

Oculus

Rose Elected to Institute Board, St. Vincent's Hospital Expansion Opposed, Part of Allwork Bequest Received, Chapter Charlotte Street Site Plan Incorporated into Final Plan, Student Reception Held, Oculus Requests Submissions from Members and other Readers

●Charles Hughes attended the State Association Conference. William Rose of White Plains, nominated by the Chapter, was elected to the AIA Board (our other representative is Anna Halpin.)

●St. Vincent's Hospital expansion: Charles Hughes testified at the Landmarks Commission hearing that a special Chapter committee felt the proposal's shape was not compatible with the Greenwich Village Historical District.

●Allwork Scholarship Fund Policy: \$90,000 of the \$200,000 bequest has been received. The Chapter needs to establish an overall scholarship policy and a Scholarship Committee will be formed.

●The site plan prepared for Charlotte Street housing by members of the Housing Committee - Herbert Mandel, Richard Blinder, Herbert Oppenheimer and John Ellis - working on their own time, is, at this writing being incorporated in the final draft of the Housing Authority's Request for Proposal as the recommended basis for design.

●Chapter members and other

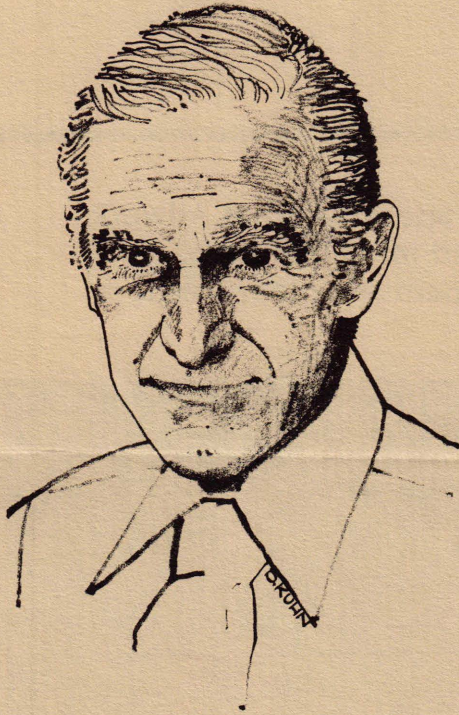


Some of the 200-odd first-year architectural school students who exchanged views with chapter officers and members at a reception on Monday, November 13. The model is by students at the Voorhees campus of New York City Community College.

readers are reminded that they may submit materials to *Oculus* for publication in the newsletter. Submissions should be concise and about a topical subject. Illustrations (photos and drawings) are encouraged. Please give the editors - Denis Glen Kuhn, 245-4207 or Ken Ricci, 730-1950 advance notice so that space in the forthcoming

issue can be arranged and publication assured. □

Brendan Gill Talks about His Latest Book-Summer Places, the Guggenheim and the Beauborg, and Foresees the Possibility of Lower Manhattan Becoming an Intellectuals Disneyland



Brendan Gill

Theater critic, novelist, poet, biographer, raconteur, New Yorker par excellence, Brendan Gill revealed in a recent interview that his childhood desire was to be an architect. He talked to this reporter at his comfortably cluttered midtown office, where the traditional frosted glass light in the door announced in large letters to the visitor that this is "The Wurd Factory" and, in smaller type below that the "Editor-in-Chief" works here.

Mr. Gill, a lanky, energetic man with sparkling eyes and wit to match, disclosed that "a dread of mathematics" deterred him from pursuing an architectural career; he turned instead to writing. What literature gained, however, architecture did not lose, for Mr. Gill also became one of this country's leading activists in the field of

historic preservation, as well as a lifelong friend of architects and architecture - both old and new. This year he fulfilled his childhood ambition when the Chapter, in recognition of his preservationist efforts and his contributions to architecture, elected him an honorary member.

His latest book, Summer Places, with superb photographs by Dudley Witney (published by Methuen, Inc., New York, NY, 1978), is another, pleasurable contribution to our understanding of American architectural and social history. Summer Places describes the country and seashore retreats built by the rich in the United States and Canada throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It traces the development of summer places from their origins as health spas or religious retreats, rooted in the Puritan tradition, to their grandest, most hedonistic manifestations, such as the palatial Biltmore, designed in the 1890's by Richard Morris Hunt for Walter Vanderbilt. Another theme runs through the book: the memories which these rambling houses and mansions evoke, akin to childhood feelings, nostalgia for a past which is gone.

The summer places he describes, says Mr. Gill, disappeared with the Depression. "In the post-war period we have second homes, which we put on like second overcoats. These are a different thing entirely from summer places." The wealthy in our time, he continues, "have adopted protective camouflage." Flaunting wealth, at least architectur-

ally, is out of fashion. 'Second homes' conform to a more modest, efficient, and faster paced style of life. They suit contemporary needs, but something, Mr. Gill clearly feels, has been lost.

