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2006 OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LAS VEGAS CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

LAS VEGAS

The DESIGN AWARDS

FROM A CONTROL TOWER TO A DOG SHELTER, THIS YEAR'S WINNERS BUILD VEGAS' MOMENTUM

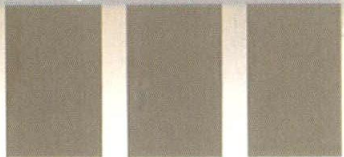
Model Homes: THREE ARCHITECTS LEAD BY EXAMPLE

THE MEANING OF Frank Gehry IN VEGAS

Plus

DAYE HICKEY ON 'The Vegas Loophole'

ALAN HESS ON 'The Next Dimension'



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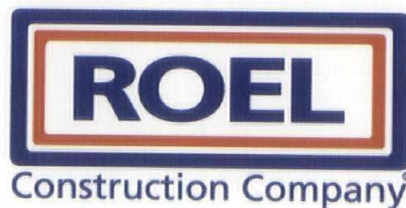
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LAS VEGAS

4
President's Note

8
Contributors

11
Orientation

- Alan Hess on the Strip's next evolution.
- Nevada's sudden green movement.
- Solutions to the teacher housing crunch.
- A design think tank ... in Vegas.
- One creative corporate space.

23
Urban Planning

The AIA offered some sage advice in 1969—and much of it still applies.
BY GREG BLAKE MILLER

37
Revitalization

Phoenix's long downtown struggle could teach Las Vegas a thing or two.
BY NORA BURBA TRULSSON

89
AIA Las Vegas

Celebrating a long, productive past, and predicting architecture's future. Plus ...

- AIA Milestones
- AIA Honors
- AIA Events

97
On the Boards

Snapshots of some fresh designs by local AIA architects.

104
Perspective

Architecture loosens up, thanks to "The Vegas Loophole."
BY DAVE HICKEY



46
Home Remedies

Three architects show us all how to create more affordable, sustainable and livable homes in the desert.

BY PHIL HAGEN

54
Upping the Ante

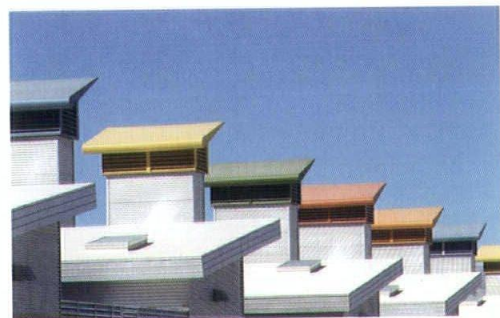
Meet seven Las Vegasans helping to evolve our visual sophistication.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON MAYES
STORIES BY AMY SCHMIDT

62
Getting Gehry

We attempt to answer a few lingering questions about the controversial Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Center design and its architect.

BY SCOTT EDWARDS



66
Design Winners

Once again, we roll out the year's best in Las Vegas architecture. But first, a five-year progress report ...

BY WILLIAM L. FOX



COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN KARCHMER
COURTESY TATE SNYDER KIMSEY ARCHITECTS

50 Years of Architecture Leadership



LAST YEAR THE CITY OF LAS VEGAS CELEBRATED ITS CENTENNIAL. This year the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects celebrates 50 years. As Las Vegas has grown, so has the discussion about architecture and the importance of design, as well as the need for our magazine. With this sixth issue of *Architecture Las Vegas*, we focus on the contributions made by our members and the influence they have had on the way our city looks and functions.

Living, working and designing in a 24/7 town has always presented a unique challenge, one that architects here have eagerly accepted. Back in 1969, George Tate and other members of the AIA were called upon to devise a growth plan for the City of Las Vegas. Their research and conclusions were published that year as "A Checklist for Cities." Upon reviewing this document some 40 years later, writer Greg Blake Miller

finds that many of the same issues and concerns are still being contemplated by our city ("The Eternal Checklist," Page 23). While revisiting the Checklist, he also reiterates the need for these recommendations to be incorporated into the city's future plans.

Meantime, in "Lessons From Phoenix" (Page 37), Arizona writer Nora Burba Trulsson examines the efforts of Las Vegas' "sister city" to the south to redevelop its downtown, and, in a sidebar, *Las Vegas Review-Journal* business reporter Jennifer Robison considers what lessons might be applied here.

As a growing city in a desert, Las Vegas faces problems that require unique solutions. In "Home Remedies" (Page 46), Editor Phil Hagen writes about three local architects' approaches to solving their own housing requirements, and finds their sustainable and affordable designs to be important examples for all of us. Meantime, the "Testing Affordable Housing" story (Page 16) discusses the Clark County School District's efforts to provide housing for teachers. Later this year, AIA Las Vegas, in partnership with the Lied Real Estate Institute, will attack the issue of housing for our growing workforce by inviting local officials and planners to participate in a one-day seminar, "Workforce Housing: Attainable and Sustainable Solutions for Southern Nevada."

Frank Gehry's controversial design for the Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Center has brought international attention to Las Vegas and, no doubt, will be discussed for years to come. A friend of mine stated, "The public is upset because the design is too different; the architects are upset that it is not different enough." Writer Scott Edwards distills the debate into a thought-provoking article ("Getting Gehry," Page 62) that asks four big questions, including "What does the building mean to Las Vegas?"

While the projects that received this year's Excellence in Design Awards may not receive international acclaim, they are, nonetheless, examples of the kind of first-rate work done every day by local architects. Review them starting on Page 70 and decide for yourself!

This year we lost one of our most valuable members, closest associates and most influential leaders. Dale Scheideman, AIA, passed away on February 8. He will be greatly missed. You can see why on Page 91.

This year's *Architecture Las Vegas* team deserves many thanks. The writers, editor, art director, editorial board and the publisher have all put many hours toward this year's edition. AIA Las Vegas now publishes its own magazine, headed by Executive Director Randy Lavigne and assisted by Debi Raffi. Led by Hagen, our editorial board discussions were lively and thoughtful. I am grateful for my year of service, as I never realized the time, energy and effort required to publish our magazine.

I hope you enjoy it, and that it will inspire you to reflect on our community, our history, our future and, of course, our architecture.

Wade J. Simpson, AIA
2006 President, AIA Las Vegas

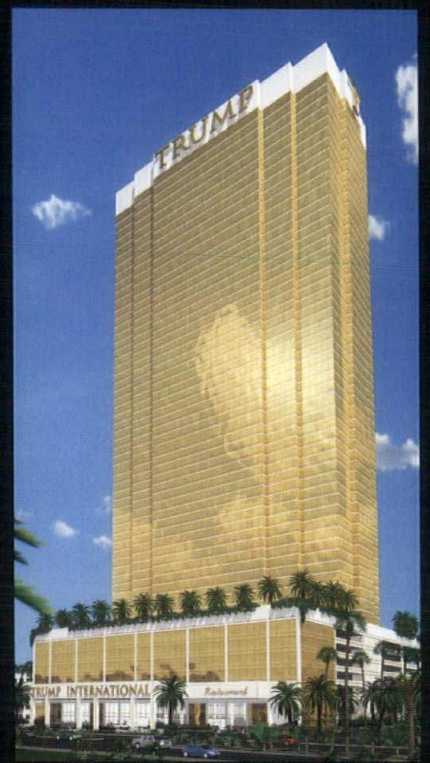
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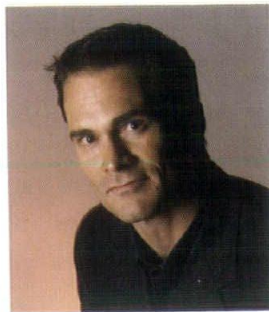
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Phil Hagen has been editor of *Architecture Las Vegas* since its launch in 2000. Twice it has won a Maggie Award for Best Annual Publication in the West. Hagen owns Vegas Ink, a writing, editing and consulting company, along with business partner **Amy Schmidt**, a veteran design writer who contributed this issue's stories on the Institute of Modern Letters ("Design of the Times," Page 18), an inspiring headquarters ("Office Maxed," Page 20) and seven local design sophisticates ("Upping the Ante," Page 54). Together they produce the annual *Cultural Guide* for Nevada Public Radio and the quarterly *First Friday* newsletter for the Downtown Arts District, among other publications.

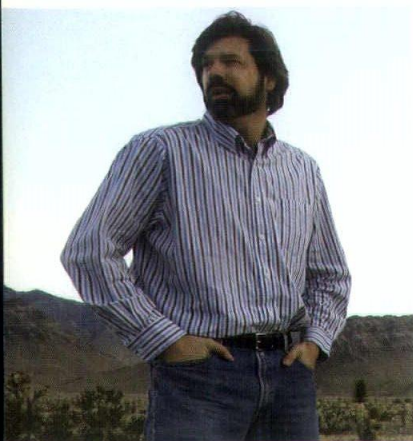


Phil Hagen

DialV9Design partners **Sonda Andersson Pappan** and **Michael Shavali** are national-award-winning designers who specialize in the creative development of consumer magazines, newspapers and custom publications. While design director for New Times (now Village Voice Media), Pappan headed the redesign or start-up of more than a dozen of the company's publications. She has also designed for *SPY*, *GQ* and *Rolling Stone*. This is the second year she has art-directed *Architecture Las Vegas* along with Shavali, a design contributor.

For our "Upping the Ante" portraits (starting on Page 54), photographer **Aaron Mayes** captured design-savvy Las Vegas whose ideas for our city differ from those found in tract homes and box stores. "One element each of my subjects had in common was a desire to build a better Southern Nevada," Mayes says. "More style. More class. More interesting. And each person is definitely working toward that goal." A full-time photographer at UNLV, Mayes takes on the occasional special project in between running after his three-year-old daughter and her twin one-year-old siblings.

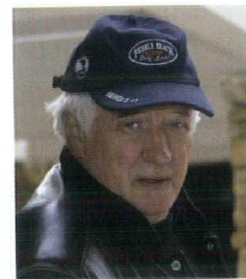
In our very first issue, **William L. Fox** wrote about the AIA Design Awards from the jury's perspective. Now, five years later, we thought that idea deserved an encore as a way of gauging local architecture's progress (see "A Measure of Success" on Page 67). A member of the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, Fox is the author of several books on the human response to deserts in art and architecture, including last year's *In the Desert of Desire: Las Vegas and the Culture of Spectacle* (University of Nevada Press). His work has been recognized by the Guggenheim Foundation, National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He now lives in Los Angeles.



Aaron Mayes

Who better to evaluate the latest incarnation of the Strip ("The Next Dimension," Page 11) than **Alan Hess**, author of *Viva Las Vegas: Afterhours Architecture* (Chronicle Books), perhaps the most respected book on our desert city's mythical built environment? A regular contributor to *Architecture Las Vegas*, the Los Angeles resident is one of the leading architecture critics in the West. His latest books are *The Ranch House* (Harry Abrams), *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (Chronicle Books) and *Oscar Niemeyer: Houses* (Rizzoli International), now in bookstores. *Organic Architecture: The Other Modernism* (Gibbs Smith, Publisher) will be out in fall 2006.

The words and thoughts of **Dave Hickey**, winner of the MacArthur "Genius" Award in 2001, are valuable currency in both the art and architecture worlds. The Las Vegas-based cultural critic, who wrote our back-page essay ("The Vegas Loophole," Page 104), has lectured widely about issues in both realms, and he has contributed articles to many major publications, including *Rolling Stone*, *Artforum*, *Harper's* and *Vanity Fair*. He has taught as a visiting professor at the Southern California School of Architecture (Sci-Arc) in Los Angeles and the Graduate School of Design at Harvard, and served as the Cullinan Chair of Architecture at Rice University. In 1992, he delivered the Preston H. Thomas Memorial Lectures on Architecture at Cornell. He currently teaches in the creative writing program at UNLV.



Dave Hickey



Nora Burba Trulsson

To tell the story of downtown Phoenix's rise from the ashes ("Lessons from Phoenix," Page 37), we called on **Nora Burba Trulsson**, a Scottsdale, Arizona-based freelance journalist. She is the editor of *Sources+Design*, a bimonthly magazine for design professionals, and co-author of *Living Homes: Sustainable Architecture and Design* (Chronicle Books, 2001). Her articles on design, travel and lifestyle have appeared in *Sunset*, *Western Interiors and Design*, *Renovation Style*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *Arizona Highways*.

Greg Blake Miller, who has contributed to *Architecture Las Vegas* since 2001, was the perfect match for "The Eternal Checklist" (Page 23), a story that required an insider's knowledge as well as outside perspective—of both time and place. Raised in Las Vegas, he has reported on urban design, the environment, politics and culture in communities from Orange County to Moscow. He currently teaches journalism at UNLV and is the author of the forthcoming novel *This Game We Play*.



The Next Dimension

The CityCenter and Las Ramblas 'mini cities' aren't reinventing the urban form in Vegas; they are evolving it—in a big way. **BY ALAN HESS**

FORGET EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT VEGAS," URGES THE website for Las Ramblas, one of the two enormous developments that are launching the next phase of Las Vegas. That slogan may be smart marketing, but it's a bad way to do architecture. As trendy and (say it again) enormous as are both Las Ramblas (at Harmon Avenue near the Hard Rock) and MGM's Project CityCenter (next to Bellagio on Las Vegas Boulevard), they are in fact solidly rooted in the fundamental urban patterns hard-wired into the Strip when El Rancho Vegas opened in 1941. If their architects and developers understand this, they'll make a real contribution to Las Vegas architecture.

Both new projects have the complexity and appearance of miniature cities. They combine all the functions of a city, from entertainment venues and retail to residential units and parks. But these diverse uses have been part of Strip hotels since the early days, when the Flamingo, Desert Inn and Sands provided every amenity to visitors so they would not stray off campus.

What's new today is the scale. Las Ramblas (Centra Properties and Related Las Vegas, with George Clooney and

Rande Gerber as major investors) will have 11 buildings on 25 acres at a cost of \$3 billion, with the first phase opening in 2008. CityCenter (MGM Mirage) will open in 2009 with at least a dozen buildings on 66 acres for \$6 billion.

In the previous phase of Strip development, beginning with the Mirage in 1989, a single large tower, setback from the street, dominated a collection of low-rise buildings housing restaurants, casinos and shops clustered around its base, the way a Medici villa dominates a small Italian hill town. Bellagio's design exploited this striking contrast in a handsome urban composition: a tree-lined promenade in the foreground, framed by a mid-ground spectacle of water and fountains, with the baronial tower completing the scene like a theatrical backdrop.

That model is changing. Increasing demand is not only pushing the Strip outward (with Las Ramblas, a second major tendril has sprouted: the Harmon corridor from Paradise Road all the way to Interstate 15) but upward. In the new prototype introduced by Las Ramblas and CityCenter—and expected to be followed by Boyd Gaming, which will build its \$4 billion Echelon Place on the Stardust's 63 acres—a dense

The first phase of Las Ramblas will consist of four hotel and condo towers.



The 66-acre, \$6 billion CityCenter is coming to the Strip in 2009.

conglomeration of tower blocks rise across the entire site. Instead of the leisurely suburban spaciousness of the older model, these organize the space and architecture in the urban image of gridiron blocks with boulevard-like streets and pedestrian ways cutting through them. Buildings rise from sidewalks lined with stores, hotel lobbies and restaurants on the ground floor. Part-time residents in condos mix with weekend visitors in hotel rooms.

Is Las Vegas really turning into Manhattan? No. This is simply the latest evolution of the linear downtown pioneered by Los Angeles' Wilshire Boulevard in the 1920s, when the suburban metropolis was first established as the 20th century's premier urban form.

The CityCenter and Las Ramblas designs are ambivalent about whether they see themselves as an inevitable step in

The Strip is not so much changing its character as maturing as an urban form.

the evolution of Las Vegas' vital and innovative urban form, but they obviously take pride in their big-name architects, who show little sensitivity to the Las Vegas context. Las Ramblas hired Arquitectonica for its centerpiece hotel. CityCenter sought out Cesar Pelli for its twin curving towers. Rafael Viñoly, Norman Foster and Kohn Pederson Fox are waiting in the wings for future CityCenter phases. The developers' innocent faith in name-brand architects is puzzling, given the fact that Rem Koolhaas left town without a trace after designing the Guggenheim at the Venetian.

Pelli's buildings are (as is to be expected) sleek, sophisticated, hard-edged and corporate, in contrast to the fanciful populist themed extravaganzas of recent years. Arquitectonica's modernist egg crate facades for Las Ramblas'

high-rise hotel aims directly at the hipster demographic. Of course, hip modern design was at the heart of Wayne McAllister's Sands hotel design, and Milton Schwartz's Dunes, too, in the '50s and '60s, but they expressed a festive spaciousness that suited the desert playground.

Equally disturbing is CityCenter's boast that they are bringing "Times Square-style neon" to Las Vegas. Whatever happened to Las Vegas-style neon—one of the region's great contributions to modern architecture? This exposes a major blind spot in the designs.

There are, however, some encouraging signs that these designs don't take the neo-urbanist slogans too seriously. CityCenter especially appears to have learned from the complex layering of scale and spaces seen in the plans of Bellagio and Caesars Palace as they have grown, adding new towers, shops, wings and pools. With a pleasingly Roman palimpsest of open spaces and varied forms, these elements interweave pool terraces and promenades within the dense blocks of buildings and the wide-open spaces of the casino space. It is fortunately not a monolithic mega-structure.

Links to neighboring hotels are created at the middle and rear of the property, creating a practical and pleasurable hierarchy of spaces and pathways. Bellagio's magnificent pool terrace, for example, will blend into CityCenter's in a large unified space. This Strip serendipity is aided by common ownership, but the architects and planners can be credited with exploring the possibilities of these intriguing public spaces.

These new projects may look like traditional urban models, but they aren't. Joined by new condos, destination malls and smaller boutique hotel-casinos under construction or planned, the Strip is not so much changing its character as maturing as an urban form. The suburban model that gave the Strip its innovative power is still at work. Las Vegas may yet invent the ultimate form of the 21st-century city. ■


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Taking the LEED

Nevada's new green law gives a needed boost to sustainable design in Las Vegas.

BY TONY ILLIA

THE LEADERSHIP IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN program (LEED), architecture's nationally popular sustainable approach, has had a major breakthrough in Southern Nevada with the passage of Assembly Bill 3. The new law offers up to a 10-year, 50 percent property tax cut on private developments that achieve a LEED Silver rating or higher. Nevada is only the second state to pass such legislation. AB3 also requires that all state-funded projects meet basic LEED requirements.



The community college's Telecom building should land a Silver rating for its green design.

LEED is the U.S. Green Building Council's six-year-old method for grading project sustainability. Points are awarded in six categories, including energy and water efficiency, work atmosphere and indoor air quality. Ratings go from basic certification up to Silver, Gold and Platinum.

While developers are sometimes leery of LEED due to added upfront expenses that can run up to 15 percent,

the value comes from long-term operational savings through conservation and improved efficiencies.

"Operating costs account for 35 to 50 percent of office rents, yet energy bills can vary up to \$1-per-square-foot among similar buildings," said B. Alan Whitson, a national authority on facility design and management. "Turning green can cut energy costs by 40 percent or more. Upgrading building's lighting can add \$6-per-square-foot to its value.

Because the three-to five-year process begins after project completion, Southern Nevada has no LEED buildings but there are about two dozen local projects registered and awaiting LEED certification. The first one should be the two-year-old Telecom Building at the Cheyenne Campus of the Community College of Southern Nevada, and it is expected to receive a Silver rating.

Design-build collaborators JMA Architecture Studios and Martin-Harris Construction used recycled materials in more than 25 percent of the 85,000-square-foot building. Nearly three-quarters of the lighting comes from a combination of windows, light shelves and magnified skylights, which reduces electrical bills while creating a better learning environment (studies show that natural light results in higher test scores and happier people). While achieving LEED criteria added \$500,000 to the cost, it's expected to cut operating expenses by more than 20 percent annually.

The Clark County School District, one of Las Vegas' biggest landlords, expects to follow LEED to operational savings starting with the Northwest Career and Technical Center at Durango and U.S. 95. Designed by SH Architecture, the 213,000-square-foot facility will use artificial turf, waterless urinals, recycled materials, a storm-water filtration system and electronic metering to monitor energy-use. The project to be finished in spring 2007, is pursuing a Silver rating.

It's an environment-friendly building that will reduce energy costs by more than 50 percent, the district says. Given that it's built to last 50 years, that could be quite a savings. ■

THE GREEN SHOWCASE

The Las Vegas Springs Preserve, a 180-acre urban park under way at Valley View Boulevard just south of U.S. Highway 95, stands to catapult public awareness of green building. The Las Vegas Valley Water District is transforming the site that once provided water to early settlers into a sustainability showcase featuring low-water, energy-efficient demonstration buildings and gardens. Beyond the straw-filled retaining walls, which protect the microclimate for plants and animals

inside, there is a 30-acre "cienega," or wetlands area, formed from recycled water, and a 46,000-square-foot Desert Living Center built with rammed-earth walls for improved heating and cooling. The center, designed by Lucchesi Galati, uses shredded jeans for insulation and railroad ties as roof trusses. A 50,000-square-foot Visitors Center by Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects is built from recycled steel siding and lime-based plaster. The preserve will open in late 2007.

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Design of the Times

The Institute of Modern Letters begins contemplating contemporary art and architecture issues from the 'perfect' vantage point: Vegas. **BY AMY SCHMIDT**

THIS IS MECCA FOR ME," SAYS LIBBY LUMPKIN AS SHE settles into the low, cozy booth underneath a canopy of fake flora in the dimly lit Peppermill Fireside Lounge on Las Vegas Boulevard. "It embodies all of the principles of great entertainment design. I even wrote an essay on it for the State Museum in Belgium."

So it's fitting that we're here to discuss her new role as director of Design Discourse for the Las Vegas-based International Institute of Modern Letters. It was that particular essay, "Loving Las Vegas: Fine Art and Entertainment," that heightened the art critic and historian's interest in writing about design.

The Belgian museum was hosting a casino-themed exhibition during that period, in the late 1990s, when Vegas was the place to visit for students serious about design. Lumpkin, and her husband, fellow critic Dave Hickey (who wrote the essay on Page 104), hosted many of these students during their stint as professors in UNLV's College of Fine

Arts. So the museum asked Lumpkin to write about the Las Vegas aesthetic, what she calls the only "unique, fully indigenous American architecture."

In doing so, she defined the difference between fine

art and design by explaining their audiences: While design appeals to the broadest audience possible, fine art appeals to a much smaller slice of the population. She concluded that in order to appeal to the broadest number of people, entertainment design had to trade on recognizable conventions, but with convention comes boredom. How do you mitigate boredom? "You spectacularize it, and Vegas spectacularizes better than anyone else."

It is these theories that deserve further exploration. But one of the things she found while teaching art at various universities was that they were preaching the same theories over and over—theories that were relevant at the height of conceptual style.

The mission of the institute's design arm, Lumpkin says, is "to eradicate the hierarchal distinction between fine art and design in terms of its appropriateness to receive scholarly attention." And it won't be limited to just writing about entertainment design, but design in terms of objects, institutions, cities—you name it. "Las Vegas is the perfect place to contemplate design."

Lumpkin plans to establish the institute's rep by publishing a series of books on art and architecture. The first will be a book on Morris Lapidus (see sidebar below), followed by books on artists such as Jim Isermann who "make fine art that looks more like design," and a series of books on ongoing architectural projects from conception to completion, including the restoration of the Lapidus-designed Fontainebleau in Miami and the construction of the Las Vegas version. (Fontainebleau Resorts CEO Glenn Schaeffer is the founder of the Institute of Modern Letters.)

Overall, the Design Discourse will be devoted to writing about a variety of issues, and Lumpkin is open to ideas. "We're looking for innovation and originality in the proposals that cross our desk," she says. "If I could find another Robert Venturi, I would be delighted." ■



Libby Lumpkin also serves as executive director of the Las Vegas Art Museum.

REVISITING LAPIDUS

For its first book, the International Institute of Modern Letters' Blue Fountain Press has picked an appropriate subject: Morris Lapidus.

"Much like Vegas," Libby Lumpkin says, "Lapidus has been hissed at by blue bloods and academics alike. This book will allow us to understand what design principles of his have allowed him to be redeemed."

The "father of commercial architecture," as she refers to him, Lapidus designed more than 250 hotels worldwide, including the Fontainebleau and Eden Roc hotels in Miami in the

1950s, which had a "big influence" on the early Strip.

The book will include substantial excerpts from two of Lapidus' books, *An Architecture of Joy* (1979) and *Too Much Is Never Enough* (1996), plus an essay by Lumpkin's husband, Dave Hickey, on the architect's ahead-of-the-curve postmodern style.

The \$1.5 billion, 4,000-room Fontainebleau Las Vegas (expected to break ground this year) will draw heavily from the influences of Lapidus, what CEO Glenn Schaeffer refers to as "Miami Swank."

—A.S.

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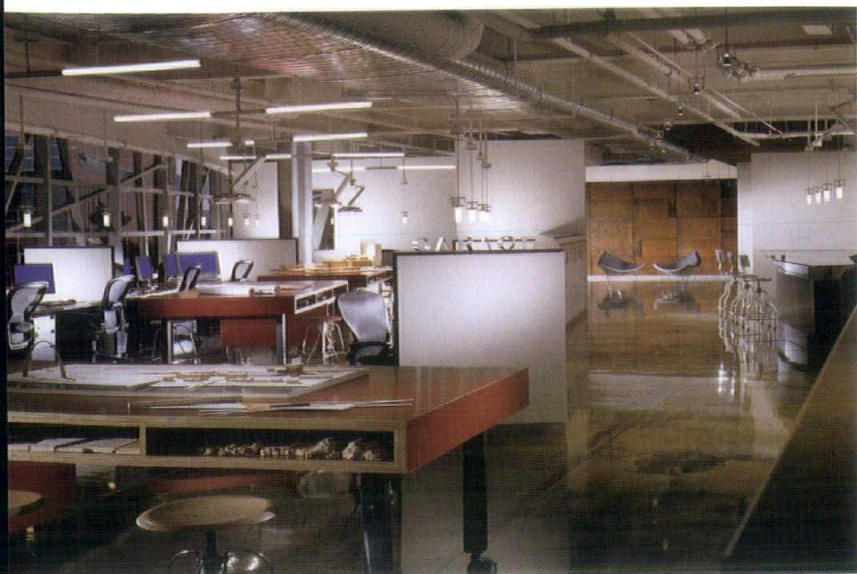
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Vegas firm generates efficiency and excitement with its open work environment, innovative lighting and brand-new design lab. **BY AMY SCHMIDT**

SOMETIMES LESS REALLY IS MORE. TAKE FOR INSTANCE THE Mies Van der Rohe-inspired corporate offices of Marnell Corrao Associates, the premier design-build firm in the city. Much like one of the late architect's most famous buildings, the German National Pavilion in Barcelona, it's an open space of glass, travertine and polished steel that offers a natural flow inside and out. In the reception area, you'll even find Barcelona chairs like the ones Van der Rohe designed for the Pavilion in 1929. Together, the overlapping planes, polished vertical columns and sunshiny clerestories create a voluminous, grid-like structure that exudes as much confidence as it inspires.

At 48,000 square feet, the three-year-old building houses Marnell Corrao's Architecture, Design, Construction and Development offices for more than 1,500 employees. Because CEO Tony Marnell, AIA, is the "referee between art and finance," quipped President of Architecture Brett Ewing, AIA, during a recent tour, his office divides the simple, symmetrical space, along with an open plaza where Marnell Corrao hosts client presentations.

On the left, waist-high, charcoal-colored panel walls were recently reconfigured to form mentoring stations where junior architects learn the ropes from senior staff members. Also added were U-shaped collaborative hubs for the architecture and interior design teams, fostering a "studio-style atmosphere where employees feed off of each other's creative energies," Ewing says. And in a corner of the two-story structure, the design library takes full advantage of the high ceilings with a mezzanine and stairs constructed of metal and frosted glass to allow in as much daylight as possible.

On the right, the accounting, human resources and purchasing offices use the same materials, finishes and color palette—in slightly different configurations, but still allowing for a seamless visual experience.

And then there's the view. Because Marnell Corrao sits on a piece of desert just east of McCarran International Airport, the walls of windows offer unobstructed views of the Valley's natural and manmade beauty, including some of the company's largest projects—New York-New York, MGM Grand and Excalibur.

It's downstairs, though, in the Garage—the company's design laboratory, also added during recent renovations—where Marnell Corrao literally and figuratively "busts out of the box," Ewing says. While the vibe on the upper level is quite distinguished, the Garage is where the creative mechanics—the interior, graphic and fashion designers—get a project's engine to purr amid the exposed duct work, polished concrete floors and a decidedly asymmetrical glass wall. It's an underground industrial warehouse of good design.

What does this all add up to? A working environment lauded by employees, clients and visitors alike. "We have new employees from all over the country who tell us this is the nicest office they have ever worked in," Ewing says.

But it is the openness of the overall plan that really gets Ewing's creative juices flowing. "There's no distinct hierarchy in the company or the building," Ewing says. "I started here 18 years ago as a draftsman. If you have the drive, the ambition, the wherewithal, you can do anything—and you're encouraged to do so." ■



"The Garage" is Marnell Corrao's new design lab (shown top, inside and out). Pictured above is the design library.

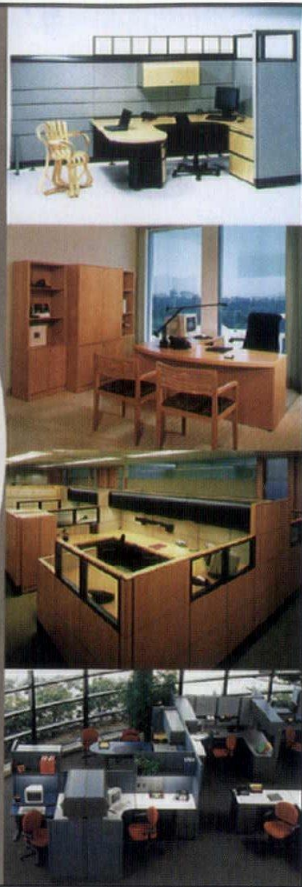


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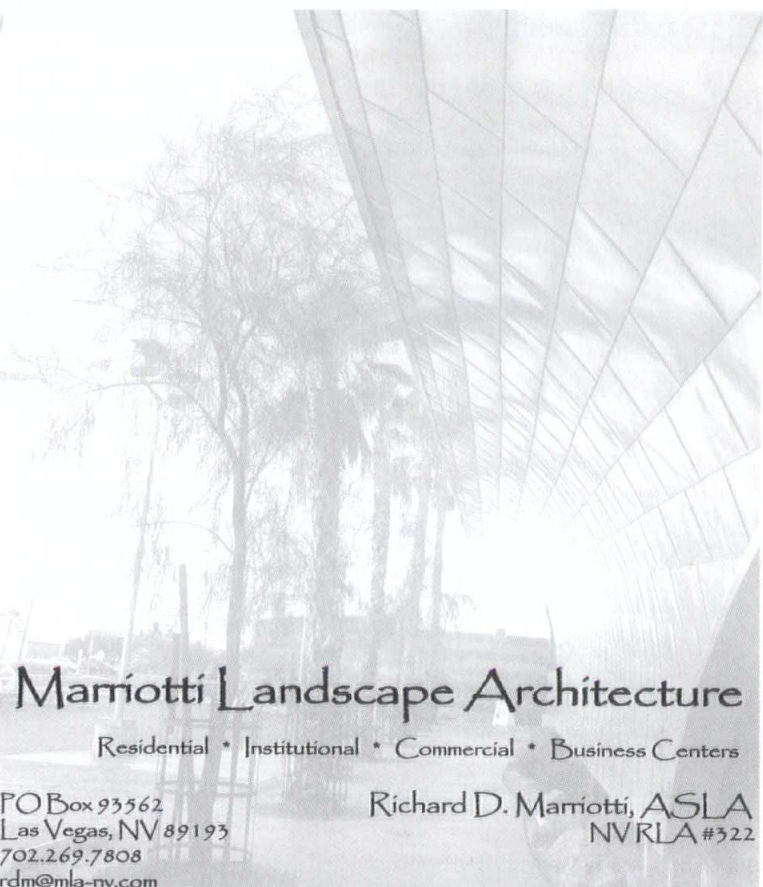
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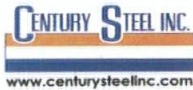
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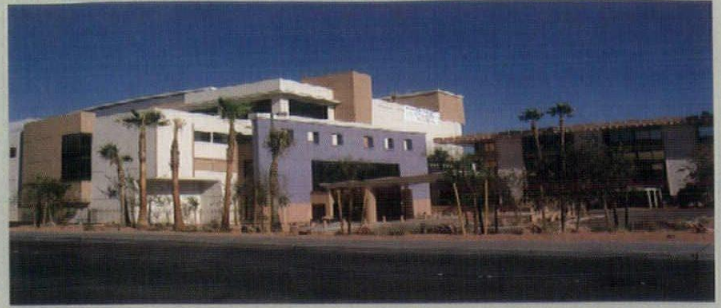
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The American Institute of Architects was created in 1857. For the last 149 years the organization has provided education, government advocacy, community development and public outreach activities, and has endeavored to create an environment that is responsive to the people it serves. As members of the AIA, more than 77,000 licensed architects and associated professionals express their commitment to quality design and livability in our communities throughout the country. The Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects – AIA Las Vegas – was established in 1956, and has served the Las Vegas community for fifty years.

