L. A. Re-dos and Add-ons: 
Private Space vs. Public Policy

In the mid-1970s after the publication of my book on chairmakers in southeastern Kentucky, I returned to the study of folk medicine (begun in 1968 with field research in northeastern Canada). And I began writing about fieldwork methods, pedagogical techniques, and architectural design. My interest was largely action-oriented and applied. In the previous decade I had read widely in art history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. I had written many papers and articles about various concepts, theories, and perspectives. But the study of folklore also relates to fields that apply hypotheses and inferences to bring about social action and change. Practitioners in medicine and nursing, social work, gerontology, architecture, and urban design were only beginning to be aware of the value of studying traditional behavior (if they even knew that the field of folklore studies existed).

I found myself interested in architecture for personal reasons, having lived in several "styles" of houses and also having begun to learn the skills of remodeling through "on-the-job training." That my wife changed professions from nurse and nursing educator to real estate salesperson might have influenced me as well.

In 1977 I was invited to give a paper at The Winterthur Conference on American Folk Art. A revision of that paper appeared as "L. A. Add-ons and Re-dos: Renovation in Folk Art and Architectural Design," in Perspectives on American Folk Art (1980c).

Before the conference began it was rumored that this would be the "shootout at Winterthur." Controversy was expected, for many of the folklorists had a very different point of view from that of most folk art collectors and dealers and from some museum personnel. In his catalogue entitled Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition (1977), accompanying an exhibit by the same name and appearing just before the conference, Kenneth L. Ames spoke of "moldy figs." He objected to several assumptions found in many writings on folk art and to a propensity of folk art enthusiasts not only to ignore the situations in which objects were made and used but also to create for themselves a fanciful and falsified context. The term "moldy

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"fig.," noted Ames, has been used by some jazzmen in recent years to refer to someone interested only in early jazz (that which was written before World War I). It is appropriate to folk art study, as well, contended Ames. For a common notion is that the only true folk art is painting, sculpture, and handicrafts produced in an earlier age of agrarian simplicity, or sometimes found today among the old and obscure but presumably happy folk in remote pockets as a survival from the past.

Louis C. Jones, another participant in the conference, objected to what he took to be the "acerbic tone" of Ames's catalogue. He expressed resentment that for some people there seemed to be only one way of looking at American folk art. He criticized the exclusion of American paintings from consideration in many of the presentations at the conference. Setting forth his ideas in "The Winterthur Folk Art Conference: Some Afterthoughts" (1977), Jones referred to "material culture specialists" at the conference as "the Pink Plastic Flamingos." These people, complained Jones, "recognized no limits to their inclusions, lumping together, in their generalizations, architecture, kitch (hence the Flamingos), furniture, tools, and voodoo ritual items as well as many of the objects claimed by the Moldy Figs." For Jones, "The real crux of the difference between the two groups lies in the area of aesthetics, for," he writes, "the Moldy Figs insist on there being an element of the beautiful or satisfying, if an object is to be inside their definition of otherwise dissimilar objects." The Pink Plastic Flamingos, on the other hand, who "want to bring a scientific orderliness to the field," emphasize "tradition" and "context" and "artifact" rather than "art" that is personally appealing (1977:5).

A way of resolving the apparent conflict between the two orientations of folk art appreciation and its scientific study lies in recognizing similar concerns, rather than stressing the differences, between them. The area of aesthetics, Louis C. Jones insists, might well be the crux of the matter. For aesthetics clearly relates to the attraction of folk art for many people who want to isolate it for contemplation. But aesthetic concerns also embrace, as Ames contends, the attitudes and responses of those who made and used the objects originally. Although certain forms have been singled out for appreciation and study as American folk art, particularly painting and sculpture, there are other forms that are less perceptible and more ephemeral that are also examples of tradition and the aesthetic impulse in everyday life. Study and contemplation of a few objects that one finds personally pleasing, then, is but one aspect of a more encompassing respect for human beings and what they are capable of making and doing.

Especially in the last half dozen years or so, traditional architecture has been recognized by many as an art form and examined in regard to matters of symbolic expression and social function as well as ramifications for improving urban planning and developing a user-oriented, behaviorally based system of architectural design. I have in mind, for example, works by Michael Ann Williams (1985), Charles Martin (1983), Sara Selene Faulds (1981), Christopher Musello (1986), and Simon J. Bronner (1983), as well as numerous articles reprinted or cited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (1986) and the many essays in Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II, ed. Camille Wells (1986).

This is not to gainsay the earlier work of Henry Glassie. From the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s he published many articles on the geographical distribution
of barn and house types as well as building techniques. He also authored works taking a semiotics approach to architectural design. A few of his many publications are mentioned in the references. These and other works inspired subsequent generations of folklorists who based their own research on them, exploring similar as well as different kinds of issues.

