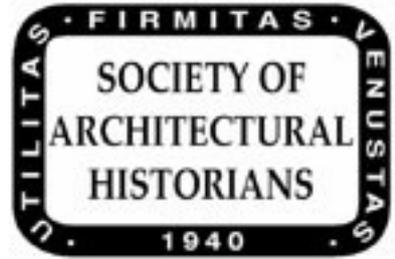




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Review: **American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture**

American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture by Alice T. Friedman

Review by: Robert Brueggemann

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Clinton Piper, Sally McMurry, and Franklin Toker, this is the third volume in the BUS guidebook format introduced in 2008. A “How to Use this Book” section is followed by a foreword, acknowledgments, introduction (with endnotes), and five chapters: “The Western Capital—Pittsburgh and Allegheny County”; “Rolling Hills and Rolling Mills,” on eight counties surrounding Allegheny County; “Ridge and Valley,” on seven south-central counties; “Great Forest,” on ten north-central counties; and “Oil and Water,” on five northwestern counties. There is a glossary, bibliography, illustration credits, and an index.

Each chapter begins with a map of the county or counties discussed and there are detailed maps of individual communities. Regrettably, there is no map showing all thirty-one western counties within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (Such a map does appear in the more recent *Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania* volume by George E. Thomas.) While the introduction includes endnotes, such documentation does not appear elsewhere in the text; the inclusion of notes throughout would enhance the book’s value as a reference work. Finally, nine thematic sidebars provide concise but wide-ranging information. “Planned Communities” (98–99), for example, guides the reader through regional examples from 1804 to 2002. Other sidebars include: “Inclines: A Trio of Diescher Inclines” (76); “Urban Parks” (110); “Bridges and Dams” (138); “National Road” (258–59); “Coal Patch Towns and Reclamation” (270); “Mighty Iron and Steel” (312–13); “State and Federal Parks” (448); and “Barns: Vernacular and Spectacular” (500). The sidebars, unfortunately, are not listed in the table of contents or in the index; according to series editor Karen Kingsley they will be in future BUS volumes.

The Allegheny County chapter—the book’s longest at 93 pages, compared to 427 pages for the other thirty counties combined—was adapted from Franklin Toker’s *Buildings of Pittsburgh*, published by SAH in 2007 to coincide with the Sixtieth Annual Meeting held in Pittsburgh. The editors have preserved the best elements of *Buildings of Pittsburgh* and the end

result is the best-paced and most accurate of Toker’s writings on Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. That said, it is worth noting some important errors and omissions. Claiming that “Modernism came to the fore in the 1930s with Frank Lloyd Wright’s office in the Kaufmann Department Store and . . . Fallingwater” (41) slights the important early modern work of Titus de Bobula (of Hungary), Richard Kiehnel (of Germany), and Frederick Scheibler, all of whom were either trained in or immersed in the literature of Austro-Germanic Secessionist architecture and design and began working in Pittsburgh shortly after 1900. Pittsburgh’s 210 Sixth Avenue (originally One Oliver Plaza, William Lescaze, 1968) has not “retained” the lobby murals by Pierre Soulages (commissioned by Lescaze) and Pittsburgh artist Virgil Cantini (49); both murals, unfortunately, were removed from the building in 2009. Gordon Bunshaft’s Heinz Vinegar Works (1950–52, not 1949) is acclaimed as “the first use of the International Style among Pittsburgh corporations,” but readers are not told that the “blue-colored glass curtain wall” is now covered by corrugated metal siding (97–98). Several other small but significant errors—of matters such as date or attribution—mar this otherwise informative chapter.

*Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania’s* most significant contribution comes in its chapters on Allegheny County’s neighbors. (Of these thirty neighboring counties, only one, Washington County, has been surveyed during the past seventy-five years, and that survey, conducted in 1973–74, was limited to pre-twentieth-century structures.) The research and writing here are pioneering and rigorous. The architectural histories of the thirty counties are told for the first time, and knowing them enriches our understanding of each county and of all thirty-one together. The book’s general introduction characterizes Western Pennsylvania as a whole, noting that only four of the thirty-one counties are considered urban, and it articulates the importance of topography, farms, and industrial sites, as well as architecturally significant buildings. Donnelly states: “This volume . . . introduces the many architects active in the five regions, [and it

marks] the first time these Pennsylvania architects have been drawn together in a single book. We hope this will inspire further studies of those whose bodies of work merit in-depth research” (x). Discovering the regional work of architects based in Pittsburgh, learning about the work of architects based elsewhere in Western Pennsylvania, and finding architectural gems—a Furness carriage house in Clarion County, a Halsey Wood church in McKean County, a Breuer house in Westmoreland County, a Neutra house in Fayette County, and many others—these make this volume an indispensable guide and architectural reference book to the buildings of Western Pennsylvania.

ALBERT M. TANNLER  
Pittsburgh History & Landmarks  
Foundation

Alice T. Friedman  
**American Glamour and the  
Evolution of Modern Architecture**

New Haven and London: Yale University  
Press, 2010, ix +262 pp., 40 color and  
125 b/w illus. \$65.00, ISBN 9780300116540

You might imagine, from a quick glance at the dust jacket, that this volume would fall into the category of “coffee-table book.” Certainly the glossy image of poolside entertaining at Richard Neutra’s Kaufmann Desert House in Palm Springs would suggest a title like *Hot Resorts of Southern California* or *The New American Desert Style*. The first part of the title, *American Glamour*, rendered in large letters that pick up the tint of the swimming pool, does nothing to dispel this impression. Title and image appear calculated to suggest that this is not a stuffy work of scholarship. Left at that, the reader might well assume it was another breezy romp through the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Only with the second line of the title is there an indication of how much higher the author has set her sights.

