

# THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER

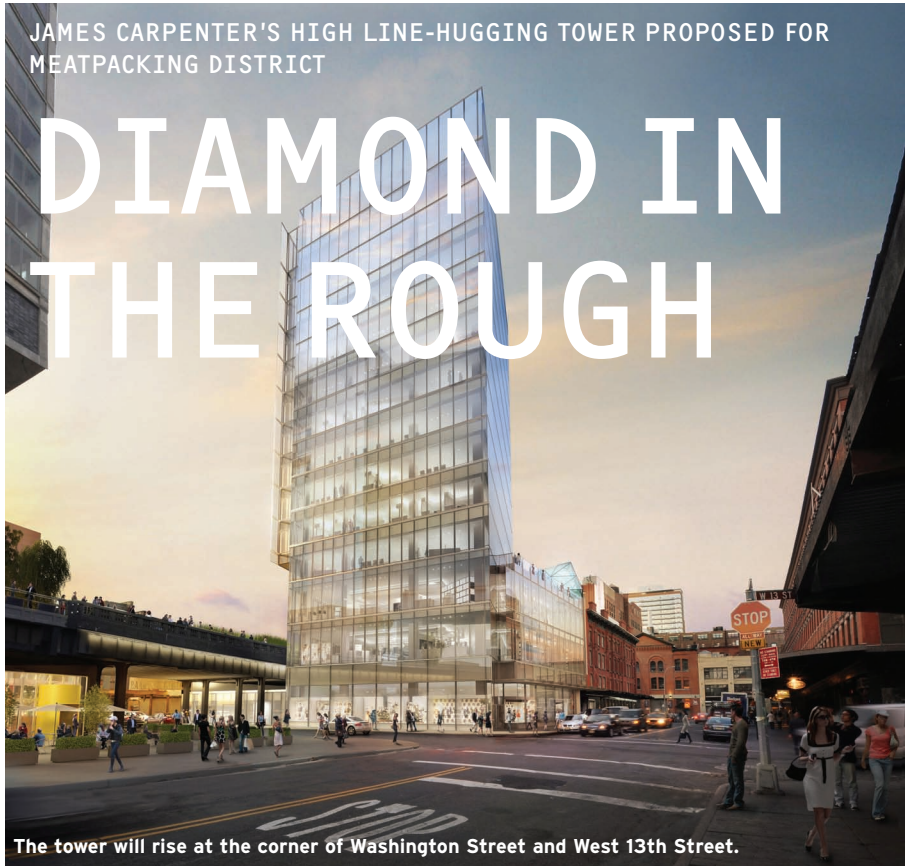
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JAMES CARPENTER'S HIGH LINE-HUGGING TOWER PROPOSED FOR MEATPACKING DISTRICT

## DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH



The tower will rise at the corner of Washington Street and West 13th Street.

COURTESY JCDA

Long before it became a real estate commodity, the High Line was considered a blight on its neighborhood. But since the Bloomberg administration approved the construction of a park on the trestle in 2002 and the West Chelsea rezoning passed three years later—allowing for higher density residential development along the park—the High Line has morphed from eyesore to eye candy.

Not, however, for a pair of brothers heavily invested in the Meatpacking District. Darryl

and Stewart Romanoff, whose family has owned and developed buildings in the area since the 1940s, argue that the High Line, by covering 23 percent of a two-story market building they own, prevents them from taking full advantage of the site.

Claiming hardship, the Romanoffs have filed for a variance with the Board of Standards and Appeals, requesting a 50 percent boost in the lot's density. They then hope to replace the **continued on page 9**

UNSTUDIO BUILDS AT THE BATTERY



COURTESY UNSTUDIO

## KIOSK AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

Kicking off this year's celebration of Henry Hudson's voyage into New York Harbor, the Dutch architecture firm UNStudio has designed a sinuous "X" to mark a spot in the Battery where New York and the Netherlands will jointly honor the founding of Nieuw Amsterdam some four hundred years ago.

On January 28, the design for the whirligig-shaped pavilion was unveiled to the applause of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, the Dutch Consul General, and others, among them Dutch newsmen who demanded to know whether the structure wasn't in fact shaped like a windmill. Others called it a flower, and some even thought it suggested a "ninja star," but no matter, said architect Ben van Berkel. "It's all good," he told *AN*. "I always aim for designs to work on many different levels."

The 5,000-square-foot pavilion will enliven what is now a **continued on page 7**

### CONTENTS

06 HARRY COBB LOOKS BACK

11 MORE MTA MONEY WOES

14 OLD DEAL, NEW DEAL

20 PHOTOGRAPHY AND TRUTH

04 EAVESDROP  
10 STUDIO VISIT  
12 AT DEADLINE  
22 MARKETPLACE  
25 CLASSIFIEDS

DOB'S NEW VISION FOR SAFETY

## RISK AVERSE

Continuing his overhaul of the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) that began after last year's fatal crane accidents, Commissioner Robert LiMandri recently announced findings from the unprecedented \$4 million High Risk Construction Oversight (HRCO) study of crane, hoist, concrete, and excavation operations launched by the DOB last April. The department's annual budget also rose by \$5.3 million to fund 63 new positions for oversight and **continued on page 3**



COURTESY MOS

The MOS-designed structure called *Afterparty* will open in late June.

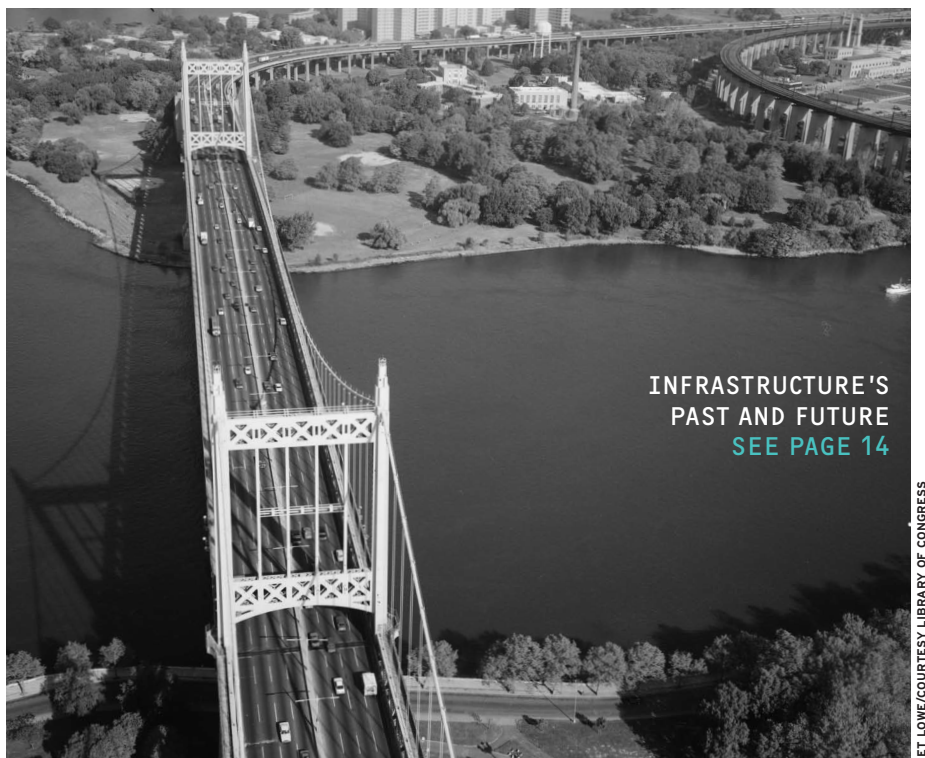
Party's over, kids: In a real sign of the times, the annual MoMA/PS.1 summertime installation is no longer known as an "urban beach," but an "urban shelter." Admittedly, it did become a farm last year, but the trend is a sober one: The New Haven and Cambridge-based firm MOS named their winning proposal *Afterparty*. **continued on page 4**

MOS WINS P.S.1'S 2009 YOUNG ARCHITECTS AWARD

## RECESSION SPECIAL

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ROADS NOT CHOSEN

"We're going down a road to disaster. We've never seen this kind of spending, ever," said Republican Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama about the current \$800 million federal stimulus package. But as we show in this issue's feature article, the stimulus proposal made by Franklin Roosevelt in his New Deal was just as drastic and contentious in its own day. The Tennessee Valley Authority, for example, was conceived by architects and planners of the Regional Planning Association of America to be an ambitious rethinking of regional planning for the entire country. They were sorely disappointed when Roosevelt presented it simply as an electrification program in order to get Senator Shelby's precursors on board.

The original city planners at the TVA aspired to create model "new towns" at the base of every dam to house the mammoth project's work force. But efforts to reprise the cul-des-sacs and collectively owned commons of the 1929 new town of Radburn, New Jersey, were branded "socialist" by conservative lawmakers and dropped from the only new town that was eventually built, in Norris, Tennessee. The young architects who designed Norris housing were recent graduates of the first university architecture schools, and drew up plans for modernist, white-walled and flat-roofed houses with wide, banded windows and Marcel Breuer-like furniture. But again southern politicians viewed this architecture as an alien invasion into traditional Tennessee vernacular, and forced the TVA to build wooden-sided bungalows with little dormers and windows. This opportunity to create communities on par with the best German *siedlungen* was sadly squandered.

Though modern architecture was rejected for domestic buildings, the TVA's dams, offices, and overlooks were built in the new style, elegantly melding form and landscape. The dams in particular remain among the most beautiful examples of concrete formwork in this country. On a grander scale, the RPAA's Benton MacKaye briefly worked for the TVA, helping to shape the Norris Dam access road, creating what he called a town-less highway. With gently winding curves following the Clinch River, and planted easements free from intrusive billboards, it is truly one of America's most beautiful roads.

Opponents of the current legislation will likely argue against any large government-sponsored intervention into local or regional landscapes. It is up to architects and planners to continue to make a case for the most expansive policy possible to address our lack of investment in the nation's crumbling infrastructure—and not be defeated by shortsighted provincialism. **WILLIAM MENKING**

RISK AVERSE continued from front page

enforcement of construction safety regulations.

In front of building industry members assembled at the annual BuildSafe New York conference on February 3, LiMandri revealed that the department will implement 41 recommendations to "help prevent accidents and raise accountability across the board." The changes are based on findings by more than 30 engineers from CTL Engineers and Construction Technology Consultants (CTL). CTL president Dr. Gene Corley, who led investigations of structural performance following the Oklahoma City bombing and September 11 attacks, said the team visited approximately 600 construction sites and met with stakeholder organizations to gather data.

One of the HRCO's recommendations is receiving special attention from the DOB. LiMandri and a group of construction firm officers, union representatives, worker advocates, and OSHA members are promoting a new worker safety campaign that encourages construction workers to wear safety harnesses whenever they are on the job site. The campaign features posters in seven languages. Below the picture of a dad in yellow construction hat and his son is the message, "If you fall, they fall too." According to the commissioner, worker education is crucial to reducing 2008's high fall-injury rate, up 121 percent from 2007.

DOB Cranes and Derricks division head Jason Ocharsky announced the study's recommendations for crane and hoist operations. Though Ocharsky at times drew laughs from the audience—"Ladies and gentlemen," he said at one point, "you should not need a rubber band, a bungee cord, duct tape, and a golf club sock to operate a crane"—the proposed regulations are serious and far-reaching. Recommendations include increased technical oversight of tower crane operations and more training for DOB inspectors. Ocharsky pointed to examples of regulations in countries such as Singapore, where cranes older than ten years are retired permanently, regardless of their condition. The HRCO's analysis of excavation and concrete operations was equally extensive, though crane safety remains foremost in the public's mind after last year's deadly accidents.

While doing its part to quell accusations from City Hall about DOB shortcomings, the study will raise questions about whether the city's building safety issues have been correctly evaluated and remedied. Last September, when the Buildings Department announced new requirements for erecting, dismantling, and raising tower cranes, it heard a collective groan from industry members who feared the regulations would drastically slow the city's building projects and put jobs at risk.

Whether the new rules help or hurt the industry in a time of stagnating projects remains to be seen. LiMandri said that the current downturn could provide a much-needed pause to improve construction safety throughout the city. And he emphasized that regardless of industry concerns, building professionals should be prepared for changes. New Yorkers are armed with camera phones and quick to dial 311, he pointed out. Should the department turn up new areas of safety risk, LiMandri added: "We're going to regulate it." **JENNIFER KRICHELS**

U.S. GETS MORE DISMAL GRADES ON INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT CARD

STATE OF DISREPAIR

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has released its 2009 Report Card for American Infrastructure, and the results are grim. The association gave the most powerful nation in the world an overall grade of D and stated that it would take a five-year investment of \$2.2 trillion to bring the U.S. up to par with the rest of its class—the world's major post-industrial nations. In the current draft stimulus bills under debate by Congress, infrastructure

spending accounts for a comparably tiny \$30 billion of the estimated \$800 billion total.

With the advent of the economic crisis, infrastructure has drawn a level of attention it hasn't seen since the days of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. And while some critics wonder whether investment in roads, bridges, rails, and the like will give the nation's economy the immediate boost it needs, the ASCE has jumped wholeheartedly behind this cause.

