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Spring 2012

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Small Size, Big Thinking

Breaking Barriers

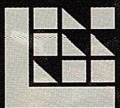
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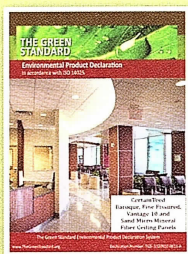
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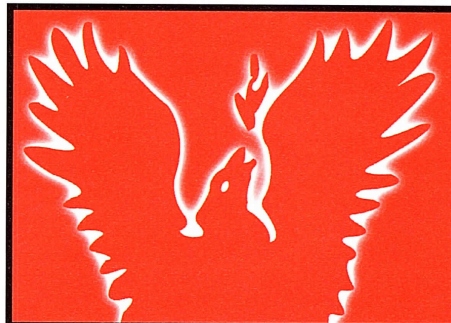
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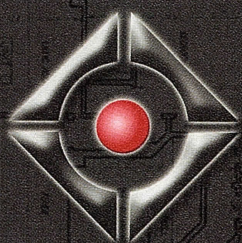
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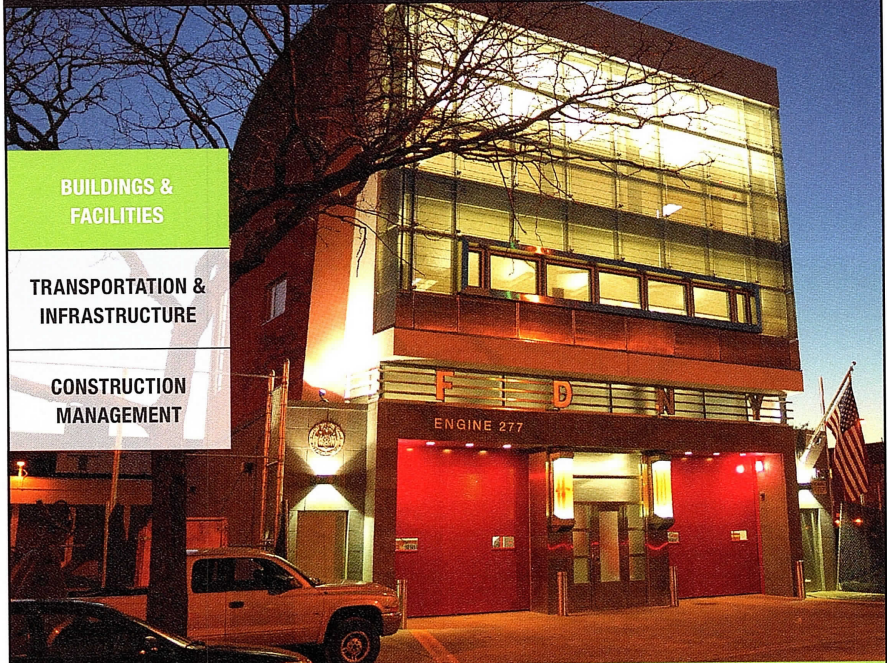
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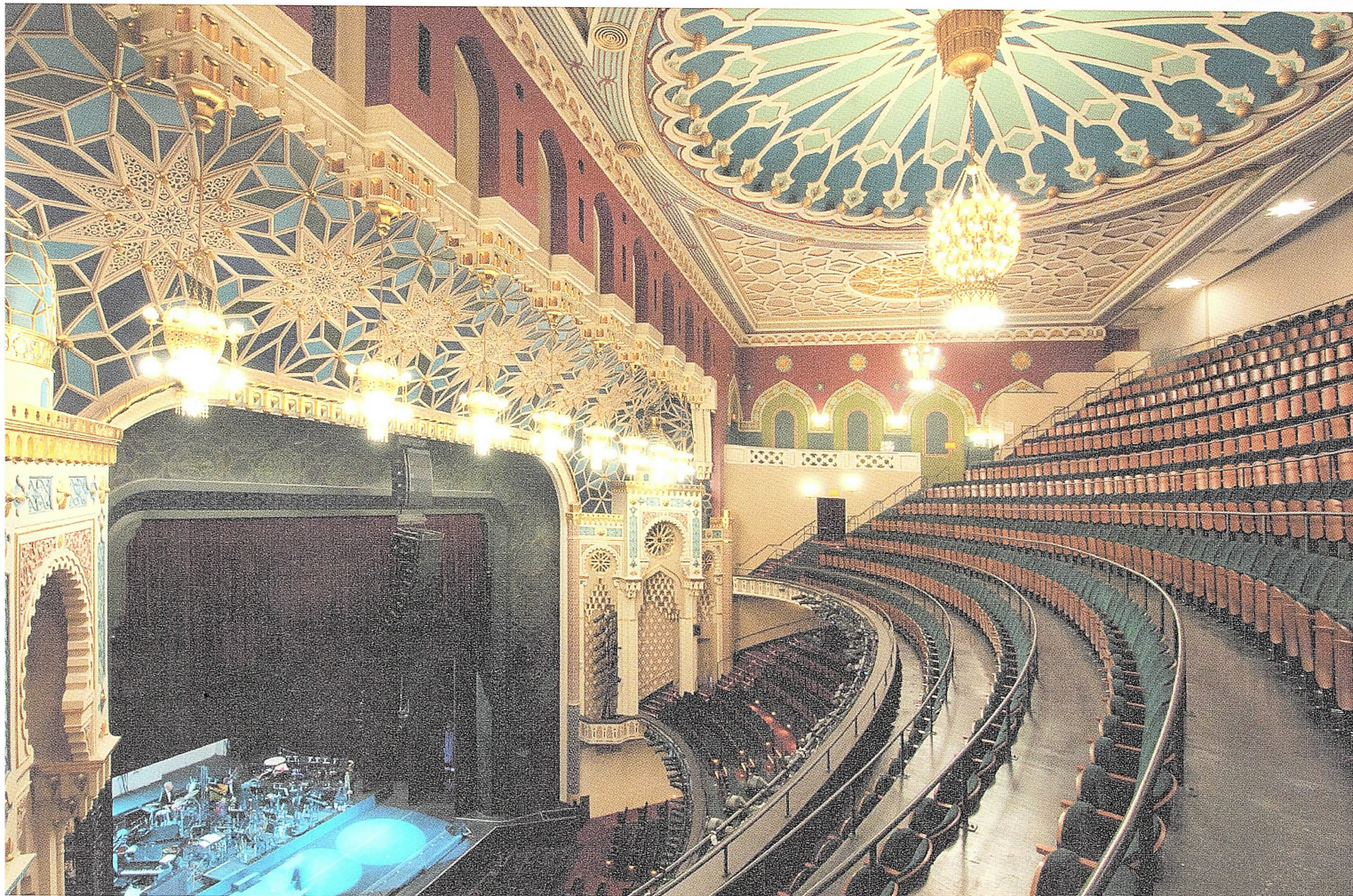
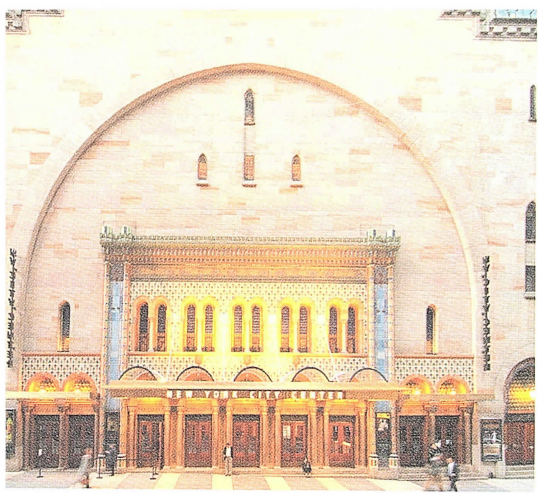
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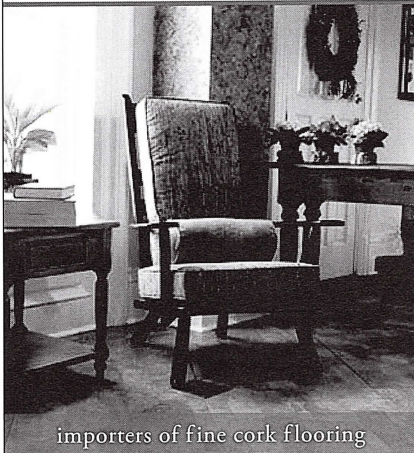
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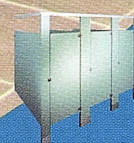
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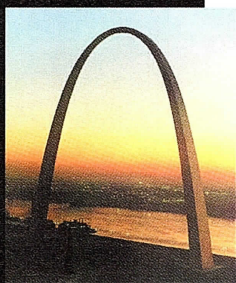
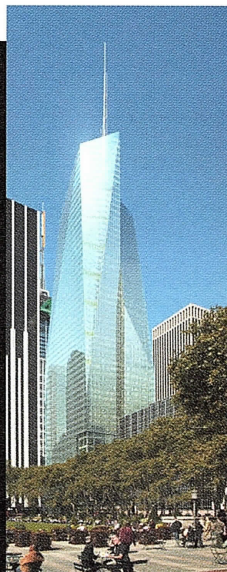
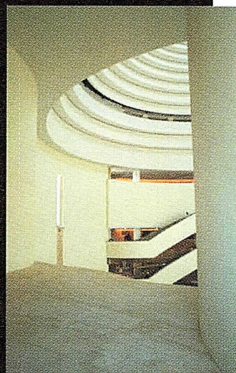
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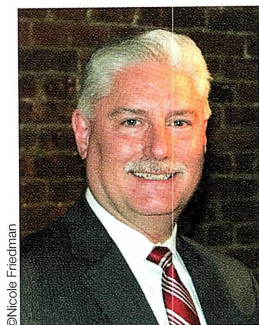
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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



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Invitation to the Future

The theme of this issue is “Small Firms Doing Big Things,” and includes work by emergent firms and a look at how competitions can serve as a means of discovering up-and-coming talent. The subject matter fits nicely with my president’s theme for 2012, “FutureNow.” As architects and designers, we determine our own future by how thoughtfully we respond to the challenges and opportunities we face. With this in mind, we’ll explore how we must take the lead with government officials, vocally and actively, in shaping New York City’s built environment both today and beyond PlaNYC 2030. We’ll examine how our younger colleagues envision what lies ahead for our city and our industry. Most importantly, how do they plan, when they are leaders, to give us all a better future?

Bringing together city officials, industry leaders, design professionals, and manufacturers, the FutureNow lecture series will address these PlaNYC 2030 topics: energy and the environment, infrastructure and transportation, water and the waterfront, public spaces and housing, and education and public health. We’ll discuss a range of challenges to architectural practice by convening an Emerging Professionals FutureNow Conference, which will focus on the outlook for the profession and the development of new goals for our younger members.

The Emerging New York Architects (ENYA) Design Ideas Competition and the New Practices New York Portfolio Competition are the centerpieces of a year that will continue to spotlight innovative technologies and sustainability. The Harlem Edge: Cultivating Connections, ENYA’s fifth biennial design ideas competition, is exploring the redevelopment of the decommissioned marine transfer station located in the Hudson River at 135th Street. Connecting the local Harlem community with the waterfront, the site echoes the recent efforts by New York City to reclaim the waterfront for a variety of publicly beneficial uses. The competition provides a means to discuss public access to the waterfront, urban agriculture,

creative programming to stimulate economic activity, and sustainability. The exhibition will showcase the winning entries, additional submissions, and the work of studioENYA, a mentorship program held in collaboration with the Center for Architecture Foundation that is aimed at providing students with comprehensive exposure to the skills needed to become an architect.

Since 2006, the biennial New Practices New York juried portfolio competition has served as the preeminent platform to recognize and promote new and innovative architecture and design firms in New York City. Sponsored by the New Practices Committee, it honors firms that have utilized unique and innovative strategies in both their practices and projects. Through the competition and exhibition, the committee is dedicated to serving as a forum for new and evolving models of practice. The exhibition will showcase the work of the winners, including original installations. Related programs will include a weekend design-build workshop for firm members and local high-school students.

AIANY continues to invest in its future by utilizing three strategies: Advocacy, which promotes policies to streamline and remove regulatory impediments to our practice, such as supporting a coordinated review process (which influenced the initiation of the Getting It Done Together and the NYC Development Hub initiatives); Public Outreach, which elevates the practice of architecture by being a strong voice in public policy debates and conducting open, spirited forums at the Center for Architecture on policy affecting the built environment; and Professional Development, which prepares our future leaders through the work of our 27 committees, including Fast Track Leadership Series, Speed Mentoring, ARE Review Sessions, Intern Development Program, and CES programs.

I invite you to join us as we envision the future of our profession – and of New York City.

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Small is the New Big



Editor anticipating pedal power when NYC Bike Share kicks into gear this summer.

AIANY's 2012 focus on emerging talent will be highlighted throughout the year by exhibitions and programs built around the winners in the biennial New Practices New York (NPNY) and Emerging New York Architects (ENYA) competitions. So it seemed most fitting to start the year by spotlighting small practices – both established and up-and-coming. Considering the energy, resources, and time it takes before one can even consider opening an architecture practice, they've proven their mettle.

