

Baan Mai Magazine as a Space of Negotiation: Constructing Home Culture in National Housing Authority Flats, 1976–1979

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Primary Sources

Baan Mai Magazine produced by NHA
between 1976–1979

Research Framework

Production-Consumption-Mediation (PCM)
paradigm of design history

Objective

- 1) To understand the new home culture that emerged within NHA flats by examining it through *Baan Mai* magazine.
- 2) To highlight how government strategies and everyday responses intersected to shape new ways of living in high-rise housing during a critical period of urban transformation.

Key Details

The Foundation of
Baan Mai Magazine

Negotiating Homemaking

Negotiating Self at Home

Spaces of Negotiation,
Spaces of Transition

This diagram presents
the method, structure,
objectives and highlighted
keywords of this paper.

Abstract

This paper presents a design history of a “new home culture” focusing on the living and homemaking practices of the low-income group in late 1970s Thailand, particularly in the flat-type buildings constructed by the National Housing Authority (NHA). These flats were developed in response to severe housing shortages and the rapid growth of slums in Bangkok. The study examines the NHA’s role as both a producer of modern housing and an advocate for new living standards, alongside residents’ adaptation to life in high-rise buildings and the associated societal and cultural shifts. It applies the Production-Consumption-Mediation (PCM) framework of design history, which seeks to understand the cultural and social significance of designed objects through producers’ perspectives, consumer responses, and the shared ideas and ideals surrounding them. The study centers on *Baan Mai* (New Home), a magazine published by the NHA from 1976 to 1979 and distributed free to residents of its flats. *Baan Mai* served as a communication tool between the government and residents, addressing the challenges of adapting to new living conditions. Its content included advice on managing small spaces, maintaining efficiency, controlling noise, fostering a DIY furniture culture, and responding to residents’ complaints about issues such as water pricing and hygiene. This paper examines *Baan Mai* as a space of negotiation between the NHA and residents, revealing how both parties contributed to shaping the new home culture. Through analyzing the magazine, the study highlights how government strategies and everyday responses intersected to form new ways of living in high-rise housing during a critical period of urban transformation.

Keywords: design history, NHA flats, shelter magazine, home cultures, public housing

Introduction

Baan Mai (New Home) magazine was in circulation for only four years, between 1976 and 1979. It was produced and distributed largely free of charge to residents of flat-type housing developed and managed by the National Housing Authority (NHA) of Thailand.¹ Established in 1973, the NHA aimed to address severe housing shortages brought about by rapid urbanization, particularly for low-income groups.² According to its criteria, flat housing was allocated to the lowest-income households³ and, in some cases, to former slum residents displaced by demolition. The flat-type housings, where NHA flats typically took the form of four to five storey blocks, with individual units of about 40 square meters. For many occupants unfamiliar with such compact, vertical living environments, adapting to this new mode of habitation—and learning to understand it as a *home*—required guidance.

Therefore, *Baan Mai* was established to serve that purpose, while also functioning as a channel through which residents could provide feedback to help improve their living conditions. Its content ranges from articles expressing the NHA's expectations—how residents ought to behave in their new environment, approaches to homemaking for both function and pleasure, housekeeping advice, and information on job opportunities—to sections that amplified residents' own voices, including letters to the editor, published complaints, and interviews about daily life in the flats. In this way, *Baan Mai* not only reflects the authority's attempt to instil particular values, but also offers a platform for residents to articulate disagreements or dissatisfaction. The magazine thus emerges as a site where class and cultural transformations surrounding housing and domestic life were negotiated, revealing how various agencies actively shaped the ways of life in these new homes.

Research Framework

The Production-Consumption-Mediation (PCM) paradigm of design history is used as a framework to examine producers' perspectives, consumer responses, and the shared ideas and ideals embedded in designed objects—in this case, flat space.⁴ Mediums such as magazines or manuals have often been used to analyze the design aspects of objects. The magazine not only documents the design process but also imposes certain uses and elicits cultural and societal responses. In the case of NHA flats, *Baan Mai* played this role by revealing the shared ideas and ideals surrounding their design from the perspectives of both the producers and the users.

This essay argues that *Baan Mai* played a significant role in transforming ways of living among flat residents. The magazine functioned as a space of negotiation between the NHA and its residents, where both parties contributed to shaping what became the “new home culture” of the late 1970s among the low-income groups. This concept encompasses two key aspects: how residents created their homes within the given space and how they perceived and conducted themselves in their new living environment. The first aspect relates to the physical transformation through spatial arrangements and homemaking, while the second concerns personal habits, routines, behaviors, and the ways residents adapt their attitudes to the new environment in their new home.

Analysis, Discussion and Results

The Foundation of *Baan Mai* Magazine

Baan Mai (Fig. 1) was first published in 1976, three years after the establishment of the NHA. It was produced and distributed free of charge, primarily to flat residents, under the NHA's supervision. Chookiat Uttkapan, the first editor-in-chief of *Baan Mai*, stated in the first issue that the magazine was intended as a communication channel between the state sector and the citizens of NHA flats. Its content paid attention to improving the living conditions of both flat and slum communities.⁵ It was quite unusual for a shelter magazine to focus on the homes of low-income residents, who had limited purchasing power for home improvement compared to the middle class. However, this focus gave *Baan Mai* a unique editorial direction. Instead of being dominated by consumer product advertisements, the magazine featured advisory articles on how flat residents could economically enhance their living environments and gradually adjust their behaviors and attitudes to better adapt to their vertical habitats—or their so-called “New Home.”

