

Rome Continuity and Change: The Eternal City Layered in Time

For the eighth consecutive year Yale School of Architecture will sponsor a Rome study trip in May and June for students entering their final year.

Last spring 18 second-year students spent three weeks in Rome studying and drawing the city and its buildings. With the Western world's finest achievements in urbanism, art, and architecture, Rome has always beckoned the architect. In ancient times it was the model for all other cities, and when the empire's power waned, marauders plundered its riches. During the Middle Ages, Rome's artistic sway was like a flickering candle, all but extinguished before igniting again with the Renaissance and the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. The city returned to the position of artistic pacesetter and, with the country's unification, became Italy's capital, where the glories of its past would inspire its rulers and impress its subjects until today.

Across centuries, a familiarity with Rome has been considered a prerequisite for the well-trained architect. Beginning in the eighteenth century, artists, architects, and aesthetes made it an obligatory stop on the Grand Tour. Romantic, atmospheric ruins were sketched and, for those less artistically inclined, souvenir "views" were commissioned, just as today's rushed visitor might snap a digital image or buy a postcard. Soon a more rigorous engagement became the norm, and would-be architects were expected to spend several years in Rome measuring and drawing buildings and sites of antiquity, creating elaborate reconstruction drawings of how the places would have originally appeared. The coveted Prix de Rome was the ultimate career achievement for a student at the École de Beaux-Arts. In the twentieth century architects as diverse as Edwin Lutyens, Le Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and Robert Venturi were each profoundly influenced by their time spent in Rome.

Today the fundamental capacity to master issues of order, proportion, scale, context (historical and topographical), and light (in spaces and on volumes) is essential for any competent architect, and Rome continues to provide a vital laboratory. For students to engage this unique city effectively, direct observation through on-site hand drawing is essential. Making visual diaries requires them to observe precisely; moving easily between quick notation and analytical diagram, between capturing a momentary fall of light and more sustained representation.

By walking the axial thoroughfare from Piazza del Popolo to San Giovanni in Laterano on the first day, the students gained an understanding of the city's plan and topography. Visits to buildings, gardens, and public spaces were grouped thematically: the centralized domed space (the Domus Aurea, the Pantheon, Sant'Ivo), and the courtyard (the Cancelleria, Santa Maria della Pace, Palazzo Massimo). Two professors from Cornell University's Rome Program participated: guest lecturer Jan

Gadeyne guided us through the Fora, and Jeffrey Blanchard helped us fathom St. Peter's and the Vatican. Joined by Yale faculty member Bryan Fuermann, we visited the outlying gardens of Villa d'Este, Villa Lante, and Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola, where a bunch of unsuspecting Yalies got drenched by the surprising Mannerist water jets; also spent time in the astonishing twentieth-century Ninfa garden. There was time set aside to enjoy the richness of Italian cultural and culinary achievements. This year the class had the opportunity to attend the Pritzker Prize ceremony, held in the Campidoglio, and was invited to be present when the current Bishop Professor, Glenn Murcutt, was awarded the medal. When in the course of his remarks he stressed the importance in his own work of learning from direct observation, a cheer emanated from our small group.

During the course of the seminar, in addition to maintaining a sketchbook, each student identified a subject for more sustained study, using drawing to investigate and communicate their observations in final presentations. Some documented either individual buildings or public spaces; others compared varied solutions to a common geometrical problem, such as the relation of a domed ceiling to a rectangular plan. Some studied how facades captured light, modified a street wall, or created a silhouette. On the last day these drawings and sketches were the subject of an informal review at the American Academy, followed by a farewell celebration.

The pace of the seminar was intense, but the drawings attest to the enthusiastic curiosity and commitment of all who shared these three astonishing weeks in Rome.

—Stephen Harby and Alexander Purves
Harby ('80) is a lecturer at the school of architecture, and Purves ('65) is associate professor.

