

## Architecture Loses Three Very Different Leaders

*They died within the space of four weeks: one a regionalist, almost a guru to generations of architects in the Southwest; the second, American architecture's prime individualist, whose work is enjoying renewed attention in these eclectic times; the third, a statesman of the profession and co-founder of one of the nation's largest firms.—Ed.*

### O'Neil Ford

Purely on the basis of the built accomplishments of his firm, Ford, Powell & Carson of San Antonio, O'Neil Ford, FAIA, who died July 20 at the age of 76, would have to be considered one of the leaders among 20th century Texas architects. The works included campuses for Trinity University and University of Texas in San Antonio, the Texas Instruments plant in Dallas, the Tower of the Americas for San Antonio's 1968 Hemisfair.

But Ford's leadership went well beyond the buildings, as attested by these comments by colleagues (and sometimes competitors), students, and architecture critics.

David Dillon, *Dallas Morning News*: "He turned architects' attention to native Texas architecture, native materials, indigenous forms. He wasn't talking about wild West; he wasn't talking about sentimental attachments to the frontier. He was looking at forgotten buildings, the kind of German stuff around Fredericksburg and the hunky, almost Romanesque buildings down along the Rio Grande River.

"So I think he gave other architects a kind of vocabulary of forms and materials that they hadn't noticed before.

"I think the other area where he was very important right from the beginning is that he was a preservationist in the '30s and '40s when it wasn't a cause, and he fought the long, lonely battles at great personal cost when nobody else was interested. He always put his money where his mouth was on that issue. He didn't get contracts in San Antonio for about 15 years because of his opposition to the Breckenridge Park Freeway.

"For all his influence as a teacher, very few architects do work that is anything like his. Frank Welch is a good example. He's a superb architect and learned a great deal from Neil, but you have to look a long time at Welch's work before you can see any real influence."

Frank Welch, FAIA: "I was an early employee and since then a colleague and close friend. Neil's work was very non-egocentric, and therefore it wasn't a high-style vocabulary that was easily discernible from one to another architect he influenced. That didn't transfer. What transferred was an intrinsic character or caring and sense of mission about an approach to things—approaching a job with honesty and candor and pragmatism and the sense of a building being correct in its place. He never did those show-stopping buildings. He was for the self-effacing architectural statement, the crafted building of singular honesty. I think this nonegocentric quality is the thing that is really informing about his work and the reason he had so much appeal for younger people.

"He was being influenced by history long before postmodernism, but instead of it being classical Europe, this was native, indigenous. We've been doing things with history for a long, long time and enjoying it."

William Caudill, FAIA: "Neil never got caught in the bottom of a cliché barrel. He's been a regionalist from the very beginning, and to be a regionalist during the onslaughts of the International Style—you're going upstream. And he did it all the way; never veered his course.

"As a competitor, he was absolutely wonderful. When our firm was getting started, his practice was already eight or

10 years old. We got a letter from a guy in Plainsville, way out in West Texas, asking if we were interested in designing his house. I wrote him about how great we were, and how interested in this thing, and I got the letter off into the mail special delivery. About 10 days later, I got a letter from this man in Plainsville saying he had extended his invitation to three different firms, including O'Neil Ford's, that he appreciated our letter and got it in three days, but the same day Mr. Ford got his invitation, Mr. Ford called him and said, "If you don't want a goddamned colonial house, I'll get my airplane and fly up this afternoon and see you." He got the job. That was when I started flying. I've had nothing but respect for Neil. Before he died, we (the Texas Society of Architects) were putting him up for gold medalist.

"I recognized his great talent immediately when I moved to Texas (I'm an Okie) in the '40s. I was teaching at Texas A&M, and from the start I felt there were only three architects in the whole Southwest who deserved recognition and emulation, O'Neil Ford, his partner Arch Swank, and Karl Kamrath."

Arch B. Swank Jr., FAIA: "He was a many-faceted person, an absolutely amazing draftsman, and he had the greatest appreciation for the nature of materials and an amazing inherent feeling for the structure of building, even though he had no academic training. He was a pioneer in the lift slab concrete-type construction, and he was one of the early architects interested in prestressing, post-tensioning, hyperbolic paraboloids, thin-shell construction, and so forth.

"In one of my last notes to him, I asked him to write a foreword to a book that the Dallas chapter is helping publish on Neil's mentor, Dave Williams, with whom Neil did studies of indigenous buildings, especially those done around 1840 by German and Alsatian settlers in the hill country in Texas. Neil wrote, "The sense of native things, the respect for climate, and the development of style just grew" from the research. He insisted on the necessity of understanding these values as well as

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Larry Paul Fuller



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other precedents, learning why buildings were shaped and planned as they were. At the same time he abhorred the idea of copying any building."