One of these topics is that of both historical and contemporary remodeling and modifications. Alluded to by Henry Glassie in “The Wedderspoon Farm” (1966), this subject was treated more recently and extensively by Thomas Carter, Gerald Pocius, Robert Blair St. George, Bernard L. Herman, and Michael Ann Williams at the American Folklore Society meeting in 1982 (see also Milspaw 1983; Cromley 1982).

I gave the paper below in October 1977, at a symposium of the Popular Culture Association/West on the topic of Manufacturing Urban Realities. This was a month before I presented a paper at the Winterthur Conference on the same subject of remodeled houses in Los Angeles. The essay below is shorter and less formal than the one that was published, and it contains somewhat different information and treatment of the subject. Both essays, however, consider aesthetic matters, sensory experiences, and the ramifications of studies of traditional architecture for behaviorally oriented design and public policy.

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In this presentation I focus on a particular form of behavior and its outputs, that of the renovation of homes by owners (or under the control of owners). I also examine some of the consequences of this kind of study for folkloristics and related fields; I am concerned particularly with ramifications for the designing of houses by architects, for improving the relations between the building department and the public, and for understanding the so-called housing boom.

The remodeling of houses seems to epitomize the theme of this symposium: Manufacturing Urban Realities. Information is certainly readily available. We are deluged with books and articles in popular magazines offering advice to the would-be remodeler. Many homeowners have participated in this activity and are anxious to share their experiences, whether pleasant or unpleasant.

That the creation of personal space should be examined becomes apparent when we consider a few statistics. In their book *The Owner-Builder and the Code* (1976), Kern, Kogon, and Thallon report that owner-built houses account for minimally 40% of all new housing in rural areas and 20% of all new single-family dwellings in the United States. These estimates, based on government statistics, do not include the many instances of adding to, repairing, or refurbishing homes. Even if not everyone physically modifies a home, most of us decorate or redecorate. There is, therefore, an enormous data base to be examined for its implications and ramifications.
This data base consists of varied activities and forms. In the local parlance, a "re-do" has been (or soon will be) renovated. It might or might not have been a "fixer upper" in need of repairs (and if so, it might also be a "re-hab," particularly if it is a part of the city being rehabilitated). Or, rarely, the structure is "restored," that is, someone has gutted the place of accumulated renovations and remodeling attempts in order to return the building (or at least some parts of it) to its original appearance or "character." Making repairs to reverse the trend of "deferred maintenance" is expected. Where there is little hope of "re-doing a place" because of its alleged economic or functional obsolescence or its run-down condition, the property may be sold "for lot value" and its building dismissed as a "tear-down." A "move-on" is a building constructed on one site but later moved to another location; it might also have been "re-done" or have an "add-on."

Re-dos and add-ons are similar in some respects to "conversions," whether making a home of a former mill, barn, school, bank, factory, winery, or warehouse, or, commercially, converting a building from one use to another (e.g., in Santa Monica a natural food store called "Nature's Power Station" occupies what once was a service station, while two historical homes have been moved from a residential area to a commercial section and turned into a restaurant and a museum, respectively). They are also similar—in process, attitude, and aesthetic concerns—to many "owner-built" or "handmade" houses. Some researchers have combined several of these phenomena into one category of so-called spontaneous, indigenous, nonformal, nonpedigreed, nonclassified, vernacular, anonymous, exotic, or communal architecture (also called "architecture without architects"). Then these structures are contrasted to "official" or "commercial" architecture produced by contractors, professional builders, designers, and architects.

Re-dos and add-ons relate to other architectural forms studied by folklorists in the past (log cabins, for example) in that they involve "tradition." Through the imitation or repetition of forms, design elements, materials, construction techniques—which people become aware of largely through oral communication and face-to-face interaction among friends, colleagues, or acquaintances—fixer uppers exhibit continuities and consistencies in human behavior. The same kinds of questions may be asked about re-dos and add-ons as are raised regarding the making of quilts, chairs, and other objects studied by folklorists. What motivates people to remodel houses, renovate their homes, or decorate and personalize their space. How and why are certain forms, design elements, or construction techniques generated; why are they perpetuated; how are they modified? How do people conceptualize and use space? What meanings do the activities and forms have for people, or what psychological or social purposes or functions are served? And, of course, what are some of the implications and ramifications of answers to
these questions for both understanding human behavior and improving the quality of life? In what follows, I address only a few of these questions in order to suggest that this aspect of contemporary behavior offers much to consider regarding the topic of “manufacturing urban realities.”

Why Remodel?

