

a manifesto

the congress of residential architects lays its foundation.

by duo dickinson, jeremiah eck, and dennis wedlick

The majority of Americans live in poorly designed homes that are haphazardly sited, thoughtlessly constructed, and, in some cases, hazardous to their health.

The quality of most new single-family construction for the last 40 years is at best only adequate. Despite general progress in building technology, few home design innovations have been sought after by the home building industry. The vast majority of single-family house plans built today are simply variations of a few dozen house plans that are decades old. These homes rarely are adapted to their specific locations, have plans that reflect the way most of us live, are pleasing to the eye, or contain details that give them a sense of quality. Our built environment is plagued by sprawl—by a relentless consumption of building materials and land, with little attempt to honor either.

Record numbers of houses are being built each year with higher construction budgets than ever before, yet residential architects are largely at the margins of this boom. Led by developers, the home construction bonanza is driven by dollars and not by concerns

about design integrity, human safety and well-being, and environmental sustainability. Their success would seem to indicate that the “industry standard” single-family home is all that is desired by the general public and causes no concern to the architecture profession.

Despite appearances, both architects and homeowners care about the state of residential design. Those of us who design homes as the central focus of our architectural careers know there are thousands of architects and millions of homeowners throughout the country who take home design seriously. Among the general public, there’s a booming market for information on home design, demonstrated by a proliferation of television programs, Internet sites, and printed publications on the subject. Homeowners and would-be home buyers are increasingly discontent with the current state of housing, and they’re looking for solutions. As a result, a growing number

of architects are actively writing and talking about house design to the general public as a distinct discipline of the architecture profession.

Change is needed; change is possible. We believe that by coming together as a congress, residential architects can be a powerful and effective force for positive change.

Towards this end, we have developed a Mission Statement with a set of priorities. We’ll be conferring in June with a group of Founding Counselors in Washington, D.C., at the national headquarters of the AIA. Our initial goal is to chart a course for aggressive exploration of our chosen craft’s future, while identifying and acknowledging our present problems and strengths. Ultimately, with the support of the AIA, Taunton Press, and *residential architect*, the Congress of Residential Architects will formally convene on December 8 in Los Angeles for its inaugural forum on The State of Residential Architecture.

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mission statement

Congress of Residential Architects (CORA)

The purpose of the Congress of Residential Architects is to provide a continuing forum in various venues for advocating and enhancing residential architecture by licensed professionals in North America. These forums would be focused on the following principles:

1. Sharing knowledge among architects who have dedicated their practice to designing single-family homes.

2. Demonstrating the relevance and value of single-family residential design to the public at large.

3. Enhancing the knowledge and development of design methodologies and technical and social research to benefit the practice of single-family residential design.

4. Fostering communication between architects and publishing and professional organizations to make single-family residential design accessible to the general public.

5. Encouraging and improving academic programs that teach the art and science of designing single-family homes.

6. Providing advocacy in related fields such as land-use laws, aesthetic regulations, and technological systems specific to single-family residential design.

7. Recognizing excellence in single-family residential design.

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