



# International Archive of Women in Architecture *IAWA Center News*

Fall 2010

No. 22



## **PROFESSOR DR. MILKA TCHERNEVA BLIZNAKOV**

Founder of the International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA) (1927 - 2010)

Dr. Milka Tcherneva Bliznakov, Professor Emerita of Architecture at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Founder of the International Archive of Women in Architecture, passed away from natural causes on Thursday, November 4, 2010 at age 83. She was born in Varna, Bulgaria on September 20, 1927.

A distinguished architect, scholar and educator, Dr. Bliznakov joined the faculty of architecture at VPI & SU in 1974 to teach architecture, urban design and architecture history until her retirement in 1998. Prior to teaching at Virginia Tech, Professor Bliznakov taught at the University of Texas from 1972 to 1974. With her trailblazer attitude, she was the co-founder of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture in 1972. In 1985, she founded the International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA) at Virginia Tech that has grown through her enthusiasm to secure for history a collection of over 350 archives of the pioneering generation of women in architecture - a true legacy.

Milka Bliznakov received her professional master of architecture degree from the State Polytechnic University of Sofia, Bulgaria. She practiced architecture in Bulgaria from 1952 to 1959; in France from 1959 to 1961; and in the United States from 1961 on. She began her doctoral studies in the late 1960s and she was graduated with a Ph.D. in architectural history from Columbia University in 1971. Her dissertation was titled: "The Search for a Style: Modern Architecture in the U.S.S.R. from 1917-1932."

During a span of more than two decades, Dr. Bliznakov established an international reputation as an important teacher and scholar on Russian Constructivism and the Avant-garde. Her essays have been sources for many subsequent research endeavors and publications. Among her publications are: "The Constructivist Movement in Architecture" in: *Soviet Union*, Vol.



3, no. 2 (1976); "Urban Planning in the U.S.S.R.: Integrative Theories" in: *The City in Russian History*, Michael F. Hamm, ed., University Press of Kentucky (1976); "The Realization of Utopia: Western Technology and Soviet Avant-garde Architecture" in: *Reshaping Russian Architecture*, William Craft Brumfield, ed.,

Cambridge University Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (1990); "Soviet Housing during the Experimental Years, 1918 to 1933" in: *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History*, William Craft Brumfield; Blair A Ruble, eds., Cambridge University Press (1993); "Nietzschean Implications and Superhuman Aspirations in the Architectural Avant-garde" in: *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary*, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal ed., Cambridge University Press (1994); and "International Modernism of Socialist Realism: Soviet Architecture in the Eastern Republic" in: *New Perspectives on Russian and Soviet Artistic Culture*, John O. Norman, ed., St. Martin's Press (1994).

She received a number of awards and recognitions, including the prestigious Parthena Award in 1994 for her efforts to document the work of women in architecture and environmental design, Fulbright Hays Fellowships in 1983 and 1991, International Research and Exchange Grants in 1984 and 1993, National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1973-74, and Wilson Center of the Smithsonian Institution Scholar in 1988.



A gifted, inspirational teacher, her seminars on modern and Russian architecture held in her house's living room on Wednesday evenings are legendary. An exceptionally caring individual, her passionate support of music and the visual arts was famous. Through the years, Milka was renowned for hosting small piano concerti in her house and her enthusiastic, heavily accented "Bravo!" was often heard there and at larger venues. Milka Bliznakov leaves behind a rich legacy of a vibrant academic career driven by intellectual ideas.

Milka empowered others to make history. She believed simply and directly in the idea of the mosaic. In a country where she found and celebrated new freedoms, she found something missing: knowledge of the work of women in creating the built environment. Her legacy of the IAWA is a potent challenge to the future.

Milka herself sent out 1200 initial letters to begin the collection of the International Archive of Women in Architecture. These people would become her friends and our friends. Their stories are amazing. There is the first generation of women in Japan who questioned the quality of life that could be provided by the built environment, the first woman architect from Pakistan, one of the first women in Austria to study architecture, a portfolio she took with her when she fled the Nazis and came to the U.S., and a woman architect in a pink sari who arrived here to open a doorway to 500 more women architects in South Asia.

