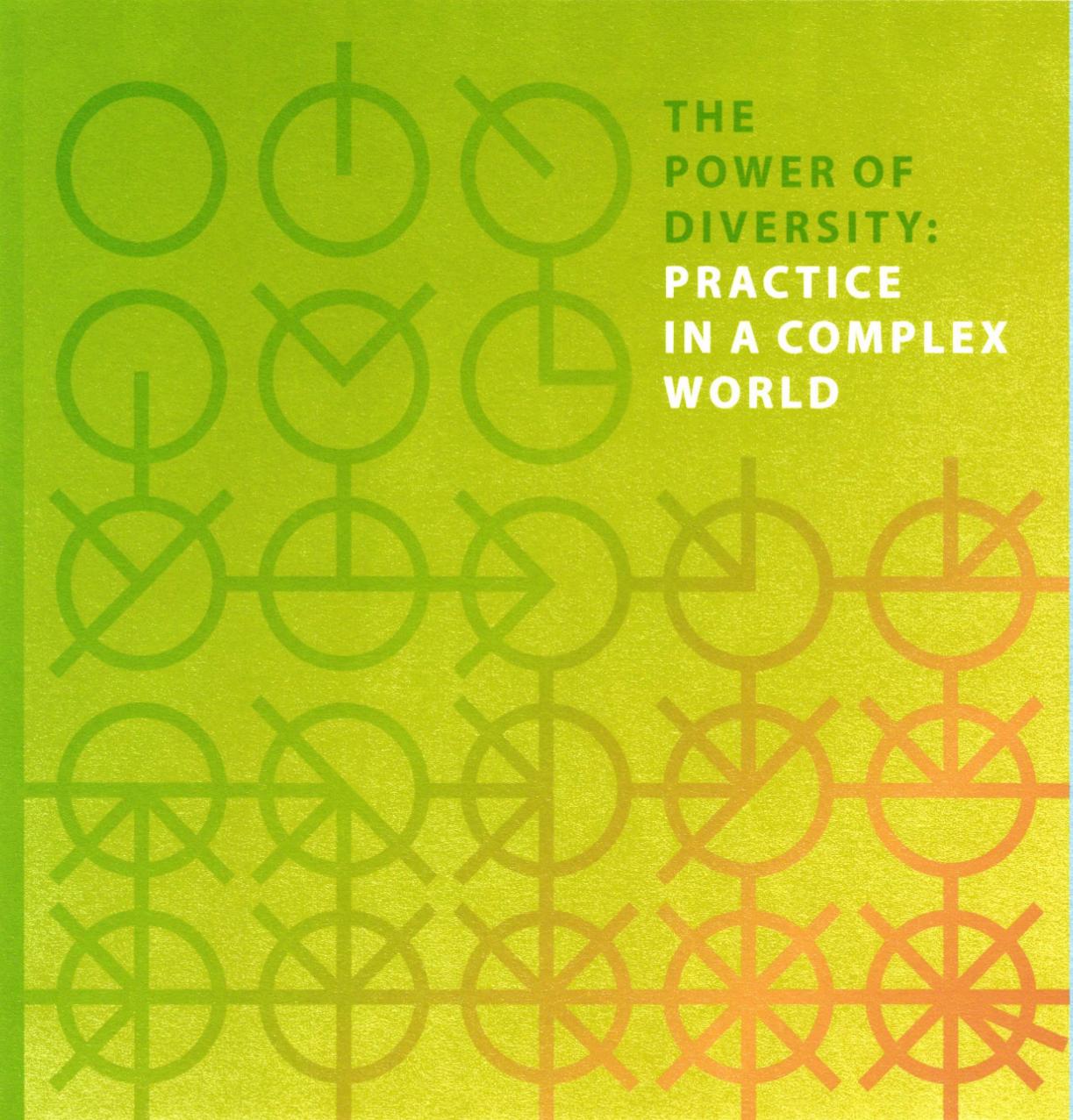




COLUMNS

MAR/09 Designed For Hard Times: The economy's impact on architecture |
Spaces of the Imagination: The work of Giovanni Piranesi | Habitat: Exploring the
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HOMEFRONT

BY BECKY SPEVACK



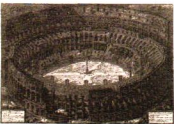
Process. Merriam-Webster defines it as *a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result; a series of actions or operations conducing to an end; a continuous operation or treatment*. Process is something that I think about a lot, something that I believe plays a large role in my life, in my work, and in who I am. When asked to describe what sort of art I make, I usually refer to it as “process art”, and even though process art is not the most popular or well known movement in the art world, I could not imagine a more fitting description of my work or my mindset throughout the making. Much of my work involves various series of self-defined tasks, and the cast-offs of these tasks are what becomes the ‘art’ or product to be shown. An example of this self-defined process is a project in which I created my own tea ceremony, recording each cup of tea I drank within a specific period of time, creating ‘ink blots’ from the discarded tea bags. Even my love of glass and glassblowing ties back into process. The final product is not that important to me –it’s more a focus on the repetitive motions, the process of making. If there is something to show for it at the end – a cup or vase or bowl – great. If there is nothing to show, except for my sweat, great. Either way, spending my time working through each step, performing each action in sequence to strengthen my skills or explore the material is more valuable to me than creating some physical evidence of that time spent.

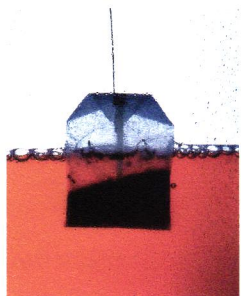
Similarly, I believe that architecture, and the act of designing, are directly tied to and wrapped around process. There is not necessarily a “right” way to go about this, but I am sure that many architects go through a series of steps as they create, with each individual and each new project informing that process. The act of creating, then evaluating, redesigning, showing to clients,

continued page 2



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reworking, et cetera is a process in and of itself. The need to evaluate where you stand and how to move forward is something the architectural community is familiar with, and within these pages, we take a look at the economy, and how local architectural firms have weathered past downturns. Through introspection, many firms have stood the test of time and trial, but not without being willing to look hard and make necessary changes. We hope that some of the stories told on these pages will be a help or inspiration to anyone out there wondering what comes next.

Just as businesses and individuals need to look inward and examine common practices and comforts, so too has *Columns* participated in some recent soul-searching. It's no surprise that times are tough, and the near future does not necessarily hold a lot of promise. Even with a stimulus package passed, questions of viability and sustainability cannot be ignored. Non-profits especially are feeling the pinch, and as AIA Pittsburgh moves through 2009, choices have to be made to ensure that we are providing the best services to our members, addressing your needs. As such, we have decided to reduce *Columns* to a quarterly publication, with the sincere hope of bringing it back in 2010 in it's bi-monthly form.

In the meantime, we are pooling our resources to provide every opportunity we can to serve you with the current recession in mind. Executive Director Anne Swager, Hon. AIA has been working with some local members to form the new Unemployed Architects Group. While it doesn't have the sexiest name imaginable, it gets right to the point – there have been multiple rounds of layoffs, and this group meets for lunch biweekly at the AIA Pittsburgh office to connect and be a support to one another in similar situations. You don't have to be a member to attend, we just want to help and encourage the community in whatever way we can. We are also currently working on our programming for Build Pittsburgh 2009, which is themed "Opportunities in Architecture for Challenging Times". This full day of continuing education will focus on giving you the tools to be best prepared to weather the storm in these challenging times.

