

Number 32

SAN FRANCISCO BAY ARCHITECTS'

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REVIEW



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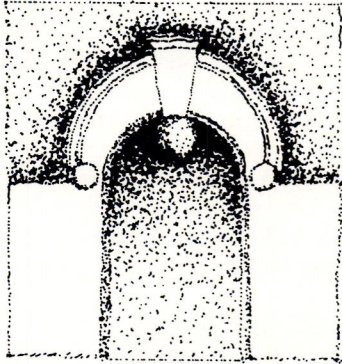
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I N S I D E



A Special Sense of Quality: *The architect's emotional/ spiritual/intellectual response*

Theme of this June's American Institute of Architects National Convention in San Francisco is "Value Architecture"—a seductive and subjective topic open to many interpretations. Critics, art historians and architects all have different definitions of this concept, but value in architecture is probably clearest when the general public recognizes a project as especially praiseworthy. The commonly held opinion that a building is special is the clearest indication that a project has risen above the mere acceptability.

Many factors contribute to making a building that inspires such respect. The opportunities of the site and program are blended with the restraints of the budget, the local codes, the regional economy and other factors. Enlightened municipal officials sometimes contribute to successful projects, and seldom does a worthwhile building result without discriminating client. Most importantly, the architect must impart a special sense of quality to the building. To varying degrees every design reflects the architect's emotional/spiritual/intellectual response to the situation and the most successful building is often the one endowed with the architect's strong personal sense of what is appropriate.

Value in architecture takes many forms. Buildings can add value because their physical beauty lifts our spirits. The Conservatory at Golden Gate Park is such a structure—a man-made object whose combination of pleasing geometry and lightness yields an impressive elegance.

Sometimes it is the symbiosis of building and site that imparts value. The obvious regional example is the Golden Gate Bridge which frames and enhances the headlands it joins and—dare I say?—improves on nature. Less grand in scale but equally successful is the Rutherford Hills Winery, a building by Roma that gracefully folds itself into an oak-covered hillside above Napa Valley.

Sensitive selection of building materials often yields a richness that continually pleases both user and observer; in other instances it is an assemblage of buildings that is highly valued. The rows of Victorian houses in San Francisco's residential neighborhoods are praised less, I suspect, for the merits of each individual structure than for the fabric that they create when taken as a whole.

Other buildings and places are perceived as valuable less for their physical properties than for the human social interaction they create. Embarcadero Center's podium levels probably violate some basic principles of retail design but succeed wonderfully for people—largely, I believe, because of the intensity of the use they receive.

Value is almost never absolute in something as complex as a building.