



Philip Johnson's "Glass House" remains one of the most famous residences in the world. Photograph by Wayne Andrews. Northwestern University Library Art Collection.

Architecture

by Ira Tattelman

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During the 1990s, sexuality entered the field of architecture. Scholars began researching the sexuality of architects from the past; activists addressed workplace discrimination; and practitioners used sexual identity as an inspirational tool in design.

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) began sponsoring an annual diversity conference focusing on the links between gender, sexuality, and cultural experience. Archivists from the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University and the Frances Loeb Library at Harvard University began examining their collections from gay, lesbian, and gender perspectives.

Groups such as BGLAD (Boston Gay and Lesbian Architects and Designers) and OLGAD (Organization of Lesbian and Gay Architects and Designers) formed to build community by organizing meetings, hosting lectures, and publishing newsletters. Consumer magazines such as the *New York Times Magazine* and *Architectural Digest* featured same-sex couples, and gay and lesbian magazines such as *The Advocate* and *Genre* incorporated design columns.

The effects of HIV and AIDS also brought gay architects into the media. Many who died, such as Alan Buchsbaum (1935-1987), Frank Israel (1945-1996), Roger Ferri (1949-1991), Mel Hamilton (1949-1992), and Mark Kaminski (1953-1993), were in the prime of their careers. The profession began to recognize the lost potential of these gifted designers.

When Philip Johnson, one of the most famous architects in the United States, appeared on the cover of *Out* in 1996, the profession's "coming out" reached its apex. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people were all undeniably part of architecture's family.

Gay and Lesbian Architects

Looking into the sexual orientation of architects and designers can lead readers to make assumptions about its impact on design decisions, which must perforce remain speculative. Some architectural critics and historians caution against forming conclusions about such matters, for too little is known about the effect of sexuality on creativity. Moreover, the process of identification and speculation can close down readings of ambiguous work.

Still, there is a long association of gay men and lesbians with building and design, whether it be the constructions on a grand scale by figures such as William Beckford and Ludwig of Bavaria or the interior designs of Elsie de Wolfe. While any list of gay and lesbian architects is both incomplete and limiting, its inclusion here highlights the diversity and wealth of talent these somewhat arbitrarily selected individuals have brought to the field.

In his biography of Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924), Robert Twombly writes, "There is a good deal of evidence--some personal, some architectural--to suggest that Louis Sullivan may have been homosexual."

Sullivan, who coined the phrase "form follows function," began to strip down the classical influence that was popular in his time. His designs featured both organic ornamentation (intricate patterning based on natural forms) and structural innovations (multi-story steel structures with elevators). His work includes landmark buildings in Buffalo, Chicago, New York, and St. Louis.

In *Boston Bohemia*, Douglass Shand-Tucci implies that Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942) was homosexual at a time when the term was just being recognized. Focused on the relationship of art and religion and using architecture to communicate his beliefs and passions, Cram is best known for his American Gothic churches such as All Saints in Ashmont Boston and University Chapel at Princeton. As Shand-Tucci remarks, "Anglo-Catholicism became for Cram the principal expression or carrier of his sexual orientation--and in a most characteristically Platonic way."

Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950), Julia Morgan (1872-1957), and Eleanor Raymond (1887-1989) are three probable lesbians whose work has recently been studied. de Wolfe, considered to be the first professional interior designer, brought light colors and casual decor into formerly dark, heavy Victorian-era settings.

Morgan, the first woman architect registered in California, was eclectic. Many of her residential-scaled churches and girls clubs carried on the local traditions of wood construction. Her best known work, San Simeon or Hearst Castle, is a varied mix of European and American elements. Sara Boutelle observes that "Morgan had a special knack for swimming pools, using color, light, and shape to create sumptuous designs that flaunted a hedonism startling for so modest an architect."

Raymond, an innovator interested in solar power and new structural technologies, focused on small modern homes in New England. "I like the personal contact with whoever is going to use what I design," she said. "Houses are so important in the background of children that I feel important [doing them]."

Philip Johnson (b. 1906) is often credited with popularizing the International Style. As the first Director of the Department of Architecture at New York's Museum of Modern Art, a professor at many universities including Harvard and Yale, the first Pritzker Prize winner (1979), and *Time Magazine* cover boy (1984), Johnson is both famous and influential. His "Glass House" in New Canaan, Connecticut, modernist office buildings, postmodernist skyscrapers, and deconstructivist structures are well-documented. His chameleon-like attachment to changing design trends have kept him fashionable and controversial.

Bruce Alonzo Goff (1904-1982), Paul Rudolph (1918-1997), and Charles Moore (1925-1993) were educators and innovators. Known mostly for his residences, Goff rejected the strict geometries of modernism. His houses strongly respond to their sites: the circular forms, abstract shapes, and natural contours found in land, rock and sea. As a visionary, he tried not to follow what came before but to look for design solutions outside the mainstream. Many of his designs are playful and experimental, blurring the distinction between inside and outside with gardens, pools, and rough textures.

Rudolph was at the forefront of a style known as Brutalism, using poured and textured concrete to make aggressive and massive forms. Towers and beams, ramps and windows overlap, penetrate and integrate in strikingly sculptural ways; mechanical and structural systems are often complex. His large-scale government, commercial, and residential buildings around the world are often imaginative and memorable while sometimes disorienting and "in-your-face." As he once said of his designs, "You overdo it in order to make it visible."

