Exclusive Excerpt from Steven M.L. Aronson's forthcoming HYPE

Plus: Brendan Gill on House X; Interview with Richard Serra
We're Jumping

SHAW-WALKER
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Views and Reviews

A Hesitant Welcome to Vanity Fair

Comes now the new Vanity Fair to be copied with on top of the flood tide of paper that already swamps daily life in New York. And it is no easy task. This reborn magazine brings cheer; many new pages for our Ralph Lauren album of the perfect WASP family at play by the sea; confirmation of everything we already know about Michael Graves, Merly Streep, Laurie Anderson, Robert de Niro, and Julian Schnabel and Co.; more of the rambunctiousness in New York (you remember that we left him at the Times and we had not yet learned whether his son got into Harvard? Well, I'm afraid we still don't know).

I'm glad to discover that Clement Greenberg is alive and well. I intend to begin Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel right after I finally read One Hundred Years of Solitude, although Lord knows when that will be. I love Gore Vidal's account of his Gobi Desert junket and the elegant pages from the original Vanity Fair, and I appreciate Philip Burke's excellent likeness of President Reagan (see above).

I wonder, though, if Vanity Fair will survive, being so All-Embracing. The last possible all-embracing magazine in America was Life, which really died years ago. There seems to be no room any more for the ambitious magazine that wants to give us Everything, even if, in contrast to Vanity Fair, it has legible typography and a point of view. This is, I think, mainly because the New York Times has taken over, using up the public mind. From stuffing mushrooms to codding our emotions, from fashioning brand-new antique Shaker rocking chairs from a kit to viewing secret Sri Lanka and understanding William Blake, almost all that we once learned from magazines we now learn — not only on Sunday, but every day — from The New York Times.

Where, then, if anywhere, can the chronic magazine reader turn? Perhaps to those few middle-aged magazines that have been with us since childhood — say, the National Geographic, Consumer Reports, Popular Mechanics, and Mad? Or to The New Yorker, for which the New Yorker is inevitable. To the great span of magazines — from earnest to fluffly — that can be shuffed through with pleasure at the stationer's or dentists', but which pouring into the home cause distress. And to the spare, quirky others that, like good restaurants, specialize — pursuing their subject, whatever it is, with passion and a clear eye: the Amicus Journal, with the lowdown on environmental issues; the Nation, which has never forgotten the decency of the Old Left and packs more meat into a 300-page editorial than most newspapers string out over a double-page of opinion; Landscape, a mysterious and beautiful magazine I once saw somewhere and never found again. And Vanity Fair, which you hold in your hand.

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Skyline is brave, sexy, provocative, strong-minded and great-looking. It provides more news about architecture in our city and the built environment than can be found in the Times, The Daily News, The New York Post, The Village Voice and the general magazines all together; not to mention in radio/television land, which, for architectural coverage and comment, is terra incognita.

So slim down and shape up, Vanity Fair. I do hope I'm wrong and that you will make it.

Joan K. Davidson
President, The J.M. Kaplan Fund

Dear Suzanne Stephens:

I heard from my partner that you liked our model apartment [see p. 12 of this issue], and I said, "Have you read Skyline?"

To refer to the project as a "Beach House" [Skyline, March 1983, pp. 8-9], and to call us "youthful masters" is condescending and implies not-visibility through immensity and generic language.

To assume that the only legitimate architecture is one that creates a "new architectural language," is absurd [sic], arrogant, and inaccurate historically.

Finally, to invalidate the private residence, architecturally, for its non-accessibility [sic] is fraudulent and pretentious. Ideas are not limited to "public buildings" — remember Paladio [sic]?

Written with less respect and disappointment in your inability to be more objective and informed.

Sincerely,

Charles Gwathmey

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Editorial Office: Skyline, 8 West 40th Street, New York, New York 10011; phone (212) 398-9474

"Reagan Staying the Course" by Philip Burke (from Vanity Fair, March 1983)

Notes on Contributors

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Barry Bergdoll, a doctoral candidate in Art History at Columbia University, is currently studying Leon Vaudoyer in Paris.


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Skyline

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Skyline April 1983

New York City Report

Peter Freiberg

Skyline

Peter Freiberg

Savings Theaters (?)

A major brouhaha is likely to develop soon over theater air rights, as much as that zoning plan approved last year, a Theater Advisory Council (TAC) — consisting of theater owners, preservationists and others — was told. The TAC will make recommendations to the City Planning Commission on how to "strengthen the long-term viability of the legitimate theaters." Within the next few weeks, the TAC is scheduled to come up with proposals — and already the fur is flying.

The three major theater chains — Shubert, Nederlander, and Jujamcyn — have submitted what a spokesperson called a "working document" to the TAC. The proposal opposes landmarking of the theaters, which is now under consideration by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (see Skyline, November 1982, p. 28), and instead calls for the temporary no-demolition regulation currently in the midtown zoning to be made permanent.

The theater owners would give the City Planning Commission the responsibility of deciding whenever applications for demolition are submitted, whether the owner deserves a special permit. The owner (whose advisers were Cooper Eckstut Associates and Hardly Holman Pfeiffer Associates) then go on to make a proposal that "is a major precedent if adopted.

The theater chains want the right to transfer air rights over their buildings anywhere within a wide swath of west midtown, from 34th to 38th Streets (including Columbus Circle) between Sixth and Eighth Avenues. Present zoning allows non-landmarked buildings to transfer air rights only to adjacent properties and permits landmarked buildings to sell air rights to other lots, across the street or down the block through a common chain of ownership. The owners’ plan would be a significant liberalization of these restrictions, but the owners also say that red deal real estate tax assessments and revocations from real estate taxes when theaters are dark.

Under the City Planning Commission recommendations, 1.7 million square feet of the 2.5 million in the Gair and Sweeney buildings would be kept for manufacturing for at least 15 years. Monte Davis, a loft tenant on the board of directors of the Fulton Ferry Local Development Corporation, was enthusiastic about the report. "The owners told Skyline he thought the report was "fine," a "step in the right direction." Nevertheless, neighborhood activists in the Save the Jobs Coalition expect Walentas and his landlord, former Deputy Mayor and Planning Commissioner John Zucotti, to lobby hard at City Hall to weaken the recommendations. What will happen? "It will depend on Koch," says Davis. "If City Planning, which is not known for its spine, can come out with a report like this, I’ll believe in any kind of miracle, I’ll believe in someone saying no to John Zucotti.”

Brooklyn Bridge Celebrated

It opened on May 24, 1883, and the praise has never stopped: David McCullough, author of The Great Bridge, says more paintings, etchings, lithographs and photographs have used it as subject or backdrop than have used any other American structure. Next month will be the centennial of what was once called "the eighth wonder of the world," and six months of festivities in the city have been planned in celebration of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The observation began early, on March 19, with an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum entitled, "The Great East River Bridge: 1883-1983." It will run through June 19, and features more than 300 objects, including paintings and prints as well as some of the original engineering drawings of John and Washington Roebling, the designer and chief engineer, respectively. Other cultural institutions participating in the celebration will include the Museum of the City of New York and Pratt Institute.

The highlight of the celebration will be May 24, when a "Rededication Day" will be held reminiscent of the holiday declared a century ago in what were then the cities of New York and Brooklyn. There will be a parade, a salute by ships in the harbor and a fireworks display at dusk. A 25-minute sound-and-light show will run through October 10.

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Main Street near Fulton Ferry, Brooklyn (Steven Daniels)

Brooklyn Bridge drawing (1903)(Municipal Archives,NYC)

Brooklyn Bridge cutout (1877) (NY Public Library)
A few controversies have been resolved, while others are still left dangling. New trouble spots emerge, but the good guys persevere.

Ken Barwick (photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission)

More East Side Towers

Developer Paul Milstein is at it again. Recently, in a controversial case that has yet to be decided, he asked for a substantial zoning variance to build a higher residential tower on the Upper East Side (see Skyline, December 1982, p. 17). Now, Milstein is seeking another huge variance, this time further down on the East Side in the Murray Hill section — on a square block, stretching from 31st to 32nd Streets between Lexington and Third Avenues, where a post office was once scheduled to be constructed.

Milstein has long been criticized by preservationists and neighborhood activists for such actions as his sudden demolition of the Biltmore Hotel and his unsuccessful attempt to win a massive variance for a building in the Lincoln Center area. His Mastic Development Corporation, formed with his brother Seymour, placed a winning bid for the post office site — although the firm is still reportedly involved in price negotiations with the federal government because the block was not totally cleared of tenants. Milstein, whose architect is The Vilkins Group and whose urban design consultant is Raguel Raimati Associates, came up with a plan for a residential development that would contain more than 900 apartments.

Under the current zoning, an as-of-right building with a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of about 8 is permitted. According to Raimati, this project, plus medical offices, "would basically create one long tower," with heights ranging from 24 to 48 stories depending on the zoning lot. Instead, Milstein has proposed a development with an FAR of 12 — a 50 percent increase in density — that he argues would enable him to build a better planned project, including a 16,000-square-foot, park open to the public. In addition, Milstein would renovate an existing school, which is next to the site where he would relocate site tenants wanting to live there.

While a number of tenants are enthusiastic, Community Board 6 expressed strong opposition to Milstein's initial rezoning request in its preliminary talks with him, and is expected to take a similarly tough stance when its variance proposal comes before the Board of Standards and Appeals (RSA). Philip Howard, chairman of Board 6's zoning committee, says it makes sense to "develop the whole block as a whole," but that an FAR of 12 is out of the question. In return for placing 50 tenants in the renovated building, says Howard, and building a park, Milstein is seeking to increase his development space from about 650,000 square feet to almost a million. "We're not buying it," says Howard. "I'm all for a sensible development here, but I'm not for paying a 50 percent bonus price for doing it. I'm giving the guy a 12 percent or 10 percent bonus." Norman Marcus, counsel to the City Planning Commission, says Milstein's plan received "a very negative reaction" from the agency, which is likely to oppose it in the RSA.

According to Raimati, a major reason Milstein is seeking a variance is that a stream running underneath the middle of the site makes development difficult and more costly. Howard calls this claim "absurd," and there is doubt whether even the RSA, which is generally sympathetic to developers, will buy this argument from Milstein and the legal firm advising him, Tulo and Zaccotti.

Barwick at MAS

After five years as head of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), Robert Barwick is resigning this spring. Barwick, 42, will return to the Municipal Art Society (MAS), where he previously served as director and will now become its president — the new title for its chief executive officer.

Preservationists generally give Barwick high marks for his work on the LPC — except for his actions during the Portman Hotel controversy, which led to tough designations as Radio City Music Hall, which was threatened with destruction by Rockefeller Center Inc. the day Barwick took office, and the Upper East Side Historic District, where the LPC acted despite initial opposition from developers, the City Planning Commission and some architects. Barwick himself, in an interview with Skyline, lists those two designations as ones in which he feels particularly proud. He says he got substantial personal gratification from the designation of the Loew's Historic District in the South Bronx, which helped working-class minority homeowners in their effort to preserve their neighborhood. "The most critical thing we can do," says Barwick, "is let people know we recognize that where they live has some value." Under Barwick's tenure, the LPC also designated a number of skyscrapers, including the Chrysler, Empire State, Daily News, McGraw-Hill and Lever House buildings.

Barwick says Mayor Edward Koch gave him complete independence and "has not interfered in anything." Preservation activities, however, were extremely upset over the latest LPC proposal to save the two theaters on the site of the proposed Portman Hotel — a project strongly favored by Koch. Barwick, who had come into the controversy after the Board of Estimate had made the basic policy decisions about the Portman, but Jack Goldstein of Save the Theaters says intervention by Barwick might have forced City Hall to consider an alternative proposals to prevent the theaters' destruction. Barwick says the Census to Save New York, a government- and foundation-funded project to identify all potential landmarks throughout the city, could help prevent fiascos like the Portman situation from developing.

Barwick has been asked by Koch to suggest several names as possible replacements, but the mayor is also seeking nominees from other sources. As Skyline went to press, Barwick said he had not decided on his list, which might include several members of the LPC. Selection is complicated by the fact that the post, paying $41,633 a year, is officially part-time, and anyone filling it would not be able to pursue planning, architectural or other projects that would raise questions of a conflict of interest.

Barwick says the next chairperson will find that while there is still criticism and opposition on specific landmark proposals, the "principle of historic preservation and the basic support for the law is no longer controversial. Those who attack it are forced to attack it obliquely." Barwick may be right, but, as the Lever House battle and the opposition by churches to landmarking shows, opponents do not give up easily — and there may be a move to weaken the landmarks law. Barwick says he hopes to strengthen MAS to place it in the forefront of zoning and other city issues as well as preservation. "I think there's a need for a strong, disinterested civic voice," he says.

Harrison Goldin (photo: NYC Office of Comptroller)

Skyline April 1983

Update

As Skyline went to press, a State Supreme Court justice overturned the city's approval of the controversial Million Dollar Landmark, 723 Park Avenue (see Skyline, April 1982, p. 4; June, p. 7; October, p. 5) on grounds that an "equivalent or lesser" impact study had not been prepared. But City Hall said the judge lacked updated information when he made his decision, and the city will either return to Supreme Court Justice Richard Wallack seeking a new decision or appeal to a higher court. Commissioner James Grau and West Side elected officials opposed to the $1 million project had files the lawsuit, charging the developer and the city with violating environmental laws by failing to consider alternatives to the massive project. Lincoln West is planned for the 9,000-square-foot site between 59th and 56th Streets along the Hudson River. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Lincoln West Associates said the death of Carlos Varona, who managed the firm, will not alter construction plans.

Westway looks more and more like a dead project. A federal Court of Appeals upheld Judge Thomas Griesa, who a year ago revoked an Army Corps of Engineers permit for construction of the landfill necessary to build the Battery-to-42nd Street superhighway (see Skyline, May 1982, p. 4; October, p. 4). Then, last month, lawyers for the federal government revealed that there may have been a conflict of interest on the part of an Army Corps official who ruled against undertaking additional studies on Westway's possible effect on the striped bass in the Hudson River. The official had overruled a panel of experts who recommended that a two-week, independently supervised fish study be done.

If the Corps now agrees to conduct a study, a decision on the landfill would be put off another 1-3 years or more. The delays increase the possibility that Governor Mario Cuomo, who has supported Westway, will do what opponents have long sought: "trade in" Westway's fewest highway dollars for $1.4 billion that could be used for mass transit as well as a modest alternative road.

Leaver House is now an official landmark. After months of debate and controversy, and after weeks of putting off a vote, the Board of Estimate finally upheld by 6-3 the Landmarks Preservation Commission's (LPC) designation of the 30-year-old glass skyscraper on Park Avenue between 53rd and 54th Streets.

The Board of Estimate vote saw Mayor Koch, Controller Harrison Goldin and City Council President Carol Bellamy lined up in favor of the designation, with the borough presidents of Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island backing their Manhattan counterpart. Andrew Stein, in his opposition role, and Goldin and Bellamy have two votes each, the borough presidents one. But the March 10 vote was an anti-climax to the drawn-out controversy, since Goldin, who was the swing vote (see Skyline, March 1982, p. 4) announced his position days earlier.

The designation was strongly opposed by Fisher Brothers, who had contracted to buy the land underneath the building from the Goetz family estate. Fisher Brothers wanted to do the building (designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) and replace it with a higher-rise building. The development firm, which has made political contributions in the past to both Goldin and Stein, lobbied hard; but before the vote, one of its lawyers said the company might seek to overturn the designation on grounds of economic hardship, a move that is unlikely to be approved by the LPC. What is more possible is that Lever Brothers, whose lease on the building has 27 more years to run, will seek to take advantage of the law (although the company's plans could run into trouble at the LPC). It's also possible that George Klein or another developer will seek to buy a site adjoining Lever House for a high-rise building that could utilize the landmark's air rights.

In the meantime, however, preservationists are celebrating. "It was a long fight," said Joyce Matz, a publicist who was active in the Lever House battle, "but it's worth it to have a building of such architectural significance."
Barry Bergdoll

"Adolf Loos" and "Jean Prouvé," two major retrospective exhibitions held in 2002 in the IFA’s series "Les Instants Français d’Architecture (IFA)," exemplify the spirit of critical revisions this young institution has focused on the Loos of the early years, were often re-imagined or re-contextualized by students, the scarcely two-year-old IFA has rapidly established itself as a pivotal point and forum for architectural debate, chiefly through its energetic exhibition program. Juxtaposing modest and highly-focused exhibitions of current student or "star-status" projects (such as Norman Foster’s Renault factory under construction in Swindon, England, with larger documentary and historical exhibitions, IFA has avoided alignment with any group or tendency in its enterprise as an instigator of the late-emerging French critique of modernism (see Skyline, November 1981, p. 8). Since the days of London’s Progress of Both Loos’s household names; but names that all too often have hidden behind simplistic rubrics as, respectively, "prophets" and "constructivist wizard" of the Modern Movement.

Adolf Loos: A Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition

Long hailed as a brash pioneer of the modernist rupture with the past, Loos’s provocative essay "Ornament and Crime" (1908) and the abstract garden facade of the Steiner house in Vienna (1910), Loos was praised by Gesquias and Le Corbusier and historically sanctified by Giordano and Penven. More recently his work — more literally appreciated — has known a dramatic flurry of interest and a rush of publications and translations, notably a major retrospective (the first major American survey of Loos’s work) held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1986. Both Loos’s building project and his theoretical treatises on architecture are referred to in American post-modern imagery. Yet Loos’s fundamental classicism, his cosmopolitan irony and his sardonic sense of humor generally go unnoticed — the principal factors in his historiographical leap from father of the Modern Movement to Seconde nature — post-modern "sensibility" — remain enigmatic. The small but briskly installed IFA exhibition presents Loos’s entire career. It opens with a short biography, a French public less absorbed than either its Italian or German neighbors with the revival of Loos. An accompanying two-day symposium (held February 24-25), bringing together the purveyors of that revival and the French research team that has been working on Loos’s career and professional status renders an overview of modernist art and architecture and engineering it sets out to expose. At times it reads more like a mythological than an analytical essay. In opening the catalog, flexible and international Maison du Peuple at Clichy as the industrial prototype for the Centre Beaubourg, Classey ignores the essential issues of the cultural and political differences between 1930s syndicalism and the official programs of cultural and national representation of the Pompidou years. The IFA exhibition has adequately isolated and analyzed a misunderstood thread of modernism, but just a assessment awaits its reweaving into the history of the Modern Movement.

