



CNU 26.Savannah

Architecture of Savannah
The Fabric of the City

Eric Brown

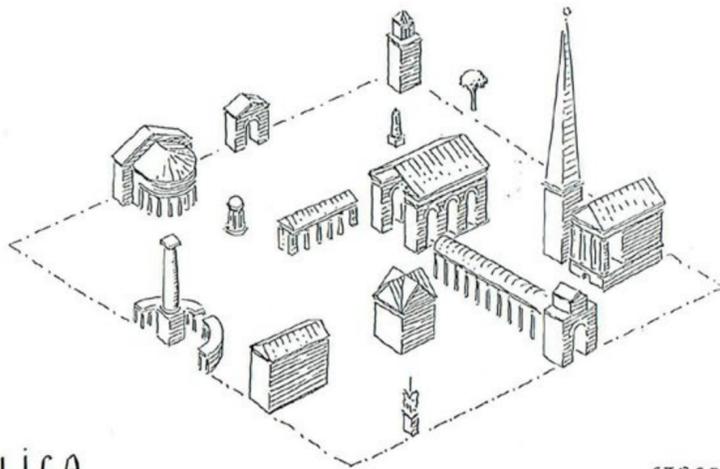
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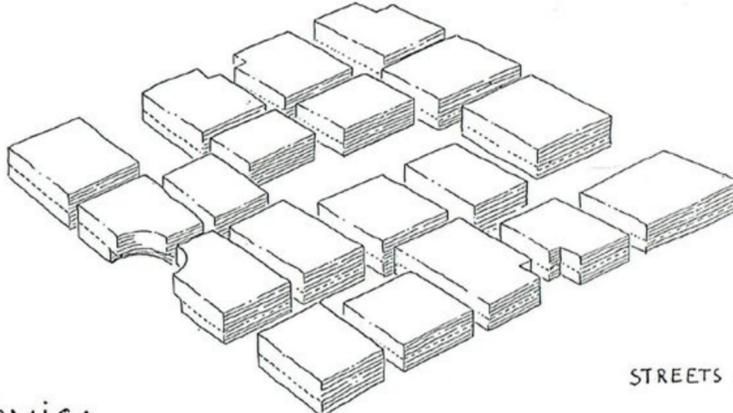
“A plan of this degree of discipline focuses in icy sharpness the ability of the architect to give it architectural expression in the third dimension.”

Edmund N. Bacon on Savannah architecture



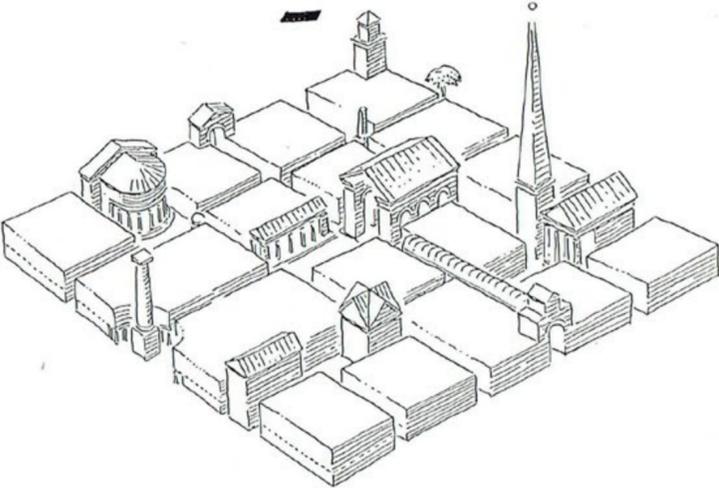
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MONUMENTS
WITHOUT
STREETS or SQUARES



RES ECONOMICA

STREETS and SQUARES
WITHOUT
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CIVITAS

THE
TRUE
CITY



1) Building Typologies

2) Frontages

3) Material

4) Proportion



1) Building Typologies

These are the basic building types and Savannah is pretty unique in that it has such a full range of building types. Many cities, mostly due to their economic growth cycles, only developed a few building types. Cleveland, for example has no rowhouses. This range of building types gives Savannah a rich pattern of architecture.

Not only does Savannah have this full range of building types, it has them mixed in a fine grain way. Most blocks have several building types built into them. This diverse use of buildings on a block by block level builds a picturesque streetscape and a memorable walking experience. These building types become the tool kit of the urban designer.



