AMERICAN
ARCHITECTURE
AND URBANISM

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This book is concerned with the meaning of American architecture and with an assessment of the kind of human environment it has created in that geographical area which is now occupied by the United States. The splendid pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern achievements of South and Meso-America are not treated. In one sense, that restriction, though long if rather foolishly sanctioned by historical custom, seems especially artificial here, since all the architectures of this hemisphere can be shown to exhibit common hemispheral traits. Obvious cultural differences between them do not obscure those similarities which have grown out of the common experience of living on this side of the world. A vast landscape, a more or less scarifying contact with the Indian population, certain racial crimes, colonialism, a sense of distance from the centers of high civilization, a feeling at once of liberation and of loss: all these attitudes and phenomena have been shared in varying degree by every post-Columbian culture in America, and they have marked its architecture in various essential ways. Together they build toward a kind of meaningfulness, a distrust of the place, a restlessness shared to some extent even by the Indian civilizations which preceded them.

Yet, though present throughout the hemisphere, that restlessness and all it entails have been most intensely experienced in the area of the United States. Its people have always been the most adrift from precedent: their culture has consistently remained that of a frontier—at first a physical, later a social and technological one. The cataclysmic modern shift from the small, pre-industrial world to a new world of mass population and industrialism did not begin in America, but when it came to these shores it developed faster and more completely in the United States than anywhere else in the world. This must have taken place partly because there was less of the old in America to hold off the new, and partly because of the character of the American himself. The rush of immigration which began in the 1840's exacerbated an archetypal colonial sense of oppressedness and partial alienation, and it eventually swept away that anchor in classical learning and in the cult of intellectual attainment which had been the true distinction of, and, indeed, the spur to, reasoned revolutionary action in late colonial and early republican society. So the American became the first man, the first modern man, trampling over the earth and all old things. It is no wonder that the first characteristic forms of twentieth-century architecture began to take shape in his hands.

It all this rests whatever justification there may be for restricting this discussion to the architecture of the United States and to some of its predecessors in this continental area. Forms of a special flavor, deriving from various amalgams of colonialism, primitivism, technological experiment, and social and geographical expansion, indeed arise out of it, setting it off in kind, degree, and historical position from the other architectures of the Americas. So the mission churches at Acoma (Fig. A) and Rancho de Taos (Fig. B) share critical characteristics of linearity, planarity, and simplification of mass with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses in New England (Figs. C, D), and all exhibit a similar colonial relationship to the architecture of the mother cultures from which they derived. Each also shares special qualities with later architecture in the United States, with its industrial buildings, for example (Fig. E), or, in other ways, with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, or with the curtain-wall skyscrapers of this generation, or the buildings of Louis I. Kahn. Mid-twentieth-century vernacular architecture, too, shows a clear impress of its American past, as well as some of the liveliest examples of peculiarly American adaptation and, perhaps, invention.
It should be no surprise that such is the case. There is surely a daemons that dwells in places—not least, as D. H. Lawrence claimed long ago, on this grand and ruined continent, disquieting to inhabit, small enough to spoil, too large to own. It moves through its people like a vengeful ghost, giving them their dreams of space and journeys, of Europe on one side, war drums on the other, calling them on.

It can be no accident that twice in its history a good percentage of its population has enthusiastically given up everything tending toward sedentary, civilized life in order to exploit a new means of transportation, a new vehicle of transcendence and escape: first the horse, then the automobile. The high-silled saddle trappings of the Plains Indians (Fig. 1) and the fins of the 1950's (Fig. 2) are not so far apart in effect and intention; nor are the wind-adjusted tepees of the plains and Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House rotating on its mast: mobile both, unfixed to the ground (Figs. 1, 4). And in 1967, one-fifth of the houses constructed were trailers themselves, mobile homes, huge in size, some of them expandable, opening out in all directions (Fig. 5). Colonies of them, generally geriatric in program, sprawl in the desert (Fig. 6).
The more general pattern as it has taken shape by the second half of the twentieth century is equally convincing: a tiny, highly efficient house, big automobile, and camper—hogan, horse, and travois; small difference between them (Figs. 7-9). Similar, too, are the human qualities which brought the primitivist and nomadic patterns forth, alike among post-conquest Plains Indians and contemporary Americans: a sense of open horizons, an impatience with communal restraints, an instinct for the continuation throughout life of childish joys, a taste for violence, hard use, quick turnover, lonely fantasies, eternal change. The feathered lance and the ponies of the Strip are alike heraldries of American culture, of its Stone Age, churning heart, windy gestures, and vacant lands (Fig. 10).  

