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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

By Tracy Certo

There we were, bumper to bumper

on the Harbor Freeway in L.A., when we suddenly found ourselves under a mammoth concrete structure that jutted forth and towered over us. What fresh freeway hell was this? As we soon discovered, it was another multi-lane freeway soaring overhead—an unsettling encounter, especially in that earthquake-prone area.

It’s been ten years since we moved from L.A. and a lot has changed, notably the traffic. One friend from Thousand Oaks is in the same house and same job yet, his commute has doubled in a decade, from 45 minutes to 90.

In West L.A. where we used to live, it’s a logjam. We averaged 15 mph on the San Diego Freeway the few times we ventured on it. The short cuts we knew and loved aren’t very short anymore. We were late everywhere we went.

Weeks later, in a phone conversation with Congressman Earl Blumenauer (page 16), I mentioned L.A. The Congressman had just made a solid case advocating for incorporating really good design in infrastructure. At one point, he said that people will no longer settle for “chunks of concrete” in highways and other similar projects. That’s when I asked his opinion of the proposed freeway stacked on top of an existing freeway to ease the unbearable congestion in the San Fernando Valley. He paused for just a second. “Sub-par,” he said in quiet disgust.

Having just experienced it, I would have to agree.

Los Angeles is a great place to live if you’re an orange, as Fred Allen said. Or, if you know where to go. Despite its many faults (bad pun), I love L.A. and, especially, Malibu, which is where we went. In the spectacular and mysteriously uncrowded canyons, we hiked for miles without seeing anyone.

At the Colony, that fabled wealthy strip of beach, a long fence and a stern sign warned about trespassing on the hallowed ground. I crashed the gate, anyway, to continue my run only to discover that in a city of more than 8 million, I was alone on the beach. It was worth risking arrest.

Unofficially, people like me who stay politely along the breakwater are tolerated in the forbidden zone, but not those who park their coolers on the sand. The big issue is: who owns the rights to a beach? It’s hotly debated today just as it was ten years ago. And may I suggest another? Beach infrastructure. Those signs and fences are ugly in more ways than one.

On a much brighter note, L.A. now boasts the spectacular Getty Center, Richard Meier’s shining mountain-top complex of travertine marble with a 360-degree view of the city and ocean. Let’s talk great design in infrastructure. If you have billions to spend, the sky’s the limit and here’s proof.

Start with the smooth and elegant tram that winds up the mountain and the cool marble and glass station stops. From the start, you know you’re embarking on a very special journey. Even the public restrooms and picnic area are noteworthy and it’s all free, except for the parking.

More than one friend told me if we were short on time, to go to the Getty for the architecture and skip the collections. Architecture eclipsing its function? In this case, yes. Among the many wonderful tours offered is the popular Architecture Tour.

It leads to the Robert Irwin Garden “a sculpture in the form of a garden inspiring to be art” according to its creator. The sculpture/garden/art is so visually stunning and soul-stirring that you’re reluctant to leave, even for natural light galleries showcasing masterpieces.

The temperature was in the high seventies, the sun just was just breaking through the morning haze and life was good. For oranges. And those on top of the world at the Getty Center. Although we hated to leave, it will be our first stop when we return. Of course, we know an alternate route that bypasses the freeway.

While doing some background research on Earl Blumenauer, I came across his recent piece in Landscape Architect Magazine. As you can see, we opted to run that in this issue, too (page 4). In fact, if I had my wish Blumenauer would have joined us at the Roundtable discussion on design issues in infrastructure (page 6) at the AIA office. Then we could have grilled him—um, I mean inquired politely—on what it really takes to make well-designed public works projects.
Taking the Public Hostage — Responding to Terrorism

By Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon)

From my first visit to Washington, DC, the highlight of each trip was a morning run down the Mall. The routine never varied. I visited the memorials to Lincoln and Jefferson, then the Vietnam memorial to sense the pain of loss suffered by so many and the hope of reconciliation and healing. I would circle the U.S. Capitol, an awe-inspiring monument to democracy.

Since my election to Congress six years ago, these runs have become a morning ritual, with the Mall’s symbolic reminder of the significance of each day’s work. Sadly, since September 11th, this source of pride and inspiration has become a daily reminder of our continuing inability to find intelligent ways to protect both our citizens and our national heritage.

Concrete barriers litter the landscape. They wall off our citizens not just from vital symbols of our government, but from the government itself. Visual blight is compounded by the disruption of pedestrian and vehicle movements in and around the Capitol and the White House. We are cheating the experience of millions of visitors, as well as the thousands who work here. Even more troubling, these security measures may actually make people less safe.

These remedies create a false sense of security, while buildings and crowds remain vulnerable. By spending huge sums of money on only marginally useful construction, we divert money and attention from other more effective means. Worst of all, we may be putting people in danger. Transforming our most important and heavily trafficked public spaces into barrier-strewn obstacle courses will also interfere with rescue efforts in the event of actual attack or accident. Sadly, these cold, ugly and ineffectual monuments to our fear mean that in a sense, the terrorists are winning another battle. They are taking away our public spaces and freedom of movement.

Poorly designed security measures can have a devastating effect on entire communities. The extended closure of National Airport resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs, some perhaps permanently, and the displacement of thousands of others. The roads that have been closed around the Capitol and the White House have snarled traffic and frustrated commuters. Suppos-
Henry Hornbostel Tours

The following special events are being planned in conjunction with the release of a 272-page hardbound book, "Henry Hornbostel: An Architect's Master Touch." Advance reservations are required and space is limited. Some tours include refreshments and book signing with Walter Kidney. For more information, call 412-471-5808, ext. 527 or email: marylu@pghfl.org.

Sunday, October 20 2 – 5 p.m.
WALKING TOUR: Carnegie Mellon University's Original Campus
MEETING LOCATION: Outside the main entrance to Hunt Library, facing the central lawn.
TOUR LEADERS: Paul Tellers, AIA, university architect and Martin Aurand, archivist, both from Carnegie Mellon University; Charles L. Rosenblum, architectural historian and critic; Walter C. Kidney, architectural historian, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation. 
Reservations by October 16.

