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NC Architect

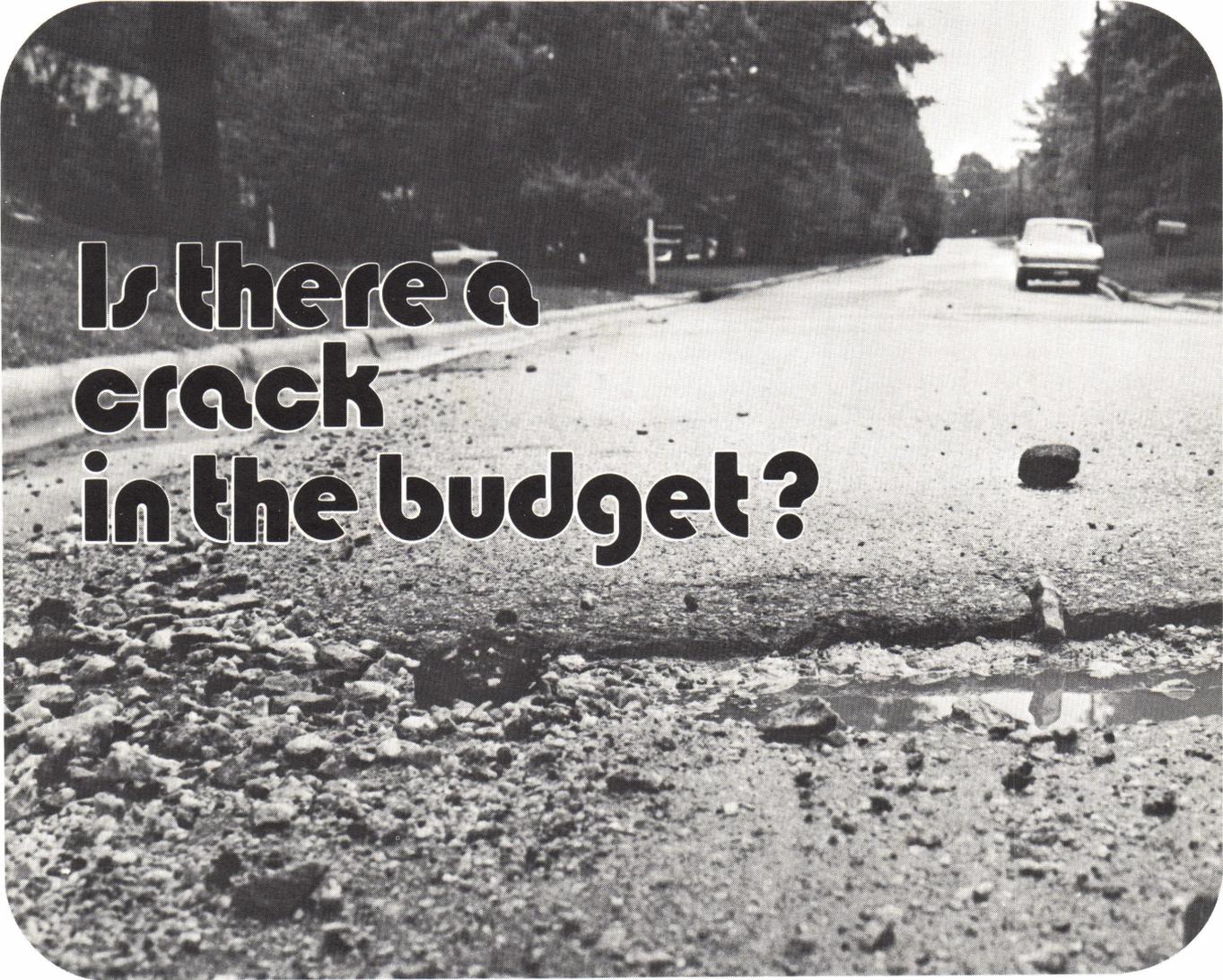


September
October 1976

Published by the
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SARC

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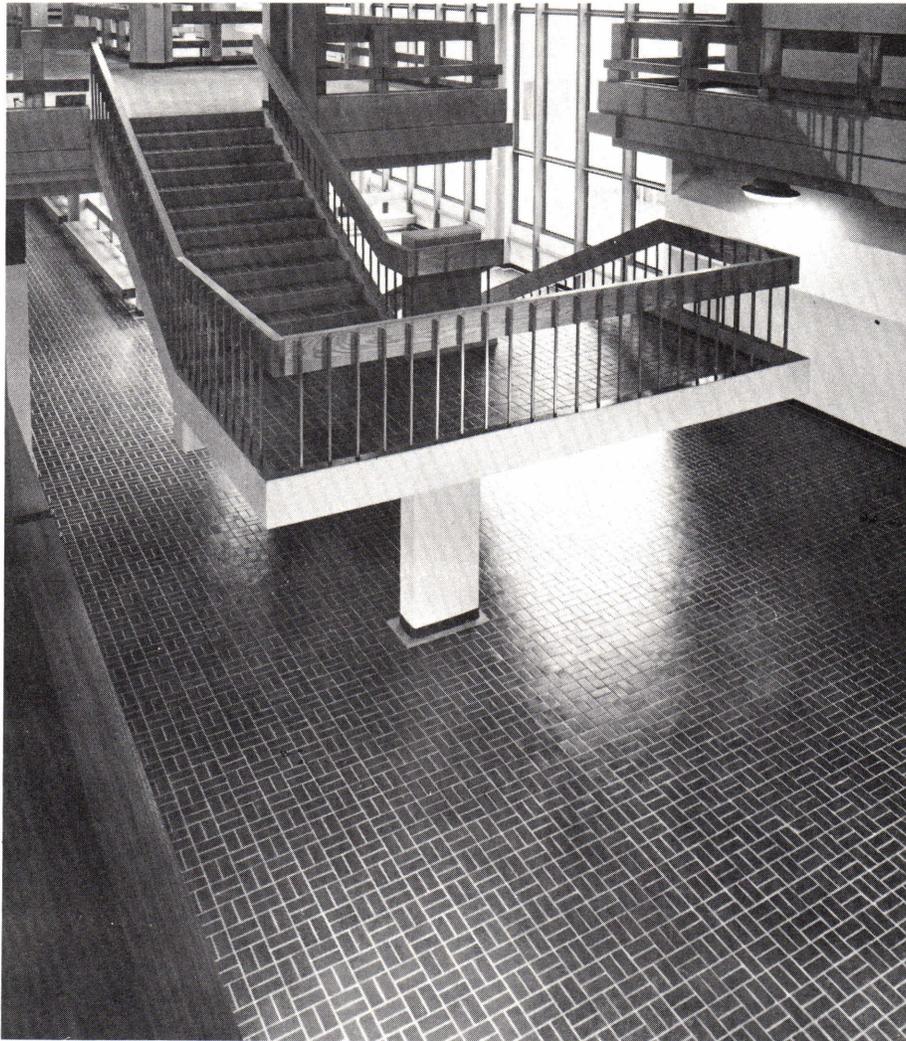
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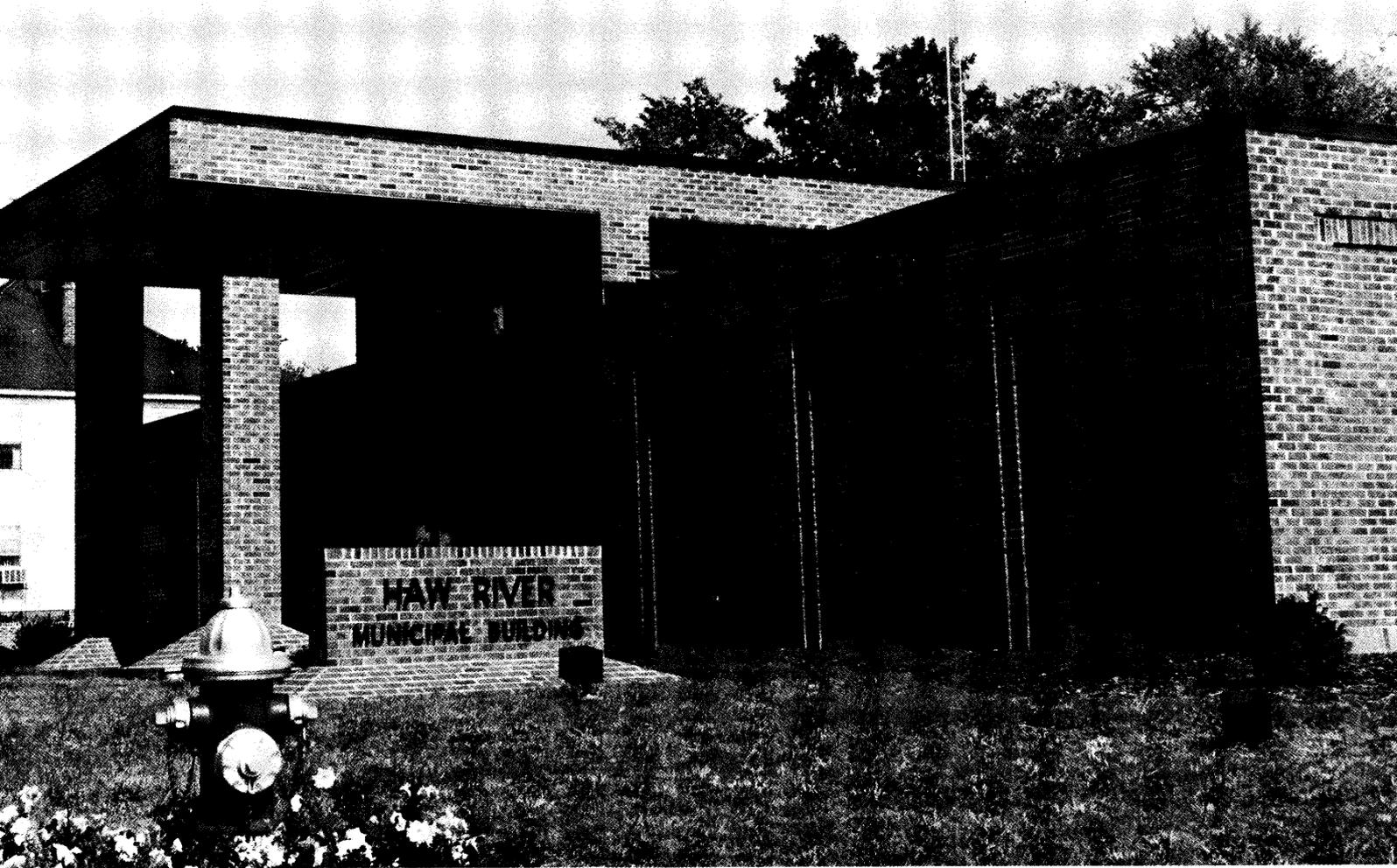
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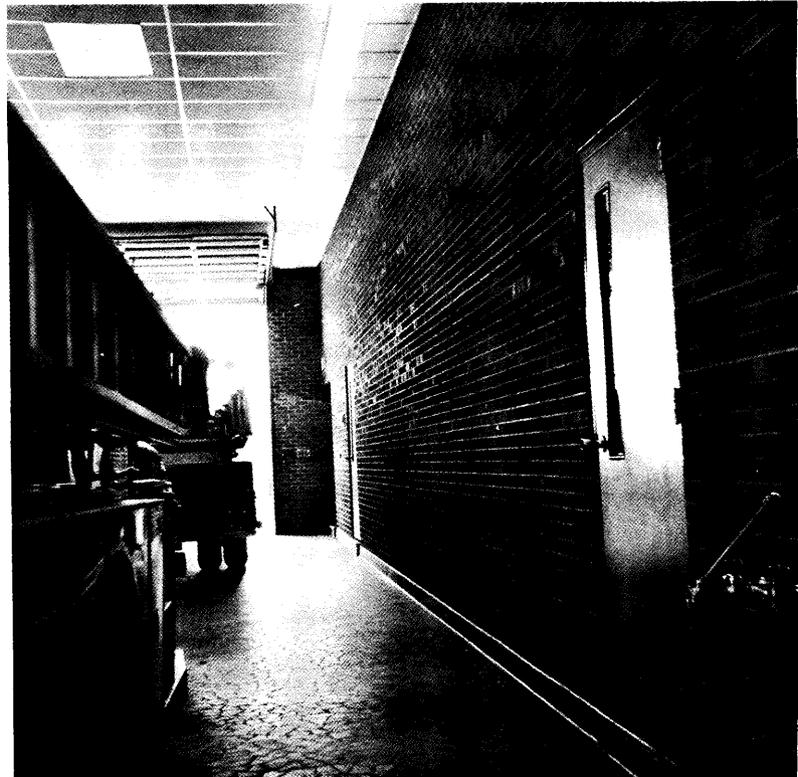
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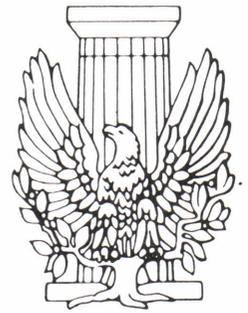
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September
October 1976

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William W. Caudill, FAIA	We Architects	An Address to the South Atlantic Regional AIA Conference	6
SARC 76 HONOR AWARDS	Clark, Tribble, Harris & Li	Physical Plant Building, UNC-C	6
	Hayes-Howell & Associates	Middle School, Alamance Co.	7
	Odell Associates Inc.	Charlotte Civic Center	9
	Corkern & Associates	Moss Creek Golf Clubhouse	10
	Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle & Wolf, Inc.	US Postal Service Center	11
	Thompson, Ventulett & Stainback, Inc.	Northlake Office Park	12
	Cooper, Carry & Associates	DeKalb County Fire Station	13
	Toombs, Amisano & Wells	Peachtree Office Building	14
Ernie Wood	Criticism: The First Word	Comments on Architectural Criticism	15
	Index to Advertisers		18

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WE ARCHITECTS — and Our Magnificent Erratic Behavior

**An address by William W. Caudill, FAIA, Chairman of the Board
Caudill Rowlett Scott, Inc.**

**To The South Atlantic Regional Conference
Charleston, South Carolina
September 8-11, 1976**

WE ARCHITECTS are a strange breed. We thrive on a certain magnificent erratic behavior. One decade we go in one direction; the next decade, we do a complete turn-around and go in the opposite direction.

