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Better Design in Housing Developments: The Architect's Role

by LOUIS G. MELTZER

President, Suburban Maryland Builders Association

In keeping with the general theme for the year: "Environment Through Design," the editors of PVA have asked L. G. Meltzer to give the home builder's view. Mr. Meltzer, also a director of the Metropolitan Washington Home Builders Association, speaks from wide home building experience. His firm, L. G. Meltzer & Associates, since 1952 has constructed over 2000 dwelling units in the Washington Metropolitan area.

The achievement of good design in housing developments is a task that calls for good judgement in the balancing of all the factors that make the final product attractive, livable, and salable. If an architect wants to develop this good judgement, he must visit many subdivisions, talk to the real estate salesmen, discuss job problems with the construction superintendent, and mingle with mortgage bankers. He must be aware of new products and new construction techniques, and should be thoroughly familiar with the local building codes and the F.H.A. Manual.

In his consultations with the builder client, the architect must blend his good judgement with that of the builder. Where a client is "difficult" the architect must insert in each job as much good design as he can, and by educating the client, bring him to the point where good design ideas are readily accepted. However, it behooves the architect to be humble in his daily tasks. Many successful builders have an instinctive feeling for good design, and some architects who have been practicing architecture all their lives, never achieve it. It is the job of the architect to join the practical ability of the businessman with his own creative imagination.

An ideal situation is one in which the architect is consulted from the moment the builder is considering the purchase of the land. Good design starts at this point. It is almost impossible to plan a good subdivision on a flat site that has no trees. The architect must also participate in the engineering and site planning, as the most attractive house loses its appeal when not placed properly on an ap-

propriate lot.

Next comes the planning of the actual house types, and here the architect must remember that the final product is to be sold to a person he has never met, and whose desires must be pleased without the benefit of previous consultation. It is now that the training mentioned above pays off. An architect cannot afford to be "typed" as a modern or "traditional" architect. He must be able to work in all mediums. The architect who insists on doing things his way or not at all can do his client a grave disservice. Within the limits of even the most limited selling price established for a subdivision, there is room for the basic elements of good design, good color planning, and good site work.

More credit should be given to architects who design pleasing communities. They are just as important as those who design the monuments that are given so much publicity in the architectural magazines. The F.H.A. should be approached by the architectural associations and persuaded to allow more realistic architect fees, so as to encourage the employment of competent men. Architects who do subdivision work should be accorded as much publicity and prestige in the official publications and trade magazines as those who do office buildings, public works, and cathedrals.

In short, all those who endeavor to give "Better Environment Thru Design" must be made to feel that their efforts are worthwhile and are recognized. This will help to attract the best talents to the task of giving to our citizens attractive communities within the reach of their incomes.

Thomas H. Locraft
F.A.I.A.

The architectural fraternity mourns the untimely passing of one of its most respected members, Thomas H. Locraft, F.A.I.A. The loss is especially felt by Potomac Valley Chapter architects, many of whom studied under Dr. Locraft during his many years as head of the Department of Architecture at Catholic University in Washington, D. C.

Dr. Locraft, who was fifty-five, had been architecture chairman at the University since 1949 and a faculty member since 1931, the year he received his doctorate. After undergraduate training at the University he studied under scholarships at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in Paris.

The diversity of styles in Mr. Locraft's work reflected his belief that an architect's designs should be many-faceted. Evidence of his contemporary design is shown in the new Conaty Hall at Catholic University and the Washington Permanent Building Association and St. Luke's Catholic Church. He was cited in May by the Washington Board of Trade for the two latter buildings. Many other buildings in the area stand as tributes to his fine architectural ability.

"Buildings are for people; they are not monuments," was a favorite saying of his in and out of the class room.

Long associated with Frederick V. Murphy, who died last year, Mr. Locraft was the senior partner of Thomas Locraft and Associates. He was active in civic affairs, serving currently on the Commissioners' Planning Council, consultants on the city's planning problems. He was also secretary of the District Board of Examiners and Registrars of Architects.

A fellow of the American Institute of Architects, he had served on its national awards, fellowship and allied arts committees and once directed the local A.I.A. chapter.

His memory will be perpetuated at Catholic University with the Thomas H. Locraft architectural scholarship to which donations may be made by his many friends and admirers.

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NEXT REGULAR MEETING

12 Noon, October 7, 1959

Brook Farm Restaurant

7101 Brookville Rd., Chevy Chase, Md.

November Meeting—November 4, 1959

October Program

At our October luncheon, Mr. Ronald Senseman will show a film which is called "A Plan for Learning," put out by the United States Steel Company.

American Glass Exhibit
On Display in Washington

Every period of American glass manufacture is covered in "The Story of American Glass" which will be on view at the National Housing Center from October 1 through October 22, 1959.

Part of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, the exhibit which has already been well received in Europe as part of a U.S. Information Agency program, has now been reorganized by popular demand of American museums and other interested groups.

Jamestown glass; the work of Wistar, the real founder of the American glass industry in 1739; historical flasks of national heroes, famous events and well-known Americans—all are part of this famous exhibit.

