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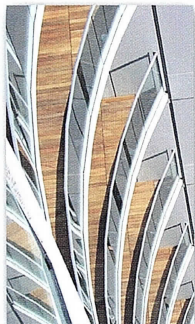


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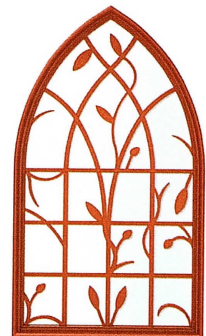
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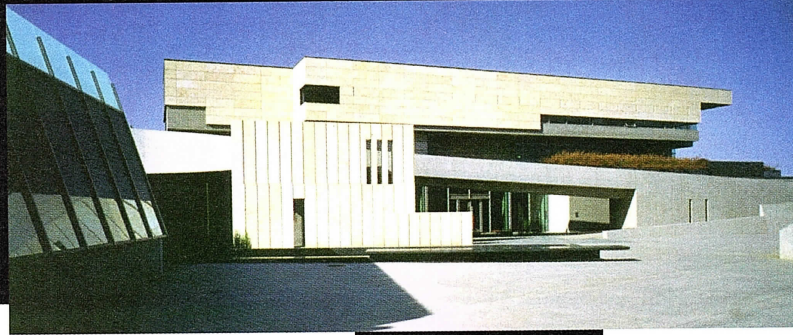
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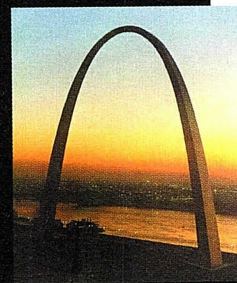
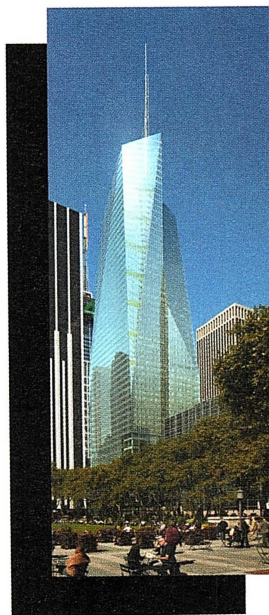
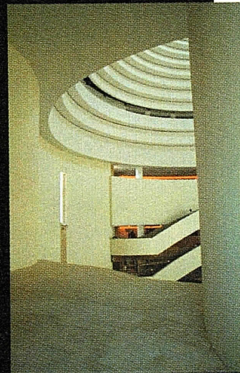


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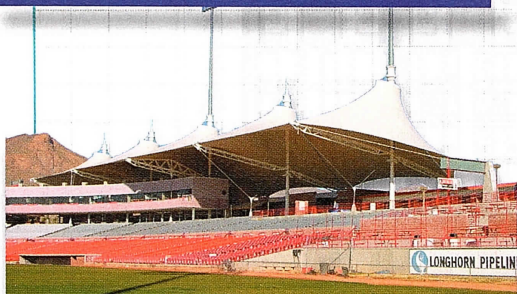
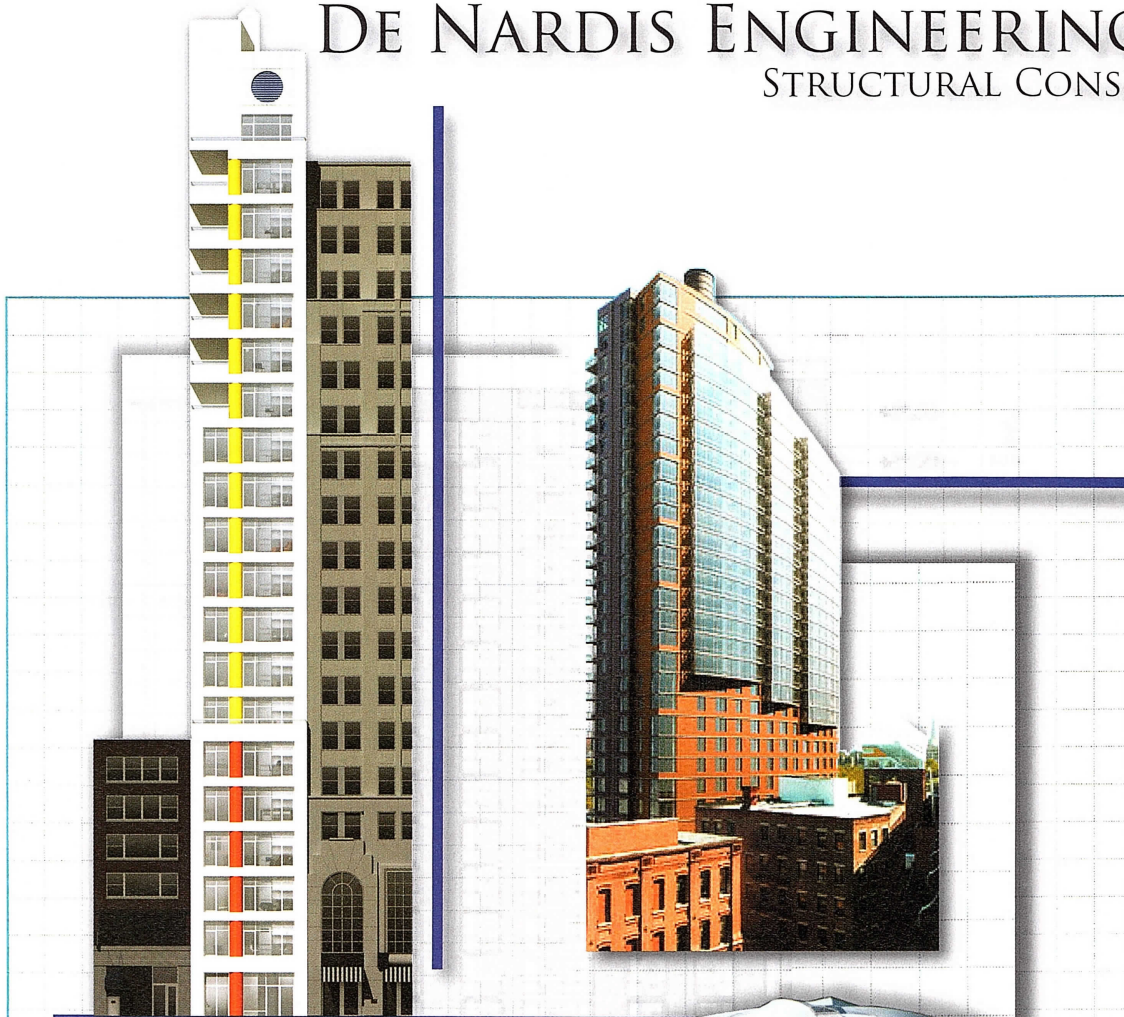
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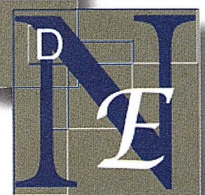
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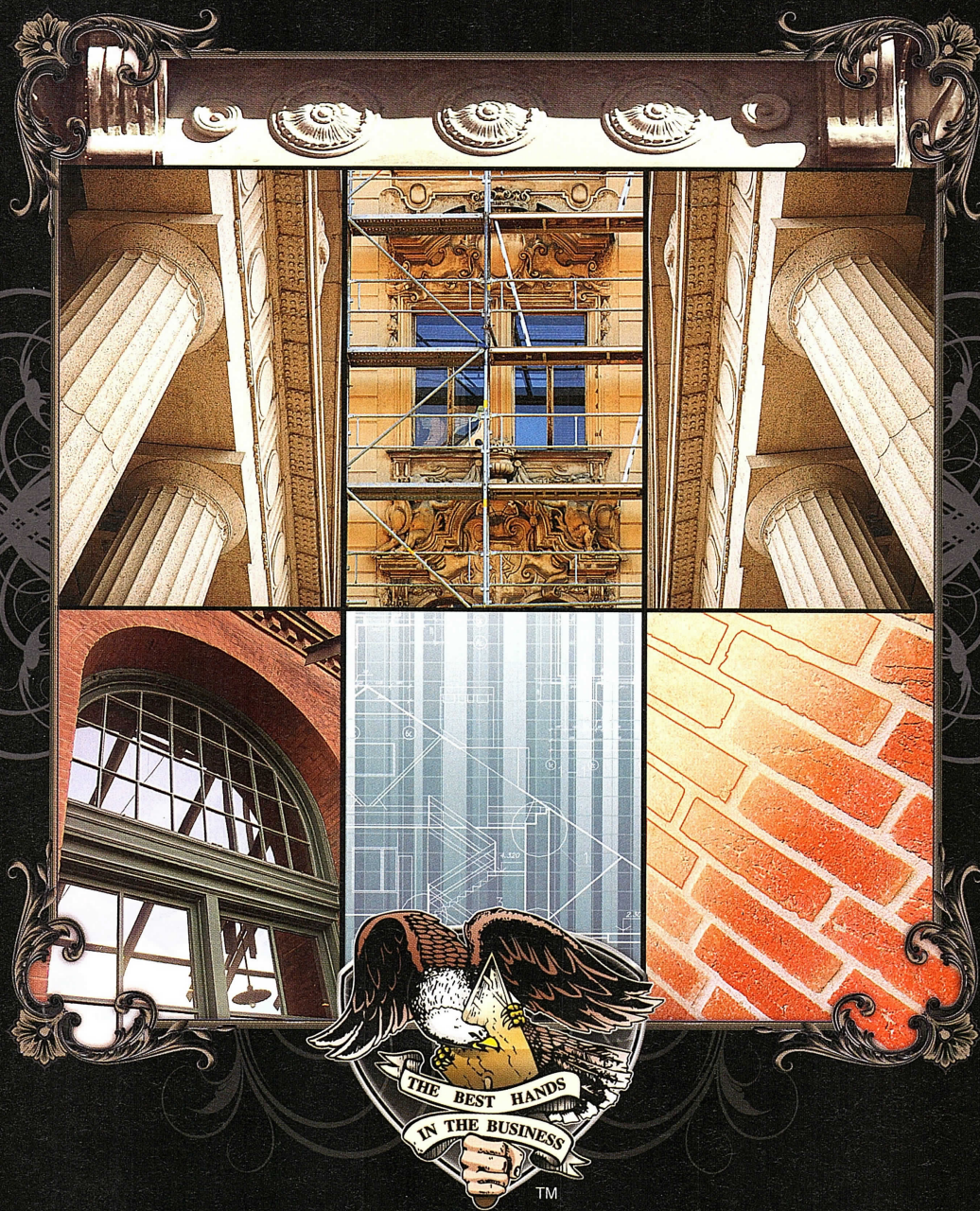
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Elevating Architecture / Design Literacy for All

First Words
Letter from the President

As I write this, the House and Senate have finally approved an economic stimulus package that will hopefully restore jobs and promote investment in our nation's industries. Architects asked for more dollars to be dedicated to design and construction, but the bill also addresses some of our requests through its support for schools, federal and state infrastructure, and sustainable practices. These government investments are an added opportunity to highlight and reward design excellence. They are also an important stimulus within our industry to produce the best in architecture, which is the timely goal of my presidency this year: "Elevating Architecture."

Beyond the mere discussion of quality, which is essential to justifying the allocation of our tax dollars, is the discussion that is the focus of this issue of *Oculus*: "Design Literacy for All." In addressing the economy, our nation needs to assure that investment is made in buildings and furnishings that are more than beautiful. We no longer have the luxury of creating buildings for their shock-and-awe value. We must now create buildings that are functional and sustainable and a core benefit to our sense of civic worth.

To accomplish this goal of design literacy for both professionals and the public, we need to look at the past to discover which buildings have raised our spirits, encouraged community, and continue to provide distinguished settings for civic discourse over the years. We must then look to the future to deliver the same humanist goals in our new buildings and infrastructure.

In this issue of *Oculus*, we review the Obama Administration's priorities and how they fit into an urban agenda, as well as the kinds of design environments that connect with the public and students. We also visit a few different institutions that foster design innovation through competitions.

More than ever, the architecture profession and the public have the responsibility to change course and educate ourselves to best solve the needs of transportation, education, and energy independence in ways that allow our economy to thrive and provide an excellent foundation for future generations. At the AIANY Chapter, we've begun aggressively addressing the economic downturn, most recently with the new initiative, Not Business As Usual. Within this bimonthly lunchtime program, offered to downsized and unemployed professionals, we're creating a healthy and productive forum for discourse on how to regroup and forge ahead with clear goals and an understanding of our important role in the global crisis.

Design literacy for all is neither a luxury nor a pipe dream. It is the directive for our industry as we reevaluate our role in creating public space and elevating architecture to its rightful place in a better world.

Sherida E. Paulsen, FAIA
2009 President
AIA New York Chapter



KELLY CAMPBELL

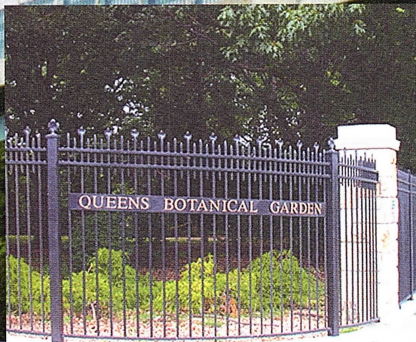


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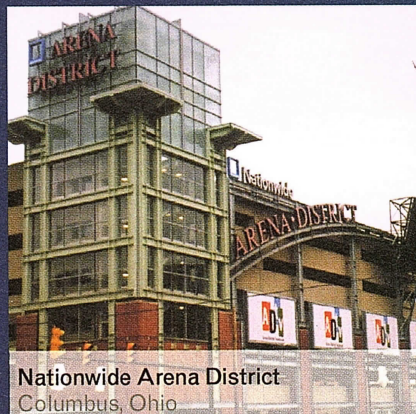
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In Perspective

Working on this issue about design literacy got me to thinking about when and how my “design” education began. I can actually pin it down to the day: Lincoln’s birthday, 1960-something. My mother-the-artist came to school to teach my third-grade class how to draw in “perspective” (never mind that we could barely pronounce it). The assignment to draw Lincoln’s log cabin seemed, at first, to be a pretty boring subject.

It turned out to be, however, one of the great “ah-ha!” moments in my life. I learned a vocabulary totally new and mind-expanding to my young brain: “point-of-view” (a bird!), “vanishing point,” “infinity.”

And filling that flat piece of white paper with a “cabin” that looked three-dimensional was liberating! (Undoubtedly, it also must have had a hand in my high grades in geometry.) My world was never the same: how I looked and still look at it, what I saw and how I still see. It may not have inspired me to be an architect, but ever since, architecture – built and natural, house and beehive – has informed my world, as it does everyone’s, whether they’re aware of it or not.

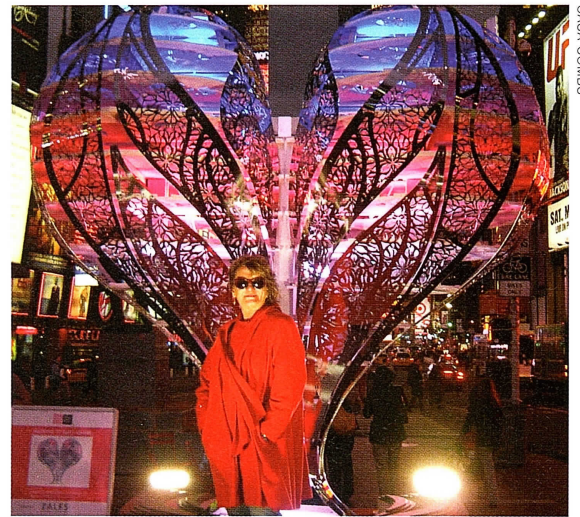
Which raises the question: Are we, professionals and the public alike, becoming a more design-literate society? That is the overarching question this issue of *Oculus* addresses, as a complement to the AIA New York Chapter’s 2009 theme, “Elevating Architecture / Design Literacy for All.” From consumer icons to politics, we investigate the changing language of architecture in these changing times. Ideas competitions can generate icons and catapult careers, but what messages are reaching the public? The *Chicago Tribune*’s architecture critic Blair Kamin reflects that President Obama’s focus on infrastructure is moving America “in the right direction.” New projects at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Syracuse University are very different in tone, scope, and scale, but both communicate to users the value of thoughtful design. An expert in information design explains why it’s important for architects to take an “empathetic attitude” toward wayfinding for those of us without built-in compasses. Looking to future generations of a design-literate city, the Learning By Design:NY program is making visual literacy elementary for some Harlem kids in understanding their neighborhood. And a group of public-school students are creating some striking portraits of their schools through the lens of a camera.

