

ARCHITECTURE
ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Focus on the Museum Tower

The "season" in architecture, as in all of the arts, has its quota of star events, trends, new faces and people to watch, although the excitement on the drawing board this fall may not be visible on the street for another few years. The new AT&T headquarters at 56th and Madison still qualifies as the longest-running hole in the ground, while its neighbor, the IBM Building, is already an overwhelming skeletal presence, and what was announced a year or two ago will make its substance felt this year as steel and concrete rise into the sky.

But what may be the most important building of the season is not in New York; it is reaching completion now in Cambridge, Mass. The new "house," as it is called by its members, of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, to be occupied in October, is an architectural event of genuine significance. The building is notable not just because it is handsome, but because many of the ideas of post-modernism have come together here for something overdue from its proponents: this is a coherent work of architecture rather than a pastiche of private references. Historical and symbolic sources are assimilated, not flaunted like new toys. And one does not need a key to break the code in order to understand and appreciate what can be immediately perceived as a design of utility, strength and grace.

Wide, overhanging eaves suggest a Renaissance or Tuscan villa or the California work of Greene and Greene; an academic loggia is as much a New England porch as a classical arcade. The skill with which this sizable structure is scaled for a domestic rather than an institutional effect, and the way it fits the double context of a wooded Harvard site and an adjoining urban community, is exemplary. The building succeeds in being both "house" and "academy."

The surprise of the season is that this is the work of the firm of Kallmann, McKinnell and Wood, because Kallmann and McKinnell are the architects of that paradigmatic structure of the 1960's, the celebrated, competition-winning Boston City Hall, a building that is all New Brutalist bravado and raw concrete and rejection of the past. This combination was, and still is, quite right for a city where the realities of political power can use a bit of dignified dressing up. Not everything works about the building, but it succeeds as well for one purpose as the Academy does for another, serving as civic symbol and urban centerpiece for Boston's Government Center and remarkable downtown renewal.

The Academy is actually a more revolutionary building. It is a thoughtfully and carefully made structure that meets the avowed intention of the post-modernists — to restore a

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richer range of forms and meanings to buildings deprived of pleasure and symbolism by a rigid functionalist esthetic.

This fall will bring at least one architectural first — an exhibition of houses, or rather, designs for houses, commissioned from an international group of architects by a distinguished art gallery, that can be bought and constructed. "Architecture II: Houses for Sale" will open at the Leo Castelli Gallery on Oct. 18. The show marks the expansion of the gallery entrepreneur's role from the art to the architecture market. ("Architecture I," Castelli's first foray into the field, was a show of extremely marketable architectural drawings.) Castelli is packaging the houses as avant-garde works of art, with the advantage that the client not only knows what he is getting, but also has the gallery's stamp of approval. There will be plans, sections, elevations and models of eight houses, with suggested construction methods and estimated costs.

The selection includes work by the Argentine-American Emilio Ambasz, better known to date for a poetic surrealism than for structural pragmatism; Peter Eisenman, whose formal interest in the purity of a space-enclosing geometry outstrips his concern with the messiness of family life; and Vittorio Gregotti, an Italian "cultural activist" whose domestic attitudes remain somewhat mysterious on this side of the ocean. Also represented are Arata Isozaki, a mainstay of the international avant-garde establishment; Charles Moore, best known for his witty stage sets for public and private life; Cesar Pelli, another Argentinian, the suave designer of the Museum of Modern Art's equally suave tower and expansion; Cedric Price, the British "plug in" architect of the irreverent 1960's; and Oswald Mathias Ungers, the German architect, planner and teacher who sees universal salvation in the order of the grid.

All are talented architects with a very special kind of vision; some have a pronounced tendency to override reality. Obviously, these houses will bear little resemblance to anything in the familiar American subdivision. Anyone with courage or money enough can build them.

Architectural exhibitions and events continue to grow in range and number this fall; a separate listing appears on this page. They include everything from the transformation of Atlantic City from ocean resort to casino community to a documentation of American movie-house facades.

One of the season's major and more provocative offerings will be Bernard Rudofsky's exhibition, "A Contribution to the Art of Living," at the Cooper-Hewitt in November, in which the well-known architect, author and critic will continue, in the museum's words, "his musings on new ways of life." A number of these musings, from "Are Clothes Modern?" to "Anonymous Architecture" have been seen over the years at the Museum of Modern Art. This show, which will deal with the basic functions of eating, sleeping, cleansing and bathing, will be a kind of wrapup of the highly personal com-

mentary of this veteran analyst of art and life. Billed "not as an exhibition of product design, but as an exercise in observation," it will be carried out, as usual, with a fine, iconoclastic eye.

The architectural trend of the season seems to be the museum-tower. The Museum of Modern Art's spectacular entry into the field of real estate development is rising fast. The Whitney Museum, as reported in this space last fall, is still holding a complete Madison Avenue blockfront with the serious potential of large-scale, combined institutional and commercial construction. Whatever one thinks of these speculative-esthetic capers as architecture, urbanism or museology, one cannot blame financially pressed arts institutions for seeing the development potential of their property as salvation and security.

The latest unannounced but fast-moving museum-tower plan is for the Museum of American Folk Art, the Modern's near-neighbor on 53d Street. The Folk Art Museum has put together

'The latest tower is for the Museum of American Folk Art.'

a number of the brownstones remaining after the Modern's expansion, and will add them to its own property farther down the block. All this will be demolished for a 30-story replacement tower. The lower floors will serve the museum and the upper floors will be given over to apartments, offices or a hotel. Well, there goes the rest of the street's small buildings, and the shops, restaurants and galleries that gave it so much diversity and charm — it was only a matter of time. With the persistent rumor of another CBS tower across 53d, there goes the neighborhood.

The architect for the Folk Art Museum, which is in the initial design stage now, is Emilio Ambasz, also of the Castelli Gallery "Houses for Sale" show. Put his name on the season's list of People to Be Watched. That list should also include, as a perennial member, like the best-dressed regulars, Philip Johnson, with the Johnson/Burgee nostalgic-modernistic ITEL tower for San Francisco, and a small Johnson house for Big Sur country that looks like the ultimate sendup of the Shingle Style. He is never a bore — that would be the cardinal sin.

Watch, also, Kevin Roche of the firm of Roche-Dinkeloo, which is undergoing an interesting sea-change or evolution of style with the new General Foods headquarters. And Frank Gehry, on the West Coast, whose work veers from the outrageous to the extraordinary and promises to loom large in the confusions and contributions of the season and on into the 80's.

The significant anniversary of the season was marked in July; this is the 25th year for Disneyland. In that time span, architects have moved from rejection of the world according to Walt to its acceptance as a model of popular art and culture. Not only is the profession busy leaping into the future; it is earnestly catching up with the past. Put that in your Mouseketeer hat as the season's cosmic commentary. ■