

OCULUS 6/80

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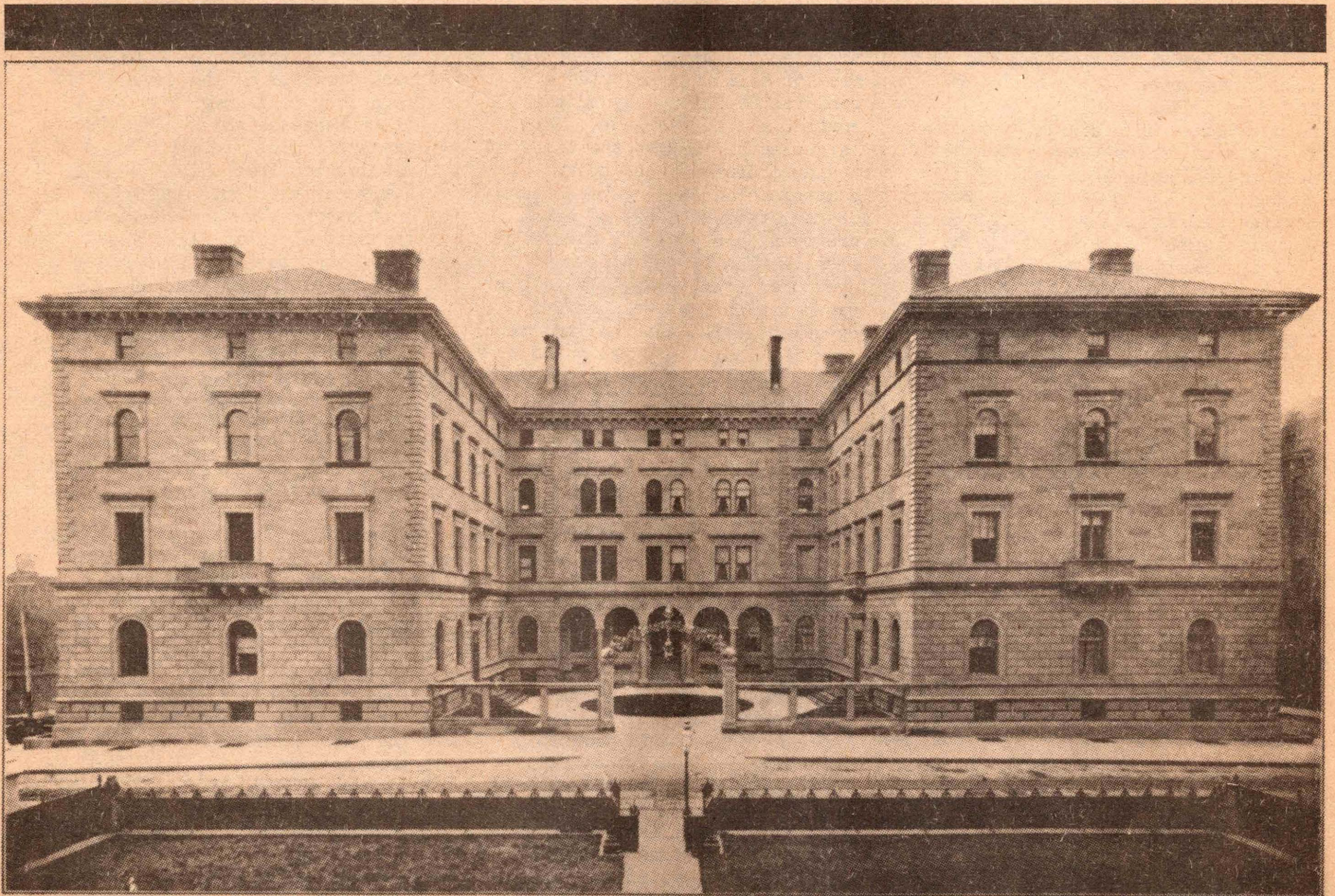
Photograph c.1884.
The Lady Chapel of St.
St. Patricks' now covers
where the photographer stood.

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June 1980

New York Chapter/
The American Institute of Architects
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On Meaning in Architecture

The current series of programs sponsored by individual committees of the chapter are broadly concerned with the deepest aspects of the design considerations - with that final question we must ask about our buildings - what do they really mean? This is a kind of summary question and includes of course the experiential criteria of function and use, but it is especially concerned with the total response of the beholder to the form and visual character of the building. What are the associations and connotations which are triggered in the mind of the viewer when he sees the building in question? What sense of purpose does he read behind the expressive forms of the architecture? As he looks at the building, what would he conceive as the goals and purposes of the designer? What are the buildings of our time which are loved and what are the ones that are hated and why?

Much of the impact, the conveyed meaning of buildings seems to be the result of circumstances beyond the control of the immediate designer. We commonly believe our projects to be caught up in a series of circumstantial events which have at least as much impact on meaning as do our own formative powers as designers. The very bulk of construction conveys meaning, and is the most direct embodiment of power. Architects usually think of the size of buildings as being a societal decision, beyond the control of the designer. In a larger sense though, the stuff of zoning ordinances and bulk controls, the developers' concept of mix, the whole set of urban programs, are actually the distillation of the utopian dreams of architects. It is our urban visions, as well as our detailed design acts on individual buildings which gradually build up the meaning of our cities.

