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FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

Saulius Svirplys

AUTEUR DE LA THÈSE / AUTHOR OF THESIS

M.A. (History)

GRADE / DEGREE

Department of History

FACULTÉ, ÉCOLE, DÉPARTEMENT / FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT

“Creeping Diversity”: Housing Design in Bramalea, Canada’s First Suburban Satellite City

TITRE DE LA THÈSE / TITLE OF THESIS

Dr. Eda Kranakis

DIRECTEUR (DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS SUPERVISOR

CO-DIRECTEUR (CO-DIRECTRICE) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS CO-SUPERVISOR

EXAMINATEURS (EXAMINATRICES) DE LA THÈSE / THESIS EXAMINERS

Dr. B. Craig

Dr. D. Davis

Gary W. Slater

Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

**“CREEPING DIVERSITY”:
HOUSING DESIGN IN BRAMALEA,
CANADA’S FIRST SUBURBAN SATELLITE CITY**

by

Saulius Svirplys

**Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the M.A. degree in History.**

Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa



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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-32481-3
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-32481-3

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ABSTRACT

“CREEPING DIVERISTY”:
HOUSING DESIGN IN BRAMALEA,
CANADA’S FIRST SUBURBAN SATELITTE CITY

Saulius Svirplys,
University of Ottawa, 2007

Supervisor:
Eda Kranakis

Much has been written on postwar suburbs in North America, and their impact on society. What are missing are histories of the housing that exists within these suburbs, and how both the idea behind suburbs, and the realities of the time, had an impact on the design of such housing. For this work, Bramalea, Ontario, was chosen as a case study location to begin exploring suburban housing design. Begun in 1958, Bramalea was unique in that it was designed as Canada’s first suburban satellite city, which meant it was planned as a self-sufficient community. Houses in Bramalea were a product of both their location, but also of outside influences. Economic conditions, technological advances, and design trends, all influenced the history and evolution of suburban housing. Popular culture and the changing ideas about the nature of suburbs also played an important role in the houses that were built in Bramalea.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not be possible without the ongoing support and inspiration from my parents, Violet and Antanas Svirplys. Likewise, my sister, Larissa, has long been my role model who inspired me to follow in her footsteps, and write a Master's thesis. My Nanny should also be credited with teaching me the value, and importance, of higher education. My remaining three grandparents, all who have passed, gave me the strength, work ethic, and know-how to succeed. Michel Doiron has constantly been there to listen, motivate, and support me through this whole process. My family gave me the power to write this work.

I would also like to thank the realtors who took the time to provide me with research material and insight into Bramalea housing, namely Gail Fielder and Marie Seckler. I am indebted to Peter McDermott who not only had hundreds of floor plans, but also subsidised my photocopying costs. I would also like to thank Larry Aldea from Ottawa, who gave me material that I did not use on this project, but will on future endeavours.

Special thanks are due to Eda Kranakis, my advisor, for her time and effort, as well as being a great guide in this process. I also would like to thank the two readers Donald Davis and Beatrice Craig, for their editing and suggestions.

It is the many minds behind the creation of Bramalea that gave me the material to write this thesis, as well as the story for the novel that I will be publishing as my next project. I took my first steps in Bramalea, and it is the spirit of the place that will lead me into the future.

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PREAMBLE

There is one vivid memory that my Nanny has of me as a child, which she often tells me about when I see her. She remembers me sitting in the middle of the living room floor playing with my set of blocks. I looked up to her, to seek reassurance that my creation looked okay. I was using the blocks to build streets of houses. It was my favourite thing to do, especially with my older sister. We would use the blocks to construct suburban streets and cul-de-sacs of houses, complete with roofs, chimneys, and of course, garages. In essence, I was constructing abstracted block forms that mimicked what existed outside the front door of my house. I was building my very own version of a place called Bramalea.

At the time, I did not know that I was sitting in the middle of a house that was located in Canada's first satellite city, nor did I know the magnitude of the vision that was the force behind Bramalea. Designed as a completely self-sufficient city with places to live, work, learn, shop, worship and play, Bramalea was a major undertaking. In many ways, it was dreamed of as an almost utopian city, and was certainly promoted as such. Much like the fantasy community of blocks that filled my childhood imagination, the designers of Bramalea sought to build a fantasy community in real life.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written on postwar suburbs in North America, and their impact on society. What are missing are histories of suburban housing, and how both the idea behind suburbs, and the realities of the time influenced its development. Economic conditions, technological advances, and design trends all influenced the history and evolution of suburban housing. Popular culture and changing ideas about the nature of suburbs also played an important role in the houses that were built in postwar Canada. Yet suburban housing has been left out of most architectural histories. The latter only focus on buildings designed by key architects, whereas most of the houses built in Canada, particularly in suburban areas, were designed by drafts-people not architects. Not enough has been written about the kinds of houses most people actually lived in, and the reasons for their designs.

For this work, Bramalea, Ontario was chosen as a case study location to begin exploring suburban housing design. Begun in 1958, Bramalea was unique in that it was designed as Canada's first suburban satellite city. The term 'satellite city' meant that Bramalea was planned as a self-sufficient community, one where people could live, work, play, shop, learn, and worship. This was in contrast to many other suburbs of the time that were built as bedroom communities of a larger nearby city. The formal definition of a suburb describes it as being a residential district outside of an urban centre,¹ yet Bramalea was never intended to be only a residential district. Bramalea was also unique because it was designed to provide housing for all income groups. This was also in

¹ Katherine Barber, Ed., *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.1448.

contrast to many postwar suburbs, particularly American, that only provided housing for a particular income group.

Even though it was called a city, Bramalea was designed to be a suburban city, meaning that it was to have lower building densities and more open spaces than existing older cities. It was to be a community with urban amenities, but built using the suburban model. By building everything from scratch, the idea was that the shortcomings of existing cities could be avoided.

The first houses in Bramalea were built in 1960, with the last houses constructed in 1995. A large in-fill development was also built between 2001 and 2003. This provides a specific, appropriate, and useful date range in which to explore suburban housing design. The variety of housing types in Bramalea makes it ideal as a case study of suburban housing.

The first part of this work will give a brief background on the overall design of Bramalea, as well as divergences from the original plan and the reasons for these. The main body of the thesis concerns the actual design of the houses within Bramalea. My analysis will focus on the architectural language of Bramalea by examining the exteriors of the houses built. Next, a room-by-room examination of the interiors of the houses will highlight changes and historical precedents for such rooms and will consider trends over time. Finally, three specific types of houses in Bramalea will be examined: zero lot-line houses, townhouses, and apartments.

This study revealed four key things about housing in Bramalea. First, the houses were designed to embody design elements that catered, in part, to dreams and fantasy. In the early years of Bramalea, houses accentuated the horizontal, reflecting the dream of a

semi-rural location. Later, the exteriors of the houses were designed with nostalgic elements, and they also reflected notions of opulence that were a part of popular culture. This fantasy architecture was not unique to Bramalea, but was a part of suburban housing design across the country. The second key feature of Bramalea housing was that in later years the interiors also came to reflect the fantasy of opulence. The average size of the last houses to be built in Bramalea was more than double that of the first. This reflected changes in economic, technological and familial make-up. As a third notable point, even though the houses were built in Bramalea, where accommodations were supposed to be provided for all income groups, by the late 1980s and 1990s there was little variety in the types of houses built. Even so, the variety of types and affordability of houses built up until this time make Bramalea unique. Lastly, some of the houses built in Bramalea were more urban in nature, and did not fit in with the notion of a city built on the suburban model. Higher densities of houses made many areas in Bramalea feel crowded, especially with the construction of high-rise apartment buildings.

Richard Harris's book *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* argues that many houses in early Canadian suburbs were self-built or uniquely designed, giving the suburbs variety. He believed that by 1960 most Canadian suburbs had become unaffordable to the masses and standardized in housing design.² While this was true in many cases, Bramalea proved to be quite the opposite, with both affordable and unique housing types. Comparing the history of Bramalea with the model suggested by *Creeping Conformity* reveals how unique Bramalea was for its time, as it did not

² Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

follow the typical conformist pattern of most Canadian suburbs. Bramalea's development can better be described as "creeping diversity".

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is based on a variety of primary and secondary sources, with the floor plans for houses built in Bramalea being the most important. When I started this project, I only had six floor plans, all within a townhouse development built in 1996. In order to have ample research material I had to locate floor plans for houses built in Bramalea dating back to the early 1960s. Unfortunately, the builder that constructed most of the houses in Bramalea, Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited (Later Bramalea Limited), went bankrupt more than a decade ago, making access to their files impossible. But in any event, the archives of builders are not open to the public, even for research matters. The building industry is known to be secretive, and is not willing to share information under any circumstances. All of my attempts to use builders as a source of information failed. This meant that even builders who built in Bramalea and who are still in business would not allow me to access their old floor plans.

Working in the real estate industry, I became aware that established realtors often keep floor plans on file. Upon contacting realtors working in Bramalea, I was able to make copies of their floor plans. From the six townhouse plans I began with, my collection swelled to over four hundred and sixty plans for single family homes, townhouses, and condominiums built in Bramalea from 1965 to 1996. Of the plans I acquired, over 65% were by Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited. The floor plans used as the basis of this work represent approximately 80% of the designs for

single-family houses built in Bramalea, a suitable sample size for writing on housing design in Bramalea.

My next step was to create a database to record the important information revealed by the floor plans. A spreadsheet was created detailing pertinent information about each plan, including year built, size, price, number of bedrooms, bathrooms, etc. In addition, certain attributes were also recorded, such as the presence of key rooms and the number of garage spaces. These data allowed me to trace the growing number of rooms and luxury features that became commonplace during the years of Bramalea's development. Compiling all of these data allowed me to create profiles for each year, showing averages and typical features found in houses built in Bramalea.

Although extensive, the collection of floor plans assembled did not give the full picture of the built form in Bramalea. Many of the floor plans from developments were missing dates, price lists or site plans. In order to piece together the built environment more information was needed. One important source was the archives of the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* newspapers which contained advertising and articles on the various developments. The details they provided allowed me to put dates to the plans, and to see how they related to other developments in the Toronto area at the time. It was also valuable in showing how economic conditions affected the building industry. In conjunction with newspaper archives, I also used maps and diagrams of Bramalea to piece together the various developments and to plot out their locations. For some developments this proved a challenge, as the advertisements did not indicate the exact location. For these instances, I used a variety of methods to pinpoint locations. Using the MLS (Multiple Listing Service) website for real estate listings, I was able to pick out the

houses pertaining to the plans that I had, and then find their addresses through the website. The city of Brampton also has a website with air photos of the entire city, which could be used to locate the various developments. I also spent hours walking the streets of Bramalea and taking photos. On weekends I took the opportunity to visit realtor open houses to see the inside of some of the houses I had plans for.

To further piece together the history of the built form, I was able to obtain copies of the founding documents for the design of Bramalea. These included one of the master plans, as well as marketing booklets for potential homebuyers, investors, and industries. These proved valuable to determine how the housing as built measured up to the original vision for Bramalea.

THE SUBURBS: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES

Recent literature on the suburbs has not been favourable, with most urban historians and planners criticising the postwar suburbs. Academics have focused on the downside of suburban living, especially the creation of a culture that is highly dependant on the automobile. They have also criticised the bland monoculture of many suburban areas as a result of homogeneous housing types and income levels. The low density of many North American suburbs has also meant that they lack the population needed for the cultural amenities found in larger urban centres. While the postwar suburbs were built with the best intentions, in some ways they were failures. Bramalea, on the other hand was specifically designed to have a variety of housing types, as well as to have cultural and recreational amenities usually not found in North American suburbs.

The list of books scrutinizing postwar suburbs is extensive, but a few key works stand out. Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck's *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, is a book that admits that the postwar suburbs were built with a good intent, but failed to meet expectations. Instead, they became sprawling cities, many of which in the United States were designed and zoned for only one type of housing.³ For many people, being amongst their own income group may have been the motivation to move to the suburbs, but in many cases too much uniformity has been detrimental to the character of these communities. Likewise, Philip Langdon's *A Better Place to Live* points out that with a sea of homogeneous households, many streets are left completely abandoned during the day as all of the residents are at work. He proposed that if there were a mixture of income levels, including retired couples, then someone would be home at all hours, making for a safer and more dynamic community. This could only be possible with a variety of housing types, which most American suburbs lack.⁴

Bramalea does not fit well with this historiography. Although designed as an automobile-dependant community, it differed from most suburbs in that it was not meant to be homogenous. It was actually designed to have variety in its housing accommodations.

The late Jane Jacobs called for communities with a variety of housing and income types. She too decried the homogenous and exclusionary postwar suburban environments, as well as urban neighbourhoods that lacked variety. She called for streets to be filled

³ Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000).

⁴ Philip Langdon, *A Better Place to Live – Reshaping the American Suburb* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

with life, and to be gathering spaces. Jacobs has been noted as one of the most influential voices on urban planning and culture. In her final work, *Dark Age Ahead*, she mentions the city of Brampton (with which Bramalea was amalgamated in 1973) in a positive light. Even as Canada's fastest growing city, Jacobs points out that Brampton "may be one of the country's most cosmopolitan and economically sophisticated communities."⁵ She approved of the dynamic mixture of ethnic groups, income levels, and employment opportunities in Brampton. It is the section of Brampton that was formerly Bramalea where the most diverse types of housing accommodations are found, and where many of these people work.

While all of the works mentioned above critique the housing that has been built in the typical North American suburb, their analysis of the actual design of suburban housing is superficial. Most of the authors have only focused on the exteriors of the houses, and their relation to the street. They also do not consider the organic growth of these suburbs as they continuously adapted to new architectural and housing design trends. This thesis differs from most on the topic of the postwar suburbs in that I will be examining the changes in the design of housing in Bramalea, to explain how and why they occurred.

For some reason, Bramalea has been left out of the pantheon of publications on Canadian and North American suburbs. Don Mills, a slightly earlier development similar to Bramalea, has stolen the focus as a self-sufficient development in the Toronto area. What is interesting is that Bramalea was five-times larger, and more complete in its design as a self-sufficient city. While both were originally designed to have a mix of housing types and price ranges, Don Mills, now being in the City of Toronto, has become

⁵ Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead* (New York: Random House Canada, 2004), p.91-92.

a very expensive place to live. As is often the case, socio-economic conditions can push one community into the spotlight and shadow another.

Don Mills garnered more interest in architectural journals from the 1950s and 1960s, because renowned architects designed the houses and industrial buildings that were built there. In the architectural and architectural history fields, buildings not designed by architects, especially renowned architects, are rarely of interest. Only a select few are chosen to fill architectural history textbooks. The designers of the houses in Bramalea were never mentioned (a practice which was, and still is, commonplace in the suburban housing industry), and I did not seek them out. For the purpose of this thesis the names of the designers are irrelevant, even if they were architects, because the designs for the houses were largely controlled by outside forces. Any suburban house not specifically designed for a client will be influenced by the public's perceived wants and needs, which in many cases is a result of builders telling them what they want or need, and by economic conditions. In essence, the designers of the houses in Bramalea were not usually the key decision makers on many issues that affected the housing design.

While the overall design for the satellite city of Bramalea will be investigated, this work is mainly about the design of suburban housing within this context. Most works on housing and Canadian architecture tend to leave out suburban housing. Even landmark books such as the 630-page *A History of Canadian Architecture* by Harold Kalman largely ignore suburban architecture. While a few examples were discussed in the volume, they were all architect-designed, unique specimens. The design of quotidian suburban housing was completely absent.⁶

⁶ Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture, Concise Edition* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The anthology *House, Homes, and Community: Progress in Housing Canadians, 1945-1986* explored suburban housing in some of its chapters, but only in very general terms. Deryk W. Holdsworth and Joan Simon's chapter *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space* directly referenced Bramalea but did not go into any specific discussion of actual housing designs.⁷ Typically books on the topic of suburban housing have focused on types of houses, but not on the influences that dictated the design of their exteriors and interiors.

There is a limited and recent historiography non-architect designed housing. One Canadian author who has an interest in the subject is Avi Friedman, director of the "Affordable Housing Program" in the architecture department at McGill University. Two of Friedman's books, *Room For Thought – Rethinking Home and Community Design*, and *Peeking Through the Keyhole – The Evolution of North American Homes*, (co-authored with David Krawitz, also from McGill), have dealt with both urban and suburban housing design. However, there was no attention given to actual, specific examples of house designs. Instead, generalizations were made pertaining to specific types for given time periods. Dissecting the house room-by-room, Friedman took into consideration the trends, technology, economic factors, lifestyle choices, and changes in society that influenced the way that houses were designed.⁸ What sets Friedman's work apart from other analyses is the fact that he is an architect, and his books suggested

⁷ Deryk W Holdsworth and Joan Simon, "Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space." *House, Home, and Community: Progress in Housing Canadians, 1945-1986*. Ed. John R. Miron (Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1993) 188-202

⁸ Avi Friedman and David Krawitz, *Peeking Through the Keyhole: The Evolution of North American Homes* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) and Avi Friedman, *Room For Thought: Rethinking Home and Community Design* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005).

changes to the errors that had been made in housing design. As a result, his books have an ulterior motive, and are not purely analytical, but also prescriptive.⁹

In contrast to Friedman's analysis, which looks at outside factors that influence housing design, there are authors who look at how the spaces within a house are used. Judith Flanders' *The Victorian House* examined how British Victorian culture affected the use of space within the houses. Her room-by-room analysis not only revealed the types of rooms that were found in the Victorian house, but she also revealed a lot about the society at the time.¹⁰ While Flanders looked specifically at the Victorian terrace house in the United Kingdom, Friedman took a more general approach, spanning several time periods and cities, although only within North America.¹¹

A third approach found in the historiography is thematic, where the analysis of housing design is examined within a specific context. An example is Peter Ward's *A History of Domestic Space – Privacy and the Canadian Home*. As the title indicates, the work is a history of domestic space, focused on privacy issues. The book is successful at melding both the kind of analysis Friedman used (which looked at outside influences that dictated the way a house was designed), and the approach of Flanders (that looked at how spaces within a house were used). Ward's work is a broad analysis that begins with First Nations' housing before European settlement, and ends with contemporary suburban housing. Because of the broad time period, only a very short section of the book pertains

⁹ Saulius Svirplys, *The Methodology on how to Analyse Suburban House Floor Plans as a Primary Source* (Gatineau: Saulius Svirplys, 2006), p.4-5.

¹⁰ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House – Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: Harper Perennial, 2003).

¹¹ Svirplys, *The Methodology on how to Analyse Suburban House Floor Plans as a Primary Source*, p.5-6.

to suburban housing.¹² What is interesting about the book is that specific examples of housing designs are presented, with floor plans included.¹³ The present study builds upon this approach.

¹² Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space – Privacy and the Canadian Home* (Toronto: UBC Press, 1999).

¹³ Svirplys, *The Methodology on how to Analyse Suburban House Floor Plans as a Primary Source*, p.6-7.

CHAPTER 1

BRAMALEA

While the focus of this thesis is the design of housing in Bramalea, the vision of the city in which this housing was built must first be outlined. In Canada, the post World War Two era was characterized by a positive outlook and a new start for returning soldiers. The era saw a baby boom, which sparked a turn towards the suburbs as an environment to raise these new families. Located just outside urban areas and thought of as safe places in rural settings, postwar suburbs grew at an unprecedented rate. Within these suburbs, the design of houses inevitably reflected the values of the time. As these new living environments existed outside of cities, they were designed to take advantage of open spaces that allowed for lower housing densities. Sprawling bungalows visually accentuated the horizontal, which were a contrast to the vertical, narrow houses in urban areas.

In the Toronto area, many postwar suburbs grew quickly and without any sort of planning. In the sea of unplanned sprawl, a dream was born to build a fully-planned suburban city from scratch on the outskirts of Toronto. The goal was to create a satellite city, which was to be a completely self-sufficient community providing places to live, work, shop, learn, worship, and play. As such, Bramalea was considered a great solution to the burgeoning population in the Toronto area at the time.¹⁴

The idea of Bramalea also captured the fantasy of creating the perfect place to live and raise a family. For many of the young couples who chose to move to the suburbs, it was because they had children. While it may have been considered normal for people

¹⁴ David Piper, "70,000 to Live in New Town Near Brampton," *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 November 1958, p.4.

without children to live in an urban apartment, it was not ideal with children.¹⁵ For children, the small size of many apartments was seen as substandard, and they lacked the space for the many consumer products and toys that were becoming a part of everyday life. The inability of an apartment to provide a backyard was also seen as a detriment. The suburbs were desirable because they provided affordable housing, allowing young families to buy their very own house – thus fulfilling the North American dream of home ownership.

The design for Bramalea called for it to be a new city that would avoid the mistakes of the past. It was a forward thinking design, which was ideal in the postwar era that sought to forget the Second World War. Children, important factors in the design of Bramalea, were often referenced in early advertising. Bramalea advertisements from the early 1960s featured the image of an innocent little girl named *Bonnie Bramalea*. Her tag line was “I live in Bramalea, doesn’t everybody”¹⁶, which indicated that she lived in the safe bubble of Bramalea, and did not know the outside world. Bramalea was also said to nourish “young fry and teeners...by living in a city that’s progressive...[And they were] encouraged to participate in the spirit of things.”¹⁷

In a booklet published when Bramalea was first begun, the developers explained that:

The city will be a balanced and integrated urban community – not a new subdivision or suburban sprawl. Through a harmonious arrangement of Industrial

¹⁵ S.D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p.55.

¹⁶ *Bramalea Guardian*, 13 August 1964, p.8.

¹⁷ *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 February 1968, p.3.

Parks, residential neighbourhoods and focal centres for shopping and cultural activities, it will provide for the well being and prosperity of [the] population.¹⁸

These statements reflect the forward-thinking positive outlook of the era, in which society believed that changes could be achieved through technology and the built form. In the 'brave new world' a completely new self-sufficient city was met with much anticipation, and in some ways seemed utopian.

The idea of a utopian city in North America was not new. At the 1939 New York World's Fair, the most popular attraction was *Futurama*, a massive diorama that portrayed a city in 1960, one that was characterized by technology and automobiles. Not surprisingly, the General Motors Corporation created the suburban environment of *Futurama*, with its many lanes of highways crisscrossing the landscape.¹⁹ In the late 1950s, the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright revealed his plans for *Broadacres City*, a decidedly suburban environment also serviced by highways, yet with the futuristic fantasy of personal helicopter-like flying vehicles.²⁰ After Bramalea was started, at Expo '67 in Montreal, the idea that technology and thorough planning could change society was a common theme. Moshe Safdie's *Habitat '67* apartment complex was a perfect example of the daring aspirations for the future. Bramalea was very much a product of its time, and one that fulfilled the vision of creating a better kind of life through a highly planned built environment. Years later, the reality is that these plans were mere fantasy. The *Futurama* city of 1960 never became a fact, helicopter-like flying vehicles do not exist in cities, and *Habitat '67* was the only such building built - even

¹⁸ *Bramalea, Canada's First Satellite City* (Toronto: Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1958), p.5.

¹⁹ David Gelernter, *1939 - The Lost World of the Fair* (Toronto: The Free Press, 1995).

²⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Living City* (New York: New American Library, 1958), p.198-199.

though countless others were planned. While Bramalea was built, this thesis will reveal that it was not built exactly as planned.

While most postwar Canadian suburbs were built as residential communities, Bramalea was unique in that it was designed as a completely self-sufficient city. By creating a suburb that not only provided housing, but also employment and community amenities, Bramalea was not just a bedroom community outside of Toronto. Because of the intense planning as the ideal suburban satellite city, Bramalea took the postwar suburban vision a step further. The idea for the design of Bramalea was described as being similar to a British new town, yet designed for the specific context of its location in Canada. It was the success of these British new towns, which drove the design of Bramalea as a solution to the problem of the unplanned sprawl of suburbs that surrounded Toronto. As a planned community, Bramalea was seen as a better alternative to both larger cities and unplanned suburbs by providing a better quality of life.

Another thing that made the plan for Bramalea unique was that it was designed to “offer...housing to every income group in single and multiple-type structures, including outright ownership, condominiums, and rental arrangements”²¹. While certain other planned cities like Radburn, New Jersey, begun in 1928, were meant to house all walks of life, “by 1934 three in five family heads were at least middle executives; there were no blue-collar workers”.²² In many cases, postwar North American suburbs were designed to house predominantly middle-class, middle-income families, with some specifically designed for higher-income earners. In Bramalea there was variety, with houses that “must all meet Bramalea’s high standards of design. They are priced from the middle

²¹ Helga V. Loverseed, *Brampton – an Illustrated History* (Burlington: Windsor Publications, 1987), p.262.

²² Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow – An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* Updated ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), p.127.

income to the executive range.”²³ Later, low income and socially assisted housing was also built. The homogeneity of many Canadian, and particularly American, suburbs was not a part of the design for Bramalea. It sought to open up the American Dream to those who might otherwise not be able to partake in it, especially by providing a wide variety of rental housing. The vision was for all types of people from all walks of life to be able to live in a fully planned new city.

A land development company was created to put in the infrastructure to build Bramalea, named Bramalea Consolidated Developments (BCD). Due to complications in the early years from having many builders constructing houses in Bramalea, some of which were poorly built, BCD decided to open its own house-building division. By 1962, BCD not only was the developer of Bramalea, but also the builder of the majority of the houses. Nonetheless, it continued to sell parcels of land to other builders. Eventually, the company created to develop Bramalea grew and branched out to other development and building projects. By the 1970s BCD was building houses and owned land, malls and office buildings, all across Canada. In the 1980s, BCD (by then called Bramalea Limited) had become the largest real estate company in North America. Unfortunately, the company created to build Bramalea grew too large, too quickly. In 1995, suffering from the consequences of two recessions, Bramalea Limited went bankrupt, leaving a \$3-billion debt. The company’s remaining assets and land in Bramalea were sold off, and the dream of Bramalea was never completed by the company created to do so.

²³ *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 February 1968, p.5.

1.1 Satellite City?

From the beginning, Bramalea was promoted as a ‘satellite city’. A 1959 advertisement in the *Toronto Daily Star*, defined what this was:

Satellite cities are one of the urban planner’s solutions to problems created by the sprawling growth of big cities. They are designed to blend all that is best in urban living with the healthy freedom of the countryside. Their distinguishing characteristics are (1) a location just beyond the boundaries of a metropolitan area (2) a population of 50,000 or more – large enough to support the shopping centres, theatres and other commercial, civic and cultural amenities associated with urban living, and (3) a harmonious arrangement of industrial, commercial and residential areas which permits easy movement between homes, plants, offices, stores, schools and recreation facilities.²⁴

Furthermore, the designers of Bramalea pointed out that:

A satellite city should not be confused with the earlier garden cities of drab factory and housing estates of the 1920’s and 1930’s, or with Levittown, Long Island, New York, and similar postwar housing developments. Even such model North American communities as Park Forest, Illinois and Radburn, New Jersey, lack the distinctive character and urban atmosphere which is an essential quality of Britain’s satellite towns.²⁵

Its designers compared Bramalea to British satellite towns, pointing out that there would be a more urban atmosphere in such a city. In a way there was confusion as to what Bramalea was to be: it was to be suburban and have urban qualities at the same

²⁴ *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 October 1959.

²⁵ *Bramalea, Canada’s First Satellite City* (Toronto: Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1958), p.6.

time. This type of explanation is based on the following idea promoted by the developers of Bramalea: “Here are all of the advantages of city as well as country living, but not the problems of either. There is no traffic congestion. No smog. No urban sprawl...an abundance of pure air to breathe, open fields and lush greenbelt.”²⁶ All of this in what the promoters called a planned suburban city – one that would remain that way. Many advertisements during the 1960s for Bramalea promised it would provide “better living...through planning.”²⁷

The definition put forth by the promoters of Bramalea as a satellite city differs from that of others in the planning field. According to Gideon Golany, a satellite town was a “settlement close to a large urban centre. This type of town is strongly influenced by the larger city’s economy, i.e., economically it is an integral part of a large urban body although it is physically separate from it.”²⁸ This was hardly what the original promoters of Bramalea believed it to be, as they saw it as a self-sufficient city, which should have been classified differently. Golany broke up the types of new urban settlements into two groups: settlements without economic self-containment, which included satellite towns, and settlements with economic self-containment, which should have included the design for Bramalea. Out of the eleven in the latter group, Bramalea most closely resembled what has been termed a ‘new community’. This idea was very similar to the British new towns, modified for North America. Essentially, a new community was fully planned to include a variety of housing, cultural facilities, as well as employment. Although self-

²⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 March 1968, p.18.

²⁷ *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 October 1959.

²⁸ Gideon Golany, *New-Town Planning: Principals and Practice* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), p.48.

sufficient, a new community should also be close to a major urban centre.²⁹ This most accurately described the idea behind Bramalea, and how it was actually built.

1.2 The Lay of the Land

In order to ensure that Bramalea was built as envisioned, a master plan was drawn up before the city was begun, and subsequent versions were created to adapt to changing conditions. The extensive plan laid out the location and type of buildings to be built, as well as roads and parkland in the city. Of the original 8,000 acres (later 10,000) planned for Bramalea, 4,200 were set out as residential; 2,400 as industrial; 550 as greenbelt; 500 as schools, parks and churches; 250 as commercial; and 100 for institutional purposes.³⁰ It was “the largest single block of land ever assembled for the purpose of erecting and adjoining a satellite city to a Canadian metropolis.³¹”

The Industrial parks in Bramalea were laid out in a J-shape edging the residential areas (Fig. 1). Near the geographic centre of Bramalea was land for a city centre and commercial core. This eventually became the location of the *Bramalea City Centre* mall, office buildings, a hotel, a police station, and the City Hall building, which included a library and live theatre. Outside of the core, sub-locations were planned to house smaller commercial centres with grocery stores and more local amenities. Most of these were built, although some in locations differing from the original plan. Land was also earmarked for recreation centres, schools and privately-funded places of worship. Within

²⁹ Golany, *New-Town Planning: Principals and Practice*, p.28-30.

³⁰ *Bramalea, Canada's First Satellite City* (Toronto: Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1958), p.5.

³¹ *ibid*

the residential neighbourhoods, four types of housing were planned: detached and semi-detached; townhouses; low-rise; and high-rise.

The residential tracts of land in Bramalea were subdivided to include fourteen distinct neighbourhoods of varying sizes, each assigned a letter name from A to P, with the exception of I and O (Fig. 2). Within these neighbourhoods the street names all begin with the letter that corresponds to the section. For instance, Autumn Boulevard, Avondale Boulevard, and Addington Crescent, can be found in the A-Section. While this idea was continued for the most part, exceptions exist in the M- and L-Sections, as well as a small unclassified area with no letter assigned. Over time, these letter sections have become distinct communities, each having different reputations and desirability depending on the type of housing built.

Because of extensive planning, Bramalea was actually built as a completely self-sufficient entity. Many people live and work within Bramalea because of the inclusion of the industrial and commercial parks. In present day Brampton as a whole, half of the working population actually works within Brampton.³² This is unusual for a suburb, especially one so close to Toronto, and it is made possible by Bramalea's unique mix of residential, commercial, and industrial areas.

³² Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead*, p.91.



Fig. 1. Contemporary map of Bramalea (MapArt Publishing Corporation, 2001).



Fig.2 . Contemporary map of Bramalea showing letter sections (MapArt Publishing Corporation, 2001 – overlay by Saulius Svirplys, 2006). Circles represent places of worship, squares represent schools.

CHAPTER 2

THE ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE OF BRAMALEA

The style of Bramalea's housing was characteristic of the type of fantasy architecture found in many postwar suburban areas. I like to use the term 'fantasy architecture' to refer to houses that masquerade as something they are not. Throughout Bramalea's history, houses were specifically designed either to propagate the idea of a suburban idyll with open spaces, to have a style hinting at some sort of nostalgic time in the past, or to reflect ideas of luxury current within popular culture. Even though such fantasy architecture was common in many suburban areas during the time Bramalea was built, there were some unique examples more specific to this location.

Houses built in Bramalea during the 1960s and the early 1970s were conservative for the time. While many Canadian houses built during this period displayed a contemporary style with sweeping and unusual rooflines and large expanses of glass, the houses in Bramalea were more conventional. Only a handful of contemporary styled houses were built in Bramalea, as they did not relate well to the fact that the architecture was very much connected to the idea of the city as a new suburban arcadia.

Historic suburban precedents from the 1920s up to the 1950s were a part of the subconscious of those buying houses in the early years of Bramalea, as many would have grown up in such houses. Perhaps the quintessential example of a suburban house was the one-and-a-half storey New England Cape Cod style house. This type of house, originally built by settlers in Massachusetts in the early 18th century, came to represent the quintessential North American house. In the 1940s, a simplified Cape Cod style was popularised by William Levitt in the mass-produced postwar housing he built in the

Levittowns in the United States.³³ Levitt's compact, simply executed Cape Cod design facilitated rapid, streamlined production. The workers would move down a street doing one specific job on each house, much like Henry Ford's production lines for cars. As a result of this efficient formula, most of the houses in Levittown looked the same. Levitt forever changed the speed at which suburbs were built, but more importantly, he influenced the look of the suburbs.

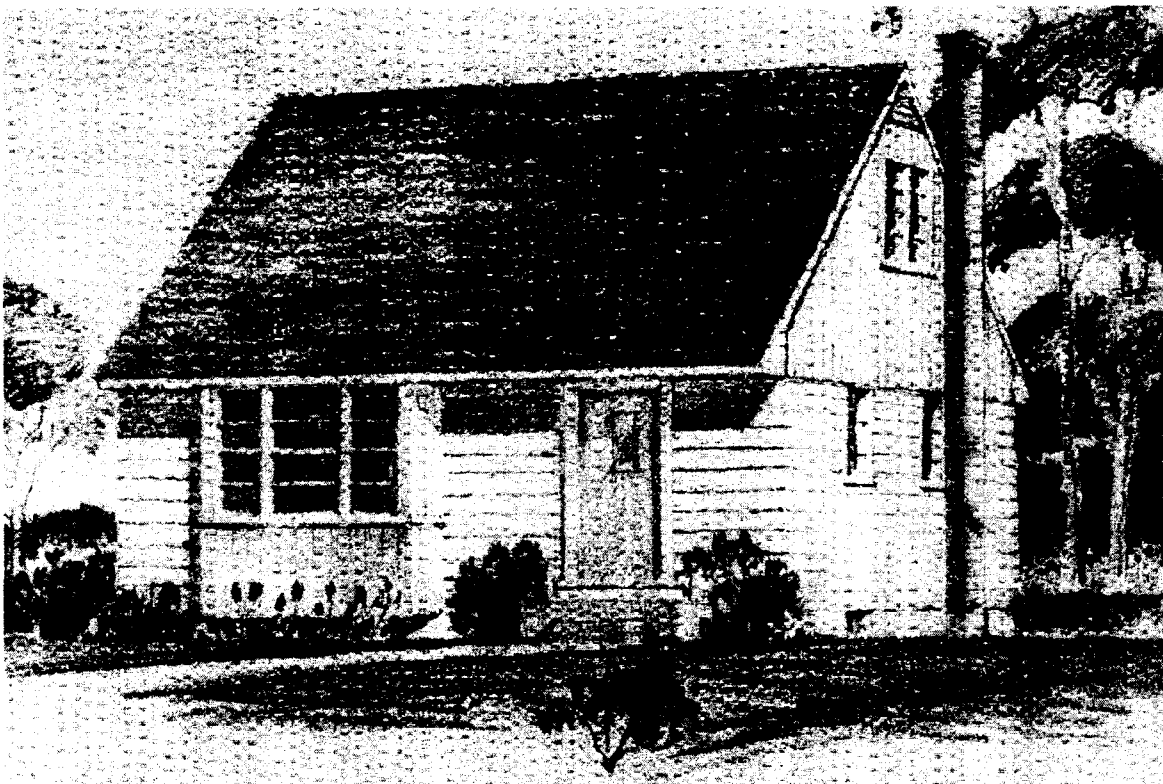


Fig. 3 . "Plan 314" façade (*Small House Designs*, CMHC, 1954). The large sloping roof gave the house a low profile, yet there were still rooms on the second floor.