In my professional adolescence as a young professor at Texas A&M University, I remember well hearing an old architect remark, "It wouldn't surprise me if one day we'll be doing 'punched hole windows' again." He said this when 'ribbon windows' were in style. I retorted to a young architect friend, "That old bastard can't see beyond the end of his nose. Punch holes will never return." I was right — for about a decade. By

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Physical Plant Buildings
University of North Carolina
at Charlotte

**Clark Harris Tribble & Li
Architects**
Charlotte, N. C.

Price & Hill, Inc.
General Contractor

Jury comment:
"A beautifully detailed and soundly executed building whose only danger is that it is perhaps the best building on the Campus."

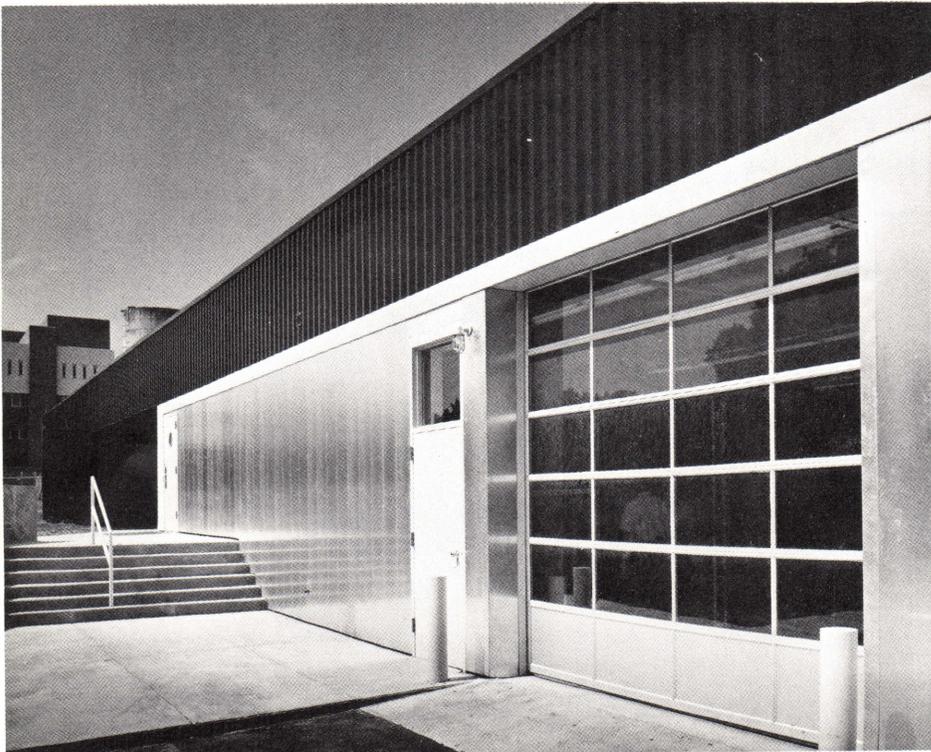


photo: Rick L. Alexander

then the ribbon window had grown so much that it ate up all the wall, leaving only a frame and glass — a pure Miesian effect. Came the turn-around. The punched hole in the solid wall returned! My own firm dipped deep into this cliché barrel.

A decade later (which brings up to the present), another turn-around occurred. The ribbon window returned, as popular today as it was in the early 50's.

Like aviators, architects love to make the 180-degree turn. Technology, economy and lifestyle demands it. But often we change direction just because we are bored with what we are doing.

WE ARCHITECTS in the early 50's were functionalists. We were obsessed with making things work. "If it works, it'll look good." Our 1950 maxim: "Form follows function."

Then the turn-around.

Like the Greek god Proteus, we changed. Switched from functionalism to formalism. We became formalists — obsessed with creating beautiful form. "If it looks good, the people will be happy." Using "universal space" that could be adapted to any function was the rationale. Our 1960 maxim: "Function follows form".

When the turn-around?

A decade later — in the 70's. — We returned to the function emphasis. We talked about performance. Attended seminars on how to measure performance. On life-cycle cost. Because of a declining economy, we searched for ways to cut out the fat, wasted space in order to cut cost. "A building should be like a car — not only should it look good, but first of all, it should perform with a high degree of efficiency."

During the 50's, WE ARCHITECTS loved lightness. The load-bearing wall became an anachronism. We used the expression "floating architecture." We liked our buildings to appear to be suspended in air,

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Southern Middle School
Alamance County, N. C.

