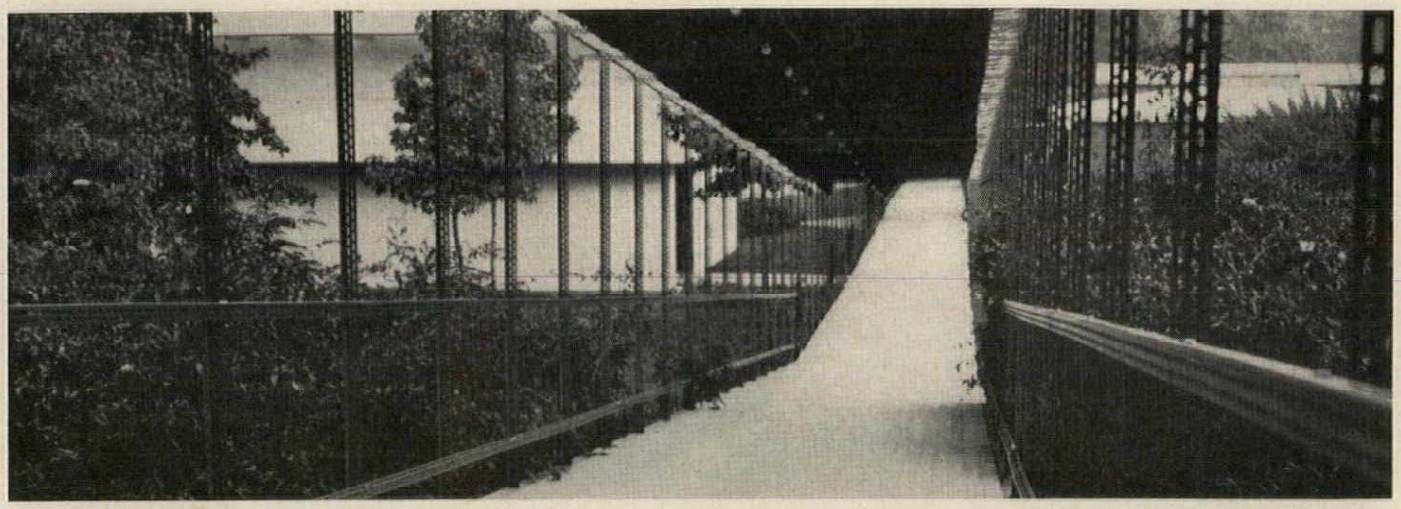

The covered way leading to the Park

MILAN'S ELEVENTH TRIENNALE: THE MOOD (MODE?) INTERNATIONAL

A Provocative Tour of the Latest Exhibition in a Special Report by Betty Campbell, Editor of the English Journal "Concrete Quarterly"

This summer's Triennale Exhibition at Milan has been described—and particularly by the sophisticated Italians—as just a little disappointing. Perhaps we have grown to expect too much of this Exhibition, which gathers together the best in architecture, decoration and industrial design. Of course, the standard of excellence was high. That one could even wish it higher is a tribute to the fabulous reputation the Triennale has built up for itself.

The architectural section was devoted to a historical outline of the development of structure, leading up to the exhibition of modern design and planning which made its greater part.

In some ways this section was the weakest in the Exhibition. That it contained little that was unfamiliar is perhaps an unfair criticism, since it was intended primarily for the general public and, as such, showed an admirable cross-section of the best work of the past decade. The presentation—clever—suffered at times from being too clever. Much of it led through narrowing and opening passages closed with false walls and ceilings, and trick lighting, at times highly effective, degenerated at others into a gloom in which it was difficult to see the exhibit at all.

The story led, by models and enlargements, from column-and-beam, through the false arch, the Roman vault, and medieval timber work, to Baroque, representing, as the caption said, the first "conquest of space through structure." It then moved on to the great iron engineers—Telford, Brunel, Paxton, Eiffel, Roebling, and to the early reinforced concrete work.

