

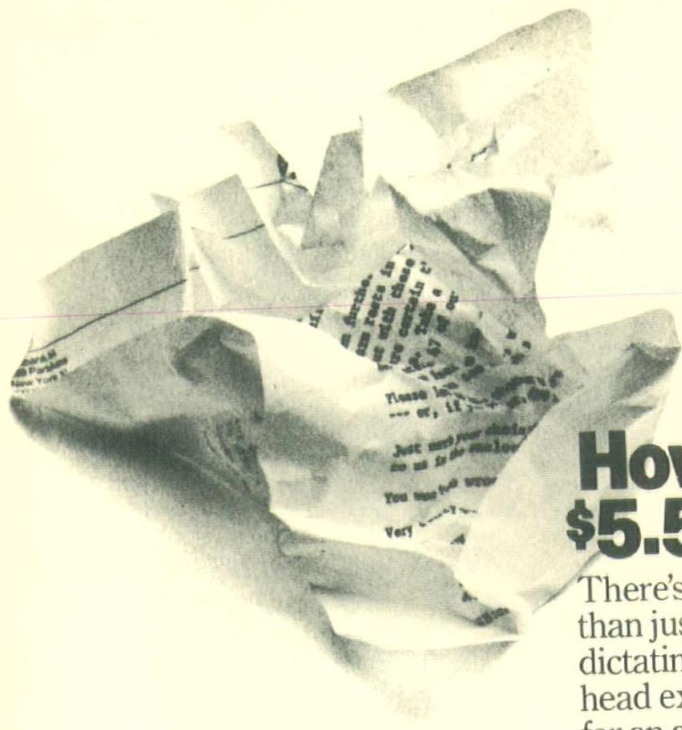
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Chautauqua in Mississippi



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the mississippi architect

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Cover

A pen and ink rendering by Art Director Charles Blanks invites us to discover Chautauqua in Mississippi, beginning on page 5.

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A Center For Small Town Research and Design: An Opportunity Or An Exercise?

Paul Roberson, AIA
Editor

The development of a Center for Small Town Research and Design at Mississippi State University, coordinated by the School of Architecture, presents both school and the architectural profession with a marvelous opportunity for accomplishment. It also has in it the seeds of isolation for both school and profession.

If the Center becomes an academic exercise and provides for participation only by faculty, staff and students, then this will represent a lost opportunity for some significant, practical work in this field. The bottom line should be results.

One of these "bottom lines" represents raising the general quality of building design and environmental planning in small and medium sized cities in the State of Mississippi. The Center can marshal the practicing profession into an active role which will benefit both and provide opportunities for both. To do this the Center needs to define its program and intentions in sharper terms than it has so far and provide a real role for local practicing architects, and it needs to do this soon.

If there is one lesson learned the hard way from all the planning activity that came out of the "Great Society" days, it is that outside consultants are usually viewed with indifference and are generally ignored. The most effective planning efforts were those done by local people themselves. The shelves of many small cities contain dust covered volumes of studies that were done for the sole

purpose of acquiring a grant to pay for them — exercises in futility.

Whereas the Center should call upon the profession for participation, the same goes for the profession — it should get used to calling upon the Center for leadership, expertise, and help.

As architects, we might begin by requesting that as part of its developing program the Center — (1) Include local architects to aid in any study conducted in their locality or region. (2) Develop, monitor, and promote a simple fair system of building design competition which could be used by cities and counties to raise the level of design quality for their facilities. The selection of participants could be done by inviting the most qualified architects showing an interest in the project. Programming and judging for these limited competitions should focus on selecting the best design that, in the jury's opinion, can be constructed within the projects' stated budget limitations. This isn't simple to do but, in our opinion, would help local city and county officials become better aware of the importance of good design, and offer the competition system something it badly needs — credibility. These small competitions should stress getting results and avoid wasting the town's time and money.

We suggest that the AIA and the Center sit down and devise means for mutual effective cooperation in this significant opportunity. We hope it doesn't pass us all by.

Letters

To The Editor:

Here is the word on the subject of *Preservation*. It's not all moon light and rosy words, but some I think should be said. As a result of the present Govt. guide lines, we often have to spend the budget on something that is only of interest to archaeologists of the future and serves little or no purpose in the presentation of history to the present.

The tax incentive legislation, so loudly acclaimed as the boom to preservation, has cost the life of many a good building. When Owners are faced with compliance to a set of guide lines that cost more than the incentive, preservation becomes economically impractical.

For what it is worth here it is.

Bill Gill, AIA

P.O. Box 9864
Jackson, MS 39206

Editor's Note: See page 10 for Bill Gill's "word" on the subject of Preservation.

To the Editor:

Your feature on the design awards (Volume 10, number 1) could have been much improved had the jury comments been published. The real worth of any architectural design jury is the professional evaluation, or critique, as it is the vehicle through which dialogue begins, and becomes, therefore, an enlightening exercise.

The site plan published with the Bailey Avenue project is actually that of McCune Clinic.

This error is a **surprise**, as it occurs in an otherwise excellent publication.

Sincerely,

R. Michael McKewen, AIA

806 Colonial Circle
Jackson, Mississippi 39211

We appreciate Mr. McKewen's suggestions and will, indeed, print the jury comments next awards issue. We regret the error made on the McCune Clinic site plan — Ed.



Students at work in The School of Architecture's award-winning home building on the MSU campus.