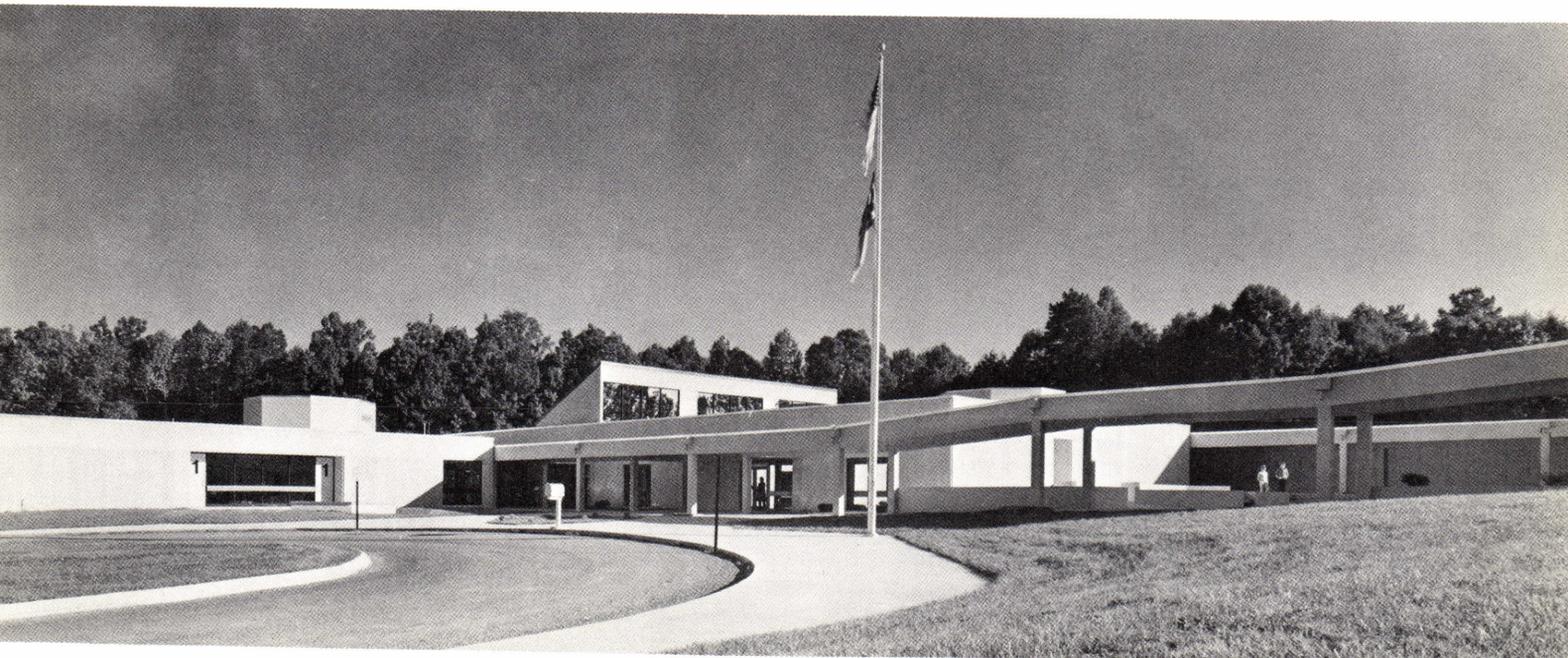
**Hayes-Howell & Associates
Architects**
Southern Pines, N. C.

Robert H. Pinnix, Inc.
General Contractor

Jury comment:

"A charming school building that is made refreshingly warm and welcoming through the Architects' adept handling of massing and scale."

photo: Markatos Photography



hovering above the ground instead of dug in as we once did when Frank Lloyd Wright was our hero. In the 50's lightness was goodness.

A decade later came the turn-around. Why? I'm sure some of us just got bored. Advancements in concrete technology could have helped. In any case, in the 60's we went from lightness to heaviness. We wanted more permanent-looking buildings. Not those light ones that look like they wouldn't last beyond the amortization period. We rediscovered monumentality. We even reinvented the arch. AIA juries gave prizes to the heavies, as if they had weighed each submission.

A decade later in the 70's, we've had another 180-degree turn. Lightness came back in vogue. Glass and metal walls are replacing concrete and brick. We hear expressions: "elegant lightness"; "Machine esthetics"; "the crystalline effect"; and "technology vernacular".

In the 60's WE ARCHITECTS loved right angles. Today we are more in love with the sharpness — 60-degree corners or less. Also, there's a rash of buildings under construction with clipped corners (chamfers, if you please). Architects were clipping their corners during the Victorian period. We get bored with form. Want to change regularly.

So much for our **product**. Now how about our magnificent erratic behavior related to the **process** of architectural practice?

In the 50's WE ARCHITECTS worshipped gods — those great form givers. We looked to Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies and a few lesser deities for not only verbal inspiration and guidance but for esthetic handouts we could use to make ordinary buildings look classy. We emulated and imitated the gods. We acted like "the poor man's prima donnas". Some of us wore Frank Lloyd Wright cloaks, if not Corbu's heavy horn rim glasses.

Then the turn-around in the 60's. "The prima donna is dead". The team is the new genius. "Architecture by team" was the maxim (at least it was mine). "Buildings are too complex for one man to handle," he said. "It takes a team."

In the 70's the team concept still lingers, but there are signs that if the team is here to stay, there must be at least one great designer on it. The "great man" may be on his way back. Paul Kennon, president of CRS, recently said, "Sure, we practice the team concept. In CRS it's 'architecture by team'." Then he added, with a grin, "Of prima donnas."

In the 60's, despite the earlier student riot at Columbia University and Ralph Nader, the architect and the client pretty much had their way as to what they built and where they built it despite a few screams of "interference."

Then the 1970's turn-around. The thing to do today is to get the users involved, we say. Even put psychologists, sociologists and conservationists on the team. It's the neighborly thing to do.

The erratic behavior of the architect extends beyond current history — your time or even my time which spans the sons of sons of architects. Go back to the turn of the century. It was then that architects were "master builders." Dictionaries still use this archaic term, telling evidence of their lack of creditability. For today, if we were "master builders" we would get kicked on our butts, and thrown out of the AIA.

Yes, it's true, you young architects; our species were once master builders. Hard to believe, but it was true.

Then came the turn-around. WE ARCHITECTS voted ourselves out of the building business. When we did, we gained a much more purified form of professionalism — and at the expense of sacrificing a large

portion of the housing market to others. You get something; you lose something. To find an architect who makes a living designing houses these days takes a lot of looking. To make sure architects not only didn't build but didn't even get involved financially in materials and building systems, we kicked them out of the AIA for just fooling around on the edges of building. A friend of mine, one of the best architects I knew at the time, was kicked out because he manufactured storage walls for low-cost housing. We told him: "Get rid of your factory or get out." He chose the latter.

Now there seems to be a slow-revolving turn-around — right or wrong. It may mean complete

erosion of the concept of an architect as a pure professional — like doctors & lawyers, although those professions seem to be changing faster than ours. The turn-around takes the form of architects involved in fast tracking, construction management and system buildings. WE ARCHITECTS don't quite know what to do with those guys. Kick 'em out or let them teeter on the brink of unethical conduct until the majority of architects can make up their minds where to go? It would be no surprise to me if within five years we do a complete turn-around and go back to being "master builders." Fits into the pattern of our magnificent erratic behavior.

But this I know: we're in for a change.

Before I stick my red neck out (it's blood) by listing a few more changes which we may encounter these next five years, permit me to indulge a bit more in WE ARCHITECTS and our magnificent erratic behavior.

At the 1969 AIA Convention in New Orleans, WE ARCHITECTS made "problem solving" a nasty word. Function went out; form came in. Frankly, form needed stressing. Some of our buildings look like chicken houses or shoe boxes turned on ends. Louis Kahn helped us get out of the doldrums. The timing was perfect. But, where else to go? After "function follows form"? After affluency? After the product emphasis? Naturally to the opposite pole.

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Charlotte Civic Center
Charlotte, N. C.

Odell Associates, Inc.
Architects
Charlotte, N. C.

