In your article, you did not mention the principal reason why the architects, W. C. Kruger and Associates (whom you also do not mention) were asked to make the change, and that is the fact that Santa Fe possesses an Historical Zoning Ordinance (declared constitutional by the Supreme Court of New Mexico) and that the Capitol complex lies within the area protected by the Ordinance. The latter requires that new buildings conform with the spirit of the City's traditional architectural styles.

This is a type of conservation measure adopted by an increasing number of American cities to protect their historical areas at a time when areas are tending to lose their character. I am sure you will agree that if a large non-conforming building were proposed to be erected in the Vieux Carre' in New Orleans, or on Beacon Hill in Boston, the authorities would have been desperately concerned to prevent it. That is exactly what happened in Santa Fe when the Mayor, an unanimous Council and an aroused citizenry petitioned the State to reconsider the design and substitute instead one compatible with the architectural tradition of the historical area of the City. The latter was fortunate in having the State acquiesce.

With regard to your comments on deviations from the Master Plan, prepared by Associated Architects of Santa Fe and approved by a previous Capitol Buildings Improvements Commission, of which I was a member, I would like to remind you that I voted for that Master Plan "with commendation" (with exception of individual buildings which I felt should be closer in spirit with the traditional historical zoning ordinance of Santa Fe). I have not been consulted on matters of relocation of buildings in relation to the Master Plan as it originally existed.

In fairness, will you please publish this letter in New Mexico Architecture?

Sincerely,

John G. Meem

NOTES ON READING


Not too long ago I had a disquieting experience when returning home from a fairly long trip. For six months I had travelled Spain and southern Italy on a kind of architectural field trip, but now I had come back to pick up the routine of life and teaching. In one important way, however, my home-coming was lacking the usual reassurance and pleasure which envelops the returning traveler. The most memorable experience of the return was the shock with which I realized what a very ugly place my home town was — what an aesthetically barren and abandoned place!

During six months architectural travel I had learned to use my eyes to see. So now I looked at my old, familiar home territory with new eyes — enquiring eyes which had forgotten the convenient habit of overlooking that which was ugly. I was shocked. Did I actually live in such a hideous community? Was this the town I had remembered nostalgically as I drove across the tableland of Old Castle? How could I have forgotten the utter desolation of North Fourth Street, the signboard jungle that is Central Avenue, the asphalt wastelands, the impudent assaults of gas stations and drive-ins, the gloomy disarray of half-empty, never-ending strings of jerry-built stores? Not until the benign shadows of night swallowed up this ugliness could sensitive eyes find relief. Even then, alas, one could not blot out a comprehension of the English language so as not have to understand those blatant neon signs!

In the course of a few days at home, however, I again learned to accommodate myself to my old environment, to block out this ugliness by simply not using my eyes. There was no other solution. Why inflict useless suffering on ones sense of vision? Self-flagellation is old fashioned.

But people with their eyes closed will not do much for the visual improvement of their community. And what our cities need are not artists skilled in over-looking but seers — seers who not only see and judge for themselves but who work to open the eyes of a community to its condition and lead it to a better state of being.

Now all architects and citizens interested enough to read this magazine should be seers — and do-ers. If you haven't had the experience late of taking a fresh look at your home town you should try it. And if you can't manage a six-month preparatory trip to Spain, a very effective substitute will be a look at Mr. Peter Blake's new book, God's Own Junkyard.

You can read it in a couple of hours. And it will shock you into action.

Essentially the book is a series of photographic essays — usually organized on the "comparative method." One side of the page shows what nature provided, the other, what man has done to it. Sometimes the contrast indicates what man is capable of doing at his best in opposition to what he usually does.