Fig 1

Front Cover, *Baan Mai*
Year 1 No.1, May 1976
(Fig 1-1)

Front Cover, *Baan Mai*
Year 1 No.2, June 1976
(Fig 1-2)

Front Cover, *Baan Mai*
Year 1 No.6, October 1976
(Fig 1-3)



Fig 1-1



Fig 1-2

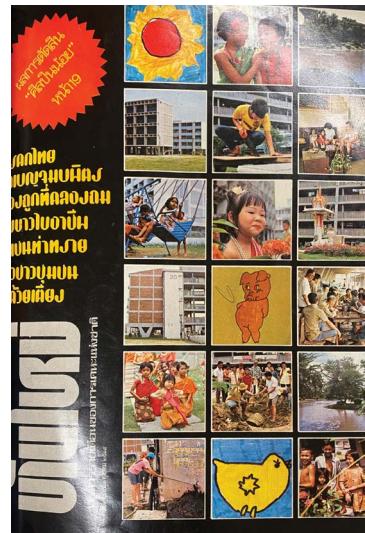


Fig 1-3

Baan Mai was often presented through editor's notes, valuing residents' voices and encouraging flat residents to submit their requirements and concerns for the NHA to solve. Over its four years of publication, residents' complaints can be observed alongside the NHA's advice on various aspects of daily life. The voices of residents, compared to the NHA, might not have been equally represented, yet they were substantial enough to reveal the dynamic between the two agents in the formation of a new home culture within this new form of living space. Among the published content from both agents, two central themes stand out in discussions of life in this new home: the environment and the self. The content related to the environment covers topics such as home decoration, space arrangement, keeping up with hygiene, and safety within the flat community. Meanwhile, the content focusing on the self addressed issues such as changes in residents' attitudes toward community life, economic consumption, and discussions of job opportunities. This published content reflects an ongoing negotiation between the audience and the producer—an approach rarely found in typical shelter magazines elsewhere.

Negotiating Homemaking

It has been said that the NHA's flat design differs from the model developed by the Department of Public Welfare (Fig. 2), which had previously constructed homes for low-income residents before the task was transferred to the NHA.⁶ Documentation detailing specific design changes is scarce, though one piece of evidence (Fig. 3) suggests what might have happened during the design development of NHA flats: a 1971 study on the minimum usable area for Thais, using a modular design approach.⁷ This research was conducted by Wattanyu Na Talang, the first appointed director of the NHA, while he was leading the Applied Scientific Research Corporation of Thailand (ASRCT).⁸ However, it seems that the scientific approach to solving space-related problems was applied only in the design process. When issues caused by spatial design emerged during actual use, a cultural approach was employed to address them, as evidenced over four years of *Baan Mai*.

