His sketches and finished renderings are sensuous and stunningly beautiful. In an era when the Photoshop-collaged computer image makes every perspective appear to be the product of the same hand—or, better stated, the same machine—here is work of tremendous personality and engaging line work. Before graduation, in fact, Spence met many of his school expenses by taking on outside commissions for renderings, and one can probably assign a good deal of the credit for his winning of commissions and competitions—like Eliel Saarinen before him—on his adept drawing skills. Renderings of the Sea and Ships Pavilion and the early Misses Reid house at Easter Bel- mont, Edinburgh (1932) stand out as superb works in their own right, but virtually any of the panoply of Spence drawings reproduced in the book would be museum worthy.

Figure 1  Sea and Ships Pavilion, preliminary scheme, aerial perspective. From Basil Spence, Architect

Working in Central London was quite unlike working on the periphery of cities on what was sometimes former farm land. The complex commission for the 1970 Royal Cavalry Barracks tried Spence’s intellect, design skills, and patience—the project dragged on for some thirteen years. Given the site’s prominent position on the edge of Hyde Park, the neighborhood—one of considerable wealth and influence—was wary of new construction that might upset the architectural balance in their backyard. The most questionable aspect of this basically successful project was the high-rise tower with the flats for the Royal Guards—a density not at all to Spence’s choosing but determined by the program. While the architect, it seems, welcomed this vertical counterpoint to his primarily low-rise, horizontally oriented composition, in situ a building of that height appears ungainly and unfortunate. Understandably, not all were pleased with the project at the time of its completion, especially given London’s predilection until that time to foreshow high-rise construction. From a perspective some four decades later, however, the project appears to have aged gracefully and become an acceptable part of the urban fabric.

Like many architects of his time, Spence’s trajectory spanned an eclectic historicism, a tainted modernism, and a modernized contextualism. There are few moments when his work can be neatly assigned to any single category, however. In this he is typical of his times and typi- cal of his country—that is, until the New Brutalism reared its head in projects such as the South Bank development, with its Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, and Denis Lasdun’s nearby National Theatre (1965–76). As noted above, even Spence was not immune to the lure of exposed concrete, but his projects in that idiom will not be those for which he will be remembered. Looking back today, Spence appears to have eschewed an architectural style applied to the site for an architecture appropriate to the site. The results are not always successful in formal terms, nor are they always beautiful. But one can almost always discern the concept behind the form, the idea as a response to a complex web of factors, each given careful consideration. In our current formalist era, filled as it is with angular and biomorphic frivolity, this is a good time to take a renewed look at Spence’s buildings—to emulate their consideration, if not their precise forms.

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Katherine A. McIver
Women, Art and Architecture in Northern Italy, 1520–1580: Negotiating Power
London: Ashgate, 2006, 300 pp., 4 color and 18 b/w illus. £60, ISBN 0754654117

Scholars working on early modern Italian art and architecture have long profited from the peninsula’s highly litigious nature. Local and state archives are filled with the documentation of long-running legal cases, including disputes over inherit- ances that span several generations. Katherine McIver’s work in the under- studied and under-exploited archives of Parma, Piacenza, Reggio Emilio, and the even smaller centers of Busseto, Correggio, and Scandiano is a reminder of how much we can learn by moving off the beaten tracks of Florence, Venice, and Rome. Her study focuses on a group of women from the Pallavicina and Pallavicina- Sanvitale families, related both by mar- riage and blood, whose power base lay in the small, highly contested feudal area between Bologna and Milan. As they mar- ried, were widowed, and fought for their own or their children’s inheritances, they left behind a large body of evidence doc- umenting their legal rights, their possess- ions, and their sense of pride and
responsibility for their family. The women fought their brothers, brothers-in-law, uncles, and even their own sons. (In one case a son tried to sue his mother for spending too much money on his wedding, thereby dissipating his inheritance.) Each dispute generated notarial records, account books, inventories, and letters. These, along with a very small number of surviving buildings, images, and objects, give McIver the chance to reconstruct the Pallavicina women’s complex lives and their relationships with the buildings they constructed and the goods they owned.

