following the creation of the Home Builders and Subdividers Division in 1922. Drawing on these sources for his 1930 study, *Financial Aspects of Subdivision Development*, published by the Institute for Economic Research (formerly the Institute for Research in Land Economics and Public Utilities, founded by economist Ely), A. D. Theobald noted the stabilizing potential of this set of practices. Within the profession itself, these practices functioned to regulate the behavior of members, providing alternatives to the risky speculative activities associated with curbstoners. Theobald also claimed that, over time, the body of research amassed through the study of successful practices and the analysis of built examples served to strengthen professionalism. The role of subdivision development in stabilizing property values was perhaps most important for the process of professionalization. Instead of being subject to the always tricky business of assessing and predicting values, realtors had the opportunity to shape
values in their residential subdivision developments. And economic value, of course, was the measure of their success. To the extent that the community-building project, when weighed in the scale of value, showed stable or increased property valuations, realtors could point to what they saw as an objective basis for their claim to professional status. This is what Nichols was referring to when he wrote, in 1925, that “[realtors] have realized that they cannot regard their business as a profession if they simply transmit values as they find them and fail to apply scientific principles in building cities.”

The third significant aspect of these subdivisions as models for realtors is their scope. In all of them, the realtor maintained control over the entire process of development, from land acquisition through street design, building, landscaping, marketing, financing, and the location of community and commercial services. In other words, through these projects, realtors asserted an ideal of their activities that emphasized large-scale and multidimensional planning and organizational skills. They presented themselves as assuming responsibility for the shape that the physical growth of suburban residential areas would take, in terms of tree-lined enclaves of predominantly single-family houses; for the economic stability of these developments, in terms of the maintenance of property values through use, building, and design controls; and for the definition of social well-being, in terms of residential areas that provided safe play areas for children, access to shops, schools, community facilities, and churches, separation from industry and commerce, and a controlled mixture of socioeconomic groups. In short, such commitments demonstrated that realtors were not interested merely in short-term gain through the buying and selling of a commodity. A 1908 editorial in the Chicago Tribune reflected this when it stated, “The real estate dealer is no longer a mere speculator in land or buildings. His activities have increased until he is recognized among the influential forces of the community.” The realtor claimed to address the needs of the community as a whole and to provide both tangible and intangible patterns for physical and social development.

Another manifestation of realtors’ identification with large-scale planning is their early and sustained organizational relationship with
city planners. The 1909 NAREB meeting took place one month after the first National Conference on City Planning (NCCP) and included a speaker on city planning who relayed information about this conference to the realtors. NAREB leaders increasingly were involved in the NCCP: in 1913, Nichols joined its general committee and several realtors were featured speakers at its annual conference in 1915. In 1917, Nichols, Bouton, and two other developers were among the founding members of the American City Planning Institute, which later became the American Institute of Planners.\(^{89}\)

Within NAREB, interest in planning issues first took organizational form in 1914, when Bouton, Nichols, and Duncan McDuffie, among others, established the City Planning Committee.\(^{90}\) This committee drew together realtors who were concerned with land development, residential subdividing, and house building. When NAREB was restructured in 1922 to accommodate the growth of professional specializations, these realtors became the leaders of the Home Builders and Subdividers Division.

The close relationship between realtors and planners that characterized these early years culminated in 1925, when the Home Builders and Subdividers Division worked with the American City Planning Institute to develop guidelines for subdivision controls. The document that the two groups jointly formulated in 1927 became the foundation for *A Standard City Planning Enabling Act*, the model for land-use planning and regulation that the United States Department of Commerce issued to state governments beginning in 1928.\(^{91}\)

Thus, realtors' professionalization and their focus on issues of community development enabled them to join with other professionals who were shaping physical and social patterns of urban decentralization. One emblem of the way in which realtors' concerns meshed with those of others can be seen in a 1923 advertisement in the *National Real Estate Journal*. The ad offered to developers the services of a landscape architect and engineer whose credentials included not only a sample site plan incorporating curvilinear, tree-lined streets and a riverfront park, but memberships in NAREB, the American [sic] Conference on City Planning, and the American Association of Engineers (fig. 44).
An illustration of how I saved 2,000 feet of selling frontage — a minimum value of $100,000.00 for the M. S. Ramsayer Company, one of the largest builders of homes and subdivision operators in Toledo.