Yet the general pattern of American architecture is perhaps best introduced by the strongest exception to it, within which, nevertheless, the pull of its influence can be perceived. Reference here is to the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, who were the most communally minded builders of urban architecture that these continental limits have yet known. Monumental architecture, ultimately deriving from that of Meso-America, was built by Indians other than the Pueblos. One thinks of the Mound Builders of the Mississippi and the Ohio, and of their cosmic snakes, earth-molded, rising out of the river bottoms (Fig. 11). There were towns, too, of many types: the plastered sod hemispheres of the Pawnee (Fig. 12), the long houses of the Iroquois, the fortified villages of the Mandans. But the Pueblos and their architecture have special meaning. They formed a frontier at once agricultural and urban, eventually surrounded by nomad marauders; they were cities in the heart of the American wilderness, rocks in the flood. Civilized, the Pueblos never entirely succumbed to barbarian pressure or imitation. One might say that they are still resisting it today. The nomad made himself a horseman, and in the brilliant twilight of his history he fashioned for himself a gaudy role. But the Pueblo Indian, though he loves his horses, has never let them bear him away—nor his pickup truck either. He is still exercising his obsessive passion, which is for the earth and for the life that grows out of the earth. His history begins with that image.
In the gorges of the Colorado the wind wakes with the touch of the sun (Fig. 13). At dawn the buttes of the Grand Canyon lie sunk in darkness below the continental rim. Slowly the red light modeled their sides, revealing their bastions step by step, the fastest and most strictly constructed architectural forms on the continent and still, after all their aeons, wholly ignorant of man. No human dialogue can engage their archaic presences: a Greek temple would be riding chaos on their mesas, a Gothic cathedral lost among the spires. Far to the south, indeed, the temple bases of Mexico echo their forms and, in a more manageable sacred landscape, call the mountains to themselves (Fig. 14); but there are no such temples here. It is the empty soul of the Great American Desert and the ultimate image of its power; a place of vast silence, the pilgrimage centre of the continent, Delphi lost in it, Apollon Colorado-drowned. Out of those depths, so the Pueblos believe their primal ancestor emerged and climbed to the upper world.

Pueblo history, most clearly in the Mesa Verde area repeats and then partly reverses that process. The first Anasazi people, the earliest Basketmakers (ca. A.D. 1-450) apparently lived in caves on the sides of their deep canyons and raised corn and squash on the flat mesa-tops far above. The Modified Basketmakers, of ca. 450-750, moved up out of the caves and dug themselves pit houses on the mesa near their fields (Fig. 15). The first pits were more or less circular; development was toward oval and, finally, rectangular types. A timber frame, eventually carried on four posts, rose above the pit, supported slanted rafters, and was covered with brush and earth. Entrance came to be by ladder through the smoke hole in the roof. The earlier side entrance shrank to the size of an air vent; between it and the fire pit an upright slab protected the flame and distributed the air. Beyond the fire, a shallow spirit hole, a sipapu, like a posthole, recalled the canyon depths whence the ancestor had sprung. Already there were kivas among the houses, even some so-called Great Kivas, and the appearance of these underground rooms for meeting and worship shows that architectural specialization had already begun (Fig. 16). But the house itself was dwelling and temple at once, a clean, cool darkness, invoking the caverned earth and lit, like the Roman Pantheon, by a single shaft of sunlight from above.

