It is the first of its kind in Manhattan or anywhere else: the “en-suite sky garage.”

The marquee feature of the building going up at 200 11th Avenue will whisk car and driver skyward to one of 14 condos cum garage. “It’s a crazy idea, but we thought it was a good one,” developer Young Woo told Bloomberg.

At the March 12 luncheon for the New York Buildings Council, a trade group supporting the local construction industry, Larry Silverstein, president and CEO of Silverstein Properties, and Anthony Shorris, executive director of the Port Authority of NY & NJ, outlined the latest construction schedule for the World Trade Center site. According to their projections, complete site work—including the cores and shells of towers 3 and 4 is ready for foundation work to begin. Steel erection on the Freedom Tower should breach street level sometime in May.

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David Paterson is now New York’s 55th governor, but veterans say that his approach to urban planning remains a mystery. Moynihan Station’s future is once again unsure, as is the fate of $7 billion worth of...
Dream, Kitchen.

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In February at a lecture in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Daniel Libeskind said, “I won’t work for totalitarian regimes…. I think architects should take a more ethical stance.”

He went on to add that although he loved China, its history, and its culture, he was disturbed by how little architects working there know about the public process or even about who previously owned, occupied, or had used the land.

“It bothers me when an architect is given carte blanche and told here’s a great site, build X,” he said to an audience of 1,700, calling for architects to be more principled because they have a significant “role to play at the forefront between practical issues and issues that effect people’s lives. It’s not enough just to have a good site.”

The uproar that ensued mostly in the British press has not spread here, but Libeskind makes a reasonable point given the rapid pace of development in China over the past few years. The English architecture newspaper Building Design quoted Nicholas Ray, an architect and lecturer at Cambridge University, who said he respected Libeskind’s stance. “It’s very good, and because of his profile, it sends a strong message.” Jan Kaplicky of Future Systems, praising Libeskind, chimed in, too: “I’m delighted Daniel has said something on this. It’s about time, and I agree 100 percent. It’s essential you don’t work in a country where the regime has a bad record on human rights.”

But the paper also reported that a Dutch architect Eric van Egeraat dismissed Libeskind’s stance as simplistic and a “publicity stunt.” “I could say the same thing about Russia, or France, or anywhere. To try and ideologise architecture is totally wrong; you completely overestimate its power. Architecture should be used to promote IDEOLOGY—I need to be aware of that—but it doesn’t make the architecture or the stone and brick bad.”

The downturn in the American economy is surely striking fear into the minds of many architects, and will leave them hunting for more commissions abroad like Steven Holl’s massive Hybrid project. Developed in a world under way in Beijing (AN 02_06_08). The need to be pragmatic about bringing in new work may muffle nascent desires for a Libeskind-like protest, yet his point resonates louder than ever, especially given the ongoing question of the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

Architects who do mental gymnastics to rationalize commissions from unsavory regimes are one of the oldest stories in the profession, but more recently, architects have been feeling good about the ethical standing of their profession, thanks in part to worthy organizations like Architecture for Humanity, Public Architecture, and Architecture Without Borders. Refusing to work in a country as economically powerful as China takes more of a commitment, since it could cut into potential jobs and profits. But if the prospect of not working to protest a political position requires too much, it is still worth discussing an appropriate response for a profession that wants to have a serious role in building well-functioning cities and societies.

We are not calling for a protest against building in China, or in Azerbaijan, or for any emerging authoritarian dictatorship with an eye on cultural recognition. There would be a certain irony in protesting one country’s invasions when our own is fighting in Iraq. But it is time for a broader conversation about what it really means for architects to work in the world with eyes wide open. WILLIAM HEMMING

WEST CHELSEA CRACK-UP continued from front page

NYC’S NEXT BUILDER continued from front page

In March 7, the sky garage got a lot crazier when the Department of Buildings (DOB) issued a stop work order to the 20-story, Annabelle Selldorf-designed project.

Two days earlier, a handful of union members who were picketing the non-union job noticed that some of the concrete structural columns appeared misaligned, and that other sections looked cracked. One called the DOB to complain, and following an inspection, the site was shut down.

Despite the warped columns and other concrete irregularities, the building may be structurally sound. “It is my opinion building is not in danger of falling over,” DOB spokesman Kate Lindquist told AN. “Where not clear is whether the current problems need to be corrected further to address any structural issues.”

Presented with pictures of the project’s imperfections, a handful of engineers said it was very possible that the concrete could be structurally stable without testing it first. Tests are now underway, though it is the project’s engineers, Goldstein Associates, and not the department that is performing them. According to Lindquist, “The owner’s engineer has the resources, calculations, and data to make a technical assessment.”

Aside from the structural concerns, difficulties could arise for the building’s facade if the cladding system is not designed to handle the extra tolerances created by the out-of-plumb columns. This could lead to installation problems and possible leakage.

An engineer for Gilsanz Murray Steficek, which is serving as cladding consultant on the project, said the building seemed in order. “I’ve been there,” the engineer told AN. “It looks fine. I think Goldstein has everything under control.” Calls for comment to Selldorf Architects and Seven Star Construction, the general contractor, were not returned.

Though Lindquist expects the project to resume once the owner’s report is complete, she said that the incident “certainly raises questions about the work on site.”

MATT CHABAN
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THE STIMULATING JEAN NOUVEL

Ah, springtime, when young men's fancy turns to love, and middle-aged men's fancy apparently turns to things a little fleshier. At a recent launch party for L’Homme, a new men's fragrance from Yves Saint Laurent, the main attraction was the presence of Jean Nouvel, who had designed the fragrance's bottle. Like so much of what the bald and black-clad architect creates, it caused gasps. A thick test-tube-like glass shaft rises from an octagonal platform base. But heck, biomimicry is all the rage these days, right? The brief was presumably to come up with something virile, and Nouvel obviously took his directive literally. And just in case you missed the joke, there is a squirmy little bauble floating around inside. Mr. Nouvel described it thusly to the good people of Wallpaper*: “I thought we should mobilize a huge national will to make teleportation available to everyone.” To finance it? “Within every municipality there should be a tax-exempt 24-hour zone where everything is legal: drugs, sex, and music.”

This last suggestion, we dare say, might just get traction among some local pols.

