EDITORIAL

Everything these days is about image. It has reached such absurd proportions that an Ontario cabinet minister was forced to resign this summer, not because she had done wrong, but because she might have been perceived to do wrong in the public eye. "Perception," said the committee who recommended that Evelyn Gignac should step down, "is as important as reality."

As two-dimensional creatures of the media, magazines are also about image. Thus architecture magazines are sometimes criticized for giving a superficial view of architecture at the expense of its social and technological underpinnings. We show glossy photographs of carefully selected views of buildings, taken on the most brilliantly sunny days; we crop out the unsightly garbage bins, the concrete stains, the mundane strip mall next door. It is also said that magazines' concentration on aesthetics perpetuates the idea of architecture as a fashion parade, and certainly one can watch different features—a particular roofline, a wing-like canopy—appear and disappear in the flow of trends.

These days, when the profession is in crisis, there are certainly important issues to be discussed. We could, as the American magazine Progressive Architecture has done recently, drop the photographic features of buildings and concentrate on investigating the professional issues and the programmatic aspects of building. But to downplay the importance of design is to overlook the essence of architecture. Though technological, social, economic and political forces drive architecture and instill it with meaning, the resulting expression and manifestation, its appearance, are its final end. The arrangement of forms, the play of light, the crafted detail, the ordered plan, these create the delight in Vitruvius's triad, and are what architects aspire to in their own work. And a magazine's role in taking architects through buildings, albeit reducing a three-dimensional creation to a flat page, can hopefully still play a role in stoking the fires of good design, and thus ultimately benefiting society by creating a better environment.

The key for editors is to find the right balance, to find a way of featuring design, but also to relate it to philosophical and practical issues. The challenge is how to do this in a limited amount of space (The Canadian Architect relies on advertising revenues and its size is regulated by that). One approach we have been trying over the past two years, and which was strongly favoured in a recent survey of our readers, is to concentrate issues on a particular building type; a comparison of the plans makes a good resource for the architect designing a similar building, and an overview locates the type within the larger historical and typological streams. This month we have four interpretation centres in remote regions of Canada, and Steven Mennell relates them to the museum type and observes how they have reversed the traditional approach to the artifact.

Every two or three months we take a broader theme, trying to place design within the larger sphere. Thus we have focussed on the environment, landscape, housing and education, and future issues will have themes such as the future of practice, the meaning of computer technology, urban design, and so on.

In the moralistic '90s we must not forget that good design does not have to be divorced from social and ethical issues. In fact the two go hand in hand, and as an architecture magazine we shall try to reflect this.

Bronwen Laidger

NEWS

Foster's Monumental Scope. Sir Norman Foster of Britain is overseeing alterations to two buildings which figure significantly in the tumultuous history of the 20th century: the British Museum and the Reichstag in Berlin. His first design for the refurbishment of the Reichstag, which is scheduled to reopen in 1996 to house the parliament of the united Germany, covered it completely over with an immense glass canopy. However, the Germans decided they wanted something more like the original copper dome, which had been destroyed during World War II. Foster duly dropped the canopy and produced a beehive-shaped steel and glass hat. At the British Museum in London Foster is glazing over the courtyard that houses the famous Reading Room in which Karl Marx wrote Das Kapital.

The Bell Will Not Toll. The clock and carillon on Parliament Hill in Ottawa will be silent for two years while masonry on the Peace Tower is repaired by Spencer R. Higgins Architect. The restoration is part of an ongoing $250-million program of restorations to the Parliament buildings over 12 years, with different architects being hired for different portions of the work.

