Hopkinson House
Living Monument to Modern History

by Neal Zoren
Photography by Jamie Nicholl

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Because Oskar Stonorov was both an architect and a sculptor, he was able to combine art with building in a marvelous way, as is beautifully exemplified in the experience one has in entering and moving through the public spaces of Hopkinson House, which he designed.

Upon entering the building from Washington Square, one’s attention is drawn to the right by what appears to be a great sculptural wall which turns out to be four bronze panels by sculptor Jorio Vivarelli placed between the elevator doors.

Ahead is a glimpse of a colorful floor-to-ceiling mural by artist Lucius Crowell with a curtain drawn back to reveal a sunny garden. As one turns to one’s left, the mural comes into view in all its grandeur. And framed by glass doors directly ahead is Stonorov’s fine sculptural group of two reclining figures, the central focus of the courtyard he designed around it, providing a most satisfactory conclusion to the art trip.

Edmund N. Bacon

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nary views of Philadelphia. For the lobby, Stonorov chose contrasting adornments — a mural that juxtaposes the bucolic and peaceful with lively aspects of city life and elevator banks separated by four bronze castings that represent the four seasons. Convenience, tranquility, history, constant modernity, the finest of artistry, and the tone of urbanity combine under Stonorov’s plan to make Hopkinson House distinguished among Philadelphia domiciles, and among its buildings in general.

From its embryonic stages, Hopkinson House broke so many molds, it seems appropriate that it should flout custom again by giving itself a hand on October 25, 1998 at age 35.

Further examination shows the logic of making this particular anniversary an occasion worth special attention. For all of its 35 years, Hopkinson House has stood as a vivid reminder that the urban renewal decisions that encouraged its construction worked. It offers proof that apartment liv-

ing suits Philadelphians and that attentive management and well-maintained elegance add up to a happy living situation for all fortunate enough to enjoy it.

This, indeed, is a cause for celebration. Welcome to the building that shared in making the vision of foresightful city planners and a pantheon architect a reality and, more than that, a success story. This publication will give further insight into the scope of those planners’ dreams, the nature of architect Stonorov’s conception for a complete living environment, and Hopkinson House’s place as a living monument to modern history.

The Future Home

A view of Washington Square before urban renewal

Stonorov’s design for rooftop recreation: the pool and the “Skylarium.”
A KEY ELEMENT TO A
RECLAIMED PHILADELPHIA

Hopkinson House was an integral part of the progressive plan begun almost 50 years ago when architect and city planner, Edmund N. Bacon, was named head of Philadelphia’s City Planning Commission.

A decade would elapse before some of Bacon’s boldest and most far-reaching ambitions would see fruition, but seeds, nurtured by consecutive Philadelphia mayors Joseph Clark and Richardson C. Dilworth, were sown that would give prime areas of Philadelphia a stature to match the city’s status, at that time, as the third largest metropolis in the United States.

Society Hill in general, and Washington Square in particular, were priority targets for improvement within Philadelphia’s urban renewal plans.

These were among the oldest and most prestigious sections of the city. William Penn himself, on original designs for Philadelphia, plotted out the “green publick space” that was to be Washington Square. (It was named the Southeast Square in Penn’s plans and was renamed Washington Square in 1832 in honor of George Washington, a frequent visitor to its park, to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.)

Homes and other structures in Society Hill survive as an authentic and surprisingly unadulterated record of residential and small business architecture in urban America. Some of the houses date back 150 years and boast leading lights of early America among their owners and occupants.

Society Hill evolved and declined in a pattern common to many neighborhoods in many American cities. Large homes, mansions even, were built by the gentry to accommodate their lifestyle of the time. During the eras of William Penn, America’s founding fathers, and deep into the 19th century, Society Hill was “the” place for the prominent and active Philadelphian to live — a distinguished address because of its proximity to many of America’s most honored historic shrines.
Passion for the new, the larger, and more open, private spaces affected Philadelphia the way it did all cities. The gentry sought bigger, more isolated homes. Northward and westward expansion took prominent Philadelphians to a series of new neighborhoods if not out of the city altogether. Those who remained in Philadelphia tended to choose Rittenhouse Square ("Southwest Square" to William Penn) or Chestnut Hill as the places in which they would build their homes. Houses in Society Hill, instead of remaining desirable, became dwellings for the middle class, and, eventually, the poor and even the indigent. By the 1950's, blocks and blocks of Society Hill were tantamount to slums, many of the former mansions having been sliced into multi-family dwellings that could be accurately described as tenements.