SEND TIPS AND TELEPORTERS TO EAVESDROP@ARCHPAPER.COM

EAVESDROP: ANNE GUINLEY

> THE PARK SLOPE ARMOORY

1642 5th Ave., Brooklyn
Tel: 718-271-7572
Designers: OMNI Architects

Originally opened in 1895, the Park Slope Armory is back in use again: Its vast sunlit spaces, expansive drill floor, and balcony seating provide an ideal configuration for a multi-purpose athletic center. The primary goal was to maintain the integrity of the landmark building; the deteriorating steel trusses were scraped and repainted terracotta red, matching the color of the old brick, stair balusters, and new Olympic-quality, 200-meter track. The original iron railings remain on the balcony and, although unusual in a modern athletic center, make the building’s history seem present. “The idea was to rehabilitate the original structure. The balconies are almost identical, the stairs are still there, and the floor has been maintained and adapted for a different use,” said Michael Vujosevic, the principal in charge of the project. The soaring, barrel-vaulted ceiling is 80 feet at its peak, and the original transom and large windows flood the space with natural light. Managed by the Department of Design and Construction, and designed by OMNI Architects for the Department of Homeless Services, the 65,000-square-foot space will be used for running track instead of running drills, thanks to adaptive reuse.

AUDREY JAYNES

THE ARCHITECTS' NEWSPAPER APRIL 2 2008

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AUDREY JAYNES
While Brad Pitt and his star-architect entourage attract the cameras, other New Orleanians are trying to get some work done. To that end, the New Orleans Building Corporation (NOBC) on March 6 released a request for qualifications for Phase One of a sweeping plan to reunite the city with the Mississippi River for the first time in more than a century.

With a budget of $157 million, the project calls for landscape and urban design on 70 acres, knitting together networked green spaces in place of blockaded access, spotty amenities, and battered wharves. “The idea is to spread the wings of the riverfront from the very small core that exists now to the full, five-mile stretch,” said NOBC chief executive officer Sean Cummings.

The winning team will dig into New Orleans’ Reinventing the Crescent plan, finalized last month. That document is the product of a team led by urban designers Chan Krieger Siemiewicz; landscape architect Hargreaves Associates; TEN Arquitectos; and local design firm Eskew + Dumez + Ripple.

Stretching from Jackson Avenue to the Holy Cross neighborhood, the design aims to undo damage from prior development. New Orleans’ waterfront has also been barricaded by levees, railways, floodwalls, and parking lots, while cruise-ship berths make yet more obstacles to public access.

“Our strategy was to try and alleviate these conflicts wherever possible,” said Mark Dwyer, associate at TEN Arquitectos. Elevated pedestrian connections, strategic flood wall penetrations, and visual connections also knit into the larger plan, he added.

Major work involves pedestrian bridges and revamped areas like the so-called Moonwalk, adjacent to the French Quarter, where riprap banks will be replaced with land-craded steps and shade structures. This phase also calls for a new amphitheater and sanctuary; stabilizing the fire-ravaged Mandeville Wharf; and wind turbines to power portions of the riverfront.

Landscape elements include a terraced levee system and floodwall modifications. Four finalists will be interviewed for the contract, which is worth up to $10 million. Submissions are due April 7. The full three phases, worth $294 million, are expected to spur $3.6 billion in private investment— with work tidied up in time for New Orleans’ 300th anniversary in 2018.

Visions of sleek towers looming over low-scale zones have not necessarily wowed the neighbors, thrilled as they may be with the new waterfront. “I’m concerned about having buildings that are out of scale and out of proportion,” said Julie Jones, president of the Bywater Neighborhood Association. “We’ve got 19th-century houses that are in a bad state. A lot of us think dealing with blight would do more for the neighborhood than sticking an amphitheater on the edge of it.”

While the findings of the official investigation into the disaster had yet to be released as of press time, attention seemed to be focused on a frayed nylon sling that was still attached to the fallen collar. An industry insider who requested anonymity told AN that the use of nylon slings for this kind of work is poor rigging practice, because steel has sharp edges and can easily cut nylon. In fact, Section 31 of the Ironworkers’ Collective Bargaining Agreement entitled “Safety Provisions” contains a clause that clearly states that wire rope slings will be used instead of nylon straps. But these workers were not ironworkers, nor was there a master rigger on site supervising the jump, the source said; they were crane operators from Operating Engineers Local 14. The Department of Buildings (DOB) allows anyone who obtains a tower crane rigger’s license to supervise and execute a crane jump and does not require the presence of a professional engineer or a master rigger (a master rigger must be the officer of a company and be able to acquire $10 million in insurance). As a result, said the source, “You get these roving bands of operating engineers getting their buddies together during the weekend and jumping cranes. They don’t have anywhere near the cleared up described in the press reports.
AN_06_01_15_mp_FINAL:AN_06_CLH_Mar25  3/25/08  11:28 AM  Page 7

Continued from previous page
towers 1 through 4, the Calatrava-designed transit center, and the memorial—will be ready for tenant build-out by 2012.

After nearly seven years of contested designs, political wrangling, and financial uncertainties, the four-year schedule announced today sounded overly optimistic to many, especially considering the recent downturn in the economy and the continuing inflation of construction prices. But Silverstein assured the room of construction and real estate executives that the timeline is feasible and that funding for the project is in place. As evidence, he pointed to last year’s settlement with his insurers, which resulted in a total payout of $4.2 billion, and to the $2.6 billion in Liberty Bonds that have been assigned to reconstruction efforts. All told, said Silverstein, public and private expenditures on the site will total $20 billion in the next four years.

Shorris spoke more directly to concerns over the rise in construction prices. “We were relatively lucky with our market timing at the Freedom Tower,” he said, “but inflation is a constant source of pressure. Adjustments have been made in the design, but they haven’t affected the major elements. We just hope that our rate of getting smarter will exceed the rate of inflation.”

According to Silverstein, at the time of his update workers were test-blasting at the sites of towers 2, 3, and 4, and erecting two cranes for foundation work. By the end of the month, foundation work for each of those towers should be well underway. Within a year, the buildings should reach street level. The Richard Rogers-designed tower 3 and Fumihiko Maki-designed tower 4 are expected to top out in mid 2010, and the Lord Norman Foster-designed tower 2—the tallest of these three at 1,278 feet—is expected to follow in 2011. Steel erection has already reached 75 feet up on the Freedom Tower (tower 1), and should reach street level in two months. Tishman Construction, who is building the Freedom Tower, is completing the work at towers 3 and 4, and Turner Construction holds the contract on tower 2.

The luncheon took place just hours after Governor Eliot Spitzer resigned his post as a result of implication in a prostitution ring. When asked what he would say to incoming Governor David Paterson, Silverstein responded, “All agreements have been signed, all decisions have been made. Now it’s time to get on with it.”

While work ramped up on towers 1 through 4, plans for tower 5 fizzled. On March 19, JP Morgan Chase announced that it would not build a headquarters on the current site of the derelict Deutsche Bank Building, but instead would move into Bear Stearns’ building on Park Avenue.

