



Just a name—Calder. Alexander Calder. What comes to your mind? Mobiles . . . stables . . . airplanes . . . wood? Wood?

Stop for a moment, and imagine: Mobiles, like rainbows caught on spider webs of wire. Stables, starkly angled against sleek plazas. Needle jets threading the skies in bright and whimsical patterns.

Mobiles and stables have become parts of our lives; they are synonymous with "Calder." But, did you know that Calder's world was inhabited by much more than these designs? Did you know that he made jewelry and toys? That he painted and sketched, designed rugs, tapestries, and stage sets?

He cast bronzes, made mechanized sculptures, wove wire into circus figures, and designed household objects such as silver utensils and wooden doorknobs. And did you know that Calder carved figures from wood?

This story is about one man's designs in wood, one of the first materials Alexander Calder used in sculpture. He began, in 1926, by making wire caricatures of people and animals, then switched to wood.

PEEKSKILL, NY, 1928: "I worked outside on an upturned water trough and carved a wooden horse . . . a cow, a giraffe, a camel, an elephant, a cat . . . several circus figures, an ebonny lady bending over dangerously, daringly called Liquorice."

Calder's early figures were only slightly altered from the shapes that he saw in roots or lumps of wood; not much more worked on than the driftwood we collect for the image its convoluted form drew in our minds.

The first wood carvings ap-

peared in 1929 at New York's Weyhe Gallery. And they were well-received. Some critics labeled his work static and impersonal; but others saw in Calder an artist with a new direction. Murdock Pemberton, *New Yorker* art critic, wrote: "Calder is nothing for your grandmother, but . . . he will be the choice of your sons. He makes a mockery of the old-fashioned frozen-stone school of sculptures and comes nearer to life in his creations."

In this exhibit were some excellent sculptures: *Horse*, not a single block of wood, but several bits cunningly joined; *Double Cat*, seen curved in enigmatic repose from front or back; *Cow*, a humorous preserving of the wood's grain and shape; *Camel*; *Sharksucker*; *Wooden Bottle with Hairs*; *Constellation with Quadrilateral*, *Gibraltar* . . . and others.

Sensitive to his materials, Calder always worked with their potential. Any bit of wood or metal held an inherent shape; yet no shape remained fixed. An entrepreneur once suggested mass-producing *Cow* ("... his *Cow* is a cow with all of her pathos left in," Pemberton wrote), but Calder protested: "That piece

of wood turned out to be a cow, but the next one might be a cat. How do I know?"

He gave his carvings shape and personality with the barest touch of knife to wood. That economy is what makes them special. But Calder only said: "I take a lump of wood and make very little alteration in its shape—just enough to turn it into something different."

He also used wood in his stables, *Gibraltar*, for one. The stables were abstract combinations of textures and forms—pieces of rough or planed wood and spheres, linked by humor and thin steel rods. Some, he painted; others, he let the wood's warmth come through.

More complex and abstract than simple wood stables was a new design, which grew out of a desperation of sorts. It was wartime, Calder wrote in his autobiography, and metal was scarce:

"In 1943, aluminum was being all used up in airplanes and becoming scarce. I cut up my aluminum boat . . . and I used it for several objects. I also devised a new form of art consisting of small bits of hardwood carved into shapes and sometimes paint-





Calder's Woods

My-Chau Bui

ed, between which a definite relation was established and maintained by fixing them on the ends of steel wires . . . I called them *Constellations*.

Calder mounted some *Constellations* on bases. But for some others he found a new environment: hiding all means of support, he hung them from the wall. Later, he used this original concept for some wall mobiles.

Calder has said that *Constellations* were inspired by Miro's series of gouaches (1940-1), and by canvasses of Yves Tanguy, a neighbor in Connecticut. But this wasn't a case of simply borrowing from friends:

"[Constellations] had for me a specific relationship to the Universes I had done in the early 1930s. They had a suggestion of some kind of cosmic nuclear gases . . . I was interested in the extremely delicate, open composition."



Alexander Calder was born into a family of artists: his grandfather (creator of the William Penn statue atop Philadelphia's City Hall) and father were sculptors; his mother, a painter. Calder continued in and expanded the family tradition, although he received a degree in mechanical engineering.