Tuesday, October 22 7 – 9 p.m.
AUTHOR'S RECEPTION & TOUR
Rodef Shalom Congregation, Shadyside
Sylvia Busis of Rodef Shalom will lead tours of the temple, beginning at 7:00 p.m. and at 8:15 p.m. Reservations by October 18.

Friday, October 25 12 noon – 1:30 p.m.
WALKING TOUR: Hornbostel in Downtown Pittsburgh
TOUR LEADERS: David Vater, AIA; Lu Donnelly, architectural historian; Albert Tannler, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation; Charles L. Rosenblum, architectural historian and critic. Reservations by October 23rd.

Sunday, October 27 2 – 6 p.m.
BUS AND WALKING TOUR: Hornbostel in the East End
TOUR LEADERS: David Vater, AIA; Lu Donnelly, architectural historian; and Charles L. Rosenblum, architectural historian and critic. Seven buildings/memorials designed by Hornbostel with a visit to Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial and two private homes. Reservations by October 21.

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AIMING FOR BETTER DESIGN IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE
A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

In an AIA Pittsburgh first, we recently brought together a small group to discuss the problems and possible solutions to getting higher standards of design in public infrastructure. Henry Nutbrown of Port Authority graciously agreed to attend to represent the infrastructure side. Eloise Hirsh, former director of City Planning, lent her expertise along with two architects who are very active in the community, Paul Tellers, AIA of Carnegie Mellon University and Rob Pfaffmann, AIA of Pfaffmann + Associates. Anne Swager, Hon. AIA executive director of AIA Pittsburgh moderated. Columns thanks all of our participants for their commitment of time and energy to an issue of importance to all of us.
**Columns**: We'll start the discussion by asking: what are the barriers to good design in the public infrastructure? In identifying the barriers we can talk about the process of change and what it will take to incorporate good design.

**Pfaffmann**: Back when I was the AIA president in 1992, that was one of my key agenda items, to address the architect's involvement with the infrastructure of the city and get together with the Transportation for Livable Cities conference that was happening in Pittsburgh to do a charrette of the Mon River crossing.

I had a wonderful time working with the Port Authority trying to figure out how to do that and, following that, the Port Authority did its own set of workshops looking at alternatives to the bridge. I think that as architects we had an influence on their workshop in terms of putting together an open process to look at design. I think that's a very important aspect of our role in the AIA—being instigators of that kind of public forum, to look at design before it gets too far into the process.

**Telliers**: It seems like the government authority or whoever is responsible for maintaining or changing or improving infrastructure won't reach out to the design community. It's up to the design community to step forward as you just described. I recall that process—in a friendly way—that said these are the issues and try to engage the government authority and whoever is responsible for creating the infrastructure and dialogue. The public process is essential but it needs to be a controlled one. There's concern of adding costs or delaying the project or causing dissent.

From my own personal experience, we've had a great deal of success in Oakland dealing with tasks forces engaging Penn Dot in a discussion about the Forbes Bridges—at the Blvd. of the Allies and Forbes at the west of Oakland. To make a long story short, I think this ongoing dialogue is going to result in a better design. And I think Penn Dot and their design team from Wilbur Smith are engaged in this conversation. They didn't ask for our help but they got it.

**Columns**: How did they get it?

**Telliers**: We started with a committee. People from the Department of City Planning and the Oakland Task force sat down with Penn DOT. They agreed to participate in a process with the understanding that they had a budget and weren't able to add money for the process. So we came up with some foundation money to engage a consultant to the Oakland Task Force, Environmental Planning & Design. So they could grapple with difficult design issues, aesthetics in the broader sense—landscaping, lighting, and making sure the fabric of Oakland was sewn into this. Rob's actually been involved in working with the Oakland Planning & Development Corporation making sure that development opportunities in this area are going to be enhanced by the bridge project.

**Pfaffmann**: Approximately a million square feet of space in the Oakland portal. If you don't do it right it isn't going to be desirable for development.

**Hirsh**: I'd like to make a change in the title of this because saying good design in infrastructure isn't saying enough. Things are designed to national and international standards and designed around safety and liability issues which are different from aesthetic issues. (Referring to Nutbrown) One thing you always used to say when you came into a meeting was, "Well I can't see why we can't design this for an award."

**Nutbrown**: I would start off by arguing with that question of why can't we have good design? Every design that is put out is a good design. Can it be made better? We wouldn't put out a bad design. For the most part, public works is done for utility. You need to get across the river so you design a bridge. Does the bridge have a lot of gingerbread on it, as we did in the distant past like the very good-looking 16" St. bridge? It's about eliminating dollars. When you consider all the things that have to be accomplished to keep the infrastructure in a state of good repair and still build for our future, there are only so many dollars in place. If you try to accomplish all those things and try to add a lot of aesthetic considerations to the project, then you won't get as many projects built.

**Hirsh**: I don't know if that's true. The bridge barriers from other states that we've been working on with Penn Dot don't cost any more. They just are designed differently. It added costs to the project only because we did them late. But the costs for a lot of these things is not that much more except, I understand, there's a maintenance difference between concrete and steel beams.
Pfaffmann: I had an experience with the Byways to the Past Conference that Penn DOT and Preservation Pennsylvania co-sponsored. The heads of the Maryland or Kentucky DOTs outlined the federal highway administration program for “Context Sensitive Design” (CSD). I was really impressed with it. I wasn’t expecting to see such support for design issues.

Hirsh: Penn DOT’s starting to do something like that.

Pfaffmann: That’s right, they changed the name of it to “context sensitive solutions.” It reflects a pragmatic aspect of getting things done and getting things built.

One of the things the DOT officials said was that engineering agencies have always resisted community input. They end up spending more money because they view community input as an impediment and it delays the project 10, 15 years. If they had just gone along with what the community wanted, they would have saved money.

The other point he made is: our educational system fails us. Engineers don’t have the experience in community planning and facilitation and they don’t have experience in design—their capital D, not design in terms of engineering but the architectural and aesthetic, the integral aspect of how you develop a structure. What a lot of the engineers said is, these are the problems we usually run into when we have failure. He was advocating that upfront, the money has to be allocated properly, recognizing that they will save money in the end.