By way of text there are eleven short essays which vary in length from one to eight pages. Here Mr. Blake does a masterful job of summarizing the folly of the new communities we are building so proudly and so blindly — building by the hundreds and thousands of acres in our suburbs and by the million-dollar-acre in redeveloped areas within our cities. In discussing the latter, for example, he says:

With a very, very few exceptions, our cities seem to be headed for a grim future indeed — unless we determine to make some radical changes. That future looks something like this: first, our cities will be inhabited solely by the very poor (generally colored) and the very rich (generally white) plus a few divisions of police to protect the latter from the former. Second, they will be primarily places to work in — places for office buildings and for light industry. Third, they will become totally ghettoified — not merely in terms of racial segregation, but also in terms of usage: there will be office ghettos, industrial ghettos, apartment ghettos, amusement or cultural ghettos (like Manhattan's gold-plated Rockefeller ghetto, Lincoln Center), bureaucratic ghettos, shopping ghettos, medical-center ghettos. In other words, there will be virtually no mixed uses of streets or of neighborhoods, so that most areas of the city will be alive for mere fractions of each day or week, and as deserted as Wall Street on a weekend for the rest of the time. In short, we have lost, or are about to lose, the most important asset of any successful city: variety. This choice — the great choice available to the city dweller of people, things — events — is, traditionally the principal difference in spirit Suburbia and the Metropolis...
Mr. Blake's manner of writing is as nimble and witty as his analysis is perceptive. He spares none of us in searching out the causes for this horrid mediocrity that our society is creating. He points to rapacious land speculators, moribund government regulators, imperious business men, advertising boondoggles, and a bemused public that acknowledges no higher authority than the right of each individual to use and abuse his property as he wants, no matter how adversely that effects the whole community. Even our artists and "intellectual elite" who should have the vision to show the way today as they have in past generations, have lost their way in a futile pursuit of transient novelty.

The depressing thing about Mr. Blake's appraisal is that it is so accurate. The "systematic uglification of the United States" goes forward with complete public approval. Nature is recklessly being eliminated. And the arrogant and barren environment that we are substituting for nature is a frighteningly accurate portrait of ourselves, our countrymen and our society.

— B. Bunting

new mexico architecture nma

Published bi-monthly by the New Mexico Chapter, American Institute of Architects, a non-profit organization, at 301-D Grace Land Drive S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Editorial correspondence: All correspondence should be addressed to Rainbridge Bunting, 3021 Guadalupe Trail, Albuquerque, New Mexico. No responsibility will be assumed by the editor or publishing organization for unsolicited contributions. Return postage should accompany all unsolicited manuscripts.

Advising correspondence: Requests for information and other correspondences should be addressed to W. M. Britelle, Sr., 301-D Grace Land Drive S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Change of address: Notifications should be sent to N.M.A., Box 390, University Station, Albuquerque, N. M., at least forty days prior to effective date. Please send both old and new addresses.

Subscription rates: single copy 50¢; one year $2.50. Second class postage paid at Roswell, New Mexico.

Editorial Policy: Opinions expressed in all signed articles are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the New Mexico Chapter, A.I.A.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Albuquerque Blueprint Company 26
Albuquerque Gravel Products Company 5
Albuquerque Testing Laboratory 16
Apache Lumber Co. 16
Atlas Building Products 9
Blue Streak Reproductions 16
Bulecraft of Pittsburgh 4
Broadway Lumber Co. 26
Builder's Block & Stone Co., Inc. 14
Crego Block Co., Inc. 23
Culligan Water Conditioning, Inc. 11
Don J. Cummings Co., Inc. 13
General Paint Corporation 12
Hanley Paint Mfg., Co., Inc. 18
Hunter-Hayes Elevator Co. 25
Hydro Conduit Corporation 15
Kinney Brick Company, Inc. 17
Lydick Roofing Co. 26
Miller & Smith Mfg. Co., Inc. 29
Monarch Tile Manufacturing, Inc. 2
Mountain States Telephone 11
New Mexico Marble & Tile 12
New Mexico Pipe Trades Industry 29
Office Interiors 9
Otto, Edgar D. & Sons, Inc. 28
Portland Cement Association 27
Santa Fe Studio of Church Art 17
Southern Union Gas Co. 24
Southwest Veneerite Co. 18
Stryco Sales, Inc. 12
Trox, Inc. 5
Wellborn Paint Mfg. Co. 11

MEMBER PUBLISHERS ARCHITECTURAL COMPONENTS, 21 Official Publications of Components of the American Institute of Architects in 30 key states.


Area Representative, W. M. Britelle, Sr., 301-D Grace Land Drive S.E., Albuquerque, N. M. Tel. 255-7540.