

# NOTES ON TACTICAL RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

by Jeff Cooper

It is easy to deplore the degeneration of our social order, difficult as it may be to explain it. But it is not impossible to do something about it. Before doing so, however, one must admit that it exists. The news tells us that we live in a savage society in which subhumans prey with relative impunity upon the innocent and the decent; but, as with death, these facts are hard to accept.

Since most people respond to hypothetical peril with the assumption that it will not come to them, the first step in adjusting to our present social situation is the hard, clear, unflinching understanding that it can indeed come to us—personally. It is amazing to read of people who did not choose to believe this until after they had been victimized. They all knew that burglary, robbery, assault, and murder were not only possible but frequent, but they took no precautions because they simply would not admit that they, themselves, could be the victims.

Once you accept the fact that you actually may be the next target—today—you have taken the first great step toward your own physical security. Having made this simple, if difficult, admission, you can never afterward be surprised, and surprise is the greatest single element in tactics—offensive or defensive.

Defense of your person is your first concern, and it is a very elaborate study to which we have given a great deal of professional attention over the years, but let us turn for the moment to the defense of your home. Street crime is certainly horrific, and it is our national shame that we cannot maintain safe streets in our big cities, but more shocking yet is the thought that we cannot even go home, shut out the street, and relax. The goblins follow us even there. Consider the Manson atrocities as only the most notorious on a long and horrible list.

Defense of your home may probably be stated better as defense in your home, for saving your life is the main concern, whether on the street or home in bed. There are things that can be done to avert burglary in your absence, but they are only effective if they are incorporated into the house as it is being built, and they are dauntingly expensive. To build a house that cannot be broken into is to build a fort, and even then it can be defeated if the intruder has the time and the wit. (The pyramids were designed to be burglar-proof, by kings who commanded unlimited wealth and labor. The tomb robbers broke into them almost as soon as the funeral flowers wilted.)

But we can make certain arrangements to insure that our homes are a good deal more secure when we are in them, and I think we should.

In a recent visit to Southern California we were depressed to note the efforts made by householders to harden their homes; first because this was necessary, and second because the systems employed did not seem very effective.

To see iron bars and barbed wire around the houses in which we grew up without even door locks is sadder than to see a city smashed by war, but still worse is to see good people relying on completely passive structures which can never succeed against an evil will. We saw great, electrically operated gates which could be climbed by any active schoolboy. We saw heavy locks on doors which could be burst open at the hinges. We saw guard dogs which could be bribed with doped hamburger. We saw nothing that was specifically designed to enable the homeowner to counterattack. Evidently the doctrine is that one covers up, keeps his head down, and calls the police.

Let us agree on one major point right here. The police cannot protect you in your home. If goblins break in upon you the police should be called—as soon as you get around to it—in order to write our reports and clean up the mess. But the goblins are your problem. Bear that always in mind.

Several features in a house can help you defend it. Some must be built in as the house goes up, but others may be added to structures already completed. In most cases they need be neither unsightly nor inconvenient.

Point One:

When you are asleep you are helpless. Few things can be more nightmarish than to open a drowsy eye to see a shadowy

figure standing over you in the gloom. This need never happen.

Bedroom windows must be ironed, obviously in such a way as to permit their opening from the inside in case of fire.

(A prominent United States senator must live out his life with the memory of his adolescent daughter who was murdered in her bedroom by a monster who simply kicked open the French windows—because he, the senator, had not protected his own child.)

But just the windows are not enough. There must be a strong barrier between the sleeping quarters and the rest of the house. A bolted door will do (dead bolt, not a pickable latch), but an iron grill is better because you can see through it—and shoot through it.

No barrier is impenetrable, but if it causes a racket if attacked it will awaken you, and that is all you need. If you are awake, armed, and aware, you cannot be defeated by any predator, human or otherwise. Clearly the iron grill must be fastened in such a way that it cannot be unfastened by stealth. Use your imagination here.

Point Two:

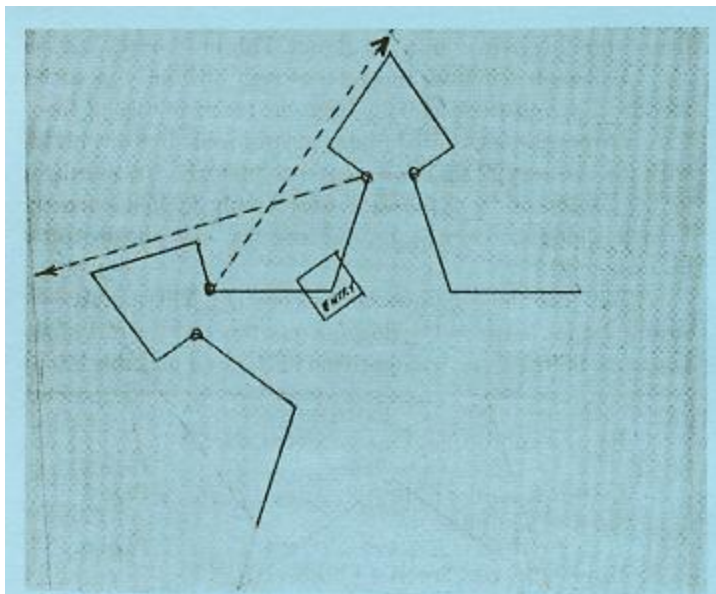
Sleeping quarter protection can usually be installed in a ready-made house, but door arrangement is another matter. You must be able to see who is at the door without exposing yourself. Peep holes are better than nothing, but essentially all doors—front, back, and side—should be recessed in such a way that anyone seeking entrance may be viewed in full, from the side or preferably from behind. When a visitor knocks on your door he should be, in effect, surrounded by your house, aware that he is in view of the people inside from several angles. Even if he intends a coup-de-main he will be at such a tactical disadvantage that he may well chicken out.