Two exhibitions are presently on view at the Institut Français d’Architecture in Paris: the groundbreaking exhibition of 1870-1933, 50th Anniversary Exhibition, presented in collaboration with the Institut Autrichien de Paris, was curated by Felice Samuele and Patrice Ven°Cren. Jean Prouvé, L’Idee Constructive was presented in collaboration with the Golden Pavilion Museum, Rotterdam, and curated by Jean-Paul Robert. The shows will be on view until April 21 and April 16, respectively.

The exhibition "catalogue" edited by Pierre Marsalga describes the history of the original 1901 exhibition on the construction of Loos’s Tumowsky Apartment (c. 1900). Absurdly enough, it consists exclusively of the pages presented at the original exhibition, including not a single photograph or plan of the disappearing building, a project that was never built.

Yet even in France, where his Nancy atelier represented the foremost of industrial experimentation in construction for some thirty years, an individual "artistic" personality is hard to discern; Jean Prouvé remains famous but little known. This "anonymity," as much a product of Prouvé’s commitment to team design as of the denial of the title "architect," which would subsequently for a forthcoming publication of the Actes du Colloque Loos. A melange of synthetic documents, pieces, impressionistic reminiscences and more scholarly essays, the majority of the material is familiar from recent Italian and Austrian publications, such as the essays by Aldo Rossi and by Burkhardt Ruckehein on Loos as urbanist. More interesting are essays on Loos’s lesser familiar Paris years (1922-26) — the only souvenir being the now sadly altered house for Tristan Tzara on Montmartre — an essay by, for the most enlightening, by historian Bernard Michel. Michel picks up the torch of Carl Schorske’s work in his cogent and insightful analysis of Loos’ position in pre-war Viennese society. Adamantly aristocratic and cosmopolitan in ethos, Loos was profoundly bourgeois and provincial in background. Nor did he occupy the personal or professional center. This image of Loos society might have wished. His clients were precisely the commercial bourgeoisie he disdained in his writings. Loos was an outsider who was an insider, an insider who chose to be an outsider; his architecture and life, Michel suggests, are based on the dialectical tension between acceptance and rejection, between ethics and dandyism.

Jean Prouvé: L’Idee Constructive

In contrast to the determined outsider of Viennese and Parisian society, Jean Prouvé is associated with nearly every major figure in the history of twentieth-century French architecture from Mallet-Stevens to Rogers and Piano. He has played an essential role in major monuments of the functionalists tradition from the Maison du Peuple at Clichy (1936)—the pioneering curtain-wall structure in France — to the immense shell structure of the Centre National des Industries et Techniques congress hall at La Defense (1956). A critic of the principles of industrialization embodied in the "Constructivist" milieu, Prouvé disdained the pretensions of nearly every major French city since the War, and the president of the highly-criticized jury for the Centre Beaubourg, Prouvé has remained at once publicly controversial and the trusted collaborator and ally of countless architects.

Jeans Prouvé’s "star-status" projects, among many other significant "artistic" architectural and sociopolitical associations and to trace the thread of a consistent architectural theory — or at least ethic — through Prouvé’s long career. As both his sparse writings and 13-year-long course at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers (1957-70) demonstrate, theory for Prouvé emerges only from action. His body of work contains none of the drawings of fantastic but feasible projects one associates with great technical innovators. Rather, his inventions are all immediate responses to pressing problems, whether in the challenge of industrializing the housing industry after World War II or in the need for standardized schools and school furnishing in France of the 1950s and ’60s. The designs exhibited are all working projects. Prouvé repeatedly insists, "J’ai horreur de dessiner sans construire" (I abhor drawing without building). Nonetheless they are a didactic clarity that immediately instructs the workman or fabricator in an untried technique, or the student in the thought process where material and technique are inherent in the mental conception of the drawing. But while tracing Prouvé from his origins in the Nancy Art Nouveau to the grands chantiers of the 1970s, the catalogue oversimplifies the complex issues, almost reduces architecture and engineering it sets out to expose. At times it reads more like a mythological than an analytical essay. In opening the plan-open, flexible and international Maison du Peuple at Clichy as the industrial prototype for the Centre Beaubourg, Classey ignores the essential issues of the cultural and political differences between 1930s syndicalism and the official programs of cultural and national representation of the Pompidou years. The IFA exhibition has adequately isolated and analyzed a misunderstood thread of modernism, but just a assessment awaits its reweaving into the history of the Modern Movement.
The Cultural Congress

Richard Meier

Participants at the recent Cultural Congress of Paris

Much has been written about the conference staged in February by France's President Francois Mitterrand and Cultural Minister Jack Lang, but most of the reporting has focused on what seems to be minor issues. I found that the symposium, entitled "Creation and Development," was one of the most stimulating I have ever attended. The meeting, held February 12 and 13 in Paris, involved in its discussions 100 or so invited foreign artists, economists, filmmakers, actors, writers, philosophers and a handful of architects - myself, Kenzo Tange, Renzo Piano, Ricardo Boffil, Vittorio Gregotti.

The organization of the conference was remarkably well thought out. The participants were divided into three round-table seminar-discussion groups; each group met to bear papers and to make comments on three separate topics, "Creation and Economic Development," "Creation and International Relations" and "Creation and Change in Society." At the end of the first day and on the second day the entire group convened for larger sessions open to the press. I was assigned to the group that was concerned with the topic of "Creation and Economic Development," chaired by John Kenneth Galbraith. The participants began the debate by addressing such questions as, "Which periods in history give rise to artistic development and economic power simultaneously?" "Is development per se an economic and creative act?" And, of course, the theme of creation as an economic commodity constantly reappeared. The question was raised as to whether "creation" could be an object or commodity with a short life span, easily disposed of or quickly consumed. Galbraith raised the point that the role of the artist was important to the economic development of Paris, London and New York, for art is a major "industry" in all three cities. Leopold Sedar Senghor, a poet and writer, contended that culture is a basic commodity throughout the world, not just in Europe. The development of industrialization, he further maintained, brings into question the fate of culture, for "the Western world holds something that is wanted throughout the world: a cultural environment."

The issue of creation and economic development inevitably raised questions as to the relationship and obligations of developed countries to the Third World. Participants discussed problems of unemployment in underdeveloped countries, as well as in countries where technology is freeing men and women from physical labor. On this point Wassily Leontief, the Nobel-Prize-winning economist, noted that he had developed a morality of "if you don't work, you don't eat." He further explained that, as this morality changes due to technological factors, culture will take on a more important role.

While many of the questions posed were never answered nor most of the issues resolved, the discussion maintained its momentum the entire two days and did produce some interesting opinions: Galbraith, for example, pointed to the resistance to an association of art and economics on the part of both artists and economists. But, he went on, money does not necessarily destroy art. Other participants warned that one should not confuse creation with artistic production.

Several participants' pronouncements in the discussion took industrialized nations to task. Kate Millett claimed that "culture" is for rich people, that rich people don't create art. Norman Mailer put it even more pithily: "The economy of the First World is an excremental economy," he maintained, explaining further that "the worst aspects of the American economy have proliferated throughout the world. Plastic is a excrement of oil and abounds everywhere. Quantity equals quality." Instead of heaping all the blame on the Americans, William Styron, "a Francophile down to my fingertips," countered that France and America "produce garbage in equal measure." Styron also made an observation that others were to bring up frequently - that Mitterrand had increased the cultural budget in France at the same time that Reagan was slashing funding for the arts in the United States. Susan Sontag, too, expressed amazement that this type of discussion was being sponsored by the French government - a debate that certainly would not occur in the U.S., she added. (It should be noted that France's Ministry of Culture received $1.05 billion or 7.6% of the national budget in 1981, while the U.S. government appropriations only $500 million or .06% of its Federal budget to artistic endeavor.) In the closing session Francois Mitterrand gave an address in which he concluded that, "Any creation of the mind is first and foremost political."

[Footnote] Architecture and urban problems were not addressed at this preliminary meeting. The format and atmosphere were much more conducive to the participation of those versed in the articulation of sophisticated ideas those who are fast on their feet. The artists and architects were clearly out of this literary league. Norman Mailer was the only one to point out the sad inadequacy of French urban values and urged protection of the Paris skyline. I must agree. The French government is at a strange crossroads right now with its regard to its intentions, concerns and interest in urbanism. French architects must begin to identify the meaningful relationship between architecture and society, and further analyze the significance of the buildings they are currently putting up. France's program of urban decentralization and the proliferation of new towns is making the environment increasingly worse than the French seem to think. The French, like the rest of us, need to rediscover certain kinds of "conventions" in architecture.

New American Art Museums by Helen Searing

Here is the first major consideration of art museum architecture as a genre in itself. In civilized society, the art museum is the embodiment as well as the repository of the society's aesthetic values and the museum itself reveals with particular immediacy the nature of architecture as an art. Searing thus offers a concise history of American architecture from the late eighteenth century to the present. "Exceptionally thorough and enlightening." -New York Times $24.95, 112 Illustrations

Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles by Stefanos Polyzoides, Roger Sherwood, and James Tice

Photography by Julius Shulman "The authors combine stylistic advocacy with a well-illustrated architectural survey... Scholars and architects will find this survey as informative as the architecture is refreshing." -Library Journal "A rare and illuminating book behind the facades reveals the beauty of residences built around cool, fragrant, green, and refreshing courtyards, but goes further, explaining why-in this generally exuberant society-so many people sought privacy by enclosing their outdoor places." -A. D. Roeder $24.95, 349 Illustrations

At bookstores

University of California Press

Berkeley 94720
Canadian architectural circles were surprised with the news that relatively unknown Edmonton architect Douglas Cardinal had been selected to design the National Museum of Man for a site in the shadow of the Canadian Parliament Buildings in Hull, Quebec. Cardinal was selected over the heads of the doyens of Canadian architecture by Canada Museum's Construction Corporation Chairman Jean Sutherland and a review panel. The building, budgeted at $93 million, will have a companion new National Gallery designed by Moshe Safdie across the Ottawa River on the Ontario side of the National Capital Region.

Douglas Cardinal is a Metis — one-eighth Stoney Indian. Much was made of Cardinal's native background in the government press release — "He's a Shaman of his adopted tribe" — announcing his commission for this showcase for the cultures of Canada's aboriginal peoples. The sobriquet "Metis Architect" diminishes the accomplishments of this truly radical architect. In a series of subtly undulating buildings constructed in Alberta over the past fifteen years, he has developed a visionary curvilinear architecture in a country that time and again again resists the blandest of corporate architecture, in both public and private commissions. First in a church, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Red Deer (1969), then more implausibly in a huge government office complex — Ponoka Government Services Center (1977)— and a large community college in Grande Prairie (1976), Douglas Cardinal has rejected the rigid rectilinear form language of the Modern Movement and replaced it with an equally emphatic idiom of ceaselessly curving brick.

Cardinal has yet to make it into the august pages of any of the glossies of the architectural press. His work, relying as it does on the subtle modulation of unornamented curving surfaces set against the wide prairie landscape, photographs very poorly. Most visitors who had labelled his prairie regionalism "Gopher Baroque" from a photographic familiar with his buildings have come away stunned by the architectural power of his sensuous and brooding work when seen in person. Another difficulty in dealing with Cardinal and his architecture is that he does not fit neatly into any of the competing design ideologies current in Canada, or anywhere else. Cardinal is anti-modernist, a sentiment more deeply felt by him because it arises in part out of a dismay with what modernization has done to native people in Canada. His feeling is not a mere shift of aesthetic and urbanistic sensibilities; in all of his projects, Cardinal invests far more than token efforts in working with user groups. The result is that his buildings are both popular and popular — recording in their current forms an inescapable anti-modernism missing from the more esoteric, and more truly conservative, post-modern neoclassicism. While most of the architectural avant-garde has opted for the surface effects of an elaborated historicist mannerism, Cardinal has gone past the baroque to a position as one of the few remaining architectural expressionists. It is a lonely aesthetic position, but Cardinal evidently thrives on his loner's status.

Cardinal the expressionist has some well-placed, mercurial friends. Philip Johnson is a fan of his work, calling him "the only man on the whole continent able to make brick work for him." Johnson's comment is brought home by Cardinal's recently completed studio, which, in spite of any other aesthetic cavils one may have about his personal style, is a tour-de-force of brick. Every king-maker and polemicist, Johnson told me that Cardinal "is one of the few true post-moderns; one who actually builds, and doesn't just talk about it." Without a doubt, Cardinal's period of obscurity is over; His $50 million St. Albert Civic Centre opens this year, and in 1986 his National Museum will open in Hull, Quebec.

An obsession with Rome dominated the presentations from people as diverse as John Lawson and George Baird — a buffing concern in the case of Lawson, whose justifications for some appalling intrusions into Pennsylvania's urban fabric had to do with misguided interpretations of Borrominian archetypes. The spirit of Colin Rowe also hovered over the session, again in people as diverse as Steven Peterson and Rodolfo Machado. Machado pointed out that arcades and palazzi were rather less apt than atriums and parking garages. His acceptance of new building types as raw material for urban design and their transformation into object buildings gave a clear direction to Machado's city as a series of rich and heroic monuments, using the vocabulary of place and culture. George Baird felt that the primary obligation of urban building is not to the building itself but more to the void around it. This argument had a slightly different orientation than those of Graves and Machado, whose "object-buildings" would affect the spaces between them by their presence, more than by active intervention. Baird's gentle insertions into the urban, to use two Canadian projects he showed — for Regina and Vancouver — were at the level of fine-tuning existing possibilities.

Steven Peterson relates the loss of the traditional formal garden (the interface between the wilderness and the city) to the loss of urbanism. To regain urban coherence, he stated, one must clearly define the qualities of outside space, since the infinite space of modernism has depleted the urban vocabulary. Michael Graves' rich and humorous case for a figurative architecture, a poetical architecture, was utterly convincing, propagating the conviction that a beautiful object has an ultimate beauty that goes beyond personal meaning. Mitchell/Giurgo's work, which perhaps hilberto has been a strong role model for many architects in the area, only emphasized how potent is the present concentration on typology, as seen in the work of Baird, Graves, Machado and Peterson. Of the speakers, it was Rodolfo Machado who grasped most directly with the present reality of the city, possibly because he was outside North America's dilemma of both defying the past and feeling obliged to rework it.
April 1983

Emerging Voices: Young Architects and Their Work

Tuesday, April 5
Morphosis: Thom Mayne and Michael Rotondi
Peter Waldman

Tuesday, April 12
Anthony Ames: Martin & Jones Architects

Tuesday, April 19
Richard Foster: Peter Wilson

Tuesday, April 26
Kreutz & Olson Architects: Ronald Adrian Krueck
Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Architects

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April 6
John Burgee: Is This Post-Modern?

11
Paolo Portoghesi: Current Trends in Modern Architecture

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Notes & Comment

Installation by Hans Holdt (photo: Dorothy Alexander)

Results of Hong Kong’s Peak competition for a luxury residential development with related club facilities have just been announced. First prize went to Zaha Hadid of England; second prize to Barrington Charles Marshall of Australia; third prize (two awards) to Edmund Baylon Burke of Ireland, and to John Hagmann and David Mitchell of New York. . . . Robert A.M. Stern in association with Martinez-Wong & Ryan of San Diego has just won a limited competition for the design of an office building to house 40,000 square feet of commercial and retail mixed-use space for Southwest State Group Inc., a subsidiary of SEG Austria. The building is to be located on the eastern end of La Jolla’s commercial district, on a hill overlooking the ocean. Construction is due to begin in September 1983. . . . News from Battery Park City Authority: $186 million worth of construction is currently under way at the World Financial Center, a mixed-use development of 18 million sq. ft., four-block complex designed by Cesar Pelli & Associates and financed by Olympia & York. The foundations for all these buildings, the winter garden and the mechanical plant for the entire scheme are now going in. Meanwhile architects with drawings approved for the next phase of residential development (1800 units total) include Bond Ryder Associates, Conklin Rossant, Davis Brody, Ulrich Fraser, Groen & Partners, Keith Knerr & Associates, and Charles Moore. . . . The five finalists for the new Ohio State Visual Arts Center are due to be announced May 25. The partners are Gruzen, Beck, Graves, Moore, and Serota. The five finalists, each teamed with a local architect, are Eisenman/Robertson, Arthur Erickson Architects, Michael Graves & Associates, Frank O. Gehry & Associates, and Paul Milas & Associates. . . . On March 24 Hans Holdt was present at the opening of the new shop he designed for Ludwig Beck of Munich in the Trump Tower. Swanke Hayden Connell and North Design Associates were local coordinators for this 3,500-sq. ft. interior. An entrance retail on painted steel columns, plastered, airbrushed “sky” and painted floor introduces shoppers to a brightly lit interior where they may browse through designer clothes and artifacts. A gold-painted model of Ludwig III’s castle Neuschwanstein (1872) is reflected in a large mirror; reddish pink carpet, marbleized finishes, gray/blue walls with gold trim, a frieze of fake stag’s skulls and white and blue jagger patterned ceiling all create an opulent setting with Bavarian references for the “Rive Gauche” customers. . . . The City of Barcelona is moving ahead with its plans to reconstruct one of the leading icons of Modern Movement architecture, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s German Pavilion, designed in 1929 for the Barcelona International Exposition. Cristiano Cirioli, Fernando Ramus, and Manuel Morales will be the architects in charge of the reconstruction of the pavilion on its original site in Barcelona. . . . A ten-acre piece of property in Long Island City, Queens, is being transformed into the International Design Center New York by Lazard Development Corporation, a subsidiary of Lazard Realty. Lazard has hired E.M. Pei & Partners to prepare the master plan, which calls for retention of the old American Tile Building and the adjacent Bollina Building for the Design Center plus renovating the nearby Executone Building and building a fourth structure. Joseph D’Urso has been hired to design the interior spaces (110,000 sq. ft. on five floors) of the old building. Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel are designing the spaces (50,000 sq. ft.) of the eighth-floor Bollina Building. The entrance facade will have graphics and signage by Vignelli Associates.

