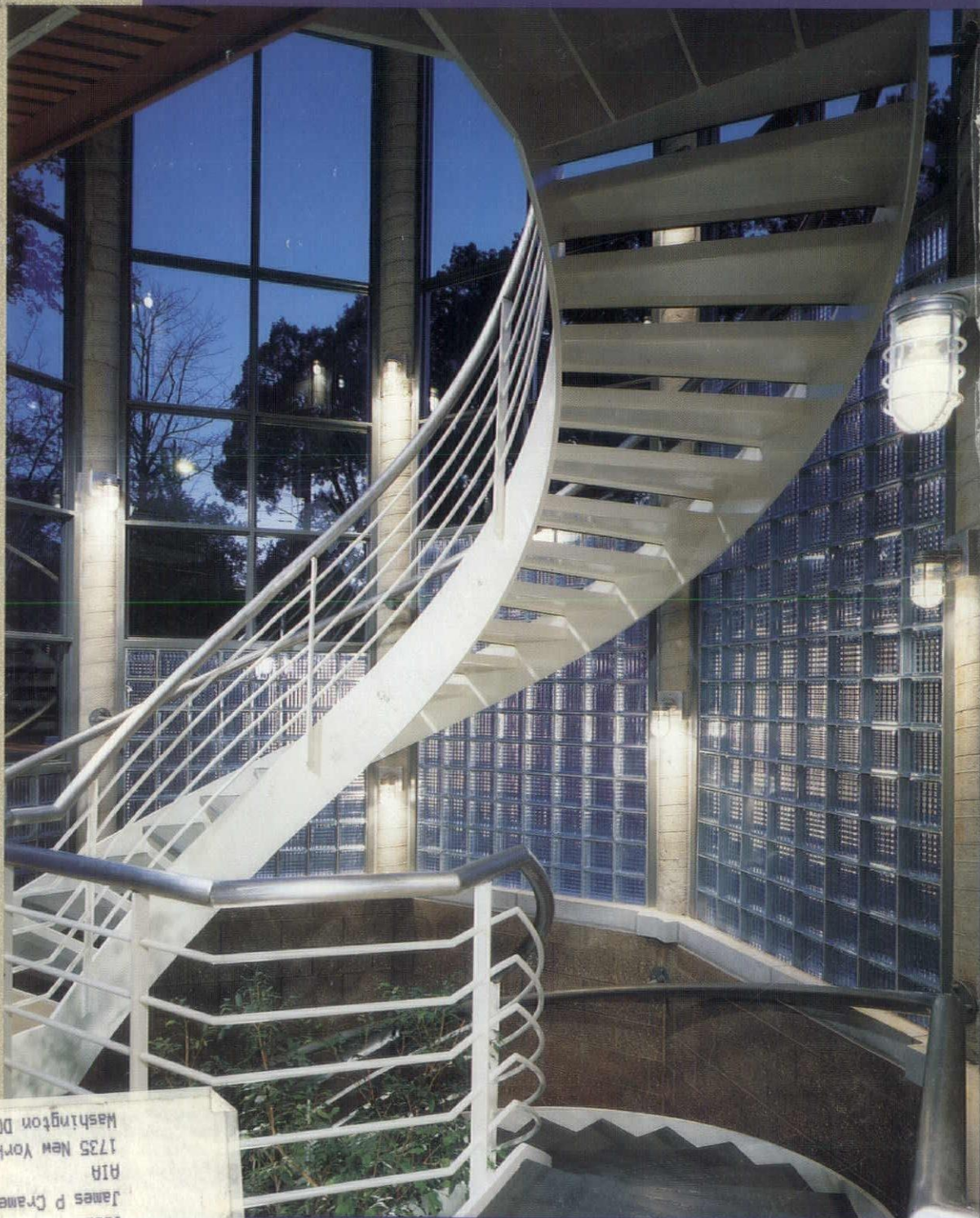


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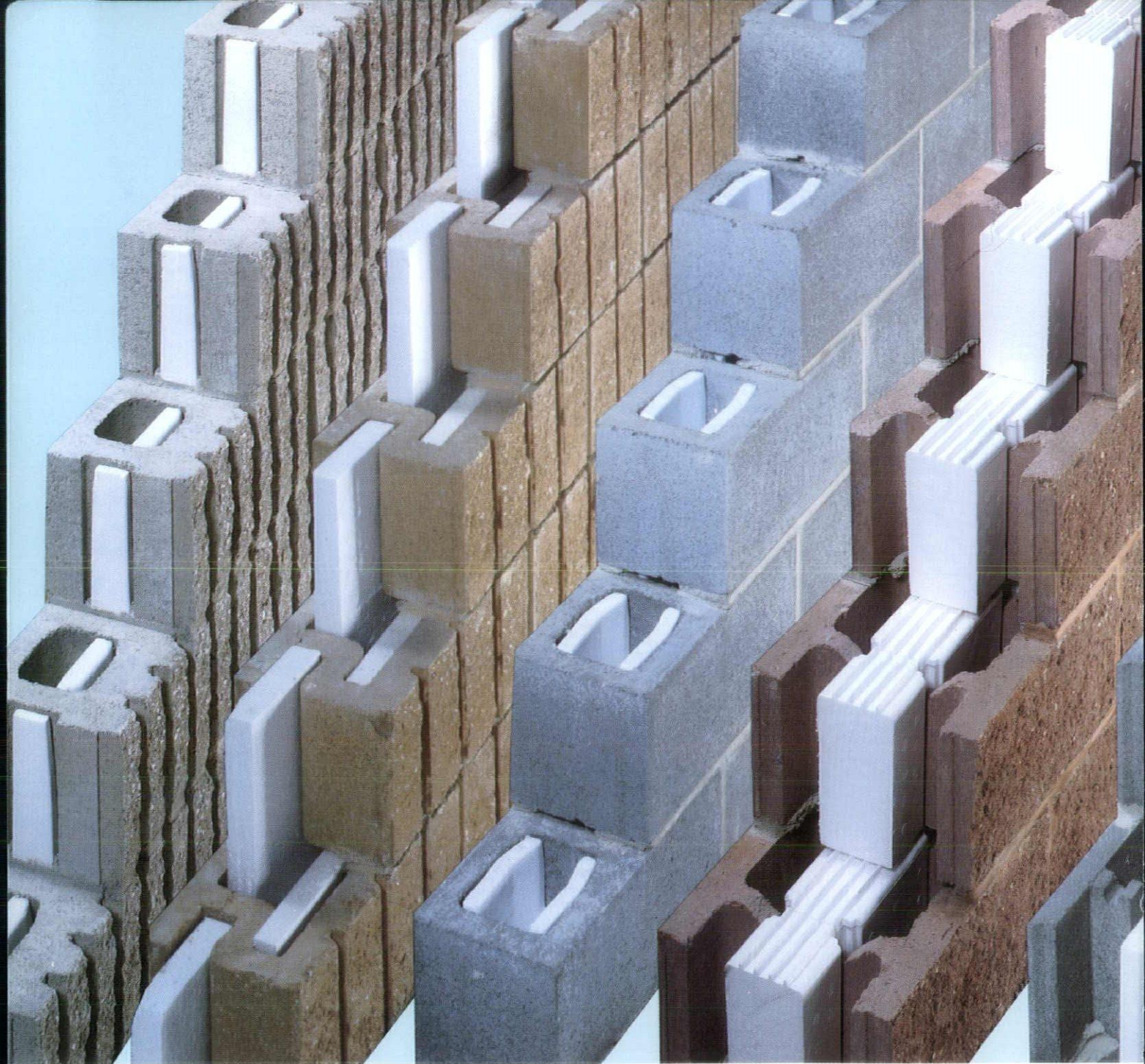
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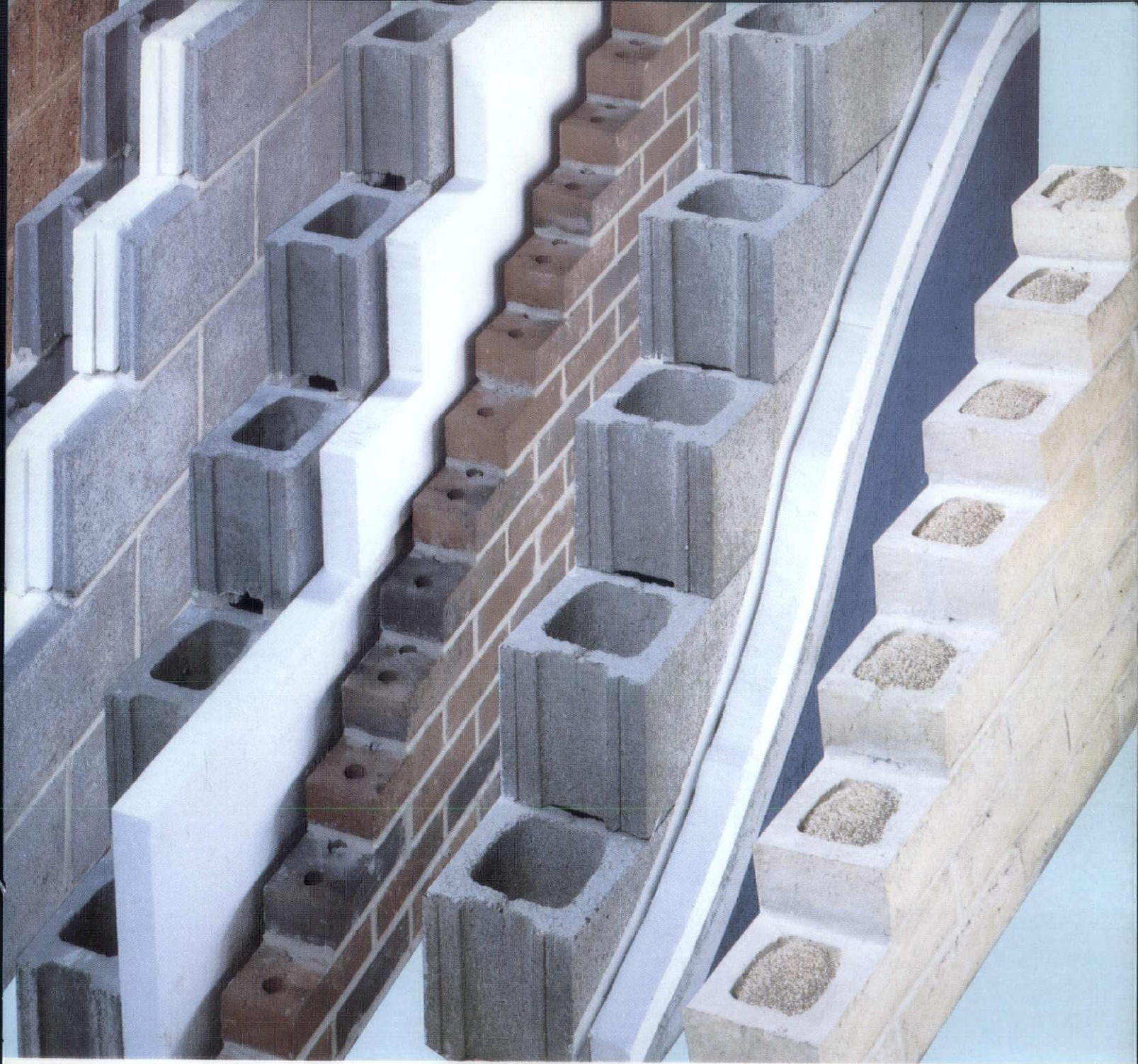
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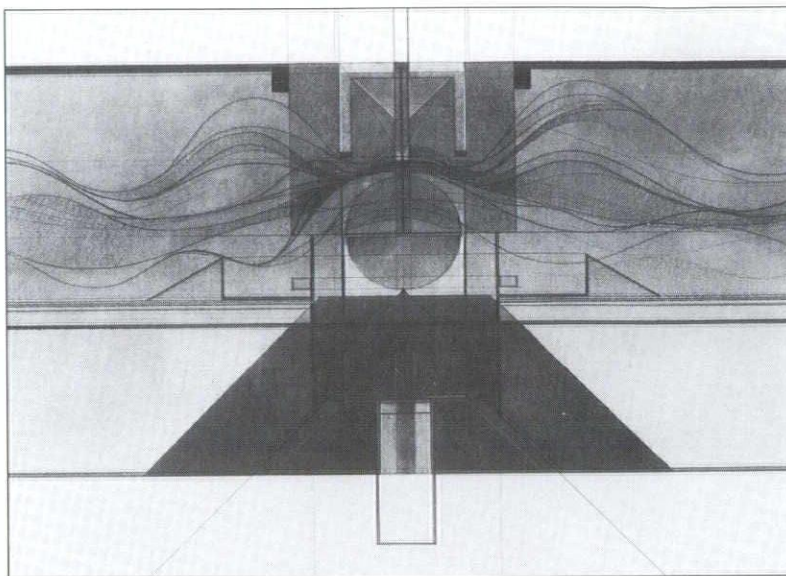
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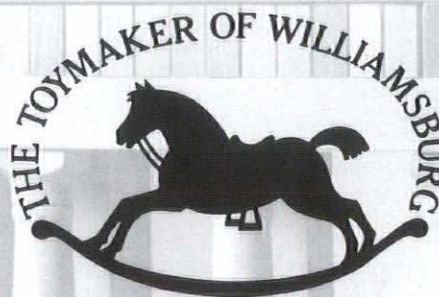
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inform

November/December 1990

volume one number four

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Adapting Old Buildings to New Uses

With increasing frequency, architects will be adapting old buildings to uses that are more relevant in a modern age. In this issue, Inform looks at four accomplished solutions to this challenging design problem. *By Vernon Mays*

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Montpelier: Whose History to Preserve?