Karl Kamrath, FAIA: "We never worked together. We had a lot of fun talking about architecture though we never did see anywhere near close eye to eye on architecture. He did a fine job in producing the old Texas-style homes, which were always gracious and nice, while we were doing a more American architecture in the manner of Mr. Wright. Twenty-five years ago we were founding members of our Egg and Dart Club. We were friendly competitors, and there was only one man who could out-talk Neil. That's Philip Johnson."

Bill N. Lacy, FAIA: "I had the pleasure of making a four-hour video tape interview with him for WGBH of Boston last December. We had such a great time. I told him I enjoyed watching the tape so much because it was the only time I was able to turn him off when I wanted to. What was interesting was that throughout this long interview, he kept coming back over and over again to people. No matter what we talked about, he'd get back to San Antonio and the people. He was one of the most sensitive architects to the human qualities of design—and a talker, and a raconteur. I said to him once, 'A lot of people know what the FAIA stands for behind your name, but a lot of others are curious about the ICS.' He grinned and said, 'International Correspondence School at Scranton, Pa.' Then he always rushed in after that to let you know that he has proper academic credentials, that he lectured at Harvard and has honorary degrees and all that."

"During the taping I asked if he considered his work derivative, and he snorted and told me it was absolutely derivative. He said, 'All of architecture is a remembering of one kind or another. You don't just invent this thing.'

"He was one of the two or three mentors whose integrity and talent I most respected, and I loved him like a father. Besides that he was a marvelously entertaining, outrageous human being."

Larry Paul Fuller, *Editor, Texas Architect*: "He used to half mutter and half growl, 'When you hear someone say, "Oh,

that's a fun building! you know damn well it's a bad building.'" But that was a little misleading because while no one would say that his buildings are fun, there's great pleasure to be found in their quiet elegance, their restraint, and the use of natural materials made delightful through the human touch.

"The thing that came through to me was that he found architecture to be very serious business with definite limitations. Buildings have strict purposes, and he really felt that that was the challenge facing architects—to live within those limits and still do something useful. He never swerved from his belief that architecture is the most serious of the arts.

"Then there was his having gotten dirty. He really knew how to lay the brick; he was not only one to appreciate crafts, but also was a real craftsman.

"O'Neil Ford was salty, saucy, irascible and irreverent, yet he exuded a unique kind of elegance."

Paul Kennon, FAIA: "In his own creative way, he built on these regional forces and the antiquity of the Southwest, fused with the needs of the day. And he was a self-made architect who developed such a tremendous tactile sensitivity to materials. He was a tremendous force here in Texas."

Jack McGinty, FAIA: "It became apparent to me as chairman of the Texas Society of Architects committee that has been gathering documentation for possible nomination for the gold medal that to him architecture was what it was all about, not architects, not personal statement, but an architecture of context, people, and quality. I perceived him as a leader and spokesman rather than a competitor. That's very rare."

Wolf von Eckardt, Hon. AIA, *Time*: "O'Neil was a real 'mensch.' His language was atrocious, and he took a certain pride in this. But he was so genuine in his concern for all the things one should be concerned with. He drove me crazy sometimes when I was on the *Washington Post* and he was fighting the good fight against the freeways, and he called up every two days and delivered some harangue. But in his case, it was not ambition; it was not to win. He was so sincerely involved that you forgave him his slight excesses.

"He was quite selfless. He could have built a big firm; he certainly had all the talent to make a large, moneymaking office, but I think he liked to stay close to the soil. I will never forget the time I stayed overnight at his place in San Antonio. Here in the middle of his town was his farm, and all these incredible sack-like bulges drooping down from the trees in the dark. I thought the trees had some tropical disease. The disease then proceeded to cry like babies all night long.

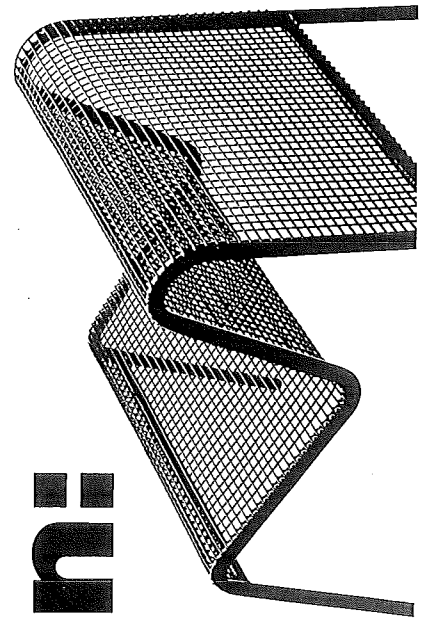
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It was Neil's collection of peacocks. He also had a marvelous collection of old cars. I had just read about such things in Scott Fitzgerald, this extremely modest, down-to-earth life of his. He was a very well known architect when I first met him 20 years ago, and lived in this little shack, almost.

