

Dorothy Pelzer (1915-1972), Architect/Researcher



Dorothy Pelzer was born in America in 1915. She studied at the Institute of Design in Chicago from 1937 to 1941. In 1947, she went to the MIT and obtained a master's degree in Architecture in 1950. Subsequently, she both practised and taught architecture until 1958. Pelzer joined the International Voluntary Service at Vientiane and Laos between 1962 to 1963. After she left IVS, Pelzer decided to stay on in Southeast Asia doing research on her own. She wanted to document the fine traditional house forms which were fast decaying or being destroyed without records being kept.

Dorothy Pelzer travelled extensively, under difficult conditions, in nine Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines. She had assembled 31,000 black and white photographs and 7000 colour slides. She believed that the domestic village houses embodied the culture through their architecture, social customs and religious traditions.

In 1970, Dorothy Pelzer returned to America trying to get publishers for her book Houses are people. She did manage to get the contracts but unfortunately she became seriously ill with cancer in 1971. She died in 1972 without a draft.