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Mediocrity

A few years ago our National A. I. A. could not find any church design submitted of sufficient merit to receive an award. This commentary which chastises the capabilities of the submitting architects has so disturbed me that I have decided to submit the following for your consideration:

In the very elemental—all architecture is a physical expression of a need—the need usually is for shelter and to make physically comfortable that which it would house. Parallel with this, the physical, there should be concern for those workings in man which are his religion, his philosophy, and his ethics. It is true of all architecture, if we agree that religion, philosophy and ethics are guiding factors in man's every day existence, that the degree of emphasis placed upon the physical and the thoughts of man will dictate how successful the resultant architecture will be.

How successfully architecture can create physical evidences of what is not expressed by those who define the need is difficult to imagine. If those who define (usually those who control expenditures) are primarily concerned with the basic physical satisfactions, there can be little inspirational appeal in the program. If on the other hand there is an over-emphasis on the inspirational to the detriment of the physical (wherein the out-of-the-past architectural treatment is used though it groan under the requirements of a contemporary need) the result cannot be considered a happy solution. It would appear then that a fine sense of balance be maintained in the handling of both the physical and thinking faculties of man. Not only should full consideration be exercised in architect-selection but the same and perhaps more should be exercised in the selection of those who formulate the tenets upon which to build. It would be appropriate that awards of work well done should be placed upon the shoulders of those who with the architect held steadfast to sound principles and conversely they, too, should wear the mantel of mediocrity when the target has been missed.

Schmaltz

There is in Manchester a Delicates whose contents and spirit I greatly admire. Here in this a gourmet's delight, I nibble at taste that, and buy the most unpronounceable food. The man and wife team who own a store are comparatively new to this city—formerly was a steward on ocean vessels—she a wonderful 'hausfrau.'” By cold economic analysis this venture of theirs could possibly endure—for who could pay the price for this excellent food—to exist one must sit on the staples. But no! here is a store who first thought was quality and second is price. three years, from a drab ordinary store, it emerging bright and inviting. Recently they installed new wall shelving with valance lining, the shelving sensibly is no higher than arm's height, the remaining space to the ceiling is blessed with well spaced potted green which gambol freely along the valance. It was a touch of love, of summers remembered. In answer to my compliments she remarked “I live here more than in my home, I like things pleasant.” I remarked that she was feeling the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, she countered with “Did you hear this fellow Wright on Omnibus a little while ago? Is he quite a man!” Walking around the counter she and I discussed modern interiors and exteriors, likes and dislikes, we agreed that little “schmaltz” added something but lots of things a little ham could go a long way.

You've seen these wonderful creatures at work—an old man whittling a wooden Indian for a bright-eyed boy—a pain-knobbed Grannie's hand sewing red buttons on a beaded doll—a flower in a lapel or on a dress—something they all have in common—they all pleasantness so much they want to share it.

Does age have a corner on the market giving?
W SAFETY CODE SEEKS CUT IN HOME ACCIDENTS

WASHINGTON—Housing officials recently said their forthcoming "safety construction code" as an "important milestone" in the home building industry. They said the code, which will be published this spring, will cut the "looking" number of home accidents to "a minimum."

At present more than 30,000 persons are killed and more than 4,000,000 injured every year in accidents in the home. The toll of fatalities has been mounting every year.

Officials said the code will include the "first ethical safety standards" ever produced in the country. It embodies "the best thinking" of builders, architects and safety experts and has been under study for almost two years.

Officially the code is the product of the National Association of Home Builders, with 3000 members, and the National Safety Council. But experts from related industries have been called in for consultation.

Publication of the code has been delayed by careful redrafting of the code's language. Originally it was expected last October.

The code will contain a "comprehensive check list" to "guide" builders in the construction of safer homes.

Members of the N. A. H. B. have already pledged "voluntary compliance" with the code. Copies of the code will be distributed nationally. Support of the code is counted upon by the N. A. H. B. as the most important precedent in bringing the nation safer homes.

With these new standards," the association said, "home builders and architects for the first time will have a clear, simple and detailed post by which they can readily build their homes the safety which the public rest and the stature of their industry demands.

Their effectiveness will depend upon the extent to which they are put into practice by every member of the industry."

The code also pays special attention to the construction of bathrooms—"one of the dead parts of the house if not properly safeguarded."

W TWO LARGE CONTRACTS FOR AIRBASE AWARDED

The construction program for the $42,000,000 airbase for the Strategic Air Command at Portsmouth, N. H., made its most extensive strides it has been disclosed by Col. L. H. Hewett, division engineer, New England Division, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, who awarded two large contracts to contractors, issued invitations to bidders for a million-dollar-plus contract and then opened bids for the entire program—construction of the runways, taxiways, aprons and aircraft refueling system.

