



"The Temple of Poseidon at Paestum (450 B.C.), an example that suggests that the main stream of plastic evolution no longer flowed through Colonial Greece at the time of its construction." Photo R.D.M

Following "The Pompeian House," in 1933, and "Conflict in Hellas," in 1935, came a series of more detailed and more profound studies in Greek architecture, all of which were published in the "South African Architectural Record." It is worth noting them in the order in which they appeared, because this order clearly reflects Martienssen's conception of architecture, and the dialectical method which he employed in studying it. His studies were as follows:—

1. "The Hellenistic House—With special reference to examples at Delos," November, 1939.
2. "Greek Cities," January, 1941.
3. "Some Aspects of Doric Temple Architecture," March, 1942.
4. "Space Construction in Greek Architecture with special reference to Sanctuary Planning," May, 1942.

Impressive as is the range and content of these studies they are the more remarkable for the logic of their succession. They begin with the microcosm and culminate with the macrocosm. From the particular they pass to the general. Separately they represent well defined stages in a long process

of integration and as such are greatly illuminating. Together they constitute the integration itself, an integration by no means complete or final, yet so widely based and scientifically made that it threw new light on the whole field of Greek architecture. This was duly recognised by the University of the Witwatersrand in 1941, when it conferred on Martienssen the degree of Doctor of Literature for a thesis based on the above studies and researches carried out in the field, that is, on actual sites in the Mediterranean Basin and in various European museums. As stated elsewhere in this journal, overseas scholars in England and America also recognised Martienssen's contribution to the study of Greek architecture, and it is to be hoped that in due course his work in this field will be published in book form as a tribute to his scholarship.

The main results of Martienssen's researches in Greek architecture may be summarised as follows:—

Firstly, he drew attention to the domestic work whose architectural importance nineteenth century and even the greater part of twentieth century scholarship had failed to realise. For the first time he showed that, contrary to the general opinion

of classical scholars and architects alike, the Greeks did achieve something in their domestic architecture, and that their achievement in this field, socially as well as aesthetically, was equal to that of their monumental architecture, their theatre, literature, and their plastic arts.

Secondly, he produced for the first time in English, a comprehensive picture of Greek town-planning ranging from pre-Hellenic, through Hellenic, to Hellenistic times. In it he demonstrated that contrary to the judgments contained even in the most reliable works on Greek architecture, pre-Hellenic town arrangement as evidenced particularly by the remains of the Minoan town of Gournia was not haphazard and not without considerable formal quality; and that Hellenistic architecture in the medium of town planning and building, so far from being aesthetically inferior to that of the Hellenic age at its best, was one of the greatest achievements of the Greeks and one of their most valuable contributions to western civilisation. Incidentally he also gave archeologists fresh argument for dating the plan of the town of Selinus in Sicily from the 5th rather than from the 6th century B.C.

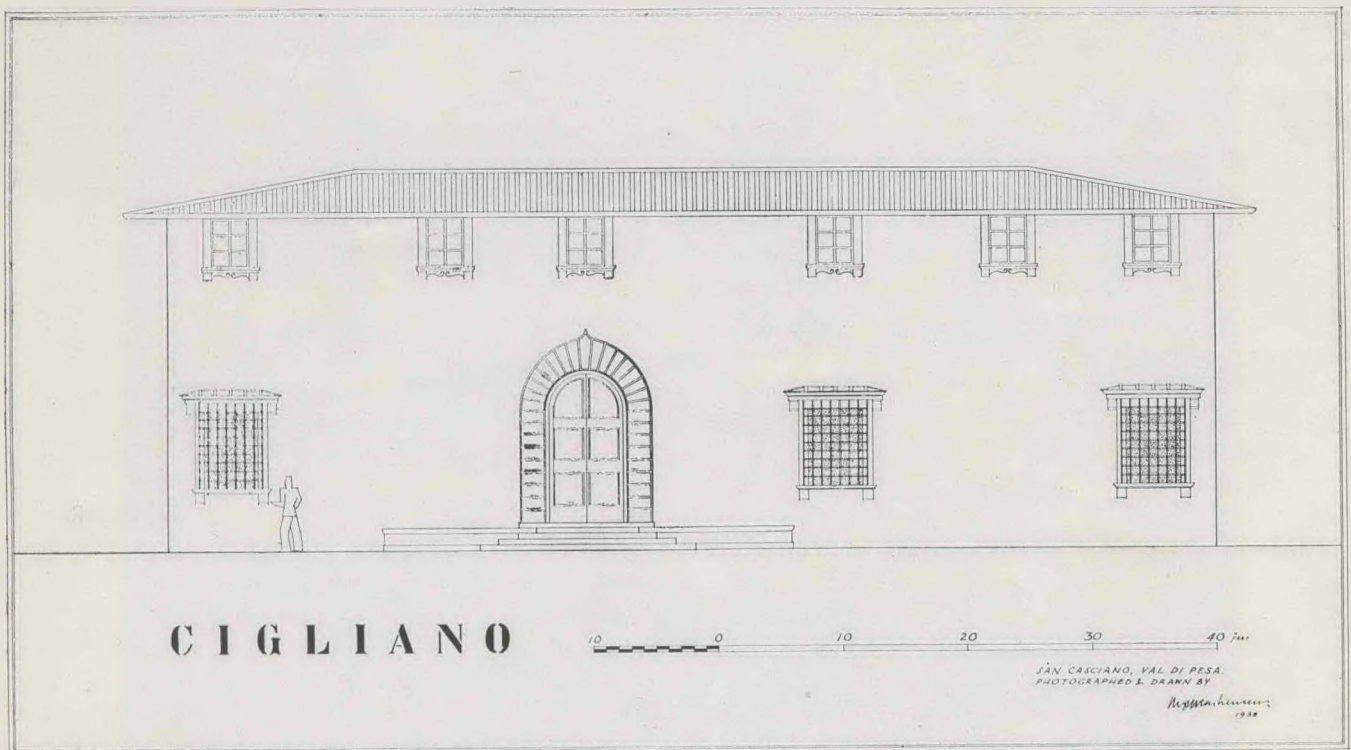
Thirdly, and this is perhaps the most important result of Martienssen's researches in Greek architecture, especially from the standpoint of contemporary architectural criticism, he established criteria for appreciating the aesthetic order of

historical architecture on so wide a basis that they are entirely applicable to contemporary problems of planning and design. Moreover, he set such a high standard of criticism that in its very shortcomings were the seeds of a new philosophy of architecture, more comprehensive and more human than any in the past.

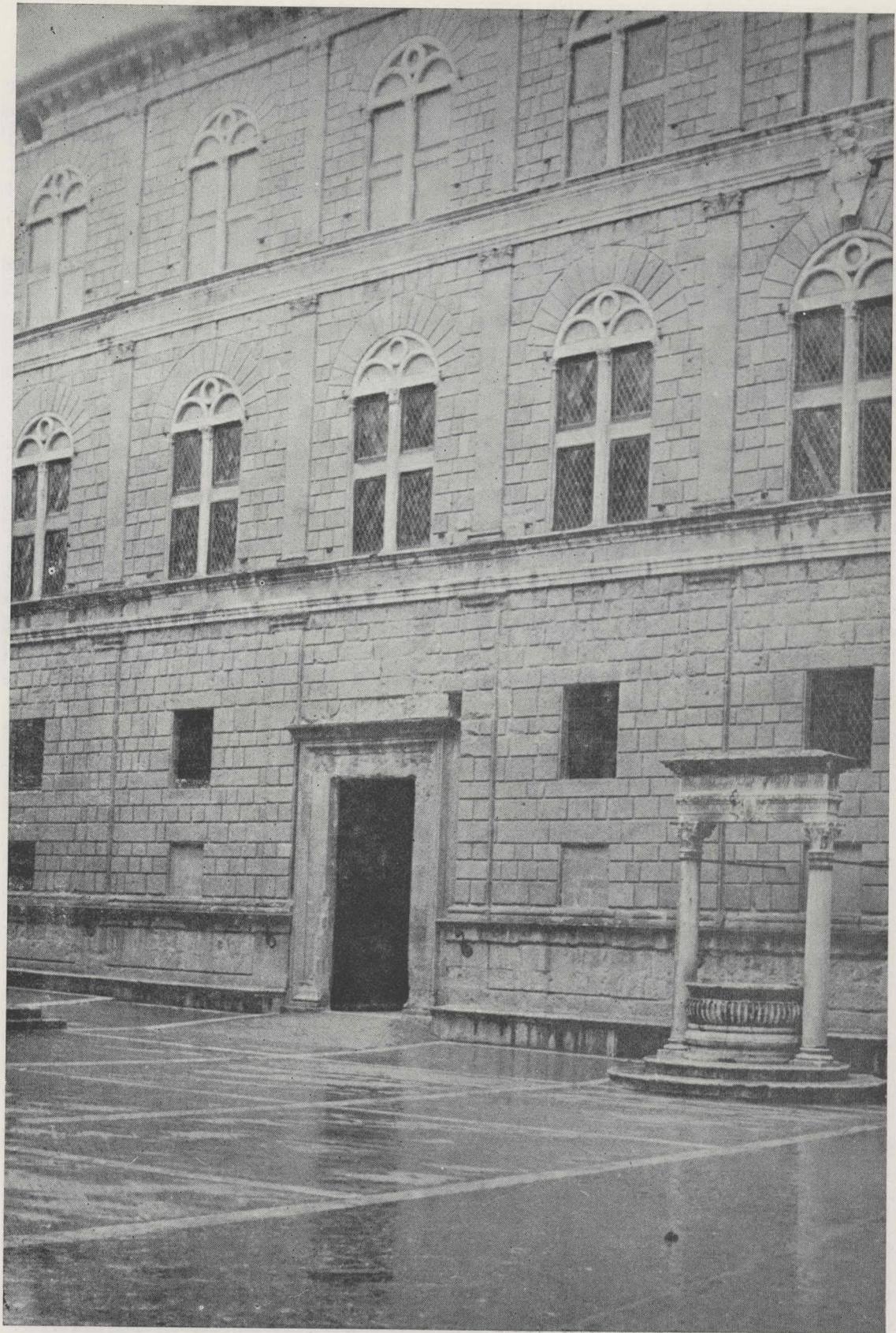
Martienssen's studies in Greek architecture must rank as the high-water mark of attainment in this field. They are unsurpassed in depth of insight, breadth of understanding, and brilliance of exposition. No appreciation of his scholarship can be made, however, without some reference to his studies on the architecture of the Italian Renaissance which were published in the "South African Architectural Record" as follows:—

