

BRAVE NEW HOUSE

by Robert Platts, Gary Hasler, and Paul Anderson

Les auteurs de cet article sont trois étudiants de première année du programme de maîtrise de l'Université du Manitoba.

Today's society is at once progressive, fickle, trend-following and highly mobile. In the space of ten years, almost any family will experience wide swings in space needs, personal tastes, and requirements. Whether they know it or not, such a family, straight-jacketed by its studwall-drywall-stucco house, fairly screams for cheap and quick flexibility: a house

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which will accommodate changes with little or no disruption of the inhabitants' lives.

The traditional house was wholistic, in that the structure served as both interior and exterior expression and was integral with any contained systems (i.e. fireplaces, venting windows). As new services became necessary (i.e. plumbing, electricity, communication, central heating), they were shoehorned into existing wall and ceiling types to preserve the traditional appearance. The resulting house is clumsy and inflexible, in that changing or moving any one system or component requires radical surgery followed by finicky, labour-intensive cosmetic repairs.

A truly contemporary house must be atomistic, with components as independent as possible so that changing one does not require disturbing the others. The components can be separated into three types:

- A. **Structural Base Layer:** both structural and weatherskin on the exterior, space-dividing on the interior.
- B. **Expression Skin:** covers both surfaces of the base layers, both on surfaces of the base independent: (i.e. "bolt-on").
- C. **Service Network:** (i.e. plumbing, ventilation, electricity, communications) — permeates the interior space, enabling access to any point; linked to exterior mains through a command centre.

All of these components would be accessible and flexible. However, this does not require that services be exposed or "expressed," so long as they can be easily accessed. The Structural Base Layer can even be of a conventional construction type as long as it is sufficiently flexible towards changes and additions, and is not dependent on the expression skin for rigidity or weatherproofing. The expression skin is the most individualistic, customised component, changing from room to room, from time to time, and even being "unbolted" and taken to the new house when the family moves.

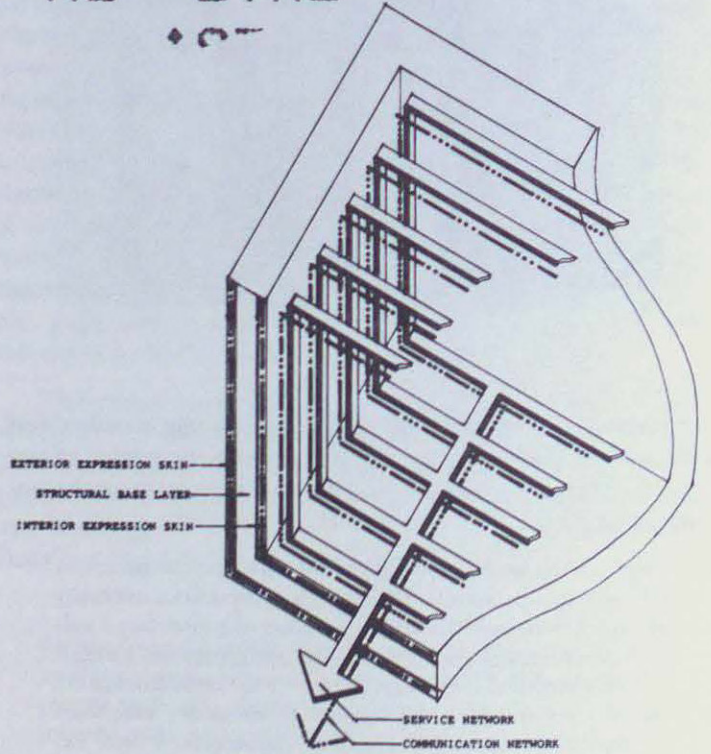
A design based on this new attitude will result in a house flexible enough to accommodate the changing needs and desires of the truly contemporary person. This new house, by its very flexibility, can avoid the inevitable obsolescence which plagues current forms.

Robert Platts, Gary Hasler, and Paul Anderson are first year master's students of architecture at the University of Manitoba.

