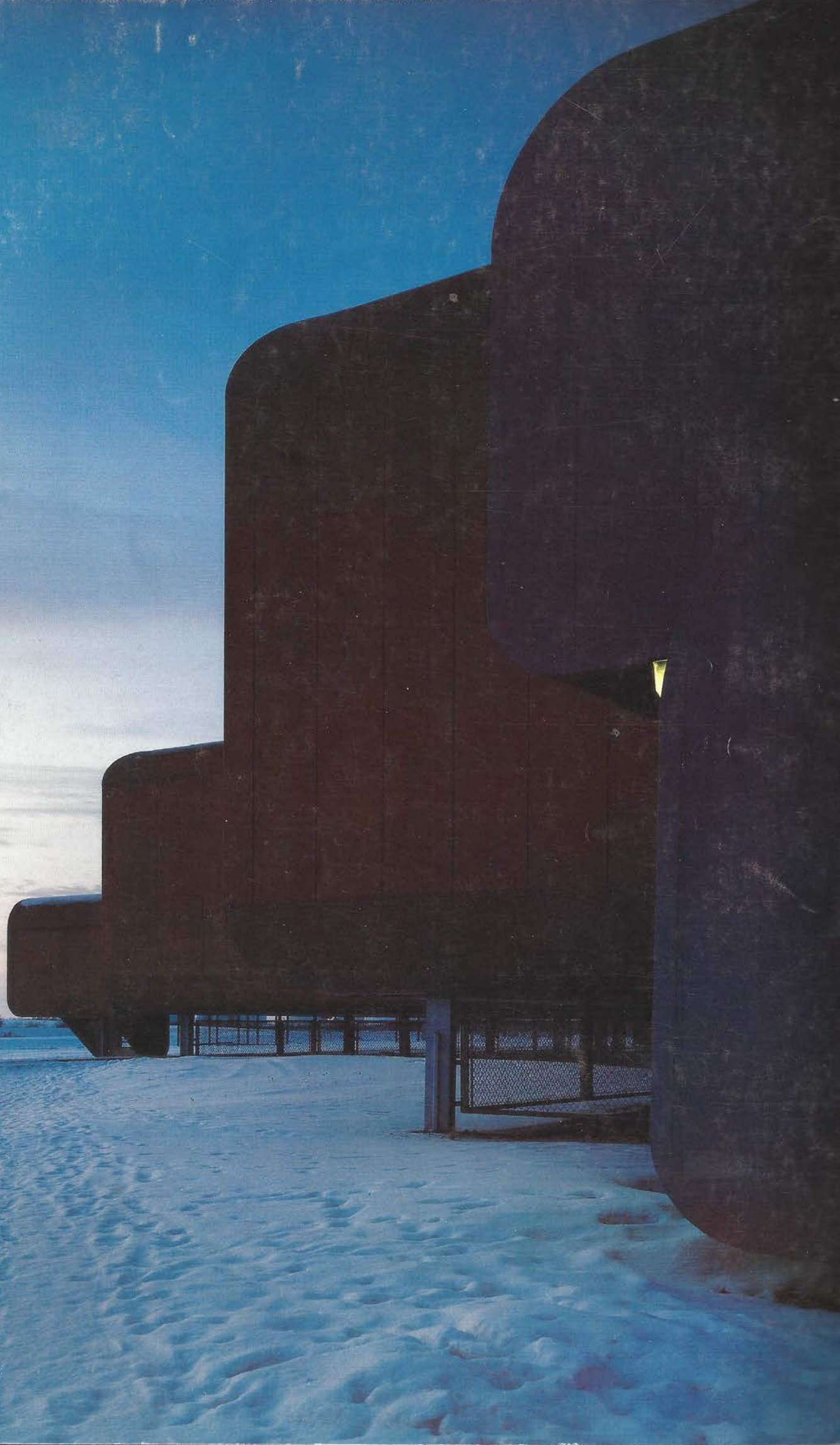


# ARCS FUTURE

JANUARY 1984 FIVE DOLLARS



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way. I am happier and more productive when trying to figure out how to provide more homes without polluting the groundwater, or trying to solve the problem of solid waste disposal.

**Shipsky:** Where do you see yourself in five, ten, twenty years?

**Ferragamo:** I hope I'm still in architecture. I hope I won't have to work as hard. It wears you down, the constant strain; it sours your attitude. You can't do good architecture if you have a bad attitude. Maybe I'll get more involved with teaching. But I don't know if I can leave this. It's like an addiction.

