This untouched photograph shows the perfect natural lighting that is obtained with Corrugated "Perspex". Although a full roof section is shown here Corrugated "Perspex" can be used in single sheets or can be used in walls where the construction is a corrugated building material. Corrugated "Perspex" is easy to fit — made in the same corrugations as standard corrugated roofing material, Corrugated "Perspex" simply takes the place of existing material. Old buildings can be economically lighted by taking out the required number of sheets of roofing and replacing them with "Perspex". This method is quick and inexpensive — no framing or flashing is required as with glass.

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Apart from roof lighting Corrugated "Perspex" has been used effectively for modern effects in interior decorating.

One of a series by IMPERIAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES (N.Z.) LTD, distributors of "Perspex", "Nylon", "Albarkane", "Woolvex", etc.
On theories of design

We have been taken to task by several correspondents for our Editorial in Number 6, Volume I. It appears that many folk are not happy unless they, or someone else, can deduce rules of design. This is an occupation that has been happily followed from Aristotle to the present day. Meanwhile the artist and designer gets along with a happy indifference to the law-givers.

Let us leave out of this discussion those who develop theories of aesthetics. Mostly their cogitations have died with them—the artists' works remain. Let us confine our attention to the rules of design. There have been many attempts to define them and here are three that are generally accepted:

1) The design must have unity.
2) The object must fulfill its purpose.
3) The material must be used according to its nature.

Everyone will accept the first, but when you see an object you feel that it has or has not unity. If you cannot feel that it has or has not unity, knowing the rule will not help.

If we accept rule two, we must exclude as not good design most Chinese bronzes. If we accept rule three, we must exclude as not good design nearly all Baroque architecture and Bernini sculpture.

Perhaps we had better stick to the vague rules:

The design must be rhythmic. We challenge anyone to convey in words an understanding of rhythm in design to someone who does not know what it is.

Never mind. Suppose we accept that, or all or any of the rules, then we have the right to ask, does a knowledge of them (a) enable anyone to design well or (b) enable anyone to judge whether an object is well designed or not? Our answer is emphatically no.

Why do we object so strongly to rules of design? There is a good reason. Every drawing teacher will tell you that the first demand of every student is: "Give me a formula!" There is no formula for good drawing except practice. Formulas and rules are the refuge of the lazy man who does not want to use his hands and eyes and is afraid of being found out. How nice if all our judgments could be effected by trotting half-a-dozen rules out of our pocket!

To conclude, we will negate our argument by formulating two rules, both infallible: to judge music, learn to listen: to judge design, learn to see. If any reader has any better rules of design, we should be glad to publish them.

Editor: E. C. Simpson  Art Editor: E. Mervyn Taylor

Two-monthly Journal of the Architectural Centre Inc.

C.P.O. Box 1628, Wellington, C.I.

February-March 1950
WORTH LOOKING AT

Three-dimensional pattern

ABOVE—Ben Nicholson,
Project 1945

TOP/RIGHT — Cantilever
Stair, Architect M. Furniss

RIGHT — Aerial Photo,
Rotation of Crops in
Canterbury
TWO HOUSES

BY E.A. PLISHKE

Sometimes I read articles or listen to people discussing the growth of an "indigenous" New Zealand style for houses, saying that it should be fostered and strongly supported. But I never know quite what to think—I feel uneasy and wonder what is really meant by it. In the back of my mind I cannot forget how this word "indigenous" has been misused by reactionaries all over the world. On the other hand I am fully aware of the core of truth in it and the importance of the problem. The Oxford Dictionary defines indigenous as "native, belonging naturally."

The determining factors in this sense are, for instance, local prevalence of particular building materials, resulting in particular ways of construction and social and economic conditions. The fulfilment of these requirements is a condition for any good design. But it would be misleading to assume that this alone would result in a modern New Zealand style. Before we go further I think it may be wise to define what we mean by the word "style". There is much to say in favour of the use of the term "style" for any attitude of the designer that can be seen in an object conceived by him. It is this mental attitude and taste, mirrored in the object, which makes the style. That is the reason why a brick house in England and a timber residence in New Zealand can still have the same style and atmosphere. That applies for the 'nineties, for instance, as much as for today. Altogether I think the style of the 'nineties was as international as modern architecture.

