

The Ford house, Aurora, Illinois, featured in *Life* last year, is Bruce Goff's latest design of a private dwelling that has been constructed. Goff, one of America's leading architects, has ushered O.U.'s School of Architecture into the national limelight.

The University's School of Architecture is gaining an enviable reputation.
By allowing the students to create instead of copy, the school accepts

No Warmed Over Ideas

By Bill Goodner, '52

While driving through the college avenues or walking across the student-crowded campus, most visitors are unaware that tucked away out on the North Campus is one of the University's most illustrious and best known schools—the School of Architecture and Architectural Engineering. However, the Architecture School's out-of-the-way location, removing it from the day-to-day contact of most students, makes it better known to those off than those on the campus.

Secluded in the northwest corner of the North Campus on a level Oklahoma land-

scape is building 604. A drab, wooden, military type structure. One that would make an ex-GI remember. Climb the frame stairs, open the double doors and step inside. The drabness fades. Lines, color, light, and life leap out. Comparable to arrival in Oz, you step from the real world of the present into a hoped-for world still on the drawing board. Here on display are the blueprints of the modern present and the unrealized future.

Strolling in the uniquely designed corridor of abstract lines and forms, one pauses before each piece of work, each display care-

fully taking it in, wondering if its construction is possible, trying to imagine it in stone and steel. Glancing through the offshoots in the hall, one sees students intently bent over drawing boards. At the right end of the hall is an office partitioned by Japanese bamboo curtains and decorated with oriental drapes. Behind the desk sits a medium built man shouldering a face full of individualism. He, too, is intent at work, but is often interrupted as the bamboo curtains frequently swish open admitting students who consult him with their problems in

drawing and design. He is Bruce Goff, Mr. Architect of Oklahoma University.

To write a story on the School of Architecture at O.U. and to exclude Bruce Goff would be like writing a story and omitting the main character. To set down a personal account of Goff without relating his work at the Sooner School of Architecture would be to create a main character without writing his most progressive chapters. They are as inseparable as fall weather and football.

Among the architecture students B. G. is not only symbolic of Bruce Goff, but also dates a period in the school's history—Before Goff. Formerly the school was treading the same tired trails along with most of the other architecture schools in the United States. These old eclectic schools taught their students to copy the architecture of by-gone days, Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Gothic. Students were told that everything had already been created in the field by the architects of the past. All they could do would be to copy the masters and perhaps vary the design.

After the war students in a good many schools, including O.U.'s, rebelled against this type of instruction. They reasoned that it wasn't right for them to be taught to design according to past standards when the top architects in the country were not drawing their blueprints accordingly. Then the

This striking combination of lines, light and shadow is the main corridor of the School of Architecture. The general view of the main display area shows how the use of strings, plants and plywood have given the old Navy barracks a new look.

school went after modern architecture, but in the old way. Schools started teaching modern design by telling their students to model their work after one of the present day greats like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier or Mies Vander Rohe. Students were being taught to copy instead of create.

"Most education is what has been done, what is being done and not enough of what you can do," Goff believes.

With the union of Goff and the School of Architecture in February 1947, the policy of the school changed. All the dead wood that accumulates in a curriculum over a static period was cleaned out and brought up to date. The school now is widely known for several reasons, but the most important being the stress it places on INDIVIDUALITY, not only of the student but of the instructors as well. B. G. (Before Goff) when a design problem was assigned, the student would rush into the library to see how "George" did it. Now that same design problem seeks to find how the student would do it and the library is used only for technical research.

Goff often reminds his students, "No one is interested in a warmed over idea."

Every instructor salts the student's soup of knowledge with a different type of spice. Goff frequently states there are no "yes-men" on his faculty. "In fact," he says, "the

only thing we agree on is that architectural education should be individualistic and that architecture should be progressive."

