

Architectural New Frontier

With the presentation of 22 new campus designs to the trustees of the State University, New York revealed an advance in public construction that made all of Washington's well-publicized and beautifully phrased directives for better government architecture look like words, not buildings. The real action has been in Albany.

The billion-dollar, ten-year college construction project under the administration of the State University Construction Fund is only the lead-off of Governor Rockefeller's three-part plan that will raise the level and streamline the procedures of virtually all state building. It will include office and administration construction and medical and mental hygiene plants as well as higher educational facilities.

This work has now been taken out of the State Architect's office and the Department of Public Works, where time-consuming snarls of red tape and administrative moss made a three-year job take six. It has been given to a special agency. It is now possible to commission, directly and nonpolitically, some of the country's top talent.

The day when the State Architect could handle all of the jobs is gone. Patchwork remedies, like the hiring of "consulting" architects for the overwhelming workload, at substandard fees and with inadequate jurisdiction, don't work. And the product, in the peculiar pedestrian style instantly recognizable as government-issue architecture, won't do. The new system will not guarantee excellence; it merely offers a good way to go after it.

The State University program has been the cause of discreet rejoicing in the architecture profession. It is also the source of some rueful amusement; the Republicans have beaten the Democrats on the architectural New Frontier.