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Civic Architecture

Civic architecture has historically been one of the greatest sources of pride in any civilization, and such edifices become the icons of a society. The design of a civic building goes beyond its immediate function and enters the ongoing cultural debate about meaning and symbolism in the public arts.

In his provocative book, *De-Architecture*, James Wines discusses a communication gap that he perceives between society and the architectural profession. His thesis is far from a criticism of modernism as a style, since he believes that the glib classical imagery of postmodernism does not answer the problem. Wines argues that the continued repetition of form in any medium creates information apathy—people no longer respond with interest. The challenge to architects of public buildings is to create a design vocabulary that invites society’s participation and enjoyment.

In this issue of *Architecture New Jersey*, we show the Grad Partnership’s federal courthouse project, which explores the evolution of style as it relates to meaning in the public eye. Also featured in this issue are two competition entries for the design of a new library, one entry using a traditional vocabulary, the other a distinctly modernistic approach. Other projects demonstrate the diversity of building types and design approaches by New Jersey architects.

—RDC
The new Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse is located amid a complex of municipal and federal government buildings, including the Newark City Hall and a building that houses the main post office and old courthouse. Intended to relieve overcrowding in the existing courthouse/post office, the five-story King Building will include thirteen courtrooms, expandable to twenty-six, and space for several government agencies.

In front of the new building, a landscaped plaza will extend the two-block-long pedestrian walkway that connects the federal and municipal buildings of the Newark Government Center. The King Building's monumental portico will lead into a skylit rotunda encircled by balconies on each floor. Federal office space will occupy the first two floors and cherrywood-panelled courtrooms the upper floors. The fifth floor will contain Appelate Court chambers and four ceremonial courtrooms with sixteen-foot-high ceilings, skylights, and large chandeliers. Three separate circulation systems will be provided: one for judges and staff, one for detainees, and one for the public.

The "client" for this commission is the Public Buildings Service of the General Services Administration. The term "client" is used tentatively since, as in most building situations, the immediate owner is a representative of diverse interested parties, including occupants, visitors, operators, maintainers, and, in this case more than most, society at large.

The evolution of this building's design is a study in attitudes and perceptions about the appropriate aesthetics of governmental buildings in the United States. Recognizing the importance and sensitivity of the task, the GSA required that three independently developed schematic designs be submitted by the Grad Partnership for consideration. Three teams of firm members each addressed the issues of context in terms of site use and relation to adjoining buildings (see illustrations labelled A, B, and C on page 11).

The primary contextual elements were the Rodino Federal Office Building, dating...
from the 1960s, and the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse designed by Lehman and Totten of Washington, D.C., in 1931. The latter building demanded and received the most attention in terms of design consideration. Compatible proportions, cornice lines, and fenestration were all accounted for in each of the three designs.

The design review committee selected scheme A, but directed that it be modified to provide an entrance plaza similar to that in the other parts. After further development of the design, the then-administrator of the GSA in Washington dictated removal of the pedestrian bridge and literal copying of the existing neo-classical Post Office design.

Clearly, this was a definitive statement on the part of those determining aesthetic policy at the highest levels of the GSA that the appropriate expression of civic architecture in Newark, as well as in Washington, is neo-classicism. Indeed, the government-prefereed aesthetic dates back to at least Roman times and has been interrupted in general acceptance only sporadically by movements such as the Gothic and the Modern. It apparently appeals to democrats, republicans, and royalty alike.

The government's aesthetic desires, however, required interpretation since unlike in buildings of other eras, significant portions of the budget are devoted to mechanical, electrical, security and transportation systems. The head of the team for Scheme A, Allen Trousdale, comments: "Use of traditional materials such as natural stone, bronze, and copper was simply not possible within the cost limits. This constraint actually helped in the search for a contemporary expression when glass-fiber reinforced concrete was found to be the only economically viable material available for the exterior.

