

aug 1990

A R C H I T E C T U R E
CALIFORNIA

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Volume.12 Number 1 August 1990

Influencing Architecture: The Politics of Design Control

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From the Editorial Board

As you will have already observed, this issue of **Architecture California** represents a significant change in direction for the magazine. In addition to signalling the resumption of a regular publication schedule, it reflects fundamental changes in content, format, and editorial responsibility. These changes have not come about easily.

Over the past two and a half years, the Editorial Board, working closely with the President, Vice-President for Communications/Public Affairs, and the Executive Director, has labored to reshape **Architecture California** to be more responsive to the shared needs of our readership as well as to the highest ambitions of the CCAIA. During this institutional soul-searching, the idea that the magazine can and should more fully exploit its unique role as a service to architects practicing in California emerged as the foremost concern. As the only forum for professional discussion of specific issues affecting our practices, its role is significantly different from that of national magazines and it was felt that this difference should be accentuated.

Coming in the midst of these editorial discussions, the news of last year's drastic cut in the operating budget for **Architecture California** posed the riddle of how to produce a meatier, better written, more informative magazine at less expense than the previous edition.

A look at this issue makes obvious some of our decisions. Chapter news and notes are gone having been absorbed by

Update. Advertising, which has been a drain economically (as well as visually) has been eliminated. Our current financial straits render color photography a luxury in which we will indulge only occasionally.

Less apparent are operational changes such as the reduction of the Editorial Board from eight to four members and the replacement of Board meetings by conference calls and faxes. Another change is that each of the three regular board members will now assume responsibility for the overall direction of one issue each year. Design and production also have been simplified through the efforts of the Dunlavey Studio. Most importantly, our new Editor, Alicia Rosenthal, AIA, generously agreed to take time from her practice to apply her editorial talents to this fledgling enterprise.

Our hope is that you will find this issue to be substantial in the hand as well as professionally. Finally though, the success of **Architecture California** as an idea will depend upon its readership. We actively solicit your ideas for future issues as well as your comments and criticism. This is, after all, a participatory publication produced by volunteer members of the CCAIA for the membership and we encourage you to take part.

Barton Phelps, AIA
Chair, Editorial Board

From the Editor

Californians feel blessed by a benign and beautiful natural environment and have a tradition of actively organizing to preserve and enhance it. The artificial, built environment has also historically attracted the attention of community groups, but only relatively recently has it become a cause of widespread concern among citizens. The abstract notion of the public as a user whom we serve as responsible professionals is transformed into a very real, vocal group of representatives of that public with specific opinions and requirements. The need to include the input of third parties in design decisions is affecting the traditional architect-client relationship.

More and more communities are becoming missionaries of control, often inspired by one form or another of built abuse or by a vision of the future of a place. Among architects, few issues elicit such strong and divergent reactions as those of design control, especially in the realm of aesthetics. Emotions run high, touching on fundamental beliefs we hold as professionals and citizens.

In examining design control, it is not the intention of **Architecture California** to judge or recommend the adoption of a particular position, but rather provide information and provocative points of view in order to initiate a dialogue that will transcend simplistic conclusions. We think it is safe to say that design control is a political process with profound implications. An issue such as taste in aesthetics, far from being superficial, can convey strong social bias and serious economic concerns. Design Review appears prone to

manipulation and therefore can be used in both selfish and altruistic ways. As architects, the challenge before us involves locating ourselves in the political spectrum in a position that is consistent with our values as professionals and as citizens.

This collection of essays, organized in three sections, attempts a broad consideration, and looks at the possible implications of design control and design review from perspectives within and outside our profession. **Background** brings us a historical overview of design control in America, particularly in California as well as a discussion of its economic and legal implications. **Case Studies** describes diverse experiences with design control at different stages of implementation in communities throughout; **Commentary** is a collection of pithy thoughts on the topic that we hope will be helpfully provocative.

I wish to thank all contributors and the Editorial Board for their support, enthusiasm and many captivating discussions. I invite you to contact CCAIA in writing with your views on the topics under consideration in this and future issues as well as on our journalistic approach to them.

As an architect and AIA member I share the Editorial Board's enthusiasm in bringing to you our first issue of the "new" **Architecture California**. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed my role in making it happen.

