Andrew Michael Geller, who died December 25, at age 87, was an artist, designer, architect, and my grandfather. His whimsical sense of humor, apparent right down to his last conscious moments, characterized so much of his life and work.

ANDREW GELLER, 1924–2011

While Village people focus their attention on New York University’s expansion plans and doings at the former St. Vincent’s Hospital, the future of the Hudson Square neighborhood just west of SoHo is in the midst of major rezoning. The real estate arm of Trinity Church aims to transform at least 21 blocks of post-industrial Manhattan into

COMMUNITY TRIES TO CARVE OUT OPEN SPACE IN HUDSON SQUARE

GREEN WEDGIES

The public review process got off to a cantankerous start on January 3 after New York University (NYU) filed plans with City Planning for its 20-year expansion on two superblocks in Greenwich Village. In a move that struck some Villagers as audacious, the university touted the addition of more than 140,000 square feet of publicly accessible open space, while building out 2.4 million square feet in new

PROVING GROUND

Known as the Granite City, Aberdeen, Scotland’s silvery gray townscape, will soon have a dynamic new emerald heart. Designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) with Olin and the Scottish architecture firm Keppie, a new hybrid park and cultural center will transform an existing park and extend over a road and rail trench to better connect the city with a highly programmed, fully accessible indoor

Thin Crust

The public review process got off to a cantankerous start on January 3 after New York University (NYU) filed plans with City Planning for its 20-year expansion on two superblocks in Greenwich Village. In a move that struck some Villagers as audacious, the university touted the addition of more than 140,000 square feet of publicly accessible open space, while building out 2.4 million square feet in new

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An unofficial 1962 memo entitled Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture is perhaps the most important piece of public policy to include architecture since the 1902 McMillan Commission. The memo will celebrate its 50th anniversary on May 23 but few architects have ever heard of the document. It seems to have been the sole creation of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who at the time was an assistant secretary of labor under Arthur Goldberg. Goldberg was concerned about Washington D.C.’s growing federal bureaucracy and lack of adequate modern office and court room space (no major government building projects had been started in the capital since the 1930s), and he asked Moynihan to outline the problem and suggest some solutions. The result was something much more far reaching than the Secretary expected from the ambitious young New Yorker, and it may also explain why not much happened with it for thirty-plus years. In the 1960s as today, the General Services Administration handled all government building design and construction projects, but they also selected their architects. The results of this policy were that few buildings were built of any architectural merit (with some exceptions, like Mies van der Rohe’s 1964 design for Chicago’s federal courthouse), and many were even considered eyesores in their communities.

Moynihan suggested that the government begin encouraging the country’s best architects to submit designs and plans for federal projects. And in order to attract the best architects, he further suggested moving away from any notion of an official government style. As legal writer Daniel Brook pointed out in Legal Affairs (journal 2005), Moynihan suggested that “it should be our object to meet the test of Pericles’ evocation to the Athenians: “We do not imitate—for we are a model to others.” Federal architecture, should embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought.” Fifteen years later, when Moynihan was elected senator from New York, he introduced a bill to require juried design competitions for federal projects, but the bill never made it out of committee.

The 1964 Moynihan memo did eventually lead to the creation in 1994 of the GSA’s Design Excellence program under its farsighted deputy director Ed Feiner. It was Feiner who, hoping to establish a proper selection process to ensure a higher quality of architecture, seized on Moynihan’s memo as the basis for the program. The program under Feiner and now Casey Jones has been responsible for drastically upgrading the quality of federal architecture and infrastructure projects all over the United States. This GSA policy has instituted juried competitions and peer review procedures that have produced an unprecedented number of important projects (at least since the time of Jefferson, Latrobe, H.H. Richardson and McKim, Mead and White).

Let’s hope this will not happen, but should the Tea Party and their Republican allies in Congress take political control in next year’s national elections, what they hope to delete from government includes banning HUD from spending money on the support of “all-defined rubrics, such as ‘sustainability,’ ‘livability,’ ‘inclusivity,’ and ‘equity,’” according to an excellent policy paper President Barack Obama and The Forgotten Urban Agenda written by Greg Cascom in the environmental news and commentary website Grist. Under such circumstances, staying the course of good design will be even tougher than it was in Moynihan’s day, but just as essential, if not more so.

William Menking
The retail level of the tower at 200 West Street in Lower Manhattan, also known as the global headquarters of Goldman Sachs, has a decidedly unstuffy new tenant: the eyewear store Artsee. With other locations in the West Village and Miami, the company is known for its emphasis on eyewear as unique art objects. New York-based Openshop, the designers behind the Miami location, took on the job to translate the brand’s dual identity as an eyeglass store and an art space. The wide and shallow store was unusual layout for a retail space but perfect for a miniature gallery. In fact, the designers wanted the space as a whole to be “a spectacle in and of itself,” according to Adam Hayes, an Openshop partner. Inspired by the geometric shapes in Robert Motherwell’s “Spanish Elegy” series, Hayes and partner Mark Knebel marked the space with large rounded cutouts to hold mirrors and display the eyeglasses, flanked by the vertical strokes of the doors leading to exam rooms and storage. Custom millwork and furniture are minimal but dynamic, and an undulating ceiling is created from geometric light fixtures of reclaimed pine. “These were surprisingly economical to fabricate—each module is identical to the next, but the effect is achieved by shifting and rotating them around the grid,” said Hayes. CINDY YEON CHUN

PAIN IN THE GLASS

All systems were go for the Spring 2012 opening of the Zaha Hadid-designed Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University. That was also the target date for what museum officials described as “simultaneous openings” at partner art spaces across the globe, from Sao Paulo to Ho Chi Minh City. Not so fast. Material supply delays have now pushed back the formal dedication of the 46,000 square-foot museum to sometime this fall. Blame it on broken glass. Hadid’s building, which she describes as “a sharp, directed body, comprising directional plasts which reflect the topographic and circulatory characteristics of its surrounding landscape,” requires no surprise—highly specialized glass panes, many of which did not survive the trip to East Lansing.

FOSTER ON FILM

Norman Foster, who, as writer Mark Lamster has noted, “even in his 70s, has the look of a heavy in a Guy Ritchie film,” skis, sketches, and visits his childhood home in Manchester, England, in the film How Much Does Your Building Weigh, Mr. Foster?, a documentary produced by the architect’s wife that screened on January 25, at the IFC Center. Directed and dreamily photographed by Norberto Lopez-Amado and Carlos Carcas, the film moves seamlessly between irresistible images of Foster’s buildings, and the man himself, dashing between projects, reflecting on his career, and earning praise from scriptwriter Deyan Sudjic on everything from his work ethic to his wardrobe. “Everything inspires me,” says Foster early in the film. “Sometimes I think I see things others don’t.”

SOX POPULI

Charles Renfro’s latest gig—J. Crew model—could make the architect a household name, somewhere. Appearing in a two-page ad on the inside front cover of Fast Company, Renfro is sporting a trim, tailored outfit of fine Italian fabric, otherwise known as the Ludlow Suit, and some dazzling multi-colored socks. “This is what they mean by style with substance,” says the ad copy. (Oh, that’s what they mean…wait, what?). Renfro shares the page with other creative types who enjoy suiting up with an individualized twist (vest and wallet chain, high tops and no socks, etc.). We always thought Renfro’s design signature was scarves, not socks.

