

Model Houses and Housing Ideology in Australia

Kim Dovey

Abstract

This paper explores the meaning of the house through an interpretation of model house advertisements and display houses in Australia over the past 20 years. The advertising discourse is analysed as a set of cultural constructs, which, being market sensitive, reflect changing social structures, values and ideologies. Over this period the house structure has been transformed. The informal 'family' area has expanded, become formalised, and is becoming the new heart of the house. The back yard has been both segmented and integrated with the new heart. The parents' realm has been enlarged, and detached from children and family areas. There has been an overall increase in the symbolic importance of the interior of the house which is called upon to fill an onerous role in resolving social problems. The increasing number and size of interior spaces are identified with a dream of privatised freedom that ironically locks many Australians into financial bondage.

Introduction

Every home in this range is a statement ... of how you see yourself. ... It's a range of homes that reached beyond the normal boundaries of bricks and mortar to become a vision, a philosophy which culminates in the belief that a house must be a home. And a home must be everything you've ever dreamed of. (Model House Advertisement, 1988)

Advertising text in the housing industry studiously avoids the word 'house', it is always this complex package of socio-spatial meaning we call 'home' (Dovey, 1985; Lawrence, 1987a). The 'Great Australian Dream' is popularly known as the desire to own a house that embodies such meanings and the marketing of the house as commodity is the marketing of this meaning. The house is also a cultural artifact enshrouded in myth and deeply embedded in ideology. Its importance for the constitution and reproduction of social relations is increasingly recognised (Bourdieu, 1977; Saunders and William, 1988). Problems of housing affordability and sustainability ultimately hinge around issues of ideology – the unspoken constructs and ideas that drive the housing market. This paper presents preliminary results of an

attempt to understand this locus of meaning and ideology through interpretation of the advertising discourse for model houses in Australia since 1968. The primary aim of the project is to understand the values and ideologies underlying the production of such housing and the manner in which they both persist and change over time.

The research design involved a survey of a sample of major model house advertisements appearing in newspapers in Melbourne and Perth over the period 1968–89. A model house is defined as any standard house design marketed for mass production.¹ Newspapers with large circulation, wide market sector, and a large volume of housing advertisements were chosen. An underlying assumption to this research is that the marketing agents for these buildings are spending money rationally – that their market research taps a reliable experiential base. If this is so then the values revealed are a clue to the cultural forces that are producing built form in the first place.

A few words are in order about the limits of this study. First, it is not assumed that the houses live up to the claims of the advertising, nor that they reflect how the average person lives, or what they can afford. The advertising evokes a set of myths and portrays an ideal rather than a reality. Second, the discussion

focuses on spatial relations and images only because these are the forms through which the dream is woven. I do not wish to assert any priority of the spatial over the social, nor any deterministic relation between them. Third, while model houses are a very substantial piece of the market they are but one piece. Specifically excluded are the bottom (which is rental), the top (which is custom-designed) and all types other than the detached. Model houses represent a kind of apotheosis of the dream and, in their advertising, the myths surface in a manner that makes them available for interpretation.

Although about 250 houses per year are included in the sample, the study is not empirical and statistics are used only to add breadth to what is primarily an interpretation of meaning. The method is at once deconstructive, hermeneutic and phenomenological. The task is to unpack the forms of discourse, to interpret the nature of the myths and to understand and articulate the experience with which the dweller is asked to identify (Wernick, 1983; Jhally, 1987). All text which appears in italics is a direct quote from the advertising copy. In addition to the analysis of advertisements, the research included visits to a large number of constructed display houses in both cities. This involved collection of further advertising brochures and interpretation of the house itself as an advertising medium. In this paper I will discuss some selected themes which point to interesting transformations in both the structure and meaning of the Australian house over the past 20 years.

Plan structures

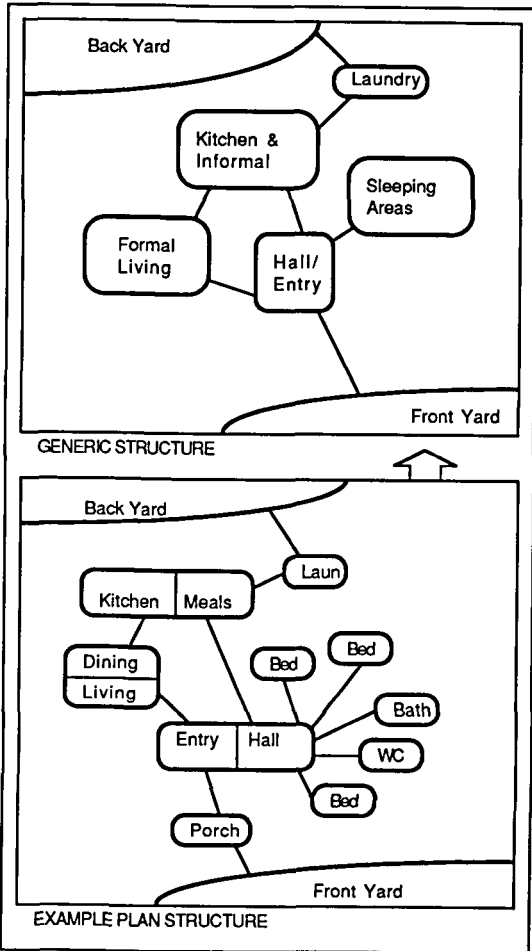
The house structure has been analysed using a technique which regards the house as composed of a range of 'places' or centres of meaning which are structured in a certain set of relationships. These 'places' are meaningful segments of domestic space which may or may not be enclosed. The plan signifies a set of categories and their structural relationships. It is not assumed that each element is necessarily used in one particular way (that the dining room is used primarily for eating for instance) only that the houses are sold in this manner. Thus each 'place' is a part of the house which is either named on the advertisement and/or is separable in terms of privacy such that an activity in one 'place' would not be an integral

