Expanding Agency

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Women, Race, and the Dissemination of Modern Architecture

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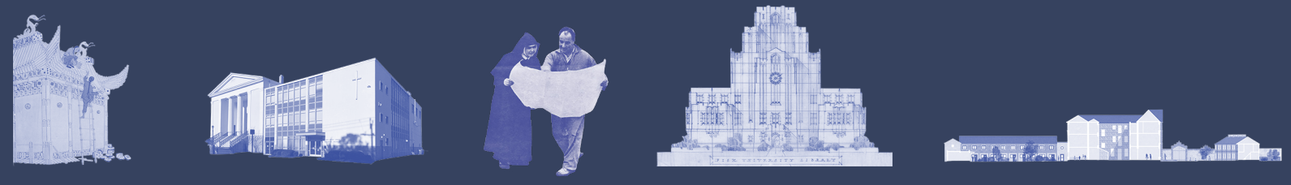

Expanding Agency:

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Kathleen James-Chakraborty

‘Expanding Agency: Women, Race and the Dissemination of Modern Architecture’ seeks to identify the multiple channels through which women and African Americans shaped the built environment with a focus on the 1920s through the 1970s. Journalism, entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and patronage provide four means of tracing their impact.

The expansion of print culture, as well as the introduction of new mass media, such as film, provided educated women with a means of supporting themselves economically as tastemakers, and their largely female readership with design guidance. In the United States, this included introducing women to the International Style in advance of the 1932 exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, widely credited with popularising it there. In settings as diverse as Argentina, Britain, Turkey, and India, women journalists alerted their readers to multiple ways to modernise the home, which were as likely to involve new technologies as styles. Even where domestic servants remained affordable and electricity expensive or not widely available, women were charged with implementing new standards of hygiene, often as extensions of their role as mothers.

Women determined to make a living through their interactions with the built environment devised multiple other means of supporting innovative architecture. Although in most industrialised countries they remained underrepresented – if not entirely absent – on building sites, they marketed and even developed new building materials. They were also active as real estate developers, often championing technology or spatial arrangements intended to make life easier for both working women and housewives. They established businesses, as well, that sold modern design and founded and successfully ran cafes that nurtured discussion among architects and bookstores doubling as publishers of new ideas.

In the twentieth century, women’s historic involvement in charitable activities took new forms. As bureaucrats, they acted as intermediaries between politicians in newly independent countries and international aid donors. As social reformers, they pioneered new forms of housing. They have also been critical for the establishment of innovative arts institutions. For instance, Inge Scholl co-founded the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, Germany, a successor to the Bauhaus; Gira Sarabhai was instrumental in the establishment of the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India; and Phyllis Lambert set up the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal.

Ethnic minorities have also deployed modern architecture to make their own statements about identity. In the United States, the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) became places, for instance, where African Americans commissioned and designed buildings that expressed their political as well as educational aspirations. Even when white administrators, funders, and architects retained control, campus buildings proved to be critical sites of empowerment.

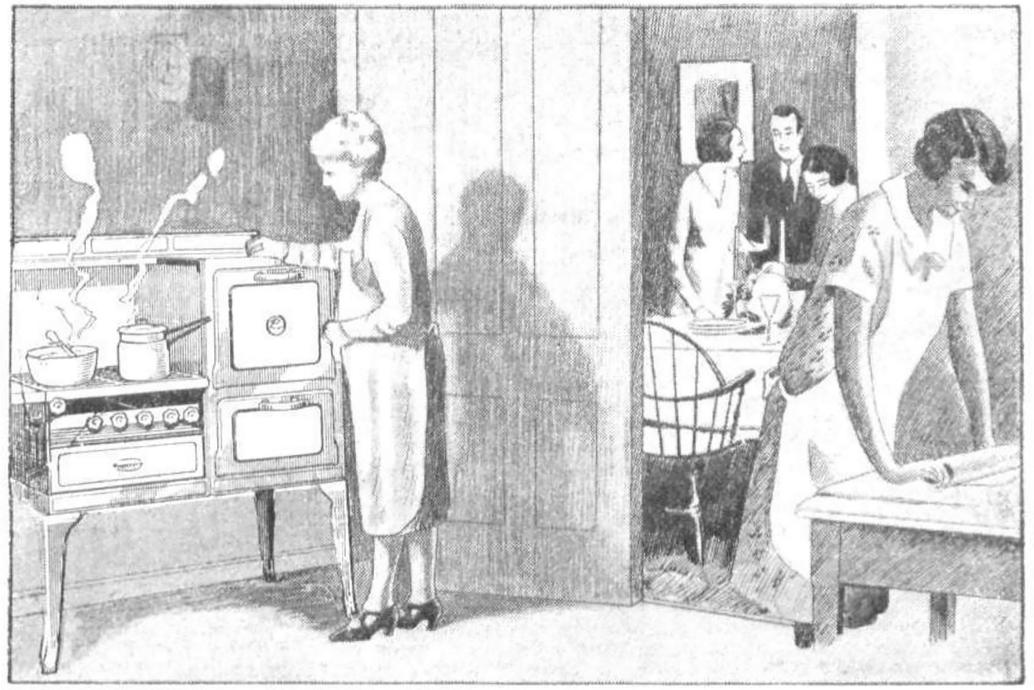
1930s Kitchens in Bombay and Buenos Aires

Pooja Sastry

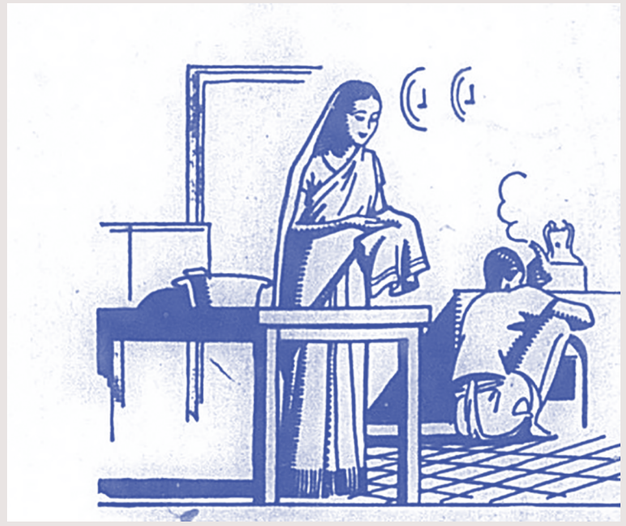
What did kitchens in Interwar Argentina and 1930s British India look like a century ago? The pages of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in Bombay and *Caras y Caretas* in Buenos Aires from between 1931–1939 show that the modernisation of domestic spaces took very specific forms in the two territories, interacting closely with local climate and cultural norms. Both Bombay and Buenos Aires were important cities in their respective territories. Each territory's national imagination was being consolidated in response to their immediate geopolitical circumstances, but also in response to ideas of race and cultural purity, which took distinct forms in India and Argentina.

In both territories, precepts of global domesticity, which involved instructing women on conjugal families, middle-class consumption, and modern ideals of childcare, served to shape a sort of patriotic everyday, since they were invariably combined with religious and national ideals. These ideals were projected repeatedly upon women: all domestic drudgery was not labour but an act of love when performed by a dutiful mother with eyes turned to nation and God. In reality, however, women often could not afford to lavish care on their family in the form of full-time domestic labour unless the family was exceedingly wealthy. Women often found ways to earn a wage despite the constraints of modern ideas of middle class respectability.

The romanticisation of *criollo* identity in Argentina and nationalist self-Orientalising in India in the pages of the periodical were both based on unequal citizenship as much as they were based on imaginary pasts. In India, the upper caste nationalist movement covertly enforced the Hindu caste system as a backbone of Indian identity. This was achieved by positioning British colonisation as the greater evil while remaining dependent on oppressing a large number of communities as 'lowered caste' by forcing them to perform every kind of labour that the upper caste Hindus refused to do. In Argentina, *criollos* and European immigrants alike were integrated into a national Argentine identity based on the image of the settler's rural homestead on colonised land, a form of wealth generation made possible by the low-waged agricultural labour of indigenous people and formerly enslaved workers from the African continent. Both cultural national identities were thus constructed on the bedrock of the labour of a large underclass of workers.



Sketch depicting domestic workers accompanying an advertisement for a stove. *Caras y Caretas* (20 September 1930): 14. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Sketch accompanying an advertisement for tea. *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (14 February 1937): 56. British Library, London.