TEN YEARS FROM START, QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART BACK ON TRACK

Long Live Queens

Tucked into Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s State of the City address on January 12 was a brief call-out announcing that the tortured Queens Museum of Art expansion project continues to soldier on. Initially projected to cost $37 million, the latest estimate for the expansion/renovation has reached $88 million and the original 2009 completion date has been pushed to fall 2013. Though the road to the finish line has been tumultuous, new design details have been refined and the grand opening appears to be within reach.

The project’s history took a meandering path from the get-go. Designed by Robert Moses’ man Aymar Embury II for the 1939 World’s Fair, the building once housed an ice skating rink in half its vast column-free hall; the rink was moved out as part of the failed 2012 Olympic bid, allowing the museum to expand within its own walls from 50,000 to 100,000 feet. In 2003, Eric Owen Moss won New York City’s first Design Excellence competition to develop an iconic design for the space. Moss’ proposed slumped-glass entry addition would have wiped out the central section of the original building, and in 2005 it was scrapped. At the time, the museum’s executive director Tom Finkelpearl told AN that “things weren’t clicking.” One year later, a new design by Grimshaw emerged, embracing the original art deco-inspired structure. The designs released in 2006 responded to a need to catch the attention of 250,000 Great Central Parkway commuters while incorporating two formal entryways. The entrance facing Flushing Meadows Park maintained Embury’s classical colonnade, while the entrance facing Grand Central Parkway placed an illuminated glass curtain wall in front of the columns. Original designs included the name of the museum translated into scores of languages and etched onto the glass. It also incorporated a floor-to-ceiling arched glass dividing wall in the interior that would have disrupted Embury’s column-free 115-foot arched truss. Both elements have been altered.

Inside, the truss will flow free of disruption. “We’ll be able to do large-scale installations like no other museum in America,” said Finkelpearl. A small skyscraper above the central lobby and a larger one to the south between two galleries feature baffles that direct light downward, while a series of angled glass panels—50 percent transparent—frame the skyscraper. Each row of hanging glass panels follows the rectangular form of the skylights before dropping down and shifting in angle so as to block and direct natural light.

The most important design element is at the western facade. A sand blasted dot graphic runs up the glass, becoming less dense toward the top. At night, the dot finish will be kinetically lit by LEDs programmed by a guest artist. Metal halide lights will wash over a vertical metal mesh that runs perpendicular to the glass, and a two-tone metallic finish will form letters that read “Queens” when viewed from the north and “Museum” when viewed from the south.

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**UNSPORTING**

**PADLOCKED—ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE**

is easy to miss, surrounded by buildings. The acre-size site is home to a tot lot and playing fields. Its trim ceilings served within intimate reach of John Singer Sargent’s combustible El Jaleo flamenco dancer—intimate engagement with a space as idiosyncratic as they come—and you have a near impossible architectural challenge when it comes time for an expansion.

It was a difficult task even for the ingeniously accommodating talents of Renzo Piano, who was charged with providing rooms for the public programs at the museum. Working closely with long-time director Anne Avellan, Piano had to redefine the museum’s accessibility mandate for the age of mass culture consumption. The result is heartbreaking, not due to any fault in the architecture, which is scaled to perfection, replete with interesting details, and spatially rich. The fault is in the way we demand giving priority to cafes, multiple elevators, and coat lockers personal engagement with art. Civic space today looks as if it were made to be hosed down; it is devoid of the inimitable.

Piano clearly understood what he was up against and strove to turn it to its advantage. Instead of the ephemeral, he provided geometry; in place of the mysteriously opaque, he introduced uplifting transparency. Piano succeeded in reinventing the Gardner for today’s museum visitors. And where there is silence, he does orchestrate experiences.

There’s the glass entrance that extends into a ground-floor greenhouse; the lobby halls are lined with bookshelves, loaded with actual books. There’s the so-called “no precedent” I can think of—couches, floor lamps, love seats, and birdcages with actual tweeting birds. Popped on an easel is a poster-sized interactive iPad providing the museum’s and Isabella Stewart Gardner’s history. Tea will be served in the afternoon. Cozy library in spirit, the Living room is encased in glass—and like almost all the spaces in the new $14 million addition—casts all its views back across the yard to the old palace, which Piano noted was really just a warehouse. A café, gift shop, impressive education rooms, and a very wide hall fill out the rest of the ground floor. The real experiences are upstairs, reached by a splendidly ostentatious cable-hung glass and steel double staircase. Two 36-foot cubes clad in speed-greened copper float atop the glassy ground-floor podium. One is a rectal hall for 300 and does, in fact, achieve real personality thanks to its three extreme vertical tiers of one-deep seats on all four sides of the cube. The competition between watching people performing below and eyeballing audience members directly across the way will be intense. The other cube is for exhibiting, but its proportion makes an enormous distraction out of the floor-to-ceiling glass wall. The art current-ly on display and commissioned for the space, Tapestry Radio Onl, by former artist-in-residence Victoria Morton, can’t hold a candle to the view of the back of the palace silhouetted against the northern sky. The icing ceiling can be lowered, and that may help refocus attention. On occasion, masterpieces from the collection will be cycled in for display, although most have probably never before been seen in blasts of so much daylight.

I feel unequipped to comment on probably the most important feature of the addition—the connector. Those who know the Gardner recall the extraordinary experience of arriving in a small, dark, compressed anteroom at the front of museum and the enchantment of then stepping into the expansive courtyard, a moment referred to as the “explosion.” People have very strong feelings about that particular ritual. I never felt the “explosion” and so walked along the 50-foot glass corridor joining new addition to old with vivid eyes. And I liked its minimalism, its minimal views of the sky, like a pond rimmed by the copper addition at one end and the palace’s balconies at the other. The “umbilical cord” ushers visitors into a dark brick space seamlessly akin to the cloister and then, boom, the steampy Italianate courtyard with its potted palms dappling cory marble nudes.

Those 50 feet of separation work wonderfully well at demar- cating the divide between the efficiency-minded culture venue that is a 21st-century museum today and yesterday’s randomly arranged, laxly organized, and poorly lit but entirely magical wonder rooms of old.

**CRIT> ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM**

**PROVING GROUND continued from front page and outdoor space with a rolling high/lowland landscape. On January 16, the Aberdeen City Gardens Trust and the city council announced that DS-R had bested some of the leading firms in both architecture and landscape architecture—West 8, Foster + Partners, Snøhetta & Hoskins, Mecanoo, and Gustafson Porter—to win the commission.**

**FIGHT OVER PLAYGROUND—ONCE PUBLIC, NOW PADLOCKED—ON THE UPPER EAST SIDE**

Ruppert Playground, a silver of open space on 93rd Street between 2nd and 3rd avenues, is easy to miss, surrounded as it is by tall residential brick buildings. The acre-size site is home to a tot lot and playing fields. That’s not so behind Community Board 8 (CB8) is fighting back and the debacle of how Related was able to privatize a public space has become both a warning for the future and a worrying precedent.

The crux of the issue is the 1983 sale of the site directly behind the playground, the last phase in the development of the Ruppert Urban Renewal Plan, part of the Mitchell-Lama housing program. Related Rentals offered to pay the city $10 million for that site with plans to build a residential high-rise, the present Carnegie Park. The sale hinged on CB8’s approval to amend the site for residential use, the city intimating that the developer’s funding was necessary to build the nearby neighborhood senior center, Yorkville Gardens. The controversial move, accused of being “emotional blackmail” by CB8 member Sam Hanoy, was passed. A Land Disposition Agreement was then drawn, stipulating that Related maintain the two public recreation sites prescribed in the Ruppert Plan and build by the city in 1976/ Ruppert Park for 10 years and Ruppert Playground for 25 years. In 1997, the park, three blocks away from the play-ground, was transferred to Parks & Recreation. The play-ground, a time-release bonus, became private property.

