Report from the University

Architectural Education

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No. 1 of a Series

(Editor's Note: The NEW MEXICO ARCHITECT will carry a monthly report from the University of New Mexico by Prof. Schlegel. In planning this series with Prof. Schlegel, every important facet of architecture was discussed and scheduled for coverage in Report from the University.

Many subjects scheduled for review are controversial in nature. The views expressed in this Report series are those of Prof. Schlegel, and do not necessarily represent the Chapter's official position on such subjects.)

It is the intent of these monthly articles to discuss the problems and methods of Architectural Education. The problem of education is not one of just educating prospective architects, but one of educating the public, clients and architects as well. This is a continuous process of learning wherein all become educators.

In this first article I wish to discuss some of the forces which dictate public taste and to try to analyze some of the psychological and emotional reasons for our likes and dislikes. This phenomenon must be understood before we can educate, before we can design.

Psychologists tell us that it is human nature to reject any experience which is unfamiliar to our emotional response. This is due to the fact that we have not been preconditioned to this experience through the environment or our education. Therefore, we fail to understand the experience. We cannot comprehend the image. Thus we feel ill at ease, lose our confidence; our actions become confused, our responses negative, and we reject this new experience.

This means that we are able to respond positively to only slight variations from our past experiences, and are only able to comprehend new experience through education and slight environmental changes from that which we have been commonly associated. The automobile industry has practiced this principle by introducing only slight year-to-year model changes.

Sociologists have known that taste is also dictated by social pressures which cause us to make decisions irrelevant of the true nature of the situation. We can classify the groups who succumb to these pressures, as follows:

1. The Social Level Seekers.

They base all their decisions on the accepted norm of the group with which they wish to be associated. This is a progressive situation in which one strives to attain the next social plateau. (The desire to be one of the Country Club set.)

2. The Conspicuous Consumer.

as Veblen calls this group, wishes to express his financial success through obvious symbols. (The Cadillac Crowd.)

3. The Society Escapers.

They are basically not orientated to our epoch. Therefore,
they select a past way of life as means of escape. (The adobe inhabitants.)

They feel that their selectivity must be in no way associated with the mass consumer. (The foreign car, Hi Fi, but no T.V.)

These socially pre-conditioned groups cannot be changed appreciably. Their attitudes and patterns of life are established and although they may be false, to them they are very real and very important. The architect must be able to recognize this and then either design within this false premise in order to maintain the commission or refuse the work.

All of us realize that many decisions in life are based on the economics of our time. This can be separated as follows:

1. The Installment Buyer. He disregards a true evaluation of the object and selects it in reference to installments. The mass builder has thrived on this group.

2. The Mercenaries. Their only interest is profit. They are oblivious to their moral obligation to society and have no regard for our visual environment. (The wheeling and dealing promoter.)

The architect's acceptance of this type of commission is feasible only if he also is so orientated.

My thesis is that in order for the relationship between architect and the client to be compatible, the architect either must be: (1) in phase with the client; (2) willing to accept the orientation of the client; or (3) able to educate him by improved increments of design. If the basic approach to the building is established on either the false values of the client or the architect, it will never be fine architecture. It will only reflect this image. Outstanding architecture can only be produced when the basic premises of the building, the architect and the client are established on intrinsic values. Then there is hope.

NEW MEXICO ARCHITECT

Chapter Officers Re-elected; Liberty Named Director

Highlight of the Chapter's annual meeting held in Albuquerque at the Alvarado Hotel on April 11 was the election of officers for the 1959 business year.

All Chapter officers who served during the 1958 business year were returned to office for another term.

As one Chapter member put it: "They (the officers) have been in office only a year, and the projects now in the planning stage should be carried to completion. It wouldn't be practical to bring in another slate of officers at this time. And, too, those fellows have done a good job."

Re-elected were: W. Miles Brittelle, Sr., president; Philippe de M. Register, vice-president; Arthur W. Dekker, secretary; and John J. Heimlerich, treasurer.

Elected as director to replace Jason P. Moore, whose term expired, was James S. Liberty of Albuquerque. The term of Director Kern Smith, Carlsbad, extends through the 1959 business year.

Phil Register, who is also Chapter Public Relations Chairman, announced that new committee appointees will be named and existing committee projects reviewed in time for a full report in the May issue of the NEW MEXICO ARCHITECT.

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