To illustrate this point on contemporary buildings, two houses are shown on these pages. One of them I have built in Wellington and the other long before I decided to come to New Zealand. It stands in the Austrian Alps on the shore of a lake near Salzburg, where there is much snow and ice in winter. The construction is timber, the outside cement plaster, inside plywood and plaster. Floor and walls are heavily insulated against the cold and all glass double in double sashes and double doors. The climate of the Alps provided much greater obstacles, which had to be overcome in order to realise, by actual construction, the climate, the conception of openness and lightness, which I tried to achieve in both houses. Although the climate and other local conditions had of course to be taken into account, certainly the conception of space and form and the attitude towards construction was the primary fact.
HOUSE IN WELLINGTON

PHOTOGRAPHS
IRENE KOPPEL
This is an example in which design has ebbed to its lowest. The elevation gives little indication of the plan. The verandah of the early house is there but is now too narrow and the roof so high that it is of little practical use. The endeavour of the designer was, of course, to obtain the maximum display with the technique and wealth at his means. Note the excessive characterless decoration and the extreme ceiling height of 12 feet, a ceiling height suitable for the rooms of a large Georgian house, but totally unsuited for the small rooms of this house. No doubt when built this house had an appeal to the people of the time as the latest in fashion design, an appeal involving the certainty that their forefathers' houses were never like this. It was in reality the dregs of the classic revival.

The sketch is a synthesis of the 1900 suburban villa. The bay window, the verandah, the wood fret pattern and cast iron decoration, the turned balustrade, the gable finials and the three-quarter drawn blinds, they are all there.

Photographs by courtesy of the Turnbull Library.

Drawing by Juliet Peter.
In England William Morris and the school of architects working with him greatly influenced design. Years passed before the New Zealand house was to show the reflection of the work of this school with its return to simplicity of composition, emphasis upon craftsmanship and avoidance of excessive decoration. This house, which is not a particularly good example, shows the strong influence of this school. The roof is of particular interest; compare it with the previous example: it is of burnt clay tile probably imported from France. Some years were to pass before a similar tile was manufactured in New Zealand. From this time until the last few years it was the desire of practically all architects to use tiles as a roofing material for their houses. William Morris’s teaching against all machine-made material and return to the character of the simple rustic English cottage retarded the serious design development of corrugated roofing material, which was the roofing material for the great majority of houses because of its economic and practical advantages, replacing the wood shingle of the pioneer house.

The full development of the cottage or romantic school of design is characterised by sharply contrasting forms and materials with prominent roofs, big chimneys and heavy projections as this vigorous example shows. Note the small casement windows, the variety of materials, plaster, brick and mock half-timber work, the winding path and the ubiquitous ivy.

A secondary influence from California was to complete the change of appearance of the New Zealand house. This is a typical house of the California bungalow type. The origin of the design was not Europe but Asia, particularly Japan and China. The bungalow became popular with the speculative builder and was readily accepted by the public. This can be explained to a large degree by the similarity of climate, social and economic conditions and methods of building construction between California and New Zealand. The bungalow built of timber was characterised by an open plan, large windows and a low-pitched roof in contrast to the stone or brick cottage, tightly planned and with small windows and a high-pitched roof. During the first three decades of this century there was a sharp design conflict between the bungalow and the cottage. Most architects, and particularly those trained in Europe, were advocates of the cottage. This was unfortunate because the bungalow without skilled design direction degenerated into a type little better than the 1800 villa.
Our tourist literature lets down its hair about the variety and magnificence of this country's landscape. Alpine ranges, pastoral peace, the wonders of the geyser land, the sublimity of the cold lakes, the tropical bush, the thundering waterfall, helped out by interspersed snippings from the poets, allure the tourist to come and sample the attractions of this paradisal land of which we are so proud.

Why limit our pride to the places we seldom visit? Is not an object of pride an object of care? Has anyone ever been heard protesting against the filthy litter of paper, ice cream containers and cardboard which converts every picnic ground and holiday resort into an eyesore? Quite lately the short distance from the road to the Huka Falls was like walking through a gigantic rubbish tip.

The commonest specimen of the New Zealand flora, to be found in both islands and in the most unexpected places, even on the snowline of Egmont, is the beer bottle. It flourishes, both as a whole and in pieces, over a wide terrain ranging from our city streets to unlikely corners of our scenic reserves.

