

A Mourned Saloon

Sometimes one longs for an original, imaginative, slightly offbeat gesture in a city where official action is so often routine, stereotyped and dull.

An occasion offered—and was ignored—the other day, when O'Rourke's saloon at 446 Pearl Street came down, its swinging doors, mahogany bar, huge mirrors and gas lamps demolished for an urban renewal development.

We wonder if anyone thought of saving and reusing that nostalgic if shabby facade and some of those irreplaceable fixtures for the new bar or restaurant facilities that should properly be designed into the forthcoming middle-income housing-developments which all too often suggest architectural isolation wards rather than happy places of human habitation.

O'Rourke's was a period piece, down-at-the-heels, but virtually intact. This kind of Victorian saloon design, highly prized by architectural connoisseurs, could have added authentic, colorful contrast to the modern architectural antisepsis that marks most redevelopment.

Planners and designers do a great deal of talking these days about "capturing human values" and "incorporating neighborhood atmosphere and history" into their schemes. At the same time they ignore the opportunities in front of their eyes. It is just this kind of imaginative and thoughtful design touch that is so badly needed and so lacking in most of our characterless urban renewal architecture.