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Thesis Proposal

For my thesis I want to build a row house in a historical area of Philadelphia that uses new building techniques and is net zero energy while still fitting into the historical context. I have previously done research on the types of Philadelphia row houses and their development. They are the predominant residential building type throughout Philadelphia, as well as showing up throughout most cities. There are struggles of how to incorporate new construction buildings into the blocks of historical facades. Many new constructions of row houses just repeats the facade details in order to fit into the look of the block and keep with the historical image of Philadelphia. I however would like to research how a row house can evolve with a fresh design taking into account environmental issues, and new construction techniques and materials, as well as consider how to showcase this new technology and design and forward movement of design while still pulling historical details of the typology in order to fit into the natural street scape.

I want to research the construction techniques and development of the row house in order to pull out the defining aspects and focus on how to keep the integrity of the row house while still updating it. I believe it is very important to learn exactly why they are built the way they are and where many of the details came from and to not lose these in the new design. I also want to understand the problems of these buildings such as long thin rooms and poor light infiltration and focus on how to develop solutions to these.

I have grown up in Philadelphia and have been exposed to numerous types of row houses. I have seen firsthand many different layouts of the homes, as well as seen them as single family housing and as apartment buildings. I have also been into many that have been renovated and no longer have the interior historic layout and discovered how this can lead to improvements. Of these I have also seen some houses that repeat the historical facades and others that have a more contemporary look. I also have a site in mind of an empty lot between two row houses in a historic residential neighborhood, but that is not in an area of historic preservation.

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