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The cover of a 1900 catalog from Geo. L. Mesker & Co., one of many available at the Building Technology Heritage Library. See page 14.

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A review of some of the most popular stories in 2016.

By Martha McDonald

The numbers are in for the year and for our new website that was launched in March, 2016, and our readers have shown us what most interested them. Using Google Analytics and our own tools, we examined which products, features, bloggers and opinions received the most hits and clicks during the year. So here we go — a look back at some of the highlights of 2016.

To review the year in print (which then made it to the website), it started with the Annual Buyers Guide in February and a feature that interviewed prominent classical architects and designers. In April, the cover story was about how preservation is helping revive Detroit, and, as usual, the June issue featured the Palladio Award winners.

August offered the Clem Labine Award winner, Christine Franck, along with a number of recent projects on commercial interiors. Institutional architecture was highlighted in the October issue, along with a profile of a groundbreaking engineering firm, Silman, and a feature showing how food (restaurants) and preservation can work together. And finally, our December issue on religious buildings reported on the repairs on the Washington National Cathedral after an earthquake and featured the new Mormon Temple in Philadelphia.

While our statistics found that readers most went to the Buying Guides and The Magazine on the website, they often focused on particular stories. One that garnered quite a bit of interest was "Preserving Detroit's Future," in the April issue, written by our contributor Nancy A. Ruhling.

She interviewed a number of architects and developers who showed that preservation is playing a significant role in contributing to the city's revival. Her list of 11 buildings that have been saved and another that are in progress. And who knows — those numbers could have increased since then.
A feature on revitalizing Detroit with preservation
of historic buildings was a big hit with readers last year.

Christine Franck was awarded the Clem Labine Award.
Her story appeared in the August issue.

Clem Labine’s feature in the April 2015 issue and his
guides on rebuilding Penn Station were very popular.

The abandoned 1924 Hotel Syracuse was saved and
now thriving as the Marriott Syracuse Downtown.

One of the most popular features was about how
to preserve wood windows written by John Leeke for the
August issue.

Another feature that drew reader interest was the
current project story on the restoration of the Hotel
Syracuse in the August issue. It shows how a Syracuse
native, Ed Riley, saved a historic 1934 hotel.

Readers also often clicked on a feature by D. Jeffrey
Minnis, the founder of the academy in Southern Pines,
NC, who described how his academy renovated a
small, simple space into a classical academy.

One of the technical articles that garnered quite a
few hits was “Historic Window Repair: Sash Joint
Dutchman,” written by John Leeke and published
in the August issue. He gives a detailed, step-by-step
process for repairing historic wood windows, along
with high-quality photographs and diagrams.

so high on the hit list was the Opinion tab,
which features a collection of viewpoints.

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with a list of resources, including books and websites. A longtime historic consultant, Leeke is the author of many articles on this subject and of books such as America's Windows.

Metal windows also garnered quite a few hits this year, with the article by Gordon Bock in the Oct. issue in 2015. "Making Sense of Metal Windows in Historic Buildings" discusses the role of steel and aluminum windows.

Another technical hit was the article on architectural ironwork published in the June issue. "Guidelines for Specifying Architectural Ironwork," was written by Robert Walsh, a blacksmith who has been handling architectural metalwork for 25 years.

The Palladio Awards continue to draw interest from our readers. As usual these are published in the June issue and 2016 was the 15th year for the awards program. It was launched in 2002 by Clem Labine. The 2016 winners included (1) HBRA Architects for the restoration of the West Entry of the Deering Library at Northwestern University; Schooley Caldwell Associates for the adaptive reuse of Cristo Rey Columbus High School; (3) Gladding Holme Architecture for the design of Christ Church Newport Hall, Christopher Hall University; Robert A.M. Stern Architects for the design of Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary; (5) Architectural Resources Group for the design of the Steven S. Kollins Education and Visitor Center.
SITE TOP: A blacksmith led guidelines for specifying architectural ironwork.

