to the region. These ancient shapes are modern.” (37).

Facing Southwest offers an excellent introduction to Meem's residential work. Wilson, the author of The Myth of Santa Fe, is sensitive to the complexities of New Mexico's multilayered histories. The excellent illustrations in Facing Southwest support Wilson's arguments about the significance of Meem's architecture. As Wilson notes, site was crucial to the design of many of Meem's houses, and clients often chose their building sites specifically for the views of the Jemez or Sangre de Cristo mountains. Meem adopted a romantic sensibility in his approach to the site, often employing irregular floor plans or window placement to capture the best view of the spectacular natural setting. Photographer Robert Reck's superb photographs capture the harmonious interaction of nature and architecture in Meem's houses. The bright New Mexico light that dapples Reck's interior images conveys a specificity of place and time, while the exterior images are carefully composed to illustrate the importance of foliage and views to the character of each house. In the “Design Idioms” section of the book, close-up images of Meem's doors, window seats, ceilings, and floors give a sense of the range of the architect's skills. Reck's contemporary photographs are supplemented by period images, notably by Ansel Adams and Laura Gilpin, and copious floor plans and other visual materials. They are pleasurable to browse and useful to scholars. The result of Wilson's work is a sophisticated and well-written book that will appeal to historians of American modernism and casual aficionados of the southwestern style.

Taken together, Mastering Tradition and Facing Southwest show how references to the past provide both social prestige and a heightened sense of place in the American home. The grand formal houses of Pope and the smaller, more intimate homes of Meem are fascinating counterparts in the ongoing dialogue about the integration of tradition and modernity in the domestic environment. Too often it is perceived that this dialogue took place only in the public sphere, where grand monuments and public buildings are interpreted as announcements of a culture's commitment to its heritage or its ambitious embrace of the future. As Garrison and Wilson demonstrate, the architectural interplay between past and present is not always as polarized, nor as public, as one might believe. The synthesis of architectural traditions and modernism in the private houses of Pope and Meem demonstrates the complexity of the transition from the past to the present. VICTORIA SOLAN University of Chicago

Notes

The twentieth-century middle-class desire for a small spacious house is the theme of Sandy Isenstadt's clearly written and well-illustrated book. His account of the modern house takes a new direction in identifying the perception of spaciousness as its key feature, really a feature of the owners' experience of the house rather than a quality of the architecture per se. To trace this idea, Isenstadt follows the word spaciousness as it appears in descriptions of and critiques of houses starting in the eighteenth century. Designers wrote about qualities of spaciousness, providing clients with a vocabulary to talk about it. “The polemic of this book,” Isenstadt asserts, “is that modernism in architecture may be defined as much by the perceptual ambitions of its patrons as by the formal innovations of its producers and that the desire for spaciousness in small places preceded modern architecture's much-vaunted ability to provide such an effect” (9).

In tracing the ups and downs of the idea of spaciousness, Isenstadt shows that "spaciousness...was historical, a cultural preference in the United States for visual extent in domestic environments that developed over time” (10).

The introduction locates this work as part of the general postmodern interest in visual studies that surfaces in cinema, ethnography, geography, sociology, and other disciplines. The author mentions Guy Debord's 1964 Society of the Spectacle as a related investigation of the role of the visual. One might have expected an acknowledgment of phenomenological studies having to do with human perceptions, such as Christian Norberg-Schulz's Meaning in Western Architecture, or more on Grant Hildebrand's Wright Space, with its investigation of prospect and refuge. The author is not, however, especially interested in

Sandy Isenstadt
The Modern American House—Spaciousness and Middle Class Identity

The twentieth-century middle-class desire for a small spacious house is the theme of Sandy Isenstadt's clearly written and well-illustrated book. His account of the modern house takes a new direction in identifying the perception of spaciousness as its key feature, really a feature of the owners’ experience of the house rather than a quality of the architecture per se.
theory; rather, he grounds his arguments in the texts and images produced in period publications. In chapters one through four, the author identifies the small house as of particular interest to eighteenth-century designers, nineteenth-century pattern books, and twentieth-century developers and their customers. Chapters five and six focus on windows; chapters seven and eight examine the view as the key to spaciousness as it triumphs in the 1930s through 1950s and begins to decline in the 1960s. This organization of the material—partly thematic, partly chronological—is sometimes awkward and leads to repetitions (for example, the matter of legal controls on land use to protect aesthetic qualities comes up on page 172 and again on 245 through 248; the theme of a good view for the picture window appears on page 213 and again on 241).