Specialization increased in the Developmental Pueblo Period, of ca. 750-1100. Rectangular houses of masonry, with vertical walls and flat roofs, were grouped first in curved, then in E- and L-shaped rows, forming garden apartments for their clan groups (Fig. 17). In the open courts which they defined, more elaborately stylized kivas were dug, perfectly circular and wholly below ground, with cribbed ceilings of cedar beams. In them the ceremonial functions of the older houses and kivas alike must have been elaborated, and the oldest circular house-shape was permanently memorialized. They were mainly, but not exclusively, reserved for the men as clubhouse, workshop, and retreat. Here they renewed contact with the earth and climbed skyward through the smoke. High rose the ladder poles. Above them, the cubes of the dwelling units proliferated until they lifted in massed tiers, set back story by story to provide living terraces on their roofs (Fig. 18).
During the Great, or Classic, Pueblo Period, of ca. 1100-1300, a much higher proportion of kivas was built and, for whatever reason—defense, proud monumentality, or both—the apartment-house villages, with their courts and kivas, began to be enclosed as a single shape within one thick wall. The finest known of such great buildings is the so-called Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, south of the Mesa Verde (Figs. 18-21). Its rubble masonry is faced with various patterns of tiny slim stones, as elegant as wafers, laid flat and making a fluid wall-mosaic far more flexible than Romanopus incertum. Those sinuous walls housed a thousand people in a vast D-shape, rising to five sweeping stories in the curve and closed by a one-story section across the flat side. Large kivas were constructed and then packed about with earth in the court. They might be much expanded in size and surrounded with peripheral rooms, so forming monumental interior spaces, as in the Casa Rinconada and others in Chaco Canyon, or in the pueblo at Aztec (Fig. 22). Many of these Great Kivas were also sited in topographically commanding positions, as if making enlarged contact not only with an increased congregation but also with the grander natural forms of the land (Fig. 23). In consequence, much of the kiva's cylinder might now project above ground—as at Aztec itself or in some of the modern pueblos of the Rio Grande. There they still call to the sacred mountains around them and set up a beautifully direct relation between man-made and natural forms, which patterns of the dances in the plazas before them complete (Fig. 24).
During prehistoric times, the whole complex of the Pueblo Bonito had been canyon and mountain in itself, a labyrinth of communicating cells, a galaxy of circular pits. Rectangle and circle moved symmetrically together. But it was in the Mesa Verde that the most startling development took place. Late in the Great Pueblo Period, ca. 1200, most of the population moved its villages back off the mesa tops to long, shallow caves in the canyon walls (Figs. 23-27). Others left the area for good. The motive remains unknown, but there is good reason to believe that prolonged drought and progressive desiccation played a major role. Perhaps for this reason, new structures, tending toward symmetrical shapes and apparently of purely ritual use, such as the so-called Sun and Fire temples, made their appearance.

There were, it is true, many tiny groups of houses at the Mesa Verde in the clefts of the canyon, built of leaf-shaped, bread-colored stones. But the few large concentrations of dwellings, such as Cliff Palace and Spruce Tree House (Figs. 25-27), show the structural and spatial rhythm developed to its fullest, a melody of square and circle, of rectangular and cylindrical towers, with kivas sown like raindrops among the cubical cells. Most of all, the kiva tops formed courtyards watched by several levels of doorway-eyes. The women held the houses, as the kivas the men. The space so formed is instinct with emotion still, a true urban theater, suspenseful, like a stage, as if, at a shout, the actors would appear: surely women in the doorways, but up the long ladders projecting from the kivas might climb—what? The men give themselves many parts, and they mount through the smoke in their disguises, embroideries of the gods or of the great nations of animals. The old towns still seem to await the mask and the rattle and the feel pounding the drum of the earth, and in the modern pueblos the dance goes on (Fig. 24).
By the thirteenth century, the old Anasazi sites were almost all abandoned, and their people had moved south, probably dispersing among the so-called Regressive Pueblos of modern times, founding the high Hopi towns and moving down into the drainage of the Río Grande, and since then repeatedly moving their pueblos tiny distances, as if working off some psychic restlessness within them. Splendid Taos (Fig. 28) has moved several times, but its two pyramidally stepped-back house-blocks still dance the sacred mountain before its face and receive its waters in the stream between them. The simple geometry of their trapezoid, flat-roofed units, massing up their hollow cubes with unsophisticated profiles and plain surfaces, should be seen, like Anasazi architecture before it, in contrast to the elaborately sited, richly profiled, large-scaled and massively sculptural temples of Mexico (Fig. 14). Where the two cultures can be seen side by side, as at Casas Grandes in Chihuahua, each remains discrete, and the contrast between them is enormous. Despite its own changes of style, and indeed its spartan aridity and hardness when contrasted with Mayan shapes, Mexican architecture may be regarded as of an almost baroque complexity when compared to the simpler Pueblo forms.