Swager: (To Nutbrown) We had a conversation years ago about the parkway going under where the Wabash bridge was supposed to go over. The Wabash Bridge project got killed and that day you made the decision that the highway had to come back up. My recollection is that regulations prohibited you from doing anything else because you weren’t allowed to have money spent on aesthetics.

Nutbrown: When planning for the Wabash Bridge was underway, Penn DOT was also planning the parkway renovations and the long viaduct from the Ft. Pitt Bridge to Grant St. which is a bigger project than the Ft. Pitt Bridge. The idea of lowering the parkway to the point where it could be flooded was not one that was greatly embraced by Penn DOT or the Federal Highway Administration. But when we saw the benefit of having a bridge across the river that will be operable 365 days a year and, after considerable engineering, we saw the two could co-exist and the parkway would only be flooded we estimated once every seven years.

That’s the eastbound parkway—the westbound gets flooded every year, year and a half and it stays flooded longer—so we could design this at higher elevation.

That changed the whole character of the project from one where you simply took off the concrete bridge deck, which was in very bad shape, to taking off the bridge deck and beams and at the very simplest, lower the pier shafts, cut them off and rebuild at a lower elevation. It wasn’t quite that simple because once you allow into a flooding situation, bridge decks could actually float away like barges.

So you either had to make sure they were held down firmly and could float and then there’d be a portion that would be wall construction and so you had to make sure the design of that would allow itself to be flooded and then allow the water to recede again without causing any failure of the structure. Now those things are all engineering solutions that can be done but just costs more money to do it. It was estimated that the cost difference between simply redecking the bridge to one where you lower it with this new configuration, that was about 15 million. The time difference was 13 months longer in duration. So it cost more money and it took more time and the value of the time on the motorists for the detour. Time of the detour times four dollars an hour was 16 million.

Pfaffmann: This is where I think there’s a lot of argument about how we set our priorities in transportation planning. We add up all those costs and then we say, okay, this is a fifty or hundred year project so that amount of money is relatively small. I think this is what led to the Big Dig in Boston. When all is said and done, all the problems with the overruns and costs, we’ll look back and say that is one of the most important things that American cities have ever done. And I think the frustration we all have with that project is that the relative investment is pennies when you look at the lifespan of the project.

Hirsh: Wait, I feel strongly about this. There was no design issue here, it was political leadership.

Pfaffmann: That’s what I’m talking about.
Hirsh: It's really influencing things that stand in the way of aesthetic design. It has everything to do with what regular citizens in communities will either tolerate or demand. In Pittsburgh, there's not a high level of public outrage and concern for great infrastructure. Our standards are lower. You know, one of the fun things about going to Chicago and getting in a cab? The cab driver talks about the buildings as you drive around because it's a value there, its something they love. We don't have that going here.

Tellers: I think that what you're saying is, if we're arguing for community process--and I can't comment on the Wabash Bridge issue--but if you truly went out and polled the people... 

Hirsh: Henry would have been lynched. He would have been lynched!

Pfaffmann: I agree with you a hundred percent.

Tellers: ...but there wouldn't have been people support for 13 months more time and 15 million more dollars.

Hirsh: That's where political leadership follows, where that public opinion will be.

Tellers: And are you glad they do?

Hirsh: Sometimes yes and sometimes no.

Tellers: These are difficult issues.

Pfaffmann: I guess the question is: what is the job of the design professional in their community advocacy role in terms of calling that to the community's attention? I think that's the issue. And also working for the reform of state and federal government procedures that are more likely to bring that political consensus along. Granted, we have a different culture here than in Boston or Chicago. We can work to begin to change that.

Swager: I'd like to hear Eloise's feelings on the PA barrier project. When the AIA agreed to be the administrator for the barrier project—it was because we would have an opportunity to influence the culture on Penn Dot, to show that if we could put together a good process with architects and civil engineers, it might help everyone come to the table more often in more positive ways. I would like to hear Eloise's views on that process, if it worked and if it would lead to better opportunities.

Hirsh: I think it definitely did work. I think there are folks in the bridge division and the district and Harrisburg who generally enjoyed the process and learned some stuff. I think the whole idea of adding the design concern really got turned up quite a few notches by that process. Once the process started, the folks really cooperated. These were engineers who loved designing stuff and solving stuff. It would not have happened without an absolutely huge political push. Not that some people don't want to do it, but they're already working in 110 capacities. Someone with political push has to make it happen, to make room for it. That's happening on the district level with the 16th St. bridge and the 31st St. bridge so it will all help.

Swager: Those in charge of the bridge division at the state told us that as part of this community process, they would like to develop some tools—maybe a CD, a brochure or something—to start putting together the kinds of solutions that they could live with. So they would have better options to give to communities.

Hirsh: I think that's a really good point. Because they haven't seen a tool like the one that was developed by the local architect firm's streaming video.

Tellers: This is all addressing barriers.

Swager: Just one barrier.

Tellers: If I can take that as one example and expand it a bit. At the Forbes/Blvd. of the Allies project, this has to do with bridges and a problem I don't have a solution for—which is the worst type of problem.

Hirsh: Oh, God, you'll have to collaborate with someone. (Laughs)

Tellers: The problem is spanning openings since bridges by definition span from a to b and with the engineering that exists today, it can be done with box girders—you can build significant bridges with very simple structures. In the glory days of bridge design in Allegheny County, the many bridges that were built by Stanley Rouse are just beautiful, some with added architectural and sculptural elements. The structures are elegant and they're elegant engineering solutions. The trusses, whether they're below the deck or arch above the deck, or the suspension cable like the Three Sisters on the Allegheny River—we love these.

"It's about eliminating dollars. When you consider all the things that have to be accomplished to keep the infrastructure in a state of good repair and still build for our future, there are only so many dollars in place. If you try to accomplish all those things and try to add a lot of aesthetic considerations to the project, then you won't get as many projects built."

HENRY NUTBROWN
This is Pittsburgh. So we were dreaming, in our project at Forbes/Bldv. of the Allies, of doing something in the spirit and the energy of those great bridges. Even bridges of the 60's, like the Ft. Pitt Bridge with the huge sweeping arch trusses, it's just magnificent.

