Philadelphia’s colonial master plan featured five squares: two to the east, two to the west, and one at the center. Inspired by Parisian boulevards, city planners cut through the plan to make way for the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at the turn of the last century. The central and north-west squares became circles swirling round the Louvre-inspired City Hall and fountains designed by Alexander Stirling Calder at Logan Circle.

With the launch of the Marcel Breuer Digital Archive in April, Syracuse University reached the midpoint in digitizing their extensive Breuer collection. While the public and critics debate the merits of Bertrand Goldberg’s Prentice Hospital in Chicago or Paul Rudolph’s Orange County Government Center, the new website will add grist to the mill of Brutalist defenders looking for concrete arguments about the movement’s pedigree. Though Breuer and many of his disciples would likely eschew any stylistic labels, there are finds within the archive that arguably could be viewed as seeds for the Whitney Museum, a Brutalist icon.

Times Square needs extensive subterranean work before the future can get underway. “That’s the greatest story never told,” said Janette Sadik-Khan, Department of Transportation (DOT) commissioner, of the outdated infrastructure beneath the street, including 19th-century trolley tracks and gas mains now being replaced by some serious backstage (that is, below-grade) infrastructure to support one of the world’s great outdoor stages.

Everyone can be an urban planner, and that’s a good thing, according to Mike Lydon, principal at Brooklyn’s Street Plans Collaborative and author of Tactical Urbanism, Volume 2. With a surge of interest in urbanism across the country and at every level, communities are rethinking public space, or the lack therein. Into the breach, so-called tactical urbanism has surged, offering quick, affordable tools for making a big impact. Lydon and other tactical urbanists will be contributing to the U.S. Pavilion’s Spontaneous Interventions: Design

Korea is calling all starchitects. See page 8

Talking Tactical Urbanism

Plugging-in Plaza

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Collaboration is a keystone of architectural practice and education. But with the rise of an Internet culture obsessed with no-holds-barred sharing, how collaboration is defined continues to shift, especially in education as a wave of decentralized, nontraditional arrangements swells. The new models forge partnerships outside of the traditional faculty-student relationship and incorporate

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It’s official: Walking works. The Brookings Institution has put out a study, and the Sunday review section of The New York Times has ratified it. Not only is walking good for your health; walking is good for making places livable. And in the one way that seems to count: by adding on average a value increase of $8.88 per square foot to office rent, $6.92 to retail rent, $301.76 per month to apartment rent and $89.54 to home values with every increasing degree of walkability, according to the Brookings paper which drew on metropolitan Washington D.C., for its data.

It may seem obvious that places where people can convene, converse, and commute with ease are superior places to places where you can slip from car through garage into your home unseen, but it had to be said, and with dollar signs and real estate values. Thus armed, developers and planning agencies can put some weight behind making walkability a development and planning priority over, say, surface parking, competitive height, or suburban-style sprawl.

It’s a lesson that architects, landscape architects, and planners have already absorbed. “Weaving together” and “reconnecting urban fabric” have been in common parlance for at least a decade. Hudson Yards in New York has walkability at two levels, along a new boulevard and up on the rescued last stretch of the High Line; the Southwest Ecodistrict and Wharf in D.C. (See page 15) are all about “mixed use across the site in continual rotation” which sounds like planner-speak for “you can walk there safely at night.” In Los Angeles, the visions recently released for the 40 acres around Union Station all presume courtyards and parks before those emblems of auto-centric planning, axes and gateways. The director of one team, NBBJ/Ingenhoven Architects, Ben Dieckmann pronounced bluntly that “towns are not created by buildings but by the voids between them.”

As large-scale urban master plans talk the walk in the United States, what are they saying abroad? More American firms than ever, and at all sizes, are working in Asia, the Middle East and India. They are hired over local designers as a sign of aspiration by governments and developers expecting to get the most sophisticated and advanced planning and architecture available in the world. Too often, architects find themselves rising to the occasion of what one British journalist described as the most common brief: Build me an icon, here’s the budget.

And while green roofs have quickly surfaced on mega-structures of every size and ambition, variation in scale, walkability, and true connections to context appear more rarely. The Gensler-designed Dubai International Financial Center built with speed in the early noughts is basically a 60-story towers-in-the-park complex dressed up with some sustainable flourishes including a boulevard of green space that flows not only across the site from the city but up and into the mezzanine level of a hotel plus live/work program. That certainly sounds better than the usual retail base as the standard way to connect with walking, talking humans.

Obviously, architects have limited sway when called to a job. Still, it would be nice to believe that architects when working as planners will make that extra effort to espouse the same values of human scale and walkability when working abroad as they are beginning to do so effectively here.

