Unpacking Prefab

Contemporary design has made its mark on almost every facet of mass-manufactured goods in competitive consumer economies—from toothbrushes to furniture to cars. The exception, of course, is the house, despite the efforts of progressive architects over the past century to devise the domestic equivalent of prefab. Just over a year ago, Dwell magazine organized a competition for a prefabricated house for a couple, Nathan Wieler and Ingrid Tung, who pledged to build the winning entry. The only limits were a budget of $200,000 and size of 2,000 square feet. The winning scheme, a 2-bedroom, 2½-bath home by New York firm Resolution:4 Architecture, began design development last June and is scheduled for completion this July. True to type, the bulk of the house’s construction—comprised of five modular pieces—required only two weeks in the factory to fabricate. Gaining familiarity with fabrication, complying with state and local building codes, and dealing with general contractors constituted the project’s greatest hurdles, consuming nearly ten months of the process. The house’s assembly on its rural site, in Pittsboro, North Carolina, began in April. The house is coming in on budget, though with concessions (like cheaper fixtures), which the clients and architects accept as part of the endeavor’s R&D. continued on page 5

The last residential component of Battery Park City, the Solaire, designed by Rafael Pelli who heads Cesar Pelli and Associates’ New York office, has earned numerous awards and media attention as the most sustainable residential highrise in the country. On top of a LEED Gold rating, an Environmental Business Leadership Award from the Natural Resources Defense Council, and a Top Ten Award from the AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE), the Solaire, completed last September, nabbed an award of excellence from Green Roofs for Healthy Cities (GRHC), a Toronto-based network promoting the environmental benefits of green roofs. Landscape design firm Balmori Associates received the award on June 3, at the GRHC’s second annual Greening Roofops for Sustainable Communities Conference in Portland, Oregon. The Solaire is the only New York project among six winners, which include the continued on page 4

In 1949 Marguerite Dollander asked her friend and former art school classmate Jean Prouvé to design a modest vacation house for herself and her husband, Roger, on a lush site, a former vineyard, near the beach of St. Clair on the Côte d’Azur. The nearest town is Lavandou, between Toulon and St. Tropez. The couple had honeymooned on the sunny coast before the war. Villa Dollander is textbook Prouvé, with a straightforward L-shaped plan that opens to a garden where Marguerite remembers Prouvé’s brothers camping out. The steel structure and aluminum roof were fabricated continued on page 4

The space-starved Whitney Museum of American Art recently admitted that it has plans to expand beyond its 1966 Marcel Breuer building on Madison Avenue, a decision that surprised no one who remembers the museum announced—and then scrapped—previous visions by Michael Graves and Rem Koolhaas of a grander Whitney. What irks some architects is that the latest Whitney blueprint will be by Italian superstar Renzo Piano. News of Piano’s selection from a list of architects considered by the Whitney was hinted at in The New York Times on May 19, but Piano’s priority reached the other architects with whom the Whitney was talking the night before, in an email from the museum’s director, Adam Weinberg. The message warned all those architects not to disclose the new developments, according to one architect who has continued on page 2

On June 3, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) made available applications for 1,100 condominiums in Queens’ newest development, Arverne by the Sea. When complete, the community will consist of 2,300 mostly market-rate residential units in a mix of for-rent and for-sale condos, one- and two-family houses, and midrise apartment blocks located on 100 acres facing the Atlantic Ocean in the Rockaways. So far, 27 two-family homes have been built and sold for between $395,000 and $495,000, and 121 more are under construction. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg welcomed the community’s first homeowners at a ribbon cutting ceremony on May 25. continued on page 3
Throughout the modern age, one persistent challenge for architecture has been how to systematize its production in order to make it more accessible to a greater number of people. Early on, this challenge was addressed through the standardization of the basic units of construction—from the discrete beam, stud, window, or panel to entire systems for structures, walls, floors, mechanics, and more. The toolbox approach led, naturally, to explorations of total prefab—a factory-built, assemble-on-site building. With predecessors like Buckminster Fuller, Walter Gropius, Jean Prouvé, Albert Frey, Archigram, and many others, a new generation of architect-inventors has not given up on the dream of achieving the balance of utility and affordability that so many other mass-market products have managed to pull off.

Ironically, one inevitable consequence of pioneering design work is that it immediately gains in status—and value—and thus is seldom truly accessible to a large audience. Look at the furniture designs of the Bauhaus and Charles and Ray Eames. Or the beachfront house designed by Prouvé—a plum example of his factory approach to building (page 1)—which will surely attract buyers motivated by a collector’s impulse above all. The winner and finalists of Dwell magazine’s prefab house competition (also on page 1) have told us that they have been fielding plenty of inquiries from prospective buyers, but continue to struggle to keep costs significantly lower than the average architect-designed home. Some architects have turned to a risk and affordable ready-made industrial product—the shipping container—as a way to eschew the high initial investments required to implement the manufacture of an entirely new product (page 8).

More recently, the challenge of systematizing the production of architecture has been addressed by the creation of representational tools. Though CAD is pretty much industry standard, there is still room for improvement in how data is transmitted among architects, engineers, fabricators, and builders. Moreover, digital technology has gone further, shaping the way architects convey their ideas to both their clients and the public, and striving to engage emotions. Why not? It’s what we have come to expect of the filmic form. And it’s what we’ve always expected of architecture.

FEAR OF MODERNISM

‘We have come to expect of the filmic form. And it’s what we’ve always expected of architecture.’

WHERE ARE MODERNISM’S GUARDIANS?

A small masterpiece, the Richard Feigen Gallery (1967–69) on the Upper East Side, designed by Pritzker Prize winner Hans Hollein, is being disfigured while local guardians do nothing to intervene. It’s a pity the New York chapter of DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of Modern Movement) could do nothing to save the building. In early June, a wrecking crew began to dismantle the facade. Who knows what is going on inside.

This is particularly disturbing as the local chapter of DOCOMOMO is preparing a big conference in September at Columbia University. This suggests that the organization is equipped to deal with the legacy and preservation of modern architecture on academic terms, but is ineffective when it comes to real-world struggles. Welcome to the Ivory Tower. This is just the latest of a long list of examples of a total lack of leadership in the field of architecture.

