

Admitting that modern architects would disagree with him, Von Eckardt lauds the use of old world styles by the architect of St. John's Armenian Apostolic Church in Southfield.

## Renaissance idea gets a bad review

(Continued from page 6A)

square surrounding a stained glass circle.

Before he made his architectural critic of the synagogue, Von Eckardt laughed and said, "When you write the article make sure you have me saying 'I think' before my criticisms. Otherwise I get sued. The constitution allows me to think."

Von Eckardt said he would rather architecture "be good, than original." And Bnai David, in his eyes, is the latter.

"The building doesn't invoke the presence of God in my mind," he said.

**ANOTHER RELIGIOUS** building in Southfield, St. John's Armenian Apostolic Church, 2301 Northwestern, drew high praise from the architecture critic.

"They're building on their Armenian tradition with this church. I think it's quite touching, although the modern architect will say it's a sin to reproduce anything Old World. Reproducing or recreating the Armenian home town spirit in a new setting is all right with me.

"If re-created architecture is dishonest, then we might as well say it's wrong to carry on the Armenian faith and all its beautiful Old World tradition."

Both the modernists and the latter-day colonialists go overboard, according to Eckardt. What's more ridiculous, he said, designing a room with plastic, Pewter-style candlesticks or making it look like it is inhabited by spacemen?

Last in his critique of Southfield structures was Eckardt's assessment of

the American Center, headquarters for the American Motors Corp.

**THE BUILDING** sits off of the I-96 expressway and is an example of a style of architecture Eckardt calls the "mirror box."

The American Center "doesn't represent people, it represents the sky," says Eckardt.

"The isolated mirror box is sort of the last gasp of a dying form of architecture. People are fed up with it."

Eckardt was kind to his hosts at LIT, saying that the college has successfully integrated its buildings with the land, something that he admires.

"The college has used the land well, Eckardt said. "Look out this window and you see trees and a creek. The college is part of the soil. I think better architects are being taught here because they have their feet on the ground—literally."

"But not only architects need to get involved in building and zoning matters, Eckardt relates how he joined his neighborhood block association in an attempt to stop a national restaurant chain named "Gino's" from changing the folksy restaurant on the corner into a "computerized fast-food dispensary."

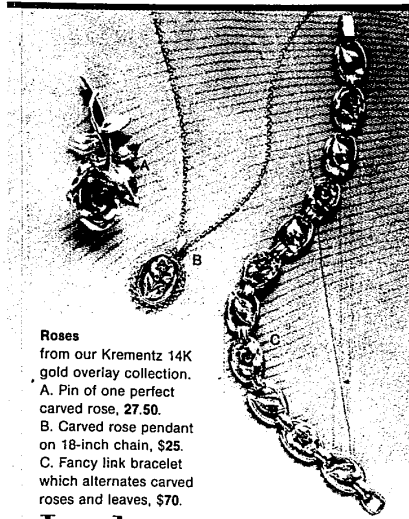
Residents organized in opposition, wearing T-shirts that urged an end to "Gino-side."

They won, sort of. Gino's withdrew. The restaurant is now a French bistro and "it's fare mediocre and expensive," Eckardt writes. "But at least it is not a fast-food chain dispensary. For a price, you can sit and linger and watch the world go by, rather than eat on the run."

The critic is optimistic.



After reading Von Eckardt's criticism of the Renaissance Center, it's not surprising to hear him call the Prudential Town Center in Southfield "a gilded cage."



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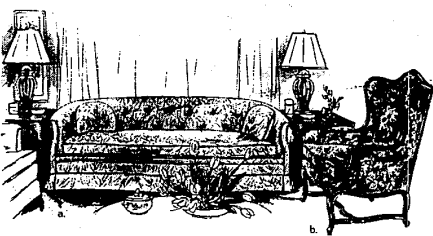
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