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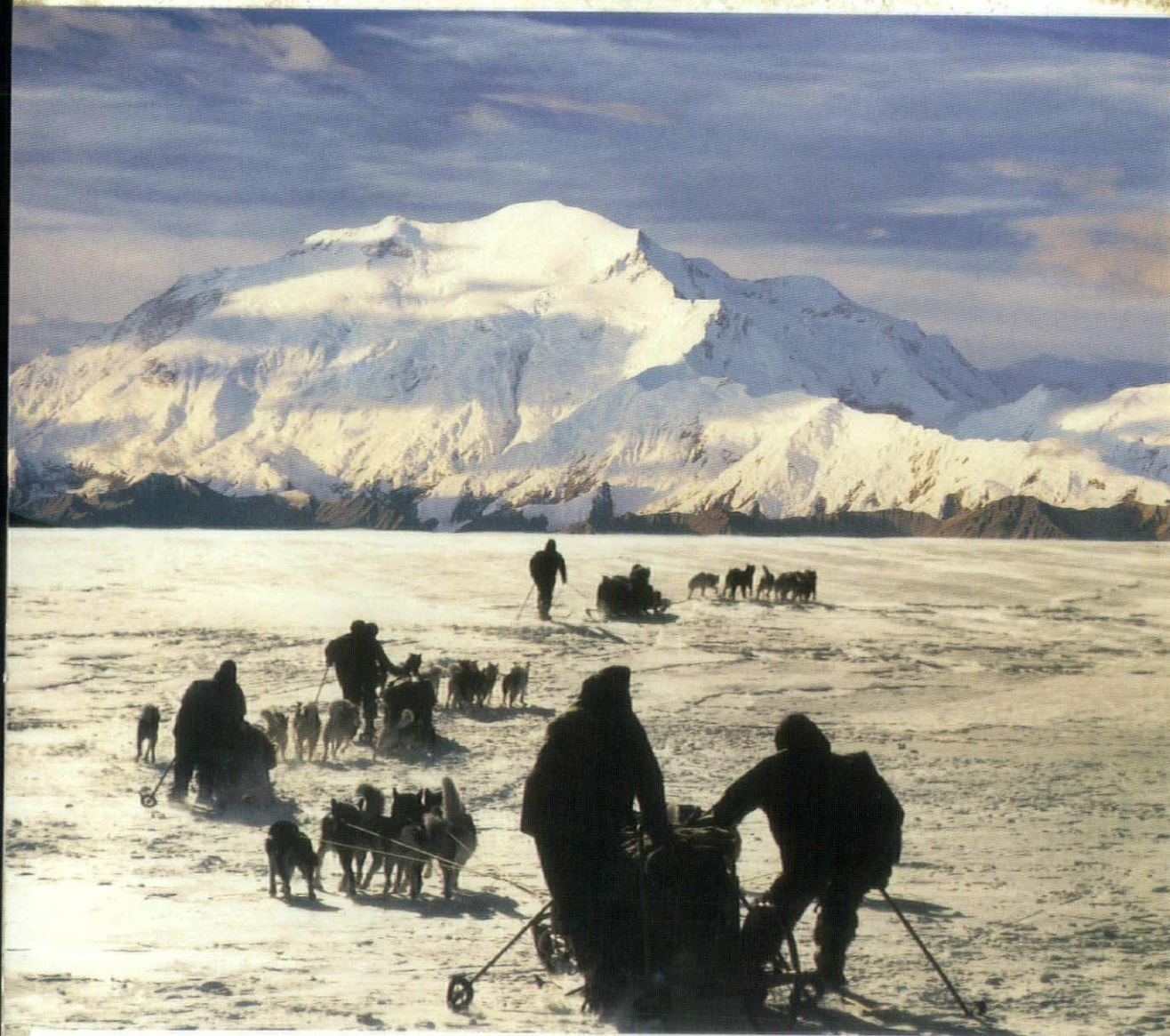


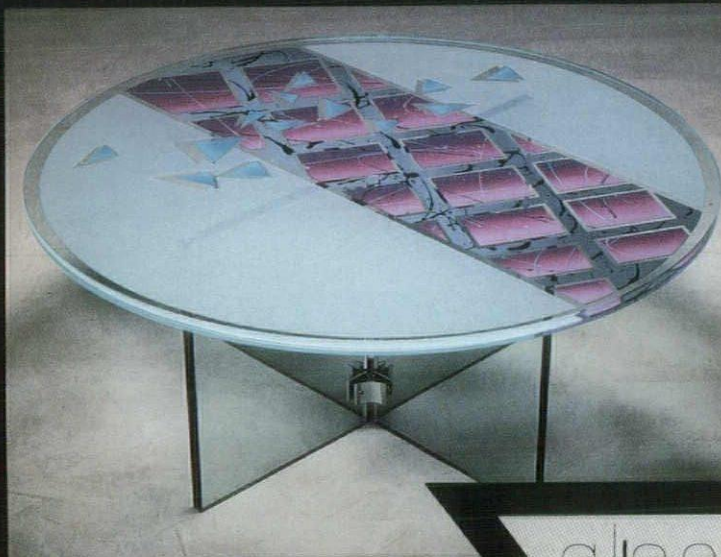
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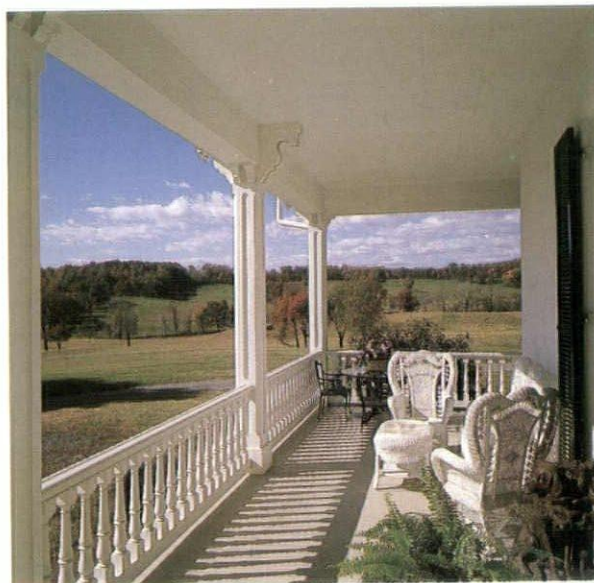
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# inform

fall 1991

volume two number three

12

## Young Architects

In a profession that often reserves the glory for its seasoned veterans, the up-and-comers of architectural practice are starting to build reputations of their own.

*By Vernon Mays and Stephanie L. Riker*

**Keith Mehner**, Kerns Group Architects, Washington, D.C.  
**Mustafa Kanishka**, Sherertz Franklin Crawford Shaffner, Roanoke  
**Jeff Bushman**, Jeff Bushman, Architect, Charlottesville  
**George Nasis**, Shriver & Holland, Norfolk  
**Robert Steele**, Steele & Associates, Richmond  
**Temple Washington/Chris Hubbard**, Temple Washington & Associates, Falls Church  
**Richard Salopek**, Bairley Maginniss & King, Alexandria



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## The Gatekeepers of Good Design

What's good design? What's not? When it comes to the billion-dollar construction program of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the judgment calls rest squarely on the shoulders of the state Art and Architectural Review Board. *By Vernon Mays*

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Carl Lounsbury, historian with a cause

Cover illustration by Peter Hoey.



Grant Mudro

Kahn's Kimbell Museum: "a presence, an aura, unmatched by any other architect."

## At Long Last: Kahn Retrospective

Over the summer, the American Institute of Architects conducted a national survey that ranked Louis I. Kahn fourth on a list of "Top All-Time American Architects." This is no mean feat, especially when the competition is the likes of Frank Lloyd Wright, I.M. Pei, Thomas Jefferson, Mies van der Rohe, and anyone else who ever picked up a pencil and started sketching on the back of a cocktail napkin.

This news coincides with the appearance of the first major retrospective of his work, "Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture," which runs from October 20 through January 5 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The exhibit has the added distinction of having been designed by renowned architect Arata Isozaki, whose powerful design, inspired by the plan of Kahn's unbuilt Mikveh Israel Synagogue in Philadelphia, features a sequence of semicircular "ruin-like" exhibition walls which are intended to suggest Kahn's visionary synagogue.

Louis Kahn arrived in America in 1906 as a five-year-old emigré from Estonia. By 1924, when he graduated from the University of

Pennsylvania with a degree in architecture, Kahn had already come to the conclusion that architecture must have a decidedly human dimension. He adopted what he considered the best qualities of Modern architecture — its love of new technology and abstract visual language — while infusing his buildings with a profound understanding of the ancient meaning and purpose of architecture. The architects who listened to his muse — including Robert Geddes, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Romaldo Giurgola — came to be known as the "Philadelphia School" and subsequently were closely identified first with Kahn and later with the phenomenon known as Post-Modernism. They broke with the dominant International Style and carved out distinctive niches of their own.

The exhibition, curated by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, delves into Kahn's early interest in drawing and painting to show how he achieved his current status as one of the century's preeminent architects. With six thematic sections that document Kahn's recurrent themes, his emerging philosophy as a practicing architect and

teacher at Penn and Princeton, and the tenor of his times, "In the Realm of Architecture" weaves a rich tapestry from some 300 artifacts including photographs, manuscripts, models, sketches, blueprints and reminiscences from colleagues.

This complex and varied exhibition is eminently worthy of the three books on Kahn that Rizzoli publishers is releasing simultaneously. In the introduction to one of them, the show's catalogue, historian Vincent Scully strikes just the right note: "Kahn was a supremely great architect. That fact is becoming more apparent with every passing year. His work has a presence, an aura, unmatched by that of any other architect of the present day. Far beyond the works even of Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, it is brooding, remote, mysterious... Kahn's buildings, the very distillation of the 20th century's later years, are primitive, too, but they are wholly devoid of gesture, as if beyond that, or of a different breed... Their body is Platonic, abstractly geometric. They thrum with silence, as with the presence of God." The other two books — one on the master's writings, lectures and interviews, the other a compendium of his vibrant paintings and sketches — offer a glimpse into the sometimes placid, sometimes turbulent waters that nurtured Kahn's singular vision.

When "Louis I. Kahn" departs Philadelphia, it will travel from France to Japan, making a stop in Fort Worth, Texas, at the Kimball Art Museum, widely regarded as one of Kahn's masterpieces and a mecca for architects everywhere. The exhibition will be reconfigured at each location, except at the Kimball, so brilliantly designed that it will serve as its own appropriate exhibition space. And what could be more fitting?

Douglas Greenwood

## Air and Space Center Readies to Take Flight

The Virginia Air and Space Center and Hampton Roads History Center is going through the roof in more ways than one. When the Hampton facility's springtime "Topping Out" celebration drew double the expected response, organizers had to turn people away. "You never want to do that, but it's nice to have to," says Jeannette Petrolia, the center's director of development.

Hampton Roads was eager to get a look at a project that has been in the making since 1984. Back then, the city of Hampton was planning its 375th anniversary when officials realized that nowhere was the history of the city nor its waterfront region adequately displayed. "Then a wonderful thing happened," says Petrolia. In gathering community support for a history center, advocates contacted officials at the nearby NASA/Langley installation. NASA, it turned out, was looking to relocate its visitors' center from a high-security area to one that was more readily accessible. The two groups joined forces to create a new non-profit institution that adopted as its theme: "From the Sea to the Stars."

Dominating the views of the 110,000-square-foot building are a series of curved vaults that suggest the image of

birds in flight. Design architects for the facility are Mitchell/Giurgola Architects of New York; Rancorn Wildman Krause Brezinski Architects of Yorktown is the associate firm.

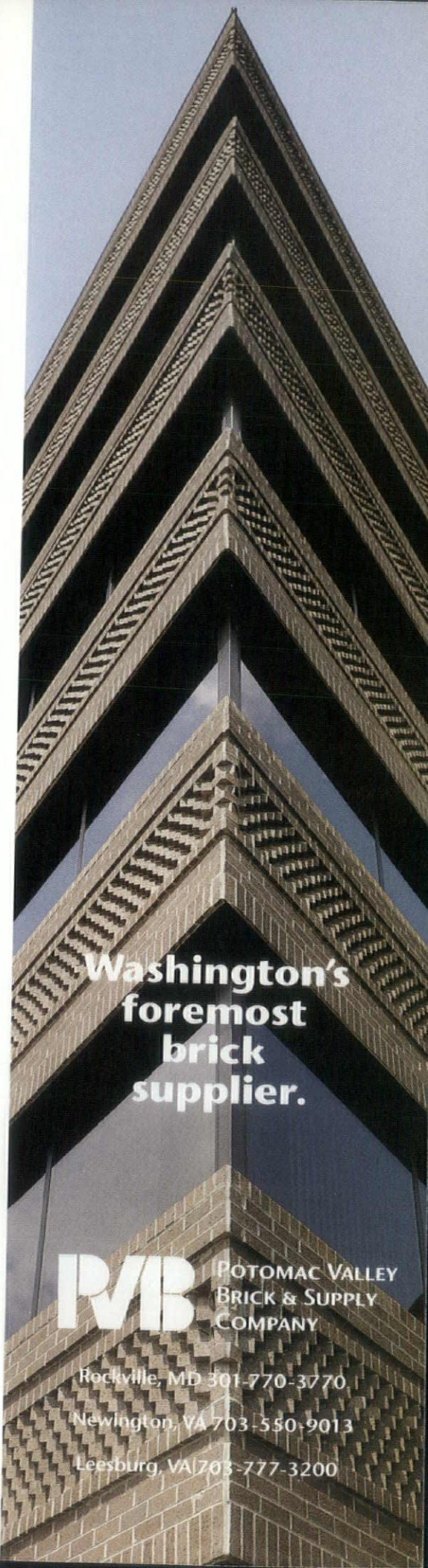
The building's heavy masonry base helps relate it to the Old Hampton district nearby. As it becomes loftier, stretching to the equivalent of nine stories, the new center opens into a 100-foot-tall atrium in which a collection of small planes will be suspended. The finished center also will contain conference areas, classrooms and a 300-seat wide-screen theater. Visitors will be led through the center in a series of exhibits interpreting the progress from sea exploration by the early colonists to space exploration in the 20th century. As the official visitors' center for NASA/Langley, the building will also function as a resource for school curriculum development and field trips.