SITE BOTTOM: A feature on how restaurants and preservation can work together to benefit neighborhoods appeared in the October issue.

A small retail space was converted into the Academy of Classical Design in Southern, NC.

W: The Immanuel Chapel in Alexandria, VA, was one of sixolio winners last year.
ABOVE: Historic gardens around the country are evolving and thriving in today's environment. See April issue for more information.

LEFT: Written by Vincent Michael, a blog on house museums drew quite a bit of attention.

The Huntington Library; and (6) Historic Doc the Chara Aurora Cooper Haas Pipe Organ F. Bryn Athyn Cathedral.

A feature mentioned earlier, "Paths to Traditional Architecture," in the February issue, was high on a hit list last year. It was written by Paul A. Ramo who interviewed a number of noted traditional architects and artisans to discover how they had learned their art.

Two other features, one on preserving historic gardens in the April issue, and another, "Where Foo Preservation Meet," by Jenn Larsen, in the Oct issue also made the most popular list.

Blogs

One of the blogs that received quite a bit of attention and a number of comments was "The Problem House Museum," by Vincent Michael. He showed how difficult it is for these museums to survive on their own.

In addition, the blogs on plaster by Patrick were high on the digital hit parade. "Natural Hydraulic Plaster: A Plaster in a League of its Own," "the R. Aggregates and Fiber in Plaster," and The Pragmatist of Craft," were of particular interest to our readers.
Interior lighting was a popular category last year. This sconce by Crenshaw Lighting is typical of the many products featured in the magazine and on the website.

Peter Miller’s opinions also drew a crowd. His recent blog, “The State of Things: January 2017,” sets the outlook for the industry as we go forward. Restoration at the National Cathedral was also a hit.

Products, product information is one of the highlights of the magazine and the website. Not surprisingly, Division 4 (Doors, Window, Shutters) was at the top of the parade. And the section here that got the most was door hardware. Next in line were interior molding, exterior lighting and wood windows.

Another popular category was exterior elements, led by the Division 10 category, lighting. Cornice moldings and hardware in general were among the top 10 categories cited by our readers. Interior elements, ornamental metalwork Division 2, columns and capitals, roofing specialty art glass were also important. Many other acts and categories such as woodwork, fences and landscape specialties and stairs and railings also received reader interest in 2016 as the Buying Guides due to be one of the most important parts of the magazine.

These are just a few of the highlights from TRADITIONAL BUILDING magazine in 2016. We are most grateful to all of the writers who contributed features, articles, book reviews and Forums, and to all of bloggers on the website.
The cover of a Sears Building Materials catalog from 1929.
Building Technology Heritage Library

An online free digital library offers more than 8,000 brochures printed before 1964.

Gordon Bock

Strangers to preservation are ever amazed at how historic building devotees, who they assume to be lost in the past, are in fact among the earliest adopters of cutting-edge, 21st-century technology. The internet, of course, is everyone’s digital Swiss army knife, and a prime example of how it's being put to traditional use is the Building Technology Heritage Library (www.archive.org/details/buildingtechnologyheritagelibrary) where period trade catalogs—throw-away paper brochures decades and centuries old—are collected and digitized for less global access and a new life.

According to Mike Jackson, FAIA, who spearheads the effort, “Period trade catalogs can be highly valuable to preservation professionals who are assessing structures for their historical evolution, environmental safety, and any other architectural engineering conditions.”

Explains that being commercial in nature, and made for relatively short lifespans, trade catalogs are found in most architectural libraries. “So in 2010 the Association for Preservation Technology (www.apt.org) in collaboration with the Internet Archive (www.archive.org), launched the Building Technology Heritage Library (BTHL) to create an online archive of these historic technical documents that makes them accessible to the widest audience.”

The BTHL is hosted by the Internet Archive, a San Francisco-based non-profit digital library founded by internet visionary Brewster Kahle with a mission of providing universal access to all knowledge.” As Jackson points out, “These materials are available to the general public charge, and all are in the public domain.”

What is the BTHL?

