

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## LATIN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE SINCE 1945

The colorful and dramatic architectural achievement that has emerged from the world's biggest building boom in Latin America will be shown in a major exhibition LATIN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE SINCE 1945, at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, from November 23 through February 19. Forty-nine buildings, including large complex university cities, public housing projects, stadiums, a night club, hotels, industrial buildings, churches and private houses have been selected from recent work in 11 Latin American countries by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, the well-known modern architecture historian, and dramatically installed by Arthur Drexler, Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design. Large-scale photomurals, plans and 3-dimensional color slides in individual viewers are used to illustrate the recent remarkable achievement of Latin American architects, whose work, Mr. Hitchcock says, now excels recent European building and matches in interest and vitality modern architecture in this country.

The exhibition was organized under the Museum of Modern Art's International Exhibitions Program, directed by Porter McCray. After the New York showing it will tour the United States and Canada. To coincide with the opening, a book, LATIN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE SINCE 1945,\* written by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and containing photographs of all the buildings in the exhibition, has been published by the Museum.

According to Mr. Hitchcock, who was sent by the Museum to Latin America to conduct this survey, the main characteristics of Latin American architecture are: 1) The wide-spread use of concrete in conventional cage construction and thin shell forms, due to lack of structural timber or steel: 2) Many devices, inherited or newly developed, to control excessive heat and glare of the sun: 3) More use of color, either painted stucco, or mosaic, etc., than anywhere else in the world. He found the best work in university cities and public buildings and concluded that in these fields Latin America leads the United States.

56 architects are represented, including Oscar Niemeyer, Brazil's most famous architect; Lucio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Jorge Machado Moreira, who founded the Brazilian school; Carlos Raúl Villanueva, distinguished architect from Venezuela;

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LATIN AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE SINCE 1945, by Henry-Russell Hitchcock. 176 pages; approx. 250 plates; tentative price \$6.50. Publication date, December, 1955. Published by the Museum of Modern Art, Distributed by Simon & Schuster.

Henry Klumb, of Puerto Rico; Max Borges, Jr. of Cuba; Alejanro Prieto of Mexico; Martin Vegas, a student of Mies van der Rohe; Francisco Artigas and Jaime Ortiz Monasterio.

In the first gallery 8 foot high photo murals have been installed under a low ceiling of translucent panels through which soft light filters. In an adjoining gallery photographs of varying sizes are recessed in the walls which have been covered with panels of rough dark brown cork. Three groups of stereo-realist viewers containing three-dimensional color photographs taken for the Museum by Rosalie T. McKenna, give visitors an opportunity to see the use of color and to achieve a sense of the actual dimensions of the buildings.

The end walls of the first gallery are covered with photomurals of two outstanding buildings: Oscar Niemeyer's Church of St. Francis in Brazil, and the Cerro Piloto Housing Development in Caracas, Venezuela, designed by Guido Bermudez and Associates. In the Niemeyer church, Mr. Hitchcock points out, the free curves characteristic of his planning are used in paraboloid shell vaults. The mural on the east wall, executed in azulejos (painted tiles) is Portinari's finest work in this typically Brazilian material. The Cerro Piloto Housing Development, at the opposite end of the room, completed last year, is one of the largest in the world, and represents a unique feat of rapid construction. Built by the State Housing Authority to house new arrivals in the world's most rapidly expanding city, 48 blocks of modest apartments incorporate with great ingenuity dwelling units of many different sizes serviced by skip-floor elevators. It is almost "the equivalent of a complete city, and the vision of these loose groups of blocks set against the splendid landscape seems to realize one of the recurrent dreams of 20th century urbanism," Mr. Hitchcock says.

In a field in which Latin America leads the world, university cities, Mr. Hitchcock calls the mosaic-walled library of Mexico University City one of the most original buildings. It was designed by Jaun O'Gorman, one of the first to introduce modern architecture to Mexico twenty years ago. "Mr. O'Gorman has used the blank walls of his stack-like library tower, unbroken except for tiny stair windows, like the pages of an illustrated codex," Mr. Hitchcock says. "The colors of the mosaic executed with rough lumps of natural minerals rather than with glass tesserae, are remarkably soft and rich," he says, and concludes that "this remains the most successful example of the large-scale use of figural decoration in modern architecture."