McDevitt & Street Co.
General Contractor

Jury comment:
"The design and execution of this highly ordered yet flexible building has produced a civic center with varied and adaptive spaces within, while it addresses the surrounding city with appropriate scale."

photo: Gordon H. Schenck, Jr.



WE ARCHITECTS are polecats. We get bored with the slowness of evolution. We over-react. The 70's brought on the shocks, the fears and the over-reactions of declining economy. We were frightened too by the infringement of related professions. Psychologists and sociologists scared the hell out of us, monkeying around in our territory. The 1975 AIA Convention in Atlanta brought this out. The product emphasis has had its day. The new emphasis is process. This reflects attitudes of the schools who years before became disinterested in product and grabbed at process. They abdicated teaching design. Instead they stressed process using grand terms such as

design methodology, design strategy and design tactics instead of teaching design skills. Schools did a great job of giving the profession sharp-thinking, managerial types of architects. Still are. But very few are turning out designers, although there are signs of a turn-around.

HOPEFULLY THE LATE SEVENTIES WILL BRING TOGETHER THE PROBLEM-SOLVING FUNCTIONALISTS (WE NEED THEM), THE PRODUCT-MINDED FORMALISTS (WE NEED THEM) AND THE PROCESS-MINDED MANAGERS (WE NEED THEM) — TOGETHER IN TEAM ACTION.

**HONOR AWARD
SARC 1976**

Moss Creek Golf Clubhouse
Moss Creek Plantation
Hilton Head Island, S. C.

**Corkern and Associates
Architects**
Hilton Head Island, S. C.

Golden Isles Building Co.
General Contractor



Jury comment:

"An expression of an orderly concept. A straight-forward arrangement of diverse and varied functions in a remarkably small and ordered building."

There are encouraging signs of an emerging balanced design approach which will give the people of this country and the world more functional, more beautiful and more economical forms and spaces.

Now what's ahead for US ARCHITECTS in the five-year future? Hopefully, better buildings. There are a few road blocks — if you want to call them that. But who's smart enough to tell a road block that stops progress from a road block that stops profession foolishness?

Road blocks (or challenges), call them what you will. But whatever they are, they will cause change — attitudinal and operational.

Get ready to change.

Here are some things that will cause us to change our way of doing business during these next five years:

1. **Energy:** Architects and engineers blew it in the 60's. We forgot everything we learned in the 50's about the basics of energy conservation through design. All we have to do is return to fundamentals. And stop designing obese buildings that have insatiable appetites for energy. No longer can we go on our merry way designing energy-leaking buildings. Regardless of whether a building is heated and cooled by gas, or oil, or coal, or nuclear energy, or solar energy, or Carter's Peanut oil, the public will demand energy efficiency through design.

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Sectional Center Facility
U. S. Postal Service
Florence, S. C.

Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle & Wolf, Inc.
Architects
Columbia, S. C.

Ruscon Construction Co.
General Contractor

Jury comment:

"A clear expression of the industrial product expressed in this near machine-like building serves both community and trucks with balanced honesty and forthright presence."



2. **Consumerism:** Users will do more back-seat driving. Not all bad either. This could lead to better design.

3. **Recycling:** Better be ready — not just think we are ready — to recycle everything from a small room to an entire city. And it takes more imagination to make an old Ark run than it does to start from scratch.

4. **New Business:** The giant projects — the kind the big firms do — may be few. Pray that the Middle East will hold its peace.

5. **Accountability:** Buildings tattle — tattle on the architects. They tell the world that architects are good, fair or bad. They tell judges and juries whether or not architects

practice with competency or with illegal laxity. The future will bring on more malpractice suits and more demands for guaranteed price and delivery schedules — which brings on more suits.

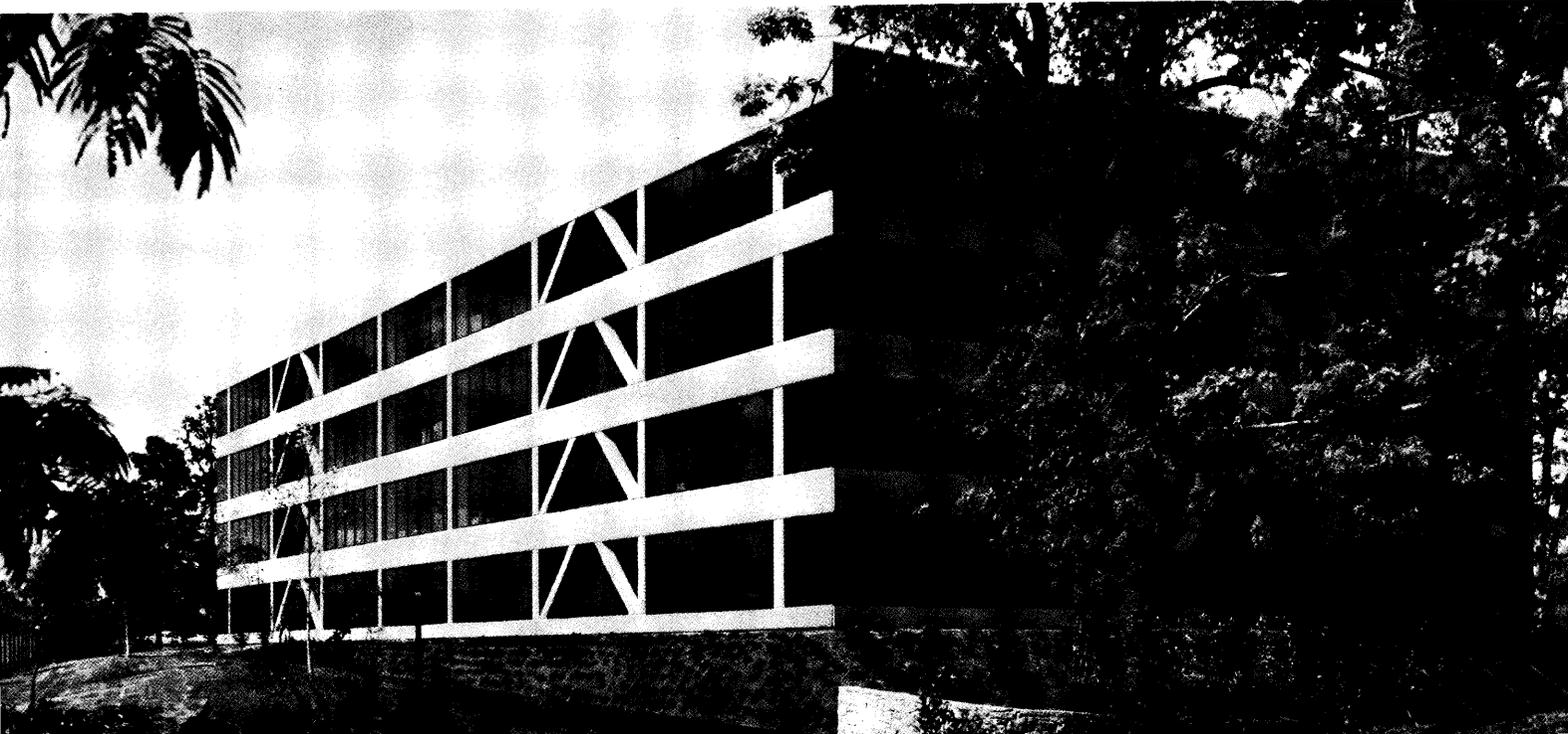
5. **Profession:** We have to change. The courts are making us. Our ethics border on illegal price-fixing. Ethics have to undergo a major overhaul — like it or not. At the Philadelphia Convention, Jack McGinty took a very clear, thoughtful and positive view of new professional ethics. A lot of us were not listening. We must open our ears and minds to what is happening in the real world.