It takes five years to get a degree in architecture at the University; after that every graduate must serve three years as an apprentice to a licensed architect. The O.U. school has such a sound reputation that there is a waiting list for the graduates with starting salaries of \$300 a month. The profession is favorable to the students the University is producing and realizes that the students are equipped with a solid architectural background second to none. For a while there were jobs only in the near vicinity, but now the school's prominence brings offers from all points of the compass. However, accented strongly are practical architectural problems and Goff asserts this program encourages more students to practice in their own state.

This means teaching a greater emphasis and awareness of regional problems, he believes. "We aren't looking to New York or Paris for criticism. We try to make a student's problems regional—something he'll come across in every day work."

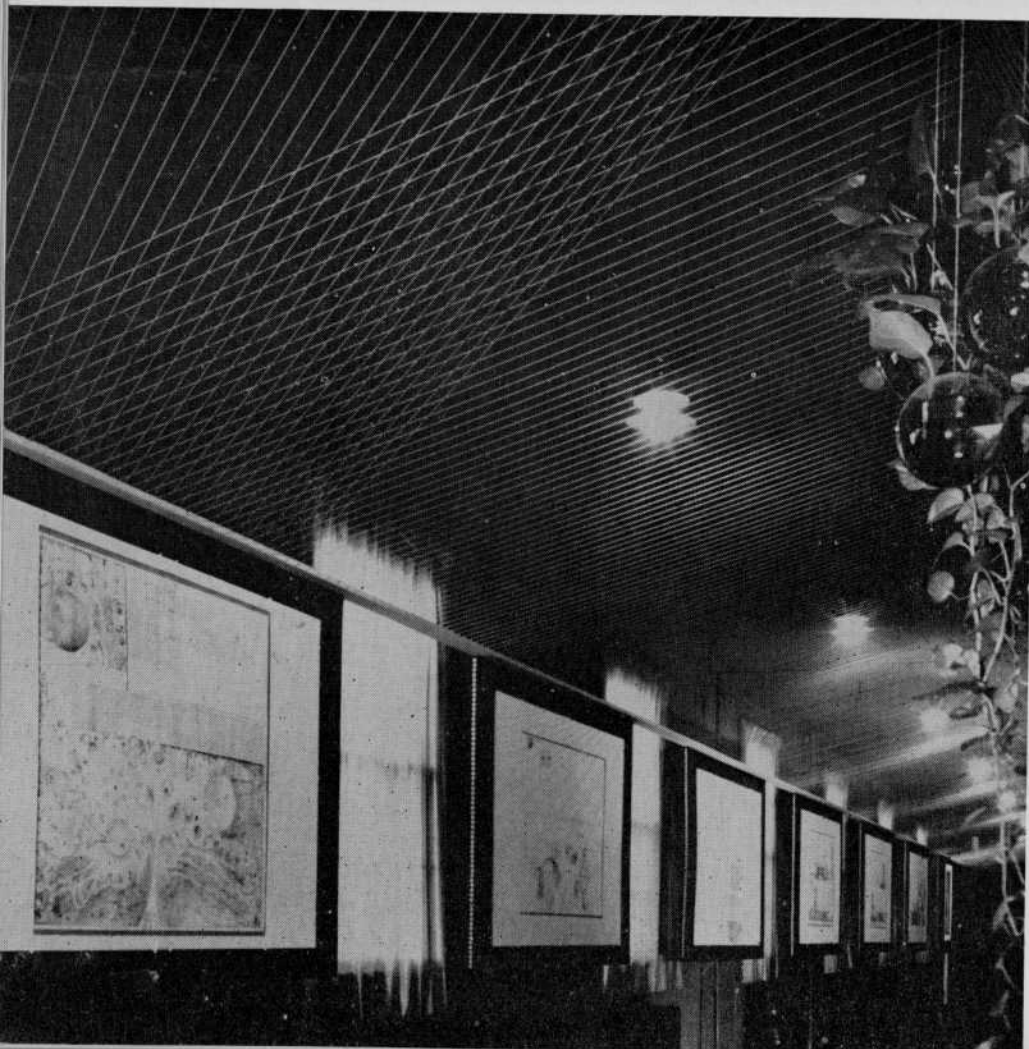
Goff, who has done a great deal of work in Oklahoma, having designed Tulsa's Boston Avenue Methodist Church, the Tulsa Building and Page Warehouse, says the program is turning more O.U. architects toward small Oklahoma towns, "where they can take a hand in community planning."

