OLD HOUSE, NEW FUTURE:
THE QUIET REVIVAL OF THE SHOTGUN HOUSE

By

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In memory of
Charles and Opal Lee Tate

Many thanks to

My loving husband,
Henry Kwasi Prempeh

and

My encouraging advisor,
Dr. Anthony S. Parent, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Shotgun houses (“shotguns”) are the most widely acknowledged expressions of African-American architectural design in the United States. They are New World constructions, rooted in indigenous African architectural and spatial traditions and influenced by American Indian and European building techniques. The name describes a wide variety of narrow homes where the rooms are aligned in a single row without the use of an interior hallway. Prior to the 1950s, shotgun homes were one of the predominant housing types in the United States. Today, only a few examples of shotgun houses and shotgun neighborhoods remain in cities across America. Many of these are in a state of disrepair.

The place of shotgun architecture in local and national social history not only justifies proactive preservation efforts to save and restore the remaining few but, encouragingly, the shotgun house has benefited from a recent resurgence of interest. This new spotlight on the shotgun house has revealed exciting new prospects and possibilities for reviving old shotgun communities and repositioning the shotgun as a suitable, affordable and environmentally-friendly solution for contemporary housing needs.
INTRODUCTION

The story of the rise and fall of the shotgun house as an architectural form in the United States is, in many respects, a story of the African American experience, from slavery through the Reconstruction to the coming of Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the dawn of freedom in the modern post-World War II era. In this history of trials and tribulations, the shotgun house has often stood as a contemporaneous testament to the struggle of a people for dignity and a place in the American social, economic and cultural landscape. Yet, despite its significance as a witness to a people’s history, the shotgun house has not garnered quite the same degree of mainstream recognition and respect as have such other distinctive, historically rooted African American cultural forms like music, literature and dance.¹ While an enduring association with Jim Crow continues to cast a stigmatizing shadow on the shotgun house as an architectural style, there are encouraging, albeit scattered, signs of a revival of interest in the shotgun form as an answer to contemporary mainstream housing needs.

Shotgun houses (“shotguns”) are the most widely acknowledged expressions of African American architectural design in the United States. They are New World

¹ Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, Common Places (University of Georgia Press, 1986), 58.
constructions, rooted in indigenous African architectural and spatial traditions and influenced by American Indian and European building techniques. The term “shotgun house” was already part of the mainstream American vocabulary by 1903.2 The name describes a variety of narrow homes where the rooms are aligned in a single row without the use of an interior hallway. Some have also suggested an African etymology for the name “shotgun,” drawing specific parallels to terms such as to-gun, which means "place of assembly" in the southern Dahomey (modern Benin) Fon area.3

From the end of the Civil War through the 1920’s, shotgun homes were not only prevalent throughout the southern landscape, they had also found acceptance in communities throughout the mid-West and California. By the 1930’s, however, the appeal of the shotgun house began to wane. Residents increasingly felt estranged from the American dream of prosperity and unable to escape the negative stereotypes projected onto shotgun houses and their inhabitants. The national eclipse of shotgun houses began in the 1950s, as perhaps tens of thousands of shotgun houses were destroyed nationwide in the name of postwar “urban renewal.” Shotguns, which had once housed Americans, black and white, poor and middle class, became stigmatized as a symbol of urban poverty and blight. Their mass destruction and replacement by urban housing “projects” was often met with approval at the time.

Today, only a few examples of shotgun houses and shotgun neighborhoods remain in cities across the country. Many of these are in a state of disrepair. Some of the largest communities of surviving shotgun houses, each reflecting a distinctive local and


3 Ibid.
regional flavor and adaptation, can be found in New Orleans, LA, Houston, TX, Atlanta, GA, Jackson, MS, St. Louis, MO, and Louisville, KY.

The place of shotgun architecture in local and national social history justifies proactive preservation efforts to save and restore the remaining few in cities across America. These indisputably historic homes have important stories to tell about the social, economic, political, cultural and demographic histories of their particular local communities; histories that would be lost, perhaps irretrievably, if these last shotgun houses are left to decay and disappear.

Encouragingly, the shotgun has benefited recently from a resurgence of interest, as various architects, urban planners, community development organizations, private foundations, and prominent home and design magazines peer behind the veil of stigma that has come to be associated with it and objectively re-evaluate it as an architectural style. This new spotlight on the shotgun house, especially from influential design professionals and marketers, has revealed exciting new prospects and possibilities for reviving old shotgun communities and repositioning the shotgun as a suitable, affordable and environmentally-friendly solution for contemporary housing needs.
CHAPTER ONE

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE:

THE HISTORY OF THE SHOTGUN HOUSE

The seemingly humble shotgun house is a resilient architectural style that dates back to the 1700s and represents a unique opportunity to explore the manifestation of African architectural aesthetics within American material culture. Its path in the New World contributes to our understanding of the condition of slavery and the acquisition of freedom for blacks in both Haiti and the United States. Its former prevalence and ultimate demise in the American landscape also underscores the social, political and economic callousness of segregation while providing evidence of the longstanding African American struggle for a place in the American landscape.

Anthropologist and historian John Michael Vlach has carefully traced the roots of the shotgun housing type from Africa to the Caribbean to the United States. In his 1976 dissertation, Vlach demonstrates proximic relationships regarding cultural norms, spatial appropriations and building practices as the primary links between West Africa and the Caribbean. His research identifies a traditional two room African structure with a covered porch that perhaps was influenced by an Arawak Indian structure in Haiti that had its entry at the end of the building.4 The two forms coalesced resulting in the

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compound structure that was brought from Haiti to New Orleans. Tracing the migration of the shotgun house from Africa to Haiti to Louisiana clearly shows the persistence of certain traditional building types. At the same time, the modifications made to the housing type demonstrate the influence of changes resulting from contact with various ethnic groups and different building approaches as well as changing social needs.

In America, many have falsely assumed that shotgun houses are mere architectural extensions of the slave cabin. While many came to see it as a sort of “neo-slave cabin,” because of the continued degradation of blacks during the heyday of shotgun construction, essentially there is no direct relationship between the shotguns built by free blacks of the early 1800s and American slave cabins. Slave cabins were most often windowless 10 x 10 or 12 x 12 squares. In fact, it is more likely that formerly enslaved people, most of whom were not exposed to shotgun architecture at the time of Emancipation, would have adopted the more prevalent saddlebag style architecture customary throughout the South. This housing style consisted of two adjacent rooms attached parallel to the road.

In Haiti, unlike in America, enslaved Africans were allowed to influence the architectural environment in which they lived. They designed their own houses and by the early 18th century had developed a small rectangular dwelling with a gable entrance that was simply called a caille or house. Other Haitian terminology for the house include maison basse or lower house and kay a lo or caille a lo, both latter phrases stem from the French description caille longue which literally means long house. Although gable-entry houses did occur in some parts of central Africa, where many Haitian slaves

6 Allen George Noble, Traditional Building (I.B.Tauris, 2007), 56.
originated, the shotgun house is indeed a New World construction that developed first in the West Indies. This house type, the prototype of the shotgun, was then successively built in urban Haiti, and entered the United States via New Orleans.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Taking Root in New Orleans}

The earliest American shotguns appeared in New Orleans in the early 19th century; and the city remains at the hub of shotgun development today. The Notarial Archives of New Orleans offers substantial insight into the origins of urban shotgun architecture. The organization houses 40,000,000 pages of signed acts compiled by the notaries of New Orleans dating back to 1733 and, importantly, a sizeable collection of 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century posters advertising the sale of real estate.\textsuperscript{9} The first shotgun house noted in the Notarial Archives record was sold in November 1833 and was located on Bourbon Street near St. Philips in the French Quarter.\textsuperscript{10} Given the intermittent nature of record keeping in the early years of the Notarial Archives and the fact that the organization also archived building contracts, it is not unreasonable to assume that this home was built prior to its 1833 sale date. It would also not be unreasonable to assume that this home was not the oldest or only shotgun home existing in the community at the time.\textsuperscript{11}

Early New Orleans building contracts also reveal that at least five shotguns were built four years later in 1837, further demonstrating that the architectural form had taken root in the city by the 1830s. Four of these homes were the North Shore type; they

\textsuperscript{10} Upton and Vlach, Common Places, 62., Plan book 15, folio 33, New Orleans Notarial Archives
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
appeared at Constance and Enterpe Streets in the lower garden district. These identical structures were examples of elaborate shotgun variations with two room additions flanking the rear of the house and a porch surrounding each of the remaining three sides.  

Given that vernacular architectural forms generally take years to evolve, the presence of these variations suggests that the traditional or basic folk house form was probably much older than what is represented within the limited number of recorded documents that exist from the 1830s.

These early records, although few, offer valuable insight into the evolution of the shotgun and suggest that shotgun architecture had a firm footing in the New Orleans landscape by the first quarter of the 1800s. However, they do not reveal the exact date of arrival of this unique vernacular style. To determine the reason behind its appearance, we must connect the homes to their makers.

The success of the Haitian revolution marked a tremendous moment in history for blacks in the New World regarding the overthrow of colonial oppression and the establishment of the first republic in the Americas ruled by people of African descent. However, Haiti’s success also left the country politically and economically isolated. Many free persons left the country in search of economic prosperity elsewhere and a substantial number chose New Orleans. In 1809 alone, five years after the end of the Haitian revolution, more than 50 ships

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12 Ibid., 62-63,77.
13 Ibid., 63.
brought 2,000 free people of color to the gulf city from Haiti. By 1810, New Orleans was home to 12,223 individuals: 4,507 whites, 4,386 slaves, and 3,332 free people of color.\textsuperscript{14} The influx of such large numbers of individuals would have created a significant demand for the construction of new housing. There are numerous documents that confirm the relationship between shotgun homes and the free blacks in New Orleans who built them.

In 1835, builder James Jolle, a 	extit{homme de couleur libre}, constructed a house for Uraine Marsenat Chapieaux that measured 15 feet wide and 45 feet deep. This house and a similar dwelling that Jolle built the following year were likely shotguns. In 1839, Francois Ducoing requested that Laurent Cordier build a 	extit{maison basse} or lower house, again a term used in Haiti for buildings of the shotgun type. This house was built in Elysian Fields, which was at the time a black Creole neighborhood. The connection between Haiti and New Orleans is more pronounced in the case of Martial Le Beoeuf who in 1840, stated in a building contract that his house was to be constructed after the example of those in Santo Domingo.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, in the 1840s its Haitian roots rather than any references to conventional Creole house types were still defining the housing type. The precise size of the floor plans of some Louisiana and Haitian shotgun houses is almost identical. Structural and aesthetic intentions including ceiling height and decorative elements were also generally the same.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, the shotgun house in New Orleans was developed almost certainly as a result of a massive infusion of free blacks from Haiti. By 1850, the number of free black craftsmen in the city had grown to approximately 680 masons and carpenters.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, free blacks were in a position to both

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} All references to 19\textsuperscript{th} century shotgun construction. Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 67-69.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 63.
\end{flushright}
buy and build houses of their own choosing. They controlled sufficient financial resources and technical skill to develop their own architectural environment. But how and why did this structural type gain such a pervasive presence throughout America?

