

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

Sun, City, Farm [Graduated Structure]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/48s0n6m0>

Journal

Places, 14(3)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

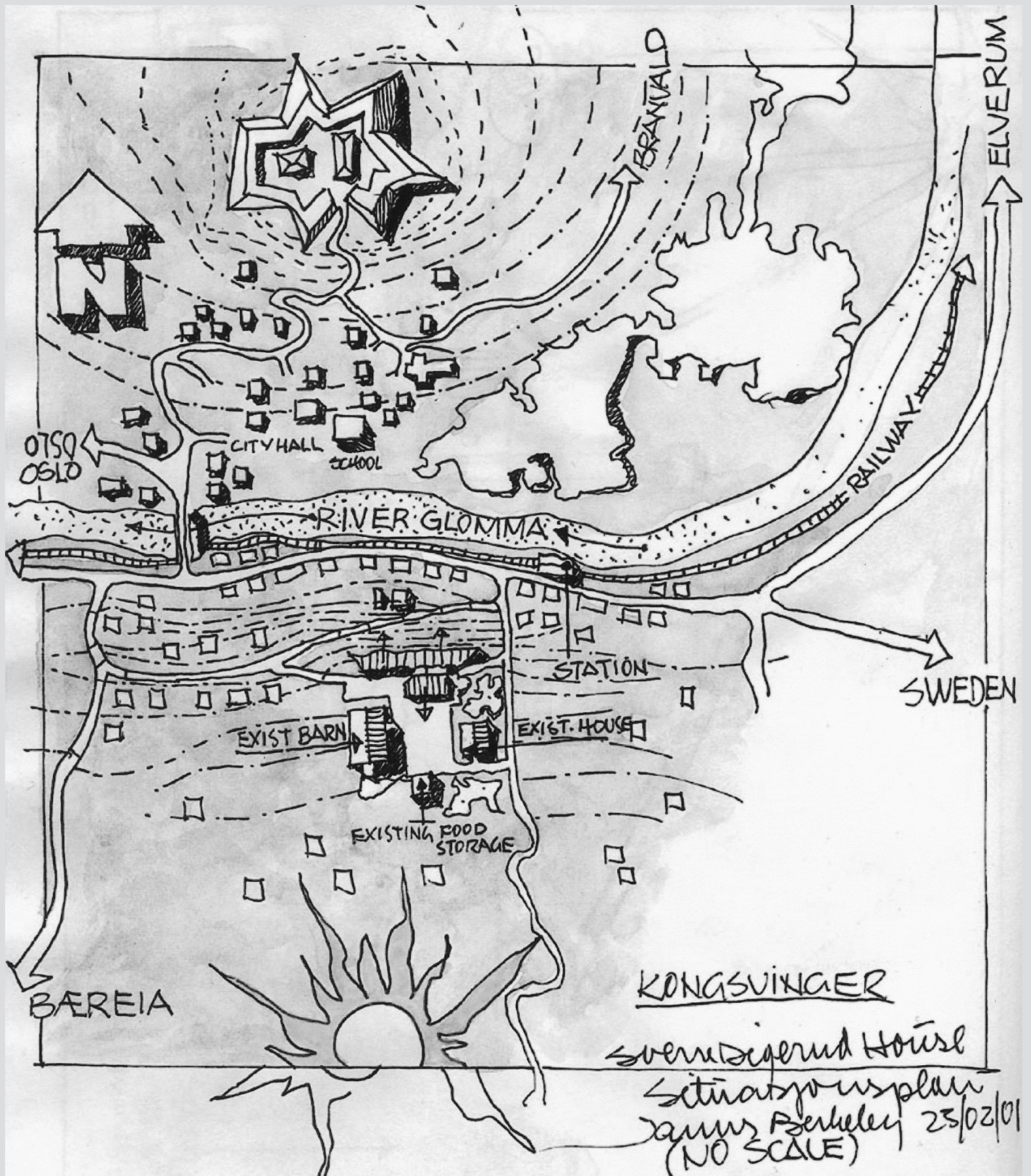
