

NEW YORK CHAPTER

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O C U L U S

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COVENTRY CATHEDRAL AND ITS ARCHITECT

One of the most attractive guests to visit the Chapter for many a month lunched with a group of members on December 8th and gave an illustrated talk on the development of plans for the Cathedral of Coventry. Basil Spence, Architect, of Edinburgh, Scotland, has just concluded a speaking tour of Canada with his distinguished colleagues, The Reverend Richard Howard, Provost of Coventry Cathedral, and The Reverend Clifford E. Ross, Chaplain to the Lord Bishop.

The Chapter was fortunate enough to sit in this good company for two hours and review in detail the problem raised by the tragic destruction of the old Cathedral on November 14, 1940, the competition held for the re-creation of the Cathedral in which Mr. Spence's winner was dredged up from three quarters of a mile of drawings, and a detailed presentation of his solution, together with the historical background and the religious ideology in which it is rooted.

In developing his historical concept, Mr. Spence emphasized the fact that all great ecclesiastical architecture was modern in its day. One of the most telling examples he cited was the large East Window of Gloucester Cathedral, an expanse of very light Gothic mullions set in a heavy Norman frame. In a spirit of reverence and affection for the ruins of the bombed structure, the architect decided to let them stand as a link between the past and the future of Coventry; they serve as an open narthex to the new building which will swing away at right angles to their axis.

The reborn Cathedral will have a long nave terminating in an altar of ivory, at some distance behind which will hang the largest tapestry in the world. (Mr. Spence is almost as proud of this as an American architect would be expected to be.) The nave will be lighted by very tall stained glass windows and covered with a light concrete vaulting carried on slender pre-stressed columns. There will be two chapels and a baptismal font.

In his delightful talk introducing Mr. Spence, Mr. Howard emphasized that although the non-historical style in which the new Cathedral is conceived has aroused much controversy there is none in the Close itself. He spoke of the warm-hearted regard in which he and his fellow officials hold their architect. Listening to the penetrating practical analysis of the problem, the dedication to its spiritual values and withal the good humor which Mr. Spence brings to its solution the Chapter members could not but share that regard to the full.



GREETINGS 1953-4

NEW BOOKS

CLIMATE AND ARCHITECTURE, by Jeffrey Ellis Aronin. Reinhold Publishing Co., New York, 1953.

"To acquaint architects ... with the demands and phenomena of the large and small scale climates; and to inform them how to apply this knowledge to the design and orientation of building." This is Mr. Aronin's object as stated in the introduction and conclusion of his new book, "Climate and Architecture", and he achieves it admirably.

In well-arranged chapters and in amazing detail, accompanied by numerous graphs, tables and clever illustrations, he discusses each phase of climate, from sunshine through air currents to sleet storms as it affects building design. He covers a wide range; from the trial and error method of primitive people orienting an igloo in the Arctic or building a leaf shelter in the tropics, to the scientific planning of chicken houses, residences, schools, hospitals and towns; from the windswept western plains to the hot and humid climes of South America and India.

It is a book which deserves to be in every modern architect's reference library.

DECORATIVE ART 1953-54, The Studio Year Book of Furnishing and Decoration, edited by Rathbone Holme and Kathleen M. Frost, published in London by The Studio Ltd.

This handsome volume, international in scope, is less concerned with architecture than with the decorative arts. Several somewhat oddly assorted houses are presented of which one by H. W. E. Stauch in Johannesburg, South Africa, is idiomatic and stylish. Two examples from the U. S. A. are at least lush.

The sections on furnishing, lighting, silverware, ceramics and glass presenting comparative examples of work from the various nations are extremely suggestive. Some of the Dutch, Danish and Argentine furniture seems fresh and simple; the Germans appear to have preserved their predilection for quaintly shaped wing chairs.

The format, illustrations, of which a number are in color, and the general presentation is distinguished.

PRESENTATION METHODS: Volume 1 of Pencil Techniques in Modern Design by William W. Aitkin, Raniero Corbellotti and Vincent R. Fiore, published by the Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York.

This is a valuable book both in general interest and for those wishing to study the various techniques of pencil rendering. All of the phases of the problem are considered from quick sketches for capturing an idea to the most finished presentation drawings. There are sections on the mechanics of pencil strokes and washes and many reproductions of the work of most of the best and most representative renderers, each with an analysis of the method, grade of pencil and paper employed to obtain the determined effect.

A chapter on rendering for printing processes explains the effect of the half-tone screen on different types of drawing and how best to meet its requirements.

The text is clear and the illustrations are beautifully reproduced.

COMMITTEE WORK

Hippolyte Kamenka, Chairman of the Chapter's Civil Defense Committee, addressed the New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Chemists at their meeting in Newark on October 20th. He gave an hour's talk on various types of air raid shelters and the amount of protection they may afford against bomb attacks.