Continued from page 6

Expertise at rigging that ironworkers do. You have to ask yourself: why are they using nylon slings? It’s the first no-no. They shouldn’t even be in the toolbox.” Ironworkers execute all crane jumps on structural steel building projects, but they are rarely used for concrete projects because they are one of the most expensive trades to hire. According to the source, another factor that may have attributed to the fail was the crane’s floating foundation. Tower cranes are designed to be freestanding up to, and sometimes above, 200 feet, but they have solid concrete foundations in order to absorb lateral loads, which this crane did not have. Most developers are loath to spend a quarter of a million dollars on a temporary foundation for a crane, and so engineers have to rely on tiebacks to the building, which leaves a percentage of redundancy if the tiebacks fail.

The real trouble with the situation is that while the workers involved in the accident were doing things by the book, the book itself has two loopholes that may have led to the catastrophe: The city allows people who are not professional riggers to execute crane jumps, and does not require stand-alone foundations for tower cranes.

The city will most likely tighten regulations on crane jumps as a result of this accident, first by requiring that a master rigger and professional engineer be on site during jumps, and second, by requiring more robust foundations. The regulations were tightened last year after sections of a tower crane fell on a taxi on 3rd Avenue during a jump, that time by requiring that a licensed tower crane rigger be on site during the process. Previously, tower crane riggers only had to be on site when a crane was put up or taken down. In spite of these regulatory shortcomings, New York City’s crane laws are the most stringent in the nation, even more restrictive than those required by federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations.

“If you compare the number of cranes in the city with the number of injuries, it’s a pretty low percentage,” said the source. “You look in the newspaper in Florida and every day you see cranes tipping over. We don’t have that. But because of our environment, when something goes wrong it goes catastrophically wrong and takes out a building.”

The DOB’s investigation is looking into the companies involved with the construction site, including Joy Contracting, a New Jersey-based concrete company that held the crane contract and employed the operating engineers involved. The DOB is also investigating Kennelly Development Company of Manhattan, the developer of the residential condominium, and the general contractor, Reliance Construction Group (RGC). Both Kennelly and RCG expressed their sympathy to the victims and said that they are cooperating with government agencies in the investigation.

AARON SEWARD

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Architects:
HOK Sport
Photo: S. Levine/Xem/NI Mets

Construction schedules always run against tight deadlines, but struggling to meet client move-in dates is extra important when the hopes and dreams of thousands of fans rely on the completion of a project. By choosing steel for the entire superstructure of Citi Field, HOK Sport opted for a material that can be erected faster than comparable systems, ensuring that the Mets will be the first Major League Baseball team in New York City to move into its new home.

Aaron Seward
Backhoes have been busy along a 13-block swath of Brooklyn this month as the clock runs out on New York City Council deliberations over contextual height limits for new construction near Grand Street. A similar frenzy swept the area during a 2005 rezoning. Among the projects that beat the height restrictions that time was the 50 Bayard Street condominium, designed by Karl Fischer Architect, whose advertising boasted: “It’s now illegal to get this high.”

Now another Karl Fischer–designed project is hitting the dirt before Williamsburg’s next contextual-height zone falls into place: a 16-story tower slated to rise on the corner of Grand Street and Driggs Avenue, developed by SK Development Group. In order to expedite the process, construction workers have been demolishing the previous structure, once a bookstore, while simultaneously pouring concrete for the tower’s foundation, a tactic that has raised eyebrows among local sidewalk superintendents. “If you were a developer, wouldn’t you follow that strategy?” Fischer asked about the quick concrete work. He added that builders stand to lose a bundle of money from the proposed rezoning—or “downzoning,” as he calls it—which he claims won’t benefit the area in the long run.

That sentiment is not shared by Brooklyn Community Board 1, the Borough President’s office, and the Department of City Planning, all of whom approved the new zoning, which emerged in the wake of the 2005 rezoning of the Williamsburg-Greenpoint waterfront. That move made way for the new crop of high-rise residential towers along the East River while imposing contextual height restrictions for many of the neighborhood’s highland areas. At the time, developers of projects that exceeded the proposed contextual building heights hurried to pour their foundations ahead of the rezoning, which allows in-progress projects to exceed the proposed zoning envelope.

The rezone, which the council will decide by April 18, includes a two-block radius along Grand Street between the BQE and Berry Street, and two triangular blocks on Metropolitan Avenue. This area’s existing R6 zoning has no height restrictions, permitting tower construction on large lots. The proposed R6B zoning would limit building heights to between 30 and 40 feet, with a maximum height of 50 feet, reflecting the area’s three- to four-story structures.

For his part, Fischer remains hopeful that foundation work will be completed on the new tower before the council’s verdict comes in. “The City Council doesn’t want to show favor by rushing [the rezoning proposal] through,” he said, alluding to perceived council bias toward neighborhood activists, who have bitterly opposed developers’ under-the-wire handiwork.

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Conservation Corps, told AN. “I would with West Side advocacy group Housing preservation,” John Raskin, an organizer to prioritize housing development and housing issues from his time as a legislator, “Given his understanding of affordable that its strong residential component plays meeting. Selecting a Hudson Yards bidder at its March office. MTA spokesman Jeremy Soffin told AN that his board still plans to vote on senior advisors and requested anonymity to discussed Hudson Yards with the mayor’s whose sale will fund the MTA’s last capital plan, seems assured of continuity.

“I think it’s got an energy of its own,” said Steven Spinola, head of the Real Estate Board of New York and advisor to the Hudson Yards bidding process. Since the MTA revised its guidelines to require an “equity-type interest” in the land, Brookfield Properties withdrew its bid and focused on its own nearby platform project, a five-acre pair of skyscrapers it calls Manhattan West. That project, with private financing for predevelopment in place, will likely follow its own course. A nearby hotel from Extell Development Company, a long-shot Hudson Yards bidder, similarly has financing in place. The private financing of big projects near Hudson Yards makes that site’s development prospects solid, even if Moynihan Station founders.

City Hall is also willing to flex political muscle on the matter. Hudson Yards can solidify Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s legacy by creating more affordable housing, energy-efficient sewer systems, and attractive public space. Someone who has discussed Hudson Yards with the mayor’s senior advisors and requested anonymity to avoid violating confidences explained that the mayor is pressuring the MTA to select a bidder by April so that the city can complete land use review before Bloomberg leaves office. MTA spokesman Jeremy Soffin told AN that his board still plans to vote on selecting a Hudson Yards bidder at its March meeting.

Another advantage for Hudson Yards is that its strong residential component plays to Governor Paterson’s evident interest. “Given his understanding of affordable housing issues from his time as a legislator, Governor Paterson is in a good position to prioritize housing development and preservation,” John Raskin, an organizer with West Side advocacy group Housing Conservation Corps, told AN: “I would expect him to be at least as strong a position under his leadership as we try to win permanent affordable housing on the rail yards.”

