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“Queer Architecture?”

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Queerness and architecture are not obvious bedfellows. To be sure, there is much scholarly writing about “queer space” — that is, how queer people experience, inhabit, and reclaim urban space. But notwithstanding architecture’s long history of gendering styles, rooms, and decorative interiors, there is no “queer” architectural style. However, many architects and interior designers think that “queered” space can contribute to queer identity formation. For example, while “a skeleton in the closet” once referred to a dubious family history, for queer people the “closet” has become an enduring metaphor. Whether one is in the closet or coming out of it, the closet remains a symbol of self. Coming out of the closet is a way to realize one’s human potential. As Clare Cooper Marcus argues, “The self signifies the unification of consciousness and unconsciousness in a person, and represents the psyche as a whole, an encompassing whole which acts as a container” (Cooper Marcus, 1974, p.12).

For many queer people, self-realization begins with the body as a container of the self. From prosthetics and makeup to tattoos and gender confirmation surgery, the body can be an instrument for exploring and testing one’s gender identity and presenting one’s sexual preferences. Similarly, the clothes one wears and the room one inhabits can be transformed to express a queer-friendly place to encounter the world and interact with it. Coming out on the dance floor remains one of the most powerful and memorable experiences for many queer youth — a safe public place that is licensed for liminality, a place where one can, in a newly altered body, engage and perform the new self (Urbach, 1996).

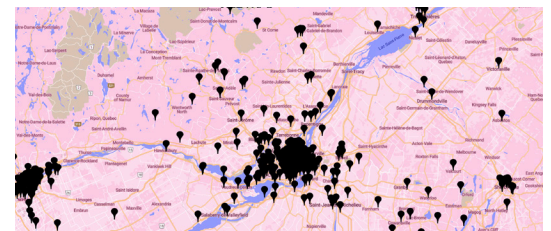
Then comes the opportunity to nest and transform one’s home. Here, queer people can express their difference, surround themselves with affirming imagery and mementos, and perhaps even design an ideal “container”. In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Carl Jung describes the gradual evolution of his home on Lake Zurich and how it reflected his state of mind, from ecstasy to deep depression (Jung, 1965). Clare Cooper Marcus builds on Jung to argue how the house is the symbol of self, in its most expressive and enduring form (Cooper Marcus, 1974, p. 12).

For contemporary queer culture, the house expands its visible presence beyond its walls with the aid of digital media. Interactive platforms have expanded the notion of home into a large network of localized memories. For example, the interactive project *Queering the Map* allows queers to tag a digital map of the world with their lived experience (Echenique & Boone, 2018). The majority are good memories, such as romantic encounters in public places where they felt at home. The memories are described with a short text and pinned anonymously, even in countries where homosexuality is illegal, showing the power of new media to provide visible alternatives and a sense of belonging.

As an architectural historian, I believe queer material culture merits careful study. Fortunately, young scholars are finding support to research queer topics that may be difficult or even impossible to

Abstract

In the twentieth century, places designed for and by queer people have moved out of the shadows and into the light — normalized and at times even commercialized as tourist attractions. This chapter reflects on the presence and increasing visibility of queer places, and particularly architecture designed by and for queer people — from public monuments, celebrations, and exhibitions to private homes that lesbians and gay men designed as homosocial retreats, from the Côte d’Azur in the 1920s to Fire Island in the 1970s. The chapter closes with a reflection on queer design partnerships working in an anti-gay environment, analyzing two such couples active in Canada in the post-war period: Arthur Erickson & Francisco Kripacz, and Mary Imrie & Jean Wallbridge.



Queering the Map. Montreal and its region.
Queeringthemap.com

take on in their home country, increasing the geographical reach of queer studies. Deep dives into the archives of queer architects and designers are all contributing to the development of queer architectural history.

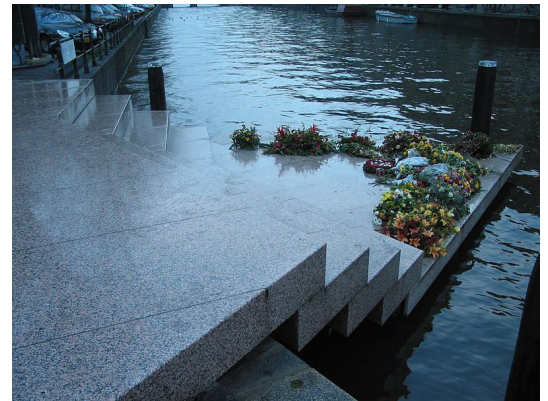
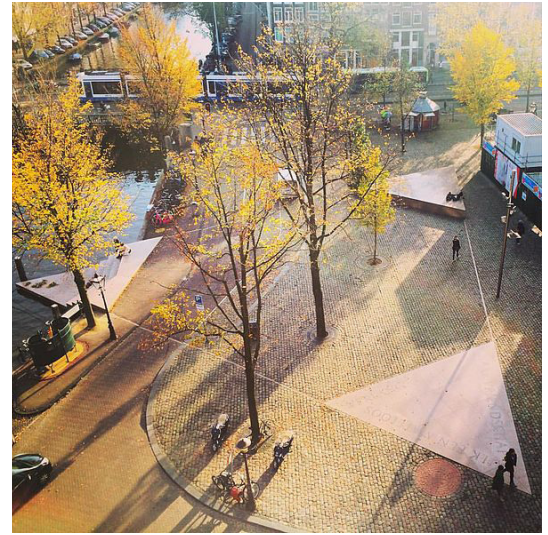
Many places resonate in the collective memory of queer people and should be celebrated with monuments, plaques on buildings where a famous queer person lived, and to protect queer-significant urban districts such as the Castro in San Francisco. The first monument dedicated to queer people was Amsterdam's Homomonument (1987), described by the artist as a commemoration of the suffering of queer people. Other monuments followed. Pierre Nora calls these lieux de mémoire (site of memory), whether they be a monument, a house, a bar, or a discotheque (Nora, 1989). But unlike monuments to commemorate fallen soldiers, queer places of memory are continually under threat. For this reason, it is important to archive, create exhibitions and write books about queer material culture.

This chapter reflects on queer material culture from the point of view of both architectural history and architectural practice. I show how architecture in the 20th century has evolved in response to homophobia — from protecting one's house behind high walls and fences, to buildings increasingly more open to the street. In terms of practice, I investigate designers' contributions to queer identity formation in a variety of places: museums, street parades, and vacation houses. But we first need to ask, "what is queer architecture"?