Although Milka was an undoubtedly forceful presence, as all of us knew, she possessed a special, gentle side. This spirit she extended especially to people whose work had been overlooked and that could be lost to history. The works collected as she gazed upon them were 'marvelous.' Her encouragement and dogged pursuit of the goal of the IAWA would often produce a situation where the hearty "Hold on! - hold on! - hold on!" would boom from 2 to 100 feet across the room and cause every head to turn.

We recently held the IAWA Center Annual Meeting here at Virginia Tech on Saturday, October 30, 2010. Milka was, as we all remember her, an active presence at the meeting and unwavering in her support for the goal of the IAWA Center. We will cherish her enthusiasm for the legacy she established along with many other fond memories. Family, colleagues, students and friends will dearly miss her.

## PROCESSING THE WORKS OF SIGRID LORENZEN RUPP, ARCHITECT

By Sherrie Bowser

A self-professed maverick, Sigrid Lorenzen Rupp, AIA graduated from UC Berkeley with a B. Arch. in 1966. After a European tour and several years of practical training, she struck out on her own in 1976 with a small nest egg, a mortgage, no clients, and no safety net. 10 years later the nest egg remained untapped and her firm SLR/Architects had grown to 10 employees.



Apple testing facility.

Owing perhaps to her German heritage, Rupp was a meticulous record keeper. Inge Horton reports on observing Rupp's "high degree of systemization and orderliness" in the 1998 IAWA newsletter, noting the neatly labeled rows of document boxes and tubes of drawings in Rupp's office chronicling approximately 600 jobs and 21 years of practice.

This organization is evident in her record transfers. In 1997 and again in 2004 boxes upon boxes arrived at Special Collections in Newman Library containing information about her firm and about

Rupp as an individual. Diaries, photographs, and water colors exist alongside office files, drawings, and specifications offering a treasure trove of research material to individuals interested in architecture, women's studies, literature, sociology, or art.

Researchers will have an intimate look into the operations of a female-owned and -operated architectural firm thanks to Rupp's photo albums, journals, telephone logs, datebooks, and project files. The office files document both the joys of getting her first major projects with clients like Stanford University, Pan Am, Pacific Bell, Apple, and Sun Microsystems and the frustrations of not being able to break out of the million dollar projects to get the "big 'important' jobs." Her beautifully illustrated journals document her travels to exotic and domestic locales and offer reflections on architecture, society, and her personal insights.

In a letter to Dr. James D. Boulgarides, a professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at California State University, Los Angeles, Rupp states: "I was never very good in school... I was the maverick, only I wasn't brilliant. Lack of brilliance is forgiven in men, not in women. I set out to prove that a mediocre woman could get (and should get) as far as a mediocre man. I think I have done that. It is nothing to be proud of, it is simply a fact." After delving into this collection I doubt Rupp's legacy will be one of mediocrity.

Rupp's professional papers are processed and available to researchers. Her personal papers will be available by the end of the year. For more information about Rupp's collection or other materials in the IAWA please contact Sherrie Bowser, IAWA Project Archivist, sbowser1@vt.edu.



Alaska as seen from Rupp's tent, travel diary, 1999. One of 33 travel diaries in her collection.

## GLASS CEILINGS: Highlights from IAWA Center

In March of 2010, the Exhibition - Glass Ceilings: Highlights from IAWA Center, was mounted at the Virginia Center for Architecture in Richmond, Virginia to showcase the work of women in architecture and design in recognition of "Minds Wide Open," the Virginia statewide initiative celebrating women in the arts. The exhibition featured highlights from the collections of the IAWA Center, demonstrating the significance of female designers across decades, continents, and genres of architecture. The exhibition encompassed work from many women in architecture and related design fields including work from Han Schroeder born in the Netherlands (1918-1992), an early woman graduate of the ETH, Zurich, Switzerland (her sketches from the famed Rietveld-Schoeder House and her architectural drawings); work from Lilia Sofer Skala's student portfolio created at the University of Dresden between 1915 and 1920 which she carried when she fled the Nazis in 1939; papers and architectural drawings from one of the first licensed women architects in Japan, Nobuko Nakahara; architectural work from Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice Lois Gottlieb and her student photographs of learning in the fellowship at Taliesin; and from Beverly Willis, the innovative computer program CARLA from the 1970's for land development analysis.

