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ARCHITECTURE; The End of 1960's Architecture

By FRED A. BERNSTEIN

DONALD EDGE, a South Florida architect, had come here to say goodbye.

"I still think it's a beautiful piece of sculpture," Mr. Edge said of this city's courthouse, a bunkerlike concrete building that his firm designed in 1969.

Soon after Mr. Edge's visit, crews began demolishing the building. Within months, a 1916 courthouse -- yellow brick with Greek Revival details, wrapped inside Mr. Edge's building for 30 years but still largely intact -- will once again command the site.

Architecturally, it will be as if the 60's never happened.

In a society otherwise enamored of the styles of the 1960's, the architecture of that decade is rarely loved and frequently reviled. All over the country, 60's buildings are being torn down while much older buildings survive.

Functional problems, like leaky roofs and inadequate heating systems, are often to blame. But just as often, the buildings are simply disliked by institutions that have enough money to replace them.

And the charge to eliminate 60's buildings is, in many cases, being led by baby boomers who came of age in the 1960's. "If you consider yourself progressive, you're always going to want the opposite of what you knew," said Joseph Rosa, the curator of architecture and design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, noting that many boomers grew up in modernist houses.

At Princeton University, five brown-brick dormitories designed in the 1960's by Hugh Stubbins & Associates will be demolished, or at least altered beyond recognition, in 2007. "Students have been critiquing these dormitories for 40 years, and some of those students are now trustees," said Jon Hlafter, the university architect. One trustee, Meg Whitman, president and chief executive of eBay, who was born in 1957, has given the school tens of millions of dollars to build a Gothic-style quadrangle instead.

Yet while wealthy institutions are erasing 60's buildings, architecture professionals and 20-somethings consider them hip. Anna Mod, who lectures on preservation at the University of Houston, said her students "totally get these buildings." Ms. Mod compares 60's buildings in Houston to the Art Deco district of Miami Beach. "Twenty years ago, a lot of people thought it was too modern," she said.

Of course, "everything comes around again," said Robert A.M. Stern, the dean of the Yale School of Architecture. Which is why preservationists fight to save buildings that even they find hard to like.

Still, "many of the 60's buildings have to go," said Mr. Stern, an author, with Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, of "New York 1960." Flimsy, with low ceilings and unopenable windows, and highly energy-inefficient, some 1960's buildings would cost more to update than to replace, he said. But others, Mr. Stern said, "are important monuments that must be saved."

For preservationists, the challenge is to separate the masterpieces from the mediocrities before the wrecking ball takes both. Politicians, developers and philanthropists will have to decide which buildings are worth going to bat for.

The obvious solution is to focus on the work of "star" architects, like Edward Durell Stone, who after decades of seeming unfashionable is winning converts to a brand of modernism that depends on the seemingly infinite repetition of shapes. "I hated him when I was in architecture school," Mr. Stern said. Still, he has argued in favor of preserving Mr. Stone's New York Cultural Center, completed in 1965, with its famous lollipop columns facing Columbus Circle -- not because it is beautiful, but because it is "a landmark in the history of architectural taste."

A brochure issued by Landmark West, a group fighting to save the building, says, "The lollipop building isn't licked."

Louis I. Kahn's buildings (of which there aren't many) are sacrosanct, largely because their classical proportions and solid materials conjure up the very permanence that so much 60's architecture appeared to reject. In Bangladesh, where Mr. Kahn's Parliament complex was built between 1962 and 1974, the Supreme Court recently halted construction of two houses, for the speaker and deputy speaker, that interfered with Mr. Kahn's plan for the site. It was the first significant preservation decision in that country.

Marcel Breuer, designer of the Whitney Museum of American Art (completed in 1966), and Eero Saarinen, who designed the CBS headquarters known as Black Rock (1965) and the T.W.A. terminal at Kennedy Airport (1962), are also on the list of architects whose buildings preservationists rally around. But Mr. Breuer's Pirelli Building, completed in New Haven in 1969, was partly dismantled to make way for an Ikea parking lot last year. And the Whitney considered two proposals -- by Michael Graves and Rem Koolhaas -- for additions that appeared to devour the Breuer building before turning to Renzo Piano for a different scheme.

Not all of Philip Johnson's buildings have been championed by preservationists. Until this year, the city of New York allowed his 1964 New York State Pavilion at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park to deteriorate to the point of collapse. (The city has recently taken steps to find a new use for the building.) Kevin Roche is also in the sometimes-worth-saving category. His 1967 Ford Foundation building on 42nd Street (credited to Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates) will probably survive, thanks to the inventiveness of its architecture and the wealth of its owner. But his Veterans Memorial Coliseum in New Haven, designed in the 1960's as a monument to car culture (a huge garage is its most visible feature), is slated for demolition.

Another approach is to save 60's buildings that form historic districts. That is the tack being taken by a group of Houston preservationists, including Ms. Mod, who are hoping that a corridor of postwar buildings on the city's Richmond Avenue can be saved as a kind of "modern architecture district." The proposed district includes a concrete headquarters built for the Houston Independent School District in 1969, now slated to be torn down. But the "district approach won't help buildings like Pier Luigi Nervi's American masterpiece, the 1962 bus terminal on the Manhattan side of the George Washington Bridge. The building is largely ignored, and its owner, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, has

floated plans to build a multiplex on part of its roof. Nor will it help Richard Neutra's 1961 Gettysburg Cyclorama, housing a 360-degree battlefield painting. The National Park Service is planning to demolish that Pennsylvania building after what some preservationists are calling the second battle of Gettysburg.

At the top of most lists of important 60's architects is Paul Rudolph, the dean of Yale's architecture school from 1958 to 1965. But one of his largest public buildings, the Orange County Government Center in Goshen, N.Y., could be demolished soon, depending on the results of a study commissioned by the county executive, Edward A. Diana.

Mr. Diana said he was focusing on the functional problems of the 1963 building. "We have 87 roofs, and every one of them leaks," he said. "Should the taxpayers be forced to sink money into an inefficient building that doesn't meet their needs?"

He admits that if he took a vote on Main Street, "the building would be demolished tomorrow," but not because of leaky roofs. The building is an anomaly, a hulking maze of "corduroy concrete" in a town so quaint "you have to get permission to change the color of your house," Mr. Diana said.

Mr. Rudolph's style is often called Brutalist, a term first applied by Le Corbusier to buildings that shaped concrete into bold, sculptural forms. ("Béton brut" is French for raw concrete.) But to some in Orange County, the name suggests brutality, as if 1960's buildings are antihuman.

"Just look for the ugliest building in town," a policewoman said, when asked for directions to the government center.

Baby boomers, in Goshen and elsewhere, have made their preference for traditional architectural styles clear. Houses with faux Colonial, Georgian and Mediterranean details are far more common than contemporary homes, even in left-leaning suburbs.

"My clients include some of the most liberal people in the country, and they want traditional houses," Mr. Stern said.

The problem is that buildings, unlike wide ties and Jefferson Airplane albums, can't be put in storage for decades while their owners hope they become fashionable again. The 60's buildings may be back in style among New York's elite; organizers of a benefit to save the lollipop building included the painter Chuck Close and the writer Tom Wolfe. But most of the country has yet to see the beauty in the inverted ziggurat or serrated concrete, which appears to suggest fortification.

Some 60's buildings were never too practical in the first place. The 1965 Chatham Towers, just north of the Brooklyn Bridge, are among New York's most