Ontario Forum Falls. Despite frantic efforts by opponents to stop the demolition of the 1971 award-winning Ontario Place Forum, Eberhard Zeidler's sunken amphitheatre with its revolving stage and floating sculpted roof was demolished in September. The "Friends of the Forum" opposition group, which included Zeidler and the original landscape architect Michael Hough, had been calling for an environmental review but this was denied by the provincial government. One of the main objections was that the new building will be excavated into a hill along the north edge of the site which meant that over 250 trees had to be removed. MCA, the private developers, say that 100 of these trees were diseased or dying, and promise that with transplanting and new plantings, there will eventually be more trees on the man-made

Continued on page 8

The Bell Will Not Toll. The clock and carillon on Parliament Hill in Ottawa will be silent for two years while masonry on the Peace Tower is repaired by Spencer R. Higgins Architect. The restoration is part of an ongoing $250-million program of restorations to the Parliament buildings over 12 years, with different architects being hired for different portions of the work.

Ontario Forum Falls. Despite frantic efforts by opponents to stop the demolition of the 1971 award-winning Ontario Place Forum, Eberhard Zeidler's sunken amphitheatre with its revolving stage and floating sculpted roof was demolished in September. The "Friends of the Forum" opposition group, which included Zeidler and the original landscape architect Michael Hough, had been calling for an environmental review but this was denied by the provincial government. One of the main objections was that the new building will be excavated into a hill along the north edge of the site which meant that over 250 trees had to be removed. MCA, the private developers, say that 100 of these trees were diseased or dying, and promise that with transplanting and new plantings, there will eventually be more trees on the man-made
islands in the privately funded competition. Greer will receive $140,000 for the commission which is to be completed for a G7 Summit in Halifax in 1997.

Greer’s comb-like form recalls an Inuit myth: when society broke down into disarray, a shaman dove to the bottom of the sea to comb the hair of the sea goddess in order to restore social order.

ENVIRONMENT

Steel versus Wood. Environmental Building News, a bi-monthly publication from Brattleboro, Vermont has investigated the merits of traditional wood framing versus the increasingly popular steel framing for houses. Producers of both products claim environmental benefits, but the publication found that the production of steel is 25-40% more energy intensive than wood, that it dramatically reduces the insulating performance of walls and floors unless measures are taken to reduce thermal bridging, and that steel contains less recycled material than is often claimed. On the other hand they point out that promoting wood as a renewable resource is only justified if forests are properly managed.

Regulating Green. Concerns have been raised over the intention to attach the Energy Code to the 1995 National Building Code. The proposals for the new NBC are currently undergoing a second round of public reviews. The Canadian Home Builders Association has argued that the building code was created to govern the safety aspects of building and should be kept strictly to that role. The Energy Code Steering Committee recently replied: “The real issue is not the scope of building codes, but whether society should regulate this area; once it is decided to regulate, most people would agree that the building code process, with its extensive infrastructure, is the most efficient way of doing so.”

PROJECTS

Brampton Courthouse. Webb Zerafa Menkes Housden Partnership are the architects for an 8-storey courthouse south of old Brampton. Located on an open suburban site at the intersection of Hurontario Street and a minor road, the building tries to establish an urban character to the corner, with walls parallel to the streets and upper floors set back. One of the interlocking volumes is solid in character, clad in limestone, and it embraces and frames a concave volume which is light and transparent on its south side. Behind this facade are the public waiting areas to the courtrooms. The 50,500-m² building is in working drawings and has a budget of $10 million.

Twin Buildings. Two matching office buildings are being constructed in Richmond, B.C. for the C-2000 program of CANMET. One of the pair will be constructed to market standards, the other to an environmental program, and then the two will be compared for performance. The C-2000 program invited proposals to build model commercial buildings to advanced environmental standards. Bunting Coady are the architects on the Richmond project, which was designed in collaboration with the developers and engineers.

ADDENDA

Missing Renovations. In announcing the Wood Council award winners we omitted the renovation/restoration merit awards. These were: Farouk Noormohamed, Lion’s Gate Ismaili Centre, North Vancouver; David Weiser, West Vancouver Yacht Club; Gerald L. Forseth, Van Snellenberg residence, West Vancouver; Birmingham & Wood/Paul Merrick, Green College, U.B.C.

CALENDAR

Competition for Venice Biennale. Canada’s exhibit at the 1995 Venice Biennale in June 1995

Continued on page 33