"Crumbling infrastructure has a direct impact on our personal and economic health, and the nation's infrastructure crisis is endangering our future prosperity," said ASCE president Wayne Klotz in a statement. "Our leaders

are looking for solutions to the nation's current economic crisis. Not only could investment in these critical foundations have a positive impact, but if done responsibly, it would also provide tangible benefits to the American people, such as reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality, clean water supplies, and protection against natural hazards."

Since the ASCE's last report in 2005, little has improved. At that time, the association put the cost of upgrades at \$1.7 trillion. In the intervening years, that number has increased by half a trillion. Some of the 15 infrastructure categories that the association tracks have gotten worse, while

continued on page 7



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For tourists who aren't quite ready to abandon their guidebooks for the GPS maps on a cell phone, there is a happy compromise: NYC&Co's sleek new information center near Times Square "is an architectural manifestation of Google," according to Kevin Booth, the marketing organization's CFO. The architecture firm WXY and media designers at Local Projects collaborated on the new storefront, which features a series of interactive media tables and digital projectors shaped as the letter "i" and visible from the street to draw in visitors. The base of the projector changes color according to the category that the user at each station has selected, "museums and galleries" or "dining," for example. Through an interface that looks much like a giant iPhone, visitors can use a coded interactive disk (or "puck") to get maps and directions, restaurant listings, museum schedules, and other information, which they can easily email, text, or print out. According to Claire Weisz, principal of WXY, "The idea was to create a prototype of a new way of experiencing the information, so the biggest challenge was coordination and inventing, and creating new things on the go." **MARIANA RODRÍGUEZ ORTE**

EAVESDROP: SARA HART

MEIER GIVETH AND  
MEIER TAKETH AWAY

In the arena of gift giving, bequests to museums are second only to universities with the potential for attached strings. Sometimes gifts are withdrawn before the thank-you notes are written. Did the latter happen at the **Museum of Modern Art** recently? We hear that **Richard Meier** offered the museum its pick of bibelots from his library, which apparently includes some Bauhaus rarities. The museum was thrilled, particularly since it's mounting *Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity* in November. In most cases, a museum can't attach monetary value to artifacts based solely on the donor's estimation, so the recipient is obligated to have the gifts appraised by an independent expert. Rumor has it that upon hearing how valuable his collection was, Meier withdrew his offer and has even declined to lend the artifacts for the exhibition. Although we don't expect to see empty vitrines in November, we don't expect to see the venerable modernist at the opening festivities, either, unless he has a change of heart... Speaking of festivities, MoMA has instituted a moratorium on elaborate opening dinners due to the current economic unpleasantness.

FLASH: OUROUSSOFF  
BREAKS NEWS IN PRINT

Speaking of empty champagne flutes, we turn our attention to *New York Times* architecture critic **Nicolai Ouroussoff's** year-in-review-cum-scolding of December 21. Embedded in his admonitions was this seemingly innocuous announcement: "**Jean Nouvel's** 75-story residential tower adjoining the Museum of Modern Art has been delayed indefinitely." While this shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone, we hear it was the first MoMA director **Glenn Lowry** had heard of it, and he was not amused. We wonder if he's heard about the canceled dinners.

CALLING ALL THE  
USUAL SUSPECTS

With news of **Julie Lasky** leaving *I.D.* for the Design Observer, attention turns to her successor. No one's been annointed yet, but if anyone's listening, Lasky speaks highly of editors **Jill Singer** and **Monica Khemsurov**. *I.D.* publisher F+W Media is advertising the position on its website. Applicants should be on a Nobel Prize shortlist and be able to turn water into wine. Lasky's slippers will be hard to fill. Shoe fetishists can try on the new job description by going to [www.fwmedia.com/career/ny09-1](http://www.fwmedia.com/career/ny09-1).

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## RECESSION SPECIAL

continued from front page

The project comprises a series of aluminum-framed conical structures whose dark, thatched skin will provide shade. The tent-like shapes, which will range in height from about 15 to 40 feet, are open at the top to create a chimney effect by drawing hot air up through the aperture by induction, to be replaced by air cooled at the ground level by the thermal mass of the courtyard's concrete walls. Concrete water troughs at the center of each tent will further cool the air.

Each summer for the last 11 years, the museum has sponsored a competition to design a shade-and-water structure for its wildly popular summer DJ series, Warm-Up. Five teams are asked to submit proposals for the structure, and the winner is given a budget of \$70,000 and four months in which to build it. MOS, which also just won a Progressive Architecture Award for a drive-in in Marfa, Texas, beat out the proposals of four other teams: Indie architec-



COURTESY MOS

ture of Denver, Colorado; and L.E.F.T. architects, Bade Stageberg Cox, and PARA-project, all of New York. The commission is a valuable one, and prior winners have included SHoP Architects, Work AC, and Los Angeles-based Ball Noguees Studio.

For their submission, MOS's Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample wanted to get away from the baroque excess that has characterized much of high-end architecture over the last few years (see under: installations in the Venice

Biennale's Arsenale). "With the *Afterparty*, we weren't just thinking about it in terms of the economy, but as architecture, too. We felt the need to look for new methods of design, after the party of a sort of high-formalism that has dominated academic discourse," said Meredith. The pair also sees the installation (which is in part inspired by the forms and functionality of Bedouin tents) as a respite from the often-frenetic nature of the Saturday evening parties at P.S.1. **ANNE GUINEY**



## **The Architect's Newspaper introduces**

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COURTESY PEI COBB FREED

## BEING THERE

**With this conversation at his home office on January 31 with Harry Cobb, a founder of Pei Cobb Freed, *AN* launches a series of interviews with architects from different generations talking about their own day-to-day career experiences with downturns in the past. Cobb, now 82, came of age during the Great Depression. It was then that he chose to become an architect, based on a trip abroad for which his mother managed to save by entering the real estate market.**

### *The Architect's Newspaper:*

**What was the economic situation when you first started working as an architect?**  
**Harry Cobb:** I graduated from Harvard's Graduate School of Design 60 years ago and immediately went to work. It was 1948 and I have worked ever since, but I can't say I know much about downturns and I don't think my experience is atypical for an architect.

According to Wikipedia, there have

been eight recessions in the years I've been in practice—the first one was 1953–54—and those recessions have occupied 12 of those 60 years. But if you ask me what I remember about them, I'd say not much, because they simply didn't register in my recollections by comparison with what I would call the vicissitudes, the highs and lows, of practice, which in my case have not even been related to recessions.

### **When, if ever, did you become aware of the boom-bust cycle in building?**

In the early years, our work was driven by our relationship with William Zeckendorf, Sr. He was an imaginative, energetic, and ambitious developer, and I.M. Pei, Jim Freed, and I worked for him as in-house architects for about ten years. (I.M. had been a critic at the GSD when I was a student.) Zeckendorf was an extraordinarily ambitious entrepreneur and risk-taker. He ultimately went bankrupt, but that was after we had already branched off and established an independent practice.

The only period I can recall that the profile of our practice was driven by a downturn was in the 1973–74 recession. It was a big one, and the first to last more than a year. That was the recession that took our firm to Iran. We were active there for four to five years until the revolution, and fortunately, we weren't working for the government but for private developers.

We were also busy because I.M. was in the middle of the East Building for the National Gallery of Art in D.C., which was a very high-profile project. But you can't sustain a practice on one project, no matter how high-profile. We considered ourselves fortunate when we were approached by those developers from Iran. But interestingly, what I remember most about Iran is not so much about the projects—none of them got built—but about going to Isfahan and Persepolis to see the splendid buildings. In any case, Pei and Freed were more involved with those jobs, and I was just stopping over on my way to a major mixed-use project

I was working on in Melbourne, Australia, called Collins Place, which was well underway. But don't attach too much importance to Iran, it just happened to be where we turned when things dried up here.

### **Did that first experience condition you somehow to try to prepare for the next one?**

If you're asking if we felt at risk, I would have to say architects are always at risk. I've never known a time since I came to New York when I did not feel we were at risk. I don't think you can enter into architecture if you don't have a tolerance for risk, especially if what you are interested in is the art of architecture, not the business.

### **How do you cope?**

After a while, you realize the sky isn't really falling and you just live with it. Every practice inevitably has periods of great financial risk—and these may not have to do with recessions. I associate risk instead with projects that were poorly managed, and led us to lose a lot of money—although they might be the same ones that launched our reputation. Sometimes I feel our practice has raised bad management to an art form!

### **What are the events that have shaped your experience?**

This recession is by far the worst since the Great Depression and is undoubtedly going to register. But the other eight I could not describe as very significant events in my life. The significant events—both for good and bad—related more to what was going on in the practice. No recession could possibly leave a mark on one's psyche as deep as the problems encountered with the John Hancock Tower [in Boston], or when we spent six years doing a complete overhaul of Kennedy Airport and on the day we finished 900 drawings, the project was canceled. And it was not because of a downturn but because of politics. Those disappointments are much more vivid in my mind.

### **How did the Hancock catastrophe, as you called it, impact your firm?**

A few years after that episode we were in a sense blacklisted by developers and corporations. We were aware our practice was badly hurt—it was on the front page around the world with these horrible pictures of plywood on the windows. We were considered not safe and that came closer than anything to jeopardizing our existence. But after four or five years, there was a kind of reversal when people said: If those guys are still around, they must be doing something right because they should be dead right now.

And we retained the confidence of our clients through the whole episode. In a sense that is the most important achievement of my life—getting that building finished in a way that was not compromised.

### **Did you develop strategies along the way for recovering from setbacks?**

We've never had a strategy, no one has ever gone out on the road to promote work, we've just responded to opportunities. We spend a lot of time, of course, in the process of getting work through interviews and, increasingly, through competitions. We're involved in three major ones right now. We have been fortunate: I wouldn't call it luck, and you just can't tell what's going to come in over the transom. The main thing we've always known—you might call it a hedge—is pursuing diversity, both geographically and in types of work. That has always helped to protect us against the collapse of any one sector.

### **How do you feel about this time around?**

Like all architects, we're apprehensive, but not in a panic. Partly it's just a matter of experience. If you live in a profession as long as I have and you are always at risk, you get accustomed to living at the edge of disasters. Someone once told me, or maybe I said it myself: Who speaks of success? Survival is all. And I completely believe that.



The hotel and culinary center are set in the landscape near an old quarry in a 16th century abbey.

## UNVEILED

### HOTEL LOISIUM ALSACE

Inspired by the success of the Hotel Loisiium Langenlois in Austria, the French government, hoping to boost the profile of the Alsace wine region, has asked the same developer and Steven Holl to build a second branch on the French border of Germany and Switzerland. Though both projects include similar programs—boutique hotel, spa, and culinary center set in a culturally significant landscape—Holl has designed a very different building for the French site. Clad in blackened wood, the building is enlivened with a vibrant red pavilion-like event space. "The blackened wood will help the building merge with the forest," Holl told *AN*. "The pavilion is like a flower on a crooked tree branch."

Located on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route and adjacent to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Marbach Abbey, an old stone quarry, and rows of vineyards, Holl's somewhat inscrutable building digs into its rugged surroundings. Suites set in small towers with wraparound views peek just above the horizon, and sustainable technologies like geothermal wells, green roofs, and retention ponds show that Holl's engagement with the site is formal, architectonic, and built into the operation and life of the building itself. **ALAN G. BRAKE**

**Architect:** Steven Holl Architects  
**Client:** Loisiium Alsace  
**Location:** Near Colmar, France  
**Completion:** 2011

COURTESY STEVEN HOLL ARCHITECTS



**KIOSK AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD**

**continued from front page** bleak piazza hemmed in by Whitehall Street and the bus loop in front of the Staten Island ferry terminal. Every year, five million people, including 70,000 daily commuters, charge across Peter Minuit Plaza between ferries, buses, and subways. "That's a quarter of the entire population of the Netherlands," van Berkel said, awed by the prime Manhattan site.

