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Architect Public Relations

By MARVIN J. GERSTIN, House and Gerstin Advertising Agency, Inc. Washington, D. C.

In our "Better Environment Thru Design" series, we hear a member of the advertising and public relations profession discuss the architect's public relations needs.

The architect, like a coelacanth, is a living fossil. The last remaining vestige of aesthetics at work in our business community.

Certainly art has painted itself into an abstract corner. Poetry is a private language less accessible to many than the study of Russian. In the world of music, one of our accounts had the bright idea this Christmas of advertising the classics as business gifts. Without his regular following of intellectuals, diplomats, and architects, this merchant's Christmas would have been calamitous.

The architect, of all artists and philosophers, comes closest to the heart of our business world. He is the barometer of its operation and expansion, and nothing can be done in commercial or industrial endeavor without bearing his imprint.

At any rate, in this expanding economy the business world can't expand without an architect. The stature of the architect in the eyes of his client, his ability to control or direct the client, and the pile of brick the architect leaves behind become tremendously significant to the rest of us.

We ordinary citizens may be impotent in our ability to zone or not zone, direct budgets and tell where roads will go. We live in the houses given us, walk miles inside shopping centers. But for one fleeting moment, there, the architect has our lives in his hands. He can come out great and "delight the senses", as one of the fellows so frequently says. Or he can collect his fee and run.

Admittedly architect-client relations are an intricate, difficult subject. This is no agitated demand for architects to stand up and fight. Let public relations do some of the fighting for you. Public relations in a sense is an attempt to instill or earn respect. Respect for your profession in general must lead to respect for the individual, and perhaps some alleviation of

then tensions that invariably exist between architect and builder, businessman and dreamer.

No patient would conceivably stop the operation and direct his doctor to cut a little this-a-way instead of that-a-way. Doctors have stolen a march on us in the field of public relations. Yet the training and enormity of an architect's job, say, on a 9-story apartment building is certainly comparable to a critical operation.

The architectural fraternity can do a lot more than it does to establish its dignity and importance in our community. Architects are too reluctant in presenting opinions to the public. They are not politically active enough as a distinct, organized group.

They are not socially active in community affairs. They are not opinionated enough as a body (but ask any architect a question at a party and you'll find he is brimming over with articulate answers)—somewhere, behind some closed door he has mullered over many a significant problem.

Architects don't protest enough or lead enough. At the last Park and Planning Commission hearings not one architect offered testimony. Neither Potomac Valley nor the downtown chapter was represented. I haven't seen a letter to the editor from an architect since the Capitol Dome incident. German rocket scientists have better public relations and speak with more authority on American affairs than architects.

This is quite dismaying to the rest of us folks, because we would like to live in that better designed environment you talk about. Please try some organized, self-opinionated, stature-increasing public relations. Then, when the client says, "Go ahead, you're the doctor," you can solve a lot of our problems.

Biennial Competition

It is with pleasure that your Committee informs Chapter members that the Biennial Competition for Awards in Architecture is well under way. The deadline for submissions is 5 P.M., May 2nd. Judgment will follow shortly with the Dinner Awards Exhibition to be held in the week of June 6th. This Dinner will also be an installation of officers and may be looked forward to as an important Chapter social affair. Arrangements are being made by Mr. Dennis Madden for a pleasant evening.

The Committee wishes to call attention to the fact that the general approach and character of this competition was discussed and reviewed, brought before the Executive Committee and ultimately aired at a Chapter meeting. The reason for carefully scrutinizing the rules of this competition is that there has been criticism from some of the Chapter members taken as high as the regional level. There is a feeling that the competitions have been conducted on too high an architectural plane with jurors who judge more on a national rather than local level. In some members' opinion, this results in a lack of recognition of reasonably good, general architecture and other than Chapter members receiving most of the awards. Primary concern of the Committee was whether this is an inequity and whether changes in the competition approach and/or jury, should be made.

The device to obtain more recognition for good, local, general architecture and more awards for Chapter members, would be in the instruction to the jury. Should jurors be instructed to provide a minimum number of awards in the various categories, special awards, or be instructed to judge not on a national basis, but more in recognition of good journeyman architecture? The Committee felt that when a jury is so charged, such instruction expresses lack of confidence or, to some extent, "rigging" of the very type we are decrying today in the television industry. Our prior competitions have

(continued on page 2)

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER OF MARYLAND

American Institute of Architects

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Co-Chairmen, Public Relations Committee
JU. 9-45450 — RA. 6-1005

Don Burke, Public Relations Counsel
15 W. Montgomery Ave., Rockville, Md.
GA. 4-9300

NEXT REGULAR MEETING

12 Noon, March 2, 1960

Brook Farm Restaurant

7101 Brookville Rd., Chevy Chase, Md.

April Meeting — April 6, 1960

Montgomery Council Amends Electrical Code

Upon motion of Councilman Frosh which was duly seconded, Ordinance 4-34 with Councilmen Werner, Cahoon, Frosh Williams, Hickey, and Walker voting in the affirmative, Councilman Kyle not voting, amending Chap. 82, Montgomery County Code 1955 titled: "Electrical Code." On or after March 1, 1960 all plug type fuses used in new electrical installations in new or existing construction shall be of the S type design, or in lieu thereof, approved circuit breakers.

