

The Museum of Modern Art

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Habitat, the demonstration at Expo '67 of new housing ideas and techniques that may profoundly affect the design of our future cities will be shown at The Museum of Modern Art from June 1 through July 16 in a large scale model supplemented by the continuous projection of 132 color slides.

The exhibition was selected by Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, who taped the narration which accompanies the slide presentation. Plans and enlarged photo blow-ups are also on view.

Mr. Drexler points out that architects have long sought to apply to building the techniques of mass production used for automobiles and other artifacts, and that if we hope to meet the anticipated demands for our expanding population we must learn to do so. An important contribution made by the architect of Habitat, Moshe Safdie, is that he has demonstrated what many architects have long maintained: that it is possible to use mass production to increase variety, and in fact give each apartment dweller the experience of living in his own house.

Built by the Canadian Corporation for Expo '67, the design concept of Habitat begins with the observation that Canada must provide the equivalent of a complete city for 70,000 people every month until the year 2,000 if it is to keep pace with its population expansion.

Habitat contains 158 apartments or houses. It is essentially a pile of inter-connecting concrete boxes arranged to afford privacy and sunlight and generous outdoor living areas. There are twelve levels. Individual houses are reached from aerial streets which traverse the entire structure. From each of these streets no apartment is more than one flight up or down. Three elevator towers serve the aerial streets.

"The units are not stacked solid. They leap out into space and frame extraordinary vistas of sky and water, as well as of each other. Although the building

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is roughly symmetrical in its layout, the complexity of this stacking -- the play of solid and void -- is so rich that walking into it is like walking into a kaleidoscope. Habitat looks as if someone had built a village on a Mediterranean hillside and then removed the hill," Drexler notes.

Each concrete box was made on the site in a factory constructed for the purpose. Color slides in the exhibition show this process including the gantry ready to carry a unit to the adjacent site where a giant crane hoisted the units into place. Before each box was installed it was equipped with prefabricated bathrooms of fiberglass.

The basic structural unit is 38 1/2 feet long, 17 1/2 feet wide and 10 feet high. It weighs approximately 80 tons and is fabricated without a roof, which is separately cast and installed. Part of the roof of each house becomes the terrace garden for the house above it.

Three hundred fifty-four of these units were combined in Habitat to make 158 "houses", or apartments, varying in size from one to four bedrooms. Houses are thus made up of one, two, or even three boxes and many are duplexes. In all there are 15 different plans.

There are two networks of ground circulation: a surface road system which connects all service areas and parking facilities; and a completely separate pedestrian network one level above the ground which connects all parts of the project through walkways and plazas.

"Individual blocks cantilever as much as twenty feet. When two blocks cantilever toward each other from different stacks, the result may be an overhang of as much as forty feet. All of these combinations are enlivened by the play of light and the movement of crowds, but nothing in the busy exterior prepares the visitor for the truly heroic scale of the open-air spaces the building encloses at ground level," Drexler says.

Vertical circulation is through three cores of elevators which stop at every fourth floor and serve the horizontal pedestrian streets. Access to the houses is directly off these pedestrian streets sometimes one level above or below the main

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walkway. The main walkways, however, are continuous through the project. Curved plastic shields over the aerial streets turn them into protected arcades. Certain areas on two floors are to be used as playgrounds for younger children. The building is centrally heated and air-conditioned. Plant boxes on the terrace of each house are watered and fertilized from a central supply line.

Habitat has been built on a narrow strip of land called Mackay Pier. The Federal Government owns 50 percent, the Provincial Government 37 1/2 percent, and the City of Montreal 12 1/2 percent. It is anticipated that the project will be sold to private enterprise after the closing of Expo '67 and that the balance of usable land on Mackay Pier will be made available for extension and continuation of Habitat. The original version was five times larger than what was finally built, and as executed the project does not yet include stores or other facilities.

Costs were higher than anticipated, partly because the factory constructed to make the concrete boxes represents an investment of over two million dollars. The extremely high cost of each unit, about \$100,000, is therefore largely the result of having built too little rather than too much.

Twenty-six units are furnished and open for viewing to visitors to Expo '67. Others have been rented to individuals and corporations during the course of the fair.

Habitat was designed by Israeli-born architect, Moshe Safdie, who moved to Montreal at 16 and studied architecture at McGill University. The principles of Habitat can also be applied to urban renewal areas and could reduce the need for relocation by building in stages beginning on available open land before demolishing existing buildings.

Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Circle 5-8900.