SHAKING UP P.S.1

Technically, the nation may be out of the recession, but it certainly doesn’t feel like it. That sense of disequilibrium was the driving concept behind Pole Dance, the wobbly winner of this year’s Young Architecture Program at P.S.1. Created by Florian Idenburg and Jing Liu of Solid Objectives–Idenburg (SO-IL), Pole Dance beat out entries from two other Brooklyn firms, Freecell and Easton–Combs, along with Cambridge’s William O’Brien Jr. and the Danish contender BIG–Bjarke Ingels Group. MoMA and P.S.1 announced the winners on January 22. Idenburg called the continued on page 5

LPC CONTENDS WITH DEVELOPER’S UNCONTEXTUAL TOWER

HEIGHT ISSUES

The Great Jones Hotel is a 13-story sliver building that snuck into the ground before the section of Noho surrounding it was made a historic district in the fall of 2008. The building thus did not have to undergo review by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, that is, until the developer cut so many corners in its rush to build that the LPC now gets another crack at it. Many in the community were hoping the city would require the developer, SDS Brooklyn, to tear down its topped-out hotel and start anew. Instead, the L-shaped building on a through-lot with entries on both Great Jones and continued on page 11

ASTORIA WAS ONCE A QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD IN northern Queens lined with working-class one- and two-family homes. Many still remain, but like so many outerborough areas, it has in recent years been overtaken by out-of-scale development tapping into outdated zoning. To counter this, the City Planning Commission certified a continued on page 3

P.S.1 BRINGS ITS POLE DANCE TO QUEENS

NORVAL WHITE, 1926–2009

Architect, educator, and sharp-witted editor of the AIA Guide to New York City, Norval White died on December 26 at age 83. Here two colleagues remember the irrepressible champion of New York architecture.

Richard Dattner
Dattner Architects

If Norval White has been described as a larger-than-life personality, he was physically and acoustically even larger. My first sighting, and hearing, of Norval was at the Cooper Union in 1963—where I was joining him on the architectural faculty. Towering over the crowded reception in the Foundation Building, his stentorian voice commanded attention—and ultimately, appreciation—since he was usually the most knowledgeable person in the room. Norval was a polymath, conversant with architecture, literature, politics, French culture, and almost everything else.

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TRADING UP

I enjoyed your “Insider Trading” feature listing recommended contractors and vendors (AN 01_01_20:10). We at Langan Engineering & Environmental Services were pleased to be on the list. For future reference, we’d be more accurately described in the “multidisciplinary” category. In addition to civil and environmental, our third (land lease–servicing) primary practice is geotechnical engineering; and we also offer transportation engineering, land surveying, and natural resource permitting.

CHRIS VITALDO
LANGAN ENGINEERING & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
NEW YORK

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

The pundits and academicians haven’t understood the genus “architect” (“Bluntly Speaking,” AN 01_01.20.2010). We care about everything! In 1925, Corbus proposed a museum of the everyday, and illustrated common glasses and bottles, steamer trunks and filing cabinets. Consider also the photograph of Mies in his Chicago apartment: The table and chairs are his, but the room remains “as found,” with Paul Klees on the wall. Architects from the Smithsons to Bob and Denise demand what? Ornament! Some years ago, under the sponsorship of Steelcase, 62 prominent individuals chose objects representing “industrial elegance.” These included both ordinary paper clips (Gwatney) and stealth bombsers (Philip Johnson). Every choice was individualistic, and nevertheless the individual choices were serious. Yet, the Museum of Modern Art (as well as lesser institutions) remains un movado. Now, only “high-style” items are deemed suitable. High-style has its place, but the ordinary demands recognition.

TOM KILLIAN
FRANÇOISE BELLOCA, ARCHITECTS
NEW YORK

PUBLISHING TIES THAT BIND

The first architecture magazine in the United States was The New York Ecclesiast published in 1848, but it only lasted five years. It was created by a predecessor organization to the American Institute of Architects, the New York Ecclesiastical Society, and it represented the growing voice of the profession.

The really serious architecture magazine in his country, The Island Architect and Builder, was published in 1883 in Chicago and was instrumental in calling for a strong and diversified professional organization. More often than not, such journals were associated with professional societies and supported by their membership lists. In fact, throughout its history the AIA has supported or sponsored several journals and magazines as a benefit to its members. In the 1920s, for example, the AIA handed the reins of its quarterly magazine, The Journal of the Society of AIA, to Regional Planning Association of America founder and member Charles Whitaker, who turned the journal into a forceful advocate for government housing and community planning. Whitaker’s magazine eventually became the AIA Journal that in turn became Architecture magazine. Headquartered in New York, Architecture was the official magazine of the association until it sold its coveted AIA affiliation with its guaranteed membership lists and income to McGraw-Hill and Architectural Record in 1996. Record then became the “official” journal of the AIA until last month.

The AIA has now decided to transfer its endorsement and subscription income to Washington-based Hanley Wood’s four-year-old Architect magazine in January 2011. The rumor is that the AIA wanted to exert more control over editorial content than its arrangement with Record allowed. The AIA seems to believe that it will be able to better shape information coming from a magazine group just down the road from its Washington “Octagon” headquarters. They also wanted a publisher who would manage its convention business. And while McGraw-Hill was planning to hire the same organization that currently runs the convention, Hanley Wood already has such a business in-house.

Still, it cannot be good news that the AIA thinks its views of the profession are best served by controlling the information it publishes. Architectural Record under Robert Ivy and its supererb editors—from Suzanne Stephens and Cliff Pearson on down—always balanced the need to please the AIA with a belief that architecture deserved something more than a trade publication. Nothing we have seen from the Washington-based Architect has shown that it will follow this path.

Finally, it is curious to imagine a compelling magazine on architecture coming out of Washington, D.C., where there is virtually no architecture community nor culture of design. The profession may only realize what it has when the transfer from Record to Architect happens next year. What is to happen to Architectural Record and its staff of professional journalists? The editors are suggesting—perhaps, wishfully—that they may start up a subscription department and become a self-supporting business—or even an online-only magazine. But given McGraw-Hill’s recent sale of BusinessWeek, the company does not inspire confidence that it has the desire or means to make an independent architecture magazine really work. Stay tuned.

WILLIAM MENKING
With space at a premium, deciding whether to use the top floor of the Museum of Arts and Design as a restaurant or as a gallery must have been a tough choice. Luckily, the museum found a way to have its cake and eat it too: Co-owner Brian Saltzman and project architects Schefter Design created the Robert restaurant to double as a showcase of contemporary design in furniture, lighting, and video art. London-born architect Philip Michael Wolfson contributed Robert’s reception desks, mirrored cocktail tables, and bar stools, as well as a communal table made from a plank of powder-coated aluminum that he has bent into a spiky, 6-foot-tall sound wave. The jazzy theme continues in architect Johanna Grawunder’s LED-lit Lucite chandeliers, which hang suspended from the ceiling to create a scattered field of glowing orange rectangles. These angular lines are balanced by the curves of Vladimir Kagan’s neutral-toned swoopy sofas. A rotating series of artwork—beginning from the ceiling to create a scattered field of glowing orange rectangles. These angular lines are balanced by the curves of Vladimir Kagan’s neutral-toned swoopy sofas. A rotating series of artwork—beginning with Jennifer Steinkamp’s video art piece Orbit—vies with expansive views of Columbus Circle and Central Park for diners’ attention.