That contrast between the architecture of the Valley of Mexico and of New Mexico is particularly clear and cogent in Spanish colonial times. Here it was in fact a question of modifying European Baroque forms in accordance with the primitive resources of the New Mexican frontier. The Pueblo of Taos, under its sacred mountain, and the mission church of San Francisco at Ranchos de Taos to the south (Figs. 28-31) both show how building with adobe tends naturally to produce simplified, strongly modeled shapes which, because of the necessary...
avoidance of detail, seem strangely scaled and abstract. The Cathedral of Mexico (Fig. 12) and San Francisco or, better, the much earlier church of San Esteban at Acoma (Fig. 33), can demonstrate with exactitude the contrast between what we may now be permitted to call Mexican and American forms. One derives from the other, but the former defines the great plaza of a metropolitan capital, the seat of Montezuma's power and the center of systematic Spanish urbanism in the New World. The other stands high on the edge of a monstrous boulder whose summit supports an Indian pueblo. It faces as in a dream the so-called "enchanted" mesa across the valley, not the Renaissance splendors of a thronged urban square. What in the Mexican church is elaborate in profile, movemented in surface, and fluid in the modulation of part to part, has all disappeared. The massive walls are static in mass, plain and flat of surface. The cathedral embodies a civilized conversation of many complicated scales; San Esteban is a simple heavy chant. Bearing walls, cedar beams, flat roofs, and buttressed corners make an architecture which, in relation to that of Mexico, is simplified, clarified, and primitivized. These qualities at Acoma as at Ranchos de Taos, become positive ones, like the beginning of something which—though deriving or degenerating from a more developed style—has worked its way back to first principles, from which a new kind of growth may well be possible. The fact that no such development occurred in New Mexico indicates no more than the area's own general lack of development. The qualities its colonial architecture shares with that of the Eastern Seaboard were in fact to play an obvious part in the history of American architecture as a whole.
But Acoma is much more than a demonstration of frontier conditions. It creates a monumental interior space, which is one of the first and noblest to be built above ground on the northern part of the continent—a high, shadowed volume, vast and austere (Fig. 34). So the bearing walls of flat stones and adobe brick are thick and battered inward in order to rise high, while the projecting cedar beams which span between them rest on carved and painted wooden corbels, which stretch and swell with an Etruscan exaggeration of profile. Before remodeling, a bloom of light enveloped the altar from a transverse clerestory over the choir. The device still exists at Rancho de Taos (Fig. 31) and elsewhere in New Mexico, to which it is unique. It seems at once a primitization of the European windowed dome and a recollection of the smoke hole in the kiva (Figs. 15, 27), which, of course, still functions in the pueblos in more or less the traditional way.

The light from above is another exact description of the American position between two worlds. So is the mass of Acoma as a whole, riding like a ship over the desert. It is built of Indian materials, but it rejects the hived, stepped massing of Indian forms (Fig. 34). Its verticality is uncompromised, but its horizontal axis is intensified as well. Its assertions are fierce and heroic, ultimately Hellenic in origin, and it physically introduces the divine pretensions of the European individual into the savagely innocent American land.

The late-medieval colonial forms of the Eastern Seaboard, like their landscape, are less tragic and grand than those of New Mexico, but their relationship to their European antecedents is much the same. Their history has been more than adequately explored elsewhere, so that they need be treated only in these particular connections here. In the architecture of the English colonies there are three significant differences from that of the Southwest. There is no Indian influence; the house is more important in social terms and as the bearer of style; and most of all, the East Coast had what the Southwest lacked, a pattern of middle-class urbanism which was to form the dominant cultural strain of the United States as a whole. Here, therefore, as in Florence 390 or so years before, the middle class directed its energies toward the creation of a kind of classicism in its own image, seeking out reason-
American scheme appeared very early (Fig. 36). The grid was archetypally colonial as well, ideal for impatient settlers on a continental coast; it had been current long before Hippodamus and was used by the Greeks at Smyrna in the seventh century B.C., and at Metapontum and Akragas in the sixth. The English were employing it in ravaged Ireland during precisely the period when their colonization of America was taking place. But New Haven's grid is of a special and distinguished kind. It is a purely Vitruvian figure, a perfect square, canted a little off the north-south axis to adjust to the rivers that mark its site by the shore. It is divided by open streets into nine smaller squares, with the central one reserved as common land, in New Haven called the "Green." From the earliest days, a meetinghouse, itself a perfect square, stood near the center of the Green. Later, when most of the squares were quartered by new streets, a single north-south avenue, named Temple Street, divided the Green; along it, early in the nineteenth century, three churches were strung, facing eastward like temples (Fig. 37). They replaced the old meetinghouse, and their steeple rose high into the Green's wide swell of open air. A State House in temple form stood behind them, until it was pulled down late in the century (Fig. 38). Westward, the open space was defined by the Old Brick Row of Yale College, long gambrelled barns turning their flanks to the street and punctuated by frontally faced buildings with churchlike towers (Fig. 39). Elsewhere around the Green, each house stood free on its own plot of ground, defining the central open space as ships moored around it, not as a wall. The urban structure was widely spread but shaped by tall cubes, exact and self-contained, each a small grid in the large, in an order as integral as, if less fixed than, Peking's (Fig. 40). The concept of the row house was resisted in such towns. New Haven gained only a few in the nineteenth century. The major definition of space was eventually to be accomplished by trees. With romanticism, elms were planted, and the whole, indeed almost all, of New Haven became Canterbury Cathedral, the streets long avenues with sacred names: Church, Chapel, College, Temple, Court, Crown, and Elm.
By the middle of the twentieth century, the elms were dying without remedy. Towns like Litchfield, Connecticut—though there the plan is the great cross-axis of a linear, ridge-top site—still bold the feeling: separate houses, broad lawns, the elm forest marching in dark pillars and arching and interlocking over all (Fig. 41). The space is wide, but the order, made up of self-sufficient individual units, is fixed and complete. Hence, the New England town was the first and perhaps still the most beautiful of all those several syntheses of Europe and America, of the garden and the woodland, of the street and the savannah, which American architecture was to bring into being.

