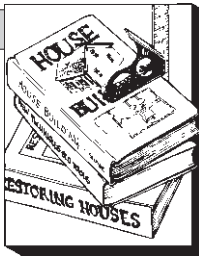


Affordable Books

Building Affordable Homes: A Cost-Savings Guide for Builder/Developers by NAHB Research Foundation. NAHB, 15th & M Streets, Washington, DC 20005; \$18 (\$14.40 NAHB members), paperback; 1982.

Affordable Infill Housing: Five Case Studies by NAHB Research Foundation, see above; \$14 (\$11 NAHB member), paperback; 1987.

A Decent Place to Live: The Report of the National Housing Task Force by National Housing Task Force, Washington, D.C.; printed supply exhausted, xeroxed copy



Cost-saving ideas for every phase of design and construction are covered in *Building Affordable Housing*. Suggestions range from zero-lot line development strategies to the use of rolled-concrete curbs; from modular planning on 24-inch centers and eliminating wire mesh in slabs, to getting rid of double floor joists, and using single plates in wall framing. It also covers such things as the use of 4x12-foot drywall sheets, cluster plumbing, and installing 1/2-inch diameter vent pipes.

But labor-saving recommendations are scanty, and sometimes advice is contradictory. At one point, it suggests using overhangs for aesthetic and sales appeal, but later recommends eliminating them for economy. Sometimes the book's recommendations will be unacceptable to builders. For example, using 3/8-inch plywood for roof sheathing won't wash. Tables and illustrations supplement the text, and for those seeking more information, there are extensive reading lists.

This publication will be particularly interesting to multi-unit developers where small savings per unit can be magnified, but it does have tips for everyone in the trades.

Affordable Infill Housing describes cost savings achieved on five case studies of site-built and prefab projects in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Kentucky, and Massachusetts. For example, the Burlington, Vt. project utilized changes in site development, Optimum Value Engineering construction techniques, and streamlined permit procedures to save an average of \$2,378 on each of 20 energy-efficient two- to three-bedroom town-house units that quickly sold for \$45,000 to \$49,000. Although it lacks in breadth and detail, it presents specific ideas learned from real life jobs for reducing the cost of infill housing.

Last but not least we come to *A Decent Place To Live*, the report of the National Housing Task Force. As the authors of the report note, there's not much "good news" about our present national housing situation. They report the following: In 1986 one in seven residents of the U.S.—over 32 million people—lived in poverty. Almost a third of all Americans earned less than \$15,000 per year. And one-quarter of all full-time jobs paid less than poverty-level income for a family of four.

The report paints an even bleaker picture of the rent situation. Sixty-three percent of poverty-level families were renting. Between 1970 to 1983, median rents increased at about twice the rate of median incomes. In 1975, 3.7 million low-income renters paid more than 50 percent of their incomes for rent. (Financial writers generally advise people to budget 25 to 30 per-

cent of their income for shelter.)

Moreover, as deteriorating units gradually became more "affordable," the "trickle-down" process slowed considerably. It was this trickle-down process that for decades met some of the needs for private-sector, low-income renters. Between 1973 and 1983 roughly 2 million units were lost. Rehabilitation offered few answers, in fact, rehabbing existing buildings often forced out low-income tenants who lacked rent subsidies. The homeownership rate also declined some 2 million families from 1980 to 1986, reversing a 40-year trend. In some urban areas the "domestic terrorism" of crime and drugs has destroyed the fabric of family life.

I could go on, but you get the picture. To counteract this situation, the Task Force presents 40 pages of hard-hitting commentary that details their ten-point program for providing decent, affordable housing to all Americans by the year 2000. Through a new delivery system, they propose new sources of capital and financing. They also urge increased cooperation between federal, local, and private agencies and individuals. Finally, they see a need for revised tax policies and improved public housing and fair housing programs. The report is of vital concern to anyone in the housing industry who cares about their fellow citizens or the future of their country. It is currently out of print, but you can get a photocopy from California Senator Alan Cranston or from your own member of Congress.

Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses by John Sergeant; Whitney Library of Design, Watson-Guipill, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036; \$16.95 paperback; 1984.

When everything is said and done, we all know that if a house is to be "affordable," it probably won't satisfy its owner's every need. And architects won't be satisfied either, because it's very difficult to make money on moderate-cost single-family houses.

