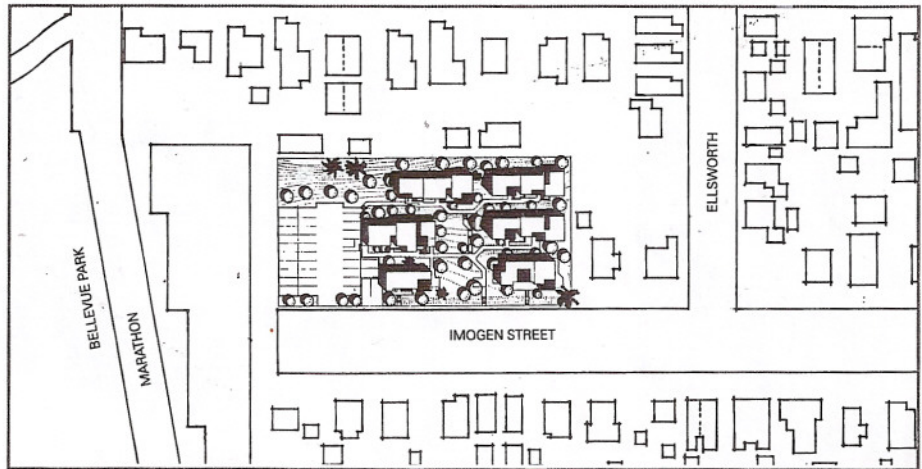
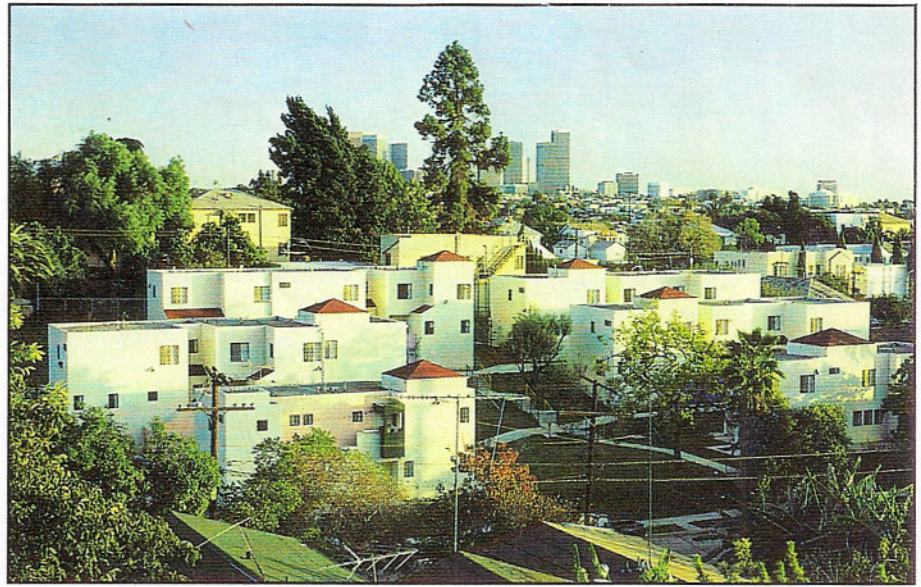


Affordable Hillside

On an unused parcel designated for a freeway, Bruce Sternberg's Imogen Apartments borrow from L.A.'s single-family housing tradition.



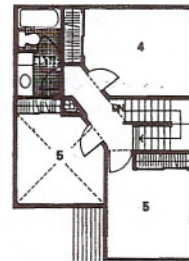
SITE PLAN

N 100'/30m

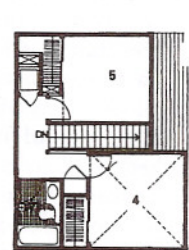
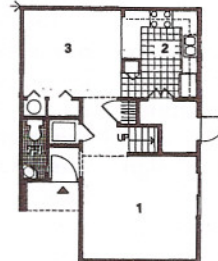
Bruce Sternberg's Imogen Apartments are an attempt to create medium-density housing in a neighborhood of aging, single-family bungalows without disrupting the character of the street. The neighborhood is a largely Hispanic area near downtown Los Angeles, on the edge of the hilly Silverlake district. The developer bought the sloping, one-acre parcel from the California Department of Transportation, which had earlier intended it for freeway construction.