On the precise level of formal design, the profession is slowly becoming aware of both the richness and importance of architectural language. Gradually our voices begin to reshape the words which architects before us used - a learning which helps us to understand what they were saying, as well as teaching us how to speak more fluently in our own language. Curiously, this reacquaintance with history has not come about primarily through a literary or academic movement, but largely through the daily familiarization with the work of our ancestor architects which has occurred in the recycling movement. Perhaps the most astonishing lesson which the profession has learned from the whole current effort at reuse of older structures is the ease with which the entire function of a building can be changed. This discovery, that railway stations can so casually be turned into restaurants, that

These observations by chapter president William Conklin concern the series of special chapter meetings organized by individual committees.

manufacturing buildings can be turned into living lofts, that warehouses make great shopping centers, has demonstrated to an astonished profession, both the actual independence of form and function, and the overriding importance of the expressive face and form of the building.

But it is not only this casual glance backward which is causing the profession to reexamine its work, it is also a considerably less firm fix on the future. It is a long road away from the Ville Radieuse which so motivated the profession, to the realization that utopia is not everybody's dream. And the environmental consequences for the natural world of advanced technology have become a major concern to the nation and to thoughtful people throughout the world. Perhaps yet to come is a deep sensitivity to advanced technology's impact on our building forms and on the meaning which these buildings then convey, and on their urbanistic role in city life. In short, the future is not what it used to be.

With these two reevaluations, we begin to see now that building forms convey ideas and have consequences whether or not the meaning conveyed coincides with the conscious intentionality of the designer, or of the client, or indeed of the articulate edge of the culture. This new awareness of the expressive range of architecture must now be seen as a prelude to a more conscious use of style as idea and of form as meaning. Our committee meetings begin this self-analysis and provoke questions, but answers can only come from us as individual designers, determined to develop an architecture of more directed significance, an architecture unconcerned with time either future or past, but deeply concerned with meaning.

Design for Health

On March 25, an overflow crowd of over one hundred persons attended the second in the Chapter's series of panel discussions on various issues of architectural practice. This discussion, hosted by the Chapter's Health Facilities Committee, dealt with the question: "Is Functionalism an Adequate Basis for Hospital Design?". It was the first event happening at the new headquarters, in the main floor meeting rooms.

A sub-committee of the Health Facilities Committee consisting of Norman Rosenfeld, Saul Ellenbogen and Henry Horowitz arranged for

the appearance of Eberhard Zeidler, of the Zeidler Partnership, Richard Sonder, of Russo and Sonder, and Rita Conyers, of St. Vincent's Hospital, to appear as panelists. Norman Rosenfeld served as moderator.

Each panelist presented his views. Ms. Conyers described the difficulties facing an institution attempting to build in an historic district in the city, which did not address the question, but did point up the complexities facing all parties in such an undertaking. Mr. Zeidler, whose firm has designed many innovative health

facilities felt that medical functionalism was not the only basis for his hospital designs; he provided many slides of his work to support his view that the emotional content of architectural design was an important part of his projects. Finally, Mr. Sonder, a partner in a prominent firm whose specialty is medical facilities, supported by slides, illustrated his point of view that a piece of architecture (including health facilities) is a synthesis, and that it is impossible to separate "functionalism" and "esthetics".

A lively discussion ensued.



The panel: Norman Rosenfeld, moderator; Richard Sonder, Eberhard Zeidler, Rita Conyers. This was the first meeting at the Urban Center, the main floor at Villard.

Architecture for Export

The panel discussion so named held March 13 by the Overseas Practice Committee, Terrance Williams, chairman, who moderated, was a remarkable affair, and the announcement poster's admonition FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE was apt indeed. The quality of this discussion on the impact of American architecture and culture on Iran and the Third World will barely be suggested by the notes which follow here. A tape of the whole meeting is at the chapter office.

Tom Wolfe speaks in a pattern of impressions impossible to skim, but this listener particularly noted his point about how few countries other than the U.S. have a good feeling about being essentially middle class. Most countries have no middle class, a very small upper and a very large lower. In a country like Italy, if you are middle class you immediately act upper class (Italian hostelrys are either impossibly grand or else something plain, without even a picture - if you are not a nobleman, you shouldn't waste time on pictures). In the U.S. our innumerable motels have pretty good carpets, a picture, and a super bathroom. Lower class people in other parts of the world think it would be wonderful to live like our middle class, but the view of their leaders is that the U.S. is the great, technologically supreme power which can do anything.

How we are viewed was developed further by Jivan Tabibian: There is a certain kind of ambivalence, not in the receiving cultures, but in American culture transmitted abroad. Americans are very ambivalent about themselves, their wealth, their position; you feel you must call the doorman by his first name, which just doesn't seem right coming from the chairman of the GM Board. It is a lingering egalitarian notion. We seem to feel there is no point in

accumulating wealth unless one can ostentatiously display it, and yet there is a certain guilt while doing so because it implies selfish enjoyment, whereas everybody knows that work should be a kind of insurance for salvation. What is most nagging about this ambivalence is that other societies are not used to seeing authority waver - are not used to seeing people in power, people with the whip, hesitate or become confused. When Americans export their powers, these ambivalent signals are like cracks: the receivers think you are not sure of what you are telling them. The paradox is that the old, traditional cultures are highly complex and smooth running, with the many parts highly integrated, and the introduction of a new architecture can be fundamentally disruptive. Such a culture might be compared to a complex racing automobile in which the loss of a part can cripple the whole. The U.S., on the other hand, has a much lower performance level: we are tremendously productive, extremely wasteful and inefficient, but quite able to replace parts and keep going. We are for the most part less like a racing machine than a dependable Chevy.