Lane House:

A fairly unique type to Savannah, this is a small typically single story cottage type. The typical Savannah units are lap siding and wood frame construction. These were initially developed as a response to affordable housing as these would be added to the backside of a typical lot and these units would front the lane. Many lots would have a modest front cottage or house and a lane house also.





Carriage House:

This is a pretty common unit type and popular now in many new neighborhoods. In the downtown core of Savannah, these units are extremely popular and are in use as garages, rental apartments and retail/commercial spaces. The typical unit downtown is brick construction that may be plastered. Some of these units, especially on the corners are a fee simple separate unit while most of the others are part of the front lot unit.



Single Family House:





Row Houses:

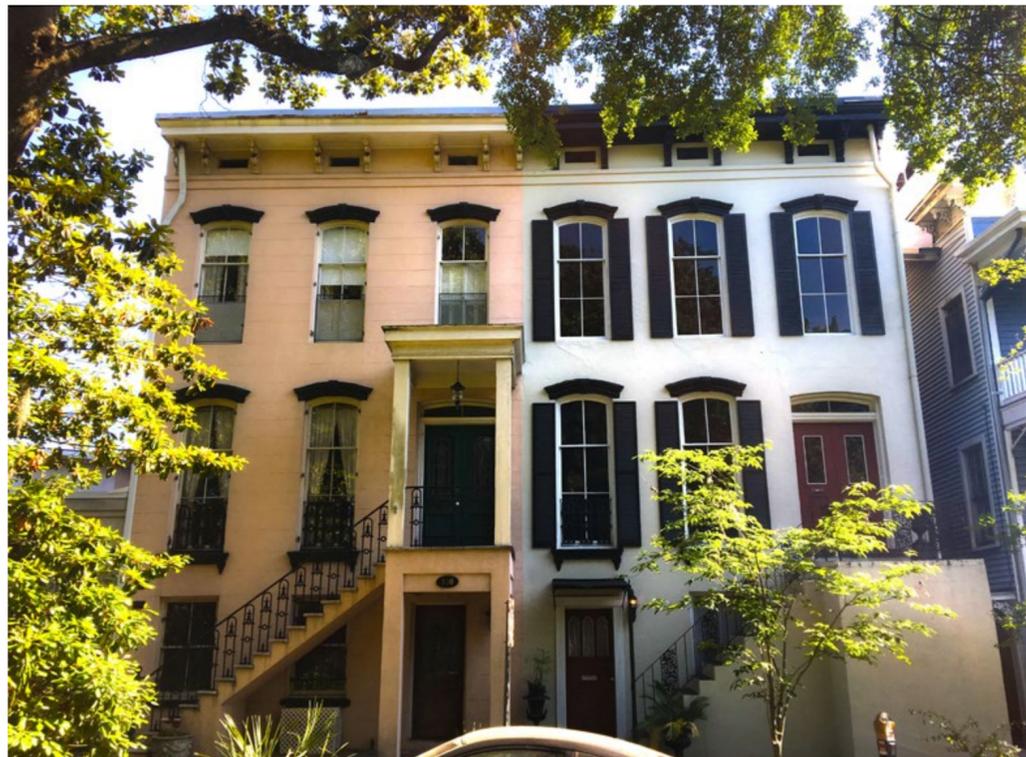
This is also a popular unit type historically found mostly along the East coast or larger cities with a link to the Typical English, French or Spanish row house. These units are a big part of the Missing Middle as they are really attached single family homes. Sizes range from small to large and sometimes the units are grouped as a multi-unit set or standalone. As an English city, Savannah has the typical English row house that then is modified based on the City Plan and local climate. Savannah has three main types of row houses: The **English Rowhouse** a 2 or 2 1/2 story unit with a slightly raised stoop. The **English Basement**, which raises the main living level up off the street and added a lower level for office or servants. The last type is the **Sideyard** type which is related to its Charleston Cousin.





Double House or Duplex:

Another common type across the US is the double house or duplex. This type takes two basic forms; the **side by side house** (Double House) and the **Over Under Duplex**. The Side by Side is either simply a pair of row houses built together or a building designed with two units. Sometimes these units also each have a carriage house and/or basement unit as well. The Duplex type is an Over Under condition in which the building takes the form of a typical house but with typical side stair to the upper unit and a slightly raised ground level unit. Savannah has both types but the Over Under is a later addition, being more common in the late 1890-1920 era and thus found in the Savannah Midtown and Victorian neighborhoods.