Competition

(continued from page 1)

received national recognition and even praise, because they were conducted on a high plane and the jurors were permitted to select significant architecture, as they saw it in the work submitted.

When we read reports of juries, we find them quite cognizant of the very problem that has caused some of our members to be unhappy with results in the past. A recent article in the A.I.A. Journal, by Dean Burchard, compared, in an interesting manner, the profession of architecture with that of law and medicine. In the field of medicine, for example, he says, brilliant research, surgery, skillful medical administration, is what the medical journals and the newspapers report and what is generally talked about. But, at the same time, all kinds of doctors of less fame, are needed to treat broken toes successfully or to disinfect minor wounds. We all know that the general medical practitioner is an unsung hero, and we very rarely read or hear about him. Many of us

BIENNIAL COMMITTEE AT WORK



Co-Chairmen Andrew H. MacIntire and Gene Delmar talk over award certificates design for Biennial Competition.

play a like role in the field of architecture. If we are to compete with the leaders, we must realize our own personal work may be at stake. But we do so with the full realization that it is the uplifting of the whole profession of architecture that is involved, as our own personal work. We may lose as individuals but the real winner is architecture and the profession.

In reading reports of jurors, other than our own, the awareness of United States architecture and local architecture is a matter of concern and consideration and we find juries stating an awareness that many architects felt they didn't have much chance in presenting just good architectural work, that competitions want something out of the ordinary. Maybe this is so, for perhaps "something out of the ordinary" would be similar to a brilliant piece of surgery or to an exceedingly well pled case before a court.

We find juries speaking of "shock" architecture, excitement, interesting expression, but also stating that novelty alone will not be lasting, and buildings are to be used, houses are to be lived in and all must endure, live on, and please. Your Committee is sure that any good jury feels and knows this, and that a really good piece of straightforward work would be so recognizable that it would be acknowledged.

The Committee, therefore, felt that our juries should not be instructed, should not be hamstrung and should have the Chapter's confidence in their being able to decide for themselves what is significant among the work of the architects in this area, whether they happen to be our Chapter members or not. Perhaps some of us will not have a beautiful cer-

tificate to enjoy handing to one of our clients, but our competition will remain on a high plane, as it always has been. We feel very proud of the number of awards that the juries have seen fit to confer on the entires submitted in the past. Our jurors have told us so and we feel we should be proud.

Jurors, in other reports, speak of inequities, the difficulty of evaluating a piece of architecture truly, by means of photographs. Extremely spectacular mounts and very handsome color presentations have been a part of our past competitions. The time, effort and expense of color photography and unique display techniques work as an advantage to larger firms capable of spending money for these presentations. As architecture is the prime concern and it is still possible for a small practitioner to produce a significant piece of work, discouragement of elaborate presentation of color and display technique has been recommended. Due to the fact that many firms already have shot color work, color has not been barred in this competition.

The official program will be available soon and it is hoped that Chapter members and architects of the area will submit their work to make this another successful competition, and to find again if any of us or our neighbors has been able to produce a few precious drops of "essence", the goal of architects through the years.

GENE DELMAR
ANDREW H. MacINTIRE

Co-Chairmen, Committee on
Exhibitions and Competition

Historical Building Committee Active

In a recent report to Vice President Milt Prassas on the progress of committee work, Paul Kea and Clif White, co-chairmen of the Committee for Preservation of Historical Buildings, report a continued "vigilance to prevent the destruction of any buildings that have historical significance."

Some of their activities have been:

- Aid to the Prince Georges County Historical Society in an effort to acquire title to Montpelier, a fine old historical home erected by the Snowden family near Laurel, Maryland;
- Plans approaching completion for the Dr. Ross home which was located in Bladensburg. Measurements were made of the house prior to demolition in 1958, the plans developed and turned over to the National Parks Service for processing and filing at the Library of Congress;
- Assistance in the restoration of the Market Master's House in Bladensburg to the extent of having providing measured drawings and standby assistance during the restoration. Interest in the historical significance of this building has been expressed by the National A.I.A. Historical Building Committee.

