



# INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVE OF WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE

## IAWA Center News

VirginiaTech  
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Fall 2012

No. 24

### EDITOR'S NOTE

By Helene Renard

In this issue of the newsletter, we focus on materials and new collections that have come into the Archive. Labelle Prussin's work focuses on indigenous African building methods. K.C. Arceneaux comments on two of Prussin's books that have been added to the Archive. Wendy Bertrand's collection consists of many boxes of materials, documenting her personal and professional life. Professor Marcia Feuerstein reviews Bertrand's book, *Enamored with Place*, and I uncover some of her fiber arts creations. We are adding a new feature to the newsletter with Lindsay Nencheck's piece about her residency and research at the IAWA made possible by the *Milka Bliznakov Research Prize*. Finally, "A Note from the Chair" provides an overview of the past year's activities at the IAWA Center. We thank you for your continued interest and support.

### THE IAWA ADDS BOOKS OF AFRICANIST LABELLE PRUSSIN TO THE COLLECTION

By K. C. Arceneaux, Ph. D.

The IAWA is pleased to have acquired for the International Archive of Women in Architecture, three monographs by the esteemed architect, historian, and Africanist, Labelle Prussin. These works include: *Architecture in Northern Ghana* (UC Press, 1969), *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa* (UC Press 1986), and *African Nomadic Architecture: Space, Place and Gender* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995). In her introductory statements at the African Architecture Today conference (Ghana, 2007, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology), Dr. Prussin related the African saying, "An elder who dies is like a library which has burned down," (<http://www.mudonline.org/aat/programme.html>) emphasizing the importance of documenting the often-fragile work of traditional architecture, with its perishable materials of wood, textiles, adobe, and animal skin vellum. Dr. Prussin's writings, photographs, and drawings as presented in these three books, are not only a fertile resource for the preservation of traditional African architecture, but also develop original formulations that enhance the theory and practice of architecture in a global context.



Fulbe women erecting a matframe tent, north of Bamako, Mali.  
Photo from *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa*  
by Dr. Labelle Prussin, 1986.

Dr. Prussin's contributions to the history, theory, and practice of architecture have spanned four decades. She graduated from the University of California (1952), and Yale (Ph.D., 1973). Her teaching appointments have included positions at the University of Science and Technology in Ghana; the University of Michigan; the University of Washington, and CUNY, and also in Malaysia and Japan. Her awards and recognition include the Arts Council of the African Studies Association Leadership Award, in 1998; she was appointed as Honorary Research Fellow in 2002, at the KNUST's Golden Jubilee in Ghana, and was appointed as an Honorary Research Fellow the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, in 2007. Her professional practice has been conducted both in the United States, and in Ghana.

Dr. Prussin's book, *African Nomadic Architecture: Space, Place and Gender*, can be seen as a vanguard model for an approach to the history, theory, and preservation of traditional architecture, and comprises research that considers the relationship of gender and architecture within cultural context. This book is of particular interest and value to the IAWA, in that, multiculturally, nomadic architecture is typically constructed, maintained, and owned by women. In an economy of materials and construction, dwelling

Continued on page 2 . . .



Examples of the techniques of earthen construction used by the women of Djenné, Mali, including cylindrical sun-dried bricks and kiln-fired pottery and paving bricks. Photo from *Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa* by Dr. Labelle Prussin, 1986.

transforms to palanquin, as architecture provides the means for its own transportation. Prussin points out that sedentarization of nomadic ethnic groups weakens women’s control over, and relationships to, their architectural surroundings. This cultural shift can have implications for the collective memories of cultures, through the loss of traditional architectural settings for rituals that include marriages and births. This finding has important implications for the design of sedentary, culturally-specific architecture, not only for the quality-of-life of women, but also for the vitality of cultures. The perishable materials of wood, woven fibers, and animal-skin vellums, that comprise the armatures and coverings of nomadic architecture, are also cultural armatures -- through their materials, processes, orientations in the landscape, gender-associations, and as staging for rituals that are the performative narratives that reinforce cultural and individual identities.