part of an activity in another. There are situations where this criterion is somewhat arbitrary, however ambiguous cases are not a significant proportion and they can be interpreted separately.

The unquestioned context for these houses is the suburban block; they are all detached houses with clear orientation to both front and rear yards. There is often an optional garage or carport attached to the house plan, however these have not been included in the analysis which follows. While this technique owes something to the structuralist interpretation of house plans by Hillier and Hanson (1984) I am not suggesting any kind of structural determinism. Instead I am attempting to interpret the structures as reflecting changes in social relationship and environmental meaning (Lawrence, 1987b). The technique permits an analysis of the structure of the houses separately from the minor differences of room size and shape. Thus a plan will have an identical structure to its mirror image and to many other house plans of different shape or size of space. For purposes of analysis, these structural diagrams have been further simplified according to the zones of the house reflected in both the plans and the advertising – sleeping, formal living (living and dining), informal living (kitchen, meals, family, rumpus, games) and the access points between them. I shall refer to these as generic structures.

Figure 1 shows the single dominant generic structure (46 per cent of sample) at the start of the study period from 1968–71, together with a typical plan structure. Figure 2 shows a typical plan from that time. Sleeping areas were almost always consolidated in the sense that they were accessible from the same hallway (84 per cent of sample) and accessible from near the front entrance. Most plans had a small meals or family area in addition to a kitchen (87 per cent). There was a single exit to the backyard which was commonly via the laundry but sometimes directly from the meals area. By the late 1980s the plans had diversified, fragmented and undergone some marked structural shifts. Figure 3 shows two of the most common generic structures in 1984–87 together with example plan structures. Plans from this period appear in Figures 4 and 5. The following sections of this paper will explore some of these structural shifts together with an interpretation of the changes in social values that are also evident through other readings of the advertising material.

Fig. 1 Plan structures and generic structures, 1968-72



The new heart

One of the most remarkable changes in the plan structures over the past 20 years is the development of the informal living areas of the house. In 1968 the family room or meals area was usually an elongation of the kitchen, if it existed at all (Figure 2). The kitchen had traditionally been a place of informal living, eating and working as well as cooking. The elongation was a means of separating the eating and living activities from the cooking activity where principles of efficiency dictated a smaller area. It was also related to the lure of television during meal times – one means of keeping the mess and the children out of the formal living area. The period under study shows a steady increase in the area of informal living and a progressive segmentation into 'meals', 'family', 'games', 'rumpus', and sometimes 'great room' 'TV room' or 'media centre'. A sample of plans that advertised their dimensions shows that while the areas devoted to formal living/dining remained constant at about 28 square metres, the areas devoted to informal living (excluding the kitchen) rose from an average of about 8 to 32 square metres over the study period.

While the formal living and dining areas have maintained their existence, size and symbolic importance, they would appear to have become marginalised in relation to the house as a whole. There are several indications, in addition to the massive increase in