Photomurals are also shown of the Auditorium and covered plaza at the University City in Caracas, Venezuela, designed by Carlos Raul Villanueva, which Mr. Hitchcock

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says rivals the buildings of the Mexico University City in boldness and in the profuse use of associated works of art. "Inside the auditorium the remarkable ceiling, worked out by the architect in association with the acoustic specialist Robert Newman and the sculptor Alexander Calder, is certainly one of the most striking examples in the world, both by its scale and by its architectural integration, of a collaborative project," he says. Sculptures by Arp and free-standing mosaic screens by Léger and various Venezuelans produce a sort of contemporary museum half in and half out of doors under the covered plaza adjoining the auditorium.

Another example of good public architecture is the Cancer Hospital and Clinic in Sao Paulo designed by Rino Levi and Roberto Cerqueira Cesar. This impressively large and straight-forward edifice, skilfully organized, makes the most of its difficult but dramatic site; Mr. Hitchcock says, "building up handsomely from the garden court on which certain public rooms open at the rear."

Shell vaulting, a characteristic of much Latin American architecture, is dramatically illustrated by a large photograph of a Cuban night club designed by Max Borges, Jr. for Havana. As Mr. Hitchcock points out, this example of shell vaulting almost rivals in scale the Latin American stadiums. "But the elements here, set down under great trees which here and there cut through them, are exploited for their lyricism and for the curious cave-like but not oppressive spatial effects they can produce."

A notable example of 20th century low-cost housing is seen in the Pedregulho project designed by Affonso Eduardo Reidy in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The long sinuous block is built on a hill, and the rising terrain with the highest block at the rear halfway up allows the whole scheme to display itself in actuality almost as clearly as in the model. Tile grille work and other sun control devices give a delicacy of scale to the completed housing blocks and the light colors of the painted stucco are happily accented by panels of azulejos on some of the lower structures. Also shown in the exhibition is the primary school and gymnasium, designed by Reidy for the project.

Another superb group of beautiful apartment houses, which Mr. Hitchcock says avoids the inhuman scale and monotonous detailing of most modern apartment houses, is that designed by Lucio Costa on the northern edge of the Parque Guinle in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. "By using different types of sun control - both vertical louvres and grilles of tile to provide a happy combination of regularity and variety - Costa has expressed with unusual clarity on the exterior the individuality of the dwelling units within." Mr. Hitchcock says.

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The apartment house in Rio by Jorge Machado Moreira, like most new Brazilian apartment houses, is raised off the ground on free standing concrete supports. Local building codes permit an extra story at the top when the ground story is not utilized and thus encourages this characteristic treatment which results in open space even in crowded city centers.

Private houses in Latin America, planned for large staffs of servants and large families, tend to open inward on a patio rather than outward on a lawn as do houses in North America, but within this generalization there is a considerable range of styles. The house designed by Luis Barragan for himself in Mexico, for example, has in effect, an almost blank facade hardly distinguishable from those of its older neighbors. Traditional in materials, sturdy in scale, it represents a sophisticated handling of Mexican provincial building methods. "But the effects he achieves so simply, as in the walled roof terrace, give a strong and highly conscious abstract quality," Mr. Hitchcock says.

Niemeyer's house in Rio de Janeiro, on the other hand, is set in the hills above the Bay of Gavea and he obviously has sought a special harmony between the boldly rounded hills and the sinuously curved walls. "At terrace level, the pavilion is so completely open that the view carries right through between the two more solidly walled ends, the crisp, straight line of the terrace railing providing a simple base line for the landscape." The pavilion contains only the main living areas and the kitchen.

"Another of the dozen private houses in the exhibition is by Le Corbusier, the only building in the western hemisphere by the great French architect. Although Le Corbusier has had more influence in Latin America than any other European architect, it is surprising to note how different this house is from the houses built by local architects," Mr. Hitchcock says. "On a relatively narrow urban lot, framed by party walls, Le Corbusier has created a sort of space-cage open at the base and criss-crossed by ramps leading up to a doctor's office in front and the vestibule of the dwelling to the rear."

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Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, Circle 5-8900.