

## Citeations



### On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century

Richard Longstreth, *Cambridge and New York: MIT Press and the Architectural History Foundation*, 1983, 455 pp., 272 illus., \$39.95

Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture: A Biography and History  
Thomas S. Hines, *New York: Oxford Press*, 1982, 356 pp., 360 illus., \$49.95

The Second Generation  
Esther McCoy, *Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith*, 1984, 208 pp., 250 illus., \$27.50

Reviewed by Diane Ghirardo

Richard Longstreth traces the early careers of four leading San Francisco architects in *On the Edge of the World: Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century*. Ernest Coxhead, Willis Polk, A. C. Schweinfurth, and Bernard Maybeck, following a pattern to be emulated by leading architects over the next century, studied and practiced elsewhere before coming to San Francisco in the late 1880s. They found a society less constrained by architectural traditions and, most importantly, one not dominated by large, well-established, and famous architectural firms. All had worked for such firms in the eastern United States, and all sought the kind of freedom that California offered. Interaction with California's mild climate, rugged terrain, and relaxed life style produced a regional architecture of distinction. To Longstreth's credit, he does not attempt to make the four into something they were not: while all were gifted, none was an architect of international significance. Within the limits of their modest practices, the four architects managed to build intelligent, interesting, and comfortable houses, not an inconsiderable achievement. Their talents were admirably adapted to the needs of the Bay area with enough Eastern gloss to remain fashionable.

Working with only minimal archival material (much was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire), Longstreth manages to present a full account of the important early years of their practices. Polk and Schweinfurth both worked for A. Page Brown before they moved west, and Maybeck worked for Carrère and Hastings after a stint at the Beaux-Arts. All were familiar with the work of McKim, Mead and White, the firm that set the standard of excellence throughout this period. But the four architects drew from many other sources as well. One of the most attractive features of Longstreth's book is the careful addition of material relating to the European sources from which each drew. Maybeck, the most intellectual of the four, was particularly attracted to the theories of Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper. His career developed later than those of the other three; likewise his reputation is greater. Hearst Hall at the University of California and the Palace of Fine Arts secured him a place in history, and his rustic country houses fostered a local tradition of considerable significance. The other architect who developed an international reputation was Willis Polk, for his Hallidie Building. This striking building - one of the few major office building commissions Polk received - has no precedent in

*Lovell (Health) House, Los Angeles, 1929. Richard J. Neutra, architect (Photo by Willard D. Morgan, courtesy Blaffer Gallery)*

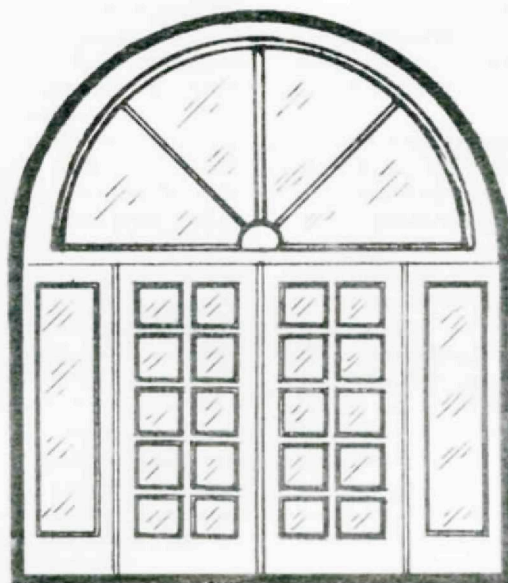
his work. Kenneth Frampton lavishly covered it in his recent *Modern Architecture, 1919-1945*, and unlike many other buildings in San Francisco, it has eluded the wrecker's ball. Longstreth confesses that no hard evidence about the building exists, but apparently Polk's client, the University of California, wanted a "glass-fronted building." How Polk went from the elegant Baldwin Compound in Santa Clara County (c. 1900) to the Hallidie Building remains a mystery - and a fascinating one that Longstreth does not explore.

From the sober, even fashion-conscious work of these Bay Area architects to the work of Richard Neutra is quite a jump. Neutra's practice in California spanned over four decades, and his influence on students and on housing and school design has been enormous. Thomas S. Hines's biography, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture*, covers his life and career in meticulous detail. As the most famous architect to maintain a practice in California, Neutra clearly deserves this kind of careful attention. Hines received full access to the Neutra archives from his widow, Dione, and poured enormous energy into the project: he visited nearly every building Neutra designed (even lived in one!) and interviewed his professional associates, friends, and family. The result is a book that will no doubt remain the definitive work on Neutra for a long time to come.

