

Judging Becket with Stone

Noting what seems like a missing *t*, this cover editorial piece is not going to be about Samuel Beckett, author of *Waiting for Godot*. It is, rather, about the very pressing question of what to preserve of the work of large commercial firms. Nowadays, two maligned past practitioners, **Welton Becket** and **Edward Durell Stone**, serve as illuminating exemplars—along with other examples too numerous to list—of the sorts of dilemmas facing modernist preservation. These figures and their projects shaped our domestic skyline and set standards for professional values and aspirations. They even projected, in what seems today like



John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC, Edward Durell Stone: begun in early 1960s, completed in 1971 (photo: Theo Prudon)

far more optimistic and potentially peaceable times, an image of America abroad, as seen in the **Istanbul Hilton** by **Gordon Bunshaft**, the **US Embassy in Havana** by **Harrison and Abramowitz**, or the **US Embassy in New Delhi** by **Edward Durell Stone**. While the phenomenon of the commercial firm is not new, given the significance of McKim, Mead and White or D. H. Burnham and Co., the sheer volume of work by such firms as Becket's or Stone's (or of **Eero Saarinen's**, **SOM** and **HOK**) presents us with serious challenges and a looming responsibility. (For comments regarding how this relates specifically to the work of Saarinen, see page 7 for a review of two new books on that modernist master.) The preservation dialogue, frequently seen as being about personal preference—thought, therefore, to be largely subjective—needs to be redirected not only to the larger subject of architectural design; it also has to include a broader discussion of the historical, cultural and contextual significance of the full spectrum of international, national, regional and local buildings and their architects, elite geniuses and innovative professionals alike.

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

- Society of Architectural Historians 56th Annual Meeting**
Providence, RI April 14 - 28
- 29th Annual California Preservation Foundation Conference**
San Francisco, CA April 28 - May 1
- "Learn/Celebrate/Dream": AIA 2004 National Convention and Exposition**
Chicago, IL June 10 - 12

EXHIBITS

- Mori on Wright: Designs for F. L. Wright's Martin House Visitor Center**
Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Through March 14
- The Undiscovered Richard Meier: The Architect as Designer and Artist**
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA
Through April 4
- Design-Recline: Modern Architecture and the Mid-Century Chaise Lounge**
Busch-Reisinger Museum,
Cambridge, MA March 20 - July 11

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Welcome

Over the past eight years, DOCOMOMO has become the national advocate for the preservation of modern architecture, evidenced by our testimony in support of many preservation causes. Over the same period, several new chapters have been established, with others still forming across the country.

Through our newsletters, organizing meetings, tours and lectures, we provide information and support on advocacy issues; our expanding website, www.docomomo-us.org, continues to provide easy access to this information and more.

In 2004 DOCOMOMO-US has committed to two new coordinated initiatives. First, in September of this year, New York City will be the site of the VIIIth International DOCOMOMO Conference, following in the footsteps of seven earlier conferences (held in Paris, Brasilia, Stockholm, Barcelona, Sliac, Dessau and Eindhoven). Hosted by DOCOMOMO-US, an added component of the conference will be the initiation of a series of technological seminars dealing specifically with nuts and bolts issues affecting post-war modern architecture in the US and throughout the world. Information about these sessions can be found at the conference website www.docomomo2004.org.

Our second initiative is to play a more active role in establishing liaisons with other organizations, so as to play a leading role in providing technical information to our members. One such venture is the establishment of an interactive database for the register of modern buildings. Following in the footsteps of DOCOMOMO International, we have begun to survey and record many modern buildings across the country in order to provide more documentation for our members and other interested parties. Since the success of advocacy is based on knowing what exists and what has been done regionally, nationally and even internationally, our efforts are not intended to duplicate existing surveys but rather to supplement them, thus serving preservation efforts more effectively.

This is a very ambitious agenda for what is still very much an all-volunteer organization, but with your help we know we can do it. We hope you will continue to support DOCOMOMO.

—Theodore Prudon
President,
DOCOMOMO-US

Modernism in Argentina: “The Paris (and Berlin and New York and London) of the South”

Argentina evokes tango, soccer and financial crisis—not to mention the architectural epithet “Paris of the South.” Francophile tendencies in Argentina during the 19th and early 20th centuries, though, were just one of many imported and reworked architectural styles at play. Modern Movement architecture in Argentina has a similar hybrid history, but the earliest inklings of Modernism in Argentina coincided with an illustrious visit. In 1929, the Sociedad Amigos del Arte (Friends of the Arts Society) invited **Le Corbusier** to Buenos Aires to give nine lectures. Via these lectures—and, of course, imported European magazines—Modernism began to be explored locally.

In anticipation of Le Corbusier’s arrival, writer and socialite **Victoria Ocampo**, founder of the cultural journal *SUR*, sought to commission a house in Buenos Aires employing Modernism’s aesthetics; well-known academic architect **Alejandro Bustillo** received the commission. The house shows a great tension between the modern ideals the client sought to express and the hesitancy of the architect, with the resulting design more an application of Modernism as a style than an embodiment of its principles. However, the Ocampo house is considered the first building in Argentina built in the spirit of Modernism, typical of much hybrid Argentine architectural production. In 1997, a destructive renovation project was proposed for the house by the Argentine government and accepted by UNESCO. Outcry from citizens and preservationists halted the project and the site is now the home of El Fondo Nacional de las Artes (National Endowment for the Arts).

Despite Le Corbusier’s visit and Ocampo’s pioneering house, accepted modes of taste during the 1930s remained classically inspired, with a move towards nationalistic colonial architecture. However, an early wave of Modernism did manage to emerge; its practitioners generally remained outsiders, and it



Casa del Puente, Mar del Plata, 1942



Kavanagh Apartment Building, Buenos Aires, 1935

remained mostly a style for the elite. A noteworthy example is the **Kavanagh Apartment Building**, completed in 1935 by **Sanchez, Lagos & de la Torre** in Buenos Aires. At 33 stories, it was the largest reinforced concrete structure in South America, remaining the tallest for many years. Initial cost regulations were set up in order to assure quality of result, and apartments were aimed at middle class individual owners. It was also the first apartment building in the world to have a central air conditioning system. Mixing the forms of an Art Deco American skyscraper with that of expressionism while employing German construction standards (DIN regulations), the building remains today a major city landmark.

Classicism fully emerged as the primary mode and style in which to build by the 1940s. However, significant Modern works were still realized despite the historicist trend. This was in part due to a lack of strong influence, either at the universities or in architecture journals, on the early generation of Modernists. Exemplary projects were realized, though, such as **Casa del Puente**. An elegant single-story exposed concrete house in the seaside town of Mar del Plata, it was built in 1942 by

Amancio Williams for his father. Supported by a sweeping arch over a stream, the house was innovative for its free plan, fenestration and daring use of materials. Now a national landmark, it is currently in very poor condition; the city of Mar del Plata is hoping to raise funds and purchase the property for restoration as a museum and cultural center.

