NO WHITNEY CLONE, MAINTENANCE BUILDING WILL HAVE A PRESENCE ON THE HIGH LINE

SUPER SHED
Designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RPBW) with Beyer Blinder Belle (BBB) as architect of record, the new High Line Maintenance and Operations (M&O) building is no incidental shed for storing lawnmowers. It is a substantial 21,000-square-foot, four-story structure with a complex program that mixes public and private, back-stage functions and an open-air gallery. “If I had only two words for the building: it would be frugal and robust,” said Mark Carroll, senior architect continued on page 7

OPPOSITION TO GEHRY’S EISENHOWER MEMORIAL SPAWNS COMPETITION FOR SOMETHING CLASSICAL
NEW OR DÉJÀ VU
While the planning for President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s memorial in Washington, D.C. began in the last century, the Eisenhower Memorial Commission is seeking a distinctly 21st-century space for the 34th president. But the contemporary approach is drawing the ire of groups pushing for a more traditional design. In 2009 following a national competition, Frank Gehry was selected to design the four-acre plaza, Eisenhower Square, south of the National Mall between the National Air and Space Museum and the Lyndon B. Johnson Department of Education Building. Gehry’s design, markedly absent his vocabulary of twisting forms, calls for a colonnade of unadorned limestone pillars supporting 80-foot tall woven stainless steel screens depicting scenes from Eisenhower’s life. A continuous mesh band is set 90 feet from the Education Building, and two 100-foot-wide screens frame the opposite corners. continued on page 4

WHEN IN ROME
As announced in March, the Museum of Modern Art and PS1 of New York have joined forces with MAXXI in Rome to launch YAP MAXXI, the first Italian edition of the 12 year-old Young Architects Program. On June 23, an exhibition of the five finalists and the winning project opened simultaneously at MoMA and MAXXI, documenting all five MoMA PS1 finalists and the five MAXXI finalists. In Rome, the winning project, WHATAMI designed continued on page 9

D.C. ZONING ALLOWS FOR RAIL YARD DECKING
CROSSING UNION LINES
“Nothing like this has ever happened in D.C.” is how architect Shalom Baranes described the recent rezoning of the rail yards behind Union Station in the nation’s capitol. Baranes has been retained by the developer Akridge to design a mixed-use development across fourteen-acres of platform. Both the developer and the architect have remained relatively mum during the zoning process, preferring to wait until the ink had dried on official documents. The D.C. Zoning Commission unanimously passed the order in April and published it on June 9. The developer has set the bar pretty high for Baranes by calling the project Burnham Place after Daniel Burnham, the hundred year-old station’s architect. An initial reaction might be to compare the project to New York’s massive Hudson Yards proposal. But it’s continued on page 3

MAXXI’S OWN YOUNG ARCHITECTS PROGRAM WINNERS

“WHATAMI” DESIGNED...
Any worthy report bolsters and expands upon an anecdotal truth. Architects gravitate to New York City in large numbers—even larger numbers than expected—making design the fastest growing creative industry in New York, according to the Center for an Urban Future (CUF), a think tank dedicated to independent, fact-based research about critical issues affecting New York’s future.

But we knew that. Now what? The recommendations of the report are concise and within reach—and in need of immediate and vocal endorsement by the entire design community.

On a small scale, the city already supports the fashion industry, helping to facilitate the move of the fall fashion shows to Lincoln Center, launching an incubator in the Garment District, and arranging a fellowship program and workshops for fashion entrepreneurs. That kind of backing needs to be more substantial. First, the city needs to understand that design is much more than fashion. It is that broad and diverse definition of the profession—encompassing everything from game design to building design—that has the potential, if treated as a single entity, to have tangible impact on the economy.

Too much political capital has already been spent on grousing and counter-grousing about the disappointing results of the Javits Center as economic driver. The CUF report rightly says the show’s thing, the not convention center itself, and suggests the city ought to better promote the design-related trade shows already here, namely ICFF. (It also roots for the resurrection of Brooklyn Design, shut down this year when state funding was withheld.)

Other cities do it better. At the Milan fashion fair every year, banners stream across the streets, almost every shop, restaurant and hotel is stacked with event guides and maps. The city makes an enormous investment in high quality design installations spread across many neighborhoods. There is always a major attraction demanding vast international media coverage. One year, the big event was at a palazzo where Yoko Ono artfully suspended knives, Robert Wilson staged a one-person drama in a life-size Cornell box, and Peter Greenaway sat naked in a bathtub—thought provoking at all kinds of levels.

London has also pulled way ahead of New York as a design destination, and in just a few short years. Can you imagine a New York City Council working with the NYCECD to hatch plans for a design event? That’s what happened in London when British Design Council and the London Development Corporation launched the London Design Festival in 2003. In order to foster the festival as a citywide event, marketing tools kit provided by the city go out to all participating design organizations, non-profits, museums, shops and many others. With a stroke—at the cost of a few banners, stickers, a website and a map with flags—the festival design is a branded event for the city that now attracts 350,000 visitors to events across the city for nine days every year.

The CUF report recommends begetting a New York Design Festival, but that could be expensive, something to save for flusher times. But right now there are things that can be done, again, following the example of others. In Korea, for instance, Seoul has built up a vendor list to promote designers and architects with strong track records for jobs within government and accessible to city, BIDs and development corporations. This is not the same as the Department of Design and Construction’s Excellence procurement program. It is simply a trusted resource list shared by all city departments—parks, planning, transportation, schools, health, etc.—on all matters of design from structures to signage to graphics for brochures. That may sound like a pipe dream given the local credo of balkanized power bases, but it would be an excellent starting place, and it is an achievable goal.

And what about a mayoral advisory group on urban design policy and priorities. Again it already exists in London, and Mayor Daley in Chicago relied on an informal design policy group that has helped put Chicago way ahead on the sustainable design front. The report, available for a good read at www.rncfuture.com, is loaded with other smart ideas, from matching designers to tech start-ups in entrepreneurial partnerships to creating affordable housing for the design industries and promoting the export of architecture and design services in the same way we export cars and beef. Bloomberg may be looking at loan guarantees that will be the first step in encouraging development. That is the start of the trajectory that will be part of a national trend that’s looking at design as economic development.

And what about the real estate sector? A few years ago, people said, “Well, the market will take care of that.” And of course it will. Now with the market tanking, there is more interest in making the market do what it was supposed to do. Now is the time for architects and designers to put their shoulder to the grind stone to frame and promote those plans. Let’s make sure that the new mayor feels that ignoring such far sighted plans would be a scandalous loss for the city.