But today, Penn DOT tells us that a box girder is it. We said, how about a single pole and cable suspended structure? What could be simpler? And they said, well, that's failure critical. So they wouldn't accept it. We couldn't make any progress at all on the arch above the deck. And we didn't want anything below the deck because we're trying to increase the aperture below. We wanted a truss or a cable or a suspension bridge or anything above the deck so it would not only satisfy the engineering need of spanning a to b but it would also be visible from a distance like the Ft. Pitt Bridge.

**Nutbrown:** Actually I was still at Penn DOT when that project got started. I shouldn't admit that because I can complete projects faster than that one. But it was Eloise who came to me one day at the very beginning and reminded me: Henry you have to remember now, that this is the gateway to Oakland. It's different than just a bridge to anywhere. We had charged Wilbur Smith our consultant in coming up with unique designs and some of those ideas were arches.

**Tellars:** But they have since been rejected.

**Nutbrown:** Well that may be. But I think you have the attention of Penn Dot that this is the gateway to Oakland due to Eloise.

**Tellars:** We certainly have their attention. What we're pursuing as we speak is an arched girder so we will achieve the philosophical objectives but we're not going to do a truss or a cable suspension.

**Pfaffmann:** One of the challenges of talking about design in that context is, you have a piece of historical structure there at the Blvd. of the Allies that has a strong presence—even the bridge that's there now would be great because of the whole attempt to beautify that road that was built in the 1930s as a classic era. How you would reconcile that with new construction is how you would deal with new construction in old buildings. I think that's an incredible challenge.

**Hirsh:** One of the things that we haven't talked about is significant down grader of public infrastructure. This is true of roadways, parks, comfort stations, all this stuff, and it's stronger in Pennsylvania than other states. Then there's the unfortunate seventies period of antivandalism architecture. People thought if they designed something that said, you can't destroy me, that would solve the problem. In fact, those were the challenges.

**Tellars:** An issue that might relate to that idea is that we have the technology today to do things more simply than the complexity that was demanded of engineering solutions in the past. This might also relate to the idea that in the past there was a different palette of materials. Schenley Park was built with beautiful stone walls and brid trails and all sort of wonderful things in the depression, as I understand it, because the labor costs were extremely low so labor intensive design solutions tended to be more elegant and more complex.

**Pfaffmann:** The CCC and WPA.

**Tellars:** Yes.
Pfaffmann: At the end of this conference I attended, we had a panel discussion and one of the discussions was everyday infrastructure. We have these big special gateway projects but the everyday approach to building a barrier or building a small bridge crossing in a rural area have not been addressed. Ironically, I think that Penn DOT can go back in its archives and see how they did design in the different regions of the state and how they all responded to that leadership of that era. So you had these pattern books of bridge design. The classic ones are the concrete billiards systems with the arched holes punched out of them like you see on the turnpike. The turnpike is a great example of that lost infrastructure. And the turnpike is a good example of how we didn’t have to lose it. A lot of that was done for expediency. In the value system of our design, concrete walls were put on with anti-graffiti paint; they put up the steel barriers with a rash of concrete barriers and you lose all that character of our oldest turnpike. You can still do that safely and within the budget.

So what came out of this is: we should get together. It's not just a preservationist issue—it's about going back and looking at those roots and saying, what parts of those things can we bring forward into a philosophy about pre-engineering a bridge which is already done. A lot of these bridges are pre-engineered in a sense. The engineer is just executing that pre-engineered design. How can you begin to work upfront in that process to change that? Architects are not involved in that aspect of the work and we need to get involved both in the political process and in doing our own small projects with local engineering firms.

Tellers: This conversation has happened many times, that architects have shot themselves in the foot because they're seen as a profession of “let's add art to a project” or lets add costs. Back in the glory days of bridges in Pittsburgh, I sense that architects and engineers worked together. It wasn’t like the bridge was designed and the architect came along and added decoration to it. The pier design and the span design were all integrated into an architectural solution. How have we moved away and further separated ourselves into, you guys do bridges and we do buildings? That's unfortunate.

Swager: Why has that happened? Is there a reason?

Pfaffmann: The nature of the building process changed radically after the war. The state highway construction is probably where that began.

Hirsh: I think it has to do with the education system as well. We had a consultant once who had an architecture degree and a bridge engineering degree.

Tellers: The whole world of design has become so much more specialized. When I first started out as an architect, there were architectural series drawings and an electrical series, a couple of drawings that showed where the light switches went and how to switch them. Now the electric engineering on a simple building—there isn't such a thing as a simple building—involves a lighting consultant, an acoustical consultant and an audiovisual consultant that’s part of the electrical team that gets sewn into the architectural team. The technology is driven to specialization in the profession.

Nutbrown: I wouldn’t put too much blame on the education. When I came out of school, I knew how to design a simple precast beam and I knew how to design a riveting connection. I did not know how to design a bridge. (Laughs) So they throw you in to the workplace with those fundamentals. At that point you meet with other engineers who have squirreled away in secrecy all these things that give them higher predominance within an organization. They have all the cast riveting connections that you can ever think of. They have those in their drawer. They are, you know, sort of heads and shoulders above someone else. It's on the job training where you really get your education and it's that on the job philosophy that's how you develop a project. In terms of leadership, leadership starts at the very top of the critical system and works its way down through the public works division. Most successful projects of that sort start out, for example, the Mon River Bridge. We had the two weekend charrettes because it was required to do that. I can tell you that today it would be a lot simpler and lot less expensive to go with a conventional railroad bridge. But everyone recognizes you don’t stick an old railroad bridge in the middle of Pittsburgh next to the Smithfield Bridge, that most people adore, and even the Ft. Pitt Bridge which I think we've come to admire. We just don’t do that.

Pfaffmann: I still think, though, that the educational system does fail engineers. There was a great conference that

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ANNE SWAGER
“It wasn’t like the bridge was designed and the architect came along and added decoration to it. The pier design and the span design were all integrated into an architectural solution. How have we moved away and further separated ourselves into, you guys do bridges and we do buildings? That’s unfortunate.”