Leading off is an in-depth look at the NYC Department of Design + Construction's Design and Construction Excellence program that gives small firms the opportunity to tackle big city projects. Other firms are going further afield, finding work overseas and avoiding "New York City myopia." Still others are thriving in a down economy by being nimble and innovative. We also catch up with two teams of small architecture and landscape architecture firms who are blurring the lines between the two disciplines, finding new ways to bridge the "architecture/landscape divide." Last, but certainly not least, we explore how competitions offer experience and exposure – and sometimes even lead to work – for both veteran and emerging talent.

In our regular departments, "One Block Over" meanders along Fifth Avenue's Museum Mile and finds myriad makeovers happening at a number of the city's cultural treasures. "In Print" peruses the pages of *The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age* to uncover "a rich brew of insights, anecdotes, and ideas that can benefit anyone with a stake in the urban environment." The Storefront for Art and Architecture, which helped launch Steven Holl, FAIA, when he was a young unknown, is the subject of "19-Year Watch."

Speaking of young unknowns, the winners of the 2012 NPNY portfolio competition were announced shortly before this issue went to press (see "Center Highlights," pg. 19). The winners in ENYA's *The Harlem Edge: Cultivating Connections* competition will have been announced by the time the magazine is being printed. This could prove to be a breakout year for any or all of them, and we plan to keep tabs on their progress. Where will the next generation of new talent come from? There's a good chance a lot of these young architects are incubating their design skills through the Center for Architecture Foundation's workshops at the Center and its Learning By Design:NY programs in classrooms throughout the city. We'll keep tabs on them, too.

Final thoughts: My personal and heartfelt thanks to Kirsten Sibilia, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP, for her unstinting dedication over the last three years as AIANY director of publications, and as chair of the Oculus Committee in particular. Also thanks to Jessica Sheridan, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP, who is stepping down as editor of e-Oculus after six years to join the Board of Directors as associate director. It has been a joy to have both as colleagues. I'm looking forward to working with Guy Geier, FAIA, FIIDA, LEED AP, as Oculus Committee chair, and Benedict Clouette, who has joined AIANY staff as e-Oculus editor-in-chief. What a privilege and honor to serve with them all. And here's a special shout-out to architecture critic and friend Paul Goldberger, Hon. AIA, who was selected by the AIANY Honors Committee to receive the 2012 Stephen A. Kliment Oculus Award at the AIANY Honors and Awards Luncheon on April 18.

By all indications, the new year appears to be off to a good start!

Kristen Richards, Hon. AIA, Hon. ASLA
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Center Highlights

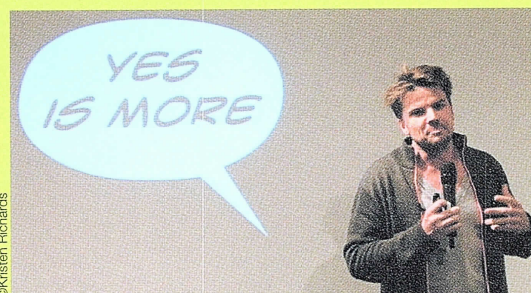


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(right) AIANY President **Joseph J. Aliotta, AIA, LEED AP** (left), and Center for Architecture Foundation President **Michael Strauss** at the BREAKTHROUGH party celebrating the joining of the original Center at 536 LaGuardia Place with the adjacent storefront.



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Center for Architecture Foundation

(above) In January, the Center for Architecture Foundation celebrated the 20th anniversary of its first Learning By Design:NY school program in 1992. Many of the original members of LBD:NY Committee gathered to toast this milestone. (l-r): Julie Maurer; Polly Carpenter, AIA; Catherine Teegarden; Christine Hunter, AIA; Jerry Maltz, AIA; Howard Stern; Rosalie Byard; Dorothee King; and Linda Yowell, FAIA, LEED AP.



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(left) The 2012 New Practices New York juried portfolio competition winners and jurors gathered at the Center to celebrate in January. The winning firms are: **Abruzzo Bodziak Architects**; **Holler Architecture**; **formlessfinder**; **Marc Fornes & THEVERYMANY**; **SLO Architecture**; **The Living**; and **Christian Wassmann**.

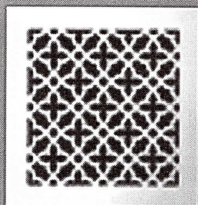
(above top) The December Oculus Book Talk starred **Bjarke Ingles** of BIG/Bjarke Ingles Group, who gave an animated, fast-paced presentation of his book, *Yes is More*.

(above bottom) City Councilmember **Brad Lander** was among a dozen speakers at the first Freedom of Assembly: Public Space Today series, which explored the state of public spaces and how design can play a role in our free expression through assembly.

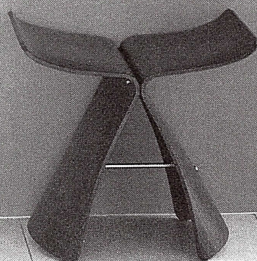
(left) AIANY Executive Director **Rick Bell, FAIA**, NYC Department of Transportation Commissioner **Janette Sadik-Khan**, and **Alison Cohen**, President, Alta Bicycle Share, kicked off the "Two Wheel Transit: NYC Bike Share" exhibition in early January.



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- Foster an exchange and collaboration among members of the design, construction and real estate community
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- Promote cultural tourism of New York City's architecture

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©Neoscape for Robert A.M. Stern Architects



Museum Mile Makeover

Fifth Avenue's cultural treasures renewed

BY CLAIRE WILSON

©Aislinn Weidale/Ennead Architects



©Amphase



(top) Robert A.M. Stern Architects: Fifth Avenue entrance to the Museum for African Art
 (middle) Ennead Architects: Museum of the City of New York
 (bottom) Gluckman Mayner Architects/Beyer Blinder Belle: Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum, rendering of new Third Floor Gallery

Museum Mile is getting something of a spruce-up. Six institutions along the Upper East Side stretch of Fifth Avenue and another nearby have either completed ambitious renovations or are in their final stages. And a new museum is coming.

The Museum for African Art will be the newest star in the firmament when it opens later this year. Designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects (RAMSA), the mixed-use structure anchors Museum Mile at the northeast corner of the park and is a worthy addition to its periphery. The museum component of the building, which is two-thirds residential, has unusual windows that are informed by familiar African visual references without being literal or gimmicky. And the building's location at Fifth Avenue and 110th Street, the gateway to Harlem, is almost as important as its design, according to Dan Lobitz, AIA, a partner at RAMSA. Lobitz says the museum is exactly the sort of institution that should occupy one of the four corners of Central Park, which are so critical to the urban plan of New York – and to public life. “In most cities that kind of public square is an appropriate location for an important public building, a gathering place,” he says. “Our building will be that gathering place.”

The Museum for African Art is the first new museum to come to Museum Mile since the Guggenheim opened 53 years ago. The exterior of the Frank Lloyd Wright landmark was renovated extensively for the 50th anniversary celebration in 2009 by Wank Adams Slavin Associates.

In January the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) reopened the second phase of its galleries for American art, and in September of last year it opened a new home for Islamic and Arab art, both designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. MMA also plans to move some of its contemporary art holdings to the Marcel Breuer-designed Whitney Museum in 2015, when it decamps to the meatpacking district and a new facility designed by Renzo Piano.

Gruzen Samton Architects did the extensive renovation of the Museo del Barrio, completed in 2009, and last fall the Frick Collection (nearby but not part of Museum Mile) unveiled the redesigned Portico Gallery by Davis Brody Bond Architects and Planners. The National Academy Museum & School also reopened last fall following a major renovation by Bade Stageberg Cox.

The challenge of renovating these institutions has been to bring old buildings, many of them almost 100 years old and built as mansions, into the 21st century. At both the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) and the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, exhibition space was severely limited; office, conservation, and research space was misallocated; and other necessary systems were outdated or non-existent – such as the lack of climate control at the MCNY. “The temperature could swing from 100 to 40 degrees inside, depending on what the temperature was outside,” says Tim Hartung, FAIA, a partner of Ennead Architects, which did the renewal.

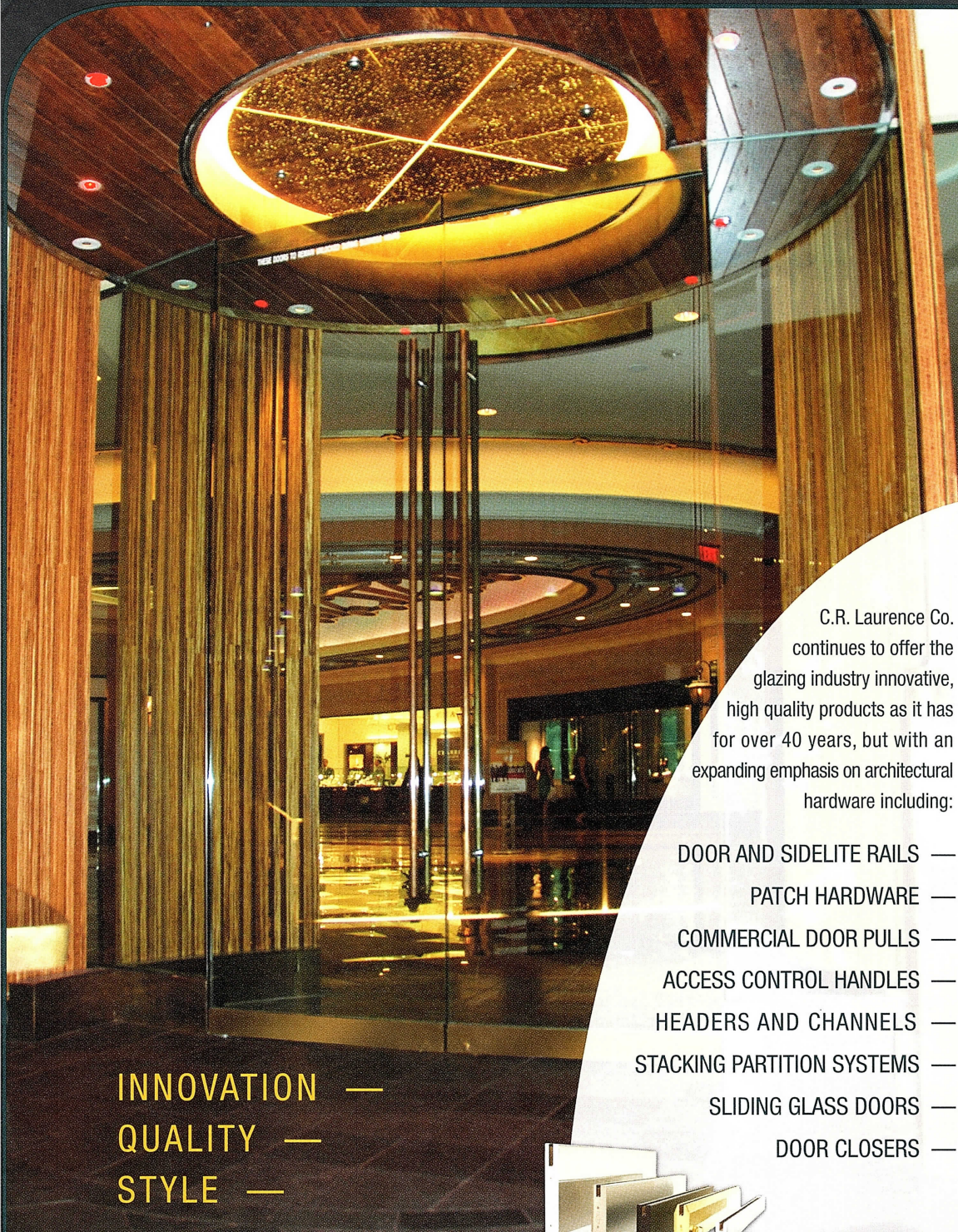
At the Cooper-Hewitt, where exhibition space will be expanded by 60%, technology had to be integrated almost invisibly by design architect Gluckman Mayner Architects and executive architect Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners (BBB). According to BBB Partner and Director of Historic Preservation Richard Southwick, FAIA, “The biggest challenge is to install new systems with a light touch, with the least impact on the historic fabric.”

The newly modernized older museums and the Museum for African Art will likely face another challenge when all the scaffolding comes down: how to handle all the new visitors.

Claire Wilson writes for the *New York Times*.

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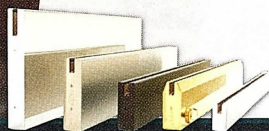
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Small, Agile Firms Succeed in Lean Times

BY KRISTEN RICHARDS, HON. AIA, HON. ASLA

Earlier this year, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce published a report called “Hard Times, College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings: Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal.” The college major with the highest unemployment rate for recent grads? Architecture, at 13.9% (architecture grads age 30 and over are at 9.2%). Newspapers across the country ran stories with headlines such as “In today’s economy, don’t let your babies grow up to be architects” (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*) and “Want a Job? Go to College, and Don’t Major in Architecture” (*New York Times*). Needless to say, the architecture blogosphere lit up.