Funding for the joint venture has come from corporate and individual donors, as well as local businesses. The "Topping Out" celebration raised \$40,000 in tickets and sponsorships — and boosted confidence even more. Now less than half a million dollars away from their \$29.7 million goal, center officials say they are right on schedule. The finished complex is set to open to the public in April 1992. For information, call 804-727-0800.

*Stephanie L. Riker*



The new center will include displays both of aircraft and Hampton Roads history.



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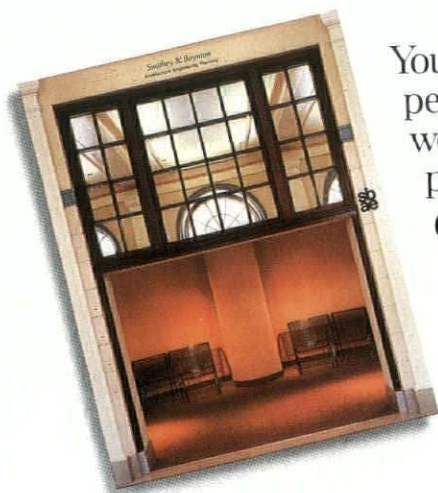
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### Modernism Reconsidered

Eight lectures exploring "A New Spirit in American Architecture" by architects who are reexamining Modern theory. Speakers include Norman Jaffe, Merrill Elam, Tod Williams, Maya Lin and Virginia architects Carlton Abbott and Gregory Hunt. Tuesday evenings through Dec. 17. Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, 202-357-3030.

### Greek Revival Review

A photographic exhibit of Greek Revival architecture inaugurates the newly renovated Barret House, Richmond headquarters of the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects and a prime example of the mid-19th century style. Through Nov. 17. 804-644-3041.

### Land Use Awards

Projects recognized by the Urban Land Institute for design quality, relevance to community needs, and resourceful use of land are featured in drawings, models and video. Continuing Nov. 20-Mar. 31 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448.

### Federal Style

Furniture, paintings and decorative objects in recreated Federal period interiors, through Jan. 6 at the Octagon, Washington, D.C. 202-638-3221.

### New American Garden

The wide-ranging trends in contemporary garden design are explored by a selection of landscape architects including Martha Schwartz, Morgan Wheelock and Meade Palmer in a Wednesday night lecture series through Dec. 11. A Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, 202-357-3030.

### Paley in Miniature

Albert Paley's early pins, brooches, neckpieces and other jewelry reveal the sculptor's fascination with metal, which led to his monumental work in wrought iron. At the Renwick Gallery, Nov. 22-Mar. 22. 202-357-1300.

### African-American Quilts

An exhibit of 24 contemporary quilts explores improvisational images, developed similarly to jazz, as applied to this craft. At the Renwick Gallery through Jan. 5. 202-357-1300.



Barret House,  
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# Getting to the Point

## The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance

By Henry Petroski. Illustrated. 434 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$25.00 cloth.

By Douglas McCreary Greenwood

If there is one implement we all take for granted today, it is the pencil. At least that's what Henry Petroski thinks. To shore up this lack of respect, Petroski, an engineering professor at Duke University, has written a delightful book chronicling the history of the pencil — which has, by extension, implications for further realms of design. He says at the outset, "The business and technology of making pencils have obscure roots and have evolved in fits and starts out of the unwritten traditions of craftsmanship." It is his purpose, then, to clarify and elucidate.

"The reasons for many of the physical characteristics of the pencil are as lost in those traditions as are the origins of the sizes and shapes of many a common object, but the relatively recent origin and short history of the modern pencil also makes it a manageable artifact to twirl about in the fingers and reflect upon in the mind," he says. And while there is no lack of scholarly research in *The Pencil*, the reader develops a sneaking suspicion that this project was as much a labor of love as it was of scholarly endeavor. This, of course, is what makes a book sing, and what makes many of Petroski's apparently circuitous excursions into arcane matters eminently worthwhile.

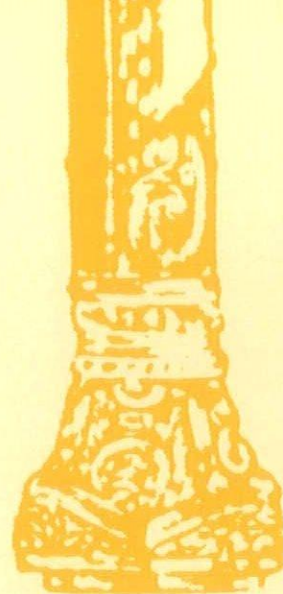
Petroski tells us, for example, more about the etymology of "pencil" and its early forms than we really need to know. Like many professors, he is intrigued by minutiae. But, like the very best of them, he has the bigger picture in sight and is able to articulate the vagaries of the pencil's history with humor, zest and insight.

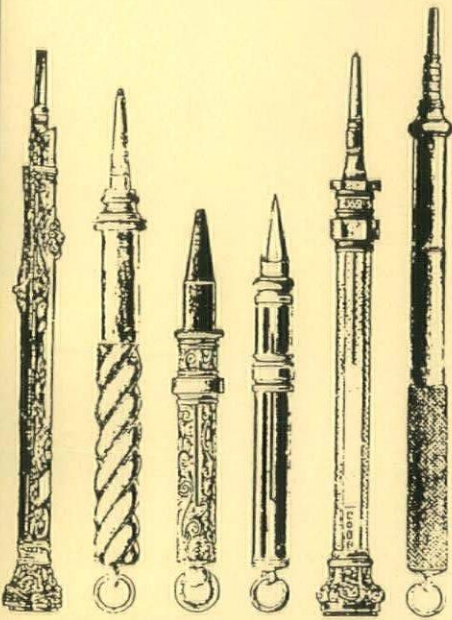
He rhapsodizes, for example, about the valuable graphite found during the 16th century in England. "The plumbago from Borrowdale had certainly been absorbed into the universe at large over the three centuries since it had been discovered: being blown in dust from all the sawing and rubbing, being deposited on the furniture of pencil factories and on the hands and clothes of their workers, being carried in fabricated veins of lead in millions upon millions of wood-cased pencils made and exported around the world, being buried with the stubs of pencils no one wanted to hold on to, being laid down in notes in the margins of books like trail markers through forests of thought, being redeposited in thin lines of thoughts and images on countless sheets of paper, being twisted and crushed in the lines of crumpled manuscripts and sketches, being burned with the thoughts and images no one wanted, or no one wanted to remember or build. So by the mid-1800s what had once

been the world's purest source of plumbago was essentially worked out and had been diffused throughout the world in a three-centuries-long fit of black entropy."

As "the tool of doodlers," Petroski asserts, the pencil "stands for thinking and creativity; but at the same time, as the toy of children, it symbolizes spontaneity and immaturity." Yet as he notes, the pencil is also a "product of immense complexity and sophistication." The author thus becomes an apologist of sorts for all of the pencil's shortcomings — for the fact that in its most common configuration, as a piece of graphite encapsulated in wood, it is much less long-lived than the pen, and further, that its role is considered inferior, by nature of its elements and its purpose, to the pen. Indeed, the pencil seems to bear a relation to the pen similar to that of watercolor to oil painting: the former being tentative, more loosely composed and executed, unfinished, a sort of preliminary draft, and the latter being the finished product, created not on paper but on canvas and intended to last literally for generations.

Petroski ruminates on many things, such as why teachers earlier in this century were opposed to pencils with rubber erasers (they were too expensive, they were useless once soiled, and they





Examples of turn-of-the-century gold and silver pencil cases and mechanical pencils.

communicated disease when boys swapped them). He tells us that by the 1970s about 20 million pounds of plastics were being used annually by more than 200 American firms to make about 2 billion writing instruments, with the Japanese and Germans taking a lead in ultra-thin lead technology. And he describes the late 18th century breakthrough in France that resulted in the Conté process, whereby powdered graphite was mixed with clay and water to form a paste that could be worked into a holder.

Since the subtitle of his work is "A History of Design and Circumstance," Petroski also covers many of the finer points of the pencil's development. For example, today about three out of four pencils are yellow. The reason, Petroski postulates, is that by the end of the 19th century yellow had become indelibly associated in the popular mind with high-quality pencils. This "circumstance" derives from the fact that, as the English mines' output of superior graph-

ite declined, manufacturers and suppliers sought the precious metal elsewhere, finding exquisite lodes in Siberia. To capitalize on this new source, entrepreneurs such as Franz von Hardtmuth, in direct competition with the renowned German pencil makers of the Faber family, created a new pencil called the Koh-I-Noor, painted it yellow, and launched it with resounding success. Other manufacturers sought to cash in on the interest in Orientalism (which had a striking influence on European and American artists in the latter 19th century), creating pencils that bore such names as Mongol and Mikado. Where the "natural" wood finish had once held sway, yellow became the standard by 1893.

On the matter of design, the author dwells on efforts to create consistently smoother, and eventually thinner, leads. Just why there are round pencils and octagonal ones, and why the octagonal shape seemed to predominate — Because it doesn't roll? Because it is easier to hold? — are not central questions for Petroski. They simply evolved.

In what usually appears as a throw-away line in biographical sketches of America's most famous nonconformist, Petroski develops more fully the story of Henry David Thoreau's forays into pencil making. Not surprisingly, Petroski embraces the Harvard-trained Thoreau as an engineer, an innovator who looked askance at the world he inhabited. Thoreau's father, John, had become adept at pencil making, even though American pencils were inferior to foreign models well into the 19th century. Neither as smooth as the Borrowdale graphite from England nor

as elegant as the *conté crayons* from France, Thoreau's pencils were at least more reasonably priced, and they found a niche in the American marketplace. By the mid-1840s, after Henry's tinkering with new combinations of lead and clay, the standard Thoreau pencil became significantly better, leading his more famous friend Ralph Waldo Emerson to write that Thoreau "believes he makes as good a pencil as the good English drawing pencil." From all accounts, he was right.

Petroski concludes, among other things, that despite the predicted replacement of the pencil by the computer in the design fields, it is unlikely that drawing by hand will ever totally disappear.

By turns speculative, philosophical and historical, *The Pencil* is, as social history, a qualified success. Petroski too often feels compelled to defend his vocation, though in all fairness he declares in his preface that he will approach engineering through the history and symbolism of the pencil. Tighter editing could have spared us slightly corny passages. But we are fortunate that the good professor has assumed the role of Boswell to the pencil. For Petroski's realization that "really old pencils are as hard to come by as information about old pencils" has led to a thoroughly delightful essay on an indispensable tool for all of us.



Douglas McCreary Greenwood heads the *Environmental Resource Guide* project at the American Institute of Architects.

# young 'ä'rchitects

12

Youth is a relative term when it comes to talking about architects. "They call it an old man's profession," says Robert M. Groth, a Roanoke architect licensed in 1988. "You look at a lot of well-known architects and you see that they start out doing projects for their families. By the time they achieve national recognition, they are often well into their 40s or 50s."

There are exceptions, of course. But it's not uncommon for any architect under 40—even those with 10 to 15 years' experience—to be considered a little wet behind the ears. Perhaps that's part of the reason why, two years ago, young architects began exercising a collective voice through the Young Architects Forum. Both Groth and Gary Arnold, of AP2 Architects in Newport News, served on the national panel created to articulate the needs and concerns of their contemporaries. Professional issues were discussed, but social concerns such as housing the homeless were strongly emphasized too, says Arnold.

Difficulty in obtaining recognition for one's work was a frequent complaint among the recently licensed participants. "Young architects are frustrated also by the fact that architecture, as a professional service, gets so little compensation in relation to lawyers, accountants and doctors," says Groth. "The reason is because the public doesn't

*In a profession that often saves the glory for its seasoned veterans, the up-and-comers of architectural practice are starting to build reputations of their own.*

understand what architects do and how many hats they wear—their coordination of such a large number of consultants. We have to be both creative and analytical."

This year the role of advocate has passed to 29-year-old William Carpenter, an architect at Bairley Maginniss & King in Alexandria and an advisor to the national forum, which seeks to empower young architects to succeed professionally and offer them relevant programs. Efforts to organize a regional Metropolitan Washington Young Architects Forum have received strong response in Washington, D.C., and suburban Virginia and Maryland. In just a year, attendance at the group's meetings has jumped from 11 people to 120.

As for giving up-and-coming architects their due, *Inform* presents on the following pages a sample of the region's young talent. Our informal survey revealed some interesting patterns. For instance, despite the fact that many of these architects cut their teeth during a decade in which Post-Modern buildings monopolized the pages of professional journals, nearly all of them named orthodox Modern masters as their architectural forebears. In general, though, this generation of architects has tempered Modernist rhetoric with its own concerns about making buildings that both complement their surroundings and acknowledge, where appropriate, the influence of local culture. And, while these journeymen sometimes fall prey to the excesses of youth, the sensitivity and intention revealed in their projects bode well for a range of exciting results in the years to come.

*Vernon Mays and Stephanie L. Riker*



Age 28

Keith

**Mehner**

**Education:** B.Arch., Kansas State University, 1986.

**Experience:** RTKL Associates, Baltimore, 1986-90; Kerns Group since 1990.

**Major Influences:** industrial and farm buildings for their honesty; use of materials and expression of function; Arts and Crafts design for its beauty of details and connections.

