



# International Archive of Women in Architecture

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
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## Welcome!

With this first issue of the *International Archive of Women in Architecture Newsletter*, I extend my welcome to those new to the archive and a warm thank you to our past contributors, active participants, and avid researchers. As our contacts throughout the world have increased, so, too, have the contributions of papers from women architects and designers. We find this growth both satisfying and encouraging.

A generous grant from the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects makes this newsletter possible, and we now can introduce the purpose and goals of the archive to a widespread audience of architects (both male and female), potential and current donors, architectural schools and organizations, archivists, and researchers.

The IAWA collects and preserves materials to supply a growing interest in the history of women in architecture. Sources about women architects of both the past and present must be available to provide researchers with primary material for original research.

Please help us in our efforts by donating your papers (they're more important than you think!), using our collections in your research, or becoming a Friend of the IAWA. We ask that you use the attached coupons if you want more information about the archive, if you would like to donate your papers, or if you want to become a Friend.

If you have questions about any aspect of the archive—preservation and care given to the materials, research, access, rights to your papers after donation, and available guides—please feel free to contact me. □

Laura H. Katz  
Archivist

## Professor Milka Bliznakov Leads Efforts to Establish Archive

Milka Bliznakov, professor of architecture in Virginia Tech's College of Architecture and Urban Studies, can point to two occurrences that led to her efforts to establish the International Archive of Women in Architecture.

Bliznakov first became aware of a sparsity of information about women architects several years ago when students asked her why they never heard the name of a woman architect, never saw a woman exhibiting her designs, and never heard a woman architect presenting a guest lecture. "I went to the library and found out that there is very little about women architects in the library," she said.

About the same time, an architect acquaintance who had practiced in Bulgaria and Germany for more than half a century died. "Her family saw no value in the sketches, in the drawings, specifications, business correspondence, everything she had created during almost 60 years of architectural practice, and threw it all away," Bliznakov said.

Because of her own work as an architect, an architectural educator, and an architectural researcher, she knew that women had made significant contributions in such areas as housing design; yet these contributions remained unrecorded. The only source of information on these designs, she learned, was the architects' own records, and she realized that if these records disappear, women's contributions will continue to pass unnoticed.

"As a researcher, I found I had to correct the omission of women from architectural history," she said, adding that she does not want "future generations, simply because of a lack of information, to say women architects never did anything. I want to make the information available."

In 1983, as she began contacting women architects throughout the United States and Europe—she wrote over 1,000 letters and visited several countries—she learned that many women "did not work for personal glorification," and she found that modesty often had prevented her colleagues from seeking the attention that would have marked their places in history.

Their response to an archive of women's work, however, was positive, although some questioned the wisdom of separating women's work from that of men. "The response to this question is simple," Bliznakov replied. "The need to collect women's records is great, and the space and time we could dedicate to this effort is limited.

"Women architects are still few, and collecting their work is manageable. The omission of women's contributions, neglected for so long, needs immediate



Beverly Willis, Ballet Association Building, San Francisco, 1983, IAWA collection.





rectification. And above all, since most women were and still are reluctant to promote and publish their accomplishments, their archives must become available for future generations to evaluate."

Bliznakov also has found that many buildings designed by pioneering women architects—often private residences or social housing—have been destroyed. "Since women's work was seldom mentioned by the press, the archive of the designer herself becomes the only source of information," she said.

In 1985, she began working with Glenn L. McMullen, head of special collections at Virginia Tech's Newman Library, and later with archivist Laura H. Katz to establish the archive in the special collections department. She wrote articles promoting the archive for publications in the United States, Canada, and Germany and continued her letter-writing campaign and visits to pioneer women architects to solicit their personal archives.

By early 1987, the IAWA had received the works of 28 women from Austria, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, and West Germany, and the International Union of Women Architects had sent a collection of materials.

