

## About Face

**Industrial Façades** by Bernd and Hilla Becher. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995. 271 pp., illus., \$75

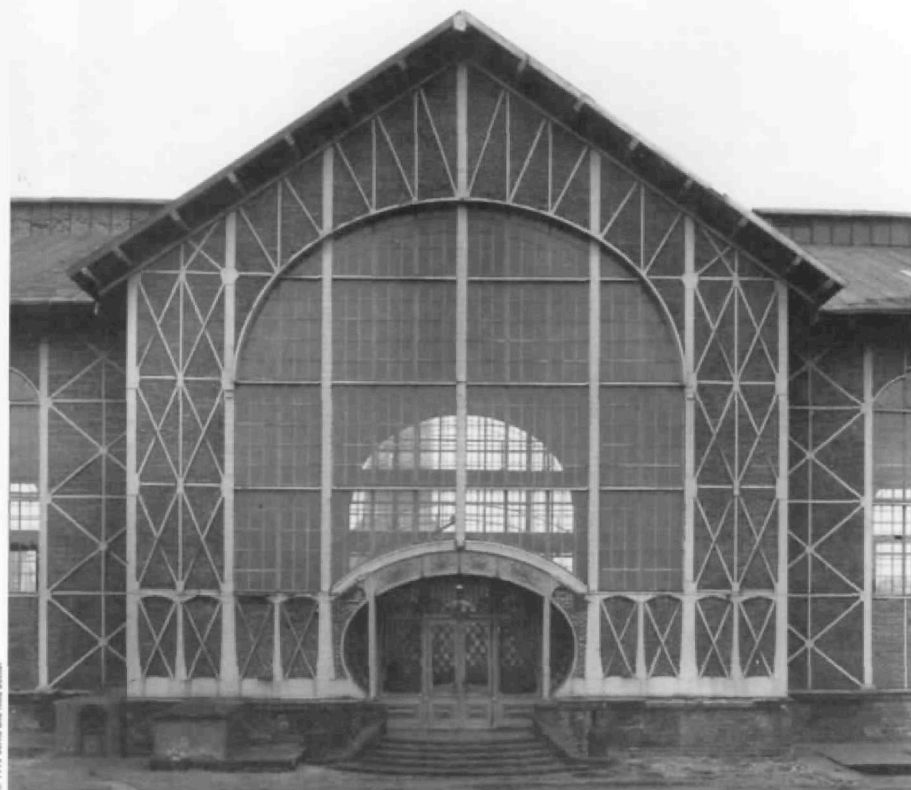
Reviewed by Nonya Grenader

Bernd and Hilla Becher are archivists who meticulously photograph and collect images of industrial structures. Since their earliest collaborative exhibition of German half-timbered workers' houses in 1957, they have focused their unwavering regard on industry's artifacts: water tow-

flat, cloudless sky that the Bechers insist upon has the effect of pushing each building face slightly forward. Oddly, the stark rendering often anthropomorphizes the façades: openings in a brick, metal, or glass face take on a range of human expressions.

The Bechers are not unique in their typological format. Eugène Atget's extensive record of the street façades, doorways, and windows of turn-of-the-century Paris is the model for serial photography. Placing his photographs in thematic albums, Atget realized the strength of a selective grouping. In a more casual mode, Edward Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1962) describes the route from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City as experienced from the gas stations along the way. As dissimilar as these photographers are, they, like the Bechers, do not seek a "decisive moment" but rather hope to create an ensemble piece in which the method and the documentary aspects are inseparable.

Viewing the Bechers' work via book



Zeche Zollern II, Dortmund, Germany (photographed 1971).

ers, blast furnaces, gas tanks. The Bechers' style is one of unadorned directness. Rigorously free of strong shadows and human presence, the resulting images provide as clear a reading of the facts as possible, emphasizing the variety of profile, infill material, and detail inherent in this building type. "We do not attempt to turn old industrial buildings into relics, but we would like to memorize the chain of their different aspects as completely as possible," the Bechers stated in 1976.

