LUCIEN KROLL
ARCHITECTURE & CHOICE

At the invitation of the architecture students at the University of Washington, Lucien Kroll is expected to visit Seattle in late October. This brief article will serve to review a few of the ideas expressed by his work, by way of an introduction.

My first suspicion that something architecturally strange and different had happened in Belgium came as I thumbed through a hot-off-the-press copy of Jenck's Post-Modern Architecture. There, on page 106, amidst the clutter of the new, the old, and the rehashed architectural imagery, were two small photos of a project attributed to Mr. Lucien Kroll and his partner. The project was a housing and academic complex in Brussels for medical students: the buildings appeared to be radical and overgrown versions of the handmade homes one associates more with Southern California than with Northern Europe. Walls were patchworks of building materials, forms were broken and indistinct, and the interior order of the complex could not be surmised. The story line revealed some reason behind the chaos. This was a large-scale experiment in the combined participation of the users and construction workers in the design of an intricate building program. The results were demonstrably rich and eclectic, and the issues raised important.

Lucien Kroll is a Belgian architect who has pursued a focused range of issues since the mid-sixties. Kroll has interpreted the role of the architect as a designer of the use (the true client), in cooperation with the builder (the artisan), providing buildings made of vernacular forms in an undisturbed landscape. Kroll’s work may more properly be called an “architecture of ideas” than many of the self-proclaimed dogmas available on the current style market. It has been an architecture which relies on discernible political and social principles rather than a predominant, repetitive, and highly-personalized aesthetic. And it has been built, allowing retrospective and independent review and comment on the ideas which have motivated his design.

Kroll is a stocky man with a thick and long hair, and intense eyes. He is more inclined to polemics than polemics in conversation. He lives and works in a small apartment complex in residential Brussels which he designed some years ago as an expression of the values he finds important. It sits on a generous site with a simple, flat facade overlooking a quiet street. The entrances, hallways, and garden are designed as common spaces which increase the chances of encountering a neighbor; “neighborliness” is a term that arises frequently during a conversation with Kroll. The Kroll atelier occupies space on the ground floor. A meandering garden in the rear connects the studio and the apartment units, which were designed for and initially occupied by friends and associates who have since moved on. The garden is curious. It is noticeably ragged and untended. Simone Kroll, a potter, excuses herself as a very poor gardener, but the natural disarray seems to complement the designed interiors. Kroll clearly has sought to reduce the traditional distinctions of work/home and family/social/league/friend with this building project, without eliminating them altogether. The point, he says, is at least to have the choice of the relationships you would like to pursue.

The housing complex for medical students at Woluwé-St-Lambert in Brussels remains Kroll’s most controversial project, and in many ways is a logical extension of the principles incorporated into his own house. The commission for the project grew from student protests of the late-sixties. Medical students, angered by a master plan proposal for “monumental” new facilities, persuaded the administration of the Catholic University of Louvain to hire Kroll as the project architect.

The Kroll atelier took very seriously its relationship with the secondary client which had been their strong advocate. The atelier interviewed the individuals and families who would occupy the completed project and arranged a separate program for each unit to meet their expressed requirements. This resulted in spaces of such variety and character that subsequent generations of the student community have easily found units to their personal liking. After meetings with representatives of the entire community, public functions were arranged along a winding interior “street” that connects several buildings and around

WOLF VON ECKARDT
A CRITIC DEFINES HIS TERMS


At the time of this lecture, the building was receiving its exterior paint and decorations. Von Eckardt commented on this and the general state of the architectural profession in his talk, “Architecture, A Time of Change.”

The Portland Building is “in the air” in Portland. Wolf Von Eckardt acknowledged this with a simple yet effective analysis of its merits, placing it in the larger context of Modern Architecture. He characterized the building as an example of a fascination with style, “blue collar ribbons on the same old Bauhaus buildings,” a good conversation piece but fundamentally banal, “architecture of pastel-colored drawings.” On functional grounds it does not solve the problems it should have addresssed. It is not responsive to its social and urban context and is therefore architecturally unimportant. His thesis was that the only important architecture today is that which responds to an understanding of the profession’s social purpose and that only by so doing can we create a good, livable, creative environment.