**Favorite Building:** La Tourette, by Le Corbusier.



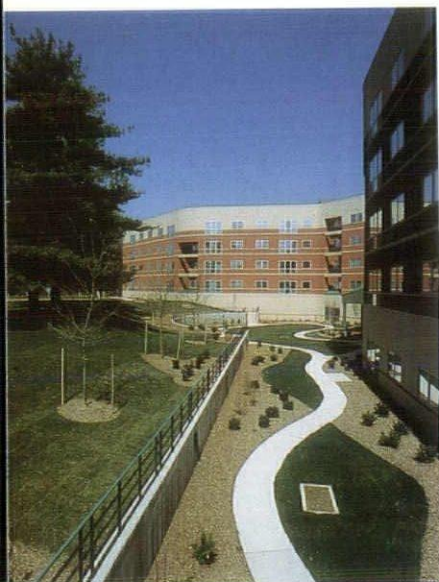
Kerns Group Architects  
Washington, D.C.

Keith Mehner thinks hiding structural elements often is a mistake. "People relate better to buildings when they can understand how they work," he says. He admires industrial and farm buildings for their simplicity and sees the same straightforward expression of materials in Japanese architecture. "Nothing is ever really covered up. What you see is how the engineering fits together." An outlook emphasizing basic elements complements Mehner's work method of breaking a project into manageable pieces and fine-tuning as the goals get progressively smaller.

A Japanese-inspired sculpture studio at the Maryland Institute College of Art, designed by Mehner while employed at RTKL Associates of Baltimore, reflects his penchant for structural clarity. The temporary structure, selected from among 15 schemes during an in-house competition, recently won an American Institute of Architects Honor Award at the national level. The studio met the client's demand for easy assembly by making the most of common materials such as corrugated steel, fiberglass panels, and telephone poles. Once completed, it provided a space filled with natural light where sculptors constructed a three-ton wooden Buddha.



Maxwell MacKenzie, Courtesy RTKL Associates (sculpture studio); Michael Dersin (portrait)



Mustafa

Kanishka

Age

39



Sherertz Franklin Crawford Shaffner  
Roanoke

Time is the key to Mustafa Kanishka's approach to design. "We are an increment of time," he says, noting that buildings should reflect their day while remaining in harmony with buildings of the past—"but not to the point of mimicking, because each is a different building, a different time, built by different people." Kanishka prefers that a building age like a person, so when possible he chooses to work with materials such as limestone, concrete and steel because "they get the stain of time." He begins a project by concentrating on its surroundings and the visual impact it will have on the site. "I don't believe, necessarily, that there is beautiful architecture and ugly architecture," he says. "Sometimes we design buildings that are not beautiful for everyone." Buildings of even the simplest materials may inspire awe when viewed at a distance, he says. The current wave of discussion over Deconstructivism, an architecture typified by skewed angles and organizational schemes that often emphasize conflict rather than mitigating it, generated what has become a necessary thinking process for Kanishka. "Deconstruction involves the opposition between theory and practice, because it questions the way we do things and the way we think of architecture," he says.

The fragmenting of architectural elements takes literal form in the Clarke-Frederick-Winchester Regional Jail, where a visitors' corridor covered in white limestone (above right) is detached both formally and functionally from the main cell blocks. Kanishka's attention to site



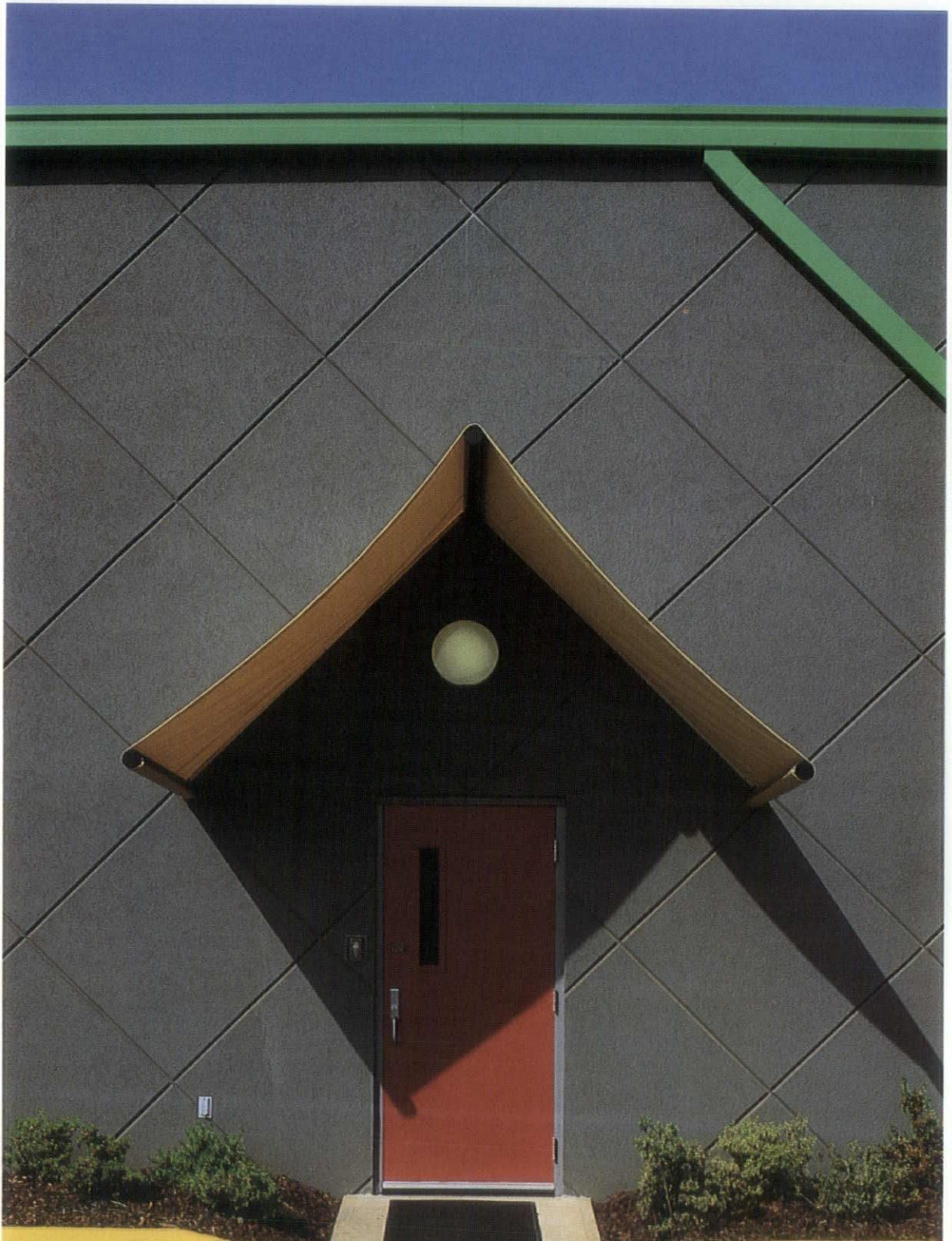
considerations generated the undulating form of the Quarryville Presbyterian Home (above left), which cradles a landscaped courtyard where elderly residents can take in the fresh air of rural Pennsylvania. At the Brambleton Surgery Center in Roanoke, a project headed by SFCS design director David Bandy, Kanishka took the lead in developing a pattern to articulate the synthetic stucco walls and suggested the use of bright color accents (facing page).

**Education:** B.Arch., Kabul University, Afghanistan, 1976; M.Arch., University of Utah, 1980.

**Experience:** Hallet, Hermanson & Associates, Salt Lake City, 1977-79; Brixen & Christopher, Salt Lake City, 1979-88; Sherertz Franklin Crawford Shaffner since 1988.

**Major Influences:** Louis I. Kahn for the mystical quality of spaces he created, his no-nonsense use of material, and his poetic use of language. "He believed in Order and Chaos, and he chose Order first."

**Favorite Building:** Salk Institute, by Louis I. Kahn.

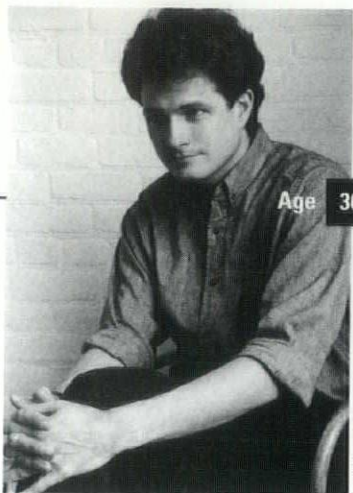




Philip Beaurline

Time and again, Jeff Bushman encounters the same question from people he meets at cocktail parties: Is your work traditional or modern? "I've been thinking for years about how to answer that question," he says. "I make a conscious effort to have a foot in both areas." Much of his attraction to the simple structures found in rural areas, in fact, is that they defy easy labeling. "I'm real happy when people have a hard time labeling my buildings, because I think you start to shortchange work when you label it." But Bushman acknowledges a consistently expressed attitude toward materials in his projects. "I get a real delight out of seeing the way things are assembled. One of the tragedies of the late 20th century is the demise of the mechanical watch, because watches are no longer an analog of something else. I think a building can be fascinating in the way it goes together and the analog of it, the poetry of it." The making of good details is a regular topic of conversation among the four designers in Bushman's office. And it's the kind of conversation that small firms lend themselves to. "Architecture as a business is a very weird proposition," he says. "So if you can do it small, that's good. Making architecture takes a huge amount of time, and in a 'time is money' world you can have a lot of difficulty [trying to make good buildings]."

Detail is the operative word in the design of a Charlottesville jewelry gallery (left), where the intent was to contrast colorful handmade objects against a simple muted background. Display units of waxed steel and tempered glass were fabricated locally and assembled by the architects, who also applied hand-rubbed paint to the walls. Bushman's delight in the columned porticos of Palladian villas found local application in the porch of a Charlottesville residence (facing page, middle). The railings there were modeled after Japanese bamboo fences admired by the client. More stately is a new garden pavilion—20-feet-square and situated to receive the sun all day—built to complement an existing stone house (inset).



Age 36

Pam Marracini

J  
E  
F  
F

# B U S H M A N

Jeff Bushman, Architect  
Charlottesville

**Education:** B.S. in Architecture, University of Virginia, 1977;  
M.Arch., U.Va., 1984.

**Experience:** Richard Shank Associates, Charlottesville, 1977-81;  
Eisenman/Robertson Architects, New York, 1981-84; Ralph Lerner,  
Architect, Cambridge, Mass., 1984; began own practice in 1985.

**Major Influences:** City of Venice; Andrea Palladio; rural vernacular  
architecture; Le Corbusier; Leon Krier.

**Favorite Building:** Jacopo Sansovino's Loggetta, Venice.



Philip Beaurline

Jeff Bushman

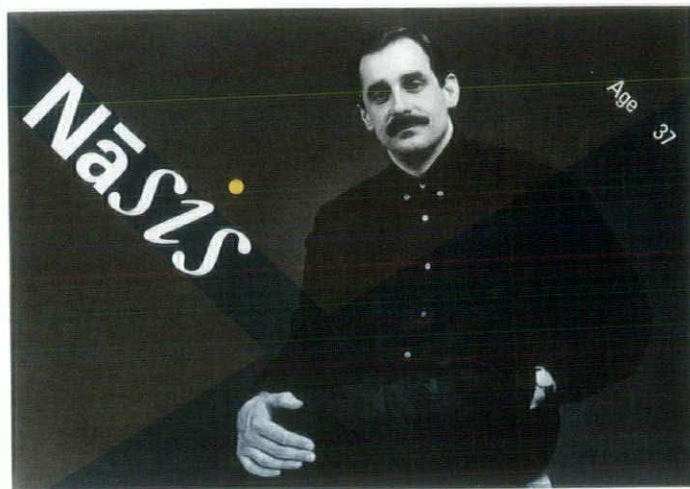
George C.

**Education:** B.Arch., Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1976.

**Experience:** J. Arthur Johnsen, Montclair, N.J., 1976-77; Shriver & Holland since 1977.

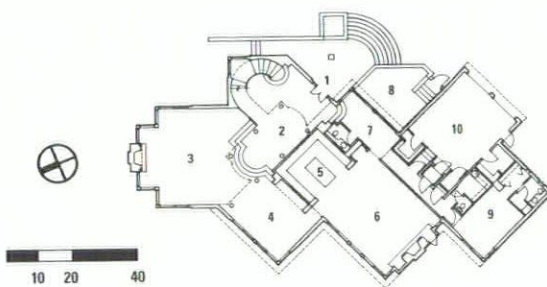
**Major Influences:** VPI professors Tom Regan and Olivio Ferrari ("who taught discovery in the design process and emphasized quality above all else"); Swiss artist Max Bill; the Bauhaus ("problem solving in all the arts, at every scale"); Robert Pirsig on the limits of rationalism; Rudolf Arnheim on the intelligence of perception; Camillo Sitte on modern city planning; regionalism in architecture; Robert Venturi ("less is a bore").

**Favorite Buildings:** Helsinki concert and convention hall, by Alvar Aalto; Thorncrowne Chapel, by Fay Jones; Fallingwater, by Frank Lloyd Wright.



#### First Floor Plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Foyer
- 3 Living Room
- 4 Dining
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Den
- 7 Conservatory
- 8 Courtyard
- 9 Guestroom
- 10 Garage



18

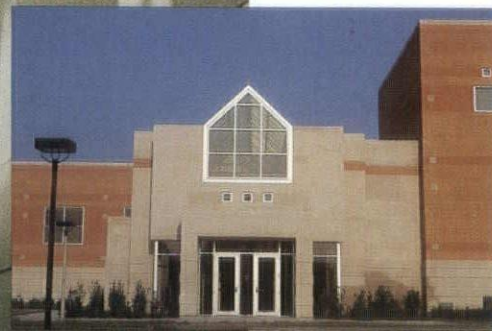
Shriver & Holland Associates  
Norfolk

Architecture treated as sculpture—that is, buildings designed and built with little concern for their surroundings—has left a terrible legacy for today's architects, says George Nasis. He is attracted, instead, to the more contextual and humane methods of city planning that were common prior to the Modern movement. And his interest in the subject has paid off, particularly in projects he has overseen on college campuses. "You can do towering buildings that work well as long as, at the street level, they still respond to the pedestrian scale," says Nasis. He admires solutions such as the planned town of Seaside, Florida, where car-dominated roads take a back seat to paths where people can walk. In his role as design architect on a multi-faceted team, Nasis says he still begins each project with an open-ended kind of exploration that he picked up in architecture school. Though many ideas generated in this way end up being tossed out the window once the particulars of a specific site are factored in, Nasis says the process often yields ideas that are useful to the project, too.