At five, he was making wire jewelry for his sister's dolls, and before he had entered his teens, Calder had a workshop for making jewelry, toys, and gadgets. Pliers (his sister saved to buy him his first pair) always remained his favorite tool.

While studying at New York's Art Students League (1923-26), Calder created his first wire sculpture, a rooster-sundial; published *Animal Sketches*, a book of draw-

ings; and carved *Flattest Cat*, his first wood sculpture.

But Paris was the pivotal point in Calder's artistic development: A fresh and admired figure in intellectual and artistic circles, he found friends in Pascin and Miro. What started things, though, was a visit to Piet Mondrian's studio in 1930: "This one visit gave me a shock. . . . Though I had heard the word 'modern' before, I did not consciously know or feel the term 'abstract.' So now, at 32, I wanted to paint and work in the abstract."

And, in 1932, the circus came to town. The first animated sculptures—wood and wire circus figures—were run by hand cranks and motors. And a name was born. Why not "mobile," asked Marcel Duchamp; then Hans Arp suggested "stabile" for some stationary constructions Calder had shown a year earlier.

Alexander Calder died a short time ago. He was 78, but did he ever seem to grow older? His life was full and happy, and his joy in

it is reflected in his work. A French newspaper called him: "L'homme qui savait parler au vent." In a language where nouns and verbs took on another meaning, he did, indeed, seem a man who knew how to "talk to the air."

His varied works, born of happy tinkering, orbit in constellations of a Calder universe. But they aren't out of our reach: New York's Whitney Museum of American Art is the first of three homes for a 50-year retrospective of his work.¹ "Calder's Universe" brings to earth some 200 of his designs in a show that has drawn larger crowds than any other in Whitney's history. And wooden objects comprise only one of 17 sections, each division representing Calder's variety: Toys, Circus, Oil Paintings, Graphics, Theatrical Productions, Innovations, Wire Sculptures . . . and much more.

Typically, Calder took a personal interest in the exhibit (which opened just before his death). Thomas Armstrong, Whitney's director, told how "after the show opened, [Calder] came down the street with a can of paint and brush and touched up a mobile. He [came] to the show six times and loved it . . . and the other visitors got quite a kick out of seeing him."

As an artist, Calder won his following with design concepts that opened a door into our imagination and taught us to be free. Wood, metal, and wire were his basic media, but he scorned no material—even using cast-off ob-

Please turn to
CALDER page 21



"Write something for me . . . something exciting and beautiful . . . like a check."

DE CONCEPTS
IN WOOD DESIGN

1. The exhibit, sponsored by Champion International, will travel to: Atlanta, Georgia (High Museum of Art, March 5-May 1, 1977); Minneapolis, Minnesota (Walker Art Center, June 5-August 14, 1977); and Dallas, Texas (Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, September 14-October 30, 1977).

Dialog

Continued from page 16.

on replacing this plywood with exterior high density overlaid plywood and would like to know whether it should be pressure-treated to be resistant to fungi.

Max Schwartz, CE/ME
Studio City, California

Yes, from your description, pressure-treatment is advisable. If the walls are proximate to food-stuffs or in contact with them, the only FDA-approved preservative is copper-8-quinolinolate. See CONCEPTS directory issue (Sep-Oct 1976) page 29 for a list of AWPI members who furnish wood so treated. We also suggest that you consult with the treater, and possibly with an APA representative, before specifying or ordering, since high density overlay may require special consideration.

We Needed That . . .

Gentlemen:

I have been receiving your AWPI journal for several years and using it extensively in my classes in construction technology. May I commend you on the excellent quality of this publication and on its breadth and depth of coverage of the area of treated wood in construction. You are rendering a valuable service and I appreciate it.

Dr. Vincent Oxley, Associate
Professor I.A. & T.
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, Missouri

Gentlemen:

This is a belated thank you for CONCEPTS which you sent us in July. It is a wonderful publication and we happen to love wood and wood construction and have made research in preservatives to save what we have—and build!

Our neighbor owns a lumber company. I will lend him this handsome book. Possibly he has it. Thanks and congratulations.