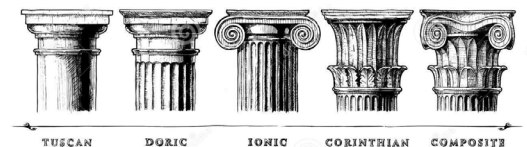
Defining queer architecture, an entangled debate

Judith Butler argues that "gender is not something that is attributed to an already pre-existing subject because of this subject's biological characteristics, but rather something that is produced through its repetitive enactment in response to discursive forces" (Butler, 2007, p. 34). These "discursive forces" include the built environment. In fact, the discourse of Western architecture is fundamentally gendered, and these gendered associations have been reinforced through education and architectural theory. For example, "the classical 'orders' of Ancient Greece and Rome were gendered — according to Vitruvius, the Doric order was associated with the masculine, Ionic with matronly, and Corinthian with maidenly genders" (Forty, 1996, p. 143). During the 18th and 19th centuries, European architects perfected the art of associating gender to rooms and their proper interior decoration. In the houses of the upper middle class for example, light colors and decorative wallpaper were used in a feminine boudoir and dark colors and leather coverings for a masculine study (Kinchin, 1996).

The massive social change of the fin de siècle was expressed in buildings that played with traditional gender associations. Art Nouveau architects began to invert gender associations to create a new architectural language. Charles Rennie Mackintosh for example, designed the boardroom of his extraordinary Glasgow School of Art with large windows flooding the room with sunlight, further brightened by a color scheme of white and apple green. The all-male board members experienced this as a visceral shock — instead of a club-like sanctum of dark wood and leather, here was a light-filled room more fitting for a women's tearoom (Kinchin, 1996).



Homomonument, Amsterdam, by Karin Daan. 1987. On 4 May, the Netherlands' annual Remembrance Day for WWII, a wreath is laid on the monument to commemorate LGBT victims of persecution; the next day, Liberation Day, the monument becomes the site of a street party.



Classical capital forms according to Vitruvius, the Doric is masculine, Ionic is matronly, and Corinthian is maidenly.

The early resort hotels in American National Parks present another example of queering gendered architectural norms. While the rhetoric of rustic hunting lodges was well-developed by the early hunter/conservationists — such as George Bird Grinnell and Teddy Roosevelt of the Boone and Crockett Club — the first concessionaires in Yellowstone National Park had to appeal to family vacationers and particularly women (Macy & Bonnemaïson, 2003). We can see the result of this collaging of masculine and feminine references in the architecture of the Old Faithful Inn, designed by Robert Reamer in 1905. The building can be described as “butch”, a combination of a “masculine” hunters’ lodge or log cabin, and a “feminine” Arts and Crafts expression of the “simple life” — plainly and gracefully decorated with attention to everyday comforts (Bonnemaïson, 2000). Although it featured a massive eight-hearth stone chimney and oversized wood columns expected of “the world’s largest log cabin”, it also advertised sitting nooks, lace-like balustrades offering intimate areas for the genteel pastimes of card-playing and conversation, and a “honeymoon suite” replete with a fresh cotton counterpane on a four-poster bed and a bay window for gazing out at the scenery. In short, the Old Faithful Inn was designed to attract women and men, armed not with guns but with cameras (Macy & Bonnemaïson, 2003). Such play with gender references was a central feature of fin de siècle and early modern architecture, as we will see later in the work of Eileen Gray (Bonnemaïson, 2019).

But it is not until the “gay liberation” of the 1970s, that architectural critics finally began to acknowledge the possibility of a queer architecture. Influenced by Linda Nochlin’s famous essay of 1971, “Why have there been no great women artists?”, Charles Jencks was the first to acknowledge a queer presence in architecture, in his characterization of the “post-modern” style (Jencks, 1977). Robert A. Gorny explains,

Speaking of the ‘Gay Eclectic’ Jencks identified the uses of irony, parody and travesty. Semantic double coding was part and parcel of his project of abandoning the reductive and universalist claims of modern architecture [...], while a number of gay architects figured prominently in Jencks’ rewriting of architectural history, most notably Philip Johnson and Charles Moore. (Gorny & van den Heuvel, 2017, p. 2)

Beatriz Colomina suggests that queer architects have contributed to the history of architecture for hundreds of years, yet “their stories, their imagination, their aesthetics is left out of architectural history” (as cited in Kotsioris, 2020, p.19). But Colomina wants to go even further by looking at the canonical works of modern architecture from a different angle. In her book *Privacy and Publicity*, she unpacks the hyper-masculinized dimensions of Le Corbusier’s architectural promenade and its over-emphasis on the gaze (Colomina, 1994). Similarly, Alice Friedman probed the tensions between Mies van der Rohe’s insistence on transparency in his famous Glass House and the frustration of his prominent client, the Chicago heiress Alice Farnsworth, who — feeling like she was living in a fishbowl — famously slammed him publicly in the pages of *Ladies Home Journal* (Friedman, 2006, p. 152). The Glass House designed by Philip Johnson however, conceived as an homage to Mies was not so much a house as a setting for a theatrical ritual enacting domestic activity. As Arthur Drexler observed in his 1949 review of the building,



Lobby at the Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, 1904. Photograph by J.F. Haynes.



Honeymoon Suite at the Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, 1904. Photograph by J.F. Haynes.



Glass House, New Canaan, CT, 1949. Architect Philip Johnson. Photograph Commons wikimedia.org

“the dignified proportions of the counter effectively transform it from a mere workspace to the scene of pontifical ceremonies. The mixing of a gin and tonic, or the scrambling of eggs, becomes a luxury which is the significant blend of ritual and necessity” (Drexler, 1949, p. 96).

A review of the literature on queer architecture sheds light on some architects while keeping others under cover. In addition to Johnson’s Glass House, both Harwell Hamilton Harris’s Weston Havens House (Adams, 2010) and Paul Rudolph’s Manhattan apartment (Rohan, 2014) define the contours of a male homosexual residential typology — what George Wagner calls the “bachelor pad” (Wagner, 1996). Rather quickly, a narrative about queer architecture unfolds with key players and key buildings. Yet other queer issues remain unaddressed, such as the periodic transformation of quotidian spaces to support queer gatherings — in the urban alleys of large cities, or in the curling rinks and barns of smaller rural communities, rented for the evening as a place to dance, party and socialize (Metcalf, 1997). Once queer bars became permanent venues, more readily visible and located near heterosexual bars, gay bashing intensified. So when bars became visible on the street, this did not liberate queer people.

To that end, Jasmine Rault reminds us “to interrupt the narrative of progress, from sexual representation to post-Stonewall liberation, which we are encouraged to reiterate and compelled to identify with” (Rault, 2011, p. 3), and instead cautions us to remain aware that queerness is a continual struggle and an evolving discourse. When the debates around queer space elude issues of race and class, a new homonormativity appears, a uniform neoliberal vision of a homosexual community rendered visible by rich white men (Vallerand, 2016). According to Vallerand, homonormativity obscures fundamental issues that are strongly marked by gender, class, and race — such as access to resources and the agency of inhabitants in the design of their homes and places of work.