**JULIE V. IOVINE**

**PLANNING SUCCESS FOR NORTHWEST**

Regarding Katherine Fung’s article on planning for highways with in cities (“Go Down Moses,” AN 11_06.22.2011) I was surprised that there was no mention of Portland Oregon. Many years ago Portland removed the interstate highway along its river front and made a beautiful park in that space, yet another proposed Robert Moses project was the catalyst for that decision. Now every effort is being made to banish automobiles from the city center. As a result, walking in the city center is a new adventure for people of all ages. A follow up article seems to be in order here. Nice work.

**GARY MARTIN**

PORTLAND, OR
REBIRTH FANTASY OR FREUDIAN SLIP?

The Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum closes its gallery doors on July 4 for the duration of a two-year, $64 million renovation. But the museum store and garden will remain open all summer, and it was up to associate director Caroline Baumann to figure out how to disguise the 80-foot-tall tower of scaffolding that was recently erected in the popular leafy retreat. Baumann called on Jee Levin and Randall Buck of New York-based multimedia design firm Treve to wrap the scaffolding in a swath of deep blue fabric printed with giant fluttering moths. Getting a hip company to project a metaphor about mourning as in moth-eaten, seems almost too self-aware. But we look forward to the clean sweep that the renovation by Gluckman Mayner promises.

THE WRIGHT PROBLEMS

Surprising, delightful, and often frustrating. Not the most appealing real estate pitch, but it’s how Pennsylvania resident Jim Gee describes the Frank Lloyd Wright “Suntoop” house that he is looking to unload (asking price: $429,000). Part of Wright’s “Admore experiment,” the 72-year-old townhouse was recently the subject of a Philadelphia Inquirer article that highlighted its design flaws for living—low ceilings, narrow staircases, and cramped bedrooms. Gee has already replaced the notoriously leaky roof and pointed out some perks of the property: “When it snows, you think you’re living in a ski chalet.” The Wright buyer is still just beyond the rainbow.

REMAKING THIS

For several years the performance artist Marina Abramovic has been planning to launch a non-profit space in Hudson, NY, at the Community Theater she bought in 2007. Built in the 30s, the 20,000 square foot building will reportedly house artist workshops, classrooms, and a library, in addition to performance space. Abramovic told one source she envisioned it as “the Andy Warhol factory without the drugs.” We’ve heard that the architect for what will officially be called “the Marina Abramovic Foundation for the Preservation of Performance Art” is Rem Koolhaas. Will the newly anointed preservation skeptic find a way to deal with preserving art that’s intended to live in the moment? Will Miuccia Prada be jealous? Stay tuned the Foundation is set to open in 2012.

REVENGE OF THE VOWELS

The latest trend in firm naming begins with the letter A...or E,I, O, U. Last year, Polshek Partners became the vaguely chemical and/or mythological sounding Enead. Davis Brody Bond didn’t change their name, but simply dropped them in favor of Aedas. For the full effect, be sure to have more vowels than consonants, as in Interboro. Did this all begin with oma? Baby Reds take note, Aegis, Oedifice, and Oedipus are still available, but at your peril.

CROSSING UNION LINES continued from front page

much closer in concept to Park Avenue,

which united a divided Upper East Side
covering over the New York and Harlem
Railroad tracks back in the 1870s. About
thirty years later, Burnham’s Beaux Arts
station in D.C. brought visitors to the foot of
the National Mall but divided the quaint row
homes of the Near Northeast neighborhood
from the gleaming white government build-
ings in the neighborhood now known as
NoMa. Few pedestrians venture across
Hopscotch Bridge, which arcs H Street high
above the tracks, bifurcating the Akridge’s
air rights. “You’re either east of the tracks or
west of the tracks,” said Baranes. “On the
west side of the bridge there’s a lot of devel-
opment, but on the east side of the bridge
it’s totally self-sustaining and disconnected.
Our challenge here is to turn H Street into
real street.” A spokesperson for council-
member Tommy Wells, who represents
both neighborhoods, said Wells supports the
proposed

In order to fill the three million square
feet with offices, residential, and retail,
Akridge will need to coordinate with the
Union Station Redevelopment Corporation,
who has its own masterplan that includes
revamping the station’s front yard, Columbus
Circle, and introducing streetcars to
H Street. Meanwhile, Amtrak’s vision for
high-speed rail presents opportunities and
challenges that Akridge hopes to tap into,
literally. By connecting with the transit levels
below, the developer hopes to entice travelers
to come up above and shop. Akridge vice
president of development David Tuchmann
said there are also plans for a north-south
pedestrian corridor with a visual connection
that stretches from Union Station all the
way to K Street, the northernmost end
of the Akridge property. “Our goal is to be
integrated as much as possible into the
rail structure beneath us,” said Tuchmann,
“or else all we’ll have is a project that floats
above the infrastructure.”

As far as the massing is concerned,
Tuchmann said much of the volume would
shift toward H Street, where the zoning will
likely allow for a 125-foot to 130-foot right
of way. He added that the project is still far
away from the design stage, but allowed
that it could serve as a “smoking of a backdoor
to Burnham’s building and that
“from a market standpoint tenants are
looking for a lot more glass.”

Akridge must now gear up for financing
the project. “We need to look for funding
from every sector,” said Tuchmann, adding
that with zoning cleared investors will see
it as a viable proposal. He suggested that
passenger facility fees on ticket prices
might provide nice bond leverage and that
TIGER grants should also targeted. Being
located above one of the nation’s major
transit hubs certainly doesn’t hurt.
OUT OF THIN AIR

Omi International Art Center’s Architecture Omi program will be using cutting-edge mobile technology in an unconventional exhibit, “Augmented Reality: Peeling Layers of Space Out of Thin Air,” to open July 9 at its namesake location just north of Hudson, NY. The show will host fantastically layered structures and environments by nine commissioned studios—among them, Vito Acconci, Asymptote, SHoP, Daniel Libeskind, and SITE—without touching a twig of an idyllic, twenty-some acre landscape of wetland, forest, and rolling farmland.

Each of the works, site-specific down to the coordinate, will exist in an entirely virtual “overlay of reality,” explained Peter Franck, Director of Architecture Omi. Through the lens of an augmented reality (AR) app called Layar, viewers will activate each GPS-pinned project and an array of multimedia guides by scanning a map of QR codes into their 3G smartphones, then aiming their cameras at various points throughout the site.

The complex 3D renderings will allow users to walk through various layers of reality as if they existed in physical space. “The technology allows for some really large scale interventions,” said Franck, “taking over the whole field with (projects) you couldn’t really create by building.”

For the show’s all-star roster of participating studios—the majority of them selected for their strength in conceptual practices—the medium is especially ripe for experimentation, in a kind of 21st rendition of paper architecture that takes its ideas off the page and into an experiential realm of the digital.