"The precast panels establish their own rhythm of jointing quite dissimilar to that of the Post Office's ashlar limestone facade. Many details, large and small, carry forward this theme of contemporary expression within a neo-classical concept. For example, the typical, heavily rusticated horizontal joints at the ground floor of a neo-classical building were reinterpreted using flush bands of bluestone. The windows in the central band of floors two through four use a theme of projected curtain wall bays, thereby reversing the typical punched, inset windows of a neo-classical building. Yet the bays create the column-related vertical expression of this neo-classical building and counterbalance its horizontal base and cap."
Federal Office Building, Paterson, New Jersey  
Chapman and Biber, Architects and Planners, Summit, New Jersey

Commissioned by the General Services Administration and intended as a catalyst for the rebirth of downtown Paterson, this new office building is located at the terminus of a superblock that has been cleared by the city for redevelopment. Circulation between surrounding buildings and the new Federal Office Building was a major design consideration.

The mass of the new building relates to an existing plaza defined by the Broadway Bank and by a five-story parking garage, as well as relating to older buildings on the east side. The north facade of the Federal Office Building provides closure for the plaza, but also is oriented to allow pedestrian movement from the parking garage and bank through the new building, out to the landscaped space in front, and across the street to the County Courthouse. A brick and cast-stone veneer with granite accents is in keeping with the area's historic context.
New Brunswick Cultural Center Atrium, New Brunswick, New Jersey
Rothe-Johnson Associates, Edison, New Jersey

A proposed Atrium for the New Brunswick Cultural Center will link the State Theatre, the George Street Playhouse, and the Crossroads Theatre. The large, linear Atrium also provides a multipurpose space for receptions, exhibits, and informal concerts; three smaller spaces serve as individual theatre lobbies. In its larger context, the Atrium complements the existing Monument Square and future Civic Square by helping to form a “grand piazza.”

Moreover, the Atrium’s structure incorporates an alley between the State Theatre and the George Street Playhouse to create a covered passageway leading to the proposed Civic Square development on Bayard Street. Beyond the Atrium’s eighty-foot extension, a series of canvas canopies overhangs the passageway.

In front, the vehicular circulation system around Monument Square is reconfigured to provide more sidewalk frontage for the Cultural Center. Paving in front of the Cultural Center echoes that of Monument Square, and a water display echoes the square’s fountain.

The exterior facade includes a continuous stone wall that unifies the theatres and organizes the design in a linear fashion. This wall is punctuated to highlight individual entries and to accent the central axis of each theatre. At the center, the wall appears to erode and reveals a glazed atrium space in front of the George Street Playhouse.

The facade is composed of buff-colored precast panels with limestone horizontal banding; the central color band is of carmine-red granite. Architectural medallions mark the entryways, which are flanked by aluminum classical columns and protected by cantilevered canopies. Mullions of the central glazed area and of the vaulted skylights are painted green. Inside, pale-colored granite and tile will cover walls and floors, and the floor pattern will continue down the passageway to Bayard Street.

The Atrium creates both an entry and an identifying landmark for three New Brunswick theatres.
Mercer County Courthouse, Trenton, New Jersey
Clarke & Caton, Trenton, New Jersey

As part of the redevelopment of the historic Roebling Complex, a private developer has proposed construction of a new courthouse facility to be leased to Mercer County. This courthouse would become part of a mixed-use complex formed both from new construction and from renovation of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrial buildings. The site's frontage along South Broad Street and the future Route 29 ensures easy access by car and bus from all parts of the county.

The courthouse accommodates all components of the county court system, including administrative offices, court support facilities, and eighteen courtrooms. On the exterior, the five-story building is of brick and cut stone with a metal roof. A pedestrian bridge across Route 29 connects the courthouse with the shops, housing, and cultural offerings of the restored Roebling Complex.

Alex Aidekman Family Jewish Community Campus, Hanover, New Jersey
Berger Associates, Newark, New Jersey

To be built in two phases, thismulti-use complex includes recreational and cultural facilities as well as office space, a daycare center, a conference center, a Holocaust memorial, and a courtyard for large public gatherings. The central organizing element is a 400-foot-long, 34-foot-high masonry wall to which all the buildings are attached.