One area of research is that of motivations and rewards for individuals' constructing, redesigning, or readjusting personal space. There are half a dozen principal reasons for even contemplating remodeling or adding onto a structure, and for doing some or most or all of the work oneself. An obvious one is attending to (changing) physical needs (for more space, different kinds of space and space utilization, or particular amenities). This motive was rarely stated or implied by homeowners I talked to, although it is one of the most frequently cited justifications in articles that attempt to stimulate the homeowner to action.

A second principle, frequently mentioned in how-to articles and books, is that of taking advantage of financial matters (to make or to save money). On the one hand, some people “fix up” properties as a long-term investment, renting the houses at a price commensurate with the amenities or putting them up for immediate re-sale. On the other hand, some individuals do much of the work themselves not only to capitalize on their own labor but also because they claim not to be able to afford the labor of others. Yet other individuals say they are motivated by the fact that they can obtain more space for less money, because the house needs work. Others point out that often they cannot duplicate the quality of workmanship or the features found in older houses. Write Stanforth and Stamm (1976:3): “Many couples are finding that they can buy more space than they can afford to rent, discovering they can even live rent-free in houses that were built with twelve foot ceilings, wood paneling, and half a dozen marble-manteled fireplaces instead of boxy little plasterboard rooms. Some are enchanted to own homes with elaborate old parquet floors and intricate brass hardware. Others who prefer a contemporary setting buy ‘shells,’ and gut them. Dramatic new spatial environments are created by stripping to the bare walls and redesigning the interiors.” Fahy (1975:xviii, xx) notes that “many of today’s builders never learned to do things the old ways,” that “there is a mellow quality about old places that you just can’t duplicate,” and that there is often “the problem of getting someone to do small jobs.” He concludes, “Chances are you will do as good or even a better job than the professionals. The reason? It’s your place you’re working on, and you care about it. . . . Fixing an old place makes you a more competent person. It gives you more control over your life. The more you do, the more you are willing to tackle. . . . It’s a good feeling to have that
confidence and that independence... And finally, when you do the work yourself, the house becomes truly yours. You'll enjoy living in it far more than you would if you had it all done by somebody else." Admits my sister-in-law: "It's just us; we don't like new houses. They don't have warmth, they don't have storage space: they're just boxes." She added, "I think the basic reason we have restored houses is that we could get a lot more house, and an older house, for the money."

It is apparent from these statements that economic incentives are not in themselves the only, or often even the major, motivation for adding to and altering the nature of houses. Newspaper headlines often scream "speculation" as an explanation of the inflated prices of houses in Los Angeles, the topic of financial rewards often crops up in conversation, and many people claim to be inspired initially and partially by dreams of wealth; yet financial rewards is usually given as an explanation of behavior when the commentator does not wish to reveal other motives. The first four males I talked to when I began my research became involved in remodeling houses when they were having problems with their jobs, which had been an important part of their lives and identities. While they considered home remodeling as an occupational alternative, none in fact has pursued this as a career. The houses they worked on for a few months now serve as a small source of income and large source of future gain, but the actual activity of remodeling the houses seems to have been precipitated by a need to occupy one's attention with other matters and to reestablish a sense of self-worth, both of which were accomplished by undertaking a task with perceptible outputs and a task that was very much unlike their jobs: in essence, one reconstructs oneself through the act, which becomes symbolic, of reconstructing an object outside oneself. Grief is like that—it can and often does spur creativity. But as an impetus, it is subsumed by a broader principle, that of self-expression.

The discussion thus far suggests several other, interrelated principles. A third reason for redesigning personal space, especially when one does much of the work oneself, in addition to the motives or rewards of increasing spatial needs and amenities and of making or saving money, is that of maintaining a sense of authority and degree of control over oneself, one's life, one's possessions. Here I have in mind such remarks as those by John Yount (1976:97, 146):

One does not become a heroin addict, an alcoholic, or a hardware freak overnight. Doubtless, a flawed character plays a part, also frustration, the influence of a certain milieu, peer pressure. I isolate ownership as a huge contributing factor in my case. Ownership of anything... Why not call painters, carpenters, whoever might be needed, you ask? I do, I do, I answer. But often they don't come when I need them. Sometimes they do perfunctory work when they finally arrive. Always their bills shock me. One illusion of addicts, alcoholics, and hardware freaks is that they were driven to their fates, and so it is with me.
He continues, "I've already isolated ownership as the terrain in which my condition takes place and hinted at some of its elements: the urge to be free of repairmen; their timetables, which never seem to fit my need; their sometimes perfunctory work; their bills. But there are other sides to a hardware freak that are neither paranoid nor defensive. The wish to make something work, to build, devise, to construct."

This same desire motivated others to remodel homes. "At one time," a remodeler told me, "I worked on an assembly line for GM, creating aberrations. There was no consciousness attached to the product, no wholeness and integrity. But if you built an entire car, then you would have a projection of self into the whole project. The same with houses." One reason for launching his first major remodeling project in 1971 was that he courted the challenge. He had had experience as a construction estimator in the 1950s. "I got to the point where I wanted to do it all," he said, "because I recognized what the problems were and how they should be solved. I wanted control of the whole project."

