

B U I L T F O R

SUCCESS

**From its modest beginnings
125 years ago, the School of
Architecture has grown to
become a national leader in
educating future architects**

In the white-walled design studios of Slocum Hall, lights routinely burn around the clock. Hunched over drawing tables, architecture students like Jason Costello '99 work perhaps the longest hours of any undergraduates, laboring for five years to earn a bachelor's degree. "The work ethic is legendary," Costello says. "You're earning a professional degree and a bachelor's degree at the same time, so it's grueling. But there's a definite sense of pride here. You can feel the passion of the architecture students and faculty."

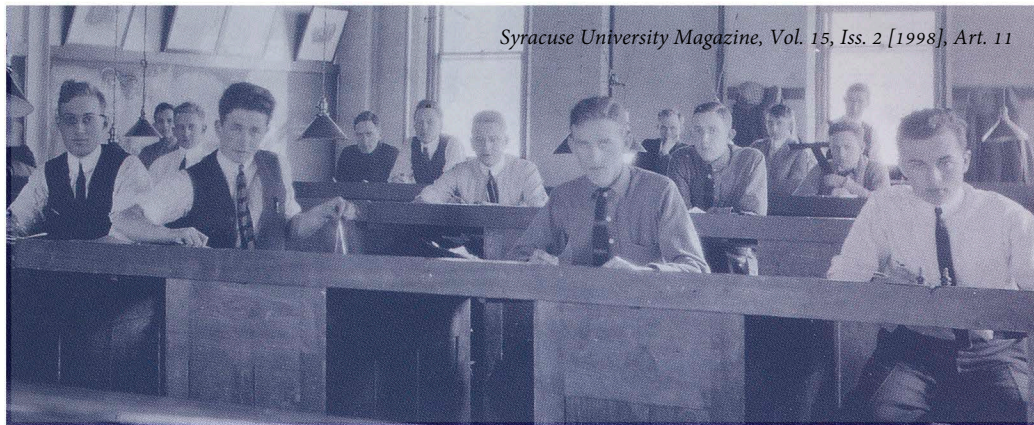
School of Architecture Dean Bruce Abbey recognizes that this legendary work ethic and the incredible dedication and vision of the faculty have made the school one of the nation's finest. "A truly distinguished School of Architecture must have talented and intelligent students, a dynamic and productive faculty, a clear sense of mission, and, above all, successful alumni," Abbey says. "Syracuse satisfies all of these criteria and our future is extraordinarily promising."

This would please George Comfort Fisk, who 125 years ago struggled to assemble a rudimentary architecture faculty for the University's new College of Fine Arts. Even for a man of influence—Fisk was a fervent fine arts advocate and catalyst for the Metropolitan Museum of Art—this was a tall order. The year was 1873, the nation was in a severe economic depression, and the University was in its infancy. There were few guidelines for launching an architecture program and no experienced professors for hire; this was one of the country's first three architecture programs and the first to offer a four-year degree.

But Fisk, the persuasive dean of the new College of Fine Arts, patched together a makeshift architecture faculty with professors

BY DENISE OWEN HARRIGAN

Archival photos courtesy of the School of Architecture



Architecture students work in the drafting room in Steele Hall, circa 1911-15.

Slocum Hall became home to the architecture department in 1917.

from the painting department and the College of Liberal Arts. Then he approached such local architects as Horatio Nelson White, who designed the Hall of Languages, and asked them to teach architectural design—without pay.

Despite its fragile foundation—and a first-year enrollment of one student—the architecture department steadily gained stature. Some questioned the need to offer architecture—or any fine art—in that economic climate. As W. Freeman Galpin notes in *Syracuse University: The Pioneer Days*: “One may be pardoned for wondering why the College of Fine Arts was not nipped in the bud. As is well known, the trustees of the University were at their wits’ end to keep the College of Liberal Arts intact and loathed to divert so much as a penny toward the new venture.”

