as biographies frequently do, with the subject’s background: Gordon’s entry into journalism is described, and her beginnings in the world of advertising are highlighted, as is her development of expertise in the field of housing. The impact of these beginnings is clear in the subsequent chapters, which detail her use of surveys, contests, product placement, and other business techniques, as well as her mastery of the tools of communication and persuasion. Chapters follow on House Beautiful’s multiyear “Pace Setter” model home program and its partnership with furnishings and building materials companies, and the magazine’s research into and promotion of climate control and other home technologies. Other chapters focus on Gordon’s favored architects and designers, including Alfred Browning Parker, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Frank Lloyd Wright. A final chapter on Gordon’s embrace of the Japanese principle of shibu (simple, unobtrusive beauty), the subject of two special issues of the magazine in the early 1960s, signals her search for something beyond modernism and foreshadows the emergence of postmodernism by the end of her tenure as editor.

Penick’s coverage of the magazine’s editorial content is broad and deep—at times a little too broad, as it can be difficult for the reader to hold in mind all of the themes and topics while the argument progresses. On the other hand, the varied foci of the chapters and the large cast of characters help to temper the tendency toward hagiography in architectural biography. The book does, however, include several photographs of Gordon standing in compelling poses at Taliesin West, which cast her in the mold of Wright, her host, as a prophetess and seer. Gordon emerges as a visionary and a complex and important figure in American culture.

The value of Penick’s book lies not only in the story of Gordon and House Beautiful; it also requires us to look in new ways at other well-known stories of institutions’ activities and engagement with consumers, such as the famous tract developments built by Levitt & Sons on Long Island and in Pennsylvania, MoMA’s Good Design exhibitions, and the well-known programs of more elite shelter magazines, such as John Entenza’s Arts & Architecture. Compelling archival research, oral histories, and the “backdrop” (as Penick describes it) of political and cultural history make this book both an important source on the postwar period and an excellent model for future architectural biographies. Penick convincingly situates and contextualizes the story of a single individual within a larger historical narrative and, in doing so, highlights the role of magazine editors as propagandists in the history of American and modern architecture and design.

Complementing Penick’s innovative focus on Gordon and House Beautiful is the book’s splendid design. Yale University Press has produced a lavish, beautifully illustrated volume that brings the subject artfully to life. Missing, however, is a bibliography. Penick does briefly refer to supporting and complementing works in endnotes and acknowledgments, but she could have done more to situate her contribution within the growing literature in this field. The same is true with regard to the magazine’s readership. References to readers’ responses to certain issues and programs are sprinkled throughout, and Penick mentions letters to the editor, but she takes little notice of the people who actually subscribed to and read the magazine. Nor does she offer much discussion of the Hearst Corporation, the magazine’s publisher. In any book devoted to the issue of “influence,” attention should be paid to such individuals and corporate entities. Penick might have presented examples of houses inspired by the Pace Setter program as a measure of the magazine’s influence. More problematic is her glossing over of issues pertaining to housing in the age of white flight. The “American Way of Life,” discussed extensively, is presented as a monolithic thing, and Penick’s discussions of class differences and racial divides in housing are minimal at best. The book’s framework makes big claims for Gordon’s contributions to the fundamental architectural issues of the day, and Penick argues persuasively that Gordon cannot be ignored simply because she edited a “mere” shelter magazine. At the same time, Gordon and her magazine failed to address major issues in housing, public spaces, and commercial architecture, choosing instead to focus on an individualistic, materialistic, isolated, white-oriented ideal: “the American Dream.” A clearer acknowledgment of the limited sphere of House Beautiful in defining what constituted America and American modern architecture would make this impressive book still stronger and more complete.