Mr. Ramsayer called me into consultation on Plat No. 1, after a comprehensive study of the property I designed for his company. Plat No. 2 with a saving of $100,000 in selling frontage with only a slight additional expense for the development.

My Office renders a complete, Landscape Engineering service, beginning with the site sale and survey plans, topographical surveys, establishment of grades, planning storm drains, sanitary sewers and sewer systems, ornamental lighting, entrance ways, sales controls, and restrictive deeds.

For the purpose of expert advice and guidance to our clients, I have compiled a complete record of all legal documents relating to correctness and meaning of land.

I have designed and developed a great many large subdivisions throughout the United States and in constant consultation on many others. I have saved thousands of dollars in selling frontage for my clients.

We render the highest standard of service. Every man engaged on my staff is an expert. My fees are moderate. Will consider even in trade for services.

Write me freely regarding your problems.

JOHN J. WATSON, Landscape Architect
619-624 Gardner Bldg., Toledo, Ohio

Figure 44. This 1923 advertisement from the National Real Estate Journal indicates the close working relationship that had been forged among professionals involved in housing development. Here, a landscape architect and engineer offers his services as a subdivision site planner to realtors. He notes that he is a member of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, the American Association of Engineers, and an organization of city planners.
A 1924 address by Nichols, who was one of the most vocal spokesmen for the leadership of realtors as city builders, provides another token of the forms that professional interaction took. He began by asking, “What man in any city is better fitted to serve as mayor than the Realtor?” and he continued,

In Kansas City we have several Realtors members [sic] of our city council; an ex-president of the real estate board as president of the board of park commissioners; an ex-president is chairman of the city plan and zoning commission with four other Realtors on the board; a Realtor a member [sic] of the board of education; a Realtor on the fire and water board commission; our county commissioners, law enforcement league, building code commission, board of public works and health board. Your splendid president of the National Association has long been active in our welfare work; a Realtor is president of our Art Institute, vice president of the Symphony Orchestra Association and Liberty Memorial Association, and so on throughout all the activities of our city.92

Just as his Country Club District served as a model subdivision for developers in the 1920s, Nichols’s incantation of realtors penetrating all levels of civic administration provided a model of a network of experts leading urban development. This contrasts with Albert Wood’s vision of suburban residential development nurturing popular, broad-based civic involvement. The next chapter will look at how it was that Nichols’s model prevailed.

Rationalizing Development

The realtors’ professional project provided a solid basis for the public leadership role that Nichols urged upon his colleagues. The creation of a national organization with a clear identity and codified procedures meant that clients and fellow practitioners could rely on set standards of service by realtors. It also consolidated and transmitted realtors’ collective expertise. By systematizing knowledge, increasing the predictability of transactions, and improving efficiency, the professionalization process rationalized realty practices.
The three subdivisions we have examined also reflect the use of rationalized practices. Assembly-line production procedures, standardized materials, and modular plans contributed to the greater efficiency of these projects through speed and lower costs of construction, as well as to the predictability of the end product.

The principle of rationalized organization links the histories of realtor-developers and large-scale suburban residential subdivisions. Both emerged at the same moment and responded to an interlocking set of needs and possibilities in building practices, house design, planning models, city expansion, and professional capacities, all of which promoted rationalized development. The entrepreneurial skills that their professionalization reinforced—the abilities required to organize and manage multifaceted projects—put realtors in the best position to pursue subdivision development.

