

# JOURNAL OF INTERIOR DESIGN

---



## *Table of Contents*

---

### LETTER

- A Hearty Economy  
and Healthy Ecology  
Can Co-exist **82** *Jane Nichols*

---

### PERSPECTIVE

- What's Wrong  
with Pretty? **54** *Caroline Hill, M.S.*  
*Carl Matthews, M.S.*

---

### ARTICLES

- Interior Design  
in K-12 Curricula:  
Asking the Experts **6** *Stephanie A. Clemons, Ph.D.*
- Automated Creativity:  
Digital Morphology and  
The Design Process **32** *Kathleen Gibson, M.A.*
- A Case for Typology  
of Design: The Interior  
Archetype Project **39** *Jan Jennings, M.S.*
- Motive, Mind, and Media:  
Digital Sketching in the  
Creative Culture of Design **60** *Jason Meneely, M.S.*  
*Sheila Danko, M.I.D.*

---

### AWARDS

**91**

VOLUME **32** NUMBER 3

2007

# Interior Design

## Homeless shelter design: a psychologically recuperative approach

*Jill Pable, Florida State University*

Persons who are homeless are often victims of life crises that can result in emotional disorientation. It follows that homeless shelters should possess an architectural design that fosters a counterbalancing sense of healing and refuge from this distress of life on the streets. Perhaps among the most impactful aspects of environments for the homeless are psychological ramifications that encompass issues of personal space, territoriality and the spatial nature of human social interaction.

Unfortunately, restricted building funds coupled with shelter organizations' minimal staffing and time often make creating a homeless shelter design that is fully functional, safe, and restorative difficult to achieve. Unintentionally, this can create environments that do not fully address social damage inflicted by street life or successfully coax homeless persons to commit to programs that can promote healing.

This creative submission proposes that assistance in planning recuperative shelter environments may be found in Abraham Maslow's self-actualization theory, a psychological construct often referenced by social scientists engaged in studies of the homeless. This humanistic personality theory may facilitate a flexible, user-centered approach to design. Maslow's self-actualization theory moves beyond his well-known 'hierarchy of needs' and provides pragmatic, detailed descriptions of optimal human psychological adjustment. These characteristics are focused and yet general in nature. A review of these characteristics brings to mind qualities many would use to describe a good friend. For example, an self-actualized person

- ▶ is realistically oriented;
- ▶ is accepting of him/herself and others;
- ▶ is focused on problems outside him/herself;
- ▶ believes in the basic good of life and approaches people without stereotype;
- ▶ is philosophical and possesses a non-hostile sense of humor; and,
- ▶ can discriminate between good and evil and maintains a personal moral code (Maslow, 1968).

Many of Maslow's concepts might be interpreted and

### MERIT OF DISTINCTION

**Title:** Homeless shelter design: a psychologically recuperative approach

supported through architectural form, and may be particularly applicable to facilities that serve persons in crisis. When coupled with relevant architectural concepts from Alexander's pattern theory (Alexander, et. al,

1977) and CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) (Poyner, 1983), a theory-to-practice grid emerges that may facilitate a practical, empathetic approach to homeless shelter design.

Further, because Maslow theorizes that few people ever attain full self-actualization, the grid may suit the needs of both the shelter staff members and vulnerable homeless clients. The theory-to-practice grid is envisioned as a living, changing framework that will grow and evolve to include other aspects of human experience such as universal design, sustainability, and further treatment of social justice issues. Therefore, dissemination of the grid to others for their feedback is an important aspect of its positive transformation, and this is the hope for this presentation proposal.

Designing from a psychological personality theory starting point is perhaps particularly important in the case of "first-contact" spaces, such as an preadmittance area of a shelter where homeless persons make application for food, shelter and rehabilitative programs. This is because first impressions may be a contributing factor in a homeless person's decision to commit or continue to reject reintegration with society (Davis, 2004).

