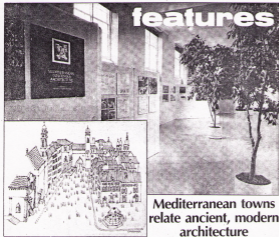


## features



by Susan Wall

**F**OR those of you who have dreamed of far away places and haven't had the chance to travel, here is an opportunity for you to be engulfed in the lands of the Mediterranean.

Steven and Celia House, architects in the San Francisco firm of House & House, spent 14 months traveling the Mediterranean region, studying the richness of these lands. They brought back representations which reach beyond the average tourist's snapshots.

The exhibit, "Mediterranean Indigenous Architecture: Timeless Solutions for the Human Habitat," is on display through Nov. 20 in the Temple Buell Gallery at the Architecture Building. It features photographs and drawings of the hill-towns and villages of the Greek Islands, Italy, Spain and Yugoslavia. Once inside, you'll discover these towns speak a language which is quite poetic.

"The true basis for any serious study of the art of architecture still lies in these indigenous, more humble buildings—everywhere that are in architecture what folklore is in literature or folk-song in music, and with which academic architects are seldom concerned. Though often slight, their forms are intimately related to the environment and to the behavior of the people. Functions are truly conceived and rendered with natural feeling. Results are often beautiful and always constructive." This quote, from Frank Lloyd Wright, is among several from architects, poets and philosophers that are displayed among the drawings and photographs.

Upon approaching one of these towns and continuing into it, you gain an appreciation

and understanding of the people, the environment and the town's various elements.

Many of the Mediterranean hill-towns are displayed in the exhibit, and most of them share certain characteristics. The setting and the landscape, the streets and the plazas are the most notable of these towns' similarities.

Anyone who has traveled in the region knows these towns have something to tell us, something to teach us.

**"O**UR experiences in the Mediterranean must first have changed our perception of architecture," said Celia House during a lecture at the California Poly-Technic University. "We hope these villages will inspire, as they have for us, the desire and the ability to see beyond the surface, beyond our culture-grounding, beyond our vision of what architecture 'should be,' and to see the world around us as our best resources for design ideas."

This indigenous architecture is the type of architecture that can't be translated literally, she said, yet through its study, we can draw from the experience and learn from its elements.

"Landscape and Man: These are the two primary factors for the creation of a true work of architecture"—Aris Konstantinidis.

From a distance, the Italian town of Marano seems to hover somewhere above the mountain on which it is perched. The steepness of the site provides light, air and spectacular views to the countryside.

In Spain, the town of Setonil is unique in ascending. Tucked under the cragging weight of an olive tree-enclosed hill, houses have the

overhanging rock of the mountains as their back.

Again your approach, the character revealed to you sets the mood for your entry into the town.

If you are approaching a Greek island, your entry could be at the base of a sheer cliff, topped with the dazzling white houses of the islanders. You'll soon get your entrance for the day walking up the stone-paved mule path into town. It could be that your boat pulls into a bustling port, full of activity with the

Left: The Mediterranean architecture exhibit in the Temple Buell Gallery. Inset: 'The magnificent main street—Plaza' A drawing representing the plaza, the gathering place of the town. Below: A photo in the exhibit showing a Greek village, perched atop a sheer cliff. (photos of exhibits by Kyle Smith)

seaman unloading goods. Entry by land will bring you to the rugged town with no view of the countryside behind you.

These are the landscapes which are represented in the House's exhibit. Their study of these villages provides some insight into the importance of landscape to the various Mediterranean hill-towns.

Whichever type of entry you experience, however, you'll be embraced with a variety of streets in various through. They sustain the heartbeat of the town. As illustrated in the exhibit at the island of Mykonos, the white cubic houses immediately engulf you in a tangled maze of tiny, winding streets. These streets curved into the street, supporting the flow of life and activity which lives there.

As described in the exhibit, "Delos was a magnificent main street—Plaza. With its narrow side streets filling it with people from all directions. It is alive with activity and flows into plaza after plaza, matching all the public spaces with a natural flow of human life."

The progression into the more grandiose public spaces, the piazzas or plazas, is delightful whether one approaches gradually along a wide promenade, or happens in suddenly from a smaller street.

Its use just as in an outdoor cafe of a plaza and observe. If it's market day, you will see the plaza filled with merchandise dangling off the canopy-covered, three-sided carts of the merchants. You'll hear the call of the pedagogue unloading his newly completed or watch the children splash in the water of a fountain, resting themselves from the heat of the sun which fills the plaza all day long.

It's a wonderful experience to be able to explore a hilltown. The House & House exhibit brings you into the towns. Through their photography and drawing skills, the Houses allow your eye to explore and see how all the elements combine to express the rich beauty, spirit and grace of this unique and intriguing indigenous architecture.