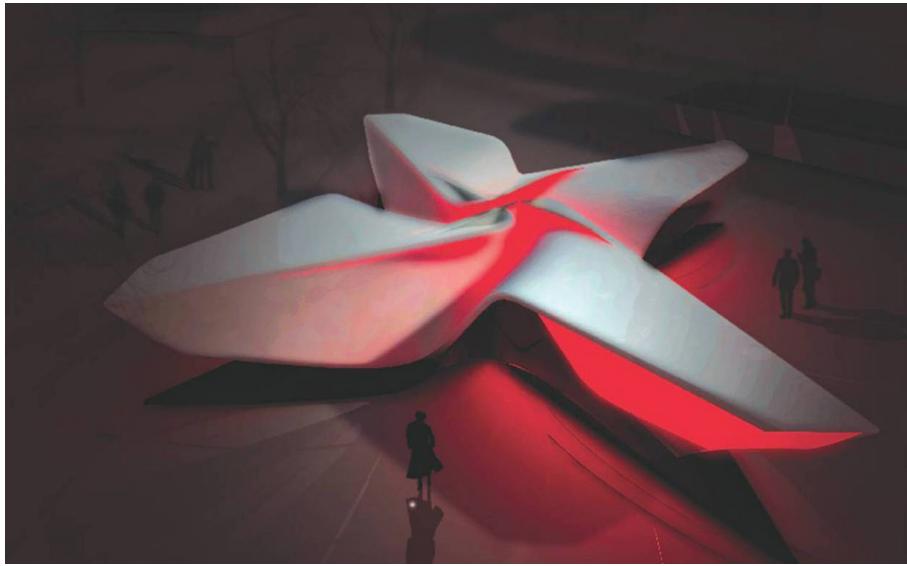
The structure is multivalent in more ways than one. To be known as the Amsterdam Plein and Pavilion, it will include openings on three of four sides to accommodate a cafe, an information desk, and public restrooms. Materials for the project are as yet undetermined, although according to its architect, it will be white with a changing LED light display. When asked if it were like another sculpted white pavilion—Zaha Hadid's art-stuffed pod for Chanel, which critics deemed an unseemly metaphor for corporate profligacy after it landed in Central Park—van Berkel replied to the contrary. "Oh, no!" he exclaimed. "This is a really working pavilion."

Handel Architects will serve as local

associates on the job, with site design by landscape architects at the city Department of Parks and Recreation. Due to open by September, the pavilion will be the famed Dutch architect's only extant work in the United States, since a widely published house in upstate New York that van Berkel and partner Caroline Bos designed burned to the ground last February, barely six months after its completion. Construction on the firm's luxury condominium, the metal-beribboned Five Franklin Place, had been reported to be at a standstill, but van Berkel said it is going ahead as planned and that its 55 apartments are getting snapped up, albeit less briskly than before.

Warrie Price, president of the Battery Conservancy, said in a statement that the pavilion will offer "a superb culinary experience, great visitor orientation information and materials, and an iconic, recognizable spot for residents and visitors to rendezvous." But let's not forget the toilets, perhaps a most fitting way to celebrate the pragmatic genius that has long marked this great Dutch-American experiment, New York.

**JULIE V. IOVINE**



COURTESY UNSTUDIO

**STATE OF DISREPAIR** **continued from page 3**

others have shown no improvement. Aviation dropped from a D+ to a D, primarily due to outdated air traffic control systems. Roads also slid, falling from a D to a nearly failing D-. According to the Federal Transit Administration, the cost to improve roads to good conditions is more than twice the current annual federal capital outlay of \$9.8 billion.

Solid waste held onto the highest grade, C+. This was thanks to the fact that more than a third of the 254 million tons of solid waste produced in the U.S. was recycled or recovered, which is a seven percent increase since 2000.

Bridges received a barely average grade of C. The ASCE estimates that 26 percent of bridges remain either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

Public parks, recreation, and rail held tenuously to their collective C- due to underfunding. National parks face a \$7 billion maintenance backlog and railroads need more than \$200 billion through 2035, a good investment for the environment when you consider that rail freight is three times as fuel-efficient as trucked cargo.

Dams, hazardous waste, and schools maintained a D average. The number of deficient dams has risen to 4,000, while downstream development has increased. Funding for cleanup of the nation's worst toxic waste sites has declined steadily. The National Education

Association estimates that \$322 billion could bring existing schools into good repair.

Levees appeared on the report card for the first time, earning a dismal D-. More than 85 percent of the estimated 100,000 miles of levees in the U.S. are privately owned and the reliability of most of them is unknown. The ASCE puts a rough cost of repair at \$100 billion.

Drinking and wastewater systems and inland waterways also got a D-. An \$11 billion budget gap means that leaking pipes will continue to waste about seven billion gallons of water daily. Aging wastewater facilities discharge billions of gallons of sludge into U.S. waters each year and need roughly \$390 billion over the next 20 years to fix the problem.

The ASCE identified inland waterways as a neglected resource. While an average tow barge can carry the equivalent of 870 tractor trailer loads, 30 of the 257 locks still in use were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while another 92 are more than 60 years old. It would take about \$125 billion to replace these.

The only grade improvement in the report card went to energy, which rose from a D to a D+. Much progress has been made in grid reinforcement since 2005, but as demand continues to increase, as much as \$1.5 trillion could be needed to upgrade electric utilities by 2030.

**AARON SEWARD**

# EERO DYNAMIC



Once an icon of air travel's future, Eero Saarinen's **Terminal 5 at John F. Kennedy International Airport** was in danger of becoming a relic—until JetBlue hired **Gensler** to bring the building into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A structural steel design afforded JetBlue the flexibility to revive the historic Flight Center and keep pace with a rapidly changing airline industry. Easily adaptable to everything from the latest aircraft designs to new security regulations, the terminal is cleared for takeoff.

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Ammann & Whitney  
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THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER FEBRUARY 18, 2009

# TRADING UP



Creating the appearance of effortless takes precision. In the built environment, this means inspired design and craftsmanship. In the business environment, it means streamlining operations to rise above the rest. That's why Bank of America challenged **Gensler** to design a staircase uniting its new trading floors at **One Bryant Park**. Fabricated by A-Val Architectural Metal Corporation and erected by Empire City Iron Works, its illuminated steel and glass construction is more than ornament. It represents the free flow of ideas. It represents mobility and agility. It represents how to get to the top.

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## BRONX PROMISSORY PLANT REBORN AS HOME FOR NONPROFITS AND SMALL BUSINESSES



COURTESY BEYER BLINDER BELLE

## OLD MONEY

A financial crisis may seem like a strange time to develop a 400,000-square-foot building along the Hunts Point waterfront in the South Bronx, but the development scheme relies on an architectural logic that the original builders tested, profitably, in a financial crisis a century ago.

The American Bank Note Company building began its life on the Hunts Point waterfront in 1907, during a financial panic. Its exterior is plain, dark, and uniform—to hide the bond-printing work inside from thieves and saboteurs. It features sawtooth skylights and terminal nodes where printing presses once stood. By the time construction ended in 1911, said Jon Denham, principal of Denham Wolf Real Estate Services, a residential neighborhood had grown up around the site and a federal rescue had made engraving and printing promissory notes a healthy business. Today, Denham said, the building's original traits make it worth redeveloping for the nonprofits and creative firms that have taken root in the neighborhood over the last few years. Exterior renovation is now visible, and the team hopes to open the rechristened BankNote by 2011.

The team is working quickly, with Beyer Blinder Belle as lead architect. The tenant list already includes the intrepid environmental-justice organization

Sustainable South Bronx and the well-regarded Typical Theater Company, and Denham said he's participated in long-range planning with civic groups. "We are helping not-for-profit tenants access rent subsidies and assistance," he told *AN*. "We want local groups to understand that we are investing millions to improve the infrastructure of the building."

And it's that infrastructure, updatable to current needs, that makes Denham even more confident. "We're keeping the great old windows, which were literally falling in, and maintaining a sawtooth roof skylight system across the building," Denham said. "What's fun about that is that at the time the building opened, electrical light was expensive and not so reliable." Some similar attitudes toward daylight have entered tenants' thinking today. Work also includes making the building's street frontage friendlier and

restoring its roof.

"The building was designed in a T-shape on an armory concept," said Neil Kittredge, the BBB partner leading the design. "It was totally reliant on daylight because you had engravers doing beautiful allegorical work on notes and then you had printing presses under the skylights. It resulted in distinctly proportioned spaces."

With the lighting system in place, Kittredge set about reorienting the massive site around small firms and street life. "The building is easy to get lost in, and because of a steep hill you can enter at different floors. We're designing lines under the skylights that will lead to three entrances when it's done. We're trying to create a logical circulation system that allows you to orient yourself within various parts." The developers hope to include a supermarket, a likely draw for foot traffic, when they complete the renovation in 2011.

**ALEC APPELBAUM**



The interior has generous daylighting from sawtooth skylights.

MARISOL DIAZ

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**DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH** continued from front page current building with a 215-foot-tall office building designed by James Carpenter Design Associates and architects Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel. Preservationists are aghast, and the local community board ambivalent.

"The fundamental issue is that the applicant is using the High Line as justification for a hardship," said Brad Hoylman, chair of Community Board 2. "But many members of the community board see it as a wind-fall." In a separate interview, Bo Riccobono, a member of the board's preservation committee, was more direct. "I think it's bull-shit," he said.

On January 22, the board voted 32-2 in favor of the project, which is located at 437 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street, though some preservation groups couched the vote as a rejection because the board called for the floor-area ratio to remain at its current density of 5 FAR, not the 7.73 the Romanoffs requested. Of the other variances they seek, the board supported two—one eliminating rear yard requirements, another concerning height and setback waivers—and one that it modified: a request for 30,000 square feet of retail, up from an allowable 10,000 square feet. The board requested that retail square-footage be limited to 20,000 square feet, fearing that more might encourage big-box stores.

Gary Tarnoff, the developers' counsel, said the Romanoffs appreciated the board's comments and will take them into consideration, but intend to proceed with their original proposal. "We saw the board's vote as a recognition of the hardship," Tarnoff said, "and now we expect the BSA to make a final determination on these matters." Tarnoff said he expects the project to go before the BSA in late March or early April.

Though the Romanoffs' argument that the High Line has created a hardship on the site may seem disingenuous, variance hearings at the BSA deal primarily with financial matters. The burden of proof lies with balance sheets, not ideas of appropriateness, context, or scale, which are the sticking points for preservationists. "What they're seeking to do would forever change the neighborhood and we can't stand to see that take place," said Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, which led the charge against the project. Still, when the Landmarks Preservation Commission



MATT CHABAN

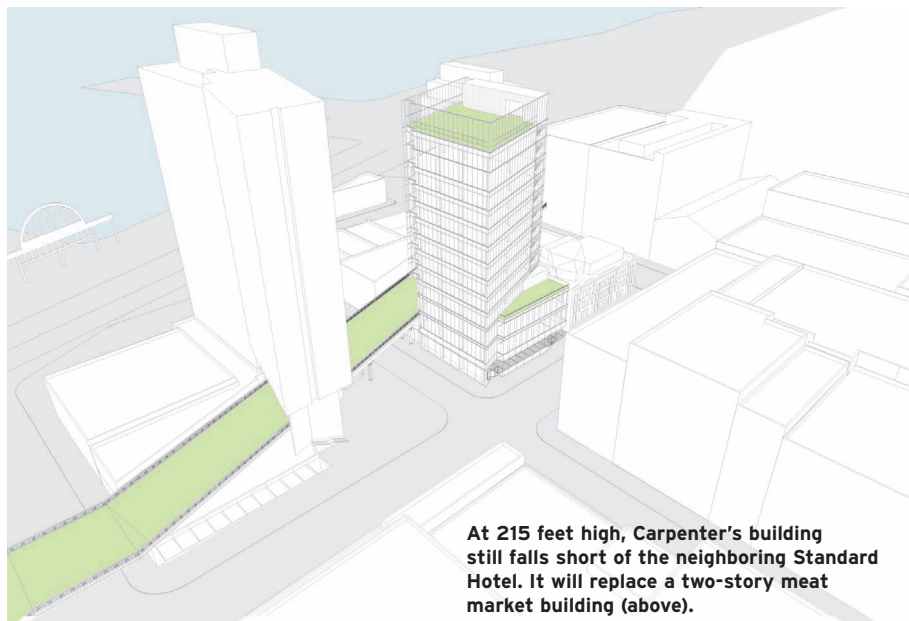
created the Gansevoort Historic District in 2004, the building was excluded because it was not found to be historically or architecturally significant.

While the West 13<sup>th</sup> Street facade rises the full height of the building, in concert with the Standard Hotel across the street, a setback on the Washington Street side provides a simple yet clever gesture with a threefold purpose: reducing the scale on Washington Street to match the neighboring buildings, gesturing toward Diane Von Furstenberg's adjacent building with its distinctive oculus, and creating an overall massing that parallels the tracks. "The form of the building sort of announces the High Line to the broader community," Carpenter said.

Carpenter added that the facade will be akin to the curtain wall at 7 World Trade Center, both in appearance and spirit. "We try and work a sense of depth into [the building's skin], like there's something behind the glass," Carpenter said. "We're trying to develop a very quiet building that doesn't have the busyness or noise of the other glass buildings nearby, like the Standard."

So far, the design has won the project supporters. "There's nothing wrong with building a really good building that people are going to like and that somewhere down the road we might consider landmarking in its own right," said David Reck, an architect and chair of the board's zoning committee. Hoylman said that the board endorsed the project, albeit in shorter form, because there was general support for the design.

Annie Washburn, executive director of the Meatpacking District Initiative, called the existing building "a black hole" and said the new building is more in line with the ongoing development of the neighborhood. "The meat market is leaving," she said, "so we need to create another marketplace here. It's becoming a creative marketplace, and this is precisely the sort of building that it calls for." **MATT CHABAN**



At 215 feet high, Carpenter's building still falls short of the neighboring Standard Hotel. It will replace a two-story meat market building (above).