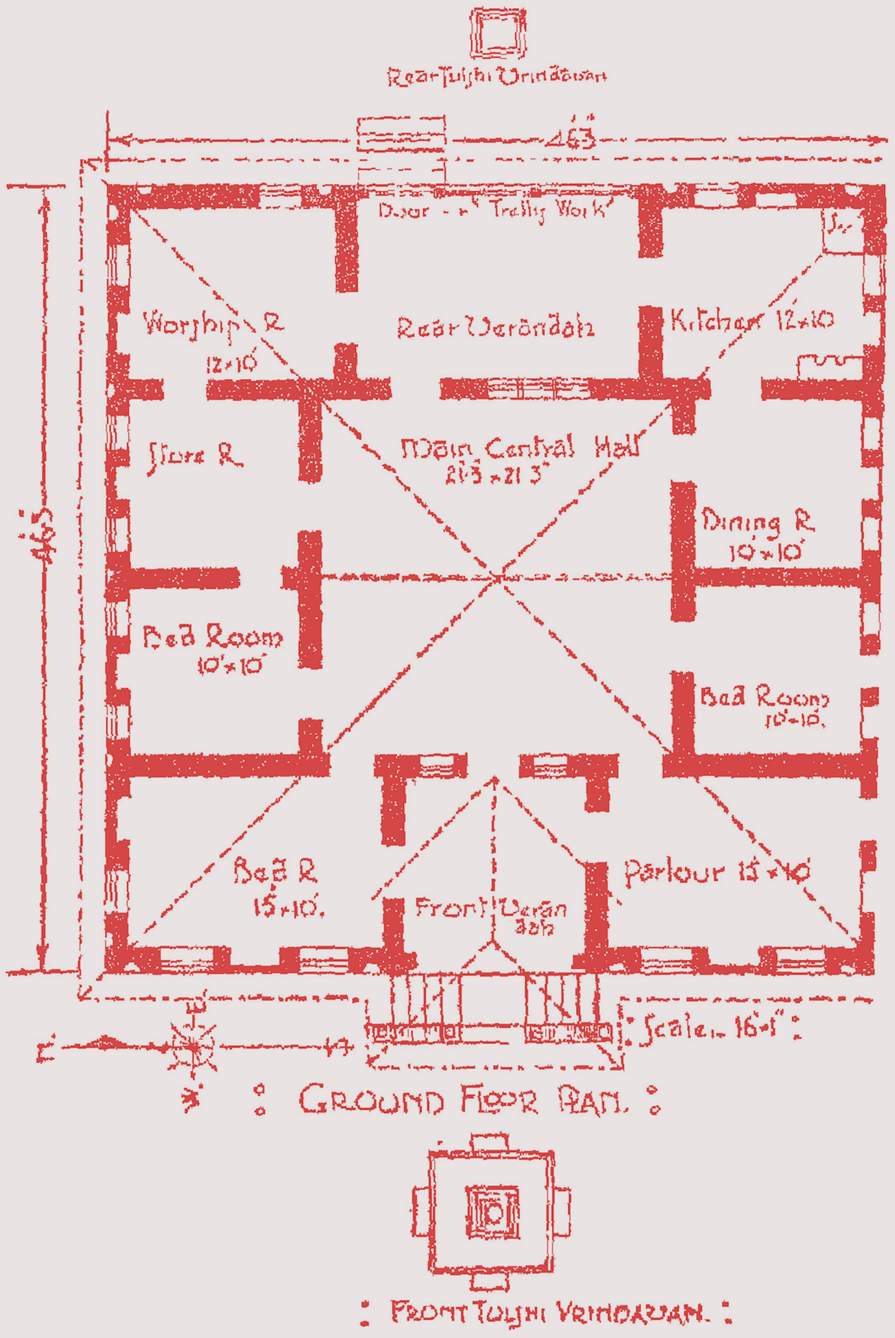
‘Dust is a Great Enemy of Health’

Pooja Sastry

In his 1935 manual *Cheap and Healthy Homes for the Middle Classes of India*, Raghunath Shripad Deshpande informed his readers: ‘If one starts to clean a house from one end, before one reaches the other, the former is again ready for cleaning. We have thus to wage a war continually against dirt, and our enemy is such that it is impossible to completely vanquish him’. Deshpande was an engineer based in Poona in the Bombay Presidency of British India who frequently used descriptions such as the one above to instruct his readers on building their own single-family homes over the 1930s and early 1940s. Deshpande’s manuals were an authoritative voice and he even collaborated with prominent Bombay-based architecture firms such as Master, Sathe, & Bhuta and Marathe & Kulkarni, whose designs for flats in the city of Bombay were published in his later manuals. Although he did not intend his manuals for women readers, Deshpande was clearly familiar with manuals for British housewives and advice on domestic hygiene dispensed in Marathi and Hindi women’s magazines like *Grihini* and *Chand*.

Deshpande wrote his manuals amidst contestations for Hindu Maratha identity by Brahmin and Non-brahmin communities. A Brahmin himself, Deshpande demonstrated his implicit alignment with the Hindu Maratha Brahmin movement by attempting to incorporate what he called ‘purely Hindu’ features into his sample house plans. Deshpande’s criticism of the ‘deficiency of light and ventilation and general insanitary conditions of the homes of the lower classes’ was based not just on colonial public health responses but also the link between caste and ‘purity’ in the Hindu caste hierarchy, in which lowered caste workers were considered ‘impure’. Deshpande was writing in an established tradition of orientalist conservatism, which involved rescuing the ‘ancientness’ of India from history. This involved ‘freeing’ a newly-defined category of ‘Hindu’ architecture from the plurality of its Indo-Islamic context based on textual evidence. Such resurrected Hindu ‘traditions’ were alloyed with the emerging discipline of climatology, which quantified light and air requirements into indices to create *Vastu-vidya*, or ‘the ancient Indian science of architecture’.

Deshpande’s assignment of functions to rooms and their placement borrowed from manuals such as J. Gordon Allen’s *The Cheap Cottage and Small House* and G. Gordon Samson’s *Houses, Villas, Cottages, and Bungalows for Britishers and Americans Abroad*. However, his vision was distinctive in that he adapted several features from *wadas*, local mansions built by Hindu uppercaste families who had established feudal rights over the domestic labour of women from lowered caste communities in western India since the eighteenth century. Even as the manuals sought to envision a new independent India by weaving narratives of a glorious past into everyday domestic forms, these were ultimately made modern by domestic cleaning tasks which were disproportionately performed by lowered caste women on very low wages. The gaps in the manuals’ instructions show that the author’s visions of modernity incorporated inequality as part of its daily rhythms, and those who were disadvantaged within this framework were left out, both from the manuals and the architectural volumes they describe.



Plan for a modern house inspired by a *wada* (Fig. 54). Raghunath Sripad Deshpande, *Cheap and Healthy Homes for the Middle Classes of India*, Poona, 1935, 260. Digital Library of India, Item 2015.351612.

1930s Bombay Films

Pooja Sastry

Bhabhi ('Sister-in-Law', 1938) and *Duniya Na Maane* ('The Unexpected', 1937), were two of the first talkie films made in Hindi in Bombay, and they anticipated a new kind of modern Hindu domestic spatial imaginary. *Bhabhi* was based on Bengali short story *Bisher Dhuan* ('Poisoned Air'), written by writer Saradindu Bandhopadhyay and set in Calcutta. The short story and film were both centered on Hindu widow reform and sought to show that widows are human beings deserving of mercy and respect. The transposition of the story from Calcutta to Bombay indicated an existing transregional network of stories surrounding Hindu widow reform. *Duniya Na Maane* was also based on a short story named *Kunku* ('Vermilion') by Marathi writer Narayan Hari Apte. *Kunku* was itself heavily inspired by *Sharada*, an 1893 Marathi play based on the contentious subject of child marriage written by playwright Govind Ballal Deval. As in *Duniya Na Maane*, the title character in *Sharada* was a child bride who vocally criticised the entrenched inequality of the Hindu beliefs which have led to her predicament.

The 1930s were also the first decade in which a new genre of film, the social film, and specifically the social problem film, began to become popular because of the addition of sound. Unlike 'mythologicals' or 'historicals' or 'adventure' films, both *Bhabhi* and *Duniya Na Maane* were social films, with actors in modern clothing playing everyday roles in recognisable domestic settings. A big part of the draw of the social films was music: both films featured songs which comprised an integral part of the films' narratives. The music composers and lyricists for the films borrowed significantly from multiple sources, including *Bhakti* music and folk traditions from North India, and the Persian lyrical tradition of *ghazal*. The songs of the two films were also circulated independently of the films, such that audiences listened to them on the radio even if they had never watched the films. The endeavour of creating a recognisable domestic spatial imaginary was aided by the prominent onscreen presence of oleographs of humanoid Hindu gods and goddesses. These oleographs constituted a mass Hindu material culture so ubiquitous that most of the subcontinent's population had seen one of them by the 1930s.

Bhabhi and Duniya Na Maane were thus not only grounded in current social reform debates but also in the ongoing context of the nationalist movement and the attempt to forge a common pan-Indian (Hindu) identity from a multiplicity of languages and cultural traditions. The films articulated a new vision of a modern Hindu society in which widows could live respectably and child brides could seek justice. However, it is important to note here that that child marriage and the burning of widows or subjecting them to harsh restrictions were both uniquely uppercaste Hindu preoccupations. Working class and oppressed caste women could not access protection within uppercaste Hindu bourgeois society. What seemed to be progress was at the cost of persistent exclusion: the normalisation of the Hindu domestic spatial imaginary also meant the marginalisation of large swathes of the audience who were lowered caste or not Hindu. Despite relying on the skills of their Parsi and Jewish actors, Muslim song directors, and set designers from lowered caste and Buddhist communities, the films were part of a loosely constituted nationalist media infrastructure which normalised Hindu as Indian and all other religions (especially Islam) as not-Indian.

Publicity material for *Bhabhi*, directed by Franz Osten (Bombay Talkies, 1938). *Filmindia* (Bombay, January 1939): 26.

Kadın Gazetesi

İpek Mehmetoğlu

The weekly *Women's Newspaper (Kadın Gazetesi)*, published from 1947 until 1979, was one of the longest-running women's publications in the history of journalism in Turkey. Owned and run exclusively by women for women, its authors focused on social, political, and economic issues, including women's rights, women's problems, and women's philanthropic activities, as well as popular topics such as fashion, travel, and home decoration.

