



THE ARCHITECT AND THE BUILDING

In the picture, Eero Saarinen is telling a press conference his concept of what was required for the Women's Residence. On the pages that follow: pictures of it and a report of the interview.

Photographed by JAMES DRAKE

A STARKLY-PLAIN OUTSIDE, BUT A WOW! INSIDE



Lawrence S. Williams

Pennsylvania's new, \$4 million Women's Residence Hall, designed by one of the world's most famous architects, was occupied by its residents at Thanksgiving time and dedicated on Founder's Day. Although almost two months separate those two dates, the building still remains a controversial one, acclaimed by some, panned by others. Principal reason for the latter reaction is the severe, plain outside of the Hall (above); the ohs and ahs come from the interior court (right), onto which the four separate houses open. The pictures on these four pages show what the discussion is about.



Lawrence S. Williams



Most of the rooms are designed for two girls, with desks for each. The window in this room is one of

the narrow "slits" which actually brings more light into the room than might appear from outside dorm.



Two coeds relax in one of the shuttered lounges which look out over the court and dining area below.

'AS IF IT WERE A MEDITERRANEAN TOWN'

WHATEVER ELSE may be said about the new Women's Residence, it has been among the chief topics of conversation on the campus for several months. The outside has been referred to as "severe", students have called the entrance "the moat", others have been delighted by its appearance.

What follows is a description of the basic features of the residence: Although from the exterior, the building appears to be a single, four-sided structure, it consists of four separate houses, joined to share a central interior court. All student rooms are on the perimeter, each with its own windows. All social and public rooms surround the court and face it.

The exterior, of hand-molded red brick and black steel, is, to say the least, unpretentious, and according to architect Saarinen, deliberately so. The walls are broken by three different window types, to enliven the exterior and keep the rooms from repetitive similarity.

The landscaped, glass-enclosed, five-story-high court is the building's *piece de resistance*. Some of the social and public rooms project deeply into it; others are pulled back under the balconies for variety of effect.

The main entrance is from an exterior ramp-walk to the second floor of the court, known as court level. This level, which has the informal lounges, serves as the main crossroads and social center of the hall in the same way that a village square relates to surrounding buildings. The center area of this level is open to overlook the cafeteria area on a paved dining terrace, with a central decorative fountain, on the ground level below. From both levels can be seen above the various lounges and shuttered private balconies of the suite activity rooms.

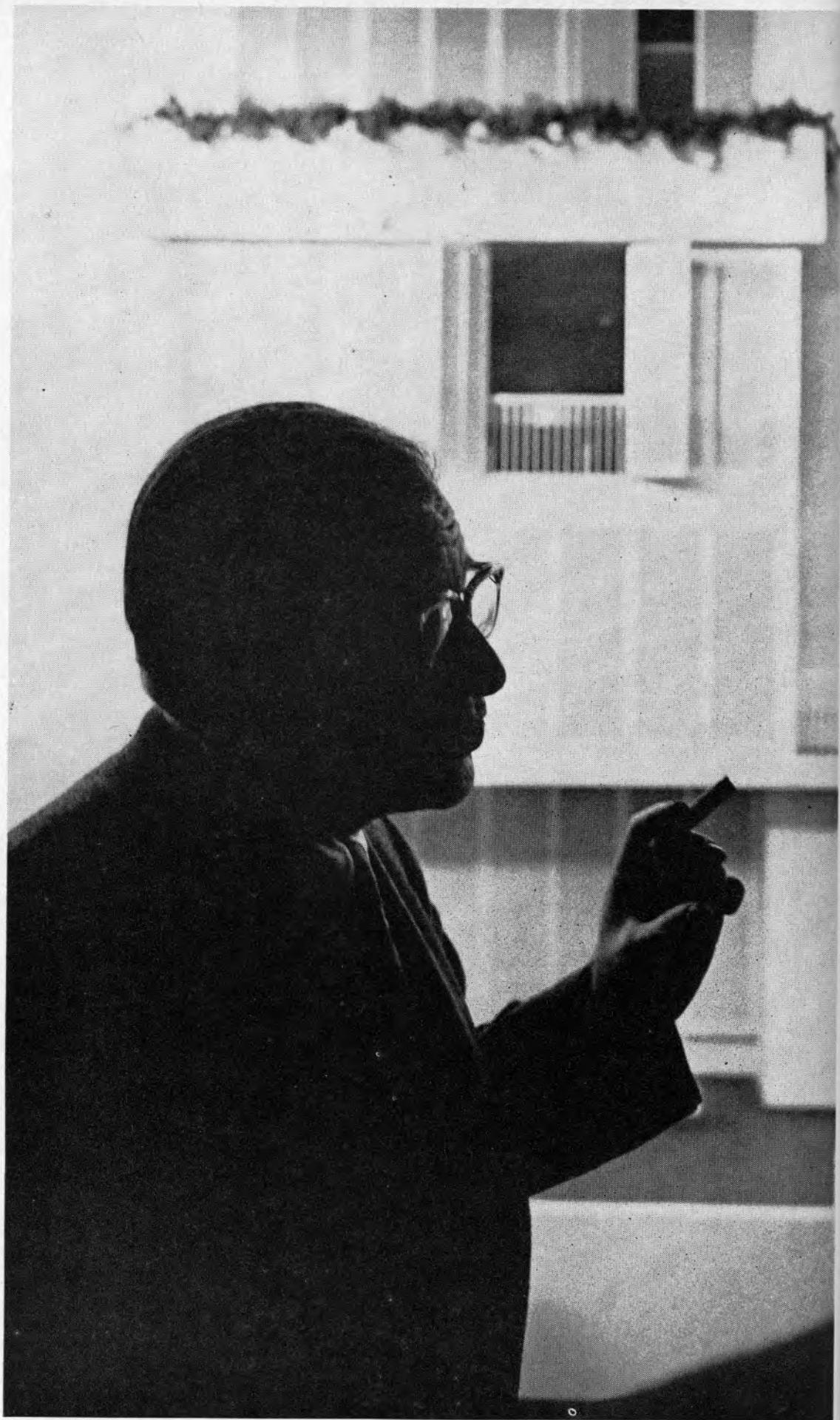
The interior walls of the court are white-painted, poured concrete and black natural slate. Wrought iron balustrades and the louvered shutters

