large. Such an instance of vivid yet ephemeral, spatial, and visual contradiction constitutes a species of evidence that might easily elude the architectural historian. Garman also conducts a detailed consideration of official reports and daily punishment logs—artifacts he wisely incorporates within his expanded definition of the standard archaeological record—in order to determine the manner in which various spaces within the prison were deployed for resistant activity and subsequent punishment. Such empirical evidence supports the exchange of discipline and subversion that he reads into the institution’s spatial organization and provides a new perspective on penal architecture as a continually unfolding enterprise.

Garman’s project is important for both social and architectural history, and one wishes at times that his larger objectives were less encumbered by the apparent disciplinary limitations of archaeology. The author’s theoretical ambitions usefully complicate both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives on incarceration. But one wonders whether the archeological study of a single, minor carceral example such as the Rhode Island State Prison can sustain these ambitions on its own. Indeed, Garman’s lengthy recapitulations of the existing literature of incarceration and archaeological method often overwhelm the material evidence he seeks to present. This is unfortunate, for it is precisely the use of the material record that promises to set his consideration apart from other studies. Perhaps one contribution that architectural history can offer archaeology in a return is a broader mechanism of historical inquiry. Standard historical practice would suggest that other examples might substantiate or better serve the larger cultural claims about penology and capitalism that Garman culled from his chosen site. For example, Charlestown State Prison in Massachusetts was a contemporaneous building constantly remodeled (and also eventually demolished) in reflection of penology’s halting development. Limited investigation of other nineteenth-century prisons would, I suspect, support Garman’s observation that a cycle of architectural obsolescence and renovation was characteristic of early American penal architecture. While it may not be the archaeologist’s job to undertake such a wide-ranging study, one wonders whether concentration on a single site might not result in methodological constraints that are worth interrogating within the field.

BERNARD ZIRNHEDL
New Haven, Connecticut

Bernard L. Herman
Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780–1830

In Town House, Bernard Herman arrives at a new way of understanding what urban life and its architecture in the early American city meant to its makers and participants. Herman argues that to interpret town houses we must understand both their physical and experiential qualities—that is, how they were made, designed, used, and perceived. Herman’s analysis proceeds through linked layers of urban experience, from wealthy, established merchants to working-class artisans, slaves, and transient laborers. No matter how lowly, all these people lived within networks of international trade and influence, and large or small, the town homes were sites where owners, builders, and occupants negotiated between public and private identities, inert space and human action, personal circumstance and community norms.

Relatively small and simple town houses did not house small and simple lives. Repopulating artisan houses and neighborhoods has enabled Herman to reconstruct a complex material world where the interaction of social identities with occupational and economic realities took physical shape. As such, Herman’s book has been recognized as exemplary in the field of vernacular architecture. Town House was the cowinner of the 2006 Abbott Lowell Cummings Prize, awarded by the Vernacular Architecture Forum for the best work in vernacular architecture studies.

Herman’s seven chapters meander from major urban centers to lesser enclaves in the United States and England. His range of field work and archival investigation is impressive, encompassing in-depth work in Charleston, Philadelphia, Lancaster, Boston, and New Castle, Delaware, as well as Bristol and London in England, and side excursions to several other locales. In most chapters, Herman sets the scene with a brief story—testimony in the Denmark Vesey trial, for example, or an account of creating a spun-sugar dessert for a fancy dinner party—which offers a glimpse into “the ways people employed town houses as symbolic representations of self and community” (2). “Urban Settings,” the first chapter, sets out definitions of “presence of place, situation, comportment, and circumstance,” key concepts in Herman’s reading and analysis of these North Atlantic rim communities (2). Most of the book explores aspects of town-house design and use from various perspectives, from the elite permanent population to the economically and socially dispossessed. Herman’s conclusion turns the complexity of these disparate views into a key aspect of the city.

Throughout this work, Herman reminds us to look beneath surfaces. Merchants’ town houses, for example, varied considerably in exterior appearance, within cities as well as in the trans-Atlantic world. Still, American merchants shared notions of respectability and sociability with their counterparts in other cities and overseas. Polite society required that places be outfitted with certain accoutrements. Tea tables, dining tables, and card tables provided the venues for genteel exchange whether in Bristol, England, or Charleston, South Carolina. The blending of “local practice and cosmopolitan values” explains similar conceptual solutions to social and design problems, such as how to accommodate commercial space within urban dwellings or how to segregate service and
servants, all within buildings and interiors that bear little surface resemblance to one another (117).