Inspired and influenced by Adolf Loos, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Rudolph Schindler, Neutra brought to his work a passionate belief in the importance of design in day-to-day life: the title of one of his books, *Survival Through Design*, suggests just how significant he believed it to be. In his exploration of the relation between the built environment and human psychological development, Neutra concluded that poor design is not just aesthetically repugnant, it is also bad for us. His own work involved a constant search for an architecture at once aesthetically pleasing and technologically refined, easily repeated in low-cost versions, and perfectly adapted to the needs of a client. Because of his sensitivity to locale and to client needs, Neutra moved easily between the crisp, Modernist designs for which he is best known to a relaxed, textured version of the International Style in brick and wood, often with sloping roofs. One mark of Neutra's distinction is that he shared discriminating clients with Rudolph Schindler (the Lovells) and Frank Lloyd Wright (the Kauffmans). A detailed comparison of the respective houses is instructive, not least for what it reveals about the interests of the three architects.

Hines presents an old-fashioned biography - in the best sense of the word - but there is room for more work. Neutra still needs to be understood as one among many protagonists in an important and complicated period, and Neutra's ideas as presented in his books need to be explored more thoroughly. From the most intimate to the most global level, Neutra believed the character of the environment to be crucial to well-being and he elucidated the arguments for this view in his books. Indifferently edited, repetitive, and often difficult to follow,

TEXAS JAMBS  
QUALITY WOOD WINDOWS  
AND DOORS



PRE-HUNG FRENCH DOORS

## Texas Jambs

6304 ALDER

669-1333

Specializing in . . .

### contemporary art

by select regional artists

### custom framing

by experts in conservation techniques

open Sundays

## boulevard gallery

1526 Heights Blvd., Houston, TX • 869-8733

CONTEMPORARY CUISINE

Lickety Split

A RESTAURANT  
TO INDULGE YOUR PASSIONS

LUNCH: MON. — FRI. 11:00 am — 3:00 pm  
DINNER: THURS., FRI., SAT. 5:30 pm — 10:00 pm

6628 MAIN STREET  
(MED. CENTER)

529-1714



the books nonetheless represent Neutra's mature reflections on design. That Hines passes over them rather briefly is puzzling. Hines declares his work to be an "analytical narrative," a detailed chronological account of Neutra's life. As such it is readable, meticulously researched, and important. Yet its primary weaknesses derive precisely from the models Hines chose: Neutra also needs to be examined in the context of architectural culture from 1924 to 1960, which demands more developed studies of the work and ideas of his contemporaries, reciprocal influences, and his own writings. No one book can accomplish everything, and this is not to fault Hines's text but rather to indicate directions for further work.

The most notable link between Neutra and those whom Esther McCoy calls, in the title of her book, *The Second Generation* (Gregory Ain, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Raphael Soriano, as well as J. R. Davidson) is their passionate commitment to a socially responsible architecture. Her highly personal, largely anecdotal accounts bring the architects to life and, from my knowledge of Raphael Soriano, are wonderfully accurate. McCoy helps fill in major gaps in the literature on California architects, but precisely because her account is so personal and anecdotal, the book is of limited use for scholars, although it makes for delightful reading.

Perhaps the most significant fact that emerges from a comparison of the three books is the way interest shifted, over time, from matters of fashion and style toward matters concerning social responsibility, low-income clients, inexpensive but adequate housing, and the liveability of cities. The new consciousness about the architect's responsibility to more than the single client came to California with its immigrant architects, who reacted to California's openness in the 1890s as a later generation did in the postwar (I and II) years. Although only Neutra attained international stature, in different ways all the architects made special contributions to California. Many critics have long argued privately that California's best architects have tended to come from elsewhere, and the three books reviewed here tend to confirm that suspicion. ■

### **The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit: America the Beautiful—An Assessment**

Lyndon B. Johnson Auditorium, Austin, Texas

Sponsored by  
The University of Texas at Austin,  
The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library,  
and the Southwest Center for the Study  
of American Architecture.