Kohn Pedersen Fox’s Procter & Gamble

A recent lecture at the Architectural League brought the audience up to date with Kohn Pedersen Fox’s design concepts and some of their latest projects. As illustration William Pedersen presented the new 17-story twin-towered East Building for Procter & Gamble, now under construction in Cincinnati. The massing of the structure is intended to respond to both the configuration of the site and the overall building pattern generated by the city’s grid. Because of its relationship with a main highway of the city, the tower will act as a marker, or type of gateway. The lower levels of the East Building are designed to form a complex series of square-arched spaces and rhythmic modulations on both the interior and the exterior. As the building rises, the facade changes from first-floor white limestone decorated with black granite, through white marble to the second level; above that white concrete and stainless steel cladding leads to white marble on the bright octagonal tower.

In his presentation Pedersen proposed that architects should try to organize today’s high-rise office buildings with their “primitive” character—free-standing, autonomous, insular and uncommunicative—into collective spaces that support and enhance the public realm. Pedersen sees this as a central task of architecture today, and a major concern of his firm. The lower part of a building (down to the property line), he maintained, should visually link with adjacent faces to define public space. “Visual linkage between buildings is made possible when buildings are composed of elements derived from common concerns,” he contended.

Because the top, middle and base sections of tall buildings are seen in varying degrees of detail by the viewer, Pedersen urges a tall building be designed with this thought in mind. Like other architects currently designing towers—Diana Agost, Mario Gandelsonas and Michael Graves, among others—he argued that to establish a human scale in a skyscraper its expanse should be articulated into small volumes with rich detail and emphasis on “entry” and “procession” space. The surface of the repetitive vertical middle section should respond to the sun’s orientation and “the aesthetic nature of the structural system.” The distant viewer should perceive the top as a “signature” establishing the building as a personality in a community of structures.

While some of the detailing and ground floor articulation of the Procter & Gamble building seem crude—at least in model form—the overall configuration and treatment of the tower seems to fit well with the Cincinnati context. The architects’ sensibility is shown in their building’s stylistic references to nearby older buildings, such as the Cincinnati Post Building and Central Bank Tower, and in its position on the edge of the city grid. —SH

Project: Procter & Gamble General Offices East Building, Cincinnati
Architects: Kohn Pedersen Fox, William Pedersen (in charge), Alex Ward (senior designer), Robert Coppa (project architect), Timothy K. Hartley (project manager), Benedict Curtola (job captain)
Client: Procter & Gamble
Size: 200,000 sq. ft. city block adjacent to existing Procter & Gamble headquarters
Location: On the eastern edge of the midtown city grid, close to a major highway which passes underground
Program: The new 800,000 sq. ft. of offices, restaurant, 500-seat auditorium and sales training center accommodates 1,800 people, and was to be visually integrated with the existing office building and garden.
Structure and materials: Poured-in-place concrete. A limestone facing to the exterior, dark granite medallions, with white marble to the second floor, entrance and lobby. Public interiors have travertine and terrazzo floors with plaster walls and wooden picture rail. Darker granite to base of exterior columns at ground level.
Building Crit

A London Observer
Views New York

Colin Amery

Trump Tower, southwest facade (photo: Dorothy Alexander)

Site plan

This tale of three towers has no happy ending. When
this aptly-named journal asked me to look at some of the
latest manifestations of the skyscraper syndrome in
Manhattan, I felt rather like the doctor called in to
analyze the symptoms of a patient already overcome by
boils. That towers continue to sprout, grow and bloom in
Manhattan is obvious to any visitor. The infinite number
of newer seedling projects will create a jungle-like
effect, with a lack of light and air where it matters — for
the people on the ground. Manhattan's urge to shoot
skyward has little to do with architecture. As expressions
of economics, these new buildings cannot be seen as
architecture, but only as reflections of the Dow Jones
index.

Three towers sharing certain common features — the
Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, 500 Park Avenue, and
the Museum Tower on West 57th Street are recent
examples of the trend of building tall, expensive
residential buildings on highly valuable sites in the
"best" parts of the city. Zoning and development
pressures provide the parameters for their form and
architects try to make the process palatable. Since all
three buildings occupy sites that are of immense civic
importance, the potential for large-scale and lasting
damage to the environment is enormous.

The Trump Tower, 500 Park Tower and
the MoMA Tower are all nearing
completion; an English architecture critic compares and contrasts them.

The Trump Tower cuts like a jagged saw into Fifth
Avenue. It is too tall. It is too coarse in conception and
too slickly unsophisticated for such an important site in
the city. Architects Swanke Hayden Connell have
abused the architectural intelligence of the average New
Yorker: No one will be lured far long by the flashy
glamour of the atrium, which cannot conceal the poverty
of the parts.

Being the part of the building most New Yorkers will
see, how does the atrium add to the indoor urban fabric
of this section of Fifth Avenue? The first thing that
struck this observer was the uniforms of the doormen.
Red tunic and tall bearskin have a loose affiliation to
the Brigade of Guards, but are not characteristic of any
regiment likely to be seen trooping the color before Her
Majesty. The next thing that impressed this visitor was
the harsh sound of a piano and a violin ricocheting off
the brass and marble. The Trump trio plays for your
pleasure daily, although by the time this article is
printed the sound of the musicians will be drowned by
the rush of what is already being described as the "most
magnificent waterfall in the world." Poor Niagara . . .

Atrium

Ground floor of atrium (photo: Dorothy Alexander)

Plans of typical office (left) and apartment (right)

It is a dizzying trip up the escalators through the six
floors of the atrium space in a glittering world of rose
tinted mirrors and hot-pink Italian marble. It is difficult

Projects: Trump Tower, New York
Architects: Der Scutt with Swanke Hayden Connell
Architects. Richard S. Hayden (partner in charge), Der
Scutt (partner in charge of design), John Peter Burie
(project architect), Fanny Gong (senior designer),
Domestic Scale (job captain)

Client: The Trump Organization and The Equitable Life
Assurance Society of the United States

Site: 35,000-sq.-ft. site on the corner of 57th Street

Program: 750,000 sq. ft. of gross building area
includes six retail floors, 13 commercial office floors and
30 apartment floors

Structure and materials: Pour-in-place reinforced
concrete, with a 4-story post-tension concrete truss
above the 6th floor. Breche Porfuir dark marble, pink
mirror glass and polished brass to atrium, brown
mirror glazed exterior

Consultants: Structural Engineers: The Office of Irwin
G. Cantor; Mechanical/Electrical: W. A. DiGiacomo
Associates, Inc. Landscape Architect: Balsley-Kuhl

Completion: 1981
“Polshek’s expanses of glass are not as large or as impressive as Bunshaft’s, but the glass curtain wall retains a general deference to the overall proportional system of the older building.”

Project: 500 Park Tower, 500 Park Avenue, New York
Architects: James Stewart Polshek and Partners
Client: The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States with Tishman/Spyer Properties, Inc.
Site: Southeast corner of 59th Street and Park Avenue, located between commercial area to the south and residential area to the north
Program: The mixed-use tower adds 57,000 usable sq. ft. of new commercial space and 152,000 usable sq. ft. of luxury condominium space to the existing landmarked Pepsico Building. Residential areas consist of 56 condominium apartments and 4 maid’s units on floors 12 through 40; the basement and floors 1 through 11 are commercial space
Structure and materials: Reinforced, poured-in-place concrete, concrete facade
Model apartments: Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, David Hicks
Completion: October 1983

The interior of this residential tower presently can be seen only to the form of two models — one by Gwathmey/Siegell and the other by David Hicks — both totally designed and furnished at dollhouse scale. The apartments are on a grand scale. There are only 56 of them on the 29 floors. Most floors include only two large apartments, each extending the length of the building, with the living rooms in the cantilever section having two or three exposures to the views.

David Hicks has produced his inevitable mixture of antique and modern sentiments for the apartment interiors. It is by any standards uninspired stuff. The Gwathmey/Siegell approach to these good spaces is, by contrast, original and expressive of the architecture. The palette of their design successfully defines the elements of form in the limited architectural vocabulary of the interior spaces. Their use of Mackintosh and Hoffmann furniture indicates their spatial awareness. Mackintosh, above all other European designers, knew how to use furniture to create space.

The solidity and depth of the 12-inch recess suggest discreetly that this architect is aware of the past. The corners of this building, which the two traditions meet, are the evidence of Polshek’s concentration. Polshek prudently retains the past as a pedestal for the future with discretion and respect; 500 Park Tower avoids all excess.

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“The three approaches seem to indicate that discretion produces a better result than daring—Trump’s attempt to cut a figure on Fifth Avenue does little to advance the design of the high-rise.”

MoMA Tower

When the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art decided to take advantage of the museum’s midtown location and build an apartment tower in its air space to fund the museum expansion, they were faced with an architectural problem per excellence. They opted for a design for Museum Tower that, compared to the Trump Tower, is the soul of discretion. While the project has had a complex history of developers and architects, it was finally Cesar Pelli who designed the tower’s façade and museum spaces and Edward Durell Stone the actual apartment layouts. Pelli’s glass aesthetic provides a subtle elegance. He has sheathed the 52-story tower in a skin of glass, carefully organized to include 12 shades of gray and blue in an arrangement of small-scale elements. The effect is rather like a discreetly clad fish—scales of graduated color that change in the light and give the solid structure a fluidity. The top of the building, stepped for terraced penthouses, brings back a sense of excitement that neither Trump Tower nor 500 Park Avenue have.

Inside the MoMA Tower the apartments aim at spacious luxury, and achieve some success. The 9-foot ceiling height and the glazed corners of all but 20 of the 167 apartments make many decorative possibilities available, although the decorators Parish-Hadley Inc., McMillen Inc., and Bray-Schaible Design Inc. have stayed within the range of tiger-skin traditional to nylon-parachute modern for model apartments. None of the designers attempts to realize the potential of this building or see these residences as some kind of reflection of the contents of the museum below. The Museum Tower could have experimented with new aesthetics of interior architecture instead of continuing the faux-malachite approach.

The smaller studio apartments, with their sloped glazing walls, are an agreeable and amusing attempt to top the museum with a pile of high-rise "Marimarina" artist studios. Even more effective should be the apartment of Philip Johnson. Not only has he chosen an apartment with a view of the AT&T building, but he has decided to design the interiors in a reinterpreted Sir John Soane style. A restrained revival of serious neo-classicism—fine moldings and shallow domes—will surround this founding father of the International Style as he looks from the window across his Museum garden to the broken pediment of the granite monument he has left on Madison Avenue.

What are the lessons to be learned from the three latest residential towers? Like the rivalry in thirteenth-century San Gimignano in Tuscany, the urge to erect towers is more of social/historical interest than of architectural.
Interview

Richard Serra and Peter Eisenman

I am not interested in the idealization of the perennial monstems of art history, emptied of their historical function and meaning, being served up by architects and artists as the need to legitimize their artistic production by glorifying past achievements. Their "appropriate historical solutions" are in essence simply a black celebration so much for the exact bronze figure on the pedestal and the iconic column. The return to historical images, icons, and symbols is based on an illusionary notion, the nostalgic longing for the good old days when times were better and art was meaningful. — Richard Serra, Perspectives 19 (1982)

P.E.: In the past, figurative sculpture — the figure on the pedestal — was concerned basically with the meaning imposed on the form of the figure by the artist. Modernist sculpture intended to break away from figuration or, let us say, representation in terms of figurative and specific sculptural, as opposed to supposed sculptural itself. You say that what you want to do is to bring a sense of sculptural intentions. Is this the representation of sculptural intentions?

R.S.: The biggest break in the history of sculpture in the twentieth century occurred when the pedestal was removed. The historical concept of placing sculpture on a pedestal established a separation of the object from the beholder's space of the viewer. "Pedestalized" sculpture invariably transfers the power of effect by subjugating the viewer to the idealized, monumentalized or enlrged thing. That is why it is important to recognize the history of sculpture since Rodin is based upon their desire to represent questionable symbolic values under the guise of a questionable humanism. The fact of the matter is that symbolic values have become synonymous with the act of placing a self-named sculpture on a pedestal.

P.E.: Isn't Art in Arf burgin we text stated that the "viewer" is a function of the piece. Basically this is my response to my sculpture. I know that there is absolutely no audience for sculpture, as there is none for poetry and experimental film. There is, however, a big audience for products that give people what they want and supposedly need but not more than they understand. Marketing is based on this premise.

In terms of architecture right now, a lot of people have a need to build and a lot of clients are concerned with what's considered "relevant." This creates a situation in which both client and architect receive criticism and advice on how to go about it. Since there is no audience for sculpture or poetry, no one demands that they resist manipulation from the outside. On the contrary, the more one betrays one's language to commercial interests, the greater the possibility that those in authority will reward one's efforts. Architects have justifying phrases for the epic" or "civic" or "contemporary" or "mportant" or "compromising." When Robert Venturi's pylons for Federal Triangle in Washington, D.C., were criticized for not being symbolic enough, he returned the next day with the American flag atop each pylon. This is the kind of self-justifying pragmatic compromise I am talking about.

P.E.: You have said that your House of Cards project (1969) is an example of internalized necessity in sculpture, and yet it does make a metaphorical allusion — to something very fragile, almost self-critical. The phrase "house of cards" is traditionally used to imply a negative idea. My first projects were called "houses of cards" precisely because they were autobiographical. Was the self-critical idea intentional on your part?

R.S.: No. The title of the piece is One-Ton Prop. I wrote "House of Cards" in parentheses. In my work, at the time, I had been propping lead elements against the wall. Even in those wall-props, it was easy to understand that the "how" was defining the "what." But these pieces were still related to the pictorial plane of the wall. When I decided to build a freestanding work using the same principle of point load and compression, I wanted to defy a space, to hold a space.

P.E.: Then the space and not the wall becomes an implied armature — a negative substance. Armature is usually thought of as solid, but it could be a void.

R.S.: I wouldn't say the space is the armature. There never has been an armature. Armature and pedestal are old solutions to new problems.

P.E.: In the House of Cards was it your intention to present the object in process, as opposed to having the object represent a process, as is done in what is commonly known as "process" art?

R.S.: As I said, I was interested in the "how" defining the "what." I do not believe in the mystification of the creative process. I would just as soon have the work involved available to anyone's inspection as part of the content. Not that it is the content, but that it would be discernible to anyone wanting to deal with that aspect of my work.

P.E.: The idea of the object in process was not part of the intention?

R.S.: I wouldn't call those works "objects in process" because I don't think of the works themselves as performing. Although when you use lead, it does have a high order of entropy. Obviously it's not going to last, and is going to deflect. That's all implied. I'm more interested in the process as the actual fact of it. You can build a structure under compression that implies collapse and impermanence and yet in its mere existence denies this. What I find interesting about the House of Cards is that as its forces tend toward equilibrium, weight is negated. When something is truly balanced, it becomes weightless.

P.E.: You say you are interested in the notion of the impermanence of the object. Do you think that when the pieces of lead ships knocked down your pieces did so because they were nervous about the limit — whether the pieces would fall on them? They did not want the objects to be out of their control, so they knocked them over before they had a chance to fall over on them. Whether or not the pieces actually fell down, they create the anxiety of the maker and the viewer not being in control. These pieces are interesting to me because they create the objects have their own power. But it seems that you ultimately reject this idea of disequilibrium in your work and that is precisely what you reject because it implies formalist notions of balance, symmetry and, finally, composition.

R.S.: I use gravity as a building principle. I am not particularly interested in disequilibrium.

P.E.: But for you gravity also has formal overtones of convention.

R.S.: No. Gravity has always been a problem in sculpture that is as the scale is resolved is part of any definition of making sculpture.

P.E.: Again going back to the House of Cards, you argue that pictorial illusion is being expanded, and yet the process of translation of the piece into a scultural illusion.

R.S.: Allusion is different from illusion. If something has the potential to decay, that can be allusion. Smithson's Buried Woodshed (1970) and its potential to collapse is an example of allusion. SITE alters Smithson's concept from one of allusion to one of illusion.

P.E.: I would think SITE alters Smithson's concept from illusion to something very literal.

In talking about large-scale sculptures other than those of Smithson — those of Noguchi or Calder, for example — you say that they remain little more than model enlargements. Thus the scale is not conceptually or arbitrary. Are you suggesting that inherent in sculptural concepts there is a notion of scale specificity that is not anthropomorphic, not related to man, but related to the intrinsic being of the sculpture?

R.S.: I don't think it's related to the intrinsic being of sculpture. I think it's related to site and context. Whether something is large or small has nothing to do with scale. Large or small has to do with size. Scale deals not only with the interrelationship of the parts of a sculpture but also, more importantly, with the sculpture's relationship to its context. The context always has its boundary, and it is in relation to that boundary that scale becomes the issue.

When I talk about Calder's and Noguchi what I am saying is that those are studio-made pieces. In the studio they might have scale. To take those sculptures out of

A well-known sculptor whose work is conceived at an architectural scale discusses his concerns with a well-known architect whose work embodies sculptural concepts.
"Architects are openly reactionary in their adaptation of watered-down artistic conventions. Their continual misuse of art as ornamentation, decoration and garnish denies the inventions of the past."