A good example of this push back, on a homogenous queer architectural discourse, is a recent exhibition on Luis Barragan’s well-known home, office, and garden in Mexico City (Moffitt 2019). Evan Moffitt showed that this house was designed not for one, but two people — the other person was not Barragan’s lover but his maid, who occupied very small rooms in the back of the house, an enduring tradition from Spanish colonial times (p. 2). Moffitt does not attempt to reduce the aesthetic impact of this iconic architect who was strictly closeted throughout his long career, but he teases out the contradictions that are present in, what at first glance appears to be an integral, complete work of architecture. The hidden dialectic of class required the maid to be invisible at all times, disappearing into hidden staircases and tucked into the deepest recesses of the dwelling. And the class issue is combined with a deeply repressed homosexuality, wrapped in a cloak of intense Catholic spirituality. For Moffitt, these divisions are fundamental to the enduring appeal of Barragan’s work. He writes,

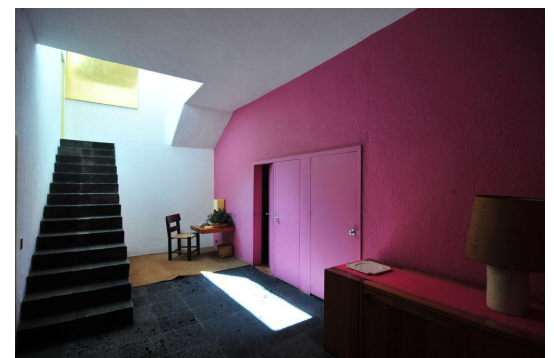
fraccionar, to divide or parcel, gives root to the fraccionamientos, or official neighbourhoods, of Mexico City. The verb applied to Barragan’s life in many ways: the modernist play of architectural volumes; the consubstantial power of the holy trinity; the irreconcilability of queerness and religious conservatism; the design of suburban housing developments [of gated communities and convents]. (p. 4)



Paul Rudolph Apartment and Penthouse, 23 Beekman Place, NYC, 1977-1995. Photograph Commons wikimedia.org



Weston Havens House, Berkeley, CA, 1940. Architect Harwell Hamilton Harris. Photograph Commons wikimedia.org



Interiors of Luis Barragan’s house, Mexico City

Through this exhibition, one can see the extent to which certain aspects of Barragan's work have been ignored or even erased, as his work was promoted as emblematic of Mexico's contribution to modernism. As a result, Barragan's contributions as a queer architect have been marginalized, and the persistence of colonial social patterns expressed in his buildings left unquestioned.

The lesbian feminist contribution

Most of the history, theory and criticism of queer architecture focuses on places for gay men and the work of gay male architects. However, feminist historians have done a great deal of work over the past 20 years ranging from sexuality to the history of domestic spaces (Heynen, 2005) and are starting to include lesbianism as an aspect of their research, such as Eileen Gray's active participation in the lesbian networks in Paris of the 1920s (Rault, 2011). As I move forward, I propose to draw on the work of feminist and queer philosopher Rosi Braidotti for her critique of oppositional identity politics, in which one gender / "race" / religion / sexual orientation is considered to be less than the other (Braidotti, 2013).

[Braidotti's] concept of figurations unpacks the various practices and discourses to demonstrate that they are situated and take form in specific constructs. Such configurations are materially embodied and embedded, relational and affective. (Gorny, 2017, p. 4)

Architecture is one means through which such configurations are "materially embodied and embedded." As Michel Foucault has argued, architecture is a "visible statement" of a discursive formation around power and knowledge (Hirst, 1993, p. 52). Bodies inhabit buildings and building designs are imbedded with assumptions about what bodies should and should not do. Architecture is one of the discursive forces we tangle with in our daily life. If we agree with Shakespeare who said that the world is a stage, it seems clear that people enact roles with architecture as a stage set. But unlike other discursive forces, architecture is experienced in a state of distraction (Benjamin, 1968). So the impact of architecture on our lives is strangely more pervasive but also more unconscious.

For the purpose of this chapter, queer architecture is understood to be buildings created by queer architects as well as designs aimed at the queer community. As it will soon become evident, many of the examples are in Canada. I am also drawing on queer aspects of my research and from my own architectural practice, Filum Ltd — shared with Christine Macy, my life-long partner. The chapter first explores places of queer memory — from monuments and celebrations to the growth of entire districts. Then it looks at modern leisure architecture, such as summer homes for lesbians on the Côte d'Azur in the 1920s and gay men's beach houses on Fire Island in the 1960s and '70s. Lastly, the chapter turns to the architectural profession and explores how queer couples collaborate in an anti-gay environment. To do this, I compare two such couples active in Canadian post-war modernism: Arthur Erickson and Francisco Kripacz and less flashy but, as it will become apparent, important to lesbian architectural culture, Mary Imrie and Jean Wallbridge.



Interior of Luis Barragan's house, Mexico City

Places of memory of queer culture

Places of memory in the form of monuments and celebrations are important to queer culture, as they recall the oppression of queer people. Commenting on literature about queers, Heather Love says,

The embarrassment of owning such feelings, out of place as they are in a movement that takes pride as its watchword, is acute ... These texts do have a lot to tell us, though: they describe what it is like to bear a 'disqualified' identity, which at times can simply mean living with injury ... not fixing it. (Love, 2007, p. 129)

Monuments recognizing and commemorating the suffering of queers play an important role in validating queer identity and naturalizing queerness in larger social contexts. These places of memory may have their origins in local histories, but are today subsumed in a touristic machinery, transforming them into places of pilgrimage for queer visitors from across the world.

Monuments

Karen Daan's Homomonument commemorates all gay men and lesbians who have been subjected to persecution because of their sexual orientation (Daan, 1987). It was erected in 1987 in the centre of Amsterdam, on the bank of the Keizersgracht. Three large pink triangles of granite are set into the ground to form a larger triangle. The purpose, according to the artist, is "to inspire and support lesbians and gays in their struggle against denial, oppression and discrimination" (Daan, 1987).

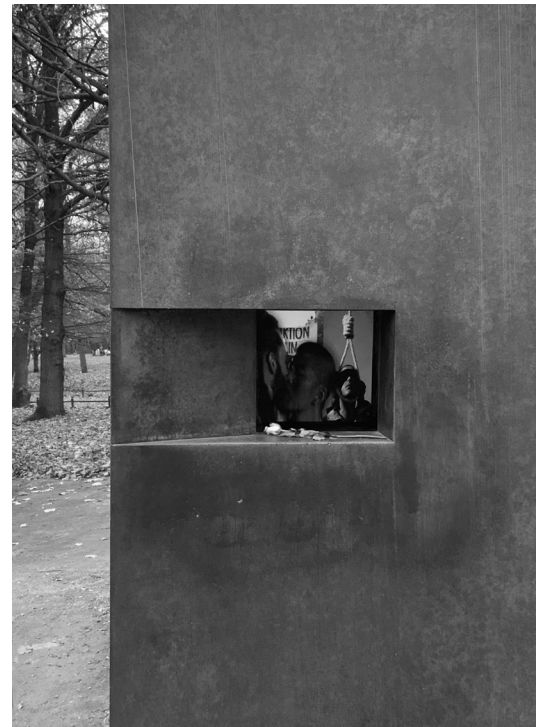
Subsequent monuments to persecuted homosexuals have been realized in cities around the world: in Germany, the Angel of Frankfurt (1994), the Rosa Winkel monument in Cologne (1995), and the Memorial for Homosexuals Persecuted by the Nazis in Berlin (2008). This most recent memorial, by artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, is located at the edge of the Tiergarten, across the avenue from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. It is a tilted cuboid of concrete, with a window embedded on its front; here, visitors can peer at a video of two men kissing. Nearby, a panel explains that "you could be arrested for a kiss during the persecution of homosexuality that began under the Nazis and continued until it was finally voided in 1994" (Wockner, 2008).

