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DEMOLISHING THE OLD CLICHES ABOUT THE HOUSING SHORTAGE

BY ROBERT H. MUTRUX

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Sorry, reports an iconoclastic observer, but reality paints a different picture.

IN THE MIDST of all our other national problems it is heartening to learn that in the area of housing, there is no crisis. The recent fanfare, the inflammatory rhetoric are for naught and we have nothing to worry about after all.

This startling conclusion is based on a combination of expert observation and deductive reasoning. If there were a crisis worthy of the name, it would be apparent to everyone that a significant segment of the population had no place to live, and such is obviously not the case. No one in the entire country is reduced to renting sleeping space on an unsheltered sidewalk, as many do in Calcutta, and no one has to resort to the vagaries of the lottery to gain access to a 9' by 12' cubbyhole. as one must in Tokyo. And no one seeks perennial shelter under the nearest viaduct, though many are forced to do so in Helsinki.

Moreover, I have seen large areas in nationally-acclaimed housing projects in St. Louis, Mo., in Bridgeport, Conn., and Springfield, Mass.. obviously unoccupied because large sections of window-glass are missing. In New York City alone the number of habitable dwellings left untenanted is astonishing. Meanwhile, in the neighboring Bronx, Co-Op City rises majestically to welcome all those who dream of brand-new dwelling-space at a mere \$26.00 per room, including airconditioning.

If there were a crisis, every citizen in the world's richest and most sociallyconscious country would meet it on crisis terms. However, Secretary Romney assures us that there is no cause for alarm. Our native genius for mechanization will solve whatever temporary situation exists, and dwellings will soon (say in three to five years) cover the land like Manna from Heaven. Or Mustangs.

Furthermore, our leaders as a group appear untroubled. Mr. Daniel P. Moynihan has expressed no noticeable concern and neither our highest elected official (who is burdened with three more residences than he actually needs,) nor his loquacious surrogate has once mentioned the subject. And who would be a better judge of the state of the nation and the temper of its people?

If there were a housing crisis we would deal with it in the best American tradition. Our President would declare a national emergency, and summon up the Department of Defense. That branch known as the Corps of Engineers is the best-trained, the most experienced, the best equipped organization in the world to deal with a problem of housing. And they have the most money. \$70 billion per year will buy a lot of two-by-fours.

This efficient group would immediately embark on a series of "Search and Build missions. Their victories in the field would be measured by a careful count of homes erected, known as "the Build Rate." Bungalows, town houses, low and high-rise apartments would be erected with the same cranes and bull-dozers that built the army camps in Korea and Vietnam, and the helicopters that now hover over distant paddy-fields would deliver completed homes to their final locations. Most important of all, a nation-wide plan of planting and the creation of playgrounds and parks would replace five years of defoliation and destruction.

Our esteemed commander-in-chief would of course, draft the required technical personnel and would also enlist the nation's most facile minds to build up civil and morale and enthusiasm. Adults would be encouraged to invest in Building Bonds, children would be taught to play with jack-hammers and power-tools instead of toy machine guns. And they would point proudly to each new emblem designating a newly-constructed home that their fathers would paint on the sides of their pick-up trucks.

But such drastic steps are unwarranted. Our able leaders have expressed their confidence that "the private sector" can be counted on to help their fellow men (all 26 million of them) who do not possess decent homes, and that the situation is not one of national stature.

So while FDR and gloomy talk about an "ill-housed one-third of a nation" rests quietly on his grave, why not relax? Have the rumpus room air-conditioned, and plan next spring to do your modest part by fixing up the barn into a rentable apartment. And next month I'll tell you about the crisis in the Middle East, which also doesn't exist.

The Louisiana Architect Number 1

Volume X

THE LOUISIANA ARCHITECT, Official Journal of the Louisiana Architects Association of the American Institute of Architects, is owned by the Louisiana Architects Association, not for profit, and is published monthly, Suite 200, Jack Tar Capitol House Hotel, Baton Rouge, La., telephone 348-5579. Editorial contributions are welcome but publication cannot be guaranteed. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Louisiana Architects Association. Editorial material may be freely reprinted by other official AIA publications, provided full credit is given to the author and to the LOUISIANA ARCHI-TECT for prior use.

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> THIS MONTH'S COVER - John Herbert Schaeffer, AIA, at work in his studio on the Pecan wood sculpture, "The Crossbearer". cover photo by Andy Smith

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The site contains an entire city block in the down town area which allows easy access from all directions. The preservation of one of the 100 charter members of the Live Oak Society standing on the site was a prime requirement along with the need for the building to innitiate a revitalization of the downtown area.

The foundation and structural systems have been designed to accomodate nine additional floors to an ultimate height of twelve stories. The columns are sheathed in Italian Travertine marble and Pennsylvania black slate. The slate is also used as a flooring and wall facing material — generously on the ground floor and as accents on the second floor.

