



# International Archive of Women in Architecture

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
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## In Memorium

"It must have been very inspiring to grow up in the most unique house at the time," I asked Han Schröder during our first conversation back in 1985.

"Oh, yes," she responded.

"My mother kept transforming the interior spaces daily, because the sliding partitions could be moved very easily.

However, the large glass windows were a constant target for the children.

They would throw stones and hardly ever miss. In comparison with the surrounding houses in Utrecht, ours was the most curious place for people to inhabit, and we were often the subject of local jokes."

Now a landmark of the De Stijl movement, the Utrecht house in the Netherlands was designed in 1924 by Han's mother, Truss Schröder-Schröder and Gerrit Rietveld.

Han Schröder decided to devote her life to architecture. Upon her graduation from Zürich Polytechnic (ETH) in Switzerland in 1940, Han worked for Rietveld before establishing her own practice in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 1954. A decade later, she came to the United States "to learn about new materials and . . . to research certain institutions for the young and the handicapped," she explained. After working at two architects' offices in Los Angeles, she moved to Garden City, New York, to teach interior design, first at Adelphi University, and then at Parsons School of Design. In 1967, she joined the faculty at the New York Institute of Technology and from 1973 until her retirement in 1988, the faculty at the Virginia Commonwealth

University in Richmond. As an educator, Han Schröder had a strong impact on the curriculum and a most beneficial influence on her students.

Han Schröder was an inspiration for the International Archive of Women in Architecture. She was the first to donate her entire professional archive and thus lay down the foundation for our collection. She was a cherished advisor, a benefactor, and a dear friend. Her lifelong accomplishments were featured in the first issue of the IAWA newsletter in 1990. It is with deep sadness that the IAWA mourns the loss of Han Schröder, who died on March 20, 1992, after a short illness, in the Boerhaave Clinic in Amsterdam. The IAWA honors her memory with respect and admiration. She left behind many friends who will never forget her.

## Milka Bliznakov, Chair, IAWA

I had the pleasure and the privilege to be a student of Han Schröder from 1983 until she retired in 1988. I remember asking questions in class. Han would respond in a rather cryptic way. If you asked, "well, what does that mean?" she would say nothing and leave it up to the student to ponder. It may have been weeks or months, or sometimes even years later, but eventually you found yourself in a situation where those rather cryptic responses would come to mind and all of a sudden they all made sense. Han wanted the students always to question everything. She believed that there were never any "correct" answers to anything, only solutions that might be more appropriate than others. Han Schröder fostered an environment where traditional solutions were constantly being challenged. She felt the design might be more about the places you don't put things than the places you do. She offered a view of the built environment that focused on the "space" itself as a tangible design element.

As I was finishing my senior year, Han advised me to focus my talents in the direction of product design. When I told her that I was interested in architecture instead, she offered to

help me consider some of the schools that she felt were extraordinary by virtue of their curriculum. "If you want to pursue architecture you must do so at a university that has the strength to shape those skills that you already have, not some country club," Han told me. She often spoke highly of the graduate program here at Virginia Tech. I applied, was accepted, graduated, and am on the faculty.

It was Han Schröder who encouraged me to use the computer as a design tool. I began working on the computer in 1985, and have been using it ever since. Han felt it was important that people of vision pursue new technologies just as the designers of the 1920s sought to use the new building materials of their day. Han visited Blacksburg several times between 1987 and 1992. She always loved catching up with her former students. Since I graduated in December of 1991, I have been made the Director of the MultiMedia Lab for the Colleges of Architecture and Engineering. I will continue to question and explore and will now be able to help a new generation of students to do the same. Han Schröder was an accomplished architect, a wonderful teacher and good friend. Han will be truly missed.

**Gordon G. Miller, III**  
Director, The MultiMedia Lab



Han Schröder with her students.