It’s not like a new architecture grad can hang out a shingle and declare him- or herself in business. In New York State, a graduate still has to undergo years of internship and costly exams to become fully licensed. An economy languishing in the doldrums for the last few years hasn’t helped matters any.

And what of small established firms? James P. Cramer, principal and chairman of the strategy consulting and research firm Greenway Group and founding editor and publisher of *DesignIntelligence*, strikes a somewhat optimistic tone – with caveats. “Small firms can be successful even in these times,” he notes, because small practices can establish brand differentiation more easily than large firms. “We don’t believe the future of architecture belongs to large firms. The best of small firms will find themselves on the opposite end of commodification.” He does point out a potential drawback, however: they may not have “the depth of talent to do an entire project.”

While a small firm can be “more nimble, flexible, and efficient,” Cramer continues, “it can also be more lonely.” He sees some small firms going through an “emotional recession” of disappointment and disillusionment which, he says, “is just as big a puzzle to solve as a financial recession.”

Statistics in ZweigWhite’s 2011-2012 Small Firm Survey of Architecture, Engineering, Planning & Environmental Consulting Firms – which polled small practices across the U.S. – crunch a raft of numbers about firms with 1–24 and 25–49

employees that bear out some of Cramer’s observations. Here’s a sampling from the “Fewer Than 25” category:

Does your firm ever turn down work due to a lack of manpower?

Frequently.....	20%
Occasionally	20%
Rarely	40%
Never	20%

Proposal hit rates

Percentage of proposals shortlisted.....	8.3%
Percentage of proposals won.....	40%
(\$80,000 was the median amount for a proposal submitted last year.)	

How well balanced are the risks and rewards of firm ownership?

Rewards outweigh risks	24%
Risks/rewards well balanced	44%
Risks outweigh rewards	32%

Next year, will the business environment be...?

Much better	4%
Somewhat better.....	50%
Same	8%
Somewhat worse.....	35%
Much worse.....	0%
Unspecified.....	4%

As an editor, I find these survey stats among the most discouraging: only 30% of the firms send out press releases, and then only twice a year to a list that averages only eight media contacts.

These may be tough times, and the Georgetown report and ZweigWhite survey suggest that many firms have adapted to a volatile market. I am impressed by the intrepid determination and spirit of the young architects and small firms profiled in this issue – and so many others who set their sights high in a lean, mean era. They exhibit courage, character, and heart. As Cramer told me recently: “I would not discourage my son or daughter from entering the field.” Neither would I.



OBRA Architects: Sanhe Yanjiao YJ2011 Elementary School, Beijing, pg. 28.

What's Inside

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- 34 Launch Pad to Success

Public Projects, Small Firms, Targeted Tactics

Having replaced fee-based bidding with quality-based prequalification, the city's Department of Design + Construction has been matching talented smaller firms with appropriate projects. The result is civic construction with grandeur, greenness, and verve

BY BILL MILLARD

Future senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, as an assistant secretary of labor, had an unglamorous assignment: to write a memo on federal office space. Rare indeed is the memo that becomes a manifesto, yet Moynihan's "Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture" came to guide national design policy, directing civic buildings to "embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought," express the dignity of the national government, reflect regional traditions, avoid an official style, and respect landscape and streetscape contexts. It wasn't until 1994 that the principles were translated into the Design Excellence Program of the General Service Administration (GSA), under Edward Feiner, FAIA, replacing auto-pilot Neo-classicism and penny-pinching Minimalism with high standards for aesthetics and performance.

In July 2004 Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced a Design and Construction Excellence (D+CE) Initiative, piloted by the Department of Design + Construction (DDC) under Commissioner David Burney, FAIA, and incorporated into citywide procurement rules in 2006. DDC's program, says Burney, adds local policies to the goals it shares with GSA's. Along with quality-based prequalification, a predetermined fee schedule, and a review process involving in-house architectural liaisons and professional peers, a "small firm set-aside" program reserves projects below \$15 million for firms with 10 or fewer employees; for projects in the \$15–\$50 million range, eight larger firms are eligible. The initial RFP process in 2008 identified 24 smaller firms; the second, in 2010, selected 20. The next RFP is expected in summer 2012.

Matchmakers and sherpas

As Burney explains, the set-aside responds to the observation that "whatever criteria you use, the big firms always get all the work." Allocating sub-\$15 million projects to small practices promotes project quality, he notes. "For a \$5-million library renovation, do you want AECOM?" he asks. "Probably not. You're going to get better service from the smaller firm," particularly more hands-on involvement by principals. DDC pairs projects with practices – paying attention to scale – and guides relations among the firm, the city agency serving as client, and community boards or other local stakeholders.

The D+CE program has been "good about bringing some lesser-known smaller firms into the system – not just the usual suspects," says participant Belmont Freeman, FAIA. The program can be a ticket to wider recognition for a small or young firm with a strong vision but few realized designs. The emphasis is on a promising portfolio, a familiarity with sustainable-design strategies (mandated by Local Law 86), and an ability to meet schedule and budget demands. "I can't think of one small firm where we've said, 'They were terrible; we're not going to use them again,'" Burney says. "To us, it's a matchmaking process. There are certain projects suited to certain firms, and we're trying to make that marriage."

"Part of our responsibility is to beat the bureaucratic path ahead of these design firms and keep the process moving," Burney notes. Guidance through complex municipal procedures is a boon to small firms for whom the paperwork and meetings can be daunting. "We had not realized we have to do so many presentations," says Anna Torriani, AIA, a principal of Atelier Pagnamenta Torriani. Their branch library on Staten Island (see below) required meetings with the New York Public Library (NYPL) board, the Art Commission (now the Design Commission), and the community board. DDC's encouragement of innovative design was instrumental in the project's success. Residents had been asking for a library since 1937, but the abstract design solved certain problems in nontraditional ways, and the prolonged silence after the community presentation was nerve-racking. Finally, Torriani recalls, "somebody got up and said, 'Hallelujah!' That was the end, and everybody was relieved."

Architects who have navigated city government's complexities praise DDC even while lambasting other officials. Belmont Freeman Architects has D+CE contracts with both DDC and the Parks Department. "I think it's a great system," Freeman says of DDC's program, "because you knock yourself out on the big RFP prequalification, and once you're approved as one of the 20 firms, the RFPs that ensue are streamlined. It saves a lot of time for everybody." On the other hand, construction delays on Freeman's 59th Street Recreation Center for Parks' program reveal trouble spots in municipal processes. The original scope of work and budget "had no connection in reality," Freeman says, and "the mechanism for increasing fees to consultants to design



Atelier Pagnamenta Torriani: The Mariners Harbor Branch Library on Staten Island sports a glass-roofed spine that “cracks” the building open like an oyster shell.



larger and more complex projects has lagged.” Change orders have been approved by Parks but blocked by other officials. “You know our comptroller is in political trouble and is trying to look like Mr. Tough Guy, protector of the civic finances, by rejecting everything.” Still, Freeman unhesitatingly says he’d enter the program again.

Flames at the end of the Wicks

“This project demonstrates the shortcomings of the Wicks Law,” Freeman continues. Instituted in 1912 and expanded in 1946 under a bill sponsored by State Sen. Arthur Wicks, this state law mandates separate electrical, plumbing, and HVAC contracts on public projects over certain cost thresholds. Its corruption-fighting purpose was admirable on paper, but its implementation overcomplicates projects. Instead of saving by keeping a general contractor from putting an overhead profit on subs’ work, Burney notes, it has inflated costs through delays, infighting, and poor coordination. “If you’re doing a small library and your electrician goes belly-up,” he observes, “the whole project grinds to a halt.”

“When you have a very complicated project,” Freeman says, “cracks between these contracts open up. There were constant delays in determining who was supposed to do what. The general contractor didn’t have overall responsibility; it was an extraordinarily cumbersome way to implement a project. Change orders had to be written to cover work that wasn’t covered in any of the three contracts, and could take months to approve.”

Fortunately, two new project labor agreements valid until 2014 have replaced Wicks with a set of uniform union rules, work rates, overtime systems, and related procedures. DDC now awards contracts directly to a general contractor, whom

Project Credits

PROJECT: Mariners Harbor Branch Library
CLIENT: New York Public Library; NYC Department of Design + Construction
ARCHITECT: Atelier Pagnamenta Torriani
PROJECT TEAM: Lorenzo Pagnamenta, AIA, Anna Torriani, AIA, Wasmiya Tan, Raffaele Stefani, Damien Romanens, Nam Suk Oh, Juan Carlos Salas Ballestin, Caterina Inderbitzin, Petya Ivanova, Felix Lederberger
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Weidlinger and Associates
CIVIL ENGINEER: Michael Wein, PE
LANDSCAPE: SCAPE
MEP & LEED: Plus Group
LIGHTING DESIGN: Fernando Soler
CODE: Berzak-Schoen
COST: Faithful & Gould
SPECIFICATIONS: Construction Specifications
CONTRACTORS: Plaza Construction Corporation; Ace Contracting; EF Pro Contracting; Adco Electric Corp.

“To us, it’s a match-making process. There are certain projects suited to certain firms, and we’re trying to make that marriage.”

— David Burney, FAIA, Commissioner, Department of Design + Construction

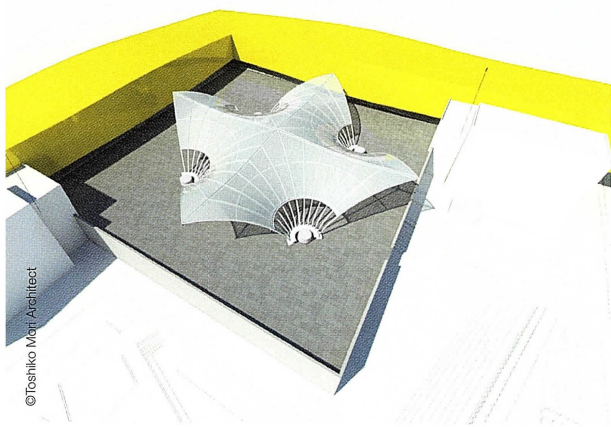
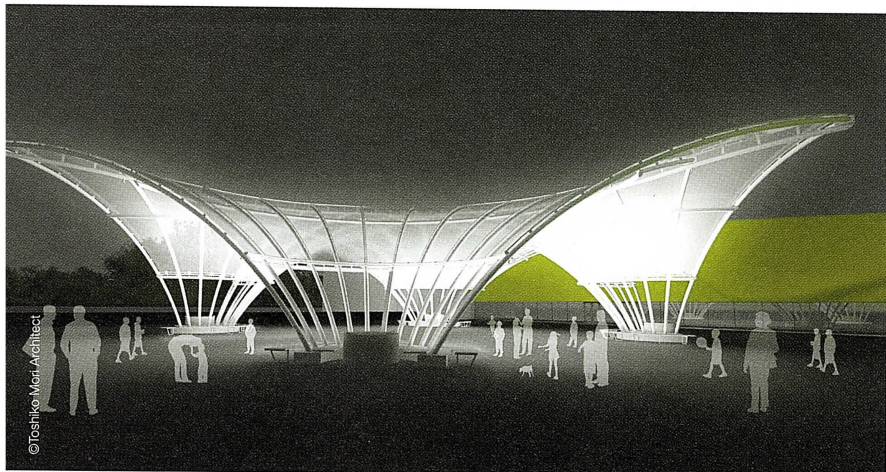
it holds responsible for hiring subs who can work harmoniously and stay on budget. “We’re out of the Wicks Law business,” says Burney. “Hooray!”

Atelier Pagnamenta Torriani: Mariners Harbor Branch Library

A working-class neighborhood in northwest Staten Island will soon have a library that combines historical awareness with creative use of light and materials. Noting that the area once had what Lorenzo Pagnamenta, AIA, calls “a strong undercurrent of oystering and maritime life,” he and Torriani used an oyster shell as a contextual metaphor for the single-story building. Patrons and staff enjoy natural light from clerestories and a glass-roofed spine that “cracks” the building open like an oyster shell. Low-E glazing with internal louvers minimizes southern glare while admitting northern light. As classic Carnegie libraries used monumental staircases to imply an ascent toward knowledge, Pagnamenta notes, Mariners Harbor Branch presents its open roof as “a point of enlightenment.”

Shade provided by several mature trees protects an outdoor reading garden and terrace. The architects acknowledge the library’s multiple functions as a community center and job-search headquarters for recent immigrants by providing generous spaces for all ages, public computers, and an ample reading room. Scheduled to open late in 2012, Mariners Harbor is recognized as a D+CE flagship project and won a 2008 Design Excellence Award from the city’s Design Commission.

Pagnamenta and Torriani found that working with the NYPL as client and DDC as manager was surprisingly smooth sailing, though the project was still subject to Wicks. “We were lucky the



Toshiko Mori Architect:
The translucent canopy atop the Brooklyn Children's Museum will host events, performances, and educational programs.