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> PIANO DESIGNS NEW WING FOR BOSTON’S GARDNER MUSEUM
STILL A LADY
A hands-off approach to a beloved museum is understandable when considering an expansion. And at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Renzo Piano has kept his 70,000-square-foot extension 50 feet away from the Venetian Palazzo that replicates that the linen heires built in 1902 for her eclectic collection. The sculpture, tapestries, and paintings by Botticelli, Titian, Rembrandt, Degas, and Sargent are housed with the strict stipulation that her museum be used “for the education and enjoyment of the public forever.” Located in the backyard, with a new main entrance on Evans Way rather than facing the Fenway, the new wing—long in discussion and finally unveiled on January 21—more than doubles the museum’s size to 130,000 square feet. But in height, its four stories will reach only to the eaves of the older structure. Piano’s extension is connected by a 75-foot glass passage that directly slides into one of the peripheral corridors around the famed glass-roofed courtyard. (The original entrance off the Fenway once introduced people on axis with the courtyard, but that direct approach had long since been displaced by a side entrance.) “You used to enter in an obscure way, and it will still be an obscure way,” Piano said at a press briefing. “It was important to not be too direct, to protect the fragility of the place.”

Without the need for other contingencies, Piano was free to build his own sculptural shape and has done so modestly, breaking the addition down to manageable elements and focusing his design energies on two corrugated copper-clad boxes atop walls of glass and separated by a glass-encased circulation stair. One 40-by-40-foot cube houses a 300-seat concert hall for the museum’s popular music program. The other 30-by-30-foot box, for the display of artworks from the collection, features a floor-to-ceiling glass wall facing the back of Evans Way Park elevation. Gardner’s palace. The café, bookstore, classrooms, and administration offices are all located on the ground floor and to the rear of the twin cubes, where there is also an expanded conservation department.

Last summer, controversy erupted shortly before the museum’s board voted unanimously to proceed with the expansion. At issue was a Gothic-trimmed carriage house containing an artist’s apartment that some preservationists and staff members wanted to protect because it was inspired by ideas that Gardner shared with the art critic (and friend) Bernard Berenson. After a brief scuffle in the press last May, the carriage house was demolished in July and the site cleared for new construction. That space will now include a small greenhouse where two artists’ residences will be tucked under a sloped glass roof.

The museum has so far raised enough funding to proceed with $102 million in pledges toward a total budget of $114 million for the new wing, $64 million of which has already been raised. The museum hopes for completion by early 2012.

> Dwell in the House of Eunni
Not since The Gutter thrilled us with snarky opinions and unsubstantiated rumors, and the short-lived Edificial worked valiantly to fill its slippers, has there been any satirical commentary about designers or the design media that promote them in the blogosphere. Enter the Unhappy Hipsters (unhappyhipsters.com), a blog that pokes fun at images mostly from Dwell magazine of homeowners in their oh-so-clever modernist houses. The authors of the Unhappy Hipsters pluck photographs from recent issues and rewrite their captions with deadpan faux earnestness. It’s not that hard: More often than not, the photos are styled with one dweller gazing listlessly out of a vast expanse of glass into a vast expanse of nothingness, presumably recalling a Sylvia Plath poem about “designing futures where nothing will occur.” When children are posed in the shots, their expressionless round faces seem a little sinister. One worries about Billy’s hamster.

Needless to say, the bloggers are keeping their identities secret, as they have day jobs to protect. They did, however, graciously respond to an email query from Eavesdrop. The creators are two female friends, a writer and graphic designer, who started Unhappy Hipsters to amuse themselves. They use it to ask the important questions, such as, “You picked the concrete floors and gravel yard. Can’t you pretend to like it?”

The blog has gone viral with nearly 6,000 Twitterers. “We pick all the photos and write all the captions. Nothing is reader generated, although we’ve gotten plenty of submissions,” they say. “But we’re dying to submit, but will settle for sharing our favorite caption on a father-and-toddler photo where the two face off from custom-sized adult and miniaturized seating: “The debate—whether the ubiquity of suburban neo-modern developments was really an upgrade from new-money McMansions-ended in a standoff, mired by the generation gap.”

Irony wins again.

SEND TIPS AND STYLISH ABJECTION TO EAVESDROP@ARCHPAPER.COM
BULL'S EYE ON CITIES

TARGET REFINES BIG-BOX MODEL FOR URBAN LOCATIONS

The sluggish economy hasn’t stowed mega-retailer Target’s expansion plans. The design-savvy discount store is spending more than $1 billion this year to upgrade 340 of its locations across the country, many of which will now include fresh food sections. In addition, Target is focusing more on urban areas for new stores, adapting its suburban big-box model for denser, more pedestrian-oriented locations.

Target calls its fresh food sections “Pfresh.” About 100 Target stores currently have Pfresh components, and the company expects to have an “edited assortment of products,” according to Barrows. “Our focus is on creating the same ‘Expect More. Pay Less.’ brand promise that our guests have come to expect from us.”

This year, Target will open locations in urban neighborhoods in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Boston.

“When considering a new site for a store, we always partner with the cities involved, and consider a number of factors including demographics, competitor activity, and market potential,” she wrote. “Along with these, for urban stores we also consider the uniqueness of the specific site from an access, parking, and visibility perspective.” Access to public transit is also a factor. Crane’s Chicago Business has reported that the company is negotiating for space in the Louis Sullivan–designed Carson Pirie Scott building on State Street in Chicago’s Loop. The company declined to comment on the possible location. In New York, it will open a store in Harlem’s East River Plaza this spring—where it will become Manhattan’s first Target—and another store in Flushing, Queens. These two outlets join existing locations that include Gateway Center in the Bronx; Elmhurst, Queens; and Brooklyn’s Atlantic Terminal.

According to Barrows, the Minneapolis-based chain has approximately 50 in-house firms to test out their ideas, working with Buro Happold, which has a budget of $85,000 and should open in late June.

As a final element, dozens of balls will bounce around the net, reacting as the poles are moved to create a sort of game, though one without any rules, at least not yet. “Visitors can make their own rules as they experience the space,” Idenburg said. The whole, tenuous structure moves in uneasy concert—much like the world beyond.
DAVID SARKISYAN, 1947–2010

The resentment from Moscow’s mayor Yuri Luzhkov did not stop with the death of David Sarkisyan, the Erevan-born director of the Russian State Museum of Architecture (MUAR), who passed away in Munich on January 7 after a brief bout with cancer. The mayor explicitly forbade Sarkisyan’s burial in the Armenian cemetery of Moscow, so the large gathering of his friends had to follow him to his final resting in the Troekurovskoe suburban necropolis. An outspoken critic of the mayor’s decisions relative to the city’s built heritage, Sarkisyan would have relished his ability to stir up bureaucratic trouble from beyond the grave. Sarkisyan had succinct and biting words for the transformation of Moscow into “a symbiosis of Disneyland, Las Vegas, and a Turkish resort,” while fighting a desperate rear-guard action for the preservation and careful restoration of many pre-revolutionary and Soviet landmarks. His death shocked Russia’s intelligentsia.

