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## A magazine not (only) for architects

It was a matter of discontent that led to the birth of **Inform**, the new design magazine that premieres with this issue.

Two years ago, Virginia members of the American Institute of Architects decided to create a journal of their own. Until then, they had been served by an independent trade publication that carried industry news aimed at a narrow audience. Among architects there was an acute desire to produce something different — and better. They were equally frustrated by the lack of informed criticism and discussion of design in the region's press, and eventually asked, "Why keep waiting for someone else, when we can do it ourselves?" That step, in turn, germinated the concept for a new type of magazine. Members chose to eschew the professional journal in favor of a well-designed, general interest magazine covering the full spectrum of design interests. Publisher John Braymer, in promoting our new venture, can be overheard calling it "the Smithsonian magazine of design for our region." Certainly we are setting high standards for ourselves and encompassing a broad array of topics, so that analogy is not overreaching.

But, as we launch this project, a few words of explanation are fitting — and perhaps necessary — for in its early stages **Inform** may defy easy labeling. It is unlike any magazine ever attempted, a lively mix of articles on graphic design, consumer products, interiors, historic preservation, furniture design, landscape architecture and urban planning — all in addition to architecture. As the magazine matures, we anticipate increased coverage of the visual arts. And, while we believe it will be relevant and interesting to a wide range of trained design professionals, **Inform** is really created with the untrained reader in mind. We will rely primarily on the talents of professional writers to delight and enlighten our audience with coverage of people who make things happen, places that uplift our spirits, issues that touch our lives, books that offer new insights and much more.

It's unsettling to admit that, despite an increasing sensitivity to visual language in our culture, there are still few places in America where architecture and design are treated in print as much more than the latest fashion. That attitude overlooks the fact that designers are at work every day making critical decisions about reshaping our cities and suburbs, solving the housing crisis, preserving our historic resources, simplifying our household chores and making visual sense of the flood of information on the printed page. The work of these designers is important, engaging, sometimes harsh and often witty. Their work, and their ideas, are the stuff of this magazine.

That said, welcome to **Inform**. And spread the word.

*Vernon Mays*  
Editor

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Vernon Mays

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# inform

premiere issue  
volume one number one

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## Architecture in the Eighties

High-profile buildings, and high-profile designers, were characteristic of a decade in which arrogance and greed replaced modesty and service as virtues. *By Richard Guy Wilson*

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Despite 100 years of success, the nation's oldest state preservation group finds itself continuing to face new challenges and develop new areas of expertise. *By Deborah Marquardt*

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Everything from Chesapeake Bay dialects to mobile homes is explored in the recently published *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Not surprisingly, the book illuminates fascinating aspects of Virginia art and architecture.

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Who ever thought of running shoes as a designed object? Yet as American product design emerged from the doldrums of the '70s, a host of everyday products were completely revamped.

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On the cover: The Center for Innovative Technology.  
Photo by Karen Schneebaum.



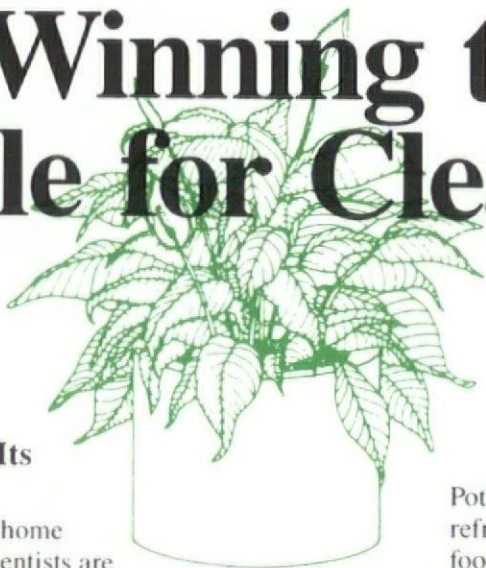


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# Indoor Plants. Winning the Battle for Clean Air



## The Indoor Plant Does Its Bit For Cleaner Air.

Those plants in your office or home are not only decorative but scientists are finding them to be surprisingly useful in absorbing potentially harmful gases and cleaning the air inside modern buildings.

Tightly sealed offices with their beautiful furnishings are proving to be hostile environments.

All sorts of dangers lurk inside — formaldehyde and benzene fumes released from building materials, furniture and carpeting; ozone from copying machines; fumes from cleaning solvents; and secondhand smoke.

## NASA Research Focuses on Living Plants.

We all may be breathing a lot easier thanks to promising National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) research on a most sophisticated pollution-absorbing device: the common office and house plant.

The Interior Plantscape Division of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America has joined with NASA in a

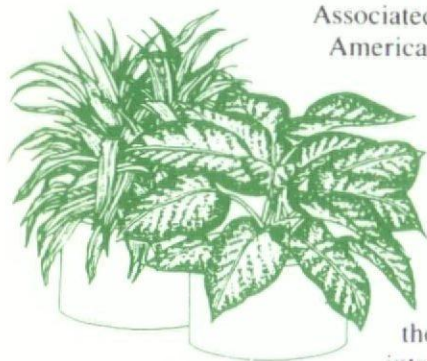
two-year program to study the effectiveness of popular office plants in cleaning indoor air.

NASA research on indoor plants has found that living plants are so efficient at absorbing contaminants in

the air that some will be launched into space as part of the biological

life support system aboard future orbiting space stations.

Dr. Bill Wolverton, a NASA research scientist, believes that NASA's findings about indoor plants have some down-to-earth applications for cleaning dirty indoor air.



He estimates that 15 to 20 Golden Pothos and Spider Plants can clean and refresh the air in the average 1,800-square-foot home.

## Indoor Plants For Better Breathing.

In the initial NASA studies over a dozen varieties of common interior plants were placed in sealed, plexiglass chambers. Formaldehyde, a toxic chemical with the greatest exposure on humans, was introduced. Within 24 hours, the plants — Philodendron, Spider Plant and Golden Pothos — removed 80% of the formaldehyde molecules from the chamber.

## NASA Research Identifies The Most Effective Pollution Fighters.

Recent findings reveal that flowering plants such as the Gerbera Daisy and Chrysanthemum are extremely potent in purifying interior air. Other good performers are Draceana massangeana, Spathiphyllum, and Golden Pothos.

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Bruce Muncy

Long-lost details were recaptured at the Executive Mansion.

## Facelift for the Manse

Not only did the recent exterior restoration of Virginia's Executive Mansion reintroduce forgotten architectural details and a surprising old shade of paint, but research conducted prior to construction yielded, as a bonus, new discoveries regarding the state's architectural past.

First occupied in 1813, the house originally was built in an austere Federal style. "It really was a Boston house plopped down in the middle of Richmond," says architectural historian Sarah Shields Driggs. Within months after initial completion, however, the addition of a front porch and several decorative elements were recommended. Those changes, finally realized in 1830, brought about the "finished" state that was the model for the 1989 restoration.

Among the major elements that had been removed from the house during the 19th century were the parapet at the eaves, a

balustrade above the porch and ornamental panels between the windows. Research led historians John Zehmer, of the Historic Richmond Foundation, Calder Loth, of the state Department of Historic Resources, and Driggs to Boston to study the papers and buildings of Alexander Parris, the mansion's original architect. Previously unexplored relationships between the mansion, the Wickham-Valentine House (Parris's other surviving Richmond building) and other structures in the area emerged when the Boston buildings were examined. Carpenters employed at several Richmond buildings, for example, were found to be Parris's cousins, establishing his influence on Virginia architecture long after his return to New England in 1812.

In looking for an alternative to the blue-gray paint that had covered the building in recent years, both a creamy yellow and dark red were considered. Sampling techniques indicated the mansion had been each color during the mid-1800s, and the choice prompted much debate, says architect Henry Browne, of the Charlottesville firm Browne, Eichman, Dalglish, Gilpin & Paxton. Yellow won, and with it a series of alterations that add up to what Browne calls the project's major accomplishment: "historical accuracy."

Vernon Mays

## BEST IN STATE

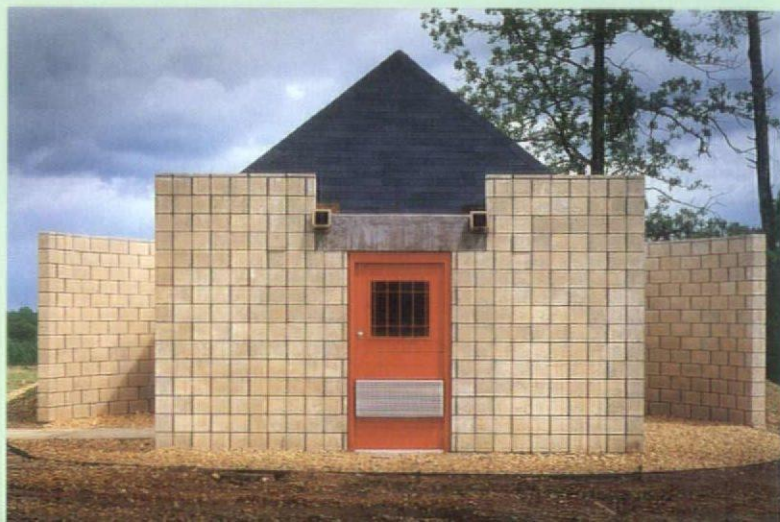
One tends to picture award winning buildings as prismatic office towers or clever, well-crafted houses. So the naming of both a bunker for disassembling live explosives and a water treatment plant as winners among Virginia's eight Awards for Excellence in Architecture came as a surprise to some. Yet the awards only prove what architects have always known: good buildings can result even when not designed to house grand institutions or glamorous functions. The ordnance stripping bunker, for example, expresses in simplest geometric terms the need at Quantico Marine Base for a protected room from which students can view an instructor disassemble live munitions. It was designed by the Alexandria firm James William Ritter Architect.

The attention to materials and color at the Opequon Water Reclamation Facility make it stand out from all other complexes of its type. The architects, Camp Dresser & McKee of Annandale, were praised for their carefully organized treatment of what is often viewed as a mundane exercise.

Other winning projects:

- the Wendell Pool House by VMDO Architects of Charlottesville;
- the Shields Tavern restoration

The bunker at Quantico: architecture where least expected.



Steven W. Small



in Colonial Williamsburg by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Wiley & Wilson Engineers and Architects;

- the Peninsula Montessori School in Newport News by Rancorn Wildman Krause Brezinski Architects of Tabb;
- the new entrance and galleries for the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News by Carlton Abbott and Partners of Williamsburg;
- the Massanutten Lodge restoration in Shenandoah National Park by Browne, Eichman, Dalglish, Gilpin & Paxton of Charlottesville; and
- the Hazzard Mill House in Front Royal by Karl E. Kohler Associates Architects of Vienna.

The awards, presented by the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects, were selected from 97 entries by a jury consisting of Boston architect Jean Paul Carlhian, New York architect Billie Tsien and Robert Campbell, architecture critic for *The Boston Globe*. Awards were announced at Building Virginia 89, the society's annual conference.

## Peace Victorious

Perhaps the *least* interesting thing about the National Peace Garden Design Competition is the winning design. Chosen in September from 900-plus entries, the handsome winner, as proposed by architect Eduardo Catalano of Cambridge, Mass., depicts the pattern of an olive branch, an intricate ornamental garden planted in a variety of low ground covers and surrounded by an elevated walkway. Upon seeing the winning drawing one competitor was heard to say, "I'm glad that the competition wasn't for a *national* garden. If so,

we'd be looking at a huge American flag, planted with red, white and blue petunias."

There was, indeed, a fair amount of grousing as observers, most of them obviously competitors, filed through Building 158 at Washington Navy Yard Annex, where for two days all the entries for the proposed garden along the Potomac River were displayed.

Two area teams received honorable mentions. Architect Peter Blake with designers George Martin and Jack Masey proposed a triangular ziggurat with one side elongated in a gradual slope planted with trees. Landscape architects Joseph E. Brown and Dennis Carmichael proposed a symbolic walk through a "meadow of diversity" to a "fountain of unity." More than 30 of the submissions featured the most popular peace icon, the dove; a dozen featured the peace symbol popularized in the '60s. But many entries were unexpected. Included were "The Egg," a large white marble shape emerging from the ground, and the giant "Bullseye," declaring: "We are all targets."

Catalano, the winner, noted that he used only the elements of nature in his scheme, whereas most of the other designs "imposed" themselves on the site. Now, he's off to raise money to get the project off (or should we say on?) the ground.

*Susan Tamulevich*

**Background image: Parterre for Washington, D.C., peace garden.**



## VANGUARD GRAY

For decades, Eileen Gray's designs were little studied and often ignored, easily passed off as the work of a follower, not a pioneer. But a 1987 biography

of the British-born furniture designer and architect thrust her to the forefront of academic study, and her designs have enjoyed new popularity. A permanent collection of Gray's designs at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond make it possible to confront her decorative objects firsthand.

Efforts to pigeonhole Gray's work have labeled it French Deco, De Stijl or simply Modern. Interestingly, she seems to have been influenced by all these aesthetic currents — and none of them. Gray's significance in design circles comes in part from her highly individual design sensibility towards materials and form, which rendered her work ahead of its time, says Frederick Brandt, curator of 20th century art at the museum.

The museum's five pieces by Gray effectively trace her progression from designs for hand-made, one-of-a-kind objects to an aesthetic better achieved through factory methods. Her breakthrough work during this period brought attention from avant-garde Dutch designers during the '20s, culminating in the briskly elegant tubular steel "E-1027" table, perhaps her best design. But others are notable, particularly the Pirogue Sofa, with its painstakingly applied lacquer and silver leaf finishes.

The unorthodox lamp in the collection was part of a room Gray designed for a decorators' show in 1922. Unlike anything seen before, the lamp had a rocketlike base of lacquered wood (complete with fins) and a shade of decorated parchment. Gray was roundly criticized for it. But the designer already had broken through the walls of others' expectations, and the results are now acknowledged for their important influence on modern product design.

*Sandra E. Wilson Parks*



**Gray's 1923 lamp shocked the Paris critics.**



## Architecture in the Eighties

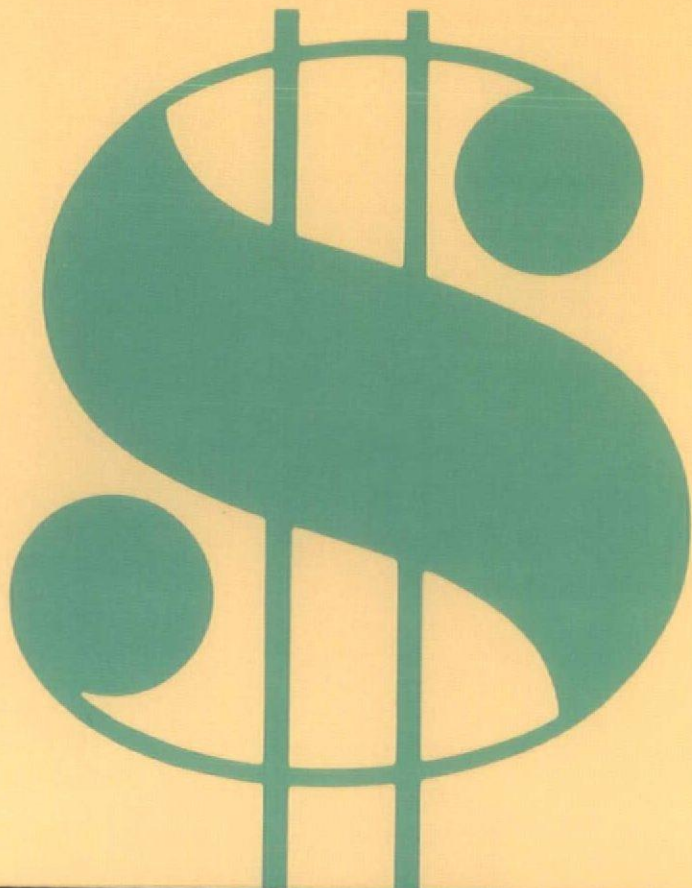
# SHOWBIZ



# Glamour



8



Already historians and political commentators have labeled the 1980s "The Reagan Imperium," and for those interested in the arts or architecture a question arises as to the possible implications of this label. Political epithets applied to architecture are not unknown — the terms "Georgian" and "Victorian" were originally political, and in this country "WPA Moderne" and "General Grant" are accepted stylistic terms. The Grant label implied a connection between the nation's most corrupt (until recently?) Presidential Administration and the bloated, mansard-roofed behemoths that symbolized post-Civil War bureaucracy, political machines and graft. We have not yet identified either a "Camelot" style or a "Tricky Dick" idiom, though perhaps unwittingly the Kennedy Center and the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., serve as landmarks for the respective Administrations.