Prussin illuminates the “interfaces between architecture and ritual,” and brings clarity to gender roles in traditional architecture, in “the recognition of gender specificity in the creation, recreation, and use of architecture and artifact.” (xv) She draws an analogy between the wood, fibers, and soft lighting used contemporarily in architecture to create a sense of comfort, and the natural materials processed and used by women in nomadic architecture.

In a paper presented at the African Architecture Today conference, at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana, 2007, Prussin writes: “Nomadic architectures are as permanent as any sedentary architecture that uses natural resources. Its building components are reused, reassembled and inherited from one generation to the next. They are permanent in the sense that their symbolic form and the architectonic meanings associated with them, the design, the technology as well as the materials used, are transmitted from one female generation to the next. It is the continuity achieved by integrating symbolic components of a mother’s tent into her daughter’s newly created domicile in the course of a marriage which endows the nomadic architecture with its historic and tectonic quality.” (<http://www.mudonline.org/aat/index.html>, p.16)

*African Nomadic Architecture* is regionally specific and detailed in its examples, but the formulations of the book widen the scope of the definitions of the materials, forms, processes, and authorship that are thought to comprise architecture. In the introduction to this book, Prussin writes: “Initially this anthology began, not as an attempt to romanticize or glorify domestic labors, but to redress a grievance: to revalidate and reverify the value that has traditionally been placed on productive labors in the private, domestic world of women.” (xxii) Prussin’s formulations are highly generative of further research into the roles of women in architecture.

**WENDY BERTRAND**  
**ENAMORED WITH PLACE: AS WOMAN + AS ARCHITECT**  
Marcia F Feuerstein, Ph.D., A.I.A.(past Chair, IAWA)

Women architects are sidelined at every stage of their



Wendy Bertrand

professional development through subtle exclusion, much to the surprise of many students and professionals. As Martha Thorne, executive director of the Pritzker Prize and former IAWA Advisor stated “... women have not been given their rightful position in architecture, .... There are enormous biases ... structural problems within education, within the profession, and within the building industries that mean that women are often left out.”<sup>1</sup>

Postcard,  
*For the Future:  
 Pioneering Women in  
 Architecture from Japan  
 and Beyond Exhibition*

24th World Congress of  
 Architecture,  
 International Union of  
 Architects (UIA), Tokyo  
 Forum

Pioneering Women in  
 Architecture, pictured  
 from left to right:

- Anna Keichline
- Han Schoeder
- Eleanore Pettersen
- Minnette de Silva
- Miho Hamaguchi
- Louise Bethune
- Lilia Skalia
- Fumiko Yoshida
- Nobuko Tsuchiura
- Masako Hayashi



The exhibition was first mounted at the Architectural Institute of Japan (AIJ), Tokyo; the 24th Congress of International Union of Architects (UIA), Tokyo; and the Gender Equity Center - Tokyo. Center Advisors Junko Matsukawa along with Donna Dunay, Kay Edge, and Helene Renard designed and constructed the exhibit and gave opening and closing talks. The IAWA Center Exhibition is evolving to pursue other global venues and invite further donations to the collection. The exhibition has since been shown at nine venues including the National Women's Education Center (NWEC), Saitama Prefecture, and Azamino Women's Center, Yokohama City, Japan.

The exhibition catalog *For the Future:* in Japanese and English designed by UIFA Japan was published and distributed. Further venues are forecast to include Mongolia, Korea, Russia, and Paris. To promote the goal of the IAWA Center globally and to widen the knowledge of women in architecture and the related design fields, the exhibition actively collects additions to the IAWA collections. Through the announcement of the *For the Future: Pioneering Women in Architecture from Japan and Beyond exhibition* with a featured article in *Global University*, Virginia Tech reaches out to an ever enlarging audience.