The Housing Center is open seven days a week, Monday through Saturday, 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., and Sundays, 1:00 to 6:00 P.M. Admission is free.

New Firm Name

Cohen, Haft & Associates is the new name of the firm formerly known as Jack C. Cohen & Associates. The address remains the same, 7961 Eastern Ave., Silver Spring, Md., and if you stop by you'll still see the familiar faces of Jack Cohen, our Treasurer, and Len Haft, our Publications Committee chairman,

A Sense of Values

by M. BUONAROTTI

Much criticism has been expressed in the past decade about the many housing projects that have sprung up in the lovely rolling farmland that once typified Montgomery County. These shortcomings in the richest rural county in America grossly reflect our deficiency in developing a sense of values.

It is axiomatic to look to our public works for leadership in preserving natural beauty and providing aesthetic solutions for the arrangement of our environment, but instead we find our agencies wholly inadequate to the task.

Progress, unfortunately, is measured in the numbers of parking lots now engulfing Silver Spring and Bethesda, and not in the trees that can be preserved. How meaningful a few trees interspaced between the parking meters and a garden wall to surround the lot would be, and how oppressed we are by the every-day ugliness of our local scene. Money and effort must be expended to meet the challenge. Even a parking lot need not be ugly.

It is almost unbelievable to report that in our public schools no funds are budgeted towards landscaping. If a \$3,000,000.00 high school had the same landscape budget in proportion to an \$11,000.00 builder's house, that amount would be \$19,500.00. If our culture so strongly rejects beauty for its own sake, then it may be pointed out that landscaping can be considered an investment in terms of increasing value. It is too bad though that beauty is defined a frill and must be justified in economic terms, rather than as a necessity for the fulfillment of our democratic ideal. An understanding and savoring of what is beautiful is one of the primary goals of education, and that which distinguishes ours from a totalitarian culture.

Vandals Dictate School Design

The Prince Georges County (Md.) School Board has approved schematic drawings for a multi-story "windowless" school because, according to a school official, the county school system spends about \$20,000 a year replacing broken windows.

Designed by chapter member Ron Senseman and believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, the three-story building would be windowless on three sides, with sky domes bringing outside light into the classrooms.

The architect reports that there also will be some interior rooms with luminous ceilings and mechanical ventilation provided. The only windows will be in front of the school facing the street.

Could be that this design may also cut down on the academic mortality rate caused by "day dreaming" on those warm spring days.

Specifications Institute Schedule

The program for the 1959-1960 Construction Specifications Institute of the Washington-Metropolitan Chapter AIA has been announced by Program Chairman Frederick Tilp. All meetings will be held at the National Housing Center, 1625 L St., N.W., on Tuesdays at 7:30 P.M.

The schedule is as follows:

October 20—Glass, glazing, metal "store front" frames, caulking compounds.

November 24—Plumbing, heating and ventilation.

December 15—Associate Members night. The associate members give a brief description and "sales pitch" of products they represent.

January 19—Electrical work and illumination.

February 16—Paints, lacquers varnish, and painting.

March 15—Foreign and domestic exterior building stone.

April 19—Structural steel and steel joints.

May 17—General and special conditions.

June 21—General business meeting and election.

This schedule is printed for the information of architects, specification writers, engineers and builders. Clip it or mark your calendar for the meetings you would like to attend.

Church Architecture Conference

A joint conference of the Department of Church Building and Architecture of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America and the Church Architectural Guild of America will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 3-4-5, 1960, in the Leamington Hotel.

According to a preliminary "alert" announcement received by the editors of PVA, the conference is planned as one of a continuing annual series of efforts which bring together denominational leaders, ministers, lay people and church architects on a national level.

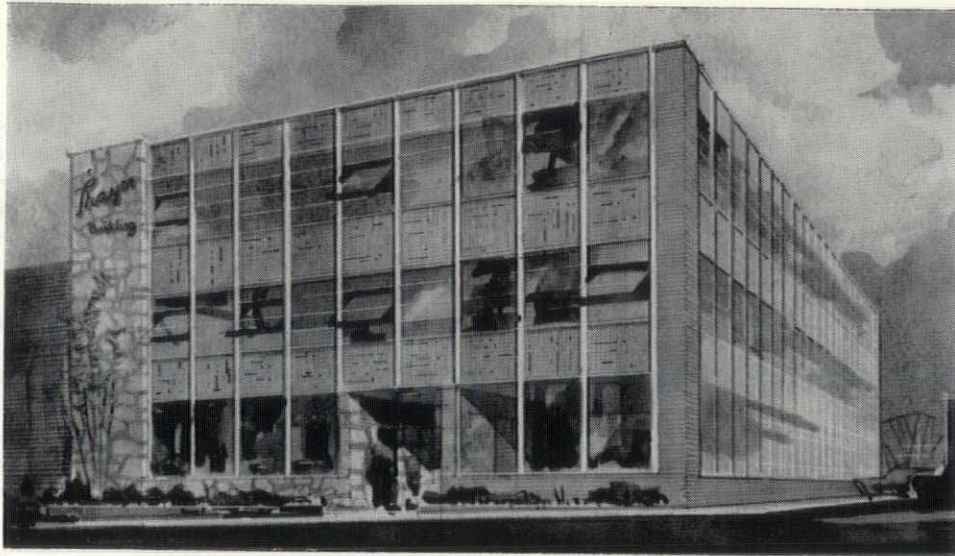
There will be competitive judging of photographs of church work submitted by architects throughout the country and exhibits of products relating to church building.