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The Eternal Checklist

In 1969, a group of Las Vegas architects mapped out some goals for our city. Their ideas still sound just about right. **BY GREG BLAKE MILLER**

ANY CITY THAT'S A MERE 100 YEARS OLD AND ALREADY capable of calling itself a world capital of this or that is bound to suffer the curse of the young prodigy: On the outside, there's a peacock's strut, a joyful excess of self-regard; on the inside, the nagging sense that the glory has come too fast, with high costs, and may prove in the end to be skin deep and unsteady and (chills run down the civic spine at this) fraudulent. What if what happens here stays here because nobody out there really gives a damn what happens here? What if, in successfully peddling a glamorous air of unreality, Las Vegas forgot to do what it takes to become real?

A city that sees itself as an essential place, one that is at once singular and central to the larger culture, had better be built upon a community strong enough to sustain and enhance this singularity. A city comes into its own precisely to the degree it is willing to confront the central question of its existence: How do we create a place that serves the needs of commerce, respects the gifts and limitations of the environment, and facilitates the physical and spiritual health of its people? A challenge like this winds up in the file folders of many professionals, from politicians to teachers to traffic engineers, but the dreamers behind any grand notion of civic design, the ones who try to envision a coherent townscape that makes all the other

possibilities a little more possible, are the architects.

Ideally.

Sometimes.

Conditions permitting.

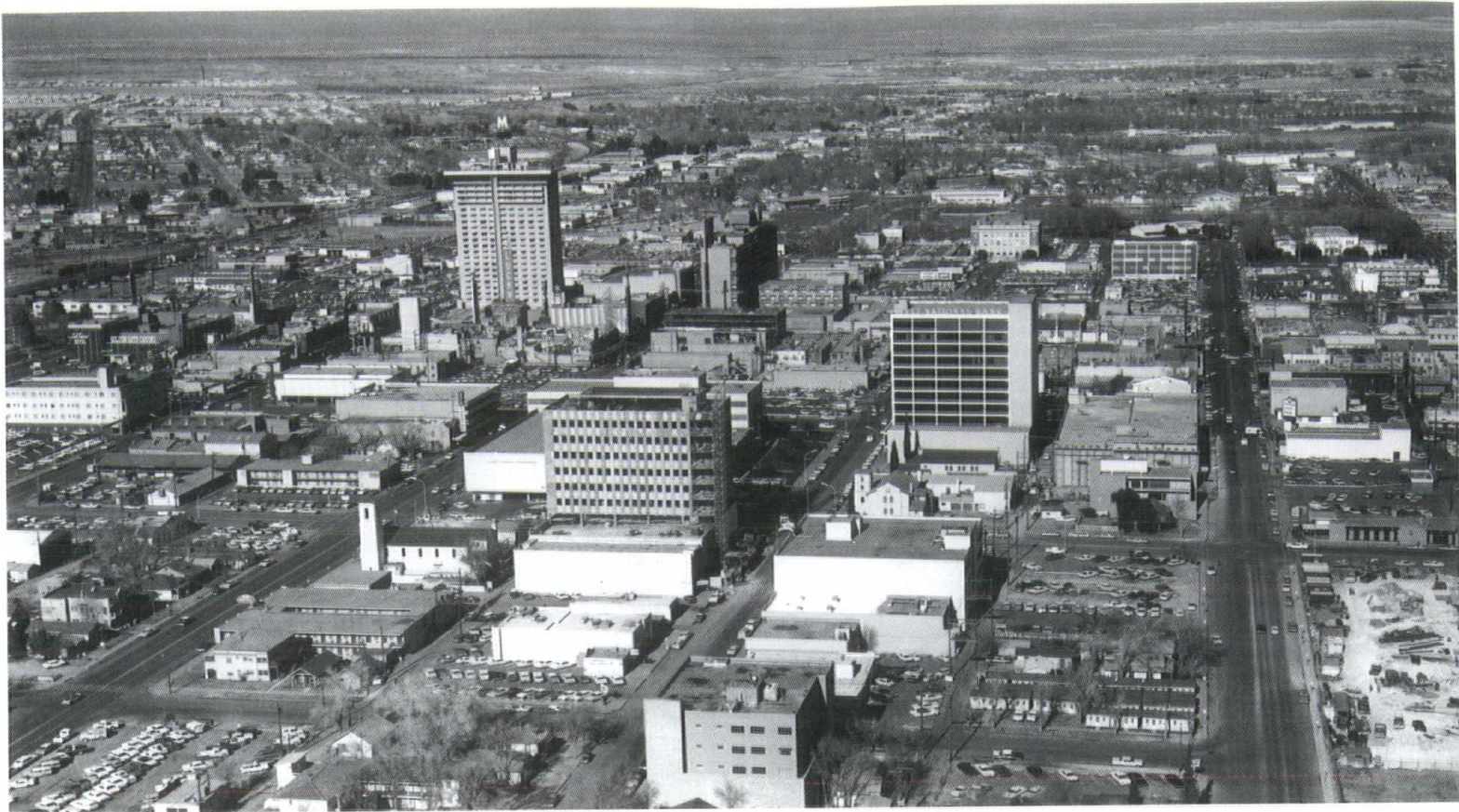
If anyone is listening.

In 1969, a group of Las Vegas architects got together and created a document that is at once strikingly clear-headed—full of specific, highly plausible traffic-flow recommendations for specific Downtown intersections—and palpably romantic. A grand dream built from the sum of small realities. They sought to tell us what ails our city from a design standpoint, and how to fix it. They wrote modestly and convincingly. The document they produced, "A Checklist for Cities," was read and taken seriously and printed in the Sunday edition of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.

Thirty-five years later, everything these men (for, in keeping with the realities of the day, they were indeed all men) spotted as a problem remains a problem. And the solutions they proposed remain, by and large, the solutions we need.

1. A Time of Change

By the late 1960s, Downtown Las Vegas—with its cowboy clubs and cramped quarters, its neighborhoods rejected



Downtown, circa 1969, was already a victim of leap-frog growth.

by the middle class and its fast-folding retail establishments—was more than a decade into its long twilight. The center of economic power had moved to the Strip, shoppers were fleeing to Maryland Parkway, and local professionals had put down roots in Paradise Valley. At this very time, as luck would have it, Lady Bird Johnson was riding the coat-tails of her husband's "War on Poverty" with a call for urban renewal that came to be called the "War on Ugliness."

In the spirit of this "war," the American Institute of Architects called on its chapters across the country to conduct regional studies based on a handful of general indica-

The AIA was not out to create Utopia but offer real solutions for Downtown.

tors of the quality of urban design and, hence, of urban life. The Las Vegas group, like others, discussed transport infrastructure, the development of pedestrian opportunities, and the division and distribution of land for residential, commercial, institutional and recreational use. In 1969, they completed their 51-page report—the aforementioned Checklist—which drew the sort of conclusions that hardly shock but seem always to go unheeded:

- While conceding that the townspeople might not be ready to embrace the idea, the architects called for the eventual development of rapid transit, and in particular for a monorail.

- They cautioned that unregulated signage could give the city the air of a cheap honky-tonk.

- They proclaimed walking the most pleasant of urban activities and called for the reestablishment of a walkable city.

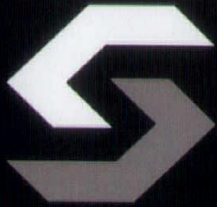
- They warned of the costs—esthetic, spiritual, environmental and financial—of sprawl.

- They called for an end to the strip commercial zoning that clogged the city's roadways, and for the development of commercial-free "traveled routes" to get people more swiftly to the secondary streets where they would do their shopping.

- They fretted over the "ever-widening ring of obsolescence" caused by the collapse of Downtown's residential neighborhoods.

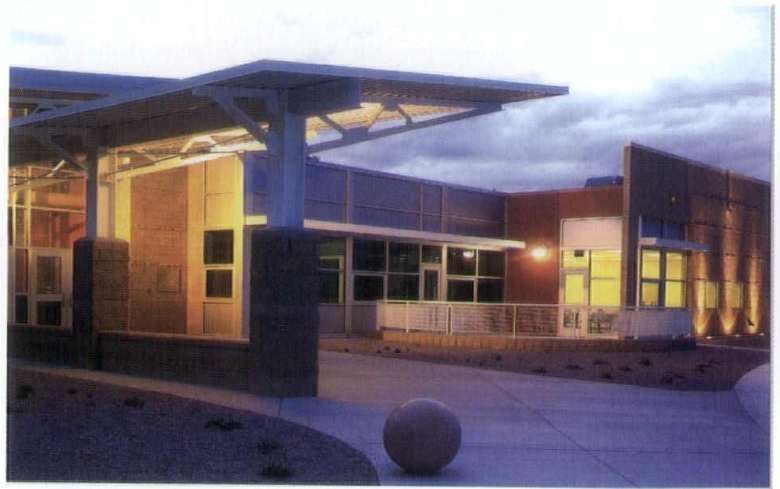
- They accepted freeways only as a partial solution to the problem of connecting the scattered pieces of a fast-growing city.

Many of the challenges the architects faced were national in scope: Modernism had given many developers a ready aesthetic excuse for simply being cheap, free not only from ornamentation but also from any sort of interesting form. The structure of cities, meanwhile, was being determined by the automobile, fueling both suburban sprawl and a general lack of regard for the pedestrian. The look and scale of streetscapes had become an afterthought. Some of the problems they faced were made worse by the economic and philosophical peculiarities of Las Vegas. There was, for instance, no children's recreation center in a city built around grown-up games, so the Las Vegas group made a



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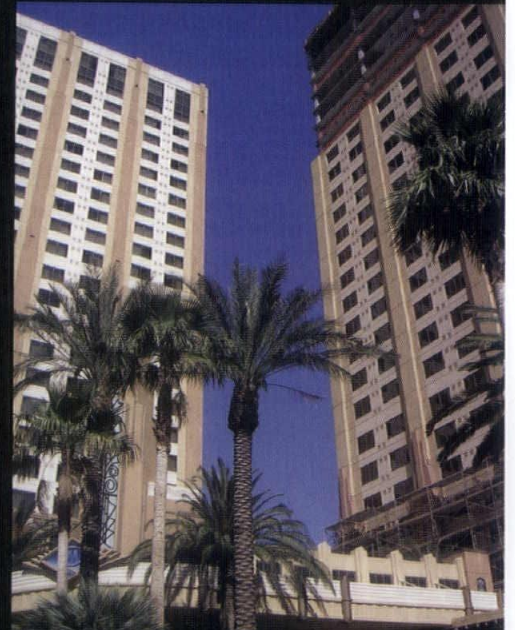
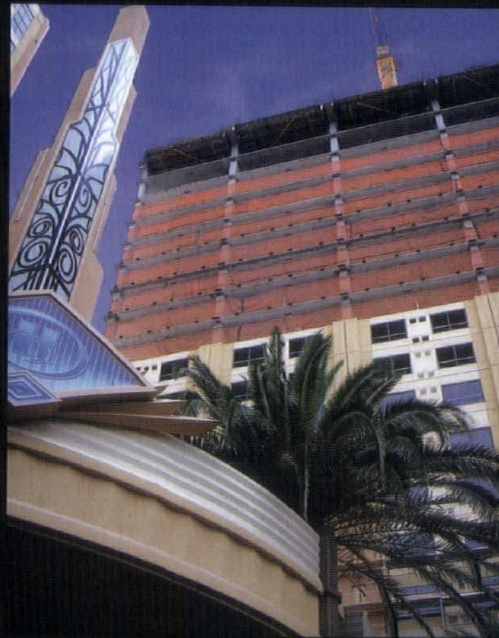
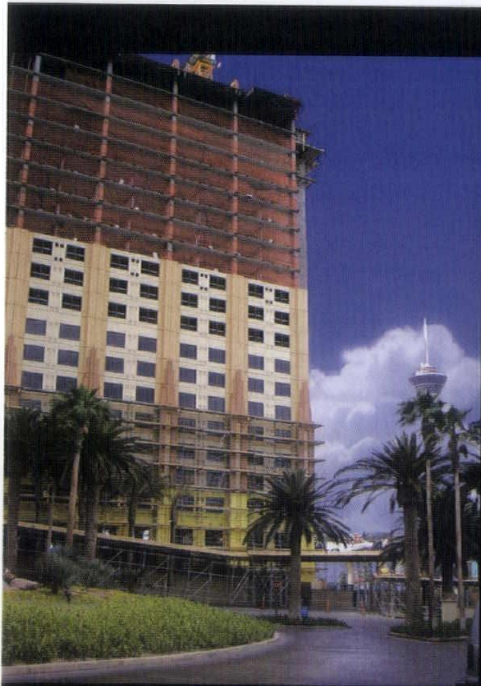


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point of recommending one. There was also the dominance of the gaming industry in civic decision-making, which made any attempt at city planning contingent on industry approval. Las Vegas' inveterate libertarianism, meanwhile, had made for a particularly inefficient brand of sprawl: "City and especially county planning was designed to promote development with a minimal amount of government interference," local historian Eugene Moehring writes in *Resort City in the Sunbelt*. "As a result, 'in-filling' was not required and zoning variances were common. ... The policy only promoted leapfrog growth." This style of growth not only consumed land and stretched the fabric of the community, it also made for costly extensions of infrastructure and utilities. Most of all, it doomed Downtown, and though the Checklist considered the needs of the entire Valley, its heart was very much in the urban core.

When the local AIA began work on the Checklist, different architects were asked to investigate specific topics and bring back their reports. Since the chapter only had 29 members at the time, this presented an opportunity for the young and energetic to get involved in creating a document they hoped would help steer the future of their city. Robert Fielden, FAIA, who today is perhaps the dean of local architects, was then a 30-year-old idealist responsible for pulling the reports together into a coherent draft. The draft was then rewritten by George Tate, AIA Emeritus, a widely admired architect whom the group respected particularly for his ability to phrase things in a way that was both clear and genial. The choice was a wise one: In "A Checklist for Cities," Tate offers up even the

The architects called for the eventual development of rapid transit, and in particular, a monorail.

group's most radical insights while still seeming thoroughly moderate. This was particularly important because the chapter was not undertaking the Checklist as a utopian academic exercise but as a set of realistic recommendations they hoped to see undertaken in concert with the proposal for a new City Hall. The group needed to speak sharply enough to make a difference, but not so sharply that city fathers would simply tune them out. In this they succeeded. The city not only acknowledged the effort, but assisted in the typing and printing of the document.

Ironically, it was the citizens whose lives the architects were trying to enhance who let them down. As Fielden recalls, funding for the new City Hall was rejected by the voters, and with that rejection, discussion of the Checklist's proposals essentially ended. The architects' intention to make the Checklist only the first phase of a grand program that would culminate with a "master guidance plan for

Downtown Las Vegas" went unfulfilled. A few years later, voters at last approved funding for City Hall, contingent upon the inclusion of a jail in the plan. At this time, the Checklist was not revived. The '60s were over, after all, and so was the "War on Ugliness." One would need Tate-like tact not to look at urban cores across America in the 1970s and declare that ugliness had won.

2. Downtown: "A Game of Inches"

On Page 19, the Checklist offers a dream:

We must decide if these Downtown streets are principally for cars and that pedestrian travel is just a by-product, or if the pedestrian is of sufficient importance to draw the line on cars and create some amenities for the man-in-the-street. The possibilities are endless: benches, arcades or canopies, congregation areas, planting, a variety of paving materials, water fountains, sculptures, shade trees, visitor information centers, etc. We have in Las Vegas a downtown unique throughout the world. With some comprehensive design, the streetscape could become as famous a congregation center as Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, Champs Elysees in Paris or Piccadilly Circus in London.

... And on Page 32, a dose of practicality:

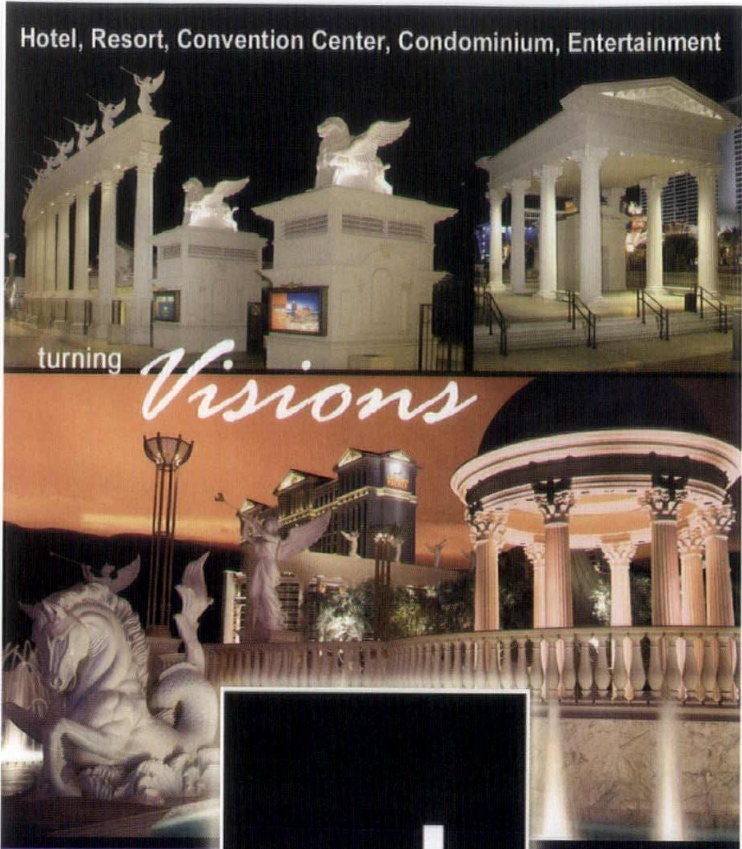
A simple amenity can be injected into the Downtown area even now which would enhance this core significantly. That is potted trees and shrubs placed at intervals along the sidewalk. Many businessmen have expressed a desire to pay for these planters but will not start anything until someone shows them a comprehensive overall program so that their efforts will not just add more clutter.

Redesigning a city's downtown requires both grand enthusiasms and small insights—indeed, the grand enthusiasms never amount to much unless buoyed by the small insights. On one hand, there is the architects' strong interest in what would ultimately be at the site of the Union Pacific depot at the end of Fremont Street, the spot where Las Vegas was born. On the other hand, there is their equally strong interest in potted trees. The strategic depot lot, which the architects said required "special attention" and had "design potential worthy of much greater effort," soon wound up as home to the Union Plaza Hotel. As for potted trees, they never did make it to Glitter Gulch.

If we try to measure the architects' 1969 visions great and small against today's reality, we have to start with Downtown's latter-day centerpiece. The Fremont Street Experience, the pedestrian mall and light canopy built in 1995, was the city's well-intentioned effort to stem the area's decay and impending irrelevance. It was a solution—minus the light canopy—that the AIA group had foreseen 26 years earlier:

From time to time, much is said about a Downtown mall. Then the idea is dropped either from lack of drive or from fear

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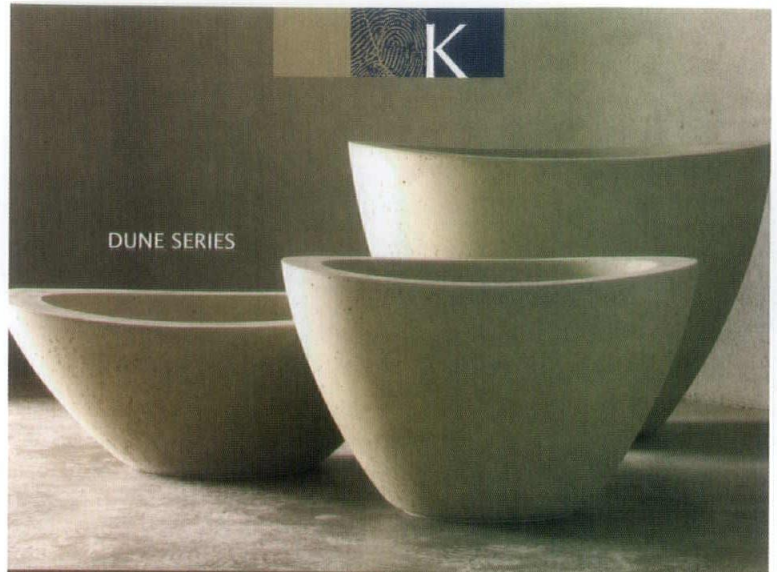
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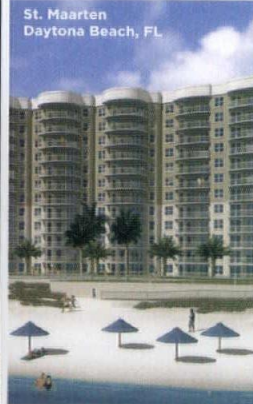
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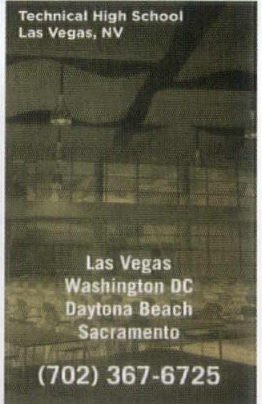
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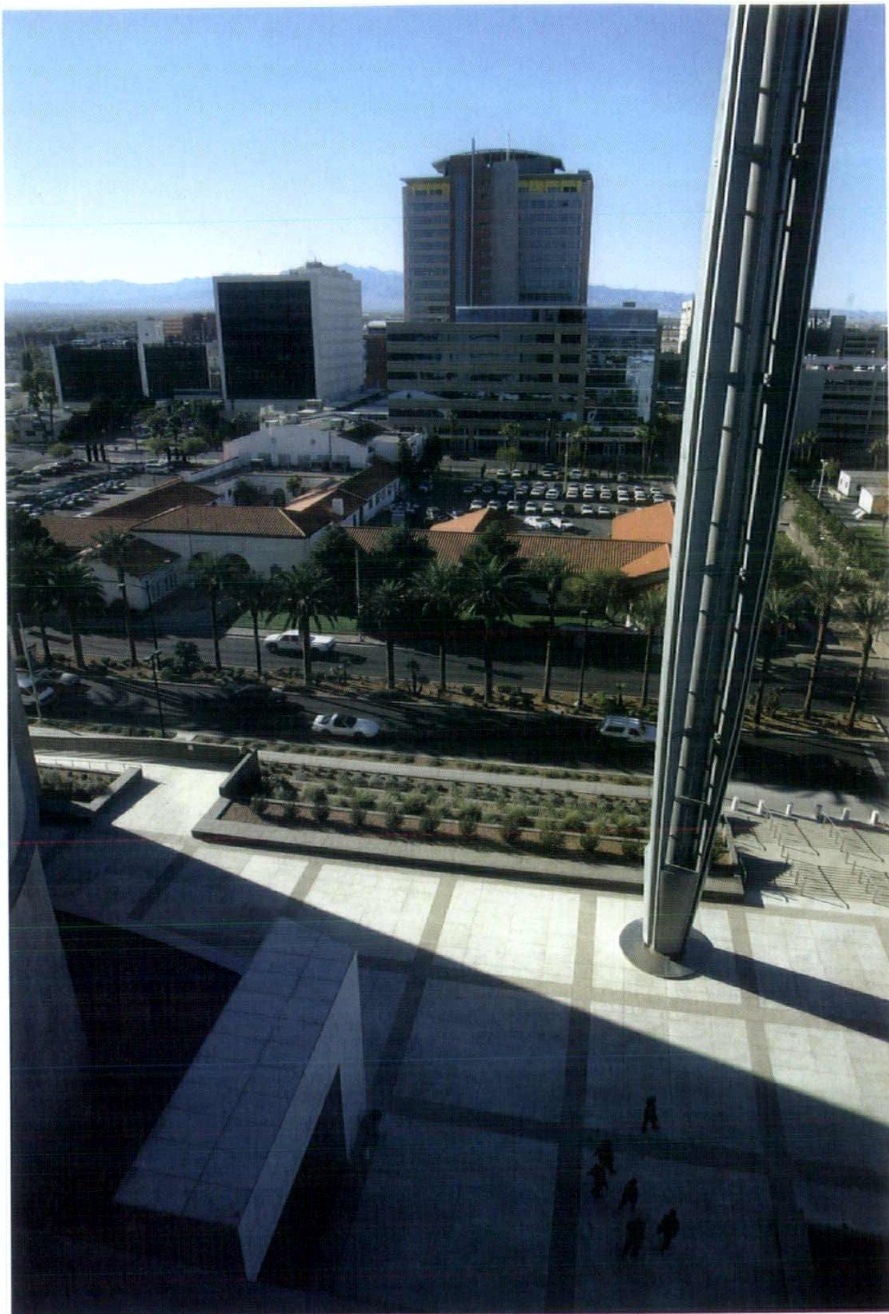
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One of the highlights of today's Downtown: the pedestrian mall in front of the federal courthouse.

of resistance from Downtown property owners. The term itself, "mall," seems to stir up emotional juices which prevent further logical development. One idea which seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle is a concept where traffic is still allowed on north-south streets but not on Fremont for, say, two blocks.

The authors go on to offer an even more interesting version where "traffic is held to one side of the street and the other [is] devoted to pedestrian activity"—thus maintaining Fremont's historic identity as a great American cruising street while simultaneously creating a pedestrian zone.

It is notable that the minds behind the Fremont Street Experience, while certainly not lacking in grand enthusiasms, neglected some of the small insights that might have helped in creating a more pleasant and integrated down-

town. They dreamed their way right past potted plants, as it were, straight to cartoons in the sky. Under the influence of the almost menacing showmanship of the Strip, they elevated spectacle over neighborhood planning. No doubt the hope was that the spectacle would catalyze wider improvement (and to some extent, perhaps, it has), but it remains brutally clear that the most notable achievements of the Fremont Street Experience—space for pedestrians, relative safety—conclude rather dramatically at the end of the two blocks that call themselves the Experience. A pleasant stroll down East Fremont on the wrong side of Las Vegas Boulevard will confirm the general absence of potted trees and shrubs at intervals along the sidewalk.

The Fremont Street Experience, of course, is not so much a downtown street as it is a downtown theme park. Any evaluation of whether we've created the great pedestrian core the Checklist recommended in '69—a core that would include places to live and work and buy grocer-

The best examples of beautification from Downtown's mini-revival are, alas, still confined to small stretches.

ies—will have to take into account the downtown that exists today not for tourists, but for Las Vegas. It is a downtown where people do, indeed, live and work and buy things. On East Fremont, for instance, people are known to live on the street, work as prostitutes and buy drugs. But, of course, East Fremont is just as inappropriate an example as the Experience: It is the Experience's muddled mirror image, a theme park of a whole different sort. If you were the Hacienda Horseman, you'd face west, too.

Nonetheless, there are, in Downtown Las Vegas, pockets of the sort of streetscapes the architects were calling for in '69—these pockets are mostly the work of the last 10 years, which gives hope that we're witnessing the delayed flowering of the seeds the architects planted 35 years ago. But the optimism must be cautious. First of all, the quality of life the Checklist called for will not be created from air by the recent grandiose boosterism surrounding high-priced condo high-rises and the development of a gleaming city-within-a-city on the 61 acres behind the Plaza Hotel. One can find grand towers and gleaming cities within cities in, say, Dubai, a place not noted for its interconnectedness and urban livability.

Robert Fielden, for one, doesn't believe in a "big-bang theory" of urban renewal, in which a single development heals all wounds. Fixing an urban core is, he says, "a game of inches." (He cites the Arts District, with its modest beginnings and gradual blossoming, as one of the best examples of redevelopment that is, paradoxically, at once unhurried and transformative, planned and organic.) It is



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not surprising that the best examples of beautification from Downtown's mini-revival are, alas, still confined to small stretches, like pilot projects to introduce us to the kind of city we could have. There has been some truly outstanding work done in the past decade, and the city deserves a good deal of credit (see story on Page 59). But the streets of Downtown still await implementation of a coordinated, moderately consistent and comprehensive plan. There are plenty of understandable legal, political and financial reasons for this. If fixing Downtown were easy, we wouldn't have spent 35 years failing to fix it.



If you stand at Las Vegas Boulevard and Bridger and look north, you'll see the unadorned narrow sidewalk and garbage-strewn parking lot of the Villa Inn. Here, quite clearly, not an inch has been gained since '69, and it would be fair to think we've lost a few yards. Turn around and look south, though, and you'd think urban renewal was an accomplished fact: Here is the sleek new Lloyd D. George U.S. Courthouse, right across the street from the attractive Foley Federal Building. Here's a traffic light just for pedestrians. There's a clean bus stop. There are palms in the median of Las Vegas Boulevard. When you cross from the courthouse to the Foley building, you wind up on the stretch of Lewis Street known as "Oscar's River," a shal-

low riverbed of slate and round rocks and yucca that runs down the middle of a walking plaza—a plaza, moreover, with a purpose: to get legal types pleasantly from one Big Important Building to the next.

If you continue up Lewis to Fourth Street, you reach the brand-new Centennial Plaza, a sitting area that abuts the lovely old Las Vegas Elementary School, which was built in 1936 and is currently being restored for arts and culture uses. There is a well-kept lawn in front of the school, and a sidewalk that runs under a canopy of trees. At Third and Lewis, there are benches alongside the City Centre Café and palms in front of the Regional Justice Center and a pleasant big-city vibe imparted by the façade of the Courthouse Bar and Grill. All indications are that Lewis Street, as the nicest street Downtown, will lead you to yet another nice place, that it will be the beginning of a metaphorical urban river that takes you from one worthwhile experience to the next. Lewis Street, unfortunately, dead-ends at the Clark County Detention Center.

So you turn right, toward the Fremont Street Experience, and end up alongside the notably hideous Clark County Courthouse and the equally hideous Bridger Building. You can stand at the crossroads of Casino Center and Bridger Street, footsteps from the backside of fabulous Fremont, and find nothing worth looking at in any direction. Except this: Near the side door of a place called "A Chapel By

5 SMART THINGS OUR ARCHITECTS SAID IN '69

Some excerpts from the AIA Las Vegas' "A Checklist for Cities," each followed by a present-day reaction from Robert Fielden, FAIA, who helped write it:

1. "The very fact itself that [developments] are widely scattered throughout the Valley creates the need for an ever-increasing network of expressways."

Even then, there were questions regarding the wisdom and stewardship of resources that made traffic planning, costly infrastructure and extended demands on community services reactive rather than predetermined for the good of the community-at-large. Most of these issues will continue until we end up building freeways over the existing freeway system—recognizing that traffic will move from one level to the other until both are congested equally.

2. "The time is not yet that mass transit would be well-received in Las Vegas. ... However, it is not too early to prepare for future transportation systems where people will leave their cars either at home or at an outer perimeter and switch to some form of mass transit within densely populated areas. ... Because of high ground valuations and acquisition costs, monorail or other overhead conveyances should be considered."

A lesson never learned. Had we concentrated on

planning and community-based urban design issues early on, urban density within current development nodes valley-wide would be great enough to support mass transit—and the system routes and related infrastructure would already be in place and operating.

3. "The traditional concept of private ownership of land constantly comes into conflict with ideal city planning. ... The problem lies in the too-liberal granting of spot or strip commercial zoning on streets, which should be retained exclusively for traveled ways."

It's a long recognized and clearly understood principle from Planning 101 that mixing local traffic with higher-speed arterial traffic leads to bad results—even under the best of conditions. With that in mind, our long Libertarian history of ignoring planning and land-use principles brings us the congestion we have—and there ain't no way out now." The only feasible transportation option for the Valley is a comprehensive public transit system that functions independently of the overburdened roadway system.

