

Summary

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Summary

David G. Murray, Robert L. Jones and Lee C. Murray

House in an Orchard (pages 2-7)

Tulsa in 1900 had a population of 1930. In 1960 the population of this city is estimated to be about 258,000, or even 414,000 if the population of the suburbs is reckoned in. Throughout this sensational growth there has been an uneven expansion in the various districts of the city. In this way certain areas in the centre of the town have retained a rural aspect; they are rural islands, as it were, in the urban sea. These "islands" were in the hands of private owners, and their value has never stopped soaring. They were sold and built over progressively. Our "house in an orchard" is located on one of these plots! The site in question measures 8000 sq. m. It has a stand of American hazel-nut trees. The setting is so natural and the buildings so modest that there is scarcely any "contrast" between landscape and architecture. This plainly does not mean that there is no longer any contrast of any kind; nor is there any question of "adaptation." What is involved here is simply an architecture without any pretensions, a self-effacing architecture.

The house is designed for a family of six, parents and four children. On the south side, the living-room and the kitchen, on the north side, the bedrooms. Between the bedrooms are situated the bathrooms (two of them), the heating installation and cupboards.

As one approaches the house from the front, one crosses the parking area for cars and bicycles. The visitor is led by a stone wall straight toward the entrance. There is a bench in front of this entrance. Just inside the entrance is the vestibule, which is dark. Upon entering the living-room, the visitor steps into much more intense light; what's more, there is more space and less feeling of restriction. This spatial disposition was deliberately contrived and creates a most happy effect.

Whereas the living-rooms are situated on the south side, the bedrooms (which can also serve as living-room or studio) are placed on the north side. The north rooms have their coziness accentuated by little windows, whereas the south rooms command an expansive view of the outdoors. Canopies serve as sunbreaks and keep excessive sunlight out of the interior of the house. The trusses of the villa are of steel I-sections. Beneath these steel elements there is a suspended plaster ceiling. The covering is formed by panels of folded sheet metal. The space between the suspended ceiling and the covering of sheet metal serves as a ventilation duct. The heat insulation is placed on the plaster slabs.

The site, owing to its size, permits rather extensive landscaping, including room for a garden: the family's hobby is vegetable gardening!

The temperature in this region of the U.S.A. is very high during at least 5 months of the year, which means that air-conditioning is indispensable. Unfortunately, air-conditioning is extremely expensive, and another solution was hit upon: From a well 6 meters deep 14° C. water is pumped through a system of pipes which cools the floor of the house. This method costs only 1/4 as much as the ordinary air-conditioning plant.

Michael and Angela Newberry

Private House on four pillars (pages 8-10)

The concept of "metallic skeleton" always implies a characteristic type of architecture. This does not prevent the steel buildings of Murray, Jones and Murray, Michael and Angela Newberry and Walter Brune from being extremely different. This differentiation is attained

thanks to the different profiles employed and the different static conceptions.

The Newberry villa rests only on four steel pillars, decentered on 1/3 of each equal side of the building (the plan of the house is thus square).

"Skeleton" construction, especially steel skeleton construction, calls for extremely thin walls, since the steel sections themselves are very narrow. Consequently, these walls must be thin and, moreover, light, since they do not serve any static purpose. They have a double function, a thermal one on the one hand, and a protective one on the other. In the case which interests us here, the pillars are especially thin. Consequence: the walls are of glass. That is to say, they can not be reduced further.

The living-rooms and the bedrooms have been situated behind this wall of continuous glass, whereas the sanitary installations and the like are placed in the central core of the house. The window panes are no longer an optical limit, their function is reduced to the "mechanical" limit. It is the surroundings themselves, full of trees, that here plays the role of optical limitation. When the trees are bare of their leaves, in winter, for instance, curtains guarantee privacy: one kind of curtain is translucent—for use in the daytime—, another kind is absolutely opaque.

As can be seen, the material, technical and conceptual possibilities of modern architecture are enormous. The vocabulary of merely human language does not suffice to describe them.

The plan of the house is square, 10.8x10.8 m. Illustration 7 shows the metallic construction. The bedroom and the bathroom are carpeted. The ducts of the heating system are run into the concrete slabs, along with the ventilation ducts (Cf. Design Sheet).

