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Title

Building of the Month Award: Philadelphia

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Journal

Places, 1(3)

ISSN

0731-0455

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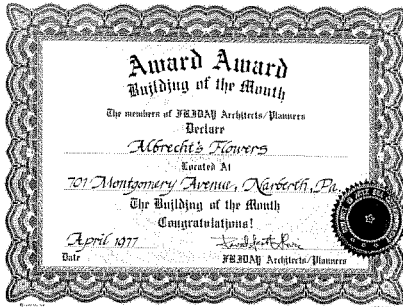
Publication Date

1984-01-15

Peer reviewed

Building of the Month Awards: Philadelphia

David Slovic and Ligia Rave



Cuilibet in arte sua credendum est: “Everyone is to be trusted in his own special art.” This Latin motto appeared in a gold seal on Building of the Month certificates, which, once each month during 1976–1977, were bestowed upon unsuspecting citizens in Philadelphia. FRIDAY Architects/Planners established the awards to bring attention to well-kept existing buildings and to reward publicly examples of loving care and innovation. The buildings selected were generally unknown, “one-of-a-kind” elements of a place.

The stated purpose of the awards was to increase general awareness so that the environment, urban life, and city fabric would be looked at in a new way, with an emphasis on recognizing “do-it-yourself” embellishments. For 20 months the Building of the Month Awards recognized, taught, cajoled, and pointed the way to straightforward and knowledgeable appreciation of everyone’s environment. The special efforts that turn simple, innocent gestures into communicative parts of the city were brought to the attention of the community.

Each winning owner/artist/creator received an official certificate and copies of all press releases. The real award, however, the important one, was the recognition of their efforts and the new status that they received in the neighborhood.

Professional journals, daily newspapers, and neighborhood weeklies published stories about and photographs of the selected buildings, praised the initiative,

and held public debates on taste, judgment, and aesthetic values.

Locally, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *South Philadelphia Chronicle*, the *Germantown Courier*, and the *Drummer* gave coverage to the selections, recognizing them as new local landmarks. As the effort to save the environment became a national issue, *Progressive Architecture*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *New York Times* mentioned the award.

The choices—some in abandoned sections of the cities—although not limited by age, use, or style, did raise specific issues about architecture, design, and urban living. These issues were addressed to several audiences. The general public was encouraged to become more aware of the physical environment and to look at our cities in a more critical, objective manner. Seen as elements of the city fabric, the awarded buildings became the pretexts for local lessons on the revitalization of decayed neighborhoods. For architects, who have the tendency to identify as architecture only what is built by the educated hand and eye of other architects, the Building of the Month Award was a public celebration, a lesson in public aesthetics.

The awards are published here as an example of lively private initiative that refocuses public attention. The photographs are those that were released initially to illustrate the awards and the captions are adapted from the original information releases.



I

Comments on the intentions of the awards program are set in bold face type.

Lynn Bensel, Don Matzkin, and Frank Mallas, who were part of the FRIDAY Architects/Planners group from 1976–1977, helped with the selection of the buildings, the research and documentation, the press release, and the photography.

Architectural theories and debates too often sacrifice objective realities for private aesthetics. These buildings were embellished according to known traditions, not personal theories. Their common criterion was communication.

May 1976
Marra's Restaurant
 1734 East Passyunk Avenue
 Philadelphia, PA

Passyunk Avenue, one of the oldest shopping streets in the city of Philadelphia, has the atmosphere of a small-town Main Street. Along it are excellent examples of shops and storefronts dating from the turn of the century, and still in good condition.

Marra's is a family-owned restaurant on the ground floor of a three-story brick building; the family lives above. The storefront, added in 1939, has an outstanding black-and-white tile design that charmingly integrates signs and decoration, giving the entire street frontage a cheerful and inviting look; an easy-to-read neon sign complete with chef; and a well-patterned brick cornice. The restaurant exemplifies how work of high quality can add surprise and delight to a built environment.



I A

I Marra's Restaurant
 Photograph courtesy of Elliot Kaufman

IA Owner of Marra's Restaurant,
 Receiving Award.



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June 1976
Entire 2300 Block
St. Albans Place
Philadelphia, PA

The entire block was probably built in the early 1870s, since it first appears on an 1875 ward map. The townhouses are handsome, simply detailed structures that make an excellent enclosure for the garden/street.