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Layout by: Christiane Mong-Hine and David Morin

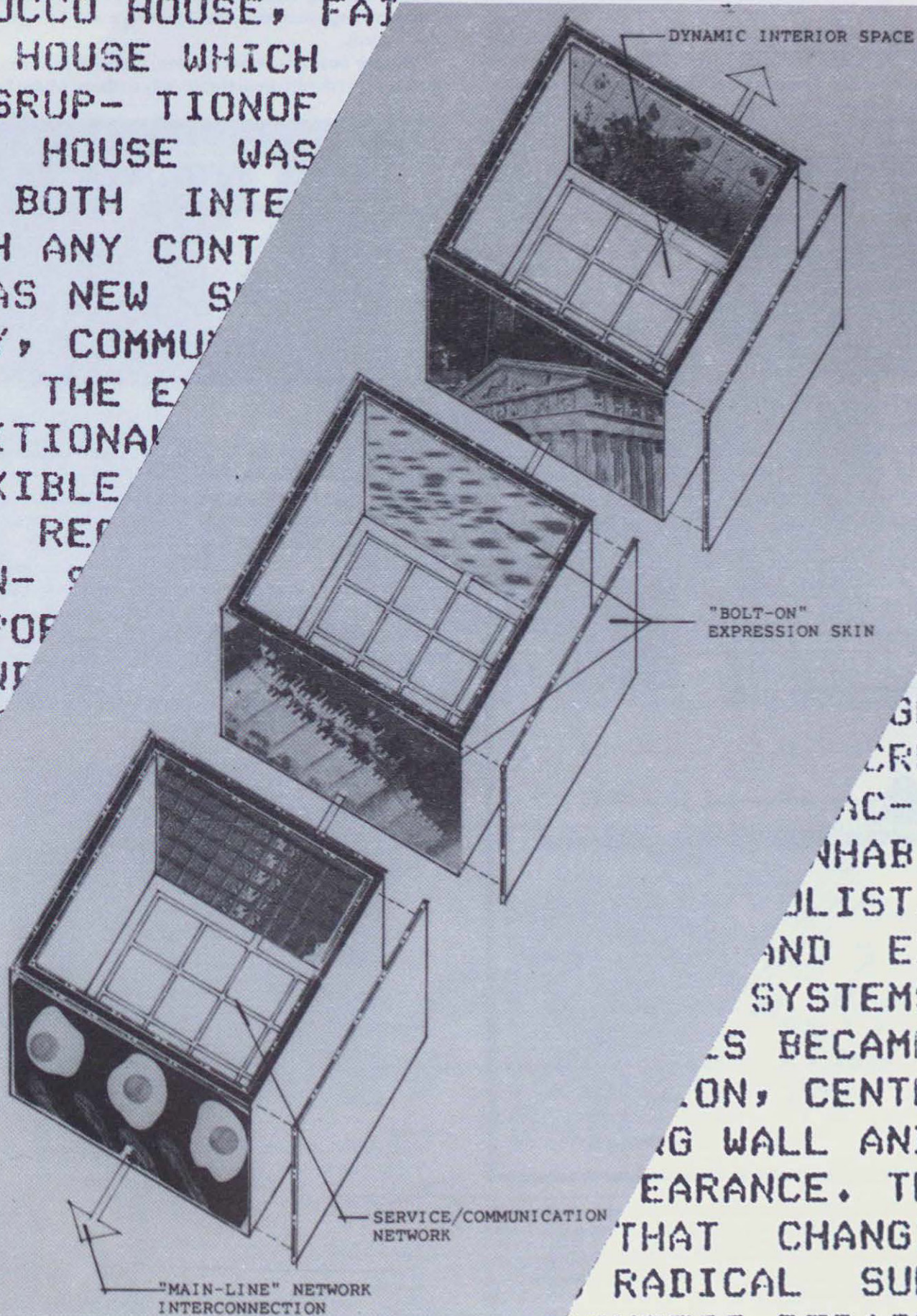
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