It has been a joy to watch our new School of Architecture develop and prosper. The faculty is a young, well qualified part of our academic family and the students are a dedicated and committed group of young men and women. One of our first graduates was pleased when he found he could compete with, and in fact surpass, graduates of old, well established programs in other well known universities. It is appropriate that our faculty in Architecture has made a commitment to the design and redevelopment of small towns and cities as these have become the forgotten elements of American life. Finally, the recognition of our program through a five-year accreditation is a credit to Dean McMinn and his faculty. We are proud of them and our new School of Architecture. They help us to be better today and will help us to become an even better university tomorrow.

James D. McComas

James D. McComas
President,
Mississippi State University

Kind Words From Tough Critics

In April 1979, a visit was made to evaluate the School of Architecture at Mississippi State for accreditation as a 5 year school. Participating in the team visit were: William J. Burke, Dept. of Chemistry, Arizona St. Univ.; M. Martha Lampkin, Mass. Institute of Tech.; Jack D. Train, FAIA, Metz Train Olson & Youngren, Chicago, Ill.; and O. Jack Mitchell, FAIA, School of Architecture, Rice Univ.

The school has received accreditation subsequent to the team's visit, and their report concluded with the following statement:

"All in all, the School of Architecture at Mississippi State is a quality program with the further possibility of contributing substantially to architectural education in this country."

Mississippi's Small Towns Singled Out For Special Treatment At Mississippi State University



Architecture author John Reps of Cornell University (center) was among the featured speakers at the recent "Chautauqua in Mississippi." Shown with Reps are Dean William G. McMinn (right) and Donlyn Lyndon of the University of California at Berkeley.

By national standards, almost every municipality in Mississippi qualifies as either a small town or city.

With the goal of improving the quality of life in these communities, the Center for Small Town Research and Design was dedicated Wednesday night (Oct. 3) at Mississippi State University.

The center, the extension branch of MSU's School of Architecture, has been charged with serving the architectural and environmental needs of the state by coordinating a whole range of academic expertise in assisting the municipalities.

"Many times, it has been said that a small town is a good place to be from," said Dean of Architecture William G. McMinn in opening the ceremonies. "But, more and more, people are finding out that a small town just might be a good place to go and a good place to be."

He added: "It is our confidence in the future of small towns that brings us here tonight."

The dedication marked the start of the first annual "Chautauqua in Mississippi," which the center is sponsoring in conjunction with the Mississippi Committee for the Humanities.

Who or What's a Chautauqua?

A number of folks at the recent Mississippi State event were heard mumbling just this question.

A quick check with Bern Keating, Greenville's resident wordsmith, reveals that the word comes to us from the Seneca Indian tribe in Western New York. An 18 mile long lake and a community of about 4000 people there have long sported the name.

It was in 1874 at Chautauqua, N.Y., that an educational and recreational assembly with a program including lectures, concerts, and other cultural events began. Soon Chautauqua programs began traveling throughout the nation, bringing culture to the hinterlands.

Keating, who went to school within a few miles of Chautauqua, N.Y., likened it to "a community concert series with more talking and less music". It has entered our lexicon to denote a special educational or recreational effort.

Chautauqua in Mississippi



Chautauqua participants gather at West Point, Mississippi's town square to observe a small town in action.

In mid October of 1979, there was an impressive gathering of minds and ideas on the campus of Mississippi State University for the first annual Chautauqua in Mississippi. Its stated purpose was to study and reflect upon the development and continuing survival of the American small town. It was sponsored by the Center For Small Town Research and Design and the Mississippi Committee For The Humanities. This Chautauqua brought together writers, researchers, designers, and historians from all over the country in an attempt to piece together the mystique of the small town, what makes it work and what there is about it that makes it an enduring subject for writers, romantics, detractors, and outsiders, and how (or if) to effect change. Of course the people who live in small towns have every bit as much trouble deciding for themselves what they are and what to become. They live there for a variety of reasons; they like the fact that it is a stable environment, but at the same time will surely endorse any change that is presented as progress.

The Chautauqua focused on one fact if nothing else — that this small town phenomenon defies categorizing and generalization at the same time. It rarely complies with the idealized Hollywood version and its identity is as fuzzy as its future.

We don't even know how to define a small town. Shall it be so ruled if it has 5,000 people, or if it has 50,000? Probably the only common blood that flows

