

# THE USES OF SPACE

By WAYNE ANDREWS, *Archives of American Art professor at Wayne State University, Detroit.*

ARCHITECTURE is a serious topic. Writing about it successfully requires the modesty of a saint and the grace of an angel, qualities possessed in our century by no one but Geoffrey Scott. If this be the case, a certain generosity is called for in reviewing the latest books on the subject, and a certain gratitude for the testimony of a practitioner such as Henry End, author of *Interiors Book of Hotels and Motels* (Whitney Library of Design, \$16.50). Mr. End is something of an expert on popular taste, having designed the sets for the movie version of *Forever Amber*. From that he went on to do over the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City, which brought him one hotel commission after another.

Mr. End is also that rare thing, a modest man. No architectural historian whom we know of is so frank about admitting his own mistakes. The Seville in Miami Beach, for which Mr. End bears the responsibility, is, we are told, "an example of how bad a job can get when a designer goes along with every suggestion from the owner because he has been successful in other types of business ventures. Money can be a great

persuader, but also a great corrupter." The author adds that "the developers of the Seville Hotel felt they needed something that would outshine last year's hotel. Starting with the selection of the name, the Seville was doomed to pretentiousness. But I was green and this was my first major hotel in a resort area. Too eager to please, I found myself using all sorts of imitative gimmicks in an effort to carry off the Spanish kick."

Mr. End has some useful advice for his colleagues. "The designers, not the owners, are the tastemakers," he claims. "The owner comes to the designer in search of an image for his hotel, his store, or his restaurant. Often he arrives with a notion that carries with it the threat of fakery and bad taste. It is then that the designer must pull him back to the heart of the program and pick a better direction. When a designer is employed to do a good job, he should explain that he should do a good job not only for the client but for himself as well."

This is a lesson that seems to have been lost on Morris Lapidus, the creator not only of the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach but also of the Americana in New York City. As quoted in the *Interiors Book*, Mr. Lapidus says of the former hotel: "It was designed for a certain type of person. I don't like it personally,

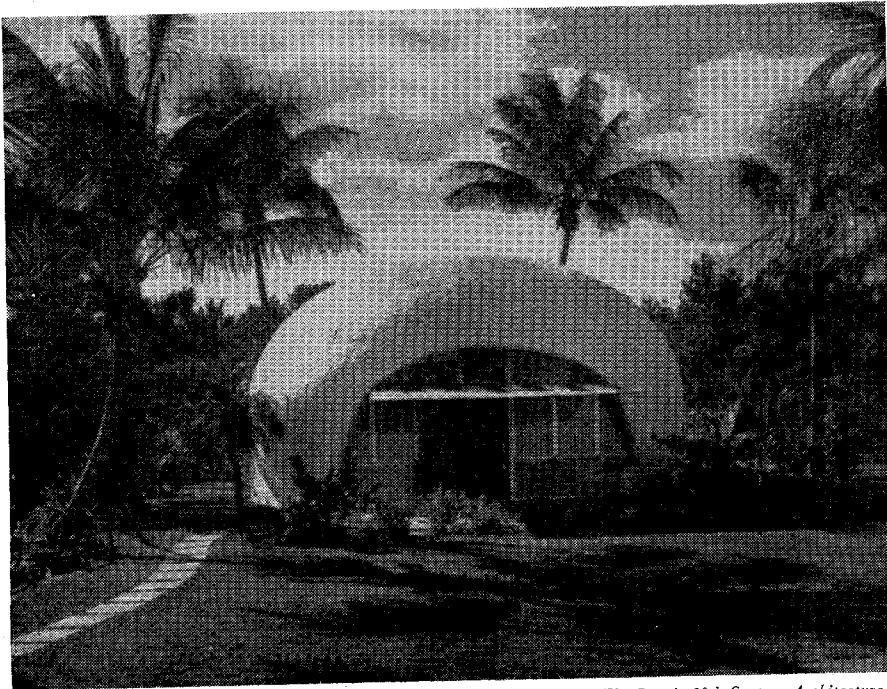
but they do. The owner says, 'My guests are very rich people who love rich, lavish surroundings.' So you play up the client's client. I certainly am not designing the hotel for myself and not even for the owner, really. He tells me what he wants because he knows who his customers are."

Mr. End might not have made quite that mistake. He also has his doubts about the hotels built abroad for the American trade. "The unique skills and experience of the American hotel industry have inherent in them a trap of which the architect and designer must be aware. It is the danger of exporting the know-how without taking into account and using the distinctive personality of the particular place in a blend that will satisfy the customers for these new bedrooms and public places."

From all that has been said, no one will be surprised to learn that Mr. End has an eye. He singles out Professor Arne Jacobsen's Royal Hotel in Copenhagen and Harwell Hamilton Harris's Motel-on-the-Mountain at Suffern, New York. Of the former he notes, "If all architects were such creators of space, interior designers would have to close up shop and look for other work."

Had the *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture* (Abrams, \$15) been assembled with something like the devotion Mr. End spends on his profession, the result would have been a useful addition to almost anyone's architectural library. But it seems that Harry Abrams, who has established the highest standards of any American publisher of art books, did not scan the proofs with his usual care. Occasional typos are to be expected in most books, but in encyclopedias they are regrettable. "Hartwell" Hamilton Harris may worry a librarian. So will McKim, "Meade" & White.

