

1-1991

## The 10 Essentials for North/Northeast Portland Housing: Guidelines for Renovations and New Construction

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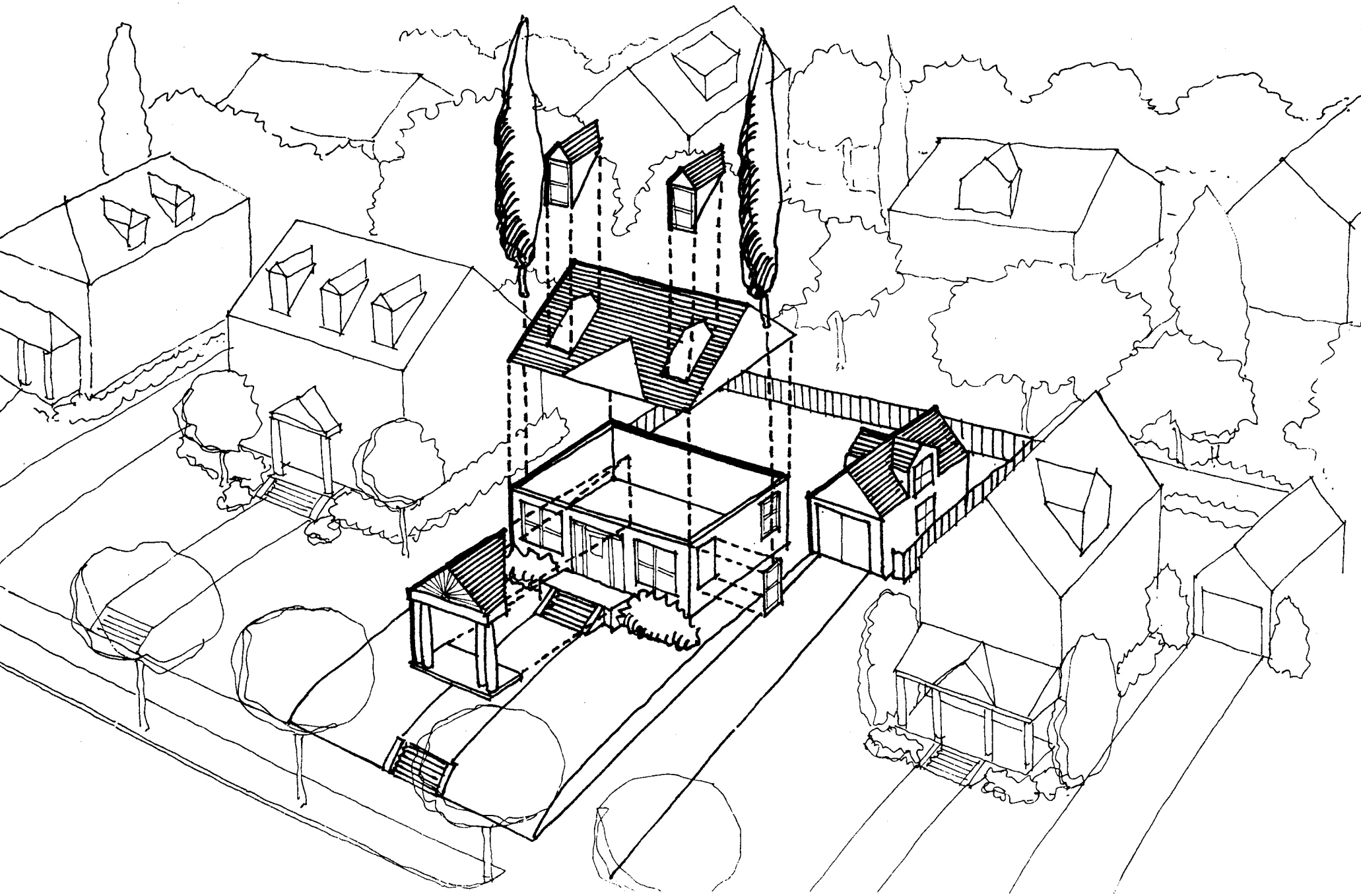
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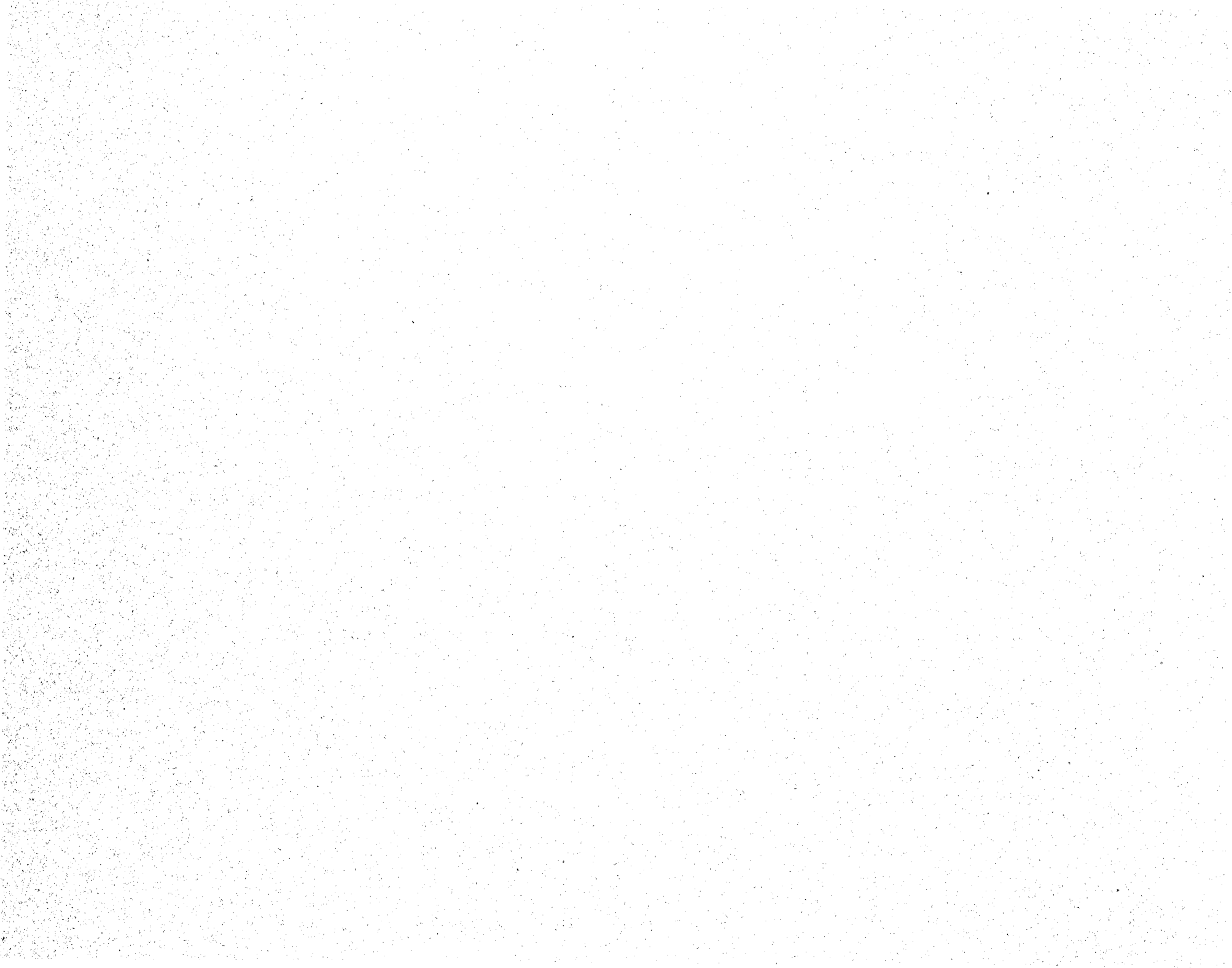
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**The 10 ESSENTIALS for North/Northeast Portland Housing.**  
A Book of Guidelines for Renovations and New Construction



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# The 10 ESSENTIALS for North/Northeast Portland Housing Guidelines for Renovations and New Construction

Portland Chapter, AIA Housing Committee  
January, 1991

*Created by the Portland Chapter American Institute of Architects Housing Committee  
for the benefit of North/Northeast Portland residents within the Albina community, present and future*

*Edited by Diana Moosman and Peter Wilcox AIA*

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# Introduction

The Portland Chapter American Institute of Architects Housing Committee is a volunteer group made up of registered architects, intern architects, landscape architects, and interior designers who work on housing problems in Portland. In conjunction with the national AIA Search for Shelter, we have assisted with a variety of projects in attempting to bring the benefits of good design to those who do not ordinarily receive them.

Some of the projects to which we have given our design assistance are completed. These singular projects benefit a few, yet we seek to multiply our efforts by completing projects with a broader scope of influence. This design handbook is our first attempt to reach beyond the individual project to a larger community and sphere of influence.

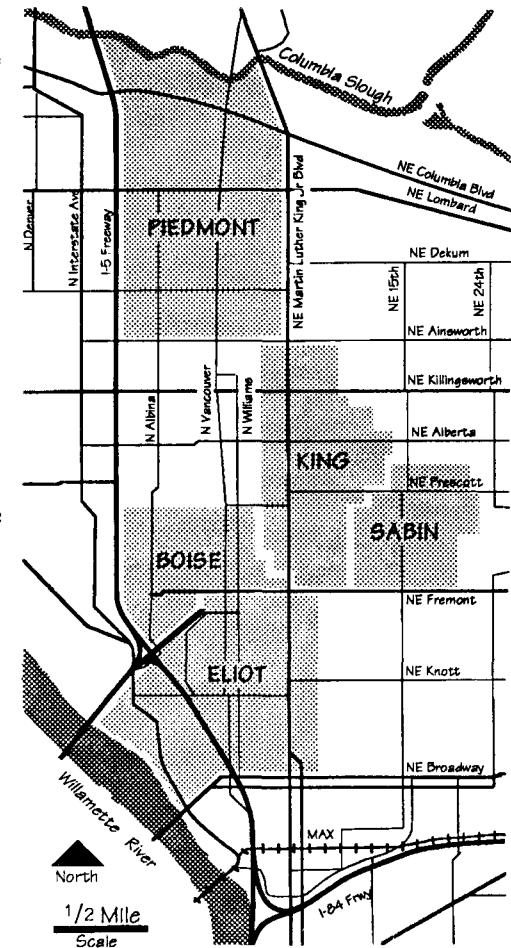
Recently we learned of a movement to revitalize North/Northeast Portland neighborhoods. A range of independent and city-aided non-profit groups are trying to strengthen that community by rehabilitating vacant and dilapidated houses. After speaking with some of these groups we found their expressed weakness was design, partially because their shoestring budgets prevented them from hiring architects. We enthusiastically saw where we could be of help.

In spite of the problems which exist, an unusually strong sense of community exists in the Albina district of Portland. We believe that this community is supported by the architectural character and scale which exist there. Because the area has not attracted strong developer interest for many decades, the Albina area has maintained a remarkably consistent "fabric" of buildings which is very like the best new development which is being proposed in other areas. Our intent in this book of guidelines is to identify the specific physical elements that encourage interaction between neighbors and the sense of community so that the beneficial character of these neighborhoods may be respected and enhanced with future renovations and additions. We also hope that these guidelines will help maintain the cultural, racial, and financial diversity of the Albina neighborhoods.