RESEARCHERS for the legal status of the building permits had already been issued—concluded they could do nothing to save the building. In early June, a wrecking crew began to dismantle the facade. Who knows what is going on inside.

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Liane Leifv menstrating, CHAIR, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND THEORY UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED ARTS, VIENNA

Though the Whitney’s current block, the museum’s leaders are none too shy about discussing it. Weinberg did not return calls for comment.

In a June 3 interview with this writer on another subject, the Whitney’s trustee and principal benefactor, Leonard Lauder, stressed the museum’s need for more space: “How do you display the works of art that have been acquired or given to you by generous donors in a museum whose walls are basically the same as they were almost 40 years ago, except for an expansion a few years ago onto the fifth floor?”

Lauder floated an alternative—leaving Madison Avenue. “If we can get more space where we are, then of course we’d prefer to stay there, because home is home. If it turns out that, for whatever reason, we’re not able to get more space, then we may have to move. DIA moved from Chelsea to Beacon. I’m not saying we’re going to Beacon, because that hasn’t been contemplated. But the Whitney is today in its third home. There’s nothing sacrilegious about moving homes if there’s no rush to do it.”

Insiders discount Lauder’s suggestion that the Whitney might simply decamp if its needs can’t be met on Madison Avenue. But Lauder’s comments do illustrate the institution’s urgency. The Whitney is expected to pay the full cost of the expansion, estimated at $200 million.

DAVID STARC

UNFAIR PLAY

As a member of the Columbia search committee that nominated Zaha Hadid as dean, I contest the gross distortion of Laurie Hawkkinson’s role in the process (EavesDrop, Issue 07, 2.40.04). Laurie wholeheartedly supported Zaha, even as her catalyzing committee facing last summer eroded the tight relationship to the GSAPP that she’d initially opposed. More importantly, the critique reveals the limited (and aggravating) understanding of the whole process.

A Columbia search committee is, of course, mostly advisory to the university’s provost and president, who are the only ones who negotiate terms with a candidate. In addition, committee deliberations are supposed to be confidential, allowing open debate internally. This breach erodes any confidence in the individuals who spread such malicious and incorrect gossip.

QWENODYN WRIGHT, PROFESSOR, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

WHERE ARE MODERNISM’S GUARDIANS?

A small masterpiece, the Richard Feigen Gallery (1967–69) on the Upper East Side, designed by Pritzker Prize winner Hans Hollein, is being disfigured while local preservationists look on.

It’s a pity the New York chapter of DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of the Modern Movement) could not have done more to intervene. The chapter of the international nonprofit, devoted to protecting modernist works, was alerted two months ago that the project was in danger. DOCOMOMO’s local representatives apparently contacted the Landmarks Preservation Commission and researched the legality of the work being done but—finding that building permits had already been issued—concluded they could do nothing to save the building. In early June, a wrecking crew began to dismantle the facade. Who knows what is going on inside.

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ON AGAIN! continued from front page

tracking the Whitney’s plans.

The current building campaign gathered steam after the post-9/11 recession led to the scrapping of the $400 million Koolhaas plan and the departure of former director Max Anderson, a Koolhaas supporter. The museum revived its ambitions with a list of seven firms that includes David Chipperfield Architects and Herzog & de Meuron. Its aim was to select and pay two or three of the firms for detailed designs, and then award the project to one of them. Shifting course, the Whitney added more names to the list.

Then Piano joined the mix, after one architect on the list praised his Menil Collection as an exceptional design. Piano’s selection makes this his fourth current project in Manhattan. The others are The New York Times headquarters at Times Square, a master plan for Columbia University, and the renovation and expansion of the Pierpont Morgan Library. Like the Morgan Library redesign, which demolished an award-winning 1991 courtyard by Voorsanger Architects, Piano Piano for the Whitney will replace Richard Gluckman’s 1996 renovation.

“There happens,” said one architect of one renovation consuming another, but he was annoyed that a museum devoted to American art was so eager to pass over emerging American architects to hire a European star. “Any architect could do a great job on that corner,” he said.

“There’s plenty of room. The problem is you have to keep the facades of these mundane brownstones, citing landmarked buildings south of the museum, acquired by the Whitney some years ago. Given the ambition of doubling the museum’s size on the Whitney’s current block, the museum’s leaders are none too shy about discussing it. Weinberg did not return calls for comment.

In a June 3 interview with this writer on another subject, the Whitney’s trustee and principal benefactor, Leonard Lauder, stressed the museum’s need for more space: “How do you display the works of art that have been acquired or given to you by generous donors in a museum whose walls are basically the same as they were almost 40 years ago, except for an expansion a few years ago onto the fifth floor?”

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DAVID STARC

EAVESDROP IS ON VACATION.
The Arverne development, facing the Atlantic Ocean, features several new public parks.

continued from front page

The Arverne development, centered on a new town plaza created at the 67" Street stop on the A train, is the fruit of the HPD's 2000 RFP for the area that was a resort in the 19" century, named after its first developer, Remington Vernor, or R. Vern, as he signed his name. At the turn of the century, Arverne was home to a thriving community of wealthy vacationers from New York City. The community boasted Coney Island—esque attractions including a theater on a pier, an amusement park, and numerous hotels. Following a series of fires and overzealous speculation in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the area began to decline. In the 1950s, white flight, spurred on by the erection of low-income housing on neighboring plots, completed its demise. As part of a 308-acre parcel of land, Arverne was designated by the city an Urban Renewal Area in 1964. The site was cleared as part of the renewal plan in 1969 and then lay dormant until the HPD took it up again in the late 1980s. The HPD's first attempts at development in the 1990s flopped due to the tanking of the real estate market. A new RFP was ordered in 2000 and was won by the team of Benjamin-Burchwood, which bought the Arverne parcel from the city for $8.3 million in 2001. The developers intend to spend a total of $100 million on infrastructure and community facilities at Arverne, which include a YMCA, a school, a transportation center, and 10 acres of parks.

