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Houses: Built to Suit
It's remarkable how differently architects can interpret the idea of providing for a basic human need—shelter. But who wouldn't want to live in a house that conforms to his individual tastes and desires? Inform looks at four new residences that were built to suit their owners to a tee. By Vernon Mays

Changes in the Old Schoolhouse
New influences, from shifts in philosophy to more complex ways of building, have altered the basics of school design. Still, many architects have transcended these constraints to make the old schoolhouse work for education in the '90s. By Sandra E. Wilson Parks

Can Tysons Corner Be Saved?
Not so long ago, Tysons Corner was a sleepy crossroads—no more than a gas station surrounded by Fairfax County farmland. Now it's every urban planner's nightmare. Can it be turned around? By Roger K. Lewis and Sunny Jung Scully

DateLines
a calendar of events, lectures and exhibitions

DesignLines
new developments in design and the arts

Travel
the making of the Blue Ridge Parkway

Profile
Sydney and Frances Lewis, modern-day Medicis

Books
the legacy of Lewis Mumford

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On the cover: Gunn/McClure Residence.
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Romance of the Taj Mahal
Artifacts and paintings from the Taj—plus art that the building has inspired over 350 years. Through Nov. 25 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. 804-367-0844

Blue Ridge Parkway
This exhibit traces the accomplishments of America's most popular scenic byway. Begins Oct. 12 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448

Too Much to Do
Presentations by Margaret McCurry and Merrill Elam, a tour of Monument Avenue mansions, critiques of award-winning buildings and a panel discussion by three magazine art directors are among the programs to be held Oct. 18-20 in Richmond at Building Virginia 90, the annual trade show and convention for the design professional. 804-644-3041

Inspired Landscapes
Five designers and artists pinpoint their sources of inspiration for garden design and interdisciplinary collaborations in a five-part series, “Landscape Design,” on Thursday evenings beginning Oct. 11. A Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, specific locations in Washington to be announced. 202-357-3030

Christening the Cathedral
Eighty-three years of construction on the Washington National Cathedral culminates with the laying of the last stone September 29 at noon. Consecration will be Sept. 30 at 11 a.m. 202-537-6200

Exploring Public Art
Former NEA staffer Richard Andrews, who was instrumental in developing Seattle's noted public art program, discusses public art Nov. 8 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. 804-367-8148

Highlands Crafts Fair
The oldest crafts fair in the Southern Highlands draws more than 150 artisans from traditional to contemporary. At the Asheville (N.C.) Civic Center, Oct. 19-21. 704-298-7928
The Architects of Monument Avenue

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Robert E. Lee Monument, the keystone of Richmond's most famous street, Monument Avenue. While the centennial celebration calls easy attention to the five major sculptures that embellish the avenue, the effectiveness of these monuments relies on the impressive setting created by some 200 houses and mansions that define the tree-lined boulevard. These dwellings can well claim to be the most impressive group of turn-of-the-century houses in the nation — the finest expression of residential styles which dominated American architecture for the past century.

In general, the architects of Monument Avenue took a bold and imaginative approach to classicism. They had nerve and guts. They manipulated and twisted architectural elements with a skill and knowledge often lacking in the faux stucco and styrofoam classicism of contemporary suburban Virginia. Still, one could say that many of the Monument Avenue houses suffer from a severe outbreak of architecture. They are eccentric, idiosyncratic and imaginative. And while the houses of renowned architects John Russell Pope and William Lawrence Bottomley have often stolen the spotlight, the work of home-grown architects is distinguished in its own right. Three of these men, Albert T. Huntt, Duncan Lee and D. Wiley Anderson, were able to create architecture in the early 1900s which counters the image of a conservative and backward-looking Southern architectural profession.

Albert Huntt's tombstone in Hollywood Cemetery proudly proclaims that he was the grandson of Richmond's first architect, Otis Manson. Manson's early 19th-century work was noted for bold neoclassical compositions, and Huntt showed a partiality to elaborate combinations of broken pediments, bay windows and multiple orders. His house at 2013 Monument is an elaborate fantasy on classical themes. Up the street at 2614 Monument, Huntt subdivided the façade into two bays and two floors, and placed a different architectural element in each quadrant. He was not limited by preconceived ideas of classical décorum. If he could wedge another element on a façade, he did.

Duncan Lee was interested in Southern architecture — not in Gone-With-the-Wind Revival, but in the architecture of southern California and Italy. His 1916 residence for Jaquelin Taylor is a restrained essay on the Italian Renaissance. This house at 2307 Monument suggests that Lee was aware of turn-of-the-century Midwestern modernism, as well as Italian classicism. Open planning and a concern for storage mark this house. Comfortable in all the popular residential styles, Lee produced several Colonial residences, as well as a convincing Cotswold cottage at 2605 Monument.

D. Wiley Anderson's promotional literature boasted that he was self-educated. What he lacked in formal training, he made up for in verve. Manipulations of scale were typical of his residential work. While the houses he designed were no larger than any on the street, the architectural elements which make them up are gigantic. Overscaled windows, massive dormers and monumental porches create the impression that the house might be crushed under the weight of its own architectural ornamentation. The residence at 2230 Monument illustrates the tendency well.

In retrospect, one of the most remarkable aspects of the works of these men, as well as the others who contributed to Monument Avenue, is that they were able to express their own architectural preferences without disrupting the character of the street. The impression is one of basic unity, not of a battle between egotistical architects trying to display their wares. This sense of harmony and respect is rare in today's residential developments, and is perhaps why Monument Avenue deserves to be taken more seriously as a work of architecture and urbanism.

Robert P. Winthrop
A Temple for Tea

A rare example of Japanese ceremonial architecture has found an unlikely home for itself in a glade of pine and beech trees on the campus of Christopher Newport College. The full-size replica of a 16th century tea house — 19 feet long by 13 feet wide by 17 feet high — was first exhibited at the National Gallery of Art, and later dismantled and rebuilt for permanent display on the Newport News campus.

In its materials and construction, the tea house emulates a building form that was first created in 15th and 16th century Japan, when tea gatherings moved out of residential buildings into small, rustic houses of bamboo, wood and thatch built in a garden setting. The simplicity of the building embodies the ideals of wabi, a set of ideals which converted the tea ceremony into an occasion for withdrawal from material concerns and worship of purity and refinement.

With the exception of a simple painted or calligraphic scroll and a small vase of flowers, the tea house is devoid of decoration. Yet the combinations of natural materials — from bamboo-grille windows to a 15-inch-thick roof of miscanthus grass thatch — gives the small house an exquisite richness. Those who know about such things refer to it as an Enman tea house, so named because its gently sweeping roofline bears resemblance to the Enman swallow.