Born on September 23, 1947 in Soviet Armenia, Sarkisyan studied biology and human physiology at Moscow’s State University, commencing a first career in pharmacology during which he designed innovative treatments for Alzheimer’s disease. He then moved on to the world of cinema, shooting close to 20 documentaries, including the acclaimed Comrade Kolontai and Her Lovers (1990). In 1991, he was first assistant director during the filming of Yuri Klimenko and Rustam Khamdamov’s Anna Karenina, starring Jeanne Moreau. Art continued to hold him in its sway after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1994, he founded the gallery Nashchokin’s House in Moscow, and during the 1990s devoted himself to film critiques for several Russian newspapers.

I met him first in 2000, shortly after his appointment as the director of the State Museum of Architecture, when he was beginning to shake up this venerable institution. A repository for hundreds of thousands of drawings and a vast collection of photographs and artifacts, the museum had been founded in 1934 and was a rather sleepy place. In the post-Communist era, major changes occurred. First, a collection of 386 Old Master drawings looted in Breman in 1945 by Viktor Baldin, the museum’s head for 25 years, was unearthed, leading to unending polemics. Then, the massive museum archive had to be relocated from the suburban Donskoy Monastery (which was summarily returned to the Orthodox Church) into the main premises of the museum in central Moscow where, in dire conditions due to severe lack of funds, they continue to be kept.

Unable to restore its premises in the 18th-century Tolzyn Mansion on Vozdvizhenka Street, Sarkisyan made a virtue out of hardship, opening in freezing weather the unheated and rundown wing appropriately called the “Ruina,” mounting fascinating exhibitions that captured audiences wrapped in their overcoats. It became one of the most sought-after exhibition spaces in the city. He engaged the MUAR in the First Biennale of Contemporary Art in Moscow of 2005, and developed a cycle of exhibitions introducing Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, and other contemporary architects to the Russian public, thanks to shrewd alliances with Western institutions such as Vienna’s Museum of Applied Arts. In 2004 he was the curator of the Moscow-Berlin 1950–2000 show, following his leadership of Russia’s participation in the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2002. In all these endeavors, he was surrounded by scores of young artists and scholars, and nocturnal feasts invaded the galleries. Sporting a red t-shirt bearing the insignia of the USSR, the director stimulated the enthusiasm of a new generation of intellectuals.

Under his flamboyant helmsmanship, the museum became a thriving center for exhibitions and public events, and his own office—a dark grotto filled to capacity with posters, movie memorabilia, piled-up books, Stalinist kitsch, children’s toys, and works of art of all kinds—welcomed vibrant and often uproarious meetings of leading intellectuals and architects. Frequently sleeping on the premises in conditions oforable discomfort, the director would greet his guests in pajamas, leading them through his personal forest of historical vestiges to drink tea. Sarkisyan also took care to present in his galleries at the major components of Russia’s architectural history, with particular emphasis on the thriving avant-garde work of the 1920s and ’30s. Sarkisyan was vocal in criticizing the most conspicuous projects of the contemporary municipality—from the demolition of the Hotel Moskva near Red Square, replaced by a wan copy camouflaging a new structure, to the creation of a historical fake within the uncompleted shell of the 18th-century Tsarskoye Palace—making him a prominent Muscovite and a constant thorn in the side of Mayor Luzhkov. Along with a group of fledgling preservationist associations, Sarkisyan led campaigns against the demolition of the 1960s hotels Intourist and Rossia, the Voentorg department store, and the ongoing gutting of the Detsky Mir store. He was one of the main forces pushing for restoration of Moscow’s Zaryadye Narkomfin House, a landmark of constructivism.

He adamantly opposed the erection of the Gazprom Tower by RMJM Architects that threatens to crush St. Peterburg’s skyline. And his death will likely have a significant impact on the fate of another modernist masterpiece: the house that architect Konstantin Melnikov built for himself in 1929. Sarkisyan passionately supported Melnikov’s granddaughter in her fight against oligarch Sergey Gorbiev’s project to create a private foundation in charge of the house and its collections. Together with many intellectuals and architects, Sarkisyan proposed instead that the house be the centerpiece of a state museum devoted to this unique building and the career of its architect. The immense emotion surrounding Sarkisyan’s death might in the end vindicate his ideas, and usher in a new era of public awareness toward Russia’s creative recent past.

JEAN-LOUIS COHEN, AN ARCHITECT AND HISTORIAN, TEACHES AT THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS IN NEW YORK.
The cardiac department at New York–Presbyterian Hospital is arguably the leader at pioneering new treatments for heart disease. In order to maintain this edge, as well as keep up with growing demand, the institution recently built a 125,000-square-foot expansion—the $125 million Vivian and Seymour Milstein Family Heart Center. In addition to providing facilities at the cutting edge of technology for diagnostics, ambulatory surgery, cardiac catheterization, and critical care, hospital leadership wanted something very special from its new building: a space that would fill people with hope.

Studies have shown that patients who are scared do worse than those who feel optimistic about their chances, and a hospital’s environment can go a long way toward putting people at ease. The architects at Pei Cobb Freed & Partners responded by flooding the common spaces with filtered natural light, and opening the interior up to sweeping views of the Hudson River and Palisades. The first challenge was finding a site for the expansion on New York-Presbyterian’s crowded campus. The place that made the most sense programmatically was a small nook between the existing Milstein Hospital and the Herbert Irving Pavilion, a cancer care center. The plot had been avoided by the previous structures because it was home to a massive pillar of Manhattan bedrock that thrust its way through the topsoil.

Prepping this ground to receive the new building required precision blasting that lowered the site’s elevation more than three stories, making way for an entrance on 165th Street. The operation had to be conducted while the hospital was functioning, and construction manager Bovis Lend Lease was hard-pressed not to give anyone a heart attack in the process.

The facility’s main entrance and lobby is on Fort Washington Avenue, three stories above the 165th Street entrance. A wide curving corridor leads visitors to a four-story atrium that functions as an events space and anchors the circulation by connecting the most important floors visually. Connections were made at each level to the existing buildings in such a seamless manner that one can travel between structures without realizing it.

The most architecturally prominent parts of the building exist for the purpose of opening the interior to natural light: the four-story atrium space, and the climate wall. The architects chose Pilkington Optiwhite glass for these assemblies and forwent performance coatings in order to keep the light coming through them as unadulterated as possible. This presented the challenge of creating the shading coefficient necessary to meet the project’s LEED Gold aspiration. In the atrium, the designers chose ceramic fritting for the 47-millimeter-thick insulated glass units. Above the first row of panels, which was left completely bare for unobstructed views, the units feature a 40 percent black dot frit on the number three surface. The atrium’s skylight is a bit more robust, featuring a 60 percent frit, which, when viewed from four stories below, is invisible. Bridges spanning the atrium to connect the expansion to the neighboring Irving Building were outfitted with frosted glass floors to keep the daylight moving all the way through the space.