12-13 April 1984

Reviewed by John Kaliski

When the Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture was inaugurated at the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, its goals were described as follows: "... to heighten interest in and respect for local architectural traditions, to establish the value of specialized studies in local and regional architecture, and to provide local collection points for the architectural records of the region." With these notions firmly in mind, this writer traveled to Austin somewhat suspicious of the Southwest Center's first major event which proposed discussions featuring participants of whom only 7 out of 23 could reasonably be called Southwesterners. The admittedly provincial question is: what could New Yorker James C. Bowling, senior vice president of Phillip Morris, or New Yorker Robert A.M. Stern, architect, much less that consummate New Yorker himself, Mayor Ed Koch, tell us Texans? Biblical rout rather than critical discourse was more than a distinct possibility since all of the above were scheduled to participate on the same panel.

The two-day symposium, titled *The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit: America the Beautiful—An Assessment* was cosponsored by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The broad mix of national personalities who participated, some currently famous, others long since retired, made for a variety show which skipped lightly over the triumphs

and failures of a generation of attempts to "beautify" America. The best attitude to take for enjoyment of this event quickly became clear: sit back and be surprised by the nuances which were constantly gushing forth from the collective group.

The first morning of the conference, under the rubric "The Land," Nathaniel Owings, champion of the corporate skyscraper, proposed a national 21-story limit on buildings and a deconstruction of Houston's skyline; a skyline for which his firm is largely responsible. Wolf von Eckardt, design critic for *Time* magazine, spoke at the same session of America's "wonderful new towns" without naming any examples. Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, likened Houston to Guadalajara, Mexico, explaining that neither had sufficient public space. This same morning Ian McHarg, chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture and City Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, described American industry as "toxically incontinent" while William K. Reilly, president of the Conservation Foundation of Washington, D.C., lauded the new sensitivity of American business. Needless to say, not much was agreed upon at the first session, a pattern that was to continue for the rest of the conference.

The afternoon session was titled "The City" and featured the most marked contrasts in style and prominence. Unlucky Robert Timme, of Houston and Taft Architects, was alone in defending his city against the irascibility of Robert Stern and the ebullience of Ed Koch. J.B. Jackson, former editor of *Landscape* and resident of Santa Fe, should have been of help to Mr. Timme in the latter's defense of the generic Sunbelt city. But Jackson made the fatal mistake of trumpeting Lubbock, Texas, as the ideal of the new American polis. Lubbock may have its charms, but this was a fateful statement for Mr. Jackson. No amount of elucidation of the joys of weekend fleamarkets in the suburbs or the relevance of 35-mph cruising as an indulgence of the populace could convince Stern and most of the other panelists that Lubbock was not a humdrum place.

Ed Bacon, the venerable city planner from Philadelphia, spoke most sensibly at this session with his reasoned call for the conscious development of "connections" in urban areas and his admission of the intellectual failures of city planners during the last 40 years. Yet Robert Stern was right to question Bacon's supposedly rational approach, which in Philadelphia resulted in the creation of yet another Rouse Company project. Stern claimed that the homogenization of the American city by the building of essentially the same project in ever increasing numbers of locales by Rouse is tantamount to the Disneylandization of our metropolitan areas. This panel, though ideologically divided and inconclusive, came the closest to questioning the assumptions which lie at the heart of any discussion about the role of cities in the American landscape and life.

The final morning of the conference was dedicated to the hopeful theme of "Visions." Unfortunately, much of the session was tangential to the topic at hand and centered on Denise Scott Brown's complaints about design review boards which did not let her firm, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, promulgate specific projects of their own design. The resulting upset was fortunately broken by the silly remarks of Bernardo Fort-Brescia, a partner in the Miami firm of Arquitectonica. Fort-Brescia attempted to equate the use of ornament with support of Ronald Reagan and unconvincingly drew a parallel between his own designs for condominiums for millionaires with worker housing projects of the early 20th century. The final session ended as divided and directionless as the others.

Tom Wolfe gave a churlish concluding address. As might be expected from the author of *From Bauhaus to Our House*, 75 years of art and architecture were simplistically rejected as a useless debate between the now vanquished philistines of taste and the until-recently-forgotten champions of the *vox populi*.

If all this activity sounds confusing, it

was. Though entertaining, the conference at its worst degenerated into confrontations between people who would not normally gather in the same room. At its best, *The Land, The City, and The Human Spirit* was akin to a giant and fascinating cocktail party hosted by Lady Bird Johnson, whose presence throughout the proceedings was positively acknowledged by all.

