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FEBRUARY, 1939.

SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

The Journal of the Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State Provincial Institutes of South African Architects and the Chapter of South African Quantity Surveyors.

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CHRYSLER HOUSE, JOHANNESBURG

COMPLETED DECEMBER 1938

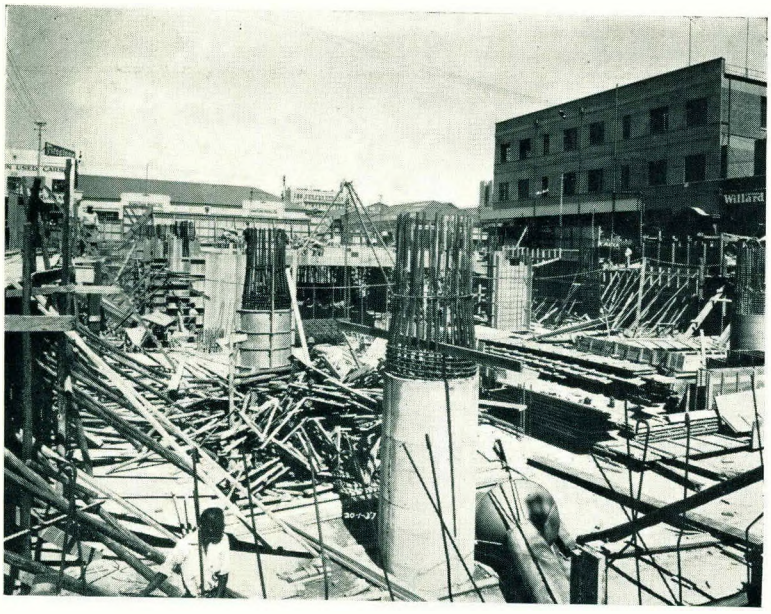
ARCHITECTS NURCOMBE AND SUMMERLEY

Rapid expansion of business, the desire to have a building primarily designed for the adequate display and servicing of automobiles and the necessity for centralisation of its activities led the directors of the Atkinson-Oates organisation to purchase a site 200 x 100 Cape feet in extent on which to erect a building to house the firm of Sydney Clow and Co., Ltd.

The architects were asked to provide, in addition to two separate showrooms, as much unobstructed floor space as possible, and to ensure easy ingress and egress of cars. Excellent circulation for this was provided by the fact that the building was surrounded by four streets, the principal being Eloff Street on the west side.

After considering the many factors governing the height of the building and the space required, it was decided to support the building on two rows of columns spaced at approximately 28 feet centres with a main span of 61 feet, and a cantilever on each side of 20 feet. These columns are expressed in the elevations at the eighth floor level, where the floor space diminishes within the main span between these columns.

As the building is not primarily intended for public parking, it was decided to use car lifts instead of ramps for vertical transportation. Because of the two showrooms required, and the necessity for a "clearing" or distribution floor below street level, and to avoid a long driveway from one end of the building to the other, the lifts were placed approximately in the centre of the building. These considerations largely affected the general layout of the plan.