In regular departments, “One Block Over” discovers the good and not-so-good aspects of the “new” Columbus Circle. For “So Says,” NJIT College of Architecture and Design Dean Urs Gauchat, AIA, discusses the importance of design literacy to the general public – and in design education for the 21st century. The *San Francisco Chronicle*’s John King offers an “Outside View” of some of his city’s successful public spaces – and what makes them so. “25-Year Watch” finds Asphalt Green as welcoming as it was in 1984, and made even better with a 1993 expansion. “Good Practices” is an amusing (or not) Episode 13 of Stark’s Chronicles of Life within the Profession. “In Print+” reviews tomes dedicated to NYC’s public art, spatial intelligence, and Corbu; “Click Here” looks at a new networking website for the A/E/C world.

Finally, the AIA’s “Walk the Walk” credo causes us all to think about the ways carbon reduction can be achieved by small changes in what we do. *Oculus* is doing its bit: Last year the magazine started being produced on paper with recycled content using green inks. Beginning with this issue, we’re using mailing labels instead of not-all-that-biodegradable poly bags.

Here’s hoping the kids in the Learning By Design:NY programs and the architecture students sweating out their crits at Syracuse U.’s Slocum Hall will, like me, find their own “ah-ha” moments – and go far with them.

Kristen Richards, Hon. ASLA
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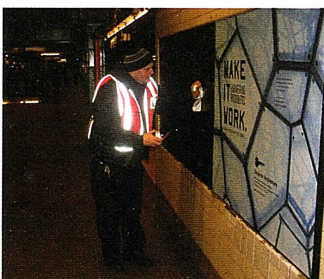
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MTA employee Israel Santiago installing the "MAKE IT WORK: Engineering Possibilities" poster in the West 4th Street subway station.



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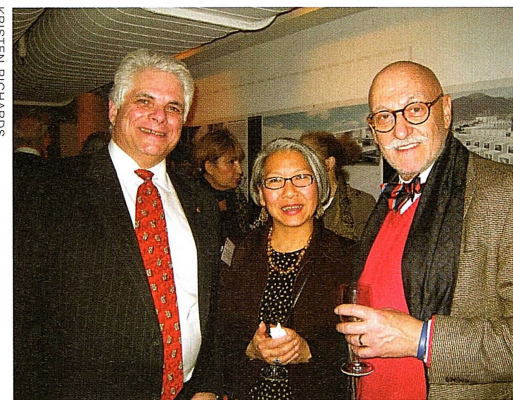
More than 600 people attended the opening of "MAKE IT WORK: Engineering Possibilities," designed by Pure+Applied, in January; pictured here: "Framing Space" by Phillip Anzalone and Stephanie Bayard of aa64, visible from the street.

SAM LAHOZ



The AIANY 2009 Board Inaugural in December (l-r): AIA New York State Executive Director Edward C. Farrell; 2008 AIANY President Jim McCullar, FAIA; 2009 AIANY President Sherida Paulsen, FAIA; scholarship award-winner Erin Bartling, student at Pratt Institute; and AIANY Executive Director Rick Bell, FAIA.

KRISTEN RICHARDS



Board inaugural (l-r): AIANY First Vice President/President-Elect Tony Schirripa, AIA, IIDA; 2005 AIANY President Susan Chin, FAIA; and Burt Roslyn, AIA, 2009 AIA NYS President.

KRISTEN RICHARDS



The Inaugural was capped by Ibex Construction's Annual Holiday Party (l-r): Ibex President Andy Frankl and Illya Azaroff, AIA, AIANY Vice President, Design Excellence.

JENNIFER (JUNGSUN) LIM/NY PROJECTS



The inaugural event of the AIANY Global Dialogues Committee, "Global Dialogues: Seoul, Newark, and New York" welcomed (l-r): Newark Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Stefan Pryor; NYC Department of City Planning Chief Urban Designer Alexandros Washburn, AIA; and Seoul Deputy Mayor and Chief Design Officer Young Gull Kwon.

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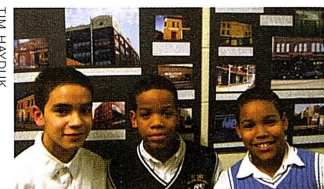
"Rapunzel's Tower" was the theme of a November FamilyDay@theCenter, where families dreamed up fanciful multiuse towers for the New York City skyline.

KRISTEN RICHARDS

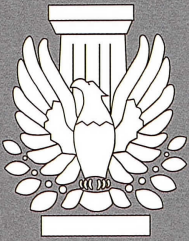


In December, AIANY and the Center for Architecture Foundation launched the Not Business as Usual initiative, a series of lunchtime discussions about advocacy, volunteer opportunities, professional training, and the new Exchange Point website.

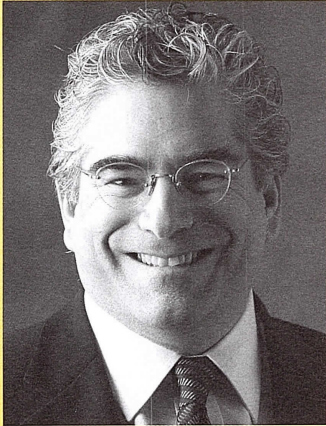
TIM HAYDUK



Sixth-grade students from P.S. 161 and their project "Manhattanville: On the Cusp of Change," an exhibition of student work created through the Center for Architecture Foundation's Learning By Design:NY program (see page 36).

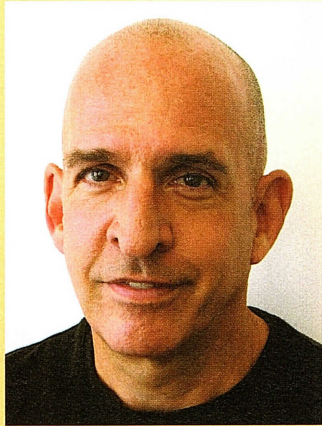


AIA New York Chapter congratulates the following chapter members who have been elevated to the College of Fellows in 2009. We are proud of them and their achievements, which are recognized with this honor.



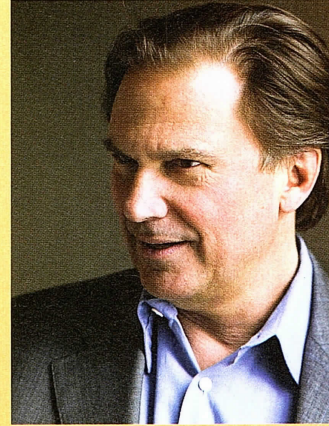
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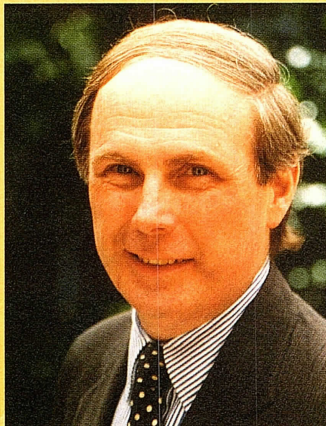
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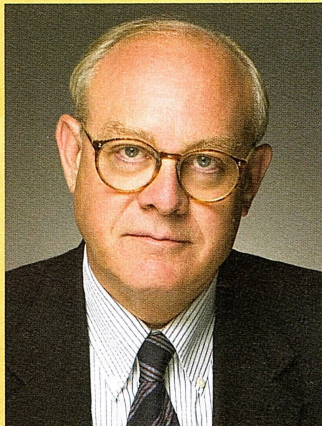


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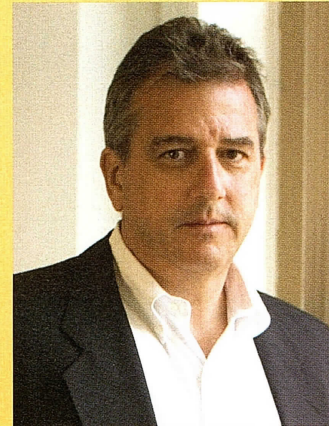


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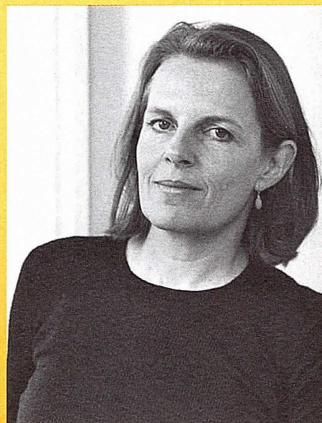
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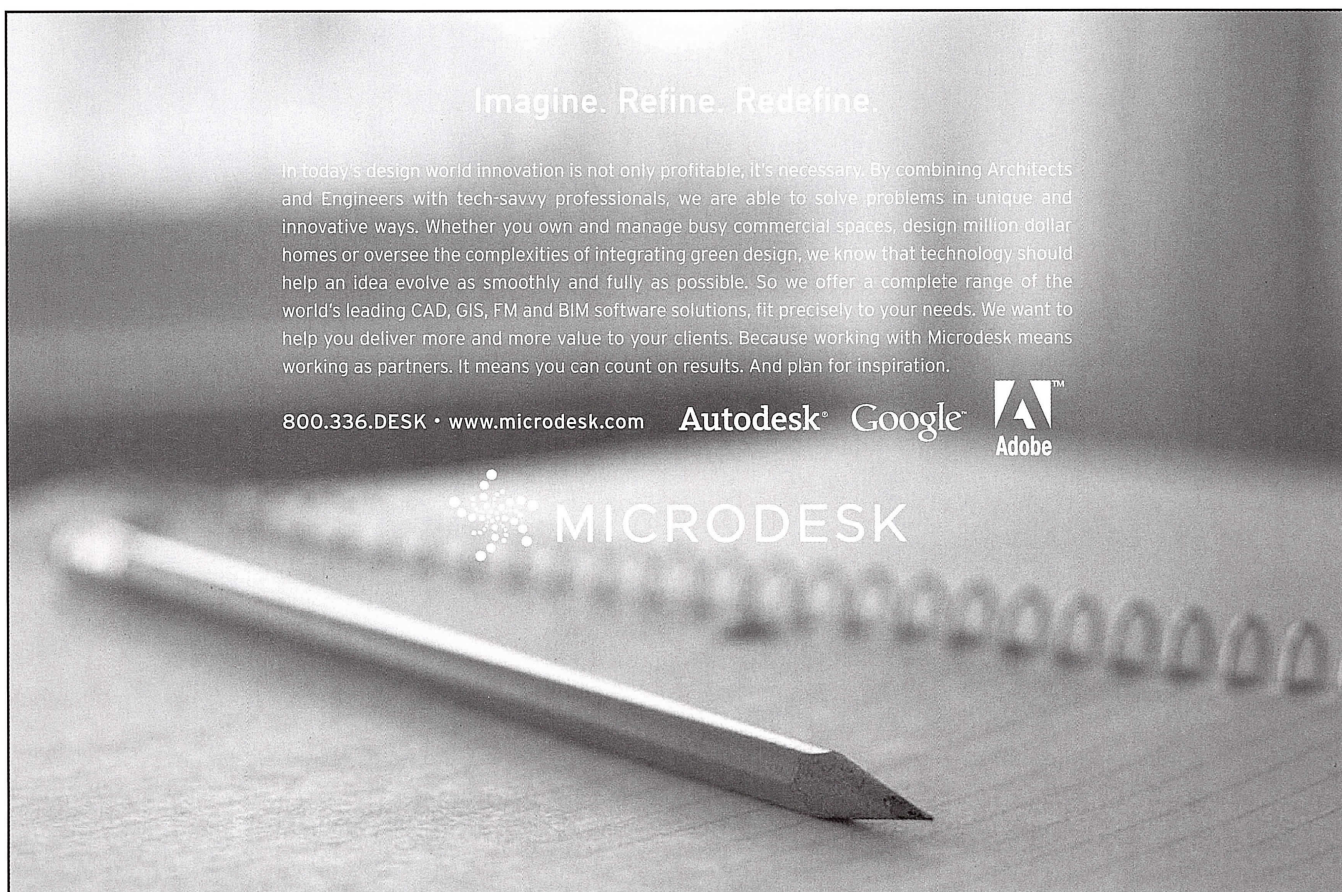
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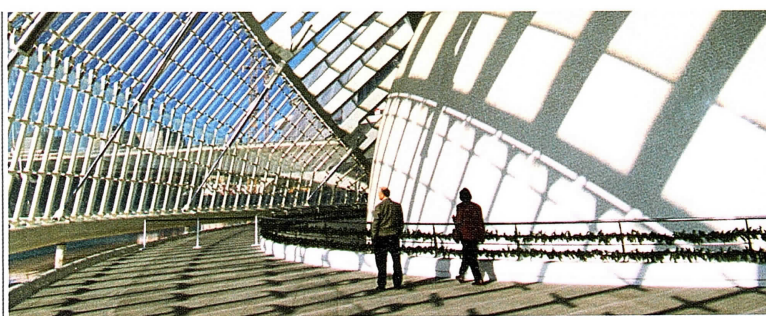
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The New World Discovers Columbus (Circle)

One Block Over
By Claire Wilson



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Left: There is now clear pedestrian access to the park at the center of the circle Center: View from the Bouchon Bakery Right: The Museum of Arts and Design is the newest kid on the circle

Steve Villani's family has been in business around Manhattan's Columbus Circle for 75 years. Last fall he moved the shop, Columbus Circle Wine & Liquor, to a space right on the circle, facing the Time Warner Center. He has fond memories of the intersection before the big vertical mall, before Trump International Hotel and Tower and *uber*-chef Jean-Georges, before Huntingdon Hartford commissioned Edward Durell Stone to build a personal museum at what is now the Museum of Arts and Design.

He has other memories of which he is not so fond. "In the 1960s there were a lot of homeless people," says Villani. "In the 70s my father was robbed at gunpoint four or five times and my uncle shot and killed somebody trying to rob us." Villani also had his motorcycle stolen from the middle of the circle, which did a stint as a motorcycle parking lot.

Alas, the seamy charm that once marked the neighborhood has gone the way of the much-reviled Coliseum. The "new" Columbus Circle, which had been gestating for more than 20 years, is a gleaming, lively, vital intersection that mixes entertainment, art, parks, shopping, hotel, office, and residential space in a package that is unique in Manhattan. By most accounts the project is a success for commercial interests and the public, despite stewing in controversy during its early planning stages.

"There is a clear sense of Columbus Circle being a dynamic place," says Joseph Rose, a partner at real-estate developer Georgetown Company, who was chairman of the city's planning commission as the project was taking shape. "With the park, fountain, retail, and Jazz at Lincoln Center's Allen Room, there is a sense of excitement and a sense of place."

Ethel Sheffer, who was chair of the Tri-Board Task Force, a group of three area community boards, personally sued to stop one of the first planned projects. On balance she thinks Columbus Circle works but is measured in her praise. "It looks better and people feel better

about it, but I don't think it has achieved the status of a great public space," says Sheffer.

Vehicular and pedestrian traffic flows more easily and safely, but other aspects are flawed, Sheffer notes. The Trump building darkens the corner, for one; another is the mall at the Time Warner Center. "I don't know how many New Yorkers want to go there or shop there," she says.

Architect Ronnette Riley, FAIA, who designed the Morgenthau Frederick eyeglass store in the Time Warner Center and Columbus Circle Wine & Liquor, criticizes the scale and layout of the retail portion and the fact that the restaurants are all on an upper level. "It is dark on one side, the spaces are too tall, and there isn't any interaction between the first and second floors," she says.

Some argue that the attractions around Columbus Circle are destination venues that people seek out only occasionally. Some say it would be enlivened by a movie theater and more casual dining spots to appeal to neighborhood residents. But no one can argue with the popularity of the Whole Foods on Time Warner's lower level or Borders on the second floor. The views from the Mandarin Oriental Hotel and the third-floor bar of the Bouchon Bakery are the stuff of fairy tales. The Museum of Arts and Design is off to a good start, and there are few entertainment experiences as enchanting as watching a performance in the Allen Room with a dreamy snowfall as a backdrop.

"There are many things one can like or dislike about individual components, but as a whole it is a huge success," Rose says. Villani loves looking out his door at night and seeing the Time Warner Center. He is philosophical. "If you don't change with the times," he says, "you're dead."

Claire Wilson writes the "Blueprints" column for the *New York Times*. She lives in Manhattan.

So Says... Urs



Urs P. Gauchat, AIA, is dean of the College of Architecture and Design at New Jersey Institute of Technology, which he transformed into an internationally recognized leader in digital design and community development. An advisor to academia, governments, communities, and industry, Gauchat is particularly interested in creating a bridge between the resources of a state university and the needs of communities. He joined the 2009 AIANY Board of Directors as public director of educational affairs. Illya Azaroff, AIA, recently sat down with Gauchat at the Center for Architecture to discuss the importance of design literacy to the general public and what architects need to know in the 21st century.

Illya Azaroff: What is the significance for you of AIANY's theme for this year: "Elevating Architecture / Design Literacy for All"?

Urs Gauchat: "Literacy" in this sense means educated, polished, having knowledge, being tuned in. When we talk about design literacy, we mean people should have a rudimentary knowledge of what design means to society and how it reflects society.

IA How do today's social dynamics in New York City benefit from greater design literacy of the general public?

