POWER PLAY

Long after big industry left Jersey City’s downtown waterfront, the streets of abandoned warehouses and factories evoked the fascination and terror of a de Chirico canvas. Lorillard tobacco, A. & P., and the Manischewitz company all kept buildings here, providing fine examples of industrial architecture in an eight-block zone. Predictably enough, artists moved in to retool the buildings, turning them into homes and studios amid a growing preservation movement that valued the industrial past.

But that urban idyll has been threatened by the specter of three, 300-foot-tall residential towers looming on the site of the former Manischewitz factory. The plan, approved by the city council last year, would allow developer Toll Brothers to build in the heart of the Powerhouse Arts District (PAD), created in 2004 to help protect the artistic and industrial heritage of the state’s second-largest city.

The still-derelict Powerhouse.

Last month, the Powerhouse Arts District continued on page B

Advocates for Jersey City Arts District battle Toll Brothers tower plan

Harlem on the Hudson

Emerging from Manhattanville’s waning industrial landscape, West Harlem Piers Park is the latest marker of a community in flux. A city-owned parking lot transformed into a ribbon of recreation—with a bike path, pedestrian promenade, and New York’s first new piers in 40 years—officially opened on May 30. The long-awaited park can be counted as a victory for tenacious local activists, even as it underlines the neighborhood’s shifting fate.

Developed by the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the $20 million, two-acre swath between St. Claire Place and West 135th Street is the result of more than two decades of local advocacy, and in many ways represents a model of community-based design. Long a dream of Community Board 9 (CB 9), the idea of a riverfront park gained traction in 1996, when the group West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT) joined the effort. The team secured federal funding for a community design charrette, and when the EDC began to focus on Manhattanville in 2000, their state-funded vision-plan included waterfront piers. In line with community goals, the EDC recognized the potential for a public recreation space to catalyze continued on page 5

West Harlem Piers Park is the latest marker of a community in flux.

$85 million overhaul for National Gallery facade

PIECES OF PEI

The massive failure first became evident in 2005, when panels around an air intake shaft were seen to be tilting outward. The museum hired the engineering firm of Robert Silman Associates to investigate the problem. The engineers used probes to monitor the support system in places where the marble veneer had been removed.

Visitors to I.M. Pei’s iconic East Building at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., have been met with an unexpected outdoor exhibit: A green construction fence surrounds the building as the museum prepares to remove and remount all 16,200 facade panels of pink Tennessee marble.

Museum officials are tight-lipped about the situation, and contractors involved are bound by strict nondisclosure agreements. But the National Gallery’s recent request to Congress for $40 million in repair funds called the problem a “systemic structural failure” originating in the anchors and clips that hold the marble panels in place. The project is expected to cost a total of $85 million and take about four years, the budget request stated, and the repairs “must be undertaken as soon as possible.”

The problem, continued on page 6
AMBITION FIRST, AS USUAL

On June 25, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced that the city had acquired a 30-acre spit of land in Queens to build the largest middle-income housing complex since Starrett City in 1974. Situated where Newtown Creek empties into the East River, the Hunter’s Point South project sounds like the best of all possible worlds: a school, 3,000 units of affordable housing for true blue New Yorkers—those cops, firefighters, and schoolteachers that everyone roots for in movies but otherwise ignores—and an 11-acre waterfront park. As usual, however, it was hard not to be cynical.

That great mascot of American independent spirit, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once wrote that every soul must learn from making its own mistakes. But that hardly seems like a game plan where the collaborative business of making cities is concerned. New York is currently glutted with grand plans gone awry, dead in the water, or compromised beyond recognition: Atlantic Yards, Hudson Yards, Moynihan Station, ground zero. They do not inspire confidence that this one will fare any better. Apparently, past errors in judgment—May we cut you another deal, Mr. Ratner?—have only served to fuel a determination to repeat until bankrupt.

The mayor’s press release made no mention of the hurdles and controversies looming at Hunter’s Point South. Even Wikipedia knows that Newtown Creek is one of the most polluted industrial sites in the country, flowing with an “estimated 30 million gallons of spilled oil and raw sewage.” A clean-up plan was not mentioned. Nor was it disclosed that this largest subsidized project in the city in 35 years is based on creating a specious nonprofit by which developers would be paid in federal tax-exempt bonds rather than municipal bonds, thus avoiding the requirement to include 20 percent low-income housing in the project. (Originally, years before the site was to be the Olympic Village of the failed NYC2012 bid and was called Queens West, it was all going to be low-income housing, a plan that would have paid off nicely right about now.)

But the real purpose of Hunter’s Point South seems to boil down to the mayor’s need to get a move on his $7.5 billion New Housing Marketplace Plan and its promise of 165,000 affordable housing units. Now, 68 percent of those are supposed to be low income, but none of them, it seems, will be at Hunter’s Point South, where the 3,000 units of middle-income housing will be rounded out with 2,000 market-rate apartments. The mayor did toss in this bone: 3,000 permanently low-income units will be built someplace else in Queens “over the next 10 years,” and an adjacent site will be rezoned to allow for at least 30 low-income units. That’s much comfort to local residents who have been complaining for years that no one consulted with them about the project, and that the housing qualification of a $55,000 to $158,000 household income is way over their own heads. Once again, city leaders have projected their ambitions on what they see as a blank slate but others know to be an existing and needful community.

In Urban Design (Minnesota Press, 2009), an excellent collection of persuasive essays rehashing the hits and misses in the field, Michael Sorkin describes post-Moses urban planning in New York as “the ongoing willed incapacity to think comprehensively.” To which one might add: “or to learn from one’s own mistakes.”

JULIE V. IOVINE

REVISING RATNER continued from front page

On June 23, the ESDC board approved a modified General Project Plan, altering one first approved in 2006, when the project was to have been broken. The new plan moves the project back three years with an expected groundbreaking this fall. Instead of developing the entire site at once, it also calls for a revised development schedule: 20 lots can be sold, with the arena parcel between Flatbush, Atlantic, and 6th avenues to be completed first, then the arena finished by 2012, and 40 surrounding lots to be completed by 2016. At the plant, construction will continue on six plots to the east, with final completion of the remaining apartment towers expected by 2019. Opponents have questioned this timing, due to the deterioration of the economy and Ratner’s troubles securing financing thus far. Another possible roadblock is that the agency has not prepared a supplemental environmental impact statement, arguing that the earlier one pertains to the same project. The plan declares that despite all the changes—it lists a half-dozen—they “would not result in any new or substantially significant impacts,” and thus there is no need for a new environmental review. The modified plan is still open to a 60-day review period, at which point the corporation board will vote on a final, possibly revised version.

Meanwhile, the MTA board voted on June 24 to shift Forest City Ratner’s payment for the development rights to the railyards from a $100 million lump sum to a $20 million upfront payment for the arena lot, with the remaining $80 million to be paid out over the following 22 years. The developer’s commitment to building new railyards was also cut from nine tracks for 76 cars to seven tracks for 56 cars, reducing the infrastructural costs of the project from $345 million to $147 million. It is a particularly significant change, since state of the arts yards were part of Ratner’s offer that helped him secure the project over an opposing offer from Extell. “They’re delivering what the railroad needed,” MTA chief financial officer Gary Dellaverson said in defense of the changes. “It’s a step up from the default position we have now for development at the proposed site.”

Despite the agencies’ vote of confidence in the developer, the latest maneuvers still provide some hope for Daniel Goldstein, founder of anti-yards coalition Develop Don’t Destroy Brooklyn, in the group’s efforts to stall, and potentially halt, the project through court challenges. “They’ve opened themselves up to additional litigation,” Goldstein said. Further suits could delay the project and push it to the end of the year, but the sale date for the development rights is the critical date for tax-exempt bonds expires. If Ratner cannot secure financing by April 1, the state will cancel all deals.