At Old Dominion University, Nasis has played a key role in the development of several projects. Nearing completion is a new Fine Arts Center (facing page) organized around a two-story atrium that encloses a busy cross-campus pedestrian path. The center's expansion plans include extending the gallery so it will pass by an exhibition space and heighten curiosity about the arts. Apart from his work for the firm, Nasis also designed the Woodard Residence (left) in Virginia Beach. Making the most of a densely wooded lakefront lot, the serrated configuration of the floor plan opens many of the rooms to spectacular views across the water.

Mark Edward Atkinson





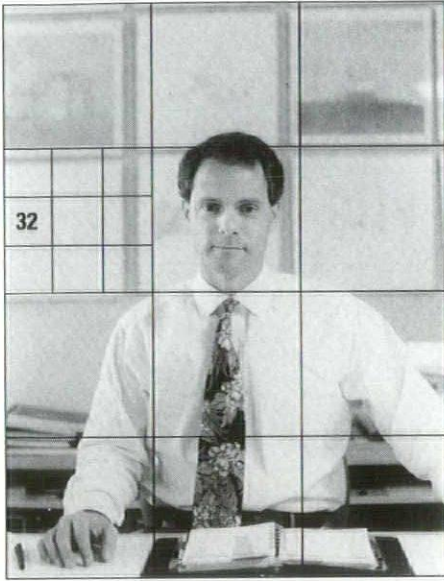
George Nasais

George Nasais

Robert A.

# steele

Age 32



Steele & Associates

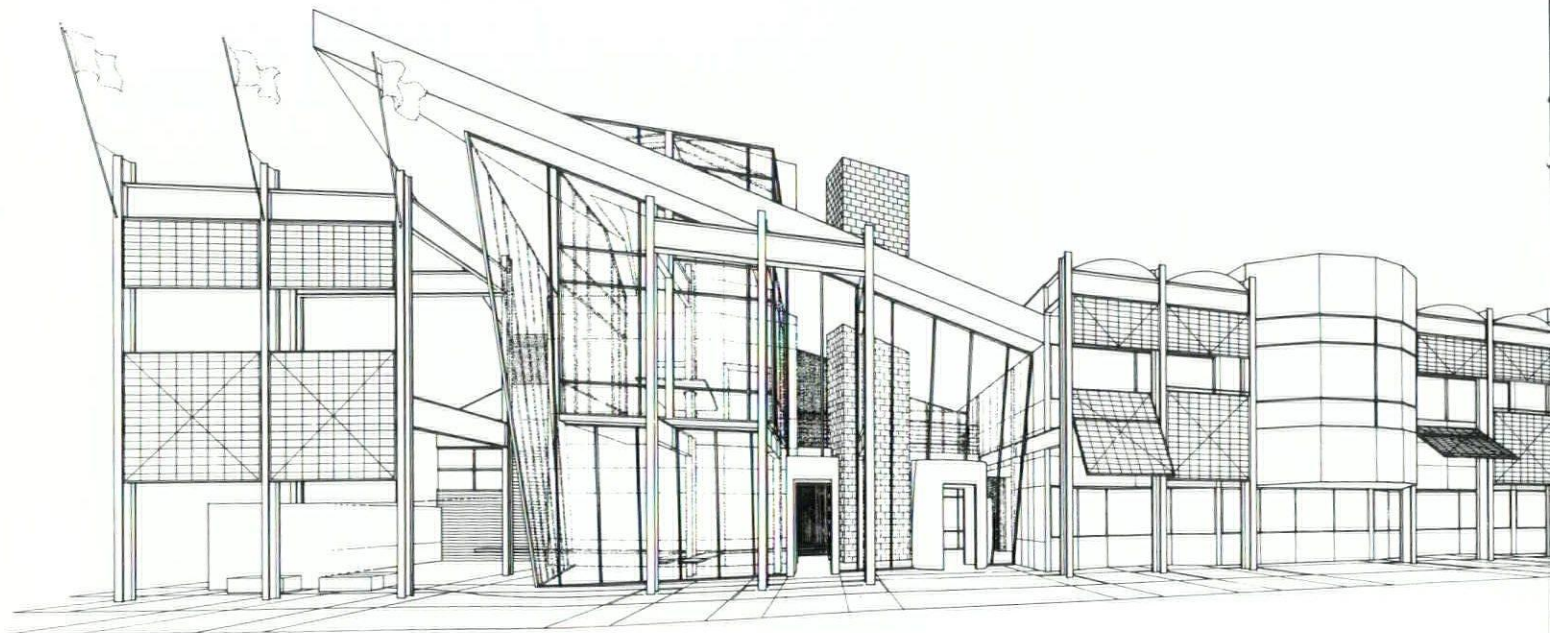
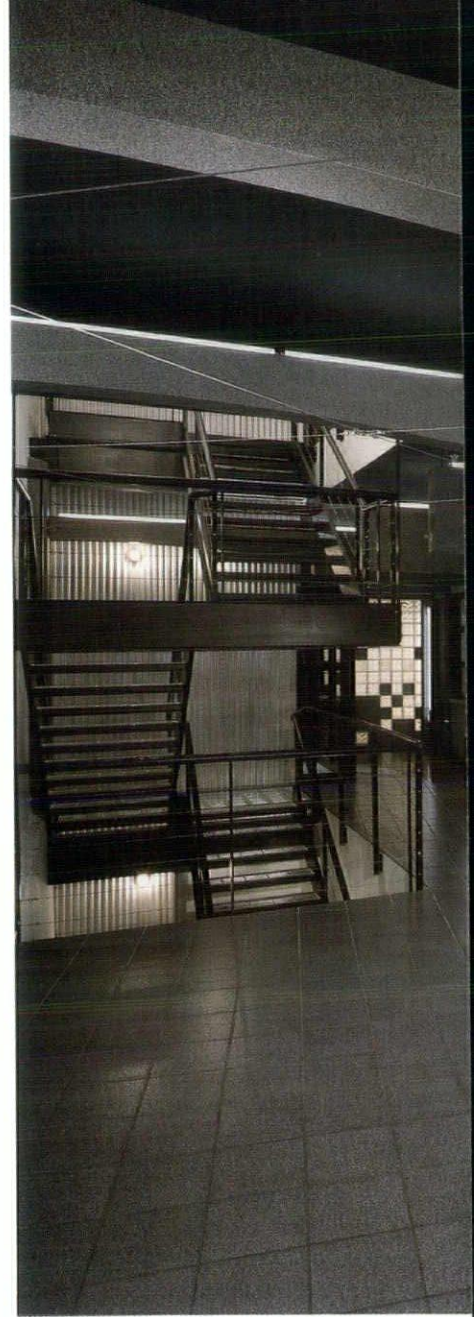
Richmond

**Education:** B.Arch., Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1982.

**Experience:** Ward/Hall Associates, Fairfax, 1982-84; Davis & Carter, McLean, 1984-86; The Joseph Boggs Studio, Washington, D.C., 1986-88; opened own practice in 1988.

**Major Influences:** Mario Botta; Richard Meier; Mies van der Rohe; Le Corbusier; Alvar Aalto; "response to context — built or natural."

**Favorite Building:** Barcelona Pavilion, by Mies van der Rohe.

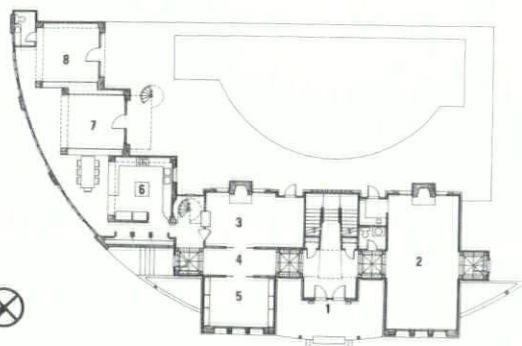




Prakash Patel

#### First Floor Plan

- 1 Entry
- 2 Living Room
- 3 Dining
- 4 Hall
- 5 Office
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Family Room
- 8 Play Room

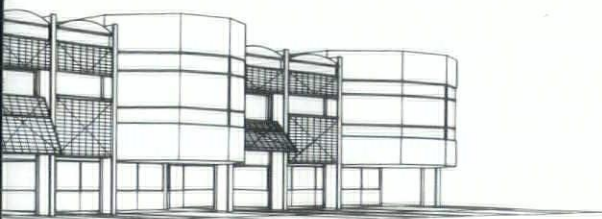


"Every site has a mentality," says Robert Steele, who holds that a consistent set of ideas and beliefs can generate buildings of tremendous variety simply because of a change in location. "Architecture is really a response, it is not a solution. I think too many architects have a style that is utilized on many different types of projects in many locations." Steele says his office doesn't favor one style over any other—"maybe that's because we are young and still searching." At 32, he is the oldest of six designers in his office, all but one of whom studied under the same handful of professors at Virginia Tech. That shared background fosters a collaborative atmosphere—but not necessarily homogenous results—in the firm. "Once the concept is created, I can hand the project to someone in the office and know it's not going to go off in a different direction," says Steele.

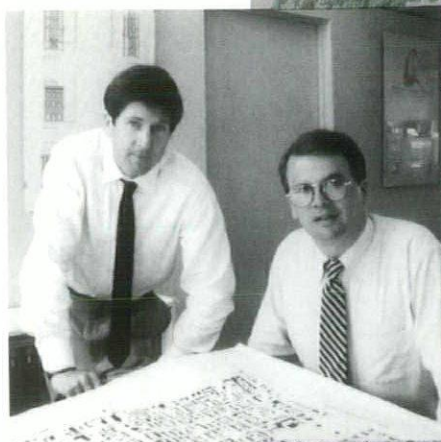
With the most complex projects, that usually means passing design responsibility to his first lieutenant, VPI alumnus Walter Parks.

The firm's most visible project to date is the conversion of a Richmond broom factory into a kidney dialysis center. A stepped wall in the building lobby (left) takes its rhythmic cues from the original structural grid, while the rich textures of corrugated metal and patterned glass block walls make for a vibrant setting. Three squarish towers (below) contain the informal rooms of a private residence in Goochland County, whose hilltop site gave rise to the radius circumscribing the house (plan, above). Construction is set to begin this fall on the Richmond Ambulatory Surgery Center (below left), a 40,000-square-foot urban complex that will house surgical suites and physicians' offices.

21



Walter Parks



Temple

**WASHINGTON**

Age 37

Chris

**HUBBARD**

Age 32

#### Temple Washington

**Education:** B.A. in Economics, Washington and Lee University, 1976; M.Arch., Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1980.

**Experience:** Prince Construction Co., Alexandria, 1980-81; VVKR Inc., Alexandria, 1981-86; opened own practice in 1986.

**Major Influences:** Aristotle, Martin Heidegger, Antonio Gaudi, Mario Botta, Louis Kahn, Carlo Scarpa, Leonardo da Vinci, Claude Monet.

#### Chris Hubbard

**Education:** B.S. in Biochemistry, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1979; M.Arch., VPI, 1983; Certificate, Harvard University, 1989.

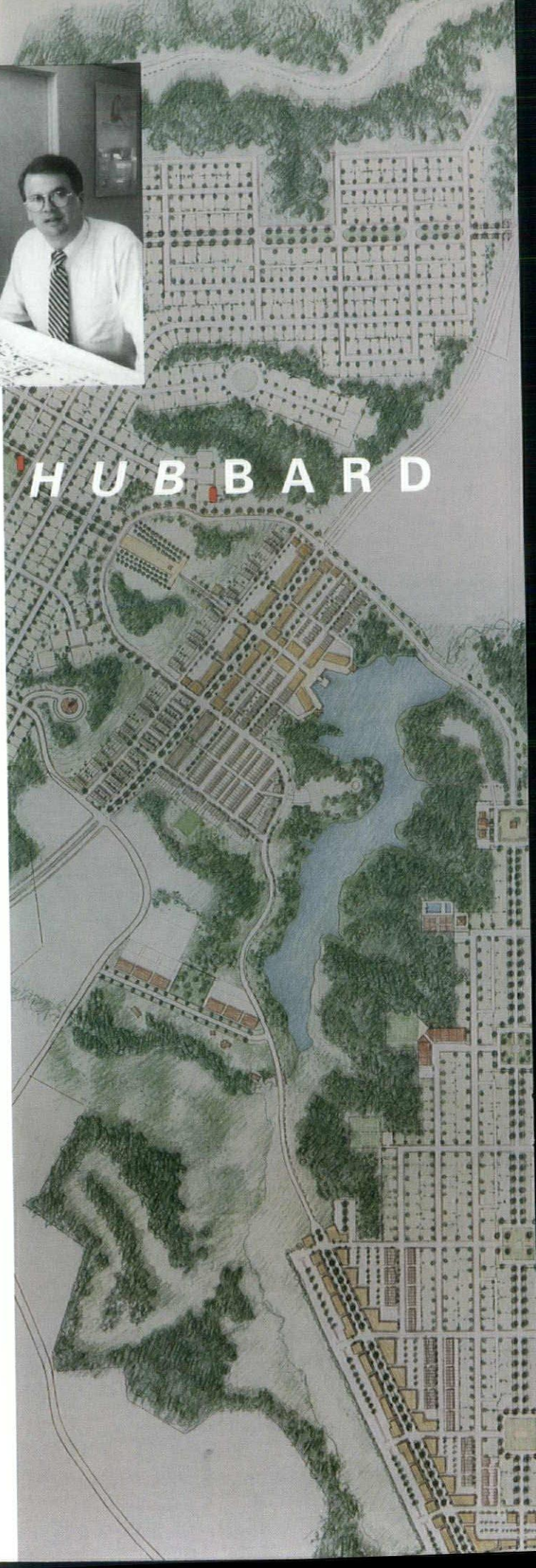
**Experience:** Ward/Hall Associates, Fairfax, 1984-88; principal at Temple Washington & Associates since 1988.