UG Design, particularly since 9/11, has become the subject of public debate and interest. There is an increasing appreciation for inspired design and designers: the fact that New York sports some iconic pieces of architecture (and some of the most spectacular art collections) is a constant source of civic pride. Some design ideas change the world; these should enable people to appreciate the power of design. Design explores the notion that ideas can be expressed visually so they can be understood by others.

IA How can the general public gain a greater understanding of the value of good design?

UG The media have had a significant impact in generating interest among the public. However, exposure to design should start at an early age. For very young kids, museums are now experimenting using Visual Thinking Strategy. Kids sit in front of a painting for an hour, asking questions relating only to what they see. They postulate what a painting is all about; as a result they start seeing in a way they never saw before.

IA Can this be done with architecture?

UG Yes, however, with architecture it's a little more complex. Everyone is aware of the potential of architecture to be transformative. For instance, Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House in Australia made Sydney think of itself as a world-class city. Once Sydney started to believe it was a world-class city, it became one. Similarly, icons such as the Bird's Nest by Herzog & de Meuron and Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao both have meaning and cultural significance beyond the buildings themselves. It's useful for the general public to understand the power of these iconic structures to symbolize towns, cities, and nations.

IA Where does one begin art education?

UG In kindergarten. An appreciation of art should be one of the cornerstones of a good education. It's a shame we are acquiescing to the proposition that music and the arts should take second place to scientific and literary thinking. School systems should not be allowed to cut out modes of thinking as a way of economizing. That is the equivalent of saying we will have only a right-brained or left-brained society. We must encourage intellectual forays into areas

Gauchat, AIA

in which the outcome is less certain and the payoff not assured. We must therefore invest in art, design, and music as essential components of a complete education.

IA In a thousand years, what will archaeology reveal about the culture of our time?

UG Our epoch is marked by an unfortunate edifice complex, based on the assumption that any human endeavor should have a building to signify its importance. We succumbed to this impulse in an irresponsible fashion.

IA What are we doing for our own profession in terms of design literacy? What is a 21st-century education for architects?

UG First, we should be aware that we as professionals serve the public. The public should understand that architects are trying to balance the needs of a client and the public good. Second, architectural education has become a superb general education. I'm making a distinction between architectural education as a path to multiple career paths, and as a means to replenish the needs of the profession. What better way to educate the public than to have more people understand what architecture is about? Third, it is important for architecture schools to be technologically advanced – they should lead the profession in the use of technology. Fourth, architectural education should increasingly rely on case studies as a way to teach future architects how to tackle problems. Studio situations should be created to give a semblance of reality and make students understand the processes that lead to good design.

IA What new imperatives face us as architects?

UG In the world today, we have the capacity to produce more of anything than we could possibly ever use. Until a good part of the last century, there was some relationship between utility and value. We're well past that. It's more a question of how to design something that appeals to a broad audience of consumers; utility is coincidental. In an era of overcapacity, competition places tangible economic value on design. It makes one product more marketable than another. The realization over the last 10 or 20 years has been that design can create markets and change patterns of consumption. As architects, we need to be aware not only of what makes an exciting-looking building, but also of how to court public acceptance.

Another imperative for education is to be aware of the negative impact that buildings have on the world. More than half of all carbon dioxide in the world is produced by buildings. Buildings contribute

mightily to global warming. In the past this could be excused because of ignorance. But to continue on the same path, knowing what we know now, is close to criminal. The worldwide need for building is on the increase for the foreseeable future. The world's population is increasing at an alarming rate; at the same time, the rate of urbanization, particularly in the developing world, is accelerating. This situation poses social and infrastructural problems the likes of which we have never seen before.

IA Any closing thoughts?

UG Architecture is a noble calling. If we have an appreciation for the aesthetics of the profession – architecture as a beautiful, intellectual enterprise based on a sense of optimism about the future – we can elevate architecture to a different level.

Iliya Azaroff, AIA, is director of design at the Design Collective Studio, an experimental arts group that works across multiple disciplines. A faculty member of New York City College of Technology, he serves as vice president for design excellence for AIANY and the Center for Architecture.



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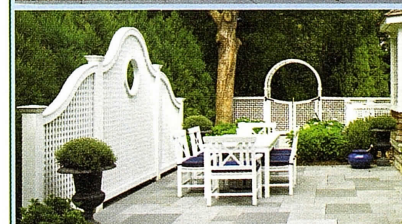


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KRISTEN RICHARDS

The Language of Architecture

What is it saying?

By Stanley Stark, FAIA, and Daniel Heuberger, AIA, LEED AP

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- Behind the Screens 29
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- Why Architects Don't Get Lost 34
- Visual Literacy – It's Elementary! 36
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The new TKT booth, the bright red, shiny, glittering gadget-like object at the northern end of Father Duffy Square (just north of Times Square), is a palimpsest of design influences, references, and gestures. As a new focal point in the neighborhood, it is a place where tourists and the rest of us congregate to mount the cascade of LED-lit, ruby-red steps to photograph the square. The TKT retail area and support space is located beneath the stairs and accessed from 47th Street. Made of glass and heated by a geothermal tap 450 feet deep, the facility is a small high-tech wonder. Architects and engineers as well as tourists flock to the site with cameras.

Tourists and designers are reading different things, however. To the public, it is a special place, a runaway chunk of one of the pulsating three-dimensional signs that surround Times Square, a technology extravaganza, a sign you can sit on. For architects and engineers, it is a building as a playful object, a demonstration of new construction technologies, and a pun on the theater. The retail space, a fiberglass shell housed in a glassy box framed by the steps, acts as a proscenium and sits as a stage set in front of a backdrop with the operating machinery – the geothermal piping, heat exchanger, and electrical switchgear – behind the curtain.

This compact but highly visible project, based on a design concept by the Australian firm Choi Ropiha, with architect Perkins Eastman and plaza architect PKSB, is at the center of NYC's media and neural network. It crystallizes the reality of contemporary design literacy: multiple messages and meanings conveyed via a wide spectrum of influences. When architecture speaks now, it talks in many tongues.

It does so amidst a bubbling visual soup of references and cues that influence architectural design and our ability to read buildings. These prompts are drawn from advertising, media culture, and trends in graphic, fashion, product, and packaging design, as well as from our rich architectural history. The iPod and the Parthenon are different, yet they both convey attitudes and lessons about style, grace, elegance, substance, and how the eye connects with an object. They resonate with the thought process of architects. The Vitruvian virtues of firmness, commodity, and delight still endure as bedrock principles. They are the core of architecture's grammar. The syntax, references, and resonances, however, are shaped by popular and consumer culture.

How do design ideas move? The iPod is probably the most popular and pervasive design object in wide use, certainly in America. Spare and tightly geometric, it employs the language of simple shapes and minimalism, a visual language shared with modern architecture both from its classic phase and the current world. The corporate attitudes that drive Apple's product design – simplicity, a toy-like approach to user familiarity and friendliness, irony, minimalism, and a distinctive design consciousness – also drive the almost classical symmetry of Apple's corporate stores and the sleek, self-conscious interiors of *Dwell* magazine.

Gerrit Reitveld's chairs and the paintings of Piet Mondrian, Peter Halley, and Sean Scully continue to reverberate in the design of our surroundings and throughout popular culture. The buildings of Will Alsop, the chromatic TKT booth, and the Target bulls-eye logo talk



to one another. Andy Warhol's silkscreens and Archigram's early 1960s collage fantasies of mechanistic megastructures have all found their way into current architectural design language. The results emerge daily and globally. The point is not which influence came first – rather, the design world is one big round table and the chips are flying.

Is there a linkage between private space and design literacy? As Donald Albrecht demonstrated in *Design Dreams: Modern Architecture and the Movies*, films made during the 1930s and 40s, particularly their set designs, helped familiarize and popularize modern design to the public. We know that consumer culture affects the design of private space (who has enough closet space?), but the mechanics of how consumer behavior and choice influence architectural space and design literacy are obscure. Does consumer product design for domestic use teach and convey design literacy and values? And does this awareness spill over from the private realm of the home to the public realm of the school, office, neighborhood?



Do our public spaces promote design literacy? Although there have been casual inquiries, the design community doesn't really know how the public reacts to our public spaces because we don't formally survey them. Times Square, Grand Central Station, the Times Square subway station, the new Columbus Circle, Ground Zero, segments of Hudson River Park along the West Side of Manhattan, Rockefeller Center, Herald Square, West 45th Street in the Theater District, West 57th Street, Madison Avenue between 59th Street and 77th Streets, Governors Island redevelopment, and on – all are public spaces, old, new, and emerging, that are vastly different in character. Some are easily legible, some chaotic and discordant. For

those of us trained to see, these places and spaces speak volumes. But for the rest of us, who knows? We should ask.

Can design literacy be taught? Design is a way of thinking, a language of ideas that can be shared with others. Professionals have created a number of initiatives to teach design methods and thinking to non-designers:

- The Mayors' Institute on City Design is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Architectural Foundation, and the National Conference of Mayors. It holds a series of charrette/roundtables and attracts a fairly senior group of decision makers, many of them actual mayors. The purpose is to approach problem-solving from a designer's perspective. It works on a case study system.
- University/Community design programs offer free design and planning services and involve community participation on projects. The best known is Sam Mockbee's Rural Studio, but there are others at Yale, SCI-Arc, and SUNY-Syracuse. Some programs demonstrate what can be done with modest means and a lot of good will. Do these initiatives promote engagement of the public with design as much as they provide a public forum for designers?

Points of Reference: Design Literacy

Experiencing Architecture, 2nd Edition, by Steen Eiler Rasmussen (MIT Press): An excellent and clear primer on the basic grammar of architecture and building design.

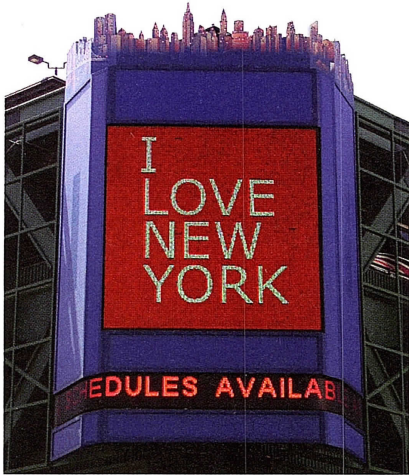
Towns and Buildings, by Steen Eiler Rasmussen (MIT Press): The principles explained in *Experiencing Architecture* extended to urban buildings and classical urban design.

Close Up: How to Read the American City, by Grady Clay (Henry Holt & Company): The grammar and dialects of the planning and design of 20th-century American cities.

Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design, 2nd Edition, by Steven Heller (Allworth Press): A leading graphic designer uses examples of late 19th-/early 21st-century graphic design to discuss how designers convey their messages via theory, politics, aesthetics, and market pressures; an insightful lesson on design language.

Pamphlet Architecture 1–10, 1st Edition (Princeton Architectural Press): The early series, particularly those edited by Steven Holl, concentrate on particular components and typologies (e.g., small house types, staircases, doors, alphabet buildings).

- Initiatives by the City of New York, such as Governors Island, Ground Zero, and PlaNYC 2030, are still in development, but it is not too early to evaluate their initial impact on the public. Does the diffuse nature of these projects, invariably slow paced and subject to political influence, make them good vehicles for promoting design awareness? Should the city be the one to canvass the public? Or is it the role of the design community? As inquirer, the city may become the target of protest and dissatisfaction, while a professional organization (e.g., AIANY, ASLA) may be viewed as a neutral group whose only agenda is to learn from the public, not defend a particular project.



KRISTEN RICHARDS

- The Center for Architecture Foundation has worked assiduously in K-12 design education for almost two decades. Buildings themselves can be used as educational opportunities. The graphic designer Alexander Isley is currently working – with Dattner Architects and the NYC School Construction Authority – on a sustainable design education program for

New York City public schools. The initiative, which involves digital, graphic, and physical information, relates sustainable design ideas to the actual building in which students are located. This example of design literacy places the emphasis on relating the design process to things that affect a student's personal experience and environment.

Will the public benefit from greater design literacy? Yes!

So will designers. The importance and power of design as a form of creative thinking and problem solving is increasingly being acknowledged and embraced by all segments of society. But this doesn't necessarily imply that non-designers understand the design process or are literate in its forms. By increasing the public's understanding of architecture and its languages and dialects, we can enhance people's sensitivity to design and increase the value they place on our buildings and public environment.

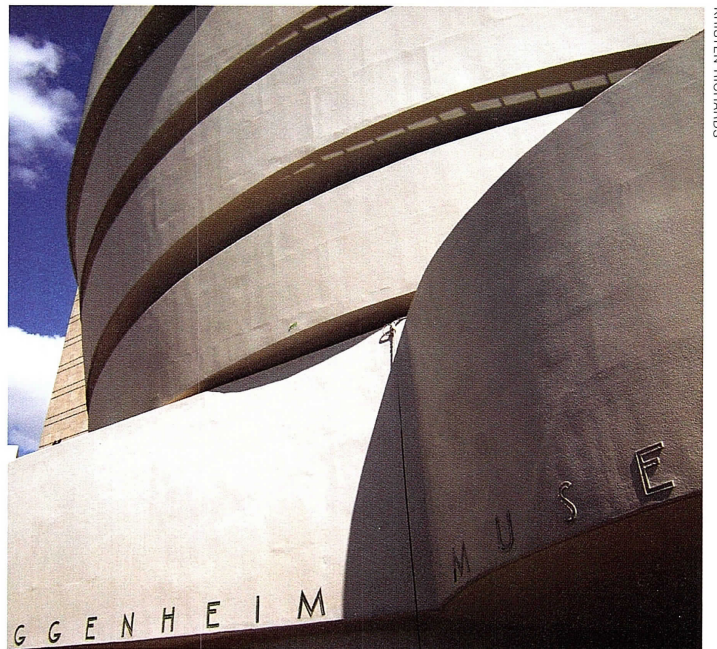
This is a fluid time, and language is changing. We should start asking people what they see and read in those panoramas when they climb the stairs of the new TKTs booth. It's also a good set of questions to ask ourselves.

Stanley Stark, FAIA, is vice president and national director for life sciences within HDR/CUH2A's Science and Technology practice. He is a long-term member of the *Oculus* Committee.

Daniel Heuberger, AIA, LEED AP, is a principal at Dattner Architects and a member of the *Oculus* Committee. He is currently involved in the design of several New York City schools.



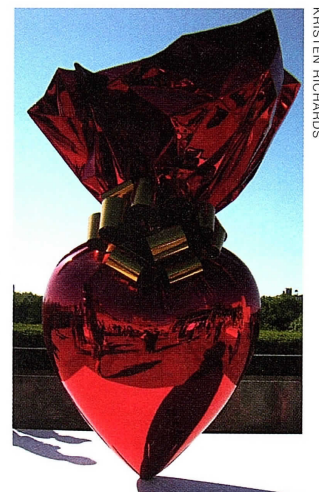
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Back to Basics

President Obama's plan to focus on infrastructure moves America in the right direction

By Blair Kamin



In the heady days after Barack Obama's election, many of the nation's architecture critics, me included, had visions of *grand projects* dancing in our heads. We evoked memories of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) and dreamed of new bridges, power plants, and other infrastructure that would uplift the nation's tattered public realm. Zohar Lazar's WPA mural-style illustration for *New York* magazine (November 14, 2008), picturing Obama alongside muscle-bound construction workers and one of those structurally outlandish, frightfully expensive Santiago Calatrava bridges, succinctly captured these hopes.

Today, that grandiose vision looks like a mirage.

Calatrava bridges? Fuggedaboutit. The stimulus package, which will cost \$787 billion and aims to save or create as many as 3.5 million jobs, is focusing instead on back-to-basics stuff like highway and bridge repairs, making federal buildings more energy efficient, and weatherizing modest-income homes. In other words, we're going to be seeing more humble bridge-deck repairs than knock-your-eyes-out bridges.

All the same, I don't mind the plan's emphasis on the architecture of pragmatism rather than the architecture of spectacle. Nor am I especially troubled by what some critics are calling its lack of a coherent strategic vision. To me, that shortcoming is less important than

dealing with the obvious bigger issue of putting unemployed construction workers and architects back to work, along with this less obvious one: In the wake of the economic meltdown and the credit crunch, we've entered a new time.

The age of self-indulgent icons is over. The age of society-serving infrastructure has begun. Across the land there are examples of the sort of creativity that architects – and the architects of public policy – can bring to these seemingly humdrum projects.

Fred Bernstein skillfully laid out such an approach in a 2005 *New York Times* story cleverly headlined “In My Backyard, Please: The Infrastructure Beautiful Movement.” In it he detailed how highly regarded designers like Steven Holl, AIA, were turning unsexy commissions like water-filtration plants into award-winning, aesthetic gems.

Holl's water-filtration plant on the edge of New Haven, for example, is a long, pipe-shaped sculpture covered in stainless-steel shingles that is said to recall the sculpture of Anish Kapoor. It teaches a significant lesson: Big infrastructure buildings have to be beautiful and offer amenities like green roofs and public parks; otherwise, because of the invariable NIMBY factor, they'll never get built.