Fig. 2 Typical plan, 1968

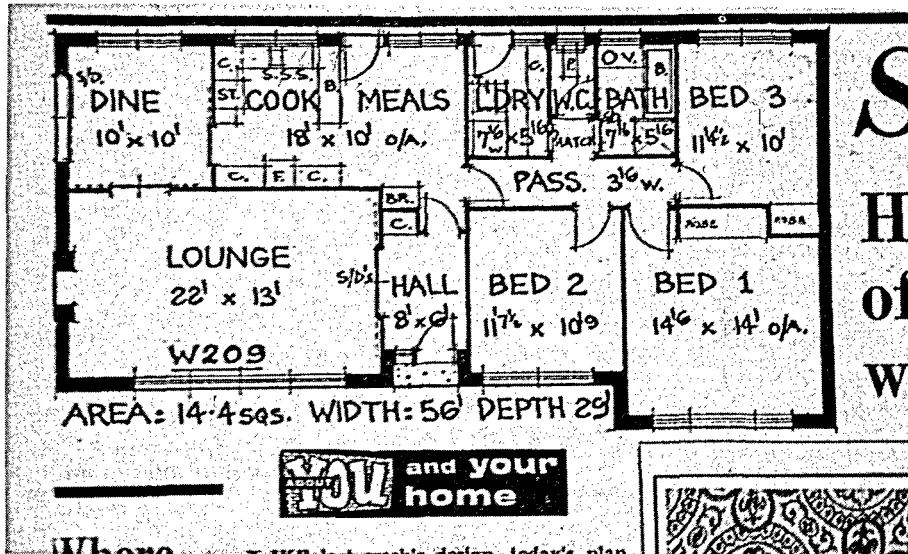
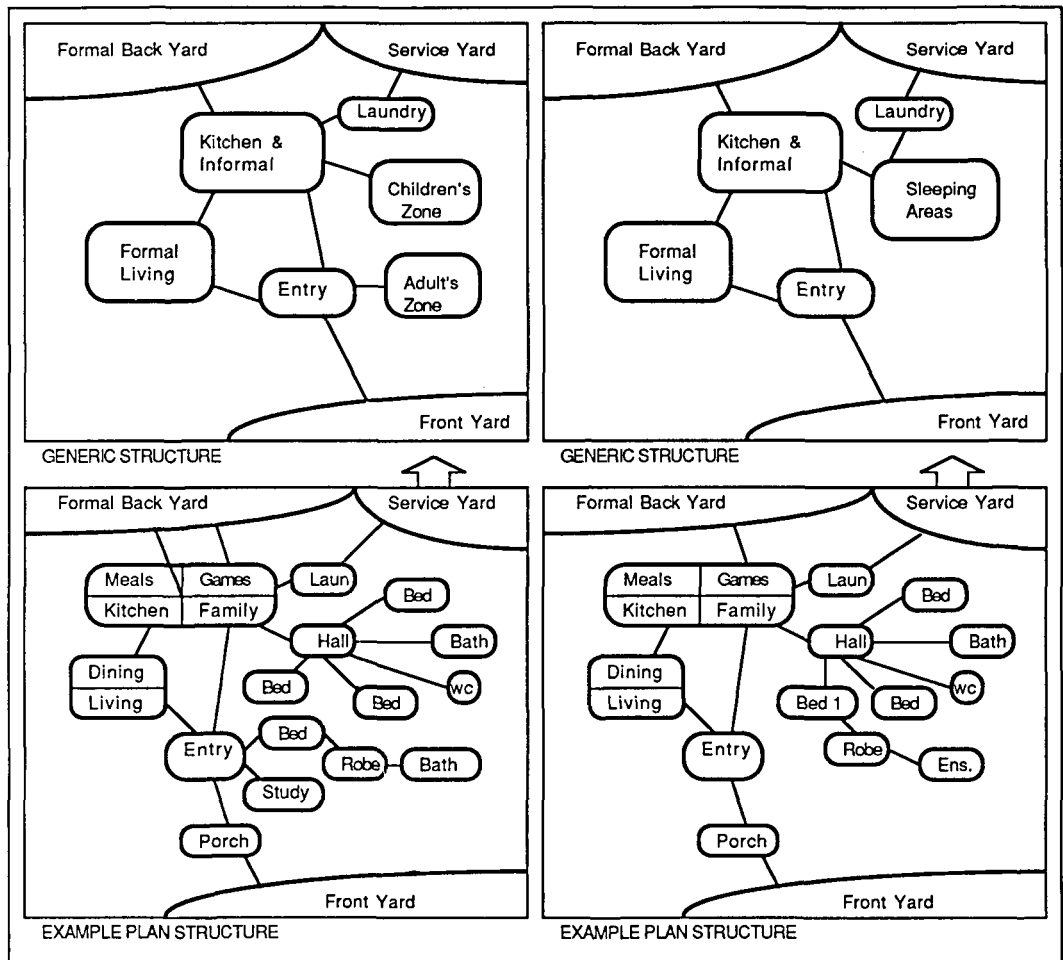


Fig. 3 Plan structures and generic structures, 1984–87



size, that the informal zone is usurping the position as the heart of the house and is becoming the primary setting for social performance. While the formal living areas have remained close to the entrance and very much on display, the informal areas have become more directly accessible to the entry. The bar, which emerged in the 1960s as a bay attached to the dining/living areas has a primary entertainment function. It is now often attached to the family or games area. The informal areas are now universally connected to the formal backyard area which has also become a primary place of social performance about which I will say more later. Many expensive design features such as cathedral ceilings and skylights are now focused in the informal zone. The family rooms of the constructed display houses are increasingly furnished in a formal manner with formal dining settings, fireplaces, bars and in

one case, a grand piano. The television, by contrast, is being largely eradicated from the advertising of these areas and relegated to a further retreat. In this formalised informal zone the image of one's informal lifestyles must be carefully monitored and the new retreats (games room, children's area and media centre) would seem to have the function of coping with the chaos.

