organized geographically and thematically with chapters on major developments where Staub made a mark, such as River Oaks in Houston, and on general themes, such as the Palladian revival. The text is supplemented by scores of color photographs taken by Richard Cheek, who clearly understands both the architecture and the author’s argument. Meticulously drawn and labeled plans complement the photographs, creating a set of illustrations that is so complete that the reader may experience Fox’s points visually and find more to ponder.

While interested in Staub’s designs, Fox consistently explores the larger context of each commission, moving his focus from the urban plan to the streetscape to the actual building lot, and finally, to the internal spatial sequence and the actual qualities of each room. Staub is a master at weaving seemingly contradictory qualities into one structure, but Fox does not miss an architectural trick. For example, in analyzing several houses, Fox describes how Staub manipulates the reading of scale to achieve “intimate monumentality, a paradoxical association of two sensations.” His observations about each house go beyond the simple cataloging that Frazer achieved—considering proportions, scale, materials, and arrangements—to discover the essential impressions created by these spaces and how the houses established the images of their patron’s owners.

While Frazer and Fox defend their work of a great American architect and compels us to think about eclectic architects in a new light.

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Notes

Gloria Fraser Giffords
Sanctuaries of Earth, Stone, and Light: The Churches of Northern New Spain, 1530–1821
Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007, 480 pp., 289 b/w illus. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780816525898

According to Gloria Fraser Giffords, scholars writing about the architecture of New Spain have generally favored the richer churches of central Mexico while largely ignoring those of the north. Those who have studied the northern churches have “examined and treated them in isolation, ignoring the fact that they were part of a larger network and were built to the explicit requirements of the Catholic Church and the architectural and decorative precepts of a specific time and place.” Giffords thus has two goals: to provide a “thoughtful, wide-ranging introduction to the churches of northern New Spain; and to heighten awareness of the many influences that come to bear upon the art and architecture and furnishings of those churches during the colonial or viceregal period” (ix).

It is gratifying to see a publication on the churches of northern New Spain that encompasses almost the entire period of Spanish rule (1521–1821), especially one that represents a great deal of research carried out throughout the region with visits to sites, libraries, archives, and other sources of information. Although the surviving colonial architecture in this region dates from the end of the seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the timeline really begins in the early sixteenth century, when the exploration of northern New Spain commenced, and when the new architecture that would influence the north emerged in central New Spain. The geographical area covered by Giffords runs from the northernmost limits of New Spain (present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California) to the northern halves of the modern Mexican states of Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí. It is unclear how this boundary was established, for it excludes the cities of Zacatecas and San Luis Potosí, both located in the southern parts of their respective states. Both are usually considered part of northern New Spain given their importance in the exploration and settlement of the region and the development of its art and architecture.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, each devoted to a topic related to the churches. The material falls under three major areas: the builders and the built fabric of the churches, the lives and practices of the clergy who lived and worshiped in and around them, and the furnishings and religious images found inside. Six chapters provide information on their styles, plans and builders, the materials and techniques used to build them, their exterior and interior surfaces, the details and decorative motifs found on those surfaces, and their furnishings. Two chapters on the clergy include information on liturgical objects, the administrative structure of the clergy, their titles, and their clothing. Three chapters on religious images discuss the objects and their frames as well as their identification and their meaning. There is no summary or conclusion. At the end comes a list of selected churches in northern New Spain, annotated to indicate those that are discussed in the text.

The discussion of styles in chapter two is thorough and informative, pointing to previous scholarship that has helped define the various styles found in Spain and New Spain. Giffords furthers that discussion by placing many churches within particular stylistic groupings. Her discussion of builders in chapter three is noteworthy, particularly the portion on guilds and women artisans, who participated in the preparation and hauling of adobe bricks and possibly in the actual construc-
tion work. The rest of the chapter, on materials, tools, and techniques, offers useful information. The discussion of retablo in chapter ten is informative, offering analysis of exterior and interior surfaces (façades and altars). Special emphasis is placed on the altars of the San Xavier del Bac church, south of Tucson—perhaps the most elaborate of the buildings considered here. Also discussed are the creators, builders, and decorators of the retablos and the themes they favored. To her credit, Giffords provides an iconographic and art historical analysis of the material rather than a simple list of parts or types.

The focus of the book is on the gathering of information on the churches, clergy, and religious images and presenting it in the clearest way possible with photographs, diagrams, engravings, and drawings. However, Gifford’s stated aims raise questions regarding her research plan and its implementation. Given the vastness of her topic, is it enough simply to introduce the material and analyze it in terms of style? What of her material’s associations with the broader history of art and architecture? How should the churches’ built forms be viewed in light of the history of settlement and development in this region? Scholars routinely survey the existing literature before presenting their own views and analyses, indicating gaps or problems in the literature and outlining what they intend to add or contribute. Giffords does not do this. She does provide an extensive discussion of the various styles found in this region (Mudéjar, Gothic, Plateresque, Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassicism, Tequitqui, and Mestizo), along with lists of churches that exemplify each. Yet she does not analyze the relationships between these styles over time and place. In fact, such relationships between cities in northern New Spain have been defined and analyzed by many previous scholars, but Giffords does not acknowledge this.2 The churches of Northern New Spain are obviously stylistically related to churches found elsewhere in central New Spain and Europe. Differences between the baroque in Italy and Spain and the distinctive character of the baroque in New Spain are widely recognized, yet how those differences should be defined is a subject of continuing debate. So too are the characteristics of the indigenous (or Tequitqui) style. Giffords does not recognize these debates or position her work in relation to them.

While Giffords conducted extensive research, much of the content of her chapters could have been presented more efficiently in another format, such as glossaries or appendices; her material is expository rather than supportive of a hypothesis. It is certainly important to know who built the churches, but materials and techniques need only be understood to the extent that they shaped built forms and spaces. The same is true of her discussions of clergy—how they were governed, what they wore, and what objects they used in conducting services. Giffords does not generally analyze or interpret her material or lead the reader to broader and more satisfying historical contextualizations. The usual concerns expressed by architectural historians regarding precedents or antecedents, developmental sequences, and other historical questions, are not part of the discussion. Had the history of architecture been the book’s main focus, it would have been more useful to the architectural specialist and the general reader alike.

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Notes

Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith, editors
Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children

For many adults, watching students interact during recess can be a confounding experience. The play area, an isolated island originally built by adults, becomes the students’ domain, replete with insider references and esoteric games that only they completely understand. Cryptic as they may be, these strange activities demonstrate the students’ hunger for autonomy within a world designed by their elders. This tension between the adult desire for control and the childhood need for independence is one focus of a new collection of essays, Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children. Though the book’s early chapters consider ways children can frequently be treated as political or ideological pawns, the most compelling essays investigate the ways they assert their own creative influence. As such, they cogently support one of the book’s central arguments: though children live in a world constructed by adults, they are “social actors in their own right, who use and interpret material culture in their own terms” (2).

Material culture is defined broadly by editors Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith. Though several of the book’s fifteen chapters concentrate upon the architecture and design of children’s physical spaces, others explore the intangible ways that adults can influence a child’s thinking. This breadth contributes to the book’s success, which is further bolstered by the editors’ ability to effectively juxtapose topics as diverse as campfire design and South African apartheid. Though the volume is divided thematically and chronologically into four sections, the diversity of subject-matter allows the reader to make unforeseen connections and gain a deeper understanding of how children are controlled by and take control of the world around them.