 Randall’s Reborn

Randall’s Island has long been a daunting landscape of deteriorating ball fields and overgrown parkland. But on May 19, the Randall’s Island Sports Foundation (RISF) announced the completion of more than 60 new athletic fields, one of the final pieces of a decade-long effort to revive the island as a recreational destination. Along with acres of landscaped open space, a waterfront promenade, and other public amenities, the vast project has transformed the forlorn site for residents of East Harlem and the city beyond.

The $130 million field project, launched in 2007, fulfills the dream of

TERMINAL HOUR

Preservationists have been trying for years to obtain a landmark designation for the 1970 I. M. Pei–designed Terminal 6 at JFK Airport, but they may have run out of time. On April 29, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey announced its intention to demolish the terminal, calling it “obsolete,” and arguing that maintaining it was not

DOWNTOWN MUSLIMS FIGHT TO BUILD A COMMUNITY CENTER

It’s Not a Mosque

Sharif El-Gamal and Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf have spent some ten years trying to create an Islamic community center downtown. Yet it only took the month of May for that dream to almost unravel when it came up

NEGRO LEAGUE STADIUM NAMED ONE OF 2010’S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

ROOTING TO SAVE

Full-sized trees now grow between the stands of the Depression-era Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson, New Jersey, which last month was named one of the “11 Most Endangered Historic Places” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Built by public funds in 1932, the concrete, horseshoe-shaped structure is one of only three still-standing stadiums that housed the professional Negro League during the Jim Crow era. The stadium was shuttered in 1997 when the Paterson Public School district, which had been

PORTZAMPARC WOOS NYC WITH TWO BOLD NEW PROJECTS

FRENCH KISSED

Christian de Portzamparc’s name has barely been heard in New York since his LVMH Tower on 57th Street went up in 1999, a harbinger of all the brand-name architecture to come. That’s about to change as the firm, Atelier Christian de Portzamparc, gets underway with two of its largest projects to date,
The indignities of international airline travel are legendary: from the time we take off our shoes at security, to the cramped legroom, to the long lines at U.S. customs counters. All these make airline travel one of the most dreaded adventures of modern life. But making it even worse for those departing from or landing in New York is the deplorable condition of local airports. It is depressing to enter nearly all the JFK terminals with their dirty and ragged commercial carpets, long, narrow, windowless transit passages, and pitted and scuffed sheetrock.

It may be hard to recall now, but JFK was not always an inferno of bad to bland terminal design, “deferred” maintenance, and commercialization of every possible wall surface. When it was opened in the public in 1962, Eero Saarinen’s TWA flight terminal, with its soaring spaces and Raymond Loewy–designed restaurant, must have been as thrilling as any of the new airports in Paris, Madrid, London, or Tokyo. This terminal, which defined the very idea of “Jet Set” travel in the 1960s, was deemed unsuitable for the needs of 21st-century travel and slated for demolition, but then saved by local preservationists after years of fighting. The airline that “saved” the terminal—JetBlue—wrapped Saarinen’s organic design with a hulking, soulless structure that jettisoned TWA to a sad and useless existence at the side-lines of the much larger warehouse.

Now, JetBlue wants to enlarge its JFK presence even more by demolishing the adjacent Terminal 6, designed by I. M. Pei in 1970. Most likely, the airline will replace it with another bland barn. While not as flamboyantly iconic a work of architecture as TWA, Terminal 6 is nevertheless an important building for its technological sophistication and early use of glass mullions. Cleaned up and restored, it is far better than anything built—or likely to be built—at the airport anytime soon. Why not save Pei’s building and repurpose it into a complex that includes TWA and the newer structures, showing the way to a new type of “historic” yet functioning airport center? JetBlue could save a historic property that belongs to the glorious days of international travel and prove its green credentials by saving perfectly usable structures.

FLIGHT PATTERN

FLOODS OF FEDERAL FUNDING?
The services of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are a commonplace in disaster recovery. Many federal and local officials praise the agency, which was established in 1979, for its quick response, coordination, and overall effectiveness. However, the agency’s role in funding emergency measures has been significantly reduced over the years.

In the past, FEMA provided funding for a wide range of emergency relief measures, including temporary shelters, disaster-related expenses, and the purchase of disaster-related goods and services. However, in recent years, the agency’s funding role has been limited to providing disaster assistance grants and loans to state and local governments, as well as to non-profit organizations and individuals affected by disasters.

Some critics argue that this limited role in funding emergency measures is insufficient and that FEMA should be more involved in providing financial assistance to those affected by disasters. They argue that the agency’s role in funding emergency measures has been reduced due to budget constraints and that the agency should be more proactive in providing financial assistance to those affected by disasters.

Funding for emergency measures is a critical issue for many affected by disasters, as it can be difficult to recover from the financial impact of a disaster without sufficient funding. Some argue that the limited role of FEMA in funding emergency measures is insufficient and that the agency should be more involved in providing financial assistance to those affected by disasters.
SieMatic S2.
The latest from the inventors of the handle-free kitchen.

Each new SieMatic kitchen developed over the past five decades set a standard for design, function and perfection. The 50th anniversary of the SieMatic brand marks a new chapter in the history of the “handle-free kitchen.” Introducing the SieMatic S2. More at: www.siematic.com/s2
A new skatable landscape has opened at Chelsea Cove, the latest section of New York’s expanding West Side greenway. Replacing an existing skate facility on Pier 62, the 15,000-square-foot skate park is the first of its kind to be built on a pier. To reduce the park’s load while achieving its 10-foot depth, blocks of structural EPS foam were used as a base, sanded on site, and topped with reinforced concrete and shotcrete. The clover-shaped bowl is accompanied by street elements circling the periphery, including ledges, stairs, and rails. “We wanted to provide a different style of skate experience,” said Brian Moore, of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA) to integrate the facility with the rest of the roughly 8-acre park. “Our main vision was to create not only a park for people moving along the bikeway, but primarily for the community,” said MVVA senior associate Peter Arato. To this end, designers blurred the division between upland and pier, while adding a mix of uses, including a green roof–topped carousel.

REBECCA GORDAN

RALLY ROUND THE LOGO

We love a good scandal, particularly when it involves skyscrapers and signage, and that’s just what was brewing when the North Carolina Museum of Art unveiled its bold new graphic identity shortly before completing its $506 million expansion designed by Thomas Phifer. Pentagram’s Michael Bluerut created the identity, confessing to us at a press jaunt that “I knew a lot of people would look at it and think ‘WT?’” His transformation of the museum’s staid logo was not instantly legible, but it was undeniably chunky and way clever. The custom alphabet borrows curves not only from the museum’s own oval skyskys but the geometric letterforms are also a nod to Josef Albers, who taught at almost nearby Black Mountain College. Small comfort for locals who bristled at the cool, Bauhausian look. Luckily, when the Tar Heels pazed up at the skyskys, they saw the light. Graphically, that is.