Not so for Frank Lloyd Wright. He spent a good part of his career trying to develop workable designs for moderate-cost houses for low- to middle-income clients. To be sure, Wright could be extravagant—some of his projects went several times over budget. But his Usonian house plans were attempts to provide something beyond cookie-cutter design housing and still be affordable for the ordinary American.

In Usonian Houses, John Sergeant gives a tantalizing glimpse of Wright's efforts in this area of housing design from the Great Depression to the Korean War period. Sergeant looks at

a number of Wright's projects, from the first Jacobs house in Madison, Wis. (built in 1937 for \$5,500) to the complex, beautiful Hannah Honeycomb house (so-named for its hexagonal modules). Finally he considers the earth-buried co-op houses Wright built for a group of Detroit auto workers.

Sergeant's text broadly sketches the generic types of Usonian house: polliwog, diagonal, in-line, hexagonal, and raised. In addition, he covers innovations and structural techniques. The book is illustrated with plans, sections, and black-and-white photos. It also has two pages of standardized details used on many of the houses. Unfortunately, the graphics lack clarity, and except for a thorough index providing a spatial analysis of the Usonian houses, the text suffers a bit from lack of depth.

The final chapters review the Broadcast City concept (Wright's scheme for a decentralized redevelopment of American communities) and Wright's efforts to popularize his organic architecture through involvement with owner-builders. Also reviewed are Wright's experiments with the "Usonian automatic" block and prefab designs. Some of Wright's magazine articles are also included.

In this overview, Sergeant writes extensively about Wright the social thinker, and he spends less time on the actual planning concepts. Nonetheless, Usonian Houses is the best single reference on this phase of Wright's career. It will be of interest both to Wright buffs and to those who still dream of producing "custom" houses on a budget.

Productivity in the Residential Building Trades by NAHB Research Foundation; NAHB, 15th & M Streets, Washington, DC 20005; \$7.00 (\$5.00 NAHB members), paperback.

This month's theme is affordability in housing, and I suppose this NAHB booklet on increasing productivity addresses one aspect of affordability. The report is based on a pilot study by a team of industrial engineers who observed, analyzed, and provided recommendations for increasing efficiency for carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, and plumbers at work on a variety of jobs.

Every contractor, supervisor, or architect knows that far too much time is wasted in the building trades, right? What's your estimate of non-productive time on your jobs? Forty percent? Twenty-five percent? Two percent? All are possible according to the report's authors.

On the other hand, tradespeople know they are working as fast as they can, and dreading the arrival of the efficiency experts. Advice on management in minute detail is generally unwelcome (such as exactly how workers should hold their hammers or that a 10 percent pay raise will increase output threefold).

But what's the true picture? The authors made 12 case studies of residential building projects (analyzing worker's output in 30-second intervals). They found that non-productive time ranged from 2 percent to 40 percent. Productive time varied from almost 91 percent to as little as 42 percent, averaging just over 65 percent. Productive support time (handling materials, discussing the job, etc.) averaged almost 20 percent for a typical total of about 85 percent pro-

ductivity. Given the wide range of variation for specific jobs these figures by themselves mean little. What is of some value about the booklet is the thumbnail analysis of each job, and the authors' general recommendations for improving productivity. These included having materials dropped in specific, convenient locations, good supervision, job site housekeeping, and asking for employee suggestions. Many of these suggestions are self-evident, if you think about running a job. Also noted by the authors are such important matters as the planning role of management, crew size, production methods (e.g. cutting lumber with a handsaw and a circular saw are both considered "productive" work), worker attitudes, benefit programs, safety regulations, and a host of other factors including the impact of the researchers on crew productivity! You'll gain some insights from Productivity, but a publication with broader scope would be more welcome.

Housemending by Dale McCormick; E. P. Dutton, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$22.50 hardcover/\$14.95 paperback; 1987.

Dale McCormick is best known for her book *Against the Grain: A Carpentry Manual for Women*, and for being the first woman to survive Iowa apprenticeship training and become a "journeyman" carpenter. She was also trained as a teacher, which is reflected in both the building classes she taught at Cornerstones in Maine, and in her friendly, down-to-earth writing style. Housemending is a home repair book for beginners, and despite some limitations, has much to recommend it in both tone and content. If you know someone, female or otherwise, who is starting to make forays into house repair, Housemending would make an excellent gift.