Colonel Hewett announced that the contract for the construction of the central heating plant and fuel storage facilities has been awarded to the Arthur Venneri Company of Westfield, N. J., low bidder at $973,800. Construction of a drainage system in the vicinity of the warehouses at the base was awarded the George B. Landers Construction Company, Inc., Portsmouth, N. H., low bidder at $58,770.

The low basic bids announced among 27 bids submitted for the construction of the runway, taxiways and apron were: Morrison-Knudsen company of New York City with Landers and Griffin, Portsmouth, N. H., $9,769,085.75; Lane Construction Company, Meriden, Conn., $9,973,619.50; and Savin Construction company, East Hartford, Conn., $10,152,384.50. Basic and alternate bids will be considered before any awards are made.

Low bidder for the construction of the aircraft fueling system was Robert A. Verrier company, Portland, Me., $876,268, followed by the George A. Fuller company, Boston, $966,296 and Savin Construction company, East Hartford, Conn., $978,676.

Colonel Hewitt also announced the issuance of invitations for bidders for the construction of an aircraft and troop supply warehouse, a refrigerated warehouse and commissary, and aircraft shops at Portsmouth. Bids for these buildings, which may result in an outlay of nearly $2,000,000 more, will be received up to 2 P. M., March 5.

Nothing has happened tomorrow.

—Journal of Living
Construction in New Hampshire Showed Gain in 1953

BOSTON—New Hampshire construction contract awards in 1953 totaled $37,110,000, or 9 per cent higher than 1952, it was announced by James A. Harding, district manager of F. W. Dodge Corporation, construction news and marketing specialists.

Individual 1953 totals of Dodge Reports compared with 1952 were: nonresidential, $16,611,000, up 20 per cent; residential, $10,057,000, down 19 per cent; heavy engineering, $10,442,000, up 31 per cent.

In December construction contracts were $2,253,000, up 2 per cent over November and 104 per cent above December 1952.

Nonresidential awards were $1,131,000, up 18 per cent over November and 75 per cent above December 1952; residential awards of $953,000 were 16 per cent above November and substantially over December 1952; heavy engineering, $169,000, down 60 per cent from November and down 63 per cent from December 1952.

New England Contract Awards Up 10 Percent in 1953

BOSTON—New England construction contract awards in 1953 totaled $1,114,205,000, 10 per cent above 1952, according to Dodge Reports totals, James A. Harding, F. W. Dodge Corporation district manager announced. Nonresidential awards for the year were $395,569,000, up 23 per cent over 1952; residential at $528,230,000 was up 7 per cent; heavy engineering at $190,406,000, down 2 per cent.

December 1953 construction awards were $101,255,000, up 19 per cent over November and up 127 per cent over December 1952.

Individual December totals were: nonresidential, $45,006,000, up 68 per cent over November and up 272 per cent over December 1952; residential $38,412,000, up 8 per cent over November and up 46 per cent over December 1952; heavy engineering, $17,800, down 23 per cent from November, up 189 per cent over December 1952.

NEW APPLICANT REGISTERED

The name of the following applicant who became registered on January 11, 1954, is submitted: 164 Mario Vincent Caputo, 6 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

Joins N. H. Chapter, A. I. A.

Warren Brooke Fleck, Butternut Farm, Lyme, New Hampshire, has been admitted Corporate Membership and assigned to N. H. Chapter A. I. A. Date of admission January 15, 1954.

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H. D. Hauf, A.I.A. of New Haven, Connecticut, has been appointed Director of Department of Public and Professional Relations of The American Institute of Architects, it is announced by Edmund R. Purves, A.I.A., Institute Executive Director.

Hauf received his B.S. in Architecture from University of Michigan in 1927 and his S. from Yale in 1932. He has been on the architectural faculty since 1929 except periods when he was in the Government service with the U. S. Navy, and, in 1949-51, when he was Editor-in-Chief of Architectural Record. He finished his duties as Chairman of the Department and Professor of Architecture at Yale at the end of 1953 and he will assume his new office at the Institute's headquarters in Washington immediately.
built in a pine grove on the crest of a hill overlooking Beaver Lake, this house follows the formula of the ideal setting as defined by the Oriental... “a hill to the north, a road to the east, a road to the west, and view to the south.”

love of the land and the towering pines therewith a yen for comfort and easy sekeeping dictated the design of this pleasant home. Mindful of the wishes of the owner, care was taken to preserve the existing trees on the site and make them an integral part of the scheme of living which the house provides.