In Canada, the Cape Cod style was chosen by Wartime Housing Limited to build 'Victory Housing' for returning soldiers after the Second World War. Its popularity continued into the 1950s, with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CHMC) annual publication, *Small House Designs* plan book of 1954, which had twenty-eight one-

³³ Witold Rybcznski, *The Look of Architecture* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.61.

and-a-half storey designs based on the Cape Cod style (Fig. 3). Between the end of World War Two and 1960, over 300,000 one-and-a-half storey houses were built in Canada.³⁴ While the style had fallen out of favour when construction was begun on Bramalea in 1958, the shutters, window boxes, and low appearance of the Cape Cod style would be translated to a new popular house style – the bungalow.

While the Cape Cod house was synonymous with early suburban architectural language, so too was the bungalow. Developed most prominently in California during the 1910s and 1920s, this low-slung house with a deep overhanging roof became a popular suburban house style in the years before World War Two. The California-style bungalow also became popular in Canada around the same time, as the “Craftsman Bungalow”.³⁵ Many examples of this type of house were built in Brampton (the historic town next to Bramalea), early in the 20th century. Later in the century, the Prairie Style, which accentuated the horizontal even more with low-slung hip roofs and horizontal windows, became popular across Canada, including Brampton. It is probable that the older houses in Brampton inspired the designers of the first houses in Bramalea. In 1958 the CMHC’s annual *Small House Designs* plan book now included only nine plans for one-and-a-half storey houses, out of a total of ninety-seven designs. In contrast, sixty-six plans were for bungalows, twelve were for split-levels, and the few two-story plans had low pitched rooflines and horizontal windows.

Bungalows in Bramalea, although rooted in earlier suburban architecture, were very much products of their time. The most striking difference between Bramalea houses

³⁴ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Renovating Distinctive Homes: 1 ½ Storey Postwar Homes* (Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2000) p.1.

³⁵ John Blumenson, *Ontario Architecture – A Guide to Styles and Building Terms 1784 to the Present* (n.l.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1990) p.176-184.

and those built earlier in the 20th century was the absence of a front porch. In 1912, the trade journal *Brickbuilder* held a competition for the design of an affordable bungalow. Their sprawling nature made these houses impractical for narrow urban building sites. The house designs submitted had large groupings of windows, suggesting that they were to take in a pastoral, rural view. A wide variety of styles of houses were entered into the competition, but they all had a front porch.³⁶

The lack of a front porch on houses in Bramalea clearly placed them into the postwar automobile era. Until the car was invented, the front porch was an important place for spending leisure time. It was the location where neighbours socialized and families spent their time outdoors. The rear yard was usually set aside for less appealing service duties and accessed via a laneway. It was in this rear space that deliveries were received, garbage stored, clothes hung to dry, and stables located. It was the utilitarian rear yard where auto garages were first built. That way, the front yard was still reserved as a space for the porch and the pedestrian. As increasing car ownership became more common, the street out front soon became noisy and polluted by passing vehicles, and thus the front porch became less desirable as an outdoor space.³⁷ Going for a walk and socializing with neighbours on the front porch also became rare. This turned the focus to the more quiet and private rear yard.³⁸ By the time Bramalea was begun, the rear yard as a private space had become the norm, and the front porch nearly obsolete.

³⁶ *One Hundred Bungalows* (Boston: Rogers & Manson, 1912).

³⁷ Drummond Buckley, "A Garage in the House," *The Car and the City – The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Life*, ed. Martin Wachs and Margaret Crawford (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), p.127-129.

³⁸ Saulius Svirplys, *How the Car Ruined the Suburban House – The Impact of the Technology of the Car on Suburban Housing: Two Strains of Design* (Gatineau: Saulius Svirplys, 2005) p.7.

In 1965, Bramalea Consolidated Developments began *Westgate* in the B-Section. The houses in *Westgate* reflected 1960s suburban housing ideals. Six of the models were bungalows, and two were two stories tall. The remaining five models were split-levels. In *Westgate*, all but four of the models presented a one-storey street façade, even if the back of the house had two stories (Fig. 4). This reflected the popular style at the time, which was inspired by the fantasy of a sprawling ranch house, and the connotations of living in the country with the luxury of land for building such a wide house. The houses reflected the fact that even though they appeared low and sprawling, they existed in a suburban context with certain land constraints. While a fifty- or sixty-foot-wide lot may be large by today's standards, it was not a rural acreage and did not allow a particularly wide house. In an earlier suburb of Toronto, Don Mills, this ideal of sprawling houses was accomplished by designing the neighbourhoods with lots that were wider than standard, but also shallower.³⁹

Split-level houses were very popular in early Bramalea. The back-split house gave the appearance of a bungalow within the land constraints of a suburban lot. The two or more stories at the back allowed for a larger house on a smaller parcel of land. Even the two-storey and side split models were designed to have horizontal accentuation. The low hipped roofs and garages placed at the side made the houses look wider than they were tall (Fig. 5). The drawings of the houses in the marketing brochure for *Westgate* accentuated horizontality by depicting them at an angle rather than straight on. The artist specifically chose an angle that made the houses look elongated. As continues to be

³⁹ Deryk W. Holdsworth and Joan Simon, "Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space," *House, Home, and Community: Progress in Housing Canadians, 1945-1986*, ed. John R. Miron (Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1993) p.194.

typical today, the houses were misleadingly portrayed without any other neighbouring houses, just trees and open green space, continuing the fantasy of a semi-rural location.



Fig. 4. "Saratoga Festival" facade, *Westgate* (1965). Even though a one-storey façade was presented to the street, the back of the house had two levels. The large picture windows suggested a pastoral view. (Please note: due to the age, quality of the original, and fact that many are photocopies of photocopies, some of the images in this work are of a bit blurry).



Fig. 5. "Country Regent" facade, *Westgate* (1965). The angle from which the house was depicted made it look wider and lower than it was.

The names given to each of the models in *Westgate* promised a suburban, if not rural lifestyle, such as: “Country Regent”, “Linden Lodge”, “Carriage Holiday”, and “Garden Glory”. The cover of the brochure for *Westgate* depicted a husband and wife on a hill overlooking Bramalea, surrounded by open green space, despite the fact that there were no hills at the time in Bramalea. The flat terrain of the Peel Plains did not provide any sort of higher vantage point to overlook the city. The houses in *Westgate* were very much products of the suburban aesthetic popular at the time.

All of the detached houses built during the 1960s in Bramalea were situated on lots at least fifty feet wide. Semi-detached houses were built on lots thirty-five feet wide, for a total of seventy feet for the two. While the suggestion of a sprawling ranch house may have been difficult to attain with a semi-detached house, the designers continued to accentuate the horizontal. In 1962, a development of semi-detached houses was begun, aptly named *Twingate*. Of the nine plans, two-thirds were back splits, while the remaining three were two stories tall. Of the two-storey models, two were only attached by the garage. This not only allowed for greater privacy, but the one-storey massing of the garage between the two houses made a strong horizontal visual statement. The two-storey portions of the houses had low-hipped roofs, making them seem less tall. The arrangement of being only attached by the garage made them look like two distinct houses and not semi-detached (Fig. 6). Many of the houses were built with two different models attached, furthering the visual suggestion that they were two distinct houses. The houses in *Twingate* were described as a “whole new idea in twin home planning... WITHOUT the compromise of look-alike designs.”⁴⁰ For back-split houses, the two houses were made distinct by separately articulated hipped roofs on the front section of

⁴⁰ *Toronto Daily Star*, 10 October 1962, p.9.

each. From a technical standpoint, the valley between the two roof structures was not ideal for drainage, but it did highlight the fact that there were two distinct houses. Some of the houses were built with one unit pulled forward slightly, again to accentuate the difference between the two. All of these small elements contributed to the suburban fantasy of owning a house of one's own, even if it was attached to another.



Fig. 7. "Carlton Glade" facade, *Twingate* (1962). Even though the houses were two stories tall, the low-pitched rooflines accentuated the horizontal. Although this image shows the same model attached by the garage, most were built with different models attached.

All of the developments built in 1960s Bramalea were diversified with a seemingly endless number of variant house designs and types. The fact that many different builders were involved made the early parts of Bramalea quite unlike the cookie-cutter streets of the Levittowns. In the A-Section many streets had detached and semi-detached houses intermixed, with no two houses alike. This propagated the

suburban ideal of owning a unique house of one's own, a contrast to the historic rows of similar houses found in many urban areas like Toronto.



Fig. 7. "Tall Oak I" facade, *Bramalea Estates* (Nu-West, 1977). The Second Empire style Mansard roof on the upper level was inspired by buildings constructed in France during the reign of Napoleon III (1852-70). The simplified execution of the windows and the materials used made the style updated for the 21st century.

During the 1970s, houses on fifty-foot wide lots and thirty-foot wide semi-detached lots remained the norm. While houses began to grow, the horizontal elements on their exterior remained the same. What this era brought with it was an interest in different materials, as well as elements borrowed from the past. Wood siding, stone, and cedar shingles gave many of the mid-1970s houses in Bramalea a tactile façade hinting at past architectural styles. Some of the houses also had a contemporary take on the Mansard roof, inspired by the Second Empire style of architecture, yet updated for the time (fig. 7).



Fig. 8. “Hawthorne” facade, *Bramalea Estates* (Nu-West, 1977). The exposed rafter tails – seen over the garage door – were inspired by the Craftsman-style bungalow. Even though the house looked like a bungalow, it was really a back-split.

The 1977-1979 subdivision called *Bramalea Estates* was the first instance in which contemporary and historic styles were combined. Nu-West’s “Hawthorne” model in the development was a split-level house, which looked like a bungalow from the exterior, especially with its long low roofline (fig. 8). The front of the house had exposed rafter tails (ends). These decorative elements were derived from the Craftsman-style California bungalow popular during the first two decades of the 20th century.⁴¹ The minor, yet significant detail of the exposed rafter tails, and the fact that the house was purposely made to look like a bungalow, made it very suburban in nature. Almost twenty-five years later, the tradition of making a split-level house look like a bungalow would return in the 2001 *Lake of Dreams* development. In this development, a series of back-split and two-storey houses were designed to present a single-storey façade to the street.

⁴¹ Henry L. Wilson, *A Short Sketch of the Evolution of the Bungalow* (Los Angeles: Henry L. Wilson, 1927).

The idea of a bungalow and its connection to the language of the suburbs is one that continues to be found today.



Fig. 9. Vanna Venturi House facade, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, www.greatbuildings.com, 2007 (Robert Venturi, 1962). This was one of the earliest post-modern houses in North America, and has become an icon of the style.

The nostalgic aspect of housing exteriors built in Bramalea beginning in the 1970s was a key change that came to define suburban architecture even to this day. The 1960s and 1970s were the beginning of a time when architects and designers no longer sought to create something modern and forward thinking, but looked instead to historic precedents. The academic world began embracing the idea of a post-modern architecture, which as the name suggests came after the modern movement. While the architects of the modern era sought to design buildings that were unlike anything seen before, the post-modernists looked back to what existed before modernism. What made post-modernism different from a mere revival of historic styles, was that architects altered and played with historic

elements in a new way. The *Vana Venturi House*, designed by architect Robert Venturi for his mother, is an example of one of the earliest post-modern houses in North America (Fig. 9).⁴² The design of the house exaggerates, distorts, and re-works historic elements such as the arch, the chimney, the window, and the classical broken pediment. Venturi also included a stairway which leads to nowhere, which was peculiar, but asked us to question the purpose of the staircase, and how it has all too often been used as a showpiece rather than a functional element.

In the years since the 1960s, the post-modern style gained popularity in the mainstream architectural world. 1980s post-modernism was a watered down version of the original, which was embraced by the designers of suburban housing. Instead of playing with the historic elements, designers instead used these elements to hint at some sort of historicism, creating the fantasy of the past. In Bramalea the façades of houses sometimes went to such great lengths to add a sense of historicism that false windows and false dormers were added. Shutters, herringbone brick patterns, coined brick corners, and windows that looked like they had small panes, made these houses quintessential examples of the post-modern style. Fram Building Group's 1986-1987 "Robinet" model had Tudor-style half-timbered detailing and windows with false mullions that made them look like they had diamond shaped panes (Fig. 10). Architect John Milnes Baker described this historically-inspired type of architecture as "Neo-Tudor", "Neo-Classical Revival", "Neo-Victorian", and "Nouveau Traditional", indicating that it was a new take on an old style.⁴³

⁴² Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.243.

⁴³ John Milnes Baker, *American House Styles – A Concise Guide* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) p.154-157.

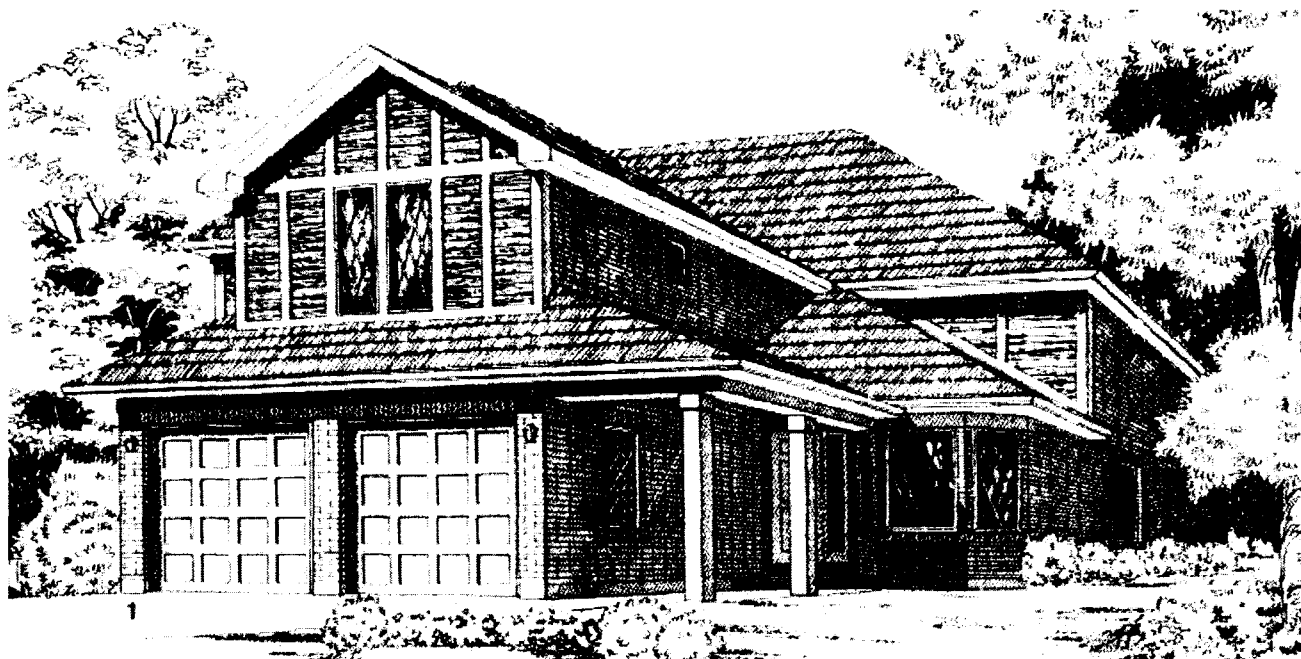


Fig. 10. “Robinet” facade, *The Nortonville Estate* (Fram Building Group, 1986). The Tudor-style elements related to a past style of grand English manors, and may have been an attempt to detract from the fact that the house had an overpowering two-car garage.

Author Russell Versaci picked out seven deadly sins of recent house design, one of which he called “Jekyll and Hyde”, which related to the fact that most suburban houses, including the “Robinet”, had a front façade, while the back and sides were in a different style.⁴⁴ Even in its naïve form, this type of post-modernism impressed the likes of Robert Venturi, whose famous book *Learning From Las Vegas*, celebrated the vernacular, quotidian, even garish architecture in Las Vegas and other cities.⁴⁵ Winifred Gallagher called this type of post-modern house “pseudo-historical”, as it hinted at past architecture. She believed the use of historic elements related to the North American subconscious about history and about what a house should be. In our collective subconscious we have an idea of how a house should look and feel. Hence cutting-edge

⁴⁴ Russell Versaci, “Seven Deadly Sins of Home Building,” *New Old House* Winter 2006, p.14, 16.

⁴⁵ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977).

contemporary-style houses were never built in Bramalea; they simply did not fit in with the subconscious idea of what a suburban house was to look like. According to Kenneth T. Jackson, the historically influenced colonial-style house derived its appeal “partly from its suggestion of affluence, and partly from its symbolic connection to an earlier period.”⁴⁶

For many of us, the farmhouses of the pioneering North Americans hold a special place in our hearts and minds. Jack Nasser, an environmental psychologist, once performed a study to see which house style appealed most to the general public. Overwhelmingly, the sample group chose the image of a farmhouse over other house styles, as it had a sense of comfort, nostalgia, and looked the most approachable. In the same study, very few people preferred a modern or contemporary-style house, save for architects, who would have been more interested in the architectonic qualities over the sense of comfort.⁴⁷ Studies like this, as well as trial and error, must have prompted the builders in Bramalea to embrace this historically-inspired style. At the *Trail Ridge* development from 1985-1987, Bramalea Limited’s “Montgomery” model had a façade that made its garage resemble a barn (Fig. 11).

⁴⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier – The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) black and white colour plates.

⁴⁷ Jack L. Nasar, “Symbolic Meanings of House Styles,” *Environment and Behavior* 21, no. 3 (1989), p.235-257.



Fig. 11. "Montgomery" facade, *Trail Ridge* (Bramalea Limited, 1985). The board-and-batten detail and front porch made the house look as though it should be in a rural setting.

While many North Americans liked the look and feeling of historic homes, they generally did not want to live in an older house that needed work, or lacked a floor plan to suit their familial needs. By having a new house that looked like or hinted at a historic house, that sense of comfort and hominess could be attained.⁴⁸ New homebuilders have long tapped into what the public wanted for reasons of emotion and status, and in many ways they also influenced what the public desired in a new house. In early Bramalea, most of the houses hinted at a rural or ranch type of architecture, inspired by the suburban fantasy of the time. The houses built in the 1970s and later in Bramalea were based on the fantasy of having a historic house.

⁴⁸ Gallagher, *House Thinking*, p.21-23.

Historically inspired exteriors were the norm for Bramalea houses built after the 1960s, but there was another change in the styles of the houses, namely a departure from horizontally accentuated houses. Beginning in the “early 1970s the constraints of land prices and servicing costs began to squeeze lot sizes.”⁴⁹ In addition, between 1971 and 1976, the price of the average house in the Toronto area doubled.⁵⁰ In 1979, Bramalea Homes released houses for sale costing much less than those offered in their other developments, in a community called *Super Singles Sale*. The *Super Singles Sale* houses were priced to reflect the fact that they were built on lots only thirty feet wide. The new development was Bramalea’s first with houses that did not have a horizontal look. Instead of bungalows and back splits, all but one of the models were two stories tall.

At the *Super Singles Sale*, horizontal elements to make houses look wider than they actually were could no longer be used. Instead, the post-modern style was embraced with a new type of fantasy architecture, one that was rooted in nostalgia for another time and place. Historically inspired arch-top windows, shutters, covered porches, Tudor-style half-timber elements, and even a Second Empire-style Mansard roof graced the exteriors of these houses. To the homebuyer, these elements gave these houses a homey feeling and helped to hide the fact that they were cheek-and-jowl with their neighbour.

The shift from the suburban fantasy being reflected in the exterior of houses can be attributed to financial realities of the time. Even though the lot sizes were narrow in *Super Singles Sale*, the houses were fully detached. This reflected a change in the type of houses built in Bramalea as by 1980, semi-detached houses were no longer constructed. The following decades were characterized by the construction of detached houses, in

⁴⁹ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.195.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.197.

many cases on lot sizes narrower than the semi-detached houses of the preceding decades.

In 1980, Bramalea Limited began a development with the narrowest lot sizes ever for detached houses in Bramalea, called *The Great Canadian Home Sale*. This development of detached houses had lot widths of twenty-five feet, which was half the width of the lots on which houses were built during the preceding two decades. The extremely narrow lot widths were a departure from what was considered suburban. Comparatively, detached houses built in the 1880s to early 1900s in Toronto's urban neighbourhoods like High Park, had lot sizes between twenty-five and thirty feet. A description for a narrow house design in the 1917 Aladdin Homes catalogue explained that it was suitable "in cities where lots are sometimes as narrow as 30, or even 25 feet."⁵¹ Narrow lot widths were unusual for a suburban environment, as they go against the whole idea of moving out of a city to escape cramped confines. Because of the narrow lots in *The Great Canadian Home Sale*, the houses were only eighteen feet wide. The standard width for a townhouse in the Toronto area had long been eighteen feet, and this was likewise true of the townhouses built in Bramalea through its entire history. While the houses in *The Great Canadian Home Sale* were detached, they were no wider than a townhouse.

The feature that made the houses in *The Great Canadian Home Sale* suburban in nature for their era was the attached garage on the front façade, as opposed to the front porches found on urban houses built during the pre-automobile era. Most of the houses in High Park had three stories to take advantage of the narrow lot sizes, and as such had the gable end of the roof facing the front. In Bramalea, the houses did not have a third floor,

⁵¹ *Aladdin Homes "Built in a Day" Catalog No. 29* (Bay City: The Aladdin Company, 1917), p.56.

but many of the houses had the gable end of the roof facing the front (Fig. 12). Instead of a window in the centre of the gable, the houses in Bramalea had decorative medallions that hinted at a window.

The promise of the suburbs had long been connected with the idea of having lower housing densities than in the city. By the 1980s, living in the suburbs no longer meant having open spaces and a sprawling ranch-style house.



Fig. 12. "Kelowna" facade, *The Great Canadian Home Sale* (Bramalea Limited, 1980). The house was so narrow that on the main floor there was only room for a garage door and the front door. The gable roof was turned towards the street giving the house a more vertical accentuation. The shutters and divided-light windows hinted at historic house styles.

The fantasy architecture of Bramalea would again change in the 1980s, this time to create a suburban sense of luxury and opulence. While the 1980s in Bramalea was

characterized by many developments with narrow lot widths, the fifty-foot-wide lot still existed in select developments. While in the past the fifty-foot-wide lot was the norm, it soon became reserved for more luxurious and expensive houses. The 1980s suburban house on a fifty-foot lot was almost always two stories tall, large, and had a two-car garage protruding out front (Fig. 13). In 1965, the average size of a house in Bramalea was 1,357 square feet. By 1985, the average in Bramalea had jumped to 2,124 square feet. The exteriors of such large houses were in strong contrast to the more humble 1960s bungalows, while historic details were used to hint at some time in the past.

The two-car garage as a standard feature on suburban houses by the 1980s reflected growing car ownership in Canada. In many cases this was attributed to the fact that with more women, especially suburban women, entering the workforce, more vehicles were needed. At the same time, a two-car garage became a sign of luxury showing that the homeowner could afford to own two cars, thus needing the garage to house them. Sometimes this fantasy of luxury did not suit the house, especially with small houses on a narrow lot widths where the garage became overpowering. The sheer size of such a massive protruding appendage made it seem like another house unto itself. The 1982-1983 "Lismer" plan by Bramalea Limited was an excellent example of a house on a thirty-six foot wide lot with an overpowering garage (Fig. 14). The 1,590 square foot house was not a luxury house, yet it had a huge protruding two-car garage. From the street, the garage was so overpowering that it hid the front door from view.



Fig. 13. "Sheffield House" facade, *Deerchase* (Bramalea Limited, 1982). The sheer size of the house at 2,514 square feet - more than twice as large as the "Saratoga Festival" pictured earlier - was apparent on the façade of the house. Much like the "Kelowna", historically inspired elements were used such as the shutters and divided light windows.



Fig. 14. "Lismer" facade, *Showcase 2000, Phase II* (Bramalea Limited, 1982). The massive two-car garage overpowered the façade of the house.

By the 1980s, the protruding garage had become the only element left on most suburban houses that represented the 1960s suburban architectural language of horizontality. The priority had changed from creating a fantasy of horizontal houses to the reality that the suburbs were places where people owned cars, and thus needed places to house them. In many cases, the structure that housed the cars overpowered the structure that housed the people.

During the 1980s, economic conditions created situations that once again changed the architecture in Bramalea. Bramalea Limited's *Deerchase* development, started in 1982, had large and pricey houses on fifty-foot wide lots. "People in Brampton balked at the prices...[of] up to \$150,000".⁵² The development was re-launched in 1984 as *The Master's Series at Deerchase*, with houses on forty-five foot lots, and much lower prices (Fig. 15 and 16). While the houses remained luxurious, their narrower lot widths, combined with an attached two-car garage, created a streetscape filled with blank garage doors. This type of street lined with garages taking up the façades of houses was characteristic of those built in Bramalea at the time.

A few years later, between December 1987 and April 1988, due to a real estate bubble, the prices of all of new houses in Bramalea increased an average of \$30,000. During this same time, the average Canadian income was about twice that amount. This real estate bubble had dire consequences on the real estate market, meaning that homebuilders had to make changes in order to make houses more affordable. Realtor Marie Seckler informed me that Bramalea Limited changed the original plans for their 1988-1990 *Emerald Cove* development after high prices curbed public interest in the houses. The original plan for houses on fifty-five foot lots was scrapped, and instead the

⁵² Karen O'Reilly, "A change of pace at Bramalea projects," *The Globe and Mail*, 6 October 1984, p.H1.

houses were built on smaller forty-five foot lots. Even with narrower lot sizes, the average price of a house in the development was \$316,000; two years later the average was \$402,000. This real estate bubble eventually burst, making the houses worth less than the owners originally paid for them. In the Toronto area, the average price of a house in 1990 was \$254,890, by 1993 it had tumbled to \$206,490, then to \$198,150 in 1996. It was only in 2002 that the 1990 average was surpassed.⁵³

The fantasy architectural language of houses built during the first decade in Bramalea was a direct reflection of the suburban notion of architecture with a focus on horizontality. At the same time, the style that was built in 1960s Bramalea was inspired by past suburban architecture, adapted for the time and location. Over time, the architectural language in Bramalea became less of a reflection of that suburban ideal, and more a reflection of economic realities. The fantasy turned from trying to symbolically reflect sprawling houses to trying to reflect a nostalgic past. With narrow lot widths, houses were made more affordable, but could no longer accentuate the horizontal. Simultaneously, the average size of a house in Bramalea grew, and in many cases the two-car garage became a sign of luxury – but also in many ways a necessity. During Bramalea’s last decade of development, the architecture of the houses spoke of history and luxury, but the houses were often squeezed onto narrow lots that were characteristic of urban locations and densities.

⁵³ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Canadian Housing Observer 2004* (Ottawa: CMHC, 2004), p.61.



Fig. 15. "Windsor" facade, *The Master's Series in Deerchase* (Bramalea Limited, 1984). Due to the narrow lot width, the garage was more overpowering than the "Sheffield House" pictured earlier, which was one of the original plans for the *Deerchase* development on lot widths ten feet wider. From this image the garage does not look overpowering, but the floor plan below reveals the reality of the obtrusive garage.

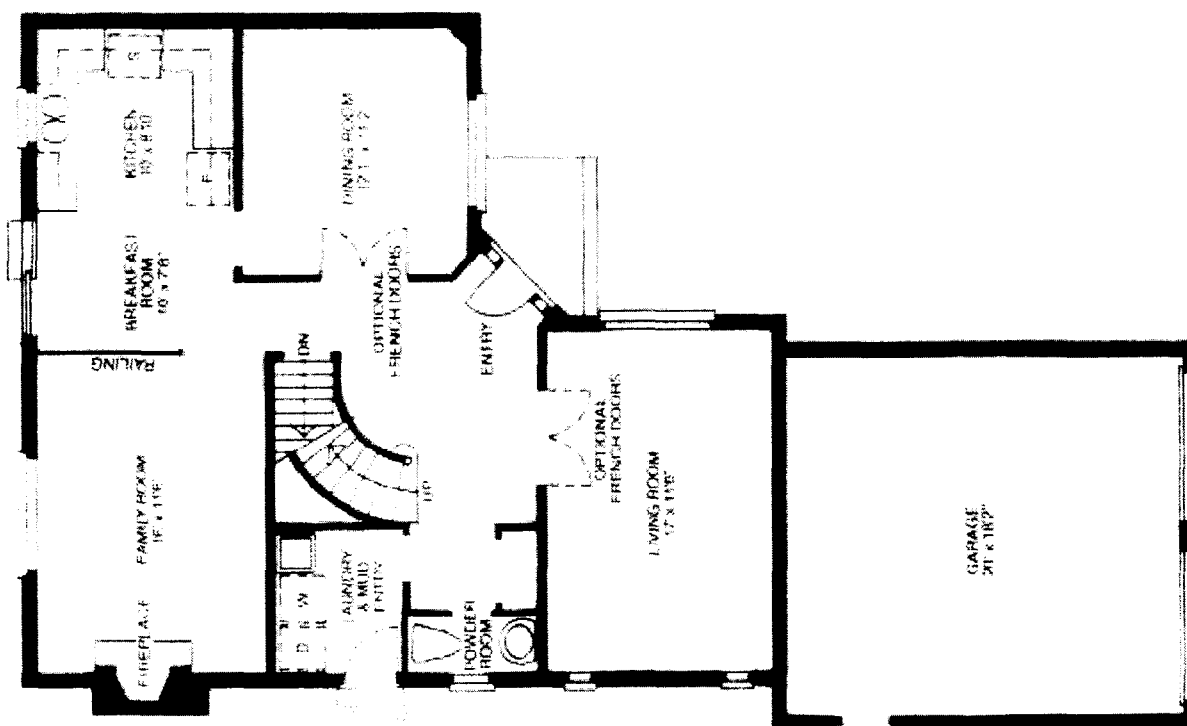


Fig. 16. "Windsor" main floor plan, *The Master's Series in Deerchase* (Bramalea Limited, 1984). The floor plan reveals the reality of the large protruding garage. The image above is drawn in a way to focus on the L-shape of the house, and thus minimizing the impact of the garage.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTERIOR OF BRAMALEA HOUSES

Between 1965 and 1990, the average size of a house in Bramalea more than doubled from 1,357 square feet to 2,725 square feet. The growing house size in Bramalea was not sudden, but happened gradually as certain rooms grew, while others were added.

During the 1960s, the typical house in Bramalea was a bungalow or split level with three bedrooms and less than 1,400 square feet of floor space. Out of the thirteen plans built in the 1965 *Westgate* development, only two had four bedrooms. The smallest house was 1,083 square feet, while the largest house in this development was 1,596 square feet. By 1988, the smallest plan for a detached house in Bramalea was 1,325 square feet, while the majority were over 1,800 square feet. 80% of the plans from that year were over 2,000 square feet, with 30% of those over 3,000 square feet. They were all two-storey houses.

The growing house size in Bramalea could be attributed to many factors, one of which was the high price. "Escalating house prices actually contributed to the growth of the dwelling itself: people wanted to feel they were getting their money's worth."⁵⁴ These increased prices in the 1970s and 1980s motivated many women to enter the workforce.⁵⁵ Many women may have entered the workforce to help pay for their suburban houses, and with a higher family income, more people could afford larger houses. This helped to promote the fantasy of opulence as seen on the exterior of houses in Bramalea during the 1980s.

⁵⁴ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.194.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.197-198.

As more people could afford a larger house, additional rooms became common in the typical suburban house. A room-by-room description of these changes will help put the phenomenon into context. Influences from the past must also be included in the room-by-room exploration of houses in Bramalea, in order to place their existence and arrangement into historical context.

3.1 The Foyer

The foyer, or entry hall, has long been an important part of housing design, as it is the first part of the house that anyone will see. In the Victorian era (1837-1901), this room was often large, and served as a filter between the outside world and the private quarters of the house. Strict social rules were a part of Victorian society, which dictated how to act when visiting someone else's house. In the houses of wealthy families, a servant would answer the door. This visitor would present a calling card, and be asked to sit and wait in the foyer. From behind closed doors, the owner of the house would decide if he or she was ready to receive the guest. If so, the guest was only permitted to enter the formal parlour (at the front of the house) or the dining room if he or she were invited for dinner.⁵⁶ All other spaces in the house were off limits to guests. In the 1890 house plan catalogue by R.W. Shoppell, every single house had a good-sized front hall with a large staircase. Sometimes this room was a large receiving hall complete with a built-in bench and a fireplace, perfect for the waiting visitor.⁵⁷ At this time, a large foyer served a pragmatic purpose tied to social norms.

⁵⁶ Gallagher, *House Thinking*, p.35-37.

⁵⁷ *Building Designs* (New York: R.W. Shoppell, 1890).

By early in the 20th century, the once large foyer had shrunk, as had the idea that a house needed to be compartmentalized and spaces filtered. The relaxing of formalities from the Victorian era was reflected in the fact that often front doors opened right into the living room during the 1900s and 1910s.⁵⁸

Similarly, many houses across Canada built during the 1950s and 1960s were designed with a front door that opened right into the living room. In Bramalea, on the other hand, every house built in the 1960s had a proper foyer. Even the smallest house had a separate entry area. While the foyer was separate and distinct, the living room was never closed-off from this area with a door, but most commonly had a wide arched opening.

