



**Model for the Future:** The 3-D models and drawing (first three images from the left) show part of a design study for site-built manufactured housing proposed for Casa Familiar affordable housing in San Ysidro. Cruz plans to weave 12 affordable housing units across a concrete framework. The open space underneath will function as a marketplace, among other uses.

Professor Teddy Cruz founded, *estudio teddy cruz*, an experimental studio in Los Angeles, in 1993, to examine the role of immigration in reshaping Southern California’s urban fabric. His housing project, “Border Postcards: Chronicles from the Edge,” was awarded the 2004-2005 James Stirling Memorial Lecture on the City competition sponsored by the Canadian Center for Architecture, Van Alen Institute, and London School of Economics and Political Science.

Drawings (far right and following page) are part of an ongoing redevelopment project (Hudson 2+4) for Hudson, a town of some 8,000 people on the Hudson River, north of New York City. Cruz focused on a series of empty municipal lots and set about developing plans for mixed-use housing and shops. He also included communal gardens, playgrounds, an outdoor amphitheater and “incubator spaces” that could be used for arts or job-training programs.

“We can learn from Tijuana because the complexity is already there.”

BY SERENA RENNER, '08

## LEARNING FROM TIJUANA



IMAGES COURTESY OF TEDDY CRUZ

Tijuana has been living off San Diego's leftovers for years. Miniature tract homes destined for demolition in the north are dismantled then replanted in Mexican soil as Lego-like imitations of the "American dream."

But Teddy Cruz noticed something strange happening a few years after these housing projects were introduced. Residents repainted the beige facades bright pink, orange and green. Tidy lawns became crowded with impromptu workshops, markets and taco stands, and individual units merged together to house extended families. The result was a free-flowing hybrid rooted in local culture.

In an age of monotonous suburbs, gated communities and artificial borders, the UC San Diego visual arts professor and architect mines these Tijuana shantytowns for creative inspiration. He uses what lies beyond the 10-foot steel wall to propose new options for affordable housing in the United States.

"The lessons learned from Tijuana have to do with rethinking sustainability, social configurations and social organization in relationship to density and housing development," Cruz says. "We can learn from Tijuana because the complexity is already there; those mixed uses thrive."

Although Cruz is a seasoned architect (he trained at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, completed the Rome Prize fellowship in Italy and studied architectural theory at Harvard), he is wary of defining himself too strictly. Rather than living in a world of blueprints and models, he has spent the latter part of his career trying to break down boundaries of specialization. He has reached across barriers to create housing that benefits residents rather than developers. In addition to working as an architect and a professor, Cruz is involved with several community agencies, and he sits on the board of directors for the Centre City Develop-

ment Corporation (CCDC)—the political arm for San Diego urban planning.

"What I do is architecture," he says, "but in order to get at the architecture I dream of, we need to step out of architecture to arrive at it. It's about wearing different hats to create a more integrated process."

A native Guatemalan, Cruz's architectural interest began with Latin America. In 1993, he founded an experimental studio in Los Angeles where he launched a workshop to examine the role of immigration in reshaping Southern California's urban fabric.

He linked the post-September 11 preoccupation with security to the impulse to refortify borders like the 60-mile barricade between San Diego and Tijuana. He says the same guarded mentality has led to a rise in gated communities and suburban tract homes that overlook community lifestyles and shut off cultural exchange. He believes that



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we are experiencing a cultural crisis where conflicts between top-down development and topography, freeway and watershed, border surveillance and labor issues, and density and sprawl define the urban landscape. He thinks more effort needs to be made to get to the root of the problems and unite residents who are physically alienated because of social and economic class.

“We should reveal and open up this conflict to understand what makes and produces it,” he says. “Without that, we’re really just decorating the problems with short-term conditions.”

While “beige urbanism” is sweeping Southern California, according to Cruz, a very different agenda guides development in Tijuana, where residents spontaneously construct their own dwellings and tailor them to the needs of the community. Tijuana’s influence is apparent in Cruz’s “Living Rooms at the Border” and “Senior Gardens” designs—affordable housing projects mixed with social services for the migrant communities of San Ysidro.

Partnered with Casa Familiar, a non-profit that serves the city, Cruz’s Living Rooms design proposes 12 affordable housing units in an area where existing zoning allows only three. Wooden houses are mounted atop metal frames to create space below for work studios and car repair shops. Each unit is envisioned as a suite of interlocking rooms, which occupants can break down or join together depending on family size.

The project’s centerpiece is a block-long, outdoor arcade, freely designated for markets, barbecues and festivals. The 1927 church standing below acts as a community center and office site for Casa Familiar.

Across the street are parallel rows of housing for seniors and their grandchildren peppered with semi-public gardens. The design interweaves private

and public space, including a full-time, day-care center onsite for children with working guardians.

To provide options usually absent in affordable housing models, Cruz and Casa Familiar negotiated density laws and designed houses with shared kitchens, says Andrea Skorepa, director of Casa Familiar. “Architecture needs to understand what people’s needs are and incorporate those needs into the home,” she says. “The question is, how can we celebrate community and function as a whole, rather than in many distinct parts? That is what makes a neighborhood—that whole feeling of connectedness.”

Cruz’s reputation for bottom-up, public-focused housing spread across the nation, all the way to Hudson, New York, where the Parks Arts Recreation and Cultural (PARC) Foundation sought his help in designing a project to reintegrate the poorer east side into Hudson’s daily life.

With this intention in mind, Cruz developed an intervention that blends seven housing units with social services, arts and culture programming and health agencies, interlaced with community gardens. He united eastern poverty

with western privilege through narrow parkways joining the working-class neighborhoods around State Street to the more upscale shopping district along Warren Street. “The two streets are very close but also very far,” Cruz says. “One is depressed and the other is gentrified. The goal was to connect the poor and rich neighborhoods.”

There is a central raised amphitheater that overlooks the park, and the park is also visible from the private balconies of the surrounding apartments. Cruz aims to preserve a community garden down the street by encircling it with housing, public services and a long, covered loggia where people can socialize. The PARC Foundation has obtained project rights from the city and is now working to organize a coalition of non profits to manage and co-own the venture. Cruz estimates that it will take two years to begin building.

While builders and planners tend to keep housing distant from social, artistic and public services, Cruz’s ahead-of-the-

curve designs challenge the way people think about mixed uses. “The spirit of the projects is to bring attention to the fact that housing cannot be seen in isolation,” he says.

Cruz was hired by Steve Fagin, the then-chair of the Visual Arts department, based on the duality of his work. And along with many recent hires in the department, Cruz has begun redirecting the visual arts program toward creating art with a public focus, regardless of the medium.

As an architect, professor and community developer, Cruz straddles many identities. At UCSD, his role has been to put one foot in the University and the other in the region it occupies. He aims to forge a bridge between high institutions of knowledge and bottom-level community activism and to bring the University into a closer relationship with its Latin neighbor—Mexico.

“We can be looking at the smaller, more localized conditions that are next

to the University and by addressing them deeply in a smart way, we can begin commenting on the larger global issues,” says Cruz. “UCSD needs to address the fact that it lives in the midst of this amazing laboratory.”

Reflecting that, his classes center on urban theory, public space and border studies and he tries to instill the notion of public culture into his teaching to encourage students to produce art with a social and political purpose.

“I try to invite students to think outside the walls of the University,” Cruz says, “to see that art is not just to be isolated in your own studio, indulging projects and producing pieces, but rather it is to really participate in the larger politics and to produce more visionary projects for the city.” 🌿

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