For all the care they took to arrange their town houses and households in an efficient, attractive, and often stylish manner, the masters of these properties had less than perfect control over, or knowledge of, those spaces were used by their servants and slaves. Testimony in the famous 1822 Denmark Vesey slave rebellion conspiracy trial in Charleston, detailing how slaves inhabited urban space, is recounted by Herman in chapter four. Entitled “The Servant’s Quarter,” this section reveals the ability of slaves to conduct much of their lives beyond the view, or ken, of their masters and “offers a way into the architectural topography of urban slavery” (121).

Herman’s chapter on the widow’s dower provides a particularly illuminating demonstration of a community’s social-architectural expectations for women of various ranks. A full range of hierarchical and functional rooms allowed the wealthy widow access to separate spaces “embracing sociability, domesticity, and commerce” (178). The ambivalent social and legal standing of widows is reflected in the carefully worded widows’ dowers that legally, but often invisibly, set off the domestic and commercial space they could use and occupy within their late husbands’ real estate holdings. Poorer widows had to make do with awkward divisions of space that could leave them bereft of the income-producing portion of their home or the ability to separate their private from their public lives.

While a widow’s identity and circumstance often had to submit to the community’s social and material expectations, travelers in the mobile cosmopolitan world of early America took care to carry with them objects that bespoke more self-formed status and personalities. A full tea service allowed a gentleman to entertain in rented rooms in proper style, and a fiddle allowed entrée into a room of strangers. Travelers found an array of rooming situations in port cities throughout the North Atlantic rim—from single cots in crowded rooms to suites of rooms finished in proper fashion for a wealthy merchant. Travelers not only took the familiar with them on their sojourns, they also brought back foreign and exotic objects to display at home, thus enabling them, once again, to assert their identities as both travelers in foreign places and inhabitants of particular social, cultural, and domestic circles.

In his concluding chapter, Herman lays out his argument for a “poetical” interpretation of urban landscape and life. Events do not occur in the abstract. They literally “take place,” as Herman asserts on the very first page of this work, in surroundings of daily life that are not mere backdrop but vital actors in people’s lives. Cities are poetical, says Herman, in that they possess “two key aesthetic attributes: ambiguity and lyricism” (262). They are both process and experience. A poet writes to convey a thought, and her readers come away with a variety of interpretations. Once written, the poem takes on a life of its own. A lyric poem insists on subjectivity, emotion, and sensuousness. Likewise, a building’s aesthetics do not consist of unchanging ornament, material, and form. Its aesthetics change as the actors change. It can convey multiple meanings simultaneously, and those meanings can transform over time as its occupants’ perspectives shift.

Architectural and urban historians should find Town House illuminating. Grounded in years of field work and archival research, Herman has combined the research techniques of archaeologists and folklorists with those of the social historian to create an architectural history of an important urban building type. This book clearly demonstrates the value of treating buildings and objects as texts to be read and analyzed and of placing those buildings into the context in which they were first imagined and used. In so doing, we gain a more intimate knowledge of places, from mansions to rented rooms, that are too easily simplified, glorified, or ignored as part of the Federal landscape.

If Herman’s work has a weakness, it is that, for all its careful attention to place, it is not as well grounded in historical context. The problems of time and chronology raise their heads immediately, as the significance of the dates circumscribing the study, 1780–1830, is never explained. Having designated the era of the early American republic as the focus of the study, one wonders if that particular generation’s specific experiences shaped their perception and use of their urban landscapes. Did wealthy merchant Langley Boardman’s rhetorical identification with the artisan class actually translate into a material expression of republican virtue? The two problems that Herman offers as key to understanding town houses, that is how builders designed them and how people experienced them in daily life, are not problems unique to a particular time or place, nor does he suggest they are. But Herman’s framework left me wondering if and how this generation of town houses and their meanings are unusual in urban or architectural history. Are we, instead, to read this study as a model of how to decipher the material and archival clues of the past in order to arrive at the “poetical city,” and hence to conclude that temporal grounding is superfluous? In his introduction, Herman reaches back to seventeenth-century Netherlandish town houses as precedent for the English town house. But the political, economic, and cultural connections and rivalries between the English and the Dutch are not referenced. Historic contextualization would enable us to know whether we were to understand the circa-1681 Paul Revere House and the circa-1711 Pierce-Hichborn House in Boston’s North Square neighborhood, discussed in the introduction, as contemporaneous expressions of two divergent worldviews or as subsequent generational differences, and if the latter, what had transpired in that generation to effect this change. But Herman’s book is not fundamentally about explaining architecture in terms of historical change. What Herman has done is masterfully decipher buildings and associated documents and objects that are often overlooked or misinterpreted. In so doing, he has provided a
One of the central questions in the history of Viennese modernism in the years between the two world wars is why so few of the city’s architects embraced the International Style. The question is even more arresting if one recalls the prominent role that the Viennese assumed in the architectural reform movement in the early years of the century. Why, given the large number of important modernist architects that Austria produced, did so few join the architectural vanguard of the interwar period?