Debate over how to restore and interpret the home of James Madison has split along uncompromising lines. Should modern additions be demolished to reveal a more accurate Madison-era home? Or should the 20th century alterations by the du Pont family remain? *By Rick Mashburn*

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The Architecture of Typography

Centuries-old methods used in building design are strikingly similar to the ways simple geometry has been applied to develop the alphabet you read. *By Derek Bacchus*

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a calendar of events, lectures and exhibitions

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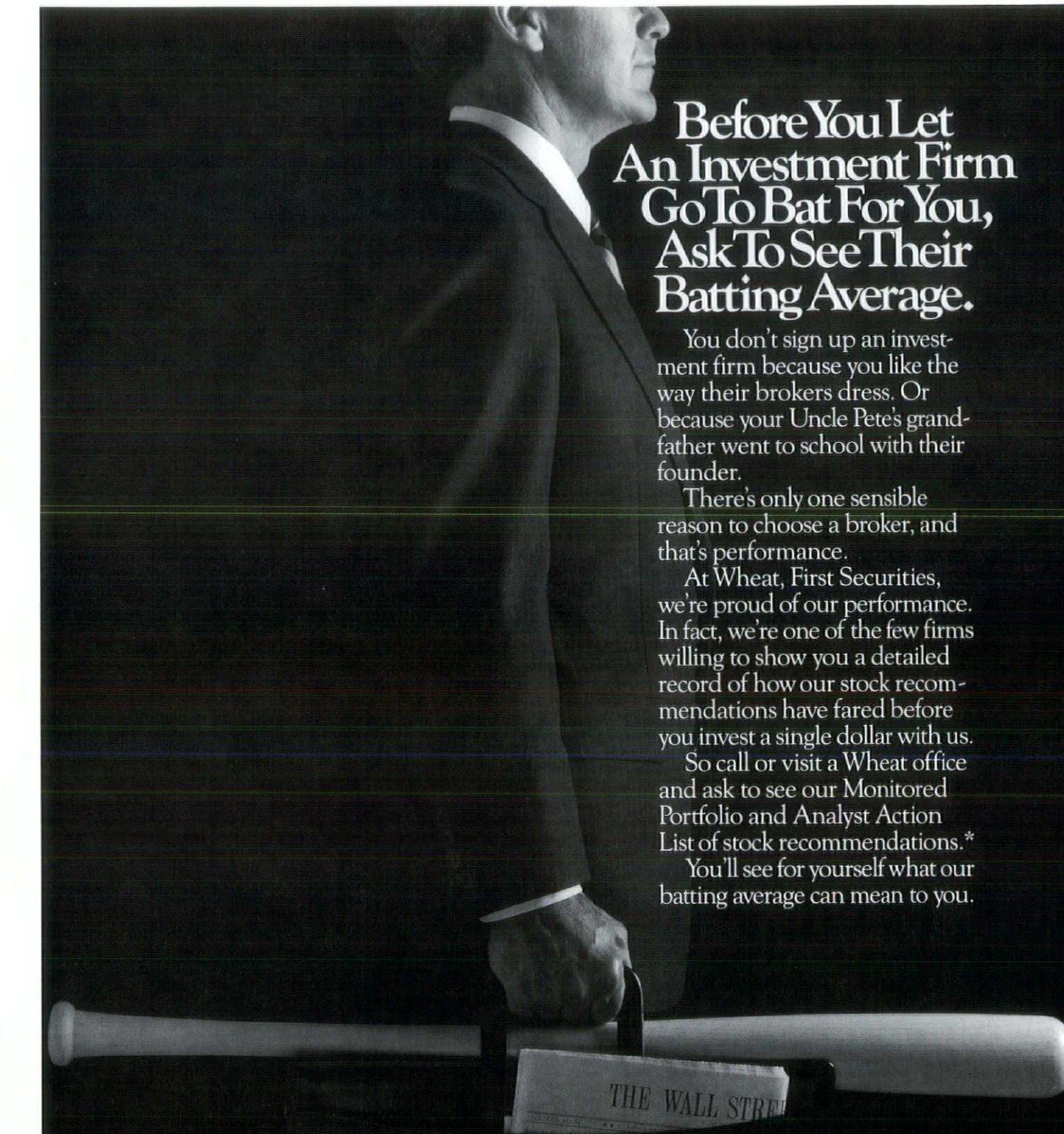
Harwell Hamilton Harris, an enduring force



p. 26

On the cover: Orthopaedic Specialists.

Photo by Whitney Cox.



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Getting It Wright

Windows, furnishings, two-dimensional designs and photography relating to the Master are explored in "Frank Lloyd Wright: Facets of Design," at The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk. Through Jan. 6. 804-622-1211

Dream Palaces

Architect John Eberson's designs for Loew's movie theatres, a nationwide chain rendered in exuberant styles, appear in "Temples of Illusion." Through Jan. 20 at the Octagon, Washington, D.C. 202-638-3105



Loew's Theater
Richmond

Is Bigger Better?

Two installations of large-scale works question the use of glass as a small-scale medium. Both can be seen from Dec. 21-Feb. 3 at the Renwick Gallery, Washington. 202-357-1300

Order in the Court

This weekend program demonstrates renovation techniques in use at the 220-year-old Colonial Williamsburg courthouse. Offered in January, twice in February, and in March. 800-447-8679

Americans Abroad

Prominent architects including Stanley Tigerman, Mark Mack, Steven Holl, Jane and Benjamin Thompson, Antoine Predock and Peter Eisenman discuss their exportation of American know-how. Tuesday night lectures begin Jan. 15. Smithsonian Resident Associates; nonmembers \$125. 202-357-3030

Windows Through Time

Eighteen American windows spanning 300 years of history. Through March 31 at the National Building Museum, Washington. 202-272-3606

Seaside Revisited

Charles Warren, architect-in-residence for Seaside, Florida, speaks on his public role Jan. 23 at Catholic University, Washington, D.C. 202-319-5188

Blue Ridge Parkway

This exhibit traces the accomplishments of America's most popular scenic byway. Through August 1991 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-3606

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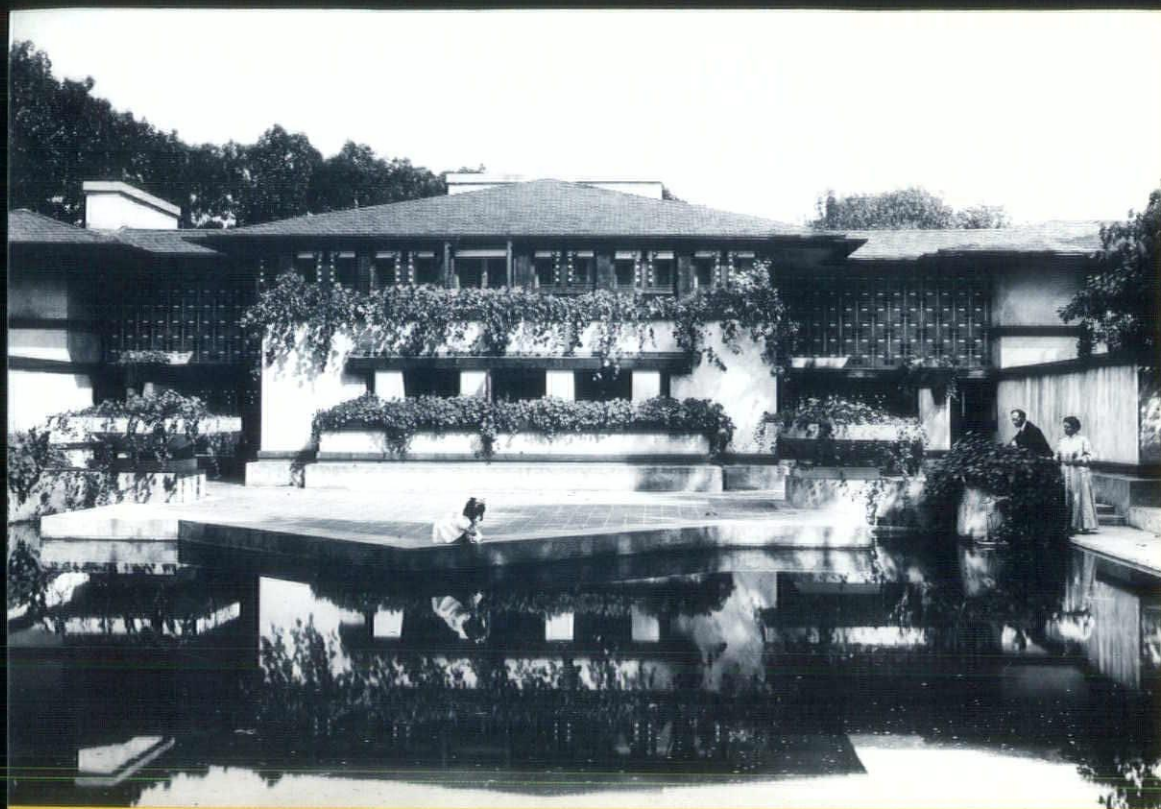
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Poolside in 1908 at the Avery Coonley House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Courtesy of The Chrysler Museum

Exhibit Explores Little-Known Wright

The first exhibition to explore Frank Lloyd Wright's life-long interest in photography and his active role in supervising photographs of his buildings opened November 11 at The Chrysler Museum in Norfolk. The show, entitled "Frank Lloyd Wright: Facets of Design," examines four aspects of Wright's long and productive career, which spanned from the 1890s to the 1950s. Photography's role is documented in part by a series of photographs from the Chicago firm Henry Fuernmann & Sons, whose black-and-white images capture the way Wright used light to define architectural space.

Weaving together the exhibit's elements is Wright's idea of an "organic unity" among all aspects of a building, inside and out. The portion of the show featuring Wright's designs for chairs, for example, underscores the architect's belief that the furnishings were as important as the house that contained them. Wright achieved an uneven range of success with his chair

designs, but the exhibit focuses on the masterpieces and leaves for another discussion some of the duds. (His three-wheeled secretarial chairs for the Johnson Wax headquarters in Racine, Wisconsin, for example, were visually exciting but also infamous for throwing their occupants sprawling across the floor.)

Yet another part of the exhibition looks at Wright's two-dimensional designs: books, magazine covers, wallpapers and plates. The fourth aspect includes fragments of the architecture itself: windows, sconces and models of completed works.

Evidence suggests that Wright participated actively in having his buildings photographed, says researcher Mary Dellin, who worked on the exhibit for New York curator David A. Hanks. Many photographs of Taliesin, Wright's Wisconsin home and studio, reveal unlivable room arrangements. "But it made for an interesting photograph," Dellin says. "The photographs take on an iconographic quality apart from the building itself."

T. Duncan Abernathy

Bunshaft: The Guru of Corporate Image-making

Nineteen-ninety saw the passing of many individuals who not only shaped, but defined, American culture. Neither will the music world see the genius of a Leonard Bernstein, nor the theater world a spirit like Mary Martin again. Feisty William Paley, founder of CBS, left his imprint on every aspect of television — and every U.S. household. Likewise, with the death in August of Gordon Bunshaft, America lost an architectural giant.

Granted, Bunshaft wasn't a household word. But, over time, his innovative forms and the accumulated body of his work gained widespread admiration.

While the world might recognize the modernity and beauty of his trail-blazing Lever House, completed on New York's Park Avenue in 1952, few would iden-



Reynolds Metals Co.

tify the building with him. A partner for virtually his entire career with the Chicago firm Skidmore Owings and Merrill, the Bunshaft name was never on the shingle. But it was Bunshaft who gave the firm sparkle during its halcyon days. For more than two decades, Bunshaft and company virtually dictated the look of the enlightened American corporation. He always worked within the Skidmore framework of architecture firm as team. "We produce the people who produce the architecture," one of the firm's founders said early on.

Bunshaft's evolution as a designer and evidence of his concentration on detail are nowhere more evi-

dent than in the three complexes he built in Virginia and Washington, D.C. — the Reynolds Metals corporate headquarters and the Philip Morris manufacturing plant, both in Richmond, and the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden on the capital Mall. Richmonders had never seen anything quite like the three-story Reynolds building when it was completed in 1958 on a 121-acre tract far beyond the city limits. The building itself remains today a virtual showcase for Reynolds' building products; its blue aluminum panels look as sharp now as they did in 1958. The building's second and third floors appear to float in poetic fashion over a central atrium — creating a serene and almost oriental effect. The memory of Lever House is here, too, in the interplay of positive and negative space and the looming presence of broad expanses of glass.

If an unspoiled rural landscape was Bunshaft's setting for Reynolds, then the sometimes-belching I-95 industrial corridor was the site Philip Morris selected for its manufacturing center in 1974. Here, rather than succumb to the "messy vitality" surrounding the site, Bunshaft molded the 200-acre tract into a serene, if not sylvan, setting. He presented the cigarette maker with a handsome facility that reads as well to a driver going by at 55 miles an hour as it does to employees and visitors walking through. Bunshaft was famous for not only leading corporate horses to art, but successfully making them drink (that is, buy). His emphasis on art in the workplace is very much in evidence here. A geometric Willy Guttman sculpture occupies the great, grassy oval beside the complex. And huge tapestries by Ivan Chermayeff bring texture and brilliant primary colors to the lobby.