Von Eckardt began by outlining how Architecture lost its direction some years ago as an expression of the values he finds important. It sits on a generous site with a simple, flat facade overlooking a quiet street. The entrances, hallways, and garden are designed as common spaces which increase the chances of encountering a neighboring

continued on page 9.
CRITICISM IN SEATTLE BETWEEN A ROCK

A ny glance across Seattle's skyline tells all: it's broader and taller than ever before and points to an architectural future we have difficulty envisioning. But we may rest assured and encouraged that it is a future unique to Seattle alone.

It follows then that our architecture critics should be at the forefront of this new world, must also be a unique and important asset. And so it seems a shame that when the Architect of the Library and the critical cheesecake it is accustomed to reading in the popular press. It also seems obvious. Seattle is growing too rapidly to go it alone without incisive comment. We're not yet an emerald, but this little green rex deserves more.

Architecture anywhere is not easy to understand right now, one might call it complex, if not fractured. Controversy surrounds the future of architecture, the history of architecture, the current relevance of theory in the academic milieu; and all rest on the back of a burgeoning civic debate on political and aesthetic issues in architecture. Seattle is no exception. But there is no critic here committed to clarifying the issues, let alone acknowledging that they exist. And there is no passion in what criticism we do read.

The emotional passivity of these presentations engenders furies in reaction, but that is an unconstructive response. The worst about buildings is new way, to reexamine our attitudes in light of the critic's opinions, to react with depth of feeling, to engage with the subject of the criticism — these are constructive activities. But to be angered by critics because they offer a lot of nothing is a waste of good emotional energy. This is one aspect of an unfortunate TV mentality in architecture and criticism—when we gape at the touchy, at the sentimentally meaningful. QUICK! break for a commercial rather than accept the risk of developing that issue and possibly resolving it. The avoidance tactic commonly practiced is patronizing, frustrating, and boring. And it never even approaches being the kind of commentary that helps us see our city.

Good criticism may be neither pretty in effect nor facile to construct. It demands much of its creator, who must be able to translate his or her own visual and spatial experiences in cogent literary ones many can understand. It does not serve more of a time commitment from the critic than occasional Sunday afternoons of focused inspiration as a respite from another occupation. And it should group the details and the generalities and present them in relation to a defined or apparent value system. The critic must step back as a public figure with a sense of history, purpose, morals, and a belief that architecture and criticism matter.

The responsibility that falls on readers of any criticism is always great. The deeper our understanding, the greater our power: the more we know about a critic and the methods of criticism used, the greater control we retain over our experience of the criticism and the architecture it refers to.

It is helpful to determine the boundaries of the work. What is the critic attempting: to judge, to analyze, to interpret, to promote, or merely to describe? Is that role explained by the critic's training? An art historian looks at buildings differently than a real estate reporter. Which issues are confronted, and which are avoided? Seattle critics feel comfortable arguing about distant buildings and very famous architects but avoid trouble locally. How much of the critic's perspective is affected by forces beyond personal control, such as editorial restrictions imposed? How much is determined by personal preference? The more competent we are at reading criticism, the stronger will be our demand for competent criticism to read.

Looking at criticism carefully is not a merely academic exercise; there is an important triadic relationship of communication between the architect, the critic, and the public, and it is imperative that each acts responsibly toward the others. Intelligent criticism, as a link between the architect and the public, is precisely what is needed right now.

The decade of the seventies saw disillusionment with many long-held ideals. In architecture, the sanctity of the Modernist ethic was abjured, but nothing yet replaces it. Critics now can play an important role in shaping the redirection of architectural values. Especially in Seattle, the architecture critic faces a great responsibility, and the role may not be pleasant; it will require taking risks and raising hackles. If the critic fails in this role, a valuable link between the architect and the public is absent. But if the critic can rise to this challenge with penetrating, incisive criticism, the architecture of our city may better reflect a healthy and informed dialogue between the architect and the public. Then a glance across our skyline will speak of more than just rapid growth; it will speak of conscious change. Because day by day, out of the rock, the form of an emerald is beginning to emerge.

Avnet and Shearn
Avnet and Shearn studied Architecture at the University of Washington.
UNREALIZED DREAMS

A furious and relentless war, waged against downtown Seattle's natural contours and tidelands for over thirty years at the beginning of this century, left behind a scarred topography much different from the original. Cut and fill operations conducted against the original lay of the land were made to accommodate both real and imagined growth. One such battle was fought over Denny Hill; in the end nobody won.