The street is completely closed off to traffic; its lovely garden is landscaped with carefully tended grass, a variety of roses, and other plantings.

The garden appears to have been started when the houses were built, as part of an effort to soften the quality of urban living.

St. Alban's Place is efficiently administered through the common efforts of the block's inhabitants, organized by a garden club and a block organization.

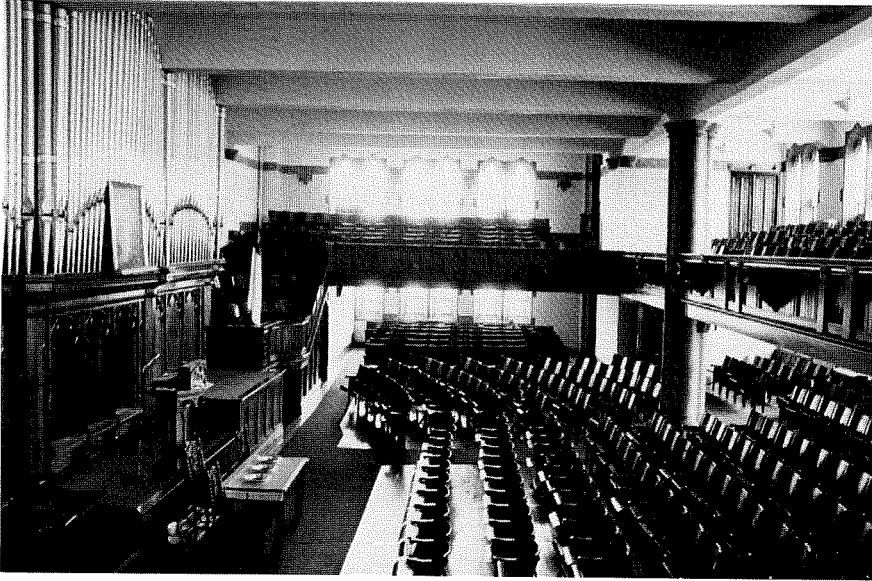
Philadelphia architect Louis I. Kahn once remarked that "a street is a room." St. Alban's Place is an example of the street as a landscaped garden extension to everyone's living room.

2 St. Albans Places
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic

2A The day of the award, St. Alban's Place.

3, 3A Spanish Baptist Church
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic

4 Steel's Fudge Shop
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic



3

July 1976
 Spanish Baptist Church
 Hancock and York Streets
 Philadelphia, PA

The church was designed by the architectural firm of Charles W. Bolton & Son just after the turn of the century. Extensively appointed using a thorough treatment of what might be called “neighborhood gothic,” it has survived several changes in parish population. It now acts as a center for numerous daily community programs for its largely Spanish-speaking parishioners.

The structure has adapted well to its changing functions, while still retaining its original sense of purpose as a symbol in the neighborhood. Its gothic style, common to many buildings of the time, manages to reflect prevailing notions about what makes a neighborhood building important.

August 1976
 Steel’s Fudge Shop
 1633 Boardwalk
 Atlantic City, NJ

Steel’s Fudge Shop, built in 1923, was once one of an elegant group of Boardwalk stores that included a furrier, a jeweler, an auction house, and a dress shop.

The shop is one of the smallest on the Boardwalk, but also one of the most colorful. The front is covered with multi-colored ceramic tiles. The sign board above the window depicts boxes of fudge and the shop’s name inlaid in bright tile. A new self-illuminating sign that juts out from the tile front is the only concession to modern Boardwalk commercialism.

The interior is just wide enough for a serving counter and an aisle. The cases, fixtures, and decorations are all of the original quite delicate design, with ceramic tiles used for decoration and wall trim.



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September 1976
The Oliver Cornman School
Cornman Diagnostic Center
Melon Street
Philadelphia, PA

Designed by the school district itself under the direction of the then Superintendent of Buildings, Irwin Cathorine, this typical neighborhood elementary school was built in 1931. It reveals a simple but well-expressed massing, an excellent use of brick, and well-placed decorative elements. Each bay contains two windows per floor with decorative brick work above and below and a special pattern of brick work at the roof line to create a visual top to the building.