4. "Some of the older residential areas south of Fremont Street still have a potential for residences if they could be protected in neighborhood groupings from cross-traffic and from the ever-widening ring of obsolescence which spreads

from the Downtown area as it changes in use from residential to commercial."

In those earlier days, there was a good mix of housing Downtown in all directions. The limits of commercial development then were Bonanza to the north, Las Vegas Boulevard to the east, Lewis to the south and the railroad tracks to the west. Even then, our notion as architects was to keep people living Downtown so there was support for the local businesses along the Fremont corridor, which ran from Stewart to Bridger.

5. "Commercial areas are being developed in such profusion, one is often concerned for their survival, let alone questions of appropriate siting. ... Of all people, architects know well that commercial sites are often more the result of political and promotional machinations than sound urban planning."

Wow! There is certainly clear evidence that this condition continues today. The perfect example may be those businesses that vacated relatively new retail locations along Sunset Road in Green Valley, moving south along Eastern to newer strip malls. In the "urburbs," we value these deteriorating strip centers as possible locations for mixed-use projects containing housing, retail and professional offices—along with open-space amenities for leisure and recreation.

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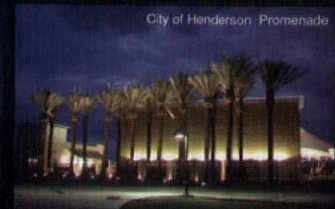
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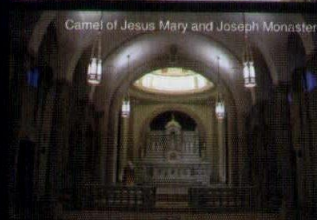
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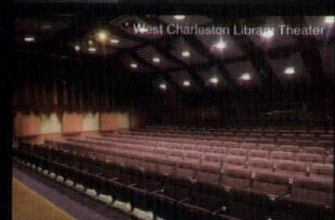
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City of Henderson Promenade



Camel of Jesus Mary and Joseph Monastery



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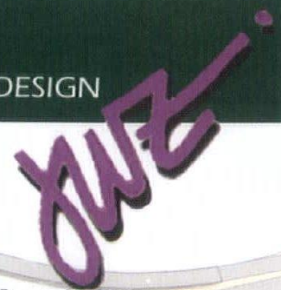
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George Tate's moderate voice was just right for the Checklist's sometimes radical ideas.

the Courthouse," there they are, the great and improbable dream of '69—potted trees. Three of them. You come closer. They look oddly unhealthy. In the pots there are cigarette butts and call-girl cards ("Tori!" "Sandi!"). You reach out to touch a leaf. It is plastic.



Today's Downtown Las Vegas, like many downtowns in an era of sporadic renewal and gentrification, is a mix of hope and abject desperation. The pleasant, restaurant-lined block of Third Street between the Fremont Street

They believed that the ultimate key was a diverse and economically viable Downtown population.

Experience and the beautiful 1933 post office (recently remodeled as the POST Modern museum) leads you in the general direction of Frank Wright Plaza, dedicated in 2003 in honor of the longtime dean of local historians. This small park, while the preferred rest stop of Downtown's homeless population, is green and well-planned around a cen-

tral (and, alas, currently dry) fountain. Across the street, behind City Hall, the unassuming Municipal Courthouse is surrounded by some of the best desert landscaping in town. Several blocks away, on Seventh and Bridger, is one of Downtown's most pleasant sights—the former Las Vegas High School, built in 1930, and transformed into the Las Vegas Academy for International Studies, Performing and Visual Arts in 1992. Last fall the campus added more than a hint of cultural vibrancy with a handsome, brand-new theater that redefines state-of-the-art in Nevada.

Meanwhile, other cultural and community amenities have made a small beachhead on Las Vegas Boulevard north of Fremont: The Lied Discovery Children's Museum is an essential institution and an architectural landmark, the Reed Whipple Cultural Center is one of the city's most venerable performance spaces, and the Natural History Museum and adjacent park add to the area's still tenuous metropolitan feel. The recently refurbished Old Mormon Fort, with its award-winning visitors center (see Page 77), signals an awareness that an essential task of any historic downtown is to preserve and wisely showcase history. The long-planned Neon Museum would do the same. Lastly, the early-1980's redevelopment of the old Cashman Field site realized a goal explicitly mentioned by the AIA group in 1969. Our Triple-A baseball stadium, now a creaky 23-year-old in an age of gleaming new Disneyfied ballparks, comes in for a lot of criticism today, but it's easy to forget what a delight it was when it opened in 1983, alongside a new convention center, and brought renewed life to a long-neglected area.

With so much conversation about putting a major-league ballpark on a new site (such as those 61 acres), we should be careful not to let the Cashman site slip once more into obscurity and disrepair. The same goes for this whole stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard, which seems at once rich with promise and teetering on the brink of obsolescence, worthy by default of the honorific "Cultural Corridor" but too poorly integrated to be recognized by many Las Vegas as a corridor of any sort. One can imagine what the Checklist's advice for the neighborhood would be: Create more opportunities for the urban walker. This is precisely what city officials have in mind with their plan for a pedestrian bridge linking the west side of the Boulevard, where the Lied is, with the east, home to the Natural History Museum, the Mormon Fort and Cashman Field. It is uncertain when federal funding approval for the project might arrive, but it can't come a day too soon for the corridor, which is already at risk of losing the Lied to the planned Town Square at the far south end of the Strip. It would be a sad irony if the corridor lost perhaps its most crucial institution just as it acquired the infrastructure necessary to succeed.



The authors of the Checklist understood that a functioning downtown should be a vibrant employment center, a cultural showcase and the hub of a city's institutions, but

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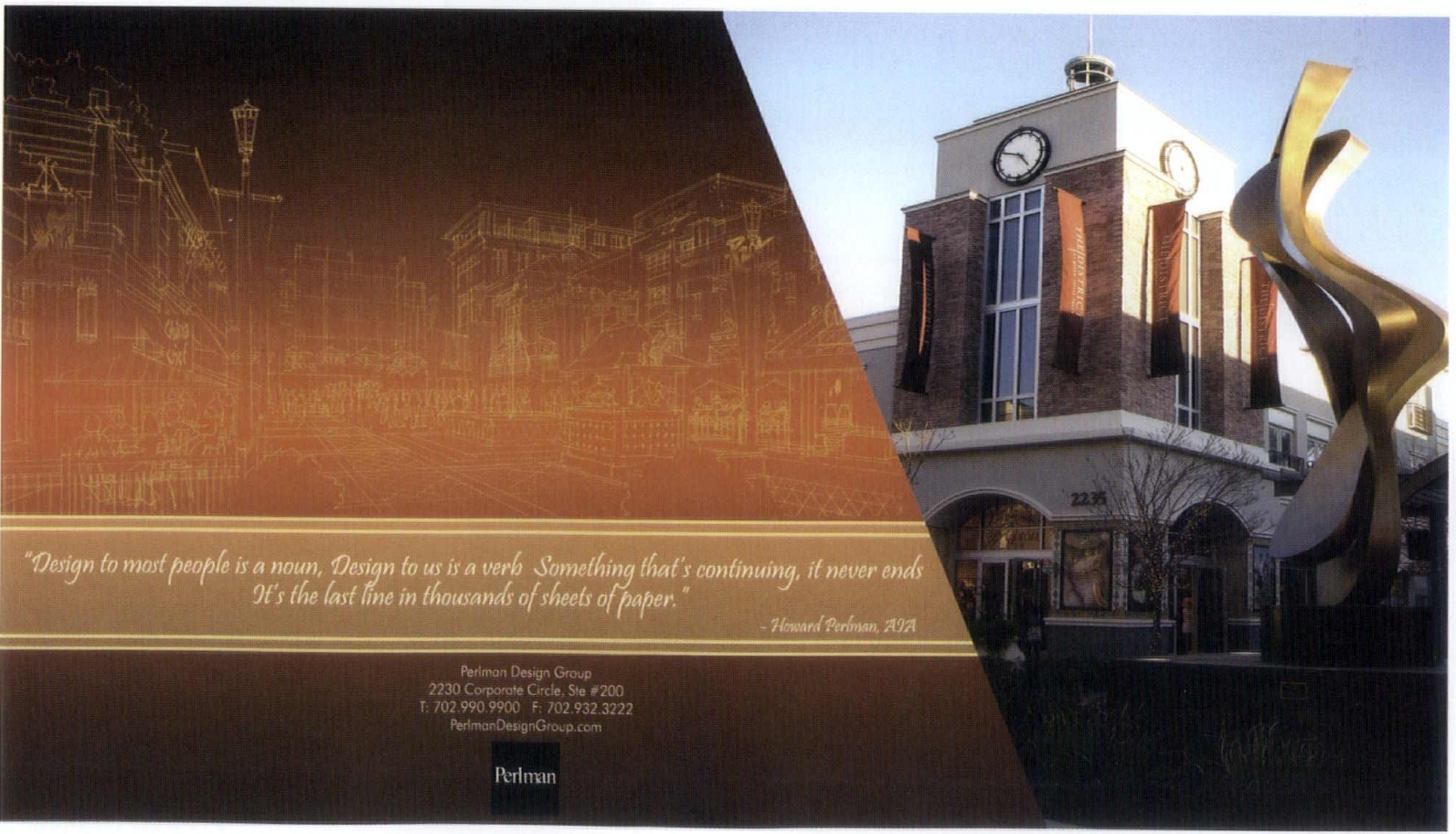
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they believed the ultimate key was a diverse and economically viable Downtown population. No doubt regional draws such as the new outlet mall (for shoppers) and the World Market Center (for the furniture industry) will play a role in reviving the health of Las Vegas' urban core, but the 1969 group wanted Downtown to be more than another commuter stop in the city's commercial life. Perhaps the most promising recent developments, then, are the rise of some relatively affordable condominiums and the preservation of older residential areas such as the John S. Park neighborhood, which became the city's first historic district in 2003. As Fielden says today, and his AIA compatriots knew 35 years ago, a great downtown must first of all be a great neighborhood, a place whose dynamism and diversity spring from the need to serve the dynamic and diverse people who live there.

3. The Suburbs: A City Unspooled

The story of the past 20 years in the Las Vegas Valley is, inescapably, the story of suburbanization. This process generally plays the villain in discussions of city life, but the news has hardly been all bad. In the northwest and southeast corners of the Valley, Summerlin and Green Valley have served as laboratories for many of the pedestrian-friendly

What is it that precludes us from the sort of creative infill redevelopment that has even begun to energize that most egregious purveyor of autocentric sprawl development, Los Angeles?

concepts the Checklist recommended. Both areas have worked to create "village" infrastructures, with walking paths connecting parks, community centers, shops and schools within neighborhoods.

Granted, the new suburbs have tremendously aggravated the pattern of "patchwork" development that the 1969 report had warned of, and they have indeed contributed to traffic, drawn wealth away from the urban core (as well as from earlier suburban areas such as Paradise Valley), forced costly extensions of the Valley's overall transport, energy, flood and waste-control infrastructures, and consumed raw land when used land could conceivably have been redeveloped. At the same time, they broke an earlier pattern of disastrously unplanned suburban growth and proved the prescience of the AIA group's prediction of where better-planned communities might come from:

As long as land ownership and enterprise operate in their present manner, the best we can hope for is some coordinating effort to attract these diverse agencies together into

an integrated and pre-planned community. To do this for a neighborhood population center of five to 10 thousand people requires a very wealthy, imaginative, public-minded, dynamic force capable of acquiring large sites and investing great sums of money which may show little or no return for many years.

If recent history has proven that vast landholdings in the hands of forward-thinking corporations can be reasonably well planned, the pressing question for the future is whether good planning can take place where land and capital are dispersed among many owners. There seems to be conceptual progress toward real urban amenities on Maryland Parkway, but "Midtown UNLV," as the ambitious plan for the area is called, is a special case, made possible by the university's institutional power. The notion of building something like Green Valley's estimable mixed-use District somewhere around, say, Tropicana and Pecos, still sounds terribly far-fetched. But we have to ask ourselves—Why? What is it about Las Vegas that precludes us from the sort of creative infill redevelopment that has even begun to energize that most egregious purveyor of autocentric sprawl development, Los Angeles?

True, that city's fabulous new Grove shopping area is built alongside a historic farmers market on a street that includes the headquarters of both CBS and the Writers Guild of America, but the Fairfax neighborhood is hardly a nest of gentry: It is, rather, home to much of the city's Ethiopian community, as it has been for decades to immigrants from around the world who, one generation after the next, have fled to the suburbs. The builders of the Grove, like builders of all places everywhere, have in mind the turning of a buck. But in the process they just might help create the kind of urban conditions that people don't want to run from anymore.

The Grove is a grand place, maybe even a little too precious for its own good, but it adheres to the basic, never-forgotten-but-often-ignored fundamental of city life—that for all our high-speed asphalt dashes across town, we'd prefer to see things at foot-speed, on a human scale. We like the opportunity to be surprised, to find places we hadn't known about, to experience the world without experiencing gridlock. And though we self-sufficient Americans might be slow to admit it, we like the feeling that someone's put some generous thought into the space we call our city.

The authors of "A Checklist for Cities" understood all this. As they wrote in 1969, they dreamed not of block-long movies in the sky, but of shaded sidewalks. They recognized, as we recognize today, that we Las Vegans live in a city with extraordinary energy, a striking natural setting, a singular heritage, a dynamic economic engine, and a remarkably levelheaded and industrious population. Could we, they wondered, use these advantages to provide ourselves an even better place to live?

Perhaps they were asking too much.

Then again, maybe they were just asking too soon. ■

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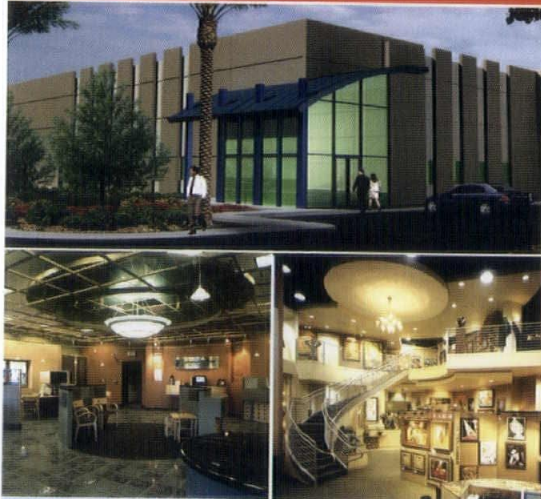
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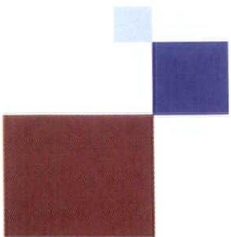
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Lessons From Phoenix

How a special architectural partnership pulled the city's downtown out of the dumps and onto the brink of vibrancy. **BY NORA BURBA TRULSSON**

EDITOR'S NOTE: There's a long list of American cities that have struggled with revitalizing their downtowns, and as you just read in our previous story, "The Eternal Checklist," this has been an issue in Las Vegas for nearly four decades. Despite the urgent push from City Hall and some impressive gains Downtown of late, this "game of inches" has a ways to go. With that effort revving at the crossroads, the Architecture Las Vegas editorial board thought it would be enlightening, perhaps even energizing, to share with you the saga of urban revitalization in Phoenix, our larger, more metropolitan cousin to the south. They've been where we're about to go.

ON A BALMY SPRING NIGHT IN DOWNTOWN PHOENIX, CROWDS line up early to get a table at Pizzeria Bianco, where owner Chris Bianco, a James Beard Award-winning chef, serves up pizzas that have food critics across America swooning. The tables turn quickly, as many of the customers have places to go. Many stroll past the impressive Arizona Science Center building to a Diamondbacks game at nearby Chase Field, a Phoenix Suns showdown at US Airways Center or a movie at the downtown cineplex.

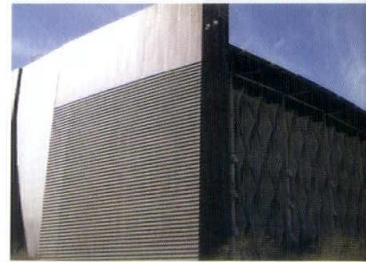
A bit farther north, another crowd hits My Florist Café for wine and artful salads before heading to performances at downtown's Orpheum Theatre, the Herberger Theater

Center or Dodge Theater. Some are also off to an art crawl, hitting a special event at the Phoenix Art Museum or exploring area studios and galleries that typically stay open late on Friday nights.

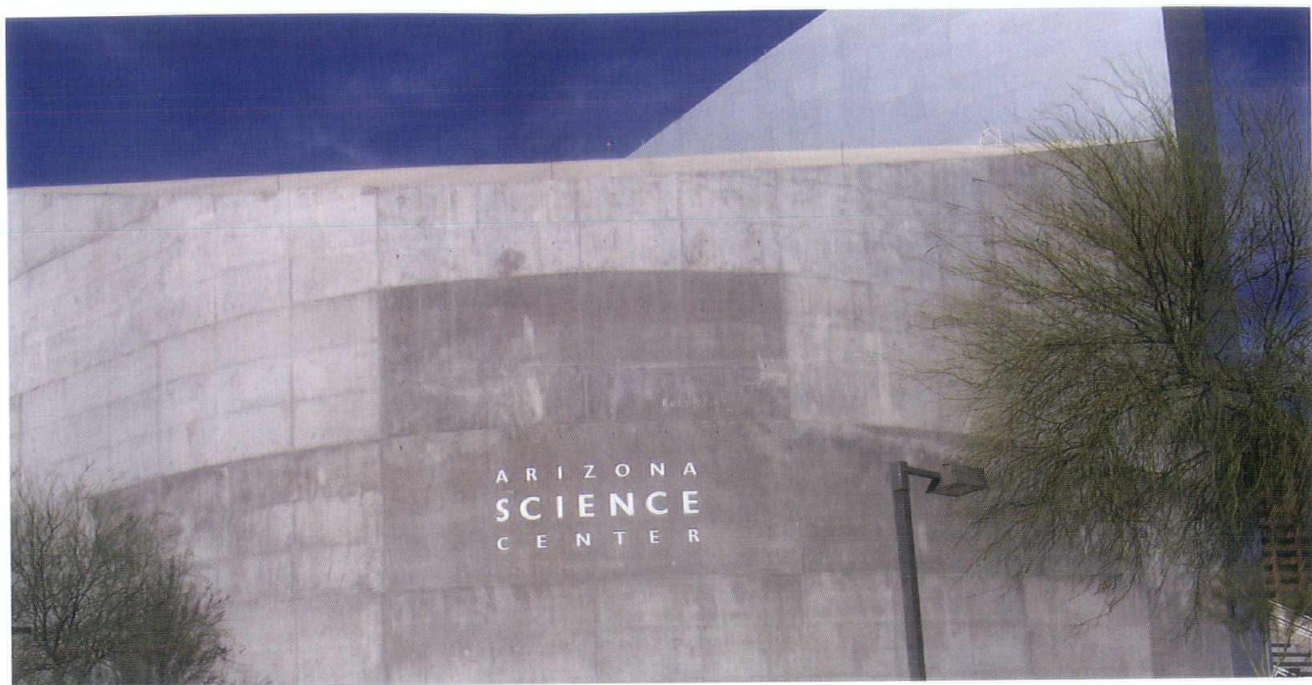
This is downtown Phoenix, 2006. It can be vibrant, teeming with pedestrians, offering a smorgasbord of events, entertainment, arts and culture. But it's not quite perfect. There are more parking lots and empty lots than restaurant and retail options. Housing choices are limited in downtown's core, and residents have to drive for basics, such as groceries, prescriptions or video rentals. And on a weekday, despite the thousands who work downtown, the streets can be eerily empty.

Still, downtown Phoenix has come a long way from the downtown of a generation ago, when you could stand out on Central Avenue after 5 p.m. and swear you saw tumbleweeds rolling by. "We used to go downtown to protest the war in Vietnam during the late 1960s," says Phoenix architect Will Bruder, AIA, a downtown activist, "but nobody really saw us. There was no 'there' there, as they say. Downtown had dematerialized, and the city was sprawling."

Today, however, major building projects have helped reshape downtown. It has, for many residents, become a



Two buildings from 1988's billion-dollar bond: Phoenix Art Museum (top) and the central library.



The Design Review Panel recommended hiring Antoine Predock to create what would become one of downtown's signature buildings.

destination rather than just a place to work. And the central core is on the brink of unprecedented change. If all goes as planned, several new projects on the horizon will make downtown the "it" spot for the entire state.

This focus on the city's central core dates back to the early 1980s when representatives from a troika of interests came together in what could best be described as a harmonic convergence. While developers—one of those three interests—had always drifted in and out of downtown's real estate market, the mayor's office and Arizona State University's college of architecture were emerging as major players in downtown's rebirth.

The push started when Terry Goddard, a Harvard grad who lived downtown, was elected mayor in 1983 and relent-

Then the young mayor set his sights on bricks-and-mortar solutions to revive the city. "Terry Goddard had a good soul, a sense of the city and some knowledge of architecture," Bruder says. "He set out to raise the bar as to what was being built downtown."

A political patron of architecture was born.

Meanwhile, in academia, Arizona State University's Roger Schlutz, then director of the School of Architecture, had ideas that meshed with Goddard's. The college had a history of community involvement. James Elmore, the founding dean, took his 1960's students out of the proverbial ivory tower and down to the bleak, dry bed of the Salt River, which cut a path through metro Phoenix, and asked them to create a public parkway along its banks. Portions of this Rio Salado project are in place today.

Schlutz, though, was a key advocate of raising the caliber of building design, first on campus, through limited design competitions. In 1984, Schlutz took that idea to Goddard when the question of a new city hall was raised. The next year, the City Council backed the idea for an international design competition for a proposed 200,000-square-foot complex that would include not just a city hall, but fire, criminal justice and other municipal buildings. Entries came from architectural superstars, including Arata Isozaki, Ricardo Legorreta, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, Robert Stern and Barton Myers, who eventually won the competition.

"The competition was very exciting," says Goddard, who is now the state's attorney general. "It helped galvanize the community on the issue of design."

In 1988, city voters approved more than \$1 billion in one of the largest general-purpose municipal bond elections ever, to be used for a new central library, science museum and history museum as well as the expansion of the Phoenix Art Museum. About that time, the college of architecture began having yet another role in downtown's rebirth under

If all goes as planned, several new projects on the horizon will make downtown the "it" spot for the entire state.

lessly stood by his campaign promise to revitalize the inner city. "My question to the city staff and council—on almost any issue they brought forth—was, 'How does this relate to downtown?'" he recalls. "Eventually, everyone was infected and knew the answer before I could ask."

Goddard's downtown agenda started simply enough—with festivals. Instead of the usual one or two events, he pushed to have monthly festivals, including the 1984 Fourth of July fireworks at Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza, the first downtown display in decades. "The previous mentality was that nobody was in town during the Fourth," Goddard says. "But 250,000 people showed up. We also proved that gridlock wasn't an issue downtown. People got in and out easily."

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the leadership of John Meunier, AIA, who became dean the year before. "Not long after the bond election, I had a conversation with Terry Goddard," Meunier says. "I asked him how he was going to be sure that the bond money would be well spent."

Goddard asked if Meunier had any ideas. Meunier suggested that the mayor set up a review board to advise the city on architecture and design for any major publicly funded buildings. "We formed the Central City Architectural Design Review Panel, which answers directly to the city manager," says Meunier, who now teaches architecture at ASU. "It still exists today."

The panel's primary task, however, was to help the city choose the architects for the bond projects. Design review,

Meunier quickly realized, became less important: "A weak architect will produce a weak building no matter how many design reviews you do. The architect must be capable."

With Meyers on board for the city hall complex, the panel worked with representatives from the city and various institutions to recommend Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates of New York for the Phoenix Art Museum expansion; Antoine Predock, FAIA, of Albuquerque to do the Arizona Science Center museum; and Emilio Ambasz of New York for the Phoenix Museum of History.

As each of these commissions were being decided, the architectural community applied "huge pressure" to use in-state firms for those major projects, Meunier says. "But our charge was to choose the best architect, the best design.

APPLICATIONS TO VEGAS

As the experiences of officials and developers in Phoenix show, making downtown happen requires a sustained concerted effort. Here are some critical lessons to remember as Downtown Las Vegas undergoes its transformation:

1. Stick with a unified design vision and demand quality. The city's Downtown Centennial Plan, adopted in 2000, laid out an overarching philosophy of redevelopment and established design standards. While the plan makes sense, the city deviated from its own standards in the handful of Downtown projects that have emerged since 2000. Standards call for a mix of uses and buildings that appeal to pedestrians, with such elements as ground-floor retail and wide sidewalks shielded by awnings, but you won't find that at Downtown's World Market Center and the SoHo Lofts tower, to name two prime examples. The apparent overriding driving force: developers' need for a return on their investments. The city, however, refers to such buildings as "catalyst projects" designed to encourage further redevelopment. Meantime, it is refining its Centennial vision to better ensure future quality and, as a result of the SoHo project, expanded it to clarify such issues as proper parking. And officials are proceeding with renewed confidence in its set of checks and balances. That's good news, as an estimated 60 projects on the drawing boards could come to fruition Downtown in the next six years.

2. Make better use of academia. UNLV's School of Architecture has run an urban-design studio out of the old Fifth Street School for six years. Students have participated in real-time projects and interacted with city officials on ideas for Downtown redevelopment. But the program could do more. The school could hire more faculty with professional and academic experience. Students could do more research on tough issues such as parking shortages and making the urban core more pedestrian-friendly. Plus, UNLV could use Fifth Street School as a launching pad for that greater role. There they could also create space for charettes, exhibits and

lectures, and provide a studio for visiting faculty and students, allowing for mutually beneficial interaction between outside universities and UNLV.

3. Create and sustain attractions. First Friday, the giant block party spotlighting the arts, has heroically revived the Arts District, but a once-monthly hoi-polloi magnet does not a vibrant downtown make. And the possible flight of the Lied Children's Discovery Museum to the suburbs would be a blow to the urban core. The experiences of officials in Phoenix show that the city would be wise to do what it could to hold onto the Lied, as well as make a big statement with the Smith Center for Performing Arts, scheduled to begin construction within two years. City officials could use the planned series of "pocket parks" downtown to encourage events and attractions in the area. And a design overhaul in the East Fremont District could create a space for major public parties on special occasions such as New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July, but also to host frequent cultural events and activities geared toward locals.

4. Develop funding and investor interest. Thanks to a tax-resistant, transient population, Las Vegas won't be able to replicate Phoenix's success in landing a billion dollars in bonds for downtown construction. Even if voters got bond-happy for the sake of redevelopment, state law restricts how much of the full faith and credit of a city can be pledged. So the city instead needs to concentrate on luring private dollars and guidance, and that seems to be happening. Executives of the Rouse Company have offered development advice to city officials. And Newland Communities of San Diego—led locally by former Howard Hughes Corporation head Dan Van Epp—is working with the city as a consultant on the development of the "61 Acres." With so many projects planned for Downtown, the city might not need major redevelopment bonds after all.

5. Enhance livability. Phoenix hasn't emphasized housing development downtown, but few urban

centers can thrive without residents. And Downtown Las Vegas is positioned to receive a bonanza of denizens. But making it livable requires more than shiny new high-rise condos. Some of the elements that make an area a good home already exist or are in planning: The Lewis Street Corridor is a model of pedestrian friendliness, and the city will take some of the revenue from condo development and reinvest it into a capital program that will enable the preservation of open space and the construction of parks, plazas, streetscapes and basketball courts. In addition, efforts in Phoenix to deploy public art as street-side enhancements could have applications here. A partnership including retailers, Arizona State's School of Architecture, neighborhood associations and the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture combined to create the Streetscape Demonstration Project, which commissions public works from local artists to tie neighborhoods together. And no serious plan for habitability is complete without improving transportation. Some form of light rail or fixed guideway could help make Downtown both livable for residents and accessible to suburbanites.

6. Balance patience and persistence. Sure, Phoenix appears to be nearing the promised land of downtown redevelopment, but those efforts have taken a generation—and in many ways have only begun to pay off. So perhaps a key task of the city's redevelopment managers is to convey to the public an understanding that even in Las Vegas, where Fortune 500 companies build \$3 billion developments in two years or less, improving Downtown requires longstanding patience. After that, it's an issue of long-term focus—keeping the city's eye on the ball through political transitions and economic downturns. Las Vegas is famously impervious to the latter, but when Mayor Oscar Goodman—a downtown crusader a la former Phoenix Mayor Terry Goddard—leaves office, the unified vision could blur. Following the original intent of the Centennial plan will help ensure that the \$13 billion in projects will propel a unified approach.

— Jennifer Robison

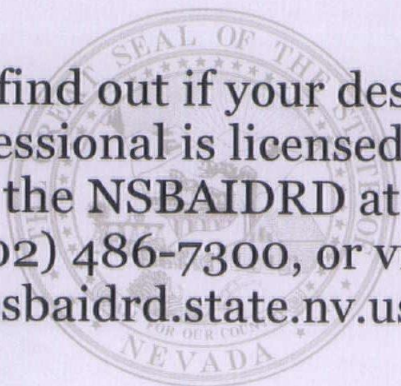
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Downtown Phoenix has become fertile ground for such restaurants as Pizzeria Bianco and My Florist Café.



For me, it was a huge relief when Will Bruder emerged as the clear choice to do the new central library. At the time, he was one of the few local architects who could operate at a national level and beat them at their own game."

Bruder, who at the time had his studio in exurban New River, had been quietly building up his portfolio as well as his cause to be the architect of the new library along Central Avenue. Freshly returned from his 1987 stint in Italy as the winner of the Rome Prize, Bruder had been carving out an identity for his bold use of materials and soaring spaces with his work on smaller, branch libraries in Phoenix. "I just knew this project was going to be mine," says Bruder,

Mayor Goddard set out to raise the bar as to what was being built downtown.

whose office is now downtown. "I set out with confidence, a vision, an agenda and a great team."

By the end of the 1980s, downtown's redevelopment seemed completely assured. With the bond-election buildings in place, there was also talk of the need for sports venues, and the seeds for a new arena for the Suns as well as a ballpark for a still-to-be-formed Major League Baseball team were planted.

Two things happened that stalled the progress. For one, in 1990, Goddard opted to parlay his popular mayorship into a bid for governor, and by law, he had to resign to run. "The last vote as mayor that Goddard oversaw was the approval of Will Bruder to do the library," Bruder says. "I wish he'd stayed the course. I wound up going through five mayors before the library was completed in 1995."

"Goddard's was a very important mayorship," Meunier says. "Downtown lost some of its political muscle when he resigned. His successor, Paul Johnson, was a brilliant politician, but he didn't have Goddard's cultural vision."

The second circumstance that cut back the scale of redevelopment was the economic downturn at the turn of the decade. While the art museum, library and science museum went ahead as planned, a newly cautious City Council ditched Myers' design proposal. "One of the great tragedies of Phoenix was that the complex was never built," Meunier says. "The city decided it didn't want to spend more on a new City Hall than a speculative office building would cost, so they got a speculative office complex dressed as a city hall."

The Phoenix office of Langdon Wilson stepped in to do the 20-story city hall building. The architecture and planning firm also did the History Museum when Ambasz bowed out due to budgetary difficulties caused by the site's utility lines.

Yet downtown still kept rolling along, albeit at a more tepid pace. The museums and library were built and well received, while the two sports venues, US Airways Center (formerly America West Arena), completed in 1992, and Chase Field (formerly Bank One Ballpark), completed in 1998, brought in the sports fans.

The Richard Meier-designed Sandra Day O'Connor U.S. Courthouse opened in 2000, earning several national awards as well as sparking some controversy—namely over the lack of climate control in the 52,000-square-foot atrium. Locals suggested that the out-of-state architects had failed to understand the desert, with temperatures hitting 100 degrees inside the space during the summer. What the public didn't understand was that the atrium had actually been designed to be a transitional space and, following engineers specifications, cooled 20 to 30 degrees by misters. "People fixated on technical issues with that building," Bruder says. "It is truly a great building, but unfairly taken to task."

New performing arts venues, including the 1989 Herberger Theater Center, the 1997 renovation of the old Orpheum Theatre and the 2002 opening of Dodge Theater,

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brought more arts aficionados downtown for everything from opera to stand-up comedy. Artists and galleries also entered the mix, creating several downtown visual arts districts, including one in the warehouses near the stadiums.

And the alliance that Goddard sparked more than 20 years ago continues today, as developers, the mayor's office and the architecture college have their hands full with four major projects.