Probably the most well known piece of Modern architecture from this period in all of South America, the **Casa Curutchet** in La Plata was designed by **Le Corbusier** in the late

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Regional Updates

Georgia

DOCOMOMO Georgia has a threefold mission: to educate ourselves about extant and lost modern movement resources in Georgia, to enhance public awareness about these resources, –and to comprehensively document them. Our application process to become a chapter has been completed after several organizational meetings, and plans have been made to announce the chapter at a number of upcoming conventions throughout the state. Recently, a roster of officers has also been elected (**Tom Little**, President; **Amie A. Spinks**, Vice President; **Jon Buono**, Secretary; and **Richard Laub**, Treasurer). We have had great attendance and enthusiasm at our start-up meetings, and are excited about introducing the chapter statewide.

The first part of our mission—to increase public and professional awareness—will be achieved through lectures, publications, events, a chapter website and documentation efforts, as well as ongoing outreach to other professional groups and cultural institutions. Creating an inventory of Georgia's 20th century architectural heritage is a major aspect of our goal, and is already underway. A database for the inventory has been started, including the following information regarding particular 20th century resources: styles/movements, contributing creators, influences, photographic documentation and a bibliography. Buildings, sites, landscapes, and other structures will be classified according to type and location, with nationally significant sites being nominated for the DOCOMOMO national register. We also intend to establish a register of properties of local, state, national, and international importance; to date, over fifty Atlanta properties have been identified and entered into this growing database. Additionally, the chapter has started collecting articles, books, publications, renderings, photographs, and other visual media regarding the modern movement in Georgia.

To achieve its goals, DOCOMOMO-GA is collaborating with several statewide agencies, among them the State Historic Preservation Office, the Atlanta

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DOCOMOMO-US | Chapter News

New York/Tri-State

DOCOMOMO New York/ Tri-State holds regular monthly meetings and continues ongoing work in outreach, education, and advocacy for modern architecture. The **TWA Terminal** and **2 Columbus Circle** have received a great deal of attention in the past couple of months, as the owners of each building are continuing with their plans for alterations. Regarding the TWA Terminal at JFK Airport, New York/Tri-State members testified at a Port Authority hearing in mid-July to support the preservation of the terminal. Our summer newsletter featured an article about another endangered JFK Airport modern masterpiece, the innovative National Airlines Terminal, **The Sundrome** (I. M. Pei, 1970). Concerning **2 Columbus Circle**, New York/Tri-State is assisting in research and advocacy with Landmark West in order to better understand and communicate the building's significance, as well as to convince the Museum of Arts and Design of the merit of preserving Durell Stone's façade and noteworthy architectural features.

In New Jersey, several members completed extensive historical research and written testimony to help in the fight to save the Hoboken **Maxwell House Coffee Factory** (Ferguson, 1939), slated for demolition. In New Haven, Nina Rappaport presented the work of DOCOMOMO at a June forum on alternative uses for the **New Haven Coliseum** (Kevin Roche & John Dinkeloo, 1972), which is slated for demolition next year by the city.

Following in the footsteps of New Canaan, numerous suburban towns in Connecticut and Westchester County are finding their modern roots in spite of MacMansion fanaticism. The Litchfield Historical Society mounted an exhibition, "In Our Own Time," during October and November; it was curated by **Rachel Carley** and designed by **Craig Konyk**. In April in conjunction with this exhibition, DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State held the first full-day architectural tour of Litchfield, visiting modern buildings by Marcel Breuer and John Johansen, among others. The tour emphasized for us all how a small interest in Modernism can explode to influence numerous homeowners in their selection of modern architects. The Historical Society in Rye, New York hosted a similar series of events in October 2003.

This fall the chapter co-sponsored (with the New York Chapter of the AIA) a series of educational events, including a lecture in October by Australian architect **Harry Seidler**. A November film showing of **My Architect** by **Nathaniel**



Edward Durell Stone's **A. Conger Goodyear House**, site of New York/Tri-State Chapter Winter Tour

Kahn (son of Louis Kahn) was also co-sponsored by the AIA. In mid-November, the chapter launched its official list serve to bring local news via e-mail to members and friends of modern architecture in the Tri-State area. Sign up at www.docomomo-us.org on the Tri-State chapter page where you will also find the latest issue of our chapter newsletter. In February, a tour of E. D. Stone's **A. Conger Goodyear House** was co-sponsored by the chapter, the World Monument Fund, and the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities. In March, a panel discussion on Modern Open Space in New York will be co-sponsored with the Van Alen Institute, featuring MoMA curator **Peter Reed** and landscape architect **Ken Smith** as panelists.

—*Nina Rappaport/Kathleen Randall*

Western Washington

On September 13th, DOCOMOMO WeWa hosted over 100 participants for a lecture and tour of Modernism in Bellevue. Incorporated 50 years ago, this post-war Seattle suburb's growth paralleled the growth of the automobile and presents many good examples of how architecture reflected the new mobility. After hearing a lecture by **Guy Besner** at the Puget Power Building, participants took advantage of the only sunny day of that week by touring a selection of commercial, residential and religious buildings. While walking around the Hilltop community, participants were able to talk with homeowners and with **Wendell Lovett**, architect of one of the houses.

Two WeWa members were involved in the Landmark nomination of the 1962 **World's Fair Monorail**. Despite getting a unanimous vote for designation by the Seattle Landmark's Board, the Seattle City Council chose to strip the Monorail of most of its protections. Currently, its demolition (to be replaced by a new monorail) is, unfortunately, almost certain.

—*Andrew Phillips*

Northern California

Fall 2003 activities of the DOCOMOMO-US/ Northern California Chapter have included an exhibit of photographs of the **Madeleine Isom Building** held at the new Gensler exhibition space in San Francisco, with an opening reception in August. In September, the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy Conference was held in San Francisco; our chapter led a Modern Bus Tour of the City that was well received. We have also continued to update our modern register, "San Francisco Modern," and hope to publish a selection from the register in early 2004.

Our annual holiday party was held in December; in May, as part of the 2004 California Preservation Foundation Annual Conference at the Presidio in San Francisco, we will sponsor a DOCOMOMO session called "Forgotten Masters of the 2nd Bay Region," as well as a modern landscape tour of San Francisco environs.

DOCOMOMO-US/Northern California Chapter meets regularly on the second Tuesday of each month. Recent publications that have highlighted

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Urban Design Commission, Georgia State University, The National Park Service Southeast Regional Office, and the Georgia Institute of Technology. Collaboration with these agencies will facilitate identification and preservation of 20th century resources and increase our information repository.

A variety of additional activities are currently underway in our area. The 1957 **Douglas County Courthouse**, by the Atlanta firm of **Southern Engineering**, was recently nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Of particular note are several recent modern movement documentation efforts: **Dr. Robert Craig**, architectural historian, has written several books and publications regarding the Modern Movement in Georgia; and the Atlanta Urban Design Commission has completed an extensive study of modern housing in Atlanta. Additionally, the Georgia State Special Collections and Archives photographic collection has gone online. This extensive collection



Dinler Towers

includes photographs and images of Georgia from 1898 through 1985.