UNBEIGE BLUSHES AT BLUNDER

The blog Unbeige fumbled a bit of news that everyone has been awaiting for eons: the announcement that Paige Rense, editor-in-chief of Architectural Digest, was retiring. Rense has been at Digest since before most living creatures today were born, starting back in the ’70s. Only thing is, Unbeige made her the “longtime editor” of Architectural Record. Robert Ivy, the editor of that publication, joked that he “was not going to leave Digest anytime soon.”

GEHRY GROWLS

At a press luncheon presenting the New World Symphony academy in Miami designed by Frank Gehry, we were seated next to the architect himself and managed to hold his attention, that is, until Victoria Newhouse announced she’d come straight from hand surgery. Still, Gehry did mention to us the hoopla dogging him since he told Tom Pritzker that going for LEED has become overly politicized. He said he cannot believe the attacks on his commitment to sustainability, harboring special disdain for Horace Havemeyer III, the publisher of Metropolis, who wrote a condescending and sanctimonious letter, Gehry said, that he did not appreciate one little bit. Burn, bridges, burn!

COMMUNITY MEETINGS ATTRACT YOUNGER PARTICIPANTS WITH SIMULATION VIDEOS

A roomful of gray hair is par for the course at most community planning meetings. The luring of a new generation of participants has long stymied community developers and planners. So a diverse group in Boston decided that if young people weren’t likely to show up at community meetings, they’d join them on their turf by making community planning play like a video game.

A $170,000 MacArthur Foundation grant was awarded last year to the team aiming to integrate computer gaming into the planning process. Using Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood as a testing ground, Eric Gordon, a New Media professor at Emerson College and software developer Muzzy Lane led members of the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in creating a game set in a virtual replica of the real Chinatown. In May, they launched the game at local planning meetings across the actual neighborhood.

Participants play as one of 15 characters, each with a goal and a life story modeled after interviews with real-life denizens of Chinatown. They include “Mei Sooho,” who immigrated recently to help look after her grandchildren and wants to find housing near other senior citizens, as well as a Tufts dental student “Evan Mira,” who wishes he could find an inexpensive place to hang out and study late at night. In the shoes of Mei, Evan, or one of the 13 other avatars, participants explore the virtual neighborhood and collect points for the progress they make toward finding the housing, job, or social space their character wants.

Afterwards, participants discuss the constraints they encountered as their character and the tradeoffs the neighborhood faces. For example, more commercial zoning will create jobs, but at the expense of space for affordable housing. “One of the goals of this process was to get people to think about their own personal preferences in relation to their character’s preferences,” Gordon said. “If someone said, ‘We need more Starbucks on the corner’ or something, other people in the room might respond, ‘Well, how would your character, Hong Yee, feel about that?’”

The time is ripe for such discussions. Boston’s Chinatown is in flux, with expensive real estate accumulating and tourist hotels opening. Expansions of the Tufts and Emerson campuses are in the works, with developers closely eyeing the adjacent under-utilized industrial land to the south. With the launch of the game, those discussions not only engage a wider swath of society—the mean age at meetings is now a mere 30 years—but are also sparking more enthusiasm. “I never heard anyone cheer at a community planning meeting before,” said ACDC’s executive director Janelle Chan.

JULIA GALEF
**TERMINAL HOUR continued**

from front page

TERMINAL HOUR continued from front page a prudent use of resources. “This came as quite a surprise to us, and a great disappointment,” said Pei Cobb Freed partner George Miller.

The terminal, which originally housed National Airlines and later JetBlue, is due to be razed, along with six cargo buildings and hangars, at a cost of $42.3 million, yielding estimated savings of $1.7 million each year thereafter. Although no precise date for the demolition has been set, the Port Authority predicts it will happen next year, after which time JetBlue will use the space to build an expansion for their growing international operations.

Terminal 6 sits next to another pedigreed building at JFK, the 1962 Eero Saarinen–designed Terminal 5, which the Port Authority agreed to preserve largely intact after heavy lobbying from the public and preservationists several years ago. However, without the landmark designation that Saarinen’s building enjoys, Terminal 6 will have a more difficult time obtaining a stay of execution. “The Saarinen building has historic status. The I. M. Pei building does not,” said Port Authority spokesperson Ron Marsico. Pei Cobb Freed, along with preservationists like New York Tristate DOCOMOMO, disagree. They cite the terminal’s expansive, clear-span pavilion space, a style that set a precedent for later I. M. Pei buildings such as the Louvre Museum’s pyramid and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston. Its all-glass facade was created with an unprecedented use of glass mullions in place of the typical metal ones, above which hangs a series of glass panels, one of the first suspended glazing systems built in the United States.

To add to the terminal’s airy feel, Pei’s team devised an innovative drainage system that feeds into the terminal’s exterior concrete columns, to avoid having to extend a vertical column of ductwork down from the ceiling. “The transparency of the glass and the uninterrupted ceiling are what give the building its character,” said Pei Cobb Freed partner Michael Flynn. The design is also notable for its approach to managing congestion, which in 1970 was just beginning to be a major pressure at airports. “We were designing just as there was this colossal expansion in the capacity of planes,” Flynn said. Rather than placing the arriving and departing passenger traffic in the same location at the front of the building as was the norm, Pei separated the main terminal from the airline gates with a raised walkway, creating space behind the building for arrivals and leaving the front of the building exclusively for departures. An innovative approach then, separation is now standard.

DOCOMOMO is now in talks with other local organizations to band together in support of Terminal 6, and is calling for public support for preservation or reuse. “It would be a total waste of energy and money and resources to demolish a building of this scale,” said DOCOMOMO–New York chair Nina Rappaport. JetBlue did respond to calls for comment.

Building on the last remaining site in McKim Mead & White’s Columbia campus wasn’t the only challenge architect José Rafael Moneo faced in designing the university’s new science center. It also had to be built atop a gymnasium without disrupting athletics. So Arup engineers envisioned the new structure as a large truss—its diagonals reflected in a daring crisscross façade—and erected it using an ingenious system possible only with structural steel. This innovation not only kept the gym in operation but also produced the vibration-free spaces so critical for laboratory work. As the final piece in a century-old campus puzzle, this new classic in a Beaux Arts setting proves there’s more than one way to bridge a generation gap.

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Architect: José Rafael Moneo
Executive Architect: Davis
Associate Engineer: Arup

Photo: © Adam Friedberg
For years, overnight visitors attending Fallingwater’s educational programs have bunked down in a cramped, four-bedroom house near Frank Lloyd Wright’s masterpiece in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. “We were literally sardining up to 16 students in that house at one time,” said Lynda Waggoner, director of Fallingwater and vice president of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, which operates the property. “We realized that demands on our programming operated the property. “We realized that demands on our programming were overwhelming our capacity. "We felt this was not about a new building having a conversation with Fallingwater,” Waggoner said. “It was about a new building having a conversation with the landscape.”

