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Editorial

The awards game

This month in San Francisco, at the annual convention of the American Institute of Architects, 16 architectural firms will receive citations for their work through the annual Honor Awards Program. They are to be congratulated. Such competitions have some value: the winning buildings get shown in newspapers and magazines, and help to set a higher national standard of architecture; and the A.I.A. results, picked by qualified and conscientious juries, excel the usual selections by scratch juries pulled together on occasion by local civic organizations. Eleven of this year's 13 award-winning buildings (other than houses) had been chosen by FORUM, quite independently, as instructive buildings to show in some detail to its readers. And yet the award procedure should not be taken too seriously by either winners or losers.

Here are some of the difficulties that the eminent juries are up against:

First, a building to win must be entered, as in any competition, and meeting the rules is both exacting and a bit costly. Hence, the awards are limited to those having the time, money, temerity, or inclination to submit their work.

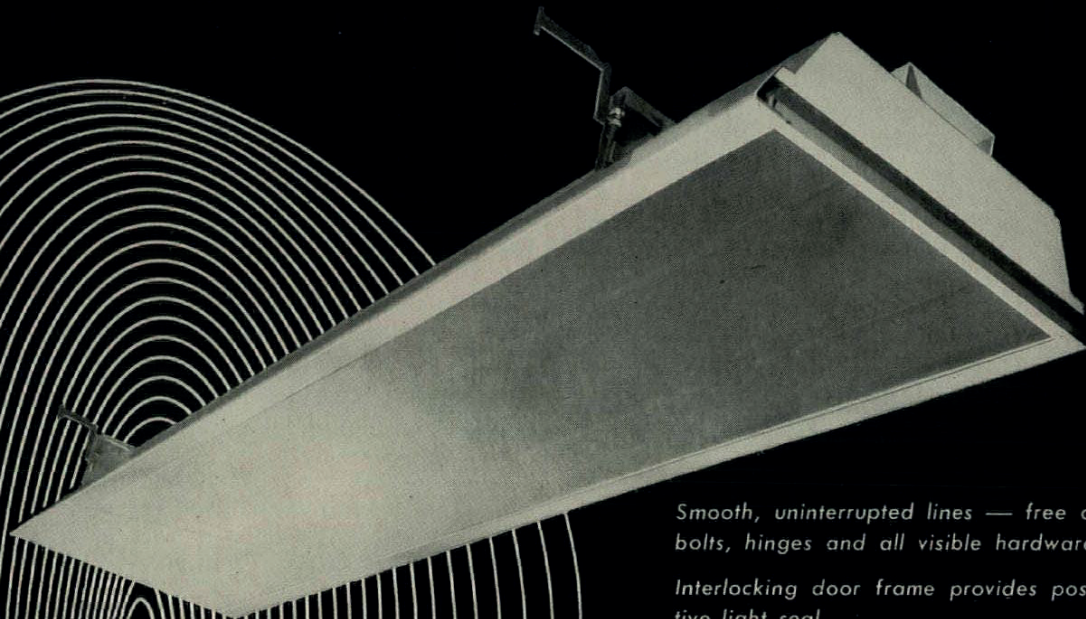
Second, it is entirely a matter of chance if jury members have seen any of the actual buildings. Photographs and plans are the chief basis of judgment; and both can conceal as well as reveal. Then, too, as Critic Bruno Zevi has said, photographs are a poor substitute at best in judging *space*, and the quality of the space which architecture creates is, after all, the essential "stuff" of the art.

Third, a competition without categories compares peas and carrots, since the buildings are totally dissimilar in program, budget, ownership, locale.

Surely it is asking too much of a jury, no matter how distinguished, to review hundreds of buildings and come up infallibly with 16 stand-outs. It was cruel of Frank Lloyd Wright to characterize the jury process as "the average of an average by an average." Yet buildings

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that are exceptional and therefore controversial must inevitably fall out, leaving a tendency to pick the "first among equals."

Awards of distinction in architecture, like awards for achievement in movies or in beauty—or in journalism—are pleasant, occasionally helpful customs, which will be ever with us. They may inspire, instruct, promote. It is hardly news to say that nevertheless competitions cannot substitute for the independent judgment of enlightened individuals, but this may, in today's publicity-conscious U.S., be worth a reminder.

Farewell to a valued friend

With the death last month of Adriano Olivetti, the Italian manufacturer and civic leader, architecture and the arts lost a great friend. Signor Olivetti was the latest, and in his lifetime the greatest, of the creative Renaissance-type patrons of the arts, and he supported them not as a matter of duty or of prestige, but joyfully and bountifully and with participation, as a man of culture naturally would.

He was president of the Olivetti Typewriter Co., a family enterprise with its chief facilities at Ivrea near Turin. He made a top-rank architectural project out of every factory facility that he produced, and beyond that of the housing, the schools, the recreational facilities, and other civic buildings that he erected for his employees and their community. A high design standard permeated not only the plant but the product; and not only the product but the showrooms, the advertising,

the graphic production, and everything that pertained to Olivetti's enterprises. In the U.S., the Olivetti showroom was a chief ornament of Fifth Avenue; it was designed by the outstanding Milan firm of "Studio Architetti BBPR" (Belgiojoso, Peressutti, Rogers) and was a showpiece for the arts and crafts, notably the sand-sculpture wall of Constantino Nivola. Other showrooms such as San Francisco's, by Designer Leo Lionni and Architect Giorgio Cavaglieri, won wide acclaim.

Olivetti did more than set a fine example in the arts; he was aware of the importance of art propagation. All architectural and planning publications in Italy that had any standing were aided by him financially, and he founded an international art journal named *Sele Arte* and an international architectural one, *Zodiac*. Two other, nonart, publications mirrored his other extensive interests: *Technica et Organizzazione* his industrial ones, and *Comunita* his social ones. (He set up the National Institute of Town Planning, and established small factories in more than 65 communities, many of them rural, operated wide-ranging employee benefits, set up his "Community Movement" to battle Communism, was elected mayor of Ivrea, and a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.)

Olivetti was probably a sharp bargainer in a business deal, and he was a showman. American planners and architects who attended an Olivetti-organized conference, in 1955, of Italian and American professionals, remember being impressively conducted through the Naples Olivetti establishment by the sturdy

Roman-browed figure in a snow-white suit, attended by a photographer as potentates were once attended by court jesters. Such little vagaries merely rendered the more appealing Adriano Olivetti's massive concern with the whole range of values of today's cultivated man.

Architecture will long and gratefully remember him.

The winner: San Francisco

There is a familiar saying that every man should be allowed to love two cities—his own and San Francisco. We love San Francisco, and we are happy she is no longer coasting on her climate and her cable cars. In a wave of new building, she has begun to rediscover herself: painfully through the automobile which is slashing her proud bay views and swallowing her parks, joyfully in new buildings that portend a whole rich architectural Renaissance.

But it is in her biggest downtown project, perhaps, that San Francisco stands to learn the most about herself. Unlike some cities that have allowed their "Gateways" and "Centers" and "Miracle Miles" to shape themselves, San Francisco has carefully studied its own Golden Gateway project, and then thrown it open to a design competition that has attracted some formidable teams indeed (see page 112). The breadth and clash of ideas, some offering highly original translations of San Francisco, can only benefit the final result. And the concepts—including the concept of a competition itself—might suggest to other cities some new approaches to urban life.