To Goff, architecture is anything that is built. It might be a pop stand, bank or cathedral. One problem the school completed was designing a public market place. Something applicable to any small community and the big ones, too. Goff is quick to state that the emphasis on practicality doesn't stymie a student's chance to try out his own ideas. Individuality is still supreme. And for that reason the school has fifty percent more transfer students than beginning freshmen.

When Mrs. Elizabeth Mock, former head of the Architecture Department of the New York Museum of Modern Art, visited the school, she commented that "this is one case where we haven't ruined individuality of students, but have developed it."

The school tries to assign problems that are practical and within the particular scope of the student's ability and experience. This is where the regional problems enter.

The first year in architecture a student spends most of his time fulfilling University College requirements; he gets just a small taste of having his creative freedoms developed. From there the students jump into studying design, properties of building materials, including cost, use and labor.



The plan, Goff says, is to blend design, architectural engineering and practical conditions. A library of building samples gives students a working knowledge of materials.

One of the principal accomplishments of the school is the understanding it gives the student of both design and mechanical structure. Most schools are set up as separate divisions of design and structure which results in the two departments bickering back and forth, handicapping instead of helping the student. Either school by itself will not get the job done. Just as a person needs both a body and a mind, both phases are prime necessities in architecture, and one without the other is not functional.

The Architecture School did the logical thing and correlated them. Responsible for the success of this maneuver is Mendel Glickman, professor of architecture and considered to be the greatest architectural engineer in the country today. Frank Lloyd Wright, leading American architect who developed the theory "form should follow function," often consults Glickman with his structural problems. Glickman believes the architect who has been taught to develop his ideas and imagination and isn't capable of determining the practicability of his design hasn't learned much. So a student at O.U. gets a chance to expound his creative freedoms, but he also learns what he will work with, coupled with the knowledge of the simplest method of construction.

Besides studying their specified field, the students are generously exposed to an array of cultural and non-aesthetic subjects. They study all types of art from the simplest primitive forms to the most recent forms plus economics, accounting and business communications.

Speaking to the Dallas chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Goff was interrupted by a man in the back of the audience who said he had hired several O.U. students and didn't find them at all satisfactory. "They implied I was old-fashioned in my ideas, didn't keep up with things, and wanted to do all my designs for me," he said. Goff quickly inquired how long it had been since he had tried any Sooner students. After the man answered several years, Goff assured him that the school was under new management and thought he would have better results with University graduates now. One Dallas architect stood up and came to Goff's support. He stated that some products of the new school were working for him at the present and he hadn't run into any trouble. "Not only do we encourage our students to have their own ideas, but we teach them to respect the ideas of others and definitely



Working on the model of a building he designed in his second design lab is one of the Architecture School's foreign students, Takenobu Mohri, Tokyo, Japan. Once completed it will be displayed along with the other exhibits on the North Campus.

not try and reform their bosses," Goff told the architects.

More and more out-of-state and out-of-country students are being attracted to the Sooner school. Looking down the class roll is almost like reading the rolls of the United Nations. Students representing Japan, Turkey, Norway, England, Bolivia, Hawaii and Greece, to scan a few, are all aspiring architects of Soonerland. Since a lot of students who desire to transfer from other architectural schools fear they will lose too many hours, they wait until after they have completed their first degree and then take graduate work under Goff. The average enrollment for the entire school is 275 students a semester. One of the best drawing cards to the school is the students who speak for it at every opportunity. Giving the reasons that persuaded him to transfer, one student said that when he went to most schools and observed student's work, they would remark, "Don't pay any attention to this, I'm just doing it for a grade." But when he asked O.U. students about their work, they rose to the defense of their ideas—which were their assignments.