The climate wall is more complex. It’s a double-curvature wall of a 22-millimeter-thick laminated glass outer wall and a 44-millimeter-thick insulated glass inner wall separated by a three-foot gap. A vertical shading system of motorized fiber-glass fabric louvers occupies this airspace. A computer program that tracks the sun controls the louvers, adjusting the shades and optimizing the amount of sunlight that passes through in the course of a day. In the evening the system is completely open, at midday it is completely closed, and a variety of conditions separate these two extremes, creating a dynamic play of light on the interior. In addition to housing the louvers, the airspace is also tied into the building’s mechanical system and functions as a thermal buffer that gives the wall an R-Value of 9.5. In the summer, exhaust air is passed through the gap, entering at the bottom and naturally venting out at the top. In the winter, the air is held in, creating a heat-saving blanket.

Rather than supporting the climate wall with Mullions, the architects employed tension rods that tie into a stiffened steel girder at the roofline and connect to the glass panels with spider-joint point supports. Both this facade and the glass wall in the atrium are hung from rod and cable tension systems and connected by spider-joint point supports. Keeps daylight coming in and views going out, but just to reinforce the connection to nature, the architects outfitted the walls inside with details of landscapes by the Hudson River School painters.

AARON SEWARD
The Cooper Union’s new academic building by Morphosis architect Thom Mayne is not only rekindling the school’s ability to inspire new generations of art, architecture and engineering students, its dynamic, shimmering form is igniting the imaginations of all who pass through Cooper Square as well. Much of this energy is owed to the unique transparency of the building’s steel-and-glass double skin wall system, reducing solar gain while bringing to light the ability of architects, and of ornamental metal, to transform design aspirations into reality.

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The winning design, Urban Umbrella, was developed by 28-year-old Young Hwan Choi from the University of Pennsylvania/Penn Design program, working with Agencie Group’s Andrés Cortés and Sarrah Khan. The award brings $10,000 for the team, whose design could become an accessory of choice for roughly one million linear feet of sidewalk now covered by more ad hoc sheds, according to Department of Buildings Commissioner Robert LiMandri, whose office helped lead the competition. Made of translucent colored fiberglass decking atop spreading palm supports, and meeting the same safety and structural requirements as the current model, the new sheds will cost 30 percent less than their $100-per-square-foot forebears, which have not been updated since the 1950s. Plans are underway to install a prototype of the Urban Umbrella at a Lower Manhattan construction site this summer, under the direction of the Downtown Alliance. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said at a news conference that the new sheds will be an option rather than a requirement, but when asked by AN if the city might lead the way by requiring them on all public projects, he replied, “Yes, absolutely.”

On January 21, the Bloomberg administration and the AIA New York chapter announced the winners of a competition to make sidewalks that border construction sites less dank and scary. Launched last August, the urbanSHED design competition attracted 164 submissions. There were no historical photographs of the original window, so it was impossible to recreate it accurately. “There was a great debate about what we should do about the window,” said Bonnie Dimun, executive director of the Museum at Eldridge Street. “Kiki and Deborah’s design resonated deeply with the board. We wanted a design that looked forward but also referenced the past.”

The design picks up existing motifs painted on the sanctuary’s walls. “The stars were what unified the place, which is very layered, very encrusted with ornament,” Gans said. “We thought the window was a beautiful opportunity to extend the wall into the light.”

“The building has always been a striking presence in the neighborhood,” added Amy Stein Milford, deputy director at the museum. “The builders drew on whatever was around, including both American symbols like five-pointed stars and Jewish symbols like the Star of David.”

Small, five-pointed stars swirl toward the window’s center, which features a large Star of David. The window will be fabricated from silicone-laminated glass, so light will come through gaps in the colored glass, unlike traditional leaded windows. Six curved ribs will provide structural support for the window and the cast-glass central star, which will extend out from the window, giving it texture and depth.

The round opening is currently filled with a window made from glass blocks, arranged in the shape of three tablets. The blocks will be saved and recycled as a donor and memorial window on the ground floor.

This is not the first time that Gans and Smith have worked together; They’ve been designing an addition to Smith’s house for several years. “You either get along really well with the person or you don’t at all,” Gans said. “We get along well enough that she asked me to collaborate with her.”

The Eldridge Street Synagogue’s journey from a near ruin to a beautiful cultural center was long and deliberate. After more than 20 years of work, the restoration of the elaborate sanctuary was completed in 2007, except for one important element: the rose window. After reviewing proposals by 11 teams of artists, the synagogue’s board of directors and staff selected a contemporary design by the artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans. It is expected to be complete this summer.

On the ground floor is a memorial wall on the ground floor. The design picks up existing motifs painted on the sanctuary’s walls. “The stars were what unified the place, which is very layered, very encrusted with ornament,” Gans said. “We thought the window was a beautiful opportunity to extend the wall into the light.”

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The safety rating has drawn notice largely due to controversy over the ultimate solution: a companion span that would be constructed parallel to the existing 84-year-old structure. Nearly five years ago, a bi-national design jury recommended a 567-foot-high, two-tower cable stay bridge conceived by Swiss designer Christian Menn. The height of the design drew outcry from environmental groups, and in 2008 the Federal Highway Administration determined that the design would have unacceptable impacts on fish and migratory birds and would have to be reconsidered.

Menn went back to the drawing board with bridge specialists Figg Engineering Group and two avian experts, and last year gained federal approval for five new bridge designs, each with towers or arches lower than 350 feet. Those proposals went on display for public review last month. Favoring its improved environmental impact and its harmony with the five-arch Peace Bridge, the frontrunner is a three-span concrete bridge with arches of graduated heights, the tallest at 226 feet.

State officials insist that federal approval will allow construction to move forward, but some are concerned about air quality in an adjacent historic neighborhood, and the likelihood that more than 100 properties would be in jeopardy. On that front, former Common Council member and State Senator Alfred T. Coppola continues to pursue a lawsuit over the construction of a new home in the bridge plaza development area.

Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, whose district includes the neighborhood in question, had favored a bridge that would replace, rather than span alongside, the Peace Bridge. Preceding the public open house on design proposals, Hoyt told reporters, “While I didn’t think we’re going to be on the covers of any great architectural magazines, the current design options are much more impressive than what we were originally talking about.”

Though optimistic about the public response, the state expects more lawsuits from opponents. And as long as travelers expect someone to answer for long delays at the border, Buffalo won’t have much peace on its plate. JENNIFER K. GORSCHE
Norval White, 1926–2009

continued from front page

born on June 12, 1926, a New York City native who lived first in Manhattan and then in Brooklyn Heights. Educated at MIT and at Princeton under Jean Labatut, he had a deep understanding of the history of architecture and urban design. Norval taught architectural design at Cooper, and left architecture and urban design. Norval taught the professional love of his life and his lasting legacy. Started in a time when IBM Selectric typewriters were still a novelty, the production of the early editions involved an immense effort of organization, research, and photography. Also unique for that time was the “voice” that Norval and Elliot established for their thousands of pithy, thumbnail project descriptions. I liken them to street-smart haiku by two hard-to-impress New Yorkers. Their directness was leavened by their enthusiasm for those projects they felt had made an original contribution, respected the neighborhood context, or overcame difficult conditions to improve the city.

I recall fondly when Norval was working on the second edition. He would join the CCNY Architecture faculty in the early 1970s on its excursions to a Chinese restaurant for lunch. But he always sat at a table by himself, avoiding conversation with the rest of us. Chopsticks in one hand and a stack of 4-by-5 cards by the other, he methodically annotated each with the narrative that would accompany the respective project. When the stack was finished, so was Norval’s lunch.