While it was at the National Gallery in 1988 accompanying an exhibition on Japanese culture, the tea house caught the eye and imagination of then-Gov. Gerald Baliles, who lobbied to bring it to Virginia. Its location at Christopher Newport springs logically from the fact that the college has a Japanese studies program and that Newport News has a heavy concentration of Japan-based companies. And while the tea house serves to promote awareness of Japanese culture within Virginia, it is no secret that Baliles went after it in order to warm commercial relations with the businesswise Japanese.

Because the tea house is treated by the college as a work of art, the public is generally not allowed inside. Student guides, however, are on hand from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Thursday, to give tours of the garden and presentations on the house and its history. For details, call 804-594-7039.

The tea house at Christopher Newport: architecture as art.
Capping Off the Cathedral

President Teddy Roosevelt was on hand for the laying of the foundation stone in 1907. Eighty-three years later, on September 29, the completion of the Washington National Cathedral will be celebrated as the final stone is put in place on the building's north tower.

The idea for such a church was inspired by Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the city of Washington, which proposed "a great church for national purposes." And though it is available for events of national importance, the church was built entirely with private funds under the auspices of the Episcopal diocese of Washington. Unlike modern buildings of such magnitude, the cathedral contains no structural steel; stones are held in place by the force of the flying buttresses against the exterior walls and the downward thrust of the vaulting bosses (carved stones at the highest intersection of roof-supporting ribs). The largest boss alone weighs 5.5 tons.

Selecting the building's formal vocabulary was no easy task during the early planning stages; advocates emerged both for the Greek Revival, a style in which many capital buildings are designed, and the Classic Renaissance language which was in vogue early in this century. But when the matter came to a vote by church trustees in 1906, the decision was unanimous: Gothic. Architect George Frederick Bodley took slight liberties with history. His plans departed from the traditional English Gothic by specifying a five-sided apse on the east end and a five-aisled configuration of the nave, characteristics that were more common to continental cathedrals. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of such a building — even with the aid of mechanical cranes and pneumatic tools — is something to behold.

Flying buttresses at the National Cathedral.
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Taming the Mountaintops

By Robert Freis

Millions of visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway have journeyed the ridge crest turnpike through Virginia and North Carolina and been awed by its mountaintop vistas. But rare is the driver, coasting along at comfortable speeds, who considers the studied interventions by man that have made the works of nature so easy to behold.

Yet there is another story along the Blue Ridge Parkway beyond that of the natural landscape and the Southern mountaineer's cultural traditions. Less obvious are the thoroughgoing research and innovative elements of landscape planning blended by the landscape architects, engineers and architects who brought the Blue Ridge Parkway into shape over a half-century ago.

"Often the best piece of work goes unnoticed by the casual observer," says David Hill, guest curator of a photographic exhibit focusing on the design and construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway that opens in October at the National Building Museum.

Hill, a landscape architect from Roanoke, prepared the exhibit to illustrate how the parkway's planners meticulously and unobtrusively interpreted the lives of the Southern high country pioneers, while conducting their own pioneering effort — one with an enduring impact on the nascent field of American landscape architecture.

The project, one of the largest of its kind ever conceived, would introduce techniques of land acquisition and usage such as scenic easements, in which landowners gave up certain rights to the use of their land in exchange for monetary consideration, while maintaining all other rights of ownership. Even land purchased outright often was leased back to farmers to keep the rural image intact. The parkway's planners also used innovative and environmentally sensitive road engineering techniques such as spiral transition curves, in which the radius of the curve varies constantly as one travels through it. Such methods were used, Hill says, to "knit together, not interrupt land patterns" and to achieve a "rhythmic transition" that allowed the passer-by to intimately experience the landscape with a minimal impact on the scene.

Chief landscape architect of the project between its inception in 1934 and the onset of World War II was Stanley W. Abbott, a Cornell graduate who is credited with gathering and directing a uniquely talented group of landscape architects and planners, many of whom were forced into the public sector by the financial straits of the Depression. Armed with a truck and sketchy maps of the Southern Appalachians, Abbott "lone-wolfed" through snow and mud and dodged bears to develop what he called "some sense of those awesome mountains," his goal being a "cinematic view of nature."

The exhibit will feature photographs used by Abbott and his team to document their investigation of local structures, and how they studied and measured vernacular wood and stone buildings, details they later incorporated into parkway elements such as bridges and fences that blended the road corridor remarkably into the surrounding cultural and natural landscapes. Hill credits this respectful approach to the educational background of the early parkway designers. Many had studied in the tradition of the...
Beaux-Arts design schools, which required that students spend time measuring and drafting classical architecture before attempting to design neoclassical buildings. Confronted with 1930s Appalachia, these designers relied on learned methods of interpreting classical elements in their efforts to interpret the vernacular architecture.

Abbott's training as field supervisor of the Westchester County (N.Y.) Park and Parkway System was manifest in the Blue Ridge Parkway design process, as the route began to reflect the concept of a series of connected preexisting recreation and natural areas, a "string-of-beads" intended to give the impression of a single large park.

The sturdy, enduring and influential design traditions of the Blue Ridge Parkway are continued even to the modern era of the highway in the design and construction of the Linn Cove Viaduct, completed in 1987 near Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina. There, cantilevered precast sections were placed on piers erected sequentially by a crane and intended to minimize construction impact on an environmentally sensitive plant habitat beneath it. Appropriately, this structure completed the final link to the 470-mile-long parkway and ended the construction phase 52 years after it began.

Hill, who originally prepared the exhibit of photographs and drawings for the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, believes the Blue Ridge Parkway was successfully and sensitively located within the natural environment due to its isolation from the abrasive roadside features of other highways. As such, the Blue Ridge Parkway — unlike other roads — has become an agent of preservation rather than disruption of the natural environment. That's simply one more credit for a byway that already has won the hearts of many.

"The Blue Ridge Parkway" opens Oct. 19 at the National Building Museum, located in the Pension Building at Judiciary Square in Washington, D.C. The show continues through April. For information, call 202-272-2448.