On review, the backroom deal was shortsighted. Community advocates have urged the city, in vain, to buy back the playground. Since the agreement expired in 2008, Related has opened the playground intermittently, based on public sentiment. While Related does not need approval to build on the site, it has other projects elsewhere in the city that need community support and so it is treading carefully. Its latest move was to announce an anchor tenant to its planned 35-story tower: a $240 million cancer radiation center. The cultural center will include an approximately 5,000-person outdoor amphitheater—with a dramatic walkway crisscrossing overhead—a 215,280 square-foot exhibition hall, and a 500-person black-box theater. The varied topography should create a variety of experiences within the small 6.4 acre park. “One of the reasons we threaded the cross paths was to create different parallels where you could have independent experiences,” Renfro said.

The pathways also connect to existing streets and major points of interest in the city, including the nearby train station and cultural institutions. Many buildings as-landscape projects are built with a relatively thin planting medium, typically on top of a curved or sloping building. Renfro calls the proposal, known as the Granite Web, a “true hybrid of building and landscape.” Working with Olin, they hope to connect the park to the dramatic and varied Scottish landscape, with large trees, deep perches, and rolling hills of health. “It will be the defining location in the city,” he said.

In a statement, Sir Duncan Rice, jury chair, said, “The Diller Scofidio + Renfro team had thought long and hard about Aberdeen’s special history and unique needs. Answer by answer, they overlooked the jury with their vision and their sensitivity to the whole downtown context.”

Now that the project has been selected, it faces a public referendum.

**Julie V. O’Donnell**
THIN CRUST continued from front page.
construction. Nearly one million square feet will sit below grade, making the new public space on the northernmost block akin to an elaborate rooftop garden. This prompted consternation among residents who fear that future university administrations will renego the public space arrangement.

Currently, the two twin slab buildings of Washington Square Village sit on the northern superblock with an elevated courtyard designed by Hideo Sasaki. The university has proposed eliminating the Sasaki Garden and replacing it with two new buildings designed by Grimshaw with Toshiko Mori. The substructure for these two buildings, known as the Boomerang Buildings, would run the entire width of the superblock from La Guardia Place to Mercer Street and would be capped with a garden designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. The substructure alone is nearly 770,000 square feet.

In tallying the promised 135,000 square feet of open space, NYU combined about 90,000 square feet of privately owned public space (POPS) with nearly 46,000 square feet of newly designated parkland on what is commonly called the “DOT strips,” which run beside Mercer and La Guardia. The parcels were assembled by the Department of Transportation in the 1950s as part of Robert Moses’ failed attempt to build a downtown highway. The new substructure would sit beneath the strips as well as the POPS. In order to assuage further development fears, the university included language in its ULURP application to designate the strips as parkland under the control of the Parks Department, which they say would be very difficult to ever reverse. But opponents said that the land is already owned by the city, and there’s no good reason to cede, sell, or redesignate.

Because the substructure sits beneath the strips, the university has also sought easements for future maintenance. It’s this issue in particular that has inflamed neighborhood activists. “Yes, Michael Van Valkenburgh can design the best landscape plan going, but that doesn’t guarantee it won’t be ripped up in the future,” said Martin Tessier of the Community Action Alliance on NYU 2031 (CAAN). “Their institutional memory is nonexistent, because events change, circumstances change, and administrators change.” CAAN’s Terri Cude added that since the strips sit at entrances to the Boomerang Buildings, the newly designated parkland is essentially an entry plaza to private buildings to be maintained by the public.

In a telephone interview, NYU’s vice president of government affairs and civic engagement, Alicia Hurley, said that such details haven’t been ironed out yet and added that by designating the area as parkland, NYU has committed itself to additional public review. “We initially designed the space with Michael Van Valkenburgh with the intention of purchasing the strips,” she said. “But once we shifted and agreed to map these areas as parkland, then we’ll have to go through a whole new effort to test our design with the community and the Design Commission.”

Below: Between the Boomerang Buildings, a 135,000-square-foot park sits atop NYU’s 770,000 square feet of underground classrooms, offices, and an auditorium.
IN DETAIL>

THE BANNER BUILDING

SCOTT HENSON
ARCHITECT WITH
GILSANZ MURRAY
STEFICEK

Local Law 11/98 is a New York City statute mandating that any building of more than six stories must have its facade inspected once every five years. Scott Hensons of Scott Henson Architects were undertaking just such an inspection on the historic 1892 Cleverdon & Putzel–designed Banner Building in Manhattan’s NoHo neighborhood when he discovered something rather disturbing. The structure’s cast iron facade—both its decorative elements, many of which had fallen off over the years, as well as its structural supports and bracing—was severely corroded. The condition was even worse on the top two floors, an 1898 addition that featured sheet metal decorative elements, which had deteriorated to the point that, in places, a person could press their fingers through them. Making matters even shabbier, the sandstone pilasters that framed the facade’s cast iron bands had worn down to a faded memory and the original single-paned wood windows had decayed beyond repair.

The building owner and the project team, which included structural engineering firm Gilsanz Murray Steficek and historical research firm Office for Metropolitan History, agreed that the only way to proceed was to restore the facade by making every effort to adhere to its original materials and traditional means of construction. One of the chief causes of the facade’s decline, aside from time itself, was severe water leakage, which had caused the original structural imbeds connecting the cast iron and sheet metal elements to the masonry backing wall to rust to a critical state. The team removed all of the metal elements and inspected them carefully. This analysis revealed that about 80 percent of the cast iron could be reconditioned and replaced on the building. This involved stripping the elements of the ten or so layers of paint that had been applied over the years and patching the odd non-fatal crack with Belzona Supermetal epoxy. Those elements that were beyond repair, or missing, were recast by Robinson Iron in Alabama using historical samples of the original facade. (the owner’s preference) and returned to the site, ready for installation. The team designed new structural supports for this purpose: structural stainless-steel bolts that pass all the way through the masonry backing wall and connect to plates on either side, holding the wall in compression. The sheet metal was attached and soldered together, and the cast iron was attached and caulked, making the whole assembly watertight and ready for another 100-plus years of life. The team also hired an artisan who was able to discern the original decorative character of the sandstone pilasters and re-create them with a sandstone patching material from Cathedral Stone.

Once all of the elements had been reproduced or repaired, they were painted patina green (the owner’s preference) and returned to the site, ready for installation. The team designed new structural supports for this purpose: structural stainless-steel bolts that pass all the way through the masonry backing wall and connect to plates on either side, holding the wall in compression. The sheet metal was attached and soldered together, and the cast iron was attached and caulked, making the whole assembly watertight and ready for another 100-plus years of life. The team also hired an artisan who was able to discern the original decorative character of the sandstone pilasters and re-create them with a sandstone patching material from Cathedral Stone.

Replacing the 54 windows required a similarly close historical analysis of the existing conditions. The windows included pulley double-hung varieties and single pivoting sashes with transoms. J. Padin in New Jersey re-fabricated them based on the original historical profiles and materials. Here, however, 21st-century technology was also employed to improve the building’s insulation with high-performance glazing.

