

# AN OPEN LETTER TO NEW MEXICO'S ARCHITECTS

by Thomas R. Vreeland, Jr., A.I.A.

Dear Fellow-Architects:

I have just returned from Princeton University where I attended a conference of thirty-five of the seventy-odd schools of architecture in the country. The overwhelming impression I brought back with me is one of the profession of architecture standing at this moment at a crossroad. The scope and enormity of the problem we face has in the last five years become readily discernible. President Johnson's January 26 statement on the rebuilding of our cities and the staggering price tag that he had attached to the job simply highlights the mounting concern throughout this country with the critical (in terms of our survival) need for developing habitable urban environments. The crucial issue which our profession faces at this moment is: are we as architects properly qualified to do the job which must be done? Is the training we received adequate to meet the real challenge? Have those of us who have been out of school ten, fifteen, twenty years managed to keep sufficiently abreast of the new developments, the new techniques and skills needed to cope with problems which increasingly apparently offer no easy solutions? Can today's practitioner, faced with increasingly complex legislation, social issues and sophisticated technological innovation, maintain leadership in the reshaping of our environment or will he be forced to abdicate to others better trained to handle them? In almost every school I have visited since September, in every part of the country, at every conference I attended, one concern was foremost in everybody's mind—the need for a change in the education of the architect. The discussion centered around the improved methods for obtaining and analyzing essential information, new techniques largely borrowed from the engineering sciences for solving complex design problems, the new environmental data which the behavioral and social sciences are making available to us. This year's ACSA Conference at Cranbrook has as its topic "The Architects Restructure Their Problems." The meeting at Princeton, alluded to earlier, was one of three throughout the country called by the AIA Education Research Project, headed by Robert Geddes, to help the schools and the profession to train themselves in the new methods which will be needed in structuring our environment.

"The problems," (I quote Geddes) "arise because it has become so difficult for architects—practitioners, faculty and students alike—to apply their understanding of form in the context of today's society. The needs of the user have become more complex and diverse. Often conflicting needs can be articulated by special interest groups in a way that

was unheard of only a few decades ago. And the social, economic and technological processes through which the physical environment is built have also grown enormously in complexity.

"The essential problem is that the schools are not turning out enough men to cope with the vast building program of the coming decades. Too few can make the formal skills they developed in their academic training a potent force in the creation of better environment. Too many fail to develop the competence that will make them a vital force in the improvement of their communities."

The overwhelming feeling at the Princeton Conference was that the changes in the profession would have to be initiated by the schools. Ben Thomson, a former principal in The Architects' Collaborative and Chairman of Architecture at Harvard, declared that he was thoroughly convinced that the practice of architecture was about to undergo a profound change, but that the change could not take place within the profession. The offices were out of control. The schools would have to make the changes, and the professionals and the educators would have to work this out together. He further declared that practice and teaching together were inseparable and essential. He warned that the schools can always buy good teachers but that, separated from practice, five years later these men were 'dead.' He also expressed the opinion that the offices, since their future might ultimately depend on the schools, had a responsibility to Teaching in time, in money and in manpower.

A prevailing theme of continuing education to the architect ran through the conference. Elliot Whitaker of Ohio State expressed his concern that graduates of architecture schools, now in offices, were making decisions for which they were never trained and he told of how, to combat this, his school was working with the local society of architects to develop continuing education programs for them. He mentioned that a very efficient system for doing this job was already in effect at the University of Illinois. He warned the schools not to wait for the profession to ask for these courses as it would most likely be too late, but to take the initiative themselves in offering them. William Speer from Auburn University told of how in order to combat the total lack of feedback information to the school from graduates, they had instituted a very successful program of continuing education to architects by means of TV. This took the form of workshop sessions with local architects in which the gain in information to the school was as great as to the participants.

If the challenge today to the nation's architects is great, the challenge to New Mexico's architects is at least as great, possibly greater. With a projected growth that will double the Albuquerque population in twenty years and triple it by the year 2000, the State will be hard-pressed to provide architects in the quantity or of the competency that will be needed to handle such a vast building program. If we are to continue to design our own buildings and not, by default, abdicate this prerogative to better qualified architects from outside the State, it will depend on a very high degree of mutual trust, support and cooperation between the profession and the University here in New Mexico. The Department of Architecture has already begun tooling up for this task by drastically restructuring the teaching curriculum, adding an additional year of instruction and introducing radically new design techniques into the training. As a participant in the AIA Educational Research Project, the Department will have a direct access to the most advanced methods of analysis and

design developed by professionals or schools across the country, and it is our intention to share these directly with you by inviting your participation in school events, juries and seminars whenever possible. We hope to be able to develop research programs directly related to the community and, as soon as possible, extension courses for practicing architects. This will require the addition to our staff of architects and planners with special skills, brought from outside the State, but skills which can be directly applied to local problems. We hope, over the coming critical years, to be able to build up our resources in staff and facilities sufficiently to create a force within the State which, in concert with New Mexico's architects, can effectively meet the challenge ahead.

Sincerely yours,  
Thomas R. Vreeland, Jr., AIA  
Chairman, Department of Architecture  
University of New Mexico

---

## THE 15th ANNUAL CONFERENCE, MOUNTAIN STATES REGION, AIA

Plans are proceeding. Ideas are being born at a rapid rate. A conference is in the making. Panelists are being sought: one panelist has been secured, one has given a tentative commitment, others are cancelling their other appointments so that they can participate.

Homes throughout Santa Fe are being made ready to receive visitors. Restaurants are polishing the silver. Shops are ordering or making new items for October delivery. All is being made ready for the vast multitude of visitors expected to arrive in Santa Fe from the far reaches of the Western Mountain Region, AIA.

Certainly you and your wife must plan to be with us. We expect you to join us, so that we can show you the best of our hospitality and the best of our wonderful Santa Fe country.

THE TITLE: DESIGN FOR PEOPLE  
THE PLACE: SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO  
THE TIME: OCTOBER 12, THROUGH 15, 1966

---

## ALBUQUERQUE HONOR AWARDS ... a correction

The first annual awards banquet of the Albuquerque Chapter of the American Institute of Architects held on December tenth was reported in the January-February issue of this magazine. At that time the magazine published one of the five *Awards of Merit* announced at the banquet: the Women's dormitory at Highland's University, Las Vegas, New Mexico, designed by Robert Walters.

In publishing the awards, however, the editors

made a serious and unfortunate error. They confused the awards given to Mr. Don P. Schlegel and Mr. Robert Walters. They mistakenly reported that Mr. Schlegel's John D. Robb house had received the *Award of Merit* rather than the *Award of Honor*. (Mr. Schlegel's house was presented in the September issue of *NMA*). The editors wish to apologize to both Mr. Schlegel and to Mr. Walter for this confusion.

In this issue we publish one other building which received an *Award of Merit*. The two other Award winners, which also have not previously been presented in *NMA*, will be published in the next issue.