—Julie V. Iovine
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SOCKS FIFTH AVENUE

One evening in late May, Architecture for Humanity's Cameron Sinclair stood in his stocking feet on a chase longue in the middle of a Fifth Avenue living room and thanked quests for coming out to celebrate the release of his new book *Design Like You Give a Damn*. The can-do meets can-done crowd included DJ Spooky, TED-Prize-winning artist J.R., and former New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussov. Sinclair revealed the mysterious connection between the scrappy non-profit and the swanky party location: hostess Phoebe Campbell, the wife of Metropolitan Museum director Tom Campbell, is also the sister of Cliff Curry, a west coast architect and co-founder of the Curry Stone Prize, which Architecture for Humanity helps administer. Ms. Campbell did admit that Sinclair was the first cocktail party guest inspired to use the chaise as a podium, not counting the family pooch.

The north end of the park is geared toward families with children. The pavilion roof gets jaunty support from columns pitched at varying angles. A polished concrete floor plays off a warm cedar ceiling that drops from 12 to 7 feet in one section of the park. Thin-streamed fountains spurt from flush bluestone pavers, with the largest at the center representing Philadelphia. Smaller jets representing the sister cities relative to their distance from the city and their populations are signified by the size of the jets. The north end of the park is geared toward families with children. The pavilion and its plaza act as a midway buffer. Its green roof points up and out 16 feet toward the circle. Split-faced Emerson limestone cladding gives way to smooth, honed accents. The seemingly cantilevered roof gets jaunty support from columns pitched at varying angles. A polished concrete floor plays off a warm cedar ceiling that drops from 12 to 7 feet in one interior-to-exterior swoop. The cedar flies through a glass wall around the snug interior housing the cafe and visitor center. The clean lines carry down into a reflecting pond. Here, all formalism ends as the pond morphs into a riot of rocks and rivulets that inundate the circle from flush bluestone pavers, with the largest at the center representing Philadelphia. Smaller jets representing the sister cities relative to their distance from the city and their populations are signified by the size of the jets. The north end of the park is geared toward families with children. The pavilion and its plaza act as a midway buffer. Its green roof points up and out 16 feet toward the circle. Split-faced Emerson limestone cladding gives way to smooth, honed accents. The seemingly cantilevered roof gets jaunty support from columns pitched at varying angles. A polished concrete floor plays off a warm cedar ceiling that drops from 12 to 7 feet in one interior-to-exterior swoop. 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Defining structure  The potential of space increases with flexibility – USM builds the base for expansion.

Is it better to be wise or clever? Cleverness has been much in evidence lately at New York’s Lincoln Center, that mid-century performing arts complex recently revived by a willfully witty matrix of interventions by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, whose delightful LED-stair-risers, paraboloid park, and subtle groundworks (along with a wholesale redesign of neighboring Alice Tully Hall and the Juilliard School of Music), have returned the place to its original aspirational urbanity. And yet some of their interventions, such as meticulously extending the facade at Juilliard in order to have appeared to have sliced it away with a glass wall along Broadway, border on the kind of architecture school juvenilia that a firm poised on the edge of greatness might do best to avoid. Maybe they should have asked Hugh Hardy to take a look. The veteran principal of the firm now called H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture started his venerable career with scenic designer Jo Mielziner and Eero Saarinen, architect of Lincoln Center’s Library for the Performing Arts and Vivian Beaumont Theater—the travertine-box-above-glass-box building at the northwest corner of the complex, adjacent to the reflecting pool. Hardy worked with them on the design of the original theater there. Now, with H3 partner Ariel Fausto, he has added, on the roof, the new 100-seat Claire Tow Theater for the LCT3 Company, along with rehearsal space and offices.

The addition has a self-evident inevitability that is the consequence of long experience and the confidence to make fewer moves. An elevator tower precisely filling three of the structural bays of Saarinen’s lobby ceiling takes you up to the roof. There you find yourself outboard, as if outside, of the addition’s main volume—a glass box screened and given monolithic sculptural presence by a horizontally banded aluminum bris-soleil about 2 feet east of its glass facade. Moving from elevator lobby to main lobby briefly places you spectacularly between those layers of aluminum and glass: this kind of delayed entry sequence, in which the building strikes a pose before inviting you in, is a great bit of business, an old modernist thrill.

The rest is strong and simple. The rehearsal space footprint is exactly the same as the combined stage/backstage area of the theater, allowing easy translation between the two layers of aluminum and glass. And, up on the roof at Lincoln Center, that piece of wisdom is demonstrably true.