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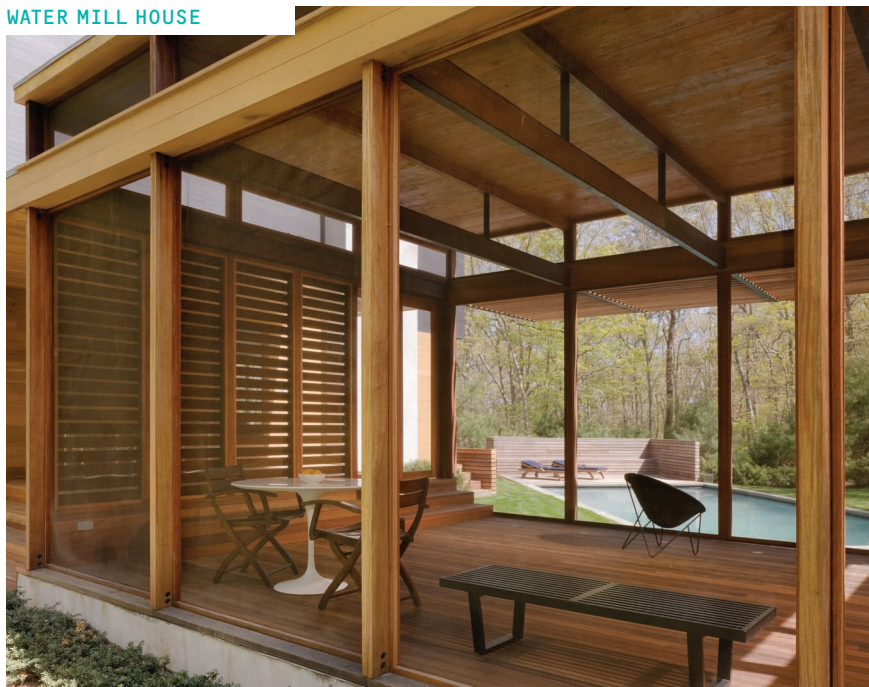


THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER FEBRUARY 18, 2009

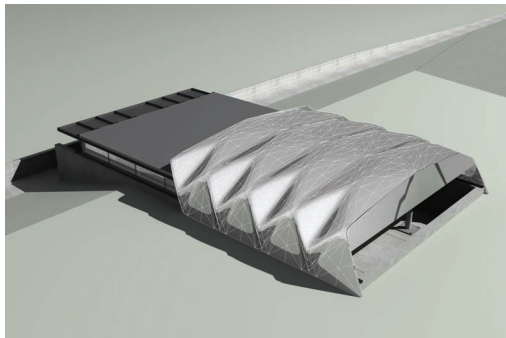
## EDAW OFFICES



## WATER MILL HOUSE



## OBSERVATORY PARK

EDAW OFFICES  
NEW YORK

The recently completed New York offices of this large landscape architecture firm emphasize day-lighting and flexibility. The central feature is a glass-enclosed conference room, which can be reconfigured into a large, open pin-up area for presentations. The architects opened up a skylight and specified low-partitioned Knoll office systems to maximize the transmission of daylight in the 9,000-square-foot, LEED Gold office. The space also includes employee showers, for bicycle commuters, and a roof garden designed by EDAW.

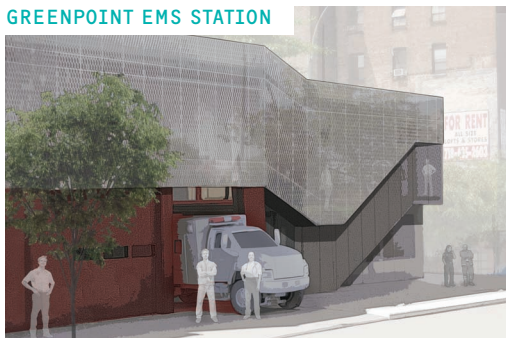
WATER MILL HOUSE  
WATER MILL  
NEW YORK

Under the new cedar cladding and flat roof of this Long Island house lies part of the frame and foundation of a 1970s developer-built home. Originally hired to design a new garage for the owner's vintage Porsche, Michielli and Wyetzner convinced the client to expand the project to include an extensive rethinking of the existing gabled structure. A screened-in porch overlooks a swimming pool, linking the house and garage to create a pleasant sequence of indoor and outdoor spaces. "The garage feels more like a pavilion in the woods," Wyetzner said.

OBSERVATORY PARK  
GREAT FALLS  
VIRGINIA

This two-phase project, for the non-profit Analemma astronomy society, includes an observatory that opens to the night sky, along with a sunken museum organized around a courtyard. The observatory's distinctive fiberglass roof is designed to be light and rigid, allowing for easy movement and clearance over the telescopes, which rise just above the earth-embanked walls. "The skin and the structure are one," Michielli explained. Burying the building helps minimize ground-level heat distortion, which can impede the performance of telescopes. The astronomy center, which will be built in a second phase, is dug into the ground and topped with a green roof, focusing the eye on the sky above and minimizing the building's impact on the site, a municipal park. The observatory will begin construction in the spring.

## GREENPOINT EMS STATION



## WATER MILL HOUSE

GREENPOINT EMS STATION  
NEW YORK

Commissioned as part of New York City's Design and Construction Excellence program, this two-story building houses an ambulance garage and adjacent storage and office areas. The difference in floor heights are expressed on the building's exterior. A Panelite-clad volume with a sloping roof connects the spaces and enlivens the utilitarian facade. The architects initially considered putting a green roof on the structure, but the agency opted for a lower-cost reflective roof.

Frank Michielli and Michael Wyetzner worked their way up through a large design-oriented firm, Davis Brody Bond, to reach partner and associate partner levels, respectively. They knew, however, that for all they had learned and the access they had gained through that respected office, they wanted to be closer to clients and more deeply involved in their projects. Five years ago they set out on their own, and have quietly built a practice with projects ranging from interiors and houses to a mixed-use building in

Harlem that they believe is the first in the city to be capped with an assisted-living facility instead of the usual condominiums or hotel. Working with a handful of associates, they have completed a chapel and classroom spaces at Yeshiva University and a restaurant and building lobby renovation at an apartment complex near the United Nations. They are also undertaking an intriguing institutional project in Virginia: a new observatory and museum on a site used by the Defense Mapping Agency during the Cold War. "We've

been lucky to have such a diverse group of clients," Wyetzner said. "We've taken more risks with these smaller projects, which keeps the work interesting and challenging."

The two describe their practice as studio-oriented, and while one of them will lead a project and serve as the sole contact with the client, there is a constant back-and-forth between the principals, who sit at adjacent desks in their Garment District loft. "We edit each other a lot," Michielli said. "We are always trying to simplify, to get to the most essential elements." **AGB**

COURTESY MICHIELLI + WYETZNER EXCEPT TOP LEFT: RAZUMNEDIA; BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT: PAUL WARCHOL



WITH A LOOMING BUDGET CRISIS AMID A DISMAL RECESSION,  
THE MTA SCRAMBLES FOR CASH

## SHOW MTA THE MONEY

Like the rest of the city, the recent boom years have been good to the Metropolitan Transit Authority, leading to shiny new buses, trains, and megaprojects. But now, with the fifth-largest debt load in the country and the state out of money, the authority is on the verge of jumping the tracks, right into territory it has not seen since the 1970s.

"The problem we're in is the perfect storm of major dedicated taxes all drying up at once," said Wiley Norvell, communications director at Transportation Alternatives. "The gas tax, the bridge tolls, the real estate tax, the sales tax—they've all gone dry. Plus, the MTA's debt has exploded over the last two years."

The result is a \$1.2 billion hole in the authority's operating budget, and a potential \$20 billion shortfall in the forthcoming \$30 billion 2010–2015 capital plan. The press has called it the "Doomsday Budget," because, short of new revenue streams, it will lead to massive service cuts and fare and toll increases throughout the system.

And if that weren't bad enough, the \$1 billion payment for Hudson Yards was pushed back a year, following a February 4 agreement between the authority and developer the Related Companies. Meanwhile, Forest City Ratner has yet to secure financing for the \$100 million it owes on the Atlantic Yards project.

On the bright side, the city's

Congressional delegation has secured between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion for the agency in the House stimulus bill, with possibly more to come from the Senate. In an act of confidence or hubris, the authority earmarked \$497 million on January 30 to complete the Fulton Street Transit Center, designed by Grimshaw and James Carpenter, before the package was even finalized.

It's enough to make even the steadiest straphanger's head spin.

"If we don't solve this problem, we're shortchanging the economy right now, when we can hardly afford to, and for decades to come," said Robert Yaro, president of the Regional Plan Association. He said that as the city has learned in the past, even a year or two of disinvestment can take decades to reverse. Fortunately, the MTA agrees wholeheartedly. "This is probably the most difficult landscape the MTA has faced in a generation," MTA spokesman Aaron Donovan said.

And yet the recession could prove, in some small way, to be the authority's salvation. Given the dire state of the economy, many politicians appear willing to entertain once-heretical notions. Take the mayor's congestion pricing plan. It was initially sold as a measure to reduce congestion and pollution, but was ultimately defeated by the state legislature

**continued on page 13**

OPEN > RESTAURANT AND BAR



### > THE OAK ROOM AND BAR

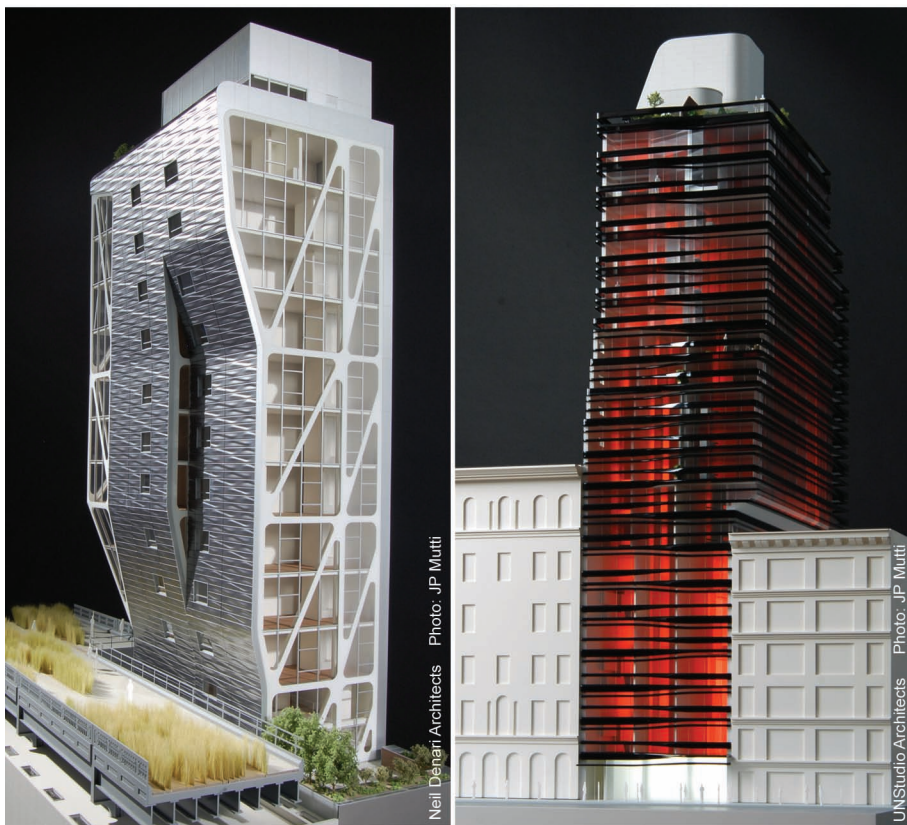
10 Central Park South

Tel: 212-758-7777

Designer: Selldorf Architects

SARI GOODFRIEND

The Oak Room at the Plaza is a quintessential New York City icon, but after a century or so, it had begun to show its age. No longer: Henry Hardenbergh's 1907 interiors have been sensitively restored and updated by Selldorf Architects, with the full approval of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Renowned for her expertise with historic restorations, principal Annabelle Selldorf wanted to make the space vibrant, stylish, and interesting, so she introduced contemporary finishes that include cork flooring, custom-designed furniture, and lighting. "The whole design was not about creating something new, rather more about the evolution of the overall space," Selldorf explained. She preserved the detailed wood paneling and the barrel-vaulted ceiling; three carved niches with murals of German feudal castles and Central Park by Everett Shinn look better than ever. The Oak Room and Bar retains its sense of history, while gracefully keeping up with the times. **DANIELLE RAGO**



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HONORS> AIA AWARDS



- 1 John Ronan Architects,  
The Gary Comer Youth Center
- 2 VJAA,  
Charles Hostler Student Center
- 3 John G. Waite Associates, Architects,  
Basilica of the Assumption
- 4 Grimshaw, Horno3: Museo del Acero
- 5 Thomas Phifer and Partners,  
Salt Point House

The **American Institute of Architects (AIA) Institute Honor Awards** recognize works that exemplify excellence in architecture, interior architecture, and urban design. Twenty-five international recipients will be honored in April at the AIA 2009 National Convention and Design Exposition in San Francisco. This year, nine projects were awarded the 2009 Institute Honor Awards for Architecture,

acknowledging their positive impact on the social and physical fabric of the communities they serve: the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore by **John G. Waite Associates, Architects** is a restoration that brings back Henry Latrobe's original concept of luminosity and spatial configuration; the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland, California by **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill**, uses glass, wood, and

concrete to ennoble and inspire; the Charles Hostler Student Center in Beirut, Lebanon by **VJAA** constitutes an innovative proposal of multiple building volumes interconnected by gardens and green roofs; the Gary Comer Youth Center in Chicago by **John Ronan Architects** is a space for socially-committed educational and recreational programs; the Horno3: Museo del Acero in Monterey, Mexico, by

**Grimshaw** is another restoration project that uses a 1960s derelict blast furnace and turns it into the centerpiece of the museum; the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life in New Orleans by **VJAA** transforms a rigid, environmentally inefficient building into a dynamic and sustainable university center; the New York Times Building in Manhattan by **Renzo Piano Building Workshop** and



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AT DEADLINE

## MOLTEN KOOLHAAS

Taken as an inauspicious sign by Beijingers and architects alike, the OMA-designed Television Cultural Center (TVCC) tower—sibling to the jackknifed CCTV tower—caught fire on February 9. The building burned throughout the night, injuring seven firefighters, including one fatality from smoke inhalation. Chinese officials are blaming fireworks from the final day of New Year's celebrations, which are thought to have sparked construction materials on the roof. It took only 20 minutes for the entire building to be transformed into a towering inferno. Though no official decisions had been made as of press time, the Chinese government seemed determined to rebuild. Erik Amir, an OMA senior architect who rushed to the scene, told the Associated Press: "It really has been a rough 6-7 years for architects who worked on this project. I think it's really sad that this building is destroyed before it can be opened to the public."