PAUL TELLERS

resulted in a book about the education and culture of architects and engineers—the nature of the training and what is missing from the course curriculum in the engineering degree. I think there are efforts to change that today: the issue of city planning and recognizing that the engineer fits into this larger context of public policy about how cities are designed. And often that it’s not the engineering solution driving the city planning but city planning driving the engineering solution. That’s because they don’t have a sensitivity and a history of city planning or community participation process or historic preservation, those cultural context issues. Even among architects we have that challenge, depending on what school you go to but it’s the reverse problem: how many architects are exposed to the engineering curriculum in a more in-depth way so we know a little more about how engineers do their work? I do think education is key part of it.

Hirsh: I think this is a much more complex problem than saying the public agencies responsible for infrastructure don’t want to do it.

Swager: Right. I agree.

Pfaffmann: Absolutely.

Swager: I think there are a lot of impediments that are built in for a variety of reasons that lead to insensitivity to certain issues but they’re not intentional. Liability is a big one, one that we ran into a lot in designing the barrier, and Penn DOT’s desire to have a TL5 on almost everything.

Hirsh: Liability is the thing that results in getting hideous playground equipment and dumbing down children’s play experience.

Pfaffmann: Why Penn DOT is different than other states has to do with the legal advice they get and the policies they set that are often not exploited. They don’t exploit the Federal Highway Administration policies and guidelines. They treat them as the bible instead of departure points. And the justification for changing a barrier or any other element and still maintaining safety is really an interesting question. A lawyer at the conference was saying, don’t assume that the limit of legal restriction is here, it could be there. Continuing to advocate for reform at the state level and understanding what the Federal government would allow are often two different things.

Tellers: Process is critical in public infrastructure and change. And determining what is good design—we’re all advocates of good design—but good design is often not a consensus. You have to create a consensus and that often comes down to a design review process. I think it’s interesting that now the department of city planning has a design review commission for public works. In my day job at Carnegie Mellon as university architect, we have a very controlled design review process—which I’m a strong advocate of—where we get a cross-campus committee of faculty, staff and students to look at changes in the campus. That works well, but now I’m taking a Carnegie Mellon project and I’m subject to review at the Department of City Planning?

Hirsh: Hurrah!

Tellers: Yeah. It works. Maybe we’re still struggling with how much control, and what does that mean? Could it cause any developer, whether it’s a university or whatever, to redesign? All sorts of thorny issues come to the forefront. What projects are subject to review? At the Community Design Center, right downstairs here, we talked about a public realm design review process that might be broader than the Department of City Planning’s process. When a major issue, like the Wabash Bridge or Forbes Avenue, comes to the forefront, should there be a consensus-building or design review process?

Pfaffmann: It’s important to recognize that there are two parts of that: the design review process of specific projects but I think we also need to look at the larger policy and technical issues that caused these problems of design review process in the first place. Often you can’t get to discuss design because you’re stymied by all these rules and regulations that are either not interpreted enough or need to be changed. You’ve got to do both. The Mon Fayette Expressway is another example. It’s unfortunate that we didn’t use the context-sensitive solution process that everyone is now advocating — the federal government and the state government — at the Mon Fayette. That’s because the PA Turnpike Commission is a separate organization.

Swager: Too much bureaucracy.

Tellers: You don’t want to be an impediment to development. You want to promote or facilitate better design.
Pfaffmann: We want to talk about design, not about rules.

Swager: We want to talk about what can happen, not what isn't allowed to happen. It's like the old zoning—trying to control design through zoning. It just tells you what you're not allowed to do. It would be very nice to have a clear sense of something.

Pfaffmann: That's a very good point, that we have a clear sense of what we want in our community at the planning commission or planning department so when a developer or agency comes in, they already know what our design value is.

Swager: Well that would help build the political leadership that Eloise has spoken of for public infrastructure. You can always say it's Penn DOT's fault but you have a group of people there that are also reporting to their leadership and that's where the rubber has to hit the road. Sorry, bad pun!

Pfaffmann: The other thing we should do is define infrastructure more broadly. An experience we've had with Preservation Pittsburgh was with lighting. We met with them about the Panther Hollow Bridge and at that point the engineering drawings were too far advanced to change and put the lighting back to where it was. There was this whole issue on what's enough lighting and what meets legal standards and how you integrate new lighting into old bridges. I think I'm still frustrated with it because it takes a political push from the mayor or someone to change them. We as architects need to understand what engineers are struggling with and the engineers need to understand what the programmatic goal of the design has to be. If you can do that before the process starts, it's more likely to be a success. Often we're coming in very late in the process.

Tellers: If we can start as a team, as I'm sure they did in the past, where the architect engineering team initiated a project rather than the engineer design it and the architects later swoop in and...

Pfaffmann: Decorate it. (Laughs)

Nutbrown: The other concern is when you're working in a community, who's really in charge? A lot of splinter groups; these self-formed committees pop up, which present some danger in trying to reach a consensus because engineers are not the best judges of art.

Pfaffmann: You mention the management of the process of community consensus. Often a lot of frustration comes out. Does that process go forward without it or behind closed doors? Maybe the planning department is getting some input. But it doesn't come out the way it does in other neighborhood building projects. And it doesn't happen early in the process when a budget is being established. I was asking an engineer about how the budget was established for a month. I said, how do you account for all the design improvements that are being made? And he said, "We just put a 20% markup on it. We have no idea." We don't do that in buildings; we'd get shot by our clients but (turning to Tellers) you might have to do that as the university architect. You might have to make some judgment by past experience.

Swager: Well, did we get it all? What do you think?

Tellers: We didn't solve it all. I was hoping to leave here with some answers. (Laughs)
"Think about convening a group that continues to talk about some of the different things we can do.*

ANNE SWAGER

NUTBROWN: I think we would all agree it gets better the earlier we get involved.

HIRSH: And also on any given infrastructure project, whatever agency is issuing an RFP, they're probably issuing only for the engineering work. Unless some changes got made for what requirements the initial team put together...

PFAFFMANN: The Highland Avenue Bridge in Shadyside/East Liberty is a great example where Councilman Cohen got together and said, look that replacement bridge has to be better than a standard issue bridge and he forced the department to add design criteria to the RFP.

HIRSH: The culture for demand for great infrastructure isn't as strong here as in other cities.

