Pier Luigi Nervi, and Bernard Zehrfuss offers a chronological jump of fifteen years that Allais uses to introduce “the prodigious wave of re-functionalization of monuments” (171)—a theme that figures prominently in the book’s final two chapters. In the richly illustrated fourth chapter, she analyzes the role of UNESCO in “decolonizing” museums, describing how during the 1960s the museum interior became a space for international values, spatial standardization, and cultural normativity. Chapter 5 builds on a celebrated essay that Allais published in 2013, which examines the international project to salvage the Egyptian temples of Abu Simbel. Finally, Allais closes the book with a ten-page coda that highlights her conclusions. “If the destructive events of the midcentury gave monuments’ keepers powerful new tools for designing aesthetic effects,” she writes, “these designs of destruction only ever gave them the illusion of intention. . . . Theirs was an ever-fleeting freedom, and an aleatory kind of architectural power” (264).

Designs of Destruction can be read as an exciting variation of global history, the architectural historical trend championed by Allais’s former adviser at MIT, Mark Jarzombek. While he emphasizes the need for architectural historians to research those areas of the world the discipline has traditionally ignored or disregarded, Allais aims to identify the global networks, colonial forces, and power interests that move through architectural artifacts worldwide, even in the West. However, at times it seems that the author’s global lens narrows to focus on American and Central European actors only. This is particularly the case in the book’s first chapter, which provides little information about the participants at the Athens Conference. In contrast with her thorough study of the members of the 1943 American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Monuments in War Areas, or Roberts Commission, Allais discusses only a few of the participants at the Athens Conference, omitting some important attendees. Similarly, although the relevance of the Athens Conference is undeniable, a more comprehensive approach to the subject, including discussion of the multiple professional meetings that ultimately led up to the conference, would have provided a more nuanced picture of the historical period. Given that Allais has studied the prehistory of the Athens Conference, as evidenced in her doctoral dissertation, “Will to War, Will to Art: Cultural Internationalism and the Modernist Aesthetics of Monuments 1932–1964,” it seems likely that such information was edited out during the book’s production.

Similarly, although the book covers the period between 1931 and 1972, the turbulent 1930s are only briefly discussed. Allais moves from her analysis of the 1931 Athens Conference in the first chapter to a detailed study of the 1940s Roberts Commission in the next. This is surprising considering that during those years the League of Nations—which Allais rightfully situates as foundational to modern bureaucratic international relations—played a decisive role in the salvation of artworks during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). This experience and the actors involved were crucial for defining the strategies followed during World War II. Although one could argue that the members of the Committee for the Salvage of Spanish Art Treasures—an international group that included the director of the Louvre, the president of the Tate Gallery, and the president of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art—were concerned with artworks rather than monuments, the boundaries between art and architecture were much more blurred than they are today. Allais recognizes that during the 1920s and 1930s the League of Nations extensively discussed “a legal project for an international agreement between states to protect art and architecture from destruction during war” (12). The League’s understanding of “heritage” gave paintings, sculptures, and architecture the same consideration, even if the first two were easier than the last to move and salvage from bombing. Eliminating this experience from the narrative by arguing that architecture and artworks should not be considered equally goes against some of the principles that guided League of Nations officials during the 1930s.

Throughout this book, as in the numerous articles and essays Allais has published elsewhere, the prose is acute, precise, and accessible. The author shows her mastery of secondary sources and her ability to identify, select, read, and interpret primary sources, which she consulted in numerous archives, both in the United States and abroad. The narrative is well supplemented by Allais’s careful selection of illustrations and the diagrams she has drawn, particularly in the second and fourth chapters. From a theoretical perspective, Allais’s greatest contribution to the literature might be her questioning of the historical afterlife of Alois Riegl’s theory of the modern aesthetic. As she rightly points out, Riegl’s vision of destruction was not catastrophic; rather, it was based on the idea of time as the natural agent of destruction. Allais effectively illustrates how the renewed interest in Riegl “since the 1970s is partly owed to the historical phenomenon of monument survival, and the many material transformations—some inadvertent, many deliberate—that were effected in the interim across so many objects of cultish devotion” (17).

Designs of Destruction is a well-researched, well-written, and engaging book that successfully bridges the gaps between architectural history, preservation policy and practice, and international relations. It is a must-read for any scholar interested in alternative constructions of modernity and the global history of historic preservation.

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Carla Yanni

Living on Campus: An Architectural History of the American Dormitory

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, 304 pp., 14 color and 132 b/w illus. $140 (cloth), ISBN 9781517904555; $34.95 (paper), ISBN 9781517904562

Living on Campus is a lively, intriguing history of dormitories that combines social and architectural history to provide a glimpse of something most readers know about but may not have realized they did. Anyone who has gone away to college—or taught at one that has residence halls—is probably aware of many of the things Carla Yanni describes without being fully conscious of where this knowledge came from.