Some other homeowners have contended that only they, having lived in the house and thus sensed its many peculiarities, are capable of understanding, appreciating, and maintaining the uniqueness and integrity of the home. One family went to two architects and two contractors for help in designing alterations, only to be frustrated by receiving plans that were too expensive to implement, or simply unmanageable (moving a several ton fireplace 60 degrees), or inappropriate to the present character of the structure; their solution was to design the space themselves.

A fourth principle is that of attaining intellectual and sensory goals. These include, for example, exercising control over the product, learning new skills and about oneself, constructing unique and highly personalized spaces, taking pleasures in the associations engendered with respect to past owners or builders and eras as well as in regard to the materials, deriving pleasure from solving tangible problems, or simply enjoying the sensuousness of different smells, textures, colors, and even kinesics (as in working with certain tools). It is this principle that is especially apparent in the published literature on so-called "handmade" houses and on renovations, and it was prominent in my interviews as well. Write Stanforth and Stamm (1976:4), the Stamms "had no idea of the frustrations that lay ahead of them, and they did not care. To them the house was beautiful, even with its half-dozen sinks and stoves, decrepit furniture, and old plumbing that sprang a new leak every day or two. They explored every inch, discovering beautiful door knobs hidden under layers of paint, and stamped brass hinges on every door." According to Cobb (1977:440), Fred Schurecht, who turned a horse barn into a house, remarked, "It's really just a question of maintaining the character of the original building. . . . You start with a shell. Old barns are great fun projects—they don't have the problems normally associated with
remodeling an old house. On this project there was no major problem other than cleaning out the manure.” And “River” (1974:84, 127) quotes several people, including Douglas Patrick who said, “Building is like yoga. You can’t do it any other way than one nail at a time. It’s the meditation of it. It’s a constant surrender. ‘Look at that hammer hit that nail!’ As within, so without.” Phil Lewitt told her, “I really like the satisfaction of seeing a building go up. It’s really tangible. And I like cutting, making things fit . . . I’m a redwood house builder. Redwood feels wonderful to work with, it’s soft and giving. Elastic. And the splinters always fester. Basically, I have built and like to build wooden structures because I like the feel of wood.” And Kent said, “Well, y’know, building a house isn’t nearly so hard as living in it . . . A house is a continuous trip. The easy part is building the structure. It’s the finishing that takes all the time; door jambs, hinges, stuff like that. It’s like meditation, really. It gets you down to a reasonable pace. You can’t think about what’s going on tomorrow, or you’ll smash your thumb.”

The comments above also suggest a fifth principle, that of actualizing self through symbolic statements. One builds an environment and also objects expressive of what one thinks one is or wishes one were or hopes others think one is. Or one generates a sense of self-worth by accomplishing a task with perceptible outputs, engaging in a rite of trial in which one tests oneself. Or one produces a sense of identity with respect to place and to others. In regard to the use of salvaged materials (which many homeowners and remodelers like to utilize), Phil Lewitt said in “River” (1974:65) “The buildings are like people—generations—the same seed running through it.” Said Wayne, “I seemed to be trying to prove something to myself while I was building the house. It was a lesson to me in perseverance. I wasn’t sure if I could do it or not, ’cause I’d never done it before.” Charlie Ramsburg, who restored an adobe house, told Gray et al. (1976:61), “The first house you build you find out about yourself—the kind of space you need. Some people blow it because they design a house that seems idyllic to a certain fantasy, but has little to do with the reality of their life . . . . It can be an addiction, this adobe building. A lot of people building houses are always looking for the perfect space, trying to find peace of mind through building.” Said Hal Migel, “When you live in a house while you’re building it, each time you add a detail, paint a stripe around a doorway, you become part of its growth.” Adrienne said, “This is a pushing out house, on many levels. The whole thing is very symbolic. It records our changes.” And as Kathy Strain observed, “When you relate to the house every day, your focus really narrows. Since we built it ourselves, there’s a real attachment. This has become our commitment, our roots.”

However, people do sell the houses, or rent them to others after renovation. “As long as they are involved in the place,” contends Cobb
As a renovator, one becomes part of a fraternity whose members anywhere have instant rapport. For example, one day in the midst of construction their doorbell rang, and Merle Gross introduced herself. It was obvious that the Stanforths were renovating a house, and so was she, on Seventy-Seventh Street. So she came in and talked, comparing experiences. A short time later, the Grosses invited the Stanforths to a party. They must have had about a dozen couples—all of them brownstoners, all indulging in the game of oneupsmanship over who had suffered the worst experience, whose house had looked the grimmest (rather like people comparing their operations). Everybody was having a delightful time. It was there that the Stanforths met the Stamms and began the friendship that led to this book.