Finally, the Hudson Yards plans align with Mayor Bloomberg’s support for mass transit, a potential area for cooperation among him, state Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and the new governor. Financing for the 7 line extension also exists via bonds that the city issued, making that project relatively immune to shakeout in Albany, though the budget is still an issue. With few contractors big enough to handle the many megaprojects that agencies are putting out to bid, the MTA awarded a tunneling contract to a consortium at a cost that may preclude the construction of a subway stop at 10th Avenue. The MTA has promised to revisit the idea of creating a 10th Avenue stop by early next year since it is nearer to residential areas, and the mayor’s staff has downplayed the idea that tunneling without the intermediate stop is a sign of trouble.

Here, too, Spitzer’s fall could improve the 7 line’s prospects. Senator Charles Schumer has tried for decades to lead a reinvention of the Far West Side. With the mild-mannered Paterson facing overwhelming challenges, Schumer is arguably the state’s most powerful Democrat. His priorities—extending the 7 line and resolving the mess around the Javits Center—match the city’s agenda and the priorities of builders like Brookfield.

Of course, the coordination of private endeavors with public transportation improvements has run afoot at Moynihan Station. Patrick Foye, the straight-talking lawyer whom Spitzer assigned to coordinate these megaprojects as downtown head of the Empire State Development Corporation, quit his post hours before Paterson’s swearing-in ceremony on March 17. What’s more, Foye’s exit could prefigure several key departures further into the Paterson administration. “Foye clearly had a personal link to Eliot, but he believes in what he does,” said someone who asked for anonymity to avoid prejudicing future moves. “I think he’s a guy who works all kinds of hours, and the question is whether he will get to keep doing that in a new administration. It’s got to be scary to everyone working at that level to ask: What kind of person is your new boss?”

Finally, the potential profit in developing midtown and connecting it to the river may be too tantalizing. “We’ve both think they’re going to end up being developers of Hudson Yards, and Moynihan is a major entryway,” said Spinola. “I don’t think they walk away if there’s a delay. Time costs money, but both Moynihan and Hudson Yards are going to go through a couple of economic cycles, and players here have patience to go through those.”

Of course, as we learned in March, cycles and terms can run shorter than anyone expects. ALEC APPELBAUM

WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM
Like many of the academically inclined architects of his generation, Joel Sanders has been building more, and the move from theory and research to practice reflects an evolution in his thinking. Sanders has long explored themes of gender, sexuality, and voyeurism in his work, and some of these earlier projects betray “a certain amount of cynicism,” he admitted. While many projects centered on a user’s visual relationship to his surroundings—think lots of peek-a-boo bathrooms with translucent glass—recent work has explored the other senses, especially sound, such as in the SoHo Hotel project in New York or a new lobby, lounge, and plaza at the University of Virginia’s School of Architecture. A couple of early projects called for roofs covered in astroturf, “which was a critique of suburbia and the American lawn,” while recent projects have used green roofs and living walls. Sanders’ work has evolved from ironic commentary to genuine engagement with alternatives.

He credits several years of close collaboration with landscape designer Diana Balmori for a richer understanding of the possibilities of integrating architecture and landscape. “We became interested in eliminating the hierarchy between the disciplines,” he said. “For a long time landscape has been treated like interior design, as somehow subservient to architecture.” While much of his firm’s work to date focused on interiors, as Sanders gets larger commissions, he has been able to work with a building’s urban context. As one of the firms selected for the General Services Administration’s “First Impressions Program,” Sanders’ team is working on the lobbies and plazas of several federal office buildings to improve security while creating a more welcoming experience for visitors.

Though he retains a flair for provocation and a quick wit, it is gratifying to see how the realities of building bring additional rigor and depth to his practice, rather than limit his ambitions.

ALAN G. BRAKE
GERING LOPEZ GALLERY
NEW YORK

The owners of this 3,000-square-foot, 57th Street gallery “wanted a downtown feel, uptown,” according to Sanders. The firm gutted the interior, exposing the ceiling, which, paired with polished concrete floors and a pristine white reception desk and walls, creates a contrast between rough and refined materials. The exposure of the beams and joists gives the space something of the industrial grit one associates with downtown galleries. The L-shaped gallery can be easily configured for large solo shows or several smaller exhibitions.

CAMPBELL HALL
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
CHARLOTTESVILLE
VIRGINIA

For a 10,000-square-foot lobby renovation for Sasaki Associates and Pietro Belluschi’s Campbell Hall (which houses the University of Virginia’s school of architecture) Sanders’ firm created a pixilated pattern on the plaza outside by replacing some of its standard bricks with white bricks. Working with UVA Architecture Dean Karen Ven Lengen, Sanders wanted to better connect indoors and out, and so the pattern is carried inside the lobby onto the floors and walls. The firm is also designing a series of “sound puddles” for inside and outside, small aural environments taken from exhibition design, which can be programmed with music from student play-lists or with simulcasts of lectures or studio crits. Technology, especially cell phones and iPods, is often seen as fostering isolation in individuals and diminishing the quality of public spaces, but Sanders hopes to use sound puddles to create gathering places and foster interaction in this currently understated portion of the building.

SOHO HOTEL
NEW YORK

The firm also plans to use sound puddles in this new 34-room boutique hotel in an existing building in Soho. Using the sound puddles and partitions, spaces are designed to be flexible, for either leisure or business depending on the needs of the user, so that a glass enclosed area in the dining room can be used for meetings during the day or as a VIP lounge after hours. A below ground spa and lap pool is partially illuminated by small glass tiles embedded in the sidewalk. A second phase with additional rooms on the upper floors may be added to the program.

YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY MEDIA LOUNGE
NEW HAVEN
CONNECTICUT

As Polshek Partnership was renovating and restoring the Yale University Art Gallery, originally designed by Louis Kahn in 1958, Sanders’ firm created a discreet reception desk, bookstore/gift shop, and media lounge, to create a comfortable space where students and the public can linger without feeling pressured to buy. The ebonized oak counter draws on the black terrazzo strips in the floor, and a pivoting bar can swing out for receptions. Contemporary sectional sofas, and green fabric-covered Bertoia wire chairs, furnish the area.

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This compact enclave of twelve sustainable courtyard houses, designed with Haeahn Architecture, will be built on a steeply sloping mountainside site outside Seoul. Using the idea of “borrowed views,” green roofs frame and soften the views of the neighboring houses. Each roof will be planted differently, creating a changing composition of colors throughout the seasons. In the interiors, small windows, or apertures, direct the eye toward desirable vistas. Detached houses are a rarity in hyper urbanized Seoul, so these residences are expected to command high prices.

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ROBIN HOOD'S WORRIED BAND

Richard Rogers, Zaha Hadid, and Venturi Scott Brown are among a large number of architects who are calling for the preservation of Robin Hood Gardens, a housing development designed by Alison and Peter Smithson in 1966-72.