As a final touch, the team also replaced the 1970s storefront. With little documentation available, Henson based a new design on what remained at street level as well as on clues implied by the fenestration above. The result is something of a rarity in Manhattan: a vintage cast iron building that retains its historic character from top to toe.

AARON SEWARD

SOURCES

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Sandstone
Cathedral Stone
www.cathedralstone.com

Replacing the 54 windows

The restoration team relied on a combination of traditional and contemporary materials and construction techniques. The cast iron and sheet metal facade was removed, repaired or re-fabricated, and replaced with new structural connections.

SCOTT HENSON
ARCHITECT WITH
GILSANZ MURRAY
STEFICEK

JACK KUCY

AARON SEWARD
ANDREW GELLER, 1924–2011 continued from front page

Andrew studied architecture and fine art at Cooper Union under Robert Gwathmey, father of the architect Charles Gwathmey. It was while recovering from exposure to mustard gas in an army training exercise that he read an article about industrial designer Raymond Loewy and became determined to work for him once the war was over. Before returning to civilian life, he designed Liberty Ship interiors as a naval architect for the United States Maritime Commission, and also served in the U.S. Corp of Engineers.

While attending Cooper Union he met Shirley Morris, the fine arts student whom he married in 1944. The two spent a brief time living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while Andrew worked for industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague, designing retail floor configurations and shelves for Macy’s Herald Square, and the “True Value Homes,” a simple track housing concept.

Raymond Loewy Associates hired him in 1947, and he immediately went to work designing Lord & Taylor stores, Maison Line cruise ship interiors, and midtown Manhattan restaurants. In 1951, he was given the assignment of designing the top-floor office interiors of the Lever House. During conception of the Lever House sculpture garden, he also served as a consultant to artist Isamu Noguchi. That same year, the Geller family (now including two children) moved to the Long Island harbor town of Northport.

My grandfather’s first freelance residential house commission was in 1953, a somewhat conventional-looking L-shaped ranch structure in Great Neck, New York. Then Elizabeth Reese, director of public relations for Loewy, asked Andrew to design a beach house for a parcel of land she had acquired in the then-sparingly populated oceanfront village of Sagaponack, New York. With very little money to work with, he decided on a simple A-frame structure emulating the aesthetics of local potato barns, and giving it the structural integrity to hold up to hurricane-force winds.

Once the house was built, in 1955, Reese immediately started using it as a backdrop for Loewy client advertising, including a magazine ad for DuPont and a fashion shoot in Vogue. Photographs of the house appeared on the cover of the real estate section of The New York Times in May 1957. Although the house was not the first A-frame, it was the first time a wide slice of the population had ever seen such a radical structure that was also low cost. My grandfather’s phone rang incessantly for weeks. Over the next three years, he would design 15 more unique beach houses, including the Pearlointh House (Westhampton Beach, 1958), considered to be one of the most influential pieces of modern architecture of the period, and the Hunt House (Ocean Bay Park, Fire Island, 1958), which was featured by the U.S. State Department in a magazine promoting the lifestyle of the average American worker and distributed throughout the Soviet Union. Many of his houses garnered nicknames for their unusual geometric shapes, such as “The Box Kite,” “The Double Diamond,” and “The Reclining Picasso.”

In 1959, Andrew reconfigured a tract-house model for Loewy client All State Properties in order to accommodate large crowds of people at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. The house sparked the famous “Kitchen Debate” between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Riding the wave of publicity from that event, All State Properties again hired the Loewy office in 1963 to design a community of vacation houses called “Leisurama.” The task fell to my grandfather. Two hundred units were sold and built in Montauk, New York. The following year, Andrew was appointed vice president of the Loewy department of Housing and Home Products where he developed thousands of tract houses to be built throughout the U.S. He continued to design housing, office buildings, and department stores until he retired from the Loewy office in 1974. Even after his retirement, he worked as a subcontractor for various architectural firms, designing restaurants in New York’s World Trade Center, Sbarro restaurants in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, and countless other structures in the United States and abroad.

In recent years, my grandfather turned back to traditional art, creating hundreds of paintings and sketches. Due to failing health, both of my grandparents moved in 2010 to Spencer, New York, to live with my mother and stepfather. Shirley passed away suddenly in July 2010. Andrew Geller had a hand in shaping mid-century American residential architecture as smart, affordable, and animated. But it was his endless curiosity about the world and its potential that was his most inspiring quality.


For help achieving the goals of your next project, contact the Ornamental Metal Institute of New York.

TRANSFORMING DESIGN INTO REALITY

A staircase creates a community in a building that needs one. That’s the philosophy behind the ornamental stair designed by Mitchell Girola Architects for NYU’s newly renovated School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Rising through a triple-height space that links classrooms and lounges, the inviting series of elliptically shaped treads and landings promotes a collaborative environment that lets students looking to learn and grow connect with mentors. Coupled with its new high-performance curtain wall enclosure, it has helped 7 East 12th Street become a light-filled vertical campus within this prestigious university, encouraging students to climb to new heights with each step.

JAKE GORS, A DESIGN WRITER AND FILMMAKER, LIVES IN ANDREW GELLER’S “DOUBLE DIAMOND HOUSE.”

Portuguese design studio Corque Design debuted its line of eco-friendly furniture and home accessories in New York last fall. New items designed by co-founder Ana Mestre include the Puf String, a seat constructed of rubber cork. The natural composite is cut from industrial rolls, allowing the seat to be constructed with a continuous piece, greatly reducing manufacturing waste. www.conquadesign.com

Co-founded by Susan Doban and Jason Gorsline as a multidisciplinary design studio affiliated with Doban Architecture, Think Fabricate has introduced the Stepping Wood Grain Chair. Curved corner pieces of solid walnut are joined by bamboo plywood and walnut boards of varying widths. End caps are lacquered MDF with or without storage cutouts. Corresponding ottomans are also available. Ivory, mocha. www.thinkfabricate.com

In partnership with reclaimed lumber company Windfall Lumber, Kirei now offers a line of engineered panels made with reclaimed materials. Manufactured locally with wood from deconstructed buildings in the Pacific Northwest, the panels are ideal for any surface in commercial and residential design. Panels are available in unfinished, clear, leather, and (shown, top to bottom) anthracite, ivory, mocha. www.kireiusa.com

KlipTech has added two new recycled paper and bamboo-fiber cladding products to its EcoClad line. The new EcoClad XP exterior cladding is available in 600 different finishes, patterns, and textures, in addition to custom-printing with any image. EcoClad Raw is unfinished cladding that can be painted by the client. www.kliptech.com

Designed by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for Mattiazzi, the Osso chair is made of oak, maple, or ash sourced near the company’s factory in Udine, Italy. Manufactured with solar-powered CNC equipment, the chair’s precise joinery creates a structure as smooth as bone—osso in Italian. The collection includes an armchair and stools in a range of colors. Available in the United States through Herman Miller. www.mattiazzi.eu

CORK, BAMBOO, AND LUMBER TAKE NEW SHAPES BUT HAVE THE SAME SUSTAINABLE STAYING POWER. JENNIFER K. GORSCHE
ARCHITECTS—designed towers at 6th Avenue
ings near their already proposed SHoP
to the Trinity plan, which favors taller build-
out more green space wherever they can.

stakeholders are now advancing ideas to eke
riverfront park so close and yet so far, various
St. John's Center's production studios, and
cut off from it by a UPS distribution center,
blocks from Hudson River Park, it's effectively
plan misses a key element: open space.

live/work/play zone. But critics say the Trinity
GREEN WEDGIES continued from front page
proposed Gap (right).
The four-block area, currently (left); with
open: So far HSC has identified the inordin-
ately wide sidewalks as one opportunity for
green space and are pushing for more
access to Hudson River Park at Spring Street.