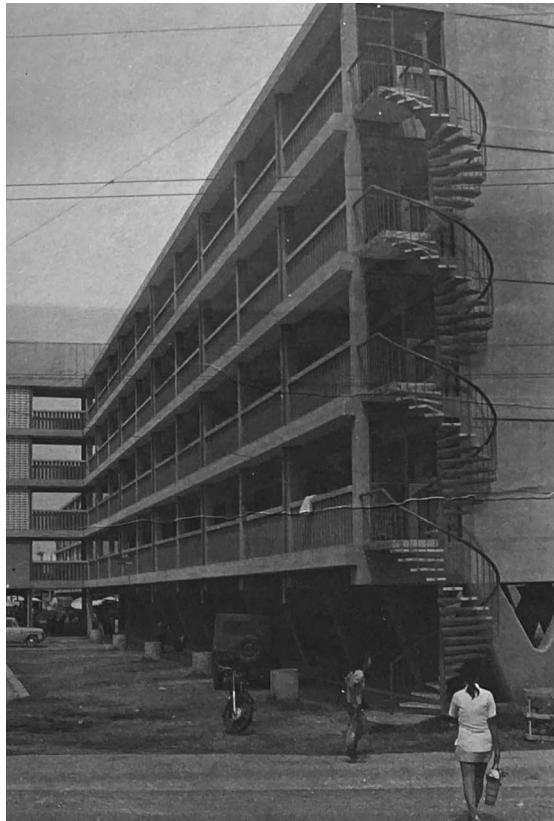


Fig 2

Huey Kwang Flat
developed by
the Department of
Public Welfare

Fig 2

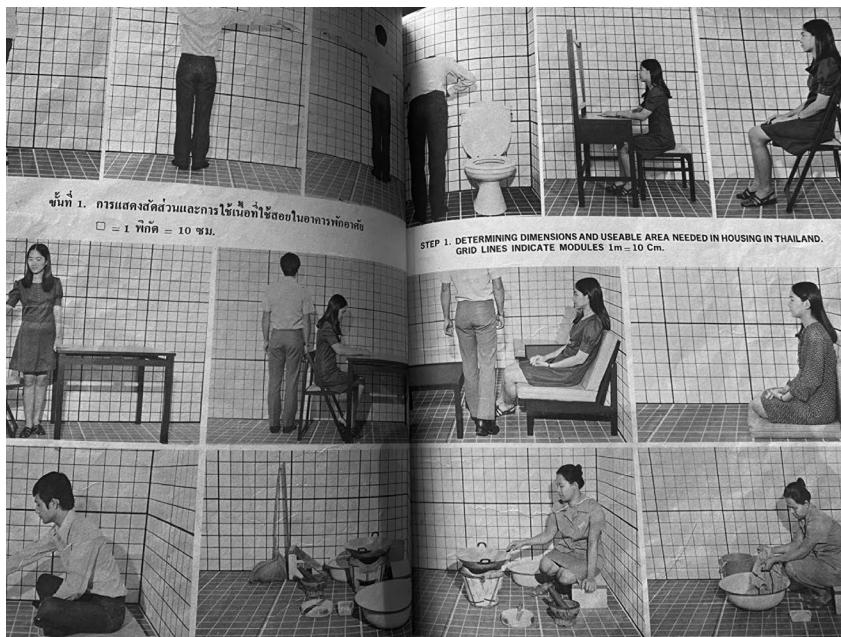


Fig 3

Spread from the article
“*Modular Design*” showing
the research of dimensions
and useable area needed
in housing in Thailand.

Fig 3

The cheapest type of flat offered by the NHA typically featured a unit of about 40 square meters, consisting of either a single empty room or one bedroom, along with a kitchen, a restroom, and a small balcony at the far end (Fig. 4). While the NHA envisioned a nuclear family of three to four members living in this type of flat, in reality, the number of household members could reach more than 11 people per unit.⁹ As a result, the NHA was compelled to provide the magazine as an after-service to a design they had not anticipated being used in such ways. To help residents cope with space limitations, *Baan Mai* published articles on how to live “Thai style” in flat-type buildings. The article *Can We Live Thai Style in Flats?*¹⁰ began by explaining why flats were the best solution to address Thailand’s urban housing shortage, even though the format of the space is originally better suited to colder climates. The article further argues that while flats might not align with traditional Thai ways of living, residents could still thrive if they were willing to let go of certain everyday rituals. It provided practical advice on adapting basic activities—such as sleeping, cooking, cleaning, and relaxing—to fit the constraints of flat living. The recommendations included sleeping on a foldable mattress instead of a bed to maximize floor space, standing rather than sitting while preparing food due to the small kitchen area, eating on a mat instead of a table to save space, and letting go of the belief that women’s clothing should not be hung above head level, particularly when using their tiny balcony for laundry. Most of the advice emphasized flexibility as the key to adaptation. *Baan Mai* suggested that residents do not need to adhere rigidly to traditional Thai beliefs in this new context and that the meaning of home space can be fluid.

A bedroom could also function as a living room, and a restroom could double as a washing area. What stands out in this advice is its adaptation process—*Baan Mai* promoted a new home culture that favored continuous change, implying that home and lifestyle were expected to evolve over time with modifications happening repeatedly as needed, rather than permanent transformation, which suggests a one-time, irreversible change with no further adaptation.

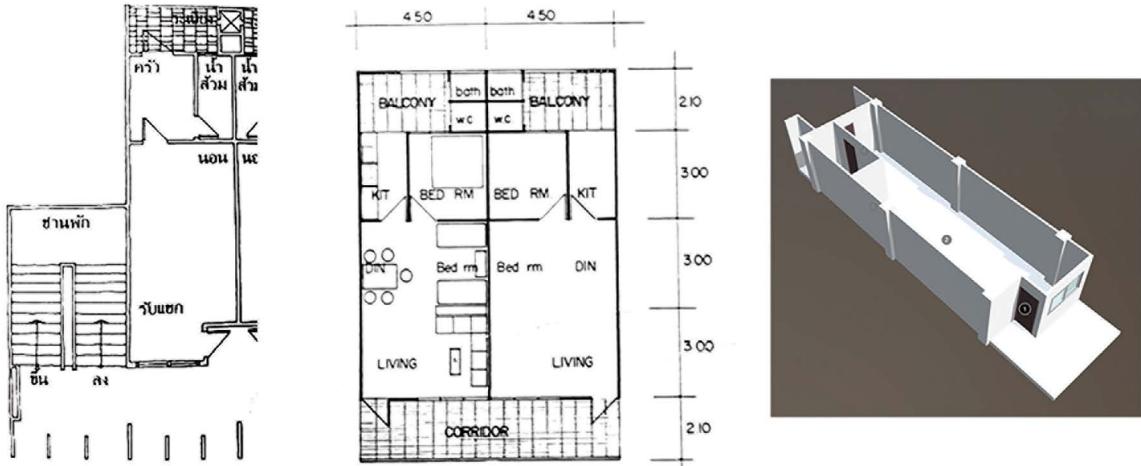


Fig 4

Another interesting aspect of homemaking discussed in *Baan Mai* was home decoration. Unlike typical middle-class shelter magazines in the west, which focused more on conspicuous consumption,¹¹ *Baan Mai* as a low-income audience shelter magazine offered guidelines for economical consumption—or even non-consumption—by encouraging residents to create their own home furnishings.¹² Driven by concerning financial limitations of flat residents, *Baan Mai* published numerous articles guiding readers to places where they could buy inexpensive home decor items, such as the Victory Monument market or the old town. Articles like *Decorating Your Flat with Cheap Posters*¹³ even included bold statements by telling those living in luxury apartments to skip the article because they were “not poor enough.”¹⁴ This article aimed to help flat residents refresh their plain concrete walls without the effort of repainting or adding elaborate patterns. It suggested buying large, vividly colored posters from street vendors on Ratchadamnoen Road, where prices were significantly cheaper than in department stores. The posters’ subject matter—whether celebrities, adorable babies, animals, or scenic landscapes—was secondary to their affordability and visual impact. Beyond directing residents to affordable shopping locations for posters, furniture, and materials, *Baan Mai* also promoted a do-it-yourself approach as a way to further reduce spending. The article *Beautiful but Cheap* encouraged readers to create their own home