Another weakness lies in this book's having been first published abroad and then re-edited for the American market. Several judicious articles have been added, by such authorities as Henry Russell Hitchcock, William H. Jordy, and John M. Jacobus; but the volume would have profited by an all-out revision. Now that the U.S. is the architectural center of the modern world, it may not be altogether wise to emphasize, as does this encyclopedia, a number of inconsequential-seeming English and Continental architects while neglecting a good many important Americans. Where, for example, is Walter Burley Griffin, the planner of Canberra? He was obviously entitled to an article. So was the firm of Purcell & Elmslie, who carried on the tradition of Louis Sullivan. And although individual bibliographies are rewarding, the bibliography at the end of the Abrams volume is trifling. Worst of all, the contributors seem to have



—From "The Best in 20th Century Architecture."

Eliot Noyes built "bubble houses" at Hobe Sound, Florida, in 1954.



had no opportunity to read each other's pieces. The paragraphs on McKim, Mead & White are properly appreciative of their later work, but no mention is made of the modern work of the firm's early years—which Russell Hitchcock did not need to be told had a certain influence on Frank Lloyd Wright. And though there are illustrations, no one can tell who photographed what.

While Mr. Abrams set out to address a scholarly audience, *Mexican Homes of Today*, by Verna Cook Shipway and Warren Shipway (Architectural Book Publishing Co., \$12.95), is obviously intended for communities where tea rooms have taken the place of restaurants. The authors are either unaware that modern architecture has made its appearance south of the border or choose to ignore the matter. For Americans who prefer yesteryear to tomorrow, this book may of course have a certain appeal.

*The Best in Twentieth Century Architecture*, edited by Georges and Rosamond Bernier (Reynal-Morrow, \$15), was designed for more enlightened readers. One of the most brilliantly edited magazines in Europe is the Swiss *L'Oeil*. Its photographs, whether in black and white or in color, are stunners, and its layouts set a standard that no magazine over here has dared to imitate. But whether this misnamed volume (something like a quarter of the contents—culled from recent issues—is dedicated to the nineteenth century) will win new subscribers in the United States is a question. Perhaps because Illinois and California are a long way from Lausanne, the editors have seen fit to ignore (with the exception of Wright) the domestic architecture of the Chicago School and also the West Coast (with the exception of Richard Neutra). By so doing they give the impression that the use of steel, concrete, and glass is the only benefit that modern architecture has conferred.

But *The Best* is a masterpiece compared with Bodo Cichy's *The Great Ages of Architecture* (translated from the German by Susan McMorrow, Putnam, \$25). This bird's-eye view of architecture the world over is laid out to discourage reading. The grotesque color plates are so startling that only the most ambitious of us will ever penetrate the fine print. Moreover, in many cases the black-and-white photographs are reproduced without credits. The text may have its virtues, but it doesn't measure up to a sober performance such as Nikolaus Pevsner's *Outline of European Architecture*.

With *The Architecture of the European Synagogue*, by Rachel Wischnitzer (Jewish Publication Society, \$6), we come upon a serious subject. Tracing the evolution of Jewish houses of wor-

ship from Greco-Roman times to our own involves research that is back-breaking, but Miss Wischnitzer is a scholar who could pass the most ferocious examination if her treatment of recent architectural history may be offered in evidence. Nor does she neglect social history. The French emancipation of the Jews in 1791 is noted, and so is the publication in 1833 of Disraeli's *Alroy*, which may have eventually led many a Jewish community to sanction the use of Moorish forms.

Professor William Muschenheim, author of *Elements of the Art of Architecture* (Viking, \$6.50), may be just as dedicated a researcher as Miss Wischnitzer, but he is not so convincing. "The purpose of this book," he announces, "is to illustrate the essential qualities of the art of architecture and to stimulate an interest in them." His students, to whom he must have lectured on the social background of these illustrations, may indeed be enlightened; but the general public, lacking anything but the briefest captions, may not be enthralled by this collection of poorly reproduced photographs.

G. E. Kidder-Smith in *The New Churches of Europe* (Holt, Rinehart &

Winston, \$17.50) speaks with an authority that Mr. Muschenheim probably cannot command, for as a photographer (and a very distinguished one) he has visited every one of the sites in the more limited area on which he comments. "There are," he asserts, "so many bad new churches in Europe and the Americas that all Christians should hang their heads in shame." He is, however, pleased to say something in favor of Saint Michael's at Coventry, with its Sutherland tapestry and Piper stained glass, and reports that the great curtain of glass at Dominikus Böhm's Maria-Königin at Cologne is "one of the loveliest to be seen anywhere."

Mr. Kidder-Smith's apt remarks concern churches of which every architectural historian has heard, or should have. Leonard K. Eaton, the author of *Landscape Artist in America* (University of Chicago Press, \$10), writes about Jens Jensen, a landscape architect of whom every Chicagoan has heard something but probably knows nothing.

"In Jens Jensen, Chicago has a native nature poet who has made the West Park System a delight to the country," Frank Lloyd Wright once testified. "He

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**St. John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn., designed by Marcel Breuer, 1953-61.**

—From *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture*.

