

Taj Mahal: Impressively Beautiful Architecture

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 12th in a series of dispatches to The Eccentric by Donald Dennis and his wife, Margaret, as they make a seven-month trip around the world. Dennis teaches art at Bloomfield Hills High School; his wife is a visiting teacher in the same school system. The following letter is written about their stay in India.

Poetry in marble—one man's devotion to his wife—a study in symmetry—a monument to eternal love—a masterpiece of Mughal architecture.

Call it whatever you wish, the Taj Mahal is an indescribably beautiful work of art and is certainly one of the seven wonders of the world. See it in the moonlight, at sunrise, at midday or at sunset, and you can see four completely different buildings.

OUR FIRST glimpse of Sh. Jahan's tribute to the memory of his wife was by full moon. It was close to 9 p.m., but the full moon afforded an abundance of cool light, and the shadows that it cast heightened the beauty of the marble.

The immediate impact of this view made us well aware that such a structure could never be justifiably described, either by the most prolific of prose writers or the most talented of visual artists.

OTHER IMPRESSIONS in sandstone and marble scattered throughout the Delhi-Agra area give mute evidence of an exciting and very romantic period in the history of India.

From the deserted city of Fatehpur-Sikri built by Akbar in 1569 to the Taj Mahal completed a century later, there was a period of building by the Mughal emperors that has no equal anywhere in the world.

Their love for beauty, coupled with their religious devotion and backed by an almost inexhaustible supply of artisans and materials, combined to create these monuments.

EVERYONE in Agra, the craft of working with marble and semi-precious stones continues on a father-to-son basis in much the same manner as then. The only difference is in the scale of the results.

In the case of the Taj Mahal, 12,000 men worked round the clock for 22 years to complete it while artisans today spend only a few hours or days on one item.

TO ATTEMPT to describe India after spending only 16 days observing it would do the country an injustice; it is as varied in its makeup as its more than 400 million population or one-and-a-quarter million square miles would indicate.

We visited Calcutta with its cattle in the streets, New Delhi with its wide carpeted boulevards, and quiet buildings, Agra with its

camels and Bombay with its growing pains. In each case we found an entirely different appearance to India.

HERE IN Bombay, thanks to the most gracious assistance of our hosts, Dr. and Mrs. Niel Pant, and in Poona with the Ratnaparkhis (an Indian family whose son, Prakash, is now an exchange student in Bloomfield Hills High School), we were afforded a firsthand view of the new India.

Dr. Pant (Prakash's uncle) gave us an excellent background of industrial India.

INDIA HAS made great progress in the past few years, and the evidence of continued growth is everywhere.

Just as strong as the thirst for industrial progress is the desire for more and better education.

Poona introduced us to this phase of development. From the minute that we stepped off the train Mr. Ratnaparkhis took us in hand and began to show us, with great pride, his India.

We visited with the entire family; saw Indian dancing (classical and modern); visited the schools;

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temples and religious centers; and we were introduced to Indian food as well as an elephant ride.

EVERYONE WE met was warm and friendly and made us feel as though we were part of the family. For the second time, we postponed our flight out of India and, with reluctance, we bid farewell to one of the most dynamic and unique countries we have ever visited. There is no doubt in our minds that we shall return to India someday when we can stay longer.

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'Raise High' Carries On Family Tradition

It was June 5, 1942, and the message was still on the mirror in the bathroom: "Raise high the roof beam, carpenters. Like Apsos comes the bridegroom, taller far than a tall man. Love, Irving Saphro, formerly under contract to Elysiun Studios, Ltd. Please be happy happy happy with your beautiful Murid. This is an order. I outrank everybody on this block."

Boo, Boo, a Wave whose duty had called her to parts unknown, had written it on the mirror with a moist siver of soap revolving an old family custom only nominally departed from by Buddy and Seymour.

However, there were signs of recent use. The coffee table was very damp as if from spilled drinks. A cigar end sat in the meter ashtray. One of the beds in the bedroom was mussed as though it had been napped on.

SIENS OF A recent party—no, it hadn't been a party; of callers—no, they hadn't been callers; of guests—yes, there had been guests (wedding guests, in fact)—I hadn't meant to let that out yet—that there'd been a wedding, that June 4, 1942, was Seymour's wedding day.

SEYMOUR didn't show up for the formal wedding, but, rather, waited for the bride to return with her parents to their apartment from whence they eloped, or so we're told in the short story which makes up the first and most compelling half of "Raise High the Roof of Beam Carpenters and Seymour—An Introduction" by J. D. Salinger.

THE STORY is a borrow from Salinger's own words, a highly inclusive recount of Seymour's wedding day in 1942.

The details are scribbled up with a fullness possibly just short of presenting the reader with a shetbet gold of each and every guest's footprint to take home as a souvenir, but Seymour himself—the main course—never puts in an appearance anywhere.

THE SECOND ITEM "Seymour, an Introduction" is an attempt by Buddy Glass to introduce us to—or, rather, impress us favorably with—his brother, Seymour.

What was he, anyway? A saint? Maybe he was. It lay "was" because we are told that Seymour is no longer living; having taken his own life in Florida in 1948.

But, saint or sinner or just "crazy mixed-up kid," I've grown fond of Seymour and, in fact, of all the Glasses: Buddy, Walt, Walter, and Zooey (his brothers), and Boo Boo and Franny (his sisters), and I want to know more of him and them.

Maybe I should explain who I am. Well, I'm one of Salinger's "general readers"; we're all over the place.

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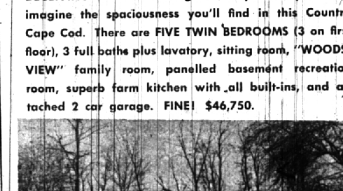
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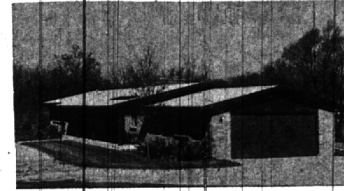
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