It separates the office and conference center to the north from the recreational amenities to the south, but also links the buildings by means of an enclosed glass corridor.
Cumberland County Guidance Center, Carmel, New Jersey
Manders/Merighi Associates, Vineland, New Jersey

Set in a wooded area, this addition to an in-patient services building is designed to provide classroom space for thirty-three emotionally disturbed students. The U-shaped addition contains administrative offices and an expandable gymnasium in its two wings, with classrooms and ancillary services along a major access corridor extending from the existing building. A common waiting room/reception area is placed at the juncture of the existing building and the administrative wing.

Exterior surfaces are split-faced textured block with red standing-seam siding and copings. The large grey screen wall, edged in red, acts as a focus for the long access road and marks the entry for this building. On the south elevation, a large overhang shades the walkway to the gymnasium wing.

Inside, the use of textured block helps limit possible damage to walls. Grey and beige tones, on the patterned floors and throughout the interior, are intended to create a soothing effect, while small red accents (cabinet pulls, etc.) brighten the color scheme. To take advantage of surrounding views and avoid an institutional atmosphere, the hallways terminate in large glass windows. Skylights bring additional light into the hallways.

Lobby Addition, Washington Township Municipal Building, Robbinsville, New Jersey
Thomas Kocubinski Architects, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

Designed to provide accessibility for the handicapped, as well as display and activity space, this high, narrow lobby becomes a focal point for the long, low form of the existing structure, a former schoolhouse. In keeping with the municipal building’s Georgian style, the lobby uses brick, large mullioned windows, and a half-round gable opening. A rotated vestibule relates to the entry tower of the nearby police building.
Located in Matteson, Illinois, the corner site of the proposed library is a grass field surrounded by baseball fields, a school, and single-family residences. Future road expansions will make this corner an important intersection, so it is an ideal location for a significant building.

The firm's intention was to design a building that would function as a civic symbol and at the same time retain a suburban quality. A low arc-shaped wall in front of the building serves visually to pull people toward the library. The axis of the building starts at a flagpole, leads into a two-story vaulted space with clerestory windows, and continues out to an open-air children's amphitheater. Gabled roofs mimic the nearby residential architecture. The entrance wall and base of the building are of 4x4 grey block, and the rest of the building is brick.

Inside, the library has three linear zones: employee space, circulation, and stacks. The building is situated so that the work rooms serve as a buffer between the baseball fields and the stacks, thereby giving readers a non-distracting view. Meeting rooms are on the second level off the circulation core.
Matteson Public Library Design Competition Entry
Jay D. Measley Architects, Red Bank, New Jersey

A different design for the same competition, this library building combines modernist vernacular with hierarchical classicism. It is articulated in three intersecting but distinct volumes: a truncated cone of heavy masonry at the center of the design; a two-wing, orange-brick L that embraces a garden area; and a skylit arc of white stucco, aluminum frame, and glass. A partially covered, colonnaded ramp leads to the formal entrance, at the intersection of the arc and one wing; a series of terraces runs alongside the ramp and provides outdoor seating.

The three volumes fulfill distinct programmatic requirements. A rotunda containing the circulation desk lies under the central cone. The large section of the arc is the main reading room, and the wing behind it contains stacks and study rooms. The small section of the arc is a storytelling theatre attached to the children’s wing, which terminates in a separately accessed community meeting room.

The far ends of each wing are compatible in scale and material with nearby houses.
Situated on a downtown corner, the new Public Safety Building contains police operations, courts, and other public offices. The building's abstracted classicism, limestone-and-brick facades, copper roofs, and articulated massing are intended to convey a sense of monumentality befitting a public landmark.

Two levels below the street are dedicated to police functions—prisoner intake, booking, and detention—and the sloping site permits access to the sally port at the lower level. On the main level are areas open to the public, including courtrooms and the court clerk's office. These rooms are grouped around a skylit gallery. On the second and third levels are administrative offices for police, district attorney, and fire prevention personnel. At each level, the circulation system is designed to ensure both security and appropriate public access.
Government as Client
by Nora Odendahl

If the ideal client is one who has an insatiable demand for almost any kind of new building, renovation, or restoration imaginable, then our government is that client. At the very least, federal, state, and local projects give architects work in good and bad times alike. At their best, government commissions can give architects a chance at greatness.