Seaside resorts where weekend baches abound supply their own characteristic landscape. Its main feature consists of what the Scotsman refers to as the "Wee hoose." As one stands on a hill overlooking such popular resorts their conspicuous isolation and unmistakable form seem to multiply their number out of all proportion to human requirements.

Driving into the average country town, after passing the Gothic weather-boarded church on the left and the war memorial on the right, the eye meets a procession of shop verandahs. Not one is at the same height as its neighbour, while the differing slants of the supporting poles form a corybantic dance with the varied angles of the street poles, like drunks reeling home from a party.

Our cities show pride in their civic amenities. Thrusting themselves upon our attention are our many ways of making life easy; street lights, trams, telephones, etc.

What a wonderland this could be if our man-made scenery were orderly and designed!

LEFT—Corner of main thoroughfare complete with dust-bin.
THE COMMUNITY CENTRE—
WHAT SHOULD IT BE?

BY M. B. PATIENCE

"There is indeed no such boon to society as this familiar knowledge of citizen by citizen." This is a statement by Plato. Leaving it for a moment, consider what opportunities exist for acquiring such a familiar knowledge today. We go to work in trams or buses, united perhaps by the common bond of being packed like sardines in a vehicle designed to hold about a quarter of the number of people who fight their way on at rush hours. Our work brings us into contact with our fellow men, but as few jobs are a labour of love and most employers pay wages for services rendered, the opportunities for social intercourse are limited.

We rush our food at lunch time to make the most of our precious hour of breathing space, coming into contact with those few people who habitate the same restaurant. We retire to our homes in the evenings to enjoy the company of our families, while at week-ends what spare time we have left after assisting the tired housewife with her chores is generally spent in the garden. Now and again we go to the local cinema to seek some relief from our cares, but one cannot find overmuch communal life in the two hours of darkness the cinema provides; and how much mental stimulus or intelligent interest does the cinema provide or demand?

Our unit of land subdivision in this country—generally the one-quarter-acre section—is probably just about as much as the average man can look after, devoting all his spare daylight hours to its care, leaving him with little time or energy for community pursuits. The unit of land subdivision spreads us out so thinly on the face of our portion of the earth that it is almost possible to exist year in and year out within the boundaries of our sections, without ever being bothered by anyone.

Confused Ideas Of It

Of recent years a new catchword has infiltrated into the jargon of everyday speech: "Community centres". What, I ask you, is meant by the words? Ask anyone what a Community Centre is! What sort of a reply do you get? "Oh, it's a—" "Well, it's a—" "Oh—you know—it's a place where—" It should be the centre of the community obviously, but what, in effect, does that mean? I propose to try to tell you something of what I think it means.

But first let us pay some attention to the origin of the contemporary Community Centre idea. Out of the horrific blackness left behind by the industrial revolution in England, when the effects began to be felt of the policy of "Produce, Produce, in the name of God—Produce" (oblivious of anything else but production) the necessity for some relief from the intolerable conditions of life in an urban hotchpotch became apparent to all. There was the Mechanics Institute. The first settlers brought it here.

Its English Origin

The terrifying increase in urbanisation of land in England resulting from the change-over from an agricultural to an industrial economy had all but obliterated any traces of the old community sense in the nuclei of the expanding towns. The aftermath of the 1914-18 war saw the rapid fringe development of housing estates around towns and cities, built at much lower densities than had applied earlier, with the result that the social wilderness was vaster in area than ever before. Whole new housing estates were laid out and developed without ever a thought of the possibilities of community life. Classes segregated themselves in their own areas, and studiously avoided any contact with other classes. Then with the advent of the war, bringing with it the terrible toll of devastation and waste, focussing attention on the need for re-building according to a plan, what had been merely an idea in the heads of a few of the more thoughtful planners was accepted as a basis for planning.

A new social concept of planning was born: the neighbourhood unit, approximating to some 10,000 people, being the average size of a group in whom the sense of community could be developed, and being as well a convenient size upon which to base the children's social unit, the school. To increase the physical demarcation of the unit, so increasing the social awareness, and to reduce the toll of death on the roads, arterial routes were planned to pass between the neighbourhoods, while the unit itself, though planned as a part of the whole, was to be in effect a self-contained social nucleus enjoying a life of its own. At the centre of the neighbourhood unit would be located the various shops, cinema, cotehe, library, community hall and the like as well as the schools, to provide a common meeting-place for the activities of the citizens, young and old, once more creating an environment capable of bringing the opportunity for group activities to the people. Diagrams 1 and 2 show how the units are related.