Well into the 1900s, the architecture department relied on local architects for free instruction. This was not only a matter of thrift. It was standard practice at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, the world’s premiere architecture school. European students traditionally took their work to architects’ offices for critiques. “These architects considered it their obligation to continue the profession by passing their experience on to a coming generation,” explains Professor Emeritus Paul Malo ’50. “The practice was modified here, with the architect coming to the studio. But the basic notion continued that architectural education should engage practicing designers as critics.”

SU’s providential alignment of the architecture department within the College of Fine Arts established a design focus that endures to this day. Where institutions like MIT and RPI followed Germany’s lead and stressed the structural underpinnings of architecture, Syracuse University, in the Beaux Arts tradition, underscored the artistry—though never to the exclusion of structural expertise. Dwight Baum, a New York City architect who worked on the SU campus and wrote for *Architecture* magazine in the 1930s, notes: “Syracuse realizes that the architect must be the most fully trained man of the learned professions because of the wide knowledge he must possess. Its courses stress not only artistic ability, but also the need for good construction and the conduct of professional practice in a businesslike manner.”

The first graduating classes in architecture were small, with 74 students earning degrees between 1900 and 1922. (By comparison, the same period produced 260 music and 72 painting graduates.) It was ironic, a department that addressed issues of space had a perpetual problem finding it. In 1883, the entire College of Fine Arts moved from its cramped quarters in the Hall of Languages to Crouse College, then into Steele Hall in 1908. The congestion persisted until 1917, when the college moved into skylit Slocum Hall,

designed by Frederick Revels. Revels graduated from the College of Fine Arts in 1895, and chaired the architecture department from 1902 until 1934. By all reports he was a stimulating teacher, but he is best remembered for designing, with Professor Earl Hallenback of the Class of 1897, a number of SU landmarks: Carnegie Library, Archbold Stadium, and Bowne and Lyman halls. Chancellor James Roscoe Day, one of SU’s “big builders,” repeatedly credited these architects—and the architecture department—for savings afforded by their drawings and plans.

SETTING A PRAGMATIC TONE

While building came to a virtual halt during the Depression, architectural education evolved. European modernism, which blossomed with the reconstruction of European cities after World War I, began to seep into American architecture schools. Syracuse University acknowledged the trend, but continued to emphasize the teaching of more traditional styles. Other schools, like Harvard and Columbia, embraced modernism, stylistically and politically, with near-religious fervor.

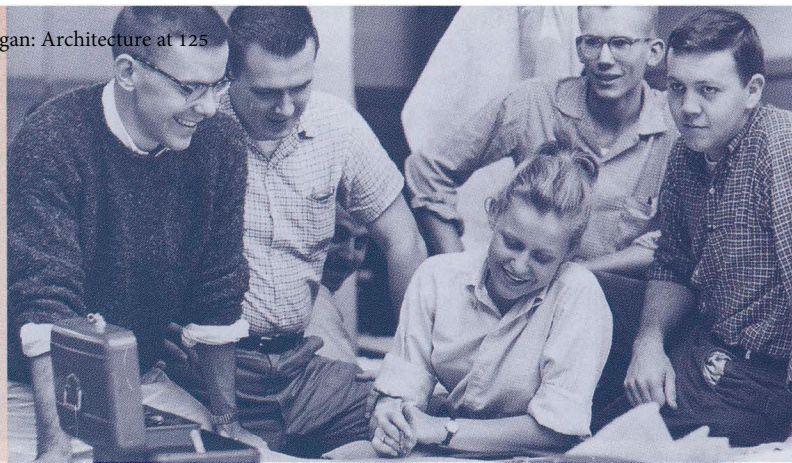
“SU is not trying to propagate any isms,” writes Dwight Baum in a 1940 issue of *Pencil Points*. “Realizing that its students are drawn mostly from upper New York State and will likely practice there eventually, it cultivates a strong respect for tradition without closing its eyes to the ever-increasing interest in contemporary design.”