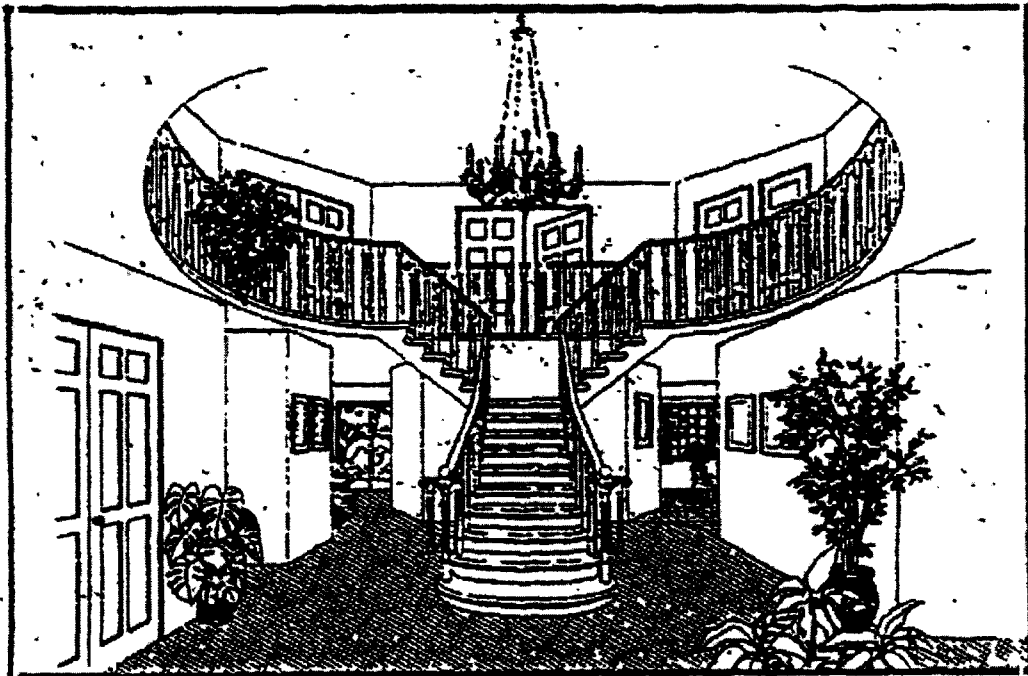
The 1970s did not see many changes in the design of the foyer in Bramalea, although, as house sizes grew, so too did the foyer. While the staircase was usually located in a service area near the kitchen in the 1960s, by the 1970s it was moved to the front foyer. This movement of the staircase would set the stage for what would come in the 1980s.

The 1980s saw the average house size grow due to the addition of more standard rooms in Bramalea housing. With these sizeable houses came the fantasy of opulence, as a large foyer became a sign of luxury and social status. These impressive spaces indicated that the owner could afford superfluous spaces that were not usable as living space. The *piece de résistance* of these large and impressive foyers was the sweeping staircase (Fig. 17). This feature was so popular that over 40% of the houses built in the 1980s in Bramalea had either a circular or Scarlet O'Hara staircase (inspired by the one in the movie *Gone with the Wind*). Popular culture had become a direct influence on the way

⁵⁸ *Aladdin Homes "Built in a Day" Catalog No. 29* (Bay City: The Aladdin Company, 1917).

houses were designed. With the sweeping staircase, also came a two-storey foyer, making the whole arrangement impressive and spacious.

*A reflection
of your good taste*



**Eight elegant homes with up to 3606 square feet
of luxury living space on 50' & 60' lots**

Fig. 17. Advertisement for the Rose Corporation's development *The Timeless Elegance of the Rose* (The Toronto Star, February 11, 1984). The massive Scarlet O'Hara staircase required a spacious foyer. The advertisement used the suggestive words "good taste", "elegant", and "luxury", fuelling the fantasy of grandeur.

In Bramalea Limited's "Leicester House" model from their 1982-1984

development *Deerchase*, the two-storey foyer with a circular staircase was actually larger

than the kitchen and breakfast room combined. Aside from the formal living room, the foyer was the largest room on the main floor of this house. At the time, it would not have been unusual to have a foyer around 250 square feet in size. That was a quarter of the size of some bungalows built in Bramalea during the 1960s.

The fantasy was not just reserved for spacious houses, as even small houses were designed to have a curving staircase squeezed into a tiny foyer. In 1980, Greenpark Homes managed to include a circular staircase in a 1,536 square foot house in their *Professor's Lake* development. In order to do so, almost a quarter of the main floor was taken up by the foyer.

It is interesting to point out that even though the staircase became such a focal point in the 1980s, its real function was to allow a person to access the private spaces on the second floor of a house (the bedrooms). Robert Venturi's staircase to nowhere in the *Vana Venturi House*, as mentioned earlier, was a comment on this type of fantasy connected to a functional element.

The large foyer and grand staircase were rooted in the Victorian era when they reflected social mores. In Bramalea, the fantasy of such formal and opulent days had a lasting impact on the design of houses, especially when living space was sacrificed to make room for a sweeping staircase.

3.2 The Living Room and Dining Room

The 1940s and 1950s brought about the beginning of mass suburbanisation in North America, and with it, a certain type of interior space arrangement in the house. The architect usually associated with popularizing the idea of the suburbs and suburban

housing is Frank Lloyd Wright. His houses took elements from the prairie style of architecture popular at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This style embraced the horizontal and mimicked the wide sweeping expanses of the American Midwest, namely the prairies. Characterised by low-hipped roofs with deep overhangs and horizontal windows, prairie houses looked as though they were connected to the ground.⁵⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright built on these ideas and created an architectural style of his own. One of the most striking interior features of Wright's houses was the open flowing spaces that mimicked the wide open spaces of the prairies. In nearly all of his houses, the main living room was a large space that encompassed both living and dining functions. Built-in benches, tables and bookcases made the large living space very much multi-functional.⁶⁰ The open-concept plan was a drastic departure from the boxed-in closed quarters of Victorian houses.

All of the above translated into the early housing built in Bramalea. The popularity of the bungalow during the 1960s in Bramalea could be attributed to its connection with the fantasy of spreading out on the land. The idea of living in the suburbs also brought with it the fantasy of a relaxed, more casual style of family living, compared to the lifestyle of cities. According to the 1956 CMHC guide *Choosing a House Design*, the living room was a space for playing, games, entertaining, writing, reading, sewing, relaxing, and watching television.⁶¹ As the book focused on small suburban houses, it highlighted the multiple uses of the living room. In the past, larger and more luxurious houses would have had a formal front parlour reserved for guests, and a rear parlour for family activities. In Bramalea, and most suburban areas during the 1960s, only one main

⁵⁹ Baker, *American House Styles*, p. 112-113, 144-145.

⁶⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (New York: Horizon Press, 1954).

⁶¹ *Choosing a House Design* (Ottawa: Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1956), p.14-15.

living space was common, and thus would have to be serve both formal and informal occasions.⁶² Most 1960s houses in Bramalea were small by today's suburban standards, and as a result the living room was not a very large space. In order to maximize the small space, it was open to other rooms, most commonly the dining room.

Plans for houses built in Bramalea during the 1970s were often based on those of the 1960s but updated for the changing times. House sizes began to grow, and the main living spaces not only grew, they become more separate. In the 1970-1972 development called *Northgate*, half of the detached houses had an archway between the living room and the dining room to make them more distinct from one another. Two of these plans had a family room, and with a new room dedicated to family activities, the living room took on the more formal role of being exclusively for entertaining. The addition of the family room "aided parents in their search to maintain the living room as an adult-only space."⁶³ The lack of multiple uses, and newfound formality made it less necessary to have an open living room. By having French doors to close off the living room, expensive furniture and decorative objects could be protected. It was at this point that doors separating the living room, which were common in Victorian houses, returned. So, too did the concept of having a formal room just for guests and special occasions.

With the addition of an informal breakfast room, the dining room also took on a formal role like the living room. During the late 1970s, having a dining room separate from the living room became a popular arrangement in Bramalea. In its new position as a formal dining area in the house, the market for historic and expensive dining room furniture grew. The room also became a place to store and display expensive dishes and

⁶² Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.61.

⁶³ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.194.

silverware, a throwback to the formal Victorian era. There was one important difference: Victorians would eat all meals in the dining room, whereas in the late 20th century it was only used for important occasions. In order to keep its expensive items clean and safe from children and pets, many families opted to enclose the dining room, most commonly with French doors so it could be admired even with the doors closed.

It may have been the most formal room in the house, but the dining room was most often the room that did not have any natural light. In townhouses and semi-detached houses in Bramalea, the dining room was often sandwiched between the living room and the kitchen, without any windows. Windowless dining rooms also existed in detached houses on narrow lot widths, like Fram Building Group's "2636" model in *Nortonville Estates West* on a thirty-seven foot lot (Fig. 18). The formal dining room was located on the side of the house which prevented windows due to fire bylaws. Some may argue that the dining room was usually used in the evening for dinner, and thus natural light was not needed. Dependency on artificial light made the light from a window unnecessary.

A separation of formal spaces can be seen in "Morning Sun" model built on a thirty-six foot lot in the 1984-1985 Bramalea Limited development *Sunset* which had a Victorian-like boxy plan (Fig. 19). By having a recessed garage in a narrow house, the front half of the main floor was characterized by a long hallway with a staircase leading straight up. Off of this hallway were the tandem living and dining rooms separated by an arch. This arrangement was very reminiscent of historic urban townhouses. The part that differed in the "Morning Sun" was a space behind the garage, for the family room. Behind the dining room was the kitchen and breakfast room located exactly where the kitchen in a Victorian urban townhouse would be. The resulting main floor plan was a

series of boxes, with the combination kitchen and breakfast room the only open-concept space in the house. The revival of formal rooms in houses, a result of the addition of the breakfast room and family room, made this type of closed-concept plan popular in the 1980s.

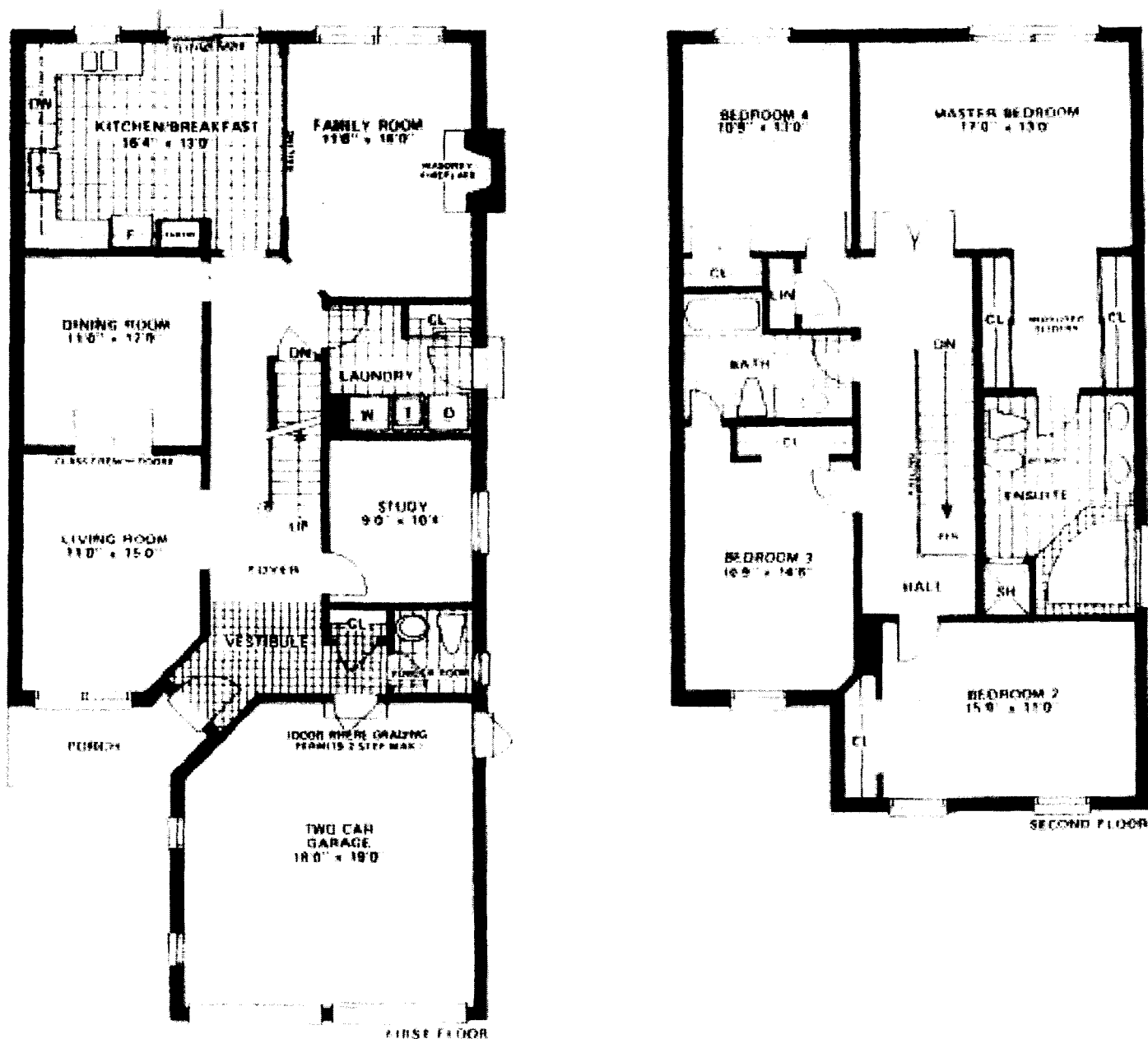


Fig. 18. "2636" floor plan, *Nortonville Estates West* (Fram Building Group, 1988). The dining room was located on the side of the house which did not allow for any windows, meaning the room had no natural light. The bathroom on the second floor also did not have a window. Notice the double French doors on the dining room.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

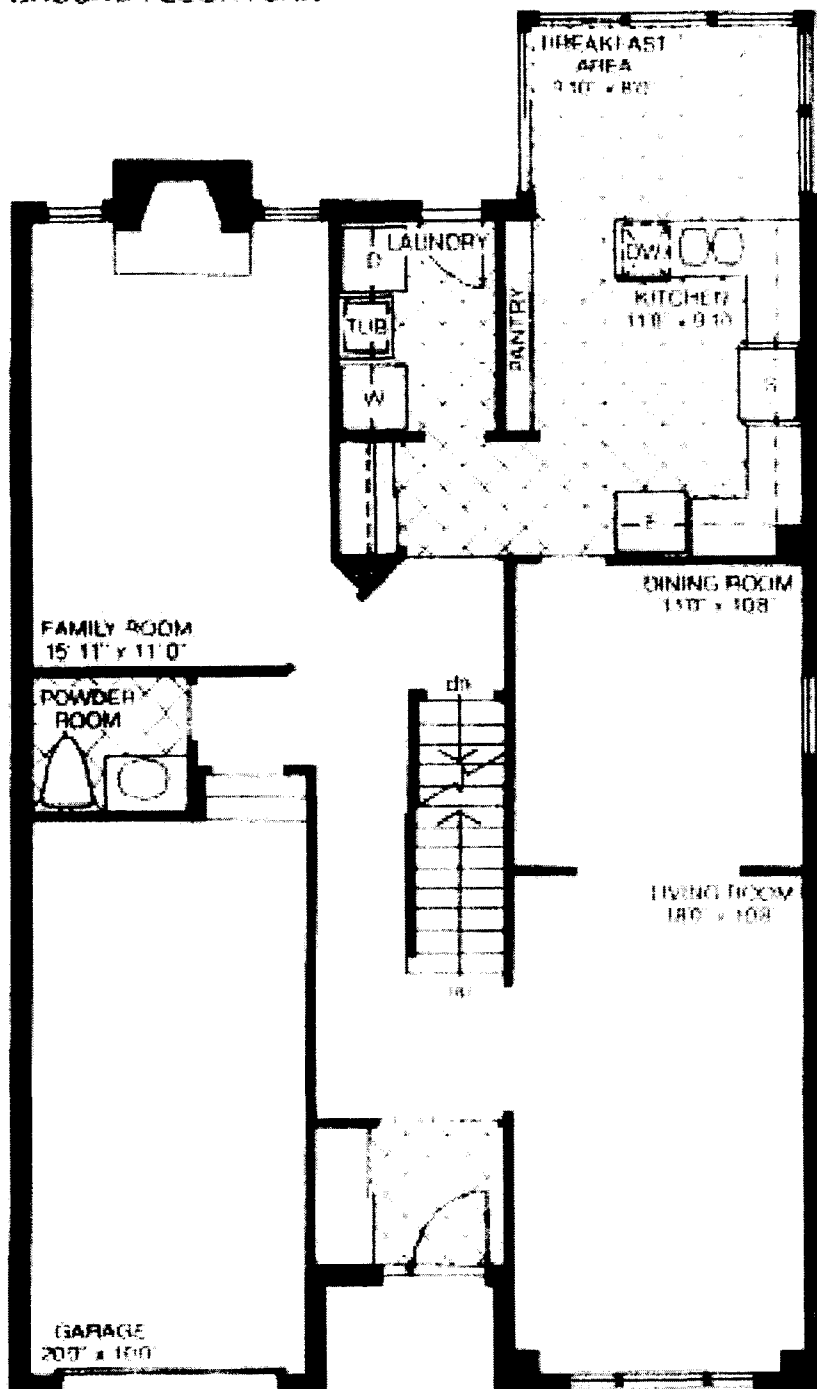


Fig. 19. "Morning Sun" main floor plan, *Sunset* (Bramalea Limited, 1984). The tandem arrangement of rooms and boxy plan was reminiscent of Victorian row houses.

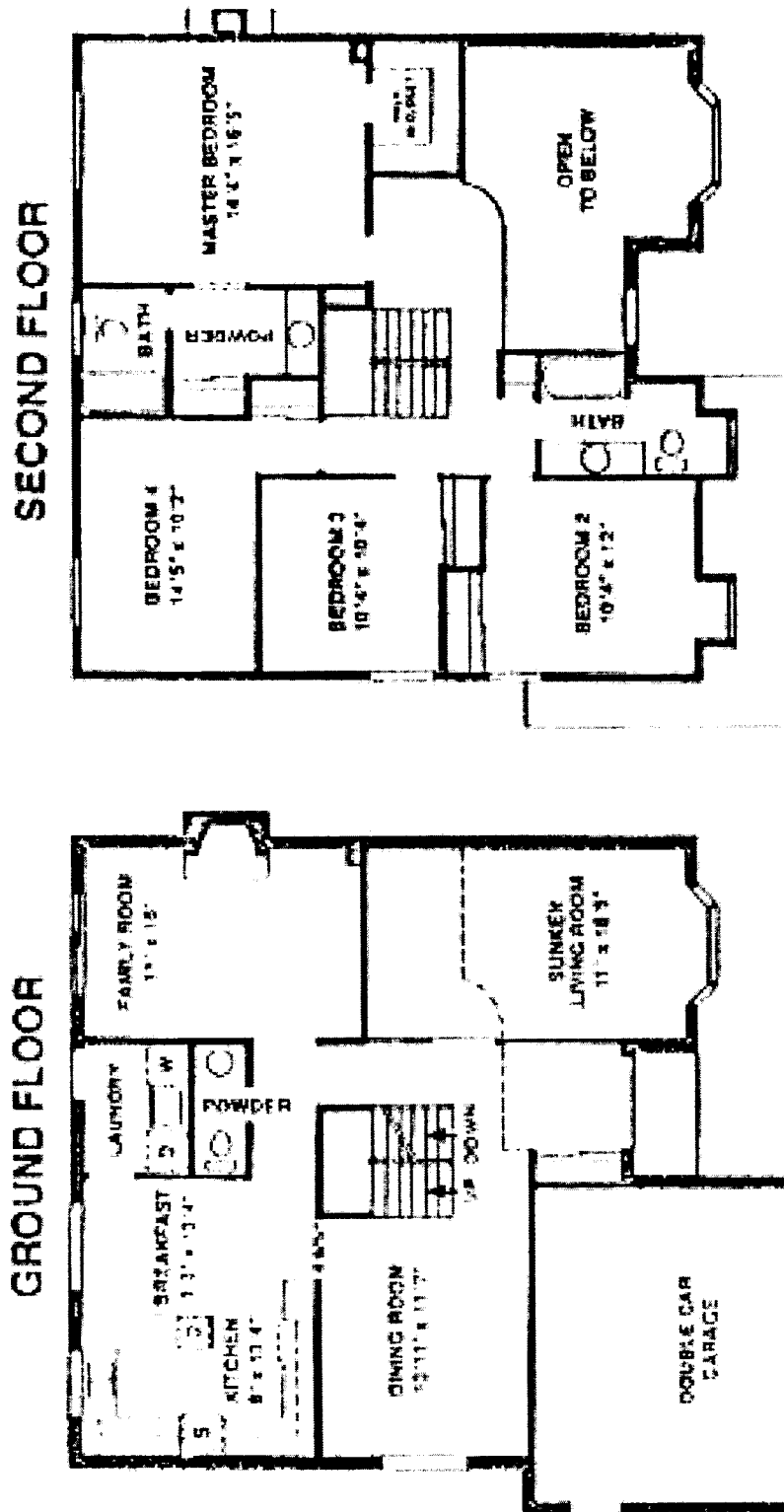


Fig. 20. "Henry V" floor plan, *King's Row* (Bramalea Limited, 1978). The two-storey living room ceiling was unusual for the time.

Only a few houses in Bramalea during the late 1970s and 1980s did not have a living room and dining room that could be closed-off with French doors. One exception was the “Henry V” plan from the 1978-1980 development *King’s Row* (Fig. 20). This plan had a living room with a vaulted ceiling that was completely open to the foyer. While this room was open to the rest of the house, there was a completely separate dining room. One of the houses in Bramalea Limited’s 1988-1990 *Emerald Cove* neighbourhood had a two-storey dining room, which although impressive, was far from intimate. Architect Melanie Taylor explains the misunderstanding of the importance of scale by most suburban house designers, as the large suburban house (often called the McMansion) “trades quantity of space with quality of space”.⁶⁴ This is very much true of the fantasy houses built in 1980s Bramalea. Even though the “Henry V” may have had an impressive living room, the fact that very few houses from the plan were built indicates that buyers were not interested in an open living room. An open living room did not appear again in plans for Bramalea houses until the 21st century.

The large in-fill development begun in 2002 as *Lake of Dreams* had a series of houses designed in an open-concept manner. In Bramalea, lot sizes had progressively been shrinking, while house sizes grew and *Lake of Dreams* was no exception to this trend. It was its open-concept plans that helped to alleviate the sense of narrowness inside the “Lakeside” a 2,300 square foot house on a thirty-five foot wide lot (Fig. 21). The dining room had no windows, which would have made it a dark room were it not for the fact that it was completely open to the living room across the hall, and open to the family at the back of the house via a half-wall. A person could stand in the hall and see every single room on the main floor. What was new in this type of arrangement was the fact

⁶⁴ Gallagher, *House Thinking*, p.41.

that the formal rooms were open to the informal rooms. In the past, the kitchen was completely enclosed, but in the “Lakeside” it could be seen from nearly every room in the house, including the dining room. The main problem with such open-concept rooms was furniture placement. The few walls meant furniture often had to be put in front of windows, or even the fireplace.

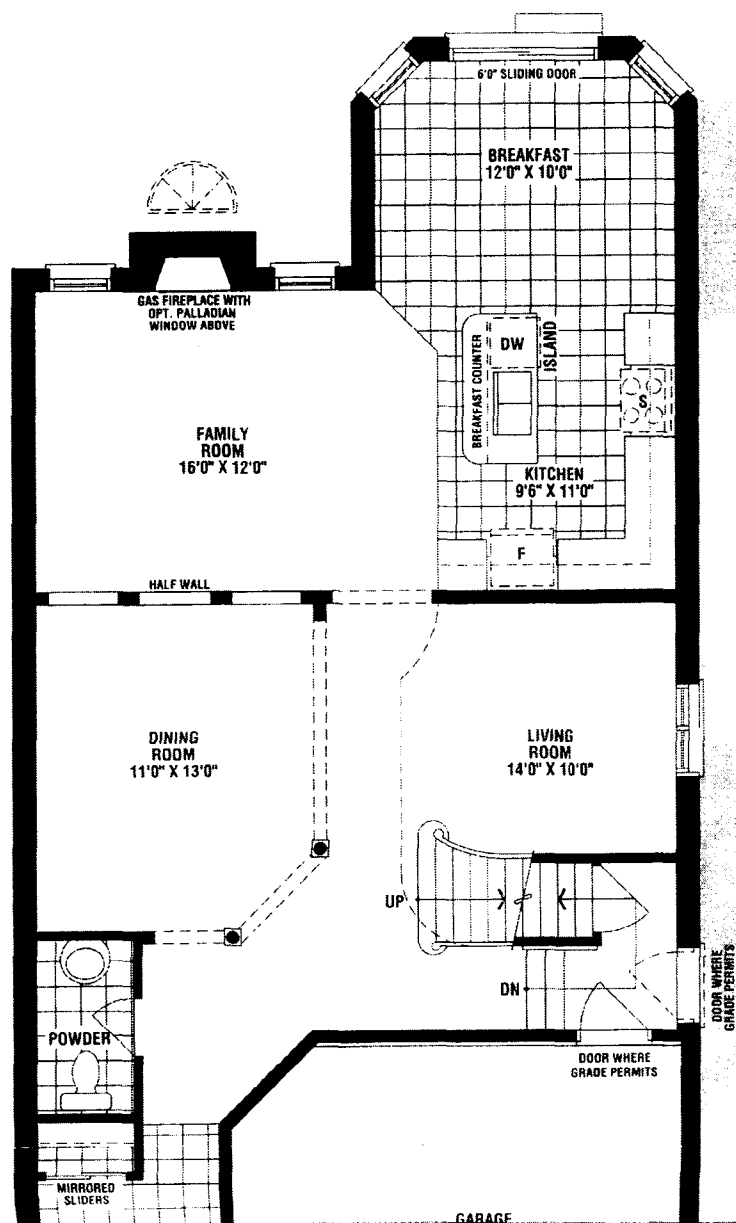


Fig. 21. “Lakeside” partial main floor plan, *Lake of Dreams* (Fernbrook Homes, 2002). The living room had a two-storey ceiling (as indicated by the dotted line). The open-concept plan meant that there were few interior walls.

The open-concept interior arrangements of the houses in *Lake of Dreams* had two causes. One was pragmatic, as open-concept designs made narrow houses feel larger, while also allowing light to penetrate windowless rooms. This was an illusion, as the houses were still long and narrow. The second rationale for open-concept plans was that families and lifestyles had become more casual. Entertaining was no longer reserved to the living and dining rooms, but spilled into the kitchen, where the chef might chat with guests while preparing meals. While the existence of formal rooms meant that they were still valued, they were less stuffy and protected than the rooms of the Victorian era that were closed with French doors.

In the 1960s the living and dining rooms were open to each other to make the multi-purpose rooms feel more spacious. As house sizes grew and additional rooms added to the typical house, the living and dining rooms took on more formal roles. By the 21st century, houses in Bramalea had once again turned to a more open-concept plan, but this time to create the illusion of a larger, less narrow space.

3.3 The Kitchen

While the living and dining rooms changed uses and arrangement in Bramalea houses, the kitchen also saw its share of transformations. Historically, the kitchen had been the most important room in the Canadian house. In the one-room houses of First Nation's peoples and the first European settlers, there was no separation between a space for cooking and a space for living. The single room was centred on a source of heat for keeping warm as well as cooking.⁶⁵ An 1851 log house is on display at the Dufferin County Museum and archives, north of Toronto. The original house was lost to a fire, but

⁶⁵ Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.71.

a replica was built based on the original *McCutcheon House*. On the main floor there was a sizable main room centred on a fireplace for heat and cooking. This large space was common in the 1900s, and in many cases, rural houses in Ontario had kitchens that took up more than half of the main floor space of the house.⁶⁶ Also on the main floor was a small bedroom for an elder member of the family, and on the second floor was one large bedroom shared by the rest of the family. In essence, the main living space in this house was a kitchen. Similarly-planned houses once existed on the land that Bramalea was built.

In the early 19th century, the houses of wealthy families with servants had the kitchen located in the basement, as they were in Britain.⁶⁷ In these large houses owners had the luxury of separating the living and cooking spaces – which was also a separation of servants' spaces and the owners' spaces. Later in the century, the kitchen in houses of the wealthy was brought up to the main floor, but located in a remote corner away from the main living spaces. In this way servants would still be segregated from the owners and guests.

Although servants were not common by the 20th century, the kitchen remained isolated from the rest of the house. What was once the main, and sometimes only, living space in the house had become its smallest room, often relegated to the back. While the 1900s saw an opening up of living spaces, the kitchen remained closed in. This tradition carried on well into the 1960s, where the kitchen was always a small, closed room in houses built in Bramalea. This was a result of the fact that smaller and timesaving appliances took up less room than those found in kitchens of the preceding century. The fact that servants no longer prepared meals prompted women to rethink and streamline

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.73.

the kitchen. A smaller kitchen meant fewer steps and therefore less work for the homemaker.⁶⁸

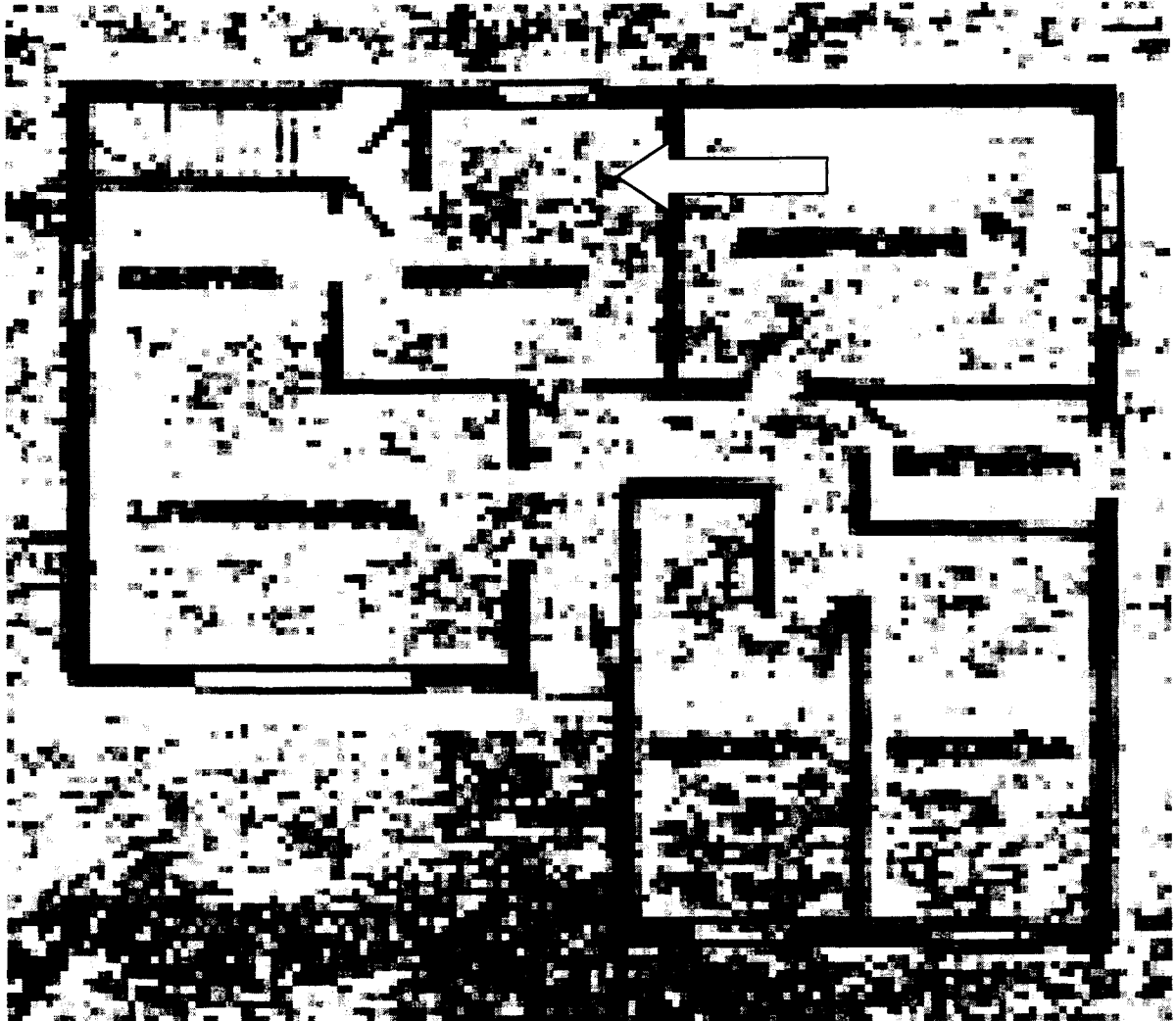


Fig. 22. "Lyric Holiday" main floor plan, *Westgate* (1965). The kitchen (indicated with the arrow) had access to the basement stairs and a door to the rear yard, as well as having three doors and a window.

As the living room and dining room were usually located at the front of houses built in Bramalea during 1960s, the kitchen was either at the back of the house, or in the middle if the bedrooms were located at the back. The kitchens of this era had many openings with at least one window, as well as doors to the hallway, dining room, and

⁶⁸ Gallagher, *House Thinking*, p.78.

usually the outside (Fig 22). The diagrams in the CMHC *Choosing a House Design* guide showed a kitchen separate from the main living spaces. The guide stated that a kitchen usually required at least two doors, one to the dining area and another to the service entrance from the outside.⁶⁹ This did not leave much space for counters and cabinets.

The workspace and service aspect of the kitchen made the placement of the basement stairs near it practical. Often a door from the kitchen led to a small landing area with the stairs to the basement and a door to the outside. To the suburban homemaker this arrangement was practical as the basement would be within easy reach of the kitchen. It was in the basement where the laundry room was usually located, as well as other housekeeping equipment. The service door to the outside would enable her to be close at hand to children playing in the yard.⁷⁰ On a 1979 episode of the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's television show *Time For You*, some of the original residents of Bramalea reflected back on the early years of their city. They described muddy and often un-drivable roads due to construction. Mail was only delivered at the end of the streets, as postal workers would not venture down the treacherous streets. During the day, hydro was often cut off to allow blasting of explosives to make way for new development on rocky terrain. All of the above did not make living in Bramalea easy for the homemaker. The simple luxury of having a service door where soiled children could be brought directly into the basement laundry room must have been a necessity. Every single-family house built in Bramalea between 1962 and 1967 had a kitchen near the basement stairs and a door to the outside. In more recent times, this direct door from outside to the

⁶⁹ *Choosing a House Design* (Ottawa: Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1956), p.24-25.

⁷⁰ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.194.

basement stairway has been practical for houses with a basement apartment, allowing the tenant to have a private entrance.

During the 1970s, the kitchen continued to be closed-off from the rest of the house, its location next to the basement stairs and an exterior door still the norm. The importance of a service entrance to the house was clear in the 1970 “Grosvenor” semi-detached model by Bramalea Consolidated Developments (Fig.23). In this plan the front door opened into a hall with a closet, and led to the living room and kitchen. A few feet from the front door was another door leading to the side of the house and the driveway, which seemed redundant, given the closeness of the two doors. At the same time, the back split design of the “Grosvenor” with the bedrooms at the back meant that having this side door brought the residents somewhat closer to the back yard than through the front door.

