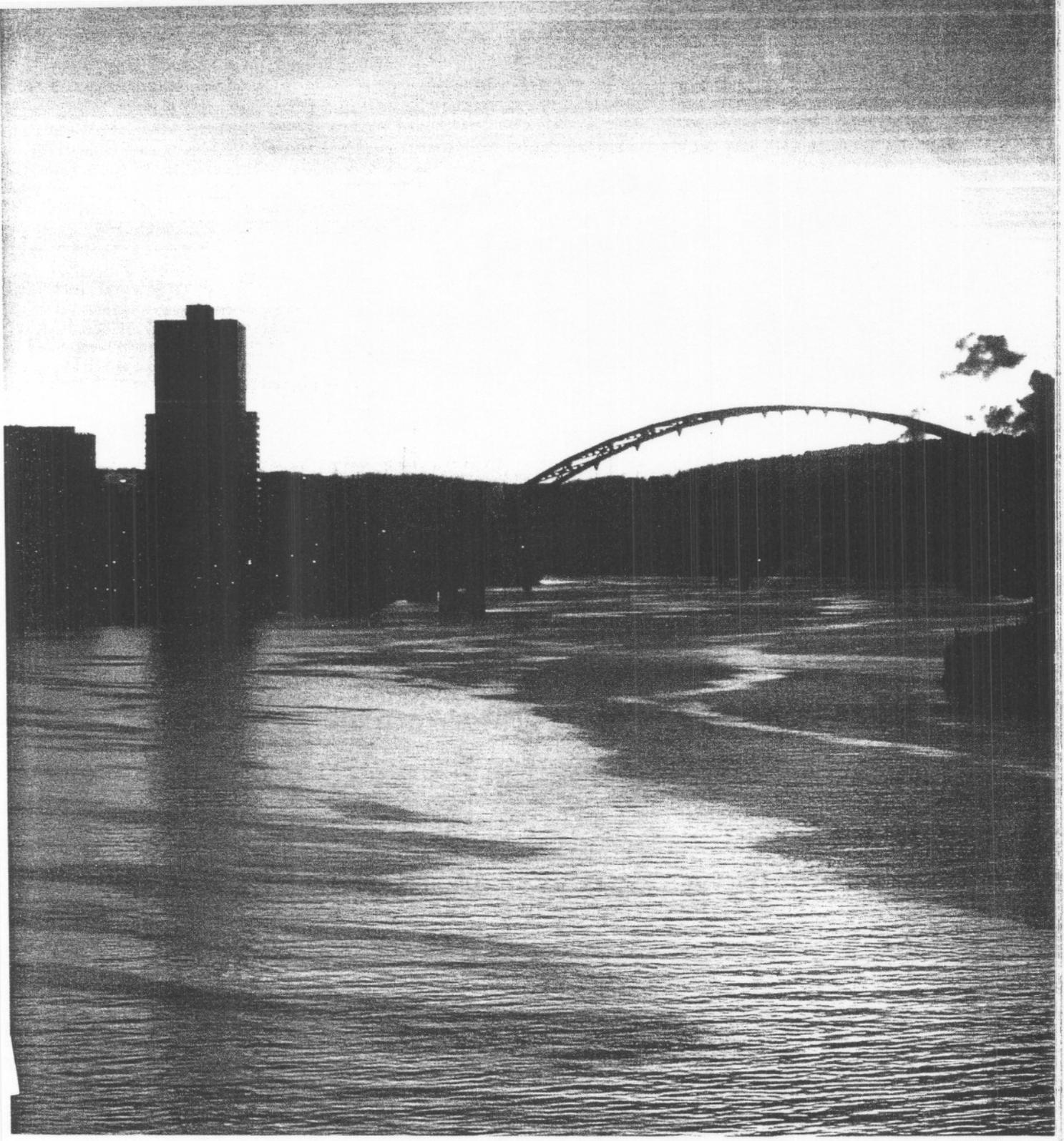


# THE PRINCE COMES TO PITTSBURGH

The connection between Prince Charles, Pittsburgh  
and the Remaking Cities Conference begins with architect David Lewis



B Y M A R K S H E L T O N



JACK WOLF

**A** city about to play host to royalty, as Pittsburgh is to Great Britain's Prince Charles, would be forgiven for wanting to make a bit of a hoopla about it, and Pittsburgh is no exception. However, the hoopla will be limited, because the Prince of Wales is coming here in early March on what is emphatically a business trip: in the last three years, the prince has made it his business to discuss, openly and forcefully, the future of cities, particularly industrial cities

entering a post-industrial age. And he has made it very serious business indeed.