Of the placement of this monument, Berliner architect Peter Sassenroth observes,

It is a very prominent place — just vis-à-vis the very well-known Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe — it is positioned at a major street leading to the Brandenburg Gate, in the center of the city! We can recognize the Holocaust Memorial by Peter Eisenman in the right edge of the image. The memorial of homosexuals persecuted by the Nazis feels like it is almost a satellite of the "big" memorial ... it has the same material, same colour ... similar proportions. It feels as if one of the big stones (stelae) was ejected from the bigger memorial, thrown over — and landed on the other side of the street, somehow tilted you can feel the connection." (Sassenroth, personal communication, November 20, 2020)



Memorial for Homosexuals Persecuted by the Nazis in Berlin, 2008. Photograph by Peter Sassenroth.



Detail, Berlin, 2008. Photograph by Peter Sassenroth.

In the year following its dedication, the monument was frequently vandalized, and its artists endured numerous controversies by Jewish historians (Wockner, 2008) — showing that the persecution of homosexuals during the Nazi regime is still seen by some people as less important than the persecution of the Jews - even if many homosexuals were also Jews.

Festivals and parades

While architectural historians focusing on queer spaces tend to look at buildings, geographers looking at queer spaces have turned their attention to the streets and square of cities. Yet often ephemeral events that reclaim the city as queer space are also designed and staged — by artists, designers, architects, and performing arts groups. We might imagine that ephemeral events such as demonstrations, parades, performances, and parties leave few traces behind. However, they are often photographed, providing us with documentary records that reveal the development of collective queer identity, the bricolage aesthetic of clubs formed by lighting and dance platforms, and the transformation of urban public space to create a queer city, even if only for a limited time.

For example, the edited book *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* maps queer urban domains in several cities (Ingram, et al., 1997). It also explores performative happenings and installations by groups such as Act-Up, intended to raise public awareness of the queer experience, and mobilize support against discriminatory laws and practices (Ingram et al., 1997). Anthropologist Victor Turner calls such events “liminal” — from the Latin word *limens* for threshold (Turner, 1969). Most cultures sanction liminal events in specified times and places. Historians distinguish between spectacle (which is imposed from above by the state or corporation) and festival (grassroots and liberatory phenomenon). Grass roots carnivalesque festivals like Halloween, present images of alterity that, at some level, ultimately empower those who are disenfranchised or oppressed by society. Natalie Zemon Davis argues that some festivals, by presenting images which are multivalent, can put into the public realm potentially liberating representations (Davis, 2006).

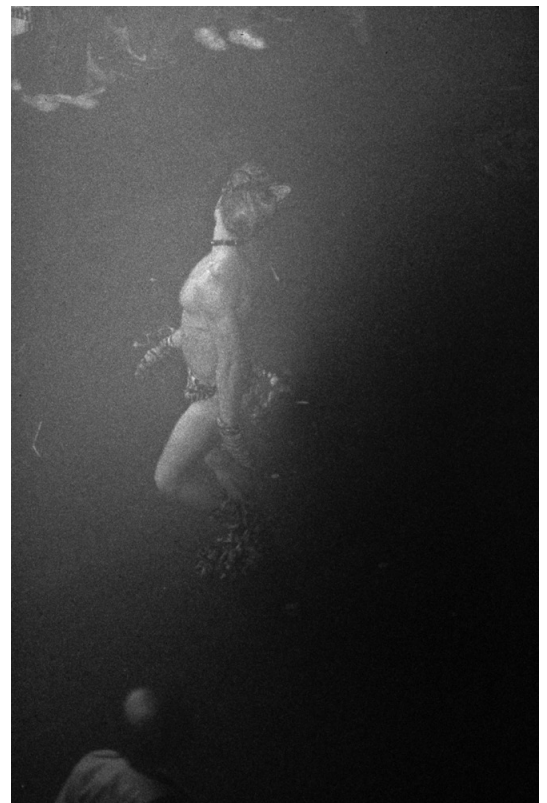
One example of a liminal event was Greenwich Village's first Gay Pride parade in 1970. This took place a year after the Stonewall riots and stretched over 57 blocks from Greenwich Village to Central Park. When puppeteer Ralph Lee started the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade three years later, it was quickly adopted by the queer community as an opportunity for the artistic expression of queerness. Unlike most Manhattan parades that proceed up or down the city's major avenues, the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade had a cross-town trajectory, beginning at West Beth Artists Colony and culminating in Washington Square. [Place Fig. 5 here] The event re-cast the city as a backdrop for the public performance of queerness, feeling like a giant block party (Bonnemaïson & Macy, 2002).

Curating and archiving queer culture

Ephemeral events like Pride parades, public actions, and protests all contribute to the identity and development of queer communities, either because they have been directly experienced and remembered,



Greenwich Village Halloween parade, NYC.
Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen, 1985



Greenwich Village Halloween parade, NYC.
Photograph by Mariette Pathy Allen, 1985

or these experiences are shared as stories, shaping what Maurice Halbwachs calls “collective memory” (Halbwachs, 1992). Other ephemera — the minor mementos of a moment — are rarely catalogued yet offer a glimpse into queer countercultures of the past. Because queer history has been marginalized or excluded from the written record, such ephemera and oral histories are especially important and sometimes the only way into the construction of a collective memory.

Robin Metcalfe’s 1997 exhibit entitled *Queer Looking, Queer Acting* (Lesbian and Gay Vernacular) displayed the ephemera of a quarter century of queer activism in Halifax, Nova Scotia. An activist, art critic, and independent curator, and a native of Cape Breton Island, Metcalfe had experienced first-hand the emergence of queer activism in Atlantic Canada. And he had collected innumerable mementos from these years: posters, placards, t-shirts, performances, and videos. All were created by professional artists and designers, but they also shared a vernacular quality, a home-grown aesthetic, and a love of word play. The exhibition took place in Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery, a 1970s-era rough concrete container.

Filum, my design partnership with Christine Macy, was commissioned to create an installation that would “queer” this formidable Brutalist space. We attached a series of stretched white lycra screens the full height of the gallery, shaping the flow of people from one zone into another. The curved fabrics surfaces also provided support to display small ephemera (pin-back buttons, stickers, posters) and project films.