Real-world constraints such as gravity, proportion, and opacity become optional considerations with SHoP’s ribbed arcs of prismatic magenta and the looming translucence of Libeskind’s planar, canopy-like structures. Delving further into the speculative, one installation, by SITE will even act as a virtual portal into the other side of the Earth. Standing in the fields of Omi, New York, one is not quite sure which is up.
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Brooks has demonstrated with a highly serendipitous Dr. Harry Cushing, but it was also an archive of legendary brain man, resting place for the collection and Brooks the job of designing a final architect and Yale professor Turner of proximity that landed New Haven It may have been a coincidence THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER JULY 6, 2011 of DR. CUSHING CABINETS OF DR. CUSHING It may have been a coincidence of proximity that landed New Haven architect and Yale professor Turner Brooks the job of designing a final resting place for the collection and archive of legendary brain man, Dr. Harry Cushing, but it was also highly serendipitous. Few architects currently in practice have the imaginative flair and game interest in challenges that Brooks has demonstrated with a small but impressive output, from his days as a design-build architect in Vermont construing idiosyncratically-shaped homes of storybook resonance, to the inspired sensitivity he brought to the ecological and psychological nuances of a campus design for autistic children in Upstate New York, championed by Temple Grandin. The story of the recently completed Cushing Center begins with 600 perfectly preserved brains lost and then found deep-sixed somewhere below the Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Cushing basically created the field of brain surgery, along with many of the techniques and even the instruments still in use today. A Yale man through and through, he bequeathed his incredible collection of tumorous brains, journals, photographs, and rare books to Yale on his deathbed in 1939. Then they disappeared, resurfacing only a few years ago. Brooks, who teaches in the core curriculum at the Yale School of Architecture, wanted to translate Cushing’s own determined questing into a design conveying a sense of the mystery of inquiry and discovery. The site was not only tight—at 1,650 square feet—but underground beneath the medical school library, disadvantages for a museum that Brooks happily manipulated to the service of his subject. And so, visitors enter at the head of a staircase leading downward and marked only by a periscopic column of glass, a vitrine announcing current exhibitions while giving subtle notice of what’s doing below. From the stair, one steps onto a ramp that spirals even lower but now flanked by LED backlit brain specimens in display jars. “Sounds ghoulish,” Brooks said, “but it’s cheery and quite beautiful, like a chorus line in the glow of the footlights.” The convoluted path—rather appropriate given the brain’s own infinite folds—ends in a wide display area where the collection is offered up in a rich multiplicity of ways, inspired according to Brooks, by John Soane’s famous house in London. Drawers open to reveal instruments; cabinets pull out into layers and layers of displays; even the counters are vitrines for presenting books, journals, and photographs. An elongated counter extension turns into a research desk while an “archivist’s nest” signals the entrance to the seminar room with space-saving and elegantly carpentered efficiency. A small seminar room devoted to furthering Cushing’s own enlightened approach to neurosurgery is off to one side. Here architecture is a cabinet of curiosity where the subject contained and the container itself are inseparably joined, and, as Brooks said, “ready to be mined.”

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GREEN ROOF DRAINS
Huddling close to the High Line at Gansevoort Street and hemmed in to the South and West by the new Whitney Museum, the M&O is an exercise in compact composition. “The volume was given to us,” said Elizabeth Leber of BBB. “It was defined before it was designed.” The strict parameters were an inspiration, she added.

In contrast to the painted steel and concrete Whitney, the M&O’s exposed dark grey brick frame blends into the surrounding historic Meatpacking District, while a hefty steel roof girder, holding up the fourth floor and a cantilever to the East, makes a direct reference to the industrial palette of the adjacent High Line. “One advantage of Renzo Piano being the designer of both projects is that it’s unusual that an architect gets to design the building and its context,” said Leber. In addition to all else, the building will also house a glazed cafe-restaurant at street level (whose operator is yet to be selected) along with a freight elevator, public elevators, and bathrooms.

The designers were keen not to impinge on the park and so backhouse functions—including a security post for the parks department police—are separated by a five-foot gap between the High Line and the building’s shell. The fourth floor is dedicated to a public meeting room, education center, and offices where Friends of the High Line (FHL) can accommodate about 20 staff. Crowning the building is a rooftop terrace and sculpture garden for the Whitney that, for now, will only be accessible to museum visitors.

For High Line staff, the building is testament to the full-time job of keeping the park in shape. “The maintenance and operations of the park includes everything from planting to cleaning up chewing gum,” said Peter Mullan, FHL’s Vice President of Planning and Design. “Every inch of it is managed.” Indeed, the recent opening of section II shows what lessons were learned from section I. In the new bleachers, the designers had to swap reclaimed teak for the eay wood used in section I, now off the certified list. Since the feature lawn in section II will be dealing with heavy traffic, there have been conversations about closing it off twice a week to give it a rest and reseed it. Apart from the glass balustrades, reduced in number from section II, most of the High Line uses pre-cast concrete, which can be power washed. “The unusual condition of being exposed underneath and above means that plants freeze more easily than a green roof or groundscape,” said Lisa Switkin, senior designer at Field Operations. However, as parcels at street level develop over time, so will the park’s ecology and its maintenance needs.

Extremely different in program, the M&O and Whitney were still initially conceived as part of one design project, that is, until the financial crash placed the Whitney’s hopes of a new home on shaky ground and the M&O block was treated as a separate entity. “The Whitney is a monolith that has landed in the neighborhood, while the M&O looks like it has always been there,” said Carroll. Now, however, both projects are on track and due for completion in 2015.

Super Shed continued from front page at RPBW.

Creating green space in New York is not always a walk in the park. Challenged with drawing activity to its campus from 65th Street, Lincoln Center commissioned Diller Scofidio + Renfro and FXFOWLE to design a restaurant that would allow street life and arts events to come together, enlivening pedestrian paths while adding valuable public space. The team’s unique solution was an elegant parabolic-roofed pavilion that grows out of the Center’s plaza, creating a lawn for those who wish to lounge, and a canopy for those who wish to lunch. Steel’s slender, lightweight profile made the project possible by enabling the structure to bear on existing foundations, a new stage among many that give the performing arts center its life.

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Architects: Diller Scofidio + Renfro with FXFOWLE
Structural Engineer: Ove Arup & Partners
Photo: Iwan Baan
Brothers Chris and Dominic Leong of Leong Leong Architecture grew up in a sleepy Napa Valley town but fell in love with cities as skateboarding teenagers visiting San Francisco. In searching out the best spots for skateboarding, Dominic said, “You find pleasure in the city in the most unexpected places, constantly creating your own space, or using the city in your own way.”