Observation must include the capability to fire, so the observation ports must be unscreened, narrow, and openable with one motion. Several sorts of slit windows made for trailers serve this purpose very well if set vertically.

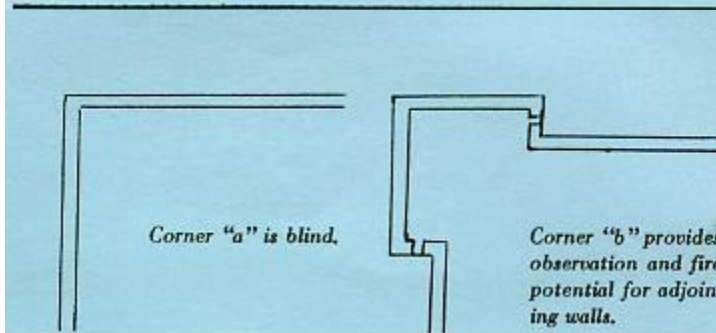
A proof door is an expensive luxury but it does promote sound sleep. Our lower-deck door, which is farthest from our bedroom and therefore hardest for us to hear, is a plywood sandwich with an armored filling, and fastened from the inside with cross-bars rather than a latch. It would be quieter to come through the grouted block wall.

Point Three:

Any house which is properly designed for the Age of Aquarius must permit its perimeter to be visible from inside it. This is the "Vauban Principle," and you must start from scratch to achieve it completely, but even if stuck with a blind rectangle, a single added bastion on one corner will give you coverage of two of four walls, and two diagonally placed bastions will cover all but their own backsides.



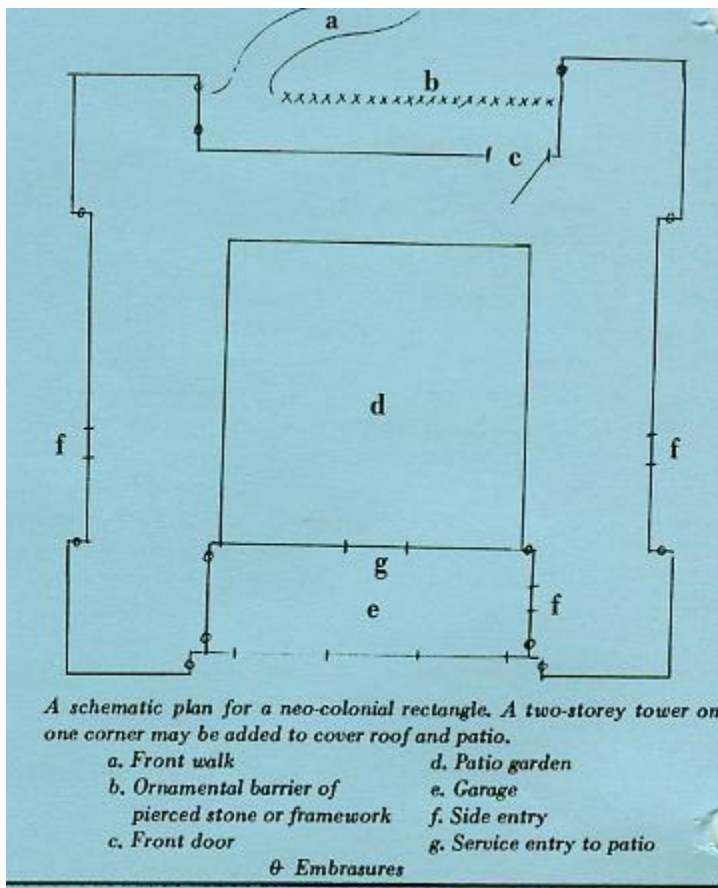
*The "Vauban Star" affords observation and fire cover for every inch of perimeter, from sheltered embrasures. It is theoretically perfect and also beautiful, but prohibitively expensive. Its principles may be applied, however imperfectly, to residential construction.*



Clearly nothing is perfect. Existing structures may be all but impossible to harden, and terrain will often render specific protective features unnecessary, but this is where architectural ingenuity becomes important. (Remember Castle Dracula, protected by frowning battlements on three sides but light and airy on the fourth, which overlooked a thousand-foot precipice?)