## 100 POSTCARDS

This exhibit disseminated the accomplishments of pioneering women through a display of student representations of the IAWA. Through a wall of post cards showcasing the student research, *100 POSTCARDS* reveals the breadth of holdings from around the world available in the IAWA held in Special Collections, University Libraries. Designed and produced by students from the School of Architecture + Design at Virginia Tech from the seminar Researching Women in Design, these small glimpses celebrate a history that surprisingly remains largely unknown. Each graphic set shows the curiosity that led the student designers to research the work of these women in architecture. Student contributors included: Marissa Brown, Antonia Ciaverella Candice Davis, Alexandra Phelan, Heather Riley and Rehanna Rojiani. Design faculty include Donna Dunay, Kay Edge, William Galloway, Wendy Jacobson, Helene Renard and Lisa Tucker. The exhibition opening featured the students offering remarks about their search through the holdings and the new perspectives they gained. Milka Bliznakov concluded the presentation with remarks relating her own experiences, and offered her delight in the exhibition as an indication of an achievement towards fulfilling the primary goal of the International Archive of Women Architecture Center.



## COLLOQUIUM EXCERPTS FROM THE GLASS CEILINGS EXHIBITION

Student remarks from opening night at the Virginia Center for Architecture

### CANDICE DAVIS

Tonight I begin by shining the spotlight on Virginia Currie, architect, entrepreneur, wife, mother. From her files, I was able to learn about the various places she lived in: Bogota, Columbia, Malaysia, Boston, Chicago, and of course Blacksburg.

One of my discoveries was Mrs. Currie's participation in the Chicago Beautiful Committee. From a scrapbook housed in the archives, I learned that Mrs. Currie, along with a group of women living in her neighborhood decided to get together and come up with a solution to make the alleyways behind their houses more appealing. The idea that they proposed was to have all the residents participate in a competition for the most artistically painted trash cans.

And, thank you to Milka Bliznakov, for whom I designed this postcard (Figure 1). I know that founding the IAWA is just a snapshot of your life, but it is the reason we are all gathered here tonight. Thank you for the archive. I know it will serve as a source of inspiration for many generations to come.

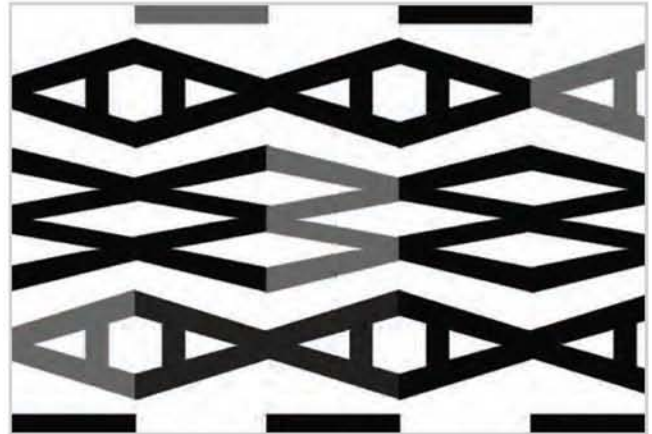


Figure 1.

### ALEXANDRA PHELAN

I began my explorations in the archive with a focus on women from Asian countries. When she was my age, Yasmeen Lari became the first registered female architect in the country of Pakistan and she started her own firm, in Karachi (Figure 2). In her writings, she describes the difficulties she encountered in getting respect on construction sites. Preserving the cultural heritage of Pakistan also became increasingly important to her and today she works as an advisor to UNESCO projects in Pakistan. As a result of the Heritage Foundation which she founded, 600 of Karachi's buildings became legally protected and preserved.

