

# PORTFOLIO

The San Juan Star

Wednesday, September 25, 1996

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## Architecture project gives a closer look into past and future

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**W**hen you think of architecture, the first things that probably come to mind are buildings and homes. Either lovely or horrendous, buildings and homes are usually contemplated as individual structures rather than integral pieces that form and are formed by society.

But a new project proposes that there's more to architecture than meets the eye.

"Re-Envisioning San Juan" — a project by the School of Architecture at Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico — expects to analyze the city not solely from an architectural standpoint, but also from a sociological and political perspective that gives a clearer, more complete idea of what San Juan is, where is it headed and, hence, who are *sanjuaneros*.

Politics, identity, sociology, urbanism and architecture will all be entwined in this project. The main purpose is to show students to have a more critical eye of their surroundings and their profession. Students at Polytechnic University's new school of architecture will have an on-hands chance to re-evaluate traditional methods of teaching architecture and should be able to see their profession as an integral part of the society.

"We've met trying to determine what the school should be. We are trying to make courses that arouse consciousness

among students," says Jorge Otero, professor at Polytechnic's school of architecture.

"What we want is to reach a consensus on what the profession of an architect should be," adds Jorge Rigau, the school's director.

To that purpose, the school is hosting a program with the participation of state-side professionals who will share their experiences in San Juan with students and provide their input for evaluating the good, the bad, the ugly and the hideous in the city.

Rather than rely only on architects' point of view, the school decided to tap experts in politics, mass communication, sociology, urbanism, tourism and other disciplines to provide a broader perspective of the city and its inhabitants.

The participants are:

- Susan Buck-Morss, Cornell University, on "Political Theory"
- Briankle Chang, University of Massachusetts, Amherst on "Media and Post Coloniality"
- Arindam Dutta, Princeton University, on "Post Colonial Studies"
- Mark Jarzombek, MIT, on "History" and "History of Architecture"
- Anthony D. King, Binghamton University, on "Post Colonial Theory"
- Mark Wigley, Princeton University, on "Theory of Architecture"
- Sergio Palleroni, Washington University, on "Latin American Urbanism"

And, of course professors at Polytechnic University's School of Architecture.

After months of reading information on San Juan, the group finally visited the city last August, taking pictures and getting an overall feel of area.

Old San Juan, slums, the University of Puerto Rico, closed urbanizations, Hato Rey, Barrio Obrero and even Caguas were on their agenda of sites.

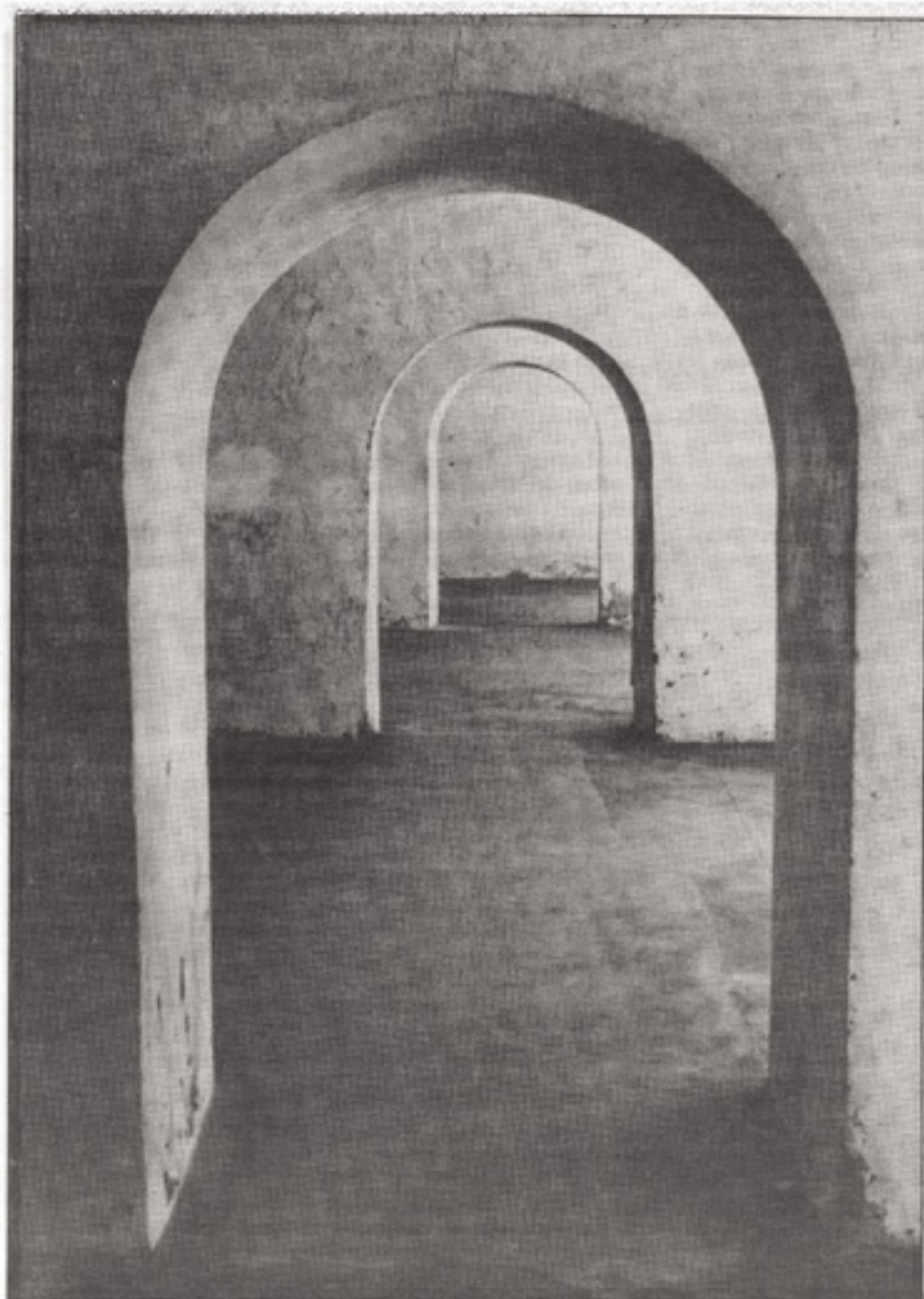
"Some even visited political rallies, and party headquarters," notes Rigau.