As we move forward into spring, as our days get longer and perhaps even a little sunnier, we will continue to move through our series of steps to create opportunities for you, to serve you the best we can. Let us know what you think, how we might be able to help you or others, and we will try to respond to your requests. That's our process. 

SO MUCH TO DO... SO LITTLE TIME

BY CHIP DESMONE, AIA

The Pittsburgh Chapter of the AIA is continually recognized as among the most innovative and well run chapters in the nation. This is due, in no small part, to the energetic efforts of its executive director, Anne Swager, Hon. AIA, and all of its immediate past presidents whose collective visions have impacted everything I have the honor and privilege to inherit. My special thanks go to our retiring president, Paula Maynes, AIA, for her steady, calm, and strong leadership during the past year – a year that saw us break new records in fundraising, income, education, outreach, and advocacy.

This coming year will present a different set of challenges to our organization as we plan now for Build Pittsburgh (our annual continuing education conference), and subsequently, Design Pittsburgh. We remain ambitious in these plans, as Build Pittsburgh will grow with more offerings and increased learning opportunities – opportunities that will come from each other and from the vital manufacturers who assist us in creating a better built environment. All of this during an incredibly difficult economic period.


We will soon revisit our Strategic Plan and recognize some of our goals and limitations. The AIA's National and State chapters urge advocacy and engagement of its members in the political process, as decisions made by and during the political process impact our environment and our collective practices. On the local level, it is my expectation that AIA Pittsburgh will build upon our developing *Policy of Public Engagement*, begun under the stewardship of Paula's presidency. These plans shall include

discussions with the County Executive and Council, as well as the Mayor and City Council, on issues that impact our communities and our businesses through the built environment. It won't be easy. However, we have a framework that we use at the National Grassroots Convention, as well as the statewide leadership event, Architects Day. Let us know if you would like to participate.



Why should we care about what goes on in the political arena around us? Because elected officials make decisions that impact our profession. These decisions impact our ability to practice architecture in a manner that best suits the requirements of our clients' goals, and the greater

good of the community at large. If we aren't at the table when these decisions are made, laws and regulations will be created that will constrain our clients, our profession, and our communities. More than any other profession or organization, architects and the AIA are uniquely qualified to guide our region in developing our many resources in a functional, efficient, and elegant way while being recognized as authoritative stewards of our environment.

So, as government officials hurriedly draw up plans for an immense spending spree to help jump start our economy, we will be there at the national, state, and particularly the local level, to make sure that our voice is heard, that our priorities are considered, and that our membership is participating fully in our national recovery. And the *Policy on Public Engagement* will help guide us in our local efforts to gain a more significant voice in the process. 

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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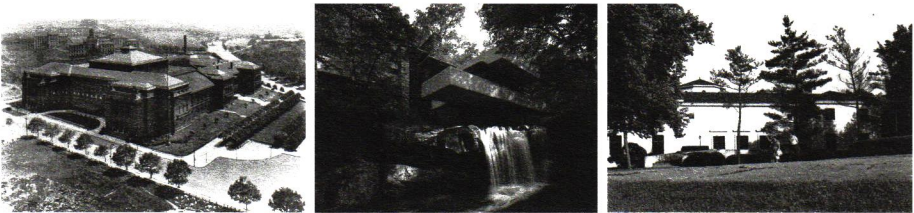
Volume 23, No. 1



PITTSBURGH'S FAVORITE ARCHITECTURE REVEALED!

Over the past two months, AIA Pittsburgh has brought to you and the public two photographic exhibits on display at SPACE Gallery – **America's Favorite Architecture** and **Pittsburgh's Favorite Architecture**. In case you missed the chance to view these, America's Favorite Architecture is a traveling exhibit that presents 150 images of the American Institute of Architects' public poll, conducted in conjunction with AIA150. Pittsburgh's Favorite Architecture is an exhibit of 25 of the most iconic buildings in our region, with an online gallery and the opportunity to vote for your favorite. The polling for Pittsburgh's Favorite Architecture closed on March 9th, and the top three choices were announced on March 12th at the closing reception at SPACE.


Pittsburgh's choice for favorite architecture was the **Carnegie Museum of Natural History**, followed by **Fallingwater** and the **Frick Fine Arts Building**. Thank you to all who voted and participated to make this exhibit a success! 



The Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Fallingwater, and the Frick Fine Arts Building

LOOKING FOR WORK? MAYBE WE CAN HELP...


Both AIA National and AIA Pittsburgh have services to help link employers looking to hire with architects looking for jobs. AIA has the Career Center, which is an electronic recruitment resource for the industry, and can be found at <http://careercenter.aia.org>. Locally, AIA Pittsburgh has an online Classified Ad page, which allows employers to post positions they are trying to fill. View ads at <http://www.aiapgh.org/aiapgh/classifieds.aspx>.

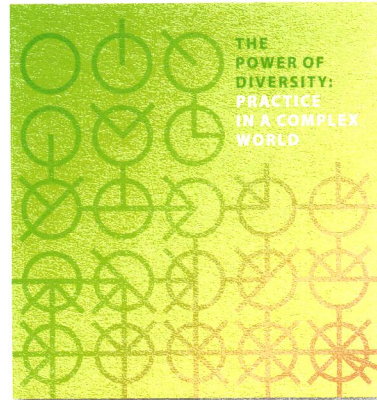
Additionally, AIA Pittsburgh has recently formed an Unemployed Architects Group, which meets for lunch biweekly at the AIA Pittsburgh offices downtown. You don't need to be a member to attend, just someone looking for work, or a community of others in a similar situation. To learn more or be added to the email list, contact Anne Swager at aswager@aiapgh.org. 

AIA NATIONAL CONVENTION IN SAN FRANCISCO!


The profession of architecture is in the midst of incredible change. As our world becomes more complex and diverse, so too does our work. From the clients we serve to the buildings we design. From those who practice architecture to how the work is accomplished.

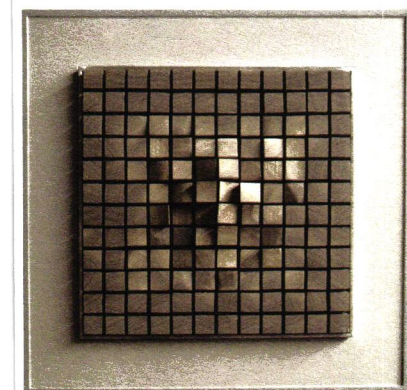
Come to the AIA 2009 National Convention and Design Exposition and see the power of diversity for yourself. Gain knowledge from experts within the profession to support excellence in design, a commitment to environmental well-being, and the advancement of new technology, materials, and methods.

Convention 2009 is being held April 30 – May 2 at the Moscone Center in San Francisco. Take the time to register today! First-time architect, associate, and international associate members who join the AIA between May 18, 2008 and May 2, 2009, are invited to attend the 2009 national convention free of charge. To register, go to <https://www.one-stop-registration.com/aia09>. 



LOCAL ARCHITECTS EXHIBIT ARTWORK

Syl Damianos, FAIA and Ray Gindroz, FAIA are preparing for an upcoming exhibit of their work at Concept Gallery in Regent Square. The opening reception will begin on Saturday, March 28th at 5 pm with a performance by the recipient of the 2008 Marilyn and Ray Gindroz Foundation award and will continue until 8 pm. The show closes on April 26th. 