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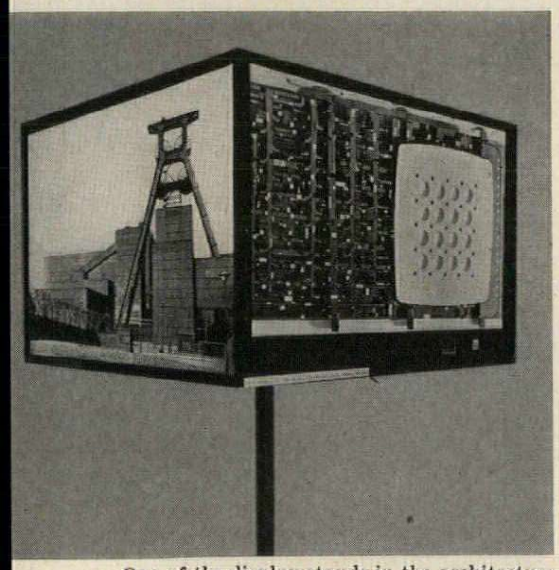
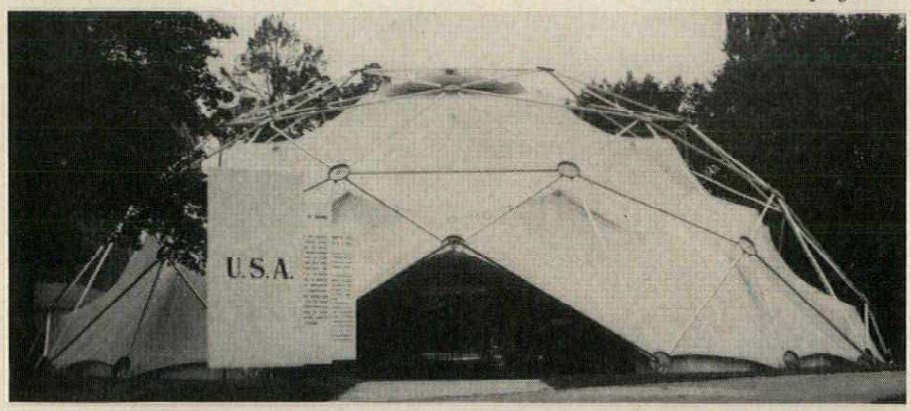
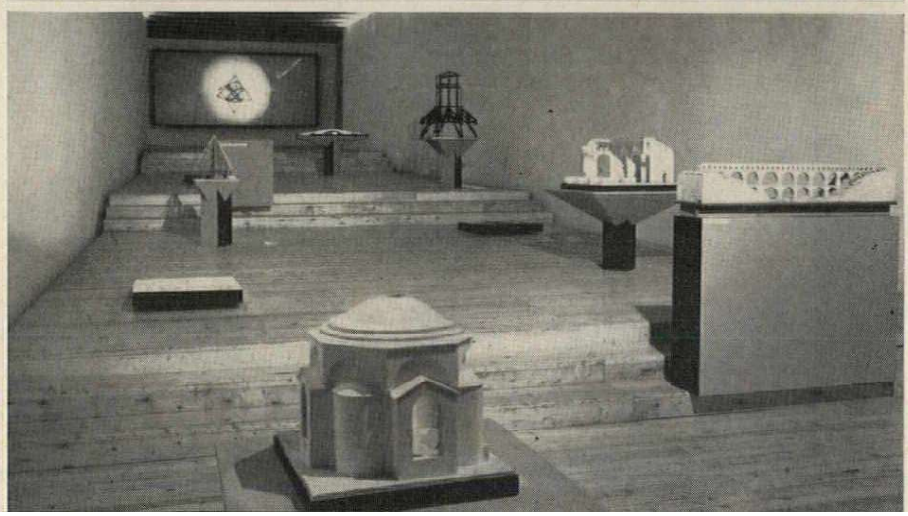


One of the display stands in the architecture section, with transparencies illuminated from within



The U. S. pavilion: the ubiquitous Bucky Fuller dome—framing here aluminum



Introductory exhibits in the Architecture section—"in some ways . . . the weakest in the Exhibition"

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—of Perret, Gaudi, Mendelsohn and Gropius, taking in Sant' Elia's prophetic City of the Future, Burnham and Root's Monadnock block, Chicago, and the first of Maillart's bridges.