Unsurprisingly, the inspiration for the American system of housing students came from England, from Oxford and Cambridge in particular. As Yanni notes, most European universities do not provide
on-campus housing (although a few do), but both men’s and women’s dormitories were often arranged in quadrangles with semiprivate green space. In American higher education, there has been, almost from the beginning, a desire not only to teach but also to shape the character of students. When the first dormitories for women were built, female students were “protected” in ways males were not. Women were almost always housed in dormitories with double-loaded corridors and housemothers guarding single entries, while men usually lived in buildings with entryway plans (also called staircase plans), which provided residents with direct access to the outdoors. Administrators felt no need to guard the men’s virtue. The first high-rise dormitories appeared in the 1950s when college enrollment increased exponentially as a result of the GI Bill. Coed housing did not appear until the 1960s, and even then, the sexes were separated by floor, often with separate elevators for men and women. Racial integration did not begin until the 1960s, and it too developed slowly. Segregation was so much a part of the story that the first dormitory in America, the Indian College at Harvard, was built around 1655 to accommodate Native American students separately from white students, who lived in a mixed-use three-story, wood-frame academic building constructed in 1642.

Yanni tells the story of college housing entertainingly, concentrating on a limited number of influential examples; these come mainly from Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Dickinson, Howard, Oberlin, and the Universities of Chicago, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The Illinois Institute of Technology, NYU Uptown (now Bronx Community College), Ohio State, Rutgers, and Kresge College at the University of California, Santa Cruz, are also featured, and buildings at Williams, Smith, and Arizona State are mentioned as well.

Yanni does not aim to tell the complete story of collegiate architecture in America. She focuses instead on student housing and the attitudes toward students that the buildings reveal. One reason college officials initially built dormitories was to provide alternatives to unregulated boardinghouses and to the fraternity houses where prosperous students often lived, making social contacts that would benefit them later in life. In purpose-built dormitories, the Gothic Revival dominated, as it did in academic buildings, although the earliest college buildings at Harvard and at William and Mary were built in a sort of Georgian vernacular. At Yale, the Gothic Revival buildings were integrated into the urban grid, as in England, while at Princeton and at most later U.S. schools, college buildings were set apart from the commercial core, since contact with city life was considered undesirable, even dangerous, in much of the country.

Yanni devotes considerable attention to the first coeducational institution in the United States, Oberlin College in Ohio, founded in 1833, without fully emphasizing how radical it was. At that time, the first women’s college (Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, founded in 1836) had yet to open. During that same year, Oberlin completed construction of the first women’s dormitory, Ladies’ Hall. The college had initially housed men and women in the same building where classes were held. A vaguely colonial wood-frame building, Ladies’ Hall was replaced in 1865 by a brick building of no particular style, housing about one hundred women. It was destroyed by fire in 1886 and replaced by smaller stone buildings that looked like large single-family houses.

Oberlin educated women decades before the well-known women’s colleges on the East Coast opened beginning in the 1860s, although Mount Holyoke had started out as a female seminary in 1837. Founded by abolitionists, Oberlin was also racially integrated. It admitted black students in 1835, but, as Yanni notes, there were some racial tensions during the post-Reconstruction era. A professor objected to white and black women sharing rooms, although the students had no problem with the arrangement. The college president at the time defended mixed-race housing, even though his successor forced black women to live off campus in 1903.

In considering the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yanni concentrates on ambitious midwestern college buildings at the Universities of Chicago, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and on Howard University’s impressive Women’s Dormitory (1929–31, now called the Harriet Tubman Quadrangle), before returning to Yale to discuss James Gamble Rogers’s Harkness Memorial Quadrangle (1917) and John Russell Pope’s Gothicizing Calhoun College (1932–33, now Grace Hopper College). She describes Henry Ives Cobb’s collegiate Gothic campus for the coed University of Chicago (1892–93), with its efficient courtyards within a larger rectangle and a number of fine collegiate Gothic buildings, and York & Sawyer’s work at the University of Michigan: the Martha Cook Building (1915), a grand dormitory for women where the residents were discouraged from becoming too academic (and therefore less marriageable), and the Law Quadrangle (1922–23), which looks more like Yale than much of Pope and Rogers’s Yale.

Moving into the modern era, Yanni discusses Eero Saarinen’s Morse and Stiles Colleges (1958–62) at Yale, which employed a modernized Gothic idiom at a time when historic styles had become anathema to many. With irregular plans and hanks of stone on their concrete exteriors, the colleges were intended to resemble Italian hill towns. Most American college buildings of the era were conceived in the International Style, but there is nothing Miesian about these. Yanni mentions and includes only one photograph of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago (1943–57). In her view, they did not contribute to the history of dormitories. At IIT, housing and everything else was treated in the same austere Miesian way.

As campuses increased in size during the postwar period, many university administrators chose to build modern, multistory dormitories. Yanni discusses the three modern high-rise River Dorms (1955–56) at Rutgers that initially inspired her research. (One of her administrative colleagues, immune to the structures’ modern charms, had asked her why such things had ever been built.) The nine-story buildings on the Raritan River by Kelly and Gruzen, with classrooms on the ground floors, were the first step in once-private Rutgers’s transition to a state university with nineteen thousand students (as opposed to the previous five thousand). Their red brick exteriors and riverside siting helped to ease the change. Yanni explains that administrators chose the design reluctantly, turning to modern high-rises only because of the
economic advantages they offered in accommodating more students on less land.