Norval helped found the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY) in the early 1960s to protest the imminent demolition of Penn Station and promote civic design. With Norval, Max Bond, Peter Samton, and many others, we staged picketing and marches in the ultimately fruitless effort to save that historic structure. Less well known is Norval’s work as an architect—with the firms of Levien Deliso White & Songer, and later Gruzen Samton—where his significant contribution was as project manager, with Peter Samton, for the Police Headquarters and Plaza in Lower Manhattan. In the last chapter of his architectural career he designed, with his wife Camilla Crowe, small residential projects characterized by classical simplicity and elegant detailing. A New Yorker to the end, Norval was working on the forthcoming fifth edition of the Guide from his home in France when he died.

Peter Samton

Gruzen Samton Architects

In the spring of 1962 Norval, then 35, together with Willemsky and a small handful of others, founded AGBANY at his office on East 61st Street. There was a small group of us young architects (he was the senior member), which also included the late Norman Jaffe, Costas Machlouzaris, Jordan Gruzen, and Diana Kirsch. We were alarmed that Penn Station was being designated for demolition. Our suspicion that cleaning, not tearing down, was being done prompted a Universal uproar. There followed a universal uproar. Gruzen and several others in 1967 at Gruzen & Partners, and worked on some major civic buildings that included the new Police Headquarters downtown, as well as winning a competition to build a stable in Central Park. The design was to be fully underground, adjacent to Calvert Vaux’s old stable at the 86th Street transverse. It would have been the first municipal “green” building, 40 years before its time. But the project was never built.

AGBANY decided to organize a picket line in front of the monumental McKim Mead & White station building, but we were fearful that the press would ignore us. Norval proposed having Philip Johnson appear and this, along with getting other modernists such as Ulrich Franzen and Aline Saarinen, did the trick. There followed a universal uproar.

Norval tried to make the case that if we pushed to have the grimy Penn Station cleaned (they were beginning to do this in Europe at that time, especially in Paris and London) then people would better appreciate the wonderful landmark in the midst. A year and a half later, demolition went ahead and in 1965 the Landmarks Preservation Commission was formed, in many ways a direct response to this tragic act of municipal vandalism.

When Penn Station was demolished it revealed, for everyone to see, that the granite exterior was a beautiful pink color, confirming our suspicion that cleaning, not tearing down, would have been the way to go.

Norval and I became partners with Jordan Gruzen and several others in 1967 at Gruzen & Partners, and worked on some major civic buildings that included the new Police Headquarters downtown, as well as winning a competition to build a stable in Central Park. The design was to be fully underground, adjacent to Calvert Vaux’s old stable at the 86th Street transverse. It would have been the first municipal “green” building, 40 years before its time. But the project was never built.

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HEIGHT ISSUES continued from front page

Bond streets can stand, and the commission is left with only the facade to debate. The developer was originally working with Dumbo-based TKA Studio on a wavy metallic design, but fearing that was too radical, brought in Smith-Miller + Hawkinson for the redo. The firm has had a number of envelope-pushing successes at the commission in recent years, including two for SDS. “We’re the hit-men for historic districts now,” Henry Smith-Miller said in an interview.

His proposal was to drop the metal sides in favor of stucco, and cover expansive windows with a stainless steel scrim with a pixilated leaf pattern. Smith-Miller said the leaves are a nod to Louis Sullivan’s Bayard-Condict Building on nearby Bleecker Street, while the materials and modern verve more closely resemble contemporary landmarks just down the block, including Herzog & de Meuron’s 40 Bond and Deborah Berke’s 48 Bond.

Community Board 2 broadly supported the plan in early January, requesting simply that the leaves be dropped for a more neoclassical approach. The board even supported a controversial 30-foot fence with a wavy pattern on the project’s Bond Street frontage that is intended to maintain the street wall while masking the taller building set behind it.

Despite the board’s approval, dozens of angry preservationists and neighbors turned out to the commission’s January 19 meeting on the building. “Honestly, well-designed refrigerators have more aesthetic appeal,” said Simeon Bankoff, executive director of the Historic Districts Council. Others realized the futility of complaining. “I agree that this is a problematic situation,” said Peter Davies, a neighbor. “I think with some input and revisions from Smith-Miller + Hawkinson, who I believe have been given an almost impossible task here, that something good can come of this.”

The commissioners were more enthusiastic, expressing general support for the project, though they withheld a vote on it for a later date. “I think you’ve presented a very inventive solution to the problem,” Commissioner Diana Chapin said. Others suggested the community was more upset with the presence of the hotel than with the design itself, something neither neighbors nor the commission could do anything about.

“The building works in the context as best I could do,” Smith-Miller told AN. “It’s a tall building, a modernist zoning envelope basically, and there’s really only so much you can do with it.”

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FEATURE

THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER FEBRUARY 17, 2010

Few cultural indicators are more sensitive than the retail landscape of shop windows and showrooms. While the flagships of Fifth Avenue may sail on with white-box minimalism intact, many smaller retailers are facing an economic imperative to make stores do more, for less. Today’s boutique often does double or triple duty as event space, gallery, and atelier—no small feat, especially in New York, where architects must adapt to pre-existing spaces rather than build ground-up. Yet in the process, they’ve sparked a new generation of stores that are multi-purpose, elegant, and downright witty without breaking the bank.

For the second branch of Matthew Malin and Andrew Goetz’s minimalist toiletry lab Malin+Goetz, which opened last year in a landmarked former barbershop on the Upper West Side, Konyk Architecture reckoned with cross-purposes when it came to brand identity: expressing the firm’s clinical style while also reflecting the new store’s particular place and time. “Matthew was concerned that it should have some warmth to it. Andrew felt we needed to continue the clean aesthetic of the original store. They were both right,” said architect Craig Konyk. So he lacquered the front and back of the store in a sleek white to match the Chelsea location, with embedded shelves illuminated by fluorescent bulbs. In the store’s midsection, Konyk affixed rough oak panels that he salvaged from a Long Island estate. Floating in front of the original wall, they offer hints of the building’s previous lives. “We strip the building down until we get to something authentic, like the existing brick, or tin, or this plaster with scratched green paint that we loved,” Konyk explained. The team tied old and new together by extending a pre-existing arched window with a futuristic circular cutout in the oak wall.

Achieving multiple aesthetic goals gets even trickier when your store has split personalities. For Puro Chile, a Chilean specialty boutique that opened on Soho’s Grand Street in September, the challenge facing Chilean architect Felipe Assadi was how to turn the large loft into a combination wine emporium, gourmet food store, and event space. Complicating matters was the city’s law against selling wine in a food store. Assadi’s solution involved moving parts: Against a glass barrier in the middle of the store stand

Gone are wenge wood slabs, white leather, and square mats. The new look in retail is decidedly ad hoc, cheap, and creative. And small shops are the place where architects can be inventive, as retailers discover that even a bit of design expression can pack enough punch to turn stores into destinations. By Julia Galef

STATE OF BOUTIQUES
eight 14-foot-tall stainless steel wine racks that rotate 360 degrees on their axes. In addition to maximizing storage, they wall off the wine section when turned flush against the glass, making it a separate entity during the day when the food store is in action. When rotated 90 degrees, they animate the space by creating a visual connection through the glass.

