



POTOMAC VALLEY ARCHITECT

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Signs for Shopping Centers

by PATRICK H. NUSBAUM
T/A Patrick Sign Studio

During the long span of 50 years America has grown far beyond the dreams or predictions of our forefathers. It has grown in population, in education, religion, commerce and industry. It has progressed from a simple type of economy to a most complex commercial and industrial life. It has moved through an involved cycle of manufacturing techniques to amazing heights. In the vast changes from a simple type of manufacturing and living of years gone by to the complexities of today, advertising has affected our standard of living. How it has added to the richness of our lives is becoming constantly better known and appreciated. Methods of production, improvements in design and efficiencies in use have kept pace with the changing times.

I wish to quote Mr. Alfred Kloke, noted sign designer:

"The idea that signs could be more than purely practical is an old one, but only recently has it been generally recognized and has become part of the contemporary planning of commercial and industrial projects.

"A perfect example for buildings requiring a thorough integration of architectural and sign design is the shopping center with its particular need for promotional consideration. Signs in shopping centers have a definite share in representing such a project appropriately. Careful planning is the key to successful signing. Not long ago the typical center for shopping was in the middle of the town where planning did not exist. Signs were installed without consideration of visual harmony and were directed mainly by the size of the merchants' business. The result was a downtown shopping district with conflicting advertising and identification signs, elements which make shopping tiring and unpleasant. The shopping center offers a chance of proper planning, but its builders have to take action or the center will face the same chaos as its ancestors downtown.

"My experience has taught me that there is one fact which makes effective shopping center signing possible: the centralization of an overall sign control. Most suitable to take over this assignment is the architect for the center. He is familiar with the project and can incorporate provisions for signing at a time when the center exists only on the drawing board. For this task he should make use of the assisting service of a graphic designer, who will interpret the requests of tenants and analyze their true needs before going to work. Each case requires individual treatment. If carefully studied the result will be of no hardship to any one tenant, but to the benefit of all parties involved.

"The harmony within the sign and the relationship between the sign and the building is very subtle and complex. A few basic requirements of obvious nature, which can be applied in general, should be mentioned here. For instance the size of a sign should not be larger than necessary to carry its message to points it can be seen from. While influenced by functional requirements, it does not need to be of dimensions to guarantee legibility for nonexistent views. Oversize (contrary to common conception) destroys harmonious feeling, rather than emphasizing the competitive element of advertising in general.

"Roof signs always, and especially if they appear in quantity, destroy the architecture of the building which supports them. However, this should not imply that the "long distance" advertising has to be completely eliminated from shopping centers. Each shopping center should have an identification sign which advertises for the center and its tenants.

"There are numerous factors involved in the problem of designing shopping center signs. Some of these factors seem to be of minor importance, but only if they are taken into full account will an overall success be guaranteed."

East Front Columns

The face lifting job of the United States Capitol, the nation's number one building, was dramatized recently in an article in the WASHINGTON POST. Finding twenty-four marble columns for the East Front has become "a task reminiscent of the labors of Hercules" for Mario Campioli, Assistant Architect of the Capitol.

Striving for strict fidelity to the original facade, Campioli is insisting that each column be carved from one piece of marble. To produce columns 24 feet high and three feet in diameter, blocks must be found which weigh as much as 20 tons.

According to the article, "from the moment when work is begun on the block, Campioli explained, 'a column can be rejected at any time up to finish', because of poor color or structural weaknesses. Sixteen blocks have been rejected to date."

The big problem, according to Campioli, is getting the columns to Washington since seven columns have already been broken somewhere between the Georgia quarries and Washington.

Sixteen of the twenty-four columns are already complete, with fourteen in Washington. Quarrying operations continue in Georgia to find the other eight.

Trained and skilled personnel are rare both in fields of fashioning the marble and handling the columns for shipment, according to Campioli. He doubts this job could be done twenty-five years from now if we wished to get a faithful reproduction of the East Front.

Compounding the problem is the fact that the original columns are being duplicated in hard Georgia marble because of its durability as opposed to the soft original sandstone.

Campioli's hope is that he will be able to clean the House and Senate wings to lessen the contrast between them and the new marble front. He expects the bright glare of the marble to tone down in time, similar to that of the Folger Library.

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER OF MARYLAND

American Institute of Architects

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NEXT REGULAR MEETING

12 Noon, December 2, 1959

Brook Farm Restaurant

7101 Brookville Rd., Chevy Chase, Md.

January Meeting—January 6, 1960

December Program

Special guest and speaker at our next meeting will be J. Winfield Rankin, Administrative Secretary of the American Institute of Architects.

A member of the bar, thirteen-year A.I.A. veteran, and resident of Bethesda, Mr. Rankin will brief the chapter on the vertical A.I.A. committee structure and its relationship with chapter committees which permits chapter committee action to be carried to the national committee level.

Heat—Electric, That Is

Chapter President Ben Elliott attended a symposium on electric heat at the Watergate Inn on November 12 which was attended by architects, engineers, power company representatives, and manufacturers of electrical heating equipment.