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Northlake Office Park
Building No. 7
Atlanta, Ga.

Thompson, Ventulett & Stainback, Inc.
Architects
Atlanta, Ga.

Jury comment:
"This tidy architectural approach to a corporate headquarters building is at once kind to its neighbors and honest unto itself."



7. **Multi-Function:** There will be more multi-functional building types. The grand mix will take hold.

8. **Design Approach:** Functionalism? Formalism? Processism? It has to be all three. The design approach can't be only an accent on process, or on form, or on function. Just one won't hack it. It takes a balance of the three. Blessed be those schools who can give the profession designers as well as managers, doers as well as talkers.

9. **Systems:** Count on increasing pressure for building systems and systems building. The high cost of labor demands a reduction of labor on the job site. I'm delighted. Who knows, someone might design

another Parthenon — a masterpiece in building systems.

10. **Software:** Don't be surprised if the architect is a part of a collaborative process to deliver a total package — software as well as hardware (a building, if you please). There are a few cases now where architects have brought in the software people or joined them to design buildings and extend services to instruct the users on how to run the operation that goes on in the buildings. Not a bad move either. Most executives don't know what to do with a building when they get it. They not only need the obvious maintenance policies, but continuing architectural service policies.

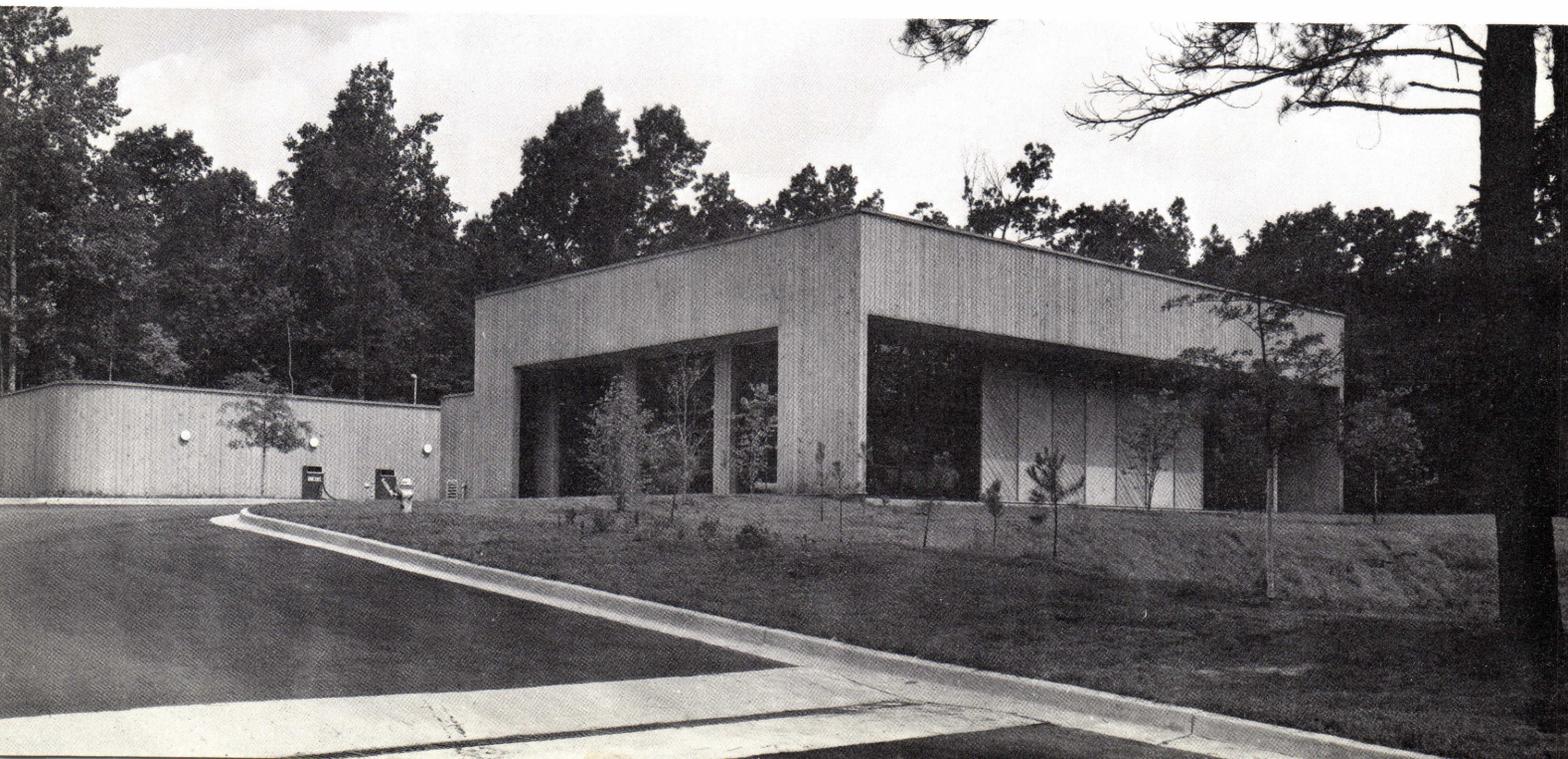
HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Dekalb County Fire Station
Number 19
Dekalb County, Ga.

Cooper, Carry & Associates, Inc.
Architects
Atlanta, Ga.

Jury comment:
"This fire house is in scale with its neighbors, polite to the street on which it sits, and honest to itself and to the community."

photo: e. alan mcgee



11. **Design/Build:** To regain the housing market we may have to construct as well as design. Who can build small houses and apartments better than architects? Fact is, there is a large unknown number of AIA architects who are doing it right now, either through construction management or the design/build processes. No reason why architects should not have the freedom to have many different kinds of practices. Phil Will, when he was AIA president, talked about this in the early 60's and pushed for comprehensive services which the AIA adopted, but at the same time, never changed the ethics to allow it to happen. Our ethics are vestiges of the turn of the century when architects were pushed out of being "master builders."