Glazed terra-cotta tiles are used to cap the vertical piers and to mark the entrances with a scroll motif that uses green, blue, purple, and white tiles in excellent Art Deco style.

The roof is used as an outdoor play area with a fully enclosed cage structure made from pipe and chain-link fencing. Two vertically extended bays contain the cage, which fits in handsomely with the building as a whole. This use of the roof represents an economical way

of fully utilizing a school building and at the same time providing controlled outdoor recreational space.

October 1976
The School of Allied Medical
Professions
39th & Pine Streets
University of Pennsylvania Campus
Philadelphia, PA

Built originally in 1858 to house the Convent of the Good Shepherd, the building is one of the oldest structures in West Philadelphia. The present building consists of the original structure and two additions, the first completed in the 1870s and the second a decade later.

The first addition, credited to the architects Deery and Kheel, extended the building toward Pine Street and produced the distinctive tall arched entry and bell tower. The later addition by architect F. F. Durang is skillfully attached to the west.

By setting the new work back from the building line and angling a part of the building's wall, Durang was able to add new space while retaining the individuality of the



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original symmetrical façade. The break in the façade also reduces the building's scale and, along with the small but regular pattern of windows, relates the building to the residential town houses on the rest of the block.

This is a wonderful lesson in designing for an urban environment. The three separate structures built at different times by different designers remain a single unified entity. Each addition respected the existing structure, improved it, and helped it fit into the neighborhood setting.

5 The Olover Cornman School
Photograph courtesy of Donald Matzkin

6 The School of Allied Medical Professions
Photograph courtesy of David Slovic



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The established architectural production of that time denied the communicative potential of ornament. To reward publicly the use of ornament and decoration in the individual style of each owner/artist made the architectural debate more alive. The award recognized the existing environment rather than the professionally conceived one.

7 Single Family Residence, 1946 North Lawrence Street
Photograph courtesy of Donald Matzkin



8

**November 1976
Single Family Residence**
2946 North Lawrence Street
Fairhill Section
Philadelphia, PA

This two-story brick row house has been painted and embellished in an extraordinary and skillful manner. The brick is overall a shocking pink, but with individual bricks painted bright red in what at first glance seems to be, though it is not, a regular pattern.

The awnings are bright red trimmed in white. The symbolic appliqué shutters are also bright red with white trim. The lower one not only covers the first floor window and door but spans the entire front of the house, giving it an identity unique in this neighborhood of anonymous houses and treeless streets.

Neighborhood craftsmen did the work on the house. They had further embellished it with horse-and-buggy appliques on the lower shutters and an American eagle on the storm door, but both have since been stolen.

While exceptional in its intensity, this residence is typical of the

tenacious optimism found in many city neighborhoods, an attitude that may still prove to be the salvation of the inner city.

**December 1976
Family Residence**
3428 Holyoke Road
Northeast Philadelphia, PA

This semidetached house is typical of the surrounding neighborhood, but has here been transformed into a joyous display of holiday lights and figures to celebrate the Christmas season. From the edge of the front yard to the top of the roof, the house is ringed in red and green lights. Prominent on the lawn are a large Christmas tree, lit figures in a crèche, Santa Claus, and Frosty the Snowman. The television antenna above the roof is crowned with a glowing star.

This wonderfully festive display is the work of the family that has occupied the house for 12 years. They decorate it every Christmas, spending their spare time for nearly a month preparing the decorations, repairing fixtures, and designing the layout.

The energy of the display represents a gesture of holiday cheer and good



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wishes sent out from the family to the surrounding neighborhood and a commitment to the community.

