



American Branch

32 EAST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022



The following notice appeared in:

PROGRESSIVE ARCHITECTURE

October 1967

History of Talent and Money

BY ROBERT H. MUTRUX

THE PUZZLE OF ARCHITECTURE. *By Robin Boyd. Published in New York by the Cambridge University Press, 32 E. 57th St., New York, N.Y., 1965. 188 pp., illus., \$12.50. The reviewer is an architect with the firm of Fletcher-Thompson, Inc., in Bridgeport, Connecticut.*

Robin Boyd is an Australian, an architect, and an accomplished writer with an encyclopedic acquaintance of the profession of architecture, its products, and practitioners. In addition to all that, he is somewhat of a philosopher.

He demonstrates all of these talents when he sets out "naively" (his word, not mine) to solve the mystery in *The Puzzle of Architecture* of one of man's oldest extensions. His book is a scholarly and readable attempt to ascertain why man, after so many years, still persists in so many ways "to do something to make a building beautiful" and to explain "why this should be so difficult."

He has wisely limited his study to the 20th Century, with special emphasis on the last two decades. The result is a comprehensive and stimulating survey of an important chapter in architectural history, framed in wide margins (which seem to invite comments), and illustrated by the author with a continuity of sketches in sanguine. Every movement, every school, every style and its inevitable deterioration into a cliché has been acknowledged and appraised. Every personage of consequence, likewise, has been accorded appropriate space.

Robin Boyd is to be complimented on the candor and perception with which he measures the works of a period when their well-publicized image often overshadows the quality of the product. It is interesting to be reminded, in one small volume, that so many personages and products have made an impression in so short a period, and how many still exert a notable influence.

Boyd, however, seems more preoccupied with the dreams and frustrations of individual creators than he is with architecture as an abstract entity. It is this quality, however, that makes his work eminently readable. He touches only lightly on that other facet of the "puzzle," the one that makes the perennial enigma possible—the client. Had he suggested that the whole fascinating history of building is no more than a series of confrontations between talented architects and equally gifted (and well-endowed) patrons, it would be difficult to contradict him. But he pursues a somewhat more complex pattern, terminating his discourse with an idealistic but inconclusive generality that might apply equally well to any of man's creative endeavors.

We, of course, are "naive" to expect a specific answer to a question that is as profound and elusive as the search for truth itself. If we feel deceived, it is only after having enjoyed a discourse on the profession that, more than all the other arts, touches everyone, and on which not nearly enough is written by people who know what they are talking about. This is a highly entertaining and illuminating work, as far as it goes. If it is not definitive, it is our fault, not his. We are not definitive, either, and it is all about us.