

Introduction

Kurt Forster, Ph.D., visiting professor emeritus at Yale University's School of Architecture, prepared the following introduction to the Warnecke Architectural Archive:

The archives of architect John Carl Warnecke (1919-2010) and of his father, architect Carl I. Warnecke (1891-1970), constitute a body of historic and architectural documents of singular significance for a profession that arguably rose to international prominence and cultural importance in the course of the twentieth century. Both for the continuity of their practices and the distinctive character of their achievements, father and son Warnecke trace a prominent line across American architecture and urban design. However different their premises, father and son sought a way of building that would, at every scale and in numerous moments, give defining shape to a profession that is always in search of solutions to questions far bigger than anyone can answer.

Not only for the long-term evolution of design in the U.S., but also for the breadth of issues and accomplishments represented, the combined Warnecke archives constitute a kind of backbone of the profession's history. If the father's work steered a course that was widely followed, especially for public buildings, since the late nineteenth century, John Carl's studies and career absorb more complex positions, ranging from such eminent, if isolated, designers as Bernard Maybeck and William Wurster in California to the powerful presence of European émigré architects such as Walter Gropius, with whom Warnecke studied at Harvard. The tasks set for architects in postwar America could only be handled with a complex set of ideas, as Warnecke had begun to absorb early on. At various points in the extended course of his practice, Warnecke was the right man at the right place: the Kennedy years in Washington, the development of university campuses, and the novel demand for unusual office and administrative structures as the century advanced.

The magnitude of these design challenges required the organization of large offices. In a field typically dominated by idiosyncratic personalities, Warnecke pioneered effective and resourceful office organization, as did such firms as Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. The firm of Carl Warnecke and Associates was capable of handling demanding projects that involved public bodies and private interests. It is no small credit to Warnecke (if also a personal loss to the dynamic of his own firm), that all three partners of one of the firms that came to prominence in the 1980s— Kohn, Pederson, Fox—sprang, almost fully formed, from the Warnecke studio.

The scope of the archive and the density of documentation destine it for integral preservation. As a major resource for future research, the Warnecke archive provides a complement to the Mies van der Rohe Archive (divided between the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Library of Congress) and the Paul Rudolph Archive (likewise at the Library of Congress and presently being inventoried). In its centrality to American building of the twentieth century, the Warnecke archive is a resource of immense value and inestimable significance.