



schemata

workshop

designing the
cohousing common
house

Grace H. Kim, AIA

no. 1 Activity Node [30]

"One of the greatest problems in existing communities is the fact that the available public life in them is spread so thin that it has no impact on the community." While this pattern was originally written with regard to the scale of a city, it relates directly to the community of cohousing, which closely resembles a village.

In discussions about memorable urban places, it's often cited that people are attracted to places where there are other people. "To create these concentrations of people in a community, facilities must be grouped densely round very small public squares which can function as nodes - with all pedestrian movement in the community organized to pass through these nodes." This principle can also be scaled down to a cohousing community. The Common House is a concentration of activities central to the community.



Fig 2.1a: Workshop at Ådalen 1



Fig 2.1b: Laundry room at Bakken



Fig 2.1c: Meal prep at Stavnsbåndet



Fig 2.1d: Resident musicians rehearse at Sættedammen



Fig 2.1e: Birthday celebration at Jernstøberiet

no. 2 Local Town Hall [44]

The Common House is the venue for community decision making and committee meetings. While this pattern was originally written for the scale of a city or neighborhood, it aptly applies to the cohousing Common House. A local town hall is 1) "... made in a way which invites people in for service, spontaneously, to debate policy, and the open space around the building is shaped to sustain people gathering and lingering." and 2) "...located at the heart of the local community and within walking distance of everyone it serves." This is most visibly manifest in the site planning and location of the Common House within a community which is addressed in pattern number 4.



Fig 2.2a: Spontaneous interactions



Fig 2.2b: After dinner conversation at Ådalen 1



Fig 2.2c: Residents linger to converse after dinner at Bakken



Fig 2.2d: Post dinner conversation at Leerbjerg Lod

no. 4 Centrally Located Common House

As indicated in the patterns *Main Building* and *Activity Node*, the siting of the Common House is very important. Locate the Common House at a central location where every resident in the community is likely to come to it at some point during the day – to do laundry, check mail, eat meals. Its location will determine the frequency of its use and, thereby, its success.

To illustrate, at Ådalen and Drivhuset the Common House is located at the end of the covered street. While the street is successful as a gathering place, the Common House becomes just the place to prepare and eat meals. The covered street is more central to all residents and becomes the location for community festivals and celebrations. Conversely, Jystrup also has a covered street, but the central location as well as its size makes the Common House the obvious place to hold community meetings, events and celebrations.

As discussed in the *Main Building*, a central location implies a visual hierarchy and can serve as an architectural orienting device.

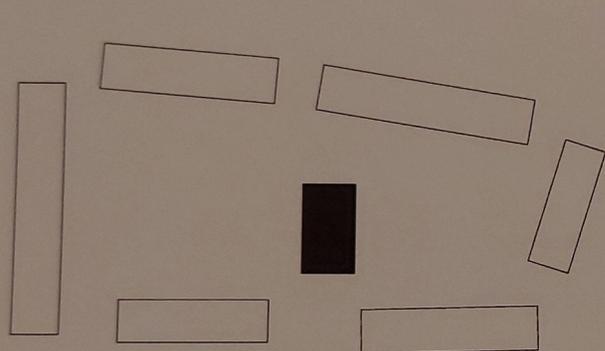


Fig 2.4a: Centrally located to all homes at Stavsnbåndet

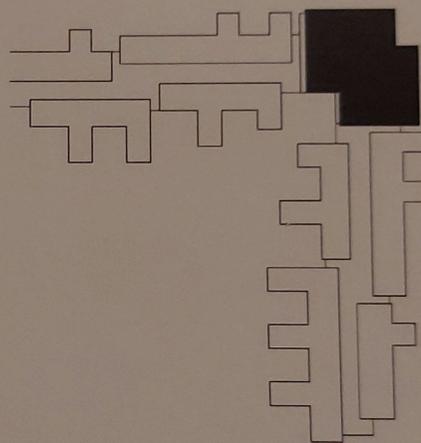


Fig 2.4b: Located at intersection of covered street at Savværket



Fig 2.4c: Common House at Savværket

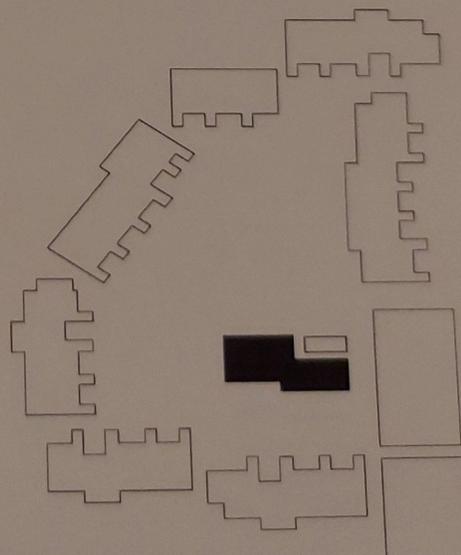


Fig 2.4d: Centrally located at Leerbjerg Lod

no. 3 Main Building [99]

"A complex of buildings with no center is like a man without a head."