LEFT: Untitled Sculpture by Syl Damianos
ABOVE: Biella – Archi della Funicolare by Ray Gindroz



18%

27%

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designed for hard times

A look at the economy's impact on the architectural community

BY JOHN ALTDORFER

Maybe between the time this publication goes to press and the moment you first read these pages, the nation's sad sack economy will suddenly reverse its seemingly endless nosedive into the deepest financial black hole most of us have ever witnessed and will start climbing back into the clear blue skies of prosperity.

But just in case that doesn't happen, remember that you never, ever kill the messenger.

So here's the scoop: this recession is scary business. Just check the AIA's Architectural Index, which recently belly-flopped to an all-time local low. With future construction billings in a dizzying decline, many area firms are postponing new hires, laying off employees, or closing shop altogether. Some area pros even warn that the worst might be yet to come.

"I've seen a lot of economic downturns in the 1970s, '80s, '90s, and early 2000s," says Phil Hundley, AIA, a principal and 33-year employee of DRS Architects. "But this is probably the worst. Financial institutions are going under. The automobile industry is bad. The housing market is shot. Those are things that we didn't see before. And it will probably get bleaker."



At this point, we haven't lost any business, especially with our short-term projects that are moving forward. But some of the longer-term projects are taking a pause.

MIKE McDONNELL, AIA

Even firms with histories dating back to nearly the last days of the 19th century are finding this financial fiasco one for the ages.

"We've been in business for 100 years," says Mike McDonnell, AIA, a principal at IKM Inc. "So we've weathered a few recessions and depressions. At this point, we haven't lost any business, especially with our short-term projects that are moving forward. But some of the longer-term projects are taking a pause."

As a result of that hiatus of jobs with three- to five-year time lines, IKM recently put its hiring on hold last year.

"We're not pursuing new staff as aggressively as in the past year and a half," says McDonnell. "That's something that's pretty consistent across town. But while we're holding stable, other firms are making first-round layoffs."

Yet, for all the dire signs that point to a lingering slump, many local architects maintain



a positive outlook and offer insights on how to survive and even thrive during this slide.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

Recessions and depressions always come to an end.

History shows again and again that however big the economic mess, eventually business rebounds, people go back to work, and clients start hiring architects again. Even better, the boom times usually last longer than the busts. To survive, firms must develop a strategy to endure the financial valleys between the peaks. Most architects will tell you that diversification is the key.

“We learned some hard lessons at DRS in the 1980s,” says Hundley. “One of the main one’s was to cultivate clients that would provide ongoing work during economic downturns. As a

result, we developed a number of government, health care, and university clients for doing different types of work. Whatever state the economy might be in, there’s always work going on at an Air Force base, post office, hospital, or college. Sometimes the projects are big. Sometimes they’re not. But the approach keeps our workforce going and makes sure that the lows aren’t as low as they could be.”

While he works in a smaller market, Adam Trott, AIA, managing partner at Thomas J. Freeman Architects in Erie, Pennsylvania, says that government housing projects are helping to cushion the economic blows his firm suffered during the last half of 2008.

“A certain portion of our work involves HUD,” says Trott. “That type of work tends to lag behind by a couple of years when it comes to financial trends. In that respect, we’ve been insulated from the problems in other markets.”



On the other hand, Trott says the firm did lay off one of its five full-time employees when a client decided to put a project on hold. In another case, the credit crunch forced a client to scrap plans to build a new structure in favor of purchasing an existing building and renovating it. Freeman got that contract, but at a lower dollar total than the original proposal.

In Pittsburgh, a few clients are pulling the plug on work, and an even smaller number is scaling back on plans. Yet, for the most part, many clients actually seem to be bucking what might be the obvious reaction to a tight money situation.

WORKING ON A DREAM

During the last days of his reign of tyranny, Saddam Hussein was running a little short on liquid assets. As a result, the Iraqi dictator started reducing many of the grand plans tied to his residential construction projects. In his heyday, the Ba'ath strongman demanded solid gold faucets for the bathrooms in his numerous palaces. But as Saddam's power and resources waned, contractors resorted to splashing gold paint on ordinary plumbing fixtures. Dreams die hard, even for a despot.

Fortunately, the consensus among local architects is that clients are holding tight to their dreams and refusing to compromise in the face of economic uncertainty.

"A lot of my clients are empty-nesters who are buying that loft or smaller residence in the city that they've dreamed about for years," says Peter Margittai, AIA, owner of the small South Side firm that bears his name. "They want to carry out that vision of how they want their new home to look. They figure that if they're going to do this one last time, then they're going to fulfill their aspirations and do it right. That's the kind service I enjoy delivering."

Making dreams come true for clients is a huge attraction to the field of architecture for many practitioners. Hundley adds that architecture can provide a morale boost for the general public during an economic downturn.

"We have to look to the future," he says. "We have to build on the positive. You can design a building that will have an uplifting effect on people's lives for years to come. There are so many examples of wonderful projects that came about during economic hard times. And they still have a positive effect today."

Locally, the Cathedral of Learning on the Oakland campus of the University of Pittsburgh is one of the prime examples of Depression-era architecture that enhanced the city's skyline as it lifted the hopes of the general public. Construction started on the 555-foot tall Gothic Revival tower in 1926 and faltered when funds proved hard to get with the onset of the Depression. To keep the project on track, the university appealed to area schoolchildren to pitch in a dime to buy a brick to help complete the 42-story skyscraper, which was eventually dedicated in 1937.

