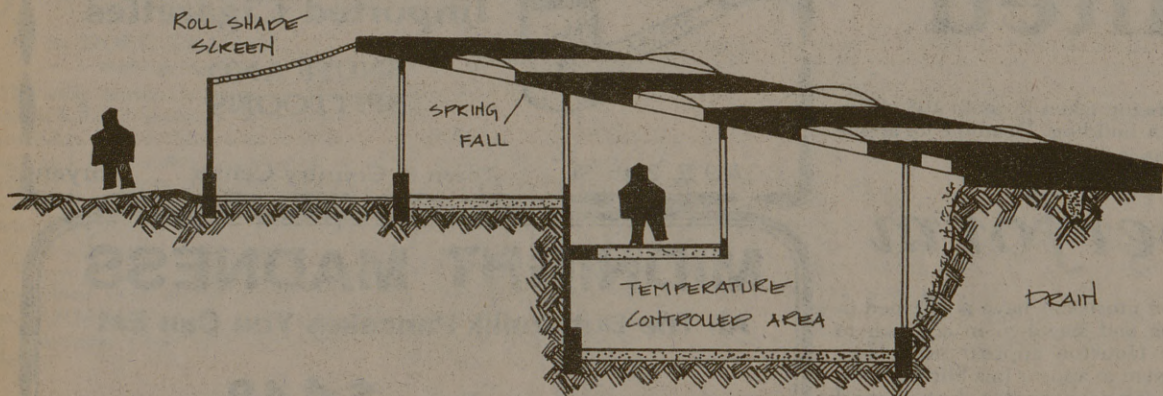


Roof-suspended earth-home



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Illustrations by
Dorothy Baker

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April 3, 4, 5

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AGGIE BLOOD DRIVE APRIL 3, 4 and 5

LOCATION:
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Wadley Central Blood Bank

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A&M team 'goes underground' for naturally insulated housing

By GREG PROPPS

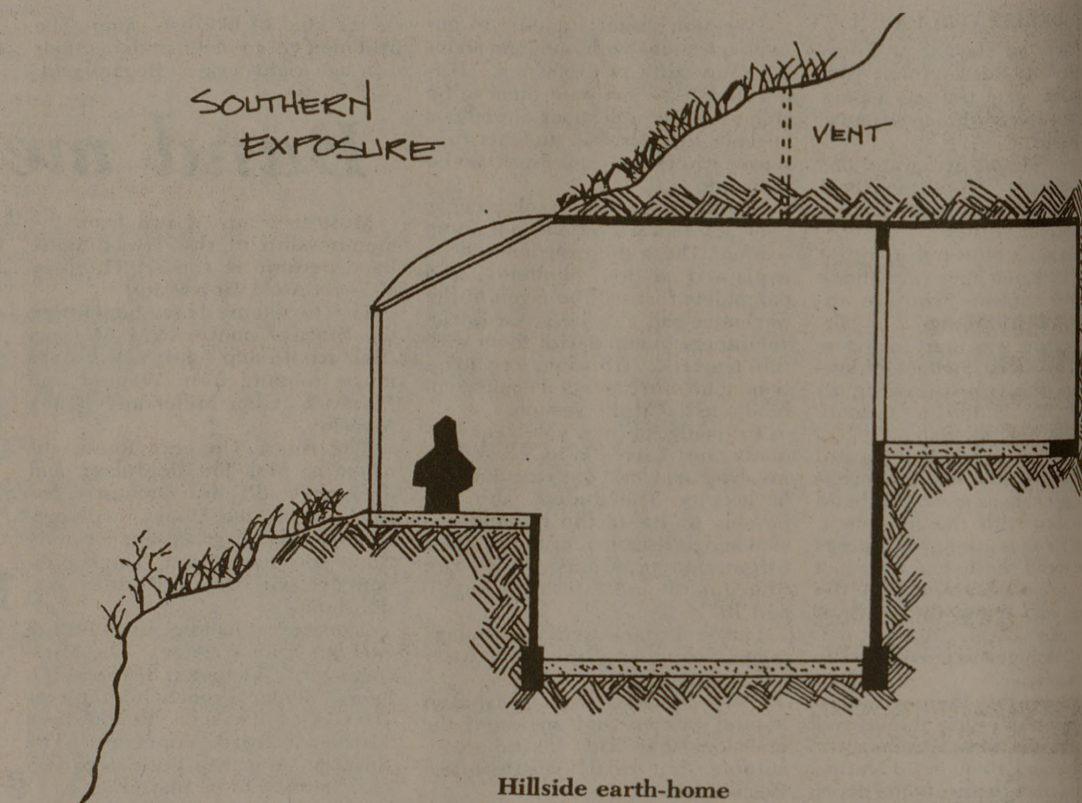
"Going underground" may take on a new meaning. It may soon mean an innovative and energy efficient form of urban housing.