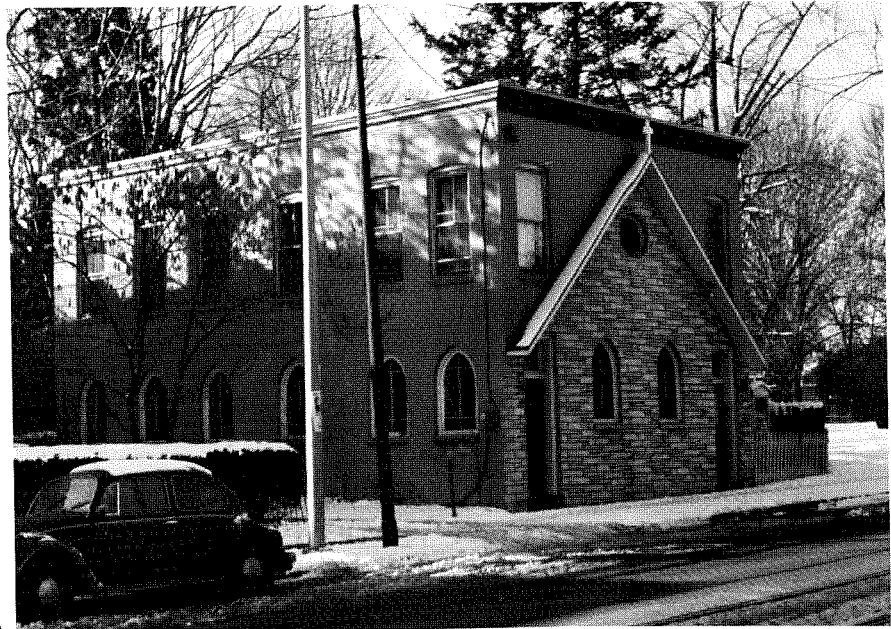
January 1977
The Parkway House Apartments
22nd Street and the
Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Philadelphia, PA

This high-rise apartment structure was built in the early 1950s by the firm of Roth and Fleisher, with Elizabeth Fleisher the design architect.

The primary façade faces south, overlooking the Parkway, and has a diversity of homey stepped terraces, balconies, and bay windows. Arranged symmetrically over the entire breadth of the building, these elements give a stately quality to the whole, while still reflecting some feeling of the active life within. Additions to individual outdoor spaces are accommodated well; in fact the building seems to encourage them through the variety of shapes and turns of the apartments.

Too often modern buildings require their dwellers to live in a uniform manner, forcing the individual to adapt to the structure rather than

the reverse. The Parkway House does not display the simple unity of a single glass skin or monolithic concrete. It is a skillful combination of habitable spaces using traditional domestic elements to make high-rise houses. The result is a strong visual, spatial, and symbolic presence. Its brick-sheathed forms achieve an elegance usually attributed to grander materials such as marble or granite, proving that elegance is inherent in form, proportion, and scale, not just in surfaces. Apartment developers could learn from this example.



10

February 1977
Immanuel Temple
 6418 Germantown Avenue
 Philadelphia, PA

This modest church structure demonstrates an effective use of architectural symbolism to enhance a building's function.

Applied to the front of this two-story stucco building is a permastone façade superimposed over the original one. The applied face is in the shape of a peaked roof typical of one-story churches, providing an image closer to a typical church than is the building behind it. The permastone façade has an eave of its own to reinforce the impression of a rural church.

The use of a familiar building shape to transform an ordinary building into a church is an innovative and charming gesture. Though simple in detail, the applied façade is effective.

March 1977
Tudor Style Townhouses
 3400 Block of Midvale Avenue
 Philadelphia, PA

Although the Tudor style was originally developed in 16th-century England in modified forms, in the 20th century, it has become a popular style for residential development. The Midvale Avenue houses, built in 1931 by M. J. McCrudden demonstrate its use in a thoughtful selection of materials and detailing that includes large slate roofs, wood boarding on stucco, rough stone, and leaded glass windows, all elements commonly associated with the modern Tudor style. The interior living rooms carry through the style with a cathedral ceiling employing exposed wood beams relating directly to the high windows on the front.

The backs of the houses are faced in plain brick, and although generous and accommodating in function they do not continue the stylization so important to the façades. The houses provide a distinctive character to Midvale Avenue, creating an image and feeling in a familiar style well suited to the scale of the block.