Considering Bunshaft's deep interest in encouraging corporations to adopt the role of patrons of the arts, it is fitting that one of his later commissions was a building to house 20th century art — the Hirsch-

horn. This cylindrical structure, also completed in 1974, is without question the most bombastic building in the federal parade stretching from the Washington Monument to the Capitol. Along with his sweeping skyscraper at 9 West 58th Street in Manhattan, the Hirschhorn probably gave Bunshaft's critics their greatest ammunition. While it is an egocentric building encircled by poured concrete walls, the sheer boldness of its design is exhilarating. As a system for viewing paintings and sculpture, it has its brilliant moments. Upon entering most museums, visitors are confronted by a confusing labyrinth of galleries. Bunshaft's Hirschhorn, on the other hand, starts visitors in a single spot and loops them back to the starting point — ready to be whisked by escalator to the next gallery level for another circuit. These are but a few examples of the architectural bravura personified by Gordon Bunshaft, who once wrote: "A bold idea, plus precision, care and thought, make a good building." Indeed.

Edwin Slipek, Jr.

Reynolds Metals, 1958 (above left); Hirschhorn Museum, 1974 (above).



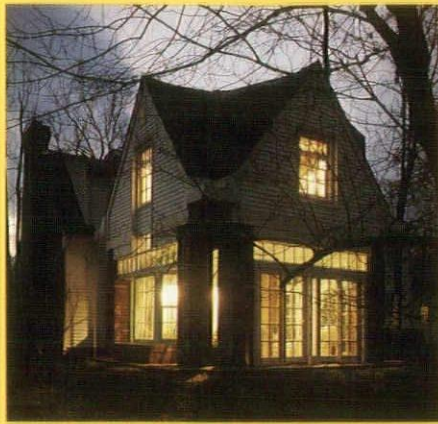
MAKING THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY

PRAKASH PATEL

PHOTOGRAPHY

202 • 328 • 0367

Seven Virginia firms recently received Awards for Excellence in Architecture in a statewide program to recognize good design. The awards, presented by the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects, were selected from 109 entries by a jury consisting of architects Margaret McCurry of Chicago, Merrill Elam of Atlanta, and Roger K. Lewis of Washington, D.C., a columnist for *The Washington Post*. Winning projects are shown here with accompanying jurors' comments.



Robert Dunay

**Ludwig Residence Addition,
Blacksburg**

Dunay Associates, Architects

"It was this idea of taking what could have been a very static box, and then opening the corner, but doing it in a way that is sympathetic to the original house." ■ "I also like the juxtaposition of the very solid and heavy with the very light and diaphanous." ■ "They have managed to preserve the fundamental geometry. But in the secondary and tertiary moves it becomes very enriched."

design excellence: *Cream of the Crop*

12

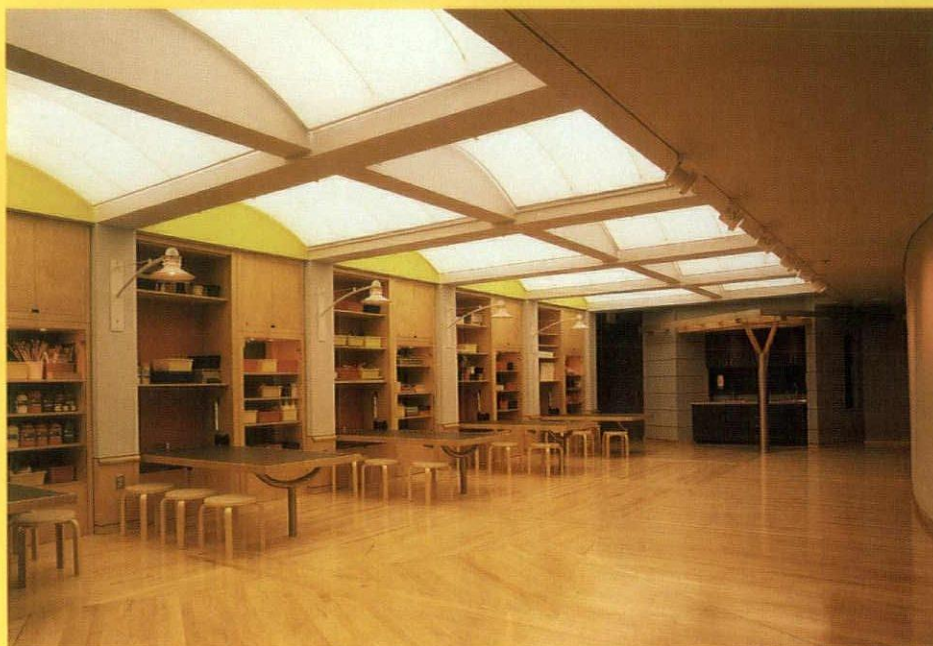


Carlton Abbott

**Museum of American Frontier
Culture, Staunton**

Carlton Abbott & Partners, with Browne Eichman Dalglish Gilpin & Paxton

"This particular project struck me with its modesty and how well it sits on the landscape. Being that its focus was the frontier and agrarianism, I think it did that well." ■ "A dynamic was created that was greater than any of the three buildings taken separately." ■ "These are very barnlike, but you know at the same time they are contemporary buildings."



Charles Shoffner

**Children's Art Resource Center
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,
Richmond**

VMDO Architects

"I reacted immediately to the level of craft — the designer's craft as well as the builder's craft." ■ "The lighting here was remarkably well done." ■ "You'll notice the pattern of the ceiling is matched by the pattern of the flooring materials. This is what architecture is all about — the orderly making of space. But the order doesn't have to make a deadly space."



Balthazar Korab

**Evansville Regional Airport,
Evansville, Indiana**

Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendoff

"It's a very pleasant place to be. There's a high level of care and interest in this project. There's a great sense of light and space." ■ "What appeals to me is the idea of integrating ornament and structure."

■ "The promenade through these various layers of structure is very appealing."

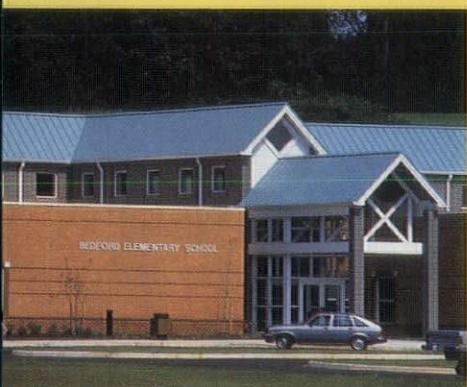


Starke Jett

**Matoaca Middle School,
Chesterfield County**

Bond Comet Westmoreland + Galusha

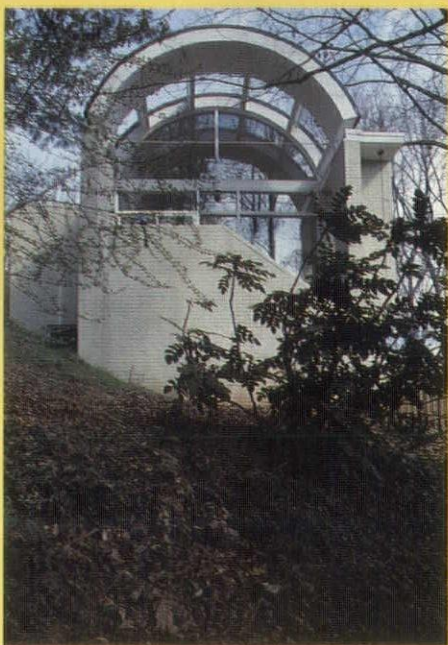
"The architect, through the use of color and pattern and texture, has really transcended the simple solution of a technical problem." ■ "[Replacing a deteriorated brick façade with new tile panels] turned this very unattractive building into something that is light-hearted and light-spirited."



Courtesy SPCS Architects

**Bedford City Elementary School
Sherertz Franklin Crawford Shaffner**

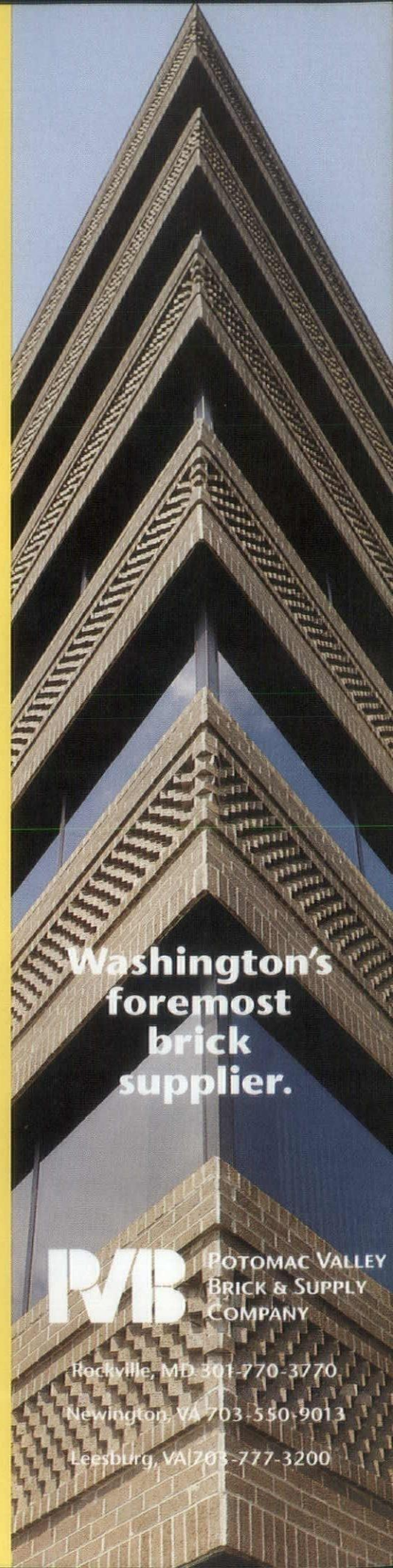
"We reacted particularly to the modulation of the exterior — the breaking down of the scale of things. You felt like the architect was very much in control of the proportion and scale." ■ "The light from above makes for a very exciting corridor inside." ■ "Everyone knows how difficult to do a canopy can be. This one is very well proportioned and detailed."



Stephen W. Small

Corcoran Residence, McLean
James William Ritter Architect

"The architect accepted [the original house's] 1950s language and made something attractive from it." ■ "It's like the site was made new again." ■ "It's more, too — the decomposition and breaking down of the walls are then pulled together compositionally by the vault."



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FORT MONROE

Standing Guard at Democracy's Gate

By Joseph Cosco

There must be something special about Fort Monroe. Why else would a ghostly hall of fame haunt the old Army post? Over the years, apparitions identified as Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, George Armstrong Custer and Edgar Allan Poe have made the place a veritable ghost-lover's delight.

But Fort Monroe has other, more substantial, attractions — so much so that this working Army installation has been named a National Historic Landmark and included on the National Register of Historic Places. Phyllis Sprock, environmental officer for the 580-acre base and its strongest voice for preservation, sums it up best: "Fort Monroe is a historical sanctuary."

The site boasts wonderful history and architecture. Yet there wasn't much talk of either several years ago, when posturing politicians tried to take the budget ax to the antiquated "fort with the moat."

The fort is antiquated and it does have a moat, but that is what makes it special, that and all the history it has seen here on Old Point Comfort, a strategic spit of sand commanding the mouth of Hampton Roads. The budget-cutters, needless to say, found the fort impenetrable.

Location is everything at Fort Monroe. Two previous forts were built here, the first by Jamestown settlers, but each was destroyed by hurricane. The present fort has proved more durable, its greatest deterrent its reputation. The old joke is that General Lee was wise enough never to attack the formidable fortification he helped to build. Time and continued military occupation have altered Fort Monroe, but the proud old place still recalls its Civil War glory days, when it stood as a symbol of Union authority on Confederate soil and served as the "freedom fortress" for fugitive slaves.

Cross over Mill Creek on the causeway from the sleepy community of Phoebus and you enter a time of live oak- and elm-lined streets and unpretentious Southern charm. You can't miss the history, but don't be distracted from the story told by the architectural details, either.

Fort Monroe was built in reaction to the harsh realities of the War of 1812. The British fleet had waltzed into the Chesapeake Bay and created havoc from Hampton to Washington. After the war, Congress fortified the East Coast; this is one of a string of forts built from Massachusetts to the Dry Tortugas, a cluster

of small islands beyond Key West in the Gulf of Mexico.

Work began on Fort Monroe in 1819 and continued until 1834. Up-to-date technology and prevailing European fortification theory produced a design for a hexagonal stone fort of 63 acres surrounded by a moat eight feet deep and anywhere from 90 to 150 feet wide. A Frenchman, Gen. Simon Bernard, supervised the design. During construction, barges used the moat to transport the granite, gneiss, schist, sandstone and brick that would be used for the walls and casemates, the shellproof chambers with openings for guns. A patch of quicksand on the northeast end forced the fort into an irregular hexagon.

The bastioned walls rest on a foundation of one-foot-square oak timbers. Inside the casemates a series of low brick arches are supported by inverted arches buried in the ground. These casemates have been home to artillery, soldiers and prisoners such as Jefferson Davis. Today these brick-and-stone honeycombs house a day care center and the many chambers of the Casemate Museum. The museum is free and the best first stop before starting a walking tour.

Within the old walled fort, some of the most noteworthy buildings are those that were built as officers' quarters. Three of the handsomest, although altered quite a bit, are the 1819 Quarters One, a residence built for the chief engineer, and two 1823 houses together known as the Tuileries, where Robert E. Lee lived.

The arched wall of Fort Monroe frames a view of Quarters One, originally built by the chief engineer in 1819 for his own accommodation.