Benjamin-Burchwood tapped Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects (EE&K) to execute the project's master plan and architectural design. EE&K sited detached buildings in a tight-knit, pedestrian-friendly network of streets that radiate from the main drag, Ocean Way. The plan bears resemblance to New Urbanist town Seaside, Florida, according to Peter Cavaluzzi, Arverne's lead designer, with most amenities within walking distance. Residents would have a 45-minute commute to Manhattan by train.

The buildings speak a beach house vernacular, with simple, white-painted wood-grained fiberboard siding, roof decks, and a variety of pitched roofs that creates some visual interest. For the community, the Cape Cod look provides a welcome change from the neighboring development of 12-story brick housing slabs. "The community didn't want rows and rows of crappy ugly boxes," said Jonathan Gaska, district manager of Community Board 14 (which includes Arverne) and adjunct professor of urban studies at Queens College. "We think [EE&K's] design is nice—it's beachy and return to the heyday of the Rockaways."

Alternative plans were proposed in a design invitational put on by the Architectural League of New York in 2001 titled Arverne: Housing on the Edge. The league invited four research-oriented teams of architects—CASE, a Dutch research foundation, and the architecture schools at City College, Columbia University, and Yale—to respond to HPD's RFP with the aim of sparking the debate over housing development. Rosalie Genevro, the executive director of the league, wrote in the invitational's exhibition catalogue, "Every so often, a shock event occurs that triggers a flood of ideas and love affairs with new possibilities. The [Arverne] scheme is one such event."

Under the banner "Re-Imagining Grand Avenue: Creating a Center for Los Angeles," the ongoing effort to revitalize Los Angeles' downtown is on the public stage again. Last week, the Grand Avenue Committee (GAC) and the quasi-public Joint Project Authority selected two developers, from an original field of eight, for the proposed 3.2-million-square-foot residential-commercial center at Bonker Hill, near the Walt Disney Concert Hall. In making its selection the GAC roundedly eliminated the Frank Gehry–led team that included Harry Cobb, Daly Genik, Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid, and Brad Pitt, leaving Forest City Development and the Related Companies still in the running. The initial field of some 60 architects and planners has been reduced to AC Martin Partners, Calthorpe Associates, Thomas P. Cox Architects, Civitas, and the Project for Public Spaces working for Forest City; and Skidmore Owings and Merrill, Morphosis, Elkus Manfredi, Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Levin & Associates, and Suismian Urban Design for the Related. Despite, or perhaps exactly because of, the optimism surrounding...
The New York Landmarks Conservancy presented its 13th Annual Lucy G. Moses Preservation Awards to the Biltmore Theatre, Kehila Kadosha Janina Synagogue, 780 West End Avenue, South Street Seaport Museum, Verizon Building (West Street), and Washington Square Arch (Manhattan); Packer Collegiate Institute Middle School and Brooklyn Historical Society (Brooklyn); and Curtis High School (State Island). In addition, the Preservation Organization Award was awarded to the High School for the Preservation Arts in Brooklyn and the Preservation Leadership Award was awarded to Joan Maynard, founder of the Weeksville Society in Brooklyn.

The AIA recently announced the recipients of its 2004 Emerging Professionals Awards. AIA Pennsylvania was named Emerging Professionals Component of the Year. The title of Emerging Professionals Program of the Year went to the Young Designers Professional Development Institute at the Boston Society of Architects, and an honorable mention in the category was awarded to Green Hoek: East River Community Boathouse Competition by AIA New York. The Emerging Professionals Mentorship Award went to Grace Kim of AIA Seattle for her work with the AIA national Mentoring Task Group. Matt Ostanki of AIA Iowa received the Associate AIA Member of the Year Award. Honorable mentions in the same category went to Emily Eastman of AIA New York and Jason Dale Pierce of AIA St. Louis. Recipients were honored at the AIA National Convention and Design Expo in Chicago, June 16.

The American Academy in Rome awarded its 108th annual Rome Prize to 28 winners, including John Hartmann, partner at Freecell Architecture and professor at NJIT; Michael A. Herman, architect at Ateliers Jean Nouvel; Peter Lynch, head of the architecture department at Cranbrook Academy of Art; Allan Wexler, professor at Pratt Institute School of Architecture; Sarah Kuehl, associate at Peter Walker and Partners; and Jon Plasecki, president of Golden Bough Landscape Architecture. The prize provides room, board, stipend, and studio to live and work at the academy.

The National Building Museum’s 2004 Honor Award went to the U.S. General Services Administration on June 3, at a gala in Washington, D.C.

The American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded Vienna-based architect Hans Hollein its $5,000 Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture, and honored Cambridge-based Preston Scott Cohen and New York-based Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi with its $7,500 Avery Award in Architecture.

Atelier BUILD was recently chosen by the Canada Council for the Arts as the 2005 recipient of the Prix de Rome architecture award.

Three winners of the International Berkeley Prize Essay Competition were announced on June 3. Angela Nyka of Iowa State University won the $3,000 first prize, Barak Levy of the Technion in Israel took home the second place prize of $1,250, and John Rea of Virginia Polytechnic Institute got $750 for a third place finish. Two honorable mentions, to Dylan Seaver of the University of Cincinnati and Sandra Thomson of Dalhousie University, were also awarded. The Berkeley Travel Fellowship, awarded to one of the 11 essay prize finalists, went to Adriano Pupilli of the University of Sydney to be used for travel and study in Barcelona.

The second annual ArchVoices Essay Competition has announced two winners and three honorable mentions. First prize of $1,981 and a set of ARE study materials from Kaplan went to Shahana Dattagupta of Seattle-based NBBJ Design. Tamara Redburn of Williamson, Michigan-based FanningHowey Associates, Inc., won second prize, a 15-gigabyte iPod and a $400 credit for ARE materials.

The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts announced its January 2004 grants in May. The 64 recipients include: 366090, $5,000, for publication support; Diana Agrest, $10,000, for The Making of an Avant-Garde: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies 1967-1984; Architecture for Humanity, $7,500 for the publication, Design Like You Give A Damn; Baruch College, $5,000, for the exhibition, Underground Art, 1925-1950: A Centennial Celebration of the New York City Subway; City College of New York, $2,500, for research leading to publication of turf, an architectural journal; Kingsley and JeriLou Hammett, $10,000 for research leading to publication of The Suburbanization of the World’s Greatest City: Is it Becoming Just Another Town; Caroleen Maniague, $5,000 for the project, A Primitive Modern Masterpiece: Le Corbusier’s Jaoul Houses in Paris (1951-55); and NYC012, $5,000 for the design competition, Olympic Village Innovative Design Study. WBEZ Radio of Chicago took home the biggest grant, a whopping $100,000, for enhancing its arts, architecture, and regional planning programming.

