

Housing for the elderly:
Robert Shaw ECHO Village
Austin, Texas
Tom Hatch Architects



In addition to the five cottages arrayed along a central commons, Robert Shaw Village for the elderly includes a larger (550-square-foot) two-bedroom house (center left in photo opposite) for a live-in manager who maintains the property and assists the householders. To give it identity, the manager's residence is oriented to the street and one of the site's peripheral off-street parking areas, but links back to the village green with a rear porch and laundry room shared by all residents. A "gateway" gazebo, and common garden complete the complex.



A gentle echo

In Austin, as in many other expanding communities (as recently as 1984, Austin was the fastest-growing city in the country), successive spurts of suburban growth have leapfrogged over the long-settled residential areas around the central business district. Predictably, the ensuing drain of people and money has opened these areas to decline; less predictably, their present, mostly low-income, mostly minority, residents now have mixed feelings about reversing the spiral. As architect Tom Hatch, whose client roster includes several such neighborhoods, observes, "They want to fix things up—but not too much."

The issue is no less than the inner-city neighborhoods' survival as havens of affordable housing, which is increasingly threatened by the same proximity to downtown that once contributed to their neglect. In addition to pressure from commercial interests eyeing close-in sites for development, the communities are resisting the blandishments of gentrification, which could boost housing costs—particularly for rental units—well beyond the reach of current occupants. And the Blackland area, home of the vest-pocket village for the elderly shown here, also faces inroads from the bordering University of Texas, whose pursuit of space for expansion is swallowing up houses and land by the block.

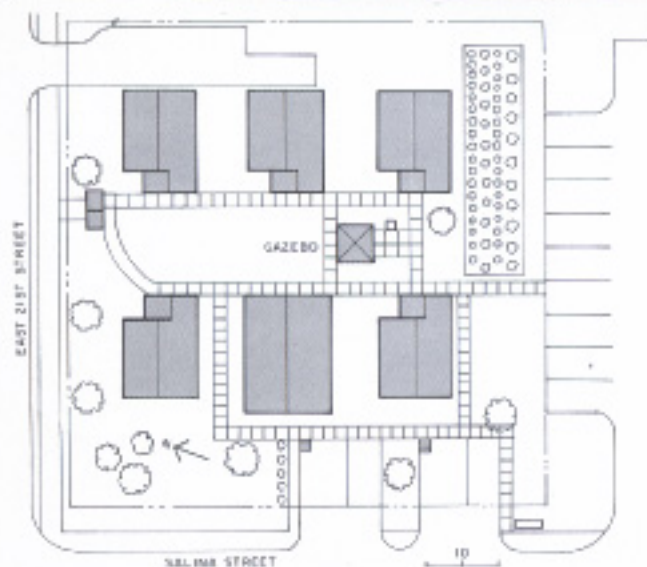
With funds coming to hand in trickles rather than a reliable flow, Blackland and other inner-city neighborhoods have found the most promising route to controlled revitalization to be infill development of new or renovated single-family detached housing, owned and managed by the community itself through a nonprofit corporation. In pursuing it, they have been abetted not only by Tom Hatch's firm, which has worked with them for the past five years, but also by Henneberger, Paup + Associates, who, having helped organize the neighborhood development corporations, continue to serve as consultants and developers.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the residents' hands-on participation is the glove-fit between housing and setting. Not only do the client/users insist on compatibility with existing dwellings, they hold firm ideas about which precedents should be honored: no "slave-quarters" board-and-batten siding or metal roofs, thank you. In Tom Hatch's sympathetic hands, client conservatism and minimal budgets have translated for the most part to a decorous '30s-bungalow style—"friendly and easy," he says, "with just a bit of edge to it"—so unassuming it takes a second glance to sort the new houses from the old.

Robert Shaw Village, which Hatch describes as the littlest PUD in Texas, exemplifies both the decorum and the timelessness. The enclave is based on the ECHO (Elder Cottage Housing Opportunity) model of compact, energy-efficient residences for old people, usually placed behind or beside an existing single-family house. Here, five one-bedroom, 440-square-foot cottages, plus a two-bedroom house for a resident manager, are instead grouped together on a single corner parcel, but they offer residents a comparable balance between the privacy and independence of living in one's own separate house and the companionship and sense of security of having watchful neighbors nearby.

In true village fashion, the tidy cottages face one another across a common green, their ample front porches providing householders an easy half step between solitude and sociability. Introduced by a freestanding gate that doubles as a mailbox shelter, the central courtyard also boasts a gazebo with adjacent barbecue pit, which has become the village social center, and a shared vegetable garden. *M. F. G.*

A vest-pocket village of tiny cottages in a subtle update of the neighborhood's favored bungalow style houses an "extended family" of old people with fitting dignity and decorum.





Familiar forms and materials—trim white teardrop siding, green gabled roofs, pier-cornered front porches—root the new cottages in the old neighborhood, despite a tautness of detail that betrays their present-day provenance. Constructed on-grade for easier handicapped access, the compact but efficient houses offer their elderly residents such amenities as air cooling, wheelchair-accessible baths, and generous storage, in addition to the shared common spaces, at a cost low enough to allow rents of only \$100 a month.

*Robert Shaw ECHO Village
Austin, Texas*

Owner:
*Blackland Neighborhood
Development Corporation*

Architect:
*Tom Hatch Architects—Tom
Hatch, partner-in-charge; Pat
Cornelison, project architect*

Consultant:
*Henneberger, Paup +
Associates*

General contractor:
Ash Creek Homes