The travertine sheathes the concrete spandrel system of each level. Stainless steel glazing and door frame members are used in the public areas. Reeded teak ceilings are used around the perimeter of the first two floors as well as for the ceiling around the interior columns, front of the tellers counters, elevator shaft walls, and escalator well wall. Teak plywood paneling, plaster either painted or with vinyl wall covering, carpet, and acoustical plaster comprise the other principal finishes. The mechanical system has 180 tons of cooling capacity which is capable through mixing boxes of delivering the proper amount and temperature of air at each location throughout the bank.

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Honor Award (Continued)







The Louisiana Architect



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This complex of three buildings is one of the most interesting ones in Louisiana. The center section was built in the late 18th century by Pierre de Trepagnier, who was given the land by Spanish Governor Galvez. This central section is of the original mud, moss and brick filling between posts—finished with a plaster covering.

The house was purchased by Richard Butler, who added the two side wings about 1817. Samuel Wilson in Louisiana Architect magazine states that these wings were probably designed by Benjamin Latrobe and were to have been followed by a rebuilding of the central section in the Virginia manner —a central building with flanking side buildings facing an entrance court. The building and grounds, after years of neglect, have been restored by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Braux of New Orleans.

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- G. Gray glass set in bronze tubing.
- H. Flooring carpet and terazzo.
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Gleason Photography

(Editor's Note: This is the fifth article in a series on Louisiana AIA architects who are skilled in one or more pure art forms.)

The Architect Artist

'Whipform' Cast Aluminum Commissioned for: U. S. Senator Russell B. Long U. S. Representative Hale Boggs

Pencil sketch for set production Otto Preminger's 'Hurry Sundown.'

O.M. HIGGINSON, HDSI

Try the Arts, There's no finer fountain of youth.

A drawing tool and a surface to work on. Does one need more? Only an intense interest and a need to create. John Herbert Schaeffer, from his first carved relief replica of Norman Rockwell's famed Boy Scout Handbook cover, and an early commissioned National Youth Administration charcoal portrait presented to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt — to the vigor displayed in the execution of 'The Crossbearer,' his latest work, finds him more deeply involved and excited than ever.

With a formal education in Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture, John works and experiments in all media. As an educator, graphic and exhibit designer, and a practicing architect, he feels that it is illogical to conceive that one can ply the profession of architecture and divorce himself from the appreciation of and active participation in the arts.

Polyurethane—For the Grant-Lehr Corporation 'Whipform' Gleason Photography The Louisiana Architect

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT IN PRELIMINARY DESIGN

By EUGENE GLANKER, AIA - Alexandria, La.

To depict an architect in the isolated role of design without reference to other functions the architectural process would be an academic and ineffectual effort. It is the intent of this article to observe design as a facet in context with other roles of the architect in order to evaluate complete architectural service. Future articles in the Louisiana Architect will emphasize other roles.

A logical sequence of functions in the development of a project may be: Market Study and Research, Program-ming and Budgeting, Preliminary Design, Working Drawings, Specification Writing, Contract Documents, and Supervision and Inspection. The order is, for the most part, in chronological sequence. It is important to note that a significant portion, two stages of the process, have at least begun and perhaps are largely complete, when preliminary design commences. It is even more important to note that the preliminary design role is the only one of the group which is distinctively directed toward particular educational background of the architect. Any of the other roles might conceivably be fulfilled by persons of other backgrounds, but as far as formal training is concerned, only the study of architecture prepares one for the role of preliminary design. It is in this role that the architect achieves his fulfillment, accomplishing that for which his talents are dedicated. It is still possible, in the practice of architecture, for one individual to participate in all of the roles of the process, but this approach to practice is becoming less and less prevalent, and the emergence of the specialist in one or more roles is the dominating factor in most practicing firms today.

Whether he is operating as an individual or as a member of a team, and whether he has assembled the preparatory data himself, or has had it presented to him, once the architect has at his command the material of Marketing and Research, and Programming and Budgeting, he is free to adapt the knowledge of this data into some rational system for ordering that linking of spaces and forms ultimately to evolve as architecture. It is at this time that the architect asserts his ultimate potential and here that he offers his greatest service: that of analyst, diagnostician, and artist.

It has always been my opinion that the most critical

part of the architect's design process lies not in the denouement of the solution, but in the accurate analysis of the problem. Few clients are able to interpret their needs to the extent that they can state their own problems in terms appropriate to the nature of the design rationale. It is, then, the obligation of the architect to make an analysis of the problem and to state the terms in a clear and concise form mutually comprehended by the client and himself.

Once the nature of the problem is recognized and clearly outlined, the diagnosis follows routinely and reflects the discipline adopted by the individual or group projecting the design. Somewhere in the gray area between analysis and diagnosis, an idea, from which a work of art will emerge, is spawned. The presumption that a work of art will emerge is valid, because if no art is present, no architecture exists.