Robert Freis is a freelance writer in Roanoke.
In Memory of a Mill

One cannot fully appreciate the sense of wonderment felt upon first seeing the Hazzard Mill House until completing the elaborate rite of initiation that first-time visitors encounter: Getting there. The road to the house leads across a low-water bridge and continues for miles along a dirt-and-gravel road, past abandoned vehicles and through a series of locked gates before making the final bend toward the house. There, in the seeming backwater, rises a stately dwelling of wood and stone that, in its own way, is quite sophisticated—an artifact more crafted than built. Owner Harold Green's first intention was to restore the foundation ruins of a 19th century grist mill on the family property and build a new house on top. Architect Mark Kohler scoured county records and interviewed the locals to uncover whatever details he could about the original frame structure. Not until after he located the remains of the original mill, which had been dismantled and rebuilt nearby as a barn, did Kohler learn he was restricted from building so near the river due to the threat of floods. Still, the investigation had inspired him. "Harold said, 'Let's just do a little cottage up there, then,'" recalls Kohler, of Karl E. Kohler Associates in Vienna. "But we had set our sights so high that we pushed the idea a little beyond that." The finished house, instead, reads like a contemporary essay on rural architecture, resting solid on a base sheathed in stone from a local quarry. "The site was overwhelming, and had a strong influence on the overall design," Kohler says. "By the time we got done, it was as tall as the six-story office building I work in." Among the interior delights is a double-height living room on the second floor, whose fireplace and chimney introduce skillful stonework inside the house, as well. Interior walls of poplar, silver-gray with age, were recovered from a Pennsylvania tobacco barn. In all, eight species of wood—including oak handrails, fir structural columns, and heart pine floors—engender an interior richness.

Beyond that, a billiards area, cozy sleeping nooks, well-equipped kitchen, whirlpool bath and wraparound deck overlooking the river all give new meaning to the notion of "roughing it." One can't help but be impressed by the exposed timber stair that rises from the first-floor entry to the third-floor master suite, lending an air of grandeur to the house. Light filters into the stairwell from above through a steel grate, which supports anyone curious enough to climb into the rooftop cupola for views of the surrounding mountain ridges. From there, the sense of being able to breathe in the wilderness air and leave city worries behind is easily accomplished. And that's what vacation houses are all about.
The Hazzard Mill House occupies a commanding site overlooking the Shenandoah River (facing page). Wood and stone are blended skillfully in the second-floor living room (above), whose curved bookshelves echo the form of the cantilevered deck outside. Interior walls of weathered poplar lend the house an appropriate sense of rusticity (top).
The traditional forms of Colonial architecture inspire a Williamsburg house by Carlton Abbott & Partners that is thoroughly modern in most aspects.

Sarah Gunn owns a shop, The Toymaker of Williamsburg, that is something of an institution in historic Williamsburg. But when it came to planning her new house, she set aside all thoughts of things Colonial and looked for an architect who would design a house to suit her tastes for the up-to-date. Her search went no farther than longtime friend Carlton Abbott. "People come to Williamsburg to buy Colonial homes, but that's just not me," she says. "He does contemporary buildings, and that's what I wanted!" While the 3800-square-foot house — a modern-day variation of the simple A-frame structures typical of the Colonial village — nods respectfully to its historic location, the similarities end once you enter the trellis-shaded threshold. A low-ceilinged foyer, graced by Ms. Gunn's collected art (including a collage by Abbott), eases the passage from outside to in. It leads directly into a skylighted atrium/stairwell, the feature of the house around which the other rooms are organized. "The circulation was very purposeful — the idea of being able to move through the house without having any dead ends," says Abbott. "And I think that helps when you are entertaining, or just in the ways you use the house every day." Abbott's decision to stick with a simple shape for the house suggested a symmetrical floor plan in which he balanced the elements around the central hall. "I like having to go through the house to get to the living room, because it adds a little more mystery to the house," he says. At the end of the hall, five steps lead down into the living room, which affords views of the thickly wooded lot behind the house. Ms. Gunn had requested "one big space" as a living/dining room which she could subdivide with a set of freestanding walnut shelves passed down through her family. Her particular needs went on to include places for displaying a collection of what she calls "unusual things" — an eclectic range of folk art objects, including her treasure of antique tin containers from early consumer products. "I grew up in a business that was merchandizing, so I've always had a thing for objects," she says. Abbott responded by providing niches and out-of-the-way spaces where the larger items could be displayed, and included a wall full of shelves in the kitchen's informal eating area for all the tins. Ms. Gunn's collection of books found a home at the top of the central stairs. And framing details in the bookshelves are echoed above in the four-paned window that admits light from the stairwell into the master bedroom. That visual theme takes its cue from the house's exterior, where a similar motif gives a contemporary flair to the house's overall traditional form. Abbott added a privacy fence between house and garage to afford a secluded outdoor living space without limiting the impression of a house surrounded by a natural landscape. (Colonial houses, on the other hand, often extended the symmetry of the house into the surrounding landscape.) Abbott, who is best known for designing in a contemporary idiom, has rarely done a building without a flat roof. Yet he found that using a traditional sloped roof was an easy transition to make. "Traditional shapes make sense — they keep water off the building, they are simple structures to build, they are something that someone can easily understand," he says. "But the house probes some contemporary thought, as well."

While owner Sarah Gunn wanted — and received — a contemporary house, the inspiration for its form (above) came from the simple A-frame structures in the restored Colonial village nearby.
Rooms are organized around a central hall that affords dramatic views through the house (below). The floor level drops some three feet in the living/dining room (left), creating a fitting scale for the main public room of the house.
THE LIFE IN PINK

Bob Anderson's ambitious renovation of an undistinguished ranch house in Falls Church turns out as "la vie en rose."

The geyser gush in Washington-area real estate prices has fueled a boom in renovations by homeowners who can better afford to enlarge existing houses than to buy new ones. But architect Bob Anderson's redo of a 1951 brick rancher took the notion of "adding on" to its ultimate, transforming a tiny 900-square-foot original to a roomy residence more than four times larger. Out for a casual walk one Sunday afternoon, Anderson and his wife, Dominique, came across a small house for sale in their neighborhood. Having recently inherited a houseful of 19th and early 20th century French and American antiques, the couple found their need for more living space to be a constant concern. Though the house they discovered was far too small and in poor repair, Anderson immediately saw in it new possibilities. For starters, the L-shaped floor plan of the one-story original suggested a location for new stairs that wouldn't disrupt existing structural walls, but would provide access to a new second floor. Once the roof was removed, the 8-foot ceiling of the existing living room was raised to almost 10 feet to improve its proportions. Changing the ceiling height also enabled the foyer to accommodate an 18th century armoire that fits neatly into a niche built especially for it. "Bob wanted to have the dining room at the center of the house — the heart — because we have large dinner parties and tend to congregate around the dining table," says Dominique. Even day-to-day family meals take place in the formal dining area that brings together Italian light fixtures, oriental art, classical columns and a fireplace with a marble-tile hearth and mantel. The house's mix of modern elements with more historical features is a combination Anderson, a partner in the Alexandria firm of Anderson O'Brien Architects, enjoys. "I consider myself an eclectic functionalist," he says. "I love good architectural form, no matter what period it's from. There are Greek Revival elements here, but the house overall is very contemporary. We have a lot of antiques, and I've always thought antiques looked better in contrast with modern architecture." The traditional qualities of the exterior are contrasted by what Anderson calls an "atypical handling of color and texture." New space added to the rear of the house provides a music room, breakfast room and screened porch downstairs, and two bedrooms for children and a deck upstairs. A large studio/office and guest room fill out the new attic. Anderson dubbed the house "La Vie en Rose" for a popular French song from the 1940s that just happens to be Dominique's favorite. The phrase's literal translation, "the life in pink," can be interpreted to mean "everything's rosy." And as far as Bob Anderson is concerned with the outcome of this renovation and addition, nothing could be more the case.
On the exterior (facing page), Anderson contrasts traditional elements with an "atypical handling of color and texture." Columns in the dining room (above) replace an original loadbearing wall and screen the room from new stairs. The scale of the original living room was improved by raising the ceiling and enlarging the fireplace (inset).
Vera Gospodnetic develops a theme of cubes in creating a haven for her family near Richmond.