Jeff Byles

LOW-ImpACT COTTAGES TO HOUSE FALLINGWATER VISITORS

ROOMING WITH WRIGHT

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Jeff Byles
SHUSAKU ARAKAWA, 1936–2010

There are just a handful of artists who have altered the direction of cultural history, and Shusaku Arakawa, who died on May 18, is arguably one of them. Beginning with his seminal publication of The Mechanism of Meaning in 1971, a philosophical experiment that received extensive praise by artists and physicists alike, Arakawa contributed to what in the curatorial field we often call “open works,” namely projects that have neither a fixed beginning nor end. His works were beautiful in being visionary, and were designed to stimulate controversy and discourse, just as his ideas were intentionally provocative.

Arakawa is particularly known for his early period of work, following the Japanese artist’s arrival in New York in 1961 and his friendship with Marcel Duchamp, who would have a great influence on his practice in later years. Together with his partner Madeline Gins, whom he met in 1963, he founded the Architectural Body Research Foundation, and went on to exhibit internationally. But it is the period when he moved more explicitly toward architecture that is of particular interest. During this time Arakawa and Gins designed and built several major projects and published their writings extensively.

Arakawa was interested in a purely theoretical form of architecture, one that was performative and whimsical while being deadly serious in its intent to resist conventional wisdom. One of his key concepts was “reversible destiny,” through which he argued that mortality was irrelevant, and if anything, an ethical challenge to be overcome. “Another way to read reversible destiny,” Arakawa and Gins argued in Architectural Body (2002), and “a less radical way, but for some people, we are given to understand, a perhaps less terrifying and therefore more inviting way—is as an open challenge to our species to reinvent itself and to desist from foreclosing on any possibility, even those our contemporaries judge to be impossible.”

Profundely concerned that architects had neglected the human body, Arakawa sought to remedy that fact through an embrace of flexible spaces, colorful materials, and organic forms in his many architectural renderings. His built works too were playfully unconventional, such as the Bioscleave House, completed on Long Island in 2008. Composed of an undulating concrete terrain sweeping around a sunken kitchen and central living space, the house is intended to keep its occupants literally off-balance and thus awake to the world around them. This strategy of creatively disorienting a structure’s inhabitants was applied on a large scale in a park in Gifu Prefecture in Japan, known as the Site of Reversible Destiny–Yoro Park. Opened in 1995, the 7-acre site includes a steeply-sloped basin with mounds, hollows, and pavilions meant to revitalize visitors through dynamic cognitive and perceptual experiences.

Arakawa’s approach dovetailed with larger developments in the visual arts, in which space became an increasing focus of work that was situated outside of the frame, gallery, or museum. As curator and director of the Slought Foundation in Philadelphia, where we have had the pleasure of collaborating with Arakawa and Gins over the years, I am indebted to Arakawa’s efforts to expand the fields of art and architecture. Besides anticipating many of today’s social, ecological, and discursive concerns, his holistic approach encourages us to move beyond the museum itself to enact a transformative politics of engagement. Perhaps the creator of “reversible destiny” would want us to think of his death not as the end, but as one more step in enacting his legacy of a life-enhancing architecture that makes possible a continual redefinition of culture itself.

AARON LEVY
At Shanghai’s Expo 2010, which runs through October, the two world powers—China and the U.S.—may be offering dispiriting visions of the future, the former with its kitschy, grandiose Oriental Crown; the latter with the bland convention-center look. (“It’s fine,” was all Hillary Clinton could say about the building on a recent visit.) But there were still plenty of design efforts that citizens of other nations could be proud of: By far, the showstopper has been London-based Thomas Heatherwick’s U.K. Pavilion, a marshmallow-shaped stunner called the Seed Cathedral that sprouts some 60,000 transparent rods, each implanted with seeds at the tip that sway in the breeze, funnel light by day, and glow by night. South Korea’s contribution designed by Mass Studies of Seoul takes the concept of “sign and space” literally and extrapolates the Korean Han-guel alphabet into three dimensions while pixilating it in two, with thousands of Han-guel panels on the exterior by Korean artist Ik-joong Kang. And for Spain, the Barcelona architects Miralles Tagliabue/EMBT created a twisting, writhing structure clad in exquisitely crafted wicker scales. Three cheers for making smaller better.

Aric Chen
Below street level in a West Village brownstone is OHWOW, a pocket-sized bookstore whose design was inspired by a 1988 Swatch watch. Streamlined graphics and angular mylar shapes were chosen to create a mood of “disorientation and melancholy” that focuses visitors on the space, said designer Rafael de Cárdenas. “It makes them forget where they are coming from, and sucks them into this world.” Drawing on his vintage Swatch collection, along with the geometric patterns of Navajo blankets and prewar New York City bathrooms, Cárdenas transformed what once was a Laundromat into a sleekly styled lair for the creative collective OHWOW, which specializes in downtown art offerings. Serving both as boutique and reading room, the 150-square-foot space includes a black-and-white tiled floor, as well as a floating shelving system illuminated by raw bulbs on porcelain bases, and fluorescent light fixtures in the ceiling. In a few bold moves, Cárdenas offers a strong identity for the collaborative, which aims to make artist-produced goods more accessible to the public. “Generally, bookstores tend to be under-designed,” he said. “But I think it’s better to be a flash in the pan.”
The Riverside Center and Carnegie 57, both for flourishing diamond-dealer-turned-developer Gary Barnett and his Extell Development.

“They’re very reasonable, they’re not prima donnas,” Barnett said in an interview. “We give them all kinds of challenges to hit and they do. They’re creative and also able to handle the challenges of building in New York and designing in New York and keeping the budget in mind while still coming up with something spectacular.”

Both the Riverside Center and Carnegie 57 present considerable challenges. The former occupies the final site at Riverside South, an 8-acre space that was originally designated for a 2 million-square-foot TV studio. Instead, Barnett has proposed a 3 million-square-foot residential complex with six signature crystalline towers by de Portzamparc. The City Planning Commission certified the project on May 24, kicking off the seven-month public review process.

The following day, the announcement of Carnegie 57 made the front page of The New York Times, touting that it would become the tallest residential tower in the city at 1,005 feet, surpassing both Frank Gehry’s Beekman Tower (867 feet) and the Trump World Plaza (861 feet). More noteworthy, perhaps, is the fact that the tower, which Barnett hopes will command the highest prices in the city, is coming along at a time when the economy is improving but far from the heights of the early 21st century.

