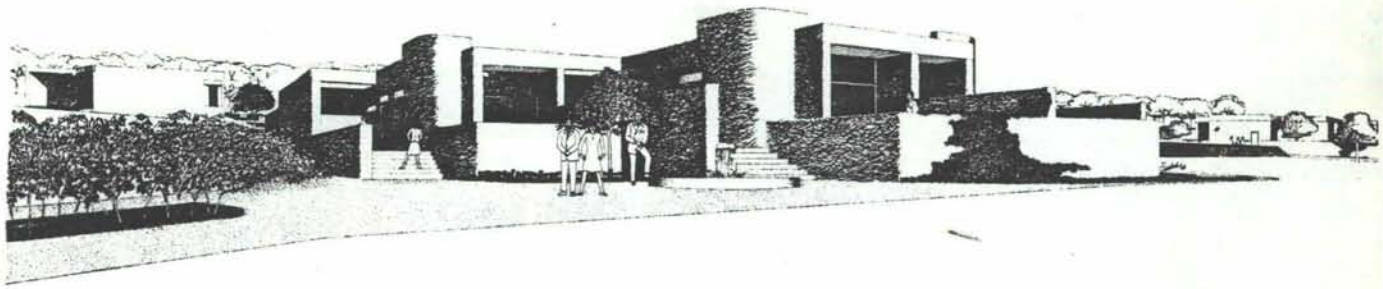


La Luz Albuquerque, New Mexico

ANTOINE PREDOCK, ARCHITECT

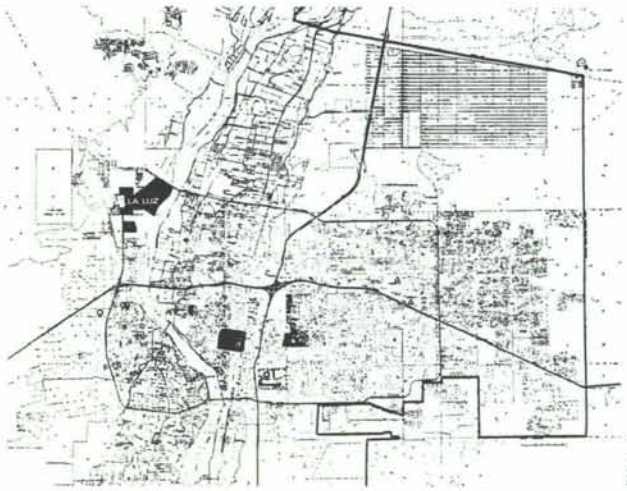


Fig. 2

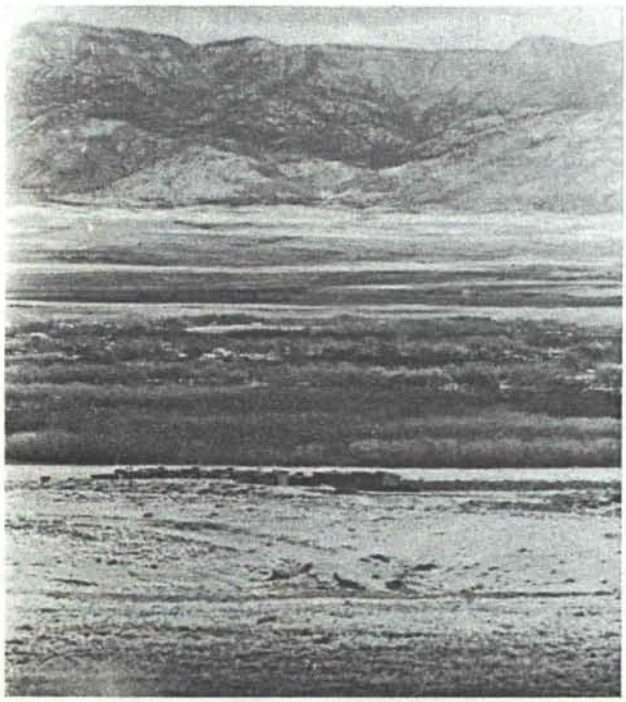


Fig. 3

The concept of La Luz involves a basic attitude toward the land: An urban environment and large open natural areas should exist together—especially in New Mexico. Existing natural patterns should be recognized and reinforced rather than eliminated. The delicate balance of plant and wild life need not be destroyed by development.