Remodeling a house may be a family affair, and often friends have an urge to help. But sometimes it is also a strain. One person said she has "lived in sawdust for 20 years." Other people complained that they never have had a house to "show off" because it is always under (re) construction. Divorce is not infrequent. How does a family avoid disaster? Generating rituals helps. When one family was working on their house this summer, there were seven people living in the midst of the rubble. "At dinner, we had a five-minute gripe session to air all the problems that day," said the husband. "And we also had grace. We thanked God that the dirt was moved that day, or that we managed to get something else done."

To recapitulate, the motives and rewards for undertaking the alteration of a home, especially when one relies in large measure on one's own labor, embrace more than attending to changing spatial needs or to financial

(1977) as long as they are working on it, you probably couldn't buy it for love or money. Once the job is finished, however, and they should be enjoying the fruits of their labor, they grow restless and want to tackle another project." Fahy (1975:xiv) warns, "Fixing a house is an intimate proposition. You get to know its every inch, and when you leave it, it's like leaving a friend." Said one person when I asked him his feelings about selling houses he had remodeled, "The house on Tennessee Street is still part of me—it's my house even though I sold it after fixing it up. It is probably how an artist feels: even though he no longer owns a particular work, it is still a part of him." And in regard to his present home that he is renovating, he said, "There is a real danger in not wanting to leave. To sell is to defeat the instinct to hold on to something. I feel that way now, here, with this house: I feel like I don't really want to sell, that maybe I should rent it, hoping to return in two or three years. On the other hand, I may sell because I might need the money."

One other principle I would comment on now is that which concerns the socially symbolic, rather than the strictly personally significant, nature of remodeling attempts by some people. Alterations and additions to homes can be and sometimes are a social experience and the basis for interaction and communication. Consider the remarks of Stanforth and Stamm (1976:170).
matters. They also include gaining a degree of control over oneself and one’s possessions, attaining intellectual and sensory goals, actualizing self through symbolic forms, and achieving at least to some extent a basis for interacting and communicating with others. For some people, renovating an older house is a moral imperative, and it redounds to the advantage of the community as a whole. (See figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4.)

But there is another side to the coin. Many people do not want to remodel; if it must be done, they turn the task over to others. Chuck Scarborough (1977) takes a stance contrary to what one usually finds in magazine articles about remodeling. He concludes his survey of personal disaster by admitting that he finally realized that he had overestimated his ability to do the work himself. "It was at this moment that, like a flash of Kansas heat lightning, a soundless, startling moment of brilliance, the two great myths of 'Do-It-Yourself' were revealed to me." In regard to Myth No. 1: Doing It Yourself Is Enjoyable and Rewarding, he writes, "For people like me, it is not. Doing it myself was thumb-smashing, muscle-straining, temper-wrecking, and miserable. Only having it finished was rewarding. Even boasting to your friends about having done it yourself isn’t what it’s cracked up to be.” And with respect to Myth No. 2: You’ll Save Money, he contends, "If you try to save, you’ll end up owning a lot of cheap things. If you don’t try to save, you’ll end up owning a few expensive things. But either way, you’ll spend more than is prudent. Any money you save by doing it yourself you’ll only blow on dinners out or radial tires.”

Conceptualizing and Creating Spaces

A second element in a study of the ways that people construct, redesign, and readjust personal space is the reactions to and conceptions of space and its utilization as well as the meanings attributed to spatial arrangements. It is generally assumed that major elements in designing and using space are texture, cavity, openness, light, color, proportion and scale, geometry or morphology, flow, and acoustics as well as the principles of harmony, rhythm, and balance. Personal opinion varies in regard to the type and amount of each element, however; all that is standard is the elements themselves, not their combinations. It is obvious, for example, that some additions look “added on,” while others are integrated more completely with the original structure; the building itself may not visually accept an addition without major and expensive restructuring, the homeowner may be trying intentionally to alter the appearance or “character” of the structure, and so on. There are also different notions of formality and informality inside and out, and of public, private, and utility space (to some people front yards are public and formal, yet two or three years ago the Los Angeles Times featured a
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photo and an article on Eddie Albert who had converted his front yard to a—rather private, and somewhat informal—vegetable garden). An otherwise public and formal room may at times be cluttered with paraphernalia of several activities because there is no other space available, or because of the other meanings and uses of this space.

When the remodeling or construction of a house is under the control of the owner who intends to live there, other elements not usually considered by architects or contractors are also of great importance. These features include territoriality (that is, which space is for whom and for what), symbolism and self-expression, associations, and identification. It is the possibility of achieving these features, but the difficulty of communicating them to others in the designing stage, that inspires many homeowners to undertake some or much of the task of remodeling themselves. It is the achievement of these features that truly "personalizes" a house, custom-tailoring it and rendering it a "home."