Foundation work began on Carnegie 57 in April and steel girders should be rising above the sidewalk by the end of June. Barnett had been trying to make the site—near 7th Avenue, across from Carnegie Hall—larger but he wound up with an offset-L where the 57th Street frontage is 150 feet compared to 70 feet on 58th Street.

André Terzibachian, a de Portzamparc principal, said the greatest challenge for the designers was determining how to take this unusual lot, along with the strict setbacks mandated by the zoning code, and craft it into an elegant, cohesive tower. De Portzamparc decided to curve the setbacks, creating a cascading effect to express “New York’s vertical energy,” according to Terzibachian.

The east and west are more like cuts than cascades—part because the vertical reflections had to be masked in the crook of the L where a semi-abstracted “Klint” pattern, in the architect’s words, employs a third type of glass. The most difficult part of the design was making it all invisible from the inside. “Our client’s concern is that it had to be as nice as possible, not too aggressive,” Terzibachian said.

Barnett demurs at the suggestion that brand-name architecture is a new approach for a firm that has worked in the past with the likes of Costas Kondylis, Lucien Lagrange, Cetra/Ruddy, and Cook + Fox. “We seek out the right architect and the right aesthetic for the inside. “Our client’s concern is that it had to be as nice as possible, not too aggressive,” Terzibachian said.

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NEWS

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been trying to make the site—near 7th Avenue, the sidewalk by the end of June. Barnett had April and steel girders should be rising above Foundation work began on Carnegie 57 in architectural bombast just a few years ago. is improving but far from the heights of coming along at a time when the economy command the highest prices in the city, is fact that the tower, which Barnett hopes will (861 feet). More noteworthy, perhaps, is the Tower (867 feet) and the Trump World Plaza feet, surpassing both Frank Gehry's Beekman Portzamparc decided to curve the setbacks, mandated by the zoning code, and craft it this unusual lot, along with the strict setbacks the designers was determining how to take principal, said the greatest challenge for this unusual lot, along with the strict setbacks

Click 350

night light

Creating a cascading effect to express “New York’s vertical energy,” according to Portzamparc. The east and west are more like cuts than cascades—in part because the vertical reflections had to be masked in the crook of the L where a semi-abstracted “Klimt” pattern, in the architect’s words, employs a third type of glass. The most difficult part of the design was making it all invisible from the inside. “Our client’s concern is that it had to be as nice as possible, not too aggressive,” said Terzibachian.

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A similar system in the Bronx has sped up buses by 30 percent. After years of planning, New York City is finally moving ahead with one of its more ambitious yet simple transportation projects: a bus rapid transit system serving eastern Manhattan. On June 7, city officials announced that starting in October, new dedicated bus lanes would be installed northbound on 1st Avenue and southbound on 2nd, serving much like an overland subway with stations every ten blocks or so, where passengers will pay before boarding. Signal prioritization, another time-saving maneuver, is planned for a future phase beginning next year. The project is meant to alleviate congestion, speed up buses that now take 90 minutes to cover the 8.5-mile route from Houston to 125th Street, and create a “complete streets” system, though a protected bike lane that was to have run the entire length of the route will now terminate at 34th Street. A similar system in the Bronx has sped up buses by 30 percent.

Speaking of long-gestating projects, it took two years, but the Related Companies finally signed a contract for Hudson Yards with the MTA on May 26. It happened to be the same day The Wall Street Journal revealed that the developer received a major investment of $475 million from the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System toward the $15 million, 26-acre development on the Far West Side. Related put $217 million into escrow as part of its deal with the MTA, but will not begin paying the $1 billion it agreed to when it took over from Tishman Speyer—the initial winning bidder in 2008—until a series of triggers, agreed to in April, are met, such as Midtown commercial vacancy rates at 11 percent (around 14 percent in May) and AIA commercial billings above 50 (48.5 in April).
Reconstruction work at the World Trade Center in New York has required a level of coordination and cooperation that would demoralize even the largest of integrated design firms. This is especially true of the transit hub, which reaches out to connect the various buildings on the site with multiple train lines traversing Lower Manhattan.

The way it is told in the halls of AECOM—the company in charge of the hub’s engineering, site preparation, PATH facilities, security, wayfinding systems, and more—getting a handle on Santiago Calatrava’s vision for the project proved to be a tall order for the transportation experts assigned to the job. The Spanish architect may be renowned for his clarity and eloquence, but his high-flown presentations proved to be Greek to these men and women who are more accustomed to planning circulation paths and calculating load patterns. Luckily, AECOM had a solution to this communication breakdown. It reached into the voluminous folds of its global network and pulled out a few architects—employees of a former DMJM office in Arlington, Virginia, to be specific—sending them north to act as emissaries and interpreters between the silver-tongued architect and his iron-eared collaborators. The result, reportedly, has been a smoother integration of the project’s sculptural and functional design elements.

The past decade has seen a proliferation of large and complex projects that draw upon global resources both intellectual and material. The World Trade Center is but a small example. Entire cities are being built from scratch in the wilderness of China. Luxury developments stocked with the finest in convenience and culture are rising from the deserts of the Middle East. Entire cities are being built from scratch in the wilderness of China. Luxury developments stocked with the finest in convenience and culture are rising from the deserts of the Middle East. As the projects have gotten bigger, more all-encompassing in their scope, and located in what were once far-flung corners of the world, the firms that design and build them have followed suit. No one company has taken this impulse further than AECOM. With 45,000 employees and offices on every continent, this megath has assembled expertise in every area necessary to design, build, and fuel a modern city. Its reason for being—“to make the world a better place”—is as magnanimous as it is grandiose; its purpose—“to enhance and sustain the world’s built, natural, and social environments”—is as singular as it is vague. If you have never heard of AECOM, or if you have only just recently become aware of the name but aren’t certain what exactly it is or does, you are not alone. Up until last year, AECOM was little more than a holding company, a fairly abstract entity that held together a loose consortium of design, engineering, and project management firms operating in their own sectors and under their own names. Its genesis dates to the late 1980s, when Kentucky-based Ashland Oil, looking to diversify its business, purchased five large architecture and engineering companies, creating a design firm called Ashland. The oilmen, however, soon lost interest in this line and allowed the companies to buy themselves back. In 1990, those five firms, including architecture giants DMJM and Frederic R. Harris, established the AECOM name, which stands for architecture, engineering, construction, operations, and management. From that moment forth, the growth did not cease as more and more firms were acquired and more and more disciplines were incorporated. In 2007, AECOM became a publicly traded company, and today it is one of America’s biggest firms with more than $6 billion in annual revenue.