Fig 4

The layout of a Din Daeng (left) and Huay Kwang (middle) flat unit, designed by the DPW and published in ASA Magazine in 1971 and 1973, respectively. The image on the right is a 3D model, rendered for the NHA Virtual Museum website, showing the layout of a Bon Kai flat unit, designed by the NHA.

furnishings without the need for an architect or interior designer. It provided reference images of worktables, kitchen shelves, couches, and clothing cabinets, along with suggestions on how to build them inexpensively. For example, it recommended constructing a worktable using trestles (commonly used by construction painters) as legs, repainted for aesthetic appeal, with a tabletop made from plywood, rubber plywood, or raintree wood. Similarly, it suggested assembling a shelf using rubber plywood combined with angle steel, a material typically found at local building supplies store. DIY home furnishing is also about maximizing space. Some designs were made to be multifunctional—such as a worktable that could double as an ironing board or a sofa that served as a seat during the day and a bed at night.¹⁵

Living the best life through flexible rituals and minimal spending turned out to be a concept this paper assumes flat residents adopted with less resistance. There may have been some rejection of content related to home decoration, as low-income residents often lacked the time for such practices. However, the strongest response was simply to ignore the advice rather than actively oppose it. This may have been because they understood that home decoration was a personal choice beyond the control of the NHA—it was entirely up to them whether to follow these suggestions or not. However, when it comes to shared spaces beyond their private rooms, the situation was different. In this case, flat-type buildings seemed to have a greater influence on residents, encouraging them to pay attention in maintaining common areas.

While the NHA primarily guided residents through *Baan Mai* articles to focus on their private rooms when discussing homemaking, residents themselves played a more active role in pushing the NHA to take responsibility for the flats' overall environment. In this sense, the design of flat buildings redefined the meaning of "home" for residents, extending the practice of homemaking beyond their rooms into shared public spaces. In *Baan Mai*, numerous letters of complaint were published, addressing issues from residents' doorsteps to common areas within the buildings.

Some were blunt and direct, while others took a more sarcastic tone, ranging from practical concerns—such as why doors were always placed facing each other instead of alternating sides to reduce awkward encounters with neighbors¹⁶—to more satirical critiques, like questioning whether the broken corridor lights were an intentional artistic statement of the NHA.¹⁷ Other residents suggested improvements, such as installing battens along the corridors to allow for communal planting and greenery.¹⁸

The scope of these concerns extended beyond individual buildings. For instance, a letter published in issue 28, written by a resident of the Din Daeng flats, proposed a better way for the NHA to regulate market stalls beneath the buildings in the community.¹⁹ At the time, the NHA allowed stalls to be set up beneath every other flat building, a system criticized by residents. He argued that since some vendors did not live in the flats, they had little incentive to maintain hygiene, often leaving tables and chairs out after closing. He suggested assigning 2–3 stalls per building and allowing only residents of that building to operate them, believing this would encourage responsibility and cooperation. Residents' concerns went even further, addressing the surrounding environment beyond the flat's community. Complaints included the lack of a nearby bus stop²⁰ and the absence of a warning sign at the pedestrian crossing near a local school.²¹ While these issues might not traditionally be considered part of "homemaking," residents framed them as necessary for creating a more livable and pleasant environment—suggesting a broader perspective in which urban planning itself became an extension of homemaking.

Negotiating Self at Home

While the previous section argues that *Baan Mai* constructed a new home culture through homemaking—both within private spaces and extending into some public areas—this part shifts the focus inward, examining the territory of the self. This paper proposes that *Baan Mai* sought to negotiate with both the behavior and attitude of flat residents.

The demographic composition of flat residents contributed to the uniqueness of these communities. The flat residents of the NHA belong to the lowest-income groups, earning less than 1,500 THB per month according to NHA criteria, and include former slum residents who were relocated to the newly constructed buildings. *Baan Mai* regularly featured articles with short interviews of flat residents, highlighting their diverse backgrounds. The residents included street vendors, low-ranking police officers, schoolteachers, housekeepers, and general laborers—many of whom could be considered part of the petty bourgeoisie, as proposed by Benedict Anderson.²² This generation had migrated from the suburbs to Bangkok in search of job opportunities during the previous decade.

Recognizing that many flat residents were unfamiliar with modern architectural forms, the NHA expressed concerns—through *Baan Mai*—about their behavior and attitudes in this new type of community. Unlike homemaking, which focused on adapting living spaces, this concern was more inward facing, addressing the self-discipline and social responsibility of residents. The article *Now I Understand*²³ illustrates this through the story of a fictional character who has just moved into a flat. The narrative presents a series of scenarios highlighting the challenges of adjusting to flat life. In one instance, the protagonist prepared dinner using a stone mortar. Out of habit, she dragged it across the floor because it was too heavy to lift and pounded the chili as forcefully as she always had. The next morning, she was awakened by the same noise—this time coming from her neighbor. Another scenario involved her husband, who invited friends over for an evening gathering. They ate, drank, danced, and sang late into the night. A few days later, the neighbors hosted a similar event, but with more people and even louder noise. Through these experiences, the protagonist realized that living in a flat was different from living in a standalone house. With units directly attached to one another, she had to be more considerate about noise to avoid being subjected to the same disturbances. As seen in this example, *Baan Mai* sought to negotiate changes in residents' attitudes

and behaviors, encouraging them to adapt to communal living in a way that minimized conflicts and fostered harmony. Apart from noise issues, hygiene was another major concern that *Baan Mai* consistently addressed to flat residents. One such example is the article *Revolutionize Your Kitchen*,²⁴ which offered practical tips on maintaining a clean kitchen. Thai cooking methods often produce smoke and oil buildup, so the article suggests using a mixture of orange juice and salt as a natural cleaning solution. The acidity in the mixture helps dissolve greasy stains effectively. Another tip focused on how to wash greasy dishes during winter. The article advised pouring hot water over the dishes before using dishwashing detergent to make cleaning easier.