To Mrs. Johnson's credit, she was one of the few participants whose actions consistently speak louder than her words. Through her endowment of the National Wildflower Research Center she will do more to emphasize and promote the specific aspects of each particular area of the country than many a planner or architect as this center reintroduces native wildflowers to native habitats. In the future, the Southwest Center for the Study of American Architecture would do well to follow Mrs. Johnson's example as it sets out to organize future symposiums related to its stated goals: start with a small seed and let it flower rather than start with a cut flower and watch it wilt. ■

### **The American Cityscape: New Directions in Civic Art**

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston  
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance  
22 February - 28 March 1984

Reviewed by Barbara Cochran and  
Michael Underhill

The challenge presented by the Rice Design Alliance's spring lecture series was clear: How can we improve and thereby come to appreciate our American cities? As the title, "The American Cityscape: New Directions in Civic Art" implied, civic art is more than the random placement of isolated objects, whether large-scale sculpture, landmark buildings, or public squares. Rather, it is the integration of all these features into a cohesive urban fabric.

For Houston in particular, this series addressed timely, albeit difficult, issues. How do we define Houston's urban fabric? And, more importantly, how do we establish the criteria with which to judge additions to, or subtractions from, this fabric? We need to form a shared sense of judgment about, and responsibility for, our cityscape. The fact that the lecturers rarely revealed their criteria bears witness to the difficulty of resolving the inherent problems of choice on a public scale. As speaker Barbara Rose stated, the imposition of civic art on future generations is a "grave responsibility" compared with the choice of a painting for a private home. Yet in the series, choice was never elevated above matters of personal taste and financial will. Surely, on the civic scale, we need to be clearer.

The first talk of the series was perhaps the most charming. *New Yorker* drama critic Brendan Gill has served as president of both the Landmarks Conservancy and the Municipal Arts Society of New York, a city which he described as vulgar and insensitive, where developers clamor to build the largest and the newest. "Does any of this sound familiar to you of Houston?" he asked.

Gill sang the praises of older neighborhoods and buildings. He admonished us to consider future generations before demolishing buildings that may not presently appear to have architectural merit. His argument was twofold: (1) we come to value architectural styles after they have gone through a period of disfavor, and (2) the loss of an individual building, however unnoteworthy, can mean the loss of the neighborhood fabric.

While these arguments are valuable for Houston, everything is not worth saving. The urban fabric must be understood before we may decide what constitutes an irreparable loss. And how do we judge the works of the recent past unprejudiced by current fashion?

Stanton Eckstut, a New York urban designer, fulfilled the roll of antihero—a designer interested in reworking the

fabric of the city rather than building monuments. The case of Battery Park City, for which his firm prepared a master plan, is a very effective argument. The discarded vision of a multileveled, air-conditioned urban compound was not only unfeasible, it represented a nightmarish misunderstanding of cities.

In his talk, and his firm's Battery Park City plan, Eckstut stressed the use of development guidelines, multiple designers, and configurations of streets, blocks, and lots that related to the financing and development of real estate. Most importantly, he showed how his plan was a literal extension of the existing fabric of the city. As he spoke, the reasoned anti-hero became the hero. The approach certainly looked right for New York.

But how do we apply this approach in Houston? Is the new convention center bad because the plan alters the street and block patterns? Not necessarily. Must new areas of urbanization invariably follow the existing patterns of development? Surely not. We need to be able to *evaluate* our urban fabric as much as we need to respect existing patterns.

Barbara Rose addressed the issue of monumental sculpture within the cityscape. Rose, an art historian and critic, argued that more is not necessarily better, expressing concern with the practice requiring developers to devote a portion of their building budgets to art. Downtown areas must not become "junkyards" of sculpture.

Rose at least attempted to explain her choice of monumental sculpture. Yet her criteria of participation and whimsy only brushed the surface of why one piece is good and another bad. While she was clear and well-spoken about which pieces she liked or disliked, a more critical analysis would have done much to help the public differentiate between a Dubuffet and an Adickes.

Architect Hugh Hardy chose to discuss museums, the traditional repositories for art. He neglected, however, to acknowledge that these "artful lodgings" were placed within a larger whole, the city. His presentation of the addition to the Museum of Natural History in New York was a rare exception. There, he not only explained the impact of the addition to the existing structure, but he carefully discussed the context of the immediate neighborhood and the overall skyline of Manhattan. A pity he didn't present similar analyses for his other projects.