McCormick starts with an intangible subject not considered in most building books—attitude. She points out that the first time you try anything it will probably take you twice as long as it would otherwise. She advises patience as the antidote for the frustration, anger, and self-criticism that too easily arise when one attempts to do something really foolish (like drive a wood screw without drilling a pilot hole first). She also suggests finding a friendly ally at the local hardware store and an experienced advisor to turn to for counsel.

Next she tackles tools and how to use them—from checking a claw hammer for balance before you buy, to making a proper "crow's foot" (V) mark when measuring.

Having covered these preliminaries, McCormick devotes nine chapters to the essentials of painting, plumbing, electrical work, walls and ceilings, doors, windows, furniture repair, and floors/stairs/ramps. Each one addresses troubleshooting, specialty tools, repair and maintenance techniques, and offer tricks-of-the-trade. Analogies, such as likening plumbing to the human circulatory system, help to clarify things. Dozens of plain vanilla line drawings help as well. My favorite picture was the (inadvertently?) headless planer shown on page 115.

In general, McCormick's instructions are to the point and easy-to-follow, even down to the basic detail, such as which way to turn a shutoff valve to close it. Once in a while she misses the mark or confuses. For instance, having

personally endured many hours of frustration on plumbing repairs, I raised an eyebrow when McCormick effused about how "If you liked jigsaw puzzles as a child, you'll love plumbing." I was mildly aghast when she failed to point out the myriad difficulties, aggravation, and demoralization lurking in such work, especially in light of her introductory remarks about patience. Perhaps McCormick doesn't want to discourage novices, but sometimes she

is a bit of a Pollyanna.

At other times she wasn't altogether clear (as in describing how to tell bearing from non-bearing walls), and she ignored occasional important points (such as how to prevent attic insulation from blocking eave vents), but overall you'd be hard put to find a better single reference on home repair (with the outstanding exception of the *Reader's Digest Complete Guide*).

—Paul Hanke

Free & Cheap

Squeezing Them in With Style: The Urban Land Institute offers David R. Jensen's *Zero Lot Line Housing*, a guide for building in small lot space. The book covers site selection, building and landscape design, and legal considerations. With graphics and fact sheets on completed zero lot projects, 160 pages, \$37.00. Contact Urban Land Institute, 1090 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005; 202/289-3340.

HUD Helps: Useful information on affordable housing, case studies, home builder's guides, cost saving tips, and a list of all HUD affordable housing publication come in one information pack from the Joint Venture for Affordable Housing. It is free, and most other publications run from \$3 to \$8. Contact HUD USER, P.O. Box 6091, Rockville, MD 20850; 1-800/245-2691.

Also of note from HUD: *Streamlining Local Regulations, and How Local Regulatory Improvements Can Help*, two HUD guides to reducing housing and developments cost; *Housing Special Populations*, a resource guide and bibliography of a wide range of publications on special housing needs; and *Housing Rehabilitation: Programs, Techniques, and Resources*, a guide to HUD programs, rehabilitation technology, and historic preservation.

The Harvard Study: The Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University has issued *The State of the Nation's Housing* by William Apgar and H. James Brown. It is a wide-ranging report on the nation's housing problems. Price, \$5.00. Contact The Joint Center for Housing Studies, 53 Church Street, Cambridge, MA, 02138; 617/495-7908.

Meeting needs: The National Institute of Building Sciences study *Meeting America's Housing Needs Through Rehabilitation of Existing Housing and Vacant Buildings* outlines some strategies for rehabilitating the 1.7 million vacant buildings in the U.S. Copies are free. Contact NIBS, 1015 15th Street, N.W. Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005; 202/347-5710.

Floor plans, a variety: Northern Homes of Glens Fall, N.Y. offers *The Founders Guild*, a catalog of eighteen different colonial home designs, and *Northern Homes Catalog* which contains 55 designs for homes of all types. Both books are \$15.00 each. Contact Northern Homes, 51 Glenwood Avenue, Queensbury, N.Y. 12804; 518/798-6007.

From the BSA: The Boston Society of Architects offers a wide range of special publications, including *The Affordable Housing Challenge*, case studies from selected affordable housing developments. It covers budget, design, and site considerations. Also from BSA, *A pattern Book of Boston Houses* features photos and detail designs for classic Boston houses. Contact Boston Society of Architects, 305 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02115; 617/267-5175.