



Up close and personal - architect Duo Dickinson was fascinated by the decaying buildings he saw around him in Venice. The tourist became a convert and his informal study is on view at ArtSpace in New Haven. The exhibit, "erosionREVELATION" - Evocative Images of Decay and Control from Venice" is up through Feb. 14. Photo below, a typical tourist's view of the city.

Venice waits for you

Local architect documents the decay of old world city

By Susan Braden
Editor

Like most architecture students in college, Duo Dickinson studied the incomparable Piazza San Marco, immortalized by painters for hundreds of years. But, he was unprepared for Venice, where he walked the ancient flagstone streets, thousands of miles from his comfortable home in Madison.

Dickinson was incredibly moved by the crumbling architecture around him. Antiquity beckoned. Nibbling on the local pizzas while he and his wife Liz wandered the twisting alleyways of the city that is bordered by canals, Duo was a shutterbug, documenting the lovely decay and ruin all around him.

The tourist became a convert and his informal study is on view at ArtSpace in New Haven. The exhibit, "erosionREVELATION" - Evocative Images of Decay and Control from Venice" is up through Feb. 14. In the exhibit are prints from 3-by-5 inches to oversized, 30-inches by 4-feet.

"It's total serendipity," Dickinson says. "It's an extremely different experience - I was visually turned on." He describes the ambience as "astonishing" and he calls the Piazza San Marco "perfect," "beautiful and wonderful."

This was no professional jaunt - although Dickinson is well traveled. He and his wife, Liz, traveled to Venice to see his son, Will, play the French Horn with the Choate Rosemary Hall Orchestra, which was on a concert tour there.

And this is an architect who is

known for his expressive contemporary houses that cleverly use exposed timbers - new and reclaimed lumber. Dickinson is a wood guy - not stucco, not stone.

He says he has a "life-long obsession with wood" and now it is in vogue again as it is renewable. He was taken aback by his reaction to the aged stucco buildings in Venice.

Why was this relevant to an architect who specializes in building stately shore homes? Simple, he says, this is the extreme opposite of the tear down fever that has struck so many architects, builders and many hom-

owners here.

In Venice, the old is revered and preserved for the ages, despite the weather.

"The climate is wet and damp," he says. "Everything wants to be perfect and smooth." The environment, he adds, was "causing 80 percent of the stucco to fall off."

"It's so humid - the nature of the ancient stucco, the nature of the ancient brick. The brick veneers were not fired at a high temperature."

See VENICE, Page 10



Venice: Local architect finds beauty in aging buildings

From page 13

Dickinson was drawn to photograph these very old buildings and to capture "the beauty of seeing these erode." In fact he became obsessive and admits with a laugh, "My wife was glowering at me. I would be staring at this thing."

What the architect saw were "vignettes" that told him the story of the "human effort to stop change."

"They were so flawed, beating against the tide, human beings trying to freeze time. It was very poignant to me."

On a simpler level, he adds, "They just looked really cool."

It's not just the buildings...

While Dickinson has traveled the globe, he was not prepared for the culture shock he would feel in the heart of Venice.

"I didn't see a single wheel," he says. On the surface this elicits a "Huh?"

"Everybody gets everywhere by boat or by foot," he explains. No cars, no bicycles. All travel, he notes is waterborne. Not surprising since Venice is comprised of 118 islands in the Adriatic Sea.

Dickinson noticed right away, "The different vitality of something that is waterborne - that kind of blew my mind. It was all ancient."

The city, built around 166 A.D. possibly by refugees from Roman cities, is basically built on swampland or "gunky soil" as Dickinson puts it.

For Connecticut Yankees, he describes: "Much like if you decided to build a city on a salt marsh."

What also astounded him was the fact that there was very little modern architecture... sure there was a Star Bucks but it was housed in a very old structure with its modern sign. The modern age intruded in the form of gigantic, colorful advertising banners that were everywhere and used to conceal

construction sites from view.

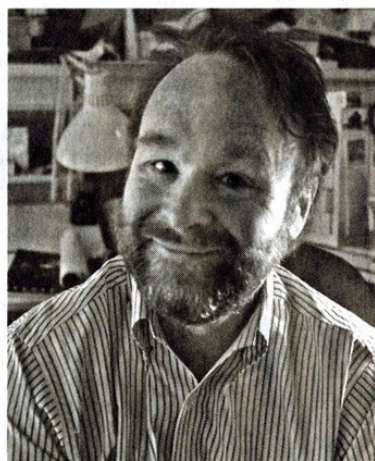
He adds, "the unrelenting tourist crap that is right up to date."

And, Italian style, travel on the canals was at "break neck speeds" in new sleek power boats or the old gondolas.

But the buildings spoke to him.

"It's poignant to see these buildings continually coping," Duo says. "The buildings have a resume, an autobiography. At the weakest point that is where you have the most repair."

"It's a completely alien culture to the American ethic of manifest destiny - the tear down ethic. The building itself is actually the land."



Architect Duo Dickinson