The Greek City

Now returning to Plato's statement: what sort of place, if any, was provided in his day that would encourage this "familiar knowledge of citizen by citizen" he speaks about. The answer is to be found in the agora or town centre of the Greek city, such as Priene illustrated in Diagram 3. The Greek city was much the same as our own is today. It had its houses, its streets, its public buildings, its theatres and shops. Unlike our cities it possessed a wall for its defence, and unlike most of our cities it
NEIGHBOURHOOD UNITS AND ROAD PATTERN WITHIN THE TOWN.

ABOVE: An "ideal" diagram of neighbourhood units related to road layout of the town.

RESIDENTIAL UNITS WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOOD
circulation and shopping location.

ABOVE: An "ideal" diagram of residential units making up the neighbourhood and local shopping centres.

A TOWN OF 45/50,000 POP'N.

BELOW: A sketch layout for a small town illustrating the principles in the 'ideal' diagram.

BELOW: A sketch layout for a neighbourhood unit with its residential units and illustrating the principles in the ideal diagram.

A NEIGHBOURHOOD UNIT
possessed an obvious and designed town centre, which was at the same time the community centre, the agora or public square.

In it would be found the shops which attracted the daily attentions of the inhabitants. In the shelter of its colonnade would walk the aged taking their mild exercise. In one corner, perhaps, the student would be engaged in earnest debate with the philosopher. At some point in its open space would be placed the shrine of the City's God. Adjacent to it would be the ecclesiasticon or Senate house. Because the newspaper was unknown, the populace could get the latest news from the agora in conversation with others. In short, the agora was the community centre, the centre of the community, the town centre—whatever you like to call it.

Applied To New Zealand

If it is true that the city is the people, then any town-planning programme must fall to the ground if it does not pay proper regard to this fact. From what has been said earlier of the neighbourhood unit as a group of some 10,000 people it will be seen that this figure would approximate to the population of the average New Zealand town.

It would be correct in New Zealand to think of the community centre as that part of the town where people from all parts of the town gravitate to enjoy the stimulus of group activity. This becomes the town centre, the real community centre, where, as in ancient times, people are brought together to a common meeting-place to do their shopping, to see a film, to have a cup of coffee in pleasant surroundings, or even just to sit in the sun and watch the world go by. Here the local council offices should be housed, the art gallery and museum should be located to enable the habit to be formed of dropping in. They should not be put in some imposing but inaccessible spot.

So here we are in New Zealand just emerging from the pioneering phase, during which a strong community sense was engendered through having to carve a home out of the bush and being glad to know that assistance from one's neighbour would be forthcoming if required. But the bush has now gone, and the necessity for pioneering has passed away, and with it the erstwhile community spirit. The planner's problem therefore is to revive that community spirit. How can it be done?

Can the Community Spirit Be Revived?

Certain activities demand a group to perform them. Football brings together a number of people; Brass bands another group; the attendance at the Plunket rooms unites mothers. There are play-readings; the gymnasium; the swimming bath and so on. The community centre, as I think of it, must make facilities available for the pursuit of all these activities, placing them in intimate relationship. While mother does the shopping the younger children can play happily in the adjacent sand pit. When father goes to Brass band practice, mother may go to the Thespians nearby. The adventure of shopping can be undertaken in the quiet of the shopping precinct without fear of life and limb from traffic. Provision must be made for car-parking. The housewife can have her shopping burdens made easier if she can use the family car, parking it in a convenient spot. The same parking provisions must apply to cinemas and theatres. After the picture or play, facilities for a cup of coffee in congenial surroundings must be available. Most important is the provision of space for the crowd of people who would be drawn to this spot, and for space for the citizens, on municipal occasions, to hear an address by the mayor from the balcony of the town hall.