The brick fireplace makes a natural division between the living room and the front entrance hall thus allowing house traffic to bypass the living room. The open plan with high windows on the west side of the living room give the occupant an unusual view of the pines and a wall of grass to the rear frames an ever changing picture of a lovely lake. Kitchen, Dining-room and Master-bedroom share this view.

Taking advantage of a sharp fall in the contour of the land at this point the basement furnishes space for a two-car garage, laundry, shower and toilet facilities for swimmers, as well as storage space for a boat, and the other play and hobby interests of three active boys. Space has also been provided to satisfy the needs of the Owner’s interest in growing prize flowers.

Architect: Alexander J. Majeski.
Contractor: Moody & Morin.
Decorator: House & Garden Shop.
Landscaping: Leon Pearson.

Photos of Levesque Residence on Page 10
Exterior Views of Levesque Residence, Derry, N. H.

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IS IT ARCHITECTURE OR JUST BUNK?

BY SHEPARD VOGELGESANG, A.I.A.

In spite of the title I gave this talk, it's not so much to amuse as to infect, so far as I am able, and to the extent the occasion affords. Architecture is a hoary subject. I have endeavored to limit myself in this discourse to the domestic field, moreover to a single phase and a single son. The field I cover is still for too broad, association with the Great Books Groups taught me that when one discusses and attempts to instruct, he begins with definitions. It is difficult to begin with a definition of architecture because probably no two architects can agree on any definition which two men would say they understood. This could not be so. Laymen are very important architects, really more important than other architects, and we should be able to make ourselves understood. There is truth in one of the most popular of the definitions that architecture is frozen music, but that one has always left me cold. In the eighteenth or sixteenth century someone made another try and said that architecture provided: Firmness, commodity and Delight—that definition I particularly the Delight part. Actually the practice of Architecture seems less occupied with delight than with a budget and that condition makes architecture too often today to be the art of stretching a heavy mort- e over a light structure of desires and disappointments.

However, we are about to examine Architecture in the grand rather than the mean manner, and I should forthwith return to my definitions and my examples. May I say that the examples to come may seem surprising as a choice, most of them are by the best or best architects this country has produced and in a few cases perhaps the best architects of the two centuries dis- solved.

Now for my definitions. First and most effly it seems to me that Architecture is n's joy in his shelter—habitation with a ritual pick-me-up. I think this quality distinguishes the examples I keep promising to discuss with you, and I think it is what makes these houses different from other houses which have not been treasured over time or which have not yet begun to be treasured because through some prejudice the joy in them is not perceived.

To attempt a more technical definition which describes some of the means of providing joy in man's shelter I would say that Architecture is the measured and rhythmic organization of habitable space.

It is expressed in structure by means of materials chosen with informed selection by the architect for their properties, quality and intrinsic beauty of substance.

It is expressed in workmanship by the skill of the craftsman, the mason, the carpenter, the mechanical worker, and it has not yet been expressed by the skill of the manufacturer.

It has visual grace through proportion. It is expressed in structure by means of materials chosen with informed selection by the architect for their properties, quality and intrinsic beauty of substance.

Firmness through calculation, expert execution and collaboration between the builder and the architect.

Joy through rhythmic measurement amounting to movement when in sequences, contrast, harmony, light, color and sympathetic relationship to it's environment and to the pride of ownership.

It has something else—every sequence of room to room, in doors to out of doors, span to space covered inspires a physical reaction in the person who becomes aware of architecture.

This is perhaps the most personal and most universally expressed public reaction to it. Everyone has a tendency to identify himself with architectural form. The upright of the column under it's load, the leap of the arch, the freely moving plan—the cramped jerky plan all these attributes can be felt physically as well as spiritually and are less alterable than such preferences as those of style which are more a matter of environment, of opportunity, of intelligence and of physical predispositions. It is under the influence of these
I Know What I Like—

(Continued from Page 11)

physical predispositions that the “I Know What I Like” assertion belongs. It has always been susceptible of education and alterable. Only the person who does not care does not change.

EXAMPLES

(1) I begin with a house known to many of us and loved by nearly all. Its authorship seems to be in doubt and it goes by attribution rather than signature to Bullfinch. Here we have Classic balance and symmetry as the organization. The rhythm is distinctly one of two’s and the measure or interval is the extent of the blank or rest space.

(2) Here is another, not even an attribution this time, a strong statement of Classic balance and of rhythm of three’s, not only expressed in the three vertical bays and triple division of the doorway, but also in the triple horizontal divisions which mark the two storeys. Perhaps this is the place to say that Classic design starts from a preconceived order, at least to me, that the form of this house or any Classic form is fitted to the preconceived mold or image and emphasized, it is not evolved in the same way that the Organic or Romantic form is created. The Romantic form may exist in it’s creator’s brain. Frank Lloyd Wright has assured me that it does and that he doesn’t put pencil to paper until he sees every part in its relationship to the next and to a whole. But this process with Organic design is immensely difficult and complex. Most of us, in a limited way, are Classicists and visualize what we want, to some extent, but few progress to Organic visualization. The next example shows a detail of Organic design.

