

MAKE-WORK is Conrad Jameson's favourite expression. It is what architects indulge in, he says, and to call a halt to it is the object of his campaign against them.

So far the most conspicuous event in his campaign has been the publication of a hefty article in the *Sunday Times* entitled *How Modern Architects Have Failed Us*. But those who would dismiss him as a mere populist had better first make themselves familiar with his more serious essays in learned architectural and planning journals.

Educated at Harvard and LSE, his training was in psychology and philosophy and he makes a living by the application of these disciplines to market research. He is the head of one of the biggest market research organisations in Europe, employing 500 field workers and he lives in the sort of Kensington house where a grand piano looks perfectly at home in the drawing room. But the preoccupation with architecture and planning is much more than a hobby. A book entitled *Notes for a Revolution in Urban Planning* is on the verge of publication and he has already started on a second entitled *Why Cities Die*. His, then, is an authoritative voice which cannot easily be dismissed, as the organisers of last year's RIBA conference discovered when they tried unsuccessfully to withdraw their invitation for him to speak.

It is in housing that, according to Jameson, the need for reform is most urgent. His formula is simple: get rid of the architects and replace them with standardised pattern books. Architects, he says, should stop trying to solve non-existent problems, and let housing design return to a true vernacular. But what about the architect's special skill in, for example, the sensitive use of a particular site? Jameson's reply is typically blunt: "The truth of the matter is that we've done without all this sensitivity and got a better result. There is really a tremendous amount of mystique. If you can get a south-facing view, that's good. And if you can get a hill, that's lovely, because you can look out on something — but it's not a problem. Look at hillside housing in vernacular societies and you will find basically the same house. So what's the problem?"

But surely architects are now trying desperately to return to some form of vernacular? Jameson will not let them off the hook that easily. "We had a terrible period of architect designed housing. They are now trying a lot of low rise but I don't take that too seriously. They're still trying to make housing look like a painting."

What kind of pattern books should take the architect's place? Jameson's models are American and there are no exact parallels in this country. He certainly has no time for Roger Warren Evans' neo-Georgian styles. "I went to the Ideal Home Exhibition last year," he says, "I was dragged there by an architect who wanted to show me what the real vernacular was. It was just terrible."

Private house-builders who might warm to Jameson because of his frank attitude to architects should be warned that he has little praise for them either. He has been 18 years

PATTERN BOOK PROPHET

Conrad Jameson, the market researcher who sold the Players No 6 brand to the British smoking public, is now devoting his talents more and more to his campaign to replace architects with pattern books.

in this country, but still talks as an outsider. "Your building industry here has never been very sensitive to market development, and so it gets away with murder. I've worked for several firms myself and their ignorance almost matches their arrogance. It's very difficult to understand where they get the notion that they know what the consumer wants. I've talked to them. They say 'Really, I sold them the house without showing them the plans!' This was only five years ago and they were laughing their heads off, saying that they could sell the back of a garage."

"I wouldn't give the builder much discretion at the moment until he has begun marketing properly again. He should feel the breeze of competition, not the way he feels it at the moment, but the way a number of good marketers feel it, so that they are sensitive to everything including the small print on the tin."

So much for architects and house builders. Surveyors and planners, and the rule books that they create, if anything suffer even more from the Jameson onslaught. "The rules say, for example, that car parking has to be within the boundary of the site, which means that you can't exploit the site very successfully. It's a devil of a good excuse for make-work and it is absolutely unnecessary. A car can be parked in the street. In Kensington — stockbroker belt — we're all parked in the street. The genteel idea that you shouldn't have to walk more than a few yards to your car is daft. All you're doing is cheating another person out of a house because the rules have made this one so expensive."

JAMESON'S interest in architecture has stemmed from his work in social research. He, early on, came to the conclusion that architects were failing to deliver the goods that people wanted. His original idea was to form a partnership between architects and social researchers. But again and again his researches led him to the conclusion that success simply depended on sticking as far as possible to traditional forms. "It was only then that I realised what a hell of a lot of make-work was going on. I dropped my

original proposal and said 'just forget it'."

What then is the Jameson pattern for the future of housing design? Surprisingly, given the fierceness of his attack on the status quo, the work "compromise" constantly recurs. "What I want to propose is a sort of golden compromise whereby builders, local authorities and consumers would be brought together. First you check out that the consumer is getting the sort of thing that he might want. He can never say what he wants because he doesn't know exactly, but you should test that you have given him real alternatives and not phony ones. Second you check with your building community and major suppliers. Third you check that it is generally in line with what the community wants to do through its elected representatives. Where does the architect come in? He comes in hardly at all, but he is necessary at the beginning to get the plans agreed. I do not think that architects should be entirely excluded but they will decrease in numbers."

EXAMPLES of the sort of housing that Jameson would like to see are few and far between in this country. But there have been recent developments which come nearer to his ideas. The Essex Design Guide is mentioned, but it is misguided, he says, in the way its results are achieved. "One thing that I am very sympathetic with the builder about is the danger of imposing a design. I come from a building family and have an instinctive dislike of anything that is simply imposed without consultation by a bureaucrat or an architect. It must be a three-way conversation. He must have freedom. When the Design Guide says, as it does say, that you need an architect to design these forms, it's laughable."

"They have a design guide. What they need to do now is turn it into pattern books that you can buy for a pound. There is no reason why you shouldn't have a better *Daily Mail Book of House Plans*. It's very important to equalise the chances between the big builder and the small builder. You've got to have plans that the small builder can take right off the shelf and roll out. I think in America you pay \$25 for the plans, and you know that everything has been tested, everything is there."

In the end the conversation inevitably returns to the position of the architectural profession. Jameson's theory, based on a sociological tradition called "occupational ideology", states briefly that the "belief system" of the professional man is no longer regarded as a stabilising force, but is now seen as a cover for opportunism and anti-social tendencies. But however profound and well-developed the theory, its practical outcome is, for Jameson, glaringly obvious: there must be fewer architects, and the need to reduce the numbers in the profession is all the more urgent in a country which supports several times the number of architects even the most developed of its neighbours.

"It's going to take a long time to get out of the Modern Movement. We're only just beginning. And the only way to do it is to reduce the numbers in the profession. That's the campaign at the moment."