Much about the so-called information superhighway, creating a digital library of historic publications sounds easy—just pour them into the virtual domain of cyberspace for anyone to sample—but there’s more to it than meets the virtual eye. Trade catalogs are technical, descriptive documents—typically booklets of a few dozen pages—that are not literary merit but rich with graphics, photos, and diagrams.
and product and marketing information.

Originally widespread and free, most are now, paradoxically, hard to find and even precious. "Only a few architectural libraries around the country recognized the value of trade catalogs enough to start collections," explains Jackson, among them Avery Library at Columbia University in New York and Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, DE. "There are several local libraries with specific collections, such as the Chicago company catalogs at the Chicago Public Library," he says.

Another example is the University of California at Santa Barbara, home to the Lawrence B. Romaine Trade Catalog Collection. Romaine was a rare book dealer from Massachusetts who began collecting trade catalogs in the 1920s. "Romaine wrote the seminal book on the subject—*A Guide to American Trade Catalogs, 1774-1900*—and amassed a collection of over 40,000 catalogs that the University is still organizing and we hope to work with at some point."

For all its unlimited digital reach, the BTHL keeps a tight rein on its scope. "We focus on the technical and trade literature, which nobody else has been doing," says Jackson. "A lot of the late 19th- and early 20th-century publications on building construction design were captured by Google Books because they were in the major engineering and architectural libraries. But the trade literature wasn't in those libraries only in these few, isolated, special collections."

Jackson singles out the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal for special credit in this regard. "When we started our effort, we posted open request of, in effect, 'If you've got a collection, please let us know.' They raised their hands and offered to share their collection, which was fantastic."

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When asked if there are any thin spots in library's coverage, Jackson says the collection of early Sweet's Catalogs is pretty good from its debut in 1906 up to the 1930s, but "weak" thereafter, especially in the 1950s. "We'd love to have people donate Sweet's Catalogs from the 1940s, '50s, and up to 1963 because these books have assembled huge amounts of data on the Modern-era commercial building sector," a category of ever-increasing interest to preservationists.

He adds that since the Sweet's Catalog Files of the post-war era are actually encyclopedia-like compilations of manufacturers' information published by F.W. Dodge Company, for scanning these multi-volume sets will have to be disassembled. "Perhaps, there's a retired architect out there looking to downsize." For more information, contact the BTHL at digitization@aptl.org.

---

Ken of Catalogs

makes the BTHL so useful is the way it opens up world information that formerly was obscure to the point of being incredibly rare. "To appreciate the value of trade catalogs," explains Steven Schuyler, a rare books collector who specializes in architectural publications (rarebookstore.net), "you have to understand the context of the word ephemera." Often described as junk, everyday printed items of paper, Schuyler's example is a ticket stub for a 1960s Beatles concert. "Maybe it made it into your wallet, maybe it ended up in the trash can. However, if you were smart enough to save the ticket, that's an instance of really valuable ephemera today."

Schuyler says Schuyler. "The thing about trade catalogs takes them exceptionally ephemeral is that they were designed to be obsolete after a certain amount of time. The idea, he says, was that once you received the greatest catalog from the manufacturer with a price list, you were supposed to throw the old one away. "That's why they became so scarce, and today we think that what's really rare is the material that wasn't really collected or saved."

Jackson's own embrace of period catalogs goes back to the 1970s when he had something of a trade-epiphany. "I was working on Main Street America," he says, helping to revitalize traditional American districts, "when I saw a Mesker Storefront catalog reprinted in an early APT Bulletin." Mesker, founded in 1872, was America's first manufacturer of prefabricated ornamental sheet-metal facades for storefronts that became epidemic in small- to medium-sized towns across America from the 1880s to mid-20th century.

"Wow, this is really cool! I thought until I found the original Mesker catalog for sale at a flea market.
and bought it,” says Jackson. “From there on I started collecting architectural trade catalogs, finding them here and there in used bookstores, ephemera shows, and the like.” Jackson put his ever-growing collection to work as head architect of the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office for 27 years.