The gem of Fort Monroe is the Chapel of the Centurion, born of a tragic explosion that claimed two lives, built according to Richard Upjohn's plan for a small rural church, and consecrated in 1858, making it the Army's oldest working chapel. The Gothic Revival chapel boasts an eagle-topped missal holder and three Tiffany windows.

Fort Monroe is a sampler of military architecture, featuring many post-1860 buildings that were constructed in accordance with quartermaster plans, a generic series of building designs issued from Washington for use around the country. The architecture they contained was as strictly hierarchic as military society—there was no mistaking the difference between a house for a lieutenant and a house for a general officer. All told, Fort Monroe has 16 existing antebellum structures and some 31 buildings from the construction boom of 1875-99. Of the latter, the 1879 Old Main Barracks and the 1894 Post Headquarters Building are of interest. The early 1900s saw an aggressive building program dominated by vernacular Colonial Revival and Neoclassical styles. Renowned architect Paul Pelz designed three multifamily residences and an officers' quarters that add a graceful air to Ingalls Road.

Also dating from the early 1900s is the stately Gold Coast on Fenwick Road. With a sweeping vista of Chesapeake Bay, this is clearly some of the choicest real estate on the East Coast. The Commanding General's 1907 home (an elaborate Classical Revival residence, No. 3-655 in the Quartermaster General's stock of plans) is its centerpiece.

But Fort Monroe isn't all Southern and it isn't all revival. Several quirky buildings give the place some spice. The two most interesting are the Romanesque Revival post office, built

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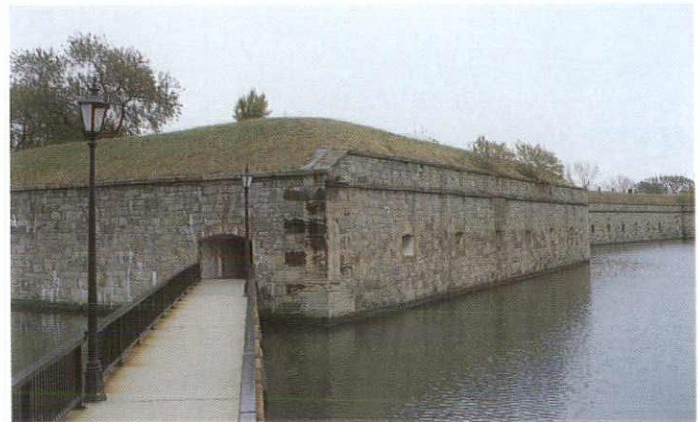
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in 1898, and the International Style signal station, an irregularly-shaped, three-story hexagon built atop the fort wall in 1943.

Today, Fort Monroe walks a fine line between preservation and meeting the demands of a working headquarters for the Army Training and Doctrine Command. "That fort is an active, living, breathing fort," says Mary Harding Sadler, a historical architect with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, which enforces national preservation codes. "It's really amazing how they use their historic spaces."

Although some of the old fort's character has been lost to growth and change, the Army seems to be doing its best to preserve the historical wealth that remains. A restoration team from the National Park Service has been brought in to repair or rebuild the windows of the Casemate Museum, for example. "The reason I use them is because they know what they are doing," says Sprock. "They teach other people to do this stuff." When repairs to a section of the fort wall were made several years back, all the stones were replaced and the masons went to Gloucester for just the right mortar.



Mark Atkinson

Much of the credit for preservation is given to Sprock, described by Sadler as "a tough lady who has real sensitivity for the architectural quality of the place." Sprock almost single-handedly catalogued the entire fort with detailed descriptions of each building. Such documentary surveys are the critical first step in identifying valuable architectural resources, and Sprock's work will be the foundation stone for a preservation effort that will carry on for decades at Fort Monroe.

Getting There

Fort Monroe is easily accessible off I-64 at Exit 69 in Hampton. Follow signs from the highway to the fort entrance.

Getting In

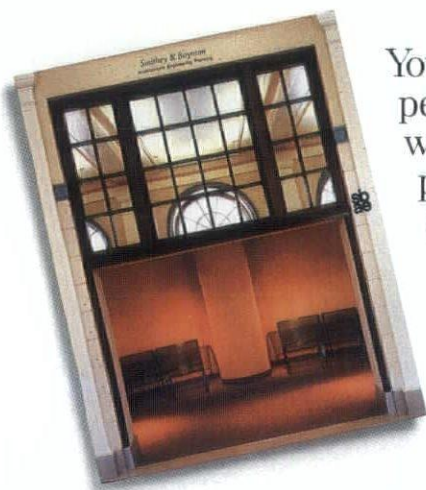
Admission is free to the base and its public attractions. The Casemate Museum is open daily, weekends included, from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.



Joseph Cosco is a writer with The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star in Norfolk.

A peaceful air pervades the moat surrounding Fort Monroe, which sits on a strategic spit of sand at Old Point Comfort.

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New Uses for Old Buildings

18

It has become accepted wisdom in architectural practice that a large part of what architects will be doing in the future is adapting old buildings to new uses. While the tax advantages that encouraged this sort of development were severely curtailed in the mid-1980s, the fact remains that many older buildings made obsolete by their intended function or location still possess great economic potential through transformation, rather than demolition. They may have intrinsic historical value or merit as an anchor in the urban landscape. Or they may offer new possibilities due simply to the amount of space they contain. In this issue, *Inform* features four accomplished buildings that have been infused with new life.

By Vernon Mays

Photos: Philip Beaurline



WAREHOUSE CHIC

Too often the temptation in warehouse renovation is to let the original architecture do all the talking. But architect Peter Sheeran felt a different response was called for in converting a cavernous second-floor loft into the South Street Executive Suites.

The client, who owns the turn-of-the-century Charlottesville building occupied downstairs by the South Street Restaurant, had called for 22 individual offices with common facilities for a receptionist, copy center, kitchen and conference room to serve each tenant. "We have done authentic restorations of buildings in which we were careful about what to restore and how to restore it," Sheeran says. "In this case, since there was little to restore, the program really suggested a more contemporary use of the building."

Which is not to say all steel and glass. Sheeran, formerly of Cleveland Sheeran Architects, sought to deliver slick, functional office space while using familiar materials and details that would complement the original timber-framed structure. "The idea was to balance what I characterize as the more comfortable feeling you get from the traditional details of an older building with the openness of light and space that is more inherent in contemporary architecture."

What resulted was a series of boxlike volumes arranged within the shell of the original building. Sheeran had advised his client of tax credits (greatly reduced since then) that are available for rehabilitating historic buildings. Qualification for the credits is governed by federal restoration guidelines, one of which states that new construction may be approved as long as it can later be removed. That guideline provided the impetus to leave the roof structure intact and treat the new pieces as freestanding elements.

In doing so, the quality of the interior space was improved immensely. Windows were rebuilt to admit natural light and allow views of the street below; skylights were added at the intersections of the circulation paths to bring natural light into the heart of the building. Brick arches elsewhere in the building suggested the idea for the repeating arches that occur in the hallways and unify the new offices. Wood moldings and trim in the original warehouse were bulky in nature, so Sheeran also used heavy baseboards to provide continuity between the old and new. Pickled finishes on the new woodwork give an antiqued patina that fits comfortably with the character of the exposed roof timbers overhead. A brick chimney jutting through the loft from the restaurant below refused to be ignored, so Sheeran transformed it into a dividend — a cozy hearth in the waiting area that lends the final touch of class to this new business address.



New offices contrast with the exposed structure of the old warehouse loft (facing page). Sheeran used an intrusive brick chimney to his advantage, creating a fireplace that complements the waiting area (above left). Contemporary touches in the waiting area include an overhead shelf that holds both plants and lights for the work space beneath (above right).

Pioneer preservationist Mary Wingfield Scott long ago had recognized the value of the orderly file of Greek Revival townhouses known as Linden Row. But little had been done, even after she bought them, to restore the houses' simple elegance or ensure their survival into the next century. She gave the buildings in 1979 to the Historic Richmond Foundation, which accepted the challenge of finding a suitable future for them. The foundation, in turn, sought a private developer who could breathe new life into the houses by giving them commercial usefulness — thus underwriting their maintenance and repair.

A STRING OF PEARLS

With a stroke of inspired restraint, Glave Newman Anderson Architects turns a series of 19th century Richmond townhouses into the Linden Row Inn.

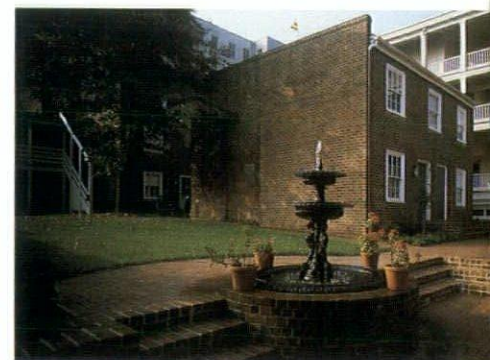
Early proposals were for office use, and each called for gutting the interiors and retaining only the facades intact. "We couldn't in good conscience allow that," says John Zehmer, the foundation's executive director. Far more appealing was the idea, suggested by Southeastern Historic Properties of Winston-Salem, to make the buildings into a small hotel that would preserve the existing rooms and interior stairways.

The central problem posed by that solution was how to make seven buildings into one. Not wanting to disturb the simple rhythm and consistent setbacks of the building fronts, Glave Newman Anderson Architects looked to the rear of the buildings for ideas. The fact that the back porches were already in decrepit condition was something of a godsend, for that allowed their complete removal and replacement, says architect James Glave. What had been individual stairways squeezed between latter-day bathrooms that protruded from the buildings is now a sweeping gallery that unifies the string of buildings while providing covered circulation for guests walking to and from the hotel lobby, restaurant and meeting rooms.

To see the back of Linden Row — with its columned porches, paved courtyards, and small servants quarters (also converted to guest rooms) — one could easily mistake this for a cosmetic fix-up job. That is a testament to the convincing accuracy of the architectural detailing and the architect's sensitivity to the scale of the original houses. Indeed, the galleries and gardens look as if they could have been there since the buildings were put up in the 1840s and 1850s.



Richard Cheek



A sweeping porch on the back of Linden Row makes seven houses into one (facing page). Windows were made uniform and shutters added to give consistency to the front facade (above left). First-floor double parlors were converted to suites that include a living room (above middle). City gardens in the rear offer an oasis in the midst of downtown (above right).

Inside, the original first-floor double parlors became suites and each of the bedrooms upstairs was made into a standard guest room. Much of the interior architectural detailing — molding, fireplaces, marble mantels and plaster cornices — had survived. The authenticity of detail is complemented by Mary Wingfield Scott's collection of pier mirrors and gasoliers, which are on loan from the foundation. "We were very much in favor of not 'Williamsburging' the interior," says Zehmer, whose organization retains design control over the buildings. The desire was to convey a mid-19th century ambience true to the period when the houses were built. Glave believes that was accomplished: "This project says more about what Richmond was in the 19th century than just about any building I know."





The spirit of graphic designer Donald Deskey resides at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street in southeast Washington, D.C., where a vintage 1937 Kresge's five-and-dime was converted to small shops and offices. Deskey, a popular form-giver of the '30s, survives through his impact on the jazzy patterns and streamlined forms designed during the recent expansion and dressing up of the art moderne building.

"We studied a lot of the decorative arts of the 1930s," says architect Amy Weinstein, noting the source of inspiration for the new layers of patterning used both inside and out at 666 Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E. Deskey's work, because it was among the best of his era, kept turning up in Weinstein's research. Thus his influence is found throughout the building's rich decorative surfaces.

P A T T E R N • P L A Y

Gentrification of the Capitol Hill neighborhood had created a demand for upscale shops that rendered the Kresge's obsolete. The project took shape in two steps: renovation of the existing one-story building into six retail stores, followed by a skyward expansion of three floors. Prominent features of the original building were its sweeping horizontal show windows and a brick band that whipped sharply around the corner, says Weinstein, of Weinstein Associates Architects. Patterned bands of brick on the new upper floors took their cue from the building's strong horizontal lines, while the simultaneous shifts and folds of the pattern's geometry give the feeling of a façade that is less like brick and more like wallpaper. (A Deskey-designed wallpaper, in fact, generated the early studies for the brick pattern.)

Treating the brick decoratively was desirable because of an adjacent Victorian residential neighborhood, where detailed brickwork appears frequently. "It occurred to us that we could be Victorian in reference to the old buildings by using an intricate pattern and degree of articulation, while being modern in the way we express the brick, which was to use it as a skin hanging on a steel frame," Weinstein says.

Art deco patterns also provided a jumping-off point for the bas relief panels that form a ribbon along the Pennsylvania Avenue façade. "We thought to ourselves: What would a modern architect who lived back then do for a decorative panel? Then we took that idea and reinterpreted it in a modern way," Weinstein says. The sculptural pattern is recalled in smaller panels above the store windows and lobby entrance, and as another decorative band in the lobby, where Weinstein manipulated the perception of horizontal movement to its fullest. An undulating plaster wall beckons visitors in, where the wavy forms in the marble floor suggest a feeling of vertigo. Narrow reveals in the paneled wall, faux finished with an exotic grain to simulate fine woodwork, further emphasize the horizontal flow. All told, each pattern on the building's surfaces successfully reinforces the act of taking the slippery forms of decorative Modernism and translating them into a contemporary essay on movement and speed.

Lobby illumination comes from low-voltage lights suspended from thin rods arranged like "pick up sticks" (facing page). The sweeping Pennsylvania Avenue façade (above) is enlivened by a jazzy brick pattern and three-dimensional frieze (inset).