Here's another idea I can pass along based on my experience of covering Mayor Richard M. Daley in Chicago for nearly 20 years: City-building is a long-term process, not a one-shot deal, and it begins



ZOHAR LAZAR

with basic steps that chart a path toward bigger ones. Nation-building may work the same way. The point is to get going – now. Obama can tweak his infrastructure initiative in 2010.

When Daley first came into office, architects joked that he had “City Beautiful instincts,” as though he were some sort of latter-day Cro-Magnon dragging his knuckles on the ground. But Daley wisely persisted with simple infrastructure improvements that his constituents, the voters, could see – building more than 80 miles of landscaped medians in city streets, planting more than 500,000 trees, and the like. Block by block, the city changed – not all of it, to be sure, but significant chunks of it. That was smart politics and smart city planning.

The city looked good, so the mayor looked good. Only after he got the basics down did Daley embark upon Millennium Park and his other *grand projects*. Obama’s push for visible, usable infrastructure shows that he’s wisely taking a page from Daley’s playbook.

The other thing worth remembering about Daley’s public works is that they tend to draw people together, unlike those of his father, Mayor Richard J. Daley, for whom expressways and public housing projects sometimes served as tools to keep poor blacks and white ethnics apart. Millennium Park offers a rare piece of such common ground in a region that remains balkanized along the lines of race and class. Obama picked up on this theme in his inauguration speech,

Vision or mirage (l-r): President Barack Obama, NY State Governor David Paterson, NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Frank Gehry, and Santiago Calatrava

hailing the power of infrastructure to “bind us together.”

It was disheartening, then, when House Democrats caved in to Republican criticism and struck from the recovery bill a provision that would have directed \$200 million toward rehabbing the crumbling National Mall. Yet the bigger picture holds reason for tempered optimism, especially because the final legislation provides a healthy \$8 billion for mass transit. That could accelerate the drive for high-speed rail networks and other green ways of getting around.

From water-treatment plants to fixing up federal buildings, the myriad projects in the legislation represent a first step toward rectifying the shameful lack of attention the nation has paid to its public realm. Obama, who once dreamed of being an architect, is moving things in the right direction: away from splashy architecture and back to basics. Only by tending the garden of our shared spaces can we truly make democracy flower.

[Blair Kamin](#) is the *Chicago Tribune*’s Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic and the author of *Why Architecture Matters: Lessons from Chicago*.

Design Competitions in the Public Eye

Competitions can generate icons, solve problems, and catapult careers; they're also a form of communication. What messages are reaching the public?

By Bill Millard

Competitions can either broaden public architectural awareness or simply feed the star system. They raise questions about whether design is an individual gift or a communicable body of knowledge. Open debate about design presumes the latter, but practices aren't consistent. We don't always require competitions, and when we do hold them – generating superb results, noisy spectacles, or quagmires like Ground Zero – decisions may rest with politicians or developers, not architects. Observers might infer that mainstream America loves a good horse

race but views the design fields as so arcane that judgments are practically interchangeable.

G. Stanley Collyer, Jr., Ph.D., editor of *Competitions* magazine, decries the common presence of nonspecialists on juries. "The layperson can't read architectural drawings," he says. "It's more of a beauty contest than anything else." He compares most U.S. competitions unfavorably with Europe's codified system in which all government projects require competitions and decisions are in professionals' hands. "In this country, everybody thinks they're an architect," he says. "I think that's an American mindset."

Collyer adds, however, that Americans are as responsive as anyone else to commodious, firm, and delightful buildings – once we're exposed to them. He observes that in Columbus, Indiana, with its concentration of high-profile Modernist buildings, "younger people who've gone to schools designed by good architects have a different appreciation of architecture." Direct experience with sophisticated spaces is itself an instrument of design literacy, and competitions enhance popular understanding by producing icons. James Hoban's White House design resulted from a 1792 competition with a single juror, President George Washington. Public competitions gave us Central Park, the St. Louis Gateway Arch, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"If you know what makes a good public realm, you can ask for it," says Deborah Marton, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space. "If you don't know, you don't know what to ask for." Laypeople may be implicitly aware of design flaws, she notes, without identifying them as such. The pedestrian passing through an overscaled, auto-oriented space perceives it as hazardous or intimidating, but may not see those qualities as design effects open to change. "They'd probably say, 'It's just the way it is,'" Marton explains. "A lot of them wouldn't focus on the fact that it's poorly designed." The Design Trust thus puts environ-



The Design Trust for Public Space/Grand Army Plaza Coalition's Reinventing Grand Army Plaza ideas competition were on view on the plaza itself in a month-long exhibition designed by Pentagram



©VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE / ASHLEY KELLY AND RIKAKO WAKABAYASHI

The Van Alen Institute's Envisioning Gateway: A Public Design Competition for Gateway National Park winning entry was "Mapping the Ecotone," by Ashley Kelly and Rikako Wakabayashi

ments and practices under both professional and public scrutiny. Its competition Reinventing Grand Army Plaza generated solutions for one of Brooklyn's most perplexing sites and displayed the top 30 entries at the plaza itself. Competitions like this may not always produce realized designs, but they help reframe civic life as a set of remediable conditions.

An ecosystem with multiple niches

"The design competition is a tool for education about a public, to a public, for a public," says Adi Shamir, director of the Van Alen Institute (VAI), which studies the processes that shape design of the public realm. Open competitions, the VAI's specialty, bring civic priorities to designers' attention, then channel solutions back to the populace through exhibitions, publications, and online information. Bridging academia and practice, the VAI has produced what Shamir calls "an opportunity for the real world and the imagined world to meet up." Finding some projects "grand and naive" and others "realistic and literal," she says, "we know that those two types can overlap. Sometimes something naive and grand actually has tremendous power to imagine the future." Though economic forces drive most construction, ideas competitions promote experimentation and career development and occasionally point the way toward realization.

The U.S. has no consistent competition model, as historian Hélène Lipstadt explained at a Princeton conference in 2006,¹ in part because an AIA code from 1900 to 1973 made open competitions difficult. The code was abandoned because of concern over Federal Trade Commission "restraint of trade" regulations, then replaced in 1982 with nonbinding guidelines, *The Handbook of Architectural*

Design Competitions (rev. ed., 1988; a major revision is in the works, with electronic publication expected in summer 2009). Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan moved American procedures closer to a European model by writing "The Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture" (1962) and introducing legislation requiring competitions for certain federal buildings. In recent years, says Shamir, the National Endowment for the Arts and the General Services Administration (GSA) have been the government's chief "stewards of a design- or arts-based language for, and accessibility for, a public." The GSA's Design Excellence program, in particular, has raised the quality of federal courthouses nationwide.

Outside the public sector, the local competition ecosystem includes ideas competitions organized by the VAI, the Municipal Art Society of New York, and the AIA New York Chapter's Emerging New York Architects (ENYA) Committee; the Design Trust's competitions, undertaken in partnership with a city agency or community group capable of realizing the winning design; invited competitions resembling requests for proposals; awards for portfolios of work, like the AIANY's New Practices New York and the Architectural League's Young Architects Forum and Emerging Voices programs; exhibition-based competitions like last year's White House Redux at Storefront for Art and Architecture; and the juried National Design Awards and the People's Design Awards, organized by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. The League's new Urban Omnibus website provides a platform for partnerships to increase awareness of competitions; its interviews with jurors on the Design Trust's Grand Army Plaza competition, for example, add a backstory clarifying decisions. "The vocabularies that different groups of people use to talk about building are so different," says League Executive Director Rosalie Genevro. "There's this complete mismatch when a community member and an architect talk about the same project."

New Yorkers can thank the organizers, jurors, and architects behind this process for numerous major structures and smaller civic amenities. A Design Trust feasibility study, "Reclaiming the High Line" (2001), provided early momentum to the Friends of the High Line. The reopening of Governors Island owes much to a VAI open competition. Likewise, the new TKTS booth in Father Duffy Square, the work of Choi Ropiha of Sydney, Australia (design concept), NYC-based Perkins Eastman (architect), and PKSB (plaza architect), emerged from a VAI-sponsored design competition in 1999. The new CityRacks "Hoop" to appear later in 2009 can be attributed to a Cooper-Hewitt/NYC Department of Transportation competition that selected the design by Copenhagen-based Ian Mahaffy and Maarten De Greeve from more than 1,200 submissions.



AIANY New Housing New York Legacy Project: Via Verde - The Green Way, sustainable, affordable housing by Phipps Rose Dattner Grimshaw

DATTNER ARCHITECTS

¹"The Competition in the Region's Past, the Region in the Competition's Future," in Malmberg, Catherine, ed., *The Politics of Design: Competitions for Public Projects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 7-28. For further perspective on the social function of competitions as an "educative spectacle," see Lipstadt's essay "The Experimental Tradition" in *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1989; An Architectural League Publication), pp. 9-19.



ENYA South Street Seaport: Re-envisioning the Urban Edge competition winner: N.E.E.D.'s Sangmok Kim, AIA, LEED AP (New York), and Sungwoo Kim (South Korea) submitted "Fish Works," where recreational zones mediate between fish farms and the existing urban fabric

AIANY's chief contribution to the 2007 AIA sesquicentennial celebration was the New Housing New York Legacy Project, a competition in partnership with NYC's Department of Housing Preservation and Development. A jury including Shaun Donovan, Hon. AIA (then HPD Commissioner, now HUD Secretary), and Adolfo Carrión (then Bronx Borough President, now director of the White House Office of Urban Affairs) selected Phipps Rose Dattner Grimshaw's *Via Verde*: more than 200 units of sustainable, affordable housing to be built near The Hub in the South Bronx. "Seeing an AIANY design competition result in the construction of affordable housing is gratifying enough, but the important thing about *Via Verde* is its replicability," says AIANY Executive Director Rick Bell, FAIA. "It has raised the bar for sustainability and design excellence in all affordable housing." The economic crisis, Bell notes, makes competitions increasingly important to architects.

To Caroline Payson, director of education at the Cooper-Hewitt, competitions are simply a more formal and open version of the choices people make every day. "Someone is holding a design contest," she says, "every time they make a purchase, by what they decide to bring into their own homes."

Embracing the contradictions

Certain features of competitions reinforce the tendency for results to be more accessible than processes. Many laypeople think of design as a market phenomenon, says ENYA co-chair Jessica Sheridan, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP, linking name-brand recognition with product quality but lacking a language for explaining functional and aesthetic determinants of that quality. By circulating impressive renderings without explicating the work behind them, competition organizers are missing opportunities to communicate. "It's not just about the final 'tada!' image," Sheridan comments, "which is what the public is only exposed to." ENYA members emphasize research and community conversations at project sites as well as nuts-and-bolts learning about back-end organizational work. Southpoint: From Ruin to Rejuvenation (2006), she recalls, brought organizers and entrants into extensive contact with Roosevelt Islanders, producing detailed knowledge of neighborhood history and concerns about how new construction might change island life.

Other recent experiences suggest the value of clarifying certain



Cooper-Hewitt/ NYC Department of Transportation CityRacks competition winner "Hoop," by Ian Mahaffy and Maarten De Greeve

distinctions, for example, between ideas competitions and those geared toward construction, between open and invited competitions, and between master plans and final designs. When the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's Innovative Design Study warned in its RFQ, "This is NOT a design competition and will not result in the selection of a final plan,"² many didn't get the message. "Most people understood [Daniel Libeskind's master plan] to be the plan," Marton recalls. "The whole phase that came in with specific designs for individual buildings was confusing to many people, because they felt they'd already seen the plan."

Some see these perceptions as manifestations of inherent internal tensions. No other discipline, says Storefront Director Joseph Grima, relies on competitions as much as architecture. This is a loss for those other fields, he believes. "Competitions are such an important vehicle," he notes, "precisely because they capture the thinking mind in its raw state of productivity and intelligence," regardless of built results (or even victory: losing entries have often generated career-changing ideas). He acknowledges downsides to the system: globalized competitions bringing "the usual suspects" into site after site can flatten out local features, reward excessively spectacular or oversimplified forms, and crowd out emerging talents. The best-organized competitions, Grima says, are "very inclusive, especially towards protagonists of local scenes, so that new ideas do emerge," the kind that "wouldn't actually emerge from a conventional commission."

Grima understands how competitions evoke the "highs and lows of what can be an incredibly challenging and at times unrewarding profession, but at the same time the sense of accomplishment that comes with seeing your work appreciated and your insight chosen above everyone else's." Competitions are riddled with contingencies: the clarity of the brief, jury dynamics, the organizers' vision and flexibility, entrants' communication skills. It is easy to develop a love/hate relationship with the system. It is also a bracing challenge to interpret one's ideas to both jurors and the public with nuance and conviction. In these respects, competitions mirror and intensify the maddening, exhilarating nature of architectural practice itself.

Bill Millard is a freelance writer and editor whose work has appeared in *Oculus*, *Icon*, *Content*, *The Architect's Newspaper*, and other publications.

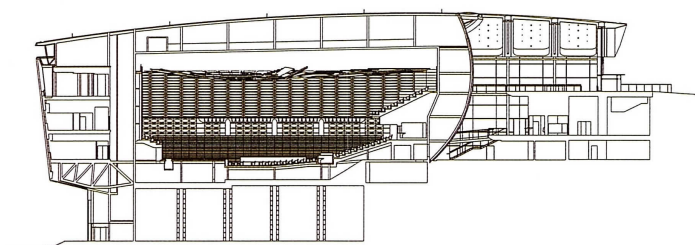
²Sagalyn, Lynne B. "The Political Fabric of Design Competitions," in Malmberg, *ibid.*, pp. 29-49.



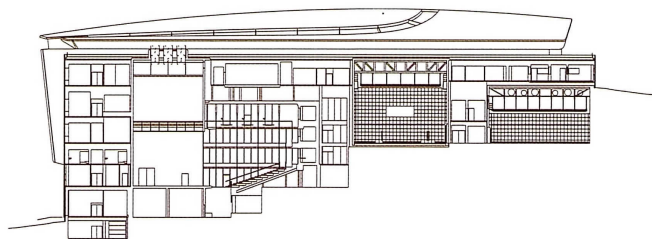
Behind the Screens

The new performing arts center for Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute straddles virtual and physical spaces

By Lisa Delgado



GRIMSHAW/DAVIS BRODY BOND AEDAS

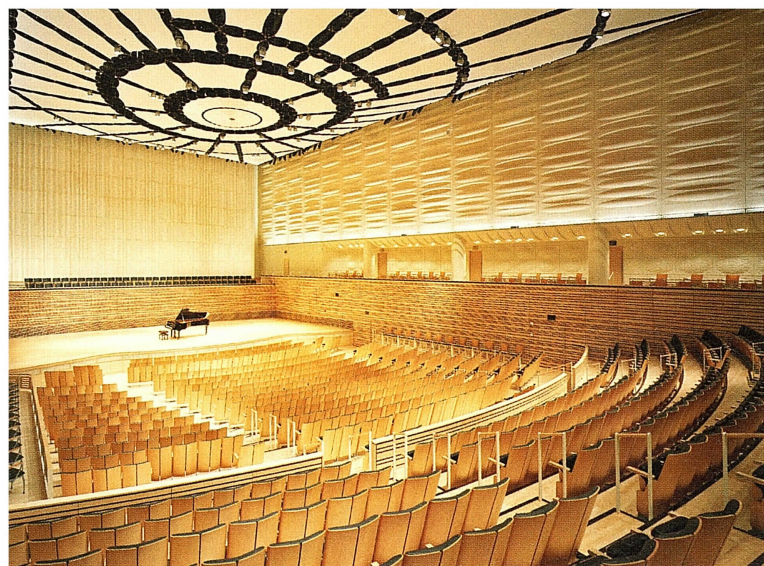


Top: North block section: concert hall and main lobby (right) **Above:** South block section with artist-in-residence studios (left), theater (center), and Studios 1 and 2 (right)

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away (well okay, Troy's not quite that far), Grimshaw began working on a project that finally came to fruition last fall. Seven years after the firm won the competition to design the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), the ultra-high-tech building in upstate New York opened in October 2008, with Davis Brody Bond Aedas as architect-of-record.

It was Grimshaw's first performing arts center, and it might also be the first time the firm has earned comparisons with the oeuvre of George Lucas. The 221,200-square-foot building includes one darkly futuristic room that EMPAC Director Johannes Goebel calls the "Darth Vader space." For a charmingly nerdy place like Rensselaer, perhaps that's a compliment. Certainly many spaces in EMPAC have a sci-fi feel, since they are geared to highly immersive virtual reality experiences. In keeping with its art-meets-science mission, the building was designed to be equally well suited to scientists using data visualizations in three-dimensional space and to avant-garde theater troupes staging all-enveloping multimedia spectacles.