This mushrooming to such gargantuan proportions was not conducted randomly, of course. Rather, AECOM leadership singled out companies for acquisition that filled a market or geographical niche not yet represented in the portfolio. To use architecture as an example, shortly after 1990, Spillis Candela of Miami was acquired for its expertise in civic and courthouse design. Hays Seay Mattern & Mattern of Virginia were brought aboard for their cultural experience. Chinese firm CityMark was purchased because, well, they were in China. EDAW was sought out and wooed for its highly developed global planning and landscape design practice. Most recently, Ellerbe Becket was merged for its strength in the Midwest and expertise in sports and healthcare typologies. That last acquisition more or less rounded out AECOM’s portfolio, giving it influence everywhere on the planet and skill in everything imaginable, but that doesn’t mean that it will stop its search. The company is always looking for smoothly operating integrated design firms, and would particularly like to increase its competence in airport design. AECOM made its official debut in October 2009. “Two years ago it was decided to reorganize the company,” explained Tom Fridstein, an AECOM executive vice president and president of global architecture. “It had grown to such a size and there were so many companies we wanted to rebrand to one identity.” The company’s many disciplines were organized into five main business lines: Planning Design and Development, which includes architecture, engineering, landscape design, project management, and economics; Transportation, with everything from airports to bridges and tunnels; Energy, both generation and transmission; Environmental, from brownfield restorations to carbon footprint assessments; and Water, with wastewater treatment facilities.
The business lines share a common financial structure, business development and marketing department, data systems, and, of course, human resources, as was shown in the example of the World Trade Center. It is difficult to conceive of how such a many-limbed beast would even begin to function with one mind, but AECOM has devised a fairly simple matrix to help navigate its global business. On one axis of this matrix are geographical regions, and on the other are business lines. While local offices are largely in charge of developing and maintaining their own business—as with many firms, most of AECOM’s clientele are repeat customers, legacy clients of the legacy firms—the company’s top leadership, which is mostly made up of architects and engineers, is in charge of looking across geographical boundaries and market sectors to locate opportunities and assign resources as needed. This gives AECOM an edge over firms that may not have such a deep pool of talent to draw from, or a network of offices around the world. “If you’re going to be global, your expertise is not going to exist in every location. That’s where collaboration comes in,” said Jon Miller, an AECOM senior vice president in the Arlington, Virginia, office. “If you have a project in Kuwait, but not the right people for it on the spot, you can draw from other regions and establish the right talent in the right location. The global market is changing,” he added. “Today in Dubai they want people there on the ground. It used to be you could do it all from the U.S. and just send the drawings. Now clients want people who are committed to the region.”

This global reach is also beneficial for AECOM clients that want to expand their business overseas. Rick Lincicome, an AECOM senior vice president who has come in from Ellerbe Becket, said that one of his old clients, a hospital based in South Dakota, wanted to expand its business outside of the U.S. They were thinking they would
have to find another architect to do the job, one with more global experience. “We had to educate them that we actually had global reach,” said Lincicome. “Joining AECOM is going to be great for that client.”

Though enormous, AECOM tries to balance its portfolio with both large and small projects. “The challenge today is being able to operate locally and globally, to work on a small level and be able to scale up,” said Fridstein. “We operate like any other firm. We have the benefit of having a huge amount of people, but we can put together a team of two people or 200 people depending on the size of the project.” And though of its 45,000 employees only 4,000 are in the Planning Design and Development division, of which about 1,500 are architects, it wishes to be seen as a design firm. “There’s a fear that these large firms put design as a subset to construction,” said Miller. “Not so here. We are very much about design. The upper management is made up of designers. When I look up I see architects above me, and that’s comforting.”

If these desires sound a bit contradictory, that’s because they are. How can an entity be both large and small, both dedicated to design and composed mostly of management types? Scaling project teams down to meet the demands of a given project is one thing, but operating like a small business with all of the cultural trappings of a boutique design house, and perhaps the guiding force of a single genius, is something quite different. What this boils down to is a bit of a personality crisis—if having multiple personalities is a crisis. The public launch of AECOM fused a multitude of businesses under one name, but it didn’t create a single culture, at least not yet. For the time being, the firm seems happy to have those different voices all under the same roof. “When we merge with a company, it’s because we think they’re doing something very good,” said Fridstein. “We don’t want to lose what that is. I’ve seen other firms buy a company and dismantle it. Once they do that, they lose the value they’ve acquired.” The large size and investment in a wide range of markets helps make the company stable, as when one sector is down, those that are up can carry things along. And the fact that it is publicly owned, without one defining principal at the top handing down the gift of their brilliance, provides for smooth changes of leadership. “When you’re this large, you can’t have one personality. Our very purpose is to be beyond one defining feature,” said Lincicome. “We are AECOM, we can do anything.”
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Davis & Warshow presents its new award-winning, expanded and re-imagined showroom in the A&D Building. This new showroom experience offers architects and designers a vibrant and exciting presentation of kitchen and bath products in an environment that encourages in-depth interaction. For over 80 years, architects and designers have relied on Davis & Warshow’s unparalleled service to help them achieve results that inspire. Stop by and experience it today.
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TECH: Time- and cost-saving innovations for kitchen and bath
With everyone wanting to minimize environmental effects while maximizing performance, plumbing has a new mandate. Faucets and fixtures in baths and kitchens must do more than bring water into our lives, they must enhance energy performance, complement interior trends, and provide healthy solutions for both residential and commercial designs. Shaped by new low-lead legislation and the age-old desire to bring luxurious spa experiences into the home, this year’s plumbing options offer a wave of smart innovations.

BY JENNIFER K. GORSCHE
Available to the North American market through Elkay, Webert’s aerodynamic Wolo series is low-lead compliant and meets EPA WaterSense certification guidelines for lavatory faucets. Also available for shower systems, the collection has chrome, satin gold, and matte black and white finish options.

The Waterless Urinal furthers Neo-Metro’s sustainable line of products by operating without water and without chemical cartridges that end up in landfills. Stainless steel naturally reduces bacterial buildup, and the company’s Enviro-Glaze powder coatings can be customized. Third-party certified as eco-friendly, the system can contribute to LEED points.

Duravit’s classic Vero collection has been reinvented in a high-gloss black ceramic, giving the angular forms of washbasins, toilets, and bidets a more sleek appearance. Meant to complement black-and-white color schemes, the collection is part of several new high-gloss and black pieces from the manufacturer.

The new Plié toilet features a seamless form that sits flush to the wall, making it ideal for contemporary interiors and easy cleaning. The high-efficiency design is WaterSense certified, with a top-mounted solid brass flushing mechanism offering 1 or 1.6 gallons per flush.

TOTO’s Luminist vessel sinks are as eye-catching as they are durable. Made of proprietary hybrid epoxy resin that doesn’t release VOCs during production, the translucent vessels are heat-, impact-, and stain-resistant. Available in round and rectangular shapes, the sinks have an integrated energy efficient LED lighting system.