MATT CHABAN
LEAD POSTS GO VACANT AT KEY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES, WITH FEW RESUMES IN SIGHT

NOBODY AT THE WHEEL

Grim news awaits public projects and the professionals who want to contract for them. Even when New York gets its state government back, the state will be operating without permanent chiefs at its key transportation and development agencies. That impasse, while more bureaucratic in nature than the June 8 coup in the state senate, means little is likely to occur on major development initiatives until 2011.

Well before Governor David Paterson lost control of the state senate, many of his appointees had already filed their positions. Today, the heads of New York State’s Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and Empire State Development Corporation are all working under interim status. MTA executive director Elliott G. Rosen has already stepped down over the summer. And it’s even harder because the governor is not attractive dates out there who qualify, said(MTAA) interim leadership. “She has limited wiggle room,” Russianoff explained. Taken further, this stasis hurts the region. When lawmakers vote on capital plans, they may privilege roads and bridges over transit. Deals like the East Side Access project to bring Long Island Railroad commuters to Grand Central Terminal have stagnant advocates and will survive. But the absence of persuasive managers will shrink the scope of transit and transit-focused development, say experts. “The federal dance that goes on requires somebody with the ability to look ahead,” said Pranger. That quality is lacking in Paterson’s Albany.

This means big projects will continue without the expertise or the leadership to make them quick or transparent. Gene Russanoff, staff attorney for the New York Public Interest Group and head of the Straphangers Campaign, said the refinancing of Atlantic Yards, approved at an MTA board meeting on June 24, probably be as opaque as any deal the MTA cut before the reformist Sander arrived. Russanoff said interim head Belinda Williams seems interested in transparency, but also lacks authority to impose it. “She has limited wiggle room,” Russanoff explained. Taking cues from the Japanese concept of a borrowed landscape, New York--based architects Michael Morris and Yoshiko Sato of Morris Sato Studio have created a laboratory for architects and designers to explore Corian, DuPont’s high-end surface material. Located in the Flatiron district, the 5,000-square-foot space was designed to take the material far beyond the luxe countertops for which it is generally known. According to Morris, a series of vignettes “borrow” the outdoor landscape and bring it into the showroom. “By incorporating abstracted references and images from nature into the Corian displays,” he told AN, “we wanted to suggest an alternative flow of time, in syncopation with the city outside.” With displays presenting educational, residential, office, retail, and other applications, the studio showcases everything from walls and ceilings to lighting, hardware, cabinetry, and furniture. To take just one example, Morris Sato designed a translucent, tubular light system made from 74 pieces of thermoformed Corian, which changes color to emphasize the amorphous nature of the space. Along with the product displays, consultants from Evans & Paul will be on hand to provide project support for architects, and discuss new applications, manufacturing techniques, and commercial specifications. The studio is open Monday through Friday, by appointment only. DANIELLE RAGO
Bell Labs Back in Limbo

Despite the announcement last August that Eero Saarinen’s iconic Bell Labs campus in Holmdel, N.J., had found a developer committed to its preservation, the building’s fate is once more in jeopardy. Contract purchaser Somerset Development is unable to finance Bell Labs’ retrofitting without building additional housing on the site, which the township fears will overburden their schools and roads, and which preservationists fear will mar the site’s formalist design.

The 472-acre Bell Labs site housed research scientists from 1962 until its closing in 2007 by current owner Alcatel-Lucent. The building’s exemplary midcentury modernist design, and its landscaped grounds designed by Sasaki, Walker & Associates, have earned it a place on Preservation New Jersey’s list of “10 Most Endangered Historic Sites.”

Somerset’s current plan would convert the building into a mixed-use center with residential lofts on the top floor, preserving most of the building’s famous mirrored facade but opening up one axis to turn its central atrium into a pedestrian street. Up to 600 additional units of housing would be built within the “ring road” surrounding the building.

The site is currently zoned for offices and laboratories, and the township has so far been unwilling to rezone it as mixed-use. “The argument that has been made (for demolition),” said township committeewoman Janet Berk, “is that if they need that use. “The argument that has been made

somewhere in the middle of the elevation will make it much more natural light. Its location in one of the city’s most polluted areas is also significant for those involved. Just to the north of the site, near Newtown Creek, stands a large sludge collector tank, a highly visible symbol of the area’s longstanding status as a dumping ground for some of the city’s unwanted byproducts.

More importantly for Goode, the sludge collector, along with Newtown Creek, recently upgraded water pollution control plant, underscores the importance of effective storm water management. She hopes the city will further incentivize green roof development with additional tax breaks or deductions in water and sewer bills. For his part, Flanner hopes the rooftop can evoke the area’s agrarian past. “Greenpoint was a farming community. Then there came the industry and the oil spill, so there’s a lot of contamination,” he said. “Right now, it’s a great neighborhood for pioneering ideas. I can’t think of a better spot in the country for a rooftop farm.”

A RADISH GROWS IN BROOKLYN

On a rooftop in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, farmers Ben Flanner and Annie Novak are harvesting lettuces, radishes, and broccoli rabe, which will appear on plates at nearby restaurants. Over the rows of crops, the East River and the Manhattan skyline fill the horizon. Their 8,000-square-foot project was planted this spring and is believed to be the first commercial rooftop farm in the city.

The rooftop was the result of matchmaking by Lisa and Chris Goode, owners with Amy Trachtman of Goode Green, a green roof installation and consulting firm. They helped coordinate between the building’s owner, Tony Argento, and the farmers to create the expansively cultivated space. For Lisa Goode, the project combines the benefits of green roofs (storm water retention, building insulation, and heat island mitigation) with the more immediately understandable and gratifying results of raising vegetables. “When you hand someone a tomato, they get it immediately,” she said. If all goes well this summer, the farm may grow onto other roofs owned by Argento, with the hope of supporting the farmers full-time.

The partners at Goode Green used reclaimed lumber edging to save money and were able to keep costs down to around $10 per square foot, well below the more typical $16 to $25 per square foot for basic green roofs. “It’s important for us to show that green roofs can be affordable,” she said. While the roof’s agricultural and economic story is novel, its location in one of the city’s most polluted areas is also significant for those involved. Just to the north of the site, near Newtown Creek, stands a large sludge collector tank, a highly visible symbol of the area’s longstanding status as a dumping ground for some of the city’s unwanted byproducts.

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SUSTAINING THE PRATT CENTER

Looking back through five decades of planning in New York, the Pratt Center for Community Development has played an active role in shaping the city. Whether for Robert F. Kennedy’s community development agencies in the 1960s, housing preservation in the 1970s and ’80s, job creation in the ’90s, or rezoning plans over the last decade, the center has significantly influenced the city’s often top-down planning policy.

Now, as sustainability comes to the fore, the center announced on June 1 that Adam Friedman will take the reins. Friedman, the former director of the New York Industrial Retention Network (NYIRN), has made it his mission that sustainability at the community level and to continue the work of integrating the Pratt Institute’s diverse art and design faculty into the center’s work.

“That’s why I came, to bring all these resources to bear on the issues,” Friedman told AN. “The issues really aren’t that different with NYIRN, but the center can provide so much more support.” For example, Friedman said he would seek to use local resources in the school’s industrial design department. “It creates good-paying jobs for local manufacturers, while also building important understanding and relationships for students,” he said.

Friedman succeeds Brad Lander, who left in March to run for city council in Brooklyn. Gary Hattem, chair of the center’s advisory board, said Friedman’s unique approach to economic development captured the board’s notice during their search for what will be the third director in the center’s 46-year history. “I think he can leverage the design capital of the institute with his incredible skills in economic development and sustainability,” Hattem said.