In acquiring the 500 acres for the La Luz project, the owners sought a large unspoiled natural area with convenient access to Albuquerque *(fig. 2)*. The chosen site is northwest of downtown Albuquerque, with a mile of Rio Grande frontage, 1½ miles of State Highway 448 frontage and quick access to Interstate 40. Great extremes in topography and plant and animal life exist on the site. The flood plain bosque, due to the absence of ditch roads, has not fallen prey to litter and general despoilation as have many other stretches of bosque around Albuquerque *(fig. 3)*. Migratory wildfowl, muskrat and beaver abound in the lowland zone along with cattails, giant cottonwoods and the many other familiar river plants.

Abutting and contrasting this lush greenbelt is the harsh semi-arid mesa, climbing gradually to a height of 100 feet above the river at the southwest corner of the property. The grey-greens of chamizo, rice grass, rabbit brush, and smoke bush of the mesa effectively compliment the almost alien greenery of the bosque zone.

The higher ground of the La Luz site commands an incredible panorama of the distant Jemez and Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the north, the nearer west face of the Sandias and the Manzanos disappearing to the south. The green line of the Rio Grande Valley undulates through these powerful landforms. Spectacular views of the city add to the panorama, especially at night with the black void of the undeveloped mesa and river valley forming

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

the foreground for the brilliant lighting display of the city.

Thinking of the inevitable West Side expansion to the Rio Puerco, it appears obvious that one day the La Luz site will lie geographically in the center of Albuquerque. The resultant land values and uncontrolled west side growth could ravage this beautiful but vulnerable site unless the entire acreage were committed to a plan. To avoid the proliferation of Polynesian-Swiss chalet suburbia, the decision was made immediately to build a community of mixed uses with controlled planning, rather than simply wholesale lots with token architectural controls.

Visually, the essence of the site seemed to lie in its open sweep to the river with the sense of being part of a great valley. Ecologically, the river valley seemed to be most vulnerable to development—the aquifer resources and their recharge zones must be protected. Viewed in the context of probable leapfrog urbanization of the West Side, provision for a significant large open space on the site seemed necessary. With vehicular access already present at the high western edge of the site at a substantial distance from the river, and in the light of the three aforementioned considerations, the structure of the development plan was evolved.

Development will occur in concentrations on the higher ground of the site *(fig. 4)*. Concentrations of connected buildings will avoid the mistake of building a patchwork-gridiron of houses at a density where neither buildings nor landscape have visual dominance. Rather, concentrated buildings will recognize particular landscape and view nuances and will generate a strong man-made landscape "event" analogous to a butte or mountain. Concentrated development can then economically justify the provision of large natural open spaces on the site, which will occupy approximately 200 of the 500-acre tract. Through the close yet private placement of housing units sharing smaller enclaves of open space in the form of plazas and patios, a greater sense of community will be evoked than generally exists in suburbia *(fig. 5)*. The large central open area between the buildings and the river will remain natural and will interconnect with the smaller open areas enclosed within the building cluster. A curvilinear pedestrian route separated from vehicular traffic will connect plaza and courtyard spaces to form a sequence of "places." This pedestrian system will also connect with a major existing arroyo which runs west to east from the high ground west of the project. Landscaping and paths will reinforce this natural drainage pattern to create a meandering pedestrian path to the Bosque. The Bosque will be maintained as a wild life area with occasional trails and clearings for hiking and picnicking.