These days, as young architects in New York City they still view their urban environment as a treasure trove of unexpected opportunities, as when they happened to pass by the experimental gallery W——Project Space in Chinatown and decided to create an installation despite its being challengingly tiny. Rather than focusing on competitions or theoretical projects, they often prefer to do such small real-world projects as a way to experiment with ideas.

Founded in 2009, their six-member firm also tackles much bigger scale projects, such as a new 13,000-square-foot headquarters (currently in construction documents) for the fashion company 3.1 Phillip Lim in downtown Manhattan and a 7,000-square-foot artist’s studio and residence in New Jersey.

While their projects vary in type and scale, one common thread that runs through them is both architects’ love of the interplay of opposites: hard concrete tiles appear soft and sensual; a closet-sized space seems to stretch to infinity; and a retail environment playfully hides the merchandise. “Different building typologies have these kind of assumed solutions,” Dominic said. “How do we challenge those conventions to create more novel effects with our environments?” What’s impressive about Leong Leong is that they pull it off without it seeming like a gimmick.

LISA DELGADO

3.1 PHILLIP LIM STORE

SEOUL, KOREA

When Dominic Leong was part of PARA-Project in 2008, he worked on a one-story Phillip Lim store in LA with an iconic facade of concrete tiles that look like a puffy quilt. The next year Leong Leong designed a store in Seoul that gave that idea a new spin: the designers emphasized the two-story Korean space’s loftier height with a gradient of tile textures, from pillowy to smooth. Each store’s interior features a curved wall that divides the space up into smaller enclaves. Mirrors lend an illusion of added space and light.

TURNING PINK

NEW YORK

This temporary art installation at W——Project Space continued their experiments with inserting simple forms into a space and using mirrors to magnify the sense of expansiveness. Here they designed a topological environment of pink foam by combining a series of basic shapes (a circle, triangle, diamond, and rectangle) and blending them together with a cohesive surface. Mirrors in the 60-square-foot space create a “mise en abyme effect, so it becomes like when you sit in the barber shop in front of a mirror and it looks like you’re looking into infinity,” Dominic explains. “There’s this weird subversion of the constraints of interior space.”

SIKI IM CONCEPT STORE

NEW YORK

For a pop-up store under the High Line as part of the BOFFO Building Fashion program last year, the Leong brothers found a kindred spirit in fashion designer Siki Im, who asked them to create a space that would subvert the conventions of commerce. They designed the store so that no clothes would be visible on entering: visitors stepped instead into an empty, otherworldly space with a curved floor and other surfaces coated in spray-foam insulation. At either end, little doors along the slopes beckoned visitors to explore further: by climbing downward, they would finally find the clothing, hung in mysterious grotto-like spaces.

CHELSEA TOWNHOUSE

NEW YORK

In the renovation and expansion of an historic townhouse, the architects played with old upon new. They kept the elements that give the 1853 residence its original charm while making the volumes more light and airy. An expansion to the back turns the kitchen into a double-height space. On the top floor, dormer skylights bring views and natural light to two children’s bedrooms. Another new skylight drains a refurbished staircase with sunlight, which also spills around the new curved edge of an adjacent hallway’s ceiling.
WHEN IN ROME continued from front page
by stARTT, a collective of young Roman architects founded in 2008 by Simone Capra and Claudio Castaldo, temporarily transforms the square in front of Zaha Hadid’s museum that opened in 2009. A green public space, it will host summer events devoted to a gamut of contemporary arts while encouraging the public to linger in a space that has yet to be landscaped or designed, according to MAXXI’s concrete outdoor pavement. The architects declare their intention to blend Hadid’s “hard, hygienic, and mono-chrome” piazza with their own “softer, racy, and colorful” living space. It is a game paying homage to the geographical maps of Alighiero Boetti, to whom the square is dedicated.

This archipelago of artificial hillocks comprise eight green islands built on hay bales and earth covered by some 7,000 square feet of lawn. The largest island is fixed at the center with seven smaller islands on wheels around it that can be moved by the public as desired. The mobile landscape is illuminated at night by eighteen 5-foot-tall red fiberglass flowers—by day they provide shade. A small pool—a water feature also required at the PS1 installation—completes the installation. Also, as in Queens this year, the key theme is recycling: the hills will be dismantled with the materials, and all light elements, donated to the district for reuse.

As well as emphasizing the public status of the MAXXI space, the objective is to promote an upcoming generation of innovative designers sensitive to environmental issues. The acronym for stARTT is Study Architecture and Territorial Transformations, and the firm is dedicated to focusing on man-made changes in the environment at different scales of intervention and varying degrees of complexity, whether involving landscape, territory, city, urban design, public works, or private architecture. Their work exemplifies the latest trend among young Italian firms in mingling research and practice, where pieces of landscape easily become objects of furniture and architecture can make a meaningful impact on the urban environment. BARRA RICCI AND ANTONINO CARDILLO

PIANO FORTE
Frank Gehry is looking to sell his archive, Richard Meier opens his Queens storage room for models to visitors by appointment, and now Renzo Piano is giving back, too. On June 10, his eponymous foundation launched a new awards competition to encourage young Italian architects, a rare breed these days. To that end, the competition was open to designers under 40 with an office in Italy presenting a constructed work. The jury, composed mostly of architectural magazine editors, whittled 69 entries down to three winners who demonstrated “innovative and poetic space research.” The purse for the prize was 10,000 euros each. And the winners are lott+Pavarani architects, ARCo and carlorattiassociati.

CRANES HANG IN BALANCE
With a deadline looming, crane operators in New York had yet to finalize a contract, threatening to halt work at some of New York’s biggest construction sites. Crain’s New York broke the crane story and reported that $10 billion in construction projects might be effected, including work at the Barclays Center at Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn and World Trade Center Tower 4 (although both sides have agreed to continue work at the rest of the World Trade Center site with or without a contract). The developers and contractors are seeking to eliminate so-called “no work” positions of mechanics and oilers. Union reps are offended by “no work” characterization for what they say is well-trained and highly skilled labor. A deal must be reached by June 30.

JUMPSTARTING KIMMEL
On June 23, the Philadelphia city council gave the Kimmel Center the green light to revamp the Viñoly-designed arts complex. The building was celebrated upon its completion in 2001 but has soured in the court of public opinion over the years, in part due to a vast interior plaza which remained empty for much of the time. A new masterplan drawn up by KieranTimberlake hopes to animate the space by breaking through the Lascut Street facade and situating a Wolfgang Puck café-restaurant in the void. Viñoly offered no comment on the renovations.