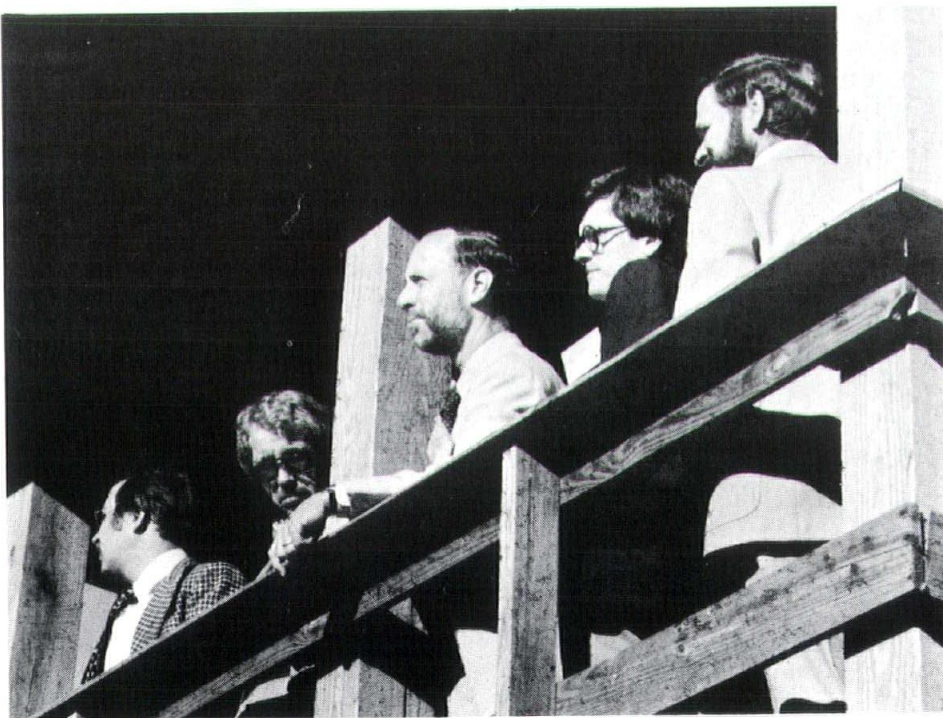
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through the veins of all small towns is the blood of independence. It can't be a satellite to another city and it resists outside interference with a determination that infuriates some people whose efforts to understand are doomed to frustration.

The truth of the matter is that you have to live in a small town, or be from one, to have any understanding of one fact . . . that beneficial change must begin from within and outsiders can only advise and suggest some things that the town may have forgotten about itself.

The most successful parts of the Chautauqua rightly dealt with the human intangibles of life in small towns. This should be a major consideration before any intrusion by researchers or designers into this field. They should realize that a small town is a small town for a reason and until they understand that reason, they may do more harm than good.

Speakers and participants of MSU's Chautauqua take a long look at the small town phenomenon.



The Chautauqua was keyed by remarks prepared by Gerald Allen, editor of *Architectural Record* and read by Dean Bill McMinn. These comments are, in part, as follows:

No amount of physical analysis, no amount of refurbishing Main Street and regularizing its graphics will do any good at all unless the deeper meanings of the artifact are first understood. Beware, too, of unbridled historic preservationists, for in seeking to create meanings from the past they may neglect and omit important meanings living in the present.

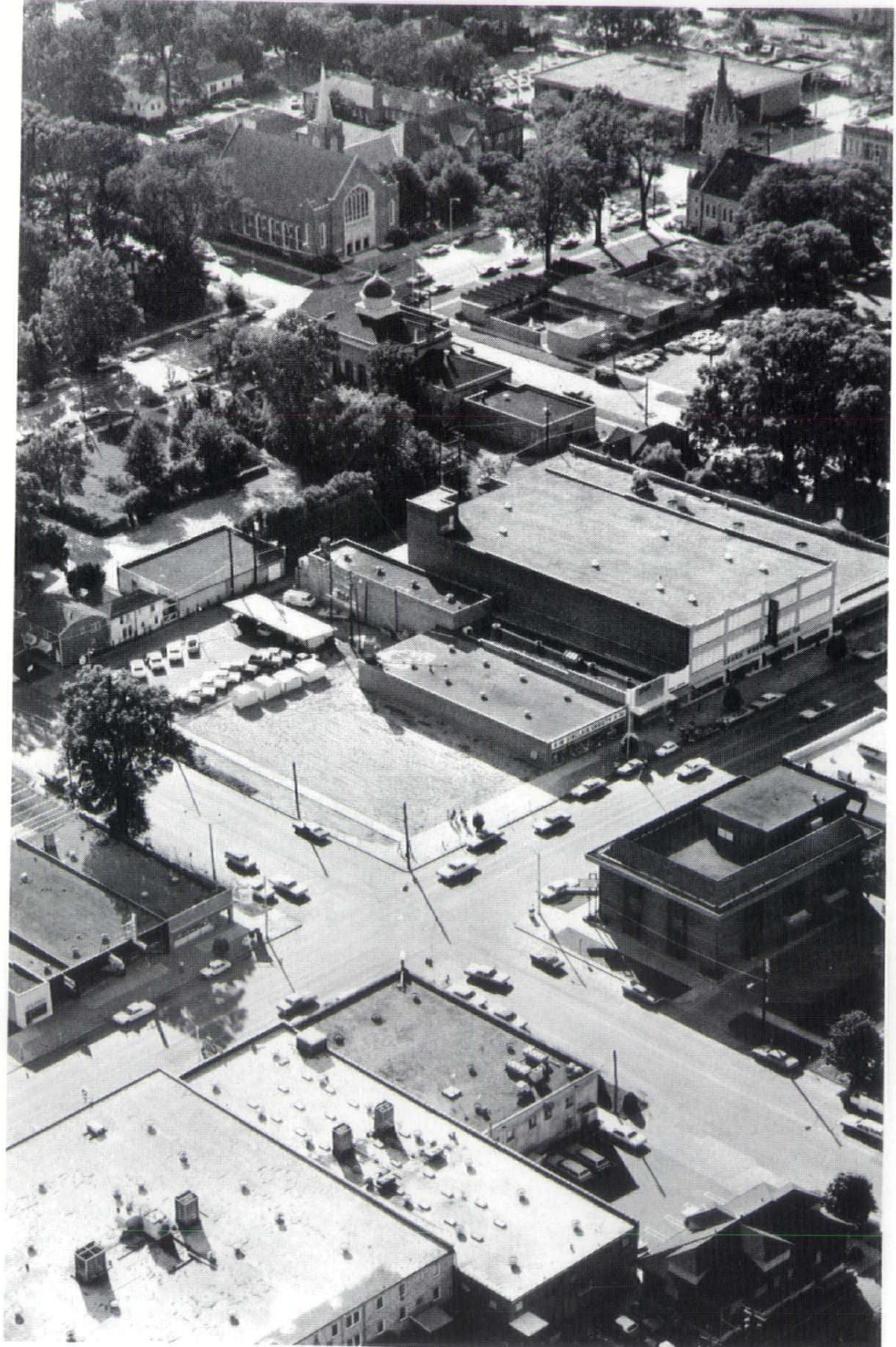
The questions, then, are these: What is the meaning, not just the form, of the small town? And to whom, if anybody, are these meanings important?