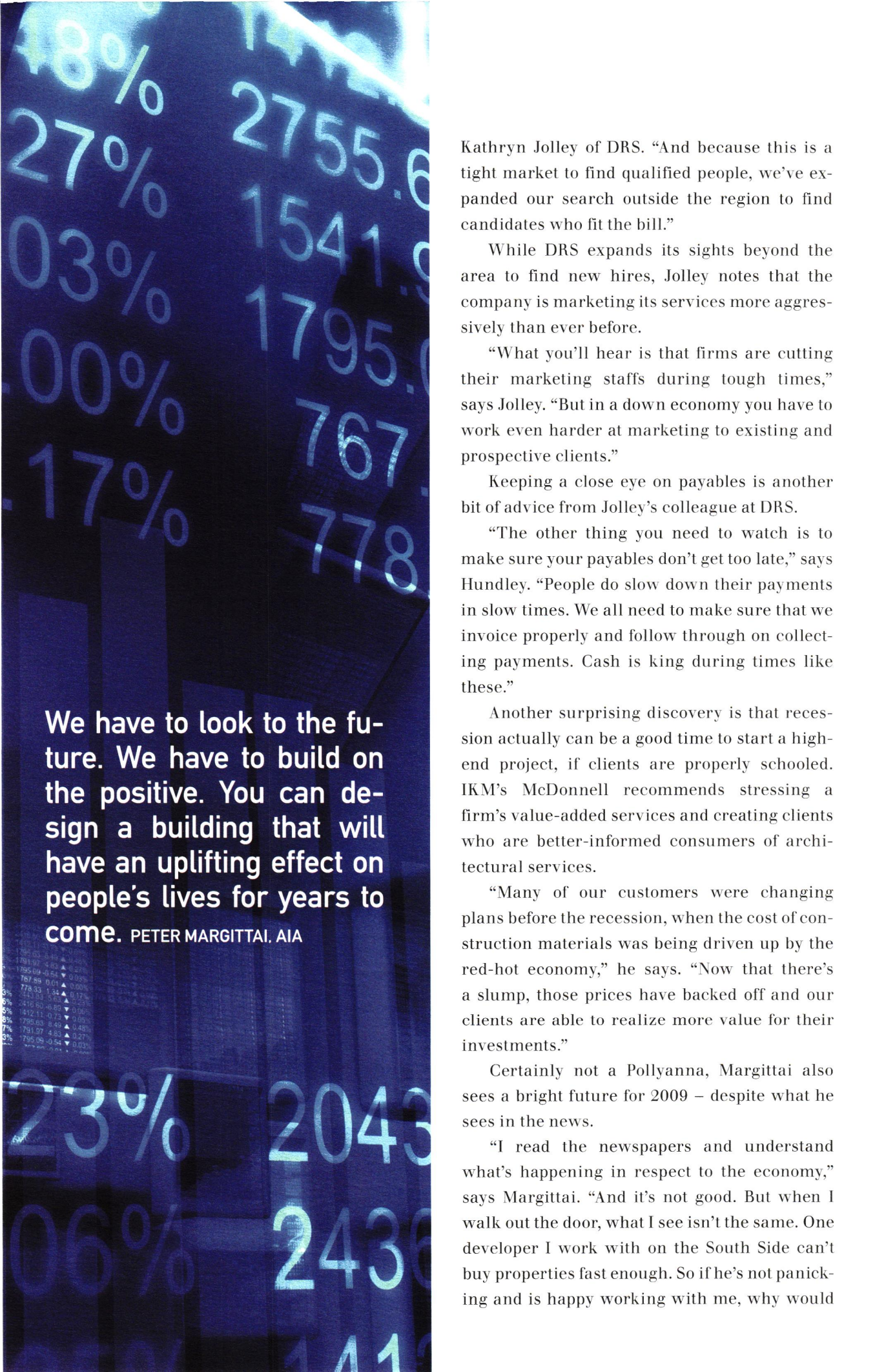
Elsewhere in the city and region, the Gulf Tower became Downtown's tallest skyscraper in the early 1930s and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in the Laurel Highlands earned nearly instant status as an American architectural icon upon its completion in 1939.

"Once people have a vision, it's hard for them to scale back," says Margittai. "Their projects are a reflection of themselves and how they want the world to view them. It's hard to scale back on that type of dream. That's why architects look for clients who appreciate the time and care they put into making that dream a reality."

TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS AND OTHER WORDS OF WISDOM

Despite some early rounds of layoffs, scrubbed projects, and office shutdowns, Pittsburgh seems to have fared well during the first months of the current economic malaise. In fact, a few firms interviewed for this article say that 2009 is shaping up well – so far.

"It's interesting to note that while some firms are letting people go, we're actually looking for a few good people to fill spots on our staff," says



We have to look to the future. We have to build on the positive. You can design a building that will have an uplifting effect on people's lives for years to come. PETER MARGITTAI, AIA

Kathryn Jolley of DRS. "And because this is a tight market to find qualified people, we've expanded our search outside the region to find candidates who fit the bill."

While DRS expands its sights beyond the area to find new hires, Jolley notes that the company is marketing its services more aggressively than ever before.

"What you'll hear is that firms are cutting their marketing staffs during tough times," says Jolley. "But in a down economy you have to work even harder at marketing to existing and prospective clients."

Keeping a close eye on payables is another bit of advice from Jolley's colleague at DRS.

"The other thing you need to watch is to make sure your payables don't get too late," says Hundley. "People do slow down their payments in slow times. We all need to make sure that we invoice properly and follow through on collecting payments. Cash is king during times like these."

Another surprising discovery is that recession actually can be a good time to start a high-end project, if clients are properly schooled. IKM's McDonnell recommends stressing a firm's value-added services and creating clients who are better-informed consumers of architectural services.


"Many of our customers were changing plans before the recession, when the cost of construction materials was being driven up by the red-hot economy," he says. "Now that there's a slump, those prices have backed off and our clients are able to realize more value for their investments."

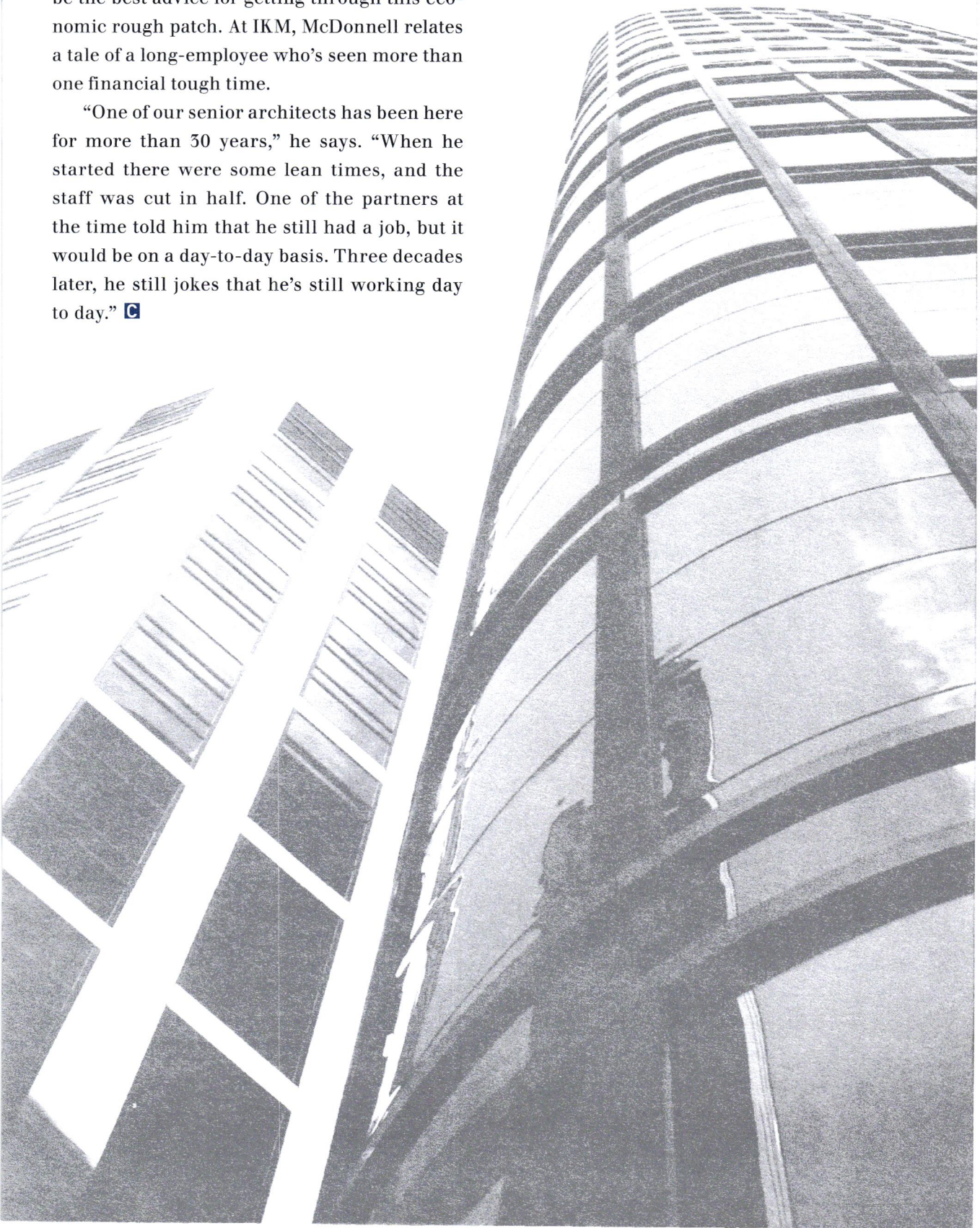
Certainly not a Pollyanna, Margittai also sees a bright future for 2009 – despite what he sees in the news.

