

Architecture: Trend-Setting Departures and Pinnacles of Excellence in ...

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Architecture: Trend-Setting Departures and Pinnacles of Excellence in U.S.

The Modern Displays Changes Since '00

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

TO observers of the American architectural scene it seems that today's building is running off in all directions at once. The record amount of new construction in recent years has been equalled only by its bewildering variety.

In the span of one generation the postwar building explosion has given the country a new face and it has given the critics architectural indigestion. To the Museum of Modern Art has gone the job of acting as super-critic, collecting and annotating the confusion for a survey of "Modern Architecture, U.S.A."

This is the title and theme of the museum's new summer show, which opens to the public tomorrow. Installed by Arthur Drexler, director of the department of architecture and design, and co-sponsored by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, it will continue through Sept. 6.

What emerges from this strikingly displayed photographic collection of 71 buildings by 38 architects—all in living color—is a sensitively culled, highly selective presentation of significant structures, trend-setting departures and pinnacles of excellence from 1900 to 1965. It is an impressive documentation of change and achievement in American architecture in the 20th century.

As background, there are the familiar landmarks of the modern movement in its early years that have become gospel in the architecture schools. The California houses by Greene and Greene, Maybeck, Yeon and Harris, are the classic examples of the liberating influence of the West Coast on domestic design. These are followed by the showpieces of the International Style by Neutra, Gropius and other illustrious refugees, buildings that became the icons of the crusading modernists in the 1930's.

Through it all there is the "sustained explosion," in Mr. Drexler's words, of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Wright's reaffirmed greatness illuminates the show



House designed by Herb Greene for himself is situated in Norman, Okla. Use of shingles simulates sculpture.

from the opening panel, Unity Temple in 1906, to the Guggenheim Museum. It continues to illuminate the work of the present generation of architects, who draw from its limitless strength and fertility in uncounted and ever-renewing ways.

It is the building of the last 15 years, however, that makes the most telling points and the most stunning impact. This has been a period of unparalleled creative productivity.

Here are the sparkling towers, streamlined luxury, awe-inspiring scale technological magnificence and cool, contemporary beauty — the sleek, abstract, glittering, bold and even brutal buildings that belong to no other time or place. It is pretty exhilarating stuff. And it proves that the art of architecture has never been more vibrantly alive.

With its usual sleight of hand the museum has screened out the pop architecture vulgarisms that actually dominate the American landscape. The visitor is placed in a vacuum of excellence.

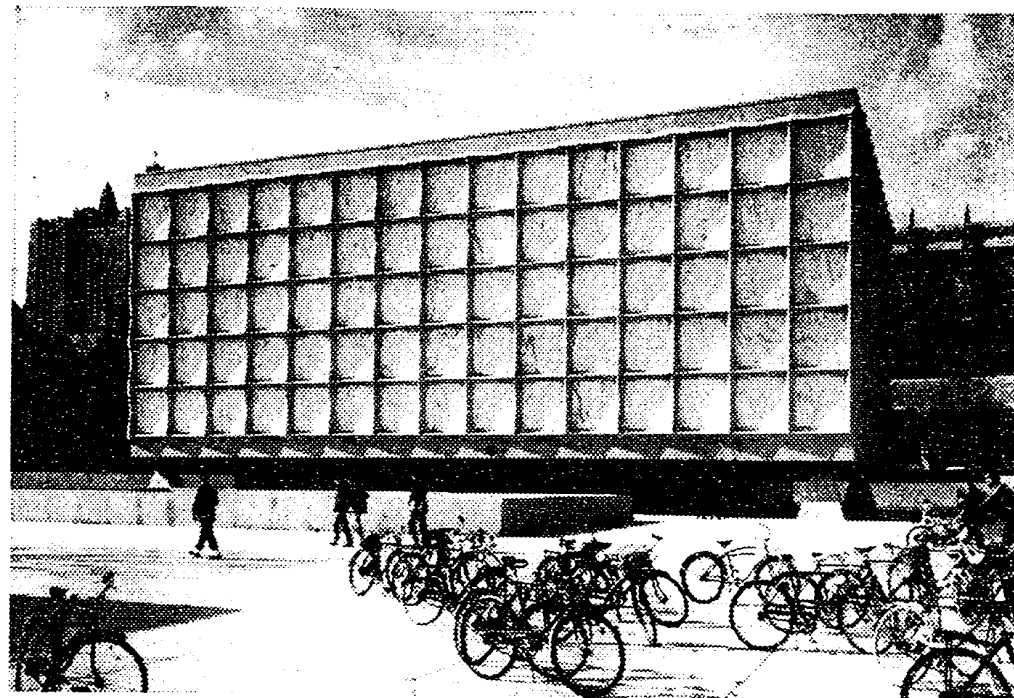
If pop architecture shouts, this architecture purrs. In the '50's the theme was the un-

