

A Show of Strength

The reputation of SU's School of Architecture is now on exhibit.

by Alix Mitchell

With just 450 students and 28 faculty members, the School of Architecture is one of SU's smallest schools. But its national reputation defies its size.

Despite the fact that the school is also one of SU's newest—formed in 1945—instruction in architecture has a long history at Syracuse. In fact, what later became the school began as a department within the College of Fine Arts in 1873, just three years after the University's founding.

Over the last several years, the school has improved upon its distinguished tradition by strengthening its design emphasis, integrating the teaching of visiting architects into the program, and establishing an advisory committee of leading architects to monitor the program. In order to publicize the school and its revitalized programs, Dean Werner Seligmann, who joined the school in 1976, has plunged the school into new activities.

He and his faculty now organize exhibitions and competitions that spotlight their students and alumni. Seligmann also encourages his faculty to take on architectural projects and exhibit their work.

In addition, the school has begun a series of exhibitions of the works of famous architects, based on an impressive collection of architectural papers and drawings from SU's George Arents Research Library.

"When I came here," Seligmann says, "I wanted to distinguish the school from the other 90 or so in the country."

Part of what distinguishes the school is its strengthened design program. Fully half of its undergraduate courses are now devoted to design.

The teachings of visiting critics adds extra insights to the courses. Over one hundred visiting lecturers have taught at the school in the last eight years, including Swiss architects Mario Campi, Ernst Studer, and Fabio Reinhart, and Spanish

architect Xavier Ballosillo.

Other visiting critics come to teach week-long segments that make up semester-long senior seminars on selected topics.

Fourth-year students also have an opportunity to study architectural design first-hand. Through the school's Florence and Summer Abroad programs, they visit and analyze great European buildings that are landmarks in the history of architecture.

To monitor the effectiveness of these programs, the school relies on the insights of its advisory committee. The committee members include Bruce Fowle '60, of the well-known New York City high-rise architecture firm Fox & Fowle Architects, James Garrison '79, an associate of James Stewart Polshek and Associates, Mark de Shong '75, a young, up-and-coming Philadelphia architect, James Freed, of I.M. Pei and Partners, and Raul de Armas, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

The committee meets twice a year, according to Seligmann, to review the school's requirements and goals.

"They look at the work we do," says Assistant Professor Christopher Gray, "and give their opinions of how consistent and valid it is. In addition to the accreditation process we go through, this helps us monitor what we do."

The school has become confident enough in what it does that it now organizes student competitions that showcase the skills of its students.

One such competition, held for the first time last year, is the Soling Architecture Student Design Competition. Sponsored by SU Trustee Chester Soling '54 and organized by Randall Korman, head of the graduate architecture program, the competition called for student teams from SU and seven other schools to create a multi-use high-rise in Manhattan's theater district. The building had to conform to 1982 building codes, under



Dean Werner Seligmann (above) augments the School of Architecture's strong reputation by sending into America faculty-assembled design exhibitions. Current examples include work by William Lescaze (opposite, above left) and Ralph Walker (far right). At the same time, faculty designs receive similar attention: Simon Ungers proposed this Pan Am Building sphere (near right).

which no such structure had yet been built.

The SU team of Peter Wieder-spahn and Richard A. Cook walked off with the first-place award, beating out teams from Harvard and Yale.

The impact of the Soling Competition, however, did not end with the judging. Several entries were featured in the spring 1983 issue of *Architectural Record*; and, according to Korman, a chapter on the competition will be included in a forthcoming book by Ada Louise Huxtable, former architectural critic for *The New York Times*.

In addition to highlighting student skills, Seligmann is currently organizing an exhibition of the work of alumni who graduated within the past 10 years. The exhibition will open at SU's Lubin House in New York City on Dec. 3, then come to Syracuse, and later travel to alumni clubs across the country.