The Shotgun House: A Source of Pride, A Sense of Place

While the city’s enslaved population dwelled in small cabins and corners of white homes, the free population had already established a sense of place within the city. Amidst the many fine houses in New Orleans belonging to both blacks and whites, it is not difficult to imagine that members of the newly emancipated population were in search of a home they could finally call their own. By the end of the Civil War, there were possibly thousands of shotgun homes in New Orleans. For the city’s enslaved population, these properties were a symbol of freedom and defiance against white oppression that recalled the Haitian Revolution, and offered an important model for black prosperity. While the city’s freedmen population lacked political and civil rights, they did possess definite property rights.

By the mid-1830s free blacks owned $2.5 million in property in New Orleans. They were a proud and sophisticated community that began operating their own schools in 1813 and many were financially able to send their young men and women to France or Northern schools to be educated. At the French opera and theater free persons maintained box seats in the second tier, they attended mass at the St. Louis Cathedral on Sundays, and throughout the week they kept a busy social schedule of balls, parties and

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
meetings of benevolent groups.\textsuperscript{21} Even after the Civil War, only Charleston, SC, Washington, DC, and Baltimore, MD rivaled New Orleans in the diversity, wealth, and cosmopolitan character of the black population. However, blacks in New Orleans were far more prosperous. In 1880, New Orleans blacks could boast a per capita wealth of $40, a handsome sum compared to another considerably prosperous community in Savannah, GA, where their blacks possessed only $7.31 per capita.\textsuperscript{22}

Uncommon for a Southern city, New Orleans’ large enslaved population lived with their slave owners in the city, usually in separate slave quarters beside or in back of the main house. Thus, the enslaved population lived in close proximity to a very large free black population. And certainly, throughout the 1800s enslaved blacks took note of the free black success that emerged from their small shotgun homes. Eager to attain that level of achievement for themselves, they embraced the shotgun form as a distinct symbol of black independence and economic mobility. The architectural form not only met their physical needs, but was an outward expression of a new identity claimed by blacks as free individuals. Thus, along with hope and inspiration, the shotgun building technique spread across America.

Unlike most folk traditions which are past down orally from one generation to the next, the shotgun largely spread across the country in one generation. Knowledge of shotgun architecture was passed hand-to-hand and mouth-to-ear as African Americans sought an immediate path to a better life and as old communities were reshaped by the rapid expansion caused by new arrivals.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, blacks who were acknowledged as the labor source that built the grand Southern mansions and worked as carpenters and masons

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
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in cities and towns across the South never were credited with building common houses of their own design.\textsuperscript{24} The shotgun house became the first national expression of black influence in the realm of architecture. While some shotguns were crudely built out of found materials, others were examples of fine architecture.

The trend spread rapidly for several reasons. The shotgun was an invaluable solution to meeting the national pressing need for affordable housing generated by the Emancipation. They were easy, quick and affordable to build. They did not require a lot of land, but were simple to modify and expand after construction if land and materials became available. Unlike most forms of housing for enslaved people, they were quite dignified by comparison. And importantly, the perpendicular alignment was a stark break from Euro-American conventions. To black communities far from the Gulf shores, to those who had no knowledge of Toussaint L’Ouverture and his overthrow of white power, to those who lacked awareness of perhaps the wealthiest black community in the nation, one thing was understood clearly, the shotgun served as a singular object that stood in clear and defiant contrast to the white aesthetic. It was an external sign of difference, which was related to ethnicity as well as independence.\textsuperscript{25} African Americans could and did affect their own architectural environment with shotgun homes providing a necessary source of pride and sense of place.

\textsuperscript{24} Upton and Vlach, \textit{Common Places}, 58.
The peak of shotgun building spans from Reconstruction until the 1920s. With four million former slaves seeking low-cost housing, untold scores of shotgun homes were built, making it the single most prevalent housing type in America during that era. To meet the housing needs spawned by the Great Migration, mail order plans and materials for shotgun homes were widely available by 1900, making it popular and economical to build in both urban and rural settings. By the 1930s, the shotgun represented 60% to more than 80% of the housing stock for African Americans in some Southern communities. While the vernacular style initially represented a source of self-esteem for African Americans, it later acquired the stigma of stereotypical perceptions.

The rapid expansion of shotgun housing paralleled the rapid swell of Jim Crow practices across the nation. Through a variety of malevolent practices, whites exerted great efforts to maintain the racial status quo that had dominated the slave era. This dynamic of race relations led to both the success and the demise of shotgun housing. To illustrate this point, imagine the shotgun house representing two sides of an interesting American coin. On one side, the shotgun represented a symbol of pride and prosperity separate from white domination. On the other side, the small stature of the humble

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shotgun maintained a social order that was unintimidating and acceptable for whites. However, that social order was only temporarily acceptable for blacks.

Understanding the backdrop of race, one sees that the cultural and social identities that developed within a segregated environment (particularly in the South) would welcome a separate housing type that distinguished black and white living spaces after the Civil War, especially after freedom threatened to bring blacks and whites closer together economically. Architecture, like identity, can be the result of negotiation. The shotgun house played an important role in that negotiation. Like everything in the South, the shotgun was certainly a result of the struggle between establishing a secure sense of place for blacks and maintaining social, economic and even aesthetic domination for whites.

Just as rows of slave cabins on plantations had been used to control large populations of blacks, the congregation of African Americans in shotguns communities was commonly employed by the controlling class as an effective method of separateness and containment. In lockstep with the development of black music, theatre, dance, and fashion, the context of the South also gave rise to the need for a type of segregationist architecture. And within the horrific social context of Jim Crow, housing that, from the white perspective, would entrap blacks as lower class citizens was favored. By 1929, a Tennessee judge expressed the widely accepted opinion that shotgun houses could only be rented to the very poorest class of tenants. The simple, small homes that once held big dreams of prosperity for blacks were hugely denigrated by the larger society.

The humble shotgun was ultimately unable to shoulder the onerous weight of both racism and classism in America. As African American’s hopes and dreams of social, political and economic equality were dashed, the shotgun was gradually transformed from being a point of self-respect into a place of disdain. Its initial role as a “step up” in society never materialized into a successful escape from poverty and oppression. In this way, the shotgun replaced the slave shack as the most prevalent physical symbol of segregation and race struggle in the American material landscape. For the shotgun, it was at first “heads you win,” but later “tails you lose.”

The Assault on the Shotgun House

Due to decades of negative dogma, by the 1950s, the shotgun was sufficiently abhorred by both blacks and whites. The effects were long lasting. In 1992, the city of Delray Beach, FL, its Community Redevelopment Agency and the predominately African American community of Mount Olive hosted an affordable housing design competition. One entry produced by architect Marilys R. Nepomechie was a plan based upon the shotgun house. This proposal was greeted coldly as the African American residents expressed that the style of house “could only serve to stigmatize and marginalize them [the African Americans] further.”

As the 20th century social order successfully relegated blacks and the poorest whites to the shotgun housing style, it maintained a reputation for serving as “indecent” housing for those who possessed no other economic choices. The homes themselves were not

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only viewed as substandard, but those who resided in them were systematically and erroneously relegated to the lowest echelon of society. In many other communities, but not all, African Americans abandoned their shotgun homes to escape the negative stereotypes that further isolated them from economic opportunities.

Negative stereotypes and shotgun homes maintained in poor condition by destitute residents or unscrupulous landlords made the homes an easy target for demolition via urban renewal projects nationwide. Shotgun homes were most often located in black neighborhoods where the Federal Housing Authority (founded in 1930) established discriminatory mortgage underwriting standards that steered lenders away from minority areas. This practice known as redlining caused real estate values in minority neighborhoods to plummet. Absentee ownership and a shortage of mortgage lenders for inner city residents led to disinvestment in these neighbors in general and contributed to the deterioration of shotgun houses in the mid and late 20th century. Interpreted solely as a symbol of poverty by both blacks and whites shotgun houses were demolished after being vacated by both willing and unwilling residents. In some neighborhoods, land values became so high that the shotguns were razed to make way for more upscale homes. From 1950 to 1970, over 425,000 low-income homes, mostly in African American neighborhoods, were demolished through government-funded programs. Instead of designing local, state and national programs to target the systemic issues of racism and poverty, the simple solution was to clear-cut communities. Many shotgun neighborhoods were specifically targeted. In the same period, only 125,000
affordable housing units were rebuilt, some of them intended to only warehouse the poor, while others were transformed into affordable housing neighborhoods for whites.\textsuperscript{30}

Nonetheless, the concept of a simple, single-level floor plan lived on in ranch-style houses. The FHA promoted this new style of housing for working class whites, allowing them to escape to the suburbs.

The Legacy of the Shotgun

Not everyone was phased by the negative implications of shotgun living. The negative perceptions of shotgun living have softened, if not mostly dissipated gradually over the past twenty years. Many Americans under the age of fifty have no concept of the racial negativity associated with the shotgun house type. Thousands of shotgun homes have remained in continued use since the early 1900s. New Orleans, along with many other cities has significant shotgun communities, and some have even established Shotgun Historic Districts. In cities all over the country, communities have or are taking action to preserve the last remaining shotgun homes that exist.\textsuperscript{31} Some have preserved them as cultural centers or small historic house museums.

Ironically, the shotgun house may have survived long enough to meet the trend toward small, sustainable housing. Many shotgun houses in the south are models for

\textsuperscript{30} David Brown and William Williams, \textit{Row: Trajectories Through The Shotgun House} (Rice University School of Architecture, 2004).

Undeniably, the shotgun house has played a critical role in the history and culture of the south, and that role has been widely recognized by historians, architects, and preservationists. In 2001, Rice University sponsored a three-day symposium and conference entitled "Shotguns 2001” to illuminate contemporary shotgun house design. The conference featured talks by prominent cultural historians, including belle hooks, Alvia Wardlaw, and a host of architects who outlined the importance of the shotgun in the southern landscape and presented opportunities for re-envisioning the architectural style in preparation for its future role in the American landscape. As we consider architecture as a social indicator of who we are, what we value, and how we relate to our environment, the shotgun house offers fertile ground for continued study regarding the distinct histories of communities across the country. A better understanding of shotgun buildings as a part of a diverse architectural language will give us a greater appreciation of the housing style itself and unveil how it was able to successfully meet the changing housing needs of millions of American families over the past 200 years.
CHAPTER TWO

TYPES AND VARIATIONS:

THE LANGUAGE OF SHOTGUN HOUSES

The shotgun moniker is derived from the anecdote that, if one fired a shotgun through the front door, the pellets would pass cleanly through the house and out the back door. Conversely, the true nature of shotgun housing is that it represents a wide-ranging architectural typology that is far more varied than one might expect. Most simply, the archetypal shotgun home is one-story, one room (10 – 14 feet) wide and two to six rooms deep with all the rooms aligned without an interior hallway. They are frequently characterized by a gabled roof where the roof ridge runs the length of the house. In actuality, the doors may or may not be aligned at each end of the home. In New Orleans, many believed that perfectly aligned doors could attract apparitions. To accommodate the local spiritual beliefs of some residents, either the front or rear door was often set at the opposite end of the home or the front entry and window(s) were shuttered to appear identical from the street to confuse spirits and deter their entry.