Philadelphians who did not live in Center City rarely ventured past its commercial streets, primarily Market and Chestnut. Visitors could not be encouraged to extend their sightseeing much beyond Independence Hall which, in that era, housed the Liberty Bell. Businesses on Walnut Street brought mercantile traffic to that thoroughfare, but the general public found little use for any place south of Walnut. Only a Greek enclave between 8th and 11th on Locust Street, the shops that composed "Antique Row" on Pine Street, and the thriving discount clothing stores of South Street were comfortable to a visitor. Most of Society Hill was deteriorating badly, which meant houses of historic vintage, a virtual museum of American domestic architecture, were in dire jeopardy.

Bacon, Clark, and Dilworth realized this area could be reclaimed. Philadelphia’s future depended on it. If carefully orchestrated, they acknowledged, a plan could be devised to attract people to a safe urban life in the most historical section of America’s most historical city. Houses might be renovated in a manner that would make them live up to that expectation. Renewal projects could be designed that would have the effect of encouraging a return to the city of the urbanly-inclined. Massive simultaneous improvement could make Society Hill and its surrounding areas desirable in perpetuity.

Washington Square was a key to the urban renewalists’ plans. Hopkinson House sits on the Square’s southern end, as a keystone.

Washington Square itself was in comparatively better shape than most of its neighboring streets, especially those to its immediate south and east. Though the area around it was bleak and the Square’s park relatively unvisited, it was bordered on three sides by buildings of importance.

Publishers seemed particularly attached to Washington Square, and it was lined with the main headquarters of national and international firms like the Curtis Pub-
A universally applauded idea, backed by a sound urban development plan is not enough to bring a building into being.

The Washington Square site Hopkinson House occupies was targeted for a high-rise residential dwelling, but before it could be erected, someone would have to agree an apartment building was a financially viable venture and formulate a plan to make it a reality.

Records show a group called Major Realty Corporation, with offices at 123 South Broad Street, emerged to develop Hopkinson House, Inc. All of the available correspondence for the group comes from the archives of Paul Trichon, who lived at Hopkinson House from 1962 until the end of his life.

Letters are addressed to First Pennsylvania Bank, which financed the purchase of the land and the building of Hopkinson House; the Federal Housing Administration, which contributed to the initial building costs, various insurance companies, and various contractors. All of this activity started as early as 1959 although Hopkinson House would not admit its first occupants until November 1962. Even then, original residents say, the building was not complete. Only the lower floors were ready for occupancy while the upper reaches were being completed. As a reward for moving in that November, developers forgave pioneering residents their first month's rent.

Stonorov and Haws were meticulous in presenting estimates for site preparation, building of a sidewalk, and other costs. Oskar Stonorov was a major encourager of the Hopkinson House project, and Ed Bacon says he campaigned vigorously to be the building's designer.
By the middle of 1963, all 33 floors of Hopkinson House were ready to be lived in, and each of the 536 apartments was filled.

Hopkinson House remained an apartment dwelling for 17 years. In 1980, it was converted into a condominium building. Many of its residents were among the buyers, and most of the units in Hopkinson House are occupied by owners. The esteem the building has enjoyed during its entire history is a tribute to its conceivers, developers, and virtually singlehanded designer, Oskar Stonorov.

TOWARD A TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

To borrow a phrase that probably had not been coined in Oskar Stonorov's lifetime, the architect took a totally environmental approach to his design for Hopkinson House.

Having free rein to conceive an urban living space that addressed the need for public or communal areas, decorative splendor, recreational life, and landscaping was among the conditions Stonorov set when he agreed to accept the commission for Hopkinson House, a challenge, for many reasons, he was eager to undertake.

Creating complete living spaces preoccupied Stonorov throughout his career as an architect and sculptor. He had established a reputation as an innovator in developing public housing. The Carl Mackley Homes, built in the Harrowgate section of Kensington as cooperative housing for members of a labor union, were a success that showed how a social and civic agenda could meld with practical, peaceful, and even elegant living.

A CULMINATION OF STONOROV TALENTS

Hopkinson House may have been a major cog in an extensive civic improvement project, but it was not a "social project" as most of Stonorov's residential renderings were. Hopkinson House would give Stonorov an opportunity to put some of his most cherished theories and concepts into practice while he worked on a commercial, yet socially significant project.

A friend and frequent correspondent of Frank Lloyd Wright and many seminal architects of his time, Stonorov had unquestionable credentials in designing elegant, functional, environmentally-integrated private homes. Here, as with public housing, his reputation was established and secure. He was also known internationally for his office campuses and government buildings.
Hopkinson House would require nothing less than the absolute marriage of Stonorov’s achievements in all of these fields. It would particularly call on him to blend his experience in designing congenial multi-family apartment complexes with his artistry in creating felicitous properties for private clients, properties that habitually showed the careful attention he gave to the site on which the home sat and his thoughtfulness regarding the person who would occupy it.