1. "Chronological Survey of Italian Renaissance Architecture." "Facade." November, 1937.
2. "Palazzo Piccolomini—A Critical Excursion." January, 1939.
3. "Cigliano—A House of the Quattrocento." May, 1941.

Here again is to be found the inexorable desire and the unrelenting effort to understand more than just to know the facts of historical architecture. And here also is demonstrated the dialectical, synoptic approach as the way to the goal of understanding. The material for investigation is as different







PALAZZO PICCOLOMINI

Photo R.D.M



from that of Greece and Rome as is the civilisation of the Italian Renaissance from its classical forerunners, but Martienssen's method of dealing with it remains unchanged. To him architecture both in theory and in practice was the "science of space definition" "par excellence," and it was in this light that he sought to discover the fundamentals, "the root formulae," of Italian Renaissance architecture, and explain its formal and aesthetic significance. The extraordinary success with which he did so rests primarily on the great range and power of his integration of the available knowledge.

For the uninitiated, and more so for the student of architecture, the "Chronological Survey of Italian Renaissance Architecture" and "Facade" illuminated in one brilliant flash of light, the sources, the head-streams of creative endeavour, and the main stream of achievement of Italian Renaissance architecture as they had never been illuminated hitherto. For the initiated, and more so for the "expert" in historical architecture, "Palazzo Piccolomini—A Critical Excursion" corrected a long-standing misjudgment and misrepresentation of the architectural significance of the Palazzo Piccolomini in Pienza, in relation to its prototype, the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence. Martienssen's case for the example in Pienza was conclusive, and once again raised the standards of historical architectural criticism to an uncommonly high level from which others could rise to still greater heights of critical appreciation and understanding.

The paper on "Cigliano—A House of the Quattrocento," which, as Martienssen modestly stated, was a footnote to the studies on the Italian Renaissance contained in the "South

African Architectural Record," of November, 1937, served to bring into focus the somewhat neglected architectural importance of the relatively small scale work of the period, namely, the country house as opposed to the town house. In doing so it showed that the organising, planning, and aesthetic achievement of Italian Renaissance architecture in this field was every whit as great as in the field of large scale palatial building, and it also added to the strength of Martienssen's integration and interpretation of the subject as a whole. The final result, if it can at all be regarded as final, was unity, clarity, comprehension, humanisation, instead of multiplicity, obscurity, mystery, dehumanisation. And so it was with all Martienssen's work in the theory and practice of architecture.

Why, it must finally be asked, was Martienssen so absorbed in the study of classical architecture, and why did he devote so much time and energy to this aspect of his life's work? The answer must surely be that more than anything else he wanted to understand and contribute to the life of his own time through the medium of architecture; that he wanted to create for himself and for his fellow-beings a life and a setting for life commensurate with the highest attributes of man as a thinking, feeling, creating, and social being; and that in order to achieve these objects he looked for guidance to the lessons of human history, to be found, if assiduously sought, in the buildings small and large, in the cities and in the countrysides in which it took place. In paying homage to the past he did homage to the present and the future. That was his greatness as a scholar, and that was the secret of his success as an architect.

# THE ART INTERPRETER AND CRITIC

Dr. Rex Martienssen possessed a sure and intense aesthetic sensibility and he retained a constant interest in, and a devotion to the visual arts.

A characteristic desire for knowledge and experience, intensified and to a certain extent satisfied by travel, academic pursuits and much general reading, occasioned an extensive and critical study of painting and sculpture, concurrent with his architectural activities. His earliest personal contact with European art occurred in 1925 in the course of his participation in the First South African Students' Tour, with regard to which a close personal friend has remarked: "There was an enormous quickening of his perceptive and critical process . . . and his mind was indelibly impressed with the architectonic forms he found there." The predominant influence at this time was that of the work of the Dutch artists and architects, and in painting, de Hoogh's work in particular. In a subsequent comment referring to his first visit to the National Gallery he wrote: "I intended to sip, rather than drink, the richness that awaited me. I was unprejudiced, and eager to meet old friends (familiar for many years in prints) paradoxically for the first time."<sup>1</sup> He refers here to the work of Crome, Alfred Stevens, Turner, Manet, Corot, Purvis de Chavannes, de Hoogh and Hobema. de Hoogh was an early favourite who seemed to epitomise for him the simplicity and tranquility of Holland that so impressed him.

Whenever he travelled, which was as often as possible, and wherever he went, he took a keen interest in his surroundings, in the country and landscape and the people who inhabited it. His travels were periods of intensive absorption, used to extend his knowledge and interests, to confirm his own ideas evolved from much study and research in the interim periods and to enrich his extensive vocabulary of art and architecture.

He took every opportunity of following up his interests, which covered a wide range of visual experience, varying from the primitive art of the Bushman and African Negro to the maturity of Léger. With great enthusiasm he gleaned and gathered his information—often from obscure sources; he "discovered" Marcel Gromaire during the course of a visit to the Luxembourg, in 1933, and subsequently met the artist in Paris; he imparted his knowledge freely to both students and colleagues, and through the medium of his writings to a larger group, not all of whom were sympathetic. He was greatly impressed with the work of Léger, which, but

for him, might have remained to this day an unknown quantity in this country. He visited Léger, too, in his Paris studio, in 1937. This contact with a man he so greatly admired was a "memorable experience" when "even the most casual remarks took on the colour of deep pronouncements after they had been sifted, received and acknowledged."<sup>2</sup>

In his approach to all the visual arts he instinctively sought the fundamentals, and in spite of a romantic streak in his nature, he shunned the romantic and sentimental, the trivial and insipid in art. The grandeur and picturesqueness of the natural landscape held great appeal for him, but the trite representationalism of naturalistic landscape paintings induced no response but aversion. His approach was essentially classic,



BRONZE AGE CYCLADIC FIGURE





ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE BY NICOLAS POUSSIN

"Exquisite poise, with absolute clarity of volume and recession links Poussin with the masters who were still to come—Corot in his Italian mood and Cézanne of the Paysage Rocheux."

seeking for the formal abstract values as opposed to those of realism, phantasy and to a certain extent lyricism. Although his taste was catholic his studies and labours were circumscribed, by his three fundamental concepts of art—form, colour and spatial relationship—which were concomitant. He brought to bear, too, in his appreciation, a marked scholarship and sensibility, an ardent enthusiasm and spontaneity—indicative of a vivid and active mind—which he tempered by a keen discrimination. The criteria which conditioned his selection did not limit it, and the accent on form gave coherence and stability to his choice. It included works of such differing characteristics as that of the Archaic Greeks, of Michaelangelo, Rodin, Poussin, Corot and Léger. The formal abstract qualities of the Argive and Cycladic sculptures mingle with the ruthless "significance" of Michaelangelo and with the inherent abstraction of Donatello. Of Rodin's Balzac he said: "It is the expression of the spirit of Balzac not of his outward

figure."<sup>3</sup> His interest in Rodin's work represents a phase leading to a more clearly defined attitude, satisfied by formal and abstract qualities of both primitive and contemporary sculpture. Primitive sculpture, particularly that of the Archaic Greeks, left a very considerable impression on him, being infinitely more stimulating than the "limpid and polished high-school athletes of Polyclitus."<sup>4</sup> He reacted most strongly to the arbitrary acceptance of a standard of "realism" as the criterion of Greek sculpture and the assumption that all these sculptures were attempting to portray a physically ideal human type, which automatically rejected a large body of work which was not commensurable with the "naturalistic" standard. "We are to believe," he said, "that it was presumption to create sculpture—a slightly ludicrous effort which fell far short of the embodiment of Scopas-passion, Lysippus-elegance, and Phidias-serenity . . . We are to believe that the red Sunion Apollo and the timeless Delian figure were





PAYSAGE ROCHEUX

PAUL CÉZANNE

but pathetic attempts to achieve perfection," for, on the contrary, "when the impulse is of an abstract nature (as for instance, the idea of a diety conveyed by a carved idol) our interpretation should not be coloured by comparison with forms found in nature. For by such comparison we deny immediately the metaphysical attributes of the work."<sup>5</sup>

His dialectic evaluation of this early work, which raised it out of the mire of archaeological derogation, set it on a firm base of valid aesthetic significance, and found a counterpoint in the contemporary sculpture of Henry Moore and Constantin Brancusi. The link is discernible in the "metaphysical attributes" of these works; incidentally, too, some of it shows a decided influence of "primitive" sculpture. They demonstrate the purely abstract and geometrical approach and express the intellectual significance of life and form.