And they also took a close look at how colonialism, the impact of the 1898 U.S. invasion and even tourism has influenced architecture.

"We've molded ourselves to tourists' expectations. And that, too, becomes part of our architectural identity," says Rigau.

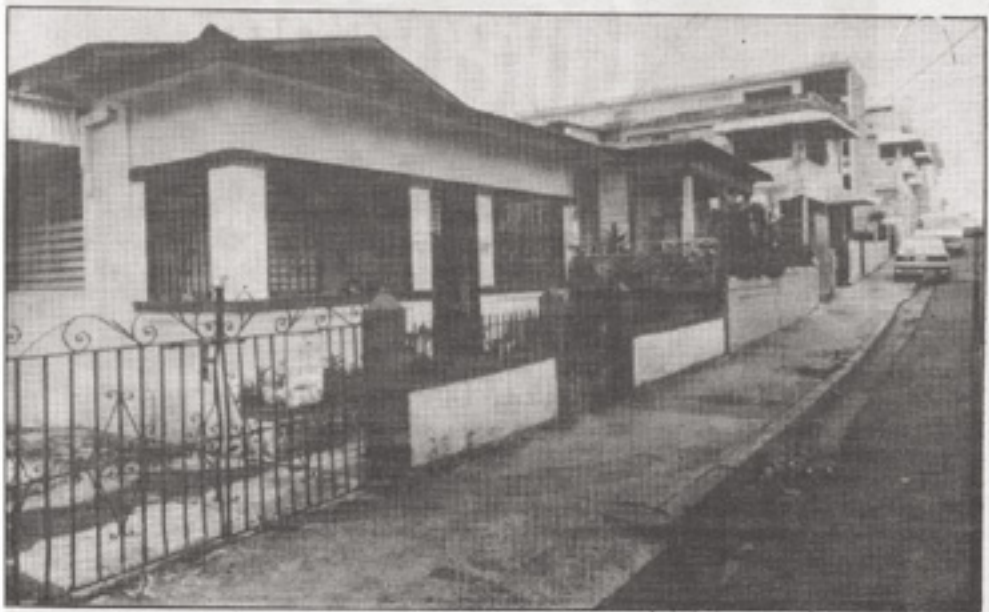
The group will then return in January to take part in the architecture school's workshop in which they, students and professors will take a closer look at all the mentioned elements, defining, envisioning, re-defining and re-envisioning the city.

And in the process, students will define, envision, re-define and re-envision architecture and architects. "The intention is not to instill (information), but rather help students take a critical look at things," says Otero.



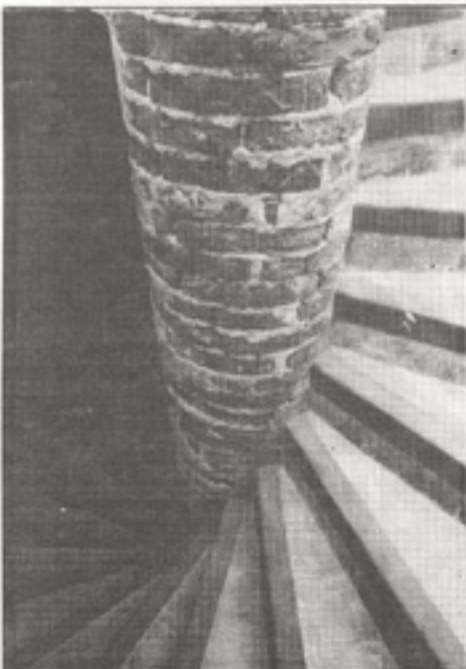
STAR file photo

Archways on the lower level of El Morro in Old San Juan, one of the areas on project's agenda.



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A street in Barrio Obrero, one of the areas the project participants will study.



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A spiral staircase in El Morro.