If you are interested in DOCOMOMO-GA and have information you would like to share, please email info@docomomoga.org or tlittle@sbcharch.com. So far, local reception has been great and we look forward to future projects and efforts.

—Amie A. Spinks

Southern California

The opening of Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall this past fall has had an electrifying effect on

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DOCOMOMO-US | Chapter News (cont'd)

the Chapter include the last issue of **arcCA**, the AIA California Council's quarterly journal. This past May, the **Diablo** Magazine issue dedicated to modernist homes printed an article about our advocacy work for little known and threatened residential buildings.

—Laura Culbertson

New England

The New England Chapter is steadily consolidating its position as the leading source of information on and advocacy for the work of the Modern Movement in this region. We have recently completed, along with SPNEA (the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities), a series of six tours of modern houses and modern housing developments around the Boston area, including tours to: **Six Moon Hill, Peacock Farm, and Five Fields** in Lexington; **Snake Hill** in Belmont; **Conantum** in Concord; and a tour of houses from the early 1930's to 1970 in Lincoln. More tours, including a tour of modern houses in Western Massachusetts, and a second tour of Modern houses in Cambridge, MA (in conjunction with the Cambridge Historical Society), are planned for the near future.

In June, the chapter sponsored a tour of **Paul Rudolph's Jewett Art Center** that also featured a lecture by Wellesley College Senior Lecturer **John Rhoads** about the history, evolution and significance of the complex. September saw strong DOCOMOMO-NE participation in the annual Massachusetts State Historic Preservation Conference, which featured a tour of Modern buildings in Boston led by **Henry Moss**, as well as a panel on Modern houses and house districts chaired by **David Fixler** and featuring **Bill Barlow** as a panelist.

The "Invisible Modernist" house exhibit noted in the last newsletter, which featured 10 Modern houses of the interwar period that predate the arrival of Walter Gropius in New England (and Sigfried Giedion's pronouncements on that arrival) was shown during December at the Boston Society of Architects Building. Among the houses featured in the exhibition was **Edwin "Ned" Goodell's 1933 Field House** in Weston, MA; it has been the subject of an internationally-recognized advocacy program mounted by members **Hélène Lipstadt**, the architect's grandson **Ned Goodell**, **Gar y Wolf**, Moss and Fixler. We are pleased to report that these efforts have proved successful and that a sympathetic new owner has been found for the property.

The *Boston Globe* ran a feature article describing **Gina Coyle**'s efforts on behalf of saving the **Kuhn House** in Wellfleet, MA, as well as her advocacy for the creation of a Modernist historic district on the outer reaches of Cape Cod. DOCOMOMO-NE was prominently featured and cited in this article. Paperwork on establishing such a district has been submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission, with the Northeast Chapter as well as the Boston Society of Architects acting as sponsors on its behalf.

Finally, DOCOMOMO-NE will soon undertake an Oral History project to document the rich history of the Modern Movement in this region. This effort, scheduled to include interviews with many

original **TAC** (The Architect's Collaborative) partners as well as other prominent architects, should be underway before the end of this year.

—David Fixler

Midwest

The Midwest Chapter sponsored two presentations this past year, the first an entertaining and provocative lecture at the Chicago Architecture Foundation given by **Jeanne Lambin**, entitled: "Recent Past or Piece of @#!: The Problem of Preserving 'Underage' Architecture." The second, this time at the AIA Chicago Chapter, further addressed unique topics of recent past architecture with multi-media presentations by recent graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Historic Preservation program. **Chrissy Barr** discussed the benefits and successes of split-level homes, and **Marilyn Lehman** presented the underappreciated yet intriguing graphics, paint colors, and unique pattern names of postwar garage door designs.

DOCOMOMO members participated in the 40th anniversary celebration of Bertrand Goldberg's **Marina Towers** on a weekend in May, staffing a PR table to increase awareness of our regional chapter. Members also promoted our international and national organizations as well as the upcoming 2004 conference by representing DOCOMOMO-US in the Restoration & Renovation Chicago exhibit in September. We had great interest, with approximately 80-100 people stopping by the booth to pick up information.

In anticipation of our chapter's Autumn House Tour, the chapter viewed a video on architect **Paul Schweilher**. The video was originally broadcast as part of an HGTV series on Historic Homes. **Gunny Harboe**, DOCOMOMO-US Vice President, participated with other noted historians and preservationists in the November Chicago Architecture Foundation panel discussion, "The Farnsworth House: A Look at Its Past and Future." The presentation was standing-room-only and helped to increase awareness of the plight of the Farnsworth House. In December, Chicago area preservationists celebrated the success of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's and the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois's (LPC) bid at Sotheby's for the **Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House**.

Lynette Stuhlmacher



Buckminster Fuller Dome, Nautilus Hotel, Wood's Hole, MA, site of the New England Winter Tour

Regional Updates

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the city of Los Angeles, punctuating a growing awareness and appreciation for architecture and urban design in Southern California. Yet concepts like "history" and "heritage" have always been fluid in a city that embraces its own clichés. Recent trends both in the city and within the greater metropolitan area (a region of about 3600 square miles) underscore increased appreciation by Angelenos of the built environment in general, as well as specific attentions to the legacy of Modernist architecture.

Increased redevelopment is occurring in cities to the east of Los Angeles, in areas such as Covina, Colton, and Fontana that enjoyed their initial building boom from the late 1940s through the early 1960s. Many extant resources in these areas have local if not regional architectural significance. DOCOMOMO's advocacy brings an attention that would go a long way toward helping to preserve some of the best of these buildings, in the face of communities generally sympathetic but development-oriented.

While suburbs to the east grapple with replacing their Modernist buildings, developers within the city have embraced older office buildings from the '40s, '50s, and '60s. Buildings along the Wilshire Boulevard Corridor and in West Los Angeles from these years are seeing revitalization, while Downtown there is an aggressive renovation push involving everything from early Beaux-Arts piles to rough Art Deco concrete warehouses. In the



The Pegasus

later case, adaptive re-use predominates; noteworthy projects involving signature Modernist buildings in the Financial District include the Pegasus and The Standard Hotel.