In addition to his work with NYIRN, Friedman served as director of economic development for former Manhattan borough presidents David Dinkins and Ruth Messinger. He has also taught urban planning at the Pratt Institute and Columbia University, and in 2005 he convinced David Dinkins and Ruth Messinger. He has also taught urban planning at the Pratt Institute and Columbia University, and in 2005 he convinced David Dinkins and Ruth Messinger. He has also taught urban planning at the Pratt Institute and Columbia University, and in 2005 he convinced Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg noted on the park’s opening day, Columbia University is contributing funds to support park maintenance. Since the area will not technically be mapped parkland, however, there remains some question about how the park will be maintained. A Parks Department spokeswoman, Patricia Bertuccio, described the park as “under the purview of the Riverside Park Fund.” She added, “It looks like a city park; it’s going to be treated like a city park.”

For now, a cooperative agreement between the EDC and the Parks Department governs the open space, allowing the EDC to continue the master plan, which includes new ferry services.

To build park patronage, James Subudhi, sustainability coordinator for WE ACT, is working to “raise awareness” about the space’s design, Subudhi added, one thing is already clear. “It will be a very popular park this summer,” he said.
JUMPIN' JAVITS

Reportedly from the day it opened in 1986, the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center has leaked. Hardly the best building designed by Pei Cobb Freed, the Javits Center was almost value-engineered out of existence, according to Bruce Fowle on a recent tour. FXFowle and Epstein, a Chicago-based architectural design team, was charged with fixing the building’s numerous problems, and Fowle is set on ensuring the same mistakes are not made again amid ongoing political ambivalence toward the $1.4 billion renovation project about to get underway.

“We are banking on them waking up to this once we get started,” Fowle told AN. “People just don’t believe you can turn this into something.”

With the Empire State Development Corporation’s May 19 approval of the renovation, and a Public Authorities Control Board vote expected on July 15, the project is all but secured. Initially proposed as a massive overhaul designed by Richard Rogers with the help of FXFowle, that project ran into cost overruns and other snags. Ultimately, the Spitzer administration scaled back the overhaul designed by Richard Rogers with FXFowle’s vision and placing those into the project, at which point Rogers departed.

The stopgap efforts have failed “over very short timeframes,” which prompted the NTHP, according to a museum statement. I.M. Pei was not available to comment. The long-brewing battle over New Orleans’ Charity Hospital took a sharp turn in May, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court challenging federal approvals of two new hospitals that would supplant 165 properties in the historic Mid-City district. Caught in the crossfire is the fate of Charity Hospital itself, an art deco icon damaged by Hurricane Katrina and shuttered ever since.

The long-brewing battle is the result of a $2.2 billion project announced in 2007, in which the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Louisiana State University (LSU) targeted a 67-acre area northwest of Charity’s current site for new construction. The campus would include the VA hospital, already funded by Congress, and the LSU academic medical center, funded in part by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) compen- sation for Katrina’s damages to Charity, which had been the school’s teaching hospital.

To carry out the plan, NBBJ and New Orleans firm Biltch Knevel Architects were named as LSU’s architects, and Studio NOVA—a collaboration between NBBJ and local firms Eskew+Dumez+Ripple and Rozas Ward Architects—were hired as the VA’s architects. Though the groups originally said they were co-locating the hospitals in order to share facilities, current plans show separate parking, transportation access, and energy plants, because LSU has not yet gained sufficient funding to move forward. Each hospital is oriented along a central spine, with critical services at 22 feet above grade to allow operation to continue in case of a major flood.

The problem, as preservationists see it, is two-fold: First, the plan effectively abandons Charity, leaving little hope for reuse of this New Orleans landmark—and one of the longest continually running hospitals in the nation. Second, as the Trust’s lawsuit claims, the VA and LSU failed to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) regarding the historic properties that would have to be razed to make way for the project.

According to NTHP deputy general counsel Elizabeth Merritt, the agencies prepared an environmental assessment (EA), rather than a full-blown EIS. “The crucial difference between an EA, which the agencies prepared, and an EIR, which the lawsuit contends they should have prepared, is that an EIR would have to be premised on the acknowledgement that the destruction of historic properties is ‘significant,’ and would have to consider alternatives that would avoid, reduce, and mitigate that significant impact,” said Merritt. Moreover, the NTHP believes the 37 acres sought by LSU is twice the amount of land needed, since much of the space has been reserved for buildings that may not be constructed for decades.

Though the VA will not comment on pending litigation, Don Orndoff, director of the VA’s Office of Construction and Facilities Management, said that the National Trust fully participated throughout the historic review process. “The NTHP suggested many of the mitigation measures ultimately adopted as stipulations in the Programmatic Agreement,” he said. Plans to salvage neighborhood structures include the adaptive reuse of the SOM-designed Pan American Life Building, the Dixie Brewery buildings, and five shotgun houses, to be used as transitional homes for veterans. The agreement allows for relocation of 20 additional houses, and for a preservation and rehabilitation grant program to which the VA, state, and city will contribute a combined $1.4 million over three years.

The National Trust has meanwhile advanced an alternative plan, whereby the VA hospital would occupy the site currently planned for the new LSU development, and Charity Hospital would be rehabilitated for LSU. Last year, local NTHP affiliate Louisiana Preservation Commission commissioned a $600,000 study by architecture firm RMJM, which found that Charity is structurally sound, and proposed a retrofit that would save taxpayers $283 million for the same million square feet of LSU programming.

Jennifer Rinekels
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GLASS CUBE HELPS RESTORE D.C.'S OLDEST COURTHOUSE TO FITTING GRANDEUR

APPEALING ADDITION

For nine months, Hany Hassan couldn’t wait for it to be over. In 2006, he and his team at Beyer Blinder Belle in Washington, D.C., where he’s a partner, had taken the portico of one of the city’s oldest public buildings off its base for an underground expansion. Temporary steel supports held the building’s iconic columns in mid-air. The team monitored the structure twice daily "to make sure it didn’t move an inch," he recalled. "I can’t tell you about living every day through this and wondering when we were ever going to finish this part."

Now the whole $100 million project, renovating and adding to the old D.C. Courthouse in Judiciary Square, is complete, and you might never know what gave Hassan such turmoil unless you’d seen the neglect the place had endured in recent years. On June 17, the building, Washington’s first city hall when it opened in 1822, became the gleaming new home of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, which is D.C.’s highest court. Along with a painstaking rehab, Beyer Blinder Belle put a new ceremonial courtroom underground on the south side (hence the portico drama) and added a simple, modern entrance pavilion to its north side, where a more elaborate Neoclassical portico stood for a few decades until 1917.

Hassan’s design revives a tragically overlooked building but also a crucial site in Pierre L’Enfant’s vision for the Mall. “It’s once-in-a-lifetime project.”

The new addition, a grideld glass cube that you enter beneath a trim colonnade, has a fearless, restrained quality. Some of Washington’s preservation watchdogs are not keen on obvious newness, but Hassan believes L’Enfant envisioned. “It’s the re-greening of Judiciary Square,” said Hassan, who views the site as the most important space in Washington after the Mall. “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime project.”

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RAZING ROCKLAND

Officials in Orangetown, New York are putting the final touches on a plan to flatten more than 50 historic buildings at Rockland Psychiatric Center, the vast state campus that was once New York’s most renowned mental-health facility. Though preservationists have mounted a belated campaign on behalf of the center’s impressive collection of Mission and Colonial revival buildings, most of the dilapidated complex seems destined to make way for hundreds of units of new residential development.