Routes from all parts of the town should flow naturally to the community centre, where presumably the main route in and out of the town will be. Here, too, should be the bus depot, so that the visitor is introduced to the place at its community centre and can find his way readily to all the facilities. The loosely applied term "community centre" must of necessity mean something more than just a building catering for a combination of needs, while at the same time it should include that very thing among its component parts. The real problem is one of re-integrating society and environment so that both may interact, to produce the New Zealander of the future, not as the rugged individualist of the pioneering age, but as the urban product of an urban environment which caters for the social needs of its people, and promotes Plato's "familiar knowledge of citizen by citizen".
"LEAVE THE DISHES IN THE SINK, MA"

After two visits to the demonstration house, I have strong doubts about the stay-home powers of the kitchen. It seems to me that the housewife would be just as eager to stack the dishes in the sink and get away from it all in this home as she would be in dozens of others. Doubtless the students who designed it were all Irish types, and each remembered that his or her mother had been saying for years how she wished she had a stainless steel bench and plenty of cupboards. These have been provided, and very useful they are as far as they go, but the rest of the kitchen seems unimaginative and completely lacking in incentive for the worker to try to raise her skill to a science.

Economy, I realise, was a guiding factor, but, just for instance, there must have been a space piece of timber somewhere to use as a partition in the drawers under the sink bench. Anyone who has dived into a well-stocked drawer for the vegetable life will see the point.

In any case, the idea of putting kitchen implements into drawers and saucepans and basins and jugs away into cupboards is hardly labour-saving. A man who has any kind of workshop in the back yard does not put his hammers and chisels in drawers so that he has to dive every time he wants one. A thoughtfully-designed kitchen would have some kind of rack round the work bench for the more commonly-used implements to be stored immediately to hand. Just as effective is a narrow strip of wood strong enough to hold a line of medium-sized screws. Small screws can then be attached to the end of the handles of knives, peelers, potato-mashers, etc., so that they can be hung up.

Again, much time is wasted through thoughtlessness in storing of basins and potts and constantly used china. For the kitchen envisaged by the Architectural Centre there would be plenty of basins and saucepans needed every day. It is irritating, to say the least, to have to undo a nest of basins before the right one is reached. All that is needed is an open shelf for the basins and jugs to be kept singly. The same principle applies to the storing of saucepans. The same inspiration that lay in the divisions of the broom cupboard could have been brought to bear on the putting away of saucepans. Even a few nails on the inside of the pot cupboard would help to avoid that nesting problem.

One very baffling omission is that of a plate-rack. There is obviously no provision made for a dish-washing machine, although possibly the children of the family were considered as a labour-saving device. A dish-rack not only saves time with a tea towel, but, by storing dishes in the immediate vicinity of the worker, considerably eases the effort that is required in opening a cupboard door, taking a plate out of a pile, setting the pile to rights and shutting the cupboard door again.

Two of the most frequently used commodities in the kitchen are flour and sugar. Taking this from cupboards, opening them, removing some of the contents, shutting the tins and replacing them is a maddening process. The solution seems to be a pull-out bin with compartments for flour and sugar. A similar container would be useful for bread.

For a family of four there is not really very much work space in this kitchen. One or perhaps two pull-out boards just under the sink-bench would be a great help. These are invaluable for cutting bread, as pastry boards, or just for a little extra space when speed is necessary and there is already a pile of dishes on the bench.

It struck me too, although this might be just ignorant prejudice, that the method of storing vegetables was not altogether satisfactory. I thought it might be an improvement to make a sliding tray, flush with the floor, which could be slid out and properly cleaned without the necessity for crawling into corners.

The last important omission is that of a properly designed chair. Scientific tests have proved that it is much less fatiguing, and therefore much more efficient and much speedier to perform many kitchen chores seated. The chair need not be much more than a stool of the right height for the work bench with a low back support and it necessary a foot-rest. The happy housewife in this kitchen could conceivably shell peas at the built-in table sitting on one of the stools provided but her back would probably kill her.

My reactions to the kitchen have been largely governed by the disappointment of one who has looked for Higher Things and has plodded away with no greater inspiration than that which could be derived from any advertisement of any "model" kitchen photographed from a distance. None of the additions I have mentioned would add anything to the appearance of the demonstration kitchen as it stands, but owners of factories and workshops do not as a rule seek to improve the efficiency of their workers by wrapping their machines in chiffon when work is over. Personally, I would swap the tea towel gadget any day for just a few more aids to the speedy completion of work in the kitchen.

—M. ROTH

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FLUORESCENT AT ITS FINEST
The management Committee of *Here & Now* advise readers & subscribers that the publication has not ceased permanently, but is being reorganised on an adequate financial basis.