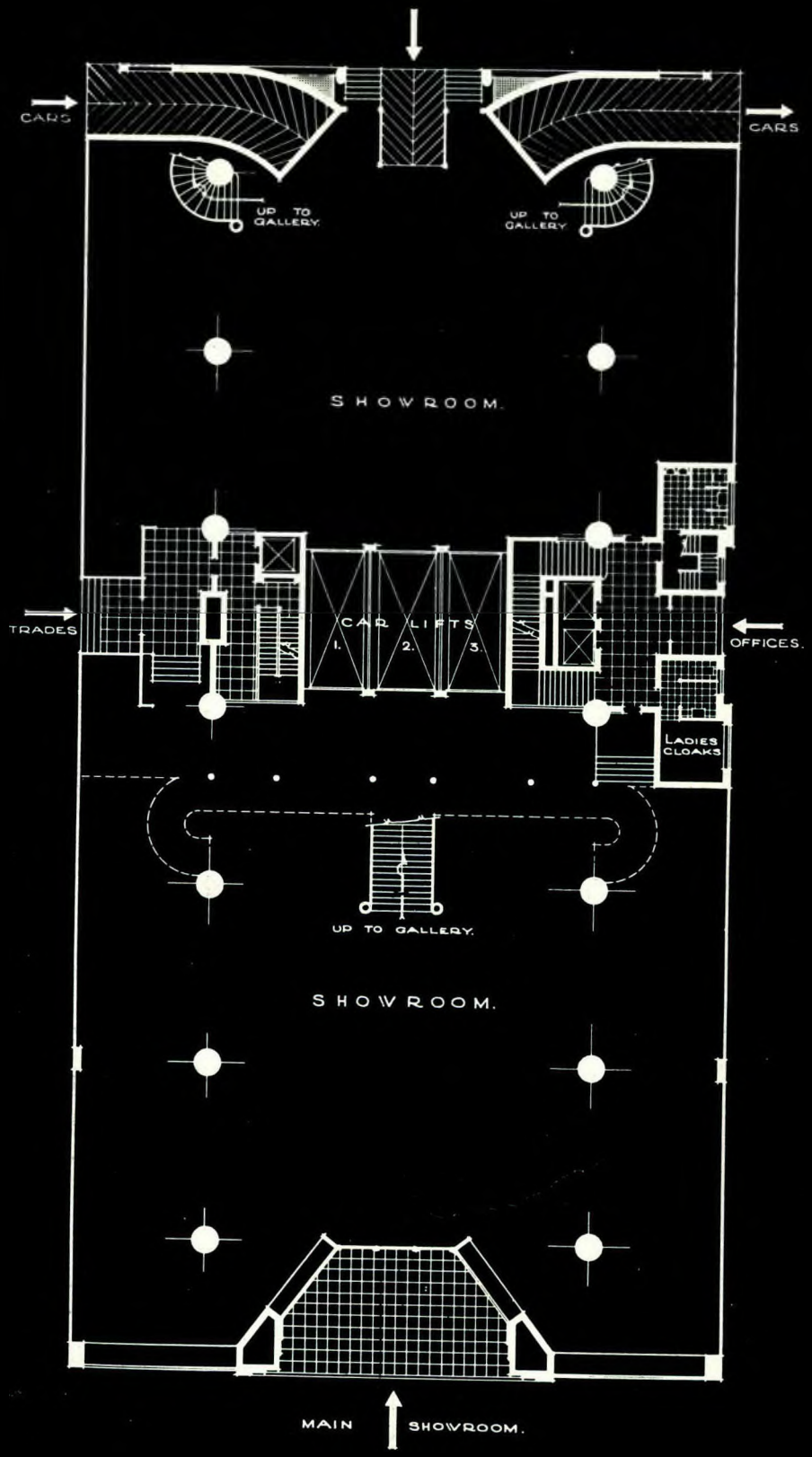


B A S E M E N T
C O N S T R U C T I O N

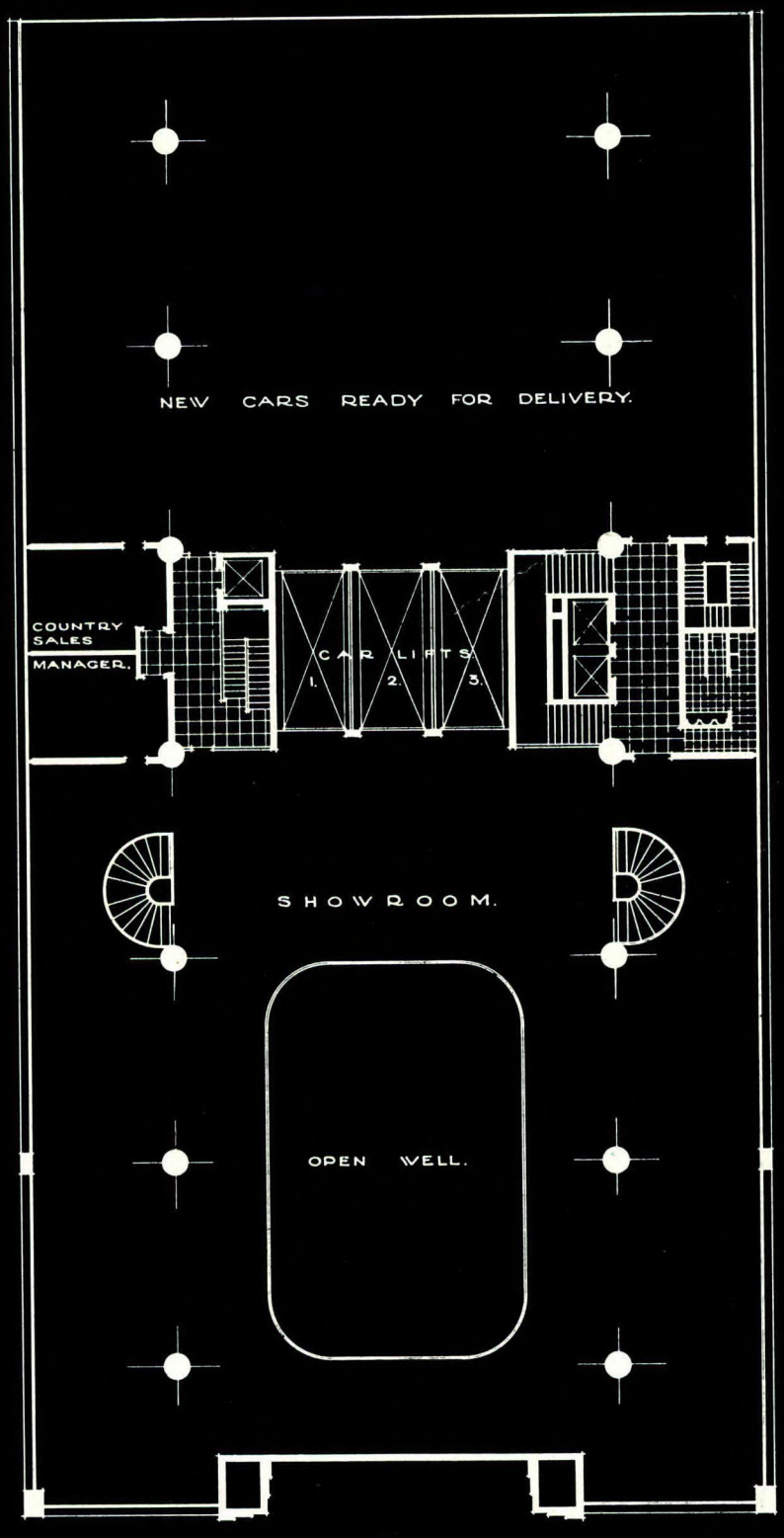
CHRYSLER HOUSE

CARCASE OF SHOWROOM

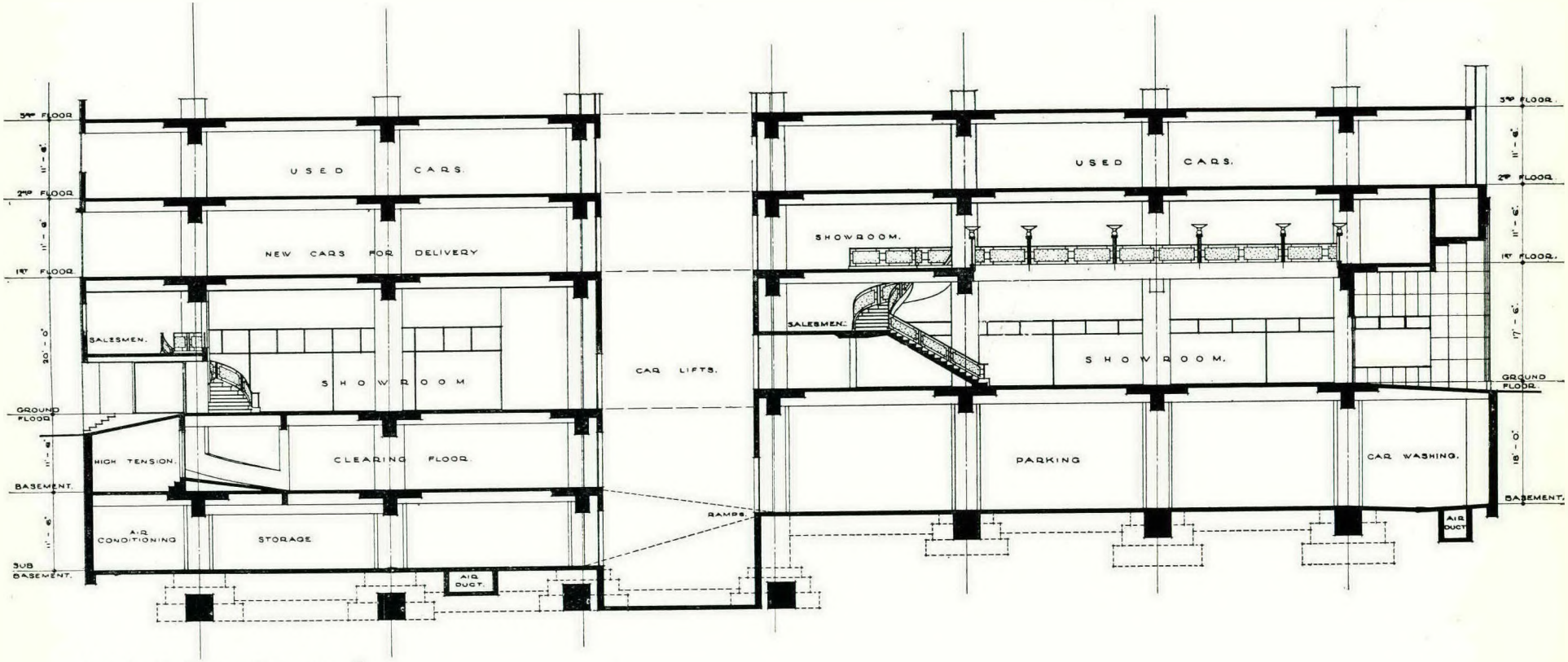




ground floor plan.