New Haven Building Notes

The Coliseum in Ruins

On August 26, 2002, the New Haven Veteran's Memorial Coliseum—Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo's spectacularly conceived yet infamous arena/parking garage—hosted its last event: a World Wrestling Entertainment *Smackdown!* featuring wrestlers Hardcore Holly, Mike Awesome, and Hurricane. It was absurd and depressing, perhaps an omen for a building wrestling with life.

In May, with the city in a budget pinch, Mayor John DeStefano proposed that it might be time for the structure to go: it was losing money, in need of an expensive renovation, and increasingly unable to compete with newer arenas in the region. A few weeks later Governor John Rowland let slip, probably not so accidentally, that it was a done deal. In an effort to save face, the city hastily commissioned an economic impact study, but the result seemed preordained. In early September, without a public hearing or an attempt to consider alternative uses for the building, the end was

declared. Contracts were severed, workers were let go, and pieces of the coliseum were auctioned off. With a crowbar and \$84 you could buy a row of seats.

How did it come to this? How could it not have? The building was unpopular from the start. The few who defended it often did so for the events it hosted rather than for its architecture. But as the mayor said, "You don't just tear something down because you don't like how it looks." Well, we should hope not! Nonetheless, the building has been neglected for years, partly because of popular disdain for its architecture, resulting in the need for renovations the city says it can't afford. In a sense, the city started tearing down the coliseum years ago.

It should be remembered that the coliseum was the product of the highest architectural ambitions, and its demise is a shame. Roche's design and the city's commissioning of it were visionary and idealistic—qualities that seem alien in today's context (cross your fingers for Lower Manhattan). The coliseum's design was the offspring of a process much like the one taught at the school today: intellectual, discursive, and experimental. We should all reflect on Roche's good intentions in the upcoming months, and sigh: there but for the grace of God go we.

The city is seeking \$10 million in state bonds to pay for the coliseum's demolition, which may or may not be forthcoming. Until it is, there is always the possibility that it could be saved. If you are interested in joining the efforts to save the building, please contact the Urban Design League at 203-624-0175 or write to urban-designleague@icnnet.net.

IKEA Close to Deal on Pirelli Site

In brighter news, pending city approval, the Swedish furniture retailer IKEA has agreed to purchase the site of the long endangered Pirelli Building, next to which they intend to build a 300,000-square-foot store. The company plans to retain a large portion of Marcel Breuer's landmark building, although at the time of this writing the exact amount is in dispute with concerned preservationists.

The Pirelli site was purchased in the late 1990s by developers intending to build a large regional shopping mall. After an extended campaign led by a coalition of local merchants, environmentalists, and a rival mall developer, the project was stopped. The prospect of an IKEA superstore has been greeted very differently. Merchants believe that IKEA's customers, who often drive great distances to shop at the inexpensive contemporary design store, will stop in downtown New Haven before heading home. Environmentalists are happy that IKEA plans to pay for the site's amelioration. And the city is thrilled at the prospect of 400 new jobs, all with benefits.

The only hitch is the fate of the Pirelli Building. Originally plans called for the demolition of the entire two-story base, leaving only the floating box on stilts. Responding to public concerns, IKEA agreed to retain the front third of the base, preserving the elevation visible from I-95. Pleased with the company's cooperative attitude but still unsatisfied, preservationists continue to press the issue. IKEA hopes to open the store in 2004.

For information on the fate of the Pirelli Building or to get involved, contact the Urban Design League or e-mail the Long Wharf Advocacy Group at longwharf_group@snet.net.

The Effort to Save Connecticut General Continues

Half of the long saga to save Connecticut General's historic headquarters seems to be coming to a sad end. The Emhart Building, one of two historic structures by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, is scheduled for demolition by the end of the year. The fate of the other building on the grassy 600-acre campus, the Wilde Building, is still undetermined. The two edifices were the product of a radical and influential experiment in corporate architecture. In the mid-1950s the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, hoping to lure new employees in a competitive market, assembled an all-star team of Modernist designers, including Bunshaft, Florence Knoll, and Isamu Noguchi, to speculate on a new type of office environment. The result was the suburban corporate campus: futuristic low-slung glass buildings picturesquely set on rolling fields. The offices were

open, with integrated ceilings, demountable partitions, and under-floor services. Times—and corporate culture—changed, and the company, now called CIGNA, decided a new type of campus was needed. New plans call for a golf course, hotel, new office space, surface parking, and upscale housing—but let's see what the market can hold.