I'd like to do one house a month, and one sizable project each year, with no pressure. Just sit down and enjoy each moment of it. Don't get me wrong. I enjoy it now, but there must be a way to do it with less tears. That's what I'd like to find. I didn't know where I was going seven years ago and I ended up here. It's kind of an adventure for me.



Joe Fama is the director of TPA (Troy Professional Assistance), a community design center in Troy, N.Y. Quoting from their brochure, "TPA provides design and planning services to low income people, neighborhood groups, and other nonprofit organizations who wish to improve their homes, buildings, and neighborhoods."

**Shipsky:** Joe, what were your values like in the '60s?

**Fama:** I had a sense of a new generation about to take over the country and maybe the world. My values were based on ideas of a redistribution of power and wealth in this country, participatory democracy, antimaterialism. I had and still have a healthy interest in anarchy.

**Shipsky:** How does your work differ from a conventional architectural practice?

**Fama:** We work directly with low income people, which I don't believe private firms ever do. There is no owner or group of principals who acquire a profit. We have a very different office structure, there's more of a collective atmosphere. More participation by the staff in decision-making.

**Shipsky:** What about your values today?

**Fama:** They haven't changed much since the '60s, but my sense of tactics is different. There is a whole different set of battles to be fought today. My age is different: I'm 35, not 20. Twenty-year-old people, even with the same philosophical frame-

work, react differently to things. The '60s put the spotlight on 20-year-olds; the times called for a response only 20-year-olds could make with the required enthusiasm. Now we're 35, and if the circumstances were the same, I don't think we would be the leaders; I bet they'd be 20-year-olds. **Shipsky:** What are your career goals? **Fama:** That's a tough one. Friends often ask me when I'm going to get out of what I'm doing and start doing something meaningful. I guess I don't have any career goals, other than to respond to situations as they come up. I have no objective to broaden or expand what I'm doing.

**Shipsky:** Do the terms New Age, futures, ecology, networking apply to your work? **Fama:** Our work is too street-level to plug into any broad theoretical framework. We just have problems to be solved.

**Shipsky:** What are some of your accomplishments since graduation?

**Fama:** A newspaper reporter once said that people like us exist by little wins and big losses. Here are some of our bigger little wins, since my graduation in '71. Our Hoosic Street Bridge was built at about a third the size of the original proposal. We got funding and renovated a multiservice neighborhood center; spearheaded resistance to diverting funding from community development to urban renewal; did architectural work for hundreds of low income people and dozens of nonprofit organizations; and completed a 120-apartment, \$3 million project.

**Shipsky:** Do you feel your classmates have managed to keep their '60s values, or have they joined the establishment?

**Fama:** I've always been bothered by the way the '60s were portrayed in the media. I don't believe the '60s were anywhere near as radical as the media led us to believe. I think the people who seem to have given up their '60s values never had them to begin with. They turned out much the way I would have expected at that time. I think the people who were affected by those events have a good, healthy sense of skepticism toward authority. Those who over-reacted to the times came out with a sense of cynicism, which I think is unfortunate. My belief at the time would have been that they would join the establishment. Some of those people who did join the establishment now act surprised at the fact. But I think they are romanticizing and exaggerating the level of radicalism they espoused at the time, and I'm not really sure why they're so stunned that they are now practicing a conventional brand of architecture. I think some people were very positively affected by the events and thinking of the '60s, and I think they carry that with them. I don't think they've thrown it all out the window. What you think of the buildings they do and the projects they work on depends where you're sitting. **Shipsky:** How have your values evolved?

**Fama:** Energy conservation was an embryonic cause, at least to me, as I graduated. Now it's probably the second most important consideration for us, after user needs. The women's movement was not part of my overall thinking. There were a lot of personal insights that movement brought to light, that had to be addressed in all aspects of our work, and have become part of the principles on which we work.

**Shipsky:** Do you maintain some sort of academic, theoretical, ideological stance in your work?

**Fama:** Not really. The day-to-day grind issues don't call forth those ideals for sharpening. They're up there in some mental attic, still motivating us, but to be honest about it, they're probably in need of a dusting and polishing.

**Shipsky:** Do you feel there is any hope of conventional architectural practice evolving to the point where it can "... release the skills, enthusiasm, and sense of commitment that many architects possess but cannot use in any satisfying way?" (Malcolm MacEwen, *Crisis in Architecture*).