The campaign, initiated by the trade newspaper Building Design, urges English Heritage to recommend that Robin Hood Gardens be designated as a listed building.

The decision to demolish Robin Hood Gardens was made due to technical failings and social problems. The Smithsons' reputation, established with their Miesian influence and their urban perspective, was damaged by the problems at the site.

The campaign has been fueled by recent remarks in the magazine Grand Designs by architecture critic Anthony Lipton, who referred to Robin Hood Gardens as a modernist masterpiece. Rogers went as far as to say, "Robin Hood Gardens is as good, if not better, than any modern building in Britain."

Other signatories acknowledge that the estate has problems, but nothing that can't be fixed. The campaign has probably been fueled by recent remarks about the estate in the magazine Grand Designs.

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he was developing as he
embrides many of the ideas
of a local bookstore, and it
borough of Philadelphia for
the 2,500-square-foot house
was taking off. He designed
as a surprise that he agreed to
Art Museum in Fort Worth,
tment center in Dhaka,
Within the space of a week, two massive gifts were bestowed upon two of New

On March 18, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated
it finds the building out of character.
air rights for the project. While the undulating 75-story tower awaits the many-
MoMA tower is suffering vocal denunciations from its potential neighbors. On
Despite breathless reviews in the architectural press, Jean Nouvel's proposed
as Duke Ellington, Frank Sinatra, and Elvis. The landmarking includes an
RCA operated a recording studio at Webster Hall that recorded such greats
used for dances, receptions, and union gatherings. In the 1950s and 1960s,
ny League universities are in the midst of a building boom, and Yale is joining
Princeton and Columbia in creating new undergraduate housing. While the residen-
tial expansion reverberates at the center of the school's sense of itself as a community, another real estate deal will likely have greater implications for the university as a research center. Last summer, the university acquired a 137-acre parcel with 1.5 million square feet of laboratory and office space from Bayer Pharmaceuticals. The campus in nearby West Haven and Orange, Connecticut, which includes 17 buildings constructed from 1968 to 2002, will likely be used by researchers at the medical school, as well as provide storage space for the University's museums. In a statement, Yale University President Richard Levin said, "The availability of Bayer's science laboratories will allow us to undertake research programs that we would not have had space to develop for a decade or more."
CRAFTSMANSHIP. PERFORMANCE.

Designed by world-class designer Laura Kirar, the Vir Stil faucet reflects a love of classic form with a contemporary silhouette. An iconic design along with impeccable craftsmanship offers precise control and unsurpassed performance.
North Brother Island in the East River is visited by rare birds, the occasional park employee, and photographer Christopher Payne, whose work documents the Art Deco hospital, Neo-Gothic morgue, and other ruins there. The complex is a crumbling testament to an era with a greater sense of civic duty. BY ALAN G. BRAKE
When the hospital complex was in full use, the island had almost no tree canopy. After 40 years of neglect, the staff house looks as if it was built in the midst of the woods (left). The tuberculosis hospital (above) is the largest and most modern structure. The dock and gantry (right) is now beyond repair.
North Brother's physical plant includes a derelict morgue (above), a coal storage building (facing page, above), and a boiler plant (facing page, below).
Architect and photographer Christopher Payne is fascinated with the afterlives of buildings. A chronicler of ruins, he has photographed disused factories on the East River, the High Line on the West Side, outmoded transit electrical substations throughout Manhattan, and, for the past few years, shuttered insane asylums and state hospitals across the country. Payne’s latest subject is the buildings and landscape of North Brother, a derelict hospital island in the Bronx under the jurisdiction of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, far removed from the cycles of development and change that are transforming the city. Evidence of habitation and of the island’s checkered history is literally disappearing into the woods.

In the 1880s, the island was home to a contagious disease hospital and was a model of reform-era hygiene and efficiency, earning the praise of the muckraking journalist Jacob Riis. Among its inhabitants was “Typhoid” Mary Mallon, the cook and notorious source of several outbreaks, who, in 1904, was rescued nearly 250 passengers, but more than one thousand people died. The tuberculosis hospital was completed in 1938. The island became the site of one of the nation’s worst nautical disasters, the 1904 downing of the steamship General Slocum, which sank just offshore carrying German immigrants on a holiday outing. Nurses and patients on the island rescued nearly 250 passengers, but more than one thousand people died. The tuberculosis hospital was completed in 1938, but was quickly repurposed to house World War II veterans who were attending college in the city through the GI Bill. By 1952, the island became a treatment facility for juvenile drug addicts before being abandoned altogether in 1964.

Today North Brother has largely slipped from public consciousness. It does not, for example, appear on the MTA Subway map: The place where the 29-acre island would be shows only water. “The city has an uncountable number of histories and events that are lodged, hidden away in some archive or someone’s memory,” said Randall Mason, a professor of historic preservation at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied the island extensively. “But things have a way of coming back; they resurface.” He cites the African Burial Ground as an example. “Places become invisible if they’re not used,” he said. The Parks Department classifies North Brother as a nature preserve.

In his photographs, trees sprout from the crumbling architecture, Tai called North Brother “the most interesting of the heron islands.” He added, however, that “maybe its highest and best use is to preserve it for wildlife.” Parks is sympathetic to the island’s history and the concerns of preservationists, and according to Tai, the department is hoping to do a partial restoration of the dock to make it occasionally accessible for small groups, and has secured $500,000 in funding toward that goal. Restoration of one of the smaller buildings as an interpretive center may be possible, but he noted, “We have very reduced budget forecasts, so it’s not a very high priority.”

In this era of public-private partnerships, piecemeal development, and limited public resources, the state of limbo in which the island sits is not altogether uncommon. The scale and significance of its architecture, once accessible by frequent ferry service, is a disquieting reminder that such limitations were not always commonplace. For Payne, abandoned public buildings hold a particular attraction, not just for the romance of their ruin but as vestiges of civic aspirations long since jettisoned.