Assadi built even more flexibility into Puro Chile’s food section. The shelves lining its walls are attached to heavy-duty hinges so that they can swing around to close completely flat, and display cases in the middle of the store are on wheels to allow them to be cleared out with ease. As a result, Puro Chile can go from a packed store to an event space with a 150-person capacity in a matter of minutes. In its short tenure so far, it’s been used for everything from exhibition openings to fashion-week afterparties. “When I took the fashion week people here to preview the space they said, ‘What were you thinking? We can’t do a show here,’” a store spokesperson recalled. “But then we transformed the store and they said, ‘Oh wow—this is a beautiful, raw space.’” For firms tackling multi-use projects on a smaller budget, it helps to have a light touch and an interdisciplinary background. Brooklyn-based firm Tacklebox’s experience in furniture design and installations came in handy when they were hired to build a new home for Saipua, a small Red Hook outfit that sells handmade soaps and floral arrangements. Settling on a 700-square-foot warehouse space, Tacklebox had to create an intimate store setting and a back-of-house studio—all on a bare budget. Tacklebox’s solution was to think of the store as a large piece of furniture, building a 20-foot-square, freestanding box at the front of the space. “We really didn’t want to permanently attach to the warehouse,” said project architect Jeremy Barbour. The result was an intimately sized shop in which Saipua’s wares are displayed in cut-away shelves, after being crafted in the untouched warehouse behind the box. Although their tight budget was Tacklebox’s initial reason for seeking out salvaged wood, it was the perfect fit aesthetically, due in part to the geographic context of the store. “Red Hook is very close to the sea, and everything here has a bleached gray quality,” Barbour said. Unable to obtain salvaged wood locally, they turned to Craigslist to find a contractor selling beams that had been harvested from a collapsed Shaker barn in Michigan—the wood has a silvery hue that matches the faded beauty of Saipua’s new neighborhood.

Cost constraints served as creative inspiration at Italian winery Le Vigne as well, which opened on Greenwich Avenue in July. Working on an “astoundingly low” budget, according to MADLAB studio’s Petia Morozov, who designed the store with artists’ collective SPURSE, the team headed to Goodwill and the Salvation Army to scrounge up materials for a striking installation. In the center stands a jumble of chairs and tables fixed together in one 25-foot-long, white-painted assemblage in which the wine collection is embedded at jaunty angles. A second sculpture of found furniture crowds up close to the storefront window, blocking the street view into the interior and lending Le Vigne a surrealist air. The designers’ artistic approach obviated any costly changes to the 600-square-foot space, preserving its original walls and tin ceiling. Embodying the best of the new boutiques, their design serves as decor, display system, objet d’art, and marquee, all in one.
A kit of parts and boundless creative moxie have brought near-instant retail success to the young design group Rich Brilliant Willing

By Jennifer K. Gorshke

You wouldn't think you'd want the designer of a pocket liquor bottle to try a hand at your kids' playground, but somehow the design world's new triumvirate has managed to be all things to all people, so far. Formed in 2007 by RISD graduates Theo Richardson, Charles Brill, and Alexander Williams, Rich Brilliant Willing has already created several high-profile designs, from the Matryoshka coffee table and Excel floor lamp that debuted internationally in 2009, to picnic-friendly packaging for Norwegian aquavit company Unie and a play-structure entry for a competition sponsored by The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh.

The range of projects could be mistaken for the youthful abandon of a country that's not known for cultivating young design talent. The club's goal is to strengthen the international presence of brilliant and willing talent. The club is about to launch DEMO, for cultivating young design talent. Its goal is to strengthen the international presence of a country that's not known for cultivating young design talent. The publishing will undoubtedly bear advice for upcoming generations of brilliant and willing talent.

Said Williams, "It's a mish-mash of the urban environment," said Williams. "Making three pieces was a project. There are three of us, and each of our personal flairs shines through in the fixtures.

"It's true that we have these three distinct interests," said Richardson. "One of us is interested in materiality, one in form, and one is an inventor bringing spontaneity to the work." In today's market, this flexibility appears to be both survival tactic and advantage. The designers don't see themselves as specialists in a particular medium, allowing them to stretch their relationships with satisfied clients.

This year, Urban Outfitters will begin producing the studio's Newtility Lighting Collection, cast metal and wood dowels that integrate handy shelves and electrical outlets for recharging any gadget under the sun. Much of RBW's work has a temporary feeling, and all of it has a ready sense of humor, as if conceived by the writers for some late-night television comedy skit. But make no mistake: The scheme is deliberate and business-minded.
“The material options of the e_serie product line allow you to conceal or reveal the contents depending on what will be stored or displayed. The hardware, while minimal, allows for functional operation and multiple configurations. This versatility makes it easily adaptable for both residential and commercial settings.”

Stephan Jaklitsch
Stephan Jaklitsch Architects
www.teambywellis.ch

“AN editors chose these LED-illuminated casegoods that were standouts at the recent Cologne furniture fair. The piano-lacquered MDF cases have flexible strips of LEDs in white, red, green, or blue that offer even illumination across the display surface. Twenty different colors and 12 programs of lighting can be set by remote control.”

Stephan Jaklitsch
Stephan Jaklitsch Architects
www.xentelon.com

“In our work, we emphasize lightness, suspension, and flexibility, and the Arakawa systems help us achieve that, as they permit quick and easy reconfiguration of the space. We use them so frequently, in fact, that we often customize the systems and use them with standard pieces.”

Michael Gabellini
Gabellini Sheppard Associates
www.arakawagrip.com

“ALU is a great system. Autopole has been around a long time and it’s been used by many retailers and designers, and remains a very popular display system.”

Scott Anderson
Vice President for Retail Store Design, Estee Lauder Companies
www.alu.com

“We have worked on many projects with Fleetwood Fixtures where they have created high-quality, complex custom retail fixtures. Fleetwood embraces challenges while bringing experience to a project. They value collaboration, always providing mockups and samples while making suggestions for better detailing or installation.”

Dan Wood
Work AC
www.fleetwoodfixtures.com

“One shelving system I like in particular is by Rakks. The wall track is very low-profiled and the brackets are simple aluminum plate. One trick we have used is to have thick shelves custom-made, wide and deep enough to conceal the wall bracket, so you get the effect of a floating shelf without the expense.”