Stone Forest’s Siena collection is hand-carved from Siena Silver-Grey marble, allowing the stone’s characteristics to come through without embellishment. The 700-lb. Adagio Chaise curves with the contours of the body while absorbing ambient room temperature or warmth from the sun.

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The latest evolution in Vola’s line of freestanding shower fixtures, the FS3 offers a slender silhouette ideal for minimalist, or any modern, bathroom. The fixture integrates high-tech features including thermostatic and pressure controls. Like the FS1, the fixture was designed by Aarhus Arkitekterne A/S and is available in polished or brushed chrome or brushed stainless steel.

Graff is expanding its Trends line of bath faucets with the Sade, a curved flat-edge spout and complementary handles, and Structure faucet (on cover). Lavatory faucets come in two finishes with single-handle, widespread, wall-mount, and floor-mount models. Coordinating sets for tub and thermostatic showers are also available.

Dornbracht’s new line of hot water dispensers aims to eliminate the laboratory look from the kitchen with styles to complement the Tara and LOT collections created by Sieger Design. Both faucets are available in hot water or hot-and-cold models, which are designed for use with the InSinkErator water filter and tank set.

Using a cavity of water to heat its reflective surface, the Reflect showerhead prevents condensation from forming even in a steamy room. The result is a patent-pending showerhead and non-fogging shower and shaving mirror suitable for residential and commercial use and made in the U.S.

The Nova Podium lavatory faucet is a lead-free, all-brass design that can withstand more high-traffic use than faucets that use plastic components. Competitively priced for residential and commercial bathrooms, the single-handle faucet can be specified with a low-flow aerator to earn points toward LEED certification.

The Twin creates space in which to store bathroom items and appliances, transforming the shower stall into a useful piece of furniture. Made of tempered safety glass, anodized aluminum, and a mirrored silver finish, the cabinet is 160 by 80 by 195 centimeters.
Taking inspiration from their new residential project in Salzburg, Hariri & Hariri’s prototype Crystalline Collection for Rapsel simulates pieces of rock and crystal. This eye-catching shape continues the firm’s interest in natural formations that are angular and faceted rather than curvilinear.

Agape’s Cartesio bathtub is a versatile shape available as a freestanding, corner, wall, or niche-mounted unit, with storage and taps fitted to the bathtub, wall, or floor. Meanwhile, in Soho, the new Studio Anise showroom welcomes the Agape Store, featuring the largest North American display of Agape bath collections.

Identified by the CNC-fabrication technology used to generate them, each piece in Zaninelli Bagni’s new collection is carved from a single piece of hand-selected stone. Designed by MrSmith Studio of Milan, the collection includes washbasins, shower receptors, and an oval bathtub with inclined backrest to maximize comfort.

Designed by Patrick Messier for Montreal-based Wetstyle, the Be Bathtub is inspired by the organic shape of an exotic fruit. The collection’s tubs and sinks are available in a glossy finish or matte Wetmar, the brand’s eco-friendly natural stone composite material.

The Wish collection of freestanding bathtub and above-counter sinks are composed of a solid-shell, 100 percent polymer structure that is resistant to stains and has a finish that is glossy and smooth to the touch. Tubs are available in rectangular and oval shapes with an optional raised backrest, as shown.
Sanitaryware, bathroom furniture, bathtubs, shower trays, wellness products and accessories: Duravit has everything you need to make life in the bathroom a little more beautiful. More info at Duravit NYC, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, Phone +1 212 686 0033, info@us.duravit.com, nyc.duravit.com
With iBox Universal’s ten-year anniversary approaching, Hansgrohe has introduced the iBox Universal Plus, a rough-in valve that accommodates over 150 trim sets—Hansgrohe, Axor, thermostatic, and pressure-balanced—allowing contractors to specify only one valve while incorporating sound- and waterproofing technology and consistent high water flow. 

Gebert’s concealed carrier system requires only four connections to the floor and studwork, allowing the frame to withstand loads up to 880 pounds. Actuator plates are removable for maintenance access to concealed tanks and flushing mechanisms, and frames come complete with necessary plumbing and drainage connections.

Available exclusively with Kohler’s wall- and deck-mounted Insight Touchless Faucets, the Hybrid Energy System is designed to last 30 years without replacement or labor-intensive battery changes. A patented low-energy draw sensor prevents high-current draws and preserves the hybrid energy cell, which is recyclable at the end of its lifetime.

A companion to its line of Blue water filtering faucets, Grohe’s Red Mono faucets deliver boiling water on demand from an under-sink heater with a four- or eight-liter capacity. The Red Duo model provides boiling water as well as a standard hot- and cold-water faucet. Both systems are childproof.

The StyleTherm thermostatic shower system from California Faucets is a precise temperature dial available at the same cost as conventional pressure-balance controls. Each tub and shower application has its own temperature control, allowing users the flexibility to use them at once or independently.
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Ever the anomaly in the world of architecture—from his early days peddling standardized concrete masonry units to his later forays into geodesic domes—Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) remains an enigma, even after finally being invited into the inner rings of the architectural pantheon. Following on 2008’s Starting with the Universe, organized by the Whitney Museum, come two books—one on him, one about his ideas—centering on Fuller’s epic struggle with the evolution of the Dymaxion House.

Loretta Lorance focuses on Fuller’s biography and on the Dymaxion House in Becoming Bucky Fuller, which she declares a “revisionist study.” The other, Fuller Houses by Federico Neder, uses Fuller as an armature to explore the ideas and images surrounding his development of the Dymaxion House as something less concerned with an “object than with the project.” As narrow as the former is, the latter is broad. And this concern with the project, Lorance has determined, follows out of Fuller’s failure at producing the object.

Lorance argues that Fuller revamped himself as a visionary of domestic architecture when he could not produce the Dymaxion House. Fuller spent the better part of the late 1920s to 1930s developing various prototypes of what eventually became the only two built Dymaxion Houses, which were recently coupled into an exhibition at the Henry Ford museum. Despite his unwavering belief and determination that his designs were the future of domestic architecture, Fuller eventually realized architectural, societal, industry, and most importantly, investor support were not forthcoming. Thus he decided to position himself, according to Lorance, as an idealistic visionary.

Fuller’s development as a salesman and a dedicated entrepreneur, for better or worse, is well documented. He tenaciously engaged possible investors, presented questionable patents, and requested that the AIA support his project. The AIA flatly rejected Fuller on the grounds that they do not support mass-produced architecture. Lorance uses these opportunities to discern the factual Fuller from the fictional—such as his presenting the Dymaxion as a project ready for production—by highlighting discrepancies between accepted history and “fact.” However, only in the last chapter does Lorance delve into “revisioning” Fuller’s history. The evidence for this emerges from the autobiographical notes Fuller wrote in 1939 for a colleague at Time, Inc. for an unpublished article. Fuller consciously came to terms with his failing enterprise and focused on promoting the visionary, futuristic aspects of his design. This document provided the historical base for all subsequent interviews and histories. This is the revisionist study, and Lorance painstakingly provides the lead up to it.