Philip Seib was the assistant director for Public Affairs of the Dallas Museum of Art and coordinated the bond election campaign for its new building. Seib's pragmatic approach to the development of the Dallas Fine Arts District addressed financial and political issues all too often ignored. In retrospect, although the methods seemed heavy-handed, the lesson was instructive. But do clever means necessarily lead to the creation of exciting urban space? Seib seemed to suspend any critical judgement of the final product. Funding may be a large problem, but it's only half the battle.

R. Allen Eskew, an architect with Perez Associates, master planners for the New Orleans World Exposition, also discussed practical problems with a lesson in cutting red tape. An interesting aspect of the fair is that since it is temporary, one can take chances. Barbara Rose stated that it was easier to favor monumental art when temporary, and the designs for New Orleans celebrate an ephemeral and festive role. Yet the results seem to fall short of the apparent potential. Was it because the goals themselves were ill-defined? Do shaky and insubstantial goals invariably result in shaky and insubstantial architecture? It is a sad commentary when a city needs to host a fair as an excuse to refurbish itself.

In closing, we would like to offer kudos to Drexel Turner, who organized the series, and RDA for dealing with this topic. It was a disappointment because the speakers did not address what we believed to be the crucial issue—establishing criteria for judging civic art. This is not a heroic subject; sparks don't fly. But it is crucially important to Houston today as we try to establish the character of our urbanization. ■



## Existence Precedes Essence: Selected Projects in Architecture

Lawndale Annex

Sponsored by the University of Houston

College of Architecture

4 April - 18 April 1984

Reviewed by Peter D. Waldman

*Alice in Wonderland* provides us with a narrative of "seeing" both fantasy and familiarity in a world without scale or gravity. The story is both liberating for a summer's slumbering imagination and terrifying when one awakens to find oneself back on the ground beneath the cooling shade of a tree. In contemporary architectural education time never seems to stop, but history is made anew ever so frequently with the invention of pedagogic looking glasses.

Student work recently exhibited at the Lawndale Annex by the College of Architecture of the University of Houston illustrates a way of "seeing" through one such looking glass. It offers a liberating alternative to the current doldrum-like quality of the use of history in architectural education.

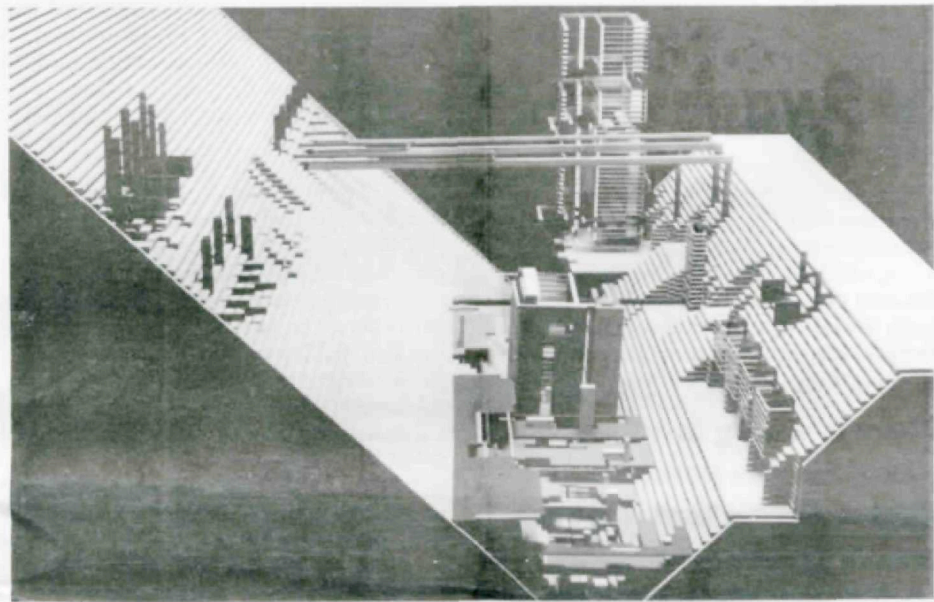
In the two decades since the publication of Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in*

analysis of a Vermeer painting, and then its reconfiguration to establish a strategy for a new institution of society: a business school.