Once considered one of the world’s premiere psychiatric hospitals, Rockland contains some one hundred buildings, including its own firehouse, power station, and working farm. Built between 1927 and 1966 by state architects Sullivan W. Jones, William E. Haugaard, and Carlson & Sweat, the 550-acre site opened in 1931, becoming a thriving medical community. At the height of operation in 1956, there were nearly 10,000 inpatient residents, and the campus was a bellwether of trends in psychiatric care, from electroshock therapy to lobotomies for psychiatric research. In light of the deteriorating condition of the buildings, town officials have called saving them unfeasible. “It’s not in the state’s interest or taxpayers’ interest to have these buildings that are not being maintained left to deteriorate,” said Suzanne Barclay, executive assistant to Town Supervisor Thom Klein.

Advocates for the complex have focused their efforts on three endangered Works Progress Administration murals on the project site, which at this late date may be the only historic pieces of the complex to be saved. “It's hard to focus on the murals because of the huge complex that is proposed to be destroyed,” admitted Roberta Lane, program officer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “We want to try and find some sort of help for them in dealing with the murals,” she added.

“The buildings, I don’t know what to do.”

The Rockland Psychiatric Center's 550-acre campus includes a firehouse (left) and many WPA-era buildings in simple but dignified Colonial and Mission revival styles (below).
The north and south faces of Eleven Times Square were treated distinctly to respond to their unique contexts. The south face echoes the massing of Piano’s Times Building next door, and features a solar shading system and highly reflective glass. The north face pulls back after the podium to preserve views from the street, then cant out to regain floor space, and the entire volume rotates to the west, opening up views to the Hudson River.

It is immediately apparent upon visiting Times Square. Though it stands 40 stories tall and encompasses 1.1 million square feet, the tower is far from imposing. In fact, it’s hardly noticeable. This is because at the northwest corner, after the sixth floor, the building steps back significantly. Higher up the elevation, it cant out again to regain floor space, creating a skewed profile, but the gesture is highly effective. Approaching from the west, the neighboring Empire Theater remains in plain sight, as does the Candler Building with its Coke bottle-green windows. The same is true of the opposite approach: Pedestrians can continue to appreciate the view of Raymond Hood’s art-deco masterpiece, the McGraw-Hill Building. These historic structures, so important to the character of the district, would have been obscured if Eleven had jutted straight up into the sky.

Eleven’s highrise neighbors to the north and south also influenced its form. The podium and setback tower motif echoes Arquitectonica’s Westin Hotel across 42nd Street, creating an open gateway to Times Square from the west. Meanwhile, the massing of the building’s south face mirrors Renzo Piano’s Times Building across 41st Street, with its cutout corners, sheer verticality, and horizontal detailing.

Following these disparate design cues created two different aesthetics and, for each, a distinctly defined side to the building. FXFowle again used the two-faced nature of the building to their benefit. Like nearly all New York City office buildings in the post-9/11 era, Eleven has a composite structure of a concrete core and steel-framed bays, marrying the security of the former’s rigidity and fire resistance to the versatility inherent in the latter’s long-span capabilities. The architects coupled the core in the crook of the L, keeping the street faces open and dividing the north and south sides into distinct spaces, each large enough to accommodate disparate programming.

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Eleven’s plan also turned out to be a boon for views of the city. The cutouts made on the south face created a kind of bay window, adding to the panoramas and daylight available to tenants—factors that earned more points in the LEED tally. The north side, however, is even more of a view machine. FXFowle rotated the canted portion of the building, a volume known as the crystal, by several degrees to the west so that the north-facing windows did not look out directly onto the Westin, but instead opened up dramatically to nearly unobstructed vistas—at least on the upper floors—of the Hudson River and New Jersey. The crystal also features perimeter columns pulled back from the facade, creating cantilevers of as much as 15 feet ending in unbroken expanses of glass. The architects were also able to avoid placing columns in the building’s many corners, a consideration that will no doubt add to the allure of these locations for offices, while at the same time perhaps opening them up to more than just the upper echelon of the corporate chain.

All architecture, to a certain extent, is a response to the demands of external forces and interior programming. Eleven Times Square, however, a new speculative office tower designed by FXFowle now nearing completion on 42nd Street and 8th Avenue, goes further than most structures in deferring to its surroundings while catering to the needs of tenants. In the process, the skyscraper has moved beyond even its most environmentally friendly contemporaries—the New York Times Building, Hearst Tower, and One Bryant Park—to set a new standard for tall building design.

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The vacant storefronts in commercial districts throughout New York City are among the most striking signs of the economic downturn. However, on old industrial sites and in neighborhoods where national retail has never ventured before, developers are betting that a new generation of malls will bring in hordes of shoppers. One such mall is the $500 million Gateway Center at the Bronx Terminal Market, which in May held a ribbon cutting for its first tenant, Home Depot.

Situated on a 16.5-acre site along the Harlem River near the new Yankee Stadium, this 950,000-square-foot project for the Related Companies represents a major departure from the traditional suburban mall. Instead of being enveloped in parking lots, this mall is pedestrian friendly. It has wide sidewalks, a small outdoor plaza with seating, and several street-level spaces for restaurants and retail. Sloped roofs and interior streets break up the massing of the enormous development. And instead of big-box stores spread out laterally, here they are stacked on top of one another in two three-story retail blocks that flank a six-story garage for 2,341 cars. The two retail blocks are staggered by about 15 feet, allowing each big-box store to connect to its own dedicated parking deck by walkways that pass over interior streets.

If a mall of this size were built in the suburbs, it would typically take up 100 acres.

The vertical design, with its relatively modest footprint, resolves many concerns that critics have about malls, said John Clifford, principal at GreenbergFarrow, which did the project’s master plan and retail design. A large share of shoppers, about 37 percent, are supposed to arrive by public transit and on foot. “There are a lot of urbanists who hate the suburbanization that these uses bring,” Clifford said, “but when you think about it, there couldn’t be a better use of land resources.”

Gateway is one of several vertical-style malls under construction in the city that GreenbergFarrow has helped design. East River Plaza, planned by the Blumenfeld Development Group on a three-block site between East 116th and 119th streets adjacent to the FDR Drive, is due to open this fall. Vornado Realty Trust’s Rego Park II in Queens will also open this year. And a GreenbergFarrow design for another Related project, the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, is in the midst of a contentious public review process.

Does a new approach to malls that incorporates going vertical, adaptive reuse, and density make these mega-retail projects more attractive—or at least palatable—in urban settings like the Bronx, Queens, and along the East River? Alex Ulam wonders if this new generation of retail is for real.

**MALL CITY**

The vacant storefronts in commercial districts throughout New York City are among the most striking signs of the economic downturn. However, on old industrial sites and in neighborhoods where national retail has never ventured before, developers are betting that a new generation of malls will bring in hordes of shoppers. One such mall is the $500 million Gateway Center at the Bronx Terminal Market, which in May held a ribbon cutting for its first tenant, Home Depot.

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Does a new approach to malls that incorporates going vertical, adaptive reuse, and density make these mega-retail projects more attractive—or at least palatable—in urban settings like the Bronx, Queens, and along the East River? Alex Ulam wonders if this new generation of retail is for real.
These massive developments will undoubtedly change the way that many New Yorkers shop. Gateway, which is 90 percent leased, will provide the Bronx with its first Bed Bath & Beyond and its first wholesale club, BJ’s. East River Plaza will house the first Costco in Manhattan. The new malls also promise thousands of jobs for low-income neighborhoods that suffer from high unemployment.

Yet many community groups and local business advocates are not thrilled by the new designs or the shopping opportunities these developments promise. While some opponents are willing to accept new malls if they commit to paying a living wage, others ask whether the new malls, which receive generous tax abatements and subsidies, are coming at the expense of more sustainable and less inherently auto-dependent forms of development.

Irwin Cohen, a developer who specializes in adaptive reuse, had plans to redevelop old industrial buildings at the Bronx Terminal Market into a multipurpose facility that would rent to independent food vendors, much as he did when he turned a former Nabisco factory into the highly successful Chelsea Market. Local operations would have been better anchors for the Bronx site than big-box national retailers, he argued. “Why should we have what is being done in the rest of the United States foisted on us—shopping malls and cars?”