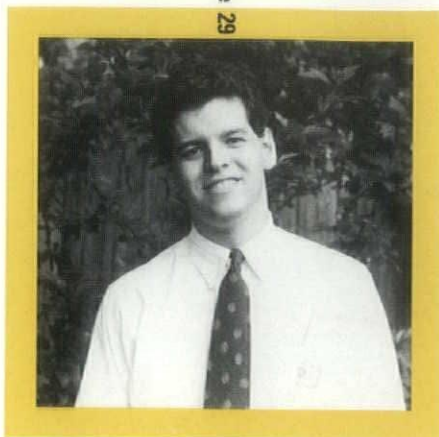
**Major Influences:** Italian Rationalism, Luis Barragan, Carlo Scarpa, Mario Botta, Martin Heidegger, Thomas Merton, Paul Ricoeur.

**Favorite Building:** House and atelier of Luis Barragan.

Temple Washington detests what he calls "the Colonial box." He and partner Chris Hubbard are intent on creating modern residential prototypes as alternatives to the standard suburban fare. "Architects have lost standing in the residential market," Washington says. For that, he blames the architects, who he says have walked away and left builders and developers to fill the gap. For his part, Hubbard strives to assimilate modern technology without the result appearing high-tech. Now the two collaborate on virtually every project, blending Washington's intuitive approach and Hubbard's more practical one.

The duo's penchant for rethinking conventional designs resulted in a master plan for the new town of Boulder (right), slated for a 950-acre site in Stafford County. Aided by the architects, the developer already has gained approval for new zoning categories needed to create the town, which is based on traditional planning concepts and pedestrian-friendly values. Neighborhood streets will contain a non-repetitive mix of condominiums, townhouses and single-family houses, and urban centers will invite a variety of commercial uses. Neighborhoods are woven together by boulevards, commercial centers and open spaces.





Richard S.

# SAL O PEK

**Education:** B.Arch., Carnegie-Mellon University, 1984.

**Experience:** Lorenzi Dodds & Gunnill, Waldorf, Maryland, 1984-86; Bairley Maginniss & King since 1986.

**Major Influences:** Le Corbusier; Bauhaus; DeStijl movement; builders of cathedrals; ancient Egypt and Greece; the architecture of the American Industrial Revolution, 1880-1930.

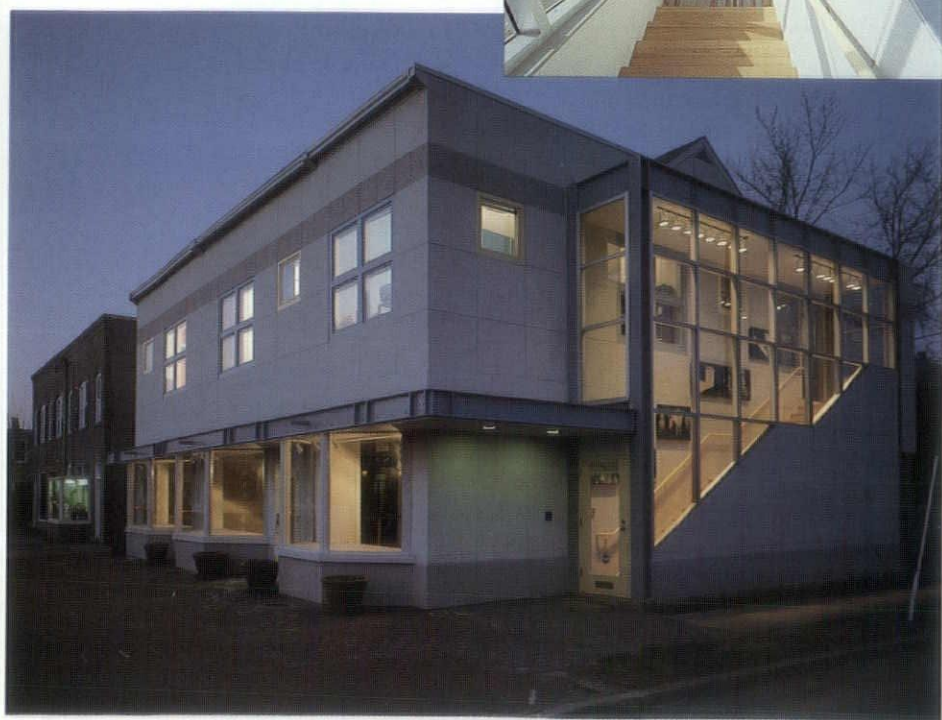
**Favorite Building:** Ronchamp Chapel, by Le Corbusier.

Bairley Maginniss & King  
Alexandria



Richard Salopek likes to find the real events which influence design, such as the play of sunlight on an interior wall or the transparency of a building's skin that allows the activity inside to become part of the street scene. Because he thinks architecture should pay more attention to the human condition than to academic theories, Salopek looks for inspiration in "the trenches of society." His interest in the American Industrial Revolution informs his appreciation for the beauty of structural elements, and he admires the commercial buildings of the late 19th century for their street-friendliness. "A good architect understands the people and culture where his building will be constructed," Salopek says, and he strives to make his work fit easily within its cultural context.

In a recently completed rehab of 2001 Mt. Vernon Avenue in Alexandria (left), Salopek converted second-floor apartments into offices for the owner's video production company. An irregular facade was resurfaced in stucco and given a new identity with industrial steel elements and an orderly pattern of windows. A new "gallery stair" entrance was added to the side of the building, and the space enclosed in glass so that passersby can see examples of the firm's photography displayed inside.



Photos: Michael Bruce

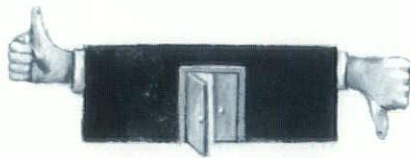


Meganck

# THE GATEKEEPERS OF GOOD DESIGN

*What's good design? What's not?  
When it comes to the billion-dollar construction  
program of the Commonwealth of Virginia,  
the judgment calls rest squarely  
on the shoulders of the state  
Art and Architectural Review Board.*

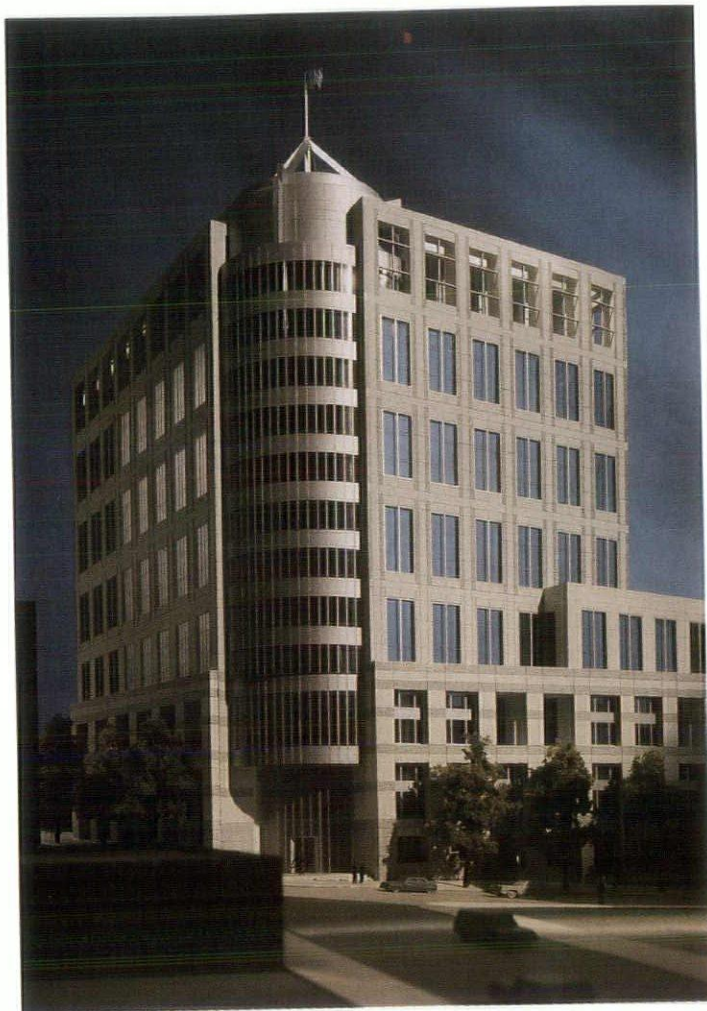
By Vernon Mays



When Pete Anderson first appeared before the state Art and Architectural Review Board nearly 25 years ago, he says the committee was essentially "the old boys club" that, for many architects, proved to be as much an irritation as a source for valuable critique.

"But going to the board was, for me, a kind of serious architectural treat," says Anderson, now a partner in the Richmond firm Glave Newman Anderson Architects. "It meant that I would get motivated to talk to people I considered design peers, people who understood design language, people I could really talk to from the heart about design intent. They could help us see where the intent was correct and where we could address it more effectively. We engaged in good discourse."

Anderson decided back then that he wanted to serve on the governor-appointed board someday himself, envisioning it as an opportunity to leave a positive mark on the architecture of the Old Dominion. His chance came in the summer of 1990,



### State Corporation Commission Headquarters

Discussion of this new office building and parking structure in the government district surrounding the state Capitol centered on how to treat its prominent corner tower. The board cautioned the designers not to overplay the corner, which functions as the "front door" for the building. Eventually a stone grid that was to extend to the corner was eliminated altogether to more fully reveal the glass cylinder. Architects for the project are Odell Associates of Richmond.

when he was named to the six-member body. By accepting, he joined a board that had its beginnings in the state art commission established in 1916. Its original charge was to approve purchased or donated works of art — including paintings, murals, stained glass, bas-reliefs, monuments and fountains — before they could be accepted as state property. Later its scope was expanded to include aesthetic review of buildings and structures destined to be placed on state property. Legally, the board serves only an advisory function; formal authority to approve projects rests with the director of the state's Department of General Services. But appeals are rare, and they invariably fail. In effect, the Art and Architectural Review Board calls the shots — aesthetically speaking — on every building the Commonwealth of Virginia slates for construction or demolition.

That's no small task. From 1988 to 1992, more than \$700 million in state funds were earmarked for construction projects. Another \$326 million — primarily for use in college and university projects — were raised through revenue bonds. Total capital outlay: about \$1 billion over four years.

Given its broad responsibility, the board passes judgment over an incredible range of projects. On any given day, board members might debate the merits of everything from a new development plan for a sprawling college campus to the destruction of a weather-beaten picnic shelter in one of Virginia's many state parks. "Quite seriously, some of the little things — like the 8-by-8 plywood observatory at Northern Virginia Community College — are just as important as something costing many thousands of times more, because we're talking about an attitude about how buildings fit into their environment," says Anderson.

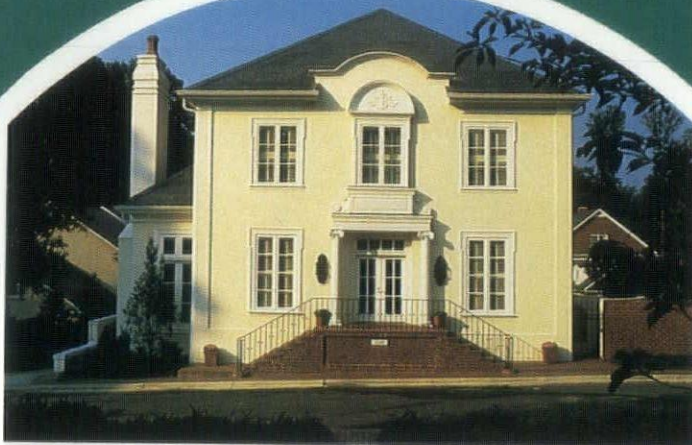
But the board's advice, deliberate as it may be, is not always welcome. Often the panel finds itself in the uncertain

position of telling seasoned designers to take another crack at a building design before offering their seal of approval. "These boards have a reputation for being punitive and kind of controlling," says architect Timm Jamieson, a partner with Hayes Seay Mattern & Mattern in Roanoke. But Jamieson says he approaches the board with an open mind, because the reviews generally improve the end product. "The reputation is that design review doesn't help — that it hinders artistic creativity. I don't agree."

Yet his enthusiasm for the process developed slowly. Jamieson recalls repeated car trips from Richmond back to Roanoke during which he fumed over comments made by the board. In one instance, the board directed Jamieson to simplify a proposal for a series of small architectural elements in a master plan for Virginia State University. The piece to which Jamieson was most attached — an entry pavilion intended to signify arrival at the heart of campus — was the very element they wanted to scrap. "And they were right," Jamieson admits. "When I removed the pavilion, all the other parts of the plan became stronger."

Some architects liken their episodes before the Art and Architectural Review Board to lying on a bed of nails. The comment most often heard is that one's success in winning over the board depends too greatly on who happens to show up for that day's meeting; one influential member can carry the day (an observation that's particularly reflective of the days when the board included former U.Va. dean of architecture Jaquelin Robertson). Board members also are accused of being too glib. "One of the people on the board said our building looked like a duck," says Henry Ayon, an architect at Odell Associates in Richmond. "I felt that in a constructive environment that comment would not have been made that way."