## ALMS FOR ATLANTIC YARDS?

Politicians, developers, transit advocates, civil engineers—everyone wants a piece of the federal stimulus package, including developer Bruce Ratner. The *New York Post* was told by city officials that Ratner would "lobby hard for a piece of the federal pork." Borough President Marty Markowitz deemed the project "shovel-ready," while the developer has refused comment to numerous outlets, including this one. Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn called Ratner's efforts a grossly opportunistic bid for taxpayer funds.

## THEY HEART NEW YORK

Digital-design mavens Gage/Clemenceau Architects have delivered a valentine to New York. A two-ton, 10-foot-tall valentine, to be exact. The Times Square Alliance and diamond merchant Zales commissioned the firm to build what is arguably its first major civic work. The heart comprises two stainless-steel ventricles precision-cut with water jets by Milgo Bufkin and layered with translucent Corian that was CNC-milled and embedded with purple LEDs by Evans & Paul. "We wanted to make something to showcase some of the technologies we're up to," said Marc Clemenceau Bailly. It will be on view for at least two weeks following Valentine's Day at the foot of the TKTS Booth.

## YES, ARCHITECTS CAN

The AIA is urging members to get more engaged in political offices and appointments, and recently tallied the number of active members involved in politics, including mayors, city council members, planning commissioners, and the like. The survey revealed that at least 850 architects hold such posts, or more than one percent of total AIA membership. "The survey aims to get more architects involved in the debate about the role the built environment has within the larger society as well as the smaller community," said AIA spokesman Scott Frank.





COURTESY RESPECTIVE FIRMS

**FXFowle Architects** has an open and inviting design; the Plaza Apartments in San Francisco by **Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects & Paulett Taggart Architects** is a sustainable housing project for the chronically homeless, with on-site physical and mental health facilities; and the Salt Point House in Salt Point, New York, by **Thomas Phifer and Partners** is an efficient and elegant residence designed to work with its surroundings. The entire listing for this year's interior architecture and urban design awards can be found on the AIA website: [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org).

MRO

**SHOW MTA THE MONEY** continued from page 11 because, in its members' view, the real purpose was to fund mass transit. Newer proposals, however, such as those put forward by former MTA chair Richard Ravitch—East River bridge tolls, payroll taxes, slightly increased fares and tolls—avoid the bait-and-switch and go right for the money.

Norvell said that compared to last year, the tone in Albany is "markedly different," with almost no complaints about the payroll tax and a surprising openness to East River bridge tolls. "Oddly enough, the financial crisis has created a lot of political breathing room," he said. "We're looking at \$2.50 MetroCards, \$100 monthlies. Nobody wants his fingerprints on that."

It will likely be late March before we know whether it is Doomsday or V-Day for the MTA. The federal stimulus package must first be passed, though even that would be but a few nickels in the bucket. From there, it should take a month for the legislature to either endorse Ravitch's plan, adopt an alternative, or let the MTA go forward with its cuts, which the authority's board approved in December. Given the state's budget woes, that remains a distinct possibility.

Transit advocates remained heartened despite the MTA's predicament. "I have reason to believe it will pass, given my conversations with people in both houses," Yaro said of the Ravitch plan. Norvell believes the legislature owes it to the MTA. "The system's been starved by Albany for the last decade," he said. "The ball is in their court. We hope they make the right play." **MC**



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## Built for the People of the United States of America

**Seventy-five years ago, gripped by the Great Depression, America launched an audacious program of public works that left a proud legacy of bridges, schools, highways, and dams whose scope and ambitions still stagger. As Congress faces a comparable challenge today, will an economic jolt tied to shovel-ready spending and familiar funding formulas match the monumental vision of the New Deal?**

**By William Menking and Aaron Seward**





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In 1931, New York Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt sat in on a roundtable conversation with the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) in Charlottesville, Virginia. There, RPAA members including Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, and Clarence Stein presented the future president with a powerful argument that fallout from the economic collapse of 1929 might be best attacked by following a “new road” of regional planning at a national scale. The governor seemed sympathetic to their ideas, and helped MacKaye launch his ambitious plans for the Appalachian Trail, which began in New York State.

Two years later, when FDR began the historic 100 days of legislation that kicked off the New Deal, the RPAA’s lobbying seemed to have paid off. Roosevelt placed MacKaye in a planning position with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and selected Stein’s partner, Robert Kohn, as the first head of the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA). But while the RPAA’s progressive goals were embodied in these programs, as the New Deal wore on, its idealism and the scale of its ambition became muddled through political compromises.

The Greenbelt Town program, which was supposed to change the face of America with a series of highly rational garden cities, was whittled down to three small projects. And the TVA’s initial steps toward creating a “dynamic regional and interregional economy” were soon shed by its director, Arthur Morgan, who steered the authority toward becoming merely a source of electricity for the industrializing south. This tension—between those with plans to use government action and money to transform the country and those who

prefer a more laissez-faire approach focused purely on temporary job creation—is very much alive today as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) works its way through Congress. Like today’s stimulus package, the New Deal started as a jobs-creation program, but it gave rise to profound changes in the landscape and culture that were a natural outgrowth of the era’s newfound belief in the federal government’s ability to play a transformational role. As we debate what many call “the New New Deal,” the lessons of the 1930s remind us that a focus on job creation need not preclude a commitment to the broader progressive agenda that made the New Deal so far-reaching.

The New Deal’s largest and best-known agency, the one that became synonymous with the entire program, was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Enacted in 1935, it received more money and attention than any other of the Roosevelt administration’s initiatives. By 1941, the WPA had spent approximately \$11.4 billion (\$169 billion in today’s money). Of this massive investment, \$4 billion went to highway and street projects; \$1 billion to public buildings; \$1 billion to publicly owned or operated utilities; and another \$1 billion that funded initiatives as varied as school lunch programs, the famous Federal Writers Project, and sent photographers like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans out to document the American landscape. By the time it was disbanded by Congress in 1943 as a result of the manufacturing boom created by World War II, the WPA had provided some eight million jobs and had left its mark on nearly every community in America by way of a park, bridge, housing project, or municipal building.

The magnitude of the change created by the WPA’s modernization program was unprecedented among direct federal interventions, and the current recovery bill has the potential to be as, or more, effective. At this writing, ARRA promises \$825 billion in economic stimulus, \$275 billion of which is tax cuts and \$550 billion of which is actual investment. Much of this \$550 billion will go to construction projects to bring America’s flagging schools, health care facilities, and infra-

structure up to standard and beyond. A recent analysis of the bill from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave the following run-down on infrastructure spending: \$30 billion for highways, \$9 billion for transit, \$1.1 billion for Amtrak, \$10 billion for science facilities, \$3 billion for airports. The list goes on, including appropriations for clean water and restoration of brownfields, but also money for other architecture-related building work: \$16 billion for school modernization,



JET LOWE/COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



COURTESY BROOKLYN COLLEGE

After the Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, the federal government covered 90 percent of costs for highways like the 1963 Alexander Hamilton Bridge (facing page, center span). The Triborough Bridge (top) was built in 1936 with \$44.2 million from the Public Works Administration. The previous year, the PWA allocated \$5 million for the original Brooklyn College campus (above).





COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Modeled after English garden cities and completed in 1937, Greenbelt, Maryland (above) was one of three greenbelt towns created under the federal Resettlement Administration. The 1940 segment of Manhattan's East River Drive, sketched by Hugh Ferriss (below), received a PWA grant of nearly \$4.8 million. The New Deal's heroic ambition is exemplified by the Tennessee Valley Authority's Norris Dam (facing page), completed in 1936.

\$9 billion for Department of Defense projects like VA hospitals and child care centers, and \$2.25 billion for rehabilitating public housing.

While the rough balance of funds in the current bill and the WPA evinces a kinship, they will be disbursed in a very different fashion. Harry Hopkins, FDR's handpicked director of the WPA, worked directly with the states to evaluate and select projects. Other agencies, such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA), also had their own directors, their own budgets, and the power to choose how best to spend them. The money in the current stimulus package will be apportioned to the states not through newly created agencies based in D.C.—as was the case in the 1930s—but by existing formulas. These formulas evaluate the needs of various localities by calculating factors that range from demographics, to income levels, to official reports on structures and efficiencies. The formulas have the benefit of distributing funds by objective measures rather than political ones, as goes one criticism of the

WPA. However, these measures change little from year to year, and a formula-based system has done little to address infrastructure failings at a regional or even national scale.

What has not changed between now and then is the imperative to choose projects that are ready to start construction immediately. What we might call "shovel-ready" projects were a big part of the WPA agenda, and there were a number of regional plans in place, notably those developed by Robert Moses in New York, that captured an enormous share of federal funds. By 1936, New York City was receiving one seventh of the WPA allotment for the entire country, employed 240,000 people with this money, and was considered "the 49<sup>th</sup> state" within the WPA. Meanwhile other municipalities floundered in their attempts to draw up plans, and the WPA canceled more than 100 major grants to 11 northeast cities because the blueprints for those projects were not ready. Today's analog is the "Use it or Lose it" provision in the bill that demands the return of funds if they are not put

to work within 120 days. Because of this urgency, many are wary that we will spend \$100 billion filling potholes.

There are a few significant projects in New York that promise to make a real difference to the region. One is Access to the Region's Core, or the ARC tunnel, which will improve transportation between New Jersey and Manhattan. East Side Access, a project that will do the same thing for commuters coming from Long Island, is already under construction, but in dire need of funds. The same can be said for the MTA's 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Subway project. And then there's the Fulton Street Transit Center, which promised to become a central element of downtown's redevelopment before the MTA's own parlous financial situation put it in jeopardy. These projects, which stand to receive substantial stimulus funding, will undoubtedly improve transportation in the New York region and lay the groundwork for increased demand in the future. But what about transportation between New York and Boston, or New York and Chicago? What about developing a framework for wind power in the tri-state area? What about a comprehensive plan for regional watershed management?

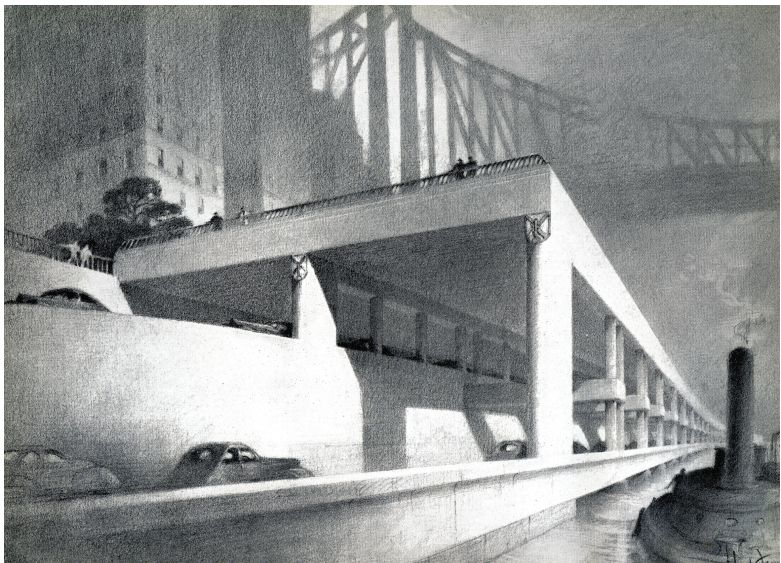
There is no agency to think about the changing infrastructure needs of the country as a whole. In 2007, a bill was put forth to do just this: The Infrastructure Investment Bank Act would have established a national institution to evaluate project proposals and assemble investment portfolios to pay for them, much like the World Bank does on a global level. The fact that it did not pass Congress speaks to a reluctance in the U.S. to put planning power in the hands of the federal government—the same reluctance that the

RPAA came up against in the 1930s.