Project Credits

PROJECT: Brooklyn Children's Museum Rooftop Canopy
CLIENT: Brooklyn Children's Museum; Department of Cultural Affairs (funding agency); Department of Design + Construction (managing agency)
ARCHITECT: Toshiko Mori Architect
PROJECT TEAM: Toshiko Mori, FAIA, Joshua Uhl, AIA, LEED AP, David Jaubert, Mathieu Lemieux-Blanchard
STRUCTURAL/MEP/FIRE PROTECTION/ACOUSTICAL ENGINEER: Arup

separate contractors worked agreeably together on the site," says Pagnamenta. "What we liked," Torriani adds, "is that the client really, truly believed in design."

Toshiko Mori Architect: Brooklyn Children's Museum Rooftop Canopy

Another highly regarded project might not have happened at all if Toshiko Mori, FAIA, were easily swayed by rumor. During earlier administrations, she had heard "scary stories": contractual paperwork, bureaucracy, an unconscionably slow payment schedule, an impossible review process. "It's a project that firms our size would never be able to afford to entertain," she says.

Mori describes her experience with Burney's team and operations, however, as a "wonderful surprise. If this was the way the city operated all the time, then I was totally misinformed, but I have a suspicion that things have drastically changed." Her firm's addition to the Brooklyn Children's Museum had to respect an impressive design pedigree: a 1977 building by Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer expanded by Rafael Viñoly Architects in 2008. She added a three-season rooftop canopy to accommodate events, performances, educational

programs, and casual outdoor dining from the existing café. The canopy had to be very lightweight to respect the building's structural capacity. Working with Arup, she chose a heat-resistant ethylene tetrafluoroethylene (ETFE) skin on arched-steel tubular forms, radiating from four support points as symmetrical fan shapes conjoined above, creating curves that harmonize with Viñoly's boomerang design. The canopy earned her firm a 2010 Public Design Commission award.

Slade Architecture: Staten Island Zoo

James Slade, AIA, LEED AP, and Hayes Slade, AIA, cite their work at the Staten Island Zoo (out to bid at this writing, with no opening date fixed) as the kind of contract that would rarely be available to a small firm. The client is the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), but the site is on Parks Department land. Budget cuts and political negotiations trimmed a more ambitious master plan, including a new entrance building and a farmstead educating urban children about rural ecosystems, to two new components: a leopard exhibition and a carousel enclosure. Working on this eight-acre zoo, renowned for niches like its reptile collection (and a charismatic groundhog that once bit Mayor Bloomberg), gave the Slades some education about a different ecosystem: city-government processes.

"Each agency involved," says James Slade, is "trying to do what's best for the city as a whole, but coming at it from different views." Parks emphasizes tree preservation and grounds maintenance; zoo officials are concerned with visitors' experience, animals' well-being, and relations with adjoining residents; DCA strives to spread resources evenly among multiple competing constituencies. DDC acts as orchestrator and assists with documentation.

Slade Architecture:
The carousel at the Staten Island Zoo is being relocated from the periphery to a more central location near the dining facilities, and being refitted with glass doors and an ETFE roof to lower sound nuisances to neighbors.



Project Credits

PROJECT: Staten Island Zoo
CLIENT: Staten Island Zoo
ARCHITECT: Slade Architecture
PROJECT TEAM: Hayes Slade, AIA, James Slade, AIA, LEED AP, Emily Andersen, RA, Georg Brennecke, JP Casillas, LEED AP, Tian Gao, Kristina Kesler, RA, LEED AP, Eliza Koshland, Chia-Ping Lin, Jeff Wandersman, RA, LEED AP
EXHIBITION/LANDSCAPE DESIGN (LEOPARD EXHIBIT): The Portico Group
MEP ENGINEER (CAROUSEL): Pavane & Kwalbrun
CIVIL ENGINEER; ELECTRICAL/PLUMBING ENGINEER (LEOPARD EXHIBIT): Stantec
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Gilsanz Murray Steficek
LIGHTING DESIGN: Tillotson Design Associates
GRAPHIC DESIGN: Bill Smith Group
PROJECT MANAGEMENT AGENCY: NYC Department of Design + Construction

"I think the model is European cities, where nearly all public buildings are competition-based. That gives opportunities to many young and unknown firms, and promotes the design culture. The excellence and importance of architecture are more in the public eye."

— Toshiko Mori, FAIA

The Slades strove to maintain a band of trees surrounding the zoo, but a leopard enclosure normally needs below-grade walls to keep the cats from digging out. Foundation excavation, Hayes notes, is often "basically a slow way to kill trees." To preserve the roots, they chose a horizontal, subterranean mesh digging barrier instead of the customary leopard-proof concrete. A foundation system using football-shaped diamond piers and steel poles driven in a cone formation saves materials and is less invasive to the landscape. Placing the carousel centrally near the dining facilities and giving its enclosure glass doors and an ETFE roof lowers sound nuisances to neighbors and creates a bright, open area where adults can dine while watching their children ride.

DDC has been instrumental, Hayes notes, in getting these design solutions approved. Along with guidance on time-consuming documentation, the Slades add, working with the agency generates internal benefits for a small firm that extend beyond the immediate project and offset the tight fee structure. Submitting drawings to DDC strengthens a firm's ability to produce deliverables required by complicated organizations. Future clients view the city's vetting as a sign of a firm's credibility, and DDC's online Design Consultant Guide is, in Hayes's words, "the closest thing you'll ever see to a manual on how to do the optimal project."

A permanent culture of progress

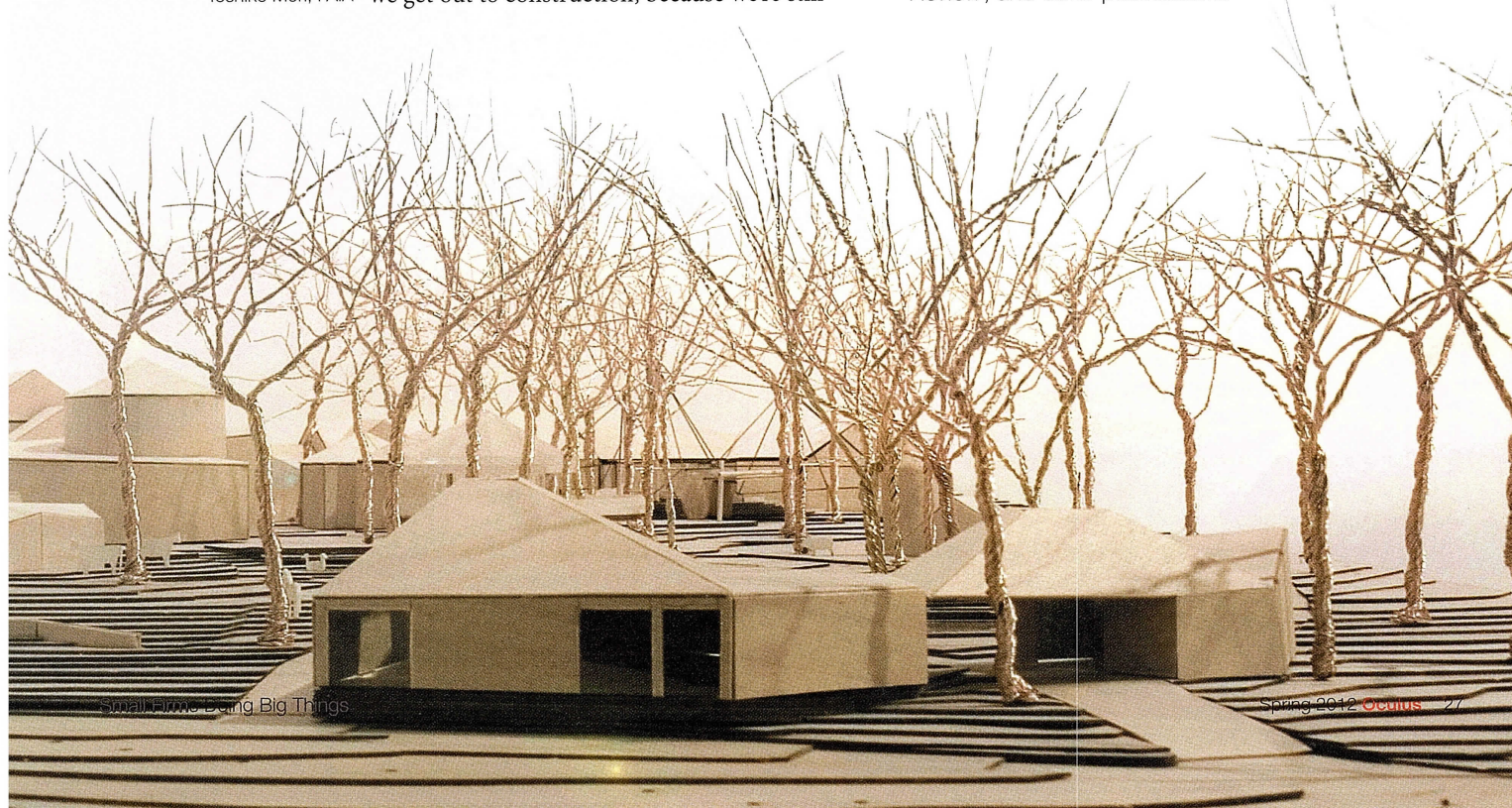
DDC is not resting on its laurels. The second term in the phrase "Design and Construction Excellence" is Burney's next frontier. "We fall off when we get out to construction, because we're still

bound by low bid," he says. To connect design teams and construction managers earlier, he favors quality-based selection in construction as well as design. Considering the sophistication of today's buildings, trades, and technology, particularly BIM systems, "if you're not working together as a team during the construction process, you're really in trouble." Processes that deliver BIM models to subs, he notes, raise questions of joint responsibility for information integrity, and "we're probably five to ten years away from getting full penetration through the trades in terms of full BIM capabilities."

Mori views DDC's program in a global context. "I think the model is European cities, where nearly all public buildings are competition-based," she says. "That gives opportunities to many young and unknown firms, and promotes the design culture. The excellence and importance of architecture are more in the public eye." She favors adapting the selection process so it includes open presentation and dialogue, perhaps even public participation as in Switzerland, as well as portfolio reviews.

On the inevitable question of what to do after this mayoralty ends, Mori has one simple recommendation: "Retain all the current commissioners!" The leadership that has made D+CE into a civic norm, she believes, is "a huge asset that any new mayor would inherit...something the city can be proud of globally." ■

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



Small Firm Workplace: The Whole Wide World

For small firms, working overseas may be the best way to land projects and avoid “New York City myopia”

BY WENDY ORDEMANN, LEED AP

Braving language barriers, mixed time zones, opaque legal systems, and baffling bureaucracies, some small architectural firms are working outside American borders with success. Perhaps chief among the rewards is a busy staff and a steady cash flow. Other advantages include opportunities to tackle interesting projects not available to small firms in the U.S., exploration of vernacular design, and the excitement and stimulation that come with travel and exposure to different cultures. And today, working overseas is easier than ever thanks to Skype, frequent flyer miles, an increasingly international workforce, and the Internet. It also means getting commissions can be more difficult, however, because everybody can compete for everything everywhere.

International settings often mean bigger projects than those found in New York City. The 18-person WORK Architecture Company (WORKac) is restoring and redeveloping the 19-acre New Holland Island in the heart of St. Petersburg, Russia – the result of winning a competition. Says WORKac Principal Dan Wood, AIA, LEED AP, “Meeting people from other places keeps us aware that we are part of international culture.” And, perhaps equally important, it helps his team avoid what he calls “New York City myopia” – that sense that if it doesn’t happen here, it doesn’t matter.

In Shenzhen, a city in Southern China’s Guangdong Province, OBRA Architects is redesigning a one-kilometer stretch of a city street – addressing traffic problems, putting in subway lines, and increasing awareness of ecological considerations. “Our work is bigger overseas,” says OBRA Principal Pablo Castro, AIA, whose firm has a staff of 14. “It includes opportunities for master plans and new forms of public space.” Castro loves the dynamism of the Chinese culture and economy. “There’s a conscious sense that development lags the West, and they are endeavoring to catch up,” he says. “They are pragmatic people looking for new ideas that they can rethink and adapt to their culture.” OBRA is taking its commitment a step further: it is about to open an office in Beijing.

In western Africa’s Senegal, where Fred Schwartz, FAIA, FAAR, principal at the 15-person Frederic Schwartz Architects, is creating housing for “the poorest of poor,” more than 3,000 people came to the groundbreaking. “That felt great,” he says. “Can you imagine anything like that happening here?”

Finding work

The hardest step may be getting that first commission. For many firms, the best way to land a project is through competitions. “They create a more level playing field. It’s a better selection system than the U.S. interview process,” Schwartz says. “You won’t do an airport in the U.S. unless you’ve done an airport before. So how do you do your first airport if no one’s giving you a chance?”