PROPS FOR SKYSCRAPER PROGENITOR
The Cities Service Building at 70 Pine Street in Manhattan, once the world’s tallest, finally made the grade at Landmarks Preservation Commission on June 21. It could be argued that the subtle Deco lines of the 66-story building played second fiddle to the Gothic grandeur of the Woolworth Building, and now New York by Gehry threatens to upstage the 1932 masterpiece by Clinton & Russell, Holton & George. The commission decided to step in and give the building some well-earned respect by landmarking the exterior and its marble-clad lobby.

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2 TRANSLUCENT CONCRETE
LUCCON
Translucent concrete maker Luccon has added two new options to its line of fiber optic cable-embedded concrete blocks. The first, Luccotherm, is a translucent concrete with an integrated insulation core, making it suitable for a variety of facade applications. The second introduction, Luccon veneer, was developed to give product designers a translucent concrete veneer that has three-dimensional pliability and can be cut, drilled, and glued. www.luccon.com

3 HYDROMEDIA
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4 GRAFFITI
REFIN
Modeled after industrial and urban environments, Refin’s new Graffiti collection reinterprets the look of rough concrete in porcelain stoneware. Monochromatic tiles in a wide range of sizes range from grey to warm tones and are textured with irregular marks. The line includes two graphic collections: Urban, featuring an abstract collage of images and text; and Grigio, a geometric pattern over grey porcelain. www.refin-ceramic-tiles.com

5 URBAN TOUCH
FIORANESSE
Fioranese’s Urban Touch line imparts the look of pockmarked concrete on glazed porcelain stoneware. Tiles are available in 24- and 18-inch squares and 12-by-24-inch rectangles in four colors: Corda, Cemento, Mastic, and Graffite. Three finishes include Flat, Arrow (a brushed finish), and Roof (a nailhead pattern). Mosaic tiles are also available. www.fioranese.it

6 BEVEL BENCH
SITU URBAN ELEMENTS
Constructed with a new ultra high performance concrete called Takt, Situ’s Bevel Bench requires minimal maintenance, features a sleek silhouette, and is suited for harsh weather conditions. The bench’s mirroring front and back pieces allow for compact shipping. The two sides, separated by a thin reveal, are secured along an integrated spine with stainless steel fasteners. Freestanding and surface-mount designs are available. www.situ-urban.com

THERE’S MORE TO NEW CONCRETE THAN MEETS THE EYE.
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The Steelcase Worklife Center is one of the Chicago Merchandise Mart’s largest showrooms, spanning 45,000 square feet and encompassing four areas displaying the furniture manufacturers’ various brands. The company hired Los Angeles-based architect Joey Shimoda, who also designed the Steelcase Center in Santa Monica, to create interiors that would unify the showroom with the common corridor bisecting it. After reading about a project by molded gypsum, concrete, and fiberglass fabricator Formglas in a magazine, he called the company and was on a plane to its Toronto headquarters the next day to discuss a series of geometric architectural elements he envisioned for the space.

“We knew that cast gypsum would be a good way to do this,” said Shimoda. Glass fiber reinforced gypsum (GRG) is a white, thin-cast alpha gypsum that is preferable to traditional plaster castings because of its light weight, high strength, and easy installation. The team began to work on three main architectural elements for the showroom. Because an undulating glass wall would separate the Center from the corridor, Shimoda wanted to draw visitors to the storefront with a row of totems—elliptical column covers in a pattern of stretched and compressed facets. The second element, called The Body, would be a veiled enclosure to shelter the showroom’s cafe, bar, and presentation room from the rest of the space. The third feature, born of necessity, was a screen over the return air louver for the Mart’s exhaust system, which required a pattern with 70 percent perforation.

The team collaborated with Steelcase global vice president of design, James Ludwig, to create each element’s pattern. The goal was to create a large number of design possibilities by using one shape as a starting point and manipulating it to achieve multiple forms. Shimoda and the Formglas team produced computer files in Rhino and CATIA. Using a laser scan of the existing structural elements along with site measurements, they accounted for space constraints. The finished forms were divided into segments that would allow for them to be transported to the showroom and installed there.

Using the computer models, Formglas used a 5-axis CNC mill to manufacture molds for each shape. Each of the twelve column designs is approximately ten feet high and is constructed from eight pieces with a range of elliptical geometries supported by wood reinforcing ribs. Saw-tooth overlap joints allow the column cap and base to fit together smoothly; joints were caulked, sanded, and painted on site.

The double-sided grille is made up of horizontally intersecting curved ribs that create diamond-shaped openings and establish a semi-opaque enclosure around banquette seating. Formglas experimented with fusing individual components in the mold, allowing for a faster construction process and easier assembly. While the mechanical portion is open, additional sections are backed with drywall. The wall is painted gray, creating a functional design element that connects all of the Steelcase space, visible through its glass walls along the corridor. In total, Formglas fabricated approximately 1,000 parts for the space over the course of three months.

Showrooms and exhibits contend with a set of site-specific issues—about impact, temporality, flexibility, and toughness—that make them ideal laboratories for experiments in materials, technology, and planning. Four new installations reveal a lot about how architects make it happen.
At Chicago’s Merchandise Mart, Maya Romanoff, manufacturer of handcrafted wall coverings, had to make the most of an off-the-beaten-path sixth-floor corner location at the end of a 70-foot hallway fronted with another showroom’s glass wall. To find the bright side, Romanoff retained Tom Marquardt and Mary Beth Rampolla of Design Collaborative, the branding and design firm that recently rebranded themselves, now as two firms: Marquardt+ and ViroDesignLab.

The first step was to incorporate the design into the hallway. The designers asked plasterers to create a triangular wedge shape in the ceiling that starts from a pinpoint before expanding to the showroom’s glass entrance. The wedge is reflected in the floor as well, where the designers peeled back the hall carpet to reveal a concrete floor that they finished in shiny clear Ardex latex. An LED-backlit logo spreads across the entire wall opposite the adjacent showroom, delineating clearly where Romanoff begins and the common space ends.

Once inside, clients enter an oval space intended to swoop sight lines around what was originally a truncated square space. “The final plan was based on a radial system, like a globe grid,” Marquardt said. “We wanted to deny any right angle.” The Ardex finished floor, which began at a thin point in the hallway, spreads throughout. The ceiling, which dropped down a foot at the entrance, pitches back up almost two feet before running along the perimeter of the space in a circular fashion creating a dynamic eave. The eave incorporates a soffit to accommodate the 9-foot tall panels displaying product, but it also doubles as the place to hide all sound, electrical and climate systems.

Three different display units were developed to work within the soffit. For the back of the showroom ten magnetic slider panels hold small swatch books, while thirteen five-foot-wide pivoting panels evenly stagger beside windows overlooking the Chicago skyline. Opposite the pivot panels, a bank of 30-inch wide pullout panels brings a condensed product library into the showroom. In both the pivots and the pullouts, the wall coverings do not sit within a frame; they wrap each panel.