ALAN G. BRAKE IS AN ASSOCIATE EDITOR AT AN.
The condition of the interiors vary from the totally ruined boiler plant (facing page, left) to the relatively intact entrance hall of the nurse's house (facing page, right). The contrasting solidity and decay of the island's buildings are on display in the nurse's house courtyard (above).
APRIL 2008

THURSDAY 12
Lecture
Dietrich Neumann The Illuminated Building 2:00 p.m. National Building Museum 401 F St. NW, Washington, D.C. www.nbm.org

EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Kosmographie Gaykне New York University Deutsches Haus 42 Washington Mews www.nyu.edu/deutscheshaus

MÅNDAG 14
Lectures
Elsa Zorn Kärn British Arts and Crafts Jewelry 6:30 p.m. Neues Galeria New York 1048 5th Ave. www.neuegalerie.org

Tom Angotti, Miquela Craytor, Jeannie DuPont, et al. PanNYC 2003 Post-Bloomberg 6:00 p.m. The Urban Center 457 Madison Ave. www.mas.org

TUESDAY 15
Lecture

EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Rob Nadeau Heavy Chalk Mixed Greens 531 West 26th St. www.mixedgreens.com

FRIDAY 18
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Frederick Kiesler: Co-Realities The Drawing Center 35 Wooster St. www.drawingcenter.org

Yüksel Arslan
Visual Interpretation The Drawing Room 40 Wooster St. www.drawingcenter.org

SATURDAY 19
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Bryan Savitz Rare Gallery 521 West 26th St. www.rare-gallery.com

STEPHEN TALASNIK
ANATOMY OF ARCHITECTURE: DRAWINGS AND SCULPTURE
Marlborough Chelsea
545 West 26th St.
Through April 12

"Unbuildable" and "unlivable" are two words not commonly associated with successful architecture. But looking at architecture as a concept rather than a reality allows artist Stephen Talasnik to engage the viewer through the process of building, rather than the thing itself. The exhibit features 35 drawings and 12 sculptures ranging from small, elaborately detailed 6-inch sculptures to 16-inch drawings to 4-foot sculptures and 6-foot-wide drawings that recall the exposed infrastructure of bridges, stadiums, transportation systems, and transmission towers. Constructed from the inside out, each structure is dissected into unbuildable and unlivable spaces. While the sculptures are created from the exposed infrastructure of bridges, stadiums, transportation systems, and transmission towers, the exhibition also considers the use of metal bronze to create a unified form. Talasnik also uses graphite, liquid graphite, ink, and collage in his drawings to produce a similar effect. Here, transforming architecture into a concept turns out to be a sensory experience.
Towards the end of the 19th century, the British social reformer Charles Booth made an illuminating map. As part of his Inquiry into Life and Labour in London, he color-coded the city’s streets on a pre-existing plan to create “The Descriptive Map of London Poverty.” The colors picked out seven different social classes as they ranged from black (“lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal”) to yellow (“upper middle and upper classes, wealthy”). Some 50 years later, another similarly-coded map of London appeared. This time the colors represented bomb damage during the Second World War, with black representing “total destruction” and purple “beyond repair.” Today the spectrum reappears in the London House Price Map produced by the real estate website myhouseprice.com.

All three versions appear in Simon Foxell’s Mapping London: Making Sense of the City, whose premise is that maps are more than an aid to navigation or a record of growth and change. Tracing a city’s development through a series of them can be fascinating in itself, as Foxell recognises, and he begins with a section that does just that. In London’s case, the starting point is the Copperplate Map circa 1556–1558 that gives a precise picture of the city and its rural fringes: the gardens, orchards, fields, and open spaces where windmills turn and people practice archery or do their washing. Such vivid detail vanishes as the city expands and the familiar A-to-Z format arrives.

Having set the scene in this way, Foxell devotes the rest of his book to maps with distinct purposes, which prove disparate. Some have an environmental bias, showing land surface temperature variations, noise levels, or air pollution. Others constellate the city’s fire stations or track its sewers and water supply. Harry Beck’s famous map of the London Underground is here, but so are earlier, less schematic ones.

Foxell stretches his parameters to include some panoramas of the city, which is a visual bonus, for Wenceslaus Hollar’s “long view” of 1647 (before the Fire of London) and the Rhinebeck Panorama of 1810 are works of art. He also features fictitious maps, such as one depicting Albert Square, the imaginary setting of the long-running television soap Eastenders (where Booth’s “semi-criminal” class is still much in evidence).

But maps are often a means of imagining a place—they show what might have been as well as what was—and Foxell highlights a London that stayed on the drawing board. Perhaps the most famous casualty was Christopher Wren’s plan for rebuilding the city after the Great Fire of 1666. Blithely ignoring such matters as the ownership of land, it replaced the one-time warren of narrow streets and alleys with avenues, plazas, and a grid. Foxell includes this, but has also found several other post-fire alternatives, among them a design by Valentine Knight that proposed a much more simplistic grid than Wren’s, enclosed by a broad canal.

Neither Wren nor Knight’s vision stood much chance. As Foxell puts it: “London, although it has been generous in making space for snippets of radical city ideas, has never allowed them to challenge its inherent small-scale grain and multi-centeredness.”

No doubt Terry Farrell’s vision for three new islands at the mouth of the Thames Estuary, also in the book, will go the same way, not to suggest that Farrell is another Wren. Foxell’s text is solid, though he doesn’t discuss the subject with the imagination that Robert Harbison brings to it in his extraordinary book Eccentric Spaces (MIT Press, 2000). “Maps simplify the world somewhat in the way a heavy snowfall does,” writes Harbison, who goes on to explore their psychological appeal: their promise of mastery and order. But given the amount of online activity now, Foxell well knows that we are entering a whole new era of map-making.

A second edition of this book may look very different from the first. If the text is supplementary to Mapping London, it’s completely incidental to Building London, which is just a large-format picture book. Drawn from the

continued on page 25

THE ACCIDENTAL CRAFTSMAN

Minka: My Farmhouse in Japan
John Roderick
Princeton Architectural Press, $24.95

Every culture has a unique heritage of building, but few are as intricate and detailed as Japan’s historic wood farmhouses. Known as minka, which means “house of the people,” these rustic homes are famed for their heavy timbers, detailed joinery, and large open interior spaces. The nation’s dwindling stock, dating to the 17th century, is now caught between the vogue for historic preservation and the vagaries of contemporary building codes.

Minka: My Farmhouse in Japan traces the life of one such building and its accidental owner, the renowned journalist John Roderick. His memoir blends architectural detail with cultural context relating to his life in Japan and the minka that he, feeling coerced by his adoptive family, purchased in 1965. Roderick chronicles how he acquired the 1734 structure, transported it over 100 miles from Ise to Kamakura, and painstakingly renovated it to contemporary standards. The book is further affecting in light of the author’s death, at age 93, on March 11.

A longtime correspondent for the Associated Press, Roderick studied Japanese in 1942 under the War Department program. He began writing on China, however, where he lived among the Yan’an locals in caves in 1947 and reported on the Maoist

continued on page 25

Yoshihiro Takishita sits outside of the living room.
SILENT ACRES
Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes
Walker Art Center,
1750 Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis through August 17

Divided into three main sections addressing housing, driving, and shopping, Worlds Away at the Walker Art Center gives a curiously arm’s-length view of what’s happening in suburbia. In light of the current sub-prime mortgage crisis, an exhibition that laid bare contemporary suburban architecture as an expression of the nexus of residential finance structures, real estate strategies, and land use policy could have been topical and insightful.