As people move about in the physical world, they create mental maps of places they visit and inhabit. "Such maps need a point of reference: some point in the complex of buildings, which is very obvious, and so placed that it is possible to refer all the other paths and buildings to it. A main building, which is also the functional soul of the complex, is the most likely candidate for this reference point." Whether it be a child in the community, a frequent visitor, or a first-time guest; there should be visual clues about the hierarchy of buildings that would allow the Common House to be recognized as being more important than the other buildings in the community.

As the main building in a community, the Common House should be architecturally significant. A unique color, central or elevated location, or distinct roof form provide the important visual cues.



Fig 2.3a: Unique form at Blikfanget



Fig 2.3b: Distinct color & form at Kilen



Fig 2.3c: Color & form at Munksøgård



Fig 2.3d: Elevated location indicates importance at Trudeslund



Fig 2.3e: Central location implies prominence at Stavsbandet

no. 5 Degree Of Publicness [36]

"Some people want to live where the action is. Others want more isolation." This is personal preference can easily accommodated within a community through proximity to the Common House. The homes closer will likely be occupied by people that become the community caretakers or "gatekeepers" who know each of the community members well. Likewise, the families further away may form closer ties with their immediate neighbors.

One can observe the degree of publicness residents are comfortable with by looking at the items placed in the public areas. At Drivhuset, some residents define personal space with landscaping while others required no barriers. Similarly at Ådalen, some residents placed benches outside their units while others placed a table and chairs. Given the narrow street section, residents who desired more privacy recessed seating areas into their entry alcove. At Leerbjerg Lod the patios outside each unit demonstrated varying levels of desired privacy - some were very open with low plantings while others were secluded by tall hedges.



Fig 2.5a: Plants imply privacy at Drivhuset Fig 2.5b: Secluded patio at Leerbjerg Lod Fig 2.5c: Seating along street at Ådalen1



Fig 2.5d: Frequent opportunities for interaction at Drivhuset



Fig 2.5e: Seating pulled into nook for privacy at Ådalen1

no. 10 Eating Atmosphere [181]

"...when the table has the same light over it, and has the same light level on the walls around it, the light does nothing to hold people together; the intensity of feeling is quite likely to dissolve.... But when there is a soft light, hung low over the table, with dark walls around so that this one point of light lights up people's faces and is a focal point for the whole group, then a meal can become a special thing indeed..."

Frank Lloyd Wright described this as creating a "room within a room" - the people sitting around a dining table forming the "walls" of this inner room. This will help create an intimate setting at the dining table within the larger dining room. Create a sense of intimacy by providing solid wood tables which comfortably seat 6-8 adults and placing a pendant fixture over each table. Conversation is easily maintained in a group of this size, if there are 10, then two separate discussions will occur because the people at the far ends of the table have a difficult time conversing.



Fig 2.10a: Flower & lights highlight dining tables at Overblik

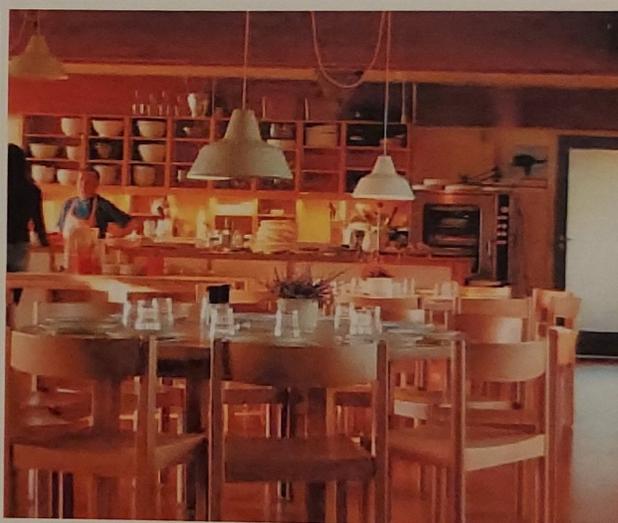


Fig 2.10b: Setting the mood for dinner at Sættedammen



Fig 2.10c: Candles add to cozy atmosphere at Stavnsbåndet



Fig 2.10d: Tables ready for diners at Bakken

no. 11 Cooking Layout [184]

"...it is essential that the cooking area be fashioned as a workshop for the preparation of food.... No need for the counter to be continuous or entirely built-in...it can even consist of free-standing tables and counter tops."