As much as Lorance focuses on Fuller’s personality during the development of the Dymaxion House, Federico Neder focuses on the cultural context happening concurrently to Fuller’s perpetually transforming project. Readers encounter Diego Rivera, Adolf Loos, Frederick Kiesler, and the ever-present Le Corbusier, among others. Fuller Houses categorizes itself around themed chapters on innovation, enclosure, lightness, form, control, and the artifact that the Dymaxion House ultimately became. Each calls upon contemporaries of Fuller to explicate the timeliness of his theories, practices, or their advanced nature.

The first, “Flying Fish,” tackles the influence of progress and innovation that ultimately yielded to aeronautics. As such, Fuller presented the Dymaxion as an engineering and technological feat that reduces friction with the natural environment and reduces the physical labor of inhabitants so they could devote themselves to other, more pleasurable or self-enriching endeavors. One of the odder pairings is the discrepancy between the stark lines of Adolf Loos’ 1903 apartment and the overly textured and cushioned interior. This was the exact approach Fuller took to make the unfamiliar form of the Dymaxion seem more domestic to potential investors. Neder reveals this as the root of the discrepancy between yearning for technological advancement and a cushy lifestyle.

In the chapter “Industrial Dance,” the image of Diego Rivera inspecting Fuller’s Dymaxion Car initiates the conversation between the intermingling of the machine and the organic, such as Rivera represented it in his murals. However, while Fuller’s rounded forms, Neder points out, coincide with aesthetic developments, they really evolve from his technological investigations. The chapter concludes with comparing Kiesler’s Endless House to the Dymaxion House as both projects combine “in a single gesture the sensuality of form and the precision of geometry.” Neder notes that the former failed to escape abstraction and the latter couldn’t escape the limits of technology.

Neder’s final pages continue the vector of these themes into contemporary investigation—the sinuous forms, techno-aesthetics, and prefabrication. Ultimately, both books illustrate that the Dymaxion House at different stages of its development meant something different even to its designer, either as a product of the day or a vision of the future.

I found Lorance’s book not difficult to read but difficult to enjoy. Its highly academic tone and structure focuses on personal minutiae and rests well in the hands of researchers. Written chronologically, the book progresses from event to event, strung together with quotes and citations, dry facts over compelling narrative. Conversely, Neder’s book reads as a comparative history that ties together architectural and artistic achievements to create a context of creativity. Anecdotes and disparate references make interesting revelations and connections. These create a richer understanding of the items that intrigued Fuller’s investigations as well as the broader range of work by which Fuller loosened his provocations.
It's hard to top the sight of Robert Smithson skipping along Spiral Jetty. Toward the end of the 60s, for him, the earthwork’s construction on the Great Salt Lake in 1970, the artist picks his way over the 1,500-foot-long, 15-foot-wide counterclockwise coil of mud and black basalt rocks, letting viewers grasp its scale for the first time. It's an unusually playful moment for a movie about cosmic phenomena and prehistoric natural forces. Earlier in the film, De Maria's Earth Room, which communicates a less hierarchical, more “open-ended” message.

In her book Architecture and Narrative, Sophia Psarra explores on the one hand, “how spatial and cultural meanings are constructed in buildings and how they are communicated to their viewers, ” and on the other, “the relationship between conceptual structure and perceptual experience.” To do so, she takes up examples of specific buildings or narratives, for example, Sir John Soane's Museum and Jorge Luis Borges’ short fiction and museum exhibition design, and performs close analysis of these works, focusing on form, composition, and users’ experiences of spaces, as well as how these works communicate “cultural content.”

The result is a rich investigation of how spaces and buildings communicate meaning, both in terms of form and social and historical context. For example, in an investigation of the Parthenon and the Erechtheion in the first chapter of the book, Psarra constructs a narrative around and about these two structures, considering the buildings' physical relationship to each other and to surrounding structures, along with mythic narratives associated with each building and their existing interpretations. She concludes that the two buildings work in concert, the Parthenon forming “a conceptual and narrative unity” in contrast with the Erechtheion, which communicates a less hierarchical, more “open-ended” message.

Psarra, a professor of architecture at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, provides incredibly detailed, thoroughly going analyses of each of the examples she presents, though at times it is difficult to work out exactly why or how she has chosen them. (This is compounded by the fact that there is little to no mention of the particular structures or stories outside of the chapter in which they are discussed.) While Borges’ short fiction would seem an obvious choice for a discussion of architecture and narrative, the same could be said for the works of other authors or genres. Why Borges, and not, for example, Gothic literature? Indeed, why literature alone and not film? Film seems an ideal starting point for an investigation into the relationships between sequencing, composition, and perception of architectural space but, though Psarra does mention Sergei Eisenstein and his concept of montage, the issue of film is not taken up.

In his essay “Narrative Space,” film historian Stephen Heath gives an astute analysis of the way space and narrative interact in film, and further-more the way this relationship is carefully “coded” so as to be intelligible by film audiences. In so doing, he deals with the problem of “filmic construction of space, of achieving a coherence of place and converging the spectator as the unified and unifying subject of its vision.” The essay ends, by analysing the meaning of some of the ideas, and an analysis of any number of other discussions of filmic space or even examples from films, would have granted depth to Psarra’s argument, providing yet another point of reference from which to explore her central thesis, and in the process extending its implications. Regardless, the issue of Psarra’s choice of examples is less troubling if one thinks of Architecture and Narrative in terms of a series of discrete case studies, in which the author tests her hypotheses regarding the interrelationship of built form, perception, and narrating. Thinking of the book in these terms, it appears more as a starting point than a series of studies that lead to a definitive conclusion. Architecture and Narrative provides a model for how one might consider a building’s social and cultural contexts in relation to its aesthetics, and, as part of this, suggests that buildings exist within a web—or “dynamic network,” in Psarra’s words—of different meanings. Narrative is one way to take into account the totality of this “dynamic network.” Moreover, discussing architecture in relation to narrative allows Psarra to consider the temporal aspect of architectural analysis, which includes both the points of divergence and convergence among different interpretations of a single building, as well as shifting and multiple meanings. Since such meanings can change over time, Psarra has offered a way of looking at and interpreting architecture that is rich in its complexity and rife with possibility.