One of Roosevelt's first acts of the New Deal, an act some say he first mentioned at that RPAA roundtable meeting in Virginia, was the creation of the TVA. This ambitious project targeted the poorest part of the country, the one hardest hit by the Depression, and took it upon itself to modernize and reinvigorate it. Through a comprehensive regimen of education and infrastructure building—including the construction of 29 hydroelectric dams and even the building of one town—the TVA turned this rural backwater into the nation's biggest producer of electricity, and one of the backbones of mobilization during WWII. Though it faced determined opposition, and proposals to implement similar regional plans were shot down across the country, the TVA stands as a high water mark.

The only time in American history that the federal government has been able to enact a national plan was through the Federal Highway Act of 1956, a project whose skeleton was drafted by the NRA during the Depression. While many today dispute the merit of this program, it is instructive to note that the only way Eisenhower was able to sell the highway act to the country was by declaring it vital to national security.

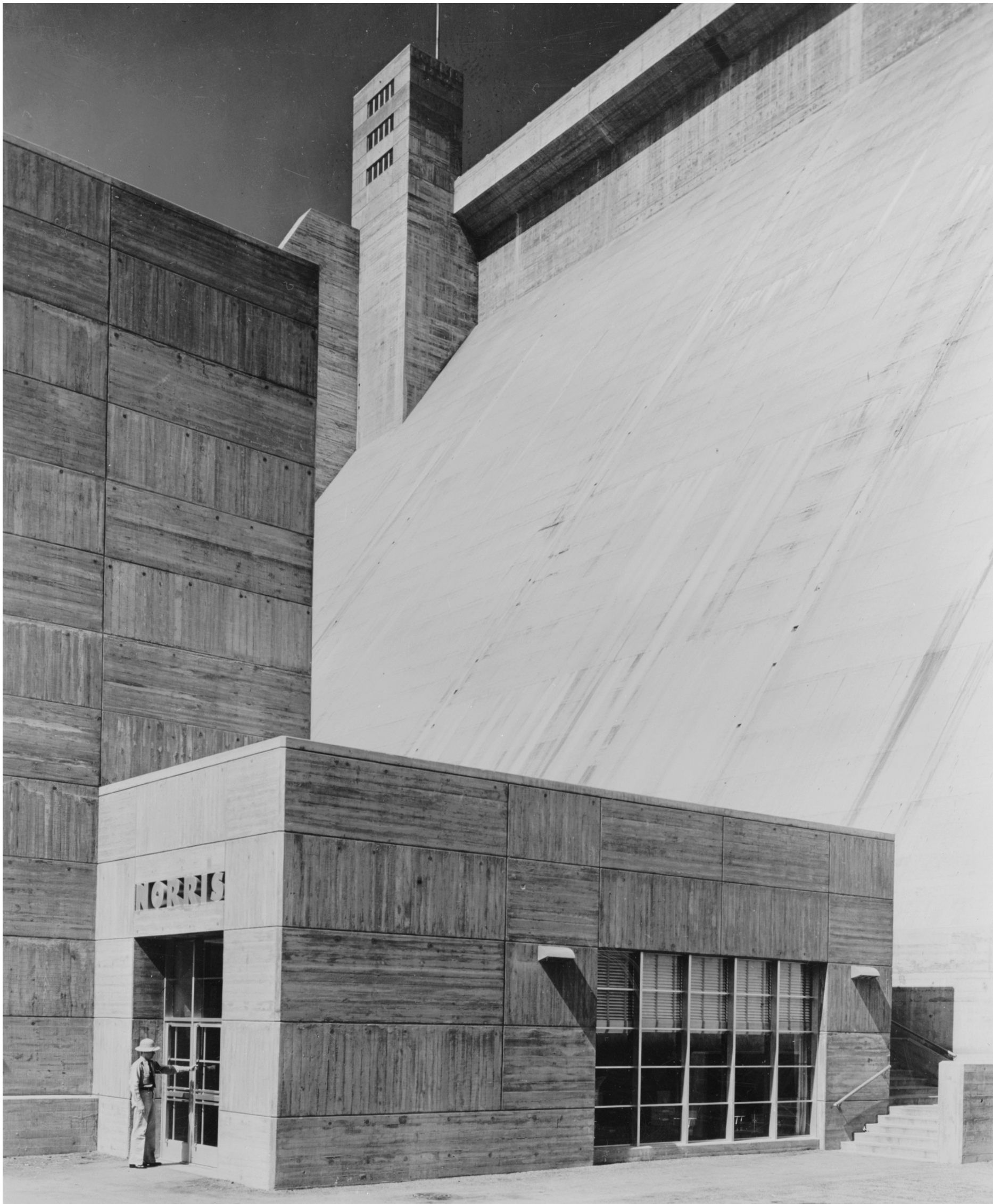
Today we face not nuclear Armageddon but a danger that could, in the long run, prove all the more crippling: our national infrastructure on the brink of collapse. It seems time to draft our own "new road," one designed not just to pull us out of economic crisis, but also to lay the groundwork that will carry us undiminished into the future.



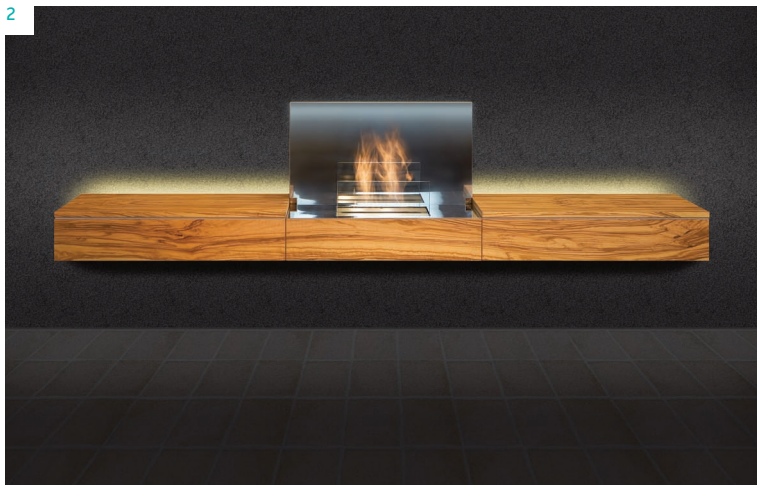
FROM EAST RIVER DRIVE (FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY, 1940)



FEATURE  
17







IN THE DRIVE TO TAKE BACK PRIDE OF PLACE IN THE CONTEMPORARY HOME—OR EVEN THE CORNER BAR OR RESTAURANT—SOOT-FREE AND PORTABLE FIREPLACES HAVE BECOME THE LATEST IN CUSTOMIZABLE FURNISHINGS

# WARMING TRENDS

1 FIREScheme  
THE PLATONIC  
FIREPLACE COMPANY

Started by architect Henry Harrison in 1984, the Platonic Fireplace Company continues to provide creative and innovative contemporary designs that aim to reinstall the fireplace rather than the widescreen plasma TV as the hearth of the home. One of Harrison's latest conceptions, firescheme, allows clients to get at least a piece of an original design by one of Britain's leading interior architects. Shown here is firescheme with a steel extraction system instead of a chimney and a canopy clad to match. The fire—an "invisible" Socrates burner—is ignited through the company's own fire pebbles and sits upon a lime-stone shelf with a granite facing and fireback. [www.platonicfireplaces.co.uk](http://www.platonicfireplaces.co.uk)

2 FIREBOARD  
SCHULTE DESIGN

Germany-based Schulte Design has released a line of "fire furniture" in which everyday pieces—here, a sideboard—are transformed into mobile fireplaces. Each piece is made from Schulte Design woods and covered with sheet steel, powder-coated black heat-resistant safety glass, and a stainless-steel reflector. It includes a double-walled combustion chamber with ceramic foam inside that provides low fuel consumption, uniform flame length, long burning time, and unlimited usage. The Fireboard is a beautifully crafted storage space, as well, with two drawers, 27.5 inches wide, with a reflecting hinged back plane that romanticizes the burning light or folds down to make a continuous surface. [www.schultedesign.de](http://www.schultedesign.de)

3 THE LINEAR BURNER  
SPARK MODERN FIRES

Spark Modern Fires, the designer and manufacturer of modern, clean, and elegant gas fireplaces, recently announced a new customizable modular burner system called The Linear Burner. This new system gives designers and architects the ability to create custom linear fireplaces with a nationally certified and approved burner system. The burner is completely customizable and available from lengths of 24 inches to 96 inches in one-foot increments, as well as multiple views: one-sided, two-sided, three-sided, or completely open with an overhead vent. [www.sparkfires.com](http://www.sparkfires.com)

4 EF5000  
ESCEA

In the hands of New Zealand-based Escea, the outdoor fireplace is anything but primitive. Their new range of gas fires, just introduced in the United States, is available in a variety of finishes to complement any room or outdoor setting. Escea's EF5000 open-front outdoor gas fire features vent-free technology that requires no chimney, simplifying the installation process and ensuring that all heat generated is directed to the desired area. Available in marine-grade stainless steel with stone inserts (granite, marble, or similar) and Florentine Bronze, the fire measures 51 by 25 inches and comes with an electronic touch pad ignition with three settings to control its CSA 56,000-BTU vent-free heat output. [www.escea.co.nz](http://www.escea.co.nz)

5 BONFIRE  
B+D DESIGN

Tunisia-born artist Cathy Azria wants to blur the boundary between fireplaces and art by creating one-of-a-kind installations in which fire animates a structural composition. Her inspiration draws from natural materials, organic forms, and the interplay of light to make "fire sculptures" that work. Bonfire is Azria's latest, and reminiscent of fallen tree branches. Made from steel rods, customized to fit any opening, this is a sculpture that glows while emitting a cracking and popping sound as the steel begins to expand, simulating a real campfire experience while suitable for gas, electric, or solid fuel fireplaces. [www.bd-designs.co.uk](http://www.bd-designs.co.uk)

6 FUSION  
ECOSMART FIRE

The Fusion fireplace joins a line of freestanding, portable fireplaces that are fueled with environmentally friendly ethanol. Streamlined in shape and made of modern materials, the Fusion fireplace is a flexible piece of furniture for any home or restaurant in need of a visual warm-up. With no installation or building work required, you simply unpack and position. Made with an MDF timber surround with a fire-resistant topcoat and constructed around a stainless steel firebox insert, the Fusion features a double opening with a "see-through" effect made with tempered, heat-resistant glass. [www.ecosmartfire.com](http://www.ecosmartfire.com)

DR



FEBRUARY

WEDNESDAY 18

LECTURE

**Pei Zhu and Tong Wu**  
**Interlaced Logic**

6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

EXHIBITION OPENING

**Asian/American/Modern Art:**  
**Shifting Currents, 1900-1970**  
Noguchi Museum  
9-01 33rd Rd., Queens  
www.noguchi.org

THURSDAY 19

LECTURES

**Liza Fior**

**The Strategic Sellout and**  
**the Virtues of Risk: Liza Fior**  
**muf architecture/art**

6:30 p.m.  
Yale School of Architecture  
180 York St., New Haven  
www.architecture.yale.edu

**Frank Lupo, John Cetra,**  
**Ismael Leyva, et al.**

**Slenderness:**  
**New York | Hong Kong**  
6:30 p.m.  
Steelcase Showroom  
4 Columbus Circle  
www.skyscraper.org

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Lisa Yuskavage**  
David Zwirner Gallery  
525 West 19th St.  
www.davidzwirner.com

Sites

Whitney Museum of  
American Art  
945 Madison Ave.  
www.whitney.org

FRIDAY 20

LECTURE

**Rem Koolhaas**  
**Hermitage 2014**

6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Apparently Invisible:**  
**Selections Spring 2009**  
The Drawing Center  
35 Wooster St.  
www.drawingcenter.org

**Sun Xun: Shock of Time**

Drawing Room  
40 Wooster St.  
www.drawingcenter.org

SATURDAY 21

SYMPOSIA

**Twin Phenomena:**  
**Preservation and Modern**  
**Architecture in Latin America**  
**Gustavo Araoz,**  
**Louise Noelle, et al.**

10:00 a.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

**Home Design in New York**

**Jean Nouvel, Craig**  
**Greenberg, et al.**  
1:00 p.m.  
Museum of the City of  
New York  
1220 5th Ave.  
www.mcny.org

LECTURE

**Martin Filler**  
**Contemporary Architecture**  
**and Its Critics**

6:00 p.m.  
City College  
Shepard Hall  
Convent Ave. and 138th St.  
www.ccny.cuny.edu

EXHIBITION OPENING

**archeography III**  
**(suspended gardens)**  
SUPERFRONT  
1432 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn  
www.superfront.org

