

WELLINGTON CLUBHOUSE IS CASE FOR 'MANNERE

By: Regan Young

Looking at the barracks-like Wellington Place Apartments while driving down Candelaria Road in Albuquerque, one would not imagine that they encircle what may well become stylistically a most significant building. The little clubhouse in the center of the complex is one of the first examples of a real synthesis of high-style New Mexico Regionalism and the post-modern application of stylized fragments of history. This 'Mannered Historicism' could become the basis for a new regional style: contemporary, yet aptly reflecting the history and context of New Mexico.

New Mexico architecture has long been the result of such a synthesis of current and traditional modes of design: a dialogue between the universal and the specific, the international and the local. An early demonstration of this process was during the Territorial Period (1850-1912), when imported classical window, door, and cornice details were applied to the indigenous mud box house forms of the region. Thus the world-wide trend of using details from Greek architecture was applied to a traditional way of building which was reponsive to local environmental and cultural conditions, creating a totally unique and appropriate style.

By the late 19th Century, there developed in many a disenchantment with the internationally prevalent Continental architectural vocabulary. Rejecting universal solutions, architects in America and abroad began to explore vernacular (common) building forms in search of more locale-specific styles. The first significant revival style to appear in New Mexico was the California Mission Revival. With their flat plaster walls, arcades, Spanish tile roofs, and multi-curved gables, the old AT&SF Train Stations in Albuquerque and Las Vegas are probably the state's earliest and best examples. But by the 'twenties', the Spanish Pueblo and Territorial Revival Styles had also emerged here, emulating earlier native prototypes. Both were local manifestations of this international impulse to find a specific regional architecture.

After World War II, Modern architecture began to make its impact on Albuquerque, bringing with it new building types (shopping malls, high-rise office buildings) and new structural possibilities. Facing Modern New Mexico designers was the difficult reconciliation of the high-tech aspirations of the new architecture with the heavy visual qualities of traditional construction. The broad expanses of glass, thin-skinned walls, and machine-made materials which characterized much of Modern architecture never seemed to fit in here. By necessity, the style was transformed, acclimated to the conditions of the Southwest. Modernism, however, remained revolu-

tionary. Historical models were rejected when designing in favor of abstraction, purity, and Platonic geometry.

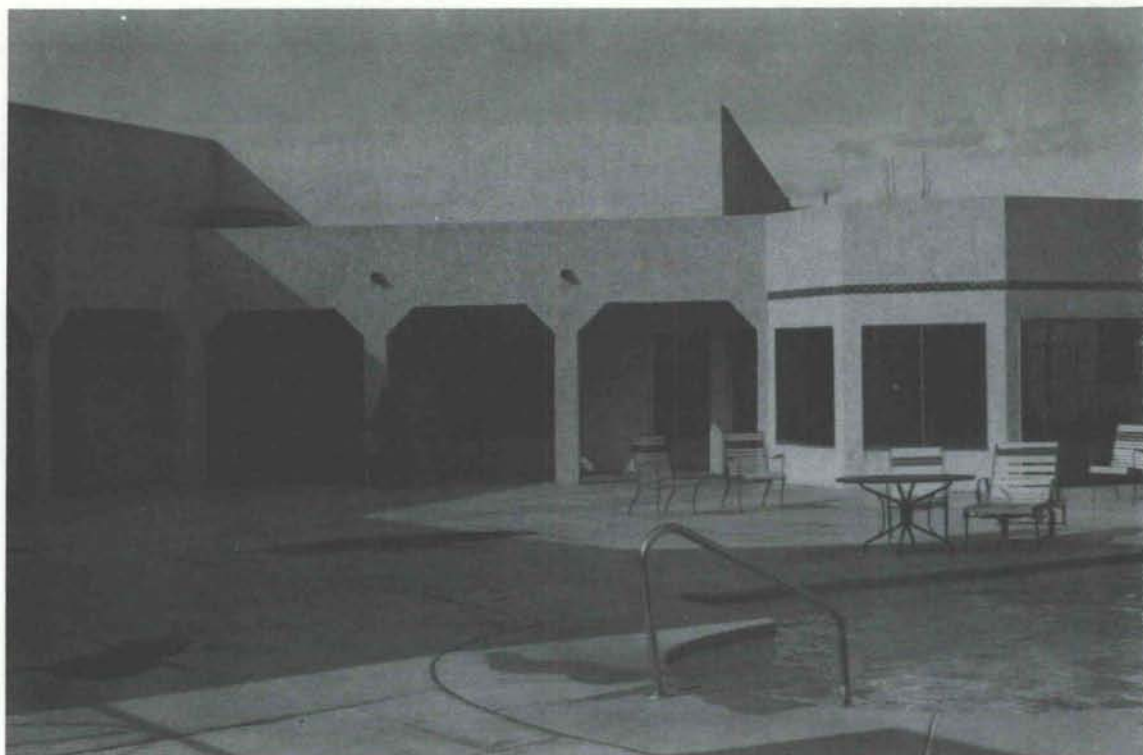
Two distinctive approaches can be discerned in the progressive architecture of New Mexico of the past decade. During the late 1960s Antoine Predock took the simple, volumetric, and prismatic language of the Kahn*-inspired Philadelphia School and adapted it via the use of local materials and color. To this basic formal vocabulary Predock added a limited number of "functional" stylized elements such as concrete lintels and *canales* to create what has become High-Style New Mexico Modern. The other approach more closely follows nationally published work and is best represented by the work of Albuquerque architects Dyer-McClernon (Hiland Senior Center, Good News Baptist Church). These projects display an appreciation of common building materials, mannered references to popular culture and historic form, and contemporary literate modes of design.