Their most recent photographic typology, *Industrial Façades*, studies this building group in a range of locations, dates, and styles. The buildings are photographed in an unchanging frontal view, vantage point dead center, creating a collection of austere and striking images. As in earlier studies, the Bechers often use scaffolding to achieve this camera position, about halfway up each structure. The

format can be frustrating. In their earlier gallery installations, a three-by-three grid presentation often reinforced the repetitive nature of the images; the individual photographs could be compared as the variations emerged. Later exhibitions used entire rooms as a means of grouping, which still allowed the viewer to process multiple images simultaneously. In the book, the large and exquisitely precise images are presented one per page, so comparing more than two photos at a time becomes impossible. Some of this significant taxonomic effort is lost.

Although the Bechers' visual record is expansive, it is by no means an exhaustive history of the type. Except for a brief introduction by Klaus Bussmann, the museum director who selected the Bechers' work for the 1990 Venice Biennale, the book has no text and only place-and-date captions. Unlike the



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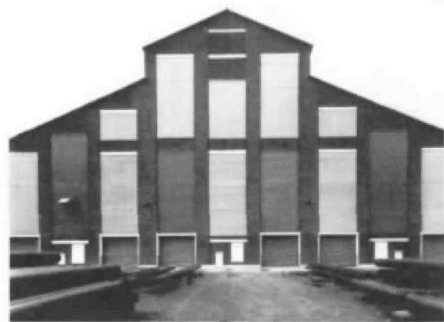
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Bechers' other collections of photographs, in which the chutes and cylinders of water towers and blast furnaces clearly announced their function, the faces of these factory buildings, warehouses, and depots are enigmatic, masking the variety of industrial processes that take place within.

The façades, however, reveal an approximate historical sequence. The substantial brick buildings with step-gable roofs evolve into gently canted metal sheds; the early arched windows with elaborate surrounds are a stark contrast to the glass curtain walls of more recent structures. The photographs capture the texture of the building type, but the viewer must sort and compare, making temporal groupings. In his introduction, Bussmann notes, "References back to great historical models are rarely explicit, and requirements for prestigious exteriors are the exception, but it does seem that, as in everyday design, 'the spirit of the times' made itself felt even in the most obscure industrial provinces in the choice of materials, the formal structure, and certain fashions and preferences."

It is everyday design that the Bechers seek to preserve. They document and pay homage to the efforts of the anonymous engineers, designers, and laborers who created these utilitarian buildings. Many of these industrial structures, with their broken panes of glass and signs of aging and neglect, will soon be replaced. Though often described as "objective" photographers, the Bechers in their methodical visual records convey a solemn respect for these industrial edifices. Like elegiac collectors they capture the complexity found in the ordinary and present the façades as portraiture, each singularly unique yet collectively related. ■



Top: Harrison, New Jersey, USA (photographed 1994).  
Above: Werdohl, Saverland, Germany (photographed 1985).

## New and Forthcoming Books About Texas Architecture

Compiled by Karl Kilian

**An Architectural Life: Memoirs and Memories of Charles W. Moore.** *Written and edited by Kevin P. Keim.* At his death, Moore (1925–1993), who had been associated with universities and architectural firms in Berkeley, New Haven, Los Angeles, and Austin, left behind this first-person account of his career, his thoughts about architecture, and the Austin home that served as a laboratory for his ideas. (Bulfinch. 75 color, 150 black-and-white illus.; \$45.) Available.

**Lake/Flato Architects.** *With a preface by Oscar Riera Ojeda.* Established in 1984, the San Antonio firm has completed projects — among them ranch houses, banks, schools, and libraries — in Texas, California, Colorado, and New Mexico that have won numerous state and local awards and a 1992 national AIA Honor Award. (AIA Press. 72 color, 60 black-and-white illus.; \$19.99 paper.) Available.

**The Domestic Architecture of H. T. Lindeberg.** *With a new essay by Mark Alan Hewitt.* Harrie T. Lindeberg (1879–1959) trained in the offices of McKim, Mead & White and quickly became a sought-after designer of country houses for America's elite. This reprint of a classic 1940 monograph includes Lindeberg's work in Houston's Shadyside neighborhood. (Acanthus Press. 300 black-and-white illus.; \$75.) Available.

**Carlos Jiménez.** *With an essay by Stephen Fox.* The first American monograph on the Costa Rica-born Houstonian — with a foreword by Rafael Moneo and a postscript by Lars Lerup — presents eight projects including Jiménez's house and studio and recent museum buildings for Williams College and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. (Rice University School of Architecture/Princeton Architectural Press. 16 color, 112 black-and-white illus.; \$40.) Due 1997.