As a result therefore of his criteria, he reacted almost

instinctively to the untrammelled; his interests lay in those works which were most highly non-representational—abstract painting and sculpture, ballet, pottery and typography.

The impressionists were the "stepping-stones" leading to that form of visual expression which embodied most positively his tenets, and in which his appreciation seemed to mature, for even in 1933 he displayed far more interest in those painters who were preoccupied with form. Gauguin's work probably appealed to him as much for its bold tropical richness as for its suggestion of travel in remote places. The passionate and dynamic turbulence, the blazing colour and draughtsmanship of van Gogh was of but passing interest. He responded to the exceptional, simple and unexpected quality of the drawings of Matisse. The character of Degas' ballet studies, with their "captive movement," space and plastic composition, so strongly reminiscent of the other art, touched a responsive chord, for he saw in choreography the



"generation of successive and interpenetrating space patterns" and in ballet, a "spectacle employing a space technique, enhanced by music and with the human body used as an instrument of Art."<sup>6</sup>

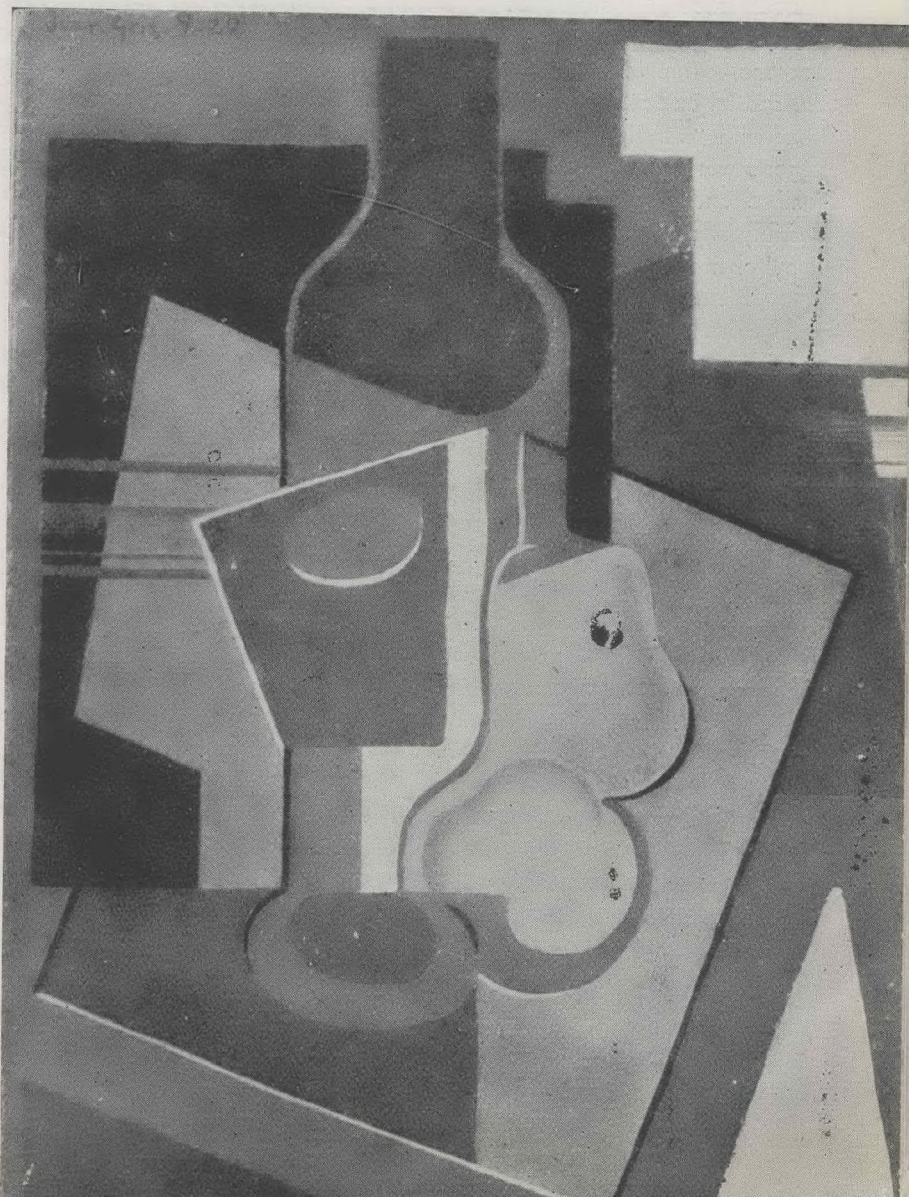
Martienssen's studies brought him into contact with Cézanne's paintings in about 1933. He was greatly moved by the architectural basis and the ideals behind Cézanne's work. Cézanne brought volume back into painting; he realised that colour could play a vital rôle in the expression of volume and that he could draw with colour; he realised that we perceive form not as an outline first drawn and then coloured in, but as a series of distinct planes defined by colour; he worked as a "disciplined researcher who would establish a universal set of values, and as an interpreter of the visually significant world in which we live."<sup>7</sup> The sense of geometry and abstraction in Cézanne's work is, of course, explained by his dictum that "Everything in nature adheres to the cone, the cylinder and

the cube." That Cézanne was responsible for the discovery of the essential geometry of the vernacular buildings of the South of France, and through the medium of two-dimensional analysis, showed that the buildings had volume as well as surface, was an assertion made by Martienssen in a study in 1939. He further suggested that this was a "lesson for the later masters of painting and architecture to interpret and apply" and, too; "had Cézanne lived even longer it is likely that he would have extended the framework of his researches until the natural elements in recognisable contexts had been replaced by abstract arrangements having an intrinsic and organised relationship independent of the accidental."<sup>8</sup>

Martienssen saw Cézanne not only as a vital colourist, as one of the initiators of the Cubist movement, but as "an influence and force in the schools of painting and architecture whose principles are closely derived from his teachings."

Following Cézanne, and before his interests finally centred

STILL LIFE (1920) JUAN GRIS





round the paintings of Léger, the phase of Cubism engrossed him considerably, particularly the later works of Juan Gris and the "flat" still-life studies of Braque, and to a lesser extent, some of the abstracts of Picasso, the "changeable wizard of modern painting." Appreciated for their varying characteristics, these works were a conditioning element in Martienssen's approach to Léger's art, they existed, too, as the basis for critical comparison.

It was, however, in Léger's paintings that he found the greatest satisfaction; he found them an endless source of inspiration, his appreciation seemed to crystallise, and in them his concepts found concrete expression. From the time he first came into contact with Léger, Martienssen followed his development with striking constancy and with the sympathy and devotion of a kindred spirit. It was a source of enrichment to his knowledge and personality. Martienssen recognised the direction given to Léger's earlier researches by that "architectural" bias which was the result of Léger's previous work as an architect. M. Tériad, in his monograph on Léger, has remarked: "L'art de Léger est un art de l'espace. Il est par conséquent très près de l'architecture." This, no doubt, was one of the factors which influenced Martienssen. He felt the spatial and structural qualities of Léger's early preoccupations with "La vie actuelle." He had a long attachment for Léger's work of the early twenties—those groups of "rotund, sombre and profoundly immobile" women, and a long and possibly stronger attachment for Léger's more recent "objective" abstract compositions.