Westwork Architects, the firm that designed the Wellington Clubhouse, is among the first to attempt the traditional New Mexican synthesis of indigenous form with contemporary applique. The partners, Lawrence Licht, Glade Sperry and Stanley Moore, all come out of the Predock office. To the basic Predock vocabulary there is a conscious addition of pop/historical materials and elements to create a busier, more varied, and possibly even more regional architectural expression. While the Modern architects responded to the strong geometries of the ancient New Mexican landscape and architecture, post-moderns add the richness, variety and texture drawn from the wealth of historic examples found in the present-day Albuquerque cityscape.

In its layout, the Wellington Clubhouse has much in common with traditional New Mexican spatial arrangements from the Spanish Colonial Period. As opposed to most Modern Albuquerque public buildings which are objects floating in a sea of asphalt, the Wellington gathers itself around a swimming pool to define and focus upon an outdoor space. In a typical Spanish

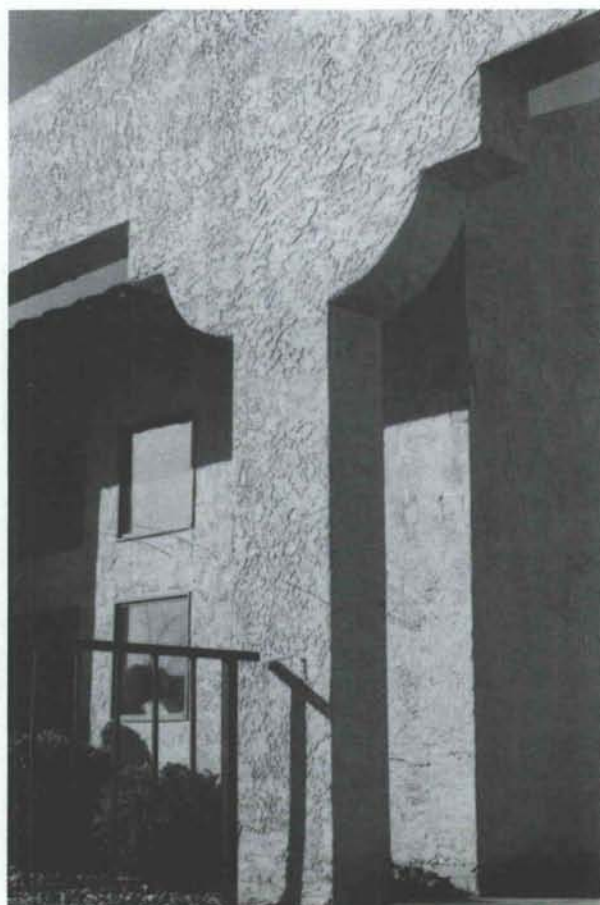
**Between every two epochs, there appears a major transitional figure. Because of his reverence for light, space, and abstraction, Louis Kahn (1902-74) stands solidly within the Modernist camp. Yet because of his simultaneous predilection for hierarchy, formalism, and symbol, his work can be seen as a water shed, influencing much of the progressive work of the past two decades.*





Colonial fortified village or an isolated hacienda such as the Martinez House in Taos (1824), the plaza or courtyard was a gathering place for trading and defense and thus the symbol for community. So it is with the Wellington. The long anonymous blocks of apartments provide a neutral backdrop for a fine-grained architectural gem which celebrates the act of people coming together.

In approaching the building one recognizes many of the elements which give New Mexico and the clubhouse a sense of place. While the color and texture of its stucco associate the building with the rest of the complex, its angularity and sloped Spanish tile roof make it stand out as something more than another dwelling. Glazed ceramic tile around the doorway defines the entrance and recalls the Mission Revival Style in its double-curved form, and the 1920s and 30s Route 66 strip architecture in material. Probably the most clever gesture, however, is in the semi-detached wall in front of the main facade. The wall is reminiscent of the layering effect created by current fashionable architects, and at the same time alludes to the Spanish Colonial **portal** or porch. Just as in the other details though, the motif is not literally reproduced but rather translated into a self-conscious contemporary reference. The *zapatas* (corbels) atop the columns become two-dimensional, flattened into the plane of the wall and geometricized into perfect forms. This gesture is at once very traditional and very contemporary: a unity of vernacular and post-modern intents. This **zapata** form then becomes a signature for



the building and is inverted and repeated as a motif over the entrance, on the chimney, and inside above the fireplace. Around the central pool area the various parts of the building form a U-shaped plan to encircle this community outdoor space and open to view of the mountains. Arcades provide a visual link between the various elements which curve around this open space. The arcades begin at an octagon-shaped jacuzzi room at one end of the curve and terminate at the other with a Greek temple/bandstand, a reminder of the classical precedents in New Mexico architecture.

We are now in a situation similar to the beginning of this century. Tired of the ubiquity and monotony promoted by universal solutions (then Classical and Gothic, now Modern), we once again turn to more regional styles to provide a much needed sense of place. This is the significance of the Wellington Clubhouse. Taking a traditional New Mexican approach, current design ideas are applied to an established native style. This combination of high-style regionalism and contemporary design is a new/old way of producing an appropriate New Mexico architecture.

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His publication credits include:

"Show Reveals Beauty of Architectural Drawings" *Albuquerque Journal*; Friday, November 5, 1982, Page 1 Section C

"Critical Mass: The Albuquerque Indian Hospital Addition", *Mass: Volume 1 Number 1*, Spring 1983, Pages 22-24

(with Mark Eshelman and Stevens Williams) "Guide to Albuquerque Architecture," *Albuquerque Chapter American Institute of Architects*

