Campus Towers Offer Alchemy Roosts And Smoke, But No Bells

By BETTY CREECH

The first impression which a visitor receives of any university is probably the campus itself. The buildings of Rice blend to produce a unity of effect because of long range planning in campus architecture. The first buildings were constructed in a style reflecting Mediterranean influences, particularly Italian, and this precedent was followed in later construction.

ONE OF THE most interesting and noteworthy of the architectural features is the towers on campus. The earliest of these is the Rice landmark, the campanile. A part of the first building group finished, composed of the machine shop, the mechanical laboratory, and the powerhouse, it was designed as a chimney to remove poisonous gases. To students of language it may seem misnamed, for although the Italian campanile is a bell tower, our campanile is only a glorified smokestack. A smokestack would not have seemed quite congruous with the suave atmosphere of Rice, however, so we must have a bell tower. It mattered little that the campanile had no bells.

THIS ILLUSTRATES the Rice tradition of camouflage, making things appear better than they really are. This talent is useful in essay test questions, clothes, make-up, and hiding old smokestacks.

The campanile was built with a sort of canopy like a square hat modeled after the Italian architect. True again to Rice tradition, the campanile enlivened campus life by dropping a portion of this overhang which had been loosened by lightning. It fell through a skylight into a laboratory, narrowly missing the students.

ON TOP OF Lovett Hall stands the tower of power. The administration offices, the meeting place of the Board of Trustees, and the office of the President of the Institute were built in this central tower of four stories.

Also the single faculty men were originally housed in Faculty Tower over the old Commons Hall in Baker College. This is somewhat a reversal of the popular opinion which pictures the administration and faculty in deep, dark cellars.

OVER EACH laboratory in the chemistry building is a hood which leads through a network of ducts to empty into the chemistry tower. This tower is part of the ventilation system of the building. However, in addition to its utilitarian purpose, the chemistry building, including the tower, was designed to be ornamental. For example, several symbols of the ancient alchemy both decorate and add atmosphere to the classes held here. They also serve as a study guide for the serious student of alchemy.

ABOVE ALL of this, the tower stands aloof and proud. While the chemistry building displays signs brought in by the students, the tower is a monument to true science. It is octagonal in shape corresponding to the eight families of elements. On each side is a plaque bearing the atomic symbol of one of the first eight elements. It eagerly displays at least those eight symbols to any chemistry student in need of a cheat sheet, provided that he has a pair of binoculars. In addition, the chemistry tower often houses a number of pigeons and owls, showing a warm friendliness and remarkable school spirit.

THE CAMpanile of the chapel in the student center is the most recent addition to the family of towers. The architecture of the student center echoes that of the older buildings, and so this bell tower is also modeled after the Italian campanile. It was inspired by the tower of the church of Saint Francis of Assisi and was executed in imported tile and Italian marble; unfortunately the body was not removed. This bell tower is at least slightly more sincere in its claims. The electric chimes sound like bells.