

Looking South

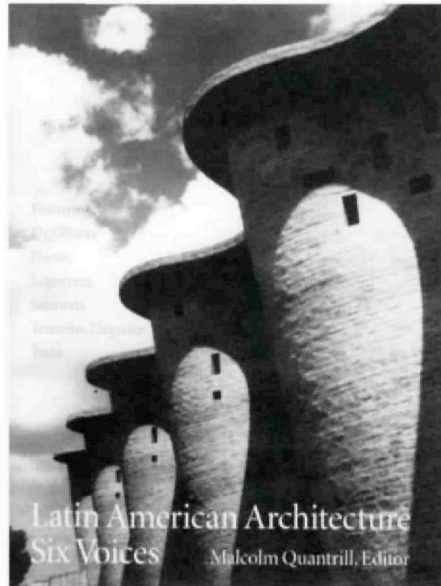
Latin American Architecture: Six Voices
edited by Malcolm Quantrill. Texas
A&M Press, 2000. 240 pp., illus., \$60.

Reviewed by Rafael Longoria

After a quartet of well-received books, the *Studies in Architecture and Culture* series published by Texas A&M University Press has established itself as a serious forum for reflecting on the evolving legacy of modernism. That forum, though, has not until now looked south. While the series' first four volumes — *Constancy and Change in Architecture, Urban Forms, Suburban Dreams, Modernity and Its Other, Culture of Silence* — were driven more by topic than geography, the buildings examined and the architects explored tended to be European and North American. The fifth volume changes that, shifting the focus to Latin America by featuring the work of six architects from six different countries — Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The format consists of a biographical essay by a critic from each of architect's home country, followed by a survey of six selected projects. With the exception of Uruguay's Eladio Dieste, who was born in 1917 and died recently, all the featured architects were born between the two World Wars and are still practicing.

The preface by Kenneth Frampton, Ware Professor of Architecture at Columbia University, reads like an insightful book review. He revisits the glory years of Latin American architecture and lauds the renewed interest in this long-ignored part of the world. But he also laments that Brazil was left out of this collection of essays — particularly when the great Sao Paulo architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha would have fit so well with the tenor of this tome. That raises the question of why these particular six architects, good as they may be, were chosen to represent their region. The answer may be found in the biographical notes. There, reading between the lines, it becomes clear that this book was conceived in the mid-1980s by a group of Frampton's disciples at Columbia. In this light, certain comments in the preface and in the acknowledgments start to make more sense.



The excellent introduction by Argentine critic Marina Waisman effectively and concisely tells the story of Latin America's transition from colonialism to modernity, and the search for regional identities. It recognizes that there is not one Latin America, but rather a complex set of cultural and geographic variations on the theme of encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples. She places the featured architects as belonging to the second generation of Latin American modernists, and reminds the reader of the enormous influence of the first generation, which included such extraordinary figures as Luis Barragán, Oscar Niemeyer, and Raul Villanueva.

The six essays range from great to unremarkable. The most compelling are those that introduce the work of architects who are not very well known in the United States, while the ones that cover well-publicized figures such as Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta fail to add much to what has already been written.

Particularly good are Fernando Pérez Oyarzún's piece on Chilean architect Christian de Groot, Silvia Arango's piece on Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona, and Alberto Petrina's piece on the Argentinean master Clorindo Testa. And Mariano Arana provides some valuable background on the formation of the inventive Eladio Dieste of Uruguay, an architect who was recently the subject of an elaborate symposium at MIT.

While the enormous influence of Le Corbusier on Latin American architects is well documented (and reinforced here by the presence of Salmona, who worked

in Corbusier's Paris atelier), a surprising revelation of this collection of essays is the significant influence that Louis Kahn exerted on most of the featured architects. De Groot, Legorreta, and Venezuela's Jesús Tenreiro-Degwitz all acknowledge a direct debt to Kahn, and it is hard not to think of Kahn when looking at Salmona's Quimbaya Museum or his Franco House, or Testa's expressive sketches for the Londres y América del Sur Bank in Buenos Aires.

