



The Corporate Villa



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Editor's Notes

Suburbia, a complex topic of perpetual significance amid the changing patterns of American life, has been examined in several recent issues of *Design Quarterly*. Approached from diverse points of view, an expansive, kaleidoscopic subject emerges.

John Chase, in *DQ 131*, *Unvernacular Vernacular*, looks at contemporary American consumerist architecture, a phenomenon which is, for the most part, a non-urban one. The buildings he chooses to discuss are of no known architectural style, yet in their proliferation they constitute a kind of "people's" style that is quasi-historicist yet essentially unrelated to the accepted evolution of architectural form.

Another look at non-urban America is Lois Craig's *Suburbs*, *DQ 132*, in which she takes a backward glance at the domestic side of suburbia. In this essay she discusses a cross section of residential suburban developments. Everything from the architectural heights of California's Case Study houses to an architecturally impoverished Levittown are reassessed from a fresh perspective.

Another aspect of suburbia, an essentially post-World War II development, is the suburban office building that may stand alone in a semi-rural setting, may be a part of an industrial or office park complex, or may border one of the countless roadside strips that surround our major cities.

Fred Koetter, who practices architecture in Boston and teaches at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, has recently completed a major office complex outside of Boston, the Codex World Headquarters Building. In its salubrious non-urban setting, this project for a facility with over one thousand employees, provided Koetter, Kim & Associates the opportunity (as the winners of a national competition) to create a superior suburban building type, a truly appropriate working environment: a corporate villa.

In this issue of *DQ*, Koetter discusses the history of the suburban office building and then analyzes it in terms of its potential relationship to the classical Roman or Palladian villa. He proposes a new kind of villa cum office that he believes will bring urbanity to the suburbs in a new context.

But can the arcadian dream be realized in America's suburbs? Do our working and domestic goals fit comfortably into such a visionary environment? A small group of idealists persists in the search for suburban prototypes that will provide affirmative answers to these questions.

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(front cover, inset)
Andrea Palladio
Villa Almerico Capra
(La Rotonda)
Vicenza, Italy
© Philip Trager 1986

(front and back cover)
Koetter, Kim & Associates
Codex World
Headquarters Building
aerial view, 1986

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Fred Koetter

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As our ever expanding suburbs come to replace the city center as America's primary workplace, the suburban office building has emerged as a conspicuous element in the contemporary landscape. Yet the typical suburban office building, often isolated or collected in sterile "office parks," offers no coherent substitute for the services, amenities, diversions and public life provided by the city.

It may be said that these buildings are direct reflections of the society they serve. The mass suburbanization process has, in effect, created an atomized society—scattered and uprooted—whose citizens, collectively nourished by electronic communication, are socially and culturally starved because of their physical isolation from one another. Today's suburban society, quite simply, is a society with no identifiable public presence and no tangible public realm in the traditional sense. The typical suburban office building stands as a mute monument to this situation.

At the same time, one recognizes these buildings (along with other public arenas such as shopping centers) as natural meeting places—as places where the citizens of suburbia actually "get together" on a regular basis. Therefore, might not these buildings and their associated activities become catalysts in the formation of a new kind of public realm drawn from the suburban experience? They could perhaps constitute an alternative to the city, reflecting not only the aspirations of suburban life but also the necessities of genuine community expression. With such thoughts in mind, how might this potential public realm be given physical form? In considering the possible architecture of such places, one hopes to identify a building form that, while removed from the city, maintains a level of civility and public presence normally associated with urban architecture. Such an inquiry might also recognize that suburbia may be seen as part of a larger "non-urban" or "other than urban" tradition and that its various public or common-use installations, particularly the suburban office building, might be gainfully informed by the architecture and building types of this tradition.

More specifically, I would propose that the villa, the large country house of classical origin—a conspicuous element of that non-urban tradition—is directly relevant to this inquiry, and that a useful and positive association between the villa and the suburban office building is possible.