The spread of shotgun architecture across the American landscape can be traced directly to the Great Migration. Given this knowledge, it is easy to envision that along each migration stop, the locals created their own version of the shotgun, most having never seen the original structures of Louisiana. As with most vernacular customs,
individualized aesthetics are not of great significance in folk building. With the shotgun, the overall similarity is present and symbolic of association within the group, but expressions of the architecture vary greatly within a set of architectural confines. In each city the shotgun structures that emerge are actually unique regional interpretations of the architectural style. Many people falsely assume that all shotgun homes are identical. Upon further inspection, we see that shotgun homes are mostly similar within the communities they serve.

The simple unifying description of the shotgun manifests in infinite variation across the country. The subjects of urban versus rural types and regional variation could form the basis of an entirely separate discourse examining local norms regarding width, depth, foundation types, porch types, roof types, interior and exterior materials usage, fenestration and ornamentation. In fact, the shotgun frequently reflects architectural embellishments representing many formal styles including Victorian, Italianate, Greek revival, craftsmen, and others. The once ubiquitous shotgun served such a large and varied population across the country that inevitably popular modifications gave rise to important subtypes and significant variation within those subtypes to meet the regional, cultural, socio-economic and individual needs of its inhabitants over multiple generations. This examination offers a cursory view of the myriad and often unexpected variation that exists.

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33 Noble, Traditional Building, 5.
Shotgun Singles

The most recognizable shotgun form is the shotgun singles, which forms the basis for this general housing type. Urban shotgun singles are usually set on rectangular lots with narrow street frontages. Most often, the homes are set back slightly from the front property line, and sometimes behind an ornamental cast-iron or white picket fence. In the neighborhoods such as Faubourg Marigny, Esplanade Ridge and Faubourg Tremé in New Orleans, the homes were often constructed directly atop the front property line, forcing a small front stoop or steps to spill onto the sidewalk. These steps were originally built of wood, but were later replaced with concrete.

Nearly all early shotguns were of wood frame construction and, most were raised on brick or cement block piers (a convention that materialized from its flood prone origins in New Orleans that also contributed to cross ventilation). Its design is well suited for the Southern climate. Front porches, the shotgun’s contribution to the broad field of American architecture, provide much needed shade from the sun and encourage interaction between neighbors. Masonry examples did emerge, but rarely in the Deep South. Only a handful of masonry examples survive today in cities such as Memphis and various parts of the mid-West.

The varying facades of shotgun houses yield an interesting stylistic dialogue. With the exception of examples built directly on the front property line, most shotgun homes feature a front porch covered by a roof apron and supported by columns and sometimes brackets and lacey ornamentation. The front elevations were organized around the placement of the front door. On single shotgun cottages and side hall and side gallery cottages, the door is generally set to one side of the façade. The door is adjacent
to one or two window openings that range from simple standard size openings to elaborate full length casements fitted with six-over-nine pane sash.\textsuperscript{34} The side elevations, which often faced side alleys or were in close proximity to other shotgun homes, remained relatively plain. In cooler climates, chimneys were commonly built in the interior, allowing the front and middle rooms to share a fireplace opening in each room. The kitchen usually had its own chimney.

The shotgun is often recognized by its steeply-pitched front gable roofline extending over a porch. But again, this tells only part of the story. For example, in New Orleans, from the 1850s through the 1870s, the porches were covered by the hipped roof of the cottage. The hipped portion of the roof is supported by square wooden columns, with the roofline hidden by a generous entablature. During the 1880s and 1890s, local tastes shifted toward an exposed roofline for the porch overhang; which was then supported by a sequence of ornate machine-cut wood brackets.\textsuperscript{35} The style became more ornate in the 1890s when turned wood porch columns were used to support the front edge of the roof and additional millwork ornament was set between the tops of the columns. On these later facades, the roof design commonly shifted from a hipped roof to a small gable section at the peak of the roof and a sloping apron beneath it that extended over the porch. The front porches of these houses were almost always decorated with railings, either set between the porch columns, or between newel posts on those houses without porch columns. The railing balusters were generally cast-iron or turned wood.\textsuperscript{36} These

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
trends regarding roof design, well documented in New Orleans, would not necessarily follow suit in other areas of the country.

The rooms of a shotgun house are lined up one behind the other. Typically, the living room is first, then one or two bedrooms, and finally a kitchen and bathroom in back. In three room shotguns, parents frequently slept in the first room and housed children in the middle bedroom. Early shotgun houses were not built with bathrooms. Residents in shotgun communities often shared communal outhouses. In later years, part of the back porch was converted to a bathroom, or a lavatory was added with a small hall before the last room of the house. Sometimes a restroom was added via a side addition built off of the kitchen.

Other than the basic floor plan, little else seems to be “standard” about the iconic shotgun single. While there are many examples of dilapidated and abandoned shotgun houses, the images provided herein deliberately represent well-kept examples (where available) of shotgun single and multi-family homes that are in continued use.

38 Georgiana Page McCoy. Interview. 2006.
Urban Shotgun Types

View photo at:


Figure 3: The most ornate Victorian style shotguns are usually found in New Orleans, where sophistication and class distinction are important aspects of the local culture. This home features a vent on the front gable, a full front porch with turned wood posts, gingerbread brackets and other ornamentation. (Photo credit: Gregory Smith www.tinyhousedesigns.com)

View photo at:

FL Architect Fan, www.flickr.com

Figure 4: Simple, well-kept shotgun with shed roof over the front porch in Atlanta’s Hyde Park neighborhood. (Photo credit: FL Architect Fan, 2008, www.flickr.com)

View photo at:

www.inetours.com/New_Orleans/Garden_District.html

Figure 5: Italiantate New Orleans shotgun house with elaborate façade and iron gate in the front.

View photo at:

http://projectrowhouses.org/

Figure 6: Shotgun homes in Houston often have a recessed front entry which offers greater privacy for the front porch and the first room of the house. (Photo credit: Project Row Houses)
Figure 7: Brick Italianate shotgun house in Louisville features a hipped roof with flared eaves. (Photo credit: www.skyscrapercity.com)

View photo at:  

Figure 8: A row of shotgun houses in St. Louis built around 1890 that utilize the Roman arch. These urban dwellings demonstrate sophisticated brick façades revealing interesting shapes and insight into the success of African Americans in the area. (Photo credit: Michael Allen)

View photo at:  
www.ecoabsence.blogspot.com/2008_09_01_archive.html

Figure 9: Simple, but elegant brick shotgun single in New Albany, IN. (Photo Credit: www.photobucket.com)

View photo at:  
tfulmore_2008's Profile / All Albums / New Albany Shotgun Homes http://s293.photobucket.com/albums/mm70/tfulmore_2008/New%20Albany%20Shotgun%20Homes action=view&current=20080329016.jpg

Figure 10: Historic shotguns in the Butchertown neighborhood of Louisville, feature a novel brick and wood façade combination. (Photo credit: Encyclopedia of Louisville)

View photo at:  
Small City and Rural Types

View photo at:

View photo at:
http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2008/05/25/historic-shotgun-house-be-relocated

Figure 11: Last remaining shotgun house in Georgetown, TX. The home, owned by Ethel Moore, an African American woman, is leased to the Georgetown Cultural Citizens Memorial Association for use as a Black Heritage Museum. (Photo credit: Williamson County Historical Committee)

View photo at:
http://vanishingsouthgeorgia.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/0011.jpg

View photo at:

Figure 12: Historic shotgun in Columbia, MO features clapboard siding, high pitched roof and no windows on the front facade. (Photo credit: Alex Lewis)

Figure 13: Abandoned four room shotgun in south Georgia. (Photo credit: Brian Brown and Vanishing South Georgia)

Figure 14: With a current population of approximately 37,500, New Albany, IN has about 500 shotgun homes. This block reflects the simplicity of rural types, but the lack of a front porch and awnings are urban features. Few side windows are common in colder and Midwestern climates. (Photo credit: dead Louisville)
The North Shore House

The North Shore house is perhaps the original shotgun housing type. It is depicted in early rural drawings from Haiti where nearly identical forms exist today. These shotgun houses have wide verandas on three sides. In the United States, the homes were modified with a rear ells or T-shaped extensions. Often, many of the rooms have an exterior door providing access to the side galleries, so the house may have no or few windows. Some examples have as many as eight exterior doors.

The houses were so named because many were built on the north shore of New Orleans' Lake Pontchartrain as summer homes for wealthy whites. However, most were built around Mandeville and Abita Springs in St. Tammany Parish as resort homes for blacks. However, they exist in many other areas. Recent research has revealed that several of the earliest surviving buildings on the North Shore were built by and for African Americans.

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41 Vlach, “Shotgun Houses.”
Side Hall, Side Gallery Houses

Side hall cottages and side gallery cottages are essentially four-to six-room shotguns built with an alternative access to the rear rooms of the house. Side hall designs feature an enclosed corridor that runs a partial length of the house. Side gallery designs essentially feature a front and rear ells connected by an open side porch set under the main roof of the house. Like the more traditional shotgun, these cottage types are one room wide with a roof ridge perpendicular to the street. One could argue that side halls and side galleries are not true shotgun houses because the strictest definition of the shotgun floor plan requires the rooms to be "en suite" -- one after another without a hall. For the side gallery shotgun, the rooms are en suite, despite the additional passageway offered by the side gallery. I suspect that the side gallery type is influenced by the North Shore style. While some may split hairs on this matter, side hall and side gallery homes are clear derivatives of traditional shotgun architecture. These forms undeniably developed within the same contextual environment of the shotgun demonstrate a continued evolution of the architectural form. Unlike the railroad flat, there is little indication that side hall and side gallery modifications warrant any discourse separate from the shotgun house.
Figure 16: This Victorian style side gallery shotgun in New Orleans allows for exterior passage from the front to the rear of the house without passing through the interior bedroom(s). Its side porch also affords residents greater outdoor privacy than offered by the front porch, a shady place to sit and an enjoyable view of the side garden. (Photo credit: Boxchain)

View photo at:

Figure 17: Side Gallery Shotgun House, Eastlake, Holy Cross, New Orleans, 1979. (Photo Credit: Jeff Lamb)
Figure 18: Sample Shotgun Types

Traditional Shotgun
No Interior Hall

Side Hall Shotgun
Partial Interior Hall

Side Gallery Shotgun
No Interior Hall
Alternative access to front and rear rooms via a side porch.

Railroad Flat
Interior Hall
extends from the front door to the back door.