The government branch perhaps most familiar to New Jersey architects is the state’s Division of Building and Construction, under the Department of the Treasury. Although the various state agencies choose their own architects (from a list furnished by DBC) for projects costing under $29,500, this division oversees the design and construction of most state-owned properties other than highways.

Recently, DBC has changed its methods for selecting architectural and engineering firms, so that both the range of firms and the quality of work done will improve. As explained by DBC deputy director Charles Strano, the first of these two selection methods is a new A/E term contract system that covers projects with fees of up to $150,000. Such commissions are no small matter: Strano points out that somewhere near eighty percent of state-initiated projects fall into this category, and that term contracts will provide firms with about $25 million in fees over the next two years.

Being awarded one of the three-year contracts is actually a form of prequalification, rather than a commission for any specific project. But it is a prequalification that commits firms to provide the services and rates that they themselves have detailed in an initial proposal. Strano describes the proposals, which DBC solicited early last year, as setting forth “in-depth pricing over seven defined personnel levels—principal, senior partner, and so on. The firm states the number of people that will be made available to the contract, and specifies rates for each of the three years. The firm also includes proofs of qualification such as financial statements and examples of previous work.” Strano adds, “This contract has retainage and professional liability, to say to the architect, ‘We want you to perform.’”

DBC received over three hundred proposals, and after several months of evaluation offered term contracts to about 230 consultants (forty of whom are architectural firms). The term began in October 1989; based on how the method is working, new applications may be taken before the first three years are over.

Not only does the term contract system allow firms with as few as two full-time employees to participate, but it also strives to give all firms an opportunity to get actual commissions. When a state project has been defined, DBC engineers and architects decide what services will be needed, and how many project-specific proposals to solicit from outside firms. Then, DBC’s computer randomly picks from the list of design professionals three to five firms offering the necessary services. “We mail these firms a detailed scope of work, and ask them how they would handle the project, how many worker hours would be needed, what resources they have,” says Strano. “This way you give the firms the opportunity to decide which jobs they want and which jobs they’re not really interested in getting.” The process is repeated for each new project: “If I award to one firm, it doesn’t exclude them from the next shot. It’s just the luck of the draw.”

In the second selection mechanism, DBC is responding to the architectural community’s concerns by moving away from fee-based bidding. By filing form 48A, architects can apply to be prequalified in specific fields of expertise and within specific ranges of project cost, the highest being $25 million and above. Once the scope of work has been developed for a proposed project, the consultant selection board of DBC, together with a group project manager and a representative of the using agency, solicits detailed technical proposals from a short list of prequalified firms or from firms who have responded to a public advertisement. The board’s subsequent review of these proposals may include interviews with the firms before the final few proposals are chosen and ranked.

The ranking does not consider costs. “We’re not interested in bargains; what we’re looking for is to pay for what we get,” Strano emphasizes. “If the highest-ranked architectural firm can give us a reasonable price to do the job, then that’s who we want to talk with first.” None of the firms knows what the others’ bids are. If the first-ranked firm has a relatively high bid, DBC negotiates with that firm. If they cannot reach an agreement, then DBC starts over with the second-ranked firm.

So far, according to Strano, DBC has engaged one firm in this way—Ryan and Gibson for the Trenton War Memorial restoration. However, the division will use this selection method for forthcoming projects in the $150,000-and-above fee category.

Once an outside architectural firm has been hired by DBC, it can expect to be dealing with a project broken down into four phases: program development, design, construction, and closeout. Project managers from DBC are in charge at each of these stages, and transition meetings occur between stages. A representative of the using agency participates in the process throughout.