EVENT

**Dumbo Art Center's Benefit**

6:00 p.m.  
Dumbo Arts Center  
30 Washington St., Brooklyn  
www.dumboartscenter.org

WITH THE KIDS

**Discover Engineering**  
**Family Day**

10:00 a.m.  
National Building Museum  
401 F St. NW,  
Washington, D.C.  
www.nbm.org

SUNDAY 22

EXHIBITION OPENING

**Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or**  
**P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center**  
22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens  
www.ps1.org

EVENT

**42nd Street Deco**  
**Walking Tour**

2:00 p.m.  
Former Daily News Building  
220 East 42nd St.  
www.mas.org

MONDAY 23

FILM

**Deathbowl to Downtown**

(Coan Nichols and Rick  
Charnoski, 2009), 87 min.  
6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

TUESDAY 24

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Cast in Bronze:**  
**French Sculpture from**  
**Renaissance to Revolution**  
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
1000 5th Ave.  
www.metmuseum.org

**Michaël Borremans**

**Taking Turns**  
David Zwirner Gallery  
525 West 19th St.  
www.davidzwirner.com

CONFERENCE

**Managing Construction's**  
**Financial Crisis:**  
**How to Capitalize on**  
**the Challenges Ahead**

Through February 25  
The McGraw-Hill Companies  
Corporate Headquarters  
1221 Avenue of the Americas  
www.construction.com

WEDNESDAY 25

LECTURE

**Edwin Schlossberg**  
**Design and Visualization**

6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

EXHIBITION OPENING

**Projects 89: Klara Liden**  
Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53rd St.  
www.moma.org

THURSDAY 26

LECTURES

**Brian Ripel,**  
**Anthony Lau, et al.**  
**Indoor Bike Parking**  
**Solutions for NYC**

6:30 p.m.  
Musuem of the City of  
New York  
1220 5th Ave.  
www.mcny.org

**Michael Rockland**

**The George Washington**  
**Bridge: Poetry in Steel**

6:30 p.m.  
The Skyscraper Museum  
39 Battery Pl.  
www.skyscraper.org

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Benjamin Tritt, Sara Carter,**  
**Karim Hamid, et al.**  
**Terra Nova**

33 Bond Gallery  
33 Bond St.  
www.33bond.com

**Brücke: The Birth of**  
**Expressionism in Dresden**  
**and Berlin, 1905-1913**

Neue Galerie New York  
1048 5th Ave.  
www.neuegalerie.org

**Cézanne and Beyond**

Philadelphia Museum of Art  
26th St. and the Benjamin  
Franklin Pkwy.  
www.philamuseum.org

FILM

**Steven Holl: The Nelson-**  
**Atkins Museum of Art,**  
**Kansas City**

6:30 p.m.  
The Center for Architecture  
536 LaGuardia Pl.  
www.aiany.org

FRIDAY 27

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Christopher Lowry Johnson**  
**What We Call Progress Is**  
**this Storm**

Winkleman Gallery  
637 West 27th St.  
www.winkleman.com

**Hernan Bas: Works from**  
**the Rubell Family Collection**

Brooklyn Museum of Art  
200 Eastern Parkway,  
Brooklyn  
www.brooklynmuseum.org

**Thomas Scheibitz**

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery  
521 West 21st St.  
www.tanyabonakdargallery  
.com

EVENT

**Works on Paper**

Through March 2  
Park Avenue Armory  
643 Park Ave.  
www.sanfordsmith.com

WITH THE KIDS

**Black History Month**  
**Celebration**

2:00 p.m.  
Charles A. Dana Discovery  
Center at Central Park  
110th St. and Lenox Ave.  
www.africanart.org

SATURDAY 28

LECTURE

**Peter Gluck**  
**Fear of Architecture:**  
**A Problem of Process**

6:00 p.m.  
City College  
Shepard Hall  
Convent Ave. and 138th St.  
www.ccny.cuny.edu

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Florian Maier-Aichen**  
303 Gallery  
547 West 21st St.  
www.303gallery.com

**James Patterson**

**Harvest**  
bitforms gallery  
529 West 20th St.  
www.bitforms.com

**Lorraine Shemesh**

**Intersections**  
Allan Stone Gallery  
113 East 90th St.  
www.allanstonegallery.com

MARCH

SUNDAY 1

EXHIBITION OPENING

**Martin Kippenberger:**  
**The Problem Perspective**  
Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53rd St.  
www.moma.org

MONDAY 2

LECTURE

**Anthony Vidler,**  
**Reinhold Martin, et al.**  
**Histories of the**  
**Immediate Present**

6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

TUESDAY 3

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

**Arbores Venerabiles**  
**Cece Cole:**  
**Knots and Conceits**  
Wave Hill  
West 249th St. and  
Independence Ave., Bronx  
www.wavehill.org

**Michael Rakowitz**

**The worst condition is to**  
**pass under a sword which**  
**is not one's own**  
Lombard-Freid Projects  
531 West 26th St.  
www.lombard-freid.com

WEDNESDAY 4

LECTURE

**Thom Mayne**  
**Overlapping Realities**  
**(Both This and That)**

6:30 p.m.  
Columbia GSAPP  
Wood Auditorium  
113 Avery Hall  
www.arch.columbia.edu

EXHIBITION OPENING

**Into the Open:**  
**Positioning Practice**  
Parsons the  
New School for Design  
Sheila C. Johnson  
Design Center  
66 5th Ave.  
www.parsons.edu

LIST YOUR EVENT AT  
DIARY@ARCHPAPER.COM



NATIONAL TOURIST ROUTES PROJECT

DETOUR:  
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN ALONG  
18 NATIONAL TOURIST ROUTES IN NORWAY

National Building Museum  
401 F Street Northwest, Washington, D.C.  
Through May 25

The latest exhibition on view at the National Building Museum, *Detour: Architecture and Design Along 18 National Tourist Routes*, explores Norway's picturesque and varied natural landscape, as well as nearly 200 "small but sensational" architectural projects along the nation's popular tourist routes. The four designated routes—Sognefjellet, Old Strynefjell, Hardanger, and Helgeland Coast North—cover 1,150 miles and include information centers, rest stops, and observation platforms along the way. These small-scale architectural projects, often given little design attention in the United States, are treated with great care in Norway, thanks to a collaboration begun in 1993 between the Norwegian Public Roads Administration and the foundation Norsk Form. Designed by both Norwegian and international architects, landscape architects, and designers, including Carl-Viggo Hølmekbakk, Pushak arkitekter, Tommie Wilhelmsen and Todd Saunders, Landskapsfabrikken, Jensen & Skodvin, and Peter Zumthor, these buildings add richness to the landscape, in addition to serving the basic bathroom, way-finding, and snacking needs of tourists and other travelers. On display are seven models, photographs, and a film that transports viewers to Norway's scenic roads.



PETER MACAPIA

PETER MACAPIA/LABDORA  
SWARM

bridgegallery  
98 Orchard Street  
Though February 25

Peter Macapia and his office labDORA focus on an experimental design field they call "dirty geometry," which they hope will affect the way the world envisions, and later builds, architecture. Macapia's latest exhibition, *Swarm*, now on view at bridgegallery, explores geometrical patterns and systems through computational processes. The work here is based on the mathematical concept of topological optimization, which identifies networks within a larger structural system. To create their experimental architectural structures, Macapia and his team begin with data sets that are translated into structural forms that he calls "pavilions." Made from advanced rapid prototyping tools specifically developed for this work, the pavilions are essentially models that sometimes evolve into real architectural projects. Such was the case with Macapia's first major urban project, Dirty Geometry Pavilion 1, for Performa, the international biennial of performance art in New York.



## The Illusionists

### Reality Check:

#### Truth and Illusion in Contemporary Photography

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
1000 5th Avenue  
Through March 22

James Casebere, *Hospital* (1997).

COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Photography, as a medium, occupies a paradoxical position in the popular imagination. On the one hand, the photographic image is widely considered to be an incontrovertible record of reality; on the other, it is often dismissed as untrustworthy or illusory because it is so susceptible to physical and contextual manipulation. Since the 1970s, a number of photographers have seized on this fundamental ambiguity in order to interrogate not only the epistemological impli-

cations of the photograph, but also the very concept of the real itself. *Reality Check: Truth and Illusion in Contemporary Photography* provides an engaging overview of artists using the photographic image to explore the line between fact and fiction.

The works presented in *Reality Check* fall roughly into two categories: images of constructed or staged situations that seem real, and images of real subjects that are so artificial or otherworldly as to

seem unreal. The first group is best represented by Thomas Demand's photograph of what appears to be a desk piled with white tubes, but is actually a three-dimensional model in cardboard and colored paper. The tension in the image between verisimilitude and artificiality produces a feeling of the uncanny, which is quickly extended into the political dimension: The scene is based on a news photograph of an artist's studio used by the Baader-Meinhof Gang to stage a dynamite

attack on a state prosecutor (hence the white tubes). Meanwhile, James Casebere's construction depicting a hospital dormitory suffused with eerie moonlight associates photographic illusion with both the space of the unconscious and the modern disciplinary institution.

Rather than approach illusion through physical construction, other artists included here have turned to more traditional set-up photography. Gregory Crewdson's lush, gothic image of a night scene in small-town America owes much to the Hollywood brand of romantic illusion. It also demonstrates the danger of merely indulging in spectacle. Philip diCorcia's posed photographs of male prostitutes in Los Angeles share Crewdson's tendency toward romanticism; however, by publicizing the fees paid to these young men for their participation, diCorcia suspends illusion in order to emphasize photography's very real social ambiguities: It can simultaneously exploit, delight, and inform. It is surprising and disconcerting that diCorcia's photographs are the only works in the exhibition centering on human subjects, as if the problems of truth and illusion pertained only to objects.

Among the artists concerned with revealing the illusion and artifice that pervade reality itself, there is, interestingly, a focus on architectural subjects. Thomas Struth and Frank Breuer, both former students of Bernd and Hilla Becher, bring a realist eye to the extremes of post-modern architecture. A large photograph by Struth captures the kitsch grandeur of a simulacral Caribbean

port town fronting a Las Vegas casino, while two smaller works by Breuer document block-like industrial halls that conceal their functionality behind jumbo corporate signifiers. Meanwhile, Stephen Shore finds a kind of Beckettian absurdity in the empty window of a calculator shop, and Julian Faulhaber exaggerates the brightly colored geometries of a hyper-modern gas station to the point where it resembles an Ed Ruscha painting.

One of the most arresting photographs in the exhibition is Shai Kremer's panorama of a training camp for urban warfare in Israel's Negev desert. The camp painstakingly simulates the environment of an Arab village, complete with shops, a hospital, a mosque, and a soccer field-cum-cemetery; yet the modular construction and unpainted concrete of the buildings, along with the twilight or day-break setting, give the impression of a ghost town or a science fiction film set. With this image of an intricate community somehow suspended between life and death, Kremer manages to evoke both the predicament of the Palestinians and the complexities and contradictions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole. Like all of the most interesting work in *Reality Check*, Kremer's photograph uses visual tropes of truth and illusion to go beyond the problem of photography and into the social, political, and philosophical ambiguities of his chosen subject.

**MICHAEL PAULSON IS A WRITER AND CRITIC BASED IN NEW YORK.**

## THE CITY REORDERED

*The New Urban Renewal: The Economic Transformation of Harlem and Bronzeville*  
Derek S. Hyra  
University of Chicago Press, \$22.50

In the decade leading up to the current economic crisis, formerly distressed urban areas across the nation experienced significant economic revitalization and social change. The characteristics and extent of such transformations were by no means uniform across cities and neighborhoods, nor were they necessarily confined to the last decade. But it was during this time that the revitalization of urban areas became significant enough to constitute a sea change in the socioeconomic geography of metropolitan America.

Among the affected communities were Chicago's Bronzeville and Manhattan's Harlem, emblems of African-American urban experience for the last century. In *The New Urban Renewal: The Economic Transformation of Harlem and Bronzeville*, sociologist Derek Hyra examines the distinct ways in which the phenomenon has played out in these two areas. Through his research, Hyra became well acquainted with people in both communities, ranging from

public housing residents to politicians. He balances firsthand anecdotes and observations with an engaging analysis of policy and political structures.

*The New Urban Renewal* was completed just before the ongoing meltdown of the housing market, which means that Hyra's work suffers from unfortunate timing. Readers may smirk when presented with a discussion of mortgage-backed securities as an unfamiliar financial instrument rather than as a symbol of financial collapse. Nevertheless, the book is a valuable look at gentrification—an urban process by no means finished.

Historically, Bronzeville and Harlem have both undergone successive transitions, from white to mixed-income African-American to concentrated black poverty. Both were impacted by the loss of industrial jobs and the construction of large public housing projects. As Bronzeville and Harlem began to rebound, however, their differences became apparent.