The roofs literally provide a breath of fresh air for the city where smog, an overabundance of concrete, and a lack of open space can raise summer temperatures by more than 5 degrees.

For Sale continued from front page

in Prouv’s factory in Nancy, and assembled on site. Back in its day, neighbors were worried that house—a genuine light construction—would be blown away by the wind.

The circulation for the 75-square-meter house—which has three bedrooms, one bath, a living room, and a kitchen—is the outdoor terrace. "It’s a true summer house," said Mathieu Lalande, grandson of the Dollanders. "You have to go outside to reach the other rooms but you live outside most of the time here anyway."

The family decided to sell the house, after the recent death of its longtime caretaker. Interested buyers should contact Lalande at mat.lalande@laposte.net. ELM
Many of the Dwell contest's 13 other finalists have also had some success with their prefab designs in the last year though are grappling with the same issues that mass-production-minded architects tried to balance for the last century: function, affordability, and value. Custom, architect-designed homes average about $400 to $500 per square foot, compared the $150 to 200 per square foot that many of these designer prefab houses are hitting. Ron Radziner, partner in Los Angeles firm Marmol Radziner + Associates, whose design costs about $200 per square foot, was quick to point out that prefab may not be for everyone. "It's certainly not the least expensive option, which is the manufactured home," he said. New York's Kohn + Partners architecture devised two models of prefab houses, one at 1,200 square feet and $250,000, and another at 1,500 square feet and $300,000. Naturally, the expectation is that prices will drop once the design/fabrication processes become more accepted and implemented. Dwell client Wieler's eponymous company, which builds and develops architect-designed houses, is now marketing two versions of Minneapolis-based Ralph Rapson & Associates' Greenbelt home (another Dwell finalist), and has managed to find a factory in North Carolina to produce the units at $100 to 125 per square foot. Certainly, designer prefab has been steadily attention. Resolution: 4 Architecture has sold 13 of its prefab homes, all following the modular design typologies explored in its original Dwell submission. Another finalist, Rocio Romero, based in Perryville, Missouri, sold three of his 1,150-square-foot LV Homes. And both Radziner and Kohn + Partners said they received hundreds of inquiries following the competition, including some serious possibilities. Observed Kohn, "Designer-prefab houses are a natural outgrowth of Internet commerce, where you order something today and have it on your doorstep tomorrow." Despite the seeming spike in interest, however, architects have a long way to go to claim the 95 percent of the built environment that isn't designed by them. Hopefully the "design for the masses" attitudes of Ikea, Design Within Reach, Target, and Dwell, which have been raising design awareness among the general public and making designer items more accessible to a wider consumer base, will extend beyond the stuff that fill our houses, to our very houses themselves.
CASH FOR CCA
The Canadian Center for Architecture raised more than $500,000 at its annual ball, Celebration of Architecture, earlier this month. The gala, under the honorary patronage of Cirque du Soleil's founder Guy Laliberté, was themed “Architecture and Circus.”

WHITE CITY PROTECTED
UNESCO formally declared Tel Aviv's White City a world heritage site on June 8. The White City was shaped by European immigrants who brought Bauhaus-influenced architectural ideals to Israel between 1931 and 1956. UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention treaty in 1972 to protect and preserve international cultural and natural sites considered of outstanding value.

WHAT DOES THE BRICK CODE WANT TO BE?
The Structural Engineering Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers is calling for public comment on the proposed revisions to the 2002 editions of its Building Code Requirements for Masonry Structures and Specifications for Masonry Structures. The standards and specifications are referenced extensively in the United States' model building codes. To participate in the public comment process from June 15 to July 29, visit www.seinstitute.org. The Masonry Standards Joint Committee will review and address all comments submitted through the public ballot.

25 YEARS OF SCOOPING POOP
"If you've ever stepped in dog doo, you know how important it is to enforce the canine waste law," said former mayor Edward Koch on June 2 at Madison Square Park to celebrate the 25th year of the Canine Waste Law, commonly referred to as the "pooper-scooper law." The public celebration was a reminder to New Yorkers to clean up after their dogs.

HOUSE FOR SAGAPONAC
The first house of the much-anticipated Houses of Sagaponac was finished this month. Hariri & Hariri's 5,000-square-foot contribution to the dream home development entered the market at $2.95 million. Henry N. Cobb's design, the first to sell, pre-sold at $2 million. It is still under construction, along with residences by Stan Allen, Shigeru Ban and Dean Maltz, Samuel Mockbee, and Annabelle Selldorf.

COMMENT ON WTC CENTER
The draft recommendations for the World Trade Center Site Memorial Center released earlier this month are open for public scrutiny. Interested parties may view the recommendations and make comments through July 1 at www.renewnyc.com.

LIGHTS ON!
The Departments of Transportation and Design and Construction announced the selection of three finalists in the international City Lights competition: Atelier Imbrey Culbert (New York); Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (Chicago); and Thomas Phifer and Partners (New York). Three alternates were selected: Staubach + Kuckertz Architekten (Berlin); Christoff: Finio Architecture (New York); Leni Schwendinger Light Projects (New York). The finalists were selected from 201 submissions from 23 countries. Finalists will submit final designs by September 17. The winner will be announced in October.

