
 BOOK REVIEWS

Charles W. Moore, Kathryn Smith, and Peter Becker (Editors), *American Domestic Vernacular Architecture: Home Sweet Home*. Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles and Rizzoli, New York, 1983, 150 pp., \$17.50.

"Home sweet home/with a sense of place/and motion/made by children/or children grown up/of adobe/or wood/or covered with stucco/and drenched in dreams." These themes of the above image form the content of *American Domestic Vernacular Architecture: Home Sweet Home*, a publication culminating from a symposium and a series of exhibitions at museums and galleries throughout Los Angeles and Orange County. The book was supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and was underwritten by a grant from the Ahmanson Foundation. Among other supporters of this project were the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Craft and Folk Art Museum of Los Angeles coordinated the project.

The book is a compendium of illustrations and essays by various architects, interior designers, architectural historians, museum administrators, and educators that address each theme. Quoting from Webster's Dictionary, Charles Moore's introduction defines vernacular as "of the people, of ordinary people in particular." He presents this book as an American counterpart to Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects*.

David Rochlin's essay on "The Front Porch" traces its evolution from its early forms to the present, perceptively noting the shift from the public streetscape to the more private backyard and our contemporary substitutes for the front porch: terraces, balconies, and decks. "Added on Ornament," by Jane Bledsoe, contains a brief description of five homes in Long Beach, California, built in the 1920s and 1930s, which were the antithesis of the International Style. Despite some captivating photographs, this article barely scratches the surface, failing to provide any explanation of how, when, or why the occupants of these houses personalized them as they did. Gene Kavanaugh's piece on "Regional Color" unfortunately is illustrated only in black and white. Her writing, however, is inspiring: "driving cross country can be like reading a book about color, only the pages are in days instead of minutes." Dextra Frankel's article on "The Architecture Within" quotes from artists whose work reflects the idiom of vernacular architecture.

Roger Scharmer analyzes the image and identity of houseboats, briefly comparing different houseboat communities along the West Coast. Similarly, Charles Moore illustrates some exotic California mobile home parks with Egyptian and Arabian motifs in his essay on "Trailers."

One of the most scholarly pieces is by Barbara and Arlan Coffman, who analyze early architectural construction toys in America. They point out that constructing toys, which allow bringing the construction to life and taking apart and reboxing various pieces, all contribute to a child's development as a person and can result in an increased sense of self-worth and identity.

James Volkert and Nancy Walch further explore children's vernacular architecture in an essay on exhibitions called "Rough Housing," which encouraged children to participate in the building process on-site at the Junior Arts Center in Los Angeles. Volkert analyzes the patterns with which children approach building: capturing life-sized space; incorporating areas around the building, such as gardens and walls; paying more attention to detail; and developing a systems approach by building things such as gardens and walls; paying more attention to detail; and developing a systems approach by building a tree house, for example. Each two-week session focused on one of these phases. Walch argues that the process of building allows children to explore their creative instincts, learn to make decisions and solve problems, and interact with others.

In his brief section on "Chairs, Boxes, Sheets, and Tree Houses," Roger Hart substantiates the Volkert-Walch argument based on results of his own and other's research. Hart analyzes how children benefit psychologically and socially from building by increasing their sense of competence; experimenting with different role models such as mother, father, cook, architect; and by learning

to cooperate with each other to create a type of Gestalt, such that the final product of the group as a whole surpasses that of its individual members. Hart's many bibliographic sources provide enticing reading to those interested in the topic.

Mary Ann Beach Harrel's piece on "The Vernacular Castle" accompanies a group of photographs displaying Southern California homes that resemble castles. No further references on this topic are given, however. By contrast, Carla Fantozzi's article, "Hearst Castle: The Creation of a California Monument," is linked to a wealth of other literature. She examines the close relationship between client William Randolph Hearst and his architect, Julia Morgan, in designing the San Simeon monument to what had become a California vernacular style.

The book also contains descriptions of "The Ranch House" of old California by Esther McCoy and Evelyn Hitchcock, "The Plank House of the Northwest Coast Indians" by Bob Easton, and "The Common American Bungalow" by Robert Winter. Winter's text and fascinating illustrations, many of them advertisements from magazines and mail-order catalogs, depict how the bungalow, with its emphasis on the living room and the fireplace, symbolized the good life and attainment of the American dream.

In "Tile, Stucco Walls, and Arches: The Spanish Tradition in the Popular American House," David Gebhard offers one of the most insightful, thought-provoking articles in the anthology. He demonstrates the romanticism of the Spanish tradition through the names that builders gave to these houses: "The Alvarado" and "The Cortez," for instance. Gebhard convincingly argues that the Hispanic image is to the Southwest what the East Coast Colonial has been to the United States east of the Mississippi, that is, an image of continuity, tradition, and almost timelessness.

In a related piece, Kirk Peterson describes "Eclectic Stucco," drawing on examples from Long Beach and Oakland, and directing readers to high concentrations of these buildings in San Francisco's Richmond District, North Berkeley, Hollywood, and San Diego's Mission Hills. The objective of proliferating the stucco style, he proposes, was to provide a link with the Mediterranean, whose climate most resembled that of California.