Christopher Leinberger’s recent article in The Atlantic, “The Next Slum?” paints a grim picture of the imminent demise of many recent suburban residential development projects and the likely social consequences. But rather than taking an investigative stance, or declaring a distinct polemical position, this show, co-curated by Andrew Blauvelt and Tracy Myers, is more archival, offering a visual catalog of views of new suburban landscapes, both newish and well-known.

As mounted in the bright white galleries of the Walker’s Herzog and de Meuron addition, the exhibit—comprising photographs, architectural models and drawings, paintings, and occasional videos—seems strangely lifeless and static, perhaps as an indirect critique of its subject. One comes away with the impression that suburbia is either dull monochrome or garishly multicolored, with a limited tonal range in between.

Adam Cvičjnović’s wall-sized latex-on-Tyvek painting Same Day Delivery, an orgiastic explosion of consumer detritus, greets the visitor on arrival. But the energy of this image is encountered in few other projects on display besides Benjamin Edwards’ video-game-like panorama Immersion and Estudio Teddy Cruz’s Cross Border Suburbs, which depicts the transmigration of residential components from Levittown San Diego across the U.S.-Mexico border to Tijuana. Without scrutinizing the wall-labels (printed in an uncomfortably small typeface), many of the artifacts—especially the architectural models—are alluring but mute. One has to make an effort to read crucial comments such as those associated with Cruz’s projects that declare: “No advances in housing design can be made without advances in housing policy and economic frameworks.” In the shrine-like rooms, the silence is broken by voices from Howard Silver’s 1980s documentaries on the (now defunct) BEST catalog retailer showrooms, big boxes designed as architectural one-liners by James Wines and Alison Sky of SITE: “Beautiful store.” Comments one elderly male shopper in the film Grand Shopper showing Cruz’s projects that declare: “Just don’t like the architecture outside the house.”

A somewhat wistful but stoically resourceful tone pervades Worlds Away. Several other projects address the demise of formerly successful shopping malls, or strategies for reinvigorating and reactivating these abandoned behemoths and their associated sea of parking. Interboro’s installation documenting the fall from commercial grace and subsequent ad hoc resuscitation of the Dutchess County Mall in Fishkill, NY, makes a misguided attempt to turn what is essentially a slide show into a three-dimensional experience. Plans, usage patterns, and photos are projected vertically onto a horizonal surface featuring a white scale model of the building, which distorts the text captions and images and makes them hard to read, while the voiceover narration switches from a supposed first-person elderly male, representing the distressed mall itself, to a female recounting Interboro’s proposed incremental re-uses. Like so much about suburban architecture, this piece offers relatively limited content stretched over a disproportionate amount of physical space.

More effective use of media is demonstrated in Lateral Architecture’s Flatspace project, which combines wall-mounted video animations, drawings, and several Plexiglas models that are colorful and fetching, albeit somewhat inscrutable. “In its current form, public life in exurbia is comprised of fleeting encounters of drivers jockeying for parking spaces, utilitarian dialogues at drivethru, and other perfunctory exchanges. How can one transform this environment?” the designers ask. The component projects Pixelscape, On Off Ramps, and Confetti are proposals for alternative hybrid uses of canonic suburban spaces, such as parking along the circumference of cloverleaf ramps. This figure appears again in a fabric pattern designed by Jessica Smith, where massive infrastructure elements are flattened into a repeat surface pattern of a linen wall-hanging, which from a distance looks perfectly art nouveau.

Among the photographers, Andrew Bush’s widely seen portraits of car drivers still arrest the eye, while Angela Strasheim’s shot of a family holding hands and saying grace in a McDonald’s restaurant has a quality of surreal poignancy that persists, even when one discovers that the photo is not an extraordinary chance moment of verité but her own Apostolic Family. Photographer Brian Ulrich stalks frozen food aisles in a suburban Chicago grocery store looking for signs of cultural malaise, and not surprisingly, finds it. Greg Stimac’s shots of people mowing their lawns are more interesting as a series than on their own (two are shown in the exhibit), but several others are presented in the catalog. In a more ambiguous and critical gesture, Matthew Moore’s Rotations: Single Family Residence #5 (2003-2004) presents 16 variations on Off Ramps, and Confetti’s proposals for suburban spaces, such as parking along the circumference of cloverleaf ramps. This figure appears again in a fabric pattern designed by Jessica Smith, where massive infrastructure elements are flattened into a repeat surface pattern of a linen wall-hanging, which from a distance looks perfectly art nouveau.

Julia Christensen has allegedly logged 75,000 miles to document re-used Big Box stores around the U.S., a valiant but not terribly interesting exercise that seems more like a kind of penance. By contrast, Paho Mann’s grid of inkjet prints, Re-inhabited Circle K’s (Phoenix) (2004-06), presents 16 variations on the theme of what to do with abandoned single-story supermarkets. Shot in color at the exact same eyeliner and distance, Mann’s work brings to mind Bernd and Hilla Becher’s stark black-and-white typologies of disused industrial structures and, like theirs, adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Ed Ruscha’s early 1990s photographs of parking lots are mounted, wittily, perpendicularly to more recent bird’s-eye views by the Center for Land Use Interpretation of vehicular test tracks. Auto technogeoplyphics, made in 2006-08, show the secret patches of land north of LA and near Phoenix where major car manufacturers test their future models. The vast loops in the sandy-colored ground, inscribed courtesy of Volvo, Ford, Nissan, Honda, etc., seem mysterious, slightly sinister (like spy satellite discoveries), and almost mythical. These vast runic inscriptions, like an inadvertent species of Land Art, are the Mayan ball courts of the SUV age.

Repetition as a means to a higher-order pattern and, at the opposite end of the development food chain, the generic made unique again: these are the underlying aesthetic principles that thread through Worlds Away. The cycle of construction, occupation, bankruptcy, dereliction, and ad-hoc individualization is hinted at without being made explicit as the show’s polemical argument. The accompanying 336-page catalog, edited by Blauvelt, features interviews, plentiful images, and critical essays by a range of authors; in many ways, it provides a richer experience than the exhibition and will probably become a standard reader for courses on contemporary suburbia.

**Paho Mann’s Re-inhabited Circle K’s (Phoenix) (2004-06).**
THE ACCIDENTAL CRAFTSMAN continued from page 23.

Escalation. Only in 1959 was he assigned to Tokyo, where he grew enamored of the “noisy, free-wheeling democracy of postwar Japan.” A chance encounter brought him together with a law student named Yoshihiro Takishita. As their friendship blossomed, Roderick wistfully mentioned his taste for the “spare, clean, uncluttered lifestyle” of rural Japan. He soon found himself in possession of one “monster of a house” in a condemned village, for the sum of $14.