The guidelines contained in this booklet differ from the initial ideas generated several months ago. Our thinking was tested through the discussions we had with those who have worked extensively in inner North/Northeast Portland, in particular the non-profit development

groups. The final project further evolved after several long, evening walks we took through the Boise, Eliot, King, Piedmont, and Sabin neighborhoods this past summer. On these walks we identified the essential elements that give these neighborhoods their physical character. These 10 Essentials are listed in the order of importance we feel they have. The first nine "essentials" are taken from the existing patterns and the tenth offers suggestions for future additions. All of the essentials are intended to guide rather than to act as absolutes.

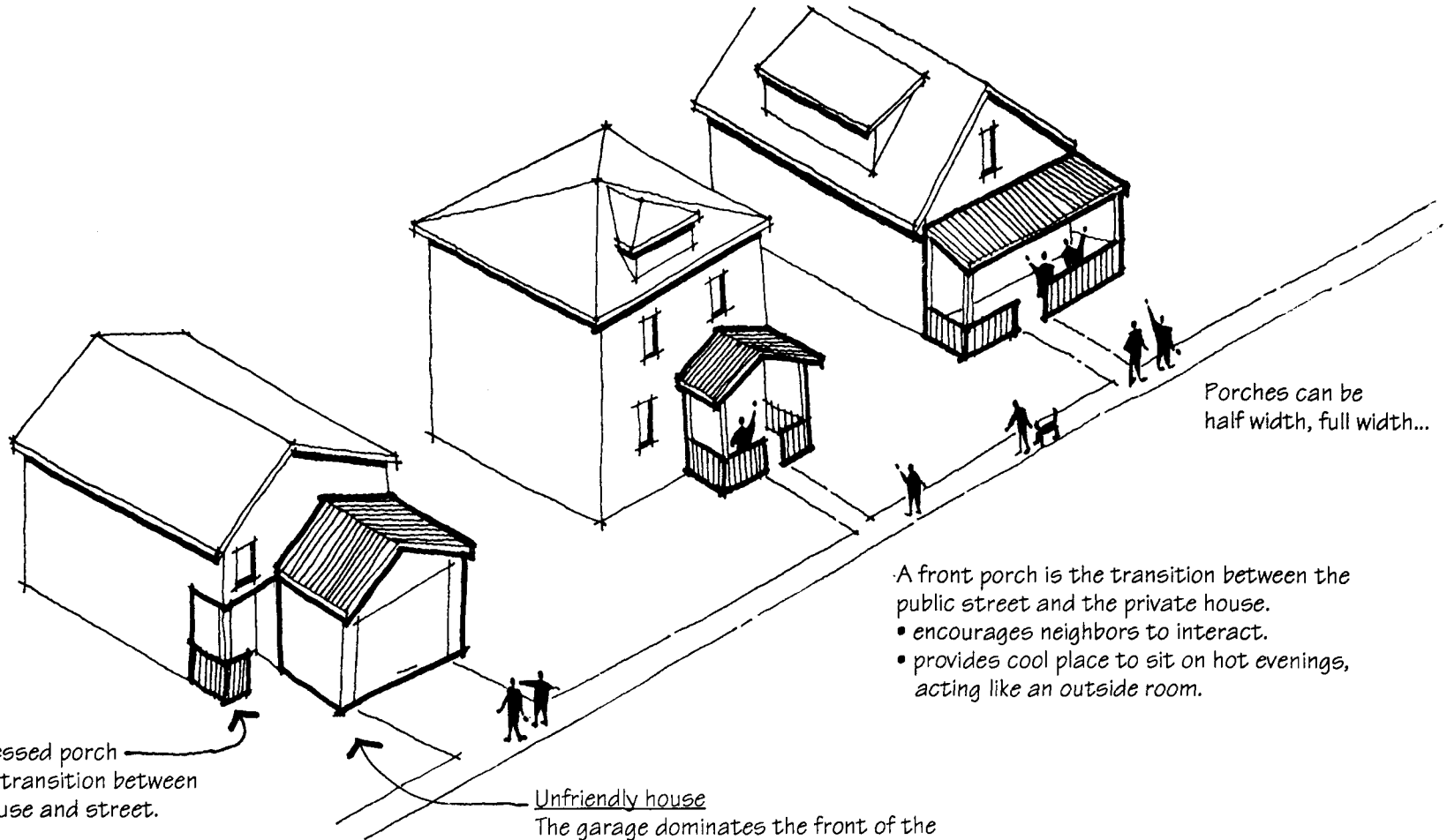
During our explorations we were also struck by the richness and diversity of the populations living in North/Northeast neighborhoods and the special idiosyncrasies they add to their homes. Through this workbook we hope to point out the patterns that exist, not discourage individual experimentation and expression. Similarly, we hope to see the existing population retained and further diversified.



We offer this book's suggestions to those who build or re-build in North/Northeast Portland. We hope that they will find that it is in their own economic interest - as we think it will be through added marketability and neighborhood physical improvement - to follow our suggestions. We believe that following these guidelines will benefit the community

# 1 | Every house needs a useable front porch.

The best way to make a house and neighborhood welcoming and to give people a comfortable place to sit outside is a porch. Porches should be nearer to the street than any other part of the house and deep enough for people to sit and still let someone walk by - about 6' minimum. A porch is a place which feels like being inside yet lets people share their block's outdoor space with their neighbors. It contributes greatly to the quality of life that exists in North/Northeast Portland by helping people get to know each other and by letting them watch over each other's houses from the safety of their own dwelling. It is the most essential part of a good, North/Northeast Portland house!

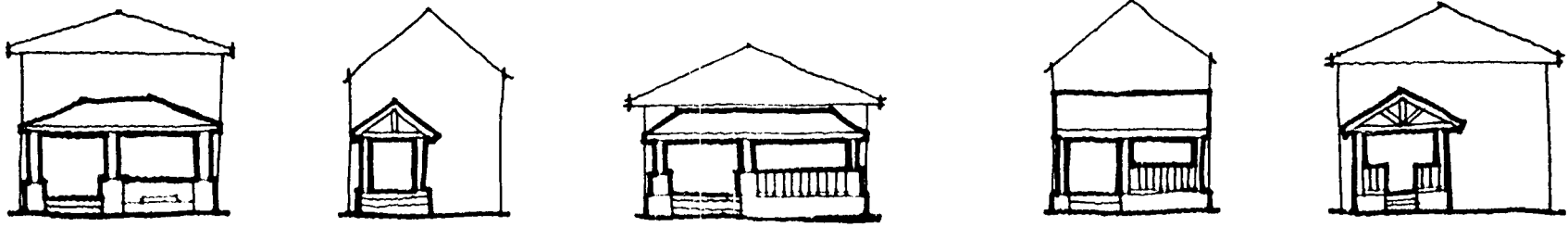


Recessed porch  
• no transition between house and street.

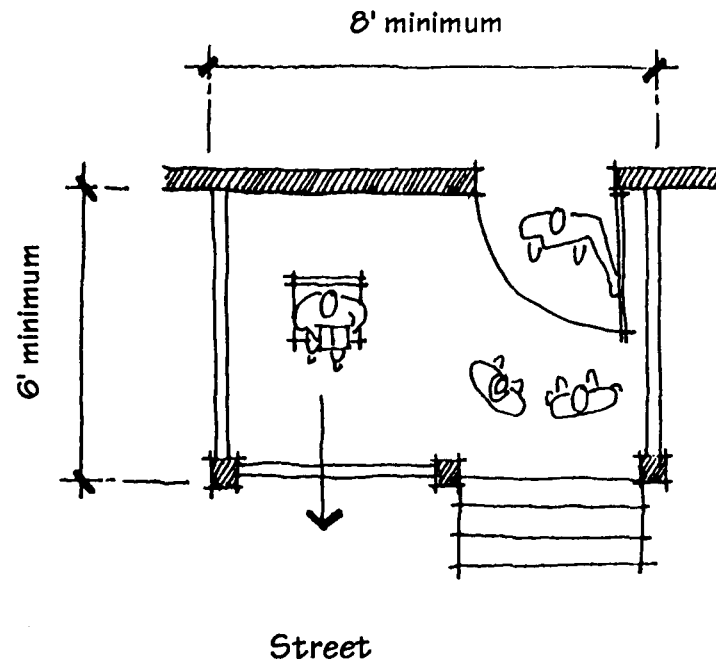
Unfriendly house  
The garage dominates the front of the house and discourages interaction.  
• much of the front yard is paved driveway.

Porches can be half width, full width...

A front porch is the transition between the public street and the private house.  
• encourages neighbors to interact.  
• provides cool place to sit on hot evenings, acting like an outside room.



# 1 Every house needs a useable front porch.



Porches should be thought of as an inside/outside room. Columns and railings define the edges or "walls" of this room. They should be large enough to allow at least one person to sit facing the street - 8 feet wide - and deep enough to allow a person to stand while the door is opening - 6' deep.

# Every house needs a useable front porch.

Roofing Material typically matches the roof of the house.

Rafters can be small.

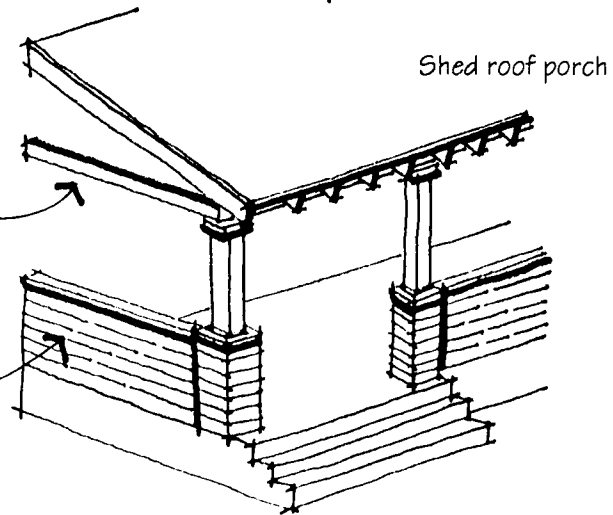
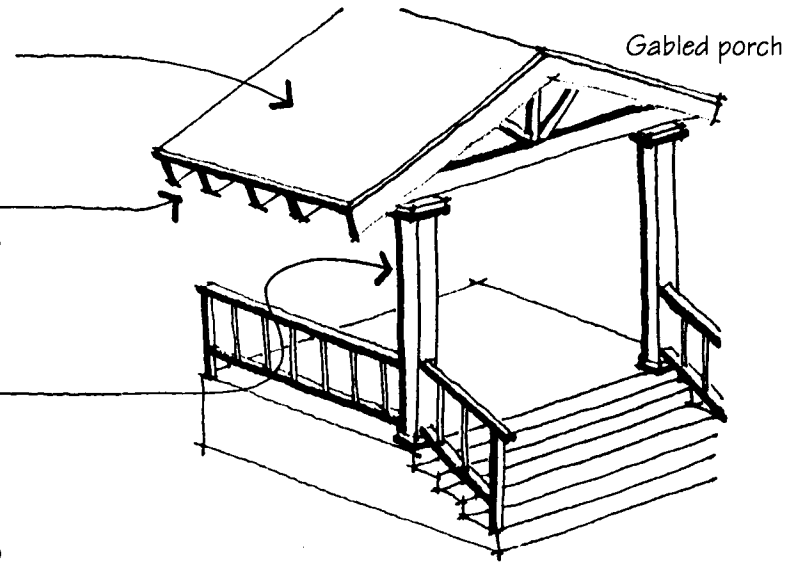
- usually left exposed if the house eaves have been exposed.