The outward image of Vera Gospodnetic's rural house — crisp, rational, almost stark in its geometric purity — does little to belie the designer's preoccupation with a natural form. Yet the memory of a tree (specifically, the tree that once occupied the hilltop along the James River where the house now stands) nagged at her throughout the building's design. "It killed me to take that down," says Ms. Gospodnetic, an intern architect with the Richmond firm Interplan. But penance was paid when she completed the house, for placed prominently as the centerpiece of the two-story atrium is a lone black olive tree that pays tribute to the victim of the site's improvement. Located at the symbolic heart of the 5000-square-foot residence, the tree serves both as focal point for the house's floor plan (one large square subdivided into nine smaller ones) and counterpoint to its expansive white planes and ascetic details. "This house is very serene, very simple," says Ms. Gospodnetic. "I would call it crystal clear." Aided both in the overall concept and in selected details by her brother, Yugoslavian architect Branko Siladin, Ms. Gospodnetic took a set of rough collaborative sketches and saw them through to exquisite execution. While the house's exterior evokes first impressions of static symmetry, the suggestion of formal balance is betrayed in small ways throughout (by a projecting bay window on the north side, for example, and by counterbalanced columns in red and blue on the south). A pristine cylinder that rises from the ground beside the pedimented entry contains a spiraling marble stair whose stepped sides echo the visual theme of cubes and squares played through the house. Scaling the stair from the entry level, visitors arrive at the threshold of the atrium, whose sun-drenched brightness is contrasted by a black lacquered fireplace. Tiny low-voltage lights fixed overhead on taut cables can be adjusted to illuminate the sculptures and paintings by Yugoslavian artists displayed in the room. Surrounding the atrium are the living areas, a collection of rooms that flow freely into one another while allowing the possibility of being closed off by custom-crafted pocket doors divided into four-inch squares of glass. A study, music room, conversation area, dining room, kitchen and two patios leave no leftover areas for formal entertaining, as Ms. Gospodnetic intended. "I really tried to cut on the space that is lost and increase the space that we use," she says. "For me, the most important thing was to create a space that would reflect the way we live, that would satisfy all our needs, and that would be solid and strong — just like our family." The stair's carpeted second flight ascends to a landing that overlooks the atrium and leads to four bedrooms. Rooms facing the river embrace views of the pastoral countryside; more private is the façade that opens toward undeveloped land north of the house. "Of course, I had to use what the site offered," says the architect. But one shouldn't neglect what she offered the site, as well.
Glass is used freely on the south facade (facing page), which opens toward views of the James River. A two-story skylighted atrium, which serves as both gallery and gathering space, is the showpiece of the house (above). The spiral stair (inset) reveals itself as a half-cylinder, three stories tall, on the exterior.
The collecting has started all over again for Sydney and Frances Lewis, who all but emptied their Richmond mansion in 1985 by donating their coveted collection of furniture and art to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Out went the exquisite Art Nouveau bedroom suite by Louis Majorelle, the Art Deco cabinet, clock and desk by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann and dozens of early 20th-century pieces other museums would have killed for. Out went enough contemporary paintings and sculptures to fill entire new galleries. Out went so much — more than 1200 pieces in all — that, with the exception of Frances's cherished 18th century English dining table and a few Tiffany lamps, mostly what the Lewises saw when surveying their house were bare walls and empty floors. They turned to each other and asked: "What now?"

What else? Collect. "I liked the empty house, but we needed a few things," says Frances, waxing animated while perched on a plastic-laminate chair of Memphis Group origin. "There were all kinds of things bursting out in furniture-making in the '80s — right?" she fires, seeking affirmation from husband and constant companion Sydney, "so we decided why not go with that, indulge ourselves, and buy the work of living artists again?"

In doing so, the Lewises have outdone themselves, amassing an eclectic range of brightly-colored and willfully-shaped tables, chairs, clocks, couches, beds, chests and lamps that blur the distinctions between art, craft and design. Their interest in art furniture has confirmed the reputations of some artists and built new ones for others. Work by young talent sits alongside pieces by established architects Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, Gaetano Pesce and Ettore Sottsass and artists Roy Lichtenstein, Wendell Castle, William Paley and Dakota Jackson.

To venture into the Lewises' living room today is to risk sensory overload — a jazz ensemble of colors, shapes and textures that test the boundary between harmony and discord. No doubt the room would elicit nervous reactions from Middle America, but Sydney and Frances take it in stride. Knowing how to place a neon-purple aluminum footstool beside a sculpted wood bench takes a keen eye and a bit of daring. "We try to make the objects look as good as they can," Frances says. "But, it's true, we've never desired a really comfy atmosphere. Coziness is not high on our list."

Each of the Lewises scouts new purchases, but Sydney and Frances operate with a unified vision. Their collection started to take shape in the 1960s when Sydney, the founder of Best Products Co., began bartering company inventory for artists' works. (Andy Warhol, for one, swapped paintings for a vacuum cleaner, TV sets, film and musical instruments.) Today the Lewises rely on a web of contacts and dealers in New York and Europe for word on who's doing what, and they frequent a handful of galleries in search of the best. Over the years, their collecting
habits fueled the careers of so many aspiring artists that the Lewises recently were given the prestigious Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Award for outstanding patronage of the arts. The honor, presented in New York by the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, acknowledges their peer status with such notables as Dominique de Menil, Joseph H. Hirshhorn and Paul Mellon, all past winners.

