report from the university

Don P. Schlegel
Assoc. Prof. of Architecture
University of New Mexico

Who is responsible for our residential architecture — the architect, the builder or the home-buyer?

A recent survey of building construction clearly indicates the lack of participation on the part of the architects in this field. The survey listed sixty-six million dollars worth of construction in Albuquerque in 1958. Of this total, forty-five million dollars were in housing of which seven hundred and fifty thousand were architecturally designed. This means that just 1.7 percent of all money spent for housing was the direct responsibility of architects. If we reduce this to housing units, the architects designed nineteen units out of a total of four thousand, three hundred and twenty-two.

The questions I would like to raise at this point are: Can the builder continue to disregard the knowledge and ability of the architect in this vital area of our visual environment? Can the architect continue to disregard two-thirds of the total amount of construction — housing? Can the home-buyer continue to disregard the advantages of architectural services?

I feel very strongly that neither the builder, nor the architect, nor the home-buyer can continue as they are today. It is evident that they must appreciate each other's difficulties for their own salvation. No one group is responsible for our present situation. The blame must be divided.

The builder today prefers to hire a drainage expert for his site plan and to send a draftsman to the West Coast to take photographs of the best selling houses for his design inspiration — hence the Hansel and Gretel houses in Albuquerque. His general feeling is that architectural service is an additional cost of no additional value.

The architect usually has failed to grasp the problems of the builder's house and has shown a great lack of interest in the custom house. He has at times disregarded material costs, erection procedures, unit changes and has failed to understand the mass market. He has often turned away the home-buyer on the basis that his production costs would be too high to show any profit on a house of less than fifty thousand dollars.

continued—page 16
The home-buyer usually is not concerned with good design when purchasing a house. His only concern appears to be the amount of the down payment. When shopping for architectural services, he bases his decision on minimum fees, disregarding the fact that as the fee decreases, so does the amount of detail in the drawings and specifications making it more difficult for the contractor to submit an accurate bid.

How can we bridge this gap between the architecture we can build and that which is being built today?

I have no startling solution, but, instead, turn to education. I feel that only through education are we going to see great changes in this direction. The architectural schools throughout the country realize this responsibility and every effort is being made to increase the architectural education of all the people.

At the University of New Mexico we have architectural exhibits, open lectures, panel discussions, T.V. programs pointed toward the education of the general public, but our real emphasis has been within the University.

This year we have sixty-seven freshman architects—fifty from New Mexico. As we educate larger numbers of architects, some of them will work with builders, F.H.A., government and in other positions in which architectural knowledge is needed. The schools cannot be satisfied with the education of architectural students alone. It must educate every student. This must be done: first, by building good architecture so that he can experience it; second, by requiring architectural service courses; third, by exhibits, lectures and panel discussions.

At the University of New Mexico we are trying to point out the fallacy of historical facadism. How much progress we will make in this direction is not known.

This year we have initiated an architectural seminar for graduate students in which we discuss the creative processes in architecture, art, music, sculpture, dance and poetry. This course is being taken by graduates in education whose architectural attitude will affect our children, and by business administration students, the future clients for commercial buildings.

In Contemporary Architectural History we have an enrollment of thirty-seven students, only one-half of which are architectural majors.

We are beginning to make progress in architectural education for all, but we cannot rest. We must continue our efforts, for in this way the appreciation of architecture will spread and this only can improve the architecture of the future.