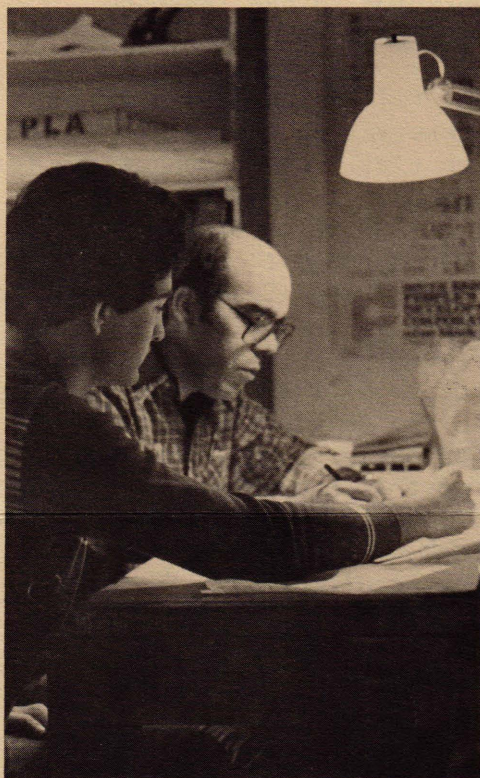
Already the biographer of such diverse personalities as Tallulah Bankhead and Charles Lindbergh, Mr. Gill has long been working on a biography of one of his favorite architects, the designer of many summer places, Stanford White. White, he says, was "a romantic figure who brought joy and friskiness to the rich and their architecture. McKim, Mead and White paganized America."

White was a playful architect, and playfulness is one of the qualities which Mr. Gill enjoys most in architecture. He admires, for example, the Chrysler Building, which, with its fantastic decoration, adds delight to the New York skyline. He feels that today many architects are moving from the strict elegance and austerity of the classic modern movement into more playful styles of design.

Frank Lloyd Wright, he comments, contrary to his reputation as an autocrat, had a playful nature which expressed itself in his work. Mr. Gill, for example, likes the Guggenheim Museum, although it does not respect the street line or its neighboring buildings. Wright, he says, meant the Museum to be sited in Central Park, free-standing and surrounded by greenery. He compares the Guggenheim to the new Beauborg in Paris, which he "wants to be good. It promises to be playful." (Mr. Gill

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New York Architectural Students Assist Urban Homesteaders in the South Bronx



Student Michael Bertone and Architect John Sabatino.



Washington Avenue, South Bronx project at the start of rehabilitation.

Photos by Joel Gershkon

Twenty-two architectural students from New York Institute of Technology and Pratt Institute have volunteered to work with the Planning and Design Unit (PDU) of the People's Development Corporation (PDC) in the Melrose-Morrisania area of the South Bronx. The students are designing gut rehabilitation housing for urban homesteaders and are also helping to plan the nine-block area under PDC's jurisdiction.

Community people interested in architecture and construction related careers, and architectural students form the staff of the Planning and Design Unit. Architect John Sabatino works with the student volunteers, the staff, and urban homesteaders. Danny Soto who has been involved in PDC and PDU since their incep-

tions in '78, is the administrator for the unit.

This program of urban involvement provides the architectural students with many opportunities. They work on real projects, are involved in every phase necessary to produce finished buildings, and receive credits toward their architectural degrees. In addition, the students get experience in the renovation and rehabilitation field which will be the salvation of many neighborhoods and communities in our cities.

PDU projects under construction include the gut rehabilitations of 494 East 167 Street, 1246-48 Washington Avenue, and 1217 Washington Avenue. These apartment buildings are HUD 312 Demonstration Projects. 1182-84 Washington Avenue is part of

the New York City Community Development program and is also under construction. The Planning and Design Unit is also administering the contract for a creative playlot on Washington Avenue.

By working on these projects the students learn to understand the needs and desires of those who are in the community. In many instances the students work with individual homesteaders to provide them with unique apartments which respond specifically to their needs. Both the students and the community people benefit from this interaction. The students experience an architect/client relationship first-hand and the urban homesteaders learn of the design process and of architecture. □

Joel Gershkon

Brendan Gill Talks....

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cautions that he hasn't seen the Beauborg yet, and that we must actually see buildings to understand and judge them. (Photographs falsify.) He is skeptical, though, about the Beauborg's intrusion into the fabric of Paris and feels that it, like the Guggenheim, might work better set against a natural background.

The siting of these two buildings raises the issue of urban coherence, another quality which Mr. Gill values highly. The brownstone, he says, traditionally gave coherence to the confusion of Manhattan streets and neighborhoods. He believes that we need more preservation efforts such as the Gramercy Park Landmark District to "prevent the further rape of neighborhoods in the city. Manhattan has

already been overbuilt. We need to conserve what we have."

Asked about several of the new towers under construction in midtown, he says that they "seem old-fashioned," rising directly from the street without setbacks. They represent a reaction to the experiments with plazas of the 'sixties, "which were largely an unsuccessful experience. We've learned." He thinks, though, that the return to large buildings fronting the street, while preserving urban continuity, may be an "excuse for developers to squeeze the last square foot" from a property. Among the new towers, he feels that the Palace Hotel, being built behind the Villard Houses, may work the best, simply because, as a standard modern slab, it will serve as an unobtrusive

backdrop to the landmark building.

Mr. Gill foresees exciting preservation possibilities in the city. Lower Manhattan, for example, could become "an intellectual's Disneyland," a tour through the city's history from Castle Clinton, to the U.S. Custom House, perhaps renovated as a home for the Museum of the American Indian, to the developing South Street Seaport. He believes that "most of the work of architects in the next thirty years in New York will be reweaving the fabric of the city." And he welcomes his "fellow architects" to the challenges and pleasures of this work. □

Bill Stein

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*In answer to the question:
the Chicago World's Fair
brought a resurgence in
eclectic architecture; what
will be the effect of the King
Tut exhibit on speculative
housing in Staten Island?*