For his part, Clifford has long pondered such questions. He began designing malls out of GreenbergFarrow’s Atlanta office for Home Depot, and helped introduce the big-box concept in New York in 1993, designing the city’s first Home Depot in Ozone Park, Queens. Since then, Greenberg Farrow has designed more than 6.5 million square feet of big-box stores and malls in New York City alone. In recent years, as developers have looked to more urban neighborhoods, new design strategies were required: hence the vertical mall.

Take East River Plaza. Instead of existing as a monolith that eats up three city blocks, the 650,000-square-foot project is broken up by an open-air galleria, similar to the one at Gateway, that lines up with 117th Street, providing orientation to the neighborhood and to stores on four above-grade retail levels. Here, every other level of retail is accessible from the adjacent, eight-story parking garage by pedestrian bridges that connect over the galleria. The project also seeks to harmonize with its surroundings through a facade of masonry and brick, chosen to echo the texture of the neighborhood and to reference the 19th-century Washburn Wire factory, which occupied the site. While these are

Opposite page: The mixed-use Rego Park II in Queens includes connections on several levels: A pedestrian galleria links retail buildings with surrounding streets, while a twin-level vehicular and pedestrian bridge spans to the existing Rego Park mall.

Top: The Gateway Center at Bronx Terminal Market includes midblock passageways to a future riverfront park, as well as activated street frontage under the Major Deegan Expressway.

Middle: Each level of the multi-tiered retail center connects to its own dedicated parking field, simulating a suburban, big-box configuration on a tight urban site.

Bottom: The project preserves a small slice of the historic Bronx Terminal Market, stepping down from large retail volumes to the lower-scale neighborhood beyond.
Related Companies aims to adaptively reuse the 92-year-old Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, with plans for retail tenants, cinemas, and a fitness center to be integrated into the 180,000-square-foot drill hall, one of the largest in the world.

A similar strategy has been used at Gateway Center, where remnants were incorporated from the art deco Bronx House of Detention, demolished to make way for the new mall. Eagles from the structure’s frieze, for instance, are perched on steel columns around the mall’s street-side plaza. The building also references heroic 1930s warehouse architecture through four 30-foot-tall glass towers, which conceal exit stairways and serve as beacons above the Deegan Expressway. “We wanted to take a little bit of the history of the site and impart it onto the design of the building,” said Gregory Cranford, partner at BBGM, the project’s architect of record. “So we have done that with the massing and with the big forms. We wanted to have a little bit of the same scale, but in a modern vocabulary.”

Among the new malls, Rego Park II may best address its surroundings. First, the superblock is not out of place here—neighbors include tower-in-the-park residential developments, along with the original Rego Park mall. And instead of being primarily a retail zone dominated by big-box stores, the 1.675 million-square-foot development called for a more diverse mix of uses to animate the public spaces, including a 25-story residential tower atop a seven-story parking garage with ground-level retail. Currently, however, the tower is on hold.

Other elements of the project go well beyond window-dressing. A tensile fabric canopy covers a 50-foot-wide gallery along the central axis of the development. In contrast to the galleries at Gateway Center and East River Plaza, which accommodate cars and pedestrians, the one at Rego Park is strictly a pedestrian mall that attempts to bring an urbanistic feel to the neighborhood. “We are trying to integrate open space into the community,” said Giovanni Valle, project architect for Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects, which designed the facade for Rego Park II. (SLCE is the architect of record.)

Kingsbridge Armory, meanwhile, represents another approach. This project involves building a vertical mall inside the landmarked Kingsbridge Armory. Under the plan developed by GreenbergFarrow, the inside of the armory would be ripped out and a steel truss-framed structure would be inserted inside the shell of the building. The project, though, has been opposed by groups like the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance (KARA), which demands that Related commit to having tenants pay a living wage, as well as add recreation space for children. There is also outrage about plans for a 60,000-square-foot grocery store, which residents say could drive out local grocery stores that pay union wages. “We are not looking to create a poverty wage center in the middle of Kingsbridge,” said Desiree Pilgrim-Hunter, a KARA spokesperson. (Glenn Goldstein, senior vice-president of the Related Companies, said that it was too early in the approval process to discuss plans for the armory.)

There is much to praise about New York’s newest vertical malls. They’ll revitalize old industrial areas, and relate more sanely to the city than earlier megaprojects did. But worries remain that these projects are still suburban—reliant on car and truck traffic, and a threat to local businesses. That is a particular concern given the subsidies and tax abatements involved. Related, for example, received a $7.1 million city subsidy toward the expense of razing the original Bronx Terminal Market, as well as about $132 million in city tax abatements for Gateway. The company also received preliminary approval for subsidies and tax abatements on the mall it plans for Kingsbridge.

“These urban mall projects fit into a pattern of public dollars being used to fund the expansion of national chain retailers,” said Stacy Mitchell, the author of Big Box Swindle, “while independent businesses never see a dime.” There is no reason why forward-thinking design couldn’t also serve a more balanced vision of community investment—and a still more sustainable wave of shopping in the city.
kitchen

TRENDS: How American and European kitchen standards meet and compete
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Culture Clash?
Purists will love the pared-down lines and open rectangular spout of GROHE Allure – original and authentic, its unspoiled design is matched by two unique GROHE technologies: GROHE SilkMove®, for unbeatable smooth performance, and GROHE StarLight® for an intense shine. It is an inspired combination of craftsmanship and pristine style – a truly alluring product. Experience the GROHE Allure at your local Davis & Warshow showroom.
Once it was possible to look at a kitchen—the knotty pine cabinets and avocado-colored appliances, or stainless steel counters and chef’s eight-burner stove—and get an instant read on the inhabitant’s origins and aspirations. Today, kitchen design options are far more sophisticated and varied, but certain traits persist, especially between American and European brands. And even though the working parts of both are made to the same high standards, European—and especially Italian—styling still tends toward the sleekly modern. But domestic designs are fast trying to satisfy a growing market in America. JENNIFER KRICHELS grills manufacturers on whose kitchens are the hottest.
EUROPE

1. BOFFI
   Italian manufacturer Boffi has added the larger K1 single-block kitchen island—with a sliding top to hide cooking components—to its line of consolidated kitchens designed by Norbert Wangen.
   www.boffi.com

2. SNAIDERO
   Presented in Europe last year and recently available in the United States, the KUBE kitchen was designed by Giovanni Offredi for 60-year-old Italian manufacturer Snaidero.
   www.snaidero-usa.com

3. ARCLINEA
   Antonio Citterio designed Italian manufacturer Arclinea’s stone, larch, and stainless steel kitchen with ceiling-mounted shelving that can be fitted with lighting, an indoor miniature greenhouse, and food warmer.
   www.arclinea.com

4. BULTHAUP
   The b3 kitchen by Germany-based Bulthaup is inspired by Donald Judd’s designs and features new tall wall units with sideways-sliding doors and a seamless finish.
   www.bulthaup.com

5. IKEA
   Orange and yellow are the newest door color options in Ikeaa’s RUBRIK APPLÅUD line, which fits with its AKURUM built-in kitchens.
   www.ikea.com

6. SCHIFFINI
   Italy’s first industrial producer of modular kitchens, Schiffini recently released Giuliano Giardini’s new G.One kitchen, made with 100-percent-recycled, waterproof wood fiber panels.
   www.schiffini.com

7. LEICHT
   German manufacturer Leicht’s Freewall 40 system adds a design element to kitchen walls while concealing cupboard space, outlets, and lighting when not in use.
   www.leicht.com

8. SCAVOLINI
   For their first-ever kitchen design, Perry King and Santiago Miranda created the Scenery program for Italian manufacturer Scavolini, which distributes its products worldwide.
   www.scavolini.com

9. ARMANI
   Created in collaboration with Dada, Armani/Casa’s Calyx is its second kitchen system, featuring black stone countertops and interior surfaces clad in silver fabric and glass.
   www.armanicasa.com
Kevin Henry spent much of his 25-year career bringing European cabinetry to the United States, but now his job is promoting one of this country’s youngest cabinetry manufacturers, Bazzèo. The Secaucus, N.J., company bills itself as the first eco-centric U.S. manufacturer of contemporary cabinetry, producing kitchens with wood from managed and sustainable forests and non-toxic paints, lacquers, and veneers.