Both technically and conceptually, the task of designing the center was tricky. The soil and clay underneath the huge hillside building turned out to be softer and more unstable than anticipated. The architecture and engineering team considered numerous designs for the foundation before settling on a system of rock anchors. Designing the performance spaces for acoustic isolation and seismic safety was another engineering challenge. To help eliminate structure-borne vibrations, one of two high-tech studios, Studio 1, floats atop a huge grid of steel springs; Studio 2 has an independent foundation, explains Craig Schwitter, P.E., principal of lead engineering firm Buro Happold. Because the technical requirements were so complicated, a group of theater, acoustics, and audiovisual experts had to coordinate closely with the architects at every step along the way.



PAUL RIVERA / ARCHPHOTO

Above and right: The 1,200-seat concert hall

Adding to the design's complexity was the fact that the program itself was highly varied: along with the spaces devoted to virtual environments, the center also needed a concert hall for symphonic music. Grimshaw's solution was to create a deliberate schism in the space, guided by the division between analog and digital worlds and the very different ways that people like to see such spectacles unfold. The building's north side, containing the 1,200-seat concert hall, represents the analog world, while the south side, containing high-tech experimental performance and research spaces, represents the digital.

Underlying the design concept is the notion of "design legibility," or communicating the structure of a building visually to its inhabitants. Because of symphonic music's traditionally lights-on environment, a space like the concert hall "cried out to be legible, in this sense," says William Horgan, an associate director of Grimshaw's New York office. The firm designed the hull to be ultravisible, even from the outside: it can be prominently seen through glass curtain walls, and its curved form is echoed in the gentle arch of the barrel-vault roof. Clad in cedar, the hall's form was inspired by the resonant chamber of a wooden stringed instrument.

When visitors step into the main entrance lobby at the top of the hill, the hull's intriguing geometries entice prolonged looks, from the zigzags of multihued cedar encircling it to the funnel-like forms of the entryways leading inside. Where the hull's curves meet the barrel-vault roof above, a halo-shaped skylight encircles it, promoting design legibility by communicating the separate identities of the concert hall and the roof that surrounds it, Horgan explains.

Unlike the curved exterior, the concert hall's interior is essentially shoebox-shaped, its slightly convex walls lined with panels and banners to perfect the sound during performances, says acoustician Larry Kirkegaard, FASA, Hon. AIA, of Kirkegaard Associates. A web-



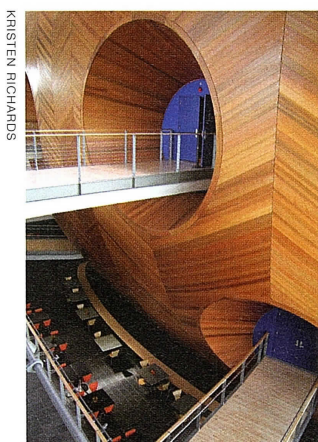
PAUL RIVERA / ARCHPHOTO

like fabric ceiling helps reflect high-frequency sound; lower frequencies pass through it and reverberate off the volume above. With a decor featuring gentle earth tones and natural materials such as maple-and-wenge sidewalls and maple-and-leather seats, the visual effect is soothing and sensual.

While the concert hall represents the physical presence of an object in space, the southern performance spaces represent voids within a solid. They include Studio 1 and Studio 2 and a larger 400-seat theater with a 70-foot flytower. Unlike the concert hall, the size and shape of these spaces are unknowable from the outside: enter a doorway, and it's like stepping into another world. They are conceived of as "found spaces," Horgan says.

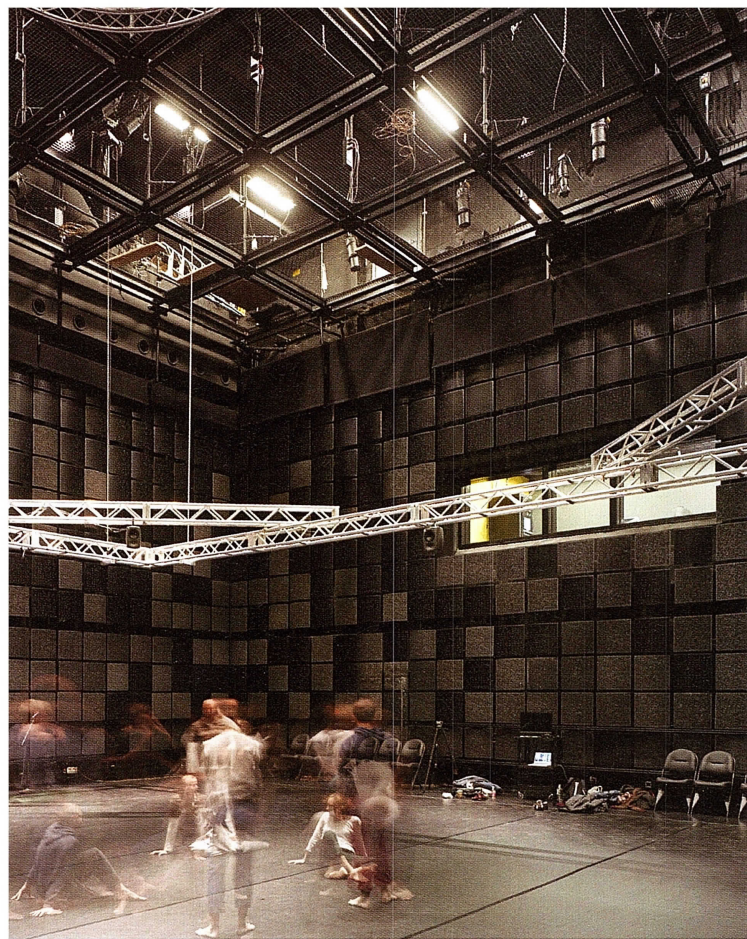
When the lights are up, Studio 1 (a.k.a. Darth Vader's lair) is as stark and imposing as its nickname suggests. The 3,500-square-foot black-box theater space is wrapped with black, futuristic-looking acoustic tiles, some of which have pockmarked surfaces that reflect and scatter sound, while others are perforated and absorb sound. Hovering overhead, a changeable rigging system includes a set of iron rings, 40 feet in diameter, that provides the framework for a 360-degree panoramic screen and projectors for creating immersive virtual environments. A high-speed fiber network link to the university's supercomputing center provides prodigious computational power for scientific modeling and simulations, and a digitally controlled rigging system can be used to fly people or objects through the space.

The overall effect is techie, but with an eye to aesthetics. The architects and acousticians designed the tiles not only for their sonic performance, but also to be pleasing in their look and composition. Thin borders emphasize each tile's uniqueness, so that each one is "in a sense, a single voice," Horgan remarks. "It's a symphony of pan-



KRISTEN RICHARDS

Bridges span the atrium to barrel-shaped entries to the concert hall



PAUL RIVERA / ARCHPHOTO

A changeable rigging system in Studio 1 includes 40-foot-diameter iron rings to support a 360-degree panoramic screen and projectors for creating immersive virtual environments

els on the wall, each contributing to the whole.” With the lights down, the black decor disappears in deference to the audiovisual productions staged there. The 2,500-square-foot Studio 2 has a similarly simple decor, but it is optimized more for lights-on musical performances, so it needed to have a warmer architectural presence, achieved through a maple floor and ivory-colored acoustic tiles.

The 400-seat theater is a cross between the studios and the concert hall. Despite its impressive array of audiovisual technology, including a high-res 3D projector, it has a relatively traditional look that would make the average theatergoer feel at ease. One gesture that gives the space its own personality is its vibrant red gypsum walls. “When it was painted red, it was as if the room had suddenly jumped for joy,” Horgan observes. On a functional level, the space is distinguished by its high degree of flexibility, with features such as movable seating along the sides and detachable projection screens and loudspeakers that can create virtual environments.

As audiovisual technology and computer processing power steadily improve, architects will no doubt find themselves designing



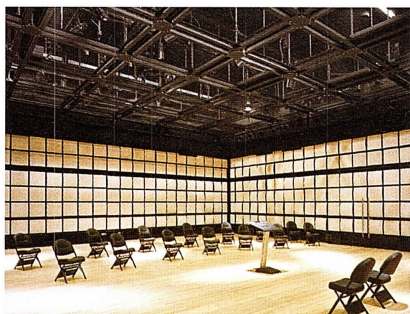
PAUL RIVERA / ARCHPHOTO

The 400-seat theater includes a 70-foot fly tower with computer-controlled rigging

more buildings like EMPAC. The limitations of a small computer screen are obvious, and the notion of being able to walk around freely in virtual environments – surrounded by data or theatrical performances – is an alluring one. When the Wii generation grows up, what will its architecture look like? Will it feel comfortable, luxurious, and familiar – or stark and futuristic, like something out of a sci-fi flick? If the spaces of EMPAC are any indication, it might be a little of both.

[Lisa Delgado](#) is a freelance journalist who has written for *The Architect's Newspaper*, *e-Oculus*, *Blueprint*, and *Wired*, among other publications.

Client: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY
 Design Architect: Grimshaw, New York, NY
 Team: Vincent Chang, Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, Mark Husser, Andrew Whalley (Project Partners), Simon Beames, Shane Burger, David Burke, Demetrios Comodromos, Chris Crombie, Nikolas Dando-Haenisch, Chris Duisberg, Matt Eastwood, Paulo Faria, William Horgan, Kirsten Lees, Melissa Lim, Theo Lorenz, Junko Nakagawa, Michael Pawlyn, Juan Porral, Mariam Mojdehi, Barbara Kurdiovsky (Project Team)
 Architect-of-Record: Davis Brody Bond Aedas, New York, NY
 Team: J. Max Bond Jr., FAIA, William Paxson, AIA (Partners-in-Charge), Ernesto Bachiller, AIA (Project Manager), Bruce Dole, Jon Edelbaum, Dean Ficek, Steven J. Fischer, AIA, Robert Halverson, Fernando Hausch-Fenn, Nathan Hoyt, AIA, Fareh Garba, Richard Klibschon, Belinda Len, Ying Li, Marc Massay, Donald Nicoulin, Glenn O'Neill, Danny Papajic, Oliver Sippl, Mayine Yu, Dohhee Zhong (Project Team)
 Structural/Mechanical/Plumbing Engineer, Sustainability Consultant, Simulation Analysis Consultant: Buro Happold
 Electrical Engineers: Buro Happold; Laszlo Bodak Engineering
 LEED Consultants: Buro Happold; Turner Construction Company
 Acoustician, Audio/Video Systems: Kirkegaard Associates
 Theater Consultant: Fisher Dachs Associates
 Industrial Design (auditorium seating): Billings Jackson Design
 Quantity Surveyor: Donnell Consultants
 Construction Manager: Turner Construction Company
 Landscape Architect: The Saratoga Associates
 Civil Engineer: Clough, Harbour & Associates (CHA)
 Architectural Lighting: Office for Visual Interaction
 Fire Engineering: Arup Fire
 IT Consultant: Shen Milsom & Wilke



PAUL RIVERA / ARCHPHOTO

The more intimate Studio 2 is optimized for lights-on musical performances

Good Bones Win Out

Bringing together two eras of design at Syracuse University's School of Architecture renews a Beaux Arts building and finds the hidden green virtues of its original design

By Richard Staub

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY



DAVID JOSEPH

Syracuse University's Slocum Hall

Can you teach an old dog new tricks? In the case of Slocum Hall, the home of Syracuse University's School of Architecture, very much so. Or perhaps, as James Garrison, AIA, of Garrison Architects believes, it was simply a case of bringing back some moves the building could perform nicely all along.

Slocum Hall is a Beaux Arts brick and limestone pile designed by two School of Architecture professors, Frederick Revels and Earl Hallenbeck, which opened in 1919 as the home for the Schools of Agriculture, Engineering, Home Economics, and Architecture. It housed dairy cows in the basement and classrooms on the first three floors, and tucked away the architecture studios in the fourth floor's attic-like spaces. In 1939, when the Agriculture School closed, the School of Architecture gradually took over more of the building until it occupied the entire structure.

As often happens with buildings of a certain age, however, "improvements" were made. To gain more floor space, the university filled in the openings for the skylit atrium on each floor. It put up walls to create more private spaces, removed the lecture hall, introduced hung ceilings, and shut tight the over-the-door transoms. Garrison, an alum, remembers his first impression as a freshman was of a dense warren of small rooms – not what he'd expected from an architect-



The newly reopened atrium, looking up from the ground floor

ture school. When Syracuse University hired him in 1999 to renovate the 110,000-square-foot building, he knew what he was up against.

Garrison's brief was to help implement the School of Architecture's mandate to reflect the creative potential of architecture, make design visible on campus, reinforce collegiality and interdisciplinary study, and demonstrate to students the fundamental principles of form and construction. More specifically, the facility was to include a lecture hall, gallery, café, studios, research spaces, reading room, faculty and support offices, and review spaces.

With several decades of experience teaching architecture, and a fundamental commitment to sustainability, Garrison knew how the facility should ideally function and was also attuned to its hidden "green" virtues. Over 10 years of stops and starts, he had to convey his solution to two successive chancellors, three successive deans, the 34 architects who make up the faculty, the campus architect, a variety of other administration stakeholders, and, of course, the annually changing student body. But he had a convincing vision for the project, based on Slocum's good bones, and it was as much about subtraction as it was addition.

When Garrison describes the project, he begins with the building's thick walls and the inherent energy smarts of the original design. Built before air conditioning was in common use, the building circulated air naturally, drawing it in through the open windows and allowing it to pass through the open transoms and interiors, up the atrium, and out through the vents in the skylight. After careful testing, Garrison hypothesized that if he opened the atrium and the transoms and removed the previously inserted walls and hung ceilings, the natural flow of air would eliminate the need for air conditioning. He was right. Without air conditioning, the project cost went down 20%, and there is an anticipated annual fuel savings of \$150,000. The construction cost was \$114 per square foot.

"In reopening the atrium and removing walls, we were also reinforcing the physical connections that will support the school as a community," says Garrison. "It's easy to make connections between students and faculty, see what various classes are up to, and communicate. Energy flows through the building." And in the clarified, light-filled structure, what he did introduce has a quiet but distinct presence.

The most significant addition is the 135-seat auditorium, a very visible volume that hovers in the two-story exhibition space, supported by struts. Like most of the new components, it has pale, honey-colored bamboo plywood cladding. Also in bamboo are new bench seating on two floors at the edge of the atrium, equipment enclosures, and paneling on some corridor walls.

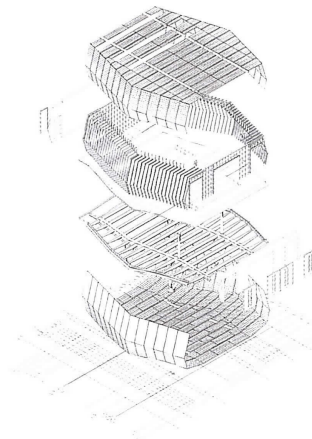
The facility, which opened in September 2008, is in effect teaching by example. When students and faculty experience Slocum Hall, they are discovering how two eras of design thinking can come together as a convincing whole. "Garrison made the logic of the design very apparent," says Mark Robbins, AIA, the school's dean, "and the juxtaposition of old and new reads right away."

Danton Spina, a fourth-year architecture student quoted in the university's newspaper *Daily Orange*, seemed to get it. "It's such a little thing, but to reopen the atrium and bring it back to its original architectural aesthetic, to have this open space and all these interactions with people yelling to their friends on different floors, means a lot. The amount of light is great and the quality of air is so much better," he said.



DAVID JOSEPH

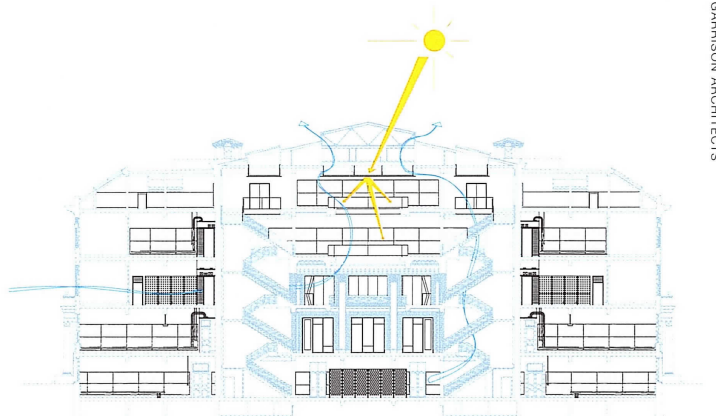
Above: The 135-seat auditorium Below left: Axonometric of auditorium Below right: The auditorium hovers in the two-story exhibition space



GARRISON ARCHITECTS



DAVID JOSEPH



GARRISON ARCHITECTS

Section illustrates the flow of natural light and ventilation (blue = existing elements, black = new elements)

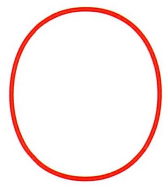
Richard Staub is a marketing consultant and writer who focuses on issues important to the design and building community.