Of the earlier period Martienssen said: "We find in the monumental and architectural period of his activity (1919-1929) that his work never became solely the expression of a personal and internal vision as did that of Picasso and Braque. His work showed a preoccupation with, and formal interpretation of the essential external realities of the contemporary scene."<sup>9</sup> Martienssen has traced the constancy of the fundamentally spatial aspect of Léger's work through the different phases of his development. He saw, in the gradual reduction of the number and complexity of volumic elements, and in the move towards the more "objective" compositions, Léger's move towards a wider and more universal interpretation of the materials of architecture. He saw in each fresh experiment the demonstration of the new laws of "space-colour" which "resolve with almost mathematical economy the complex problems of space enclosure," which are basically architectural. Léger himself has said: "Modern architecture born of modern painting offers the people infinitely greater and more reasonable possibilities of existence than did the preceding architecture." Martienssen's own statements and his teaching reflect a similar attitude. The analogy between

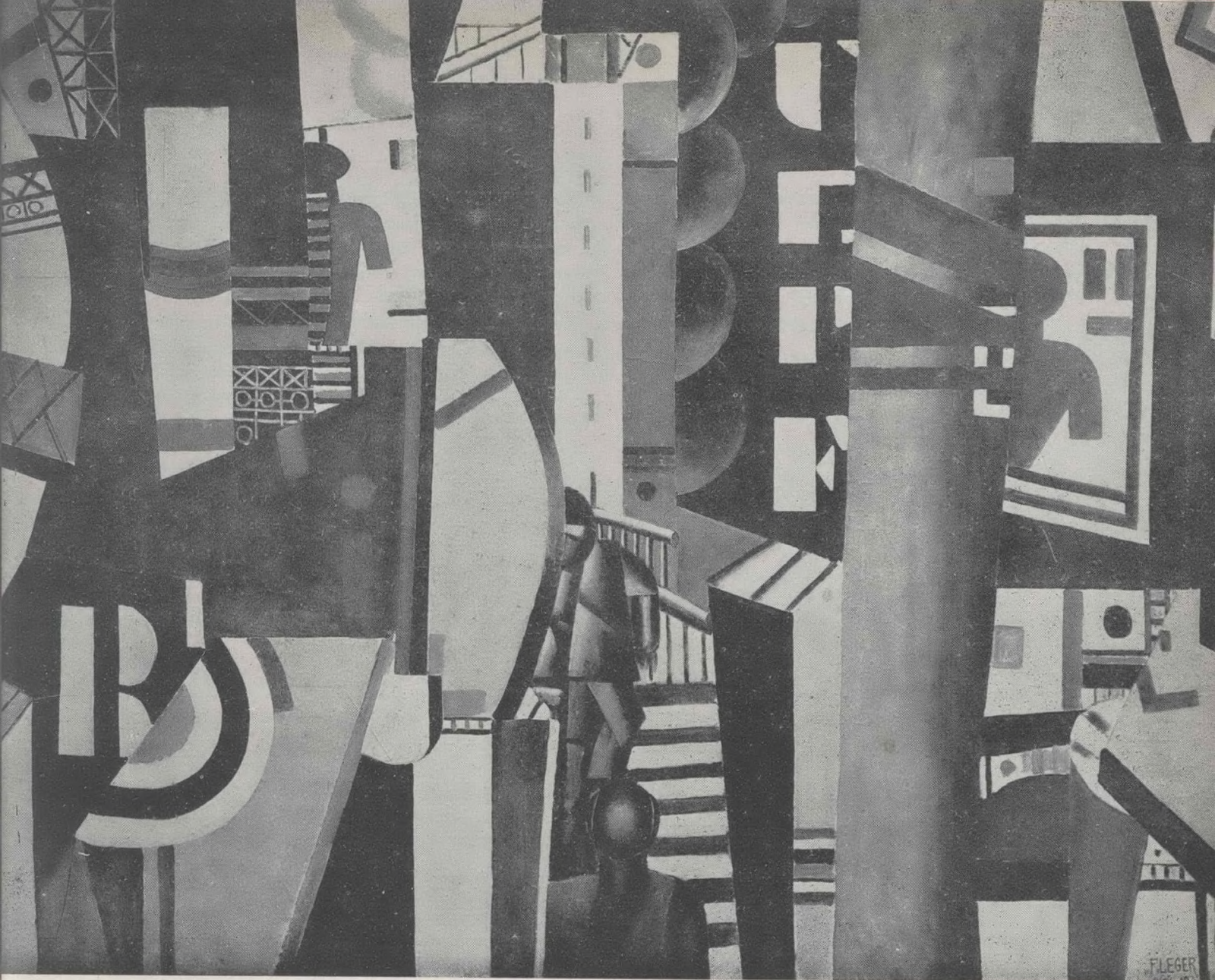
painting and the arrangement of architectural form suggested itself to Martienssen—he quoted a statement by Kandinsky—when discussing the main facade of his own house. He foresaw, too, the possibility of a far more intimate and direct relationship between art and architecture—the result of the destruction of the barriers existing between the three arts, painting, sculpture and architecture.

In this connection he found the house at Cap Martin Roquebrune, Architects, Eileen Grey and Jean Babovici, "an arresting demonstration of architecture which is complete in itself, and in which the traditional separation and co-existence of the three plastic arts within a single system is replaced by a single entity having the functions and attributes of all three."<sup>10</sup> Architecture defines the "space," sculpture sublimated in the forms of architecture, conditions them, and painting, through colour, is an extension of them. The limiting functional rôle is architectural, and the common link between the three is the space medium in which they are conceived.

The interest displayed in this demonstration was a result of a reintegration of Martienssen's visual concepts from which the idea of space emerges as a vital factor in his appreciation. Constructivism was for him an indication of the gradual breaking down of these barriers and a means whereby this new incorporation of the plastic arts could be achieved. An architectural theme was implicit in "the constructivist stage sets of the Meyerhold Theatre," in "the 'space-constructions' of Gabo and Moholy-Nagy," and "in the paintings of Fernand Léger and Jean Hélion."<sup>11</sup> It was this attitude that prompted him to write: "Thus the final synthesis in which architecture is complete in itself (having absorbed the attributes of painting and sculpture) represents a stage towards which all three expressions have been tending."<sup>12</sup> He has demonstrated this "tendency," in some degree, in the design of his own house.

As a measure of the deep appreciation and understanding that Martienssen evinced during his meeting with Léger in Paris, it is to be recorded that Martienssen was invited by the artist to write a short book on his work for English readers. It reflects much credit on Martienssen's sympathy and perception that Léger should have made this suggestion after so brief a contact. In a subsequent letter to Martienssen, in June, 1938, Léger suggested that the essay might take a dialectical form, in which his work and that of Picasso would have been considered in argumentative opposition. The project appealed immensely to Martienssen, for, no doubt, he was fully equipped for such a task, and too, the form that the book would have taken—that of the typical French soft-covered monographs, which had such a typographical appeal for him—and the manner of presentation, would have been that which he applied to his other studies and researches.





## LA VILLE FERNAND LÉGER

It is to be greatly regretted that he was unable to embark on this at the time, for with the advent of the war later, the project was never to find its place with Martienssen's other fluid and scholarly literary works.

Surrealism never had any appeal for Martienssen, for its morbid psychological probings into the underworld of the subconscious were the antithesis of his delight in the fresh and sunny aspects of human life, where reason prevailed. He saw it as a cult, a concession to contemporary man's neurosis. The whole conception of the "Super-realists" was opposed to the intellectuality of abstract art; it is not strange, therefore, that Martienssen, whose aesthetic temperament

demanding those very qualities that the Surrealists abhorred, was so patently out of sympathy with them.

Martienssen's extensive activities left him little time to attempt a delineation of his own concepts, or to turn his attention to serious painting even if he had had a strong desire to do so. He found it more absorbing and instructive to contemplate the paintings of the many artists whose work he found so stimulating. He did, however, venture into this field some years ago, when he contented himself, apart from a few original studies, with making copies of a small number of the works of contemporary artists. Chief among these was a study he made of Léger's "Les Odalisques," for which pur-



pose he had only a monochrome reproduction. The colours he derived from analytical reasoning and his knowledge of Léger's palette of the period. He was greatly excited when he subsequently found that he had achieved an almost exact copy. Another of his studies was a copy of a Lurcat landscape, so precise that many could not determine which was the original.

His greatest preoccupation was, however, with the "Record" and it is in this that one sees the practical demonstration of Martienssen as an artist. Here he was working in a medium which had an instinctive appeal for him, and in which he could apply his authoritative knowledge of composition and typography in a fresh and highly spontaneous manner. There was something French in Martienssen's temperament which directed his sympathies towards French art and culture, and one sees something of this in his work on the "Record." There is, too, something of the lyrical quality of Italian typography to be seen in the "Record" following his European tour of 1937-38.

He set himself a high standard, and, within the boundaries set by practical technical limitations, he strove always to attain it. The two-dimensional problems of typographical design he tackled with spontaneous enjoyment. A fine sense of

colour and design distinguishes his work in this sphere. The covers of the "Record" which, for many years, have shown a consistently high standard of achievement, remarkable for their unexpectedness, freshness and variety, display far more lyricism than any of his other activities.

These covers are the fruits of his creative endeavour.

#### NOTES TO "THE ART INTERPRETER AND CRITIC."

<sup>1</sup> Martienssen "S.A. Architectural Record," December, 1927, *Reactions and Reflections. An Analogy.*

<sup>2</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," August, 1942, *Fernand Léger in Paris—1938.*

<sup>3</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," December, 1929, *Architecture in Modern Life.*

<sup>4</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," September, 1936, *Changing Generator in Greek Sculpture.*

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," February, 1942, Footnote to *Frontispiece.*

<sup>7</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," March, 1939, *Architecture in Modern Painting.*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Martienssen, "S.A. Architectural Record," October, 1941, *Mediterranean Houses.*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

#### FLOWER AND BUTTERFLY LEGER COLL./R.D.M





## THE HONORARY EDITOR

Martienssen's first contribution to the "South African Architectural Record" was an article entitled "What is Architecture?" This article appeared in June, 1925, when he was a second-year student at the University of the Witwatersrand. For a beginner it was a most appropriate essay with which to enter into the literary sphere of architecture. Not only was it unusual in the choice of its subject but it was also remarkable for the boldness of outlook and power of discernment which it displayed. For Martienssen it marked the beginning of a life's search for the meaning of architecture and of a prolific literary output directed to that end. It was the starting-point of a brilliant academic career which in the literary sphere alone was to bring about a new era in South African architecture.