The advertising is often quite explicit that the heart of the house comprises the informal living areas, as in slogans such as – *the home with the Big Heart* and *The Kitchen and Family room are the heart of any home*. In some cases it is the 'games' area that is seen as the centre – *Focal Point is huge sunken games room and Games room as hub, meals at half time*. There has been a persistent focus in the advertising on the amount of space devoted to these areas which has been added to the house rather than

Fig. 4 Typical large plan, 1988

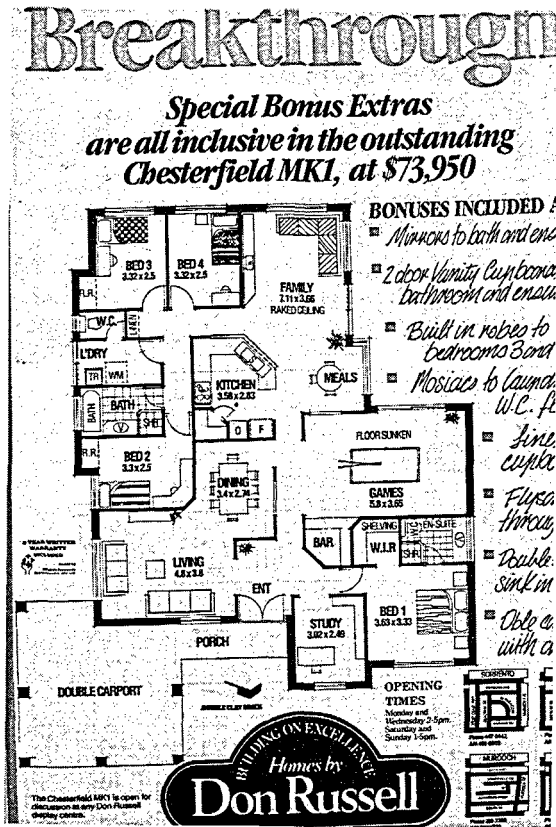


Fig. 5 Typical plans and gendered values, 1987



displacing existing space. *Life Wasn't meant to be Squeazy* proclaims one slogan and another advertises *The Great Indoors*. Sometimes the informal area is called a *great hall* or *great room* which links together images of status, power and baronial splendour (Figure 6). The 'Games' rooms are also advertised as having a role in keeping the family together – *the family that plays together stays together*. It is in this new heart that the dream of home life is increasingly focused. And there is a linking of these large interior spaces with an ideal or privatised freedom and happiness:

There is something irresistible about space for it brings with it a feeling of freedom and real contentment. It opens the door to endless possibilities.

The need for dining and living areas appears to have become more symbolic and less functional. While the formal zone is a place for the display of cultural taste it is produced for relatively rare social occasions. Research on the actual levels of living/dining use would be in-

teresting but highly problematic since even in its emptiness it remains a symbol of those occasions, which may or may not occur. I have anecdotal evidence of people who literally never use their dining room for eating (they dine with guests in the meals area) and others who leave formal areas unfurnished for long periods after buying a house due to lack of funds. The continued symbolic importance of the formal living areas is also indicated by the fact that there are virtually no current houses wherein the formal areas are not clearly on display to all of those who enter. In a sense their primary function is to be conspicuous to guests who are fed and entertained in the new heart and outside.

The divided backyard

An important part of the transformation of the informal zone of the house is the parallel transformation of the backyard. At the beginning of

the study period the backyard typically had only one access point to the house via the laundry. And while the landscaping of the backyard was never shown in the advertisements, it was a thoroughly informal area dominated by garage, workshop, vegetable garden, clothes line and lawn/garden areas. It was a multi-use place that included barbeques, parties and children's play as well as productive household work (Fiske et al, 1987).

During the study period the backyard underwent a split into formal and informal areas with the formal area being closely connected visually and functionally with the informal living areas of the house. The clearest indication of this is in the house plan where two separate exits (from laundry and family area) from the rear were quite uncommon in 1968 but became ubiquitous by the 1980s. With the addition of a games area a third exit often appears. The interim phase of this development was to have separate exits onto the same general backyard area; however the 1980s plans in particular show a demarcation of exterior space such that the new heart of the house overlooks and has direct access to the formal outside area, around which the plan of the house is often wrapped. The laundry exit, by contrast, is directed away from this area, usually to the back of the children's sleeping zone. The plans of the 1980s also show a marked increase of landscape designs on the plan, even though such designs are not sold with the house. This transformation has hidden the productive aspects of the backyard from the socially symbolic formal areas. Areas such as workshop, garden shed, garbage and washing line become accessible via the laundry. The rest has become a highly social place for recreation and the enactment of social roles – the barbeque, patio area, swimming pool and garden. The structural diagrams and an analysis of the written advertising discourse both show the importance of the visibility and accessibility of this place from the major interior informal areas.