Part of the answer no doubt lies with the influence of Otto Wagner. Despite his prescient designs in the decade before 1914, Wagner never abandoned his allegiance to classical principles—or his conviction that the architecture of the past could still serve as a model for the present. The same was true of most of his students and followers, including Josef Hoffmann and Joseph Maria Olbrich to Jožef Plečnik and Leopold Bauer, who continued to believe that history had a place in the making of a new aesthetic. The adherents of the Wagnerschule, with few exceptions, would pursue a course in the 1920s markedly at odds with most of the European avant-garde.

But many Viennese who were neither students nor followers of Wagner continued to subscribe after World War I to a sort of modernized historicism. Although Adolf Loos, for example, advocated a formal language of simplicity and restraint, he too drew on historical ideas—especially Greco-Roman classicism—for his designs. (Among Loos’s prized possessions was a seventeenth-century Italian translation of Vitruvius.) The same was true of Josef Frank, who was, after Loos, the most visible Viennese architect on the international scene in the interwar years. At the time, Frank was considered the most “modern” of the younger Viennese architects. He was the only Austrian invited to build at the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart, and he was the sole Austrian representative at the founding of the CIAM in 1928. But by the end of the 1920s, Frank emerged as an outspoken critic of Walter Gropius, Hans Schmidt, J. J. P. Oud, and the other German and Dutch functionalists, arguing that they disregarded the complex nature of modern society. The exteriors of Frank’s buildings may have borne a superficial resemblance to the International Style, but their massing and arrangement was more composite (a consequence of Frank’s belief in reproducing the complexities and contradictions of the past), and their interiors, which displayed Frank’s penchant for discordant patterning and his belief in physical comfort, were strikingly at odds with the purified look developed by Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Only a handful of Austrians produced work that repeated outlines of the International Style. The most important, of course, were Richard Neutra and Rudolph M. Schindler, who spent most of their careers abroad, in California. Of the younger Austrian modernists who remained, few were able to generate a large body of work due to the impact of the war and the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. Among the best were Lois Welzenbacher, who built a series of elegant hotels, resorts, and houses in the Tyrol and southern Germany, and Walter Loos (no relation to Adolf Loos), who designed several striking villas in and around Vienna before immigrating to Buenos Aires. But undoubtedly the most noteworthy of the younger Austrians in the interwar years was Ernst A. Plischke (1903–1992), who is now regarded as the preeminent architect of the post-World War I generation.

Plishcke has been the subject of several previous studies, but until now, there has not been a comprehensive examination of his life and work. 1 Ernst Plischke: Modern Architecture for The New World is a collaborative effort of two well-known and respected authorities on Austrian architecture and design, August Sarnitz, a professor of architecture at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna, and Eva B. Ottlinger, who teaches in the art history department at the University of Vienna and is the curator of the Hofmobiliendepot (Imperial Furniture Collection). The book, originally published in German in 2003, was reissued in English the following year to accompany an exhibition of Plischke’s work at the Wellington City Museum. It offers a wealth of new material, especially on Plischke’s interwar designs in Vienna, and will become an essential resource for anyone interested in the period, but the book leaves some unanswered questions about his work and its meanings.

Plischke was born in 1903 in Klosterneuburg, a small town on the outskirts of Vienna. His father was an architect in the employ of the Ministry of Public Buildings who also operated a small private construction firm in his hometown. Hoping to follow in his father’s footsteps, Plischke decided to study architecture. Just after the war, he entered the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule, where he came under the influence of the visionary educators Franz Čížek and Oskar Štrnad, who before the war had been Frank’s partner. In 1923, Plischke was accepted into Peter Behrens’s master class at the Akademie der bildenden Künste, and over the next few years he developed a personal style that borrowed from Behrens’s tectonic rationalism and German expressionism.

In 1927, Plischke began tutoring a young American architect, William Muschenheim. The two men developed a close friendship, and after a brief stint working for Frank, Plischke moved with Muschenheim to New York to establish a practice there. The onset of the Great Depression dashed the effort, and in late 1929, Plischke returned to Austria. He...