

## Architecture

# The Letterhead Is Solidly Male

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

THE New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects has mounted an exhibition in its headquarters offices at 20 West 40th Street called "Women in Architecture" (through June 7th). It is extremely interesting both as architecture and as polemics. The initial (thankful) reaction is that the trap one feared of having to judge architectural design in terms of sex, with appropriate allowances and innuendos, just doesn't exist. The product is blessedly asexual.

But the issues are there, as they are everywhere today, demanding and deserving attention. They are succinctly stated by some telling statistics appended to the display. The show contains the work of 58 women representing less than one tenth of A.I.A. firms in New York City. Of these women, 29 are foreign born and 19 were educated abroad, which says a lot about the comparative status of American and European architectural education and practice.

Of the 58, 23 are married, and some are in husband-wife partnerships. Otherwise partnership or full associate positions are rare. Eleven in this highly selective show are principals in firms; six are associates. Some are designers and job captains, but they are more likely to be assistants in these categories. If they are in charge of anything it is apt to be interiors, the traditional role of women in the field and low spot on the architectural totem pole. (Actually, men are just as good at it, sometimes better.)

Of the 23 who are married, 10 have children—a figure you may make what you want of—but it could indicate that both the practical and emotional problems of family responsibility for the professional woman are far from solved. Make no mistake; today's woman is having a rough time with role resolution and that involves a great deal of personal uncertainty and agony, whatever rights are won. It's not easy, either, for the men.

Only 16 of the group are registered architects. Nineteen belong to the A.I.A. In the national membership, there are 24,000 men and 300 women, a pretty appalling statistic. In 1970, women represented 3.5 per cent of

the 56,214 practicing architects in the United States. In 1973, the median yearly income for men was \$15,800 for women, \$13,200. It is obviously not the field to go into to get rich, male or female, but the women have to slice the bread a little bit thinner.

In a survey of women architects, 70 per cent said they found discrimination in the area of promotion and advancement within their firms. 95 per cent of the men said there are no special difficulties for women in professional practice.

Does this mean that male architects are male chauvinist pigs or just nice dense status quonicks in tweed jackets, button-down shirts and pipes? Is discrimination essentially like architecture—which obviously exists by men. Or vice versa. Unpositive act or a static state of mind? As a profession which sometimes (but only sometimes) reaches self-complacency for real or imagined traditional inertia, the profession must be pushed and shoved into change by activist women?

Certainly the action has begun. The Alliance of Women in Architecture was started in 1972, with an ambitious program of consciousness raising for both men and women, and plans for an institute for special training and projects for and by women. A most perceptive battle cry was sounded by Ellen Perry Berkeley in a comprehensive article dealing with the problems in the September, 1972, *Architectural Forum*.

It was only by considerable persistence that they were able to separate the boys from the girls except by 'sal-chapter's, Equal Opportunity and advancement. Committee, led by Judith Edelman of Edelman and Salzman and Anna Halpin of Sweet's Catalogue and the New York Chapter Executive Board, got a resolution passed by last year's national A.I.A. convention in San Francisco. It put the fact on record that woman's lot in architecture is not a happy one and called for an affirmative action program. It barely made it with the men by a three to two vote.

The current exhibition was sparked by Rosaria Piomelli of the I. M. Pei office. It causes an impressive drop in their housewife hats as they are more intimately concerned with this particular kind of environmental show reveals about architecture by women is that it



Raquel Ramati and Ada Karmi-Melamede with the Second Avenue Subway Study

Jack Mannings

But the product is blessedly asexual

of time in a windowless kitchen will break her neck to give the kitchen a view. She knows that the kitchen-as-walled-off-end-of-a-living-room is a perversion of layout, function and life. (Some prestigious men architects have inexplicably given these abominations to garden apartments.) She understands the relationships between space and privacy and pleasure, operational efficiency, and the potential human violations of a bad plan. But such affinities and insights are accidents of the social role, not just aspects of architectural art.

There is no doubt that some of the best houses are designed by husband-wife teams, such as Julian and Barbara Neski. And it is also noticeable that this is a field in which husband-wife teams seem to specialize.

On the other hand, this is by no means the limit of female sensibility. Women employed by such firms as Gruzen and Partners are involved in the kind of civic and institutional commissions that are that office's mainstay. To name two: Hortensia Mateos is listed as project manager for the Downtown Manhattan High School, and Annette Kwok is credited as designer of York College in Queens. No line can be drawn between men and women in ability to understand educational programs, or many others; talent in translation is a completely individual thing.

The job range is wide, but the firm role remains narrow. Only through specialties

and new fields are women beginning to emerge from the team. In preservation, Narelle Townsend has done impeccable house drawings for the assessment of restoration of Manhattan's Saint Nicholas Historic District, for the office of James R. Doman and Associates. That is a study we keep on hand for pure pleasure. In urban planning, significant breakthroughs have been made by such women as Raquel Ramati of the New York City Urban Design Group.

But in traditional practice, advancement stands out because of its scarcity. Eleanor Larrabee, for example, of Warner, Burns, Toan and Lunde, moved from designer (1958-60) to associate (1960-66) and then to senior associate. More commonly the letterhead is monolithically male.

Symbolically, the problem is at least as old as the Erechtheum. With conscious irony, the announcement poster of the exhibition shows one of the famous Greek ladies who hold it up.

"Created by man to carry the great burden of the stone entablature," T. M. Prentice, president of the sponsoring New York Chapter, explains, "the caryatids stand frozen, uncomplaining, one knee gracefully broken forward in a half step to suggest that the load is borne effortlessly. They seem less a symbol of the self-aware involvement of women in artistic creation than an image drawn by man of female subservience." Baby, you have a long way to go.