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A Home For Art

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TO BUILD UP an atmosphere of art creation about the whole Art Center and to create a place of interest for all the population, old and young - through the creative power of the young ..."  
Eliel Saarinen thus expressed in words his aim in designing the Des Moines Art Center. He defined his aim equally well, using no words, in the architecture of the building.

This late Finnish architect, known worldwide for his insight into the basic nature of personality as well as for being a modern artist with a great choice of media, has completed a work that we may enjoy. The Des Moines Art Center, on West Grand Avenue near Polk Boulevard, was opened in June 1948 - fulfilling years of dreams - "a home for art, not a museum."

Features of spaciousness, dignity, open design and an abundance of light characterize the studios, galleries and meeting rooms of the contemorarly designed building. The rooms connect to form two U's, one devoted to the art center school, the other to galleries where the works of Iowa artists and others are exhibited and permanent art collections are shown.

These square and rectangular shaped rooms are large and void of furniture so as not to detract from the art objects. High walls in the galleries are covered with a natural colored monkscloth, a suitable background for the variety of pictures used against it. Eliel's wife, Loja, supervised the designing and weaving of the draperies.

Classrooms

The school rooms, completely windowed on one side, are suitably designed and equipped for craft work, weaving, woodworking, picture framing and matting, printmaking, photography and sculpture.

The spacious auditorium, used for public lectures, concerts and movies, is indirectly lighted and has a stage the width of the room. Three serving kitchens, a recreation room, several meeting rooms and offices for the director and staff are other rooms in the art center. They are functionally built to fill the needs of art students and professionals, business men, homemakers and hobbyists young and old.

The center space of the gallery U is filled with a reflecting pool, placid but impressive. Carl Milles, the noted Swedish-American sculptor, designed a bronze fountain group that stands in the pool. "Pegasus and Bellerophon," the sculpture, is taken from a story in classic mythology. Bellerophon, is balanced on the winged horse, Pegasus, and together they symbolize aspiration and the creative imagination that guide an active, progressive art center.

"Pegasus and Bellerophon," a bronze fountain group by Carl Milles, noted Swedish-American sculptor, stands in the pool at the Art Center in Des Moines...