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the project, there seems to be collective amnesia about the numerous failed "fresh" starts that Bunker Hill has seen over the last five decades. Tagged Redevelopment Area Number One by the newly established Community Redevelopment Agency in 1950, the area southwest of El Pueblo, L.A.'s historic center, has been subjected to annihilation, re-grading, and no less than five master plans in the last half century. Prior to 1950, the neighborhood was a community of 10,000 largely immigrant and minority residents living in squalid conditions in disintegrating Victorian structures. By the 1970s, most of the structures had been razed. Aside from a few lone towers, Bunker Hill was effectively the largest open construction site in North America. In the early 1980s, the southern half of the hill was the focus of a protracted competition that pit Canadian architect Arthur Erickson against the "L.A. All Stars"—a super-group made up of figures like Charles Moore, Frank Gehry, and Cesar Pelli. Erickson's winning scheme, the so-called California Center, presented a composition of several office towers linked by plinths and arranged around a swirling shopping center at the site's eastern edge. Essentially, the parti emerged from a modernist urban gesture—tower blocks interspersed with excavated courtyards. The L.A. All Stars' scheme, by contrast, abandoned the singular modernist gesture in favor of a sort of orchestrated, postmodern chaos. The team proposed an "exquisite corpse," or nine buildings, each designed by a different architect, loosely connected by a variety of public spaces developed by Moore and landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. In place of that promising and imaginative entry stands Erickson's banal scheme, a project so uninspired that, when invited to comment on the competition process, Rem Koolhaas declared that it "poignantly evokes what is no longer there: conviction, seriousness, invention...It is surprising that the image of downtown is presented...as merely an East Coast one sees through rose-tinted Polaroids."

The perpetual redesign, promotion, and marketing of Bunker Hill have become something of a local tradition, in line with L.A.'s infamous skill for manufacturing its future while destroying its history. However, the neighborhood's turbulent history makes a case for the return to something akin to urbanism, or at least the will to experiment with our accepted ideas about cities. Given the celebrated reemergence of downtown L.A. as a bona fide residential and cultural center—and the city's reputation as a font of architectural experimentation—one wonders whether the latest Grand Avenue Project will spark new prospects for downtown or if we will be treated yet again to the usual, quotidian developers' exigencies.

In the 24 years since the last major effort to determine Bunker Hill's future, it seems as if L.A. has devolved from being the subject of wonder (think of Reyner Banham's paean to the city) to a place increasingly obsessed with replicating the picturesque and quaint. L.A. deserves an invigorated proposal that is unapologetic about exceeding our present expectations of urbanism. PETER ZELLNER
As shipping containers begin to break out of Red Hook, Elizabeth, New Jersey, and the outer-borough rail yards that are their natural habi­tat, and show up on the Upper East Side’s museum row, it is fair to ask: Why containers, and why now? The architectural zeitgeist has settled—at least for the summer—on the container as the building material of moment. In New York City, two projects are on display: Sean Godsell’s Future Shack is currently in the garden of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, and LOT-EK’s Mobile Dwelling Unit (MDU) will open on July 1 in the Sculpture Court at the Whitney Museum of American Art. (Another container-based project, Adam Kalkin’s Quik House, was installed this spring at Deitch Projects in SoHo as a part of the gallery’s exhibition, Suburban House Kit. It closed on March 27.)

LOT-EK’s Mobile Dwelling Unit (MDU) is the prototype of what the firm imagines could be a moveable living space that would plug into a purpose-made vertical infrastructure dock in cities around the world. The 40-foot container is fitted out with zones for sleeping, living, bathing, cooking, and working. Once it is lifted into place and attached to the hypothetical dock, each zone could slide out, creating a useable series of rooms. When the occupants want to go elsewhere, they could undock or replace individual zone modules so that the MDU’s profile is once again that of a standard container, and move on.

Godesell’s Future Shack represents a more Spartan approach to refitting a container for domestic uses than the MDU, but since it was conceived as a potential solution for housing refugees around the world, its rough and ready quality makes sense. The interior is clad with plywood sheets, and skylights provide interior light. A shed roof above the container is fitted with solar panels to provide electricity. Godsell had been working on the idea for several years, but since entering the Future Shack in the nonprofit group Architecture for Humanity’s competition for housing refugees in Kosovo, the project has garnered notice and credibility. Kalkin’s first container project was actually a performance piece, but since then, he has moved closer to the unglamorous concerns of cheap housing. The tongue-in-cheek order form that accompanied his Deitch installation may have been the last gasp for the performative elements of his projects, because he says he is now developing ideas about containers as housing in Afghanistan.

These contemporaries clearly have some superficial similarities, but each seems to have used the shipping container as a vessel for decidedly different ideas. While Godsell’s no-nonsense approach uses an abundant and inexpensive resource for its possibilities for speedy assembly and reasonably low cost to house people in need, Kalkin coyly references everything from Duschamp’s multiples to 1950s ideas of modern living. Meanwhile, LOT-EK’s Ada Tolla explained part of her and partner Giuseppe Lignano’s fascination with shipping containers stems from the fact that they embody a much larger global system. “It is not just an object that sits,” she said. “It has connotations of Asia and Africa, and the infrastructure behind this network. We try to transport that network and its systems into architecture.”

The abundance of shipping containers is a byproduct of a trade imbalance that means that many more arrive in the United States than leave. In and around New York, shipping containers are as numerous and unwanted as pigeons, with thousands arriving every year. The costs for their shippers to have them
LOT-EK’s MDU (1) is based on the concept that, around the world, there could be colonies of standard container docks where an urban nomad population could arrive and plug in its module houses.

LOT-EK’s Container Home Kit (4) is a prefab house in which containers can be linked to make a 2 or 4-bedroom house, while its Container Mall (5 and 7) is like a vertical flea market, in which each unit is occupied by a different retailer. Australian architect Sean Godseli developed Future Shack (2 and 4) to address housing for post-crisis refugees. Urban Space Management created Container City (3) on the Docklands in London, to provide affordable live/work space for artists (2000 and 2003).

People have been using shipping containers for things other than storage for a long time now—without the help of architects, thank you very much. The yard on the outskirts of Newark periodically doubles as an unofficial homeless shelter. An auto body shop in Williamsburg uses several containers to house everything from spare parts and offices to a pair of understandably irritable Rottweilers who guard the lot at night. Seabox.com, the website of a container manufacturing and outfitting firm in East Riverton, New Jersey, shows pictures of containers tricked out as a shed with aluminum siding and Palladian windows, and in one truly impressive case, a mobile home for an elephant.