The motivating idea may spring from a pecularity existing among the premises of the problem, or it may occur as a peculiar solution to a commonplace problem. Whatever the nature of the design inspiration, it follows that since no two problems are the same, no two solutions should be the same. The creative process is thus allowed to continue indefinitely.

The mechanics employed by the architect in the Preliminary Design role vary widely and include all manner of graphic devices, visual aids, charts, sketches and three dimensional props. The method adopted usually has its inception during the formative years of education and may undergo significant changes, all directed at a more efficient and positive effect, during the years of practice. No matter what means are used in the approach, all have one thing in common during the early stages of design. The common denominator is a coordinating element which will allow the designer to assemble all of the components of the problem, regardless of how complex or simple, into some coherent relationship without a preconceived notion of the ultimate solution. This is probably the single most difficult concept for the untrained observer to grasp, but it is absolutely essential to the design process, for without it the work cannot be creative; if it is not creative it is not art; and, if there is no art there is no architecture.



The art content in architecture fulfills a more sophisticated requirement of the human being, but it is nonetheless true that the "raison d'etre" of architecture still lies in its capacity to satisfy the third primary need of mankind, that of shelter. No matter how successful a work of art a building might be, it does not stand valid as architecture unless it satisfies its basic purpose of shelter for some function of human endeavor. So many poor designs are justified on the basis of being functional that most designers eschew the cliche', but one cannot escape the fact that architecture must be functional to justify its existence.

During the first two phases of the architectural process,

Market Study and Research, and Programming and Budgeting, most of the functions of the occupancy have been established, but during the Preliminary Design stage those requirements previously established must be constantly re-examined and re-evaluated. Frequently a very excellent solution is derived as the result of compromising certain conditions which were considered essential somewhere in the first two stages of the process. Much of this facet of design is accomplished during periodic consultations with the client. Such client consultation continues throughout the Preliminary Design period and is a vital and essential condition to the design process. Again, the architect has at his disposal many devices to further communication between the client and himself during this period. Surely the pencil or pen and ink sketch is the oldest and most widely used device for this purpose, but modern practice has produced such diverse means as slide projection, movie film, model mock-ups, tape recordings, computer charts and sketches and a wealth of other devices to bridge the communications gap. So precise have the mechanics of presentation become that at the conclusion of the Preliminary Design role, the accomplished architect can provide his client with a total visual knowledge of the project to be constructed, and there is little left to speculation outside the area of construction time and cost.

If everything follows in the order of the total process, the amount of money which should be dedicated to the project is determined during the Programming and

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BUQUET & LEBLANC, INC. GENERAL CONTRACTORS 2610 GOVERNMENT STREET PHONE 342-6521 Budgeting phase, and the actual cost is revealed at the conclusion of the Working Drawings and Specifications phase. To avoid a wide disparity between the two figures is largely the responsibility of the designer during the Preliminary Design role, and this is probably one of the most difficult and least tangible tasks that the architect must face.

The project which does not get built because of budgetary reasons represents one of the tragic wastes of human effort and time, and no matter to whom the financial responsibility falls, the net effect of unused plans is that of an irreparable loss. It becomes the burden, then, of every architect who assumes the design role, at sometime during the design process, to make the decision which will determine into what cost category the project will fall. The term "category" is used because the choice at this time is a generalization which still leaves the designer with a certain flexibility regarding more specific selections at a later date.

The selection of a category is somewhat analagous to a sculptor choosing his medium, and once the architect has made his choice, he must work within the limits of his category just as the sculptor works within the limits of his medium.

To illustrate this point, let us presume that the architect's media will revolve about a structure of wood, steel, concrete, masonry, or a combination thereof. The nature of the problem, the environment, and the budget will suggest a structural system and a whole family of materials which will be compatible with the structure. The designer must work within the feasible limits of the family chosen. All of the components must be compatible in terms of aesthetic response, life tenure, relative cost, service and maintainability, visual effect and character. If the architect must reach from one category to another to satisfy his program, then he has made the wrong choice in the beginning, and a negative result will follow. In concluding, it might be of interest to note the time interval that separates an architect's appreciation of a design effort from that of the client, the public or the casual observer. The time difference occurs because the architect acquires a full appreciation for the design effort at the conclusion of the preliminary design stage, whereas the observer does not experience this realization until construction is complete and perhaps even later. Thus, the major creative energy has been expended at the summation of the preliminary design, and most of the subsequent effort on the part of the architect or his associates is directed towards executing a finished product that matches as closely as possible the preliminary design concept.

Since the client or observer is usually not capable of comprehending spatial concepts until they are constructed, it is understandable that the time period between the completion of design and the completion of construction is one during which the architect needs the implicit confidence of his client, because the purpose of his efforts is not always explicable in lay terms.



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