Other ideas focus on swapping displaced
air rights for green space, an idea triggered
by the popular High Line, such as one for a
tower overlooking the Holland Tunnel.

Recently a study by WXY Architecture was
presented to the community board that would
allow air rights for buildings to be sold and
distributed throughout the neighborhood
so as to encourage interconnected green
spaces. Instead of placing privately owned
public spaces (POPS) next to the new build-
ings, the plan encourages building owners
to assemble plazas together, in this case
a series of midblock parks between Hudson
and Varick to be called the Hudson Square
Gap. As there are only three major real
estate players in the area—Trinity, Edison,
and Extell—the plan would seem doable as
long as Trinity and Edison adapt the plans
they already have for the block.

The proposed Hudson Square Gap runs
from Henry to Spring Street, where Edison
wants to build a midblock tower effectively
plugging the proposed gap. That tower
would have its own POPS designed by
Starr Whitehouse facing Dominick Street,
a design dependent on the Port Authority
allowing it to encompass an adjoining park-
ing lot that sits above the Holland Tunnel’s
entrance and cannot be built upon.

But all roads lead to Trinity, who owns six
million square feet and holds the ULURP
application. Their plan carries the most
weight unless City Planning can be encour-
gaged to think otherwise. TS

ST. VINCENT’S RISING
On January 23, City Planning approved the Rudin Management’s plan for the
St. Vincent’s Hospital campus, allowing the company to build an $800 million
multi-use complex. The plan includes 450 luxury condos, a 564-seat school,
15,000 square-foot public park, and street-level retail; the approval did not apply
to the O’Toole building, now the responsibility of the North Shore Long Island

Jewish Medical Services. Before voting “yes,” Commissioner Burden said the
plan successfully integrates the old site back into the fabric of the neighborhood.
She added that she was “confident” the developer would also find a way to
integrate an AIDS memorial into the plan for Triangle Park.

THREE DOWN
Crain’s reports that Larry Silverstein plans to cap 3 World Trade at seven floors
instead of the planned 80 if he doesn’t find an anchor tenant by the end of
the year. It came as no surprise, as a 2010 agreement with the Port Authority
dicted that the developer pre-lease 400,000 square feet and line up $300
million before 3 WTC could continue to climb skyward.

MOM AND POP FIGHT BACK
After hearing citywide complaints about the drugstores and banks taking
over mom and pop retail on the Upper West Side, City Planning addressed the
issue at a January 19 meeting with the West Side Neighborhood Retail Streets
Initiative. The plan seeks to regulate storefront width at a maximum of
40 feet (25 feet for banks) and to dictate storefront transparency with ten-foot
high glass requirement. Existing businesses would be grandfathered in so the
current bank ghetto will remain for the foreseeable future.

TENTH STREET SIDESTEP
Moments before Landmarks Preservation declared Tompkins Square North
an historic district on January 17, developer Ben Shaoul got permits from
the Department of Buildings for a rooftop addition to 315 East 10th facing the
square. The buzz from Landmarks was that the addition would be set back
far enough so as to not compromise the nineteenth-century streetscape and
hipster vibe.

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John Bredehorst
Managing Director
When most people think of garbage, it’s foul odor and rotting fruit peel that come to mind, not world-class design and innovative thinking. But as cities like New York find ways to handle trash more sustainably, different approaches are being tried, including reinventing old technologies in new ways and building waste-processing facilities in urban centers that can generate their own heat. One such facility is already a star. The Newtown Creek wastewater treatment plant in Brooklyn, New York, was designed by Greeley and Hansen, Hazen and Sawyer, and Malcolm Pirnie, environmental engineering consultants, in association with Ennead Architects. Completed in 2008, the plant consists of eight giant, stainless-steel “eggs” that are illuminated at night and visible from the other boroughs. Visiting the so-called Egg Beaters has become something of an attraction, and the wastewater plant even stars in a new short film, The Art of Waste, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January. The New York Times has hailed the plant as a sign that “the modern renaissance of New York is complete.” It is a surprising distinction, but such praise for the design of new waste-processing facilities may become more common as cities look to modernize their current waste-management strategies with an eye to heightening design quality, sustainability, and accountability.

For decades, garbage trucks hauled New York’s trash to the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island. When the landfill closed in 2001, the city turned to exporting garbage to other states by truck, not a popular move. As American cities like San Francisco and Seattle add compost to their recycling programs, and European cities turn to new waste-to-energy plants, New York has lagged behind. According to an article in The New York Times last October, the city now recycles about 15 percent of the waste collected by the Department of Sanitation, primarily from residences, down from a peak of 23 percent in 2001. Improvements are in the works. Observed Kendall Christiansen, the founding assistant director of New York City’s recycling program, “From the start, New York was a pioneer from a recycling perspective—but the program stagnated and didn’t keep looking forward to what the next thing to do was and the attention fell off.” He attributed the failure to innovate in part to the popularity of other sustainability initiatives like green building. But he believes that Mayor Bloomberg’s new waste-management plan is a significant step in the right direction.

Upgrading New York’s waste management has long been on Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s agenda. In 2006, his administration adopted a new strategy for solid waste removal. The plan emphasizes exporting garbage via barges and trains instead of by trucks and aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 192,000 tons per year. In 2009, the Department of Sanitation added hybrid collection trucks—at a cost of $500,000 each (federal subsidies reimburse about half)—to cut emissions within the city, among the first in the country to do so. In January, Bloomberg reiterated his administration’s commitment to overhauling the city’s waste management strategy during his State of the City address. He announced a goal to double the amount of residential waste diverted from landfills by 2017, and proclaimed, “We’ll explore the possibility of cleanly converting trash into renewable energy.” Bloomberg’s plan promises to bring new facilities into the city by changing the local infrastructure for handling waste. One of them will be the Sunset Park recycling facility currently under construction in Brooklyn. The 11.5-acre complex will be situated on the edge of the Gowanus Canal, allowing barges to drop off and pick up materials. When completed, it will process 600 tons of glass, metal, and plastic every day. Designed by architect Annabelle Selldorf, the facility indicates the newfound prominence of waste infrastructure in the urban landscape.
design raises the bar for infrastructure, using corrugated steel and translucent fiberglass panels, and an exposed steel frame in the tipping building where materials arrive. In 2010, the Public Design Commission praised the plan as "elegant and restrained." Selldorf, who is known for her work on gallery spaces and luxury residences, said in an interview, "I think that the overall design is meant to be a pleasant surprise for people who expect a recycling facility to be just piles of metal and glass." While the facility is located in an industrial area, its relationship to the community was also an important consideration for Selldorf and the city's recycling company, Sims Metal Management. "From the onset, public engagement was a desire that the client articulated," she explained. In a further gesture of outreach, the complex will include an education center where students can learn about recycling and 3.5 acres of open space. Its construction is also part of a long-term plan to develop the waterfront district, known as the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Business Area.