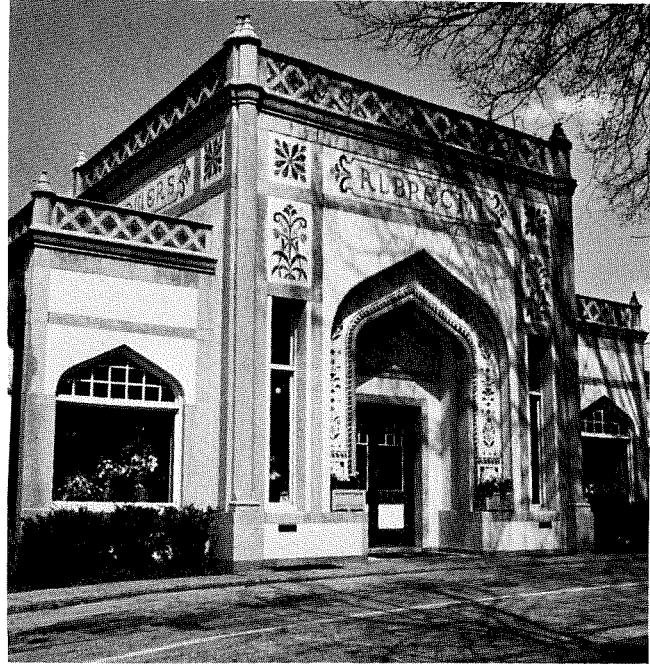
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The detailing is careful, employing materials appropriate to handle both the functional and associative aspects of the images.

April 1977
Albrecht's Flowers
 701 Montgomery Avenue
 Narberth, PA

After seeing a picture in a magazine of a building he liked, John Albrecht, founder of the flower shop, commissioned architect Louis S. Adams to build this structure.

The central stone and stucco building houses the main shop facilities and is flanked along the sides and rear with greenhouses. The shop is beautifully scaled to attract the attention of passing cars along Montgomery Avenue. The major openings are in an Indian style that is echoed in the profile of the adjoining greenhouses. The openings are appropriately decorated with a floral motif made of colored tile inlaid in the stucco. Above the main entrance and along the sides of the central structure appear the name ALBRECHT's and the word FLOWERS, also in tile.



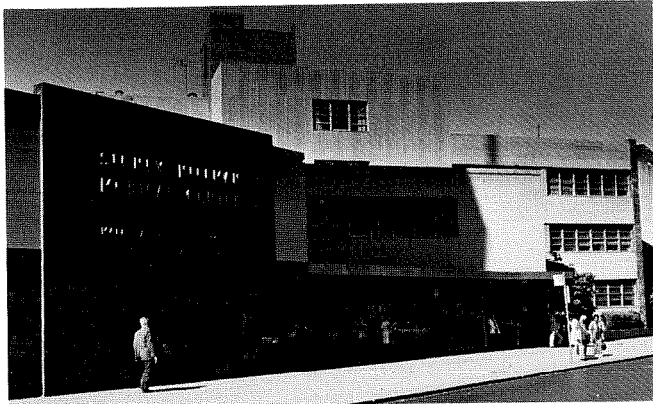
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The entire building is a delightful example of good commercial design. The entrance attracts arriving customers through its use of large-scale openings and colorful decorations that relate to the business that is going on inside. The more functional greenhouses are more modestly scaled and were left undecorated.

A few of the greenhouses were purchased from private estates and are over 125 years old. The entire distinctive ensemble has become a landmark of Philadelphia's Main Line.

11 **Albrecht's Flowers**
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic

12 **Tudor Style Townhouses**
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic



13



14

May 1977
Sidney Hillman Medical Center
 2611 Chestnut Street &
 2115 Sansom Street
 Philadelphia, PA

This medical center was the first facility of its kind in the United States. It provides medical, recreational, and rehabilitative services for the workers in the apparel industry of Philadelphia. Designed by architect Herman Polis in 1951, it displays a combination of massing and a choice of materials both sympathetic with and in contrast to Chestnut Street. The jagged massing of the orange-limestone front angles away from the street, while the reddish-brown polished granite base and endwall, aided by a band of stainless steel over the entry, hold the street line. The saw-tooth plan allows more natural light into the building by creating additional wall surface in which to place windows. This scheme also permits a clear view down Chestnut Street from the building's interior.

Perhaps the building's most impressive feature is the humane and cooperative spirit in which it was conceived. The initial funding, the continuing operating costs, and

the supervising trusteeship are shared equally by management and labor organizations of the industry to produce an up-to-date medical facility and a pioneering geriatric center.

June 1977
The Mayfair Diner
 7353–7373 Frankford Avenue
 Philadelphia, PA

Family owned and operated, this around-the-clock eating establishment serves several thousand meals daily to the merchants and residents in the area.