The Reagan Reign in architecture in the 1980s has meant a flashy, showbiz, surface-deep fascination with glamour along with an open worship of \$\$\$ and conspicuous consumption. Today in America arrogance and greed are not sins — they have replaced modesty and service as virtues. American architecture in this decade adopted the slogan "more is more" in an incredible display of overscaled ornament, Palladian windows, oddly placed temples, contorted pediments and Roman *thermae* windows. Glitz and shine are everywhere; no fewer than 20 types of marble compete with a sweeping assortment of gold-plated, chrome and brass fixtures.

Certainly not all of this has been bad. A return of some sensuousness to architecture, compared with the roughness of hammer-bashed concrete, is to be welcomed. But there is an overly-plump quality to much of American architecture — too many flocked finials and anodized pediments that need Dr. Mies's 10-day guide to slim thighs.

Historic preservation continued in the 1980s, although in trying to meet the "real world" of real estate and developers, it found itself like the virgin in the back seat of a car: an innocent flirtation leads to deeper problems. Architects who earlier had viewed preservation with suspicion now found it a money-maker and embraced it. The Tax Act allowing accelerated depreciation for reusing older buildings was touted as a savior, but it may have turned out to be as big a destroyer as was urban renewal in the '50s and '60s. Many older properties were instantly inflated in price as a result of the write-off provisions. Carelessly "rehabbed," they lost their original purposes to become boutiques and chocolate cookie counters. What will they be like in 30 years? Who will save Richmond's Shockoe Slip the next time around? In other words, the historic preservation movement, by looking for the quick fix to fly with the developers, lost the long-term perspective. Where preservation was adopted, it scarcely made a dent in the grittier issues of the built environment. Increasingly, the city and, indeed, the entire environment are privatized: the shopping center is taking over all social functions.



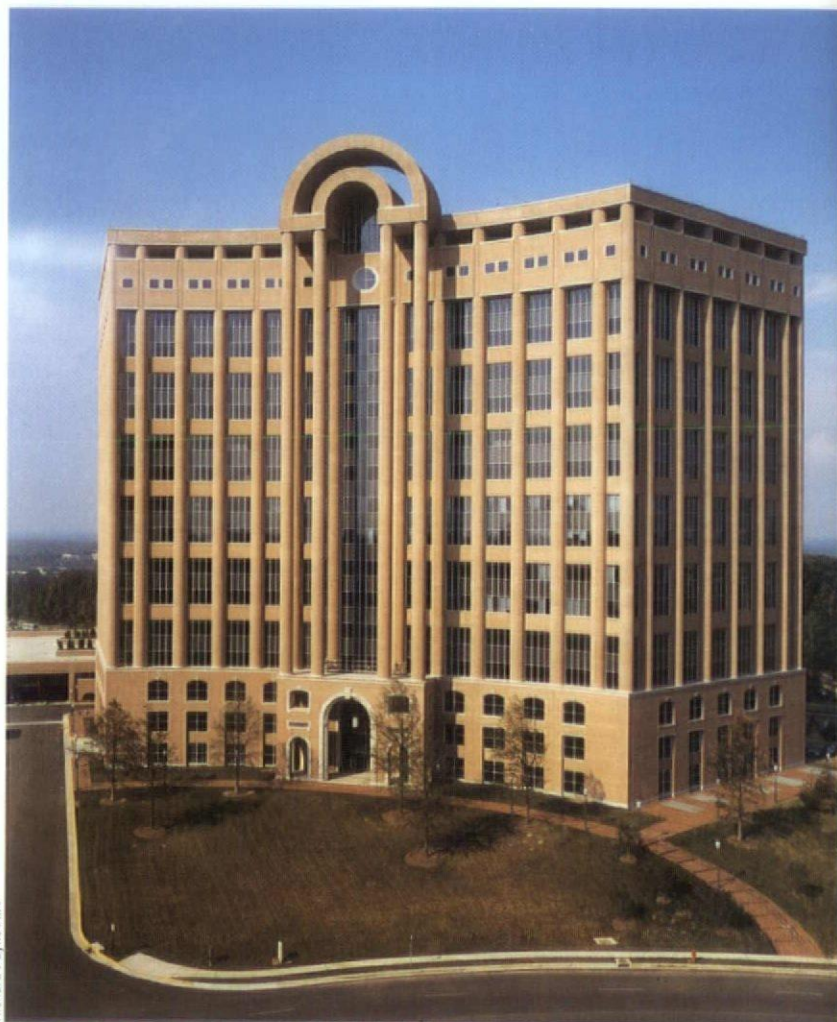
The hero to Reaganomics architecture is not the architect, but the developer. Donald Trump, who flaunts an infantile passion for tasteless glamour, is king. That Trump is the best known businessman in America and is well-served by architects indicates a serious loss of moral purpose. The sad fact of the developer tale is that architects have repeatedly proven Philip Johnson's adage: "I am a whore." Virginia, in particular, has been ravaged by developers. The outskirts of our cities are lined with abysmally planned shopping centers, horrible corporate headquarters and idiotic "spec" buildings. Tyson's Corner must rank as the most hideously planned development in the country, and the contribution of architects to its development is a scandal. Can even Philip Johnson, architect of Tycon Towers there, really think his high-rise has any redeeming qualities?

The mess we are creating outside our cities, and increasingly in our rural areas, is a pressing issue that architects and other professionals seem to ignore. A recent series of articles by Tony Hiss in *The New Yorker* highlights the value of the countryside and suggests that design strategies be developed before we are all subsumed in three-acre plots and McDonalds restaurants.

Showbiz made a great and pernicious impact upon architecture in this decade. Instead of being known for good work, just being known became the goal of some figures in the architecture and art worlds. Andy Warhol, a relic of 1960s Pop Art, became the archetypal '80s artist — empty of meaning, but known. Architects became celebrities; being published in glitzy magazines or gossip sheets was the highest accolade. On a more positive note, in the 1980s architecture moved into the public eye via TV programs, specialized bookstores, and exhibits of architectural drawings, artifacts, photographs and furniture. Two public television series by Robert A.M. Stern and Spiro Kostof illustrated the neurasthenia of architectural culture in the 1980s. They were trite and boring. Museums, as well, actively collected and tried to interpret architecture to an ever more sheeplike public. With all this attention came a possible problem: Is architecture just one more disposable commodity?

The style of the 1980s was pomo, or Post-Modernism, which began years earlier as a critical inquiry concerning history and modernism. This is a well-known path: ideas ferment and become movements, which lose their intellectual substance when taken up by lesser hands as mere styles. Now this is not to say that everything has been awful. Some real masterpieces have been created — Michael Graves' San Juan Capistrano Library is one — and there have been some real quality designs, such as Robert A.M. Stern's Observatory Hill Dining Hall at the University of Virginia and Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer's Best Products Headquarters in Richmond. At a much lesser level, shopping centers may not be any better, but at least they have entrances.

*American architecture in this decade  
adopted the slogan "more is more" in  
an incredible display of overscaled  
ornament, Palladian windows,  
and oddly placed temples.*



Richard Payne AIA

Tycon Towers (above) in Tyson's Corner: Any redeeming qualities?



*The style of the 1980s is pomo, which began years earlier as a critical inquiry concerning history and modernism.*



The other significant development has been the reappearance and the serious discussion of strait-laced revivalism, "neotrad" (neotraditionalism), or perhaps better termed "retread." The political connections are obvious: The new intellectual respectability of both conservatism and the neoconservatives, or those old-line liberals who found new virtue in far-right polemics, have their equivalents in the former architectural Modernists who converted to neotrad. Of course revivalism, especially in the form of the Colonial, never really disappeared; it survived quite well in the hands of the contractor and (what we euphemistically call) provincial architects. But now in the 1980s traditionalism in architecture has a respectability not present since the 1920s. In this reappraisal of history I might point not immodestly to the role of historians in reevaluating the past.

Now I do not mean to accuse all of the neotraditionalists of conservative politics, since in many cases their responses were derived from context, and appropriately so. By this I mean Hartman-Cox's addition to the Commerce School at the University of Virginia, where the Neo-Georgian tradition is effortlessly continued. Also to be cited is the marvelous work



Timothy Hursley



Whitney Cox

of Marcellus Wright, Cox and Smith at the University of Richmond, which picks up on Ralph Adams Cram's earlier style. Finally, to note the recently reopened Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, also by Hartman-Cox, where a sow's ear of a complex — a few years ago the most inhospitable museum imaginable — has been transformed by intelligently looking at the original 1920s building. It ranks with the very best work done anywhere in the country.

Certainly an aspect of both neotrad and pomo has been the revived interest in classicism, which has ranged from straightforward revivals to more abstract trusses and cylinders. Art Deco has found appeal as a classically-based Modernism. Classicism as the true academic system, in that it has a heritage of written texts, found a haven in the schools; and there has appeared a new classicist personality, similar to Jerry Falwell in its proclivity for strict interpretation with about the same depth. The hope of some classicists for a

**Not everything has been awful. The exceptions: Observatory Hill Dining Hall, University of Virginia (top), and E. Claiborne Robins School of Business, University of Richmond (bottom).**



development similar to that of the Beaux-Arts or the American Renaissance at the turn of the century is already doomed. The problem of the Post-Modern mind, which includes all of us, is that we know too much — we realize there are alternatives and the clock cannot be turned back to a rosy time that never existed.

Already a new wind is blowing, and while historians are not astrologers, it does not take much prescience to sense that molded stone dentils are but one answer. The problems are too diverse to allow for a single solution. As in politics, polemics are a subterfuge for facing issues. Have the '80s been an interlude? A time of avoiding reality? Is architecture simply window dressing? Or does it speak to deeper — cultural and social — concerns? Yes, we have had our fads; decon (deconstructivism) arrived and seemed to have left within four months, leaving behind a trail of "exploded" or "caved in" buildings.

In spite of the pretentious philosophy of decon, with the outrageous suggestion that we need more alienating buildings, a few architects are investigating new forms. We are living in a



Norman McGrath

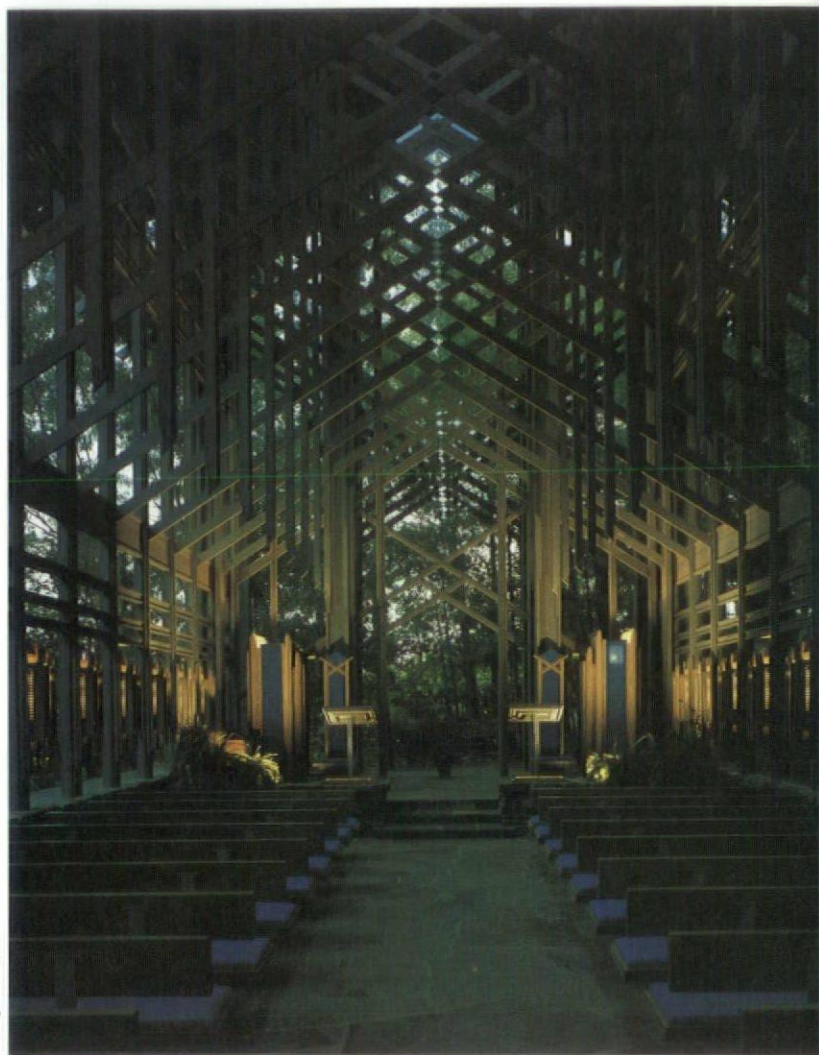
modern world, and many options are possible. The fast-approaching millennium will bring a retrospective sensitivity and a quest for a new approach. Recently I have heard several architects openly say, "I am a Modernist, not a ...," words that were unthinkable two years ago. The buildings of the 1980s that will be remembered will be some of those noted above and others that escape immediate concerns and assume an air of timelessness, such as Fay Jones's little chapels down in the woods of Arkansas. For the '90s, and for a kinder and gentler architecture instead of the unabashed self-promotion of the Reagan Reign, an admirable goal will be keeping up with the (Fay) Joneses.

*Richard Guy Wilson, a professor of architecture at the University of Virginia, is a noted critic and author. Substantial portions of his essay appeared originally in the May 1989 issue of Architecture magazine.*

*The buildings of the 1980s that*

*will be remembered will be those that escape immediate*

*concerns and assume an air of timelessness.*



R. Greg Hursley



**The interior of the Best Products Headquarters in Richmond (above left) offered bold combinations of materials. Thorncrown Chapel in Arkansas (above right) achieves an unpretentious charm.**



Randolph McAusland

## Making a Name For the Arts

By Robert L. Miller

It's doubtful you have seen Randolph McAusland yet in national magazines like *HG* or *Architectural Digest*. And *Who's Who in American Art* seems to have overlooked him, too. But now that he's director of the Design Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, those omissions should soon be righted. For McAusland, arguably the leading spokesman for the role of design in America, has only begun to raise his own low profile.

This is quite in character with the person who wrote that "the design and fabrication of celebrity is one of the dubious achievements of the late 20th century." And it surprises only when one learns that his career has followed the track of media insider — first, after graduating Princeton, as a staffer for *The Wall Street Journal* and then on the business side of design magazines. In 1982, the struggling *Industrial Design* magazine tabbed him as publisher. Within five years, the renamed *ID/The Magazine of International Design* had more than doubled its circulation, tripled its revenues and revealed the managerial McAusland as a fearless, articulate advocate.

"Randy is really two people," says *Interior Design* editor Stanley Abercrombie, a long-time friend and fan. "Outwardly he's a soft-spoken, self-effacing gentleman. Inside, there's a ferocious tiger of activity and accomplishment."

McAusland's first six months at NEA seem to have left that duality unaltered. On this particular day, he is leading a panel of artists, designers and architects in a tense discussion of Sen. Jesse Helms' proposed sweeping ban on NEA funding of material that is "obscene or indecent" or derogatory of "the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion." Taking a break, McAusland remains casual and composed, his countenance of indeterminate middle age both genuinely warm and gently unrevealing. Then, in response to a query about a recent lecture by him titled "Is America Design Illiterate?" the tiger stirs.

Regaining America's lost leadership in product design depends on planting direct, grassroots knowledge of design in all segments of society, he asserts. "I want to distinguish between design education and design advocacy." Simply urging good design on industry has often led to superficial borrowing of European models that makes American design look better than it really is, he says.

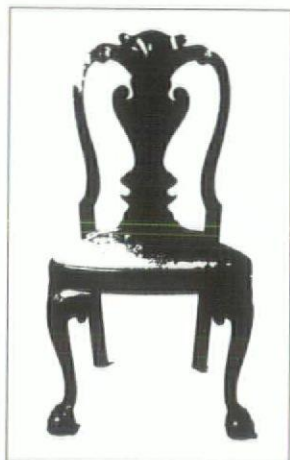
"Navajo objects, Shaker furniture . . . that's still most of what we can call our own living design tradition. For design to really put down roots in American society, we need education on all levels, from the schools — K through 12 — to corporate executives and public officials. And we must start by teaching the teachers."