This past year, the *Milka Bliznakov Research Prize* was awarded to Andrea Merrett, Ph.D. student from Columbia University. She conducted research in the archive during the fall semester to

create a book chapter "The second wave of feminism -- women's contributions to architecture in the United States from the 1960's through the beginning of the 21st century." Merrett's research utilized materials from eleven collections highlighting the significance of the Archive as a resource.

The Annual IAWA Center Board of Advisors Annual Meeting in October included the working meeting; the IAWA Center exhibition - *A Strategic Intersection*, an analysis of archive materials by architecture and design students; and the symposium – *Dwelling - Three International Perspectives*.

Symposium presentations explored: "the Ger - Yurt of Mongolia," by Bat-Od Sarantsatsral, Urkh Co. Architects and Planners, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; *A House by the North Sea* by Alice Finnerup Møller, Architect MAA, Denmark; and *The Great East Japan Earthquake* "Anybody can be a photographer of Omoto Region, Iwaizumi Town, Iwate Prefecture"— a UIFA exhibition proposal by Junko Matsukawa, Tokyo, Japan.

Finally, it is with a great sense of appreciation that we recognize the dedication of those who generously contributed to the future of the IAWA: Thomas Barrie, Wendy Bertrand, the Milka Bliznakov Estate, Alicia Bulwik, Wena Dows, Lois Jane Hastings, Kristine Fallon, Virginia Lyon, Lindsay, Nencheck, Maria Rosaria Piomelli, and Joan Wood.



Wendy Bertrand drafting at her desk at Western Division Naval Facilities Engineering Command, San Bruno, California, 1975. Photo courtesy of Wendy Bertrand.

She discovered the importance of female networks through OWA, which became a cohort for the women, employing 'feminist' attitudes that fed into her design and management philosophy. This group-centered non-hierarchical approach to management was based on group consensus and open participation, allowing flexible work schedules that adjusted to family and personal needs. Yet Bertrand remained frustrated by constant discriminatory practices that prevented good design and good works, observing that the tremendous waste of talent created by direct and indirect discrimination zapped emotional energy from women trying to do their best work within a climate of negativity. Bertrand recounts her experiences with discrimination that impacted admission to the profession, acceptance by peers, evaluation by professors, acceptance by clients, promotion practices and hiring. While we may think these days are gone, on March 22, 2012, Denise Scott Brown warned "being a student for a woman is about the best it gets ... young women today, don't cast out your feminist awareness: when the glass ceiling hits you, you will think it is your fault, unless you know a bit about feminism, and it will destroy you."<sup>15</sup>

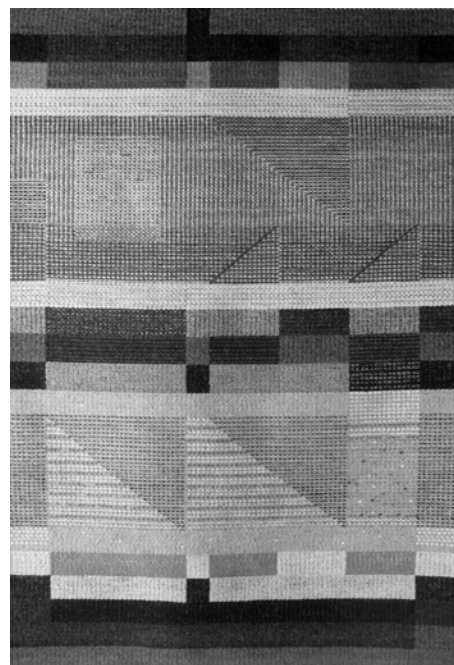
1. <http://www.archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=6016>, 4/25/2012.  
2. Vanessa Thorpe, "Zaha Hadid: 'I'm Sure That As A Woman I Can Build A Very Good Skyscraper' ", The Guardian, Feb. 20, 2013, 10:59 AM <http://www.businessinsider.com/zaha-hadid-on-women-in-architecture-2013-2#ixzz2OV6dPfAX>  
3. Ibid  
4. <http://www.archpaper.com/news/articles.asp?id=6016>, 4/25/2012.  
5. "Women In Design call for Denise Scott Brown's Pritzker Prize Recognition ... And more Arts News." Huffpost Arts and Culture [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/01/women-in-design-call-for-denise-scott-brown-pritzker-prize\\_n\\_2991734.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/01/women-in-design-call-for-denise-scott-brown-pritzker-prize_n_2991734.html) , 4/1/2013.