Matthew Baird
Matthew Baird Architects
www.rakks.com

Leading retail designers offer their go-to solutions for merchandise display. By Alan G. Brake

Nice Racks

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FEBRUARY

WEDNESDAY 17
LECTURES
Marcel Smilga
Infrastructure Design
in the Contemporary Landscape
6:30 p.m.
Harvard Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy St., Cambridge
gsd.harvard.edu
Takaharu Tezuka and
Yuki Tomita
Nostalgic Future
6:30 p.m.
Columbia GSAPP
Wood Auditorium
arch.columbia.edu
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Modernism at Risk:
Modern Solutions for Saving our Modern Landmarks
Back on the Map: Revisiting the New York State Pavilion at the 1964/65 World’s Fair
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl., www.aiany.org
TOUR
Contemplating the Void:
Interventions in the Guggenheim Museum
6:30 p.m.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
1071 5th Ave., archleague.org
THURSDAY 18
LECTURES
Eero Lehtola
Eero Saarinen’s Search for Architecture
6:30 p.m.
Yale University Art Gallery
McNeil Lecture Hall
1111 Chapel St., New Haven
www.architecture.yale.edu
John Edge, Jessica Harris, and Ted Lee
The Great Migration & Southern Cooking in New York City
6:30 p.m.
Museum of the City of New York
1220 5th Ave.
mcnyc.org
Rafael Viñoly
Current Work
7:00 p.m.
Cooper Union Great Hall
7 East 7th St.
archleague.org
SYMPOSIUM
Discussing an Enduring Legacy
David Adjaye, Peter Cook, Rodney Leon, et al.
5:00 p.m.
Pratt Institute School of Architecture
Higgins Hall Auditorium
61 St. James Pl., Brooklyn
www.pratt.edu
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
Compass & Rule: Architecture as Mathematical Practice
in England, 1650-1750
Yale Center for British Art
180 Chapel St., New Haven
www.yale.edu/cbfa
Quicktake: Tata Nano
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum
2 East 91st St.
www.cooperhewitt.org
FRIIDAY 19
LECTURE
Nuit Bali
Focus: Joseph Beuys
11:30 a.m.
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org
SATURDAY 20
EVENTS
Artist Forum: Economies in the Digital Age
11:00 a.m.
Art in General
79 Walker St.
www.artingeneral.org
Basic Proportion in Practice
10:00 a.m.
Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America
20 West 44th St.
www.classicist.org
WITH THE KIDS
Wilderness & Wildlife in New York City
Family Workshop
1:00 p.m.
Museum of the City of New York
1220 5th Ave.
www.mcnyc.org
MONDAY 22
LECTURES
Ben Fry
Defining Data Visualization
6:30 p.m.
Columbia GSAPP
Wood Auditorium
arch.columbia.edu
Craig Schwitter
Adaptive Environments
12:00 p.m.
Harvard Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy St., Cambridge
www.gsd.harvard.edu
Monte Wilson and
Bernard Haykal
The 21st Century School: King Abdullah University of Science and Technology
12:00 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, D.C.
nbm.org
Stephen Orr
Smart Gardens: Getting More with Less
6:30 p.m.
New York School of Interior Design
170 East 70th St.
cfa.iaign.org
Tom Vanderbilt: Traffic
6:30 p.m.
Paul Rudolph Hall
180 York St., New Haven
www.architecture.yale.edu
Seung H-Sang, Hyung Min Pai, and Yoonjin Park
Extended Topographies and the Korean Urban Condition
6:00 p.m.
Harvard Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy St., Cambridge
www.gsd.harvard.edu
TUESDAY 23
LECTURES
Alexandra Yaneva
Is Architecture Accountable?
6:30 p.m.
Columbia GSAPP
114 Avery Hall
arch.columbia.edu
Andrew Scott Dolkert
The Raw House Reborn
6:30 p.m.
The Skyscraper Museum
39 Battery Pl.
www.skyscraper.org
Bernard Tschumi with
Mohsen Mostafavi
New in New!!
12:00 p.m.
Harvard Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy St.
www.gsd.harvard.edu
EVENTS
Luncheon Winter Bird Walk
12:00 p.m.
American Museum of Natural History
Central Park West at 79th St.
www.amnh.org
RAPID RESPONSE:
Sustainable Architecture
6:30 p.m.
Studio-X
180 Varick St.
www.arch.columbia.edu
Robert Yaro, Linda Cox, Roland Laves, et al.
Opening Out Toward the Water: The Big Picture
5:30 p.m.
Hunter College
68th St. and Lexington Ave.
cuny sundaysaltkaleidoscopes.org
Shannon Sanders McDonald
Sustainable Design for Emerging Energy and Movement Technologies
12:30 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, D.C.
nbm.org
Dominique Perrault
Presence and Absence
6:30 p.m.
Columbia GSAPP
Wood Auditorium
Avery Hall
arch.columbia.edu
FILM
Selections from Montreal International Festival of Films on Art
3:00 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
cfa.iaign.org
SATURDAY 27
SYMPOSIUM
Footprint NYC
1:00 p.m.
Studio-X
180 Varick St.
www.arch.columbia.edu
SUNDAY 28
LECTURE
Sam Roberts
Only in New York
2:00 p.m.
Museum of the City of New York
1220 5th Ave.
www.mcnyc.org
MARCH
MARCH 1
LECTURE
Christopher Payne
6:00 p.m.
New Jersey School of Architecture
141 Summit St., Newark
architectural.njit.edu
TUESDAY 2
LECTURE
Raymond Neutra
6:30 p.m.
Columbia GSAPP
Wood Auditorium
Avery Hall
arch.columbia.edu
EXHIBITION OPENING
The Moureau: Medieval Tomb Sculptures from the
Court of Burgundy
Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 5th Ave.
www.metmuseum.org
RETOULING INDUSTRIAL SITES
Center for Architecture
1218 Arch Street, Philadelphia
Through March 26
Once the scourge of down-and-out inner cities, the relics of America’s industrial past now serve as inspiration for a fresh take on the urban landscape. The exhibit Retooling Industrial Sites at Philadelphia’s Center for Architecture investigates the reinvention of factories,warehouses, and power plants, presenting more than 50 projects from 3 design firms including SMP Architects, Behnisch Architects, and Olin. Along with examples of industrial reuse in Philadelphia—such as the Urban Outfitters headquarters at the city’s Navy Yard—the show includes projects across the country like Baltimore’s Clipper Mill foundry and the Hubokan Waterfront Plan. Also on view are photographer Jacob Helmim’s portraits of vacant Philadelphia factories, among them his series Five Floors No Production (Robert Bruce Sweater Co.) (2009, above). Presented by the Community Design Collaborative with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, the show is part of the five-year Infill Philadelphia initiative to help spark community reinvestment.

DAIDO MORIYAMA: HAWAI
Luhring Augustine Gallery
531 West 24th Street
Through March 13
Daido Moriyama emerged as a photographer in the 1960s as a vanguard of Japanese artists pushed the boundaries of the medium. Inspired by Jack Kerouac’s On the Road, Moriyama began shooting landscapes from moving vehicles with a small, hand-held camera. His high-contrast, grainy images reveal a fascination with the contradictions that arise when age-old traditions meet modern society, whether in the tango halls of Buenos Aires or the back alleys of Shinjuku. In his latest photographic series, Hawai (2007, above), Moriyama turns his lens on the islands of Hawaii and Oahu. Revisiting these locales before feeling prepared to shoot his surroundings, Moriyama seems to delight as much in the process of making images as in the poetry he finds in desolation. As the 77-year-old photographer put it in a recent interview with The Japan Times: “As long as I can walk, I will continue wandering the streets.”
Mark Girouard will turn 80 next year. During his long career as an architectural historian, he has produced some of the most engaging and important books on English architecture ever written. Life in the English Country House, the Victorian Country House, and Sweetness and Light: The Queen Anne Movement will continue to delight and inform readers for generations. Girouard is that rare scholar who maintains his authority while also engaging his audience with prose that is witty, humane, surprising, and often quirky.

Following in the footsteps of Christopher Hussey, John Summerson, and Nicholas Pevsner, Girouard has emerged as the éminence grise of English architecture.