The Downtown Phoenix Partnership, formed in 1990, is a public-private nonprofit organization whose mission is to encourage and protect downtown investment. Phoenix is one of more than 1,000 cities in the United States that have such an organization, which "brings together public and private sectors to benefit how downtown develops," says the partnership's president and CEO, Brian Kearney. "Otherwise, projects could stumble along, happening here and there."

One of the partnership's more recent achievements was to brand downtown as a marketable place by dubbing the central core "Copper Square," creating an identity and even streetscape elements that set downtown aside from other metro areas.

Under the aegis of Mayor Phil Gordon, the City of Phoenix Downtown Development Office opened in 2004 to handle the new rush of development activity. Its first project was to develop a 10-year plan for downtown's future, which was adopted by the City Council.

ASU's College of Architecture is represented downtown with the new Phoenix Urban Research Laboratory (PURL).

Despite the recent whirlwind of development, downtown is still shy on places to live, affordable or otherwise.

The 10,000-square-foot facility, housed in the former ballroom of the Security Building on Central Avenue, accommodates 40 to 50 students who work on urban design and planning issues. There's a lecture area, public conference rooms for charettes and lectures, plus office space for faculty and staff. "Downtown is our agenda," says Wellington Reiter, the new dean. "We plan to be involved and embedded in the community through programs such as PURL."

The three organizations are front and center for four hot projects that promise to confirm downtown as the city center that Phoenix has been struggling for decades to achieve.

Ground has already broken on the \$1 billion light-rail project, funded by sales tax increases and federal monies. By 2008, the 20-mile line will run from the city's northwest side through downtown, to the airport, ASU's Tempe campus and suburban Mesa.

Construction is well under way for the \$600 million expansion of the Phoenix Civic Plaza convention center. When all the phases are completed in 2008, the center will be tripled in size. The city has also funded an adjacent \$350 million, 1,000-room Sheraton Hotel, designed by Miami-based Arquitectonica, to

serve the convention center. A privately funded downtown W Hotel is also scheduled to break ground soon.

A new 25-acre bioscience campus, built within the old Phoenix Union High School property, includes the Translational Genomics Research Institute (designed by SmithGroup of Phoenix), a planned biomedical collaborative project, plus a future University of Arizona medical school.

Downtown's ASU campus, to be sited a few blocks from the bioscience campus, is slated to welcome its first students this fall. Set within a framework of new and remodeled buildings, the campus will be home to the College of Public Programs, the College of Nursing and the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications. It will also be home to up to 15,000 students, with onsite student housing as part of the plans.

Though the basic funds—some \$233 million—for the massive ASU project must be approved by city voters in a March bond election, the city is confident the measure will pass. "The city has a successful track record with bond elections," says John Chan, acting director of the City of Phoenix Downtown Development Office.

ASU's Reiter is concerned that the downtown campus project not be just a series of buildings and dormitories, but a compelling destination for students, downtown residents and visitors alike. "The campus must have a civic space, some kind of a plaza to draw people," Reiter says. "There needs to be some place for people to congregate. Downtown also must offer amenities such as retail and restaurants to make it attractive to students. If there's nothing to do downtown, students could change majors to be on the Tempe campus. That could be catastrophic for downtown."

Also of concern in some quarters is the quality of design associated with the new projects. "It's fine that these new buildings are on time, meet the budget and meet the program," Meunier says. "But they must elevate downtown. We should be doing buildings as good as the [1988] bond buildings."

And then there's the housing issue. Despite the recent whirlwind of development, downtown is still shy on places to live, affordable or otherwise. The Downtown Development Office and the Downtown Phoenix Partnership are working to attract apartment and condominium projects to the city. "From a market standpoint, we believe that retail and restaurants will follow housing," Chan says. "We need to get more people living downtown."

Despite it all, downtown Phoenix is well on its way to having a "there" there. "I'm proud of laying the groundwork for what is happening now," says Goddard, summarizing more than two decades of collaboration between politicians, academics and market forces. "Downtown is still incomplete. Any one project will not turn the tide; everything has to work together. But today, the city still needs to pay attention to the design of new buildings. It's an obligation that major buildings should be remarkable, and not just handed over to the lowest bidder."

Meunier agrees. "You can't let everything boil down to the bottom line. That's a disaster. It's not the way to create a great city. Never has been, never will be." ■



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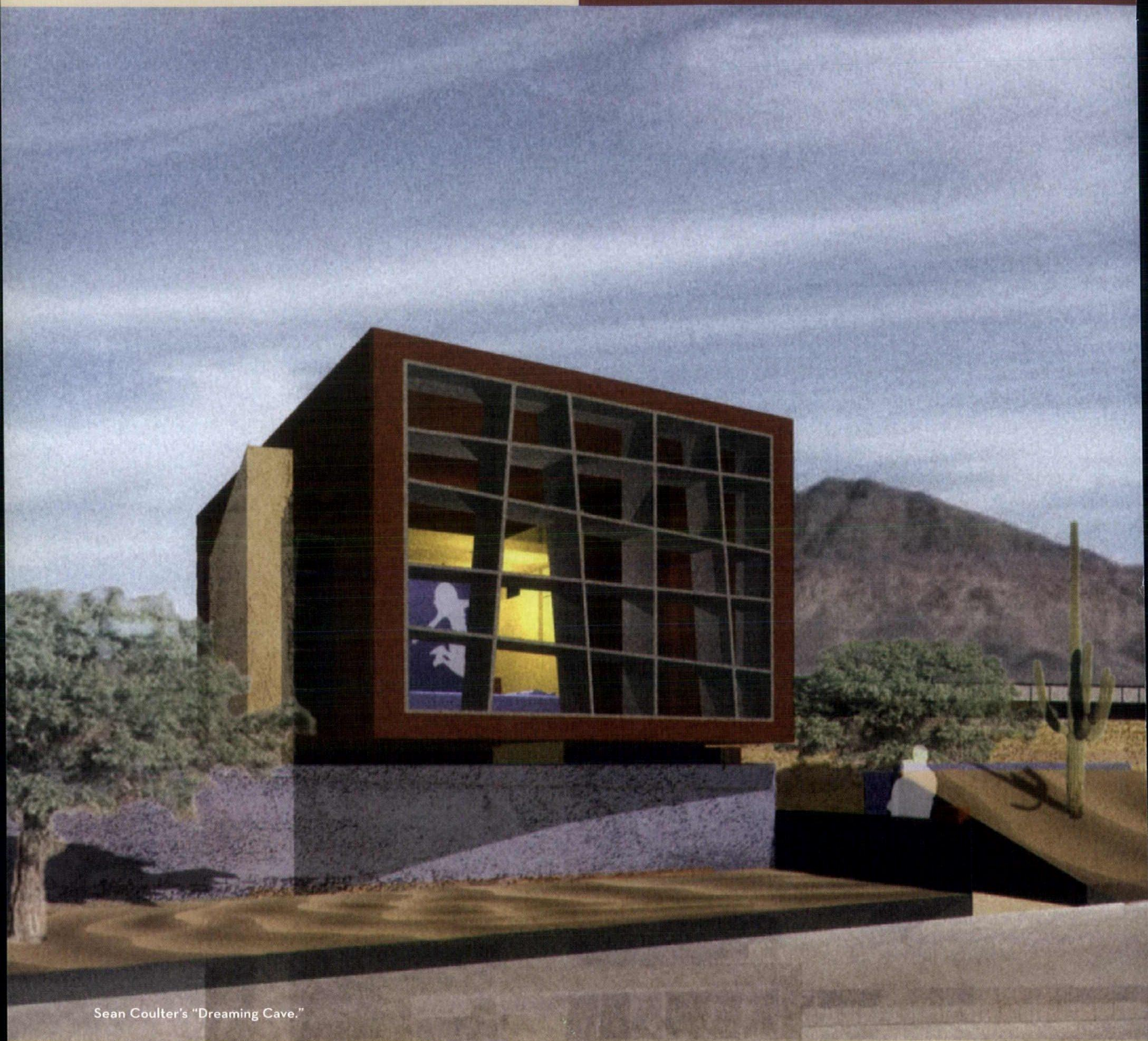
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Sean Coulter's "Dreaming Cave."



**Three architects create dwellings
for themselves with an eye toward
helping the rest of us better
understand good, responsible
design in the desert**

HOME *Remedies*

By Phil Hagen

W

hat kind of house would the average Las Vegas architect build for himself? The answer might seem a little disingenuous at first: "A house that he can afford." And these days, that ain't much.

That's bad news if you were looking for an article on "Luxury Homes." But if you're in the market for ideas more applicable to the average citizen and beneficial to the community as a whole, you're on the right page. We'd like you to meet three young AIA members—Nic Niccum, Sean Coulter and Lance Kirk—who have made or are in the process of making a home for themselves.

Which means they'll be relatively affordable examples. (In fact, two of the three are fixer-uppers.) But because the words "average architect" are not a comment on their abilities, these three designers also bring other important sensibilities to Las Vegas' table of residential issues, which include sustainability, homogeneity and sprawl (all three homes are infill). And because the average architect uses both sides of the brain to ply his trade, you're about to see responses that are both practical and creative. Not to mention sincere. After all, each architect's home is where his heart is. ➤

Mr. Re-Tract

Nic Niccum rethinks the Vegas tract home—starting with his own

The little house on Beachfront Drive in the Lakes was a typical tract job: cheap materials, dysfunctional floor plan, lacking in character. And it was just what Nic Niccum was looking for.

The AIA architect, then with JMA and now director of project management for Slade Development, bought the three-bedroom, 1,450-square-foot home—built in 1986 and looking every bit of its age—for about \$150,000. Friends were shocked, and indeed, for a young professional with a swinging single lifestyle and a Lexus, it seemed an odd choice. But Niccum sought a place to test a theory—"I wanted to rethink the tract house"—and this felt like the perfect lab.

His theory is based on something many tract-home owners identify with in Vegas: a lack of identity. Niccum believes our need to be different was "pushed aside for the fast growth of the Las Vegas economy. Now is the time to take back that which was left behind."

That is, to "re-tract" homes in older neighborhoods. His coined term ("re-TracT," for marketing purposes) is not only about creativity, but affordability and sustainability. "Most designers and architects need a clean palate to create an affordable dwelling," he says. "In Las Vegas, a city that implodes its infrastructure, we need to rethink a use of the past. Existing and useful materials are at our disposal every day. Analyzing and restructuring these items will create a new perspective on green architecture."

Over five years, one room at a time, he did a major re-tract job on his "first case study," reusing as many of the original materials as possible—and anything available at Home Depot—to create a more efficient, more livable habitat. Walk into Niccum's "Beach House" today and you'll find a striking bungalow loaded with personal, modern touches. But look closer, beyond the interior design, and you'll see how much the house really has changed.

Step down from the entryway onto his "canvas," a living-room floor comprised of four-by-four birch plywood, and inserted into its midst you'll see a horizontal "shadow box" whose glass covers a distorted photo of a woman—the first clue that this isn't your father's tract home. Its geometry mirrors a hole in the far wall that Niccum notched to restore the line of sight from the front door to the next room (his lounge) and on through to his back yard.

"It's about the energy of the house, about letting it breathe. Plus I can see the front door from my hot tub."

Look to the left and you'll find another cure for the compartmentalization that ails the average home: You

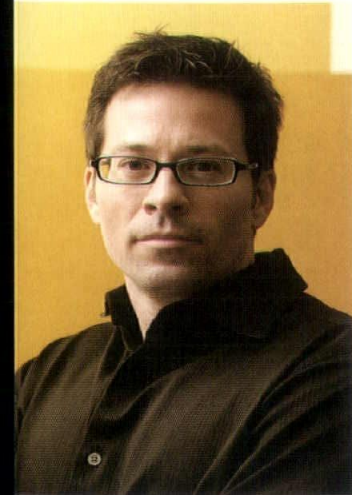


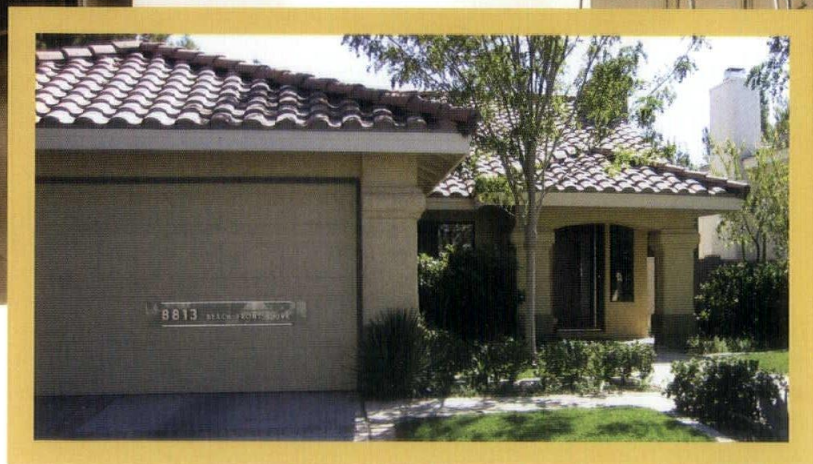
Niccum hopes to turn his "re-tract" project into a book.

can see daylight streaming through the guest bathroom. So as to not disrupt the energy flow even when that space is occupied, Niccum installed a narrow, vertical window in the bathroom door that matches the one in its exterior wall (except, of course, for the former being opaque).

Besides putting out a better vibe, the home seems more spacious, too. He designed the interior in "layers" to reduce the scale and build depth—accomplished through a variety of design tricks, such as using floating panels and 28 shades of color on the walls. "It's a small house, but it's more about how it functions," he says. "It doesn't feel small."

He also used his re-tract theory to suit his lifestyle. The poolside rear door of the master bedroom became the primary entrance, creating a "casita" feel that carries out his beach motif. Meantime, he tore down his closet and the bedroom doorway next to it, using the extra space for a walk-in version you'd expect to see in a custom home. Push against the new mirror on the closet's back wall and, presto, there's the hallway. "I always wanted a secret passageway," Niccum says.





The architect's re-tract resourcefulness is everywhere you look. In the living room, the fireplace's hearth consists of flagstone salvaged from the front yard, and the mirror above it came from his bathroom. In the kitchen, the two stylishly angled sheets of glass covering the overhead lights came from his old shower door. In his master bath, the new vanity mirror is an old closet door turned sideways.

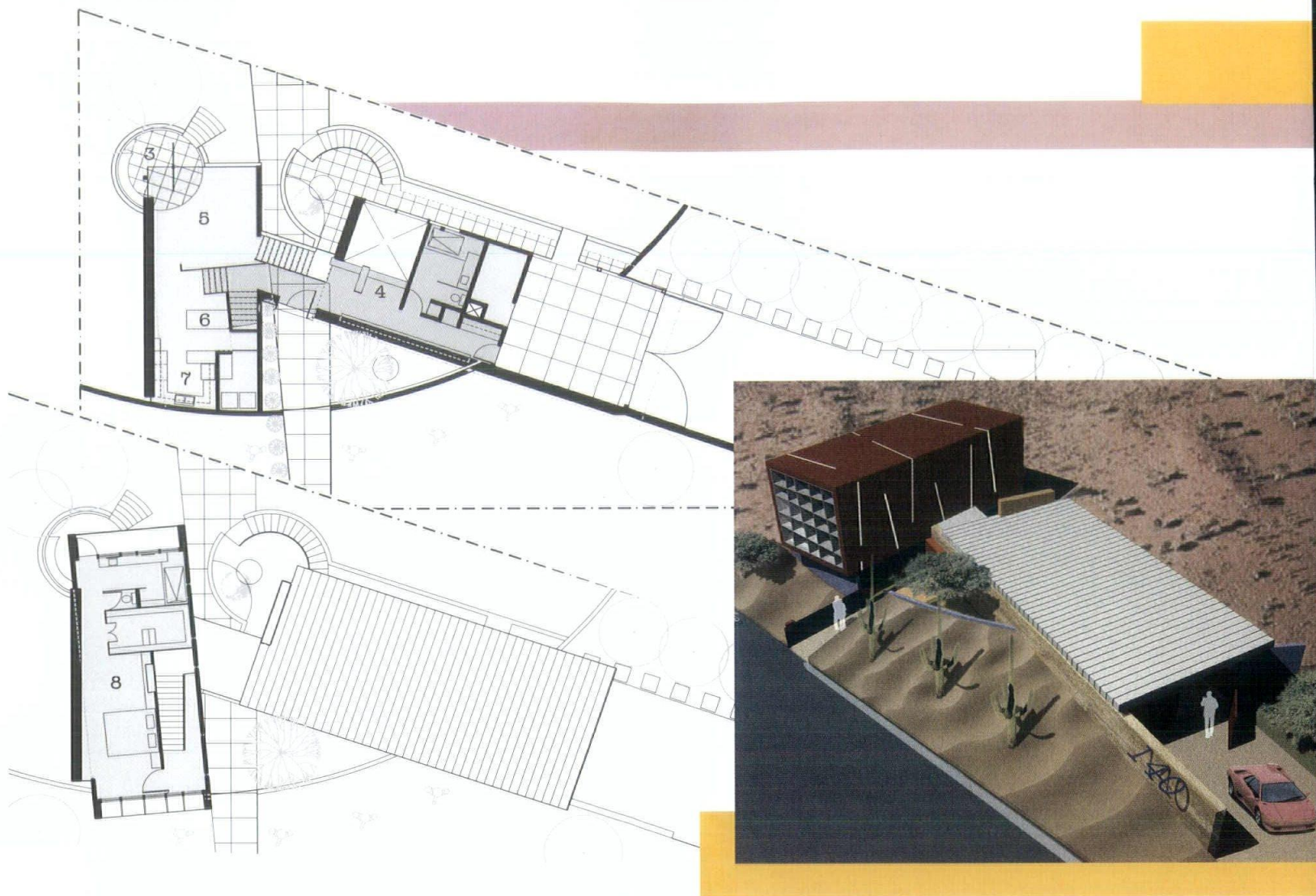
"Everything in here is a test," he says. Some passed, such as the use of floor tiles for bathroom countertops, and his Martini Shower, which features travertine tiles to represent ice shavings and a backlit shadow box containing a giant photo of the cocktail that produces a hazy silhouette effect at night. On the losing end, there was an attempt to finish the lounge floor with spilt wine. "It looked awful," he says.

A large part of re-tract has to do with the process, which for him was an odyssey that involved a lot of sacrifice—socially and domestically. But, in addition to self-exploration and a happy home, his results include the basis for a book. "This is *Zen—The Art of Home Improvement*," he says, borrowing from the popular *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. "Each room is a chapter."

Meantime, he hopes to inspire better living in Las Vegas. Though his degree of sweat equity isn't for most tract-home owners, the core idea can be.

"You can do this very cheaply," he says, admitting he has no idea how much he spent when counting all the personal touches. "I went way beyond. All it really takes is patience."

Opposite left: the "Martini Shower." Above: the kitchen and lounge, from which you can see the living room and, thanks to a wall cut-out, the front door.



Floor plans of the home (above) show the Cave's pair of circular, subterranean kivas, as well as kitchen (7), living room (5), library and study (4), and master bedroom (8).

The Dreaming Cave **Sean Coulter digs up a solution for an irregular lot using ideas that should inspire mainstream homebuilders**

It's a lot that only an architect could love. In fact, the wedge of land along some old railroad tracks in an otherwise developed area near downtown Henderson was thought inappropriate for homebuilding, which is why it was still for sale. But the very same day Sean Coulter, AIA, spotted it, he began drawing up the solution.

He designed a double split-level home that offers 3,200 square feet of living space while keeping a low profile. The trick: More than half of it is subterranean or semi-subterranean.

This was more than a mental exercise for Coulter, the director of design with Welles Pugsley Architects. Once he locked in on the challenge, this was where he wanted to live. So he put in an offer on the quarter-acre property.

He calls it "The Dreaming Cave," a name with appropriate depth, starting with the fact that his design is inspired by Anasazi and Aboriginal dwellings from long

ago. "I like the way they interpreted context," Coulter says. "Their context is similar to ours, but their approach to the landscape is more appropriate than the way we're doing it. Their environment shaped their culture, rather than the other way around."

The Cave's context—an awkward desert lot with some great views—gave Coulter some rationale for using unusual forms.

Outside, he sought to make the most of those views, while at the same time designing a strikingly modern, Mojave-appropriate residence that manages to keep a low profile along an established streetscape. That lowness is possible through the aforementioned trick—he calls it "earth integration"—which also smartly keeps most of the home out of the heat. Where there's intense sunlight above, he'll have walls of rammed earth to block its effects. Meantime, the home's windows should be able to capture enough indirect light to keep the electric lights off all day.

Inside, the four levels allow him to split functions in the household, as well as to make a metaphoric offering—"the storyline of creation"—to the gods of homebuilding past.

The first level, which he dubbed "The Beginning," centers on his subterranean studio where creation (a.k.a.



The Cave's context—an awkward desert lot with some great views—gave Coulter some rationale for using unusual forms.

architecture homework) will take place someday (probably late 2007). The rest of the space is devoted to a spare bedroom. The windows are 10 feet high, slightly higher than the retaining wall outside, which forms a walkway between it and the length of the house. At the end of the passage, encircling the sharp corner of the basement, is the first of two kivas—an outdoor retreat once relished by the Anasazi.

The second level, which starts at four feet underground, is "The Past," and it features the kitchen/dining area and a living room that opens to the second kiva.

The ground floor is "The Present," a space devoted to Coulter's librarian wife. There's a library/study lined with bookshelves, including one that will drop down a full story to his studio. There's no ceiling between these his-and-her centers, allowing the household's creative energy to flow vertically, as well as to keep communication lines open. "So we can stay in touch," he says.

The top floor is "The Future." Starting at seven feet above ground, this "floating form" is slightly cocked from the floor below to take advantage of the views and set it apart visually from the rest of the house. It contains the

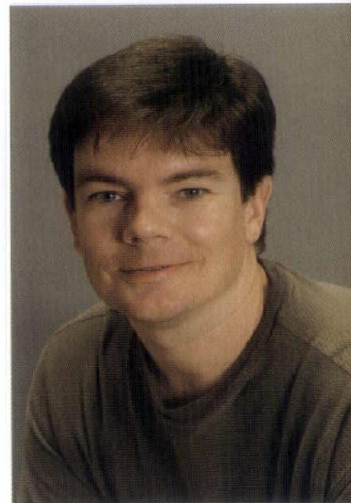
master suite, where the architect can dream at night and get a good look at Sunrise Mountain in the morning, thanks to the wall of glass facing north.

Besides making a home for himself, Coulter hopes the Cave will be a proving ground of good design so others—like those who design tract homes—might pick up something about "responding to context in a positive way," he says. Aside from the somewhat pricey earth integration, there's no excuse: This house is a simple construction of solar-oriented forms that are fairly inexpensive to create.

As far as materials, he says, "People have a problem using products they're not familiar with." But wait till they see his rammed-earth walls (a "dirt cheap" method that's thousands of years old) and the Cor-Ten steel (which oxidizes to a natural, permanent color a la Red Rock Canyon, never needing paint or maintenance). Inside, he plans to use cork on some walls and bamboo for flooring—both durable materials from rapidly renewable resources.

"I'm an architect, and I don't have a lot of money, so I'm trying to use inexpensive materials yet retain a sense of uniqueness. It can be done, and I think developers can find a way to do that, too."

Coulter angled his master bedroom suite (above) to capture the optimum view of Sunrise Mountain in the morning.





Kirk's computer drawing above shows an expanded and revamped front and two-story addition in the back.

Lean and Green **Lance Kirk hopes to break the Vegas mold with a model of sustainable living**

The house is only 856 square feet, and it needs work. The wood-shingle roof, for instance, has been fighting the elements since World War II. The neighborhood, too, has been decaying for years, and many of its residents, such as the woman with the purple fetish across the street, don't exactly seem in a renaissance mood.

No, it's not a model situation in the eyes of most Las Vegans, but Lance Kirk, Associate AIA, an intern architect with Lucchesi Galati, plans to change that. For one reason, it's his home, and he intends to make vast improvements for his wife and son. Beyond that, as one of the architecture community's authorities on sustainable design, he'd like to lead Las Vegas by example. In the heart of this sprawled-out metropolis, he'll create a sustainable, affordable, desert-appropriate home that saves on water, energy, materials and land.

"I want to show people that this is an opportunity," Kirk says. "This is what they can do if they put their energy and money into renovating homes like this instead of building new ones. It rejuvenates old neighborhoods, improves communities and saves on resources."

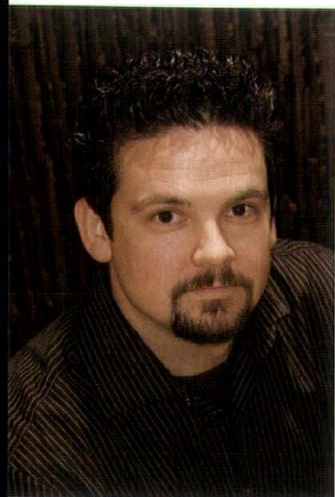
His neighborhood, the Huntridge (near Maryland Parkway and Oakey), has suffocated over the years as the city moves on without it, chasing a bottomless demand for bigger, newer places to live. But with environmental concerns on the rise and affordability on the decline, more Las Vegans have begun to infill some of these smaller, older areas.

Not all Huntridge homes are purple; many are quaint, or have the potential to be. But the spaces within are often tiny, and the materials used by the Greatest Generation were not always, well, the greatest. The windows are all single-pane, for example, and the interior walls cement plaster. "You can feel the cold come right through," Kirk says.

His remedies include 21st-century-style "green" materials, from low-E windows to the ultra-efficient structural insulated panels (SIPs), which he'll use for new walls. Such improvements should reduce his home's energy use by half, even with the additional space.

The new insulated metal roof will help. He can't wait to see it up there for second reason, too. "It'll add character," he says. "Plus it's got a 40- to 50-year lifespan, then once it's done it can be recycled."

Kirk will start the project in his large back yard—a Huntridge bonus—where he'll take down the old shed and put up a freestanding two-car garage that'll have a





second-story "getaway" space (which could serve as a sleeping/storage space while the rest of the main house is being transformed). On its roof will be photovoltaic cells, and factoring in the aforementioned home efficiencies, the two-kilowatt-hours system could potentially capture enough solar power to make the home self-sufficient.

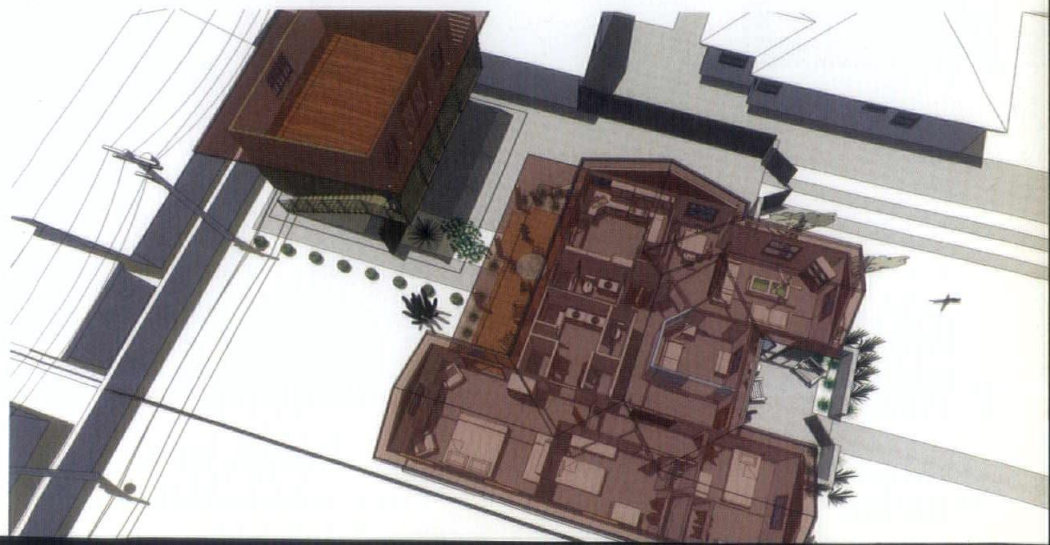
Overall, he hopes to create a more livable indoor-outdoor space back there, with a shadier, more accessible porch, a gazebo and a trellis connecting house to garage. For the columns holding up the back porch and trellis, as well as for landscaping walls, he plans to use rammed earth—an affordable, sustainable means of creating supports using a compacted mix of dirt and cement.

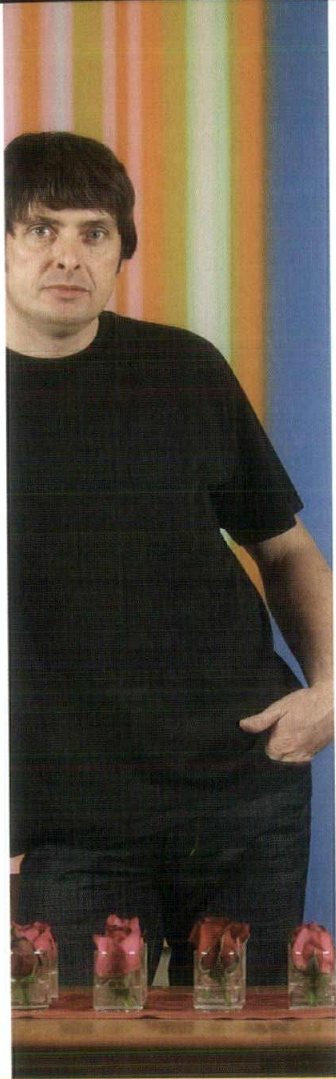
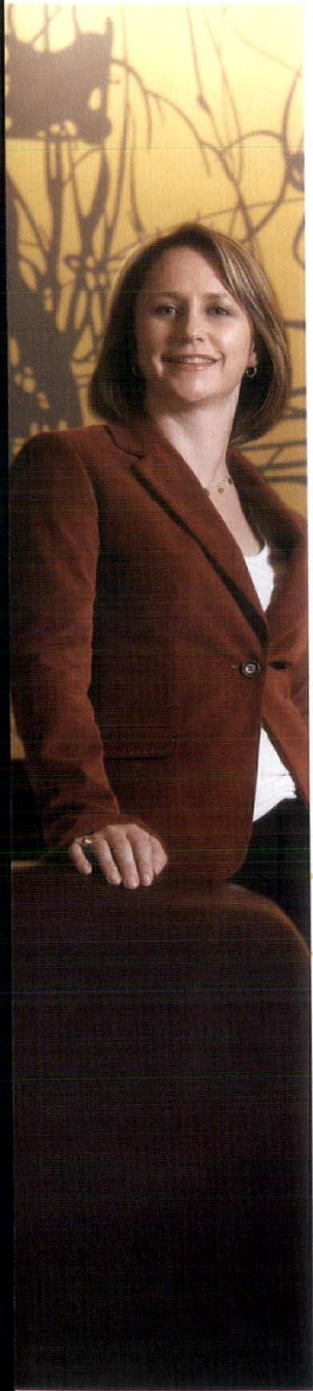
Inside the main house there'll be a new entryway and an expanded master bedroom with a new bath, increasing the total square footage to 1,800. He'll also raise the eight-foot ceiling in the family room (perhaps adding a clerestory, if structurally possible) and knocking down some walls to create more space, or a sense of more space.

None of it will go to waste, Kirk assures. "I don't want to make the house bigger for the sake of making it bigger. When I have too much space, I just use it to collect junk. I simply want to make this house better designed and organized."

He figures all of those improvements—plus new Energy Star-rated appliances, xeriscaping and water-saving measures—will cost \$60,000 to \$80,000. But the result still amounts to a much cheaper investment than building a house from scratch out in the suburbs. And come late summer, when it's finished, a much more gratifying investment—for him, his neighborhood and hopefully a whole lot of others. ■

Above: Kirk's new back yard. Inset: His old front yard. Below: An overview of the project.





UPPING the ANTE



STORIES BY AMY SCHMIDT



Meet seven Las Vegans
behind the city's evolving
sophistication in design

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON MAYES



as Vegas is on quite a winning streak, with each boom of its first century having blessed us with more tourists, more growth, more renown. But so swift have been the economic successes that our community and culture are too often left to tread water in the boomtown's great wake. A good, honest look in the mirror reveals an adolescent city in search of an identity. And we all know too well what the outside perception of "Vegas culture" is. There's still a ways to go before we will be taken seriously as a sophisticated, progressive metropolitan area and begin to live up to the billing "The City of the 21st Century."