Schwartz’s overseas work began when he teamed with Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates to win a French competition in the 1990s. He has since done projects in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Castro’s first foray overseas was also the result of a competition. ORDOS 100 was an attempt to commission 100 architects to design 100 villas for Inner Mongolia. While that project is at a standstill, he met plenty of people in the process who invited him to come back to do other work. “It all just started to happen on its own,” Castro says, “though I admit that when we go over there, it’s ‘all P.R. all the time.’”

(opposite page right)

PROJECT: Sanhe Yanjiao YJ2011 Elementary School, Beijing

CLIENT: Xiaohua Huang, Beijing Xishan Industrial Investment Co.

ARCHITECT: OBRA Architects

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT: China Architecture Design & Research Group

Part of a large new residential development, the 370,000-square-foot school for 1,800 children will begin construction this summer.

(below)

PROJECT: New Holland Island, St. Petersburg, Russia

ARCHITECT: WORK Architecture Company

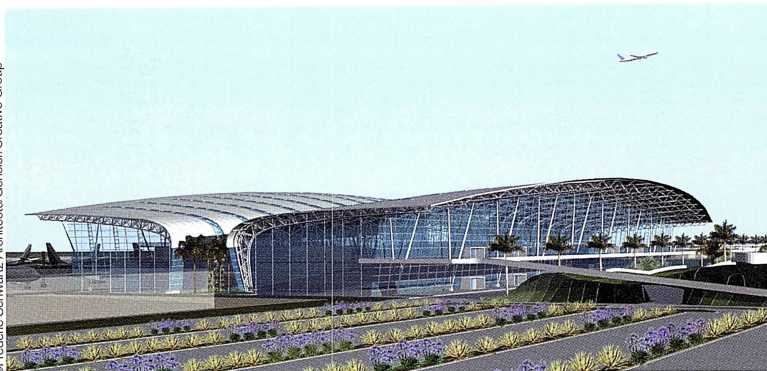
This “city within the city” is a renovation and new construction project that will feature performing arts, education, and retail spaces, as well as parks and gardens, on a 19-acre island.



©WORK Architecture Company



©Frederic Schwartz Architects/Gensler/Creative Group



(above) PROJECT: Chennai International Airport, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
ARCHITECTS: Frederic Schwartz Architects; Gensler; Creative Group
Once complete, this 6.4-million-square-foot project will be India's third largest airport. It consists of four new terminals, two of which are nearing completion.

There are other ways to find work, too. Schwartz was invited to participate in a project in Africa after United Nations delegates saw the Kalahari, a multifamily building his firm had designed in Harlem. His work in India started with a young architect whom Schwartz tried to hire. The young man decided to return to India instead to work for his father's firm, but asked his father to team with Schwartz. The two firms went on to do several airports together.

"We're seeing a lot of public/private partnerships," Schwartz says. In these relationships, creating a design that is sympathetic to the local culture is common. "At the other extreme, we're also seeing developers who simply want to land their brand in a particular country rather than trying to go local. It all depends on the government, country, culture, and profitability."

And that leads to what is often the second step in the process: finding a local partner. "We nurture those relationships," Schwartz says. "They smooth the way." Understanding how things work in their country, local firms teach their American colleagues about the language and culture, introduce them to people, and comprehend indigenous design. Local firms know how to get projects built, and often handle billing and contracts. Shifting some of the work to an overseas partner also helps avoid the need to quickly staff up in the U.S.

The process of finding a partner may seem baffling, but more often it seems "your partner finds you," Castro says. "Word travels; people get in touch."

Complications abound

Working overseas is not for those who are risk-averse. In some places there's overwhelming poverty and political oppression to face; most onerous, there is corruption. Once an architect steps outside the American legal system, other things change, too. A contract isn't necessarily a contract in the American sense; it's more of a guide than a legally binding document. Firms need to look for creative ways to work through differences. In China, for example, Castro says he avoids "over-clarification" of contract terms. This is a cultural necessity and a good way for those involved to save face.

Getting paid is another tough issue, but it's a tough issue in the U.S. as well. Small firms need big financial skills to plan

and execute work. They sometimes need to wait months for payment, accept cash or wire transfers, learn to ask for a big percentage up front, and bill for the work they're about to do. Another approach is to route payments through local partners, who have more leverage.

Travel costs can be high, though there's no substitute for meeting face to face. Phone calls help, even if they take place at 3am. Opening an office and/or purchasing blocks of plane tickets may also be worthwhile.

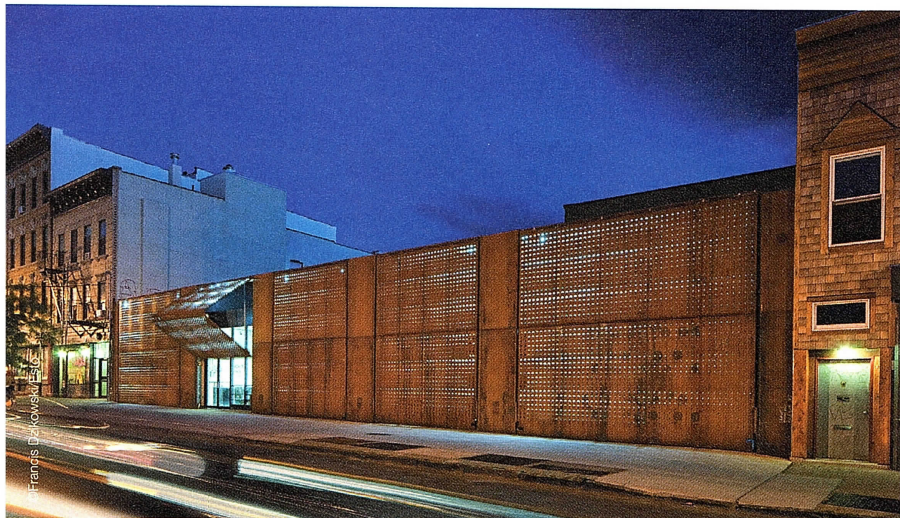
And then there is the language issue. Sometimes it's worth paying for a translator. WORKac's Wood tries to avoid the problem by hiring international workers here in New York. There is always someone on his staff who speaks other languages, including Chinese and Russian.

Achieving quality and consistency in what gets built may be the final challenge. The construction force may be untrained, and may even include migrant workers from the countryside. Materials may be unavailable or nonexistent. Baffling local practices – windows positioned to open upside down, changes made by the local shaman – get built despite what the drawings say.

To iron out these kinds of problems, U.S. firms need to appeal to the local design and construction community, with whom a good relationship is essential. At the same time, it's worth rethinking the approach. "Projects must be straightforward and buildable," Castro says. "We must think about materials and processes carefully." Adds Wood: "You can't just do the same things you always do. To be involved internationally, you need an open mind to the cultural context. There are differences in climates, how people act, and what they expect."

The bottom line is not bringing in the big bucks, though of course everyone wants to make money. Rather, the best reward is the joy of working in other places. "Being small is an asset," says Wood. "Every project is important to us. We are completely engaged in that new locale, and it is exhilarating." ■

Wendy (Talarico) Ordemann, LEED AP, is an award-winning journalist who has worked at *Architectural Record*, *This Old House*, and *Metropolis Magazine*. She was a staff writer for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Post*, and the Associated Press.



Small Size, Big Thinking

Ingenuity and adaptability are helping three young architecture firms to thrive

BY RICHARD STAUB

Contrary to common wisdom, a recession can be a fertile time to develop a practice. Three young architecture firms – one of which has occasionally been a one-man shop – are finding their own ways to grow during challenging times by being nimble and innovative.

Just give it a glow

The oldest, relatively speaking, is Andre Kikoski Architect (AKA), a seven-person, downtown Manhattan practice that opened its doors in 2001. Already featured in the *New York Times*, numerous design publications, and the book *New York Dozen: Gen X Architects*, the firm has designed several residences, restaurants, and other projects that have a high-end aura. By contrast, the Wyckoff Exchange is a very cost-conscious adaptive reuse project in the scruffy but increasingly trendy arts neighborhood, Bushwick, Brooklyn.

What AKA had to work with were two aging warehouses that developer Cayuga Capital Management wished to convert to retail use. “We wanted to create an iconic venue for the neighborhood,” says AKA founder Andre Kikoski, AIA, LEED AP. “The buildings’ 10,000 square feet were to become a series of generic, white-box spaces that could be combined as desired, so we made the façade the primary design element and took our inspiration from the materials, textures, and forms of nearby industrial structures.”

AKA introduced an 18-foot-tall wall of textured Corten steel with five motorized warehouse-style security doors 18 inches in front of the standard glass façades. During the day, the doors fold up to create an awning over each unit and announce that the establishments are open for business. In the evening they descend to protect the storefronts.

The doors actually have two layers: burnt-orange Corten on the outside and light-gauge stainless steel on the inside, with a layer of LED fixtures between them. The light glows invitingly through rows of holes cut at various angles into the Corten. The design is hardly standard industrial fare. At the conclusion of the project, the client told AKA that he was able to lease at a price that far exceeded the going rate.

The rewards of “analysis and attention”

The recently completed Civic Building for University Place, WA, by Soluri Architecture (SA) offers a classic example of how a small, eager firm can work like a much larger one. The break came for founder Andre Soluri, AIA, when he was working for the developer Outside the Big Box as an ad hoc owner’s advisor on the \$250-million, 10-lot Town Center development in University Place. Believing the project’s international architecture and planning firm was unresponsive and too expensive, the developer put together a younger, less expensive, more agile team that included SA. Soluri’s participation in that project, including his design for an office building, resulted in his firm being recommended for a 2007 invited competition of eight firms to submit for the Civic Building project.

Soluri suspects that flush times explain why only three of the eight firms – most of them based in Seattle – actually submitted proposals. “Developing our entry presented a steep learning curve because I had never worked on a project of that size,” says Soluri. “City officials told us we won the project because our level of analysis and attention went far beyond what our larger competitors offered.” The 60,000-square-foot building includes city offices, a library, the police department, and commercial tenants. The six-year-old firm has also completed a 12,000-square-foot retail center just outside Seattle; Rab Lighting’s 17,000-square-foot headquarters renovation in Northvale, NJ, is under construction. SA is also designing a master plan for Mango Cross Studios, a major motion picture and TV production studio complex in Bethlehem, PA.

(opposite page) Andre Kikoski Architect: At Wyckoff Exchange in Bushwick, Brooklyn, Corten-steel warehouse-style security doors fold up to form awnings during the day, and fold down to protect the storefronts at night.

Soluri made two previous tries at having his own firm, but didn't have the business to sustain it. This time he thinks it's for good. "Right now the firm fluctuates in size between one and four people, and the flow of work is steady," he says. "I have a team of freelance staffers I can call on who understand how I work. The depth of analysis I used for the City Hall project has become a template for the large projects we are currently involved in. And we use BIM to add greater efficiency to the process."

The art of placemaking

VAMOS Architects (VA) brings an entrepreneurial approach of a different kind to its practice. Husband and wife architects Evan Bennett, AIA, and Silvia Fuster started the firm in 2007, with Fuster's Catalan background leading to a planned Barcelona office along with one in New York. While the firm pays the bills as the architect-of-record on a number of high-end commercial interiors projects, its research-based work in placemaking is what drives the practice. That can mean developing events, installations, or structures that foster human connections and activity. Often VA will develop a concept first and then look for backing later.

VA's very visible storefront office in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, has provided a fishbowl environment to test its philosophy to think and act locally. Small-scale, low-budget projects that emphasized neighborhood connections and involvement eventually led to the non-profit designNYC teaming VA with Nostrand Park, a placemaking

Project Credits

PROJECT: Wyckoff Exchange
OWNER: Cayuga Capital Management, LLC
ARCHITECT: Andre Kikoski Architect
PROJECT TEAM: Andre Kikoski, AIA, LEED AP, Adam Darter, LEED AP, Liam Harris, LEED AP, Michael Chung, Laurie Karsten
LIGHTING CONSULTANT: Lumen Arch
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Rodney D. Gible Consulting Engineers
MEP ENGINEER: Rosini Engineering
CODE CONSULTANT: CODE
METAL FABRICATOR: SMF Service Metal Fabricating
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Development Builders

PROJECT: University Place City Hall
CLIENT/OWNER: City of University Place, Washington State
DESIGN ARCHITECT PRIME CONTRACT: Soluri Architecture
PROJECT TEAM: André Soluri, AIA, Jayson J. Christopher, Assoc. AIA, Phoebe Park Kincaid, ASID, LEED, Sylvia Borucowicz
ARCHITECT-OF-RECORD: Helix Design Group
PRE-CONSTRUCTION SERVICES: Rushforth Taylor Construction
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: PCS Structural Solutions
MEP ENGINEERS: Tres West Engineers Inc.; Enginuity Systems LLC
CIVIC ENGINEER: BergerABAM (formerly Petra Engineering)
LIGHTING CONSULTANT: Candela Light Design & Consulting
ACOUSTICAL & A/V: Sparling (formerly Yantis Acoustical Design)
ENVIRONMENTAL & LEED CONSULTANT: O'Brien & Co.
LIBRARY TENANT IMPROVEMENT ARCHITECT (INTERIORS): Koppe / Wagoner Architects
GENERAL CONTRACTOR (CORE & SHELL): Jody Miller Construction

PROJECT: Destination Nostrand Business Improvement Prototype
CLIENT: Nostrand Park, Laurel K. Brown, Director of Community Planning
ARCHITECT: VAMOS Architects
PROJECT TEAM: Evan Bennett, AIA, LEED AP, Silvia Fuster, Niklas Thormark, Will Kemper, Taryn Humphrey
DESIGNNYC ADVISOR: Lisa Green/Selldorf Architects



VAMOS Architects: "Destination Nostrand" is a series of high-visibility pop-up installations to add vitality to closed storefronts along a stretch of Nostrand Avenue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

organization fostering development in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. To offer a sense of possibility for a 10-block stretch of Nostrand Avenue, which has many closed storefronts and empty lots, VA proposed a trio of high-visibility pop-up installations that add vitality to the street and let potential businesses test their appeal. The vibrantly colored concepts begin with street furniture that spell out "NOSTRAND," then store awnings and shop windows, and finally a complete makeover of a vacant space for a trial run.