Trade catalogs document not only the products they push but also the larger markets, industries, and times in which they flourish. “The rarer material has origins in the early advertising of the 19th century,” says Jackson. Catalogs of all kinds got a boost from the U.S. postal system when it classified them as aids to the dissemination of knowledge (eligible for lower postal rates) and the advent of the rural free mail delivery service after 1896.

“Over half the population was rural then, so a man like Richard Sears was a genius to put this mammoth catalog together to reach the rural audience.” Adds Schuyler, “One of most interesting things about the trade literature is the price lists and advertisements for other companies it often contains—sometimes more important than the original text.”

Jackson says the BTHL collection stops in 1963 because trade catalogs after this date, though still published in print, remain in copyright. From the 1990s onward, technical commercial literature becomes increasingly digital and, potentially, will one day find its way into online libraries where it can be located and retrieved.

Bringing the information treasure trove in trade catalogs into wider hands is not a new idea. In the 1970s, pioneering reprints from specialty publishers such as Dover, Da Capo, and The American Life Foundation, helped fuel interest in catalogs and spread information to historic building scholars as well as those researching furniture, lighting and other collectibles.

“In the late 1980s Avery Library microfilmed 1,800 catalogs from their collection in an early effort to disseminate them to other research libraries,” says Jackson. The microfilm didn’t catch on, he says it all came together in the new, digital online effort.

In fact, the BTHL is not the first to put trade catalogs online either. “Some material—the jewels, speak, such as 19th-century paint catalogs with color plates of Victorian houses—have already been scanned and included in various collections.” He that the Smithsonian Institution has a fantastic collection of 400,000 items, but only the tip of this iceberg is as yet online.

“Actually, the BTHL has scanned a lot of literature from the 20th century, courtesy of Jablonski, a paint and building conservator in York,” says Jackson. While presenting accurate colors in trade literature has always been extr

LEFT: Mike Jackson, FAIA, is spearheading the effort to build the free online Building Technology Heritage Library. It features an archive of pre-1964 architectural trade catalogs and related technical publications that are available in the public domain.

OPPOSITE: A page from the catalog, “Paint fresh from the factory,” from the Franklin Paint Co. It was published in the 1930s.
We do not ask you to send a penny of money with your order, unless you want to. On all orders amounting to $10.00 or more we give you 60 days to pay for the goods at the low factory prices quoted in this catalog. There are no strings tied to this offer. No bank deposits to make—no papers to sign—no C. O. D.’s to pay. Just send us your order—state plainly that you wish to accept our 60 days’ credit terms. We ship the goods at once and let you pay for them 60 days later. (See Page 28.)

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(See inside back cover)

Franklin House Paint
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Franklin Barn Paint
FOR PRICES AND DESCRIPTIONS SEE PAGE 6
difficult (color information shifts in traditional, four-color printing and digital scanning alike), such documents are invaluable for all kinds of building research and restoration.

Judging by the numbers, the BTHL is a success with users and sponsors alike, but there's still room to grow. "We know we're getting 50,000 downloads a month," says Jackson, "yet very few of these people tell us why they look at this material." All users need to report, he says, is that they found a catalog useful for XYZ reason. For example, Jackson says one user wrote that a catalog helped restore an old building, while other material became legal documents in an environmental justice suit in California.

He adds, "We'd love to have more users comment by responding to the Internet Archive 'add review' prompt. If they see something they like or are hoping for more, that's where these reviews can help us develop the BTHL even further."

Gordon Bock, co-author of The Vintage House (www.vintagehousebook.com), is an in-demand speaker for courses, seminars, and keynote addresses through www.gordonbock.com.
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Ornamental molding and custom millwork is the specialty of Driwood. Click on no. 2077.

EverGreene created the historic plaster ornament for St. Thomas Aquinas church in Lincoln, Nebraska, including these capitals. Click on no. 2460.

Haddonstone manufactured this portico with Corinthian capitals and fluted columns. Click on no. 4020.
Canning Studios marbleized these enormous columns in the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. Click on no. 5100.