Another consideration is that of behavioral similarities, and in particular the use of models on which to base one's behavior. That which is done to the "fixed up" structure includes a "face lift" inside or outside (repainting, repapering, adding a facade of shingles or brick or boards), an addition, enhancement of the inherent qualities of the structure as conceived of by the owner, alteration of the structure to change its character completely, and/or remodeling inside especially by installing a new kitchen or bath in accordance with current trends (presently, the use of wood, ceramic tile, used brick, and stained glass is gaining in popularity). That which is done depends on the owner's skills, finances, motives, and personal taste as well as self-concept. Often there is a difference between what owners do for themselves if they intend to live in the house for a long time and what they do in anticipation of the desires of others if they intend to sell the house soon. For most alterations there tends to be a reliance on models, which is of course tempered by particular circumstances. These models include conceptions of what the building ought to look like (e.g., what are the characteristic features of a "true" Spanish, Mediterranean, California Bungalow, etc.?), what one thinks others desire in a home, and so on.

A second set of models concerns the sources of designs, techniques of construction, uses of tools, choices of materials—otherwise sometimes known as "tradition." These models include books, magazines, friends and acquaintances with some experience relevant to a particular problem, suppliers (especially knowledgeable people in hardware stores, lumber yards, and plumbing and electrical stores), contractors and designers who are hired to assist or who are asked for estimates and then pumped for information, other houses, and tradesmen (observed at work and questioned). That is to say, people's behavior is influenced by print, by the oral communication of
Figure 3.1. Kitchen "Before"

Figure 3.2. Kitchen Remodeler
The kitchen of a small house was being remodeled. The remodeling carried many symbolic meanings, brought a great deal of pleasure in successfully meeting challenges, and epitomized the "salvage aesthetic" typical of some people in the area at the time (i.e., refurbishing the entire house cost less than $1,000 for materials, few of which were new). (The person in the doorway in fig. 3.4 is a visitor to the house and was not involved in the remodeling.)
information and advice (which is the principal external influence), and by objects that they observe (e.g., “I’ve finally figured out how to do the door and doorway; remember that house we saw on Oceano...?”). Typically many homeowners alter plans during construction and remodeling and make further adjustments during use as they come to realize more fully the kinds of space they want and the meanings they are giving to the space. Often they depend on serendipity—the fortuitous discovery of salvaged or inexpensive materials, the help of friends or “handymen,” sudden inspiration from a supplier or publication, and so on.

Other models refer to outlook, assumptive framework, or accent. That is to say, many people distinguish in the behavior of others and sometimes themselves, at least implicitly, between two processes, attitudes, and approaches. On the one hand, there is the “systems approach,” though not always named (or called that), commonly associated with a contractor or architect unfamiliar with the specific uses to be made of the space. It consists of advance planning (often based on standardized procedures and designs employed a priori), the use of the ideal sequence of “layering materials” in construction, and the relegation of specific tasks to different specialists. Such an approach is considered “cost-efficient” by some individuals—those who are not trying to personalize the space—but it is objected to by others, including homeowners employing some contractors and designers, because of the expense to them and because of what seems to be a lack of concern for their specific values and personal needs. On the other hand, there is the “person-specific approach,” or “customizing,” commonly associated with the homeowner or owner-builder, concerned more with personal-space utilization than with the most efficient ways to operate a business.

A curious dilemma is generated for some homeowners who find themselves caught between the extremes of wanting to mythologize the space to conform to and express their fantasies and to fulfill their particular symbolic and ritualistic needs, on the one hand, and on the other, to make the remodeled house appeal to others for resale purposes. (One family, for example, covered a wall of the dining room with old moss-covered, weathered shingles, though acknowledging that to other people trying to eat dinner in such an environment might be a nauseating experience. Another family, when remodeling and adding to their home, actually diminished the living room area to practically nothing and enlarged several bedrooms to a grand scale for they, unlike many people, tend to “live” in the bedrooms as if they were private “islands.” Another person was overheard to remark, “For myself, I would like to have a free-standing restaurant stove in my kitchen, but since few other people are really gourmet cooks maybe we ought to just install a simple built-in; on the other hand, maybe we can put in the built-in,
but also have a space for a commercial range and just take the range with us if we move; but then again, maybe I could... or... or maybe... ").