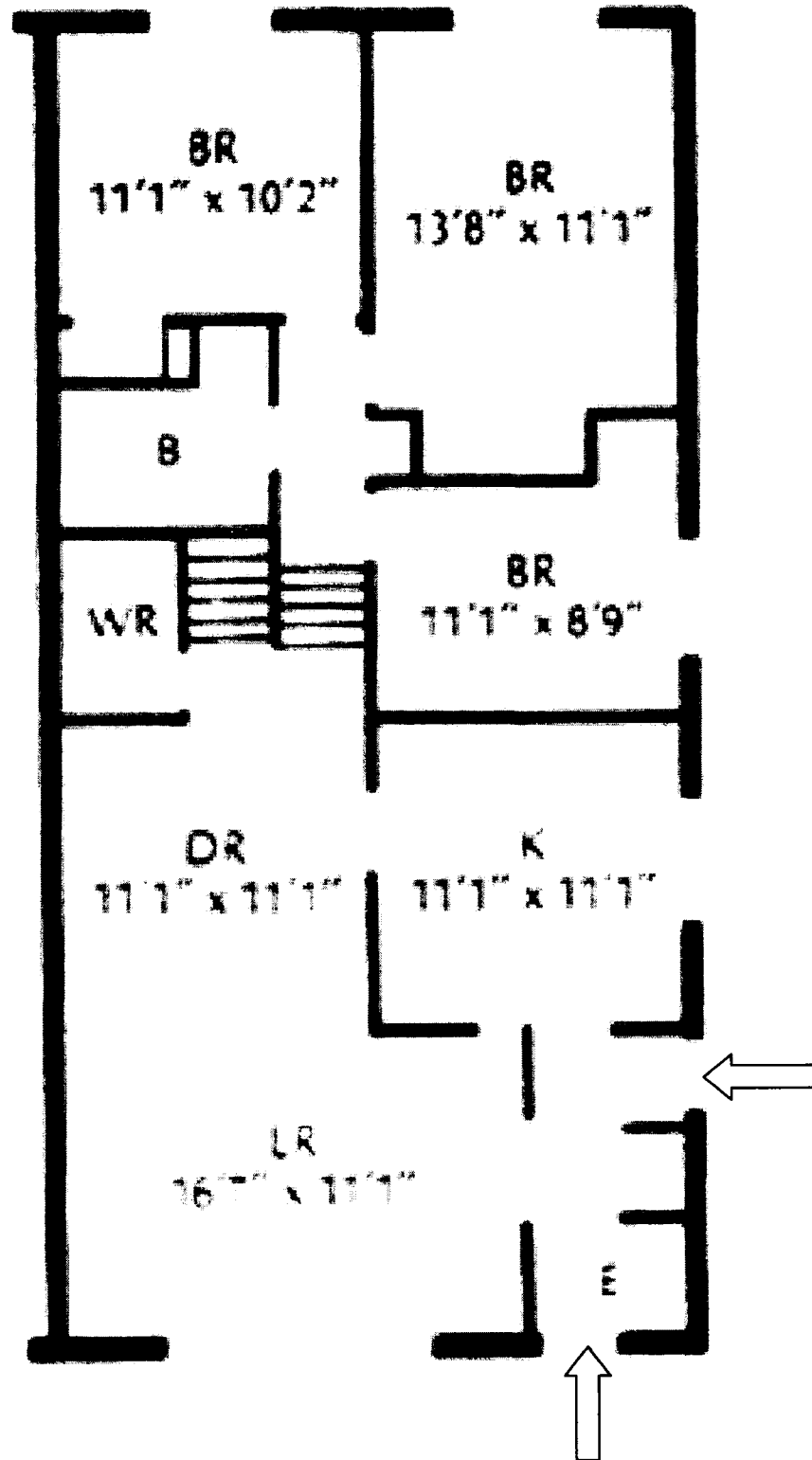


Fig. 26. "Grosvenor" floor plan, *Northgate* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1970). The arrows indicate how close the front door and the side door are on this plan.

Bramalea kitchens grew in size in the 1970s, making room for a small eating area. In larger houses, a separate breakfast room – an informal eating area – appeared at this time. By 1975, even small houses might have a separate breakfast area. The “Thorpe” a semi-detached bungalow built in 1975-1976 by Bramalea Consolidated Developments was just under 1,000 square feet (Fig. 24). A tiny ten by eight foot breakfast room adjoined the kitchen. In compensation, the actual work area in the kitchen was a mere eight by seven feet, while the dining room was only eleven by eight feet. The resulting design had two dining areas, neither of which was large enough to have both a proper dining table and enough room to walk through the space. The breakfast room had to be passed through to get to the basement, while the dining room was the only access point to the bathroom and bedrooms. Buyers may have been attracted to the design because of the breakfast room, but the overall arrangement of rooms had suffered as a result.

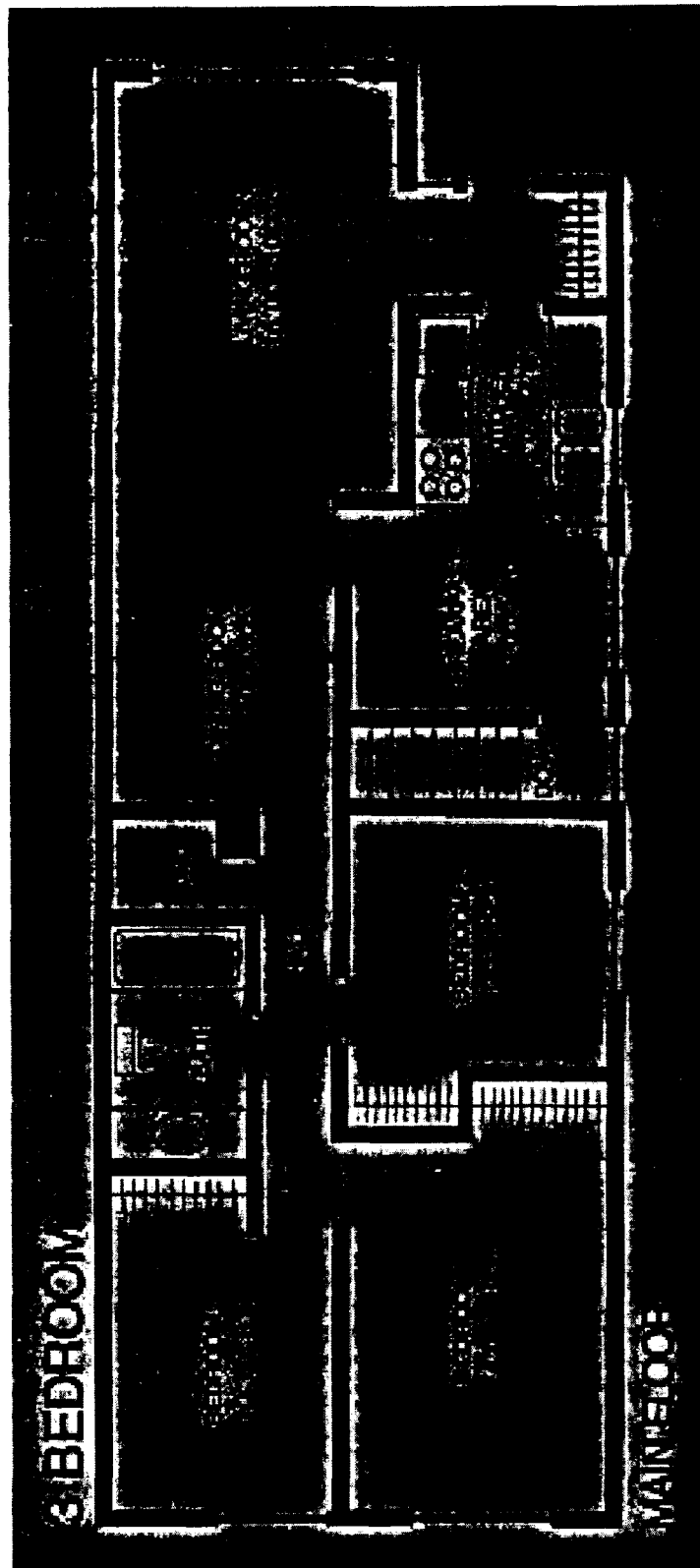


Fig. 24. "Thorpe" floor plan, *Bay Meadows* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1975). The design may have had two dining areas, but neither was large enough for a proper table and chairs. The kitchen workspace was extremely tiny.

The breakfast room was not a radically new feature of houses, but one that became more common in Bramalea during the 1970s. In the late 19th century, an informal dining area, called a “morning room”, existed in larger houses for the wealthy, and usually did double duty as a winter garden for plants.⁷¹ In the early 20th century, the room was still rare, yet was called the “breakfast room” because only breakfast was served in the space. It was not until the 1920s and 1930s that an informal dining area became commonplace in suburban housing, although this room was usually a tiny alcove separate from the kitchen. Often it was located between the kitchen and the dining room, and so served as a pantry and servery for the dining room. This tiny space, frequently only five to six feet wide, only had room for built in banquette seating on either side of a narrow table.⁷² These tiny rooms had disappeared from suburban housing by the 1950s, when the eat-in kitchen became more common. The new term referred to the fact that the kitchen now had a small area for a table, usually in a corner. Now that dining traditions were less formal, eating in the same room as food was prepared became accepted practice. Modern appliances not only made food preparation easier, but also more sanitary, making it more desirable to cook and eat in the same room.⁷³ The child-centred society of the postwar era also saw the importance of an eat-in kitchen in order to monitor children while cooking and cleaning.⁷⁴ It was not until house sizes started to grow in the 1970s that a separately defined breakfast/morning room would return, and this time as a room on its own.

⁷¹ Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.73.

⁷² *Honor Bilt Modern Homes* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1926).

⁷³ Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.74.

⁷⁴ Gallagher, *House Thinking*, p.82.

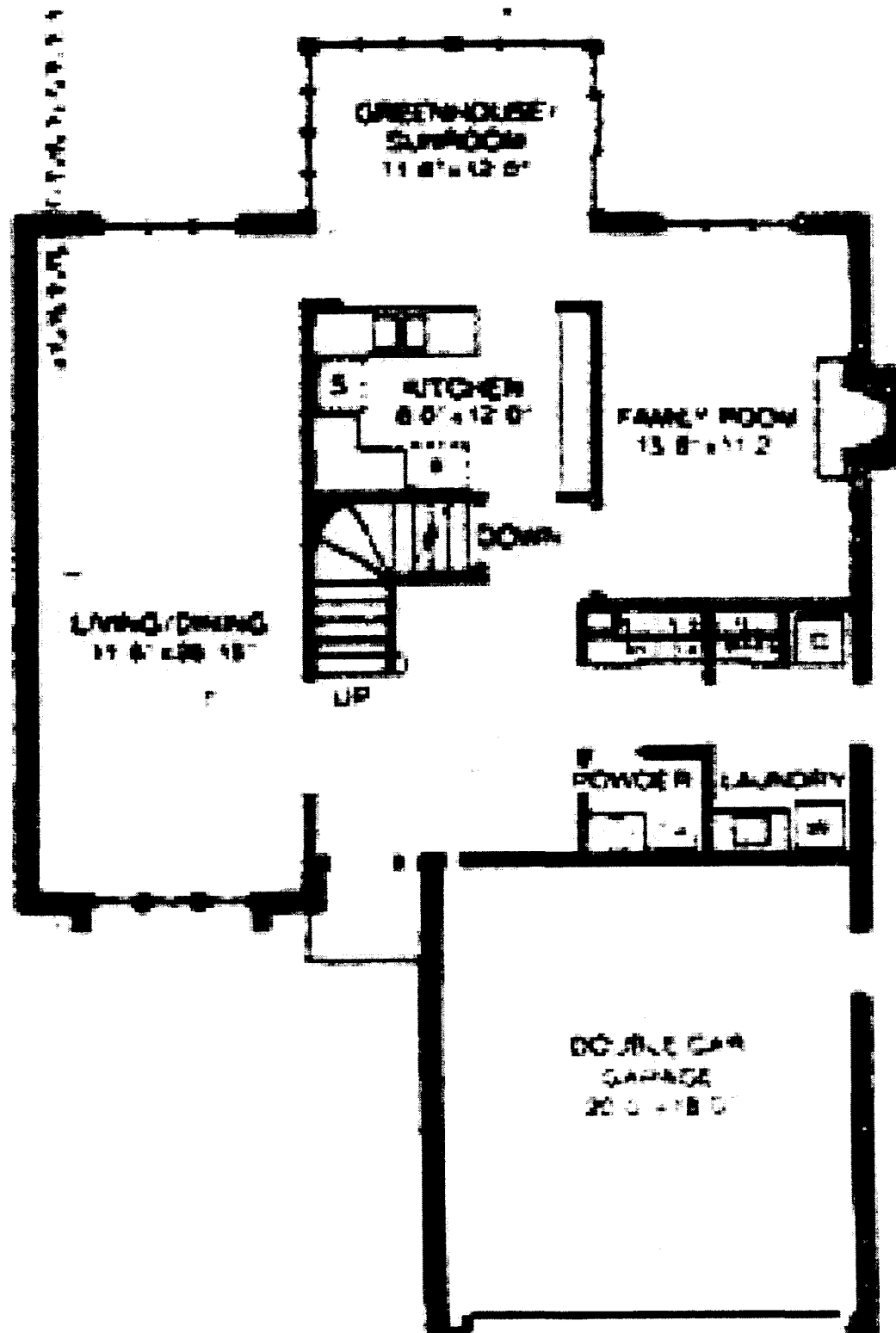


Fig. 25. "Greenhouse" main floor plan, *Bramalea Estates* (Bramalea Homes, 1970). The Greenhouse/Sunroom space was used as an informal eating area, much like the winter gardens in houses from the 19th century. The foyer in this model was actually larger than the kitchen.

During the 1970s, the breakfast room became a feature of houses built in Bramalea. Thus, all three of the builders constructing houses in *Bramalea Estates* offered plans with a breakfast room. Bramalea Homes' "Greenhouse" model had a large eleven by twelve foot breakfast room with windows on three sides (Fig. 25). This greenhouse space was reminiscent of a luxurious conservatory usually only found in mansions. At 2,190 square feet, the house could support such a room without sacrificing valuable space elsewhere. The kitchen had a peninsula counter, which was a new feature of houses in Bramalea at the time, as the closed-off room of the 1960s did not allow for such a counter arrangement. The kitchen and breakfast room combination in the "Greenhouse" had an opening to the dining room, family room, and hallway, all of which had no doors. This reflected the growing trend of opening up the kitchen to other spaces. Some of the more open-concept designs of the late 1970s completely removed the wall between the breakfast room and the family room. For the first time ever in Bramalea houses, the kitchen was no longer a completely closed-off room, but the formal living and dining rooms were still kept separate from this open informal precinct.

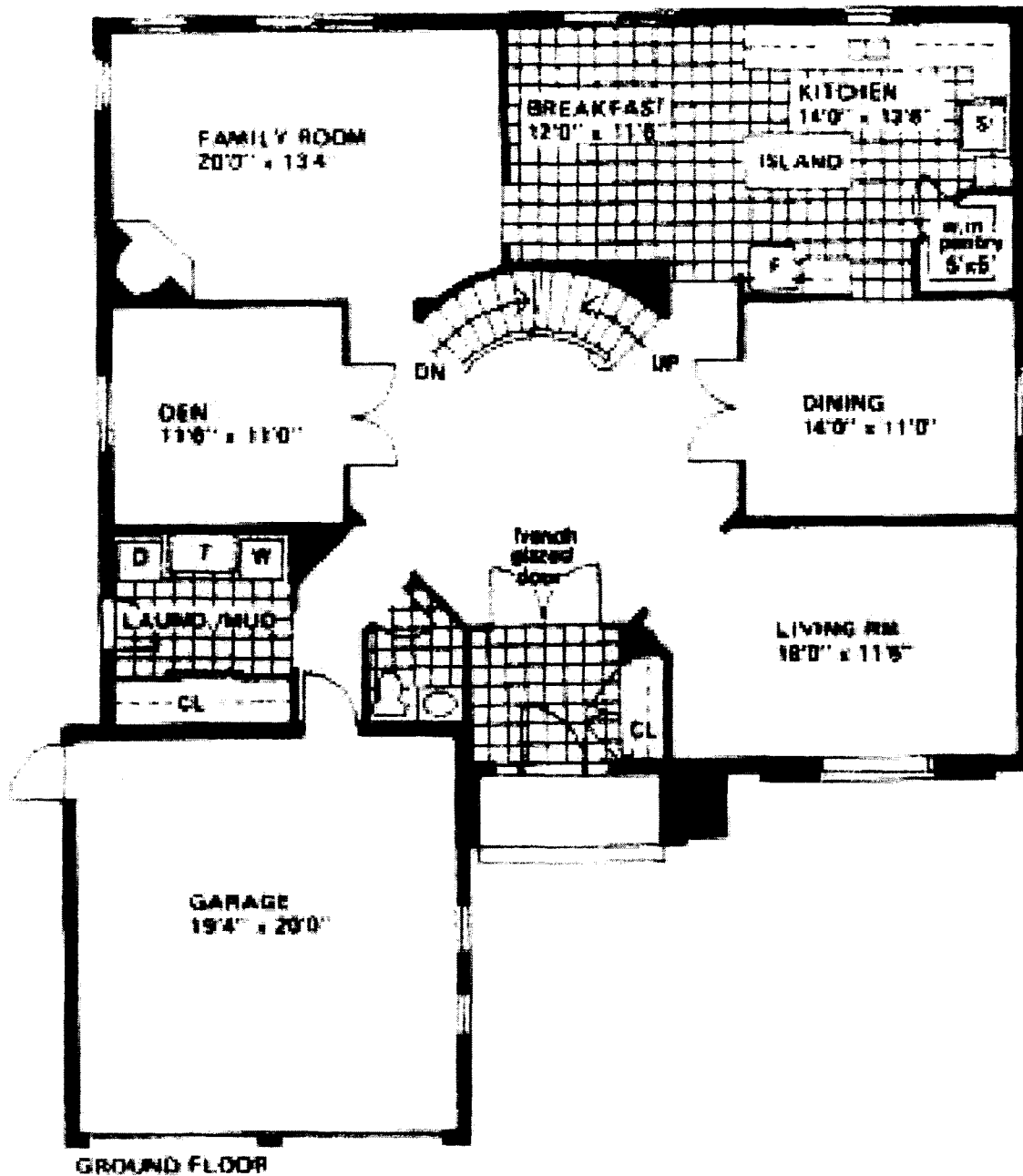


Fig. 26. "Fantasy Rose" main floor plan, *The Timeless Elegance of the Rose* (The Rose Corporation, 1983). The large kitchen featured an island as well as a walk-in-pantry. As a product of a time that promoted luxury, this 'fantasy' plan had an enormous foyer with sweeping staircase, and a dining room with French doors.

In the 1980s, the kitchen grew even larger as the house sizes continued to grow, while the breakfast room was now a fully developed large room on its own (Fig. 26). The

size of the kitchen work area also grew in the 1980s as social norms changed. With more and more families having two working parents, kitchen duties were no longer seen as the realm of the wife. This period saw, although slowly, the acceptance of both men and women working in the kitchen, even both at the same time. The need for a larger space became apparent. Entertaining became more casual, and would often happen in the kitchen. Larger and open kitchens allowed not only a peninsula counter, but also a work island. The popularity of the island increased over the years, especially with a breakfast counter for a quick snack, or for entertaining. Gadgets and time saving appliances have flooded the market. Kitchens not only had to be larger to house appliances like the dishwasher, microwave, trash compactor, to name a few, but pantries became popular for storage. With less time to prepare food from scratch and to go shopping for fresh food, these pantries have served as a place to store processed foodstuffs for the family. By the late 1980s, a pantry had become a common feature of houses being built in Bramalea.

As the kitchen was less a merely functional workspace, it also moved away from the service entrance and basement access. Instead, a main floor laundry/mud room took over that function, often located near the garage entry and access to the basement stairs (see Fig. 25 and 26).

In the 21st century, all but the two smallest plans built in *Lake of Dreams* had a breakfast room. The peninsula counter or work island complete with a breakfast bar was common in nearly all of the plans (see Fig. 21). The open-concept nature of these houses meant that the kitchen could be seen from most of the rooms on the main floor. This exposure required kitchens to become fancy rooms, with details and cupboards that

looked like furniture. While in the past, the kitchen was hidden away, the newest houses in Bramalea turned the kitchen into the showpiece room of the house.

In Bramalea, only a few houses had the kitchen located at the front of the house. This reflects the Victorian tradition of having the parlour at the front of the house.⁷⁵ As it was the first room that guests would see after the hallway, it made sense to locate it at the front of the house. In the larger Bramalea houses, the formal living room became the front room, kept separate and presentable for guests, while the back of the house became the informal precinct with open kitchen, breakfast room, and family room areas.

Since the 1960s, the kitchen space in Bramalea houses has more than doubled in size. What once was a just work area has expanded to include the informal breakfast room. A typical two-storey house in 1965 Bramalea had a kitchen that took up less than a third of the main floor. By 1988, the kitchen, breakfast, and family room precinct took up more than half of the main floor area of a typical two-storey house. The kitchen had finally come full circle from its roots as the main living space in the house. Having both a formal and informal eating area became the norm in the late 1970s and 1980s, which was tied with the fantasy of luxurious living. It was also during this time period that having a formal and an informal living area, with the introduction of the family room, also became the norm.

3.4 The Family Room

With the increasing popularity of having formal rooms to showcase expensive items, the informal family room became common in Bramalea. While formal rooms were reserved for guests, the family room became the space for everyday living. During the

⁷⁵ Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.61.

1960s in Bramalea only 30% of the plans for houses had a family room, with 14% of them being on the main floor. By the 1970s this room had become more common, thus adding to the growing suburban house size of the period. The average square footage of a house in Bramalea during the late 1970s was just below 1,800 square feet – up 500 square feet from the 1960s average.

The family room was not only a new addition to houses in Bramalea during the 1970s, but it also became very much linked with the kitchen and breakfast room. This cluster of rooms was not always connected, as before the main floor family room existed, most families had an informal living area in the basement: the recreation room.

The recreation room usually had a twofold function, one being for informal everyday living, and the other as a room to entertain. The bar, a popular addition to the up-to-date recreation room, made it the ideal location for adult parties. The main floor living room was usually reserved for more formal occasions, and much like the formal dining room, was filled with expensive furnishings and artwork. The fact that the recreation room was in the basement not only removed it from the main floor of the house, it removed it from the room where meals were prepared. This arrangement complicated matters when playing children were a whole level below and out of sight from the homemaker preparing meals.

A main floor family room in Bramalea appeared first in the 1967-1970 community *The Estates of Bramalea Woods*. Its large houses on generous lot sizes were in a price bracket that was only accessible to doctors, lawyers, pilots, and other well-paid professionals. At the time, a main floor family room was regarded as a luxury to be found in only large, expensive houses. The newness of the family room meant that designers did

not know where to put it. In the 1,810 square foot “Ranch” bungalow plan, the family room seemed like an afterthought and was located off the dining room (Fig. 27). This meant that a formal room had to be passed through to get to the informal family room. The circulation path between the kitchen and the family room, going through the dining room, was an impractical arrangement. The two other models in the development which had a main floor family room also had it removed from the kitchen, usually down a back hallway.

When the main floor family room became more common in less expensive houses, it was also separate from the kitchen. The same basic prototype for a two-storey house that was built since 1960 was expanded to include the new addition of a family room. What once was a void behind an attached garage became the most logical location for the family room. This is apparent in the “Ranch” plan, where the family room occupied the space behind the garage.

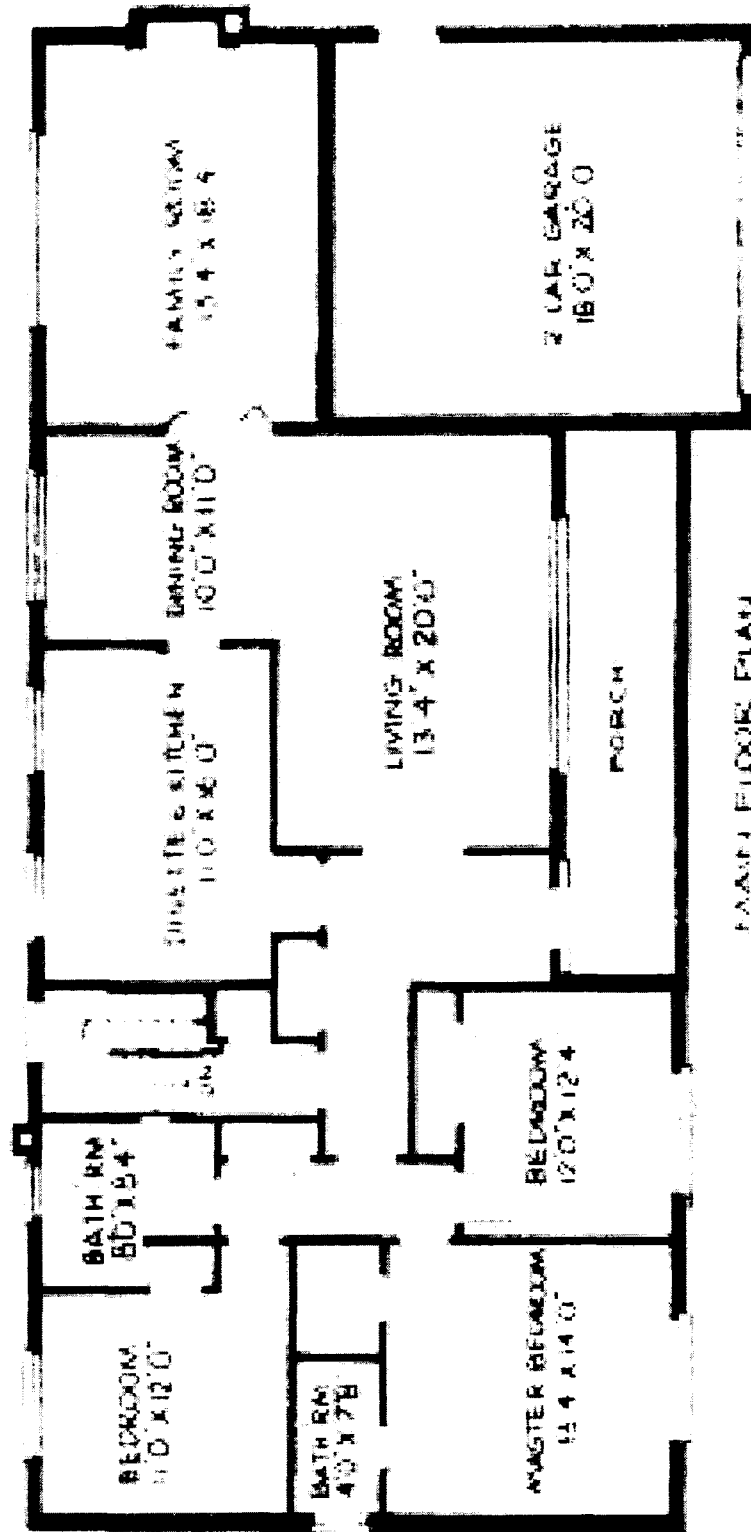


Fig. 27. "Ranch" floor plan, *The Estates of Bramalea Woods* (1967). The family room was in an awkward location only accessible from the dining room.

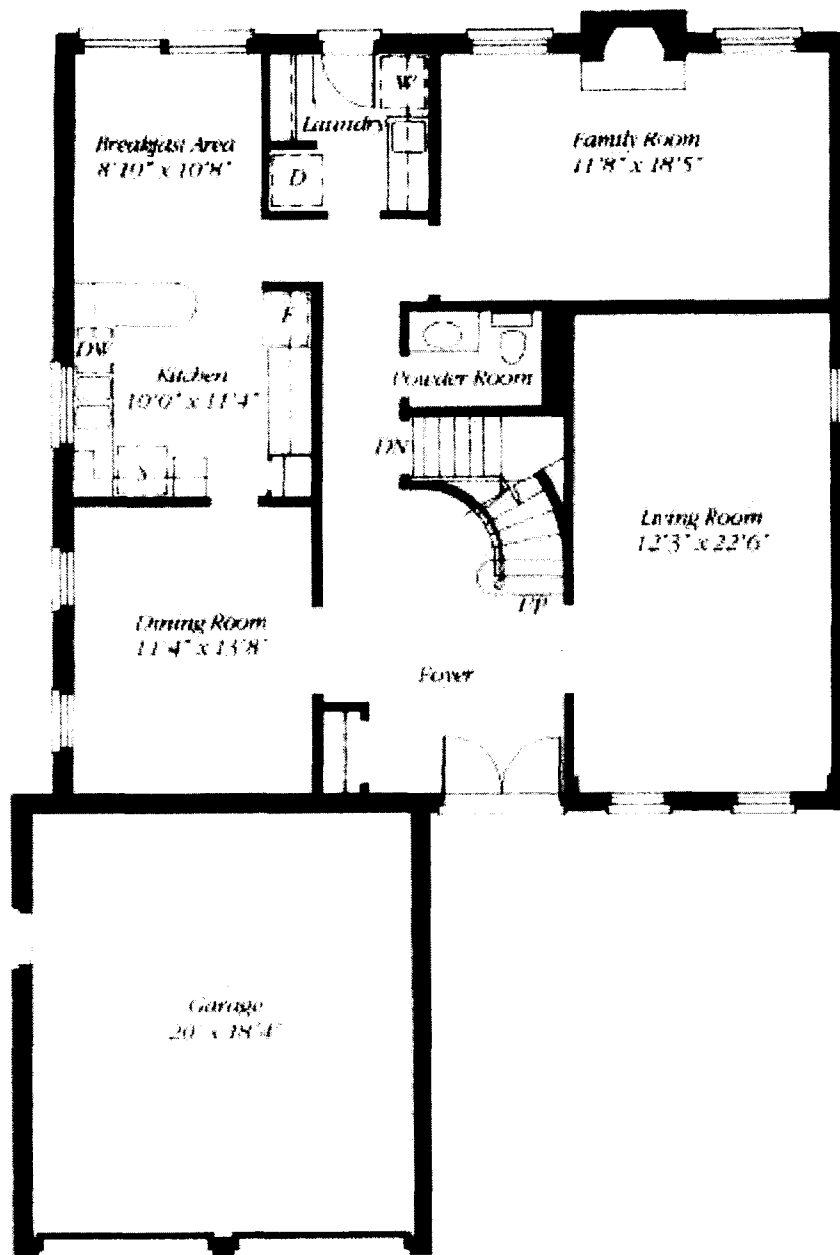


Fig. 28. "Gloucester" main floor plan, *Deerchase* (Bramalea Limited, 1984). Even though the kitchen and the family room were separated by the laundry room, they were just across the hall from each other.

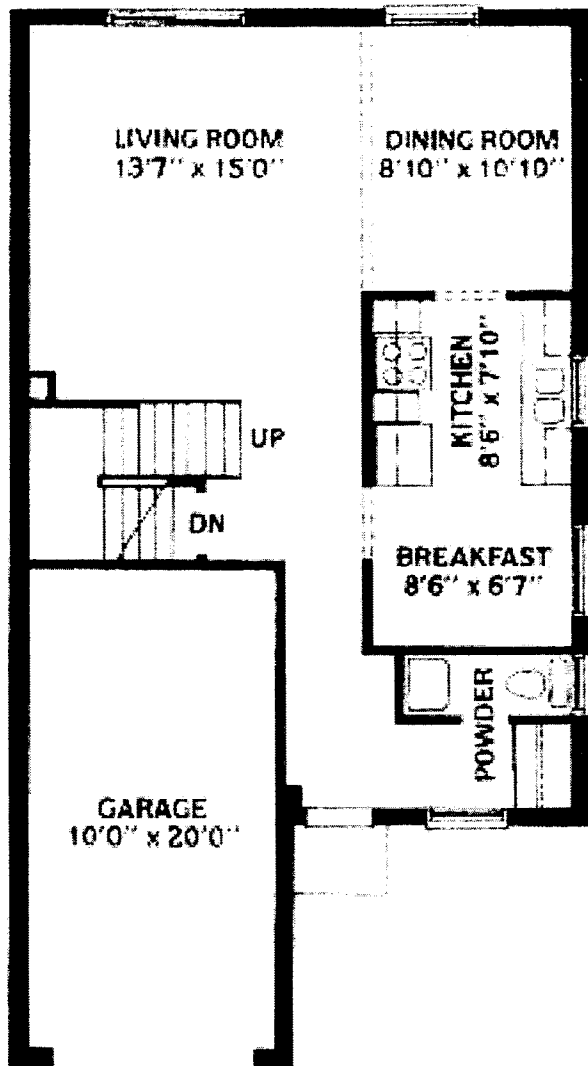
The main floor family room very quickly became popular, so much so that in the 1980s, 83% of the plans for houses in Bramalea had a family room, 75% of them being

on the main floor. The percentage of plans with a family room had nearly tripled since the 1960s. By 1988, 96% of the house plans in Bramalea had a main floor family room. The family room also moved closer to the kitchen in this period. A standard arrangement in Bramalea houses at the time was to have the kitchen and family room separated by the laundry room or powder room (Fig. 28). In some cases the family room and kitchen were located next to each other, but with an arch between the two, keeping them open, yet separate. By the middle of the 1980s, the wall between the breakfast room and the family room started disappearing. At first, a railing or half-wall between the two was common. In an effort to keep the two open yet separate, a step down into the family room became common by the late 1980s.

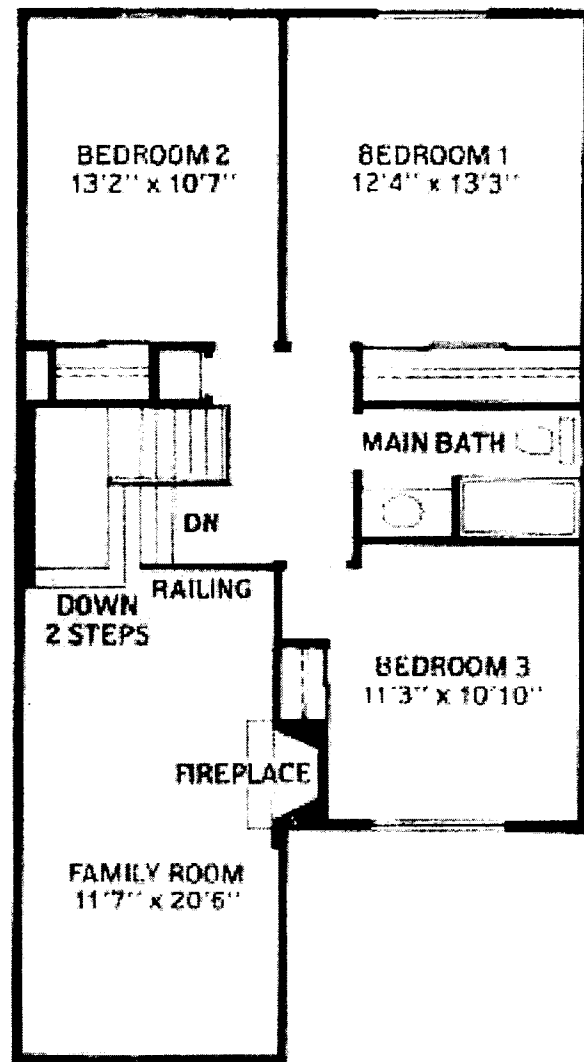
The space above an attached garage also became an ideal location for a family room in some Bramalea houses. This upper level space permitted this room to have a high or vaulted ceiling. A family room above the garage debuted in 1979-1980 at Bramalea Consolidated Development's *Professor's Lake South* community. Its 1,620 square foot "Windermere" model had a family room above a single-car garage (Fig. 29). When a double-car garage became common, this room also became quite large. The family room over the garage was still a feature of some of the houses in *Lake of Dreams*.

The main floor family room was associated with increasing consumer wealth, which allowed more people to afford larger houses with family rooms. This increased wealth allowed many people to afford formal furniture to fill the living room, while also necessitating an informal family room for everyday living. The ballooning size of the suburban house continued to grow, especially with the addition of one more main floor room: the den or office.

