

COMPETITION REPORT

A big builder's big idea is parlayed
 into the biggest architectural contest in history.
 After months of headaches, hard work
 and some high humor, housebuilding reaps
 the benefits of a \$57,000 investment
 in design improvement

Presentation of the prize-winning houses in this issue BUILDING marks the climax of the greatest design competition in the history of housebuilding. Eleven thousand architects, designers, draftsmen and architectural students studied the competition program; 2,727, another record number, submitted designs; 63 won prizes. Never before have so many people in the design profession been so interested in a single problem. Never before has the financial reward been so great—\$57,000, exclusive of awards in locally sponsored subsidiary competitions. Never before has a competition had a broader, higher purpose—to encourage closer collaboration between architect and builder and stimulate the improvement of small house design.

This big competition was logically inspired by one of the housebuilding industry's big men: Tom Coogan of Miami, a big man whose 220 lb. weight is balanced by his big thoughts and the big contributions he made to the industry as the 1950 president of the National Association of Home Builders. Last summer he suggested that BUILDING conduct a competition as part of its editorial campaign for closer architect-builder collaboration. He backed this suggestion with an offer of \$15,000 of NAHB's funds for prizes and expenses. The editors willingly accepted the challenge, matched NAHB's offer, agreed to conduct the competition and explored means of further augmenting the prize money.

In sympathy with the competition's goal and mindful of its promotional possibilities, six far-sighted manufacturers and trade associations quickly lined up behind NAHB and BUILDING. As associate sponsors, American Gas Association, General Electric Co. and Kwikset Locks, Inc., each contributed \$5,000 to the national and regional prizes. As special award sponsors, Douglas Fir Plywood Association, Libby Owens-Ford Glass Co. and Youngstown Kitchens by Muller Mfg. Corp. each put \$2,000 in the general prize and explored a kitty and offered \$8,000 of side prizes for various phases of the small house design problem in which they were particularly interested: plywood built-in features, the use of glass and kitchen planning, respectively. In addition, NAHB encouraged its member associations to sponsor local contests to raise local prize money and thus broaden the competition base and swell the purse.*

One client, 2,700 designers

Meanwhile the design problem took shape. It was decided that the house should meet the requirements of the typical merchant builder and, in turn, the typical family for whom he builds. This meant a gross floor area limit of 1,000

* For the results of the biggest of these local contests, see p. 230.



Competition announcement first appeared in BUILDING's September issue. Such publicity drew 11,000 inquiries.

Program setting forth rules and regulations of the competition detailed the design problem.

Mailing tubes containing competition entries were received in Chicago. Photo was taken two days after competition closed, before most entries had arrived.



Oscar Associates



ft. and, since new small houses early last fall could be built to sell with land for \$11 a sq. ft. even in high cost areas, it meant a top sales price of about \$11,000—a figure which fits the budget of the mass market. It also meant three bedrooms to accommodate the 3.2 people who comprise the typical family. Since a basementless house can be built anywhere (it is the norm in many parts of the country) and enjoys increasing popularity everywhere, it was logical to eliminate the basement from the competition, rather than require that each house have one.

While FHA and VA design and construction requirements were recognized by the program, a broad interpretation of them was purposely permitted—contestants were allowed “a fair interpretation of general FHA and VA requirements” with authority to disregard the interpretations of local FHA and VA offices. This permitted them to blink at many of the Government’s picayune restrictions concerning contemporary design, roof pitch, dwarf partitions, open planning, multiple use of space, etc.—restrictions which are tending to freeze small house design to yesterday’s patterns—restrictions which, if followed to the letter, would have inhibited the imagination of the contestants and produced only a series of uninspired house designs little better than those built today. It is hoped that the results of the competition will prompt FHA and VA to take a fresh look at their old design standards.