This transformation of the backyard is an extension of the dream of a spatially extensive privatised freedom, from the cultural symbols of the interior to the natural symbols of the barbeque area (Fiske et al, 1987). An important consequence of this shift is the general drift of the backyard from being a place of production to one of consumption. It is a process of hiding and displacing the vegetable garden, garden shed, workshop and solar clothes dryer, and their replacement by the more consumptive

swimming pools, electric clothes driers and designer landscapes.

Constructing the generation gap

Another major change in the plan structure over the past 20 years entails a distinct and progressive separation of parents from children. In the earlier plans, from 1969–72, 84 per cent of sampled plans had all of the sleeping areas consolidated in the sense that they were accessible from a single hall. This hall was generally directly connected to the front entrance. By 1985–89 52 per cent of all plans had a complete split between parents' and children's zones in the sense that they share neither the same bathrooms nor the same hallway. Most often the parents' suite is off the entrance hall and children's bedrooms are clustered off another hall accessible only through the family room. At the lower end of the market an interim measure appears in the form of a semi-ensuite which generates separate access but a shared bathroom. The problem of access to an infant child is commonly resolved through the provision of an extra room near the parent's suite.

This architectural split between parents and children represents a gain in privacy but the advertising indicates that it is also a means of marketing a solution to social problems. The house and the informal area at the heart are portrayed as a kind of battleground from which parents are offered a peaceful retreat. One house is described as the 'peace plan' (Figure 6) wherein the warring generations retreat to opposite ends of the house and meet occasionally in the 'great room' to negotiate treaties. The text quotes John Lennon's plea to 'give peace a chance'. Another house is sold on the basis that parents need not see the children at all – *If it didn't have an intercom you'd spend days looking for the children*. Clearly these are houses which are believed to resolve social problems, wherein family relationships can be improved by severing them. The advertising puts it succinctly – *absence does, after all, make the heart grow fonder*.

Parental self-indulgence

This construction of the generation gap is further evident in bathroom design. The structural separation of the generations was made possible by the addition of the second bath-

Fig. 6 A house of intergenerational warfare, 1987

The \$74,800 Peace Plan.

Living conditions are as follows.

1. Parents and children shall each have their own separate zones. At either end of the open fire.
2. Roughly constructed of Cuneo's last wood saw to be confined to the kids quarters. (i.e. the rumpus room).
3. Heavy metal rock'n'roll may only be played in kids barracks behind closed doors. Out of earshot of parents.
4. Emission of parents retreat is strictly prohibited. This is a house for unadulterated peace and quiet.
5. All troops to use their designated toilet and bathroom areas.
6. A truce shall be called 3 times a day to promote peaceful discussion.

This is to take place on neutral ground under the soaring ceilings of kitchen or dining areas.

Note: Provision is also made to avert the financial battles within the house.

Under the Vogue Retreat Converseson families will be close. But never too close for comfort.

So if you'd welcome living in such blissful harmony, call Endeavour Homes soon on 850 8699.

Or see our display homes corner of Killeys Road and Jacobs Drive, Scoresby (763 0528) or at 154 King Street, Templestowe (842 7002).

And in the words of John Lennon, give peace a chance.

ENDEAVOUR HOMES
A Division of JAMES HUNTER REALTY PTY LTD

'Never on a Sunday' didn't live in a loft. It is possible that all of these developments are related to the general rise of hedonism in the 1980s and the cult of the body (Lasch, 1980).

Gender

Gender related issues have changed significantly across the study period particularly in relation to the transformation of the kitchen. The advertising of the 1968–72 era often marketed the kitchens as gendered places of efficient productivity, with slogans such as *designed with the woman in mind*. The new visual connection to the family/meals area was sold as *enabling greater productivity – the lady of the house can keep one eye on the youngsters and the other on dinner*. The surveillance function from the kitchen has been an important criterion in determining the spatial layout of the informal areas. This panoptic function is also created by the trend to *sunken* family or games areas, there are no sunken kitchens.