first floor plan.

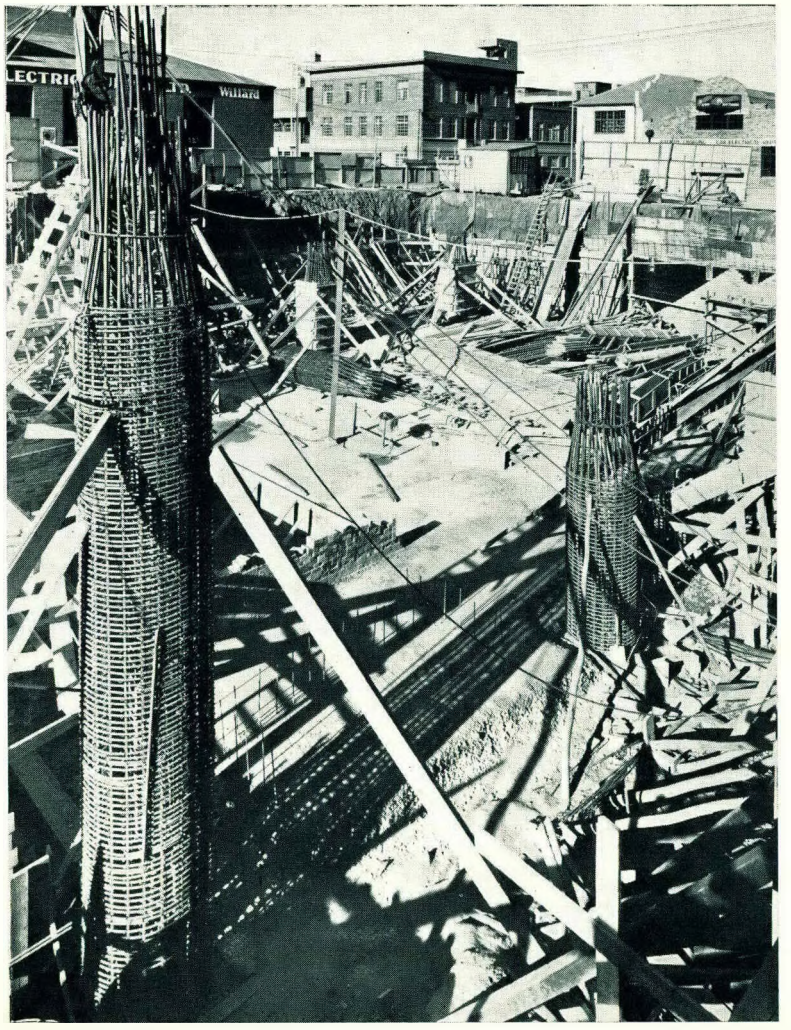


longitudinal section on ℄

CHRYSLER HOUSE, JOHANNESBURG, 1936 — 1938

Before proceeding further it is necessary to survey the accommodation at each floor level.