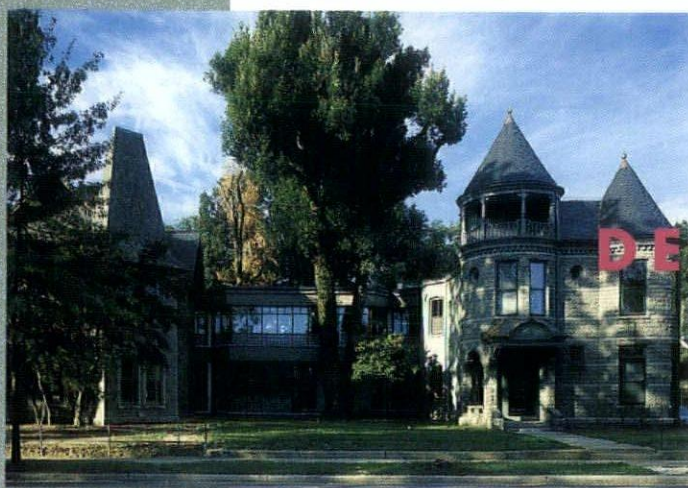
An old five-and-dime on Capitol Hill gets a facelift in resplendent 1930s fashion with an addition and renovation by Weinstein Associates.

Thirties Style

23



Architect Sanford Bond pays due respect to the Richmond streetscape in connecting two houses to accommodate an expanding medical practice.



In the daytime, the link between two Victorian houses (above) sits unobtrusively back from the street. At night, its transparent elements bring the whole to life (far right). New additions included a waiting room (top) and stair tower (inset) that takes its cues from the old houses.



The problem brought to architect Sanford Bond was simple in theory, but a bit sticky in the doing: Take two distinctive Victorian-era houses and join them, without committing aesthetic sins in the process. The givens were the easy part: two robust Queen Anne-style residences, rendered in rusticated granite and replete with rich detail. "It would have been folly to try to duplicate them. So we tried to pick up the theme of the old," says Bond, of Bond Comet Westmoreland + Galusha Architects.

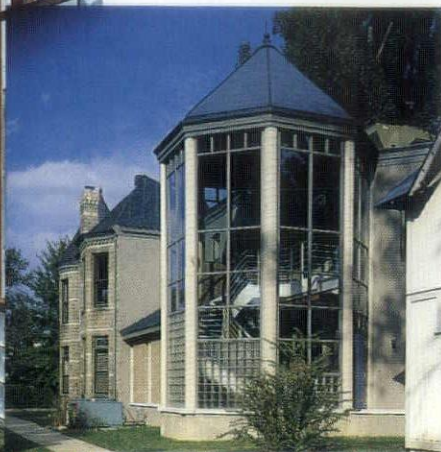
The client, a burgeoning practice known as Orthopaedic Specialists, was expanding from one house into the second, and needed additional space between the two for a waiting area, examining rooms, physical therapy room and administrative offices. Two

factors governed the exterior dimensions of the connecting wing. First, Bond wanted the addition to sit well back from the sidewalk so as not to disrupt the regular rhythm of houses along the shaded avenue in Richmond. The

DEFERRING TO

space between the houses, he thought, were as important to the streetscape as the houses themselves. Second, the site had two large oaks, one with a 60-inch-diameter trunk, that begged for preservation. So the addition had to squeeze between them.

The selection of materials was strongly influenced by the original houses. Bond erected one wall on the addition's façade in a rough-faced granite, but relied on a smooth, beige-colored concrete block throughout much of the new building. While sympathetic to the stone in size and means of construction, this ground-faced block gives the addition a contemporary feel and makes clear the distinction between old space



and new. Bond's use of poured-in-place concrete columns, something of a personal signature, only further reinforces the impression of a contemporary addition. Wave-patterned glass blocks were used on the addition's front façade also to harmonize with the rough granite. "We tried to get materials that were compatible in feel — but not literally copies," Bond says.

Interior materials both contrast with and complement the original houses. Of particular note are the fabric panels used on examining room walls and the ceilings built from inexpensive fir strips; both add texture and warmth to a project that too easily could have slipped into institutional sterility.

Both employees and patients are the beneficiaries of the building's tour de force, the spiraling steel stair encased in a tower of glass at the rear corner of the building. Transparent glass in the upper

E • I N - B E T W E E N

portions of the tower shifts to translucent glass near the bottom to offer privacy to patients taking the stair to the physical therapy rooms in the basement. Industrial materials notwithstanding, this is exhilarating space. Yet the tower's basic form is contextual, taking its cue

from the bay windows and turrets of the original houses. "There was no way to compete with these Queen Anne-style buildings," Bond says. "So we decided to do something that would lie in the background." Both the overall transparency of the addition and its understated flat roof help to achieve that quiet aesthetic. Still, in choosing to play second fiddle to the existing houses, Bond didn't waste the opportunity to produce a building with a distinction all its own.



Photos: Whitney Cox

Debate over how to restore and interpret the home of James Madison has split along uncompromising lines. Should modern additions be demolished to reveal the Madison-era home? Or should the alterations remain in recognition of the lifestyle enjoyed by later residents, the family of William du Pont, Sr.?

M O N T P E L I E R:

Whose History to Preserve?

By Rick Mashburn

Montpelier, the Orange County estate of Marion du Pont Scott, is a pink Cadillac of a country home. Long as a city block, the 55-room house sits on a 2700-acre horse farm complete with steeplechase course, racetrack and 135 support buildings, including 35 dwellings. The estate even has its own train station.

The more famous Montpelier, the lifelong home of James Madison, is little more than the domed and columned icehouse designed by the fourth president of the United States. It is the graveyard in which he and his wife lie. And it is a house that exists but is largely invisible, for James and Dolley Madison's Montpelier was swallowed whole by Marion du Pont Scott's pink mansion.

When Mrs. Scott's father, William du Pont, Sr., purchased Montpelier in 1901, the house had already passed through six owners and many changes since the time of the Madisons. Between 1902 and 1936, the du Ponts added another 35 rooms, nearly doubling the dimensions of the house. Mrs. Scott's chief contribution to the mansion was the creation of her "Red Room" in a part of the house where President Madison's mother had lived. It is an art deco lounge featuring a silver ceiling, glass-brick fireplace and walls covered with photographs of horses.

In 1984, Montpelier became the last home of a Founding Father to pass into public hands: a \$10 million bequest from Mrs. Scott allowed the National Trust for Historic Preservation to purchase Montpelier from her heirs. Though the house has been open to the public since 1987 and recently underwent a \$2 million stabilization, Montpelier still appears much as it did when the Trust acquired it. Tour guides move visitors through mostly empty rooms, and they point to gray cardboard cutouts of windows and doors in explaining the long-disturbed configuration of the home of the Father of the Constitution.

For six years now, the question of what the Trust should do with Montpelier has been the subject of intense study and debate — challenging, frustrating and, at times, angering preservationists all over the country. Montpelier is likely to remain the subject of controversy for years to come.

Though there is little visible evidence of progress, says Christopher Scott, executive director of Montpelier, "we've been moving steadily and firmly in one direction. The reason nothing appears to have happened is we're taking care to get a lot of opinions so we'll know where we're coming from."

In 1987 and 1988, the Trust brought in teams of professionals to investigate the architecture, archaeology and landscape of Montpelier, and their findings resulted in a discussion paper on the future of the site. In the summer of 1989, the Trust and the Foundation for James Madison's Montpelier held "The Madison Conference," a two-

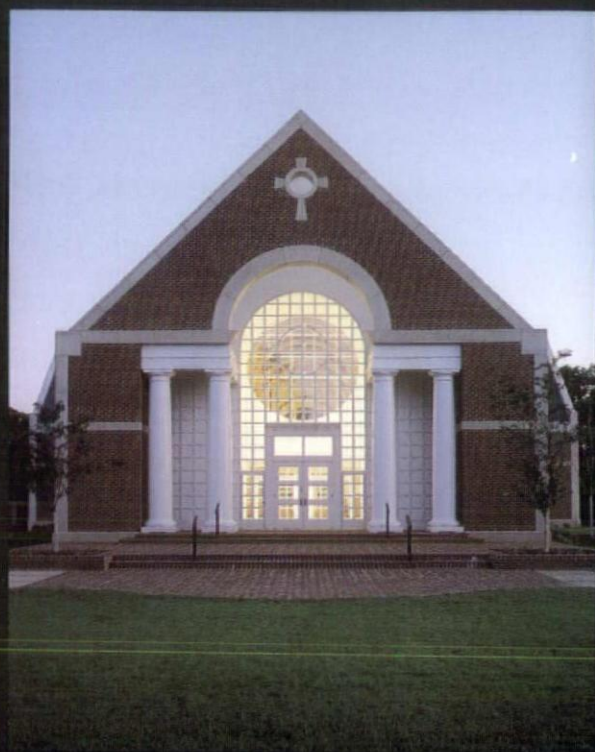


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years: decorative woodwork, doors, windows, staircases and whole walls have been removed. Nearly all the Madisons' furnishings were sold after the President's death in 1836 to pay the gambling debts of Payne Todd, Dolley's son by her first marriage. Few records pertaining to the house and its furnishings remain.

To further complicate the matter, Mrs. Scott's will was contested by the nieces and nephews who were her heirs. The settlement reached between them and the Trust states that "appropriate recognition" be given to William du Pont, Sr., in the interpretation and presentation of Montpelier, and that the drawing and morning rooms of the du Pont family be furnished and maintained as a memorial to him.

The impact of the du Ponts on the landscape surrounding the house is impossible to ignore and equally difficult to destroy. Leaving a 20th century horse farm in Madison's front yard would be historically inaccurate, yet tearing down 135 buildings, a steeplechase course and a racetrack would

The Beauty Of Recycling

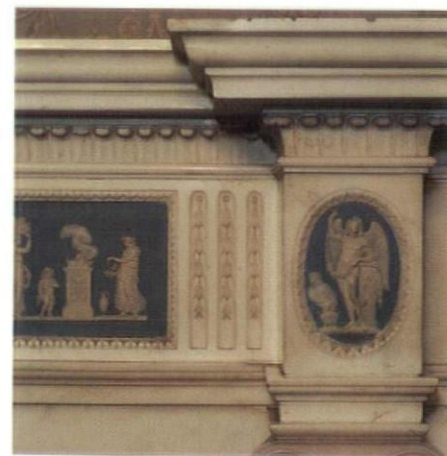
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deprive the Trust of a source of substantial income.

The greatest difficulty in realizing Mrs. Scott's vision of a restored Montpelier, however, is the prevailing bias among historians and preservationists against the museum house in its most common incarnation — "the typical rich white man's house with furniture and pictures and porcelain on the mantel," as Christopher Scott describes it. Such houses do not accurately portray life as it was lived in them, many professionals now argue.

Restoring Montpelier to an approximation of its state during the Madisons' day would create "an elegant fake," argues W. Brown Morton, assistant professor of preservation at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg. Speaking at last year's conference, Morton argued for preserving the du Pont mansion, making it "the most innovative and responsible preservation project in the nation."

According to Scott, the trustees' decision to restore Madison rooms within the du Pont house reflects the majority opinion of the many professionals who have joined in discussions regarding Montpelier. Yet not everyone is convinced, by any means. Charles Phillips, a restoration architect who participated in the initial investigation of the house, says that although the Madison structure has seen a great deal of alteration, evidence needed for an accurate restoration remains intact.

"There are only four rooms with all four walls in the same location as during the Madison occupancy, and even those four do not have all the doors and windows in the same location," Phillips says. "But when you get all the data on paper you can see what the original floor plan was. There is only one partition whose location is in question."

"We have successfully restored other houses where the changes were more radical and the evidence more disrupted," Phillips says. He and architectural historian Paul Buchanan, who also participated in the Montpelier study, have guided the restoration of numerous Virginia landmarks, including Stratford Hall, Gunston Hall, the Wickham-Valentine House and the White House of the Confederacy.

"One problem with keeping the du Pont stuff is that it's just not very good," says Phillips. "The wings of the house are now two stories instead of one, which makes a



big, massive block of building, when before, it had some pretensions of grace. It stepped down as it went out. Now the mass is too large for the portico."

Helen Marie Taylor, who lives near Montpelier and has been an outspoken advocate for a Madison-era restoration, likes to call the du Ponts' portion of the house "that motel addition on the back." She argues that it reflects poorly on President Madison's "taste and sensitivity" to design and architecture.

The interior of the du Pont's "English drawing room" reflects a taste bred by wealth. A marble mantle with Wedgwood inserts (facing page) has been informally attributed to 18th century British architects Robert and James Adam. The chandelier with cherub ornaments (above) also was purchased in Europe.

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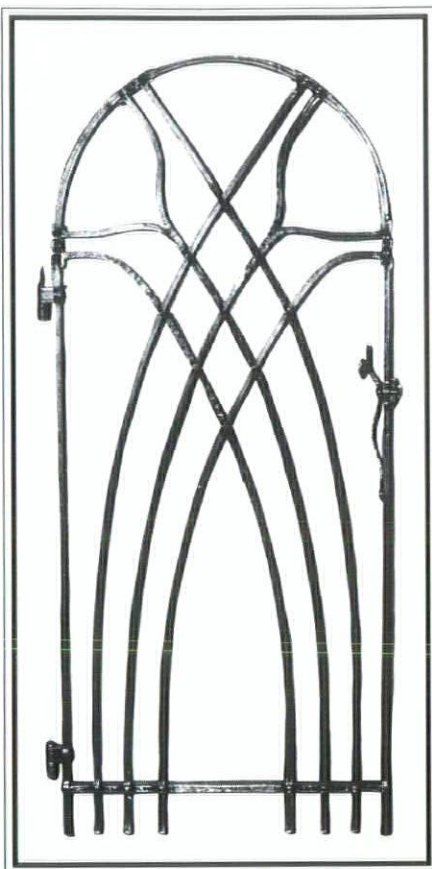
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Mrs. Taylor speaks passionately of the need to honor the greatly underrated Madison by restoring his home as fully as possible, and she suggests that the interiors of the du Pont rooms might be removed from the mansion and put on display in one of the other buildings on the grounds. "One cannot restore the Madison house without taking out the art deco room," she says. "Aunt Marion's Red Room is completely incongruous. The Trust ought to get on with doing what its donor wanted it to do."

