

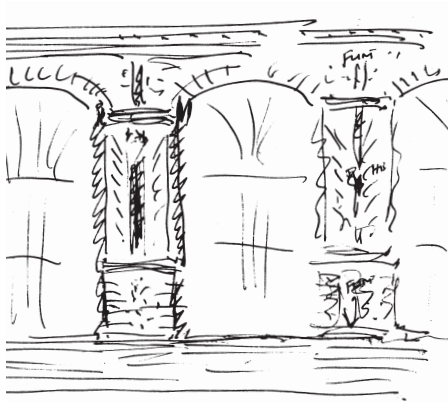


7 / NEW FORMS OF BRICK AND BLOCK CONSTRUCTION

One of the most obvious ways to make buildings is out of block and brick. It is one of the oldest methods. It is cheap, easy, easy to play with, easy to modify—and sturdy when it is done. Unfortunately the concrete blocks of our own era are efficient but ugly and dead; they are, also, hard to

modify partly because they are hard to cut, and the modularity of the cells (at least in US cell-cored blocks) makes it necessary to line the blocks up in modular fashion so that the cells can be reinforced with bars and filled successfully.

During the last years I have tried many kinds of experiments which use modified block. We made construction in which we used ordinary H-block but allowed the blocks to move around. We did this in experimental walls built for the Fresno project (page 547), and we did a more experimental version, in which we used beautiful marble strips, in chases, in combination with blocks that we ourselves had cast (page 461). One of my students has tried casting huge blocks with beautiful ornament in them (page 546). We have tried a system of lightweight blocks (sold publicly as Itong or Hebel, page 548) which are large, nice to touch, can be cut with a hand saw and fitted to almost any shape. They are mortared together not



Early sketch for West Dean building



North wall construction, West Dean Visitors center



Construction detail, West Dean Visitors center

with conventional mortar, but with a kind of polymer glue-mortar like tile-setting compound.

And in West Dean (these two pages) I tried making enormous walls with an integrated poured combination of bricks, concrete, flint, stone, and massive blocks and insulation work-

ing together as a single structural wall because of the interlock of the different elements with the poured concrete. I like that one very much; it is almost two feet thick, all works together, looks beautiful, and is built like a tank. All these are experimental but not too hard to try.



8 / SOPHISTICATED MAY MEAN ADVANCED
OR IT MAY MEAN PRIMITIVE IN APPEARANCE BUT
ADVANCED IN CONTENT

I hope you see from these few examples the idea which I am putting forward. The necessities of the fundamental process ask us to change construction techniques, profoundly.

If we are to build a living world, we need a way of building that allows centers to be shaped and locally determined by the whole; that means that materials and techniques are chosen so that

components can vary subtly in infinite but not extraordinary ways to fit the living structure of the context.

Ways of doing this can be very advanced. In some cases they may also be nearly unknown or newly invented and of necessity ultra-modern. Many of the examples I have given are techniques that are technically sophisticated,