Louisville, Architecture and the Urban Environment is a collection of articles that originally appeared in the Louisville Courier Journal in a column entitled “The Urban Environment” between 1975 and 1978. The author is William Morgan, an architectural historian who teaches at the University of Louisville and is actively involved in historic preservation in Kentucky. The book is an attempt to give wider circulation and more permanent expression to a discussion of the particular problems Louisville has faced in recent years. At the same time, it is an attempt to illuminate architectural and urban issues that are current in cities throughout the United States.

As newspaper journalism, the book generally speaks directly to specific issues—to news. The columns are sensitive, well-reasoned, and well-written and they are based on a scholar’s knowledge of his subject. The tone of the articles is level-headed but self-assured, opinionated, and impassioned when the situation calls for it. One suspects that the evident success of the column is partly due to the personal commitment and sense of urgency that comes through so clearly.

The author acknowledges Ada Louise Huxtable and Wolf Von Eckardt as influential in his approach to current architectural and urban problems. One is also reminded of Jane Jacobs in the choice of subject matter and in the points of emphasis, namely in Morgan’s interest in a strong downtown for Louisville, in his perception of the need for variety in the city, and in his vehemence about the stupidity of misplaced parking garages and wrongly widened freeways. Like these other better known critics, Morgan sees his role as encompassing far more than stylistic or aesthetic questions about modern architecture. His articles also deal with city planning and historic preservation and with the complex economic and political conditions that are part of every significant development in the building of American cities today.

Indeed, the organization of the book, as well as the title of the column, reflects the broad view that the author takes of the role of the architectural critic. The book is divided into three sections entitled Buildings, Places, and Preservation, corresponding to the respective emphasis on architecture, city planning, and preservation. Almost every article is accompanied by one or more photographs and many articles conclude with brief postscripts describing developments that occurred after the article was written.

Of the three sections, those on Places and Preservation are the most interesting and the section on Buildings is the least interesting, at least, I suspect, to outsiders. This would seem to be primarily because even Louisville’s best contemporary architecture, some of which is quite good, is little different from good modern design in most comparable American cities. Moreover, urban architecture today is generally so constrained by building codes, city planning regulations, and politics that it is often more productively discussed in the context of city planning rather than as architecture.

It is in the Places section where forces affecting the look and shape of our cities are best dealt with. Here, Morgan writes about downtown parking garages, large redevelopment projects, suburban shopping centers, and freeways as well as about more hopeful projects such as bringing residents to abandoned buildings downtown and rejuvenating the city’s remarkable aisles as residential enclaves. In the Preservation section he discusses the need for preserving the fabric of the city and the context around its landmarks, the success of Louisville’s nationally recognized preservation program, and a number of specific preservation issues.

Along the way the book raises the issue of the role of the architectural critic today and, implicitly, of the relationship between a good critic, a good newspaper, an informed public, and good planning and design. In the case of Louisville, The Courier Journal is widely recognized as one of the better newspapers in the country. Its sponsorship of a column of architectural criticism is only part of its open-minded coverage of urban affairs. When Morgan says that Louisville has an unusually successful preservation program and when the postscripts suggest the positive influence of his column and the public debate which accompanies it, one hopes that this book and others like it might serve as object lessons to other cities. As Morgan says in his introduction, it is ironic that so little newspaper space is normally devoted to issues of architecture and planning whose impact is far more lasting than so many other issues.

In his introduction Morgan wrote, “Simply stated, the purpose of the ‘Urban Environment’ column is to remind people of the role that architecture and design have in shaping our surroundings and in determining the quality of life in the city.” Certainly he has achieved that goal for his primary audience, readers of a daily newspaper. As an architectural historian I also found the book to be enjoyable and instructive and a good introduction to a city I know very little about.

MICHAEL R. CORBETT
San Francisco

The last decade has been one of change in the architectural world. Critics have declared the death of modernism and the birth of postmodernism. Architects are engaged in adaptive-reuse projects on an increased scale. Preservation has become a popular field of study in our academic institutions, and the issues involved in contextual design, long subordinated to the individual architectural statement, are being discussed in both the popular and trade press.

How can new buildings be designed to relate to the existing environment? Are design guidelines a positive or negative means by which to achieve good design? Is continuity of the built environment best achieved by employing literal or metaphorical relationships? Should a new building be subservient to its context or should it seek to create a statement of its own? We find the beginnings of some answers to these questions in a new book by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Old and New Architecture: Design Relationships.

The crux of the theoretical problem of design relationship is one of style. Most contributors to this volume reject the slavish imitation of style as practiced in reproducing Georgian detailing on massive office blocks in Alexandria, Virginia, or the new-old Santa Fe style in the Southwest. Rather, they seek to address the stylistic question by utilizing the 19th-century concept of harmonious contrast. That is, a new building placed within an older context should be an honest expression of its time in the choice of materials and technology, but should create an aesthetic continuity with its surroundings.

The National Trust’s publication is based on a conference held in 1977 in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Trust, the Latrobe Chapter, the Society of Architectural Historians, and the Washington Metropolitan Chapter, American Institute of Architects. The conference provided a forum for discussion of relationships between new and old architecture to gain a greater understanding of design methodologies which have been used successfully or unsuccessfully.

Osmond Overby, in his introductory essay, examines the historical antecedents of the current design philosophies. He demonstrates convincingly that when new building was done in an old context, the designer almost always opted for a new stylistic expression rather than a superficial copy. Peter Blake’s essay on the “Architecture of Courtesy” sets the theme for most of the design philosophies expressed in the volume. His ideas are also linked quite closely to Tryston Edward’s concepts of manners in architecture.1 For architecture to relate to its context, the architect must control the urge to make a statement. The architecture must respect the texture and scale of the past in which it is set. Above all, the architecture must