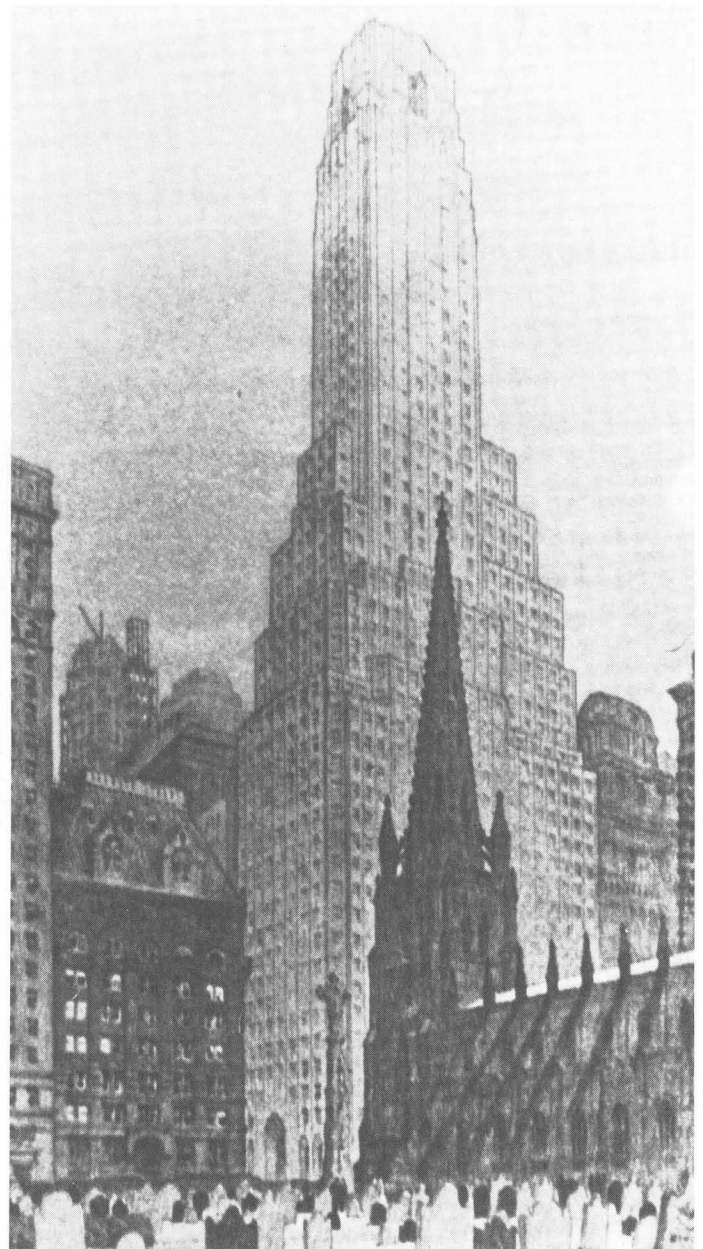
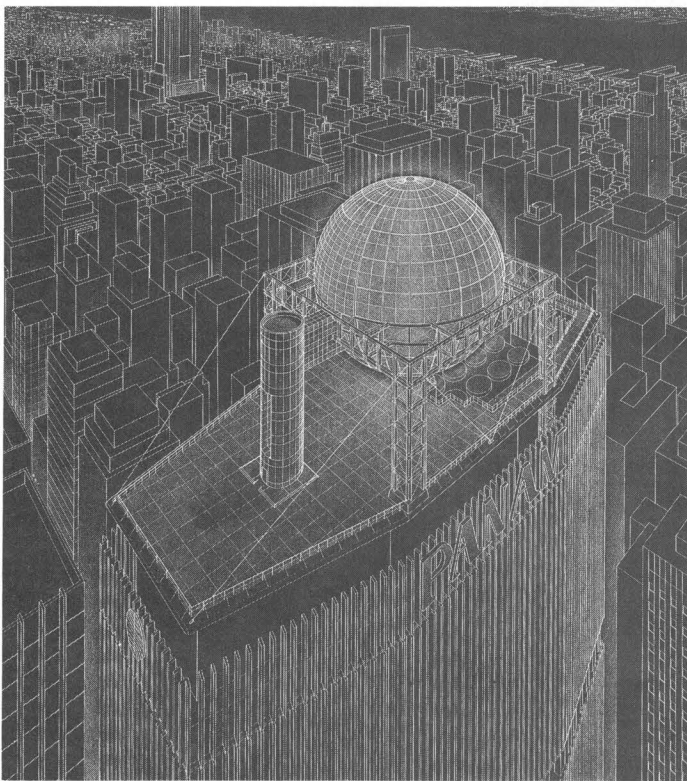
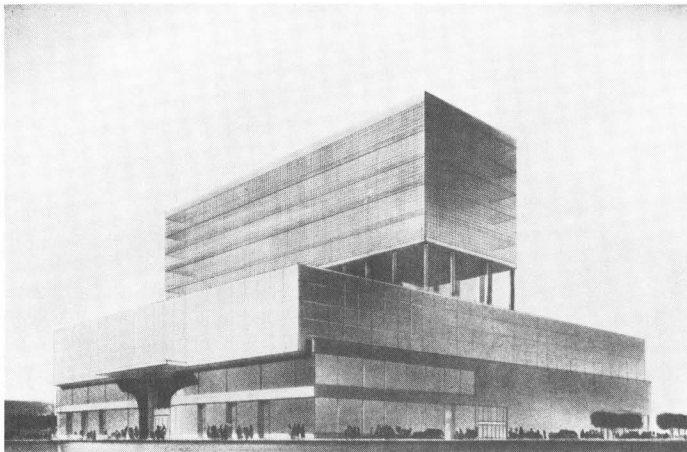
Work by faculty members also gets its share of attention. The school has held faculty exhibitions and competitions, but, says Seligmann, it also encourages faculty to

