Catherine Bauer Wurster
from "Modern Housing"
Catherine Krouse Bauer Wurster

(1905–1964)

She was a prominent American public housing advocate and educator of city planners and urban planners. A leading member of the "housers". She dramatically changed the concept of public housing and law in the United States.

Her influential book Modern Housing was published in 1934 and is regarded as a classic in the field.
Housers were a group of planners who advocated affordable housing for low-income families. Catherine Bauer was a leading member of a small group of idealists who called themselves housers because of their commitment to improving housing for low-income families.

“Often the only woman at events and meetings, Bauer was once described as a ‘handsome blonde with brunette economic ideas.’”

“Housing’s White Knight,” Architectural Forum (March 1946), 117
Modern Housing

Catherina Bauer’s 1934 book which is Modern Housing, and her later work with the Labor Housing Conference, Bauer played a central role in developing and communicating a program for a new kind of American housing system. The modern housing program suggested a way of designing a unified public policy with regard to housing issues as opposed to the usual twotier approach, which generally isolates and stigmatizes the poor.

While designing the housing methodology, she placed women first, emphasizing that the basic requirements of a good home should be defined regarding the person who will most use the internal space: the woman.
The houses of America, reported one of the Committees in Hoover’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership back in 1931, constitute ‘the largest mass of obsolete and discredited equipment’ in the country.

Old housing methods have broken down; but what is the new method? Shall we attempt to revive the speculative real estate business by artificial resuscitation—or shall we make low-cost housing a responsibility of government? Will Big Business and the ‘pre-fabricated house’ solve everything? Should we try to make homeownership and individual construction easier—or shall we build planned communities designed, equipped and administered as a unit?

There are questions which must sooner or later be answered by the American people. The information on which to base an answer will be found in this book.

“Housing and Planning can be used strategically to achieve social change.”

-Catherine Bauer

Bauer’s thesis in Modern Housing was that the real achievement of the postwar European housing programs was not the quantity of dwellings produced. Instead, the significant breakthrough was the creation of an entirely new kind of shelter and a new framework for producing it without any profit. This kind of housing was built as part of comprehensively planned neighborhoods, with parks, schools, and other community facilities nearby.
Every housing-reformer believed that the ideal home was a small house with an attached garden.

There should not be extra outside walls, extra land which always lies useless in the shadow of one house or the other, dead windows (or windows looking directly into other people’s rooms), extra feet of pipeline and street-pavement, and extra interior heat. The money, that spent for these, should spend for better construction and more and better-lighted space within the house.

It should be a much more economical and very much more livable dwelling type. One of the ways for that designing attached groups of two, four, six, or more houses. It also provide not to use windows on a facade because of the attechment. If they were detached houses, one-family houses are usually built in long rows and at a somewhat higher density.
Ideal House in America

In her lifetime Bauer changed dramatically the concept of social housing in the United States based on Europe. Programs in European countries frequently served as models. Before the change, projects were extremely expensive and therefore frankly aimed at "the more fortunate classes". She proposed ways to provide better and cheaper urban housing. It became reachable for all classes.
Edith Elmer Wood  
(1871-1945)

was a US housing reformer. The only other female member of RPAA.

1920s as a highly respected and oft-cited author of housing criticism.

In one of her research, she discovered that one third of the nation was ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clothed. The research was affected on Catherine’s modern housing approach.
William Wurster
(1895-1973)

was an American architect and architectural teacher at the University of California, Berkeley, and at MIT, best known for his residential designs in California.

Wurster was a husband of Catherine Bauer, as well as an influential figure in her own right in the field of public housing.
The Gregory Farmhouse is a Modernist style house. It was an example of dogmatic International Style. Wurster developed an understated architecture that relied heavily on regional building history and indigenous materials handled, however, with simplicity, refinement, and a forward-thinking and creative mind.
Bauer was immediately drawn to the rationalist tendency within architectural modernism that would come to be known as the "international style." Despite its strong appeal for her, however, she doubted that this aesthetic would become popular in America.

**International Style**

- The emphasis of volume over mass
- Regularity in the facade, as opposed to building symmetry
- No applied ornament
One of the five leading members contributed to the goal of the association that Bauer was also active on the issue of housing.

It is America’s most distinguished urban research and advocacy organization. Clarence Stein, Benton MacKaye, Lewis Mumford, Alexander Bing, and Henry Wright were the essential backbone of the RPAA. Allied with Mumford and the Regional Planning Association of America was Catherine Bauer.

Members of the group were particularly concerned with creating higher quality neighborhoods than either cities or suburbs typically provided Americans.

RPA works to improve the prosperity, infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life of the metropolitan region. Some of the region’s most significant public works, economic development and open space projects have their roots in RPA ideas and initiative.
Lewis Mumford (1895–1990)

He was RPAA’s theorist, philosopher, urban critic, and author. He believed that society should be improved through rational and economically sound planning.

Clarence Stein (1882 - 1975)

He was an American urban planner, architect, and writer, one of the proponent of the Garden City movement in the United States.

Benton Mackaye (1879 - 1975)

He was an American forester, planner and conservationist. He was a central figure in the development of RPAA’s “regional city” concept.

Henry Wright (1878 - 1975)

He was a planner, architect, and major proponent of the garden city, an idea characterized by green belts and created by Sir Ebenezer Howard.

Alexander Bing (1879 - 1959)

He was a first president of the RPAA. Developed deep concern for needs, less privileged.
Ernst May

Ernst May (27 July 1886 – 11 September 1970) was a German architect and city planner. May successfully applied urban design techniques to the city of Frankfurt during the Weimar Republic period.

Catherine Bauer became a strong proponent of European solutions like low rise housing estates of Ernst May.
Bauher’s ideal solution, is the self-contained regionally planned new town, a more centralized modification of the Garden City, such as Letchworth in the UK.

Ebenezer Howard had worked on the garden city and this movement started in 1898 in United Kingdom. This movement is related with city planning. The aim was keeping nature and the city together. It can be evaluated within the content of the ecotopia approach. Howard’s garden city idea has the concentric (other shapes that share the same center) pattern with open spaces, public parks, and six radial boulevards.
LETCHWORTH

Architectural Style/qualities:

- ‘Letchworth Look’ housing inspired by Arts & Crafts movement, consisting of:
  - Roughcast render cladding over bricks
  - Street layout is in an axial layout with roads radiating out from a central square.
  - Tree-lined streets, each with a different variety of tree.
  - Zoning of different types of building - industrial, commercial, middle-class and worker’s housing.
  - Surrounded by a rural belt.

Letchworth was the world’s first Garden City, founded by Ebenezer Howard in 1903.
Contributions of the Catherina Bauer

- Successful format of modern housing comparison between "disciplined democracy" and "colonial feudalism."
- "Against the Tide: Movement Popular and Otherwise", focus on conservation
- "Framework for the Future"
- "A Platform for Physical Reconstruction"
Housing affordability is a perennial problem in Australia and has worsened significantly over the past three decades. Economic and social factors were the major drivers of the interest in tiny houses. Economic factors included affordability, the desire to own (detached) property without a high mortgage and to reduce expenses and debt.
Catherine Bauer Wurster
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