A blizzard in mid-October

By September the many details were at last approved by the competition’s various sponsors; 3,500 copies of the 12-page program were printed and the competition got under way with a two-page announcement in *BUILDING* (see cut). Augmented by newspaper releases and direct mail promotion, this announcement brought a blizzard of mail requesting copies of the program. The daily total of requests started mildly enough at 61, but reached a storm of 611 within a week and hit a peak of 1,167 one Monday in mid-October, just as the supply of programs was about exhausted. This unexpected flurry overtaxed the machinery set up for handling requests and required that the program be put back on the presses—two factors which accounted for the unfortunate delay experienced by many contestants in the receipt of their competition literature. Program requests continued to arrive daily by the hundreds until mid-November and didn’t start to drop off markedly until December 5th—only ten days prior to the competition’s closing date. They are still coming in spasmodically from hopefuls who have failed to read the fine print. (Still unexplained is the reasoning



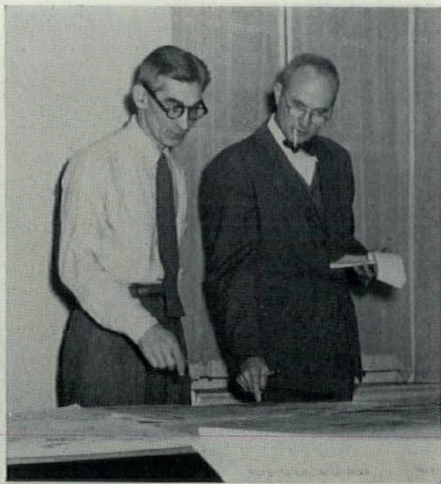
After ironing, entries were classified by region and preliminarily evaluated on basis of quality (above) then jury examined each design as it was displayed on easel (right).



Jury members deliberating before the display easel. Above, standing, l to r: two jury assistants, Yost, Smith, Ford. Seated: Williams, Burns, Goodman, Belluschi and (back to camera) Will. Picture from opposite direction (below) includes Professional Adviser Carl Lans standing between Belluschi and Will.

Photos: Percy H. Prior, Jr.





Architect Jurors Goodman and Ford compare notes in final elimination of competition designs.



Builder Jurors: Burns ponders over a design after Williams has completed his notes and moves on to next table, Goodman beyond.

Technical Jurors Smith, Will and Yost (below, l to r) compare entries in the special awards phase of the competition.



Photos: Percy H. Prior, Jr.



Jury Chairman Belluschi (right) gives his vote to recorder in closing hours of judgment.

COMPETITION REPORT (continued)

behind the most extraordinary request—for the program of the Kentile competition, also conducted by BUILDING, but way back in 1948!

Although the program warned that questions about the competition and requests for interpretations of the program would go unacknowledged, a goodly number were received. But the inquiries were of no great importance, viz.: "Do I determine the upper left-hand corner of my paper while looking at it from the front or back?" and "I can't get everything on a 20 x 30 in. sheet, may I use a bigger one?" and "Is Hawaii part of the continental U. S.?" and in the same vein, "What have you got against us Canadians?" Finally and frantically by telephone: "Since I can't possibly finish my presentation by 5 p.m. on December 15th, may I have an extension of time?"

Apparently most of the contestants, typical of the profession, squeezed every minute out of the time limit; few entries had been received prior to December 15th. Those who procrastinated to the bitter end were confronted with a shocking coincidence: Of all the 365 days in the year to select for a strike, the post-office truckers picked December 15th, and contestants in many cities found that the post office would accept no mail weighing more than 8 oz. BUILDING's editors were again snowed under—this time with telegrams and phone calls from all over the U. S.: "What will I do?" Answer: The deadline was waived; all entries received prior to the judgment were given equal consideration.

From shell case to mangle

The postal log jamb was broken during the weekend and on Monday six weary mailmen dumped 800 mailing tubes in the Chicago office rented for the purpose of processing the competition entries. Next day came the deluge—1,100 tubes, then a sharply diminishing number each day until the total reached the record-breaking figure of 2,727* and the piles of tubes almost filled the 14 x 20' office to its 14' ceiling. The containers were every shape and size including a black metal stove pipe and a heavy cardboard cylinder which had once held an artillery shell. Stuffed inside of one big tube during its handling by postal men was a small tube addressed to a laboratory in Minnesota and containing a blood sample between two glass slides! The men unwrapping the tubes soon learned to expect most anything.