"The real crux," says Phillips, "is that if it weren't for the association with Madison, Montpelier would be just another wonderful, grand estate with no particular significance." On that point, there does seem to be widespread consensus. "The reason why the National Trust owns Montpelier is because of Madison," Christopher Scott says. "It is extremely important to interpret James Madison wherever we possibly can."

Representatives of the Trust and Montpelier's staff met in early October to form a plan for the interpretation and furnishing of the house. Before that meeting, both Scott and Ann Miller, Montpelier's architectural historian, said they envisioned a thoroughly nontraditional approach. Ms. Miller suggested that various rooms might depict the three phases of the President's residence there. "It will not be the standard museum exhibition," she said, "but will use state-of-the-art technology, such as multimedia sound-and-light shows."

Scott delights in the rare opportunity to do something at the mansion that has never been done before anywhere. "Montpelier will be as different from your standard museum as the present-day museum is different from stuffed birds in glass cases," he says. Though details of the plan remain elusive, one thing is for certain: however the Trust proceeds, it will be sure to ruffle someone's feathers.



Rick Mashburn, a freelance writer in Winston-Salem, N.C., is a contributing editor to Historic Preservation magazine.

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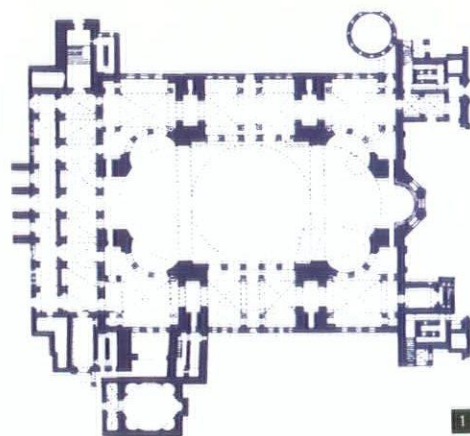
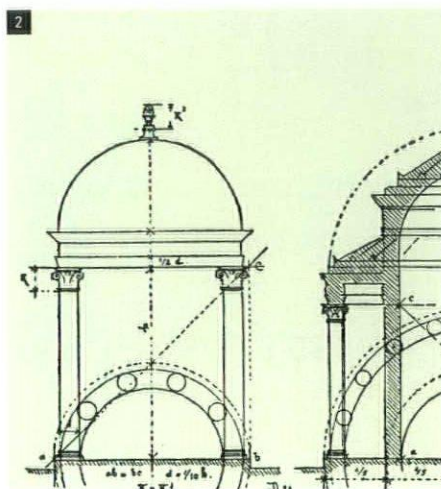
The methods that architects have relied on for centuries to design buildings find direct parallels in the application of geometry to create both ancient and modern typefaces.

By Derek Bacchus

made of parts. So the designer's ultimate challenge is to orchestrate the harmony of those parts — to achieve what the Roman architect Vitruvius referred to as “the beauty and fitness in the adjustments of the members.”

But how is that harmony accomplished? It happens first on paper, through the understanding and use of geometry. The lesson is as old as building itself. It was stressed during the Renaissance by the Italian Leonbattista Alberti, who insisted a painter's training include all the liberal arts, “but first of all I desire that he know geometry... One who is ignorant in geometry will not understand these or any other rules [of art].”

Alberti, of course, was not going out on a limb. Geometry of form is at the root of much great art and most architecture. It is fundamental to Greek and Roman monu-



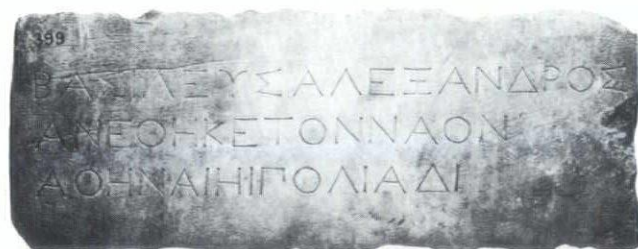
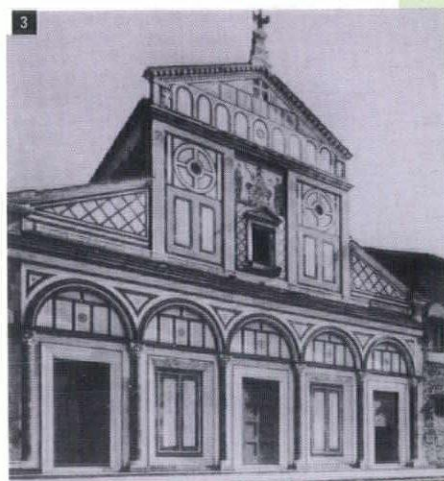
On a day-to-day basis, architects and typographers deal, respectively, in the abstract realms of space and thought. Their ability to convert those abstractions into something concrete and communicable is dependent on a simple graphic device — the line. Lines emerge as forms, and those forms are

ments built before the time of Christ, it formed the basis of the Beaux-Arts tradition that flourished from the late 1600s to the early 1900s, and its complexity and refinement were the religion of the orthodox modernists during this century. The beauty of pure geometry saturates the icons of architecture, as evidenced in the floor plan of the 6th century Hagia Sophia in Istanbul **1**, the drawings of Vitruvius **2**, and the facades of Santa Maria Novella in Florence **3**. This manner of producing architecture shares common ground with the evolution of our printed word, the domain of typography.

Tools of Writing and Forms They Made

Geometry's imprint was not at first visible in the development of written language; the tools of writing were far more important. Two separate traditions in the nascent art of typography emerged about 5500 years ago. In Egypt, the use of a relatively flat and smooth writing surface and the development of the reed/brush as a pen produced a free-flowing writing style that evolved from hieroglyphic to hieratic to demotic scripts. Their descendants are cursive writing, calligraphy and serif italic letterforms. The other tradition developed in Sumeria, where the common writing instrument was a stylus that impressed wedge-shaped forms into tablets of damp clay, later baked hard. This form of writing, called cuneiform **4**, encouraged gradual simplification and abstraction over 18 centuries of Sumerian civilization.

Our phonetic alphabet, based on the sounds of speech, took its lead from the Phoenicians. They were the peripatetic businessmen of the Mediterranean, acquiring through their travels the best of many cultures, including writing systems. With the ascent of their own civilization, the Greeks found in the Phoenician alphabet a written language to which they could easily add a few sounds of their own — namely, vowels. Surviving Greek inscriptions show not just the graceful angularity of their modified letterforms, but the beauty of an implied underlying grid **5**. Here the use of geometry — so fundamental to the Greek art of building — emerges in the written word. Within a simple square, the various signs of circle, triangle and rectangle are easily identified.



Typography: A Primer

Like any professional, the typographer has a language all his own, and sometimes only the words of the trade will do. A few terms you may not be familiar with are

serif

small elements added to the ends of the main strokes of a letterform.

A

sans serif

typefaces without serifs.

A

hieroglyphic

a picture or symbol representing a word, syllable or sound, used by the ancient Egyptians instead of alphabetical letters.

hieratic

an abridged form of cursive hieroglyphic writing used by Egyptian priests.

demotic

a simplified system of Egyptian writing used by the common people.

cuneiform

a writing system of wedge-shaped characters used in ancient Assyria, Babylonia and Persia.

entasis

a slight, convex swelling in the shaft of a column. The term "reverse entasis" implies a slight narrowing in the center.

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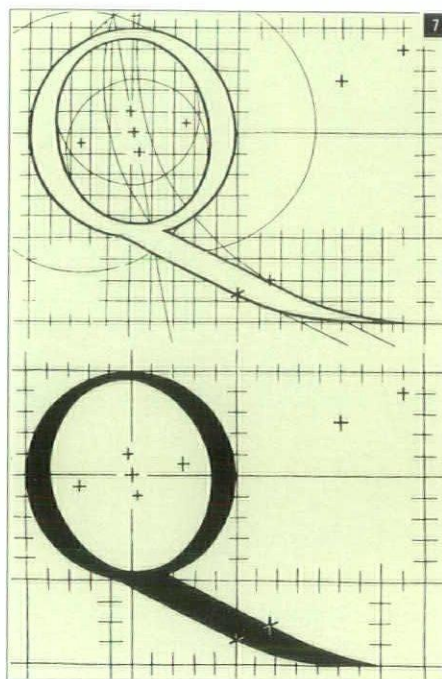
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Geometry Refined

The Romans borrowed freely from Greek culture, and the Roman writing system, too, relied on Greek antecedents. Trajan's Column, one of the surviving antiquities in Rome, contains one of the finest inscriptions of Roman letterforms. Its geometric aspect is clearly evident, but an important innovation takes shape, as well. Subtle adjustments appear, not only within each individual letter, but as the letters relate to each other to create a unified whole.

After the Romans, it wasn't until Renaissance Europe that someone presented a theory of constructed proportions for type. In 1525, Albrecht Durer showed first how geometry, then adjustments made for the eye, are needed to construct beautiful letterforms ⁶. By this time, the Roman models were setting

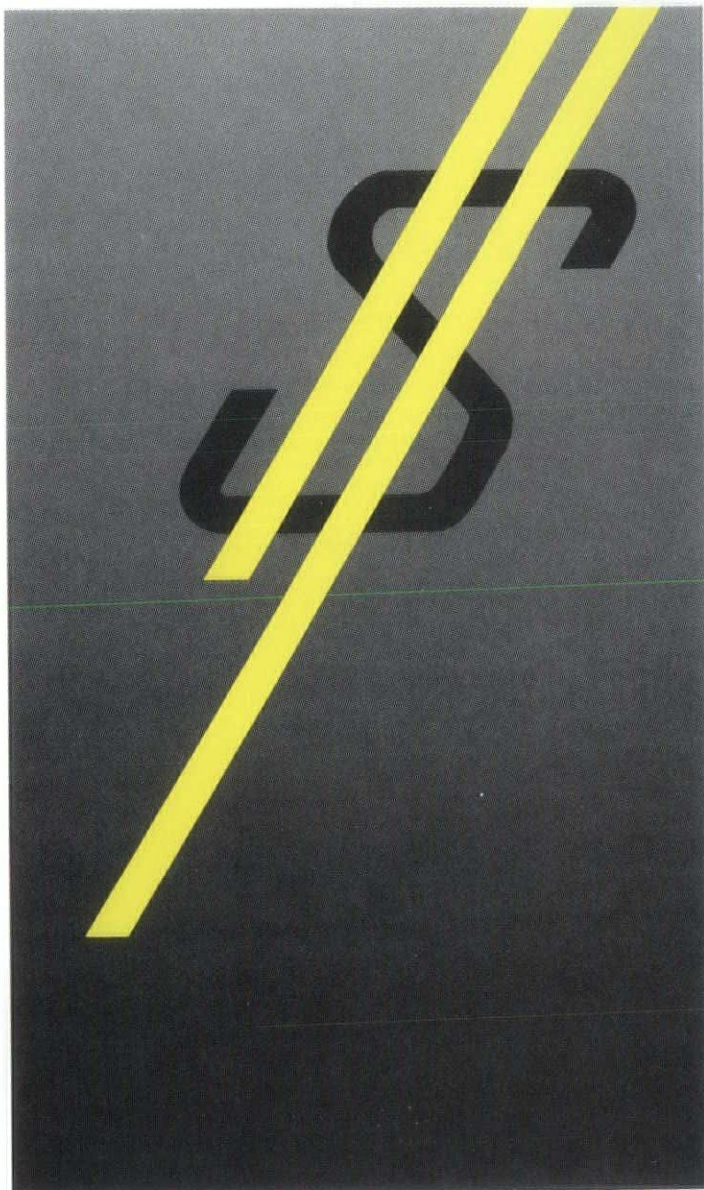
the standard as Durer, Geoffrey Tory and others flocked to Italy to assimilate the lessons and energy of Italian Renaissance printing and scholarship. By the time Gutenberg's innovation of movable type was barely 50 years old, Venice alone boasted more than 200 presses. For typography, it was the place to be.

Tory, a Frenchman who studied in Rome and Bologna, sought to better Durer's work when he published his *Champ Fleury* in 1529. He devised a grid of 10 units square and used it as a guide to construct the 23 letters of the Latin alphabet. The letter Q, for example, required seven arcs drawn with a compass; five for the O, and two for the tail ⁷. Even though there existed a desire to standardize the geometry of the ideal Roman letter, the compass centers — under the guise of pure Euclidean logic — were carefully arrived at through subjective visual testing. In other words, a routine of trial and error was employed until the "most satisfying" proportions were achieved.