Apartment Building (Small):

This is a less common type but they are typically a small center hall building that will have 2 units per floor and have 4-6 units. Many of the Savannah units have no dedicated parking, using only on street spaces for residents. These buildings typically have a scale and mass that makes them compatible with single family units and they can be designed as more urban units or more relaxed units that might have front porches and frontages that match up with more T-3/4.





Apartment Building (Medium):

A less common in Savannah type, this is often common in the larger industrial era cities, the famous Chicago U Courtyard building is an example. These buildings typically have 8-16 units arranged around a center entry hall or courtyard. Some examples will have parking or retail on the ground level as well. None of the Savannah examples have dedicated parking to them and there are more examples outside of the downtown area with great examples along Victory Drive.





Apartment Building (Large):

These bridge the gap between the Missing Middle and the conventional apartment buildings. What is important here is to understand the scale, massing and how the building interacts with the street frontage. These qualities are what the new conventional buildings lack. The buildings are designed with a base, a middle and a top in the classic style, even if they are a more modern or modest building. They also have a clear elegant entry and the ground level relates to the street in a meaningful way. Also of interest is that none of the examples in Savannah have any sort of dedicated parking.

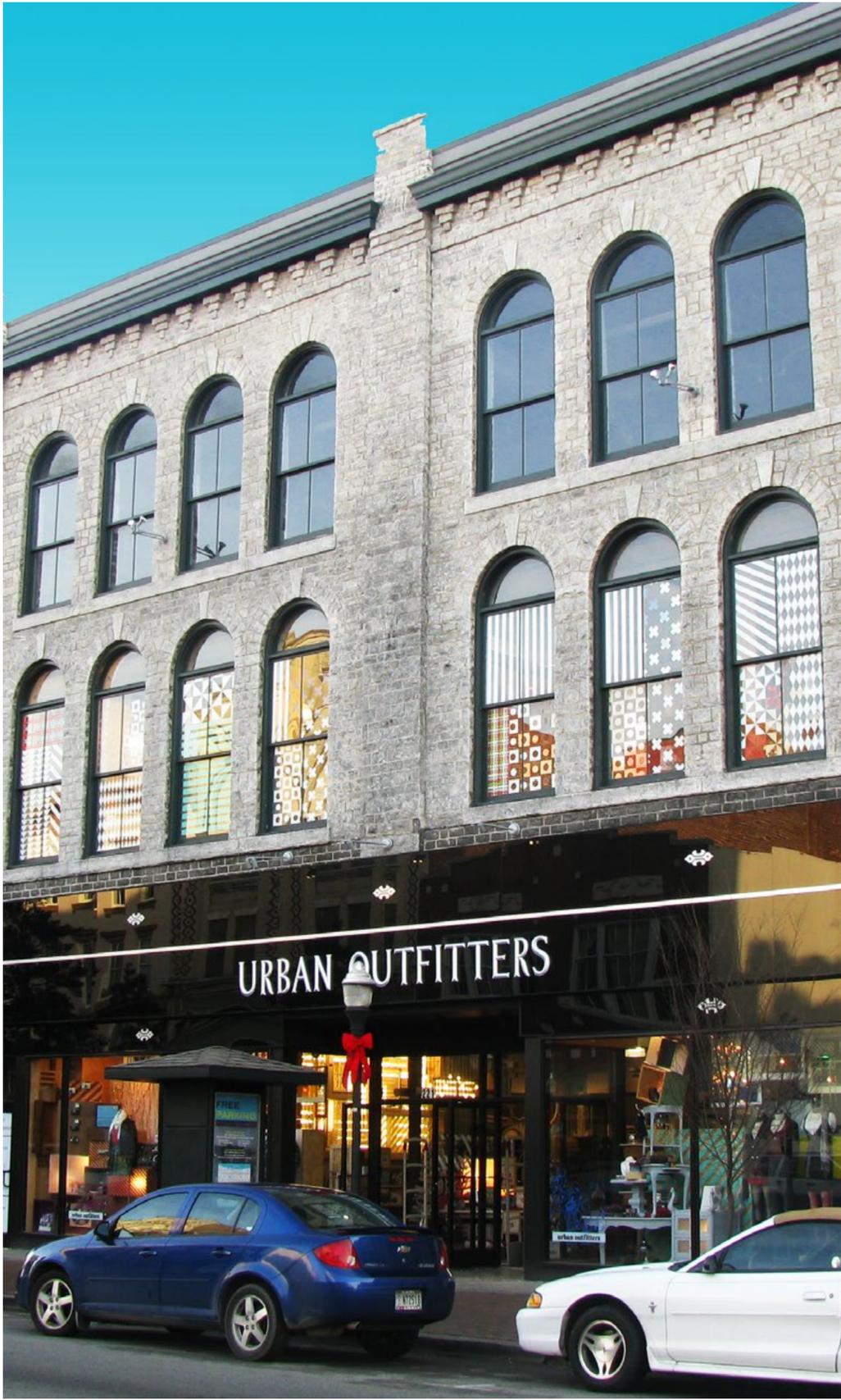


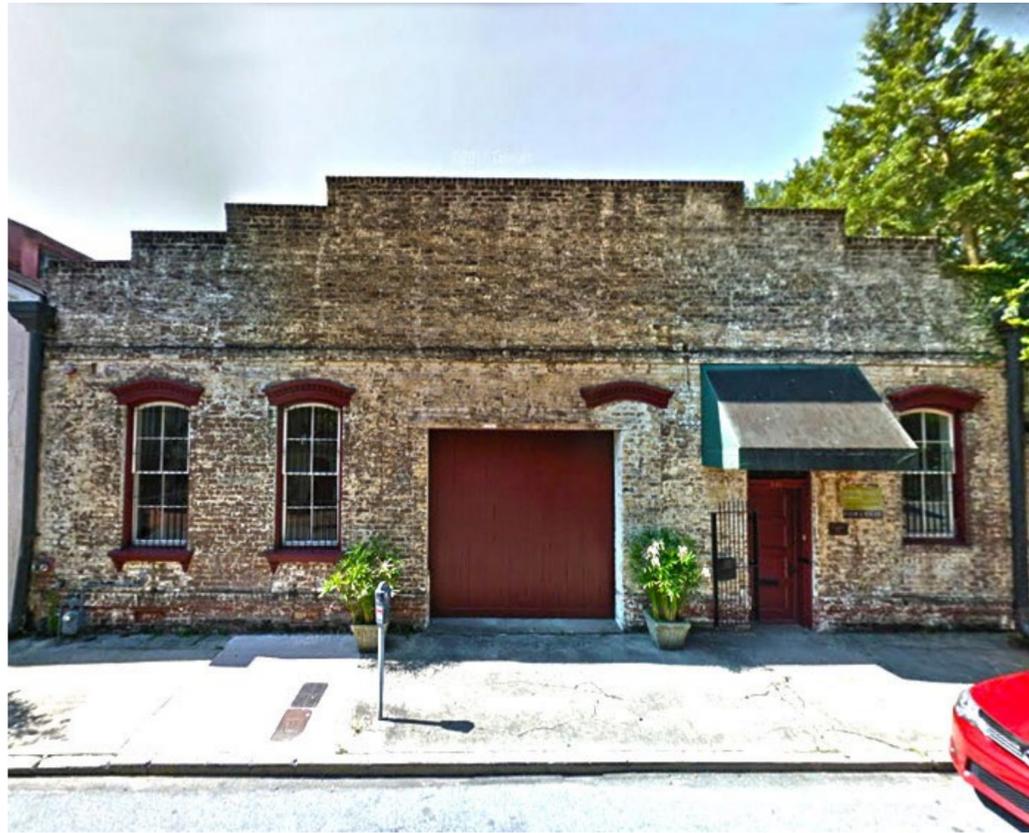
Live Work Unit:

Every city has (or had) some of these, a common type. These are really a small scale mixed use building. They either were designed as a row house type unit with a 1st floor retail/office or have been retrofitted over the course of time. These may also have a rear carriage unit as well. These typically have very little dedicated parking in Savannah.