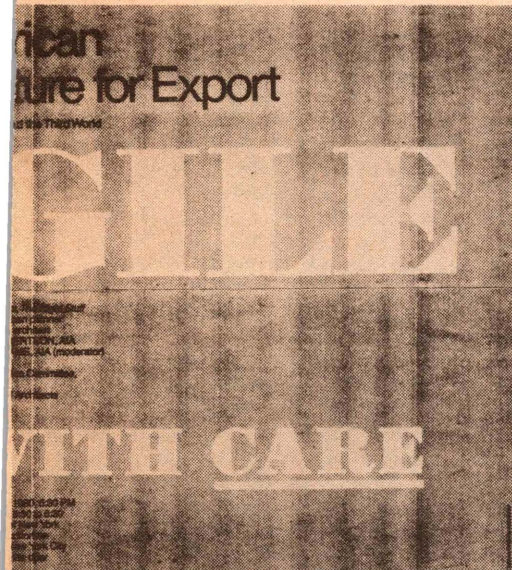
Nader Ardalan described human progress throughout history as being of two kinds: spiritual, sacred, cultural - and material, usually not mutually exclusive. But the only time man was at the center of life was here in this country in the '50's and '60's, when we went into a period of man in control of himself and the universe unparalleled in history. Third World people educated in the U.S. saw good in the skyscraper and in planning which separated functions - places of work and residence - which, installed abroad where most functions were closely interwoven, caused an incredible confusion of traffic jams. Teheran was like the Wild West: there was no possible way to develop an economic or administrative framework.



We shall have to look at the last 50 years as a kind of aberration in human history. Most societies in history attained a balance between non-material aims and material growth.

Jaque Robertson drew a lot of these thoughts together: The U.S. has not yet recognized that it is perceived as the great world empire, and it is not sure that it likes that role. Mostly our emissaries have gone abroad with all kinds of expectations and no training to the experience of foreign cultures. The export model we have been sending out is not working very well, and most of the world has a bad case of cultural indigestion. It is the major crisis that for the first time in history a world empire has gone out and has not been able to enforce its moral institutions with conviction, without negative feedback. We have enormous doubts, and it shows. We do not present the convincing institutional set-up that we presented in 1776. We are not sure of what it is that we want, who we are, and what we think. Americans brought many different images to Iran. The team I was with in Iran made recommendations which went totally against their expectations. We said tall

NEWS



buildings were inappropriate at a time when the government was giving tax incentives for buildings over 10 stories. We said don't build on certain pieces of land when the mayor said you should build on every piece of land. We said don't use steel and glass, which were expensive and scarce, at a time when another architect was recommending very high-rise steel and glass. This confused our clients quite a bit; there was an enormous amount of misunderstanding. We were not sure of the actual symbols of our culture, but we were very sure of its flexibility in responding to new situations, and if you were to ask what was our strongest export item, it was to respond in a way which was not pre-conditioned or understood beforehand either by ourselves or by our clients - and this does not work too well with the image of empire.

George Lewis

BRUNNER WINNER

The 1980 Arnold W. Brunner Award, \$10,000, for "a study in some special field of architectural investigation which will most effectively contribute to the practice, teaching or knowledge of the art and science of architecture" goes to John Hejduk, architect and dean of the Cooper Union School of Architecture.

Hejduk's proposal was to prepare for book publication the work he has done as a student, teacher and practitioner since 1947. In his words, he "had come to realize that the work is methodical, pedagogical and evolutionary, and in many ways conservative (that is, the conservation of an elemental and basic approach to architectural thought)... the intent of the book will be pedagogical."

Nancy Miao is chairman of the Brunner Committee, the other member of which are Samuel Brody, Percival Goodman, Charles Gwathmey, Ada Karmi-Melamede, Peter Kastl, Theodore Liebman, Arthur Rosenblatt, William Shopsin, Suzanne Stephens and Michael Wurmfeld.

The committee received 40 proposals, with a high level of merit.

ANNUAL MEETING: AWARDS

The Chapter's Annual Meeting, June 26 at 6:00 p.m., will be the first large event at our new headquarters in the Villard Houses. There will be awards, the change in chapter leadership, and a reception with refreshments.

This is a chance for members, old and - especially - new, to meet informally, and to celebrate our move to this extraordinary location.

The Chapter's 1980 awards were recommended by the Jury for the Medal of Honor and Awards of Merit, members of which were James Freed, Abraham Geller, Alexander Kouzmanoff, Arthur Rosenblatt, C. Ray Smith and Joseph Wasserman, with William Conklin chairman ex officio. The awards will be:

Richard Meier, the Medal of Honor;

Richard A. Kahan, the Award of Merit;

Kent Barwick, Honorary Member;

Stephen B. Jacobs, the Pioneer in Housing Award in memory of Andrew J. Thomas;

The Municipal Art Society, a Special Citation for its publication The Livable City and for creating The Urban Center.

Following which John Belle will succeed William J. Conklin as chapter president; he will be the latest in the long line of distinguished presidents which began with Richard Morris Hunt in 1867.

NEWS

DUES

At the chapter meeting May 15 a 20% increase in dues was approved unanimously, there apparently being no disagreement that the Chapter's budget was reaching a point below the level of reasonable austerity. The reduction in allocations for committee programs was particularly noted.

The new dues schedule, effective October 1, 1980, will be as follows:

Individual member: 1st year, \$30; 2nd, \$60; 3rd, \$99.60.

Associates and Professional Affiliates: 1st year through 5th year, \$36; \$72 thereafter.

Unassigned members, \$36.

Sustaining Member (firm)
dues will be calculated at \$25 per architectural personnel.

URBAN DESIGN GROUP

City Planning Commission chairman Herbert Sturz's announcement that the Urban Design Group, a section strongly supported by the Chapter since its inception, was being dissolved led to a meeting with him on April 2 attended by William Conklin, John Belle, Jaquelin Robertson and George Lewis. The importance of continuing a strong, nationally respected urban design entity was stressed and Mr. Sturz explained that he was consolidating three formerly separate and sometimes competing sections involved with urban design: the Urban Design Group itself, the Manhattan office of the Planning Department, and the Office of Midtown Planning, the head of which, Kenneth Halpern, will be director of the new entity. The urban design capabilities of all five borough offices will be strengthened.

