

## CORNER OF TWO STREETS

### CORNER OF TWO STREETS :

Indicate the treatment of spaces where two streets meet; it is also the corner of the building or the combination of the latter with the contiguous street space. In a curved road they are the space and the frontages of the buildings forming the bend, or the junction of a private street or a villa where the cul de sac creates two street corners.

The right angle corner of two streets finds an illustration in the chessboard cities of the hellenistic or Roman time. The edges of the corner buildings could be not sharp in order to avoid scratching the rough walls, especially for the cattle. (Our, Iraq, 4000 B.C.)

At various times, there are some more or less rounded building corners, which are made up of various functional elements (signs, lamps ...), or the subject of particular treatments ranging from a stone at the foot of the corner edge, intended to push back the carriage wheels on streets without pavements (2), to the corner niche (as in the Middle Ages) which serve as a pretext for the construction of a corner turret (1).

From the Renaissance on, various features appear at building corners: very beautiful watchtowers - like those built on trumpet arches by Philibert Delorme (3) - and oriels. The overhanging oriel forms a forepart, generally several storeys high, and constitutes an appendix prolonging the interior space (4). Conversely, corner niches forming a cavity are pretext for the implementation of ornaments such as statues or clocks (5).

"As for the houses themselves and with the intention to give a satisfying aspect to the streets, it is necessary to pay a very special attention to the arrangement of the buildings located at the junctions and turnings of the streets (...). It is necessary to treat the corner buildings so that all their principal frontages and that the bays are laid out on the two streets which cross".

Raymond Unwin, *Town planning in practice*.

Another treatment found at that time is the corner column of a gallery (6) which characterizes a nodal point making two large public spaces communicate.

In the middle of the 19th centuries, the regulations of Parisian architecture were consistently changing and permitting more freedom and autonomy.

Thus the building corners, as the remainder of the construction, undergo innovations such as ornate cornices, mouldings and projecting balconies (7).

The corner buildings become generally rounded and crowned with a dome or a more significant structure, which punctuates with force and elegance a singular space (11).

With the development of commerce, rotundas arrived on the scene to facilitate public access to the department stores (Le Printemps) (9).

In the same spirit, cut-off corners (10) develop in order to help vehicle drivers seeing and turning, as mentioned by Hénard in his study on transforming Paris "Études sur les transformations de Paris".

The treatment of frontages at street corners also encourages the creation of shops, or even more imposing structures like the Looshaus built by Adolf Loos. The Viennese architect designed the residential and commercial building so as to integrate it in a crescent-like layout of the reorganized

junction (13) and (14).

At the time however, this building attracted criticism from a large section of the public and of emperor François-Joseph because of its extreme simplicity, as compared to the surrounding frontages, and of its contrast to the urban landscape (15).

This last example also shows how the project of corner buildings results from the organization of the streets forming the blocks. One knows the famous example from Broadway in New York (8) where the corner building called "Flat Iron" is located at the intersection of the old Indian track and the gridiron of the Manhattan plan (subdivision laid out by the 1811 Commissioners' Plan).

Thus the urban design builds on the treatment of junctions, crossroads and roundabouts. These areas are often planted with rows of trees which constitute a major design element of the corners of two streets (12).

These design principles were adopted in many garden city schemes before the Second World War.

However, technical progress and the use of new materials (metal structures, bricks, glasses...) generated freer and more varied forms (16) and (17).

With the development of the large-scale housing estates of collective and individual buildings, the specific treatment of the corners of two streets is abandoned.

In the Seventies, we find original treatments like the concrete corner building by architect Puccinelli (18).

Today the treatment of the corners of two streets illustrates well the ambiguity between design and singularity. The corner buildings of the Arab World Institute (19) in Paris constitutes an interesting case which expresses the articulation between two volumes: on the Seine side, a blade whose frontage is curved to follow the river, on the parvis side, a block whose frontage is a gigantic screen; between the two, a fault open to the île de la Cité island. As for the Mirabeau roundabout, it respects very academically the shape of the block and at the same time celebrates the new Citroen district in its image of ostentatious modernity (20).

In the future, the mayor in his development plan, as well as the building owner during the preparation of the file for planning permission, will have to take specific care of the very particular treatment of the corner of two streets which involves the creative capacity of the control of work (architect, landscape designer, designer, sculptor...).

CF. ROW OF TREES, CROSSROADS, GARDEN-CITY, CLOCK, BLOCK, HOUSING DIVISION, CUT-OFF CORNER, GABLE, NODAL POINT, ROUNDABOUT, ROTUNDA, VILLA.