A highlight of the book and a pleasant surprise is "The Stucco Box," by John Chase and John Beach. This provocative piece examines the seemingly nondescript stucco apartment buildings that first sprung up in multitudes during the 1950s and 1960s all over the Los Angeles basin. The mass production of this building form corresponded with the surge in the city's population, and the authors argue that these apartments primarily fulfilled a need for temporary housing for new immigrants to California. The authors aptly point out that their color palettes had more in common with automobile, fashion, advertising, industrial design, and contemporary art of the 1950s than with most previous residential color schemes. In fact, these architects' use of abstract art and irregular forms for ornamentation in grilles, frames, and panels displayed a superficial commitment to Modernism. The conclusion of Chase and Beach is that the stucco box has become an artifact symbolizing faith in technological progress, upward social mobility, relatively stable social values, and the City of Los Angeles itself.

"The Temple, the Cabin and the Trailer," by Charles Moore sums up the exhibits on which this book was based as "America's cultural baggage." "The Three Commandments of Vernacular Architecture," the final piece (by Peter Zweigg and Bruce Webb) concludes that the builders of these houses shared the following goals: "make it shelter; make it look like something; make it a dream."

Overall, this book constitutes worthwhile reading for architects, architecture students, and the general public. As far as academicians are concerned, they would probably find only a handful of the articles (about one-third) to be intellectually enlightening. This is neither a "coffee table" picture book nor a reference book for one's scholarly library; along this spectrum it falls somewhere in between, more like specialized pleasure reading.

Among the book's shortcomings is its lack of emphasis—again with some notable exceptions (the Coffman, Gebhard, Hart, Chase and Beach pieces, for example)—on scholarly research and its reliance instead primarily on essays, thought pieces, and at times almost poetic passages. This type of writing has its place in architectural literature, but it is not research. For the most part, the book offers much breadth but little depth. Many of the authors simply describe a particular house form, show pictures

of it, but make no effort to explain how or why it developed, to relate it to other literature, or to carefully develop and substantiate an argument. Some pieces read more like extended captions for photographs rather than an attempt to contribute to a larger body of knowledge.

The book as a whole reads as a series of unrelated passages, and the connections among them are relatively weak. While the introductory pages to each section, written by Peter Becker, are well written, the organization of the entire work is not clear. The subheadings reflect disparate, unrelated parts rather than a cohesive whole. A seemingly trivial point, but one that reflects poor production quality and is distracting to readers is the frequent number of typos found in the text. Lastly, the title of the book is too general to reflect its true content. Most articles focus on the West Coast, and especially California. The domestic vernacular architecture presented is not truly representative of all the United States. House forms in New England, the Midwest, and the South, for example, are rarely mentioned. The unusual nature of the book, encompassing several different museum exhibits, helps explain some of its deficiencies. The task of tying all these materials together must have been exceedingly difficult.

Nonetheless, despite its weaknesses, this book adds a needed dimension to the current literature on the home. It offers a potpourri, a collage of different vantage points, and offers food for thought for future research. For instance, how do residents of conventional housing view inhabitants of house-boats and trailers—or their most recent, improved form, manufactured housing? How do city decision makers view them? What kinds of stereotypes about these occupants persist? What does the average person think of stucco boxes? Might these too, someday, be viewed in a more favorable light?

The book's other major contribution is its generous use of visual materials, especially black and white photography. These photographs help capture the feel of vernacular architecture and are often just as important as the text. This strong integration of visual and verbal material is sadly missing from much of the architectural research and environment-behavior literature.

Finally, the editors should be credited for succeeding in broadening the definition of American vernacular architecture, as Peter Becker put it in his conclusion, "to include the roots, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, and especially, the flowers, to consider the beauty of the whole, and to suggest that the prize, so revealed, is worth the having."

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C. Richard Hatch, (Editor), *The Scope of Social Architecture*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1984, 362 pp., \$42.50 Hardcover.

Over the past two decades, while the planning profession has seen a significant shift toward community participation, architects have, by and large, held to the model of a unified design where the architect is responsible for everything from the general concept down to the smallest detail. There are, however, a group of architects who have been urging that users should share in the design of buildings, particularly in the design of residential buildings. These architects have applied their ideas in a number of experimental projects, and this is a book about 26 of these. Most of the projects are in Europe—Holland, Austria, England, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Sweden—but there are also projects in New York, California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Virginia, and two in Cuba. I will not list the projects, some of which have been well publicized in various journals. The projects are, however, varied in terms of subject matter, purpose, and philosophy, and the way in which future users are involved in the design process. Nor will I list the 52 architect-authors and commentators, many of them well known. The presentations are, on the whole, open, clear, and thoughtful, and, with one exception, remarkably free from the "fairy dust" that rises when one pounds most books on architectural design. Most of the projects include multifamily, multistory apartment buildings, and most reflect the influence of John Habraken and the SAR in