GROUND FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



ROOM SIZES ARE APPROX.

Fig. 29. "Windermere" floor plan, *Professor's Lake South* (1979). This was one of the first instances of a family room over the garage in Bramalea. With such a large family room in a small house, the kitchen and breakfast room were very small.

3.5 The Main Floor Den

The office or den was the last major main-floor room that became common in Bramalea houses. The first appearance of this room was in 1967-1970 development *The Estates of Bramalea Woods*. The "Mansion" design at 2,648 square feet was the largest in the development, and would have been mansion-like as it was twice the size of many

houses in Bramalea at the time (Fig. 30). This house had all of the rooms that were later to become common in less expensive Bramalea houses such as an expansive foyer with circular stair, breakfast room, family room, and den. What was at the time a very luxurious and spacious house would become the norm in terms of size and amenities in new Bramalea housing during the 1980s.

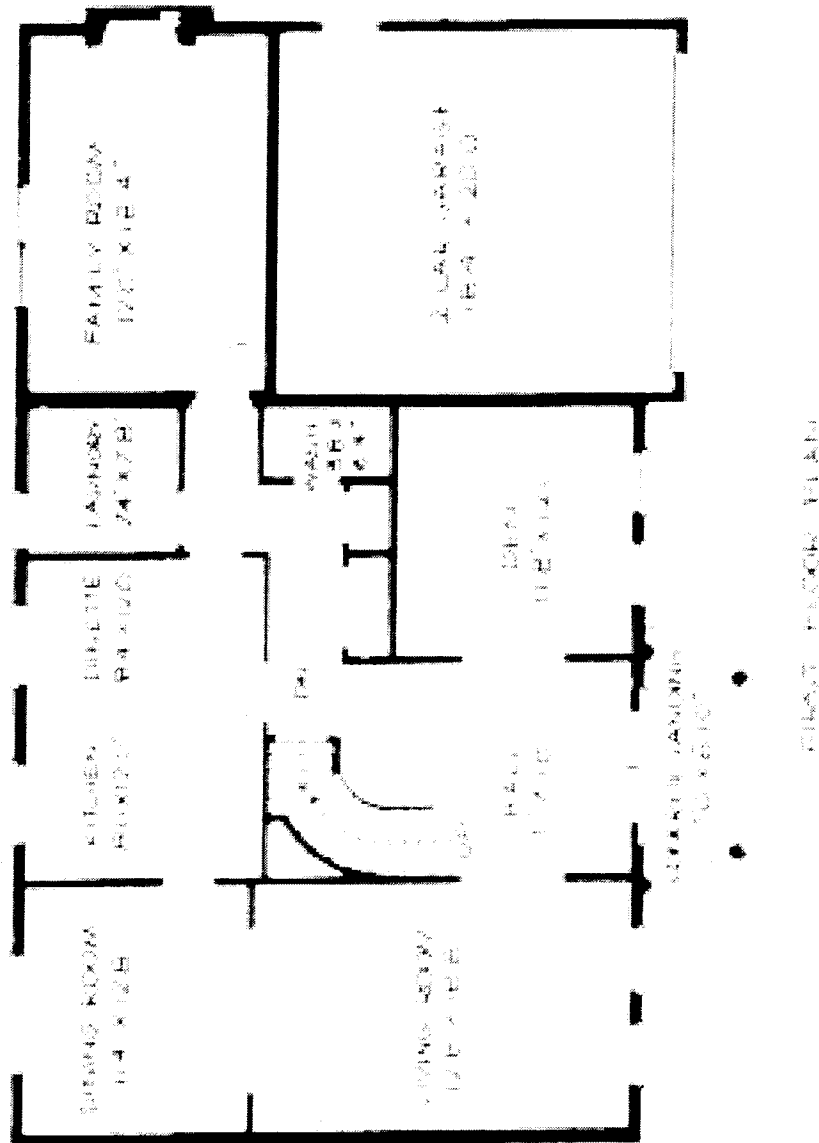


Fig. 30. "Mansion" main floor plan, *The Estates of Bramalea Woods* (1967). At the time, a main floor den was a luxury. The family room was removed from the kitchen and closed-off with a door.

In 1983-1984, the Rose Corporation's *The Timeless Elegance of the Rose* development was the first in Bramalea to have a large number of houses with a main-floor den. Although spacious and expensive, these houses were far from estate-like with lot widths of fifty-feet, nearly half as wide as those in *The Estates of Bramalea Woods*. Nonetheless, half of the ten models had a main floor den. The smallest model was 2,200 square feet, and the largest 4,000 square feet (the largest model ever built by any builder in Bramalea). The main floor den in these houses was just one of the many features, such as a large foyer and sweeping staircase that made them luxurious, status symbols (see Fig. 26).

The popularity of a main-floor den saw its inclusion in many plans by the mid 1980s, even in houses that were not large or luxurious. In 1985-1987, Fram Building Corporation wedged an eleven by eight foot den into a 2,270 square foot house on a forty-foot wide lot (Fig. 31). The resultant plan was one with many rooms, some of which were too small to be practical, particularly the kitchen and breakfast room. Four other plans on forty-foot lots in the development managed to fit a tiny den into the main floor. The same builder pushed the envelope further in its 1988-1990 development of *Nortonville Estates West* with a 2,636 square foot house on a thirty-seven foot wide lot, complete with a main floor den. This house, although similar in size to the 1967 "Mansion" design in *The Estates of Bramalea Woods*, was on a lot almost a third smaller. By this time, the main floor den had entered the realm of the not-so-luxurious house. In 1988, almost 40% of the plans for Bramalea houses had a main floor den. Much as the addition of a breakfast room in the 1970s saw other rooms shrink to accommodate it, the addition of the main floor den had similar consequences.

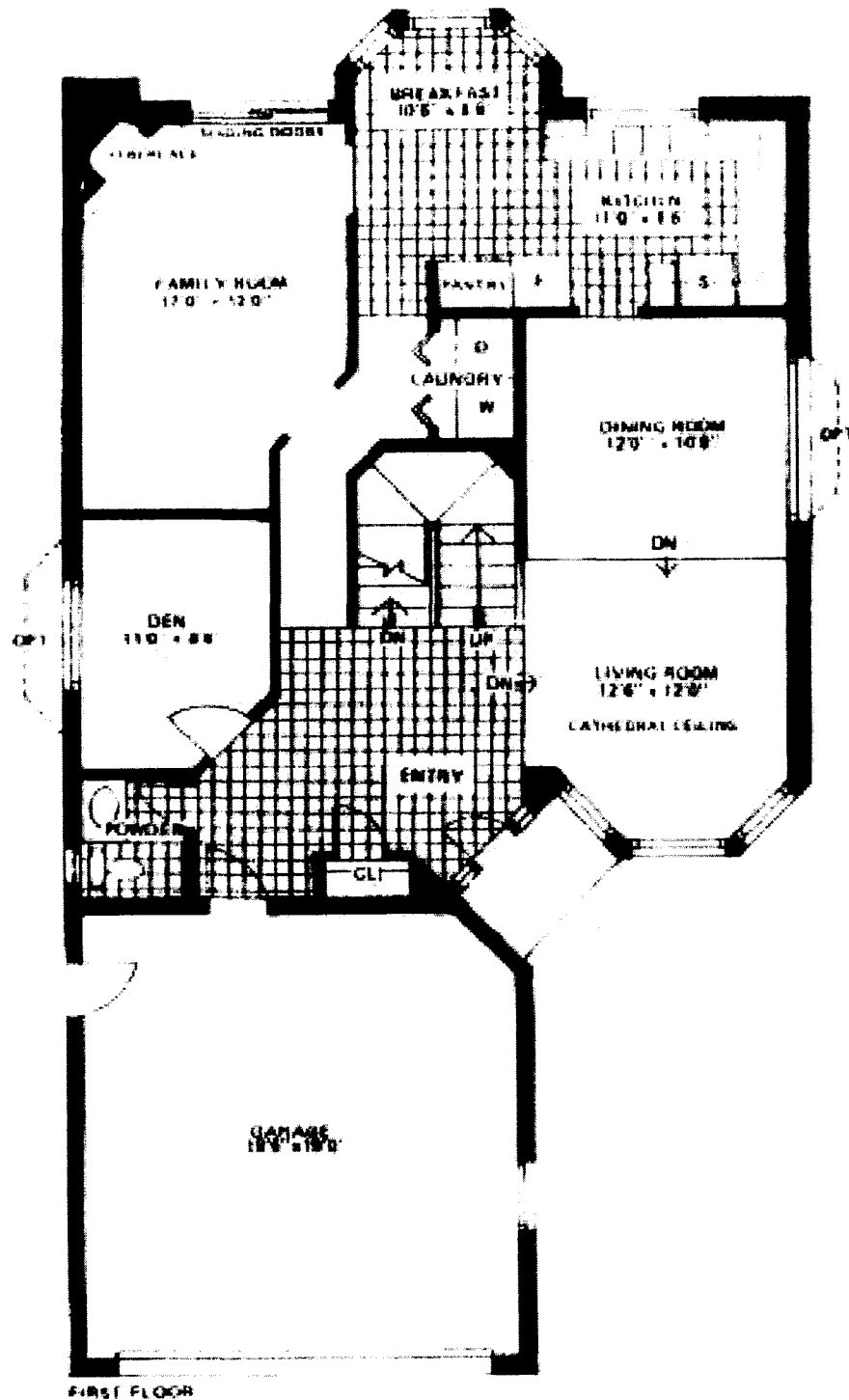


Fig. 31. "Graham" floor plan, *The Nortonville Estate* (Fram Building Group, 1986). Although tiny, the den took up valuable square footage making the kitchen and breakfast room very small.

The main floor den in the 1980s was a curious phenomenon. Today, its inclusion makes sense to accommodate one or more of the computers found in most suburban houses. The internet has allowed more and more people to work from home or to telecommute, but this was not the case in the 1980s. While working at home was possible then, the location of the main floor den in most Bramalea houses, usually in the middle of the main floor, did not make it practical for accepting any sort of clients. Perhaps the best explanation of such a room was the fantasy of the luxury and prestige of being able to afford a house with one. While a pre-prescribed use may not have been attached to the main floor den in Bramalea houses during the 1980s, they became increasingly common, and contributed to the growing size of the average house.

3.6 Bedrooms

In 1960s Bramalea, the bungalow was the most common type of house, with the bedrooms on the same floor as the living spaces. Nearly all bungalows in Bramalea had three bedrooms. In 1966-1967 the *Southgate Village* development by Bramalea Consolidated Developments, was unique in that it had a four-bedroom bungalow, the “Carleton Crest”; at 1,499 square feet this was the largest bungalow built at the time. Four bedrooms were usually reserved for larger two-storey and split-level houses. A split-level house usually had two to three bedrooms on the upper level with one to two bedrooms on the lower level. The 1962-1965 development *Twingate*, with semi-detached houses, had more four-bedroom models than the detached houses offered during the same time. The houses in the development were also larger than most detached houses, which made them more desirable and affordable than a detached house of the same size.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the two-storey four bedroom house became the most common type. While the three-bedroom house still existed in the 1980s, it was always the smallest model in the development. Four bedrooms were so popular that some houses as small as 1,360 square feet were designed to include four, albeit very small, bedrooms. During the 1980s, 61% of the house plans in Bramalea had four bedrooms. While the average family size had decreased since the 1960s, the number of bedrooms in the average Bramalea house grew, as many families by the 1980s no longer had children share bedrooms. Given the increasing focus on individuality and privacy, families wanted to provide every child with a bedroom, with another room set aside for guests.

In the 1980s, bedroom closets became much larger than those of the 1960s. This can all be attributed to the growing consumer wealth, and the ability to afford to buy more clothes to fill a larger closet. In the master bedroom, the walk-in-closet became common and grew larger with time; sometimes it was as large as some of the small bedrooms of early Bramalea houses.

The 1980s brought with it a new category of house in Bramalea – the five-bedroom house. Of the ten house plans in the 1983-1984 development *The Timeless Elegance of the Rose*, half had five bedrooms. During the 1980s, only 6% of the house plans in Bramalea had five bedrooms, while only 33% had three bedrooms.

Two bedroom houses were only built twice in Bramalea's history. In 1972-1974, low-cost zero, lot-line houses were built. The smallest model, a bungalow, only had two bedrooms – a first for Bramalea.⁷⁶ This house would have only been attractive to empty nesters, a couple without children, or a single person. The second time two-bedroom

⁷⁶ Globe and Mail 8 Dec. 1972, 19.

houses were built was in the 1988-1990 townhouse development, *Carriage Walk South* (Fig. 32). These luxury condominiums were specifically marketed to, and bought by, young professionals without children and by empty nesters. It was during this period that one-bedroom condominium apartments were sold in Bramalea – a sign that the suburban environment was not just for families anymore.

Aside from the two-bedroom houses, by the 1980s most houses in Bramalea not only had more bedrooms than ever, but they were also larger rooms. The bedroom had become not just a place to sleep; it had also become a private sanctuary for children. In the era of computers and multiple-television households, many children had rooms set up like their own private apartment. The result was that many families found themselves spending more time apart rather than together. This was very much true of the master bedroom, which by the 1980s had grown to epic proportions

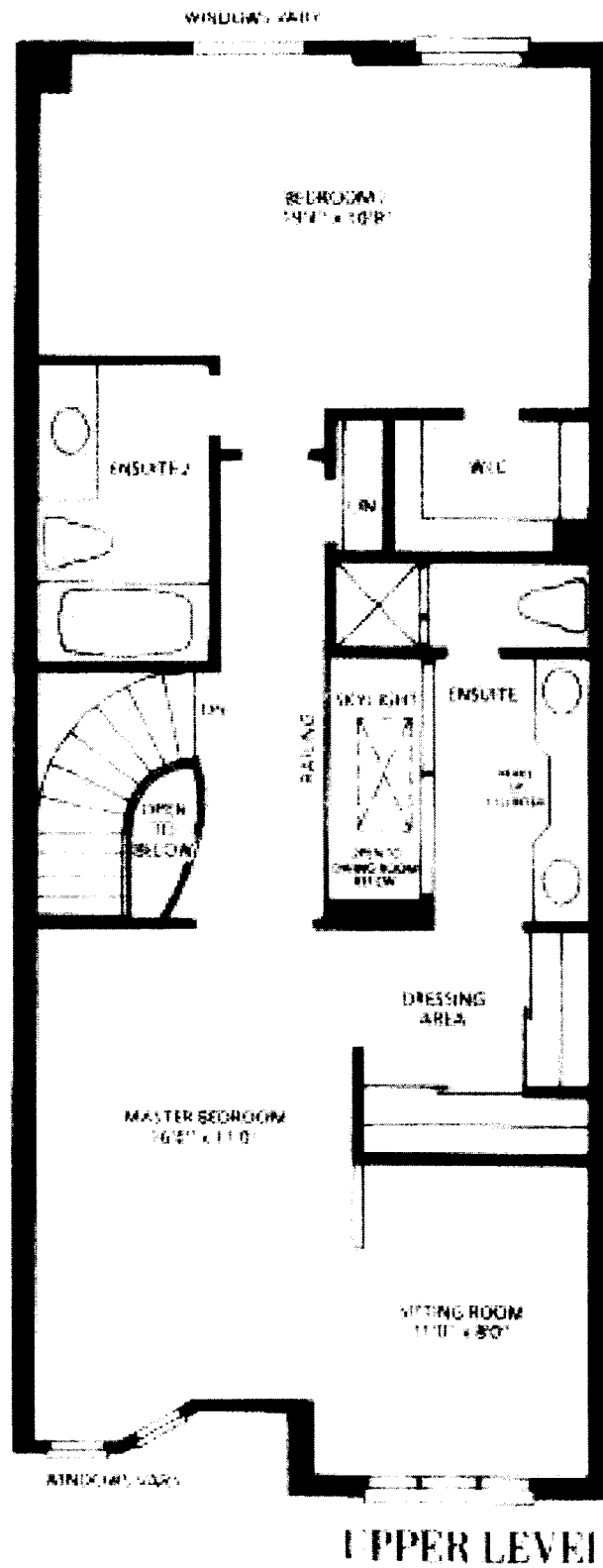


Fig. 32. "Peugeot" second floor plan, *Carriage Walk South* (Bramalea Limited, 1988). This luxurious plan featured two large bedrooms, each with an ensuite bathroom. The master bedroom had its own sitting room.

3.7 The Master Bedroom

The master bedroom had long been the largest and most luxurious bedroom in the house. In the Victorian era, it was often called the “best bedroom”, and usually had its own fireplace.⁷⁷ In the 1930s, only the very wealthy had the luxury of an ensuite bathroom off of the master bedroom;⁷⁸ the typical middle class house until the 1970s did not have a master bedroom with an ensuite bathroom. During the 1960s, Bramalea houses were unique in the fact that many actually did have an ensuite bathroom off of the master bedroom. Even rarer, one of the semi-detached plans from 1962 had an ensuite bathroom. As a comparison, a Brampton development from the early 1960s called *Peel Village* had eight detached house plans, only one of which had an ensuite bathroom. These extra features in Bramalea may have been included to attract buyers to the new city. While some houses in Bramalea during the period had an ensuite bathroom, it was usually quite small – in most cases the same size as the main bathroom. Some houses also had a ‘cheater door’, which was a second door from the main bathroom into the master bedroom.

During the 1960s and 1970s the master bedroom was always the largest bedroom in the house, but it usually was not too much bigger than the other bedrooms. At the time, a room as small as eleven by eleven feet would have been considered large enough to be a master bedroom. By the 1980s, this size was regarded as too small, as many secondary bedrooms were at least that size.

⁷⁷ Ward, *A History of Domestic Space*, p.29.

⁷⁸ James Ford and Katherine Morrow Ford, *The Modern House in America* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc, 1940).

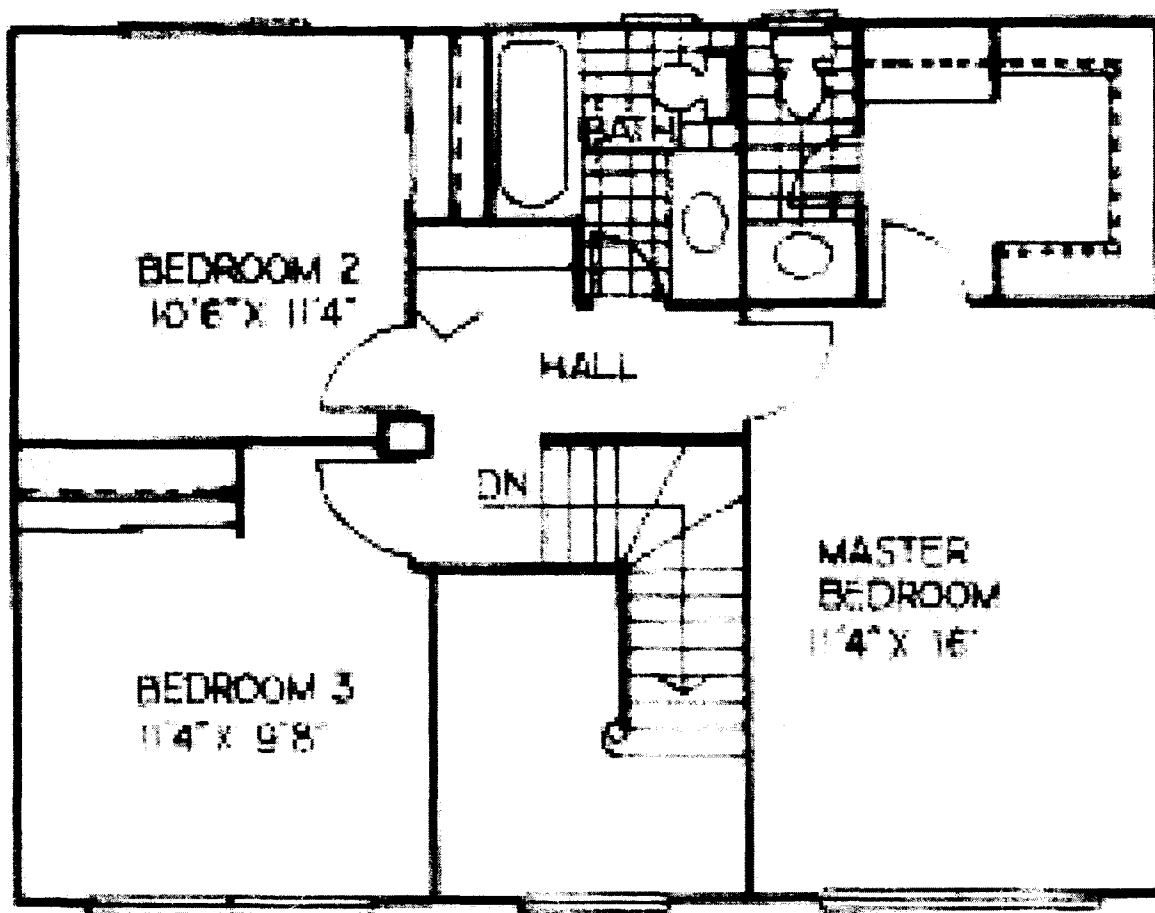


Fig. 33. "631" second floor plan, *Bramalea Royale* (Ashton Woods, 1980). While only a two-piece ensuite was provided, the walk-in-closet was larger than the main bathroom. The luxury features of the large walk-in-closet and two-storey foyer meant that there could only be three bedrooms in the 1,800 square foot plan.

During the early 1970s fewer houses actually had an ensuite bathroom than in the 1960s, as space was taken up instead by a walk-in-closet. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, both a walk-in closet and an ensuite bathroom became more popular. In smaller houses, the ensuite bathroom consisted of a toilet and sink. Many designs in the early 1980s seemed to struggle between the inclusion of a walk-in-closet and an ensuite. Some smaller houses, as small as 1,200 square feet, would have had an ensuite bathroom, but the trade off would have been a wall-to-wall closet rather than a walk-in-closet. At the

other end of the spectrum a smaller two-piece ensuite would have been the trade-off for a large walk-in-closet. During the 1980s, 73% of the plans for houses in Bramalea had a walk-in-closet. In some cases, especially in Ashton Woods Homes' 1980 *Bramalea Royale* development, the houses had room size walk-in-closets, yet a tiny two-piece bathroom (Fig.33). Either way, bedrooms as a whole were made smaller to accommodate these extra features of the master bedroom.

In the 1980s, 84% of the plans for houses in Bramalea had an ensuite bathroom; only the smallest houses did not. Of those with an ensuite bathroom, 2% actually had a second ensuite bathroom off another bedroom, meaning that the house had three bathrooms on the second floor. The ensuite became so popular that in the 1996 *Hampton Landing* townhouse development all of the houses had an ensuite. The ensuite bathroom was no longer reserved for larger detached houses.

By the late 1980s, the ensuite bathroom went from what was a standard bathroom, to include a separate shower stall, double sinks and a soaking tub – sometimes with a large step-up platform. In some cases this room became so large it rivalled small bedrooms. The master bedroom also became larger as a room, and more luxurious as a retreat. In 1980, Bramalea Homes introduced the first of a series of plans that included a master bedroom complete with a large studio over the garage. In their *Sterling Ridge* development, the 2,555 square foot “Tiffany” model had an eighteen-by-twenty-foot sunken studio with a fireplace and vaulted ceiling, off of the sixteen-by-fourteen-foot master bedroom (Fig.34). The studio space was actually larger than any of the living spaces in the house. While everyday family living happened in smaller main floor rooms, the private aspect of having the studio off of the master bedroom made it impractical to

entertain or even have other members of the family use it. The vaulted ceiling and large windows also made this room one of the nicest spaces in the house, yet its location probably meant that in most households it was underused.

In 1982, Bramalea Limited advertised the unique feature of their plans with this studio, some of which had a fifty-seven foot long master bedroom (with studio and ensuite) and up to 839 square feet of space (Fig. 35).⁷⁹ In contrast, the smallest bungalow in the 1965 *Westgate* development was just 244 square feet larger. As a result, the average house size in Bramalea by the mid 1980s was in excess of 2,000 square feet. The smallest detached house that was newly released by builders in 1988 was 1,914 square feet.

The over-proportioned master bedroom was very much a reflection of the type of houses built in 1980s Bramalea, and the idea of luxury and opulence. With growing consumer wealth and double-income families, a large house was a way to show success. The generous and lavish master bedroom was a way to reward the homeowner and to signal that they had accomplished something after all of their hard work to build up a career with a good salary. The large master bedroom, and houses in general, allowed the owners to indulge in large furnishings and to spend their spare time spending disposable income on the home. The recent explosion of stores, television shows, and a general interest in interior décor is the culmination of a trend started in the 1980s.

⁷⁹ *Toronto Star*, 17 July 1982, p.E5.

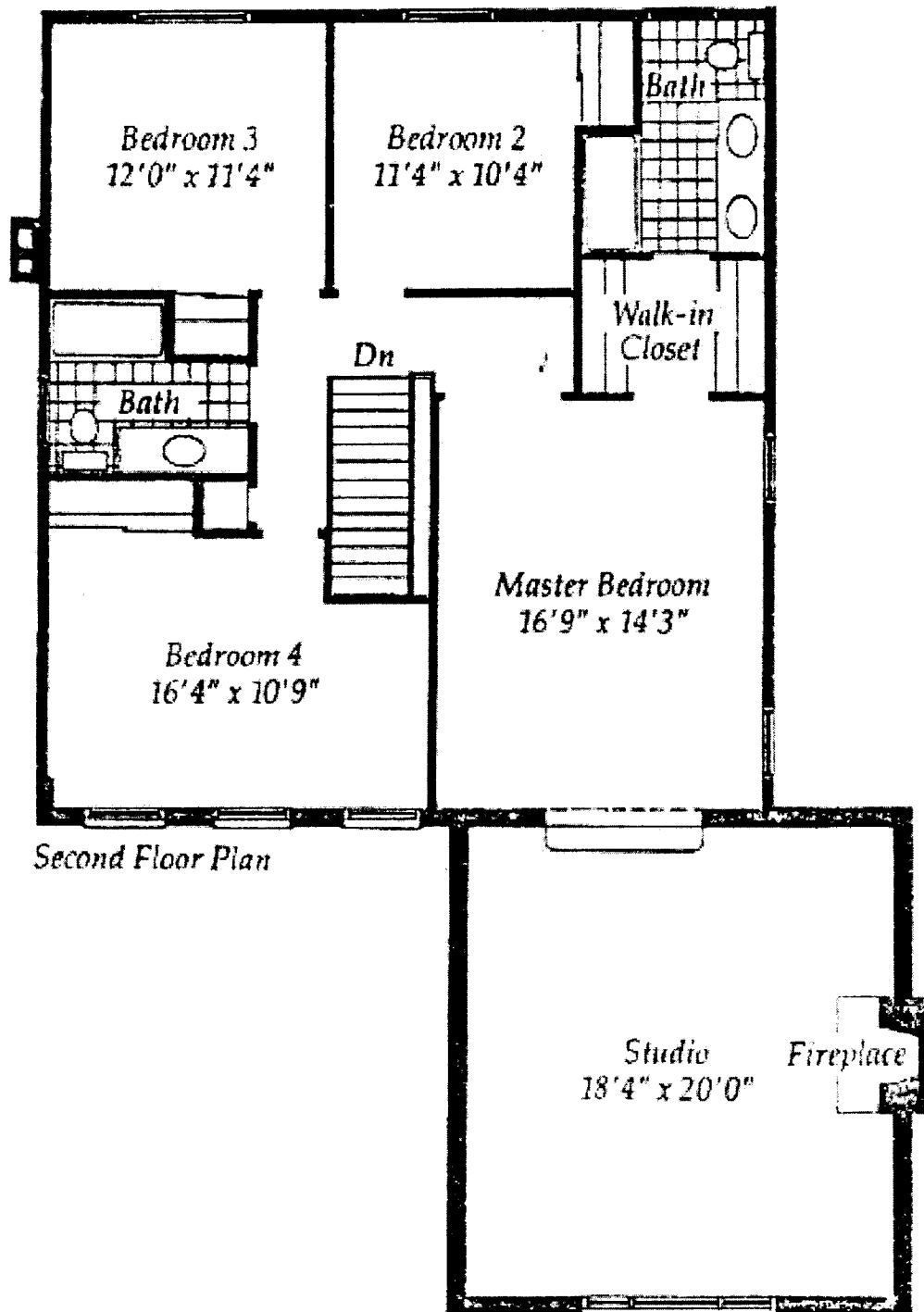


Fig. 34. "Tiffany" second floor plan, *Sterling Ridge* (Bramalea Homes, 1980). The sunken Studio was the largest room in the house.

THE 'SUITE' LIFE

WITH A SPECTACULAR 57 FOOT MASTER BEDROOM SUITE

Artists' concept Model shown: the Arroyo-Bramalea on 75' lot \$187,500. Prices and specifications subject to change without notice.

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Fig. 35. Advertisement for Bramalea Limited (The Toronto Star, March 27, 1982). This studio is depicted with a sofa, desk, and a sewing machine, making it a multi-purpose space

The master bedroom had come a long way from its roots as a small room with a regular closet and no ensuite bathroom. The importance of large bedrooms, especially the master bedroom had resulted in more square footage in the average post-1980 Bramalea house dedicated to these rooms.

3.8 Bringing it all Together

While there were well over five hundred different plans for houses built in Bramalea, the majority were based on a few basic arrangements of rooms, all of which had historic precedents. Throughout the 1960s, nearly all of the houses in Bramalea, including semi-detached and townhouses were based on the basic models of the urban Victorian house, the foursquare or the Georgian centre hall plan. While the rooms had been stretched or manipulated in a variety of ways, the basic arrangement had its roots in the past. Much as the exterior of houses in Bramalea sought to reflect something other than what they were, the fantasy of the past was reflected in the floor plans for the houses built.

A significant number of plans for houses in Bramalea were rooted in the design of the foursquare, which was a suburban version of the urban Victorian house. Dating back to the mid 1800s, Victorian houses in England and in Canada were used the same room arrangement with slight variations. In urban row houses, terrace houses, semi-detached and single houses, the parlour was always located at the front, with the dining room behind, and the kitchen at the back of the house (Fig. 36). Interestingly, “the layouts of the houses of both rich and poor were eerily similar.”⁸⁰ The entry, hallway and staircase ran parallel to the living and dining room. At that time, houses were not supposed to be more than four times as deep as they were wide, in order to allow sufficient natural light into the interior.⁸¹ By the early 20th century, this basic arrangement was re-worked for larger suburban lot widths and became known as the foursquare house style (Fig. 36). This type of house still had the parlour (now called the living room) at the front of the

⁸⁰ Flanders, *The Victorian House*, p. xlvi.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.xxvi.

house, and the dining room behind. The extra width available on suburban lots allowed the kitchen to be located beside the dining room at the back of the house, instead of behind it. As the name of the type of house described, the main floor was divided into four sections – the fourth being the front hallway with staircase. In many instances, this allowed the footprint of a house to be a perfect square. This basic arrangement of the living room, dining room, kitchen and hallway, was the basis of the majority of the early house plans in Bramalea.

In the 1965 development *Westgate*, all of the two two-storey models were based on this foursquare main floor. Likewise, most of the back-split models' main floor also followed this arrangement (see Fig. 26). In bungalows, the bedrooms were arranged in a variety of locations in relation to the main living spaces, but these living spaces were based on the traditional foursquare design (see Fig. 22).

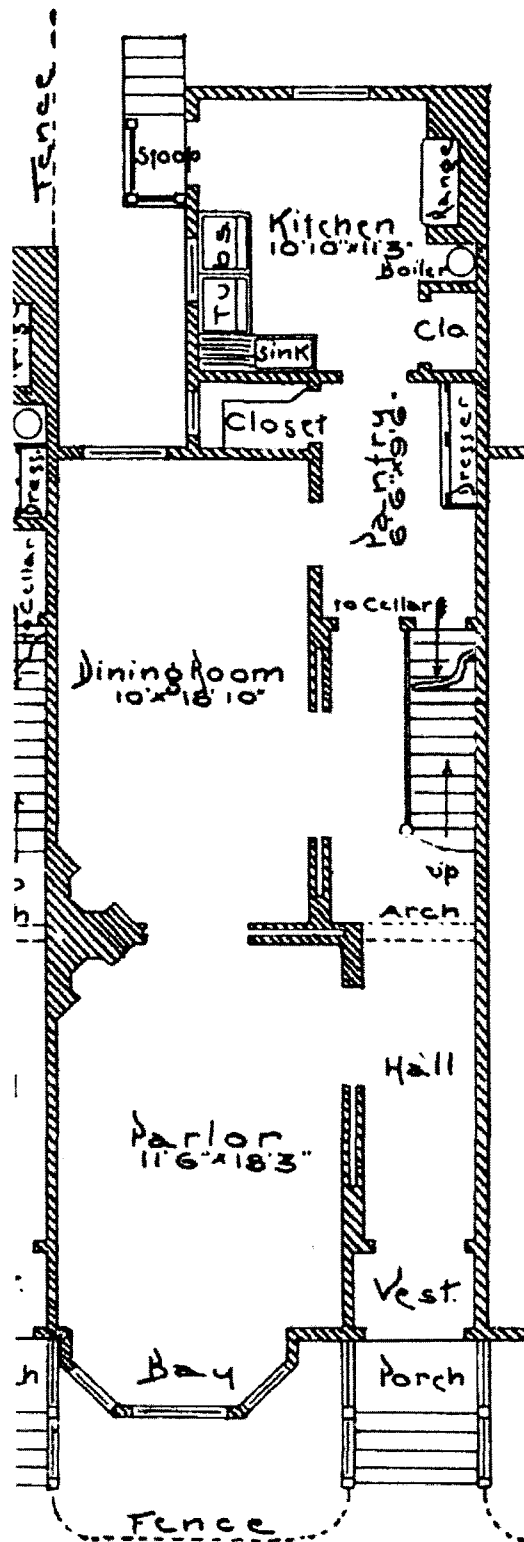


Fig. 36. "Design No. 443" main floor plan (R.W. Shoppell, c. 1880) This plan for a row house had the living and dining rooms in tandem with a hallway running parallel to them.

