

C O L U M N S



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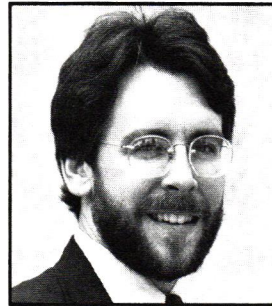
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View Point: A Preservation Sermon

Rob Pfaffmann, AIA, President



"The American Institute of Architects believes that preservation of historic resources and their environments deserves high priority among the nation's programs and goals."

This excerpt from 1991 National AIA Public Policy Directory sounds good, like Mom & apple pie. But until the historic rehab tax credits and Quincy Market caught our attention, many architects were more than willing to see the headache ball fly. Our membership was no exception. Our less shining

moments often come in the form of a quiet noninvolvement or as in the case of 1960 urban renewal efforts, active advocacy. Do you know the Chapter once advocated demolition of the County Jail?

The profession is not without its heroes: In 1932, the first major survey of Western PA's architectural heritage was conducted by Charles M. Stotz (founder of MCF). More recently the general public associates the work of John Martine, AIA (our Historic Resources Chair) with a strong commitment to the revitalization of our urban neighborhoods such as Southside.

It is this uneven commitment to the preservation of our heritage and community that is typical of our profession as a whole. It is very easy to lash out and say that our lack of leadership indicates a lack of real conviction to architectural and planning principles.

The truth, as with most things in life, lies somewhere in-between; between our professional negligence, rationalization on one hand and our clients' ignorance or economic hardship on the other.

Reality is that the business of designing and building always requires some sort of compromise. The politics of preservation can put architects in a variety of circumstances, each with a difficult, often no-win situation:

- Do we dare refuse a commission because it contradicts our professional principles?
- Do we rationalize a demolition because "one more won't hurt?"
- Do we let our egos speak and say "we'll design a better one in its place?"
- Do we complain that historic ordinances "prevent us from doing great work?"

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Solace and symmetry in the therapeutic swimming pool at D.T. Watson Rehabilitation Hospital, designed by Reid & Stuhldreher.