

TAMU architect cuts designs

By RICHARD EDWIN VROOMAN
M. ARCH., Texas A&M, 1952
The Aggie Forum is open to all members of the TAMU community who wish to express ideas which cannot be developed in the Listen up letters column.

Choice of columns to be published and editing of those columns are at the discretion of the Editor. Thanks for the recent articles giving us the details of the interior design of the Memorial Student Center addition, and the name of the designer. We architects would like to see also printed the names of the administrators who selected this designer and approved his designs.

In the 1960's and 1970's the Board of Directors of Texas A&M has brought about remarkable progress

in many areas toward the goal of making this a great university. In the area of Architecture, the Board has sometimes progressed and sometimes retrogressed.

In the course I teach called "The Arts and Civilization" I am using as a textbook Toynbee's *A Study of History*. This great scholar refers several times to "mimesis" or "social imitation of ancestors." He says, "The dead weight of meticulously observed customary practice obstructs innovation and social progress." Mimesis has often appeared in architecture. Careful copying of sensitive designs is certainly flattery, but it is not creative architecture. If it becomes eclecticism - the assembly of a variety of traditional details without an awareness of their proper relationship - then it is not

even good mimesis.

Texas A&M University expresses the will of the people of the State when it seeks the best in every field whether Agronomy, Nuclear Science, or whatever. In the field of Architecture, some first-rate buildings have been erected, thanks to the wisdom of the Board. But that wisdom occasionally fails, and it has failed in a critical area: in the housing of the administrators themselves. The Board has clearly not heeded the advice of qualified professionals when it builds such designs as that of the President's house (built in the 1960's, not in the 1860's), the interior of the Board of Directors' quarters (built in the 1970's, not in the 1770's), and the interior decoration of the M.S.C. which has been forced on the students and other users. Had these designs been based on cost savings, there might be some justification. In any case, these design decisions were made by Board Members with no apparent qualification to judge esthetics. These designs deny the existence of the College of Architecture and of the profession of Architecture as it is practiced today. These designs prevent Texas A&M from being considered a great university.

Keep in mind that architects appreciate the truly sensitive designs of all of the history of Architecture. On the campus, there are a few fine old buildings. But no architect today who is worthy of the name "architect" copies the designs of long-past eras. If designs had to be imitated on the campus, those of certain early Texas buildings (as illustrated by Buch Schiwetz) would have been better choices for inspiration. Many of those were honest buildings.

In using the term "Architecture," we mean the complete design of a building, inside as well as outside. The house of the first President of the Republic of Texas was "Architecture" in that a good job was done with wood worked with limited hand tools: the shutters not only closed over the windows but also had adjustable louvers made without machines. Today, the first and most obvious indication that a house is not Architecture is the false shutter - the decorative thing flanking a window, fastened to a wall so that it cannot close, and in many cases even if it could close it is not wide enough to cover half the window. This kind of design is like pinning a monkey's tail back on a human being and letting it hang out behind his/her clothing. Another example of this is false columns - supporting no load. We had hoped that the final example of this to be built on the campus would be the Coke Building back in the 1950's. Still another example of bad design is that in which one material imitates another, such as a bench

whose brass legs try to imitate the wood of trees. Designers who commit this sort of folly would fail as students at Texas A&M, or in any other college of Architecture in the world.

It is reported that one recent Board Member, H. C. Heldenfels, was primarily responsible for the selection of the designs for the President's house and the interior of the addition to the Student Center. The entire Board must, of course, accept the responsibility. Perhaps these designs attract donations to the University from like-minded "Exes," but people with such views are few, and they are refusing to accept the present and the future. Others more aware of what constitutes good design - architects, professionals in related fields, and truly educated laymen ("education" is the opposite of "mimesis") - can only blush and fume when visitors see the housing of our administrators. "But don't you have an outstanding College of Architecture here? ... then how did this happen?" As for the students' reaction to Pahlmann's details in their Student Center, they have reason to be unhappy.

At present, another Board Member is imposing his esthetic judgment on the design of the proposed new College of Architecture building - a building designed for architects by other architects. The preliminary cost estimate indicates that some items must be cut to bring the cost within the budget. Several desirable practical items must be omitted. But this Board Member insists on spending thousands of dol-

lars on a device to screen from view certain details which he considers unattractive. We architects do not presume to advise this Member on business investments. We cannot accept his nonqualified judgment on our work. We trust he will retreat from this position, or there will have to be an answer to the people of Texas who demand that their money be wisely spent.

We architects do not question the authority of the Board to make decisions, nor do we question the sincerity of the Board. These are successful and basically good men who truly want the best for Texas A&M. Their judgment - usually good - has in the cases cited above been unfortunate.

The Governor of the State should screen prospective Board Members with regard to attitude toward design. An architect or other design professional who is highly respected by his/her peers should be appointed to the Board. Meanwhile the Board owes us a promise to be guided by competent professional advice from today onward. We thank the Board for its dedicated work otherwise.

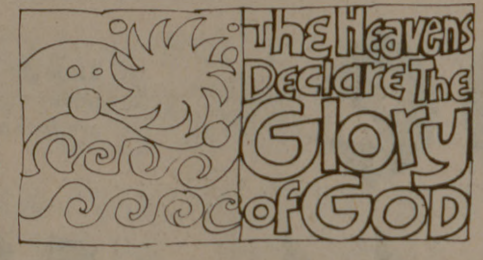
Vrooman has taught Architecture in the Texas A&M System since 1949.

In 1955 he won the competition to design the All-Faiths Chapel.