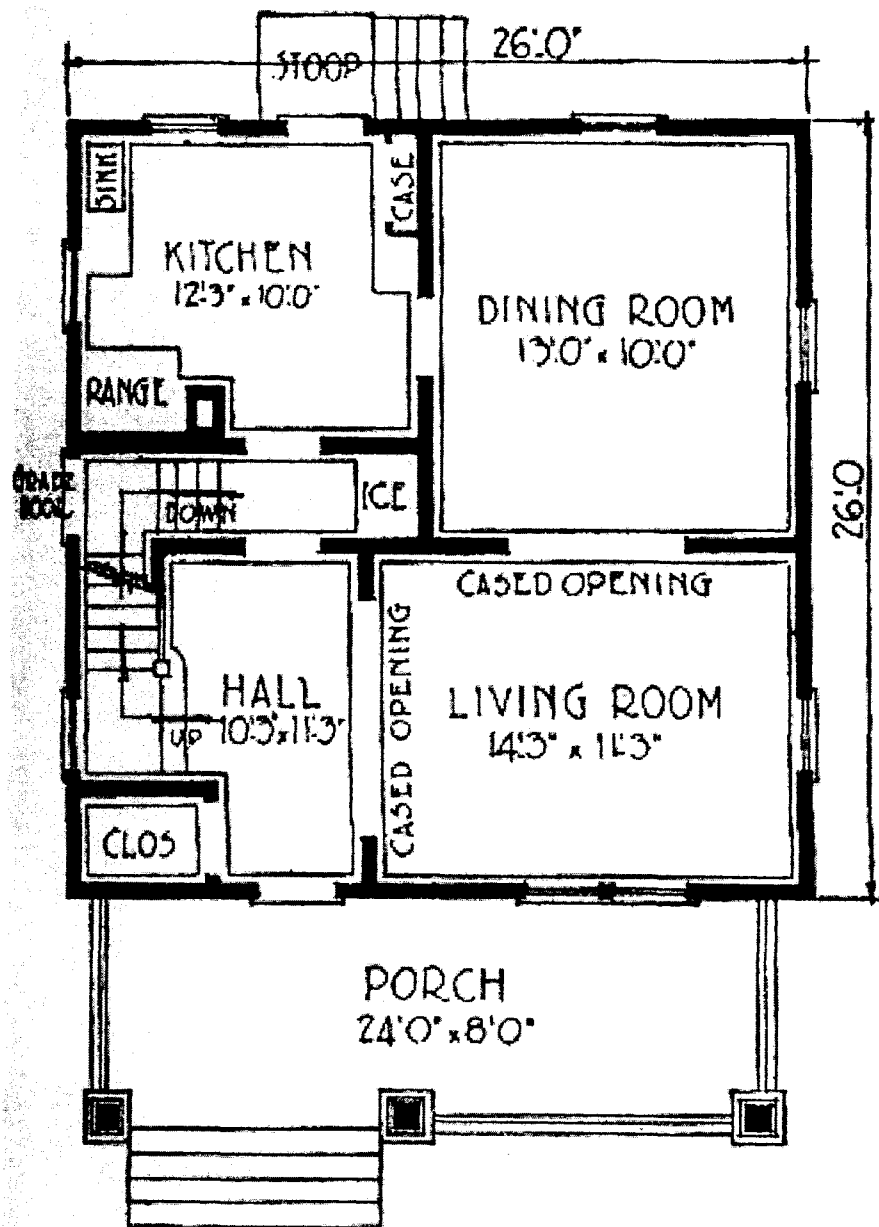


Fig. 37. "No. 556" main floor plan (Gordon-Van Tine Homes, 1923) The footprint of the house, without the porch, is a perfect square.

During the 1970s and 1980s, some plans had the basic foursquare arrangement rotated ninety degrees, placing both the living room and the dining room at the back of the house (see Fig. 29). The increasing focus on family and the privacy of the home,

made facing the main living areas toward the private yard sensible. With this plan, none of the main floor rooms had front-facing windows.

The addition of a main floor family room during the 1970s manipulated the basic foursquare room arrangement. As creatures of the suburban automobile culture, most houses at the time had attached garages, which the original foursquare lacked. This created a void behind the garage, which became a place to locate a family room (Fig. 38).

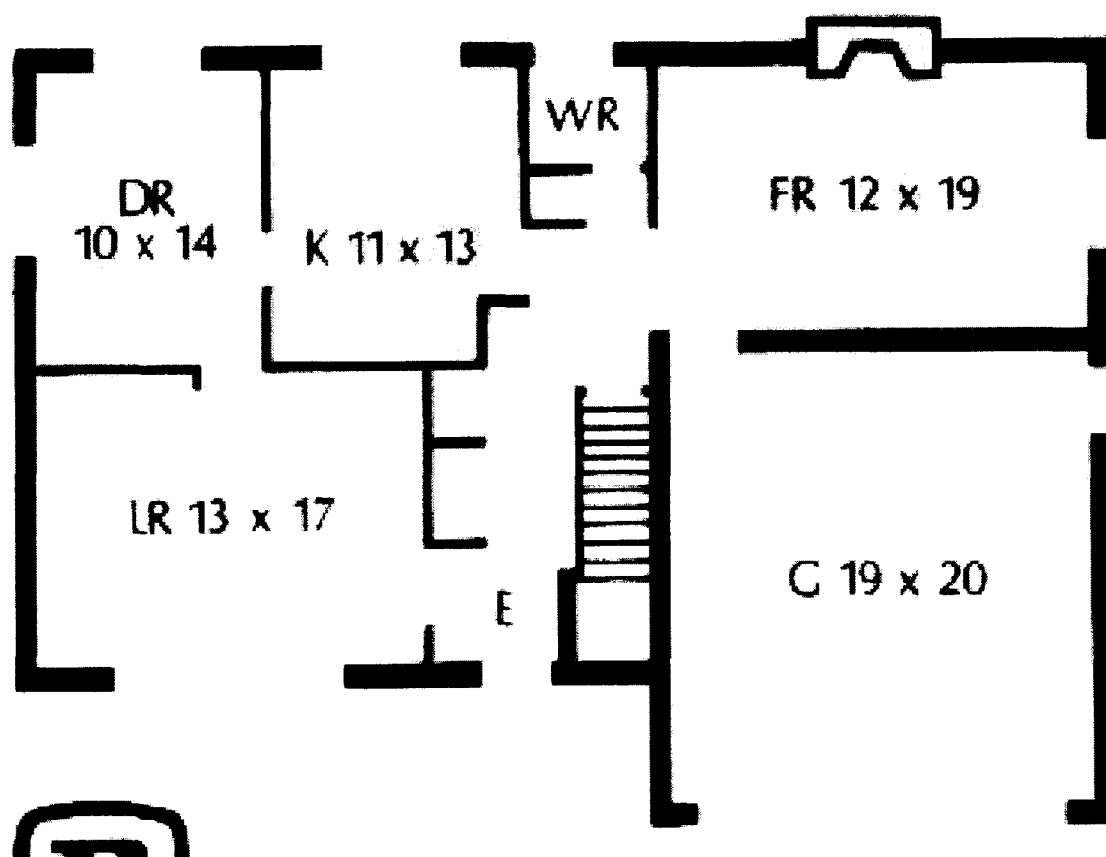


Fig. 38. "Bordeaux" main floor plan, *Northgate* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1970). The addition of a double-car garage and the family room added two new bays to the basic foursquare.

The third historic influence of Bramalea houses were the Georgian style houses (built in Ontario 1784-1860). Traditionally, these houses had one or two parlours on one side of the centre hall, with the kitchen (or pantry) and dining room on the other (Fig. 39).

The ubiquitous “Ontario Farmhouse” style found throughout the province was also based on this basic centre hall plan. Before their demolition, most of the historic farmhouses on the land where Bramalea was built were in this style. In the 1960s, the same centre-hall arrangement with a living room on one side, and dining room and kitchen on the other, was the basis for some of the houses.

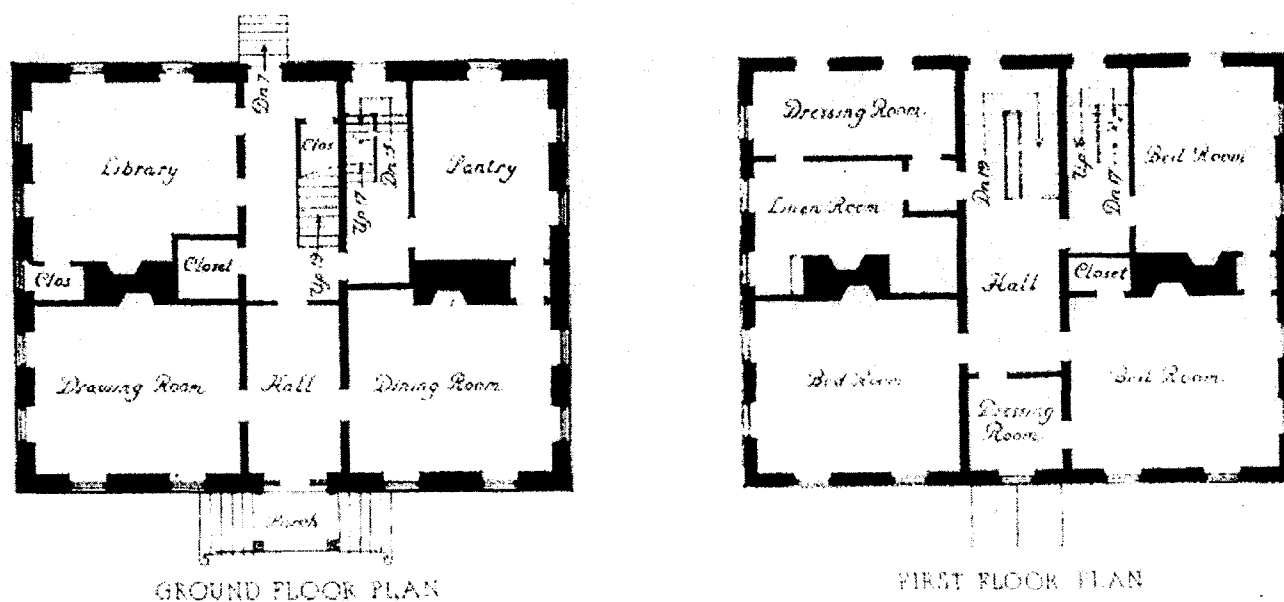


Fig. 42. “Acacia Grove” floor plan, Starrs Point, Nova Scotia, early 19th century [Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space – Privacy and the Canadian Home* (Toronto: UBC Press, 1999) 27]. A central hall characterised the Georgian style house.

By the mid to late 1970s, the Georgian centre hall plan had regained popularity, and by the 1980s allowed for the large foyers that characterized the houses of the period. The addition of a two-car garage blocked what should have been the location of the front facing dining room window. Even so, the location of the dining room across the hall from the living room made these plans a mirror of Georgian houses. In the 1982-1984 *Deerchase* development the design of the “Gloucester House” was based on the Georgian plan (see Fig. 28). If the protruding two-car garage were removed, the house could nearly

be mistaken for a Georgian-style house with its centre-hall plan. The difference was that the “Gloucester House” had a nearly square foot print, whereas a Georgian house was always wider than deep.

The Georgian style of house was used as the basis for many designs, but also as a marketing tool. The “Ferndale” plan from the 1977-1979 development *Bramalea Estates* was based on the Georgian centre-hall plan. The write-up above the plan stated that “you get the old fashioned elegance of a centre hall plan layout”. Nostalgia for the past was an element in the descriptions of many plans in Bramalea of the time.

In the narrower, detached houses built during the 1970s and 1980s, the Victorian town house arrangement was reflected in the plans with all rooms in tandem. Much like the historic precedent, the living, dining room and kitchen were lined up. With the two-car garage as the norm in Bramalea, many of the houses based on the Victorian townhouse actually did not have any living room windows facing the street (Fig. 40). In the past, the formal front room was presented to the street and to guests. By the late 1980, the first impression many houses presented to the street was the sheer size of the garage. In some cases the garage was so overpowering that the front door of the house could not be seen from the street. This dehumanizing presentation towards the street reflected the suburban dependency on the car as a mode of transport, rather than of the relation of the house to the people on the street.

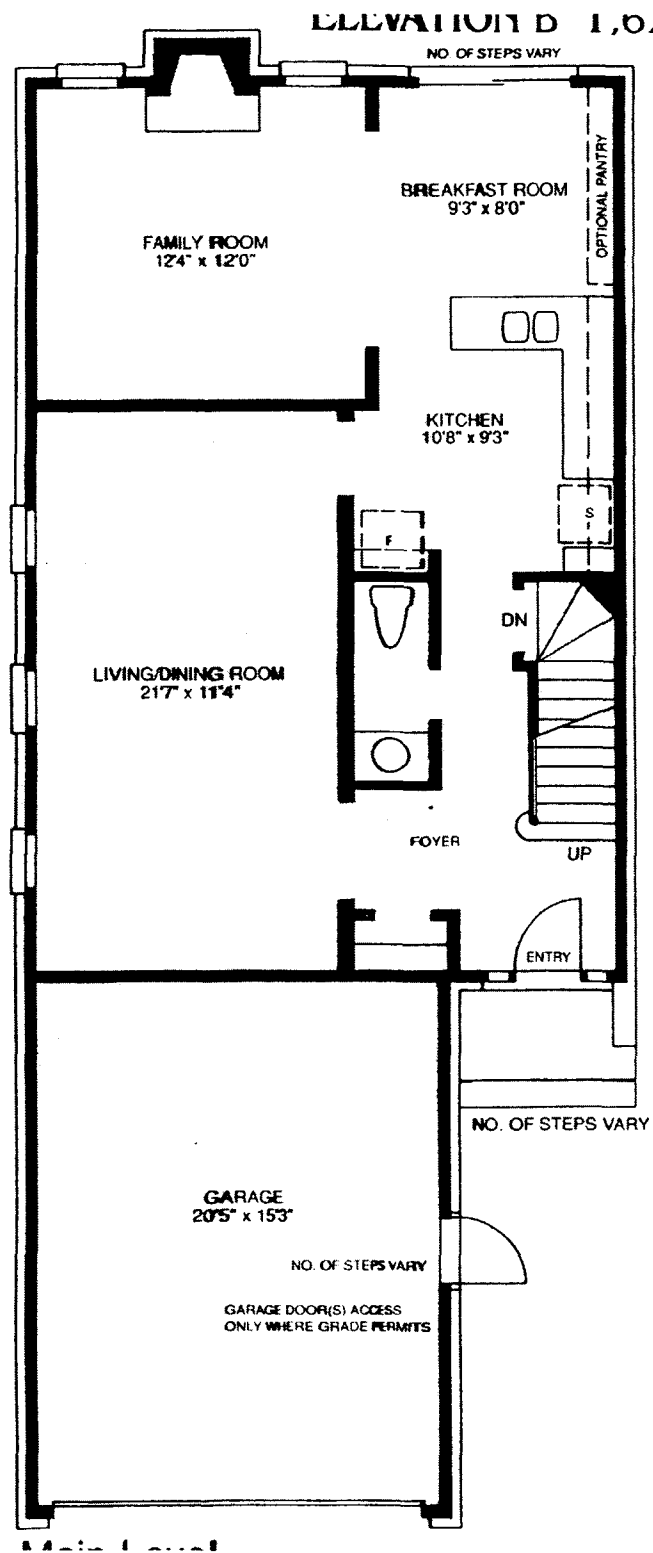


Fig. 40. "Aster" main floor plan, *Montage by the Park* (Bramalea Limited, 1990). Even with a tandem room arrangement, the plan differed from the Victorian row house as it had a family room and breakfast room. The attached garage did not allow any front facing windows.

GROUND FLOOR PLAN ELEVATION A

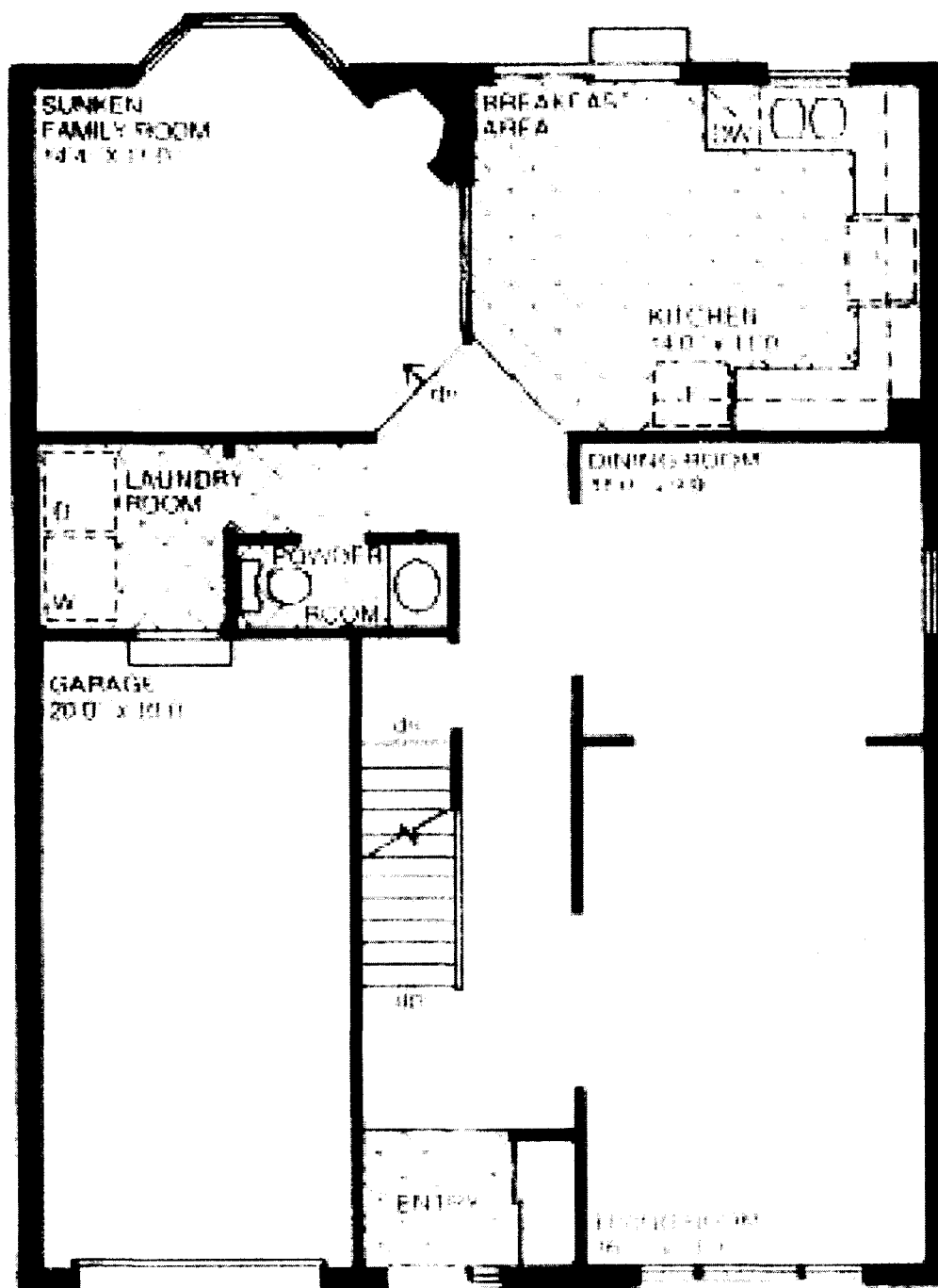


Fig. 41. "Sunlight" main floor plan, *Sunset* (Bramalea Limited, 1983). The garage was located where the dining room would be in a Georgian centre hall plan. The tandem arrangement of the living and dining rooms made the plan more akin to a Victorian house.

One interesting type of house built in Bramalea during the 1980s had a garage recessed into the massing of the house. In most of the developments built by Bramalea Limited during the 1980s, one or two models were arranged in such a manner. These designs were based on *both* the Georgian centre hall plan and the urban Victorian house.⁸² The symmetry and central hallway from the Georgian style was mimicked the 1983-1985 *Sunset* development (see Fig. 19). The “Sunlight” model adapted the Georgian-style house for the suburban environment by placing a single-car garage to one side of the central door (Fig.41). Where a parlour or dining room would have been found three hundred years before now became the location of the garage. On the exterior the garage was downplayed, as its door was completely flush with the façade of the house. The tandem arrangement of the rooms, and the long hallway next to them was reflective of Victorian house planning.

While many of the plans for houses built in Bramalea may have had roots in urban house design, they were adapted and altered to the suburban context. Originally, wider lot widths saw the prototypes expanded horizontally, but by the 1980s narrower lot widths saw a return to an arrangement more akin to the Victorian townhouse. The addition of a garage again saw these historic styles altered to suit the suburban environment. Even with all of the changes, the everlasting influence of the past on house design in Bramalea was undeniable.

3.9 Changing Economic Conditions

The addition of rooms to the average Bramalea house contributed to the fact that by 1990, the average size of new houses built was 2,725 square feet, double the 1965

⁸² Blumenson, *Ontario Architecture*, p.5.

average. While Bramalea was envisioned as a place that would offer living accommodations for all walks of life, affordable housing for lower-income families was no longer built by the mid 1980s. While many were built in the 1970s, the later half of the 1980s only saw the construction of luxury condominium apartments and townhouses, as well as high-end detached housing.

The growing house size in Bramalea was the most prominent change in the way that houses were designed, but the changing social norms, values, and economic conditions can not be overlooked. Examining the H-Section of Bramalea as a case study can best highlight these changes in house design.

The majority of houses built in the H-Section were detached zero lot-line houses in the *Villages of Central Park* from 1972-1974. These houses were built with affordability in mind and were supported by the Ontario Housing Corporation. To cut costs, the houses were built on small lots (thus the necessity of zero lot-line planning which will be explained in detail later in this work). The houses themselves were also small; the majority under 1,000 square feet (Fig. 42). Not surprisingly, their rooms were small, with kitchens as small as six-by-ten-feet. All of the plans had only one bathroom. Affordability was the most important guiding principal of the design for houses in this development, while still providing a fully detached house.

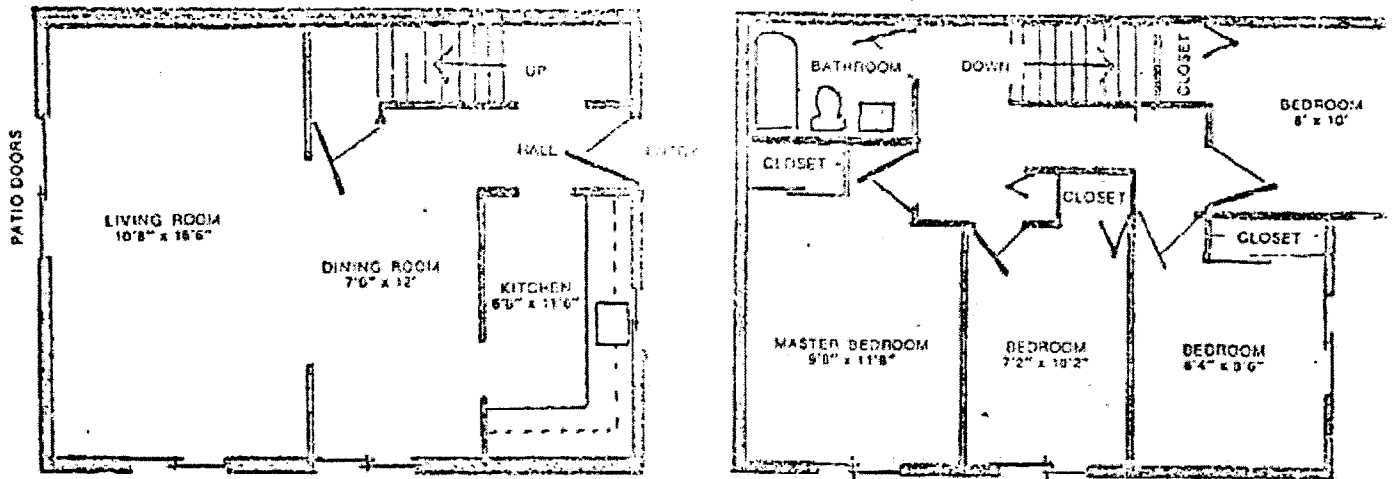


Fig. 42. "Ontario Habitat" floor plan, *Villages of Central Park* (1972). The small two-storey plan was smaller than many of the 1960s bungalows in Bramalea.

Ten years after the *Villages of Central Park* was completed, an infill development was built on land originally set aside for a school. Ninety-two houses in *Highland Park* were built in 1984 on narrow thirty-foot wide lots. While affordability was important, these houses were not supported by any government subsidy, and were more luxurious than the zero lot-line houses, even though they, too, were small in size. All the houses in *Highland Park* had an attached single-car garage, which none of the houses in the *Villages of Central Park* did not (Fig. 43). This reflected the importance of having a garage as a part of housing design by the mid 1980s. The houses were fairly small for the time, (1,202 to 1,392 square feet, with one larger model at 1,600 square feet), but they had the type of amenities common in larger Bramalea houses. All of the houses had a main-floor powder room and a full bathroom on the second level, although not an ensuite bathroom. Economic conditions at the time called for smaller, affordable houses, yet still with certain standard features that had become the norm since the 1970s.

In 1987-1988, the *Carriage Walk* development of luxury condominium townhouses was begun. As an expensive enclave, these townhouses were actually larger than the detached houses in both the *Villages of Central Park* and *Highland Park* (Fig 44). The smallest house at 1,225 square feet was larger than all of the zero-lot line houses, while in the second phase, *Carriage Walk South*, a 2,081 square foot model was built, which was twice as large as the zero-lot line houses. All but the smallest model had an ensuite bathroom off a large master bedroom. These models had three bathrooms total – two more than the houses in the *Villages of Central Park*. Even though these houses were attached, they were far more luxurious and expensive than the adjacent detached houses.

With increasing wealth during the late 1980s, luxury townhouses made sense in Bramalea, and thus were a successful endeavour. At the same time, the young families that first moved to the suburbs in the 1960s had grown up, leaving empty nesters. This type of development gave these couples the opportunity to stay in Bramalea, while living in a maintenance-free, amenity-rich condominium complex. On the flipside, the young, childless, executive couple also found such a complex desirable. Living in the suburbs had become more accepted for childless families, and even singles, many of which had grown up in suburbs like Bramalea. Thirty years earlier the population of Bramalea overwhelmingly consisted of young families with children, but with time the demographics transformed, thereby allowing for different types of housing.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Fig. 43. "702" floor plan, *Highland Park* (Bramalea Limited, 1984). Although still small, at 1,360 square feet, the house had more luxury features than the zero lot-line houses.

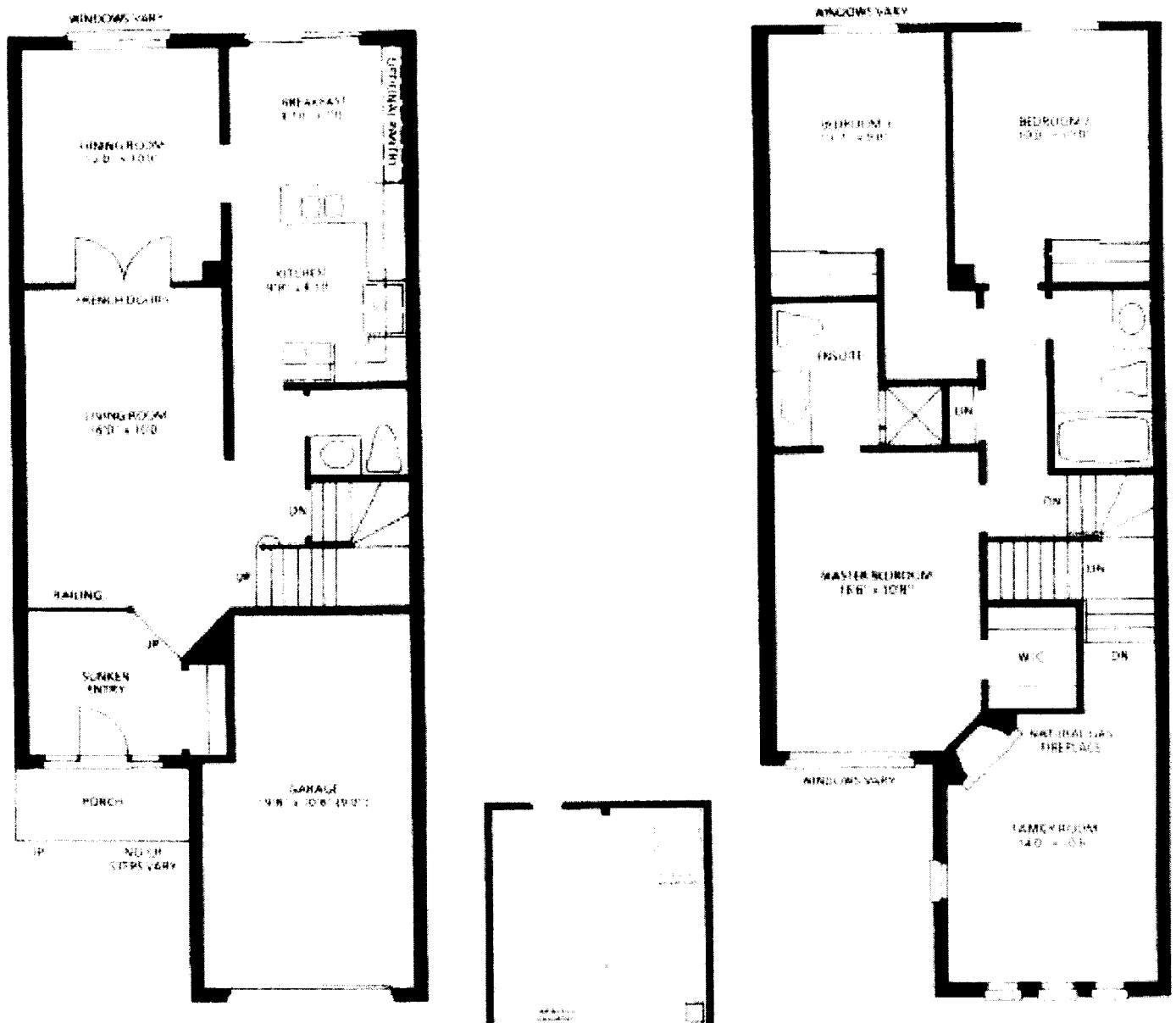


Fig. 44. "Delage" floor plan, *Carriage Walk South* (Bramalea Limited, 1989). Features such as three bathrooms (including an ensuite), a walk-in-closet in the master bedroom, a family room, and an attached garage made this 1,597 square foot house very luxurious. Of interesting note is the lack of a window in the living room.

The most dramatic change in housing design is evident at the last development in the H-Section. In 1989, Bramalea Limited released the first of a series of condominium

high-rise towers called the *Bellair Condominiums*. Titled “condomansions”⁸³ most of these units were over 1,000 square feet in size. With marble floors, coffered ceilings, and an ensuite bathroom off the large master bedroom, these units were even more luxurious than those of *Carriage Walk* (Fig. 45). This development could be seen as the pinnacle of luxuries that came with each additional development in the H-Section. Much like the demographics of Bramalea at the time allowed for developments like *Carriage Walk*, the same was true of the *Bellair Condominiums*. On the cusp of the 1990s, economic conditions allowed such condominiums in Bramalea, versus the need in the 1970s for affordable detached houses. Sadly, by the early 1990s projects like the *Bellair Condominiums* became financial burdens for Bramalea Limited, as the market became unfavourable for such luxurious and expensive condominiums. As a result of the inflated real estate bubble at the time, those who bought at the *Bellair Condominiums* in 1989 paid more than they are worth on the resale market today.

⁸³ *Toronto Star*, 9 December 1989, p.A10.

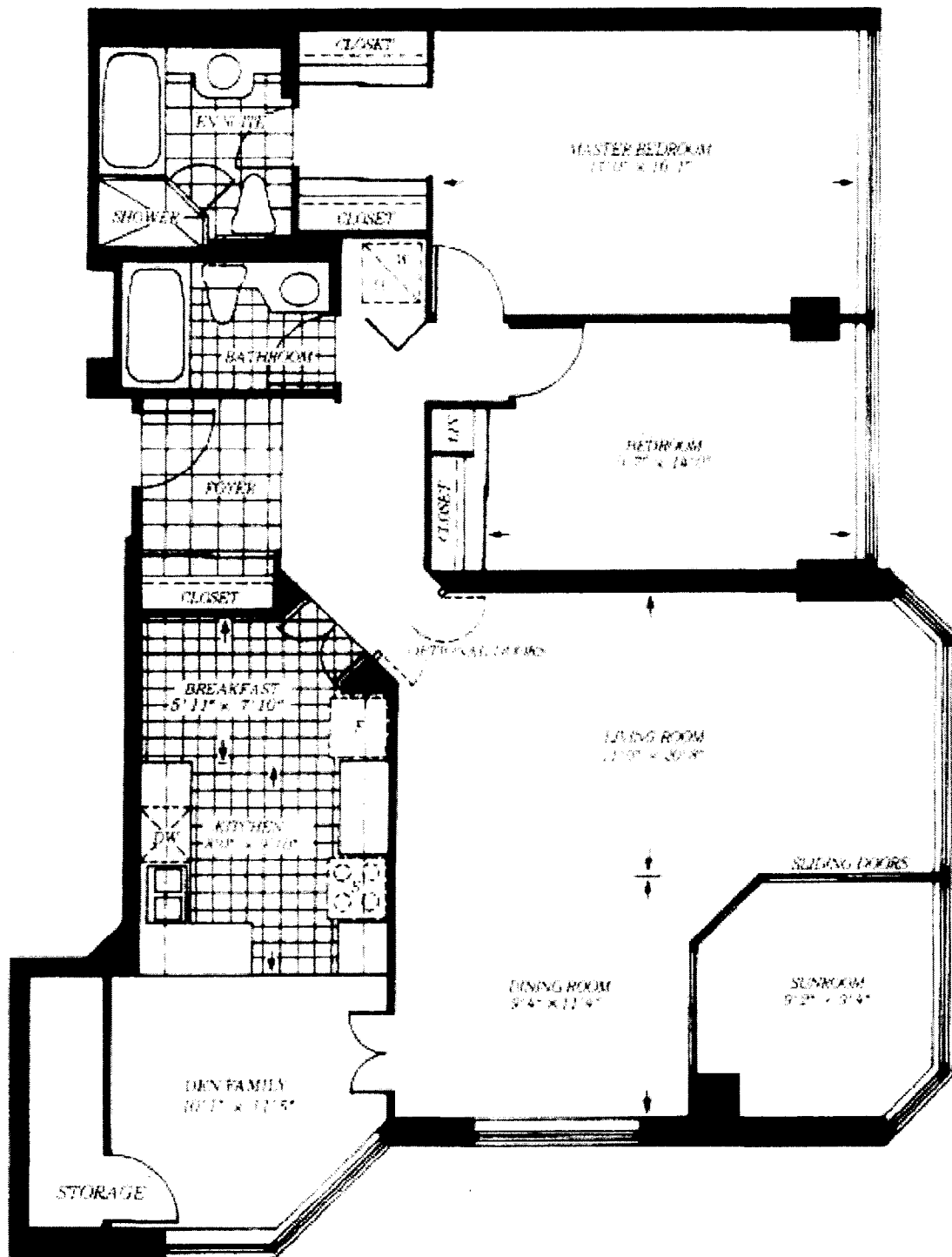


Fig. 45. "Alta Vista" floor plan, *Bellair Condominiums* (Bramalea Limited, 1989). At 1,400 square feet this condominium was larger than most of the detached houses in the H-Section.

CHAPTER 4:

THREE TYPES OF HOUSING IN BRAMALEA

To further explore the design of housing in Bramalea, three specific types will be examined in depth: zero lot-line housing, townhouses, and apartments. While the detached house may have been the most ubiquitous type built in Bramalea, these three examples also provide insight into suburban housing design. Examining the site plans for the developments, the exterior style, and the interior plans will further place such housing into the context of Bramalea and suburban housing design as a whole.