## WENDY BERTRAND'S "THINKING HANDS"

By Helene Renard

Historian and author David McCullough said in an interview on 60 Minutes that it is "through the vehicle of a story" that one best experiences the significance of historical events. This comment resonated with me as I spent time with artifacts from architect Wendy Bertrand's collection at the IAWA. Among the materials that sparked my curiosity is a set of photographs of lampshades, a book entitled, *Rug Retrospective: Nine Weaving Seasons*, and an artist statement accompanying an exhibit called Architects Doing Other Things. On my second visit to the collection, I skimmed through a bit of her autobiography, *Enamored with Place*, which provided context for these disparate pieces. Together, they give us a glimpse into Ms. Bertrand's creative life. The *Architects Doing Other Things* exhibit took place in 2010 in Chicago. Wendy's statement gives us a sense of some of the things she values and champions. Under the heading "inspirations," she includes "the optimism and drive to make the world a better place for women during the Feminist Movement," along with respect and care for nature, and "the idea that architects' work can bring delight to the quality of place and life." She urges "others considering doing other things" not to be disempowered by the conventional definitions of the architect's profession, and to be creative about how we might contribute to the making of place.

Wendy's book revealed that the lampshades were a project that



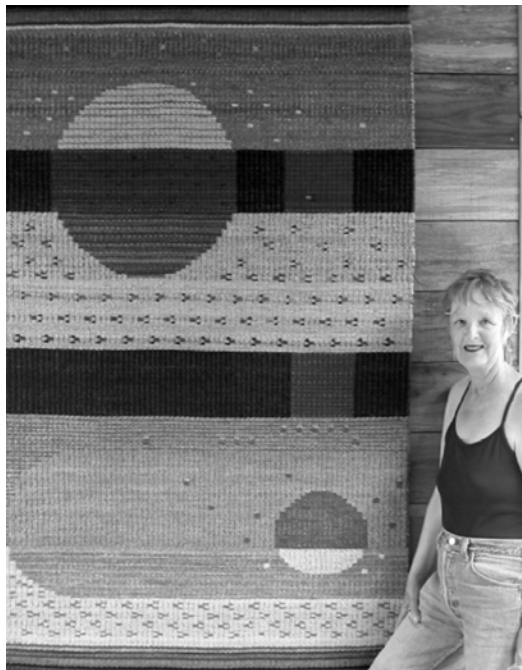
Honey, hand-woven rug, 56" x 83", woven by Bertrand in Del Norte County, California. Photo courtesy of Wendy Bertrand.



The “neglected shack in Del Norte County” that Bertrand renovated in 1990. Photo courtesy of Wendy Bertrand.

she used to bring design to the apartment that she shared with her young daughter when she moved to California to begin her architecture studies. Made from cut paper and cardboard, these are examples of an impulse to make the ordinary beautiful. In her book she states, “envisioning, planning, designing, finding the materials,“... “and constructing things have always come naturally” (2012:17).

The Rug Retrospective catalog reveals that Wendy practiced architecture for 21 years before she began weaving. Her weaving practice was sparked by her 1990 renovation of “a neglected



Wendy Bertrand standing with one of her hand-spun, hand woven rugs at her weaving studio in Del Norte County , California. Photo courtesy of Wendy Bertrand.

shack in Del Norte County.” In the process of renovation, she joined a community of spinners and weavers and began making rugs. Her compositions are often inspired by nature and are geometric and colorful interpretations. She writes, “the act of creating with fiber offers an extremely joyful experience.” Paraphrasing Howard Risotti’s 2008 article in *American Craft Magazine*, she states that he “reminds us that in Italy before the Renaissance, the act of making things was not consciously separated from the mental activity of thinking about what to make.” She adds “in the fiber arts I use my ‘thinking hands’ (Risotti’s lovely phrase)” (2012:347).