Friedrich Wilhelm Kraemer

Sandforth House in Brunswick (pages 11-13)

The architect has the following to say about his work:

Although modern architecture has obtained a foothold everywhere, its possibilities do not appear to be clearly defined. The almost total effacement of walls, the replacement of walls by glass have obliged us to make use of the surroundings as an element of spatial limitation. We are led to believe that this new conception of nature corresponds to our present-day mode of life. But what is involved here is not just a conception of nature, but rather a new spatial conception of so-called modern architecture.

Formerly, the constructed space was surrounded by walls, it was a closed volume. At the present time, the architectural space has become a co-penetration of different elements, not necessarily "closed": mobile walls, pillars, glass fronts, etc. These different elements constitute a complex which is no longer identical with the "closed" and discrete volume. Limitations have been replaced by co-penetrations.

This new spatial conception has thus completely changed the external aspect of our architecture. To be sure, we are still obliged to protect ourselves from cold and heat. But it is no longer thick, heavy walls that serve the function of thermal insulation. They have been replaced by glass and the sandwich plate. Of course, glass alone, i.e., the increase in size of the windows, does not suffice to define this new architectural conception. A transformation of the plan is likewise necessary. In order to achieve this spatial co-penetration, the employment of light pillars is indispensable. Unfortunately, builders of dwelling houses have not up to now succeeded in employing the "light-weight skeleton," probably for economic reasons.

The builder of the Sandforth house was more generous than the average. He has accepted the employment of the skeleton—even though it is more costly—and in this way makes a truly modern plan possible.

Antonio Bonet

Private House in Buenos Aires (pages 14-17)

The building under discussion here is set back from the road in the suburb of Martínez. The architect designates his work "virtual prism," the horizontal limitation of which is formed by the steel skeleton and the vertical limitation by large window panes or again by walls faced with tiling. This principle of limitation—as well as the plans and photographs of the house—reveal the especially formal character of the architectural composition.

There is no doubt that every work of architecture is the product of a certain formal vision on the part of its creator. On the other hand, there can be no question of priority between "design" and the "given problem;" nevertheless, the architect ought to know whether the design ought to correspond to the given problem and to the given materials, or again whether the design ought to take first priority. Architecture in which design "dominates" is not necessarily bad in the sense that the problem inherent in the building is neglected. We believe that every architectural firm possesses certain characteristic formal elements not in any relationship, in the proper sense of the term, with the given architectural problem. Moreover, we shall always have to ask whether these small "embellishments" deserve to exist or not, i.e., whether they are in correspondence with the "laws" of the building in question.

In the case of our private family house in Argentina, the form derives particularly from the construction system (steel skeleton). An examination of the house reveals an accentuation of the spatial arrangement of the various elements. This accentuation is more "external" than internal. The exterior dynamism of the composition is caused by the metallic skeleton, that is to say, by a structural element.

The principal purpose, or even the sole purpose, of a metallic skeleton is structural in nature. As such it becomes an integrating part of the formal totality of the building. But in the case we are discussing here, the skeleton has still other functions: it becomes a dynamic decorative element. The following question will come up: Dare a normally structural element be "supplementarily" entrusted with other functions? In our opinion, no. We have at our disposal other elements when decoration is involved. The employment of structural elements for a non-structural function gives rise to an inevitable disequilibrium in composition.

It should be added that the siting of the building in the garden is, in a very general way, most effective. The steel sections are painted black, the square tiles are red and yellow. The floor tiles of the outer patio and of the balcony are grey.

J. Mozin

Four-storey Private House in Liège (pages 18-21)

A private family house with four stories appears to be an absurdity. However, in the case in question, the architect is his own client and so this phenomenon becomes comprehensible.

The lowest floor comprises a small apartment reserved for the architect's father. The top floor is a roof terrace used in part as storage space for utensils. The owner's apartment proper occupies only the two middle floors. The studio-bedroom is situated at street level, whereas the living area is on the upper floor. The centre pillars and rear ones, of metal, run through three floors, whereas the pillars on the south side run through all four floors. The continuation of the skeleton on the roof floor raises the same problems as the villa of A. Bonet. This "structural" continuation on the terrace serves a purely formal purpose; nevertheless, what appeared to be exaggerated in the case of the Argentine villa seems more plausible in this case.