4.1 Canada's First Zero Lot-Line Housing

In the early 1970s, two hundred acres of land were made available in Bramalea by the Ontario Housing Corporation to build affordable housing. According to the master plan, the land was originally set aside for townhouses, which were believed to be the best solution to affordable housing. This plan was changed in 1972 in favour of a mixture of housing, but no specifics were outlined at the time.⁸⁴ In order to cut costs, building and planning standards were examined and decisions made as to how to build the most affordable housing. As a result, the Ontario Housing Corporation examined the standard lot size and lot setback standards for detached houses. At the time, the front-yard setback was twenty-five feet from the road, with four-foot side-yard setbacks. It was decided that these spaces were often underused, and thus could be eliminated, thus paving the way for the first application of the zero lot-line concept in Canada.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "Home in Brampton for \$750 down payment," *The Toronto Star*, 1 January 1972, p.43.

⁸⁵ "Ease rigid municipal standards to cut costs, builders ask," *The Toronto Star*, 3 June 1972, p.25.

The idea of zero lot-line planning was based on the fact that there were to be no setbacks, which meant that a house could be located right on the lot line of the property. Whereas the suburban tradition was to place a house in the centre of a lot, the new concept meant that a house could be placed on either the front, back, or side edge of a lot. The lot could be smaller, with most a mere thirty-by-eighty feet in size, in contrast to the standard fifty-by-one-hundred foot lot for detached houses in 1960s Bramalea. In many cases the lot was not a traditional rectangle, but a multi-faceted irregular shape (Fig. 46). By the end of 1972, the first of 2,400 houses were set to be built. The development was titled *The Villages of Central Park*, and all the houses were located on cul-de-sacs. This made the development very suburban in nature. Since these houses were detached, they fit in with the suburban dream of owning a house of one's own.

With the assistance of the Government of Ontario's H.O.M.E. (Home Ownership Made Easy) Plan, the houses were offered at an extremely low price. To make the houses even more affordable, the land was not owned, but leased from the Ontario Housing Corporation for up to fifty years. However, the homeowner had the option of buying the land outright after five years.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Toronto Star* 12 September 1972, p.67.



Fig. 46. Site plan of zero lot-line houses in the H-Section (www.bramptonmaps.com, 2006). This image shows that the lots were not rectangular, but rather irregular shapes.

In September 1972, construction began on the first six hundred and sixty-four houses of *The Villages of Central Park*. It was anticipated that these houses would take a year to sell, but in fact they sold out in just six weeks. A waiting list then had to be established for the forthcoming phases. By the middle of 1973, there were well over one thousand names still on the list. The builders had no way of keeping up with the huge

demand for the houses, so the list had to be cut off for the next few years to allow those already on it to purchase a home within in the development.⁸⁷ By 1974, there had been 1,700 lot-line houses built, with the final 700 in the project slated for completion that year. For the thousands still on the waiting list wanting the remaining 700 houses, a lottery was held to pick names. Those on the list had the option of paying a fee of \$100 to enter it, or dropping off the list. If their name was drawn from the lottery, the potential homeowner was shown the available houses and had to make a decision on the spot to purchase.⁸⁸ Some stipulations were attached to the purchase, such as that the buyer had to live in the house and not rent it out. In addition, the house could not be sold for five years without the permission of the Ontario Housing Corporation.⁸⁹

While the concept was a success, it was not without its drawbacks. Some of the first streets to be built adopted a herringbone formation, with the houses angled diagonally from the road (Fig. 47). The problem with this setup was that, with the houses placed so close together at right angles, the front windows overlooked each other. The arrangement was discarded in later developments, and houses were designed with blank facades to be placed on the lot line to ensure privacy. Even so, the streetscape was not like a typical suburban block with houses in a neat row; instead they looked haphazard with some placed right at the street and others pulled back. The houses were also rotated on the lot, with some having the wide side facing the street, and others the narrow end.

⁸⁷ *Toronto Star* 18 April 1974, p.A6.

⁸⁸ *Toronto Star* 11 July 1974, p.A21.

⁸⁹ Saulius Svirplys, *Bramalea: The History of its Architecture and Built Environment* (Gatineau: Saulius Svirplys, 2005).

For some of the early residents, it took a while to get used to the odd landscape created by the layout.⁹⁰

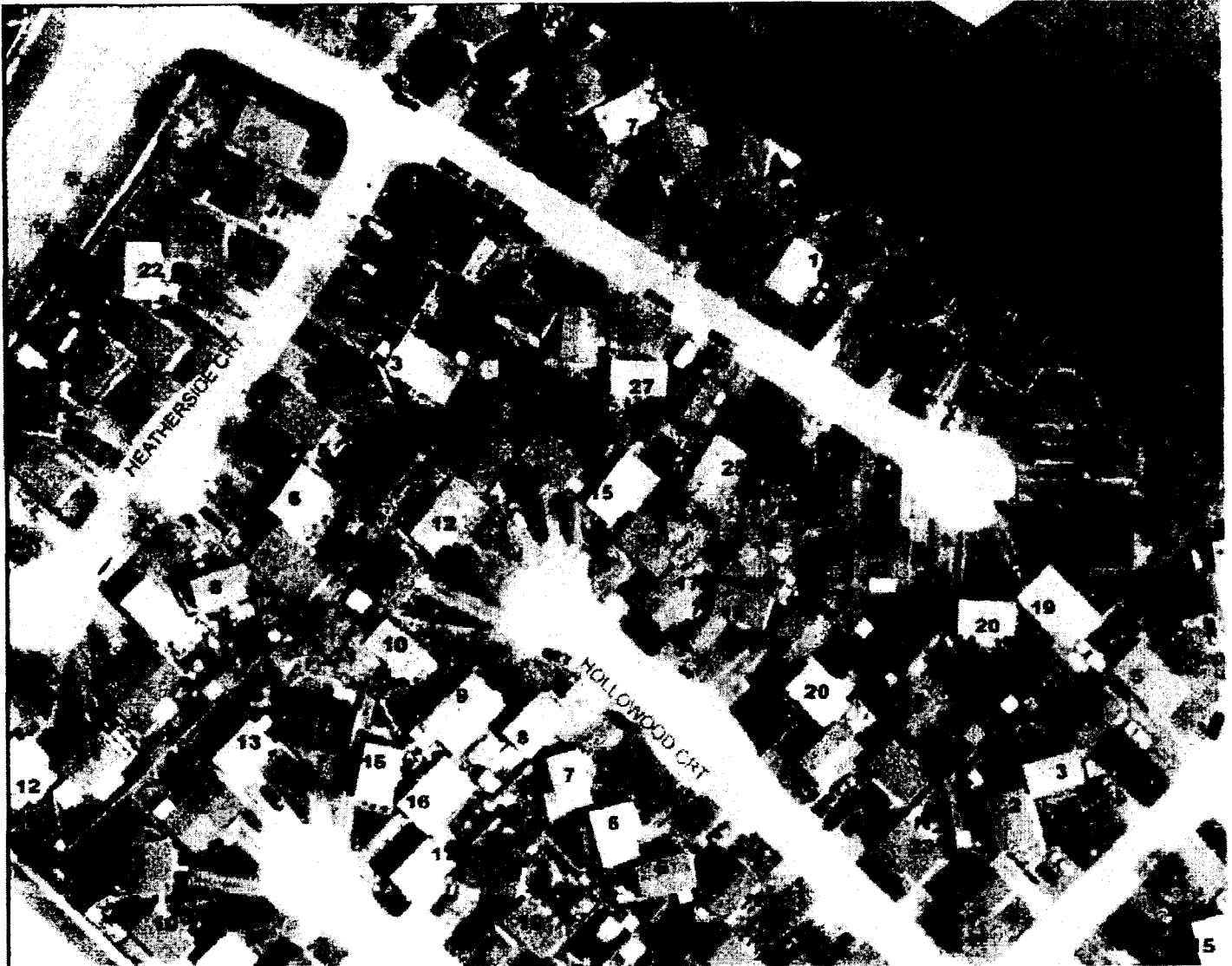


Fig. 47. Air photo of the zero lot-line houses in the H-Section (www.bramptonmaps.com, 2006). From the air, the seemingly haphazard placement of the houses is apparent. At the top of the photo are the houses that were sited in a herringbone pattern with problems of privacy.

The second problem that continues to plague *The Villages of Central Park* was the fact that the streets were very narrow in order to cut costs; sidewalks were also omitted.

⁹⁰ Stan Davies, "Residents like the small lots, and the \$19,000 price," *The Toronto Star*, 6 September 1973, p.E1.

The narrow streets became problematic because they were always lined with parked cars, as the tiny lot sizes did not allow for much parking, and none of the houses had garages. Snow removal in winter months proved to be a logistical nightmare; the city was forced to purchase smaller snow removal equipment. The high density of the development, coupled with narrow streets lined with parked cars, could easily have been mistaken for an urban residential area in downtown Toronto.



Fig.48. Houses in the G-Section (Saulius Svirplys). This photo shows the unusual roof that rolls down the façade of the houses, as well as the location of some of the houses at right angles to one another.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the developments was not the placement of the houses on the lot, but the style of the houses themselves. An array of very contemporary features distinguished the basic rectangular shape of the houses in *The Villages of Central Park*. The most striking element was the uneven roofline of most of the houses. While a traditional gable roof had the peak at the centre, these houses had the peak placed off-centre allowing two different angles of the roofline, one usually very steep. In some cases

the roof rolled down the side of the house and ended at the bottom of the upper level windows (Fig. 48). When the house was turned so that the gabled end faced the road, the profile of the roof was unlike anything one would expect in a suburban context (Fig. 49).

Secondly, the window arrangement of the zero lot-line houses was unusual, especially by suburban standards. On many of the houses, irregular spacing and window sizes were found on any given façade. For privacy reasons with the zero lot-line arrangement, all houses had a windowless façade on the side that sat on the lot line (Fig 50). In some cases, the front of the house, which faced the street, was void of any openings, save for the front door. Such a house presented a very unwelcoming face to the street.

As explored earlier in this work, most people had preset notions of what a house was to look like, especially in the suburbs. The uneven rooflines and irregular window placement of the zero lot-line houses were unlike anything that had been built *en masse* before in residential architecture. Many of the odd façades of the houses in *The Villages of Central Park* have since been altered over the years. To make them more “suburban” in style, homeowners added regular shaped windows, windows on walls which had been bare, as well as window boxes and shutters (Fig. 51). Even so, the majority of the houses retain their quirky exteriors.

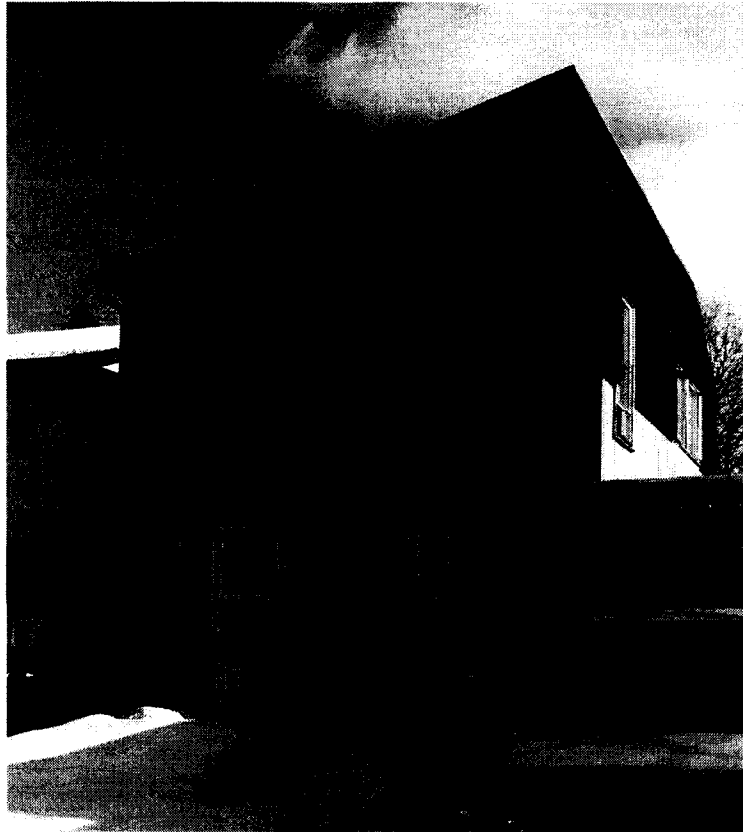


Fig. 49. House in the H-Section (Saulius Svirplys). In profile, the roofline is unlike anything ever seen in suburban architecture. Many residents have opted to add a window on the second floor façade.



Fig. 50. Houses in the H-Section (Saulius Svirplys). The house on the left had few windows on the visible sides for privacy reasons.

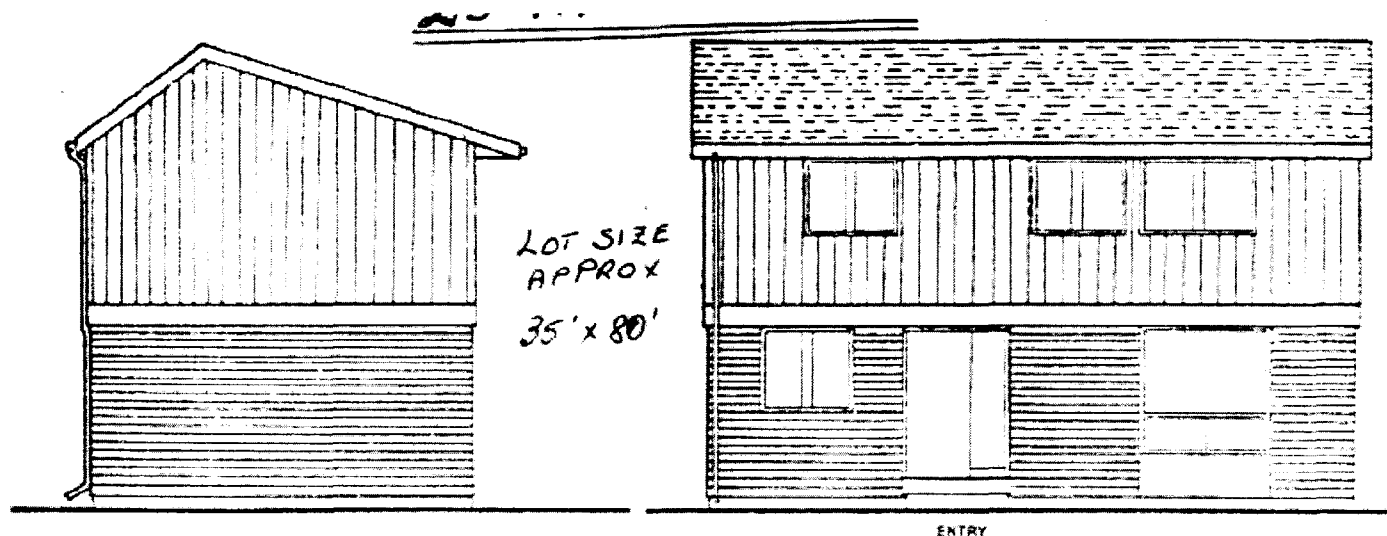


Fig. 51. Houses in the H-Section (Saulius Svirplys). The house in the centre has had traditional windows and shutters added. The house to its left still has the original horizontal windows on the second floor. The close proximity of the houses meant that there was a lack of a front yard, especially with both driveways so close together. It is hard to discern where the property line between each house is.

As a way of cutting costs, the houses in *The Villages of Central Park* were purposely made small, without any wastage of space. While house sizes had started to grow in Bramalea during the 1970s, the zero lot-line houses actually stepped back to even smaller sizes than those of the original houses from the 1960s.

The “Ontario Chateau” was designed as a centre-hall plan akin to the Georgian houses referred to earlier in this work (Fig. 52). Upstairs, the design only had windows on the front of the house, as this particular model was commonly located on the lots where the house was at the back of the lot-line. While the floor plan showed a sliding glass door on the back of the house, the location of the model at the back of the lot-line meant that the only openings on the house were located on the front. This arrangement would have the location of the sliding glass door in the living room moved to the front of the house.

In this case, the front, and technically the back door, were on the same side of the house. Because the only yard was located at the front, the entire front yard was usually fenced in, jarring expectations about the distinction between front and back yards, and public and private spaces. As these were all features that had become synonymous with suburban living, the zero lot-line house was a striking shift.



the Ontario Chateau (S-3-7-AB)

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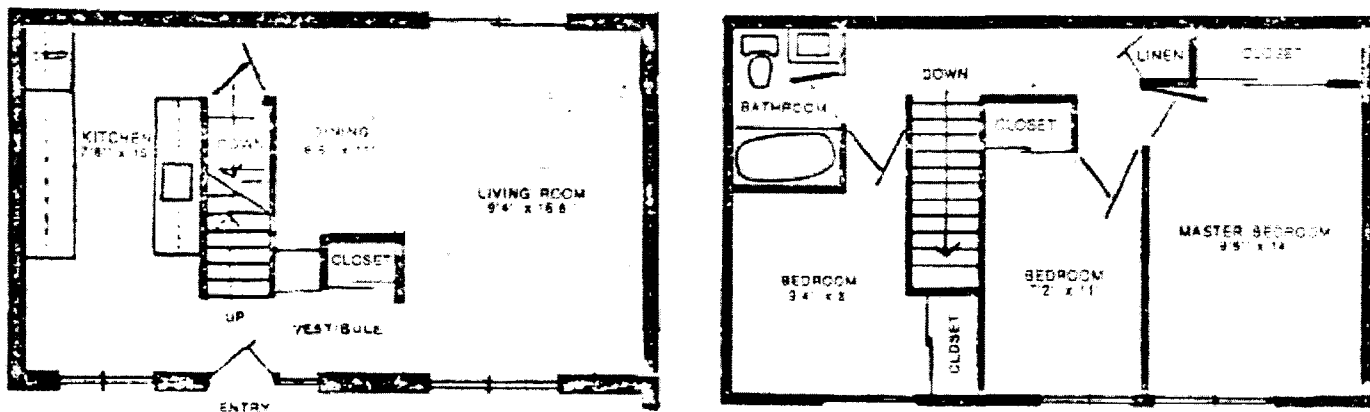


Fig. 52. "Ontario Chateau" elevations and floor plan, *Villages of Central Park* (1972). The house was designed with no windows on the sides or back on the second floor for privacy reasons.

The Villages of Central Park was an example that rewrote the pre-conceived notions and fantasies of suburban housing. While the zero lot-line concept made a fully-detached house possible, the lot sizes were much smaller than before, allowing for higher densities of housing. In many parts of *The Villages of Central Park* privacy issues were at the forefront, especially in the first set of houses where the overlooking windows made the area seem very urban in nature. The architecture of *The Villages of Central Park* seemed foreign and not suburban – or even urban for that matter.

4.2 Townhouses

Thousands of townhouses were built in Bramalea throughout its history, of varying styles, sizes, and price ranges. During the 1970s, Bramalea was the location of the largest number of high-density townhouse developments newly built in Ontario.⁹¹ Like detached and semi-detached housing, the design of townhouses changed with time. Bramalea's townhouses were unique in that 95% of them were condominiums. This meant that homeowners shared common elements and areas, and also paid fees to have the complex maintained. Being condominiums not only affected the overall appearance and upkeep of the houses – even if they were inexpensive – it also had an impact on the way the neighbourhood was designed. Whereas detached houses were sited independently of one another, condominium townhouses had to be arranged to relate to one another, as well as to shared amenities, such as a pool. In Bramalea, the arrangement of townhouses followed several patterns, each with a distinct housing design.

Ontario's first condominium housing debuted with a group of townhouses built in the B-Section of Bramalea. It became possible only with the passing of the proper

⁹¹ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.195.

legislation by the province in 1967, to authorize ownership of common elements.⁹² Two clusters of near-identical townhouses were built across the street from each other; the houses on the south side being built as rentals. What made both clusters of townhouses unique was their arrangement on the site. None of the houses had a garage; instead, communal parking lots were scattered throughout the development. The rows of houses were arranged in a varied fashion, some parallel to the main road and others perpendicular to it. This arrangement removed many of the houses from both the road and the parking lot, making them accessible only by a walking path. An abundance of greenery and parkland surrounding the site made the development very similar to the garden cities envisioned by Ebenezer Howard in the 1890s. Townhouses built in the first ever garden city, Letchworth in England, were arranged in a similar manner along pedestrian paths, rather than a roadway.⁹³ While Letchworth predated widespread automobile ownership, the overall design sought to remove the houses from roads where carriages passed, and to align them with open spaces. In Bramalea, many townhouses faced or backed onto communal parkland, instead of a street. This type of development plan was only suited to a condominium or rental arrangement with a common body in charge of maintaining shared walkways and parkland. The composition itself was synonymous with the fantasy of the suburbs as a place with plentiful open green spaces. While the houses may have been attached, they did not feel crowded thanks to their parkland location and the fact that they were not lined up in a row on a main road.

⁹² *Bramalea: A Profile of Canada's First Satellite City*, nl: np, nd.

⁹³ Charlotte Fiell ed. and Peter Fiell ed., *1900s, 1910s Decorative Art* (Köln: Taschen, 2000), p.108, 144-145.

Village in Bramalea, which was a return to the type of townhouse development where garage-less houses were centered on green space rather than the main road or parking areas (Fig. 53). While growing car ownership necessitated more and larger parking areas, the development still featured an abundance of open spaces, including a playground and outdoor pool. The 1967 development was more linear in shape and had no through streets, but *The Village in Bramalea* had a narrow private road, with speed bumps, that connected the parking areas to the main street. The importance of the car at the time made this design change a necessity.

One of the greatest differences between the townhouses in Bramalea and those of garden cities like *Letchworth* was the style of the houses. In Letchworth, the townhouses were designed to look like one large manor house. This was a British tradition that had roots in buildings like Bath's famous "King's Circus" and "King's Crescent" by John Wood, built between 1754 and 1767. In both the Circus and the Crescent, all of the houses in the row were completely identical, making the entire block look like a massive palace. In contrast *The Village in Bramalea* was unique in that each house in the row was treated completely differently, from the colour of the roof shingles, to the exterior materials used (Fig. 54). Six completely different historically inspired exterior styles were built, with nearly unlimited colour options. As a result, in a particular row no two houses were alike. While only three plans of the same square footage were offered, the development did not suffer from monotony. Even the houses within the row had variety, as some units were pushed back a foot or two, while others were pulled forward. This all tied in nicely with the suburban dream of owning a unique house of one's own, even if a detached house could not be afforded.

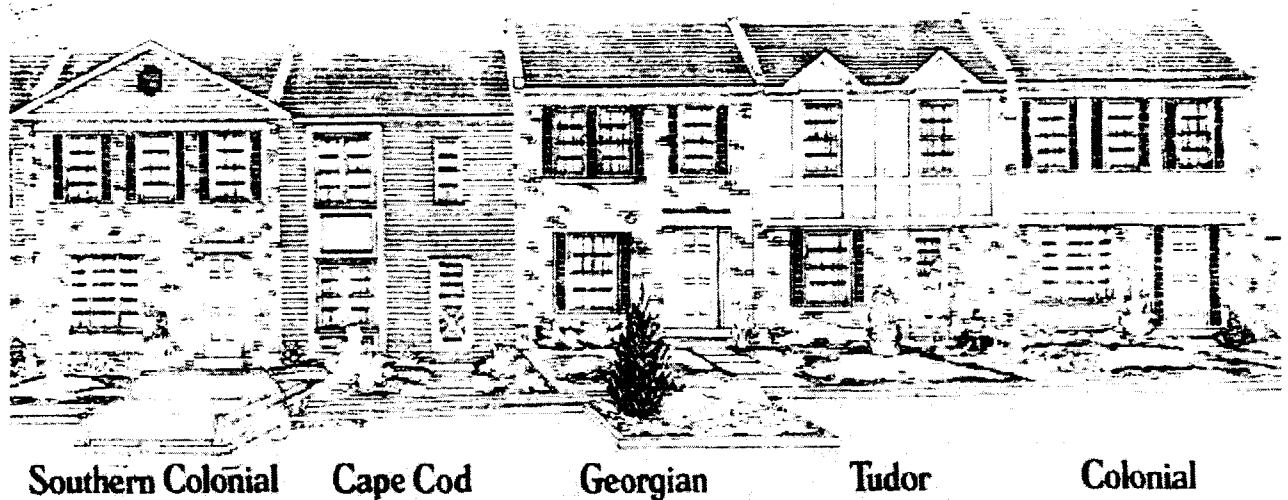


Fig. 54. *The Village in Bramalea* facades (Bramalea Consolidated Developments, 1975). Each unit had a different style facade.

To the west of *The Village in Bramalea*, another development was built called *The Village Two in Bramalea* with the same house designs and a similar arrangement. Subsequently, in 1977-1978 a development was built called *The Village Three in Bramalea*, although this design had moved away from the garden city influence. While a green space occupied the centre of the development, all of the houses had garages, requiring them to face a road and creating a more monotonous streetscape. From an aesthetic perspective, the garden city arrangement was more appealing. From a pragmatic perspective, especially with growing car ownership, not having an attached garage, or having a parking area removed from the front of the house was not ideal particularly in the cold winter months. While rental housing residents may have been willing to accept common outdoor parking areas, townhouse owners, “demanded that the car had to be next to the house,”⁹⁴ preferably in an attached garage. The 1970s developments of *The New Englanders* and *Cedar Glen* featured similar garage-less plans to those in *The*

⁹⁴ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.195.

Village in Bramalea, but the houses faced a main street, with parking pads directly behind the houses. This type of arrangement did not provide much open green space. *The Village in Bramalea* and *The Village Two in Bramalea* were the last developments in Bramalea to be inspired by garden cities. By the 1980s all houses in Bramalea, including townhouses, had an attached garage.

The second grouping of townhouse developments in Bramalea was a hybrid between the garden city type and a new garage centred type. Starting in 1971, Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited began construction of a project for over 1000 townhouses within three developments, all sharing the same set of floor plans. The designs—six in all, half with attached garages—were simply titled *Bramalea Townhouses*. The largest of the three with attached garages was a three-story plan. The *Bramalea Townhouses* lacked the variety of *The Village in Bramalea* in terms of exterior style. The plans without garages allowed the houses to be arranged in a manner akin to that of a garden city. In one of the developments, *Clark Square*, the houses without garages were located in the centre of the complex and served by a central parking lot. As in *The Village in Bramalea*, many of the houses were centred on a green space and were connected to the parking lot via pedestrian pathways. The houses with garages were located in the outer ring of the development and were served by a private road.

The largest development in which *Bramalea Townhouses* were built was called *Bramalea Park*, locally known as “Fleetwood Crescent” after the name of the road that snaked through the development. The sheer size of the development, with hundreds of houses, was overwhelming. While a few slivers of green space existed behind some of the houses, the complex produced an overall feeling of overcrowding. Certain sections of

the complex only had three-storey townhouses with garages. These areas, with narrow streets or dead-end lanes, made the sheer height of the houses feel even more overpowering. The development was purposely built to be inexpensive, and by crowding more houses into an area, the price could be lowered. Many of the rows of garage-less houses were extremely long, sometimes up to twenty together. The plain facades of identical units were not made to look like a palace, in the manner of “King’s Crescent” in Bath, but ended up looking like worker’s housing in England during the industrial revolution (Fig. 55). All units in the complex had the same monotonous colour of brick and siding. This development did not even attempt to fulfil the fantasy of living in a suburban area with open spaces and individual housing.

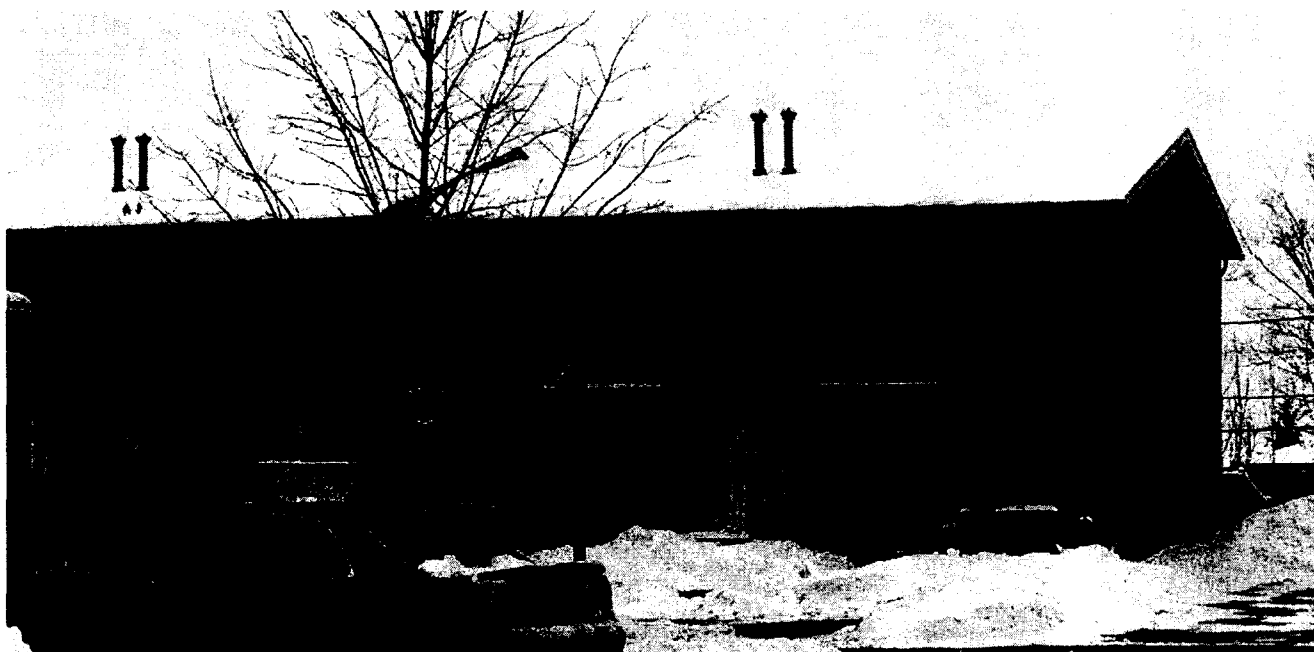


Fig. 55. Houses built based on the *Bramalea Townhouses* plans, *Clark Square* (Saulius Svirplys). The plain facades and long rows of houses made these units look like industrial workers housing.

The three-storey townhouse was a direct by-product of the fact that more families could afford to own a car and wanted an attached garage. Yet, a garage attached to the

front of a townhouse eliminated front-facing windows on the main floor. The wide garage and the narrow front door area together took up all of the main floor width of a typical eighteen- to twenty-foot wide townhouse. This meant that the back was the only exterior wall on the main floor that could have windows to bring natural light into the house.

While many two-storey townhouses with attached garages were built in Bramalea, the three-storey townhouse with garage became more common during the 1970s. In a three-storey townhouse, the “main floor” was raised to the second level to allow windows both front and back, the garage being one floor below. This arrangement was similar to the type of houses built in Renaissance Italy, where the main living spaces were on the *Piano Nobile* built above a ground floor that was reserved for service functions. Historically, in urban areas, it has also been common to raise the living spaces above the service or commercial uses and the busy street below.

The “Type D” model of *Bramalea Townhouses* was three stories tall, without a basement (Fig. 56). The three-storey plan enabled the house to offer five bedrooms (four on the third level and one on the ground level), which was something unique to townhouses and detached houses at the time.

While practical, the three-storey house was a visual departure from all things suburban. Early suburban houses embraced the horizontal and favoured sprawling ranch houses. Three floors above grade was a marked divergence from the bungalow, the most common type of 1960s Bramalea housing. Not only was the townhouse a more urban housing type, so too was the idea of having to build up, rather than out horizontally. In many parts of downtown Toronto, the historic three-storey townhouse was common, but

a similar type of house in the suburban environment seemed out of place. Nonetheless, it became necessary in order to provide affordable housing and an attached garage.

While overcrowding existed in these lower-priced townhouse developments, more expensive townhouse complexes in Bramalea also suffered from monotony and close quarters. The *Bramalea Hamlet* built by Bramalea Consolidated Developments in 1971 was a development with higher-priced townhouses sandwiched into a tight site (Fig. 57). All of the townhouses were three stories tall with garages. Given their height on a narrow private road, the development felt more urban than suburban. The garages were recessed into the massing of the houses allowing them to be moved closer to the road, and the driveways were only deep enough to park one car. On a sunny day with a low winter sun, the street actually got very little natural light due to the height of the houses. While this phenomenon was common in urban areas with skyscrapers, it was unexpected in the suburbs. The exteriors of the houses were brick on the lower floor, with a cedar-shake mansard roof for the upper two floors. Perhaps this roof design was an attempt by the designer to make the houses look less tall. Throughout the development, the houses all looked exactly the same.

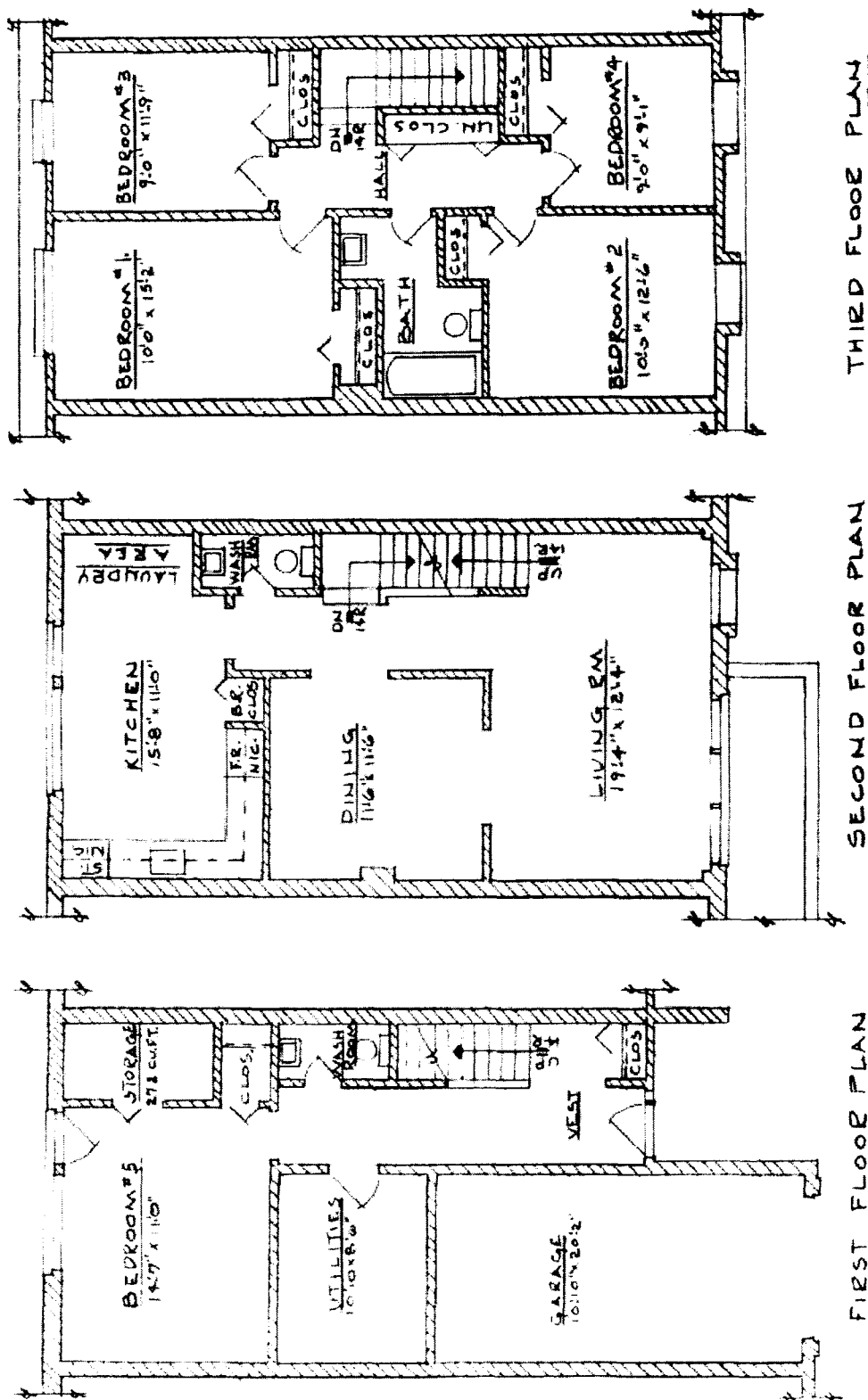


Fig. 56. "Type D" floor plan, *Bramalea Townhouses* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1971). The three-storey plan had the main living spaces on the second floor, which allowed for front-facing windows.