THOMAS DE MONCHAUX
TALKING TACTICAL URBANISM continued from front page Actions for the Common Good at the 13th Venice Biennale in August. AN gets a jump on the conversation:

The Architect’s Newspaper: How does tactical urbanism differ from traditional forms of urbanism? How did you get involved with the movement?

Mike Lydon: In 2010, I began noticing a lot of little things happening that were, in a lot of ways, self-funded or self-organized but having a big, longer-term impact. One of the flagship examples of tactical urbanism, Build a Better Block, which started in Dallas, was just a weekend event. Essentially it put a three-lane one-way street on a road diet—adding chicanes (bump outs) and a bike lane. They visually mocked up an environment, a neighborhood setting, that the community wanted. The result was huge. It rippled all across the internet and produced actual change in the city of Dallas itself.

After seeing that, I started looking for similar efforts—both bottom-up and top-down—and it was clear people were being really creative in making physical changes in their neighborhoods. New York City is the great example of public space reclamation. Using very temporary materials in plazas and public spaces built literally overnight, (those plazas) became these placeholders that are very highly used. Now we’re seeing some of them up for permanent design and construction. That process is what’s fascinating and what I have been very interested in trying to document.

What is the value of this tactical approach?

A lot of these efforts are not expensive. Really, $2,000 can help people envision change. What’s difficult about the traditional planning process is that it’s behind closed doors. It can be intimidating for people to get involved, but if you’re experimenting with change in real time on the street, on your block, or on your sidewalk, people get a real understanding of what that means. Especially when it’s part of the larger planning process. You can mock it up, and it becomes a type of evidence in real time. People can say, “This really works for me. I like it.”

What are the tactical urbanism projects that have achieved long-term success?

Open Streets (Appropriating a street for non-automotive use) is one of the most successful out there. We’ve been documenting Open Streets programs around the country as part of the Open Streets Project. There are now 70, from very small towns to large cities like New York, Chicago, and LA. It’s something that can be scaled to each individual town and it touches on a number of issues facing communities, from public health and community exercise to developing discussions around making cities more pedestrian and bike friendly.

Businesses tend to do very well during Open Streets, so it’s good for the economy, too. Build a Better Block and all its variations is also a very good tactic. It’s basically a neighborhood barn raising. People really get together and volunteer time for a week-long or weekend-long event during which they mock up what they want to see on the block.

What’s great about the guys from Dallas—Jason Roberts and Andrew Howard, the founders of the Better Block movement—is that they’ve open-sourced it. They are the consultants on numerous Build a Better Block projects all over Texas and the Southwest, but they are really happy to serve as a resource. They have one now in Philadelphia and we were involved in one in Oyster Bay, New York.

Memphis did one that had a cycle-track, where they mocked up a physically separated bike path during a weekend-long event called A New Face for an Old Broad, which was on Broad Avenue, and that cycle track has remained for the last two years. It was supposed to be temporary, but everyone loved it, so they just kept it and now, two years later, there’s an actual detailed plan to build a permanent cycle track with a much more permanent structure and materials. It’s one of those great case studies in which you see a temporary idea leading to permanent change.

Did tactical urbanism help give rise to the surge in interest in urban issues among the general public, or did it emerge from it?

It’s probably a little bit of both. With the economy the way it’s been the past couple years, there’s been a lot of interest in the fact that cities are a lot more resilient economically, but I think the rise of the whole tactical urbanism trend and interest in cities is also a reflection of how information is exchanged via the Internet. There are dozens and dozens of blogs and resources to tap into in any city now that are on the ground explaining neighborhood issues, drawing in supporters for changing neighborhoods.

How can tactical urbanism work in architecture and the formal planning process?

A couple of ways. Projects that started unsanctioned or that were generated at the neighborhood level really rise up quickly when they’re successful. They then gather the attention and support of city council people, politicians, city planners, and different departments in the city. We’re seeing that in a lot of places. Portland, Oregon, is a good example with depaving. Neighbors got together in 2007, bunted up a bunch of pavement and put in some green space, with gardens and public space. It was a really good idea, and the municipality funded the initiative with some seed money. It turned into a nonprofit and then gained funding from the Environmental Protection Agency at the federal level.

The planning process is not going to be replaced by tactical urbanism. Following up on comprehensive planning efforts, the neighborhood-wide or city-wide planning process can use tactical urbanism to take some of the most popular ideas and really do things quickly rather than have them wait on the shelf for the million-dollar funding stream. Tactical urbanism is a tool for the more formal planning process.

BRANDEN KLAYKO

SPACE

Since its construction in 1982, the Jacob K. Javits Center has been one of the world’s leading examples of space-frame design. But the I. M. Pei & Partners-designed exhibit space needed updating to put its best face forward for the 3.5 million visitors it receives each year. So owners engaged Epstein Global and FXFowle Architects, who developed the recladding program that is dramatically increasing the building’s transparency and energy efficiency. Targeting LEED Silver with a glazing system that will enable the building to exceed energy code requirements by 25 percent, the new face of Javits proves that being old doesn’t have to mean retiring.