Columns help determine the character of the porch.

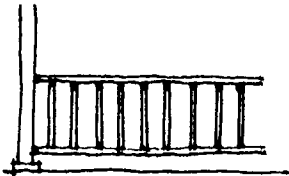
- Typically in North/Northeast Portland they are thick and sturdy (8" minimum to 18" wide).
- Columns and beams can be boxed in to achieve larger sizes.
- Trim at top and base are important additions for character.

Beams are typically oversized with a height to width ratio of 1 1/2 high to 1 wide.

Railings are another major character element.



## Some railing options



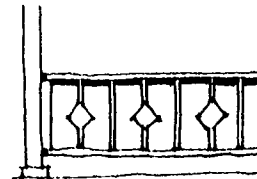
Open - 2x2's vertical 6" maximum spacing



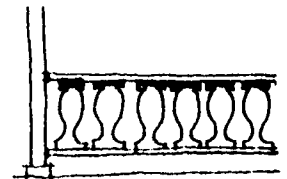
Closed - slating material to match house



1x4's alternating with 2x2's



1x's with cutouts



1x's cutout to look like ballisters

## 2 | The frontyard is the house's "contribution" to the street.

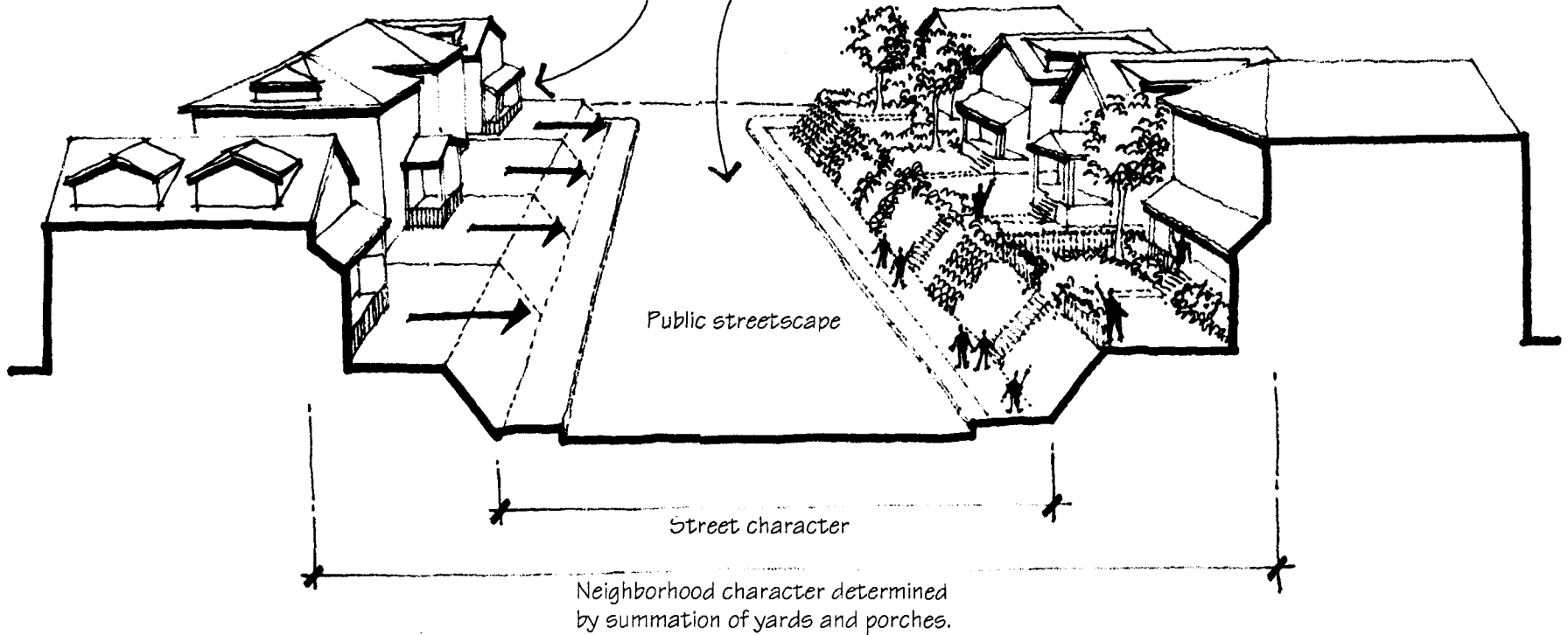
Although the front yard may belong legally to the owner of a house, it exists above all as a part of the common space which makes up the center of the block or neighborhood. This "streetspace" still functions as a kind of shared living room in many North/Northeast Portland neighborhoods just as it has in the most successful cities throughout history. It succeeds here because of the width of the streets and the closeness of the houses to the street and to each other. Opaque high fences or dense, high landscaping either parallel to the street or between lots tends to subdivide the block with losses to security, neighborhood character, and neighbors getting to know each other.

# The frontyard is the house's "contribution" to the street. 2

The landscaping of the front yards determines the character of the whole block.

Porches are outdoor rooms overlooking the streetscape.

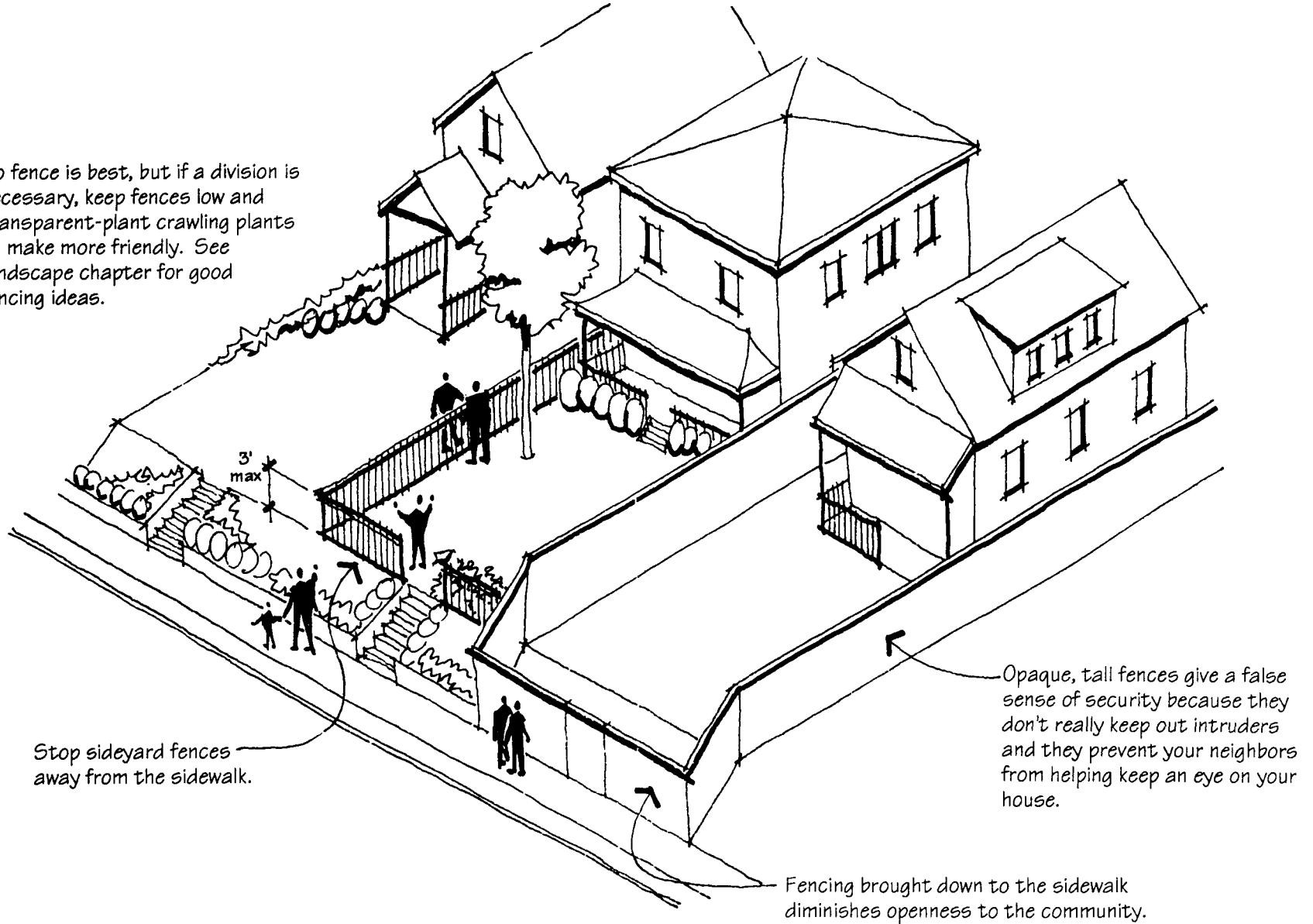
The streetscape is the public living room where neighbors interact. The side walls of this room are the house fronts with their porches, or street trees.





## 2 | The front yard is the house's "contribution" to the street.

No fence is best, but if a division is necessary, keep fences low and transparent-plant crawling plants to make more friendly. See landscape chapter for good fencing ideas.





NORTH



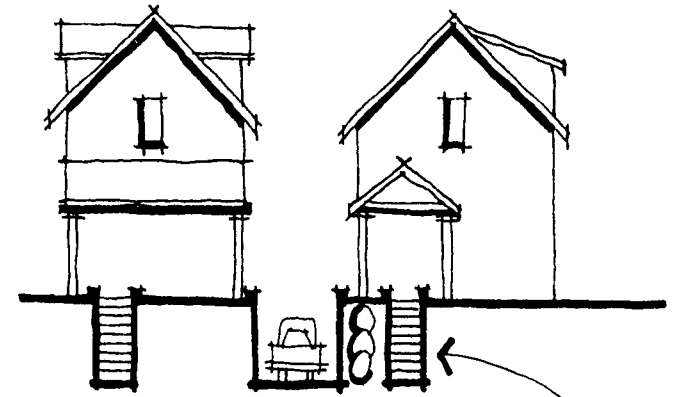
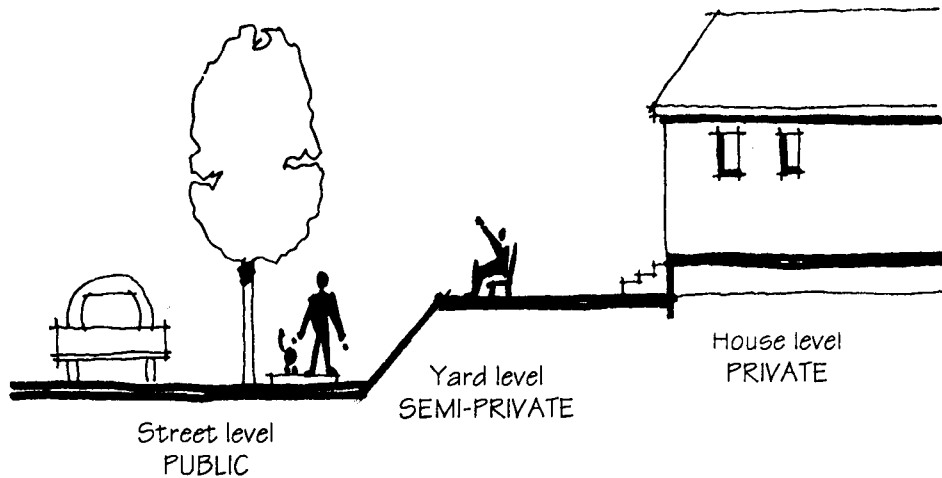
SCALE

