Architects On The March

By
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Taking a brief glance into the pages of history, it might be recorded that the black architect as professional only dates back a generation or two; yet, to investigate the matter further, it is in reality the black slave who laid the foundations and stones which created this one of the most powerful nations on earth.

However, the history of the black professional architect may once again take a progressive step in the recognition of the black contribution to America. For in May two young black architects, Louis E. Fry Jr. and Robert J. Nash, were elected into the American Institute of Architects College of Fellows, joining three other blacks, previously elected.

Paul Williams, Louis E. Fry Sr. and Howard H. Mackie, until the investiture of Fry Jr. and Nash, were the only blacks in the 999 Fellows of the AIA, which represents 4 per cent of the total, approximately 96,000, registered architects in the United States.

FATHER AND SON HONORED

The election is also significant in that this may be the first time in history that two generations, Messrs. Louis E. Fry, senior and junior, of blacks have ever been recognized by an organization such as this.

But, nevertheless the history of architecture has taken its step forward, socially and structurally, for as with everything, there are two sides and our honor recipients, Louis E. Fry Jr. and Robert J. Nash, have and are pursuing the different courses.

Louis Edwin Fry Jr., proprietor of Fry and Welch Associates, 7600 Georgia Ave., NW, Washington, D.C., has pursued what might be considered the traditional path of architecture, building and design.

Fry Jr., who received a Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude, from Howard University in 1949; a Bachelor of Architecture, 1958 and a Master of Architecture in Urban Design, 1962 from the Harvard University School of Design; and a Fulbright fellowship to study at the Technische Hogeschool te Delft, the Netherlands, 1954-55, joined the firm, established by his father, in 1960.

Louis E. Fry Jr. At Work

(Photos by Carolyn Wells)

Robert Nash

Louis Fry Sr.

Fry and Welch Associates according to Fry was "established in a time when the black architect was virtually unheard of."

"My father, Fry Sr., working as a professor of architecture, established the firm by designing part-time while he worked at educational institutions mainly in the south.

"Through his work at the educational institutions, the firm developed a tradition of working in the field of educational design facilities, which has been maintained over its periods of growth and success.

"The firm actually became Fry and Welch Associates in 1954 when Fry Sr. took on a partner, John Welch, thus producing the present firm and its noble reputation.

"Because of its successful work in the field of educational design, the firm expanded and presently consists of 14 architects and three offices, the regional office here in Washington, D.C. and branch offices in Baltimore, Md. and Tuskegee, Ala.," replied Fry Jr., completing the history of the firm.

Now a little more relaxed, the soft-spoken man with the demanding personality, began to discuss his family and his work.

"My wife, Genelle, is a math teacher at Lincoln Junior High School and is often quite helpful to me in my work.

"And my children, Jo Nisa, 15; Vicki Lynn, 13; Louis III, 13 and A'Liexa, 11, have all contributed something at one time or another.

"Our home, 7100 Alaska Ave., NW, Washington, D.C., started out to be my project, but with the suggestions and specifications given by everyone, it became a family project."

MAY FOLLOW DAD

Graying somewhat at the temples, Fry commented, "Although I have this gray hair, I don't intend to retire just yet, but I do hope that the family tradition, in reference to the firm, will be continued.

"My children are presently keeping their options open for the future, but Vicki, the 13-year-old daughter, has indicated that she wants to pursue the architectural field.

"She is very adapt in design and colors and often helps me with a project or two.

"I'll tell anyone, architecture is not a field to get rich in but it is very rewarding if one likes a challenge.

"My prime consideration right now is to make a mark as a professional in the field of architecture and to open the door for more blacks to enter.

"I believe that during the riots and racial strife, the role of the black architect improved, but now the trend seems to be subsiding."

The firm, which represents one of the oldest black architectural establishments in the District of Columbia, has projects which are 75 per cent in the design of educational facilities; 15 per cent in residential development and 5 to 7 per cent in the design of medical facilities.

Fry recalled a few of his projects, the Morgan Elementary School, Washington, D.C.; the Sickle Cell Anemia Clinic, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; the Education Building, Morgan State College, Baltimore, Md.; and the U.S. Department of State Embassy Residence, Budapest, Hungary, but noted that the pride of the firm is the new experimental school, presently under construction at Fort Lincoln New Town.

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