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Note

1. Recent years have seen significant and innovative scholarly work in the areas of housing, development, real estate, style, and taste—all subjects addressed in the book under review. In her acknowledgments, Penick recognizes the work of Alice Friedman, Dianne Harris, Andrew Shanken, Barbara Miller Lane, and James Jacobs. Yet she overlooks other key sources, such as the following: Elizabeth Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); Greg Castillo, Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); John Archer, Paul J. P. Sandul, and Katherine Solomonson, eds., Making Suburbia: New Histories of Everyday America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); David Monteyne, Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Sara Stevens, Developing Expertise: Architecture and Real Estate in Metropolitan America (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016).

Kenneth I. Helphand
Lawrence Halprin

Lawrence Halprin (1916–2009) was recognized during his lifetime as one of the preeminent American practitioners of landscape architecture, planning, and urban design. His extensive corpus of written, built, and visionary projects celebrated designing for human experience. Halprin shaped the built environment through design practices inspired by the arts and by the patterns of the natural world. Keenly attuned to the cultural context of his era, Halprin spent his career addressing social issues, the dilemmas of urbanization, and environmental concerns. In his recent, incisive monograph, Kenneth I. Helphand, professor emeritus of landscape architecture at the University of Oregon and fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, introduces readers to Halprin’s professional oeuvre and legacy through careful analysis of his most influential and enduring projects.
Helphand is ideally suited to unpack Halprin’s design methods, theoretical position, and approach to professional practice. Drawing on insights from his deep knowledge of landscape history and theory, Helphand is able to explain and assess Halprin’s designs clearly. He astutely leverages the existing scholarship on Halprin, notably the 2012 special issue of Landscape Journal (vol. 31, nos. 1–2) to which he contributed, and the handful of books written on individual Halprin projects such as the FDR Memorial and Sea Ranch. The book is well grounded in carefully cited archival research and bibliographic references. While pursuing his research in the Lawrence Halprin Collection at the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Helphand culled many of the plans, views, details, and sketches that enhance this richly illustrated volume.

In his overview of Halprin’s career, Helphand describes the landscape architect’s background and formative experiences, including the time he spent on an Israeli kibbutz, his service in World War II, and his education and work experiences. This discussion is complemented by a survey of selected projects that demonstrate the unique aspects of Halprin’s approach as well as the evolution of his thinking. While convincingly illustrating his deep impact on contemporary practice, these examples also showcase the firms and partnerships that Halprin established over the course of his career, which included collaborations with architects, planners, ecologists, and artists. The design principles, themes, and concepts grounding Halprin’s practice are addressed in subsequent chapters that present the projects. Through these chapters, Helphand shows Halprin’s range and scope as a designer and frames the consistency of outlook informing his explorations and his values. Helphand visited Halprin’s extant built works to study and assess their designs; this familiarity contributes to the book’s substantial and insightful analyses.

The task that Helphand undertakes in this volume—assimilating, organizing, summarizing, and evaluating the vast body of work produced by a midcentury icon—highlights the value of such monographs and, more generally, the work of the Library of American Landscape History. This book is the third entry in a series from the University of Georgia Press and LALH titled Masters of Modern Landscape Design, which is devoted to the work of important mid-twentieth-century landscape architects. On its website, LALH describes itself as “the leading publisher of books that advance the study and practice of American landscape architecture—from gardens and parks to city plans,” and notes that its books serve to “educate the public, motivating stewardship of significant places and the environment, and . . . inspire new designs that connect people with nature.”1 Readers would do well to explore the other volumes in this series.

Halprin’s legacy is deep and lasting, a fact that makes this volume—paradoxically, perhaps—the least comprehensive of its series. Nonetheless, Helphand’s prose is clear and intelligently wrought. The book draws upon and extends existing scholarship while registering gaps and opportunities for future work. Chapters focusing on specific case studies, for example, show that further depth might be achieved in the analysis of certain projects and their local impacts, relevance, and legacies. A more thoroughgoing critique of Halprin’s design process and a more in-depth study of the nuances derived from his cultural milieu would be welcome additions, as would sustained explorations of his impact as a thought leader and designer, his office’s construction processes, and the resilience (or lack thereof) of his built work.