Another designer I researched was Laretta Vinciarelli. Throughout her work, which exists primarily on paper, she has pushed the traditional boundaries between art and architecture. Vinciarelli's artworks give form to what is formless: light and water. Her imaginary universe respects no program, function, or client; rather the watercolors suggest places that do not exist, except on paper. A few of Vinciarelli's drawings can be found on display in the gallery tonight.

My participation in this seminar has given me a sense of women's role in the history of architecture.

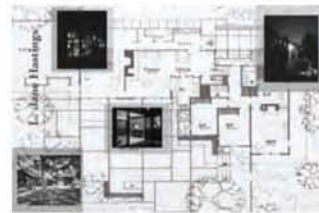


Figure 2.





Figure 3.

### MARISA BROWN

For me, the most beneficial part of the Researching Women in Design Seminar was being able to gain insight into the lives of prominent women architects. I learned what their interests were, and what they struggled with to become an architect.

Lilia Skala was one of the first females to study architecture (Figure 3). After fleeing to the United States during World War II, she changed career paths and began acting. As an actress, she won an Academy Award for her role in *Lilies of the Field*. Her archive contains her student portfolio, which she carried with her as she fled Austria. It contains watercolors that use vibrant colors and texture to create a sense of space within the painting.

Audrey Briens was born and raised in Texas. Her archive made it evident that she was not afraid to be a woman in a field that was dominated by men. She was also an accomplished fabric and furniture designer, photographer, painter, and Spanish translator. She also included a memoir entitled “Confessions of an Irreverent Iconoclast.”



### ANTONIA CIAVERALLA

What I most enjoyed was learning about the lives of these talented women. I will always remember the strength and the work of these women architects.

Alice Finnerup Møller says about her renovation of a traditional farmhouse: “In architecture there is a silent but strong language. A language that is national and international at the same time. The national architecture is the heritage and the international is the picture of the world today.”

I found Anne Tyng’s work and writings inspirational (Figure 4). As she says, “By ‘crafting space’ I mean the tangible synthesis of randomness and orders of subjective and objective, the specific making and dimensioning of solids and voids by human eye and hand which

answer to abstract forming principles. To craft space is to give immediacy and tangible identity to profound universal principles of relationship, constants untouched by time or circumstance.”

I studied Dorothy Alexander, and her work entitled, “White Flowers” from *Serial Images* 1974. While licensed to practice architecture, she began her own firm, and was also the house photographer for *The Writer’s Voice* and the American Academy of Poets.

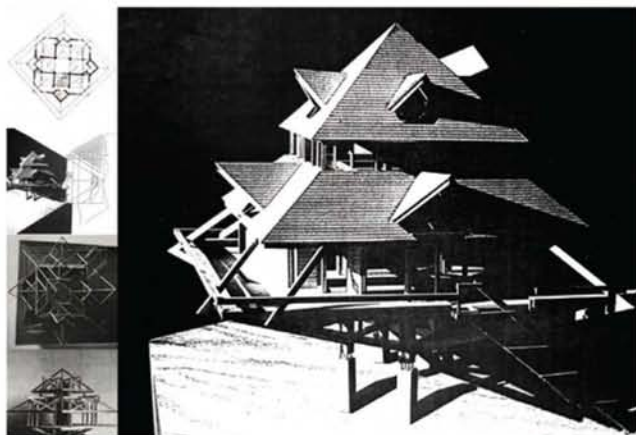


Figure 4.





## PECK STACPOOLE FOUNDATION SUPPORTS IAWA COLLECTIONS

By Aaron Purcell, PH.D

For the last two years, the Peck Stacpoole Foundation made generous grants to cover costs related to storing, preserving, and processing manuscript collections of the International Archive of Women in Architecture Center (IAWA). The Foundation is a charitable endowment based in New York City, which offers need-based grants to libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions. Their grants support genealogy, local history, and greater access to museum and archival collections. In 2009, the Peck Stacpoole Foundation awarded a \$5,000 grant towards the processing of IAWA manuscript collections. This funding assisted in the processing of the Pamela Webb Architectural Collection and several smaller IAWA collections. In 2010, Special Collections applied for and received a second grant of \$7,000. The University Libraries thank the Peck Stacpoole Foundation for their generosity and look forward to future support for the collections of the IAWA. Since the founding of the IAWA, Special Collections has partnered with the IAWA Center in its mission to preserve and provide access to manuscript materials from the IAWA. At present there are over 350 collections, which document the important role of women in the architecture and design fields.