## IAWA Spotlight Hilde Weström

Born in Neisse, Upper Silesia in 1912, Hilde Weström was among the few women enrolled in architectural studies at the Berlin-Charlottenburg Polytechnic in 1932. She was a student of Heinrich Tessenow at the same time as Albert Speer. When Nazi ideology penetrated the University, Hilde Weström moved to Dresden and graduated in 1938. As a student, she participated in the historic preservation and restoration of several churches which developed her "appreciation for quality and authenticity in architecture," she recalls. She started her practice in Berlin, but soon moved to Breslau (now Wrocław), where she worked during the war years (1942-1945). When she returned to Berlin, her knowledge about restoration became very important as she evaluated the ruined buildings that needed to be restored. She also worked on the demolition and clearing of the rubble. In 1952 she won a national competition for housing for the elderly in Berlin. By 1957, she had joined the Berlin "Interbau," developing dwelling-types for the state financed housing program. "Women usually designed from the inside outwards, as they are more concerned with the elaboration of spatial sequences which give the user a feeling of freedom and well-being. Women are more attentive to the children's needs, their development, learning, play, and rest requirements. They also care about every detail, including cost. Women are more thrifty and consequently build more economically."

During the following thirty years, Hilde Weström completed over eight hundred housing units (condominiums, rental apartments, social housing, private houses), and won numerous design competitions. "Competitions are very important, as they force an architect to keep up with professional developments and be both



Hilde Weström, Waldorf-Kindergarten and Music School, Berlin-Zehlendorf. View from the street.

inventive and imaginative in order to succeed," Weström stated in a 1984 interview. Though fond of her contribution to housing design, she was very interested in child development and education. Her first school was the transformation of a bomb shelter into a primary school (1950), followed by kindergarten space incorporated into her housing projects, and a ballet school on the ground floor of her 1953 social housing. In her designs for schools, Hilde Weström stressed the experiential aspects of learning. The kindergarten and music school in Berlin-Zehlendorf (1961) and the primary school in Linthal-Glarus, Switzerland are her favorite projects. The Berlin school combines natural materials (exposed brick and wood) with brightly colored walls.

She used forms and colors to articulate spatial experiences, not only in her schools, but also in her housing. "I consider how materials and colors will age in time. Silver-gray and deep pink, for example, age decently together," she explained.

While some of her ideas are kindred to Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy, her personal interest in child development started during the war years, when toys for her children were difficult to find and she began making them herself. For awhile, she actually supported her family by selling her



Kindergarten rooms transformed into concert hall. Folding walls accommodate changing interior needs.

toys made of scrap materials. The interdependence of form and materials later became an important aspect of her architecture. Her most expressive designs were houses for artists and poets, where client and architect aimed at congruent artistic goals, as for example, the house of the sculptress Ursula Hanke-Förster in Berlin (1964). At the end of her career, Hilde Weström collaborated with Hans Scharoun on the construction of the Ibero-American Institute to the State Library in Berlin. Although she retired in the mid-1980s, she continued to keep busy. For example, she researched the work of an artist friend, Gerda Rotermund (1902-1982), organized a posthumous commemorative exhibition and prepared the catalogue.

"I leave it to you to decide how to categorize my manifold contributions," Hilde Weström wrote me when she donated her materials to the IAWA. She had been involved in social activities, furniture and interior design, landscape and urban design, preservation and restoration, as well as raising her family of four children. Her daughter, Ute Weström is also a successful architect in Berlin, and involved in a wide range of pursuits. Ute studied psychology, philosophy, and sociology before making a commitment to architecture. Her interest in art is expressed in the art museums she renovated, retrofitted, or built. The IAWA hopes in the future to have the profound pleasure of housing her archives.

M.T.B., Chair

## Recent Aquisitions Beverly Willis, FAIA

She is an artist with oil paintings, frescos and wood sculptures to her credit. She is a craftswoman, a furniture designer, an interior designer, an architect, a leader in preservation and retrofitting of historic buildings. She is also a writer, an activist, and at the age of 18, she was already a pilot. She is what she wanted to be, a Renaissance woman, not a *uomo universale*, but a *donna universale*. Beverly Willis studied engineering at Oregon State for two years, then art at the University of Hawaii. She started a craft business in Hawaii, the Willis Workshop, which later became Willis and Associates, Inc. In 1960, she moved her practice to San Francisco, begin-



Hilde Weström and W. Kampmann, Flexible living spaces at "Interleau" exhibition "The Town of Tomorrow", Berlin 1957



ning with remodelings and designs of small houses, and soon worked up to larger renovations, such as the 1963 transformation of three nineteenth-century buildings on Union Street from residential to commercial use. This was among the first successful projects devoted to preserving the neighborhood's architectural integrity by rejuvenating old buildings. It was followed by the rehabilitation of several buildings in San Francisco's Jackson Square. Beverly Willis's renovation of the Vine Terrace Apartments of 1972-1975, renamed Nob Hill Court Condominiums, brought her national recognition and the AIA award.