Helphand introduces readers to some of Halprin’s most important and enduring projects, arranging them chronologically over six decades. He exercises keen judgment in selecting works recognized for their impact and merit, many of which received awards at the time of construction or subsequent recognition through publications and popular veneration. The works discussed are, in order, Caygill Garden in Orinda, California (1950–51); Halprin Dance Deck in Kentfield, California (1952–54); Old Orchard Shopping Center in Skokie, Illinois (1955); Sea Ranch in Sonoma County, California (1962); Niccollet Mall in Minneapolis (1962/1967); Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco (1962–68); the University of California, Santa Cruz (1963–67); the Portland Open Space Sequence in Oregon (1963–78); Freeway Park in Seattle (1970–76); the planning study The Willamette Valley: Choices for the Future (1972); the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C. (1974–97); Levi Strauss Plaza in San Francisco (1978–82); the Haas and Goldman Promenades in Jerusalem (1984–2002); Yosemite Falls Trail in California (1997–2005); and the Sigmund Stern Recreation Grove in San Francisco (2005). Eleven of these projects are redrawn in plans at the same scale, providing readers with comparisons illustrating the projects’ variations and commonalities.

Helphand’s project selection and organization allow for a comparative analysis that reveals both continuity and innovation as Halprin’s career unfolded. For example, Helphand repeatedly references Halprin’s fascination with natural forms and systems, particularly water in native streams and along shorelines. Numerous sketches show Halprin’s inspiration from and immersion within the natural world; a resonance and affinity with nature can be seen clearly in projects as diverse as Sea Ranch, the UC Santa Cruz campus, and the Stern Grove. In fact, Halprin sketched throughout his career and maintained a “portable office” in more than a hundred volumes of sketchbooks. A selection of pages and images were published in 1981 in Sketchbooks of Lawrence Halprin, a book that inspired a generation of young designers to record their own thoughts and impressions.2

Halprin’s use of water is particularly notable in fountains set within urban plazas, a leitmotif in his work. These fountains do not literally re-create the features of nature; rather, they are referential and highly studied abstractions of the flow and patterns created by water. Visitors are encouraged to interact with the fountains and related spaces, to move into and through the water, and to engage with the sound and visual liveliness of the experience. The sequence of plazas and fountains in one of Halprin’s iconic works, the Portland Open Space Sequence—now restored and culminating in the Ira Keller Fountain—is an example of such a use of water. The fountains at the FDR Memorial are also marked by their sequential design, though water here becomes a symbolic presence sustaining the site’s imagery and experiential impact.

One of Halprin’s early projects entailed creating the dance deck at his house. He conceived it with his wife and collaborator Anna Halprin, a pioneer of modern dance. The project’s emphasis on exploring and
celebrating human physical movement forged the basis for Anna Halprin’s choreography and movement studies. These are interpreted and codified in Lawrence Halprin’s 1970 book *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* and incorporated into his concept of “notation”—an iconoclastic system for recording design processes and identifying human interactions in and with space.¹ Such methods point to a foundational tenet of Halprin’s urban design: people activate and create spaces.

Halprin’s expertise and interest in urbanization are demonstrated in his reports and studies, and by his participation on national panels and committees. His influential 1960s books *Cities* and *Freeways* have become touchstones for those championing the value and relevance of civic and urban works.⁴ One of his early projects, Ghirardelli Square, set forth ideas for preservation and adaptive reuse of industrial settings that became standard in subsequent decades. That said, Helphand is careful to highlight other projects that display Halprin’s range and facility. The Willamette Valley planning report, for example, shows a prescient sensitivity to issues of ecological balance in the face of growth and development. Halprin’s work at Yosemite explores another dimension of the same problem and illustrates his deftness in negotiating access and balancing external impacts on a sensitive site.