Helen Sawyer Farnsworth
Sarasota, Florida

Thanks. We needed that. See "Red Face Department" at the beginning of "Dialog" above.

Another Correction . . .

Gentlemen:

I enjoyed reading your Nov-Dec 1976 issue, in particular the several articles on marine piles and bulkhead structures.

I would like to make one correction to the article entitled "Prolong Those Pilings" by T. L.

Coates. The speed of stress waves in piling is many times faster than the cycle speed of pile driving hammers. By the time a hammer strikes a pile the second blow, the stress waves in the piles due to the original blow are virtually dissipated by dampening. The problem of cracking of concrete piles is not due to the overlapping of stress waves from different hammer blows but instead, due to a single hammer blow.

Cracking of prestressed concrete piling can be prevented by the proper selection of driving equipment including hammer size and strikes, pile and hammer cushion material and thickness. Computer programs have recently been developed to evaluate the magnitude of the stress wave to insure that piles are not damaged during driving.

George C. Fotinos, Chief Engineer
Santa Fe-Pomeroy, Inc.
Petaluma, California

We've forwarded your comments to Mr. Coates and have shared them here to help correct any misimpressions that may have arisen. There are possible problems with any and all types and phases of construction. Fortunately, most of them can be circumvented with knowledge, care, and attention to detail.

Those Common Problems . . .

Gentlemen:

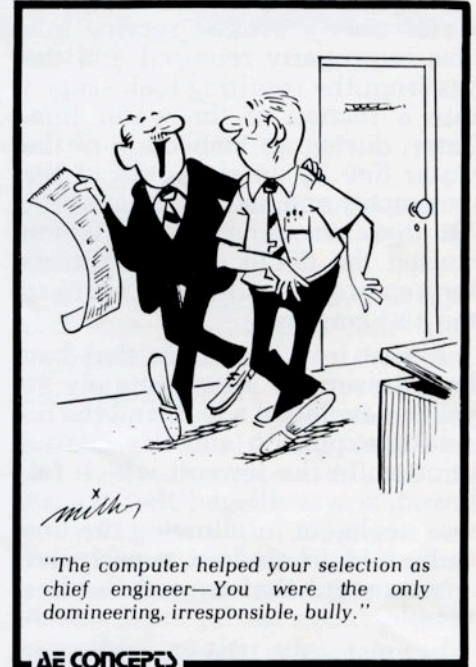
I have been trying to collect your continuing series "The Common Problem" in CONCEPTS. I find your articles to be very useful in not only my private work but most particularly in courses I teach in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning.

In checking my files, however, I realize I have only a small number of the articles you have written over the last few years. Is it possible to obtain back issues, or better yet, copies of back articles? The succinct nature of your articles and inclusion of bibliographies are particularly good and I have enjoyed reading and using the material you present.

Paul G. Salisbury, AIA
Director, Campus Planning—Utah
State University
Logan, Utah

Gould fans will be happy to know that we intend to publish a collection of back articles late in 1977. With this issue's column, there have been a total of 14 diverse Gould columns on condominiums and planned unit de-

velopments. If you can't wait for the reprints, order the appropriate back issue of CONCEPTS (currently \$0.75 each)—and state which article you want. If the complete issue isn't available, we'll send a Xerox copy of the article. Our index—Jan-Feb 1977 issue—will help you determine what you are missing from your collection.



Calder

Continued from page 9.

jects: a sculpture from a film canister, beer cans, wire and leather; or another, marrying cans of Medaglia d'Oro coffee and Ballantine beer with a ring of cellophane tape.

Calder, the man, won many friends by his wit and charm. A Washington Post article described him as a "big, bear of a man who wore his grins sideways . . . [and] a shock of white hair that stood up, like the fins of a Calder mobile. His speech, a deep mumble, was the despair of his friends. And his wife often acted as 'translator,' cleaning up some of his earthier remarks."

What's in a name? Well, if the name is Calder, then it contains much of what is art in the world today. And, in just two words to a friend, a special view of life.

It was after a dinner in his honor at the Whitney Museum. Georgia O'Keefe was talking to him—of how sad she was that so many of their old friends were gone . . . how life was not what it used to be. Calder just grinned his lopsided grin at her, and said: "You exaggerate." **AE**