William Penn clearly had London in mind when he planned Philadelphia—not labyrinthine medieval Loncon, but plans like those of Evelyn, Holme, and Cradings for its rebuilding after the fire of 1666. Philadelphia was again a grid, this time made up of rectangles forming one long oblong of city stretched between its rivers and divided by two avenues crossing at a square in the center (Figs. 42, 43). Four additional squares enlarged the scale of the rectangles and were reserved for parks.
The radial avenues of Sir Christopher Wren's plan for London (Fig. 44) had no takers in the colonies, unless the ceremonial axis at Williamsburg may be felt to derive from a similar baroque impulse toward movement and climax (Fig. 45). Wren's scheme was a dynamic one, of unified order based beyond Versailles on the radiating avenues andobelisked intersections of Baroque Rome. The new republic was to seize upon its unifying gesture, but the colonies preferred the order of separate, repeated shapes. The plan of Savannah, for example, intensified the contrast between the closed and open units of the grid; the squares of park were separated by only a few blocks of built-up rectangles, so that a beautiful rhythm of street and square expanded and contracted through the city (Fig. 46). The system was retained during Savannah's growth through the early nineteenth century right up to the Civil War, and it was given monumental stability by the splendidly abstract Greek Revival architecture which was built during that period. Hence, the urban solids and voids of the center of Savannah attain a sculptural balance worthy of the three-dimensional, modular-grid schemes of Francesco di Giorgio, though gentled by the American river of trees (Fig. 47).

Behind the trees, all along the East Coast, stand the houses, though originally they stood stark and alone in pitiless, Iron Age clearings. In New Eng-
land. It was an English medieval wood-frame dwelling imported in toto (Figs. 48, 49). Rapidly, however, modifications were made in it which led its forms in the direction taken by those of New Mexico. The thatched roof was changed to shingles, creating a tighter, harder profile. The skeleton frame, which in English examples might be weatherboarded, plastered, tiled, or left exposed as half-timber, was soon uniformly sheathed in thin, narrow American clapboards. Windows and doors were pushed tight up to the forward plane of the clapboards to keep a weather seal. The extremes of the American climate so played a part in closing the surface, making it more planar, more linear, and thinner than in the general run of English houses. A frontal gable was common in England. It occurred in the colonies, too (Fig. 48), but soon was almost universally sheared off, so tightening the profile further (Fig.

As in New Mexico, everything became simplified and clarified; the virtues sought were now the elemental ones of strong, obvious shapes and plain surfaces. Plan and structure, despite some variations, were also systematized (Figs. 50, 51). The great fireplace mass, the only sculptural solid in the house, soon assumed a central position, stabilizing the heavy skeleton of the frame, which was sheathed to make a hollow box of space around it. The rooms, low and with the frame largely exposed (Fig. 52), naturally assumed their positions in the system; their windows found a regular, more or less symmetrical placement. The English original was thus distilled into a more rigid order, less compromised by variety, less rich in modulation.

Those qualities became standard in America. The provincial baroque house of the mid-eighteenth century has them too: a regular plan, thin shell, taut,
linear details, windows tight on the surface—in general, a flat pattern of sharply separated shapes like that of colonial painting (Figs. 53, 54). While the linear and flattened architectural forms can be matched by some English examples, the paintings so far cannot quite be. It would thus seem to have been a matter of instinct and choice: Englishmen in America came actively to want perfect, precise, fleshless, puristic shapes—first dark, but soon incandescent with light blue or yellow paint against

