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## In this issue...

... *Erwin Mühlestein*, architect (Geneva), presents a choice of documents and studies concerning what he calls the "rear" side of the urban reality; he suggests us to approach the problem of housing in urban areas not by contemplating façades but by looking at buildings from behind. In a scenario for a possible film on the renovation of traditional housing blocks and courtyards he offers a *tour d'horizon* of the problem – from the crisis of the established modern housing principles to the recent interest in traditional block developments, especially in England and Scandinavia.

*Björn Linn* (Stockholm) then offers a survey of the historical development of dwelling types arranged around open courts, from prehistoric huts to the block developments of the Roman "insulae", which remained a prototype of urban housing for 2000 years. In the 20th century architects and urbanists have adapted the successful method of fragmenting work processes into separate operations in order to increase efficiency, especially in the building industry. As a result the slab has been introduced as the modern prototype for mass housing. Its dramatic shortcomings have helped to generate a new interest in traditional urban typologies.

In his article on "Housing Blocks in Berlin, Yesterday and Today", Prof. *Josef Paul Kleihues* offers a survey of housing strategies in Berlin during the 19th and 20th centuries. While the modern movement has abandoned traditional forms of block development, the important housing campaigns in Berlin during the Twenties nevertheless maintain numerous qualities of those traditional estates, especially a clear differentiation of spaces devoted to circulation and those devoted to recreation and leisure. Only in the Fifties these traditional qualities have been sacrificed to the modernist obsession with large open spaces.

Professor Kleihues' recently completed project of a housing block at the Vineta Platz in Berlin therefore tries to recuperate qualities both of 19th century court developments and of more recent



Hof in Berlin-Wedding (Foto Gerhard Ullmann, vgl. S. 53)

concepts developed by Berlin architects like Alfred Messel and Hans Scharoun. His more recent project for the Park Lenné in the centre of West Berlin however proposes an updated version of Godin's "familistère" at Guise.

In his documentation of traditional court houses in China, *Werner Blaser* offers a glimpse into the beautiful exhibition which he has prepared on this subject and which is now on display in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zurich. He plausibly argues that the "Chinese

Court House" should be thought of as a symbol of a functionally open architecture in the service of an improved quality of living.

In her article "Hamburg from behind" *Ulrike Bläich* then offers a survey of Hamburg's various attempts to improve the quality of life in the downtown areas. She then goes on discussing various "rear sides", by which she means not only hopelessly abandoned and neglected backyards. She introduces a larger concept of "Stadttrückseiten" which includes also open spaces and streets be-

tween housing blocks which are frequently inhabited or used commercially.

In Munich, there exists a political group called "*Aktion Grüne Gartenhöfe*" whose aim is to actively promote and to advise tenants in their efforts to rehabilitate urban backyards and courts. The group presents a few among its recent projects whose origins have to do with the fact that there are "needs and interests which are neither extravagant nor particularly costly, but which usually fail to be realized because it is difficult to articulate them on a private basis and to find the right public agency to which the necessary claims could be addressed."

In Switzerland too, as *Peter Lanz* argues, the renovation of traditional urban neighbourhoods has become an important issue. Zurich has no less than 500 courts, which are actually being mapped in a comprehensive inventory. Whereas in the fifties architects liked to envisage the future of Zurich's densely inhabited central areas as magnificent "villes radieuses", more recent proposals – like the interesting project by *Marcel Thoenen* for a "Wohnhof" in Zurich-Seefeld – tend to limit their scope to a rehabilitation and improvement of the existing housing stock.

*Johanna Lohse* entitles her article on a new cultural centre in Paris (Le Lucernaire) "Forum de l'avant-garde". In fact, Le Lucernaire is one of the most remarkable examples of the rehabilitation of a former welding workshop situated in the backyard of a traditional apartment house. Today, the workshop. The former apartment house and the court itself are the stage for continuing cultural goings-on, from 12 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Finally, *Helène Larroche*, (Paris) describes the fascinating project which had been recently developed by a group of young Soviet architects and whose aim is the renovation of one among the most lively neighbourhoods in the centre of Moscow: a project scheduled to be realized in the context of the Moscow Olympics. It's architecture combines elements of urban megastructures with an almost baroque *gusto* for architectural decor.