In no area can Las Vegas make up ground faster than in architecture and design. What we create, after all, is a true reflection of who we are. As a progress report of sorts, on the following pages we present snapshots of seven Las Vegas who are helping raise the bar in a variety of design arenas—from art to urban. Whether it's the promising designs of UNLV alumnus Adrian Jones or the inspiring good taste of Bonnie and Hugh Fogel, they are upping the ante in a game where there's more at stake than just money.





TIM BAVINGTON

Artist

At Art Basel, Tim Bavington did something he hadn't done in 20 years. On a sandy beach in Miami, he joined other artists in *Modern Painters* magazine's soccer match, one of the more frolicsome events during one of the world's most important art shows. The British-born painter even scored a few goals. It was yet another surreal highlight in 2005, a year in which his work hung next to Rothko and Reinhardt at the Albright Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo; he landed a deal with German art bookmaker Steidl to publish a catalog surveying his work (due out in April); and sold out solo shows in San Francisco, London and New York. But the most momentous happening had to be the purchase of a painting—"Physical S.E.X.," based on a song by The Darkness—by the Museum of Modern Art. "You can work a lifetime and not get that kind of recognition," says Bavington, who sprays his signature music-inspired stripes—based on favorites guitar solos or songs—in the studio of his mid-century modern house Downtown. During a recent visit to MoMA, Bavington had the opportunity to thank Director Glenn Lowry for showing an interest in his work. Lowry replied simply, "Thanks for making great paintings."

Tim Bavington's first solo Vegas show will be at G-C Arts, 1217 S. Main St., through May.





MICHELE QUINN

Director, G-C Arts

Owner, Michele C Quinn Fine Art Advisory

Yes, they show some pretty cool works on the stark white walls of the contemporary gallery in the Arts District, but that's not the main project at G-C Arts (formerly known as Godt-Cleary). As an installation consultant, Michele Quinn marries art with architecture. After immersing herself in the New York City art scene, she returned to her hometown to build collections that are not only artistically rewarding, but well-suited to the environment around them. Such as the art deco lobby of THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, where she hung works by contemporary giants, including Robert Rauschenberg (shown above) and Richard Serra, whose "Carnegie" and "Venice Notebooks" are two-dimensional representations of the weight of his rolled-steel sculptures, which had inspired the architect, Klai Juba, in the first place. "It's such a huge, aggressive space," Quinn says, "the works had to be equally as bold." She also installed the acclaimed collection at the Nevada Cancer Institute, and for Harrah's Corporate she is looking at works by the Scottish painter Callum Innes and Brazilian photographer Vik Muniz. "Art, architecture and design all merge together on some level," Quinn says. "It's not about decorating the space." Next up: the MGM Mirage's CityCenter, which will integrate a public art program into a rotating collection, as well as possibly involve commissioned wall drawings and light installations. Meantime, Quinn will continue to expose the community to new concepts, including a Prefab exhibition by LA architect Marmol Radziner, by developing nonprofit shows for exposure's sake.



WORLD MARKET CENTER

STEVE VAN GORP AND FLINN FAGG

*Redevelopment Manager and Planning Manager,
City of Las Vegas*

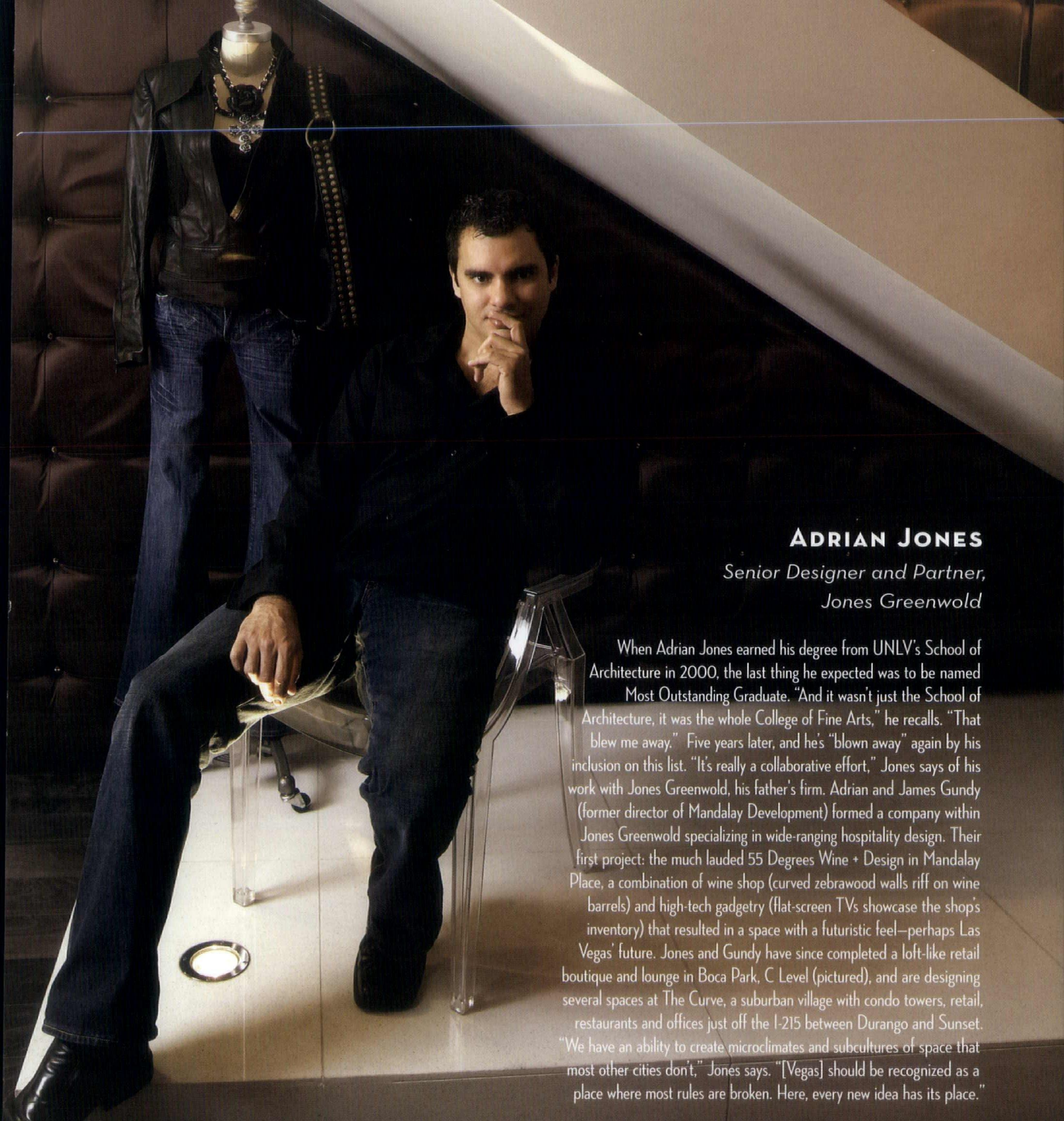
"Vegas may turn out to be the same kind of city New York was 100 years ago," says Steve Van Gorp, Associate AIA. And he should know. Van Gorp—much like his successor in Planning and Development, Flinn Fagg—is intimately acquainted with the "Downtown Plan." He's rewritten it more than once, removing the "highfalutin French terms" in favor of just one: *laissez faire*. This type of "attitude encourages developers to help build the city's vision for Downtown." Eight years and three job titles later, Van Gorp continues to help Fagg tweak The Plan as the two New Urbanist disciples of Andres Duany keep the vision for Downtown alive. "When I first came across the ad for urban design coordinator in Las Vegas on the Internet, I thought it was a joke," says Fagg, who came from Miami two years ago. "I had no idea there was even anything urban about Las Vegas. But what got me really interested was reading about Mayor Goodman's goals for Downtown." So what exactly is the vision? "Reposition Downtown as the urban core of the Valley," Van Gorp says, "by converting it into distinct urban neighborhoods [Arts, Entertainment, Casino, Office] with wide, tree-lined sidewalks encouraging pedestrian traffic." So far, so good. Nearly 50 development projects have zoning approvals—most of which involve skyscraping residential towers. (Van Gorp predicts that up to 40,000 residents will be living Downtown in five years.) Missions accomplished include the World Market Center (pictured) and the Las Vegas Premium Outlets, which will be expanded. Across the street is the 61-acre Union Park, "the hinge that holds all of Downtown together," Van Gorp says. "We've stumbled twice with two developers, but now the city is moving ahead on its own. It will be our little Rockefeller Center, a nationally recognized civic space."



HUGH AND BONNIE FOGEL

Owners, Unicahome

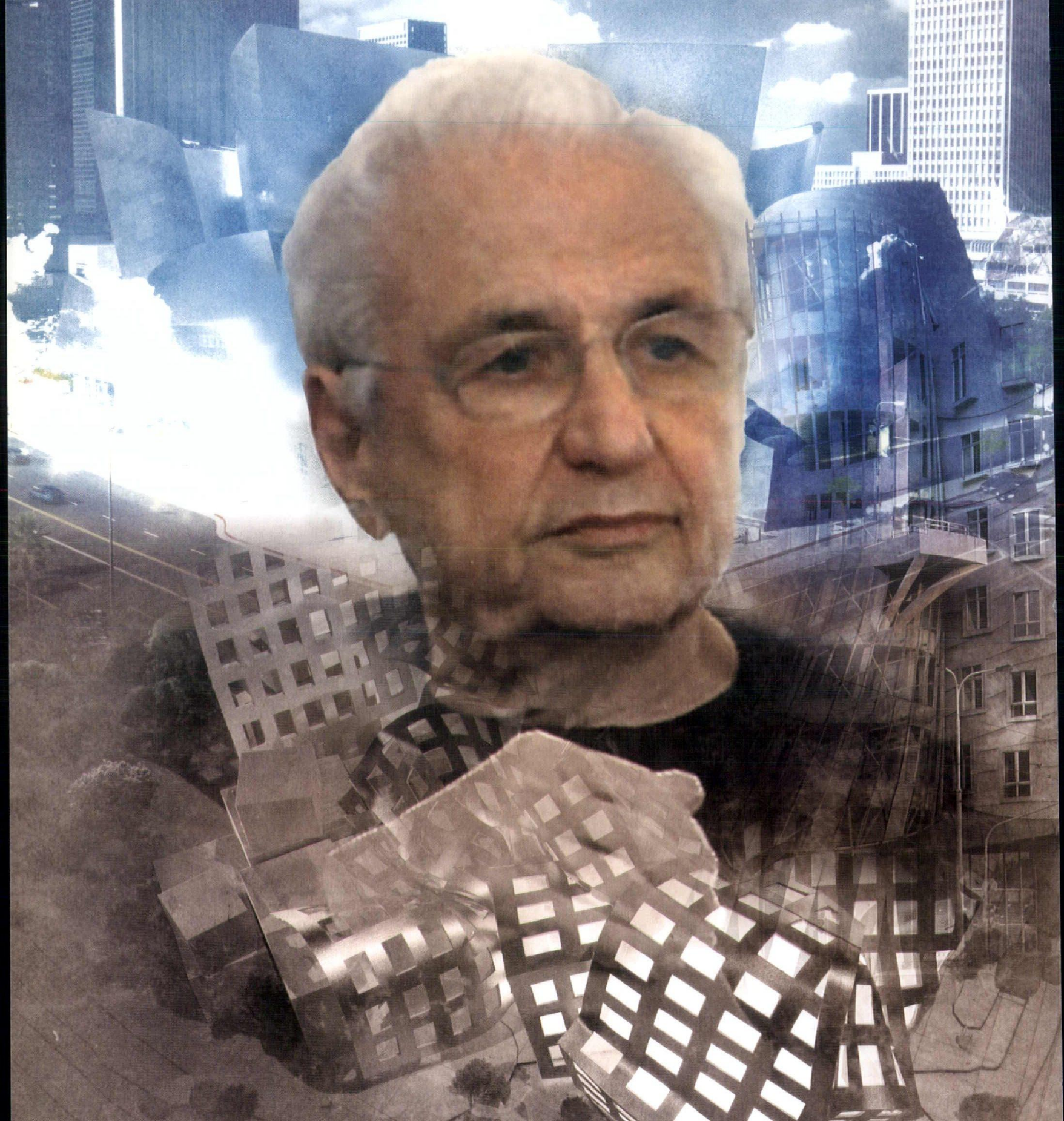
"This is the best AIA store ever!" was a sentiment often echoed through the Mandalay Bay Convention Center during the AIA's national convention last year. For the design-conscious who live here, it could simply be the best store period. Whether it's the shop on Dean Martin Drive or their website (*unicahome.com*), the Fogels have built a reputation here and nationally for retailing smartly designed products that enlighten as much as they entertain. Consider the Carlos Night-Light (by Kathleen Walsh for Walteria Living), a porcelain pull-in light in the shape of a Chihuahua with a dog cone for a shade; Mark McKenna's Designer Emulation Kits, which re-create the finest lighting designs of the 20th century in miniature versions that sit atop a nine-volt battery; and the On/Off Switch by Tobias Wong, offering remote-control lighting at 100 feet, with switch and plate displayed in a Lucite box. "The goal is to expose people to things they wouldn't normally see," Hugh says. "Good design affects you on a personal level; it's not just a highfalutin concept." He and Bonnie use their relationships with manufacturers and designers to bring in notable designers and architects to give lectures, including Johanna Grawunder, the principal architect of the Wolf House in Ridgway, Colorado. Otherwise the design enlightenment of Vegas—not to mention the success of their business—hinges on the couple's good taste. "We buy something because we like it," Bonnie says.



ADRIAN JONES

*Senior Designer and Partner,
Jones Greenwold*

When Adrian Jones earned his degree from UNLV's School of Architecture in 2000, the last thing he expected was to be named Most Outstanding Graduate. "And it wasn't just the School of Architecture, it was the whole College of Fine Arts," he recalls. "That blew me away." Five years later, and he's "blown away" again by his inclusion on this list. "It's really a collaborative effort," Jones says of his work with Jones Greenwold, his father's firm. Adrian and James Gundy (former director of Mandalay Development) formed a company within Jones Greenwold specializing in wide-ranging hospitality design. Their first project: the much lauded 55 Degrees Wine + Design in Mandalay Place, a combination of wine shop (curved zebrawood walls riff on wine barrels) and high-tech gadgetry (flat-screen TVs showcase the shop's inventory) that resulted in a space with a futuristic feel—perhaps Las Vegas' future. Jones and Gundy have since completed a loft-like retail boutique and lounge in Boca Park, C Level (pictured), and are designing several spaces at The Curve, a suburban village with condo towers, retail, restaurants and offices just off the I-215 between Durango and Sunset. "We have an ability to create microclimates and subcultures of space that most other cities don't," Jones says. "[Vegas] should be recognized as a place where most rules are broken. Here, every new idea has its place."



1 What's the Building Supposed to Mean?

Do this: Spend a moment examining shots of Frank Gehry's model for the Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Center and see if you can possibly disagree. It looks like Alzheimer's. Or at least what the disease would look like after it's been abstracted into a concept and then literalized into a building by the computer-enhanced practices of high-postmodern architecture. You don't have to look all that hard; even radio commentators have noticed the similarity, one calling the design a "cruel joke" a few days after it was unveiled. No wonder: The five-story office and research wing in front can be read as a healthy brain hemisphere—broad, sturdy, the human activity inside providing a handy metaphor for synaptic exchange. Behind it, though, the signature "Frank Gehry" touch—the chaotically folding gray trellis over a vast courtyard—begs to be seen as a diseased lobe collapsing into its own emptiness ...

Which will make the Ruvo Center, when it's built, absolutely the artiest theme architecture in town.

Just don't tell Gehry I said that. After all, world-class architects don't do theme. "It wasn't meant to be the brain," he sighed at the February press conference at which the model was unveiled, moments after Dr. Zaven Khachaturian, head

We attempt to answer four Frank questions—from the meaning

GETTING GEHRY

of his Alzheimer's Center design to how it will forever impact our city

Alzheimer's researcher, had praised its brain-like allusions. Gehry often uses visual metaphors to fix the perception of his work—he likened his career-sanctifying Guggenheim Bilbao Museum to a wrecked ship, and has said his trippy Experience Music Project in Seattle was inspired by a broken guitar. But, as critic Hal Foster has noted, those images are only intermittently useful in understanding Gehry's work. Hendrix never went on a drug bender so deep that he'd see a shattered guitar in the EMP's warped topography, despite the decorative fretwork atop the front.

So it was no surprise to hear Gehry explain that his building was inspired by, of all improbable things, a blanket. "One of the first things you experience when you're born is the folds of your mother's [sleeves]," he said, citing the extensive drawings of folded fabrics done by Michelangelo and Bernini. "Metaphorically, it's a comforting image." Perhaps, although it's worth wondering how comforting the folds will seem when they're rendered in whatever metal Gehry selects. But Gehry ("Genius emanated from his aura," Mayor Oscar Goodman burred) must have seen the way it mimics the brain, don't you think?

By Scott Edwards

2 How Will It Work With Vegas Aesthetically?

"Las Vegas' sign makers work so far out beyond the frontiers of conventional studio art that they have no names themselves for the forms they create." That was Tom Wolfe writing in the early '60s, and now, a half-century later, Frank Gehry rides into town as pretty much the only architect going who can take Wolfe's famous attempt to name those forms ("Boomerang Modern, Palette Curvilinear, Flash Gordon Ming Alert Spiral, McDonald's Hamburger Parabola, Mint Casino Elliptical, Miami Beach Kidney") and condense them all into a workable—and, amazingly, popular—style. "Las Vegas," Gehry told the *Las Vegas Sun*, "gives you license to do something more exuberant."

The pairing of Vegas and Gehry "seems absolutely perfect to me," says Kurt Andersen, a New York-based writer (formerly *Time's* architecture critic) and radio host (*Studio 360*). "Perhaps the already-crazy Vegas context is why this design seems so extremely, violently, mock-ruin-ishly f---ed up. And I mean f---ed up in the best possible sense."

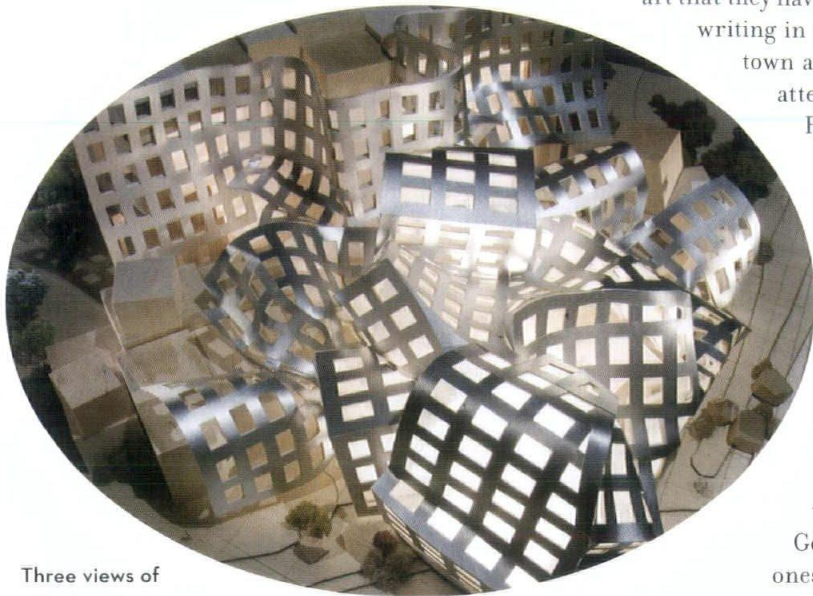
Most obviously, Vegas and Gehry both exhibit a spectacle mentality; they share a love of the aha gesture—Vegas for utterly commercial ends, Gehry for either artistic reasons (if you're a fan) or shrewdly marketable ones (if you aren't). Neither can tolerate boredom. Both know that, in our crazy, postmodern, mashed-up, cross-pollinated world, where a CD that mixes the Beatles and gangsta rap becomes a phenomenon, nothing beats boredom like the energy discharged by freakish, unlikely combinations. And so, while he's lukewarm toward casinos, the disjunctions inherent in Gehry's practice are writ large all over the Strip—in the frantic visual juxtaposition of, say, Excalibur, New York-New York and the MGM Grand. ("Beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all," wrote French surrealist Andre Breton, an aphorism that ought to be carved into the cornerstone of every Gehry building.) The city and the architect both do their best work on that hard-to-locate border separating creative freedom from large-scale self-indulgence.

There are those, such as urban theorist James Howard Kunstler, who'd argue that neither architect nor city can reliably find that line and thus are made for each other. Gehry's extravagant use of exotic materials—such as titanium—"represent a fantastic waste of resources. That's consistent with the something-for-nothing, [f---]-the-future ethos of Las Vegas." Both celebrate style over substance.

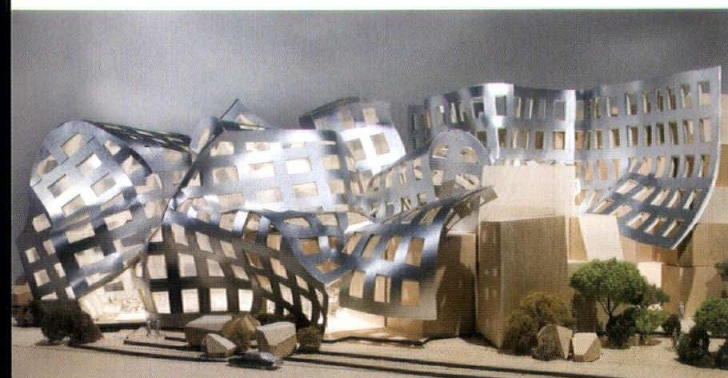
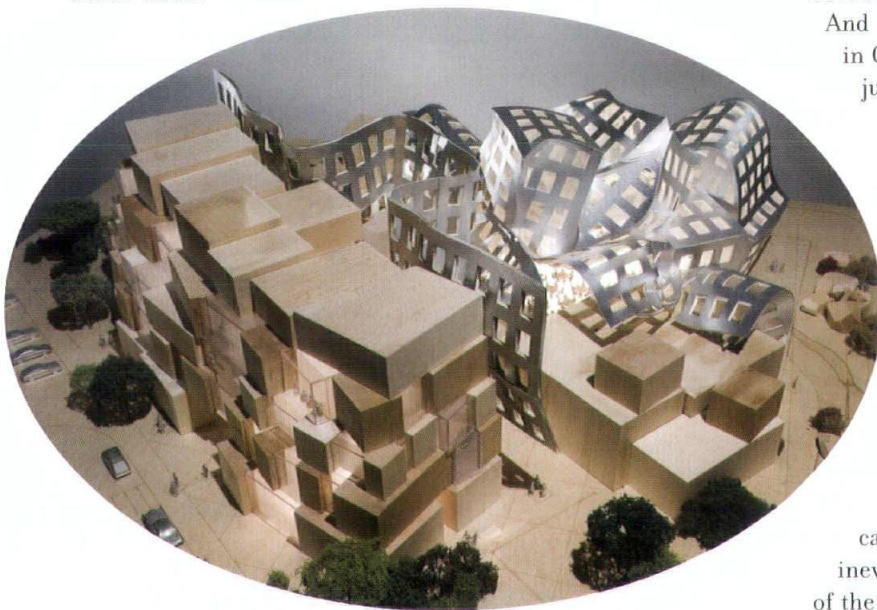
Most of the time, Gehry's buildings go up in a place where they can't hide. Not here. The Ruvo Center will be Downtown, but it will inevitably be perceived against the architectural churn of the Strip. "One of the reasons the Bilbao Guggenheim is so amazing," Andersen notes, "is its contrast against the old, traditional, late-19th-, early-20th-century urban context of that city. In other words, Gehry can't really do anything that 'clashes' with Vegas, since it's Vegas ... but the building can't easily be, as so many of his other ones are, the wacky, brilliant, fantastical loon among normal, boring buildings."

3 What's It Mean For the City?

What it's already meant, of course, is a warm gush of Gehry idolatry. "The mere fact that the design for this research center has sprung off Frank Gehry's drawing board ... brings the highest level of credibility to a city scorned as an architectural circus," Tom Gorman hyperventilated in the *Sun* a day after the unveiling. "Architectural antics had their place for a while, but now we're going legit." For all that this ignores the city's history of genuine architectural influence—*Learning From Las Vegas* is only \$14.93 from *Amazon.com*—it does get at something crucial: our civic ambivalence about exactly what kind of city we've built ourselves. If you think about it, Las Vegas' cultural impacts



Three views of the Lou Ruvo Alzheimer's Center model.





tend to originate in the lowbrow, commercially driven end of things ("What happens here stays here," for example, or the vernacular of casino signage) and get extrapolated by professors and Frenchmen into the highbrow legitimacy of postmodernism or modern art. Wouldn't it be nice if Vegas had the instant credibility that a primo Frank Gehry structure would confer?

As it turned out, this longing for approval was at the heart of the backlash that swelled after the unveiling. In a smackdown broadcast on Nevada Public Radio (KNPR 89.9-FM), commentator Jeff Burbank called the Ruvo Center an "absurd eyesore" that the city is willing to swallow for the sake of its low self-esteem. He was particularly concerned about how Gehry's design will function among the existing buildings of Downtown—the blunt mass of the World Furniture Market and the county government's sand castle, primarily. Gehry's building is "incongruous" with such placid, orderly structures, he said, urging all involved to have Gehry take another whack at devising a more conventionally appealing center. It's a sentiment shared by a fair number of people in any straw poll you conduct.

Yet there's something undeniably self-defeating in this argument—it's essentially a brief in favor of a more boring Downtown. Fans of a vigorous, exciting Downtown ought to consider welcoming a building so eager to shake things up. Then again, the discussion is rendered mostly moot if Las Vegas isn't getting good Gehry.

4 Is Las Vegas Getting Good Gehry?

Gehry seems to think so. "And now [Las Vegas] wants to become a city, to become legitimate," he told the *Sun*. "It seems impossible that a tiny little building might change the face of Las Vegas. But we did it at Bilbao."

Still, this question will remain open for a long time, probably years, as the Ruvo Center settles into its fate as one of those peculiar local institutions—Oscar Goodman is another—that is equally loved

and despised. For every resident jazzed by its novelty and cheek, another will be turned off by its smug eclecticism. Nor will those attitudes break along predictable white-collar (read: educated) vs. blue-collar (likes monster truck rallies) lines. Just ask an intelligent friend who's not an architecture buff; you're likely to get an answer similar to the one I did: "I don't like it. It doesn't move me in any way."

If such comments indicate a general confusion about the standards architecture ought to be judged by—should it move you like art or impress you like craft?—it's also true that Gehry buildings tend to defy easy good/bad labels anyway. A few, such as the Bilbao museum and his so-called Dancing Building in Prague, are beautiful regardless of your standards. But Google up an image of his model for the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem and get ready to let loose a puzzled wow. There's some kind of fan thing in the middle—it calls to mind a huge turbine—and an ugly blue coil at one end. It's ... intellectually frenetic, let's say, but is also the sort of jumble that gives critics leeway to complain that Gehry substitutes chutzpah for style, throwing down an arbitrary effusion of shapes held together by little more than the power of his name. "A strained disorientation that is frequently mistaken for an Architectural Sublime," as one critic wrote.

Is the Ruvo Center great Gehry? "It's very hard to make that kind of definitive judgment based on any architectural model—especially Gehry's work," says Andersen, a longtime observer of both Gehry and Las Vegas. "I would say: Looks to me like it could be great Gehry; the particular composition and moves and some of the details I haven't seen him do before."

Judgments as to the building's greatness will finally have to wait until it actually is a building—there's still a lot of designing and material selection to do. But it's hard not to root for the building to succeed, both—let's be upfront about it—because it would be cool to have a world-class building that doesn't have baccarat tables, and because this really is a Vegas kind of endeavor. Among the conceptual links between Gehry and Las Vegas is a kind of cheery optimism (to say nothing of the terrific optimism of the center's medical mission). I'm sure the architect doesn't think of himself as particularly utopian, but I can't think of another word to describe his stubborn faith in the value of bringing new forms into being. "I'm a romantic," he told the *Sun*. All of which ought to make him right at home in this town. ■



Other Gehry icons (clockwise, from left): Prague's Dancing Building, Chicago's Pritzker Pavilion and LA's Disney Hall.





Our witness to the jurying process gathers insights about the city's latest and greatest designs—and reaches a few conclusions about our architectural maturity

A Measure of Success

By William L. Fox

T

he late anthropologist Gregory Bateson once said that "all information is news of difference," and it is true that we see by comparison. Project the image of an object in front of someone and move it exactly as the eye moves in its hundreds of scans per minute, and the person is unable to see the object. The split-second you move the image out of sequence with the eye, however, it becomes visible.

All of which is a way of saying that I'm going to compare this year's AIA Design Awards with the ones given out in 2000, which was the last time I covered the jurying process. As it turns out, there's been a lot of movement, in ways both predictable and not.

The first thing I noticed was that the number of entries was up only slightly, from 64 to 69. Five years ago the jurors were puzzled about the lack of entries from a state where more building permits were being issued annually than in Los Angeles. They made a strong statement when they awarded five projects in the Unbuilt category, versus only three in the Built submissions. They were applauding things to come. Part of the reason for the slim pickings, they thought, was that much of the state's residential architecture was being driven by cost-effective cookie-cutter home design, while businesses were scrambling to establish themselves in a growth culture. Not a lot of thought was being given to the cultivation of image.

Some of their comments remain true today. Residential

work can barely keep up with demand, and luxury in Nevada still usually means larger and more expensive, not necessarily better. Only a handful of residential entries turned up this year, and just one Las Vegas home design was genuinely noteworthy. And while a handful of businesses around the state have been erecting signature buildings, none this year stood out.

The projects that took the most awards were public buildings, primarily educational facilities. That's a welcome evolution in Nevada, a state known in the past to erect cinderblock classrooms more fit for inmates than students. The standout was the Arbor View High School from Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects, which received a Merit Award in the Built category (see Page 73). The school district's latest prototype is not flashy—after all, it's publicly financed—but it displays a "simplicity of materials," as the judges put it, that is both handsome and sensible.

The only commercial property to get a nod from the jury this time was "Main Street Las Vegas" submitted by assemblageSTUDIO (see Page 79), one of three awards picked up by the state's favorite iconoclast. The mixed-use development received a Citation Award in the Unbuilt category in acknowledgement of his intelligent updating of European modular design.

A related issue propelled the jurors to give UNLV student Daniel Chenin an Honor Award in the Academic category (see Page 83). His typology of contemporary American lifestyles, which he used as the basis for a flexible housing system that could be conformed through

AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS

Tate Snyder Kimsey's Animal Shelter (left) earned top honors.

marriage, children, divorce, widowhood—or about any other circumstance you could find yourself in—was compelling enough for one juror to express interest in hiring him as soon as he graduates.

The other major issue for the jury in 2000 was the lack of local context for the entries. They were frustrated by the inevitable limitations of not seeing the surrounding streets and landforms. It was immediately apparent that their feedback had filtered back through the AIA to its members. Almost all the entries this year contained strong contextual clues, and sometimes even establishing shots making the local setting apparent.

As in the past, most of the entries were from Las Vegas, and all jurors had at least some familiarity with the city. Architects who work in the West take the city more seriously now, and understand what the Strip is and how it differs from the rest of the town. Likewise, while the jurors may not have spent as much time thinking about design in Reno, they know what Lake Tahoe and the Eastern Sierra are like.

Now, as then, the jurors represented a range of experience and aesthetics. David Daniel is from the relatively small firm of David Owen Tryba Architects in Denver and specializes in institutional renovation and expansion projects. David Brems grew up in a small Utah town and is a founding principal of Gillies Stransky Brems Smith, a relatively large firm with offices in Fort Worth, Texas, well as in Salt Lake City. He is quiet, intense, thoughtful and a pioneer in sustainable building projects. Lawrence Scarpa is a founder of Pugh + Scarpa, a medium-size but high-profile firm in Santa Monica. He has taught at UCLA, helped found the nonprofit organization Livable Places and

has work exhibited at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. He proved to be good-natured and quick to find good points in most of the entries, but also decisive about leaving under consideration only those that appeared to him to be genuinely significant projects.

If I had to characterize this jury, I'd say that it proved to be a bit tougher than the one five years ago. Scarpa summed up the tenor: "Just because a building has some details or an individual aspect everyone likes isn't enough reason to give it an award."