Shotguns with Sidesaddles and Saddlebags

In the equestrian world, the sidesaddle generally allows female riders to sit aside rather than astride a horse. Interestingly, 19th century innovations in sidesaddle designs opened up a whole new range of equestrian recreational pursuits for women while allowing them to conform to social norms for modesty. Within shotgun terminology, the sidesaddle is a small exitable addition to the back room of the cottage. This addition opened up a whole new range of possibilities for women who generally managed the kitchen area at the back of the house. The sidesaddle allowed for greater room, flexibility, and ventilation in the cooking and dining areas of the home. It afforded women better oversight of children in the side yard, made the streetscape visible from the rear of the house and gave women the ability to welcome visitors and entertain at the rear of the house while keeping the other living spaces private. Thus, the sidesaddle enhances the functionality of the shotgun design, further weaving together indoor and outdoor living spaces. In southern Louisiana, the sidesaddle is called lagniappe, meaning an unexpected gift or benefit, or a little something extra added as a show of gratitude.
When the sidesaddle is not just a little bump out, but one or more complete rooms, the addition is referred to as a saddlebag. Generally, the saddlebag is used as an additional bedroom and does not contain an exit. Thus, its function is entirely different from the sidesaddle. A shotgun with a saddlebag addition should not be confused with a “saddlebag house.” The saddlebag house is a two room vernacular cottage of Cracker origin that features a fireplace in the wall between the two rooms and a shed roof. (Interestingly, many African Americans constructed saddlebag houses immediately after the Civil War.) Thus, the sidesaddle or saddlebag is considered an architectural feature of the shotgun house, not as a housing category under the shotgun type umbrella. It would inappropriate to refer to a shotgun house as a “sidesaddle” or “saddlebag.” However, in Louisiana one might hear a shotgun house referred to as a *lagniappe* house.

Figure 19: This vacant shotgun house in the Happy Hill neighborhood Winston-Salem, NC is currently for sale (April 2010). The house demonstrates an elaborate saddlebag addition that contributes two extra rooms to the basic shotgun structure. Unusual for the saddlebag feature, one room (probably used as a bedroom) contains an additional exit. (Photo credit: Belinda Tate, April 24, 2010)
Shotgun Doubles

A double shotgun is simply a duplex where two shotguns share a central wall. This housing type is also referred to as a “double-barrel” or shotgun double. The housing style first appeared in New Orleans in 1854 and became a popular urban crowding solution nationwide. In some areas, the double barreled shotgun became associated with the absolute poorest of neighborhoods because they required less land use and fewer materials per household than shotgun singles.\(^{43}\) In some cities, double shotgun homes are now more prevalent today than shotgun singles. Perhaps the larger size of the structures helped them escape the wrath of many urban renewal projects.

Around the nation, double shotguns exist with all the regional architectural penchants for style, materials, and ornamentation that single shotguns exhibit. However, they are rarely located in rural areas. Most often, the doors of the double shotgun are placed at opposite ends of the facade, with two window openings set between them. An unusual double shotgun included in a NOLA exhibition featured a shotgun single-plus-sidehall duplex; uniquely, five openings across the facade included three windows sandwiched between two doors.\(^{44}\) Over time, many shotgun doubles have been converted to single-family homes, or bungalows.

Figure 20: Ornate double shotgun in the French Quarter. Typical of New Orleans, the house features decorative brackets and cast iron ventilators in the porch ceiling. (Photo credit: New Orleans Homes and Neighborhoods)

View photo at:

Figure 21: A double shotgun house in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic District of Atlanta, managed by the National Park Service. It maintains an unusual hipped roof over each porch entry. (Photo credit: Cheryl Shropshire)

View photo at:
www.nps.gov/history/crdi/places/places_index.htm.

Figure 22: Most often, double shotguns are designed with the doors on each end of the house and the windows in the center. This design, featuring windows on each end of the home, breaks from convention. While the house is described online as a shotgun house, the tin shed roof suggests that it could be a saddlebag duplex or at least one of the many shotguns influenced by the Cracker saddlebag design. (Photo credit: Matthew Dolney)

View photo at:
Camelback Shotgun Houses

Camelback shotgun houses were designed to afford residents more living area and greater privacy. These homes, also called “humpbacks,” feature a partial second floor addition at the rear of the house. Both shotgun singles and doubles exist as camelbacks. The partial second floor, or "hump," may be one or two rooms deep and consist of a total of one to four rooms.

The camelback emerged relatively late on the shotgun evolutionary timeline. Some speculate that the style is a reaction to tax codes that favored them as single-story homes due to the partial second story.

Figure 23: Camelback shotgun with a sidesaddle in the Paristown neighborhood of Louisville, KY. (Photo credit: Angry Aspie, 2003, public domain)

View photo at:
img.photobucket.com/.../Butchertown/Btown28.jpg
www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=412265

Figure 24: Camelback shotgun single with a sidesaddle and elaborate façade in Louisville, KY. (Photo credit: www.photobucket.com)
Two Story Shotgun Buildings

Ironically, the larger two story shotgun type is less common than the many smaller shotgun styles. However, these buildings are found sporadically throughout the nation and, given their relative rarity, historic preservation groups should work vigorously to preserve them. The two-story shotgun exists in three primary forms -- as two shotgun singles, double-barreled shotguns, or double-width shotguns stacked one atop the other. Charlestown, SC boasts at least one three-story shotgun structure which is now home to the popular Hominy Grill restaurant. Previously, the lower level of this structure served as a barbershop with two floors of living quarters above.

Two-story shotguns exist as single family and multi-family residences for both middle and working class residents. Some purists deny that two-story shotgun cottages are true shotguns. However, the two-story floor plan is clearly a direct descendent of the original single story design. Our stereotype of the shotgun is most challenged by an oversized shotgun style most commonly found in communities along the Mississippi River from the Gulf of Mexico to Chicago. Having discovered no particular name for it, I refer to this style as the Mississippi River style shotgun (although it appears that this
style possibly exists in a few coastal communities in Georgia). The style simply consists of four extra wide rooms, a living room and kitchen/dining area on the lower level and two bedrooms on the upper level. These homes are only one room wide, with each room on the two floors communicating without the use of an internal hallway. For this reason, they fit squarely within the realm of shotgun typology.

Multi-family versions are referred to as shotgun flats, not to be confused with its more common cousin, the railroad flat. A railroad apartment, or railroad flat, is similar to a shotgun flat except that like a railway car, the apartment has a hallway that runs its full length from the front door to the back door or window (if any). Railroad apartments emerged in New York City in the mid-1800s. Employed to address urban crowding, these flats were made abundant by developers in several major urban areas, including Chicago, Boston and San Francisco. Unlike shotgun flats which were commonly found as two- or four-family dwellings throughout the south, railroad flats are frequently found in brownstone apartment buildings and large tenement buildings five and six stories high. Many early railroad apartments provided wretched conditions. They were narrow and often without internal sanitation forcing tenants to use outhouses located on a narrow strip of land at the rear of the properties.\footnote{Simon Eisner, Arthur Gallion, and Stanley Eisner, \textit{The Urban Pattern} (John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 128.} Conditions in these tenement buildings became so deplorable that New York passed its first laws to regulate the building standards in relation to railroad flats in 1867.\footnote{Ibid.} In some cases, destitute families would take up residence in each room of the apartment, with the hallway providing a communal space.\footnote{Richard Sennett, \textit{The Conscience of the Eye} (W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 27. American Institute of Architects, “Architectural Record” 50 (n.d.): 104, 114-115.}
In many cases, the railroad flat floor plan proved to be less desirable than the shotgun floor plan because it created long, narrow, dark hallways and dark, poorly ventilated bedrooms.\textsuperscript{48} In an effort to produce more livable quarters, many landlords and residents removed walls thereby creating larger, brighter and more airy rooms, essentially converting these railroad flats into shotgun flats.

Two-story shotgun structures exist in many unexpected places. However, due to our typically limited ability to recognize the forms of the housing type, they often go unnoticed as members of the incredibly diverse category of housing.

\textsuperscript{48} Eisner, Gallion, and Eisner, \textit{The Urban Pattern}, 128.
Two-story Shotgun Buildings

Figure 27: This two-story shotgun in Faubourg Marigny, New Orleans bears elements of Italianate Victorian design. The bracketed, overhanging flat roof, the decorative quoins, and the wood siding and cast-iron ornamentation demonstrate all the trappings of New Orleans sophistication. (Photo credit: Shoestring Traveler)

View photo at:

Figure 28: This two-story shotgun in Alliance, OH evolved from the rural tradition of omitting a window adjacent to the front entry. However, this simple design includes a window on the front façade on the upper level. Two-story shotguns generally have an upper and lower porch; this design also defies that convention. (Photo credit: Kate Deioma)

View photo at:
www.kaytedeioma.com/photobank/KMD04Ohio158low.jpg

Also see modern two-story design at http://www.vhdesign.com/new_orleans_house_plans.htm

Figure 29: Of all shotgun types, the double-wide, 2-story shotguns such as these are probably the least investigated, perhaps because their large size does not obviously reference the more elemental shotgun style. The two grand shotgun estates pictured here are located in the Chicago area. These homes are often only two rooms deep with public areas downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. (Photo credit: Jessie Davis Interiors)

View photo at:
http://www.jessiedavidsoninteriors.com/renovations/shotgun-content.html

Figure 30: This simple two-story shotgun flat in the East Winston neighborhood of Winston-Salem, NC is one the last remaining of its type in the city. It consists of two shotgun apartments one atop the other and resides in an area being rehabilitated by Habitat for Humanity. (Photo credit: Belinda Tate 2/27/10)

View photo at:
http://jefflamb.wordpress.com/category/shotgun/page/3/

Figure 31: This shotgun apartment building is a two-story double-barrel shotgun that consists of four flats. It is located in the Esplanade district of New Orleans. (1979©Jeffrey Lamb)
CHAPTER THREE

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT:

RECAPTURING THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

Faltering substantially under decades of devastation and mass abandonment, neighborhood gentrification, and contemptuous urban planning, the pervasive shotgun which once blanketed innumerable neighborhoods, now only dots the vast American landscape. Standing firm nonetheless, these remaining humble abodes still evoke nostalgia for “the good old days” when neighbors functioned like extended family members and communities provided critical social, emotional and economic support. Given our current fascination with the production and evolution of African American vernacular spaces, our intrigue with small architecture in a world facing substantial environmental and population concerns, and our modern understanding and appreciation for the past, the shotgun floods our collective memory of how we as Americans made our society, and how we as families, struggled, survived - determined to create a better future. After housing untold generations of people of African descent who, survived the transatlantic slave trade, American slavery, and a myriad of other types of oppression, thousands of shotgun homes remain standing. They have morphed into a variety of forms giving rise to a unique language of architectural typology. Over time these homes have undergone a variety of changes to better adapt to the needs of the centuries of families they have served. Shotguns, inextricably tied to our past, seem certain to play a part in our future.
Shotgun homes remain on today’s American landscape with thousands of home owners and tenants living in them across the nation. They offer a viable solution to the housing shortage as they no longer symbolize the negative imaginary of the past. Given that many shotgun neighborhoods were obliterated by the 1950s, many younger Americans have no knowledge of the housing type or the negative stereotypes associated with it. Expanding architectural choices have recast the shotgun house as an affordable and attractive housing alternative. Quality built, small and affordable homes are desirable to both renters and buyers. These small homes that were once defined as symbols of poverty are now respected as innovative, practical and sustainable structures that serve as a symbol of cultural pride.