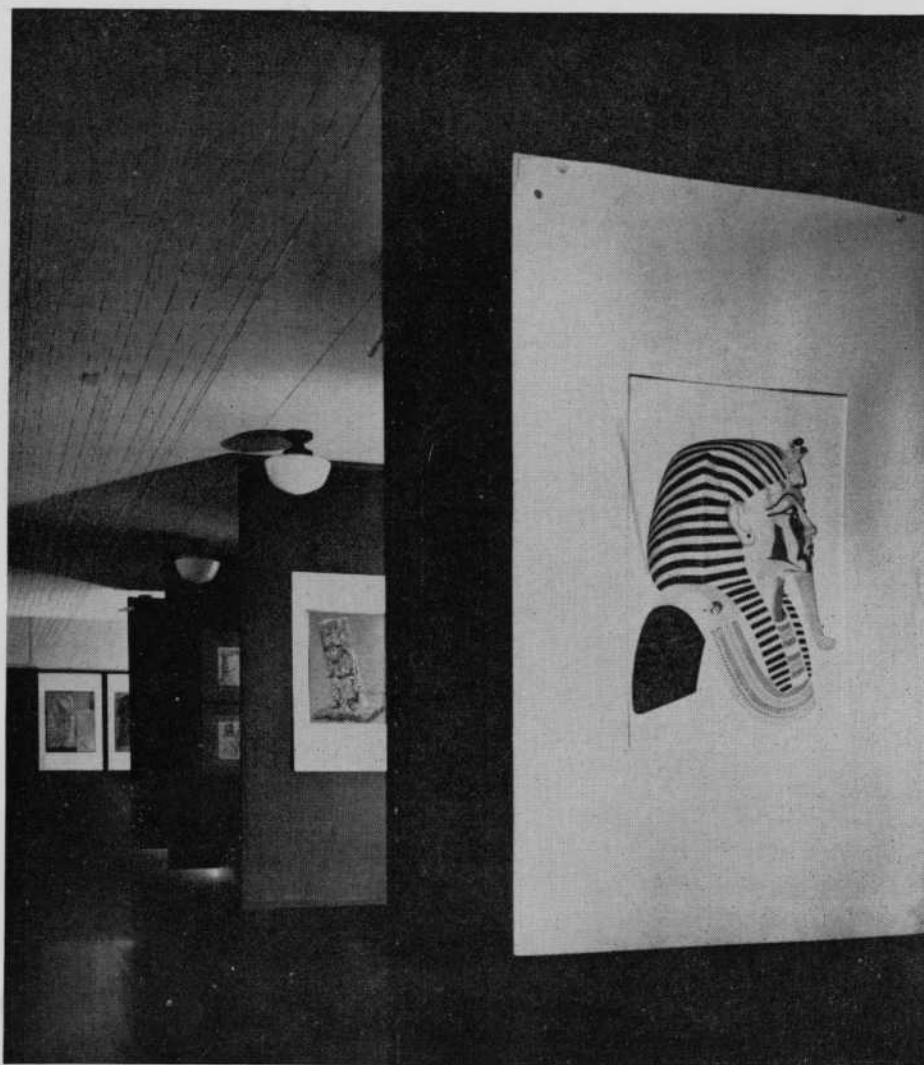
No teacher ever touches a student's de-

sign. "We try to make the student see the weakness in his work," says Goff, "but we do not substitute our ideas for his."

Commenting on the students extra amount of enthusiasm one teacher said that the school must have a special type of student and asked Goff how he taught imagination. Goff quickly replied that it wasn't taught but developed.