A brief list of some recent DBC projects suggests the range of opportunities New Jersey offers to architects (in-state and otherwise). Restoration work includes shoring up the dining room at Drumthwacket; making the Old Barracks in Trenton more historically accurate and upgrading its mechanical and environmental systems; and preserving Barnegat Lighthouse. At Sandy Hook, a $12 million marine fisheries laboratory involves both the renovation of an existing barracks building and the construction of a new laboratory with saltwater tanks. An administrative building and patient facility at Greystone Hospital, a warehouse wing for a state police building in West Trenton, and a marine police station in Point Pleasant are a few
The Department of Community Affairs

New Jersey's Department of Community Affairs does not act directly as a client, but its activities have a profound effect on the state's architects. Its policies in promoting development, reviewing plans, and establishing building codes always bear watching.

Although new commissioner Randy Primus, the former mayor of Camden, foresees budget cutbacks as creating "a tough year ahead," he is enthusiastic about the department's missions. "We want to use government to facilitate development," he says. "For that, we need to use a variety of tools." He mentions that DCA is working with nonprofit groups such as Newark's New Communities, and wants to work with additional nonprofit housing organizations. The Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (a subsidiary of DCA) helps a segment of the New Jersey population, and could, Primus says, assist a wider spectrum of eligible residents. State policy decisions can also make a difference; for example, HMFA moved its offices into Trenton to aid in revitalizing that city.

Both as mayor and as commissioner, Primus has heard constant complaints from builders and developers that the state's permit process is an obstacle to development. "They argue that an onerous permit process in New Jersey contributes thirty percent of the cost of new housing," he says. "One developer indicated to me that he was going to be building a project in the city of Camden, and that it happened to be located on a county road, a major road. There was the local review, then the county review, then the state review, then all the DEP clearances—a lot of time and money spent getting through the whole process. So we want to take a look at the permit process and make it as efficient as possible. At the same time, we must meet our obligations to protect the health and safety of the general public, and make sure that the buildings are built in accordance with codes."

William Connolly, an architect who directs the DCA's Division of Housing and Development, describes the regulatory problems in further detail. One problem concerns review of building plans and the other review of land development projects. The former, he recalls, became a serious impediment about three years ago, at the height of the construction boom, when DCA was flooded with plans to review and took up to six months to do so. Now, for the six hundred or so largest projects annually, DCA is proposing an option of peer review.

"That would allow one architectural firm to do a code review of the work of a second architectural firm, instead of those plans having to be submitted for us for review," explains Connolly. As he points out, such a peer review process is already common among structural engineering firms. "The peer review firm would need to have people on their staff qualified to review plans for code compliance, but most architectural firms do.... The New Jersey Society of Architects has one very real concern with the proposal—does the peer review firm now have some sort of liability they didn't have before? We're trying to work that out and I think we can, so that the peer review firm won't be assuming any extra liability."

Reforming land development regulations will, Connolly says, be more difficult. At present, a significant housing subdivision can take an average of two and one-half to three years to approve. "As we see it, there are too many agencies involved in reviewing each project and too many different sets of standards and rules for one project," the housing director says. "Fighter planes and moon rockets have triple-redundant systems to make sure that nothing gets missed—we have a system with six backups for storm sewers."

The DCA wants legislation that will make land-development regulations, like building codes, uniform throughout the various agencies and jurisdictions involved. If a single review could be conducted at the local level, the process would take a few months instead of years, and development costs would go down.

And, says Primus, the DCA is open to suggestions from all parties concerned with development and building. "What I'd like to hear from the architects' perspective is what's wrong with the system now, how we can improve it, any thoughts they might have on programs that would be effective in producing affordable housing—particularly in the permit process."

—Nora Odendahl
“Make No Little Plans. . . .”
The New Jersey Center for the Performing Arts

The New Jersey Center for the Performing Arts, a large-scale project of cultural arts facilities whose cost is estimated at more than $200 million, is presently in its first phase of development. To be located on a twelve-acre waterfront site in Newark, the whole project involves acquisition of the site, creation of an arts district, and construction of up to four buildings, including a 2,500-seat, world-class concert hall and a multi-use theatre. The hope is that this ambitious venture will serve as a catalyst for revitalizing Newark’s underused riverfront.

