

Architects Searching

Hawaii Can Build On Much History

In the interest of improved urban design, members of the American Institute of Architects, Hawaii Chapter, have prepared a series of articles concerning the Island "City-scape" for the Sunday Star-Bulletin and Advertiser of which this article is the first.

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The impressions of an architect on coming to Honolulu to live, especially to one who has been a critic and writer on architecture, are bound to be mixed.

A first reaction is that in this benevolent tropical atmosphere the Pacific-oriented design traditions should unquestionably be continued. One welcomes the occasional building that emphasizes this fact, and turns up one's nose at the contemporary steel and concrete structures that might equally well have been built in California, New York or Michigan.

But very soon, when one stays here for longer than a tourist's stretch, a reaction sets in: Hawaii, particularly Honolulu, is no longer the kind of society that produced the thatched-roof shelter. It is worth while to understand and admire the cultures of that kind that have passed and those few that remain, but to design and build in those same terms today makes no sense.

What then, should the contemporary architecture of Honolulu be, and how well have its architects achieved it?

In the first place, there are many local traditions to draw on beside the questionable "native" one. There are the anomalous but handsome structures of the missionary period, the stolid masonry headquarters of the big companies, the strong influences from romantic Mainland architects. There are vital local contributions made earlier by creative local people, some very poorly documented, such as the work of C. W. Dickey and Hart Wood.

Most important are the factors of environment: The sun, the rain, the benign temperature, the mountains and the sea, the beaches and the broad horizons.

The malihini welcomes evident attempts to base design upon these qualities.



Outrigger Canoe Club architecture fits the setting.

The occasional street-level arcade, the great open central court of City Hall (and soon of the State Capitol), the prevalence of the lanai — these seem to be natural expressions of a Hawaiian architecture and one wishes for more.

It is very easy to be critical of the architectural work that has been done here. A great deal of it has been imitative; much of it is inappropriate. The overall impression is chaotic.

On the campus of the University of Hawaii, at Waikiki, in the developing downtown area, on the ridges and the valleys as tall buildings go up, in the new subdivi-

sions — everywhere there is a mixture of styles, of scales, of materials.

But after all the impressions and reactions, one ends up with a sense of vitality, of searching, of an increasing maturity.

In many residences, in some of the new hotels, office buildings and even apartments, the results are good and are appropriate to the Islands. In a casual drive from downtown to Kahaala one sees many recent structures that look well in Honolulu and might look out of place somewhere else.

There is a great deal of work to be done, and there is a capable, disciplined group of local architects to do it.

How to achieve that openness to the climate and yet privacy for oneself, that casualness that the aloha way of life demands, and yet the dignity that the growing stability of the State deserves; how to develop materials so that they are used naturally; how to use the diminishing land to the best advantage to its owners and its neighbors — these are the problems that architect and community will struggle within the period ahead.

Ultimately, the big question is the last one: How the architect and the community can work together to achieve these ends. The big challenge for the architectural profession in Hawaii is to express the aims and the hopes of the people of Hawaii.

Architecture is not an isolated, personal creative effort; it results from community needs and desires. That is the reason for this series of articles: for your architects to tell you of their beliefs, and for the public to talk back about its wishes.



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