In the past, waste infrastructure projects have rarely received a warm welcome from nearby residents, who imagine that they will bring odor, noise and pests. The result, according to environmental justice advocates, is that waste management facilities are disproportionately located in low-income communities that have less power to oppose them. The majority of New York City's garbage is delivered to transfer stations in neighborhoods in the South Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, which trucks must pass through. Bloomberg's plan attempts to address those inequalities by developing four new marine transfer stations in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. The stations, designed by Dattner Architects and engineers Greeley and Hansen, will transfer garbage from their respective boroughs onto barges to be shipped away. The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance praised the plan for relieving the burden on neighborhoods where stations have historically been located. But the stations exemplify just how difficult siting a waste project anywhere in the city can be. The proposed Upper East Side station, which will be located on 91st Street and the East River, has been at the center of numerous lawsuits and rallies for the past five years. Residents have opposed the project's proximity to a public housing project and park with playing fields, but in December a judge dismissed a lawsuit against the station.

According to Bernard Zipprich, who led Dattner's efforts on the marine transfer station program, environmental justice is one of the biggest challenges of building waste infrastructure in urban areas. He said that, for example, the station's final design took community input into account. A screen wall for the station's entrance ramp will block garbage trucks from view, and the design maintains the existing promenade along the East River for public use.

Internationaly, waste infrastructure is attracting creative solutions that point to increased engagement among architects with the problem. In 2010 Bjarke Ingels of BIG unveiled a design for an incinerator that would double as a ski slope and...
recreational center in the center of Copenhagen. The plant went before a city council vote in December amid concerns it would be rejected over fear of carbon emissions.

In London, a study was commissioned in 2009 to develop a comprehensive plan to handle a whopping 85 percent of the city’s trash by 2020. Then the government changed and the deadline was moved to 2036, if ever. “Right now, waste management in London is a crazy free market affair with every borough selling off their trash to the cheapest bidder,” said Alun Jones, a partner at Dow Jones Architects, the firm that prepared the study in collaboration with Arup. “That means taking it down the Thames to the east and smearing it all over the countryside.” Sponsored by former mayor Ken Livingstone, “Rubbish in—Resources out: Design Ideas for Waste Facilities in London” envisioned a range of innovative solutions including gasification and anaerobic digestion plants suitable for urban settings. With gasification, a thermal treatment plant burns waste in an oxygen-free environment releasing gas as usable energy. The anaerobic digesters—high-tech composting with bacteria—were shown located beneath parking lots with shops and gardens above; they too can provide heat and energy for their neighbors, or even bio-gas for cars. Jones said the idea was to design the plants as iconic markers in the city reminiscent of the iconic graphic Ps in Tokyo that indicate parking lots. “They can be interesting buildings,” Jones added, “and it makes sense on so many levels, but the current economic organization of waste management is stacked against it.”

In Barcelona, ecoparks have proved successful at integrating mechanical and biological treatment technologies in settings that include marinas and residential developments. The city currently has three ecoparks that manage 60 percent of the waste produced by the city and provide enough energy for its own electricity needs with a plan to support some 800 nearby housing units as well. Guided tours of the plant are becoming a popular education destination.

Barcelona is also at the forefront with an old technology that’s new again—pneumatic tubes. Since its debut at the Olympic Village in 1992, an automated waste collection system beneath the city streets has been in operation throughout Barcelona. Residents and business owners deposit garbage into portholes on the street, and an underground network of pneumatic tubes whisk everything away to a collection plant. Organic waste gets diverted for conversion into biogas, which heats buildings while recyclables are picked up by truck. Albert Mateu, the vice president at Envac, the Swedish company behind the pneumatic tubes, estimates that installation will be complete in seven years and one-third of Barcelona will have access to automated vacuum collection.

Barcelona was the first city to include vacuum collection in its official waste management strategy but the Jetsons-like system is catching on fast and has been exported abroad. Envac has put similar systems in Disney World and parts of London, Montreal, and Stockholm.

Rosina Abramson, Envac’s U.S. representative, said the company is working on feasibility studies to retrofit several New York public spaces with the latest in pneumatic tube technology. The underside of the High Line may become a super highway for Chelsea Market’s refuse, while a system of trash tubes beneath the Core Island boardwalk that Envac is planning with the New York City Economic Development Corporation may ultimately extend to the surrounding amusement parks, ball fields, and the aquarium.

In fact, New York City has had its own pneumatic network on Roosevelt Island since 1975, and it is still in operation today. Envac, who was responsible for the system, is also consulting with Cornell University on their new applied science campus planned for the south tip of the island. “Cornell has a specific energy management plan and independent policies on waste disposal,” said Abramson. “The new Envac system would be specially designed to deal with their campus environment and needs like servicing laboratories.”

It is new developments, like Cornell’s New York campus, and dense districts that are prime candidates for pneumatic systems, Carlos Vasquez, Barcelona’s sanitation director, is careful to point out. At a New York University symposium in 2010, Vasquez explained, “Pneumatics arranges and releases public space. It is the best advantage.” He listed noise reduction and decreasing heavy traffic as two other benefits. "If architect Juliette Spertus had her way, other parts of the city besides Roosevelt Island would get pneumatics, too. In 2010, Spertus curated Fast Trash, an exhibition about automated vacuum waste collection on Roosevelt Island and in other cities. She is currently working on two studies with CUNY’s University Transportation Research Center that examine the costs and benefits of upgrading the system on Roosevelt Island, and retrofitting subway tunnels and viaducts with pneumatic tubes. “It’s not the cheapest option,” she admitted. “Barcelona chose to do it because the environmental benefits were so great. One challenge is figuring out where to do it, and another is the financing.”

Pneumatics is not the only sustainable technology under discussion. After
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FEBRUARY 2012

WEDNESDAY 1
LECTURE
Reinhardt Meyer-Kaltus
Voices of the People in the Berlin Phono Archive
6:00 p.m.
National Gallery of Art
Washington, D.C.
www.nga.gov

EXHIBITION OPENING
Mary Corse: Minimalism
The Lehmann Maupin Gallery
540 West 26th St.
www.lehmannmaupin.com

THURSDAY 2
LECTURE
Andrea Duany
Heterodonia Architectonica
6:30 p.m.
Sciame Auditorium
CUNY Spitzer School of Architecture
141 Convent Ave.
cuny.cuny.edu/ssa

SYMPOSIUM
The Architecture of Discourse: Publication & Publicity in Architecture
Aaron Levy, William Menking, and Tom Weaver
6:00 p.m.
Meyerson Hall
Penn School of Design
210 South 34th St.
Philadelphia, PA
www.design.upenn.edu

FRIDAY 3
EVENT
First Friday
Architecture Research Office
6:30 p.m.
Architecture Research Office
170 Varick St.
www.archleague.org

SATURDAY 4
EXHIBITION OPENINGS
From the Library: The Fleeting Structures of Early Modern Europe
National Gallery of Art
4th St. NW and Constitution Ave.
Washington, D.C.
www.nga.gov

Sanford Biggers: The Cartographer’s Conundrum
MMA MoCA
87 Marshall St.
North Adams, MA
www.massmoca.org

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KEY NOTE SPEAKER
PATRIK SCHUMACHER
Director, Zaha Hadid Architects

Day 2: Friday, February 17, 2012 9AM-6PM
Pratt Manhattan Campus, New York, NY

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Gridlock—the word has become metaphorical—indispensable in dealing with Washington as well as New York. But in the beginning was the grid, the Manhattan street pattern itself, laid out in 1811, whose 200th anniversary is commemorated with an exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY), curated by architectural historian Hilary Ballon. Not until the 1980s did the word “gridlock” come along, the exhibition tells us. Formally certified on March 22, 1811, the report of the “Commissioners of Streets and Roads in the City of New York” offered a plan its authors promised would “unite regularity and order with the Public convenience and benefit.” The ur-grid, the Commissioners’ Map, is on display as the centerpiece of the show.