For Henry, Bazzèo’s executive vice president, the biggest difference between American kitchen companies and their European counterparts is a matter of range: fewer styles but complete customization. “Since World War II, factories in Europe have been working off of the production model,” he said. “American manufacturing comes from the shop-built model, where the factory is based on the individual order and not the production order.”

To old-guard European kitchen manufacturers, flexibility lies in the broad range of designs. “The necessity of always having in production not only traditional but also contemporary allows Europeans to be more flexible in manufacturing,” said Francesco Farina, CEO of Scavolini USA. Scavolini, which began as a small workshop in 1962, has been Italy’s largest kitchen manufacturer since 1982. While Americans focus on upgrading existing designs, usually with a traditional bent, “the Italian designer never ceases to consider experimenting,” according to Farina. Italian designs maintain their reputation for pushing boundaries with colors, materials, and shapes, resulting in almost laboratory-like settings that Americans tend to think of as exclusively modern.

Except in cities like New York. Stacey Jattuso, a project manager and interior designer at New York-based BSKK Architects, said that American kitchen programs don’t get much of a reaction from her clients when presented next to European models. She said her New York clientele wants adventurous designs, and American companies are not known to be risk-takers. “It’s not that the demand isn’t there, it’s that the desire isn’t being met with the products. The European kitchen companies typically have nicer designs, in terms of aesthetics, not necessarily in terms of craft.”

Jattuso added that big European manufacturers’ reluctance to change the size of their modules does make U.S. fabricators more appealing to her, as does the environmental sustainability of buying regionally. She said that Henrybuilt, founded in 2001 on the premise of bridging a gap between inflexible European designs and the lack of contemporary American kitchens, is one U.S. company that holds its own against Europeans. One of the largest misconceptions about this country’s manufacturers is that they lag behind Europe in the area of craftsmanship, but from handmade cabinets to hinges available at Home Depot, domestic products have a reputation in the design community for equal or better quality, if not for high design.

Contemporary American kitchen manufacturers are less focused on replicating Europe’s styles and more concerned with finding their own niche. Outside of urban centers, manufacturers are still trying to evaluate the market for contemporary kitchens. Though nearly 90 percent of manufacturers still produce traditional designs, more and more are introducing clean lines for a changing audience more attuned to modern styling through the surfeit of shelter magazines and Ikeas over the last decade. American manufacturers know something else about the American buyer: They love gadgets. Bazzèo is currently talking with Microsoft and an iPod docking company about integrating more non-cooking technology into their programs, and the American appliance market is offering more high-tech cookers, washers, and vent hoods that were previously available only in Europe.

Unexpectedly, the current economic downturn may help some American manufacturers to mature and succeed more quickly. Architects and developers have been especially focused on U.S. companies recently as they try to stimulate the economy at home while looking for ways to reduce shipping costs and waiting times.

The national industry’s recognition of a demand for contemporary design is only about 50 years overdue. As an architect recently pointed out to Henry at this year’s ICFF, Europe’s kitchen designs grew out of the Case Study Houses of the 1950s and ’60s in California, while kitchens here took a turn for the traditional. “He said to me, ‘I look at these kitchens and it’s like reclaiming our birthright.’ It’s so great to recapture that system. More than once I’ve had Italians and Germans asking where our product is available.”
To meet the needs of homeowners wanting to fit a high-tech kitchen range into an existing cabinet opening, Italian appliance manufacturer Bertazzoni has expanded its Dual Fuel line with a 30-inch model. Available in stainless steel and eight automotive-grade colors, the oven has eight cooking functions and a triple-layer door designed to prevent heat loss.

www.bertazzoni-italia.com

Hovering discreetly above the cooking range, Elica’s Wave island hood has three speed levels and remote and touch-sensitive controls. The patented Evolution air-treatment system is integrated into a small steel cylinder, ensuring that a clunky vent hood won’t ever upstage the kitchen cabinets again.

www.elica.com

With a 22.6-cubic-foot capacity, the capacious new Electrolux French Door models also feature freshly designed hardware, lighting, and glass shelving. The Wave-Touch control panel fades to an uncluttered display once selections are made; the IQ-Touch model is available for those who prefer options to be ever visible.

www.electroluxappliances.com

British architect John Pawson’s new line of cookware for Demeyere recently became available in the United States, adding a top-pedigree option for pots and pans. The pans’ 7-Ply/Material comes in several thicknesses to suit a range of cooking methods, and TriplInduc material allows the cookware to be used on all types of heat sources.

www.demeyere.be

An under-sink, water-filtering faucet from Grohe has separate waterways for filtered and unfiltered water, ensuring that purified water has no contact with the faucet’s metal parts. An LED display built into the handle blinks when the filter cartridge should be replaced.

www.grohe.com

Without any visible display panel when the dishwasher is closed, the DF 260/261 dishwasher from Gaggenau is available in stainless steel or aluminum-backed glass door panels, or can be configured to match custom cabinetry. Its noise level is a mere 40 decibels, so a red light projected onto the floor indicates when it is in use.

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A new bamboo plywood end-grain pattern from Smith & Fong lends a textured appearance to architectural surfaces in the kitchen and can now be specified FSC-certified and urea formaldehyde (UF)-free under the label PlybooPure.

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Based on the principles of biomimicry, plank-matched vanes from Columbia Forest Products use soy proteins modified to perform similarly to byssal threads, the proteins secreted by mussels to make them adhere to underwater surfaces. The resulting range of UF-free plywood products has strong adhesion and better waterproofing than UF products.

www.columbiaforestproducts.com

This flooring, counter-top, and decorative surface material is made from durable layers of compressed glass that is 100 percent recyclable. Available in 110-by-49-inch slabs, the material contains no colorants or additives, and can be thrown into the recycling bin with glass bottles when removed.

www.coveringsetc.com

Millwork panels from Kirei are manufactured from reclaimed sorghum straw, poplar wood bonding layers, and KR Bond, an adhesive with no added urea formaldehyde. Compatible with most commercial finishing materials and fasteners, the lightweight boards are available in 12.0-by-71.7-inch and 35.8-by-71.7-inch panels.

www.kiriusa.com

Tolerant of moisture and extreme temperatures, Trekking is a new floor and wall cladding made with 40 percent recycled ceramic content. The tiles are pressed at more than 6,400 PSI and fired at 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit to create a durable anti-slip surface recommended for use in interior and exterior applications.

www.novabell.com

The world’s largest manufacturer of natural quartz, Cosentino introduces a new material containing 75 percent post-consumer and post-industrial recycled content and 25 percent quartz and stone scrap bound by corn oil–based resin. Large slabs are available in 63-by-128-inch pieces; tiles are 12, 18, or 24 inches square in three thicknesses.

www.cosentino.com

Virginia-based ECO Supply Center recently began importing high-density blocks of leftover cork material from Portugal to be fabricated into naturally antimicrobial and heat- and water-resistant slabs available in 1 ½-by-25-by-36-inch sections that can be cut, sanded, and seamed with traditional woodworking tools.

www.ecosupplycenter.com
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JULY 2009

DIARY

JULY

WEDNESDAY 8
Lectures
Sudhib C. Jambhekar, Frank Sabourin, et al.
Globalization and Local Essences of Design Development in Dubai and Abu Dhabi
6:00 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.aiany.org

Michael Middleton Dwyer
EdgeWater: Building Classical Architectural Along the Hudson River
6:30 p.m.
The Philip Johnson Glass House
400 17th St. NW,
the Real World
William Eggleston in
www.moma.org
11:30 a.m.