The Center is being developed by a nonprofit corporation of the same name and funded by state grants as well as private philanthropy. The corporation’s head is Lawrence P. Goldman, whom Architecture Magazine has credited as the driving force behind Carnegie Hall’s successful renovation.

The first phase of the Center includes development of a master plan, construction of the concert hall, and schematic designs for the theatre. The master plan is being created jointly by the New York architectural firms of James Stewart Polshek and Skidmore Owings & Merrill. Both of these firms had worked previously with Goldman, the former in renovating Carnegie Hall and the latter in designing support facilities nearby.

In devising the master plan, the two firms have been charged with evaluating the site’s overall urban form. According to Todd Schliemann, a senior design associate in Polshek’s firm, the approach has been to give shape to urban space. This goal is accomplished through strategic placement of streets, pedestrian paths, and buildings.

The test of the plan’s ability to participate in “placemaking” as well as of its role in revitalizing the waterfront will depend on a host of different factors. Continued financial and political support for the project, and selection of an architect who can bring the vision (depicted in this aerial perspective) to reality, will be crucial.

At present, a search committee is soliciting names of firms with arts facilities experience from directors of performing arts theatres throughout the country. No architect for the Center has yet been selected.

—Sharon Ayn McHugh
Charles A. Spitz, AIA, was appointed by Governor Kean to serve a five-year term on the New Jersey State Board of Architects and Certified Landscape Architects.

Matthew J. Wolchko, AIA, was named a partner of The Aybar Partnership, of Ridgefield, as of January 1, 1990.

Sami N. Hanna, AIA, announces the opening of his office to practice architecture: Sami N. Hanna Architects, P.C., located in Chatham.

Armstrong, Jordon and Pease, Architects, AIA, PA, of Raritan, formerly of Somerville, will become known as Jordan & Pease Architects, AIA, PA, with the retirement of Quentin Armstrong, AIA.

Chris Cowansage, AIA, has been named an associate of CUH2A, of Princeton.

Kenneth Rubsamen, AIA, has been named a senior associate of Rothe-Johnson Associates of Edison.

Martin M. Bloomenthal, AIA, has been named a senior associate and Kenneth B. Drake, AIA, an associate of The Hillier Group, Princeton.

New Jersey Monthly Magazine recently held its second annual Designs of the Year Awards program. Two of the six projects selected for awards were by NJSA members: Ecoplan, PA, won for their Spider Monkey Zoo (commercial architecture), and Michael Burns, AIA, won for Romo Books, Far Hills (commercial interior). Judges were Elizabeth B. Howard, National President of the American Society of Interior Designers; Alan Gaynor, AIA, President, Alan Gaynor & Company, P.C., New York City; and Paul Heyer, President, the New York School of Interior Design. Selections were made from over 100 entries.

T. Jeffrey Clarke, AIA and Robert W. Russell, AIA, have been named principals of the architectural firm of Holt & Morgan Associates, P.A., of Princeton. Mr. Clarke was recently elected vice-chairman of the Princeton Historic Preservation Review Committee. Mr. Russell is chairman of the Hightstown Economic Development Committee and has been a director of Architects Housing in Trenton since 1986. The founding principals of the firm, Philetus H. Holt III, AIA, and A. Perry Morgan, Jr., AIA, are celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary of architectural practice together.
Books

The Most Beautiful House in the World

by Witold Rybczynski
New York: Viking, 1989. 211 pages. $18.95

An architect and professor of architecture at Montreal’s McGill University, Witold Rybczynski here turns to one of the oldest of literary forms, the tale of the quest. Like all quests, his began with a dream; in this case, a dream about building a boat. In recounting his tale Rybczynski shares insights discovered in the pursuit of his dream.