**The Alleys and Back Buildings of Galveston** by Ellen Beasley. In a work that ties together architecture, urban history, and African American studies, preservation consultant Beasley considers the carriage houses, servants' quarters, stables, and other buildings that have lined the alleys of Galveston since its earliest days. (Rice University Press. 47 black-and-white illus.; \$39.95.) Due fall 1996.

**Galveston Architecture Guidebook** by Ellen Beasley and Stephen Fox. Galveston contains the largest and most historically significant collection of 19th-century buildings of any Texas city. Here's a guide to both the historical work and more recent structures, each with photograph, map, and historical, descriptive, and critical commentary. (Rice University Press. 450 black-and-white illus.; \$32.50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.) Due fall 1996. ■

# BIG

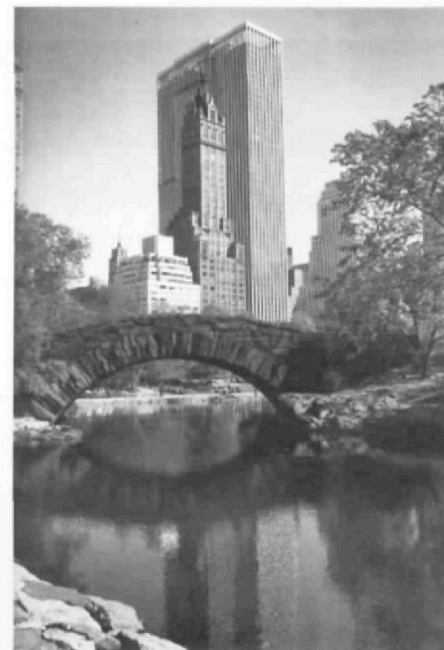
**New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial** by Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995. 1,374 pp., illus., \$125.

**S, M, L, XL: Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large** by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau. Edited by Jennifer Sigler; photography by Hans Werlemann. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995. 1,344 pp., illus., \$75.

Reviewed by Stephen Fox

The Monacelli Press last year produced a pair of bibliographic blockbusters, two 1,300-plus-page books that look critically at architecture and city building of the recent past and present. Robert Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman's *New York 1960* completes the trilogy that began with *New York 1900* and included *New York 1930*. Their concluding volume is enormous, impressive, and flawed. The authors conscientiously define architecture and urbanism as broadly as possible, and to that end they include chapters on interior design, historic preservation, and the movies. They deal not only with the architectural highlights of the period — the United Nations, the Seagram Building, Lincoln Center, Jane Jacobs, Citicorp Center — but all of the in-between buildings. This means, for example, that they devote considerable space to the economics, politics, design, and construction of low-income public housing complexes, speculative offices, and apartment buildings.

*New York 1960* is important because it forcibly makes the point that building projects of this nature definitively reshaped so much of New York in the 30-year period under study. By sheer weight of examples cited, the authors make readers aware of how marginal the Chase-Manhattan Bank Building, the TWA Terminal, and the Whitney Museum (just to cite three celebrated works of the period) were to the production of characteristic post-World War II urban space in New York. The book's tragic flaw is that the authors are overwhelmed by their data. The chapters, arranged by urban sectors for the most part, read like a narrative listing of note-card references to individual buildings: how the project came about, description of the building, what the critics of the time had to say. The authors make virtually no attempt to



Top: The General Motors Building from Central Park Edward Durrell Stone, architect, (1968) with the Hotel Pierre and the Sherry-Netherland Hotel. Above: One and Two World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth & Sons architects, (1973).

summarize and interpret their findings. This is to be regretted; however, their data are very valuable. I found the coverage of public housing development especially rewarding. The authors reveal how the provision and design of public housing were systematically driven by political and economic factors external to the families who would live in the complexes, and that critics of the day foresaw (and vigorously denounced) all the potential problems that such misconceived complexes portended. Yet the authors never quite get around to being explicit about this. They fail to take advantage of the material they have amassed to give readers the big-picture interpretation that