One-Tom Prop (House of Cards), Richard Serra (1969)
the studio and site-adjust them is conceptually different
from building on a site, where scale relationships are
determined by the nature and definition of the context.
You can't build a work in one context, indiscriminately
place it in another, and expect the scale relation to
remain. Scale is dependent on context. Portable objects
moved from one place to another most often fail for this
reason. Henry Moore's work is the most glaring example
of this site-adjusted folly. An iron deer on the proverbial
front lawn has more contextual significance. Architects
suffer from the same studio syndrome. They work out of
their offices, terrace the landscape and place their
buildings into the carved site. As a result the

Belts, Richard Serra (1966-7) (Peter Moore, Castelli)
studio-designed then site-adjusted buildings look like
blown-up cardboard models. There are exceptions: the
work of Le Corbusier, Wright, Kahn, Gehry . . .

P.E.: Rosalind Krauss has written that in recent
sculpture, such as that of Robert Morris and David
Smith, there is a changed relationship of viewer to
object. Because a change in the viewer's position
provides a change in the sculptural object, the space of
the viewer becomes part of the space of the object. The
viewer and the object are seen as occupying the same
space.

R.S.: Changing the context of perception by having
viewer and sculpture coexist in the same behavioral
space implies movement, time, anticipation, etc. This
wasn't started with David Smith or Robert Morris. This
concept was developed by Brancusi in Tiris Jiu and has
continued throughout the twentieth century.
When sculpture enters the realm of the non-institution,
when it leaves the gallery or museum to occupy the same
space and place as architecture, when it redelines space
and place in terms of sculptural necessities, architects
become annoyed. Not only is their concept of space
being changed, but for the most part it is being
criticized. The criticism can come into effect only when
architectural scale, methods, materials and procedures
are being used. Comparisons are provoked. Every
language has a structure about which nothing critical in
that language can be said. To criticize a language, there
must be a second language dealing with the structure of
the first but possessing a new structure.

P.E.: You want architecture to be a neutral background.
When architecture comes off the wall and off the
pedestal, you seem to want it to remain as a discrete
object, to maintain its neutrality. When architecture
becomes both figural and contextual, it worries you
because it leaves the sculptor with little room to operate.
You say that architects — and specifically Robert Venturi
— claim to be dealing with context, yet are never critical
of it. In other words, their "site-specific" architecture is
simply objects that fit into the site or attempt to fit into
the site. This is what in architecture is called
"contextualism." I see a difference between what you
mean by "site-specific" in your work and what Venturi
or the contextualists mean by "site-specific" in their
architecture.

R.S.: What they call contextualism I call affirmation in
the guise of social justification. For "contextualists,"
to build site-specific means to analyze the context and the
content of the indigenous cultural situation, then to
conclude that what's needed is to maintain the status
quo. That's how they seek meaning. They give a great
deal of priority to the person who laid down the first rock
as well as the last person who put up a signboard.

P.E.: And the nostalgia for that?

R.S:. Nostalgia, and the willingness to augment the
existing language. In my work I analyze the site and
determine to redefine it in terms of sculpture, not in
terms of the existing physiognomy. I have no need to
 augment existing contextual languages. I'm not interested
in affirmation.

P.E.: But you are also not interested in negation.

R.S.: No, I'm interested in sculpture; site-specific
sculpture.
Interviues

P.E.: There could be site-specific architecture that is critical, that attempts something other than an affirmation of the fact that everything preexisting on the site is good. Piranesi's recreations and Palladio's redrawings were inventions and not so much concerned with what was actually been on a site. What interests me in your work is that it is neither affirmation nor negation. Most architects do in fact say that whoever laid the first stone made the contest. You do not say that. You try to analyze the context in a way that might necessitate the removal of the first stone.

R.S.: Absolutely.

P.E.: To allow for meaning in architecture, the material itself may be covered up; this is departing from materialism. In this way, to do in architecture what Richard Serra does in sculpture could mean to do the reverse. That is, the actual fact of covering up materiality may bring the object closer to architectural as opposed to material necessity. You do this when you cover up foundations of certain pieces because the foundations literally hold up the pieces, but the work is not conceptually intended to be seen that way.

R.S.: All my pieces will stand if they are placed into the ground and the earth is then backfilled. The reason for the fixtures and foundations is to satisfy engineering codes laid down by cities, the federal bureaucracy, and so on. For example, Rotary Ave was required to have a foundation in order to meet city codes, although it is apparent that a 100-ton quarter-circle will "breastend" anywhere.

P.E.: Let's go on to another subject. You say you reject chance, which is totally random, and you reject judgment, which is totally closed. You say experimentation is somewhere in between, but that your experiments with chance, influenced by William Burroughs and John Cage, led you to a dead end. What is the difference between a judgmental viewpoint and a viewpoint of chance? Would you say there is chance in Jackson Pollock's action paintings, for example?

R.S.: Absolutely not. I saw Pollock's retrospective in Paris recently. In these paintings the skeins don't touch the edge, they never leave the border or boundary; the passage of paint is absolutely controlled. People misunderstand the "how" of the process and think that because someone is standing over a canvas working on the floor in a spontaneous manner, he must be out of control. But the decisions as to how much paint to use, where to put it, in fact, all the formal conditions that go into making paintings — line, massing, overlaying — are tightly organized. In hindsight it's obvious how much structure is contained within the overall field and how much the overall field is a structure. It's not an amorphous field.

P.E.: When Pollock says that his paintings are not random, he is implying that if you knew of his feelings, you know that they must be controlled by an unconscious reality. The imagery that comes up — the black holes that appear large, the white and black, the pulsations — finally overtakes him.

R.S.: I have great difficulty with spurious psychological interpretations. One's psychological make-up at a given moment is developed from the womb on; and one's activity at a given moment is an intersection of congruences that will vest certain emotions. But to say that works are the result of an emotional state is to use a knee-jerk causality that simply does not follow. Critics have tried to explain one of my works — splashing molten lead — as a temper tantrum. It's hard to keep up a temper tantrum for seven days, the time it took me to complete the sculpture. The same confusion surrounds Pollock. Pollock was never out of control. Look at his paintings.

P.E.: You used the term "noncompositional" in reference to Pollock's work.

R.S.: There is no hierarchy of parts in Pollock. There is no relation of part to whole in terms of composition, as there is, for example, in Malevich, in whose work forms float on the ground in compositional relation to each other and the framing edge. There are other examples of European compositional tradition that are more pertinent: the work of Matisse, the Cubists, Mondrian.

P.E.: Your Belt pieces seem to be based on a non-compositional idea; only when you get far enough away from them is there a whole image. For me it is not the elements of composition in architecture — the bay, the column, the window — that are interesting, but what is between them. Similarly, in the Belt there seems to be a serial structure, without beginning or end, and the important consideration is not the elements but the spaces in between — the negatives, the voids.

R.S.: Although non-figurative, the Belt piece, done in 1966-67, is structurally related to Pollock's University of Iowa painting. If my origins as a painter culminated in anything, they culminated in Pollock. Then I felt a need to move into literal space.

P.E.: The open spaces you moved into were cuts in the landscape, cuts that were seen as substance, not void. These cuts try to create substance out of nothing. An open field has a certain neutrality about it because of its insubstantiality. When a cut of some kind is introduced — a wall, a line, whatever — you are not creating a figure in the ground, but you are creating out of that


Richard Serra (photoc by Dorothy Alexander)

...ground. Is it not the figure/ground nature that is important, but giving substance to the void.

R.S.: My elevational pieces point to the indeterminacy of the landscape. The sculptural elements act as barometers for reading the landscape. They are not viewed as discrete sculptural units nor as parts in a larger composition. It's impossible to have an overview of the work in its entirety. In different proximities the work functions and is perceived differently. At a close distance the elevational fall of the landscape is experienced step by step. From a further distance the elevational fall seems measured by the sculptural elements.

P.E.: Don't the actual physical pieces, the sculptural objects, then become the pedestal or the frame for the landscape? Isn't there a reversal whereby the object itself now becomes the frame?

R.S.: It does become an element defining the landscape within its given boundaries, but it does not become the frame. If you use the word "frame" in referring to the landscape, you imply a notion of the picturesque. I have never really found the notion of framing parts of the landscape particularly interesting in terms of its potential for sculpture. Smithson was interested in the picturesque. His Spiral Jetty (1969-70) not only spirals...
you out into the landscape, framing vistas of the landscape, but as it dovetails back on itself, it also leads you to concentrate on its internal structure. A more recent project, the neolithic tomb of Uluburun, being a centripetal structure, leads you into its vortex hit by hit. That’s an interesting notion in terms of its relation to the narrative of seeing but it’s not of particular concern to me.

P.E.: Bringing an object to reality is certainly the opposite of abstraction, which is not an aspect of your work. Your work has an immaterial — that is, a latent or other structure in the material real. Abstraction deals with the notion of the inessential, the approach of immateriality. While a fractal may be an abstraction of a column, your work is not an abstraction of anything. You are in fact making concrete ideas real.

R.S.: For the same reasons that I am not interested in the distinction between concrete art and abstract art, I am not interested in whether my art is called structural or abstract. I don’t subscribe to labels and “isms,” although many have certainly been applied to my work.

P.E.: I would call your work “structuralist” in the sense of looking for the structure inherent in a text. It is a matter of searching in the structure not so much for the text or the meaning of the text as for the inherent structure of the text. What is the internal necessity, the inward feeling that you have talked about? It is not the other than the work’s own structure? What is the sculptural identity that these things are revealing?

R.S.: I can’t answer that question. It depends on one’s knowledge of the condition and history of architecture, painting and sculpture; it depends on what one brings to a specific work. I don’t think there is any ideal interpretation; I don’t think I need to articulate a dogma of how to see my sculptures.

P.E.: I am trying to get at the notion of structure as part of the ineffable condition of an object. The presence of the structure itself is no guarantee of art. What is it that makes art out of structure? Is that what you concern yourself with.

R.S.: It’s not something I program into my work, although I may recognize it. I am most interested in selecting structures that define the context in question.

P.E.: But aren’t you interested in their self-selection rather than your selection of them? You do not invent or use an arbitrary selection; they select themselves from a range of possible archeologies.

R.S.: I am confused. They don’t select themselves. They are not fabricated. What is it that you are talking about? You imply that I am just there to somehow receive structures?

P.E.: No, you are not passive. I am arguing that you engage in another activity. You do not invent or select but rather uncover a range of possibilities.

R.S.: By implication the selected solution is an attempt to resolve all of the possible solutions to a problem. The decision (selection) process differs according to the context, although there is never any certainty.

P.E.: You did not invent the Rotary Arc. You found it.

R.S.: Persistent in the world! That sounds strangely Calvinistic.

P.E.: No, preexistent in the context and in the universe of sculpture.

R.S.: A tilted aren’t decorative in the history or repertoire of sculpture.

P.E.: It preexisted. It was there and you found it.

R.S.: Where?

P.E.: It preexisted conceptually. It is possible to conceptualize it before you make it become." The idea that you do not determine — the inherence of sculpture, the inherence of an object — don’t you think they preexist and that your work gives them substance?

R.S.: I don’t believe that my sculptural concepts are found objects. They are inventions. Of course they relate to the tradition and history of sculpture, but they are still inventions.

In the universe of sculpture the concept suggests itself. Let us say you are not playing a game of chess... All potential lines exist, but all lines are not necessarily winning lines nor are they necessarily elegant. Some are more effective or beautiful than others. But the context... the configuration of the poetic — the art of the winning game — lies within the rules of chess

Richard Serra and Peter Eisenman

The problem of self-referrality does not exist once the work gets out of your hands and is publicly discussed. Even negative controversy is evoked by the site-specificity of the sculpture. P.E., if a work is not your work, it is not the person’s of the author. It’s a curious fact that all the petitions against my piece in the Federal Plaza dealt with the property of the work, whereas the art press never criticized the work but attacked the person. Here we have another form of promulgating self-referrality.

Once the works are erected in a public space, they become others’ works. By their inherent value and explicit values they become judgmental by what they exclude. They simultaneously criticize what they neglect and pass judgment on other works.

P.E.: The self-referrality that I am speaking about in your work is not narrative. It is not telling Richard Serra’s story. It is telling its own story. Modernist self-referrality created a split between author and object. James Joyce was thought to be non-narrative in the sense that he removed the imposition of the author between the reader and the object. I believe the same thing exists in your work, although it is not modernist. The object tells me how to see it — that is its self-referrality.

If you don’t want to use the term self-referral, you could say your work is “structural” in that the dialogue it opens up is an architecture of its own structure. This kind of structure is not an abstraction. If anything, this archaeology reveals what has previously been hidden in the classical closed or contained object.

P.E.: You say your sandboxes — my “chess board” — is a methodology and not merely a series of images. The methodology seems to be figuring post-modernism in things rather than similarities. You seem to be looking for those seemingly unrelated differences thereby to end the similarities. But your intervention is limited by the sandbox. Your sandbox, for instance, is defined very differently from Robert Morris.

R.S.: I would hope. The problem is that Morris plays in my sandbox and everybody else’s. I call that plagiarism, other people call it mannerism or post-modernism. Those who play in others’ sandboxes, or who play with the icons, forms or themes or history, label under the assumption that their work can be dispersed. The source and center of work no longer exists to make the necessity of invention but from strategic game plans.

P.E.: I want to ask you about ideology in relation to structure. It seems to me that the notion behind the landscape becomes meaningful in the literal sense of ideology. I believe that your urban pieces are antithetical to that; in their anti-ideology they become ideological.

R.S.: Art is always ideological, whether it carries an overt political message or is for art’s sake and based on the ideological separation of the art work. Art always, either explicitly or implicitly, manifests a value judgment about the larger sociological context of which it is part. Art supports or neglects, embraces or rejects class structure. Tutt’s Monument to the Third International is no more ideological than a black painting by Ad Reinhardt. Ideological expression does not limit itself to an affirmation of power or political bias. To answer your question about your project of manifesting the idea of my work, there is no difference in the degree of ideological content in my urban and landscape pieces.

P.E.: I would argue that your work is non-ideological in the sense that it does not speak to the meaning of man’s condition today vis-a-vis the natural and physical world. Man has unleashed physical forces that can destroy him at a greater rate now than ever before. This idea has changed the former relationship of man to God and to the natural environment. I think our future, but now we are in what I call a futureless present, a condition of immateriality, in that we face the biological extinction of the entire civilization.

Man’s relationship to God and nature has traditionally been mirrored in architecture. But I don’t believe you address this issue in your work, nor do most architects. It seems to me that underlyings in your pieces’ return to history is their intuitive realization that the post-man condition does occur. It seems that the anxiety of man’s present condition has caused architects to abandon their responsibility and to go back to history as if they were ostriches sticking their heads in the sand.

R.S.: You can’t construct a causality between the fear of biological extinction and post-modern architecture — I’m thinking through history books. That’s doomsday philosophy. True, modernist architects believed in a better future; they understood that developed utopian ideas for city planning as well as pragmatic solutions for workers’ housing. But post-modernists also believe in the future: the future of AT&T and corporate America.
Steven L. M. Aronson

Steven M. L. Aronson: Today nobody can imagine any architect creating the kind of symbolic universe of world order that Le Corbusier, for example, seems to expect, to create a new order, a new society, a new form. It's a very romantic notion. In the same way, the romantic notion of architecture is still held in certain architectural circles.

Philip Johnson: No, of course not. It's like Shakespeare or any other great man — each generation has its own version of a great man. And in order to change his version, you have to change the classic interpretations of the works. But only the great men themselves are not only not embodied. They had an impersonal conviction about a kind of individualism that makes a tremendous impression on society that would alter the nature of society. The great historical American architect is the one who can change history. He's a kind of a historical architect.

S.M.A.L. I: But what about the myth of the architect as someone who can change the world through architecture?


S.M.A.L. I: Wright didn't see Rand's joke, did he? He believed the myth.

P.J.: Sure. So did I. So did the whole Modern Movement. Today we have our hands full just trying to save architecture, save what's left of Park Avenue, but back then we were out to save the world, not just textiles.

The Modern Movement disintegrated because the architects were just as moved by salvation through architecture to survivalism as we've got up to, damn-lucky to have a job.

S.M.A.L. I: No architect has pure, idealistic goals anymore.

P.J.: Oh, all the old people still do. But I think that belief system in America finished, the descendant of that you can do good by having social-housing-done-by architects, the social housing that is trying to do social-reform thing — that's one I hate. I don't like Wright. Move the capital to the middle of the country. That's ridiculous. It's one of those things. Not only said it, he designed one practically. A great park and building complex at the Golden Triangle — where the Messongahs and Suezkeba became the Ohio. Oh, he was a great magnate. Magnificent, he was our greatest individualist. And what did he design? It was our most famous, but he was a politician, not a professor, a self-appointed architect.

S.M.A.L. I: In terms of how architectural reputations are made, do you think it's like the rich people, who think that the rich people on Martha's Vineyard that you've got, the rich people on Martha's Vineyard that you've got, is that it's all great.

P.J.: I'd have to say that's what it is. And I'd say, if I got the job, I'd take the flip thing form, this wonderful dimension, and put through these cylinders like this if all right. I'd get the job.

S.M.A.L. I: There are many styles of selling. You're clever. You're good at all of them. And there are two kinds of selling: one is the presentation of self. God's in the details, Philip. — Remember, you dress beautifully. Robert Stern described you in print as a clotheshorse.

P.J.: Bob Stern, of course, is describing himself. He was a slob, you see. Oh, and then he got married to a Gimbel and got into the clothes, and he said himself, "Philip Johnson is a clotheshorse, it must have something to do with success, I'll be a clotheshorse, too." This is my interpretation. People always describe themselves when they're talking about somebody else.

S.M.A.L. I: So does an architect's personal appearance advertise his work, the way a movie star's, or not?

Are architects supposed to be stylish, idiosyncratic, and dramatic?