**A TRIUMPH INSIDE AND OUT**

Influenced by the Bauhaus school of design and a disciple of both Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, Oskar Stonorov worked in a modern idiom he endowed with personal flair. In his design for Hopkinson House, he thought in terms of clean, simple, functional lines enhanced by details that would make the building’s exterior distinctive. In Hopkinson House’s case, this external distinctiveness would come from the brilliant placement of balconies which give the building a delightfully eye-catching staircase pattern, the effect of which elicits admiration when viewed from several distances and angles and is even a source of amusement as one realizes how wittily Stonorov employed his design.

To anyone approaching Center City Philadelphia from the south or the west, Hopkinson House immediately stands out as a landmark that leads to both respect and curiosity. It anchors the north and eastern views of high-rise Philadelphia from both I-95 and the Schuylkill Expressway and makes even those who know the city well ask “What is that handsome building that captures so much focus?” “That’s Hopkinson House.”

Stonorov incorporated Hopkinson House’s bold, dominating presence into his plans. Yet, from the northern edge of Washington Square along Walnut Street, Hopkinson House, with its broad, glassy entrance and its handsome porte-cochere, is a gentle, welcoming presence that fits, environmentally again, with the entire setting of the park and buildings around it.

**CONGENIAL SURROUNDINGS**

Hopkinson House’s ground floor area is a fitting candidate for inclusion in any tour of Washington Square or Independence Mall. No less an authority than Edmund N. Bacon comments on the delight of entering Hopkinson House in a quote published on the inside cover of this book.

Stonorov was a sculptor as well as an architect, and the presence and placement of art within his buildings was as important to him as any other aspect. Everything of note that makes Hopkinson House special can be traced directly to the imagination of Oskar Stonorov. He was a frequent collaborator with both the sculptor and muralist involved in executing his vision for Hopkinson House. His friendship with painter Lucius Crowell extended beyond collaboration. Sculptor Jorio Vivarelli is constantly linked with Stonorov projects, includ-
ing the Benjamin Franklin Parkway building once called The Plaza, which is now a hotel. Vivarelli’s role was to realize sculpted masterworks based on designs provided by Stonorov. The architect conceived the piece he wanted. Vivarelli brought it into being. Even the original lighting fixture that once illuminated the lobby was conceived by Stonorov and sent to the Venini company of Italy for manufacture.

All supervising of installations and approval of finished work was the province of Stonorov which underscores that to him, architecture in general and Hopkinson House in particular were more than routine exercises in drawing and engineering.

Four bronzes, mounted on the elevator walls, are particularly outstanding, as is another Stonorov/Vivarelli creation, “Adam and Eve,” which brings distinction to the outdoor plaza. This plaza was included by Stonorov to give Hopkinson House residents access to fresh air and open space. Seen through glass doors, “Adam and Eve” enhances the lobby as much as it serves as a centerpiece for the plaza.

The elevator sculptures, “The Four Seasons,” must count as some of the most prestigious interior art in the Delaware Valley. Each panel features a diaphanously clad woman in a pose or attitude that reflects the time of year represented.

The first sculpture, “Spring,” is vibrant with movement, excitement, and energy. In the next panel, “Summer,” the figure seems more placid, perhaps even contemplative. In “Fall, the woman seated holds a cornucopia representing the harvest, the fruits of which are resting, symbolically, in her midsection. “Winter” contrasts directly with “Spring.” The woman is once again in motion, but rather than seeming to revel in the soft, invigorating breezes of gentle spring, she is blown and buffeted by violent winds, against which she raises her arms to guard herself.

The artists carried through with textured bronze to cover the side walls of the elevator and to bring some relief to the white marble in the outer lobby.

No less striking is “Adam and Eve,” an evocative bronze that decorates and brings a focal point to Hopkinson House’s ground floor plaza. The work is at once playful, romantic, and dramatic with Eve in an alluringly recumbent position while Adam rests his head on her right shoulder, his legs seeming to be floating in the air.

“Adam and Eve” contributes to the tranquility of the Hopkinson House plaza which epitomizes the elegant simplicity with which Stonorov endowed the entire Hopkinson House project. Even the surface of the plaza suggests a place outside of the city, possibly an Italian terrace, even though one can see some of Philadelphia’s most remarkable buildings from it.

A moat that ran around the perimeter of the plaza has been replaced by flower beds along its north, south, and west sides. Plantings contrast with lovely wildflowers, like those in an informal English garden. On the eastern wall
is now a fountain which fits naturally and beautifully into the plaza's design.

Returning inside, one sees the recently restored mural, “Philadelphia Panorama,” by Lucius Crowell on the west wall.

