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194X: Architecture, Planning, And Consumer Culture On The American Home Front (Architecture, Landscape And Amer Culture)



Synopsis

During the Second World War, American architecture was in a state of crisis. The rationing of building materials and restrictions on nonmilitary construction continued the privations that the profession had endured during the Great Depression. In a major study of American architecture during World War II, Andrew M. Shanken focuses on the culture of anticipation that arose in this period, as out-of-work architects turned their energies from the built to the unbuilt, redefining themselves as planners and creating original designs to excite the public about postwar architecture. Shanken recasts the wartime era as a crucible for the intermingling of modernist architecture and consumer culture.

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Customer Reviews

During the Second World War, American architecture was in a state of crisis. The rationing of building materials and restrictions on nonmilitary construction continued the privations that the profession had endured during the Great Depression. At the same time, the dramatic events of the 1930s and 1940s led many architects to believe that their profession—and society itself—would undergo a profound shift once the war ended, with private commissions giving way to centrally planned projects. The magazine *Architectural Forum* coined the term “194X” to encapsulate this wartime vision of postwar architecture and urbanism. In a major study of American architecture during World War II, Andrew M. Shanken focuses on the culture of anticipation that arose in this period, as out-of-work architects turned their energies from

the built to the unbuilt, redefining themselves as planners and creating original designs to excite the public about postwar architecture. Shanken recasts the wartime era as a crucible for the intermingling of modernist architecture and consumer culture. Challenging the pervasive idea that corporate capitalism corrupted the idealism of modernist architecture in the postwar era, 194X shows instead that architecture's wartime partnership with corporate America was founded on shared anxieties and ideals. Business and architecture were brought together in innovative ways, as shown by Shanken's persuasive reading of magazine advertisements for Revere Copper and Brass, U.S. Gypsum, General Electric, and other companies that prominently featured the work of leading progressive architects, including Louis I. Kahn, Eero Saarinen, and Walter Gropius. Although the unexpected prosperity of the postwar era made the architecture of 194X obsolete before it could be built and led to its exclusion from the story of twentieth-century American architecture, Shanken makes clear that its anticipatory rhetoric and designs played a crucial role in the widespread acceptance

Andrew M. Shanken is assistant professor of architectural history at the University of California, Berkeley. His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Art Bulletin*, *Design Issues*, *Landscape*, *Places* and *Planning Perspectives*.

A fascinating look at how consumer culture embraced the idea of "planning" during World War II as the United States imagined life in 194x- the year the war would end. It was particularly interesting to read about how various prominent architects joined with building product manufacturers to produce written materials for distribution to ordinary Americans. In the end, planning was cast off by these same corporations near the end of the war once many of the entrenched manufacturers realized that modernization threatened their business models. Shanken also does a nice job of identifying a desire to return to pre-war and pre-depression normalcy, explaining why postwar housing was so conservatively designed. The book is a quick read and contains lots of illustrations from 1940s advertisements that are often highly amusing to today's reader.

A valuable addition to the growing body of work about the American home front during World War II.

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