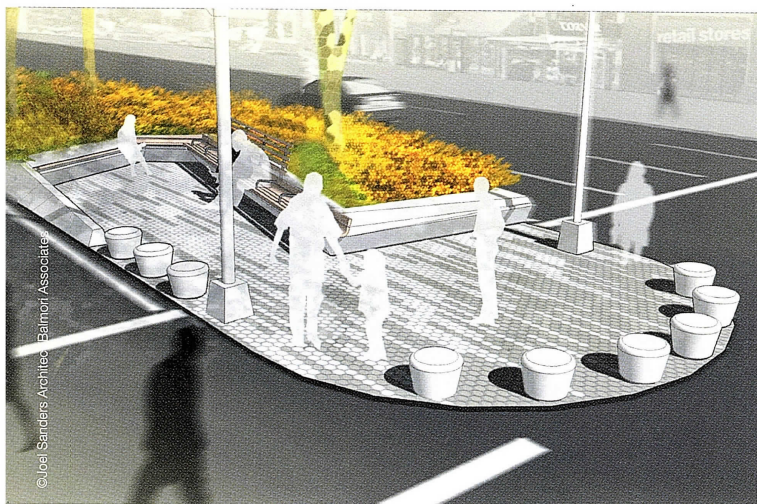
The partners' involvement in retail projects at other firms – Bennett while at OMA helped design Prada stores, and Foster at WORKac assisted with Anthropologie stores – got them interested in how to engage the public for more general benefit. The firm has advised Macro-Sea, a development company that takes on "interim-use projects that transform and energize the urban landscape." Their collaboration has included last year's Park Avenue South mobile pools. VA is also working with the city of Cardona in Spain to develop a master plan to transform the dense, medieval town of 5,000 into an environment that will support active, healthy lifestyles, and will include a new community center to encourage fitness and sports.

By staying open to opportunities and flexible in their operations, these firms have found different ways to pursue their own design directions and develop client relationships that will sustain them. They are expanding both the role of architecture and ways of practice. ■

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



Soluri Architecture: The 60,000-square-foot Civic Building in University Place, WA, includes the city hall, the police department, a library, and commercial tenants.

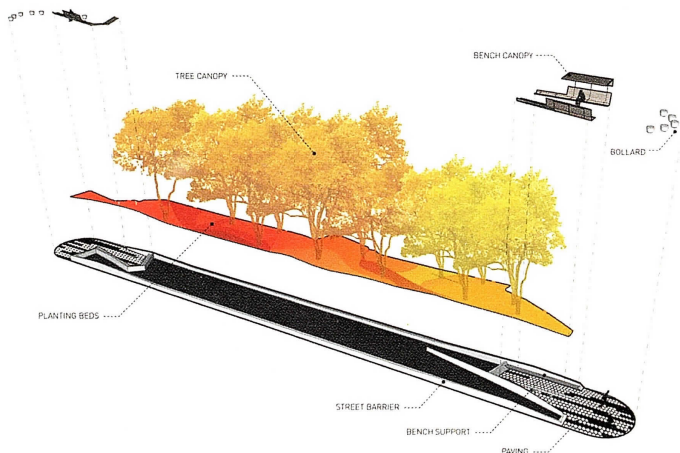


Breaking Barriers

How some small NYC firms are bridging the architecture/landscape divide

BY LISA DELGADO

When discussing the relationship between architecture and landscape architecture, one can easily fall into the language of dichotomies: culture versus nature, indoor versus outdoor, hard versus soft. Too many architects see plantings as little more than a frilly border to architecture as the main event. Landscape architects beg to differ and are helping architects create lush settings that lend buildings greater power and perform such useful tasks as keeping stormwater out of overburdened sewers. Spurred by a surge of interest in sustainable design and more holistic ways of thinking, a growing number of architects and landscape designers are collaborating in new ways to bridge the “landscape/architecture divide,” as architect Joel Sanders, AIA, calls it.



(top and above) Joel Sanders Architect/Balmori Associates/Domingo Gonzalez Associates: The Broadway Malls master plan envisions medians along nearly 100 blocks as varied but unified landscapes with meandering paths and seating areas.

Ten-person Joel Sanders Architect recently teamed up with the 15-employee landscape and urban design firm Balmori Associates, along with lighting designer Domingo Gonzalez Associates as consultant, to create the master plan to turn the Broadway Malls, planted traffic medians from 70th Street to 168th Street, into a linear park. In a city like New York, a linear park can be an especially powerful means to create a heightened sense of connection between a landscape and architecture, according to Diana Balmori, FASLA, principal of the eponymous firm. “It runs through a very dense city, its length creating an active corridor for humans and an ecological ‘green corridor’ for many other species,” she says. “The length of a linear park gives it its ecological value. As a continuous greenbelt, it fosters a great variety of biota, from small mammals to birds and plants.” An urban linear park also encourages pedestrian activity and the development of cafés, restaurants, and residences near the park’s access points, as with the High Line. It’s a phenomenon Balmori playfully calls the “centipede effect” because of the myriad legs of heightened activity along a park’s cross streets.

The median is the message

Currently in conceptual design development, the Broadway Malls project came about via designNYC, an organization that pairs designers with non-profits that need work done (see “A Giant, Hardly Sleeping: Pro Bono Sector,” *Oculus*, Fall 2011). In this case, the client is the Broadway Mall Association, a community organization that maintains the medians. Many of the existing medians are rather bleak and uninviting, with seats facing the traffic, Balmori notes. By contrast, the new master plan envisions plentiful and varied greenery, meandering paths, and seating areas that face inward.

Sanders’s and Balmori’s firms focused on creating a “sinuous, integrated approach” to the hard- and softscape, Sanders says. In one potential design, concrete street barriers and benches undulate to echo the curve of a hill. A gradient pattern of dark and light pavers creates a sense of connection to the dark asphalt of the street nearby, and leads the eye forward along the median’s verdant pathway. While the park’s final form may depend on funding, ideally Balmori would like to see every median include pedestrian paths, so the whole stretch of nearly 100 blocks could serve as a walking space. Other design ideas include turbines to capture wind energy from the motion of nearby cars, and reflectors on the sides of the medians so car headlights help illuminate the space at night.

True equals

Since 2006 Balmori and Sanders have taught a studio together at the Yale School of Architecture on what they call “interface design”: the design of the border where landscape and architecture meet. The ideas they developed led them to co-author *Groundwork: Between Landscape and Architecture* (Monacelli Press, 2011), and to collaborate on projects, including a house in Bedford, NY, and a 2012 Olympics equestrian facility for Staten Island. (Though the latter was never built because the Olympics went to London, they regard it as an excellent showcase for their ideas.)

PROJECT: Broadway Malls
 CLIENT: Broadway Mall Association
 LANDSCAPE AND URBAN DESIGN: Balmori Associates
 ARCHITECT: Joel Sanders Architect
 LIGHTING CONSULTANT: Domingo Gonzalez Associates
 INITIATOR: designNYC

PROJECT: Alley Pond Environmental Center, Douglaston, Queens
 CLIENT: NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
 ARCHITECT: Leroy Street Studio
 PROJECT TEAM: Marc Turkel, AIA, RIBA, LEED AP, Shawn Watts, AIA, RA, LEED AP, Morgan Hare, LEED AP, Lesli Stinger, RA, LEED AP, Christine Chang, LEED AP, Sebastijan Jemec
 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: dlandstudio llc
 PROJECT TEAM: Susannah C. Drake, ASLA, AIA, RLA, RA, Halina Steiner
 STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Robert Silman Associates
 MEP ENGINEER: Kohler Ronan
 GEOTECHNICAL, WETLANDS ENGINEER: Langan Engineering and Environmental Services
 LAND SURVEYOR: Munoz Engineering
 LIGHTING DESIGNER: HLB Sherwood Design Engineers
 COST ESTIMATOR: Stuart Lynn Company
 EXPEDITER: JAM Consultants
 ACOUSTIC, IT, SECURITY CONSULTANT: Cerami & Associates
 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT: Viridian Energy & Environmental
 EDUCATION CONSULTANT: Hester St. Collaborative

In such collaborations, the two firms work together at the beginning to come up with the big ideas, Sanders says. Then, during design development, his firm tends to focus more on the hard-scape, and Balmori's on the landscape. At times it can be tricky to convince clients and others that an architecture firm and landscape design firm can be true equals in a collaboration. "Usually either the architect is the lead and hires the landscape architect as a consultant, or vice versa," Sanders explains. "There's always this idea that one of the two is in control." Sometimes clients must be convinced to "let the two be an integrated team from the beginning," he says. "It's an educational process, but eventually the client understands."

Ideally, others such as an ecologist and a sustainable engineer should also be involved from the very start, he adds. "You need to get all these people around a table at the inception of the project, before you commit your design to paper. This should be a holistic design approach that considers interior and exterior in a way that's cohesive, sustainable."

"Teaching tool"

Architecture firm Leroy Street Studio and landscape design firm dlandstudio are another pair of small local firms that have teamed up recently to design an ambitious project: an environmental center in Queens. (The approximately 25-member architecture firm regularly collaborates with the seven-member Brooklyn firm dlandstudio for Parks Department commissions through the Design Excellence program.) Currently in schematic design, the Alley Pond Environmental Center (APEC) project involves redesigning an educational nature center in an area of freshwater and saltwater tidal wetlands near the base of Little Neck Bay. Approximately 50,000 children and college students visit APEC each year to learn

about the wetlands ecosystem and its relationship to the urban environment. "The site has amazing potential to show what architecture and landscape architecture can do together," says Shawn Watts, AIA, LEED AP, a partner at Leroy Street Studio. "Unfortunately, it's because the site has been pretty much destroyed by development." High-speed traffic surrounds the area, and there's a sewage-pumping station nearby.

"Our proposal was to create a building and a landscape together that would act as a teaching tool for kids to show what's happened and how to rectify things that have gone wrong," Watts explains. While the final design is yet to be determined, various eco-friendly tactics include the redesign of an existing education space in a former furniture store, as well as new pavilions, gardens, outdoor classrooms, and courtyards to provide buffers from the traffic noise. An environmental engineer and other consultants are helping to boost the sustainability of the project, which will target LEED Silver or higher.

The collaborative process has involved many joint meetings and site visits, as well as work done by each firm alone but shared by sending scanned drawings back and forth, says Susannah Drake, AIA, ASLA, RLA, RA, principal of dlandstudio. While the process may be conventional, the outcome is anything but. It's "a pool of ideas that we're stirring," Watts says. "When the collaboration is good, it's really good," adds Marc Turkel, AIA, RIBA, LEED AP, another partner at Leroy Street Studio. "The result is better than any of us could've come up with on our own." ■

Lisa Delgado is a freelance journalist who has written for e-Oculus, *The Architect's Newspaper*, *Architectural Record*, *Blueprint*, and *Wired*, among other publications.

Leroy Street Studio/dlandstudio: The new Alley Pond Environmental Center in Douglaston, Queens, will be a LEED-rated educational center focusing on the 635-acre park's wetlands ecosystem.



Launch Pad to Success

Competitions help small and young firms take off – and soar

BY JACQUELINE PEZZILLO, ASSOC. AIA, LEED AP



Experts say that the early, formative years of a child's life have the most influence on the type of adult he or she will become. The same premise can be argued for architects at the beginning of their careers. Creativity and experience nurtured during a firm's conception and initial stages of growth will influence a practice's output for years to come. As more and more small firms are established, these designers, who may not necessarily have clients knocking at the door, ardently seek outlets to give their fledgling firm a boost. Competitions provide the much-needed nourishment for both young and established small firms to experiment, gain exposure, and exercise their creativity.

Forming an identity

"Entering any competition is always an opportunity to stop and reflect on who you are, what you make, and how you make it," says Matthew Bremer, AIA, former co-chair of the New Practices New York (NPNY) Committee. Bremer, a principal at Architecture in Formation and a recipient of the 2009 AIA Young Architects Award, notes the impact that winning competitions has had on his practice, citing his firm's successful partnership with FXFOWLE, Curtis + Ginsberg Architects, and Rader+Crews Architecture/Landscape Architecture for The Navy Green planning and mixed-use development competition in 2007.