Architect: Garrison Architects, New York, NY
 Team: James Garrison, AIA, Sal Tranchina, Herbin Ng, Vanessa Moon, Mark Gordon, Kris Gregerson, Elizabeth Emerson, Lisette Wong, Samantha Whitney, Ryan Cole, John Lacy
 Construction Manager: Hayner Hoyt Corporation
 Structural Engineer: Klepper, Hahn, & Hyatt
 MEPFP Engineer: J. R. Loring & Associates, Inc.
 Lighting Designer: Cline Bettridge Bernstein
 Sustainability and Acoustical Engineering: Arup Acoustics
 Code Consultants: Code Consultants, Inc

Why Architects Don't Get Lost

...and why we need to create supportive
wayfinding systems for those who do
By Sylvia Harris





On road trips with architects, I am always intrigued by their remarkable internal compasses. When entering cities, driving along country roads, or wandering about shopping centers, architects rarely, if ever, get hopelessly lost. As a group they have an amazing natural sense of orientation and direction.

I am an information designer. Even though I create wayfinding systems to help people navigate through large hospitals, airports, and other public venues, my sense of direction is unreliable and I get lost at the drop of a hat. My architect friends make fun of this handicap, but I have come to see it as an advantage. It helps me understand the behavior of ordinary people as they make their way through increasingly complex environments. And it gives me more compassion.

In architectural team meetings, I've heard my colleagues laugh at the stories I tell of people getting disoriented. But it might be helpful and illuminating for building professionals to shift perspectives and see navigation through the eyes of ordinary people, many of whom can't read a map, find north, or remember landmarks.

Why people get lost

The art and science of navigation has come of age in the last 30 years. Kevin Lynch is credited with coining the phrase "wayfinding" and introducing the concept to future generations of architects in his seminal book, *Image of the City* (MIT Press, 1960), the result of a five-year study of Los Angeles, Boston, and Jersey City. Lynch concluded that every traveler within a city or town forms a unique mental image that he uses to navigate and orient himself. The best public places are logical and ordered and provide a wide variety of navigational cues that allow people to build their own personalized mental maps. Signs are not enough to aid navigation, Lynch discovered. Maps, compasses, people, and even smells are all needed to help people create their own unique navigation strategies. It is not uncommon to observe visitors to New York City walking around with MapQuest directions and a visitor's guide while still asking people on the street for directions.

The cognitive psychologist Doreen Kimura believes there are multiple ways to assemble and understand mental images of physical spaces. In her controversial book *Sex and Cognition* (MIT Press, 1999), she reports on studies showing that sex hormones affect brain organization at a very early age, eventually leading to significant differences in the ways men and women solve spatial problems. After years of conducting spatial tests on gender groups, Kimura concluded that women tend to be good at remembering objects in an array and can easily remember landmarks along a route. Men, on the other hand, tend to have internal compasses that enable them to rotate spatial arrays in their heads, and therefore they rarely "feel" lost. Understanding these differences explains a lot. People dependent on landmarks flounder and feel lost in a new setting where they have not learned the landmark patterns, or in settings where the landscape is nondescript. People with strong internal compasses need only a good map and the location of true north to find their way. In my practice, I've also met people who can't process spatial information of any kind and are much better off with verbal support.

The architectural profession includes both male and female practitioners, but I wonder if the field attracts individuals of both genders who have finely calibrated, multidimensional plotting instincts. Architects typically have superior spatial skills and the ability to rotate objects and plans in their heads. But if they assume the general public perceives the world as they do, architects may not realize how easily confused people can become in any new environment. The challenge for architects and wayfinding designers is to develop supportive wayfinding environments complete with a wide assortment of communication tools that augment their users' individual cognitive approach to navigation.

The way to go

Creating supportive environments for all people starts by embracing redundancy. A supportive space presents the user with a wide variety of navigation tools – something for everyone. The most navigable environments have at least these three tools: maps for those with good targeting skills, landmarks for those with strong memorization skills, and personal support for those who prefer verbal instructions.

One way to make sure the wayfinding systems provide enough redundancy and are understood by people of varying abilities is to work with professional information designers and conduct periodic usability tests. Information designers are creative experts who conceptualize and create communications programs and services. Usability consultants work with information designers to evaluate people in the process of using objects, places, and services. These professionals are the secret ingredient in most successful wayfinding programs because they ensure that a site has the right array of navigational tools for its typical population.

On a recent visit to a local business improvement district, I experienced firsthand the benefits of integrated wayfinding communications. The neighborhood had a distinctive graphic style and brand, which helped me define the boundaries of the district. I used a few key art installations as landmarks. Maps were located at critical decision points, and finger direction signs pointed to popular destinations. Every few blocks I could find maintenance staff in clearly marked uniforms who knew it was their job to help anyone who looked lost. The web of streets in that district was bewildering, but I felt supported. This is how integrated wayfinding works.

Do these findings about wayfinding systems mean that architects should allow themselves to get lost? No, but they do suggest that perhaps the best way to serve people is to develop an empathetic attitude toward wayfinding, and to hand over the wayfinding reins to usability experts and communications specialists on complex public-space projects. This is important not only for the everyday users of the built environment, but also for all design professionals who have to find our way.

Sylvia Harris is an expert in communications and information design. For the last 25 years she has provided visitor communications master-planning services to the country's leading public institutions.

Visual Literacy — It's Elementary!

A Center for Architecture Foundation workshop boosts Harlem kids' understanding of their neighborhood and city

By Jane Cowan

PATRICK HESS



The class of 2019: P.S. 161 sixth graders pose in front of Low Library and the statue of Alma Mater during their trip to Columbia University

literacy begins with the basics: Letters are combined to form words, words are combined to form sentences, and then paragraphs, and then books. Visual literacy, too, begins with the foundations: Shape, color, texture, pattern, and line are combined to give form to buildings, streetscapes, and cities. For most professionals, the introduction to visual literacy began in architecture or design school. Yet visual literacy has value and importance for all students of all ages, whether or not they are studying architecture and design. (See "Growing Patrons" in the *Oculus* Winter 2007/08 for a related article.)

Why? Visual literacy increases one's powers of observation. It improves one's vocabulary. It develops better speaking and writing skills. It provides students with the ability to make sense of the world around them, and connect seemingly disparate parts. It enhances and encourages spatial thinking. It sparks curiosity about one's envi-

ronment. It elevates one's daily experience (say, walking to school) as a valuable source of knowledge and learning. Any pedagogue would agree these are important goals, yet, one need not be an educator to understand how lessons in visual literacy can enhance the standard curriculum. To this end, the Center for Architecture Foundation's Learning by Design:NY (LBD:NY) program has – in its 19 years of existence – sent architecture and design professionals into hundreds of New York City public-school classrooms to teach multi-week "residency" workshops where students learn the rudiments of architecture and design. While the goals of these residencies vary wildly depending upon the class and age of the students, they all have at their core a strong foundation in visual literacy.

Since spring 2007, with support from the New York State Council on the Arts, the NYC Department of Education, and the generosity of

M(Group) and OMNI Architects through Center for Architecture Foundation's Adopt-A-School initiative, LBD:NY has conducted a special multi-year residency that exposed one group of 125 youngsters to architecture. The students at P.S. 161 Don Pedro Albizu Campos School in Harlem began their introduction to architecture when they were in the fourth grade. Today, as graduating sixth-graders, they have developed into sophisticated observers of the urban environment, savvy problem-solvers, and urbane critics of the architectural scene in their neighborhood and the city in general.

Throughout the five semesters of the residency, visual literacy formed the backbone of the children's studies. During the first semester, they took a macro view of architecture and learned to identify different building types, such as residential, commercial, or industrial. They were introduced to – and learned to identify – architectural vocabulary, such as cornice, arch, column, lintel, keystone, stoop, quoin, etc. The students also explored the variety of building materials found in their immediate neighborhood and within the school building itself, such as brick, brownstone, glass, metal, limestone, and terra cotta. They learned the components of a neighborhood, including residential buildings, schools, libraries, hospitals, places of worship, open spaces, commercial sites, police and fire stations, etc.

During the second semester, as fifth graders, the students zoomed in on Harlem. While the youngsters knew the name of their storied neighborhood and were aware that tour buses ply its streets daily, many were unfamiliar with the reasons for Harlem's worldwide fame. Through neighborhood walking



Interviewing the local coffee-cart proprietor about Columbia University's expansion plans

tours, visits to important Harlem sites, and the study of historic photographs and maps, the students learned Harlem's vibrant history. They conducted in-depth research of 25 Harlem landmarks and constructed models of these buildings. Later, they turned their research about these buildings into original short plays, writing scripts, creating backdrops, scenery, and costumes, and performing. Legendary Harlem sites like the Apollo Theater, the Hotel Theresa, the Schomburg Center for Black Research, and the Abyssinian Baptist Church shared the stage with less familiar (but no less important) Harlem buildings like photographer James Van Der Zee's studio, the Old Broadway Synagogue, the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque, 409 Edgecombe Avenue, and the Old Croton Aqueduct Gatehouse.

With a solid understanding of Harlem's history and architecture, the students returned to school in fall 2008 as sixth graders ready to tackle a more complicated task. The architectural lens narrowed further to the area immediately surrounding the school, known historically as Manhattanville and today the site of Columbia University's campus expansion. (See "It's Priceless," *Oculus* Winter 2007/08.) Manhattanville, the students learned, was a small village (not part of New York City) that developed in the early 19th century. Originally

rural with its own religious, medical, and child-welfare institutions, it evolved into a manufacturing and industrial center by the latter 19th century. Paint factories, commercial dairies, bottling plants, and beer breweries were common, and by the first decades of the 20th century



Students decide which of their photographs to include in the exhibit

Manhattanville came to be known as "Automobile Row." Concrete automotive buildings to house showrooms for Chevrolet, Nash, and Studebaker characterized the streetscape. By the end of the 20th century, Manhattanville had become a low-scale and low-trafficked area studded with mom-and-pop car repair shops and warehouses.

Now, the neighborhood is slated to change permanently. The students undertook an extensive photo-documentation project, in which they recorded every building and lot in the Columbia project area. Columbia University officials gave students a special presentation that explained the need for their expansion and showed images of what the neighborhood would look like 25 years hence. Many students were concerned about the impact this project would have on current residents (like themselves and their families) and workers. They peppered Columbia officials with questions and conducted on-the-street interviews with residents, workers, business owners, and passersby. Then they designed and curated an exhibition that featured their photographs and written observations about the neighborhood, on the eve of its alteration.

This exercise presented the students with a real-life scenario. The ideas they had learned about architecture were tangible. "LBD:NY brings the real world into the classroom," notes P.S. 161 Assistant Principal Pamela Price. Students learned that architecture is not only something from the past; it is happening now, in their own backyard, and will directly affect them. LBD:NY provided a foundation of visual literacy that gave students a sophisticated understanding of the Columbia project. "The awareness of their community has grown," says Desiree Howard, one of the participating teachers. "Having them consider the effect of Columbia's expansion in their neighborhood has raised the level of the discussion."

And what has visual literacy accomplished for the students? They unanimously agree they have enjoyed the architecture program. Participating in the play, building the models, taking trips throughout the neighborhood, and photographing it have been highlights of their elementary years. More importantly – and more lasting – they have learned to appreciate and look at their city and neighborhood in a new way. Eleven-year-old Christopher Thomas observes that the LBD:NY residency "really helps kids understand how places are. We also learned about and explored different places we never knew about before." To those who care about architecture and urbanism, could a more crucial goal have been accomplished?

The Adopt-A-School initiative provides firms and individuals a unique opportunity to support customized design curriculums for students in underserved schools. Sponsors help expand awareness of the value of design and the built environment. For information, visit www.cfafoundation.org.

Jane Cowan is an architectural historian and historic preservationist. She conducted the LBD residency at P.S. 161.

PATRICK HESS

PATRICK HESS

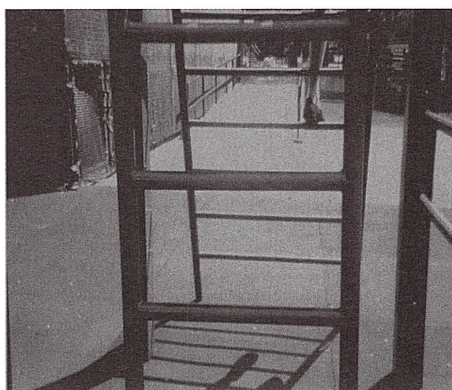
P.S. Architecture 2008:

Through the Lens of Student Photographers

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) launched a contest in April 2008 inviting all NYC K–12 public school students to submit architectural photographs of their schools. Almost 500 students entered. Last fall the Center for Architecture hosted an exhibition of the 20 winners in three categories – elementary, middle, and high school – with one citywide winner in each. The event was sponsored by the DOE with support from FXFOWLE Architects, Pentagram, National Reprographics, and the Center for Architecture Foundation.

The jury included Nelson Bakerman, architectural photographer; Michael Bierut, Pentagram; Michele Cohen of the DOE's Public Art for Public Schools; Tim Hayduk, Center for Architecture Foundation; Martin Pedersen, Metropolis magazine; Stan Ries, architectural photographer; Ann Rolland, AIA, FXFOWLE; and Maria Bonilla and Barbara Rudnick, art teachers in public schools.

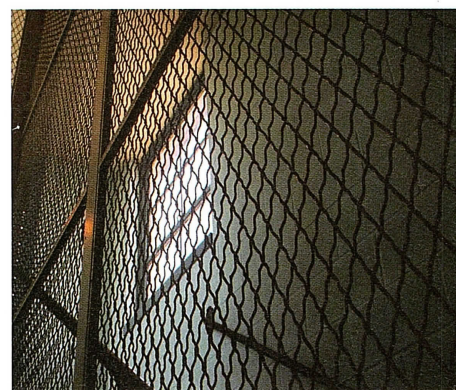
Elementary School



Citywide Winner: Raphaella Olive, P.S. 20
Clinton Hill School, Brooklyn



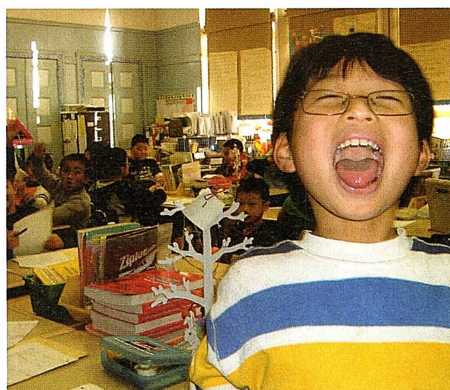
Marissa Gonzalez, 2nd Place, P.S. 116 John J. Driscoll, Staten Island



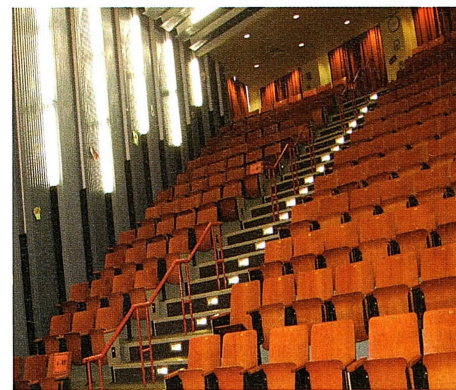
Bryan Chango, 3rd Place, P.S. 116 John J. Driscoll, Staten Island



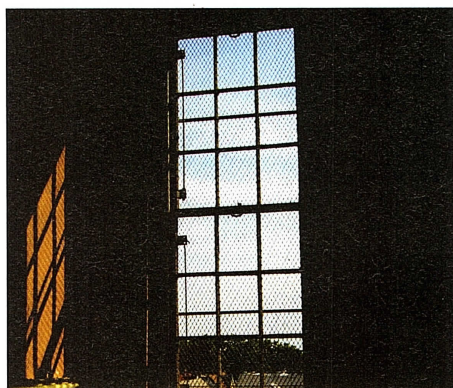
Roman Bromblin, 4th Place, NEST+m, Manhattan



Daniel Kim, Runner-up, P.S. 41 Crocheron, Queens



Kenny Shi, Runner-up, P.S. 69 Vincent D. Grippio School, Brooklyn



Qi Wen Li, Runner-up, P.S. 112, Brooklyn

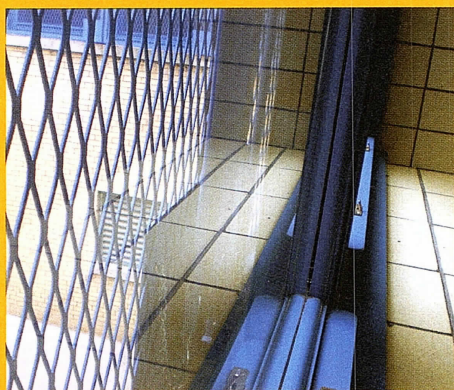


Christina Wu, Runner-up, P.S. 112, Brooklyn

Middle School



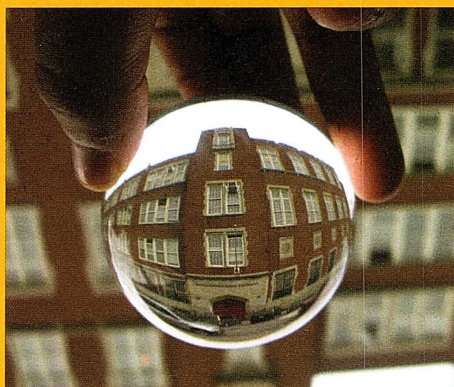
Citywide Winner: Barbara Font, P.S./I.S. 266, Queens