Sub-basement.	Air conditioning plant for showrooms, battery storage, boiler rooms, pumps, low tension chamber.
Basement.	Car-washing, greasing and storage.
Distribution Floor. (Semi-basement)	Clearing Department.
Lower Ground Floor.	Used Car Showroom.
Upper Ground Floor.	Main Showroom.
First Floor.	Showroom gallery and new cars for delivery.
Second Floor.	Used Car Department.
Third Floor.	Spares and Accessory Department.
Fourth Floor.	Quick Service Department.
Fifth Floor.	Service, electrical workshops, wireless, etc.
Sixth Floor.	Panel Beating Department.
	Mechanics' dining-room, cloakrooms, etc.
Seventh Floor.	Parking.
Eighth Floor.	Parking.
Ninth Floor.	Administration.
Tenth Floor.	Staff recreation rooms.
	General lounge.
Eleventh Floor.	Lift motor room, caretaker's flat.
Twelfth Floor.	Air-conditioning plant for offices.
Thirteenth Floor.	Tank room.
Fourteenth Floor.	Tank room.
Fifteenth Floor.	Tower.





CHRYSLER HOUSE
FROM THE WEST

The distribution floor performs a very important function in the building. Two ramps, one from each side street, lead down in an easy sweep to this floor, merging into one wide ramp facing the car lifts. From this floor the cars are dispatched to the various floors. Cars are generally brought into the building in the early part of the morning for servicing by customers and delivered again in the evening. At these two periods this floor reaches capacity, but can never become congested owing to two further small easy graded ramps which lead from it to the basement, which is capable of holding at least sixty cars. A waiting room is provided for customers on this floor.

VERTICAL TRANSPORTATION

The car lifts, travelling at a speed of 150 feet per minute, are the fastest of their type in the British Empire. They serve all floors from the sub-basement to the eighth, while the staff lift, travelling at 300 feet per minute, serves from the sub-basement to the tenth floor. The main passenger lifts of signal control type run at a speed of 500 feet per minute, and serve all floors from the distribution floor to the tenth.

CONSTRUCTION

The building is carried on two rows of columns, fourteen in all. The maximum dead load on any one column is 1,717 tons. Constructed on rock, each column is built on a separate base approximately 13 feet square. These bases are tied with reinforced concrete straps.

The arrangement of the columns provides continuous windows round practically the whole building, giving maximum light and ventilation. Theoretically there is a deflection of $\frac{1}{4}$" at the end of the cantilevers. This is created by the fluctuations in weight due to the number of cars resting on the cantilevered sections. Special provision had to be made so that cantilever beams could move without breaking the glass in the windows.

The diagram shows how this was done in the case of the shop fronts. The total weight of the tower carried at the eleventh floor level over a span of 6′ 0″ is 750 tons. A diagram gives a general idea of the steel reinforcement in a typical beam.

All the walls from the eleventh floor upwards are 6″ thick formed of reinforced concrete to allow for wind pressure.



MACHINE SHOP

VIBRATION

Owing to the fact that in an average beam there were 36 $1\frac{1}{2}$" and 20 $1\frac{1}{4}$" steel rods, all the concrete was vibrated by means of internal vibrators. These vibrated at a frequency of 4,500 per minute. The concrete varied in the slump tests from $\frac{3}{4}$" to $1\frac{1}{2}$". The use of these internal vibrators was very satisfactory, except at the haunches adjacent to the columns, where it was necessary to use external vibrators in addition.

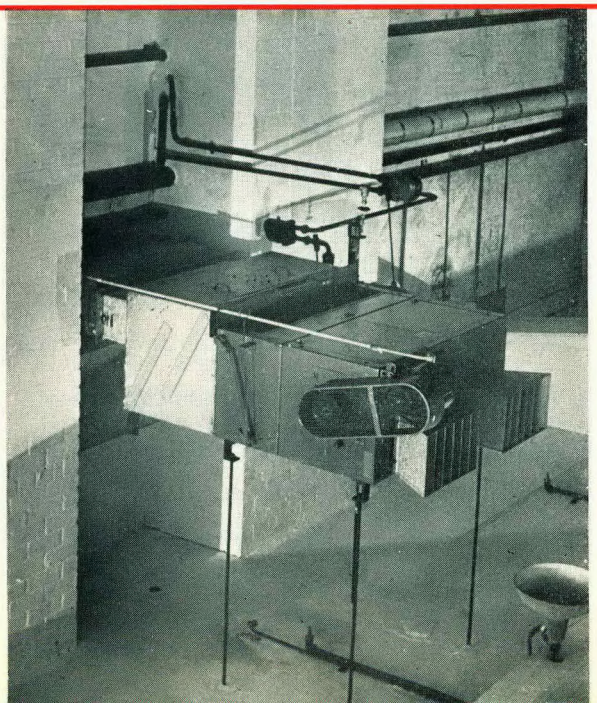
A duct for electrical conduit is provided in front of the service stair next to the staff lift, so that it is possible to add further cables from the low tension distribution board to any floor. Under the window sills of all floors provision is made for a 1" tube with switch boxes every 20 feet, so that in the event of additional machines being installed on any floor, no difficulty will be experienced in bringing cables through this conduit direct on to a machine. A further duct is provided at the back of the passenger lift for telephone cables, steam pipes, etc.