The pursuit begins with, and eventually centers on, the building of a boat shed. Can a boat shed be a work of Architecture (with a capital “A”)? At least one eminent historian, Nikolaus Pevsner, thought not: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of Architecture.” As Rybczynski follows this trail, we learn some interesting facts (for example, that Brunelleschi was trained as a goldsmith and Alberti as a lawyer). The author concludes that if the purpose of Architecture is, in John Ruskin’s words, “to raise men’s spirits,” then his shed, no matter how homely, could still aspire to being a work of Architecture.

From here Rybczynski leads the reader along the well-defined path of the design process: site selection, preliminary design, design development, construction documents, and construction. But at the junctures of these activities, he offers some interesting and often quite wonderful observations. When he and his wife are looking for a site, he considers the ancient Chinese notion of feng-shui, originally developed as an approach for locating grave sites. This concept evolved to become the method used for locating homes of the living and was formalized around 200 B.C. as the Canons of the Dwellings. Natural features such as mountain ridges, rivers, and special views were major determinants in the siting of ancient Chinese buildings.

Describing the design phase, Rybczynski remarks on the intriguing correlation between the notion of “play” and “design.” He discusses the history of toys and play, and mentions that card houses, for example, date from at least seventeenth-century Holland. He also relates the history of building blocks and notes that John Lloyd Wright (son of Frank) developed and patented “Lincoln Logs” in the 1920s.

During the course of these intellectual explorations, Rybczynski’s shed evolves from a boat house into a house for him and his wife, and his insights (about light wood framing, the development of the barn as a building type, Sebastiano Serlio and the first study of domestic architecture, and more) continue to inform and delight the reader. As with all quests, we arrive at the end back where we began, but with perhaps as good a definition of “Architecture” as we are likely to find.

Reviewer James Stryker, AIA, is a principal architect at CUH2A in Princeton.

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Government as Client
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financial instrument to sell public bonds for construction. However, it has taken charge of the State House Complex master plan and renovation, for which it hired the firms of Short and Ford and Johnson Jones. Faulkner points out that the agency has leeway to undertake additional projects, particularly of an historical nature.

Last, architects should not overlook the opportunities provided by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education. As of 1986, state universities and colleges are responsible, through their boards of trustees, for their own building projects.

New Jersey government on the county, city, municipal, and township levels is as important a client as is the state government. These local authorities build administration buildings, courthouses, police stations, human services

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Judging by a sample of two New Jersey counties, the methods for selecting architects may differ slightly from one county to the next. Hunterdon County, according to its purchasing director Charles Soriero, advertises major projects in newspapers, Brown’s, Dodge’s, and the Philadelphia Construction News. A committee that includes the purchasing director, a facilities planner, the director of buildings and maintenance, and user representatives (judges, for example, if the project is a courthouse) reviews the proposals, invites two or three firms for interviews, and votes on a final selection. The county freeholders must approve both the architect chosen and the contract drawn up.

In Mercer County, where a firefighting school and an $11.5 million corrections expansion are underway, advertising of projects is less common. Administrator William Guhl says that the county develops a short list of architects it has used in the past and contacts those firms for proposals; it tries to use in-county architects if possible. The selection is not made according to low bids; instead, fees are negotiated. At times, requests for proposals are made public, and Guhl says that local firms can ask to be considered for county work: “It’s not a closed club.”

New Jersey architectural firms need not confine their civic work to their own backyards; they can compete for commissions in counties and states other than their own. They can also compete for the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of projects undertaken by the federal government.

**DBC’s term contracts will provide firms with about $25 million in fees over the next two years**

Finding out about federal projects is easy, since they are generally advertised and described in the Commerce Business Daily, available by subscription. This publication also tells the selection criteria for specific projects. If a firm wishes to be considered for federal work, it must fill out Standard Form 254, which provides general information on capabilities and past experience. This form is filed each year with the regional offices of separate federal agencies. Another completed questionnaire, Standard Form 255, is required to apply for a specific project.

The General Services Administration, which describes itself as “the Federal Government’s real estate agent, landlord, and building facility developer,” is the most obvious client agency. Its projects range from museums to offices to courthouses (see pages 10 and 12 of this issue for two examples).