Although McIver focuses primarily on three women—Laura Pallavicina-Sanvitale, whom she characterizes as a matriarch with patriarchal tendencies; Giacoma Pallavicina, who used her wealth to support the poor, particularly indigent women; and Camilla Pallavicina, a pawn in family matrimonial negotiations—the book is not organized as a series of biographies. Instead, McIver provides case studies that illuminate gender relationships, public and private space and patronage, and women’s relationships with material culture. But the archivally recorded disputes do not always fit neatly into her categories, and this leads to some lack of focus and confusing organization. For example, the chapter on the Renaissance palazzo as a public voice for women does not deal with any of the three main protagonists, but with another relative, Ippolita Pallavicina-Sanseverina, who built her own palace in Piacenza. Reconstructing that building, which was completely transformed in later centuries, is an impressive act of archival archaeology using contracts and payment records. But this has to be put to one side in the next chapter when we move into the palazzo interior, which McIver characterizes “as a private voice for women.” Here she assembles an impressive range of inventories for women’s palaces; Laura Pallavicina-Sanvitale’s home is analyzed, alongside those of her numerous female relatives, in extensive detail. But having seen how Pallavicina-Sanvitale’s rooms were laid out, we move onto another patron and a close reading of Paola Gonzaga-Sanvitale’s painted camerino dell’ Evaside at Scandiano and her frescoed chamber in Fontanellato near Parma, which was decorated by Parmigianino. An excellent discussion of the contents of these inventories follows in a chapter on domestic consumption, and the book concludes with a final chapter on religious foundations. In each of these chapters the author tries to focus on one of the key Pallavicina women, but she discusses many others as well. This can make it difficult to follow the many characters involved (particularly since they often share similar names!).

The extensive, lengthy footnotes and the detailed explication of the archival trail demonstrate the vast amount of documentary investigation that was required to reveal the lives, patronage, ownership, and influence of these many almost totally forgotten women. McIver hints at even further material (extensive account books, letters, and poems written to and by these women) that she has not been able to include, presumably because of limitations of length.

But if this is an exceptional piece of micro storia, it raises larger issues about how we use present-day categories to manage the evidence of the past. The public–private divide is a useful way of splitting a book into chapters, but does this reflect the way space and possessions were perceived in the sixteenth century? Did a matriarch such as Laura Pallavicina-Sanvitale, who led her feudal faction, really present herself in the same fashion as a patriarch? How differently would male and female members of the family behave? McIver is very sensitive to these questions, but because the bulk of the book is taken up with detail, she cannot always address them as fully as she may have wished. What she has done is provide such a wealth of material that future scholarship will not be able to ignore the women of sixteenth-century Parma and Piacenza. The publisher, Ashgate, is to be thanked and congratulated for allowing the author to include almost fifty pages of transcribed inventories and a glossary (although they should be chided for the poor quality of the black-and-white reproductions). This ensures that the book will become an invaluable resource for work on women as patrons and consumers in sixteenth-century Italy.

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Luke Morgan
Nature as Model: Salomon de Caus and Early Seventeenth-Century Landscape Design
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, 328 pp., 54 b/w illus. $55.00, ISBN 0812239636

Salomon de Caus (1576–1626) is a typically Protean Renaissance figure. Among the many fields in which he was expert he was active as garden designer, hydraulic engineer, and perspective theorist, and his places of work were as widespread as his interests. His biography traces a path from what were probably artisanal origins in Normandy through a journey in Italy, to the courts of the Archdukes Albrecht and Isabella in Brussels, of King James and Crown Prince Henry in Britain, and of the Count Palatine Frederick of the Rhine, the future “Winter King of Bohemia,” in Heidelberg. He designed important gardens for all of them.

As Luke Morgan notes in the introduction to this closely argued book, De Caus has however remained an elusive historical figure. Previous literature on him reveals wide divergence of opinion. De Caus has been regarded as a madman, a Protestant martyr, a magus, and, in contrast, a forerunner of the Industrial Revolution who invented the steam engine.

Morgan refutes all these interpretations, finding their roots in the thickets of earlier scholarship. He provides instead the first comprehensive account of De Caus’s life and work, which carefully reconstructs his career. Morgan reads De Caus’s work in the light of his publications. A more sober picture results, in which De Caus emerges as a pragmatist.

In Morgan’s view De Caus is a thinker and writer for whom utility and functionality were principal criteria. Pragmatism characterized his penchant for hydraulic engineering. His publications lack arcane significance, and so do his garden designs, in which a coherent narrative structure is absent. De Caus’s gardens are rather full of what Morgan calls familiar topoi. Hence the major importance of De Caus consists in his transmission of Italian ideas of garden and grotto designs to the north.

The title of Morgan’s book expresses