FRIDAY 10
Lectures
Claire Huddleston and Amara Antilla
Legibility/Illegibility: The Use of Language in Modern Art
11:30 a.m.
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org

EVENT
Nature Photography Series II
10:00 a.m.
Wave Hill
West 249th St. and
Independence Ave., Bronx
www.wavehill.org

SATURDAY 11
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Ragas and RajaS: Musical Imagery of Countiy India
Philadelphia Museum of Art
26th St. and the Benjamin Franklin Pkwy., Philadelphia
www.philamuseum.org

FILM
North by Northwest
9:00 p.m.
Harvard Art Museums
55 Oxford St., Cambridge, MA
www.harvardartmuseums.org

TUESDAY 15
Lecture
Design Remixed
Alicia Chang and Sarah Gaphorn, MOHM
6:30 p.m.
Apple Store, Soho
103 Prince St.
www.aiany.org

EXHIBITION OPENINGS
GlassWear
Museum of Arts and Design
2 Columbus Circle
www.madmuseum.org

EVENT
Daniel Arsham, Jonat Boker, and Juha Sancruz Ruiz
SiteLines 2009:
Untitled Corner
7:00 p.m.
One Chase Manhattan Plaza
www.lmnc.net

THURSDAY 16
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Artists-in-Residence 2008-09
Hurvyn Anderson
Studio Museum in Harlem
144 West 125th St.
www.studiony.org

Selections from the Permanent Collection
Focus: Oscar Kokoschka
Neue Galerie New York
1040 5th Ave.
www.neuegalerie.org

FRIDAY 17
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Cézanne to Picasso:
Paintings from the David and Peggy Rockefeller Collection
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org

FILM
Frank Lloyd Wright:
The Mike Wallace Interviews
(Mike Wallace, Frank Lloyd Wright, 1957), 53 min.
11:00 a.m.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
New Media Theater
1071 5th Ave.
www.guggenheim.org

WITH THE KIDS
Moving Through Art
11:00 a.m.
Robin Museum of Art
150 West 17th St.
www.aiany.org

SATURDAY 18
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Group Exhibition
McKee Fine Art
511 West 25th St.
www.mckeefineart.com

Moving Perspectives:
Shahzia Sikander/Run Xun
Smithsonian Institution
Freer Gallery of Art
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
1050 Independence Ave. SW,
Washington, D.C.
www.asia.si.edu

TUESDAY 14
Lectures
Jamie Drake
Designing Interiors
7:00 p.m.
Corcoran Gallery of Art
500 17th St. NW,
Washington, D.C.
www.corcoran.org

Loretta Lorenci
Becoming Bucky Fuller
6:30 p.m.
ScultureCenter
44-19 Purves St., Queens
www.sculpturecenter.org

EVENT
Teddy Cruz and Damon Rich
Architectures of Crisis:
Architectures of Resistance
4:00 p.m.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
1071 5th Ave.
www.guggenheim.org

AESTHETICS OF CROSSING
Van Alen Institute
30 West 22nd Street
Through July 24

Two design teams pair off in the Van Alen Institute’s Aesthetics of Crossing exhibit to examine how design affects the experience of traversing national lines. The architectural half of the show—Land Ports of Entry by New York City–based Smith-Miller + Hawkinson Architects—takes viewers inside two recently built border stations that regulate traffic between the United States and Canada. Photographs in the show linger on the surveillance and security techniques used in the stations, and on the varying degrees of transparency in the structures’ materials. Together, they highlight the fundamental tension of the border structure: It must serve both as an entrance and a barrier, an idea richly explored in the firm’s port of entry at Massena, NY (above), winner of a recent OSA Design Award. The exhibit’s second half, Citizenship by Design, created by Kadimbari, Baxi and Irene Cheng, takes a more conceptual approach to the topic, examining the documents that determine which borders can be crossed and which cannot. Just as crossing different countries’ passports and other papers that identify and regulate international movement, Baxi and Cheng tease out the graphic threads common to them all, splicing the designs together into new templates for self-identification. The result is both colorful and provocative, proposing new ways of conceiving citizenship and identity in a rapidly globalizing world. Don’t miss a special conversation at the Institute on July 30 at 6:30 p.m., with Teddy Cruz and Thomas Keanan discuss architecture and politics at the border.

MICHAIL ZELEHOSKI:
OBLIQUE CONSTRUCTIONS
Ferlin Gallery
437 North Street, Pittsfield, MA
Through July 26

Newly returned to his native Massachusetts from a long apprenticeship in China, Michail Zelehoski makes his debut at Ferlin Gallery with an ambitious collection of two- and three-dimensional assemblages. Harvesting scrap wood and furniture from local buildings, Zelehoski reincarnates them as warped versions of their former selves. Sometimes they retain their mass, like a reconstructed bed and grand piano, or as in the sinister Trap, which transforms an architectural storage rack from Copperworks into a human lobster trap. Elsewhere, Zelehoski flattens his scavenged treasures, disassembling chairs and laying out their parts to create trompe l’oeil pictures of surrealistic furniture. With scrap wood filling in for paint, even flat subjects like Billboard #2 (above) seem to pop out of the picture plane. And the nuanced hues of the found wood—the variation in its natural grain, and the remnants of old stains and graffiti—give Zelehoski’s canvases a tactility and vividness that paintings rarely achieve.
The Le Corbusier Code

Le Corbusier had an incalculable effect on the architecture and planning of the last century, a mercural and inescapable influence felt today. Kenneth Frampton calls him the most famous and certainly most controversial architect of the 20th century, a description that encompasses his problematic thinking, his theories about cities, his modernistpolemic, and most of all, his buildings, which created an architectural ascendency that spread throughout the Western world. In 1987, I visited the centennial exhibition entitled Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century at the Hayward Gallery in London. The show, which was organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain in cooperation with the Foundation Le Corbusier in Paris, ranged over the architect’s career, from its beginnings in Switzerland in 1907 to works still under construction at his death in 1965. Like a dormant seed, his work has been preserved in rhetoric, protected by 50 years of modernism—until now.

While a half-century of historians have given elevated meaning to his explorations in building tectonics, materiality, physical planning, and new building typologies, only recently has research yielded secret and possibly esoteric intentions embodied in his work. Architectural historian Robert Coombs investigated the mystical themes in the architect’s chapel at Ronchamp, uncovering symbols of Marian programs and references to the Cathar Grail, Gnosticism, the Virgin Tomb, divine numbers, sacred geometry, alchemy, and other iconographies. Of particular note was the relationship of the three primary exterior walls of the chapel to cosmic references to the Annunciation, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin Mary. There seems to have been a conscious triple entendre that wove building form, program, and esoteric intent. This drama is unique when compared to the conventional wisdom on this building’s genius, and it brought up new questions, at least within the mainstream, on the nature of Le Corbusier’s work.