By re-presenting queer ephemera in the context of an art gallery, and asserting their cultural value through critical catalogue essays, Metcalfe showed the centrality of these objects in shaping queer culture in Atlantic Canada and asserted their cultural value and

OUT: Queer Looking Queer Acting. Exhibition. Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, NS. Photograph by Robin Metcalfe, 1997.



significance. According to him, the exhibition and catalogue were a “celebration of the past, an important social and historical documentation, and a passing of the proverbial baton” (Metcalf, 2002, p. 4). Our installation was a metaphor for queer life in Nova Scotia: a small community nourished by creatives for whom living on the margins of power is not a weakness, but a strength.

Homosocial party houses

In the 20th century, lesbian and gay professionals — even those living and working in large cities — faced pervasive anti-gay sentiment that required them to keep their private lives securely closeted. But summer offered an opportunity for license, when queers wanting to socialize with like-minded friends sought out secluded coastal settlements with a reputation for a freer, bohemian lifestyle. Such summer houses, designed for socializing as much as for leisure or retreat, often reveal a queer sensibility in their inversion of conventional room types and arrangements, and in their complex design strategies to achieve both exposure to and privacy from their natural settings.

Two well-known summer vacation regions are discussed here: for lesbians in early 20th century France, the rocky escarpments of the Côte d’Azur; and for gay men in New York City of the 1960s, the surf-caressed beaches of Fire Island. The vacation houses in these two locations, designed or adapted for queer lifestyles, provide us with insights into the spatial and architectural expression of an unconstrained queer life.

Sapphic modernity on the Côte d’Azur

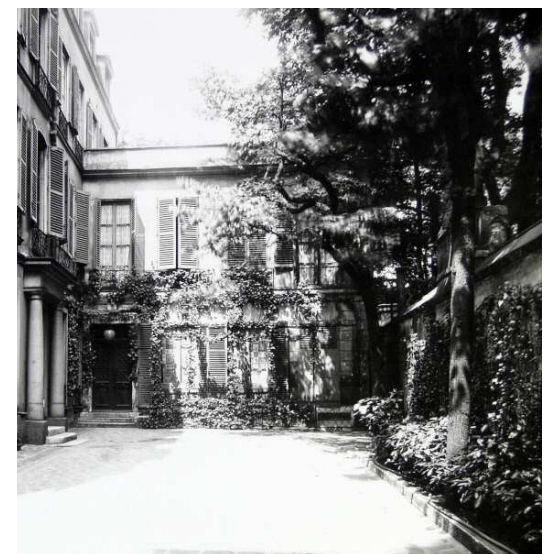
In early 20th century, Paris was a magnet for wealthy lesbian women who wanted to throw off the harness of familial and social restrictions and find an environment that would allow them the latitude to live their life as they chose. Many of these women were artists, writers, performers, designers, or patrons of the arts, and Paris offered them a fruitful context for their creative, professional, and social life.

The writer Natalie Clifford Barney and the painter Romaine Brooks were two such strong-willed heiresses, at the center of an influential circle of friends, lovers, and acquaintances that included most of the creative women living in Paris at that time. Barney’s house on the Left Bank of the city was a rarity — a free-standing pavilion surrounded by a large garden, which also contained a small garden folly she dubbed the Temple de l’Amitié (temple of friendship). This secluded yet expansive pavilion surrounded by a lush overgrown garden projected a captivating atmosphere of freedom and romantic decay. Barney’s salons on rue Jacob were famous for the guests they attracted and the artistic rituals that took place on Friday afternoons.

To paint however, Brooks needed solitude. Traditionally, the French bourgeoisie vacationed on the coasts of Normandy or the Riviera, so it is unsurprising that many wealthy lesbian couples built their summer houses on the Côte d’Azur between Saint Tropez and Monaco. The land was relatively inexpensive, the new “modern style” of architecture offered a different approach to domestic life, and they could socialize



Portrait of Natalie Clifford Barney (right) and Romaine Brooks (left), ca. 1920.



Barney’s residence at 20 rue Jacob, Paris. Pavilion (top) and *Temple de l’Amitié* (bottom). Photographs by Eugène Atget, 1910.

with friends and lovers in the public beaches and cafes of Saint Tropez, Cannes and Menton. Barney and Brooks called their architect-designed modern home the Villa Trait d'Union (the Hyphenated Villa). This was a house of two wings — one for each of them — sharing a dining room in the middle. The house was destroyed during the Second World War, and its traces are more literary than visual. Yet the notion of a “hyphenated villa” offers a powerful metaphor for a lesbian lifestyle — two dwellings connected by what they share yet separated, each with their own integrity and autonomy. This is undisputedly an idea of home, but one that has been changed, “queered” in its assertion of independence and togetherness being two compatible states.

In this regard, as Judith Butler says, “the task is not whether to repeat [normative family structures] but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (as cited in Heynen, 2005, p. 25). In the Villa Trait d'Union, the bedroom is duplicated — displacing the singular optics of what happens in these rooms and to propose an alternative. “Such displacement might be enhanced,” Hilde Heynen continues, “not only through the queer practices of bodily inscription that Butler takes as her main examples, but also through spatial set-ups that refuse simply to reproduce received patterns. Architecture can contribute to that by mimetically displacing domesticity” (Heynen, 2005, p. 25).

A second significant summer house on the Côte d'Azur is Eileen Gray's E.1027, her maison en bord de mer (house by the seaside). This Anglo-Irish heiress moved first to London to study art and then to Paris to realize her ambition of becoming an artist. Integrated into Parisian lesbian circles through her long relationship with the singer Damia (Marie-Louise Damien), Eileen Gray was also an aristocrat, and the social equal of other wealthy women — attracting a large clientele for her lacquered furniture and interior designs. In the early 1920s, she expanded into architecture and E.1027 was her first realized building. It is a house for two people to live and work, as well as a housekeeper. Gray's oeuvre, as a furniture designer and as an architect, demonstrates with great sophistication the art of “mimetically displacing domesticity” (Heynen, 2005, p. 25)

One way that Gray does this is well-described by Jasmine Rault in her article on Gray, “the design of sapphic modernity cultivates the space of transition where sexuality is a deliberately obscured, impossible object of knowledge and pleasures are sustained in its suspense” (Rault, 2011, p. 6). Nowhere is this more evident than in Gray's choreography of the path one must take to enter the house. From the chemins des douaniers (coastal path), one descends through terraces of lemon trees to arrive at the entry walk which parallels a blank wall. This ends abruptly at the front door, where one reads the words *entrez lentement* (enter slowly) stenciled above. After crossing the threshold and into the foyer, one can glimpse the sea but not the inside of the house. Here, the view is blocked by a solid freestanding wall, which offers up instead a place to hang one's hat and jacket. Gray called this piece of architectural furniture an *épine paravant* (spine-screen) — suggesting that it was an integral feature of the house with a structuring importance. It prevents a visitor from seeing the living space unless they are invited in. The architect Le Corbusier found it intolerable, as it interfered with his expectations of uninterrupted views



Barney's residence at 20 rue Jacob, Paris.
Pavilion (top) and *Temple de l'Amitié* (bottom)
Photographs by Eugène Atget, 1910.



