

# D E S I G N      B O O K      R E V I E W

32/33  
g/Summer 1994  
00

- Architecture
- Urbanism
- Landscape
- Design



## *Other Americas*

**Contemporary Architecture and Issues in Latin America**

## Forthcoming Issues of Design Book Review:

Issue **34** FALL 1994 "Architecture of Humanism"

Liane Lefaivre, guest editor

James Ackerman

Alexander Tzonis

Cesare de Seta

Howard Burns

Martha Pollack

Françoise Choay

Richard Cleary

Mario Carpo

Anthony Vidler

Paolo Berdini

Marco de Michelis

Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Issue **35** WINTER 1994 Industry and Its Paradigm

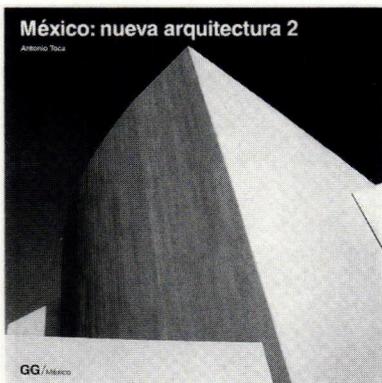
Issue **36** SPRING 1995 A Home for Housing

DESIGN BOOK REVIEW  
AND MIT PRESS JOURNALS  
ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF:  
GRAHAM FOUNDATION  
ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR  
THE ARTS

# GG<sup>®</sup>

Editorial  
Gustavo Gili, S.A.

Rosselló, 87-89  
08029 Barcelona - España  
Tel. (93) 322 81 61  
Fax (93) 322 92 05



**México: nueva arquitectura 1**

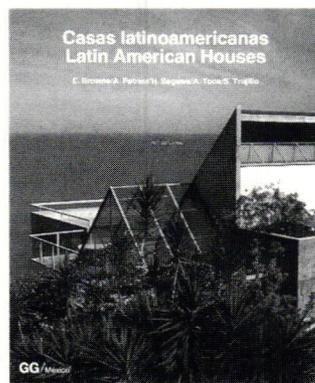
A. Toca/ A. Figueroa

**México: nueva arquitectura 2**

A. Toca

Each volume 192 pages,  
25,5 x 25,5 cm, Paperback,  
text in Spanish

Both volumes include a selection of almost 40 works built in México intending to reflect the contemporary Architecture in México since 1980 until now.



**Casas Latinoamericanas/  
Latin American Houses**

E. Browne/A. Petrina/  
H. Segawa/A.Toca/S.Trujillo  
144 pages, 25,5 x 22 cm,  
Paperback, text in English  
and Spanish

The present book offers with a wealth of images a selection of 39 private houses situated throughout Latin America.

Distributor for the U.S.:

Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.  
300 Park Avenue South New York, NY 10010-5399  
Tel. (212) 387-3400. Fax (212) 387-3535

FOUNDING PUBLISHERS

John Parman  
Elizabeth Snowden

GUEST EDITOR

John A. Loomis

EDITOR

Richard Ingersoll

MANAGING EDITOR

Cathy Lang Ho

CONSULTING EDITOR

Suzanne Chun

ART DIRECTOR

Betty J. Ho  
Soo Hoo Design

TECHNICAL ASSISTANT

Martin Dare

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Luis Estrada  
Maria Oliver  
Galia Somolinoff

EDITORIAL BOARD

Charles C. Benton  
Christine Boyer  
Zeynep Çelik  
Jean-Louis Cohen  
Dana Cuff  
Luis Fernández-Galiano  
Kenneth Frampton  
Diane Ghirardo  
Robert Gutman  
John Dixon Hunt  
Liane Lefaivre  
Lars Lerup  
Bonnie Loyd  
Mary McLeod  
Jane Morley  
Fritz Neumeyer  
Andrew Rabeneck  
Marc Treib  
Alexander Tzonis  
Dell Upton  
Lorraine Wild

COVER: Luis Estrada.

FRONT COVER IMAGE: Hotel Nacional, Havana, Cuba; McKim, Mead and White, 1930. Photograph by José Ho.

BACK COVER IMAGE: Residence, Golden Beach, Florida; Carlos Zapata Design Studio and Una Idea, Architects, 1993.

Photograph by Peter Aaron/Esto.

*La única manera de conocernos a nosotros mismos es reconocer a los otros en su alteridad.*

The only way to know ourselves is to recognize the otherness of others.