Roderick’s friendship with the Takishitas offers the book’s most intriguing material. Yoshihiro’s parents, an ex-Imperial Army cavalryman and a kimono maker/historian, were instrumental in arranging the minka purchase. Abandoning his law studies, Yoshihiro became de facto project manager, scheduling the beam-by-beam dismantling and delivery of the house over narrow dirt roads and hairpin turns. He also navigated among dubious real estate agents and conniving local councils while coordinating workers from distant prefectures. Indeed, Yoshihiro, who eventually became Roderick’s adopted son, was so successful in modernizing the house without sacrificing its historic integrity that he went on to a career as an antiquities dealer, renovating minka throughout the world.

Roderick’s Minka is a quick read that will charm enthusiasts of Japanese architecture (or fans of whimsical memoirs), even if the author repeats himself on occasion and strays too often into anecdotal accounts of housekeepers or international visitors. The volume’s black-and-white photos show the minka under reconstruction, but reveal little about the renovation’s unique achievement as a hybrid of historical form and modern amenities.

Still, Roderick’s sense of adventure and curiosity are vibrantly displayed throughout this tale, which illustrates the relevance of craft, tradition, and history to contemporary society. That much was clear to Emperor Hirohito of Japan, who awarded Roderick the Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1985 for his meritorious service to the nation.

JAMES WAY IS A TOKYO-BASED WRITER AND DESIGNER.
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The electrician was Interphase Electrical, 79 Rocklyn Ave., Lynbrook NY 11563, 516-256-5515.

Studio Visit: Joel Sanders Architect (p. 10): The fixtures for the Yale University Art Gallery media lounge were fabricated by Art Guild, 300 Wolf Dr., Thorofare, NJ 08086, 856-853-7500, www.artguildinc.com.

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It started somewhere in a whirl of swirling lines and color emanating from the source, pulsating, protoplasmic, spiraling outward like one of Jung’s mystic mandalas. Psychedelic explorers of the early 1960s wrote about spatial mutations in vivid prose, lines and color emanating from the source, but few put them into real spatial adventures, with flashing lights and softy padded enclosures. The USCO collaborative (Gerd Stern, Steve Durkee, Michael Callahan, Stewart Brand, et al.), pioneers of early psychedelia, built a temple to the new acid religion in an old church in upstate New York. The six-sided “tabernacle” featured a domed ceiling, walls painted with mystical imagery, strobes, black lights, and oscilloscopes. There was much talk of centering, getting centered, finding the center. “Hold on to the center,” said the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu, while the ancient i-Ching spoke of innumerable centers in its enigmatic hexagrams, vague enough to serve every occasion from quiet introspection to armed revolt. Everyone wanted to sit, squat, kneel, join hands in a circle, assume the lotus position, sleep, or make love on the ground. This was the primary instinct in the transformation toward Aquarian living—a downward movement—signaling a return to primitive origins, to Mother Earth, and the beginnings of environmental consciousness. Mattresses and pillows were scattered across floors. Legs of tables and chairs were sawn off in what Tom Wolfe described as the “amputated” look. Unnecessary furnishings were limited or banished altogether.

Meanwhile, young design rebels set out to create versions of psychedelic flux in what one critic called “LSDesign,” hoping to liberate architectural space the way Jimi Hendrix was liberating rock music. Even a mainstream journal like Progressive Architecture acknowledged LSD’s potential when it published interviews with architects who had designed under the influence of Aleksandra Kasuba’s Fabric Structure in Whiz Bang City No.2 was built in Woodstock, New York in 1972. (LSD: A Design Tool? in August, 1966.) There was a widespread fascination with microenvironments, rooms within rooms, and toy-like contraptions that promised to turn the routines of daily life into total theater. Lines of sight were skewed. Disorienting illusions were created with mirrors, converging panels, ramps, and staircases that led nowhere. Billboard-sized “supergraphics” were painted onto walls and ceilings with exaggerated numerals, arrows, and chevron patterns intended to abolish bookie space. Rooms, even whole cities, would appear as cellular entities, detached from conventional engineering, floating, almost nonexistent. “All that is solid melts into air,” wrote Karl Marx, and in post-Beatles consciousness, everything seemed transitory and floating, literally filled with air. Vinyl inflatables became ubiquitous at Be-In, rock concerts, and antiwar demonstrations. Architect-activist members of Art Farm drove across America setting up their 100-foot inflatable pour. The Utopia, a group including architects and designers in Paris, proposed a whole world of inflatable structures, from housing units to vast traveling theaters. A similar clique in Austria, Haus-Rucker-Co, planned to re-stimulate the urban wasteland with pod-like dwellings called “pneumacozms” that would sprout like alien sponges from the shells of old infrastructure. In the summer of 1970, they erected a giant air mattress in Manhattan that blocked traffic and created an instant spectacle.

Space was perceived as entirely malleable and could be made to twist and torque with scrims of stretched fabric, as in the work of Aleksandra Kasuba, a Lithuanian-born designer who created a coconolike dwelling in the woods of Woodstock, New York, by stretching fabric between the branches of several trees. Loose edges of fabric were sewn together by hand while stones were used to anchor the structure to the ground. (14 people lived inside Kasuba’s ghostly membrane during Whiz Bang City East, an alternative building conference held in the summer of 1972.) Journals of the late Sixties and early Seventies were filled with urban proposals that expanded and contracted with fluctuating populations; cities that hung suspended in midair; cities that breathed; cities that nurtured creativity. A new, more free-forming soft city which is not tied to hierarchical notions, wrote Archigram’s Peter Cook, while others speculated about “alternative scenarios” for a younger, nomadic generation. Paolo Soleri filled his notebooks with scenarios for a younger, nomadic generation. Paolo Soleri filled his notebooks with fantastical urban forms called “Arcologies” that were drawn like musculature, stretched and twisted into biomorphic sinews. Lines of sight were skewed. Disorienting illusions were created with mirrors, converging panels, ramps, and staircases that led nowhere. Billboard-sized “supergraphics” were painted onto walls and ceilings with exaggerated numerals, arrows, and chevron patterns intended to abolish bookie space. Rooms, even whole cities, would appear as cellular entities, detached from conventional engineering, floating, almost nonexistent. “All that is solid melts into air,” wrote Karl Marx, and in post-Beatles consciousness, everything seemed transitory and floating, literally filled with air. Vinyl inflatables became ubiquitous at Be-In, rock concerts, and antiwar demonstrations. Architect-activist members of Art Farm drove across America setting up their 100-foot inflatable pour. The Utopia, a group including architects and designers in Paris, proposed a whole world of inflatable structures, from housing units to vast traveling theaters. A similar clique in Austria, Haus-Rucker-Co, planned to re-stimulate the urban wasteland with pod-like dwellings called “pneumacozms” that would sprout like alien sponges from the shells of old infrastructure. In the summer of 1970, they erected a giant air mattress in Manhattan that blocked traffic and created an instant spectacle.

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