"Small towns are **not** nice!" my travel agent scribbled on the envelope of my ticket to come here. This was not just the opinion of another arrogant New Yorker, since she lives and works in a small town in Connecticut and therefore has first-hand experience. "What a dump!" Bette Davis, the frustrated swinger in a Midwestern small town, said in "Beyond the Forest," while the song "Chicago" trobbled in the background. "If I don't get out of this town I'll die. If I don't get out of this I **hope** I die."

People like this doubtless have their points. These need to be discovered and understood. Other people have held quite different attitudes towards the small town — among them the Mississippi poet William Alexander Percy. Here is a poem of his written from New York about his home town, Greenville. Notice, again, how little is said about what either place actually looks like, but how much is said about what both are:

*I have a need of silence and
of stars;
Too much is said too loudly; I
am dazed.
The silken sound of wirled infinity
Is lost in voice shouting to
be heard.
I once knew men as earnest and
less shrill,
And undermeaning that I caught
I miss
Among these ears that hear all
sounds save silence,
These eyes that see so much but
not the sky,
These minds that gain all
knowledge but no calm.
If suddenly the desperate music
ceased,
Could they return to life? or would
they stand
In dancers' attitudes, puzzled,
polite,
And striking vaguely hand on
tired hand
Force an encore, too fill the
ghastly pause?
I do not know. Some rhythm there
may be
I cannot hear. But I — Oh, I
must go
Back where the breakers of deep
sunlight roll
Across flat fields that love and
touch the sky;
Back to the more of earth, the
less of man,
Where there is still a plain
simplicity,
And friendship, poor in
everything but love,
And faith, unwise, unquestioned,
but a star.
Soon now the peace of summer
will be there
With cloudy fire of myrtles in
full bloom;
And, when the marvelous wide
evenings come,
Across the molten river one
can see
The misty willow-green of Arcady.
And then — the summer stars . . .
I will go home.*

William Alexander Percy's Greenville is pictured in the top of the photograph shown below. The cityscape in the lower half of the photograph depicts recent commercial development . . . an encroachment of the same urban coldness and harshness he experienced in New York. Small wonder he longed to "go home."



WHAT DOES A CENTER FOR SMA

Mississippi State University is in a unique position to bring to bear the expertise of the university community on problems of small towns throughout the state by creating a Center for Small Town Research and Design. The advantages of using Mississippi State University as the base of operations for this center are numerous. The university was founded in an isolated place. Its origin as a land grant agricultural/mechanical school played a significant part in the philosophy of its location. The university has since become a broadly based institution, but the Center for Small Town Research and Design could be an extension of this founding philosophy in taking advantage of the university's special location. The region is rich with small towns that would provide the kind of firsthand experience necessary for serious research, analysis, and proposals. Field study in a large number of small towns could easily be accomplished using the university as a base. Also, Mississippi State University is fortunate in being a diverse institution; the resources of the many areas of expertise found within the academic community would provide the broad interdisciplinary approach necessary to develop strategies for improving the quality of life in small towns. In addition, the university has always had a strong service/extension orientation, thus a number of long-standing positive relationships to small communities in Mississippi are already in full operation. These ties would serve as an ideal starting point to begin to connect small towns to the Center for Small Town research and Design. Finally, this center would provide Mississippi and Mississippi State University with a mechanism for achieving a national reputation in

a field of study that has been virtually ignored but certainly will be of growing importance in America's future.

Goals

As a means of summarizing, the Center for Small Town Research and Design should be created to achieve the following goals:

1. Bring together the broad expertise of Mississippi State University and the resources of the small towns in Mississippi in order to improve the quality of life for citizens in these communities.
2. Create an opportunity for Mississippi State University to gain national prominence in a special discipline that will become even more important as our country's present growth and migration patterns continue.
3. Establish graduate-level study, research, and national funding in a specialized field that will directly benefit the people of Mississippi.
4. Provide an arena for interdisciplinary work that would help to strengthen communication within the university community.

A Specific Proposal

Every academic and service unit at Mississippi State University could make a significant contribution toward improving the quality of life in America's small towns. A survey of experience, expertise and interest among these various units reveals this initial list of disciplines that would contribute directly toward the goals of a Center for Small Town Research and Design.

TOWN RESEARCH & DESIGN DO?

Academic Units (Research Efforts)

Department of History: to direct historical research and to cooperate in efforts of preservation, restoration, and reuse.

Department of Anthropology: to conduct social impact analysis and research.