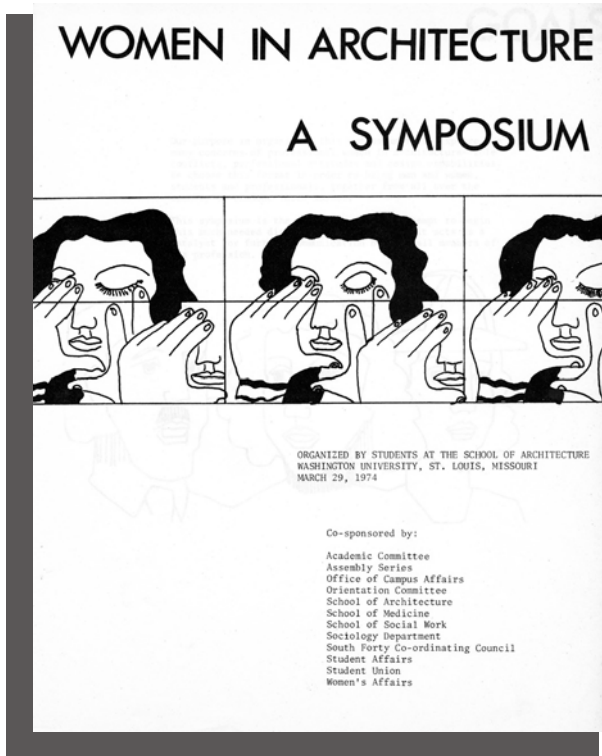
These statements reveal the pleasure that the maker takes in not just envisioning a made thing, but in executing it with her own hands. Wendy’s body of work, and the writing that illuminates the story behind the work paints a picture of a creative force that perseveres and thrives despite the many challenges that she faced throughout her professional career.

Notes: Bertrand, W. 2012. *Enamored with Place: As Woman + Architect*, Eyeonplace Press, San Francisco.

### NOTE FROM LINDSAY NENCHECK, 2011 MILKA BLIZNAKOV RESEARCH PRIZE AWARD RECIPIENT

In 2011, I was awarded the *Milka Bliznakov Research Prize* by the International Archive of Women in Architecture Center for my research on the 1974 Women in Architecture Symposium. As the first academic conference to examine the intersection of gender and architecture, the Symposium marked the emergence of a national conversation about women’s roles within the profession. My interest was first sparked by a single paragraph featured in Susana Torre’s book, *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*. She referenced the event, its legacy, and its association with Washington University in St. Louis, where I was enrolled in the graduate architecture program. My status as a student allowed me to make connections with the event’s organizers and record their stories. As my research became more focused, I found invaluable resources at the IAWA at Virginia Tech.

Participating in the IAWA residency was a richly rewarding experience. Granted access to a broad collection of materials, I spent several days poring over documents in the library. I was most interested in the collections from the Architectural League of New York, the Association for Women in Architecture, and the personal papers of Judith Edelman and Susana Torre, but found immense enjoyment in rifling through unrelated archival boxes.



Program, 'Women in Architecture Symposium Washington University, 1974 in Judith Edelman Architectural Papers, 1967-1997, (Ms1997-010), IAWA, Special Collections, University Libraries, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