Seattle, in the years between 1900 and 1910, experienced boom-town growth and thinking. R. H. Thomson, Seattle's Chief Engineer, planned for the physical expansion of the commercial city away from its original core and north into the area of Denny Hill. "Some people seemed to think that because there were hills in Seattle originally, some of them ought to be left there, no difference how injurious a heavy grade over a hill may be to the property beyond the hill." Thomson's way to increase the commercial value of the property beyond Denny Hill was to eliminate the hill, wipe the slate clean, and replace it with more commercially valuable flat sites which would be linked to the existing commercial center. In his mind, everyone would prosper.

THE PLAN

As City Engineer, Thomson alone did not have the power to undertake such a grand scheme as the leveling of Denny Hill. He and his allies therefore launched an effort to convince the property owners of Denny Hill of the profits that awaited them. Seventy-five percent of the property owners were needed to petition City Council for an "improvement district" to further Thomson's goals. One argument used to persuade potential signers went like this: "Property on Second Avenue at Pike Street is worth perhaps $2,000 a front foot; but 120 feet away from that, where the hill is very steep, Second Avenue property is worth only $100 to $200 a front foot, and values are still farther up the hill." This numbers game made the proposition look attractive to those who saw potential windfall profits in their property. There was no full consensus reached on the issue, however; the final petition contained only 7 percent more signatures than the minimum required.

The improvement district covered approximately 21 square blocks and 2 1/2 miles of streets stretching from Pine to Cedar Street and Second to Fifth Avenue. Within these boundaries on Denny Hill were solid neighborhoods of small homes and apartment flats of Seattle's working class. Crowning the top of the hill was the Washington Hotel, its Victorian splendor a source of local pride.

The proposed work was monumental. Cuts into the hill ranged from 10 to 112 feet, the greatest coming from the block between Third and Fourth Avenues and Lenora and Blanchard Streets (the present location of the Fourth and Blanchard Building with its Pennzoil Place-like skyline.) To regrade that one block involved moving 360,000 cubic yards of earth, an amount comparable to digging out a football field to 218 feet below grade.

Moving all that dirt was not cheap. In all, approximately $1,500,000 was spent to remove more than 5 million cubic yards of Denny Hill between 1906 and 1911. The City spent $1,000,000 to regrade the public streets while the property owners who subscribed to the local improvement district paid $500,000 to have their lots leveled.

THE HOLD OUTS

Not all the property owners in the Denny Hill improvement district subscribed to the regrade. For varying lengths of time, individuals held out against economic and legal pressures to comply. If, for example, they did not take advantage of the contractor's first price of 22" per cubic yard, they would have to pay nearly four times that amount for the same work later. Regardless of the consequences, some held out while the regrade continued around them. In certain areas these hold-outs ended up with lots (called "spite mounds"), one hundred feet in the air above the new grade. These people were considered obstructionists by proponents of the project. In a legal challenge, Seattle's Corporation Counsel ruled that they were within their rights as property owners, and many continued to hold their ground against the regrade. A few held out to the end and flatly refused to be lured by the promised riches, but most succumbed to the pressure to join.

"Some people seemed to think that because there were hills in Seattle originally, some of them ought to be left there . . ."

Resistance was in vain. Sometimes a property owner was able to salvage his home and move it to another site, but most often it was destroyed outright. The story of Z. T. Holden is typical. Referring to his home of 27 years at Fifth and Virginia, he said: "That house was modern in every way and cost me $3,500. [However] having no place to move my house, I turned it over to the wreckers and sold it for $100. I figured it all kinds of ways, but could not save myself. . . . They tore up my property will be worth a fortune when regrading is done. I hope so, for I have waited a long time." The Denny Regrade never lived up to the dreams of its promoters. Those who speculated with their homes and family property found that the profits never materialized. Many lost their only major asset and were left with nothing but vacant lots and regular payments to be made on their improvement district subscriptions.