Alicia Rosenthal, AIA

The Community as Client: Architectural Review in America

David Gebhard

In the late summer of 1892, the New York architectural critic and writer Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer visited Chicago's World Columbian Exposition, then well along in construction. What interested her most was not the specific question of the success or failure of the Beaux Arts Classical architectural imagery, but rather what lessons the fair could provide for the planning and replanning of American cities.¹ She wrote, "Any one of us can point to good and beautiful buildings in American towns; but can anyone think of a single satisfactory large group or long perspective? Beautiful groups, beautiful perspectives, a stupendously beautiful panorama is what the Fair will show us. It will be the first real object-lesson America has had in the art of building well on a great scale; and it will show us how, on a smaller but still sometimes a very large scale, our permanent streets and squares ought to be designed."²

The vision of the architect-planner Daniel H. Burnham, and the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, brought about the planning and architectural unification present at the Fair, mentioned by Van Rensselaer. The Fair offered a unique opportunity for Burnham and Olmsted to function in a manner foreign to the nineteenth century American *laissez-faire* scene. They could play the game of architectural/planning arbitrator, similar to the role played by Baron Georges Haussmann in the replanning of Paris during the regime of Napoleon III.

As Van Rensselaer had anticipated, the 1893 Chicago Fair served as an impetus for America's long term involvement with the City Beautiful movement. While a few City Beautiful-inspired civic centers and other fragments were built across the country during the first four decades of the twentieth century, the grand city plans of Burnham and others never came to fruition.³ These various schemes were not realized due to their often prohibitive costs and the array of difficulties posed by the private ownership of land and buildings. Equally determinant, though, was the sentiment of clients, their architects, and a large segment of the public that openly embraced a *laissez-faire* approach to design. Van Rensselaer's, Burnham's and others' vision of an architecturally unified city lacked reality, for in the end it did not provide any acceptable mode of architectural review. Europe and England could and did impose such controls via the continued presence of a leftover feudal bureaucracy that could operate as architectural/planning arbitrator. Americans, with their traditional suspicions of government, found it difficult to conceive of granting such authority to an appointed governmental bureaucrat or even to elected officials (though there have in this century been occasional exceptions, such as Robert Moses of New York).

Ultimately, the demise of the Beaux Arts-inspired City Beautiful movement was due, not to its ideological defeat at the hands of the Modernist, but to its inability

to provide a workable method of carrying out its ideals. The typical City Beautiful solution (the creation of a Fine Arts Commission) might work in the public arena of Washington, D.C., but it did not function well in other American cities, large or small. Such commissions could work effectively only within the limited public realm involving groups of governmental buildings and parks, or on a very small scale with a new town or suburban development planned and controlled by private capital. Many privately established communities laid out in the second and third decades at least initially entailed firm architectural control and review. In the teens there were the copper mining towns of Ajo (Arizona), Tyrone (New Mexico), and others. During the heady boom days of the twenties, Florida witnessed the creation of many speculative cities, including Opa-Locka, Boca Raton and Coral Gables.

California experienced the same phenomenon, with communities such as Palos Verdes, San Clemente and Rancho Santa Fe. Upper middle class suburban residential developments like St. Francis Woods and Forest Hills in San Francisco, and Bel Air and Westlake Village in Los Angeles, accompanied these planned communities and preceded them in some instances. These communities began with some architectural controls. A few developed and maintained a highly visible review process. In Palos Verdes, this process specified the Mediterranean/Spanish Colonial Revival image – both in gardens and buildings. The seriousness of the developers of Palos Verdes appears in the “name-brand” professionals they involved in the process: the landscape architect and planner, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the planner, Charles Cheney, and the architect, Myron Hunt.⁴ Generally these private communities dealt with the need for architectural review via legal covenants (C C & R’s), not by any action upon the part of a governmental body.

