

Townhouse builders did homework

By JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

It's a popular belief that they don't build them like they used to. But, at the Troy Michigan Design Center's recent ViewPoint presentation by Victor Saroki of Saroki and his group, focusing on representative townhouses.

20th century Midwestern lifestyle.

Chapters of the American Institute of Architects in Philadelphia, New York and Boston each arranged a two-day agenda for Saroki and his group, focusing on representative townhouses.

Not copies

"The townhouses in Philadelphia were too Colonial in style, and many of those in New York were too modern," he said. "We decided that the townhouses in Boston were the most appropriate style for Birmingham. But that didn't mean we could copy. We had to translate the earlier style to suit the late 20th century."

The Boston townhouses were tall — four or five stories — and the kitchen was likely to be in the basement. They were also narrow — about 18 feet wide — and brownstone was the most commonly used material.

People in the East are used to living vertically, but those in the Midwest are used to more space.

The architect designed seven units, with three 1,200-square-foot floors to a unit. Each unit is almost 26 feet wide.

Automobiles were another 20th century phenomenon to be accommodated, so a garage, topped by a garden terrace, was attached to the back of each unit.

"Each unit is different in its detailing, but there's a sense of harmony and rhythm. The townhouses in Boston weren't built at the same time, but people respected the integrity of each other's house, and we tried for the same effect."

"Brownstone is hard to find these days, and it has a tendency to shale. We used very light brickwork, with very small mortar joints. The mortar was the same color as the brick."

"We had a lot of fun with the masonry, but there's a sense that there are still craftsmen who can build like they used to, but you have to find them."

Formal gardens

"The small formal gardens in the front were landscaped right away, and surrounded by wrought iron fences. The facades are staggered in compliance with a city ordinance, which also required the brickscreen wall around the back of the units."

Goldman was contacted by his client while the townhouses were still in the design stage.

"I stepped into a working team," the designer said. "And we all worked together to ensure that the client got a wonderful space."

Goldman had sandblasted glass installed in the front doors, in keeping the late 19th-early 20th century custom. It gives a very soft art deco effect, and there is no need for curtains.

Each of the units has a three-

story bay window. Owners are encouraged to use the same window treatments on all three tiers.

Goldman uses sheeted curtains, backed by shades, for complete privacy in the evening, when the lights are on.

"The owner was easy to work with," Goldman said. "He really only had two stipulations. As a book collector, he wanted hundreds of linear feet of shelving, and he wanted firm seating that allowed him to sit up straight."

"We made one trip to the Michigan Design Center, where he sat on the furniture I had picked out. After that, I just showed pictures of what I recommended."

"Most of the furniture is 18th or 19th century reproductions, and there are Oriental rugs in each room, over the plank oak floors. The living room/dining room area was finished in a celadon green, and on the top of the bookcases we used a celadon green crackle lacquer, very popular in the 18th century, and revived in the Victorian era."

"As soon as you walk into the townhouse, you feel welcome. It's a warm and inviting space."

The townhouses have won several awards and are about to be featured in an Italian architectural magazine. Photographers love them. They've been used in at least one nationally televised automobile commercial. The Detroit Institute of Arts gives tours of them. They're a landmark.

But surely the ultimate recognition came from the craftsmen themselves.

"When the project was finished, we had a celebration on the site," Saroki said. "The craftsmen's wives said they had seen the project often — their husbands used to drive them by in the evening to show them what they had accomplished that day!"

Studied structure:
Planners did research when building the award-winning Merrill Park Town Houses in Birmingham.



DIA plans variety of events for month

The Detroit Institute of Arts has planned numerous special programs and events for visitors of all ages in its annual "May is Museum Month."

"Polish Day at the DIA," Saturday, May 1, and "Cinco de Mayo," Sunday, May 2, will begin the schedule of activities. Commencing Wednesday, May 5, and continuing every Wednesday in May will be the DIA Shop and Shuttle, which will provide express bus shuttle service from the Somerset Collection, 12 Oaks and Eastland malls to the museum.

Festivities will continue with "Art for the Young at Heart," for older members of the community, Thursday, May 6; "Mother's Day Brunch," Sunday, May 9; "Cap &

Brunch," for recent graduates, Sunday, May 23; and "Family Day at the DIA," with free admission and fun-filled activities for the whole family, Sunday, May 16.

The DIA is open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday. Beginning May 8, the weekend hours will be extended to 5 p.m. The recommended admission is a donation of \$4 per adult and \$1 per child. DIA Founders Society members are admitted free. For more information, call 833-7971.

"Polish Day at the DIA" will feature a talk by Eleie Holmes Peck, associate curator of Near Eastern art, and a cello recital by Paul Ledwon, accompanied by pi-

anist Wesley Fishwick. Those attending the recital may meet the performing artists in an afterglow.

"Cinco de Mayo" will feature viewing of "Detroit Industry" murals by Diego Rivera, guided tours in English or Spanish, a traditional Mexican crafts display, a performance by a local musical group called Los Adolescentes, and a lecture on "Enduring Traditions: Mexican Art from the Pre-Columbian Era to the Present Day."

"Art for the Young at Heart" will include artists' demonstrations, gallery talks and a film presentation of "Young at Heart." Portrait opportunities will be available for a nominal fee at the Mother's Day Brunch. Pianist Al-

den Schall will play at the brunch. Reservations are required. Call 833-1857. Also that day, a lecture on "The Egyptian Royal Mummies of the New Kingdom" will take place.

"Family Day" events will include performances by the Cass Tech Jazz Band and MBS Dance Company, artists' demonstrations, a children's treasure hunt, special tours for youngsters, storytellers, a caricature artist, puppetry, magic and face painting. Student readings will take place.

Those wearing graduation caps will receive a gift from the DIA. Reservations are required. Call 833-1857.

Oakland writers to speak at conference

The fifth annual Writers' Conference sponsored by the Livingston County Writers' Group is scheduled 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 8, at the Miller Intergenerational Center, 850 Spencer in Brighton.

The registration fee is \$35, which includes a luncheon. Deadline is Saturday, May 1. To register, call 1-517-546-0134 or mail a registration form to LCWIG, 151 Latson, Howell 48843.

Local speakers at the conference will include novelist Thomas Sullivan of Lathrup Village, playwright Kitty Dubin of Birmingham, and poet Margo LaGattuta of Rochester.

Co-chairpersons of the conference are Pearl Ahnen and LCWIG president Ann Blaine.

Keynote speaker at the conference will be Tom Kakanias, whose first novel, "Michigan 1933," was named by the New York Times Book Review as one of the 10 best crime novels of 1988. The book is now under option with a film production company.

"Crisis Cross," his second novel, was cited by critics as one of the best mysteries of 1990. His third book, "Double Down," was selected by the New York Times as among the top 10 crime novels of 1991. Kakanias lives in Grand Rapids and is a professor of English at Ferris State University.

Among the other speakers at the conference will be Eastern Michigan University professor Gilbert Cross, who writes young adult novels and espionage thrillers; William Kienzie, whose successful "The Rosary Murders" launched his career as a novelist; Earl Snodgrass, editor and publisher of Japanophile, a literary magazine; and John Winner of the 1992 Livingston County Arts Council Award for Achievement in the Literary Arts and a winner in the International Auto Shows 1993 Short Story Contest.

Workshop topics will be playwrighting, short story writing, poetry, the novel, "Showing, Not Telling," "Turning a Novel into a Mystery,"

"How to Find Material," genre definitions and, time permitting, "on-the-spot" analysis of works. Kakanias will conduct a workshop on techniques fundamental to the creation of fictional characters.

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