"I read the newspapers and understand what's happening in respect to the economy," says Margittai. "And it's not good. But when I walk out the door, what I see isn't the same. One developer I work with on the South Side can't buy properties fast enough. So if he's not panicking and is happy working with me, why would

I panic? So far, I'm booked pretty solid through at least the third quarter of 2009. On the other hand, I'm not fooling myself. I know all this could go away tomorrow."

Mixing optimism with caution might just be the best advice for getting through this economic rough patch. At IKM, McDonnell relates a tale of a long-employee who's seen more than one financial tough time.

"One of our senior architects has been here for more than 30 years," he says. "When he started there were some lean times, and the staff was cut in half. One of the partners at the time told him that he still had a job, but it would be on a day-to-day basis. Three decades later, he still jokes that he's still working day to day." 





habitat

Exploring the places where architects work > lee CALISTI architecture + design



In a prime example of practicing what he preaches, Lee Calisti, AIA, works out of an office that is part of the house he recently designed from scratch. Not only does this help to give clients a hands-on example of his portfolio, but also allows him to be a hands-on husband and father. *Columns* spoke with him about what it is like working from home.

What is the office coffee policy?

It's just me; I have to get it myself. Of course, I don't get into trouble for eating someone else's lunch out of the refrigerator.

How long have you been in this space?

We moved in officially at the end of August 2007, although I operated my business in here from the beginning of July 2007, putting up with the construction noise in the background.

Who designed the office/space?

I did, but my wife had a major influence.

Would you say the philosophy of the firm is expressed through the design? How?

Yes. It is simple, modern, and green. However, the intention was built around the pursuit of adhering to a tight budget that the average homeowner, seeking to build a new house, could afford.

Why was this location/neighborhood chosen as home base for the firm?

It was not our original choice, but through a series of unusual circumstances, we were fortunate enough to find this lot. The site was an undeveloped lot in a 1960's city neighborhood. Since the infrastructure was already in place, no virgin land was disturbed. Also the proximity to the downtown area makes it easy for us to walk or ride a bicycle if desired. The "completion" of the street



Photos by Ron Lutz II, except kitchen photo by Craig Thompson

FIRM: lee CALISTI architecture + design

SIZE: A 2217 sf house of which 242 sf is given over to the office and related functions

LOCATION: City of Greensburg, PA

made it attractive to the neighbors who spent almost 40 years prior looking at an empty lot.

Did you do anything special to meet sustainable and accessibility standards?

From choosing a building site to selecting materials for use in the home, sustainability without excessive expense was the goal. The house serves as a “live/work” space which, beyond other benefits, eliminated the long commute of one person in the household. Through the use of a local contractor and many local materials, less energy was required to build it than the typical builder houses popular in the area. Solar orientation was also very important in the design process. Additionally, energy saving choices included spray foam insulation, low E windows, an extra high efficiency HVAC system and water heater, low or no VOC paint, and a number of recycled materials for flooring.

What/where is the client base? What are client reactions to the space?

My work currently is in Westmoreland, Allegheny, and Fayette Counties. Almost every one of my clients has been in my office. One major impact is having to clean up the house consistently in case I want to show a client around. The overall reactions are very positive. It is so much easier to show


someone a detail or space in person than to draw or model it. They get it right away.

What amenities are unique to the office?

No commute, especially late at night. I am walking or biking distance to downtown Greensburg. I have been able to spend considerably more time with my son and wife. I have never missed school functions that happen during the day. Sometimes I am the only dad at field trips and school parties. It's a blessing that I am very aware of daily.

How has the work environment influenced the way you work?

It is essential to be disciplined since there are more distractions. I am not sure I have mastered that, but at least I am aware that it exists.

In designing one's own house and office you become aware of the accountability of design decisions in a way that could never happen otherwise. This house is an ongoing lab for ideas and experiments in construction. Moreover, I can truly sympathize with my clients when they have to make decisions based on cost. This awareness is not limited to residential architecture, but to all architectural work. It goes back to that simple question that clients would ask, “would you do this on your house?” I can answer that much better now. 



BREAKING

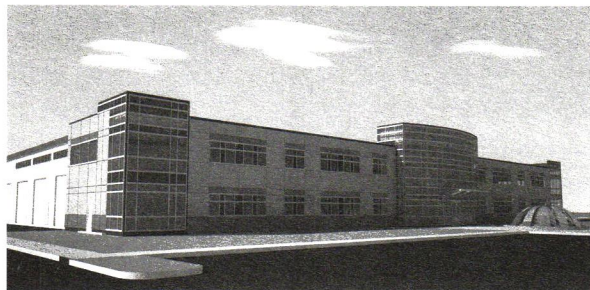
FROM THE FIRMS

Astorino, along with their affiliate company, fathom, applied innovative research techniques, never before used on a Veterans Affairs campus, for the design of the new Veterans Recovery Center.

The Veterans Recovery Center is located on Pittsburgh's H. John Heinz III Progressive Care Center and was dedicated in a ribbon cutting ceremony on Tuesday, November 25, 2008. Due to the complexity of this user group and the significant impact this type of facility has on all generations of our nation's veterans, Astorino turned to fathom – a unique design research company that offers a deep understanding of how subconscious thoughts and feelings can translate into more meaningful design – to help them truly understand these veterans and the issues that they face.

Burt Hill has been commissioned to design the interiors for the new Equitable Resources headquarters facility in Pittsburgh. The new facility is 257,000 sf, covers 12 floors in a downtown high-rise building, and will accommodate the company's current needs and anticipated growth. The key goals for the design include creating a feeling of community and collaboration while enhancing privacy through traffic patterns. The new headquarters will house between 500–700 employees.

Desmone & Associates Architects have been hired by Baker Hughes International to design a new building for the company in New Stanton, PA. The new site will include a 64,000 sf office/workshop building, a separate 2,800 sf



Baker Hughes International

hazardous materials storage warehouse, over 180,000 sf of outdoor yard storage, and a gas tank farm. The firm has also been brought on by SingleSource Property Solutions to work on the expansion and relocation of its operational headquarters, as well as hired by law firm Reed Smith LLP to provide the interior design and construction drawing services for an office expansion for their Pittsburgh office.