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Architect: Epstein Global; FXFowle Architects
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SEOU L RISING

Yongsan International Business District, a $30 billion, 37.7-million-square-foot, mixed-use development, will create a new business and cultural center for Seoul, South Korea. The design contains 66 buildings connected by an underground level and designed by renowned architects such as BIG, SOM, MVRDV and assorted other big names. The development is scheduled for completion in 2016.

**1. DANCING DRAGONS**
**ADRIAN SMITH + GORDON GILL ARCHITECTURE**
- 1,476 and 1,279 ft
- (88 and 77 STORIES)

Mullions between the scale-like overlapping glass panels will provide natural ventilation in this mixed-use tower that includes residential, hotel, and retail elements.

**2. PROJECT R6**
**REX**
- 472 ft
- (56 STORIES)

This filing-cabinet-shaped residential building has a large courtyard garden and features small apartments with movable walls, which are designed for short-term tenants.

**3. HARMONY TOWER**
**STUDIO DANIEL LIBESKIND**
- 797 ft
- (48 STORIES)

The design for this office tower will feature vertical winter gardens on the south and west facades, providing users access to planted parks at each of the 38 office floors.

**4. CROSS # TOWERS**
**BIG ARCHITECTS**
- 702 and 669 ft
- (50 and 46 STORIES)

This residential building, which contains a library, a kindergarten, and a gallery space, utilizes unusual massing to go around height restrictions and maximize square footage.

**5. TRIPLE ONE (LANDMARK TOWER)**
**RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP**
- 2,034 ft
- (111 STORIES)

The centerpiece of the Yongsan International Business District, this conical office tower is poised to become the seventh tallest building in the world.

*Photo credits: Courtesy of respective firms*
Plug-in Plaza continued from front page

No longer will visitors simply look up at the energy of Times Square; they’ll be sitting on it, too. The long granite sculptural benches indicating the thrust of the Great White Way will now carry electrical currents of up to 400 amps. The new entertainment infrastructure with fiber-optic connectivity will be the first of its kind in the city and could have implications for other event venues likely to pop up on 34th and Broadway, Madison Square, Union Square, and other plazas in Midtown.

The commissioner added that if the entertainment plaza model were to be replicated elsewhere it would probably follow a public/private model similar to the Times Square renovation, where months of community charrettes met key support from the Times Square Alliance. Of the $45 million spent on the renovation, $5 million will go toward event infrastructure.

Weisler-Cohen engineered electrical plug-in points on the benches that will provide both 400 and 200 amps. Bexel engineered the broadcast capacity, while Weidlinger Associates facilitated utility coordination. The power for plazas to the southeast will be provided by transformers hidden within two buildings on the south side of the square, while on the northwest a transformer will be placed in a prefabricated vault designed to go beneath the sidewalk. The DOT will manage and maintain the system.

“It fits into the basic goals of consolidation and simplification that have been key for the project as a whole,” said Snøhetta’s Clair Fellman. The plug-in points will eliminate the need for generators, whose noise and pollution have been known to cause neighborhood outrage, as they did during last year’s Fashion Week at Lincoln Center. Organizers there eventually plugged in to supplies at Fordham University and at the David H. Koch Theater, but there were still miles of cables “hidden” beneath protective pads cluttering the area.

Department of Design and Construction (DDC) Commissioner David Burney said he cannot think of a precedent for similar event infrastructure. Bryant Park, for example, has power capacity not broadcast infrastructure. “The event economy has really evolved in the last 20 years,” said Bryant Park executive director Daniel Biederman. “You’re much better off if you can have underground connectivity distributed throughout your space.” But while facilitating events is important, Burney noted the main focus of the redesign remains the “de-cluttering of Times Square.” If it’s not needed, it’s got to go. Gone are telephone booths, curbs, and many of the light posts. “There’s more than enough ambient light from the signage,” Burney noted.

Con Edison is already working their way north on the square, converting oil systems to natural gas. Burney said that toward the end of this year, the DDC will begin to follow the energy company, capping below-grade work with cast-in-place 12-foot-by-12-foot concrete slabs. Modular concrete pavers will top the slabs. The pavers combine white quartz aggregate with darker hued concrete for contrast, while small stainless-steel circles called “pucks” will be embedded for a touch of glitz.