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Begun at the University of Virginia in 1986 under McAusland's predecessor Adele Chatfield-Taylor, the Mayors' Institute for City Design is a teacher-teaching success story, one that McAusland is now expanding aggressively. On campus, eight mayors meet with eight designers for a relaxed, essentially off-the-record discussion. Each mayor presents a hometown-design case study while peers and professionals praise, question and kibbitz. "It's so successful that we've franchised it," says McAusland. Regional editions in Minneapolis, New Orleans and San Francisco are early spinoffs. The "national edition," however, remains in Charlottesville.

Not all mayors become born-again design advocates, McAusland concedes. "But they see they're not alone... they identify with stories in similar cities. It gives them the courage to say 'time out' to developers. Elected officials are under tremendous pressure to make the public realm hospitable to development. Here, they subtly pressure each other toward humanizing design."

Humanizing is something of a specialty for McAusland. Alongside his dynamic persona — his eleventh-hour fund-raising and dash to France to save the core of the Raymond Loewy archives for the Library of Congress is but one example — there's the warm side of scholarly inquisitiveness, good manners and wit. NEA's crusader for federal, civic and corporate design excellence is also the author of a history of the American supermarket, and the unapologetic founder of a failed humor magazine, *The New Satirist*.

Industrial designer Marc Harrison recalls McAusland's having devised the rules for a competition in which the win-

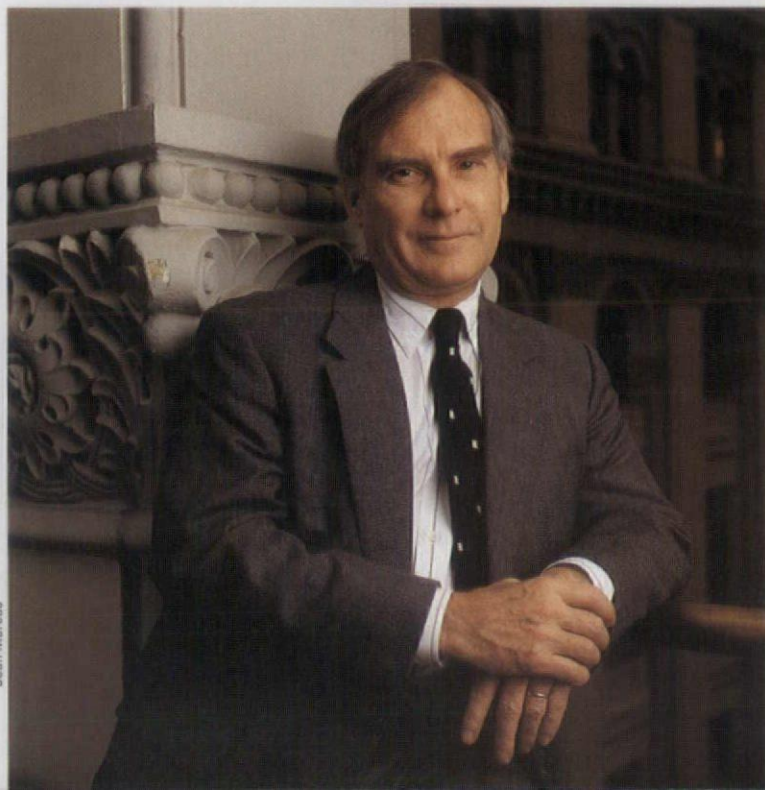
ning product designs did not, for a change, automatically become the sponsoring company's property, but were negotiated for and purchased accordingly. "Decent and civilized," Harrison observes. But, as McAusland prepares to rejoin the panel, one wonders aloud if civility can cope with the problem of public funding for controversial art, an issue that could possibly affect graphic design (AIDS and anti-drug posters, for example) and public art supported by the Design Arts program.

"We live in a culture that's both ethnically diverse and open to alternative lifestyles," he responds. "The best remedy in this context is a sense of tolerance. That works two ways; it's important for certain artists to tolerate religious groups, no less than for those groups to accommodate people unlike themselves. Intolerance is the sign of an immature society. I hope for the maturation of our culture."

In McAusland's balance of respect for the artist and respect for society, of advocacy and self-effacing finesse, of love for both popular and high American culture, a still-evolving federal arts program may have found its best agent yet for meshing design quality with public policy. His farewell editorial in *ID* quotes Jeffrey Meikle on the uneasy coexistence of two visions of American design. "One self-consciously elitist vision stresses the moral and spiritual obligation of the designer," writes McAusland, "the other, more democratic in tone, concentrates on providing the public with what it seems to want at the moment. We really cannot have one without the other."

*Robert L. Miller, an architect, is head of Robert L. Miller Associates, a professional services public relations firm in Washington, D.C., and New York.*

McAusland in the atrium at NEA headquarters: "a ferocious tiger of activity and accomplishment."



Joan Marcus

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## CARRYING THE TORCH AT APVA: IS LOVE ENOUGH?

**Despite 100 years of success stories, the nation's oldest state preservation group finds itself pressed to keep up with new ideas and methods.**

By Deborah Marquardt

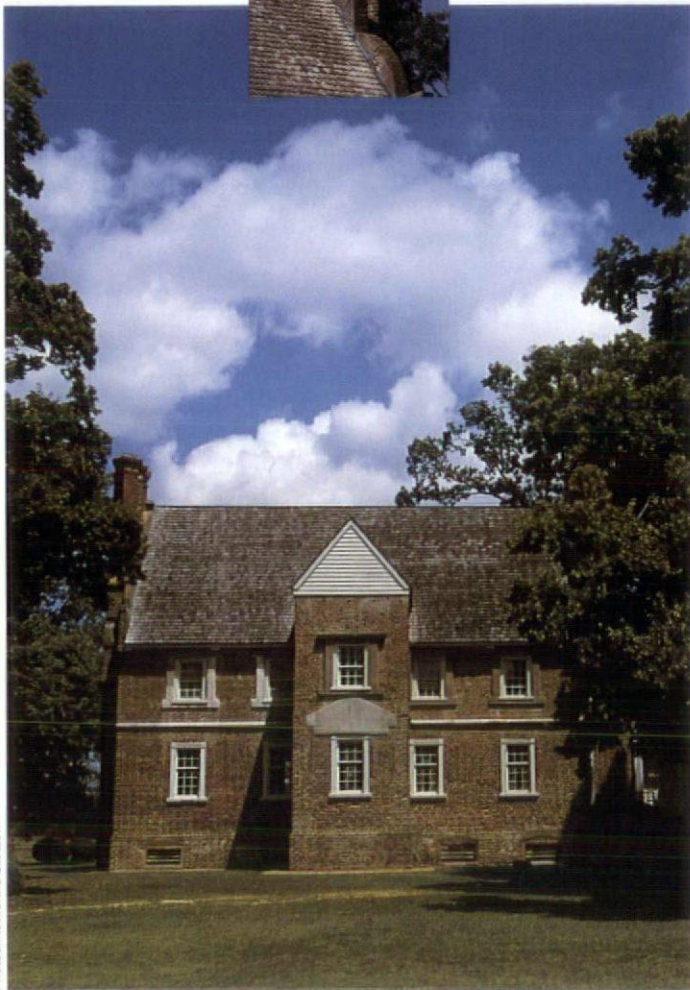
On an overcast mid-October Saturday, the parking lot at Bacon's Castle in rural Surry County is punctuated with license plates from Kansas, North Carolina, Virginia. The curious have come to see this oldest documented brick house in English North America, a house occupied by the rebel forces of Nathaniel Bacon during Bacon's Rebellion of 1676. They listen intently as the guides describe the Flemish gables, offset triple chimney stacks and cruciform floor plan — architectural features that have become obsolete.

Outside, a tiny boy is more interested in the woolly caterpillar that has taken residence on a carrot tuft in a garden that's been planted anew in 17th-century remains. Discovered during archaeological investigation, it has been called "the largest, earliest, best-preserved, most sophisticated garden that has come to light in North America."

Bacon's Castle, rescued by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities in 1973, is considered among the organization's most important works in a portfolio that includes credits such as Jamestown, the Williamsburg Powder Magazine, the John Marshall House in Richmond, the Mary Washington House and Rising Sun Tavern in Fredericksburg, Smithfield Plantation in Blacksburg and others. Chartered on February 13, 1889, by a group of determined women, the organization has 22 branches across the state, as well as one in Nashville and Washington, D.C. It has more than 4,000 members and oversees 35 properties, 22 of which are museums. Through the years, it has owned, leased or maintained more than 60 historic sites.

Yet Bacon's Castle seems the perfect metaphor for the preservation organization. The foundation is old but sound. The decision to interpret the evolution of the house, rather than destroy more modern additions for the sake of returning it to a 17th century identity, signals the new era of professionalism. And the staircase, which currently is undergoing renovation and hangs suspended in mid-air, symbolizes the future unknown.

A century has passed, and with it an age of innocence. As APVA celebrates its 100th birthday and enters its second cen-



Photos: Katherine Stetson



Bacon's Castle (above), built in 1665, is perhaps the APVA's most valuable resource. With later additions, it documents 300 years of architectural history. The original house boasts Flemish gables and offset triple chimneys (inset) that were signs of refined taste during their day.



tury of existence, new challenges abound. Historic preservation has become technically sophisticated, requiring the expertise of trained professionals rather than volunteers. Air pollutants and acid rain — issues that would have startled the founders — endanger landmarks. There's a whole new generation of buildings — 19th century rural homes and mercantile buildings — that face extinction. And preservation's donated dollar is shrinking.

"The APVA is not very well prepared for all the things it will have to do even between now and the end of the century. They've always just been keeping up," warns Robert W. Stewart, a Richmond architect and member of the organization's William Byrd Branch.

Hugh Miller, who heads Virginia's Department of Historic Resources, agrees. "I think they are managing their properties in a responsible way, but it's in fits and starts. It is time to develop management and preservation plans. It's the longer term that's the challenge, the future."



APVA

It was a Virginia torn by the ravages of the Civil War and Reconstruction that gave birth to the APVA. Beverly Tucker Coleman, determined to save the Colonial capital of Williamsburg, and Mary Jeffery Galt, concerned that all Virginia's landmarks were disappearing, joined forces to organize the nation's first preservation group. It was an outlet for women, a socially acceptable activity, since they had few opportunities outside the home. Still they had to depend upon men to speak publicly on their behalf.

Historian James M. Lindgren, a professor at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh and author of a study on "The Gospel of Preservation in Virginia and New England," says landmarks weren't the ladies' only mission. "They were equally as concerned with preserving a culture," he wrote in *Virginia Cavalcade*. In a second article for *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Lindgren reported, "...the APVA memorialized sites that represent traditions

threatened by change, traditions that included governance by a responsible elite, deference on the part of a disciplined citizenry and reverence for the customary ordering of society."

In its early days, the APVA also considered its mission to be the correction of the historical record. Lindgren notes the members were particularly galled by New Englanders' claim that Plymouth, not Jamestown, was the "fountainhead of American liberty and identity."

Among the society's first missions was to rescue Jamestown — "the shrine of patriotism" — from decay and erosion. The organization was granted title to the Commonwealth's holdings in 1892, and owners of the rest of the land donated the church ruin and 22.5 acres to the APVA a year later. A retaining wall stopped consumption of the property by the James River. Today the site, operated by the APVA in cooperation with the National Park Service, attracts nearly 500,000 people annually.



APVA

Its first actual preservation effort occurred in Williamsburg, researching and repairing the Powder Magazine, purchasing the structure for \$400 and opening it as a relic house in the 1890s. The organization also obtained the colonial jail and the remains of the ice house of the Governor's Palace, and backed restoration of Bruton Parish Church and its graveyard. Dr. W.A.R. Goodwin, a member of APVA's Colonial Capital Branch, eventually spearheaded Williamsburg's restoration with funding provided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the organization relinquished its responsibilities to Colonial Williamsburg.

In Fredericksburg, the Mary Washington Branch was busy trying to rescue the home of George Washington's mother, Mary Ball Washington, from those who wanted to dismantle and move it for exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

The ruins at Jamestown (above left) were the rallying point for the fledgling APVA, which feared for the total demise of colonial monuments. The organization thrived as an acceptable outlet for women, some of whom gathered (above right) at Smith's Fort Plantation in 1938.



Later, the same group preserved and restored the Rising Sun Tavern, a former stagecoach stop built about 1760.

The organization grew, somewhat like a gangling teen. Branches sprung up across Virginia, staving off one preservation crisis or another, from Patrick Henry's home, Scotchtown, in Hanover County to the Cape Henry Lighthouse in Virginia Beach. From a 20th century perspective, some of the early efforts seem "hysterically amusing at times," says Richard T. Couture, associate professor of history at Longwood College and author of the book, *To Preserve and Protect*, commissioned by the APVA in 1982. "They were in love with Pocahontas," he notes, and sometimes slightly gullible.

Some of their decisions seem preposterous — for instance, the rule to forbid any "negro excursions or picnic parties" at Jamestown and a refusal to place a monument on the island commemorating the first black immigrants known to have arrived on a Dutch ship. The group raised money by hosting elaborate pageants, the last of which was the "Presentation of Pocahontas at the Court of James I of England." Guests, who were "a large and enthusiastic assembly of Richmond Society," were "resplendent in the dress of the period," says the association president's report of 1923.

Preservation in those days was often dictated by taste, not science. R. Angus Murdoch, APVA's professional executive director from 1970 to 1985, recalls an amusing anecdote at the John Marshall House. The organization assumed the Richmond landmark in 1911 under a lease arrangement with the city. When Murdoch began analysis of the home's original color scheme, he found layer upon layer of paint. "It seemed it had been repainted every two years. We figured every three years there was a change in the furniture committee chairman." Murdoch, currently director of the Lifesaving Museum of Virginia in Virginia Beach, says he doesn't think the house has been painted again since 1975.

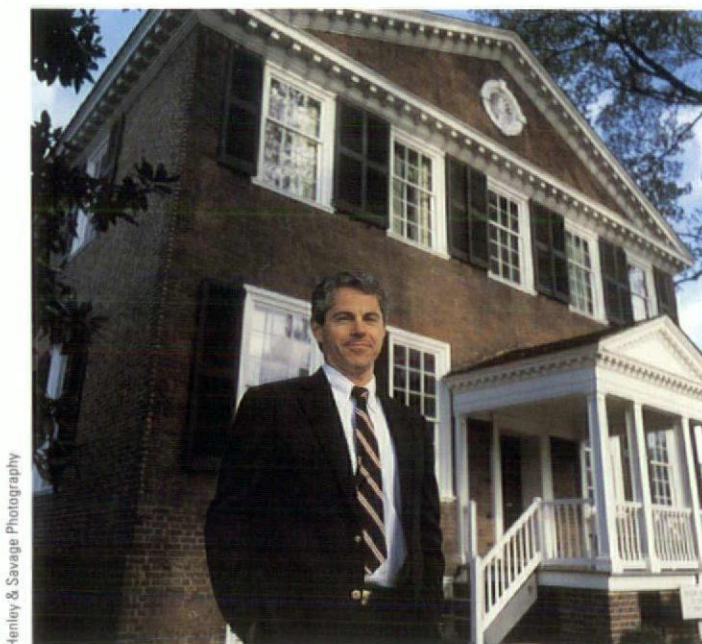
Mary Douthat Higgins comes from a three-generation APVA family and remembers riding the bus to her Sunday afternoon hostessing duties at the John Marshall House during the gas-rationing days of World War II. She recalls, "In the '60s, we had 16 different committees, mainly ladies, and we had no real knowledge of how to go about refurnishing a project. I hate to admit it, but it was like we were playing house."

Still, allows Couture, "They were the premier organization of their time, and they don't get the credit. They did it the hard way. They didn't have a Mount Vernon or a Monticello, but they have preserved a fine collection of houses. There seems to be a sneering attitude among young preservationists

toward these ladies, and that's unfortunate." Lindgren agrees. "I studied the first half-century [of APVA]. You can't divorce their work from the attitudes sweeping the state at the time, those being anti-radicalism, conservatism and traditionalism."

At the same time, APVA proved remarkably forward-thinking in some areas. Galt, for instance, resisted efforts to beautify Jamestown, wishing to avoid "all artificial appearance." An artist herself, Galt looked to that training and Italian restoration techniques to suggest they alter as little as possible. She also fought other APVA members who wanted to sell bricks from a Jamestown kiln as souvenirs.