## ELIANA CÁRDENAS

By Joe Scarpaci

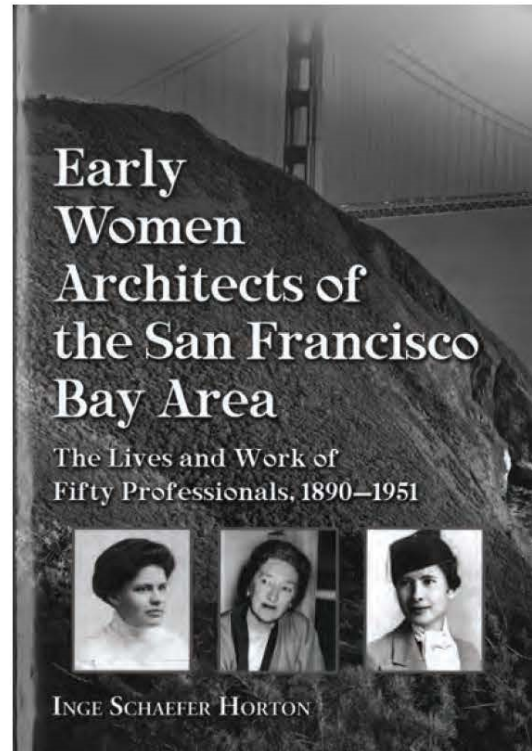
The community of architects and urbanists in the Americas has lost an important member with the passing of Cuban architect, Eliana Cárdenas, this past June. Her reflections on the construction and representation of Cuban architecture left indelible marks in the literature. So, too, did her outreach to her colleagues elsewhere in the Americas, Europe and Africa.



Eliana Cárdenas

When a team of us (Kay Edge, Heather Woofert, Joe Scarpaci) participated in the 2003 ACSA conference in Havana, Eliana was kind enough to take time off from her duties as one of the conference organizers and escort a few of us on a walking tour. She did so with enthusiasm and grace.

Although the IAWA archive was enriched by some of her publications, we look forward to adding to the Archive her works over this past decade, and we remain open to collaboration with Eliana's students and colleagues.



## BOOK REVIEW

By Kay Edge

Emeritus Advisor Inge Horton has recently published a book: *Early Women Architects of the San Francisco Bay Area: The Lives and Work of Fifty Professionals, 1890-1951* that draws upon materials from the IAWA. It is a comprehensive, meticulously researched book that will prove to be essential in completing an important story of pioneering women in the architecture profession. Generous illustrations, both photographs and drawings, make it particularly appealing to architects. In Part I, Horton describes the historical context in which these women were working, their protected lives and the social expectations of the time. She points out who their inspirations and role models might have been in a limited Victorian milieu and examines what architectural education was like for women who were determined to pursue the profession. She describes how many of them managed to combine a career with family life. In Part II of the book Horton examines the design legacy of these women from cottages to churches to gas stations. She also describes the alternate professions some women chose as authors, critics and teachers. Part III of the book is devoted to individual portraits of selected women. Here, Horton presents relevant biographical information for each woman and explains her importance to the history of architecture. The book is a valuable resource for those doing research on women architects as well as a pleasurable read.



## REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Donna Dunay, FAIA

This year has been particularly productive with many events that showcased the holdings of IAWA. Since the inception of the IAWA, an international Board of Advisors has guided the organization with the work of soliciting, collecting and promoting archives of women in architecture. This year, we wish to thank all past advisors who continue to be active on behalf of the IAWA Center and extend a special thank you to advisors leaving the Board. We welcome the activities of all our advisors past and present with special thanks to Jennifer Gunter King who is leaving the board this year and yet wishes to remain active in pursuit of the goals of the IAWA Center.