P.J.: No. No absolutely not.

S.M.A.L. II: What about Richard Meier? He has an aura. He just seems to float miles above the grip of everyday life — his silver half, his silver Mercedes, the blue-white shirts. He's a dreamboat. His detailed design of himself must attract clients.

P.J.: He hasn't attracted many. Oh no, he hasn't had much work to speak of. Yet he's the most deliberate of all the architects to be an architectural personality. And he's very tall and very, very handsome, and I enjoy him. I'd rather have lunch, let's say, with him than with any living architect.

To me the ideal architects are Mies, Corbusier, and Robert Hines, and they are the three. Wright, of course, had his own way of self-projection. The purple cape. The purple hair. The hair that was really purple but blue, and the cape wasn't exactly purple, either — these things get exaggerated. But the other two were working on their work. That's all they did. Mies and Corbusier didn't give one damn about anything else. They might have thought they did, but they didn't. Even Wright didn't really care as much as he thought he cared, and his flamboyance wasn't really to the jugular of success as Stern's.

People thinking people didn't, but I think they were right, that he was successful in his work at that time, whereas any artist with his salt should stick it out, you know, and have the consistency, and get to do successes as a thing in itself. It's like money — plenty of people work for money. Like the Skidmore firm. It's such a big firm, what else would you work there for? You gotta keep the firm running, increase profits over last year. Now that I don't know what to — money doesn't occur to me. Success I thought didn't occur to me as such, but when I analyze Stern's singularized deviation to success, I wonder. I don't know. It's a question.

S.M.A.L. III: What precisely are the ingredients in Robert Stern's success?

P.J.: Chaspubh, a shiit. You can call it arrogance if you want to. It's so obvious that he has that style from Frank Lloyd Wright. But it's better to be humble once than false humility. I'm very fond of Stern. He's got a style. It's as simple as the Philip Johnson of his generation.

S.M.A.L. III: Does Philip Johnson think that Robert Stern has succeeded in his arrogant ambition to be the Philip Johnson of his generation?

P.J.: Well, I could be another person if I said yes. You see, you can't expect Papa to say that the son is going to be as good. If he had, he wouldn't have enough amour. And you can get away with that. I don't have to be interested in the kids, but do you really want to be good? Think how the father really wants his son to rival his architect. Who's going to be as good as him? It was the end of the architecture. He didn't want anything. He wanted to be the only architect that everyone liked. He actually said, "If we were to create the mistake of a project in history by building the mistake of a house, and Mies was the same way. So was Corbusier.

S.M.A.L. III: What precisely are the ingredients in Philip Johnson's great success?

P.J.: Very much the same as Stern's — chaspubh. I'm a shiit, too, you know. I'm not very good at human relations. I don't have a whole lot of friends. Mostly enemies. And quite naturally when you get to my status you have to have them — what you would do without them? But as for Stern, I'm not as bright as he is, anywhere near. That man can absolutely think rings around me, and his historical acumen and knowledge are second to none. I think he's the best architectural historian living. We can write . . . Stern is a marvelous writer.

S.M.A.L. III: Was it you who introduced him to Gerald Hines?

P.J.: Ya, sure. Oh, ya. I also introduced Gwathmey to Hines. And I introduced Sert to Hines. He's got as many done houses for Hines, who's a genuine patron of architects — he's done more jobs than anyone else, like Gehry and the whole bunch, made a fortune. He thunked out. He submitted plans for Hines's house in Martha's Vineyard that didn't get by the local design council, and Stern took over. I just think that Stern is the brightest son-of-a-bitch. My lunch list would be Stern, then Meier, but for different reasons. Stern hates Meier, by the way.

S.M.A.L. III: But he sings Meier's praises.
P.J.: I didn't do it! I did it! Oh, shit. Well, you see, it shows through. And I liked Wally. Of course, I tend to like people when they're no longer competitors. I'm much better off with Robertson than with Falleddo. He's the most fabulous architect. He doesn't admire me, because I was a shit. But he's my friend. He's my friend. Oh, I'd say, "Well, you do want to do a lovely building, don't you go to Bunshaft?" Unanswerable. Sheet producers. That's why I don't want to make that mistake. Bunshaft was building every building in New York.

S.M.L.A.: Let's not overstate the case for what is happening in architecture today—you are the father and mother of many architectural sons. Now that Peter Eisenman and the rest have become community leaders, as to being out to kill the elder of the tribe—namely you?

P.J.: Well, I fell in love with another architect. Mies van der Rohe, and later I revolted against him.

S.M.L.A.: Do you think that Eisenman's identification with his architecture and Urban Studies is going to work for or against him, now that he wants to be commercially successful and practice architecture in a big way?

P.J.: He's the brightest man in the country. My lunch list would be Eisenman, then Stern, then Mies.

S.M.L.A.: Another preferred lunch guest? Another brightest man in the country?

P.J.: Eisenman is an entirely different intelligence from Stern's. They're the two brightest people on the horizon. Today, I'm surprised that Stern and Robertson have gone into partnership together.

S.M.L.A.: From your experience with corporate clients, how would you say that Eisenman will have to overcome his image as a purely intellectual in order to make it big in big business?

P.J.: That's easy enough—send Robertson. Eisenman wouldn't appeal to an executive of Pan Am; Robertson would, he's the image of the corporate executive. Eisenman has a wonderful voice, a losh d'v, oh ya. But actually, Eisenman wouldn't hurt. He thinks he's an intellectual like you and me, and he's wrong and he's right. I don't know what he is and a terrific manager. I mean, you can't start a school like the Institute and Robertson and you have the层 at the top and it's all better, but you can't be in the world for fifteen years and still be banished, and still be inexcuseable, without . . .

S.M.L.A.: Eisenman seems to function as a kind of impresario of the avant-garde.

P.J.: Ahhh. Exactly. He's perhaps like that man in the dance, who we do mean, Dlhahites. He plays with all of us crazy people. He's wonderful with the crazies. He said, "leave the crazies to me." He doesn't know how I revel. He's the first to revel on his own genius.

S.M.L.A.: Why? Is he also crazy?

P.J.: Like a fox. He's got a terrific sense of how to use craziness togeme the world. It was the only way to get to Koolhaas, Krifer, . . . Rossi, most of the Europeans of today. You could only get to them if they showed you and you still have a show of Wally Harrison and have a show of me—I the oldies, you see, Eisenman's so broadminded, and so clever at getting in the whole ball of wax was that, there's only one place in New York where architecture happens—at the Institute. He certainly did surprise us all by wanting to become a commercial architect. One more thing on his belt. He's so good at everything else that why should he be successful at this, too? Well, it's the Philip Johnson problem, you know, couldn't李先生. He gave seven over-a-hundred-millions-dollar buildings. That's a lot of buildings, and the fees aren't bad.

S.M.L.A.: But doesn't strike you as ironic that this man who loves everything about his architect partner the solid and jaunty Robert Jcrlbernoff?

P.J.: That's not so hard, Robertson's essence of WASP-ness, of the bookish gentleman—he's a Virginian gentleman—because you would never have a bookish political in the sense of WASP-getting-ahead-in-the-State Department, correct-tie point of view. It sounds hard, but it needn't be; it's very, very important in political accomplishment. He'd like to be mayor of New York, but he has none of the characteristics of Robert Dreyer, the department of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art. He's written editorial blood for years, because he doesn't want to be mayor. And the Museum is a real magazine, and to put it in any format at all took a Drexler. Drexler's a beautiful writer. He's just crazy—like everybody else.

S.M.L.A.: Clearly, architecture books are not just for architects. Of course, you say, that Inoue Kahn wouldn't have been "establishment" at the late age he did if Vincent Scully hadn't written what he did about him. Here is Kahn's, was a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and became a luminary, attracting large commissions.

P.J.: Large commissions? You mean the capital at Bangladesh? Well, Lou Kahn and I were friends, and he's the most magnificent man I've ever met, and he is a human being. And, as I understand it, he is an artist. We're "born out of light." "Material is spirit." "In the beginning lies eternity." "I ask you, what is there?" He convinces me. I'm not an artist, but I'm a human being. And Kahn is an artist, and he isn't overwhelmed . . .

P.J.: Scully overrates everybody, I think it's one of his charms. When he built his own house, he copied my Glass House, but he never gave me the full PR treatment. He gave me full treatment. Then he did Kahn. Then he did Drexler and now Rios. Well, they can't all be gods. But Scully is by nature an Irish elfin enthusiast—a type that I happen to love, so it's all right with me. But whether it's good for the subject or not in the long run, I don't know.

S.M.L.A.: You see Scully as a kind of publicist, then?

P.J.: Nothing wrong with that. Less a historian and more a publicist, that's exactly how Leon Venturi put it. But Scully is enthusiastic about him because he's not too enthusiastic about anyone else. Not that he doesn't write enthusiastic letters that Stern and Eisenman put together, Scully says, after all, Johnson's going to be known for his books, not his works. He is hardly complain. Only, I'm an artist. And artists are very sensitive. Scully's greatest fault is that he isn't overemotional, not that he's terrible. I mean, it's so personal and ridiculous. I don't mind admitting that actually I'm very partial to critical. That's why I didn't understand what you were talking about that's different. We all have a human, we all . . .

Paul Goldberger feels that since he's a critic he can't write about saying something bad about even something that's good.

1. One architect who was present has a different "take," as Johnson might say, on the occasion: "It was typical Johnson. He won everyone's good humor—told everyone they were terrible, but didn't hurt anyone's feelings, and poured on something else were academically interested in it."

2. The fifty-seven-year-old Venturi, feeling perhaps that he was controversial, went on the press, as he is known among those who give out work, now has a PR super: Lutina Balldridge, Jacqueline Kennedy's social secretary, was hired. The way Venturi recently came upon a press kit from "Thirt Balldridge barracks the Venturi image. Now, Venturi recently, and at the press conference, interviewed an architect friend: "did you know that Bob Venturi has a press agent?" The friend said, "I believe it." Johnson promptly phoned him and several other architects as well and a copy of the press release. In truth, Johnson was shocked. Thirt Balldridge says: "I think they were very smart to have a public relations firm to make people aware of them. After all, they're in Philadelphia."
Italian architects have been in the vanguard of furniture design since the 1960s; only in the last few years have U.S. architects been getting involved in a similar way. With Knoll International and Vitra setting an example, other firms, along with many eager architects, are making their own plans. Architects are naturally intrigued by the prospect, since the design of a piece of furniture presents a possibility to explore in a microcosm ideas that they may be developing at an architectural scale. In many cases, too, architects simply seek furnishings suitable to the scale and style of their architectural environments. Given the current obsession with historically referenced architectural style, the design of furniture that is not too tinted in a modernist aesthetic is in demand. Early modern pieces, too, are increasingly favored over the familiar Bauhaus staples.

As witnessed by two famous chairs of Breuer and Mies van der Rohe—the Wally chair and the Barcelona chair—furniture by architects can catch on with the public in a way that buildings may not. Although the piece of furniture may solve quite different problems than a building, the design object quickly imparts to the observer much about the architect's own attitude toward architecture. The concern with comfort and use is the most obvious clue. The approach to form, materials, and structure also indicate where the architect's interests and concerns lie. The crafted elegance of Richard Meier's designs, shown opposite, or the technical inventiveness of Emilio Ambasz's chairs, or the structural clarity of Mario Botta's chair all represent certain orientations one finds in their larger-scale work.

But designing a piece of furniture is in some ways much more treacherous than designing a building. Because furniture can be tested, seen and evaluated more quickly and easily, public opinion about an architect's work can be formed by this isolated evidence. Thus each piece of furniture both advertises—and betrays—its architect.

This month Skyline surveys the furniture scene and spotlights objects designed by architects and designers from a select group of showrooms. We also explore how one firm, Knoll International, has managed to combine a commitment to architect-designed products with the everyday realities of producing, manufacturing and selling furniture.

A little over five years have passed since Knoll International was purchased by General Felix Industries. Since that time, Knoll, GFI, and Marshall Cogan and Stephen Swid, young investment bankers who bought GFI in 1974 have increasingly gained public recognition. Harvard Business Review has found Knoll's achievements extraordinary, in both sales volume and perceived image. According to Marshall Cogan the sales for the past year were $170 million world-wide—-as compared with the 1977 figure of $61 million. (According to Moody's Index General Felix's overall net sales were $300 million in 1981, and $226,460,000 the first nine months of 1982). While Knoll's growth rate has been about 25 percent a year for the last few years, Swid and Cogan's current predictions are 15 to 20 percent sales growth per year—-a figure they see as an "natural" after the explosive start.

Meanwhile, the image of Knoll-designed furniture has been developing in parallel with an increased exposure to the same time period. Specifically, Knoll's program of involving architects in the design of furniture and showrooms has brought them great attention.

Knoll's hegemony as a prestigious and innovative furniture designer and manufacturer was undisputed from the time that the German-born Hans Knoll founded the company in 1939 and with his wife Florence became systematically introducing the "modern" furniture of Mies van der Rohe, Eero Saarinen, Charles Eames and, later, Marcel Breuer to the U.S. market. (The firm also offered interior design services in the planning stages to their clients.) With the change of ownership, however, during the 1960s and '70s, Knoll had to come to rely increasingly on its "warhorses." By the mid-1970s designers had stopped talking about Knoll. Then, after 1977, with Nan Swid working at Knoll as Design Manager and later, President and Director of Design, a group of architects and designers new to the company were enlisted to develop various lines of furniture.

First Joseph D'Urso—a talented young designer known for his highly polished minimal interiors—came out with a line of furniture. His designs were followed by desks and cabinets by architects Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel, and nine pieces of seating and tables by Richard Meier (see p. 21). Next, a collaboration between architects and designers new to the company were enlisted to develop various lines of furniture.

The opening of new showrooms, some designed by architects, has occurred almost simultaneously with the appearance of new products. D'Urso's furniture was introduced in the new York showroom with designs by Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown in 1980; Richard Meier's furniture was specified for the first time in the newly renovated showroom and offices that Knoll had just opened in SoHo, designed by in-house staffer Paul Haigh. The Boston showroom, designed in 1980 by Gwathmey/Siegel, also occupies its own building on Newbury Street, and Stanley Tigerman is currently renovating a showroom in a Knoll-owned building on the fringe area of Houston. (He is also executing the master plan for the site, which includes two other buildings owned by Knoll.) Two years ago Knoll had Lee Stout, Creative Director of Design, do the showrooms and facade of its building in Atlanta.

Knoll's choice of showroom designers has been criticized nevertheless. Some think that the showrooms would present a stronger, more dramatic image if Knoll had done what Soular did with Michael Graves—have one architect represent all the different architecture shows new in the past year.

Other architects say that Knoll's choice of designers doesn't represent a consistent point of view about architecture or design, that Knoll is simply trotting out a sampling of ware from the "established" avant garde. Of Richard Meier, for example, is a far cry from that of Stanley Tigerman; the designs of Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel are ideologically distinct from those of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown. Nor does the "established avant garde" produce iconoclastic designs on the order of those being designed by architects Enette Sobotta, Michael Graves and Hans Hollein for the Italian-based Memphis group. While Swid and Cogan have avowed to "provide a platform" for young and talented architects and designers, Knoll is also keeping with Knoll's longstanding position at the "leading edge" of design, the pieces these architects are producing (compare to be a few steps back from that edge. This criticism applies even more to the rest—the majority of Knoll designs are developments that are refined and elegant, but not earth-shattering.

Knoll's choices may be "safe," but the quality of the designed object is nonetheless very much present. The men introducing furniture well in the marketplace, and a good part of their success probably has to do with the timeless quality acquired by designs that are not going past too close to the "edge."

According to Swid, the Joseph D'Urso collection has consistently been a huge seller: "People who are buying with Knoll's stand in the present. Meanwhile two rocking chairs designed by architects Stanley Tigerman and Margaret McCurry are in the development stages, and more architects and designers are waiting in the wings.

At the same time as these American architects are being "showcased," Knoll International, headquartered in Paris, has been aggressively developing a well-known European architects and designers: Ettore Sottsass has just designed new sofas and tables for Knoll that are being currently shown in Europe, although they are not available yet in the U.S. At a show in Paris, Altogether Knoll claims to have 800 different products in production, including fabrics and products in its lines world-wide, with forty new products in development.

Obviously the furniture from Meier, D'Urso, Venturi et al. represents a tiny portion of the total product line at Knoll. As Jeffrey Osborne explains, the office systems designs, of which Knoll carries four, are the strongest sources of income. They usually are designed by industrial designers familiar with the complex technology, functional requirements and price factors involved in the development of office systems. The architect-designed pieces act as "pull-through" items, as Stephen Swid puts it. In other words, they occupy the most visible and the most used lines of furniture or the showrooms and presumably end up buying the staples. A careful balance is struck between seduction and sell.

This careful balance is backed up by a well-thought-out managerial policy. In-house designers receive a percentage of the royalties for their designs, profit-sharing is available to all employees, salaries are high, and the firm is profitable. The young Knoll employees have been consistently introduced to the architects and designers new to the company. The year 1983 was a turning point for Knoll: in the first year of production alone—-the single-most successful product Knoll has come to take out with Swid and Cogan taken over. "While the Zap line of office/dividers and storage units is Knoll's largest seller in terms of dollar volume and quantity of sales, that same system of industrial designer Otto Taul of West Germany, was developed and designed before Swid and Cogan came on the scene. Three months is too little time to tell how the Richard Meier line of furniture is doing, Cogan states, although reports indicate the side chairs and dining/conference tables are moving the fastest.

In other words, the Knoll architecture showrooms are designed to be a platform for the young and talented architects and designers under contract world-wide. These developments make Swid and Cogan's recent record with Knoll International all the more interesting. How to maintain this momentum and make it even more a platform for the next generation of architects and designers? The building of a Knoll-owned building on the fringe area of Houston. (He is also executing the master plan for the site, which includes two other buildings owned by Knoll.) Two years ago Knoll had Lee Stout, Creative Director of Design, do the showrooms and facade of its building in Atlanta.