During this period, the University realized that a four-year curriculum could not adequately equip an architect for practice. In 1935, under College of Fine Arts Dean Lemuel Cross Dillenback, a fifth year of study was added, increasing the requirements for a bachelor’s degree in architecture to 182 credits. The additional “thesis” year served as a bridge from studies to practice, with students tackling a project from its conception through working drawings, schedules, and cost estimates.

This attention to marketable skills has been a hallmark of SU’s architecture program—even under leaders like Dillenback, a “painterly” dean who valued fine presentation drawings. According to Baum: “Syracuse University has kept its feet firmly on the ground, turning out its quota of young men equipped for immediate useful service. There is nothing spectacular about the school at Syracuse, nor anything exotic about its teachers...there are no acknowledged giants among them eager to undertake the intellectual rearing of a race of disciples to go forth and reform society. But they are practical men, sane thinkers, and experienced guides along the road to capability in the everyday world of architecture.”



D. Kenneth "Doc" Sargent '27, right, was involved in the architecture program for 40 years. He served as dean from 1958 to 1969.



Members of the 1961 architecture class discuss a project.

The school's pragmatic tone was accentuated after World War II, when 150 veterans flooded the program. "The veterans expanded the school and gave it a different character," Malo says. "They were anxious to get on with their lives and careers—they were highly motivated, and practical about their goals."

Endorsing their sentiment was D. Kenneth "Doc" Sargent '27, a prominent practitioner who began teaching in 1930 and profoundly influenced the program for the next 40 years. "Sargent passionately believed that architecture was a profession that served society, like medicine," recalls Malo, who was a student and longtime colleague of Sargent. "Doc Sargent saw the physician, not the artist, as the ideal model for the architect."

These high expectations compelled Sargent, who served as dean of the by-now autonomous School of Architecture from 1958 until 1969, to add an optional sixth year of liberal arts to the architecture curriculum. According to Malo, Sargent believed this optional extra year would prepare graduates to take their rightful places "in circles of decision makers."

"Doc Sargent was the Harry Truman of the architecture world," remembers Bruce Fowle '60. "He was a plainspoken man who focused more on technology than design. When I graduated I knew a lot more about how to put a building together than my colleagues who had specialized in design."

Outside academic circles, Sargent was widely respected as a principal of Sargent, Webster, Crenshaw, and Folley, one of the largest architectural firms in the Northeast. But one of his partners, Frederick Webster '32, remembers Sargent as an educator at heart. "He wasn't in the office much. If there was a choice to be made between the practice and the school, he always chose the school."

SELIGMANN STEPS IN

Sargent resigned in 1969, and the tight-knit architecture program—like higher education in general—seemed to unravel during the next several years. But in 1976, Werner Seligmann, an award-winning architect and authority on Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, stepped into the dean's office and set a clear course for the next dozen years. Seligmann, who passed away in November, had taught at the University of Texas, ETH Zurich, Cornell, and Harvard, and his goal was to make Syracuse's program equally prestigious. Convinced that design was underemphasized, he increased the number of required design courses from 2 to 10.

"Werner was a force of nature; he had a profound effect on everyone he came in contact with," says Professor Randall Korman. "He put this school on the map. He was a confirmed

MEETING THE computer challenge

In 1873, the challenge was to find a professor for every architecture course. Today's challenge, says School of Architecture Dean Bruce Abbey, is to find a computer for every architecture student.

"We still start with pencils and T-squares, teaching the traditional methods of hand drawing, but then we move on to using computers," explains Christopher Gray, chair of the school's undergraduate program.

According to Professor Bruce Coleman, who teaches computers and technology, a

massive computing transformation is under way in the profession and architecture schools. "Employers now demand that graduates be CAD (computer-aided design) proficient, not just CAD literate," he says. "They want people who can sit down and fly—graduates who can be 100 percent productive from day one. Professional expectations keep going up."

The School of Architecture's computer saga began in 1986, with one basic course and one PC. "The next year, some industrial-strength software was donated

by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, one of the nation's largest architectural firms," reports Coleman. "SU provided a high-end workstation, and I introduced our first advanced computing class. There was a long learning curve, but the expertise gave us credibility with firms and other schools of architecture."