NOTES, SKETCHES, or SITE PLANS

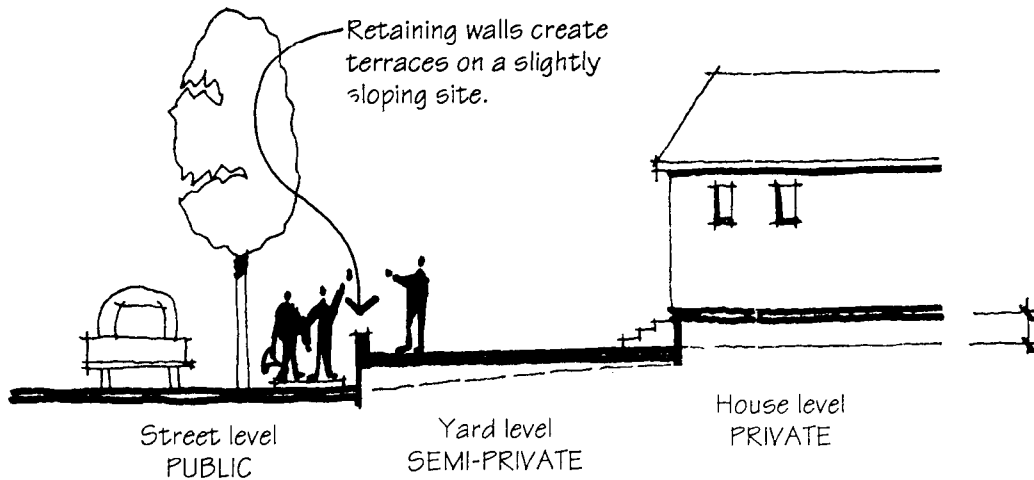
### 3 | Build at the existing grade.

Many North/Northeast Portland neighborhoods have lots which are terraced (raised) above the street level. This puts cars at a relatively lower level and makes it easier for people to talk across the street. It provides another layer of semi-private space - similar to porches - that enhances security and block-based community. New houses should also be built at the raised level, where it exists on a given block-or at any level which predominates in a given area-so that they will not break up what is a good thing for everybody! Usually a vacant lot will already be at the right level and one must only work with it as it found - not doing any significant cutting or filling.

"Terraces" ease transition between Public and Private.



Cut grade minimally:  
When you must cut the grade for a driveway do not put a stair directly next to it. Leave a planting strip between the stair and driveway to minimize the impact of these holes in the grade.



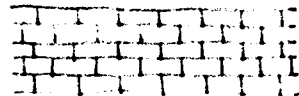
Houses in inner north/northeast are raised above the yard grade. This gives the house a visual "base."

Retaining wall ideas:  
Texture and incremental blocks are better than solid concrete.

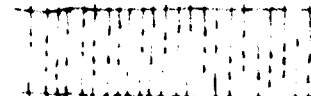


Plant moss if in shade.

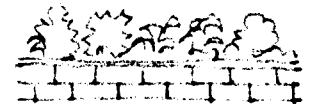
Broken sidewalk retaining wall



Rusticated concrete block



Textured concrete



Terraced garden wall

## 4 | Landscaping is not a secondary thing.

Most of the time, landscaping is treated as a matter of maybe adding a few shrubs and possibly a tree or two after a house is built or remodeled. Many times, even less is done. Landscape is really a major element of the livability and security of a house, not to mention its curb appeal. Also, landscaping is much more than just plants. It is land shaping, outdoor rooms, fences, protection against crimes, children's play areas, food growing...fundamentally a part of the whole fabric which is woven out of the buildings, the yards, the sidewalks, and the streets.

# Landscaping is not a secondary thing. 4

Landscaping helps to intergrate the house and lot. Planting provides shade, can produce food, and beautifies the house and neighborhood. Cluster rather than disperse plants to form edges for "outdoor rooms".

Consider sharing your small backyard or sideyard with your neighbor to create a usable garden.

A tree in the front yard can provide a ceiling for this outdoor room creating intimacy. Take special care in selecting a tree that provides shade without blocking out light to the house or lessening security. Consider sun angle in all seasons when deciding upon a deciduous or evergreen tree.

A shallow front yard with street trees is usually too small for an additional tree.

A continuous line of low-growing bushes can take the place of a fence.

Low, transparent sideyard fences make small lots appear larger while defining property lines and enabling neighbors to chat and watch over each other's houses.

Foundation plants can soften the transition between the front yard and the building by screening the concrete foundation. Select low to medium high plants that won't provide hiding places for intruders or block sunlight.

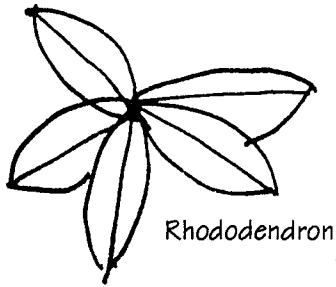
Plants grouped together can accent the entry walk while adding color and fragrance.

Consult the Forestry Division, Bureau of Parks and Recreation, City of Portland, before planting street trees in the public right-of-way. They will advise you on tree species, permit procedures, and maintenance of existing street trees. Call 823-4489.

# 4 Landscaping is not a secondary thing.

## Texture

Put plants of different textures next to each other for contrast and maximum interest.



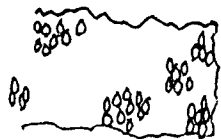
Rhododendron

**BOLD**  
Big leaves (4"+)  
Can see each leaf easily.  
Open growth habit with light between leaves, branches and twigs.



Sarcococca

**MEDIUM**  
Medium-sized leaves (1.5"-3")  
Less light between leaves than bold texture and more than fine texture.



Boxwood

**FINE**  
Very small leaves (.25"-1")  
Don't perceive individual leaves as much as a mass of color (like grass).  
No light between leaves.



Lawn (grass)

Plants for South/West-exposure yards (sun-tolerant plantings)

Street Trees:  
Contact City of Portland Forester.

Front Yard Trees:  
Contact local nursery

Shrubs:  
(f) Barberry  
(f) Juniper  
(m) Burford Holly  
(m) Mugho Pine  
(b) Fraser's Photinia  
(b) Leatherleaf Viburnum

Ground covers:  
(f) Carpet Bugle  
(f) Lawn - Ryegrass  
(m) Bearberry Cotoneaster  
(m) Dwarf Periwinkle  
(b) Creeping St. Johnswort  
(b) English Ivy

Plants for North/East-exposure yards (shade-tolerant plantings)

Street Trees:  
Contact City of Portland Forester.

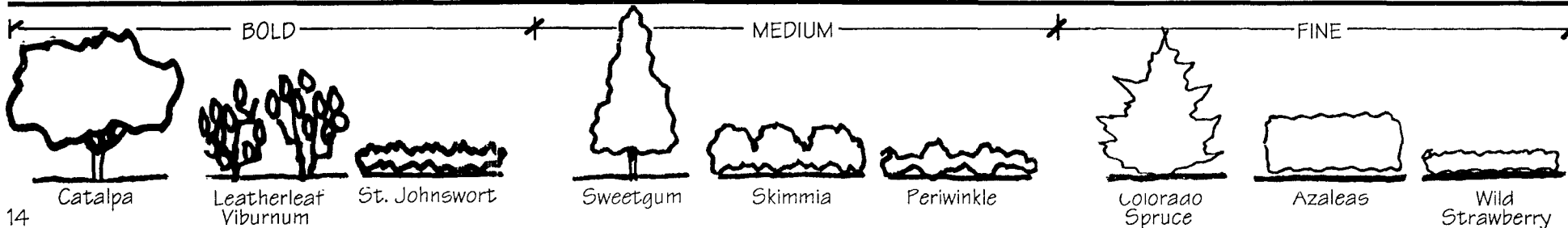
Front Yard Trees:  
Contact local nursery

Shrubs:  
(f) Azalea  
(f) Sword Fern  
(m) Sarcococca  
(m) Skimmia  
(b) David's Viburnum  
(b) Rhododendron

Ground covers:  
(f) Lawn - Ryegrass  
(f) Wild Strawberry  
(m) Dwarf Periwinkle  
(m) Japanese Spurge  
(b) English Ivy

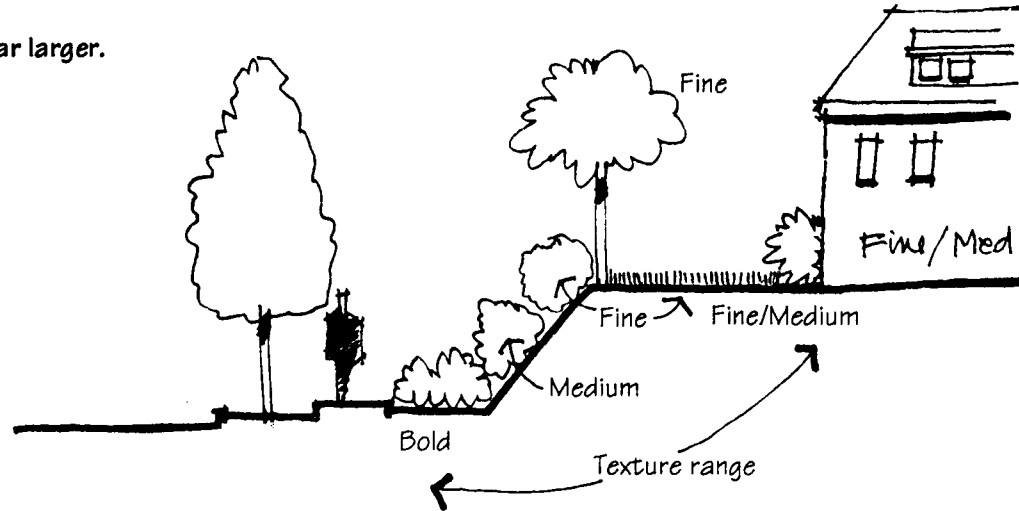
(f)= fine texture  
(m)=medium texture  
(b)=bold texture

These are suggested plants that grow well in Portland.  
See References and Resources, page 32, of this book or local nursery for more ideas.