Halprin’s “bigger than life” character was no doubt instrumental in creating public and professional awareness of his firm and its work. In Helphand’s assessment, however, it becomes clear that Halprin’s intellectual range, grasp of issues, willingness to test boundaries and experiment, and dedication to his principles are what sustain his legacy. As Helphand states: “Halprin was an innovator in both method and design who created memorable places. His works demonstrate his design skill, attention to choreography and performance, passion for art, and idealism. While he worked at all scales, he excelled as a site designer. . . . He had a masterful sense of scale, creating places that are studied calibrations between areas of intimacy and the larger whole” (58).

This volume serves as an admirable, accessible, and synthetic study for those already familiar with Halprin’s work. For the nonexpert, it provides an essential introduction to Halprin’s innovative practice and his most significant projects and publications. It highlights his design process, his conceptual contributions to the field, and his intellectual relevance. In doing so, it points to Halprin’s critical impact on our built environment. This book is highly recommended and would make an important addition to any library. Halprin influenced generations of planners and landscape architects, and the lessons and ideals he brought forward resonate widely today.

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**Notes**


Daniel Naegle, ed.

**The Letters of Colin Rowe: Five Decades of Correspondence**


*The Letters of Colin Rowe: Five Decades of Correspondence* is an extraordinary book, one of gravitas and density, a compelling record of a life devotedly spent in pursuit of the idea of architecture. There is much to praise and little to criticize. In fact, in the preface, editor Daniel Naegle preemptively criticizes of the book’s most obvious shortcoming, admitting that it includes few letters, or none at all, to Rowe’s most important colleagues—James Stirling, Alvin Boyarsky, Colin St John Wilson, Robert Maxwell, Fred Koetter, John Hejduk, and Alan Colquhoun, among others. There is, by way of compensation, a rich body of letters to Henry-Russell Hitchcock. That so many letters are absent underscores just how prolific Colin Rowe was, for this volume is 560 pages. Its five-pound weight makes it feel like a little monument, or at least a block of marble.

Naegle’s labor of compilation and transcription here is considerable. He has written cogent biographical essays and introductions to each of the sections into which the letters are clustered: “Injury,” “America and Austin,” “Cambridge,” “Cornell at First,” “Disillusion,” “Publishing,” “Renown,” “Withdrawal,” “London,” and, finally, “Washington, D.C.,” where Rowe died in 1999. The editor’s footnotes, however, are dizzyingly excessive. While helpful for truly obscure references, does this book’s presumably well-educated audience really need to be schooled that à bientôt is French and means “see you soon”; that NYT stands for The New York Times; or that “Pyramid in the Cour Napoléon” is I. M. Pei’s Louvre entrance? Are we to interpret this mania for notation as ironic, since Rowe never provided any notes? Or are we instead to deduce that the editor or publisher has judged our cultural facility so diminished that we’ve become intellectually efeebled and need such hand-holding?

The book’s subtitle is *Five Decades of Correspondence*, but it includes letters written by Rowe only, making it a one-sided conversation. We feel to be standing next to a mirror looking at Rowe looking at himself. The reflections are sometimes stingingly blunt, often enigmatic, and consistently absorbing.

Just as architects sketch to shape and test ideas, Rowe’s letters are sketches, and each unfolds as an act of thinking, not merely corresponding chattily. From the earliest letters through the final ones, Rowe is continually fleshing out his point of view: probing and critiquing; describing places and their impressions; hypothesizing, honing, and countering; veering off into tangential lines of thought; or spontaneously dropping in anecdotes or verse. Letters move through his life as an educator and lecturer; his writing, travels, and collecting; his relations with his brother, David, his sister-in-law, Dorothy, and their two sons. We hear him tapping away on one of his manual typewriters, the carriage bell dinging, propelled late into the night by countless cigarettes whose aroma one can still detect in his library, particularly on the damp days that Rowe detested.³

Letters to his parents about his first transatlantic travels are marvels of observation and wit, with Rowe playing the intrepid...