Worthington Millwork makes wood columns for interior and exterior applications. Click on no. 1630.

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This decorative cast-metal capital from Herwig illustrates the variety of ornamental metalwork created by the company. Click on no. 9130.

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Hot-stamped leaves from King Architectural Metals can be used in a variety of applications; the elements adorning this railing are available in the company's catalog. Click on no. 418.

This floral fan design was created by Canning Studios. Click on no. 5100.

This stained-glass window was created by Rohlf's Stained & Leaded Glass Studio. Click on no. 6240.

Abatron's LiquidWood restoration system regenerates and waterproofs dried out or spongy wood. Click on no. 1300.

Allegheny Restoration restored these windows for the post office in Monongahela, PA. Click on no. 1004.

Architectural Components restored the windows for the Jacob Whitemire House at the Minuteman National Historic Park in Lexington, MA. Call for more information.

Allied Window manufactured a storm window for this round-top window. Click on no. 690.

The model 6114 pulley from Architectural Resource Center is designed for use in traditional windo. Click on no. 1670.
This Mission style door-knocker fabricated in hammered bronze is available from Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage. Click on no. 2085.

La Woodworking offers more than 300 styles of wood and storm doors. Click on no. 9600.

Crittall Windows offers traditionally styled windows and doors made with recycled and recyclable-steel content. Click on no. 2016.

Classical architectural elements from Decorators Supply Corp., such as this door surround, were used to enhance this room. Click on no. 210.

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Clem Labine's Traditional Building
This elegant entryway was fabricated by Driwr Glick on no. 2077.

This elaborate door knocker was fabricated by E.R. Butler in the Early American style. Click on no. 2260.

This extra wide door from Fimbel Architectural includes a concrete center post made to match the historic exterior of this firehouse. The original building's openings could not accommodate the width of new fire trucks. Click on no. 1953.
Haddonstone created the custom window surround for this building in Kent, U.K. Click on no. 4020.

HeartWood created these wood doors for the Newton Cemetery. Click on no. 1911.

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   Tab Colbert, CEO, Ludowici, New Lexington, OH

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Designed by Mark Finlay Architects and fabricated by **Deep Landing Works**, the model L-9800 stands 29 in. tall and projects 19 in. from the wall. Click on no. 809.

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**Pacific Register** created the decorative metalwork for this staircase. Click on no. 2070.

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A successful architect leaves behind an impressive body of built work, but a really successful architect also leaves behind a thriving practice that can carry on the firm’s vision when the founder passes from the scene. After reading this unique monograph from Harrison Design, it looks like William H. “Bill” Harrison has scaled these twin peaks of architectural achievement.

This new volume, which marks the 25th anniversary of Harrison Design, is not your usual architectural monograph because it tells not one but two distinct and separate stories. First (as one would expect in such a book) it functions as a sumptuous photographic portfolio that showcases the full range of the firm’s projects. Second, the book provides insights into the human side of the firm—giving more of a backstage look into the “people part” of the architectural business than you get from the typical monograph.

Founder Bill Harrison’s path into architecture was hardly linear: Always interested in drawing, he was only 12 years old when he started working part-time as a draftsman for a local architect. Nevertheless, a career in architecture was far from inevitable because Harrison is a man of many interests. As Henrik Taylor’s lucid text relates, Bill’s other early enthusiasms included nuclear physics, ballet—and neurosurgery.

Even so, Bill enrolled at Georgia Tech’s School of Architecture—but his restless energy soon drew him in many other surprising byways: UPS truck loader, an architectural rendering and model business, lighting designer in California, proprietor of a leather crafting and apparel company, partner in an enterprise that booked live events in clubs and theaters, blue-water sailor, and—finally—a design-build contractor. His trans-Atlantic sailing adventures had taken him to Italy’s Veneto region, where Palladio’s villas re-ignited Harrison’s passion for architecture. This seemingly unrelated accumulation of experiences in drawing, Palladian architecture, and coordinating diverse groups of people as a businessman eventually formed the foundation for building a far-flung architectural enterprise.