In the late eighties, the school took a giant step forward with an IBM grant for close to a half-million dollars that allowed it to invest in 3 workstations, 10 PCs, and expensive software. "SU renovated rooms 107 and 109 in Slocum Hall for a multi-disciplinary computer lab, and we were up and running," Coleman says. "In return, we helped IBM develop integrated software that could be used by architects,



Werner Seligmann set the school's course in the late seventies and built its international reputation.

modernist, but not an exclusivist. He had a deeply abiding sense of history and embraced a wide range of architects, from Michelangelo to Mies van der Rohe. He acknowledged the dichotomy between the tenets of modern architecture and the benefits of a traditional city, and challenged students to create modern buildings that were sympathetic to historic context."

Professor Bruce Coleman studied under Seligmann at Cornell, worked in his architecture office, and followed him to SU. He believes his mentor elevated the program to new heights. "He pushed and pushed and pushed faculty and students to do their best—though not always with a lot of tact. He emphasized design, but insisted that everything students designed must be eminently buildable," Coleman says. "Werner took this school from a program with a regional reputation to one with an international reputation."

Robert Stark '83, a partner with Macon Chaintreuil Jensen & Stark in Rochester and Buffalo, says Seligmann made SU a very challenging place. "He was a very warm man who really cared about students," Stark says. "But if you didn't really care about architecture, you didn't want to run into him."

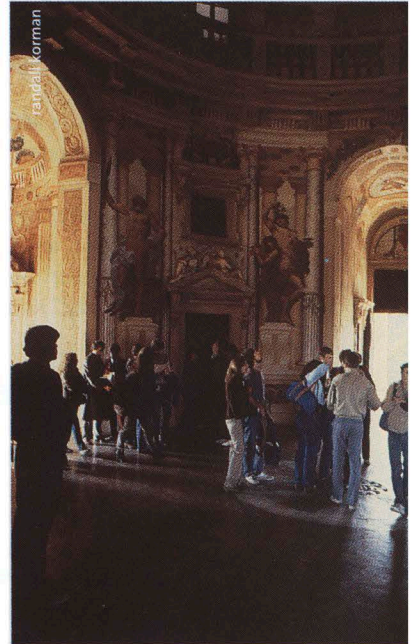
In 1990, Seligmann resigned as dean and turned to full-time teaching at SU, interspersed with prized visiting professorships at Harvard, Yale, ETH Zurich, and the University of Virginia. This

year, he received the highest award in American architecture education, the Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education from the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture and the American Institute of Architects.

BALANCING DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Nearly a decade after Werner Seligmann resigned as dean, the programs he developed or endorsed continue to define the School of Architecture. Design remains central to the school's mission, but is balanced by a capstone course in technology that other schools often emulate. The course—Advanced Building Systems—requires students to virtually dissect an actual building and dramatically boosts their professional preparation.

The Florence program, often called "the jewel in the crown of the architecture curriculum," continues to generate "immeasurable benefits," says Korman, who helped establish the program under Seligmann in the early 1980s. "Werner had an abiding belief in the cultural and architectural values embodied in European cities and felt there was no substitute for living in one of these cities," explains Korman. "The Florence program is strategically positioned between the third and fifth years of undergraduate study. When students return after one or two semesters in Florence, they are transformed. They've reexamined their values. They've been exposed to European concepts of style, and they come back and approach their final year—and their thesis—as very cultivated people."



A visit to Palladio's Villa Rotonda is a regular part of the Florence program.

engineers, and related professionals."

SU has since replaced those workstations and PCs, and installed a new \$100,000 CAD studio in Slocum Hall. "That's why computing is called the black financial hole of higher education," sighs Coleman. "Fortunately, our dean is vitally interested in this area, and the University administration supports our needs."

SU architecture students don't take computing courses until the third year of the program. "This gives them time to learn something about architecture first," Coleman says. "The picture is still very blurry about whether computers help students learn any better. We know computers make things go faster, but speed is not a concern at this level.