Building-craftsmen's work was also rationalized, but in a direction that narrowed their sphere of activity. Just as the need for planning and logistical coordination of the construction process increased, building-craftsmen's tasks became simplified, specialized, and routinized. Their dependence on construction continued to make them vulnerable, too, to the impact of wider economic forces on their industry. As the value of housing in relation to the gross national product slid, beginning at the turn of the century, building-craftsmen had few alternative uses for their skills. By 1930, however, realtors who engaged in speculative building were deriving their profits not from construction but from the combined sale of land and structures. Taylor's experience at Brightmoor exemplifies this; as he described it to his fellow realtors in 1923, “I build the houses to sell the lots.” Both the nature of building-craftsmen's work and the value of their labor embedded in their product were shrinking. Realtors who organized the entire development process, on the other hand, were in a position to absorb a shift in value and continue to make a profit.

Architects' skills in manipulating standardized, modular elements contributed to realtors' large-scale projects. Since “what the average consumer was now purchasing . . . was a new dwelling in a new district of completed dwellings, rather than a vacant lot in an undeveloped area with an uncertain future,” developers needed an
array of houses that balanced individuality with unity and that presented a satisfying and familiar image of stability right from the outset. A rationalized system of design permitted architects to generate such plans.

It seems that architects were somewhat less successful as designers of overall planning strategies for entire subdivision developments. On the one hand, they did not offer a special competency in this regard; engineers (such as Westwood Park's Punnett and the Toledo advertiser in fig. 44), landscape architects, and planners were among those acknowledged as capable of designing new residential sites. On the other hand, architects' planning contributions did not always meet the criteria for economy and efficiency that dominated developers' concerns. The fate of Albert Wood's innovative proposal is instructive here; his idea to cluster houses and services was rejected for the Ford Homes in favor of a more conventional alignment of houses with the street.

Realtors needed to control the volatility of real estate if they were to ensure its dependability as an investment. This meant rationalizing the physical environment, securing a predictable order so that residential developments would maintain their value. It was in pursuit of this goal that realtors employed individual deed restrictions, which Weiss describes as the initial "very significant abridgement of private property rights." More sweeping devices for ensuring stable, use-restricted development, such as subdivision controls and zoning, followed, sometimes forged through collaboration between realtors and planners. To these must be added, however, the physical patterns that realtors imposed on subdivision development. In all of these ways, developers succeeded in shaping land use in the 1920s and later, justifying the 1925 comment by a past president of the National Conference on City Planning to NAREB's Home Builders and Subdividers Division: "It is the Realtor subdivider who is really planning our cities today, who is the actual city planner in practice." Realtor Nichols saw his colleagues' role as formative, declaring, "I believe that the work the subdivision men have done in this country has been, in a certain degree, the foster mother of the city planning movement."

Of the three developers we have considered here, the firm of Bald-
Westwood Highlands

Win & Howell best bears out Nichols’s claim and comes closest to the model of the emerging community builder. They were indeed realtors engaged in subdividing and house building, among other brokerage activities.\textsuperscript{101} The success of their association with other realtors in guiding development of the West of Twin Peaks District toward protected residential use exemplifies the kind of dependable community of realtors that NAREB had been organized to achieve. Baldwin & Howell’s promotion of the construction of the Twin Peaks Tunnel demonstrates realtors’ collaboration with local government to bring about infrastructural improvements that made further residential development feasible. Westwood Highlands itself was developed in relation to other new residential tracts in the district, and extended the patterns that had already evolved there, in terms of both site design and housing. The innovative aspect of this subdivision within its district was the developer’s confidence in market acceptance of these patterns. This confidence enabled them to build the houses on speculation and as part of a single, unified scheme, rather than selling the lots alone.

By developing such speculative subdivisions, realtors stamped the physical environment with a predictable order that derived from built form itself. The decisions this entailed depended upon responses to trends in suburbanization and home ownership that were worked out by a larger network of housing professionals of which realtors made up only one part. To continue to explore the success achieved by rationalized residential development it is necessary to look more closely at this network and its activities.