Richmond's William Byrd Branch was one of the first preservation organizations to suggest adaptive reuse as an effective means to save more buildings. Disturbed by urbanization's threat to whole neighborhoods, the pioneering Mary Wingfield Scott was moved to action in 1935 by the planned destruction of the Adam Craig House, the 1790 home of the heroine in Edgar Allan Poe's poem, "To Helen."



Henley & Savage Photography



After the branch purchased and stabilized the house, it was leased to a variety of community organizations and once housed an art center. Such adaptive reuse projects, according to a 1938-40 APVA report, could "extend indefinitely the work of the APVA better than if we ourselves attempted to acquire and maintain a large number of museums and shrines." The branch also spearheaded the use of revolving funds to purchase more properties, restore them, and sell them with restrictive covenants to protect their historic characteristics. More recently, dendrochronology, a process of analyzing tree rings to date timber used in historic homes, was developed under the aegis of the APVA during its investigation of Bacon's Castle.

"We have had our problems in adjusting to changes, yet at the same time, we knew changes had to come," says Higgins. She

Acting executive director Bruce MacDougal (above), with the 1790 John Marshall House behind him, embodies the new attitude toward professional stewardship at the APVA.



remembers going to seminars, where “we began learning.” The organization started developing master plans for house museums and introduced archaeology to its range of activities.

About 1968, membership decided it needed the guidance of a professional staff, hiring its first executive director. It was a big step, and one not all the volunteers embraced. Yet the group as a whole has been quick to adopt many staff recommendations. “I’ve found an incredible amount of dedication to professionalism, although we have so few professionals,” says acting executive director Bruce MacDougal. He credits the organization for the work it did without guidance. “The decisions weren’t so bad. They were well-made even when they were amateur,” he says. “Jamestown could have become a Disneyland.”

Outside criticism of the APVA has focused on its organization, the disparate web of local branches. They have been, simultaneously, a boon and a bane. William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1910, said the decentralized nature of the APVA “frittered away its energies.”

Branches often developed argumentative factions. Even its founders, Galt and Coleman, clashed in the early years, with Coleman cutting Galt out of decision-making. The Byrd Branch organized itself under the noses of the old guard, because it differed on matters of preservation philosophy. Even today, statewide President Shirley Van Landingham complains she sometimes has to referee disagreements in the Hanover Branch over the running of Scotchtown.

“The branches keep us honest,” MacDougal concedes. “Any organization made up of individuals is just like any family. There will be disputes. Our relationship with the branches relies on a lot of faith and trust. It’s a complex system, and with that comes give and take.” When some branches complain they don’t get adequate support from the professional staff in Richmond, he reiterates, “It’s like family. Some personalities need more attention.”

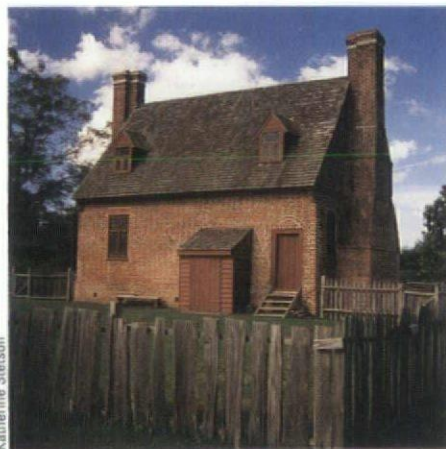
To its credit, the branch system has allowed the organization to learn about available properties. Their members assist with house museum tours, operate gift shops and carry out other critical tasks. Branches with no properties fulfill other roles. The Yorktown branch, for instance, restores court records. All told, it is unlikely the branch structure will yield to a more centralized organization. Says Van Landingham, “The branches are us. There is no way we could manage all these properties without branches and the tremendous number of volunteers.”

Still, changes must come. Just as difficult as the first 100 years will be the next, the challenges no less awesome for



Katherine Wetzel

Artifacts gathered through archaeological research include a colonial-era wine bottle uncovered at Jamestown.



Katherine Stetson



Henley & Savage Photography

*Just as difficult as the  
first 100 years will be the  
next, the challenges no less  
awesome.*

“What we do for Virginia, the state of North Carolina does for North Carolina,” says President Shirley Van Landingham, standing (above right) in the Farmer’s Bank in Petersburg. The group rescued Lynnhaven House (above left), built in the manner of 17th century English farmhouses.



Van Landingham than for Galt or Coleman. Some of the challenges are financial. The APVA's annual headquarters budget of \$650,000 is raised through gifts and grants, admissions, rents and endowments. It covers a professional staff of five, the restoration shop, a horticulturist and expenses at several properties. Property-related income accounts for 49 percent of the budget, endowment and investment 21 percent, and contributor support (including a recent state appropriation of \$100,000) the rest. Local branches contribute to the upkeep of other properties, some of which are endowed. "What we do for Virginia, the state of North Carolina does for North Carolina," says Van Landingham.

Meanwhile, Van Landingham and MacDougal, a trained architectural historian, realize the need for more professionals. A new administrator with a business background is being sought now, and MacDougal will become director of properties when one is found. "It's too much for one person with a background in architecture and history," says Van Landingham. "We need a financial development officer, a public relations person and more maintenance employees at museum properties." Gail Braxton, director of the Mary Washington Branch, and curator of collections Nancy Packer cite the need to bring all the collections up to museum standards.

Outsiders like Murdoch and architect Willard Gwilliam say the organization also needs to bring its focus forward. "We're losing a lot of 19th century rural landscape and architecture. There's a lot that needs to be addressed," says Gwilliam, of Colonial Williamsburg. Hugh Miller, whose state agency has enjoyed a good relationship with the APVA since the '60s, says the organization badly needs to develop management strategies for both preservation and operations, and long-range planning for protection of their properties.

Those themes were echoed in a speech delivered to the APVA by Daniel P. Jordan, executive director of the Thomas

Jefferson Memorial Foundation, which oversees Monticello. Jordan admonished the group to be more inclusive of black Virginians in both its holdings, commitments and membership, that it become a leader in heritage education, and that it be even more committed to rigorous scholarship. "How many sites have a historic structures report, perhaps the basic document required for serious preservation and restoration? How many sites have measured drawings either done by hand, in collaboration with a team from the Historic American Buildings Survey, or by photogrammetric techniques? How many of the sites have a furnishing plan or a collections management policy or accessible archives or a records control system or an accurate guidebook?"

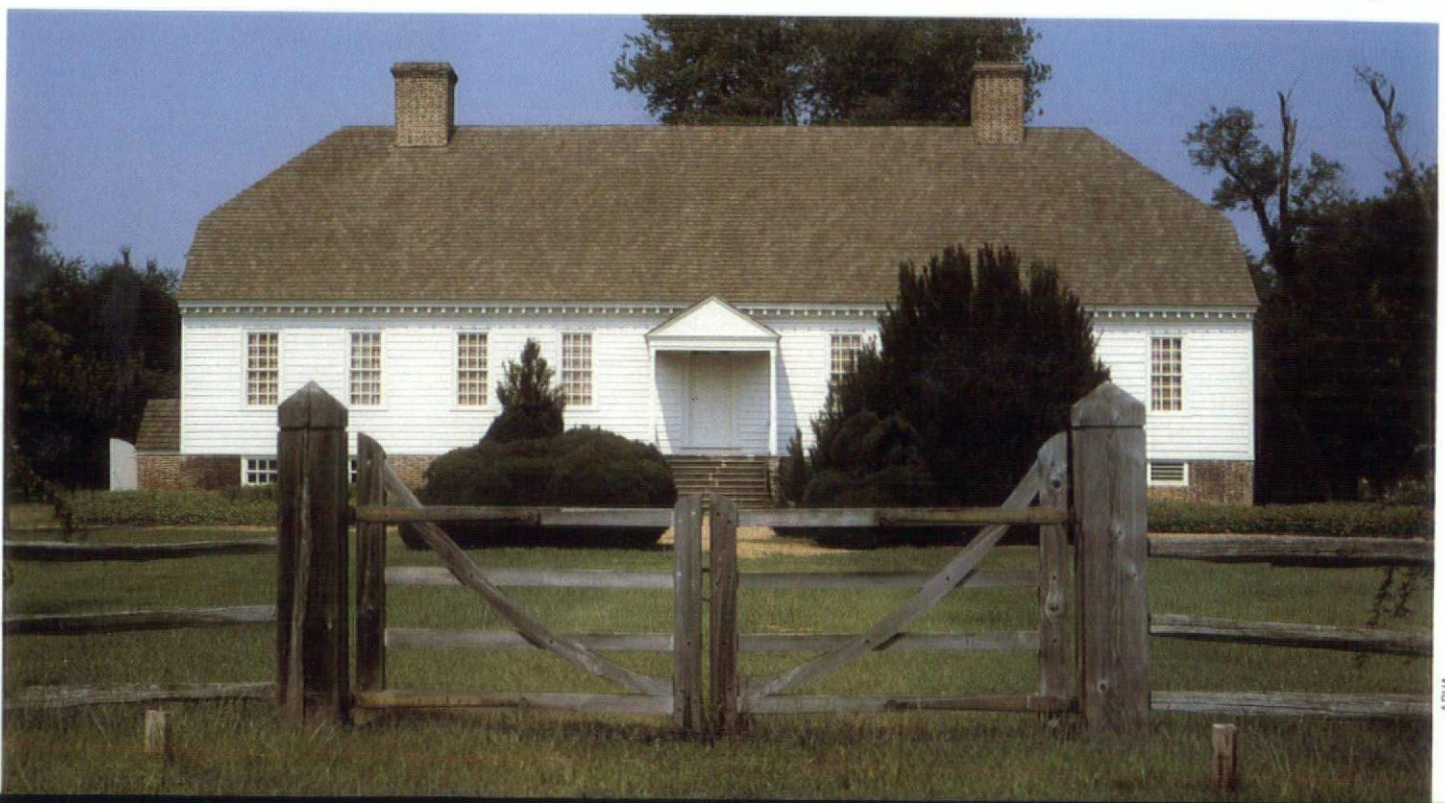
Jordan and others also recommended the APVA become more outspoken on behalf of preservation. Says Gwilliam, "Many things are destroying our history. They need to be a voice before the legislature."

All of the goals, of course, require funding. "Overall, the APVA has been a very prudent manager of resources to achieve its goals. They have long been creative in property management and use," says MacDougal. But it's no longer enough. "We must find the APVA a larger endowment for these properties," says member Braxton.

The campaign for donations remains a scramble. Van Landingham, for one, hopes the staff reorganization is a step toward more aggressive fund raising. Still, she admits she doesn't know where the money will come from. "I feel like we have a super organization," says Van Landingham. "It is one loved by many. I think that love will carry this organization through."

*Deborah Marquardt is a freelance writer in Norfolk.*

Scotchtown, the home of Patrick Henry, was derelict when bought by APVA in 1958. The house contains a fine collection of English and southern furnishings.





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By Vernon Mays

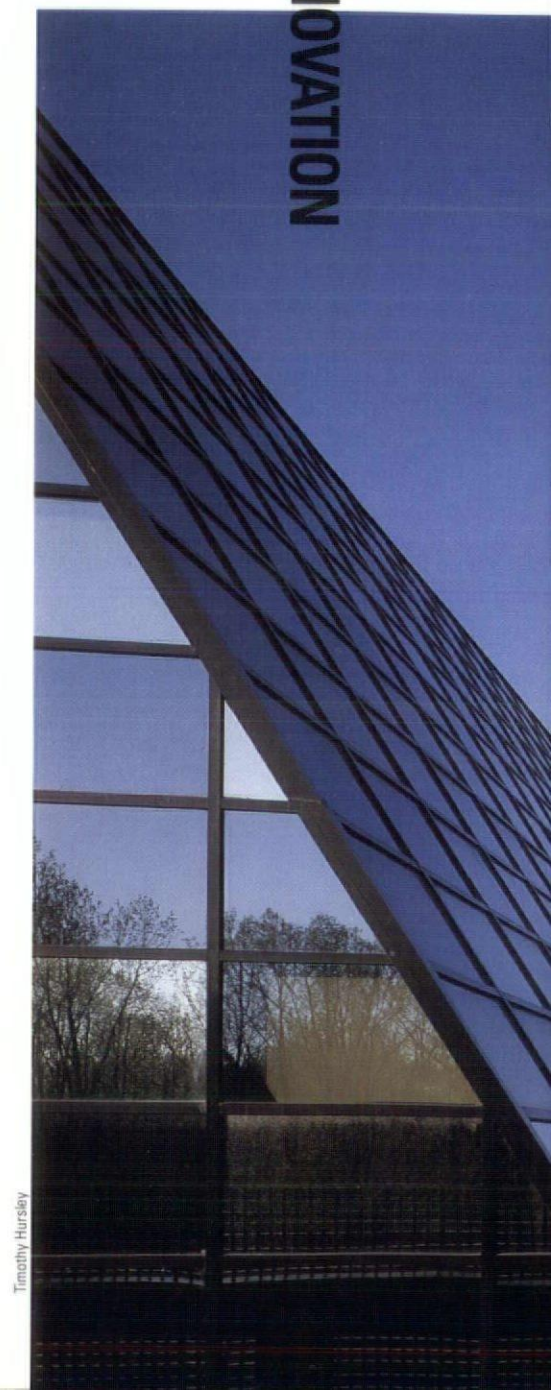
Light rain fell from a dark and brooding sky as honored guests arrived by limousine for the dedication of Virginia's new Center for Innovative Technology. Yet spirits were not to be dampened by nature's whim on this late-September night. For amid the colorful whirl of evening gowns, endless platters of hors d'oeuvres and free-flowing champagne, a new era was being ushered into existence. This building was its symbol.

There to say so were the politicians: U.S. Senator Charles Robb, Governor Gerald Baliles and former Governor Linwood Holton, now the president of CIT. While they fumbled for the words to aptly describe the center's unconventional design—Holton, for example, identified the main elements as “an office tower that went up, *zoom!* and a research building that went out, *zoom!*”—they were unanimously excited about it.

The architects were equally represented—Bernardo Fort-Brescia, of the Miami firm Arquitectonica, geared up in typical hyper-mode, eyes bulging in mock disbelief as he reported on client problems in this part of the world or that. There, too, was Virginia architect G. Truman Ward, known to friends and colleagues simply as G.T., pressing the flesh and warmly welcoming all who had come to hobnob in the state's remarkable new architectural piece.

