AN ARCHITECTURAL FORUM

Editor, New Mexico Architect
Dear Sir:

I was impressed, but not amused, by the overwhelming 'modernism' in your Jan.-Feb. issue of N.M.A. The use of concrete, now a pattern of modern Mexico, and the over-abundance of advertising on the use of Pumice blocks brought a feeling of sadness for the loss of original soft lines of early New Mexico architectural design.

Four years ago I built my third home of Pueblo style — all adobe. At that time a heating expert gave me 'statistics' about pumice block versus adobe block. He claimed the heat insulation factor was better in the pumice block. I entered an equivalent home built of pumice during these hot summer months and found no comparison in the refreshing 'cool' interior of mine and his. It seemed evident, even on the surface, that my adobe construction was a far superior insulator than the pumice block house.

I then speculated that some statistician perhaps set a heat lamp on one 8" block of pumice versus the 4" side of a 4" x 10" x 14" adobe. Overlooked was an additional factor of close to another 4" of insulation on adobe construction with its adobe fill and plaster each side.

A contractor argued that the pumice wall was less expensive to build. This, I found not so at all. Pumice wall labor at $3.50 per hour versus adobe brick layers at $1.25 an hour more than overcame the additional time needed to build an adobe wall. And after all, isn't the wall the minor cost of a home?

These two examples of contractors' arguments are what often persuade the future home-builder to settle for less charm, and actually poorer construction. The pumice homes I have visited now stand with irreparable cracks whereas my adobe remains solid and secure from heat and cold.

An oft-misrepresented story by the contractor is that the soft lines of adobe walls can be duplicated in pumice. I have yet to see the ultimate esthetic value of feeling right 'at home' in a pumice house. I'll go along with the practicability of the use of pumice and cement construction for buildings — but not for a 'home-to-feel like a home'. Unless of course you want the 'modern' touch. Does this 'modern' touch begin to really appeal to a home owner when the charm and grace of the past is completely forgotten? I doubt it! Why not have articles on the adaptation of the things and materials the past has taught us?

Sincerely yours,
Webb Young

The NMA would be happy to accept advertisements from adobe brick manufacturers.—the Editors

National Honor Awards—Presented for distinguished accomplishment in architecture for any building in the U.S. or abroad completed since January 1, 1956, this year's awards go to: Edward Stone, for his U.S. Embassy, New Delhi, India; Mario J. Ciampi and Paul Reiter, Associate, for their Rivera Elementary School, Daily City, Calif.; Minoru Yamasaki, for his Reynolds Metals Regional Sales Office Building, Detroit; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill for their Pepsi-Cola World Headquarters Building, N. Y.; Birkerts & Straub for their Summer House, Northville, Mich.; and two awards to Philip Johnson, for his shrine in New Harmony, Indiana and his nuclear reactor in Israel.