Center Area and Monaca school districts recently hired **Foreman Architects Engineers (FAE)** to conduct a feasibility study to assist them with their pending merger initiative. FAE's feasibility study will include extensive analyses of all school facilities in the districts, their capacities, and enrollment projections. Based on FAE's findings, the firm will create construction options designed to facilitate the districts' merger transition, as well as meet the regions' future educational facility needs for the K-12 population. Additionally, Foreman Program and Construction Managers (FPCM) will team up with Cleveland-based Richard L. Bowen + Associates to manage the construction of four Ohio-based school programs. The two companies will jointly carry out project and site management responsibilities for these pending construction and/or renovation initiatives: Brookfield Local Schools, Trumbull County; Rittman Exempted Village

Schools District, Wayne County; Indian Creek Local School District, Jefferson County; and Barberton City School District, Summit County. Foreman Architects and Engineers have also been hired by the Riverside Beaver School District to complete renovations to Riverside High School.

JSA Architecture Planning Engineering Interior Design has announced the completion of the new office fit-out for Fragasso Financial Advisors at 610 Smithfield Street in downtown Pittsburgh. The new office occupies the entire fourth floor of the building with approximately 17,500 sf. The dynamic office design facilitates a more cohesive interaction between departments and provides for increased conference space and a training room for 50 people. Abundant wall space is also provided throughout the office for the display of artwork, company honors/awards, and for flatscreen televisions

which flash the latest business news. JSA project team included **Thomas J. Mrozenski, Jr., AIA**, team leader; Noelle Weaver, NCIDQ, project manager; Anita Myers, NCIDQ, director of interior design, and Jim Gaynor, PE, manager of engineering. General contractor was Shannon Construction.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

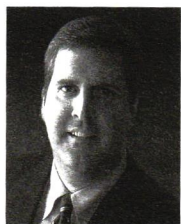
Dana Steadman, AIA has joined **Hayes Design Group – Architects** as a senior associate. A longtime resident of Wexford, Dana has practiced in the Pittsburgh area for over 30 years. He holds an Architecture Degree from Syracuse University and is a LEED AP. Mr. Steadman brings diverse experience to the firm, with a focus on commercial and educational projects. Catherine Peek has also joined the firm as an associate. Catherine has moved to Pittsburgh from San Diego, where she practiced for several years with firms specializing in institutional projects.

Mascaro Construction Company, LP has announced that 22 employees have received their LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental



Fragasso Financial Advisors

Design) accreditation from the U.S. Green Building Council. The employees are: Mark Belmar, Jeff Braum, Bill Charles, Jr., Ron Cortes, Bill Derence, Ed Elinski, Pat Harvey, Clinton Hatfield, Dave Kimmel, Mike Kuchera, Chris Madden, Jim Majernik, Joe Manganello, Jack Mascaro, Pete Mastro, Scott Metzger, Matt Morris, Tony Sands, Jason Sheffield, Dave Stouden, Eugene Vennare, III, and Tim Wilson.



Clark

Greg Clark is the newest senior consultant for The Sextant Group. Formerly a principal at one of New York's most prestigious audiovisual and acoustic consulting firms, Greg's experience includes New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, RUSH University Medical Center, UNC Genomic Science Building, Infinity Tower Dubai, Mumbai International Airport in India, and even NYC's new Brooklyn Bridge Park. While Greg has now relocated to The Sextant Group's Pittsburgh office, his projects will continue to span the country and beyond.

KUDOS

The Master Builders' Association (MBA) and the Construction Advancement Program (CAP) awarded \$4,500 scholarships to Kyle Kaminski and Kari Zeleznick, both students at the University of Pittsburgh School of Engineering.

AIA Pennsylvania has awarded **Strada** an Honor Award in Architecture for Design for Mifflin School. The Strada project team was **John Martine, AIA, Alan Cuteri, AIA, Michael Stern, ASLA, Cas Pellegrini, AIA, and Tom Price, AIA**. The client was Pittsburgh Public Schools and Yarrowborough Development, Inc was the contractor.

In the January 2009 issue of The Architectural Review (UK), **studio d'ARC's Live/Work Studio** was selected as one of the Houses by Emerging Architects. The project was selected from over 100 international residential project entries submitted for the AR Awards for Emerging Architecture: 08.

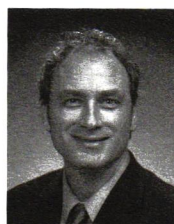
Larry J. Payne, AIA, a senior associate with WTW Architects, has been appointed to a two-year term on the Marshall Township Planning Commission.



MBA and CAP scholarship recipients



Mifflin School



Payne

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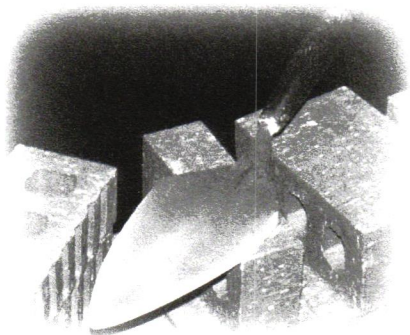
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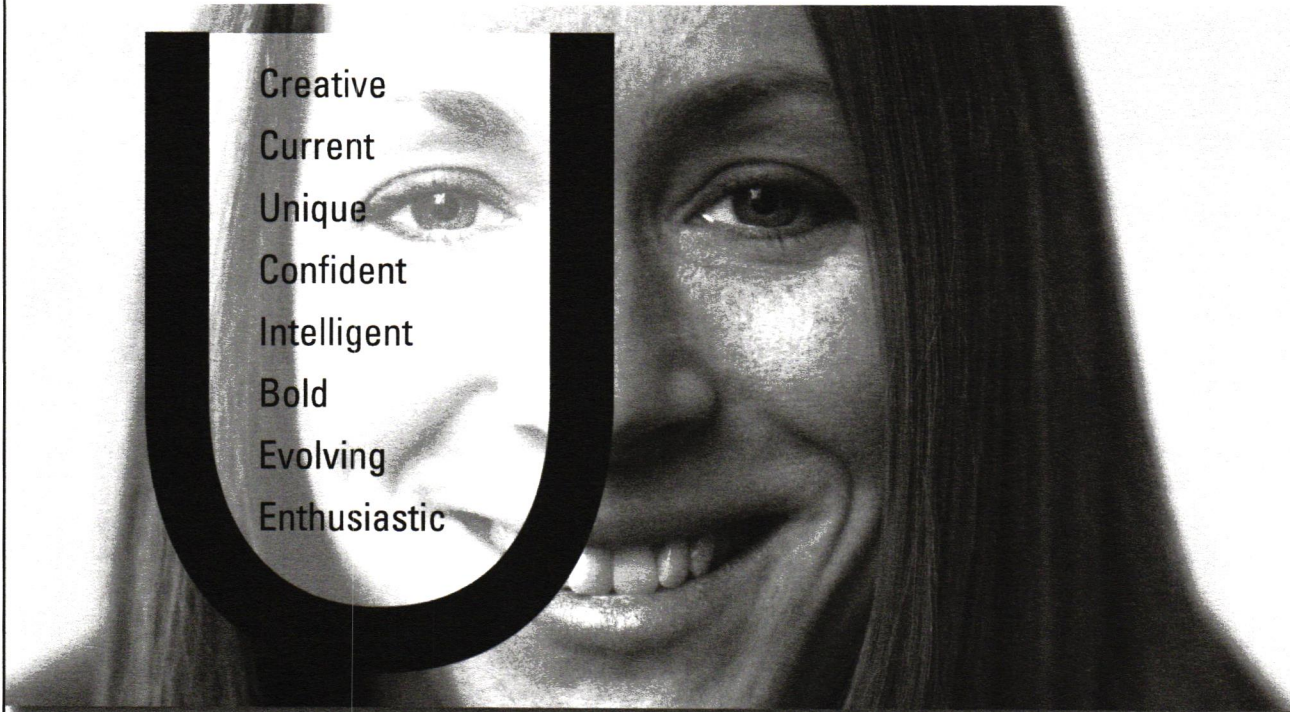
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spaces of the imagination

The work of Giovanni Battista Piranesi

BY SEAN SHEFFLER, AIA

On the second floor of the Carnegie Museum of Art, tucked in a corner of the Scaife Galleries, sits a small room dedicated to Works on Paper.