So his position as honorary chairman of the Remaking Cities conference, to be held March 2 through 5 at the Vista International Hotel, is honorary only in the sense that the heir to the British throne can't be expected to handle all the details involved in an international conference of architects, urban planners, politicians, historians and economists. He can, however, be expected to

speak candidly about what cities have been, are and might be. And that means that he will be speaking to a large extent about Pittsburgh itself, because one of the most intriguing features of the conference is that the Mon Valley is one of the main *subjects* of the conference: for four days in March, the attention of the urban planning and design world will be focused not only on our city, its problems, its potential and its future, but also on Pittsburgh as a symbol, as

a case study of sorts, for industrial cities around the world as they face the 21st Century.

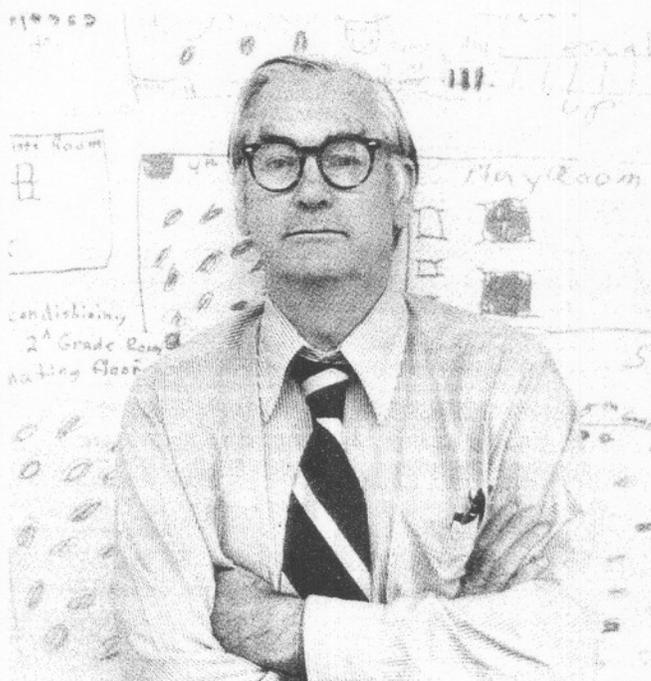
To understand how a prince, a city and a community of professionals, who until recently were operating on the fringes of contemporary architecture, have coalesced in Pittsburgh to contemplate the future of urban life, it is necessary to examine the common ground the three have come to share, and it is not an overstatement to say that the most prominent embodiment of these intersecting worlds sits in a design studio on Penn Avenue: architect David Lewis, of Urban Design Associates. Not only has he played a fundamental role in remaking Pittsburgh, but he has also played a fundamental role in making urban design a symphony of many voices, a truly democratic process. When Prince Charles talks of developing human approaches to urban design, of buildings "which raise our spirits and our faith," he is speaking in a language developed and promoted to a very large degree by David Lewis.

If Lewis were simply another hand-wringer lamenting urban decay, he would be simply another hand-wringer lamenting urban decay, of which there are legions. Most of them are theoreticians and philosophers who are quick to chronicle the origins of evil within the urban critical mass, and to use the decay of cities as a metaphor for all that is wrong with cities, the people who live within them, and by implication, the societal "us."

What makes Lewis different is that he turns this perspective on its head: we need to think of metaphors for what we want to be, he says, and shape our cities accordingly. To Lewis a city is a metaphor waiting to happen.

All this talk about "metaphors" is disorienting to those whose concept of urban renewal is limited to what we have taught ourselves about it in the past quarter-century. The question, "What does this city want to be?" is jarring to a citizenry schooled in the traditional axioms about clearing urban blight; fixing up the slums, the downtown, the riverfront, the "neighborhoods"; about redeveloping rundown property, about gentrification, about tearing down and building up as a method of addressing crime, hunger, despair; about attracting development money with tax abatements and zoning

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changes. To understand Lewis, and this new generation of urban planners, is to be able to understand how, for example, he could say of Remaking Cities that the "conference is not necessarily addressed to reviving cities," but rather, "Should our cities in their present form be revived at all?" To understand such a question is to understand what it means to think of cities as metaphors.