The Pegasus, once the **General Petroleum Building**

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Building Obituaries

Introduction: Building Obituaries and Threatened Resources

Although modernism had made its appearance in the United States prior to World War II, the birth and maturation of the Modern Movement in the United States was due to the great postwar building boom. Today, many masterworks of Modernism from this era and earlier face uncertain futures; currently, numerous resources have been inadequately maintained, dramatically and unsympathetically altered, or—even worse—simply demolished. Since DOcumentation of the MODern MOVement is a primary aim of DOCOMOMO, the column **Building Obituaries** will do precisely that, feature lost, altered or threatened Modernist works. If you have a resource you would like included, please contact the editors (at newsletter@docomomo-us.org) or representatives from your area at the e-mail address listed under "Chapters/Regional" on the back of the newsletter. —*Jeanne Lambin*



Farnsworth House, Mies van der Rohe, 1951: saved by the National Trust for Historic Preservation/the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois

THREATENED (AND SAVED!!): Mies van der Rohe's Edith Farnsworth House

*As this newsletter was going to press—and against incredible odds—the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with help from the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and Friends of the Farnsworth House, successfully purchased what is arguably one of architect Mies van der Rohe's most important American works, only one of three residential works built in this country. In a press release circulated by the National Trust, it was stated that the building was turned over to their possession on the afternoon of Wednesday, December 17th, 2003, just five days after the Sotheby's auction described below. National Trust for Historic Preservation president **Richard Moe**, Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois president*

***David Bahlman**, along with John Bryan, chairman of the Friends of the Farnsworth House, shared in this Modern preservation victory; Moe and Bahlman expressed their appreciation to the many people who showed exemplary leadership and generosity in making this possible (especially those preservation members of the Friends and other related organizations).*

Rather than concentrate completely on the success of these efforts (which could have easily turned out differently, as bidding for the house was extremely competitive, ending at a \$7.5 million purchase price!!!), the editors are running the previously slated article, to stress the precarious nature of numerous other such valuable resources nationwide.

For many, Mies van der Rohe's 1951 Farnsworth House is not just a house; rather, it is an embodiment of Modern Movement ideals. The home's current owner, **Lord Peter Palumbo**, art collector, philanthropist and former Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, acquired the house from its namesake, **Dr. Edith Farnsworth**, in 1972. After careful stewardship of the house for over three decades, Lord Palumbo is now selling the house at a Sotheby's auction on December 12, 2003 in New York City. It is estimated to sell for \$4.5 to 6.0 million.

In a recent article in the *UK Telegraph*, **James Zemaitis**, Senior Vice President and Director of Sotheby's 20th Century Design Department, describes it as "one of the seven wonders of the Modern architectural world. It was the most staggering development in 20th century domestic architecture, and set on pastoral grounds of breathtaking beauty."

Despite its acknowledged significance, one of the great wonders of the modern movement could be lost if the house is sold to an unsympathetic buyer. Such was the case with **Eero Saarinen's**

Rancho Mirage, sold at a Sotheby's auction for \$2.45 million and subsequently demolished by its new owners. The fate of the Farnsworth house is particularly precarious, as there are currently no local, state or federal landmark laws in place that could prevent the Farnsworth House from being altered, moved or even demolished.

In an attempt to stop the potential desecration of this landmark, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois have launched a major campaign to purchase the Farnsworth House to ensure the home's preservation on its original site and maintain public access to this world-class monument. To learn more about the Trust's campaign or to make a contribution, visit the Trust's Web site at:

<http://member.nationaltrust.org/farnsworth> or call 1-800-315-6847 and ask about the Farnsworth campaign. All contributors will receive a one-year membership to the Trust when they support the campaign. —*Doug Gilbert*

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was designed by **Welton Becket** and completed in 1949. In the conversion to high-end apartments, details such as the accordion bi-fold windows (pictured) have been preserved, as has the original lobby; the exterior was restored, and street-level retail is being re-introduced. **The Standard Hotel** began life as the headquarters for Superior Oil in 1956. Designed by **Claud Beelman**, the building is clad in white and black Carrara marble with stainless steel spandrels; the lobby is currently a historic landmark. The renovation was led by **Konig Eizenberg Architect** and completed in 2002.

While an image of High Modernism is just as important to these conversions as is the actual architecture, other iconic Modern structures are not enjoying such respectful attention. The 1949 **Eames House** (Case Study House #8) is now battling development next door: a 22,000 sq. ft. Tuscan villa, roughly ten times the size of the historic home and office. Development hinges on a permit from the Coastal Commission, as well as the community of Pacific Palisades. The Cultural Heritage Commission has defended the Eames House. Despite a 36-foot retaining wall, the project will likely be built; current compromise consists of shifting the new house away from the much smaller home.

Other threats to signature Modernist homes in Los Angeles have not been as benign. Last year, **Richard Neutra**'s **Maslon House**, built in Rancho Mirage in 1962, was torn down after a Minnesota couple paid \$2.45 million to acquire the land. They cleared the site a month later, without comment (and with permission) from the city, which was apparently not aware of the significance of the structure. This is a common story, unfortunately; **RM Schindler**'s 1928 **Wolfe House**, on Catalina Island, was also demolished last year when new owners declared it too much of a fixer-upper. They committed, ironically, to build a new home in the same "spirit."

Schindler's own house in West Hollywood has come under unique development pressure. The property to the south was sold recently, demolished to make way for a lot line-to-lot line

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2004 International DOCOMOMO Conference Update

The VIIIth International DOCOMOMO Conference, **Import/Export: Postwar Modernism in an Expanding World, 1945-1975**, will be held on the campus of Columbia University in New York City from Sunday, September 26th to Tuesday, September 28th, with workshops and local tours on September 29th/30th and October 1st/2nd, and regional tours thereafter. (This represents a slight modification of the originally announced dates.)

A 17-member international Program Committee selected the approximately 100 papers and posters from among the almost 300 abstracts submitted. Committee members came from three of the present five subchapters of DOCOMOMO-US (NE, Tri-State, and NoCA), as well as 11 countries (or Working Parties): Canada, England, France, Italy, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Netherlands, Puerto Rico, and Spain. Tri-State member **Jo Goldberger** and Columbia Preservation program student **Flora Chou** administered the blind review process.

Building Obituaries (cont'd)

THREATENED: Smith and Williams's Design Office

A Modernist building in South Pasadena, designed by the firm of **Smith and Williams** in 1958, is now threatened. An amazing structure that served as the offices for a group of associated businesses including the Smith and Williams architectural office, the landscape office of Garret Eckbo, Dean and Williams, as well as other design firms.

It is a unique landmark structure, consisting of four separate buildings with a common courtyard and a connecting roof of expanded metal mesh arches. Its current state suggests a very high degree of integrity; and it includes original globe fixtures, an open, winding stairway in extremely good shape, and much of the original landscaping.

The building's architects, Smith and Williams, designed two unrealized houses for the Case Study House program; designer **Garret Eckbo** was perhaps the leading modernist landscape architect in mid-century California. The building won many significant awards and was featured in the September 1959 issue of **Architectural Forum**; it was also recently featured, through original Julius Schulman photographs, in the Taschen book, **Modernism Rediscovered**.

The South Pasadena Unified School District wants to demolish the structure to expand an adjacent middle school. The local AIA is preparing a State Landmark Nomination and the Cultural Heritage Commission in South Pasadena has completed a nomination for local landmark status and has designated the building. The School Board seems intent on demolition regardless, and the City Council plans to cite overriding considerations as justification for ignoring any potential landmark status in the development process.