derstated elegance of Mies van der Rohe's painstakingly detailed exercises in expensive, sophisticated, glass-walled simplicity. In this mold, the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill established a kind of platinum-and-ball-bearing standard for industry across the country.

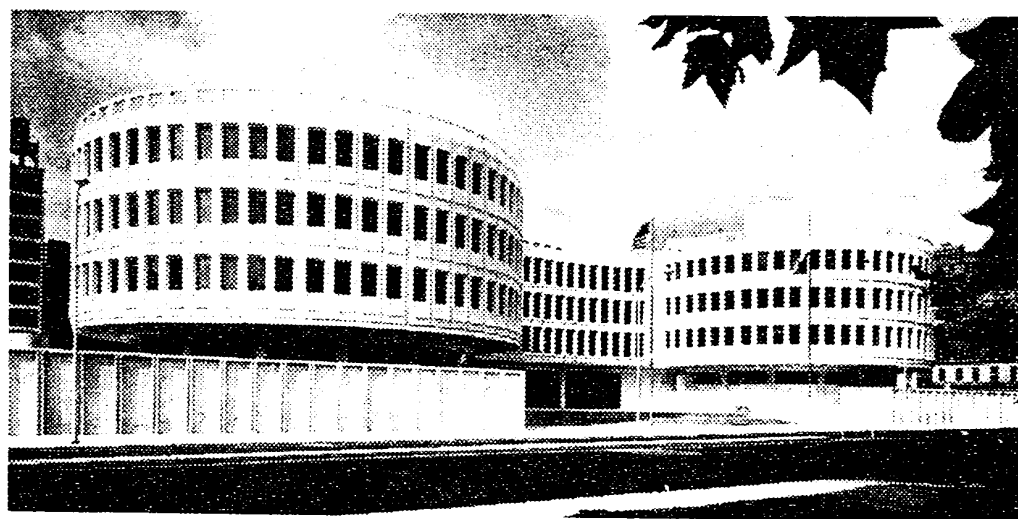
In the '60's the mold broke. "Less is more" became "anything goes." Corporations flirt behind concrete lacework by Minoru Yamasaki and harem grilles by Edward Durrell Stone. The college campus has become architectural laboratory and incubator, with the icon-breaking experiments of men like Paul Rudolph and Lou Kahn setting the standards today.

The first impression is of a fantastic array of disparate approaches to the basic matter of enclosing space and providing shelter in our increasingly man-made environment.

But the final impression is a surprisingly coherent picture of strength, vitality and progress over 65 years of structural and esthetic explo-



Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale is work of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Gordon Bunshaft, partner in charge. The frame is filled with translucent marble.



Police Administration Building in Philadelphia, designed by Geddes, Brecher, Qualls & Cunningham, employs precast concrete panels resting on a cantilevered platform.

ration, and a sharply heightened awareness of the world that we have built.

Good architecture never dies. It only fades away, maimed and mutilated by neglect, decay, remodeling and misguid-

ed maintenance. In spite of its air of permanence, it is singularly vulnerable to abuse. The museum has fudged only slightly to make the older structures look good when time has been less than kind.

The record is surprisingly

complete. To some, the message is chaos. To others, it is creativity. To Mr. Drexler, today's diversity is "schizoid, but encouraging." By any evaluation, it all adds up to a remarkable moment in the history of the building art.