"Their importance to the Commonwealth of Virginia is inestimable," says Frederick Brandt, curator of 20th century art at the Virginia Museum. "They are totally unselfish — two extremely intelligent people who both have a great eye. Plus they are so free and willing to share their gift of collecting skill. I think that's what sets them apart."

Sydney's passion for art was kindled when, following a heart attack in 1962, doctors advised him to find a diversion from the pressures of running Best Products. (The company was sold in 1989, but the Lewises continue to play advisory roles there.) Sydney's love for collecting — shared equally by the energetic Frances — is exceeded only by his fascination for the artists whom they meet along the way.

Their friendship with sculptor-architect James Wines spawned an interest in architecture. Wines's firm, SITE Architects, was commissioned to design a series of now-famous showrooms for Best Products, many of which feature brick facades that appear to be peeling off the building or crumbling into ruins. Wines introduced the Lewises to design celebrities such as Robert Venturi, Michael Graves and Malcolm Holzman, whose New York firm, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, designed much of the Best Products Headquarters in Richmond and the 1985 West Wing addition to the Virginia Museum.

Yet one wonders why lawyer-turned-entrepreneur Sydney Lewis got converted to the cause of good design. "Because it makes me feel good when I see it — that's all," he says. "And I hope it would make a lot of other people feel better than seeing some of the garbage they see." At times, the Lewises have virtually forced their flair for the avant-garde upon conservative Richmond. In 1974 they placed a 10-foot-tall Claes Oldenburg clothespin in front of their neo-Georgian mansion, and have been known since then for challenging the limits of accepted taste.

Sydney acknowledges that his desire to expose his hometown to a range of contemporary art figured strongly in singling out the Virginia Museum to receive the Lewis collection. "It was like thrusting something on a child and making him eat it," he says. Frances hastens to add that the museum's financial stability and active outreach program also were important elements in their decision. "People in Virginia may not know how lucky they are to have this museum in the state," she says.

But those who appreciate the intrinsic value of art recognize their good fortune in having patrons like Sydney and Frances Lewis, whose generosity has benefited many colleges across the state, too. "We try to be good citizens, and where there are good deeds being done in this community, we like to participate," Sydney says. "I know with us that we are not being philanthropic because it hurts us. We are being philanthropic because we enjoy it."

The Lewises' traditional mansion is filled with the untraditional: functional furniture by architects and much more that remains closer to the realm of art, such as Roy DeForest's "Dog Table #2" (above).
Changes in the Old Schoolhouse

New influences, from shifts in educational philosophy to more complex ways of building, have altered the basic tenets of school design. Still, many architects have transcended these constraints to produce something of worth.

By Sandra E. Wilson Parks

My clearest recollections from the days when I sat in the fourth seat of the third row in Mrs. Bledsoe's second-grade class are the sound of screeching chalk on the blackboard and the dry smell of erasers and paper. But the physical surroundings in which the daily drama of my education was played out — the playgrounds, hallways, stairwells and classrooms — are constant elements in my mental snapshots of school days. Institutional green walls? Pale and putrid, they still evoke anxiety about certain failed algebra tests. And, to this day, I resent hopper windows after years suffered in sweltering Tidewater classrooms, because the high ones were always too difficult to open.

My feelings, of course, may not have been uppermost in the school board's mind. For schools were once built as grand symbols of civic pride as often as they were built to contain the humble day-to-day routine of feeding the three R's to America's youth. From the spare, but noble, stick-built country schoolhouses to the cities' monumental temples of learning rendered in thick masonry walls, our schools long stood for fundamental values of dignity, hard work and community.

But new influences have rewritten the basic tenets of school design. Shifts in curriculum and teaching methods, the sheer force of the information explosion, and rising costs of construction and operation have kept school districts on their toes searching for better ways to accommodate rapid change. Architects, likewise, are strapped by regulations that were unimaginable 30 years ago and the pressure to deliver the most building for the least money. Still, many have succeeded in transcending the mishmash of rules and the constraints of modern construction to produce something of worth.

"The real challenge is in obeying what is mandated in an imaginative way," says Robert Vickery, a Charlottesville architect who specializes in school design. In recent work on Frederick Douglass Elementary School in Winchester, which he designed in collaboration with the Charlottesville firm VMDO Architects, Vickery says the building's site and configuration allowed him to design the fire stair as a light well, enclosing it in glass so that it feeds daylight into the corridors. Vickery challenges the notion that schools, by their nature, must all look alike. "Each site is different, and there's always something that allows you to give a distinctive flavor and innovativeness to that school," he says.

The disappearance of the large monumental schools that routinely were built in the early 1900s in favor of low-rise schools that became popular after World War II was caused by a variety of forces, wrote renowned school architect William Caudill in his 1954 book, Toward Better School Design. But the main reason, said Caudill, was that "the old school was primarily designed to impress the adult and the new school primarily designed to impress and provide comfort to the pupil." In principle, he may have been right.

Matoaca Middle School
Bond, Comet, Westmoreland + Galusha Architects

Renovation of this Chesterfield County school, built in 1975, was an urgent need when the architects were called in. The job's first phase involved reworking the interior classrooms, cafeteria and counseling area to simplify circulation flow. But more critical were the prefabricated brick panels peeling from the building's facade. The architects designed a replacement system using ceramic tile arranged in a lively pattern — and transforming Matoaca's bland walls into something upbeat. Uninspired "less is more" columns at the building's entrance were fattened up and now support a bold canopy that has become a focal point for the school.
Caudill's influential writings popularized the notion of pupil-centered design for primary and secondary schools in the '50s and '60s, when, in order to accommodate Baby Boom children, schools were popping up like mushrooms. Great emphasis was placed on providing students with a comfortable environment — enough air and light, adequate space and temperatures, and proper acoustics — to foster learning. Children's social and emotional needs were stressed as well (those institutional green walls, for instance, were encouraged as being soothing to the spirit and easy on the eyes).

Such were the prevailing philosophies when architect Gordon Cialusha began work on his first school in 1958. Classroom design at the time was driven by state regulations that dictated windows of a certain size and height along the outside wall to minimize the need for artificial lighting, says Cialusha, of the Richmond firm Bond, Comet, Westmoreland + Cialusha Architects. The result was that almost all classrooms were 22 feet wide from exterior wall to interior corridor; everyone agreed that was how far daylight would penetrate into the building. When the idea of extended use of schools came about, the need for more electric lighting increased and the 22-foot classroom was made obsolete. Classrooms became deeper, and the exterior wall dimension was reduced — which also shortened the corridors and made school construction more economical. With the advent of air conditioning, the possibility for placing classrooms and offices within the core of the building with no windows made schools even more compact. In the '60s, new ideas in education produced new buildings: open classrooms, octagonal classrooms, even round rooms. The architectural form reflected an attitude that learning was not always best accomplished through an authoritative, one-way flow of information from teacher to student, but took into account the alternative that, in a less-regimented space, students might also learn from each other.