The kitchen should be designed with the typical number of cooks in mind. This pattern identifies four main elements in a kitchen: stove, sink, food storage and counter. No two should be more than 10' apart; total length of counter should be at least 12'; and no single section of counter should be less than 4' in width.

Galley kitchens open to the dining room work for smaller cooking groups such as Overblik, Blikfanget and Sættedammen. A central work island accommodates larger cooking groups - Savværket and Leerbjerg. Lod had central work surface, while Kæphøj, Trudeslund, Stavnsbåndet & Ibsgården had a central stove top. Bakken, Kilen, Munksøgård, Ådalen, and Drivhuset had separate cooking & cleaning areas to facilitate circulation flow.



Fig 2.11a: Separate dishwashing area at Munksøgård



Fig 2.11b: Island cooktop and work surfaces at Andedammen



Fig 2.11c: Galley-style kitchen for two cooks at Blikfanget



Fig 2.11d: Ample workspace for 4-6 cooks at Savværket

no. 12 Production Kitchen

The common kitchen should be designed with large-scale food production in mind. Commercial appliances should be prioritized, whenever feasible. Stoves with 4-6 large burners should be centrally located to allow for maximum utility in kitchens designed for cooking teams greater than two. A water tap (or pot filler) located near the stove will reduce accidents resulting from the filling and transport of heavy pots. Commercial ovens can accommodate numerous large baking pans and maintain constant temperature. Commercial refrigerators can accommodate large boxes of produce and bulk quantities of meat and dairy products.

While it is possible to compromise on commercial stoves or ovens, the most important and necessary commercial appliance would be the dishwasher. In addition to a quick cleaning cycle (2-3 minutes), commercial dishwashers can accommodate a large number of dishes, especially oversized pots and baking pans, and provide a higher degree of sanitization due to hotter water temperatures.



Fig 2.12a: Commercial burners and oven at Jernstøberiet



Fig 2.12b: Commercial dishwasher at Jernstøberiet



Fig 2.12c: Carts for storage and easy table setting at Savværket



Fig 2.12d: Centrally located burners and pot filler at Kæphøj

no. 20 Community Laundry

Central laundry facilities are often found in the Common House. Danish communities have devised ways to increase the productivity of the laundry rooms. In nearly all communities, there is a method that allows residents to queue up their laundry in community washing effort through the course of a day.

How it works: Resident B brings laundry to the Common House and finds the washing machine is busy washing Resident A's laundry. Resident B sorts his laundry into the appropriate number of baskets, queues up the baskets with prescribed washing instructions (water temperature/cycle, amount of detergent, and drying request) and leaves. Resident C arrives to find that Resident A's cycle is complete and puts the load in the dryer. Resident B's load is then placed in the machine using the washing instructions provided. Then Resident C sorts his own laundry and places the basket at the back of the queue. Resident A comes back to collect their dry clothes, transfers Resident B's load from the washer to dryer and starts up Resident C's load in the washing machine. And so the cycle continues. These images depict some of the ways different communities indicate their preferred washing instructions to their fellow residents.



Fig 2.20a: Wash tags at Ådalen 1



Fig 2.20b: Laundry baskets queued up at Ibsgård

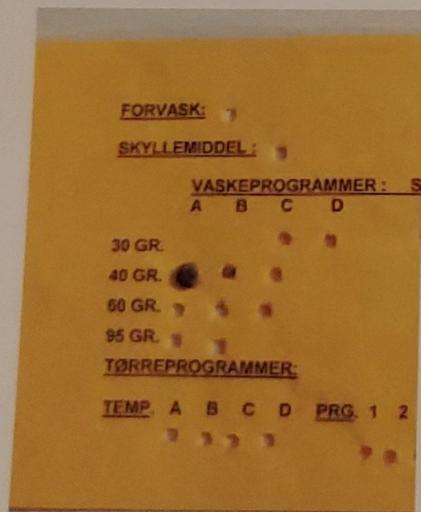


Fig 2.20c: Wash instruction for community with blind resident



Fig 2.20d: Wash instructions left in basket



Fig 2.20e: Laundry queue at Leerbjerg Lod at Klien

no. 26 South Facing Outdoors [105]

"People use open space if it is sunny, and do not use it if it isn't...."

