

Chicagoland Dream Houses: How a Mid-century Architecture Competition Reimagined the American Home, by Siobhan Moroney. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2024. xii, 272 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, index. \$125.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper, \$14.95 ebook.

Reviewer Matthew Gordon Lasner is an independent scholar.

Histories of buildings typically follow one of two tracks. Architectural histories—the stuff of exhibitions, architecture schools, and art history—mostly focus on authorial intentions and the exceptional. Histories of the built environment tend to “read” buildings, no matter their appearance, as the products of larger forces. Rarely do the twain meet. In Siobhan Moroney’s *Chicagoland Dream Houses*, they do. Not for nothing, Moroney is neither an architectural historian nor historian of the built environment but a political theorist who co-taught an American Studies course on “American spaces” and became interested in what house designs reveal about “social norms and aspirations of domestic life” (3).

Her subject here is the rare venue in which the refined and the everyday meet: a home-design contest run neither by architects nor builders (or their trade journals) but by a major Midwestern newspaper: in this case, *The Chicago Tribune*’s Chicagoland Prize Home competition of 1945. Home-design contests were hardly uncommon. But most were sponsored for architects through journals like *Architectural Forum*, or for consumers by women’s magazines like *Ladies’ Home Journal*. In both cases, few proposals were ever built. Chicagoland was unique. Among the nearly 1,000 submissions were examples by some of the country’s most promising architects, including German émigré Marcel Breuer and Chinese-born, M.I.T.- and Harvard-trained I. M. Pei (working with his wife, Eileen), as well as examples by those without credentials, including G. I.s and women like Lucille McKirahan, who won a top prize. The bulk fell in between: “workaday architects” (2). More unusual was that *The Tribune* committed to getting examples built in and around Chicago. It promoted winners—chosen by a jury that included the president of the National Association of Home Builders and architect John Merrill of the prominent firm SOM—and other designs to home-seekers, and worked with builders to develop them.

Like many scholarly forays into new fields, a strength of Moroney’s work is its fresh positioning. Despite the ubiquity of small-house competitions, *Chicagoland Dream Houses* is the first book to focus on them. It is also the rare example of a history of buildings that tracks down and interviews users (current and former homeowners) and explores how they modified their homes. She has also done a superior job of surveying the literature and weaving the story of the contest into it.

The result sheds light on contested terrain. A debate simmering in the literature for decades has been the degree to which postwar U. S. housing was what Americans wanted or if they had it foisted upon them in service of the profit motive. It hovers over studies like Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* and shapes urban-planning and housing-policy discourse even today. Mahoney cannot quite settle things. But submissions she unearths offer strong clues about what Americans valued in a home: privacy for the nuclear family, natural light, an entrance hall, a garage (or two), storage, a washing machine, and a discrete place to dry clothes, all set in landscaped grounds. What they wanted, evidently, was a house.

A particular strength of the study is Moroney's "big data" approach. Many useful insights derive from her analysis of large number of the designs: for instance, how many included dining rooms, fireplaces, or second bathrooms, and which among these features tended to get built. Other insights derive from comparing the submissions that architecture journals published with those that the jury honored. Sadly, Moroney did not have access to all the materials she needed. She is curious about the *Tribune's* business interest in the competition and how it got winning entries built. But only private company records can answer those questions. Still, *Chicagoland Dream Houses* offers a welcome look at a revealing episode in architectural, urban, and housing history that will appeal to specialists as well as general readers.

Strangers No Longer: Latino Belonging and Faith in Twentieth-Century Wisconsin, by Sergio M. González. Latinos in Chicago and the Midwest. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2024. 292 pp. Illustration, graphs, notes, index.

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Sergio González's *Strangers No Longer* traces the longstanding presence of Latinos in Wisconsin through religion. To tell this story González examines the faith-based organizations that helped Latinos claim belonging in the Midwest, a region synonymous with the White heartland. His work challenges the perception that Latinos are perpetual foreigners. Spanning from the 1920s to the 1980s, González frames his book around the practice of faith-based hospitality interactions that are sites of power and negotiation (9). The book details how Latinos reshaped the church into a space for community formation, labor activism, social services, and sanctuary. He argues that a diverse Latino community navigated