Another impetus, which has had a far more lasting impact on establishing archi-

tectural controls and review has been tourism. In the United States, tourism brought together two seemingly unlikely groups in society: those who were ideologically arguing for a romantic self-conscious cultivation of regional differences made visible via planning, landscape architecture and architecture and those who had an economic interest in seeing tourism promoted. The earliest “grand” episode of architecture promoting tourism was in Florida in the mid 1880s. The key figure in this affair was the New York investor Henry M. Flager, who through railroad acquisitions developed the Florida East Coast Railroad system and commissioned the New York architectural firm of Carrere & Hastings to enhance the historic Spanish atmosphere through their designs for two resort hotels, the Ponce de Leon Hotel (1888) and the Alcazar (1890). A few years later, in 1893, the city of St. Augustine suffered a severe fire that destroyed a large section of its central core. Regional romanticists joined with the business community to argue that the city should be rebuilt entirely along Spanish lines; the basis of their argument was that an enhancement of the Hispanic image would entice more winter visitors to the city.⁵

The real and mythical enhancement of exotic non-Anglo images developed almost as early in the American Southwest and in California. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, which traversed New Mexico, Arizona and Southern California, quickly took over first the Mission Revival image and later the Pueblo Revival and the Spanish Colonial Revival images. Architectural icons of the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads eventually joined the Santa Fe in this endeavor of regional salesmanship.

An off-shoot of this created regionalism, with decided implications for architectural controls and review, was the development of an interest in historic preservation. The pointedness of this connective link shows in the early establishment, in 1894, of the California Landmark Club, by

Charles Lummis (who was the first editor of *Land of Sunshine*, the promotional magazine of the Santa Fe Railroad) and Arthur B. Benton, the designer of Hispanic resort hotels such as the 1903 Mission Inn in Riverside and the 1910 Arlington Hotel in Santa Barbara.⁶ Their arguments for preserving the Mission churches and adobes of California was identical with those for creating Mission Revival railroad stations and hotels, namely that it would help to entice visitors to the state.

The close linking of historic preservation and architectural controls and reviews grew appreciably in the late 1920s and on into the 1930s. Charleston, South Carolina initiated its first ordinance in 1929 (a more complete ordinance was past in 1931), and New Orleans created its Vieux Carre Commission in 1936.⁷ The rationale for historic preservation eventually became, especially after 1945, one of the key arguments for the creation of historic districts. Their administrators reviewed all proposed demolitions, modifications and new developments. An intriguing development of historic preservation in recent years is that historic preservation commissions have, to a considerable degree, replaced planning commissions as the principal planning body in many communities, including New York City itself. Before turning our attention to incidents of official governmental design review, two added arguments for design controls that have been part of the scene in America for many years, should be noted. The first is aesthetic, i.e. the "obligation" of each community to cultivate the beautiful. The second has to do with the desire of citizens in a community to preserve, not only the historic flavor of the place, but equally, its scale and ambience. Such controls were entailed in several private developments in the nineteenth century including Llewellyn Park of 1852-53 (Llewellyn Haskell and Alexander Jackson Davis) and in Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's 1868 suburban development of Riverside, Illinois. With the rapid acceleration of ur-

banization and density of development experienced across much of the American landscape since 1945, the issue of scale and present character has often turned out to be the underlying reason (sometimes, stated, often not) for design review and controls.

The preeminent figure responsible for establishing the rational and eventually legal arguments for aesthetic controls was the planner Charles H. Cheney (1884-1943). Cheney, who was a close associate of Olmsted and Olmsted, was a founder of the American City Planning Association (1917). He wrote the architectural review legislation for several communities, including Santa Barbara, Palos Verdes and Rancho Santa Fe. Within every master plan drawn up for a community, he argued, there should be a section devoted to "architectural control of all buildings, signs and physical appearances. The general architecture, mass and appearance of all buildings, private as well as public, is essentially a matter of public concern."⁸ Cheney, with Newman F. Baker, Harold Beardslee Brainerd, Thomas W. Mackesey, and Rollin L. McNitt, established the court-tested abilities for communities to initiate design review legislation.⁹ The broad and general acceptance of the principle of community review can be seen in the comment of President Herbert Hoover in 1930, that "Beautiful buildings surrounded by ugliness partake of that ugliness and their beauty is impaired. So it is with all American cities where there is no architectural control."¹⁰

The communities of Nantucket, Santa Fe and Santa Barbara share several aspects that have allowed them to introduce design review and to sustain this process over many decades. All three of these communities are small urban environments and they are all somewhat removed from large urban centers. Each is situated within an impressive natural environment: Nantucket within its dunes, marshes and the ever present sense of the ocean; Santa Fe in its juniper and piñon covered hills