Knoll's choice of showroom designers has been criticized nevertheless. Some think that the showrooms would present a stronger, more dramatic image if Knoll had done what Soular did with Michael Graves—have one architect representing all the different architecture shows new in the past year. Others suggest having a more complete spectrum of architects design the showrooms. Knoll emphasizes, however, that showrooms should display merchandise, and one senses that it is afraid that too many architect-designed showrooms would be a "nightmare." Instead Knoll seems to seek its distinctiveness by occupying single buildings.
Meier and Gwathmey/Siegel at Knoll

Sarah Halliday

Included here are examples of recently designed furniture by Richard Meier and Gwathmey/Siegel.

**Richard Meier collection (1982)**

*Dimensions and list price:*

- Chair: 21" W x 20"D x 27¾"H, 17¼" seat; $2,520
- Low stool: 17¾" diam. x 15¼"H; $1,590
- High stool: 13¾" diam. x 27¾"H; $2,120
- Chaise: 72" W x 27½"H x 23½"W; $13,500
- Telephone stand: 18½" diam. x 27¼"H; $3,120
- Table: 40" x 40" x 15¾"; $8,750
- Table: 60" x 40" x 27¾"; $7,620
- Table: 40" x 80" x 27¾"; $7,270
- Table: 60" x 96" x 27¼"; $7,940

*Description:* All items come in black and white laminated hard maple veneers or in natural solid hard maple, with mortise and tenon construction. Black and white finishes are hand-rubbed urethane lacquer; natural finish is hand-rubbed low-sheen vinyl. The high stool has a stainless steel footing, and the chaise is channel-tubed fabric or leather with down pillow.

*Comments:* In an ensemble, the pieces form a geometrically abstract and beautifully proportioned collection. Each item becomes a sculptural element, ordering and containing the space around it. The dining table top's rounded — rather than angular — corners, however, detract somewhat from the purity of line and form of the rest of the pieces. Similarly, the chaise departs from the astringent simplicity of other pieces because of its overall bulk and the density of its vertical supports. Unofficial word is that the conference table and side chair are selling well, but we find the low stool the most formally elegant item. It is both a pure object and a functional one. Heavy enough to denote sturdiness, it has neither the uncomfortably sharp seat edge of the high stool, nor the too-low and unaccommodating backrest of the armchair.

*Office desks and table by Gwathmey/Siegel (1982)*

*Dimensions and list price:* Desks are 62", 74" and 81½" long by 30" or 39" deep and 28½" high. Matching credenzas are 20½" deep; the table is 101" long by 39" deep by 28½" high. Some examples are listed below.

- Two-pedestal mahogany desk 62" x 39" x 28½"; $2,750
- Two-pedestal mahogany desk: 74" x 39½" x 28½"; $3,090
- Two-pedestal mahogany desk: 81½" x 39½" x 28½"; $2,861
- Two-pedestal mahogany credenza: 62" x 20" x 28½"; $3,308
- Mahogany "race-track" table: 101" x 39½" x 28½"; $2,200

*Description:* This range of furniture comes in varying combinations of rectangular tops. The desks are available with one rounded side; the table has semi-circular ends. Materials vary from solid mahogany to laminate, or techgrain (resembling wood) veneers, and any combination of pedestals, legs and tops can be ordered.

*Comments:* Subdued and traditional in tone. All the pieces have classic simplicity, unobtrusive shapes and a quality of finish that should make them appropriate for varied surroundings.

Skyline visits a select group of showrooms and comments on the objects on display.
Graves at Sunar

Looking at Michael Graves' furniture at Sunar is as good an excuse as any to visit the stunning showroom. One enters through a darkened, castle-like lobby highlighted by a Graves mural. Carefully planned vistas and axial passageways are emphasized by linear features on the walls, also executed by Graves. Moving past swaths of richly-finished Graves-designed wallhangings, one comes to a conference room, large central showroom and small offices. The complete spatial and decorative continuity obviously provides a sympathetic setting for Graves' furnishings.

Tables by Michael Graves (1982)

Dimensions and list price:
Table: 40" x 105" x 29" (8 legs); wood $20,837, painted $12,308
Table: 60" x 70" x 29" (6 legs); wood $15,677, painted $9,025

Description: The table top is of Birds-Eye Maple inlaid with ebonized wood and natural mother-of-pearl, semi-gloss lacquer finish or polyurethane painted wood with colored lacquer finish. Legs are 6" square-section solid wood, with vertical ebonized inlay or black paint pin-striped in the recesses to match the top. The feet are painted black and finished to match the top. Colors vary from cream through terracotta, blue and green to black.

Comments: The Mammal table has an aura of opulence, but the massing seems out of proportion—the long top of the eight-legged table is wafer-thin compared to the sturdy pillars supporting it. The effect is exaggerated by the bevelled tabletop edges, which again reduce the sense of mass. The vertical strips on the legs reduce the bulk, but only to a degree. The table's sumptuousness comes from the finely inlaid and decorated top, the neat feet and the fine craftsmanship. Two bolts from top to base of each leg are needed to prevent them fracturing off if the table is shifted. Also, with four, six or eight legs, seating at the table is limited to just so many people—one per "portion." This is a formal table for an ordered household.

Lounge chair and sofa by Michael Graves (1981)

Dimensions and list price:
Lounge chair: 32"W x 29"D x 32"H, 154" seat height; maple $8,438, mahogany $8,459
Sofa: 54"W x 30"D x 32"H, 154" seat height; maple $14,609, mahogany $4,714

Description: The frame is hardwood with a choice of Birds-Eye Maple or Pomele Burrled Mahogany veneer, finished with a partly seened lacquer and ebonized wood front corner detail. Foam upholstery is finished in either fabric or leather.

Comments: These pieces are very comfortable to sit in and coordinate well together. Their shape, slanted back and channelled fabric recall Viennese and Art Deco designs. Seen in a pale fabric and with darker wood finish, the front posts become abstract shapes supporting an aardvark-like mass. The disconnected details are unsettling: The partial scrolling of the posts, the small repeated triangles patterning the frieze below the front part of the seat, and certainly the ebonized strips attached to part of the outside edge of the legs point up the problems areas. When the ensemble is executed with mahogany in dark fabric, however, these details coalesce to make a homogenous whole.

Armchair and side chair by Michael Graves (1982)

Dimensions:
Side chair: 17"W x 19"D x 33"H, 18" seat height
Armchair: 23"W x 21"D x 35"H, 18" seat height

No prices as yet for this prototype.

Description: Both chairs are of Birds-Eye Maple over a hardwood core. Arms and quarter-circles are of ebonized hardwood, with a mother-of-pearl inlay to the armchair arm. Fabric or leather seat.

Comments: There seems to be little rationale behind the chairs as a pair or as single objects. They are awkward. The arms of the armchair and the side chair's quarter-circles seem to jut out from the rest of the chair. Also designed to catch the unwary sitter is the beveled edge of the seat and notched leg tops. There is little connection between the back supports and legs, which seem to follow opposing design ideas. While the chairs are designed to match the table, it is hard to see how the chair's complicated lines complement the absolute simplicity of the table shape.

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"Botta has attained the essence of high-tech simplicity in these chairs... The backrest hitting mid-back does, however, encourage the sitter to twitch and move."

**Botta at ICF**

On the following pages are a number of designs specially selected for review by the editors. Best-selling items are designated by a star (*).

Side and armchair by Mario Botta (1982)

*Dimensions and net price:
  Side chair (Primus): 19"W x 224"D x 284"H, 184" seat height: $540
  Armchair (Seconda): 204"W x 224"D x 284"H, 184" seat height, 20" arm height: $625
  Description: Both chairs are framed with steel tubing in silver or black epoxy finish, with a structural support curved to allow the seat to bend. Chair seats are made of perforated steel, silver or black epoxy contrasting to the frame. The backrest is expanded charcoal polyurethane rolled in two sections.
  Comments: Botta has attained the essence of high-tech simplicity in these chairs: Either version would be perfect in Norman Foster's Hongkong and Shanghai Bank (see Skyline March 1983, p. 21). Since they have no color (only gray and black) and no decoration, the objects can be seen as pure form, integrating and expressing elements of structure and function. The black-seated chair appears in reality to be more transparent than the silver-seated version, for the black perforated seat reflects less light and makes more visible the chair's structure below. Both chairs are fairly comfortable (for all-steel construction), and the diagonal support of the backrest allows some springy movement. The rubber backrest hitting mid-back does, however, encourage the sitter to twitch and move.

**Ambasz at Krueger**

The Managerial Chair from the Vertebra series by Emilio Ambasz and Giancarlo Piretti (1976)

*Dimensions and list price: 224"W x 194"D x 334"H, 194" seat height: $572
  Description: A seam-welded tubular steel seat and backrest is padded with injection molded plastic and polyurethane. A five-blade aluminum alloy pedestal column base is finished with black epoxy and has an automatic height-adjustment mechanism. The back rest and seat tilt forward and back together or independently, and the chair has a 360° swivel. Rubber/vinyl bellows conceal all mechanical and automatic movement mechanisms, and the chair is finished in fabric.
  Comments: The chair has a jolly sophistication. The rounded padding softens any sci-fi effect of the bellows, and the whole is comfortable and fun to live with. This version has no arms or headrest, presenting the cleanest version of the more luxurious Vertebra chairs.

*The Institutional Chair from the Vertebra series by Emilio Ambasz and Giancarlo Piretti (1976)

*Dimensions and list price: 194"W x 227"D x 304"H, 174" seat height: $156 (no arms)
  Description: A stacking chair that has optional arms and padding to seat and back. Seam-welded tubular steel finished with black epoxy in various colors. Automatic relax, upright and tilt forward positions.
  Comments: A well-fashioned workmanlike design with enough optional variations to make it interesting.

The Lumb-r Chair by Emilio Ambasz and Giancarlo Piretti (1983)

*Dimensions and list price: The chair's dimensions are not available yet; the list price will be in the $250 range. Currently the chair is sold only in Europe. Certain modifications are being made with the chair legs before the U.S. version is introduced at NEOCON in June.
  Description: Armchair or armless, the chair is of molded hardwood ply with upholstery and steel legs. The backrest can be moved to upright or relaxed positions.
  Comments: Skyline has seen only photos of this chair, but it seems it will maintain the standards of comfort and design established in the other pieces.
Special Report: Furniture

“Hollywood in the fifties is recalled in this side table by the Austrian architect. . . . It would be difficult to place the piece in a casual environment without upsetting everyone’s equilibrium.”

At Furniture of the 20th Century

Schwarzenberg console from the Memphis collection, by Hans Hollein (1981)
Dimensions and list price: 63"W × 17½"D × 30½"H; $3,950
Description: Pink-stained briar wood with gold-leafed hardwood legs on two "eyebrow" hardwood bases.
Comments: Hollywood in the fifties is recalled in this side table by the Austrian architect. Its pink color is striking — it would be difficult to place the piece in a casual environment without upsetting everyone’s equilibrium. Surely it is a collector’s item, a film prop, and definitely the center of attention in a low-key room. The table feels as if it is covered with a plastic laminate; it comes as a surprise to learn that it is indeed 100 percent the genuine article.

*Side chair by Robert Mallet-Stevens (1928)
Dimensions and list price: 17¾"W × 16½"D × 32½"H, 17¼" seat height; $210
Description: Sheet and tubular steel welded construction, with matte black lacquer, high gloss red or gray crinkle finish.
Comments: Hovering somewhere between the industrial, the vernacular and the chic, this chair is a winner.

At Atelier International

*Armchair by Le Corbusier (1928)
Dimensions and list price: 29½"W × 27¾"D × 26½"H, 16¼" seat height; leather $4,190, Fabric $2,540
Description: Tubular steel finished in polished chrome, matte or glossy enamel or glossy urethane in many colors, including pastel. Seat supports use coiled springs, and cushions are stuffed to approximate the original Le Corbusier samples. Upholstery can be fabric, leather or vinyl.
Comments: The whole line sells well (no surprise), although the armchair sells the best of Le Corbusier’s designs. With the new pastel colors for the frame, and tan and canvas leather sling, the manufacturer (Cassina) is meeting new market demands with a sense of style.

Gibigiana light by Achille Castiglioni (1981)
Dimensions and list price: 15½"H, $410; 20½"H, $430
Description: This steel reading lamp has a concealed halogen light projected up through a cylinder and reflected off a circular mirror. The lamp is finished in red, black or bronze housing.
Comments: This latest implement for reading fulfills its noble task in a streamlined avian style.

Sindbad two-seat sofa by Vico Magistretti (1981)
Dimensions and list price: 68½"W × 33½"D × 75½"H, 16¼" seat height; $5,740
Description: A box of molded polyurethane foam padded with Dacron is covered with black fabric on a base of black-lacquered beechwood. Removable blanket covers with cotton, wool or leather borders are attached by hooks, clips and Velcro in many colors.
Comments: The sofa by this furniture designer has a back low enough to be comfortable yet high enough for support, with the look of casually modish furniture. Very Italian and very Solda.
"This chair could go anywhere and we would like to take several ourselves."

At Stendig

Kita side chair by Toshiyuki Kita (1983)
Dimensions and net price: 15¼"W × 19¾"D × 30¼"H, 17¾" seat height; $199
Description: Available in beech with ash top, in natural, black, red, blue, pale blue, pale green or pale pink matte opaque finish, with removable upholstered seat.
Comments: This supremely elegant design by the Japanese designer owes its clean-cut lines to the classic wood kitchen chair. The pastel shades best show off the combination of slight curves, thin vertical struts and traditional splined shapes of back and seat. This chair could go anywhere and we would like to take several ourselves.

*Gina armchair by Bernd Makulik (1981)
Dimensions and net price: 21½"W × 22¾"D × 32¾"H, 18½" seat height, 22¾" arm height; $230
Description: Beech frame with natural satin, red glossy, black matte or glossy lacquer. Seat is polyurethane on rubber webbing; back is polyurethane on molded plywood.
Comments: Its simple fluid lines account for this chair's popularity.

Dimensions and net price: 72"W × 33"D × 31¼"H, 17" seat height, 23½" arm height; $1,880
Description: Natural-oiled cherry or ash, with fabric, leather or vinyl upholstery and tight seat.
Comments: In looking at a version upholstered in green "Aguapile" (velveteen) fabric with very pale cherry frame, the contrast between the sofa's simple lines, uniformly subdued fabric, and the floral grain on the natural wood frame seemed jarring. However, with the taut seat and elegant Regency-like curves, it does achieve a mixture of casual and formal qualities that is unique.

*Bankers chair by Ward Bennett (1967)
Dimensions and net price: 25½"W × 25¾"D × 32¾"H, 19" seat height, 26¾" arm height; $485
Description: Natural-oiled cherry or ash, with cane, leather or fabric.
Comments: The chair by this furniture designer is a remarkable combination of a simple, basic modernist line and a fluid, traditional and comfortable form.

Bennett at Brickel

Bankers series armchair (1967); Ward Bennett

Bankers sofa (1982); Ward Bennett
Hammond Beeby & Babka for Hild Library

The design for the new classical-style Hild Library in Chicago inspired architects Hammond, Beeby & Babka to produce a limited assortment of furniture for the reading rooms. Thomas Beeby, working with Tannys Langdon, designed furniture that recalls vernacular styles of Northern Europe and the United States. In one design a plank chair, ornamented with stencilling and hand-painting, is paired with a similarly executed trestle table. The two architects also designed an armchair based on the American colonial wing chair, with ornamented wood enclosing walls. Another piece of furniture, a table that turns into a chair with a screen-like back, will be used in the children's story-telling room. This item is currently on view in the exhibition of decorative screens at the Rizzoli Bookstore in Chicago. (see p. 28 for review of show).

Voorsanger & Mills for an L.A. House

In remodeling a house in the lush and luxurious Bel-Air section of Los Angeles, architects Voorsanger & Mills proposed to the client a group of custom furniture in a style suitable to the axially organized wood-paneled interior they planned. Their proposal met with approval, and currently Voorsanger & Mills are designing 45 separate types of furniture (126 pieces). The traditionally conceived items vary from solid and comfortable easy chairs to light and elegant side chairs, and they rely on an assortment of different woods, such as teak, mahogany and walnut. As an added touch of exotica, Purple and Green Heart woods are used for decorative inlay. The choice of fabrics—silk, mohair, and wool in shades of browns, subtle greens and blues—will maintain the desired aura.

While some architects have recently designed extensive lines of custom furniture, others have won awards in the third annual Progressive Architecture furniture competition, as seen here.

P/A Furniture Competition

Last month Progressive Architecture released the results of its Third Annual International Furniture Competition held in February. In looking over 800 submissions from more than 20 countries, the jurors—Kenneth Frampton, Frank Gehry, Arata Isozaki, RodoHo Machado and Michael McCoy—gave two first awards, six awards and eight citations. A first award went to Roger Crowley for the design of a side chair of fruitwood and cane (photos, below), which the jury admired for its proportions and careful balance between historical and modernist forms. A design with quite a different orientation also won a first award—an ingenious portable self-inflating plastic seat, designed by Dean Maltz of Tokyo (photos, right).