To explore this idea, this creative project theoretically applies the Maslow theory-to-practice grid to a real homeless shelter's pre-admittance area. Images of this project are provided here. If accepted for presentation, an animated walk-through movie of this solution will also be shown.



**Figure 1.** Photograph of the existing shelter pre-admittance area. Interviews with homeless clients of this shelter reveal various issues concerning this first-contact space.

► The single entrance to the area encourages co-opting of passageways and territorial behaviors that can make entering persons uncomfortable.

► Due to its location directly on the street and adjoining sidewalk, persons are subjected to uncomfortable comments and looks from passersby. This is particularly true for female homeless clients.

► The perceived quality of the space's design and materials is low, and by extension may communicate low regard for users.

► The current nature of the space repeats the context of its urban site outside of the fence, and may be unattractive or even repellent to persons seeking a solution from life on the streets.



**Figure 2.** Bird's eye view from the street

Maslow Criteria: "Accurate perception of reality": the provision for order and clarity. The proposed solution shows that the design's massing seeks to express clarity through its literal, physical outreach to the homeless from the existing building. The patio's site is challenging in its literal and abrupt adjacency to a busy street (street sidewalk is shown below in foreground). Below, an excerpt from Maslow Theory-to-Practice Grid.

Maslow Self-Actualization characteristic	Explanation of the characteristic	Antithesis of this characteristic	Patterns response	CEPT/Proxemics response	Patio design criteria
An accurate perception of reality	Self-actualizers are free of pessimism and defensive distortions. Can judge real from phony in people, events, and ideas.	Pessimistic, defensive. May be unable to make accurate judgments concerning truth and fiction in others' intent or events.	Patterns that relate to clarity in spatial experience and procedure. #120. Paths and Goals. Place goals at natural points of architectural interest.  #126 Something roughly in the middle. Design space to draw people towards a natural center.	Provide clear definition of controlled space so that people recognize differences between public/private.  An organization should stake claim to a space by creating well defined border and edges that imply ownership and control.	<i>Create a design that says the shelter is here</i>  Patio should send cues of separation from the problems of the street and a sense of security, stability and refuge. Forms and textures that evoke an enduring presence will be used. Overhead forms will appear to be well supported and overtly unsettling assemblies will be avoided.  Provide up to date accurate information on digital boards and bulletin boards. Provide a way to queue up for check-in that is fair and efficient.
Greater acceptance of self and others	Self-actualizers are tolerant of human frailty and less judgemental of others. Lack shame and anxiety.	Experience shame and anxiety. Intolerant and judgemental of others.	#114. Hierarchy of Open Space. Every space has a back and a view.  #116. Hierarchy of Open Space. Every space has a back and a view.	Design and place furnishings to break up group size and avoid colonization/preemption.  Provide multiple entrance points and passageways to increase sense of access and security.	<i>Create a design solution that says the shelter is here</i>  Seating locations: Avoid placement that puts arriving persons "on parade". Seating placement should be back-protective to avoid sense of vulnerability.



**Figure 3.** Eye level view from street entrance.

Details of the space are designed to exude a tacit sense of respect in various ways. Projected ceiling surfaces and color are selected to evoke a sense of shelter and protection reinforced through the use of clean, simple massing forms with walls that form obvious, ample roof support. Partial enclosure from the street coupled with multiple paths/openings implies a separate, yet permeable relationship to street life while helping the organization lay claim to the patio as protected, monitored space. Color and materials are neutral at the street and exhibit a gradient of growing color strength to subtly elicit a sense of life and optimism at the building interface.

Other details:

► The design places receptionist-counselors in the midst of the patio (instead of in a recessed room behind a small window) which also helps to curb negative

behaviors through real and perceived surveillance. Homeless persons and counselors can both sit down for confidential counseling at the same seating height level (on the left), evoking a sense of equality.

► The stress of waiting is minimized by providing a digital message board indicating a person's admittance status without physically standing in line. Waiting for services and its accompanying uncertainty are among the most stressful aspects of homelessness.