Gary Sorensen, a lecturer in the civil engineering department at Texas A&M University, is doing research on using the earth as a building material, and using wind, water, vegetation and the sun as a climate modifier. Sorensen's research includes building houses partially underground.

By using a subterranean design, the builder can take advantage of the earth's insulative properties. The ground is slow to react to climatic temperature change and serves as a perfect year round insulator, Sorensen said.

Don Sweeney, assistant dean of the college of architecture and environmental design, and a partner in the research, said there is a relatively constant soil temperature at 30 feet below the surface, and in a moderate climate, such as College Station, that temperature would always be 68 degrees.

Building a house partially underground would utilize this constant temperature to reduce heating and cooling costs as well as reducing construction energy consumption. Sorensen said that by using indigenous or locally occurring building materials, energy could be saved. This would leave conventional



Hillside earth-home

building materials free for other uses.

L. Dale Webb, an associate professor in civil engineering, and another partner in Sorensen's research, said since cold air settles in low places, proper ventilation would allow the house to become a pool of cool air in the summer. Closing off the ventilation would keep the house warmer in the winter.

One of the team's designs involves digging out a suitable space and running structural beams across the hold at the ground level. The inside and outside walls would then be hung from these beams.

Webb said that hanging walls from above makes them non-loadbearing. This would make it possible to have moveable inside walls for a more flexible living space once the house is finished. A suspended wall would not need the

strength of wood and could be made of a less expensive material.

The roof would be built several feet above the ground surface to allow natural lighting through skylights and provide a view of the outside. This would give the house a more conventional look, helping to dispel the misconception of living like a mole.

This design would also allow landscaping around the structure, to help generate or dissipate air currents around the house.

The projected costs for a house of this type would be around \$15 per square foot as opposed to \$35 per square foot for a conventional structure, Sorensen said.

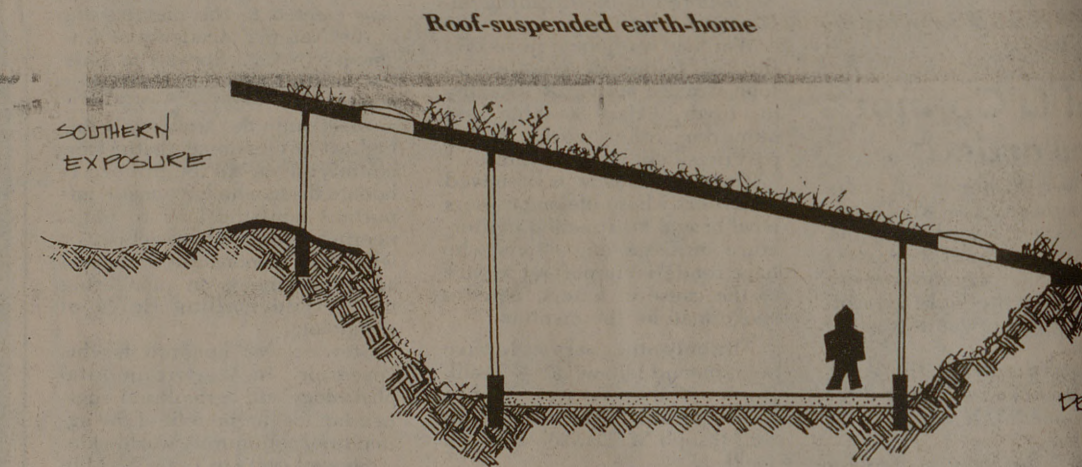
Another design involves tunneling into the side of a hill, still using the earth's insulative properties, but allowing the southern wall to re-

main exposed. This way a conventional front door and windows could be used, Sorensen said.

Exposing only the southern side also helps to reduce cooling heating costs. Sorensen said this design would allow housing steep hills that would otherwise be unsuitable for building.

Sorensen is in the process of using a 13-acre site at the University Research Annex to build examples of his housing ideas. He suggests the Construction Equipment Engineering School at the annex could be used to build the structures.

The idea of building partially underground is not a new one. Chinese have done it for centuries. But Sweeney said there is a problem in selling the idea to the public. People just won't accept an idea until it has been researched and reintroduced locally, said Sweeney.



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