The Executive Committee at its April 8 meeting forwarded the following resolution to Chairman Sturz:

"The Executive Committee of the New York Chapter/AIA congratulates the City Planning Commission and Chairman Sturz on the appointment of Max Bond as a new commissioner, and also offers any appropriate assistance in the restructuring of urban design within the Department and the Commission, with a view toward creating a more effective administration of urban design concerns."

BATTERY PARK CITY

The Chapter testified at the Board of Estimate hearing January 9 in favor of plans developed by Alexander Cooper Associates. There had been a well-attended open chapter meeting on December 20, and a special committee, Joseph Wasserman, chairman, developed the testimony. It commended the proposed street pattern, "which, as far as possible, seeks to effect a seamless tie to the adjacent city fabric...and which takes maximum advantage of the potential waterside vistas," and it cited "a potential for building form and character which could be extremely satisfactory as a residential and working environment."

Recognizing that further, more detailed planning remained to be done, the committee's paper called attention to the lack of a "model" for the typical residential block, "one which would successfully combine the plan requirements of an exceedingly dense building form, its necessarily great off-street parking requirements, and a desirable level of amenity for the private open spaces within the residential block envelope." Also pointed out were the lack of an off-street parking plan, adequate provision for active recreation spaces, and the lack of an overall strategy for maximum energy conservation and utilization of energy sources.

The paper concluded: "We regard Battery Park City's realization as one of the most significant developments proposed for our city. We therefore urge consideration of the points raised in our review, and we seek further opportunities to consult with the UDC, the City, and its consultants as the plan is further developed."

LOCAL LAW 10
INSPECTION OF EXTERIOR WALLS

New York City has recently passed a new law known as Local Law No. 10 for the periodic inspection of walls of all buildings greater than six stories. The law was the result of a recent death and the reporting of building deterioration which has resulted in falling cornices, parapets and sills endangering the citizenry of New York.

The law is patented after requirements for similar examinations established in the City of Chicago. Its key elements require the complete physical inspection of all exterior walls. The inspections are to be performed within two years after passage of the law on February 1, 1980 with follow-up inspections conducted every five years thereafter. The Chapter and the engineering societies have joined with members of the real estate community to make recommendations to the Building Commissioner on the interpretation and administration of the law.

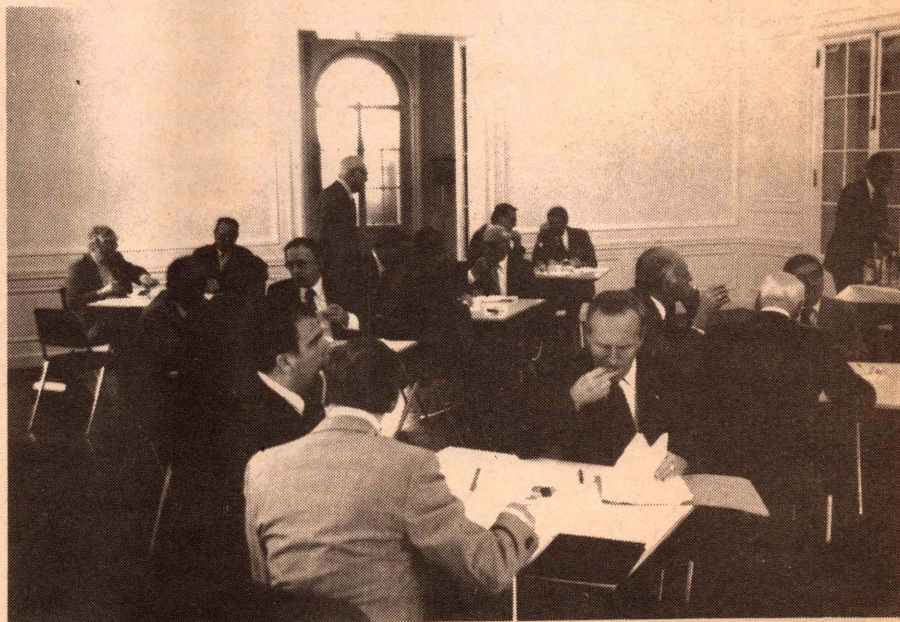
Of particular concern is the requirement for the submission of a written report "certifying" the results of the examination and setting forth a statement concerning the watertightness of the exterior surfaces. Such a statement by the professional might establish liabilities and could void insurance coverages which do not provide for warranties. It is believed that this result is beyond the purpose of the law and is not a requirement of the Chicago Code where only a report of the examination and recommended remedial action meet the legal requirements.

It is felt that modifications in the New York law would be necessary to allow architects and engineers in the City to perform their services in a professional manner without increasing their inherent liabilities. Such recommendations are to be submitted to the Commissioner. It is recommended that extreme caution should be exercised until the conditions of the examination and its legal implications are clarified.

Martin Raab, a member of the Chapter's Executive Committee, is Chairman of our City Agencies Committee.

NEW YORK AIA CONVENTION 1985

Scheduled several years ago for 1982, and with serious planning about to begin, something happened on the way: the design of the new Convention Center with its great public space unveiled, and like a great flash of light, it was clear that a New York AIA convention simply had to be in it. It will be, in the week leading to July 4 in 1985. This took some doing on the part of AIA V.P. Anna Halpin and Director Bill Rose, as well as Frank Brown of the AIA staff - it is not easy to shift commitments of this kind - but it was done. It should be the greatest, most festive gathering of architects in history.