Latin American Architecture left me with small complaints, but large compliments. The quality of the copy-editing and the translations of the different essays is uneven (Legorreta's name was misspelled more than once). I would have preferred that the photo captions be placed adjacent to their respective images, rather than relegated to the end of the book. I was puzzled by the fact that the biographical notes included all the editors, but left out the authors of the essays. And as printed, some of the drawings are hard to read. However, I was delighted to see some projects that I had never seen before, and to read essays by some excellent critics who are rarely published in English.

The people in charge of the *Studies in Architecture and Culture* series must be applauded for turning their attention to Latin America. Frampton's preface and Waisman's introduction each offer suggestions of architects who deserved to be included in this book. I have a few more of my own to add. But any lists of overlooked architects should be interpreted not as complaints, but as suggestions for future volumes.

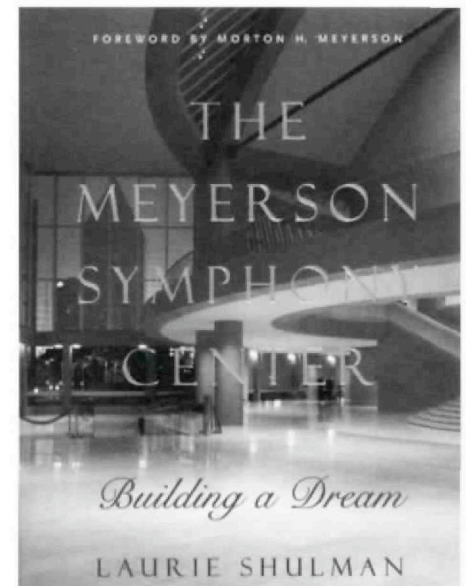
Symphonic Setting

**The Meyerson Symphony Center:
Building a Dream** by Laurie Shulman.
University of North Texas Press, 2000.
399 pp., illus., \$39.95

Reviewed by Barry Moore

Laurie Shulman has created a big, heavy book, and an admirable piece of research. Building the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas was a long, slow process, but the result made it all more than worthwhile. Dallas produced an outstanding music hall — a true cathedral of our time — that is well loved by musicians, audiences, and critics alike.

Shulman, who has worked as a pro-



gram annotator for orchestras, chamber music series, and summer festivals, does an admirable job of identifying all the important players, and in the process has produced an important record of civic achievement in north Texas. The early heroes were Dallas Mayor Robert Folsom, Kevin Lynch, the consultant who formulated the Dallas Arts District in the mid-seventies, Dallas Symphony Association chair Philip Johnson, overall project driver Martin Meyerson, and the indispensable Stanley Marcus. And that list doesn't even include the big donors. The chronology is all there as well, in great detail: the failed bond election of 1974, the successful ones of 1978 and 1984, the turf skirmishes with the Fair Park Auditorium board, the architectural and acoustical consultant selection, the budget and schedule-induced grief (\$30 million over, three years late), the construction issues, and, at last, the successful finish. Obviously, the city and social politics have a limited geographic appeal, but the story of the "process" is of much wider interest.

To begin with, the symphony hall started as little more than an acoustical description. The criteria included excellent bass response, brilliance in the high frequencies, good blend and mixture of sound, and stage acoustics that would allow musicians to hear each other. The models for what was wanted in Dallas could be found in the Grosser Musikvereinsaal in Vienna, Symphony Hall in Boston, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall in New York. All are of comparable size to what eventually became the Meyerson.

For me, the selection process provided the most fascinating reading. From an initial list of 35 architects, six were selected for interviews. Among them were Bud Ogelsby, Gunnar Birkerts, Leandro Locsin, Also Cossutto, Arthur Erikson, and Philip Johnson. (The story of how Johnson got himself disqualified by Stanley Marcus in the first 30 seconds of a 45-minute interview is alone worth the price of the book). I.M. Pei initially declined to be considered because of what he saw as problems with the selection

process and his workload — he was designing Texas Commerce Tower in Houston at the time. But after the selection committee deadlocked, Marcus persuaded Pei to go after the job. Pei's statement that he had never designed a concert hall, but that he wanted to design a great one before he died sealed his selection. The committee was convinced that he would give the project his total care and attention.