It will be no news that the way of independent reviews is a hard one, but public response to our first issues was so good that every effort had to be made to keep *Here & Now* alive.

**ART IN INDUSTRY**

Last year we praised Imperial Chemical Industries for its initiative in commissioning a leading New Zealand artist to illustrate its calendar. This calendar turned out to be a decisive break from the conventional cottage-garden scene sent to us in the grocer’s Christmas parcel. The 1949 calendar, illustrated with six wood engravings by E. Mervyn Taylor, was successful as good design and was possibly successful also as a good advertisement for ICI, as this year the firm has commissioned an equally distinguished artist, George Woods, to illustrate its 1950 calendar.

Whatever the motive of ICI, the result is an achievement in good design for everyday things.

Events and personalities in New Zealand’s history of the pre-1830 period provide the subject matter for the six scraper-board illustrations and accurate letterpress at the front of the calendar gives the bare bones of the story behind each illustration.

These illustrations show a vigorous imagination at work and through sharp contrasts and the strength of a central figure appear to grasp the very essence of the story, though sometimes at the expense of other details. The figures have a bold, imaginative and somewhat sinister appearance. William Colenso, for example, examining a botanical specimen, looks rather like Sherlock Holmes sniffing at blood stains.

The one major criticism about the calendar is that it does not work. The cover, which in itself is well designed, and the written commentary about the illustrations, have both to be torn off before the January-February page can be hung, and the January-February page suffers the same fate by the time March appears. It seems a great pity that by the end of the year nothing will be left of such a well designed calendar except the December sheet. A spiral ring binding would have obviated this difficulty.

Perhaps in the years to come when good design is no longer a rare achievement, the Postmaster-General might follow the enlightened policy of Imperial Chemical Industries. And then we might have some postage stamps of which we need no longer feel ashamed.

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LETTERS TO EDITOR

"DESIGN REVIEW"

Sir: My spirits rose when I read "A plea for ornament" in your October-November issue. In fact, since reading this issue, my interest in Design Review has revived. Whereas in the past I got round to reading my copy when there was no other reading matter to hand, now I look forward to the arrival of the next.

I fully appreciate and approve of the high standard of thought which is aimed at, but "for good human reasons" I have constantly to get down to a less refined atmosphere to keep my interest alive. The article "The Industrial Fashion Designer" was very refreshing. "Housing in New Zealand" gave one a feeling that it is rather romantic to be a New Zealander and to have been born and brought up in one of those old rambling houses. (They are not so frightful after all.) "A kitchen for New Zealand Mothers" draws attention to the fact that at some stage in every woman's life, the kitchen is the most important room in the house. The Why and How of Children's Drawings," well really, aren't children marvellous! "Review of Home & Now," jolly good, must get a copy and see for myself.

I trust these reactions of one reader of your journal are of interest to you.

HILARY D. M. BERTINSHAW

A MATTER FOR AGREEMENT

Sir: Your failure to meet the arguments of my article A Matter for Agreement, prompts me to ask you, once again, whether you believe there is any basis for common values in design. In fact, it leads me to ask whether you believe there is a common basis for values anywhere. For example, I would say that to dismiss an invitation-article as "words and more words," and not to attempt to refute it, logically, is an example of very bad manners. If you agree that such an action was highly indecorous then, by our agreement, we have confirmed a common value, haven't we? But, if you do not agree that yours was a "highly indecorous action" then, if further consultation fails, no doubt we will be, as it were, on two islands. Even in such a position, however, there would cluster on your island all those who agree that, "impoliteness to article writers is a highly defensible value," and on my island, all those of the contrary view. And in each case values would be established within the respective groups by their agreement on the matter at hand. Thus values would be confirmed, being, as I have said, "A matter for Agreement." Do you agree?

B. SUTTON-SMITH

WHAT IS DESIGN?

Sir: In the August-September issue of Design Review there appears a letter by B. Sutton-Smith criticising your article headed "What is Design?" of a previous issue. Since you devoted a page to this letter I feel that it should not be passed over without further comment than the editor's footnote.

The point made in the original article What is Design? is a sound one. Design does not exist apart from the object. But Mr. Sutton-Smith states that before people can find any "basis of agreement" they must first have "at least some common values with respect to design." He says that we must agree on certain things about good design before...
we can profitably discuss examples of it. He goes further and says, if I understand his letter, that if we don’t, there will not be any discussion possible.