Take, for example, the metaphor of an "interior street." In traditional lexicon, the term is meaningless—"interior" means "inside," and "street" means something like "a public road in a town or city." Walnut Street is a street, as are Grant, Smithfield, Stanwix and Wood. Metaphorically, though, the old Jenkins Arcade was a "street," a thoroughfare lined with shops and traversed daily by thousands of pedestrians, many of whom used it exactly like a street—as a route

to get from one place to another.

Enter one of the newest Urban Design Associates projects: the new Student Center on the campus of LaRoche College. For a moment, ignore the traditional markers and judgment-producers of new architecture, and just stand inside the doorway. You are not in a hallway, or a lobby, or an atrium; you are as Lewis would put it, "on a street, a spine of sorts, that opens onto special areas—a street that ends in a student square. It is an enclosed, internal street, one that in principle goes back at least to medieval times, to the enclosed courtyards of Oxford and

Cambridge, which were imitated at schools such as Harvard and Yale, and which also relates to a particular kind of religious architecture—the cloister, with its long passageways. The building at LaRoche represents a long history recreated in contemporary forms, in response to the needs and wants of students, faculty, alumni, administration, all of whom had a role in the concept of the building. It is an intensely democratic building, which is what we're interested in building."

The use of historical principles of architecture in the development of new buildings is not new or radical. What makes the interior street thought-provoking is that it is consciously a metaphorical way of thinking about a building, its uses, and emphatically, its users. What is noteworthy about this design strategy is that those who use the building were consulted in

the planning and design in a manner that is all but unprecedented in contemporary architecture.

This is where the new urban visionaries differ most clearly from their predecessors: the new buildings are designed with the users in mind. The experiences of David Lewis that have led up to his being able to ask questions such as "Should our cities be revived in their present form?" and "If not, then what form should they take?" began to evolve nearly 25 years ago. The experiences began with a small group of architects concerned with what Lewis calls the "role of architecture in the formation in the economic and social mainsprings of cities." In the past 50 years or so, architecture was the science of providing the physical structures that the traditional decision-makers had decided were in the best interests of their metaphorical city, which was

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a city of bankers and real estate developers and public sector planners. Housing projects were designed by architects, for example, but in the same way that a warehouse for the storage of mattresses was designed by an architect—the specifications and the intended use were based on the requirements of the warehouse owner, who ostensibly knew best what it was that he needed. In building structures for the containment of inanimate objects like mattresses, there was really no other way to do it but in the manner Lewis calls “top down” planning—the people with the money decided what they thought they needed, and called in someone to design something to fit those perceived needs.

But people are not mattresses, although the Top Down way of thinking about urban planning does not allow for very much flexibility when it comes to addressing the metaphorical needs of the people who will ultimately live in, or work in, or walk past, a new building. Top Down planning figured meticulously things like number of square feet per person, and number of tenants per elevator, using sophisticated formulae developed by other Top Down specialists, and came up with a financially attractive plan for a structure, right down to the costs of uprooting whatever and whomever happened to be in the place where the new building would sit. “Traditionally,” says Lewis, “bankers, real estate developers, politicians and planners made decisions in terms of their own agendas, decisions that affected the lives of ordinary people, the users, without considering the agendas of the common citizen. This led to a wider and wider gap between the provision of things like buildings and expressways, the economic policies that were necessary to provide the tax dollars to provide them and in the needs of ordinary people.”

In response to Top Down planning, “Bottom Up” planning was born. On a small scale, in isolated situations, some planners began to ask the ordinary citizen how he perceived the future of cities, of neighborhoods. What should the architecture say? they asked. What kind of city, what kind of society, do you want to leave for your children?

“When we asked,” says Lewis, “people came forward with rich and varied concerns, concerns that were rarely addressed by traditional planners. And when we began to draw what they asked for, we developed images—urban metaphors—that were totally different from traditional urban planning. The same happened with architecture; the conception of architecture was completely different than was traditionally held.”

This gap is much wider in Great Britain than in the United States—although the large-scale public works projects of the 1960s, such as monolithic housing projects, spaghetti bowl expressways that wiped entire neighborhoods and failed urban “malls,” such as East Liberty’s, provide plenty of American examples. In post-war, Socialist Great Britain, huge urban planning departments undertook to provide “decent” environments for their cities. Thousands of residential, industrial and commercial buildings were built by governmental entities, and the countless decisions made about these structures were made remote from the citizens—with the best intentions, Lewis points out, but still remote from people. And according to Lewis, this meant that the groundwork had been laid for a revolt.