We Will Be Back: The Katrina Effect

For the better part of the last century, shotguns houses bore the stigma of housing only those who possessed no economic alternatives. While Jim Crow practices often did confine many African Americans to the shotgun housing type, these homes were often kept in pitiful condition by landlords or impoverished residents. In recent years, Americans have shed many of these negative stereotypes. Small communities around the country who have held on to their traditional shotgun homes, and possibly most compelling, Hurricane Katrina unearthed the realization that the shotgun homes of New Orleans were neither the first nor the only shotgun homes whose destruction had been mourned over the years.

On August 28, 2005, Katrina battered the Gulf Coast causing overwhelming devastation. More than 1,800 died, countless were injured, and tens of thousands were
left homeless. New Orleans alone suffered more than $81 billion dollars in property damage. As the cameras of major national and international news networks panned across the flood-wrecked landscape, many Americans saw a series of mysterious narrow cottages that intrigued them. Those who had not seen shotgun homes in many years were surprised that the housing style had survived in great numbers in New Orleans. Others were being introduced to the housing style for the first time. Important to this discourse, the storm had indeed devastated the oldest, the most historically significant, and likely the most numerous shotgun housing stock in America. However, national and international coverage of the storm sparked an interest in the housing type, and more importantly, revealed that attractive, well-appointed shotguns offered respected homesteads after decades of indiscriminate condemnation as indecent living.

The cameras of major news networks quite profoundly altered the trajectory of the shotgun house. By simply providing intense national awareness of the devastation in New Orleans, the media also revealed a long-standing and proud community of shotgun residents from a variety of socioeconomic strata. The broadcasts, however inadvertently, dispelled the myths that, one, people of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds would systematically reject shotgun living when other options were present and, two, that African Americans had completely abandoned their interest in and sense of cultural pride surrounding shotgun homes. Perhaps most intriguing, by featuring homeowners in New Orleans who preferred and were loyal to shotgun living, the broadcasts suggested to some that the same might be true elsewhere in America. The attention sparked a renewed

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interest in the housing type as an affordable housing solution and inspired an interesting collection of new shotgun construction bearing a variety of architectural innovations.

In the aftermath of the storm, proud NOLA residents returned to the Crescent City to reclaim homesteads representing a plethora of architectural styles. Surprising to many, residents of the Ninth Ward, home to New Orleans largest concentration of shotgun homes, demonstrated a marked commitment to their residences. While the novelty of the shotgun had long garnered the interest of cultural historians, it had been falsely assumed by most of the nation that shotguns offered unlivable floor plans to dwellers who, as a homogeneous group, possessed limited economic choices. Unlike the willing residents who had abandoned ramshackled shotguns in previous decades, NOLA residents exhibited a clear cultural pride in their homes as estates that had been owned by their families for generations, as important celebrations of community, regional and national history, and as a preferred lifestyle choice. When faced with the question of whether (and how) to rebuild NOLA shotguns: The answer was clear, “We will be back.”

Rashida Ferdinand, a New Orleans artist, was one of many residents who indeed returned. In 2007, the popular PBS series *This Old House* began to document Ferdinand’s shotgun renovation journey.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{50}\) *This Old House*, television broadcast, directed by David Vos (New York, NY: PBS/This Old House Television, August 2007). http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/info/0,,20052704,00.html.
Ferdinand’s treasure, an 1892 single shotgun built partly from barge boards, was severely damaged by waist-high storm water after Katrina. As a proud fourth generation resident of historic Holy Cross, part of the Lower Ninth Ward, Ferdinand had bought and began renovations on the home in 2004, prior to the storm. Returning home six months after the disaster and determined to restore the structure, she removed four feet of almost-new drywall and all fiberglass insulation, and then scrubbed the studs and remaining surfaces with bleach. After two and one half years of perseverance and with the help of *This Old House*, Ferdinand returned to her shotgun home complete with a new 1,000 square foot camelback addition that added upstairs bedrooms, a bathroom and attractive views of the Mississippi River traffic and the downtown skyline. Ferdinand’s story, along with others, reflects the sentiments of many residents who prove the long term viability of the shotgun cottage architectural style. Ferdinand ends the episode that unveils her house with a statement signify her cultural pride. “Our community is coming back,” she said.

PBS aired a series of 10 episodes about post-Katrina New Orleans, featuring a number of restored shotgun homes inhabited by both blacks and whites. Marna David, a white resident of Holy Cross, demonstrated how she was also able to renovate her charming shotgun single, twice – once before, and once after the storm.

Of course shotgun renovations are not new to New Orleans or to television. *This Old House*, PBS’s longest running series, renovated a New Orleans shotgun around 1990. In one of the 2008 episodes, the show’s host, Kevin O’Connor praises the house type by generally referring to a restored shotgun as “a gem of a house.” These examples not only demonstrated to millions of viewers a broad sense of American cultural pride, but
disturbed persistent stereotypes by revealing little known information about middle class shotgun living.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Cottage Living} magazine, another important industry style maker, designed and built one of the area’s finest examples of shotgun living. The publication’s 2007 \textit{Cottage Living} Idea House is a magnificent two-story modular shotgun. Designed by South Carolina’s Eric Moser, this home provides local architectural flavor and creative flair in a neighborhood that was still trying to rebuild. With more than 2,400 square feet, the exquisite three bedroom, two and a half bath design epitomizes the best of shotgun living\textsuperscript{52} Further, the home is located in the Faubourg Bouligny neighborhood near the prestigious Garden District, which alone contains about 215 shotgun homes. The magazine reinforced the idea to its 1 million readers that shotgun living is not limited to the poor, and can even offer a luxurious contemporary lifestyle.

Although alternative housing types were made available to NOLA residents after the storm, nothing suggested that the shotgun had lost its appeal. Residents restored them, even rebuilt them willingly. Along the way, the rest of the nation learned about the

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{This Old House}, television broadcast, produced by Deborah Hood and David Vos (New York, NY: PBS/This Old House Television, 2007-2008 season).

\textit{New Orleans Project Episodes featuring Rashida Ferdinand - Programs #2717, 2718, 2719, 2721, 2722, 2723, 2726.}

\textit{New Orleans Project Episodes featuring Marna David - Programs #2717}

Show Descriptions: \url{http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/tv/house-project/show-descriptions/0,20152647,00.html}\textsuperscript{52}

Television Profiles: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0S6cJVvtpI}

history of shotgun architecture and began, once again, to accept this housing type as a
desired housing type.

Inspired by New Orleans residents’ unwavering determination to restore their
shotgun homes, architects from New Orleans, the gulf coast region and around the
country began to create innovative designs for displaced residents. The Miletus Group,
based in Rochester, IN, launched a Rebuild New Orleans shotgun house project in 2006.
The company offers a variety of traditional shotgun designs and an array of available
finishes that complement the historic nature of existing structures. They also created an
in-fill method using modular techniques to construct their homes, thereby minimizing the
challenge of using heavy equipment and work crews in tight spaces. Offering three basic
floor plans, a single, a double, and a saddlebag, the factory built shotguns are transported
by truck and inserted on the site, yielding a less intrusive and much shorter process of
assembly.\textsuperscript{53}

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View photo at:
http://www.shotgunhouseproject.com/rebuild_booklet/thearchitecture.html \\
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Figure 35: The Miletus Group demonstrates the modular shotgun implementation method as an urban
system to reduce costs, increase construction speed, and reduce the interruption of urban patterns. (Photo
credit: The Miletus Group, 2006)
\end{center}

Interestingly, the Miletus replacement homes are nearly the exact size of the
existing shotguns, small. Their shotgun has a front porch, living room, dining room,
large kitchen, two bedrooms and one bathroom in only approximately 880 square feet of
living space. The homes are nearly fourteen feet wide and are designed to fit on lots as

\textsuperscript{53} The Miletus Group, Inc, “Rebuild New Orleans: The Shotgun House Project,”
small as 20’x100’. Their double shotgun is essentially two 880 sq ft units designed to fit on a lot as small as 34’x100’. Not overlooking the desire of some clients who admire the shotgun design and desire more living space on a narrow lot, Miletus produces a larger four bedroom/two bath saddlebag design with slightly less than 1600 square feet. Its narrow profile is a mere 28 feet wide and fits on a 34’ x100’ or larger lot. To increase affordability for displaced residents, the Miletus homes can be acquired in as a finished or unfinished. The unfinished version will be installed in structurally sound condition and, if desired, finished to a minimal living state. Otherwise, interior and exterior surfaces will be unfinished to reduce the initial acquisition costs. Finishes can then be added according to the owner’s pace and budget. Thus, responding to local interests, Miletus’ 2006 architectural innovation in modular design offered a lower cost product delivery of a unique urban architectural style. 54

New Orleans lost over 109,000 homes due to Katrina and since the storm, prefabricated homes have been frequently touted as the fastest, cheapest and most effective manner of replacement. Typically, as with the Miletus example, modular homes are built off site. Large sections of the house are constructed in a warehouse or factory, and then hauled to a lot where they are permanently installed. The process often uses traditional construction methods, traditional hand labor or traditional assembly methods, in an indoor environment.55 A process called digital fabrication differs significantly from the process used to manufacture standard modular homes. And one MIT professor, Larry Sass, also inspired by shotgun houses, pushed the architectural style to the forefront of today’s digital technology.

54 Ibid.
Sass, an assistant professor of computation in the MIT Department of Architecture, endeavored to make the first digitally fabricated house in the United States in New Orleans by the summer of 2010, and put a family in it. Sass was one of five architects featured in a major show in the summer of 2009 at the Museum of Modern Art titled "Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling," which focused on the importance of prefabricated and sustainable housing. Sass' project, “Digitally Fabricated House for New Orleans,” was a New Orleans-style shotgun house erected alongside four other architects' works in a lot next to MoMA.

Sass visited New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Deeply affected by the sea of small and impersonal rows of identical FEMA trailers, Sass applied his years of digital fabrication research toward the creation of a more attractive and more affordable housing solution. Motivated by the region’s dedication to shotgun architecture, Sass pushed the prefabrication of shotgun homes further, marrying the humble home style with high-tech digital fabrication methods. Today, his prototypes for new shotgun homes sit right at the cutting edge of technology and “anyone off the street” could put together one of his houses.