Digerud, Jan

Publication Date

2002-06-01

Peer reviewed

2. Graduated Structure



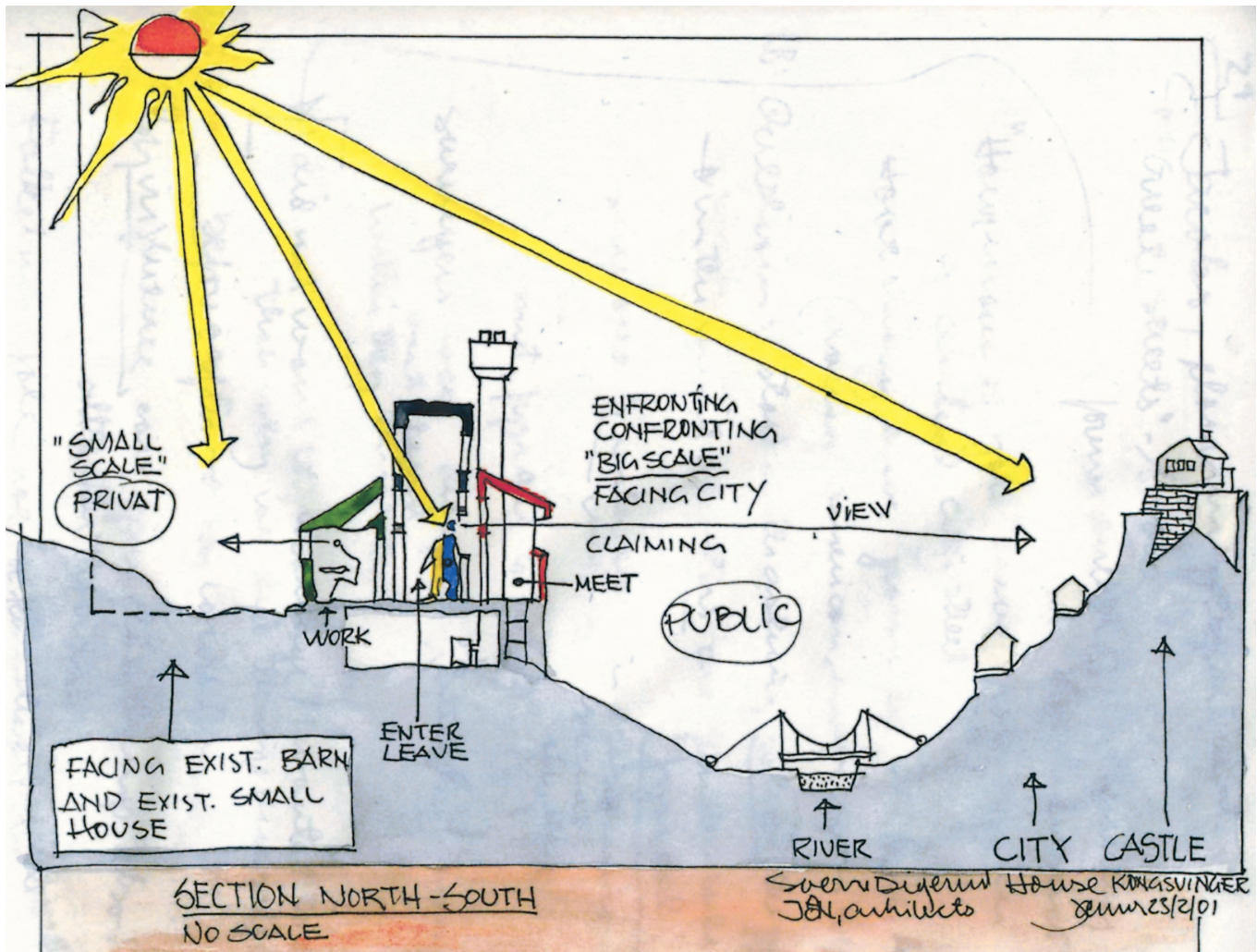
Establishing a graduated structure of spaces and forms is central to making places within which we can comfortably dwell.

