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Cover: Inside Ant Farm's Environmental Structure at the Freestone Conference. Photo: Joshua Freiwald

P/A THIS MONTH

PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE[®] JULY 1970

Advertisements for a Counter Culture

Ideas, born at the Spring Equinox conference held at Freestone, California, are presented as a series of advertisements. Twenty-one pages of public notices proclaim the means to design new social and building forms in harmony with the life patterns of an alternative culture. Photographs, drawings, and comments are presented unedited as they were submitted to P/A by the conference participants.

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Eclectic Classicism

Long rejected and ignored in the rise of a modern architecture, the value of Beaux-Arts and related modes is reassessed as the basis for a common urban language. Developing in reaction to a profusion of historical styles, they established new standards of planning and design, leading to a degree of competence and specialization that made American architects of the period world leaders in the profession.

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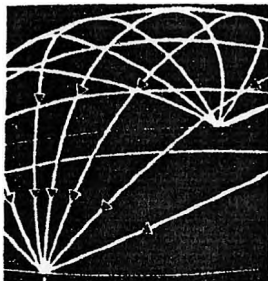
Toward an Urban Vernacular

The basis for a common language of urban forms is sought in a group of imaginative solutions to real economic problems. Most of these complexes, beginning with the best public housing of the 1930s, employ common materials and construction techniques with uncommon sensitivity to develop inexpensive yet sophisticated interior and exterior spaces.

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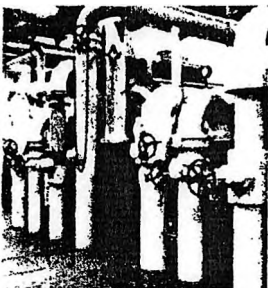
MATERIALS AND METHODS



The Spheroid Grid Dome

Architect Ted Litzenberger has designed a dome that can be easily assembled on site using readily obtainable materials and local unskilled labor. The dome is well suited for both temporary and permanent exhibitions, is capable of greater spans per unit weight than other existing domes, and is surprisingly stable for its lightweight frame structure.

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District Cooling/Heating Plants for Central Cities

Ten companies, involved in the district-plant approach to heating and air-conditioning, are selling chilled water, hot water, and steam at a cost less than a client can manufacture for himself. P/A presents a study that analyzes the district-plant solution for several given situations.

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Chemicals in Finishing

The proliferation of new chemical finishes that have swamped the architectural market in recent years has induced the creation of a new technical field that deals with the proper use of surfacing chemicals. P/A discusses the role of the new finishing specialist and defines the different types of chemicals in use today.

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Hazardous Materials

How the design and application of some materials can create serious health hazards is reported by the Chief Specifications Writer of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York.

Last February this column pointed out the hazards in the use of sprayed-asbestos insulation. The New York City Air Resources Commission has since instituted strict controls in the application of sprayed-asbestos fire protection to protect both the installers and the unsuspecting public.

These new ordinances require the complete sealing off of the area in which the work is to be performed by means of tarpaulins or temporary enclosures; use of approved Bureau of Mines masks; warning signs; cleaning up operations after installation; vacuuming of droppings into sealed containers and disposal in approved sanitary fills.

Awareness of this hazard should prompt us to examine all of the building materials that are currently employed, and especially the man-made products of chemistry in order to learn about their potential danger. If we can recognize the problem areas we should be able to minimize their hazards. Some materials pose certain problems during installation. Other materials can present certain problems as a result of their exposure in the completed design.

During application, there are countless materials that require special precautions. Spray fibers for thermal insulation, fireproofing, and sound isolation, whether they contain asbestos, mineral wool, or similar fibers, can pollute the atmosphere with irritants that may be harmful upon inhalation. Enclosure of the areas where these operations occur may be necessary. Mixing of volatile paints and coatings that may cause explosive reactions must be

carried on under controlled conditions. Tar products have been known to produce skin irritations and rashes. Some sealants have acrid fumes that may be harmful to people who are sensitive and allergic to these properties. It is essential that manufacturers recognize these problems and develop precautionary programs to reduce and minimize these hazards in the mixing, preparation, and installation stages. Contractors and installers should be cautioned and they should introduce safety measures for the protection of personnel involved in these applications.

For many years architects and engineers have designed buildings with components that are now being recognized as having a deleterious effect upon the inhabitants. For example, ducts, air shafts, and ceiling plenums utilized for the movement of supply or return air are sometimes lined with fiber-like materials such as asbestos, mineral wool, and fiberglass. These materials are used for either fire-resistant properties in the plenum areas or for sound isolation or thermal insulation in ducts and air shafts. They are constantly being eroded by air movement and the particles are carried into the air supplied in the habitable areas. Studies being conducted by some medical authorities indicate possible contamination of the air supply that may cause irritation, at the least, and serious health hazards at the worst. Details of designs should be reexamined to place these materials externally if possible, out of the air stream, or by coating and sealing these surfaces when there is no other solution. Some municipal bodies are

studying these problems and are considering ordinances which may preclude the use of such materials when they are exposed in air handling designs. A recent New York City ordinance requires the sealing or coating of these fibrous materials in ceiling plenum areas.

Some materials, such as urethane foams, have been known to give off noxious gases when exposed to fire and are presumed to have lethal effects upon individuals exposed to these fumes. The new New York City Building Code, enacted in 1968, contains a provision against the use of materials for interior use that emit gases upon incineration that are more toxic than those produced by the burning of wood or paper. While no standard test method has been promulgated to evaluate the degree of toxicity of burning wood or paper as compared to other materials, one must begin to take cognizance of these materials as possible health hazards when subjected to fire. It is a well known fact that more fatalities occur from smoke and gas inhalation than from fire itself. In the disastrous Boston Coconut Grove fire, in the early 1940s, hundreds perished from the effects of smoke and fumes developed by the burning of coated decorations, than from flames produced by the fire.

Many plastics used in building construction should be tested for smoke development and fuel contribution, as well as flame spread characteristics, to determine whether, in the event of fire, the effects of smoke will be a contributory cause for fatalities. In addition, a meaningful standard test procedure should be developed to measure the toxicity resulting from the burning of materials to ascertain the level at which certain of these materials might be considered detrimental to the health and safety of the inhabitants.



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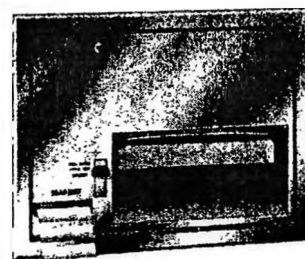
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