Currently gracing its walls is *Architecture and the Spaces of the Imagination*, a modest but powerful tribute to one of the most accomplished and influential architectural delineators in history: Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Born in 1720, Piranesi's formal training included studies of art and architecture, drafting and technical drawing, and also stage and set design. He established himself as a master architect, but found no clear success as one; instead, he earned his lasting fame through architectural illustration, representing spaces both real and imagined. The exhibit contains an impressive amount of selections from his best-known series of works, *il Vedute di Roma* (Views of Rome) and *Carceri d'invenzione* (Prisons of the Imagination).

Over the course of his career, Piranesi produced thousands of measured illustrations of the city for several architectural treatises, including

Recently the Carnegie Museum of Art featured the exhibition *Architecture and the Spaces of Imagination*. The exhibit closed on Feb. 15, 2009.

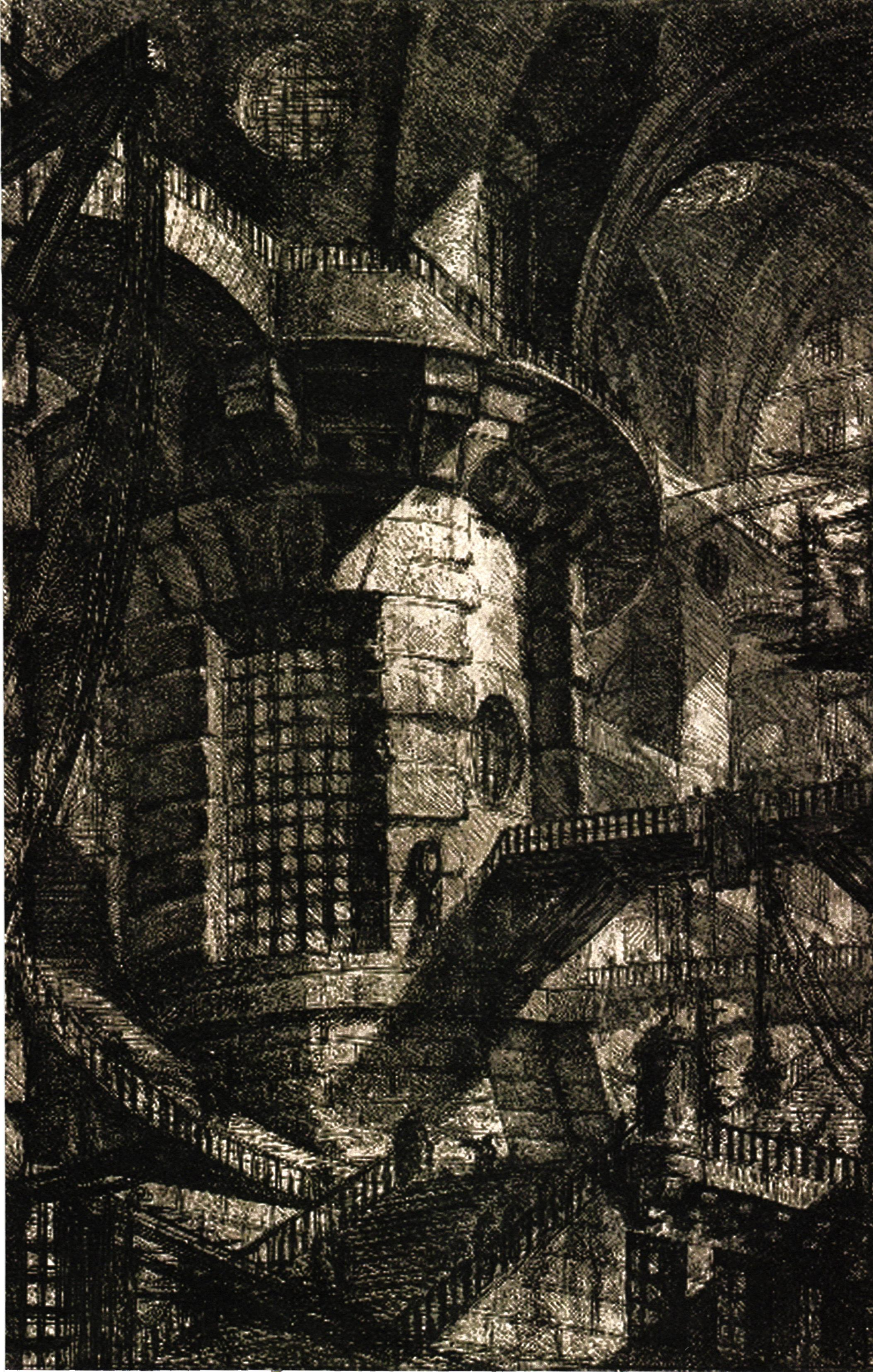
at least one of Piranesi's own: *Antichità Romane de' tempo della prima Repubblica e dei primi imperatori* ("Roman Antiquities of the Time of the First Republic and the First Emperors"). Only a handful of these plates are part of this collection, giving a small glimpse into a visual feast of Rome's greatest treasures, many of which have changed little over the course of two centuries. Villas, palaces, monuments, and cathedrals are all rendered with the same sense of grandeur by the careful hand of the artist. Beyond, vast hillsides recede into the distance. Where architecture had given way to ruin, Piranesi relied on his imagination to fill in the gaps, adding vases and urns, figures and fabrics, injecting some artistic license into the imagery. These *Vedute* are refined, polished plates with controlled linework, an eclectic mix of architectural detail and theatrical forced perspective, their incredibly painstaking level of craftsmanship revealing the artist's enormous respect for the urban fabric of Rome. Piranesi's creative play is most evident in the image of *St Giovanni in Laterano*, where the exaggeration of scale and forced perspective gives the impression of a gargantuan soaring structure much larger than its actual size, a hint of the works yet to come.