The archive organizers also established a board of advisors to oversee its operations and assist in realizing its five major goals:

- To find and preserve the records of the pioneer generation of women architects, whose papers may be lost or dispersed if not collected immediately;
- To appeal to retired women architects who have played a part in architectural history to donate their papers to the IAWA;
- To appeal to active women architects to save their papers and to consider placing them in the IAWA at a later date;
- To serve as a clearinghouse of information on all women architects, past and present; and
- To encourage research on the history of women in architecture through seminars, exhibits, and publications.

Today, supported by the University Libraries and the College of Architecture

and Urban Studies, the archive has expanded its holdings to include work by some 70 women, and it sponsors seminars and exhibitions on women's work. It continues its efforts to secure the work of other women who feel, like Bliznakov, that the important contribution of women architects must be preserved.

"Although it may take many years to collect the works of women architects around the world, the most important step has been made toward the creation of a permanent record of women's contributions to the man-made environment," Bliznakov said.

She urged women architects to send their work, help a colleague send her work, or bequeath their papers to the IAWA. "Each contribution," she said, "is adding to a better understanding of our social, cultural, and architectural history." □

## Han Schröder Donates Drawings, Papers to IAWA

*(Editor's note: Information for the following article came from a personal interview with Han Schröder and from material she donated to the IAWA.)*

Noted Dutch-born architect Han Schröder, who grew up in the famous Rietveld-Schröder House on the outskirts of Utrecht and worked in Rietveld's office before establishing her own practice, has donated her archival materials to the IAWA.

The influence of the unique house in the Netherlands, built in 1924 and recognized as the world's first "modern" house, and a mother who, although not an architect herself, collaborated with architects and "had strong ideas about a house not being a series of cubicles" is evident in the work of Schröder. "I presume that my approach to design, namely trying to create the best possible background for specific tasks to be performed instead of accepting an interior as a thing in itself, is rooted here," she has written.

"As Rietveld stated, the eye needs more space than the entire body. I was brought up with that," Schröder said during a recent visit to the archive.

Like her mother, Schröder believes that an interior should be flexible enough to allow various kinds of behavior, and she sometimes incorporated sliding partitions "as the medium for dynamic flexibility" in her architecture.

An example of her use of this medium is her design, in 1962, of 28 apartments in Austerlitz, the Netherlands, for retired, single nurses. The project, which received considerable attention and was inaugurated by Queen Juliana, involved low-cost subsidized housing and maximum use of small spaces. "Such was the design that the living area always remained spatially extended by another area. It could not be turned into an enclosed cubicle," she said.

In her design work, which mainly consisted of private houses, renovations, medium-sized buildings serving as community centers for young adults and children, dormitories, and apartments, she considered each building a challenge—"the challenge of the analyzed problem. Seldom does a person know what he needs; we [architects] have to give him what he needs. This analysis should be part of our expertise." →



Han Schröder (above) works on model of Kesslerhuis. Interior of Kesslerhuis (below).



During the recent visit to Blacksburg, she said that two areas have interested her in architecture: (1) responding to the increasingly physical needs of people by understanding and analyzing those needs and (2) recognizing that "you don't design space; you define space." Because of her approach, she said, "the wall around the space has a different meaning for me," resulting in "a different type of architecture."

As early as the age of eight, Schröder was helping make study models and prototypes of experimental chairs for Rietveld, who was a friend of her mother. "The almost continuous close interaction with a designer of the format of Rietveld, who was an excellent teacher as well, obviously had an extremely strong impact on me," she has written.

During her mid-teens, G. van de Groenekan, an internationally known maker of modern furniture in Utrecht, supervised her one-and-a-half-year training in carpentry and furniture making.

She also was exposed to a multitude of top architects, designers, and artists who journeyed to Utrecht in the 1920s and 30s to examine the revolutionary house, which now is a museum. "Frequently assigned to demonstrate the flexibility of the interior partitions, and therefore being within earshot, nothing could keep me from listening attentively," she has written.