The committee also interviewed three acoustical consultants, among them Russell Johnson of Artec. After a two-stage interview, Johnson was hired to work on an equal footing with the architect.

Acoustical design came first, with the early choice of a modified shoebox over a fan shape. Johnson was a proponent of early lateral reflection of sound for different audience areas. He shaped the geometry of the hall accordingly, with high reverberation chambers, and then handed it to Pei, together with his opinion that the space could contain no more than 2,000 seats and still have excellent acoustics.

Pei's group combined the orthogonal geometry of the performance hall with a rotational geometry of the public ancillary spaces that shape the hall's exterior iconography. The committee and designers thought of it as a "box surrounded by a lens," but the skilled crew of Bateson Construction always called it "the bandstand."

The finished Meyerson drew raves for its splendid acoustics. In addition to that, the hall is one of the most distinguished works of architecture in Dallas, and one of I.M. Pei's greatest achievements.

Shulman has included a number of sketches and photos, but not nearly enough to please the more visual reader. I confess I did not read all of this book, mainly because a lot of it would interest only a Dallas historian. But the parts I did read related to the story of how a community builds a great building, and that is story that deserves telling.

In the end, the arts patrons in Dallas accomplished beautifully what they set out to do some 20-odd-years ago — "to create an environment for music that was aesthetically pleasing and as acoustically perfect as we can make it." Now, as they admit, the new challenge is for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra to match the architecture with its artistic quality. ■

NEW AND NOTABLE

Mies van der Rohe in Berlin edited by Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll. MoMA/Abrams, 368 pp., illus., \$70. The catalog for a Museum of Modern Art exhibition, this in-depth look at Mies' early career is the first volume to examine his work in Europe in its historical context. Here, 11 scholars shed light on the interplay of tradition and innovation in the evolution of the architect's theories and methods.

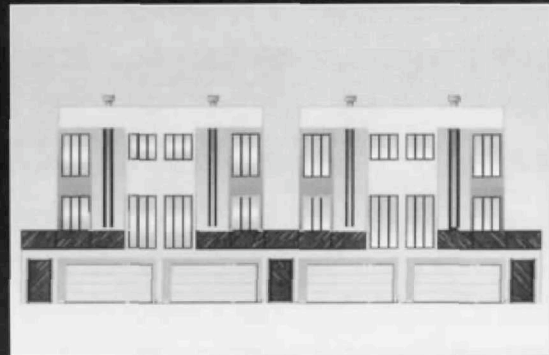
Mies in America by Phyllis Lambert, et al. Abrams, 584 pp., illus., \$75. Based on new research and previously unstudied material, this catalogue for an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art presents fresh and often corrective interpretations of the architect's stateside achievement. Essays by Lambert, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas, and others look beyond Mies' most famous triumphs to probe the relationship between a seminal body of work and its cultural context.

Mutations by Rem Koolhaas, et al. Actar/DAP, 720 pp., illus., \$45. Koolhaas teams up with an international group of top architects and theorists to explore the myriad transformations that the city is undergoing. Organized as an illustrated atlas of contemporary urban landscapes, *Mutations* is a vivid portrait of the current condition of the city and a survey of emergent possibilities from around the globe.

Stronger Opponents Wanted by Dietmar Steiner, et al. Birkhauser, 192 pp., illus. \$29.95. The construction of a cultural building in the heart of a city is never just a matter of architectural design. This book presents six projects, including the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Sydney Opera House, in light of the surrounding media attention and the wrangle for public position. In each case, architects are entwined with politicians, public money, and media interests, all of which ultimately influence their buildings.

Usonia, New York by Roland Reisley and John Timpane. Princeton Architectural Press, 192 pp., illus. \$40. Reisley, an original and current resident of Usonia, tells the story of a group of idealistic men and women who, following World War II, enlisted Frank Lloyd Wright to design and help them build a cooperative community an hour from New York City. *Usonia, New York* illuminates the passions and problems of a group developing a designed environment with America's most famous, and most famously volatile, architect. — Michael Kimmins

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Coming in

Cite 52

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