OFFICE ENTRANCE



MAIN SHOWROOM



INDEPENDENT AIR-
CONDITIONING UNIT IN BASEMENT

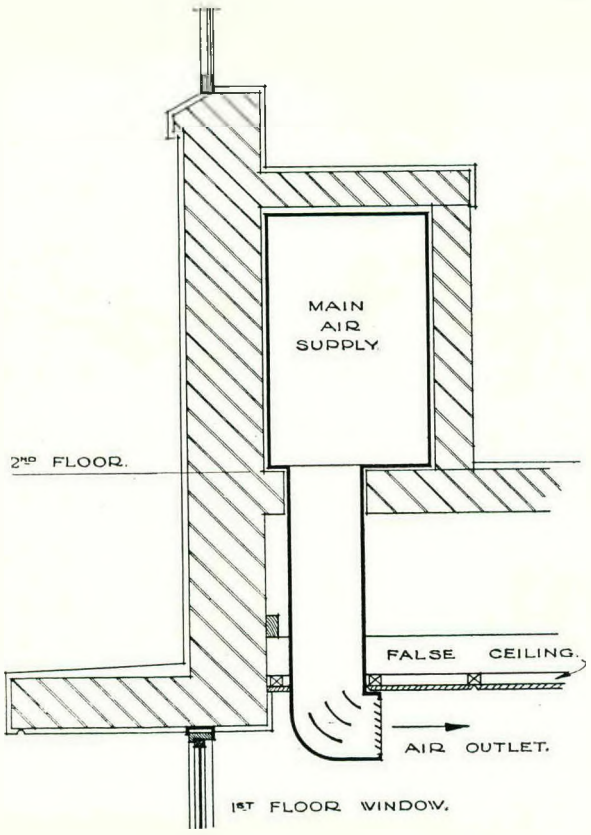


DIAGRAM OF AIR OUTLETS TO 1ST FLOOR SHOWROOM.

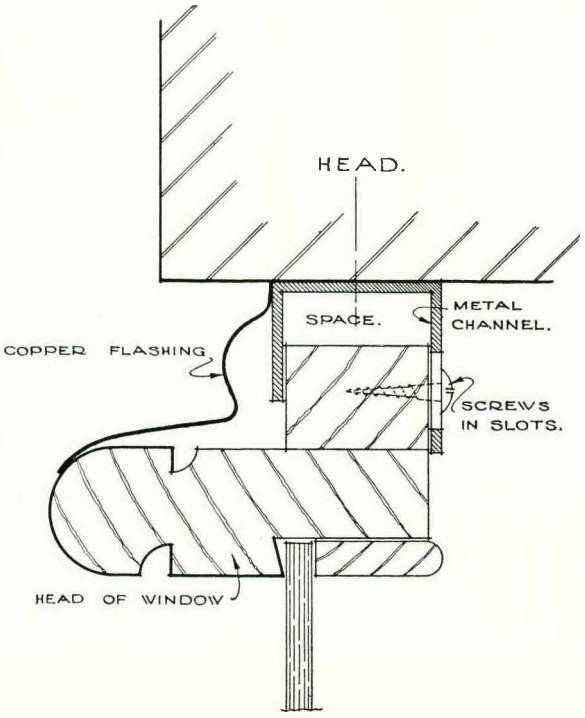


DIAGRAM OF EXPANSION JOINTS TO SHOWROOM WINDOWS.

VENTILATION

The air-conditioning for the showrooms and offices presented many serious difficulties, as it was impossible to pass any of the large ducts required through the main beams. Commencing in the sub-basement, the duct, size 10′ 6″ x 6′ 6″, passes under the straps between the column bases to the front portion of the building. From this a duct branches off in front of the staff lift, which ventilates the space where new cars are awaiting delivery. From the front it passes up to the second floor level and is taken along the walls beneath the windows and ejected into the showroom as diagram. To ventilate the basements the provision of separate air-conditioning units, as shown in the photograph, overcame all disadvantages of cumbersome ducts. The showrooms are not only air-conditioned for the comfort of customers, but the great problem of keeping dust off cars on display has been satisfactorily solved.



VIEW FROM SOUTH-EAST CORNER

GENERAL FINISHINGS

Bronze was selected for the handrails and general metal work in the showrooms. This determined the treatment generally. Owing to the rapid changes in car design and colours, and the heavy structural appearance, the treatment was subdued, except for the columns, which were finished in a cellulose old penny bronze colour. The ceiling is formed with a fibrous material 1½" thick sprayed with an imported plaster mixture, for an even effect. The floor is of ¼" rubber, manufactured to an extra hardness. It is laid in squares approximately 2' 6" x 2' 6" with a ¼" joint filled with latex compound.

Eight three-kilowatt lamps set in inverted bowls light the ceiling, while the remaining part of the showroom is lit from laylights and special reflectors above the windows on the ground floor. The glass in these reflectors can be changed so that it is possible to alter the whole colour of the showroom, or spot any particular car with colour.

The offices are formed with framed partitions in laminated teak so that they can be altered at any time. The directors' offices are panelled in laminated flush stinkwood from floor to ceiling.

Externally, the building on the front and 50' 0" on the returns is faced in precast terrazzo to the tenth floor level. The remainder is finished in special rough cast plaster. The front fins are finished in 18 gauge stainless steel fitted round angle iron brackets. Green neon tubes run on each side of these fins, and continue to the top of the building, emphasising the vertical treatment of the facade by night.

The excavations for Chrysler House were started on 11th June, 1936, and the building was formally opened in December, 1938. Rock was encountered over the whole site at a depth of a few feet, and at one point gold-bearing reef was exposed.

Within 75 yards of the site, buildings are restricted owing to the existence of old mine workings and, in view of this, it may be of interest to mention that during recent severe earth tremors, occupants of the building reported that the shocks were not felt to the extent that might have been expected. It is thought that the relatively high deflection which can take place as a result of the lay-out of the concrete frame, and the elimination of continuous loading along the frontages, may possibly account for this.

Photographs by Architectural & Engineering Photographic Service, and James L. Smith

ESSENTIALS FOR CREATIVE DESIGN

BY WALTER GROPIUS

Reprinted from "The Octagon" Journal of the American Institute of Architects

Feeling greatly honoured at being asked to give a brief statement about my ideas of education before The American Institute of Architects, I ask you not to expect my contribution to be a ready-made scheme for an American architect's training. For, being a newcomer to this country, I am very anxious first to make myself acquainted with the conditions peculiar to the United States, their history and tradition, their art and industry, before I may feel entitled to make any specific suggestions for reforming architectural education in this country. So I am going to confine myself to making more general remarks, which I believe to be universally true, regarding education towards creative design.