Moore's work helped found the postmodern movement. Rebellious and fun, Moore quoted equally from classical structures and pop culture. He argued that architectural forms have meanings and associations and worked with their symbolism. Turning familiar forms into brightly colored icons made a connection to the past while pointing out their current use as appliqué. Moore's scenographic, populist tendencies are best represented in the Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans and museums at Williams College and Dartmouth College.

Alan Buchsbaum is one of the creators of the High Tech style. Bringing off-the-shelf, industrial materials into commercial interiors, juxtaposing open, metal shelving with old English office chairs in New York lofts, Buchsbaum created contemporary, informal spaces for adventurous individuals. He disliked the banality and pretension of formal interiors and worked with clients such as Bette Midler, Diane Keaton, and Christie Brinkley, who appreciated his alternative approach. He died from AIDS complications in 1987.

Franklin D. Israel is well-known for his work in Los Angeles. Taking his cues from the riots, fires, floods, and earthquakes of the city, Israel's work embodies both the tension of the city and the need to find a place to rest. His homes for Hollywood figures and offices for film companies challenge notions of comfort and order. When he learned about his HIV-positive status, Israel became more open about his sexuality. Knowing that his time might be limited, he worked hard to make his designs innovative, tough, and visually attractive.

Jed Johnson (1949-1996) designed interiors, sometimes in association with his life partner, architect Alan Wanzenberg. Johnson began editing and directing films at Andy Warhol's Factory and designed the artist's townhouse. By 1980, he had opened his own office and developed an eclectic style that included the contemporary and classic. With clients such as Richard Gere, Mick Jagger, and Barbra Streisand, Johnson decorated by "looking at the personality of the client and taking your clues from it. . . . You get an image of a room that would suit them," he remarked. Johnson died in the 1996 TWA Flight 800 explosion.

Currently active gay and lesbian architects include, in addition to Philip Johnson, such prominent figures as Rodolfo Machado, Mark Robbins, Stanley Saitowitz, David Schwarz, Jorge Silvetti, and Robert A. M. Stern. In addition, several writers who focus on architecture and space include such authors as Stanley Abercrombie, Aaron Betsky, Jonathan Boorstein, Arthur Drexler, Herbert Muschamp, Meyer Rus, Jim Russell, Joel Sanders, Henry Urbach, and Wayne Attoe.

Queer Space

While the listings above acknowledge the accomplishments of gay and lesbian writers, curators, designers, and architects, architectural contributions are also made by those outside the profession of architecture. Many North American and Western European cities have large concentrations of gay men and lesbians. Because the relationship between people and places is always reciprocal, cities that have large queer populations become spaces for possibility, sites of pleasure, containment, visibility, and escape.

Affording the opportunity for both community and anonymity, the city thus comes to embody "queer space." This is particularly so of areas where gay, lesbian, and transgender people live and gather, the so-called "gay ghettos," which have been crucial to the modern gay and lesbian political and social movements. The ghettos have not only provided protective space for queer people, but they have also served as the centers of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities--even for people who do not actually live in them.

The appropriation, formation, and transformation of neighborhoods by gay and lesbian residents often have significant civic and economic impact, insofar as this process leads to the rejuvenation of neglected areas. Sometimes known as "urban pioneers," gay men and lesbians have been in the forefront of the gentrification of neighborhoods in most major cities of the United States.

However, gay neighborhoods may be more transitory than permanent. After these enclaves are fully developed, their character tends to shift again. Once "cleaned up," the neighborhoods often depend less on a particular subculture and more on broader economic considerations. Moreover, as tolerance and acceptance of gay, lesbian, and transgender people increase, these groups have less need and desire to develop specific neighborhoods.

Government agencies have begun to acknowledge the considerable contributions of gay and lesbian

residents to urban areas. Some cities, such as, for example, New Orleans, have launched campaigns to attract gay and lesbian residents as a means of revitalizing urban areas. Others have recognized that sites of commerce, socializing, and political life have cultural and historical significance.

Thus, the main street in Chicago's New Town is now lined with rainbow topped pylons. In New York, the site of the 1969 Stonewall riots has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Books such as Martinac's *The Queerest Places* and Higgs's *Queer Sites* help document places of particular significance for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

The practice of marking sites of gay and lesbian significance is sometimes controversial, however. Arguments develop about how to interpret the queer past and build a queer future. The question of what makes a space queer or queer-friendly can be contentious. The conflicting agendas of "assimilationists" campaigning for human rights and "resistors" opposing sexual hegemony complicate our thinking about public space.

Still, there is no denying that the concept of queer space, a conscious and activist recognition of the role sexual difference plays in architectural projects and places, is an important one. At its most basic, the phrase describes the physical location where queer people conduct their lives.

While it is very difficult for anyone to act outside the heteronormativity of most public and private space, queer space offers the promise of a place where members of sexual minorities can act freely and independently, a place where mainstream values that determine "appropriate" conduct can be resisted and restructured. Architecture and space are such crucial elements to human relationships that it is not surprising that the connections between sexuality, identity, and place-making have recently become an important topic of queer studies.

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