Despite its traditional appearance, Sass’s shotgun was applauded as possibly the most cutting-edge of houses displayed by MOMA’s one of America’s leading purveyor of style. His entirely digitally fabricated house is assembled from 5,000 unique pieces.

emerging from 600 sheets of plywood and plastic. Each digitally designed piece was transmitted electronically to equipment suited for cutting exact specifications. The interlocking pieces are entirely friction-fit components bearing tabs or slots for easy assembly. The resulting construction, structurally sound for living, can be put together in three or four weeks with a few people and rubber mallets. Sass and two students - using only mallets - built their New Orleans-inspired shotgun in twenty-two days. The project must be assembled on a perfectly level surface, but no measuring, cutting or nailing is needed. 57

In designing the home, Sass was deeply inspired by a woman he had interviewed sitting on her porch in New Orleans. She described her love for the brackets and architectural ornament adorning her porch. Their conversation forced Sass to think deeply about the role of ornamentation in creating a sense of “home” and he based his design research on meetings with local homeowners and his documentation of houses throughout the Garden District, the French Quarter, Faubourg Marigny and the Lower Ninth Ward. 58 While the design for MoMA features lacy, decorative arches for the front porch and a peaked roof, this façade is easily interchangeable with a variety of other designs the architect has created.

Applicable beyond the scope of the shotgun tradition, Sass's innovative digital approach allows architects to test designs before they build. Several years ago he built a tiny, digitally fabricated "instant house" to show that computer numerical controlled (CNC) technology could be used to construct a building. Sass's “proof of concept” shotgun house supports an entirely new realm of digital fabrication, affording architects

57 Ibid.
an abundance of possibilities to be explored for the sake of creative curiosity while also establishing a new set of conditions in the rapidly changing world of industrial manufacturing techniques.

His work reconfigures the relationship between architectural creativity and manufacturing innovation. He hopes that digital fabrication will create a new approach to affordable housing, and in the process, help rebuild New Orleans and other African American communities through cheaper and faster means. He is now focusing on a new shotgun that features utilities that snap in. Secondly, he hopes that his technology can and will be transferred to any part of the world. Perhaps it can even be transported to Haiti, home to the American shotgun, where the January 2010 earthquake has devastated the country.

While Sass, an expert in digital fabrication, has not priced mass production of the house, theoretically the construction should always be lower priced because he has eliminated two key measures of cost and construction -- measuring and cutting, and skilled labor. Unlike the Miletus design, Sass’s work does not require expensive equipment for installation or a factory setting for modular construction; his makes use of the intersection of digital fabrication and handwork for assembly. It embraces the mobility of design across cultures and the digital divide.

The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina brought nationwide attention to the people of New Orleans and their colorful communities, where the shotgun plays an important role. Ironically, the wreckage sparked a variety of architectural and manufacturing innovations relevant to the Gulf Coast region and beyond.
Shotgun Innovation for a New Era – beyond New Orleans

The Modern shotgun trend is not limited to replacement products for New Orleans’ post-Katrina landscape. The structure’s slender design has long fascinated architects inspired by the challenge of composing livable quarters within the margins of a small space. Over the past decade, novel shotgun designs have manifested as intelligent housing solutions in Florida, Texas, Mississippi and Kentucky. These new structures resulted from two important factors. One, architects and neighborhood development organizations embraced the indispensible role well-designed, affordable, single-family housing plays in community development. Two, homeowners now expressed a renewed interest in commissioning small homes. Thus, the elite members of this small caucus of new shotgun-style homes are not only bridging gaps in America’s tattered urban landscape, but are also standing as proud beacons in rural areas. The following examples illustrate five distinct methods employed by today’s architects to marry the affordability, simplicity and efficiency of yesterday’s shotgun with an array of modern features to create highly desirable contemporary dwellings.

In 2001, The Little Haiti Housing Association (LHAA) of Miami, Fl confirmed a neighborhood’s interest in building shotgun style homes as part of a larger community revitalization strategy. In its quest to mend the unsightly apertures that plagued the area’s streetscape, LHAA, a not-for-profit community development corporation, spearheaded an architectural competition for the design of new single family homes to serve as affordable urban in-fill in the city’s Little Haiti neighborhood. The neighborhood’s ethnically and economically diverse population of primarily first and second generation immigrant families had only been recognized as a formal community since the 1980s. The vibrant
working class community is largely comprised of older, formerly segregated neighborhoods such as Lemon City, Edison, Buena Vista and Little River. Due to a continued pattern of disinvestment by the city of Miami, housing desegregation, suburban flight, the intrusion of an interstate highway, geographic and transportation barriers, and the city’s pattern of leveling vacant or abandoned buildings as a crime prevention mechanism, the neighborhood found itself with an overwhelming inventory of over 400 vacant lots, many of them small and requiring significant zoning variances to facilitate new construction. Challenged by a maze of multiple land owners throughout the community, LHAA found itself unable to affect a large-scale neighborhood development plan. Thus, opting for a scattered site development approach, the association initiated a plan to restore and reconnect the area by constructing properties at twenty-three disparate locations within the bounds of the community.59

The competing architects were tasked with providing three- and four-bedroom design options that both met the cultural needs of the community and could be constructed for $80,000 (or $65 per square foot vertical cost) or less.60 Ruben N. Santos and Ramon N. Santos, who practice in San Francisco, CA and Alexandria, VA respectively, proposed a one story building design which addressed the novel typology of the shotgun. Their first place entry, selected by a jury of construction, design, and finance professionals, featured a private internal courtyard in-line with the homes’ bedrooms and strategic window placement to augment passive cooling in South Florida’s warm climate. Further, in a neighborhood where occasional shotgun homes still exist, the

Santos’ design contributed to the continuity of the locale through a traditional house form, while at once re-conceptualizing the structure for a new client group. According to architect Nathaniel Belcher, the competition manager, some initially found the design’s direct reference to the former “shacks” unfavorable. However, unlike the final response from Delray’s Mount Olive community a decade earlier, the designs for Miami ultimately gained more support from dissenters.61 Interestingly, a few years later, a Houston architect implemented his own version of a shotgun house that also blended indoor and outdoor living spaces.

Brett Zamore’s fascination with the shotgun began in 1998 when he sought out a 1920s double shotgun in Houston’s Fifth Ward to rebuild for his thesis project as a graduate student in architecture at Rice University. The structure was one of the city’s many abandoned shotgun houses. Respectful of the neighborhood’s history and culture, Zamore restored the home’s exterior to its original appearance in accordance with Texas Historical Commission guidelines. Inside, however, he redesigned the humble abode utilizing a class of innovative living options normally reserved for more contemporary homes.

After he shored the sagging floor, replaced worn windows and doors, and installed a new metal corrugated roof, Zamore proceeded with editing out many of the interior walls, transforming the double shotgun into a single family home with an open and flexible floor plan fit for a contemporary lifestyle. Fully aware of the range of negative beliefs appropriated to shotgun living, Zamore and others were uncertain as to whether anyone would buy the home upon its completion. However, the architectural

61 See note 29.
student was vindicated when famed Houston artist Bert Long purchased the home to move back into his old neighborhood to be closer to his mother.

The little shotgun had a transformative effect on Zamore’s budding career and influenced his approach to architecture. Enamored with the shotgun’s simplicity, he desired to capitalize on its benefits - the ventilation promoted by the doors at each end, the cooling effects of the raised block foundation, and its overall practicality - in future projects. Most importantly, the sale of the “virtually new” shotgun revealed that a well designed shotgun would appeal to modern buyers. For Zamore, the old house type had a future in new construction. In 2001, Zamore began designing, this time for a client, a house type he dubbed as the “shot-trot,” a hybrid of two Southern vernacular building styles, the shotgun and the dogtrot, which originated in the southern Appalachian Mountains in the early 1800s. Historically, a common roof bridged two log cabins leaving a breezeway or “dogtrot” between the two bays. One cabin was typically used for cooking and dining while the other served as private living quarters. ⁶²

Like the shotgun, the dogtrot offered significant pre-air conditioning benefits in the warm southern climate. Both rooms opened up to the central breezeway which not

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only provided a cooler covered area for various activities but, along with open windows, created air currents which cooled the living area.

Zamore modified his shotgun design by placing two large sliding glass doors on either side of the central living area, with one side opening up to a deck for increased living space. Thus, the line of narrow rooms provides an efficient and affordable floor plan, while the dogtrot effect enlarges the formal living area to incorporate exterior spaces. Capturing the advantages of two distinct architectural styles, Zamore’s innovation is open, functional, flexible and energy efficient. Even the trendy title “shot-trot” carries more appeal than the stolid “modified shotgun” concept,” implying that the entire language of shotgun architectural styles could foster wider consumer appeal by simply employing new terminology.

The commission of the shot-trot again substantiated Zamore’s conviction that additional demand for a well-designed shotgun home existed among buyers. In 2007-2008, Zamore speculatively built and sold three shotgun plans, called House 02, in Houston, proving that the shotgun house type, paired with the right amenities, would appeal to pioneering urban buyers who were either. Further deducing that there is even a larger market for the product outside of Houston, Zamore now offers a shotgun house kit that allows individuals to order shotgun style plans

View photos at: http://www.zamorehomes.com/

Figure 38: Brett Zamore’s 2005 “shot-trot” in Houston, TX features a front porch and recessed entry (left). High ceilings give the slender home more volume. The open floor plan (lower right) and large sliding glass doors on either side of the home (lower left and center) create a dogtrot effect. (Photo credit: Brett Zamore)
ranging in size from 500 – 2000 sq ft. The homes are flat-packed and shipped to the dwelling site with simple instructions for assembling the components at the home site.\textsuperscript{63}

New small home variations are not only appearing in the urban landscape, but also emerging in the countryside. New Orleans-based Waggonner & Ball re-envisioned the dogtrot style home when commissioned to design a main house and guest house on 40 acres in rural Southern Mississippi for Allan and Nancy Bissinger. The couple, who spend most of their time in New Orleans, built the guest house first, and then decided that the 850-square-foot home was so functional that they abandoned the construction plans for the larger structure.

The Bissinger’s wood-framed house sits on an untreated concrete block foundation. Stained board-and-batten siding is interlaced with horizontal weatherboard siding. The striking diagonal roof line is intersected by the chimney emerging from the dogtrot’s freestanding stone fireplace. The central dining porch (316 sq ft) divides the living space and screened porch (200 sq ft) from the storage and workroom area. Broad steps on one side of the home and a raised concrete deck on the other extend the dogtrot area into the surrounding landscape.\textsuperscript{64}

Despite its many unique features, one of the most intriguing aspects of the narrow, one bedroom, wood-framed house is that it takes a definitive cue from the


\textsuperscript{64} Ingrid Spencer, “Dogtrot House” Architectural Record, August 2007
shotgun. As New Orleans residents, both architect and client were almost certainly familiar with various styles of shotgun architecture. Like Zamore’s design, perhaps this home should be called a “shot-trot.” More importantly, the Bissingers’ home is perhaps another indicator that middle class families are interested in well-designed small homes, something architects and developers typically consider as appealing only to the ranks of the working class.