Seabox.com, the website of a container manufacturing and outfitting firm in East Riverton, New Jersey, shows pictures of containers tricked out as a shed with aluminum siding and Palladian windows, and in one truly impressive case, a mobile home for an elephant. Circus animals, guard dogs, and monkey wrenches are no longer the only ones to enjoy such accommodations though. Beyond LOT-EK, Godsell, and Kalkin, firms including Jones, Partners: Architects, Jennifer Siegal’s Office of Mobile Design, and even typically mild-mannered Fox & Fowle have developed proposals—and in Siegal’s case, actually built—for projects ranging from single-family houses to large-scale, multi-unit developments. While Jones and Siegal have both used the boxes as the basis for prefabricated houses, Fox & Fowle’s award-winning entry to a Boston Society of Architects ideas competition sketches out a development of 351 live/work units on a 18.5-acre brownfield site in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The plan is still more of a conceptual exercise than anything at this point, according to lead architect Mark Strauss. Strauss says that he chose containers as the building block because of their structural qualities and the chance to address the problem of their abundance.

From a material standpoint, it is easy to see why the homely shipping container has seduced so many architects. They have a steel framework that is not compromised when several are stacked up, and steel or aluminum cladding that can be modified or stripped away fairly easily. Containers are often insulated and waterproof, and come with wooden floors. There are international size standards, with the most typical modules being 8 feet wide, 8 feet and 6 inches high, and 20 feet long.

The London-based real estate development and management firm Urban Space Management has demonstrated the practical and urbanistic potential of container-based buildings in Container City on Trinity Wharf in the Docklands. In creating artists’ live/work spaces, they found the cost to construct a new building would have amounted to £120 per square foot—about three times what artists typically pay for studio space. Containers were an affordable and structurally efficient alternative. The first Container City, completed in 2000, was so successful, was so successful, that two others have followed.

According to both Ada Tolla and Mark Strauss, the short answer to the question of shipping container’s sudden appearance in the spotlight is a straightforward one: Because they are there, and there are so many of them. Their long answers are more complex (and very different) but also suggest that shipping containers, because of the variety of ways architects (and people) approach them, may not always be relegated to their rusty piles along the waterfront.

ANNE GUINEY LIVES IN BROOKLYN AND WRITES ABOUT DESIGN.
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The man who brought architecture to everyone.

Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio Community Architecture
May 22–September 6, 2004
NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
401 F Street NW
Washington, DC
202.272.2448 / www.NBM.org
Red Line, Judiciary Square Station
Free Admission • Open Daily
Without traveling the lonesome roads of Hale County, Alabama, it would be nigh impossible to render the full spirit of Samuel Mockbee’s Rural Studio, the design-build—well, “ministry”—Chapel, Hale County (1994-95). The architecture of humanism never found such raw, exuberant expression before the Rural Studio’s houses made shelter of hay bales, tires, carpet tiles and yarn, sticks, and stones. And although the houses, along with the studio’s public works—such as a senior citizen’s meeting hall, a Little League baseball field, a park pavilion, an outdoor children’s theater—are grounded in Mockbee’s distinct brand of faith, it would be profane to call them “faith-based” projects, as that epithet is so cynically deployed.

My First Recession, the MacArthur Foundation Commission (1992); below, the Yancy Chapel, Hale County (1994-95). Grant, and the posthumous AIA Gold Medal that Mockbee received this year for this body of work, its epiphanies still outweigh its stated aims in the simplest, most practical of terms.

The National Building Museum’s exhibition, Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Community Architecture, on view through September 6, assembles as full a sense of this phenomenon as has ever been articulated from a distance. And it does so without presenting him as an outsider curio. In three galleries containing 12 models and more than 100 photographs, the show elaborates the Mockbee prophecy in nearly every possible dimension, not least in the small house constructed of reclaimed carpet yarns in the central gallery. The collateral material fills in the broad margins around the built work and tries to penetrate the soul of Mockbee through his written lecture notes, photographs of the Alabama he prized by Walker Evans and William Christenberry, a copy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, which he assigned to every one of his students, and, not least, his ecstatic paintings.

After seeing these items, it seems scarcely sufficient to have known Mockbee, the man, only by the buildings on which he collaborated. His canvases have a shocking, seductive, and grotesque richness that foils the earthbound lot of humanity with religious and natural fantasies. In one series, he imagines the redemption of Alberta and Shepard Bryant, who became residents of the first house the Rural Studio constructed, the Hay Bale House in Mason’s Bend, Alabama. Alberta’s Ascension shows Alberta Bryant, poised in her wheelchair in a flower-print blouse, facing the viewer while joining hands with an outlandish, large-breasted messenger whose charge it is to liberate her from hardship—the pair of cardinals perched in the picture would suggest as much.

With architecture, Mockbee surely looked after her and her husband’s need for shelter; through painting, he sought to deliver her the world he believed she deserved.

The balance of the show concerns not merely architecture, but the passion of architecture. Several of the projects are shown through models, but more vividly through collages of snapshots showing students’ immersion in their clients’ lives—in one, a young man at a job site struggling to hold a goose in his arms while talking on his cell phone. At the risk of romanticizing its efforts, it seems that every one of the Rural Studio’s undertakings constituted a big, unruly gathering in the backwoods, where huge baskets of vegetables cover the tables, porch dogs lie around randomly, and things are both coming together and falling apart as the discovery continues. To see this life is to wonder whether Mockbee, as flattered as he may have been by the world’s accolades, didn’t also find them faintly bewildering, for although what he wrought was the work of a genius, even a genius needs those things that any person can cultivate, namely empathy, patience, and persistence. It all seemed plain enough to him.

To mind as such contemporary influential examples. Lovink emphasizes the need to surpass offline visualizations and to address practical and social skills applicable to a wide set of general problems “of human presence in a phenomenal world”—a general humanist message that is apparent throughout Uncanny Networks.