New England's heavy greens. The Greek Revival was to bring most of them to the ultimate luminescence of glowing white, electric in violet air and amber's haze. Hence, New England architecture's ultimate derivation from deep Puritan sensibilities, encouraged by a colonial situation, should not be denied in favor of simple technological explanations. It was indeed middle-class building, self-contained, even smug, not generous, but square and straight, like decency made visible, highly lit and clear. Its


rooms are paneled or plastered cabinets, obsessive containers at generally very small scale. Slowly, they became more elaborate, with larger stair halls and walls papered with landscape scenes (Figs. 55-57). Late in the eighteenth century, the painter of its occupants might throw up a double-hung window behind them to show a landscape with the house itself sitting bright on its steadings (Fig. 58), but it is in fact closed off against the place. It makes no overtures to the land, assumes no grand postures of any kind. And it was this way because its builders wanted it to be so, not simply because it was built of wood. In brick it was the same (Fig. 59). The window frames are pressed forward so that no depth of wall is apparent, and the brick surface seems as tightly stretched and thin as wooden sheathing. Conversely, English window frames of this period were pushed back by law, an urban regulation to protect them from fire. So the English surface became more plastic by legislation, and the American thinner by aesthetic choice, while the eighteenth-century gambrel roof tended to complete the effect of an interior volume of space tautly contained, even ballooning, as within a stretched fabric. The provincial-baroque details of pedimented doorways or coigned corners look as if they could be sliced off with a razor; the intrinsic qualities remain simplicity of mass and continuity of surface. How similar in all these ways were the fine factories built of metal and glass in the twentieth century by Albert Kahn (Fig. 60).

In the Southern colonies, the pattern of domestic architecture was similar but somewhat more monumental in character. The general English vernacular
was perhaps more in accord with American condi-
tions here, and the vernacular line, high-roofed and
exuberant, in red brick with white, semibaroque
trim, runs with rather papery elegance to Westover
(Fig. 62) and well beyond. But the layout of the
colonial Capitol (Fig. 61) and the corner pavilions
of Mulberry (Fig. 63) seem rather different, and they
lead to Stratford, the Lee mansion, which is the
most distinguished exception to the general rule
(Fig. 64). Here one may be allowed to cite Sir John
Vanbrugh's Blenheim Palace for comparison and
contrast (Fig. 65). The change of scale is significant:
Blenheim, tremendous; Stratford, its plan taken
from a book of 1667 by Stephen Primatt, very small.
Both houses group their chimneys in fours, with
striking sculptural effect; but Blenheim, though
more cubicist and waywardly fanciful than the
European Baroque architecture by which it was in-
spired, still advances its masses in serried compa-

nies rhythmically reaching out to its splendidly de-
signed park, and building inward and upward to-
ward the split pediment of its central block. Men
and nature are thus juxtaposed and related to each
other in the fine theater of a dance. Stratford avoids
all such movements, climaxes, and relationships. Its
side wings are clearly separate blocks, cubical and
clear-cut. The dependencies, held on the Vitruvian
quadrants, are far out in space. The scale is strange;
there is a sense of disorientation. The stair to the
hall is a ladder. The house is above the land, not of
it, a stern image of humanity isolated in the world.
Once more, the virtues are those of simplification
and primitive directness. We are reminded of
Acoma; indeed, the abstract cubism of Stratford,
too, was to come into its own in the early tendency
toward severe, geometric classicism which the Amer-
ican colonies as a whole were to exhibit during the
second half of the eighteenth century.
Colonial public buildings largely conformed to the predominantly domestic scale. Richard Munday’s generous Colony House in Newport (Fig. 66) is no larger than a substantial English house. It retains a medieval frontal dormer, which recalls those in wood of Boston’s First Town House but which has now been transformed in a Wren-like semibaroque frontispiece, lifting the facade into a vertical continuity that is the finest kind of climax to the hill slope above the harbor it crowns. A cupola leaps from the roof, as in the Governor’s Palace at Williamsburg or in many English houses. But in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall, all protuberances—cupolas, pediments, frontispices—were shared away until only a taut surface pattern of red and white remained. The building had to be monumentalized by the addition of a huge church steeple, wildly out of scale on the garden side and in any distant view but falling into perspective from the street (Fig. 67).