Even as both neighborhoods began to see an influx of new development, significant policy differences existed between New York and Chicago. Perhaps the most visible of these has been the cities' contrasting approach to public housing. Spurred by rising real estate values in the 1990s and HOPE VI funds from the federal government, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) has been demolishing much of its public housing to build mixed-income developments. By contrast, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) has remained committed

to the preservation and upkeep of its existing units, stock that on the whole never suffered Chicago's level of physical decay or gang control. As a result, Harlem's public housing residents have been protected from displacement while their counterparts in Bronzeville have had to exchange their CHA units for Section 8 vouchers, the value of which has not kept up with the neighborhood's rents.

To explain the stark difference between these approaches to public housing, Hyra points to dissimilar political systems. New York's political landscape involves a greater number of actors than Chicago's centralized machine. As a result, New York policy decisions are more accountable to a variety of interests. In the case of public housing, the system ensured that tenants had a greater say in shaping policy. While an argument of New York's comparative political pluralism has merit, Hyra grounds it in an assessment of New York's political landscape that gives too much weight to parties and the now-defunct Board of Estimate. With Republicans holding just two of the 51 seats in the city council, it's a stretch to blame a "contentious two-party system." In addition, his present-tense discussion of the decentralizing force of the Board of Estimate—which concentrated power among the five borough presidents—neglects to point out that the system was abolished in 1989. This fact is relegated to an endnote.

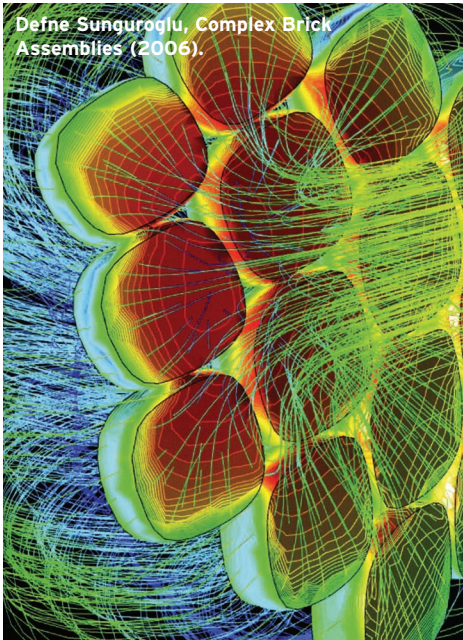
In both Bronzeville and Harlem, the "new urban renewal" is distinguished from the original notion in several respects. While the 1960s

version was a direct result of federal policies (and their local application), Hyra sees the recent incarnation as a product of a complex set of drivers that include global markets, municipal policy, and neighborhood-level conditions. The most notable distinction is the changing role of African Americans in the dynamics of the economic transformation. In federally sponsored urban renewal, white powerbrokers reaped the benefits of redevelopment efforts that negatively impacted low- and middle-income black residents. In the new process, upper-income African Americans have been the primary beneficiaries; lower-income blacks, meanwhile, have been displaced from Harlem and Bronzeville in large numbers. Challenging the stereotype of gentrification as a white-displaces-black phenomenon, the new urban renewal has not impacted racial breakdown, but socioeconomic breakdown.

In cities like New York and Chicago, the current economic slowdown has muffled concerns about gentrification. Foreclosure-driven eviction and aborted construction now dominate the discourse of threats to inner-city communities. As the nation ponders global finance and federal policy, it's also necessary to reflect on the economic surge that transformed urban communities. As policymakers work to build a new, balanced bull market, lessons from Harlem and Bronzeville are just as applicable as those from Lehman Brothers.

**JAMES CARRINGTON IS A MASTER'S STUDENT IN CITY AND REGIONAL PLANING AT THE PRATT INSTITUTE.**





## CELLULAR ZONES

*Versatility and Vicissitude: Performance in Morpho-Ecological Design*  
Edited by Michael Hensel and Achim Menges  
AD/Wiley, \$40.00

As its Jane Austen-like title suggests, *Versatility and Vicissitude: Performance in Morpho-Ecological Design* explores the idea that architecture is capable of adapting to diverse ecologies (versatility) while being formally and organizationally mutable (vicissitude). It is the third issue of *Architectural Design (AD)* to be guest-edited by Michael Hensel and Achim Menges of the design firm OCEAN. While *Emergence: Morphogenetic Design Strategies* (2004) explored the concept of emergence as a new form of thinking in architecture, and *Techniques and Technologies in Morphogenetic Design* (2006) tested those theories in practice, with the present volume, this London-based research team has turned its attention to the environment. Given this ambitious and somewhat ambiguous pairing, the projects included seldom justify the conflation of these two principles.

The authors' New Czech National Library in Prague (2006) for example, features a pair of cantilevered volumes with an enormously elaborate structural skin of branching and crisscrossing linear elements resembling the intricate network of pulmonary arteries and bronchi in the lungs. After reading nearly

one hundred pages of what amounts to a manifesto on "morpho-ecology," one is disappointed to learn that this intricate system not only has little to do with adapting to the environment, but the building's vast curtain walls of glass appear to be at odds with the climatological needs of a library. And while mention is made of the angle of sunlight as a design consideration, and of the microclimate within the building's less eye-catching interior courtyards, the focus is on exploiting generative computational tools to create unconventional web-like structural patterns. Not enough versatility; way too much vicissitude.

The strength of the book rests in the assortment of small-scale research projects created by the authors' students at the "Emergent Technologies in Design" master's program at the Architectural Association in London, which populate the essays throughout. A proposal for a rapidly deployable refugee shelter in a desert environment, for example, utilizes "sand-collector pockets" that actively gather wind-blown sand to stabilize the shelter and create both thermal mass and internal shading. Pneumatic cushions regulate the distribution of sand in an ongoing exchange with the

perpetually shifting environment. Here the theoretical framework of morpho-ecology, which is based on feedback between the innate behavioral tendencies of material systems and the environments within which they are rooted, is satisfied. Here, unsurprisingly, versatility and vicissitude become seamless concepts, mutually reinforcing one another in a continual exchange.

Not all of the research-based projects achieve this, and many fall into some of the same traps as the New Czech National Library. They experiment with material and structural performance without a convincing tie to environmental concerns. The end result is often nothing more than what the authors frequently refer to as "heterogeneous spatial arrangements." If the only way to achieve symbiosis between building envelope and environment is to multiply discrete construction units until they form an "emergent" bio-mimetic network, does this mean that the fabric of our cities is destined to have the alienating appearance of an elaborate beehive? How will this new practice model address issues of cultural specificity and the poetics of human dwelling? With a chapter dedicated to ecological precedent studies such

as the passive cooling strategies of traditional Islamic screen walls, one is reminded that what actually mediates the outside forces of climate and landscape and the internal organizational logic of structures are both local building customs and accumulated cultural history. It would be a tragedy if, in our rush to define a new design paradigm capable of ushering in greater ecological accountability, we eliminated these differences and reduced architecture to physics and biology: mere filters of environmental forces. That said, Hensel and Menges have offered us something important with this issue of *AD* in attempting to rise above the narcissism of many other publications on "performative" architecture and carve out a more responsible path. They have challenged us to begin thinking of all materials as smart, not just the over-engineered ones; to reconsider the building envelope as an active zone of mediation, not rigid delineation; and finally, to entirely rethink the terminology we use in defining environmentally responsive architecture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**BRADLEY HORN IS DIRECTOR OF THE MASTER'S OF ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM AT THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK.**

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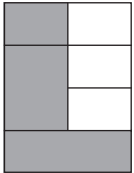
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Left: Meijo Substation under a park on Nagoya, Japan; Right: Devonshire Square Substation, London; Below: The base of 7 World Trade Center is a substation in disguise.



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## PUTTING THE SUB BACK IN SUBSTATIONS

A few days before the 2008 presidential election, Barack Obama called for the construction of a “whole new electricity grid.” Such a system would draw power from the Midwest’s wind-blown plains and the Southwest’s sun-baked deserts and then distribute it through transmission lines to energy-hungry coastal population centers.

But moving that electricity the final few blocks requires another kind of infrastructure, the area substation, where transformers reduce the high voltages of long-distance transmission to levels usable in residences and businesses nearby. Moreover, large cities like New York require an additional level of voltage intermediation and thus also need to find locations for larger substations, housing transformers one step higher in the power path than the equipment in area substations.

### Fitting In

Utility companies often encounter resistance when proposing a site for a new substation: Neighbors fear the facility will bring increased risk of fire or explosion. Some have concerns about noise made by operating machinery or the long-term health effects of exposure to high voltage. Since burying or encasing the substation solves all of these problems, the biggest questions are about design: What will this substation look like, and what will it do to the visual and social fabric of the neighborhood?

All too often, windowless concrete or brick bunkers enclosing the substation’s electrical equipment deaden the street. Even worse are unenclosed substations in less-developed areas—electrical equipment completely naked to the elements, with chain-link fence and razor wire surrounding them. Fortunately, many other design solutions are possible.

One design approach is to build a facade that harmonizes with the substation’s neighborhood. For example, Dotonburi substation looks natural next to the Ermenegildo Zegna store in Osaka’s fashionable Amemura district. Devonshire Square Substation, matching the scale and feel of its neighboring buildings, forms one wall of the London square for which it is named. And the substations

built to deliver third-rail power in the early days of New York’s Interborough Rapid Transit, Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit, and Independent subway systems were handsome examples of civic architecture, many with fine exteriors.

Increasingly, Con Edison has been employing this approach—at Astor Substation in Manhattan and the Mott Haven Substation complex in the Bronx, for example. They feature brickwork, cornices, and false windows and doors designed to fit with neighboring buildings. But a stand-alone substation is not the only answer for cities where land is especially precious. Putting the “sub” back into “substation” by placing them beneath buildings, parks, and plazas moves them out of public view while conserving scarce land for more urbane uses.

### Sub Buildings

New York’s gleaming 7 World Trade Center is a stunning example of just such an approach. Though wrapped by a generous lobby and thus hidden from view, an area substation forms its base, making the office space above it that much more valuable: The views from the 11<sup>th</sup> floor, the first above the substation, are a lot better than they would have been on the second.

Land-starved cities such as London and Tokyo have been combining substations with other uses for decades. Kingsway Substation has rested beneath an office building in the heart of London’s theater district since 1967. The new Tooley Street Substation, opened in 2002 in Southwark, is built into the underground garage of a commercial complex abutting the Hilton Tower Bridge hotel.

Similarly, all around Tokyo, many building types—from modern office towers near the Ginza to schools to traditional Buddhist temples—have long housed transmission-level and area-level substations. The Tokyo Electric Power Company has scores of substations underground.

### Sub parks and plazas

Turning the roof of a substation into a public space is another alternative to low-rise, stand-alone utility structures. Tokyo’s Higashi-Uchisaiwai-cho Substation pro-

vides two such lovely, small-scale amenities in a congested area across a narrow street from the viaduct of the main Japan Rail line through Tokyo.

Japan’s fourth-largest city, Nagoya, offers a much more dramatic example. Chubu Electric Company’s Meijo Substation lies beneath a parking lot serving Nagoya’s most famous landmark, the remains of Meijo, a castle built by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1612. In tandem with the city’s redevelopment of the castle’s parking lot, Chubu Electric constructed the underground transmission-level substation. As with Tokyo’s Higashi-Uchisaiwai-cho, Meijo Substation’s transformers are located approximately a hundred feet below street level. One floor above them is the cable room, and one floor above that is the switch room. Above that is a level of public, subsurface parking.

Castle visitors have no way of knowing that huge electrical transformers lie beneath their feet. A large plaza surrounds the substation’s handsome, stone-faced ventilation building, several equally attractive ancillary structures, and a Noh theater. High above loom the castle and its grounds. Because Meijo Substation is situated in a public park within view of a unique historical and cultural landmark, Chubu Electric had to obtain special design approvals from the city. The result is distinguished architecture encasing a technological showplace.

In London, too, reconstruction of a key public space provided a utility with the opportunity to install a major new substation. Leicester Square’s facility is so fully integrated into the park that the control panel for providing access to the substation by means of a hatch in the pavement is built into the West End’s discount-theater-ticket kiosk. The substation is completely invisible and inaudible to the hordes of park users above it. On a normal day, thousands of pedestrians stroll several feet above the substation’s roof. When the Leicester Square Odeon hosts a film premiere, thousands more congregate above the electrical equipment, whose existence is unknown to them.

The United States is far behind Europe

and Asia when it comes to burying substations beneath public parks. It’s just over two years ago that Anaheim Public Utilities opened this country’s first such facility, in the California city’s East Hills neighborhood. To build Park Substation, the utility cut into the side of a sloping lot in a hilly area of eastern Anaheim. A garage door fitted into the north side of the hill is the sole indication of something going on beneath the quiet community park.

### Urbane Infrastructure

These examples from three continents demonstrate the variety of ways that a substation can be designed to fit into its particular context. It may have a facade that complements its surroundings; it could, whether from ground level or below, carry a commercial structure or community facility on its shoulders; or its roof could provide open space, an amenity sought by nearly every neighborhood.

In the earliest days of electricity, substations operated near the commerce and homes that they powered without stirring protest. A century later, with an array of new technologies available, new ones can be better neighbors than ever while delivering the electricity that cities must have to grow and thrive.

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