Upon his return to the U.S., Harrison started renovating and selling derelict houses. Rapid growth morphed the construction company first into a design-build business and then finally—in 1991—into a full-fledged architectural services firm. By the end of 2016, in addition to the company’s headquarters in Atlanta, GA, the practice now has offices in St. Simons Island, GA, Santa Barbara, CA, Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, DC, and Shanghai, China.

Harrison Design’s architecture illustrated in these pages shows contemporary traditionalism rendered at the highest level of aesthetics, materials and craftsmanship. Some of the work is pure Classicism; other projects are inspired by a variety of other historic and vernacular styles. (There are even a few designs rendered in that most recent of historic styles: Modernism.) In each of the projects, the architects cleverly combine respect for historic precedent with the innovation contemporary living requires.

As Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk observes in her foreword, Harrison’s designers manage to make traditionalism look nonetheless modern with a skill that “recalls the last great generation of Beaux-Arts trained architects.” And like the Beaux-Arts ateliers of 125 years ago, the Harrison firm also places great emphasis on the role of hand-drawing and sketching—along with the obligation of senior architects to mentor and nurture the skills of young designers.

This anniversary monograph goes to great lengths to avoid the cult of personality that characterizes so many top-level architectural firms these days; there is no effort by the founder to hog all the credit, although there’s no doubt that Bill Harrison’s vision and philosophy remain as the central core of the practice. The text emphasizes that architecture at this scale is a team effort where collaboration is critical. Extensive credit is given to various key players in the firm through a series of brief profiles. For example, the monograph not only recounts the professional history of Gregory L. Palmer, the senior architect and managing principal, but also includes this accolade from Bill Harrison: “If I leave here tomorrow, I’d rest peacefully knowing Greg is looking after the shop.”

Similar profiles are given for eight of the other design principals—plus the landscape and interior design studios. Also somewhat unusual: In addition to the designers, ample credit is also given to the support staff, such as the tribute accorded to Deborah Harrison who for 27 years oversaw the amazing growth of the firm in her roles as Finance and Business Manager.

Today, Bill Harrison is increasingly focused on mentoring the next generation. He muses: “If I have learned anything from my path, it is to invest in people.” That concern for the future extends to a keen interest in current architectural education. Among its many pro bono activities, Harrison Design has sponsored pioneering efforts in teaching classical design at institutions such as Georgia Tech and the University of Miami—and Bill Harrison himself has devoted many years of service to the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art.

Looking through the pages of this handsome volume, the reader will doubtless find many examples of timeless design that are sure to spark further creative ideas. Perhaps of even greater importance: Anyone who is attempting to sustain and build an architectural practice in these challenging times will find numerous concepts for team-building and inspiring creative people to ever-greater heights of excellence.

Editor Emeritus Clem Labine is the founder of Old House Journal, Traditional Building and Period Homes magazines. He is the recipient of numerous awards and was a founding board member of the Institute of Classical Architecture, now the ICAA.
Traditional Architecture and the New Politics

We are entering a new architectural era but it may take some time to recognise it. A great deal is changing in the wider world and architecture is bound, eventually, to reflect this. This has always been the case: the architectural renaissance followed the competitive wealth of the Italian city states and literary humanism; the baroque followed the counter reformation; Modernism followed social and political revolutions in central Europe. We know this with the great gift of hindsight. But what can we glean from current events which crowd in on us every day?

We are all very aware of the surprise Presidential election result and, as Donald Trump himself pointed out, this follows the British referendum to leave the European Union, or ‘Brexit’. To this we must add the Italian referendum, the repercussions of which will be significant but are not fully evident at the time this was written.

Following my own work on globalisation and architecture, this is not a great surprise. Since about 1990, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the Shanghai stock exchange re-opened, and the Indian economy liberalised, the tension between homogenisation (everything becoming the same) and localisation (the re-assertion of local identity) became more pronounced. Although I would not claim the gift of prediction, the localisation trend in politics has been evident for some time; but one can never fully predict the way it will turn out.

