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194X: Architecture, Planning, and Consumer Culture on the American Home Front (Architecture, Landscape and Amer Culture)

Andrew M. Shanken

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During the Second World War, American architecture was in a state of crisis. The rationing of building materials and restrictions on nonmilitary construction continued the privations that the profession had endured during the Great Depression. At the same time, the dramatic events of the 1930s and 1940s led many architects to believe that their profession—and society itself—would undergo a profound shift once the war ended, with private commissions giving way to centrally planned projects. The magazine *Architectural Forum* coined the term “194X” to encapsulate this wartime vision of postwar architecture and urbanism.

In a major study of American architecture during World War II, Andrew M. Shanken focuses on the culture of anticipation that arose in this period, as out-of-work architects turned their energies from the built to the unbuilt, redefining themselves as planners and creating original designs to excite the public about postwar architecture. Shanken recasts the wartime era as a crucible for the intermingling of modernist architecture and consumer culture.

Challenging the pervasive idea that corporate capitalism corrupted the idealism of modernist architecture in the postwar era, *194X* shows instead that architecture’s wartime partnership with corporate American was founded on shared anxieties and ideals. Business and architecture were brought together in innovative ways, as shown by Shanken’s persuasive reading of magazine advertisements for Revere Copper and Brass, U.S. Gypsum, General Electric, and other companies that prominently featured the work of leading progressive architects, including Louis I. Kahn, Eero Saarinen, and Walter Gropius.

Although the unexpected prosperity of the postwar era made the architecture of 194X obsolete before it could be built and led to its exclusion from the story of twentieth-century American architecture, Shanken makes clear that its anticipatory rhetoric and designs played a crucial role in the widespread acceptance

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