Department of Political Science: to conduct political analysis, and to research small town government and its relationship to state and federal government.

Department of Landscape Architecture: to design visual improvements in public spaces within the community, and to provide expertise in topography, landscaping, and regional ecological planning.

College of Engineering: to provide expertise in public utilities and service, transportation systems, topography, and energy efficiency.

School of Architecture: to design physical facilities, to direct master planning of physical improvements in small town living, and to coordinate the workings of the various disciplines.

Service Units (Service Efforts)

Stennis Institute of Political Science: to research and design small town government and management.

Community Development Extension Service: to serve as the initial link between the community and the Center, to act as the "trouble-shooting" group in the team, and to investigate the effectiveness of proposals that are put into action.

Business Research Center: to research economic structure in small towns and to conduct economic forecasting.

Stennis Collection: To provide

expertise in archival research.

Social Science Research Center: to coordinate research and design in the area of small town social structure.

Center for Government and Technology: to initiate local government communication and provide expertise in small town political structure.

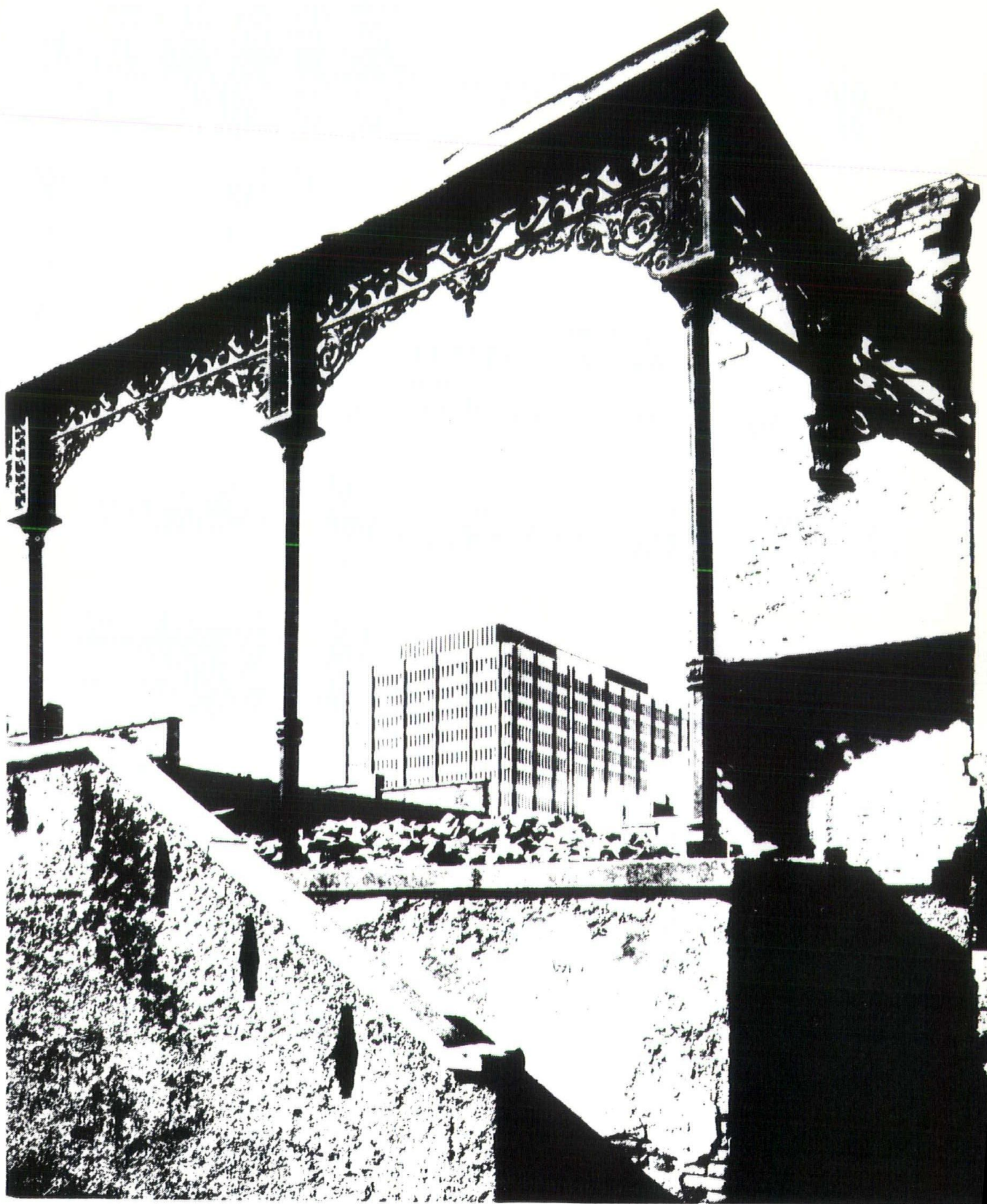
Administrative Structure

The Center for Small Town Research and Design will be a component of the Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies. It will be administered through the School of Architecture and it is envisioned that the director of the Center will be a member of the faculty of the School of Architecture.

Funding for the Center will come from a number of sources. Initial funding will come from the university through the Office of Research and Graduate Studies and from grants which are currently a part of the School of Architecture. Long range funding is anticipated from research grants generated by the Center, from university research support, and from contracts with small towns and local agencies who use the expertise of the Center.