There are, I should think, many symptoms indicating that Architecture is setting out again to play a leading and comprehensive part in the generation to come. That is to say, that Architecture has come to terms with the machine and is to take the lead in forming the whole entity of our towns with its help. We have no other choice in the matter. If we fail to achieve this, the rapid current of modern development may sweep us aside. I insist emphatically upon leaving to Architecture and to the Architect the leading rôle in art and art training which became lost to them during the transition from hand to machine work in our own era. This is not a question of giving one profession intellectual precedence over others, but a natural arrangement in keeping with their different natures. A painter, a sculptor, or a craftsman builds up his work personally with his own hands, whereas the work of the architect is dependent upon the collaboration of numerous assistants. Painting, sculpture, hand work and machine work are all to be developed again in an organic relationship with the art of building. Thus we should help the coming generation of architects to become again the backbone of the whole building profession, to develop abilities of leadership by virtue of which there can be unity in the work as a whole in spite of a multiplicity of collaborators.

I feel bound to deal first with the basic mentality and the aim of architectural education before its outline can be drawn. So may I make clear what in my opinion should be this final aim of architecture and what picture of the ideal architect should be drawn for our students.

THE IDEAL ARCHITECT.

The ideal architect needs, first of all, high human qualities. He has to deal with all sorts of people in the community, so he must build up in himself those social qualities which alone can help him to equalise the various temperaments among his many collaborators. He has to create an atmosphere of his own by means of his human capacities, his creative power, and his experience. He has to be the co-ordinating organiser who, starting out from social conceptions of life—conceptions which are valid for the whole community—welds all biological, social, formal and technical problems into a homogeneous whole. For architecture is an interpretation of life itself; in its highest embodiment it is the sublimest art, a social art. As Mother of all arts, architecture has to fulfil two different demands made by man: the purpose or objective of a thing, and its expression or form. The problems concerning the purpose or object of the thing are of a super-individualistic nature; they represent organic evolution as we see it in nature. For example, the development of a technical apparatus such as the machine is the result of the intellectual work of numerous engineers who, like links in the chain of development, build up on the efforts of their predecessors. On the other hand, the demands which we impose on the expression—that is to say, on the form of a thing—are of a purely spiritual nature. The form, the design, is not a product of the intellect, but of human desire and inspiration. Assuming leadership in both the intellectual and spiritual work means nothing less than building up an organic relationship between the needs of the people as a whole and their formal expression in architecture. This unity can be achieved only by a strong character and by power of inspiration. Inspiration cannot be taught, but what we can do is to encourage young people to attack that great, complex task of genuine architecture by stimulating their indigenous inspiration and by fitting them for mastery of technique as well as for mastery of space. Every one will agree that a sound technical training is a necessary part of an architect's training, but it is only a part; and to develop this aspect of

education at the expense of the creative qualities of mind and heart is a misunderstanding of the cause of architecture.

SCIENCE OF TECHNIQUE AND SCIENCE OF SPACE.

Architectural education has to cope with two entirely different problems. The art of building deals with the science of technique only—that is to say, with materials and construction; the art of architecture deals, in addition to that, with the science of space. Thus, the latter is much more comprehensive than the first. The architect must master both of them. He cannot be a good architect without being a skilful builder. That defines the wide range of his necessary manual and mental training and its different methods of approach: towards building, on the one hand; towards design, on the other.

UNITY OF EDUCATION.

If the unity of both is our aim, the unity of the whole training should be our main concern also in education, avoiding anxiously any too early specialisation. Here we should learn from former periods of human activity. In the last original cultural epoch of Europe, in the time of the great Gothic architects, the art school was unknown, but close contact existed between the artist and the working life of the people. Craftsmen, artists, and architects of all grades had a common training-ground—the workshop. Their education was based on mere practice, everybody within his individual limits—architects, painters, sculptors and craftsmen—taking part in the totality of the building work.

"ART FOR ART'S SAKE."

It was much later, with the introduction of the academies, that the world of production and the artist slowly began to drift apart. Meant in the beginning as a scholarly supplement for the work done in the so-called "state manufactures" of France, forerunners of our modern factories, they gradually became isolated and their relationship to the life of the community as a whole ceased to exist with the increasing development of the machine. Practice and design were slowly superseded. Unfettered by practical considerations, the academy withdrew the artist entirely from the work-a-day world and lulled him in a dream of genius, leaving him unequipped for the struggle for existence. His skill became merely a graphic and pictorial one and was therefore doomed to end in aesthetic speculation. Preoccupied with

the making of the "genius," the academy forced the majority of her pupils, who could not hold this highest rank, to become social drones. True national art, pulsating through every branch of human activity, gradually died. Belonging in its character to former ages of monarchy, the academy thus resulted in a deadlock towards the architect of to-day. It became the typical embodiment of the "l'art pour l'art" mentality and its chosen instrument. The old conception of the basic unity of all art in its relation to life and to the social strata of the community was therefore lost and gradually replaced by that aesthetic "art for art's sake" and the even more dangerous philosophy it sprang from, "business as an end in itself." The common attitude towards the arts turned consequently into a sentimental longing for historical forms by accepting aesthetic "ressentiment" and good taste as a substitute for creative art. This fatal obsession, still dominating the feeling of our present generation, needs to be overcome before true creative art, adopting the machine as the modern vehicle of form, may permeate again the community as a whole.

"FORMATIVE ART" AND "FINE ART."