SECOND THOUGHTS AND HINDSIGHT

"Even before the regrade was completed in 1911, public sentiment shifted from support to the feeling that large "improvements" like this were being undertaken too rapidly. This caused one regrade proponent, C. Closson, to appeal to the public to put aside its "bickering" over the merits of an old issue and work toward encouraging an influx of new capital to the area to . . . take advantage of these new facilities." Somewhat defensively, he wrote in the August 26, 1911 issue of TOWN CRIER: "We are not obstructionist speculators sitting tight on needed locations, but manufacturers of facilities. . . Hills and tidelands are our raw material and level land our product. Like other manufacturers, we need a reasonable market for our output." Like those who had earlier called for the leveling of Denny Hill, Closson presumed future growth would fill the regrade with new businesses and industry. The prevalent feeling in the community this time, however, was one of caution, and many commercial lots remained undeveloped.

A 1917 panorama by B. Dudley Stuart, drawn six years after the completion of the work, clearly showed the finished regrade, the slow pace of development, and, scattered among the vacant lots and regular payments to be made on their improvement district subscriptions.

View looking south along Second Avenue from the intersection of Bell Street before 1906 and after the completion of the first Denny Regrade. Note the Victorian structure in the left center of each photo-graph. This comparison gives an idea of the amount of earth that was removed when Denny Hill was regraded. Photo on left courtesy of the University of Washington Special Collections.
THE FIRST COMPETITION:
THE LAST MARKET PARCEL

The first of a series of juried competitions sponsored by BLUEPRINT: for Architecture culminated in a public presentation of all entries at the Soames Dunn Building in the Pike Place Market on July 15. A hundred people listened as the lone juror, Clark Llewellyn, Director of the Oregon School of Design in Portland, lauded the wit and fantasy displayed by some entries and lamented missing perceptions in others, while he held a heckler at bay. Nils Finne and Bill Hook were the winners (they shared the $250 and magnum of champagne).

In the past three years BLUEPRINT has sponsored well-attended lectures, exhibits, and The Urban Block Symposium. Its newest venture, this competition, attracted 39 registrants, of whom 20 entered solutions. Succeeding competitions will be designed to offer "an opportunity to become involved in drawn discussion of the design issues of our time." Grant Gustafson, BLUEPRINT President, explained that subjects will be selected both to focus public attention and thought on important local sites and to provoke imagination and humor. In mid-September the second BLUEPRINT competition will open, its subject the design of a monument to the birthplace of Seattle at Alki Point.

The schemes shown here represent the range of responses to the program for the last parcel available for development in the Market Urban Renewal area. Bureaucratically-labeled PC-1, the 93,000 square-foot site on Western Avenue between the Market and the Alaskan Way Viaduct, centered between the new Market Park to the north and the Pike Street Hillclimb to the south, is owned by the City of Seattle. The undeveloped site is used for parking and grants a grand view of the Sound to the west. A Burlington Northern Railroad tunnel burrows through the site at its low point, more than 70 feet below its Western Avenue elevation. Excerpts from the City's Urban Renewal Plan defined a building envelope and proposed a possible program. Most designers followed these guidelines, and many chose to structure their proposals using the skewed street grids which intersect at the extensions of Pine and Stewart Streets in the center of PC-1. "A Study in Axes Mundi," the winning proposal, depicts a classic amphitheater at the Pine/Stewart intersection; the form encloses space for public events and opens itself to the sky and to the west and waterfront. (Llewellyn noted that such a form could have problems with the Viaduct noises.) The juror complimented Hook and Finne on their handling of the connections to the Market Park (one which most proposals ignored) and to the waterfront.

Two non-cash awards were made at Llewellyn's discretion. "QE-2 Meets PC-1" received mention for "coming the farthest" from his initial reaction. Its authors, John Thomas and Elizabeth Sterling, would install the Queen Elizabeth II on PC-1. Llewellyn noted the proposal's sympathy with the Market's Disneyland qualities. A second merit award went to John Owen's proposal for a "Space Pin", close relative to the often-lambasted Space Needle and the almost unknown "Space Carrot".

Llewellyn's thoughtful and good-humored analysis of the entries emphasized the area's market function (its street life), because many proposals ignored this aspect of the Market's unique character. He felt that most proposals responded better to the downtown in general than to the specific Market vicinity.