are painted white. This quiet background is enlivened by green tropical plants. The result: as one coed put it, "it's as if I were in a Mediterranean town." By day the court is filled with natural light; by night, dramatic artificial light changes the character completely (*page 13*).

Each of the four houses is divided into suites accommodating from 16 to 24 students. Each suite has a private entrance from the main stairs and has an activities room with facilities for light refreshments. Each house has its informal lounge, on the main court level, and its formal lounge above with an adjacent kitchen.

There is a secondary entrance on the ground level which leads directly to the cafeteria. There is also a small snack bar.

For Saarinen's discussion of the building, please turn the page



Architect Saarinen makes a point to a questioner on the press tour. In the background are the shuttered windows which are a feature of the court.

WHAT SAARINEN TOLD THE PRESS CONFERENCE

AT THE TIME Eero Saarinen was on campus in December to appear as a Benjamin Franklin lecturer, he took time to give the Philadelphia area press a tour of the Women's Residence. At the conclusion, he held a press conference at which he was able to talk at length about his concept of the building. On these pages are portions of the verbatim transcript of the conference:

SAARINEN: I thought I would begin by explaining a little how this whole thing came about. We had a site . . . and this street (Woodland Avenue) came right through the middle. And under that street goes the main telephone trunk cable from New York to Washington, and it just wasn't in the cards to move that thing. And it made a difficult situation. . .

We had to provide space for this building and also for future buildings. We had to make a master plan. Our problem was to build for roughly 660 girls with probably four houses of 150-160, because that is a good size for a dormitory unit. . . The best site plan seemed to work out to one large building and to put all the rooms on the outside, instead of rooms on two sides of a corridor. We could put all the things like stairways, closets, kitchens, living rooms, on the inside. We could have made the court an outside court, but it seemed much nicer to put a roof over it, and that is how we got the court.

Ordinarily, the problem would have been one of maybe five different buildings with an adjoining dining room, and the girls would have walked out-

doors and there would have been trees and walks and so on. But here there wasn't enough room for that, and it seemed like a nice opportunity for one building, with the hope that in the future a similar building will be put opposite this—across from the law school. Also, in a sense, turning the whole thing inward seemed nice. I don't want to criticize Philadelphia, but looking outward and looking at certain things is not terribly nice.

DAN MOSKOWITZ, *Business Week*: The whole building seems to me unfeminine, the interior, the stairways, the exposed metal work under the roof. Is this a new idea of a woman, or do I have the wrong feeling?

SAARINEN: The easiest way for me to answer would be to say that you have the wrong feeling. But no, the concrete in the stairways would have been much nicer if we had had the money for better material. . . The court is very nice, although it isn't feminine in the lacy kind of way.

MOSKOWITZ: That is what I mean. There isn't anything pink and puffy about this whole building. Did you mean this to be a statement about college women?

SAARINEN: I think the pinkness that women tend to associate with themselves is not necessarily the definitive statement of what they mean. . . I think the woman of these years would not necessarily welcome pink as the image, as they say, of herself.

BARBARA BARNES, *Evening Bulletin*: Why did you select white? Most

every wall is white, except the cafeteria.