work on "select projects" and to promote their own work.

Assistant Professor Simon Ungers' firm, UKZ Architects, recently organized an exhibition of its work, which opened at the Facade Gallery in New York City in September, before beginning a national tour.

Ungers also received national attention last year when he designed a glass sphere that would float atop the Pan American Building. The proposal won an architectural design citation from *Progressive Architecture* and was exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art this past spring. Prepared for developer Adrian Sabo, the sphere could house a nightclub, casino, and small theater or broadcasting center.

In addition to supporting faculty work and promoting the talents of its students and alumni, the school has taken on yet another new project: It is putting the impressive architectural holdings of the George Arents Research Library on public display by organizing a series of exhibitions that will tour nationally.



The first of this series features the work of William Lescaze, the visionary architect of the 1920s and 1930s. Lescaze was a leading figure among modernist architects called New Pioneers.

The Lescaze exhibition, "The Rise of Modern Design in America," is based on the Arents Library's holdings of his personal archive. The exhibition includes photos and drawings of his work, and models of his buildings, constructed by SU architecture students.

According to Christopher Gray, project director of the exhibition, the Lescaze show focuses on architects' current interest in the origins and demise of the modernist movement.

To address this interest, a symposium was held by the school in February, when the exhibition opened at the Everson Museum in Syracuse. Then in June, a presentation and discussion were held at the National Academy of Design in New York, when the exhibition opened there. A third seminar was held at the Philadelphia College of Art when the exhibition moved there this fall.

The school's second exhibition of influential architects, presented this summer, showed the work of New Traditionalist Ralph Walker, a contemporary of Lescaze who took a much more conservative approach to design.

As with the Lescaze exhibition,

the Walker exhibition was drawn from his personal papers and drawings in the Arents Library.

The exhibition, displayed at Lubin House from June through August, featured design studies of Walker's most famous buildings, including the Barclay-Vesey Telephone building in New York City.

The school will next be turning its attention to the remarkable Arents collection of Marcel Breuer's papers and photographs. Breuer, like Lescaze, was a leading figure of the New Pioneer movement. The Arents collection spans the years 1934-1953, and contains the surviving Breuer drawings, correspondence, and photographs prior to 1951.

The school is planning to launch a Breuer exhibition in 1987, marking the 50th anniversary of Breuer's immigration to the states.

Exhibitions such as these help keep the school's name in the public eye, and that is certainly one motive for organizing them, according to Seligmann. But they are also one expression of what Korman calls the faculty's "passion for Architecture with a capital A."

All that the school does—from its intensive design program to its competitions and exhibitions—reflects this passion.

As Seligmann says, "We're determined to deliver something more than merely an ordinary education."