Submissions to THE FIRST COMPETITION: THE LAST MARKET PARCEL are on display in the Economy Market Building in Pike Place Market through August 16.
INTELLECTUAL CHILD OF THE NEEDLE: "Space Pin"
John Owen

continued on page 8.
SPATIAL DOGMA: EDY KLEINBERG's crocheted rope sculpture is at the Fifth Avenue lobby of Sea-First through July 30. Watch for its Pacific arts fiber and American inclu-

LAWRENCE HALPERN: AN EXHIBIT OF SPATIAL DOGMA: JUDY KLEINBERG's crocheted rope sculpture is at the Fifth Avenue lobby of Sea-First through July 30. Watch for its Pacific arts fiber and American inclu-

AMERICAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE: "DIE BAUHAUS IN DRESDEN" is at the Seattle Art Museum through the month of August. For more information, call 622-3538.

MUSIC SERIES: "MUSIC UNDER THE ARK" offers fine outdoor concerts every Thursday at 7:30 PM at the Pacific Science Center, Seattle Center. Call 624-6144 for tickets.

EXHIBIT: MEDICAL, SCIENTIFIC, and nature drawings done on the DSS for the American Institute of Graphic Artists. On display at the Seattle Art Museum through August.

SCIENCE FICTION FILM FESTIVAL at Pacific Science Center features the following films at noon Friday and Saturday each week: 8/6 and 8/7, "500 Leagues Under the Sea"; 8/13 and 8/14, "The Invisible Man" and "The Time Machine"; 8/20 and 8/21, "War of the Worlds". CONVENTIONS: WASHINGTON TRUST for Historic Preservation, at Whitman College in Walla Walla. Tours are Main Street Revitalization and Historic House of Washington. For more information, call 622-3538.

ALASKA SCOUT FESTIVAL: "GHOST ROCK" (1937) is at the Volunteer Park Auditorium, Seattle Art Museum.
DEER PARK (PLACE): A research biologist's perspective

Robert Lawson

UWAJIMAYA REDUX

Yoshikado Koyama

RALPH DID OUTDONE: "QE-2 Meets PC-1"

John Thomas and Elizabeth Sterling
cant lots, the remaining "spite mounds" of those who defied it. A building on one of those "spite mounds" shows has survived to this day near the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Bell Street.

Built around 1890 as the Stockholm Hotel, the Victorian building survived because of its location along the northern flank of Denny Hill. Here the difference between the original grade of Second Avenue and the new level of the street amounted to only approximately 15 feet. This allowed the original owner to defy the regrade and keep the building habitable by constructing wooden stairs to the street below.

During the Twenties, the Regrade experienced new growth in service-oriented businesses and a number of one- and two-story commercial buildings began to fill up the empty lots. Street frontage became more valuable, and the final earth of Denny Hill was excavated from beneath the pre-regrade Victorian structure and an anonymous one-story brick building erected in its place. For the next fifty years this architectural amalgam of Denny Hill-as-it-once-was and the commercial Regrade we still see today escaped development and outlived all other survivors of the original regrade.

Today this building reminds us that when Denny Hill was leveled, Seattle lost a magnificent physical landmark and an irreparable part of its oldest architectural legacy. And for what purpose: an anticipated demand that never came. The regrading of Denny Hill was a story of unbridled enthusiasm based on a false economy. When sensibility prevailed, it was too late. The presence of this building in the Regrade is a quiet little monument to the demise of Denny Hill and the as-yet unrealized potential envisioned for its replacement.

1. Sale, Roger, Seattle Past to Present, p. 74.
2. Ibid. p. 75.

Rob Anglin

Rob Anglin is currently working as an architect and architectural historian. He recently won "La Compa Par" logo design contest and next year received an Honorable Mention for a combination table/chair he designed for the Arango International Design Competition.

Dear Editor,

A friend passed on a copy of your paper (June/July '82), because our house was listed as #6 on the map of this island connected with the article "Bainbridge Island, Summertime Touring". We were, as always, pleased that the uniqueness of the house was noted. And it is unique, not only to the island, but I dare say to Puget Sound. The article neglects to mention that Hall Bros. Shipyards were originally at Port Blakely, before the move to Eagle Harbor. During this period our house was built by a ship carpenter (if that's the proper term) employed by Hall Bros. Shipyards were originally at Port Blakely, before the move to Eagle Harbor. During this period our house was built by a ship carpenter (if that's the proper term) employed by Hall Bros.

The scale of the house is deceptive. The outside looks very grand, but the "slack" is taken up inside with generally small rooms. The upstairs in particular suffers. The windows, in order to fit under the exterior dentils of the frieze, start at one's ankles & end at one's nose — with a ceiling height of only 7'4".