Luncheon at the Urban Center: The Chapter's turn to host the Council of Presidents (of construction industry organizations). John J. Collins, chairman, right foreground.

ON VICTOR GRUEN

When the news of Victor Gruen's passing came one cold grey day in February, it caused me to reflect for a few moments on the contributions of this unique architect and planner and long time member of our Chapter. Throughout a career spanning 30 years or so, he was a passionate advocate of humanism in planning and design. Through the regional shopping centers of the 50's he attempted to bring to America's exploding suburban society a contemporary version of the traditional marketplace with its bustling excitement of urban life - mixing up the act of shopping with art shows, concerts, promenading and rubbing shoulders in a very old fashioned but untypical way for these new suburbanites. (Gruen's own preferences in painting and music reflected this enjoyment of living; one of his favorite paintings was Brueghal's "The Marketplace".)

A rare mix of visionary and pragmatist, his design skills had great appeal to the department store owners. And yet, he was constantly attempting to stretch the successful formula of the shopping center an extra dimension to make it a modern counterpart to the traditional pre-auto age town

center. The first big opportunity came in 1954 at Fort Worth, Texas. (It is one of the ironies of our time that Gruen, an Old World humanistic planner, should have his first chance to demonstrate his city-shaping philosophy in a city and state not particularly sensitized to its roots!) His plan demonstrated again that mix of vision and realism that seemed to be uniquely his trade-mark: buildings grouped around people-dominated spaces designed for work, living and play, and all serviced by the lifelines of that era, the superhighway system.

He didn't particularly like the superhighway as a transportation system (he was one of the world's worst drivers!), but he recognized that it was a national phenomenon that had to be dealt with and not ignored as many more utopian planners chose to do. Decades before the Long Island Expressway had exclusive bus lanes, or Disneyworld had its monorail system, there were express bus and mini-bus systems, jitneys, people-movers and monorails as components of the highways in Gruen plans for center cities.

Although not a particularly political man, he could be a master

of persuasion with business and civic leaders, winning their confidence by demonstrating solutions to their problems of growth and transportation, and, at the same time, devising a plan that would light up the everyday life of the ordinary citizen.

Rather than lecturing his clients on the natural superiority of designers (not at all his point of view), he would show them how similar problems had been tackled elsewhere. His refreshing sense of history was in marked contrast to our profession's more common narcissism - a characteristic which seems ever more rampant today than during his career!

Throughout his life Victor Gruen attempted to achieve two very important goals, to deflate design as an elitist activity and to bring good design into the lives of everyone through the planning of cities and communities that emphasized people and not technology or hardware. It seems that in the last two decades of this century, these two goals are going to be more important than ever to our profession as we continue to exert influence and leadership in seeking the solutions that will shape our society.

NOTES

●Seven chapter members were elected to Fellowship by the national AIA Jury of Fellows, meeting in February. They are Paul Damaz, David L. Ginsberg, William A. Hall, Tician Papachristou, Walter A. Rutes, Diane Serber and Pershing Wong. They will be inducted June 2 at the AIA convention in Cincinnati.

●The Alliance of Women in Architecture is researching and organizing a walking tour of women's architectural work. It is seeking information about women and their work for the tour, which is planned for this spring: write to the AWA at P.O. Box 5136, FDR Station, New York, NY 10022. Through events like this one the AWA is seeking to bring the public to a greater awareness of the achievements of women in architecture and related professions.

●The Architectural Society of the People's Republic of China is sponsoring an exhibit of American-made building products and an exchange of technical information to take place in Peking and other major cities in the fall of 1980. Those interested in providing samples or technical information or recommending experts should contact the Abacus Group of America, Inc., 154 West 57 Street, New York 10019, telephone 586-1000, attention Arlyne LeShack.

●A second meeting with Charles Smith, director of construction, has been held. Martin Raab, Frank Munzer and George Lewis, together with representatives of the Consulting Engineers, discussed with Mr. Smith, Second Deputy Comptroller Walter Prawzinsky and others, the possibility of audits of architects' and engineers' actual costs in doing City work.

●The Minority Scholarship Committee, John Hagmann, chairman, has allocated \$8,500 in financial assistance to 27 students in local architectural schools. This program was a pioneering effort when the Chapter began it in the 1950's.

●I. M. Pei and James Marston Fitch received honorary degrees at the recent Columbia commencement.

●Department of Buildings regulations now require that all plans submitted for review be microfilmed for permanent retention in the Department's files. A briefing on the practical consequences will be provided on June 4, 2:00-5:00 p.m.; and June 18, 6:00-9:00 p.m. at the 55th floor conference facility, One World Trade Center. Refreshments will be served.

●An imaginative architectural solution to the problem of creating attractive low-rise housing for moderate income families is being sought by the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

A public Request for Proposals from development teams will be issued within the next few months for rehabilitation and new construction on several sites along Columbia Street in downtown Brooklyn, an old waterfront community bounded by the historic areas of Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill. The rehabilitation request concerns a blockfront of three-story 19th century brick buildings with storefronts. On the new construction sites, two- and three-family row housing will be preferred.

For more information contact Martha Gershun at HPD Room 9090, 100 Gold Street, New York, 10038, 566- 6821.

●Edgar Tafel, author of Apprentice to Genius, Years with Frank Lloyd Wright, full of deep insight and indulgent anecdotes, has lectured on the master close to 100 times all over the country and the world, mostly to laymen - a true service to the profession, as articles in many local newspapers will attest.