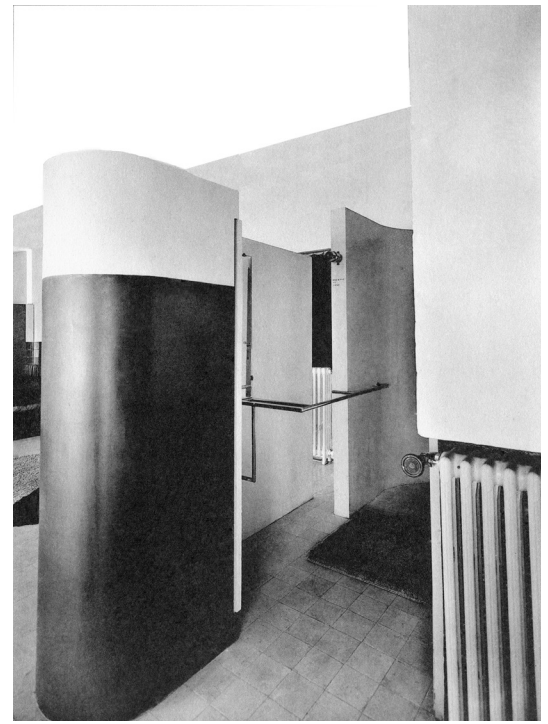
Entrance, E.1027, Roquebrune, France, 1929.
Architect Eileen Gray. Photograph by Christine Macy.

along an “architectural promenade” — a feature he prized in modern architecture (Bonnemaison, 2019).

Further scrutiny of Gray’s house reveals that it also toys with Le Corbusier’s tenet of the “free plan” which promises complete visual command. To be sure, when one is inside the main living space, the room opens entirely up to a magnificent view of the bay. On the other hand, according to Rault, *E.1027* frustrates the eye of the visitor with hidden corners, dark alcoves, and private spaces.

These were not simply contraventions of the modernist ‘free plan’ but dishonest visual obstructions that produced deceptively ambiguous bodies and desires. Indeed, breaking up the clarity of communication, designing sensually rich spaces for visual and physical privacy, generated possibilities for bodies and pleasure whose incommunicability or refusal to public intelligibility seemed designed to evade the discursive reach of power-knowledge-pleasure (Rault, 2011, p. 5).

For example, the windows of the house that open onto public paths are equipped with sophisticated sliding louvers that can be adjusted to admit sunlight or allow views to the desired degree; they can be closed entirely or opened completely. This control over what can be seen by others, and what can be seen from within, reveals Gray’s sophisticated negotiation and intentional ambiguity in the spaces of sociability, autonomy, and privacy while providing above all, control and agency over one’s “container”. “A house”, she wrote, “is not a machine to live in. It is the shell of humans, their extension, their release, their spiritual emanation. Not only its visual harmony but its entire organization, all the terms of the work, comes together to render it human in the most profound sense.” (as cited in Bonnemaïson, 2019, p.28)



Epine-paravent, *E.1027*, Roquebrune, France, 1929.



Living room, *E.1027*, Roquebrune, France, 1929.

Fire Island as a Gay haven

Like the lesbian community on the Côte d'Azur during the 1920s and 30s, Fire Island near New York City became a summer destination for gay men starting in the 1960s. Located five miles off the southern shore of Long Island, this 30-mile-long spit of sand was dotted with vacation homes. The community of Pines — 700 houses tucked into a square mile of dunes and scrub pine — was a place where gay men felt free to express their sexuality at a time when that was not possible elsewhere (Trebay, 2013). Tom Bianchi, photographer and Pines resident, recalls,

[it is] difficult to remember in an era of marriage equality and widespread social acceptance of gay people, the social and political tenor of those decades. When in many places it remained illegal for two men to dance together in public, when stereotypes of gay men as 'sick deviants, weak and ineffectual and involved in sterile, unimportant relationships' still held sway. (Trebay, 2013)

Architect Horace Gifford, “an openly gay man, in a time when this made him a true outlier, ... arrived in The Pines on Fire Island in 1961. Understanding the area’s potential – he bought a small plot of land and built himself a beach house. It was not long after that everyone wanted a modern beach house designed by him” (Hillier, 2015, p. 5). Over the next few decades, Gifford designed more than 70 modern houses that were artfully integrated in the landscape, modestly sized, and communal in their layout.

The walls and floors of Gifford’s houses are built from unfinished cedar – which weathers well – with large windows framing the trees against the sky and ocean dunes. Their simple geometric forms and integration in the landscape recall the rustic development of Sea Ranch in California, a 1964 collaboration between landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and architects Joseph Esherick and MLTW— but those houses were designed for individual families with conventional layouts. Gifford’s houses, by contrast, were designed to accommodate the social needs of the gay community he knew so well. Each house has a large central social space with built-in furniture and sunken seating “maxi couches”, and with “make-out” lofts above. The nascent gay community of The Pines became a joyful and hedonistic expression of the gay liberation movement. Gifford’s designs reflected and supported this social change. His early houses were more enclosed and discreet, but as visible expressions of a gay lifestyle became more socially acceptable, Gifford began to use larger windows and opened the social spaces to the outside, offering voyeuristic pleasure for the community he helped move into a full uproarious swing (Hiller, 2016).

In these examples, we see that the “beach house” positioned on the margins of society allowed queer people to enjoy the traditional benefits of leisure and health, while redefining the “family vacation” into a sensual homosocial environment.

Queer couples in the design fields

We now turn to the architectural profession, taking a look at homosexual couples who shared both life and work. Women have long found entry into the architectural profession a slow and arduous process, and many could do so only in collaboration with a male partner. Only



“Conversation pit” in the Kauth House, Fair Harbor, Fire Island, 1960s. Architect Horace Gifford.

recently have architectural historians begun to uncover and celebrate women's contributions to architecture — for example in the 2018 exhibition *Couples modernes*, held by the Centre Pompidou-Metz, which focused on the collaborations of couples working in the creative fields from 1900 to 1950.

Gay male architect couples felt obliged to conceal the personal dimensions of their collaborative partnerships, and lesbian couples faced even greater difficulties to obtain large commissions due to their gender and their sexual orientation. To this end, I compare the Vancouver home of Canada's best-known architect Arthur Erickson and his partner Francisco Kripacz, with the home and office of Jean Wallbridge and Marie Imrie, a lesbian couple who shared a professional partnership in Edmonton, Alberta. The comparison shows how gender and sexual orientation in this period figured in the ability of designers to obtain large public commissions. Both couples were quite artful in their relationship to publicity, in the way they always slightly displaced any possible reference to their domestic partnership.