By the later 1970s, Beverly Willis succeeded



Beverly Willis, Nob Hill Court Condominiums, View from second level

in merging her art, architecture and engineering skills in several buildings for the performing arts: the restoration of the Glide Memorial Auditorium and Community Center in San Francisco (1971), the Oakland Ensemble Theater, Oakland, California (1985), the widely publicized San Francisco Ballet building (1984, illustrated in the first issue of the IAWA Newsletter of 1990), and the present renovation of Berkshire Festival Theater complex in Massachusetts.

Beverly Willis recently donated a large portion of archival materials from her San Francisco office, including CARLA, a Computerized approach to Residential Land Analysis. The goal of CARLA is to make "better environmental design possible by minimizing the amount of land used for roads and buildings so that open space is preserved." Willis was a consultant to the State of California and several California cities on environmental criteria.

The IAWA is pleased to have a copy of Beverly Willis's moving autobiography *Remembrances of the Past*. We hope that she will find time to continue to write.

**M.T.B., Chair**



Beverly Willis, detail from fresco, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1956

## In the Archive

**Driskel, Jean Roth**, (1915-1971). Architect of Pasadena, California; Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and national president (1954-1956) of the Association of Women in Architecture.

**Dietrich, Verena**. Architect of Cologne, Germany, writer and architectural critic.

**Forsthuber, Sabine**. Art and architecture historian of Vienna, Austria.

**Kennedy, Louise St. John**. First woman to be appointed to the Architects Board of Western Australia; designer of the Perth Mosman Park Tea Rooms, the Pines Business Center in Cottesloe and numerous other structures in Western Australia.

**Koller-Buchwieser, Helene**. Architect of Vienna, Austria, who at the age of 80 continues to practice.

**Rodeck, Melita**. Architect of Washington, DC.; born in Milan, Italy, studied architecture with Helene Koller-Buchwieser at the Vienna Polytechnic.



Beverly Willis, Greenwich Condominium Renovation, Master bedroom.

### Let us know if you are interested in (please check)

- Learning more about the IAWA and its associated programs
- Donating your papers to the IAWA
- Becoming a Friend of the IAWA

The International Archive of Women in Architecture invites you to join the Friends of the IAWA. Contributions can be made in the following categories:

- \$25-\$39 Friend (\$10 for students)
- \$40-\$99 Sustaining Member
- \$100-\$499 Benefactor
- \$500-\$1000 Life Member

Enclosed is my check payable to the  
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## From the Chair

It gives me great pleasure to report that, with your very meaningful help, our collection continues to grow. At the present, we have information about 130 women architects and designers living in 20 different countries. We would love to establish a scholar-in-residence program that would make the IAWA an enrichment center for architectural historians and women's study specialists. The funds for this program would come only from our members. Please encourage others to join and aspire with us to create a special center with which all designers can proudly identify.

The IAWA is particularly grateful to our recent benefactor Barbara Schmidt-Kirchberg from Münster, Germany.

The College of Architecture and Urban Studies offers a Ph.D. program. The IAWA is an unique resource for a doctoral thesis. Would you please inform others about this opportunity.

**Milka Bliznakov, Ph.D.**  
Chair, IAWA

## Erratum

In our previous issue, Vol. 3, No. 1, **Elise Sundt** was identified as architect in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Elise Sundt is an architect in Vienna, Austria.

**Olga Wainstein-Krasuk**, is Director of the Center of Studies of Habitat and Housing, sponsored by the Organization of American States and the School of Architecture, Design, and Urbanism of the University of Buenos Aires.

We apologize for this error.

**Milka T. Bliznakov, Ph.D.**  
Chair, IAWA



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