12. **Government:** Count on more interference from national, state and local governments in the name of protecting people. The future may keep us busy erasing dumb regulations. We'll be a stronger profession for it.

THE ERA OF CHEAP LABOR
AND CHEAP ENERGY HAS
ENDED. ARCHITECTURAL
PRACTICE HAS TO CHANGE.
NO GLACIAL CHANGE EITHER.
WE ARE IN FOR FAST CHANGE,
WITHIN THESE NEXT FIVE
YEARS.

What a great time to reassess our worth. Should we **be**? Or shouldn't we be? It's the time to remind ourselves that architects are not here to perpetuate their profession but to serve people by creating buildings and outside spaces which possess architecture. It's time to recognize that we are a life-improving, contributing profession. ■

HONOR AWARD SARC 1976

Peachtree Summit Office Building
Atlanta, Ga.

Toombs, Amisano and Wells Architects

Henry C. Beck Co.
General Contractor

Jury comment:

"This innovative and sensitively detailed building is a proud addition to the city skyline. It presents a consistency in structure and space too often neglected in office highrise design."

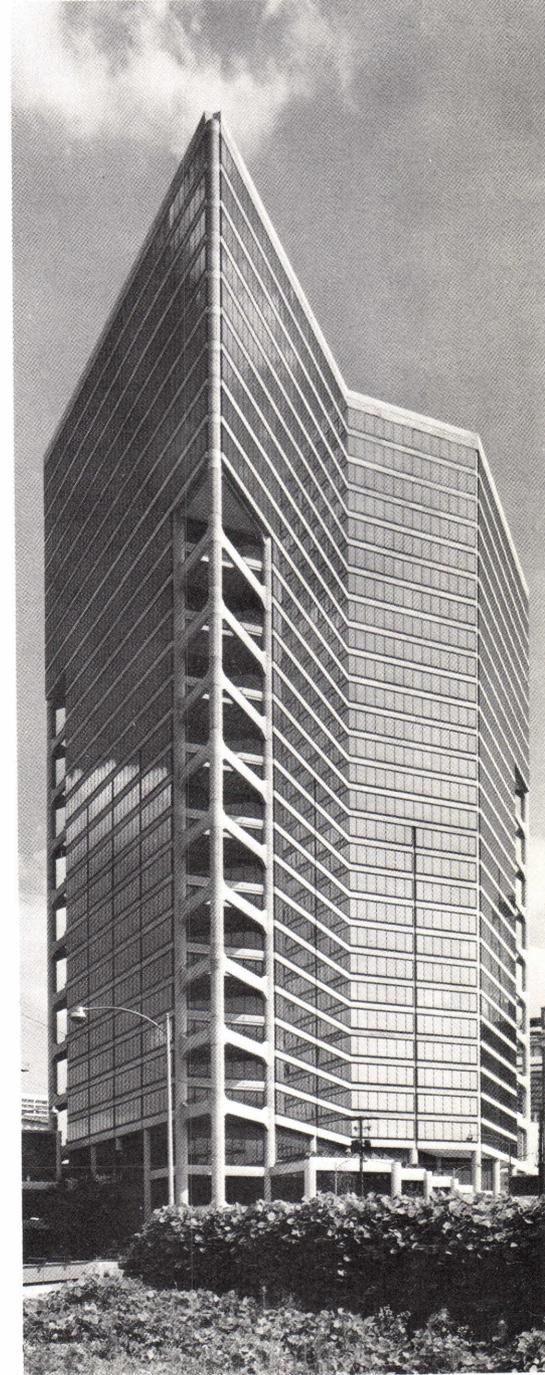


photo: George Cserna

CRITICISM: THE FIRST WORD

by Ernie Wood

"An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all."

—Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*

"Boy was that fun ... It was a most satisfying experience."

—ballerina Sallie Wilson, after throwing a drink in the face of *New York Times* dance critic Clive Barnes, July 23, 1976

The writers can wax poetic to justify their positions, the injured artists can fume and stew, but as often as not, it seems, a person's opinion of criticism depends on whether he is giving or receiving it. A few years back, an article in *The New York Times* book review described receiving a bad review as "Like being spat upon by a stranger in Times Square." A recent *Esquire* magazine article by a former newspaper arts editor condemned critics as "disk jockeys" playing other people's ideas. But, then, there is the other extreme. Many writers and artists sincerely believe that the only thing worse than a bad review is no review at all. And there's that old public relations cliché: "I don't care what you say about me, just spell my name right."

Criticism, however, is more than free publicity — and everyone from the editors who hire critics to the critics themselves to the persons whose works are criticized should realize that fact. Similarly, criticism is not a consumer guide. But what is it?

On the highest level, to turn philosophical for a moment, criticism is an exploration into the nature of "art" and an examination of whether a particular play or musical performance or painting or sculpture or building qualifies. On a more immediate level, criticism examines whether a work of art succeeds in what it sets out to do. Criticism, at any rate, is not "The Last Word," laid down by a critic who has assumed authority to make or break a work of art. (Anyone who thinks it is either cannot think for himself or is looking on the critic as some kind of scapegoat.) Criticism is quite the opposite. Criticism should be "The First Word," the beginning

of a dialogue, a process which helps the public to itself become a body of critics who analyze the art presented to it and who learn to demand a higher standard. Therein lies the reason for criticism's existence.

Nowhere does all of this seem more applicable than in architecture. Architecture is the art form which affects everyone every day. Architecture is at least supposed to mirror society's aspirations and values. Yet architecture probably receives less criticism than any other art.

Put aside, for a moment, the professional journals and consider the rest of the field. These are the publications which reach the people who criticism is supposed to be educating. Every self-respecting newspaper in every city that pretends to the tiniest amount of sophistication has criticism of books, plays, music and art. But only a handful have critics who write regularly on architecture. The number of critics who reach the general public is increased only slightly by the magazine writers and those who contribute on an irregular basis to newspapers.

Why?

Are writers, fearing that architecture is too technical or commercial a subject, afraid to venture into the field? Are editors, preoccupied with reaching a wide audience and selling their publications, afraid that architecture is too specialized a subject? Are architects, wary of losing clients due to unfavorable reviews, afraid to ask for more criticism?

I think we can give at least a qualified "yes" to each of these questions.

We also can throw in the architect's professional ethics which keep him from criticizing his colleagues, the fact that architecture is not an event like an art show or a musical performance for a writer to "peg" an article on, the fact that buildings take such a long time to design and construct that in all but the largest cities there may not seem to be enough subject matter for a writer and the fact that few writers have had any academic exposure to architecture.

This is the tip of the iceberg. But we still have not asked the most basic question — whether we want the world of critics that criticism is supposed to produce. Do architects really want their buildings criticized in public? If they do, what form should that criticism take?