Throughout the space, lighting is minimal, with 2800 Kelvin used the most and the MR16 wide spots dimmed to about 40 percent less than the average showroom. LED tape fastened to the top and bottom of a T95 Plexiglas gives the soffits of the pullout section a warm glow. To get it right, project architect James Wild went so far as to consult with boating specialists to perfect the design and weight of the wallpaper display panels. Wild also worked closely with millworker Hire Nelson to devise the system. It is based on a pine frame with a cardboard core wrapped with two 7/16-inch luan panels. A heavy duty Accuride custom drawer system sourced by Hafele gave the panels their elegant glide. Wild said the panels took months to perfect. “Once you get going in the fabrication, you get something that’s a departure from where you started,” he said, “but it’s that much better.”

TOM STOECKER
Contract design aims to impress with its flexibility, durability, and reliable appeal. But for a few days each June at NeoCon, it is also supposed to knock your socks off. It’s a conundrum that LA architect Clive Wilkinson addressed last year in designing the 30,000-square-foot Chicago showroom for furniture and workplace giant Haworth. He did such a good job they brought him back for 2011.

To provide a wow factor without upstaging furniture that needs to be frankly functional, Wilkinson decided to organize discreet gathering zones reflecting the latest thinking about the workplace. “This year it was all about open and enclosed environments,” said Wilkinson, noting that many U.S. manufacturers are far behind their European and Australian counterparts in terms of space design for offices. “It’s shocking that they are still doing cubicles while, for everywhere else, it’s all about activity-based working.”

Now even office work revolves around social hubs. And so at Haworth, columns are circled with benches and called the “front porch”; lounge furnishings are arranged to encourage informal collaborations, and one-on-one meetings are more likely to take place at a café table than around a desk. Storage does triple-time duty for acoustic and visual privacy, and sometimes even seating. In place of conference rooms with hidden audio-visual equipment, there’s an “arena” for groups with overhead projection screens set up to suggest a private screening room rather than a formal powerpoint. But the most subtle definition—and manipulation—of space can be found in the ceiling where Wilkinson varied the perforations in acoustic tiles depending on work area needs, with the fewest over public circulation where the hum of activity is desirable and over 50 percent in areas for private exchange. The changing pattern of the ceiling thus becomes both a decorative motif as well as a signal of what happens where.

Mindful that the showroom would change again in twelve months, Wilkinson was efficient at recycling as many elements as possible. Putting a platform display atop a reflecting pool—that might reappear next year—and covering last year’s mirrored columns with this year’s colorful vinyl wallpaper to appear as if the edges were inlaid with an artful reveal. “The overall approach,” Wilkinson said, “was to make 20 percent in cost give back an 80 percent change in impact.”

Julie V. Iovine

Top: An informal seating area where acoustical tiles are perforated like frit to distinguish quiet zones from circulation. Above: Shared desks and private screening bars show how work space has become increasingly social.
Jean Prouvé’s 6x6 House of 1944 is remembered as one of the greatest prefabricated designs of the 20th century. And so at Design Miami/Basel this year, gallerist Patrick Seguin staged a daily assembly and disassembly of the house to demonstrate the durable allure of Prouvé’s constructional philosophy. Prouvé developed the prefab house—to help displaced French families following World War II—so that it could fit in a truck and be erected by three men in one day. Seguin’s installation proved that this is still a relevant and applicable design for today’s architects.

The 6x6 House’s construction begins with a metal-frame base of four metal beams placed on the floor to create a square perimeter into which internal beams are fixed with 150 millimeter metal bolts. From here the portal frame section of the Compass—a core load-bearing structure that Prouvé also used in the eponymous table—is bolted into the central metal floor joist. The wooden floor plates are laid flush with the base in two sections exposing the metal frame at the edges and at the center. Along with metal, wood was a scarce material in war-torn France, which limited the number of houses that made it to production. The free-standing metal Compass is bolted to two almost 22-pound cross. Metal pediments that are bolted perpendicular to the beams and parallel to the Compass are raised to slot into the U-shaped channel on the top of the wooden wall panel. This process is repeated to form a bank of parallel rafters each slotted into the top of the wooden panels that form the house envelope, each with an equal wooden panel fit flush to the metal frame to complete the roof.

And alongside the House, Seguin installed eight glass cases with models of other Prouvé houses, all being restored or awaiting reconstruction by the French gallerist. Indeed, Prouvé is once again a prominent figure in design; also at Design Miami/Basel, Jousse Enterprise presented an example of Prouvé’s 1956 school house, while Dutch clothing company, G-Star RAW, has reinterpreted Prouvé’s furniture with 17 pieces on show at Vitra’s Germany campus. According to Seguin, in September, Norman Foster is curating a Prouvé show at the Ivorypress in Madrid.

MEISSEN EXHIBIT KUNSTHAL KADE AMERSFOORT, THE NETHERLANDS SO-IL

Meissen works anew, through geometric cases made out of brightly colored acrylic. The installation juxtaposes the narrative ornamentation of the porcelain with the clean lines and sharp angles of acrylic. The goal of the curious presentation is to create an experience in which viewers walk around each piece rather than looking and moving quickly on, explained SO-IL’s Ivo Hoppers, who helped detail the cases. “The porcelain is quite kitschy and decorative. We wanted to show it as an object that could be dissected,” he said.

The cases, which have pointed tops, range in height from 35 to 40 inches, set upon medium-density fiberboard bases made by Kwant Muebelmakers in the Netherlands. Hoppers and his team utilized digital imaging and miniature replicas of the porcelain pieces to preview how the light would show each piece through the angles of the cases. The cases were produced at Vink, a plastic processing facility almost next door to the Kunsthall KADE exhibition space.