## A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

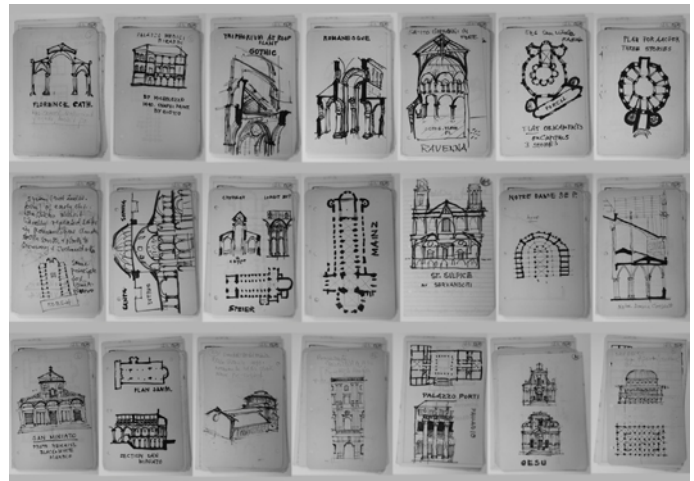
Donna Dunay, FAIA

This year, the IAWA Center broadly showcased IAWA goals to clearly demonstrate how important the collections are to "filling this gap in history." In designating Lois Gottlieb as an honorary advisor during the annual meeting, the board applauds her achievements as a pioneer, and warmly thanks her for her service and devotion to the IAWA. This year, we welcome Paola Zellner Bassett as an on-campus advisor to the board. Zellner Bassett first studied architecture at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and has been a faculty teaching in the Virginia Tech School of Architecture + Design since 2008.



Lois Gottlieb, Honorary IAWA Advisor

The exhibition - *For the Future: Pioneering Women from Japan and Beyond* has continued to be exhibited throughout Metropolitan Tokyo and in other prefectures in Japan. The exhibition marks the 25th Year Celebration of the IAWA Center in conjunction with the International Union of Women Architects (UIFA) and UIFA Japon to feature pioneering women in architecture along with a special section highlighting contributions of IAWA founder Milka Bliznakov. *100 POSTCARDS* presents the research curiosity of architecture and design students in a special section of the exhibition.



Postcard from sketches of Maria Roth, Cooper Union Class Notes, History of Architecture, undated c.1954.

From *100 POSTCARDS - For the Future: Exhibition* by Students Marisa Brown, Antonia Ciaverella, Candice Davis, Alexandra Phelan, Heather Riley and Rehanna Rojani; Virginia Tech

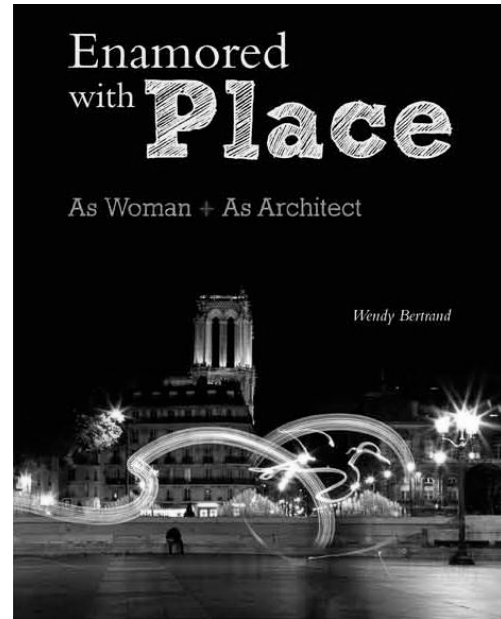
Occasionally, these digressions would yield a serendipitous reference to the 1974 Symposium or one of its speakers, and I'd be reminded of the invaluable opportunity afforded by the Archives. Although my residency was short, the hours were well-spent. These primary documents provided details that neither participant interviews nor secondary sources could convey. Additionally, the event's organizers generously donated their homemade videos, notes, and photographs to the IAWA, adding to the tremendous wealth of information already contained within the Archives.

In the year and a half since travelling to Virginia Tech, I have moved back to Missouri and joined an architectural practice in Kansas City. I am now an active member of the AIA and YAF, a board member of Women in Design: Kansas City, and – as of this week – a licensed architect. I look forward to celebrating the 40th anniversary of the 1974 Symposium and the achievements of its participants in a retrospective event at Washington University in St. Louis, scheduled for 2014. Ultimately, I remain grateful for the opportunity to conduct this research at the IAWA and to share my work with others.