It is startling to hear an Englishman talk about the American civil rights movement as the greatest political event of the 20th century, more important than the world wars, more important than Watergate. “If you think about it, a movement like the civil rights movement engenders and reinforces the best arguments of democracy,” Lewis says. “What Martin Luther King, Jr., insisted on was a full role in society for all people, and as a result, we began to see a very rapid growth in concern by citizens for a voice in decision-making in cities. In the United States, the civil rights movement generated a whole series of other movements for the recognition of rights and voices—including a tremendous arousal of interest in historic preservation, in preservation of ethnic and cultural heritage, in the preservation of neighborhoods. The United States was suddenly a very complex and pluralistic society. There was a thrust for identification on the part of ethnic groups, neighborhood groups, historic preservation groups. All of this came from the civil rights movement, and it profoundly affected some few architects and planners.”

As this newly developing strategy pertained to architecture and urban planning, massive changes did not occur. Planners and designers interested in these ideas had no organization or forum, and tended to work in their own geographical areas, developing projects when they could that defined a relationship—a metaphor—between the need for a building and the needs of the citizens. If one wishes to see Top Down planning, one might read John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (“The family which takes its . . . automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put under-

ground.”). To see a David Lewis urban metaphor, one might look at the Human Resources Center, in Pontiac, Michigan—the first completed project of Lewis’s that embodied the democratic principles of consulting the users of a building, rather than the financiers of it. The project was helped along by the fact that the financiers and the users were virtually the same group: the people of Pontiac. It was the first building in the contemporary United States to be designed with full community participation.

In Pittsburgh, the first large-scale project that embodied such extensive community participation was one that never got built: the “Great High School” program, which was intended to begin to address the challenges of integrating Pittsburgh’s secondary schools. At that time, Lewis held the Andrew Mellon Chair of Architecture at Carnegie Mellon University—the first endowed chair of urban design in the United States. He was asked by Pittsburgh’s Board of Education and the Ford Foundation to undertake the design of the new school of the future, and to have that design reflect newly rediscovered values that can be implicit in architecture: a building as an expression of an attitude, rather than simply a structural container. “Our ideas were all somewhat primitive at the time—this was the late 1960s—but they were all a part of a general recognition that urban design could be, and should be, a vehicle for a number of separate agendas: economic concerns, social aspirations, the challenge of integration, the meaning of education itself. Then we tried to deal with those concerns in terms of getting the broadest range of students as possible together, to look at the impact of school curriculum on the needs of the city and its residents. The project never came to fruition, but the idea had been established.”

Lewis left CMU and joined Urban Design Associates at the time of the Pontiac project, and since then he has made a mark on both the Pittsburgh’s skyline and its consciousness. The rehabilitation and conversion of Station Square, for which UDA did what Lewis calls “the policy designing”—the planning and design recommendations to convert a rather sorry collection of buildings into a showpiece of urban commerce and recreation. It is a project that illustrates well the idea of Bottom Up urban planning. Rather than deciding what might fit on the banks of the Monongahela River, UDA asked around to find out what people wanted. The result is not just Station Square as it exists today, but also a comprehensive plan for its continued

Monongahela, UDA asked around to find out what people wanted.

expansion and development that preserves part of the past and considers the needs of the future.

Other projects followed: the Village of Shadyside, the North Shore Development, the new Jewish Community Center in Squirrel Hill. Lewis's largest new Pittsburgh building, the Liberty Center office complex and the Vista International Hotel, is an example of an attempt to do with a large center city building what UDA has been doing more and more successfully with neighborhood and community architecture: consult the users of the building, not just the owners. "With Liberty Center, we tried to do what we have found to be so important to urban design; assess the needs and wants of the people," says Lewis. "But it's a very difficult question: how do you handle the democratic input on a large-scale project? We don't really know yet. LaRoche and the Jewish Community Center were done with very open participation; at LaRoche, we met with people from all the college communities, and created a three-dimensional master plan—a 'drawn language' of the future done to scale and style. We included consideration of the college's traditions, its landscape, the flow of its pedestrians, its need for growth. And then when we were asked to do the first building, we went through the entire process again.

"The Jewish Community Center is exactly that: it has a wide membership. It's a democratic organization to start with, so we didn't have to invent democracy there. To do that on a large scale, however, as in doing it for an entire city, is a process that will have to evolve. The larger the endeavor, the more complicated the questions become. Most large projects only get built as a result of a very complex investment package, both private and public. The packaging necessarily involves institutions that are remote from the project—somewhere, there will be someone who's looking at numbers and dollars only. So, one very often deals with a decision-making process that isn't exactly insensitive to local issues, but where the local issues are only pertinent in so far as they support the financial picture. If the issues are counter to financial concerns, the project is harder to finance. It becomes an uphill battle to persuade. You've got layer upon layer of concern here, and urban design and architecture become tools of negotiation."