Ben observed the case of the Washington Grove Elementary School addition, the first school in the area to be heated electrically, and the peculiar factors which made the introduction of electrical heat the most practical and economical solution to the heating problem for the additional facilities. He pointed out that the interest on the initial savings in the building cost, even with higher than normal insulating costs, balances off the higher energy cost.

Since during the next few decades electric power will be used as a chief source of energy for heating, air conditioning, ventilating, lighting and manufacturing, Ben suggested that the power companies might face up to the challenge of taking their transmission facilities out of the wooden pole "horse and buggy" era and come up with a weather-proof system dependable under the most severe conditions.

What is a School?

by RONALD S. SENSEMAN, A.I.A.

Many questions have been raised, both pro and con, as to the recent publicity on the so-called windowless school.

While this was not the first windowless school in the country, it would be the first multi-story windowless school.

Needless to say there are many ramifications to taking a step which on its face is so contrary to the normal concept of schoolhouse construction.

The most serious objection to this type construction would be the psychological one of no view for the students, which I think has been proved to be questionable. Many teachers who have used windowless classrooms prefer them, so I feel that this is not really a 100% rated objection. However, there are many other areas which could actually be improved by eliminating windows, such as libraries, where the controlled lighting and ventilation would be perfect, to say nothing of additional areas for book storage against the windowless walls.

We could discuss the many items ad infinitum, but I just want to enumerate the factors that motivated the design of the so-called windowless building reported recently in the P.V.A.

The concepts for the design of this top-lighted multi-story windowless school were:

- (1) A limited site which would put glass areas adjacent or close to property lines and in close proximity to the play field.
- (2) Many areas of the building can serve their intended function better if artificially lighted and mechanically ventilated.
- (3) Reduction in glass areas to the minimum with the obvious saving in fuel and the possible consideration of air conditioning. This would permit consideration of electrical heating and the saving in the initial cost of air conditioning often might well pay for the air conditioning.
- (4) A building with few window-walls requires less plan articulation, permitting more condensed cube, thereby reducing costs.
- (5) One other argument could well be made by the civil defense, as this type building would be less vulnerable from shock or blasts.

Needless to say I do not want to be the one to say that glass must go, but I feel that in light of the problems brought to the attention of the architects by the educators, we should examine ourselves and our buildings to be sure that we always do what is best, first for the students and teachers and then for the dollar-conscious public, by using all materials in proper proportion.

The old Latin expression by Vitruvius still applies: "Well building hath three conditions: Firmness, Commodity and Delight."

Today we must add a fourth dimension to the concept of Vitruvius: Economy.

Soviet Architect Demands Reform

After four years of determined but quiet effort to bring simplicity and modernity to construction here, the Soviet architect has spoken up.

He cannot do the job alone, he said. He cannot attain modernity and simplicity, beauty and function at the drafting board. The goodwill of the Communist party and Government are encouraging but much more is needed.

This plea, muted but unmistakable, was sent across the country in *Izvestia*, the official Government newspaper.

Architecture was almost the first social activity to be liberated in Premier Khrushchev's post-Stalin house-cleaning campaign.

The Premier then only party chief, condemned the style, the lush subway stations and sprawling, fluffy skyscrapers in Moscow and their imitations throughout the country in the autumn of 1955, half year before his attack on Stalin's cult of personality."

Reforms and changes in most other fields have followed with amazing speed, and most have been celebrated here and abroad. But the architects labored quietly on. A few of their experiments turned to brick and cement but not many.

Imaginative young architects grumbled that they did not seem able to find acceptable answers and that when they did, their efforts were often spoiled in the building. Thousands of new institutions and apartment houses are going up to meet desperate needs but artistically they are deficient.

Until today, however, the struggle went almost unnoticed. Recent broad hints from construction experts that architects were not properly leading the construction boom appear to have brought on the reply.

It was delivered by Aleksandr V. Vlasov, vice president of the Academy of Construction and architect of Moscow. He was himself criticized for extravagances four years ago, but he has been steadily held in high esteem, was one of the first to travel widely in the West and in his article unquestionably speaks for the most progressive ambitions among his colleagues.

The most telling aspect of Mr. Vlasov's article is that four years after his profession's "liberation" he must again dawn the old passion for ornament and complain of "relapses."

But he spoke primarily for the architects, not for them, and this was the gist of his plea.

Architects are trying very hard to re-evaluate beauty and form, seeking "reasonable" simplicity and function" in their design and something that will serve present and future.

But there can never be "style" without better building methods, without the adoption of progressive city planning, without decent education of the public and without the development of "style" in clothing and furniture, painting and sculpture, and all other art forms.

Compulsory Architectural Standards Supported

The need for some sort of Fine Arts Commission or architectural control for Montgomery County has been a recurring question in architectural circles as the county has expanded in recent years.

New impetus was given to the idea this week when the Montgomery County Sentinel, the century-old weekly in the county seat of Rockville, editorially cited the need for some "ordinance that would set up compulsory architectural standards for city buildings, particularly those in the general area of Court House Square."

The editorial was critical of one recently completed office building on Court House Square and complimentary of another new colonial structure nearby as reflecting the traditions of a "community rich with Colonial lore and history."

