

PETER BOSSSELMANN

These drawings were made during the spring of 1976 while I was working in Mexicali as a member of a joint team from the University of Baja California and the University of California, Berkeley, under the direction of Christopher Alexander. By that time, in early 1976, the team had completed a first set of structures that we called the “builder’s yard,” a set of buildings designed to demonstrate a method of construction that could be used by families who were willing and able to build their own homes. The drawings were intended to be self-explanatory. In an era prior to smartphones with access to “how-to-do-it” applications, the drawings I made are similar to frames in a video or film production. They show a sequence of step-by-step tasks to complete an operation, such as laying a foundation or constructing a roof. It was important that the drawings communicate a transparent process and not only the sequence of steps, but

also the sense of accomplishment when a completed task is seen as part of the overall construction process. Copies of the drawings were intended to remain in the builder’s yard, on display under glass. There, they would be available to family members who wanted to build their homes using our method of construction. At the time of making these drawings, we assumed that our construction project would produce not just one cluster of houses for five families, which it did, but a total of five clusters of houses to eventually house a total of thirty families who would build their own houses. When we returned to Mexicali in 1984, eight years after the Mexicali experiment, I asked the residents: “Did any family build their house according to our instructions?” Yes, was the answer, “you can’t miss it, a few blocks down the road. The house is painted blue.” There it was—I recognized the characteristic vaulted roofs.