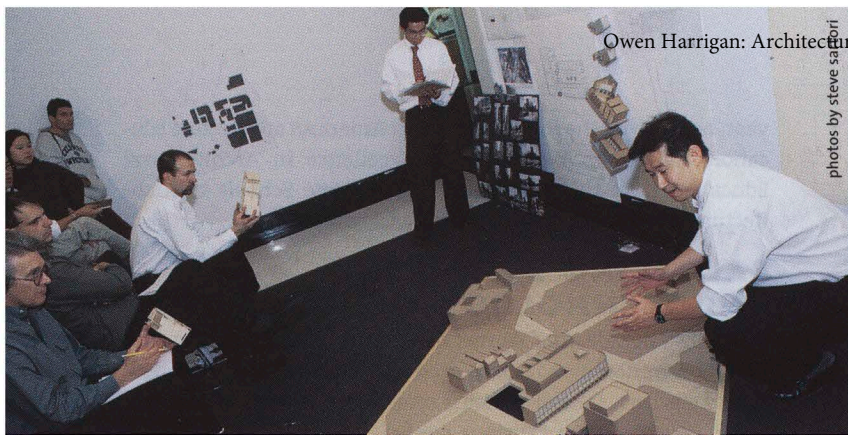
"Computer courses aren't mandatory, but I'm confident we're 100 percent covered," Coleman adds. "Ninety percent of our students take our computer courses, and the other 10 percent arrive with those skills. In the past year alone, we saw a 400 percent increase in students using computers for coursework."

Professor Richard Jensen, who uses computers extensively in his architecture



practice, cautions students to keep them in perspective. "Some people naively believe that computers think for you," he says. "The computer is like a pen. It may be faster and more precise, but it's just another tool. At SU the emphasis is still on teaching students to design and think manually."

"I understand that computers are absolutely necessary in this profession, so I've taken CAD and I use the computer for my technical classes," says Sara Felsen '00. "The computer can do amazing things, but I personally like to design by hand. Computer drawings look dead to me; they're always just right. I think the little distortions you add when you hand-draw give your designs life."



Owen Harrigan: Architecture at 125

photos by steve satori



Dean Bruce Abbey guides the school, which is one of the University's centers of excellence.

Visiting architect Rene Tan, right, leads a mid-semester critique.

Florence gives students the chance to experience firsthand what they've seen in textbooks, says fifth-year student Angela Morkrid '99. "It's a more relaxed year, but you're still learning and drawing. You absorb images that you'll always remember and may use later in designs."

Eighty percent of SU's architecture undergraduates and 90 percent of the graduate students now participate in the Florence program, which boasts its own campus and a reputation as one of the finest overseas offerings of any American university. "Schools like Cornell, Princeton, and Carnegie Mellon send students to our program, and the opportunity to teach there helps us recruit and retain the best faculty," Korman says. "The program elevated the school as a whole."

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

When Bruce Abbey, a graduate of Cornell and Princeton who had been chair of the Department of Architecture and associate dean at the University of Virginia, took over for Seligmann in 1990, the School of Architecture sat on a rock-solid foundation. The University as a whole, unsettled by demographic changes, was conducting a major self-evaluation. "The administration asked us to evaluate our program in terms of its quality, centrality, and demand," Abbey says. "We were subsequently designated a center of excellence on campus, because our students ranked with the very best of those admitted by the University. Our application numbers were high—despite demographics—and our hands-on approach to teaching made us a model for a University whose vision it was to become the leading student-centered research university."

Although SU architecture professors have a strong record of practicing and publishing, teaching remains their first order of business. The faculty boasts more contact hours with students than any other program in the University. In the middle of the night, it's not unusual to find these professors in the design studio, critiquing and encouraging their bleary-eyed students.