SPECIAL EFFECTS

The first significant movement I noticed was in the overall presentation of the entries—I found myself in a quandary. Clearly they were better organized than five years ago, enjoyed a higher level of graphic sophistication, and in most cases understood better how to construct the narrative of a good application. Put a strong image up front, tell the story of the building in terms of how it will be used and inhabited, and make clear how the design philosophy is expressed from the overall plan of the site and building down to the details.

My difficulty is that they were all drawn on computers, but then translated into printouts stuck in black binders. I'm sympathetic to the idea that this levels the playing field somewhat, so that the larger firms aren't being judged as much on how slick their computer skills are as on the quality of the designs—but it's getting to the point when architectural judging should be done through the actual medium in which the presentations are composed.

This awkward situation became doubly apparent when

The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort Visitor's Center drew praise for its contemporary touches within a historical context.

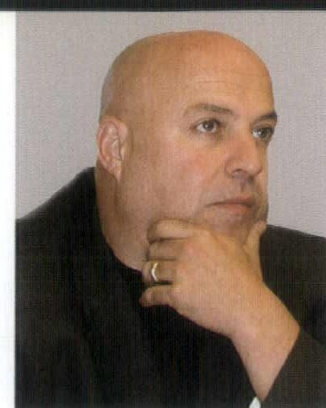




David Brems, FAIA



David Daniel, AIA



Lawrence Scarpa, FAIA

the jurors were considering the sole entry in the Open category, wherein designs of anything from tableware to automobiles can be submitted. An architectural firm had submitted its website for consideration, and the jurors were reduced to flipping pages back and forth to imagine how the screen changes worked. After puzzling over the binder for a few minutes and noting that the movement from page to page was relatively static, they decided not to award the entry any recognition. That may have been the right decision or not, it being impossible for the jurors to tell what the website looked like or how well it functioned without actually visiting it.

THE GREENBACK

In 1996 the Department of Energy contracted with the U.S. Green Building Council to develop criteria for sustainable building practices. This led to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design's Green Building Rating System, now known in the field as LEED certification. If your building qualifies for LEED status, that means you have successfully incorporated use of local materials and sustainable designs that promote recycling and energy efficiency, among other factors. I never heard the term LEED used once during the 2000 judging process, whereas this time it was high in the minds and estimation of the judges. Sustainability wasn't enough to lift a mediocre design into the winner's circle, nor did lack of it demote an outstanding entry—but all other things being equal between entries, the presence or lack of sustainable practices could tip the scales one way or another.

The Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort Visitor's Center, also designed by assemblageSTUDIO, received a Merit Award in the 2000 Unbuilt category—the only building to be singled out then for its use of sustainable design. Now the center is built and it received recognition again, this time with a Citation Award (see Page 77). Although the jurors acknowledged that the excitement factor of the design was modest, they were struck by its use of local materials, and how the building fit into its historical context yet offered contemporary touches.

Another one of assemblageSTUDIO's projects, a residence identified only as "J2," received a Merit Award in the Unbuilt category (see Page 85). Although the house will be 12,000-square-feet, it was the most clearly regional of all

the designs and praised for offering an excellent response to local climate and its use of rammed earth as a sustainable practice. The only other house to be recognized, Northern Nevada's "Eastern Sierra Residence" designed by Arkin

Public buildings in Clark County will continue to lead the way in sustainable practices, while businesses in both Reno and Las Vegas will mature and seek increasing distinction in the faces they present to the public.

Tilt, was given a Citation Award (see Page 71) not so much for aesthetics as for being both livable and, again, sustainable. Its use of passive and active energy efficiencies and construction materials such as straw bale provided a full menu of green building practices.

GOING VERTICAL

I remember standing outside an art gallery behind the Rio in 1998 with artist Michael Heizer, who'd gone outside to smoke a cigar. It was a warm October evening, and developer Steven Molasky joined us in order to bum a smoke from Mike. Molasky wanted to talk with the renowned artist about a permanent installation of his work for Las Vegas. It would have been brilliant, a series of 12 negative spaces encased in steel and lowered into the ground called The Negative Museum, a constellation of black holes in opposition to the galaxy of lights in town. After Heizer went back inside, the conversation turned to the future of Las Vegas, and Molasky surprised me by mentioning high-rise luxury residential buildings.

A half-dozen high-rises had been built in the mid-1970s and proved popular with celebrities such as Rodney Dangerfield, but land was still cheap enough in those days to encourage lower density garden-court apartments, which were less expensive to build. Now, Molasky was telling me, the development of the megaresorts and the increasing price of real estate that he could see coming augured well for a new era of going vertical. I was skeptical. *continued on page 102*





Translucent glass floor panels at the entry send daylight to the lower level.



EASTERN SIERRA RESIDENCE

Citation Award, Built
Arkin Tilt Architects

If you were to picture the perfect mountain home for the 21st century, this might be it. Nestled into the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevadas, this Gardnerville residence is an ecological marvel, matching the beauty of its rugged environment without messing with Mother Nature. "I love sustainable architecture," one juror wrote, "and this project includes every sustainable idea there is." The 3,450 square feet of living space are packaged in two buildings, which form a central terrace that's protected from both the summer sun and winter wind. Meantime, the home's strategic orientation and construction not only allow magnificent views of the mountain range and Carson River Valley, they offer careful shading while capturing the sun for passive and active solar absorption. Photovoltaic panels on the main roof and trellis generate electricity, thermal panels provide hot water, and heat comes from radiant sand beds under concrete slabs. Arkin Tilt also scored points for extensive use of "green" building materials, including straw-bale walls, structural insulated panels (SIPs), soil cement and salvaged wood. "The interior detailing ... and circulation spaces matched with the materials and the craftsmanship, and then coupled with the environmental issues, shows the real prowess of this architect," the jurors concluded. "It is appropriate to the site, and it stands on its own. A beautiful project."



The architects oriented the home to make the most of the views and the sun, as well as to fit in the rugged landscape.



The two-story mall serves as the spine that connects the school's four main "houses" (shown on the opposite page).



ARBOR VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

Merit Award, Built
Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects

When research brought ample evidence, about five years ago, that design does indeed influence student achievement, the Clark County School District began adopting a more progressive vision, and local architecture firms have since risen to the challenge. The latest example is Arbor View, the first high school from the new prototype, at Buffalo and Grand Teton in northwest Las Vegas. The district demanded efficient and affordable solutions to such issues as population (what to do with 2,700 kids in one building?), security and socialization (how to have both qualities on a closed campus in the desert?), and lack of natural light (studies show that light equals enlightenment). Tate Snyder Kimsey passed the test with style, not to mention sustainability. The judges called the \$45 million building "exceptional," praising everything from its details to its advancement of "the evolution of high school design." The judges said "the magic comes from the light," and the secret of that trick is the school's "shaded mall" concept. This two-story interior mall mainly serves as a spine for the building's three zones: Activities Mall, with gym and performing arts center; Academic Mall, consisting of four separate "houses" that create a more intimate learning environment for each grade level; and the Interior Plaza, which is the hub of student activity. While the area promotes both socializing and security (a tough combo in this day of closed-campus environments), it also permits plenty of daylight, even allowing indirect light into nearly all interior classrooms. Yet this 40,000-square-foot mall meets the district's energy standards, too, using "semi-conditioning" to control its climate, a unique system that features cool air being reclaimed from classroom exhausts, and hot air escaping from motorized vents atop the mall. The judges thought Tate Snyder Kimsey's design was pretty cool aesthetically, as well. "The fine detail in simple materials and their use in the interiors and the way they stretch to the outside space takes a building type that verges on being a mall and becomes a very elegant piece of architecture."

The school's main entry features a canopy for shade.



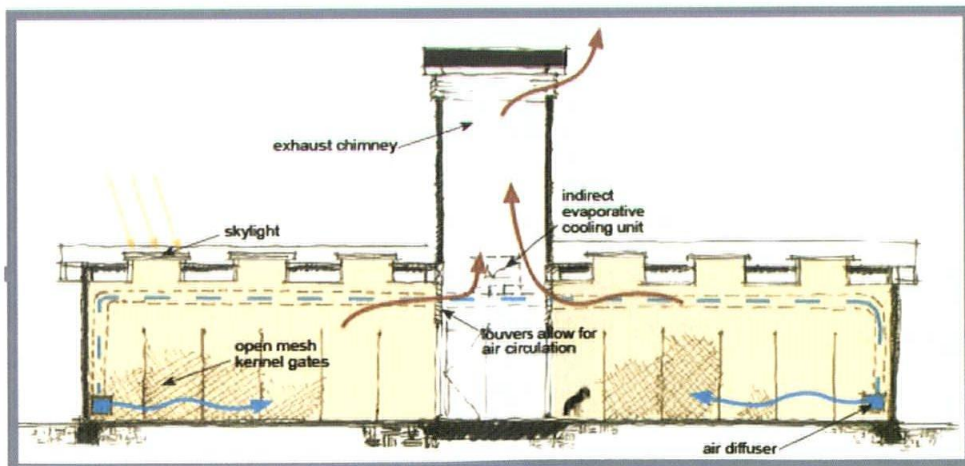
AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS



REGIONAL ANIMAL CAMPUS

Honor Award, Built
Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects

“We loved it right out of the box,” the jurors said. This animal-care campus, the new addition to the Lied Animal Shelter at 655 North Mojave Road, is indeed easy to fall for. Although, at first sight, its 22 bungalows—twin rows of identical steel modular units—actually seem more in the box. “It’s simple and repetitive building, and you’d think you’d be bored with that,” the jurors commented, “but on the contrary, it is quite beautiful and interesting.” They admired the steady juxtaposition of the vertical towers with the horizontal bungalows, and they complimented the chief distinguishing trait of each structure: shifting colors from tower to tower. “The scale and perspective is interesting and well done. ... There is a module here that is at once humane and operational.” And why should animal housing need to do any more tricks than that, when its bottom line is about comfortably showcasing and finding new homes for the dozen or so furry friends in each unit? Yet functionally something quite flashy underlies the achievement of Tate Snyder Kimsey’s simple design: sustainability, the type Las Vegas has never seen before. That’s because the campus also serves as a showcase of green architecture at its best, having been developed in accordance with LEED Platinum standards—the U.S. Green Building Council’s highest level of certification. For example, those towers don’t just serve as minimalistic signage, but as convection chimneys to vent and cool each bungalow. Shading between the rows of adoption areas is supplied by canopies that double as supports for photovoltaic cells, which convert sunlight into power. When eventually combined with six wind turbines, 65 percent of the campus’ energy will be self-produced. Not that much will be needed, as each bungalow is equipped with shaded windows, skylights that offer a balanced light level and highly efficient heating and cooling systems. It all adds up to a win for the firm and for Vegas. “It is poetic, simple and sustainable,” the judges concluded. “It embodies everything that a good building should be.”



IMAGES COURTESY TATE SNYDER KIMSEY ARCHITECTS



Rows of colorful chimneys and photovoltaic cells are hallmarks of the Lied Animal Shelter.



**AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS**



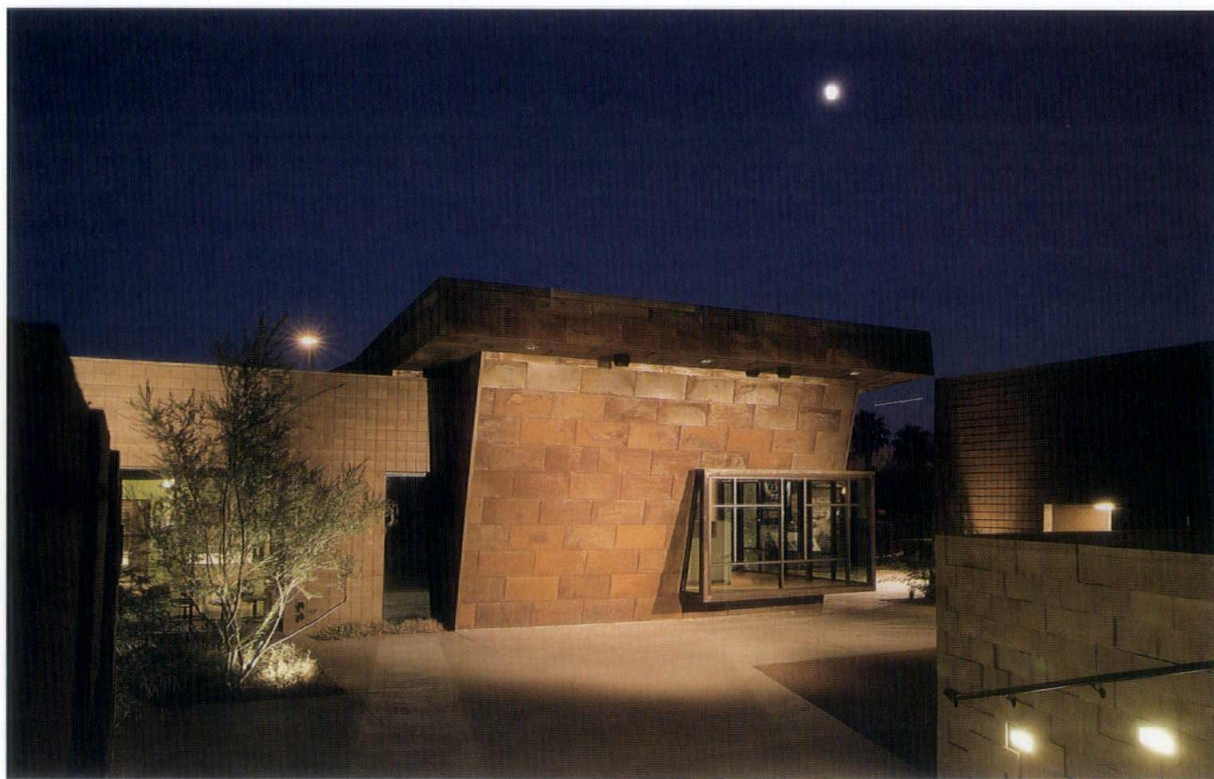
OLD LAS VEGAS MORMON FORT VISITOR'S CENTER

Citation Award, Built
assemblageSTUDIO

Designing a new place to serve and not overshadow a 150-year-old place can't be as easy as assemblageSTUDIO made it look. Especially when the latter place is as historically important as the Old Mormon Fort, Las Vegas' first building. But the design team not only made the new visitor center fit its context and fulfill its role, they did so while making it an attraction in its own right—not even counting the exhibits inside. "This project gives such a successful narrative of how you arrive at the forms and the construction of the space," the jurors wrote. "The mud brick walls and timber frame were originally done in this region ... and we liked how they were able to put these into a contemporary setting, but also allow for little surprises, like the window box corner, to exist simultaneously and collaboratively—adding value rather than being in conflict with one another." This smart combination of old and new—a juxtaposition both within the building and the site—bonds visitors with the past and present. That's called perspective, which is what a history field trip should be about. The jurors also appreciated the architect not losing sight of the more basic function of a visitor center: creating "a scale perspective [that] really evidences a good understanding and a firm grasp of scale and spaces for people." Finally, they found the project "interesting from a materials perspective as well." Though they're considered modern, the architects magically made weathered-steel siding and concrete walls work in this historical context. For this, the Old Mormon Fort's new addition received the ultimate compliment: "It feels warm and welcoming, like it belongs."



The inviting
entrance to the
new visitor's
center.



AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS

A look at the
window box from
two perspectives
(shown left and
opposite page)
within the center's
courtyard.





Main Street offers modern urban residences mixed in with office and retail spaces.

MAIN STREET LAS VEGAS

Citation Award, Unbuilt

Blok Haus and assemblageSTUDIO Collaborative

This project would be a big turn-on for any Vegas urbanite who admires the high-rise phenomenon from afar but wonders what's in it for real residents like himself who work hard for a living and wouldn't mind playing more Downtown, given the chance. He'd love to live at Main Street, a modern, mixed-use dream that, pending city approval, could come true on the outskirts of the redevelopment district. And evidently he could afford it, as the architects—on a mission "to deal with attainable housing," a growing issue in Las Vegas—came up with a contemporary design that "would appeal to the creative class" (such as teachers and young architects) yet fall "within budget." The jurors didn't comment on the affordability or urban-lifestyle issues—unfortunately, as the architects stressed that Main Street was designed to be a counterpoint to the city's luxury high-rise craze—but they did marvel at the team's "classic modernist" aesthetic. "It has a simplicity that expands to richness. ... This project presents a clarity of thought that is reminiscent of Mies van der Rohe." The 432 one- to three-bedroom units on the 11-acre parcel are each a cluster of boxes of varying elevations, dimensions and textures (including stucco and metal siding), creating an engaging visual mix to go along with the development's variety of uses (there are 31 spaces for office and retail on the ground floor). The units are organized around open circulation catwalks, which the architects hope would "create opportunities for community interaction." There are also congregational opportunities courtesy of the rooftop terrace and, in the commons area between units, two swimming pools. The architects also responded to the climate, calling for an open design that allows cross ventilation in all units as well as solar shading—which is much-needed encouragement for Las Vegas residents to leave their cool homes in the summer.

AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS

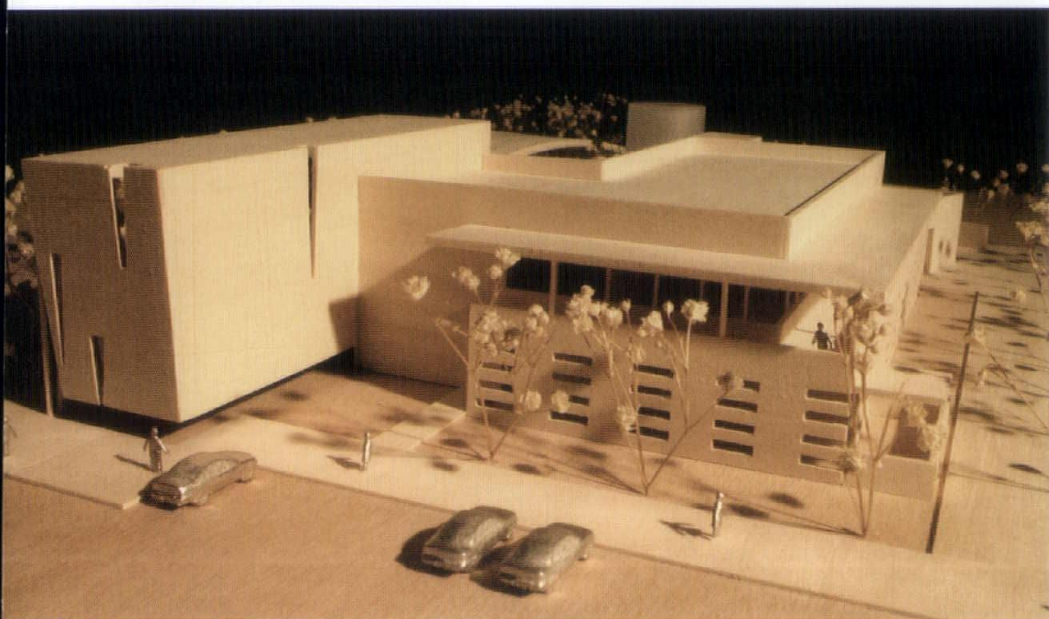
UNLV ATHLETIC ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION CENTER

Honor Award, Unbuilt

Welles Pugsley Architects

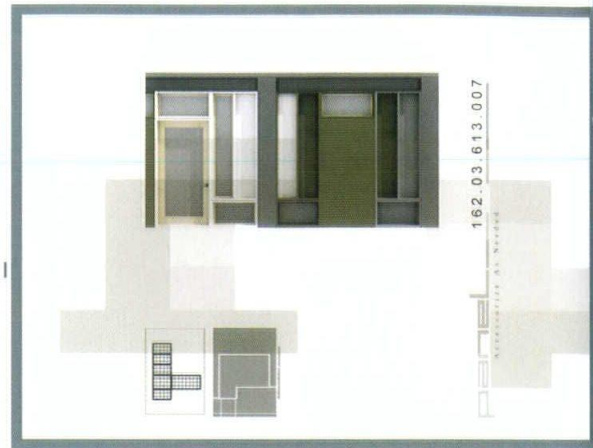
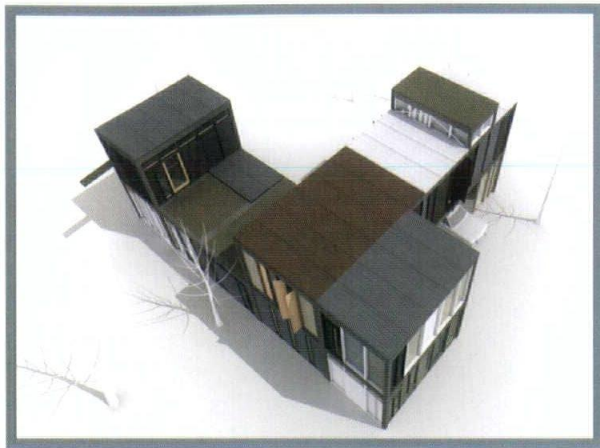
For a project that involved everything from university bureaucracy to NCAA codes of conduct to foul balls, it looked like it might have been a relatively fun design process. Setting out to make new office space for the athletic department and a study facility for student-athletes, the design team first went through meetings with UNLV's design committee. The result was an expanded mission whose challenges included the need for a wow factor (making certain spaces "suitable for recruiting athletes and wooing donors") and working around a "plethora" of restrictions (creating spaces that keep athletes and donors from mingling). This "new gateway" to the athletic complex also had to fit in among baseball fields, the track venue and football practice facility—literally and visually. Once these needs were grasped, the firm led a charrette process that culminated with the architects coming up with concepts in 48 hours. Designers evolved the building through a variety of looks—at one point even drawing inspiration from *Star Wars*' Jawa Sandcrawler—trying to get at the wow factor in two particular spaces: the Hall of Fame and the Student Lounge. The architects arrived at solutions through creative use of volume, color and material (including Cor-Ten, zinc and concrete), popping out these "special" sections and allowing the rest of the building (the office components) to be in the background. "This is a solid piece of architecture," the jury stated, "from its overall conception to how it's programmed and how it will be used." The center, scheduled to open by winter 2007, answers each problem pragmatically like a wise academician, yet, like a good team, rose to the occasion of its purpose. "It is what an athletic and academic center should be, rather than another typography that might be found on a university," the jury concluded. "It is proportioned just right in space and scale ... and it would be an exciting place to be."





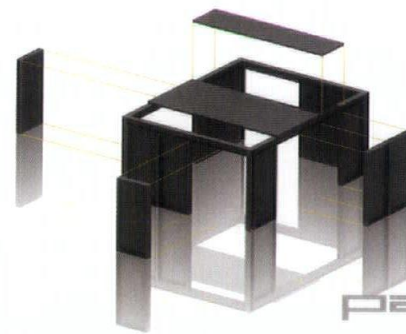
The iconic entryway with its two-and-a-half-story glass wall (above) will house UNLV's sports hall of fame. The center's two other main spaces are the athletic department (right side of model shown on the left) and the student-athlete study center (foreground of model on the opposite page).







The PANEL house can be changed as the owner's lifestyle changes.



Panel + Frame
panel
Accessorize As Needed

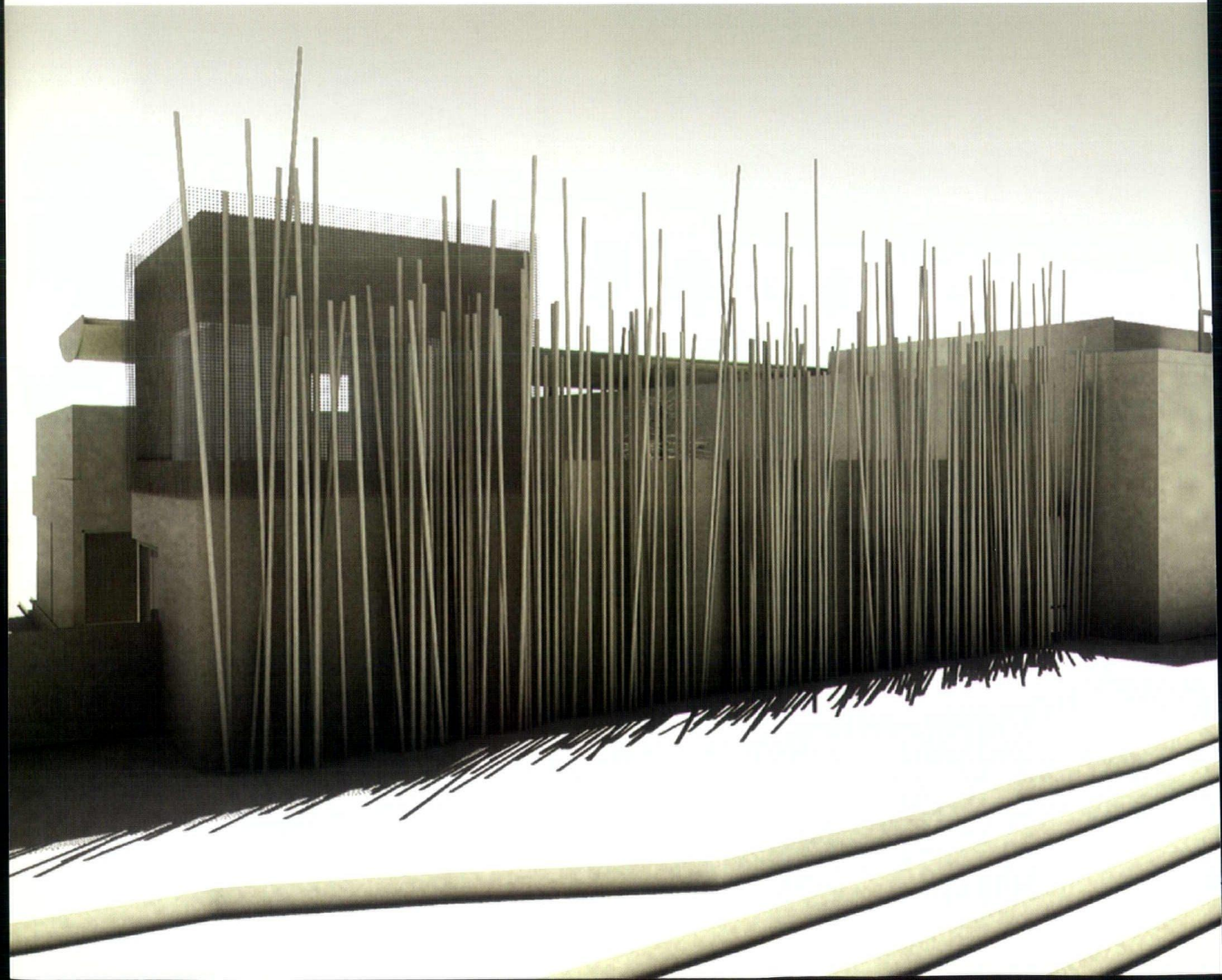
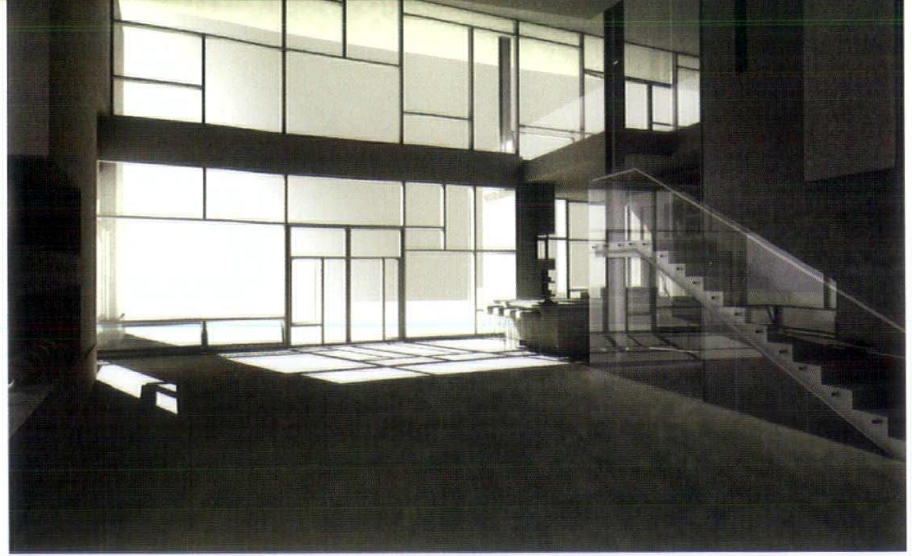
PANEL: ACCESSORIZE AS NEEDED

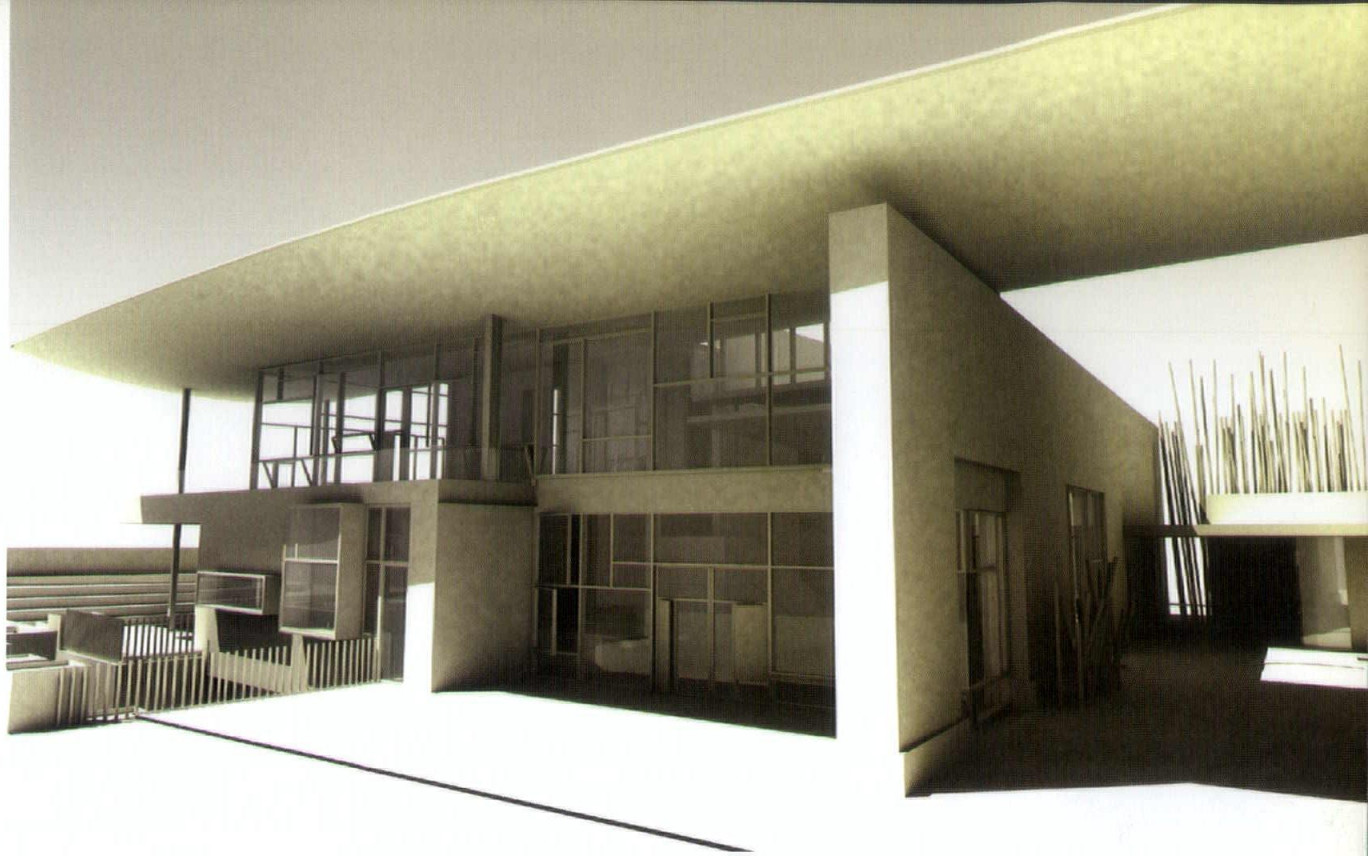
Honor Award, Academic
Daniel Chenin, Assoc. AIA

Daniel Chenin opened his project statement with the quote, "The only thing we can predict with certainty is change." The UNLV student may, however, be an exception to that rule. Judging from his award-winning design, it's a certainty that he'll get hired right out of school. The jury used the adjectives "compelling," "exceptional" and "dynamic" to describe his work—doubly impressive when you consider that his aim is to redesign the American home. "This is the kind of project you can spend your whole career working on," one juror wrote, "and it is exquisitely presented." Chenin contends that the primary certainty in life has been "ignored" by the homebuilding industry. "Our houses are not easily adaptable and therefore they do not reflect our current societal trends, lifestyles and living habits, which are marked by constant and sometimes sudden change." A new architectural approach, he claims, would allow a house to be "changeable so that the household and house can evolve together over time." His solution, the PANEL house, offers a system of components (building blocks or modules) that can be disassembled and reconfigured when the inhabitants go, say, from family of four to empty nesters. "Much like a quilt," Chenin says, "the modular components of the PANEL house are pieced together throughout its lifetime as the household evolves." Or, as his project's subtitle puts it: "Accessorize as Needed." He calls for a post-and-beam construction, which allows for a "clean, orderly and open character," but also an infinite range in panel construction and material choice because the walls are not load-bearing. He proceeds to demonstrate through computer illustrations and a flow chart how a home can evolve with lifestyle change. If, for example, your divorced daughter returns home with her child, you can reconfigure your home so that she can have her own wing or a casita. Chenin even projects the PANEL into the future, as a movement, saying its "plug-and-play" nature is conducive to "germinating throughout the suburban and urban neighborhoods across the country." One juror seemed to know where Chenin might start: "I wish this young man would come to LA."

AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS

A giant canopy (opposite page) shades the home yet lets in plenty of indirect light (right). Along one of the rammed-earth walls will be a row of bamboo plants (below).





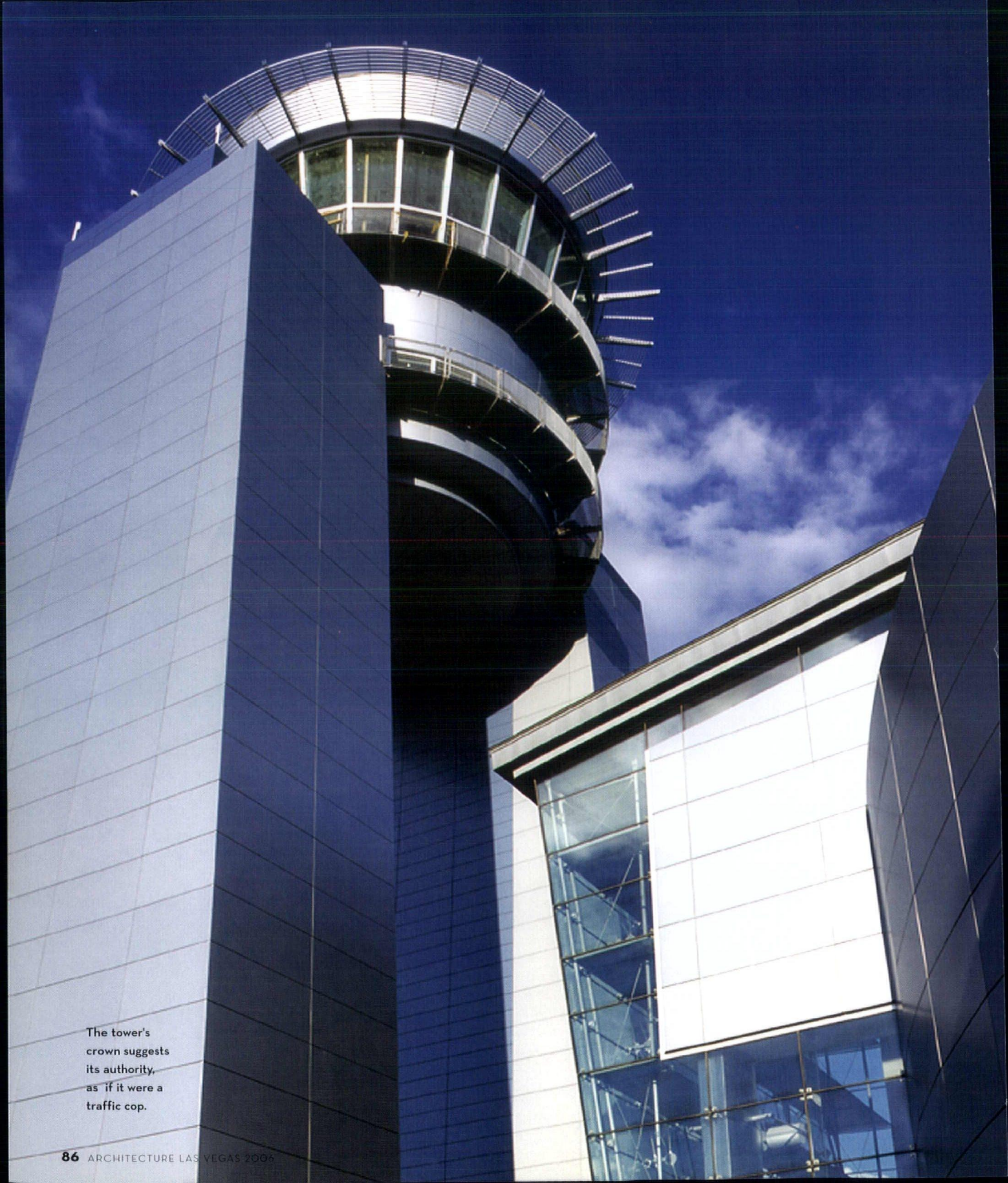
J2

Merit Award, Unbuilt
assemblageSTUDIO

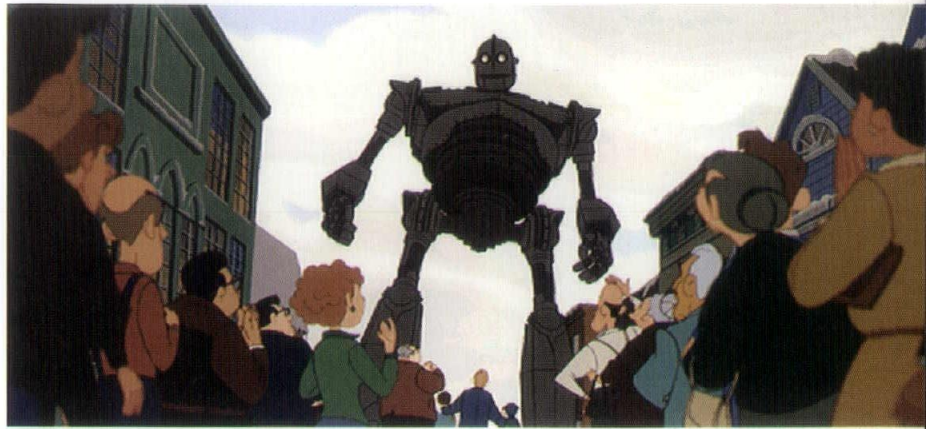
Believe it or not, in the Valley of the Dull, there is a master-planned community in Summerlin that actually requires "design individuality." It certainly got what it demanded, and then some, in the case of J2, a modern marvel of Vegas homesteading that's being nestled into the base of Red Rock. AssemblageSTUDIO called for materials that range from weathered steel to rammed earth (a first for Vegas). The designers blur the line between indoors and outdoors throughout the house, declaring the residence to be as much about this seamless lifestyle "as it is about the architecture." And once finished, J2 will gain 20 percent of its power from the sun, as part of its energy efficiency and environmental friendliness. While such qualities seem foreign here, the irony is that the jurors loved the home because, "Of all the projects we reviewed, this one is the most regional and really looks as if it belongs here." Perhaps it took an architect designing for a couple of architects (the two J's—John Klai, AIA and Jon Sparer, AIA) for Vegas to see the light of a desert-appropriate dwelling. Which wouldn't be direct light, of course. That's absorbed by the photovoltaic modules atop J2's giant canopy, which primarily serves to shade the residence, allowing what the architect believes to be a natural way to live in the desert: externally as much internally. In fact, he refers to this type of design as "a traditional desert habitation." With 12,000 interior square feet, you can imagine there are plenty of places to roam overall, and each indoor space either provides a view of the Valley or an outdoor escape. Even the basement bar and game room connect to a courtyard. Having all that space isn't exactly a time-honored tradition in the desert. Nevertheless, the jurors were impressed that J2 can be that big yet feel like home: "The way the plan breaks up and the way the individual spaces are planned, it does not lose the human scale or the ability to be an intimate house."

IMAGES COURTESY ASSEMBLAGE STUDIO

AIA
DESIGN
AWARDS



The tower's crown suggests its authority, as if it were a traffic cop.



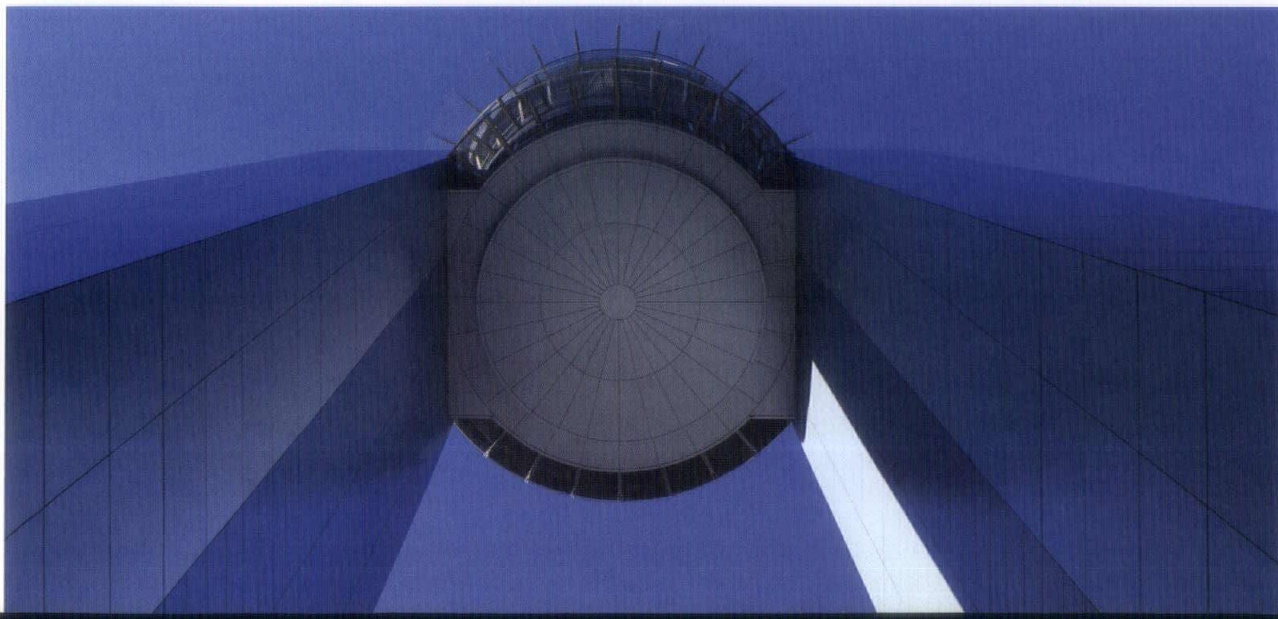
The architect drew inspiration from the robot in *The Iron Giant*.

MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT RAMP CONTROL TOWER

Merit Award, Built

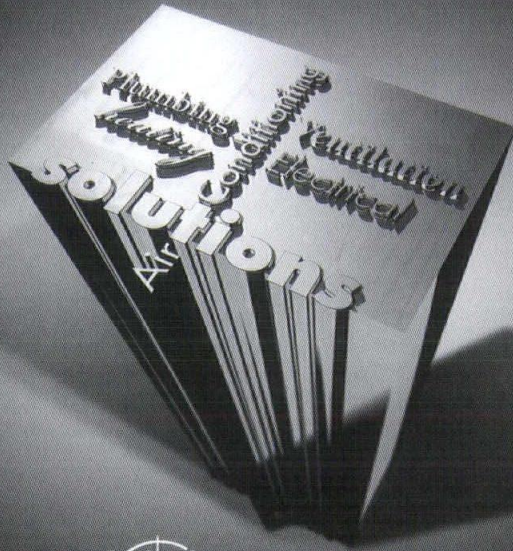
Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects

This project scored points before the jury even met. "As I flew into Las Vegas, I admired the new airport tower, so I was pleased to find it as a project in the design awards," one juror stated. "We really loved this project and how it stands on the landscape. It provides a great counterpoint to the images of the Strip." In one photo the jurors saw the sleek, steely tower against the multicolored "skyline" of New York-New York hotel-casino, authoritatively standing watch over the main intersection in America's playground. Like a traffic cop. That's one of the allusions that Tate Snyder Kimsey was going for in this \$5 million project for the Clark County Department of Aviation, which sought an observation point for aircraft movement on the ground. The Federal Aviation Administration, as you might guess, has very strict standards for such a structure. But the architect made the most of what creative freedom it did have, getting anthropomorphic with the base and exterior. Inspiration for the legs came from the Colossus of Rhodes (the ancient statue once thought to have straddled the Mediterranean island's harbor entrance), serving as a symbolic point of entry for this tourist city. The top of the tower draws from a policeman's hat (thus the tilt of the crown). As a whole, the architect goes as far as to suggest the star of the animated *Iron Giant* as a likeness, but it's not clear how this subtle metaphor plays out. Nonetheless, the jury responded well to the whimsy. "We think the architect has some fun with the analogy of *The Iron Giant* robot and how the form comes about." Meantime, on the more practical level, the tower seems to be functioning just fine: all jurors returned home safely.



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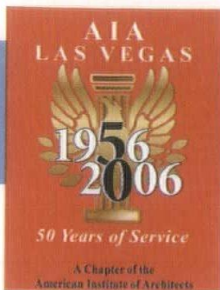


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LAS VEGAS ARCHITECTURE PAST AND FUTURE

Celebrating 50 Years

BY RANDY LAVIGNE, *Hon. AIA, Executive Director*

LAS VEGAS HAS A 100-YEAR HISTORY OF ATTRACTING unconventional, strongly independent individuals. This city was built by those who dared to dream beyond the ordinary, to risk everything on their ideas and abilities. The architects and design professionals who helped build it clearly exhibited these attributes—in abundance. So it is something of a miracle that, in 1956, a handful of maverick architects joined together to establish the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. And today, 50 years later, the chapter remains a vital entity in the community with more than 500 members.

The AIA Las Vegas Chapter was established on

January 6, 1956. Since then, the city and AIA members have benefited from the many architects who have served as president, board directors and committee chairs, and have led the chapter in upholding the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct: to protect the profession, raise the quality of architecture and safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the public.

In the last half-century, members of AIA Las Vegas have contributed daily to the planning, designing and building of this most extraordinary city. They have been an integral part of the growth and development of our communities. They initiated the effort to establish the School of Architecture at UNLV, and they have

created and provided numerous community-outreach programs that have enhanced the livability of our city.

Last year, AIA Las Vegas brought international recognition to the city and its architecture by hosting the largest and most successful AIA National Convention and Design Exposition in the history of the Institute, with more than 25,000 attendees. In doing this, AIA Las Vegas proved that, even 50 years later, the wild, unconventional spirit of the architects who first established the Chapter is alive and thriving, and that today's AIA architects and design professionals still dare to dream beyond the ordinary—and successfully turn those dreams into reality. ■

Looking Forward to the Next 50 ...

BY GEORGE TATE, *AIA Emeritus*

Las Vegas changes so fast that it's hard to imagine what the city or the architecture profession will be like in 50 years. We asked George Tate, who has worked here for the past 50 years, to give it a try.

I HAVE IN MY FILES SOME SKETCHES OF WHAT A WELL-known designer in the 1930s thought automobiles, trains and buildings would look like in the future. Anytime I attempt to predict the future, I am reminded to look at those sketches and hope not to look so much the fool as that designer. But I do have some thoughts ...

Just as things commonplace today were completely unbelievable years ago, the future will be completely different from our wildest dreams. As always, this future will be driven by technological advancement, but in Southern Nevada, I think the changes that will have the most profound effect on architecture and this city will have to do with societal, political and economic shifts.

We are particularly liable to certain threats that could disastrously affect what we have come to think of as an unsinkable economy. Economic cycles have always had a profound effect on architecture, but especially so where the sole industry is entirely dependent on tourism. Look for examples of down cycles in building in Arizona when they overbuilt, or in Texas when they got overextended, and closer to home in California when they got ahead of the economy. Then consider New York City—what would happen to us if we received a hit by terrorists on one of our major hotels?

Another threat to our prosperity is in the image problem we face if we go too far in promoting Sin City sleaze as our only marketable product. By getting too far ahead of the curve of public acceptance, we risk the action of politicians on the federal level, stepping in with high-handed laws like those that whacked the tobacco industry, citing gambling as a drain on society and public funds. Politicians at the federal level are always looking for new sources of money, and legalized gambling is one that has them drooling.

The biggest and ultimate threat to our continued growth, however, is the limitation of water. Even modern technology cannot brush that aside. Our profession will be called upon even more to design projects that conserve that precious commodity, and to design more energy-efficient buildings. Today we throw around terms like "green building" and "sustainability" as if we are experts in this regard, but I do not believe we have scratched the surface in terms of what the future will require of us. (Incidentally, we learned in our architecture classes half a century ago the principles now referred to by these fancy names, only then we called it "architecture.") We must become more attuned to nature and how to make better use of the resources that are especially limited here in the arid Southwest.

Transportation problems, too, have a tremendous impact on building and on the evolution of cities. In my opinion, our only solution lies in taking more drastic steps in the design of our city and its outlying areas. Major changes in city and regional

planning concepts must be undertaken so that living areas are connected to working areas and to commercial areas and to Downtown, and so on, in such a way that the varying transportation needs of individuals are met by a rapid, convenient, quiet and unified system. In a future world, if there is to be any quality of life, we as designers must envision it and then make it happen.

Years ago when I was an architectural student, we had a visit from the prestigious Frank Lloyd Wright. We had set up the common area displaying the best work of the students, hoping to get some helpful comments from this famous architect. We even set up a place for him to sit and a microphone to use as he spoke to the students. True to form, he strode into the building, refused to go near the microphone, and for a while wandered around the room, pointing out several misspelled words on the students' work. When he did finally address us he rambled on about organic architecture—I think. He was mesmerizing to us young students, but I didn't really know what he was talking about, except for one statement he made that has stuck with me all these years. He said a future generation—not ours but a generation of architects beyond ours—would bring into being the greatest period of architecture the world has ever known. Obviously that kind of left us out, but if there was any truth to his prediction, I believe we can say that at least we paved the way for that generation.

Like Frank Lloyd Wright, I expect our future architects to make the most of it. ■



Son of the Desert

After nearly four decades of creating first-rate regional designs, Jess Holmes calls it a day—sort of. **BY GREG BLAKE MILLER**

JESS HOLMES DOES NOT DESIGN BUILDINGS WITH THE GOAL of shocking anyone. Sometimes, though, all it takes to shock folks is to believe in a perfectly reasonable concept and follow its perfectly reasonable lead. When Holmes was designing the Whitney Library in the early 1990s, the reasonable concept was that the colors of the building should echo and interact with the colors of the desert, so he chose a palette of lavender, gold and terra cotta. This was a time when the general consensus around the Valley was that the color of the desert was, well, tan.

"We had so much trouble with the library board with the color of that building," recalls Holmes. "One lady ran in mad complaining about the colors: 'Where do those colors come from?' I said, 'I'll tell you where those colors come from. You go outside at sunset and look. Those are the colors you'll see.'"



She came back and said, 'You're absolutely right.'"

During his 39-year career, Holmes—who retired last fall from the firm he co-founded, Dekker/Perich/Holmes/Sabatini—earned an admirable reputation for both fidelity to concept and impeccable consideration toward his clients. The not-so-secret secret behind this reputation is his ability to explain his vision, and the reasons for it. Spend some time talking with Holmes about architecture and no principle seems arcane, no flourish inexplicable, and no structural element unsupported by reason. The site drives the concept, the concept drives the design—and if the design seems dreamy, Holmes will show you the roots of that dream right there in the soil.

Holmes argues that he never developed a signature style—that he approached every building as a unique design.

Nevertheless, he has given the Las Vegas Valley a number of outstanding public buildings that, taken together, clearly bear the mark of their designer. We see this mark, for instance, in the hilly topography he crafted around (and beneath) the Henderson Multigenerational Center, UNLV's Student Services Building and the Whitney Library. We see it in his use of towers and skylights to bring daylight into the center of these buildings, even as stylized and sometime windowless external walls keep out the heat. We see it in the sweeping curved facades of the Beam Music Center and the Bigelow Physics Building at UNLV.

"One common thread is that he introduced that curve or circular element," says Chris Larsen, the managing partner at Dekker/Perich/Sabatini, who has worked with Holmes for 14 years. "But he didn't do it just for the sake of it; he did it because it made sense, to soften a space or welcome people into a building. He's very regional, very attuned to the need to welcome sunlight in but protect from harsh winds. And he

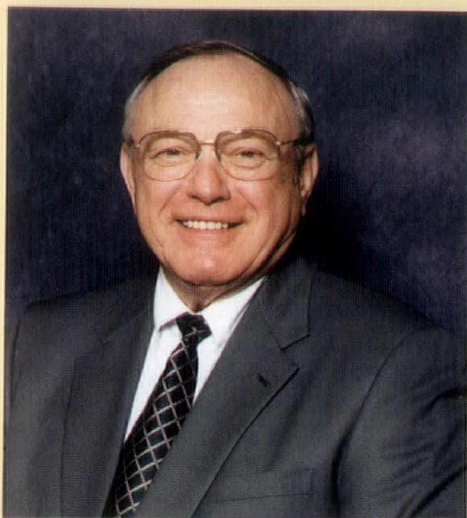
He has given Las Vegas a number of outstanding public buildings that, taken together, clearly bear the mark of their designer.

considers outdoor space as important as indoor space."

Holmes' understanding of both the demands and peculiar beauties of the desert started early. He grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and—after a short but fortuitous stint at Texas Tech, where he met and befriended Robert Fielden, who would later bring him to Las Vegas—he graduated from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. In 1967 he opened his first practice there. In 1978 he joined Fielden at Jack Miller and Associates in Las Vegas, but wound up as the firm's point man in Reno. Homesick, he headed back to Albuquerque in 1984 and teamed up with Bill Sabatini. The new firm established a key relationship with the University of New Mexico, and in 1988 Holmes came to Las Vegas to open a second office. He had enjoyed building for UNM—universities, he says, offer the best opportunity for truly creative, ambitious architecture—and was hoping for the chance to design for UNLV.

Almost immediately, he got his chance. He was given 90

Remembering Dale Scheideman, who built a future for our children



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS LOST ONE good soldier when Colonel Elton Dale Scheideman died on February 8, 2006.

Scheideman, who was 72, served as an architect for the U.S. Air Force for 30 years, directing and building housing for soldiers around the world. He retired in 1989, and two years later began his illustrious second career, as director of New Schools and Facility Planning for the Clark County School District, the nation's fifth largest. During his 14 years of service in Southern Nevada, he was responsible

for the planning and building of 169 schools, as well as nearly 200 projects at existing schools.

But beyond meeting the incredible demand of America's fastest-growing metropolitan area, Scheideman will be remembered as an architect who put students' needs above all else. "His vision was to build the best places for kids to learn," says Paul Gerner, associate superintendent of facilities.

"Dale believed strongly that design and construction had a direct bearing on how kids learn," said Fred Smith, the school district's construction manager. "He showed us that good and attractive architecture is not necessarily expensive architecture."

Some concepts that Scheideman worked into projects included:

- Plenty of sunlight in classrooms to help students remain alert and save the district money on power bills.
- Kindergarten playgrounds situated to avoid direct contact with areas frequented by older elementary children, reducing the possibility of bullying.
- Safer interior spaces, including courtyards that gave students the benefits of learning outdoors without being exposed to traffic or passersby.
- Creating interactive environments that transcend the classroom, where students can experience science and the arts. At John Vanderberg Elementary School in Henderson, for example, Scheideman oversaw the construction of the \$1 million, 3,000-square-foot biosphere rainforest. He helped create the School of Mines at McCaw

Elementary School and the Marine Biology Lab at Estes McDoniel Elementary School in Henderson.

"Dale looked at [these special environments] as a laboratory where kids could experience hands-on science," said Carolyn Reedom, a longtime principal in the school district. "Dale was supportive of projects that principals thought would be good for their students, even ones that had not been tested elsewhere. He helped children go beyond what they could learn in the classroom."

AIA Las Vegas President Wade Simpson says Scheideman's "impact on education in Southern Nevada has been tremendous, and his loss will be felt for many years."

Scheideman was a member of the AIA for 16 years. He served as president of both AIA Las Vegas (in 2003) and AIA Nevada (in 2005). In 2004, he received the AIA Nevada Silver Medal—the highest service honor that can be bestowed upon an architect.

Through Scheideman's vision and leadership, the AIA Las Vegas Chapter established the "Design for Learning" Foundation as the Legacy Project for the AIA 2005 National Convention. In his memory it has been rededicated as the Dale Scheideman AIA Design for Learning Foundation. It will fund the exploration and research into the design of educational facilities and study how design affects a student's performance and achievement. The foundation's goal is to translate this knowledge into better facility planning and architecture. ■

days to design a complex of dormitories and a dining hall. There was no wiggle room: The students were coming in the fall and they needed a place to live. "For 90 days we slept and took our meals on the floor," Holmes says. "Once a week they said, 'Go home and shower! You smell.' It was a tremendous effort. There were huge stakes for the university, and for us."

The design was completed on time, the buildings were ready early, and Holmes cemented a relationship with UNLV that lasts to this day.

To an old friend like Fielden, it figures that any client who begins a relationship with Holmes will want to keep the relationship going.

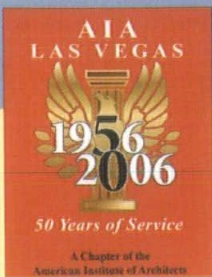
"If there was a model you would want in terms of professional behavior for an architect, he's the guy you would follow and document," Fielden says. "He has the highest level of ethical standards, he thinks of others before himself, he's a great teacher. He's also a marvelous craftsman. His designs are straightforward, contemporary, regional—part of this place. You couldn't ask for anyone to do a better job of designing for our environment than he does."

In retirement, Holmes, 66, hopes to build a house in

Pahrump, travel the country in his motor home with his wife, Connie, and start painting again—a hobby he's left aside since college. But he's not quite finished here in the Valley. For 14 years he's been working on the Visitor Center at the Clark County Wetlands Park. For an admirer of desert diversity, it was a project to treasure, but the funding was never available to complete it. Now the money—most of it, anyway—is there, and Holmes will stay on as a consultant.

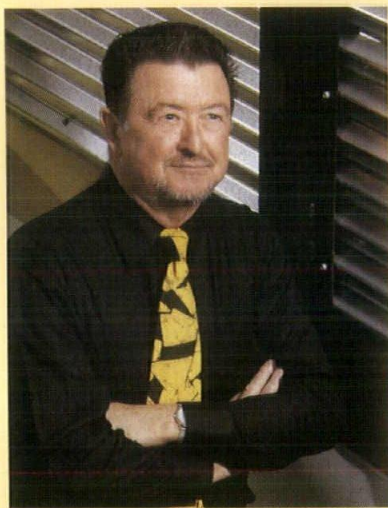
Joan Lolmaugh, manager of cultural affairs for Clark County Parks and Recreation, has worked with Holmes from the project's inception. She says the unique structure, which will stand on stilts above the 100-year-flood level, could be complete within two years.

"Jess was the prime mover, the motivator, the carrier of the torch for the design for a building that would integrate the architecture into the environment itself," Lolmaugh says. "He was able to translate that sense of integration to everyone involved. He's a wonderful individual to work with, very sensitive in terms of listening and interpreting our needs. He's been the guiding light on this project, and it only seemed appropriate that he could see it through." ■



THE AIA NEVADA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Each year, the state chapter of the American Institute of Architects honors members and firms who have made significant contributions to the community and the profession through the various levels of AIA membership.



THE AIA NEVADA SILVER MEDAL

Jack B. Sheehan, AIA
Sheehan, Van Woert, Bigotti Architects, Reno

The Silver Medal, the highest honor that AIA Nevada can bestow upon an individual architect, recognizes distinguished service to the profession.



THE ARCHITECTURE FIRM AWARD

SH Architecture, Las Vegas

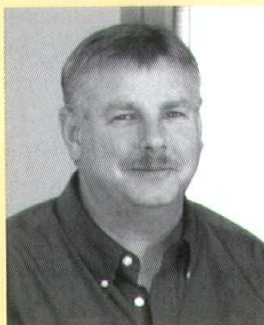
Awarded to the firm that has consistently produced distinguished architecture for a period of at least 10 years and has exhibited a commitment to be of service to the public and to the American Institute of Architects. This is the highest honor the state can bestow on a firm.



THE AIA NEVADA SERVICE AWARD

Wade Simpson, AIA
Welles Pugsley Architects, Las Vegas

Awarded to a member who has contributed significantly to the profession through the American Institute of Architects.



THE YOUNG ARCHITECT CITATION

Mike Purtill, AIA
Aptus Architecture, Las Vegas

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THE AIA NEVADA ASSOCIATE AWARD

Robin Stark, Assoc. AIA
Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects, Las Vegas

Awarded to the associate member who has contributed significantly to the profession through their participation in their local chapter of the American Institute of Architects.



THE AIA NEVADA ALLIED MEMBER AWARD

Kelle Herring
Vista Paint, Las Vegas

Presented to the allied member who has contributed significantly to the profession through their participation in their local chapter of the American Institute of Architects.



ADVANCING THE PROFESSION

Bradley D. Schulz, AIA

Honored with the AIA WMR Silver Medal

Within the Western Mountain Region, the highest honor that can be bestowed upon an architect is the AIA WMR Silver Medal. Architect Bradley D. Schulz, AIA, was the recipient of this honor for 2005 in recognition of his significant contributions to the institute, the profession, the citizens of the region and his own community.

An AIA member since 1983, Schulz has worked continuously to improve the profession and to better his community. He has served as president of the AIA Las Vegas and AIA Nevada chapters and has been instrumental in the success of both organizations over the years. In 1997, AIA Nevada recognized Schulz's contributions by honoring him with the AIA Nevada Service Award, and in 2002 he received the AIA Nevada Silver Medal.

An Upjohn Fellow, Schulz represented the Western Mountain Region on the AIA National Board of Directors from 2000-03. Through his efforts, the AIA Las Vegas Chapter was honored to be the host chapter for the 2005 AIA National Convention. As chair of the AIA Las Vegas Convention Steering Committee, his leadership resulted in the most successful venture the chapter has ever undertaken, and the largest and most successful in the history of the institute. Not only was the convention a huge financial success, but also in terms of recognition for architects and the AIA in the Las Vegas community.

Schulz has been an advocate to reinforce the link between academia and the practice of architecture. He served from 2000-03 as co-chair of the National Intern Development Program Coordinating Committee and was selected to be one of three AIA members serving on the NAAB Board of Directors in 2004. He will serve as National Secretary for NAAB in 2006.

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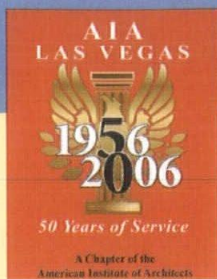


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2006 AIA LAS VEGAS HIGHLIGHTS

AIA Las Vegas is an active and vital professional organization providing educational, social and public service programs that benefit our members and the community. We invite all who are interested in quality architecture and in building livable communities to join us. Learn more about AIA Las Vegas by visiting our website, aialasvegas.org. Listed here are a few of the programs and events we have planned for 2006.

Architecture Week—Officially proclaimed by Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman, the City Council and the Clark County Commission, April 14-22 will be a weeklong celebration of architecture in Las Vegas. In addition to exhibits, school programs and the release of the *Architecture Las Vegas* magazine, tune into KNPR 88.9-FM to hear architects and community leaders discuss the most urgent and interesting issues regarding the plans and architecture of Las Vegas.

Workforce Housing Conference—Across the nation, communities are struggling with how to provide attainable housing and how to build housing that is both sustainable and makes best use of our natural resources. Nowhere is the problem more acute than in Las Vegas, where the high-rise condominium boom, escalating property prices and an ever-increasing population have strained the market. Faculty for public, private schools and universities, entry-level employees in technology and manufacturing, and hotel-casino workers are hard-pressed to find homes that they can afford. AIA Las Vegas is tackling the issue head on by providing this intensive conference and design charrette for city and county planning officials, developers, financial institutions and architects. Following a morning of programs that address land use, public policies, the developer's role, sustainable design and urban planning, there will be a design charrette focusing on quality solutions. Contact AIA Las Vegas for information on registration and participation, 702-895-0936.