Other designs that received awards included a chair for a music room made of sycamore and ebony over a pine frame by Tarek Ashkar (photo, right, top); a mechanical wood table designed by Edward Colby that can be adjusted in height like a piano stool by turning the top (right, middle); and a side chair by Michael Graves (bottom, left). Made of exotic wood veneer, bird's eye maple or lacquered wood, this chair is currently being displayed as a prototype design at Sunar (see p. 22). Citations included a design for a coffee table by Martin Linder, with a red plywood and Masonite top with black tubing and steel rod helix spring support (middle, left); a design for a desk/conference table with a glass top and poured concrete base (middle, left); and a chair made of cast glass block, with a cantilevered stamped metal seat and lacquered wood leg and frame by Nancy Skolos (middle, right). Also among the entries cited were a chair of steel tubing designed by Makoto Hashimoto of Tokyo (right, bottom) and a chair made of solid ash designed by Jack Millard (below). These and other winning submissions to the competition were on view during L.A.'s West Week in March, and will be displayed during NEOCON at the Chicago Merchandise Mart, June 16-17.
Suzanne Stephens:

Last fall, Rizzoli Gallery commissioned four well-known architects, Thomas Beeby, Michael Graves, Robert Stern and Stanley Tigerman, and one artist, Richard Haas, to design and build [at their own expense] decorative screens for a show that opened in December at the Rizzoli Gallery in New York and travelled to Chicago.

The idea of architects designing screens was promising, for the decorative object with architectural qualities: It is free-standing, conceals nothing, and their process allows large undifferentiated spaces and even obstructs drafts. The screen, evidently a Chinese invention dating from the fourth century BC, has been given the longest running over the centuries, appearing even in large drafty halls of medieval castles during the time of Edward II.

According to Janet Woodbury Adams in the recently published Decorative Folding Screens: 400 Years in the Western World, in the seventeenth century the French generally adopted the screen as an integral item in their ensembles of furniture, whereas the English viewed the screen as a free-standing object to be admired for its decorative screens and motifs.

Given that the open plan inherited from modernist architecture is still characteristic of current construction, the screen-as-space-divider could occupy an important role in today's architecture. At the same time, the recent revaluation of historical references, ornament and decoration in architecture has focused attention on the wall and its surface—an investigation with obvious design parallels to the decorative folding screen.

The architects chosen by Rizzoli have previously shown a strong interest in the decorative object, in ornament and particularly in the articulation of the wall, which most architects feel was given short shrift by modernist architecture. Strangely enough, however, this group failed to create folding screens of any great aesthetic, architectural or decorative interest. The fascio of this well-intentioned experiment at least serves as some sort of convenient stepping stone, but unfortunately for this group, the object lesson may be harshest on them: These screens are a very accessible representation of their talents and abilities to the general gallery-going public.

Tigerman, Stern and Graves in particular attempt to make the screen a microcosm of their own architectural investigations. The pitfall here is that their efforts ignore certain expectations and assumptions about the nature of the object. Tigerman must be credited with a certain inventiveness: His four-paneled screen is composed of cut-out columns that include silhouette-lighting fixtures. The columns —sheathed in fluted chiffon, with wedge-shaped capitals and bases made of copper bowls—are executed in a playful manner with whimsical pastel colors. But it is all too playful. Even though using more substantial materials might have diminished the cartoon-like quality, the “screen” as a colonnade introduces a certain whimsy.

The cut-out columns increase viability between areas, instead of curtailing it. The column silhouettes and sceneries seem to affirm the traditional “background” role of the screen in their references to walls and edges of buildings. But the reduced-scale (foot-high) fluted columns and the bold simplified contours won't allow the screen to recede: It dominates, attracting attention to its art, of which there is not enough.

Michael Graves' screen is more ambitious and more distressing. Draped with Graves-designed pale peach fabric, the screen's four-six-foot-high panels are decorated with a painted trompe l'œil blue-green drapery, mottled pink stone, and other architectural elements, including rectangular apertures. All these motifs are rendered in perspective on the front and the back of the screen, so that as you move around it you seem to be looking at interior and exterior walls of some strange building. The experiment would have been more successful if the trompe l'œil materials and drapery had been more realistic and deceptive. Instead they are executed in a vaguely impressionistic manner with little differentiation between the actual (the drapery) and the depicted (the painted elements). Even if the piece were executed with more polish, it would dominate the perceptual field. It does take over the space.

The same could be said of Robert Stern's screen. In this case, the screen doesn't just take over the space, it looks as if it will come after you too. Bundled up in its framework is a nervous combination of mirrored fragments, glazing bars, gilded broken cornices, three kinds of silk and wood pilasters and dado painted as faux marble. The tension between the formal elements and proportions effectively kills the aesthetic of the soft colors and luxurious materials. Stern and his team saw the 7-ft. 10-in. screen as a "dramatic representation of a partially open French balcony window." Yet a window is meant to reveal that which lies beyond while a screen, one thinks, should conceal. Too often these architects have chosen not to treat the screen as a screen—a lightweight, two-dimensional barrier that shares certain characteristics with a wall. Rather they want the screen to operate (to metaphorically as a screen-as-window (Stern), screen-as-colonnade (Tigerman) or screen-as-painting-as-sculpture (Graves).

Tom Beeby, on the other hand, wants to treat the screen as a piece of furniture, taking inspiration from medieval fire screens and combination furniture pieces in the snugguries of the nineteenth-century Victorian home. The piece Beeby designed with Tannis Langdon has a table that tilts up to become a circular 48-in. diameter screen. It is mounted on a chest that doubles as a seat. This furniture, which will actually be used in Hammond Beeby & Babka's Hild Regional Library in Chicago, currently under construction, has a moon-like ornament best suited to the young audience in the library's reading rooms. As a screen viewed in the same category as the other entries, however, its interest is limited; it clearly is more a piece of furniture.

Richard Haas' entry pays close attention to all the features of the traditional folding screen. With its six-feet-high black lacquered panels ornamented with diagonal gild, silver, red and blue patterns, the screen, executed by Hong Kong craftsmen, provides a rich but not obtrusive backdrop that one could place behind furniture in, for instance, or one wants to partition areas. The problem, of course, is the similarity it has to previous efforts, particularly an Art Deco screen designed by Jean Dunand in 1925. Haas' replication of Dunand gives one pause, for the most successful entry in the show is clearly this safely derivative one.

Had the architects accepted the basic definition of a screen, their own efforts might not have been so over-reaching. To effectively advance the state of the art of this object-type (presumably a goal), they would have had to maintain a certain balance between what the object is and what it could be. The folding screen is that, two-dimensional, opaque, usually decorated and recedes to the background or helps define the edge of an interior. If it is to be something else —that is, if the architectonic possibilities of the screen are to be developed —this would have to be done with discipline and restraint, as well as craft and imagination.
An exhibition of architect-designed screens, books on interiors and recent showroom design inspire commentary.

**West Week and Showrooms**

Barbara Flanagan

**Artimide Showrooms (DRE): Vignelli Associates**

If NEOCON is the big one and Designers' Saturday is the urbane one, then what is West Week? It's the warm one (with palm trees) at Cessel Pelli's Pacific Design Center—the annual western convention of the contract furniture industry. The focus of the three-day gathering (March 17-19) was a series of panels on design philosophy (13 hours) and professional practice (5 hours) and assorted audio-visual presentations (4 hours). The ponderous theme, "Gateway to the Americas," was accounted for in three hours of low-profile events that left visitors asking what "American" were. Admittedly, hyperbolic themes are standard fare for conventions and promos, but this one was just plain tenuous. If a theme is invented to rally enthusiasm and provoke conversation (especially if business in the field is bad, as it has been), then at least some of the exhibitions, speeches and programs should refer to it.

The unnamed theme of the week turned out to be "America: Gateway to Italian Design?" Nothing was more controversial than Memphis—their PDC exhibit, their panel of designers, their concurrent exhibit at the James Gallery. No one was more ardently articulate than Lella and Massimo Vignelli except maybe Michael Graves who is a Memphisite anyway. And no place was newer than the Vignelli-designed Artime showrooms. Its design is an ingenious solution to the given: the need to display many illuminated lamps in a small corner tenant space. However, this showroom is a mere snack bar compared to the formal lighting emporium of Artime, Flos and Artemide in Milan. The differences seem to reflect the respective approaches to lighting in the two countries.

Italian architects use these lamps as both the sculptural focus and the atmospheric variable of small rooms. Consequently they design showrooms as spare, abstract backdrops to demonstrate the form of the lamp or the shape and color of its light. American architects are not as convinced that lighting and furniture will salvage environments; they are also more optimistic than Italians about the continued possibility of building better buildings. So when enlightened American architects specify expensive Artime fixtures, it is often to pay homage to Italian design rather than to follow its principles.

Seen as Italian design souvenirs, the new showroom's lamps are well-installed. But to be understood as design tools, the lamps need more space to demonstrate their special relationships to various surfaces. Unfortunately, the narrow spaces of the showroom tend to foie the browsers with tunstens and halogen irrigation. And the room's bright ambient lighting diminishes the individual drama of the fixtures and minimizes the special effects of some of the Sottas and Gismondi designs.

**Design Books: A Selection**

Kate Norment


A massive and comprehensive chronological study of American decorative arts—furniture, objects, textiles, sculpture, painting, printed material—that also provides the historical, cultural and social background for the placement of the book attractive and the photographs well reproduced.


A comprehensive survey of furniture since World War II. Each section of the book highlights one type of furniture and is introduced by a brief summarizing note. There is an attempt at criticism or analysis; the book is intended as a catalogue.

**French Style.** Suzanne Slesin and Stafford Cliff; photographs by Jacques Dinoz; foreword by Robert Rosenblum. Clarkson Potter, New York. 298 pages, $35.00.

A slick, glossy picture-book. Sumptuous design-magazine-type photographs present impeccable rooms decorated in "French" style, ranging from the placement of furniture to an arrangement of seaweeds. Inconsequential fluff.


The main point of this book is the visual material documenting Mies' work—plans of his interiors and photographs of his furniture. The written material—very short texts by Blaser and a few unnamed Mies pieces—seem superfluous, providing little background.


In an attempt to fit many different trends under one rubric, this book includes material of widely varying quality, ranging from Michael Graves' much-published architectural work to relatively obscure crafts by local artists. The introductory essay is not enough to hold the series of photographs together.

**The Wood Chair in America.** Produced, designed and edited by Donovan and Green; written with C. Ray Smith and Marianne Page. Published by Estelle D. Braskell, New York. 120 pages, 200 black-and-white photographs and line drawings, $19.95, soft cover.

This book explores the development of the wood chair in America through a historical survey and glossary of styles, both of which include clear line drawings of representative pieces, and a final section on the chair-making process, which includes photographs. Aside from the useful reference material it provides, the book is notable for its high design, both in the general layout and the details—such as the glossy-black-on-matte black pages.


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Sylvia Lavin


A selection of works from the RIBA Drawing Collection has recently been catalogued in Architects' Designs for Furniture by Jill Lever. The drawings are arranged to represent the development of furniture designed by architects from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Each entry is well-documented and accompanied by an extensive caption exploring the relationship of a particular design to its intended architectural context and to the overall progression of the architect's career.

Lever's introductory text attempts more than a basic compilation, however, and is in essence a critical essay. Her criticism, though, is based on the premise that furniture most like architecture is superior to furniture that is simple furniture. Her thesis is that architecture—a role she leaves undefined—designs the "best" furniture, and that at their "happiest" designing furniture. She argues that professional architectural training, opposed perhaps to apprenticeships in the arts-and-crafts tradition, instills a developed sense of design, which greatly helps the process of creating furniture. In claiming that experimentation in this field has been a response to the architect's desire for "total design," Lever assumes that only an architect has the ability to produce furniture that can be integrated into an architectural context. Lever further asserts that the architect's need for new forms to suit new spaces leads to the "wittiest" and most "innovative" designs for furniture.

Lever never confronts drawing for furniture as an artistic genre independent from architectural drawing; furniture design and architectural design remain undifferentiated. It remains unclear whether Lever believes furniture to be the extension of a building, a miniature version of a building or simply a cheap and easily-produced building "masque." Furthermore, after claiming that architects' designs for furniture are the most "architectural," she weakly concludes that the possibility of attributing "distinct qualities to architect-designed furniture in general is doubtful." Despite some of Lever's misguided conclusions, her initial idea of calling attention to this fascinating realm of architectural practice is to be applauded.


Although the number of survey books covering architecture of the twentieth century has grown exponentially in recent years, until now choosing an appropriate text book has been difficult for teachers and students. One obstacle has been that the major works by Giedion, Penner and Hitchcock have come to be associated more with the dissemination of particular ideologies than with the simple transmission of information. The current changes in attitude toward modern architecture have magnified the problem. Even some recent texts of the highest quality, such as Leonardo Benevolo's The History of Modern Architecture or Kenneth Frampton's Modern Architecture: A Critical History, are characterized by their methods of research, relating architecture either to its political context or to a Marxist interpretation of history. These histories provide significant new insights into the study of modern architecture, but nonetheless seem almost more interesting today as "historic" works reflecting the thought of a certain period. It is neither realistic nor desirable to hope for complete objectivity in university course texts, yet certain works in related fields, such as H.W. Janson's History of Art, have succeeded in remaining useful throughout many decades.

William Curtis' new book Modern Architecture Since 1900 should prove a superb text for any course on modern architecture. His text contains nothing radical,

Architecture of the Twentieth Century in Drawings is a pictorial essay on architects’ drawings of their own architectural schemes since 1910. It does not presume to be a complete history of modern architecture, nor of the development of techniques or styles of architectural rendering. On the contrary, the book offers a brief glimpse into a particular facet of the architect’s creative process by allowing the drawings reproduced to convey their own arguments. The major task involved in producing such a book is not primarily research and writing, but the process of selection and the means of organization.

Lampugnani has elected not to follow the strict courses offered by chronology, geographic distribution or drawing methods. Instead, he has attempted to group the drawings by the visions they represent or the attitudes they embody. For the sake of clarity, the drawings within each ideologically-defined category are presented in roughly chronological order. By avoiding the snare of a traditional historical layout, Lampugnani allows the reader to discern similarities between architectural figures usually considered worlds apart. For example, in the book’s first section, a series of Frank Lloyd Wright drawings is followed by works of Alvar Aalto, inviting a comparison that illustrates the architects’ common dream for “personal freedom,” despite the vastly different forms of their work. Lampugnani’s scheme also provides a deeper understanding of architects within a single architect’s career. The placement of Michael Graves’ work does not pigeonhole him into a narrow post-modernist category, nor does it present him as a trainer to his earlier modernist designs. His work is generously afforded the opportunity to expand, for an early project is associated with the “Aesthetics of Reason” and later works with the “Ambivalence of Tradition.”

Lampugnani’s introductory text would have benefited from the inclusion of a closer analysis of types of automatic architectural rendering. He addresses the symbolic contents of the illustrations but avoids exploring the various implications inherent to perspective renderings, presentation drawings and working sketches. Equally important to the finished drawing are how and why an architect chooses to visualize his intention. The selection of paper, implements and audience forms as much a part of the creative process as does a conscious reference to other buildings or architectural styles, and is perhaps more pertinent to a discussion of the art of architectural drawing.

no aggressively innovative organization of material, no commentary on obscure buildings, no revolutionary new research. It is exactly this quaintness that enables the book to emerge as an earnest discussion carefully founded on what may be considered the “old school” of visual analysis. This return to traditional architectural history is — paradoxically — revolutionary. Curtis adheres to the belief that what one sees is of prime importance; a vast number of buildings, illustrated or described, are analyzed according to their formal characteristics. This approach does not negate the significance of non-architectural factors, nor does it necessitate conservative or limited conclusions. It is unfortunate that in the final chapter, devoted to architectural drawings and the presentation of contents of the illustrations but architectural rendering. He addresses the symbolic contents of the illustrations but avoids exploring the various implications inherent to perspective renderings, presentation drawings and working sketches. Equally important to the finished drawing are how and why an architect chooses to visualize his intention. The selection of paper, implements and audience forms as much a part of the creative process as does a conscious reference to other buildings or architectural styles, and is perhaps more pertinent to a discussion of the art of architectural drawing.

The New York Institute for the Humanities has awarded grants to six institutions in New York State to pay for a one-year part-time consultancy at each institution.

The Institute is now seeking applications from humanist scholars to fill the following consultancy positions:

1) an historian with a background in interdisciplinary and demographic studies to work with the Museums at Stony Brook to conduct research on the patterns of ownership and use of private and commercial horsedrawn vehicles in the U.S. between 1700 and 1900.

2) a social historian with a background in New England colonial history and a familiarity with the content and methodology of New England town studies such as those of Zuckermand, Lockridge and Clark, to work with the Mullford Farm Planning Task Force of the East Hampton Historical Society.

3) a humanist scholar who combines experience in urban planning and architectural history to participate in the development of an exhibition about architecture and the built environment for children at the Staten Island Children’s Museum.

4) a social historian or student of material culture, preferably with exhibition experience, to help with research for exhibitions dealing with aspects of 17th, 18th, and 19th century life in Brooklyn for the Long Island Historical Society.

5) a humanistic scholar from the field of Jungian psychology and archetypal symbolism to provide expertise in the field of visual symbols for the mounting of two exhibitions at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.

6) a 19th century American social historian to assist in researching, interpreting and installing a permanent exhibition on the lives and times of the Saguritt family, the original occupants of the Cortland County Historical Society’s premises.

Re-imbursement for participation in the project will be $5,000. Details of schedule, duties and work load to be worked out between the humanist scholar and the participating institution.

Send all resumes and correspondence to: The New York Institute for the Humanities.

“Humanists in Museums” has been funded by a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
The Undergraduate Program

The Undergraduate Program offers students from a consortium of Liberal Arts colleges the opportunity to spend a "junior year in New York" studying architecture. Architecture has generally been excluded from the Liberal Arts curriculum and treated primarily as a technical discipline. In contrast, at the IAU, architecture is approached as one of the liberal arts, and the curriculum has been developed within a strong humanistic context. Students majoring in fields other than architecture are urged to apply. It is also possible to have the year at the institute serve as the core curriculum in an architecture major. The design tutorial is highly professional, and is considered to be excellent preparation for graduate school.

The Undergraduate Program runs a full academic year. It is not possible to attend for a single semester. All students take five full year courses for a total of 30 credit hours. There are no electives. The courses are the Design Tutorial, History of Architecture, Theory of Architecture, History of Urbanism, and Structures.