► Other amenities are provided including a clock, access to books and newspapers, trash and recycle bins, a water fountain and monitored private bathroom—features usually taken for granted among most members of the public, but often absent in the harsh reality of street life.

► The intake patio conforms to the tenets of universal design. Countertops are lower to permit use by all and there are no groundlevel changes.





**Figure 4. (above)**

*View of primary seating area.*

*Maslow Criteria: "Greater social interest": promotion of social empathy and respect*

*The solution provides multiple seating/waiting options that promote socialization with table groupings. Seating is intentionally immovable to prevent co-opting or territoriality. "Leaning walls" (foreground) permit non-committed participation. Books, newspapers and games are made available, as boredom is a pervasive challenge for the homeless.*



**Figure 5. (right)** *View of rear seating area.*

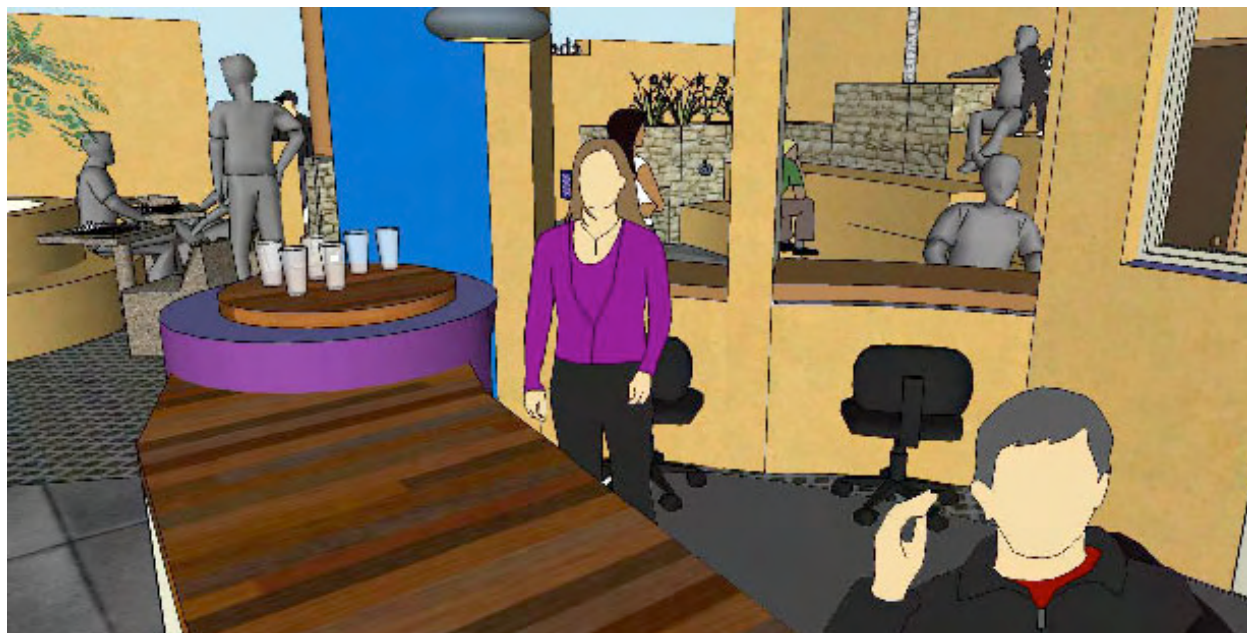
*The availability of several separate seating areas permits withdrawal for those who are not comfortable with others. Women, particularly sensitive to the observations and comments from those on the sidewalk, can retreat to seating/table areas located at the rear of the patio. Most seating offers a 'protected back' orientation as homeless persons may be sensitive to physical confrontation or abuse.*



**Figure 6.** View of secondary seating area.

*Maslow Criteria: “Greater social interest”: promotion of social empathy and respect*