At most of the exhibits of the 30's one peered through a darkness more reminiscent of a Ghost Train tunnel than an exhibition hall, but the Italians have gone seriously into this question of "museology", so presumably they were only trying out some of their theories. (They appeared to greater advantage in the really admirable "Museology" section in another part of the building.) A little more light shone briefly on work of the '40s and '50s, illuminating well-known photographs and models—Nervi's lovely ferro-cement roofs, the UNESCO building, the General Motors Technical Center, Detroit; Le Corbusier's work at Chandigarh; Lever House, New York; the Pirelli skyscraper, Milan; Neutra's Desert House; the Brynmawr factory in Wales. . . . But not for long; darkness fell again on models and photographs of Candela's Mexican factories, of Mies van der Rohe's Chicago convention hall project, of another skyscraper for Milan. . . . Could it be an intimation of an approaching Dark Age in architecture?

A view of the German section—"bright, hard precision, with a complementary streak of a rather dull heaviness cropping up in colors and shapes of pottery"

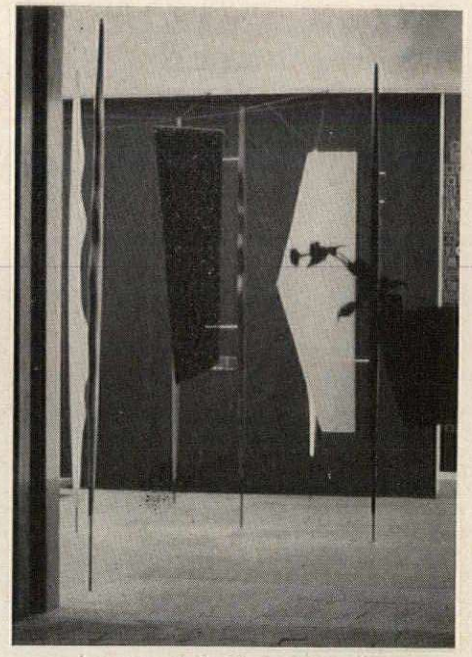
The "planning" section traced the development of the "Neighborhood", from a Roman Legion's camp in Algeria, through a 13th century English cathedral close, "Campi" in Venice, medieval neighborhoods in Germany, and the Georgian squares of London, to the early 20th century Garden Cities of Welwyn and Hampstead in England, suburbs in Berlin, Brussels, and Rotterdam, Le Corbusier's Pessac center, and so to the present day—the Pedregulho neighborhood outside Rio, recent work in England and Scandinavia, SHAPE Village, Paris, and the vast number of attractive estates built in Italy by the "INA Casa" organization. Frank Lloyd Wright's 1934 Broadacre project was there, Greenbelt, Maryland, and Gropius's designs for New Kensington, Pennsylvania. The survey culminated in an immense model of a reconstructed area for Rotterdam designed by a Dutch group from CIAM for a population of 35,000. It provided one large residential unit and two smaller, with blocks of flats of from four to twenty stories and houses both grouped and terraced, an industrial district, a civic center with domes and shell roofs, a stadium, sports grounds and park.

A section of the Triennale was given over to Italian regional arts and

crafts—a colorful display, mainly of textiles and ceramics, some of which showed a rich, Picassoesque quality.

Other sections were "Art Production" (mainly Italian), "Industrial Design", and the national exhibits of different countries.

From an overall survey of the national exhibits it is strange to see how nationalism and internationalism merge and part. There is, of course, the general climate of design —inevitable, and completely international. And there are, within it, clearly marked national characteristics. But more remarkable were the similarities of *detail* between the work of one artist and another, and still more, of one country and another. For instance, it was sufficiently surprising to see the similarity between the work of different artists in the Italian jewelry display; the ubiquitous thin spidery tendrils, combined with simple plate-forms, all in plain gold. But it was even more so to see, in the German section, exactly the same spidery tendrils, set against the same gold plate-form. And to note the prevalence of the "contemporary" form of table cutlery. These short broad prongs, these short broad blades and leaf-like shapes, this all-metal—dull, smooth metal—approach, are international. Evidently the sophisticated craftsman, of whatever country, is more susceptible to the international mood—or mode?—than to national influences.