The author begins his story with the familiar small houses conceived by eighteenth-century British architectural treatise writers such as Robert Morris, Robert Wood, and William Kent, who promoted small cottages to ornament gentlemen’s estates. Better design of agricultural workers’ cottages was also part of the small house movement, an aspect of the reform of workers’ conditions in the late 1700s. The author turns to English writers and designers to establish the roots of the idea of a small house. He then draws on English Arts and Crafts publications that popularized the simple house and influenced American builders.

In the nineteenth century, American publications like Godey’s Ladies’ Book extolled small houses, which became favorites for the emerging middle class; at the same time a discussion on how to achieve a spacious effect began. A. J. Downing proposed devices to increase the feeling of spaciousness in landscaping—for example, by planting darker trees in the foreground with lighter foliage at the boundaries—and in house design, by using protruding bays to extend a room. Mid-sized, balloon-frame houses appeared across the United States, constructed of wood members transported by railroads and supported by building and loan associations (“nearly six thousand such associations” by the end of the nineteenth century [26]), which helped make small houses affordable to middling budgets. The small house for nineteenth-century writers embodied moral values associated with the nuclear family, gentility, social order, and a refuge from urban ills. The author’s straightforward language leaves no hint that the countryside was idealized by city dwellers: “Few, if any, rubes rhapsodized the rustic” (32).

By the 1920s, smaller family size and the automobile led more clients to seek small houses in suburban locations. Elite critics mourned the loss of special rooms for diverse social occasions, while modest-income householders took to life in just a few rooms in houses of increasingly open plans. Wall sconces or murals could be used to make rooms seem even more open, but big windows compromised the sense of enclosure and domestic safety that houses should convey; many critics disparaged expanses of sheet glass without muntins, which were deemed the guarantors of domestic meaning. Yet, by the 1930s, a new language of spaciousness informed the discussion. It was not enough to have an economical or efficient house; now one needed a small house that gave the illusion of spaciousness by incorporating big windows and a view that seemed to extend private space into the adjacent front yard, keeping the focus off neighboring landscapes and on the private property of the owner.

The triumph of the picture window to expand the spaciousness of small houses led to its downfall. Already by the 1950s critics called attention to the ways builders sited houses so that picture windows looked on nothing interesting or perhaps on downright unpleasant views of traffic. People wanted picture windows only as status symbols and not for the health-giving exposure of rooms to nature that once seemed their purpose. The picture window became the subject of cartoons, even as the idea of a “prefabricated view” was promoted, and architects were encouraged to correct floor plans so that windows “will open upon the views desired” (245).

The book closes with some explorations of the larger meanings captured in this desire for spaciousness. Isenstadt speculates that spaciousness intersects with ideas about America’s identity as the endless frontier and allows us to hold onto the illusion of everyone’s democratic access to space. Spaciousness provided “cheap luxury” to middle-class
house buyers who could not afford the expense of generous dimensions in their rooms. The stress on suburban, private views “nurtured misgivings of the city,” which led to regrettable political repercussions (265). Spaciousness and view also compensated modern man for living his life in a too-close relation to deskwork, while broad vistas restored his mental health and offered relaxation. Life magazine in 1953 described a librarian, “Mr. Munn [whose] chief pleasure is the view. Because he spends so much of his working time scanning fine print, he likes to ‘see for miles’ when at home.” Isenstadt observes, “The accompanying photograph shows Mr. Munn seated in a comfortable chair looking out the window, apparently on the mend” (262). More testimonials like this from other Mr. Munns rather than the book’s general reliance on prescriptive literature would have helped demonstrate the operation of spaciousness in clients’ minds.