Unlike most students of his age Martienssen brought a considerable literary equipment to the study of architecture. His school-days were spent largely in reading of his own choice. He preferred books to games, and by the time he first turned to architecture his library showed that he had an extraordinarily wide range of interests and a highly critical appreciation of literature. It is also certain that at this early stage of his development he was fascinated by books in themselves, that is, by their intrinsic qualities of production. For when as a student he submitted his articles to the "South African Architectural Record" for publication, he was greatly concerned with the typographical presentation of them and insisted on proper layout, spatial arrangement, and form.

This early interest in typography as well as literature was reinforced by Martienssen's architectural training. Among the many places that he visited during his first study tour through Europe, in 1926, was the Planten Museum, in Holland. He studied the finest examples of typography and book design to be found there, and in later years during his periodical refresher studies overseas as a university lecturer, he became an authority on book production in England. His library contained many publications that were purely of typographical importance to him, and his critical appreciation of books tended to be coloured as much by their qualities of production as by their literary content.

At the time of his appointment to the staff of the University of the Witwatersrand, in 1932, Martienssen was not only a regular contributor to the "South African Architectural Record," but he also assisted in its publication. The value

of his work in this connection was quickly recognised, and in January, 1932, he was appointed Joint Editor. The occasion was marked by drastic changes in its character and appearance. It became a monthly instead of a quarterly publication and was completely re-designed to incorporate various innovations in format, typography, and illustration, the most striking of which was the use of lower case type for captions. As Martienssen wrote in his first editorial for the new "Record," his aim was "to infuse a spirit of contemporary consciousness, to quicken the architectural pulse . . . to make the journal a sympathetic and vital record of all art activities." The innovations which he introduced boldly proclaimed this aim.

Martienssen's work as Joint Editor of the "South African Architectural Record" covered a period of nearly eleven years and falls naturally into four departments according to his activities as editor, publication technician, artist and writer.

Of his work as editor, which was concerned mainly with the formulation and execution of policy, the best testimony lies in the rich diversity and wide range of subject and illustration to be found in the contents of the journal since 1932. Pursuing his declared aim of raising the standard of architectural thought and appreciation and widening the outlook of architecture, he attempted as far as possible to gear the production of the "Record," not only to South African but also to world architectural and artistic endeavour. That he succeeded in doing so is shown by the recognition which this journal received from architectural and art centres all over the world. Its substance and its literary and aesthetic merits were acknowledged in numerous periodicals of international repute, and internationally known exponents of architecture and art contributed to its pages.

Maintaining the broadest possible policy within the limits of his constituted powers, Martienssen drew attention to the significant aspects of the rich architectural and artistic heritage of the past, linking them to contemporary achievements in painting and sculpture as well as architecture. In recording the best contemporary work both of South African and of overseas architects he established a valuable interchange of ideas and experience between them. He rightly considered that the journal would be failing in its purpose if it served merely local interests, and he did all in his power to make it a source of creative inspiration as well as an outlet for local expression. In this respect he performed a great service to



South African art and architecture, which, without such access to the outside world of creative thought and activity as the journal afforded, could not but tend to stagnate and decline.

Besides editorials which never failed to give a lead in all matters architectural, writings on travel, book reviews, and correspondence, covering a multitude of subjects, all found a place in the "Record." Under Martienssen's encouraging influence, it was used by architects, artists, and students as the forum of their views and was thereby instrumental in developing a broader and more cultured outlook among them. The young idea received special consideration from him. He regarded students not merely as people to be taught and trained, but rather as future architects in whose hands the responsibilities of architecture would eventually lie. With this attitude to students he took every opportunity as an editor to publish their work and so brought it into the orbit of professional and public discussion where it could receive the criticism necessary to its improvement.

The high sense of responsibility which Martienssen displayed in his work as an educator was equally evident in the professional sphere of his activities. As a member of the Central Council of the Institute of South African Architects and of the executive of the Transvaal Provincial Institute, he constantly strove for greater unity and co-operation in the profession by broadening the scope of its corporate functions and aims. This is reflected in the Journal's reports of meetings, and more so in its records of congresses, lectures, and technical reports, many of which were inspired by him. With the resources available to him, flexibility was necessarily the keynote of his editorial policy. He was extremely sensitive to criticism, some of which was of a violent reactionary nature and not infrequently directed towards himself. But he went out of his way to meet it, rejecting that which was destructive, and wherever possible acting upon that which was constructive. In this way he achieved and maintained a high plane of discussion throughout the pages of the Journal, imparting to it a solidity of substance, an integrity of character, and a freshness of spirit which he conceived to be essential to its aims and purposes.

Immediately on assuming the joint-editorship of the "Record," Martienssen set about improving its quality as a production. In order to do so he collaborated with the staff of Messrs. Hayne and Gibson, the printers, in carrying out experimental researches in typography and layout. Due to technical limitations in a printers' works, the results at first did not satisfy his exacting requirements, but he persuaded the printers to import certain new type which enabled him to achieve his purpose. His meticulous attention to detail and insistence on precision coupled with his fine aesthetic judg-

ment and propensity for design had a telling effect on the production of the Journal. As technical advances were made, so its formal character steadily improved and eventually reached a standard comparable to that of the best produced journals in the world. The typography and layout-design in recent numbers of the "Record" shows a strong Italian and American influence, but it is also certain that Martienssen's work has affected overseas productions in the same class. In carrying forward this work he had to contend with considerable opposition from reactionary forces in South African art and architecture, but such opposition only spurred him on to greater effort, and the results that he achieved in the make-up of the "Record" have won for it a high place in the international esteem. Not the least of his attention was devoted to the layout-design of the advertising pages, which apart from their financial importance he considered to be essential to the purpose of the journal as a professional publication. These pages contributed not a little to the success of the "Record" as a whole.

