

# JULIAN BEINART

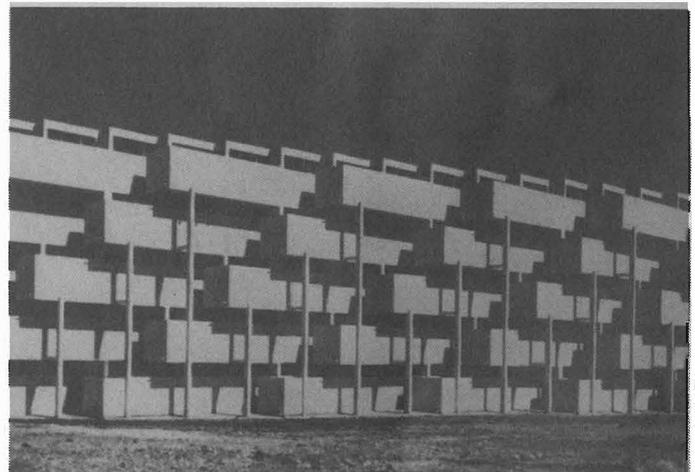
## A Review ARCHITECTURE Africa

*Neues Bauen in Afrika* by Udo Kulterman  
(Verlag Ernest Wasmuth, Tübingen)  
*A Grammar of Architectural Design, with  
special reference to the tropics* by Miles  
Danby (Oxford University Press)

THE MARKET FOR BOOKS on Africa being as it is, it was inevitable that someone would get round to writing a book on African architecture. Now two have appeared: one on new building in Africa, by Udo Kulterman, the curator of an art gallery in Leverkusen; the other, a didactic piece for architectural students in the tropics, by Miles Danby, a lecturer in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana.

Mr. Kulterman (who has a book on new building in Japan to his credit) wrote letters to architects in Africa and asked them to send him material for his book. The eight pictures which cover all of Africa's architectural heritage (from Tunisia, Nigeria, Togo and the Sudan) he obtained from the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt; the remaining 235 are those which architects kindly sent him. Books on architecture cannot be written by correspondence and Mr. Kulterman has, in doing it this way, not only given a totally incorrect impression

*ABOVE: House at Kano (architects, the Architects' Co-Partnership) which is designed for the hot dry Northern Region of Nigeria. The ground floor walls are of 18-inch-thick rubble stone; they have small openings, providing protection from high daytime temperatures. The heat from these walls radiates after sundown into the interior of the house. So a light structure has been used on the first floor composed of steel rods and aluminium sheetings; the metals have a high conductivity and so disperse after sundown the heat absorbed during the day. BELOW: Flats in Casablanca, Morocco (architect André Studer).*



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of what happens on this continent, but he makes one wonder what has happened to traditional German scholarship.

Obviously architects South of the Sahara do not reply to letters, for all of Angola and Mocambique is covered in 250 words and no illustrations. Amancio Guedes, the Lourenço Marques architect, receives three-quarters of the copy but there is not one illustration of his work. Even if Mr. Guedes is a bad correspondent, the author could surely have found examples of his work in magazines. South Africa (still a Union to Mr. Kulterman) is served by two houses by Munnik, Visser and Black of Cape Town. Good for these gentlemen, but what of Revel Fox, Norman Eaton, Hans Hallen . . . and what of Rex Martienssen and the thirties.