The home also bears a resemblance to the elegant Howard House designed by one of Canada’s most innovative architects, Brian MacKay-Lyons. The Howard house is a fine example of vernacular architecture elevated to the level of fine art. Using language reminiscent of shotgun architecture, Mackay-Lyons once explained that part of his intent in designing the house was to take a thin tube and domesticate it. The resulting svelte 12 ft by 110 ft home features one continuous living space that progresses from the garage (separated from the main house by a covered breezeway and two massive barn-style rolling doors, a take on the dogtrot concept) through the foyer, kitchen, and living room and ends at a cantilevered deck. The ground floor also hosts three bedrooms in single file along a corridor. A mezzanine loft provides a private retreat for the master bedroom and study.

MacKay-Lyons, who is admittedly inspired by vernacular buildings, believes that “good design is not only about aesthetics, it’s also about economics.” The Howard home was conceived for an art historian and his family of four. Built on a modest budget of less than $200,000 in 1999, the slender home (initially taxed as a boatshed) proves that

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modern architecture can be assessable to middle class buyers. Also, like the pragmatism of the vernacular, the design raises a strong argument for cost effective materials and methods. The house incorporates a variety of low impact strategies – including passive solar collection, passive venting, thermal massing, and in-floor radiant heating. The breezeway is clad in unfinished plywood and paved with gravel. The mezzanine office space has de-laminated chip rock walls and cabinets made of locally grown maple. The living room features pigment-free concrete floors and maple cabinets. The stair case is made of inexpensive aluminum treds. “The only source of real sustainable building is the vernacular, he says. “The vernacular is what you build when you can’t afford to get it wrong environmentally.”

This home embodied an important new direction in sustainable housing. It won the American Institute of Architects Institute Honor Awards for Architecture in 2003.

View photos at:
http://www.mlsarchitects.ca/portfolio/featuredprojects/howard/

Figure 40: The Howard House by Brian Mackay Lyons. (Photo credit: Brian Mackay Lyons, 1999)

One of America’s most recent shotguns is the home designed and built in 2009 by Shed Design+Build in Louisville, KY for Graham Clark, one of the firm’s partners. The slender home extends only 14’ 5” wide, sits on a 21’ by 111’ lot and boasts 1,438 square feet. Additional basement space and an outdoor living area increase the usable square footage to about 2,200. The lot also provides ample land for future uses.

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 116.
The architect built the modern two-story home around a completely open first floor featuring high ceilings and tall windows to give the place more volume. Additional windows nestled horizontally in the upper half of the side walls both guarantee natural light and ensure privacy on the narrow lot. The living and dining areas are separated visually by a dramatic half bath dressed in hickory planks and frosted glass. Built-in storage units and bookcases transform the small space into an efficient, livable workhorse. The second floor features a master bedroom with a large terrace overlooking downtown Louisville, a second bedroom, and a brilliant butterfly roof set back from the front facade that floods the entire floor with natural light.

Clark aims to translate his experiences with this house into a prototype modern shotgun that can be affordably built as in fill in the urban landscape. Like Zamore, and others, Clark has proven that the humble shotgun can be re-invented to be a desirable living space for those of varying economic strata, ethnic background and family size, and offer all the amenities of modern design.  

Architectural typologies often change significantly over time; the shotgun house type is no different. The architects, homeowners, and community leaders noted here are the modern catalysts for the restoration, re-interpretation and innovation of this unique architectural form. Their pioneering work has allowed the basic principles of this traditional house type to transform into a variety of fresh, affordable, sustainable and

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69 Kurt, comment on “Modern Shotgun House Could Be Future Prototype,” Broken Sidewalk Blog, comment posted April 16 2009, http://brokensidewalk.com/tag/shed-design-build/. Clark’s design did not go without controversy in Louisville, KY. One blogger considered his exterior façade a monstrosity given its stark contrast with the surrounding historic structures. “It’s disrespectful to build such a horrible looking thing anywhere, but especially among other buildings that have actual character and dignity. Shameful and selfish.” – Kurt
attractive living spaces. For more than fifty years, the shotgun was shunned by developers and homes buyers as viable options for new construction. As those at the forefront of contemporary architecture and design continue to reflect and contribute to changing sentiments towards shotguns, the door opens for architects and homeowners to re-envision the architectural form without the tainted lens of the past. As well as capitalize on its simplicity and practicality; and allow creative innovations to emerge; a proving that there is a modern role for shotguns in today’s society. These well-designed and reasonably priced housing options can and should be incorporated into larger strategies for community development.

The survival of today’s dilapidated shotguns still remains tenuous, and newer homes derived from the language of shotgun architecture are far from being in vogue. Be that as it may, the shotgun persists in the American landscape. The modern shotgun is undoubtedly marching to the tune of new architectural drummers. Nonetheless, it marches on, proving its resilience and ability to continue to capture the American imagination.
It is widely believed that the shotgun housing style remained confined to the region of Southern Louisiana until after the Civil War. However, the presence in St. Louis, Missouri, of one small, unassuming structure built around 1860 challenges this view of the shotgun as a regional peculiarity. Another common assumption is that brick and stone shotgun structures developed late in the evolution of this traditionally frame housing style. Again, this account is called into doubt by the existence of the same simple, three-room shotgun built of brick on a rubble stone foundation around 1860. Remarkably, this house remains largely in its original form. Its rarity underscores the tremendous need for proactive study and preservation of shotgun homes. While the City of St. Louis recognizes this structure as a historically important local site, its singularity and unique characteristics could provide vital insights about the early history of the shotgun housing type. The importance of such revelations could extend well beyond the structure’s immediate locale. Unlike this “lucky” shotgun home, countless others have been demolished long ago.

Follow link to photo:

http://stlouis.missouri.org/government/heritage/citypics/Urban_Shotgun%3F.jpg

Figure 42: This St. Louis cottage (c. 1860) is an uncommon example of a Pre-Civil War shotgun home built outside of the New Orleans area. (Photo credit: www.stlouis.missouri.org)

City of St. Louis CDA/SLDC, “Building Types: The Walking City (part I),”
before the distinctive aspects of their existences could be explored and documented; their histories and mysteries lost forever.

Contemporary scholars, in fact, know relatively little about the entire geographic scope of shotgun homes and how they developed within individual communities across the country. Little focus has been placed upon the relationship between these houses and the specific demographics of the communities they once served. Yet today, so few of them exist that municipalities can no longer afford to dismiss or underestimate their historical value. Each shotgun has the potential to unveil meaningful insights about the little known contributions of both African Americans and working class people to local and national material culture and identity.

Shotgun homes are important historical architectural artifacts. As a New World construction, they contribute to a global discourse regarding so-called vernacular architecture. As an American phenomenon, they echo the social, cultural, political and economic changes in the U.S. from the colonial period to the present. Their underlying importance as markers within four centuries of an evolving architectural language justifies their eligibility for historic designations, preservation and restoration. Yet, beyond their historical significance, shotgun housing offers us an invaluable contemporary model for accommodating people within an affordable, sustainable, and community-based design. The modesty and simplicity of the shotgun form paired with innovative modifications and attractive ornamentation yields an advantageous housing solution that is both suitable and desirable for contemporary needs. Several examples of new shotgun home construction embraced by communities suggest that the housing type
could play a very useful role in meeting America’s growing need for environmentally-friendly single family dwellings.

Preserving Shotgun Homes:

The Importance of African American Architectural Expression

Enslaved African Americans were often housed in meager or decrepit quarters. Nonetheless, their bare rooms (for house servants) and cabins (for field hands) were exceptionally important spaces; spaces within which they could assert some modicum of possessory ownership. Many did what they could to transform these tiny quarters or tiny corners into “homes.”\(^7^1\) Their intentions were often subtly expressed — a flower, a bottle, or anything of personal value that might go unnoticed or be deemed unimportant within the plantation power structure.\(^7^2\) A secret emotive or psychological connection with an object defined as “mine” was important to maintaining one’s sanity and hope within the totalitarian confines of slavery. African American interior spaces were indeed places of sanctuary and important escapes from the harsh realities of antebellum America. With freedom came the potential for home ownership and the ability to communicate more noticeable expressions of design. Within this new context of relative freedom, the shotgun played a critical role in creating a sense of autonomy and security in what remained a hostile and often violent environment. The shotgun house thus played an undeniable role in claiming for the once-enslaved a small corner, a small humble place they could, after many generations of slavery, finally call home — “my” home.

\(^7^1\) Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 230.
\(^7^2\) Ibid., 13.
Preserving the dwindling inventory of shotgun houses that remain will also preserve for current and future scholars and social scientists an important opportunity to further explore, study and interpret important aspects of African American and American history. The material achievements of, and incremental progress made by, blacks are often easy to overlook or underestimate. As a result, important aspects of the emergence and evolution of African American material life from 1865 to the 1930s remain concealed in the underexplored histories and patterns of vernacular design, community organization and the rare examples of home furnishings and other aspects of domestic space. Further examination of regional architectural nuances could reveal valuable insights into the private world of these individuals and how these aided in their construction of a social identity.  

While the scholarly community needs the professional preservation of certain shotgun homes to ensure that the original materials and cultural evidence survive, communities all over the nation need shotgun restoration projects to preserve the integrity of many older working class neighborhoods and to provide affordable home ownership opportunities. Old assertions that shotgun homes are unsuitable as housing options have been repeatedly proven to be false, as evidenced by the beautiful, well-kept shotguns that continue to serve residential uses to this day. While the housing type has not completely shed the residue of Jim Crow stigma, it has enjoyed a definite resilience. Since the 1980s, there have been a growing number of shotgun preservation and restoration projects around the country that have restored these homes for both private and public use.

Perhaps the most well known rehabilitated shotgun community is the Project Row Houses (PRH). PRH, launched in 1993 in Houston, Texas, is an assemblage of twenty-two formerly abandoned shotgun homes in the city’s third ward. Initiated by artist Rick Lowe and supported by other local artists and corporate sponsors, PRH restored this community of shotguns to provide affordable housing for women. The community provides housing scholarships for single mothers pursuing an education and includes a well-respected art gallery. However, the trend began well in advance of PRH.

In 1984, a group of retired black women wrote to city officials in Wilson, North Carolina, requesting assistance in saving a historically black neighborhood that consisted of 1,277 structures. The architectural styles represented in the neighborhood ranged from Queen Anne to Victorian homes built in the late 1890s to three-room shotguns. Initially, the city did not include the shotgun cabins in its restoration plans. With the prodding of neighborhood activists and state preservationists, the restoration plans were expanded to cover the shotguns, once it became clear that those homes, once numerous in Wilson, had substantially declined in number. The restoration did conjure up a painful past for some, but others understood that destroying the evidence of the past does not change it. Those neighbors fought for the importance of knowing the context in which previous generations lived.\(^\text{74}\)

Following PRH, Jackson, Mississippi, along with the assistance of The Farish Street Historic District Neighborhood Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, launched a preservation project and neighborhood revitalization plan to restore the state’s largest concentration of shotgun houses. Interestingly, the 39 homes represented a relatively unusual period in shotgun building, circa 1930-1950. In 1996, the homes were rehabilitated for low-income housing, utilizing Historic Preservation Tax Incentives and the Investment Tax Credit for Low Income Housing. These examples and others that have emerged around the country in recent years prove that shotguns homes are, as they have always been, both suitable and desirable as affordable housing solutions.