Other modern dormitories discussed here include the Julius Silver Residence Center (1956–61), Marcel Breuer’s humane, coed dormitories for New York University’s (temporary) uptown campus in the Bronx, and the oversized Morrill and Lincoln Towers (1963–67) at Ohio State University. When NYU later moved back to Greenwich Village and Bronx Community College moved into its former campus, Breuer’s dormitories became offices—with showers. At Ohio State, Schooley, Cornelius, and Schooley’s mammoth, twenty-four-story, honeycomb-shaped towers for 3,840 students were built so large not because the university lacked land, but to complement the equally oversized football stadium on the campus’s opposite side. Every school has its priorities.

UC Santa Cruz’s postmodern Kresge College (1967–73), by Charles Moore and William Turnbull, redefined dormitory living radically. Here, the architects sought “the intimate urbanism of an Italian hill town,” inspired by Giancarlo De Carlo’s plan for Urbino and Eero Saarinen’s Morse and Stiles Colleges at Yale. But they went much further, as did many aspects of this peculiarly experimental college. “Kin groups,” each made up of twenty-five students and two faculty members, one male and one female, occupied buildings with white walls and balconies that overlooked a meandering interior foot path. Earthy brown walls faced the forest beyond. One part of the complex had no interior divisions; students could put “walls” wherever they wanted them. Some tried to create family-like groupings.

Although Living on Campus focuses on college campus housing, it is most interesting for what it reveals about American values in a broader sense, including concepts of class and attitudes toward appropriate roles for male and female students. With this book, Yanni highlights the variety of architectural solutions to a problem as old as campus design itself.

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Note

Monica Penick
Tastemaker: Elizabeth Gordon, House Beautiful, and the Postwar American Home

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017, 260 pp., 132 color and 55 b/w illus. $65 (cloth), ISBN 9780300221763

In recent years scholars have been actively constructing a new narrative of postwar architectural in the United States, reframing the remarkably resilient architect-centered tale of transplanted European modernism and replacing it with a more complex account that addresses a much broader cast of characters, contexts, and methods of influence and design. Monica Penick’s Tastemaker is an important contribution to this rereading and rewriting of American architectural and cultural history, broadening both the discussion and the dramatis personae.

As the subtitle suggests, the book is, at heart, a biography, but it is a departure from those biographical works that lionize well-known designers. Quoting George Nelson, Penick notes that “most of what happens to architecture is out of the hands of architects” (vii). She offers what she describes as a “critical professional biography” of Elizabeth Gordon, the influential editor of House Beautiful from 1941 to 1964 (viii). Chronologically organized around her tenure at the magazine, this monograph highlights Gordon’s work with collaborators in graphic and interior design, photography, architecture, manufacturing, advertising, journalism, and even philosophy and contemporary cultural theory. Together with James Marston Fitch, Frances Heard, John deKoven Hill, Cliff May, Eiko Yuasa, Barbro Nilsson, Maynard Parker, Ezra Stoller, and others, Gordon sought to shape the postwar American way of life by advising and educating the public about home design. Citing Russell Lynes’s 1954 concept of “tastemaker” as a framework, Penick offers a highly detailed, intensively researched, and boldly presented narrative of Gordon’s influential activities as a design propagandist. Through an exploration of Gordon’s editorial activities, this book puts issues of taste formation, influence, and consumption front and center in the interpretation of the postwar suburban landscape.

House Beautiful was more than a source of model plans and decorating advice. Gordon actively engaged with and challenged professional journals as sources of authority on the theory and practice of American architecture. Broad, conceptual topics, including the philosophical relationship between modern design and American culture, the importance of regionalism and climate in contemporary design, and the codification of design principles and beauty, were given in-depth coverage in the 1950s and 1960s. In what seems like a direct response to Banister Fletcher’s “Tree of Architecture” and Alfred Barr’s famous flowchart diagram of cubism and abstract art for New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Gordon, in 1949, codified her own principles in a two-page House Beautiful spread titled “The River of Taste” (90–91). Tributaries of psyche, state of the world, religion, daily living, and science merge into the ebbs and flows of her river’s curves. Such diagrams were not the typical content of shelter magazines during the postwar period.

In 1953, Gordon challenged the stylistic status quo, writing a controversial editorial that cast the International Style and its leading proponents, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, as authoritarian and anti-American. She advocated instead a sort of middle-of-the-road modernism, a “blended aesthetic” that balanced American values of performance, convenience, comfort, and informality with progressive aesthetics (57). Penick skillfully demonstrates the nature of Gordon’s intellectual agenda by analyzing the words, images, and page design of the magazine and contextualizing them within social and cultural history; she argues for the importance and centrality of these words and images, not only in architectural discourse but also in their influence on a broad segment of the American public.

Fourteen chapters detail Gordon’s evolving ideas and projects and the creative ways she sought to promote them in the public sphere. This biography begins,