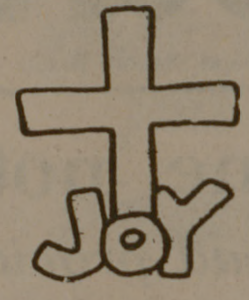
From 1961 to 1968 he represented Texas A&M in establishing the first school of Architecture in East Pakistan - now Bangladesh.

In 1972 Vrooman received A Faculty Distinguished Achievement Award.

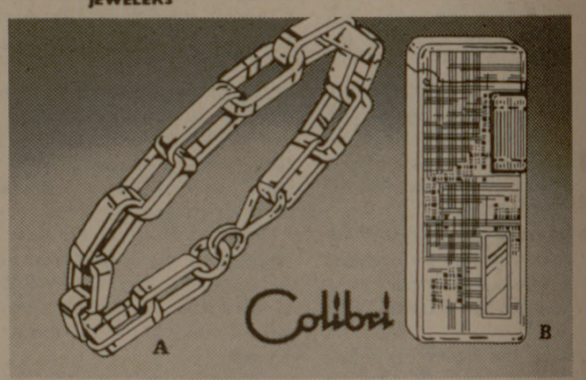
In 1973 he was elected a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects.



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Your Man at Batt

By WILL ANDERSON

A letter to yesterday's Battalion (Courts taken) complained that the three main gym floors were always in use by university or intramural teams and unavailable to "regular" students. Mark Chastain, Ron Felderhoff and Lyle Klement said the floors were taken by basketball or volleyball three hours every afternoon and asked how better scheduling could be arranged.

Dennis Corrington, intramural director, said his department was working with the physical education and athletic departments to relieve the crowding.

There are 1,656 students in the volleyball program alone so the gyms are far from being controlled by "as few as 100" people.

There was a week or two when there was no room for general recreation at all, Corrington said. Corps pass-bys, wrestling and other activities cause exceptions, but the gyms are open to "regular" students at these hours.

The Deware Field House, from 7:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.; the third floor annex in George Rollie White Coliseum from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.; the main floor in the coliseum, from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Corrington said that he hoped the priorities for increased indoor athletic facilities would be increased.

A letter yesterday from Darrell Pye (Nice but unwanted fungi) complained of how long it was taking to repair his room. A water leak had been repaired, but fungus and ruined paint had remained for 11 weeks. He said RAs and counselors had been little help and that housing had been giving him the runaround.

I called Ed Morris, assistant housing manager, explained the complaint to him and told him I had promised to check up on it.

"Well, you've checked," Morris said.
"But, don't you have some kind of comment?" I asked. He said he didn't.

"Don't you want the student's name or room number?" I asked again.
"You've checked," he said. "We'll take care of it from here."

Goodbye, Mr. Morris.
I called Pye this afternoon and talked to his roommate, Chuck Kirkham. As of 5 p.m., their room had not been "taken care of" by the housing office.

I'm going to have to keep checking, I guess.

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ATTENTION CLASS OF '77

SOPHOMORE CLASS COUNCIL REPORT

The purpose of this advertisement is to inform the sophomore class what their elected officers and council have been doing to benefit the Class of '77. We set as goals for this year to have more activities, be of service to the university, community, and the class, to leave \$2000 in our own treasury, to leave records of our activities and meetings to benefit the officers elected next year, to strive to unify the class through projects and finally to keep the class informed of what is being done.

The officers are: Kelly DeWitt, Paul Lombardino, Mike Cox, and John Riddles. The council members are: Jill Burckle, Patricia Bode, Rob Booth, Mike Box, Gary Brown, Susan Clark, Sharon Coins, Eleanor Darden, Steve Elliott, Susan Fontaine, Steve Fort, Charles Galindo, Greg Hunt, Carolyn Johnson, George Karagas, Mary Ellen Martin, Geri McCoy, Missie Miller, Dan Muehleisen, Margaret Oates, Linda Patterson, Gerard Pelletier, Susan Price, Jim Ramsey, Beck Rohland, Melodye Round, Marty Roundtree, Melanie Seeley, Duane Thompson, and Shannon Walker. Dorms that still don't have representatives are: Hart, Hotard, Law, Leggett, McInnis, Moses, Puryear, Utay, and Walton. The presidents of these dorms should contact Kelly DeWitt to insure proper representation of their dorms.

We have had two money making programs. The first project was helping "Cotton Pickin' program" bumper stickers and we made over \$600 profit. CWENS and Omega Phi Alpha helped us in this sales program. The second activity that we sponsored was a 1950's dance that was quite successful. It was held in DeWare Fieldhouse on November 2, after the Arkansas game. Music was provided by KTAM. Disc jockey Dave Kelly hosted the program. We made almost \$125 from the dance and are planning another dance of this type next year.

TREASURER'S REPORT

We had \$768.82 left from last year and we now have \$1423.64. This includes a \$100 donation we made to the bonfire to buy climbing equipment and ropes.

SOPHOMORE BALL

The Sophomore Ball will be on February 1 in Zachry from 8:00-12:00. DOPPELGANGER, a brass band that plays top forty and country western music, will provide entertainment. DOPPELGANGER is a seven piece band from Houston, that plays Chicago style. Tickets on sale soon. Tickets will be \$6 a couple, dress will be formal but not necessarily a tux.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Also scheduled for next semester is a Sophomore Picnic on April 26, and another dance that we will sponsor on February 15 after the Arkansas basketball game.

We urge sophomores to get in touch with the officers or members of the council if they have any ideas or questions. We hope that this has been informative and cleared up any questions you might have had.

SOPHOMORE CLASS COUNCIL

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