Changing behavior and attitudes regarding noise levels and hygiene was largely driven by the community and environment. However, another aspect of improvement focused more closely on the residents' selves: occupation. Articles on education, job opportunities, and careers for low-income individuals—many with limited formal education—were *Baan Mai*'s response to the socioeconomic challenges caused by changes in housing and employment. A notable example is Chief Petty Officer First Class (CPO1) Damrong Nuntanon, who was featured in the “Voice from the Community” column. Damrong, a dessert seller residing in the Bon Kai slum—soon to be demolished for the NHA's flat development—was scheduled for relocation there. He expressed concerns about how the move from the slum to a flat would impact his livelihood and criticized the impracticality of his future living space:

“The flat is way too small... too small to store all my necessary supplies. We have about 8–9 people living together, not including the three kids who help me. Just accommodating people is already a challenge—how am I supposed to manage everything else? Especially coconuts, my main ingredient. When I receive shipments of a hundred, how can I possibly store or carry them up and down? And what about the discarded shells? It's just not feasible.”²⁵

Damrong's story highlights the profound impact that flat-style housing had on residents' socioeconomic lives. This concern may have driven *Baan Mai* to emphasize career development, frequently featuring content on job opportunities and vocational education as potential solutions for affected residents. This type of content regularly appeared in the column run by Prajamsri Jitjai, highlighting various careers that do not require a high level of education, such as construction workers, public transportation drivers, or salespeople at shopfronts. The articles by Prajamsri aimed to present these jobs in a positive light, whether through the writer's perspective or interviews with people in these professions. One of their articles featured the career of a shoe repairman through the story of Apai, a man who took on this job due to a lack of higher education, yet it provided him with a good income, earning about 100 baht per day, from one to two baht for easy tasks to 400 baht for difficult ones. His monthly earnings were not much different from working for a company.²⁶

The article can be read as aiming to inspire the audiences of *Baan Mai* to see that these jobs could also be a good fit for them and provide enough income to feed their families. Moreover, these jobs were not difficult to enter, and they were outside the home, so readers do not have to face the challenge of limited space to work, as in the case of Nuntanon. Beyond career-focused content, there were also columns providing guidance on vocational education, aimed at those who lacked the opportunity to continue their formal education beyond grades four to seven. The columns emphasized that the job market still lacked skilled workers such as painters, bricklayers, plumbers, and auto mechanics.²⁷ These articles suggested where readers could find vocational schools both in Bangkok and other provinces and provided fundamental information on how they could enroll in these schools.

Baan Mai's investment in content related to jobs and vocational education demonstrates a strong understanding of its audience and a clear direction in shaping flat residents' sense of self. It can also be inferred that these efforts aimed to cultivate responsible citizens—or at the very least, responsible payers. The NHA's rent-to-own agreement, in which residents would own their units only after completing their installments, likely influenced attitudes toward ownership. Unlike a bank loan, which grants ownership immediately upon purchase, this semi-ownership stage—combined with the sense that the building did not truly belong to them—may have contributed to feelings of detachment or irresponsibility toward the property. Thus, *Baan Mai*'s emphasis on career development was not only a response to how flat living affected residents' existing livelihoods but also a strategic effort to foster financial responsibility, ensuring they remained committed to paying their installments.

Spaces of Negotiation, Spaces of Transition

At Home in Postwar France: Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort, which examines standard apartments provided by the French government for the working class from the interwar to postwar periods, argues that these living spaces were designed to instill better habits and attitudes toward responsibility, such as on the matter of hygiene. In the case of Henri Becque's "trainer housing" model home designed in 1937 for families previously living in slums, the study suggests that shelving areas were intentionally "reduced to a bare minimum because they provided storage areas that might pose hazards to good hygiene if uneducated tenants filled them with dirty or dusty items."²⁸ In the case of NHA flats, there is no clear evidence that the emptiness of the flat units was designed with a similar intent as in France or was simply a result of budget constraints. However, it is undeniable that the NHA also aimed to train their residents, but instead of using flats, it used *Baan Mai* magazine as a space to cultivate their behavior, attitudes and practice of homemaking.