Today the idea of the open school largely has been abandoned, and open classrooms have been partitioned to create more conventional teaching spaces, says Martha Phillips, a consulting architect with the Virginia Department of Education. She says the schools of the '90s are difficult to compare with those of 30 years ago. Today's educational programs are more complex and specialized, for example, so the classrooms needed to support those teaching activities also vary greatly. In addition, the lack of repetition drives costs up. (Cialusha says, for example, that the school he designed in 1958 cost about $8 per square foot to build; costs of about $70 per square foot are more common today.) Requirements for mechanical systems, structural systems — even sound systems — are much more demanding in the modern school. "These systems have all become much more sophisticated," says Vickery. "They cost proportionately more, but they are costs you don't see."
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Peninsula Montessori School
Rancorn, Wildman, Krause, Brezinski Architects
Specialized ideas in education shaped the architecture of this private school in Newport News. On a pragmatic level, classrooms 50 percent larger than the public school standard were required by the Montessori method, which emphasizes learning based on self-directed, individual activity. Beyond that, children from ages 18 months to 10 years attend the school, so each classroom was scaled to accommodate a different size child. Windows in each building are raised from the floor to a height determined by the age group inside, producing a subtle variety among the façades. Imagery from the prototypical one-room schoolhouse occurs not only in the gabled classroom buildings, but in the abstracted tower that recalls the belfries of traditional schools. A similarity exists, as well, between the school tower and Maria Montessori's "Pink Tower," a set of building blocks that is among her best known teaching tools.

Today's schools are getting larger, as well as more complex. Before World War II, elementary schools were built to hold roughly 300 students. Now a school for 600 to 900 children is the norm, says Ms. Phillips. What about high schools? Once considered large at 1200-student capacity, the metropolitan high school today is designed for 2000 students.

While the state still dictates minimum sizes for classrooms (as well as spaces such as cafeterias and laboratories), standards have become more generous for the lower elementary grades. Perhaps more influential in shaping the modern school has been a new emphasis on information technology. Enter the "media center," which may represent the clearest difference between the educational experiences of yesterday's children and today's. Where we once roamed the shelves in search of Grimm's Fairy Tales and were treated to the occasional film strip, today's children are comfortable with a smorgasbord of audio-visual material: films, videos and audiotapes. "The librarian acts more as a curator of this information, and the media center is the center of information dissemination," says architect Doug Westmoreland, of Bond, Comet, Westmoreland + Galusha, which has converted the libraries of several dated elementary schools to accommodate current technologies — while adding cozy alcoves for a bit of old-fashioned storytelling.

New ways of thinking about the emotional and social needs of sixth- to eighth-graders led to the development of a prototype middle school in Newport News that opened last fall. Gildersleeve Middle School was designed specifically to support a strategy of "block scheduling," in which students from each grade stay together for academic classes conducted by an
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This recent renovation in Norfolk is an award-winning example of how to adapt an older school to current needs. The expansion allowed Maury to meet new space requirements and state standards while renewing the historical significance of the 79-year-old landmark. Restoration work focused on the neoclassical façade and an 800-seat auditorium. But most praise for the project has centered on the ingenious filling-in of the original E-shaped structure. Two open-air courtyards were converted into atriums that house a new cafeteria and library. Art and science labs that enclose the ends of the atriums add new academic space and create a new system of corridor loops, in contrast to the "dead ends" that existed before.

"The best part about the school is that we designed it around the curriculum," says assistant superintendent Billy Williams. "In the past, Newport News has built a facility, handed it over to the curriculum development people and said, 'Now design a curriculum to fit.'" Architects Smith & Boynton of Roanoke, who designed Gildersleeve, interpreted the need for "a school within a school" by segregating the building into distinct clusters, or pods, each with its own restrooms, lockers, activity rooms, resource rooms — even offices for an assistant principal and guidance counselor who serve only that grade level. Acknowledging that the middle school years are a time for young teenagers to adapt to a larger school and class changes, the goal of block-scheduling is to foster a closeness and camaraderie within each level to provide a level of emotional security too.

Already Newport News has built a sister institution, Hines Middle School, using the same essential floor plan as Gildersleeve, and Chesterfield County is having the design adapted to its programs too. Both of these areas, Tidewater and suburban Richmond, are contributing to what many describe as a school boom in Virginia. "It's as active now as I can remember it ever being," says Ms. Phillips of the state education department. During the past two years, construction contracts were awarded on 49 new schools statewide. Yet by far the bulk of school work undertaken in recent years has been for additions.
and renovations. And for architects who specialize in school commissions, renovations are becoming a bigger part of their practice. Sparking that development is a trend toward air-conditioning older schools, replacing and upgrading heating systems, applying new roofs, and modernizing ceiling layouts with drop-in panels and new lighting.

Vickery, for one, says he is encouraged by the rise in renovations, “because a neighborhood identifies itself with a school. And if a school has to be closed down and relocated to a new site, I think that’s unfortunate. The build-up of history on that site is an important part of a neighborhood.”

So maybe there’s something good to be said for those old schools, after all, even though I couldn’t get the top windows open to coax a breeze into my sweltering classroom. I even made the ironic discovery that the internal corridor of my youth — the long windowless hallway with classrooms feeding from both sides — has become popular once again for elementary schools, based on the prevailing wisdom that young children, who stay all day in a single classroom, need visual exposure to the outdoors to feel psychological comfort. Ironic, that is, because my old teacher Mrs. Bledsoe could walk into today’s school and think things hadn’t changed a bit since I sat in the fourth seat of the third row in her second-grade class.

Sandra E. Wilson Parks is a Richmond freelance writer.
In the 1980s Tysons Corner became the favorite whipping boy of every critic who had something to say about the shortcomings of suburbia. The very mention of Tysons Corner elicited simultaneous frowns and nods recognizing the nation's symbol of visual chaos, traffic congestion and real estate development run amok. At countless seminars and symposia on urban design, Tysons Corner was invariably cited as the quintessential example of ineffective planning and zoning, a place beyond salvation.

But what's so wrong with Tysons that it needs to be saved? And for whom are we saving it? The answer depends on whom you ask.