The Technical Committee's meeting on November 24, 1953 on the subject "Potential Influence of Prestressed Concrete" was most interesting.

Mr. L. Coff spoke on the Americanization of European prestressed methods and showed how an entire monolithic structure could be built at lower cost and in a shorter time without the use of wood or steel forms. He further illustrated how the typical economical span could be increased to 30 feet at no additional cost.

The second meeting on this topic was scheduled for December 16th.

REALIGNMENT

Architectural magazines are getting thicker, more formidable. A recent issue, examined from the standpoint of its physical properties, proves to have a thickness of .6 inches (approximately that of an India paper printing of the Old and New Testaments) and to weigh 2 lbs. 6-1/2 oz. Of this impressive bulk, approximately 6.45 oz. is editorial and illustrative matter; the remaining 2 lbs.: advertising. Doubtless it is at least in part the architect's attention which this solicits, yet many are forced to the realization that with the current pressure of economic and professional affairs they are frequently unable to give every page of advertising the careful scrutiny it manifestly deserves.

OCULUS' suggestion for a corrective to this situation envisages no change in the publications but merely a slight rearrangement of the relations between publisher and practitioner. Instead of Subscribers, let a class of Contract Readers be retained by the publishers to peruse each successive issue with the care it demands. Contracts would vary from Complete Services -- a monthly reading of the entire issue -- to several degrees of Partial Services -- Bi-monthly Reading, Monthly Skimming, Monthly Thumbing -- all at established professional rates.

Instead of the cordial, intimate reminder that it's time to pay up or risk missing out on the big Brewery Reference Number, an architect will receive a dignified invitation to renew his Reader Contract, or perhaps to advance from Bi-monthly to Monthly status at a more generous retainer. The publishers will be in a position to claim "ARCHITECTURAL VISION has a higher paid group of Contract Readers than any other comparable publication." "During July and August BRICK BAT closed 18.7% more Reader Contracts than its two nearest competitors."

Does not this simple expedient give every promise of serving advertiser, publisher and architect alike. Fees and Contracts is investigating a suitable scale of retainers but has not yet reported to the Executive Committee.

PRIZE

John Fountain, who won the Season's Opener Contest hands down with his MEMBERSHIP poster has collected his promised bottle of champagne. The delay was due to the extensive investigation as to a suitable brand conducted by the Prize Committee.

THOMAS CREIGHTON ON TELEVISION

A new TV program is starting on January 12th. DESIGN FOR YOUR LIVING will be on WOR-TV (Channel 9) on Tuesday evenings from 10:00 to 10:30 P.M.

As permanent master of ceremonies Thomas Creighton will impanel three architects, and perhaps an occasional furniture or fabric designer, for each program, concentrating on the theme that everything the audience touches or uses in daily life is designed, consciously, by someone. Each program will have a client pose a basic problem: house - classroom - parking. Each architect will discuss a basic aspect of this problem, using a big black crayon and a big pad; he will literally talk with a pencil. The client will participate in a round table discussion of the proposed solutions.

Many New York Chapter members have been invited to appear in the first few programs, among them Morris Ketchum, Victor Gruen, Lathrop Douglass and Edgar Tafel. Although this is a private enterprise undertaken by Mr. Creighton and WOR-TV he hopes for support from the profession in the form of letters to the station. Chapter members will undoubtedly be moved to pour them in in impressive volume. It is a big step forward in the whole aspect of our Public Relations, an address to the layman on a lively professional plane.

SOUTH AMERICAN TREK

Harold Sleeper is conducting an Architects Trek 'Round South America. The group, which will be entertained by South American architects in the principal cities they visit, will leave Lima, Peru, late in January, swing south down the west coast and up the east, arriving in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, about February 16th.

Fortunately the trek will reach Sao Paulo, Brazil, in time to attend the opening festivities of the IVth Centenary of Sao Paulo. These will include the 2nd Biennial of the Museum of Modern Art of Sao Paulo and the 2nd International Exhibition of Architecture. The exhibitions will give a world review of modern and contemporary art and architecture, and will include many works from this country.

CARDS BY GREVILLE RICKARD

Those members who have received Christmas Cards from Greville Rickard in former years will be interested to learn that this season he is placing a considerable variety of them on the market. These cards can be seen at Mr. Rickard's studio in Woodstock Towers, Tudor City, at the Tudor Book Shop, 5 Tudor Place, and in some of the department stores. They represent the work of a fine delineator.

A CLARIFICATION TO THE ORGANIZATION DIAGRAM

The Chapter is represented on the Architects' Council by two of our members, Geoffrey Lawford, serving as the voting delegate, and the Council's President, Matthew Del Gaudio, a review of whose fine service in that capacity is planned for the next issue. The Chapter is represented on the New York State Association by Daniel Schwartzman, our voting delegate, and Harry M. Prince, the second vice-president of the Association.