Marion Manley: Miami’s First Woman Architect, by Catherine Lynn and Carie Penabad. University of Georgia Press, February 2010. 248 p. ill. alk. ISBN 9780820334066 (pbk.), $34.95

This fine monograph on Marion Manley (1893-1984) is long overdue, as is the assessment of her oeuvre within the history of Miami and Florida architecture. How timely that the Chronicle Review just published details from a forum, “Women in Architecture” where one professor commented, “Do women design, work, and lead differently than men? ...They want to be known and respected for their talents and accomplishments as good architects, regardless of gender.”

Recognition and respect is also what Manley wanted, and Catherine Lynn and Carie Penabad, assistant professors at the University of Miami, have finally done her a remarkable justice. With an emphasis on Manley’s most famous project, the architecture at the University of Miami, the authors give shorter discussion to Manley’s residential and public commissions. Building in the subtropical conditions of Florida is challenging for any type of architect, and a comparison to Frank Lloyd Wright’s complex of work at Florida Southern College in Lakeland needs greater study. The name of another important architect, Marion Mahony Griffin, is misspelled in the rather abbreviated bibliography. Also The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota is misnamed on the book’s flap text, so the book would have benefited from finer editing. It is gratifying, however, to see the Ringling’s Asolo Theater discussed, though the Manley structure in which it was housed was unfortunately demolished in the past decade. Its juxtaposition with the architecture of John H. Phillips on the Ringling estate was not a jarring as the authors indicate, given the contemporary architecture since built on the grounds.

It is unfortunate that Manley’s work is almost completely overlooked in the literature of Miami architecture. Her name does appear in various exhibition catalogues from the past thirty years; however, not until 2008 does author Sarah Allaback give her a small discussion in her reference work, The First American Women Architects.

But the book is beautifully designed and is highly recommended for libraries of all types with an interest in Miami and Florida, and academic libraries collecting architectural history, art history and women’s studies. The authors include a catalog of Manley’s works, a timeline, copious photographs, floor plans, and illustrations, well documented notes, bibliography, and index. The definitive history of modern architecture in Florida is yet to be written. This book ensures that Manley will find her rightful place in it.

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