Ed McGraw '84, a partner at Ashley McGraw Architects in Syracuse, remembers his first brush with dedicated faculty members. "My undergraduate background was in creative writing and business, and I was such a neophyte that I didn't know what a portfolio was," McGraw says. "Even before I applied to the graduate architecture program, I had three or four discussions, each several hours long, with Professor Bruno Pfister. He essentially introduced me to the profession, encouraged me to take an art class, and helped me build a portfolio. Every professor I encountered in the school had this genuine passion for architecture. And they don't ask you to do anything they wouldn't do."

Another major asset is the architecture graduate program, currently ranked 15th nationwide by *U.S. News & World Report*. The M.Arch II degree is a second professional degree designed for architects who wish to spend a year in the Florence program, studying such areas as urban design and history. "These students can study with the finest European scholars—world-renowned historians and theoreticians," explains Professor Art McDonald, chair of the graduate program.

About 80 additional graduate students earn an M.Arch I professional degree, which takes three and a half years to complete. "The beauty of this degree is these students earned undergradu-

intense all-nighters ARE ON THE AGENDA

In high school, Benjamin Pell '97 was known as a kid who didn't work to his potential. At the School of Architecture, he shed that image to survive. It takes 161 credits to earn a bachelor's degree in architecture and entails "at least five intense years of work and innumerable all-nighters," Pell says. "Architecture students are known as the hardest workers

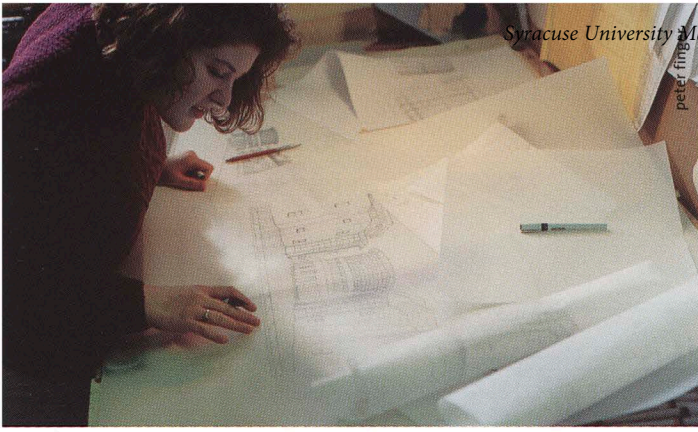
on campus. They're also considered a little insane."

Pell acknowledges the long tradition of architecture schools being a grueling and intense experience. "For at least one week out of every three or four, you're in the design studio all night, finishing a big project," he says. "Your design becomes your only priority. Sleeping, eating, and

other classes go by the wayside. At most, you sleep for a few hours from dawn until your 9 a.m. class, but you feel guilty if you even do that."

"Charretting" is the name of the high-pressure game these students play before projects are due. The term is derived from the French word *charrette*, which is a cart that once carried students' designs to architects' offices to be critiqued. Legend has it that students would run alongside the cart making last-minute changes to their projects.

"The whole process builds a lot of self-respect," says Pell, who is now employed



Architecture students spend countless hours honing their skills.

ate degrees in a variety of academic disciplines," McDonald says. "We have graduate students from fine arts, liberal arts, and engineering backgrounds—the three prongs of architecture—working as teaching assistants and bringing very different points of view to the classroom."

Aerating the entire architecture program—with more courses in the humanities, more electives, and more varied architectural points of view—is Abbey's agenda priority. "Bruce Abbey opened up the intellectual spectrum and created more of a forum for discussion," McDonald says. "A wider range of people makes for more stimulating discussion."

Korman sees Abbey as a natural successor to Seligmann. "He studied under Werner at Cornell, and he respects Werner's affinity for European culture," Korman says. "But he is also broadening the canvas to include even more viewpoints and more emphasis on issues of American urbanism."

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

When the School of Architecture held a gala celebration for its 125th anniversary in November, there was much to celebrate. The current first-year class of 116 students was much larger than anticipated, because 40 percent of the accepted students enrolled—instead of the expected 30 percent. "Right now, I think people are very optimistic about architecture in general and this program in particular," Abbey says.