Still, when Tory took the proportions of the Trajan alphabet and laid them over the proportions of the ideal man ⁸, he made a vital link to architecture through geometry. That wasn't fundamentally new. The idea that classical architecture related to human proportions was already established. And the idea that letterforms, too, should sustain that relationship was in the air. But by formalizing the proportion of the Trajan alphabet — the width of the downstroke versus the height of the letter — and

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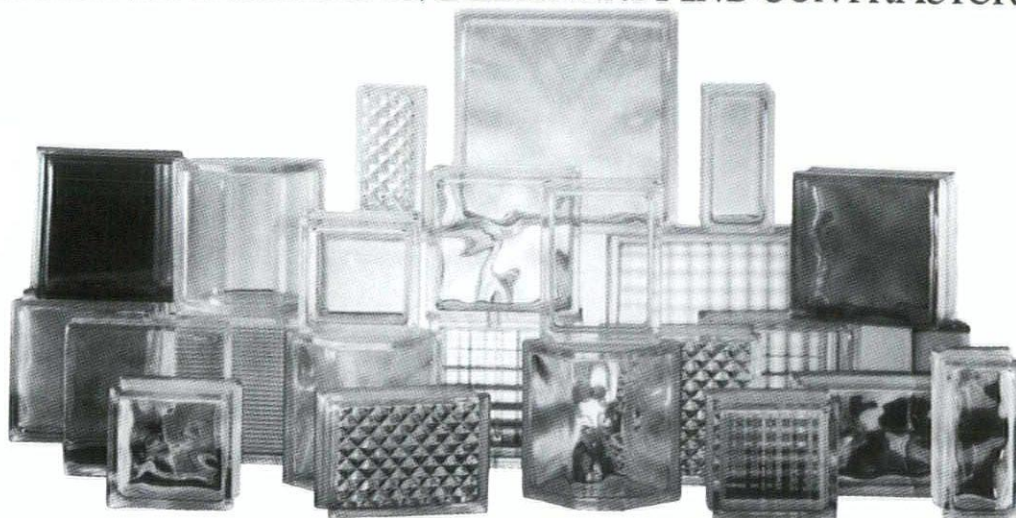
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relating it to the ideal human figure, Tory had arrived at an intellectual and humanistic rationale for his grid and construction process, and it was a method long valued by architects.

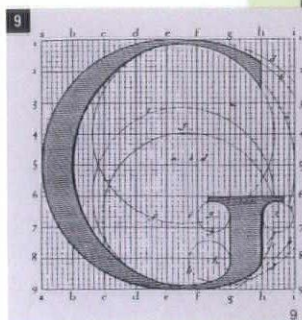
Louis XIV carried this formality to its extreme when he commissioned his Academy of Sciences to design a royal typeface. Under a mathematician's supervision, the letterforms of the Roman du Roi were constructed over a grid of 2,304 squares **9** — hardly the infinitesimal detail available today through computing technology, but downright obsessive for its day. In 1693, the typeface was cut into metal for use on printing presses.

A Shift to Crisper Lines

One-hundred years later, the trends in typeface modernization took a turn from making minute refinements in proportion to creating crisper, cleaner lines. The design by Firmin Didot **10** emphasized extreme contrast in line weight and, for the first time, unbracketed serifs (note, for example, how the downstroke of the "l" butts into the narrow serif without a gradual thickening of the line). Though designed at the end of the 18th century, Didot's typeface has a 20th century feel. Today it seems the most modern of classical serif faces, while the family of typefaces that capture the true modernity of the 20th century is sans serif.

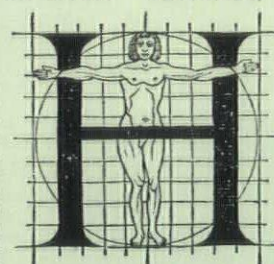
The first sans serif typeface, called Two Lines English Egyptian, came into being in 1816. But it was not until this century that sans serif designs known as Akzidenz Grotesk (1898), Franklin Gothic (1903), Futura (1927-30), Univers (1954), and Helvetica (1957) came into almost ubiquitous use. Of all these, it is Futura, designed by Paul Renner, that has the most strictly geometrical construction **11**. Unlike Helvetica, with its subtle refinements in proportions and reverse entasis of downstrokes, Futura has a firmness of geometry that is an apt reflection of early modern architecture.

Given this tradition, it's understandable — almost predictable — that the typefaces architects choose most often when working as graphic designers are either the sans serif faces of crisp contours and solid, recognizable proportions or, in the interests of classicism, the dignified Roman faces. Architects find familiarity and comfort in a typography based on geometry, for these letterforms share a method and rationale of construction that is consistent with the architect's own training and tradition.



LE SECOND LIVRE. FEUIL.XIX.

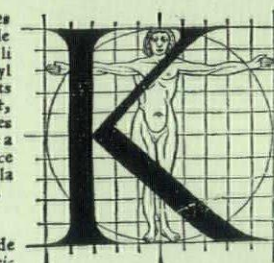
L'Aspiration a doncques son traucelant traict sus la ligne centrique & diametralle, iustement au desus du penyl du corps humain, pour nous monitrier que nosdictes lettres qu'es veulent estre si raisonnables: faictes, quelles desirer sentir les avec naturelle raison, toute enable proportion, & lart d'architecture, qui requiert que le corps maison ou d'ag Palais soit plus le depuis son fondement iusques ouuerture, que n'est la dicte courre, qui represente le chef de toute maison. Si la courre d'une on est excessiue plus grande e corps, la chose est difforme, si non en Halles & Granches, desfilles la courre commence pour la plus part bien pres de terre, pour euer limpetuoos grans ventz, & tremblemens de la terre. Doncques nos lettres ne volat idre le vent des enuyeux maldifans, veuillent estre erigees solidement en quare, & brisees, comme iay dict, au dessus de leur ligne centrique & diametrale. Excepte le dict A, qui a son traict traucelant iustement assis foubz la ligne diametralle.



Ordonnance du traucelant traict au corps humain.

Notable singular.

ON peult veoir a la figure cy pres designee commat la briseure de la lettre K, est assise sur le point de la ligne traucelant par le centre & penyl du corps humain, ayant les piedz ioints lequel centre come iay tousiours dict, est sur le penyl. La briseure des autres lettres que ie laisse pour ceste heure a faire, les renouyant en leur rencabece daire, sera tousiours aussi assise sur la dicte ligne centrique & diametrale.



Ordonnance pour la briseure des lettres au corps humain.

Iay dict nagueres ou ietraiçois de l'aspiration, que nos lettres Attiques veulent sentir l'architecture: & il est vray, considere que A, represente vng pignon de maison, veu quil est figure en pignon. L'aspiration H, represente le corps d'une maison, entendu que la partie de dessous la ligne traucelante que iay dict centrique & diametralle, est pour foubz elle constituer Sales & Chambres basses. Et la partie de dessus est pour faire pareillement Sales hautes, ou Chambres grandes, & Chambres moyennes. Le K, a cause de sa briseure, nous signifie degrez a monter en droite ligne iusques a vng estage, & dicelluy pour moter aussi en droite ligne. E.4.

Lettres Attiques veulent sentir l'architecture.

Didot **10**
(1787)

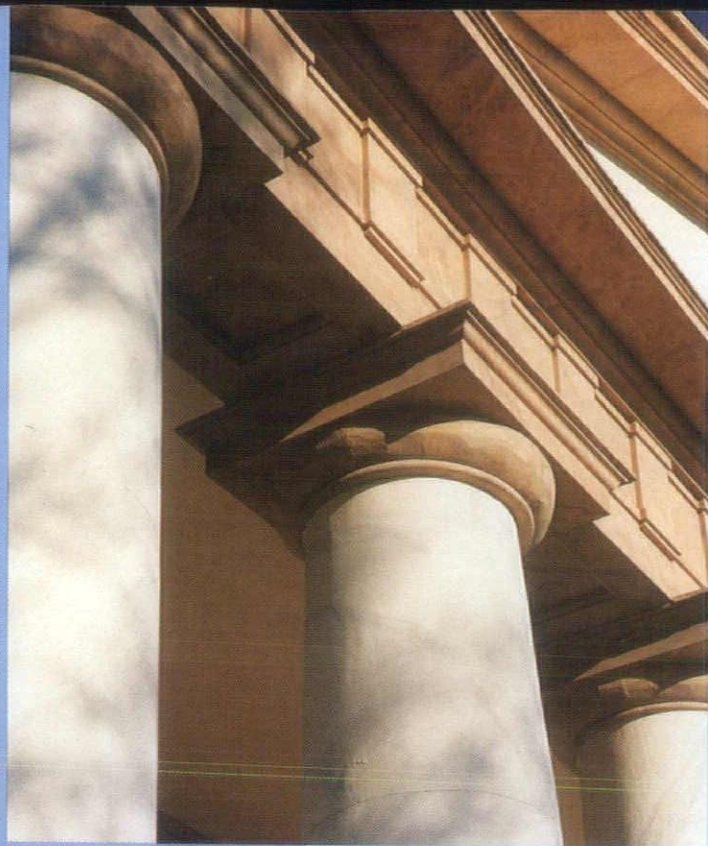
Akzidenz Grotesk
(1898)

Franklin Gothic
(1903)

Futura **11**
(1927-30)

Univers
(1954)

Helvetica
(1957)



Jack Katz, from *Greek Revival America*

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The Politics of Bricks

Greek Revival America

By Roger G. Kennedy. Illustrated. 456 pp. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang. \$85.00 cloth.

By Douglas McCreary Greenwood

The problem with coffee-table books is that they mostly get looked at but not read. This is as it should be, since so many of them are long on glitz, short on substance, and downright awkward to snuggle up with in cramped reading quarters.

As a book that from all outward appearances seems to fit this category quite comfortably, Roger G. Kennedy's *Greek Revival America* runs the risk of being doubly damned. It is a handsome book and too hefty to carry around like a paperback novel. But it is also a brilliant, if quirky,

reappraisal of one of America's prized cultural heritages — Greek Revival architecture. As Kennedy points out, this architectural movement, which paid homage to classic Greek formalism, flourished in the U.S. from 1825 to 1855. Insofar as it was a clear reference to the past, it was also a way for validating the sophistication of American culture, an allusive gesture to the roots American democracy shared with ancient Greece. With nearly 200 sumptuous full-color reproductions of Greek Revival churches, state capitols, courthouses and residences, as well as numerous architectural drawings, prints, and sketches, this tome invites the idle preoccupations of a mere page-turner. But make no mistake; this is not just another pretty book. As even a cursory reading of the opening chapters reveal, *Greek Revival America* deserves to be thoroughly savored from cover to cover.

Couched in a style that is soothingly avuncular, Kennedy's prose reflects the polished erudition of a lifetime of scholarly endeavor. Throughout the book, we encounter a tone of confidence, not arrogance; insights that illuminate without heavy-handedness; judgments that reflect the wit and wisdom of a scholar who has learned to learn from telling details.

This is true even in the bibliography, where well-informed writers traditionally wear their straightest faces. In one notation, Kennedy informs the reader, "One of the purposes of books like the one before you is to bring to the attention of academic publishers the richness of material lying about. In England, worse architects have received much more generous attention." That may well be one result of the legacy of Great Britain's

insistence on aristocratic prerogative as opposed to America's longstanding love affair with the ideals of the Greek city-state, or *deme*, one etymological root of "democracy." Kennedy, who is director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, outlines his provocative thesis that Greek Revival architecture in America really began to flourish in the 50 years after the Declaration of Independence. He advances other precepts that are perhaps even more provocative — that, in the decade following the Revolution, the founding fathers had little desire to copy from the ancients "either the governments they founded or the buildings they erected."

They were, he suggests, too well educated for that, knowing all too well the lessons of Greek democracy and the Roman republic. It wasn't until some 30 years after the Revolution that they felt comfortable enough to turn to classical Greek architecture for inspiration. And when they did, Kennedy posits, they did so for reasons closely linked to what we would label sexually unconscious motivations. "Without going too deeply into sexual politics," he asserts, "it is possible to agree that part of the anxiety [felt by Americans in the Jacksonian era] arose from a desire to find, and thereafter to impose, a new order — one symbolized with masculine emblems." In short, this book is about "the political and psychological circumstances of a nation struggling to assert itself — and about the way in which it borrowed the means to make that assertion."

Because Kennedy's technique tends to be anecdotal, it requires close attention as he sweeps grandiloquently back and forth between the facts of the (then) near-past with a sense of humor

The Doric simplicity of the Custis-Lee Mansion (above), in Arlington, represented a form of architectural expression that influential Americans found intolerable during the early years of the Republic, says author Roger Kennedy.