Writers of many women's journals and magazines have historically been engaged with home decoration and modern housekeeping advice. What makes the *Women's Newspaper* particularly interesting from an architectural point of view is its alternative and wide coverage of the changes within the architectural and urban scenes of the Turkish Republic, both within and beyond domesticity. The authors frequently analysed the design, construction, appropriation, and use of existing and new buildings, such as factories, hotels, hospitals, schools, and nurseries, developed in line with the ongoing modernisation project.

One of the journal's authors who wrote on the social aspects of the built environment was teacher and politician Hasene Ilgaz, who was elected as a member of the Grand National Assembly in 1943 as one of the first women to do so. She was not trained as an architect; however, her impressive philanthropic work in numerous women's organisations meant that she was deeply interested in these architectural developments as they intersected with ideas and practices of modern welfare. A significant example is her commentary on Ankara Maternity Hospital. The opening of the hospital in 1949, which was the first of its kind in the country for its programme, scale, and architecture, was celebrated in the *Newspaper.* A photograph of the new building, initially designed in 1937, was positioned in comparison to the previous buildings that housed the maternity clinic in the city. The architectural 'progress' of the hospital from 1925 pointed to the modernisation of the establishment. Ilgaz, in her article entitled 'Our Expectations from the Maternity Hospital', published shortly after the opening of the building, shared her excitement, hesitations, and visions about the construction of this new modern facility.

Ilgaz's comments, like others' in the *Newspaper,* are significant in understanding the connections that women forged between architecture, welfare, and journalism. They also reflect women's resourcefulness in addressing the potentials and limits of architecture in relation to social and political issues. These alternative architectural engagements challenge the boundaries of a narrowly defined, architect-centred professionalism. They present a more inclusive history of modern architecture, in which women played diverse roles.

The transformation of Ankara Maternity Hospital. *Women's Newspaper,* no. 106 (7 March 1949): 1. Periodicals Collection, Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation, Istanbul.

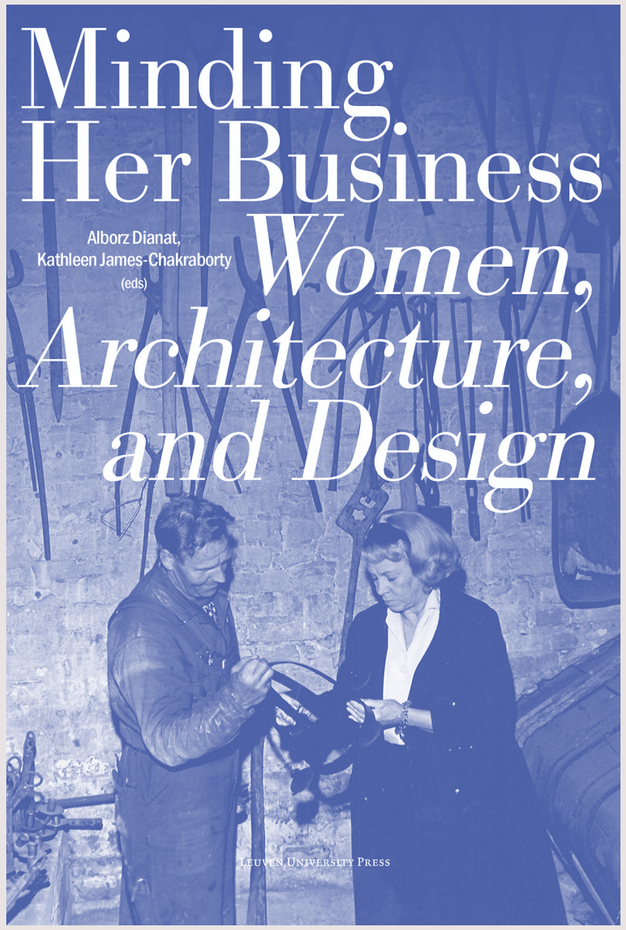
Minding Her Business

Contributors to the Minding Her Business conference and resulting book include: Dana Arnold, Alex Banister, Haylee Derrickson, Alborz Dianat, Gabriela García de Cortázar Galleguillos, Damla Göre, Mary Anne Hunting, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Kevin D. Murphy, Andrew Murray, Alexandra Quantrill, Sini Rinne-Kanto, Ellen Rowley, Maryia Rusak, Eunice Seng, Jenna Snow, Nina Stritzler-Levine, Andrea Thabet and E. James West.

Women influenced the development of modern architecture and design through a wide variety of entrepreneurial activities. A conference held in Dublin in 2024 and a resulting book – *Minding Her Business: Women, Architecture and Design* – highlighted their contributions internationally across four distinct but overlapping fields: the construction industry; domestic design, journalism and real estate development; the cultivation of social spaces; and the delivery of philanthropic interventions. Independent cases reveal the range of contributions across these endeavours. Among women operating in the construction industry was Eleanor Coade, whose artificial stone manufactory, established in late-eighteenth century Britain, became a resounding success. Her affordable and durable stoneware, statues and decorative features were used in the work of the most famous Georgian architects including Robert Adam, John Nash, and John Soane. In the modern period, contributions to the construction industry include the output of Myriam Ratinoff, an architect in Chile who utilised Multibloc: a reinforced concrete construction system invented by her husband, Sergio Kohn. In the design of homes, Ratinoff displayed the structural and visual appeal of the modern construction method, helping to promote its employment.

In contributing to discussions around domestic design, women have capitalised on the perceived value of their gender in relation to the subject. This has included the activity of women journalists and magazine owners who have addressed extensive audiences of housewives interested in the design of their own homes. Others have approached domesticity through real estate development and planning. In mid-century America, women such as the patron and landowner Helen Osborne Storrow occupied prominent positions in suburban development projects, while students at the all-women Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture were trained to design such schemes.

In cultivating social spaces, women have also provided settings within which architecture and design can be discussed and advanced. A bookstore in Singapore operated by Lena Lim encouraged greater dialogue and publication of south-east Asian subjects, combating the dominance of Western literature, including in relation to architecture. In postwar Finland, Maire Gullichsen cultivated a wider community by collecting artworks, organising exhibitions and contributing to communal engagement with design.



Alborz Dianat and Kathleen James-Chakraborty, eds., *Minding Her Business: Women, Architecture, and Design* (Leuven University Press, 2026).

Finally, women have undertaken a range of philanthropic activities related to construction. This includes the role of Camille Cosby in supporting higher education for Black women in the United States by funding a new academic centre at Spelman college. While Cosby's contribution aided her own celebrity profile, other women have worked behind the scenes. This includes Joan Tyrrell, a secretary supporting Nordic aid projects in post-independence Kenya. Recognition of the breadth of these roles enables us to understand the full scope of the impact that women have long had in shaping the built world around us – not only as architects, but also as businesswomen, journalists, real estate developers, storeowners, patrons and philanthropists.

Laura Annie Willson: ‘Britain’s First Woman Home Builder’

Alexandra Quantrill

Britain’s first woman home builder, Laura Annie Willson, entered factory work at age ten, fought to establish labour rights for female textile workers, and was an ardent suffragist. When her husband’s lathe factory shifted to munitions production during the First World War, she managed seventy women workers; she later helped found the Women’s Engineering Society to support women’s technical work. Amidst calls for more affordable homes during Britain’s postwar reconstruction, Willson became a speculative builder in 1922, overseeing the design and construction of several hundred working-class homes in Yorkshire and Surrey throughout the 1920s.

Willson described housing as ‘very much a woman’s question, and…a form of engineering of the domestic kind’, and was presented in the press as ‘a very homely woman’. In her first scheme, which she portrayed as ‘a small garden city’, houses had a front hall, living room with traditional hearth, kitchen, scullery, three bedrooms, and bathroom. Against the recommendations of Labour women, Willson excluded a front parlour to keep prices in line with state-funded housing; she personally guaranteed buyers’ mortgages and still turned a handsome profit. Willson embraced labour-saving interiors with gas and electrical appliances to reduce drudgery. For a development of houses and flats in the late 1920s, she hired a local electrical engineer and wiring contractor to help her realise a ‘practically…all-Electric’ building. The cleanliness and efficiency of the electric apparatus were a stark contrast to dusty and labour-intensive coal stoves. Despite conventional decor, Willson’s interiors manifested strains of modernisation.

Although she operated outside the professional bounds of architecture and resisted what she saw as the homogenising tendencies of modern design, Willson was active in debates over housing and material and energy systems. Despite only selectively incorporating the demands of working-class women and rejecting progressive feminism, she modelled how women might obtain economic autonomy. In making housing her business, merging feminine domesticity with the commercial domain, Willson embodied the many tensions of her era.

Kitchen of Willson’s Englefield Green demonstration home, Surrey, c. 1928. Private collection.

Mary Louise Schmidt and the Buildings Business in Los Angeles

Jenna Snow and
Andrea Thabet

At a time when few women were welcomed or encouraged to work in the architectural profession, entrepreneur and housing advocate Mary Louise Schmidt trailblazed an innovative career path as a proponent for new and modern building materials that influenced a generation of architects and contributed to the amplification of Los Angeles as a bastion of Modern architecture.