SAARINEN: First of all, the walls in my own house are white and I wouldn't want them anything else. I think it's really that an interior is made out of very personal things. In order to make the personal things stand out, you make other things such as walls as neutral as possible, and that is why white walls seemed like the nicest walls.

SHERMAN HARMON, *Redevelopment Authority*: Additional buildings are planned; are they to be the same as this?

SAARINEN: That is my hope, but you don't know what happens ten years from now. But I think the architect has a responsibility, at the time he is dealing with a larger piece of property than his building takes, to plan and work with the whole plan of the University. . .

JAN HARGRONJI, *Daily Pennsylvanian*: Part of the student body wonders why the steel bar theme is visible throughout the building—the things running around the roof, the double barred doors, and the barred doors leading into the dining room.

SAARINEN: We had to protect the windows, so that they are safe for the girls. There is a genuine need for the fence around. So we carried the theme on to other things. The things on the top, the curved thing on the top, isn't quite as successful as I had hoped. I shouldn't say this to the press. We may want to try to change that a bit, because it's a little too thin.

MOSKOWITZ: You said we'd get to the exterior of the building. It is

a rather forbidding exterior. Was this part of your turning inward idea, or was there another reason?

SAARINEN: Yes, it's true! It's a rather forbidding building. I think what that does is to emphasize the inside—the richness of the inside by the very severity of the outside. Let's say we didn't try to do a forbidding building; we tried to do a fairly severe building. Also we purposely did a brick building because of the continuity with the other buildings, because that seems to be the character of the University of Pennsylvania.

We used the three different-shaped

outside. Maybe the building is a bit too severe. Maybe buildings today are a bit too unsevere also. I could point to a lot of buildings where a little bit more severeness could have been applied, instead of trying to please.

McNAMARA: I was thinking of a magazine article where you talked about an over-all feeling of a University and sort of implied that when new buildings are built, they should fit in with the idea of the campus. I was wondering whether, in view of the severity of the building, you felt this was the over-all feeling of the campus.

SAARINEN: No, I don't want to

is really not so terribly severe and neither are the other buildings so unsevere.

STUDENT (*Unidentified*): Some of us who live in the building find the lighting inadequate. The only light is the light over the door.

SAARINEN: What you need in your room—we can't supply everything—is a work light, one of those things where the bulb lights up and lights down and is luminous on both sides. When going through the dormitories, we notice that most girls have a tiny little lamp with a metal shade which lights up a small area. The rooms need a general light. If you get that kind of light, you will be able to see yourself in the mirror and see your work space.

HARGRONJI: Was the size of the bedrooms purposely small? Was this a matter of budgetary consideration? Or did you feel that they are adequately large for living quarters?

SAARINEN: They are small. Some of the other space requirements, as well as the budgetary limitation, just made them that size. I understand the girls don't seem to mind them that size. I think they are small, but there is the problem of balance: if you make the bedrooms larger, you cannot have the small parlors for each suite. But the latter seemed more worthwhile. How you put people together in a place like this is terribly important. The University was very anxious, and I agreed with them, that certain functions be present for all 653 girls: the dining room and the general circulation among houses. Thus you have the whole building divided into four houses, and the houses into ten suites and the ten suites into roughly nine double rooms.

Certain things like dining, the post office, the laundry, are all sort of communal. At the one level, the girls have their parlors where they can have parties separately, and at another level, they have the kitchenettes.

STUDENT: In those four small lounges, there has been very little furniture. Now there appears to be so much furniture, it is almost cluttered.

SAARINEN: You have the problem of an awful lot of girls who have to sit.



In the lounge appearing in the picture on page 15, Saarinen tells members of the press the values and the uses of the room for the residents of the hall.

windows because the primary purpose of windows in bedrooms is ventilation. For study, students generally use artificial light and leave the light on. We made them purposely small because the view out of them is nothing to get terribly happy about; so the more we closed the outside, the more we opened the inside. We tried to create a balance inwards.

CHARLES McNAMARA, *Greater Philadelphia Magazine*: Was the severeness on the outside an attempt to fit a feeling of the University environment, or was it primarily a budgetary consideration?

SAARINEN: Let's not blame money. We can blame the steps and the stairways on money, but not the

make any such statement. My feeling is that this building sort of goes in general with the other buildings very well. It goes in color. It goes in mass very well. We had to answer the problem of a dormitory building as a building with an awful lot of windows very close together. The floors are lower. So you get this tiny little scale full of windows next to other buildings with much larger floors and floor dimensions. One of the things which helped it was to give the rooms different windows. It gave us a slightly larger scale on the outside.

But I didn't say in the article I wrote that the same degree of severity was a necessary part for all the buildings. My feeling is that this building