Although she graduated from the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich with the degree of Diplom Architekt in 1940 and designed a library for a collector of special edition books while still a student, Schröder has written that "1949 finally saw me take up architecture and design as my real profession."

Rietveld employed her, and she moved from draftsman to assistant designer to personal assistant, working on private houses, federal housing projects, a textile plant, schools, a children's hospital, the Netherlands Exhibition Pavilion in Venice, the Sonsbeek Sculpture Pavilion, and a number of exhibitions and interiors. "When he had a commission and he didn't have time to do it himself, he would give it to people who worked for him. That helped us get on our feet," she said.

She opened her own office for architecture, interiors, and graphic design in 1954 and found herself one of two or three independent women architects among 3,000 registered males in the Netherlands. "I cannot remember all the

work that I undertook and I never found time to list it in an orderly manner," she has written, although her first project was a residence for her brother and "the success of four community/youth/learning centers quickly established my expertise in this field." The apartments for the retired nurses were also designed during this period.

In 1963, she decided to fulfill a childhood dream to live in the United States. "I intended to learn all about new materials and their application in interiors, and I wanted to research certain institutions for the young and handicapped and to find out all about the organization of architectural offices and at the construction site in the U.S.," she has written. She also said recently that "in my life, I like to change every so many years."

After working at two architects' offices in Los Angeles, she moved to Garden City, N.Y., to teach interior design at Adelphi University on a part-time basis. She later began teaching interior design part-time at Parsons School of Design in New York. In 1967, she joined the faculty at the New York Institute of Technology, where she completely changed and restructured the interior design curriculum away from decoration, incorporating structure and architectural design. During her tenure there, student enrollment in the curriculum increased from five to about 70.

She moved to Richmond, Va., where she still lives, in 1979 to teach interior design, furniture design, and introduction to architecture and structure at Virginia Commonwealth University, retiring in 1987.

Her work is well represented in the archival materials she has donated to the IAWA. Included in the collection are the complete specifications, architectural drawings, correspondence, photographs, and miscellaneous paper work for Ellinchem, a humanist center for rejected and problem children; Kesslerhuis, a recreation building for employees of the Netherlands Steel Furnaces; De Poort, a home for rejected children; and Eerbeek, a village youth center.

Persons wishing to examine the Schröder materials should contact Laura H. Katz, IAWA archivist. □

## In the Archive

Ninety-eight women and organizations have donated materials to the International Archive of Women in Architecture. Among those contributions are the following:

- **Adamczewska-Wejchert, Hanna.** Architect, Warsaw, Poland.
- **Alex, Iris.** Development administrator for Facilities Development Corporation of the State of New York, building consultant for Young Women's Christian Association, and Fellow, American Institute of Architects.
- **Antonakakis, Susana.** Architect, Athens, Greece, and a founding member of the architectural firm Atelier 66.
- **Association of Women in Architecture, Los Angeles, California, Chapter.** Records, 1928-88. Originally founded in 1922 as Alpha Alpha Gamma, a sorority for women architecture students. In 1934 the alumnae of the sorority formed the AWA as a professional organization for working women architects.
- **Aubock, Maria.** Landscape architect, Vienna, Austria, and member of Austrian Society of Landscape Architects since 1985.
- **Aulenti, Gae.** Architect and interior designer, Milan, Italy. Major architectural projects include the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, France; Palazzo Muti-Bussi in Rome, Italy; and Civic Museum of Florence, Italy.
- **Baptista, Angelica.** Architect, Carvalhos, Portugal.
- **Bentel, Maria.** Architect and partner of Bentel & Bentel, Architects and Planners, New York and Fellow, American Institute of Architects.
- **Brosowsky, Bettina Maria.** Architect, West Germany.

The list of contributors to the Archive will be continued in the next issue of *IAWA Newsletter*. □





Elise Sundt, apartment building, Vienna, Austria, 1977, IAWA collection.

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