Kroll is a bit stung by criticism that he had abandoned design in favor of the users' choices. The metro station is an exercise in individual rather than social expression. Mushroom-like columns support the root balls of trees and shrubs above the station, which has wildly-irregular windows, skylights, and openings. Huge, cast-metal knobs support the lighting system which wanders around the ceiling. Glass dividers are decorated with waling, colorful floral designs. Every tendency to simplify and organize has been resolutely resisted. This project reveals a strong reference to Kroll's work to the Art Nouveau movement. Kroll studied architecture at la Cambre in Brussels, founded by Henry van de Velde and dominated by his followers. Like many Art Nouveau buildings which still dot Brussels, the metro station seems to be a research in individual freedom through fluid and entirely unpredictable forms which rely heavily on the craftsmen's skill for effect.

It is exceedingly difficult to classify the work of Lucien Kroll, which has everything to do with his fundamental intentions. As a continuing research into the variety and possibility of choice, each Kroll project corresponds to a specific site, program, client, context, and group of builders. They are in part dependent on the intentions of others, in addition to those of the project architect. As such, it is not a very predictable architecture. Its forms provide no general models; there are no appearances to imitate. Kroll's ideas about individual choice are the important generalizations, while his architecture remains particular and idiosyncratic.

Steven G. Cecil

Steve Cecil, who is a graduate of the University of Washington's Master of Architecture program, has lived and worked in Europe. During a trip last fall he met and interviewed Lucien Kroll at Kroll's home. Steve also writes for the Madison Park Post.
Preventing Nuclear War

TARGET SEATTLE

will be a week-long dialogue on how best to prevent nuclear war. Its purpose is to encourage citizens to inform themselves, decide where they stand, and then act on their convictions. TARGET SEATTLE will offer the opportunity to consider the alternatives thoughtfully and systematically.

TARGET SEATTLE is a citizen-supported, non-profit organization. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to TARGET SEATTLE, 904 - 4th Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98104. Phone 382-5018.

Program Outline

Sept. 24: Keynote address: Richard Lyman, president of the Rockefeller Foundation and former president of Stanford University.

Sept. 25: All-day symposium on the medical, psychological, environmental and ethical implications of nuclear war and the threat of nuclear war. Participants include physicians Judith Lipton and Paul Beeson; Harvard Medical School Professor of Psychiatry John E. Mack; Jonas Salk, developer of polio vaccine; and David Brower, head of Friends of the Earth. Afternoon sessions feature Richard Falk, authority on international law; Father William Sullivan, president of Seattle University; and Rabbi Norman Hirsch of Seattle.

Sept. 26: Individual church programming on prevention of nuclear war.

Sept. 27: U.S. Defense Policy

Sept. 28: Nuclear freeze proposals

Sept. 29: Disarmament initiatives

Sept. 30: Economic implications of the arms buildup

"What about the Russians?"

Oct. 1: Pollster Lou Harris presents findings of his latest poll on American attitudes about the threat of nuclear war.

Oct. 2: Finale in the Kingdome, featuring Archibald Cox, national chairman of Common Cause, and other national figures.

This advertisement was donated by ARCADE.
ARCHITECTURE ON THE WALLS

On July 14 "Speaking a New Classicism: American Architecture Now," an exhibition of 137 renderings, axonometric drawings, photographs, and models, assembled by Smith College, opened at the Portland Art Museum. According to Helen Searing, Curator of the exhibition, "New Classicism" is defined as "the presence in a given design of recognizable classical motifs, forms, and typologies." While adequate, that definition seems an oversimplification of this emerging trend.

The exhibition presents the art of the architect in its rendered form. One sees mainly exteriors of buildings, rendered two-dimensionally with Zipatone, Prismacolor, and watercolor washes. Designs are not based on any particular historical style but on an amalgamation of styles.

The great and good practitioners of Post-modernism are represented. Philip Johnson’s "New Playhouse Theatre" in Columbus, Ohio is displayed in a photograph of a drawing. His acute attention to detail and perspective caused one architect to respond, "This looks like something my father did 50 years ago."

The estate-like country home has also made a return appearance. Venturi, Pouliquen, Check, and Graves all offer schemes for little palaces in locations from Connecticut to California. These homes have in common little round windows, colonnades, the non-primary colors of Post-modernism, and curious cross-references to historical motifs.