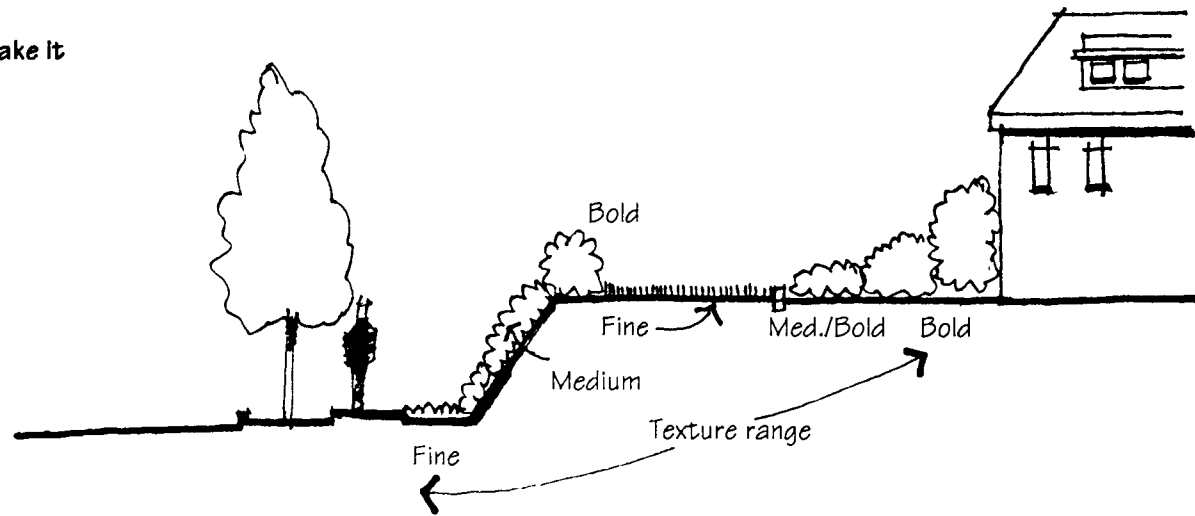


## Texture

When you want to make a small yard appear larger.



When you have a large yard and want to make it appear smaller (or more intimate).

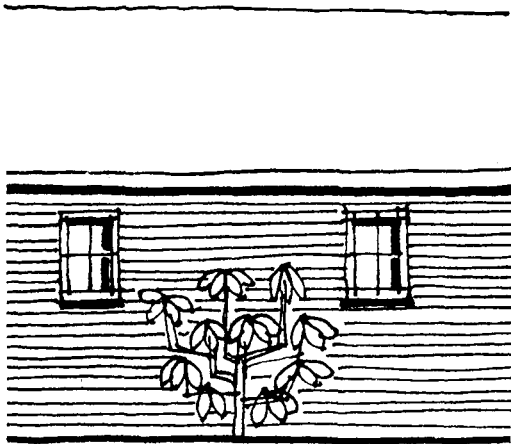




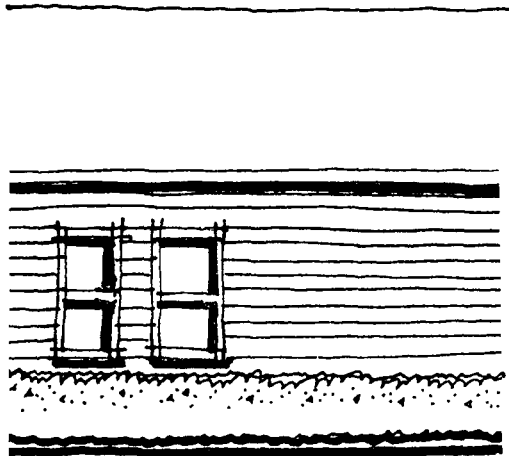
# 4 Landscaping is not a secondary thing.

## Contrast

Contrast in texture adds interest.



Bold textured plants (i.e. Rhododendrons) against fine textured building materials (i.e. 4"x siding)

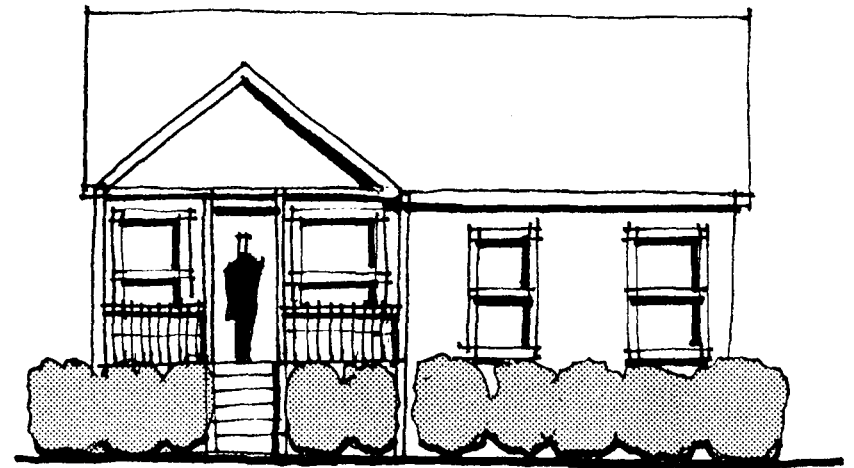


Fine textured plants (i.e. Boxwood) against bold textured building materials (i.e. 8"x siding).

Contrast in color compliments both plantings and building.

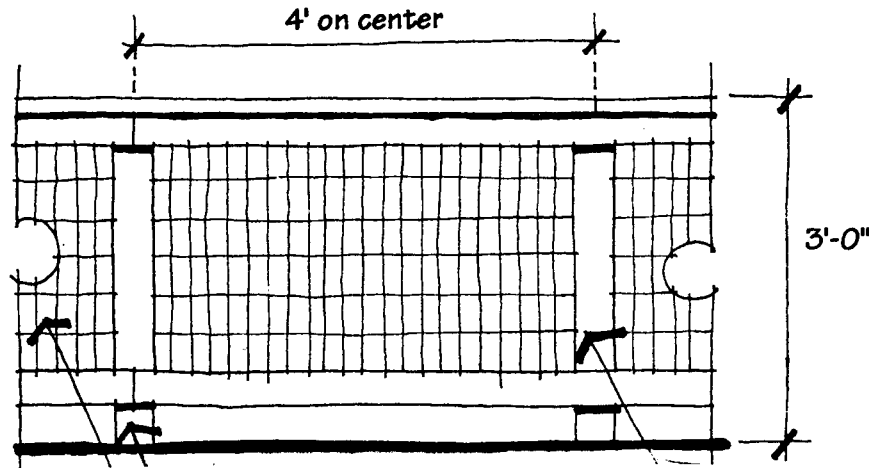


Dark house/fence=lighter plants



Light house/fence=darker plants

## Affordable fencing options

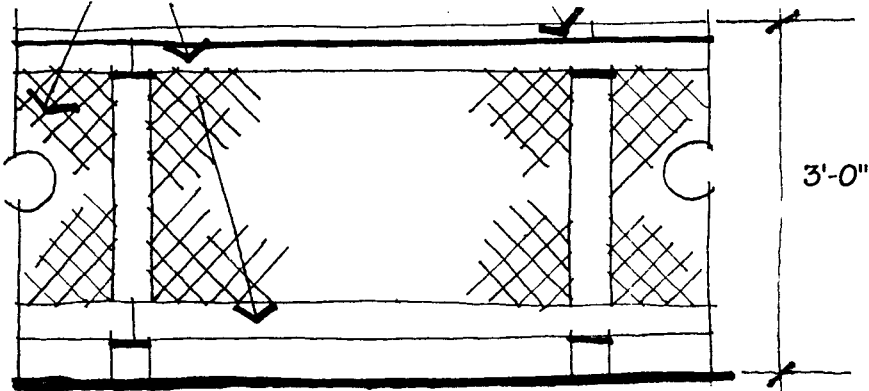


4"x4" pressure treated Douglas Fir posts.

1/2" spacer sandwiched between two 2"x4" pressure treated wood line posts.

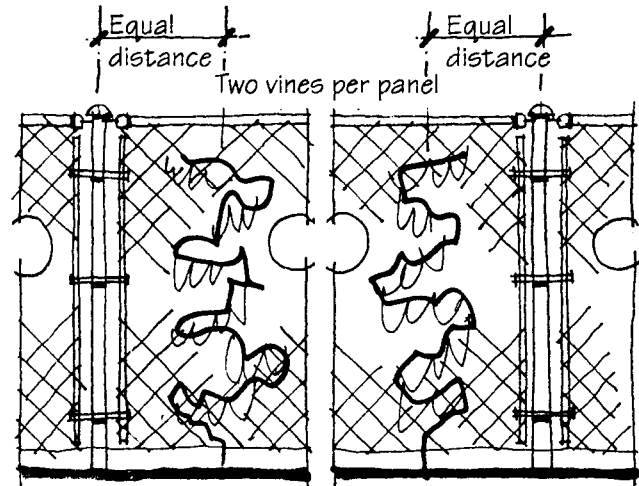
Galvanized or vinyl clad fabric or chain link (2" x4" rectangle or 2" square diagonal)

1"x4" top and bottom wood rails  
2"x6" wood cap.



Wood on wood with chain link or metal fabric fence.

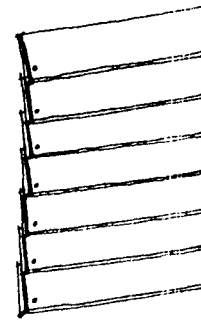
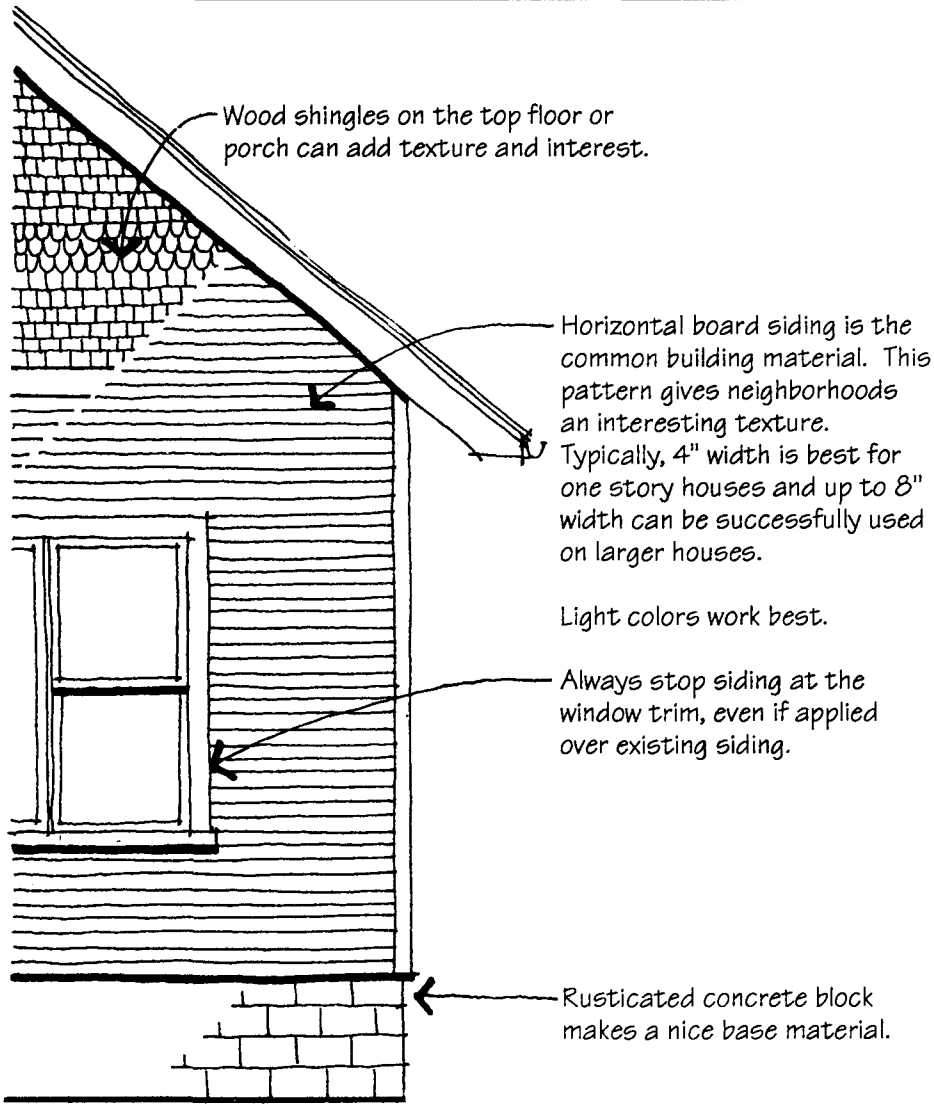
Low-transparent fences make small lots seem larger by allowing neighbors to visually share yards. This type of fencing enables neighbors to interact and help keep an eye on each others houses They also create suitable enclosures for children and animals.