*The form and location of the tiered seating area permits persons to withdraw while still observing others’ activities. It is also a convenient place for homeless persons with pets to wait and provides the animals a water dish (in a niche underneath the water fountain) and wall rings for them to be temporarily tied up while the client checks in. Storage for bicycles and shopping carts (a near ubiquitous way the homeless carry their belongings) are within sightlines so persons can easily keep an eye on these items. The patio is designed to be locked at night for use exclusively by those persons admitted to the shelter. These persons clean and maintain the patio and in return maintain exclusive use of this area at night, thus fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership, albeit transient in nature.*

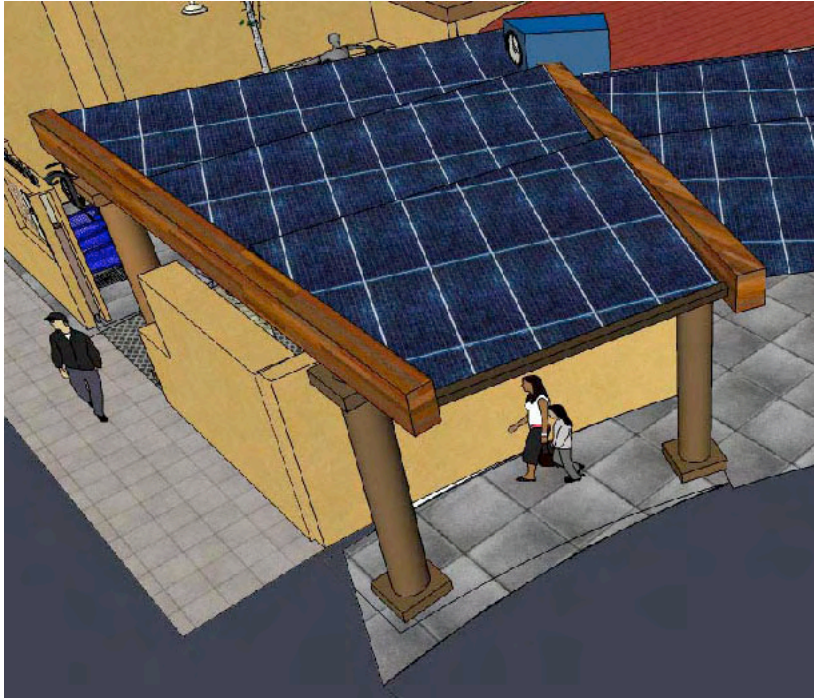


**Figure 7.** Sightlines from counselor/reception desk.

*Maslow Criteria: “Greater discrimination between good and evil”: minimize moral and ethical choice making*

*The patio’s design takes into account the probability of inappropriate behaviors, such as harassment, drug dealing and theft. It seeks to mitigate these actions through passive design where possible and more active measures when necessary. For example, vegetation is avoided that would offer places to hide objects or conceal actions. Clear sightlines are maintained for counselors to observe activities (including the key-controlled restroom on the right) to dissuade inappropriate behaviors. Roll down screens secure the counselor desk area against vandalism. Free cold drinks would likely be an attraction for homeless persons and this amenity accordingly forms a major design feature of the reception desk. If desired, glass partitions can be added to the counselor desk to provide further protection to staff members. Interestingly, the presence or absence of glass is among the most contentious design issues among homeless shelter administrators and staff, as both safety and accessibility are factors to consider.*





**Figure 8.**

*Maslow Criteria: “Actualizers strongly identify with the human species and express sympathy for and desire to help.”*

*The pre-admittance area might not only exude respect for its homeless users, but also might promote respect for the environment. Solar panels are angled to direct water runoff into reservoirs for drip irrigation and also supply power to the shelter. Because the area is prone to flooding during winter rainstorms, permeable ground surfacing material is used that allows water to percolate into the clay soil. To counteract the hard urban context of the neighborhood, trees and other plants are introduced.*



**Figure 9.** Bird's eye view of the proposed pre-admittance area.