LEFT: Mary Brogger’s Earthwork (2000). Right: Sam Durant’s installation from 1998. A pile of birdseed resembling Smithson’s mud and rocks. (Michael Green and Diana Nawi, who organized Earthworks for the MCA, also note Brogger’s debt to Walter De Maria’s Earth Room.) The grave that Earthwork brings to mind belongs to Mies and he is spinning in it. Brogger’s sculpture stops seeming absurd, however, once one recalls the real Farnsworth House’s encounters with nature. The Fox River has flooded the landmark several times, causing severe damage in 1996 and 2008. Smithson—who expected salt crystals to engulf Spiral Jetty and considered the weathering of Partially Buried Woodshed part of the piece—might have appreciated the entropy.

Lauren Weisberg is the Art + Design Editor at Time Out Chicago.
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Museum Stomping Grounds

Flush economic times in the past decade brought ambitious museum expansions and expansion plans, while the recent economic downturn has led to the downsizing of some plans and a pause for others. This hiatus, from which we appear to be re-emerging, is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, I believe it’s an opportunity for expansion-minded institutions to engage in a more holistic reevaluation of their proposed building and site expansion programs, one that would result in built work in which curatorial values previously placed solely on architecture and collections would be extended to include landscape, and both the physical and historical/contex of the museum would be given weight in planning and design decision making.

Two projects completed in the mid-2000s begin to illustrate this issue. On the physical context side, new downtown museums seen as dynamic community centers opened in Minneapolis (Herzog and de Meuron’s Walker Art Center, 2005) and Denver (Daniel Libeskind’s Denver Art Museum, 2006). The Walker is a neighbor to the city’s oldest mapped parkland, Loring Park, known in the 1880s as Central Park, but there’s no sense of connection between the two. In Denver, the museum’s setting includes a significant landscape, Civic Center, one of the nation’s premier City Beautiful-era designs whose continu um of planners and landscape architects includes Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., S.R. DeBoer, and Edward Bennett. Libeskind’s ambition did not stop with ignoring this National Historic Landmark-eligible public park—he completely redesigned it. Fortunately that design was rejected in 2007.

Those were lost opportunities vis-à-vis contiguity. In other instances, museum additions led to the demolitions of potential ly significant works of postwar landscape architecture. Take the recently unveiled additions at Richmond’s Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (designed by Rick Mather) and the Tampa Museum of Art (Stanley Saitowitz). Both had landscapes by Presidential Medal of Arts Recipients, landscape architects Lawrence Halprin (Virginia) and Dan Kiley (Tampa). Halprin’s 1974 commission was significant because it was his only realized design for an outdoor sculpture garden and he actually selected and sited all but one of the sculptures. Kiley’s 1984 commission for what was then NationsBank is considered to be one of his most important. The Kiley design was scheduled for demolition as part of Rafael Viñoly’s $76 million expansion plan in 2007. The park was scrapped due to cost, and the Kiley design may yet be restored.

Collectively, these examples raise questions about the management policies at these institutions and the challenge to extend stewardship practices beyond art and architecture to include landscape. With this as a foundation, let’s turn our attention to three even more recent projects. Expensive new designs, collectively exceeding $750 million, for significantly extending historic building footprints.

The Isabella Gardner Museum, circa 1920. have been announced or unveiled for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Renzo Piano), the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Foster + Partners), and the Kimbell Art Museum (also Renzo Piano).

The press release for the Kimbell project characterizes Piano’s addition as a “dialogue with Louis Kahn,” an idea echoed by the New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff in his May 27 article, “Two Architects Have a Meeting of Minds at a Texas Museum.” Ouroussoff wrote that Piano’s addition is set 90 feet to the west of Kahn’s building in an area that is “currently a vast lawn dotted with trees.” Not mentioned in the press materials or that article is the dialogue Kahn had with his patron about that “vast lawn dotted with trees.” In a 1969 letter to Mrs. Kimbell, he wrote: “the west lawn gives the building perspective.” Accompanying the letter was a sketch of the project with portions labeled “MUSEUM” and “ENTRANCE OF THE TREES” in bold-faced cap.

I too wish I could have a dialogue with Lou Kahn. If I could, I would ask him why he decided to preserve the pre-existing grove of trees. Were culture and nature meant to echo each other with his new design? Was the existing allée a parallel structure to the porticos he was proposing? Was he also honoring the connection to the neighborhood context and the existing allées that crossed West (and eventually to the Back Bay) tocompare and contrast and judge for themselves. For the MFA and its consulting landscape architects, Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, this was very much a guidepost. In fact, Rogers would “like to see a full restoration of the Fens, making it a potenaturally recreational area so that one can enjoy the Muddy River as they walk in a friendly environment buzzing with life—a great park in a great city.”

Contrast Foster’s approach to Piano’s, which is closing the entrance on the Fens (except for special events) and relocating it around the corner. The Gardner’s director Anne Hawley claims the 70,000-square-foot requirement for new construction and anticipated increased visitation necessitates this action. According to their press release, Piano “has responded to the Museum’s need for functional space by creating a conversation with Isabella Gardner’s Museum.” Is this a conversation or an echo chamber? Here we go again.

What are the values and what is the context for guiding change? How do we measure success? The former Boston Globe architecture critic Robert Campbell (and Gardner project consultant) recently noted that Piano’s building suggests “all the arts, from Titian to a well-turned double play, are present in the Fenway.” Moreover, in an article about the project this past January, Nicolai Ouroussoff suggested “the preservationists should put away their torches and pitchforks.” And then what?

It is worth noting that neither of these journalists mentioned Olmsted. Nor do they mention Gardner’s whimsical 1907 carriage house, a structure demolished last July to make way for the new building and its requisite landscape architecture, inspired by a building in the southern Italian town of Altamura, was a contributing feature to what may have been the only surviving villa complex in the Back Bay. Hawley said that after “five years of planning we concluded that moving or gutting the building was not an option.” How did we get back to tabula rasa? Wasn’t the architecture up for the challenge? Moreover, how do we get invited to the private spaces where celebrated archi tects converse with deceased architects and patrons?

Can holistic curatorial stewardship be achieved in 21st-century museum design? Is there an opportunity for reflection? Let’s see every student of architecture, planning, landscape architecture, historic preservation, and museum management high tail it to the Back Bay to compare and contrast and judge for themselves all the celebrated transparency and light in these new centers of energy, why are we and the historic designed landscape all too often left out and that decade the MFA closed its Fenway side.)

In 2008, after being closed nearly three decades, the original Fenway entrance was reopened as part of the Foster + Partners plan. In a recent conversation with MFA director Malcolm Rogers, he said one of the goals of the masterplan was to “make the museum part of the park” and that from the start Foster told him, “you must respect your existing building, its language, and its associated processional experi ence.” Foster, Rogers says, went on to note that you have to live with what your architecture is telling you to do.” For the MFA and its consulting landscape architects, Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, this was very much a guidepost. In fact, Rogers would “like to see a full restoration of the Fens, making it a potentially recreational area so that one can enjoy the Muddy River as they walk in a friendly environment buzzing with life—a great park in a great city.”

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