Both political and economic success had been placed at stake in the creation of this project, a \$34.5 million structure subjected

Continued on page 22

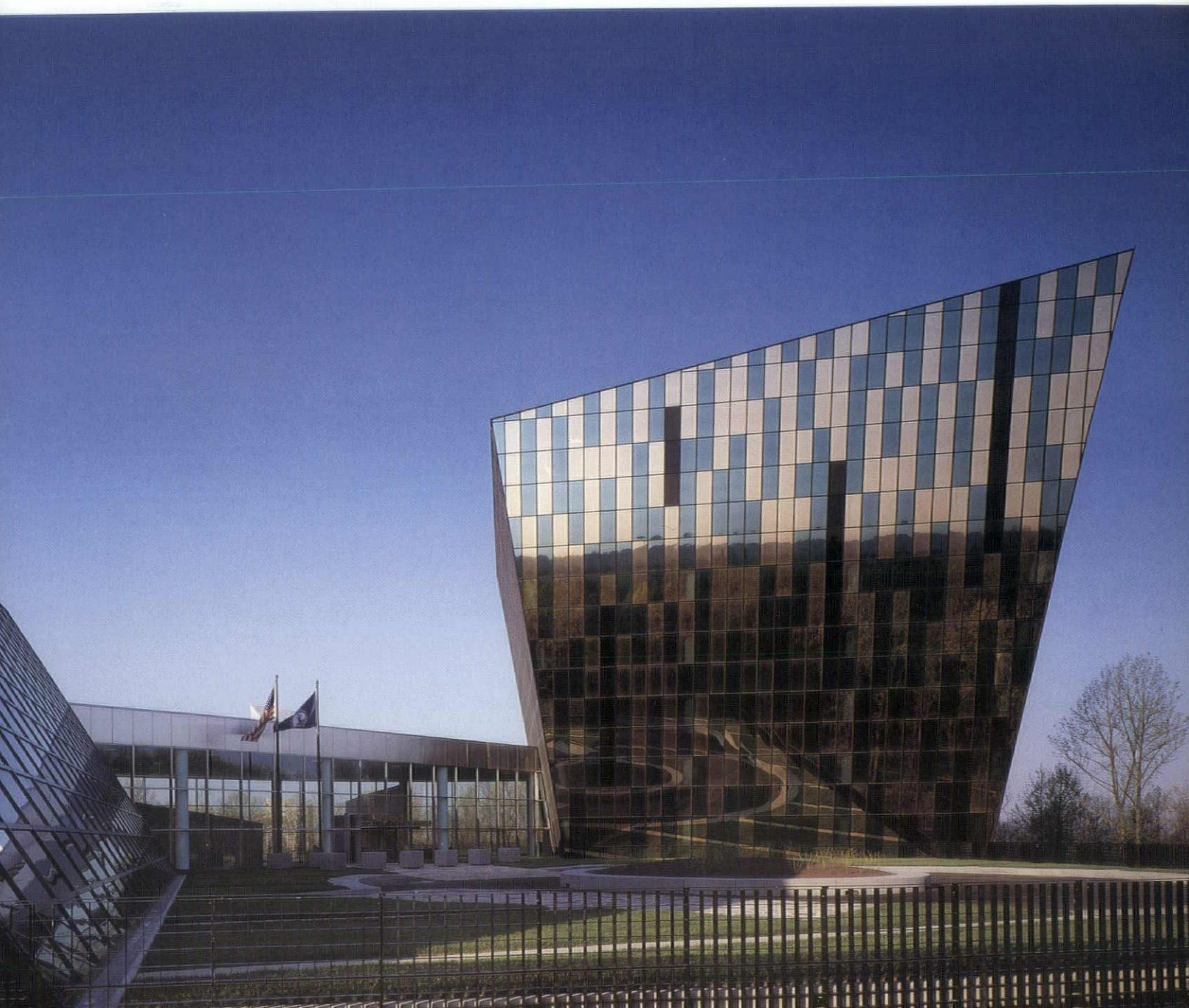


Timothy Hursley



# CIT

The formal entry of the Center for Innovative Technology terminates at an elevated forecourt where the relationships among the CIT tower (right), the labs and offices of the Software Productivity Consortium (left) and the transparent lobby become clear.





to much deliberation both in its chosen location and design. Bold and prismatic, rising in eerie silhouette against the twilight sky, the center evidences a commitment to fresh ideas and new technologies. It also represents a calculated risk in a state steeped in tradition, notably a classical architectural tradition. At once playful and aggressive, the center's appearance often threatens those who it is intended ultimately to serve — the citizenry of Virginia.



Photos: Timothy Hursley

The CIT has done for public architecture in Virginia what architect Helmut Jahn's State of Illinois office building did for public architecture in Chicago — which was to create a spectacle. A major difference, of course, is that Jahn's reflective-glass hat box is an urban place, a stack of curved office floors surrounding an interior plaza that teems with people during peak hours. CIT is likewise a conversation piece. Yet here the angular, machine-like imagery is made all the more powerful by its location in an unspoiled natural setting high on a bluff. "We felt it was important that the building be

seen, be visible, make a strong statement," says Ward, a partner in the Fairfax firm Ward/Hall Associates, which designed CIT in joint venture with Arquitectonica. In contrast to city buildings that take cues from their neighbors (or sometimes stubbornly refuse to), CIT exists in something of an architectural vacuum, reflecting the rolling landscape and mountain ridges in the distance. Fort-Brescia talks of the building conceptually as "the machine in the forest."

In 1984, then-Governor Robb established CIT to promote high-tech research both at the center and in university laboratories, the eventual goal being to link the results with manufacturers and generate new jobs. Placing a high-profile center on a high-visibility site — within easy view of Eero Saarinen's legendary terminal at Dulles International Airport and the thousands of motorists who pass daily — became key to the development strategy of the complex. Anyone traveling to Washington via Dulles is certain to notice the center and wonder, "What's that?" If, in turn, that questioning leads to further interest and investment in CIT's programs, then the center's rocky organizational start will be easy to forget. For a while, it was all that state lawmakers could talk about. Some demanded a quicker return on their investment, objecting to the millions spent on the center before any results had been demonstrated. Others wanted the center elsewhere in the state, preferably closer to their home districts. (Even as it was, a bizarre political compromise posited CIT on the boundary separating Loudoun and Fairfax counties.) Virtually all concerned had pressed for a stabler administration; during its short history, CIT has seen four presidents and two acting presidents.

Yet, for all its early organizational flaws, the CIT made a courageous decision by choosing in 1985 to invite design proposals for the building with a national "ideas competition." Backed by a \$100,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the competition generated concepts for what amounted to a new type of building — a catchall

research facility for technologies not yet invented, plus the kinds of office and meeting space required to promote CIT's mission. "When you are giving birth to something that has no precedent, what do you draw on?" asks Gregory Hunt, a professor of architecture at Virginia Tech, whose College of Architecture and Urban Studies orchestrated the competition. Hunt and colleague Jaan Holt, also a Tech architecture professor, oversaw the competition and advised the architects as the project evolved.

Five design teams were awarded cash prizes for their submissions, but only one had any discernible impact on the finished project. Its conceptual proposal for a complex of buildings arranged like an overscaled sculpture garden on an elongated platform bears a close resemblance to the realized CIT master plan because one of the competition finalists, a young Canadian architecture graduate named Jennifer Luce, landed a job with Arquitectonica and encouraged the firm to pursue the commission.

The process of design prompted the search for an image that would convey technological innovation, says Fort-Brescia. Discussions focused on the essence of movement, a notion that took into account 20th century gains in speed and powered flight. "But movement is a vague concept," Fort-Brescia says. "How can a building express that without actually spelling it out in words?" The canted sides of the seven-story administration tower, looking much like a volcanic explosion thrusting skyward, were one solution. Better yet were the angled ends of the low-slung headquarters for the Software Productivity Consortium (SPC), a private group of 14 aerospace and defense firms engaged in the development of computer software. Viewed from one angle, the three-story SPC building looks as though the top floors are sliding off the ones below.

The CIT tower and SPC offices comprise the complex's major elements; a wedge-shaped commons combining

Modern materials including stainless steel and black terrazzo are richly articulated in the walls and floors of the lobby/exhibition space (above).

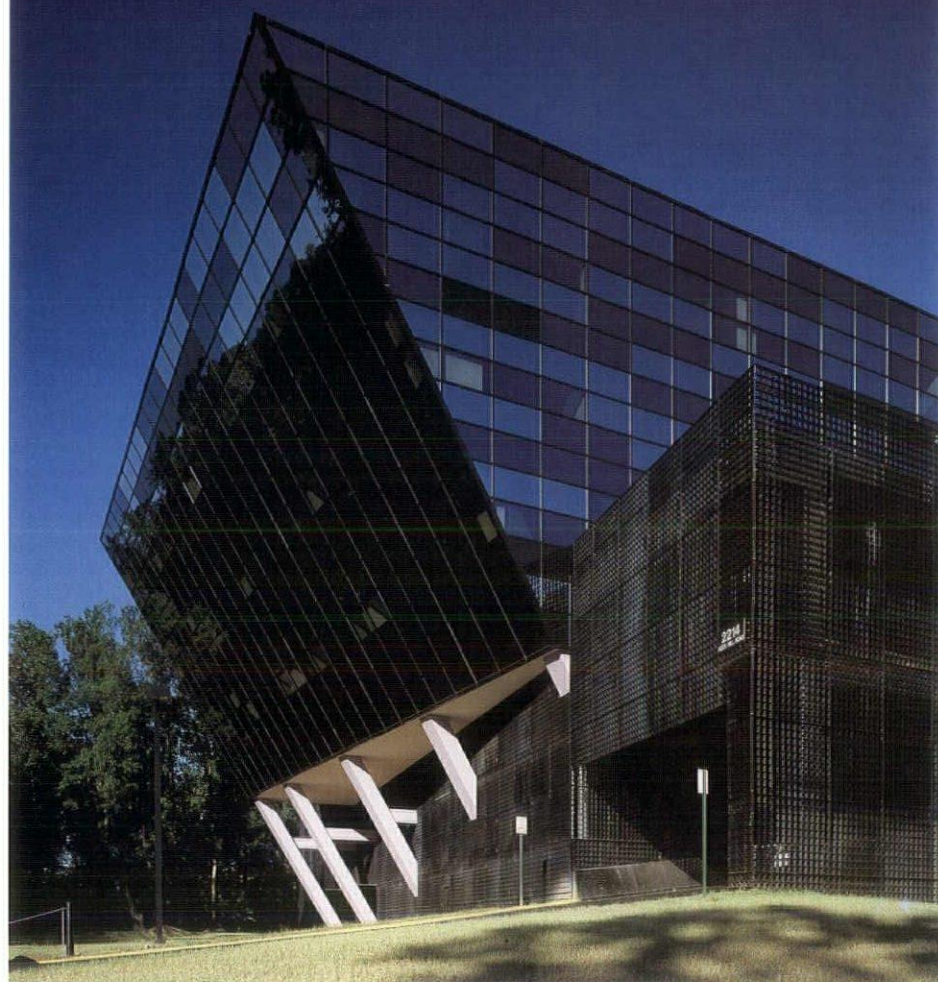
The white marble box houses an auditorium.





The lobby's centerpiece is an elevator shaft covered in panels finished with an automotive-type enamel.





Karen Schneebaum; Timothy Hursley (Inset)

lobby and exhibition space links the two. These primary forms are arranged atop a three-story podium that houses parking, a cafeteria, classrooms and a conference room. Projecting from the side of the podium — and into the commons — is a self-contained 125-seat auditorium clad in white marble. Adding visual interest to the building is its “fifth façade,” the pattern of textured stripes on top of the podium by landscape architect Martha Schwartz of San Francisco. “I wanted something strong enough to be read from the airplanes as they were coming in,” says Schwartz. “I thought of airplane landing strips, I

thought of airplane lights. That was the whole source for the idea of the gazing globes.” The globes are glass balls comparable in material to Christmas ornaments, only closer to the size of a basketball. Schwartz had envisioned a grid pattern of the globes elevated slightly above gray and gold stripes of gravel on the plaza level. While the stripes and various groupings of trees and paving stones have been installed, Schwartz’s pleas on behalf of the globes have yet to win acceptance.



Perhaps it was predictable that much of

the public would scratch its head in wonderment at the sight of this glass box gone awry. But architects, whose knowledge of changing currents in architecture often bestows on them a tolerance for experimental forms, have been clearly divided in their opinions, too. Some have relished the playful form-making in the project and praised the degree of control evident in the manipulation of the building’s forms. Critics, on the other hand, have blasted the design for its blatant willfulness and focused on the wide-open lobby/exhibition space as being suited to *anything but* an exhibition. Boston architect Jean-Paul Carlhian, who chaired the 1989 jury for the American Institute of Architects’ statewide design awards, flatly called CIT “disgusting.”

Yet such facile dismissals of the complex overlook its considerable merits. First among them is its success as a dynamic piece of sculpture, a welcome change from the inane boxes that proliferate in suburban office parks. Comparing CIT’s layout to conventional suburban plans raises other issues — for instance, what to do with cars? Rather than spread a sea of asphalt around the building, the architects relegated parking to a garage beneath the building. That step at once allowed and required a shift in scale, and helped make the building more visible. While anyone walking near the building at ground level would be completely overpowered by it, that is precisely *not* how the building is intended to be experienced. One approaches by car and parks below the podium. The “people spaces” are on top of the podium, and they are appropriately scaled for that purpose.

Entry to the site is nearly a mile distant from the building, and an effective sense of anticipation is created by the meandering route of the entry drive, which circles around the end of the center and then rises through its concrete framework along a steep ramp to a circular drop off. Here is another important break from most suburban office developments, for after ascending the ramp, one has a strong sense of having arrived somewhere.



Glass on the building's exterior has been detailed in a thoughtful, though not brilliant, way. Varying the colors of reflective glass on the CIT and SPC buildings and placing them in a random pattern add a welcome variety. And sheathing the commons in clear glass contrasts it nicely from the other functional spaces. In the end, the composition of the major pieces is balanced so delicately that the architect who tries to expand this ensemble in the future will have a challenging task indeed.

Arquitectonica is known for working in bold strokes, and the commons is just such a move. When empty of celebrating crowds, the cavernous room remains too ascetic, despite the inclusion of dynamic elements such as the glossy enameled elevator shaft, mammoth triangular column and sumptuous marble box containing the auditorium. The railings on the cantilevered elevator platform, while reminiscent of the skewed geometries that are fast passing out of vogue, are nonetheless finely crafted. Other interior materials, such as stainless steel walls juxtaposed with black terrazzo walls, are cool and Modern,

Photos: Timothy Hursley



**Landscape architect Martha Schwartz refers to the flagstone pads as "carpets at the places you step out of the building."**

but used in such a way that they enrich the space. It's worth noting, too, that the original lighting design called for a custom-made fixture hung from the commons ceiling, a touch that is sorely missing. For the moment, the standard square fixtures in the modular ceiling look absurdly out of place and out of scale, given the amount of care taken elsewhere in the building.

CIT's greatest aesthetic failing, in light of the imperative that it convey a new technology, is its wholly conventional method of construction. Whether the responsibility for that rests with the designers or with the client — ultimately, the Commonwealth of Virginia, which was anything but extravagant in setting the budget — the fact is that the CIT delivers no technological message. Structurally, it is put together like legions of other office buildings. Its imagery is that of a stage set — all surface.

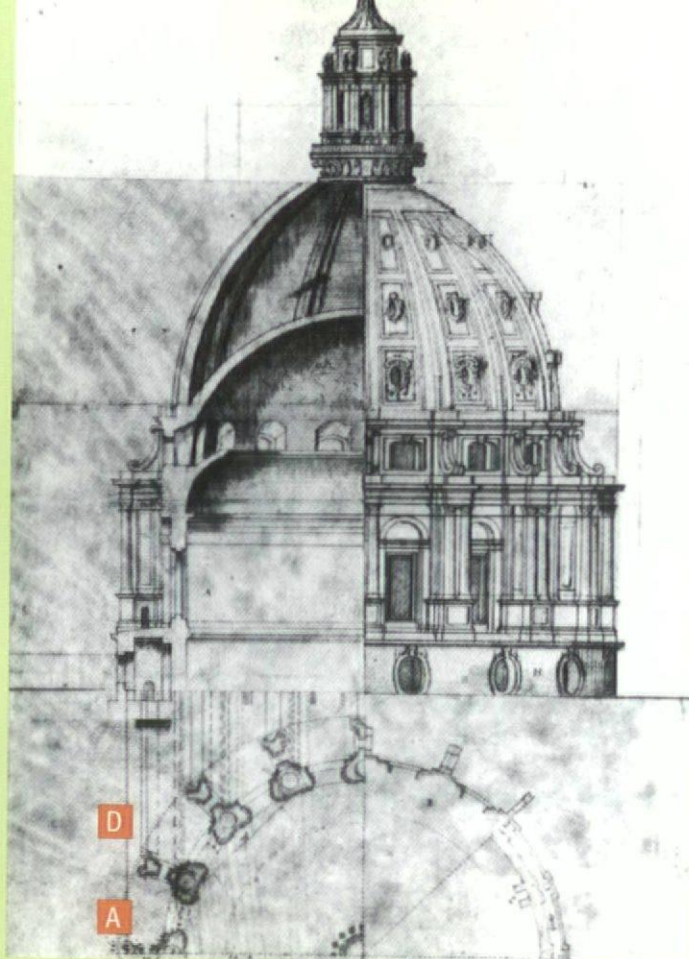
Meanwhile, leaders such as Dr. Ronald E. Carrier, chairman of the center's board and president of James Madison University, continue to poke fun at CIT. Carrier said tongue-in-cheek at the center's opening that perhaps its greatest technological contribution to date is figuring out how to get window washers up and down the tilted sides of the tower. A howl came from the amused crowd. But if, in the end, the CIT's visibility and daring promote great technological and economic strides for Virginia, it just may be the visionaries who shaped the center who have the last laugh.

25



**Despite the buildings' unusual profiles, their floor plans (above) are simple rectangles. The CIT master plan (above right) calls for some 600,000 square feet of space, four times the existing amount. From the air (top), CIT is as eye-catching as it is from the ground.**





Section, elevation and half-plan of the Dome of St. Paul's (c. 1675)

## Architecture

### Remarkable Wren

The elegance and clarity of St. Paul's Cathedral in London are brought into focus as Sir Christopher Wren's drawings and plans for the building are displayed in North America for the first time. The exhibit opens February 21 at the Octagon, 1799 New York Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. Information at 202-638-3105.