Many designers, establishing their own practices or beginning to work independently, hone their creativity through competitions, a vehicle for young architects and small firms to present them-

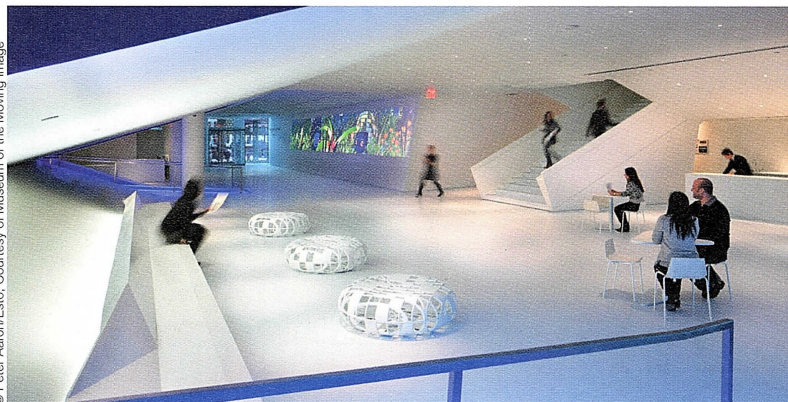
(above) Interboro Partners: winner of the 2011 MoMA/PS.1 Young Architects Program, the firm attributes the award of commissioned work such as LentSpace, a temporary exhibition plaza for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, to the experience and exposure garnered through entering competitions.

selves to peers, potential clients, and the general public. Competitions also offer a testing ground for experimentation, allowing designers such as Jeeyong An, AIA, principal of MANIFESTO Architecture, to develop ideas without client intervention. Front Studio, a firm of 10 in New York and Philadelphia, welcomes competitions as part of the firm's portfolio mix to participate in larger dialogues in urban design and global conversations about architecture. Georgeen Theodore, AIA, and her partners, Tobias Armbrorst and Daniel D'Oca, used competitions to establish themselves in the profession and cultivate a unique style when launching their firm, Interboro Partners, in 2002. Interboro, winner of the 2005 Architectural League New York Young Architects Forum (now Prize for Young Architects and Designers) and NPNY in 2006, continues to investigate its identity in this manner, most recently through a win in the 2011 MoMA/PS.1 Young Architects competition for its design, "Holding Pattern."

Gaining credibility and exposure

Competitions open the door to commissions that build reputations and experience, so that small or young firms can compete effectively for clients who will only consider experienced firms. The AIANY Emerging New York Architects (ENYA) Committee's biennial ideas competition is a portfolio builder, according to Venesa Alicea, AIA, 2011 ENYA co-chair, and it helps young firms utilize unbillable time to serve them well into the future. This year's ENYA competition, The Harlem Edge: Cultivating Connections, seeks to transition from ideas competition to built work by engendering a

(below) Leeser Architecture: the \$67-million renovation and expansion of the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, Queens, completed in January 2011, was the result of an invited competition.



© Peter Aaron/Esto, Courtesy of Museum of the Moving Image

dialogue between the winners and the community where the competition site is located. An exhibition of winners and selected entries will open at the Center for Architecture in July 2012. Realizing that the potential for built work is the biggest draw for competition entrants, Alicea has been looking toward instituting a design-build competition to entice more small firms to engage.

Thomas Leaser, principal of Leaser Architecture, has made the pursuit of both open and invited competitions a tenet of his firm's philosophy. Thanks to this practice, his firm was awarded the renovation and expansion of the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, completed in January 2011. It has also garnered international press for winning and finalist competition designs, such as the World Mammoth and Permafrost Museum and the Moscow Polytechnic Museum, both in Russia. Generating a ripple effect, Leaser has gained public recognition and earned credibility as a designer of cultural facilities, largely through unbuilt work. His firm has nearly tripled in size to a staff of 15, was an exhibitor at the Venice Biennale in 2004 and 2008, and has won work participating in invited competitions in Thailand, the Middle East, and Europe.

Promoting the profession

HWKN, winner of the 2012 MoMA/P.S.1 Young Architects Program, was established in 2006 when Marc Kushner, AIA, and Matthias Hollwich collaborated on an entry in the inaugural eVolo Skyscraper Competition. Kushner refers to the competition as a "magical experience," and credits it as the impetus for a "shotgun wedding" with Hollwich to launch HWKN shortly thereafter. Kushner, who also co-founded the website Architizer.com with Hollwich, has espoused competitions as a best practice in both his media business and his design work. Competitions are a way to crack open the insular profession of architecture, according to Kushner, who created Architizer.com to help potential clients find architects from among its members, as well as engage design fans. In 2011 Architizer.com was an influential partner in the BOFFO Building Fashion competition, which paired architects with fashion designers (see "The Lure of Pop-ups," *Oculus*, Fall 2011). This year the site sponsored the New York City AIDS Memorial Park Competition, strategically ensuring public exposure by engaging Whoopi Goldberg as a jury member.

Most competitions try to generate publicity through exhibitions of winning entries. These exhibitions offer small firms a public forum to present their work, simultaneously elevating the firm's reputation and introducing it to potential clients and collaborators. Marc Clemenceau Bailly, AIA, a partner

HWKN: METreePOLIS received Honorable Mention in the History Channel Future City Competition, which provided additional mileage for the firm, landing second place for the IBM Engineering Innovation Award and becoming the subject of public presentations and media coverage.



at Gage/Clemenceau Architects (a 2011 BOFFO winner), and former winner and current co-chair of the NPNY committee, has experienced the momentum of public exhibition firsthand. Showing relevant built work is the best way to build confidence among potential clients, he says, but P.R. exposure is next best. Clemenceau sees publicity related to competitions as a stepping-stone to winning work, and both he and NPNY co-chair Philipp von Dalwig, Assoc. AIA, are committed to providing an international platform, most recently exporting NPNY winners to the São Paulo Biennial and hosting New Practices São Paulo winners at the Center for Architecture in New York.

Competitions, ideas-based or resulting in commissionable work, are an opportunity for small firms to define themselves with fewer constraints and promising rewards. The greatest challenge, however, lies in translating competition work into long-term return on investment that will propel a small firm forward. Kushner's rule of thumb is to maintain an MBA mindset, investigating the end result of a competition while always asking, "What's in it for me?" ■

Jacqueline Pezzillo is an architectural journalist and a regular contributor to *Oculus* and e-*Oculus*.

Competition Snapshots

New Practices New York

Biennial portfolio competition to recognize and promote new and innovative NYC architecture and design firms.

SPONSOR: AIANY New Practices Committee

PERKS OF WINNING:

Inclusion in the New Practices New York exhibition at the Center for Architecture • Participation at the AIA National Convention • Free one-year AIANY membership • Free one-year subscription to *The Architect's Newspaper*
CONTACT: npny-aia.org

ENYA Biennial Ideas Competition

Poses a real-world design challenge grounded in the context of New York City.

SPONSOR: AIANY Emerging New York Architects Committee

PERKS OF WINNING:

Monetary prizes up to \$5000 • Exhibition at the Center for Architecture and online gallery • Publication in catalog with international distribution • Invitation to be a jury member for next ENYA ideas competition
CONTACT: aiany.org

ENYA Merit Award

Annually recognizes significant contributions of AIANY Chapter members at early stage of their career.

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CONTACT: aiany.org

Architectural League Prize for Young Architects and Designers

Annual competition to recognize specific high-quality works.

SPONSOR: Architectural League Young Architects & Designers Committee

PERKS OF WINNING:

Inclusion in public presentations, an on-line installation, podcasts, and an exhibition • \$1,000 monetary prize and stipend for travel and exhibit installation • Publication in catalog by the Architectural League and Princeton Architectural Press
CONTACT: archleague.org

MoMA/P.S.1 Young Architects Program

Annual competition that gives emerging architects the opportunity to build projects at MoMA/P.S.1's Long Island City museum.

SPONSOR: MoMA/P.S.1

Perks of Winning: Claim to designing installation for one of NYC's most prominent public outdoor summer spaces • Publicity and numerous publication opportunities
CONTACT: momaps1.org

Raves + Reviews

REVIEWS BY STANLEY STARK, FAIA

The Spirit of Cities: Why the Identity of a City Matters in a Global Age

By Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit

Bell and de-Shalit, two social scientists and political theorists, propose that cities with a strongly defined ethos (a sense of place, personality, culture, and meaning – that is, a spirit) often have international reputations. These cities draw people to them, and their ethos contributes to the diversity that makes social life valuable and interesting. The authors posit a linkage between this identity and a quality they have named “civicism” – the sentiment of urban pride centered on one of the city’s predominant defining characteristics.

The authors examine nine cities – Jerusalem, Montreal, Singapore, Hong Kong, Beijing, Oxford, Berlin, Paris, and New York – and the personality that characterizes each one (“ambition” in New York, for example, and “materialism” in Hong Kong). The choices are intertwined with the authors’ personal histories and careers, yielding a mixture of meaningful anecdotes and insightful observations.

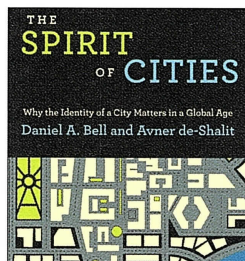
De-Shalit looks at cities through environmental theory and how urban environments talk to their residents via form, urban systems, and buildings. Bell sees cities as comparative and particular civilizations. While national differences are flattening out in response to global pressures, urban particularity flourishes. Cities provide room for these particular and unrefined cultures to grow.

Despite the inconsistent quality of the examples provided, Bell and de-Shalit put forth a provocative thesis, and they present it in a rich brew of insights, anecdotes, and ideas that can benefit anyone with a stake in the urban environment.

Bertrand Goldberg: The Architecture of Invention

Edited by Zoe Ryan. With essays by Alison Fisher, Zoe Ryan, Elizabeth A.T. Smith, and Sarah Whiting. Bertrand Goldberg (1913–1997) was a prolific and notable Chicago-based designer of large-scale urban projects. He is most famous for Marina City, a startling and powerful residential complex in downtown Chicago; the Prentice Women’s Hospital in Chicago; and the Health Sciences Center at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

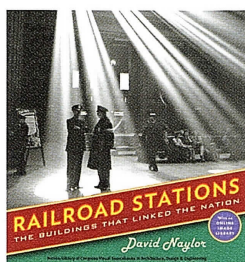
Goldberg was originally trained in the Modernist Bauhaus tradition; he worked with Mies van der Rohe in Berlin and studied at both the



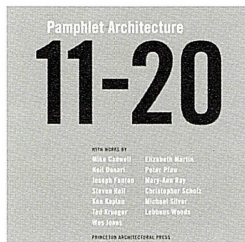
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011, 360 pp. \$35



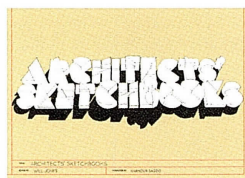
Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2011, 192 pp. \$60



New York: W.W. Norton/Library of Congress, 2012, 336 pp. \$75



New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011, 604 pp. \$45



New York: Metropolis Books, 2011. 352 pp. \$49.95

Bauhaus Dessau and Chicago’s Armour Institute of Technology (later IIT). His mature works embraced the approaches and styles of Archigram and the Metabolists of Japan. The integration of urban design and large-scale planning and technology, along with the adventurous use of precast concrete and new materials, became preeminent themes of his work. He also focused these preoccupations on an intimate scale through his elegant furniture designs.

This collection of essays, which accompanied the recent Goldberg retrospective at the Art Institute of Chicago, traces the designer’s career, the development of his style, and the varied streams of influence that his work has had on the current generation of practicing architects. The essays also reflect upon how, in a profession as episodic as architecture, a career might develop, mature, and then endure.

Noted but Not Reviewed

Railroad Stations: The Buildings That Linked the Nation

By David Naylor

A profusely illustrated survey of America’s railroad stations. The richness and cleverness of these designs are startling.

Pamphlet Architecture 11-20

With works by Mike Cadwell, Neil Denari, Joseph Fenton, Steven Holl, Ken Kaplan, Ted Krueger, Wes Jones, Elizabeth Martin, Peter Pfau, Mary-Ann Ray, Christopher Scholz, Michael Silver, Lebbeus Woods. The most recent compendium of the Pamphlet Architecture series begun by Steven Holl and William Stout in 1978 to publish the works, theories, and investigations by a new generation of unheralded architects, although some of the contributors are by now well known.

Architects’ Sketchbooks

Edited by Will Jones. Forward by Narinder Sagoo. Drawings by hand. Drawings by computer. A vast selection of drawing-as-thinking by architects.

Stanley Stark, FAIA, is director of strategic planning at Vanguard Construction and Development Co., Inc. He served as chair of the Oculus Committee from 2005 to 2007.