In the penultimate chapter, Isenstadt argues that the modern small house created a “subjective impression of space independent of its objective existence” (251). It was the architect’s job to suggest deep space where only shallow space existed, and to use windows and views to project space outwards and enlange the apparent scope of the interior. Newer ideas have dismissed the unquestioned virtues of a view. Instead, New Urbanist codes beginning in the later 1970s have returned street facades to walls with vertical punched windows and front porches, which acknowledge neighbors rather than pretend they are not there. Artists have devised ways of deconstructing the view using video cameras, questioning the acts of seeing and being seen. Television replaces the view of the infinite front yard with images of the world.

The Modern American House approaches domestic architecture through a new lens. Since Isenstadt has not chosen a familiar template for the book, such as an architect’s oeuvre or the close study of a set of specific buildings, his organizational structure is a bit awkward and allows some redundancies. Yet, the book’s themes are always intriguing, and the glimpses into previous cultural eras’ beliefs are convincing because they are allowed to unfold slowly and in detail. With its emphasis on viewers’ experience of spaciousness rather than architects creating spaciousness, the book fits into recent vernacular architecture studies that examine inhabitation as a primary influence on buildings.

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Eric Mumford, editor

Eric Mumford’s edited volume on the modernist era, St. Louis, and Washington University’s School of Architecture is a determinedly and absorbingly localized study that promises to reach beyond the collective worth of its assembled facts. From this sometimes quirky and personalized collection of essays and memoirs there emerges something larger than the institutional history of one school, something more intrinsically than a compilation of the architectural highlights of one city. The book evokes a nexus of architectural practice and education in a time and place dominated by charismatic men, interlocking social and professional networks, and high social and aesthetic ideals.

As its rambling title hints, Modern Architecture in St. Louis: Washington University and Postwar American Architecture, 1948–1973 stems from a complicated brief. Mumford memorializes an architecture school while simultaneously examining the evolution of American modernism in a largely unexamined local context. That the book owes its publication to financial contributions from Washington University itself, the city’s American Institute of Architects chapter, and the firm of Hellmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum (HOK)—three parties with a large stake in its contents—further complicates his work. Readers can make of this semi-official authorization what they wish. Sponsored corporate histories—one need look only as far as Walter McQuade’s aptly titled HOK study, Architecture in the Real World—have always cast a long shadow across architectural bookshelves. For my part, I see little or nothing sacrificed here in the way of historical objectivity. Indeed, much is gained by the addition of an insider perspective, which will ultimately stand as one of the book’s chief virtues.

After a foreword from then-dean Cynthia Weese (who retired from the school in 2005), the book introduces the postwar metropolitan architectural scene through three historical essays. Mumford’s essay—which comes last but ought more profitably to have been placed first, where it could frame the other two—surveys the role played by Washington University-connected architects in translating modernist design paradigms to the local context of St. Louis. Mumford’s title, “Triumph and Eclipse,” suggests his working thesis: that, despite the prodigious talents and ambitions represented by the school’s faculty, “[a] certain distance seems to have opened up between the local practice environment and the School of Architecture” from the 1960s forward (60).

Mumford’s thesis of a unidirectional trend somewhat elides, however, the inevitable ebb and flow of practice. For example, the placement of some of the school’s urban designers, including John Hoal and Don Royse, in key positions with the city of St. Louis’s planning department during major urban design revisions in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that Washington University has played, and may again play, a part in shaping the metropolitan landscape. Moreover, the extent to which Mumford’s “eclipse” thesis reflects the changing business of architecture in America generally, rather than the particular orientation of the school’s faculty vis-à-vis local clients, is a question largely unexamined. Key early local modernists such as Harris Armstrong, William Bernoudy, and Freder-