After cutting his teeth as a writer for Country Life in the 1950s, Girouard produced a book that remains the touchstone of his interests as a researcher, Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era (1966). While studying the collection of Smythson’s drawings at the Royal Institute of British Architecture in London, Girouard recognized that this little-known master was at the center of a revolution in English architecture that began during the late 16th century. The puzzling and often bizarre elements in Elizabethan houses were not simply curios applied to late-medieval house types, but rather demonstrated the same bold and cosmopolitan sensibility that pervades the poetry of John Donne, the plays of Shakespeare, and the music of Thomas Morley.

Elizabethan architecture, he argued, was exciting enough to command the attention of midcentury hipsters and intellectuals otherwise focused on Archigram and the Beatles. Girouard’s discoveries were wide-ranging, eventually leading him to study the English country house as a cultural bellwether for his country’s imperial history. Yale University Press published a dozen books that made Mark Girouard a star among architectural writers—a notoriety that this shy man endured with some trepidation. During his sabbatical from Elizabethan studies, other scholars filled the gaps in the story he had outlined. Meanwhile, Girouard squirreled away new information on obscure buildings and craftsmen that might appear in a magnum opus.

That opus has arrived, and it was worth the wait. At a time when publishers have generally eschewed printing large and expensive art books, Elizabethan Architecture looks like the product of a richer and more confident period. The color photos and the design are lavish, and the price daunting. For those with the money and patience to tackle a big project, the book will reward diligent efforts.

In eight richly illustrated chapters, the author covers familiar subjects such as social history and patronage, as well as more specialized areas of new research. How did Renaissance classicism reach the Elizabethans after the Tudor renunciation of Catholicism? What lay behind the geometric and ornamental symbolism that we find in Elizabethan houses? What role did technology play in the “towers of glass” that emerged during the 18th century? Who were the craftsmen behind these masterpieces? Were new literary sources and visual conceits more Flemish than Italian in origin? How important were old-fashioned Gothic building patterns to Elizabethan builders in practice? Especially in the initial three chapters, Girouard demonstrates his usual flair and brilliant prose style in explicating the fundamental themes that underlay the new architecture of the mid-16th century. His extraordinary command of literary and visual material moves the story along swiftly. Matching new photos with obscure woodcuts from Serlio and other writers, he explains the subtleties of Italian, French, Flemish, and English approaches to mythology and classical iconology. No English writer is more capable of melding complex visual explication with elegant prose. Moreover, when quotations from primary sources are required, Girouard finds the perfect examples to advance his arguments. Even to the uninitiated, the
results are dazzling. Chapters 4 and 5 are full of delightful insights and breathtaking illustrations. How many contemporary architects, I wonder, recognize that the first largely glass buildings were designed by Robert Smythson and John Thorpe rather than Ludwig Mies van der Rohe? Multiple small panes of glass were set in lead caming and limestone mullions at such masterworks as Hardwicke Hall (“more glass than wall”) to produce interior spaces with astounding amounts of natural light, brighter than many of today’s museum rooms. My first trip to Hardwicke in the 1980s was a revelation—how modern it appeared to a young architect accustomed to the dull corporate skyscrapers of New York and New Haven.

Another revelation was the mystical and (until Girouard) opaque meaning behind Thomas Tresham’s Triangular Lodge at Rushton, Northamptonshire (1594–5). “Elizabethan architecture,” notes the author, was designed “to inform, to exhort, to encourage, to delight or to mystify.” Purposely built to house Tresham’s “warriner” or rabbit warden, the structure was in fact a secret banqueting hall and served as a retirement home for its owner who had spent 12 years in prison for his religious convictions. In addition to its obvious Trinitarian symbolism (the Mass and the Twelve Apostles. Such “concepts” were common at the time, but were seldom so intensely pursued in a building (eat your hearts out, admirers of John Hejduk). The final three chapters of Elizabethan Architecture are disappointing only in relation to the standard the author set for himself earlier in the book. Most readers will, I think, find the material too dense and technical to sustain their interest, though the illustrations are fascinating. Page upon page of chimneypieces, woodcarvings, strapwork ceilings, and numerous woodcuts of ornament from books of the period are apt to leave most non-specialists bewildered despite Girouard’s nimble comparisons. Kudos goes to Gillian Malpass and her design team for keeping the pages easy on the eye. The back matter contains a fine index and dense references.

Will this book sustain the same wide appeal as Girouard’s books on the country house? No, nor should it. The author is well into retirement and needs no additional laurels. He has left his indelible imprint on both the practice of architectural history and on its students. He has brought countless new readers to the field because he writes so well for general audiences. And, most importantly, he has consistently demonstrated that buildings cannot be properly understood without understanding the people who design and use them. Elizabethan Architecture adds an exclamation point to the career that has come to resemble the literature it reflects.

MARK ALAN HEWITT IS AN ARCHITECT, HISTORIAN, AND PRESERVATIONIST BASED IN BERNARDSVILLE, NEW JERSEY.

TILTING AMBITION continued from page 10. Snow-white Carrara marble angling down into the waters of the fjord, serving as a roof for the glassy lobby and theaters below, and as a public promenade for strolling crowds above. “Not a sculptural monument,” as its creators put it, “a social monument.” The whole thing is thrillingly glacier-like, although a fastidious observer could ask for considerably greater formal and topological continuities between the external and internal circulation surfaces. Other works range from smaller-scaled Norwegian projects (an alluringly Aaltoesque museum in Lillehammer; a severely Fehnian art center in Karmoy) to huge on-the-boards schemes for hotels and cultural centers on the Arabian Peninsula—the conventionally curvilinear convexity of which suggest that the firm has decided to develop a diversity of formal vocabularies in different contexts, or to more directly express the possibly distinct visions of current principals Kjetil Thorsen and Craig Dykers. Or that they’ve been looking at a lot of shiny metal balloon sculptures by Jeff Koons. Snøhetta glided into American architectural consciousness with another competition-winning scheme, this one for what is now called the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion in downtown Manhattan. The attention of that name speaks to the tragicomic decline of civic and architectural ambition for the former site of the World Trade Center: What was to have been a 325,000-square-foot home for several cultural institutions was reduced to a 60,000-square-foot escalator pavilion for a subterranean museum and the display of fragments of the signature Yamasaki facade. Too bad. The original scheme was uplifting: sculpturally appearing to rise through and above the ground, translucently illuminating an iridescent atrium. In current reduced form, it’s still the very best building to date in the downtown reconstruction. Deft tilts along the building’s north facade and roof develop a torqued and tensioned volume that calmly consolidates the spatial and psychological stresses at that point in the streetscape. The result is a landmark that directs but doesn’t distract from the adjacent tower-footprint memorial complex.

This exemplifies what the current exhibition demonstrates about Snøhetta’s work: something as simple as sustained attention to the ground plane has allowed their projects to transcend vicissitudes of tastes and clients. At Ground Zero, Snøhetta’s work is a crisp tonic to the bathetic flim-flam that accompanied the initial masterplanning of the area, and the developer-driven mediocrities that followed. It supports the notion that more of the egalitarian and global architectural competitions that have driven much of Snøhetta’s success could allow architecture to transcend the provincial narcissisms and internecine deadlocks that so often undermine its potential to uplift cities—even and especially in New York. Now that would be a good idea.

THOMAS DE MONTCHAUX IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO AN.

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