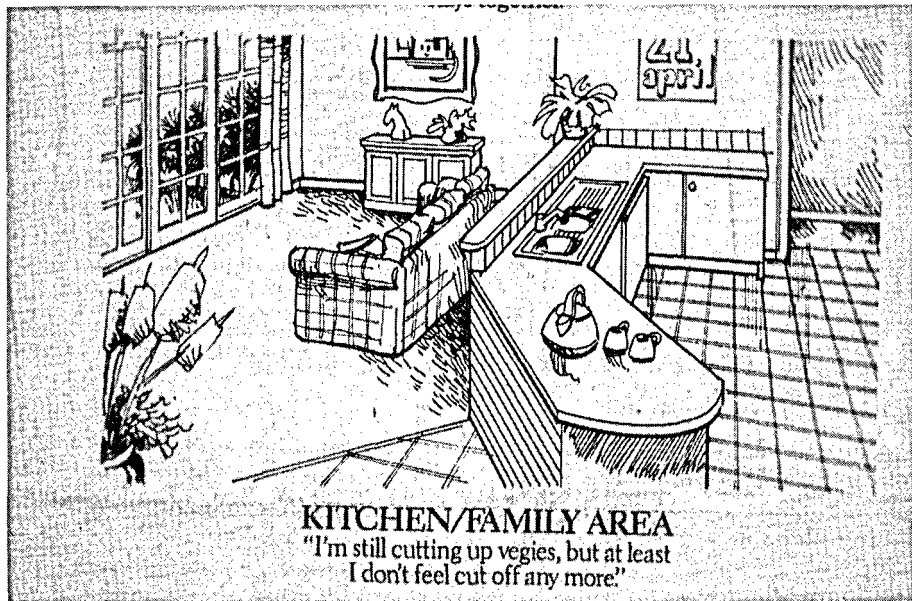
The kitchen has risen markedly in general importance through the period of study, it is no longer a place of backstage productivity but an integral part of the larger dream. The *dream kitchen* has replaced the *functional kitchen* (which is ironic because the new kitchens are effectively reduced to their functional components), and in this dream the kitchen is integrated into the new heart of the house. Houses are rarely advertised in the 1980s as designed to reduce women's work even though they sometimes recognise that she still largely does it. A recent advertisement proclaims the virtues of the combined kitchen family area with the slogan: *I'm still cutting up veges but at least I dont feel cut off anymore* (Figure 7). The woman's lament is resolved with a design that will help her feel better despite it all. Figure 5 shows a couple expressing their gendered delights with the new house, he will play games while she will cook. Home is presented as a setting for male leisure based on female work.

One of the most interesting places in the current model houses is a small room which often appears adjacent to both the parent's suite and the entrance. This room is variously labelled as den, utility, guest or study (Figure 4). In the constructed display houses it is sometimes furnished with the male symbols of cars and biographies of powerful men, sometimes with graceful vases, flowers and a couch. This room generally has double doors opening onto

room, removing the need to use the same hallway. The ensuite has become more elaborate in conjunction with the dressing room and parents' retreat in a manner that reflects a growing importance of grooming and self-indulgence. The spa bath is common, often in a window bay or with corner windows, where you may drink champagne and *wonder how the other half lives*. Is this the other half of the family, of society or both? Stained glass windows sometimes give the bathroom a quasi-religious character. In the dressing area, walls of mirrors and sometimes a complete room of mirrors create an illusion of infinite space as the body image is multiplied ad infinitum.

The parents' retreat is becoming a suite of places with powder room, dressing room, living areas and extending into the newly emergent third backyard, the parents' courtyard or upstairs deck. This parents' realm is advertised in terms of its separation from the house, it is a retreat – *It's like the Bahamas, once you're there you'll never want to leave*. And finally, it is claimed to produce a better sex life, as one slogan puts it *Whoever said*

Fig. 7 Appeasing the cook, 1987



the formal entrance area and sometimes there are no doors. This is a room for display, with a strong relationship to the formal dining and living areas. However, whose identity and using which symbols are matters which are in flux. An advertisement which was coupled with Figure 5 showed the same couple arguing over who will occupy this spare room, the woman for sewing or the man for a study, manual versus intellectual labour. In both of these advertisements the male speaks first and in the bolder type.

One recent campaign uses the slogan *Leave your Husband* arguing that, with his technical brain, *He'll never understand your new love anyway*. From this view the woman sees the house in terms of emotion and romance, this is *love at first sight*. It is also designed to appeal to an independent woman with a mind of her own. Yet, the fine print returns to an appreciation of the kitchen and its *total visual control of your children's play areas, both inside and out*. Another recent advertisement shows a dining room and asks: *Where else do you formally introduce your boss to your wife's cooking (and a vintage red)?* The wife, in this case, is conceived of as an integral part of the symbolic package of home and of the display of male taste. These advertisements are not typical, but they reflect a persistent underlying sexism and the reproduction of gendered power relations and roles through built form.

Status and identity

A broad underlying theme present throughout the period under study and linked to most of the themes outlined above involves the role of the house in the establishment and maintenance of status and identity. This theme is too broad, too complex and too pervasive for more than a brief introduction here.² While this theme is present throughout the study period, the 1980s have brought new levels of sophistication in the advertising, particularly in relation to differential marketing. Each model house is marketed as one rung on the ladder of home ownership. The bottom rung marks the establishment of a new identity as home owner and the escape from a life of 'money down the drain', subject to the whims of landlords. Ownership, however, is only part of the dream which evolves into a progressively elaborate lure which remains one rung higher as one climbs in social status. The house as a symbolic package both establishes status and communicates it to others. Figure 8 invites you to raise your status through a house purchase (at the bottom of the market) and the invitation comes in the form of a medallion with ribbons, an award for achievement. The dream is at once a stepping stone *for the family that's going places* and a reward for all the sacrifices made in the name of home ownership – *we designed it*

Fig. 8 *The house as award, 1989*

because you've made it. At the top of the market the advertising is more subtle:

You know about success. You know it can be achieved and achieved without compromise. It's reflected in everything that surrounds you. Like the home you choose to live in. A home that makes a statement in every one of its striking lines. A statement about you...