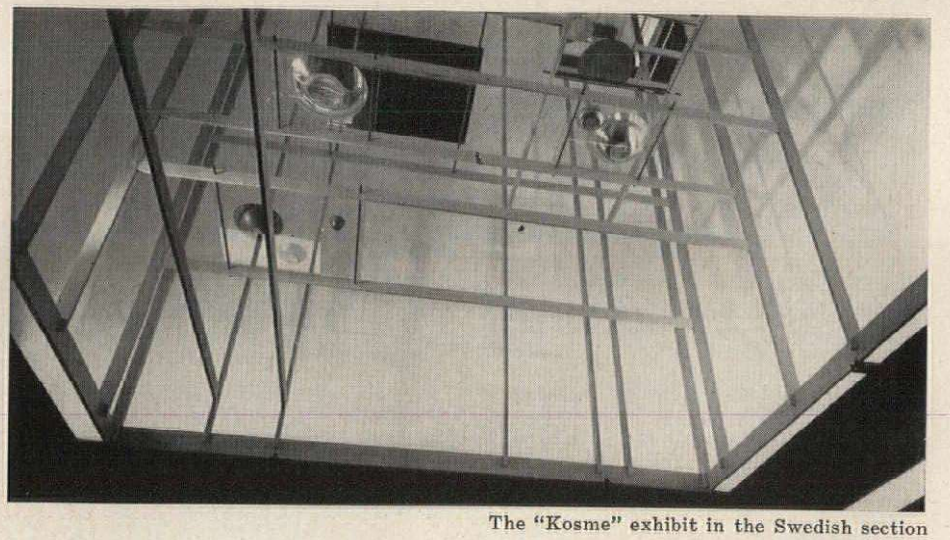
A corner of the Yugoslav section

The national characteristics were most evident (and indeed, immediately recognizable) in a general "feel", and presentation of the display. The whole of the German display, for instance, largely devoted to precision instruments, had the same bright, hard precision, with a complementary streak of a rather dull heaviness cropping up in colors and shapes of pottery (pottery shapes, basically very similar to those from other countries, but just lacking the final refinement).

The Danes, with their smooth woods and silver, had an equally recognizable air—of fresh, outdoor simplicity; the Swedes, as would be expected, presented a more polished and sophisticated version of the same thing; the Norwegians a more practical version. The Finnish approach, again, dominated by timber, and with a curiously Japanese flavor, was both characteristic and expected. The Italian contribution, largely in the "Art Production" section, where they showed jewelry, metalwork, textiles, enamels, ceramics, and glass, as well as decorated and furnished rooms, had all its expected elegance.

The "Industrial Design" section highlighted the practical quality of American designers. In the cubicles devoted to individual exhibitors the Walter Dorwin Teague Associates

showed a smoothly complex X-ray mechanism, Bell and Howell; and Burroughs a microfilm recorder-reader; Louis Becver of the General Electric Company a wall refrigerator; the Container Corporation of America a design laboratory. Exhibits from the United Kindom, France, Italy, Switzerland, Finland and Japan ranged from a Diesel locomotive (Great Britain) and an all-plastic and nylon Citroen car body (France) to an amethyst ring (Sweden), by way of furniture, bathroom fittings, kitchen- and tableware and cutlery.



The "Kosme" exhibit in the Swedish section

The United States' main exhibit was a pavilion in the grounds: one of R. Buckminster Fuller's geodetic frames of tubular aluminum sustaining its now familiar plastic canvas tent. It was perhaps unfortunate that the exhibit itself was so limited in appeal: methods of communication was the theme—radio and television, inter-office communication, factory communication, speaking equipment of all kinds, in large handsome cabinets and consoles. The only exhibits of a more general nature came from a few individual designers—in the "Industrial" section, and in the international furnishing section, where Charles Eames, George Nelson and Herman Miller showed office furniture, armchairs and tables.

A covered way led from the main hall to the grounds—useful on the day of pouring rain on which we visited the exhibition. Like several of the pavilions themselves, it was constructed with light pierced aluminum angle pieces, cut to modular dimensions, which proved both adaptable and effective.

A specimen bungalow designed on the "FEAL" system developed by Ing. Giovanni Varlonga for rapid construction to one- or two-story height was the only contribution to new building methods. It has a frame of steel-pipe columns filled *in situ* with concrete and a floor or roof slab formed with light steel joists. Wall infillings are hollow pumice concrete blocks, faced externally with aluminum; window frames and other fittings are aluminum; there are suspended acoustic ceilings. The house was used as a display of furnishings and equipment designed by Professor Ponti and others, which showed once again the "mood"—or mode—of the moment. But perhaps, at this stage, one should cease to seek in today's objects of "art decoratif"—of industrial design—the expression of an individual artist, and accept the fact that this fashion has become a *style*, to be accepted as such.