Typical chain link fence with climbing vines (i.e. miniature climbing roses).

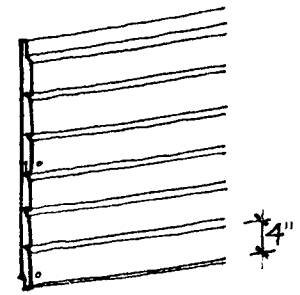
## 5 | Use affordable materials in ways that fit the neighborhood.

Among the many things which give North/Northeast Portland its particular flavor, the siding materials - and the way they are used - are certainly one of the most important. The kind of enormous variety within a single common dialect is perhaps more noticable here than in any other Portland neighborhood. This is not a neighborhood for cedar siding or unpainted shingles, just as vertical board and batten siding is out of place here. Above all, in these neighborhoods expect light colors of painted siding, siding which is almost always installed horizontally.



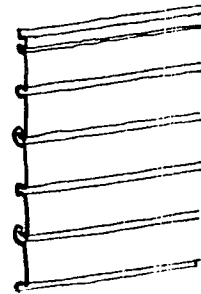
Wood clapboard shiplap, bevel siding.

- typical on existing houses.



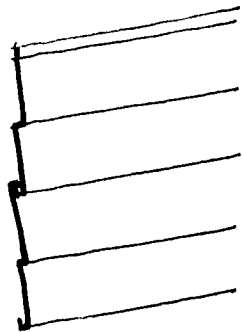
An affordable alternative is pressboard siding in 4" "board" width.

- easy to install.
- needs maintenance.



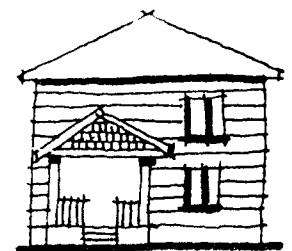
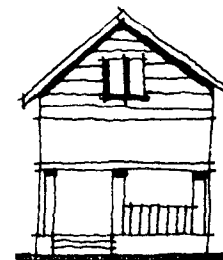
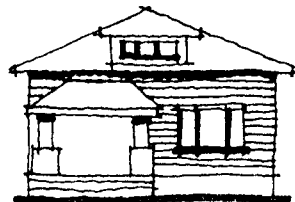
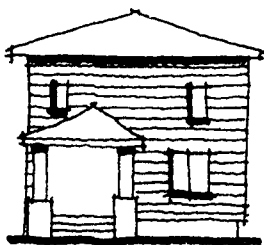
Vinyl siding

- looks similar to wood siding.
- low maintenance.
- flimsy to the touch.



Aluminum siding

- looks similar to wood.
- dents easily and is then difficult to fix.

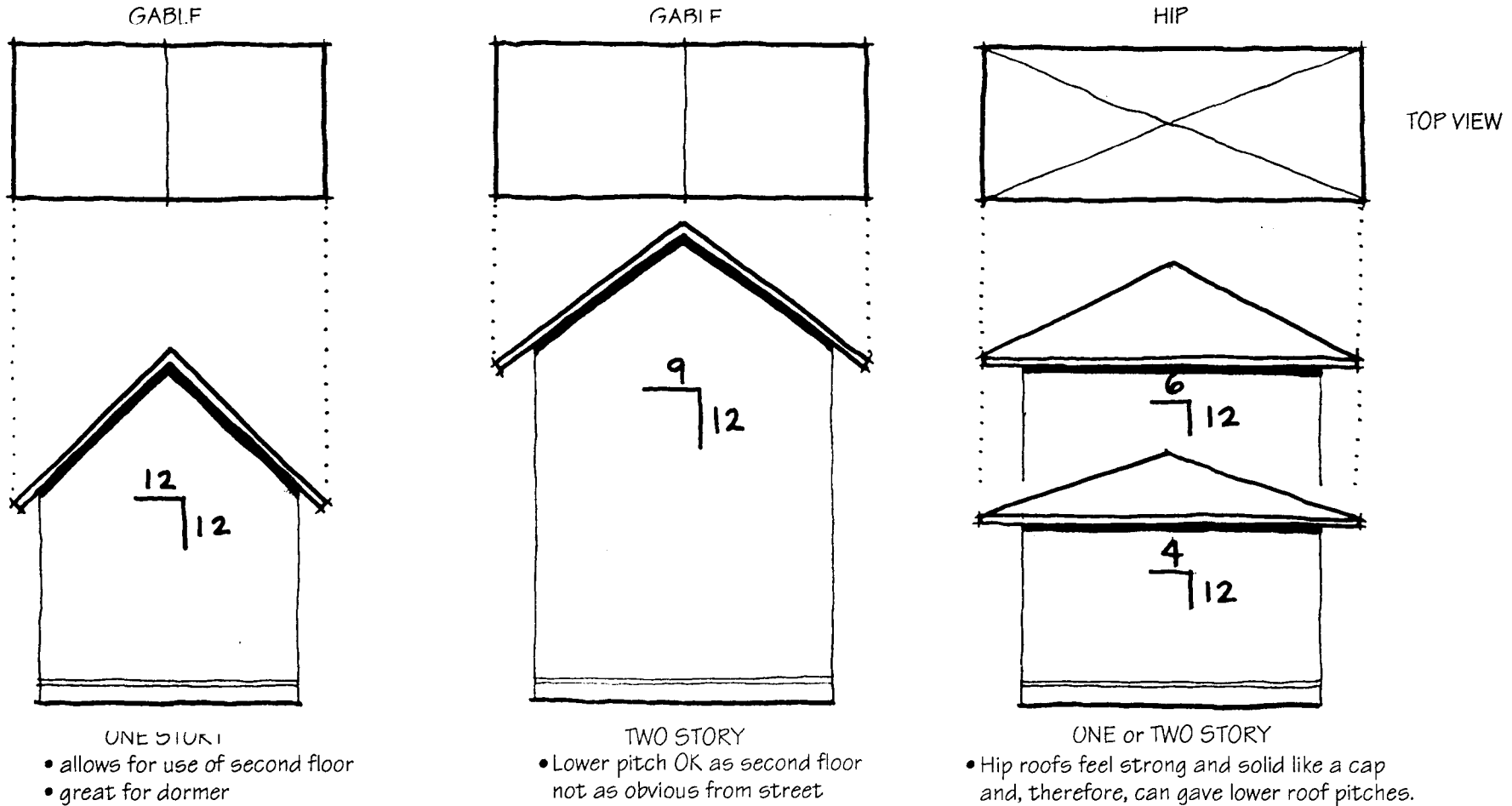


## 6 | Make roof pitch similar to others in the neighborhood.

Almost nothing makes a house appear more out of place in North/Northeast Portland than a shallow roof pitch. This disrupts the streetscape and also tends to make a house seem inferior to its neighbors - since so many of the new houses which have been built are very poorly constructed and they all have very shallow roof pitches. Full two story houses, and especially those with pyramidal roofs, have less visible roofs. For these, lower pitched roofs are appropriate.

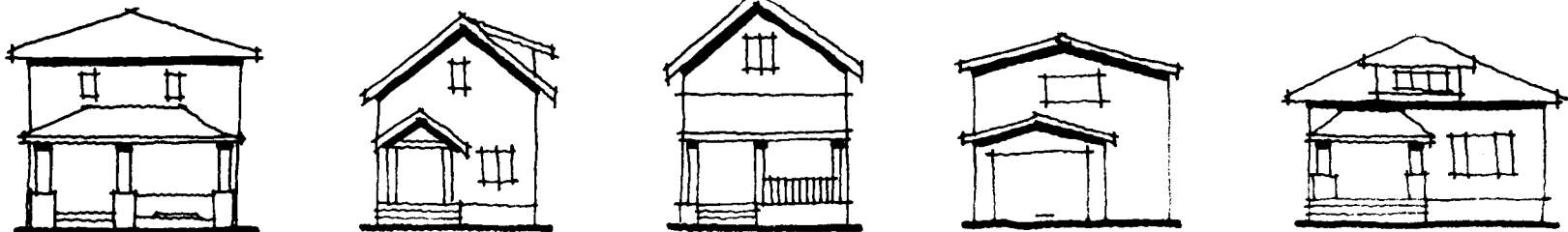
# Make roof pitch similar to others in the neighborhood. 6

Older homes have steep roof pitches. Only modern homes use 3 in 12 or 4 in 12 pitches. Steep pitches create a strong feeling of cover and verticality to the house. North/Northeast Portland homes have a "stand tall" appearance rather than sheepish low lying profiles.



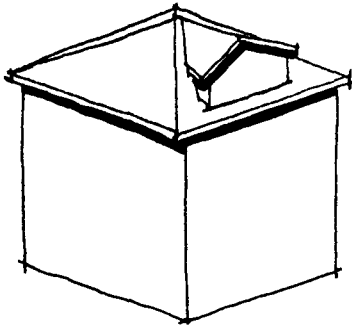
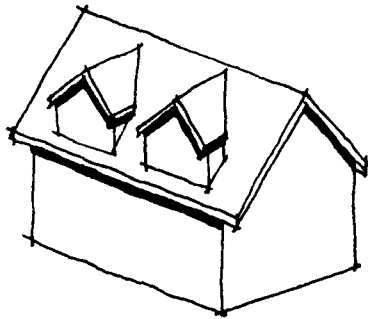
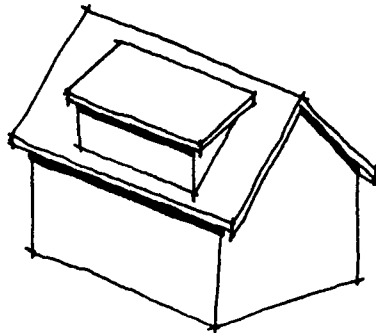
Nearly all gables in North/Northeast face the street.

Which house doesn't fit?