This misogyny, a “sinister and rotten kernel of inequality” with “insidious” male bullying, is compounded by a lack of respect by clients<sup>2</sup> that even Zaha Hadid recognizes. Misogynistic attitudes prevent women from working in the full spectrum of architecture. As Hadid declared, “I am sure that as a woman I can do a very good skyscraper, ... I don't think it is only for men.”<sup>3</sup> Twenty years ago Denise Scott Brown experienced this when Robert Venturi, her partner and husband, was awarded the Pritzker Prize alone, rather than their joint partnership. As recently as 2012, Pritzker awarded its prize to Wang Shu, ignoring Lu Wenyu, his design partner and wife.<sup>4</sup>

This is why Wendy Bertrand's *Enamored with Place: As Woman + As Architect* is so important. A discourse and reminiscence of her life during the burgeoning feminist movement, Bertrand recounts her experiences as a woman, mother, architect, and weaver from the late fifties through the first decade of the twenty first century. An autobiography, accessible to architects and non-architects, it reminds us of past and continuing exclusion of women in both academia and the profession. Bertrand thoughtfully interweaves the personal with the professional, revealing her ongoing quest to practice architecture. Her feminist approach emerges as Bertrand discloses struggles while working as a single mother and professional within government agencies that publically professed support of women and minorities but privately promoted white males. A compelling introduction and equally sharp epilogue titled “If I Knew Then What I Know Now” bookends 36 short chapters that move through time and place. From her childhood in La Jolla and Mexico, to college in Santa Barbara, Bertrand travels the world, landing in California as architect, mother, and feminist architectural practitioner.

Not a 'how to' book, this is a memoir of living, learning, making and becoming an architect. Bertrand's gypsy-like travels throughout the world, and fascination with architecture, stemmed from her

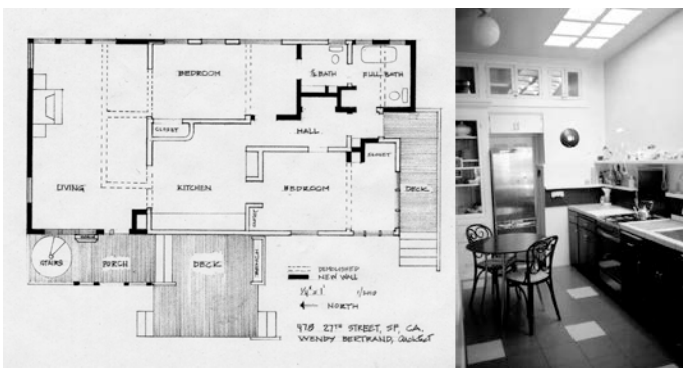


*Enamored with Place: As Woman + As Architect* by Wendy Bertrand, published in 2012. Cover photo by Chanette Manso, Paris 2011

sense of wonder and curiosity, rather than from a search for a new aesthetic. Experiences abroad shaped her sensibility of design as she became an architect with a social/user-centered consciousness. The insidious and irreconcilable discrimination at work led her to early retirement and a new life as an activist-architect with a passion for weaving and fiber arts. Her memoir is interwoven with details of her personal life, including abuse by her French husband, his kidnapping of their daughter and her single motherhood.

Bertrand's interest in architecture began with naïve wonder about the 'how' of design and, while striving to do her best, she lost her passion after realizing that competence and excellent work weren't enough: the male architectural profession kept T-squares out of female hands. She recounts how this lack of acceptance spurred a feminist movement and political changes in Berkeley, leading to Bertrand's participation in founding the Organization of Women Architects / Organization of Women Architects and Design Professionals (OWA) in the San Francisco Bay area that remains vibrant today.

OWA and the architecture program at UC Berkeley both contributed to the social and environmental behavior movement that transformed the profession from one focused on aesthetics to one focused on user-oriented design. Architecture as a profession came to be seen as a social contract. Bertrand utilized this educational philosophy, redesigning and transforming the office environment at her first job with the navy.



Left: Plan Drawing by Wendy Bertrand for the renovation of her flat in San Francisco. Right: The completed kitchen after the renovations. Photos courtesy of Wendy Bertrand.

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