Gay men as partners in the design fields

Architects have long been assumed to play a stereotypically “feminine” or a “gay” role in the construction industry — as compared to engineers and contractors — by their role in translating a client's desires, and the need to be current with fashion and style. These attributes were recast as other stereotypes: the architect as genius (Frank Lloyd Wright) or as an enfant terrible (Le Corbusier). In such mediated depictions, the architect is loaded with hyper-masculine attributes to draw out big money from the boardrooms and reassure the corporations and institutions they served. Playing the media well became part and parcel of an architect's practice. Queer architects and queer couples had to be even savvier. Arthur Erickson excelled in this — successfully creating a media persona based on rule-breaking, while never revealing his personal relationship to his life-long collaborator, the interior designer Kripacz.

Erickson was astute in his relations with the media to promote his design philosophy and profile. He is best known for his public buildings — iconic campuses for Simon Fraser and the University of Lethbridge, Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, the UBC Museum of Anthropology and Robson Square in Vancouver — and many private houses. Erickson's great contribution was his ability to integrate buildings in their natural settings, establishing a dialogue between nature and the artful manipulation of space (Sabatino, 2016). Little has been written about Kripacz who designed most of the interiors for Erickson's best-known buildings, adding texture, colour and sensuality to the often puritanical palette of modern architecture. But after Kripacz's untimely death in 2000, Erickson commemorated the professional accomplishments of his life-long partner in the monograph *Francisco Kripacz Interior Design* (Erickson, 2015). Today, the on-line retailer Amazon promotes this book as a “legacy to the working partnership of a charismatic and passionate artistic duo — a last testament from a remarkable architect to the man who shared in his greatest achievements.” Homosexuality — still implied rather than expressly stated — has now moved from taboo topic to selling point.

Erickson's home in Vancouver offers an intriguing contrast to the luxurious houses he designed for his wealthy clients. In 1957,



Portrait of Arthur Erickson and Francisco Kripacz for a publicity shot. Photograph from “Erickson Family Collection”.



Arthur Erickson's garage and garden, Vancouver, 1957. Photograph by Christina Gray.

he bought a forty-year-old garage on a double lot in the wooded neighbourhood of Point Grey. He retained this garage-home throughout his career; he called it “a place to camp” as his “real home was in the world” (Gray, 2018, p. 10). Ultimately, this was the house that meant the most to him. Tinkered with over decades,

Erickson projected an intricate entanglement of narratives around his home that served varying purposes in sustaining his public persona. Within the center of the narrative swirl, the building remained a touchstone to Erickson who declared in 1992: ‘The house is very much a part of me. It’s one of the constants in my life.’ (Gray, 2018, p. 5)

For the media, “Erickson was prone to using his curious garage-home as a narrative device that emphasized his visionary rule-breaking persona” (Gray, 2018, p. 3). In a National Film Board documentary by Jack Long, Erickson speaks about his Vancouver home as a renovated garage in a garden. When inside, he says “it is a house with no bedroom” — thereby setting aside his private life as a queer architect — and yet giving a detailed tour for all to see (Long, 1981). The interior is precious — walls in gold leaf, settees clad in raw silk, precious woods and custom-designed furniture all testify to Kripacz’s assurance in creating a luxurious and comfortable setting. The lot is surrounded by a high fence to protect from intrusions by nosy neighbors, but Erickson speaks about shaping the land to accommodate the house, as opposed to shaping the house to accommodate the land. There are two inversions here: the lack of a “bedroom” and the placement of a small loft accessed with a ladder, and the shaping of the land to adapt to the neighbourhood’s suburban setting and conservative neighbors. Erickson explains that he excavated a large amount of earth and piled it into a hill to hide the ugly door of the house across the street. The excavated pit became a pond in the center of the garden.

Erickson and Kripacz’s non-traditional domestic space provided a setting for their famed parties. One evening, the garden was illuminated with paper lanterns as Rudolf Nureyev danced around the pond, stripping down to very little before he “fell” in the water. Attracting A-list artists, celebrities, and politicians, Erickson’s parties impressed future clients and helped him secure large commissions. Although newspapers frequently reported on these star-studded evenings, no photographs depict Erickson and Kripacz in the same frame.

By contrast, at their beach house in Pines on Fire Island the couple found release from the closet and enjoyed an openly gay relationship in the summer. The weather-beaten cedar siding and lounging couches in the living room were an established vernacular, and Erickson and Kripacz’s renovation drew from this architectural language. But with money to spend, they transformed a humble cedar box into a fabulous party house.

The original shack became the chrysalis to an elaborate makeover which the locals christened “The White House.” A wide, two-storied porch concealed the front façade of glass. Wide piers, angled to the east view of the beach, supported deep angled beams across the front — a somewhat inconspicuous look of weathered siding instead of limestone that earned the house its name (Erickson, 2015, p. 15).

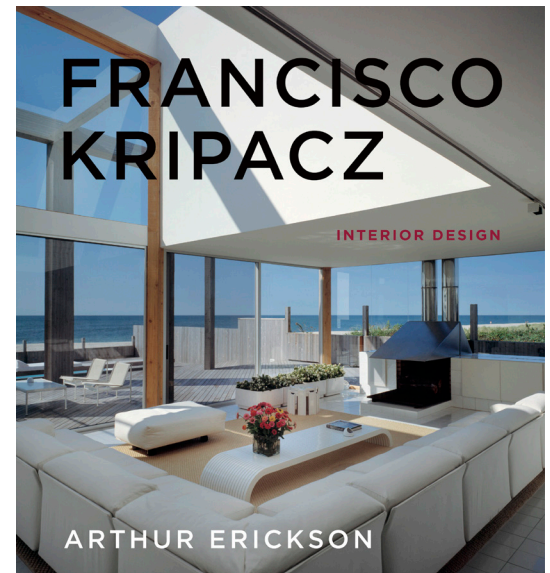


Portrait of Francisco Kripacz in Erickson's garage, Vancouver, 1960s. “Erickson Family Collection”.



Party at Erickson's house. Arthur Erickson, actress Elizabeth Taylor and Francisco Kripacz on the couch, n.d. Photograph from “Erickson Family Collection”.

The subdued and minimalist interior palette allows the house to merge with the grasses, sand and sea beyond. The floor-to-ceiling glass walls could be entirely opened allowing for a seamless transition to the outdoor deck and pool. Beyond, a slatted fence used as protection from the unwanted glances of people strolling on the beach, could be lowered on hinges, once the crowds were gone, to expose a full view of the ocean. Similarly, the living room ceiling was designed to slide open to reveal the sky. Thus, surrounding its inhabitants lounging on low white couches, the “skin” of the house could dilate, opening in all directions, allowing the warmth of a summer night and the sound of the surf to fill the open-air house. The gay community also called it “Lincoln Center,” suggesting its fantastic and theatrical qualities in the era of disco and gay liberation.



Lincoln Center, Fire Island. Photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1979. Front cover of *Francisco Kripacz: Interior Design* (2015) by Arthur Erickson. Reproduced with permission from *Figure 1 Publishing*.

Lincoln Center, Fire Island. The house and pool viewed from the back.



Lesbian architectural partners

Mary Louise Imrie and Jean Wallbridge were among the first women to graduate from schools of architecture in Canada before the Second World War. After working three years in Edmonton's Department of the City Architect, in 1950, they established their own office, the first architectural partnership of women in Canada. They were professional and life partners (Mehmetoglu, 2019, p.8).