The developer, a nonprofit home builder, had originally planned the 16-unit townhouse complex as co-op housing, and intends to convert them over time. Sternberg thus arranged the housing in six free-standing clusters to emphasize the sense of privacy and ownership, avoiding the centralized courtyard scheme more typically seen in affordable housing on a small site. To his regret, the backyard fences which would have provided further privacy were never built, exposing the under-detailed backs of the townhouses.

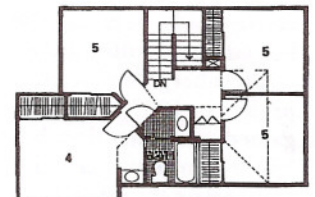
The steep site presented a number of challenges, particularly given the builder's spartan budget. Rather than excavate, the architect chose to place the buildings atop "stem walls." This



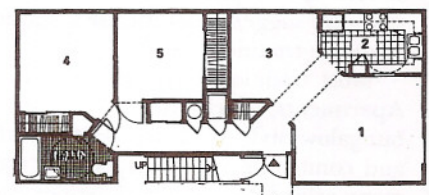
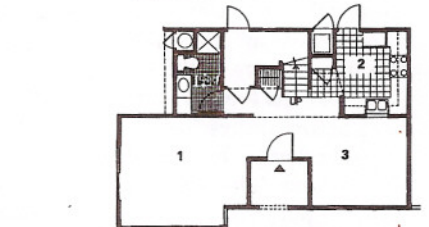
THREE-BEDROOM UNIT