—Alan Leib

We look forward to hearing papers at the conference that treat new topics, document overlooked Modernist designs in countries often studied, or take new looks at familiar places and persons of the architecture of 1945-1975. There will be a UN-like diversity in both the national origin of the speakers and the subjects of the papers and posters. The latter cover postwar architecture, landscape and planning and its preservation in: all of the Americas and the Caribbean; Eastern and Western Europe; Asia (India, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nepal, North and South Vietnam, and Australia); and North Africa and the Middle East. In accordance with the theme of import-export, the largest group of accepted submissions is concerned not with a single country, but rather with designers, users, ideas, technologies, and ideologies and their migration across borders.

A NYC-based group of volunteers will organize the social events and local tours that will supplement the paper and poster sessions and debates. Finally, thanks to a grant from the **Graham Foundation**, the conference website www.docomomo2004.org will provide background information on postwar architecture and its preservation across the world. For updated information, visit the conference website at www.docomomo2004.org. —Hélène Lipstadt



Front of Smith and Williams's Design Office

DEMOLISHED: Bertrand Goldberg's Harriet Higginson House

The Harriet Higginson House, designed by Chicago native and Harvard/Bauhaus/IIT-trained **Bertrand Goldberg** (1913-1997), was arguably not the most beguiling building. It was, after all, his first commission. The client, who Goldberg described as an "early feminist spirit," wanted a house she could "keep clean with a garden hose, inside and out!" In the pre-aluminum siding era, this was a bit of a challenge. Undaunted, Goldberg looked to the industrial world for a model, coming up with a solution: a canvas-covered house that was innovative, economical and more than a bit startling to observers.

The unique design recalled the spirit of the 1922 "experimental house" designed by Walter Gropius, Fred Fobard and their Bauhaus students; it also hints at Goldberg's later work with prefabricated structures. Although the house was somewhat awkward in composition, it was decidedly forward looking when compared to its Tudor and Colonial Revival contemporaries.

Goldberg's spirit of innovation would characterize his later designs, ranging from small-scale mobile ice cream stores and prefabricated bathroom units

cont'd on p. 10

Regional Updates

(cont'd)

condominium complex that potentially sandwiches the historic home between two imposing stucco boxes. The developer publicly pledged to build a project "sensitive" to the historic structure (and selflessly sacrificing unit sales in the process). Responding to the development threat in a novel way, the MAK Center, the Viennese art and architecture center that uses the Schindler house as its offices in LA. An international design competition was sponsored, in order to envision alternatives to the proposed development. Called "A Tribute to Schindler's Paradise" (<http://www.makcenter.com/tribute.html>), the submissions featured proposals by Zaha Hadid, Mark Mack, COOP HIMMELB(L)AU, and other local and international architects. Public discussion has taken on higher stakes as a result of this ideas competition, but whether these units go forward is not clear at this point.

What is clear, though, is that architecture is becoming a more serious topic in Los Angeles now, when many mid-century Modernist buildings are reaching the end of their useful life, in communities that often are under serious pressure to reinvent themselves. DOCOMOMO's project in Los Angeles comes at an opportune time. It is a time to build on the public's general awareness of local architectural and urban heritage, ensuring that future development includes the best mid-century Modern architecture and design, revitalized and able to contribute to new generations. —Noam Maitlass

North Texas

For the past six months, a nine member, ad hoc Steering Committee has been guiding the initial development of a North Texas Chapter, known formally as docomomo.ntx. Consisting of architects, developers, and preservationists, this committee is now pleased to announce that an application for formal chapter recognition has been submitted for approval. The mission statement, short and sweet, for the new chapter is as follows: the North Texas Chapter of DOCOMOMO-US advocates the exploration, documentation, conserva-

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Two New Books on Eero Saarinen Pose Important Questions for Modernist Preservation

Past preservation struggles such as the unsuccessful effort to save Pennsylvania Station in the early 1960s make clear that the most important question for those of us interested in keeping such significant buildings from disappearing is how—as activists—to do so. However, important secondary questions regarding modernist preservation loom as well, such as how to determine what to select from among the gradually increasing number of threatened buildings. Take, for example, the case of Eero Saarinen: while it seems obvious that arguably most of his projects are worth preserving, the plight of the TWA Terminal



Eero Saarinen: An Architecture of Multiplicity
Antonio Ramon

at John F. Kennedy International Airport suggests that even the fate of works by such a master as Saarinen are all but secure. His **Dulles Airport** terminal was, indeed, one of the first Modern buildings to be put on the National Register, yet other corporate works are not landmarked and thus subject to the whims of their corporate owners. Two new books on Saarinen propose interesting perspectives on his work, in turn raising questions that 20th century preservation efforts currently should or eventually, will have to ask—and answer—especially if efforts to marshal munificent attitudes regarding the historic built environment wish to take a proactive rather than a reactive role toward achieving concrete ends.

During the 1950s, the era of the man in the gray flannel suit, Saarinen's firm realized numerous

large-scale complexes or office buildings for a veritable cavalcade of leading American companies, including IBM, CBS, General Motors, Bell Telephone, and John Deere & Co. In addition, he designed structures for a number of educational institutions—Yale University, MIT, University of Michigan and others—as well as a bank building and church in **Columbus, Indiana**, the city of Mid-century Modernism sponsored by the Cummins Engine Foundation. His tragic, untimely death in 1961 of a brain tumor, at only 51 years of age and perhaps the height of his skills, arguably robbed Modern architecture of a practice that was one of its more vibrant, eclectic, and innovative. Inheriting a European-style, design-intensive office from his father Eliel, under whom he was mentored and with whom he collaborated from 1937 until the elder's death in 1950, Eero Saarinen took advantage of postwar American developments and ran, for a brief period, an exemplary and pioneering Modernist firm: small, productive, efficient, and innovative.

Efforts to preserve Saarinen's work, though, face two distinct problems: the status of his reputa-



The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space, Reinhold Martin

tion and the flexibility of his realized design projects. Regarding Saarinen's reputation, **Antonio Ramon's Eero Saarinen: An Architecture of Multiplicity** argues that he was an eclectic designer producing buildings that defy any typological or stylistic pigeon-holing. Decidedly an old-fashioned monograph, it catalogs Saarinen's production in a very loose and not particularly sympathetic taxonomy based on programmatic generalizations (among them dwelling, building and socializing). While Ramon's text comments on how Saarinen's reputation has "languished in critical purgatory," in part because both "jealous colleagues" and "a dogmatic press" "dismissed him as a showman," it does little to challenge these perceptions, save claiming that he was extremely serious about his firm's work and that each individual commission received the

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Regional Updates

(cont'd)

tion, and sustained use of the region's manifestations of the Modern Movement.

Centered around Dallas/Fort Worth, the chapter, due to a rich heritage of modern architecture in many smaller Texas towns, stretches north to Oklahoma, south to Hillsboro, east to Louisiana, and west to Wichita Falls. After much discussion, the Steering Committee opted not to affiliate with other professional or preservation organizations, as those existing in North Texas have specific geographic areas (i.e. Dallas or Fort Worth), and thus do not address the wider geographical region we intend to serve. Early feedback from several of these organizations, including AIA and Preservation Dallas, has been enthusiastic and supportive.