Beginning in 1914 and through the next six decades, Mary Louise Schmidt established several successful building materials businesses that showcased the latest in homebuilding materials and architectural plans. Schmidt believed architects wanted easier access to information about new building materials and provided this service by launching one of the first building materials exhibits in the United States. This exhibit in 1914 took over the entire sixth floor of the Metropolitan Building in downtown Los Angeles. Manufacturers paid rent to display materials, while architects paid nothing to visit the site and take advantage of services like obtaining building specifications. Schmidt's thriving business outgrew its space, prompting her to convince a realty firm she could fill a new building with architect offices at no charge to them in exchange for the use of three full floors for her building materials exhibit. Schmidt oversaw the construction of the new Architect's Building in downtown Los Angeles (1927) and made good on her promise to fill the new offices with architects. Despite her success, the business did not survive the Great Depression and closed in 1935. Schmidt pivoted by organising the innovative and influential 1936 California House and Garden Exhibition with the help of her employee and sister, Florence. The Exhibition featured six architect-designed model homes on a large parcel of land on Wilshire Boulevard, open to the public year round. While it was meant to be permanent, financial struggles forced its closure two years later. Most surprising for a city known for its continuous reinvention, all six houses were relocated off the site and still function as single-family homes. Not long after, Schmidt launched yet another new business, the Architects and Engineers Service, which connected architects with building materials and other services, and for which she employed only unmarried, college-educated women. With the help of Florence, Schmidt served the needs of a booming residential housing industry in post World War II Los Angeles. By 1952, the A & E Service had branch offices in New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, and Phoenix.

Schmidt opened her final, most ambitious, and longest surviving business in 1957, the Building Center, a centralised permanent exhibit of building, landscaping, and interior design resources that also served as the headquarters for the A & E Service. Over 150 manufacturers paid to display their products. Like her earlier endeavors, Schmidt created numerous opportunities at the Building Center for architects to

connect with clients, manufacturers, and each other. Over her six-decade career – from the building exhibits at the Metropolitan and Architect's Buildings, to the A & E Service, and the Building Center – Schmidt was at the forefront of innovative home building, connecting architects, manufacturers, and future home owners.

Building Center employees in front of the Center's entrance, Los Angeles, c. 1957. Mary Louise Schmidt Archives.

Ise Gropius and the Communication of Bauhaus Design

Alborz Dianat

As the founder and first director of the pioneering Bauhaus school of art, the name of the German modernist architect Walter Gropius is internationally renowned. Less appreciated are the accompanying activities of the architect's second wife, Ise Gropius (1897–1983), who significantly aided the international spread of the Bauhaus and its design philosophy.

At the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, Ise Gropius acted as the school's secretary, a tour guide for visitors, and an administrator helping to secure funding. Fluent in English, her role was also important in introducing the advantages of modernist design to audiences in the anglophone world. In May 1931, after meeting Ethel Power, the editor of *House Beautiful*, Ise Gropius published an article in the popular American magazine. Her article, titled 'Modern Dwellings for Modern People', targeted the magazine's predominantly female readers, announcing to them that standardised objects would not mechanise the individual but rather provide 'new zest and greater richness to [life's] free and untrammelled enjoyment'. She guided her readers to look at individual objects and the composition of interiors, recommending simple steps for the public to follow to enhance modern life. In communicating the advantages of modern design to women generally responsible for design in their own homes, the authorship of 'Madame Gropius' mattered.

In 1934, Walter and Ise Gropius emigrated from Nazi Germany to London, where they lived for two and a half years. While her husband could not speak English, Ise Gropius was on hand to act as a mediator during encounters with British designers, journalists and publishers. The most vital promotional pursuit in this period was the production of a book: *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (1935). The book acted as a formal introduction to the Bauhaus and its design philosophy, helping to secure Walter Gropius's appointment to chair the architecture department at Harvard's new Graduate School of Design from 1937. While the book is credited to Walter Gropius, Ise Gropius led the book's production, merging various articles by her husband into a manuscript that was then delivered to the British translator and critic P. Morton Shand. Ise Gropius accepted advice from Britons to remove theoretical sections and to appeal to audiences suspicious of extreme functionalism by reducing the severity of statements around standardisation. Though initially resistant to comprehensive changes, she later reflected that the edited book brought a 'difficult subject closer to English understanding'. The strategy was successful, as the text enticed readers with modern conveniences while assuring them that they could retain comfort in their homes. A review in the BBC's popular magazine *The Listener* foregrounded the book's stance against 'dehumanisation' and 'the tyranny of standardisation'.

Ise Gropius's journalism and promotion argued that modern design could be comfortable, aid the labour of ordinary housewives, and therefore appeal to the general public. In these terms, it was Ise Gropius doing the pioneering, building an appealing aura of domesticity and femininity to contrast the supposed severity of masculine modernism.

Self-portrait of Ise Gropius in the Director's House, Bauhaus Dessau, 1926. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Ise Gropius at a desk designed by Marcel Breuer, in the Director's House, Bauhaus Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius. Still from *Wie wohnen wir gesund und wirtschaftlich?*, directed by Richard Paulick (Humboldt-Film GmbH, 1926). Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Isotype and the Display of Women's Movements in Austria, Britain and Nigeria

Alborz Dianat

Originally known as the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics, the Isotype system used straightforward pictorial elements to communicate complex information to non-specialist audiences. From its foundation, women were prominently involved in both operations and outputs, with charts often presenting socialist causes linked to women's empowerment, including issues around equality of pay, maternal services and employment opportunities.

The Vienna Method was founded at the Social and Economic Museum by philosopher Otto Neurath in socialist-governed Vienna in 1925. Alongside Neurath, the production of charts in Vienna depended on women, including painter Elisabeth Buchmann and architects Edith Matzalik, Rosa Weiser, and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. In addition, Marie Reidemeister served as the system's chief 'transformer' – responsible for translating information into charts. After Austria's Civil War in February 1934, the group was disbanded, with official activities resuming as Otto Neurath and Marie Reidemeister settled at The Hague in the Netherlands.

With The Hague under Nazi invasion in 1940, Neurath and Reidemeister fled to Britain. After a period interned as enemy aliens, the pair married and founded the Isotype Institute as joint directors. After the sudden death of Otto Neurath in 1945, Marie Neurath was the sole director of Isotype. In subsequent years, she introduced the system to West Africa, fulfilling long-term intentions to use the system on the African continent. Following colonial networks, Isotype undertook projects in British colonies in West Africa: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast (Ghana). Despite the usage of Isotype to support women's empowerment in socialist Vienna, this aspect proved flexible in Britain and West Africa. In Britain, Isotype charts were commissioned to represent women's expected contributions to the war effort, drawing criticism from some feminists who sought women's liberation on their own terms. In the Western Region of Nigeria, Marie Neurath searched for male teachers and students to apply the system, acknowledging local gender expectations. However, Isotype was also used to display the extension of voting rights to tax-paying women in the region. The case of Isotype shows the presence of women in design production and as the subject of design outputs through the twentieth century.

Isotype poster displaying the voting process in the Western Region of Nigeria, 1956. Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection, University of Reading.

Edith Matzalik working on an Isotype pictogram with a lino cutter. Archiv des Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum.

Reclaiming Modernism: Women at the Intersection of Architecture, Textiles and Fashion

Paula Arning

Between 1910 and 1980, women designers played a key role in shaping modernism through textiles. Eileen Gray, Sonia Delaunay, Lilly Reich, Otti Berger, Grete Reichardt, and Margaret Leischner worked across architecture, interior design, fashion, and industry, using fabric to mediate between body, space, and environment. Their rugs, curtains, wall hangings, and garments were not secondary decorative elements but central tools for organising modern interiors as sensory, habitable spaces.

Eileen Gray's textile designs, particularly her rugs and interior fabrics, were integral to her spatial thinking and to her understanding of architecture as a lived environment. Sonia Delaunay positioned textiles at the intersection of art and everyday life. Her printed fabrics moved fluidly between painting, fashion, and stage design, extending abstraction into domestic and social space.

Lilly Reich's work foregrounded textiles as architectural elements within exhibition and interior design. Through curtains and display systems, she demonstrated how fabric could define spatial relationships and guide perception, challenging rigid distinctions between structure and surface. Otti Berger's experimental weaves and patents reveal textiles as sites of technical innovation and design thinking. Grete Reichardt and Margaret Leischner further demonstrate the close relationship between textile design and industry. Leischner's collaborations with Irish Ropes Ltd. illustrates how modernist textile principles were adapted to large-scale production and new economic contexts.

Across their careers, migration, political upheaval, and industrial networks shaped both practice and dissemination. Moving between France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and Ireland, these designers navigated exile and economic constraint, adapting their work to new cultural and material conditions. Their transnational trajectories reveal how textiles circulated modernist ideas beyond elite architectural commissions, embedding them in everyday life.

By foregrounding textiles as material, spatial and intellectual agents, this perspective reframes modernism as a practice concerned not only with form and vision but with use, sensation and inhabitation. It positions women designers at the centre of modernist production and underscores the fundamental role of textiles in shaping how modern architecture was lived, experienced and sustained.

Tugendhat House, living room space, Brno, 1929–30.
Photograph by Lehotsky, 2012. Wikimedia Commons.

Weaving Modernism Into Industry: Margaret Leischner and Irish Ropes Ltd.