Despite certain failures of Architecture, discernible trends and movements in the United States give Von Eckardt hope for the quality of our cities. Different groups, formed in the 60’s and 70’s around single issues, ranging from preserving Victorian buildings to preserving the wilderness, have become more comprehensive in their interest and are forming alliances. Today historic preservation groups, environmentalists, arts groups, and neighborhood organizations are beginning to work toward the common goal of a livable environment. This is a new spirit in America, according to Von Eckardt. In it he perceives the grass-roots reappraisal of Architecture and the beginning of an integrated approach to the design of the built environment. He chastised his audience for not imitating the architects that should be leading this rethinkng, instead of being led by it; that it is time for all of them to become deeply involved.

In describing this new movement, Von Eckardt made a point of saying that the objection is not directed against Architecture per se, that it is not concerned with pitting Modern versus "non-Moderne" architecture. (The Modern Movement was a rich and creative period with great and popular achievements, one of the more notable recent examples of which is Pei’s East Wing addition to the National Gallery of Art.) Rather, its central concern is simply to achieve good architecture, not bad architecture. To reinforce his point, Von Eckardt defined good architecture as socially responsive and bad architecture as that which forgets its social purpose in its concern for style. He called for an Architecture based on humanism, asking to abandon the notion that growth is ekkyard or larger. Examples of such work locally are found in Portland’s Transit Mall and Seattle’s Pike Place Market, both of which respond to social needs and de-emphasize questions of style. It is, he concluded, "Better to be good than to be original."
northwest architecture

MILLER/HULL PARTNERSHIP

David Miller and Bob Hull came to Seattle in 1977 to open a regional office for the Vancouver firm RIA Architects. The pairing survived the demise of the parent organization in 1980, and since then the Miller/Hull Partnership has gone on to build an impressive body of innovative design projects.

Both partners are WSU graduates and both served stints in the Peace Corps — Miller in Brazil and Hull in Afghanistan. Hull returned to the U.S. to work for Marcel Breuer while Miller went to the University of Illinois for his Master’s degree and then to SOM in Chicago and Arthur Erickson in Vancouver. In 1975 Miller went to work for RIA and soon persuaded Hull to follow suit. The two considered going out on their own in 1977, but an offer from RIA to open a Seattle office for them instead promised the benefits of an established office for the difficult start-up period.

Working on their own has given Miller/Hull the opportunity to explore shared design interests in their projects. Both men admire the work of James Stirling, Norman Foster, and Louis Kahn, and the influences of these architects can be seen in their work. Structure, for example, is used as an expressive element, in an idiom analogous to those used by the Late Modern architects, and there is a functional bent to the use of materials rather than an ornamental one.

Perpetual budget constraints and the firm’s concern for passive solar design have led to the recurring use of certain materials and elements (in particular, glazed roll-up garage doors, which show up in residences and at the Petosa Shopping Center) always used in innovative ways.

Although most of the office’s design work is borne by the two partners, the staff has been with them for several years and by now understands their approach thoroughly enough to support it through additional design input. Miller and Hull design together, frequently tossing conceptual ideas back and forth to push each other further than either might go alone. For them, this process works well, and they continue to produce inventive and practical projects.

Alan Razak

Al Razak writes for ARCADE. His interest in fostering good local design (and a good game of squash) led him to write about the Miller/Hull Partnership.

Passive Solar House, Mill Creek, WA (1981). In this “solar” house, the lower floor window wall/solar collector curves to follow the path of the sun. Activities are arranged behind the wall to best utilize sunlight and warmth at different times of day.

Cedar Hills Activities Building, Maple Valley, WA (1980). This extremely low-budget building utilizes economical materials — plywood siding, corrugated steel and fiberglass roofing, and pre-formed wood trusses — and crisp detailing. Piers elevate the slab above unstable soil.

Hansen Residence, Moses Lake, WA (1980). An earth-sheltered passive-solar house designed for a family of four on a small farm site. Three feet of soil cover the roof; the entry is a tunnel to the north. Garage door sections form a greenhouse in winter, roll up to shade the porch in summer.

Petosa Center, Monroe, WA (1980). Wood frame glass garage door sections turned on their sides form curving storefront walls for shops at a retail mall. Remaining construction is tilt-up concrete, truss-joists, and slab-on-grade.