This was appropriate enough, in a way, because the church—not city hall or its equivalent—was the center of community feeling and hence of monumental expression in the colonies. It was the major meeting place, and in New England the first churches were in fact nonconformist meetinghouses, even closer in function to the Moslem mosque than to the Jewish synagogue from which they so nearly derived. Like the mosque, they had been rigorously emptied of the physical presence of the divinity. Pieter Saenredam’s paintings of the interiors of Dutch Catholic churches as reformed show the naked intensity of that iconoclastic desire. The altar is thrown out; the congregation is turned away from the old long axis down the nave and is instead faced across it toward the side of the church where a new pulpit rises. The disorientation from old focii is complete. The congregation is alone with itself, a meeting of conspirators against the old order. At Hingham, the Puritan meetinghouse as it evolved is seen in its purest form (Figs. 68, 69). Light is concentrated behind the pulpit, but the whole is one volume of space more or less square and so nondirectional, its peaked roof surmounted by a single bell.
In Boston, the Old South Meeting House is just beginning to turn back into a church. Once more, the congregation sits closely together in a U-shape, the members stiff and straight, looking into each other's faces in the cold, clear light. It is the ultimate Protestant experience. A steeple, inspired by those of Wren and his followers, eventually marked the entrance on the crowded street, as Wren's had done in London, and it rises like Wren's into the sky as the single vertical marker of the Puritan town, the measure of its urban space and its only overt link with the heavens (Fig. 70). But the forms of the colonial spire are Puritan too, sharpened from their English prototypes. Whether in wood at Trinity Church in Newport or in wood and brick at Old North Church in Boston—both Anglican churches with axial naves—the American spires assert their colonial compulsion toward shapes which are unwavering and pure (Figs. 71, 72). The lanterns burned for Paul Revere in a tower which, compared with its English ancestors, is pointed as a sergeant's pike, an icicle, a northern spear (Fig. 70). Inside, too, the contrast is striking. Linear and simplified though the English churches are in contrast to their own European contemporaries, the American interiors have in fact been swept clean (Fig. 71). They burst with that passion for reason, intellectual clarity, and legalistic Justice (Dikaiosyne, in fact) which made the Revolution at last. Even most of the Gothic Revive churches of the next century in America retain that character when contrasted with the English work of A. W. N. Pugin, William Butterfield, the Camdenians, and so on. They too, are sharply spired outside, taut within (Fig. 70).
The classic reference is the correct one; the work of Peter Harrison in the middle of the eighteenth century already confirms it. Harrison should perhaps be called the first American architect. His dependence upon English example is only part of the story. He uses the books of the English Palladian architects and, like them, those of Vitruvius, Vitruvius, and Palladio. It is Palladio who is recalled in Harrison’s Redwood Library of 1748-51; central pedimented portico, side wings, but strange scale—not migonone like Lord Burlington’s Chiswick, but lumbering, big in detail (Fig. 74). Hence, though Harrison is clearly part of an English movement, and especially close here to James Gibbs, yet his intention is so heroic, in a building so small, that a new and primitive force is felt. His kind of freshness, even of welcome ineptitude, tends to remind us less of the obvious protoclassicism of his contemporary English sources than it does of the very beginnings of English Palladianism, as in Inigo Jones’s Tuscan St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, of 100 years before (Fig. 75). And we must look forward to find the like again, to the beginnings of the tough romantic-classicism of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as to Chalgrin’s St. Philippe du Ronde, of 1774-84 (Fig. 76). From this it is only a step to the purposefully revolutionary projects of Ledoux, with their stark geometry, sharp contrasts, and discontinuous juxtapositions of opposites (Fig. 77). All of this goes well with the Redwood Library and, in general, with the New England of the middle of the century.

Harrison’s own King’s Chapel is the other most striking example of English-colonial protoclassicism, with its ponderous mass, large-scaled masonry, and heavy colonnade (Fig. 78). Beside it, the small, eared stones lean in the churchyard. Inside, slabs honor the dead; one of them is called “Friend of Virgil.” Stern duty and classic learning directed, as here, Boston’s try for excellence, the toughest and most sustained that the United States was to know. The United States was born out of it.
But what was New England classicism directly after the Revolution? It is to be found in the work of Charles Bullfinch and Samuel McIntire, in a delicately attenuated decorative style derived from Robert Adam. Weight and mass have wholly disappeared; here middle-class energies were fixed for the moment upon the graceful proliferation of multi-shaped interior spaces and closed exterior surfaces elegantly inscribed. The heroic mood that made the Revolution had been dissipated. One must contrast Harrison’s Brick Market of 1761 with Bullfinch’s Boston State House, of 1798 (Figs. 79, 80). Both are derived from Somerset House, an English government building. Harrison’s details are big and strongly projected on a small mass; Bullfinch’s are small and attenuated on a large one. Bullfinch’s massing is romantic-classic enough; a block, a pedimented attic, and a dome; but his shapes are thin and stretched, like the skins of his houses. His dome especially is in marvelous tension between the cupped volume of its geometry and the glistening thinness of its golden surface: a balloon of air. So Bullfinch’s architecture, though clear and luminous, is plumply inflated and institutional, perhaps an exact embodiment of Federalist New England. To match Harrison’s sculptural force one must turn to Jefferson’s work.