Go to www.saveconngen.com for updates and information on joining the fight.

—Ted Whitten

Whitten ('01) works in New Haven and is a freelance architectural writer.

Urban Museum of Modern Architecture

In the 1950s and 1960s New Haven was referred to nationally as a Model City for its innovative housing, welfare, and city planning programs. Since that time, the ultimate success of many of those programs has been debated. However, the dividend from those years is an important collection of postwar architecture by leading American architects. Marisa Angell, a Ph.D. student in art history at Yale University, organized *Urban Museum of Modern Architecture: New Haven*, a public project designed to highlight the city as a museum of Modern architecture.

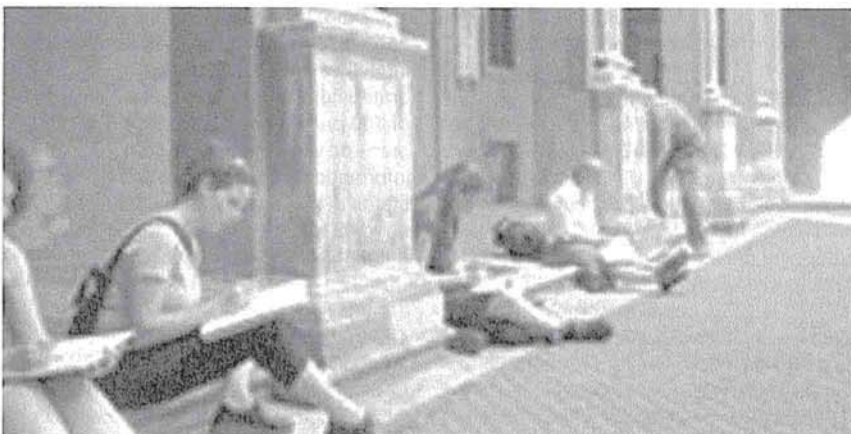
Brochures, designed by Christine Moog, a graduate student graphic design at Yale, describe the history of seven buildings around New Haven. These sit in translucent acrylic kiosks, "INFOjects" designed by Emergent Office, New York architects. The 6-foot-high kiosks include information about the building and its architect, images, related projects, a list of works by the architect in New Haven, and a map.

All seven kiosks debuted at Dixwell Fire Station on September 14, 2002, during the mayor's "Start With the Arts" day. The following day they were moved to their corresponding buildings. The institution heads of all seven sites have agreed to host the kiosks and brochures; in many cases, they have also agreed to help fund the printing.

According to Angell, the project, which she plans to expand, is intended to correct a silence: to let the architecture of New Haven speak to its visitors and residents and create a shared public identity.

Kiosk Locations:

*Yale University Art Gallery, 1951–53, Louis Kahn.
Ingalls Hockey Rink, 1956–58, Eero Saarinen.
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1960–63, Gordon Bunshaft of SOM.
Yale University Art and Architecture Building, 1958–63, Paul Rudolph.
Crawford Manor Housing, 1962–66, Paul Rudolph.
Yale Center for British Art and British Studies, 1969–77, Louis Kahn/
Pellacchia & Meyers.
Dixwell Fire Station, 1967–74, Venturi, Brown and Rauch.*



Opposite (from left): Marcel Breuer, Pirelli Building, New Haven, Connecticut. Photograph by Ted Whitten

Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, New Haven Veteran's Memorial Coliseum, New Haven, Connecticut. Photograph by Ted Whitten

This page from top: Celebrating the completion of the Building Project 2002. Photograph by Emily Bidegain

Yale Students in Rome, Spring 2002. Photograph by Steven Harby