The Advanced Design Workshop

The Advanced Design Workshop in Urban Form is oriented to two types of students; graduates of four year programs in architecture, and advanced students enrolled in professional degree programs. The program is directed at the problem of relating professional education to the actual work experience, and to finding new ways to make architectural education more effective and relevant to the Urban situation.

The ADW is a combination of a design studio and academic courses. The studio explores urban problems within a critical and analytic framework. The structure of the academic courses allows students to tailor the program to the individual requirements of their schools.

The Advanced Design Studio is headed by Diana Agrest, noted architect, critic, and Urban Theorist. The design projects all involve New York City sites, and the programs are relevant to the contemporary urban situation. Problems in recent years include The West Side Docks, Columbus Circle, and Times Square. Students work individually and in teams, under the direct guidance of a design tutor. Guest tutors have included Aldo Rossi, Robert Stern, Charles Gwathmey and Cesar Pelli.

For further information please contact Linda DuBose Bernstein at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 8 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018. (212)719-9796.

The Internship Program

The internship is intended for college graduates with little or no architectural background. It offers a year of work and study to allow the student to assess his or her interests, talents and capacities in architecture. The Internship is a three part work/study program. There is an intensive design studio which is the focal part of the program. The goal of the studio work is the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to express architectural ideas in a visual form. In addition, each student works two full days a week for one of the Institute Programs (Publications or Exhibitions) or at an outside architectural office that is connected with the Institute. The work is diverse and is intended to introduce students to the many elements of architecture that exist outside the classroom. The third component of the program is the academic courses. Interns select two or three of the academic courses offered each semester and are expected to attend on a regular basis.

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Peter Eisenman's House X

Brendan Gill

As a font of bookmaking, House X is a scantly produced masterpiece of Massimo Vignelli's sympathetic talent for advocacy through design; nobody could present Eisenman's case for Eisenman with a greater graphic felicity and, at the same time, with a more friendly entrée into understanding the totality of the work, in which the chief context will be put. Immaculate drawings and diagrams (mostly axonometric and characteristically exquisite), as well as plans, elevations and photographs of actualized models of House X, fill the pages and dominate the text. The book is a design epic, not of literal buildings but of elegiac, iconoclastic deconstruction. In colloquial English, Lardner would call it a "house of the deposed." An end to the illusion of the building, in short, as it were. To ask such questions in the austerely elegant ambience in which such a book is to risk seeming not irrelevant but an impertinent clout.

On our best behavior, then, we turn to the text and find, to our dismay, that the very title of the book invites an inquiry. Why House X and not House Ten or, better still, Ten House? How has Eisenman happened to couple one of the most highly charged words in the English language with a Roman numeral that, for most of us, has little emotional value beyond its utility for illustrating and detective-story fans ("X marks the spot"). The coupling is made all the more odd by the fact that "ten" is almost as rich a word in English as "house"; we have ten fingers, Ten Commandments, Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and so on. Yet Eisenman has chosen to number all his houses with Roman numerals, and I see in this an attempt to suggest to the reader that what he has put before the world is as a conceptual project, a scheme, as an artistically and cognitively unanswerable counterpoint to habit. It is a weakness worth examining.

In his career as an architect, teacher, journalist, and debonair man-about-town, Eisenman employs the racily conventional English bequeathed to us by Twain, Whitman, Lardner and a score of other authentic American voices; it is when he composes a book that he plunges headlong into a quaking sphagnum of Latinate jargon. An example, plucked at random: "In assuming no historical narraive logic, and in doubting or denying that an object consists of a set of hierarchical relationships that can be known, the new object becomes fragmented, relativistic, and non-autonomous. We make sense of this easily enough, though the grammar is insecure—surely Eisenman doesn't mean that the object is engaged in assuming, doubting and denying that an observer of the object is doing so—but who would willingly summarize his characteristic, often stupefyingly difficult, and, as such, the book is indistinguishable from a truly difficult but fascinating urbanism in the city which now, with its four-corner intersection, became a model of the city. In this scheme, there is no such thing; the car moves from one form of urbanism to the city in another form of urbanism in the country. Urban and rural become dialectical components. This gesture immerses in the land, compounded as rural, an architecture which is simultaneously monumental and urban. It eliminates the middle ground of the suburban house."

To my mind, this is high-falutin' nonsense. It is also a description of the use. The car, with all the restrictions, is the owner of X not to wish to engage in a constant spiraling oscillation between two forms of urbanism in the city which now, with its four-corner intersection, became a model of the city. In this scheme, there is no such thing; the car moves from one form of urbanism to the city in another form of urbanism in the country. Urban and rural become dialectical components. This gesture immerses in the land, compounded as rural, an architecture which is simultaneously monumental and urban. It eliminates the middle ground of the suburban house.

Eisenman's notions about the site are Germanic here, as being at once outrageous and carefully thought out: 'The site for the house, forty heavily wooded acres, was essentially rural. However, since the client worked in the city, the house became the endpoint of a transition from the urban to the rural setting. The car, as the instrument of this transition, was conceived of as a conceptually [should be "conceived" and "conceptually" be playing tag with one another in this redundant fashion?] spiraling from city to country. When the pedestrian left the car he would become part of another spiral, moving from the point of his departure from the car (supposedly rural) into the house which now, with its four-corner intersection, became a model of the city. In this scheme, there is no such thing; the car moves from one form of urbanism to the city in another form of urbanism in the country. Urban and rural become dialectical components. This gesture immerses in the land, compounded as rural, an architecture which is simultaneously monumental and urban. It eliminates the middle ground of the suburban house.'

I wonder whether it is possible that the Eisenman argot is a mode that is kept from the reader at a distance through a harmless act of verbal seduction? If this polyvalent amnesia was employed not to explain how the design of a certain house came into existence but to sell us snake-oil, would we not all have bought half a dozen bottles of the stuff by now and be nodding away in a contentedly half-slumber? Strangely, the pitchman himself appears to believe that he is practicing a lofty intellectual rigor by his use of all those great big bow-wow words, but this is only rarely the case. There are sentences in House X that are logical but not rigorous —"Not only does the function not determine the form, the form does not determine the function" —and other sentences that lack both logic and rigor: "First it is one reality and, simultaneously, another." Neither in physics nor in English does that which is simultaneous with something else know what it is to be first.

Eisenman says, "Each stage of the design process could be analyzed to reveal not so much a transformation but [sic] a deconstruction of the heuristic approximation." Now "heuristic" is one of the words that he is most given to falling back upon for reassurance, and with good reason. Feodora's defines "heuristic" as coming from the Greek and as being applied to arguments and methods of demonstration that are persuasive rather than logically compelling, or that lead a person to find out for himself. Eisenman uses the word in his persuasive sense; his readers are often obliged to use it in the sense of finding out for themselves. That difficulty acknowledged and, in most cases, overcome, we are free to address ourselves to the grand topic of the book —the creation of a design of a house that, as it happens, has yet to be built. As one would expect of Eisenman, it is a wondrously intricate structure, unapproachable as a work

Eisenman replies, because the practical fact of connection must be negated through encompassment. Next question?

The structure is plainly the sum of much intense and even anguished cerebrosis, and to argue its technical difficulties into a style makes a required period longer than House X. I am quick to admit that I "read" the design far less patiently than their maker does and that what I read often dispenses me for personal reasons rather than for reasons to having to do with the nature of Eisenman's architecture. (For example, a test that would be as costly to build X ought, by my standards, as to build a large and luxurious bathroom; most of the bathrooms in the plan strike me as having a penitentiary-like meanness of scale.) My chief objections to X are, however, based on the impression it gives of an invincibly aristocratic, cunningly transformed into what Eisenman himself might very well describe as a "house of the deposed."
Exhibits

Albuquerque, New Mexico
Alvar Aalto
Apr 11-May 13 "Alvar Aalto: The Mystery of Form." School of Architecture and Planning, University of New Mexico; (505)277-7903

Austin
Paul Cret
Through May 22 "Paul Cret at Texas: Architectural Drawings." "Passage of the University in the 1930s." Archer M. Huntington Gallery, University of Texas, 23rd Street and San Jacinto Street; (512)471-7324

Boston/Cambridge
Harvard Exhibitions

Chicago
Decorative Screens
Through Apr 11 Exhibition of screens by Thomas Beesty, Michael Graves, Richard Haas, Robert A.M. Stern, and Stanley Tigerman. Rinaldi Gallery, Water Tower Place, 835 North Michigan Avenue; (312)642-3500

Christian K. Laine

The Architect's Vision
Through June 15 "The Architect's Vision: From Sketch to Final Drawing." This exhibition focuses on three Chicago buildings representing a cross-section of current construction trends. Chicago Historical Society, Clark Street at North Avenue; (312)642-4600

New Chicago Architecture

Houston
Cervin Robinson
Through Apr 15 "Cervin Robinson: Architectural Photographs." Farnish Gallery, School of Architecture, Rice University; (713)527-4870

New Haven
Italian Futurism
Apr 13-June 26 "The Futurist Imagination: Italian Futurist Painting, Drawing, Collage, and Free-Word Poetry." Includes 90 objects exploring the shared goals and themes of the Futurists. Yale University Art Gallery, Chapel Street; (203)436-8902

Georgian Landscape Gardens
Apr 20-June 26 "The Early Georgian Landscape Garden." Explores developments in English gardening during the first half of the eighteenth century. 3rd Floor, Yale Center for British Art, 1080 Chapel Street; (203)436-1162

New York
Blank Walls

Lower Manhattan Buildings
Through Apr 6 "Buildings in Progress IV: Lower Manhattan." Eight buildings under construction in lower Manhattan. Gallery II, Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Avenue; (212)995-3960

Habitats
Through Apr 9 "Habitats," work by Frank Gehry, Siah Armajani, John Hejduk, Mary Miss, Marc Balet, Sol LeWitt, and other artists and architects exploring the concepts of volume, enclosure, intention and fantasy. The Clocktower, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, 108 Leonard Street; (212)784-2084

Koloman Moser
Through Apr 15 Furniture, artifacts, drawings and paintings by the Austrian designer. The Austrian Institute, 11 East 52nd Street; (212)759-5165

Vittorio Giornigi
Through Apr 15 "Urbicola," six urban projects by Vittorio Giornigi. The National Institute for Architectural Education, 30 West 22nd Street; (212)992-7400

Crystal Palace
Through Apr 24 Exhibit of 33 historic photographs by Philip DeLamotte of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace. London, Wave Hill, 675 West 222nd Street, Bronx; (212)682-2035

Inside Insights
Through Apr 31 "Inside Insights: Interiors of Architects." Includes prints and architectural drawings of work ranging from Piranesi to Miss van der Rohe. SPACED Gallery, Galaxy 165, West 72nd Street; (212)757-6500

Theater Design
Through May 1 Costumes, stage designs, drawings of theater architecture from the 16th century to the present. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 East 91st Street;

Architecture on Paper
Through May 15 "Architecture on Paper: American and European Drawings from New York State Collections." Curated by Deborah Nevin, Trevor Mansion, Hudson River Museum, Trevor Park-on-Hudson, 511 Warburton Avenue, Yonkers; (914)964-4550

Ornamentalism

Brooklyn Bridge Exhibits
Through June 19 Paintings, drawings, prints and photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge. This exhibition coincides with a city-wide program of events marking the 100th birthday of the Bridge. Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn; (212)638-5000

Apr 15-May 21 "Images of the Brooklyn Bridge." Work by seven contemporary photographers; curated by Mary Black. Gallery II, The Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Avenue; (212)995-3960

Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographs
Apr 8-May 9 "London/New York: 1900-1910." 40 illustrations from Coburn's limited-edition portfolios London (1909) and New York (1910). International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Avenue at 94th Street; (212)996-1783

Rem Koolhaas
Apr 9-May 7 Show of The Dance Theater project for The Hague by Rem Koolhaas of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. Max Protetch, 37 West 57th Street; (212)838-7436

Great Drawings from the Royal Institute
Apr 21-July 30 Eighty-two international masterpieces of architectural drawing dating from the 15th century to the present, borrowed from the Royal Institute of British Architects' collection in London. Drawing Center, 137 Greene Street; (212)622-5266

San Francisco
French Beau Arts Drawings
Through May 14 "French Beau Arts Drawings by Victor Postielle," a student at Ecole des Beaux Arts (1866-1905) and protege of A.M. F. Jay. Bonfanti Gallery, 2200 Mason Street; (415)781-8906

London, England
Contemporary British Architecture
Apr 12-May 22 "Model Futures: Contemporary British Architecture." Curated by Jeremy Dixon, John Outram, Ralph Lerner & Richard Reid, Alan Stanton, Peter Wadley. Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall; 930-3647

Milan, Italy
Gabriele Basilico
Through Apr 11 "Milan: Portraits of Industrial Buildings," an exhibition of photographs, Podigliano d'Arte Contemporanea di Milano, via Palerme 14; 2784688

Montreal, Quebec
Frank Lloyd Wright from the Met
Apr 8-June 12 An exhibition of approximately 100 objects from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's large collection of Wright material. Le Chateau Du Fresne, Musee des Arts Decoratifs de Montreal, 2929 Jeanne d'Arc; (514)259-2575

Otterlo, Holland
Nieuwe Bouwen
Apr 3-May 29 Exhibition devoted to functionalism or Nieuwe Bouwen, in which the international context is stressed. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller; 382-1241. Local work of the Nieuwe Bouwen architects will be stressed in two shows: Through May 1 "Nieuwe Bouwen and Amsterdam," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Through July 17 "Nieuwe Bouwen and De Stijl," Gemeente Museum, The Hague.

Paris, France
Roger Expert
Apr 26-May 31 "Roger Expert, L'oeuvre d'un grand patron des Beaux Arts." Institut Francais d'Architecture, 6 rue de Tournon; 633-9036

Rome, Italy
Franz Pratti

Quadrio Pirani
Apr 26-May 15 "Quadrio Pirani: Turn of-the-Century Culture, Projects and Built Work 1905-1925." A.M./Coop. Architettura Arte Moderna, 12 via del Vantagio; 361-9151
American Architecture: Innovation and Tradition
A symposium inaugurating the Center for the Study of American Architecture, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, with chairmen Mildred Friedman and speakers Edgar Kaufmann, David P. Handlin, Arthur Pales and 9:45am.

The Building: Vernacular and Monumental, with chairmen William Jordy and speakers James O’Gorman, Michael cardboard, and Thomas S. Iveson; 1:45pm.

Keynote Speech by J.B. Jackson; 5:00pm.

Apr 23 *The Place: Urbanism and Suburbanism,* with chairmen J.B. Jackson and speakers Denise Scott Brown, John Coolidge, Dolors Hayes; 9:30pm.

Keynote speech by Tom van Leeuwen; 1:00pm. "The Tradition and its Alternatives: "Brooklyn Bridge, "with chairmen Arthur Drexler and speakers Allan Greenberg, Charles Gehry, and Kevin Roche; 2:50pm.

$75.00 Registration includes membership in American Institute of Architects, Manhattan SAAP, Avery Hall, New York, NY 10012 (212)280-3473. The program will be accompanied by a travelling exhibition of the same title, guest-curated by Gerald Allen, Amy Kaufman, Richard Longstreth, Deborah Nevins, and Edward Packard, and John Zukowski. The show, which opens April 20 and runs for three weeks in the Low Rotunda at Avery, will examine the history and development of architecture in six regions in America, and developments common to the entire country in "America as a Region." 

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Baltimore Architecture Week
Apr 6-16 Sponsored by the Baltimore Chapter of the AIA; Activities include a lecture by Charles Jencks, walking tours, movies and exhibits. Information: Susan Cole, Executive Director, Baltimore Chapter, American Institute of Architects, 720 East Pratt Street; (301)727-6156.

Boston/Cambridge Harvard Lectures

Los Angeles SCI-ARC Design Forum

5th floor auditorium, 611 West Sixth Street, Southern California Institute of Architecture; (213)689-3485.

New Haven Yale Lectures
Apr 8 John Ronchess Apr 12 Kenneth Frampton Apr 14 Milka Bliznakov, "The City of the Futurists," 4:30pm. Yale Hall, 6:00pm. Hastings Hall, AIA Building, Yale School of Architecture, 180 York Street; (203)436-0853.

Gardens and Landscape at Yale
Apr 9, 16, 30 Lectures on the landscape garden and urban design; "New students in Yale’s Art Department," 1:00pm. Apr 23 Symposium, "Land and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," held in conjunction with an exhibition of early Georgian landscape gardens. Speakers include John Stigloe, Dora Webster, John Pinto, Judson Coton. 10:00am-4:30pm. Lectures and symposium at lecture Hall, Yale Center for British Art, 1980 Chapel Street; (203)436-1162.

New York John Buurke Lecture
Apr 6 John Burgee "Can This Post-Modern?" 6:30pm.

Members free, non-members $5. The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue; (212)753-1722.

Emerging Voices ‘83
A series of talks sponsored by Krueger, Apr 5 Michael Rotondi and Thom Mayne of Morphosis, Peter Waldman Apr 12 Guy Martin and David Jones, Anthony Ames Apr 19 Richard Oliver, Peter Williams Apr 26 Ron Knecht, Andreas Dauzy and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

6:30pm. Members free, non-members $5. The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue; (212)753-1722.

Vincent Scully Lectures
Milestone Lectures by Scully, Apr 4 The Colonial Experience Cambridge, MA Apr 11 "Revolution and the Classical Ideal" Apr 18 "The Realist Tradition." 6:00pm. Wood Auditorium, Avery Hall, Columbia University; (212)854-3414.

Design Strategies
Apr 5 Edward J. Werry and interviewed by Olga Guatt on "Design Strategies for Survival: In the Depression and the 1930s," 8:00pm. Fifth Floor Conference Center, 6:00pm. Dunham Showcase, 6th floor, Decorative Arts Center, 303 East 67th Street; (212)986-0718.
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