**Fama:** American architecture is part of the basic culture and economic system, and you can't beat the system unless you're the person who makes the rules. Architects, quite obviously, and I'm glad, don't make the rules. They are fated, therefore, to provide whatever services the rule-makers want. If you try to do anything else, you're going to limit your clientele. There's nothing wrong with that, but someone else will step in behind you to do the design work on most buildings. Some architects try to respond to this challenge by trying to become one of the rulemakers. I have yet to see anyone who succeeded at this without becoming a clone of the kind of person they were trying to emulate.



I heard about Will Bruder when I was at Arcosanti. I saw a 10-year retrospective of his work at the Tempe Fine Arts Gallery, was enthusiastic about it, and looked forward to interviewing him. I had met him when he brought his class of youthful designers to tour Arcosanti. We talked at his New River, Ariz., studio, a concrete, steel, and glass structure carefully fitted into the high desert.

**Shipsky:** I understand your degree is in sculpture, not architecture, because you

wanted to avoid the stereotyped ideas of schools of architecture. Bruder: Not exactly; let me explain. My degree is in sculpture, but throughout my college years I was training myself to be an architect. As a child I was attracted to building and design. General Motors had those contests where you sculpted a car out of a block of wood. I entered those from the time I was 12 and won a lot. As a result, I was accepted at General Motors Institute. It is an accredited engineering program, where you go to school six weeks, then work in a GM facility six weeks, earning \$14,000 a year, back then. I wanted to be an industrial designer; it was a good education, and I liked the hands-on approach.

But during my first work session I went through a strike at a Fisher Body plant. I was shocked by management's values and decided this wasn't my bag. I wanted something where I had more personal control. One day I'd be designing cars, and the next day toasters. The whole chemistry wasn't right. I didn't like the values of big-business America. Maybe that's tied into '60s thinking. It was '65. I wanted architecture. I had watched Frank Lloyd Wright's Greek church under construction near my home. I had been attracted to art and shop classes in high school.

I applied to Illinois Institute of Technology and got a temporary job with William Wenzler, an architect in my home town, probably the most progressive office in the state then. Sheer coincidence, pure luck of the draw. Michael Johnson, the chief draftsman, in his mid-20s, was an architecture freak. Had an unbelievable hand, and he took me under his wing. Michael was building his own house at that time, a clone of a Usonian house. So next I'm moonlighting with him, pounding nails on his house. I remember zero-degree weather, putting in glass stops. Traveling around, looking at Wright buildings, drawing, building models, surveying. I was getting this sort of thing happening.

Suddenly I was accepted at IIT. I scratched my head and said, "This is a pretty good experience. What the hell do I want to go to IIT for? I'll enroll in a course at the University of Wisconsin, and see what happens." The university didn't have a school of architecture then. I took math and structures in the engineering department, architectural history and sculpture in the art department, but my whole focus was architecture. They gave me a degree in sculpture.

I was taking a full course load, working with Wenzler 30 to 40 hours a week, doing carpentry with Michael, traveling to look at architecture: a lot of Wright, John Andrews—Scarborough, the whole Toronto scene, Macy Dubois, Ron Thom. I knocked on a lot of people's doors. Michael got me plugged into Soleri. I did a

workshop in '67; got married in '68 in Wright's church in Madison, drove from the service through the Midwest looking at Wright and Goff, spent a couple of days with Goff, which was a joy, proceeded through Oklahoma overdosing on Goff, and went to work with Soleri for seven months. Went back to finish school, and found Wenzler wouldn't have me back.

Shipsky: Why not?

Bruder: I had turned into this rebel, had worked with Soleri, my hair had gotten longer. So I went to work with Michael while finishing school. I put together a portfolio and started a Greyhound bus

## 'Hey, this is crazy, I want to go back to the Arizona desert.'

junket, to apply for work with John Andrews, Macy Dubois, Ron Thom, Louis Kahn, Roche-Dinkeloo, Paul Rudolph, Victor Lundy, and Gunnar Birkerts. Shipsky: How had you selected those architects?

Bruder: This was my value judgment on where I wanted to work when I got out of school. Their philosophy of work, the quality of function and form, the way they used materials, a spirit in their work I thought was fresh. The Canadians just blew me away—that was architecture.

I had written these architects and said I was coming. I got off the bus in Toronto at dawn and washed up in the bus station. My first interview was with Ron Thom, who offered me a job. Walked across town to Macy Dubois' office, which had no desks, only drafting boards. His attitude was, "You show me yours and I'll show you mine." We hit it off famously and he offered me a job.