TWO-BEDROOM UNIT



FOUR-BEDROOM UNIT

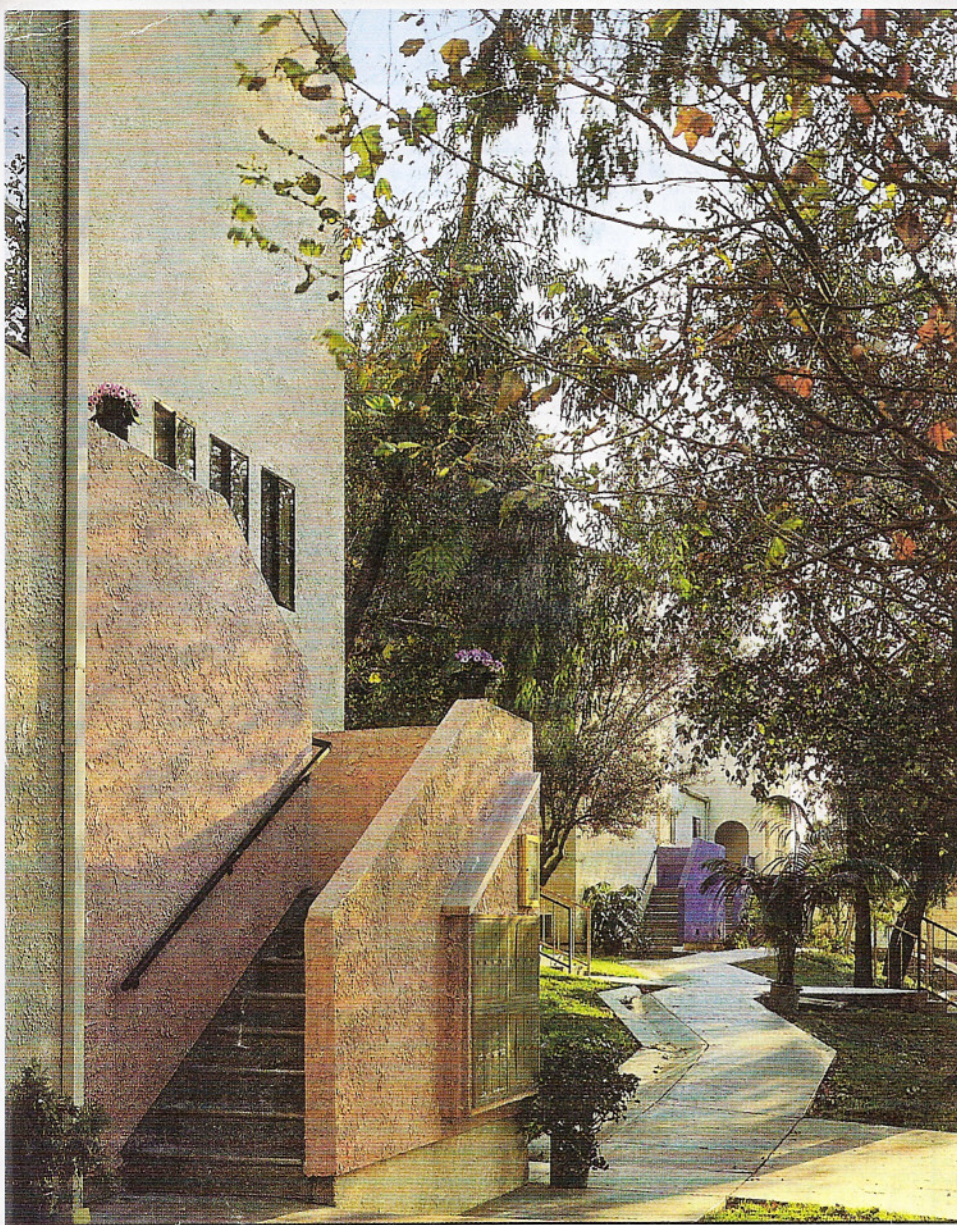


HANDICAPPED-ACCESSIBLE UNIT

- 1 LIVING
- 2 KITCHEN
- 3 DINING
- 4 MASTER BEDROOM
- 5 BEDROOM

20'/6m

To make the project conform to the scale and rhythm of the surrounding single-family homes (1, site plan), two small buildings, each containing two units, occupy the street frontage; the remainder of the buildings, each containing four units, are located farther from the street. Within the site, stairs and entries provide semi-private space (2). Interiors (3) are inspired by Los Angeles bungalows.



Derek Rath



strategy means the front door is often several feet above grade, creating the need for stairs, which become strong diagonal elements in the elevations.

Sternberg completed the Imogen Apartments project in 1987, before Neo-Traditional planning gained wide attention, but his approach has some features in common with that doctrine: his design emphasizes the importance of covered entries and front stairs. The stairs, shielded by a wall, provide a "semi-private" space that intervenes between the absolute privacy of the home and the public area.

Unlike the Neo-Traditionalists, however, Sternberg accomplishes his contextualism not through copy-cat design, but through subtle, minimal nods to tradition. The imagery of the apartments derives in part from the so-called Spanish style of home building common to the neighborhood. The simple arches and diagonal profiles of external stairs are suggestive of the thick-walled building of Hispanic tradition.

Most traditional are the plans of the Imogen Apartments, which offer an approximation of the bungalow style of living. Instead of simplifying and combining interior spaces in the manner of many affordable housing schemes, Sternberg cre-

ated many discrete spaces in each unit.

Informal landscaping covers the steep up-slope of the site, and continues north beyond the housing, to provide a green margin to a prosaic parking lot. "People often socialize here as they work on their cars, so I thought it would be good to make the environment as nice as possible," says Sternberg. He adds that local residents nixed plans to plant trees in the parking lot itself: they did not want tree resin to fall on their newly waxed cars.

Not all developers and designers in Los Angeles show as much care in multifamily housing as have Sternberg and his client. Shortly after the Imogen Apartments were completed, developers built a high-density apartment complex at the end of Imogen Street, blocking the view and denying easy access to the park behind it. The context that Sternberg worked hard to preserve has been all but destroyed by insensitive zoning and the wrong kind of developer incentives. In this setting, Sternberg's sensitive project appears a defiant David against a Goliath of speculation. **Morris Newman** ■

The author is P/A's Los Angeles correspondent and senior editor of California Planning and Development Report.

Project: Imogen Apartments, Los Angeles.

Architect: Bruce Sternberg, Los Angeles.

Client: Route 2 Community Housing Corp., Los Angeles.

Site: sloping one-acre tract intended for freeway construction in residential neighborhood.

Program: 16 apartment units ranging from 850 to 1250 sq ft, to be converted to a limited equity cooperative (total area: 16,165 sq ft).

Structural system: wood frame on spread concrete footings.

Major materials: plaster, carpet, vinyl tile, gypsum board (see *Building Materials*, p. 113).

Mechanical system: package hot-air gas furnaces.

Consultants: Barrio Planners, landscape; Albert Halimi, structural; Rouhy Dehbbi, mechanical; Mirahmadi & Associates, electrical engineering; Christopher C. Chan, civil engineering.

General contractor: EAC Construction.
Costs: \$717,000 (\$44.35/sq ft).