One of the project’s biggest challenges was sourcing the right material for the cases. Normal acrylic is available in just a few colors that would have been too harsh for the installation, according to Hoppers. The team finally located Raatz Kunststoffe, a plastics company in Germany that manufactures acrylic in a wider range of subtle tones of blue, yellow, green and in a radiant sheet that changes color with the light. Each case uses panels of a different color, while a mirrored base-plate provides additional views. Once the installation ends, the cases may well be reused to lend new perspectives elsewhere, the architect said. KATHERINE FUNG

Above: Jean Prouvé’s famed 6X6 House was remounted everyday at Design Miami/Basel, smaller models were included in the exhibition. Left: Brooklyn architects SO-IL devised a crystalline installation for Meissen porcelain at a gallery in the Netherlands.
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JULY 2011

WEDNESDAY 6
LECTURES
Chris Monkton
Brown Bag Reading Series: After You Left, They Took It Apart
12:30 p.m.
Van Alen Books
30 West 22nd St.
www.vanalen.org

Anthony Vidler, Mary McLeod, Noah Chasin
Talking Books: The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays
7:00 p.m.
McNally Jackson Books
52 Prince St.
www.atelierurbain-ny.fr

EXHIBITION OPENING
Mapping the Cityscape
6:00 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.cfa.aiany.org

THURSDAY 7
SYMPOSIUM
Harvard Design School Executive Education for Architects
Integrating Projects Management
12:00 p.m. through July 8
Harvard GSD
48 Quincy St., Cambridge
www.cfa.aiany.org

SYMPOSIUM
Urban Design Workshop #41:
9:00 a.m. through July 8
Great Hall of Cooper Union
41 Cooper Square
www.atelierurbain-ny.fr

TUESDAY 12
LECTURE
Michihiro Yoshimoto
MomA’s Evolution Through Architecture 1:30 p.m.
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org

WITH THE KIDS
Summer at the Center
Architectural Design Studio:
9 to 12 Grade
9:00 a.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.cfa.aiany.org

THURSDAY 14
LECTURE
Jennifer Gray
Plywood: Material, Process, Form
1:30 p.m.
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org

SATURDAY 9
WITH THE KIDS
Family Day at the Center
Waterfront Cities: Planning for the Future
11:00 a.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.cfa.aiany.org

MONDAY 18
EVENT
DOCOMomo Meeting
6:30 p.m.
The Architects Building
52 Broadway, Boston
www.architects.org

SYMPOSIUM
ONE Lab: Biodesign
The Metropolitan Exchange
33 Flatbush Ave.
Brooklyn
www.metropolitanexchange.org

TUESDAY 19
LECTURE
Oli Schofer, Peter Pannoy
Colonial Revival: Then and Now
6:30 p.m.
Museum of the City of New York
1220 Fifth Ave.
www.mcny.org

MONDAY 23
EVENT
Digital Photography for the Architect: A Hands-On Workshop
9:00 a.m.
AIANY DC Chapter House
1777 Church St. NW
Washington, D.C.
www.aiadc.com

WITH THE KIDS
Design Your Own Textile!
12:00 p.m.
Bard Graduate Center
38 West 86th St.
www.bgcbard.edu

SUNDAY 24
EXHIBITION OPENING
Talk to Me: Design and the Communication Between People and Objects
Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
www.moma.org

MONDAY 25
EXHIBITION OPENING
4th Annual Landfall + Giles + Vaughan Minority Architect Awards
6:30 p.m.
AIANY Headquarters
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134X-9/11: American Architects and the City
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
Through January 2

194X-9/11: American Architects and the City
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd St.
Through January 2

Promoted by the United States’ entrance into World War II in 1942, Architectural Forum magazine commissioned pioneering architects to imagine and plan a postwar American city. At the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 194X-9/11: American Architects and the City features the plans, renderings, and sculpture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Louis Kahn, Paul Rudolph, and Rem Koolhaas and their ideas for cities of the future. Rarely displayed works, such as Mies van der Rohe’s collage Museum for a Small City Project (1942), above, reveal plans for cultural centers and urban life in uncertain times.

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Dieter Rams in 1975.

Open Dieter Rams: As Little Design as Possible. Turn to page 84. There you will find the Braun product line circa 1963. I would buy any one of those products today, save the cameras, were they sold in stores. Which is to say, you get no argument from me about Rams’ greatness as an industrial designer and the superiority of his achievement as head of Braun’s product design department from 1961 to 1995, where he designed or co-designed 500 products, lighters, door handles, coffee grinders, hi-fi and televisions, hair dryers, and cameras. Plus those Vitsoe 606 shelves, still great, still in production.

Here’s Jonathan Ive, in the Foreword, to tell the lovers of Apple’s smooth, white, simplified, intuitive products that Rams was there first. “[W]hat Dieter Rams and his team at Braun did was to produce ... products that were beautifully made in high volumes and that were broadly accessible. He defined how it was supposed to be: how industry could responsibly bring useful, well-considered products to many.”

Ive gets at the crux of Rams’ importance with his emphasis on the result: “When you think of Braun, you immediately think of the products, not some abstract mission statement or charter.”

Rams was an animal for work. At his second job out of architecture school he found ideal corporate patrons in Artur and Erwin Braun, who, when they hired Rams in 1955, had already begun to consult with curators of corporate character at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, to modernize their product line and to display next to Kroll and Rosenthal. They hired him, they promoted him, and they allowed him to put together a team of like-minded, similarly-trained (and all-male) designers who stayed the same for 22 years. He had a direct connection to top management; he knew how to maintain consistency, and he obviously knew how to delegate.

Which to me sounds very American. Rams’ closest American counterpart, whose work is roughly contemporary, would be Eliot Noyes for IBM. But Lovell never mentions Noyes, much less German industrial designers who were co-designers for the 1,000 products made by Braun during his tenure. Reading the book, which has more than enough illustrations to satisfy the most demanding Rams aficionado, we begin to understand how it was done, but we fail to get a sense of historical context.

What she also doesn’t explain is why we love it. She reports on but does not interpret his work. One of Rams’ earliest successes was the SK 4, the stereo known as “Snow White’s coffin.” Rams added the transparent Perspex cover. To me this appliance looks exactly like a modernist building, with wood and glass and handle and switches simply colour-coded with a thin green stripe or dot on the switch to signify “alarm on,” for example, or had a Braille-like ridge on one side so the user could detect the switch position by feel alone. These were particularly easy to operate—another concession to the rather vulnerable and unfocused state of the sleepy user.

And less of this: “[the] pure, rather masculine utilitarianism of Dieter Rams’ products.” Why masculine? One of the nicest things about Braun is that the kitchen appliances look like the movie cameras, the hair dryers like lighters, who needs to buy a product if his team did not design differently across the sexes. And isn’t utility Rams’ philosophy? Even with these omissions, this is a book any fan of Rams, any fan of mid-century product design will want to buy. I do have a final Ramsian message for Phaidon: “Less but better.” A book on Dieter Rams, 400 pages and $90, is all we need.
Mexico by architectural historian Luis E. Carranza weaves together episodes in the history of modern architecture. As Revolution threads its way through these decades-long histories attest, the theories, issues, and characters that appear in each, it is part of the author’s structure to maintain a reader's flow. This is heady and specialized stuff, something new: an extraordinarily influential three-year mandate known as Estridentismo — a frothy neo-Mayan fantasy that sought to establish Mexico’s Pre-Columbian past as the source of a new progressive modernity. This revisionist chapter proposes that it was the influence of the Mexican cement industry that promoted an ultimately successful image of beautified Modernist architecture, instead of the Mexican cement industry’s influence of the Mexican cement industry. The creative community can transcend borders and employ a different yardstick. If we are inhabiting the imaginations of our great-grandparents today, then do our fantasies of architecture, urbanism, and industrial design have equal power to travel time?