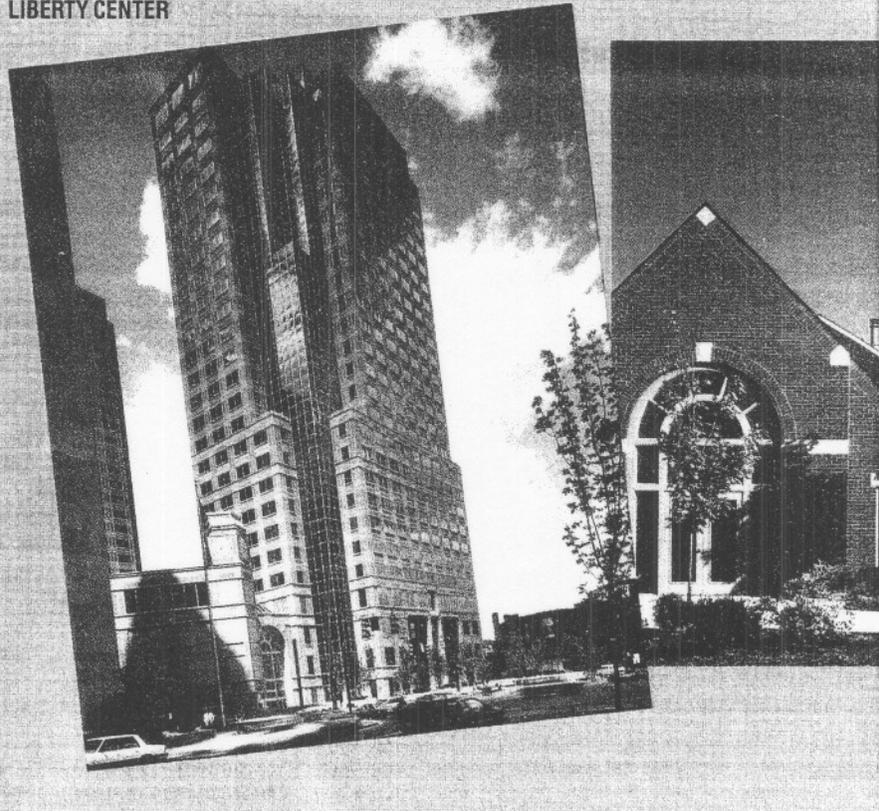
**T**his uphill battle was being fought on a hundred small to middling-large fronts in the U.S. and Britain until 1985, when an astounding thing happened. The Royal Institute of British Architects

(RIBA), at its 150th anniversary meeting, invited the Prince of Wales to speak. To the astonishment of the profession—and the world—Prince Charles made what could only be called a broadside attack on architects and their profession. He said that most architects were concerned with large corporations, not ordinary people. He said that architects had "forsaken" the northern cities of England for London. He said that architects had forgotten how to listen to the voices of the users of their buildings, that people need environments that they can feel express the metaphorical language of their relationship to the city and the land, not the

young architects, historians, economists and planners to talk to him—educate him—about cities. He went on tours of England's cities at a time when many of them—Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham—were torn by the violence and riots of a large group of young people who felt they had no future, riots that grew out of despair, unemployment and what the rioters saw as an unresponsive government. And he became their champion, too.

"In trying to find out about the pathologies of the inner city, and in seeking solutions for them, the prince asked for, and received, a meeting with a small group from the

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cold and hard buildings of the modern era. And he said that modern buildings were "tearing cities apart." Suddenly, those few and far between architects like Lewis had a champion, and a royal one at that.

If the prince had let it go at that—one speech to earn him the ridicule and rancor of the RIBA and the conservative newspapers, as most expected him to do, it's doubtful that he could have shaken up the architectural profession, which in Britain is as monolithic as a modern office building. But he did persist, hosting a series of private dinners for

American Institute of Architects," says Lewis. The group included people from Baltimore's Community Development Corporations, which had reconstituted neighborhoods in the inner city, with the most important roles in the reconstruction played by the residents themselves, including programs in urban "homesteading." There were three urban planners from Savannah, Georgia, who had developed a plan for gentrification without displacement of the original citizens. And there were two architects considered at the forefront of what was now being called

**Prince Charles said that architects, developers and planners**