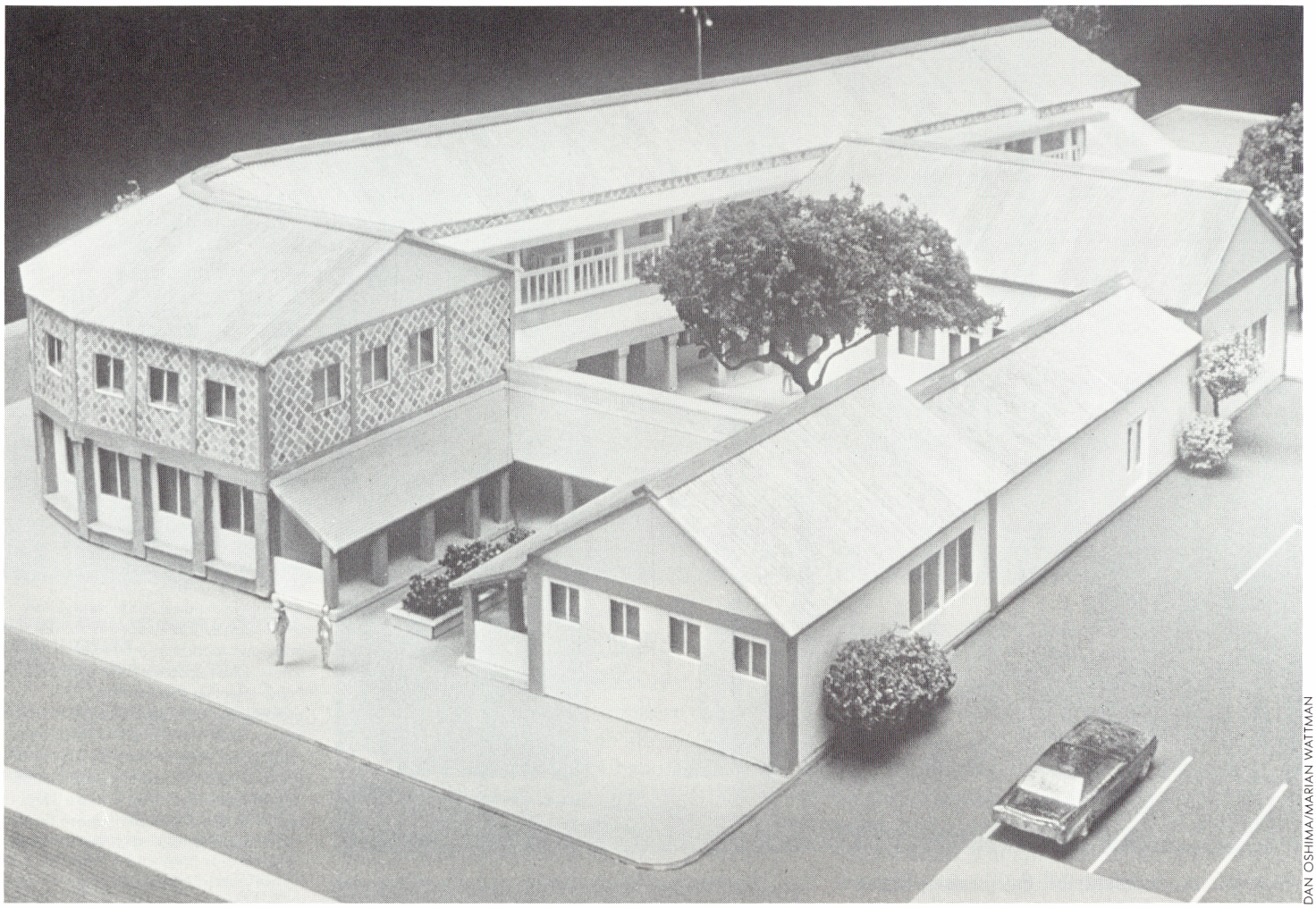


DAN OSHIMA/MARIAN WATTMAN

HOUSING FOR INDEPENDENT PEOPLE SAN JOSE
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STRUCTURE

The building wraps around the corner site; its character is emphatically noninstitutional. Two high, arched openings in the north facade permit a view of the interior courtyards. On the west side, an arcade entrance court gives access to an entrance lobby on one side and, on the other, to a first aid room and bath area that may be used independently of the shelter. The structure is designed to be a concrete frame with infill panels on the upper story which are pre-cast with in-set tiles. On the interior, the building's hand-crafted appearance will be reinforced by heavy timber ceilings in the two lobbies. The plan is well organized to give views out to the courtyards and the street from the ground floor communal spaces. The dormitories on the upper level provide 28 square feet of private space for each of the 50 beds.

Emergency Shelters

While SRO hotels are considered more or less permanent places of residence, the need for emergency shelter is being served by day-to-day facilities. Most of these are operated under various publicly-assisted programs and meet only minimum standards. In this arena, religious and other nonprofit organizations are attempting to create a more dignified environment and to offer other services besides a bed for the night.

A project that exemplifies this approach is the Episcopal Sanctuary's Shelter for the Homeless at Eighth and Howard Streets in San Francisco. Originally a warehouse and most recently a bath house, the building was sound, but in need of replanning. Lucia Bogatay, AIA says, "The main challenge was to make what was there function for a new use with a minimum of effort and cost. The only place for 'design' is in the use of color to humanize the communal spaces. The kitchen/dining/assembly area and bathrooms have the highest priority. The real satisfaction comes from making a place for the Sanctuary's vital work to happen."

Architect Christopher Alexander's Center for Environmental Structure is designing a 50 bed shelter for Housing for Independent People, a public agency funded by San Jose's Redevelopment Agency. Since the building will be at the gateway to a large redevelopment project, the city has reason to want it to be a shining example. For his part, Alexander thinks it resembles a "country inn." "I believe that homelessness can happen to anyone—me, for example," he says. "I tried to use my feelings about being homeless as a basis for the design. In the end, I was delighted when one of the people we worked with announced that they, not we, had really designed the project."



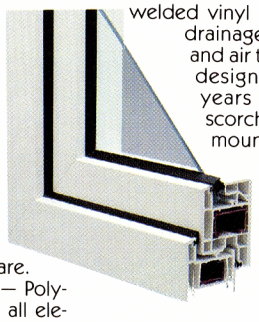
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