More Homes for Germans

By BERNARD WAGNER

WHEN THE FAMOUS DUTCH architect I. P. Oud designed his dwellings for the Weissenhof housing project in Stuttgart in 1929 little did he know of their fate two decades later. The Weissenhof housing project was at one time a shining example of the work of the "avant garde" of European architects, which included Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. Partially damaged during the war, Oud’s buildings are now rebuilt in tile-roof and dormer-window fashion. It would be difficult to visualize its original design. The extremely fruitful period in German architecture of the 1920s failed to leave any mark on the work executed since then. The years of Nazi regime systematically strangled any new ideas in architecture, thoroughly eradicated the earlier modern spirit and saw to it that German architectural schools produced nothing but obedient servants in the National-Socialist conception of art and architecture.

Today a small number of German architects are trying to pick up where Pooezig, van der Rohe, Gropius and Martin Wagner left off. To assist them, the ECA Housing Development Projects Program recently offered German ingenuity a chance to set an example for future housing projects.

THE FREE DEVELOPMENT of architecture, housing and city planning in Germany has been restricted by many obstacles. The most significant of these are:

1. There is no city planning legislation to enable the German people to rebuild their cities according to present and future needs. Practically every city has vast areas either completely leveled or consisting of ruins beyond repair. City officials, architects, engineers and bankers look at these ruins helplessly. Although bombings destroyed buildings they could not destroy property lines and inflated land values.

2. There are no new building techniques which promise a drastic reduction of building costs and there are no building codes which would permit the introduction of such techniques. German architects and engineers are still inventive and productive, but their talent cannot be used to the fullest if they are not given a chance through proper legislation by city and state governments. The Federal Government and the Housing Ministry recognize this to some extent but they are in a difficult position because of their limited means to spur action by local officers.

3. There is no central organization or group of persons either capable or in a position to promote city planning and housing in Germany. Professional organizations quarrel among themselves, labor and consumer groups are rather indifferent, and contractors and builders are too busy with small jobs and red tape to bother about the big jobs, especially if the projects have not even reached the discussion stage.

4. There is little building money in Germany. Since the currency reform, which wiped out a substantial part of the people’s savings, money has become a scarcity and banks are reluctant to make long term loans. Building money can only be obtained at extremely high interest rates and is therefore going mostly into industrial and commercial construction.

TO DATE ECA has spent approximately DM 400,000,000 ($95,200,000) for housing in Germany. However, James W. Butler, chief of the ECA Housing Section in Frankfurt, deeply concerned because some of this money from counterpart funds was apparently not spent as effectively as possible, prompted the initiation of a nationwide competition for architect-builder teams to submit in the form of firm bids their best proposals for modern low cost housing.

The winning team in each city was granted the building contract for their project and runners-up received

ECA housing competition jury takes look at site plans. Ltr., Mack Arnold, North Carolina manufacturer; Edgar Wedepohl, Berlin architect; Walter F. Bogner (chairman of jury), Harvard University architecture professor; Donald Monson, city planner; Mrs. Emmi Bonhoeffer, and Prof. Otto Bartning, president of the German Institute of Architects.

(ECA photos by W. Heine)

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American and German jury members listen to Hanover city official describe local conditions to be considered in making choice of dwelling unit plans and site location. During six-week tour almost 1,000 entries were judged.

cash prizes. The program was sponsored jointly by ECA and the Federal Housing Ministry with some $10,000,000 of Marshall Plan counterpart funds for the whole operation. Because of the desperate need for housing in Germany, competitors were given only 10 weeks to prepare and submit their entries.

The cities and sites within these cities were selected on the basis of suitability for demonstration purposes. Forty cities throughout West Germany were invited to submit proposals for suitable building sites for 200 to 300 dwelling units. Those cities offering superior sites in respect to cost, location, availability of community facilities, relationships to places of employment and other important factors, were given preference.

ECA in conjunction with the housing ministry selected 15 cities for the program: Frankfurt, Hanover, Munich, Nuremberg, Brunswick, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Bremen, Krefeld, Aachen, Luebeck, Freiburg, Reutlingen, Mainz and Kaufbeuren.

W H E N E V E R P O S S I B L E P L A N S were promoted in cases where the construction of these dwelling units would be the beginning for a larger housing development or neighborhood. In that way the progressive design of the initial project could set the pattern for any future development.

Only Bremen submitted a construction site in the bombed-out center of the city. Bremen used to be a town of the two-story row house and for that reason land values were relatively low. Furthermore, real estate owners were willing to pool their properties for common development. A successful project there could determine the residential rehabilitation picture for the rest of Bremen and could also serve as an example for other cities to follow.

What may be good for Bremen may not be good for another city as each has its own particular problem. However, Bremen is in a position to show that action by progressive citizens can make it possible to turn into reality the seemingly utopian plan on some architect’s drafting board.