An initial kick-off event took place October 31 in Fort Worth, during the Annual Meeting of the Texas Society of Architects. Beginning with this informal mixer, the Steering Committee plans to recruit a larger membership and will hold formal elections of Board and Officers and approval of bylaws at an upcoming meeting. Future events include a tour of early modern architecture in April 2004 as part of Dallas' annual Architecture Month and an October 2004 symposium on **Paul Rudolph** and his work (D/FW has three Rudolph office towers).

A preliminary listing of significant modern buildings and places has been developed, with the goal of documenting at least ten during 2004. This list includes, of course, the work of internationally recognized practitioners such as Paul Rudolph, Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, and Philip Johnson; in addition, though, the **docomo - mo.ntx** listing includes a number of lesser-known but nevertheless important works by regional modernists such as **O'Neil For d**, **E. G. Hamilton**, **Enslie Oglesby**, and **George Dahl**. It is anticipated that the documentation process will reveal the unique forms that the Modern Movement took when filtered through the culture, climate, and conditions of the region, whether practiced by native Texans or by "out-of-towners."

—Robert Meckfessel

Becket/Stone (cont'd)

The dilemmas and controversies surrounding modernist preservation of work by predominantly commercial firms are poignantly illustrated by two current examples: Stone's **2 Columbus Circle**, a.k.a. the **Huntington Hartford Gallery** (1958) in New York City, and the **Parker Building**, a.k.a. **Police Administration Building** (1959) in Los Angeles, designed by Becket. Stone and Becket are by all measures significant architects, of a piece with those 19th and early 20th century architects whose lives, milieues, and designs are fodder for scholarly monographs that teach us valuable lessons of how practice worked in the past and might (or might not) still work today. Furthermore, it is overwhelmingly the building production of non-canonical figures that today are regularly dealt with by preservation architects. Decidedly, it is not just unavowed masterpieces that have taken the wear and tear of time; a wide spectrum of work demands attention in order to retain its place in world heritage. No style is eternal; early and late phases need to be examined, understood and yes saved, so that architecture's melding of form and use is correctly seen as a constantly constructed fit rather than god-like acts of isolated lightning bolts.

It is certainly true—but not a diminishing embarrassment—that Stone's early residential work shows an outspoken modernism while his postwar portfolio, as seen in 2 Columbus Circle, is thought to have "softened," thus becoming the subject of much ridicule but also increased fascination. Wallace Harrison, in contrast, shows a similar development, yet since the 1960s he has not been subjected to such severe criticism as that heaped on Stone. This play of reputations has a history of its own: while **Robert Venturi** criticized Stone's work in his 1972 *Learning from Las Vegas*, later in that decade **Rem Koolhaas** produced an exhibit and catalogue in praise of Harrison's work and professional efficacy. Such cases should not to be taken, however, as any sort of final word. The current difference between Stone and Harrison's reputation may partly be explained by the lack of any serious scholarship on Stone, whereas a very significant monograph on Stone, Wallace Harrison does exist: **Victoria Newhouse's** 1989 *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect*. To presume that today's fashions should alone dictate the deploying of an architect's reputation in order to determine the worthiness of a building's continued existence is to deny objects the benefit of considering the rich social forces that produce and effect them. In truth, such judgements takes a myopic and rather bleak attitude toward the future unfolding of the fields of architecture, building and design.

Becket's modernist contribution in general and to Los Angeles in particular was recognized this year on his 100th birthday with a major public event, a catalogue of his work, and guided tours, much of this effort being the work of the Modern Committee of the Los Angeles Conservancy, (*For more thoughts on this subject, see the Southern California Regional Update, starting on page 4.*) The Police Administration Building was originally designed on the premise that as the home of a modern police department, the building should be efficient and inviting, not intimidating. The resulting modernist building is now called plain and inefficient, and thought not to be worth saving. This argu-



Welton Becket's Parker Building of 1959 in Los Angeles

ment is in some ways the exact opposite of the New York example, where the works exceptional dovetails with its historical aura, suggesting to some the need for updating.

Although both buildings are good examples of the period and designed by major architects, this is not about architecture. The resultant negative evaluations are, on the one hand, products of limited scholarship, thereby making good-versus-bad judgement much harder to separate and put into context, and on the other by prejudicial perception of the prior/current users or occupants. 2 Columbus Circle, while designed as a museum, served mostly for other inappropriate functions; it suffered, as well, from an appalling lack of maintenance. The LA Police Department as an institution in recent years can hardly be described as open and inviting, and it is silly to blame the building's appearance alone for the organization's need for a makeover, or to think that such cosmetic improvements alone will readily get to the heart of such complex social matters.

While there is no simple answer to the problem of modernist preservation, like many other dilemmas we must continue to evaluate buildings on their merits, the same way we do other sorts of historical artifacts and items inherited from other historic periods. We should be less influenced, as well, by merely subjective discussions, which some ten years from now will seem dated, out of fashion, and less of an intelligent or compelling issue. Current efforts to turn the **McKim Mead & White** designed neo-classical 1911 **James Farley Post Office Building** into a suitably grandiose train shed for Penn Station, as a form of penance for undervaluing the former station's cultural value can easily be reversed, suggesting that tearing down a modernist gem in anticipation of hoped-for efficiencies and ever newer newnesses yet to come would merely repeat past errors. In the meantime, taking a cue from both Becket and Beckett, we have to stop waiting for Godot. And we have to choose but wisely.

—Theodore Prudon

DOCOMOMO-US

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DOCOMOMO Workshop on Modern Architecture Surveys

On Friday, June 13 **Nina Rappaport** and **Gary Koll** organized a workshop on surveys of Modern architecture and criteria at The Preservation Center in New York. The day-long event served as an exchange of common issues in identification of significant buildings, survey methods, data bases, and issues as they relate to local governmental agencies for advocacy work and outreach.

The event included presentations of work from around the country; beginning with a presentation by recent Columbia Preservation graduate **Amy Diehl**, an assistant with the DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-State chapter's Midtown Modern Survey. She spoke about her thesis, which evaluated the use of modern architecture surveys and showed how various processes around the country each served to be a proactive way to safeguard modern architecture.

Historian **Randy Mason** of Maryland explained the extensive work he and his colleagues at the University of Maryland have been commissioned to do for the Maryland State Preservation office in their exemplary survey of a suburban region and its modern architecture, identifying significant buildings, and providing a context for the modern work. Koll presented the work in the San Francisco region and **Colleen Meager** of Boston, with **David Fixler** of the international register committee, presented surveys

of the Boston area and the work with the local landmarks commission. **Su Tamsett** showed how a local suburban community is completing an inventory of modern houses with DOCOMOMO New York/Tri-state and volunteers that is leading to the discovery of more Modern houses than expected in New Canaan, Connecticut. Rappaport presented the survey of over 200 Midtown Manhattan buildings that the New York/Tri-state chapter is undertaking, which includes compilation of the history, resources, and photographs into a database using the international register fiche forms.