PFAFFMANN: Since we are addressing the AIA audience, as to how architects can get involved, this was a big discussion at the AIA convention in '92. Penn DOT is not exactly a leader in bringing architects into the design process. How can we get architects more involved? I think one, we can advocate for RFP reforms at the various public authorities and engineering departments. Then architects have their own responsibility for understanding the system and marketing to big engineering firms to get involved.

NUTBROWN: When you go to another city and you see something they're doing right, are you even aware of what it took, the machinations to get it to that point? We may not be that different from anyone else.

PFAFFMANN: It may come through the advocacy or political consensus and your counterparts aren't any different. They have the same rules they have to follow. It's people pushing, whether it's the local chapter or the mayor.

HIRSH: And that's why organizations like AIA are so important...

PFAFFMANN: There was a wonderful documentary on PBS about Boston's Big Dig which reviewed the history of highway design leading up to it. They talked about the stopping of I-95 through Boston and the destruction of that area is what really inspired me to be an architect. There's a great book called After the Planners about the community fight against highways and urban renewal. Often the architects were not on the side of the community. The I-95 project changed the attitudes toward highway development and subsequently the rejection of the urban renewal processes. It's interesting now to see how other chapters are engaging in these debates. I feel the AIA has to be more vocal to make the case for good design in planning.

HIRSH: Do you guys engage the engineering society?

SWAGER: Part of the problem is it's difficult to get a handle on who the engineering society is. All sorts of groups of engineers go by specialty. The Engineers Society on Fourth Avenue is a social club more than a professional association.

PFAFFMANN: The Byways Conference was really great and we need to get more architects to attend these. There was so much creativity flowing. I felt my presentation wouldn't be well received but I was surprised to see the support.

TELLERS: And engage the engineering community, too.

SWAGER: And Penn DOT and Port Authority and all the groups that have so well received the AIA in recent history.

PFAFFMANN: I think we can look at the full range of things—I call this the Pittsburgh Palette—which we de-
fine as infrastructure, things like a retaining wall along Carson Street or the steps.

Tellers: I'm fascinated with architecture of the pre-air conditioning era because air conditioning was a solution to human comfort so architects no longer had to worry about natural ventilation. Now you don't have to do clever complex solutions, you can just air condition a black box and you have human comfort in a sense. The same way a box girder for a bridge is an engineering solution so the lowest cost solution to satisfy the engineering criteria is built.

Pfaffmann: At the same time, as architects we have to embrace the new technology and efficiency and make that part of our design mandate and I think the same goes for engineers the bridges. Having worked with the developers that work right down to the bone, there is a cost difference. You can do better quality for the same amount of money but there is a cost difference getting to a better level of design. But often it isn't that great in terms of the larger investment when you look at return of investment.

If you have to tear down a bridge or stadium because we designed it badly in the first place, then we're spending more money in the end.

Tellers: But there are design solutions that we want to pursue that don't have a cost justification other than an overall feeling of quality that could in a sense enhance the economics of a region. You can't put this into a pro forma.

Swager: Not being able to prove them, you end up with politicians getting taxpayers all wound up. As an example, there's a green outhouse in a national park, a simple stunning piece of architecture but the price of it—which I'm sure includes research and development—was very high. In Reader's Digest in the 'that's outrageous' section, the cost was given without any background. It's hugely damaging.

Pfaffmann: The Big Dig's the same way; right now it's perceived as a very negative thing by some. But I guarantee you 20, 30 years from now people will look back and say, wow. How could we have done anything else?

Tellers: The one solution I've heard here is getting a forum together with a lot of these parties because the main recurring problem—the right selection of expertise—is not involved in infrastructure.

Swager: It would be a next logical step, after we work with not only Penn DOT on the barriers but the Port Authority on the RFP process, to think about convening a group that continues to talk about some of the different things we can do. Like bringing a conference to town or working on the RFPs, a Henry-type person to help with the realities of that and where changes can be made so both groups can get better design solutions. Because there are a lot of things about liability and procurement processes that are difficult to understand out of the box. If you put people in the same room and work through them, you might really come up with some effective changes.

Hirsh: It might be interesting to find somebody who's in the middle, who hasn't actually got to participate.

Pfaffmann: At the Byways Conference that was made very clear. The younger engineers tend to be more attuned to the design quality.

We could find someone from the Turnpike commission, too, which is a great challenge. It's frustrating because I wrote them a letter about the toll plazas and bridges renovations. The response was that good design was not in their mission—it costs more and that's why they're not doing it.

As far as educating the public, I think it's everybody's problem. One thing is to get involved in different advocacy groups. Make sure the AIA is doing advocacy often. A lot of people are saying we really need a good transportation land use advocacy organization—it goes beyond architecture and engineering. It's why we build all this stuff in the first place. Arch Pelley has been trying to revitalize the urban design committee but is finding it difficult because everyone is so busy. So you try to make the most of it, whether it's 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania or Preservation Pittsburgh. We all have our part to play in that advocacy. Hopefully we'll all work together to coordinate.

"The one solution I've heard here is getting a forum together with a lot of these parties because the main recurring problem—the right selection of expertise—is not involved in infrastructure."

PAUL TELLERS
Ask Congressman Earl Blumenauer for a good example of incorporating great design in infrastructure and his response is immediate: the Westside Light Rail Corridor in his hometown of Portland. The multiple-award-winning public works project is a model of his philosophy that “a little bit of investment in design upfront" pays off handsomely in the end.

As the former Director of Public Works, Blumenauer was instrumental in initiating the transit system and making sure it was well designed. That process included design teams of artists and architects working with engineers to create light rail stations that are "works of art. It didn’t cost any more but provided significant enhancement,” he says.

The key? Encouraging artists and architects and landscape planners—the design community—to be part of the planning process from the start. It didn’t hurt the firm that designed the stations, either, he adds, noting that Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnerships gained great recognition. ZGF was the principal architect and urban designer for the project which involved the reconstruction of 18 city blocks and the creation of 11 transit stations. One of them, in the environmentally sensitive Sunset Canyon, is the deepest in North America.