Crowell's vantage point being the west bank of the Schuylkill River, the right side of his painting shows the Philadelphia skyline as it existed, pre-skycraper, in 1962 with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Waterworks as anchoring points in the center.

The left side of Crowell's work is more fanciful. Using a tall tree in the center of the mural to vertically divide it, his panorama leaves the urban, businesslike part of the city and concentrates on the immediate suburbs and distant farmlands in a full representation of all the Delaware Valley offers. The farm property is said to suggest Oskar Stonorov's farm in Chester County.

Time took its toll on Crowell's painting. In 1985, the mural was considered to be in such disrepair, it was covered by a maroon screen and hidden from public view. In 1998, a restoration project brought the mural back to its original fresh and colorful effect.

Fortunately, the art Stonorov and his collaborators created will be preserved for the life of Hopkinson House. Statutes passed in 1963 as part of the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority's “One-Percent Fine Arts Program” stipulate an owner must “preserve, protect, and permanently display the work of art in the space for which it was originally created and intended.” They further state “the work of art shall remain permanently in place, intact, and shall be for all purposes a part of the real estate.”

Fresh air and recreational space meant so much to Oskar Stonorov, he not only included the ground floor plaza in his “total environment” but created niches for community gathering on Hopkinson House's penthouse floor and roof.

On its highest floor, the building boasts a large room that takes up practically the entire floor in one sweep and is all windows on its south and east sides. Stonorov called this room the Solarium. Through the last 35 years, events of all kinds, ranging from family reunions and large social functions to civic gatherings and art exhibits have been held in it.

At the eastern end of the Solarium is a library stocked with books of many types. At the Solarium's western end is a door by which people have access to a wide terrace and a staircase to the roof, both of which offer breathtaking views of Philadelphia. On the roof itself, Stonorov placed a swimming pool and sundeck.

Certainly not as showy or important as the lobby or upper floors but indicative of Stonorov's more practical

"Philadelphia Panorama" by Lucius Crowell
plans, the architect designed one of Philadelphia's first building with an incorporated garage that allows immediate access to the building. He also included a large, well-planned laundry room at the basement/garage level.

Hopkinson House's northern side features one asset Stonorov certainly considered while executing his concept — Washington Square, which sits as Hopkinson House's virtual front lawn, an idea that would have brought a smile to Philadelphia founder and original planner William Penn, who plotted parklike spaces within his ideal city because he so wanted Philadelphia to remain a "greene countrie towne."

**A VISION Fulfilled**

In many ways, Hopkinson House is a vision fulfilled beyond what anyone could have imagined in 1962. At that time, Edmund Bacon and new mayor James Tate could only hope their idea of urban renewal and attendant city life would thrive. Time alone has proved the foresight of what was really an experiment, a chance to put an educated hunch into practice. Hopkinson House, opening in a questionable neighborhood, was also an experiment, also a risk, that both contributed to and benefited from the success of the policy that turned Philadelphia's core from dilapidated to desirable. For both experiments, sailing has been smooth, and prospects for the years to come seem more predictably positive than they did 35 years ago.

Philadelphia and the Washington Square section continue to grow. Another mayor committed to development that will affect generations, Ed Rendell, is championing a new Constitution Center that will bolster the educational and tourist value of the historically rich Independence Hall area. Independence Hall itself recently underwent a restorative facelift, and today, Washington Square is undergoing a year of repair and renewal. A Visitors Center is under construction.

Once Hopkinson House proved high-rise dwelling could work in Philadelphia, it was joined by other residential buildings in the Society Hill and Washington Square areas.

Oskar Stonorov would be proud that the complete environment he envisioned, also an experiment, would provide such a comfortable homelife for thousands while remaining a gem of thoughtful design. The few changes to that design have been subtle and enhancing, for example the fountain, flower beds, and second marble planter that now grace the plaza. The architect would also be pleased that the Lucius Crowell mural he conceived is restored and once again visible.

In 35 years, Hopkinson House has gone from being a pioneering venture to a venerable fixture on Philadelphia's landscape. It paved the way for much that followed it while giving its many residents pride, comfort, and a prestigious address. These are indeed a reason to celebrate. Not only Hopkinson House's origins but its decades to come.
Hopkinson House was named for Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791), a sign of the Declaration of Independence and a Renaissance man known for painting, musical compositions, and essays as well as for his career as a lawyer and a judge.

Hopkinson House
35th Anniversary Committee

Diane Rossheim — chair
Edmund N. Bacon
Diana Burgwyn
Allan Domb
Selma Dzuba
Byron Fink
Louis Gambaccini
Steve Keller
Roger Moss
Bernard Stern

The Committee would like to thank the manager and staff of Hopkinson House, for all of their help on this occasion.

A newcomer to the plaza.