Turning Times Square into a no-car zone was inevitable. “It never made any sense,” Burney said. “It just becomes a de facto pedestrian plaza anyway—we’re just recognizing reality.” Sadik-Kahn noted that before the pilot program, 11 percent of the space was set-aside for pedestrians, even though they are 90 percent of the traffic. In terms of design solutions, however, one size does not fit all. “What works in Times Square doesn’t necessarily work on New Lots Avenue,” Sadik-Kahn said. However, with pedestrian signage designed by Pentagram to be introduced across the city this fall, there will be some consistency. With its presumed success in Times Square, event infrastructure has a future throughout the city. If you can make it happen there, you can probably pilot it and make it happen anywhere.

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COURTESY SNØHETTA

Technology-based “smart classrooms” need smart buildings to be effective. Westchester Community College’s Gateway Center, designed by Ennead Architects, meets the challenge. Erected on the college’s Valhalla campus to aid new Americans in gaining essential skills for the technologically sophisticated workplace, its long-span steel trusses enable an array of spaces programmed for the dynamic exchange of ideas. More than an inspirational entryway for students preparing for 21st century careers, the LEED Gold-certified building is a demonstration of the college’s commitment to sustainability—a symbol that the campus is investing in the future in more ways than one.
FRESH PICKED
NEW AND NOTABLE DESIGNS FROM THIS YEAR’S INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE FAIR
JENNIFER K. GORSCHÉ

1. YABANÉ
A+A COOREN

The latest piece from A+A Cooren Design Studio, founded by French-Japanese design duo Aki and Arnaud Cooren, is inspired by a traditional Japanese graphic pattern. Named Yabané (“arrow” in Japanese) the four-drawer chest opens in two directions and can be used as a space divider.

aplusacooren.com

2. STEPPING STONES CREDENZA 66
THINK FABRICATE

Brooklyn-based design studio Think Fabricate’s new Stepping Stones Credenza 66 mixes colors and finishes including plyboo doors, a mirrored display alcove, and Inset Richtite top, while casters and an optional two-sided version allow it to function as a room divider.

thinkfabricate.com

3. FORÊT ILLUMINÉE SUPER-ETTE

Forêt Illuminée by designer Ionna Vautrin suggests the imagery of intertwined trees, fictional animals, and low-hanging clouds with a stitched Tyvek cocoon illuminated atop two wooden cylinders. The lamp is made by Super-ette.

super-ette.com

4. HAVEN TABLE LAMP
STEVE OH

Industrial designer Steve Oh’s Haven lamp's convertible design makes it ideal to illuminate a variety of everyday objects. It rotates to allow it to function as a table, task, or mood lamp. Expected to enter production soon, short and long versions will be available.

osteveo.com

5. PLEAT
DEBRA FOLZ

Created with hand-pleating techniques borrowed from fashion, Debra Folz’s new Pleat line of contemporary furniture pairs structured geometric forms with textiles that are hand-folded with paper molds, then steamed to set the shape. The Julie stool is pictured.

debrafolz.com

6. ELEMENTS
NOCC

NOCC’s new Elements shelving system comes as flat-pak aluminum sheets with laser-cut perforations that allow it to be folded and assembled in a variety of configurations with standard wood boards of any length.

nocc.fr
Robert W. Ferris, AIA, REFP, LEED AP, CEO and Co-Founder of SFL+a Architects, Co-Founder Firstfloor, Inc., providing turnkey development solutions to educational institutions.

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“These types of corporate relationships raise issues: are for-profit businesses controlling the curriculum, taking advantage of research, or compromising the ideals of the university? Yale School of Architecture Dean Robert A. M. Stern doesn’t think so, citing Yale’s long-standing relationship with software company Autodesk, which provides students with knowledge and skills while allowing them to test out the latest technologies in digital fabrication. “The small amount of corporate support that we do have is welcomed by those who govern the curriculum as a way to extend our reach,” said Stern.

While these experimental collaborations can be exciting for companies, students, and faculty, their success must ultimately be judged in a traditional way: by identifying clear learning goals and measurable results, especially as “small amounts of corporate support” morph into vast co-dependencies. MS
The Aluminaire House is homeless once again. Built in 1931 for the Allied Arts and Industry Architectural League exhibition, the house introduced prefabricated design methods espoused by Le Corbusier to an American audience. Corbu disciple Albert Frey designed a place like Forest Hills, Queens, where Kocher once lived, might be an interesting spot, in so much as Forrest Hills was middle-class housing for a planned community. The group has also identified a site in Sunnyside Gardens, another planned community in a stripped-down Colonial Revival style dating to nearly the same period as the Aluminaire. Schwarting noted that the Aluminaire, like Sunnyside’s multi-block redbrick stock, has a repeatable solution for every space.