Unfortunately the books do not have illustrations, which is surprising given that both Lovink’s books provoke questions about the emerging Internet culture that is increasingly inseparable from the “real world.” JAMES WAY IS AN ASSISTANT EDITOR AT AN.
Digital Avant-Garde: Celebrating 25 Years of Ars Electronica honors the world’s largest institution for digital art with two exhibitions on view through July 18th, one at the American Museum of the Moving Image (AMMI), and one at Eyebeam. At AMMI, a group show titled Interactions/Art and Technology includes works by Tom White and David Small of MIT’s Media Lab (Interactive Poetic Garden) as well as projects for the Ars Box, a stereoscopic 3D virtual environment developed for AMMI by the Linz-based arts and technology research center Futurelab. An abstract map of one such project, CAVE by Peter Kogler, depicts the labyrinthine corridors of the AMMI. An exhibition of the 1999 Ars Electronica Digital Avant-Garde: Celebrating 25 Years of Ars Electronica is also on view at Eyebeam, 540 West 21st Street, New York City, a bike ride through Manhattan’s “narrative architectures.”

Digital Avant-Garde: Celebrating 25 Years of Ars Electronica
American Museum of the Moving Image, 3601 35th Avenue, Queens
Eyebeam, 540 West 21st Street
Through July 18

LUTHER HARRIS
Architectural One-Upmanship Among the 19th Century Rich
7:30 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.aila.org

ED RUSCHA
7:00 p.m.
Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Ave.
www.whitney.org

JUNE 25
William Haas, Jeff Mulligan
Hudson Yards Special District
8:00 a.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.aila.org

RUSSEL SHORTO: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, The Forgotten Colony That Shaped America
6:30 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.skyscraper.org

SUMMOSIA
Summer Design Institute, 10th Anniversary
Kurt Andersen, Ellen Lupton, Linda Yeven, Ralph Caplan, et al.
National Museum of the American Indian
1 Bowling Green
www.aila.org

EXHIBITIONS
JUNE 23 - OCTOBER 24
David W. Dunlop
From Abyssinian to Zion: Photographs of Manhattan’s Houses of Worship
New-York Historical Society
2 West 77th St.
www.nyyhistory.org

JUNE 26 - AUGUST 16
At the Ansonia Hotel: A Broadway Landmark
Tony Smith
Urban Center Gallery
457 Madison Ave.
www.msa.org

JUNE 25 - AUGUST 31
New York: An Urban Center
Lisa Kereszi, Andrew Moore
Photography Since 1990
Robert Mann Gallery
534 West 25th St.
www.robertmann.com
THE DREAMLAND ARTIST CLUB

Coney Island
June 12 to September 6

RUDOLF STINGEL
Plan B
Grand Central Terminal
15 Vanderbilt Ave.
July 1 to 29

The public art nonprofit Creative Time is overseeing ambitious facelifts on two New York landmarks this summer. The Dreamland Artist Club, which opened June 12, consists of hand-painted signs and backdrops by more than 20 artists for the famous Coney Island theme park. Conceived by Steve Powers, the project salvages the remnants of the park’s sign-painting tradition while refreshing its public image. Spruced-up attractions include the Cyclone Rollercoaster as well as numerous stands along Jones Walk and the Boardway.

Meanwhile, on July 1, Italian artist Rudolf Stingel will install 27,000 square feet of pink and blue, floral-patterned wall-to-wall commercial carpet in Grand Central Terminal’s Beaux Arts-style Vanderbilt Hall. The work, titled Plan B, is meant to comfort commuters while provoking them to ponder the design of public space, according to Stingel. Sponsored by Yves Saint Laurent, the exhibition will be presented by MTA Arts for Transit and Art Production Fund in addition to Creative Time. A twin installation of 7,000 square feet of carpeting will be on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from June 10 through August 7.

DEBORAH GROSSBERG

FOR COMPETITIONS LISTINGS SEE WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM
What do black holes, superstrings, and strange attractors have to do with architecture? Everything, claims historian, critic, and self-styled landscape designer Charles Jencks. Starting with his publication of *Architecture of the Jumping Universe* in 1975, Jencks has been making the case that contemporary science should be symbolically applied to buildings and landscape as a reflection of up-to-date understandings of the universe and of life. In his latest publication, *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation*, he asks, "Is this a garden if not a miniaturization, and celebration, of the place we are in, the universe?" Jencks has also been (less convincingly) applying this theory to his own homes and gardens as well as a few others, mostly in the United Kingdom, where he lives. The *Garden of Cosmic Speculation* showcases his interpretive use of cosmology, theoretical physics, and chaotic dynamics in the design for a 30-acre garden at Portrack, his mother-in-law's estate in the Borders area of Scotland.

The garden takes the form of a vast expanse of undulating land peppered with scientifically inspired follies and mini theme gardens. A checkerboard terrace twists around a central vortex or singularity, ending in a tall swirling vortex sculpture representing the formation of the universe out of a black hole. Spiral-shaped earth mounds, inspired by DNA as well as Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, rise above swirling swimming holes that echo the shapes of the Hénon Attractor, a chaotic orbit. (Jencks created a similar earth sculpture for the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Landform, which cost £380,000 to build, though it recently won the 2004 Gulbenkian Prize, roping in £100,000 for the museum.)

*Cosmic Speculation*, a coffee-table tome, provides clear explanations of the thinking behind the garden's designs as well as gorgeous color photographs detailing the project's transformations from season to season. Jencks began designing the garden in 1988 with his late wife, landscape architect Maggie Keswick, and both the garden and the book are dedicated to her memory. A certain sentimentality is woven into the garden's design as well as the book's narrative, personalizing the landscape and bridging the textual gap between theory and memoir. Jencks' lengthy account of the project's history is punctuated with comments from his famous friends. Short interviews with architect Daniel Libeskind and theoretical physicist Lee Smolin are accompanied by praise from James Watson, the co-discoverer of DNA. Jencks also consulted with such experts as Paul Davies (superstring theory), Steven and Hilary Rose (biology, sociology), and Sir Roger Penrose (algebraic geometry). Nonetheless, Jencks' interpretations of modern science are too literal. The *Six Senses Garden* includes giant steel statues of various body parts representing—you guessed it—the senses: a hand for touch, a pair of lips for taste, a nose for smell, an ear for hearing, an eye for sight, and, perplexingly, a woman contemplating a brain for intuition. Libeskind smartly shied away from commenting on Jencks' superficial approach, warning against "being facile in making comparisons to scientific thought." More troublingly, some of Jencks' metaphors miss or mangle key elements of the theories on which they're based. The Fractal Terrace, for example, is a checked grid with tiles that deform as they move to one edge, but the deformation is more fractured than fractal. The main difference is that a fractal must be self-similar, repeating its form on many scales, whereas *Jencks' terrace* just breaks up the strict grid in a relatively unstructured pattern.