Without wishing to stress the definite advantages of this family house, it should be added that its most striking quality is that it is Belgian. In fact, since Horta and Bourgeois modern Belgian architecture has practically ceased to be of any importance. The general arrangement of the villa is similar to that of Rietveld in Utrecht. It is sited at the end of a row of houses with sloping roofs. The metallic skeleton is placed on very carefully worked out foundations, the soil here being loose and subject to movement. The steel skeleton is "stiffened" by means of a reinforced concrete wall at street level running north-south and of the wall between the garage and the studio running east-west.

The outer walls are either glazed or faced with sandwich plates. The construction is so devised that certain ground movements can be "absorbed" by the facing elements without their being damaged. The interior separation partitions are of plaster.

This example of Belgian architecture is encouraging.

Walter Brune

Steel, Glass, Stones, Concrete, Plaster and Wood (pages 22-25)

Private House in Wissembourg

The title of this article indicates that the most various materials have been employ-

ed in this house. It can as a general rule be said that the excess of materials exposes the architect to real dangers. Obviously there are no rules without exceptions! The size of the house by Brune in principle allows for the employment of different materials; once again the question is knowing where and how.

We note a stone wall near the chimney which appears to be a supporting element. In reality, this function can only be that of the metallic skeleton! Moreover, certain structural details (consoles in ill. 6) of the steel skeleton appear "forced." Likewise, we find one sole pillar in the living-room (ill. 13) without understanding exactly why it is there.

The dangers we mentioned at the outset have not been entirely avoided. From another point of view it could be said that the quality of the composition—arrangement of the different rooms, etc.—is assured.

Ionel Schein

Tour Viollet in Angers (pages 28-31)

The point-house in question bears the name of the Abbé Viollet, who was one of the first to concern himself with the French "slums." The building under discussion comprises: 28 apartments of four rooms, 28 of three rooms and the caretaker's flat of two rooms; a lobby with telephone, information window, bulletin board, paper basket, letter-boxes; common lounge, play portico for children, garage for bicycles, motorcycles and prams, utility rooms, a lift for six persons, main stairway and emergency stairs. The house is surrounded by a garden where the children can play.

Ignaz Sabel

Building for the Aged (page 32)

The architectural journals hardly ever speak of asylums and homes for the aged. Obviously, we are told, construction is for the younger generation and the future. It should be recalled, however, that certain urgent problems are bound to come up: First: The number of "old people" has considerably increased. Second: A man who has reached a fairly advanced age and practices a profession is obliged to make way more quickly nowadays for the young, i.e., to abandon his profession. Third: Old people no longer have a place in the family circle of earlier centuries (result of industrialization). From these facts we deduce the following:

1. The construction of homes for the aged calls for intense teamwork.
2. Old people need homes and not hospitals.
3. The home ought not to appear like an official enterprise (a kind of ghetto for the aged).
4. Any impression of isolation is to be avoided at all costs.
5. Passivity and an atmosphere of sterility are to be avoided as well.
6. Workshops (for hobbies) ought to be organized.
7. Comfort plays a preponderant role.
8. Interior decorations ought to be restrained and not extravagant.
9. The dormitory atmosphere ought to be avoided and married couples united; rooms should be arranged to suit individual needs.
10. Conversation nooks ought to be provided at the proper places.

It should be added that the London County Council has been very well aware of all these primary problems.

Construction of Homes for the Aged in London (pages 33-36)

It is difficult to describe the intentions of the London County Council (LCC) as regards the construction of homes for the aged. What the aged themselves wish, the evolution of architecture in this field and other considerations are not always well defined. Nevertheless, it can be said that the eight homes for the aged constructed over the past three years by the LCC can serve as examples from all conceivable points of view.

As early as 1951 the LCC built three homes which departed from the type of home for the aged then current: In fact, when old people needed special care, they were obliged to leave these homes, which were so badly conceived, and go into huge "barracks" for the aged with hundreds of beds. The renovation of such houses was so costly that the LCC preferred to build new buildings; thus, for example, Picton Lodge, which can furnish the desired comfort.