



HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

Second Conference Report: From House to Home Second International Conference in the Excellence in the Home Series, organised by the Home Renaissance Foundation

'Home' is a difficult concept to define. The richness of the home is reflected in the many facets attributed to it, and it is perhaps the unique and ambitious mission of the Home Renaissance Foundation to explore all these facets. At last November's Home Renaissance Foundation international conference, *From House to Home*, architects and urbanists, as well as experts in the fields of economy, sociology, business management – and even a museum director – gathered to answer the question, 'What makes a house a home?'

For most people, the link between 'home' and a specific building and location is undeniable. Houses come in all shapes and sizes. They vary in décor, functionality, comfort and basic standards. If home is so intrinsically linked to a place and the form of this place depends so much on who built it or where it is located, who makes a home? Can it be said that an architect makes a home?

Professor Lawrence Barth opened the conference by giving a brief history of architectural thought in the twentieth century, which has placed a great importance on the interaction between the space and the individual. The home, as the environment for human development, is a dynamic space: 'That care and nurturing leads to a kind of search for excellence on the part of all who dwell there that is continually asking for the home to change, transform, do more and be more.'

Because the home cultivates our development and encourages us to strive for improvement, we turn our energies back to the home and constantly demand more of it.

Lorenzo Apicella, architect and partner of Pentagram, used examples of his own renovation projects – transforming buildings with a history into homes for new owners – as evidence of the architectural potential of a building that respects the dynamic nature of the home.

The way in which the home advances human development was poignantly described by Charles Handy, who referred to the home as a school for life. As well as being the place where values are acquired and passed on, the home provides people with both personal privacy and a communion with others. It, therefore, acts as a microcosm of society. Janine Nahapiet, one of the panellists, continued in this vein: ‘relationships are the foundation of society [...] my argument is that the home provides the foundation for relationships.’

The panel also discussed ways in which a person may develop on a professional level in the home. Drawing on what was said about the development of social skills in the home and on Monica Lindstedt’s experience as the founder of a company that outsources work services related to the home, Julia Prats suggested that homemaking could be considered a profession.

The home, however, is not an isolated unit. It exists within a social and geographical location that feeds into it and which it in turn feeds. After all, it is not at the precise moment of sliding the key into the door or walking through the threshold that we begin to feel at home. As Dr Michael Hebbert asserted, the feeling begins much sooner.

The contributions of the second panel discussion looked beyond the individual and focussed on the urban context of the home: ‘We can measure the success of a home by two measures of family life... the point at which the family members come together with their feet under the same table...and dispersal – the extent to which members of the family go out, spread, ray off into the community and form part of that larger home which is the neighbourhood and the town.’

According to Piers Gough, it is the contrast between the hard side and the soft side of the city, the variety of options available to the collective and the warmth and security of the individual home that makes city living bearable. As examples of the positive effect the urban

context can have on city-dwellers, Gough presented his master plan for the renovation of the Gorbals in Glasgow in the 1990s, and Juan Ignacio Vidarte, Director of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, gave a first-hand account of the 'Bilbao Effect'.

What conclusions can be drawn from the contributions to this conference, then? From an architectural and urban planning perspective, the debate over housing is ongoing. To use an example mentioned during the conference, tower blocks are a case in point. They were first introduced in London in the 1930s as a solution to the dire living conditions in the slums. The enthusiasm for this progressive vision to improve people's lives is evidenced in the 1935 documentary *Housing Problems*. In the 1970s, scarcely forty years later, another documentary, *The Block*, was filmed to expose the horrors of tower block living. Despite being a vast improvement from the slums of the 1930s, tower blocks built in the 1930s, did not meet the basic human living requirements for city dwellers in the 1970s.

People had developed, society had developed and the home needed to develop in order to keep pushing its inhabitants forward. Thankfully, in most cases the standards for tower block accommodation have been raised. Many people today live in apartment buildings that have developed from the tower block and which meet high living standards, as Piers Gough highlighted. However, the tragedy last July in which six people lost their lives to a fire in a tower block reminds us that this is not a resolved issue.

Individuals living in homes must strive towards creating that are homes worthy of themselves and their loved ones. In the end, it is in the home that people grow, develop and take society forward.