The report justified the grid pattern with the reasoning that “a city is to be composed principally of the habitations of men, and that straight-sided and right-angled houses are the most cheap to build and the most convenient to live in.” The words fairly drip with contempt for “circles, ovals, and stars” and other ornamental shapes. The grid, with its 12 avenues and 155 streets laid out under the director of chief surveyor John Randel, became the grammar of the city. In its interaction with older streets and buildings, it produced such irregular effects as the mad intersection of 4th Street with 11th and 12th streets. Or the absent block of 11th Street at Broadway where James Renwick’s Grace Church sits. The grid is also the basis of Manhattan architecture, providing unconscious, de facto specs for builders. The grid’s champions praise the architectural creativity it has engendered. Its critics condemn the grid as generating architectural mediocrity and providing few public spaces and structures.

The exhibition is visually rich, dominated by a wonderful group of maps. With their deep shadings and contours they recall the topography that the grid plan leveled out. Yellowed documents are the original founding political documents. Also on display are artifacts of the surveying methods that created the grid. Theodolites and drafting tools remind us that surveying was the high tech of 1800, embodying an idealistic Cartesian vision as compelling in its day as Google’s vision of the Internet today. (That Washington and Jefferson were both working surveyors, amateur architects, and land speculators says a lot about the cultural basis of the nation.)

There is an example of a Gunter’s chain, the basic land measure that ruled land layout—a 100-foot block is really 99 feet, three 33-foot chains. A hewn stone land-marker is the closest thing possible to a physical embodiment of the theoretical grid.

The grid was at least as much a product of political expedience as of soaring vision. It provided the commercial advantage of generating neat modules of real estate and standardized building plots. But rather than creating standard architecture, champions of the grid argue that it forced architectural creativity, in the sense that greenhouses force plants.

Rem Koolhaas celebrates the grid in Delirious New York, calling it “the most courageous act of prediction in Western civilization: the land it divides, unoccupied, the population it describes, conjectural; the buildings it locates, phantoms...” He argued that the grid made the city resistant to any overweening large architectural scheme, while the uniformity of blocks demanded variety in architecture. “In the single block—the largest possible area that can fall under architectural control,” he wrote of the grid, “it develops a maximum unit of urbanistic ego.” The grid was the studio system behind the stars of the skyline, perhaps. John Kouwenhoven, in his classic essay in The Beer Can by the Highway, compared the grid to jazz. He associated the grid with jazz’s basic 4/4 or 2/4 beat and the skyscrapers towering above the grid with improvisational solos.

Critics of the grid focus on its failure to provide public space. The New York grid lacked the many public squares of other grid plans, notably those of Savannah and Philadelphia, noted Vincent Scully, who saw it as the beginning of America’s neglect of shared spaces. “The grid so applied might be slapped down anywhere,” he wrote, “and usually all too little public space is left free in the process. The later American tendency toward private luxury and public squallor was already well enough in evidence here.” John Reps, the eminent historian of the American city, saw the New York grid as the first fatal step toward the dull gridded cities of the West. Henry James called it a “primal topographic curse.”

The plan did call for two large publicly owned common spaces, a military parade ground uptown and a market place, but neither was realized as planned. Instead, the exhibition documents, now-familiar public spaces originated in periodic fits of public idealism, private generosity, and speculative innovation. Parks and squares showed up in odd-shaped parcels left by accidents of the map and the

Peter Murray, Clip-Kit, $15.00

The cover of British architect and journalist Peter Murray’s gripping page-turner, A Passion to Build, says it all. Bright red lingerie lies over a copy of Rykwert’s The Seduction of Place and a Pevsner guide to a place called Frampton. An iPad screen shows an athlete competing in the Euro games planned for this fictional north of England city, while a sketchbook shows an “Indigo James” design for a classical stadium favored by the local Duke of Frampton. Other images portray the Sienese Palio that inspired the designer of the opening event of the novel. While the story of the planning of the games is quite pedestrian and sad, with all the usual British complications of class and cast, the fun is in Murray’s mischievous eye for detail, gossip, style, and ambition. Few escape his eagle eye as they press on to success and fulfillment in this charming and wry narrative of Anglo-architectural glitterati.

The cast of characters is a witty amalgam of well-known and easy-to-identify personalities: the bicycle-mad global architectural titan; his ex-partner, Harry Jamb, the detail-obsessed reformed alcoholic; the lady architect who has not built in Britain; and the journalist whose romantic liaisons bring on the headlines. Murray cleverly shifts the voice of the narrator as the story unfolds, writing from the point of view of the mayor, his planner, his two main male architectural protagonists, and their wives, children, clients, colleagues, critics, lovers, and rivals.

This efficient literary conceit enables Murray to describe the production of a building and urban event in all its complexity. It also sadly reduces all the characters to stereotypical ciphers in a monstrous machine, losing critical distance. It was especially disappointing that everyone lives happily ever after, heading to Buckingham Palace to be knighted or made a lord. A more subversive ending could have further spiced up Murray’s rich and saucy parody.

Many architects have tried their hand at fiction. Alison Smithson, for instance, wrote A Portrait of the Female Mind as a Young Girl (1966) and left several unpublished novels at her death. Barry Maitland, after studying architecture at Cambridge and practicing in Britain, became the successful author of ten Brock and Kolla crime novels in Australia, winning the Ned Kelly Award three times. Does Murray’s happy ending indicate that he too has further literary ambitions, a sequel or prequel, extending back from architecture to ornament and crime? Stay tuned for the next “Harry Jamb!”

Urban design historian David Grahame Shane teaches at Columbia University, Cooper Union, and at Universities in London, Milan, and Venice.
land. Mayor Philip Hone led the creation of Washington Square, which served as an early drilling space for militia, while Gramercy Park was laid out on swampy land by a developer with the Dickensian name of Samuel Ruggles.

Manhattan’s grid presents practical drawbacks to daily life. The cultural geographer J. B. Jackson famously praised city plans with alleys that provide access for deliveries and removals. But on the grid, garbage sits waiting for pickup beside the entrance to even the most stately mansion.

Another of the critics of the grid was Frederick Law Olmsted, whose looping, biomorphic paths in Central Park map a visual reproach to the angles of the city street. Olmstead also attacked the grid as a handicap to architecture. “There is no place in New York where a stately building can be looked up to from base to turret,” he wrote, “none where it can even be seen full in the face…none where it can be viewed in advantageous perspective.”

And—in a famous sentiment displayed in large type on the gallery wall—Olmsted lamented the decentralization the grid imposed. “Such distinctive advantage of position as Rome gives St. Peter’s, Paris the Madeleine, London, St. Paul’s, New York, under her system, gives to nothing.”

But a city without a central cathedral or palace was more a democratic society and, in a city without a center, anywhere could be central. The grid may have democratized land ownership, as some historians argue, assisting in the distribution of large estates into the hands of mechanics and merchants. It allowed the economic and cultural center of the city to move uptown, through the porous sponge of the grid. “This is the purpose of New York’s geometry,” Roland Barthes wrote. The grid might lack a cathedral but it let the name of Frank Woolworth tower above all, for at least a few years.