Lucía Sanroman is a D.C.-based writer and author of the Modern Architecture pop-up book.

**The fairest decade** continued on page 10

Counterpoint to the introduction. Visitors circle around a ring-like volume with embedded vitrines that provide vital stats—such as attendance figures and event theme—for each of the expositions. Sparringly mounted wall displays provide some picturesque back-ground and descriptions of each fair. The subsequent galleries don’t differentiate between the individual world’s fairs explicitly, allowing the exhibition themes and their accompanying materials to speak for their spectacular selves. The fairs were ostensibly coming-out parties for architecture that until then had been confined to the European academy. Yet the transatlantic journey subsumes some of the cerebral quality from the work, and Designing Tomorrow introduces viewers to four commercialized versions of Bauhaus purity. Categories range from the amusing, such as the corporate expressionism exemplified by the Haveline Thermometer building, to vaguely Federal stripped-down classicism, nostalgic streamlined moderne, and verge-of-offensive regional exoticism. Whether or not the geometry of expression was altered for popular consumption, the architecture of America’s world’s fairs materialized up-to-the-minute practice. Surfaces were largely planar and finished in colors befitting an Oskar Schlemmer costume study. Buildings were made with high-tech materials, such as load-bearing glass (if also asbestos), and by nascent methods like prefabrication. The Chicago fair goes down in history as the first major architectural application of neon. Even the sites were unprecedented: Treasure Island was formed from 25 million cubic feet of material dredged from San Francisco Bay for the construction of the Golden Gate and Oakland Bay bridges.

In addition to setting new standards, the world’s fairs were active creators of technology, culture, and politics, and Designing Tomorrow represents this back-and-forth evolutionally represented according to Beaux Arts rules, while Henry Dreyfuss’ Democracy installation propped how future planning efforts would subscribe to the values of Ebenezer Howard and Frank Lloyd Wright. Houses of the future, as well as aluminum and laminated furniture, heeded the call for residential buildings to be more like cars and their interior finishes to take advantage of industry’s cutting edge. Vehicle manufacturers exhibited campaigns to the federal government for a national highway system; in San Diego, so-called Modelltown seductively dangled new FHA mortgages on the National Housing Act of 1934 in front of white, middle-class men. Whether its visions were hyper-theoretical or proto-industrial, the fairs’ dreams came true. The final gallery of Designing Tomorrow draws a direct line from the fairs’ projects to the faxes to mass electrification, wide-spread ownership of domestic appliances, and mass communication phenomena like radio. Most of these accomplishments took place by mid-century, although Schavio and Sorensen peppered their finale with double-takes. A filmed demonstration of the Moto-Man is laughingly reminiscent of a ShamWow. Henry Dreyfuss’ Elektro the Moto-Man proffers advice that could very well have been uttered by Victor Civkin and his colleagues at the GE kitchen planning department. These moments only solidify American idealism established by the Havoline Thermometer.

The very intimate link between the world’s fairs of Designing Tomorrow and this moment demands some extra contemplation. The United States dropped out of the business of hosting world’s fairs in 2002. It is no longer something about current realities of geopolitics and economic development. The creative community can transcend borders and employ a different yardstick. While we are inhabiting the imaginations of our great-grandparents today, then do our fantasies of architecture, urbanism, and industrial design have equal power to travel time?
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An excerpt from The New York Public Library: The Architecture of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building (W.W. Norton & Company) by Henry Hope Reed and Francis Morrone. Photograph by Anne Day

Pride in Details at the People’s Palace

What is the classical? One definition, based on that of the artist Pierce Rice, is the generalized and idealized interpretation of nature begun by the Greeks and the Romans and continued in the Renaissance. The Renaissance that began in Italy in the fifteenth century spread the classical throughout Europe and across the Atlantic. The classical took root in American soil in the colonial era and, following the vagaries of eclectic nineteenth-century taste, attained a climax in the early twentieth century, when America produced one of the great flowerings of classical architecture and decoration in the history of Western civilization.

Central to the Western tradition is the importance given the human figure. In the art of no other civilization does it have the chief role that it does in the art of the West, Pierce Rice in his Man as Hero: The Human Figure in Western Art has pointed out that the archetype of the idealized and generalized part of the human body is the Greek female profile, an ever-recurring image, even in our own time. The treatment of the classical figure is seen in the outline of the profile applied to the whole body. In this way, says Rice, “we are offered...a kind of synthesized view of nature. The continuity of the arm is emphasized, not its interruption by elbow and wrist.... The limbs and heads themselves are subordinated to the unity of the body itself.” The result is “the ennoblement of the human figure.”

More than any of the human figures, the baby, according to Rice, symbolizes the art of the West. It is wonderful to see this figure, even the baby with wings—the cherub—which is so much a part of the decoration of the Library. There are, in addition, any number of winged figures and a variety of masks. All this ornament, like the detail of the towers of classical skyscrapers, goes unnoticed.

The generalized and idealized treatment extends to an array of beasts, real and mythical. The classical artist draws on the animal kingdom as often as he draws on the human, if not more so. The visitor can go about the building, counting lion masks, lion paws, dolphins, and variations on the eagle and the griffon.

If that is insufficient, flora abounds. Here the great generalized and idealized form is that of the common Mediterranean plants, Acanthus mollis and Acanthus spinosus, commonly known as Bear’s Britches. It has been a source of classical enrichment for centuries, one that achieves its most splendid shape in the Corinthian and Composite capitals. For this reason, it is almost as symbolic of the tradition as the cherub. For some architects, such as John Barrington Bayley, the acanthus is the morphological symbol of Western civilization, much as the chrysanthemum is that of the Japanese or the lotus that of the ancient Egyptians.

The enrichment is hardly confined to the acanthus. Some of the more common decorative motifs are the egg-and-dart, the leaf-and-dart, pearls, and bead-and-reel. And there are the several plain treatments of surfaces in the form of moldings with such names as cyma recta, cyma reversa, ovolo, and cavetto....

John Menes Carrière and Thomas Hastings gathered this heritage as they went about designing the Library. It was not enough that the building had to stand up, that it had to serve as a giant warehouse for printed matter, manuscripts, and incunabula, and that it had to meet the needs of a large reading public. The building had to be a monument, a triumphant adornment to the city, the people’s palace to assuage the visual hunger of local pride.
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