"There are those," the editorial went on, "who sound the alarm at the mere mention of legal requirements that buildings conform to certain esthetic standards, but let them. If they own land facing Court House Square, for example, their obligation is somewhat bigger, we believe, than simply making a few bucks out of the land."

"There has been limited discussion of such a move in Rockville, we understand, but we hope—in this fast a-building city—it will soon get out of the discussion stage and reach a point where it can be acted upon—unhappy absentee and local landlords notwithstanding."

In commenting on the idea, chapter member Stanley T. Lewis, who heads up an Urban Renewal Sub-committee of the Rockville Chamber of Commerce, stated: "A city with the fine history and growth potential of Rockville must have architectural standards to insure that the governmental center of the county and its adjacent business district can be an attractive environment for the public."

Attention: Chapter Members

News items of chapter member activities are always welcome. Contact the Publications Committee Chairman or Public Relations Counsel prior to the last week of any month so that PVA will report the latest news.

Comment

The adjoining reprint from the New York Times of Thursday, 26 November 1959, points up what can happen when architecture and the allied arts are too tightly controlled and used by a Government for political purposes.

Under our system every Architect and Artist should have the opportunity to design or create freely, to the best of his ability, without worry of political retaliation or harrassment. We must guard our right and be ever vigilant that our Government, whether local or Federal, never usurps this privilege.

L. A. Haft

A.I.A. Directors Alert Chapters on City Needs

"Limited on-again off-again renewal efforts" are being overtaken by the decay of our cities, according to a strongly worded statement of the Board of Directors of the American Institute of Architects issued at their recent meeting in Portland, Oregon.

Calling upon the local chapters and individual architects to take the lead in improving our cities by advancing a coordinated approach to planning for community buildings and rebuilding, the Directors stated that: "our first priority in this coming decade must be to make our communities more livable, efficient and beautiful."

"By 1975," they added, "our total population will increase to around 225 million people, 70 per cent of whom will live in cities and suburbs. Unless the habitation for this vast population expansion is properly designed and built, our cities and suburbs will continue to generate slums and traffic congestion."

Traffic and highway problems came in for special mention when they pointed out that "in San Francisco, Boston and other cities irreparable damage has already been done by expert highway engineering without regard to city planning."

"In the Nation's Capital," the statement added, "the single minded highway engineering concept deliberately relegates to second class status the proposed cultural center, the beloved Lincoln Memorial, the charms of the Potomac River, the parks, and other works of historic significance."

The Directors urged a halt to the pollution of land, air and water, citing the need for greater emphasis on beauty in our environment. To this end they called for effective means to control city and highway blight, billboards, overhead wires, and other disruptive outdoor advertising.

In a four-day session the A.I.A. Directors also made plans for the next Annual A.I.A. Convention in San Francisco which will be held April 18-22, 1960.

Architectural Fees

Recommended architectural fees based on a two-year study of the subject throughout the U.S. was one of the chief topics at the November 11 meeting of the Baltimore chapter, according to Ben Elliott and Paul Kea who were in attendance.

A recommended fee schedule was presented to the Baltimore Chapter by the committee which undertook this study and it is available to Potomac Valley Chapter members on request.

It is suggested that the proximity of the three chapters—Washington, Baltimore and Potomac Valley—might well be the basis for seriously considering the Baltimore recommendations by each chapter in adopting fee schedules.

HERE and ELSEWHERE

New Churches in Germany

G. E. Kidder Smith F.A.I.A., New York City architect, will be the guest lecturer on the subject of "New Churches in Germany" in the Music Building of Catholic University on Monday, December 7 at 8:30 P.M.

Acting Department of Architecture Head Paul A. Goettlemann has informed the chapter that tickets are available on a first-come-first-served basis. Two tickets per chapter member are available if you will call Mrs. Elizabeth Atkins, AD 2-6000, ext. 250, at the department office.

South African Architecture

Featured at the National Housing Center, 1625 L St., N.W., Washington, D. C., between November 25 and December 8 will be an exhibit of contemporary architecture of South Africa.

The exhibit uses illustrations and photographs to trace the developments of trends in architecture in the Union of South Africa. Accessories of indigenous home furnishings have been added to the exhibit by the South African Embassy.

The exhibit is divided into five sections: Background and Regional Characteristics; Indigenous Native Buildings; Origins of European Culture; Development; and The Contemporary Scene.

Home Builder and Architect

Commenting on the lack of participation on the part of the architect in home building construction, Prof. Don J. Schlegel of the University of New Mexico has this to say in the current issue of the New Mexico Architect:

"Can the builder continue to disregard the knowledge and ability of the architect in this vital area of our visual environment? Can the architect continue to disregard two-thirds of the total amount of construction—housing? Can the home-buyer continue to disregard the advantages of architectural services?"

"I feel very strongly that neither the builder nor the architect, nor the home-buyer can continue as they are today. It is evident that they must appreciate each other's difficulties for their own salvation. No one group is responsible for our present situation. The blame must be divided."

Greetings

The members of the Publications Committee and editors of the Potomac Valley Architect wish all our readers a very MERRY CHRISTMAS and a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

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