Activities

The Center for Small Town Research and Design will have a service and research function. It will be a major component of the service and research activities of the School of Architecture. Its specific activities will obviously need to remain flexible to address the specific needs of individual small towns. The Center will provide an exciting new arena for interdisciplinary work that could directly benefit the state, the university, and small towns in Mississippi.



PRESERVATION

By William Lampton Gill, AIA

After two hundred years as a nation we have suddenly become enamoured with our past. Old buildings have become a status symbol. I submit that there are much more valid and deeper reasons for preservation of the survivors of our past than mere fashion. The economic advantages for preservation or recycling far outweigh profit motive for demolition.

The immense amount of energy invested has recently been studied by the University of Illinois. The analysis of even modest residential buildings has proven an investment in energy in the millions of British Thermal Units. Larger industrial commercial masonry buildings run into fantastic amounts of invested energy, which is simply written off and wasted in the event of demolition.

The economic advantage is frequently lost due to an insensitive handling of the original design of the building

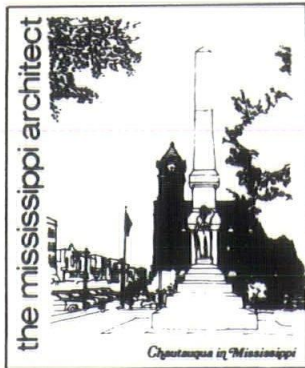
and the failure to recognize that most of the mechanical devices of this age are very transitory, subject to early obsolescence, and should not be allowed to dominate or alter a structure. It seems that we architects frequently exhibit a strange inability to consider the numerous alternatives in the complex art of building. We become victims of style to the point that we are unable to accept the discipline of a previous design. However, when we can use what is there rather than attempt to warp it to a new set of standards, the economic advantage is usually in the neighborhood of 25% of the cost of new construction. In these days of inflation, this represents a substantial economic advantage.

There is, however, the obscure but most important value of the psychological maintenance of the sense of place. Our lack of affection and attachment to a

place is the most conspicuous failure of the American urban scene. It is also conspicuous in the countryside. Those of us who served in World War Two came back to see the countryside some what improved in appearance by the building of shell homes. These new homes however, engendered the demolition of many fine antebellum and even colonial homes. This is given way since the Korean conflict to a new and less permanent type of building . . . the mobile home. Again, a round of demolition. The absorption of small farms into agribusiness has left many families with no sense of place and no feeling of home in this land. The result has been an almost complete lack of concern for the land and its beauty. This is one of the most insidious ills of our present age. We are left without heroes and without a homeland. The nearest thing we

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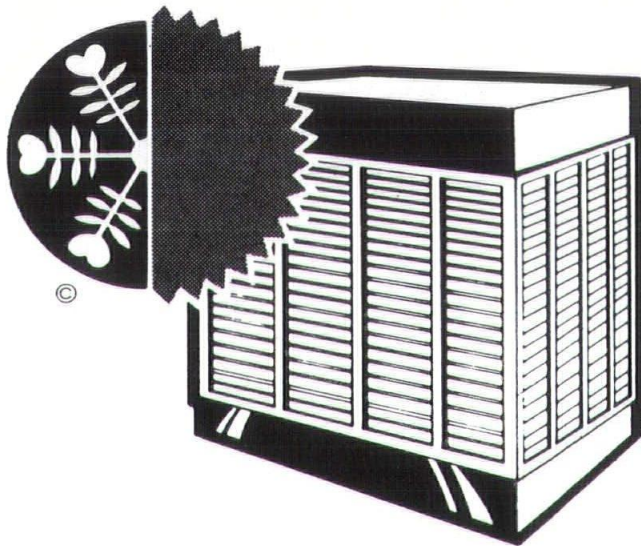
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have to a home is the interstate highway that goes past what once used to be a place of our attachment.

Many of our cities have begun to look as though they were built on the rubble heap of a war to make rubble for the next war. I was recently struck by the action of what is called the "Downtown Redevelopment Agency" of a city. How strangely the demolition of the central business district of the city appeared like London after World War Two. London, however, was concerned with its history and saved many of the fragments of its history. Londoners rebuilt London, not a copy of New York, or in the South an attempt to copy Atlanta or Houston.

This strange psychological phenomenon has lead to the slum ghettos and lawless areas within many of our cities. The only solution to this phenomenon is the renewal or restoration of these areas, not through a



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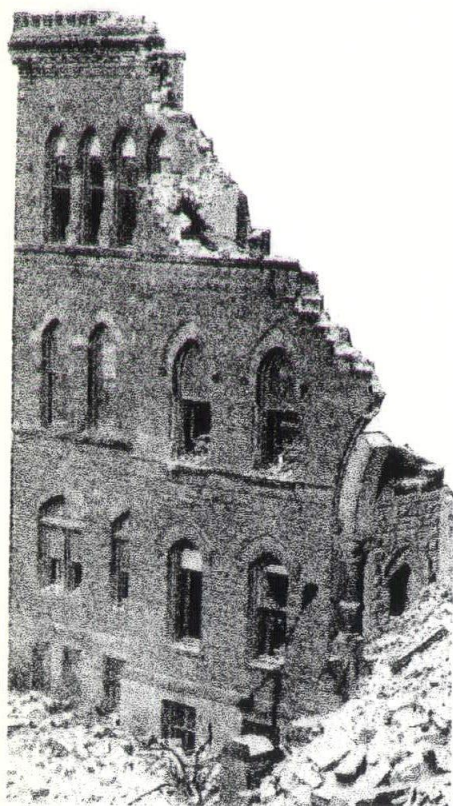
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process of destruction and rebuilding in regimented rows of high rises. We are the victims of such a hard sell to abandon cities that it appears to be almost impossible to get people back to the cities. We have forgotten the amenities of urban dwelling. We have been bombarded with the advantage of the country but no one has had the courage to tell us of the advantage of having better schools, museums, art galleries



and the other educational and cultural facilities that only a city can offer.