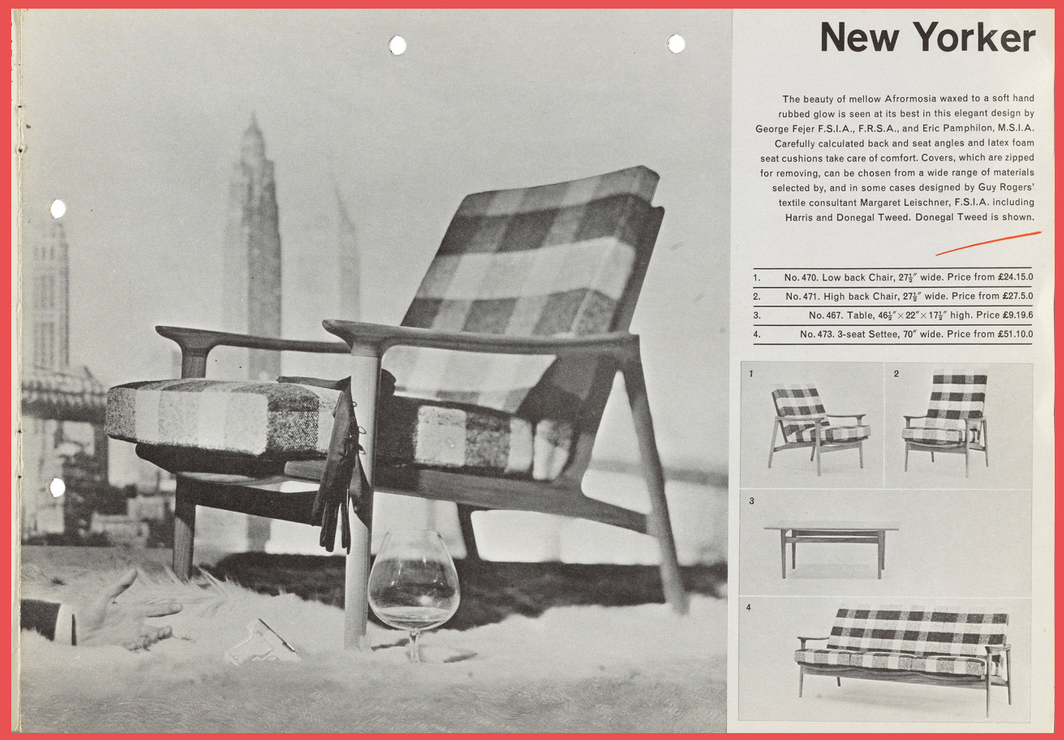
Paula Arning

Margaret Leischner (1907–1970) provides an important but often neglected link between Bauhaus modernism and Irish design. Born near Dresden, she trained at the Bauhaus in Dessau from 1927 to 1930 and received her diploma in 1931, certified by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Gunta Stölzl. She briefly led the weaving workshop after Stölzl's departure and oversaw dyehouse activities, gaining expertise she would later apply to industrial textile design.

Fleeing Nazi Germany in 1938, Leischner settled in England, where she was initially interned as an 'enemy alien' during the war. After her release, she rebuilt her career through connections with industrialists and cultural figures, especially art historian Herbert Read. She worked as a consultant for R. Greg & Co., designed aircraft interiors for BOAC, and developed innovative synthetic materials including Tygan. Her suggestion to use Harris Tweed for upholstered furniture, though initially met with scepticism, proved highly successful and influenced English furniture production. Leischner also taught at the Royal College of Art, where she met Irish artist Louis le Brocquy.

Through le Brocquy's network, Leischner was introduced to Irish Ropes Ltd. in Newbridge, County Kildare. Founded in 1933, the company had expanded from rope production into floor coverings, launching its Tintawn Carpets brand using sisal imported from Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania). From 1959, Leischner took over carpet design, applying her Bauhaus training in colour theory and dyeing to the challenging natural fibre. Sisal's variable colour, from white to yellow, required sophisticated chemical knowledge to achieve consistent dye results. Leischner developed vibrant new colours, textures, and designs that found commercial success internationally.

Remarkably, Irish Ropes publicly credited Leischner by name in promotional materials, unusual for female designers at the time. A 1962 letter from Irish Ropes to the Department of External Affairs, defending designs against international copying, explicitly names her as a 'designer of international standing' (F.S.I.A.), using her reputation as corporate authority. This rare documentation of female authorship in mid-century industrial design reflects Leischner's recognised professional status. Leischner received the Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) title in 1969, Britain's highest design honour, shortly before her death in 1970. Her work brought Bauhaus principles into Irish industrial production, helping to connect Irish design to European modernism.



Armchair 'New Yorker', page from a promotional brochure for furniture by Guy Rogers titled *'Choose Comfort with Guy Rogers for 1963'*, 1963. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Xavier University: Katherine Drexel as Philanthropist, Saint, and Architect

George Francis-Kelly

Xavier University of Louisiana was established in New Orleans in 1925 as the only college institution for African Americans in the United States administered by the Catholic Church. Xavier was founded by Katherine Drexel, the heiress of the wealthy Drexel family of investment bankers, who was canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2000. Katherine had dedicated her life to religious service, founding the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament congregation, and Xavier was originally run almost entirely by sisters from this order.

Xavier offered an alternative to the strictly manual and practical education offered in Louisiana's Black colleges at the time. The small college emphasised a liberal arts education similar to that offered by Fisk University, which encouraged African Americans to pursue professional careers and community leadership following graduation. Reflecting this, the early campus, consisting of a three-story Main Building (1932); a Convent (1932); and a Library, all embodied conventional architectural styles for higher education usually reserved for white institutions. As a modestly designed but carefully constructed Gothic quadrangular plan, the campus symbolised the deep connections between religion and education which had defined American higher education for centuries.

Despite her wealth and influence, Drexel was reportedly deeply engaged in the design and development of Xavier's campus. Sister Agatha Ryan, President of the college from 1932 to 1955, wrote that Mother Drexel 'went into the most unlikely details with architects when a building was about to be constructed'. She concerned herself with the size, lighting, paintwork, and materials used at the college, even having small brick walls constructed with different types of bricks to provide examples of how the larger structure would appear.

While the ostensibly historical appearance of the buildings would suggest the college avoided any connections to modernism, at times Drexel's commitment to her faith shaped the design of the campus in surprising ways. Ryan recalled that Drexel told the architects Toledano and Wogan that she could 'have a house of gold if I wanted it, but I don't – I want a good building'. Her faith and vow of poverty led to a resolve to avoid the kinds of lavish decoration which characterised many elite colleges of the time. She committed to providing a building which was 'substantial, simple, but convenient for the work of the Sisters,' and for the interior to provide only those things 'needed for their comfort and health, but no superfluities'. In this sense, she shared the more functionalist philosophy of the modernist architects working across Europe at the time.

Furthermore, she adopted other principles of modernism during her involvement in the building's design. Drexel would interview Sisters responsible for the teaching, cooking, and maintenance of the campus to determine the building's requirements and would study the direction of the breeze to situate it and ensure that it remain cool during the hot Louisiana summers. Likewise, Sister Agatha Ryan clearly followed Drexel's example when the college library was designed. She wrote to Toledano and Wogan, indicating that she had visited other libraries in the region to study their plans, and proposed solutions to specific problems the architects had described in regards to lighting and room allocations.

Where Xavier's campus lacks the perceived stylistic formalities of modern design, it also illustrates how interventions by women pushed towards more modernising aspects of the building. Drexel and Ryan were not merely clients but actively involved in shaping the campus. Their architectural agency shows how principles of charity and educational uplift helped produce a material legacy intended to help African Americans in the Jim Crow South.

Toledano and Wogan, Main Building, Xavier University of Louisiana, 1932. Photograph by George Francis-Kelly.

Sister Stanislaus Kennedy and Social Housing in Ireland

Ellen Rowley and
Haylee Derrickson

In 1991, Stanhope Green opened on a hill in a cobble-stoned corner of urban Dublin. This was a new housing form for Ireland, bringing a mixture of studios for single people, small family terraced homes, and step-down apartments. As a campus of sheltered housing, run by a housing charity Focus Point (established in 1984, today Focus Ireland), inclusivity and diversity were the scheme's bywords. Just as the residents were mixed, with varying needs and dependencies, so too was the architecture. After all, here was Ireland's first foray into transforming a former convent into housing and, as such, the nucleus of the site was a hulking three-story late-Victorian brick block, replete with a Virgin Mary roofline and a dysfunctional floor plan of nun's tiny cells.

The idea of this unprecedented conversion came from a locally-famous activist nun, Sister Stanislaus Kennedy (known as Sister Stan, 1940–2025). Motivated by her research around homelessness and women in 1980s Dublin, and alive to architectural potential and building waste, Sister Stan persuaded her order of nuns, the Religious Sisters of Charity, to give her the convent. Then, working with a thoughtful young architect, Gerry Cahill, they mediated and mellowed the convent block with new housing forms such as a two-story concrete cloister of apartments and a terrace of yellow-brick houses. Together, and with government funds coming from the recent 1988 Housing Act, they made 94 homes and saved the convent from seemingly inevitable demolition.

The example of Stanhope Green resonated with religious orders across Ireland. It carried a message of social justice and of care, just as communities of nuns, once so vital and potent in Irish society, were shrinking; just as their buildings were decomposing; and just as Catholic clerical and institutional abuses were being disclosed. For a short decade, other convents were transformed and Sister Stan's charitable activism, based on the practices of South American Liberation Theology, provided the model. Design-led, these conversions happened outside of market forces: on gifted pockets of city and in decaying eighteenth and nineteenth century structures. The nun and the architect's collaboration was critical. Not only did they innovate in terms of new housing forms, they stretched budgets, deployed experimental materials and retained old buildings. But most of all, they created thriving communities of homes.