Community business leaders think it's just fine, thank you — a profitable office environment with great access and visibility. Retail merchants rave about the great location, the great demographics, and the proximity of thousands of office workers who double as shoppers. Office tenants and employees who actually occupy Tysons consider it a reasonable workplace, while perhaps regretting its lack of community sense and spirit.

The few residents of Tysons' apartments tout the convenience of being near work and shopping, despite its pedestrian-unfriendly character, the lack of opportunity for walking, and the obligation to travel everywhere by car. Long-time residents of surrounding subdivisions that predate Tysons' boom lament the traffic increase and lack of green space in their community. Surely they didn't bargain for what they now have: life next to a suburban downtown that dwarfs many cities. (Of course, they probably don't complain about the dramatic rise in their property values.)

Members of the design community might defend achievements on individual projects — an award-winning building or landscaped courtyard — but most speak negatively about Tysons' lack of vision, its missing urbanity, its disorder and placelessness. They might point out that the whole isn't even equal to the sum of its parts. Some might simply say: "It's just plain ugly." So how did it come to be?

Tysons originated as a crossroads, the intersection of Route 7 and Route 123, both state roads with unrestricted access. Once no more than a gas station surrounded by Fairfax County farmland, Tysons' intense development was set off in the '60s by the arrival of the Capital Beltway and the Dulles Airport Access Road. These superhighways instantly made Tysons desirable, and the county reinforced the area's potential by zoning it for shopping centers, office buildings and parking lots.

Yet if Tysons was planned, why does it look so unplanned? Part of the answer lies in urban theory and practice. Thirty years ago, no one envisioned Tysons becoming an urban place. Located ten miles from downtown Washington, D.C., it was seen as a fragment of the suburban landscape in which segregated land uses and free-flowing auto traffic were the prevailing planning strategies. Thousands of acres of low-density residential (color it yellow) placed over here, hundreds of acres of commercial (color it red) sited over there — the planners swabbed hues over land maps that were crisscrossed by black lines representing existing and future roads.

Thus the planning grain was coarse, a policy consistent with Virginia's tradition of protecting private property rights. Laissez-faire regulation was directed mostly at prescribing land use categories, densities and parking requirements. It was a given that
land ownership and parcel patterns — not patterns of city-inspired streets, blocks and public spaces — would finally shape development.

The result is an urban area masquerading as a suburb — "urban" because in quantity it is very, very big. Two large retail malls boast nearly 2 million square feet of space, and another 15 million square feet of office space exist, more than in downtown Richmond or Baltimore. Gigantic parking lots and parking garages surround every structure. In addition, the roads serving all of this development are few but wide, and frequently choked with traffic. Street trees are sparse, a sign that Tysons is still under construction. Tens of thousands of people pour into Tysons daily, and most leave at the end of the workday. Regrettably, there is no service to Tysons on Metro, the district's mass transit system.

Parks and green space are rare in Tysons, too, the ground closely resembling a tapestry of automobiles and pavement. It's hard to find sidewalks or pedestrian paths that lead where you might want to go, much less ones that traverse parking lots.

And many uses and activities taken for granted in traditional towns and cities seem to be missing or in short supply: housing, civic buildings, schools, churches, freestanding shops (such as hardware, cleaners, shoe repair or barber shop) and even a variety of good restaurants and bars. These characteristics give Tysons its image as a "suburban activity center"; they are what make it something other than a city.

Is there a political will for change? On the one hand, maybe not. Despite its limitations, Tysons has proved to be a good deal politically. Because Tysons overlaps three of Fairfax's supervisory districts, no one supervisor or faction can claim dominance. At the same time, no single politician is beholden to Tysons. Being a giant commercial enclave, Tysons requires minimal governmental services; public amenities are found only in the surrounding residential neighborhoods. And while Tysons may have few homes, it also has few homeless. Its homogeneous, 9-to-5, commuting population ensures that Tysons is relatively free of traditional urban strife.

On the other hand, there may be a political will taking shape. Under the new county plan, the planning staff has proposed increasing the density in Tysons Corner with a commitment to pedestrian amenities and housing. The proposal argues against single-family detached dwellings and advocates the highest density limits in the county. The proposal has not yet been adopted, and details remain to be spelled out. But it is significant that the planners recognize Tysons' uniqueness along with its problems.

Fairfax County is not alone in reexamining Tysons Corner. TYTRAN, a coalition of private citizens and business representatives, is actively working to establish design guidelines for Tysons' future by sponsoring community forums and interviews with local citizens. Backed by a grant from the Urban Mass Transit Administration, George Mason University is studying sign designs specific to Tysons. In addition, the Urban Land Institute funded a pilot study of Tysons and how it might be transformed, and the Northern Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects is using Tysons as the subject of a design study this year (see story, p. 35).

Most designers share a vision for Tysons. They would provide well designed, safe, usable sidewalks that link destinations both visually and functionally. More streetside amenities — trees, lighting, art, benches and information kiosks — would be added. The number of local streets, not simply their widths, would be increased to reduce the size of blocks and provide alternative circulation routes. Curbside parking would be the norm except on the busiest streets. Parking lots would be located within blocks, or behind or between buildings, so that shops and stores front sidewalks and streets. Carefully placed urban parks, easily accessible to pedestrians, also would be woven into the street fabric.

This shared vision also would include more diverse land uses — housing, convenience shopping and civic, institutional and cultural activities — to promote community interaction and round-the-clock activity. Density increases would justify quality development in economic terms. This means higher buildings within Tysons' core, ground-level park-
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ing lots giving way to multi-level parking decks, air rights development, and new buildings in the gaps between existing ones. Greater density also would encourage more riders on public transportation. Especially critical is the need to bridge the dividing traffic channels created by Route 123, Route 7 and International Drive.

To achieve such a vision will require both surgical removal of old layers and the addition of new layers. But this is not the only vision. Consider less radical, less transforming visions for Tysons. These would encourage growth but still preserve the “suburban” characteristics of Tysons Corner.

One scenario is to make Tysons look like a corporate office campus akin to Fair Lakes, a very successful Fairfax County development planned for offices, hotels, shops, ground-surface and multi-level parking and lush landscaping — but few residents. This approach has proven economically successful in the Westpark tract in northcentral Tysons, one of its more attractive areas. Given sufficient road improvements, appropriate streetscape and planting guidelines, architectural controls and a sympathetic market, the pattern of single office developments on single parcels — with buildings set back from streets and property lines and approached primarily by automobile — could represent a future Tysons. This development pattern eventually would swallow car dealerships, fast-food restaurants and other odd parcels of land. But this approach has never been taken before, probably because large, vacant, cheaper parcels always beckon from a little farther down the road.

