

the negative space

by Paul Rider

When we think of cities, we think mostly of buildings surrounded by cement with a few flourishes of plant life to soften the hard edges. Philadelphia is one such city and was a major contributor to the building of America and its industrial might. The city was a collection of dense neighborhoods where the factories and the people who worked in them lived in close proximity. Today, most of the industry has gone, leaving behind their industrial style buildings and the homes of their workers. Over time these once productive neighborhoods have become derelict, filled with decay, trash, abandoned cars and crime.

William Penn, Philadelphia's founding father, had an initial vision of Philadelphia as a 'Green Country Towne' with stately homes surrounded by gardens occupying the area of a city block. His vision was lost as the city grew, blocks were quickly subdivided and sold and a crowded urban fabric was created. In the past decade, Philadelphia implemented a program to help these decaying neighborhoods clean up and revitalize. The program razed vacant homes and buildings, sometimes leaving behind whole city blocks of green in what were once condensed and uninviting areas. In some sections, one lonely row home remains awkwardly standing on its own, sheared from the mass of bricks that once defined the block. The neglect and decay of these neighborhoods is now tempered with open space and colored with lush, vibrant vegetation, giving us a glimpse into Penn's founding vision.

As the city cleared neighborhoods of neglected properties, it inadvertently opened up previously unseen views of the remaining buildings and shed new light and a different visual perspective on the Philadelphia cityscape. The images give focus and perspective to the fleeting new landscape which has been created in Philadelphia. The open spaces have been around for only a few short years and are once again in flux. Since making these images, the land is once again being reclaimed by buildings, some of which are highly priced town homes that stand in stark contrast to the decrepit neighborhoods which surround them. Slowly, the open spaces are being re-urbanized.

Paul Rider



















































































