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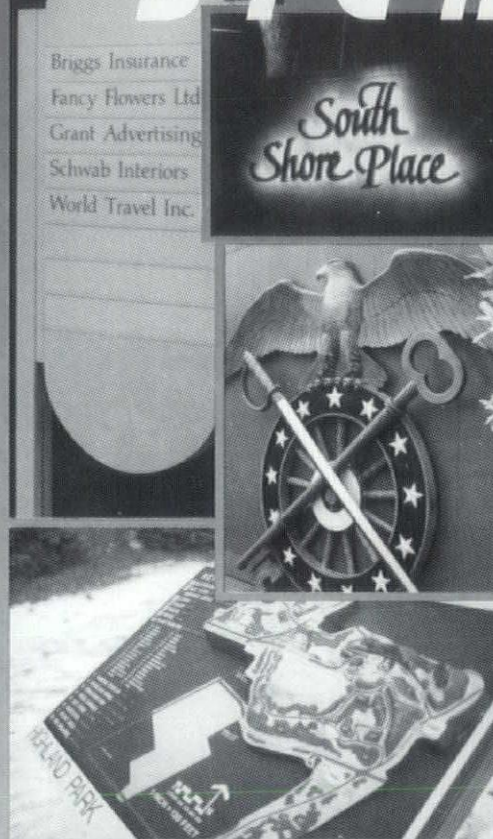


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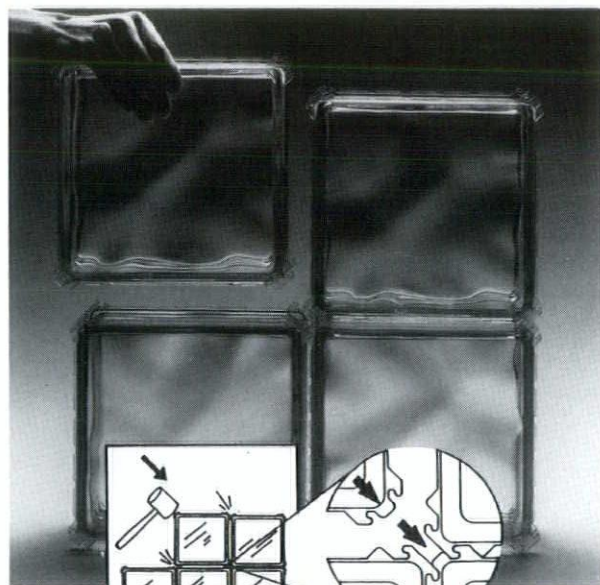
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that is both invigorating and instructive. For example, *class*, he maintains, "is a term uniquely discomfiting to Americans, who are prone to pretend that they do not know what it means, except when applied to distinguishing a bad from a worse vaudeville act. But this is a book about classical architecture; *class* and *classical* have a common root, together with *classification*. They all have to do with hierarchy. Buried in this etymology is an important clue to the reluctance of Americans to use classical devices until their jumbled social structure began to form its hierarchy anew." That, in a nutshell, is the essence of Kennedy's method — tell your readers something they always knew, but never articulated, and do it with charm, eloquence and a smattering of irreverence.

What makes this book so thoroughly enjoyable explains why it will remain a standard for this phase of American architectural history. Namely, Kennedy interprets what it meant to be an American in the 19th century grappling with the often-conflicting elements that would determine his essence. It was what Thoreau called "the essential facts of life," or, in Kennedy's view, a glimpse at what they did, and why: "We can set out on a journey across America to meet them, to accept their offerings to us: the buildings by which they told us what they wanted us to think of them — and what they thought of themselves. For though it is a public art, architecture is always an artifact of self-perception as well. It expresses either what one thinks one is or what one fears one will not be thought to be. The use of architecture to deceive is risky, for it sometimes betrays the deceiver. That is when it becomes most interesting, for, as Charles Sanders Pierce used to say about manifestoes, 'it is the belief men *betray* and not that which they *parade* which has to be studied.'"

Kennedy reminds us, too, of some easily-forgotten details about the political sympathies of creative American talents in those early years of the American Revolution. "It is worthy of note ... that every person practicing painting or architecture with any degree of professional skill in America in 1775, except Charles Willson Peale and Thomas Jefferson, was opposed to separation

from England. So was nearly every patron of importance." The interest in classical Greek architecture, Jefferson rightly predicted, would be substantial. And it would reflect a growing confidence that America could assimilate well-established architectural styles and make them standard-bearers of American democracy. It would take a salient interval between the end of the Revolution and the emergence of Andrew Jackson — a self-styled leader who considered himself the second George Washington — to bring this transformation about.

Not surprisingly, Virginia abounds with examples of Greek Revival architecture. From the Custis-Lee Mansion in Arlington to Berry Hill in Halifax County to Mr. Jefferson's neo-Palladian prototypes in Charlottesville (*not* Greek Revival in the narrowest sense) to Monumental Church, Linden Row and the State Capitol in Richmond, Virginia boasts Greek Revival architecture of the highest order. For those who like to keep score, Kennedy compiled a 20-page appendix that lists notable Greek Revival buildings across the U.S.

It is reassuring that a major publishing house would take the plunge to produce a book as lavish as *Greek Revival America*. It took courage — to say nothing of the support of the Polaroid Corporation. As Kennedy explained, "There's a gamble in producing a beautiful book and it's exactly this: beauty trivializes. When you produce a beautiful book, you can be absolutely certain that you won't be taken seriously by scholars....If we had used second-rate paper and had washed-out pictures, it would have been taken seriously as a monograph."

This judgment is not borne out by the likes of Brendan Gill, who lauded Kennedy's talents in *The New Yorker*, or by this writer. So, in fairness, the best way to approach the book is to have two copies — one for the coffee table, another for the library.



Douglas McCreary Greenwood, director of public affairs for the American Institute of Architects in Washington, is the author of Art in Embassies: Twenty-Five Years at the U.S. Department of State.

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Harwell Hamilton Harris

In the Presence of a GENTLE GIANT

By Vernon Mays

Harwell Hamilton Harris, a man of consummate dignity and reserve, sat barefoot in his famous living room and slowly ate a lunch of fruit and meringue pie. The minutes slipped by silently while his interviewer looked on, until Harris laid down his fork and raised his head. "What information can I provide you with?" he asked, as though at a loss for words.

Interviews, though, are nothing new for Harris, now 87, who was the darling of the architectural press during the peak of his career. His gradual entree to conversation reveals both his formal manners and aversion to self-promotion, even as the opportunities to promote himself dwindle to a precious few. For, in recent months, cancer has

sapped Harris's strength and slowed his stride to a tedious shuffle. Caretakers assist him day and night. Yet, despite his physical weakness and lapses in concentration, the chance to talk about his work was an invitation he would not decline.

It seems forever ago that Harwell Harris's name frequented the conversation of students and practitioners of architecture: his theories and built projects circulated most during the '30s and '40s, when the seeds of modern architecture were sprouting along the California coast. Perhaps little-known by today's budding designers, Harwell Hamilton Harris once was, in his own way, a cult hero. As a young architect, Mason Hicks of Fayetteville, North Carolina, got excited whenever he saw Harris's latest projects in a magazine. "They always caught me right in the middle of my stomach," says Hicks, now a seasoned veteran.

"They, to me, were what I thought architecture ought to be."

When Harris departed the west coast for Texas in 1952, he left behind a legacy of houses that historians and critics now credit as one of the few true regional styles of architecture. They were beautiful objects, pure art, deceptively simple in form and texture but immensely complex in their sculptural manipulations of space. Friends say the buildings reflected the man who built them. "His work always had a simplistic commonality about it that made it pleasing," says Hicks. "But it's not that way at all. It's very sophisticated stuff."

Harris built a house for himself and his wife in Raleigh soon after coming to N.C. State to teach in 1962. Now, in old age, he is as delicate as the wooden frame that separates his soaring living room from the open-air garden room beyond. In many

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Gary Allen/The News & Observer



Harris, shown here in a 1989 photograph (above left), always had a soft-spoken dignity about him. His own residence features an open-air garden room (in foreground, above right) that opens off a 16-foot-high living room.

ways the residence is typical of Harris's earlier work: it is an essay in overlapping space, natural materials and simple form. To achieve both economy and a structural logic, he generated the floor plan based on a system of standard dimensional units, a grid of three-foot modules. That was a technique he learned from his great teacher, Richard Neutra, who emigrated from Vienna in 1923 to work under Frank Lloyd Wright. In her monograph on Harris's work, author Lisa Germany pinpointed both the link and the break between Harris and his mentors from abroad. "Like the Europeans," she wrote, "[Harris] delighted in the freedom from the past that the Modern attitude made possible, but it was never enough for his buildings to be simply new and efficient. Nor was it necessary for them to be heroic. They had to be as warm as they were lean."

Reared in architecture in an era when realizing one's vision often required extreme persuasive skills or rank arrogance, Harris was exceptional for his gentle nature and humility. Born in Redlands, California, in 1903, he developed his interest in form first as a student of sculpture and painting. In classes at the Art Students League of Los Angeles, Harris studied under one of the founders of the Synchromist Movement, whose focus was to define form in space through the use of color. Harris's experience at making objects appear to recede or advance simply by manipulating their color became an invaluable tool in later years.

As a youth, Harris was unmoved by architecture. But that changed after a fellow student persuaded him to visit the Hollyhock House, a residence in Hollywood built for Aline Barnsdall by Frank Lloyd Wright. Filled with doubts, Harris went to the house and was awe-struck. "Frank Lloyd Wright was the one who aroused my interest in architecture," he acknowledges. "I still admire him above all others." But it was Neutra, with whom Harris apprenticed for five years, who left the more visible imprint.

Harris, though, was quick to stray from Neutra's example of International Style



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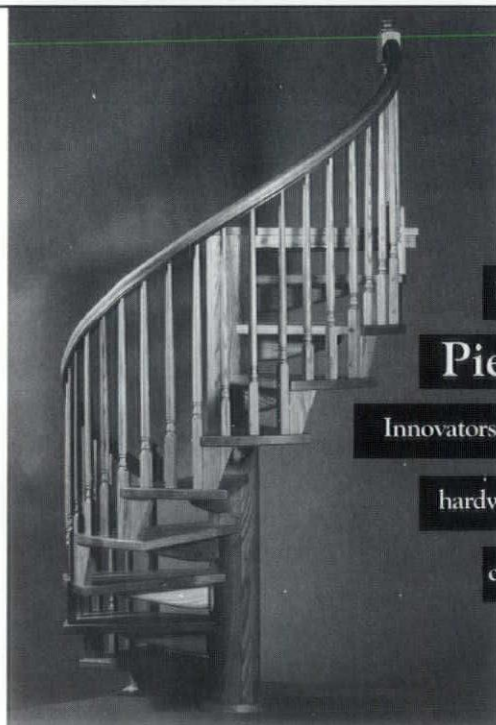
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modernism, a way of building that relied heavily on a cool aesthetic of steel and glass. While still in the formative years of his career, Harris designed a house that received immediate national attention. Known as the Lowe House, this modest residence made the most of natural redwood siding and roof shingles and introduced features that were Harris's own: bedrooms that opened to private gardens (which he intended as sleeping porches), translucent glass panels that gave privacy to the interior while admitting a soft light, and an almost exclusive use of indirect lighting.

*Harris is regarded correctly as one of
the pioneers of American modernism.*

*"You can look at anything he has
done and learn from it,
because you know that it has been
built with great integrity."*

The timeless qualities of his work made Harris a leader from the start. "He's one of perhaps four or five American architects of this century whose work I admire because of its thoroughness and authenticity," says longtime friend Frank Harmon, a Raleigh architect and professor at N.C. State. "Harwell's buildings are generally thought-built; that is, you can look at anything he has done and learn from it, because you know that it has been designed and built with great integrity. So often today we see buildings that are compromises in some way. The architect will say, 'The client wanted it this way, the budget was too small, the building inspector demanded such and such.' Or they are built to agree with a certain style. But Harwell didn't work that way."

Harris points to his Havens House (1939-40), which exploited the dramatic views afforded by a steep and difficult site, and English House (1949), a big-budget commission for a crippled painter, as his proudest accomplishments because "they best expressed the needs of the client." In the case of the English House, Harris created "a place where an

ailing person could feel comfortable, a disfigured person could feel dignified, and a sophisticated connoisseur could feel uplifted," writes author Germany. After finishing the English House, Harris moved his practice to Austin, Texas, and assumed the directorship of the architecture school at the University of Texas. The buildings he designed for Texas clients changed to accommodate the new location. They had sculptural brick exteriors, for instance, which helped protect them from the intense heat. After ten years in Texas, he moved to North Carolina and began influencing yet another generation of architects with his own steady intensity.

Like the man himself, Harris's residence in Raleigh sits in quiet reserve along a busy residential street. Viewed from the sidewalk, its understated presence and compactness belie the fact that the building contains a professional office, one-bedroom apartment, and full residence. "I think it would work better as office only than as office and residence together," he says today, still maintaining objectivity enough to criticize the building he has inhabited for nearly 30 years. "But I have tried to make the plan of any building as versatile as possible, to make additions and changes when need arises."

Perhaps because of his personal qualities, Harwell Hamilton Harris was never widely canonized in architectural circles. Yet he is regarded correctly as one of the pioneers of American modernism and, as such, has secured a place in the history of American design. "I think he is the ultimate gentleman — gentle man," says Frank Harmon. "He is almost a man of the 19th century; he is polite, considerate and thoughtful. But at the same time he has the qualities that allowed him to persevere, to see that his buildings got built, to see that his buildings were something of beauty. So what I am saying is that he is both gentle and strong. Even in his illness, he is both gentle and courageous."

Editor's note: Harwell Harris died in his North Carolina home on November 18, as this issue was going to press.

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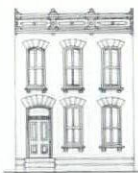


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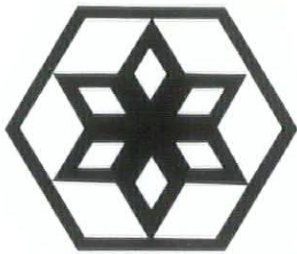
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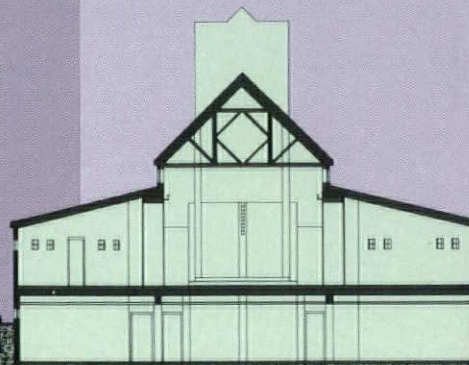
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Coming Up

In our January/February issue, look for innovations in church design, an inquiry on the status of public art in Virginia and a feature on how architecture is finding its way into the grade school curriculum. In our departments, we will visit the home and studio of an early 20th century artist and recall the wide-ranging work of Charles Eames.



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