But bringing into the gallery the sense of the grid as perceived on the street or in the popular mind is harder. How to represent the mesmerizing quality of the short blocks that make people walk farther than they plan, or the flickering passage of street numbers in a taxi window, like shuffling cards? First-time visitors to Manhattan tend to comment first on its winds and shadows, because just as the grid defied topography, it defied the sun and wind and sought to align itself with the compass, so the prevailing westerlies whistle through darkened skyscraper canyons—the word has become unavoidable.

In Waterfront: A Walk around Manhattan, Phillip Lopate writes while “one hears the Manhattan grid disparaged today as merely a capitalist device for real-estate speculation, to me it is a mighty form, existential metaphor, generator of modernity…it inspired Mondrian, Sol Lewitt, Agnes Martin, and that’s good enough for me.” Mondrian’s iconic Broadway Boogie Woogie is a reminder that the grid represents only one aspect of the city’s spiritual map: its counterpoint is the defiant, dynamic sash of Broadway. Broadway was the avenue of dreams, the impetuous id in contest with the responsible superego of the grid. Such “dramas of triangulation” are the focus of one of the entries in the MCNY’s companion exhibition, The Unfinished Grid: Design Speculations for Manhattan, a set of projects by architects on the theme of the future of the grid. The entry called Projective Exceptions, by Grant Alford assisted by Spencer Lindstrom, was inspired by the Flatiron building neighborhood and suggests three new angled exceptions to the grid.

The sidebar show was curated by Gregory Wessner and sponsored by the museum, the Architectural League, and Architizer. The more than 120 entrants were asked to speculate on how the grid might be adapted, extended, or transformed. The eight projects picked by the jury offer a refreshing mix of ground-level innovations with grand thinking. One effort, 6¼ Avenue, by ksestudio and others, offers ideas for a new corridor of mid-block open space that has informally sprouted up between 6th and 7th avenues. Dissociative New York by Joshua Mackley and Mathew Ford experiments with a new kind of regulatory structure “that would remove absolutely all regulations (zoning, preservation) from the avenues, while simultaneously freezing in their current state all the streets in perpetuity.”

In Tabula Fluxus: A New Topography for Tourists, Yikyu Choe, Michael Chaveriat, and Myung Kweon Park appreciate Manhattan’s grid so much they suggest building a second one—700 feet above today’s street level.

Clearly, where the grid is most firmly locked is in the thinking of those on its streets.

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KENGO KUMA AU NATUREL

Despite having few projects in the United States, Kengo Kuma has a passionate following among American students and practitioners for his subtly refined interpretation of organic and environmentally inspired designs. Following a lecture at the University of Pennsylvania last fall, Kuma talked to Ariel Genadt about his writings and experiments in erasing architecture, reservations about American building today, response to the tsunami in Japan, and recent commission to oversee an expansion of the 1967 Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon.

Ariel Genadt: In 2000, you published Anti-Object, promoting the provocative idea of “the dissolution and disintegration of architecture” as exemplified by your work in the 1990s. How did this idea come about?

Kengo Kuma: The idea was born as the result of Japan’s economic slump in the 1990s. I opened my practice in 1988, and in the following several years I managed to design some monumental architecture in Tokyo. However, in the 1990s, I had no jobs in Tokyo, which led me to work in more “natural” environments in the provinces, designing small buildings that could match them. These experiences formed the basis for Anti-Object.

What do you mean by dissolving buildings into an environment that is constantly changing?

“Environment” is a wide concept that incorporates both natural and urban surroundings. And naturally, the environment itself changes every day. For a site in a city, my architecture aims to merge into its urban setting. I don’t worry about the change of the environment, because I always try to make the building as flexible as it can be to embrace variety.

After visiting Columbia University in 1985, you published Good-Bye Postmodern—11 American Architects, a critique of postmodern architecture of the time. Now that you have completed your first built work in the United States—a residence in New Canaan, Connecticut—do you feel differently about American architecture?

Back in 1985, America was still full of confidence. Now it feels as if the country is confused and has lost its self-assurance. Our house for New Canaan is more like Japan than America. Nearby is Philip Johnson’s Glass House, which stands on a platform, designed in the “classical” modernist American style. Our work has no platform, no center, and everything floats in the forest.

You have written that you wish to see architecture and landscape design fusing into one, with the traditional Japanese gardener as an inspiration working from within the garden, in continuity with place. In approaching the expansion of the Portland Japanese Garden, do you identify with the gardener-designer model?

The “gardening” work style is very much the way we approach projects. I have worked with a number of landscape designers, but I wasn’t impressed with the way they designed because to me it looked as if they were forcing their compositions onto nature. Gardeners, on the contrary, try to learn from nature, and I would like to work like that in the project for Portland.

In your 2010 essay “Studies in Organic,” it appears that among the Modern architects you are most inspired by is Frank Lloyd Wright. How does your definition of organic architecture differ from Wright’s?

As I understand it, what Wright aimed at in his organic architecture was a living creature-like architecture, rather than organ-like. My organic architecture is inspired by living creatures, rather than by organs, so there is little difference with Wright. What distinguishes us is that whereas Wright considered a creature a self-complete system, for me it means some kind of incomplete flow, totally dependent on the outside world.

In the same essay, you addressed the “Bilbao Effect,” writing, “To B or not to B?” You recently won the prestigious competition for the design of the Victoria & Albert Museum at Dundee, Scotland. The clients are keen on repeating a Bilbao Effect for their city. How do you intend to preclude the reading of the new museum as an object and still satisfy the client’s desire for an architectural icon?

I do not deny that iconic architecture can revive and regenerate the city. But an icon as a self-expression of the architect won’t be loved by its local people in the long run. Instead, I believe that a “natural icon”—born from a dialogue between the architect and the location—will be favored by everyone. This is what we want to see in the project of V&A at Dundee.

Your most celebrated works in Japan are made of natural stone, while the Dundee museum will feature reconstituted stone. Some of your assemblage details seem to defy what stone “wants,” to use Louis Kahn’s expression. Would it be fair to say that makes the building appear as artificial/ object?

In every single project we work on there exists a limit to the budget, and natural materials are not necessarily usable. For the V&A, we were inspired by the masonry architecture of Scotland, which is made of grayish stones. Spreading a massive, naked texture of concrete is not what we do. I think that using reconstituted stones also represents our respect to nature.

You have explained that economic troubles in Japan turned out to be an opportunity for architectural innovation. Elsewhere you commented on how the Japanese have historically had to build in a sustainable manner and use resources carefully because of Japan’s isolation. Do you think the current financial crisis in the U.S. can also lead to innovative architecture?

Japan has always generated new cultures that convey an image of firmness and stability when the reality is that buildings yield to nature’s great forces. Should buildings reflect that reality?

The tsunami told us that however strong concrete-made buildings may be, they cannot counter the power of nature. In the old days, small Japanese wood houses looked flimsy, but they had in fact been designed taking well into account their environmental conditions through the clever choice of sites, their flexible structure to fence off natural forces, and so on. Our principle and approach in the “cloud-like designs is to make full use of such wisdom of our ancestors and grow out of fortress-like architecture in concrete.

Ariel Genadt is an architect and lecturer at the School of Design, University of Pennsylvania.
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