So much of this psychological advantage of historic preservation. Some of the pitfalls and problems that are now beginning to surface should demand our attention as architects. The entrance of the Federal Government into this process has raised some very serious questions and in a way has begun to defeat the whole idea.

Along with all Federal grants and tax incentives there is an immense mass of regulations, guidelines and restrictive measures propounded by people whose primary function is to

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justify their existence. The very nature of history has brought about an impasse within these regulations. The fact that history as we study it and know it is by people who are a product of history. History per se cannot be produced or studied in a vacuum, or to justify a political stance. There is no such thing as pure history. History is a product of the community of man. Likewise, there is no such thing as a hero who is all sweetness and light. All of our heroes stood on the clay of the earth.

Thus, the serious question arises in historic preservation as to whether a building should be restored, recycled or preserved as a pure example of history or to be placed in use in a contemporary function that is evidence of the validity and progress of history. I think we frequently attempt to copy the **how** of history at the expense of the **why** of history. We attempt to preserve buildings with such purity and perfection that we must exclude from them imperfect people. The cost of maintaining functionless buildings is prohibitive and thus lays the groundwork for another round of deterioration.

Under present incentive law many buildings must be demolished because the obligations of history according to the guide lines defeats the possibility of contemporary use. As far as the essence of history is concerned we fail to recognize the reasons certain buildings were built in certain ways. For instance, historically cities were zoned vertically by levels, not as we do now . . . horizontally in districts. Since the original cities of the fertile crescent, the first level of the cities was always the commercial, industrial, and an area for artisans to practice their arts. The second floor and up became the living quarters. The highest level representing the highest social order, i.e. the King-Priest. These cities depended upon this vertical zoning for the basis of their existence. When we attempt to separate these functions, that is, the dwelling of man from the work of man we attempt to break

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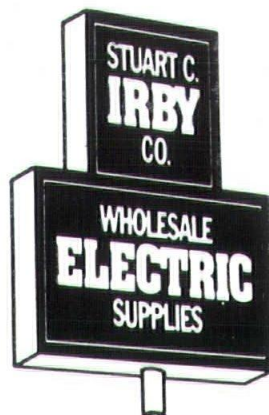
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established traditions which have been in effect for thousands of years. Our efforts in this direction in this country have led to a sort of landless society unable to cope with urban living. It is true that certain types of industry produce noxious odors, air pollution and noise pollution and must be located away from the proximity of dwellings and business areas. This is not true of much of the business of our day. The city of Reston, Va., is a good example of the recognition of this historic truth of cities and apparently has coped with it successfully.

The most pronounced evidence of Federal entrance by way of grants-in-aid in any particular field of activity is the narrowing of that field to an academic ex-cathedra of guidelines. There is always a great rush to create an immense bureaucracy versed only in this narrow field. A tight set of guidelines in the language of the bureau is an advantage in the case of collecting taxes and some other activities, however, in the complexity of architecture and in

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4000 landmarks are missing.