Fig. 57. Houses in *Bramalea Hamlet* (Saulius Svirplys). This winter photo shows the shaded street due to the height of the houses. Only one car could be parked in the shallow driveways. In the background is the *Clark House*, the first high-rise in Bramalea.

The sweeping townhouses of Bath's "King's Circus" were mimicked in the Ashton Crescent development in the M-Section of Bramalea. Here, curved blocks of three-storey townhouses created an irregular oval shape. While the concept was similar to that in Bath, the houses were of a much inferior style and lacked uniformity. The open space in the centre of "King's Circus" was a park, whereas on Ashton Crescent, two rows of houses were squeezed into the central area. In Bath, the open space allowed for the

overall impact of the curved rows to be taken in, but in Bramalea there was nowhere to stand back to see the entire composition. The best view of the oval was actually from air photos (Fig. 58). The open spaces of this development were relegated to the sizable greenbelt and river running behind, but these did nothing to alleviate the claustrophobic arrangement within the complex. For those units in the centre of the oval, the closeness of the neighbouring three-storey houses was felt on all sides.



Fig. 58. Air photo of Ashton Crescent (www.bramptonmaps.com, 2006). By far the best view of the complex was from the air.

By 1980, townhouses were no longer being built in Bramalea; instead, detached houses on extremely narrow lot widths were being constructed. The narrow lot widths brought down their cost, yet the houses were still detached. Not having affordable housing was a movement away from the idea that Bramalea was to be a place where housing was provided for “all walks of life”. While the 1970s had many affordable housing developments in Bramalea, the 1980s had few.

A sign of the growing economy during the 1980s was the return of new townhouse construction in Bramalea, but this time they were expensive. Starting in 1987, Bramalea Limited began construction on an exclusive enclave of condominium townhouses called *Carriage Walk*. Designed to be Brampton’s most luxurious gated townhouse community, the houses came with a high price for the time, starting at \$140,000.⁹⁵ The entire community had only one entrance and was surrounded by a massive brick wall. While the wall gave the development an air of exclusivity, it also blocked out the view of the low-priced zero lot-line houses beyond the complex. A pool, spa, cabana, interlocking stone walkways and full exterior maintenance were some of the benefits of living in *Carriage Walk*.

In 1988 *Carriage Walk South*, a sister complex separated from the original by a church was begun. While some of the same plans were built, larger models were introduced with over 2,000 square feet, starting at a price of \$200,000. The popularity of the complex to young professionals without children and to empty nesters prompted the release of two two-bedroom models in the development (See Fig. 32).⁹⁶ These plans had two large bedrooms, each with an ensuite bathroom, and even a fireplace in the master

⁹⁵ “Mayor breaks ground on Luxury Brampton Townhomes,” *Toronto Star*, 14 November 1987, p.E2.

⁹⁶ “Brand new townhome designs announced,” *Toronto Star*, 23 January 1988, p.E12.

bedroom of one of the models. These houses were a departure from the low-priced five-bedroom *Bramalea Townhouses* built a decade before.

As a sign of the times, reflecting economic prosperity, even the high-rise condominiums built during the late 1980s in Bramalea were luxurious and high priced. The condominium lifestyle evidently became very desirable during the late 1980s in both high-rise and townhouse developments in Bramalea.

Between 1989-1991, Bramalea Limited built condominium townhouses in a complex called *Parc Laurel*; they shared the same luxuries as the two *Carriage Walk* enclaves. However, softening economic conditions meant that the prices of the townhouses in this development had to be lowered, and the project took a lot longer to sell than *Carriage Walk*. Bramalea Limited started to suffer financially at this time, leading up to its collapse in 1995.

In 1988 Bramalea Limited made plans to build two high-rise condominium towers on the shores of prestigious Professor's Lake – a man-made lake in north Bramalea. A City of Brampton Planning and Development diagram from 1988 showed two condominium towers, with rows of townhouses at their base.⁹⁷ In 1990, advertisements for Bramalea Limited's developments indicated that a community of condominiums called *Watermark*, would be built on the lake. Residents around the lake petitioned the city against the development, as they felt the high-rises were not in keeping with the character of the area. Residents stormed council meetings and pushed the city to reject the high-rises. Eventually, the Ontario Municipal Board became involved, and the high rises were prevented from being built. Even though much of Bramalea had become very urban

⁹⁷ City of Brampton Planning and Development, "Bramalea Limited Multiple Family Site – Map No. 47-26N," 21 Apr 1988.

in nature by this time, the suburban nature of the area around Professor's Lake was protected. Ironically, had the residents of Professor's Lake reviewed the Master Plan for Bramalea, they would have seen that the area where Bramalea Limited planned to build high-rises was originally set out for high-density housing.

In the case of the Professor's Lake development, Bramalea Limited was forced to go back to the drawing board to figure out what type of housing to build on the land. They now proposed a complex of fairly high-priced, freehold townhouses, for middle income earners. After four decades of almost exclusive building of condominium townhouses in Bramalea, the last townhouses constructed were actually freehold. Bramalea Limited began selling *Hampton Landing* in 1994. In 1995, when the company went bankrupt, they halted the project. A year later, however, Aspen Ridge Homes completed the houses.

Even though high-rises were never built on Professor's Lake, the townhouses that were built were more urban in style than suburban. Most of the units were three or even four stories tall. The two two-storey models were raised up from the ground half a floor, making them also stand tall (Fig. 59). These high-rise townhouses loomed a full three floors higher than the one-storey bungalows of the first neighbourhoods in Bramalea.

While the early townhouse developments in Bramalea had sought to promote the suburban fantasy of open spaces, later projects were openly urban in nature. With affordability the most important factor in most of the townhouses built in 1970s, the result was a crowded and monotonous environment. Increasing car ownership and attached garages, made the three-storey townhouse common. The townhouses in

Bramalea were topped of at four storeys – the exact height of the first apartment blocks built in Bramalea in 1964.



Fig. 59. Facades, *Hampton Landing* (Aspen Ridge Homes, 1996). Even the two-storey units at the ends seemed tall. This images shows the whole block from a far vantage point. In reality, the streets are narrow and no such broad view exists.

4.3 Apartments

From the beginning, apartments had been a part of the housing plan for Bramalea. Even though apartments may not have been synonymous with the fantasy of suburban living, the idea of Bramalea as a city where housing for “all walks of life” was to be provided, made their inclusion necessary. Therefore, construction began in 1964 on two, four-storey rental apartment buildings. Their one- and two-bedroom apartments had the same amenities as single-family houses in Bramalea, as well as large rooms and a modern kitchen. Their rents were kept low to accommodate those who could not afford to buy a house.⁹⁸

In 1969, Bramalea’s first high-rise apartment was opened for rental. At fourteen floors, *Clark House* was tall for the time, but soon became one of the shorter apartment

⁹⁸ *Toronto Daily Star*, 6 June 1964, p.5.

buildings in Bramalea (see Fig. 57). When built, Toronto Star author Stan Davies commented that it was “incongruous to see a high rise out in the country practically surrounded by fields.”⁹⁹ However, it was located on the edge of what was to become the city centre of Bramalea, where over thirty apartment and condominium towers were eventually built.

Clark House was designed to appeal to younger renters with its cutting-edge interior design, including an interactive, lighted mural in the foyer. This indicated that even though *Clark House* existed in the suburbs, it was not intended for families.¹⁰⁰ But as a “chic” place to live, young singles and couples might find it appealing.

While the *Clark House* high-rise was not designed for families, in 1971 Bramalea Consolidated Developments unveiled a plan for multi-family housing that was intended for families. Since its inception, “architects have re-searched (sic) new forms of family housing at medium densities... [in] Bramalea. Examining combinations of two to six-storey buildings... a height limit of six storeys [was set] for family housing, since it was felt that beyond this point there was a definite loss of contact with the ground, which would be highly disadvantageous for families with young children.”¹⁰¹ *Concept 3* was an example of multi-family housing that made sense in a suburban context. The design was based on three stacked townhouses, two-stories each and each with its own separate entrance. Called ‘deck housing’, the upper units were accessed via an enclosed pedestrian street on the fourth floor, with elevators and stairs clustered at the ends. This was a similar concept to Moshe Safdie’s design for *Habitat ‘67* in Montreal. A newspaper

⁹⁹ Stan Davies, “High rise that’s different,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 August 1969, p.27.

¹⁰⁰ Holdsworth, *Housing Form and Use of Domestic Space*, p.196.

¹⁰¹ Jerome Markson, “Concept 3,” *The Canadian Architect*, February 1973, p.36.

article called the pedestrian walkways in *Concept 3* “streets in the sky”.¹⁰² The lower units were accessed by individual doors at grade level, and designed like townhouses. Each of the units had three or four bedrooms and two bathrooms, and were between 1,217 and 1,467 square feet¹⁰³, giving them the features expected for single-family housing in Bramalea at the time. Each unit was specifically designed to feel like an individual house, with privacy and appealing views. The backs of the buildings were characterized by a façade that stepped back so that each unit had a private terrace (Fig. 60).



Fig. 60. Terraced façade of *Concept 3* (Saulius Svirplys). The original design called for pergola-like structures and angled terrace railings to prevent upper units from looking over the outdoor spaces of lower units. These have since been removed.

¹⁰² Mack Parliament, “Bramalea to start building its ‘streets in the sky’ project,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 8 March 1968, p.19.

¹⁰³ *Toronto Daily Star*, 4 December 1971, p.36.

Even though the units were designed to feel like townhouses, only the lower units had a typical townhouse arrangement with living spaces on the main floor and bedrooms on the second (Fig. 61). The middle units were entered on the upper floor where the bedrooms were, and one descended a flight of stairs to access the main living spaces. In the upper units, one ascended a flight of stairs from a private vestibule to access the main floor. While the design was well executed, it could never escape from the fact that it was multi-family housing.

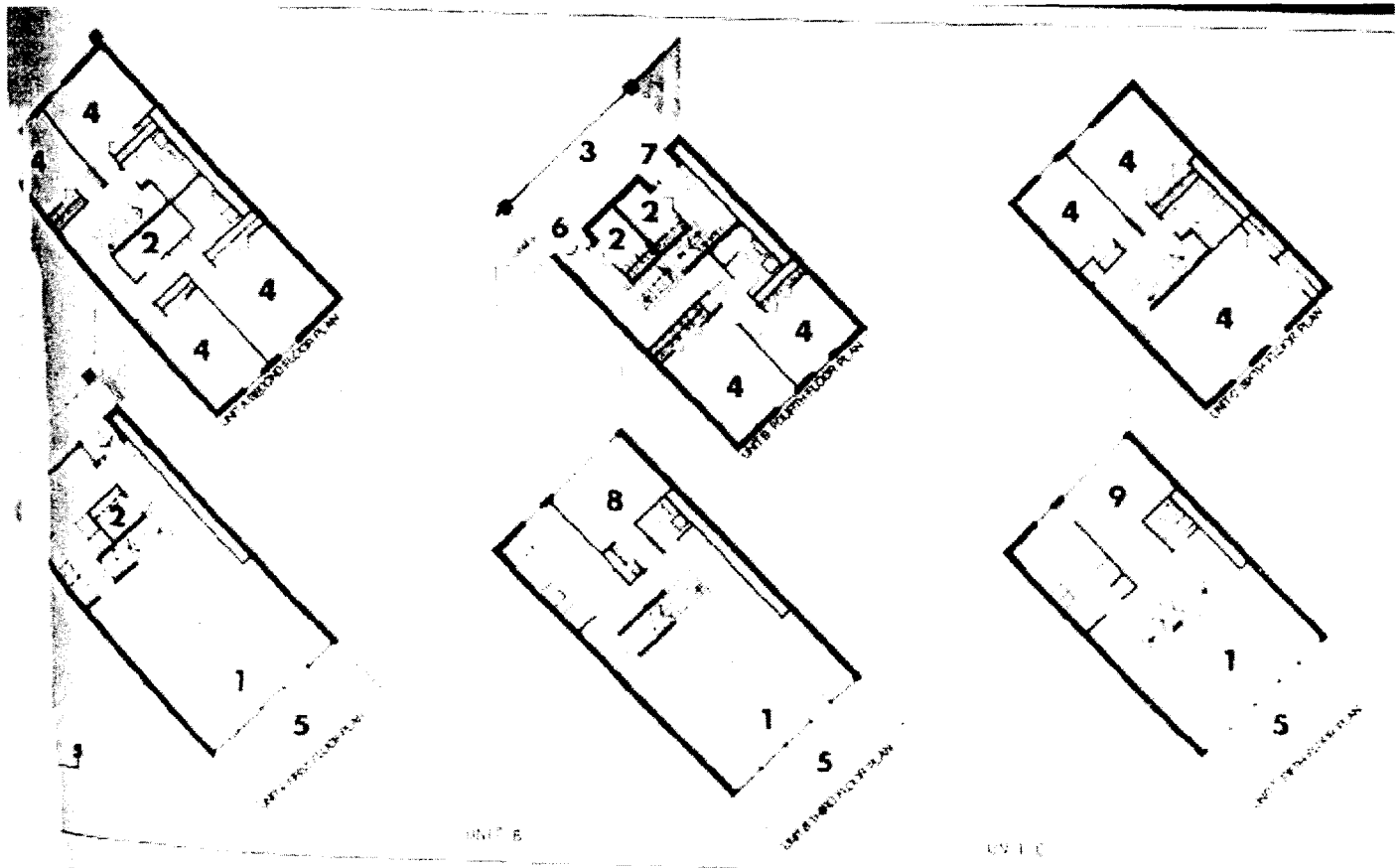


Fig. 61. Floor plans, *Concept 3* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1971). Key to numbers: 1.living; 2.storage; 3.pedestrian street; 4.bedroom; 5.terrace; 6.unit B entry; 7.unit C entry; 8.bedroom/den/dining; 9.dining.

The entire *Concept 3* complex was designed with eight buildings in a nautilus spiral shape, interconnected by the fourth-floor pedestrian walkway (Fig. 62). The

majority of the parking accommodations were underground, leaving about 57% of the land as open communal space.¹⁰⁴ At the centre of the spiral was a swimming pool, a private sanctuary for residents. While the design fostered the suburban fantasy of individuality and privacy, the common spaces fostered a sense of community.



Fig. 62. Site plan, *Concept 3* (Bramalea Consolidated Developments Limited, 1971). The nautilus shape buildings surrounded a common area with a pool.

¹⁰⁴ Markson, "Concept 3," p.36.

Originally marketed as condominium units to purchase, later advertisements for the project, which was re-launched under the name *Folkstone Terrace*, offered the units as rentals.¹⁰⁵

Concept 3 failed as condominiums for purchase because the buying public in Bramalea was not ready for multi-family living accommodations. By the mid-1970s, the tables had turned, and Bramalea's high-rise condominium building boom had begun. In 1975, the *Kensington Place* 18-storey high-rise condominium complex was begun with one- to three-bedroom suites offered at low prices and with the assistance of government grants to buyers. An advertisement at the time indicated that if a husband and wife earned as little as \$219 per week, they could afford *Kensington Place*.¹⁰⁶ Government incentives, including the Ontario Housing Action Program (OHAP),¹⁰⁷ made *Kensington Place* very attractive to young and lower-income buyers. While price was important, the units also featured amenities one would expect in a single-family house in Bramalea at the time. Formal dining rooms, kitchens with breakfast rooms, and even an ensuite bathroom off the master bedroom meant that a certain standard of living was still possible in a high-rise condominium.

Similar economic conditions and the affordability of condominiums persisted well into the 1980s in Bramalea. An advertisement for the *Bramalea Heights* condominium in 1982 showed a mature couple as well as a young, childless couple holding brochures for the project.¹⁰⁸ This indicated that even though condominium high-rises were gaining popularity in Bramalea, the majority of buyers probably did not have children. In a

¹⁰⁵ *The Toronto Star*, 25 August 1973, p.E20.

¹⁰⁶ *The Toronto Star*, 24 May 1975, p.E16.

¹⁰⁷ Stan Daives, "Incentives spur sales of low-price condominiums," *The Toronto Star*, 19 April 1975, p.G1.

¹⁰⁸ *The Toronto Star*, 9 Jan. 1982, p.E2.

suburban environment, most families with children still preferred to live in a single-family house rather than an apartment twenty stories up. For those who chose to buy a condominium in one of the numerous projects in Bramalea, nearly all were fully air-conditioned, and had at least a pool, as well as other recreational amenities.

In 1982, the CMHC refurbished two towers in Bramalea that had been occupied by purchasers under the defunct Assisted Home Ownership Program (AHOP). Many of the units had been repossessed or abandoned by their former owners.¹⁰⁹ While the units were sold to new buyers at affordable prices, the CMHC could not escape the fact that mortgage rates were a high 13½%.¹¹⁰ Again, economic conditions and affordability fuelled the purchase of high-rise condominiums in the suburban environment of Bramalea (Fig. 63). At the same time, the sprawling detached houses of the 1960s were not necessarily appealing for the new demographics of the suburbs, which now included singles and couples without children.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, affordability was the driving force behind the construction of high-rise condominium towers in Bramalea. By the mid-to-late 1980s, there was a luxury condominium boom in Bramalea, sparking the construction of even more towers. During this time, condominium purchasers were looking for options that included not just a pool, but also squash courts, tennis courts, saunas, spas, an exercise room, billiards room, party room, acres of landscaped grounds, 24 hour concierge, etc., all within a gated community. At Bramalea Limited's 1986-1988 *Sierra* condominium, cameras at the front door allowed residents to see who rang the buzzer for

¹⁰⁹ "Condos sell for \$35,300 to \$47,900," *The Toronto Star*, 12 September 1981, p.E2.

¹¹⁰ "Condominiums offered for resale in Bramalea," *The Toronto Star*, 20 November 1982, p.E6.

their apartment.¹¹¹ Within the units, features such as marble tiled foyers, wall-to-wall windows, solariums, or a large master bedroom with a walk-in-closet and an ensuite, rivalled the features offered in single-family homes. It was during this time that the *Bellair Condominiums* in the H-Section were built (see Fig. 45). The condominium market in Bramalea now offered luxury and lifestyle.

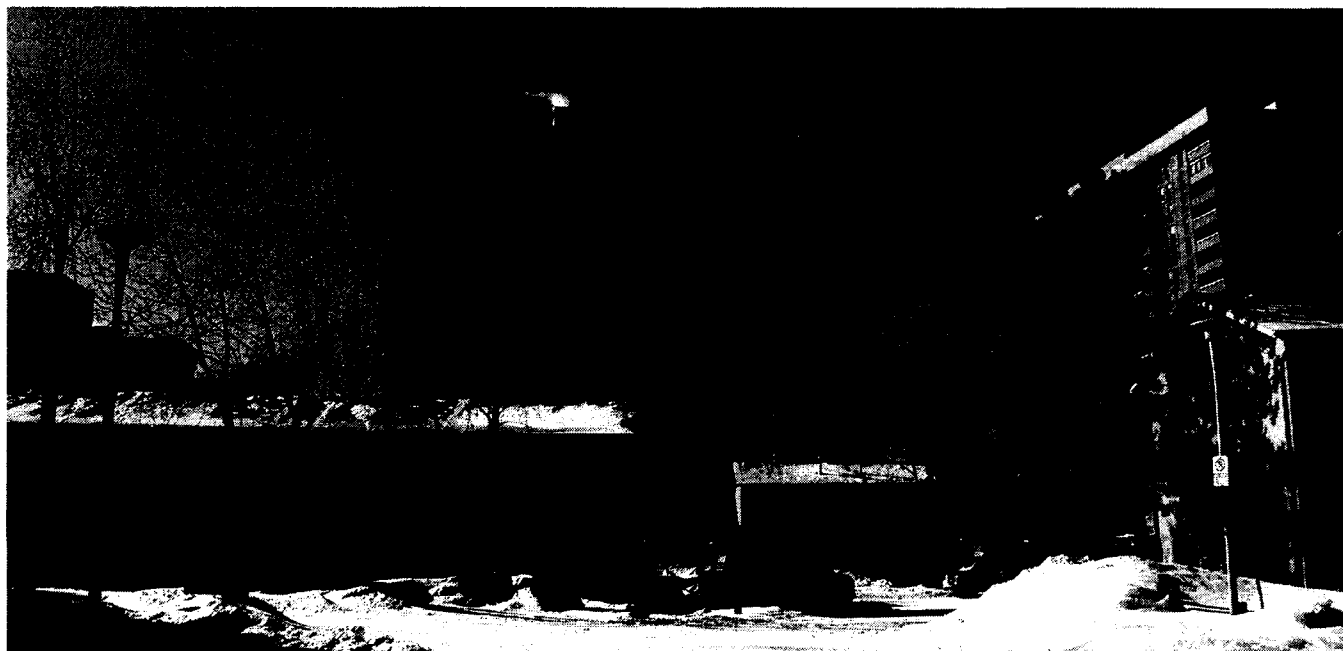


Fig. 63. View from Fleetwood Crescent (Saulius Svirplys). In the foreground are the monotonous rows of inexpensive row houses akin to industrial worker's housing. At two stories tall, they are dwarfed by the looming towers in the background, which look as though they belong in an urban area.

By the early 1990s all of the high-rise residential towers to date had been built in Bramalea. In total, thirty-five buildings were erected from nine floors in height up to twenty-eight (Fig. 64). While most were built in the city centre area at the core of Bramalea, four loomed outside of it. Approximately half of all the buildings were condominiums; half were rentals. There were an additional seventeen low-rise buildings

¹¹¹ "Every floor offers 3-bedroom suites," *The Toronto Star*, 7 June 1986, p.E1, E11.

built, including a nursing home and six social housing apartments in a single complex.

Low-rise office and medical buildings (up to six floors) also characterised the

“downtown” of Bramalea.



Fig. 64. Bramalea skyline (Saulius Svirplys). The low green landscape is interrupted by the cluster of towers at the centre of Bramalea.

The face of Bramalea was forever changed by the construction of high-rise towers, which gave the core area an urban character. While at *Concept 3* it was known that living any higher than six floors would cause a disconnect with the ground, later buildings pushed upwards to almost five times that height. In most of the buildings built in the 1980s, an enclosed sunroom replaced balconies (see Fig. 45). Central air conditioning made these rooms a more practical use of valuable square footage in a high-rise. While in the past, the suburbs were all about open spaces, and a connection with them, by the late 1980s many residents in Bramalea were only able to look at them through large panes of glass. While the 1960s picture window framed a view of one’s own land just out front, the 1980s floor-to-ceiling condominium picture windows framed views of common land, other towers, and distant vistas kilometres away.

The idea of Bramalea as a safe place to live was challenged with the construction of condominium towers with gates and guardhouses. A 1986 advertisement for Bramalea Limited’s condominiums stated that, “we believe peace of mind is more than a luxury. It

is a necessity. We have developed the most sophisticated surveillance systems available.”¹¹² At the tallest condominium tower in Bramalea, the twenty-eight floor *The Ritz*, thirty security cameras surrounded the complex,¹¹³ even though Brampton has one of the lowest crime rates in Canada,¹¹⁴ and was the only city in the Greater Toronto area to be awarded the ‘safe city’ designation.¹¹⁵ The idea of living in a totally secure environment was, and continues to be, appealing to many. The building of gates, walls and guardhouses did not agree with the original vision of a safe city conceived to include everyone. The early idea of Bramalea as a coherent community did not foster the creation of private islands within its borders.

The fantasy of Bramalea as a suburban city with open spaces and a lack of traffic came to an end with densification. Within a two-kilometre radius of the Bramalea City Centre mall at the heart of Bramalea, stand thirty-five towers, most of them more than sixteen floors tall. Most of these towers have at least 210 units, meaning there are close to 7,000 individual units within those two square kilometres. According to the 2001 census, close to 30,000 people live within the high-rises in Bramalea’s core. In 1958, it was projected that Bramalea’s population would peak at 70,000 people.¹¹⁶ That number was surpassed in 1982, with only 70% of Bramalea completed,¹¹⁷ and only half of today’s high-rises built. Today the population of the area set out for Bramalea is well in exceeds 100,000, with the entire city of Brampton’s population just over 400,000. Bramalea’s city centre area is plagued by traffic from mall-goers, high-rise dwellers, and those passing

¹¹² *The Toronto Star*, 12 April 1986, p.E21.

¹¹³ “20 acres of conservation land adjoins the Ritz condo tower,” *The Toronto Star*, 8 March 1986, p.E22.

¹¹⁴ Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead*, p.92.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.bramptonsafecity.ca>, 2006

¹¹⁶ “70,000 to Live in New Town Near Brampton,” *The Toronto Star*, 22 November 1958, p.4.

¹¹⁷ Showcase 2000 Phase II brochure, Bramalea Limited, 1982.

through. Gridlock and traffic jams are a reality of the Bramalea that was built, and not the Bramalea that was planned.

There is something jarringly odd when standing on some of the streets in the early sections of Bramalea with their low-slung bungalows, and in the background seeing towers looming above. In some cases, the houses stare directly at the high-rises. The result is one where the suburban language of single-family housing is juxtaposed with the urban language of high-rise, multi-family housing (Fig. 65).

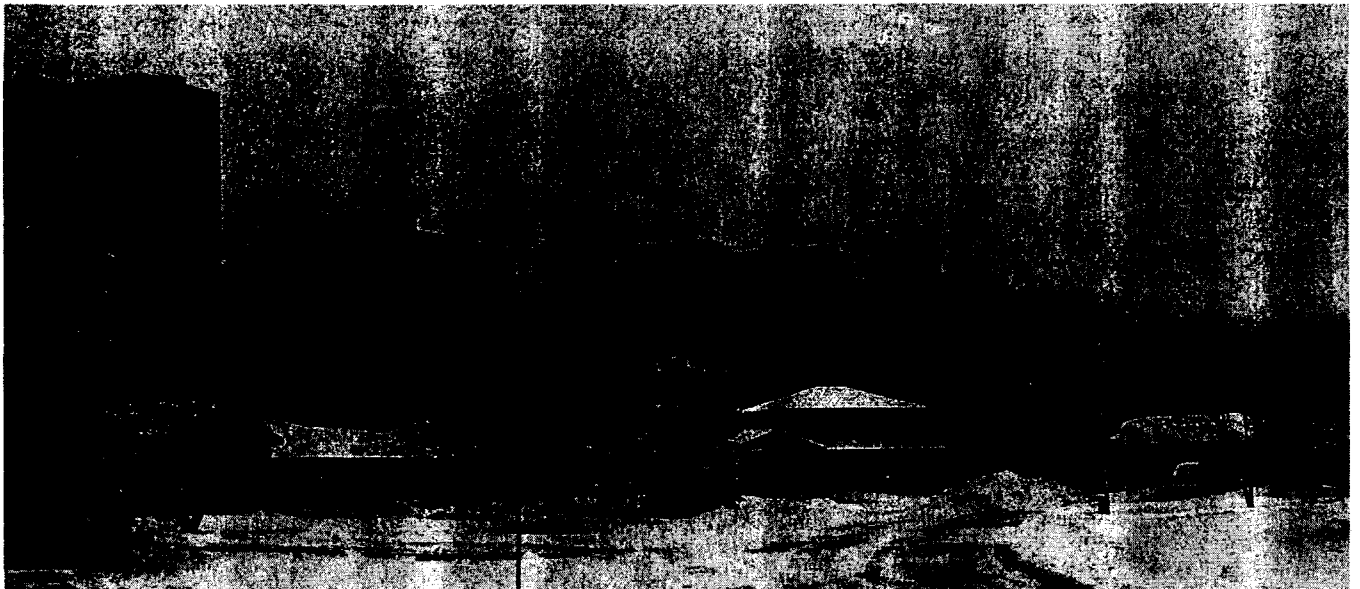


Fig. 65. View from the C-Section (Saulius Svirplys). The vertical 1970s high-rise condominiums in the background are a stark contrast to the horizontality of the 1960s bungalows and two-storey house in the foreground.

CONCLUSION

Inevitably, the utopian fantasy for Bramalea was not built as originally planned. Over time, under the influence of numerous social, economic, technological and political changes, Bramalea took a different course. In the decades following 1958, the idea of the suburbs and suburban housing changed, redirecting Bramalea's path of development. The early fantasy of the suburbs envisaged them filled with open spaces and low-slung ranch houses on spacious lots. As time wore on, and economic realities set in, the suburban house became narrower and taller and lot widths became more constrained. This resulted in many developments in Bramalea having urban densities and houses. The architectural language of suburban housing also became more reflective of past styles with the advent of the post-modern era of architectural design. These post-modern designs reflected the fantasy of nostalgia in historic-inspired details, even if the houses bore few similarities to those of the past.

Not only did the houses become more vertical in nature with shrinking lot widths, they also became larger. With each passing decade, the suburban house grew, with new types of rooms becoming commonplace. Some of these rooms had historic precedents, while others were completely new to suburban housing. From 1965 to 1990, the average size of houses in Bramalea more than doubled. By 1990, the average Bramalea house was 2,725 square feet. The fantasy of luxury, the reality of dual-income couples, and idea of having earned the right to a large house fuelled the type of housing that has been built since the 1980s.

Throughout the history of Bramalea, the houses built went through a variety of changes in interior planning, all rooted in conditions of the time. The fantasy of opulence

and luxury was embodied in key rooms and spaces. Foyers grew and became the location of showpiece staircases. The importance of the large foyer and circular staircase meant that in many plans it was one of the largest spaces in the house, even though its main purpose was circulation. Likewise, the main floor office was also a sign of luxury, no matter how small the room or the house. The master bedroom as a retreat saw its size balloon, especially with the advent of the adjoining studio. The walk-in-closet and master ensuite bathroom also became important features in the most contemporary master bedroom suites.

The addition of the family room and the breakfast room allowed the living and dining rooms to become more formal spaces, thus less-used. With more, and larger, spaces in the typical house in Bramalea by the mid 1980s, many families spent more time apart than together. In the past, the living room had to be multi-functional; by the 1980s it was probably the least used room in the house.

The style and type of housing in Bramalea also changed with time. While in the 1960s and 1970s an effort was made to provide housing for all walks of life, this was not the case in later years. Perhaps it was the overbuilding of affordable housing in the 1970s that led to the lack of any in the 1980s. Economic prosperity during parts of the 1980s led to more luxurious houses being built, including luxury townhouses and condominiums. At the same time, the detached house became the norm, no matter how narrow the house.

Sometimes fantasy took priority over whether a house actually fulfilled the physical needs of its inhabitants. In Bramalea, the early housing was very much connected with the fantasy of the utopian city itself. As the city changed, so to did the design of the houses in it. While the first houses built in Bramalea are far from being

obsolete, many have been altered to fulfil the needs of the contemporary family. While located on larger lots, and arguably better planned, the houses built in the 1960s find themselves lower priced than the newer ones on the resale market (with the exception of the luxurious houses in *Bramalea Woods*), because the older houses are smaller and lack the rooms that were added to subsequent houses. All of the houses built in Bramalea were a product of their time, including economic conditions, technology, and stylistic preferences. The houses built in Bramalea were unique because of their location, but also common to other suburban houses because of these outside influences.

By looking at three specific types of houses in Bramalea, the changes in housing trends and designs have been further highlighted. Although executed with bizarre architecture and sight lines, the zero lot-line houses in Bramalea came to reflect the suburban fantasy of owning detached houses, yet making them affordable. The most fascinating and unusual houses in Bramalea could be found in these developments, some of which have since been altered with features more akin to what was associated with the fantasy of suburban architecture. Paradoxically, the small lot sizes and narrow streets made the *Villages of Central Park* feel more urban than suburban. Nonetheless, as Canada's first zero lot-line development, it was an important example as a solution to affordable housing in a suburban context.

Townhouses in Bramalea were at first suburban in nature, based on the garden city idea, and linked to open spaces. With affordability the watchword, many townhouses by the 1970s were built in long monotonous rows that resembled working class housing from an earlier era. By the end of the 1980s, the townhouse became a sign of social status when built within a gated complex. The advent of the attached garage not only changed

the exterior of townhouses, it also changed their arrangement in relation to the road. The garage made three and four storey townhouses a reality in Bramalea. In the 1960s this type of vertical housing would not have been considered appropriate within a suburban context.

Lastly, the idea of building apartments in a suburban environment did not fit with the original idea of living outside of an urban area. Even so, Bramalea had everything from low-rise to high-rise apartments and condominium. The *Concept 3* development was designed specifically for families, while later buildings were marketed to empty nesters and young professionals due to their height. First fuelled by affordability in the 1970s, the high-rise condominium boom of the 1980s saw units with more luxuries than the single-family houses being built. For many, the decision to live in a high-rise condominium represented a lifestyle choice and a sense of safety in a gated complex. In a city conceived to include everyone, the gated community was one that diverged from the original plan for Bramalea. The high-rise towers in Bramalea not only altered the visual aspect of the suburban landscape, their high density also contributed to the traffic nightmare that exists today. The urban atmosphere continues today with more mid-rise office buildings planned, and even a nightclub located in what was to be a suburban arcadia with open spaces, safe for raising a family.

In many regards Bramalea became more urban than suburban, with high densities of housing, traffic and smog. Changes in the economy, technology, design trends, and ideas of suburban living altered the character and details of the housing that was built in Bramalea. Even though the fantasy of Bramalea failed in many regards, it was not a total failure. While Bramalea was not fully built as planned, it did fulfil the goal of providing

housing for all walks of life. While postwar suburbs have been criticised by most academics for being homogeneous, this certainly was not the case in Bramalea. In addition, Bramalea also provided more amenities than the typical suburb thanks to its master plan as a self-sufficient city.

As just one of many suburban communities in Canada, Bramalea and its housing captured the spirit of the times. The research done for this work helps us to understand the evolution of suburban housing in Bramalea, and why the houses there were built the way they were. Yet it is clear that the history of Bramalea's housing—covering nearly fifty years—also tells us a lot about the history of Canadian housing as a whole—how it was transformed in relation to economic ups and downs, how it responded to changing family structures and dynamics, how it accommodated changes in car ownership and domestic material culture, and how it was constantly reinvented to respond to new ideals and fantasies.

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