Objectives of the conference on Church Architecture are:

—To stimulate basic reasoning and thinking of ministers and lay people on the relationship of Architecture and planning for the needs of the local church program.

—To stimulate architects to create space that helps church members to worship, study, serve and play, meeting the needs of the soul, mind and body.

—To help ministers, lay people and architects to understand the need for the fine arts and beauty in church design. These include music, painting and sculpture.



Thayer Building, 912 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland
Thomen & Cromar, Architects

Secretary Cromar, Part Time Musket Toter, Active in Chapter Affairs

That determined-looking, crew-cut fellow you probably have seen scooting through the Silver Spring area in a fire-breathing Austin Healy is no week-end sports car racer, but a serious-minded, successful architect bent on his firm's business. He happens to be Theodore R. Cromar, Jr., our new Potomac Valley secretary. Ted and his partner, Trad Thomen, a Potomac Valley director, are two very active members of our chapter and other organizations in the area. Last year Ted headed up our Office Practice Committee which launched some interesting seminars on architectural topics.

For all purposes a Silver Spring native, Ted was actually born in Richmond but came here at a very early age—our secretary received his education at Blair High School, the University of Maryland Engineering School and the University of Virginia School of Architecture. He worked with the firm of Santmyers and Thomen in the District of Columbia from 1945 to 1957 at which time he became registered in the District of Columbia and Maryland.

In 1957 the firm of Thomen and Cromar hung out the shingle in Silver Spring and in 1958 Ted was registered in Florida. Mr. and Mrs. C. currently live in the Woodmoor section of Silver Spring with daughter, Mary Anne, 5 and Michael, 6.

Golf and fishing occupy Ted in his spare time plus sporadic sorties into the Maryland Civil War battlegrounds with his fellow Civil War Roundtable cronies in search of souvenirs with an automatic metal detection device. This latter group—all architects—hold forth weekly at lunch under the quaint title of OMT (Old Musket Toters) and boast the membership of such "old" architectural hands as Cliff White, Bill Blocher, Trad Thomen, Frank Beatty, Ted



Englehardt and Dana Johannes.

According to Ted, his "terrible" golf game is practiced at Brooke Manor and when sufficient frustration sets in, he heads for the Chesapeake Bay in pursuit of rockfish, or out on the ocean for channel bass or perhaps a stray marlin.

To his firm's credit, either completed or on the drawing boards are such projects as the Social Security Building and the Thayer Office Building in Silver Spring, the Regent and Garfield Apartments in Washington, the Judiciary Building in Washington and the Barrie School in Silver Spring. In addition to chapter activities, Ted is busy as Program Chairman of the Silver Spring Lions Club and as a member of the Silver Spring Board of Trade.

HERE and ELSEWHERE

Wash-Met Chapter To Elect

The Washington-Metropolitan Chapter now elects its officers in October to take office in January. The nomination slate to be considered at its October 6 meeting is: President, James I. Porter; Vice President, John W. McLeod; Secretary, Earl V. Gauger; Treasurer, A. Stanley McGaughan; and Director at Large, Francis D. Letherbridge.

Mass Transportation Forum

The recently released study of the National Capital Regional Planning Commission covering the future of mass transportation in the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area has been the subject of a series of public forums in recent weeks.

The series will be culminated on Wednesday, October 21, with a talk by W. H. Patterson of the Toronto Transit Commission presenting the latest ideas in rapid transit construction and operation as seen by the builders of Toronto's new rapid transit system.

The meeting will be held from 7:45 P.M. to 9:30 P.M. in the Interior Department Auditorium at 18th and C Sts., N.W., Washington, D. C.

Shortly after October 21, the survey will again come under public discussion on Capitol Hill before the Joint Committee on Washington Metropolitan Problems.

Architectural Revolution Over?

Writing in the September issue of the *New Mexico Architect*, Professor Don P. Schlegel of the University of New Mexico reports on a recent seminar on Architectural Education which was sponsored by the Associated Colleges of Architecture and the American Institute of Architecture.

According to Prof. Schlegel: "The summation of the conference seemed to be that the architectural revolution is over. Contemporary architecture has won. Individualism is dead. The basic approaches to architecture are established. Our function is to refine, not to continue design battle. This is not as exciting as the revolution but is much more difficult. We must strengthen our positions. We must prove we are worthy of our responsibility of environmental control. We must prove to society we are essential, that our service is for its benefit, that we supply a comprehensive and realistic need."

On the question: "Are the schools training architects to fulfill this role (the true picture of architectural practice today)?" the consensus of the seminar was "no" and that the schools were training men in the tradition of the 19th Century dilettante architect.

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