The advertising is engaged in the production of what Bourdieu (1977) calls symbolic capital, the value of those goods that attest to one's taste and distinction.³ Despite the fact that the model houses are to be replicated by the thousand, they are marketed as the unique creations of a craft industry that will display the owner's taste and flair. Their authenticity is linked to the authority of artistic creativity through house names like the *Van Gogh*, the *Rembrandt* and the *Tennyson*. A series of myths are woven around the meaning of home as a unique place where everyone can be above average yet remain at least one rung below the dream. The advertising reveals a world which at once promises the ultimate experience of home yet is primarily engaged in the production of envy.

Conclusions

Clearly I have done little more than introduce

these issues here and there are many other themes and interpretations. I will conclude with some broad observations and concerns about the directions of housing ideology outlined in this paper. With regard to the house structure, I have argued that two splits have predominated, that between formal and informal living, and that between parents and children. To bring these two together, it is also clear that both of these oppositions are increasingly aligned along a front/rear axis. While only about half of the plans show the generational split, whenever it does occur it places the parents at the front adjacent to the formal living areas and the children at the rear adjacent to the informal areas.

Together with these splits there has been a general segmentation and compartmentalisation of the house. The plans from the late 1980s show about 50 per cent more segments and functional or meaningful places than those early in the study (Figures 1, 3). Formerly multi-functional places such as the kitchen and living room have become more mono-functional. There is a place for games and television, and it is not the living room. There are two places for eating and neither is in the kitchen. Some places, such as the parental bathroom, have risen enormously in importance. Others, such as the informal backyard, have been reduced. All of these shifts are reflections of changing social values and settings

Fig. 9 The implicit interior, 1968

NEW

1. CAPEVILLE—come feel the exciting, different atmosphere of this colonial-inspired home. It's a new revelation in distinctive design with the emphasis on an unbelievably beautiful kitchen!

2. PACELEA—here's a home that will win you over at once! A functional, semi-contemporary style that's ideally suited to your ideas of a modern, family home.

3. COLORADO—a home as modern as tomorrow with the accent on a luxury kitchen and a dream bathroom. Here's a home with the perfect combination of style and space for you.

4. SUNLEA DELUXE—the newest addition to our comprehensive display centre. Another inspiring, contemporary home with separate living room, combined family/dining room, 3 bedrooms and a handy, walk-in pantry for total kitchen convenience.

5. ASHLEA—a fine example of conventional styling that offers you all the convenience features of a traditional home, blended with the standard R.D.C. ideas of high quality and fine workmanship.

R.D.C. HOMES
 Realty Development Corporation Pty. Ltd., 48 William Street, Perth, 6000. Phone 251645, 821415, 821416
 Ref. L.B.D. Directory, Map 24, H9

for social performance. Kent (1990) argues that the increased segmentation of domestic space is determined by increased socio-political complexity of society. It is clear that much of the segmentation of the Australian house occurs in an attempt to internalise some of the contradictions of society, and as a privatised retreat from its complexities. However, this segmentation seems not determined by that complexity so much as it is necessary to the ongoing production of envy and symbolic capital.

I argue above that the informal zone has become the new heart of the house. I would also tentatively argue that not only has this area grown in importance relative to the rest of the house, but that the interior of the house has become more important overall in the lives of the consumers. At the beginning of the study period only about 30 per cent of advertisements included plans. The front exterior view was almost universally shown and the structure of the house plan and its components were largely taken for granted (Figure 9). By the 1980s the reverse is quite common – a plan with no exterior view (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 8). While the view from the street is often shown in these later plans there are virtually no advertisements without a plan. One interpretation of this shift is that the interior of the house has accumulated more cultural meaning over this period. This may be in part because the significant 'others' whom one hopes to impress are visitors rather than passers by.

This trend can also be seen as part of what Saunders and Williams (1988) argue is the increased privatism of the home. The home, they argue, carries an increasing load of aspirations as it internalises many societal problems. There are examples of advertising where the model house claims to resolve problems between generations and between genders. In so doing, the dream embodies certain contradictions, such as bringing one's family together through spatial separation. While the house has always been a retreat from public life, it is also becoming a retreat for parents from their children. The dream is for a house that reflects one's authenticity and uniqueness, yet this is to be achieved with a package of meanings that are mass-marketed. The dream offers a vision of spatial freedom so powerful that many are willing to place themselves in financial bondage in their quest to achieve it. And the reality is that they are often working at extra jobs, with less time left to enjoy it (Richards, 1990).