Sister Stan's architectural adventures took her from social work in Kilkenny (South East Ireland) through the 1960s and 1970s, to Dublin during the 1980s

recession. Having established the Combat Poverty Agency, Sister Stan's work was increasingly responding to her research around poverty and living conditions in contemporary Ireland. In order to disseminate the research, and always in an effort to effect social change through political policy, she published relentlessly. Housing became her single biggest concern. Each episode was rooted in a particular architecture, from the early-1970s technocratic unfinished social housing estate in Kilkenny to the crumbling merchant's house in Dublin's Temple Bar district where she established a suite of homeless services, and ultimately, Focus Ireland. In responding to need and to place, Sister Stanislaus Kennedy's architectural agency was manifest in the making of thousands of social, affordable, or sheltered homes for turn-of-the-twenty-first century urban Ireland.

Gerry Cahill Architects, Stanhope Green Cloister, Dublin, 1991. Bill Hastings for Gerry Cahill Architects.

The Architect is a Nun: Sister Nesta Fitzgerald-Lombard's Convent

Alborz Dianat

A Catholic girl's school in Mayfield, Sussex, in England owes much of its architecture to one of its own nuns: Sister Nesta Fitzgerald-Lombard (1916–2006). Over four decades, Sister Nesta transformed the site, renovating the historic fabric and designing new structures to accommodate rapid expansion.

Nesta Fitzgerald-Lombard was one of the first women to study architecture in Ireland after the first school of architecture in the country opened at University College Dublin. However, only a small number of women from her generation practised as architects after graduation. Prejudice and lower wages pushed most to marry swiftly for financial security, while married women were legally barred from many architectural commissions. Following an alternative path after graduating in 1938, Nesta Fitzgerald-Lombard journeyed to England. She entered the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and arrived at the Mayfield convent soon after the end of the Second World War. Rather than preventing her pursuit of architectural practice, dedication to a religious life enabled Sister Nesta's output. Her voluntary work as a resident architect avoided expensive fees for the order. Trusted with renovations and new buildings at Mayfield, Sister Nesta helped expand accommodation as the school merged with St-Leonards-on-Sea in 1953. The school established a house system to retain the intimate qualities of a small convent even after expansion. While the newly formed St Dunstan's house was created in the existing Main School, the additional three proposed houses required construction. This led to Sister Nesta's design of new buildings to form St Gabriel's and St Michael's, along with the renovation of a sixteenth century manor house to create St Raphael's.

Operating with a limited budget, Sister Nesta's architecture was simple, beyond occasional flourishes in decorative brickwork. Some of her projects met the historic fabric of the convent in uncompromising terms, with boarding needs more important than sentimentality. Sister Nesta's designs went far beyond providing accommodation, however. They also included renovation of the chapel as well as the creation of an administration wing, science laboratories, music school, and a swimming pool. The extent of Sister Nesta's output is astonishing for any architect, let alone one designing in their spare time; Sister Nesta's primary occupation was as Mayfield's maths teacher and bursar. There are cases of women religious working on small construction projects collectively, from Carmelite nuns in Presteigne to Franciscan sisters in Surrey. But as a qualified architect leading such extensive projects over decades, the case of Sister Nesta is perhaps unique. Newspapers in England, Ireland, and the United States highlighted the novelty of a nun-architect, though her international profile is dwarfed by the esteem still found for her locally.

Sarah Carlton, portrait of Sister Nesta with some of the buildings she designed depicted over her shoulder, 1996. Mayfield School.

The Role of Women Architects and Designers to Foster Diverse and Inclusive Societies

Cláudia de Souza Libânio

This research explores the role that women architects and designers have played in fostering inclusive and accessible societies and communities. Twelve women architects and designers, many of whom advocated and worked for more equitable, diverse, and inclusive societies, were interviewed.

We mapped characteristics, profiles, challenges, and achievements faced in professional careers, as well as practices that enabled these women architects to find space to be successful or to make a difference by promoting inclusive and accessible communities and societies. Competencies, in terms of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes, were identified in order to expand the understanding of what allows these women to find success and drive change. Empathetic listening, openness to cultural diversity, flexibility, critical thinking, pluriverse understanding, technical and specific knowledge, ethical commitment, and transdisciplinary collaboration emerged as key competencies.

In the interviews, participatory practices functioned as more than a methodology, constituting an ethical, social, and political commitment. By embracing pluralism, they challenge normative understandings of design and architecture, recognising the legitimacy of diverse actors, viewpoints, and forms of knowledge within decision-making processes. In doing so, they reconfigure the role of the architect and the designer, moving away from a position of central authority towards that of a facilitator of collaborative practices. In educational contexts, participatory approaches can foster forms of learning grounded in horizontal relationships, collaboration, and ethical engagement.

From these results, it was possible to determine that women architects and designers are creating new ways of knowing, working, and acting, redefining what counts as valuable knowledge, what design is for, and whose voices matter. In this sense, the data analysis also emphasises the importance of expanding curricular content, building inclusive work cultures, and addressing the structural barriers that continue to marginalise women and others underrepresented in architecture and design. These women offer a model for reimagining the professional field, one that builds more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures.

Lina Bo Bardi, Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, 1968. Photograph by Mauricio Salas, 2014. Alamy.

Ethel Bailey Furman

Kathleen James-Chakraborty

Even before African American women began to study architecture at universities and were officially licensed to practice, a handful began to have careers designing buildings for themselves and their communities. The daughter of a building contractor, Ethel Bailey Forman, was perhaps the most prolific of such women, drafting designs for houses and churches for fellow African Americans, mostly in and around Richmond, Virginia, but also in Liberia, in the course of a career that spanned more than five decades. Today, many of her meticulous drawings are preserved in the Library of Virginia, where they attest to her attention to detail and her insistence on high quality construction. Furman ensured that those who dwelt and worshipped in the buildings and church extensions she designed could take pride in these structures, which were fitted out with modern conveniences to which they had not always previously had access. Her most impressive surviving work is the Sunday School addition to Fourth Baptist Church, where she herself worshipped. It housed classrooms designed to a standard similar to that of the city's newest school buildings, which were not yet completely integrated.

Although Furman did not always receive appropriate credit, which was claimed instead, at times, by clients and colleagues, she was a highly regarded, even beloved, pillar of her community. She earned her living through her skilled draftsmanship, but her commitment to architecture was only one of the ways in which she served that community. Her volunteer work was equally impressive. In addition to her contributions to local Black professional organisations, she was active in the Democratic Party, worked on voter registrations drives, raised money for healthcare initiatives, and campaigned to put new schools in the Church Hill neighbourhood, where she lived in a house that showcased her father's skills as a builder and near friends like the Wilders, parents of the state's first African American governor, whose house she had designed. Continuing the family tradition of activity relating to the built environment, her son Livingston Furman became director of operations for Richmond's Housing Authority. Less than a decade after Ethel Bailey Furman's death, a local park was named for her.

Contractor's Conference, Hampton Institute, Ethel Bailey Furman at center, 1928. Ethel Bailey Furman papers and architectural drawings, 1928–2003. Acquisition 41145, Personal Papers Collection, Library of Virginia.

Lin Huiyin and *House Beautiful*

Kathleen James-Chakraborty

Lin Huiyin (1904–1955) remains China's best known female architect. A pioneer historian and teacher of architecture, as well as an important literary figure, she was educated in England and the United States. Because the University of Pennsylvania, where her husband Liang Sicheng studied alongside her, did not yet offer women degrees in architecture, she graduated instead with a Bachelor of Arts. In the United States, Lin was exposed to ideas about balancing tradition and innovation, especially in domestic architecture, that she carried back to China with her. Whereas the revival of eighteenth century architecture associated with the establishment of democracy in the United States was what was cherished in Philadelphia at the time, Lin understood the importance of documenting and preserving China's architectural heritage,which had not yet been the subject of systematic study.

It is possible that her approach was informed not only by what she learned in the classroom, but also by the ways in which the expectations of many of the women she met – regarding domestic architecture in general and both their and her ability to contribute to its design – were shaped by the shelter press, that is, journals addressing domestic architecture, interior design, and gardening. In particular, *House Beautiful*, which was edited from 1922 to 1933 by Ethel Power, was the first such magazine, having begun publication in Chicago in 1896, and during Lin's time in the United States was probably the most influential. Power had, like her partner Eleanor Raymond, studied at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, founded in 1915 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which had an all-female student body. Power published articles by her fellow classmates, as well as the gardens and houses that they and other women designed. In Lin's years in the United States, she very strongly favoured the Colonial Revival, although she would later be among the first in the United States to publish examples of the International Style. *House Beautiful* also featured articles on Chinese architecture and gardens, usually written by men and women from the United States who had settled in or visited China. These would have helped shape the view of China and its buildings among the people Lin encountered in her time in Philadelphia. Most notable among them was Lucy Monroe Calhoun, the wife of a former United States ambassador to China. Calhoun lived in Beijing from 1909 to 1913, and again from 1921 to 1937.

It is unlikely that anything published in *House Beautiful*'s pages would have taught Lin anything new about her Chinese heritage, but whether or not she was personally a regular reader, the magazine almost certainly encouraged those around her to believe that she could have a career as an architect, and that being an architect included understanding and building upon cherished eighteenth century precedent.