I canceled the next loop of my trip, went to Detroit to see Birkerts. There was really good chemistry between Gunnar and myself, and he offered me a job. Canada required a formal architectural education before I could be registered, so I took the job with Gunnar, thinking I'd go to Canada after being registered in the U.S. I worked as lead designer directly under Gunnar on the Houston Contemporary Art Museum. That winter I was in Canada looking at architecture. It was so cold the film broke in my camera. I said, "Hey, this is crazy, I want to go back to the Arizona desert."

I wanted a population base of a million people in which to establish myself. I wanted to be a free man, to practice with integrity. I went to Phoenix to do my apprenticeship. The last architect I worked for let me go my own way, try a lot of things, stumble and fall; some

things worked, some didn't. As soon as I hit Phoenix I started picking up clients on my own because the whole focus was, the day I had my license, I walked.

I took the exam as soon as I could and passed it the first time. If you're going to be an architect the exam's nothing. My first studio was a \$1,000 addition I built onto the apartment where we were living. I started with patios, interiors, renovations. I was out with a power saw and hammer on a lot of the early jobs. Shipsky: Your first jobs were quite a step down from projects you worked on in larger offices. Were you ever tempted to return to an established firm?

Bruder: What for?

Shipsky: When did you first have a clear image of the kind of architecture you wanted to do?

Bruder: Almost from the beginning. Wenzler's office was very strong, there were good things happening there. Wright—I've been to over 250 Wright buildings. I read a lot, started my library when I was 18, spending a couple hundred dollars a month on books. Michael Johnson was a good influence. Soleri let me go through his notebooks and his sketchbooks. They have cast aluminum covers, and 400 pages ruled so you have this much to draw on and this much to write on. They're mind-boggling, like Da Vinci sketchbooks. Paolo is a mind.

Paul Schweikher was an influence; Michael made me aware of his work. Schweikher is a second generation modern master. Louis Kahn studied with him at Yale when Schweikher was doing pre-Kahn Kahn architecture. Then when I was working in Phoenix a blueprinter told me some guy from Pittsburgh was living up in Sedona and did unbelievable drawings. I was supervising a job in Flagstaff, so I drove through Oak Creek Canyon; I had no idea where Schweikher lived. I saw a building profile ahead and walked up to it: Schweikher's house. I've had a nice relationship with him for the past 11 years; I'm working on a book about him. I've seen work of his that he's never seen finished. It's architecture that just doesn't quit.

Goff—I've been to 75 percent of the Goff houses and done a lot of research on his work. Wright dumped all over the first Price scheme. Can you imagine designing a building and having Frank Lloyd Wright tell your client it's a piece of shit? And having to regroup? I mean that would be pretty devastating, a major setback. I think it was the turning point in Goff's career.

I went to Vancouver and spent four days overdosing on Arthur Erickson, met him, spent time in his studio. Tomorrow we're going to San Francisco. We went to Mexico City in June. Stayed at the Camino Real by Lagoretto. Met Augustin Hernandez—don't know if you've ever

heard of him. (Jumps up to get a book.) Look at this, it's his studio! And look at this: a 28-foot-diameter dome, acrylic glued together with silicone. There's no framing in that sucker! This guy has been working for 30 years and been ignored by the American press. How can Hernandez exist in Mexico City and I don't know about it until three years ago? And I think I know a little bit. So I developed a friendship with him; he's coming to Arizona in the fall.

I have a client in Minnesota, so I went to the site for three days; went to see Wright's Willey house, David Bennett's underground library. Up to Toronto for three days, had no business doing it, but I wanted to absorb it and meet Macy again, see all the new things. Flew to Buffalo to work with Bird Air on a fabric roof I'm doing, and because I was that far east, I flew to Pittsburgh to see Schweikher's Duquesne Building. Got in at 5 in the evening, opened my hotel window, and there it was on the horizon with all its monitors glowing. Walked over there at 9:30 and hung around till midnight.

Guess that's the way I like architecture. Shipsky: How much time do you devote to self-education?

Bruder: How much time is there? Right? It's a daily experience. I get a lot of publications, I read a lot. I want to know what's happening. Not to copy it, but to grow, to enjoy it. So again, what is that time?

Shipsky: How did you relate to what was going on in the '60s?

Bruder: Basically against the war, marched in a few demonstrations, marched in an open housing protest with Father Groppi in Wisconsin, stood up with Paolo at the federal building, when he went down for his weekly homage before that was real popular, marched in the first Earth Day.