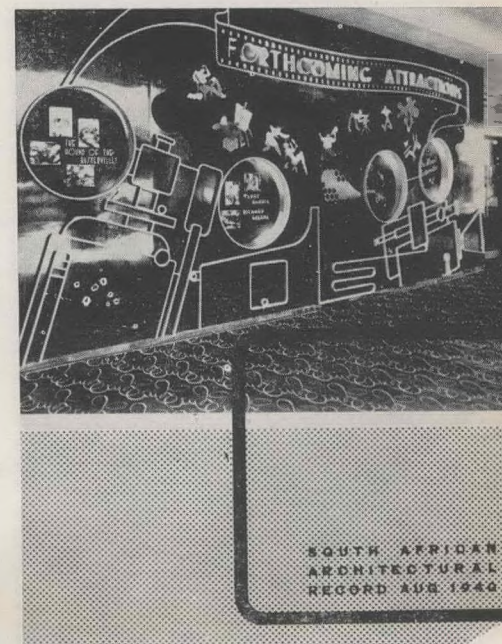
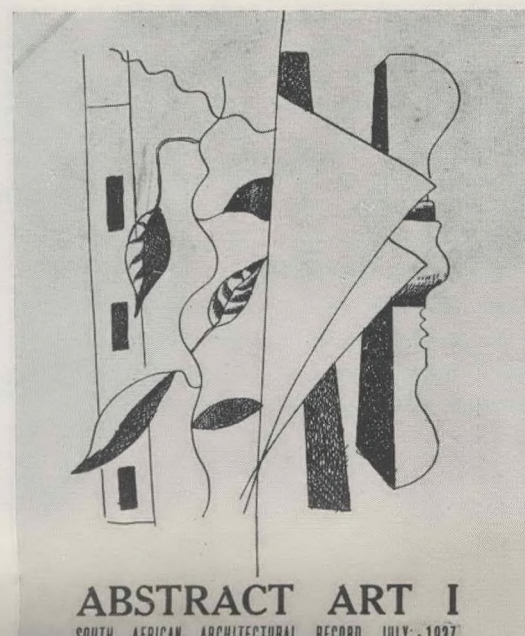
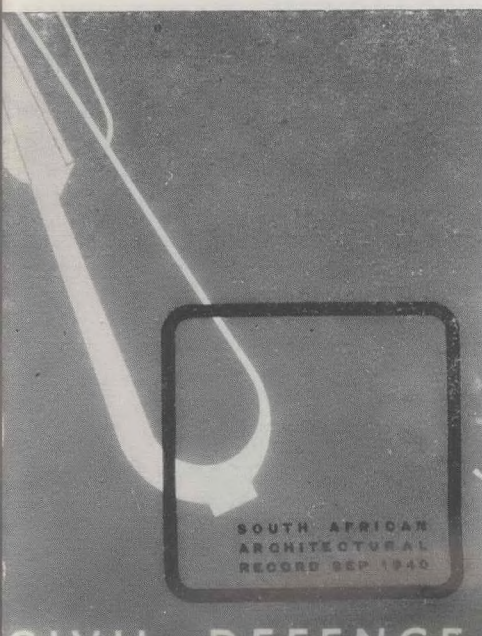
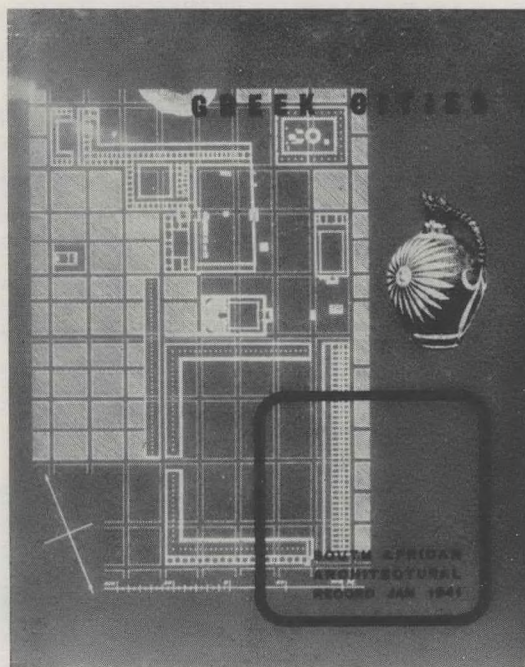
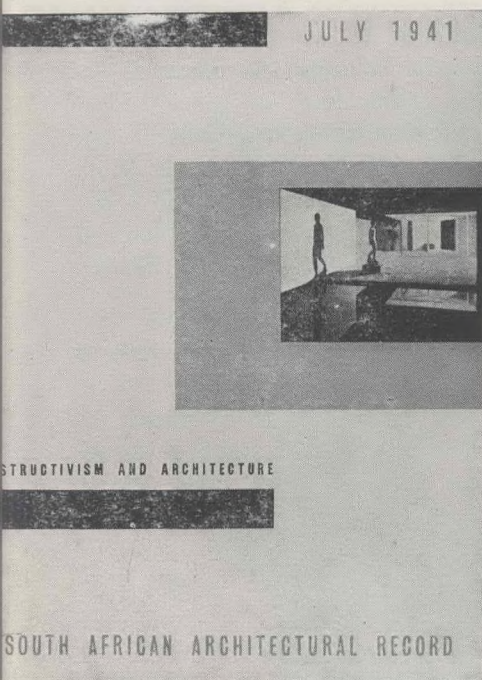
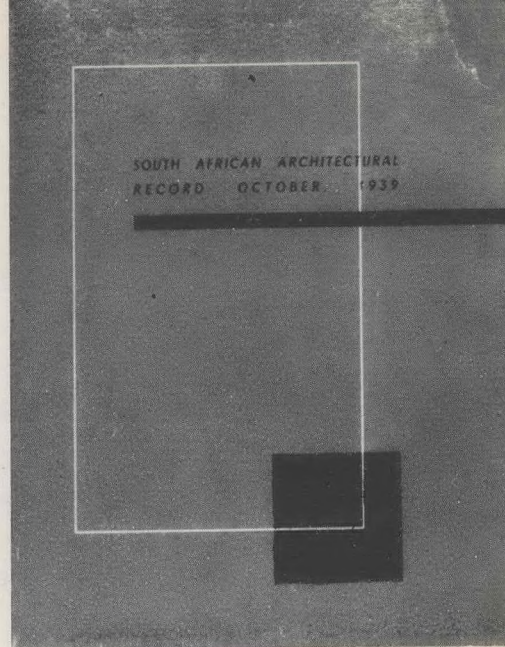
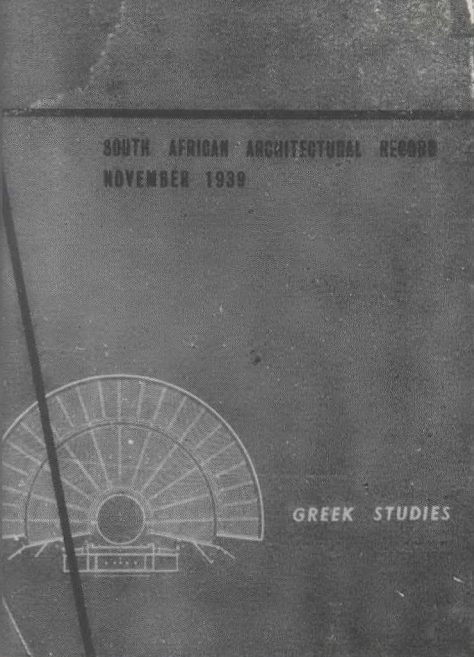
As artist, Martienssen reacted strongly to the rather drab and monotonous cover of the "Record" before it became a monthly publication. In introducing its new format, typography, and layout in 1932 he also re-designed its cover, which from that time onward underwent drastic changes. In 1936 he started producing a different cover design for every new issue of the journal and it was here that he found the best outlet for his artistic ability. In fact this was his only outlet, because under the pressure of work in the many spheres of his activity he found few opportunities for painting and had to rely on these cover designs as a substitute. In colour, form, and pattern, his designs have a strong affinity to contemporary cubist painting. Their aesthetic quality derives from a strictly abstract, architectonic treatment of their constituent elements, and consequently their appeal is as much to the intellect as to the senses. Martienssen's cover designs for the "Record" undoubtedly represent the highest achievement of contemporary South African art and have done more than any other work in this country to place it in the international sphere of significant artistic endeavour and art appreciation. They have received high praise from the foremost painters and art critics in many lands, and their place in the history of modern art is assured.

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**On the opposite page : A selection of nine of the covers of the "Record" designed by Martienssen, ranging over a period of five years.**

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Martienssen's work as writer constitutes the major part of his achievement in the "Record." A glance at the list of his contributions will show how great was this achievement and what a loss his early death meant to architecture and art. To do justice to his writings would necessitate the writing of a book, and here it is only possible to note their remarkable variety and range, their masterly literary treatment, and the enormous power of thought embodied in them. In writing he was essentially a thinker with a profound interest in all aspects of architecture and the allied arts. As such he set the literary tone of this journal, and his writings together with his cover designs and his handling of typography, illustration, and layout, all reflect the various phases of his development. The intense enthusiasm and the thoroughness with which he carried out his work on the "Record" drew a ready response from his contemporaries and students who gave him considerable support. But at times he had to shoulder the full burden of providing material for publication, and latterly, under the stress of war, it was evident that the "Record" was the result of his efforts alone. He bestowed on it the full richness of his mind and personality and in doing so raised its standard of production to a level which few professional journals have reached. Nor did he allow this standard to deteriorate. It

was the fruit of years of labour and to him represented but the ground-work for higher achievement.

Martienssen's work on the Journal was motivated by an insatiable desire to expand architectural thought and knowledge to the utmost extent. He regarded the "Record" not merely as a professional publication for the benefit of architects and artists alone, but as a means of educating the public upon whom the destiny of art and architecture ultimately depended. To see the "Record" on every bookstall in South Africa was one of his strongest wishes. It was the only outlet in this country of contemporary art and was treasured by the younger members of the architectural profession to whom it came as a monthly event full of creative excitement and pleasure.

Under Martienssen's powerful influence the effect of the "Record" on South African architecture was epoch-making. It was the product of a man whose career represented a new architectural outlook and a new type of architect in South Africa. Through its pages and covers runs the spirit of a new age: the spirit of construction and creation, collaboration and co-operation on a collective scale: the age of Rex Martienssen and of those who extend the trail he blazed.

A BLACK-FIGURE VASE FROM RHODES





# THE PROFESSIONAL MAN

"We, on the Central Council, should endeavour to bring the sphere of architectural consideration on to the very widest plane possible. I realise that the Central Council is faced with a number of restrictions, but nevertheless I think the time has come when we must definitely devote our attention to the widest aspects of the architectural problems with which we are involved. I think that for too long—perhaps due to the narrow conception of the architect's full responsibility—we have been concerned more with the minutiae of architecture than with the full implications of the architect's work as it impinges on the community. I think we might summarise the change that is taking place by saying that if we can substitute the idea of town planning, and planning for the community as a whole, for the idea of the individual and small conception, we shall be getting very much closer to an ultimate solution."<sup>1</sup>

These words were spoken by Rex Martienssen at the Third Congress of South African Architects and Quantity Surveyors held at Port Elizabeth in 1939. He attended the Congress and Central Council meetings as President and a representative of the Transvaal Provincial Institute. These words indicate the outlook of one who views the scene and sees beyond the mere everyday impediments of life—one who can see and steer a direct course to a goal far ahead.

Rex Martienssen, as a scholar, teacher, research worker and educationalist is known to many—his work within the profession is known only to those who have had the pleasure of working with him. His early contacts with the profession coincide with that time when, in 1932, he was appointed an Honorary Editor of the "South African Architectural Record"—a publication to which he had previously devoted a considerable amount of time and energy. At the same time he became a member of the Journal Committee of the Institute. As an Editor of the "Record" and a member of the Journal Committee he was in close touch with the Institute's Finance Committee in whose hands the financial control of the "Record" was placed; to his detailed knowledge of the technical processes and costs of printing the success of this journal was largely due. Through his enthusiasm and interest he was instrumental in changing the "Record" from a quarterly to a monthly publication—being prepared, in the interests of the "Record" and the profession, to bear the brunt of the three-fold increase of work which was entailed in this change.