The cynic might point out that criticism is indispensable to painters and writers, whose work could easily go ignored without public notice, but that an architect's work, to provide shelter, will go on whether anyone writes it up or not. Painters and writers, therefore, may seek criticism more actively than architects. The cynic may be right.

But I think the issue goes deeper than that. True, it comes down to money. But at issue, really, are the architect's professional ethics. Forbidden from advertising, architects may feel they are being slightly unethical, or at least being commercial, if they suggest an article to a writer. And writers may feel they are helping a commercial enterprise if they go along with the suggestion. The plot thickens.

One root of the problem is the basic difference between the kind of coverage that architects want and

Ernie Wood, a three-time recipient of the NCAIA's Press Award, writes about architecture for The News and Observer in Raleigh. A native of Chapel Hill, he holds an AB in English from Hamilton College, Clinton, N. Y. and has studied at the N. C. State University School of Design.

the kind of coverage that most journalists provide.

With the physical decay of American cities today, the concerns over how much cities should be allowed to grow, the housing shortage, the energy crisis and other issues that arise directly from the man-made environment, it would seem that publications would want to write about architecture. It would seem that they would realize the importance of the man-made environment. And they do — to a certain extent.

They cover the politics of the zoning board, the Chamber of Commerce's complaints about "no growth" policies, the high cost of fuels for heating. But they seldom talk about the quality of the man-made environment. And it is precisely that quality, I suspect, that most architects would want to see emphasized. But how?

Here lie the joys and frustrations of architectural journalism. For architecture is schizophrenic. Architecture is art and business. It is theory and practicality. It is a single building and an entire city.

There are so many ways to write about the subject that the fledgling critic can easily become confused, bogged down in technicalities and details. But there are so many ways to write about the subject that it is a wonder journalists do not stumble over them even by accident more often than they do.

I see some encouraging signs, however, some subjects that are hard not to stumble over.

First comes the nation's sudden interest in historic preservation. It always did seem strange that Americans trooped off to admire Europe's architectural heritage and then ignored their own man-made

environment. Maybe all our eyes will be opened to the architecture we have at home. Some of this interest in old architecture is sure to spur interest in contemporary design issues.

The energy crisis, decaying cities and urban sprawl also should bring more attention to architecture. It is too bad that people always wait for a crisis to correct mistakes. Bad news makes good reading, however, and the press has made us well aware of these problems. Again, interest in design should grow as a result.

But there are things the profession can do as well to help along the cause of architectural journalism.

For immediate results, architects can try speaking out on public issues. To avoid the taint of commercialism or a breach of professional ethics, they may have to avoid speaking on individual building projects. But they can discuss broader issues, government policies or specialized concepts of the urban environment that the public may not be aware of. If they know writers who already are interested in the urban environment, architects can tell them where to look for new ideas. If they don't know any writers, architects may be able to publish articles of their own.

Architects can encourage articles about their own work, or at least let writers know they are available to discuss their projects. This is especially easy to do with public buildings, like schools. But any mention of a new building should mention the architect's name, just as a news story about a trial mentions lawyers' names. Simply making the public aware who designed the buildings in their towns is the most simple — and the most subtle — form of criticism.

Architects can open selected history and theory courses in their schools of design to students in other disciplines. The profession also should encourage related fields like history, sociology, art and even business to include some study of architecture. Potential critics may be sitting in those classes. Future editors who will have to decide whether or not to hire critics probably will be there. And certainly, future clients will be there. Educating those clients — the public — we will remember, was the goal of criticism.

The critic himself will have to be part historian, part sociologist, part urban planner, part aesthetician. He will have to discover the ways a building relates to its community and ask what its long-range implications are. He will have to avoid being carried away with the bizarre and see, instead, the meaning in the typical. Yet he must see the art in a building and recognize the validity of new forms. He will have to juggle and arrange a system of complicated forces just the way an architect does. Then, he will have to translate a visual medium into a verbal one.

Architectural criticism is different from other forms of criticism by these factors and is, therefore, not always the judgemental process that makes up criticism of the other arts. Architecture can indeed be judged purely as art. But it also can be written about as news. The writer can give a descriptive "tour" through the building. Or a project can be used as only one example of a larger issue. All are valid methods of writing and all can lead in the end to critical analysis. Architects should be just as aware as writers that these methods of criticism exist. For architects have an important role in determining whether criticism will exist or not. ■

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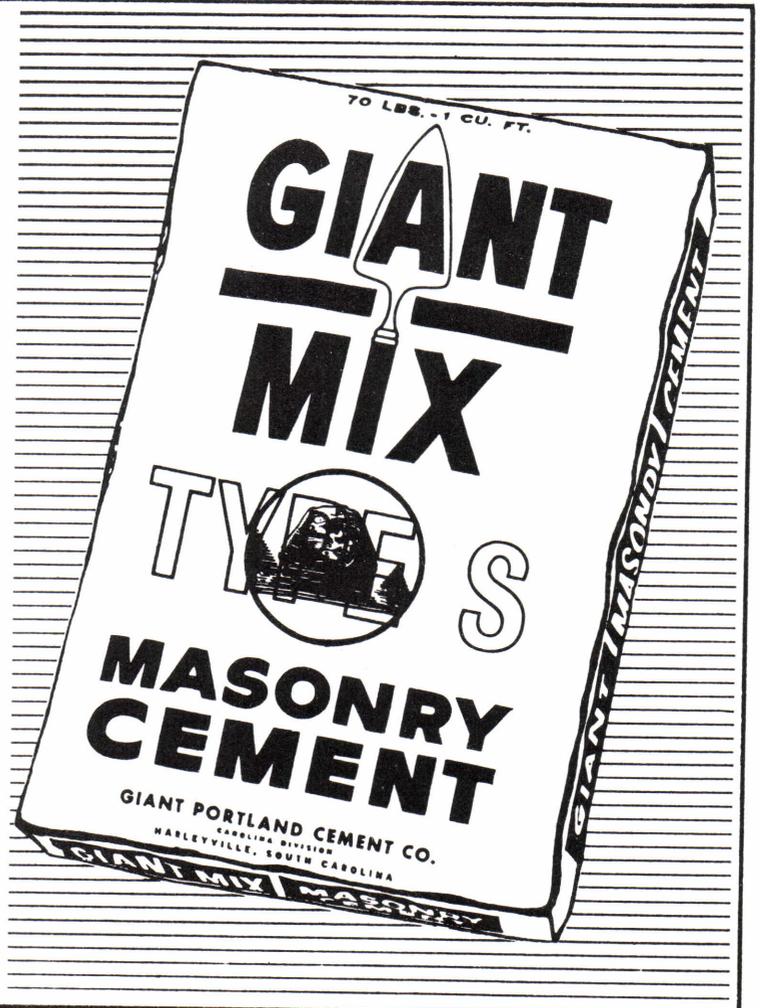
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