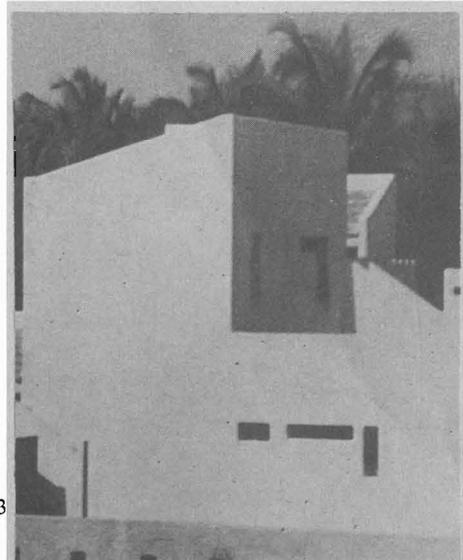
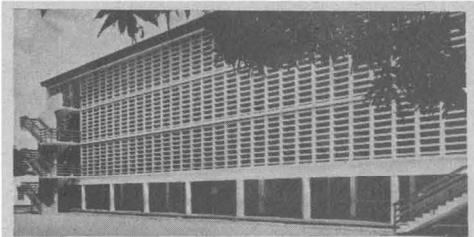
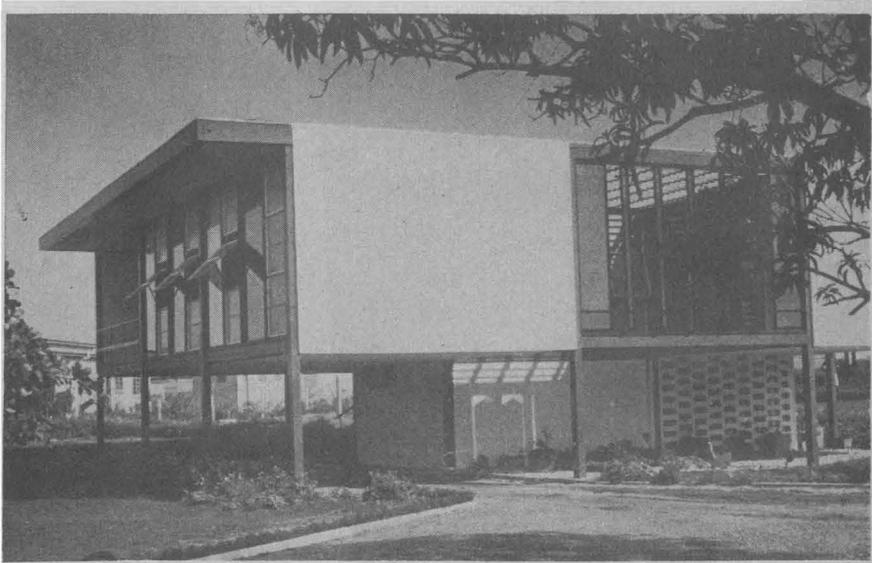
The photographs from the rest of the continent are attractive enough, but the presentation is hardly that of a serious architectural publication. Almost no plans are shown, and even fewer sections. One gets no idea which buildings are done by overseas architects, which (beside Oluwole Olumuyiwa from Nigeria) by Africans.

What is the architectural heritage of this continent? Is a new African architecture possible? What about an architectural *négritude* or an architectural African personality? One wonders whether Mr. Kulterman has heard of these terms. His book gives no indication that he has, nor does it answer any other than superficial questions. Few in Africa will be taken in by this book, but remembering the success of his book on Japan, one wonders how many outside Africa will be.

MILES DANBY DOES NOT TACKLE anything as big as a continent: he only covers the basis of an art. Intended as "an introduction to architectural design for the use of students who intend to practise in the tropics", it turns out to be just a little too naïve for students. Much of it would be wonderful material for matriculating schoolboys trying to make up their minds about architecture as a profession.

In reviewing this book for *The New African*, one would like to concentrate on its writing in terms of Africa. And this is difficult, because there is so little. Except for the chapter on climate, and the fact that many illustrations come from West Africa, the rest could apply anywhere. And rightly so. A grammar of architecture surely implies a collection of fundamentals, and these hold true for the tropics as for any climate; for Africa as for the rest of the world.

Mr. Danby has not distorted the basic facts of architectural space, colour, texture, proportion and scale to make his book African. It is a modest (except for price) collection of elementary architectural facts which will be of interest to laymen and schoolboys everywhere. ●



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM RIGHT: House at Tesano (architect Kenneth Scott Associates).

Primary school, Lagos (architects Fry, Drew, Drake and Lasdun) using multiples of four and eight classrooms in units adaptable to various sites.

Primary School, Dar es Salaam (architect C. A. Bransgrove and Partners).

One of a group of twenty-four houses for junior staff adjoining the grounds of the seventeenth century Danish castle which is Nkrumah's official residence in Accra.

Honeycomb house in Southern Tunisia.