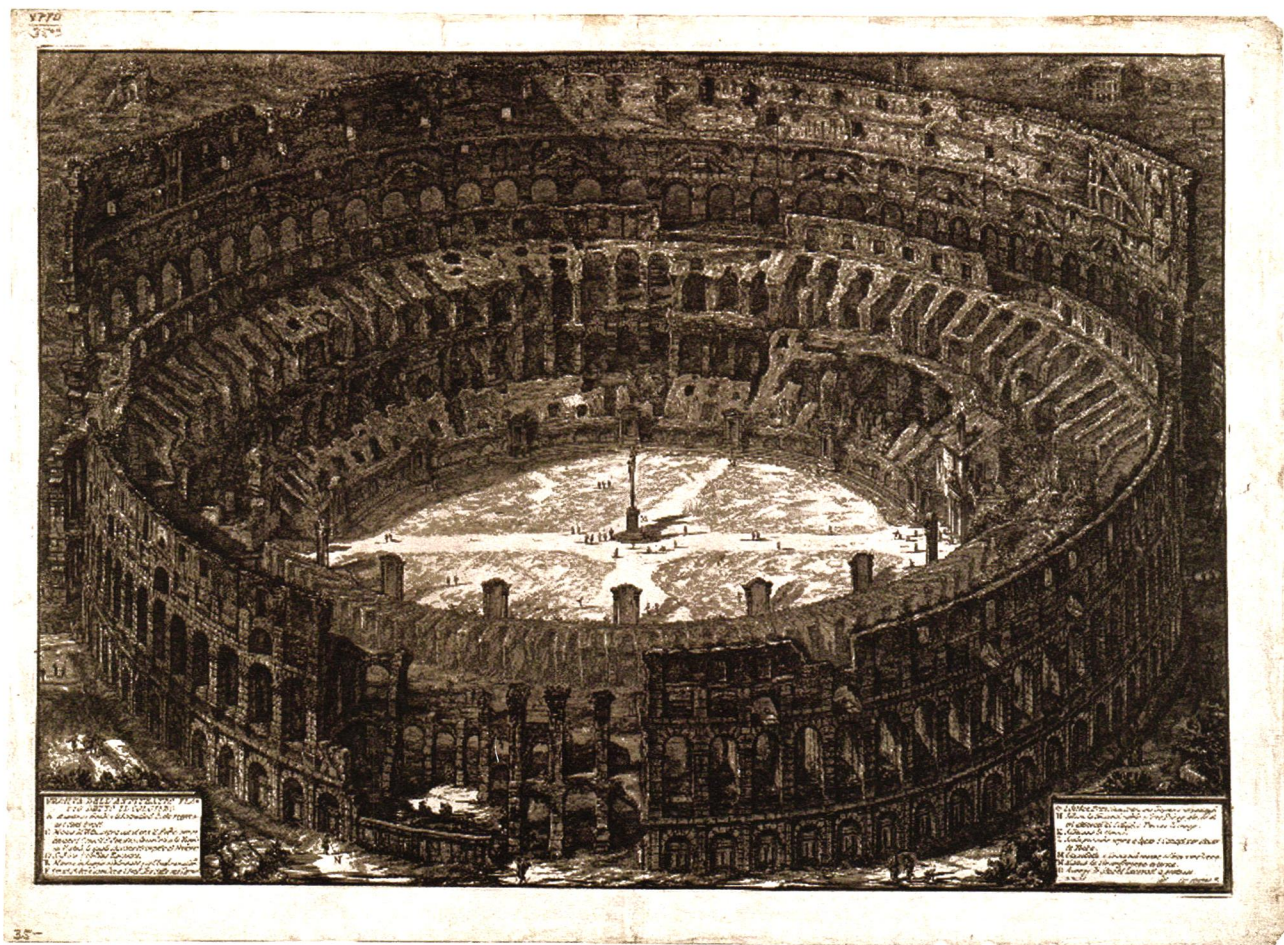
The true focus of the exhibit, the *Carceri*, is a collection of only sixteen images produced between 1745 and 1761, the staggering majority of which have been included here. The works contain the same level of detail and depth as the *Vedute*, but their subject matter could not be more surreal. The imagery is a visual cacophony of enormous stone masses reaching towering heights, built around enormous machines with no clear purpose. Ropes and chains cross the spaces, supporting drawbridges that lead to nowhere. Stairs begin to climb only to end abruptly, providing no escape from the hellish depths below. Billowing smoke surrounds grotesquely contorted figures, bound and shackled, writhing in pain. The entire series evokes an overwhelming sense of fear and dread. These are not depictions of any real spaces, but rather intricate tapestries of Piranesi's architectural

interests woven together by his creativity. This being a series of etchings, Piranesi's linework is more fluid and unrestrained than that of the *Vedute*, giving some portions of these prints a more sketch-like quality. Instead of the labor-intensive metalwork of engraving, etching uses a pointed needle to remove a soft wax-based material from the surface of a metal plate. An acid bath bites into the exposed metal, and prints are then made from this etched plate. Piranesi continued to work these plates after the first series of prints was made, turning a seemingly static medium into a more temporal, plastic one. The exhibit includes both versions of plate XI, *The Arch with a Shell Ornament* (originally left untitled by Piranesi, the literal - and often cumbersome - titles were added later by inheritors of his collection) -- the differences in the linework are subtle, but result in the deeper shadows and more ominous tones for which the series has become known. The impression is that the series was one of artistic experimentation moreso than finished presentation.

Juxtaposed, the two series are the yin to the other's yang. The massive stone arches and dark mysterious corners of the *Carceri* evoke a sense of claustrophobia, which is relieved by the vast clouded skies of the *Vedute*, much like darkness being the absence of light. However, even with the artist's characteristic flourishes of the fantastical, the limits of reality seem like restraint, almost as if the imaginative freedom of the *Carceri* were a release from the controlled precision of the *Vedute*. There is a great deal of irony that an artist would choose images of prisons as a true outlet for the freedom of his creativity, but it is here, freed from any sense of dutiful representation of an actual built work, that the artist's imagination was fully allowed to run wild. The *Vedute* established his fame and defined his career, but the *Carceri* are truly his masterpiece, a brave new world of architectural space.

Piranesi died in 1778 (and was subsequently buried under his sole completed architectural project, the restored church of Santa Maria del Priorato), but his work continued to thrive. The





Vedute are credited with a resurgence of antiquity that became Neo-Classicism, while the Surrealist movement can trace its origins to the *Carceri*. Volumes have been written on Piranesi's motivations, most of which seems to center around the dark places of the artist's mind. Some even attribute the *Carceri* to a long and debilitating mental illness in his later years (Aldous Huxley, no stranger to brave new worlds himself, called them "metaphysical prisons made of nightmare and incomprehension"). Regardless of mood, this body of work has influenced countless illustrators, including M.C. Escher and Hugh Ferriss. The inclusion of several of Clyde Hare's well-publicized photographs of the Allegheny County Courthouse provides some local resonance. Richardson's heavy rusticated masonry arches, coupled with the moody shadows of Hare's photography, are thoroughly evocative of the *Carceri* imagery... even though the exhibit is careful to note that there are no known documented Piranesian influences on either of the two men. Instead, these images are

presented side-by-side, inviting their own comparisons and conclusions.

Piranesi's world is one unencumbered by restrictions of material, scale, even gravity. Technically, the level of craft on display here is an inspiration to anyone who has ever attempted to represent a built work, existing or proposed, but there is far more to appreciate here. The dramatic angles and moody lighting of these compositions are a challenge to the now-ubiquitous antiseptic renderings of the digital age – these works contain mystery and passion that is missing from much of today's architecture, one where minimalist flat planes and simple "crisp" detailing have become the new cliché. Each one of these images captivates the viewer, drawing them into a world greater than the limits of the framed print, evoking a sense of space and place which has endured for two-and-a-half centuries. To make a lasting impression by defining space is the hope of all architects; here is a gallery full of works devoted to one who did just that. **C**



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