Mixed Use Retail:





Warehouse:



(2) Frontages:

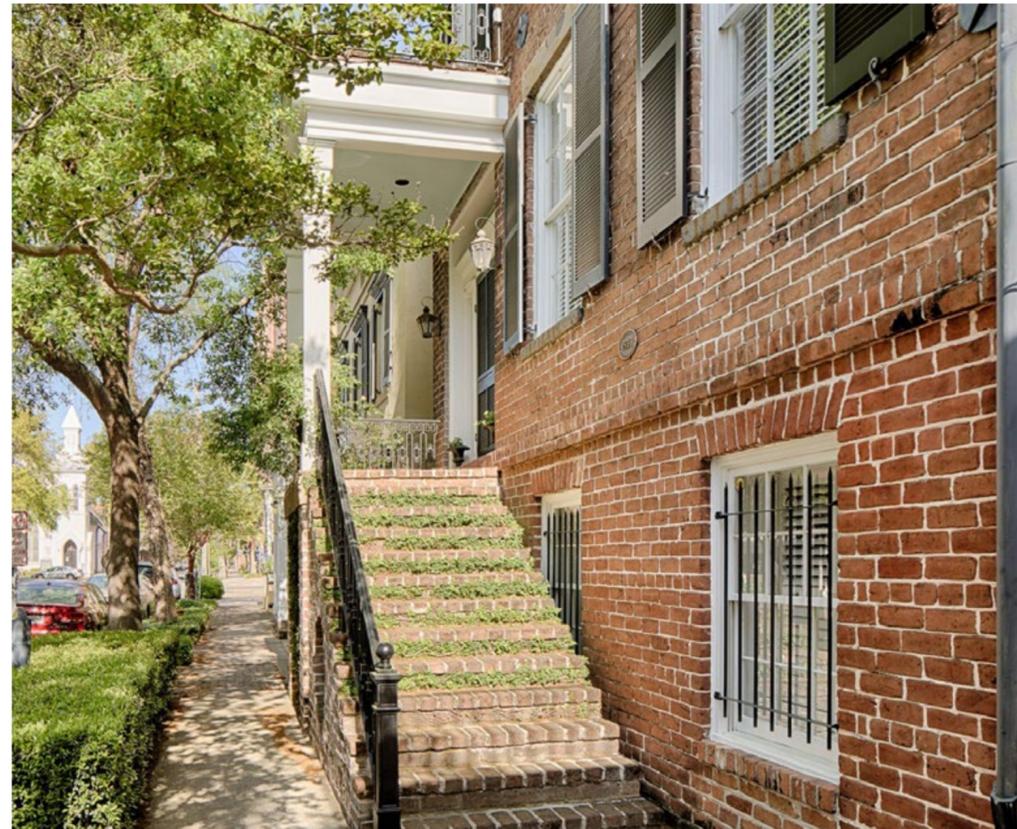
A frontage is how a building engages with the public realm or street. The Form based Smart Code lists out eight frontage types and all of those are in use in Savannah, which is again, unique. Which frontage a building uses, slightly changes its form and how it address the street. While this is a minor change, it adds greatly to the pedestrian walking experience. One of the best streets in the entire country is Jones St. and it is composed of mostly raised row houses but the large diversity in the frontages greatly adds to the charm of the street experience.





(3) Materials:

The earliest structures were wood frame low cottages. The wood framing was normally covered with locally produced lap siding. Savannah had a series of early fires that destroyed much of the early wood frame buildings. These were replaced with brick buildings by new city firecodes. Much of this brick was the Savannah Grey brick which came from the grey clay soil up the Savannah river where brick kilns were located. Savannah has nearly no natural stone but much stone was imported as ship's ballast from around the world. Thus you'll see much of the riverfront built from stone as well as a lot of pavement. Note that brick and stone would also be coated with a plaster coat for a smoother finish.





(4) Proportion:

You can find a raised row house done in an early Georgian style next a similar one later done in a revival style or Italiante. They all work together because they all follow the rules of classical proportions.

The buildings all have clear base, middle and top. The window and porch pattern is also based on a classic proportioning system, even if asymmetrical. The basis for this proposition system is the classic greek golden section which is also present in the human body and nature. This is why people feel more comfortable with building with this proportion.



Lessons to Learn:

- (1) Diversity in building form and type encourage diverse streetscapes and diversity in people. Ideally a block should have several types of buildings on it.
- (2) Calibrate your building type and design to the appropriate frontage type based on the street design and transect location. You can vary the frontage type also to create diversity along a street as well with out changing the building type.
- (3) Prioritize local materials. Whether in a historic area or not, using local available materials contributes greatly to a sense of place. Use local brick, stone or wood if appropriate. Avoid using imported materials, nothing looks worse than seeing mountain stone in the lowcounty.
- (4) Proportion: Hire a good architect! Use the basic golden section to define the building mass, fenestration pattern and also to define the individual elements.