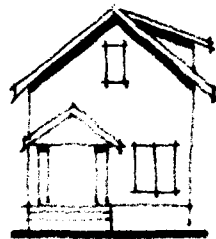
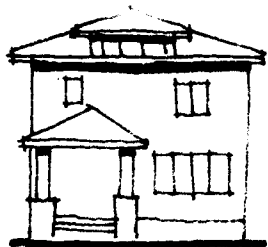
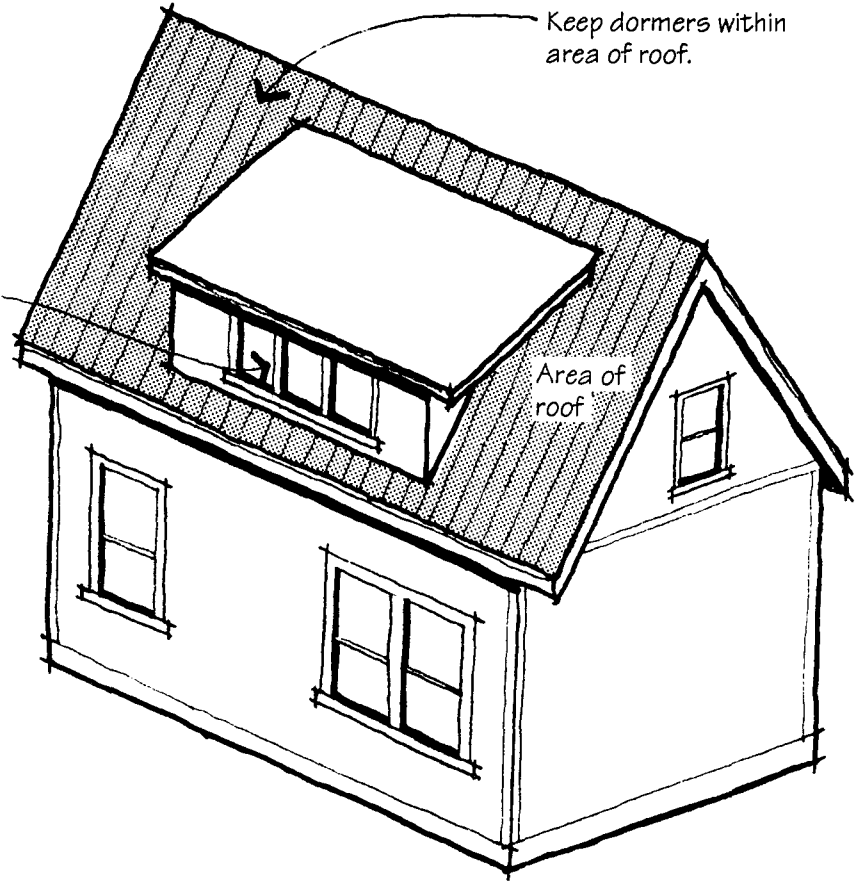
## 7 | Every house should get at least one dormer.

Dormers let light into the attic while at the same time adding headroom. Living space upstairs increases the feeling of security by providing a kind of safe haven and gives needed extra living space. Adding upstairs living space is very useful since North/Northeast Portland lots and houses are typically so small. Furthermore, dormers contribute to the cheerful roofscape which is so characteristic of the area.

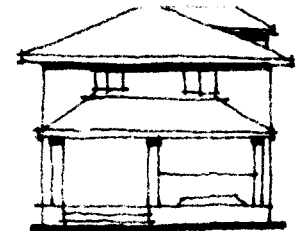
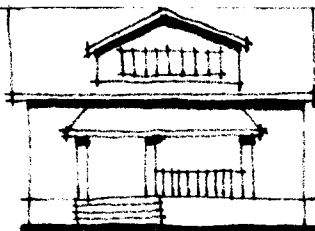


For dormer windows, keep same proportion as rest of house.

Dormers maximize attic space, allow more light upstairs, and add to the liveliness of roofscape in Northeast neighborhoods. Face the dormer south to capture warm sunlight.



For unusual houses in which the end of the gable doesn't face the street, a dormer can help the house fit in.





## 8 Repetitive vertical windows.

Broadly-horizontal "picture" windows are the biggest giveaway of an unsympathetic modification to a house. They do not work nearly as well with the upright proportions of houses in older neighborhoods as do windows which are either vertical or composed of multiple vertical window units. Finally, vertically-oriented windows also fit in better with the room proportions and interior details typically found in older Portland houses. New houses which partake of this existing pattern will fit in most naturally with the neighborhood.

## What is proportion?

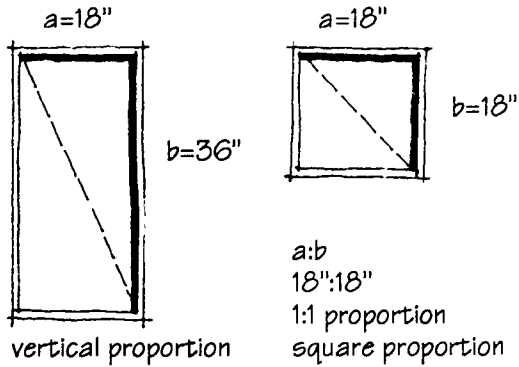
It is the ratio of the horizontal measurement (a) to the vertical measurement (b).

Example:  $a=18''$   $b=36''$

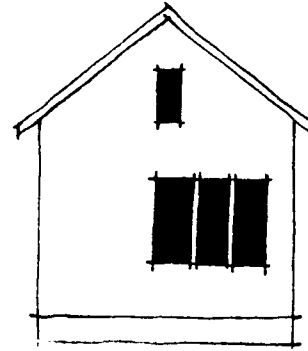
proportion is 1:2

b is twice the distance of a

A comfortable and common proportion is 2:3

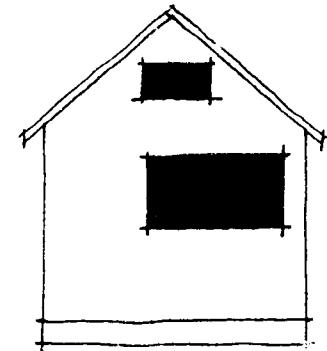


The human body proportion is vertical as well.

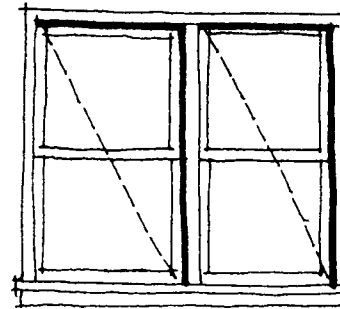


Repetitive vertically proportioned windows.

VS



Broadly horizontally proportioned windows.

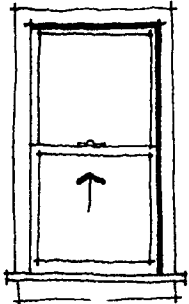


Grouping several vertical window together rather than installing a large "picture window" is the traditional pattern in North/Northeast neighborhoods.

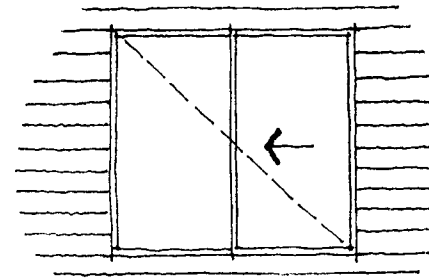


## 8 Repetitive vertical windows.

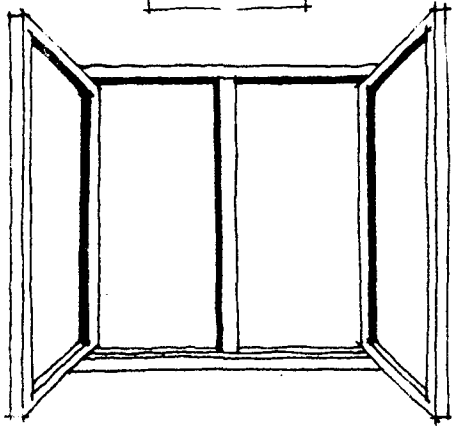
When installing new windows, keep the same proportion as original windows. Use neighboring houses as guides if you can not tell what was originally installed.



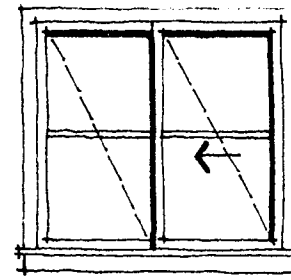
1. Double-hung windows are the most commonly used window type in the North/Northeast neighborhoods.
  - tall vertical proportion
  - wood frame and trim make windows look substantial on elevation of house.



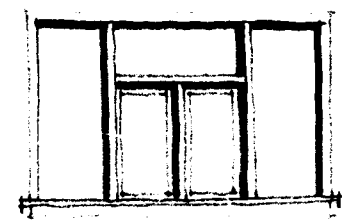
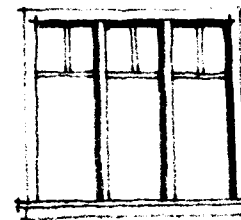
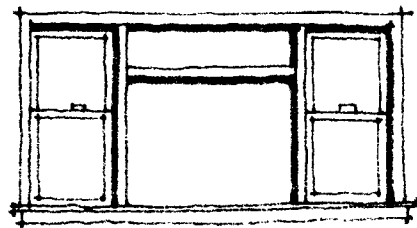
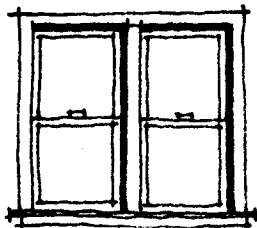
3. Aluminum slider windows with silver frames are obviously out of character in these neighborhoods. The thin center divider makes the window look like one large horizontal pane. When trim is left off, the window has no depth on the elevation. These windows connote less quality and cheap costs.



2. Casement windows swing out and give an open, airy feeling to the inside of a room..
  - strong center divider makes each side of casement look like a separate vertical window.
  - one casement can be combined with a fixed window for same affect and less cost.