Ayah Khalil, 2nd Place, P.S./IS 111 Adolf S. Ochs, Manhattan

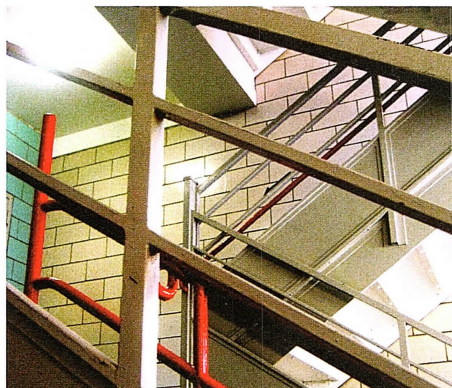


Justin Sam, 3rd Place, Irwin Altman Middle School 172, Queens

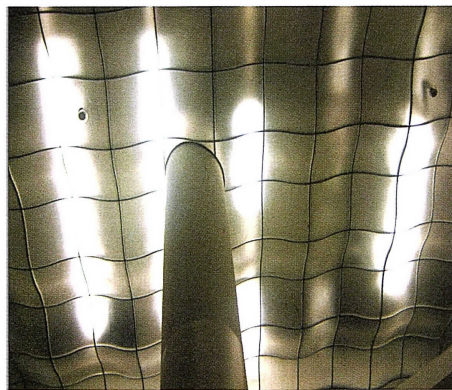


Michael Nieves, 4th Place, Academy for Social Action, Manhattan

High School



Citywide Winner: Andrew Marcus, NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies, Manhattan



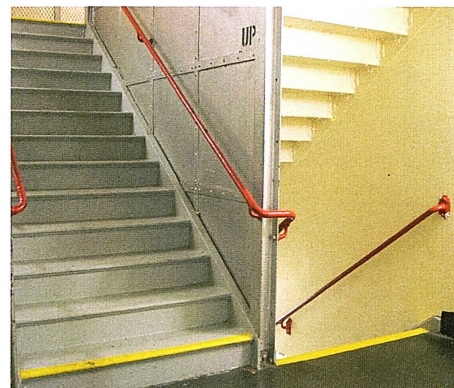
Nicoletta Gallo, 3rd Place, Millennium High School, Manhattan



Ligia Perez, Runner-up, Marta Valle Secondary School, Manhattan



Chloe Smith, Runner-up, Forest Hills High School, Queens



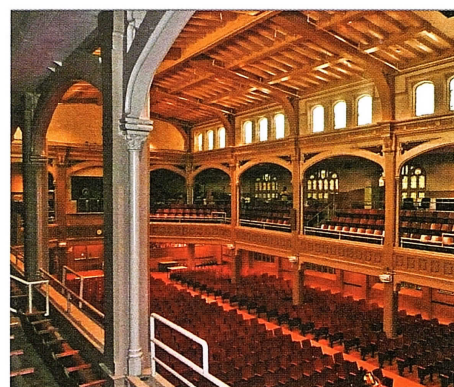
Brian Hinds, 2nd Place, James Madison High School, Brooklyn



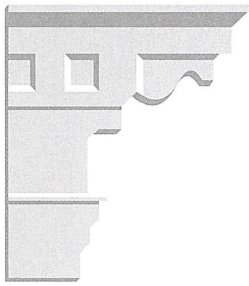
Betty Zhao, 4th Place, Stuyvesant High School, Manhattan



David Yusim, Runner-up, James Madison High School, Brooklyn



Jeaniffer Lacrete, Runner-up, High School for Service and Learning at Erasmus, Brooklyn



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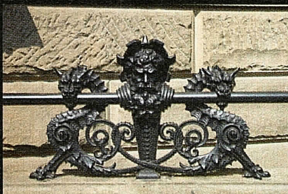
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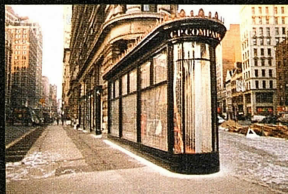
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Egalitarian, with a Genuine Air of Welcome

Outside View
By John King

The newest office tower in San Francisco, 555 Mission Street, is a 35-story stack of green glass, one flat plane emerging from the next. Sired by New York developer Tishman Speyer and New York design architect Kohn Pedersen Fox (with Heller Manus Architects), it's a work of detached corporate cool that would be perfectly at home in Midtown Manhattan.

But the plaza that accompanies the tower, designed by Hargreaves Associates, is as San Francisco as sourdough bread: wide open, well landscaped, and doing double-duty as a pedestrian alley while setting a tone of suave welcome. The sculptures are colorful, and the bosque of ginkgo trees is a soft counterpoint to the angular black granite benches.

More to the point, 555 Mission is a fresh demonstration of how the built terrain can reveal a city's values – in this case, showing a city that cares much more about manners on the ground than drama in the sky.

At times I wish this wasn't so – that too many new buildings in San Francisco lacking a signature name seem determined to escape notice. Half-hearted historicism has given way to value-engineered Modernism, and the desire to avoid controversy is as pervasive and dampening as ever.

The bright side is that the same city that settles for so-so buildings has demanding standards in terms of urban design. Under San Francisco's 24-year-old Downtown Plan, each new commercial building is required to provide publicly accessible space, with seating formulas, restroom requirements, guidelines for retail space and art, the works.

All this resonates with San Francisco's sense of itself as a city that isn't too big or crowded, but a small town that happens to have a population of 800,000 in just 49 square miles. People like to think you can always glimpse a hill or the bay; buildings never engulf. It's one step from that belief in serendipitous possibility – I can break away whenever I want! – to an expectation that there should be snug retreats wherever one goes.

There's also an expectation that buildings should be engaging at street level. When they aren't, you take note.

By way of contrast, consider Time Warner Center. I visited the complex shortly after it opened, curious to see these towers that were being praised and panned with equal passion. Walking up Eighth Avenue, I mistook the office lobby for a loading dock – and it went downhill from there. Forget the sky-slicing silhouette; what horrified me was the inattention to life below. This includes, at the base, the grand entrance to



TIM GRIFFITH/ESTO

560 Mission Street by Pelli Clarke Pelli; plaza by Hart/Howerton

the mall – a portal that looks dramatic from Central Park but is utterly irrelevant to the neighborhood's two zillion or so pedestrians.

This might not be a big deal to a New Yorker, but to a San Franciscan it is grating to see such an edifice designed from the top down rather than the bottom up.

Back to 555 Mission and the block on which it resides. Close by are two other young towers that use public space as a calling card. In the case of 101 Second Street, by the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, a four-story, glassed-in forecourt to the tower has abundant seating and, if you're in the mood to escape notice, a discreet mezzanine. At 560 Mission Street, the high-rise by design architect Pelli Clarke Pelli is accompanied by a through-block plaza, by Hart/Howerton, that catches your attention with tall stands of red bamboo that rustle behind a reflecting pool, next to a broad granite plateau where the tables are open to all.

Don't look for any of these towers in the *Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary Architecture*. I can't even find them on postcards. But they're egalitarian, with a genuine air of welcome – and by San Francisco standards, that's what counts.

John King is the urban design writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



H.G. ESCH

555 Mission Street by Kohn Pedersen Fox with Heller Manus Architects; plaza by Hargreaves Associates



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101 Second Street by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

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25-Year Watch

Dating from 1984, Asphalt Green transformed a 1944 landmark and inspired a fine 1993 expansion

By John Morris Dixon, FAIA



JEFF GOLDBERG/ESTO

Asphalt Green: Murphy Center (right) and AquaCenter (left)

This column could as well be titled “65-Year Watch” or “16-Year Watch.” Generations of New York architects have contributed remarkable design skills to the complex known as Asphalt Green, but the crucial transformation occurred in 1984, when an unused asphalt plant was imaginatively converted into a community sports and arts center. Besides embodying decades of New York architectural talent, Asphalt Green is a prime example of community activism at work.

The story starts in the early 1940s with construction of a municipal asphalt plant along the Manhattan shore of the East River at 90th Street. Remarkably, the city commissioned the distinguished firm of Kahn & Jacobs for the structure to shelter the Rube Goldberg-like asphalt-making equipment. The architects were inspired by the silhouette of the gravity-fed mechanism – and the memory of Eugène Freyssinet’s landmark dirigible hangars near Paris – to house it under a parabola constructed of exposed concrete over a steel frame.

The boldly functional structure was considered an eyesore by transportation czar Robert Moses, who was building the adjoining FDR Drive, but it won favor with both the public and the Museum of Modern Art, and in 1976 it became an official NYC landmark. That designation turned out to be the final argument for the conversion of the old plant into Asphalt Green.

When the plant closed in 1968, the city had cleared much of the asphalt production site, but the parabolic structure’s resistance to the wrecking ball saved it. Plans were then drawn up to incorporate it into a dense housing and school development, but that scheme succumbed as neighbors pressed the city to offer public recreation space in an area that sorely lacked it. Under the leadership of Dr. George Murphy, chair of the Neighborhood Committee, private and corporate contributions were secured for a sports and arts center. The case against development was strengthened by the opening of a temporary playing field, which quickly came to be seen as irreplaceable.



JEFF GOLDBERG/ESTO

View from the East River

Once the program for a recreation complex had city approval – and federal financial support – the neighborhood group was ready to proceed with a design by Pasanella & Klein (now PKSB Architects), along with HOK, successors to Kahn & Jacobs. Their fine adaptive reuse project was opened in 1984, with its parabolic centerpiece named the Murphy Center.

The main gym, with a mezzanine running track, occupies the upper part of the parabolic volume. The three floors inserted below are ingeniously configured to accommodate offices, a locker room, fitness facilities, and a 72-seat theater. The structure pioneered extensive energy-conservation strategies that lowered energy costs to about one-third those of conventional buildings.

Building on its 1980s success, Asphalt Green was able to lease an adjoining triangle of city land for an ambitious water-sports facility. With money from city and private sources, the AquaCenter, designed by Dattner Architects, opened in 1993. It contains the city’s only publicly accessible Olympic pool, with 700-seat bleachers and features that make it adaptable to a wide variety of users – along with extensive fitness facilities. With exterior curves and details recalling early Modernism, the aquatics building is a fitting complement to the Murphy building.

In a city where community reaction often leads only to delay or diminishment, Asphalt Green shows how popular activism and exceptional design skill can combine to yield a very happy outcome.

John Morris Dixon, FAIA, left the drafting board for journalism in 1960 and was editor of *Progressive Architecture* magazine from 1972 to 1996. In recent years he has written for *Architectural Record*, *Architecture*, and other publications.

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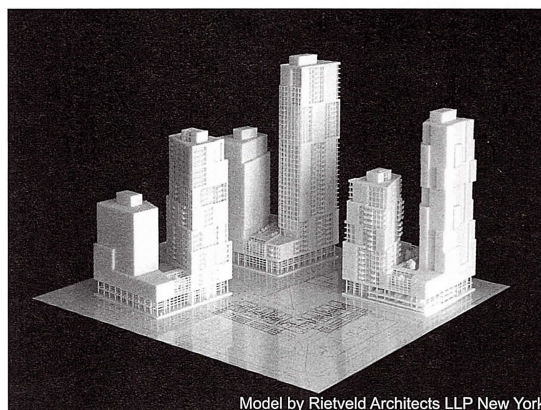
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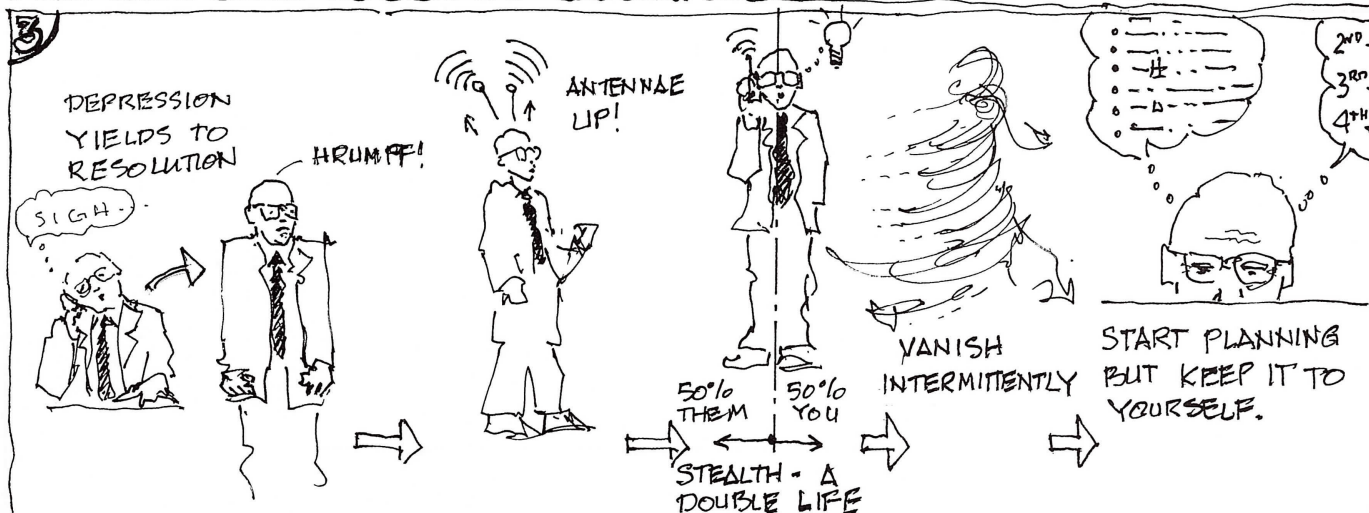
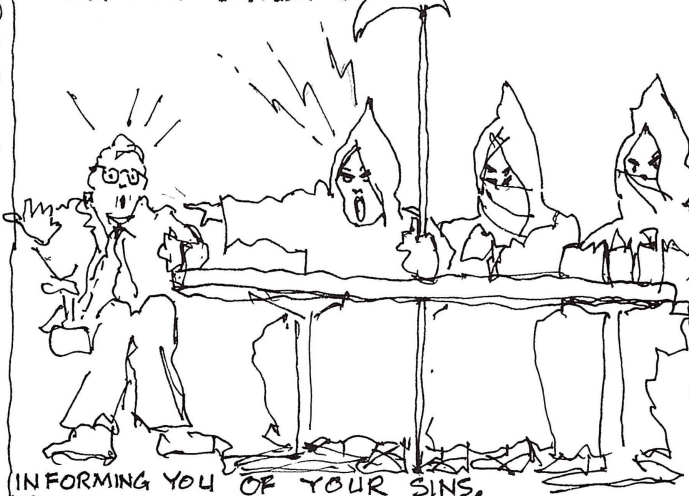
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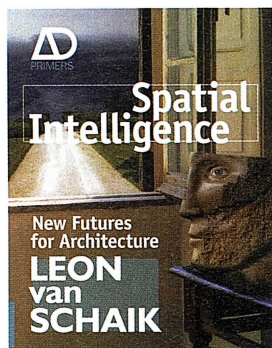


Raves & Reviews

In Print +

Spatial Intelligence: New Futures for Architecture, by Leon van Schaik. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008. 208 pp. \$45.

An architect and a professor of architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, van Schaik has written both a primer and manifesto about the use of spatial intelligence in architecture.



Spatial intelligence, one of humankind's most powerful and integrated capabilities, is also a capacity we are only beginning to comprehend more fully. Van Schaik contends that architects can deepen their understanding of the spatial intelligence capabilities they employ in their work and use them more powerfully through the virtual world technologies of the information age.

The book is organized around three main themes. First, van Schaik provides an overview and a description of spatial intelligence, how it works, and its influence on our mental space. He also argues that a variety of forces, including the disassociative nature of digital systems, have displaced the skills of space making in architecture in favor of other concerns, such as the demands of technology, construction, and project organization and delivery.

The author suggests that we more fully utilize, in architectural education and practice, our capability to understand how space is perceived and how it can be shaped, particularly through scientific investigations into spatial intelligence and the employment of virtual space technologies. This initiative, he contends, could help demystify the design process for the public and ultimately provide a more open and transparent dialogue between society and design practice.

Finally, the book explores new opportunities for more socially sensitive and engaging design via the broadening application of virtual world technologies. The work of many current practitioners, including Zaha Hadid, Peter Zumthor, and Sean Godsell, are cited in support.

This book is rich and dense, and its arguments can be challenging. But it is amply illustrated by van Schaik's broad reach into the treasure chest of architecture, urban design, and popular culture. The volume is also enlivened by the author's evocative, quirky thought diagrams.

Professor van Schaik is clearly onto something – the elusive but vital connection at the core of architecture, making space and understanding how people will use it. Whether the employment of virtual world technologies will strengthen our connection to the real world is not yet certain. But the questions he poses deserve our close attention.