Forrest W. Orr, *House Beautiful* (April 1925): cover. Fleet Library, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, USA. Digital Commons@RISD.

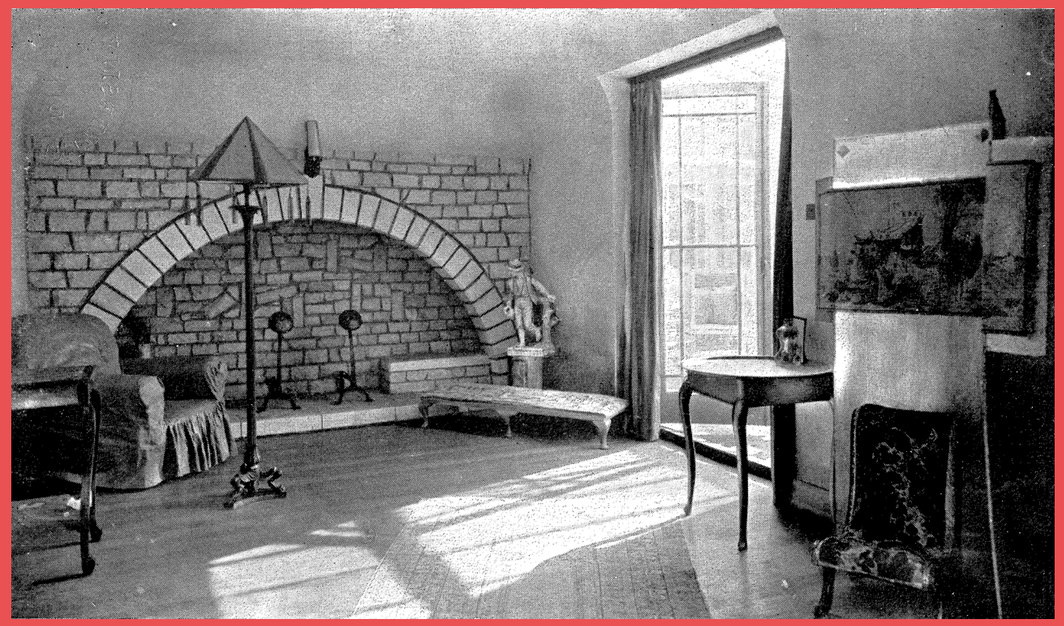
Grace Cope: Curves, Colours, and the Psychology of Architecture

Alborz Dianat

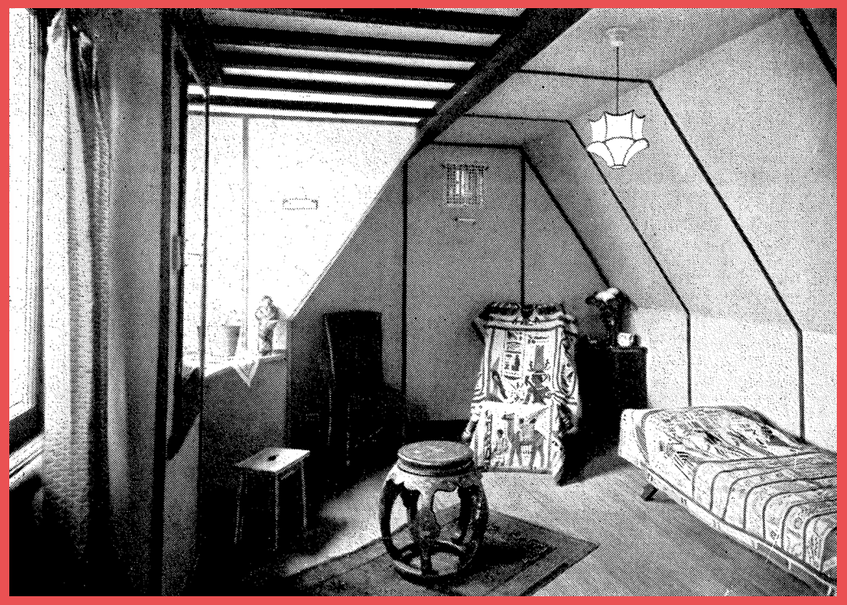
The field of psychology emerged in the late nineteenth century, with repercussions for the practice of architecture internationally. Over subsequent decades, architects, psychologists, and theorists discussed the impact of the built environment on the mental wellbeing of those experiencing it, addressing the mental effect of aesthetics, lighting, colour, acoustics, and applications of styles and symbols. A range of women professionals contributed to these discussions.

Possibly the first person to professionalise the link between psychology and architecture in Britain was Grace Cope (1874–1947). The daughter of a builder, Cope studied medicine before becoming an architect, writer, and 'psychological consultant'. Networking with prominent European psychologists including Alfred Adler, she carved her niche as an expert on the intersection of architecture and psychology. In a series of instructive articles culminating in a book (*Designs for Homes*, 1934), Cope advised the public on how to design their domestic spaces. She frequently claimed that the usage of curved walls would relieve eye strain and mental stress, while she called for the integration of 'disgruntling rooms' in homes to provide complete isolation and allow individuals to recover when mentally depleted. She also advised on the layout of kitchens, the integration of natural sunlight, and the application of colours determined to suit individuals' temperaments. Cope's journalism blurred the line between information and entertainment, simultaneously offering advice, introducing the latest gadgets, and delivering humorous anecdotes. In one interview, she claimed her mother lived to 103 by sleeping in a 'peach-colored bedroom that would have almost killed me, but the color undoubtedly helped her to live so long'.

Cope designed model homes in Australia and England that fulfilled her psychological criteria. She also travelled broadly, lecturing housewives on matters of design and conducting interviews with local newspapers in the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, Turkey and the Near East, Scandinavia, and North America. Her contributions can be situated alongside many other women in Britain addressing the links between psychology and architecture, including writers, psychologists, and psychotherapists such as Marion Milner, Muriel Barron, Nan Fairbrother, Jessie Murray, Julia Turner, Molly Pritchard, and Anna Freud.



Grace Cope, living room of a model house in Uxbridge near London. Illustrated in *Designs for Homes*, 1934.



Grace Cope, 'disgruntling room' in a house near London. Illustrated in *Designs for Homes*, 1934.

Chloethiel Woodard Smith Builds an Embassy

Kathleen James-Chakraborty

Chloethiel Woodard Smith (1910–1992) was the most prominent and successful woman architect of her generation in the United States. Even before she established her own practice in 1963, as the leading partner in the Washington, D.C.-based firm of Satterlee and Smith, she became the first woman to design an embassy for the United States government. Smith's embassy in Asuncíon, Paraguay, was one of a series the United States, which had previously more often bought and transformed existing structures, erected around the world in the 1950s as Cold War showcases of its commitment to modern architecture. Its advocates argued that this series symbolised the country's commitment to democracy and individual expression. At the same time, architects were encouraged to respond to local climatic conditions in appropriate ways. In tropical conditions like those Smith addressed in Paraguay, this entailed screen walls and double roofs to assist in cooling at a time when air conditioning remained an expensive luxury.

Smith, already an expert on South American architecture, was well positioned to pay unusual attention to the local context, although she had not previously traveled to Paraguay. Building there was a challenge, with imported materials shipped up river from Argentina by a Danish construction firm, as no one from the United States was interested in the job. Walls were often tiled instead of plastered to resist the damp.

That Smith was also the wife of a diplomat who had been posted with her husband to Montreal, Canada, and La Paz, Bolivia, gave her unusual insight into the job. Where most of her counterparts focused on the formal spaces in which diplomatic encounters with the host country were staged, Smith was particularly attentive to the places where staff and their families would relax far from home. The architectural highlight of the compound, which included the chancery and a residence for the ambassador, was the cantina facing the swimming pool. Here, one could eat a hamburger on a screened porch while watching children splashing nearby.

Finally, although the Cold War generally saw the imposition of American norms and taste abroad, Smith carried much of what she learned on the job back to Washington, where motifs she first employed in Asuncíon in order to demonstrate her attentiveness to South American architectural practice can be found in Capitol Park, an apartment and town house development located just blocks to the south of the Capitol, whose early residents included members of Congress as well as Thurgood Marshall, the legendary Civil Rights lawyer and first African American to serve on the Supreme Court, and Robert Weaver, who, as the first secretary for Housing and Urbanism, was also the first Black member of the cabinet.

Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Swimming Pool and Cantina, United States Embassy, Asuncíon, Paraguay, 1959. National Archives Catalog.

Fisk University: Skyscraper in Miniature

George Francis-Kelly

Fisk University was founded in 1866 in Nashville, Tennessee, after the United States Civil War, with the intention of providing newly-freed slaves with an academic education. After the famed 'Jubilee Singers' helped popularise spiritual music and drew new financial resources to the institution, Fisk became one of the most respected colleges in the segregated South providing African Americans with a liberal arts education.

Fisk's mission fell out of favour in the early twentieth century when academic education for African Americans was often seen as less desirable than practical, agricultural, and manual education. Fisk thus struggled for funding. The college's new white President and trustees enforced rules and discipline that limited the academic and social freedoms of the Black student body. In 1925, this caused students to rebel and the administration to be replaced.