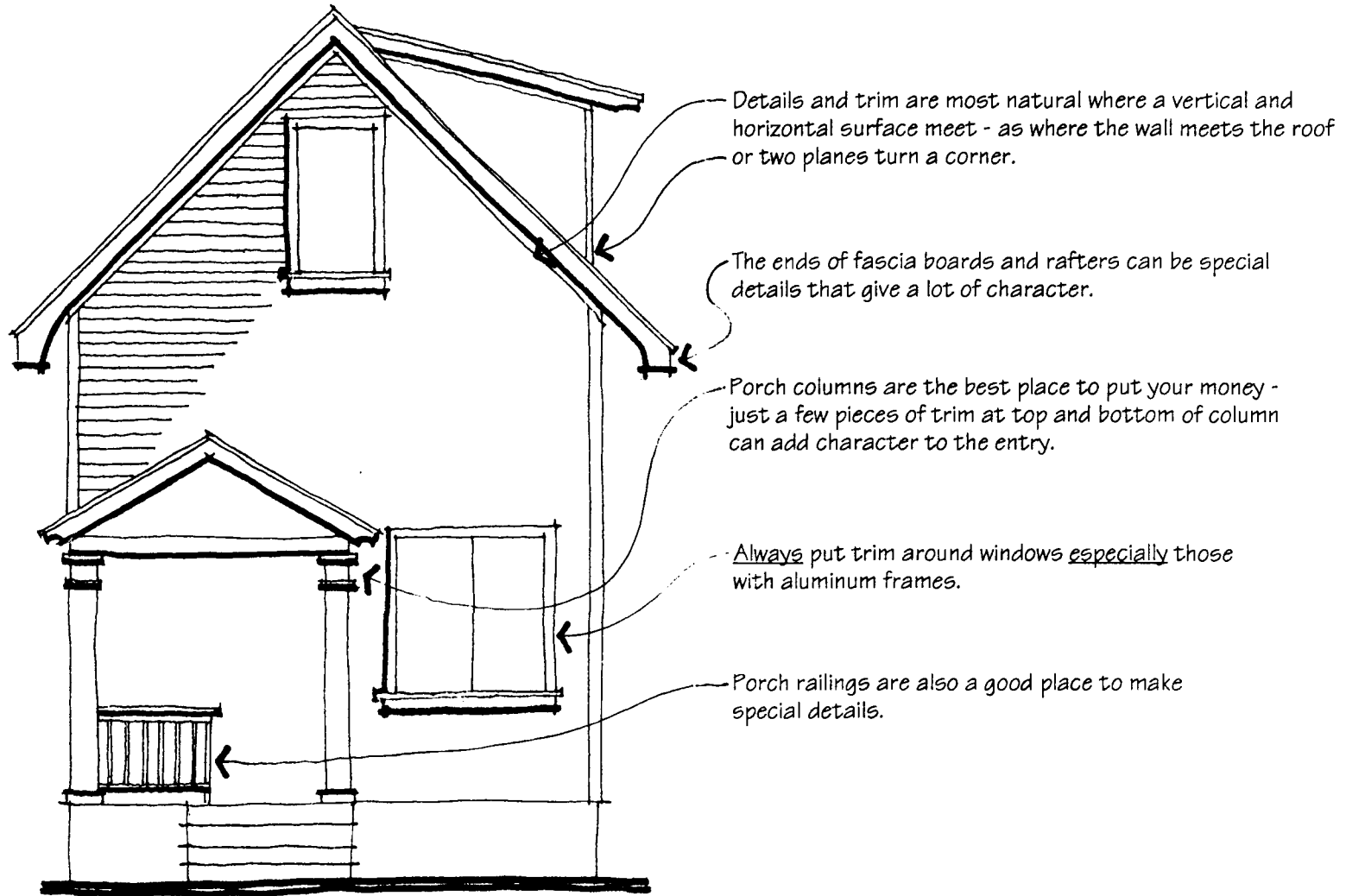
4. There are sliders now being made which have a wider frame and a center divider piece that makes sliders look more like two double-hung windows. When surrounded by trim these windows are very at home in North/Northeast neighborhoods.





## 9 Trim and details give a house warmth and character.

It's the little things that we notice when we are either up close to a house or when we live with it for a long time. The plainer a house is, the less humanity it exudes to those who live in and around it. Try making a "big deal" of at least a few things on the exterior of the house to both enhance curb appeal and give cheer and optimism to the buildings you leave behind. The best way is to look at other houses similar to yours and borrow or modify the details you see. The best places for detail are at the tops, bottoms, or corners of pieces of the building - as at the roof peak, the tops and bottoms of porch posts, the tops of windows, etc.



## 10 Create density at least one or two additional living places at a time.

Have you thought about adding living units? By increasing density within the city one is helping to preserve suburban natural and agricultural land as well as actually improve urban neighborhoods. You may be surprised to discover that adding density can enhance community and is a very good way to generate affordable housing.

Opportunities exist for neighboring households to share more than just walls, as in a duplex or rowhouse: storage, laundry, yards, and gardens may all be shared while helping to make housing more affordable and strengthening ties between neighbors. A living unit added to a house - or a new duplex instead of a single family house - helps make more affordable housing by providing an additional source of income to a family. Higher density enhances security by decreasing the amount of time when no one is home and by putting more "eyes on the street". Vacant spaces or dilapidated structures are put to beneficial use. Added living spaces provide a place to safely house relatives who need less expensive or nearby living places. Finally, increasing a neighborhood's density encourages beneficial services and businesses - such as bus lines, grocery stores, and offices to come into the neighborhood.

# Create density at least one or two additional living places at a time. 10

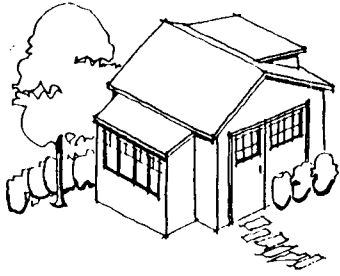
As architects we see a whole range of ways to create higher density neighborhoods. Additions, infill units, duplexes, daylighted basement apartments, or converted garage "granny flats" provide many of the benefits that three- and four-plexes or townhouses do. Additionally, smaller scale

development has some unique benefits and is less complicated to finance and build. However, remember that whatever the building type, attention must be given to the existing character and population - preferably by following the previous nine "essentials".

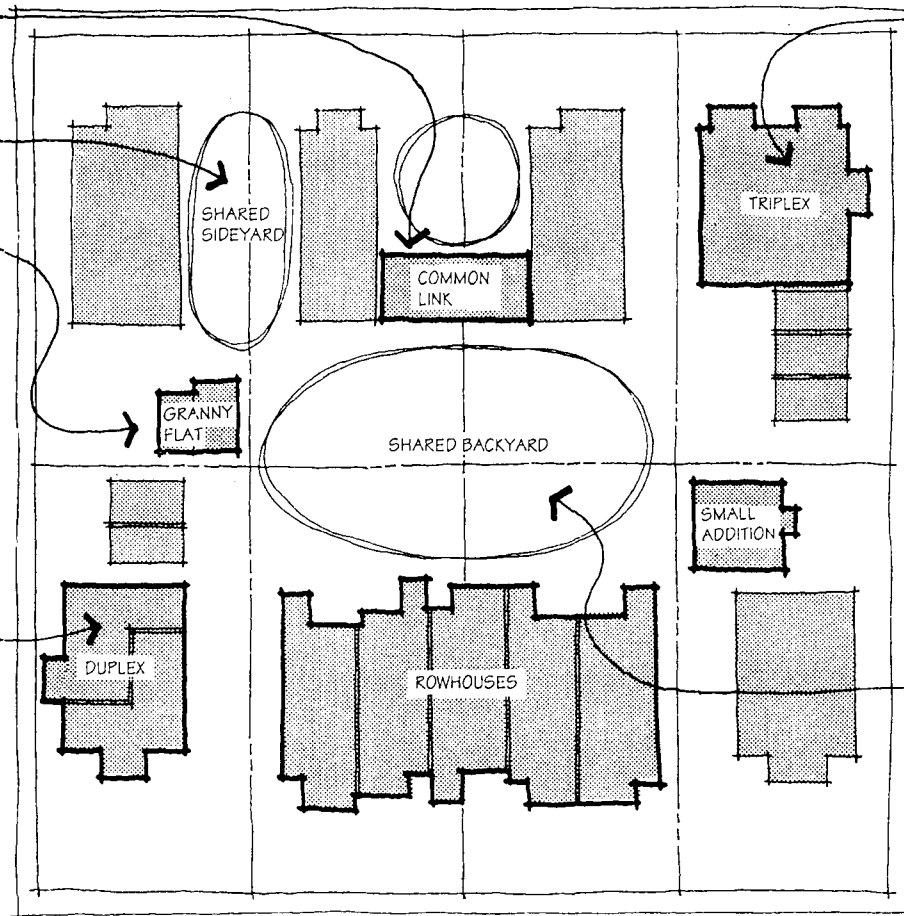
Two smaller houses can share a common area containing utilitarian functions like laundry, storage, workshop space, etc.

Sideyards can be shared to create a larger more usable outdoor area for gardens, etc.

Many garages in North/Northeast remain unused. There is potential for turning these into small living units.



Corners are ideal places to build duplexes or triplexes.



When building tri-plexes, apartments or row houses, do them in small scale increments to keep them in scale with the existing neighborhood. It is very important to follow the previous nine essentials when building these higher-density units. As with a single family house, a usable front porch closest to the street is essential as well as front yards and repetitive vertical windows.

Backyards in North/Northeast neighborhoods are often small. Shared backyards can create a large enough space for community gardens, childrens play areas, etc. Security is increased by adding more watchful eyes when kids are at play. If you must put up a fence make it low and transparent with gates.



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# Resources and References

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## Renovation and Remodeling

"This Old House" - television program,  
Oregon Public Broadcasting/Channel 10

### Books:

Rehab Right, Helaine Kaplan Prentice, Blair Prentice, City of Oakland  
Planning Dept. (Ten Speed Press; 1978)

Retrofit Right, Helaine Kaplan Prentice, Blair Prentice, City of Oakland  
Planning Dept.

- deals with weatherization and energy ideas

Rehab Oregon Right, Historic Preservation League of Oregon (1985)  
• out of print, but a copy is available at the HPLD Library

The Old House Journal New Compendium, edited by Patricia Poole and  
Clem Labine (Dolphin Books, Garden City, NY; 1983)

Fine Homebuilding Magazine, (The Tauton Press, Newton, CT)

For purchasing used and salvaged windows, doors,  
hardware, plumbing fixtures, and light fixtures:

Rejuvenation House Parts (also has some of mentioned books), 901 N  
Skidmore, Portland, Oregon

1874 House Antiques, 8070 SE 13th, Portland, Oregon

## Landscaping

OSU Agricultural Extension Service (503) 254-1500. The Master  
Gardener can answer questions about plants that won't grow, soil  
types, etc.

City of Portland, Forestry Division  
10910 N Denver, Portland Or 97217

Bureau of Parks and Recreation (503) 823-4489. Can answer  
questions about planting street trees.

### Books:

All about Groundcovers. Ortho Books. Chevron Chemical Company

All about Perennials. Ortho Books. Chevron Chemical Company

Basic Gardening, Sunset Publishing Corporation.

Color with Annuals. Ortho Books. Chevron Chemical Company

New Western Garden Book, Fifth Edition. 1988. Sunset Publishing  
Corporation.

Street Tree and Other Public Tree Regulations, City of Portland Title 20,  
Chapter 20.40.

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# Resources and References

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## Historic Preservation

The Historic Preservation League of Oregon has a very helpful staff and a wonderful library containing books about house styles and preservation. Their hours are Monday-Friday, 9-5, but call first to make sure they are available - 243-1923, 26 NW 2nd, Portland.

Multnomah County Library, 801 SW 10th, Portland. They have a wonderful collection of books on historic preservation as well as renovation and construction techniques.

Oregon Historical Society Bookstore, 1230 SW Park. They carry a variety of books to help you identify your house style.

### Books:

Architecture Oregon Style, City of Albany (Professional Book Center Inc., Portland, Or; 1983)

American Vernacular Design, Herbert Gottfried and Jan Jennings (Iowa State Univ. Press; 1985)

American Vernacular Interior Design, Herbert Gottfried and Jan Jennings (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, NY; 1988)

## New and Alternative Housing

### Books:

Co-Housing - A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves, Kathy McCamant and Charles Durrett (Habitat Press, Berkeley, CA; 1988)

Housing as if People Mattered, Clare Cooper Marcus and Wendy Sarkissian (Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, CA; 1986)

New Households, New Housing, Edited by Karen Franck and Sherry Ahrentzen (Van Nostrand Reinhold, NY; 1989)

The Integral Urban House, The Farallones Institute (Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA; 1979)

# Acknowledgements

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The AIA Housing Committee welcomes feedback on this book as well as ideas concerning the revival of North/Northeast Portland. We would be happy to have you attend our meetings or join in one of our projects. You can contact the Portland Chapter AIA at 223-8757 or Peter Wilcox, AIA, Chairperson of the Housing Committee at 295-0900.



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