In fact, this book is one of the most intriguing and compelling studies to date on modern architecture, at least on a key group of American midcentury examples of it. American architecture after World War II has inspired a great wave of recent

work ranging from the ponderously erudite to the breathlessly enthusiastic. With this book Alice Friedman, a professor of art history at Wellesley College, weighs in with a contribution that manages to be at once scholarly and highly readable, deeply researched and richly provocative.

The main body of the book consists of a series of five essays, each focusing either on a single building—Richard Neutra’s Kaufmann Desert House in Palm Springs (1947) and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Temple Beth Shalom in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania (1959)—or a group of buildings by an important architect—Philip Johnson, Eero Saarinen, and Morris Lapidus. In her introduction Friedman explains the qualities she believes unites all of the major buildings she discusses. “They share an approach to representation, image-making, and audience that is rooted in the notion of a distinctive American glamour and in its visual culture. Glamour is experiential and ideological: it is a look, an attitude, a feeling and a message. Most important, glamour is a specialized language; it is a multilayered representation constructed by experts, and it is aimed at people ‘in the know’” (5).

Friedman acknowledges that many earlier critics and historians were unkind to the buildings she describes. For them, these buildings did not address fundamental issues of architecture or society but instead provided a sleek, photogenic “package,” much like the boxes used by merchandisers to sell goods in the supermarket. Friedman does not actually confront these criticisms. She instead tries to understand the buildings in their own context, in the light of new technologies, social values, and economic forces in the postwar years. In doing so, she has consulted a vast body of recent scholarship and delved into issues that until recently were largely neglected in architectural history, for example the influence of photography, advertising, films, and changing gender roles. Following another recent trend in scholarship, Friedman gives at least as much attention to the reaction to the buildings, how they were perceived, as she does to their creation.

The book is far from a dispassionate analysis, however. Friedman displays a

great empathy for her architects, their clients, the buildings and their users. From her description of the underground “seraglio” of Philip Johnson’s Guest House, in New Canaan (1949–50, remodeled in 1953), with its seductive dimmer-controlled lighting, to the aspirations of Temple Beth Shalom’s Rabbi Mortimer J. Cohen, she offers mostly sympathetic portraits, although not without recognition of ambiguities and problems. The writing is vivid and evocative. Reading Friedman’s pages, it is easy to imagine the swish of silk dresses in the lobby of Lapidus’s Hotel Fontainebleau in Miami (1955) or the smell of new upholstery in Saarinen’s Styling Dome at the General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan (1945–56). She proves herself a master of the essay format, fully the equal of some of the most gifted practitioners of the past. William Jordy and Reyner Banham come to mind.

In a book this wide-ranging and provocative, it would be natural for readers to question some of the premises. This reader, for example, wondered about the claim that the work described was distinctively American. Isn’t it possible that class distinctions were actually more important than national boundaries? In fact, the relationship between social classes and taste cultures is more suggested than explained. Little is said, for example, about why many admirers of the Kaufmann Desert House would never have set foot in a hotel by Morris Lapidus. Or the way the buildings described here would have appealed to very different individuals than those who extolled the work of Louis Kahn on one side of the taste-culture spectrum, and those who were more comfortable with Googie coffee shops on the other. In each case the reader looks for more information about who exactly was in the know, and what it was they knew. Nevertheless, the implicit message here about the potential validity of all kinds of architectural expression is certainly one of the great strengths of the book.

I also wonder about the claims for the way in which these buildings embodied glamour. It is, first of all, difficult to see how Wright’s temple fit the bill in any fashion. More importantly, was Saarinen’s

General Motors Technical Center itself glamorous or was its aura of glamour due primarily to the cars that came from it? Would Johnson’s Glass House (1949–50) be glamorous if your Aunt Agatha lived there, with her television, overstuffed armchairs, and many cats? The question raised here—to what extent do buildings speak for themselves and to what extent is their meaning determined by the context in which they are seen—has been a perennial debate in all of the visual arts. This book does more to raise further questions about these matters than to answer them.

These last remarks are not intended as criticism. They are, rather, observations provoked by Friedman’s fascinating case studies of buildings that have mostly not, until now, been regarded as the masterworks of their era. *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture* is a bold attempt to come to grips with them and with important questions about modern architecture more generally. Even if you conclude that it does a better job describing and evoking than fully explaining, it is a major accomplishment.

ROBERT BRUEGMANN  
University of Illinois at Chicago

John C. McEnroe  
**Architecture of Minoan Crete:  
Constructing Identity in the Aegean  
Bronze Age**

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010,  
220 pp., 8 color and 205 b/w illus. \$60,  
ISBN 9780292721937

Between 7000 and 1100 BC the island of Crete produced one of the most idiosyncratic and highly distinctive forms of architecture in the ancient world. There has long been a need for a fresh synthesis of Minoan architecture, one that goes well beyond available studies of materials and techniques, diachronic changes in style, function, sterile modules, or the relationship between architectural and social units. While these topics are well summarized by John McEnroe, the primary goal of this new book is, in the words of the author, “to provide the first overall history of Minoan houses, Palaces, tombs, and towns from the Neolithic