We wish to extend a warm welcome to newly elected advisors, Kathryn H. Anthony, ACSA Distinguished Professor, School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Ellen Fisher, Associate VP for Academic Affairs & Academic Advisor, New York School of Interior Design, NY, NY.

On behalf of the IAWA, we wish to extend a warm thank you to the friends of the IAWA who have contributed work to the collection: Radka Pavlova, Ilse Meissner Reese, Beverly Willis Architectural Foundation, Zdenka Maria Novakova, Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, AIA New Jersey for the Michael Graves Lifetime Achievement Award relating to Eleanore Pettersen, Maria Roth and Milka Bliznakov. We are very appreciative also of support for the IAWA Center from Robert E. Stephenson, Paula Tredar, Tanja Kishev, Christine Bevington, Kristine Fallon, Rosaria M. Ambrosi, Thomas Barrie, Eva Huebscher, Karen Elliott-Thorpe, Marcia Feuerstein, Ilse Reese, Sarah Wetherson, Blanche L. van Ginkel, Lloyd Englander, Jennifer Brown, Fanny Mae Foundation and Milka Bliznakov. Thank you all for your ongoing support.

This year, an especially fascinating glimpse into the IAWA was offered with the Virginia Center for Architecture Exhibition *Glass Ceilings: Highlights of the IAWA Center* mounted last Spring at the Virginia Center for Architecture in Richmond, Virginia. The new exhibition was comprised of selected collection highlights from over twenty archives and the work of faculty and students in the Fall Seminar Researching Women in Design resulting in a special part of the exhibition: *100 Post Cards*. The exhibition opening Colloquium featured the student researchers giving their insightful comments about their discoveries and now enlarged vision of architecture and design.

The IAWA Center work was also presented to an enthusiastic panel at the University of Virginia Colloquium: Women in Architecture—Sharing Insights and Experiences with Mary McLeod, Kathryn Gavin, Liz Sargent, Marthe Rowen, Carmina Sanchez, Chrysanthe Broikos, and myself. Work from the collection was exhibited on easels to showcase the Archive holdings while I presented, INSIGHTS HIGHLIGHTED: Experiences of Women in Architecture from the IAWA Center. The article *Women's Voices in Architecture and Design - The International Archive of Women in Architecture Center* will appear in November in *2A Architecture and Art* published in Dubai, UAE.

In October 2010, the IAWA Center had wonderful representation at the International Union of Women Architects (UIFA) in Seoul, Korea. Advisors Kay Edge and Helene Renard were a part of the Congress and extended the work of the Center to a new audience and to old friends. The Congress was organized by the UIFA President and IAWA Center Advisor Solange D'Herbez de la Tour; also attending were advisors Ute Westrom, Junko Matsukawa, Sara Sarantsatstral.

Past Advisors are active on our behalf. From Tony Wrenn we hear "Don't miss reading, commenting on, and bringing to the attention of all there and in IAWA who should know about this, the article "AIA Launches Online Historical Directory of American Architects" in which the IAWA is a major contributor. And the importance of the Archive continues to be widely mentioned by others: "Celebrating Women's History: 100 Amazing Libraries and Collections on the Web" (<http://www.elearningyellowpages.com/blog/2008/10/celebrating-womens-history-100-amazing-libraries-and-collections-on-the-web/>).

In this upcoming year, we would look forward to an exciting exhibit in Tokyo. Junko Matsukawa, IAWA Advisor and UIFA Japan member, came in December to help prepare for this important show. As a challenge this year, the IAWA Center wishes to focus upon 25+ archives to bring to the collection to recognize the achievements of the last twenty-five years and celebrate Milka Blizankov's legacy. With this we challenge each advisor and all other friends to make this a part of their focused efforts on behalf of the IAWA Center. In considering pioneering women from all regions who have contributed to the built environment, please encourage them to consider donating their archive to the IAWA.



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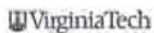
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