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Design for living: targets and achievements

# Housing means more than a roof

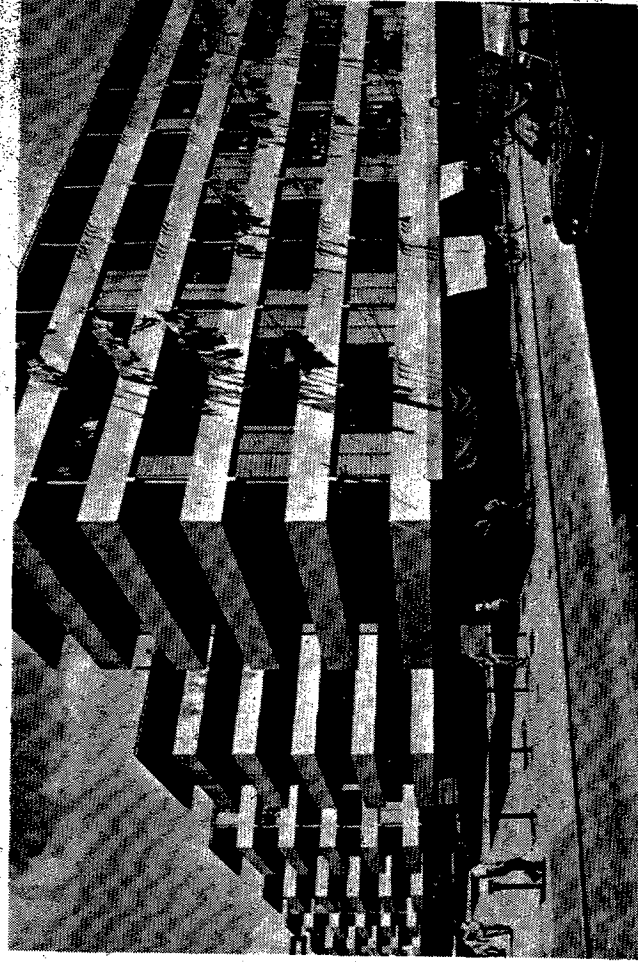
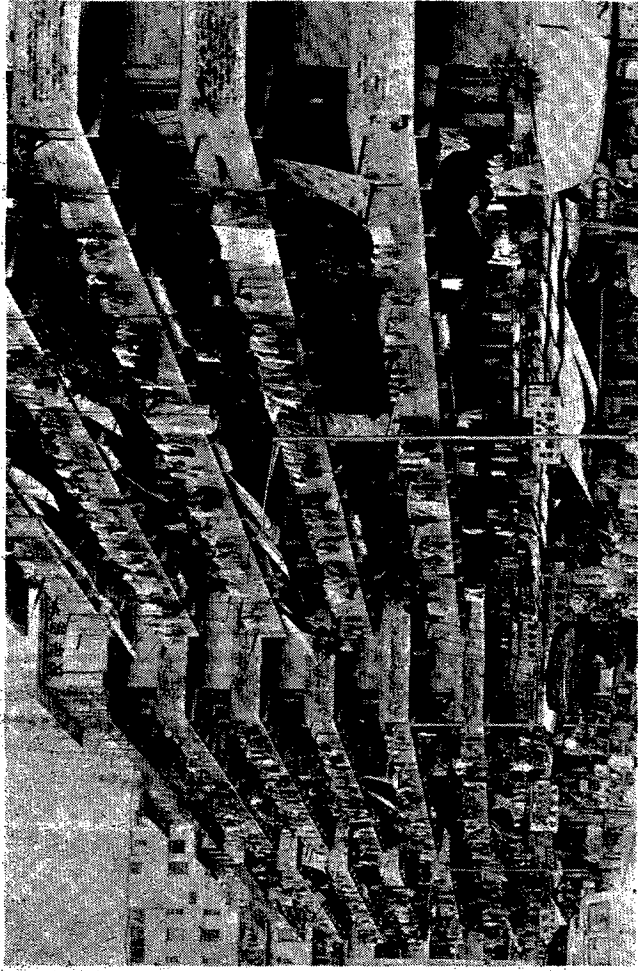
MORE than two-fifths of Hongkong's 4.3 million population is living in Government public housing estates.

This year the reconstituted Housing Authority will provide new homes for a further 100,000 under its celebrated 10-year housing programme.

The programme is an ambitious undertaking of mammoth proportions. Even at difficult times such as the present, the authority is able to find funds not only to finance the 10 new estate contracts now in hand at a total estimated cost of \$620 million, but also to let building contracts for a further nine estates costing \$385 million.

These new estates, when completed by 1978, will house up to 300,000 people. In the two years since its formation, the Housing Authority and the Public Works Department have spent about \$434 million in providing homes for over 130,000 people. Already, such staggering figures constitute a monumental achievement on the part of the Government, whose aim now is to provide self-contained living quarters for every family.

Countless numbers of people formerly found accommodation in barnacles like growths of huts haphazardly put up at rock-strewn slopes and steep hills.



**SHEK KIP MEI . . . the drab old housing estate (left) and the same lot after conversion and redevelopment (right).**

Since 1949, for a resident to share a single bed with six or more other people had been no feat of imagination. It was a stark reality. And for many, the bed was a bedside in a three-tier bunk, with other families living above or below.

People slept on cardboard sheets and straw on the pavements and crowded their crude homes on to any vacant piece of land in the urban areas. They honeycombed the hillsides in shacks, which gave rise to the immediate dangers of fire and disease. There was no widespread epidemic,

however, but a conflagration on Christmas Eve of 1953 provided an opportunity for a scheme of resettlement aimed at solving the problem progressively over the years.

Back to that night on Christmas Eve 1953, about 60,000 people lost their homes on the crowded hillsides of Shek Kip Mei, resulting in the clearance of 45 acres of land for the construction of permanent accommodation built of reinforced concrete. The first units were completed in February 1954 - 53 days after the disaster.

Since that time, the resettlement of squatters, which started as an emergency operation, continued as a means of releasing valuable Crown land required for development.

Resettlement alone did not answer the conventional housing needs of Hongkong, which were already serious before the immigrants came. Blocks of flats providing housing for a better, though still basic, standard were built under Government sponsorship by various agencies. The primary objective was to relieve the

gross overcrowding in tenement houses, where conditions were often far worse than in the resettlement estates at densities of 2,400 to 3,000 per acre.

Since 1954, the principal agency undertaking this work was the then Housing Authority. It built and managed low rental flats for that section of the population with family incomes of \$400 to \$900 a month. It also managed the low-cost housing built by the PWD for families with monthly incomes below \$400. Moreover, it embarked on a policy of building homes for families of varying sizes

on an occupancy ratio of 35 sq. ft per person, against the 24 sq. ft standard in the resettlement estates, for the living-cum-sleeping accommodation.

Within about 20 years, the Government and its chief agent had built 54 estates, housing over 1.8 million people. At present, the various types of housing estates previously known as resettlement, Government low cost housing or Housing Authority estates, are officially termed public housing estates by the new reconstituted Housing Authority.

The creation of the present Housing Authority and the 10-year housing programme were announced by the Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, in his address to the Legislative Council in October 1972. This new authority has been vested with the powers and functions that were previously fragmented. These are those of the Urban Council and the Resettlement Department, responsible for the management of resettlement estates, under the Resettlement Ordinance, those of the Housing Authority set up in 1954 to



# VARIATION IN RESIDENTIAL DENSITY.

(Distance from the city center).