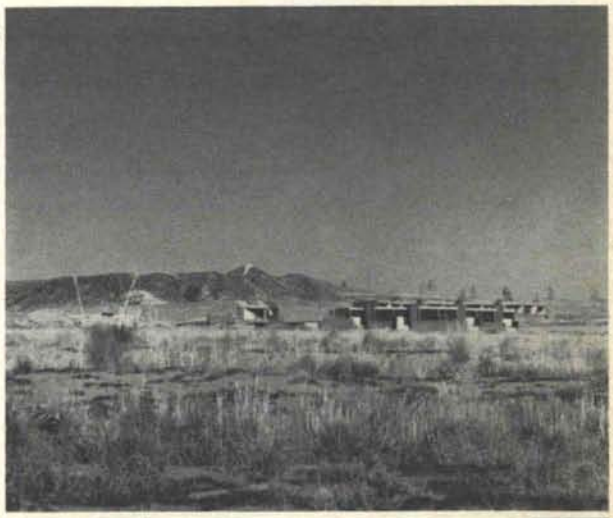
Street alignments will follow the topography in gently curving loops. The depth of street intrusions eastward from State Highway 448 will be

Fig. 7

Development plan legend

1. Houses on large lots (landscape dominates)
2. Medium density connected housing (black band)
3. Mixed commercial uses and high density housing
4. Regional shopping center
5. Community recreation 6. Elementary school
7. Natural open space 8. Undeveloped bosque