#### Point Four:

Roman patricians, when in town, dwelt in houses designed for an urban jungle no less savage than our own. Outside walls, right on the property line and generally rectangular in plan, were proof against anything but a ram and pierced by very narrow doors. The open living space was inside. This plan was borrowed by the Spaniards and exported to the New World as the patio. This design has much to offer today, where building codes permit. With one side of the quadrangle serving as a garage, and bastions at the four corners, it offers a hard carapace to the outside while providing as large an interior garden as space permits.



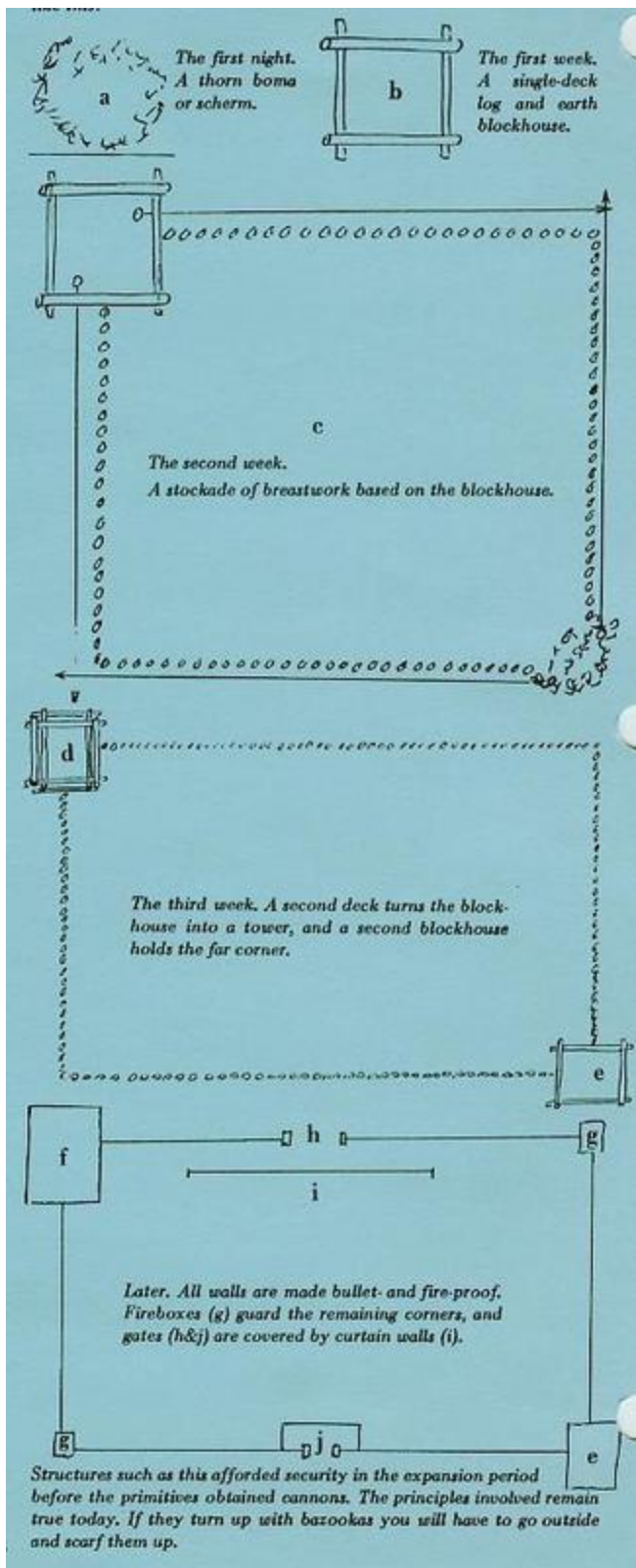
IMG]Point Five:

No inanimate structure or device can provide physical security in and of itself. Furthermore, no fortress nor sponce can withstand intelligent attack by determined besiegers. What tomorrow's house can offer, however, is comfortable living space which is hard enough to daunt the casual savage and, in addition, will permit the inhabitants to sleep secure in the knowledge that any prospective intruders must (1) make enough noise to alert the defense, and (2) be placed at a serious tactical disadvantage.

Naturally it is desirable for all walls to be relatively proof against small arms fire—especially those which include observation ports. This is not as critical as might first appear, however, since the criminal cannot undertake a siege and must count upon surprise to gain his objectives. You can prevent this by correct observation techniques coupled with a manifest willingness to use lethal force against him. Passive defense can succeed only if the cops are within earshot—and not always then.

For those who wish to build a strongpoint in the boon-docks—as opposed to a house in which to spend extended periods in comfort—the Army Department has a nifty field manual on the subject. This is FM 5-15, Field Fortifications. It is not classified.

It should be unnecessary to point out that the shield is useless without the sword, and that neither is of value without the brain. Lincoln and Trotsky and Castillo and Sharon Tate and the LaBiancas and General Dozier and the victims of the Boston Strangler could not have been helped by architecture. Their killers were allowed inside. A stranger at your door must be considered a possible target until proven otherwise. And this is not fear, much less the popularly misused term "paranoia." This is intelligent caution. The great leopard of Rudraprayag had no "fear" of people. He was able to terrorize his district for eight years because he was very, very careful. In today's savage world we need not be afraid, but we do need to be careful.[/IMG]



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