### Architecture for People

Prominent architects and designers including Michael Graves, Paul Friedberg, Ward Bennett and Michael Sampton discuss challenges likely to be encountered in the next decade. Eight sessions on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. begin January 17, end March 7. Offered through the Smithsonian Resident Associates Program. Non-member fee is \$120. Information at 202-357-3030.

### 25 Years at Virginia Tech

A celebration of the 25th anniversary of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at VPI&SU will attract alumni for a series of lectures, presentations and social gatherings. Noted author and critic Kenneth Frampton will be the featured speaker March 30 at 8:30 p.m. The lecture is free. For information on the full schedule of activities March 28 to April 1, call Ellen Braaten at 703-231-5383.

### White Gloves and Red Bricks

The 100th anniversary exhibition of artifacts and photographs from historic sites owned and maintained by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. Through April 30 at the Roanoke Valley History Museum, Center in the Square, Roanoke. Call 703-342-5770.

### Preservation Struggles

Architects and historians reveal the stories behind preserving historic sites in Washington and Virginia. Topics include the Manassas and Brandywine Station Battlefields, the Montpelier estate and Union Station. A Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, held Thursdays at 8 p.m. from January 18 to March 8. Non-members, \$110. Information at 202-357-3030.

### Award Winners Speak

Five of the 1990 winners of Honor Awards from the American Institute of Architects discuss their solutions to the issues of proportion and space when designing in an urban environment. February 18, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. This Smithsonian Resident Associates Program is \$45 for non-members. Information at 202-357-3030.

### Architecture in Context

Designing high-use buildings in historic districts is examined, including current projects such as Venturi & Scott Brown's

National Gallery Addition and Cesar Pelli's Canary Wharf complex. February 24, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. A Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, \$45 for non-members. Information at 202-357-3030.

## Design

### How Monuments Get Built

This exhibition at the National Building Museum examines the design and review process in Washington, D.C., using the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial as an example. Through February 28 at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C. Information at 202-272-2448.

### Good Design Travels

Sixty-seven objects from the Good Design Collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts highlight the best of commercially manufactured and handcrafted objects. Through February 18 at the Staunton Fine Arts Center, Staunton. For information, call 703-885-2028.

### Hands-on Design

Designer and writer Susan Tamulevich conducts a hands-on workshop for artists on the rudiments of functional design. March 16 at the Blue Ridge Fine Arts League in Winchester (call 703-662-7887 for details) and March 28 at the Flossie Martin Gallery, Radford University (information at 703-831-5754). Pre-registration is required.

## The Arts

### Tools as Art

An exhibit of almost 100 works organized around the theme of tools and hardware features contemporary works and folk art in a variety of media including painting, sculpture and photography. The collection is owned by John Hechinger, Sr., co-



chairman of the Hechinger Co. Through March 1 at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C. Information: 202-272-2448.

### Furniture from the South

Regional decorative arts of the early South are on display at the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, N.C. Period rooms and galleries contain furniture, paintings, textiles, ceramics, silver and other metalware from a six-state region. Special exhibitions of objects from the collection examine changing themes. Information at 919-721-7360.

### Consummate Tiffany

Louis Comfort Tiffany single-handedly revived glassblowing during the late years of the 19th century, moving the tastes of his patrons and the public toward handcrafted objects derived from natural shapes. "Louis Comfort Tiffany and the Gilded Age" gathers 65 works, including leaded-glass windows and "Tiffany lamps" fashioned from the leftovers of his large commissions. Through March 4 at the Renwick Gallery, 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. Information: 202-357-1300.



Gould Peacock Lamp from "Tiffany and the Gilded Age"

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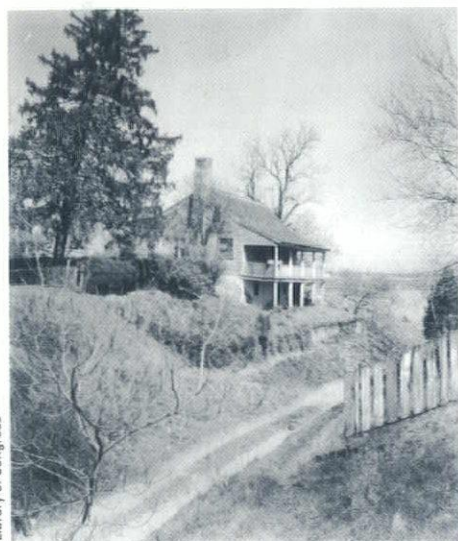
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## SOUTHERN CULTURE

### Faces of Truth and Hard-Drinking Men

Topics ranging from Chesapeake Bay dialects and mobile homes to good ol' boys and Jelly Roll Morton fill the pages of the recently published *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, a 1,634-page compendium of Southern life and history edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris. The book's section devoted to art and architecture treats with equal significance the study of elegant mansions and humble farmhouses, photography and sculpture. Two entries of particular relevance to Virginians are excerpted here.



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*The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture was sponsored by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi and published by the University of North Carolina Press. Excerpts are reprinted with permission.*

## Essays of LIGHT

### The Triumphs of Pioneer Photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston

A native of Grafton, West Virginia, Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952) studied art in Paris and at the Art Students League in Washington, D.C., but became dissatisfied with the state of academic American art and turned to newspaper illustration. She sensed the potential of photography in journalism, as it was "the more accurate medium."

Her first essays concerned political figures in the capital. She also photographed the Kohinoor coal mines of Pennsylvania, the Mesabe iron ore range on Lake Superior, and female factory workers in Massachusetts. Johnston did not approach her assignments in the spirit of Jacob Riis, the social reformer, but as an objective reporter. In 1899 she was invited by Hampton Institute, an industrial school for blacks, to dramatize the progress of educated, upwardly mobile students and graduates. That public relations and fund-raising project led to an invitation to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1902; she returned there and through 1906 photographed the students and their renowned educators Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. While in the area she also photographed, with dignity and sensitivity, poor, rural folk of Alabama.

An interest in architecture and horticulture led to Johnston's greatest commission; she obtained a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to record Southern colonial architecture. From 1933 to 1940, when Johnston was in her late sixties and early



Hampton University Archives

seventies, she traveled the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states, documenting every aspect of historic buildings and gardens, from mansions to farm buildings in every condition of repair. Her photographs convey a familiarity with the place and an appreciation for the former inhabitants. In 1945 Johnston was awarded an honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects.

Mary Louise Tucker

Among Johnston's most evocative works was this still life of students at work on the treasurer's residence (above right), photographed during her study of Hampton Institute in 1900. This house at Port Royal, Virginia (above left), was documented during Johnston's survey of the Fredericksburg area in 1927.



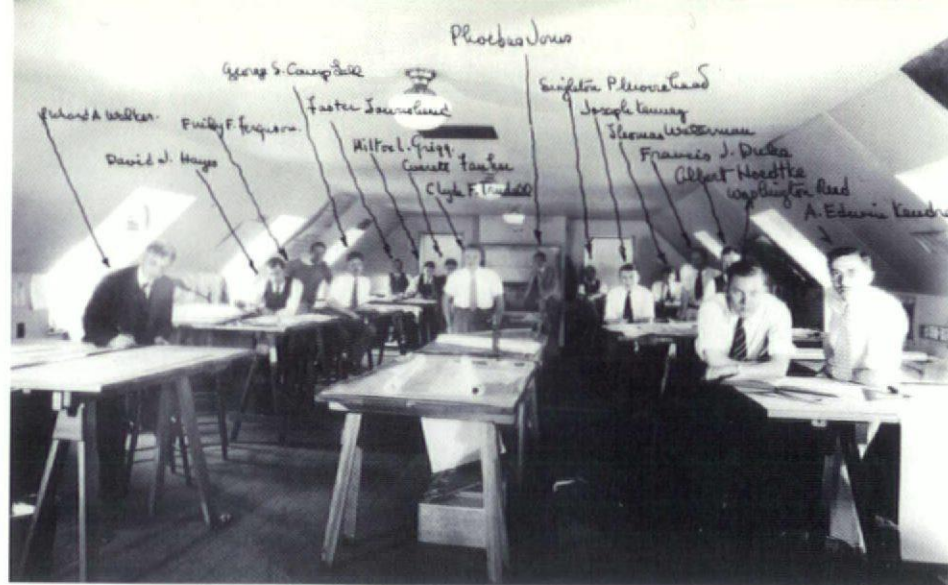


Photo and sketches: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

The drafting room at Colonial Williamsburg in 1932 (above) was the center of activity for seasoned designers and young draftsmen who shared an educational background, formal or not. Their appreciation for the picturesque quality of vernacular building was countered by a fondness for grand, balanced beaux-arts planning.

## Who Designed Colonial Williamsburg?



From its beginnings in the late 1920s, Colonial Williamsburg has been conceived as a place where Americans learn about their history. As early as 1932 benefactor John D. Rockefeller, Jr., preferred the motto "That the future may learn from the past," to more esoteric statements of purpose, and few fourth graders or museum administrators have regarded Williamsburg as merely a preservation project since. For more than 50 years, the town has maintained a powerful grip on the national consciousness. Consider for example Lee Iacocca's stated purpose of making the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island "an ethnic Williamsburg" and modern art curator Henry Geldzahler's somewhat eccentric assessment of Andrew Wyeth as "the Williamsburg of American painting — charming, especially when seen from a helicopter." Such references, as well as countless American buildings carried out in a "Williamsburg" style, reveal that the restored town is widely seen as an expression of American rather than regional culture.

Just how the re-created community of Williamsburg achieved its present evocative condition is worth considering. The essential roles of Rockefeller and the visionary rector of Bruton Parish Church, W.A.R. Goodwin, are well known, but those of the people who most directly created the place are much less so. In the beginning, design decisions were made on a variety of levels by three groups: partners in the Boston firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn, their representatives in residence at Williamsburg, and an advisory committee. Largely because of a chance meeting between Goodwin and architect William G. Perry in 1926, the Perry, Shaw and Hepburn firm was hired in 1927 to prepare proposals for restoration of principal parts of the town.

Sketches (above and right) done about 1938 by Singleton Peabody Moorehead illustrate the planned reconstruction of Duke of Gloucester Street.

The firm had been established in 1922 and had primarily produced relatively modest New England buildings in competent, restrained renditions of historical modes. With the advent of the Williamsburg restoration, the firm expanded significantly, and much administration and design work shifted to Virginia. In 1928 the firm hired Walter Macomber as "resident architect" and promptly shipped him off to Williamsburg. Largely self-educated through a series of jobs in New England architectural offices and a nearly obsessive recording of traditional buildings, Macomber brought to the project a concern for detail in craftsmanship that long outlived his tenure. For Macomber, the essence of colonial buildings lay in the subtleties of their moldings rather than in their planning, and he encouraged a quickly assembled group of draftsmen to look for design inspiration in the countryside around Williamsburg.



The draftsmen were primarily young, imaginative, hard-drinking men with different backgrounds. Best known today because of his later publications is Thomas Waterman, who like Macomber had a nonacademic education. Waterman had worked for Boston ecclesiastical architect Ralph Adams Cram and with William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. David Hays, a young draftsman also without memories of college architectural classes, was already working for the partners in Boston, and John Barrows came from a Norfolk firm. They were joined by Sammy MacMurtrie, who was finishing architecture school at MIT, and John Henderson from Georgia Tech. The quality of draftsmanship, as well as the spice of life in Williamsburg, was enhanced by George Campbell, who had recently graduated from a Dublin technical school and had left Ireland because

pressure on Macomber and the draftsmen.

A stabilizing influence appeared in the autumn of 1929, when the partners sent A. Edwin Kendrew to organize the architectural work. Systematic and eminently reasonable, Kendrew began to bring order out of chaos, and he hired additional staff to deal with the increasing work load. For a majority of them — like Finley Ferguson, Jr., Francis Duke, Everette Fauber, and Milton Grigg, all from the University of Virginia — this was their first full-time job.

From 1928 until 1948 an advisory committee of nationally and regionally prominent architects reviewed projects and helped set architectural standards for the Williamsburg effort. As restoration proceeded, the committee came to rely on the local staff for most answers, because their research at the site had made them more expert than

English village, but rather were arranged in a precise order along parallel streets broken by public spaces and designed with a strong sense of axis. This simple American Baroque plan brought order to the various vernacular parts, creating a coherent system.

All involved were unusually careful in following details of existing buildings and in employing specific evidence when it was available for reconstructions. When direct evidence could not be found, they drew on their understanding of the local style to create plausible reconstructions. They saw life in the 18th-century South as more homogeneous and certainly more genteel than late 20th-century historians do. As a result, their observations among the venerable buildings of Tidewater Virginia were selective, focusing on pleasant, well-resolved design rather than the confusion and cheapness that existed alongside it. The fine products of a



of his antirepublican sentiments. Campbell had a grasp of 18th-century details learned in the streets of Dublin and, when found staying in Boston with William Perry's chauffeur, was sent south. Late in 1928 the group was joined by draftsman Singleton Peabody Moorehead, a young Harvard graduate who had had experience at archaeological sites in the Southwest, had practiced with Macomber's old Boston firm and had developed skills at sketching old buildings on a grand tour of Europe.

The partners, Macomber, and the draftsmen all expected to have an initial period of time for study and design, but upon arriving they found representatives of the New York construction firm of Todd and Brown already present and anxious for working drawings. Antagonism with Todd and Brown, the necessity of dealing with an astonished but strong-willed Virginia community, and the rapid pace of work in what was largely a new idiom put extraordinary

even outspoken committee member Fiske Kimball in evaluating building techniques of colonial Virginia. As Macomber had done earlier in New England and George Campbell in Ireland, the staff carefully observed the details of traditional buildings and recorded their observations in drawings rather than text. By gradually developing an encyclopedic familiarity with early Virginia design, they were following a 19th-century historicist view that one could become entirely conversant in an ancient style, and thereafter design in it much like its original practitioners did. In many ways, the approach reflected an arts and crafts fascination with local, indigenous character. Old vernacular design was seen as important because it embodied a preindustrial, regional personality.

Williamsburg also held an appeal for these designers that ran somewhat counter to a vernacular mode. The buildings did not stand in an informal pattern like those in a picturesque

slave economy were presented, but the system was romanticized or left unacknowledged. Complex history was thus screened and sanitized and delivered to a nation receptive to its optimistic, patriotic message.

This is not entirely the way it would be done today; provocative economic theory, social history, and the civil rights movement would make that impossible. Yet the grand project that began in 1928 and continued along the same line for the next 50 years holds an unusual appeal. Substantially the product of a particular time and educational system, Colonial Williamsburg is commonly seen as a graceful effort, a seamless whole. Perhaps it could not have been accomplished at another time. Yet because of its size and complexity, it clearly offers continuing opportunities for development and change.

*Edward A. Chappell  
Colonial Williamsburg*



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## Still Awesome After All These Years

By Vernon Mays

Every lover of buildings, somewhere in the back of his mind, slowly accumulates a catalog of awe-inspiring works, his personal touchstones of architecture. My own includes the Pantheon in Rome, where a single sunbeam breathes life into stone, and Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamps, where

angels whisper through a wall of light.

To that list was recently added Fallingwater, the remarkable essay in stone, steel, concrete and glass completed in 1937 by Frank Lloyd Wright. It is hardly conceivable for a 20th century house, scaled more to the demands of modern domesticity than to the larger-than-life world of aristocrats and robber barons, to achieve the acclaim this one has. While Fallingwater was designated the "most successful example of American architectural design" by the American Institute of Architects in 1986, it is perhaps more significant that the house received 120,000 visitors last year, most of whom were not architects.

One senses the excitement over Fallingwater is not so much for its great physical beauty — in many places it has the imperfect hand-hewn quality of many of

Wright's buildings — but for its profound sensitivity to its surroundings. Wright spent a lifetime talking about "organic architecture," but he never fully integrated the man-made and natural worlds so eloquently as at this spot where a mountain stream tumbles over a shelf of stone. He designed the house as a getaway for Edgar Kaufmann, the retailing czar of Pittsburgh. Kaufmann had used the property as a retreat for many years before deciding to replace the modest cabin there with a more ambitious house. And when he approached Wright to create a house beside the falls of Bear Run, everyone assumed the house would be positioned to afford a sweeping view of this spectacular natural feature.

Wright did no such thing. Instead, he placed the building squarely on the stone outcroppings, stepping the forms of the house in horizontal layers supported by masses of rugged stone that seem almost to emerge naturally from the hillside. While the base of the house recedes from the stream to make space for a wading pool, part of the living room and first floor terrace thrust out dramatically above the water. Here was Wright's structural virtuosity at work: As in other of his buildings, engineers said it couldn't be built. But Wright prevailed. With the exception of one reconstruction required due to faulty reinforcement, the terraces stand as they were built 50 years ago.