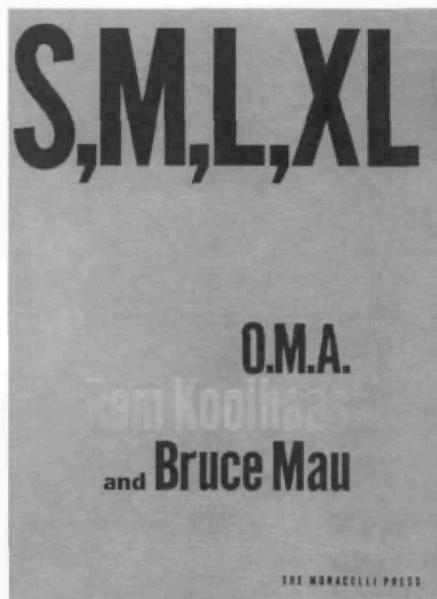
would clarify the underlying patterns, which makes the rank-and-file buildings of *New York 1960* seem not only mediocre and banal but, from an urban point of view, deadening. Stern, Mellins, and Fishman do cite the contributions of Houston architectural firms Caudill Rowlett Scott and Howard Barnstone & Eugene Aubry; Dallas architect Thomas E. Stanley; Texas-born interior decorator William Pahlmann; and the philanthropic Lasker sisters of Galveston to the architecture, design, and urban design of New York during the 15-year study period of *New York 1960*.

*S, M, L, XL* is intriguing to read (and look at) because it brings *New York 1960* up to date, so to speak, with an international perspective. Rem Koolhaas, his Office for Metropolitan Architecture, graphic designer Bruce Mau, and editor Jennifer Sigler help us to make a smooth transition into the present (and the foreseeable future) in a format that is much more entertaining than the Stern, Mellins, and Fishman production: loads of pix, BIG printing, and a running dictionary of curious definitions that echoes Benjamin and Borges. Tomas Koolhaas and Louis Price's comic-strip chapter about the torments of practicing architecture under developer- and politician-imposed constraints could have been excerpted right out of *New York 1960*, except that in this cautionary tale, the politician is a socialist. Attitude and style count for a lot here. Rem Koolhaas and his distinctive brand of ambivalent humor are omnipresent. Bruce Mau visually reinforces Koolhaas's exploration of the urban consequences of global postmodernization with bravura graphics: transparent overlays of imagery and text that relentlessly superimpose "information."

Koolhaas inquires about the kinds of places that cities have become since the time of the U.S. bicentennial. He contemplates modern Japan, Karlsruhe, Atlanta, and Singapore, among other places, in a sequence of hyper-illustrated essays organized under the rubrics *S, M, L, and XL*, which breaks this thick book into manageable units. While smugness can lead him to observations that may seem ethnocentric, Koolhaas tries to theorize what cities are today and whether architects can intervene responsibly in shaping them. I found Koolhaas most engaging in his essay on the Lille Grand Palais, when he drops the voice of ironic detachment to describe with enthusiasm the experience of carrying out a large public-works project involving many of the issues that for him are pertinent to contemporary architecture and urbanism. I found him at his most obscure in "Bigness, or the Problem of Large," which I could make sense of only by substituting the word "penis" for "big," then reading the essay as an updated version of Adolf Loos's classic architectural satire "Ornament and Crime." There is in Koolhaas's observations a pervasive sense of despair. The fact that he commits himself to spatializing through architecture the very

forces that he sees as responsible for the dreariness of contemporary urbanism is a contradiction. Koolhaas's critiques adhere to a narrow architectural perspective. He seems to see no alternatives to the present state of affairs. This gives his architecture, however antic it sometimes is formally, a pessimistic, disillusioned sense that is clearly communicated through *S, M, L, XL*.

*New York 1960* and *S, M, L, XL* collect abundant evidence of the transformations that modernization and postmodernization have made on urban life in the last half of this century. Houston itself is a notorious example of many of the phenomena these books describe. Yet embedded in Houston's worst-case experience are alternatives, however minor or marginal, suggesting that the world is not doomed to become Sixth Avenue or Singapore. That is why Stern, Mellins, and Fishman's failure to analyze, reflect, and interpret the phenomena they report is so critical: they deprive readers of a clear understanding of the forces at work in shaping the modern city. It is also why Koolhaas's implicit pessimism seems premature. Hopeful change does not usually come from the precincts of power and privilege that global architectural practices customarily serve. ■



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