Baan Mai promoted the idea that flats were a better form of living for low-income residents—small but adaptable, allowing for a good quality of life with the right adjustments. However, it also suggested that flats were not intended to be a permanent home. While they offered a significant improvement over slums for urban squatters and provided lessee with a sense of stability, NHA flats were framed as transitional spaces—places where residents could cultivate responsible habits before moving on to better housing.²⁹ This is evident in *Baan Mai*, which frequently published articles advising residents on financial management to help them eventually afford a home of their own. One article, for instance, stated:

“I don’t think the NHA takes pride in seeing a tremendous number of people registering for flat housing. At times, I feel relieved that we can ease the distress of those struggling to find a home. But I use the word distress because I know this is not a true solution—only a temporary fix. The real solution depends on you, the one facing the problem. You are the owner of this challenge, and it is up to you to resolve it.”³⁰

This passage implies that the NHA expected its audience to be active participants in improving their own lives. It also reflects the NHA’s position as a negotiator—encouraging low-income residents to strive for upward mobility. Both NHA flats and *Baan Mai* served as mediums to inspire aspirations for a better life—one in which residents could eventually own “a home with the green front yard of their dreams”.³¹

Conclusions

Throughout its four years of publication (Table 1), *Baan Mai* proved to be a unique space of negotiation. It demonstrated a level of direct engagement between the state and its citizens that was rarely seen in its time and context. Through NHA-produced content, the magazine offered clear guidance on how residents might adapt to their new homes. When placed alongside the residents' often unpredictable responses, this created a dynamic exchange that animated the flats and articulated a vivid vision of urban living and home design for one of Thailand's important demographics in the 1970s.

The new home culture proposed in this paper emerges from this space of negotiation. The argument rests on the idea that both the NHA and flat residents played active roles in shaping new ways of living. *Baan Mai* is considered a space of negotiation, presented through a range of contributions from both sides, whether concerning the making of a home or the shaping of the self.

In the making of a home, the NHA encouraged residents to arrange, furnish, and consume in ways that aligned with spatial and economic constraints. Residents, in turn, raised concerns that went beyond their individual units, calling for improvements to shared spaces that they increasingly regarded as extensions of their domestic spaces. In the making the self, the NHA promoted ideas about responsible behaviour and community-mindedness, urging residents to become responsible tenants and to pursue self-improvement through particular career paths. These efforts responded directly to anxieties among residents about job insecurity stemming from their relocation. Suggestions, complaints, advice, and even satire became modes of communication that shaped everyday life within this modern spatial arrangement.

Table 1

	Negotiating home making	Negotiating self at home	Spaces of negotiation, Spaces of Transition
<i>Baan Mai 1, 1</i> (May 1976)		<i>"Now I Understand"</i>	
<i>Baan Mai 1, 2</i> (June 1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>"Can We Live Thai Style in Flats?"</i> by Editorial Board - <i>"Decorating Your Flat with Cheap Posters"</i> by Editorial Board 		
<i>Baan Mai 1, 6</i> (October 1976)	<i>"The Year-Round Work of the NHA"</i> by Editorial Board		
<i>Baan Mai 1, 9</i> (January 1977)	<i>"Beautiful but Cheap"</i> by Kaewtasurabong	<i>"Revolutionize Your Kitchen"</i> by Rattana the Housewife	
<i>Baan Mai 2, 14</i> (June 1977)		<i>"Visiting Bon Kai Families"</i> by Rattana	<i>"Saving for a Home"</i> by Editorial Board
<i>Baan Mai 2, 15</i> (July 1977)			<i>"From Home to Garden"</i> by Sophon Kaewmenoi
<i>Baan Mai 2, 21</i> (January 1978)		<i>"Hands-on Professions"</i> by Prajamsri Jitjai	
<i>Baan Mai 3, 26</i> (June 1978)	<i>"Insights from the Community"</i> by Prakij Pleumkamol		
<i>Baan Mai 3, 27</i> (July 1978)	<i>"Insights from the Community"</i> by Vinai Malai		
<i>Baan Mai 3, 28</i> (August 1978)	<i>"Insights from the Community"</i> by Sawang Mudsalae		
<i>Baan Mai 3, 29</i> (September 1978)		<i>"The Shoe Repairman"</i> by Prajamsri Jitjai	
<i>Baan Mai 3, 30</i> (October 1978)	<i>"Talk to the NHA New Community in Raminthra"</i> by Rattana		
<i>Baan Mai 3, 36</i> (April 1979)	<i>"Letters"</i> by Editorial Board		
<i>Baan Mai 4, 41</i> (September 1979)	<i>"Letters"</i> by Chao Panich 2		

Table 1

Index of magazine articles
and negotiating themes

Although these two dimensions—home-making and self-improvement—may not yet amount to a fully articulated culture in the scope of this paper, they nonetheless reveal how a new home culture began to take form, driven by a shared pursuit of improvement. This process of negotiated improvement can be understood as a transitional space, with its unsettled character signalling a readiness for change. The cover of *Baan Mai*'s first issue features a photograph of children on the stairway of an NHA flat—one seated, two standing at the railing, all smiling. The image conveys their enjoyment as they acclimatize to their new environment. Subtly aspirational, it suggests to readers that this new way of living holds the promise of a hopeful future, attainable through embracing and making the most of their new home.