As Jencks admits, "The garden as a microcosm of the universe is quite a familiar idea." His argument for updating this age-old strategy is compelling, but his architectural applications seem contrived. The book ends up reading like a fluffy, if intriguing, exercise in self-promotion.

DEBORAH GROSSBERG IS AN ASSISTANT EDITOR AT A.W.

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**Revisioning Postmodernism**

In *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (his first book, published in 1977 with a half-million sales), Charles Jencks famously asserts the death of modern architecture and the dynami- ming of the Pruitt-Igoe housing projects in St. Louis in 1967. Published in 1977, Jencks' book is credited for delineating the postmodernism debate in architecture. It has been immensely popular in part because of Jencks' ability to synthesize the many terms, concepts, and theories that defined cultural criticism at the time. It remains in print today, after seven editions.

Artist Martin Beck noticed that Jencks has continually shifted the terms and terrain of his postmodern argument over the course of these editions and the evolution of the movement. The slim publication *half modern, half something else* documents these shifts. Jencks first theorizes "the language of postmodern architecture" in editions one and two (published with a few months of each other). He then promotes the style in edition three, when the book blossoms as a publishing and architectural phenomenon. By editions four and five, postmodernism peaks on an international stage and Jencks begins to historicize and synthesize its major elements. His polemic disintegrates by edition six, when the publisher turns *The Language of Post Modern Architecture* into a coffee-table book and it's clear that the end of postmodernism as a compelling movement is near. In the last edition, number seven, Jencks changes the title of the book to *The New Paradigm in Architecture* and attempts to update his argument, emphasizing new technology as a force in driving architectural movements, which only results in his argument becoming blurred.

Beck follows Jencks' lead and divides *half modern* into three sections. The first section simply reproduces the cover and title page of each edition, allowing Jencks' work to speak for itself. The second section presents photographs taken by six commissioned photographers working in various genres (architecture, fashion, product). The final section is an interview with Jencks, in which Beck tries to get Jencks to discuss how his views on complexity and technology changed through the editions. Beck believes and tries to get Jencks to admit that his argument became increasingly technology-driven, akin to the approach of his mentor Reyner Banham, unlike the Banham, Jencks lost the edge that posited postmodernism as a project of democratic emancipation as its use of technology was primarily about the generation of new forms.

Beck's interest in Jencks and his various editions of the same book came to him, in fact, as he was researching Banham's 1984 Scenes in America Deserta. Beck claims that Banham did not want to take part in the postmodernism movement—a movement he despised—and retreated to the America desert to avoid commenting on the work of his former student.

This book takes on a big subject in a clever way and shows how postmodernism's transformations— and those of how it was read—led the movement from its hopeful beginning to its current irrelevance.

WILLIAM MENKING IS AN EDITOR AT A.W.

Jencks' book changed with every edition (chronologically arranged, from left to right).
The practice of architecture has been transformed by digital technology, primarily in its adoption of CAD software running on PC workstations. This technology has altered the way designs are presented to both clients and the public. Presentation renderings are, more often than not, output from a 3D graphics package, sometimes directly from a CAD application, other times through a stand-alone rendering program or comprehensive modelling and animation package. The use of digital visualization tools is only growing, especially for large-scale projects that have a significant public presence and also for smaller-scale work, especially interior design. The reason? Projects at extremely large or small scales have always been difficult for a physical model to convey. We only experience the spatial nature of the world by moving through it—without movement over time, everything we see might as well be projected on a wall, as in Plato’s cave. Observe the way people move around a physical model, or the way a CAD user will repeatedly rotate a model to understand it spatially. They are viewing a static construct in the only way that can unambiguously reveal its three-dimensional form. Only animation, as part of filmmaking in general, accommodates the dynamic, temporal-spatial nature of our mental construct of the world. Current technology enables an animation to be arbitrarily close to photographically realistic, to depict unbuilt forms with uncanny detail and precision, and to show those forms in their proper context. So why are most architectural animations boring, unenlightening, and ugly? Because they are being made by architects, not filmmakers. Typical architectural animations consist of walk-through, fly-throughs, fly-arounds, and drive-bys, all from a single point of view, usually in one continuous shot. They may have a sound track of some generic electronic music, and possibly some rudimentary title cards. The 3D computer model itself may be nearly schematic in its simplicity or obsessively detailed. The materiality, lighting, and rendering may be anywhere from the software’s generic default settings to stunningly photorealistic. But almost without exception, no matter how well crafted, these leave the viewer cold, unengaged, and unenlightened. What’s missing? Nothing important—just story, design, character, direction, editing, sound, graphics, and postproduction. In other words, the things that make watching a film not just bearable but enjoyable, memorable, and sometimes emotionally or intellectually stirring. Lacking these qualities, an animation of even the most engaging, dramatic, structured, lyrical, or exciting architecture will seem dry, flat, disorganized, and boring. Architecture and its audience have a common language developed over thousands of years, possessing grammar, syntax, and symbolism. The language of film and animation has had only a century or so to develop, but it is no less rich or well defined than that of architecture, and perhaps better understood. Most people watch films and television, and most would say that they get a good idea of what their experience of a place or event would be, even if they only see it on a screen—in a professional presentation. The same audience would be bored, disengaged, and possibly confused by a dry collection of images presented in an arbitrary sequence. Imagine the differing responses to a good documentary on New York’s skyscrapers compared to someone’s vacation snapshots of the very same buildings. Any good architect will recognize that merely knowing how to use visualization tools is not enough. Without skill, experience, talent, and passion, no amount of technical expertise will result in anything anyone would wish to look at, let alone live in. Instead of having the youngest, least experienced intern produce the visualizations, perhaps more architects should follow the example set by the United Architects team in the WTC competition, which brought professional graphic designers and filmmakers in the process. At the very least, it suggests that architects intending to produce animated visualizations should learn and employ the techniques that utilize the technology more fully. ED MANNING IS A VISUALIZATION DESIGNER AND TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT.
Autodesk Revit. Because something designed for the job is better than something that isn't.