Throughout the years of service as an Editor he worked continuously to improve the policy and standard of this publication, striving to build up a journal which would appeal to the public as well as the profession. As an individualist

and teacher he saw it as a medium through which all matters of interest in the broadest sense could be brought to the attention of the profession and the community. The "Record" was different. His wide interests and broad outlook were clearly marked in the development of the "Record." Many of his researches in varied fields of architecture both contemporary and historical were published in it. Many numbers have become textbooks of knowledge and information to the student as well as the architect. His Greek studies have already been commented on as well as his thesis on "Constructivism."

In 1936, Rex Martienssen was elected to the Committee of the Transvaal Provincial Institute of Architects. He worked as a member of this Committee, and on many of its sub-committees, always bearing in mind that he was an elected member and, therefore, representing the profession as a whole. During all his years of office he stressed that all meetings of the Committees on which he served should be conducted on formal and constitutional lines—being ever conscious of his responsibility as a member of the profession which he served. His keen insight and logical outlook enabled him to look deeply into all matters which came to his notice.

His work as an educationalist and scholar was supplemented by his work on the Standing Committee of Education where, as an alternate member, he at all times sought to improve the standard of education of the student preparing to enter the profession. Here a link was forged between the student and the profession.

In 1939, he was elected President of the Transvaal Provincial Institute of Architects and represented the Institute on the Central Council. His interests were not directed solely towards the improvement of the outlook of the student and



the architect—he saw further—he realised that to improve the professional status of the architect a beginning should be made outside the profession—the public should be educated—further, the child at school should be instructed: "We must start at the beginning. We must appreciate the sensibility which is inherent in people, especially in young children, before it becomes crushed out of them owing to routine training . . . Unless appreciation is instilled and sensibility carefully developed by means of such education, I am afraid that we can hope to do very little from the outside . . . We must plan for the people of the future who are going to benefit from our architectural efforts; we must not be satisfied with the approximations of the past decade, or of the past generation . . . if we are to be effective we must not merely occupy ourselves with detailed domestic affairs; we must plan and educate on the very broadest lines possible for the future."<sup>2</sup>

In an address to the students at the annual exhibition at the University of the Witwatersrand he said: "Individual responsibility must go further than individual proficiency. There is a collective core in a school such as this which is as real as it is intangible. And there should be a corporate striving towards ideals which go beyond competitive success. By regarding the spirit of the School as something to be shared, by regarding this building as an intellectual harbour, you will be enriched; but by regarding your course merely as a series of lectures and as a drag on your leisure you will get nothing . . . The pooling of resources, the criticism and collaboration that are the outcome of the disinterested attitude, and that are feasible in a school such as this, must be the basis upon which the new outlook will be founded. If the beginnings which we now see of this attitude in the School can prosper, then we have a real opportunity to see a profession that is not occupied solely with its own problems but with the wider responsibility of service to the community."<sup>3</sup>

The two extracts given above show that broad and sincere attitude of a man who has looked deeply into the problems confronting the future of this profession: his advice to the student—to equip himself for the future as a professional man, to look forward with eagerness to the part he can play within the profession, to remember those wider responsibilities which are his as he takes his place in the scheme of things; his plea to the profession "to plan and educate for the future," to collaborate not only within the precincts of the committee room, but widely and generously in the schools and among the people themselves.

As President of the Transvaal Provincial Institute, Rex Martienssen endeavoured to keep before the Profession the meaning of Architecture, to show architecture in its true light—as a science as well as an art. He sought to improve the status

of the architect. He had a strong and genuine conviction that before this could be achieved architecture must be lifted out of the rut of the commonplace. In the preface to his thesis on "Constructivism and Architecture" he said: "The findings of scientific researchers, however, are recorded in the proceedings of societies whose activities have no direct link with the lay public, and the process of assimilation by the latter is a long and complicated series of applications to practical needs. In general the purely (and to the layman completely incomprehensible) technical results of research are the preserve of experts, and the vulgarisation of these lies outside the scope of the scientific workers. The position is rather different in architecture where, through the easy availability of examples, irresponsible and uninformed 'criticism' finds a ready reception in the minds of those laymen who, while readily admitting that the scientific is 'beyond them,' fiercely protest their right to pass opinions on an activity, superficial knowledge of which has removed the bane of the unknowable. Thus the serious worker lays himself open to comments born of complacency and ignorance; the results of his creative ability have to withstand a cross-fire of violent and conflicting opinion. It is difficult to visualise such a state of affairs in the accepted fields of learned studies. Only the emergence of the architect from the amateur status will correct this ambiguous position. For the work of the serious architect involves a wide responsibility, one that is necessarily beyond the comprehension of the man who sees all architecture symbolised in the small house of accepted type."<sup>4</sup>

Architecture to Rex Martienssen was life, not mere building. His theoretical researches were supplemented by his broad conception of the real meaning of architecture; his interest in the past was as full and wide as his interest in the present and the future. Always he related theory to practice—to him theory was never abstract. At all times he sought to improve. His wide study of all phases of architecture and the relationship between architecture and building enabled him to see clearly the ever changing movement in the world of to-day. This he illustrated when addressing the Annual General Meeting of the Transvaal Provincial Institute in 1940. He said: "However involved or difficult, or however restricted and economical the work is that an architect is called upon to carry out, parallel difficulties have always beset him. There is a tendency to isolate current architecture from all endeavours of the past. Architects will admit that Italian palaces were great, that Greek temples were masterpieces, that Gothic cathedrals were triumphs of decoration and structure, but when it comes to contemporary work, they seem to assume an automatic drop in the level of architectural achievement. This operates in two ways. First, in the refusal



to attempt serious evaluations of current work—that is, to give place and significance to serious architectural endeavour, and second, to dismiss all pleas for the establishment of aesthetic standards with the ready cry of unpractical idealism and to take resort in the statement that it is the work of the architect of to-day to fulfil programmes that can have no concern with 'great architecture.' This is false reasoning for there is great architecture being created, even though it makes different demands on our intelligence from that implied by buildings of the past. Whatever the work undertaken by individual architects, there is always available the opportunity of making a contribution to the body of significant architecture. As problems change, so will the nature of architecture undergo change. The grandiose and monumental type of building no longer represents the highest achievement, for architecture has developed to embrace the town and the very lives of the ordinary people. In building for the welfare of the common man will be found the answer to the question, what is the characteristic architecture of our age? Let us keep pace with this adjustment, so that it can be said that in these critical years the architect was conscious of the aims of his profession; that he did not lose sight of the ideals which give it meaning."<sup>5</sup>

His goal, set high before him, was the building up of a profession "conscious of its aims"; a profession built upon a foundation of sincerity and co-operation—co-operation firstly within its own ranks, and secondly with the people; a profession which could look back with pride at its achievements in the common cause of humanity and so take its place as a proud force within the social structure of the world of to-morrow.

A colleague in a recent letter wrote: "We feel that the untimely removal of such a vital, constructive personality from our professional midst—particularly at a time when constructive thought and endeavour are more urgently needed than ever—has been a great and irreparable loss."<sup>6</sup> These few words sum up the magnitude of his loss to the profession.

Often severe in criticism, but always generous in his praise he once wrote of the Italian Renaissance: "It is indeed time to take stock, and however inadequately, however incompletely, restore some of the brightness that once shone from her tall buildings."<sup>7</sup>

May the brightness that still shines from his writings and his personality remain a beacon and an inspiration to the profession and to architecture in South Africa.

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#### NOTES TO "THE PROFESSIONAL MAN."

<sup>1</sup> "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 24, No. 8, page 292. Congress at Port Elizabeth.

<sup>2</sup> "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 24, No. 8, page 293. Congress at Port Elizabeth.

<sup>3</sup> "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 24, No. 10, page 420. Fifteenth Annual Exhibition and Prizegiving, School of Architecture, University of Witwatersrand.

<sup>4</sup> Martienssen. "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 26, No. 7, page 241. Constructivism and Architecture.

<sup>5</sup> Bryer. "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 25, No. 7, page 264. Critical Review of the trends and Problems of Contemporary American Architecture.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Norman Eaton on behalf of the Pretoria Architectural Society to the President of the T.P.I.

<sup>7</sup> Martienssen. "S.A. Architectural Record," Volume 21, No. 11, page 465. Foreword to Facets of the Renaissance.

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The seven preceding papers result from the collaboration of M. Bryer, B. S. Cooke, J. Fassler, N. L. Hanson, W. D. Howie, R. Hudson, J. M. Lagrange, G. E. Londt, W. G. McIntosh, A. Wilson and B. Wilson. The papers were written by N. L. Hanson, B. S. Cooke, J. Fassler, M. Bryer, W. D. Howie and W. G. McIntosh, whose collaboration has been extended to embrace the presentation of this memorial number.



## B I O G R A P H I C A L   N O T E S

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Rex Distin Martienssen, the youngest of a family of five, was born at Queenstown, Cape Province, on the 26th February, 1905. When he was about four years old his family moved to Johannesburg, where his father, the late E. E. Martienssen, joined the staff of the Native Recruiting Corporation of the Chamber of Mines. Rex Martienssen was educated at King Edward VII School, and commenced his studies in Architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1923. In December, 1925, he left for his first trip to Europe with the First South African University Students' Tour, visiting England, Holland, Belgium and France. He was one of the party of students who accompanied Professor Pearse, of the University of the Witwatersrand, on a survey of eighteenth century town and country houses at the Cape, in 1928.