Notes

- 1 Some of them were distributed to the slum communities under the responsibility of the NHA as part of the slum improvement project. However, this paper will focus mainly on flat communities.
- 2 Before the NHA, public housing was managed by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW). Due to its ad hoc approach, the NHA was later established to take a more strategic role in addressing the housing problem. As part of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan, the government approved the construction of flat buildings in 1954, leading to the DPW's first project in Din Daeng. This four-story reinforced concrete building had an empty basement and housed 20 units per floor, each connected by a shared balcony. Each unit contained a multipurpose space, a restroom, a kitchen, and a rear balcony. Built to replace the site's wooden houses, the Din Daeng flat followed a model similar to that of Singapore. Helen L. Chiu, "Public Housing in Thailand: A Study of Policy Change, 1940-78," **Contemporary Southeast Asia** 5, 3 (1983): 352-367; Veerapong Soontornchattrawat, '**Flæt Dindæng' prawattisāt thī yang mai rīnōwēt bon samōraphūm 'Thalu Kæt'** [Din Daeng Flat: The Unrenovated History on the Battlefield 'Taloo Gas'], Accessed April 1, 2024, Available from <https://plus.thairath.co.th/topic/politics&society/100491>.
- 3 The NHA aimed to reduce housing shortages for the low-income group, specifically those earning less than 5,000 baht per month, which at the time accounted for 85% of the population. The NHA divided this population into three categories and invested in constructing residential spaces accordingly. The first category, Type (A), included those earning less than 1,500 baht per month. The second, Type (B), was for individuals with an income between 1,500 and 3,000 baht per month. The last group, Type (C), consisted of people earning between 3,000 and 5,000 baht per month. Sunya Hawaswan, "Kāndamnēn ngān khōng Kānkhēha hæng chāt tām nayōbāi khōng ratthabān nai chūang wēlā Mīnākhom Phō. Sō. sōngphanhārōisippāet thung Makarākhom Phō. Sō. sōngphanhārōisipkāo [Operation of National Housing Authority According to the Government Policy, March 1975–January 1976]," (Master's Thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2005), 79–81.
- 4 The Production-Consumption-Mediation paradigm is an observation on the development of design history proposed by Grace Lees-Maffei. It argues that the history of design has shifted its focus since the field became established in the UK in the 1970s—from production, which centers on designers' ideas and design processes as the main point of study, to consumption, which values users of design under the influence of cultural and social history, and finally to mediation, which focuses on the process of exchanging meanings between production and consumption. The mediation process can be observed either through the design object itself or through media that convey shared ideas and ideals of design objects, such as manuals or magazines. Grace Lees-Maffei, "The Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm," **Journal of Design History** 22, 4 (2009): 351–376.
- 5 Editor in Chief, "Chāk bannāthikān [From Editor in Chief]," **Baan Mai** 1, 1 (May 1976): 5
- 6 The evidence of NHA flat unit layout appears sporadically. According to the NHA research website, the design of the first flats, built in the 1950s under the responsibility of the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), followed the model of Singaporean flats. After the responsibility for flat housing construction transitioned from the DPW to the NHA, there were claims that a new design was applied. **Phō. Sō. sōngphanhārōisipsōng thung sōngphanhārōisipkāo: yuk thī sī yuk Kānkhēha hæng chāt phūa wāra hæng chāt dān thīyū'āsai [B.E. 2512–2519 (1969–1976): The Fourth Era - The National Housing Authority Era, for a National Housing Agenda]**, Accessed April 2, 2024, Available from http://housingvm.nha.co.th/VM_4.html; **Flæt Bōn Kai, flæt ræk khōng Kānkhēha na thī tang čhai klāngmūang [Bon Kai Flat, the First Flat of NHA in the City Center]**, Accessed April 2, 2024, Available from http://housingvm.nha.co.th/VM_4a.html.

7 It appeared in ASA Magazine as a “Modular” design, but it was likely inspired by Le Corbusier’s “Modulor” design. “Rabop phikat [Modular Design],” **ASA: Architectural Award’ 73** 2, 3 (September 1973): 31.

8 The Applied Scientific Research Corporation of Thailand (ASRCT) was established in 1963. Its objectives include initiating, carrying out, promoting, and supporting applied scientific research and investigations related to or aimed at promoting national development, training scientific research workers, and providing a central service for conducting scientific tests and measurements of all kinds. Malee Sundhagul, “The Applied Scientific Research Corporation of Thailand and Its Role in Research and Development,” in **United Nations Industrial Development Organization Meeting of Selected Heads of Research Institutes**, Vienna, Austria, October 18-22, 1976, 1-19.

9 As shown in a survey on the number of family members in Din Daeng Housing, conducted in 1973 by a joint-venture program between the National Education Council and Southern Illinois University under the Design Development Program, household sizes had exceeded the envisioned limit. J. Davis and Elsa Kula Pratt, “Kānsamrūat phū phak ‘āsai nai yān Dindāeng [Din Daeng Housing Dwellers Survey],” **ASA: Urbanization: Housing** 2, 2 (June 1973): 30-37.

10 Editorial Board, “Yū flæt bæp Thai Thai dai rū mai [Can We Live Thai Style in Flats?],” **Baan Mai** 1, 2 (June 1976): 15.

11 Works that focus on shelter magazines often highlight publications aimed at the middle class, especially in studies of society from the interwar to the post-Second World War. Examples include Bill Osgerby’s “*The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption, and Interior Design in American Men’s Magazines, 1930-65*”, Sheila Webb’s “*The Consumer Citizen: Life Magazine’s Construction of a Middle-Class Lifestyle Through Consumption Scenarios*.” Bill Osgerby, “The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men’s Magazines, 1930-65,” **Journal of Design History** 18, 1 (2005): 99-113; Sheila Webb, “The Consumer-Citizen: Life Magazine’s Construction of a Middle-Class Lifestyle Through Consumption Scenarios,” **Studies in Popular Culture** 34, 2 (2012): 23-47.