(3) Japan Kyoto—Garden

The jako-in

I am introducing this example because the first or about the first in this talk will in a sense be the last. You will find Japanese Architecture often referred to and rather frequently shown, and you will find some similarities to our own developments which go to show how much we are all one world. The jako-in was built some time between 1573 and 1624, not very old as Japanese architecture goes, since buildings of the ninth and tenth centuries exist in excellent preservation. You have the oneness of the build and the garden, one concept in space, playing counter-point to the other—the being so far as seen a rhythm of two the aripeggio of many notes. I might say passing that with residential and tea ceremonial houses in Japan—the informal buildings which we have learned much and can learn much more, that fragments compare beautifully in the same way that the leaves of a painted screen are each a unit complete itself which together form a larger and whole design.

(4) Bullfinch Swan House in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

A break with dependence on fenestration for rhythmic organization and an experiment in rhythm of form and mass, rectangle opposed to cylinder and accented by line rather than by window spacing, the cornice and soffit porch the tops of the cylinder and rectangle tell the story. Here we have in addition than an organization of forms, we have the desire to sweep the countryside for its prospects from the vantage of a round tower. Something of its visionment has penetrated Classic arrangement of spaces and dominates it.


Since Richardson was a Boston architect and like Bullfinch a great one, it might be that this house is lineal in descent. Buildings have rhythm of mass accented by line. But the Richardson house is organized as symmetrically and the rhythm and organization is punctuated by the windows.


Not the earliest or nearest to Richardson Wright’s houses, but a furtherance of the study of roof rhythms stated with greater clarity and also more harshness than the examples by Richardson. Wright’s early house include one on the Chicago South Side almost indistinguishable from Richardson; another the English half timber mode which became popular in the 1915’s to 1925’s and an apar
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The United States Air Force, Washington 25, D. C., announces more than 100 vacancies for engineers of all kinds at annual salaries of $3,410 to $8,360; for physicists, $4,205 to $10,800; for mathematicians, $3,410 to $7,040; and for engineering draftsmen and aircraft technicians, $2,950 to $5,940, in the United States and overseas.

The United States Army, Overseas Affairs Division, Washington 25, D. C., announces vacancies as civil engineers, construction engineer, safety engineer, in Alaska, at annual salaries of $5,060 to $5,940, plus 25 per cent of base salary. Applications will be accepted for future overseas vacancies as architectural, civil, construction, electrical, mechanical, structural, radio, and telephone engineers at annual salaries of $5,060 to $7,040, most of which call for an additional 25 per cent salary allowance.

The United States Civil Service Commission, Washington 25, D. C., announces examinations (No. 375) for cartographer, cartographic aid, cartographic technicians and cartographic draftsmen at annual salaries of $2,750 to $10,800, in Washington and in the field.

The United States Navy announces vacancies in almost all kinds of engineering and in other technical fields at annual salaries of $3,410 to $9,600 in Washington, elsewhere in the United States, and overseas.

Form 57, obtainable at first class post offices and from the Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C., should be submitted to the government agencies listed above.

I Know What I Like—
(Continued from Page 12)

ment which could have been Louis Sullivan's most highly organized and enclosed with a merry widow cornice.

(7) Louis Sullivan, Cornelia Crane house, Madison, Wisconsin—1900.

Wright, Sullivan and Richardson were trying the same means to beauty. Sullivan did few houses and of the few most are distinguished by his beautiful and chaste placed luxurious ornament and contains one of the examples of his amazing joy in line design. Without the restraint to apply sparingly, Sullivan might have become lush, but he was too great an artist to waste his gift. Since this talk does not include documents I have had to omit the famous G. and Wainwright tombs. It is perhaps rash to say that no single person and hardly an artist equals the richness of Sullivan's ornament. It was a marvel it could be executed in Chicago had the craftsmen.

(To be continued in the March issue)

Too much emphasis is no emphasis. If your voice too loud and no one hears you. Hit too hard and you excite sympathy for your victim. Draw your indictment sweeter and it becomes suspicious.
—Elbert Hubbard

When you appear before one of the millions of the earth, remember that another million from above on what is happening and you must please Him rather than this man.
—Epictetus

The fact is that to do anything in the world worth doing, we must not stand shivering and thinking of the cold and dark but jump in and scramble through as we can.
—Sydney Smith
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