Wright skillfully used the site to aesthetic as well as structural ends. He designed the living room, for example, so that an existing boulder pushing through the ground would form a natural hearth for the fireplace. Flagstone floors running uninterrupted from indoors to out strengthen the sense of the house as part of the natural landscape.

The master bedroom (top) contains elements typical of the house: textured stonework, built-in furniture and flagstone floors. Fallingwater (inset) at twilight.

Photos: Christopher Little



The deep "Cherokee red" paint that was Wright's signature identifies the metal components, such as window and door trim. Built-in sofas, beds, desks and closets are covered in walnut veneer. "It's one of the few historic houses where you can walk into the room and things are pretty much as they were when they were being lived in," says Lynda Waggoner, director of the house.

Wright was a master at manipulating space, and here he blurred the distinction between indoors and out at every opportunity. Each bedroom, for example, has a private terrace that serves in essence as an extension of the room. And while occupants of the house often are sheltered by massive stone walls, one's dominant perception is of being surrounded by the landscape.

Inside the rooms, there is an overriding sense of richness and detail. Wright insisted, for example, that the stone walls be laid in a textured manner that challenged the masons on the job. Still the effort was worth it: The result is a brilliantly resolved masterpiece of architecture, thoughtful in every detail. The suspended stair descending from the living room to the stream is but one of many poetic moments in which the building nods to the beauty and power of the natural surroundings.

The house has so captured the imagination of America that it is a regular stop on tour bus itineraries. Pressure to accommodate more people peaked last year, when groups of up to 25 were being led through the main residence and guest house, which was added in 1939. When officials realized visitors were seeing more of each other's backs than the result of Wright's vision, tours were restricted to 15 people at a

time. This policy has necessitated turning people away, so the importance of making a reservation cannot be stressed enough.

On the positive side, paying visitors have helped finance maintenance of the buildings. In the past four years alone, \$500,000 has gone toward conservation work that includes repairing stucco, replacing roof membranes and rebuilding walls with new waterproofing materials.

Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., who inherited the house, set the tone for Fallingwater's legacy when he donated the building to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1963. "By its very intensity it is a public resource," he said, "not a private indulgence." In that spirit, thousands of visitors have traveled to Fallingwater to absorb its extraordinary beauty and walk where the footsteps of genius are left for all to see.

#### Getting There

From Virginia, drive I-81 north into Maryland; take I-70 west, then U.S. 40 west via Cumberland into Pennsylvania. Turn north on Rt. 381. Signs for Fallingwater are on the left, four miles north of Ohiopyle. From Pittsburgh, follow the Pennsylvania Turnpike east to Exit 9 at Donegal. Take Rt. 711 south to Normalville, then Rt. 381 another seven miles south to Fallingwater on the right.

#### Getting In

Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily (except Mondays) from April to mid-November. Weekend tours are available from January through March. Admission is \$6 on weekdays; \$8 on weekends. An extended tour for architects only is held at 9 a.m. Saturdays; cost is \$20. No interior photography is allowed. For information and reservations, call 412-329-8501.

We congratulate the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects for the initiation and creation of this exciting new design journal.



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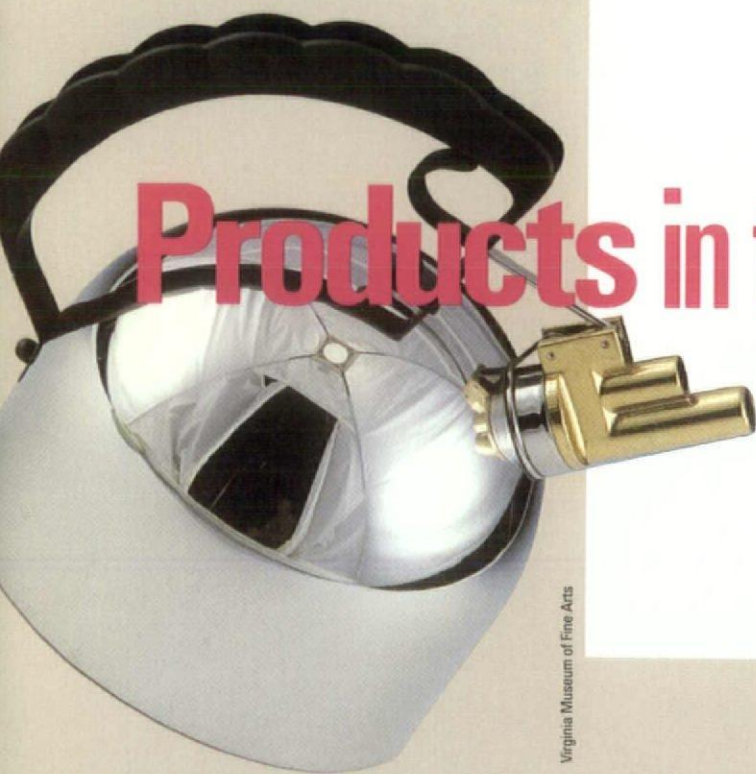
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**Inform** asked the nation's  
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**What's one of your favorite  
designs of the '80s?**

"I like the Richard Sapper tea kettle  
made by Alessi. The handle has a kind  
of animation that shows where you  
grasp it. The different parts of it commu-  
nicate what they are for. It also has  
a humor, there's a spirit to it."

Katherine McCoy  
McCoy and McCoy  
Bloomfield Hills, MI



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

## Products in the Eighties:

Once the envy of industrialized nations worldwide, American product design suffered a crisis of confidence during the 1970s. Faith in Detroit-made automobiles eroded along with trust in everything from American-made cameras to coffee makers. While innovations in product styling and appearance took precedence over technology gains among many U.S. manufacturers, factories in Japan and parts of Europe concentrated on churning out products that simply worked well and lasted.

That trend was reversed in the 1980s, which marked the reemergence of the designer in decision-making circles of many American corporations. Executives, conceding that smart design meant good business, turned to their creative staffs to simplify design, streamline manufacturing processes, improve quality and cut costs.

For an insider's view of the art and science of product design in the '80s, **Inform** spoke with designer and educator Katherine McCoy, co-chairman of the Design Department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, a leading design school located in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Ms. McCoy is also the former president of the Industrial Designers Society of America and, as such, functioned as the leading spokesman for product designers in this country. Her comments follow.

Designer and educator  
Katherine McCoy





**Q:** Tremendous changes took place in product design during the 1980s. What conditions preceded those changes?

**A:** The '70s were a rather quiet time for American product design. The professionalism of the decade led to a corporate, functionalist approach. Industrial design requires an incredible amount of capital investment on the part of a manufacturer. There might be \$5 million of retooling for just a small product, so it's really a make-or-break situation to introduce a new product. That kind of risk led companies to listen to marketing forces. So the rise of the MBAs may have actually blocked a lot of innovation by leading businesses to minimize their exposure to risk.

**Q:** It's an extreme statement to make, but I have heard the Harvard Business School be blamed outright for the decline in quality of U.S. manufacturing. Is that attitude akin to what you are talking about?

**A:** Yes. Perhaps it is somewhat unfair, but the marketing orientation they encouraged was certainly a contributing factor, because marketing's way of studying a situation is typically to interview consumers about their preferences. And if a consumer is shown something he has never seen before, he will probably give a negative response. The Ford Taurus would have failed marketing studies — in fact, it *did* fail marketing studies — but Ford had conviction and took a chance.

**Q:** What about the influence of foreign competition?

**A:** In hindsight, the best thing for industrial design in the U.S. as we entered the '80s was Japanese competition, because it shook up our American corporations. Now, in fact, when you are showing a proposal to a client for a product and he starts expressing a cautious attitude, all you have to do is say: "Japanese competition." And they respond with something like, "Oh yeah, we've got to innovate, don't we?"

**Q:** It sounds like you are crediting the Japanese with single-handedly shaking American corporations out of a sleep.

**A:** Well, yes, because the Japanese were successful in the marketplace. And their success was credited to their insistence on quality and detail, and to their willingness to risk long-term success on innovation. Frankly, Japanese industrial design and product design isn't that much different from American industrial design. The source of Japanese industrial design know-how is a school on the west coast called Art Center that was very popular in the '50s and '60s, and through the '70s it remained so. What I'm saying is the Japanese had the same training and experience as Americans, but then they went home to a sympathetic corporate culture that wanted quality and innovation.

**Q:** What other changes have come about lately?

**A:** There are two things worth mentioning. One factor was "Eurostyle," a term I really don't care for that was coined by home fashion magazines. But here are these terrific, beautiful, Bauhausian products — like those Braun has been doing for 20 years — that were only sold to the intelligentsia in a few



"Furniture has traditionally been one of the quicker barometers to show what is going on in our culture. If I had to choose one designer of products or buildings, it would be Philippe Starck. It seemed as if for so long after Charles Eames, everything going on in furniture was just a recombination of the components. It was just a different way to put these materials together. People would come up and say, 'I've reinvented a way to sit.' But Starck made it possible to say, 'I've just made a beautiful chair.' He gave them a personality, he gave them names. And that brings back a part of our American culture, which has lost its dimension of myth. These things by Philippe Starck were somewhat playful, yet mythological to me. They were not trying to overwhelm me with their technology. They represent the same idea as a beautiful Chippendale chair."

David Gresham  
Design Logic  
Chicago

**Ford Taurus:**  
Ideal aerodynamic form







**"I would choose a Texas Instruments children's learning toy called the Voyager. It's a headset, but it's not really a toy. It's designed according to semantic characteristics and incorporates an experimentation into new form languages, without chasing the end customer away. The computer chip inside is changeable by a four-year-old so it moves into a different subject matter as the child changes from one book to another. The good thing about it also is that it responds to variation around the world. You put a different chip into it to recognize a different language. It has a voice-recognition chip that recognizes "yes" and "no." What I think the '80s have brought are experiments in products that combine software and hardware, and can accommodate changes that the user wants."**

Deane W. Richardson

Fitch RichardsonSmith

Worthington, OH

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good design stores. Suddenly these products have become popular with the Yuppies. And that has to do with the new market: the postwar babies. They are much more exposed than any previous generation. They have been to Europe. They are interested in gourmet cooking. They want the best of everything. And suddenly they are much more receptive to new product ideas in the consumer market. The other recent change is technology. All of a sudden there is a whole new world of smart products — microwaves, car dashboards, alarm clocks, wristwatches, they all need programming. And personal computers are getting absorbed into the expertise of such a large segment of the population that people feel comfortable with more complex products.

**Q:** So, in the context of all the general changes you have talked about, what have been the material results?

**A:** The main thing is just a big leap forward in the visual quality of product design. The whole vocabulary of form certainly improved.

**Q:** I recall one writer describing the role of the industrial designer as "making technology understandable." Is that a fair description?

**A:** Interpreting technology is a good way to put it. And certainly to demystify it, and try to make it understandable. Also to humanize technology. So one of the theories that was born in the past few years, product semantics, looks at form as a language that communicates. Communication is, in fact, a legitimate part of function. The Bauhaus interpreted function very objectively. Frequently it had more to do with structure and materials than any kind of psychological, metaphysical qualities. And actually marketing people always understood that objects do have psychological and spiritual values, it's just that they turned that to superficial ends. But anthropologists know this. They can interpret an entire culture from one artifact. It's really an anti-Modernist idea people are arriving at that, no, the whole world's objects shouldn't look like they were from the same culture. Why should they?

**Q:** Let's go back to the idea of product semantics for a minute. Can you give me an example of a product that was developed with that in mind?

**A:** Well, there are not that many actually on the market, but there have been a lot of proposals. For instance, there is one that has been published widely. It's called the Phone Book. It's a telephone answering machine that is also a phone book, and it gives printouts of phone messages, and has a telephone. It has a number of different modes. And as you go from one mode to another, you literally turn the pages that suggest an open book. So as you turn the page, you switch from the telephone book mode to the telephone answering machine mode. The form of the product suggests the activity and, in fact, helps effectuate the activity.

**Q:** I think a lot of people who aren't aware of what designers do somehow see design as a superficial activity, in which the shape or color of an object is manipulated arbitrarily. They equate design with styling. What's wrong with that viewpoint?



**A:** Well, that is the level that industrial design had come to be relegated to, actually, in the '70s. Now, because of the issue of interpreting the machine for the user, so many problems have to be solved. We typically ask our users to bend themselves to the machine. And that usually results in lower back pain for computer users sitting in office chairs, and it results in safety problems. Industrial design makes products safe to use, it makes products productive and efficient to use, because a designer really studies the work patterns, the performance the product is going to facilitate.

**Q:** I used to hear a lot about the term "planned obsolescence." Was that notion really a conscious part of the corporate culture or just a byproduct of poorly made goods?

**A:** I think it was a very deliberate policy in the '50s in automotive design. New model changes were visual and involved superficial styling. There is plenty of obsolescence going on now, but I think it has more to do with all the technological innovation that's going on. No one needs to plan it anymore. You hesitate to buy a computer this week because next week there will be an even better one on the market.

# Reshaping Modernism

**Q:** What's one of your favorite designs of the '80s?

**A:** The Ford Taurus was the first auto lust I had felt in years. It's a slippery car. It's very close to an ideal aerodynamic form, the station wagon is. And this is the first station wagon that was the original form of the car. They adapted the sedan from the station wagon, rather than the other way around. Aerodynamics were assumed in the 1930s to be for speed, but this is a contemporary form of aerodynamics. Its object is fuel-efficiency and highway stability.



"The phenomenon that interests me is the running shoe. It came on the scene as a functional device, but has swept the world as an appearance element, while maintaining its basis of performance. Running shoe companies employ Ph.D.s to design their shoes, but they also employ designers to take care of the appearance. These Ph.D.s are busy exploring all the impact on the foot of the different activities and the shoe is designed accordingly. I hate to run, but I bought a pair just to experience it.

"I must confess also that I find it a conundrum that people who use these shoes a relatively small amount of time each day will spend so much time and so much money researching them and buying them. But a work chair in which they sit for 8 hours a day or longer, they will not research so much."

Niels Diffrient  
Ridgefield, CT

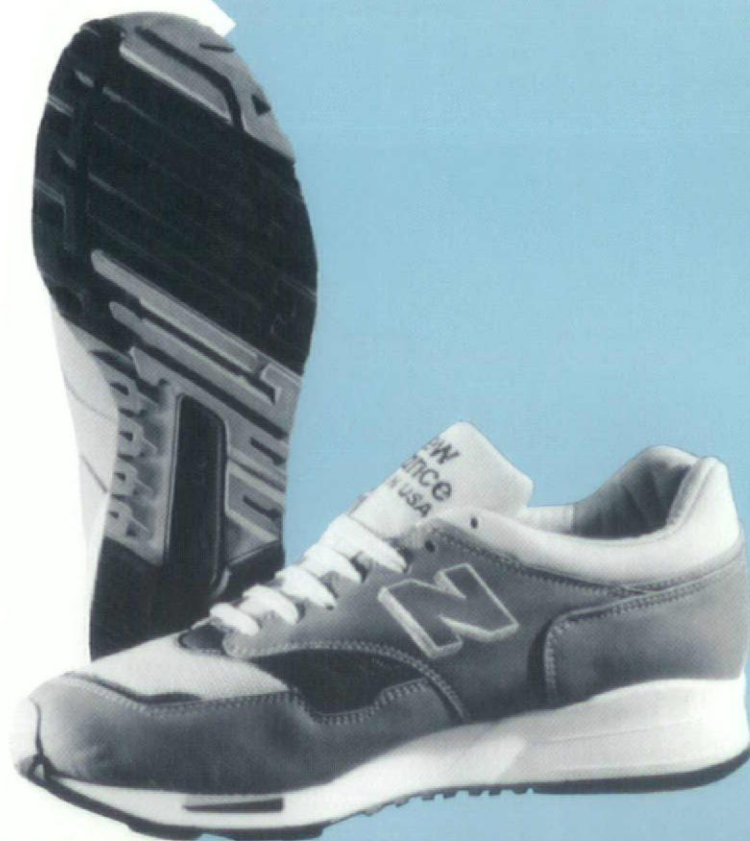


Apple Computer

"The Macintosh computer. What the Mac did was to make computer power accessible to the mass market. Even though the IBM PC did that in theory, in practice it was the Mac, with its graphic user interface and intuitive way of using applications so you didn't have to use arcane computer codes. The fact that the Macintosh paradigm was the right one is evidenced by the fact that the whole computer industry has followed it. The personal computer has probably transformed the sociology of work to the extent that previously only the telephone and the plain paper copier had done before. And what both of those had done was further the distribution and democratization of information and communication."