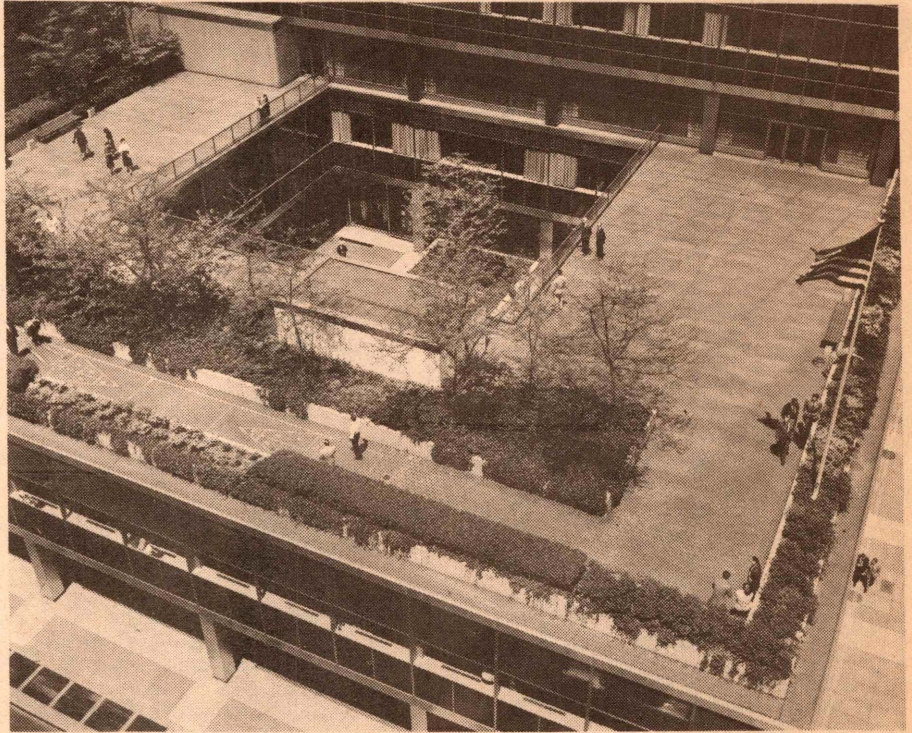
●Construction Permit Handbook, a new guide to the NYC construction approval process, is available from the City Record, 2223 Municipal Building, NYC 10007, for \$5.00 (\$6.00 by mail).

●The Board of Education of New York City is seeking a placement for each of two vocational High School students. These students are interested in architecture and are eager to volunteer work after school. They have been highly recommended by their teachers and have been selected to participate in a new program called Occupational Education for the Talented and Gifted. For information contact Carol Wernick at 596-4105.

●Member Seymour Jarmul has written The Architects' Guide to Energy Conservation, Realistic Energy Planning for Buildings, McGraw-Hill \$18.50.

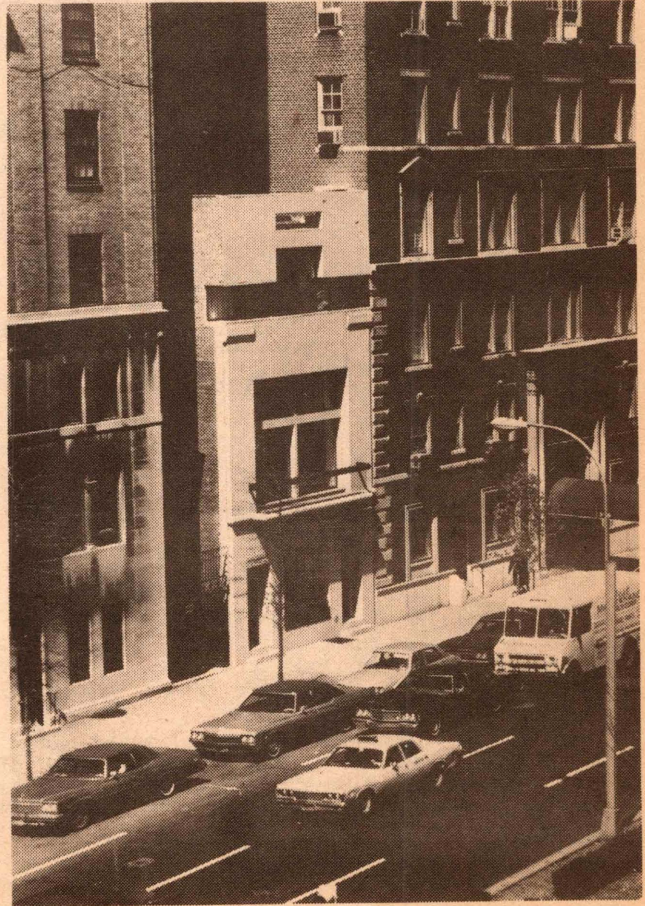
●The 1976 Brunner Scholarship grant to Jean Ferriss Leich gave necessary impetus to her book on the work of her father, Architectural Visions: The Drawings of Hugh Ferriss, just published by The Whitney Library of Design. She organized it into two sections, his visionary concepts of future cities and skyscraper structures, and his drawings of great buildings, some as they were being conceived.

Lever
House



Thomas H. Murtagh

New York
Townhouse



Ed Stoecklin

NEW YORKERS HONORED
AT AIA CONVENTION

Many New Yorkers and chapter members will be honored at the 1980 AIA Convention in Cincinnati in June.

Edward Larrabee Barnes Associates has won the 1980 Architectural Firm Award.

The 25-Year Award: SOM's Lever House.

A 1980 Honor Award to Robert A. M. Stern & John Haggman for a New York townhouse.

The Kemper Award for service to the Institute and profession to Herbert Epstein of the Brooklyn Chapter.

AIA Medals will be awarded to:

M. Paul Friedberg for introducing "a new dimension of life for different ages and social groups in the urban environment."

Cyril M. Harris for "the ingenuity and dedication of a unique personality and teacher... to the development of sound within the human environment and architectural space."

The Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, cited for "effectively recording architectural achievements...greatly promoting understanding and public concern for architecture."

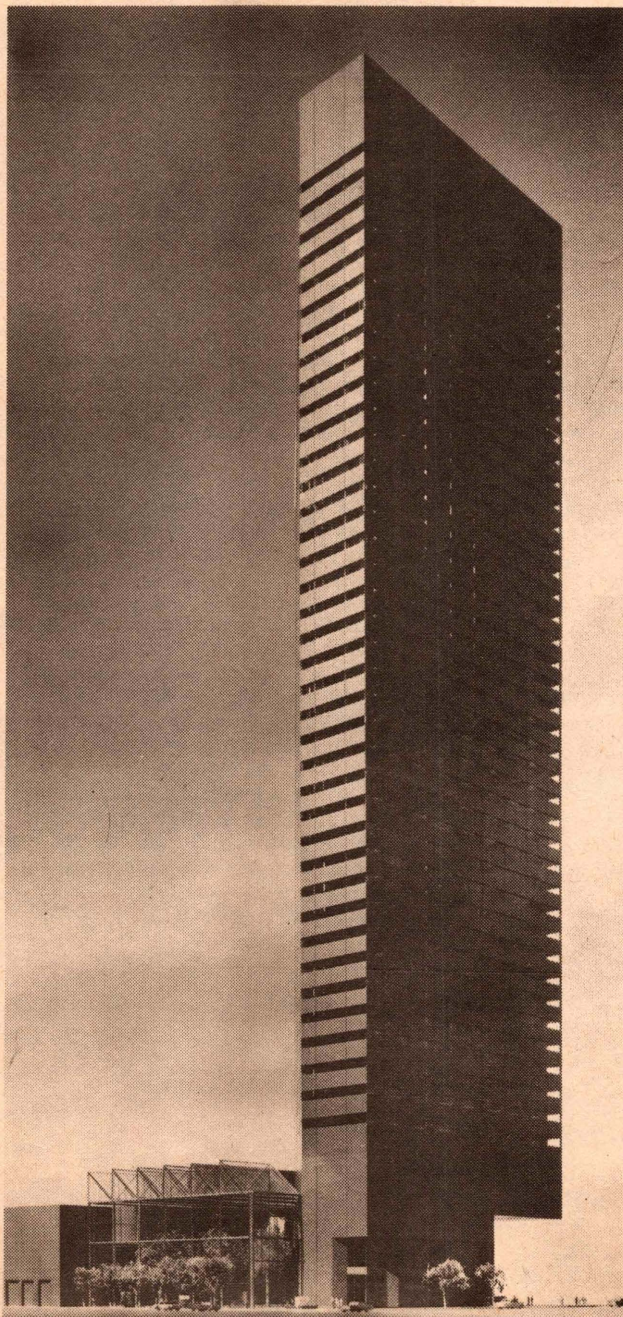
P/A Awards Program for illustrating "the design trends and concerns of the profession over the past 20 years."

Sol LeWitt, whose sculptures and wall drawings have "broadened the horizons of architectural space conceptions."

New Honorary Members are:

Ise Gropius, who has "introduced hundreds of persons to a knowledge and love of architecture."

Mario Salvadori, whose series of books on architectural structures "has revolutionized the approach of teaching structure to architects and school children."



IBM Building
Edward Larrabee Barnes
Associates

Louis Checkman

The Urban Center

Bill Shopsin, Historic Preservation Consultant to the Archdiocese of New York and a veteran of the long campaign to preserve the Villard Houses, has provided this capsule history of The Urban Center and our new Headquarters at 457 Madison Avenue.

OUR HEADQUARTERS: A HISTORY

Henry Villard, journalist and railroad financier, purchased the site from the Catholic Archdiocese in April 1881 and commissioned McKim, Mead and White to design six houses surrounding a courtyard. It was his original intention to occupy the largest of the houses, 451 Madison on the south side, and sell off the other five. Construction began in May of 1882, and Villard moved into his partially finished house in December 1883. Following a financial scandal involving Villard's management of the Northern Pacific Railroad, he was besieged by angry stockholders. Haunted by the publicity, the family fled the house in the Spring of 1884, never to return again.

Villard's house, as well as the unfinished portions of the complex, were sold to friends and business associates and completed by 1886. Several of the houses in the northern portion were owned and lived in by members of the Fahnstock family until the post second world war period. The wing in which the Urban Center is now located was acquired by Random House Publishers in 1946, which remained in the houses until 1969.

457 Madison Avenue as we see it

today is actually the result of the combining of two of McKim, Mead and White's original six townhouses. William Fahnstock hired architect Charles Platt in 1922 to combine his house (at 22 East 51st Street) and his late father H.C. Fahnstock's house (457 Madison) into one large residence.

The remodeling by Charles Platt in 1922-23 was actually far more extensive than the current one by Jim Polshek and Paul Bayard. Masonry bearing walls and chimneys were removed and replaced with a considerable amount of new steel framing. In the process all of the traces of McKim, Mead and White's Renaissance-inspired Fin de Siecle decor was eliminated.

Platt inserted within the old shell a new and restrained elegance of academically correct French Louis XVI, salons with boiserie, parquet, and marble fireplace mantels with carved trumeaus. To achieve the desired interior effect while still retaining the original brownstone exterior, Platt inserted pairs of French doors on the interior which conceal the large double hung windows and provide a double glazed acoustic insulation as well as authentic

quality to the French decor.