Some of us may regret the political direction this has taken (I voted to stay in the European Union, albeit with misgivings) but we must recognise that there is widespread alienation to the economic and political outcomes of twenty-five years of globalisation. This will have far-reaching repercussions, not necessarily all bad, and this is a phenomenon of some importance which will inevitably affect architecture, we just don’t know how.

I think that the followers of traditional architecture can take some encouragement from recent events. It is not hard to identify the architectural manifestation of global homogenisation. In the 1930s Modernism was given the name ‘The International Style’ and, while this name has been largely dropped, this is exactly what it has become. Indeed, it is an irony that about ten years ago, it was Greek academic architects that proposed that Modernism should be the style of the European Union. I’m not sure that Greeks, in their bankrupt state bailed out with European Union controls, feel that way now! Should we now regard traditional architecture as the movement that recognises the disillusion with internationalism and globalisation and reflects the rise of localisation?

It is my belief that we should. The dominance of global elites in politics and economics has its counterpart in architecture with architects, a definately elite group, who believe that the views of the public are of no interest or consequence. The threat to the identity of the everyday citizen, which has found a scapegoat in resistance to immigration (even in a nation defined by immigration) is echoed in the anonymity of towns and cities.

We know that there is a consistent desire for traditional homes. We can speculate on the reason for this but we do know that the home is the piece of architecture with which people most closely identify. While some architects may sneer at the desire for familiarity, proposing that people should be artistically challenged, the wish to be comfortable in a place which reflects what you feel about yourself is, in all other contexts, entirely reasonable. Of course, there will be people who wish to express their differences and their radical credentials and, in a free society and provided it harms no one, they must be able to do so. But the widespread sense that personal identity is best found in a home that is traditional is only a reflection of the fact that most aspects of our identity are based on traditions, be they family, religious, regional or national.

In this one simple sense, people who have the financial means to do so, can protect themselves against the personal alienation that many feel is forced upon them by social change, transformed employment, global corporations, remote political activity, and of course alien architecture. But many people—and in particular the people most vulnerable to the effects of alienation—do not have the financial means to control their immediate environment. And even those that do have the means must venture out into their communities, their neighbourhoods and their cities. In this wider environment, in projects, apartment blocks and in the workplace, personal preference and identity are no longer the concern of designers. These buildings are of a scale that they will be designed by an architectural profession that despises tradition and they will be allowed by bureaucrats who, often as not, belong to the same or associated professions and, being professionals, will always defer to the authority of other professionals.

This is the alien environment which we have created in the last fifty years or so. As with all things architectural, it is only a reflection of the alien environment which we have created in our corporations, our employment and our political systems. The international reaction against this alienation has found its political voice, in my view this voice is not always coherent, but it nonetheless expresses real alienation and real anxiety which we ignore at our peril.

There are signs that the architectural profession is losing its monolith group cohesion but it is a super tanker that will take a long time to turn. In the gaps that are opening up in the profession, there is a place for traditional architecture to develop and grow and be inventive. Traditional architects must take up the challenge with renewed vigour. This is an opportunity to step up to the spirit of the times and, in the only small way that the profession can, help ordinary citizens feel that they have a place in the world that is theirs, that is familiar, that has real identity and, above all, is not alien.

— © Robert Adam, December 2016

Robert Adam is a director of ADAM Architecture, with offices in Winchester and London, UK. Robert is well-known in the UK and internationally as a major figure in the development of traditional and classical architecture, and has advanced the acceptance of traditional design in the British architectural profession. He is also known as a pioneer of contextual urban design, a designer of furniture, an author and scholar. He founded the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism (INTBAU) in 2000, is visiting professor of Urban Design at the University of Strathclyde, and is an active member in many architecture organisations. In addition, he was just awarded the 2017 Driehaus Prize, awarded by the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture.
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