While many of the surveys are still in their identification stages, the common interests included developing a standard computerized database format that could be used in conjunction with DOCOMOMO's register criteria and fiches. Of interest is that these surveys of Modern buildings are being conducted with thoroughly modern technology and could lead to the National Register's growth as well as web-based forms to encourage easy access to writing register entries.

Joe Asteinza, a New York DOCOMOMO member and city planner, presented various configurations with GIS survey work indicating that combined efforts in a flexible systems could then be made specific to the needs of each survey and region. The participants engaged in general discussions covering such topics as how to: reach local landmarks commissions; coordinate with the international body; key in the standardization of a database system; as well as plans to hold a forum in the fall in conjunction with the 2004 International Conference on modern surveys for both government officials and a broader audience.
—Nina Rappaport

DOCOMOMO-US Board Holds Annual Meeting

Board Members from around the US converged in San Francisco the weekend of February 6-8 to hold their annual board meeting. The theme for the retreat, **Expansion, Consolidation, and Communication** provided focus for the meetings and discussions. The group worked through administrative board issues, prioritized committee activities and tasks for the upcoming term, and spent time coordinating logistics for the September 2004 International DOCOMOMO Conference to be held in New York City. The Board voted in new members **Bob Brueggmann** (Chicago), **Mark Wai Tak Lee** (Los Angeles), **Nancy Levinson** (Boston), **Robert Meckfessel** (Dallas), and commended outgoing board members for their dedicated service. **Jon Buono**, member of the newly forming Georgia Chapter, sat in on the weekend meetings.

The Saturday meetings were held at the

California College of Arts San Francisco Campus, housed in the 1952 **Skidmore Owings & Merrill-designed Greyhound Bus Building**. **David Meckel**, Assistant to the CCAC President, led a tour of the facilities. Saturday evening board members were treated to a reception prior to viewing the evocative film documentary, *My Architect*, at the Castro Theatre. On Sunday, SOM opened their offices for the final meeting and provided the group with an inside view of the office's ongoing projects and a spectacular view of the Bay Area. A downtown Modern San Francisco tour concluded the weekend and highlighted buildings ranging from early Modernism, such as **Willis Polk's** 1917 **Hallidie Building**, to Postwar high-rise design and redevelopment.

Special thanks goes to the Northern California Chapter for hosting and arranging the weekend event schedule and to the following firms and organizations for providing support in making this retreat a success: Architectural Resources Group, David Meckel and the California College of Arts, and Skidmore Owings & Merrill.
—Laura Culberson



Building Obituaries *(cont'd)*



Higgenson House

giant mixed-use complexes like **Marina City** in Chicago. Unfortunately, this seminal work of Goldberg's is long gone; so, too, is the spirit of innovation it embodied - lost in a landscape now pockmarked with characterless commercial strips, homogeneous housing and acres of asphalt. —*Jeanne Lambin*

DESTROYED: Geddes Brecher Cunningham's Pender Laboratory

Reprinted from the September 2003 issue of The Philadelphia Architect. We thank Charles Evers for bringing this building to our attention, and Robert Geddes for allowing us to reprint it.

If there was a Philadelphia School, then the Pender Laboratory was one of its earliest buildings—and the first on the Penn campus. Urbanistically, it was an infill along 33rd Street. It sat between the Moore School, a converted industrial building, and the Towne School, a fine Penn collegiate building. Functionally, the Pender Laboratory was a new wing for the Moore School of Electrical Engineering, providing open loft floors for electronic research labs, offices and classrooms. It was a utopian venture - structurally and compositionally.

Structurally, it was an ideal concrete frame. Each floor was a clear-span, two-way grid network accommodating mechanical and electrical services within the structure. Internally, to achieve the hollow grid network, removable cardboard boxes were used as formwork. Externally, pre-cast concrete formwork was used to achieve the structural frame; for example, the horizontal channels were authentically the restraining edge of the grid network. Formwork was the key to the structure. (Good word, "formwork.")

Compositionally, it fit. It was calibrated to fit with its neigh-

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Saarinen *(cont'd)*

utmost attention. Quoting the phrase "style for the job"—used by both Phillip Johnson and Reyner Banham to describe the architect in the first years of the 1960s, apparently more widely and pejoratively applied to a certain strain of work in general at this time—Ramon reverses it, in Saarinen's case rendering it a positive attribute. The phrase, however, suggests that for any architect working carefully and intelligently, explicit differences from job to job would guarantee singularity in each individual work. While Ramon's argument makes sense, it doesn't begin to clarify why within the profession, the architecture office of this particular American figure might be of special singularity, or how the advanced industrial/ aesthetic production techniques employed by it can be understood in light of activity occurring elsewhere, either nationally or internationally, at this time.

Importantly, assessing modern architecture also entails investigating the flexibility of structures, both those designed and realized as well as the organizations that produced them. As structures are outgrown and superseded by the needs (and sometimes the very existence) of clients who instigated their creation, any sort of continued existence in determinate form becomes threatened. **Reinhold Martin's *The Organizational Complex:***

Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space evokes these dilemmas by taking a more sustained look at the myths surrounding mid-century modernism's supposed flexibility, particularly the network of figures and connections surrounding Saarinen. For Martin, this architect was the central figure in a complex set of developments connecting aesthetic experimentation, developing media technologies, and large, multi-national corporations. *The Organizational Complex* is far less a monograph than a synthesis of an extremely knotty set of diverse types of evidence, involving the activities, writings, and thought of architects, artists, graphic designers, media theorists, scientists, and corporate executives—much of it new, extremely interesting, and breath-takingly vivid. Together this evidence is harnessed toward the mapping of a singular confluence surrounding certain of Saarinen's more high-profile corporate designs. Proposing that it is not organization, complexity, or architecture alone that made for the greatest transformations to architecture practice and production during the 1950s, Martin locates what he names the "organizational complex" as the most significant post-war development encompassing yet extending beyond architecture—toward other media, the military industrial complex (for which Saarinen most assuredly worked), as well as a controlling and equally controlled social order.

The Organizational Complex, published by MIT Press, is the more interesting of the two books; however, I fear it will not reach as sizable an audience as Princeton Architectural Press's physically larger monograph, despite both books being beautifully designed. The Ramon book is abundantly stocked chock full of gorgeous, full-bleed black and white spreads, including over 20 classic ESTO photographs, almost all by **Ezra Stoller** himself. Yet despite a reference to Foucault's (in)famous claim of a "death of the author," it steers clear of any complicated—or even detailed—theoretical argument as to why Saarinen's reputation is open to reinvestigation. Martin's book rectifies this oversight: it resituates



Thomas J. Watson Research Laboratory, Yorktown Heights, New York, 1961 (photo: Theo Prudon)

the work of the architect in a higher plane of knowledge, one implicated in the totalizing threat of wholesale postwar social reconfiguration. Although his analysis might be seen as beginning and ending with "the case of Saarinen," it is by no means restricted to a narrow definition of the category "architecture." A fascinating read, it does not wear its theory lightly; it is, thankfully, so lucidly articulated as to be of high interest and pertinence to more than just the architectural historian or mid-century modernist aficionado among contemporary (and future) readers. Importantly, as well, it pinpoints ongoing changes to the status of the architectural object that began to occur during the period in question. This inquiry points to an emerging new network of client, public relations, government- and corporate-funded research and development departments, professional design agents, and media venues. Furthermore, Martin makes the very significant point that the primary manner through which "buildings" evolved around this time was by their being integrated into the literal and figural environment, an environment more and more determined by franchises, branding, marketing and—ultimately—professions *other* than architecture, fields such as those encompassing the work of engineers, signage designers, HVAC experts and other related yet distinct categories of consultants.