12 Works such as “*Everyday Aesthetics in the Khrushchev-Era Standard Apartment*” by Susan E. Reid and *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* by Steven E. Harris can serve as case studies for the topic of home decoration within public housing. These works offer a comparison of how governments in different contexts encouraged residents to consume less, despite being driven by distinct ideological frameworks. In the Soviet case, consumption was seen as a capitalist act that conflicted with socialist values, which led to a promotion of more reasonable consumption. In contrast, Thailand’s emphasis on frugality within its public housing was grounded in practical considerations. While the government acknowledged the economic constraints of its residents and the limited space in the flats, it still sought to convince them that they could improve their living conditions while spending less. Susan E. Reid, “Everyday Aesthetics in the Khrushchev-Era Standard Apartment,” **Etnofoor** 24, 2 (2012): 79-105; Steven E. Harris, **Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin** (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013).

13 Editorial Board, “*Toktæng flæt dūai pōt tœ rākhā thūk* [Decorating Your Flat with Cheap Posters],” **Baan Mai** 1, 2 (June 1976): 32.

14 Editorial Board, “*Ngān kānkhēha nai rōp pī* [The Year-Round Work of the NHA],” **Baan Mai** 1, 6 (October 1976): 28.

15 Kaewtasurabong [pseud.], “*Sūai tāe thūk* [Beautiful but Cheap],” **Baan Mai** 1, 9 (January 1977): 12-13.

16 Prakij Pleumkamol, “*Khōkhit čhāk chāo chumchon* [Insights from the Community],” **Baan Mai** 3, 26 (June 1978): 2.

17 Editorial Board, “*Čhotmāi* [Letters],” **Baan Mai** 3, 36 (April 1979): 2-3.

18 Chao Panich 2, “*Čhotmāi* [Letters],” **Baan Mai** 4, 41 (September 1979): 2.

19 Sawang Mudsalae, “*Khōkhit čhāk chumchon* [Insights from the Community],” **Baan Mai** 3, 28 (August 1978): 2.

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21 Rattana, “*Khui kap chumchon mai thī Rām’inthā* [Talk to the NHA New Community in Raminthra],” **Baan Mai** 3, 30 (October 1978): 38-39.

22 Ben Anderson, "Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup," **Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars** 9, 3 (1997): 15-16.

23 "Dichan khaočhai lāeo kha [Now I Understand]," **Baan Mai** 1, 1 (May 1976): 15.

24 Rattana the Housewife [pseud.], "Patirūp kānkhrūa [Revolutionize Your Kitchen]," **Baan Mai** 1, 9 (January 1977): 23.

25 Rattana, "Yīam khrōpkhrūa thī Bōn Kai [Visiting Bon Kai Families]," **Baan Mai** 2, 14 (June 1977): 27.

26 Prajamsri Jitjai, "Chāng sōm rōngthao [The Shoe Repairman]," **Baan Mai** 3, 29 (September 1978): 12-13.

27 Prajamsri Jitjai, "Wichā hā kin [Hands-on Professions]," **Baan Mai** 2, 21 (January 1978): 22-23.

28 Nicole C. Rudolph, **At Home in Postwar France: Modern Mass Housing and the Right to Comfort** (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 61.

29 The establishment of the NHA in 1970s Thailand may have been influenced by the US Cold War agenda, which aimed to promote homeownership as a means of advancing capitalism. Works such as Avi Friedman's *"The Evolution of Design Characteristics During the Post-Second World War Housing Boom: The US Experience"* explore how the US sought to stimulate its economy and establish a new economic order focused on stability by transforming a "nation of renters" into a "nation of owners" after World War II. Similarly, Nancy H. Kwak, in *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid*, discusses how American advisors encouraged countries worldwide to adopt the ideal of homeownership, believing that expanding access to mortgages would strengthen democratic governments and capitalism. Although the emergence of the NHA in Thailand occurred three decades later, it can still be seen as influenced by policies driven by international aid organizations, including the World Bank, as outlined in *Low-income Housing in Thailand: Concepts, Development Mechanism, and Government Subsidy*. Avi Friedman, "The Evolution of Design Characteristics During the Post-Second World War Housing Boom: The US Experience," **Journal of Design History** 8, 2 (1995): 131-146; Nancy H. Kwak, **A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid** (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Busara Povatong, **Thīyū'āsai phūa phū mī rāidai nōi nai prathēt Thai: nāokhit konkai kānphatthanā lāe kān 'utnun dōi rat [Low-income Housing in Thailand: Concepts, Development Mechanism, and Government Subsidy]** (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2023).

30 Editorial Board, "Kep ngōen sū bān [Saving for a Home]," **Baan Mai** 2, 14 (June 1977): 8-9.

31 Sophon Kaewmenoi, "Bān thung sūan [From Home to Garden]," **Baan Mai** 2, 15 (July 1977): inside cover.

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Fig. 2 "Kānsamrūat phū phak 'āsai nai yān Dindāeng [Din Daeng Housing Dwellers Survey]," **ASA** 2, 2 (June 1973): 37.

Fig. 3 "Rabop phikat [Modular Design]," **ASA** 2, 3 (September 1973): 32-33.

Fig. 4 (left) "Kānsamrūat phū phak 'āsai nai yān Dindāeng," 30; (middle) "Ngān 'ōkbāep 'ākhān thīyū'āsai samrap phūmīrāidainōi thao thī mī yū nai patčhuban [Existing Designs of Housing for Low-income Residents]," **ASA** 2 (1971): 6; (right) **'Ākhān khrōngkān flāet Dindāeng [Din Daeng Housing Project]**,

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