Another model for Tysons could be Arlington’s Crystal City, where an underground retail mall serves as the literal base for dense office, hotel and residential development. It includes multi-level parking, is served by Washington’s subway and is adjacent to major highways. The Tysons II complex promises to be a variant of Crystal City with its shopping mall adjacent to a number of interconnected office buildings, hotels and parking garages. Other multi-block areas of Tysons, bounded by major roads, could grow likewise: denser, possibly with housing, but still car-dependent.
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But perhaps none of these visions will be realized. Continuation of the current pattern is not only possible, but probable. The historical willingness of commercial and residential developers to retreat to less developed areas of Fairfax County, and to counties farther west and south, could cause growth at Tysons to taper off. Escalating land prices, the inability to assemble remaining tracts into usable parcels, politically-driven growth limits and market resistance to more urbanization in a self-described suburban area may perpetuate current land use patterns.

Route 7 is likely to remain striplike. Its gas stations will become mini-marts. Fast-food outlets will prosper or fail, the successful ones devouring the parking lots of their struggling neighbors. The regional malls will continue to be disconnected behemoths competing for visibility and customers. Housing will be built only on the periphery of Tysons. And office buildings, because of the unique mix of land cost and zoning — which stipulates density, setbacks and number of parking spaces — will continue to pop up like mushrooms, not along street edges, but in the middle of sites covered with asphalt.

As a matter of land planning and design, Tysons could have an alternative future. It could become a truly urban center. But the obstacles — political, economic, legal, historical and even social — to such changes are daunting. Without inspired and courageous leadership on the part of government, coupled with support from the business community and county citizens, visionary proposals for Tysons will remain in the realm of wishful thinking. Unfortunately, we probably will continue to point to Tysons as an example of what not to do.

Roger K. Lewis is an architect and planner in Washington, D.C., and a professor of architecture at the University of Maryland. He writes a weekly column, "Shaping the City," for The Washington Post. Sunny Jung Scully is a landscape architect and a partner in the firm of Mortensen, Lewis & Scully, of Vienna. Her office is located in Tysons Corner.

Northern Virginia architects have taken to heart the humanization of Tysons Corner with an effort to channel the diverse range of opinions that contribute to its fate. Tysons 2000, a project sponsored by the Northern Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, seeks "to add the architect's perspective to the urban planning process," says coordinator Warren Almquist, the chapter vice-president.

The project began in July with a series of roundtable discussions that allowed architects to meet face-to-face with the people who most influence Tysons Corner, the 14th largest urban center in the U.S. These public discussions included representatives from Fairfax County's planning and economic development departments, TYTRAN and local landscape and environmental firms and organizations, and were aimed at giving participants a sense of current policy.

In August, participants reconvened for four charrettes, each examining a different scenario for Tysons' future. They included: "The Official Future," which assumed continued growth of Tysons using current land patterns and development strategies; "The Dark Side," which showed the effects of poorly planned, highly congested growth; "Planned, Human Growth," which emphasized human scale, mixed land uses and a sense of community; and "Environmentally Sensitive Growth," which focused on social design, innovations in land use and ecological concerns.

Almquist says this fall participating architects will review the sketches and text generated during the charrettes, boil them down into key planning concepts and present them to Fairfax County staff.
A Tale of True Cities

Lewis Mumford: A Life


By Gregory K. Hunt

With the death of Lewis Mumford in January of this year, America lost one of its most eminent men of letters. For more than 60 years, Mumford's interest in an astonishingly broad range of subjects produced some 30 books and more than 1000 reviews, essays and articles. In these writings, he emerged as biographer, historian, philosopher, poet, playwright, critic of both literature and art, and especially an incisive observer of architecture and cities. But Mumford was more than prolific. His perceptive analysis of the man-made world shaped the thinking of an entire generation of urban planners and writers.

Donald L. Miller's Lewis Mumford: A Life captures Mumford's extraordinary life and literary career with an insight borne of the author's intimate knowledge of his subject. As Mumford's literary executor, Miller, a professor of history at Lafayette College, enjoyed access to Mumford's voluminous private papers and maintained a close friendship with Mumford and his wife, Sophia.

Born in New York City in 1895, Lewis Mumford never earned a college degree and yet was one of the few American writers to essentially earn his living as a freelance scholar. An early love of reading, along with a passion for firsthand observation of New York, kindled his lifelong interest in literature, history, architecture and planning. He considered himself a "generalist with the task of enlarging the vision of those who did the actual planning and building of our physical environment."

As America's foremost architecture critic for nearly six decades, he explored the "organic" relationships among buildings, neighborhoods, cities and regions, a notion borrowed from Patrick Geddes, the Scottish botanist, sociologist and planner. Like Geddes, Mumford came to base much of his work on a dialectical method which stressed life as "an ongoing interplay between organism and environment." For Mumford, architecture was primarily a social art; a building was not to be viewed as a singular structure valued on its aesthetic merits alone, for it always existed within the wide context of the city and its region.

As Miller perceptively notes, Mumford's city is where "the issues of civilization focused, and here we find the social heritage best preserved, embodied and transmitted." In two major contributions to urban literature, The Culture of Cities (1938) and The City in History (1961), Mumford traced the origins of cities as stages for the development of human life. His city was always the place of "human community," and he considered both the medieval city and Puritan village of New England as "organic"— and thus exemplary — settlements. That attitude, and the vision for cities that he was to advocate throughout his life, were directly influenced by Ebenezer Howard's ideas of the garden city, the ideal settlement that married the best of town and country. Mumford was convinced that the ideals of pedestrian scale, green space and open areas for civic life should be requisite characteristics of communities in which modern man would be fulfilled. Mumford, in fact, tried to live what he preached, moving his young family in 1925 to Sunnyside Gardens, an experimental planned community in Queens that featured clustered houses, community flower gardens and shared green space. As a founder of the Regional Planning Association of America, an organization dedicated to the building of garden city-styled developments in America, Mumford was later to direct harsh criticism toward the post-war new towns in Britain, as well as those built privately in the U.S. during the 1960s, most of which fell below his expectations.

Mumford's writings — dense in admonishments, replete with Mumford's eye for the details of city life — buildings, bridges, rooftop towers — was documented in a variety of ways, including watercolors. The Manhattan scene above, "View from My Bedroom Window," was painted in 1916.
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Coming Up

In our next issue, we will feature the debate over James Madison's Montpelier estate, a look at how old buildings have been adapted to new uses, and an article on the architecture of typefaces. In our departments, look for stories on a design legend who came East for the twilight of his career, an example of how military needs reflect themselves in design, and a brilliant, if quirky, reappraisal of one of America's most widespread cultural heritages, Greek Revival architecture.

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