The family entered the food-service business during the sesquicentennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1926. With that experience behind them, they opened the first Mayfair diner in 1931. Since that time the Mayfair has expanded four times, moving to its present location in 1941. The present facility, an extraordinarily long dining car, was built on the site in 1956 by the now defunct Jerry O'Mahoney Dining Car Company.

The image of a diner has merged with its function. Whether it is the 1950s streamlined stainless look of

13 Sidney Hillman Medical Center
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic

14 The Mayfair Diner
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic

15 Brogan Real Estate Office
 Photograph courtesy of Donald Matzkin

16 The Boardwalk, Atlantic City, NJ
 Photograph courtesy of David Slovic



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the Mayfair or the decorated villa look of the 1970s, the exterior of a diner acts as a sign and symbol to those seeking a place to eat. The hard materials used both inside and out are easy to clean and are used with a flair that appeals to all kinds of people.

July 1977
Brogan Real Estate Office
Long Beach Island, NJ

This simple one-story structure houses a real estate office on one side of a common-entry patio and a gift shop on the other, with the family residence added at the rear. The stucco and brick front portion was designed by Mr. Brogan himself and built in 1948.

Notable features are the tasteful placement and proportion of the windows in a handsomely symmetrical and carefully detailed street-front façade; the practical and decorative use of brick for color accent, as window sills, and to band the floor line on the exterior to establish a reference line against which the ground slopes; and the exaggerated cornice with its carefully placed recessed lights, which adds a rhythmic and minimal decorative touch.

August 1977
The Boardwalk
Atlantic City, NJ

Perhaps more than any other place on the East Coast the Boardwalk exemplifies summertime at the shore. The famous pedestrian street is bounded by dwellings and shops on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other.

First built in 1820, it was improved and rebuilt in 1880, 1884, and 1890 in 12-foot sections, which were removed each fall and stored until the following spring. The present permanent Boardwalk was erected in 1896, when its name was officially adopted. The herringbone pattern dates from 1916.

Today the Boardwalk extends over four miles and provides a public walkway unique to Atlantic City. It allows for the leisurely pleasure of a stroll and yet holds the fascination of a cosmopolitan boulevard.

With the advent of legalized casino gambling, the Boardwalk will change, but it is to be hoped that the casino developers will preserve the simple delights of the Boardwalk in their otherwise grandiose plans.



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The value of these buildings is that they represent inventive communication, useful accommodation, and meaningful participation—the means for making authentic places emanate from the patterns of life at hand and from the joyful secrets of the buildings that house and encourage them.



17

September 1977
Rowhouses
4206–4218 Spruce Street
Philadelphia, PA

Like so much of West Philadelphia, these houses were designed and built around 1879 as speculative housing. What is striking about them is that they are not simply repetitive units, but a single architectural statement to be read as one large symmetrical house. A large projecting gable immediately focuses attention on the center, while identically angled, turreted, and dormered pavilions terminate the Spruce Street front with a flourish and dynamically turn the corner.

Each individual house is symbolically identified by a series of small gables. The main body of the building is ordinary Philadelphia red brick; fancy brick and terracotta elements supply emphasis and differentiation.

The more you look, the more you see in buildings from the high Victorian era. There are many levels of meaning and layers of subtlety beneath and within the obviously large-scale gestures. The strength of the overall composition works well at the speed of a passing motorist; the enormous variety of textures and profiles provides visual interest for the pedestrian and an endearing richness for the inhabitant.

The structure, attributed to G. W. and W. D. Hewitt, has been recognized as historically significant by the Philadelphia Historical

17 Rowhouses, 4206–4218 Spruce Street
Photograph courtesy of Lynn Bensei



18

Commission. The extent to which such housing has succeeded in accommodating the needs of individuals and families is underscored by this particular block, where all seven houses are still owner-occupied. That several generations of owners have seen fit to preserve the integrity of the block, maintaining each separate part scrupulously without feeling the need further to express individual ownership by even minor alterations to the original façades is an eloquent testament to the effectiveness of this “flagrant architecture.”