But what is creative art? When Goethe as a young man first saw the Strasbourg Cathedral, he discovered the difference between "formative art" as a new creative vision and "fine art" as a well balanced discipline towards a classic system of aesthetic norms. "Formative art" is what matters most in our time, where the new means of production—the machine—has changed the whole social background of our life, depriving the old forms of their former vital expression. Only formative art can create new genuine expression. A new conception towards formative art is beginning to make itself felt. To-day we insist upon the form of a thing following the function of that thing; upon its creator's desire for expression following the same direction as the organic building-up processes in nature and not running counter to that direction. We insist upon harmony again being achieved between intellect and desire. We are once again striving towards unity in the cultural world around us out of the boundless diversities in which the individual feels himself helpless and alone. The age just passed with its "isms" and its historical imitations was perhaps merely the reflection of our unconscious desire to probe the secrets of the whole visible world in order, in our longing for totality, to

overlook nothing of importance in building up our new world.

But we have still to face the widespread heresy that art and architecture are just luxury, that fatal legacy from a generation which arbitrarily elevated some of its branches above the rest as the " fine arts " and, in so doing, robbed all arts of basic identity and common life. By depriving handicrafts and industry of the informative services of the artists, particularly of the architect, the academic education drained them of their vitality. But art is not one of those things that may be imparted. Whether a design be the outcome of skill or creative impulse depends upon individual propensity. But if art cannot be taught or learned, a thorough knowledge of its principles and sureness of hand can be. Both are as necessary to the architect of genius as to the ordinary artisan.

So if we agree from a clarified aspect that the academic education of the architect has become too aesthetically emphasised as a discipline towards " fine art " and, further, that it is " formative art " which will matter again in the future, our educational system towards creative design must be properly adapted to this aim.

PRELIMINARY TRAINING.

The fact that the architect of to-day is from the outset left too much to traditional specialised training, which merely imparts to him an eclectic knowledge and does not make clear to him the meaning and purport of his work, nor the relationship in which he stands to the world at large, can be counteracted first of all by putting at the beginning of the training not the " trade " but the " human being " in his natural readiness to grasp life as a whole. The old idea of school has to be overcome and replaced by a working community. The powers and talents which are inherent in everybody should be united in free group labour, and such a community " will not learn for the school, but for life " and by itself will develop into a mature, organic life. The basis of that preliminary training should be a comprehensive course introducing the pupil to proportion and scale, rhythm, colour, light and shade, and allowing him at the same time to pass through every stage of primitive experience with materials and tools of all kinds in workshops. This will enable him to find a place where, within the limits of his natural gifts, he can obtain a secure footing. The more many-sided the aim, the more versatile

the training must be. It depends upon the individual—how talented he is as a man, as an artist, as a technician—whether he will reach a higher or lower degree of perfection, the rank of a leader or merely that of an assistant. The different capacities must be sifted out carefully. Therefore, the preliminary training should be a general one, so as to enable all sorts of artists—architects, painters, sculptors, art hand-workers, and industrial designers—to receive effective training. This preliminary training would develop and ripen intelligence, feeling, and ideas, with the general object of evolving the "complete being" who, from his biological centre, will be able to approach all things of life with instinctive certainty and will no longer be taken unawares by the rush and convulsion of our mechanical age. The objection that, in this world of industrial economy, such a general training implies extravagance or a loss of time does not, to my mind and experience, hold good. On the contrary, it will not only give the pupil greater confidence, but it will also enhance considerably the productiveness and the speed of his subsequent specialised training. Only when understanding of the inter-relationship of the phenomena of the world around him is awakened at an early age, will he be able to incorporate his own personal share in the creative work of his time.

The training has to be sufficiently broad to enable each talent to find its own way. Its concentric structure has to embody all the essential components of design and technique right from the beginning in order to give the student an immediate insight into the whole field of his future activities: the art of building and the art of space. It should not implicitly impart merely a knowledge of facts and norms but also things which constitute the most essential condition of every kind of creative work such as spatial perception, knowledge of materials, power of presentation; in addition to that, an understanding of business and industry and—the proper handling of materials and machines. The "how" of the training is therefore primarily of greater importance than the "what." If manual skill, the understanding of materials, and the powers of observation and thought are first properly trained, any specialised training can be absorbed rapidly without effort.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING.

The subsequent professional training has merely to give breadth and depth.

It should differ from the preliminary training only in degree and thoroughness and not in the essence. Also in this more advanced part of the training, manual skill in handling materials and tools seems to me indispensable for an architect's training. It not only brings him into closer contact with the means of production and the manufacturing processes of to-day, but gives him, in addition to that, responsibility towards his own design. For manual practice only provides him with the right vision as to how his design may be executed. And he arrives at self-expression according to his own form. This manual training is not to be regarded as an end in itself but as an irreplaceable means of balancing theoretical knowledge. Building practical pieces of handwork of any kind—for instance, furniture—is as valuable a training as abstract spatial compositions in materials without any other purpose than training the student's sense of space and proportion. Making tentative experiments on materials—for example, observing the contrast between rough and smooth, hard and soft, tension and repose—he discovers for himself, by exercise of his hands, the peculiarities of materials such as their structure, texture and surface.

Simultaneously the student studies the buildings' construction, their representation and computation; but, here again, the more general studies of mechanics and physics should be thoroughly studied before technical results are given by the teacher, in order to stimulate the student's mind towards his own creative thinking according to the laws of nature.

TRAINING IN DESIGN.