Fig. 8



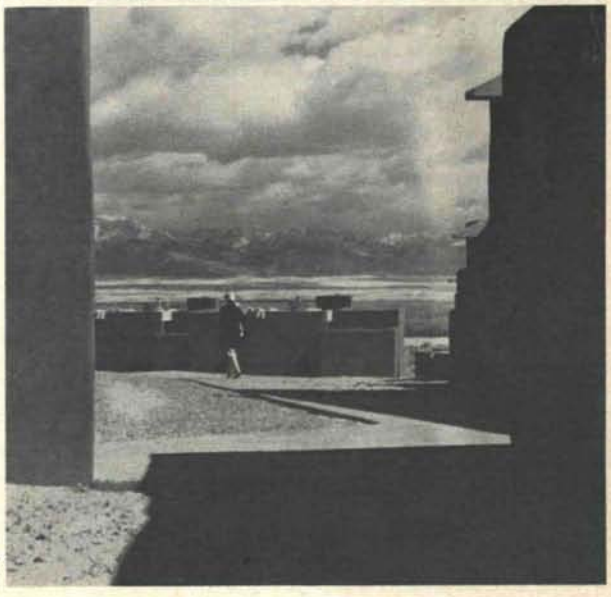


Fig. 9

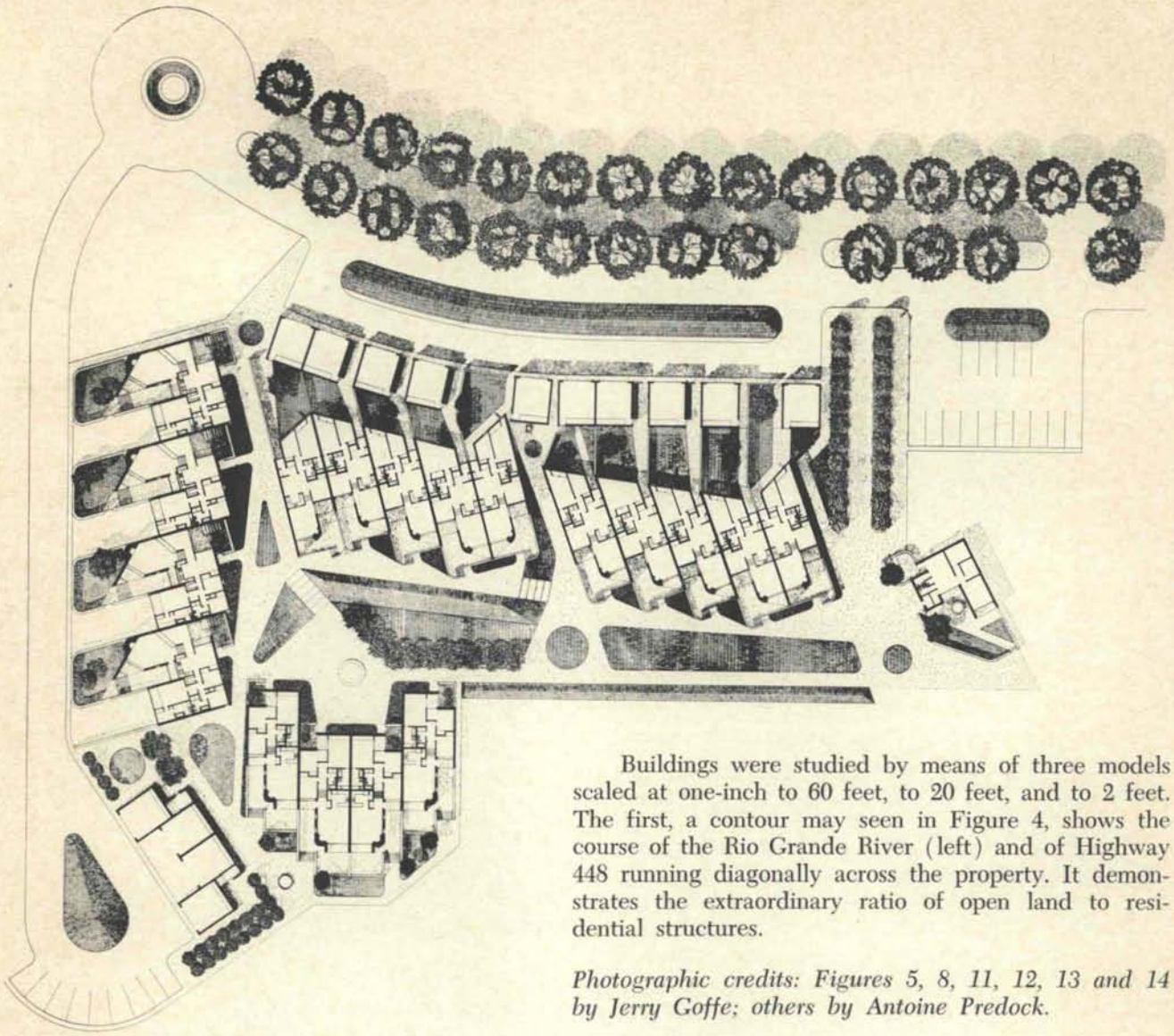


Fig. 10

Buildings were studied by means of three models scaled at one-inch to 60 feet, to 20 feet, and to 2 feet. The first, a contour may seen in Figure 4, shows the course of the Rio Grande River (left) and of Highway 448 running diagonally across the property. It demonstrates the extraordinary ratio of open land to residential structures.

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Fig. 11

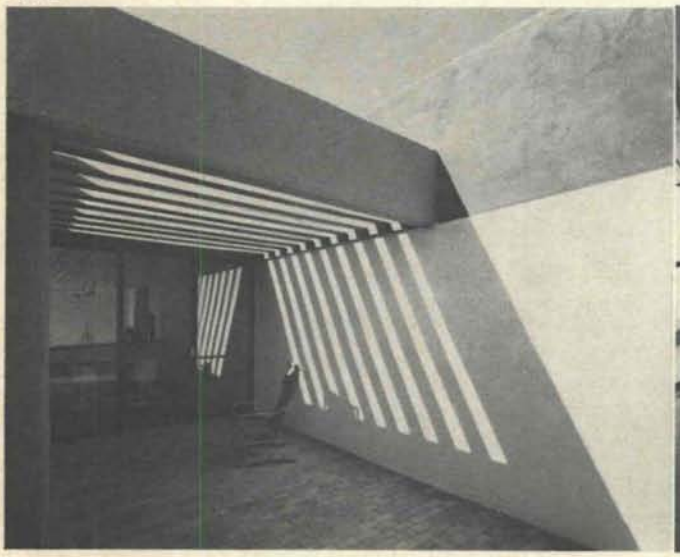


Fig. 12

minimized. The clustered housing will be served from the eastern edge of the vehicular loop system, while contained within the loops will be apartments and commercial enclaves relating to the highway scale of the State Highway 448 "strip" *(fig. 7)*. While an exciting mixture of commercial, institutional and residential uses is planned for La Luz, it will by no means be a self-sufficient "new town." The outer loop freeway system will bind La Luz to Albuquerque and a projected major shopping center at Montaño Road and State Highway 448 should have area-wide response.