Arnold Wasserman  
Vice-President of Industrial Design  
Unisys Corp.

37



New Balance





**Robert Mills**  
Courtesy South Carolina  
Historical Society

## An American Original

### Robert Mills, Architect

*Edited by John M. Bryan.  
Illustrated. 196 pp. Washington,  
D.C.: The ALA Press.  
\$39.95 cloth; 26.95 paper.*

By Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr.

Robert Mills was, in his own words, "the first American who has passed through a regular course of Study of Architecture in his own Country." Many of his peers, such as his teacher Benjamin Henry Latrobe, had studied abroad; even more, like his early patron Thomas Jefferson, were self-taught gentlemen-amateurs. Some had been trained by happenstance, rising from the skilled trades to become builder-architects. Mills, though, never hesitated to appeal to his fellow citizens' patriotism, repeatedly billing himself as both superior in training and "altogether American" in his views.

He certainly had chances to prove his worth. Over a career spanning 49 years, Mills worked on more than 160 projects. While noted by Virginians

for his surviving works in Richmond, he is perhaps better known nationwide for the Fireproof Building in his native Charleston, the Caroliniana Library in Columbia, and the Washington Monument, U.S. Treasury Building and Patent Office (now the National Portrait Gallery), all in the nation's capital.

*Robert Mills, Architect* is a profusely illustrated and detailed introduction to a staggering array of work, from rural county jails to a proposed horse-drawn monorail train designed to run between the federal capital and New Orleans. The book also serves as the culmination of the Smithsonian Institution's five-year project, *The Papers of Robert Mills*, whose editors contributed the book's five essays. The breadth and style of Mills's work has long been recognized, and the essays cover it in detail. Better yet, each also reveals much of the man himself. Mills, who lived from 1781 to 1855, considered himself far more than an architect alone; he possessed a detailed knowledge of engineering, heating, vaulting and fireproof construction. Mills had, after all, served as Latrobe's pupil and assistant for five years. Yet he was in many ways different from his mentor.

One is repeatedly struck by how the architect developed what was then a markedly different form of professional practice. Latrobe was haughty with clients, but Mills learned early to provide his clients with several designs and choices and adapt his ideas to fit their tastes — and pocketbooks. And while many like Latrobe shunned working for public boards, Mills courted such groups. He was an adept marketeer, regularly publishing drawings and specifications in booklets that served as a step-by-step guide for the builder, a handsome keepsake for the proud client,

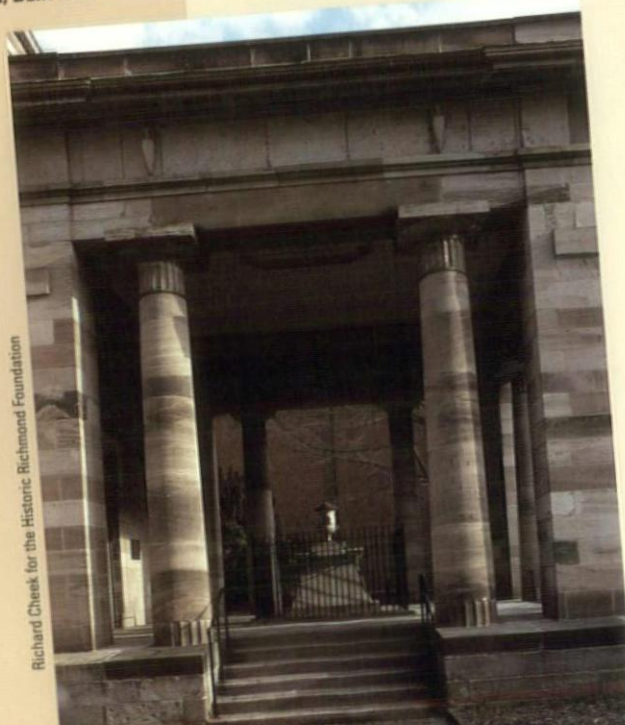
and a useful handout to secure his next commission.

He was clever enough, too, to realize his own limitations. Mills was no artist and knew it. He was, instead, a restrained draftsman who, to quote the book, possessed "that valuable substitute for genius — laborious precision." Thus, in publishing his best work as engravings for public sale, Mills often hired someone else to embellish views with landscaping, billowing clouds and a more artistic perspective.

Such devices proved especially effective in maintaining a business spread across Pennsylvania, Maryland and South Carolina. To those who warned him that he could not possibly supervise so many wide-ranging projects — courthouses, churches, monuments and rowhouses — Mills replied that his intent was rather to develop an economic, uniquely American style, a style at once adaptive and austere, yet tasteful. In short, Mills believed a building's appearance and layout were to be consistent with its use. In his designs for houses, for example, Mills included a fireproof closet for the household's important belongings, another closet by the stairs for outer garments, and a carefully conceived pattern of access for the domestic staff.

He worked extensively in Virginia too, especially Richmond, where he was noted for his "logically arranged" houses. In the Hanover House, Page-Anderson House and John Brockenbrough House — all completed between 1816 and 1818 — Mills placed the parlors to the back and stretched a porch across the entire garden façade, providing a magnificent view to the river while screening the street with halls and stairways at the front. Of the seven Richmond houses attributed to him, only the

Portico Detail,  
Monumental Church,  
Richmond, Built 1814



Richard Cheek for the Historic Richmond Foundation



Brockenbrough House — which served as the so-called White House of the Confederacy, and which some historians still dispute as a Mills design — survives. In each, Mills gradually moved away from a Federal toward a Greek Revival style.

Although his was not the “purely Greek” style sometimes employed by his teacher Latrobe, Mills nevertheless used Greek elements such as the classical orders, heavy triangular lintels and plain wall surfaces chosen for their eloquently severe, even sober, effect. Often he added expressive ornamentation to his churches, as at Richmond’s Monumental Church. Built with a 70-foot-high dome on the site of an 1811 theater fire that claimed more than 70 lives, it is the earliest of the architect’s surviving major works.

Mills, despite so many projects, was frequently scrambling to support his family. He also had to fend off the political fights his government work often engendered: appointed federal architect by President Andrew Jackson in 1836, he eventually was removed with little legitimate cause. And as a transitional figure redefining much of American architecture, he had to contend with the criticism of his peers, including Latrobe, who called Mills “a wretched designer.” Undaunted, Mills had in fact labored to create a classical and somewhat romantic American architecture to show foreigners, as he wrote Jefferson, “that the American talent is not a whit inferior to the European.” In that he very much succeeded.

*Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., a historian at the Virginia State Library and Archives, is editor of Virginia Cavalcade.*

## Waste Not

### **Saving America's Countryside** A Guide to Rural Conservation

By Samuel N. Stokes, A. Elizabeth Watson, Genevieve P. Keller and J. Timothy Keller for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Illustrated. 306 pp. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. \$42.50 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

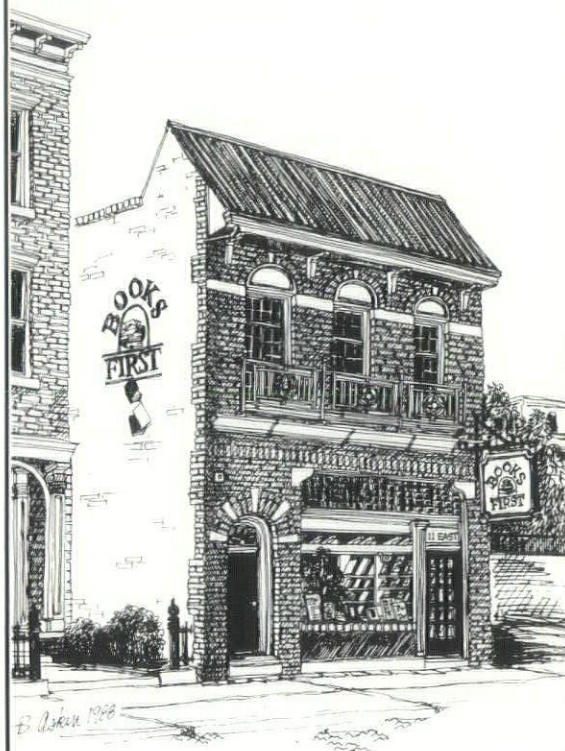
By Robert Freis

It's the sort of community crisis we read about practically every day: a new proposed landfill, a historic mansion slated for demolition, a contaminated water system, or an increase in traffic deaths on an overcrowded road. While our nation lurches in headlong pursuit of remaking itself, the past, the land and the sense of continuity they engender tumble before the bulldozer.

But now, with publication of the book *Saving America's Countryside*, there comes a quiet call to arms for a benevolent revolt on behalf of the natural and cultural landscape. This handbook offers direction on how to transform individual or collective concerns about a community's resources and identity into a functioning, vital organization that has a telling result on events. The approach is comprehensive — from organizing an advocacy group to singling out issues; from fundraising to influence-building. And the tone promotes a sense of partnership with local governments, rather than confrontation.

Two of the book's authors, Genevieve P. Keller and J. Timothy Keller, are principals of Land and Community Associates, a Charlottesville planning and design firm that has undertaken, among other projects, a scenic and historic

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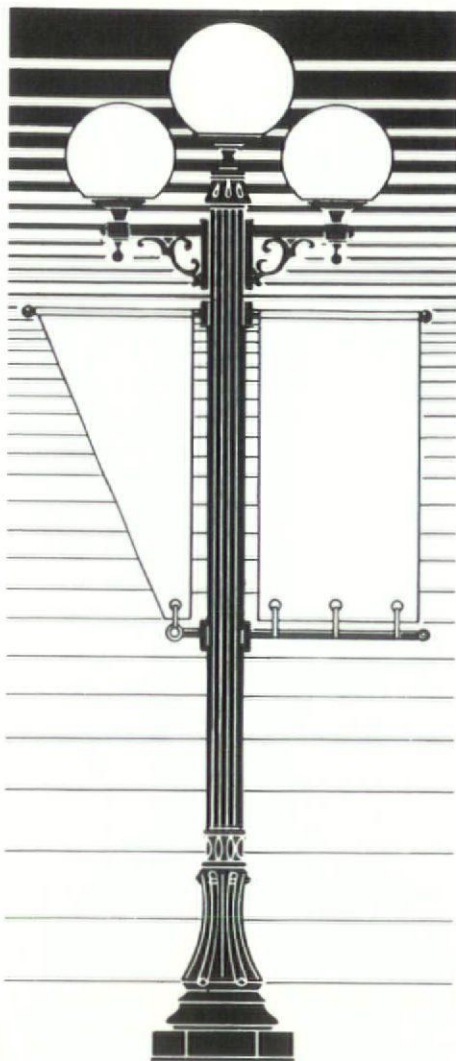


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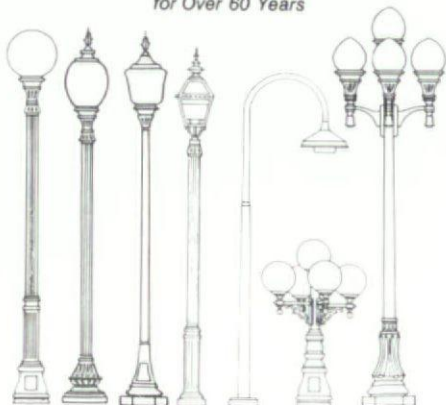
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roads study in Maryland, an environmental assessment for a township in Pennsylvania, and a commercial corridor study for Hanover County, Virginia. Ms. Keller says the book is designed for those who wish to foster or preserve a sense of place or meaning in their communities. As a guide, the book includes a directory of public and private agencies that can be of assistance and numerous case studies of efforts nationwide to protect the man-made and natural environment.

One of the more interesting case studies features Waterford, Virginia, a small venerable Loudoun County community that preserved surrounding rural landscape by acquiring scenic easements, legal covenants that allow land to remain in private hands while restricting development rights. This increasingly favored technique provides tax incentives for the private landowner while accomplishing preservationists' goals without transfer of title.

*Saving America's Countryside* suggests no single methodology. It encourages innovation and maneuverability. The



Goose Creek Historic District,  
 Loudoun County, Virginia

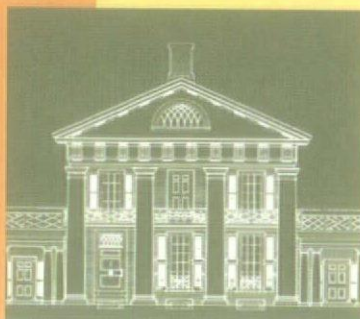
book cautions organizations not to focus on a cathartic defeat or victory, but rather to plan to be a voice heard over many years. It offers a reasoned approach toward often-emotional issues, with an emphasis on strategic effectiveness and wisdom. In times like these of economic vigor and fertile new crops of housing superimposed upon shrinking boundaries of open space, this preservationist's textbook deserves to find its way into the hands of anyone who desires to speak on behalf of our silent, nurturing legacies.

Robert Freis is a freelance writer in Roanoke.

## inform

### Coming Up

In our March/April issue we will feature three new art galleries, the ambitious program for preserving The Lawn at the University of Virginia, and IKEA, a retailing empire built on selling good design. Our departments will look at a professor who led a team to Charleston to survey recent hurricane damage, a Shenandoah Valley town with a remarkable collection of historic architecture, and the recent exhibition "Graphic Design in America."



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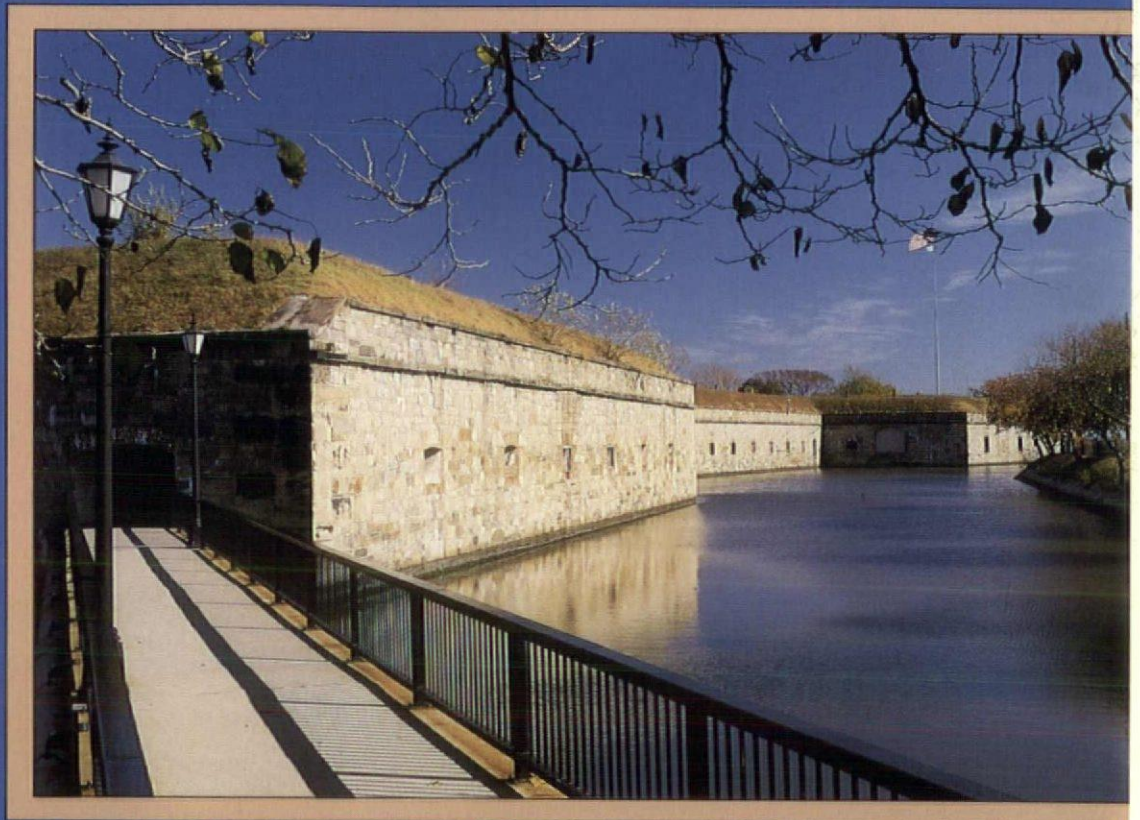
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