While some view the board as an obstruction to their right to design, others suggest the board may not always go far enough. "I think in some cases the board has been too lenient in terms of what they have allowed to get built," says Richard Ford, an architect at Baskervill & Son in Richmond. "You look at some of the state projects that have been built, and you wonder how in the world they ever got past Art and



Architecture by Meyer-Greenson

## QUIET'S BEST

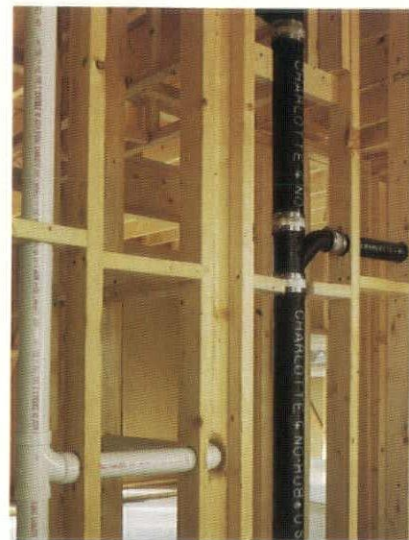
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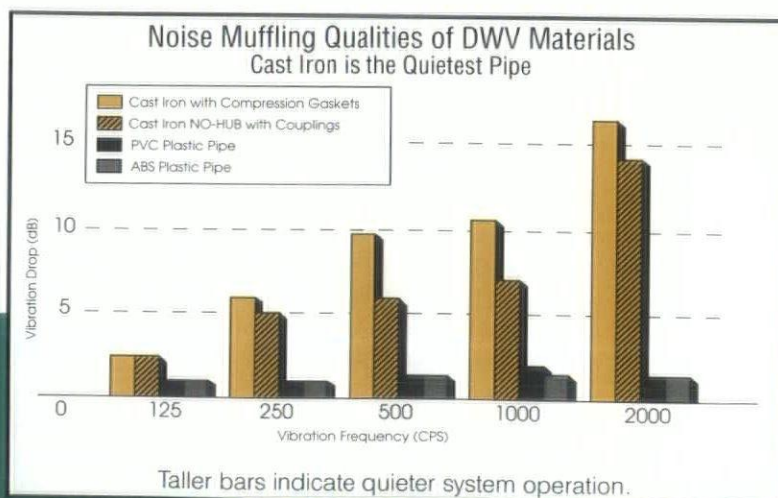
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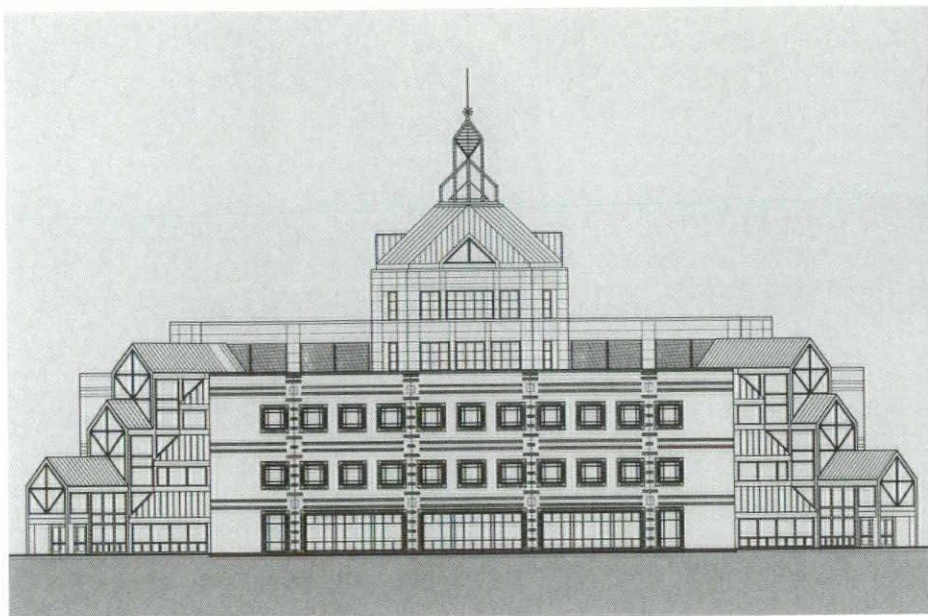
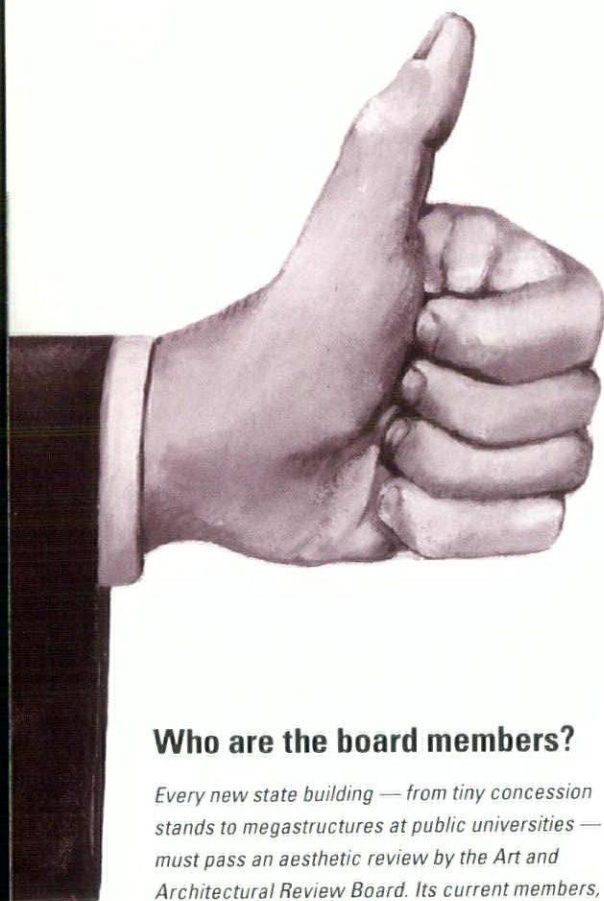
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University Center, George Mason University

This massive building, which displaces a large green space at the center of campus, will become George Mason's new focal point. Not only will it serve as a student center, but a food court, bookstore, meeting rooms and 100,000-volume undergraduate library also will be contained in the building. A full-height atrium runs the length of the center. Board members initially objected to the impact of the building on an important campus site, and a new landscape architect was hired to address their concerns and preserve a significant open space. A series of stepped glass entrances at the building's corners (above) were questioned; new entrances have been designed. Architects for the project are Marcellus Wright Cox & Smith of Richmond; design architects are Shepley Bullfinch Richardson & Abbott of Boston; landscape architects are Higgins Associates of Richmond.

## Who are the board members?

*Every new state building — from tiny concession stands to megastructures at public universities — must pass an aesthetic review by the Art and Architectural Review Board. Its current members, appointed to four-year terms, are:*

**M. Stanley Krause, Chairman** — partner in the Newport News architectural firm Rancorn Wildman Krause Brezinski; has a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Virginia and a master's in urban planning from MIT; serves as chairman of the Newport News Planning Commission. A board appointee representing the American Institute of Architects. *"An architect told me once that our job was to be sure the state didn't build bad buildings. That's not our responsibility at all. I see our responsibility as seeing to it that we build good buildings."*

**Murry N. DePillars** — dean of the School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University; has a bachelor's in art education and master's in urban studies from Roosevelt University in Chicago, Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University; a painter who has been exhibited widely. An at-large appointee to the board, he also satisfies the requirement that a painter or sculptor sits on the board. *"Most artists are concerned with many of the elements that an architect would be concerned with — rhythm, balance, color and texture. But when an architect makes a mistake, it is forever. When an artist makes a mistake, the canvas may never make it onto the wall."*

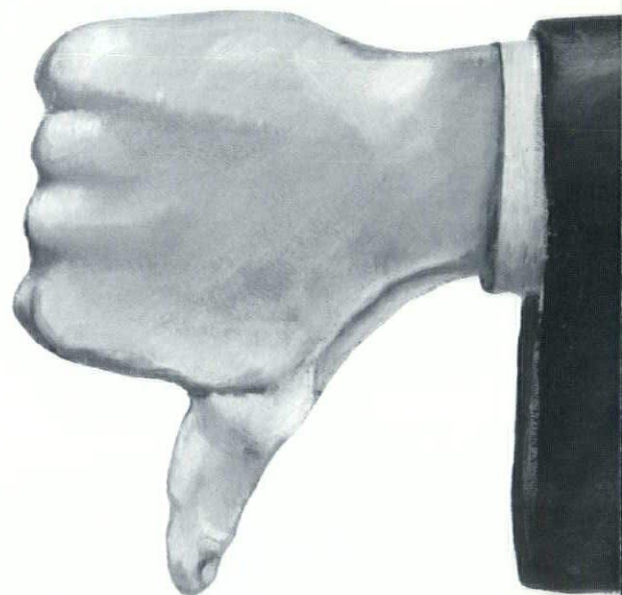
**Samuel A. (Pete) Anderson** — partner in the Richmond architectural firm Glave Newman Anderson; bachelor's in history from the University of Virginia and bachelor's in architecture from University of Pennsylvania; former president of Richmond Urban League; current chairman of United Way Services of Richmond. An at-large appointee to the board. *"I would like the message to go out to the institutions of higher learning that they will have better campuses if they get better buildings, and not just worry about the functional and the scheduling requirements — the minimum requirements of the state."*

Architectural Review." Such questions about the results of the review process contribute to another layer of concern: that, by virtue of the political nature of appointment, the method of assembling the board favors those with the best connections over those with the best eye for design. "Whereas it is well-intentioned, it is really a political dumping ground for people who are owed favors," says one architect who has faced the board many times. "There are always several people who have no qualifications to be on the board. And that's one reason why there are so many bad state buildings."

That criticism is tough to justify, however, in the context of the present board, which brings to bear decades of experience in design, planning and preservation. With the possible exception of Pamela B. Michael, whose experience in preservation at the Historic Richmond Foundation provides her best calling card, the current members of the review board each possess the breadth of academic and professional credentials — whether in architecture, art, planning or landscape architecture — to easily qualify them for service. Chairing the committee for a second four-year term is architect M. Stanley Krause, a partner in the Newport News firm Rancorn Wildman Krause Brezinski. Amiable and easygoing, yet painstakingly thorough and quietly demanding in his conduct of the board's affairs, Krause is widely complimented both for his fairness and the level of professionalism he has encouraged.

That's not to say Krause has no teeth, for he nearly single-handedly dismembered a Virginia Commonwealth University expansion plan that would have devoured portions of an adjacent residential neighborhood while ignoring more logical areas in which to expand and define its urban campus in Richmond. Most of the board's proceedings pass virtually unnoticed, but Krause made headlines when he came down hard against the VCU plan. Its basic tenets, he said in his summary comments, were neither exciting nor imaginative — "actually they are fairly pedestrian and I don't think they have been achieved. It is difficult to argue with many of them — they are like motherhood and apple pie — and this plan should be more than that. I'm looking for a plan that has vision and a heart, and an aesthetic soul."

Krause was by no means alone in opposing the plan. As is so often the case with the board's deliberations, a consensus developed quickly. And, rather than blast the plan completely, Krause offered VCU the chance to address the review board's comments before a formal vote was taken. VCU president Eugene P. Trani chose, instead, to withdraw the plan entirely. The confrontation over VCU put board member Murry DePillars in a particularly awkward position. As dean of the university's



**Pamela B. Michael** — assistant director of the Historic Richmond Foundation; has a bachelor's degree in English from William and Mary; formerly wrote on topics related to architecture and preservation for a Richmond newspaper. Represents the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on the board. *"I always said I am the voice of the people. I don't represent any profession, but I think of myself as voicing the perspective of the people, of communities, although I also bring with me a background in historic preservation."*

**Harry W. Porter** — dean of the School of Architecture, University of Virginia; has a bachelor's in landscape architecture from Syracuse University and master's in landscape architecture from Harvard; professor of landscape architecture at U.Va. since 1969; also sits on Albemarle County Architectural Review Board. Represents the University of Virginia on the state review board. *"I hope my contribution is a view that puts buildings, the landscape, and sites into one frame of reference. I'm just as concerned about a site as I am about a building. I've always felt that whether the site was urban or the site was rural, the architecture and its landscape were one."*

**Hugh C. Miller** — director of the commonwealth's Department of Historic Resources; product of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Fine Arts; former chief historical architect for the National Park Service; serves on a variety of national and international preservation committees. Ex officio appointee representing the Department of Historic Resources. *"I construe my official interest on the board being to speak for historical significance and compatible design. But, as an architect, I don't limit my participation to that."*

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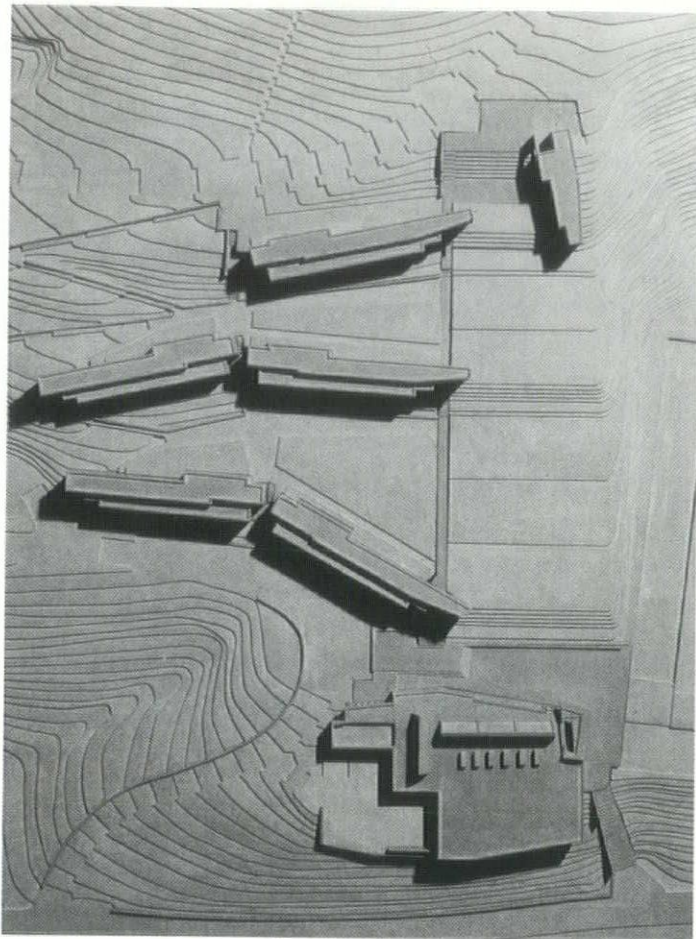
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## Stadium Road Housing, University of Virginia

Groundbreaking took place last year on this hillside complex containing dormitories, a dining hall and faculty residence with seminar rooms. Review board comments focused primarily on the location and orientation of the dining hall, which sits at the base of a terraced lawn (right-hand side of model, above). A series of "cascading" skylights on the dining hall roof was thought to be incompatible and distracting; the final design incorporates simplified light monitors over the dining areas instead. Architects for the project are Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates of New York; associate architects are VMDO Architects of Charlottesville.