Then came the problem of flattening out the tightly rolled drawings. This was solved by feeding the sheets through a home laundry mangle borrowed from the manufacturer. (Two days after it was installed, an attractive young lady arrived to demonstrate how to iron collars and cuffs and how to pleat a skirt!) The "laundry" encountered only one serious problem: one contestant had used adhesive letters on his drawing which were promptly picked up by the mangle's hot cylinder and transferred to an inappropriate spot on the next drawing to go through the machine.

During the next three weeks, Professional Adviser Carl Lans and the jury's four assistants (graduate students at the Illinois Institute of Design) screened the submissions for eligibility, sorted them according to region and tentatively evaluated their quality.

* Previous record: 2,040 entries in the General Electric Co.'s Home Electric Competition conducted by BUILDING in 1935.

Hors de combat were those entries which disregarded major competition requirements, such as sheet size, which might have given them an unfair advantage over the other law-abiding entries. One misguided contestant used four sheets of 20 x 30" paper to present at larger scale the eight drawings which the others had to compose on a single sheet.

The regional distribution of entries was closely related to population; except that the big, most populous Midwest region produced 75 fewer entries than the smaller, less populated East-Central region. The complete breakdown:

A. New England	211	E. Southwest	273
B. East-Central	734	F. Rocky Mountain . . .	99
C. Southeast	446	G. Northwest	297
D. Midwest	659	No region	8

To facilitate the Herculean task of judging this many designs, each group of regional entries was further divided into three parts: 1) those of obviously inferior design, 2) those of obviously high quality which would require close consideration by the jury, and 3) those—the biggest proportion—whose design quality fell somewhere in between. Since the designs ranged all the way from amateur doodling to professional perfection, this grading of the entries was not difficult.

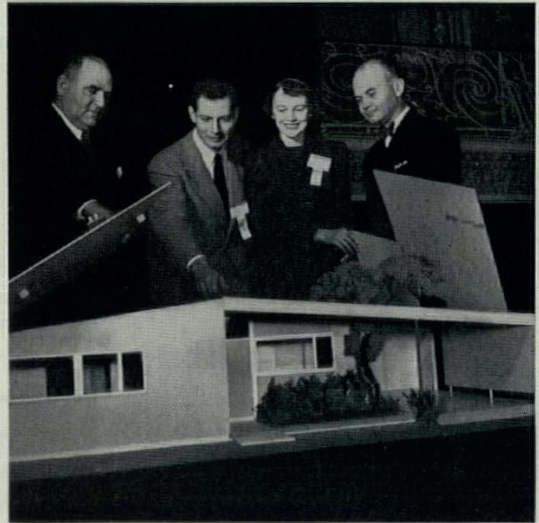
The secret jury

On January 8 the eight men who had accepted BUILDING's invitation to determine the prize winners emerged from their anonymity to assemble at the Moraine Hotel in Highland Park, Ill. (The jury's identity had been concealed from the contestants to prevent them from designing houses to suit the jury rather than the public.) They came from all directions. Architect Pietro Belluschi, selected by the jury as its chairman, was on his way from his home in Portland, Ore., to occupy the Dean's chair at M.I.T.'s School of Architecture. His colleagues on the National-Regional Jury were Architect O'Neil Ford of San Antonio, Charles Goodman of Wash-

(Continued on page 196)



First prize winner Bruce Walker and wife receive the good news in their Cambridge apartment.



Walkers at NAHB Convention session in Chicago examine model of prize winning house with retiring NAHB President Tom Coogan and BUILDING Editor and Publisher P. I. Prentice.



Prize winners after presentation of awards in Chicago:

Top row, l to r: Nagel, W. R. Smith, Wheeler, Athens, Dart, Lowrey, Joseph.

Center row: Steele, Gellman, Mackintosh, Girone, Compton, Hanson, Chase, Diament.

First row: Welch, Hajjar; Whiteley, Wachtel, (Prentice), Walker, (Coogan), Rapson, Macsai.