—Octavio Paz, "La Conquista de México," *Claves*, 1992

The cupola of the Hotel Nacional by McKim, Mead and White in Havana, heavily laden with its ornamental balustrade, glides like a baroque barge toward the horizon, toward the United States, which is invisible in the distance. However, invisibility is more profound in the opposite direction, to the south. The architectural culture of Latin America remains largely invisible north of the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande. It is noticeably absent from both architectural publications and the curricula of most North American architecture schools. This issue of *Design Book Review* aims to broaden the horizon for North Americans by rendering visible some of the contemporary issues and cultural debates about architecture in the "other Americas."

In the past, brief episodes of visibility have exposed Latin American architecture to the curiosity of a North American audience. In 1937 Esther Born presented an enthusiastic survey of modern Mexican architecture in *Architectural Record*. In 1942 the Museum of Modern Art in New York produced an exhibit and catalog entitled *Brazil Builds*, directed by Philip Goodwin, which documented and celebrated the lyrical variant of the modern movement that had taken root in that country. The MoMA opened its doors again, in 1955, this time to Latin America as a whole, with the exhibit *Latin American Architecture Since 1945*, curated by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who also wrote the text for the catalog. These publications speak with an optimism, now clearly misplaced, for "modern" economic and material advancement that did not occur as envisioned. Little has been published in the United States on Latin American architecture since then, except for the 1969 survey *New Directions in Latin American Architecture* by Argentine writer Francisco Bullrich. In recent years, two publications have appeared (both from Italy) that together provide a broad view of this much-overlooked subject: *America Latina, Architettura: Gli ultimi vent'anni*, by Jorge Francisco Liernur and *Zodiac 8*, edited by Guido Canella. Unfortunately, both are not widely available in the United States. We hope this issue of *DBR* will not be merely another fleeting moment of visibility,

but will instead serve to open an accessible, ongoing dialogue on the architecture and the theoretical debates surrounding the architectural culture of Latin America, and their potential impact on North America.

For many, Latin American architecture is still largely framed by the era of the "heroic generation," of Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Luis Barragán, and Carlos Raúl Villanueva. But the conditions that led to their ascendancy and the unswerving faith in modernity at that time have changed. In many cases, the changes were brought on by weakened economies and military dictatorships. The "thirty years war," as Jorge Castañeda has aptly termed the volatile period that engulfed much of Latin America since 1960, has taken its toll on the architectural profession too. Prior to it, the heroic generation was able to achieve a position in history that seems unattainable for architects working today.

Discussions about Latin American architecture and culture are often framed in terms of center and periphery. However, the question must be raised as to whether this opposition is indeed relevant. Is it characteristic of a periphery to have more speakers of the mother tongue and to produce more literature than the mother country itself? Is it characteristic of a periphery to have produced the first modern social revolution, as was the case with Mexico, whose revolution preceded Russia's by seven years? Is it characteristic of a periphery to have some of the largest and fastest-growing cities in the world? Is it characteristic of a periphery for the ideas of a foreign figure, such as Le Corbusier, to be embraced more passionately than in his own country, and then for those ideas to be exported back—in the case of Corbusier, via the work of architects Borja Huidobro (Chile) and Enrique Ciriani (Peru)? What meaning do center and periphery possess in a world of flexible capital, telecommunications, and globalization? Regardless of these continually blurring boundaries, Latin America still struggles to come to terms with its colonial legacy and neocolonial economic dependency. The stunning success of the Zapatista revolt in Chiapas reflects enduring economic and social contradictions, which underlie the new changes sweeping the world.

The Iberian languages and common cultural foundations of the continent provide a broad sense of unity, yet Latin America has many identities. Many layers of European, African, and Asian humanity mingle and coexist with those of indigenous peoples, creating a multiethnic society. *Cultural identity has been an issue in*

Latin American art, literature, and architecture since the 19th century. In the 1920s, Mexican Minister of Education José Vasconcelos challenged the dominant, Eurocentric vision of the world with his proposition of *la raza cosmica*, the cosmic *mestizo* race doubly gifted with the spirituality of Native Americans and the rationalism of the Europeans, destined to assume an important global role. At one time, Mexico and Brazil were particularly successful in developing a critical mass of work defining an "other" modernity, while Argentina has recently played a significant role in developing a substantial body of theoretical work. The debate over cultural identity in architecture has reached an unprecedented level of intensity in recent years.