The point is, there do seem to be two intuitive models by which homeowners and researchers alike distinguish attitude, approach, and principal concern (my wife insists that now she can walk into an open house, take a quick look around, and know immediately whether it was remodeled for the owner's particular use or specifically for resale). In essence, many homeowners who do much of the work for themselves—and for many of whom the guiding principles seem to be reparation, piecemeal learning and working, and salvaging—feel that their approach is that of "organic growth" developing from a "living experience" and leading to "wholeness" through "self discovery." C. G. Jung (1957:225), who was an owner-builder, writes, "I built this house in sections, always following the concrete needs of the moment. It might also be said that I built it in a kind of dream. Only afterward did I see how all the parts fitted together and that a meaningful form had resulted: a symbol of psychic wholeness." Such sentiments probably originate partly in the nature of the process of construction and remodeling that often attends the work of the homeowners: they build or remodel while living in the structure, design while building, collect information and learn skills as they are needed, and tend to work with and within the existing structure instead of superimposing another geometry.

**Toward a Behaviorally-Based Architecture and Public Policy**

Among the ramifications of construction and redesign and readjustment of personal space are, first, the consequences for folkloristics and related fields of study. Contends Frank Lloyd Wright in *The Sovereignty of the Individual* (quoted in "River" 1974:19):

> The true basis for any serious study of the art of Architecture still lies in those indigenous, more human buildings everywhere that are to architecture what folklore is to literature or folk song to music and with which academic architects were seldom concerned... These many folk structures are of the soil, natural. Though often slight, their virtue is intimately related to environment and to the heart-life of the people. Functions are usually truthfully conceived and rendered invariably with natural feeling. Results are often beautiful and always instructive.

What Wright calls "folk" is that which is more person-oriented, customized or tailored, subjective rather than objective, and mythologized and ritualized (i.e., "more human buildings," "of the people," "functions truthfully conceived," "rendered with natural feeling"). It is not the outputs of a category or class of people, or a particular output readily distinguishable
from other objects, but an attitude, approach, and principal concern; and such an attitude is a function of a particular individual and of a specific circumstance.

Architectural research in recent years has witnessed a growing sense of alarm at what is taken to be the abuse of the systems approach. Especially well known and articulate are the calls to action by Clovis Heimsath (1977) and John Friedmann (1973), both of whom are concerned primarily with the planning of institutions, office buildings, multiple-unit dwellings, and cities rather than single family residences, and both of whom point out some of the dilemmas in current design approaches. Also increasing is the publication of verbal descriptions and visual documentation of so-called exotic or spontaneous architecture, such as the books by Christopher and Charlotte Williams (1974) and Bernard Rudofsky (1964), neither of which includes examples of modifications in prefab houses, tract homes, and mobile homes, or of owner-built houses in the United States, and neither of which provides analysis.

What is needed is a combination and integration of the two interests, that of developing a new approach to architecture and that of recording examples of architecture without architects. "Users are not principal members of the design team," writes Heimsath (1977:31). After a building is constructed, "there is no feedback to check that the assumptions used in designing the building were indeed valid." He lists "rules of thumb" customarily followed by architects in designing a structure, at least half of which are relied on for designing single-family residences, and he observes: "None of these twenty-three rules of thumb directly involve behavioral considerations, yet each will affect some aspect of the behavior of people using the buildings designed by means of these rules." Although there are, he is quick to point out, behavioral assumptions implicit in the current design process, they are not usually tested, made explicit, or added to with new data and insights. There is, of course, one form of feedback readily available—that of users' personalization of space. But not many researchers have recorded and analyzed this information for its relevance to architectural design and public policy.

Speaking of public policy, some mention should be made of the relationship between homeowners and the building department, and between the behavior of do-it-yourself remodelers and "the code." As Kern et al. (1976) point out, regulations, which often reflect the desires (and power) of special-interest bodies, and which have many desirable attributes, sometimes unduly restrict the owner-builder, impose expensive and otherwise unnecessary solutions to problems, militate against innovation, ignore the behavioral processes inherent in owner-built and homeowner-redesigned houses, and create an atmosphere in which violating the codes is sometimes encouraged.
Some years ago the PTA in Topanga Canyon performed a skit in which a real estate salesman shows some "flatlanders" a house that, to everyone's surprise, even has wall-to-wall flooring. And someone in the skit later says, "Show me where it says in the code that the drain field has to be outside." There is an actual case, too, in which an owner-builder, testifying to a grand jury when he was an "outlaw" builder, explained, "I never bought a permit, because there weren't any for sale for what I wanted to do!" The only way to make these regulations more realistic and reasonable is to examine the actual behavior of people who construct shelters and readjust personal space, and, on the basis of such studies, to propose alternatives to the present code and its manner of enforcement. But other behavior needs to be examined as well, namely, that of the people in the building department. Homeowners (and sometimes architects and contractors) have complained about the problems of trying to get information, advice, and approval from people behind the counter at the building department, many of whom seem either uninformed or uncaring, and one of whom, it is well known and often remarked, is downright nasty. Perhaps circumstances have something to do with this. Rarely have I heard complaints about the building inspectors who are "in the field" and on the actual site where they become aware of the problems faced by the homeowner as well as the possible solutions (some of which might not be acceptable to the letter of the code).