By Stanley Stark, FAIA

Le Corbusier: A Life, by Nicholas Fox Weber. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. 821 pp. \$45.

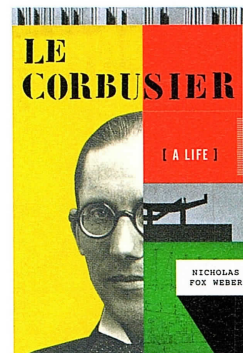
There may be enough books about the works of Le Corbusier to actually build a house, but the man himself remains something of an enigma. Not coincidentally, the name Le Corbusier was invented by Charles Edouard Jeanneret, both as the face of his public persona and as a shield to conceal his private identity, which he kept rigorously separate from his celebrated self.

Born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a grim and confining working-class town devoted to piecework for the Swiss watch industry, Le Corbusier left formal education early on. He was largely self-taught, traveling from one European city to the next, taking part-time jobs, and seeking apprenticeships. The giant of 20th-century Modernism never set foot inside an architectural school.

Le Corbusier's first encounter with America in 1935 unfolds in equal parts fascination and disdain, from which he ultimately leaves disappointed, having failed to secure the commissions he sought. Besides his well-known comments about New York's skyscrapers being too short, author Nicholas Weber reveals many vivid and less familiar scenes from Le Corbusier's visit: his near rapturous excitement upon visiting the Ford River Rouge plant in Michigan; the rush of Vassar "amazons" at his lectures with bits of his drawings to autograph; and Frank Lloyd Wright, his fellow demigod, brushing off a request for a meeting with the drier of notes: "I hope Le Corbusier may find America all he hoped to find it."

Le Corbusier's intense and complicated relationship with women is described in great detail. He maintained a close correspondence with his mother, seeking her approval and sharing his most personal travails with her throughout most of his life. He was a sensitive, though not always faithful, husband to his wife Yvonne, a needy and alcoholic woman who forbade any discussion of architecture in her presence.

The strength of the book lies in its meticulous and perceptive treatment of its hero. In comparison, descriptions of the architecture itself tend to be more superficial, and there is not much of an attempt to relate Le Corbusier's life to a cross section of the other individuals with whom he shared the development of early Modernism. Yet Weber does not sidestep the most controversial aspects the architect's life – the chillingly amoral pursuit of Soviet and Fascist patronage, the frequent indifference to human comfort and preferences, and the disastrous implications of his urban planning prescriptions. The main interest of this fascinating book lies in uncovering a passionate life devoted to challenging the order of the manmade world.

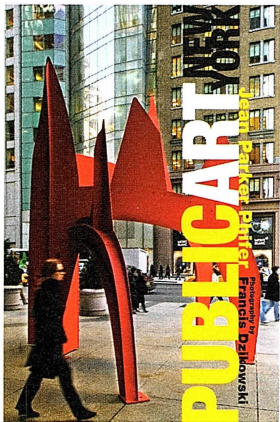


By Daniel Heuberger, AIA, LEED AP

Public Art New York, by Jean Parker Phifer, AIA. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009. 288 pp. 250 photos and maps. \$29.95.

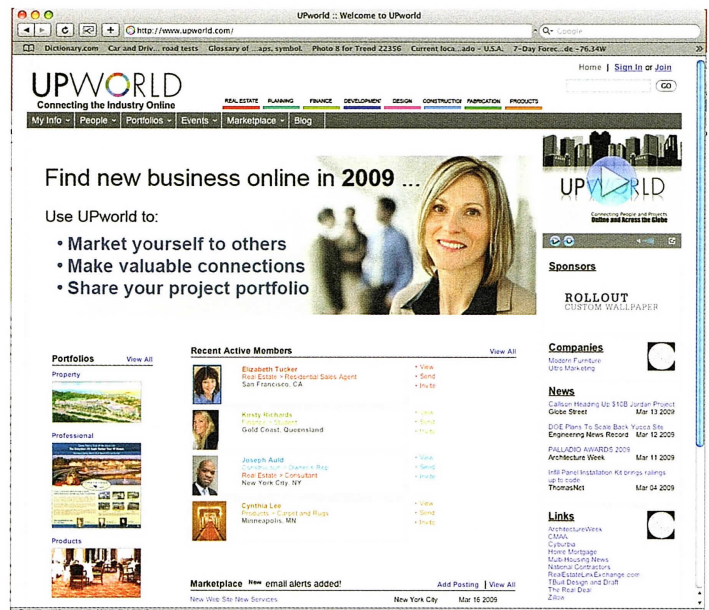
The integration of public art into the streetscapes, parks, plazas, buildings, and popular imagination distinguishes New York from other cities. Jean Parker Phifer, AIA, architect and past president of New York City's Art Commission (now Public Design Commission) leads us on a journey of discovery and remembrance through the public art projects that make NYC neighborhoods eminently livable and culturally sustaining. From familiar icons like "Patience" and "Fortitude" by Edward Clark Potter on the steps of the 42nd Street Library, to hot-off-the-presses installations such as the electronic "Moveable Type" by Ben Rubin and Mark Hanben in the lobby of the New York Times Building by Renzo Piano and FXFOWLE Architects, Phifer nimbly guides us to enhanced understanding of the who, what, and why of artworks that attract the attention of New Yorkers and visitors alike. Seven chapters of the easy-to-carry paperback offer a personal selection of some of the best in Manhattan from the Battery to Inwood. Special attention, though, is given to superlative work in the other boroughs where, increasingly, New York's artists live and work. Mierle Ukeles' full-scale masonry fire truck draws aesthetic adventurers to Dattner Architects' Bronx firehouse on Walton Avenue; Elizabeth Turk's cast-iron drain covers with flora and fauna theme have been discovered by tenacious trekkers in Staten Island's Bluebelt. All are lovingly photographed by Francis Dzikowski and skillfully described by Phifer. Buy this book and take it on a long walk through the open-air galleries that are our streets.

By Rick Bell, FAIA



Click Here: UPworld.com

With project opportunities rapidly shrinking in the present economy, you may be interested in an UPworld.com membership. Cofounded in 2007 by NYC-based architects Jennifer Magee, principal of ANTE Architecture + Design, and Oisín Clancy, principal of Field Lines Design, it is a networking website (think LinkedIn and Facebook) to connect architects, designers, planners, engineers, contractors, fabricators, developers, financiers, and suppliers. In an environment of new contacts, UPworld offers a chance to network and, perhaps, catch a lucky break.



Registration allows you to create online profiles and searchable portfolios, and offers tools to get the word out to the UPworld membership. You may send and receive messages through a personal account and review news and industry blogs. As of this writing, there are more than 12,000 registered members in the network, with more than 1,600 architects listed under "Design" (but only a handful of postings under "Jobs"). In this stressed job market, UPworld has the potential to grow and even create fresh openings. For the website to succeed, however, it needs to better link people through identifying complementary interests, skills, and needs. A click on "Portfolio" sadly offers not much more than the classified real-estate section of your home newspaper. Ditto for searching "Partners/Deals." If, for example, you could instead selectively thumb through members' portfolios, you might spot through a common design language a kindred spirit in architecture or the real-estate business. Alas, UPworld offers no easy remedy for averting the global squeeze on design prospects.

By Margaret Rietveld, FAIA

Recent Releases

More titles worth checking out:

Green Urbanism Down Under: Learning from Sustainable Design In Australia, by Timothy Beatley (Island Press)

Resilient Cities: Responding to Peak Oil and Climate Change, by Peter Newman, Timothy Beatley, and Heather Boyer (Island Press)

Getting Real About Urbanism: Contextual Design for Cities, by Bernard Zyscovich, AIA (Urban Land Institute)

Housing NYC: Rents, Markets and Trends 2008 (New York City Rent Guidelines Board)

Deborah Berke, by Tracy Meyers (Yale University Press)

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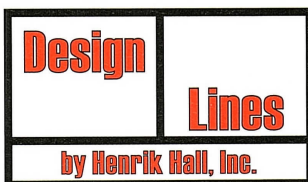
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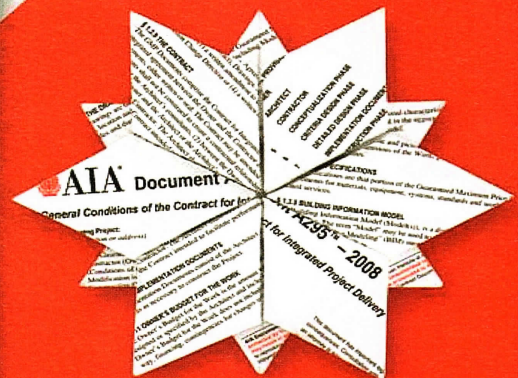
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to the four points of the compass,
to the bright spires of cities,
the overlapping trellises,
the turning spokes of the world.**

("Drawing Class" by Billy Collins, 2005)

You hold them strictly to materials, forms, colors, bulks, textures, space relations, shapes of light and shade, peculiarities, specializations, of architecture and of lettering....

(*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee, 1939)

The world has changed in the last few months, with a new president, new economic hurdles, and many unemployed architects. In response to these changes, "Not Business as Usual" – free lunch on Wednesdays – has brought together underemployed architects at the Center for Architecture. It has focused attention, in a changed economy, on jobs, volunteerism, skill development, and advocacy. Similarly, when the AIA New York Chapter Board met recently at the Museum of Arts and Design, NJIT Dean Urs Gauchat, AIA, challenged us to actively engage the present and future – *Not Business as Usual*. The AIA now speaks a language of renewal, recovery, and recombination.

Poetry is not language as usual. It condenses, compresses, transforms, designs, and specifies. The poet's ability to put together words that take on new meaning is highlighted by the eloquence of President Barack Obama's inaugural. In "Praise Song for the Day," poet Elizabeth Alexander said: "We encounter each other in words, words spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed; words to consider, reconsider." The tale of hard times in the design professions, however, begins with numbers: percentages of those without work, delays of projects cancelled and shelved.

Diversity is not people as usual. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee's words accompanied Walker Evans' photos of those in the Deep South who were hardest slammed by the Depression. It ends with a eulogy for those who "have no memorial; who perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born." A generation of architects can be lost when the work dries up and jobs are lost. How are diverse employment opportunities created? To start with, expanding upon the Historic American Building Survey, Building Energy Survey Teams could be organized through a reinvigorated AmeriCorps or a new Design Corps. Those who have no easy or apparent entry point into hibernating architectural offices could find gainful activity through documentation that leads to building renovations. The anecdotes of lives transformed give this diversity of potential employment real shape: the young New York architect, for example, going to Biloxi with Architecture for Humanity because now there is

time, now is the time. The keys are to orchestrate possibilities and make it work.

Advocacy is not politics as usual. Advocating for an expansive and inclusive definition of infrastructure is timely, as the American Institute of Architects and other

professional societies reach out to the Obama Administration and friends in Congress. The stimulus package addresses the importance of projects, including schools, that are ready to go but need funding. Extending this definition to other types of urban infrastructure incorporates energy considerations and sustainability into the discussion of funded commissions. The projects that rebuild our spirit and affirm the importance of design can be anywhere. New forms of collaboration, within and outside the architectural profession, can lead to a redefinition of practice and a world geography made fertile with new potential. In *The Coming of the New Deal*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. wrote of the activist economics of the time as being partly defensive, protecting Americans "from the ravages of unemployment and despair" – but also and more importantly as proactive, manifesting "a desire to build a better America." The need is now.

Design literacy is not drawings as usual. Ground-breaking conceptual work was envisioned by Frank Lloyd Wright and others during the Depression, and competitions of ideas filled the hours of other recessions. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote that "simple engravings are but so many invitations to start imagining again. They give us back areas of being...by living in such images as these, in images that are as stabilizing as these are, we could start a new life." Perhaps it is time to plan and, through competitions and exhibitions, to prod and provoke. Design literacy starts with communications about the value that architecture brings to our communities. Architects are community organizers, and the Center for Architecture in New York City is a community center for those in the design professions – with or without work – who have been impacted by the changed economy. It provides a place where architects and designers discuss and draw. Now is the time to animate a new relation of theory and practice, to draw the future now.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in 1934 about FDR giving a medal of the American Institute of Architects to a Swedish architect, saying, "I hope that in all of our communities, as we go back to them, we will try to keep before the people the fact that it is money well spent to beautify one's city."

Last Words

Rick Bell, FAIA

Executive Director

AIA New York Chapter



Bell goes underground, not outreach as usual

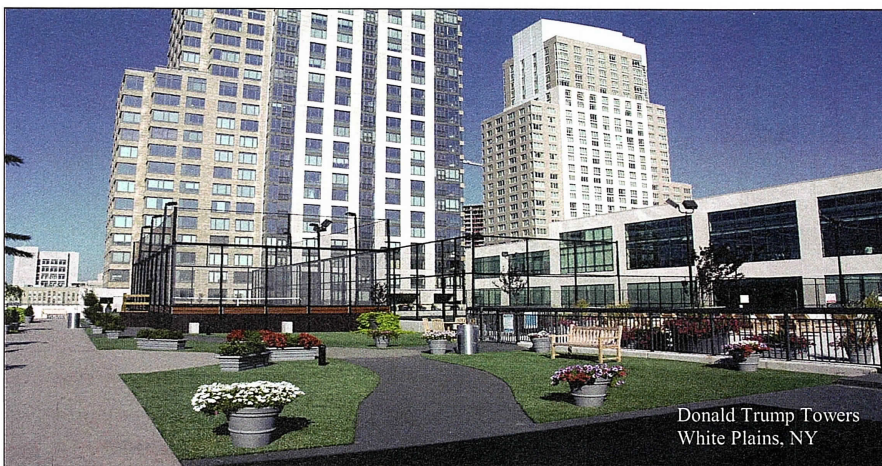
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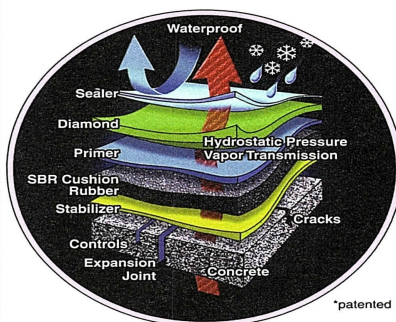
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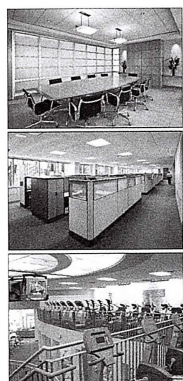
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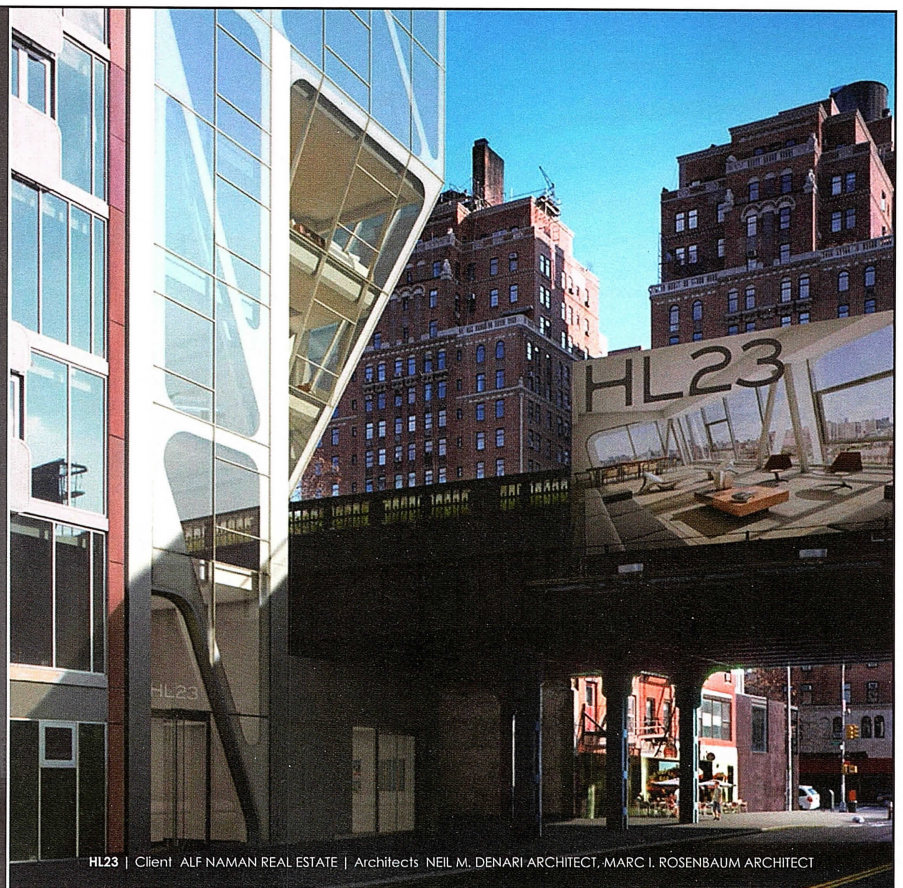
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