In the book Le Corbusier and the Occult, Dr. Jan K. Birksted has a tenacious fascination with the narrative of
Le Corbusier's life and the history of his evolving relationship with the occult. Birksted develops an in-depth link between his social history and his associations with secret societies, Freemasonry, Pythagoreanism, and other mystic traditions. Largely obtained from archival research of new documents from undiscovered and local sources, this work posits that the formative experiences of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret's childhood in La Chaux-de-Fonds, his birthplace in the Swiss Jura, was a powerful influence on the synthetic fusion of these esoteric preoccupations and his self-reinvention and subsequent practice in Paris. The Loge L'Amitié, the Masonic lodge, was the genesis of his ideas as an embodiment of the "rectitude" and "exactitude" of the emblematic Masonic symbol and the Imago Mundi (horizontal plane representing physicality) and Axis Mundi (vertical axis representing transcendence). Replete with circumstantial evidence, the book gives reason to believe that Le Corbusier's personal cosmology was a plausible appropriation and possible fabric of intention to his architecture. Despite these discoveries, the degree to which Le Corbusier himself was interested in a public revelation is unclear. He was discriminating in his self-image, and careful about the morphology of his ideas. Le Corbusier credited occult capacities to himself, yet did not belong to any occult group. In any event, the canons of the occult are (supposedly) secret.

Birksted's book serves as a scholarly addition to the understanding of Le Corbusier and the importance of his diverse work and continuing influence. As others have said, and I agree, Birksted's writing is an acquired taste. It is interesting sometimes, slack at others. It wanders off path, stranding the reader with irrelevant facts, voluminous quotations, tangential anecdotes, and lengthy endnotes. The graphic images are often weak. I would have liked to see more in-depth analysis of esoteric concepts and practices directly related to Le Corbusier's work. The book is, however, refreshing in its delivery of new material on Le Corbusier, which for 50 years has been predictable and repetitious. The book meticulously traces the unraveling of Le Corbusier's private, social, and professional interests as they informed his arcane pursuits. The focus on his early life gives a better picture of the architect and his syncretic purposefulness in the context of his later architectural works. Birksted's material is significant, and he has provided a rigorous contribution to the theoretical discourse in architecture as well as an impetus for continued investigation. The pseudonym "Le Corbusier" means "the raven-like one," which seems a fitting association of cunning and intelligence, cloaked here in supernatural speculations. Le Corbusier and the Occult reveals the complex, comprehensive, and clandestine nature of Le Corbusier's architecture—a place for dwelling, and a temple for man.

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It’s been a rough few weeks for Admiral’s Row, a collection of historic buildings on the edge of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In response to the Yard’s plans to purchase the land and demolish all the historic buildings—making way for a big-box grocery store and other retail and industrial uses—the Army National Guard Bureau recently recommended that only two of eleven historic structures must be preserved. This is far fewer than the Municipal Art Society and other groups like the National Trust for Historic Preservation had recommended. And on June 19, one of the buildings, Quarters C, collapsed after a month of unusually heavy rain.

The Row’s future may look grim, but the Municipal Art Society of New York remains optimistic that it is still possible to preserve and reuse more than two of these remarkable buildings. Despite the collapse of Quarters C—an outrage given the National Guard’s mandate to protect these historic resources—the Guard’s own studies show that most of the other buildings are structurally sound and can be rehabilitated. And MAS has developed six site plans that clearly show it is possible to preserve the buildings and also provide the community with a grocery store so sorely needed. In other words, there is no need to choose between preservation and produce.

At the heart of our plan is a respect for the Row’s irreplaceable historic fabric. Located at Flushing Avenue and Navy Street, the site includes ten houses, constructed from the mid-19th century until 1901, which housed high-ranking naval officers until the early 1970s. An adjacent timber shed dates from the 1830s, and is believed to be the only mid-19th-century survivor of this building type among Navy yards throughout the United States. Long and narrow, the shed’s form made it ideal for storing ship masts as they cured.

Together, these residential and naval service buildings are incredibly significant to the Navy Yard, the borough of Brooklyn, and the history of the U.S. Navy. Although Admiral’s Row and the timber shed have been allowed to deteriorate for 40 years, they retain a great deal of exterior and interior architectural detail. In fact, a National Guard report found that the Admiral’s Row district retains an extremely high level of historic integrity. The structures were used and maintained by the Navy until the 1970s, when the Navy Yard was closed. New York City subsequently purchased the majority of the Yard from the federal government, with the exception of this parcel. The National Guard now wants to sell this property to the city, which will lease the land to the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation.

The Guard’s recommendations that only two of the 11 historic buildings be preserved stems from the Section 106 process, a federally-mandated review that requires federal agencies to study the impact of their actions upon important historic buildings. As part of the process, the Navy Yard disclosed their plans to develop the site with a 65,000-square-foot grocery store (approximately the size of the Fairway in Red Hook), a large surface parking lot for at least 300 cars, and additional retail and industrial space on the site. Throughout the process, Navy Yard officials have maintained that they can only proceed with the development if they demolish all of the historic buildings.

While MAS agreed with the Navy Yard and local residents that a grocery store was needed in the area, we did not agree that the best plan was to create a suburban-style store set in a sea of parking. Given that the historic buildings occupy about 25 percent of the six-acre site, we were certain that alternatives could be sought that allowed for both preservation and development.

Last fall, MAS—a consulting party in the Section 106 process—presented six different alternative plans, demonstrating it is possible to retain the historic buildings while also allowing for the construction of the supermarket and new retail and industrial space. By reconfiguring or reducing the parking, and shifting the location of the new buildings, a greener and more pedestrian-friendly site could be achieved.

These plans were developed after a visioning session in which community representatives, architects, preservationists, and others came together to brainstorm about ways to save the buildings while furthering the needs of the community and the mission of the Navy Yard. We worked to not only preserve as many buildings as possible, but to promote sustainability and foster small businesses and new employment opportunities. Renderings produced by Andrew Burdick of the studio collaborative and Architecture for Humanity New York illustrate the stark differences between the concept behind one of MAS’s alternatives and the Navy Yard proposal.

So we were disappointed when, on May 27, the National Guard released its recommendation calling for preservation of only the timber shed and one of the houses, Building B. While these are two of the most significant buildings, preserving only two is inadequate. The Guard has made it clear that the preservation of these two buildings is a minimum requirement, and MAS will continue to advocate for more preservation. We are also calling on the National Guard to take three specific steps to help balance preservation and development interests.

Most urgently, the Guard must stabilize the buildings. MAS had known that the collapsed Quarters C, unlike most other Admiral’s Row buildings, had major structural problems due to a fire. That said, we are disappointed that the Guard had not better secured the buildings to protect them from further damage from the elements. The Guard must make necessary repairs to stabilize the 19th-century structures as the process of deciding the buildings’ future moves forward.

Secondly, the National Guard is required by law to sell the land to the city at fair market value—an amount that has not been made public. MAS has argued that requiring the retention and rehabilitation of the buildings will lower the fair market value, thereby freeing up money for the Navy Yard to renovate the historic buildings. We have asked the National Guard to explore this possibility.

Finally, the Guard should require an RFP that incorporates the preservation of more historic buildings. Once the Guard announced their proposed mitigation of preserving two buildings, the Navy Yard moved to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for development of a grocery store on the site. That RFP will be released within the next two months, and will call for the construction of a 40,000-square-foot grocery store (smaller than originally proposed), an employment center, and additional industrial space, as well as the retention and renovation of the two historic buildings. MAS believes the RFP must include the preservation of more buildings.

None of our work in developing alternative plans would have been possible without volunteer support from architects and developers. Now we need help again. During the RFP process, MAS hopes to identify developers who would consider preserving more of the buildings. We also would like to provide potential responders with practical information on how additional historic buildings can be integrated into new development on the site. We could use expert assistance in developing revised site plans specifically tailored to the information provided in the RFP, and aid in identifying tax credits and financial incentives to help fund the preservation of these buildings.

The Municipal Art Society will continue to advocate for New York’s architectural heritage. We strongly believe that more of these very significant historic buildings can be retained and incorporated into this development. Our fight is far from over. We welcome your expertise and advice as our important work continues.

LISA KERSAVAGE IS SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND POLICY AT THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY.
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