The college's new President, Thomas Jones, sought to redevelop Fisk, hiring new Black faculty members and acknowledging the demands for freedom which stemmed from the 'New Negro' movement sweeping U.S. cities. This also included several new campus buildings, among them a chemistry building and a nine-story library, Cravath Hall. The $400,000 library was designed by Henry C. Hibbs, an acclaimed architect of schools and universities in the region.

Inside, the decoration included on the ground floor and reading rooms continued to highlight the conventional views of academic excellence to which Fisk aspired. Yet there were also many references to the new, more radical conception of racial identity which was emerging. The famed collector and archivist Arturo Schomburg designed and curated one of the first special collections dedicated to Black history, located on the third floor of the library. Furthermore, the acclaimed Harlem Renaissance artist Aaron Douglas was commissioned to paint two murals on the walls of the reading and catalog rooms which explored themes of Black history and identity.

As a building designed by a white architect commissioned by a white college president and funded by white philanthropists, Cravath Hall Library could be seen as yet another large campus tower. Observing the library in closer detail, however, reveals how African Americans interjected in the ambition, design, and use of the building, which balanced competing ideas of a distinctly Black modernity to highlight new forms of racial pride and educational progress.

Henry C. Hibbs, Cravath Library, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1930. Images-USA, 2016. Alamy.

The Belgian Friendship Building at Virginia Union University

Kathleen James-Chakraborty, Katherine Kuenzli, and Bryan Clark Green

The Belgian Friendship Building at Virginia Union University, composed of parts of the Belgian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair of 1939–40, was the first example of European modernism on a campus in the United States. Its erection in Richmond began before Ludwig Mies van der Rohe began to build at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago or Alvar Aalto and the Architects Collaborative were commissioned to design Baker House and the Harvard Graduate Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A historically Black university was thus in the vanguard, although the reasons a structure originally designed in part to house exhibitions celebrating Belgium's exploitive colonisation of the Congo found its way to Richmond had more to do with politics than stylistic innovation.

Designed by a trio of major Belgian architects – Victor Bourgeois, Léon Stynen, and Henry van de Velde – the Belgian Pavilion in Flushing Meadows stood out for appearing to be constructed of permanent materials, including a facade composed of Courtrai tile atop a base of schist panels from the Ardennes as well as large sheets of plate glass. Inside, the black marble lining the Hall of Honour was equally impressive. A tower housing a carillon provided a focal point for the prominently located and popular building, in which well-received examples of Belgian artisanship and manufacturing were exhibited alongside Congolese art and diamonds.

The German invasion and successful occupation of Belgium in May 1940 left the pavilion in the hands of the government in exile. Jan-Albert Goris, a Belgian civil servant, schemed to get the cost of disassembling it covered by 'donating' the structure to an educational institution. Virginia Union, which was already trying to raise funds for a new library, took the bait. The national fundraising campaign, which garnered support from first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the Rockefeller-supported General Education Board, and a who's who of prominent African Americans, was led by John Malcus Ellison, the university's first Black president. Jessie Vann, the editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier,* a leading African American weekly, pledged $25,000; in consequence the tower was named for her late husband Robert L. Vann, a Virginia Union alumnus and the paper's former editor. The tower thus served as a quiet riposte to the notorious sequence of Confederate memorials lining Richmond's Monument Avenue.

Although by no means conceived by its Belgian sponsors as a monument to African American progress, the Belgian Friendship Building became not only a testimonial to interracial and international goodwill, but a means of enacting African American progress. It provided a leading Black-led liberal arts university – which

prided itself on the number of clergy and educators it had trained, including the presidents of other colleges and universities – with improved facilities. Those who studied in the building's library and science laboratories, or who played basketball or listened to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the gymnasium that doubled as an auditorium, went on to distinguished careers in fields as diverse as Virginia and national politics and the National Basketball Association.

For Our New Day, 1965. Virginia Union University Archives and Special Collections.

Tennessee State University: The ‘Separate but Equal’ Campus

George Francis-Kelly

Across the U.S. South, legal challenges to racial segregation focused on higher education, arguing that these states violated the ‘equal’ opportunities and facilities required in the ‘separate but equal’ justification for Jim Crow laws. In Tennessee, these challenges focused on the only publicly-funded college for African Americans in the state, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, now Tennessee State University.

In response to lawsuits, Tennessee authorities invested millions of dollars into the Nashville college during the 1940s and 1950s in a desperate effort to maintain segregated education. Crucially, the State Board of Education spent over $6,000,000 to improve and expand the college campus between 1945 and 1949, adding nine new buildings.

To achieve this, the state hired McKissack & McKissack, one of the largest and the most successful Black-owned architectural firms in the United States, to design the new campus buildings. McKissack adapted the Art Deco *moderne* style they had developed throughout Tennessee in the 1930s to conform to the popularity and innovation of postwar campuses.

Tennessee A&I’s new structures emphasised new materials, ribbon windows, and more flexible floorplans to accentuate the modern appearance that educational authorities hoped would negate any accusations that they had failed to provide facilities for African Americans. Spaces for teaching and laboratories for the college’s first engineering courses, a large gymnasium, and an expanded library all underscored how Tennessee A&I was modernising college education for Black students.

McKissack’s new campus dramatically improved the material experience of studying at Tennessee A&I, providing students with a higher standard of education. Yet the underlying reason for these new buildings – the maintenance of segregation – meant they also reinforced racial hierarchies. The new modernist style at US campuses has been seen to represent progress and democracy, but it could also be wielded to mask injustice and inequality.

Graduation in front of McKissack and McKissack, Martha Brown Memorial Library, Tennessee State University, 1949. Getty Images.

Shaw University: The Black Power Campus

George Francis-Kelly

Shaw University is the oldest HBCU in the U.S. South, founded in 1865 in Raleigh, North Carolina. The development of Shaw's campus in its first decades articulated a particular vision of Black uplift and ambition, replicating the elaborate Victorian and Second Empire styles popular in the region at the time. Yet by the time of Shaw's centenary, the university's fortunes had changed. It struggled to secure a financial future and enlarge its student enrolment, and philanthropists directed funds towards other Black colleges who could then attract further talent and funding.

Two key events revitalized Shaw. In 1960, the famed Civil Rights leader and Shaw alumnus Ella Baker founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) on campus, which became one of the most celebrated youth protest movements of the 1960s. Three years later, James Cheek was appointed Shaw's President.

Cheek, also an alumnus as well as a former Theology professor, brought a renewed, youthful vision for Shaw's future, which he coined the 'Shaw Renaissance'. As the Sixties progressed, this vision became aligned with the radical ideas about rights and protest that embodied the 'Black Power' era. Cheek spearheaded a new educational program for Shaw that coincided with new ideas about the accessibility of higher education for all, and focused particularly on the emerging field of Urban Studies, viewed as a remedy for the many inequalities faced by African American communities.

Cheek's most notable legacy at Shaw, however, was his transformation of the campus. The President hoped that a new, modern campus would both galvanise and symbolise a new era for the university. In 1965, he engaged the local white architects McGee and Scovil to design ten new buildings on an enlarged campus, ranging from two high-rise dormitories to a sleek geometric Administration Building.

Cheek was dissatisfied, however, with the overall look and feel of the campus, deeming it uninspiring and 'woefully lacking'. Instead, he became enraptured by the noted New York theatre architect Hugh Hardy, who had previously worked as a consultant for Shaw's arts programme. Hardy was likewise highly engaged with the new social thought emerging in the Sixties which characterised Cheek's ambitions for Shaw. Correspondence between the two shows passionate, sometimes heated exchanges but also a clear connection around the question of architecture's ability to contribute to community engagement. Hardy appears to have flattered and encouraged Cheek's grand

ambitions, suggesting that campus architecture could aid 'Shaw's potential to escape being rural and ingrown' and that by employing him, 'the environment of Shaw will be illuminated against the boldest of contemporary thought'.

Ultimately, both Cheek and Hardy's vision for Shaw was too ambitious for a university still struggling to secure a safe financial footing. When Cheek left to join Howard University in 1969, Hardy's masterplan for Shaw fell apart. All that was constructed were two interconnected iron sheds located at the far southern end of campus, designed to be a temporary 'Community Service Center', to improve local health and social care. Yet the buildings remain today, having been converted into a Speech and Hearing Clinic.

Nevertheless, the development of Shaw's campus in the 1960s highlights how new ideas regarding radical politics and the need to resolve urban problems could inform architectural planning, and how these buildings could be used to imagine how a new society built upon racial justice could be formed.

McGee and Scovil, Master Plan, Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1965. Shaw University Archives.

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Design: Studio Suss, Dublin

‘Expanding Agency: Women, Race, and the Dissemination of Modern Architecture’ explores the ways in which women and ethnic minorities, predominantly African Americans, contributed to the spread of modern architectural ideas, broadly defined to include such aspects as kitchens as well as architectural style, with a focus on the 1920s through the 1970s. Writing about architecture enabled women to make a living while shaping the taste of their often largely female readership. Creating businesses that marketed new approaches to architecture, its construction, and its furnishing offered women with a means of supporting themselves as well as championing new ideas. In addition to journalism and entrepreneurship, new roles for women emerged out of their historic engagement with charitable activities, which now encompassed international aid work and the provision of social services on the local and national levels. Equally importantly, the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities provided students and faculty with settings designed to empower them, which, in at least some cases, were also commissioned by African American clients and designed by pioneering African American architects. Taken together, the examples showcased by this project and its exhibition draw attention to some of the ways in which gender and race shaped the modern built environment.