Monticello, as completed, seems to belong to the same world as Harrison’s Redwood Library, derived from England but strongly awkward with new striving.
ings of its own (Fig. 87). Yet Monticello shows that Jefferson's intentions were more complex than Harrison's had been, and some of them prefigure forms which were to be characteristic of American architecture during its most original phase in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of Jefferson's work should be seen, metaphorically speaking, as a struggle between the fixed European past and the mobile American future, between Palladio and Frank Lloyd Wright, between a desire for contained, classical geometry and an instinct to spread out horizontally along the surface of the land. The classical desire had always been obvious in America; horizontal continuity was largely to come later. But the first projects for Monticello are prophetic. A plan from a book by Robert Morris is the English source, showing a central block slightly projected beyond side wings (Fig. 81). Quickly Jefferson thickens the fireplace masses and thins out the containing walls, so recalling common colonial structure. At the same time, he changes the proportions of the side wings, so that both they and the central mass project widely from the block. In fact, Morris' cube disappears; instead, two axes begin to cross. Next, Jefferson clarifies these axes through a continuity in interior space and extends the major one outside by the addition of what would appear to have been, on the first floor, a tiered and arced loggia (Fig. 82) like that which was later to grace Pavilion VII of the University of Virginia. Now Jefferson's plan itself closely resembles such an advanced, late eighteenth-century example as that of the Kent House, of 1836-38, by Bruce Price (Fig. 220). But Jefferson does not stop there; he extends the two axes farther than Price was to do, pushing out columned porches on the entrance axis and popping out polygonal bays on the other (Fig. 83). The fireplace masses remain grouped toward the center. Now Jefferson's plan prefigures that by Frank Lloyd Wright of the Ward Willits House, of 1922 (Fig. 224). Horizontal continuity has destroyed the English cube by crossing two extensible axes in space. But Jefferson cannot stop there either. He also creates a vertical axis, at least in massing, and a solidly monumental mass to fix the building sculpturally in place, even outside. This he finds in the dome and the drum, as well as in the pediment, of the Palladian-Burlingtonian tradition (Figs. 84-87). Yet, unlike the Villa Rotunda, or even Chiswick, Jefferson's dome does not function inside; it Monticello there is only an attic room within it. No vertical volume of space contradicts the horizontal axes with a humanistic assertion of mankind's central position and vertical stance. Monticello's final plan, though heavily compromised, still retains its spatially horizontal organization; a strong axis leads into the body of the house from the hill slope and out again to the hill's flattened crest (Figs. 85-87). The wings of the Palladian tradition are severed from that tradition's use of them as a humanistically embracing entrance element and are thrust underground to embrace, instead, the hill itself under its summit. We are reminded of Wright's first Taliesin, of 1911 (Fig. 237). But where in the massing of Wright's houses everything was finally to give way before the horizontal extension of roof planes, in Monticello the mass is locked in a tense combat between vertical and horizontal: dome and wings fiercely striving, two stories made to look like one, huge classical details, like Harrison's, banding a tiny, struggling building and holding it together. Inside, too, the gadgetry which was to engage so much
American attention is obsessively in evidence, coupled with a dogged determination, prefiguring Louis Kahn's in the twentieth century, to shape and light each space separately in terms of its clearly articulated special function (Figs. 88, 89). Prurity and purism are still at work.

Monticello is not lacking in the fussiness of the cultivated amateur or in a kind of brittle American self-righteousness (inheritor of the ages, all the world to choose from, everywhere to go), but its abiding character is gentle and heroic. Its hill, Monticello, is a perfect mound, like a king's tholos, swelling in profile and just small enough so that the compact house can cup its summit properly and the dome complete its shape (Fig. 90). Higher hills swell like sea waves around it, and the Blue Ridge rises westward with the vast challenge of the frontier. In Monticello's hall, near the eight-day clock, hung an Indian painting on buffalo hide, and gifts from Lewis and Clark (as in Peter the Great's cabinet were trays of tribal objects in gold sent back from Siberian rivers). In the dining room, busts of Voltaire, Lafayette, and John Paul Jones were ranged. Hence, Monticello is in all ways a hero's place, where one human presence focuses the landscape's forms and is borne up by them. As such, Monticello is the exact complement to the Grand Canyon in terms of American pilgrimage, yet standing between it and urban, colonial Boston. It is the place where the decisive stance was taken on the continent, when all of European memory and civilization that a single brain could encompass were shaped to provide the foothold for the step to the western sea.

Jefferson had not meant to be revolutionary in Monticello, but its design shows how close the Palladianism of the middle of the century already was