Yet another ramification of the study of homeowner-redesigned space concerns housing and its availability. On the one hand, abandoned houses constitute a rich resource through rehabilitation (rather than destruction and costly replacement) that could provide housing—and housing that many people find acceptable (because of associations and symbolism and identification). On the other hand, it would appear that remodeling and adding to houses, or otherwise refurbishing them, plays a part in the current housing boom with its spiraling prices. Many people, unable in the current market to afford a larger house or a "better" home, add to and remodel their present one. Yet others derive part of their income from fixing up houses for immediate rental or resale, thus contributing to rising prices (but also saving structures from demise and improving neighborhoods). And yet other people, by fixing up one house as their home and then selling it to buy another fixer upper, and so on, are enabled to improve their housing situation over the years.

There are other aspects of the housing boom that could be understood and appreciated more fully were one to examine the actual behavior of people. Explanations of spiraling prices are usually broadly based, e.g., speculation, inflation, and supply and demand, but fail to answer specifically a question that is so often asked: "If I cannot now afford to buy the house I am living in which I bought several years ago before the boom, then how can so
Figure 3.5. Notebook for the "Ideal Home"

Figure 3.6. Exterior Plan for the "Ideal Home"
These pages were taken from a booklet on home planning created by an eleven-year-old girl in Iowa. The booklet included floor plans, rooms, examples of different architectural styles and styles of furnishings, and illustrations of the kind of ambience, social relations, and technological amenities that were thought to constitute "the ideal home."
many other people afford to buy this house today?" There have been few attempts to profile buyers, and those tend to dwell upon the broad socioeconomic categories of age, ethnicity, present income, marital status, and so on. To my knowledge there have been no studies of actual sources of money used for both down payment and monthly payments (such factors as the increase in number of moonlighting and working spouses, or of people living together and thus contributing several incomes to rent or purchase, refinancing one property to buy another, receiving windfalls, upgrading one property and then selling it to buy another in need of rehabilitation and so on). Other behavioral considerations are involved in a study of spiraling property values, including the recent practice of holding lotteries for the sale of development homes, which seems simply to have spurred "panic buying," the practice of many homeowners known as "stretching" their family finances in order to meet payments, and even perhaps "redlining" by some lending institutions.

Conclusions

To return for a moment to the fundamental matter of personal space and its meaning, I want to conclude this presentation by emphasizing the importance that a dwelling may have in the lives of people. In 1936 an 11-year-old girl in Iowa was required to prepare for class a booklet expressing her conceptions of "home planning." A few of the pages from that booklet are in figures 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8. Twenty-one years later she and her husband bought a house in the Los Angeles area; the only feature in common between the house dreamed of in 1936 and the one purchased in 1956 is that both of them are green. The house is well constructed, built by the Meyer Brothers in 1947, and, as a simple stucco box, it is in many ways an ideal "tract" house if cost-efficiency is the primary consideration. Some drawbacks of the house, however, are that the spaces are rigidly defined, not lending themselves to the generation of other meanings and uses (no ambiguity here, except, unfortunately, in one of the three small bedrooms which also serves as a traffic way to the backyard, thus forcing what might otherwise be private space to become semipublic space). There is no entryway and there is no central hall plan to separate spaces and their uses. There are no nooks and crannies, no bay window, no attic to excite the imagination and generate associations or encourage symbolic behavior. Even radical attempts at adding on to the house are likely to produce anomalous designs. I am not suggesting that this owner and other owners of the house have not tried to personalize, mythologize, and ritualize space, for indeed they have tried. This woman, for example, put a wallpaper mural of colonial Williamsburg on the living room wall; a subsequent owner covered it with white carpeting (to produce a variety in texture) and installed a very large mirror (to suggest greater room
size and to create a fantasy in the interplay of spaces). I am contending, however, that sometimes an approach to architectural design that stresses the systematization of labor and standardization of materials, that requires the replication of models and techniques on an a priori basis, and that is generated and perpetuated solely or primarily for the benefit of the builder of the house ignores the behavior and the needs of the people who will dwell in these structures.

A study of owner-built and homeowner-redesigned houses suggests that it is this behavior of adding on to, remodeling, decorating, redecorating, and designing shelters, which is so prolific in contemporary American society, that would provide the necessary information and the conditions for testing assumptions that Heimsath and others demand in order to make urban planning and architectural designing more amenable to people's needs and space uses. "In mutual learning," writes Friedmann (1973:xix), which he is advocating, "the processed, scientific knowledge of the planning expert is joined with the deeply personal, experiential knowledge of the client." Homeowners and owner-builders have been telling architects a great deal for some time now, if only they would listen.