

RESPONSES

THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF MILLIONAIRES' ROW

Conservative Design, Preservation Shortsightedness

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Cleveland today is a fragmented city. Downtown is divided into unrelated pockets. University Circle is separated from the urban center by a devastated inner city neighborhood that looks like a bombed-out war zone. Shaker Heights, the model garden suburb, is reached by a rapid transit system that runs past junky back yards. Other residential areas are served by interstate highways slashing through old neighborhoods that once were closely knit.

Millionaires' Row is dead and gone. Euclid Avenue is no longer the "Showplace of America." Only a few of the original residences remain standing. Yet, the values and tastes of the people who lived there and the contributions of the architects who designed their homes continue to affect the development of Cleveland.

The mansions built along Euclid Avenue between 1850 and 1910 exemplified a variety of 19th century styles. The earlier homes were expanded forms of vernacular architecture in the popular revival styles: Greek, Italian and Gothic. Later, the homes became grander, and the residents expressed their self-image as the new aristocracy living like royalty in French chateaux, English country houses and Italian villas.

The architects who built the baronial homes of the later 1800's were trained in the Beaux Arts tradition. Schooled in the eclectic vocabulary fashionable at the time, they had the skills to design homes that would rival the historic buildings Euclid Avenue residents had seen in Europe and the grand mansions built for their counterparts on the East Coast.

Many of the architects represented along Millionaires' Row were Clevelanders who also designed the city's monuments, civic buildings, commercial blocks and churches. A few prestige architects were imported from New York. Charles Schweinfurth, who was brought from Boston to design the Everett mansion, stayed in Cleveland under the patronage of the Mather family and developed into one of the most prominent and enduring architects in the city's history.

Circle. Instead of boxy motels, there might have been elegant bed-and-breakfasts like Glidden House and Baricelli Inn.

Indifference to the value of preservation was expressed by residents of Millionaires' Row long before the Inner Belt dealt the neighborhood its final death blow. The same regrettable attitude has continued to pervade the thinking of corporate leaders who implode historic buildings on Public Square and developers who demolish a downtown landmark to make way for a commercial hotel.

In celebrating the legacy of Millionaires' Row, we honor the Clevelanders who left us a high standard of architectural quality. But we must also seek to correct the shortsightedness that permitted the destruction of an historic part of the city's fabric.