Imrie was on the editorial board of the RAIC Journal from 1949 to 1960, at the center of contemporary discussions and concerns in the field of architecture. "They travelled the globe to do research on post-war reconstruction and wrote several articles about their findings ... [Imrie's position on the editorial board] also led to the publication of at least two of the firm's projects" (Adams, 2000, p. 55). Over 30 years, their firm undertook 224 projects. A third of these were private houses, a quarter were apartment buildings, and 10% were commercial projects, including small office buildings, machine shops, stores, a shopping center, and a church (Dominey, 1992, p.16). Of this project mix, Annmarie Adams remarks,

Despite the fact that they designed a variety of building types, the projects by the firm published in the [RAIC] Journal were exclusively housing. Imrie commented herself on the assumption made by clients that women architects might excel in domestic design, 'People will get us to do their houses, be thrilled with them, and go to larger male firms for their warehouses or office buildings.' (Adams, 2000, p. 55)

An architectural office with two women in Edmonton raised a few eyebrows.

Much speculation was given to their free lifestyle. The two unmarried women, living and working together, made an unusual impression in a male dominated profession. Rationalizing their personal decisions for the social structure of the era, Imrie was quoted in 1984 as saying 'it was hard work with long hours ... and the practice could not have supported two families.' (Conreras, 1993, p.19)

In the mid-1950s, Wallbridge and Imrie built their home and office "Six Acres", so named for its generous lot size and bucolic setting. Originally a week-end retreat outside of Edmonton along the North Saskatchewan River, they designed a live-work building that would suit their way of life. Ipek Mehmetoglu suggests that this dual purpose-built architecture needed careful management.

Upon entering the house, one is faced first and directly with a sign 'Wallbridge & Imrie Architects', obscuring any other functional attribution to the space. ... Six Acres functioned as a professional mask, it acted as a 'double sided' space hiding the gay relationship from the eyes of the public, this time deliberately arranged and constructed as such by the owners. (Mehmetoglu, 2019, p. 10)

The floor plans for this home-office, which include its furniture layout, indicate a couple lives and works there. The living quarters on the ground floor provide a large bedroom furnished for a couple. On the lower level, facing a spectacular view of the river gorge, there is a large office and a second bedroom to the side — this corresponds to the traditional "master bedroom" and "guest room" scenario,



Jean Wallbridge and Mary Louise Imrie at a train station in the UK, 1947. Provincial Archives of Alberta PR1988.0290.0853.0001.



Six Acres by Wallbridge and Imrie, Window over the kitchen counter, 1957. Provincial Archives of Alberta 88.290



Six Acres by Walbridge and Imrie, window framing river view, 1957. Provincial Archives of Alberta 88.290

reinforcing their life as a couple.

Wallbridge & Imrie stood out from the other architectural firms in Edmonton – they were seen as hands-on, “studio” architects. Perhaps one of their distinctive characteristics was their hands-on approach to construction. This began with Six Acres, “they built a large part of it themselves, including window frames, and became, in Mary Imrie’s words, ‘half-decent carpenters’” (Dominey, 1992, p. 17). In addition, they often helped their cash-short clients by organizing work bees to build windows or shingle façades. Drawing on the Prairie tradition of collective barn-raising, they had, according to a tribute published by the Province of Alberta, a “flair for organizing volunteer work parties to reduce construction costs”, creating bonds between people through cooperation. As a result, they attracted a large circle of businesses and professionals “who soon became friends and admirers.” (Mahaffy, n.d.) Their house plans were compact and efficient, and brought scenic views into the working areas of the house, often considered “secondary” spaces by male architects — for example, a long narrow horizontal window over a kitchen counter. This integration of nature into all rooms of the house became a characteristic feature of modern Edmonton architecture in the 1960s and 1970s.

Wallbridge and Imrie loved the Albertan landscape and were avid sportswomen. A photograph of Six Acres shows two pairs of skis leaning on an outside wall. While “both benefited from privileged upbringing, [they] were equally at home on skates and in canoes on the North Saskatchewan River or kicking back over scotch and cigars” (Mahaffy, n.d.). Outdoor recreation was a source of pleasure, but outdoor camping became a necessity when it came to studying the site of a future project. Unlike many architects who might spend a day to take the lay of the land, they camped out to experience the landscape over time, to be better equipped to design a building that could fit in its surroundings. Imrie’s second cousin, Mark Slater, recalls

Mary Imrie would come to a town and, if they didn’t have a place where they could camp, she would buy up a piece of land and set up camp. Ultimately, she owned pieces of property all over Alberta. When Imrie passed away, one of the provisions of her will was that all these campgrounds belong to the province, so other people could use them (Dominey, 1992, p.16).

Well into their sixties, this working couple was referred to as “The Girls”.

The tributes that accumulated after their passing celebrated their contribution to Edmonton’s architectural scene, recognized their influence and their example as an inspiration for future generations.

Conclusion

I now return to the original proposal that through the 20th century, queerness in architecture has become increasingly open to the outside world. In 1994, Mark Robbins curated the exhibition *House Rules*, at Ohio State’s Wexner Center for the Arts. Writers were partnered with designers and asked to collaborate on a vision of dwelling for the future. Poet bell hooks collaborated with architect Julie Eizenberg to dream of a “house without boundaries” — of race, class, or gender (hooks, Eizenberg & Koning, 1994, p. 22). The poet began by sending Eizenberg a letter:



Six Acres by Walbridge and Imrie, Alberta, 1957. Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1988.0290.0777 (top) and PR1988.0290.0767 (bottom)

the little house of many rooms that is my
home holds no secrets —
like arms it reaches out to embrace
and hold me close when i leave and when i
return ...
a concern for light and shadows — delicate
lace curtains everywhere contrast with
mission oak and soft black leather —
red is the primary color throughout —
it is a simple dwelling — little rooms —
with very little in them —
just enough to bring grace, elegance, and
comfort
to all who enter — i would miss this home
more if i were not making some version of it everywhere in
the world my spirit dwells —

(hooks, quoted in Jones, 1995, p. 53)

Eizenberg's response was to reimagine suburban living, with four
dwellings sharing a common yard, kitchens, workspaces and
childcare, while keeping spaces for solitude (hooks, Eizenberg &
Koning, 1994, p. 22).

What are the qualities of queer-affirming spaces and places? How
might they re-define community, family, and self? How have queer
designers toyed with a critiques of norms as forms felt oppressive or
constraining? What new models or proposals are they shaping that
will enable people to be themselves at home and with others, and to
contribute to a more diverse, inclusive, and safer society? In this, bell
hooks has the last word:

it is our capacity to imagine that lets us move beyond boundaries
— without imagination we cannot reinvent and recreate the work
— the space we live in so that justice and freedom for all can be realized
in our
lives — everyday and always.

in sisterhood,
bell hooks
(Jones, 1995, p. 56)

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