The repetitious dismantling and reassembly of the house has reinforced its status as a kit-of-parts design. With that in mind, the foundation is looking for a low-rise high-density site on the outskirts of New York City, where the house might be more of a theoretical than aesthetic fit. In a telephone interview, Schwarting said that a place like Forest Hills, Queens, where Kocher once lived, might be an interesting spot, in so much as Forrest Hills was middle-class housing for a planned community. The group has also identified a site in Sunnyside Gardens, another planned community in a stripped-down Colonial Revival style dating to nearly the same period as the Aluminaire. Schwarting noted that the Aluminaire, like Sunnyside’s multi-block redbrick stock, has a repeatable plan. “They were both looking at the same kind of housing problems at the same time,” said Schwarting. “They’re visually very different, but they were addressing the same issues.”

The foundation contacted MoMA but then thought better of it. “With a museum it becomes an art object, and I don’t think we need to go that far,” Schwarting said. Giving the house over to a public entity such as the Parks Department would involve negotiating a caretaker with a department that is already stretched to the limit. They even talked to Richard Meier, due to his interest in the sort-of planned community. Houses of Sagaponac, but nothing panned out, which was perhaps fortuitous. “We hope to return the house to the agenda of the early modern movement,” said Schwarting. “If we can put it in a reasonable setting, where its original intentions for affordable housing are reflected, that would be the ideal.”

**NAME GAMES**

In what may seem like a backhanded vote of confidence for Related Companies’ Hudson Yards development, Extell’s Gary Barnett has revised plans to build on their parcel at Eleventh Avenue between 33rd and 34th streets and he’s unabashedly naming it “One Hudson Yards.” Like Related’s new Coach tower, Extell’s Kohn Pedersen Fox-designed tower will sit on terra firma, while the majority of Related’s multi-use plan will be built atop the functioning rail yards. The proposed tower would rise 56 stories above the No. 7 line entrance. The compliment missed: Related’s Steve Ross told the New York Post that the name was an attempt to “deceive tenants and the public.”

**BAIT AND DITCH**

There were murmurs that the affordable housing at Forest City Ratner’s Atlantic Yards might be delayed, but now it’s a roar with The Wall Street Journal reporting that the affordable housing component at Atlantic Yards, as well as at Willets Point, will have to wait while commercial development takes priority. Of the 2,250 housing units planned for Atlantic Yards, a mere 175 will be started this year. At Willets Point retail and hotel venues will take precedence over housing, which is not expected to get underway until 2025.

Promises of housing and jobs were how both projects got pitched to the public. Ratner’s executive vice president MaryAnne Gilmartin told the Journal that the reason for the delays was due partly to labor costs. Unlike most moderate-to-low-income housing developments, Ratner was using union labor she pointed out. The SHoP design for the project is set to become one of the largest prefabricated complexes in the world. Prefab units place the bulk of union labor in off-site factories, where workers make less. As much of the work shifts to factories, on-site laborers will get to punch their time cards a lot less.

**STAYING POWER**

Meanwhile, down on the Lower East Side, former stomping grounds of Dorothy Day and Emma Goldman, Community Board 3 unanimously approved the SPURA plan for mixed-use development with the proviso that fifty percent of the housing be built as permanently affordable. (The previous plan allowed for just 60 years.) The project is the largest development of city-owned land beneath 96th Street, and given its politically radical provenance, it was not surprising to hear that many of those present at the final hearing wanted 100 percent affordable housing.

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Long considered one of the most traditional and risk-averse cities in the country, Washington D.C. is embracing innovative architecture and urban planning. Thanks to a new generation of enlightened local governance buoyed by ongoing federal spending and related private development, which has kept the city booming through the Great Recession, the Capital is emerging as an unexpected model of progressive urbanism. Amanda Kolson Hurley surveys the scene.

**a new morning in washington**

It’s hard to pinpoint just when D.C. began to change—when a famously classical city took a second look at contemporary architecture and urban design, liked what it saw, and even more surprising given its ingrained traditionalism, many-layered regulatory processes, and vocal NIMBY groups, started building more of it. “Here’s the challenge in Washington: it’s still a city in which the people are fundamentally not Los Angeles-type people. This is a place that’s conservative,” said Roger Lewis, an architect and Washington Post columnist who has lived in D.C. since the late 1960s. “We have this legacy of classically inspired buildings. That, coupled with the L’Enfant Plan and the 130-foot height limit, does tend to produce a mindset…that resists innovation.”

But Lewis and others see that resistance crumbling and a new eagerness for architectural innovation emerging. Even the Height Act of 1910, once taken as doctrine, is under review. D.C.’s Mayor Vincent Gray and Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), who chairs the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform that oversees the district, recently said they would consider relaxing the limits, especially outside of the monumental core. As the city’s population grows and buildable parcels of land dwindle, economic development types can only look in one direction: up.