The William Fahnstock townhouse was typical of the elaborate formal households of New York's wealthy elite of the pre-depression era. The basement story contained service and kitchen areas; the main floor, a foyer, a reception room, a drawing room (southwest corner), a dining room (northwest corner) and a serving pantry. The second floor the library, study, and principal master bedrooms; the third floor the children's and guests' rooms; the fourth floor the maids room's (ten); the fifth floor (attic story) the men servants room's (six). To offset the nuisance of living on six floors, a service lift and a separate elevator for the family and guests were provided.

The AIA's new headquarter is located on the Fahnstocks' former second story, now rechristened the third floor. The oak panelled former library is now our conference room; the small study is George Lewis' office, with a balcony on Madison Avenue whence gathered throngs may be addressed; Mr. Fahnstock's former bedroom is occupied by our administrative staff, and his dressing room and wardrobe have

Late 1950's, Ayn Rand at Random House, in what was the Fahnestock Library, now the Chapter's meeting room. Photograph from At Random, The Reminiscences of Bennett Cerf, Random House, New York

become the documents area.

The Municipal Art Society's quarters across the hall are in Mrs. Fahnestock's former bedroom and dressing room suite (One might conclude that historic preservation makes friendly bedfellows.) The MAS has further space two floors up.

The Urban Center, including our new headquarters, has aroused great interest in the background of the Villard Houses and their original occupants. The complex and fascinating story of these Landmark Houses will soon be in print under the aegis of the Municipal Art Society and Viking Press. An exhibition is being developed with the assistance of an NEA Grant and will be installed in the main (second) floor meeting rooms and entrance foyer. If all goes as scheduled, these events will coincide with the opening festivities for the Palace Hotel in October 1980. Tours of the restored portions of the Villard Houses will be arranged during the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Annual Meeting in New York, October 8-12, 1980



Because The Municipal Art Society made possible the Chapter's move to the north wing of the Villard Houses, along with, in addition to MAS, The Architectural League and The Parks Council, we asked Laurie Beckelman, Deputy Director of MAS, to contribute this article.

THE URBAN CENTER: HOW IT CAME ABOUT

In recent years there has been an increased interest by the general public to play a more active role in the future of our urban areas. This awareness and this desire to make an impact have led to the proliferation of new laws and the involvement of large segments of the community in the interpretation, promotion, and enforcement of these laws. This increased participation has also created a need for greater understanding of the issues which directly relate to the built environment, especially the processes that concern architecture, urban design, historic preservation, and community revitalization.

The Municipal Art Society has, for many years, considered buying a property where likeminded organizations could set up their headquarters as well as expand their programs to reach a wider audience. Through a long and complicated negotiation process the Municipal Art Society has subleased, for 27 years, the north wing of the historic Villard Houses from Harry Helmsley, the Palace Hotel developer who is incorporating the landmark Villard Houses into the Hotel. A unique financial package was created to suit the non-profit organizations as well as made the Urban Center a reality. In the six-floor north wing, two floors are rented to four non-profit tenants at rentals approximately half the market value. The parlor floor, to be referred to as the Urban Center, will be devoted to programs focusing on the built environment. The rooms will accommodate meetings, exhibitions, lectures, conferences, and other public events. The Municipal Art Society invited the American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter, The Architectural League and The Parks Council to share the costs and strengthen the

programming which will take place on the parlor floor. The non-profit organizations will use approximately 8,000 sq.ft. for their office space, and 4,000 sq.ft. for the public meeting rooms which are located on the parlor floor. The 11,000 remaining sq.ft. will be used for commercial office/retail space which will generate an income for the building. James Stewart Polshek and Associates were the architects for the project. In addition to creating an Urban Center, the marriage of non-profit interests with a commercial venture will result in a financially self-supporting building.

The preliminary stages of the project needed a highly sophisticated strategy to encourage the private and public philanthropic community to support this new endeavor. CBS Foundation was the first corporation to take the lead contributing a very generous grant towards the Urban Center. This vote of confidence made it easier for other donors to contribute to this project. To date we have received generous support from both corporations and foundations: CBS Foundation, Mobil Foundation, Inc., Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc., New York Telephone, Capital Cities Corporation, the Vincent Astor Foundation, Booth Ferris Foundation, Lila Acheson Wallace, Bodman Foundation, Charles E. Culpeper Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Ittleson Foundation, Achelis Foundation, Doris Freedman Philanthropic Fund (Jewish Communal Fund), Barker Welfare Fund, Charles Ulrick & Josephine Bay Foundation, and The Joe & Emily Lowe Foundation. We also were very fortunate to receive substantial support from public agencies such as the New York State Council on the Arts and especially a National Endowment for the Arts Challenge Grant for \$300,000.

The main objective of establishing the Urban Center continues to be to improve the quality of life in New York. This central facility will concentrate on the city's private and public sectors' resources in the fields of architecture, urban design, planning, historic preservation, and community revitalization. It will also be a neutral setting for discussion of city-wide land use issues on a rational basis by government officials, design professionals, developers, Community Planning Boards, and the general public. There will be unlimited opportunity to expand all of our services while making them more accessible to our respective audiences.

By the summer of 1980 we plan to be functioning with a full program of events. The Urban Center will provide an ideal place for essential communication that is needed to enhance the built environment.

Another of the special programs organized by committees "Join the Cultural Revelation" was sponsored on April 24 by the Committee on Educational, Cultural and Recreational Facilities, Walter Levi, chairman and Gillet Lefferts in charge of the program. Panelists (at the right) were Harold Proshansky, Donald Elliott, Alan Green, moderator, August Hecksher and Richard T. Anderson.



Elizabeth Coit and her sister,
Mrs. Hawley; Mr. & Mrs. Richard
Snibbe



CHAPTER WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

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On the balcony: staff members Carol Jones, Cathanne Piesla, Angel Betancourt, George Lewis

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