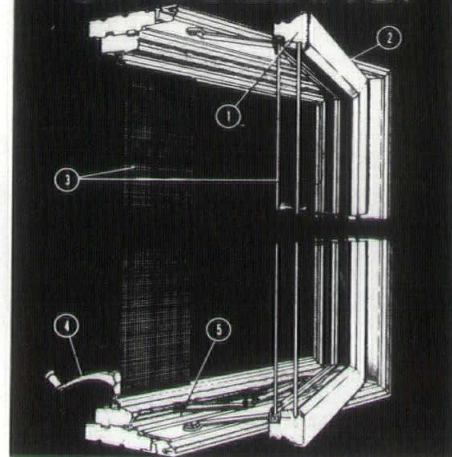
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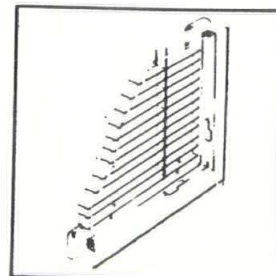
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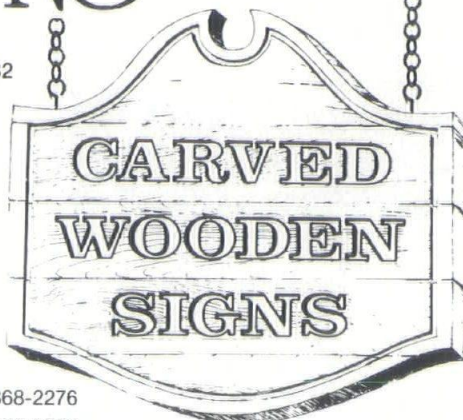
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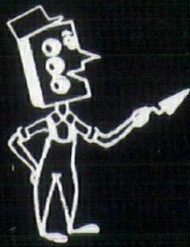
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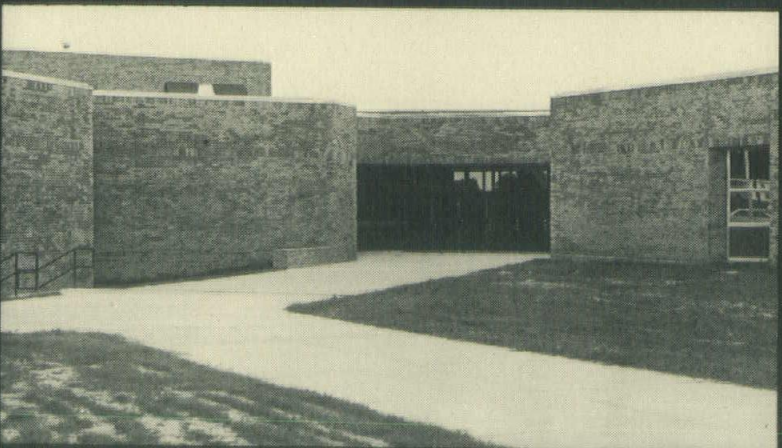
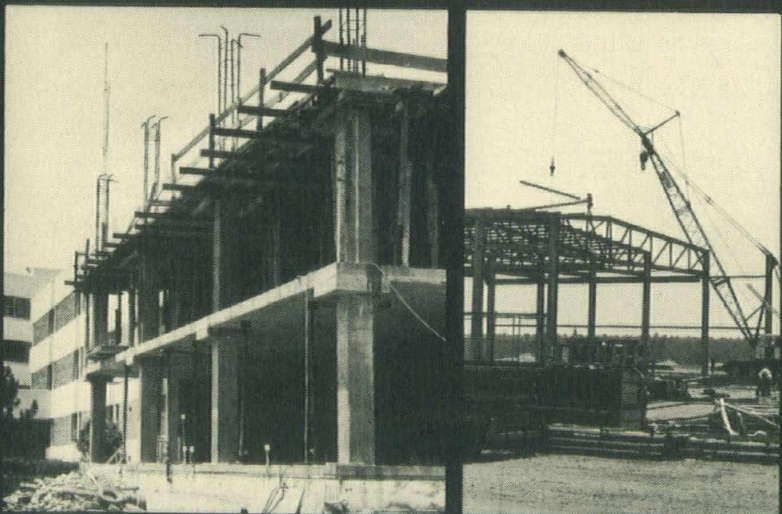
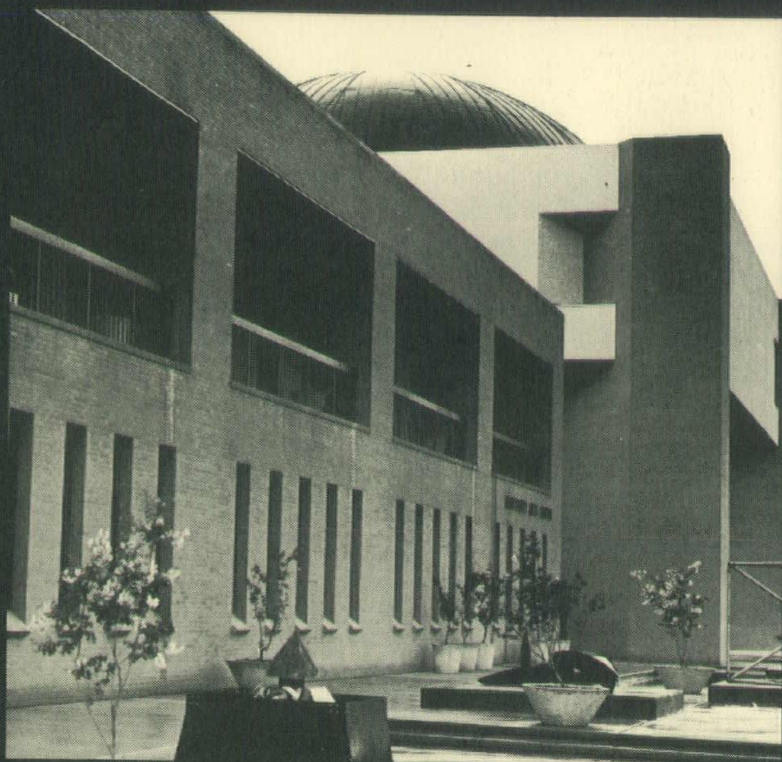
the art of building no one has devised a language adequate for stating its finalities. The universities have grappled with this problem and have copped out by attempting to teach Architectural History without a knowledge of Architecture or the people who created it.

Under the pressure of the real estate hard sell we have lost all the validity of the urban centers. As a result of the fashionable suburb, the city has not only become an illegal mixture of land use, it has degenerated into a jungle of abandoned slums.

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The art of building does not lend itself to a narrow set of rules or even government standards. Architects and builders down through history have attempted to usurp the superficial measurements of historic examples of the builders art without regard to the humanity or the reasons for the original expression of the art. This was done in an effort to set standards for the art of building.

The art of building unlike other forms of art, encompasses the entire spectrum of man's humanity. We cannot restore a building so recent as the 19th century successfully without full consideration of the people who built it originally. Humanity, the parent of art, cannot be reduced to a set of standards or rules. It always dies in the process. The history of the builders art and architecture cannot be separated from humanity and practiced in a vacuum. □



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