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# Thomas Dolan Architecture : LWI

## Interview with Thomas Dolan

Q: Why is the design of a live/work complex such a great opportunity to encourage community?

A:

The activity called "live/work" is simply a term which means that most of one's life is centered in one place, much as farmers and villagers have done forever. As distinct from those who work outside of their homes, live/workers are not "out on the rial-to," as it were, nor are they mixing and meeting at the water cooler. They tend to spend their days working alone. Such solitary isolation in both work and life eventually gives rise to a need for contact with others, a need not always perceived until satisfied.

Q: How can this need for contact be met?

A:

Situations can be created that become settings for interaction as residents cross paths, specifically through the design of common spaces and the arrangement of units opening onto them. The architect's challenge is to shape common spaces that are neutral, which invoke a sense of well-being, are comfortable, and in which one can greet a neighbor, pause to chat, and move on. This is the most important role design can play in encouraging a sense of community, and the nature of those spaces can make the difference between an alienating structure and a fully functioning community. It is the entry situation, that transition between the moment one enters the complex and the time one enters one's unit, that provides the greatest opportunities for interaction.

This, then, is the starting point of community.

Q: What are the ways in which interaction occurs in a multi-unit live/work project?

A:

In designing and later observing the residents of several multi-unit live/work communities I designed, I have discovered that three types of interaction take place between the residents:

1) Formal visiting.

Requires a definite intention on the part of the visitor, to which the response may be: "come in", "go away", or "return another time".

2) Meeting at a common destination.

Requires a definite intention to go to that common destination (laundry room, gar-



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den, pool, spa, etc.) on the part of two (or more) individuals who meet there. But the actual meetings are usually spontaneous and casual.

3) Crossing paths.

Such meetings, though never planned, are the result of normal day-to-day activity. Crossing paths can lead to interactions which become more or less regular, thereby contributing to a sense of familiarity, and even safety and security.

In my experience, the third kind of interaction works best at creating, at a comfortable pace, a sense of familiarity and the kinds of growing acquaintances that lead to a natural, voluntary sense of community.

Something seems to be working here--something new, and something old: a post-industrial form of socialization, perhaps, or the simple pleasure of meeting at the village well. Those who carry on the activities of both working and living in the same place do more fully inhabit that place: it will ever be thus. People fully inhabiting their place means a greater caring for that place and for the other people with whom they share it. This may be the great lesson of live/work communities: the rediscovery of the power of fully inhabiting a place, and of the well-being that results from it, which is why we say that live/work and community are a natural marriage.