—Aid in actively assisting interested parties in Romney, W.Va., that an historical property which was to be sold at auction should be restored. The Romney Women's Club will now restore the Mything property, one block south on Highway 50 in the center of town.

E. B. Morris Reports On Chapter Archives

Six loose-leaf, three-ring binders "in red fabric" are the repository of information on architects in the Potomac Valley region dating back to 1939, according to E. B. Morris' report on his Historical and Chapter History Committee.

The Chapter is indeed fortunate to have the benefit of E. B.'s valuable experience in assimilating important information which someday may become the chief source of a chapter history.

Commenting on his previous experience of once having compiled a history of the Washington-Metropolitan Chapter and finding data not uniformly filed, E. B. has assured the Chapter that background information on activities of architects in the Potomac Valley region are in "uniform and easily recognizable binders" in his file case at home.

March Guest

Guest at our March meeting will be the recently installed president of the Washington Metropolitan Chapter, Mr. James E. Porter.

Public Relations In Action

Chapter member Jack Cohen took the time to go out to the Green Acre School recently and talk to the fifth grade students who wished to take on a house as a school project.

The results, as indicated by some of the letters which Jack received, clearly indicate the public relations value of such appearances and the keen appreciation on the part of the children of being able to hear from a "busy" professional architect.

All of the letters Jack received "thanked" him for taking the time and were full of original reactions to his presentation.

David thought "the idea about the picture window overlooking the gully is very good" and announced that the class was going to buy some lightweight cinder blocks "to experiment with."

One young lady said that "because of your visit, we have had a lot of ideas which we otherwise wouldn't have had" and lamented the fact that some pupils were "unfortunately absent" and regretted that they had missed the talk.

On the subject of contemporary building at the University of Maryland, she disagreed and likened the suggestion to saying Williamsburg should have contemporary houses because we are no longer in the Colonial Era. The subject was dismissed with: "Perhaps you are right, but I don't think so."

Another young lady who was most profuse in her appreciation of Jack's visit, pointed out: "It is for certain that we will not build a rambler or a split level house as we otherwise might have. Feeling as I do about common houses, I thank you again for coming here and giving us new ideas."

Roger was well aware that an architect usually charged people for his time and was grateful to Jack "for not charging us anything, but our co-operation, that we wanted to give truly."

Such genuine responses from the youngsters clearly indicate the value of an architect's contact with school children to make the youth of the country aware of the architect's functions.

J.C. Award to Gene Delmar

Chapter member Gene Delmar has been named the outstanding member of the month of February by the Silver Spring Junior Chamber of Commerce.

Carrying on a Potomac Valley Chapter tradition of community-minded membership, Gene's activities as master of ceremonies for a J.C. radio program of music and reports on civic improvement were recognized in the monthly award.

The fifteen-minute program is aired each Saturday noon over Station WDON.

HERE and ELSEWHERE

AIA Convention Interest High

National AIA headquarters reports a brisk demand for hotel reservations for the annual AIA Convention to be held in San Francisco on April 18-22. The AIA Housing Bureau is located at Room 300, 61 Grove St., San Francisco 2, Calif.

Scheduled to receive Awards of Merit at the Convention are two structures in the Washington-Baltimore area. They are: The Capitol Hill Apartments, Washington, D. C., by Satterlee and Smith, and the Church of the Redeemer in Baltimore, Pietro Belluschi, Cambridge, Mass., and Associated Architects, Rogers, Taliaferro & Lamb, Baltimore, Md.

Church Architecture Conference Set

"The Modern Church: its Purpose and its Architectural Challenge" has been chosen the theme of the 1960 Joint Conference on Church Architecture to be held in Minneapolis, Minn., on May 3, 4, 5, 1960.

Headquartered at the Leamington Hotel, this conference has been planned to stimulate basic reasoning and thinking by architects, ministers, and lay people concerning the relationship of architecture and planning to the needs of the modern church.

Highlighting the program will be a National Architectural Exhibit at which awards will be given to recent outstanding churches; Ecclesiastical Crafts Exhibits with awards made to fine examples of modern church art; and a Commercial Exhibit of furnishings and equipment.

Deadline for the submission of entries is April 15, 1960.

Construction Industry Outlook Meeting

The Construction and Civic Development Department of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a conference on March 10-11 on what the new decade holds for the construction industry. Among the subjects to be discussed by industry leaders are planning, community development, markets and financing, building codes, technological research, education, training and manpower.

Conference registration fee (including two luncheons and a dinner) is \$25.00. For a copy of the program and further information write Construction and Civic Development Department, Chamber of Commerce of the U.S., 1615 H Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

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