In This Issue

Designed to protect and propagate exotic plants from around the world, the nineteenth-century glasshouse was a topos for environmental concerns. While historians have pointed to the confluence of glasshouse horticulture and the rise of environmental thought in architecture, how and why these transfers took place is not well understood. In On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture, Dustin Valen examines how gardening informed architectural production in nineteenth-century England by transmitting Victorian science into building culture. He explores how gardening periodicals and books served as vehicles for environmental and scientific thought, and how “artificial climates” made by horticulturalists were reinscribed in debates over human health and transformed into “medical climates” in architecture. Bridging these disciplinary boundaries, the glasshouse played a key role in the emerging environmental paradigm in architecture by crossbreeding building practices with scientific knowledge and illustrating how mechanical solutions could be applied to living problems.

In the 1930s, upper-class residents of Bombay were bombarded with ideas and products intended to make their homes modern. Showrooms, exhibitions, advertisements, and design books all addressed a consuming public newly interested in “the art and comfort of the home.” As Abigail McGowan demonstrates in Domestic Modern: Redecorating Homes in Bombay in the 1930s, attempts to remake Indian homes were hardly new; from the late nineteenth century on, sanitary reformers, girls’ educators, and urban planners introduced new principles of home management and hygiene into domestic space. In 1930s Bombay, attention shifted from household practices to style—a distinctively modern look expressed through new architectural spaces and the latest consumer goods. Recent scholarship has explored new building styles and practices in interwar India; McGowan argues that new kinds of furnishings and decor were equally important in defining what “the modern” meant in the city in this period.

In the 1960s, Addis Ababa experienced a construction boom, spurred by its new international stature as the seat of both the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity. Working closely with Emperor Haile Selassie, expatriate architects played a major role in shaping the Ethiopian capital as a symbol of an African modernity in continuity with tradition. Haile Selassie’s Imperial Modernity: Expatriate Architects and the Shaping of Addis Ababa examines how a distinct Ethiopian modernity was negotiated through various borrowings from the past, including Italian colonial planning, both at the scale of the individual building and at the scale of the city. Focusing on public buildings designed by Italian Eritrean Arturo Mezzedimi, French Henri Chomette, and the partnership of Israeli Zalman Enav and Ethiopian Michael Tedros, Ayala Levin critically explores how international architects confronted the challenges of mediating Haile Selassie’s vision of an imperial modernity.

The Bateson Building, Sacramento, California, 1977–81, and the Design of a New Age State explores an origin of architectural sustainability in the 1970s California governmental programs of Governor Jerry Brown and the circle around Brown and his consultant Stewart Brand, a countercultural entrepreneur. Focusing on the Bateson Building, designed by State Architect Sim Van der Ryn and his team to be the world’s first large energy-saving, climate-modulating building, Simon Sadler traces the ambition of the first Brown administration to reinvent the state as a unified ecology founded on New Age principles, notably those drawn from the second-order cybernetics of anthropologist Gregory Bateson, who served as an adviser to the governor. Drawing on archival and published sources from government, environmental policy, cybernetics, and architecture, Sadler recounts an ambitious ecological agenda that included the new Office of Appropriate Technology, a projected space program, and a water atlas for the state of California. Sadler argues for a reconsideration of the history of sustainable and postmodern architecture alike.