In 1993, the tiny, experimental Storefront for Art and Architecture helped set Steven Holl's career in motion

BY JOHN MORRIS DIXON, FAIA

The winner of this year's American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal, Steven Holl, FAIA, was the quintessential emerging architect back in 1993. That year he worked with the artist Vito Acconci to complete one of Manhattan's smallest cultural landmarks, the Storefront for Art and Architecture. While he is now recognized for his design accomplishments on three continents, the Storefront exemplifies the kind of offbeat project that often helps boost an exceptional design talent into prominence.

Although it may look like an architectural work to us, Holl says the Storefront façade, with its variety of hinged panels, was "definitely a collaboration." He likes working with artists, seeing such projects as "an extension of architecture." And the hinged panels here are, in fact, an extension of a concept Holl had applied in a housing complex in Fukuoka, Japan, completed in 1991. There, hinged panels transform open-planned apartments into discreet rooms. But the Holl-Acconci collaboration went further, with panels "rotating on every axis."

Originally intended as a temporary installation, the memorable street wall quickly became a design landmark. As it aged, the Storefront board repeatedly decided to retain it. And in 2008, Holl advised on its restoration, this time with more durable materials (and other features, like an accessible entrance and better air conditioning).

While it was a creative coup, the Storefront was just the most visible local product of a practice that had been evolving slowly for years. Holl started his own practice in 1977, at 30. As he designed an office interior here, a weekend house there, he laid the groundwork for more adventurous projects. He recalls that a key strategy was to sleep for several years "on a shelf" in his early loft-building office. During those years, he says, "the loft was like a grant" that allowed him to do experimental work

and to enter design competitions. To date he has participated in 89 design competitions, which have yielded many of his most prominent commissions.

The year Storefront was completed, Holl won an international competition for his breakthrough project. His design was chosen from among 516 entries for the modern art museum in Helsinki. Following the longstanding tradition of anonymous competitions, he labeled his submission with the Greek word *chiasma*, meaning "intertwining." The name was adopted along with the design, so the museum, completed in 1998, is known today as Kiasma. Once he was awarded that commission, Holl was able to move out of his "cold-water flat" office and never had fewer than six employees.

Notable among his numerous competition-winning works are the addition to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City (completed 2007) and the Vanke Center, a.k.a. the Horizontal Skyscraper, in Shenzhen, China (2009), both recipients of AIA Honor Awards. Winner of a 2009 design competition, and now under construction, is a new building for the Glasgow School of Art, intended to complement the revered 1909 school designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

In six years, the Storefront will be eligible for the AIA Twenty-five Year Award. Such an honor might seem unlikely, but this year's honoree is the home of Frank Gehry, FAIA, in Santa Monica, CA, which was the quirky, ephemeral-looking product of an emerging talent back in 1978.

John Morris Dixon, FAIA, left the drafting board for journalism in 1960 and was editor of *Progressive Architecture* from 1972 to 1996. He continues to write for a number of publications, and he received AIANY's 2011 Stephen A. Kliment Oculus Award for Excellence in Journalism.

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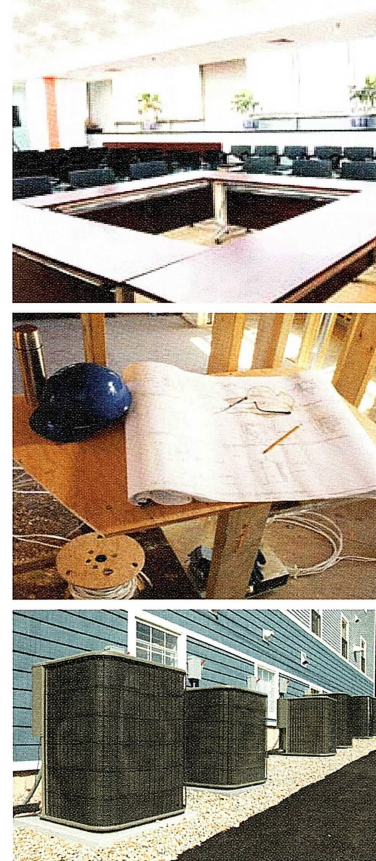


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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Smaller than a Breadbox

While many theoreticians – who may or may not be too closely in touch with real life – are still engaging in the idolatry of large size, with practical people in the actual world there is a tremendous longing and striving to profit, if at all possible, from the convenience, humanity and manageability of smallness.

—E.F. Schumacher in
*Small Is Beautiful: Economics
as if People Mattered*, 1973

It's the little things you
do / That show me
how big you are.

—Natasha Bedingfield in
"Size Matters," 2004

The winner in the
small-business game
is the owner who has
discovered that it's
everything that makes
the difference – the
big things and the little
things and all the in-
between things.

—Eric Tyson and Jim Schell in
*Small Business for
Dummies*, 2008

It's an optical thing.
The smaller the table,
the larger the plate
looks.

—The commenter "whatidsay"
on The Gothamist weblog,
08/09/2011

New York has been called the city of big dreams, big ambitions, and big egos. And the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, with close to 5,000 members, is the largest AIA component. Many assume it is composed, primarily, of big firms. But while there are architectural offices in our city that employ more than 100 people, membership data indicate that over 85% of AIANY firms have fewer than 10 people. Firms have downsized during the economic downturn, but even several years back, 71% of firms had fewer than 10.

Last year the "New York New Work" exhibition dominated the advertising space at the West 4th Street subway station during our month-long Archtober festival. On view were 221 projects designed by 130 architectural firms, 55 of which have 10 or fewer staff members. Typical of the newer practices in the show was Massforma Architects, a three-person studio founded in 2010. Its design principal, Alfred Huang, AIA, LEED AP, formerly at SOM, writes: "We are a young architectural and interior design practice that is passionate about bringing smart design to homes and small businesses. We want to design simple and beautiful solutions that delight our clients and their communities." Massforma's project was a poetically engaging lakeside retreat in upstate New York.

Another project featured was the 1,840-square-foot Breadbox Café in Long Island City. It was designed by ODA-Architecture, whose principals, Eran Chan, P. Christian Bailey, LEED AP, and Ryoko Okada, founded the firm in 2007 after working together at Perkins Eastman. Adaptive reuse of a former gas station incorporates a variety of sustainable and innovative features, including steel channels with wooden dough rollers in the skin of the building, and concrete block with grass growing where before there was only asphalt.

"Cave Bar" and "House Bar" – two proposals for a 36-seat restaurant in the East Village – are currently being displayed on various blogs. Designed by Alexandra Barker, AIA, LEED AP, and Reid Freeman, AIA, in collaboration with Cooper Hanlin Designs, the projects express the design philosophy of Barker Freeman Design Office,

which, according to its website, "employs material research, fabrication technologies, and system design as generative tools in the development of multivalent responsive spatial solutions." The Barker Freeman projects in "New York New Work" were in Mongolia and Moscow, showing that small firms can and do work internationally.

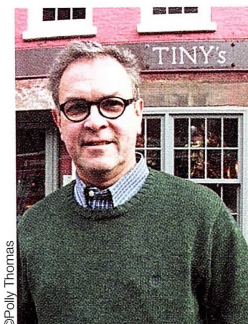
In regard to firm capability, does size matter? Some architects explain why small firms supply more personal and varied service. "We take on the craziest small projects sometimes," says Virginia Kindred, AIA, of the 10-person Redtop Architects. "Our goals are not huge. We'll take on something super low-budget if it's a way to do excellent work that really matters."

Why do some nascent firms survive while others succumb to the difficulties of paying rent and salaries, collecting fees, and finding new commissions? Perhaps the comparison of a large restaurant like the Grand Central Oyster Bar and a small bistro like Tiny's on West Broadway provides a good metaphor. In a successful small restaurant, the blog reviews tend to laud the personal service, interaction with the chef, imaginative combinations of flavor, and presentation. The hours may be horrendous and the margins minimal, but the décor is engaging and the regulars rave. It's the same with architects. The AIANY jury comments for the awards won by small firms such as Marble Fairbanks and MANIFESTO Architects (née Ginseng Chicken) are pithy morsels, delightful and gratifying amuse-bouches.

Small restaurants are a trend in big cities. Active design proponents have accused architects, urban designers, landscape architects, and interior designers of being complicit in maladies such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. People need to walk more, take the stairs, bike, and jog. But small-plate specials at restaurants and calorie counts on food packaging are increasingly apparent. Diminutive restaurants are often ahead of the curve, demonstrating how less can be more. Can architects be far behind?

Rick Bell, FAIA

Executive Director, AIA New York Chapter



Bell at Tiny's

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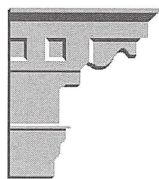
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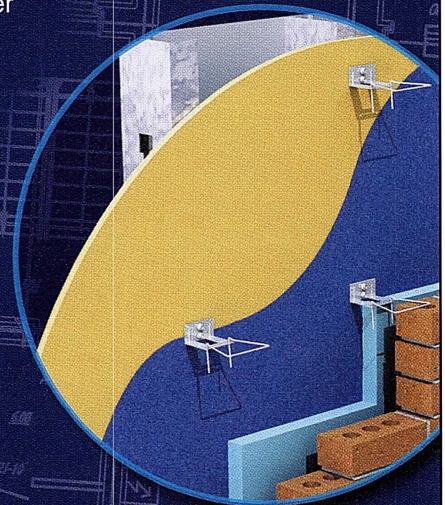
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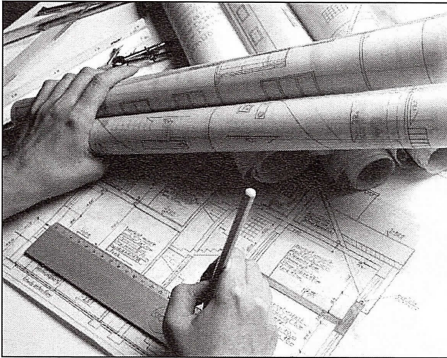
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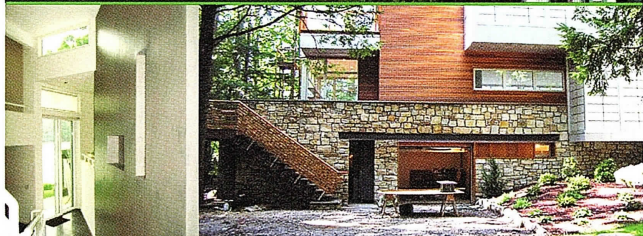
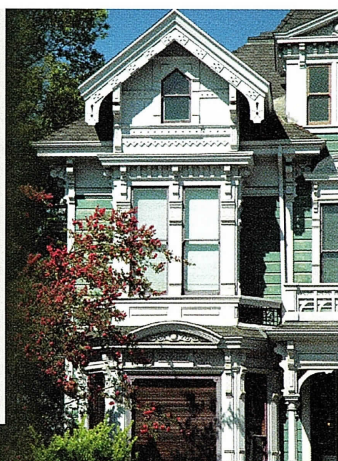
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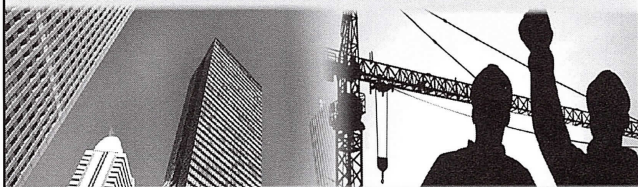
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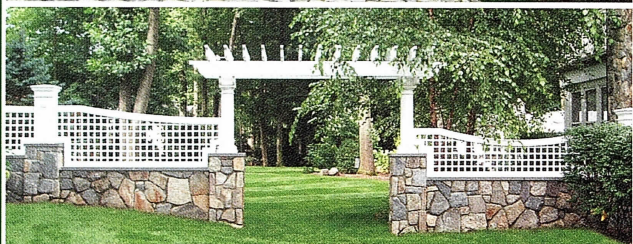
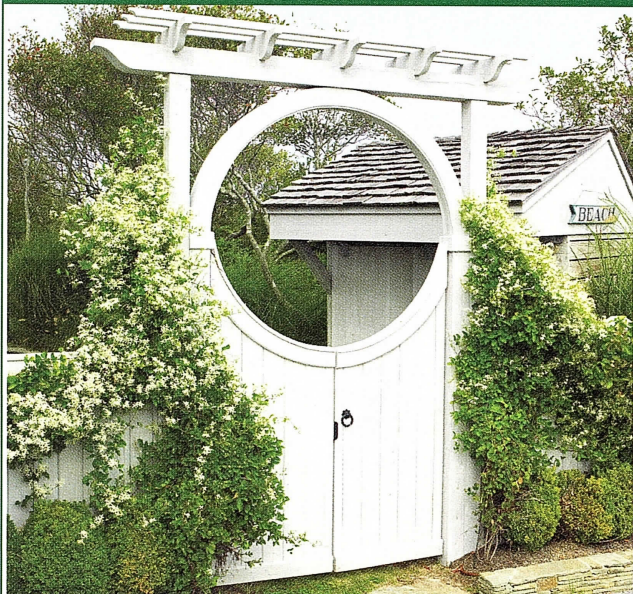
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