Since construction of all the projects was to be entirely financed by Marshall Plan funds, the selected cities in actuality received 200 to 300 dwelling units as a present. In turn, the cities had to agree to the following conditions: donate the site and carry the cost of site improvements up to the project boundaries; permit architects to deviate from local building codes and zoning ordinances; accept the decisions of the jury and restrict the list of tenants to refugees, bombed-out families and a small percentage of displaced persons.

Each project will be run by a non-profit development organization acting as a temporary owner in line with the ECA and Federal Housing Ministry aim of eventual home ownership by the tenants.

T H E J U R Y F O R T H E C O M P E T I T I O N was composed of 13 members. The American team of five was organized in Washington under the ECA Technical Assistance Program and included: Walter F. Bogner, chairman, member of the American Institute of Architects and professor of architecture at Harvard University; Mack Arnold, construction expert and manufacturer of concrete building material, Greensboro, N.C.; Donald Monson, former member of the Detroit City Planning Commission; William Wittausch, economist from the Federal Housing Administration, Washington, D.C., and Bernhard Wagner, the writer of this article.

The Germans had as their chairman Prof. Otto Bartning, head of the German Institute of Architects. Other members were: Dr. Otto Ernst Schweitzer, architect, Karlsruhe Technical University; Edgar Wedepohl, Berlin architect; Dr. E. Mengerlinghausen, consulting mechanical engineer, Wuerzburg; Dr. Fritz Leonhardt, consulting engineer, Stuttgart; Mrs. Emmi Bonhoeffer, Posenitz; Dr. Philip Rappaport, president of the organization of settlers in the Ruhr coal district (Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk), Essen; Walter Blind, consultant for housing, economics and financing, Brunswick, and Helmut Duescher, counselor for the Federal Ministry for Housing, Bonn.

For six weeks this jury traveled from city to city judging close to 1,000 entries. In Bonn the task was completed Oct. 20. The whole trip with its meetings and discussions was a splendid example of German-American cooperation. Several winners were architects who had been to America under the HICOG Exchanges Program.

P R E L I M I N A R Y I M P R E S S I O N S INDICATED that there were a great number of outstanding projects at reasonable cost. In every city the plans chosen for awards were not only of better design but were also lower in cost than the traditional housing project in the same lo-
ality. The primary aim of the housing development projects program—to achieve better housing at lower cost—has thus far been accomplished.

The sites in Nuremberg, Bremen and Luebeck lent themselves to the creation of whole townships. The dwelling units to be designed for the competition had to fit into a limited area, but the architects were at liberty to make proposals for a much larger area. The sites of Hanover, Munich, Brunswick, Aachen and Reutlingen offered similar opportunities on a smaller scale. Failure of most architects to take advantage of these opportunities helped to demonstrate the severe dearth of city planning talent in Germany.

There were a number of outstanding designs for the project sites proper where the architects succeeded in creating an interesting pattern of open and enclosed spaces and in relating proposed building groups to existing conditions of the surrounding area.

A great variety of building types were represented, many with excellent unit plans. Multi-story walk-up apartments and two-story row houses were the dwelling types most often used. Even the one-story row houses received some attention. A Munich architect developed an extremely interesting idea from the old "Atrium"-type house, which consists of a series of one-story dwellings with courts in between. The dwellings and courts are offset in such a manner as to give the tenant complete privacy. Elevations were in general simple and straightforward, expressing the various functions of the floor plans.

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**Bibliography**

**Of ECA Housing Articles**

Previous articles published in the Information Bulletin concerning ECA assistance to construction of new homes in Germany include:

**New Homes for Refugees**, article by John E. McGowan, chief, ECA and Economic Affairs Branch, Public Relations Division, HICOG, on extensive ECA-assisted housing program in Schleswig-Holstein, Issue of May 1950.


**ERP Providing Homes**, article by William T. Neal, US resident officer for Heidelberg, about ECA-assisted housing project at Weibingen, near Heidelberg, Issue of April 1951.

**Big New Housing Projects for Bavaria**, resume of German construction program with Marshall Plan assistance, Issue of July 1951.

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NEW CONSTRUCTION METHODS or systems did not appear as often as expected although the average plan showed a logical and somewhat improved use of existing traditional construction methods. Hollow concrete blocks with pumice aggregate were most popular for walls usually 10 inches thick finished with plaster inside and stucco outside. Lightweight concrete slabs such as "Ytong" and "Porenbeton" were also used successfully. Floor constructions were predominantly reinforced concrete slabs or hollow tile and rib systems. A number of contractors used precast concrete beams. Because of the shortage of wood and steel in Germany, joists of those materials were used in only a few cases.