The Albuquerque City Planning Department was extremely receptive to the plan for La Luz. The mixture of dwelling types, commercial activities and recreational uses made possible by their special-use zoning will avoid the monotony of many suburbs. A variety of choices as to way of life will be offered the homebuyer, rather than merely a choice of "model homes." In La Luz the choices will range from the urban apartment to the single-family detached house on a large lot. The large lot houses will respect the opposite threshhold of density from the concentrated housing—the lots will be large enough so that the landscape will dominate the buildings.

The project will be progressively annexed to Albuquerque—the master plan defining the zoning under the Special Use Zoning program *(fig. 7)*. A mixture of economic levels is planned including low income housing, but because of initial cash flow the more expensive housing has been started first—$15/s. f. construction cost with $29-40,000 sales price. The housing constructed thus far at La Luz is for sale under a landowners' association legal framework. This means that by owning a house the family owns a share in the open common land and a multitude of recreational opportunities—including swimming, specially designed play sculpture and riding trails. Maintenance of roads and common areas is shared by the landowners' association.

In many ways the cluster planning of La Luz and the buildings themselves are very traditional, but not by assembling superficial trappings in the name of pueblo architecture (i.e.: fake vigas, elaborately contrived parapet erosion, etc.). In similar ways to the response of the indigenous builder, the buildings at La Luz respond to the climate and landscape of New Mexico. The west side of the constructed buildings offers an essentially blank wall to the violence of the low afternoon summer sun and is closed to dust laden spring winds *(fig. 9)*. But caught within the fabric of the buildings, the plazas and patios offer shelter from the cold winter wind and act as receptors for trapping solar radiation *(fig. 5)*. The eastern facade of the connected, continuous buildings opens wide to the spectacular views, yet the glass lines are recessed beneath deep concrete fascias which have the effect of a shady portal *(fig. 6)*. Because they are recessed deeply into the adobe walls, only small window openings are without overhangs. Summer cross ventilation is assured by the geometry of the building sections. Built on a hillside, the houses have inductive air drainage back to front because of the level change. Fountains within the patio areas will have psychological and, to some extent, evaporative cooling effect. Unlike traditional New Mexico buildings there is visual continuity of interior and exterior space through the use of large sliding glass doors.

The massive adobe walls serve as heat reservoirs, storing the solar heat during the day then transmitting it to the interior of the house during the cool night. The massive, blank, earth-colored walls bind the buildings to the landscape. The deeply cut windows and overhangs in shadow interrupt the blank wall areas. Some walls are stuccoed white to bounce light into a patio or room *(fig. 11)*. Some patios have louvered roofs that are calculated to admit winter sunlight but exclude the summer sun. High walls protect outdoor yard areas and patios from wind and assure privacy between units *(fig. 14)*. All exterior walls are stuccoed adobe with sandblasted concrete lintels spanning openings. Some of the adobes were manufactured on the La Luz site with material dug direct-

