Science Cabinet #1
II. Anthropological Research
2. PREVI Patterns
a) Thick Walls

THICK WALLS

IN THE PROYECTO EXPERIMENTAL HOUSE, the wall connecting the sala, patio, veranda and family room, has a series of small niches in it, formed by 40 cm stub walls that stick out at right angles to the main wall. Each niche contains a seat, shelves, cupboard or display.

THE GENERAL PATTERN IS:

Context:

Interior wall, in any part of a building which is intended to be personal.

Solution:

The wall has "depth", at least 40 cm, which is created by a hand-carvable rigid space frame, in which a continuous variety of niches, shelves, seats, cupboards, leaning posts, and window seats occur at frequent intervals. This hand-carvable space frame is made of materials which are readily available on the retail market, and easily cut, modified, painted, nailed, glued, replaced by hand, using only tools available at any

hardware store. Possible examples are wood, plywood, fiberglass styrofoam, polystyrene. The space frame is highly redundant structurally: Large sections of it may be removed, without weakening it, and pieces or sections may be added in such a way that these sections become continuous with, and indistinguishable from, the original surface.

Problem:

Rooms with large, flat, unbroken wall surfaces almost never have any personal character, and it is very hard for people who live in such rooms to make them personal. A room becomes personal, only when the imprint of its inhabitants is clearly visible, the walls crowded with treasures and belongings (presents, pictures of sweethearts and grandparents, flowers, vases, knick-knacks, books, collections), these teasures built integrally into the fabric of the room, and the surface of the room moulded to the character of its inhabitants. If a room has large unbroken wall surfaces, made of unmouldable materials, none of this is possible. It is hard to store things in the open, without cluttering up the room, and it is not possible to build these things in a personal way into the fabric of the room.

In order to make a room personal, then, its wall surface must be deep enough to contain a variety of niches and recesses, where special things can be placed, without being in the way; and the wall must be made of materials which allow these niches and recesses to be adapted to the idiosyncracies of the things which are to be placed there, and to the habits which go with them. This argument is presented in full, with empirical evidence, in Christopher Alexander,"Thick Walls", Architectural Design, February 1968.