School of the Arts, his loyalties were at odds. "I just had to remind myself that I have a charge to the Art and Architectural Review Board and a duty to uphold in my service to the board," DePillars says. He echoed the board's request for revisions to the VCU plan.

Often during the give-and-take of board discussions, it is Harry Porter, dean of the School of Architecture at U.Va., who invokes the big picture perspective. "I think the importance of the board has to do with establishing an awareness of the diversity of architecture in Virginia," Porter says. "I am as concerned about the commonwealth's agricultural facilities in southwest Virginia and how they fit there as I am with something built in Richmond. The architecture ought to be good in both places, but it ought not necessarily adhere to the same style or the same tradition. The Shenandoah Valley architectural traditions, for example, should not get lost in the future. Many of those buildings may not be powerful as an expression of an individual architect, but they are powerful in terms of expressing a particular culture."

In general, board members see their two-stage review of schematic and preliminary plans as the best chance to improve design quality in a state system that often rewards being "on time and under budget" more than the age-old values of "commodity, firmness and delight." Hence the frustration felt when they review work by architects of questionable ability. "We cannot squeeze blood out of a turnip," Anderson laments. "And if the institutions are going to hire turnips, we are going to be stuck with bad results."

Perhaps the most difficult cases for the board to resolve are the seemingly insignificant ones, simply because low-budget projects invariably get the least attention by qualified designers. Board deliberations stalled recently, for example, during consideration of a proposal for recreational facilities at Southwest Virginia Community College. Using donated labor from the National Guard, the college was intending to create new ball fields, build picnic shelters and carve an amphitheater out of the mountainside. Representatives of the college warned that approval was needed immediately, lest the offer of free labor be lost. The scenario put the board in conflict between their strong reservations over the quality of the work that would be executed and their desire not to deny a useful facility to a rural community. After considerable hand-wringing, the board gave reluctant approval — with the exception of the amphitheater, which members decided was inadequately thought out and potentially most damaging to the site.

More prominent projects that have come before the board recently include the new headquarters for the State Corporation Commission in Richmond, the new University Center (a massive student center/library) at George Mason University, a dormitory complex along Stadium Road at U.Va., and the new State Library in Richmond. Celebrated New York architect Tod Williams went several rounds with the board over his design for the U.Va. dormitories. Williams says he was warned ahead of time of Virginia's conservatism, and he believes he presented the board with a legitimate scheme. "We found that those who wanted predictable results were more troubled by what we presented," Williams says. "I felt that meant that, as opposed to achieving excellence, the results [of the review process] will always be mediocre. There will never be a chance to take risks, and no opportunity for achieving excellence."

But Williamsburg architect Carlton Abbott credits the board with being a valuable checkpoint in the state system. "A lot of state agencies don't have an aesthetic person," Abbott says. "They may have a good businessman and a good director. But they may not have a person who can cut through to the aesthetic qualities of a project." Moreover, he notes that the art and architecture board often is the appropriate body to raise philosophical issues that the individual agencies may have overlooked. Abbott notes that in the case of the Museum of American Frontier Culture, a state attraction located near Staunton, the board questioned whether there was enough land to support

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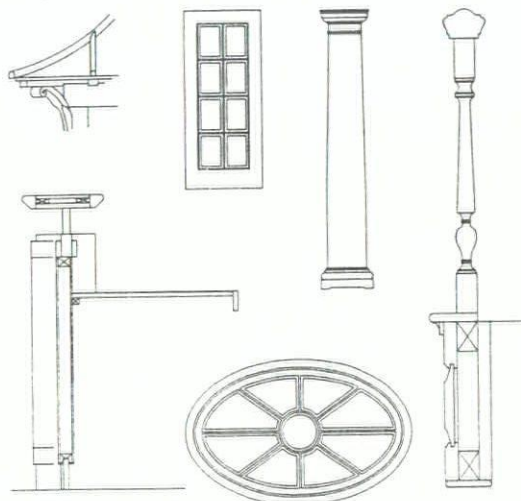
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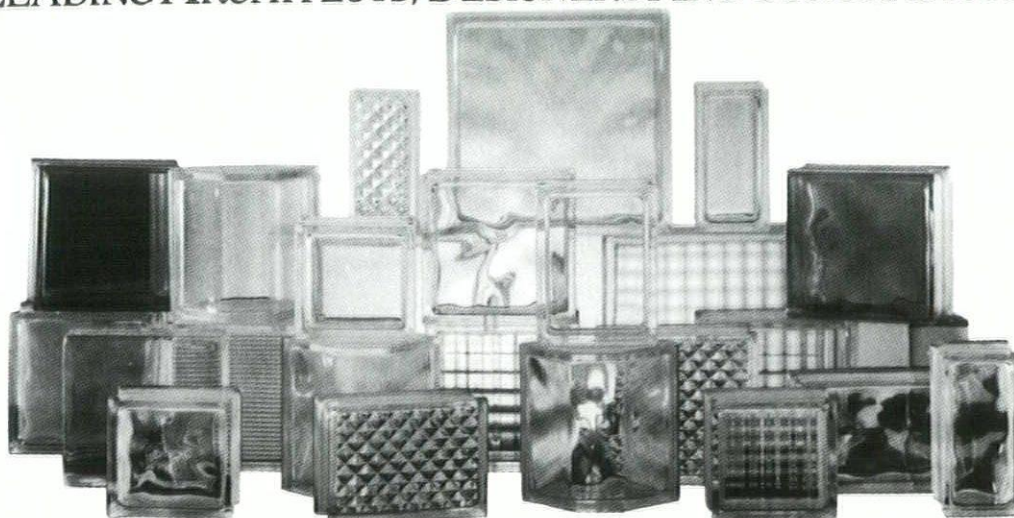
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such a facility. "They wanted to know: If you're going to do this kind of thing, shouldn't you have 2,000 acres instead of 90?" And Steven Gift, an architect in the planning office at Virginia Tech, compliments the board for being an ally in seeing that Tech achieves quality results in its building program — a goal he says is difficult to maintain during hard economic times.

Procedurally, the board suffers most from its brevity of review. Usually the members receive no explanatory material before a project is presented to them, so their ability to judge a project depends most on the presentation skills of the designer and their own savvy at grasping the essence of the proposed design. Unlike many review boards, there is no support staff to review the projects beforehand (though an architect from the state Bureau of Capital Outlay Management, which reviews each building for code compliance and structural accuracy, is usually on hand to answer board questions). Considering the importance of the board's mission and its workload, its financial support from the state is embarrassing. It operates on a budget of less than \$2,000 a year. And even though Krause has authorization to hire a secretary to type the minutes, he insists on doing it himself for the sake of clarity and completeness of the public record. "I don't think the legislature views this board as that important," he says.

But Krause, as one might expect, believes differently. One of his initiatives has been to get specific design guidelines written into the state manual that governs new construction. If he succeeds, the importance of "good design" will be elevated from a passing reference in the Capital Outlay Manual to a theme that plays prominently in the preface of the book — "so that the first thing architects read in the manual is not *how to*, but *what to*," says Krause.

The guidelines now being reviewed offer criteria (see sidebar, below right) for the board to apply when reviewing future submissions. "Any architect who is worth his salt doesn't need these standards," says Krause — implying that there are some who do.

Among the most convincing testimonials regarding the board's vital contribution comes from Werner Sensbach, who retired last spring as head of facilities planning at U.Va. In one of his last official acts, Sensbach wrote a letter of appreciation to the board. In it, he thanked the board for its supportive reception of university projects and complimented its seriousness of purpose. By way of encouragement, Sensbach concluded: "As you move forward approaching the next century, and as university projects grow ever more complex in sensitive, high-density urban environments, the work of the Art and Architectural Review Board will assume increasing importance as a means of preserving the intellectual heritage and shaping the cultural future of Virginia." That observation, extended beyond the context of campus planning, could well outline the larger task facing the board as it takes on the challenges associated with accelerated growth in the decades ahead.



Virginia State Library and Archives

A preliminary scheme for the library, now under thorough redesign following the formal awarding of the contract, showed an 8-story structure in Richmond's downtown. To promote public use of the facility, the architects proposed a lobby leading to first-floor exhibition spaces, a bookstore/gift shop and multipurpose meeting room. Book stacks and offices encircled a lofty atrium. The review board questioned why the building entry doesn't address Broad Street, the city's main commercial corridor, in a more deliberate way. Issue was taken with the roof form: does it convey the image of a library? And the board wondered if the vitality of the atrium detracted from the sense of repose one might expect in a house of knowledge. Architects for the project are Skidmore Owings & Merrill of Washington, D.C.; associated architects are Glave Newman Anderson of Richmond.

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## Setting Standards for Review

Design aesthetics is more than paint colors and window proportions. How else do you judge a good building? To guide its deliberations, the Art and Architectural Review Board is developing criteria for its reviews. These guidelines would require each proposed building to demonstrate:

- a positive contribution to the order and aesthetics of its setting.
- respect for its environmental, historical and cultural setting.
- a resolution of basic functional and organizational requirements.
- a concern for the greater public good and an attempt to achieve the best possible civic result.
- a sensitivity to fundamental principles of good design and refinement of color, form, scale, materials and craft.



For decades, Tappahannock was a vibrant port whose lifeblood was the river.

## The Self-Guided Tour of a Rappahannock Town

By Edwin Slipek, Jr.

An unrelenting flow of Volvos and Mitsubishi's careen up and down Route 17 through the Tidewater community of Tappahannock—past the predictable complement of Days Inns, Food Lions and Pizza Huts in spitfire strip succession. A Wal-Mart opening, still weeks away, is the talk of the town.

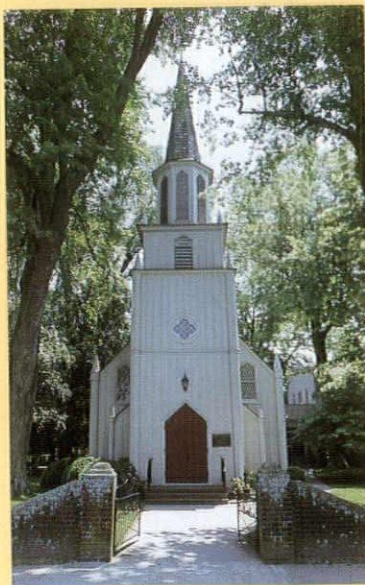
But through traffic comes to a halt where Route 17 intersects Prince Street, the time-honored main street of this Essex County seat. And if, as is increasingly unlikely, drivers turn off the main drag rather than accelerate as the light flashes green, they are immediately yanked 200, 300, even 400 years back to a time when the Rappahannock River was the route of choice for Indians, explorers and colonists. The vista down Prince Street as it drops to the water conjures images of distant ports-of-call—not weekend cottages and “exclusive condominiums” touted on nearby billboards.

Captain John Smith scouted the area in 1608 only to be fright-

ened off by what he called the “Appamatuck” Indians. George Washington slept here—really—at Webb's Tavern on many a journey from Mount Vernon to Williamsburg. And St. Margaret's, an Episcopal boarding school, has been “prepping” young ladies since 1921.

But there is nothing exclusive about Tappahannock. There is something very Virginia about the place—its lack of pretension perhaps. A spot this tranquil, a

town this tested, and a citizenry this tied to the land has little need to sell itself through color brochures and nouvelle cuisine. There are 18th century structures aplenty in the heart of town but none has been restored in anything approaching a scientific way. Maintained perhaps: a tin roof has replaced wooden shingles here, asbestos shingles have replaced slate there. Whatever a local builder suggested as available and within budget apparently did just fine.



St. John's Episcopal Church, built in 1837, is one of the town's simple but beautiful architectural treasures.

Both the “come-heres” and the “from-heres” swear by Lowery's, a local eatery with ho-hum food that has been packing 'em in since 1938. And although the town is spectacularly situated 40 miles from the mouth of the Rappahannock, public access to the river is limited. The foot of Prince Street, one of the few slips to the water, is framed by a phalanx of oil storage tanks to one side and the synthetic stucco walls of the Riverside Condominiums on the other—a building so intrusive and ill-placed that even its residents must suffer domicile guilt.

What, then, is the charm of Tappahannock? That's easy. It is

one of the few spots left in the Mid-Atlantic where an unbroken history can be easily interpreted through its homes and streets with names like Queen, Duke, Water and Marsh. It is an unselfconscious place with discoveries to be made and simple pleasures to be had by aficionados of town design and architecture.

Settled by Jacob Hobbs in the early 1600s and called Hobbs Hole, the town was a popular stop, along with Alexandria and Norfolk, for itinerant theater troupes. It was renamed New Plymouth and incorporated in 1682, the same year William Penn laid out Philadelphia. Both towns were designed according to a grid made up of rectangles abutting rivers — an increasingly popular English plan after the fire of London in 1666, and an efficient way to delineate settlement from wilderness in the New World. Both plans placed public spaces at the center of the grid. Philadelphia's City Hall occupies that spot today, while in Tappahannock county business is still conducted in buildings on the square.

An exploration of the town might start at the base of the Confederate monument that sits smack in the middle of Prince Street. Gazing toward the river, you can imagine hogsheads of tobacco being rolled to waiting ships in the 18th century. Today, agriculture and fishing account for less than 10 percent of the county's economy. With one glance you can inventory half a dozen sturdy brick structures from the boom years of the mid-1700s. The old clerk's office and the Ritchie House are among the most distinctive of the one- and two-story buildings composing the unbroken facade of Prince Street. There's a smattering of Victoriana, too, and a 1940s moderne discount store detailed in glass block.