One watershed moment was November 2007, when the Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard opened at the Smithsonian’s American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery. A billowing glass canopy designed by Foster + Partners that floats over shallow pools and rectangular planters by Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, the space won over tourists, locals, and critics alike. An elegant juxtaposition of new and old—the museums are housed in the Old Patent Office, a Greek Revival masterpiece—it showed skeptical Washingtonians that modernism could mean more than a bland office block or a hulking Great Society-era government building. Not long after, another British firm, Rogers Stirk Harbour, introduced a subdued version of high tech to Capitol Hill at 300 New Jersey Avenue. Vancouver architect Bing Thom’s...
transformation of the Arena Stage in the Southwest quadrant has also been a tremen-
dous success since its opening in October 2010. There followed, in relatively quick
succession, a number of buildings and commissions embracing the new. In 2009,
Freelon Adjaye Bond/SmithGroup beat out other supertuymes to design the National
Museum of African American History and Culture, whose first round orchestration
in how not to do urban renewal, Southwest is
suffering again, with a lift from the transformed
Growth movement.

Much of the vision behind Sustainable D.C.
involved 40 percent of the District with a tree canopy.
... bike, walking, or public transit; attracting and
making 75 percent of all trips by
... city energy use and the obesity rate by 50
... administration, Sustainable DC, which
what may be the signature initiative of his
... —wasn’t. In April, Mayor Gray unveiled
... 1990s—starkly divided by income and race,
... diverse, green, and wholly urban in a way
to shape a different Washington: dense,
... Gehry scheme, issued a statement attacking
... by Eisenhower’s family and cultural conser-
vatives. In late May the National Civic Art
Society, the most vocal opponent of the
Gehry scheme, issued a statement attacking
the lack of compelling symbolism or sense of
permanence conveyed by the design.”

“... For years, city leaders have been working to
shape a different Washington: dense,
diverse, green, and wholly urban in a way
that the Washington of the 1980s and early
1990s—starkly divided by income and race,
and bereft of people downtown after office hours—wasn’t. In April, Mayor Gray unveiled
what may be the signature initiative of his
administration, Sustainable DC, which
aims to make the District, the greenest city in the
United States over the next 20 years. Goals of
the far-reaching plan include cutting both
city energy use and the obesity rate by 50
percent; making 75 percent of all trips by
bike, walking, or public transit; attracting and
retaining 250,000 residents; and
covering 40 percent of the District with a tree canopy.
Much of the vision behind Sustainable D.C.
comes from Harriet Tregonning, the rock-star
planning director and a founder of the
Smart Growth America.

Tregonning has been instrumental in the
long-stalled but now active push to develop
the Southwest quadrant on the basis of its underutilized
downtown waterfront. Once considered a case study in
how not to do urban renewal, Southwest is
stirring again, with a lift from the transformed
Arena Stage and Populous’ 2008 Nationals
carpark.

A proposed Southwest EcoDistrict,
sparked by Tregonning’s office and the National Capital Planning Commission,
would overhaul the existing collection
of federal office behemoths along 10th Street SW, many of which are
totally underused, with new uses, and improving
the area’s connectivity, both internally and to the
monumental core and downtown. On the
nearby stretch of riverfront, developers have
their own scheme to create “The Wharf,” a
mixed-use project of 500 plus apartments and
more than 1 million square feet of office and
retail space. EE&K Perkins Eastman company
completed the master plan, which seeks to
draw urban activity to the water and maritime
activity into the new district via piers and a
mixed-use “spine” linking them. Short blocks and preserved view corridors will provide
connections to the rest of the city. The develop-
ment team, Hoffman-Madison Waterfront,
waits to break ground early in 2013.

D.C. has some of the highest rents in the
nation, so downtown is getting aggressively
built up (if not yet up)—and developers
are not skipping in their effort to lure Class A
businesses and well-heeled residents. After
years of planning, the massive CityCenter DC complex, designed primarily by Foster +
Partners, began construction last year on
a 10-acre site with an ample park and public
plaza—amenities that city leaders lobbied for.

Further west, developer EastBanc wants to
develop an existing library, fire station,
and police station into “two unique buildings
that will be the talk of the city” (according
to its website), and has hired Enrique Norten/
TEN Arquitectos for the job. Norten’s library
design is a striking riff on the standard D.C.
glass box, with staggered setbacks that break
up the massing to enliven its facades.

