notes on readings

Western Architect and Engineer,
68 Post Street, San Francisco 4, Calif.; 50¢ a copy; $3.00 a year; 3 years $5.00.

During the first decade of this century, there were several regional and national architectural publications which actively encouraged and supported the early progressive movements in American architecture. The most consistent and loyal of these was the Western Architect, published in Minneapolis. In its pages one could find illustrated the buildings and city plans of Louis Sullivan, Charles and Henry Greene, Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Burley Griffin, Purcell and Elmslie and many others. Even during the eclectic years of the 1920’s, this magazine continued to publish the few scattered examples of modern architecture which were then being built in the United States. To thumb through the pages of this magazine is to recreate the emergence of modern architecture in America.

Like many other publications the Western Architect ceased publication in the early 1930’s at the beginning of the depression. The title of this early magazine has in part emerged again in the Western Architect and Engineer, published in San Francisco by McGraw-Hill Company of California. Not including several publications sponsored by local chapters of the A.I.A. there are now at least four magazines which concern themselves with the architectural activities of the western United States; in addition to the periodical under discussion these include the well-known Arts and Architecture, the Pacific Architect and Builder, and the popular Sunset magazine. There are also several of the national magazines such as the Architectural Record which consistently present the work of the West Coast architects. Even if one takes into account the tremendous number of buildings being constructed on the Coast, there is bound to be much material which will be repeated in these magazines. As one would

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expect the designs of such well-established figures as Richard Neutra, Craig Ellwood, and Smith and Williams, to name only a few, appear frequently on the pages of these architectural magazines. Even the winning entries of the annual “Western Home Awards” are printed in several periodicals besides Sunset which along with the Western Division of A.I.A. sponsors the contest.

Compared with these other western publications, the Western Architect and Engineer would seem to present both a broader and narrower picture of the western architectural scene. Its more general coverage is apparent in the wider geographic distribution of works illustrated in its pages, as well as in the more varied presentation of western building activities. Although it may have a tendency to orient itself toward the Bay Area of California, it still presents a well-balanced fare of buildings from such widely separated areas as Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

As to the overall plan and general format of this magazine it is tastefully designed, but in no sense exciting or experimental. In this regard it does not compare favorably with the older more stylishly modern Arts and Architecture, nor has it yet acquired the breadth of this latter magazine which publishes an excellent music column written by Peter Yates and an equally good art section by Dore Ashton. As with most present day magazines the Western Architect and Engineer primarily presents current architectural works, although it has provided the reader with a few critical and historical articles such as the presentation of the historically significant First Christian Science Church in Berkeley by Bernard Maybeck, and with a few general word and picture essays such as “The West in Architecture,” (September, 1959) written by V. K. Thompson, (the editorial director of the magazine) and illustrated with the photographs of Ansel Adams. As with many of our current architectural magazines Western Architect and Engineer has thus far avoided critical comments concerning the buildings illustrated in its pages.

In the end it must be admitted that this new magazine cannot be compared with its predecessor the Western Architect, for “modern” is now the accepted norm for architecture and there is no pressing need for a crusading policy on the part of any publication, regional or national. The validity of this publication, as well as other architectural magazines, will ultimately depend on the critical depth and quality of its selection. It is impossible at this time to determine whether this magazine will come up to the tradition of high quality of its predecessor. One certainly hopes that it does.

David Gebhard

some recent books of interest:

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Architecture Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Penguin Books, British Book Center, New York, 1958. $12.50. (a virtual encyclopedia of European and American architecture of these years.)

Grant Carpenter Manson, Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910, Reinhold Publishing Corps. New York, 1958. $10.00. (a study of Frank Lloyd Wright’s early Prairie years. Its major limitation is that it fails to relate Wright to his contemporary world.)

The traffic problem cannot be solved by our present highway programs. On the contrary, highway construction without proper community planning is disrupting and disfiguring our communities. In San Francisco, Boston, and other cities irreparable damage has already been done by expert highway engineering without regard to city planning. In the National Capital the single minded highway engineering concept deliberately relieves to second class status the proposed cultural center, the beloved Lincoln Memorial, the charms of the Potomac River, the parks, and other works of historic significance.

The decay of our cities is overtaking our limited on-again, off-again renewal efforts. Our national pride, the continuation of our high standard of living and our leadership of the free world demand sound and continuing redevelopment programs based on proper planning and design.

We must stop the pollution of land, water and air. We need greater emphasis on beauty in our environment. Effective means must be found to control city and highway blight, billboards, overhead wires, and other disruptive outdoor advertising.

In many cities — Kansas City, Detroit, Nashville, Memphis, Indianapolis, and Toledo among others — architects have already given effective leadership in redesigning their communities. Architects elsewhere must follow these examples by actively contributing to the improvement of our environment and by rallying the support of the public and our local, state and federal governments.

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number of color photographs of distinguished buildings.

Primarily intended for students in high schools, the film is also considered suitable for adult audiences such as PTA, civic, service, and business groups. “Designing a Better Tomorrow” can be rented for $5.00 per showing from the Library, The American Institute of Architects, 1735 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.