The training in design must run parallel with the training in the science of building. The designer must learn a special language of shape in order to be able to give visible expression to his ideas. He has to absorb a scientific knowledge of objectively valid optical facts, a theory which guides the shaping hand and provides a general basis on which a multitude of individuals can work together harmoniously. This theory is, naturally, not a recipe for works of art, but it is the most important objective means for collective work in design. It can best be explained by an example from the musical world: the theory of counterpoint which, though in the course of the ages it may have undergone certain changes, is, nevertheless, a super-individualistic system for regulating the world of tones. Its mastery is required lest the

musical idea should remain lost in chaos; for creative freedom does not reside in the infinitude of the means of expression and formation, but in free movement within its strictly legal bounds. The counterpoint of space existed in former times in Greek and Gothic art, particularly within the old mason guilds. The academy, whose task it should have been from the middle ages, when it was still a vital force, to tend and develop this theory of the optical arts, failed because it lost touch with reality. Intensive studies must be made, therefore, to rediscover this grammar of design and to develop it, in order to furnish the student with the objective knowledge of visual facts such as optical illusions, material and abstract space, rhythm, light and shade, proportion, colour, and scale. Instead of receiving arbitrary, subjective ideas of design and ready-made results, the student gets that objective tuition in the basic laws which alone enable him to acquire the mental equipment necessary to give tangible shape to his own creative instincts. Careful cultivation and further investigation of these natural laws would do more to further true tradition than any fine arts instruction in old forms and styles. The study of old forms possesses significance only as a means of showing the way in which our forefathers mastered the laws of nature.

THE FINAL AIM OF AN ARCHITECT'S EDUCATION.

To sum up, if we want to raise the standard of the architect's profession, we must make it again socially and economically indispensable to the whole community; that is to say, we must definitely overcome that unpleasant state of being regarded by ignorant people as a costly aesthetic luxury within the building profession. We must "go the whole hog" by reuniting the art of building and the art of space.

The most essential factor of our educational system must be the unity of its entire structure in all stages of development. It must grow concentrically, like the annular rings of a tree, embracing the whole from the beginning and at the same time gradually deepening and extending it. Dividing the training into individual sections carried out separately as regards time and place, instead of simultaneously, must destroy its unity. The curriculum of the young architect must become again a comprehensive hand and brain training without any short cuts which would turn out architects only half-

educated. The authoritative layout of this curriculum must avoid any too rigid schedule, providing its framework rather than its component details. The curriculum must include: craftsmanship, co-operation on building sites, and experiments with building materials, combined with thorough studies in space and colour, in draughtsmanship, in engineering and in the elements of town and regional planning. The drawing-board training of to-day, too bloodless, too aesthetically emphasised, must be balanced by more practical manual work, as drawing is an auxiliary means only.

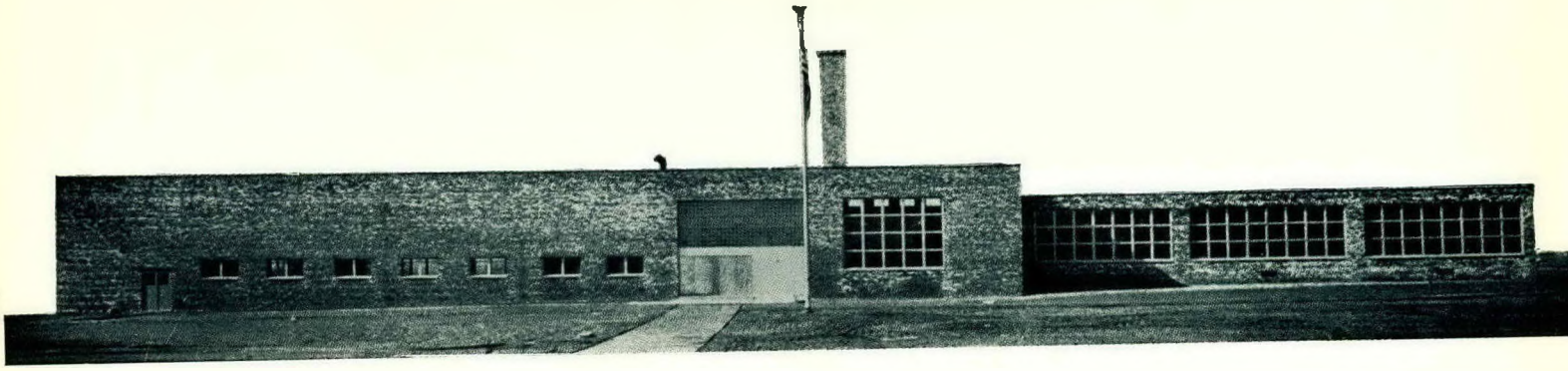
The student must be taught to think responsibly and exactly, in materials and structural units instead of water-colours, in three-dimensional and spatial relations instead of two-dimensional pictures.

Teaching the methods of approach to the problems concerned, rather than giving too many fixed results, will broaden the student's vision and make him independent and mature.

Our educational aim for the coming architect is, therefore: a man with an open mind for the new social, formal, and technical problems of our time, who seeks to create a unity of his work, the functions of which correspond genuinely to our present conditions; a man who tends to find the right expression for our new civilisation of the machine-age; a man of new vision. I cannot finish this paper without giving my best thanks to the organisers of this meeting for having afforded me the opportunity of giving evidence of my ideas in architectural education.

May I say that I feel deeply impressed by the enormous scale of American architecture and particularly by the charming Colonial houses in this part of the country. It may seem rather a daring enterprise that I, as an European architect, venture to add my experiences to the bold planning and amazing technical perfection which you have achieved. So I hope you will feel after this evidence, that I do not intend to introduce a cut-and-dried style from Europe. Having started my new duties at Harvard, I want to make my students realise how inexhaustible the means of creation are if they make use of the innumerable products of our age and to encourage them in finding their own solutions. My ideas have often been interpreted as the peak of rationalisation and mechanisation. This gives quite a wrong picture of my endeavours. I have always emphasised that the other aspect, the satisfaction

of the human soul, is just as important as the material aspect and that the intellectual achievement of a new spatial vision means more than structural economy and functional perfection. That is what makes our task so manifold and complex. More than ever before it is laid in the hands of us architects to help our contemporaries to lead a natural and sensible life instead of paying a heavy tribute to the false gods of make-believe. Good architecture should be a projection of life itself. So it should be our highest aim to produce a type of man who is able to visualise an entity rather than let himself get absorbed too early in the narrow channels of specialisation.





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HIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY
ALFRED KASTNER, ARCHITECT

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