In providing the pattern of Public Outdoor Room, it is important that this exterior room be oriented towards the sun. In the communities visited, the most successful outdoor rooms were patios facing the sun such that during the warmer months, common meals could be shared outdoors. The warmth summer evenings would cause people to linger and converse well into twilight.

These south or west facing outdoor spaces were generally accessible from the main dining space with easy access to the kitchen. They were the venue for community work day breaks and special celebrations.



Fig 2.26a: Work-day break-time on patio

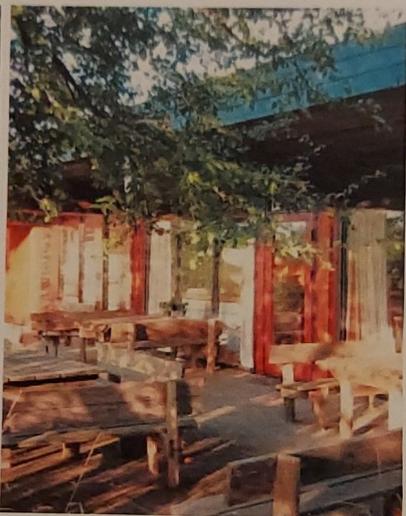


Fig 2.26b: Sættedammen dining terrace



Fig 2.26c: South-facing terrace at Bo 90



Fig 2.26d: South-facing covered space at Ådalen 2



Fig 2.26e: Patio at street terminus opens out to garden beyond

no. 30 Acoustics

Residents in both Denmark and North America complain of the noise level in the dining room during common meals and are in constant search for measures to minimize the acoustic impact of 50-80 residents conversing over dinner or children playing in the corner after a meal. The retrofit treatments were generally in the form of homosote panels attached to the ceiling surfaces to reduce or minimize the sound reflection of voices. The result was often not a visually pleasing one. At Stavnsbåndet, the acoustic ceiling was covered in a slatted wood for acoustical purposes. This was visually a nice treatment (see Fig 2.20d).

Physically separate the children's play area, which tends to be a major source of noise, from the dining room so that the dining experience can be enhanced for all residents.

The design team should include an acoustical engineer and the design process should include a discussion about the noise level of the activities that are likely to occur in the dining room.



Fig 2.30a: Geometric shaped wall panels



Fig 2.30b: Homosote panels on ceiling



Fig 2.30c: Dramatic use of Homasote



Fig 2.20d: Wood planks conceal acoustic panels above



Fig 2.30e: Acoustical tiles integrated into initial ceiling design

Common House Program

While the preceding patterns will inform the design, the actual program and configuration of rooms are critical to creating a successful Common House. Many programmatic elements were observed in the various communities visited, however, the list below identifies essential rooms to provide in a Common House. As space allows, the secondary and tertiary rooms could be provided based on resident preferences.

Many TV lounges and adult conversation areas were observed in the various Common Houses, and it appeared that they were under utilized and constantly renovated to accommodate the changing needs of the community or to increase utility. If the dining room could incorporate the appropriate mix of alcoves, these ancillary "adult" spaces would not be necessary. However, the teens and children need spaces of their own to have some autonomy from their home as well as opportunities to socialize and participate in the community.

Essential Rooms

1. Dining Room with 3-4 alcoves elevated 3 steps above main dining area
(i.e., small booth with table to seat 4-6, bay window seating for 2, nook with couch)
2. Kitchen with serving counter separating it from dining room
3. Pantry / Food storage

Secondary Rooms (as space allows)

4. Dish / seasonal decoration storage
5. Kids room with door / Teen / game room
6. Entry vestibule with Community Mailboxes, bulletin board, coat storage, and (2) toilets
7. Laundry
8. Guest Room(s)
9. Teen Apartments

Tertiary Spaces (would be nice but not necessary)

10. Shop / workroom
11. Computer room / community office

Furthermore, the success of the Common House also relies on the programming of activities. The frequency of meals dramatically effects the use of the Common House. However more informal, unprogrammed activities (especially those that could occur within an alcove) like doing homework, playing board games, scheduled TV viewing times could help increase activity within the Common House and encourage more frequent, informal stops.