Siobham Roome's "The Light Roped Figures:" *With the essential nature of Business understood as the negotiation of conflict between two parties, this interpretation of Vermeer's painting reveals the oscillating interchange of the two protagonists, the back-turning painter and the pouting coquette. This oblique confrontation between painter and coquette is the mirror for the solemn yet blurred discourse of commerce.*

*The orchestration of time lapses within spatial rhetoric modulates their feverish struggle to extricate themselves from alternating passivism and activism. The central plane in the project is the extension of the artist's picture plane. It is the medium of their focus and is that temporal barrier upon which the metamorphosis of their spatial definitions interact, producing a blurred reality to both parties.*

The second project is also two-part: a fourth-year analysis of a musical score for a piano and its reconfiguration to establish the spatial parameters of a new urban square. A context is formed with the establishment of the datum of middle C, a kind of plateau or acropolis in the



Second year project, 1984, Pat Farmer, model

*Architecture* and Rowe's collected essays on painting and architecture, pedagogy appears to have come full circle. This student work proposes a fundamental reconsideration of the principles of modernism.

In this decade there have emerged three distinct approaches with respect to the use of history. One camp pursues a romantically selective review of history for fundamental and recurrent architectural themes. Another feigns a posture of prehistory, neoprimitivism, and the search for archetypes of the institutions of society and the principles of construction. The final group looks once again at history, defined now as our recent past, and stresses the lessons of the Modern Movement as the foundation of architecture joined to and simultaneous with cultural history. To this last group belong William Taylor and Ben Nicholson, faculty members at the University of Houston and former students of Daniel Libeskind at the Cranbrook Academy.

Polemically, the work of Taylor and Nicholson with students in their first and final years is the same. Readings in architecture as cultural history are integrated with the sequential analyses of both extraordinary buildings and commonplace objects. After this strategic introduction, students are asked to combine and to reconfigure in plan and section both buildings and objects, first in terms of their own autonomous will and then in terms of externally generated programs: a business school, an urban square. The work presented is varied in theme and scale, but united in a simultaneity of parts, an articulation of joints, and a rigorous abstraction of conventions that all serve to encourage the Muse of Willful Figuration. This willfulness of the composer permits a liberation of the mind and a tyranny of the eye in a world without gravity or scale.

Two student projects reveal the value of this work as, in Nicholson's words, "an architectural methodology that can hereafter be used as a way of perception." The first project is two-part: a fifth-year

midst of an 88-keyed and stepped site section. Chords form bridges between the two hands and notes incise themselves with frequented pressure onto the walls of this new urban context.

These projects describe a spatial middle-ground, an ambiguous realm between today and tomorrow so very different from a discipline with a fascination for yesterday. Taylor and Nicholson and the splendid work of their students have declared a suspension of disbelief in today that has not been seen in schools since the early 1960s. Architecture as "the world anew" is very different from architecture as "the world again." Emerson, Thoreau, and even Aldo van Eyck would be most at home with this new work.

What is sought in both first and final years is not a specific didactic or strategy that leads to a surrogate for architecture, but a sensitivity and dedication to the making of form itself. This is an essential lesson for the young, as well as an important reminder to the sophisticated student of our discipline. However, one ultimately stands to alienate oneself from the very human sensibilities one is courting by liberating oneself from the two most fundamental themes of architecture: the weight and structure of gravity, and the dignity and congeniality of scale.

Paradoxically much of the new work is reminiscent of studies by LeCorbusier and Ozenfant from the 1920s, another historical period. Above all else the work is the most articulate and clearly jointed combination of distinct elements seen in years in architectural schools. No fascination with *poché* or superficial surface; point, line, and plane suggest space rather than "trap" it by another generation's use of walls, cornices, and plinths. A spirit of craftsmanship dominates all the work, giving promise of a renewed interest in an architecture of joinery rather than appliqué. A new exhibition, planned for next year, promises to continue the architectural discourse emerging from Cranbrook.■



## Beautiful New Living Space From VELUX.

## Bring In The Great Outdoors!



Your Sunroom or Greenhouse will be full bloom with the use of VELUX Roof Windows. Our windows not only flood a room with light, they open for complete ventilation.

**VELUX**  
Roof Windows

Compare the VELUX Fixed Skylight to others for quality and affordability.

# Texas Jains

6304 ALDER

669-1333



## Leslie & Co. Suits

1749 S. Post Oak Road, Open Thursday until 9:00. 960-9113.