In this sense, the two books together provide an additional lesson that is not part of the arguments of either author, although it is quite closely related to the central thread of Martin's investigations. The ESTO images we associate with this era are indeed beautiful images, always making the environment depicted uncharacteristically unified; at one and the same time, though, the forces acting on such environments, on individual buildings—masterpieces or everyday artifacts alike—as well as the cultural landscape in general, virtually escapes easy figuration, or any figuration at all. These environmental influences must instead be fleshed out behind the images. And one thing that *The Organizational Complex* makes abundantly clear is that images of a few projects located geographically far apart and making up only a fraction of the many versions of a ubiquitous program (say, in the case of Saarinen, office and laboratory spaces), once

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Building Obituaries *(cont'd)*

bors, not by stylistic imitation or eclectic pastiche, but by matching their scale and rhythm. It was intentionally constructivist as a structure and classicist as a composition. It sought clarity and coherence.

It was a product of the '50s—what historians might call the “long decade” in Philadelphia architecture and urbanism. The decade started in 1947 at a civic exhibition in Gimbels Department Store in Center City. Design and planning, housing and neighborhoods, politics and professions—together. It was an authentic “new urbanism” in the context of a “new politics.”

At that time, while studying architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, I would often visit **Lou Kahn** in his office and report back to the other students. Subsequently, a group including Ian McHarg and I did a collaborative thesis—a downtown plan for Providence—stimulated by what was happening in Philadelphia. I came to Philadelphia in 1951, in the first squad of **G. Holmes Perkins**'s new faculty at Penn.

Teaching at Penn was profoundly connected with practice. For example, the structural focus of our second-year design studio was a forecast of the Pender Laboratory; and the collaborative method of our graduate studios used Philadelphia as a laboratory. We often worked together, for example, on a “new house study” for the Redevelopment Authority. We were engaged by the Planning Commission as design consultants for neighborhoods and districts. The “Citizens Council on City Planning” was our forum of ideas. Two historic documents, the Comprehensive Plan (1960) and the Center City Plan (1963), were created during the “long decade.” And many of us started our architectural firms.

The Pender Laboratory was our first building. When it was being demolished this year, Barney Cunningham wrote me that he “reveled in the fact that they are having a hard time tearing it down...it was a strong building.” —*Robert Geddes*

Argentina *(cont'd)*

forties. Commissioned by a surgeon, Pedro Curutchet, it is the only residential building erected in the Americas by Le Corbusier, despite his having never visited the site nor even met the client. A wonderful example of the principles of Modernism, complete with pilotis, ribbon windows, roof garden, free ground plan and free façades, the house is still owned by the Curutchet family. Listed as a National Landmark, its care and preservation are guaranteed, for it currently contains offices for Colegio de Arquitectos de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (CAPBA).

Heavily influenced by Brutalism and the International Style, post-1950 Modern architecture in Argentina finally came into its own. The **Hipotecario Nacional Bank**, formerly the Bank of London and South America, is a sign of this, and one of the most poignant and recognized examples of Argentine Modern architecture. Designed by **Clorindo Testa** and the architecture firm **SEBRA** (1959-66), this Brutalist masterpiece is a box within a box; the outer layer is of rough concrete, with television-like punched holes, and hovers around an inner glass box. The concrete façade is supported independently from the glazing on the exterior, creating a curtained effect of layering. The concrete is absent at the building's entrance; only glass and large overhanging concrete slabs mark the portal to the interior. The building was included in the exhibition *20th Century Architecture*, held at the **Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles** in 2000, as the century's most important work of Latin American architecture.

Although the bank has changed ownership over the last decades, little alteration had occurred until 1998, when an aggressive renovation project was undertaken, in part by none other than the original architect. The proposed renovations sought to greatly alter the bank's interior as well as change significant aspects of the exterior; the bank at that time was not listed as a protected work by the Municipal or National government. Despite little objection to the renovations from the press or media, Testa's intervention was greeted with anything but gratitude from the preservation community. But with no legal protection and given the cooperation of the original architect in the redesign, there was little to do to prevent the renovations. Sadly, major aspects of the bank's original layout as well as interior and exterior finishes were altered by Testa's interventions, and the main entrance was significantly transformed.

Saarinen *(cont'd)*

extensively circulated, warp the physical reality of realized buildings to the extent that our perception of excellence and normality is entirely dependent upon the systems of circulation that control these images. The compelling lesson of Saarinen, then, is that this is true not only in reputations but also in futures.

Such a “lesson” suggests that how we view threatened and cherished traces of the past within emergent understandings of the man-made environment become important questions, helping to frame what actions we take regarding preservation and how we go about them. While Modernist preserva-



Casa Curuchet, La Plata, late 1940s
(photo: Serianne Worden)

Only when work was finished did the National Commission of Museums, Monuments and Sites decide to award the building National Landmark listing, which ironically awards the owner an exemption on all taxes.

Modern buildings in Argentina have generally aged well, due largely to the time lag that delayed importation of practices from Germany, France and the U.S. until after they had been extensively developed. As a result, many Modern Movement buildings were built by European construction firms, employing tried and tested materials. In addition, many of these pioneering approaches to Modern architecture have retained their original use.

However, insensitive interventions have occurred often in more recent years. Preservation in Argentina is, unfortunately, not at the forefront of legislative concern, despite laws both at the national and municipal level. According to a preservation architect in Buenos Aires, “the system is perverse,” with listing a slow process and controls “nonexistent or too light.” In addition, the moderate laws do not affect privately owned buildings, which are instead only subject to a more lax “urban code.” However, local authorities in Buenos Aires are currently working on a proposal to modify this code to include more than forty historical areas, with specific legislation for each area that will include protection for some Modern Movement buildings.

—*Serianne Worden*

tionists cannot go back in time to resuscitate lost buildings—although the Barcelona Pavilion reconstruction challenges even this limitation—thinking ahead before struggles shape up as struggles must eventually become a prudent step.

Both of these books, then, suggest very different futures for the role of the architect in culture; they also invest vastly different values in questions of how the architect's work is to be understood. Ultimately, thinking about the issues they raise, of *what* (we value) and *why* (others should too), will affect how we preserve artifacts of the built environment, those of Eero Saarinen as well as many other varieties, canonical works by exceptional architects as well as generic instances of everyday design and construction practices.

—*Brendan D. Moran*

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NATIONAL NEWS

winter 2004



Buckminster Fuller Dome, Nautilus Hotel, Wood's Hole, MA,
site of the New England Winter Tour

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