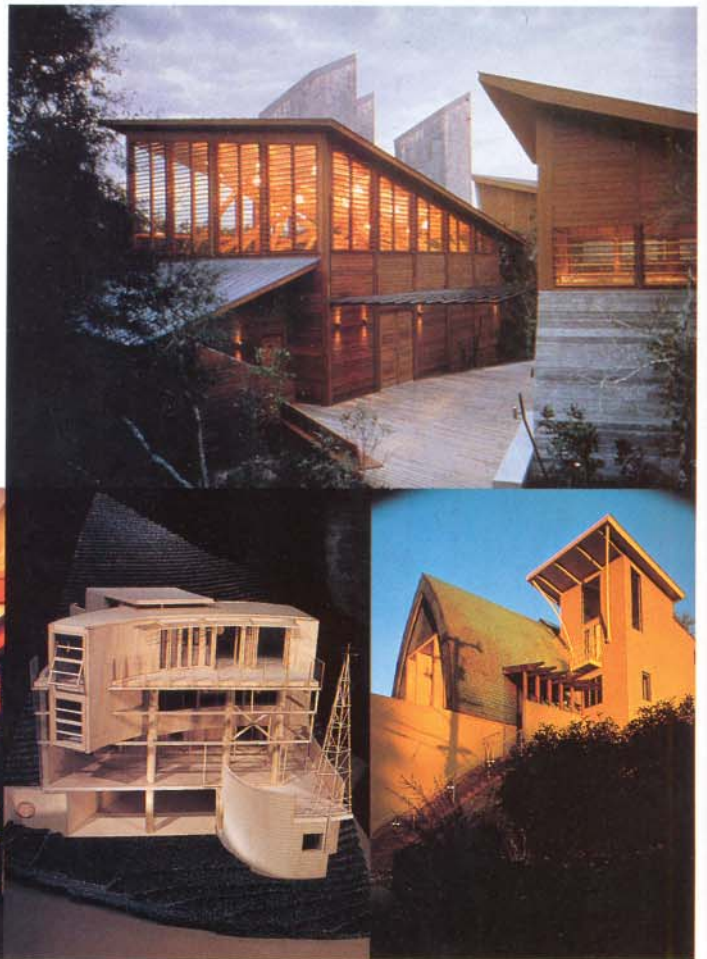


CONSTRUCTING COUPLES

As more women architects work in partnership with men, a new show looks at changes in a male-dominated profession

BY MARTIN FILLER



Even though creating domestic shelter has always been thought to have a deeply feminine component, architecture historically has been the profession most resistant to giving women the same opportunities and status as men. Only a century ago, Julia Morgan, future architect of Hearst Castle at San Simeon, became the first woman to study architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris because no architecture school in this country would have her.

More women were slowly admitted to architectural education and practice in the U.S., but almost none reached its upper echelons until after World War II, and even then very few did. Yet we now know that many of the early masters of modern architecture—including Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Gerrit Rietveld, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier—had highly talented women helpmates hidden somewhere in the background. And since the 1970s, enrollment of women in American architecture schools has skyrocketed. Today, a new generation of female architects has come of age without experiencing the imposed limitations that plagued their pioneering predecessors.

Now a thought-provoking new exhibition, “Equal Partners: Men and Women Principals in Contemporary Archi-

tectural Practice,” takes a look at the current state of male-female collaboration in the building art. Organized by the architectural historian Helen Searing, it is on view at the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts, through December 13, after which it begins a national tour. In a departure from conventional architectural displays of photographs, drawings, and models, this survey will also use “virtual walk-throughs” on video and CD-ROMs to simulate being in, rather than merely looking at, buildings. The show and its catalog focus on a broad range of relatively small firms chosen for their geographic and stylistic diversity.

“Ten years ago, when I began thinking about this show,” recalls Searing, “it seemed there weren’t that many architects to choose from. Today, even though this is a huge show with fifteen firms, there could easily have been fifty. Since it’s now difficult to identify any one dominant architectural movement, what the exhibition also shows is how many approaches are viable in contemporary architecture, from the historical allusions of Ace Architects’ Lucia Howard and David Weingarten to the more theory-oriented approach of Michael Cadwell and Jane Murphy.”

One of the most significant aspects of Searing’s >

Recent buildings by male-female teams include (clockwise from top right): Atlantic Center for the Arts by Thompson & Rose, Jordan house by Ace Architects, Thamas House II by Hodgetts & Fung, and Canyon House by Cignolle x Coleman