"I think his contribution is that he was very ahead of his time in ignoring the abstract aspects of the International Style and fostering regionalism not just in terms of decoration but a regionalism that comes out of the soil, and out of the materials, and out of the traditions. All that stuff we're talking about now he did 20 years ago. But you have this additional element of his recognizing craftsmanship as something that can do a lampshade or a door or a doorknob in better ways than the machine can, and he integrated it with his architecture in a fabulous way.

"I think the test of the pudding is always his work for Skidmore College in Saratoga, because here you have a large plant, you have a program with no money, and a very, very simple design. It's just dormitories, but with craftsmanship, and he's turned the whole thing into a simply delightful work of art. He was just a very great and wonderful architect."

ANDREA OPPENHEIMER DEAN

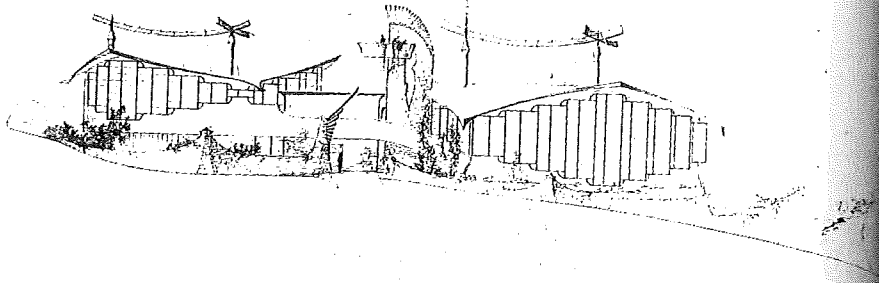
## Bruce Goff

During a career that spanned more than 60 years Bruce Goff designed nearly 500 buildings, and no two looked exactly alike. Many were startling in their originality, with extraordinary spatial effects, amplified by unexpected uses of materials and structure. All reflected a fundamental belief in the right to individual expression, a belief that Goff carried even further than his mentor and close friend, Frank Lloyd Wright. Goff's unassuming, gentle manner disarmed critics seeking complicated (and sometimes unkind) explanations of his designs. He regarded his buildings as essentially rational responses to specific conditions, and never as flights of ungoverned fancy.

Born in Alton, Kan., on June 8, 1904,

he always considered Oklahoma his native state, for it was there that he spent much of his youth and began working as an apprentice for the Tulsa firm of Rush, Endacott & Rush in 1916. Something of a prodigy, he produced designs for the firm that were beginning to be built by 1919, and in 1929 he was made a partner, having skipped college. When lack of work caused his Tulsa office to close in 1934, he moved to Chicago, where he worked briefly for Alfonso Iannelli, then taught at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and opened his own office in the Chicago suburb of Park Ridge. Following military service with the navy during World War II, he practiced in Berkeley, Calif., from

*Goff's Shin'enKan, an unbuilt museum of Japanese art for collector Joe Price.*



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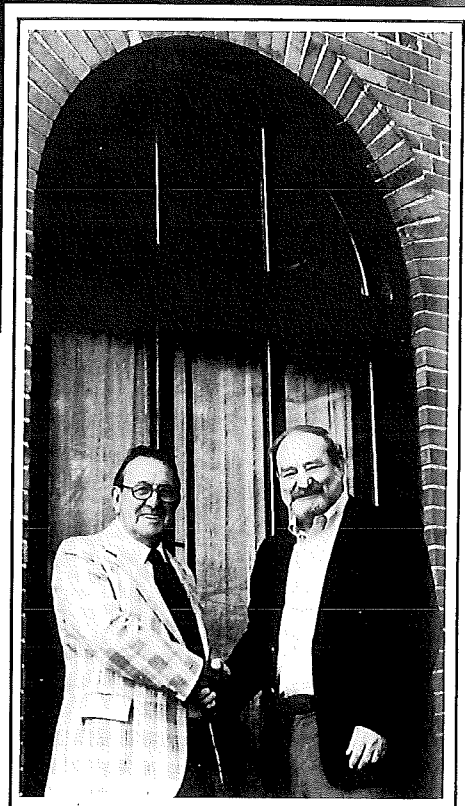
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