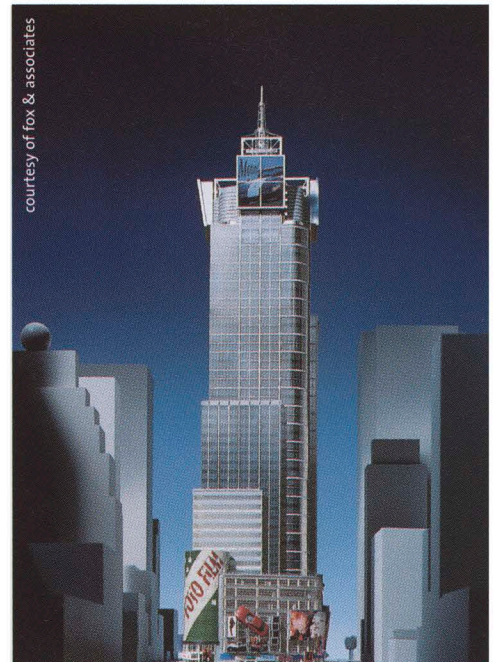
The program's popularity is also enhanced by the visibility of its graduates, "who are our best billboards," Korman says. "There's a joke that the huge firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill should

change its name to Syracuse, Owings and Merrill, because it has so many Syracuse graduates in influential positions."

One of the school's most high-profile—and prolific—graduates is Bruce Fowle '60, a principal with Fox & Associates in New York City, the firm designing the Condé Nast and Reuters buildings, the first two skyscrapers to be built in Manhattan in 10 years. "SU's program is as good as any in the country, with its design emphasis, high level of critique, and strength in technology," says Fowle, who chairs the school's advisory board. "Syracuse students have a wonderful sense of history and tradition. Their work is not so stylized that it's out of fashion by the time they graduate. They are taught to write and to communicate. We have three or four SU graduates in our firm. You know if they make it through SU, they're very good."

Ken Schwartz, who taught at SU in the eighties before serving as chair and associate dean of the University of Virginia's School of Architecture, believes "Syracuse is perceived as one of the strongest undergraduate programs in the country, with a strong graduate component. It has a totally dedicated faculty, an extraordinary work ethic, and a great spirit. Its stature has increased progressively over the past 25 years, and it has an excellent reputation among serious architecture offices in the Northeast."

But Dean Abbey is less concerned with accolades than with the challenges ahead. "Our students are here to acquire an education in addition to a professional degree," he says. "That means we have to prepare them to be comfortable on a muddy job site and in the midst of a metaphysical discourse on the philosophy of a building. And that means this school has a lot to deliver."



An illustration of the Condé Nast Building in New York City, designed by Bruce Fowle '60.

with Asfour Guzy Architects in New York City. "Every year you're in school the workload gets harder. But every year you have more knowledge and more skills to work with."

The pressure is not as intense as it sounds, Pell says. "The design studio becomes the community center. The environment becomes very cooperative, and social relationships develop. If you've never been in the studio past midnight or 1 a.m., you've missed most of the social exchange."

Professor Christopher Gray, chair of the undergraduate program, says the students

work "at least as hard as medical students, and they maintain that pace for five years."

The program's intensity reflects the wide-ranging skills that architecture requires, Gray says. "This is an education with a specific purpose. Our graduates must be accomplished in literate, numeric, and visual media. They must be creative and artistic. They must be aware of the social sciences. They must be technologically skilled, and they must be comfortable engaging in philosophical discussions. It's a heavy load, but these students are high achievers. Many of them rank among the top 10 in their high school classes."

Alumni from generations past are amazed by the work ethic of today's students. "We worked hard, but we didn't work this hard," marvels Anne Chaintreuil '71, president of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, the licensing organization for architects, and a principal of Macon Chaintreuil Jensen & Stark in Rochester and Buffalo.

"I remember working at fever-pitch to complete projects," adds Beth Duncan '38. "But when we go back for reunions, my classmates and I wonder if we could even get into the school today. And if we did get in, we wonder if we could graduate."