The GSA’s method for selecting architectural firms is, under the Brooks Act, similar to that used by other federal agencies. And it is clearly the model toward
which the State of New Jersey is moving.

First, a regional board of GSA architects and engineers reviews project-specific proposals from firms (usually within the region itself) and recommends a list of firms. Then, the recommended firms receive further information and selection criteria for the project, and they are invited for interviews with a different GSA evaluation board. Next, board members rank the recommended firms, and last, the GSA regional administrator picks one of the three top-ranked firms, unless he or she can justify, for the public record, choosing another firm.

Once chosen, a firm meets with staff members of the regional GSA office and submits a fee proposal. If the firm and the GSA regional office cannot negotiate a mutually agreeable fee, then the office invites the second-ranked firm to submit a fee proposal, and the process repeats.

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Architecture firms can also work under the GSA's term contracts, which last one year with two one-year renewals. Or they can be hired by other federal agencies, such as the Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Veterans' Administration, the Department of Defense, and so on. Since the most ubiquitous federal building is a post office, the United States Postal Service is a major client; northern New Jersey falls under its Northeast region, and southern New Jersey its Eastern region. For better or worse, this federal agency has been developing its own design tools: automated designs for small post offices and a computerized "kit of parts" for larger mail-processing centers.

This, then, is the official story—the government-architect relationship from the client's point of view. But what of the architect's point of view?

In an informal survey, several architects from major New Jersey firms all mentioned a traditional characteristic of public-sector work: bureaucracy. Dealing with the hierarchical, layered structure of government agencies can slow project schedules. For example, Howard Horii, a partner in the Grad Partnership, spent two years getting approvals from both the city and federal governments for the Department of Defense's Forrestal Building in Washington, DC. Edward Rothe, a partner at Rothe-Johnson Associates, notes that in working for the state of New Jersey, statutes requiring different contractors can make coordination and documentation difficult. Thomas Fantaccone, associate partner at the same firm, comments that public-sector work involves "more paperwork, recordkeeping, and administrative time. Working drawings and contract documents have to be very detailed."

Yet the governmental client's zealous scrutiny can have benefits; Horii says that he found federal agencies to be very careful in their analysis of designs and selection of styles, materials, and systems. "It's a matter of adjusting to their way of working," he concludes.

The architects point out that governmental work almost always involves what continued on page 30
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Marvin Jacobson, a partner at CUH2A, calls “a two- or three-headed client.” The president of Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham, Hamilton Ross, comments that these different heads may not always see eye-to-eye: the administering agency is interested in the budget and management of the project, whereas the user is concerned with the product. The Division of Motor Vehicles/New Jersey Network Complex, for example, is complex indeed, with four parties involved—the developer client (EDA), the state owner, the using agencies, and, representing DMV, the Office of Leasing Operations.

Since budgets for governmental projects are established early and are difficult to change, and since the use of taxpayers’ money demands accountability, the public-sector client is very concerned with the dollars spent, and requires especially precise estimating on the architect’s part. Joseph Bavaro, vice-chairman of the Hillier Group, remarks that governmental clients are less likely than corporate ones to rely on the architect to set budgets, and at times may be unrealistic in their own approximations. But, Jacobson says, private-sector clients may be equally unrealistic, depending on whether they have enough staff or consultants for feasibility studies.

Indeed, the architects described similarities as well as differences between public and private clients. “Both are interested in the quality of the design and have the same expectations,” says Rothe. “Every client has a personality and situational politics to be dealt with, and every building has a program to achieve internally and externally.”

Governmental commissions, though, have some distinct advantages—not the least of which may be prompt payment of bills. Horii also mentions the federal government’s set-aside for art, which in the GSA’s case is 0.5% of estimated construction costs. He was able to serve on the art selection committee for one of his public-sector building commissions; a corporate client would have used its own art consultants.

More important, as Hamilton Ross points out, government offers many prestigious projects in which architects want to be involved. “There’s an excitement about civic work,” Edward Rothe says. “The building should have a public impact, make a statement about government. This architecture can be about setting standards—about leadership.”

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