And without a doubt developed well, for the union of Goff with the school has produced several successful off-springs. Although the majority of the graduates under Goff are still serving their apprenticeships, Bob Overstreet, '49bs, has received national tribute for some of his recent work. Overstreet designed a glass drive-in drugstore and office building, both in Jackson, Mississippi, and was singled out in *Architectural Forum* as one of the country's most important architects. Bob Vahlberg, '35bs, who belongs to the Before Goff period, designed the new Geology Building for the University. Another off-shoot of the Goff school who tagged down a teaching position at Kansas State is John J. Schultz, '50ba.

Even though the wooden military type



Exhibited in the upstairs display area are some history plates used for study. The first plate shows ancient Egyptian art and structure; the second plate is Mayan. The strings have been craftly employed to break the usual monotony of a blank ceiling.

building that houses the architecture school makes the veterans feel at home, one of the ambitions of the department is to move over to the main campus. Here they feel they will be more a part of the University instead of a step-child of it.

People's reaction in the southwest to modern architecture seems to be favorable, said Goff. "In general, most folks will go along with an idea as long as it works," he commented. "The people here are fortunate in that they don't have any moth-eaten traditions they are trying to live up to. They don't swallow anything whole; they have to be convinced." Laughing, Goff added, "but they aren't cursed with too much education."

When he first started out Goff realized the problem he had of convincing people of the usefulness of his designs. Once they had seen that the functional phase could be practically combined with contemporary form and structure they accepted it.

Ironically enough, however, after Goff

had won the people in Oklahoma he left the state and returned only to be confronted with the task of converting them over again.

"People wouldn't think of demanding that their new model car be patterned after one of Queen Elizabeth's carriages yet are inconsistent in their tastes to the extent that they become satisfied with the standard box-type architecture of a past age," asserted Goff in a class lecture.

The school has received favorable reaction a-plenty. The praises that are constantly heaped on the school by the ever steady stream of national and international visitors testifies for this point. Recently two representatives of the Australian government toured the United States to investigate this country's architectural education program. After visiting every prominent school in the country, the two reported they would rather model their architectural school for the University of Melbourne on Oklahoma University's. The dean of the University of

Canada was duly impressed by the balancing of technical and aesthetic ideas into one unified program.

The progressiveness of the school is known more than scantily throughout the architectural world. When W. F. Carson, dean of the College of Engineering, wrote to President Cross on his trip to South America, he stated:

"I am sure it will be of interest to you to know that during my recent trip to Venezuela, several people mentioned the fine educational program in architecture that has been developed at the University of Oklahoma in recent years. . . Several of them expressed the hope that they could visit the school and become associated with its progressive faculty."

Even though instructing, Goff manages to retain pre-eminence in the professional as well as in the teaching field. Some of his recent work that has received national note was the Norman house at the corner of Brooks and Chautauqua. It was featured in *Life* in 1948. In March 1951, *Life* devoted a six-page layout of pictures and story on the Ford house designed by Goff. The home built in Aurora, Illinois, for Mr. and Mrs. Sam Ford attracted over 4,000 visitors a week after its construction was completed. The walls are of Kentucky coal arranged like rock. Rooms are circular in plan with dome-shaped ceilings using stran-stell framing. Inside ceilings are covered with cypress; rope is the covering material for some of the flat ceilings. Goff's design of the "Pink Crystal Chapel" ushered in something new in the way of church architecture and attracted international interest. A scale model of the chapel is on exhibit in the University Museum of Art. Designed for meditation, meeting of small religious groups or for weddings and funerals, the chapel appears as a large, lucid, pink crystal, with slanted surfaces of rosy, diamond-shaped glass panels set in a light, almost invisible framework. Set between triangular piers of unpolished, pink Oklahoma granite will be panels of colored glass. Native stone will also be used for the 150-foot chime tower, which is accented with light-reflecting glass "wings" visible for many miles.

Exemplifying his work and the school, Goff said, "An architect who imitates the present or the past is not fulfilling his job. The architect today who has the ideas for his time and his people is really the traditional architect." Such is the architect graduated from the University of Oklahoma.