Self-guided walking tour pamphlets are available at the Chamber of Commerce behind the courthouse. But you might do just as well to trust your own instincts. Turning from Prince Street onto Water Lane, you pass Emerson's Ordinary, a surviving

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frame tavern that's now a private residence. Across the street, at Water and Duke, is the simple but imposing Greek Revival Wright House, built in the 1850s and enveloped by an impressive flood of boxwood. The grounds of St. Margaret's School, graced with a canopy of stately oaks, yellow poplars and magnolias, stretch along Water Lane fronting the river. The discerning eye can decipher the once-grand Colonial and Federal mansions now embedded within institutional additions.

Sensible and solid 20th century residences in the vicinity reflect the individual tastes of their builders and occupants rather than any particular style or era. Just a few yards south, at Cross and Duke streets, is perhaps the most well-resolved structure in town—St. John's Episcopal Church, completed in 1837. Rendered in a simplified Carpenter Gothic style, the frame sanctuary with board-and-batten siding and diamond-paned windows is beautifully maintained behind a low brick wall.

One block west of Prince Street runs Queen Street, which crosses the Thomas Downing Bridge to the Northern Neck. West of Route 17, Prince Street leads into a neighborhood of mid-20th century residences that have developed over the decades around an 18th century farmhouse known as "Little Egypt." A frame house with gambrel roof and good bones, it takes its name from the rich soil that reputedly surrounded the place. Nearby, the architectural tour can be relieved by visits to the town's four antique shops. And, from May through October, Rappahannock River Cruises depart daily from Hoskins Creek.

Equidistant from Fredericksburg, Hampton Roads and Richmond, Tappahannock is an easy day trip and an excellent spot to get reacquainted with the nation's Anglo beginnings. It's a do-it-yourself place to explore. And, from all indications, the local folks plan to keep it that way.

♦  
*Edwin Slipek, Jr. is a Richmond freelance writer.*

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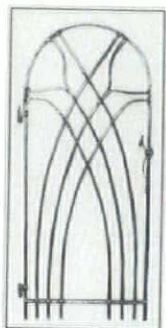
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Carl R. Lounsbury

## *Reviving the Language of* **PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE**

By Vernon Mays

Bit by bit, Carl Lounsbury is doing his part to set the record straight along Duke of Gloucester Street. There, in the heart of Colonial Williamsburg, lies what is arguably the most renowned group of "historic" buildings in the U.S. But among historians it is equally well known that Williamsburg's success in accurately recreating the shops, taverns, houses and public buildings of 18th century Virginia is more than a little suspect.

Not to demean the architects who rejuvenated the colonial capital during its vast restoration

in the 1930s — they were skilled designers and well-schooled to boot — but the products of their labor were more often than not a matter of conjecture, if not utter fantasy, and at times they stubbornly denied the historical evidence at hand. Their shared training in the order and grandeur of Beaux Arts architectural tradition simply led to misinterpretations made clearer by the passage of time.

By quirk of fate, Lounsbury, an architectural historian at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, was assigned the

task of correcting the errors of his predecessors who first reworked the circa 1771 colonial courthouse. There the architectural slate had been wiped virtually clean by a 1911 fire which spared only the brick shell and a few interior details. Every remaining stick of wood was removed during what Lounsbury calls the "vigorous restoration" of 1932. Now, nearly 60 years later, he has directed the completion of another reworking of the courthouse. Only this time it has been done with the benefit of extensive research that helped the building's present stewards recreate the architectural subtleties overlooked by their Rockefeller-era counterparts.

This latest approach to restoring the courthouse, which was rededicated June 1, was prompted by a reexamination of values, says Lounsbury. "It is based on a notion that, as there was originally a hierarchy of society here, the architecture of Colonial Williamsburg should reflect that hierarchy. It's not a matter of trashing the place to make it more authentic."

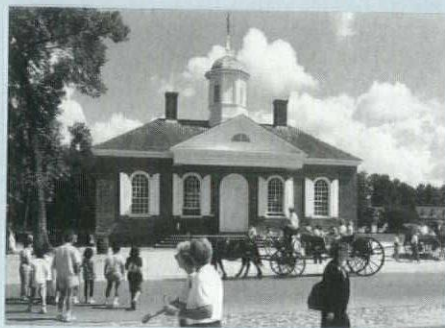
Subtle changes taking place throughout the village are intended to counter the impression that Williamsburg was overly tidy and trim. In truth, modest outbuildings behind the main houses were whitewashed or tarred, rather than painted with the finest enamel. Likewise, while the main courtroom was elegantly appointed for its day, the anterooms for the jury and lawyers would have been finished

Lounsbury (above) visited scores of sites seeking historic precedents for the courthouse restoration.

in low-budget fashion. "It's what you'd expect — those in charge got the best seats in the house," Lounsbury says. "The magistrates spent the most money on themselves and the least on the lawyers and the public."

Lounsbury's interest in social history surfaced in his recommendations for restoring the courthouse, which played an integral part in colonial life. "People came to the courthouse to be entertained and informed," he wrote in his report. "Men and boys hung out of windows to hear the arguments of popular cases, athletes played fives against the brick walls, much to the annoyance of those residing inside, hawkers peddled spirituous beverages to hundreds of eager indulgers ... and when court rose, itinerant ministers preached the gospel from the steps."

Architectural as well as social history emerged from Lounsbury's scouring of records from nearly 70 counties and his field investigations of more than 100 public buildings along the eastern seaboard and in England. More useful to his study than existing 18th century Virginia courthouses were the courthouse in Edenton, North Carolina, and a score of English town halls and guild-halls that retained many of their early fittings. Lounsbury's detective work was presented to a design review panel that deliberated through more than 50 sessions planning how to translate his findings into appropriate form. The design of the new justices' bench in Williamsburg, for example, is modeled after the example in Edenton, though it is not an exact copy. "We wanted to take the features common to all magistrates' chairs and play with them to develop our own result," Lounsbury says. New sheriff's boxes take their cues from the layout and molding details of pews found in nearby colonial churches.



How the work would be executed was discussed as much as the design details. When feasible, Colonial Williamsburg craftsmen were used to fabricate fittings using 18th century methods. Despite the delay in completion and increase in costs that accompanied such a decision, the panel agreed that using period technology rather than modern methods would have educational value for the public and produce a more genuine result. The greatest concession made to 20th century convenience was to air-condition the building. But by feeding cool air into the courtroom through slots concealed above

the crown molding, the designers achieved the desired result without disturbing the room's historical qualities.

Exterior changes to the building began with the steps, cut originally from slabs of red sandstone. They were replaced in the '30s with a bluish stone, and Lounsbury sought out restoration architect Edwin Kendrew to find out why. Kendrew, who had worked on the original restoration team, recalled that a matching stone was hard to find, as Lounsbury soon found out. Two stone brokers in Baltimore failed to produce a single lead; a third finally found a quarry in England that could supply the needed material.

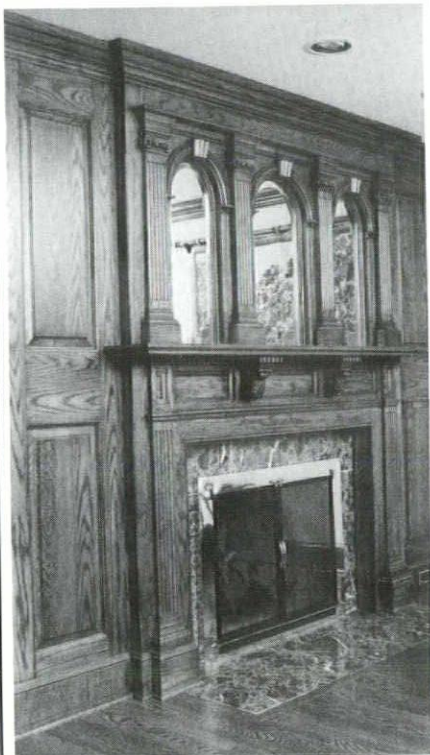
Significant changes were made as well on the small tower, or cupola, that rests atop the courthouse. Photographs predating the 1911 fire show a cupola with squatter proportions than the visually "improved" example built in the '30s. A rebuilt cupola, shortened 13 inches,



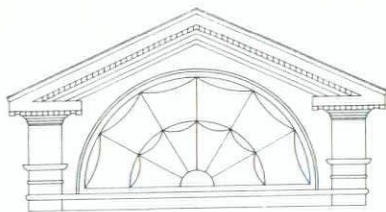
Craftsmen with the knowledge of period building techniques (above) were used to create a more convincing result. The finished courthouse (top) sports shutters as it did at least a century ago.

Photos: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

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was completed in May. New shutters for the building — evidence for which also came from 19th century photos — were modeled after others found on a half-dozen churches from the same period near Charleston.

Lounsbury's interest in 18th century architecture emerged as a necessity of his employment at Colonial Williamsburg. While pursuing his Ph.D. in American studies at American University, he concentrated on changes in the building trades brought on by 19th century industrialism. That research provided the basis for *Architects and Builders in North Carolina*, published last year by the University of North Carolina Press. While completing his dissertation, Lounsbury took design courses at North Carolina State, where Modernism was king. His relationship with the faculty was less than a match made in heaven. For an assignment to design a well-to-do house with mock Tudor elements, Lounsbury decided to take a 14th century English building from Kent, maintain the exterior intact and try to insert modern functions into it. "They were rather

shocked," he says. "They said I had abdicated my design responsibilities. I said no, quite the opposite. I had tried as hard as I could to maintain them."

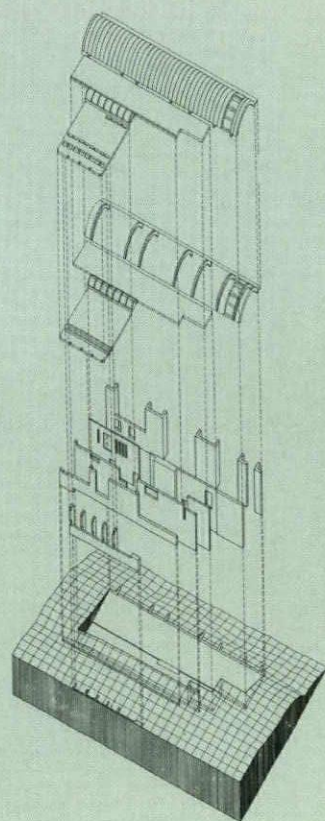
Today Lounsbury's expertise in historic buildings and construction techniques is better paired with the historic preservation program at Mary Washington College, where he teaches a course on conducting field work. He also is involved in two book projects: one is a glossary of 18th century architectural terms, and the second focuses on Virginia courthouses of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Rushing to finish off the last stages of construction on the Williamsburg courthouse only days before its public dedication, Lounsbury found himself up past 2 a.m. supervising carpentry that needed to be completed before plasterers arrived the next day. Reliving the experience the next morning with a grin, he observed: "After 8 years of working on this project, it comes down to pulling an all-nighter to finish it off."

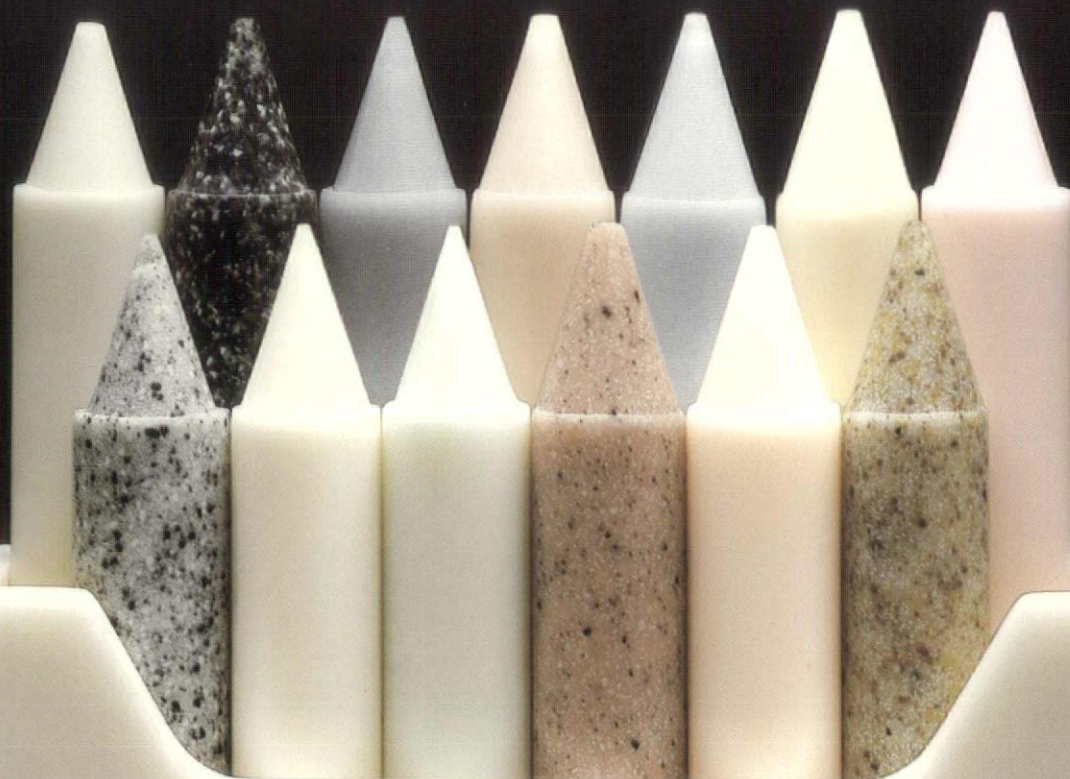
## inform

### Coming Up

In our next issue, *Inform* will highlight custom houses, explore new visions for college campuses and consider the dimension of social responsibility in professional practice. In our departments, we will introduce the country's best design museums and a designer whose specialty is light.



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