The concept of the transit stations was an extension of another Portland program, Percent of Art, with a project design team that—and here’s another key—included local officials who placed a premium on the design function. That emphasis on design is often what’s missing in large public work projects in any given city. Yet Blumenauer is emphatic about the added value it offers projects such as the transit stations. “It aids public acceptance and makes them work better,” he insists. “Not only does it make it easier for the public to use, but it also encourages the right type of development around the stations.”
The Congressman admits he seizes every opportunity he can to build alliances and partake in conversations on this issue. As he says, “I have a significant interest in including design elements into infrastructure.” What’s more, he believes the public is coming around more to this kind of thinking and the trend is gaining momentum nationwide. “The public is less accepting of big chunks of concrete—paving creeks or elevated roadways, for instance.”

In Washington, Blumenauer is pushing hard for refinement in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization legislation coming up later this year. In 1991, Congress passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), legislation that radically changed transportation policy. By shifting from a focus of completing the Interstate Highway System to a plan that allowed communities to use federal dollars for a range of transportation modes, it boosted the role of planning in communities. At the same time, it made it easier to incorporate environmental concerns. The upshot: more choices for healthier communities, says Blumenauer.

As a member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Blumenauer is hard at work once again with the sequel: the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). He likes to refer to it as “Green Tea.”

The emphasis is once again on multimodal transportation funding with more flexibility, and increased planning. “It will be reauthorized,” said the Congressman which is why he is meeting with many different interest groups to shape the legislation to promote more livable communities.

In his role of promoter, he offers this: that there will be great opportunity for landscape architects in this legislation. “Hundreds of millions will be spent on landscaping to minimize the environmental impact which, at the same time, cuts down the maintenance cost,” he says, citing an example of a right of way in Portland that was planted heavily with wildflowers. Not only did that transform the plot of land, he explains, but also it cut down drastically on the maintenance.

It is yet another example of how well things can work given the right conditions.

**The transit stops for the Westside Light Rail Corridor, designed by ZGF, are considered “works of art”, says Blumenauer.**

“Appropriate design early in the project can have tremendous consequences in durability, operation and maintenance costs,” says the Congressman who has traveled to fifty cities in one year to deliver that message.

Blumenauer’s wish is for the same design considerations in regard to infrastructure for aviation, rail, and water. As for the often tedious and complex public process that’s required of these projects, he says, “It’s fascinating for me to see what happens when public partners, stakeholders, and clients are turned loose on alternative ways of investing the money.”

For him, the issue is clear. “Each dollar invested makes a huge difference in the public acceptance of the product.” Furthermore, “It’s important to make the distinction between cost and value,” cautions the Congressman. “There are huge costs attendant to bad design that are more likely to generate public opposition. If the project is well designed, it is more likely to have acceptance and less likely to get sued or turn into a publicity buzz saw. And, it’s more likely to sustain its value over time.”

Another plus: “It inspires adjacent development to proceed faster at higher value,” he adds. Master plans for campuses and medical complexes are some examples he offers as the ideal approach to integrate good design upfront during the planning process.

To get this done on a consistent basis, he says it will take challenging the “faster, cheaper, lower bid mentality,” for one, which goes against the idea of good design in infrastructure. For another, it will take “complete teams of architects, planners, and landscape architects—multi-faceted design teams working together to deal with these projects,” he says, adding, “One of my goals is to bring together groups that have common interests—the design community and the people responsible for transportation facilities and animal rights advocates.” Animal rights?

“Road kill is serious business. Not just the animals but drivers who die as a result. Habitat and the impact on wildlife must be taken into consideration when designing highways,” says the Congressman. The investment, he says, will pay off in safer, healthier transportation roadways that are, at the same time, more attractive and pleasant.

Blumenauer feels so strongly about this Transportation Reauthorization Act and the issues it brings to the forefront that he thinks the design community “needs to make this the number one priority for the next few years. More and more communities appreciate it.”

He admits “the design community is sort of a secret weapon.” By getting the design community to advocate for this and similar issues, he thinks they will win and so will the communities where they live.

Congressman Earl Blumenauer travels throughout the country to deliver the message of the importance of well-designed infrastructure. His belief is that the design community should make it top priority over the next decade.
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New Member

The AIA welcomes Osama M. El-Abboud, Assoc. AIA, as a new member. He is a graduate of the University of Garyounis in Libya, with a degree in architecture and urban planning, where he was president of the Architectural Student Association.

El-Abboud is now living in this area, pursuing a career in architecture. Past projects include the Benghazi International Airport. An admitted “designoholic”, he loves to study architecture-related computer graphic software and he also enjoys chess and sightseeing. He is married to Halima Boder.

“Details”

The fifth annual “Details” exhibit, showcasing six top Pittsburgh custom furniture designers, will feature an opening reception Friday, November 15th from 5 to 9 p.m. The exhibit will continue through December 1st at DesignSpace Pittsburgh, 2420 Penn Avenue in the Strip. The exhibit will feature the work of Arthur Reitmeyer, Craig Marcus, Max Peterson, Reid Crosby, Bill James and Mark Blaustein. Woods used for the custom furniture range from African bubinga and curly koa to Chilean tineo and wenge.

For more information call (412) 434-0438 or www.designspacepittsburgh.com/events

Curly maple and ironwood chair by Reid Crosby
From the Firms

Hancock Architecture has relocated to 390 Pinney St. in Rochester, Beaver County.

EDGE studio has started construction of its new offices on Penn Avenue.

On August 1st, a grand opening ceremony took place at the UPMC Cancer Center John P. Murtha Pavilion in Johnstown. Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates provided architectural and mechanical engineering design services.

Washington & Jefferson College reached a development milestone for Phase I of its new residence hall (pictured above), a 45,000 square foot dormitory. The residence hall represents the first phase of an on-campus housing development. RSH Architects.

The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford held a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the ongoing construction of the communication and fine arts building, Blasdel Hall. MacLachlan, Cornelius & Filoni is architect for the 18,000 sf project scheduled for completion in May, 2003. Massaro Company is the contractor.

Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates has been selected to provide architecture, engineering and site design services for a new 52,500-square-foot multipurpose building for Penn State University's Fayette Campus in Uniontown.

Massaro Company, Prof. Affiliate, was awarded a 23,000 sf, $5.4 million project for the Potomac Highlands Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Augusta County, West Virginia. The architect is ZMM Architect & Engineers, Inc. of Charleston, WV.