When Gabriel García Márquez was asked to comment on the cultural encroachment of the United States on Latin America within the broader context of economic imperialism, he responded that it did not concern him because, in fact, he saw the opposite occurring—Latin America's encroachment upon the United States. There has, of course, been a Hispanic presence in North America since the 16th century. The people of Puerto Rico and Mexico have also had a special historic presence in the United States because of geographic proximity and perceived economic opportunities, not to mention the U.S. occupations of these territories. Today, an estimated twenty-five million Latinos—from all parts of South America and the Caribbean—reside in the United States, up from twenty million in the 1990 census, a figure that itself represented a 53 percent increase from 1980. The scope of immigration is illustrated by the fact that 40 percent of the current Latino population was born outside the United States. These statistics are expected to double over the next thirty years. Population-wise, New York is the largest Puerto Rican city after San Juan. Miami is the largest Cuban city after Havana. Los Angeles is the largest Mexican city after Mexico City. The cultural impact of this reoccupation of North America by Latin America is nowhere more profoundly felt than in language. While Spanish has been a common language in San Antonio, Texas, for over a hundred and fifty years, its prominence now grows elsewhere as well: in Miami, business is as likely to be conducted in Spanish as in English, and Los Angeles is clearly a bilingual, if not a multilingual, city. As the writer Carlos Fuentes recently observed, "The California state law decreeing that English is the official language of the state proves only one thing: that English is no longer the official language of California." Rudolfo Anaya, Rubén Blades, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Luis Valdez, Louis Pérez, David Hidalgo, Ray González, Gary Soto, Oscar Hijuelos, and Bernice Zamora are only some of the cultural figures who make

use of both languages to communicate the uniqueness and universality of their cultural experience.

In the built environment of North America, a contemporary Latin American presence is maintained on two levels: on the popular plane, Latin American culture and taste are reflected in a wide range of settings, from the front lawns of the well-to-do suburbs of Miami to the *casitas* in the urban barrios of New York. One example of efforts made to bridge the vernacular of the barrios with professional practice is Gustavo Leclerc's ADOBE LA, a group of architects who aim to integrate issues of local Chicano culture into their work. On the purely professional plane, Latin America's presence is felt both in academia and practice, with much crossover. The Latin American diasporas produced an enclave of Argentines in the northeast and of Cubans in Miami. Immigration, voluntary or not, involves making choices. César Pelli has fashioned an enviable North American-style corporate practice, while his brother, Victor Saúl Pelli, also an architect, organizes self-help housing in the barrios of Resistencia, Argentina.

The extent to which "Latin Americanness" is exhibited in the work of expatriates varies. Much of Miami's recent domestic architecture reveals a tendency toward Spanish colonial revival as well as regional vernacular. On the other end of the spectrum, Uruguayan Rafael Viñoly's Nara Convention Center in Japan embodies the spirit, confidence, and bold scale associated with the heroic period of Latin American modernism. The work of Costa Rican-born Carlos Jiménez is located somewhere in between, with his quiet, abstract elaboration of courtyard typology, mass, and light, as exhibited in his addition to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. Then there is Ricardo Legorreta, who has successfully extended his Mexico City-based practice and his syntax of *méxicanidad* into California and the Southwest. Meanwhile, the skillful formal and material manipulations of Ecuadorian architect Carlos Zapata place his work at the forefront of an avant-garde concerned with issues other than cultural specificity.

While the image of McKim, Mead and White's northward-looking hotel in Cuba reflects one kind of cultural exchange, the view from the other direction, through the framework of Zapata's beachfront *casita*, may be considered a fitting complement: this frame provides a metaphor that speaks of more evolving, more inclusive cultural exchange. The Americas share a common destiny that will only be successfully realized when the "otherness" of each is respected and reflected in our common yet diverse cultural existence.

John A. Loomis

#### Acknowledgments

John Loomis' research was supported in part by a grant from the CUNY Caribbean Exchange-Hunter College. The Getty Center for the Arts and Humanities provided a welcome sanctuary for final editing and writing. Gratitude is also due to the students and faculty of the School of Architecture and Environmental Studies of the City College of New York. For their valuable insight and assistance in developing this project, special thanks to J. Max Bond, Zeynep Çelik, Jerrilyn Dodds, Alan Feigenberg, Kurt W. Forster, Kenneth Frampton, Angela Giral, Iraida López, Thomas Reese, Nicholas Rojas, Roberto Segre, Susana Torre, and Marina Urbach.