

## Des Moines Architecture and Design

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*Des Moines Architecture and Design*, by Jay Pridmore. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015. 174 pp. Illustrations (many in color), bibliography, index. \$24.99 paperback.

Reviewer Thomas Leslie, AIA, is Pickard Chilton Professor in Architecture at Iowa State University. His research and writing have focused on the integration of building sciences and arts both historically and in contemporary practice.

Residents of Iowa's cultural, economic, and political capital take for granted an astonishing array of architecture. Since Benjamin Franklin Allen commissioned Chicago architect William Boyington to design Terrace Hill in 1869, Des Moines residents have hired leading architects, many of whom have done some of their best work there. This tradition has also inspired a parallel history of home-grown design excellence, creating a collection of buildings and a culture of architectural practice that is the equal of any comparably sized city in the country.

David Gebhard and Gerald Mansheim's *Buildings of Iowa* (1993) catalogued Des Moines's notable buildings for the Society of Architectural Historians' Buildings of the United States series, but a focused history of Des Moines's architecture has been lacking. Chicago-based architectural writer and journalist Jay Pridmore has risen to the task with *Des Moines Architecture and Design*, 12 essays that thematically document the city's best—and best-known—buildings while providing a succinct narrative of the city's development itself.

Beginning with Terrace Hill, Pridmore shows how the city established a tradition of high-minded civic and residential design, how influences from Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exhibition found fertile territory here, and how civic classicism was challenged by both Prairie Style and Modernist ideas. Throughout, progressive clients, a thriving economy, and visionary city government allowed some of the Midwest's finest architects to shape Des Moines.

But the city's own designers soon equaled these works. Proudfoot and Bird produced classical monuments that were matched by commercial buildings of exceptional quality from Liebbe, Nourse, and Rasmussen. Homes around Grand Avenue matched the splendor and quality of the Midwest's larger cities, and Des Moines's investment in architecture was extended to its religious buildings; Pridmore devotes one essay to the acropolis of church buildings overlooking the city's financial center known as "Piety Hill."

Only after World War II, however, did Des Moines gain internationally recognized architecture. The Art Center's original building by Eliel and Eero Saarinen (1948) inspired other institutions in the city to seek out world-class architects. Drake University hired the younger Saarinen in 1949 for buildings that are among his most thoughtful

works. Drake and a local bank hired Mies van der Rohe in the 1960s, and the Art Center continued its patronage by hiring I. M. Pei and, in the 1980s, Richard Meier. Again, these were joined by local work of similar quality. Chick Herbert, Ray Crites, and Brooks, Borg, and Skiles all combined international modernism with pragmatism and restraint; if it is possible to realize a modest monumentality, Herbert's Civic Center (1975) toes this delicate line with grace and power.

Pridmore's approach is admirable for its ability to show that these buildings were not isolated drawing-board exercises but rather were the result of social, financial, and cultural connections that were fostered by Des Moines's tightly knit business and civic community. He explains these buildings gracefully and legibly, and his choice of themes is apt, covering nearly every aspect of the city's design history. Readers may wish for more emphasis on the vernacular, as Pridmore's emphasis is on the monuments and mansions that exemplify the city's outstanding moments and characters. And scholars may regret the absence of footnotes, which might have inspired others to delve more deeply into some of the building histories that Pridmore tells so lucidly. Finally, any reader contemplating a driving tour will need some supplemental research to place these buildings into geographical context; the city's relationship to its rivers and its hinterland has influenced parks and infrastructure that could have formed an additional essay or map.

Still, Pridmore has written what will deservedly be the standard history of the city's architecture. It will be a vital source for any student of the city, and it lives up to the rich legacy of built work produced there over the last 150 years. Gebhard and Mansheim's guidebook will still find a place in the back seat of any windshield historian's car, but it has, after 20 years, found a worthy companion that ties its catalog of Des Moines's buildings into readable, enlightening, and richly elucidating essays.

*Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War*, by Eric Bennett. *The New American Canon: The Iowa Series in Contemporary Literature and Culture*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015. xi, 232 pp. Notes, index. \$22.50 paperback.

Reviewer Catherine Stewart is professor of history at Cornell College. She is the author of *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers' Project* (2016).

Eric Bennett's *Workshops of Empire* has an ambitious agenda: to prove that the writing programs that flourished in the wake of World War II, particularly at the University of Iowa and Stanford University, were the result of Cold War objectives. Bennett aims to identify the various intel-