I don't drink or smoke; I've never taken a drug in my life. How can you get higher than on life and architecture? Never was into the commune thing. Married Simon when I was 21 and we've been together 15 years. Got a 1Y deferment; don't know with my Midwest conservatism if I'd have had the guts to say screw it and go to Canada.

Shipsky: During the '60s did you think these experiences would affect your architectural career?

Bruder: In looking back on it I tend to see myself as having been more selfishly focused on doing architecture and building. I guess there was a certain individual rebel quality in the music of the times. You saw that you could be an individual, you didn't have to be part of the pack. I took that course. My parents encouraged me not to travel with the crowd. When I became an individual, and I think I'm an individual, I marched for open housing and against the war, worked with Soleri,

let my hair grow. Then I wasn't the individual my parents had in mind. But I think they're proud of me.

My grandfather was a cabinetmaker and tinkerer; he had a workshop in the basement. I've got a lot of his tools. Shipsky: How do you relate your work to Paolo's philosophy? I mean, wouldn't he condemn it?

Bruder: Oh yeah. He has not much interest in the individual building. That was evident way back in the '60s. If you'd ask him, "What do you think of Saarinen's art center?" he'd reply, "What should I think?" It's not very relative to reality and to life is what he thinks. There's a greater thing to be answered in his mind. Paolo's never been good with money or socializing; he's always been somewhat remote. I'd love to see any one of the arcologies out of the MIT book built. Let it be Paolo's concept, but let some big office do the details, finish, and finesse. Give Ben Thompson an arcology and say, "Detail the sucker!" and let the Rouse Co. build it. It would be dynamite! Paolo is a genius as an engineer and architect, but I think the social and political implications are where the problems lie. His mind works at a scale we can't comprehend.

Shipsky: What's your advice for young people wanting to be architects?

Bruder: Gain knowledge in the craft of building, gain respect for the craftsman, know the limits and how to go beyond them. Work in the field at least a year, construction: Dig ditches, pour concrete, pound nails. People come out with a degree and can't lay out a building—that's a crime. There's something wrong with a system that allows that to happen. Plug in a full year of travel: Canada, Mexico, ruins. Gain a design sense through a fine arts background: sculpture, printmaking, color, texture. Get the basics of two- and three-dimensional design. My art background is much richer than what I see them teaching in architectural design at the university here. And focus on people, world culture. But I don't believe a conventional architectural education will make or break an architect. There's a certain destiny; you're not going to be stifled. Your education should give you as many tools as you can get in that period. I don't see a masters or Ph.D. in architecture; your masters and Ph.D. are your first buildings.

Architects should be able to build anything they can draw.

Shipsky: Where do you go from here?

Bruder: Last fall I had the good fortune of going to Italy, where I saw Scarpa's cemetery. I shot 400 slides in two hours without a motor drive! I think it's the finest piece of architecture of the 20th century. It tells me there is a big beyond. I haven't reached any kind of potential yet. I learned a lot from the Italian experi-

ence, about buildings in relationship, in a landscape. I want to do groups of buildings, more innovative uses of materials, experiment more, do some fresh thinking, use the scrap brick in the grog pile at the brick yard, use rammed earth, sod roofs, bigger things, and smaller things. I want to keep doing architecture, and do it better. I want to organize and simplify so I can do more owner/builder work. You know, I tell an owner/builder to build a curved wall and it's not nearly as hard as telling a contractor to build a curved wall.

I want to do planning, more public work, learn more about solar. Learn more about Japan, China, and Eastern influences. Travel more. You think you know something, but you really don't know anything. I've got an awful lot to learn.



Elias Velonis is not an architect, he studied literature in the '60s. He has some fresh insights for architects. Six years ago he founded Heartwood, an owner/builder school in western Massachusetts. I met Elias for lunch at Buckstreet Manor, an old resort hotel now part of Heartwood's facilities.

Velonis: What is the architectural community's response to *A Pattern Language*?

Shipsky: The ones I've asked have never heard of it.

Velonis: I'm so surprised it's lost. I think it's the greatest book on building and environmental planning ever produced. I've been using it four years now. The first time I tried it on a design class, everybody sat up! It's such rich material, it teaches itself. The response has been universally positive, except for a few architecture students. People come up to me after the class, almost with tears in their eyes, and say, "Now I know! I felt all that in my bones, but I didn't know how to say it."

Architects seem to have lost a real sense of what the people who use a place are going to go through. They're building monuments to themselves, or something flashy, or the latest or most daring. But they're not building from the humble origins of what the needs are. I think architects say, "We're constrained by efficiency, economics, modular building practices, speed, labor costs." So the work gets totally dis-

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