It helps to know where you are within an ordering scheme. This doesn't mean always being inside or at the center; sometimes we may like most being at the margins, where choice is at hand. What matters is having various places to use and being able to hold their relationships in mind. A hierarchy of sizes can help the mind to sort through these opportunities, supporting both the concentration involved in dwelling and the confidence that nurtures exploration and improvisation.

Jan Digerud's diagrams show clearly how intimate details of dwelling can be embedded within an understanding of the larger place and climate. The complex by Barton Phelps offers many lessons in the skillful use of hierarchy. Differing clusters of rooms are organized around a large central court, itself defining a niche in the larger landscape. The pattern, here cast as a very large house, is an enduring and highly serviceable one that could as readily serve as the armature for a satisfying school, institution or conference center.

To fully support dwelling, the graduated structure must extend to the scale of personal involvement. Thus the small and immediate are also of great importance in the hierarchy of place. This is illustrated in the suggestively articulated window niche designed by Rob Quigley for a shelter in Las Vegas. It would create a framed place within the larger structure where people of extremely limited means could locate a few possessions or treasures, and with dignity claim the space as their own. A vigorously formed lobby space creates a middle level between the intimacy of the room and the large articulated structure of the whole.

To set daily actions in a larger landscape frame Buzz Yudell maps the choreography of bodily movement through two houses, referencing the iconic polarity of the hills and the sea.



Sun, City, Form

Jan Digerud's drawings succinctly capture the relation of the Sverre Digerud house to the larger context of which it is a part. They expound the architect's strategies for a design that places the inhabitant in clear relation to a larger natural and cultural order. As he describes it:

In Norway, when you design a house, it is typical to put windows that are as large as possible facing the sun. As a result, houses get too much sun, people have to put up shades to protect their furniture and the buildings are ugly. I have a hard time helping my clients understand that you should stop the sun, then sit in your living room and watch it, which is completely different from getting it straight in your face. And in Norway the sun comes in very low, particularly in the winter, and you get it, smack, right in your face.

The person for whom we designed this house had a problem. Small houses were being built all around his

farm, so he wanted the plan to include a private outdoor space. The house consists of two parallel sheds. The southern one faces the small garden, or the *geltza*, and it is private. It includes the kitchen and below is the office, also private. The northern shed contains the place where people can meet, sit by the fireplace and have a beautiful view of the city. It contains the more public rooms of the house. The northern part is longer, fronting the city like an old wall scaled to the landscape. The southern shed is shorter and partakes of a courtyard of barn structures enclosing a private realm within the larger landscape.

In between the two sheds is a passage of space that is the central part of the house. In it we made a six-poster, a structural framework that is scaled to human presence and embodies the spirit of the house. We imagined that we would make the six-poster a separate thing just sitting there, like a Greek temple, reaching to the sky, catching the sun, bringing light down into the center of the house.



The masonry fireplace/hearth stands beside it, soaking in the radiant warmth of the sun. No matter what you do, you come through this place and experience the light in the center, within the living spaces.

At one end of the central passage you can go out to a little apsidal gazebo where the shed is cut away so that the space faces due south. There, during the few months—June, July, August—when the temperature can reach the 70s and 80s, you can enjoy the sun directly. This becomes almost the most important place in summertime. It is private, but perched at the edge of the larger realm.

—*Jan Digerud*

Sverre Digerud House.

Opposite page: North-south section diagram, showing relationship with landform and prevailing sunlight. Graphic by Jan Digerud.

Above: North and center bays, with sitting area and windows admitting indirect sunlight. Photograph by Jan Digerud.