This is putting the cart before the horse. How can design possibly exist apart from an object that has been designed? According to his argument one is led to believe that we must work out a sound philosophical theory for good design before we can have it in actuality.

Let us assume that the following rules are agreed upon as a basis for “good design”:

1. Fitness for purpose.
2. Suitability of material.
3. Appropriateness of any decoration.

It is obvious that two people who wholeheartedly agreed upon the foregoing rules could in actual practice produce two objects totally different. (Assuming that they are both making the same object.) One could be well designed and the other badly designed. No headway in getting people interested in well designed things could be made that way because any set of rules or definitions can be interpreted to mean either badly or well-designed objects.

It should be clear now that the point I am trying to make is that the values apparent in well-designed things cannot be understood in a purely logical way only, nor can they be conveyed by means of verbal symbols—they must be felt. Perhaps what Mr. Sutton-Smith is really trying to get at is that there exists a state of real confusion in the minds of the majority of people as to what the whole business is all about, and like Mr. Sutton-Smith also, they make the wrong approach to it. Hence Mr. Sutton-Smith’s dig “the purely arbitrary and mystical insight of those with the ‘natural gift’ to discern for themselves.”

Can it be that so many other peoples, some of whom we call primitive (Polynesian islanders for example) possess a “mystical insight”? Their feeling for well-designed things of their own making is strong. There is nothing mystical about it, but it is true that we have on the whole been thrown badly into confusion by the process of change over from a hand to a machine age and that millions of people have lost the “feel” for well-designed things. This has been one of the evils of industrialism and has, at least in part, been responsible for horrible areas of slums in big cities. There is no easy way out of this, however, and I feel that the approach made by Design Review is in the right direction.

Alan Howie
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BOOK REVIEW


This book impresses tremendously; its scope is vast, and its presentation excellent, but undoubtedly its chief merit lies in the stress its authors have placed on an analytical approach to problems of the theatre. Those who seek ready-made solutions or a stock formula to apply to theatre design or theatrical production will be disappointed—the book does not say "this is how to build a modern theatre" or "this is how a play should be produced." Rather, it surveys the contemporary scene, analyses the problems, and provides critical and constructive comment together with a wealth of purely technical information. The rest is left to the designer or the producer.

The qualifications which the authors bring to their task are also impressive. They are both "theatre consultants" with many years practical and teaching experience in the field of music, dramatic production, acoustics and audio engineering, theatre planning and management. They are not architects and are clearly content to analyse the functions and suggest basic requirements as to form, size, and equipment in the hope that theatres and auditoriums may be more intelligently planned. They make no attempt to assume the architect's role of imparting a satisfactory aesthetic content to theatre building, but one might be rash enough to say that if their analyses are studied and applied by a capable designer a satisfactory aesthetic must result.

A large part of such a book must necessarily be used principally for reference, and the diagrams, data tables and illustrations are set out clearly with this in view. Possibly the book is over-tabulated and one occasionally sees the frightening hand of the super-specialist. For instance, a table headed "Intermission Routine" informs us that the average time in the lavatory line at the opera is 1 minute and rather pointlessly adds that the optimum time is 0 minutes.

The views of the authors on influences in the theatre which will make changing demands on theatre buildings are of interest. They mention the "liberation of the performance from the proscenium arch," but warn against over-emphasizing architecturally a unity of performance and audience in view of what they consider is a basic duality—the action of the performers and the reaction of the audience. They also refer to the trend towards abstractionism in scenery and the attempt to reduce scenery to the elements of pure design, and are careful to point out that there has been ample opportunity in the course of the theatre's twenty-five hundred years for scenery to be eliminated entirely and the fact that it has not been probably indicates that it is important to the theatre. Reactionary trends which are currently noticeable also receive mention—notably the revolt from strong realism which calls for a return of "poetry and romance," and the acceptance of the idea that to be most effective theatre must be frankly artificial.

The authors are emphatic that none of these trends alone will dominate the future theatre, and maintain that theatre as an art form is broad enough to encompass and nurture them all. They insist, however, that theatre as an architectural form must be capable of housing them all, and therein, one feels, lies a great challenge to the contemporary architect.

—A.L.G.
Design
unity
and
paint

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