Harchuck Construction, Inc. of Apollo was awarded the following recently: Shadyside Academy's Wiegand Squash Court renovations with the Design Alliance Architects, the Blessed Sacrament Church in Greensburg additions with project architect Peter Cecconi, Jr., AIA, and the Holiday Inn Express construction on 10th St. in the South Side with Indovina Associates Architects.

Altoona-Blair County Development Corporation (ABCD Corp.), a non-profit county-wide economic development agency opened its new headquarters, the Devorris Center for Business Development in Altoona, PA. The 38,000 sf facility was designed by Baechle & Associates Architects, AIA, of Hollidaysburg, PA.

Business Briefs

John E. Brock, AIA, has been named to the Executive Committee of Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann.

Perkins Eastman Architects named Quinton Kittle, Assoc. AIA, Vic Curti, AIA and Tracy DeLisio to associate in the Pittsburgh office.

Hancock Architecture recently hired Jeff Martin, Designer/Drafter, and Aimee Pavlinich, Architectural Student Intern.

Jessica Rudolph has joined EDGE studio as Office Manager.

Perfido Weiskopf Architects hired intern David Al-Qattan.

Massaro Company promoted Randolph S. Hartsock to vice president, operations and Joseph G. Tavella to vice president, estimating.

P.J. Dick Incorporated has hired William W. Hartlep, AIA in the newly created role as design collaboration manager.

Kudos

L.D. Astorino Companies announced that design architect Michael Kuchera has received certification by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB).

David E. Scarton, R.L.A., landscape architect with Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. (CEC), was recently certified by the U.S. Green Building Council as a LEED 2.0 Accredited Professional.


Burt Hill Kosar Rittelmann Associates announced the LEED certification of nine architects in Western PA: Shawn Maley, Jayesh Hariyani, Jill Swensen, AIA, Alexander Wing, AIA, Charles Parker, AIA, Stephen Winikoff, AIA, William Pope, AIA and Jon Shimm, AIA. Charles Wesley Wise of Burt Hill received his professional architectural registration and Megan Sweringen received her professional engineering registration.
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October 17, Thursday

Energy and Environmental Codes and Issues –
Strategies for Sustainable Designs

The monthly meeting of The Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) Pittsburgh Section at the Grand Concourse, Station Square.

The speaker will be Jim Benya, PE, FIES, IALD, LC from Benya Lighting Design, Linn, Oregon.

COST: $30 for IES members, $35 for non-members
TIME: Dinner, 5:30 p.m., Presentation, 6:30 p.m.
RESERVATIONS: Tom Farin 412-299-0773 or email TFarin@aol.com
DEADLINE: October 12

Please send your information to AIA Pittsburgh, 945 Liberty Avenue, Loft #3, Pittsburgh, PA 15222, or fax it to 412/471-9501. The deadline for inclusion is normally six weeks prior to publication. If you would like information describing qualified continuing education programs, please call the AIA office at 412-471-9548.

AIA Activities

October 3, Thursday

AIA Pittsburgh Design Pittsburgh Gala
at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, 6 - 9 p.m. For more information call 412-471-9548.

October 4, Friday

AIA Communications Committee Meeting
noon at the Chapter office. 412-471-9548.

October 14, Monday

AIA Pittsburgh Board Meeting
4 p.m. at the Chapter office. All members are welcome, 412-471-9548.

October 17, Thursday

Legislative Committee Meeting
noon at the Chapter office, Chuck Coltharp, AIA, 724-452-9690.

October 30, Wednesday

AIA Pittsburgh's Foundation for Architecture
5 p.m. at Strada LLC office, 925 Liberty Avenue. Contact Ed Shriver, AIA 412-263-3800.

AIA Pittsburgh is using e-mail to keep our members informed of the chapter’s activities. If you would like to be included and are a member, please send your address to info@aiapgh.org

Design Pittsburgh 2002

October 3
Design Pittsburgh Gala, 6 - 9 p.m. at
the new David L. Lawrence Convention Center, $65 in advance

October 7 – October 16
Exhibit at Photo Forum Gallery at U.S. Steel Tower

October 12
Architect’s Saturday, 1 - 4 p.m.
Lawrenceville

October 22
Design Awards Ceremony, 6 p.m. at
Carnegie Library Lecture Hall

October 22 – October 24
Exhibit at Carnegie Museum of Art

Columns October 2002

November
– Case Studies from Carnegie Mellon University
– Book Review: Dreams and Schemes
– Orphaned Spaces entries

December
– Design Awards 2002

TO CONTRIBUTE TO AN ISSUE or to submit a story idea, contact the editor at 412/563-7173 or email: toarto@adelphia.net

Around Town

October 5, Saturday

Fifth Annual Green Buildings Tour.
Tours of ten local and regional examples of exemplary Green buildings, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Contact Marc Mondor at marcm@gbapgh.org for more information.

October 8, Tuesday

CSI Meeting. Tour of Seagate and dinner at
Vaillalla Microbrewery & Restaurant. Tour begins at 5:30 p.m. with dinner to follow. Cost is $25 for tour and dinner. For reservations call Deborah Merges at 412/855-0926 by October 2.

October 9, Wednesday

Society of Design Administrators Meeting, Engineers Club. 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. $17 members $19.50 non-members. Reservations call Cheryl Marli at 412-281-1337.

October 12, Saturday

ASCE 150th Anniversary at the Westin Convention Center Hotel. Reception starts at 6:00 p.m. and entertainment begins at 8:30 p.m. Cost is $120. Call 412/261-4300 for more information.

October 15, Tuesday

ULI Pittsburgh: Development in the
City. Three Panel Discussion, 8 - 10 a.m., Regional Enterprise Tower. Information at ULI.org. 412-471-5141.

October 20 – 27
A series of events in conjunction with the release of the new book Henry Hornbostel, An Architect’s Master Touch. Call 412-471-5808 ext. 527 for information and reservations.

October 23, Wednesday

SMPS Meeting at the Rivers Club from
11:30 am – 1:30 pm. The discussion “Show and Tell / Show and Sell – There is a Difference” will be lead by Dale Graziotto of Dale Carnegie – Rivers Club, One Oxford Centre.
A LISTING OF AREA CONTRACTORS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. To include your firm in this directory, call AIA Pittsburgh at 412-471-9848.

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