The advertising themes outlined above articulate meanings that many Australians want realised in their housing. However these developments in housing ideology are matters of serious concern. First, while these changes may (or may not) contribute to an improved standard of living in the short term, they also contribute to a significant increase in consumption and environmental impact. The extra costs of construction are insignificant compared to the extra life-cycle costs such as heating, cool-

ing, furniture and cleaning as well as the on-going transport, servicing and social costs of low-density development. These costs will be borne primarily by the future generations. A second serious anomaly is that the model houses remain almost universally marketed for nuclear families with two adults plus children. Yet, with the proliferation of single parent families, childless couples, group households and a general ageing of the population, only 22 per cent of all households in Australia now have this nuclear structure. The housing stock is being produced for a minority of Australian households and for only a fraction of that family's lifecycle. Housing interest rates are high in Australia and housing affordability is declining. The proliferation of large interior spaces and the segmentation of functions has meant that we are building larger houses for smaller households and a smaller proportion of the community.⁴

A third point is that while the position of women in public life in Australia has changed markedly during the study period, the model houses reflect a deep and persistent imbalance of power relations in private life. While the dream of home ownership often brings the necessity for female employment (Richards, 1990) there is little commensurate male productivity developing at home (Ironmonger, 1989). It could be argued that the home is a haven for men from the public demands for equal opportunity. While the discourse of identity and status is primarily a male discourse of making one's mark with an architectural statement, the woman remains more an appendage to this, as wife and mother.

If the home is the 'engine room' of society as Saunders and Williams (1988) argue then there is cause for some concern about where we are going, and about the nature of the gender, age and class relations that are being reproduced. And there is also cause for concern at the owner occupied detached-house ideology which embodies an entrenched opposition to medium-density housing. The image of the detached house is a powerful symbol of status and identity in Australia. It is used by conservative political forces to signify 'family' and 'stability', conceptually opposed to a 'flat' or 'unit' where only the young, the elderly and the lower classes live. The primacy of the detached house image in the semiotics of status is a serious hindrance to the development of alternative forms and types of housing with a better relationship to the reality of household type

and structure (Franck and Ahrentsen, 1990; Cooper Marcus and Dovey, 1991). Model houses offer one kind of insight into this ideological package. In their advertising, the myths and meanings of suburban life surface and can be unpacked or punctured to reveal something of the social construction of the meaning of the house.

Notes

- ¹ In Australia they are commonly called 'Project Homes' but the word 'model' better describes their role in the market and avoids confusion with housing 'projects'.
- ² Analysis of price and status differentials in the advertising is part of a further study.
- ³ It is capital because, like the social capital one inherits through a family name, and the cultural capital one ingests through education, it can be converted into economic capital – the prospect of a promotion due to the dining room, the 'wife's cooking' and the 'vintage red' is a good example. See also Harvey, 1989.
- ⁴ If there is a glimmer of hope in all of this, it is that some of the most recent models are so large that one could form two sensible houses by adding a kitchen to the parents' suite and formal areas at the front.

Acknowledgement: *Appreciation is due for comments and contributions from Catherine Anderson, Selena Foong, Sandra Friedin, Sandra Gifford and Roderick Lawrence. This research was supported by a Special Initiatives Grant from the University of Melbourne.*

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooper Marcus, C. and Dovey, K. (1991). Cohousing. *Progressive Architecture*, Vol 6: 112–113.
- Dovey, K. (1985). Home and homelessness, in I. Altman and C. Werner (eds) *Home Environments*. New York: Plenum, 33–64.
- Fiske, J., Hodge, B., and Turner, G. (1987). *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Franck, K. and Ahrentsen, S. (eds) (1990) *New Households, New Housing*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The Condition of Postmodernity*. London: Blackwell.
- Hillier, B. and Hanson, J. (1984). *The Social Logic of Space*. New York: Cambridge.
- Ironmonger, D. (ed) (1989). *Households Work: Productive Activities, Women and Incomes in the Household Economy*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

- Jhally, S. (1987). *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning of the Consumer Society*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Kent, S. (1990). Segmentation, architecture and space, in S. Kent (ed) *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 127–152.
- Lasch, C. (1980). *The Culture of Narcissism*. London: Abacus.
- Lawrence, R. (1987a). What makes a house a home? *Environment and Behavior*, Vol 19, No 2: 154–168.
- Lawrence, R. (1987b). *Housing, Dwellings and Homes*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Richards, L. (1990). *Nobody's Home: Dreams and Realities in a New Suburb*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Saunders, P. and Williams, P. (1988). The constitution of the home. *Housing Studies*, Vol 3, No 2: 81–93.
- Wernick, A. (1983). Advertising and ideology. *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 2, No 1: 16–33.
- Kim Dovey: Faculty of Architecture and Planning, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia.**