He obtained the degree of Bachelor of Architecture in 1929, and immediately after left on his second overseas tour. On this occasion he motored through England, France, Italy, Austria, Germany and Holland. On his return to this country he commenced practice, and in 1930 was elected an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

He joined the staff of the School of Architecture, University of the Witwatersrand in 1932. He again left for Europe at the end of 1933 and visited London and Paris, and toured in Italy, Sicily, Greece and Crete.

In November, 1937, he was married to Miss Heather Bush, and together they travelled through England, France and Italy. He was about this time appointed the South African delegate of C.I.R.P.A.C. (Comité International pour la Réalisation d'Architecture Contemporaine) the executive of C.I.A.M. (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne). He had been elected a member of the Transvaal Provincial Institute of South African Architects in 1936, and in 1939, he became President, when he was also elected a member of the Central Council of the South African Institute of Architects.

The degree of Master of Architecture was conferred upon him in 1940, for a thesis on "Constructivism"; and that of Doctor of Literature in 1941, for a thesis on "The Idea of Space in Greek Architecture."

In June, 1942, he obtained a commission as Second Lieutenant in the Air Force Sub-unit of the Rand University Training Corps.

His death occurred at the Military Hospital on the 23rd August, 1942, following a course of training at the Military College, Voortrekkerhoogte.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cité de Refuge, L'Architecture Vivante—Le Corbusier et P. Jeanneret, Morancé Paris: Athens, Ozenfant in Cahiers d'Art: Palazzo Sacchetti, photo Alinari: Berlin Exhibition House, Mies van der Rohe, Moderne Bauformen: Gropius House, Bauhaus Bucher: Sunium, from "In Greece," quarterly publication of the Ministry of Tourism and Press, No. 4: Still Life, Juan Gris, Peinture Moderne: La Ville, Léger, Cahiers d'Art: Black-figure vase from Rhodes, reproduced from Hans Schaal, Griechische Vasen (Schwarzfigurig) Leipzig.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS BY REX MARTIENSSEN PUBLISHED IN THE S.A. ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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1. What is Architecture? .....	June, 1925
2. Modern Architecture, with particular reference to Shop Design .....	September, 1927
3. Reactions and Reflections. An Analogy .....	December, 1927
4. The Golden Road. Impressions of an Architectural Pilgrimage to the Cape .....	June, 1928
5. Ideals in Architecture .....	September, 1928
6. Architecture and Modern Life. (A Lecture given to the Architectural Students' Society) .....	December, 1929
7. Commentary .....	June, 1931
8. Commentary .....	September, 1931
9. The International Tendency in Contemporary Architecture, with particular reference to Swedish work .....	December, 1931
10. The Melting Pot .....	June, 1932
11. Pictures Recall (1928) .....	July, 1932
12. The Pompeian House .....	July, 1933
13. Contact with Le Corbusier. Rhapsody .....	July, 1934
14. The Contemporary House. (Paper read at Ideal Homes Exhibition, Johannesburg, September 13th, 1934) .....	October, 1934
15. Kwart-Eeu se Argitektuur .....	May, 1935
16. Conflict in Hellas—Materials for an Integration of the Greek Spirit. (Paper read to Architectural Students' Society) .....	June, 1935
17. Changing Generator in Greek Sculpture .....	September, 1936
18. Mobile Architecture .....	May, 1937
19. Man in Space. (A Lecture delivered at the Abstract Art Congress) .....	August, 1937
20. Facade. (The Italian Palace) .....	November, 1937
21. Palazzo Piccolomini. A Critical Excursion .....	January, 1939
22. The English Spirit .....	January, 1939
23. Architecture in Modern Painting. A Study in Absorption and Reinterpretation .....	March, 1939
24. The Hellenistic House, with special reference to examples at Delos .....	November, 1939
25. Civil Defence (In collaboration) .....	September, 1940
26. Greek Cities .....	January, 1941
27. Cigliano—A House of the Quattrocento .....	May, 1941
28. Constructivism and Architecture .....	July, 1941
29. Mediterranean Houses. Notes on recent solutions to the Problems of Seaside Building .....	October, 1941
30. Evolution of an Architect's House, 1940 .....	February, 1942
31. Some Aspects of Doric Temple Architecture .....	March, 1942
32. Space Construction in Greek Architecture .....	May, 1942
33. Fernand Léger in Paris, 1938 .....	August, 1942

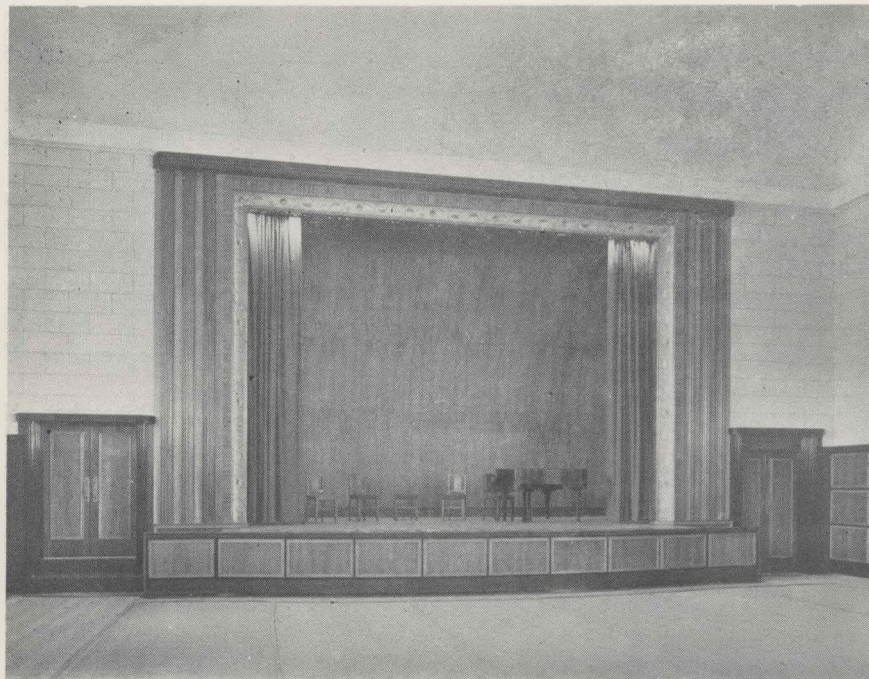
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## THE SELBORNE HALL, JOHANNESBURG

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE CRAFTSMEN'S INTERPRETATION  
OF THE ARCHITECT'S DESIGN

BY —

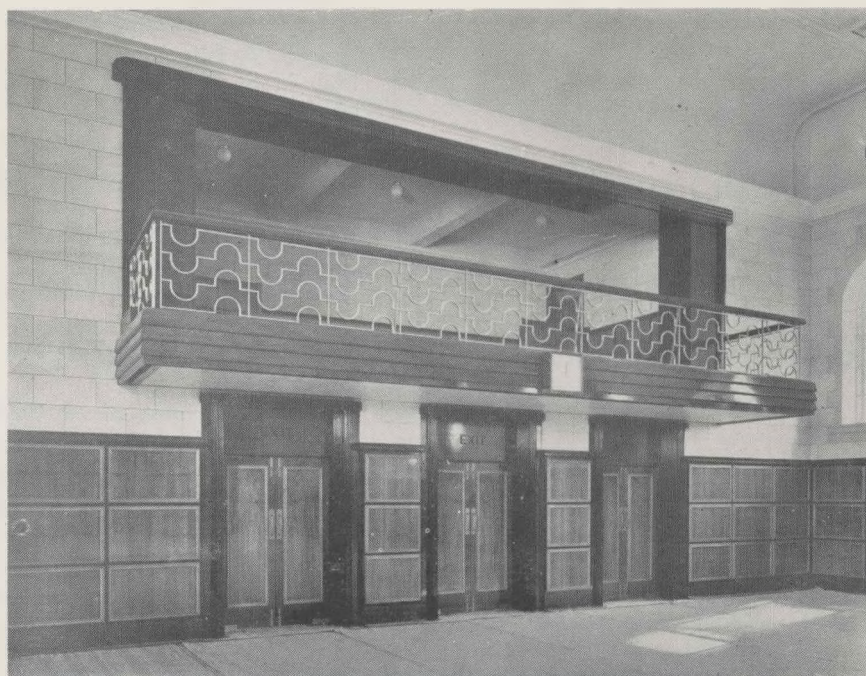
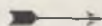


# SAGE



Proscenium formed with fluted polished Walnut pylons, Teak capping member, Zebrano architrave with the illuminated section of same faced with a polished Bronze Metal grille. The curved back-ground is of Walnut with an eggshell finish.

The general wall panelling is of Teak and Walnut relieved with ebonised Mahogany and Yellow Wood mouldings. All exits are flanked with fluted ebonised Mahogany pylons and a moulded capping member of the same material. Doors are in Walnut relieved with Yellow Wood bolection moulds and Bronze door furniture. Balcony grille is of polished Bronze.



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