



Rudolph, Paul (1918-1997)

by Ira Tattelman

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Modernist architect Paul Rudolph was one of the most esteemed American architects of the 1960s, when he was the influential chair of the School of Architecture at Yale University.

Rudolph was born on October 23, 1918 in Elkton, Kentucky. He graduated from the Alabama Polytechnic Institute in 1940. After serving in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1946, he entered Harvard's Graduate School of Design, where he graduated in 1947 with a Master's degree in Architecture.

Although he studied with Walter Gropius, Rudolph moved away from the clean lines of modernist glass and steel to the more monolithic forms of Brutalism.

He practiced architecture and graphic design in Florida, Boston, and New York, and lived in New Haven while serving as Chair of the Architecture Department at Yale University from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s.

During his lifetime, he designed private homes, multiple family housing, and public buildings in North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Rudolph's most famous work is the Art and Architecture Building at Yale, completed in 1963. This concrete building just outside Yale's urban campus is bold and complex. Hollow vertical towers contain stairs, elevators, or mechanical systems.

The changing character of natural light through large skylights illuminate the dramatic main interior space, overlooked by mezzanines and bridges. There are over thirty changes of level to accommodate offices, studios, and meeting spaces, rooms defined more by the planes of floors and ceilings than by walls.

Often under attack by both students and administrators for being inhospitable and confusing, and suffering from the wear and tear of daily use, the building has seen better days. In 2000, Sid R. Bass donated \$20,000,000 to Yale for the restoration of the "heroically-flawed masterpiece."

Additional highlights from Rudolph's career include expressive buildings at Colgate, Dartmouth, Emory, Southeastern Massachusetts, and Wellesley Universities.

The Walker Guest House in Sanibel Island, Florida, is a modern light wood building that includes pivoting panels that enclose, ventilate, and shade the inhabitants.

The unfinished State Service Center in Boston includes long, circuitous walkways that penetrate deep into the mass of the building.

For his own residence on Beekman Place in Manhattan, Rudolph created a mirror covered, steel-framed mix



Paul Rudolph designed the Lippo Center, a Hong Kong landmark. Image appears under the GNU Free Documentation License version 1.2 or later.

of balconies and stairs that has the look of a labyrinth and an intimate discotheque, an ideal setting for voyeurism and exhibitionism.

Rudolph's work is designed to excite and challenge its occupants. Lively and rugged, the buildings are often made from exposed concrete surfaces. The strong vertical striations are obtained with either ribbed-block or ribbed wood forms. The rough texture is achieved by hammering away at the poured concrete to expose the inner aggregate.

The interiors are dynamic, playing with light and shadow, drama and abstraction. Beams slide past vertical supports; walls are de-emphasized. Built-in furnishings enhance and divide the spaces.

Like many architects of the period, Rudolph believed that urban design could contribute to social reform. Many of his unbuilt urban projects were based on the "plug-in city," an idea that included mobile residential or work units that plugged into a larger framework for mechanical, electrical, and plumbing services.

His Oriental Gardens Housing Project, built in New Haven in 1970, used mobile home units. Ill-conceived and eventually uninhabitable, the project was demolished in 1981.

Rudolph died in Manhattan on August 8, 1997.

He was uncompromising and egocentric. He was also versatile and imaginative. "Architecture is a personal effort, and the fewer people coming between you and your work the better. This keeps some people from practicing architecture," he remarked, and added: "If an architect cares enough, and practices architecture as an art, then he must initiate design; he must create rather than make judgments."

Controversial and influential through the 1960s, Rudolph was fairly open about his sexuality. Yet the extent to which his homosexuality contributed to his exaggeratedly masculine aesthetic can only be speculative.

Rudolph's reputation, in decline for some time, is beginning to rise again.

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Ira Tattelman is an architect, artist, and independent scholar living in Washington, D.C. He has published in such books and journals as *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies*, *Genders and Generations*, *Public Sex*, *Gay Space*, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, *The Best of The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*, *Lambda Book Report* and *Journal of Homosexuality*.