Advocates of shotgun preservation and rehabilitation, however, face immense challenges. Given their small size, their locations in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and the ever-rising property values throughout urban American, shotgun homes are increasingly vulnerable to projects of “urban renewal” and gentrification. In these cases, an alternative use for one or a cluster of shotgun houses as a historic site, cultural center or commercial space may be more practical. In some cases, individuals might feel that one or two shotguns do not warrant attention because they do not fully convey the image of “row house” living. However, one or two shotgun survivals may contain sufficient evidence of cultural, material and historical import. In fact, because of their scarcity, small rows of three or more are considered historically significant, and may
thus be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Because each community’s style of shotgun homes tells a distinctive local story, a single representative property is important to the community at least as an artifact of local history. A slice of history, preserved, is better than none at all.

In the most desperate cases, moving the shotgun to a location where it can be preserved and appreciated is preferable to demolition. Given the current variety of successful shotgun rehabilitation projects, it is hard to render legitimate reason to demolish one of these historic properties unless the physical structure is absolutely beyond salvaging. If demolition is the only viable option for an exceptionally dilapidated structure, then the property's floor plan and elevations should be reproduced, the details related to exterior and interior construction materials, ornamentation, property contents, landscape and position within the landscape should be thoroughly documented, and, a photographic record of the property made before an inevitable demolition occurs.

Could This Be Your First House?

That is the question the New Albany Community Housing organization is rhetorically asking first time homebuyers. Currently (April 2010), one of their newly constructed camelback homes is under contract; the asking price, $104,000. The New

Albany, Indiana community is constructing four new shotgun homes as important infill in an affordable housing community. The all-electric homes are advertised to be energy efficient and economical. With grants from the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority and HUD, even a low-income buyer should find them reasonably affordable.

Figure 45: New Albany Community Housing is constructing four new camelback shotguns as infill housing in its Historic Oak Street neighborhood. As of April 2010, their first sale is pending. The asking price for the home on the left was $104,000 (under contract). The 1,280-square feet home features, three bedrooms, two baths, and a bonus room upstairs. (Photo credit: New Albany Community Housing)

While the New Albany shotguns are fairly traditional, they do incorporate one critical modification that makes shotgun homes completely livable for today’s dwellers. The modification consists of moving the kitchen to the center of the home (thus combining the living and dining areas) and moving the master bedroom to the rear of the house. While Michael Janzen is not the inventor of this concept, his 3D model illustrates it well. The modified interior floor plan creates more living space for entertaining and eliminates the awkwardness of walking through an interior bedroom to reach the kitchen or bath.

Further, the first room could still double as a second bedroom by including a sofa or Murphy bed for additional sleeping space. This design concept has been implemented successfully in the renovation of older shotgun homes as well as with other variations of
new shotgun applications such as Katrina Cottages and the chic, ultra modern shotgun homes built by the Make It Right Foundation of New Orleans.

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, Andrés Duany conceived of a group of small houses that he dubbed as Katrina Cottages.++ Duany’s tiny cottages were envisioned to be a less expensive, more attractive, and more permanent housing alternative to the FEMA trailer. One of the smallest Katrina Cottage designs could be purchased for about $35,000 for long-term housing.++ While estimates for FEMA trailers range from $15,000 - $19,000 each, the cost to maintain a FEMA park soar from $70,000 to $229,000 per unit for the quasi-permanent dwellings.++ Most of the fifteen or so Katrina Cottage floor plans categorized as either “Tiny” or “Thin” reveal strong continuities with the shotgun house. Their one, two and three room designs largely reflect passage from room-to-room without the use of an interior hallway, and situate the bedroom at the rear of the narrow structures for privacy. Two styles, named the Pass Christian Shotgun and the Rainbow Row Cottage, pay direct homage to the shotgun type. These plans, ranging from 225 to 1,000 square feet, again confirm that small quarters can provide dignified and affordable housing as long elements of modern conveniences, contemporary style, and privacy are incorporated into the design. In addition to a handful of shotgun-influenced Katrina Cottages that have been constructed (stick-built, modular, and kits via Lowe’s Hardware) in Florida, Louisiana and Maryland; Cottage Square in

++ Ibid, 21.
Ocean Springs, Mississippi is a new development that is comprised of twenty three of these homes.79

Actor Brad Pitt responded to the Katrina disaster and its consequences for the shotgun house tradition in a different way. Emotionally overtaken by the plight of the displaced people of the New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward during a post-Katrina tour and simultaneously impressed by the environmental wisdom of their housing style, Pitt vowed to make a difference in the neighborhood which had remained devastated and largely vacant two years after the storm. He described the community members as “people who did everything right,” acknowledging both their high rate homeownership (approximately 90%) and their lack of capacity to rebuild after the storm.80 Pitt sought out thirteen of the best regional, national, and international architects, including elite practitioners such as Frank Gehry and David Adjaye, to partner with the Make It Right Foundation that he founded. Their task, to design affordable, green, storm resistant and technologically advanced homes inspired by the traditional architecture of the community.81

Today, fourteen families have purchased Make It Right homes and nineteen more such homes are under construction. More importantly, the homes are setting a new standard for sustainable building within a traditional working class context. Pitt describes the homes as "fair and equitable,” referring to the fact that they are well-built and, employ impeccable design, cutting edge technology, non-toxic materials, energy

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Lowe's Corporation, “The Katrina Cottage brought to you by Lowes.com,” http://www.lowes.com/cd_TheKatrinaCottage_634317861-
81 Ibid.
efficient appliances, solar panels and water collection systems. Video testimonies from the new homeowners reveal that the lower maintenance and utility costs associated with the homes vastly improve their overall economic outlook. Pitt hopes to raise 150 homes in the Lower Ninth over the next several years and believes that "this little spot on the globe can actually advance the discussion of green architecture."

The shotgun, a housing style that was once known, at best, for its humble look and unconventional but efficient use of space and natural resources, is now being touted as possibly the new the face of sustainable living. An architectural style that offered a rung up the socio-economic ladder for newly-emancipated families in the 19th century, now offers new life to blighted neighborhoods, new opportunities for first-time homeowners, and new prospects as a model of sustainable living. After 200 years in America, the shotgun house has finally met an age where mainstream society is reassessing its architectural priorities and realizing that bigger is not necessarily better.

Beyond simple modifications to the traditional shotgun to increase its appeal for a modern lifestyle, architects are steadily redefining the scope, relevance, and possibilities of shotgun houses for both the affordable and affluent markets. Dozens of architects, influential purveyors of design, and a growing number of communities are blazing new paths to reshape the perception and seemingly limited concepts around the language of shotgun architecture. Recognizing that shotguns homes were once central to the lives of many Americans, new interpretations of shotgun design are facilitating opportunities to revive old shotgun communities and rediscover the shotgun as a relevant, affordable and

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
environmentally-friendly housing solution within the American housing market. Perhaps over time, more of us will be asking, "Could this be my house?"
Appendix A

Additional Photographs of Modern Shotgun House Designs

The New North Shore Shotgun

View photo at:

http://www.orderhomeplans.com/exec/hspos/COTNET/section/homeplans/action/plans/filter/PlnExNm.sl-594/browsemode/details

Figure 47: This magnificent North Shore style home features a deep, metal-roofed porch skirting the front, a portion of the rear, and one entire side of the home. The bedrooms are aligned along one side with a master bedroom at the rear. Near the center of the house, the kitchen connects the dining and family rooms. Architects Joe Hall and Rob Hull of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina designed this home exclusively for Southern Living magazine.

Modern Two Story Shotgun

View photo at:

www.nosanchuk.com/proj_selected_shotgun.shtml -

Figure 48: David Nosanchuk designed this modern two-story shotgun of stucco, wood and stone. He employs a collection of porthole windows along the side façade provide both light and privacy.

Two Story Double Width Shotgun with Side Saddle

View photo at:

House Plans: Key West Conch Style, House Plan # HWEPL05565
http://www.eplans.com/cottage_house-plans/HWEPL05565.hwx

Figure 49: This shotgun meets the luxury standards of Key West, Florida. The narrow floor plan boasts two sets of French doors that open into the great room and extend the open living/kitchen area all the way back to a covered porch. The mid-level landing leads to two additional bedrooms. The upper-level features a master suite and sundeck.
The ModGun by Frank Gehry

View a collection of photos at:

www.ecofriendlymag.com/wp-content/plugins/wp-...
and
http://americancity.org/buzz/entry/1659/.

Figure 50: Celebrity architect Frank Gehry was a secondary player to Robert Tannen a New Orleans architect, in the design of their “Modgun.” The Modgun, a play on the words “modern” and “shotgun,” maintains a slow, classic demeanor typical of the traditional shotgun home. Modular construction, however, suits families who may later want to add rooms. The home will be built in NOLA’s Sixth Ward. The design incorporates signature Gehry touches such as an angled roofline and a tilted axis along the shotgun’s long main gable.

Modern Shotgun Singles and Camelbacks: Two Designs for New Orleans

View a collection of photos at:

www.makeitrightnola.org

Figure 51: Actor Brad Pitt’s Make It Right Foundation has employed world class architects to create innovative shotgun inspired architecture. The foundation has built fourteen homes in the lower Ninth Ward, and nineteen others are under construction. Designed to be green, the storm resistant structures are intended to provide better protection against the future possibility of flooding. Above: These three bedroom shotgun single and camelback designs are by GRAFT of Berlin and Los Angeles. Below: North Shore influenced single shotgun designed by Concordia. The two bedroom design is pictured here. The architects also offer a two-story version.


City of St. Louis CDA/SLDC. “Building Types: The Walking City (part I),” n.d.


BIOGRAPHY

As Director of the Diggs Gallery at Winston-Salem State University for more than 10 years, Belinda Tate has curated over 50 exhibitions of African and African American art. Her work has been featured in national publications such as New York’s *Valentine Magazine of African American Art*, which, in 2007, ranked Diggs as one of the top 10 centers for African American art in the United States.

Tate holds a B.A. in Art History from Yale University. She was awarded a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship in 2004 to participate in a cultural exchange to South Africa, where she learned and shared experiences with her South African counterparts about progress and challenges in South African public education ten years after the end of Apartheid. Her personal passion is to mentor young artists and to use the medium of art to promote and preserve African American culture and history.

Tate has traveled to more than 15 countries in Africa and Europe. She and her husband H. Kwasi Prempeh, a professor of law, also maintain a home in Ghana.