The AIA Commemorative Cup goes to the winner of the golf tournament.



33rd Annual Golf Tournament—The longest-running golf tournament in Southern Nevada is always one of the highlights of our year. The 2006 edition is scheduled for May 22 at Spanish Trail Golf Course. Player, team and sponsor spaces are available. Call 702-895-0936 to reserve.

AIA Las Vegas Product Show—This annual event is open to the public and includes more than 120 exhibitors providing the latest products and technology in the design and building industry. This year's show will be October 4 in the Pavilion at the Stardust Hotel.

Klai Juba Lectures—This excellent lecture series, funded by Klai Juba Architects, brings nationally renowned architects and designers to Las Vegas. Lectures take place in the Architecture Studies Library in the School of Architecture on the UNLV campus. Check the aialasvegas.org website for a schedule of speakers and dates.



Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects were recognized for three outstanding projects at the recent AIA Nevada Design Awards.

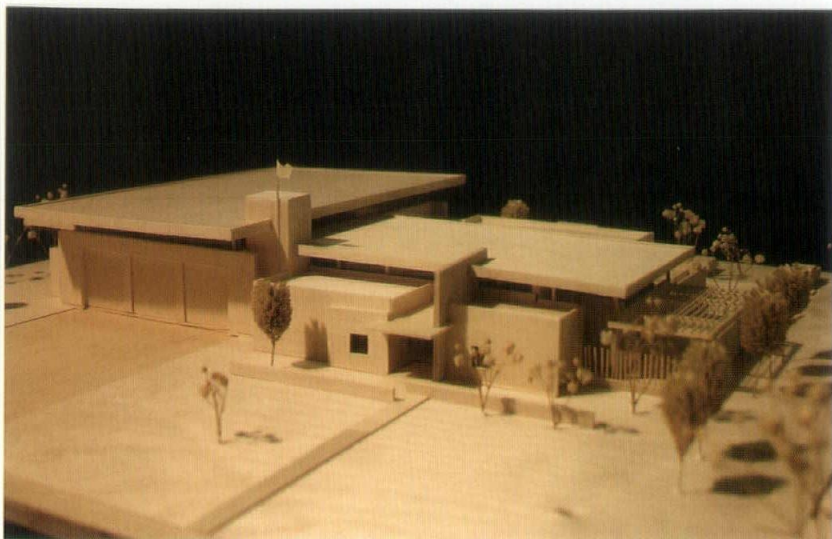
AIA Nevada Excellence in Design & Distinguished Service Awards—Designed to recognize excellence in architecture and service to the profession and the community, this statewide awards program will be in Reno this year, hosted by the AIA Northern Nevada Chapter. Held in the autumn and open to the public, the date and location of the awards banquet will be announced as soon as confirmed. Contact AIA Northern Nevada at 775-827-6600 to purchase tickets.



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CLARK COUNTY FIRE STATION PROTOTYPE

BJG Architecture + Engineering

Lead designer: Gary Eddington

Client: Clark County Real Property Management,
Clark County Fire Department

Location: Mountain's Edge Parkway and Buffalo Drive

Objective: Station 66 is the first of Clark County's new prototype fire station designs, integrating the latest technology, equipment and safety features.

Special attributes: Energy-efficient design concepts, including natural lighting via clerestory windows.

Size: 12,048 square feet

Start Date: September 2006

Completion Date: June 2007

ANDRE AGASSI COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY, PHASE 3-B (HIGH SCHOOL AND GYMNASIUM)

Carpenter Sellers Architects

Lead designer: Rick Sellers, AIA, NCARB; Michael Del Gatto, AIA, NCARB

Client: Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation

Builder: Sletten Construction

Location: Lake Mead Boulevard and J Street

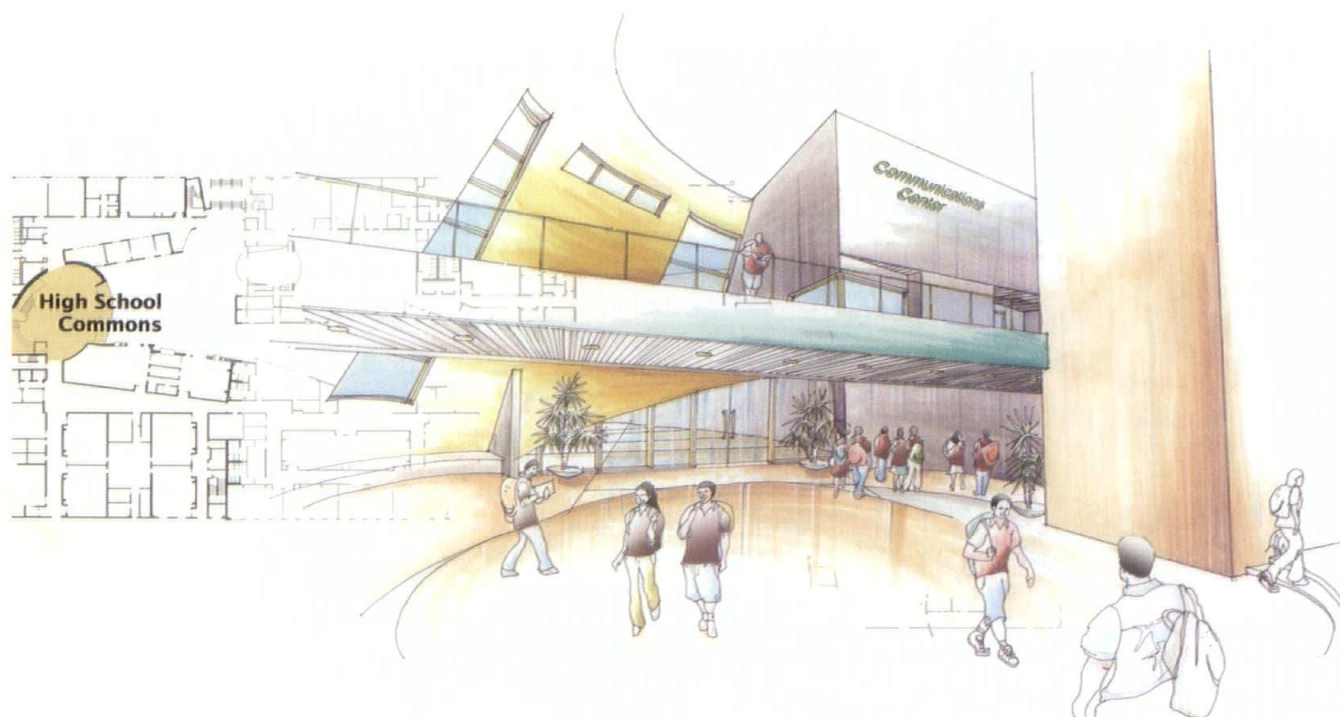
Objective: To continue the vision created from the master plan and complete the design of the K-12 campus with the design of the high school and gymnasium. As our team talked, it became apparent that the design of the third phase would signify a culmination of the matriculation process and a celebration of the next phase of the student journey: college and the rest of their lives. The final phase was not really an ending but a beginning of what will follow. This became the major design idea for the process.

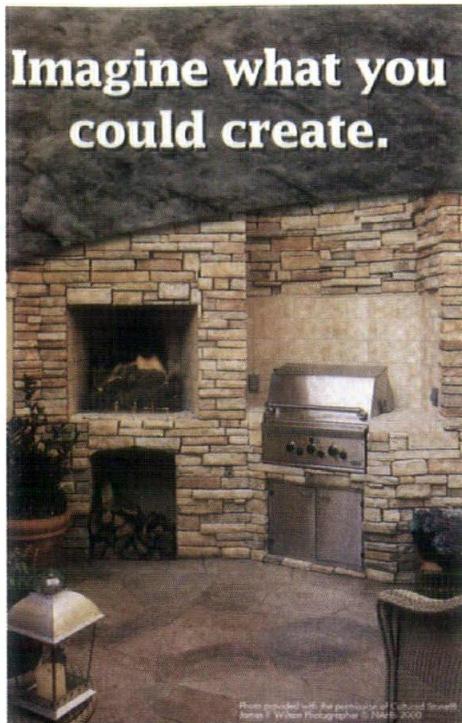
Special attributes: The entire project was phased to meet the emerging classes and allow for fundraising. The high school is built adjacent to the existing Phase 2 middle school, and the gymnasium was built adjacent to the multipurpose building. Day-lighting was incorporated into all learning spaces as well as the gym. The main interior social space is the high school commons. This sculptural shape is the terminus for the mall and is designed to allow the entire high school student body to assemble for a meeting each morning. It is also part of the graduation ceremony and fundraising. The architects conceptualized a third-floor deck for fundraisers and events that offered a view of the Las Vegas Valley (as the client had requested). They also proposed an idea to create tradition through architecture at the school: a commencement bridge from the roof deck to a smaller roof deck that spanned over the high school quad below. It is here that the architects wished to express that the students' education journey does not end at Agassi Prep.

Size: 78,500 square feet for Phase 3-B

Start date: Broke ground in October 2005.

Completion date: August 2006 (in time for the new school year)





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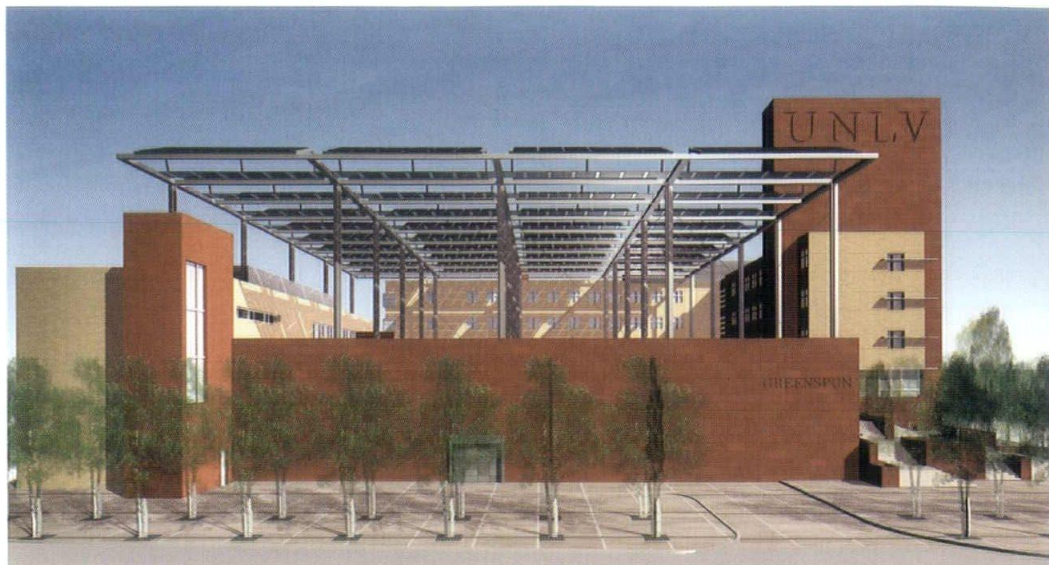
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UNLV'S GREENSPUN COLLEGE OF URBAN AFFAIRS BUILDING

HKS Inc./Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Client: Greenspun Foundation; Martha Watson, dean of the college; State Public Works Board

Location: Corner of Maryland Parkway and University Avenue

Special attributes: Sustainable and LEED accredited, yielding 76,050 net square feet with five floors on a 2.3-acre site. It will include faculty and graduate student offices, smart classrooms of a variety of sizes, seminar rooms and open informal learning areas. This facility will also house modern television studios and a radio station for student learning.

Size: 117,000 gross square feet

Start date: July 2006

Completion date: October 2007



LIVE/WORK PROJECT

JMA Architecture Studios

Lead architect: Edward A. Vance, AIA

Lead designer: Johannes Flemington

Client: LV Land Partners

Location: Bonneville Avenue and First Street, and Bonneville and Clark Street

Objective: The catalyst for the revitalization of Las Vegas' downtown office/retail code, Block B, the first of a nine-building campus, is designed as an engaging urban streetscape. This mixed-use project links major and minor architectural lines, creating a harmonious weave. Inside, unobstructed sight lines to storefronts on all levels enhance circulation and integrate specialty retail, restaurants and entertainment.

Special attributes: Typical of mixed-use development, to support your urban lifestyle within walking distance.

Size: 1.64 million gross square feet for two blocks

Start date: 2007

Completion date: 2010

DESERT LIVING CENTER & GARDENS AT THE SPRINGS PRESERVE

Lucchesi Galati Architects

Design team: Raymond Lucchesi, AIA, LEED AP; Jeffrey Roberts, AIA, LEED AP; Deborah Bergin, AIA, LEED AP; Lance Kirk, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP; Mark Molina, Assoc. AIA; Sean Crawford

Client: Las Vegas Valley Water District

Location: Valley View Boulevard and U.S. 95, within the 180-acre Las Vegas Springs Preserve

Objective: To communicate a vision of sustainable life in the desert. This vision forms the core of a compelling array of experiences and stories aimed at helping people make intelligent choices that contribute to a sustainable future in the Las Vegas Valley. The visioning process for the DLC and Gardens was developed through a series of workshops and charrettes involving the owner, community and professionals.

Special attributes: The design reflects the local environment at every opportunity, beginning with solar orientation for lighting and heating purposes. The structures are integrated into the earth, providing some thermal insulation, and above ground, the mass and thickness of walls assist in protecting heat gain and loss. Thermal mass is achieved through the use of rammed earth and cast-in-place concrete construction. Through straw-bale construction, the buildings are able to achieve high insulation values. Overall, the project hopes to earn LEED Platinum certification by satisfying objectives related to Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, and Indoor Environmental Quality. Five accompanying acres of conservation gardens demonstrate desert-appropriate water and energy-conserving design solutions by applying the latest knowledge and technologies. Also included is a constructed wetland for treatment of all gray and black water for the entire Springs Preserve, to be reused in the Desert Living Center toilets and gardens.

Estimated Cost: \$28 million

Size: Five buildings totaling 54,000 square feet, plus a five-acre demonstration garden

Start Date: January 2001

Completion Date: February 2007



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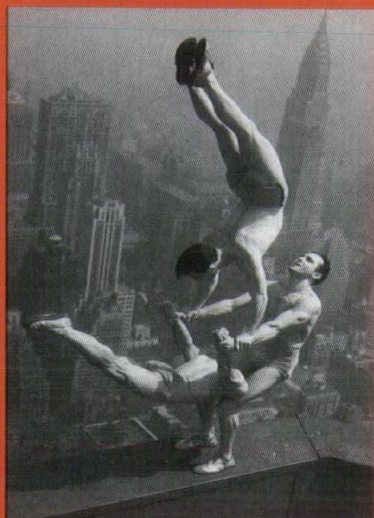
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THE CURVE—A MIXED-USE URBAN VILLAGE

Klai Juba Architects

Location: Interstate 215, along the curve between Durango Drive and Sunset Road

Objective: To create a mixed-use urban village that offers residents a suburban lifestyle with urban convenience.

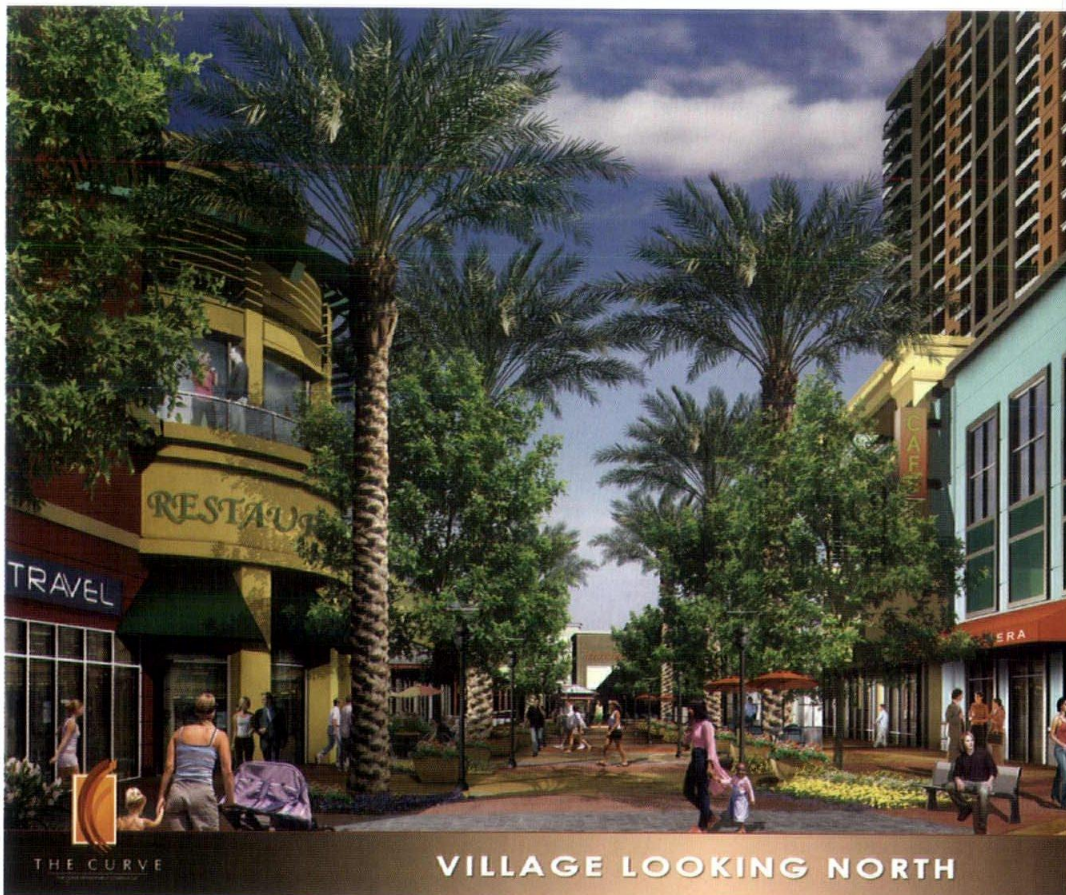
Special attributes: The first phase is 17.5 acres and will include two 18-story high-rise luxury condominium towers with 389 units ranging from 970 to 3,530 square feet and a tower space of 787,170 total square feet, 10 buildings with 115,000 square feet of retail/restaurant space, and 60,000 square feet of Class A commercial loft office space.

Size: 47.5 acres

Estimated cost: \$330 million plus for the first phase

Start date: Spring 2006

Completion date: Second quarter 2007



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Design Awards *continued from page 69*

Molasky's father, Irwin, was already scoping out how to bring Miami to Las Vegas, however, and Steven knew of what he spoke.

The Heizer project never happened, and some of the sculptures have since become iconic masterpieces in the Dia Art Foundation's museum in Beacon, New York. But high-rise residential buildings—apartment towers, if you will—came to town with a vengeance. In the 2004 awards, high-rise designs were already being considered in the Unbuilt category, with JMA winning an award for its 73-story Summit, to be completed later this year on the north end of the Strip.

As luxurious as the 50 or so towers are that are being designed, built or under discussion with banks, they still lack much architectural distinction. This year several more towers showed up in both the Built and Unbuilt competition, but almost all were passed over quickly by the judges. "We're at the cusp here," Scarpa pronounced. "Things will get much more interesting in the future." Everyone nodded. In a city that collects celebrity chefs and shows an increasing penchant for name architects, it won't be all that long before the city boasts of genuinely interesting towers. The MGM Mirage's CityCenter Project, for example, already has on board Cesar Pelli and Norman Foster. I thought immediately of the Turning Torso apartments designed by Santiago Calatrava in Malmo, Sweden, and the astonishing, almost science-fiction skyscrapers being erected in Dubai. In order for Las Vegas towers to become as sophisticated as the city's public buildings, the developers are going to have to ante up for a higher level of aesthetics.

POP SCIENCE

Speaking of science fiction, the most startling aesthetic motions I detected were the overt allusions to that genre in two of the projects. UNLV's unbuilt Athletic Academic & Administration Building, apart from having an unwieldy name, received the Honor Award in that category (see Page 80). The judges singled it out for being "formally beautiful" and "spatially exciting." What really drew my eye, however, was the overt reference to a hulking *Star Wars* "Jawa Sandcrawler," a tracked science-fiction monolith built to traverse a desert world. That acknowledgement to pop film culture by Welles Pugsley Architects showed both daring and a savvy awareness of how to

evoke an emotional response from students.

The other was the Merit Award given in the Built category to the McCarran International Airport Ramp Control Tower by Tate Snyder Kimsey (see Page 87). Perhaps appalling institutional nomenclature demands a humanizing touch of humor, but like the UNLV building, the tower uses a science-fiction icon for inspiration—this time a Japanese robot from an anime feature. Standing in contrast to the bland hotel and residential towers along the Strip, the control tower is able both to engage the imagination of the viewer and to create a brisk dialogue with those other buildings.

AND IN THE FINAL CORNER

Only one building received an Honor Award (the highest rating) this year: the Regional Animal Campus, another Tate Snyder Kimsey project (see Page 74). You know it's the one when all the judges don't even talk about it in the first round, that initial stage of the process where they eliminate almost all the entries without comment. Only one gets put aside as a given that requires no further thought until they are ready to formalize the award language. The public animal shelter is a series of relentlessly regular kennels that are, nonetheless, wondrous to contemplate, with each of the towers topped by a splash of bright color to keep your eye in motion. Using inexpensive materials and intelligent energy techniques, such as modest wind turbines and passive cooling towers to recirculate air, this completed facility shows how you don't have to have a huge budget to be aesthetically pleasing, cost-effective, humane and sustainable.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

Were I to watch the jurying process again in another five years, I might expect the following to pass across the field of vision. Both the residential and hotel towers in Las Vegas will become more individualistic, yet converse with one another—a dynamic that cities such as Dubai and Shanghai will envy. Public buildings in Clark County will continue to lead the way in sustainable practices, while businesses in both Reno and Las Vegas will mature and seek increasing distinction in the faces they present to the public. House design will follow last, as it requires educated patronage. In some places that takes a generation or two. It started in Northern Nevada at the turn of the century. In Las Vegas, it will occur in a relative blink of an eye. ■

All this, I would suggest, is a lot of bubbles in a few short years; enough, I think, to indicate a sea-change. A cynic might remark, of course, that when people with money to build buildings and people with a ravenous ambition to build them face off, an intellectual rapprochement is almost certainly at hand. But there is more to it than that. Suddenly, the two main points of contention between Las Vegas and the culture of architecture are becoming less contentious. The primary disconnect between Vegas clients and "fine" architects has always revolved less around aesthetics than around the question of who decides what's aesthetic, of just exactly who is in charge. The traditional acquiescence of moneyed clients to the architect's whim has never had much traction in Vegas, to put it mildly. Now, suddenly, there is a little give on both sides. The second point of argument has to do with the singular peculiarity of "high" architectural culture in the last century: the presump-

amazing idea that "serious" architecture need not, necessarily, present itself as a critique of all "nonserious" architecture—that architecture needn't, necessarily, contribute directly to the "dismantling of bourgeois society"—or propose some idiom of ideological "resistance."

These ideas, of course, are only revolutionary in architecture schools, but in architecture schools they are very revolutionary, and throughout the symposium, which was fraught with unarticulated rifts and acrimony, old-schoolers sat in stunned amaze listening to lectures about the shag carpeting in Paul Rudolph's bohemian love pad. They were forced to witness other offenses to the mind and spirit. They had to listen to me argue (persuasively, I think) that Jacques Derrida's idea of "deconstruction" has absolutely nothing to do with "construction"—and, surprisingly, for the most part, they held their tongues, which is a sure sign that the ground is changing.

The general upshot of the symposium was, first, that institutional architecture in a fluid

Suddenly, the two main points of contention between Las Vegas and the culture of architecture are becoming less contentious.

tion that residential architecture may be "fine" architecture, that corporate architecture may be "fine" architecture, and that institutional architecture may be "fine" architecture. But commercial architecture cannot.

I understand that this has something to do with architecture aspiring to be a "profession" rather than a "trade," of course, but it has resulted in a culture in which an architect may build a residence for a drug lord, a corporate headquarters for Enron or a post office for Saddam with no moral shadow attached, while the poor fool who designs a department store is banished forever to professional purgatory. My first sign that this was changing came in the form of an e-mail. I was invited to participate in a symposium at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. The whole affair was called "Loopholes," a title that referred to loopholes in current architectural theory through which a young architect might escape current orthodoxy. When I arrived in Cambridge, however, I found the situation a good deal more revolutionary than that. There was a new term in the air: "post critical architect." This new piece of nomenclature, I discovered, referred to the

democracy needn't take itself so damn seriously, that one might pay one's traffic ticket in the bill of a giant duck with no loss of decorum. Second, there was a growing sense that commercial architecture in a fluid democracy might aspire to some sort of refinement and grandeur—that commercial practice might offer architects a genuine site for their cultural imaginations. Finally, it was suggested that architecture, in this post-historical moment, needn't, necessarily, aspire to historical permanence. As one student remarked to me, "If it doesn't work, we could tear it down, you know, like they do in Vegas."

The next day, for the first time in 20 years, I flew home from Harvard to Vegas without experiencing the transitional culture shock that has always attended this traverse. Boston, when I left it, felt a little more "with it" than usual. Vegas, when I arrived, looked a little more refined. I decided that something was really happening, and I knew that it doesn't take much. Palladio only required eight crazy rich guys in the Veneto to change the history of architecture. Their contemporary equivalents may be here in town. ■

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The Vegas Loophole

With its guard dropping, and its old guard fading, the serious architecture world may really be learning something from us this time around. **BY DAVE HICKEY**

FOR MANY YEARS, RITA RUDNER WAS EXACTLY ON THE MONEY. "Wherever you're from," she said, "Vegas is the opposite of that." Certainly, for the past two decades, since Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown first used the words "architecture" and "Las Vegas" in the same sentence, one could safely say that whatever architecture might be, Vegas was the opposite of that. As it turned out, *Learning From Las Vegas* put Vegas on the architectural map, but the favor was not reciprocated, nor did the romance flourish. Architects attended to what the Venturis had to say, but they still hated Vegas. In an age of decorative buildings, they maintained their distaste for decorated buildings, and, thus, throughout the '90s, I shepherded a proliferation of architectural studios from Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Princeton through a proliferating number of casino properties—like Virgil guid-

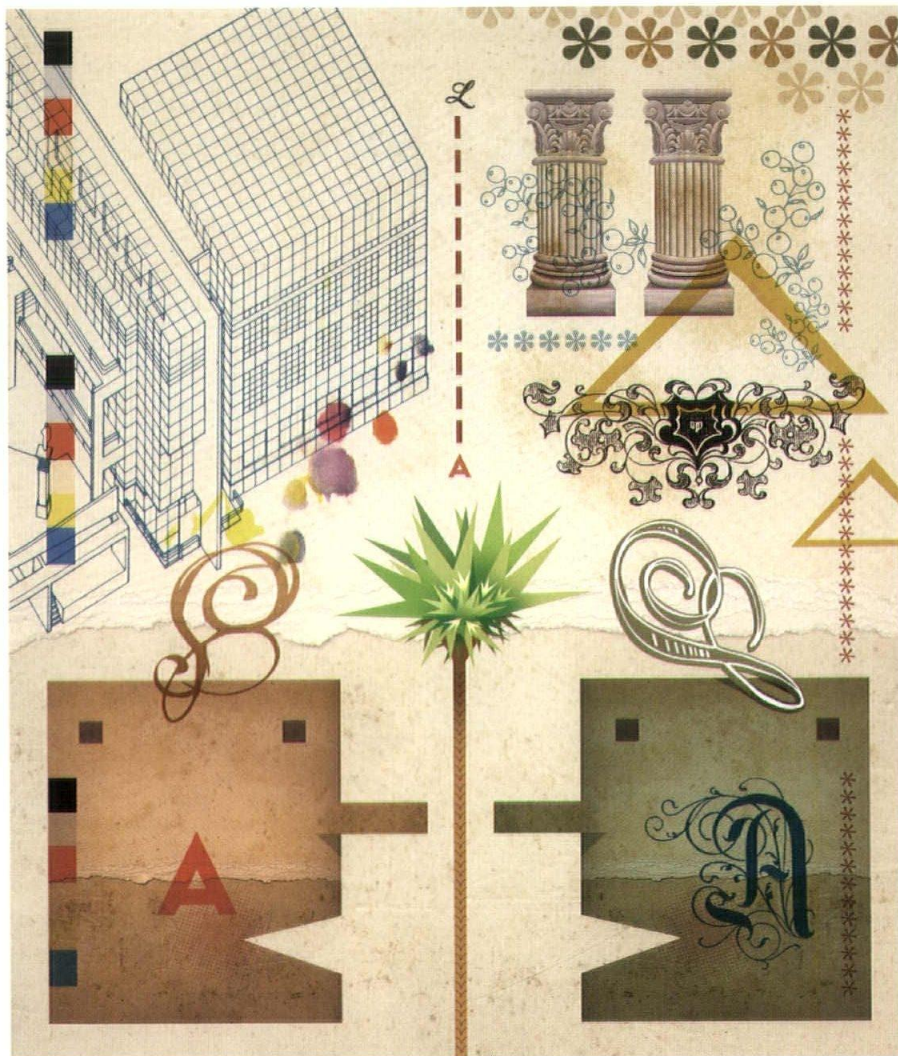
ing baby Dantes through the underworld. These fledgling architects thought of me as a kind of intellectual bodyguard, a protector, but, even so, they were shocked and daunted. Their professors, well-known contributors to the "built environment," would stand on the floor at Caesars, looking frantically about, wringing their hands and muttering, "It's so distracting! It's so distracting!"

Every time this happened, I would wonder, *Distracting from what?* Until I finally realized that Las Vegas was distracting these privileged auteurs from themselves, from the tidy white space of their "inner lives." Whenever this happened, I would suggest to them that a Vegas casino and a pristine modernist enclosure operate very similarly. They both offer you a lot to see, and virtually nothing to look at. They both bestow privacy on the inhabitant—although "high modernist" privacy is much more theatrical, more about dramatic isolation than actual privacy. For many years, then, it seemed like a Mexican standoff, with "high architecture" and "Las Vegas glamour" regarding each other warily across an unbridgeable abyss.

Then things began to change. Rem Koolhaas came to town and built an ultra-Teutonic, wildly inappropriate museum in the Venetian, and everybody thought, *Well, OK, we don't mind inappropriate.* Around the same time, Frank Gehry designed a giant motorcycle show for the Guggenheim in Koolhaas' now-defunct *kunsthalle* space. Everybody thought, *Cool design ... but motorcycles?* Now, Gehry is designing a center for Alzheimer's research here in Vegas, the first all-digital, no paper building in the country. Cesar Pelli and a pride of international corporate architects will soon embark on an "urban living environment" on the Strip for MGM Mirage. My trendy friends from Graft Design in Berlin, who assembled the "Las Vegas Issue" of *Bauwelt*, the German architecture journal, have been more fortunate in writing about Vegas than the Venturis, who have yet to do a job here. The Graft Design guys are now here on a weekly basis designing projects like FIX at Bellagio and STACK at The Mirage.

The most visible edifice of this new trend is down on the Mandalay property, where THEhotel has been created to demonstrate Glenn Schaeffer's new design axiom: "Style as the new theme"—complete with Andy Warhol, Richard Serra and Arturo Herrera. More recently, Schaeffer has purchased Morris Lapidus' legendary Hotel Fontainebleau in Miami Beach. He plans to restore it, update it, and then bring Lapidus' trademark neo-swank back to the Strip in spades (by 2008). As an ancillary to this project, Blue Fountain Press is publishing a book that analyzes Lapidus' contributions to American commercial architecture, including his design for Bugsy Siegel's speakeasy in New York, the precursor of the Flamingo.

continued on page 103



Collaboration

Dependability

Experience

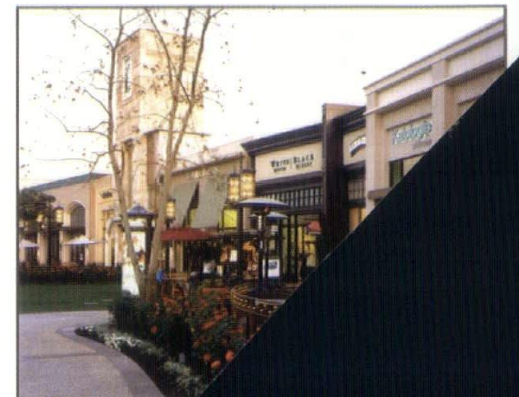
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