The pitched roof versus flat roof controversy was reflected in the roof covering material. The selection committee recommended that research experiments made in the United States and in prewar Germany be utilized for construction of a roof covering equal to the American conception of a standard three to five ply built-up roof, which carries a 20-year manufacturer's guarantee.

German technicians voiced considerable skepticism as to the use of corrugated Eternit or Fulgarit (asbestos-cement) for roof covering. They questioned the treatment of joints as well as the quality and durability of the postwar German material. The selection committee suggested that winning architect-contractor teams should get together with the materials manufacturer to work out a solution for roof covering which would be acceptable to the German Housing Ministry and ECA.

Proposals employing prefabrication or semi-prefabrication methods were not as numerous as expected and most of them were technically immature. Only one pro-
postal was free from major technical deficiencies but it was too expensive to compete with a number of good designs employing standard construction methods.

**SOMETHING MORE PROGRESS** was achieved in the field of mechanical installations. While a completely prefabricated utility core, including kitchen and bathroom fixtures, was not in evidence, a great many designers had worked out standard plumbing trees and plumbing walls. Kitchen and bathroom layouts were back to back in most cases.

The fuel shortage in Germany makes present systems of central heating too expensive for low cost housing. The individual stove is the predominant method of heating and affords the most amount of control and flexibility to the tenant and his pocketbook. In some localities people buy their own stove and take it along with the rest of their furniture when they move to another dwelling unit. As a rule central heating pays off only in elevator apartment structures with efficiency-type dwelling units.

While definite savings have been achieved through more functional design, simplified construction and competitive bidding, there are other possibilities for aids which have not been sufficiently exploited. They include intelligent site planning, taking advantage of the natural characteristics of the site and aiming at a minimum of earth movement, roads and utility lines; integration of architectural, structural and mechanical design for the purpose of repeating a few standard components as often as possible, and streamlined financing which would make construction funds available to the project development organization in a more direct manner.

**THE FINAL PHASE** of the ECA Housing Development Projects Program remains unfinished pending completion of construction of this low cost housing. However, the program has already brought about several major achievements. The idea of combining architect and contractor as a working team — unique in Germany and most parts of Europe — has proved to be the best way to arrive at bids which promise better design for less money.

The competition gave recognition to a great many young architects, who produced new and valuable ideas. Lastly, the operation stimulated professional groups, city and state officials. A wedge has been driven into wasteful traditionalism. It is up to the Germans to see that this lead will grow until architecture in their country reaches or surpasses the high standard it enjoyed in the 1920s.

**Many Education Service Centers to be Taken Over**

**GERMAN AUTHORITIES WILL** take over during the coming year a majority of HICOG’s 16 Education Service Centers, which have become focal points for the planning of democratic education reform in Germany during the last four years.

Dr. Mildred English, acting chief of the Education Branch, Education and Cultural Relations Division, Office of Public Affairs, said Oct. 8 the voluntary efforts of German authorities to keep the centers operating after HICOG withdraws support, indicates the value of these services to thousands of German teachers and school officials.

HICOG will continue to operate three of the centers — in Munich, Nuremberg and Berlin — while four will be consolidated with US Information Centers in Bremen, Wiesbaden, Karlsruhe and Hamburg. The remainder will all be taken over by education ministries, teachers’ colleges or local education groups. In turning over the centers, HICOG will provide the German receivers with all books and equipment on long-term loan and a small financial grant to assist in the first months of independent operation.

German authorities have agreed to promote the same democratic and progressive principles as were introduced by the Americans in the centers.

Established in 1947, the Education Service Centers have an average monthly attendance of approximately 49,000 teachers, school supervisors, parents and students. Each center features a library of 10,000 books and hundreds of periodicals, in German and English, relating to pedagogical subjects, as well as films projectors, tape recorders and other aids for conducting educational programs.

**THE AMERICAN DIRECTORS and German staffs at each center have organized forums, seminars and workshops on citizenship-training, democratic teaching methods and hundreds of other problems relating to education.** Several of the centers have published monthly journals, including translated articles from education magazines of other countries.

Most of the centers have conducted series of forums in which teachers, parents, journalists, labor and business leaders and government representatives have concentrated their efforts toward solving local school problems.

Many centers conduct research and demonstration projects designed to improve German education. Thus the Berlin center has developed new intelligence and aptitude tests to replace the outmoded tests now used in German schools. The Augsburg center has operated a child guidance center, in which a local psychiatrist, doctor and social worker have joined in treating problem children and demonstrating modern methods in this field. Many of Germany’s new textbooks have been written by committees working in the Education Service Centers.

The centers which are to be turned over to German authorities during the coming year are located in Bremerhaven, Kassel, Jügenheim, Weilburg, Stuttgart, Bruchsal, Heidelberg, Mannheim and Augsburg.