Fig. 13

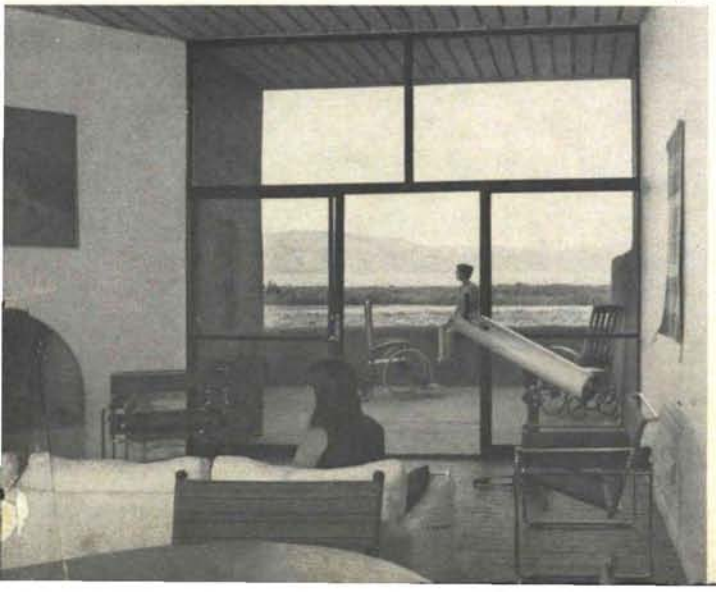
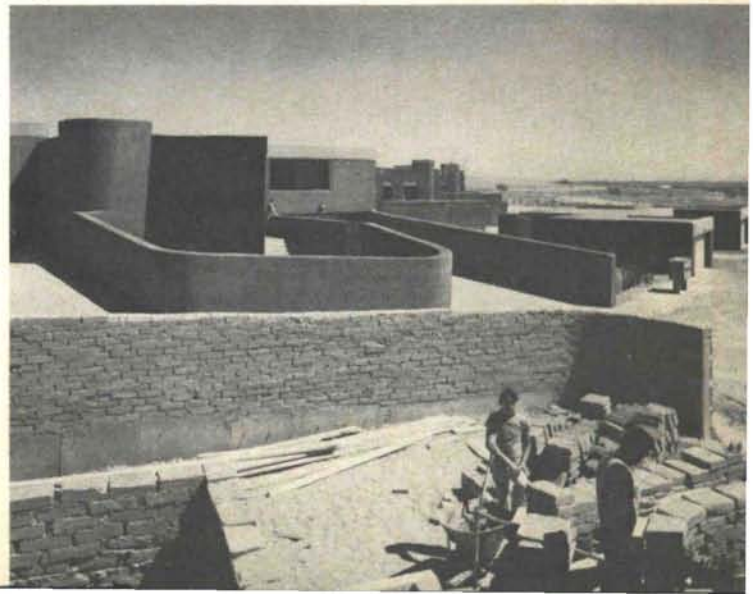


Fig 14



ly from the ground. Adobe, a material that does not require skilled masons for laying, has greater application today than in the past. Besides being a good structural and climatic solution, adobe provides excellent acoustical separation for the common wall houses at La Luz. Also, jobs are created since no special skills are required. The much discussed self-help projects are natural for adobe. Horizontal roof framing is wood with 6" batt insulation. Living area ceilings are gapped local white fir planks. Interior partitions are gypsum board on wood studs. Windows and sliding doors are anodized aluminum. Flooring is brick or hardwood. All interior walls are white *(figs. 12 and 13)*.

Since the houses are built on hillsides, internal spatial arrangements are varied *(fig. 10)*. There are three basic plans constructed thus far which angle toward selected views *(fig. 12)*. The areas of the houses range from 1500 to 2150 sq. ft. Living, dining and kitchen areas always orient directly to the primary view and generally connect spatially with patios or terraces. The bedroom zone of the houses is separated from the living zone by a privacy lock. Master bedrooms have patios or balconies. Living room terraces or patios open onto common plazas with fountains and landscaping. Plazas are multi-level following the natural topography, and they are landscaped with types of grass and trees that contrast with surrounding mesa ground cover. Earthen berms are used to deflect sound and wind and serve as a visual screen around parking areas. A wind break of trees will line the loop roads and provide shade. As development progresses west the buildings will grow successively higher to create an ascending barrier to the wind and low sun, yet looking over structures to the east at the same time.

—*Antoine Predock*