

HOUSE SEVEN: One-of-a-Kind Homes in the City—Highrise of Homes Project (unbuilt). 1981

James Wines (SITE) (American, born 1932)



IMAGE 32: Exterior perspective. 1981. Ink and charcoal on paper, 22 x 24" (55.9 x 61 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Best Products Company Inc. Architecture Fund, 1981

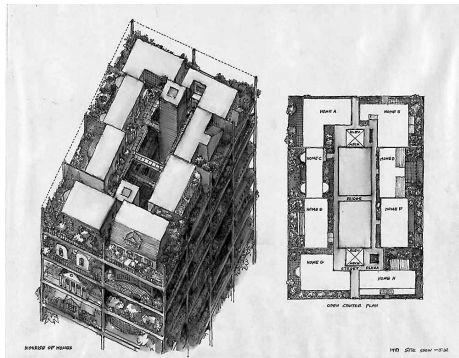


IMAGE 33: Aerial perspective and plan. 1981. Ink and sienna wash on paper, 11 x 13¼" (27.9 x 34.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Best Products Company Inc. Architecture Fund, 1981

ABOUT THE HIGHRISE OF HOMES PROJECT

Conceived in the 1980s by the architect James Wines and his design firm SITE (Sculpture in the Environment), the Highrise of Homes Project is the only design in this guide that includes the potential use of an existing building as part of its structure. SITE's objective was to develop a design that represented an alternative to the generic, mass-produced urban high-rise apartment building. The residential complex of ten to fifteen stories high could either be newly built or use the steel and concrete framework of existing factory buildings, and, according to Wines, could be built in either a low- or high-income neighborhood. Each level of this complex was to consist of plots of land with streets, upon which individual homes would be custom-built based on the preferences of the owner. The houses were to be built around a *core* in a rectangular or U-shaped configuration, to ensure that all of the plots received ample natural light.

The Highrise of Homes was to combine the conveniences of urban living with a sense of individuality not typically found in a large city. No two homes were to be alike. On the ground floor of the complex, residents would find a grocery store, shops, a garden, office spaces, a parking lot, and entertainment facilities. Residents would access their homes on different levels via elevator.

One potential site for the Highrise of Homes was Battery Park City, a waterfront residential community adjacent to the site of the World Trade Center, in New York City. This design was never built, however, because the construction cost of each housing unit was too high. In addition, each home would have demanded separate designs and different materials, requiring an unusually large amount of time to complete the project. Most construction projects in large cities like New York are of the more cost-efficient variety, such as prefabricated housing or apartment units, and James Wines and SITE attracted considerable attention in the architecture community for their innovative, utopian vision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Now that you have some information about the Highrise of Homes Project, let us look at a couple of the design drawings. What do you see in each of these drawings? What kind of information do these drawings provide about this project?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

City Planner for the Highrise of Homes

Materials needed for this activity: a notebook for each student, pencils, and pens (or colored paper, scissors, and glue for collage work), large sheets of white paper for each group, and photocopies of design drawings for the Highrise of Homes Project.

Working in groups, students should develop their own designs for the Highrise of Homes. Print the two images of design drawings and make photocopies for each of your students. Divide the students into groups of four. The groups can delegate a task to each student: for example, one person should record all ideas, one should present his or her group's work to the class, etc.

Each group represents the *city planners* and the architects for the project. The groups should decide where would be the best location to build the Highrise of Homes, develop a design proposal for the building, and present it to the class. Then break up the groups and have them form one large group, choose one of the designs, and prepare a drawing based on that design. Each original group's proposal should address the following questions:

Your house:

- As a group, how did you select this design?
- Describe the features of this house. What types of materials would you use, and why?
- Who do you think might want to live here?

The site for your Highrise of Homes:

- Describe the location you chose. Is it a large city, a suburb, or a small town? What would be the ideal neighborhood for your project? Will you build a new structure or use an existing factory? Why?
- How large will your Highrise of Homes be? How many stories will it be? How many homes will you place on each "floor?"
- Describe the location's climate? For instance, have you placed the structure in a coastal area or near the mountains? Why? What sorts of potential advantages and disadvantages do you think your choice of location and climate might have for this type of housing?
- What types of services and shops would you include on the ground floor? Explain your choices.
- Describe what it might be like to live in your Highrise of Homes.
- If you were to give your design a name other than the Highrise of Homes, what would it be?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Think about each group's design. What sorts of similarities and differences do you notice?
- Describe the work process of your group, such as the brainstorming and planning that you did. What kinds of ideas did each group member contribute? Did you tend to agree or disagree? How did you incorporate everyone's ideas? What issues were easiest to work out as a group?

ABOUT JAMES WINES

Born in 1932 in Oak Park, Illinois, James Wines founded SITE (Sculpture in the Environment) in 1970, an architectural and environmental design firm. In addition to the Highrise of Homes Project, Wines and his firm SITE have produced innovative designs for museums, schools, showrooms, and private homes. Projects include a marine science center called Aquatorium in Chatanooga, Tennessee, and a pavilion for the 1986 Worlds Fair in Vancouver, Canada. Wines once described his firm's approach to architecture in the following way: "Contrary to using art as a decorative or applied accessory to buildings, my work is an endeavor to eliminate the distinction which has always separated art and architecture."¹²

Wines studied sculpture at Syracuse University, and has also taught architecture in New York City at the New School University, School of Visual Arts, and New York University.

RESEARCH PROJECT

Highrise Housing

Research examples of highrise housing by other architects, such as Le Corbusier's L'Unité d'habitation (French for "united habitat") and Fort L'Empereur (French for "the Emperor Fort"). Compare Wines's Highrise of Homes Project to another architect's design. What were his or her goals for the design? Then explore your own neighborhood. Do you see examples of highrise housing where you live?

GLOSSARY

Core: The area in a multistory building that contains utilities such as staircases, elevators, etc.

City planner: An individual who helps guide and shape the future development of a community. A *city planner* considers environmental and social issues, and what kinds of resources are needed to improve the quality of life for the community residents, particularly concerning what types of new building projects may be necessary.

12. *Contemporary Architects*, Muriel Emanuel, ed. (New York: St. James Press, 1994), 1052.