October 1977
**Arthur Hoyt Scott Outdoor
 Auditorium**
 Swarthmore College Campus
 Swarthmore, PA

Built into a heavily wooded slope on the edge of the Swarthmore College campus, the auditorium is minimally and elegantly formed of entirely natural materials. Low stone walls make grassy terraces in circular arcs that step gently down to focus symmetrically on a slightly bowed stage platform. The backstage area lies seven feet below the parapet wall at the rear of the

stage, allowing actors to arrive—unseen by the audience—on a woodland path from a nearby building.

Magnificent trees and plantings provide an idyllic backdrop for the stage and enclose both sides, screening off the approach road from the rear. Stately poplars were left standing in the midst of the seating area and orchestra. Though their columnar trunks occasionally somewhat obstruct the view to the stage, their presence contributes greatly to the enchanted atmosphere inside the auditorium. The lofty green canopy they provide not only increases the sense of enclosure but also filters and directs the sunlight into patterns that animate the arena when it is not in use.

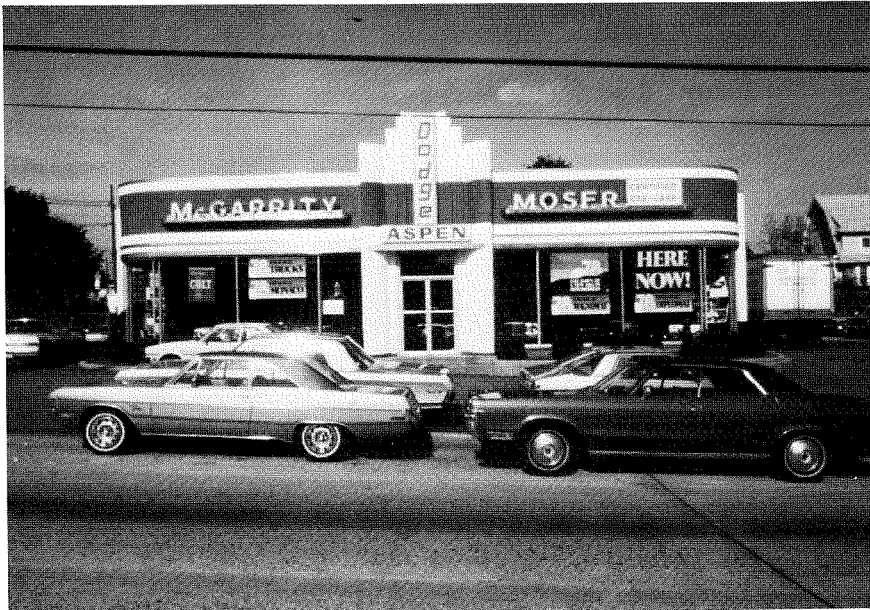
The auditorium was designed by Philadelphia landscape architect Thomas Sears in 1942. Although it was designed to be comfortable for small groups, its maximum capacity is about 2,000 people. It is not often used, but it is traditionally the setting for the college’s annual commencement exercises.

**18 Arthyr Hoyt Scott Outdoor
 Auditorium**
 Photograph courtesy of Lynn Bensel



19

November 1977
 Weathers Dodge
 Lime, PA
 McGarrity-Moser Dodge
 Havertown, PA



19

Although these two suburban Dodge dealership buildings have the same basic layout, proportions, and dimensions and relate to the street in the same way the differences in taste and attitude toward public image they reflect, as evidenced in different materials, colors, decorative elements, and internal proportions, result in totally different responses from the onlooker.

Built in 1947, both buildings have remained remarkably intact, with the only minor alterations in signage, probably because both are still operated by the founders or their offspring.

Both buildings were designed by their owners, yet they exhibit a thoroughness of concept and consistency of detail worthy of a professional designer.

19 Weathers Dodge, Lime, PA
 McGarrity-Moser Dodge, Havertown, PA
 Photographs courtesy of Donald Matzkin

December 1977
Christmas Tree Lights
Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA

These lights were commissioned by the Office of the City Representative as a holiday decoration appropriate to a city center. They line Broad Street, the main thoroughfare and longest straight street in the city, and frame City Hall Tower, the city's central point.

Designed by Alley Friends, they demonstrate how the simplest of shapes can be made a holiday symbol. The strings of green lights create a scale appropriate to the tall buildings that line the street and to a civic gesture toward the holiday season.

"Everyone is to be trusted in his own special art." Architecture needs more of this.



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