Lower-key but perhaps more transformative
programs are insinuating themselves across
the city. Capital Bikeshare, established in
2010, has met with wild success, reaching
two million rides in a city that never was
a cycling mecca. Then there’s the ambitious
construction campaign led by Ginnie Cooper,
chief librarian of D.C. Public Library. For a
not-inconsiderable price tag, Cooper, formerly
of Brooklyn Public Library, has built or
commissioned several new facilities around
the city by the likes of Davis Brody Bond, the
Freelon Group, Adjaye Associates, and Bing Thom, just announced as designer for a new
library in the Woodridge neighborhood.

That D.C. has been reshaped by so many
players—public and private, local and feder-
al—attest to an overall shift in the capital’s
self-perception. Lionel Lynch recently moved
to the District to head the new D.C. office of
HR&A Advisors, the prominent New
York-based real estate and economic
development advisory firm. Lynch had lived in the
city briefly in 2000, for an internship,
but had not planned to return. He believes
the last few mayoral administrations—which have mostly restored effective management
to the once-dysfunctional city—made it
possible for D.C. to seize its own destiny, a
new and exhilarating kind of empowerment
for people who, after all, still don’t have a
countryside in Congress.

“The district leadership has actively engaged
in urban improvements, despite the oddness of having to do so in the face of multiple jurisdic-
tions in control,” Lynch said. “They’ve
tried to make sure there’s a quality public
realm. You definitely feel that the District is
getting its own identity, or that it’s becoming
a more dominant over the federal government,
in a way that is self-reinforcing.”

Lynch (whose firm has advised on
CityCenter, the Southwest EcoDistrict, and
the reuse plan for Walter Reed Army Medical
Center in Northwest D.C.) mentions a recent
performance by Project Bandaloop, a dancing/
climbing performance troupe, on the face
of the historic Old Post Office Pavilion on
Pennsylvania Avenue. Hundreds of people
had gathered to watch; there were food
trucks and live musicians.

In the old D.C., this would have been
aimed squarely at tourists. Not anymore.
“Tourists can definitely enjoy it if they like
to, but there’s even a bigger piece of it:
Residents are interacting with the District
and the folks surrounding us,” Lynch said.

“... And that makes it a more interesting place
to visit.” And, perhaps, to live.

WASHINGTON D.C.-BASED WRITER AMANDA
KOLSON HURLEY IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR
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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, AND OTHER
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WEDNESDAY 6

LECTURES
John Straube
High Performance Buildings
Meet Passive House
8:00 a.m.
AIAB Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
cfa.aiany.org

John Benson
30 Years of Carved Lettering: John Benson, Master Lapidary
6:00 p.m.
New York School of Interior Design
170 East 70th St.
classicist.org

Xavier Costa
CHANGES
Barcelona to Boston
Northeastern University
College of Arts, Media and Design
82A Space
290 Congress St.
Boston, MA
northeastern.edu/camd

EVENT
2012 Buckminster Fuller Challenge
2:00 p.m.
The Cooper Union
41 Cooper Sq.
challenge.bfu.org

THURSDAY 7

LECTURES
David Jameson
MATTER, a double entendre
12:00 p.m.
District Architecture Center
421 7th St. NW
Washington, DC
aiad.com

James Sanders
The New York City Waterfront in Film
6:30 p.m.
South Street Seaport Museum
212 Water St.
mnyc.org

Hattula Moholy-Nagy
Lloyd C. Engelbrecht,
Eugene Bartolucci, et al.
When Marguerite Met Moholy-Nagy:
Margaret De Patta, The Chicago Bauhaus,
and Modernism in Jewelry
7:00 p.m.
The Theater at the Museum of
Arts and Design
2 Columbus Circle
madmuseum.org

SYMPOSIUM
2012 Society for Environmental Graphic Design Conference:
The Bridge
Robert Hammond, Fred Dust,
Michael Bien, et al.
12:00 p.m.
New York Marriott Marquis
Time Square
1535 Broadway
thebridgesg.org

WEDNESDAY 13

LECTURE
Niel Gutwych
Architecture of the Newars
5:00 p.m.
Robin Museum of Art
150 West 77th St.
mrany.org

David Esty
Growing Gibbons and the CNC Machine:
Woodworking in Today’s Interiors
8:00 p.m.
New York School of Interior Design
170 East 70th St.
classicist.org

THURSDAY 14

LECTURE
Henry Green
Designing a Resilient Community
12:30 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, DC
go.nbm.org

Walter Hood
Landscape Architecture
6:30 p.m.
The Greene Space at New York Public Radio
44 Charlton St.
cooperwhitv.org

FILM
Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai:
Conservation of Mosaic of the Transfiguration
Irobofo Nardi, 2012
25 min.
The Metropolitan Museum of
Art
103rd Ave.
metmuseum.org

FRIDAY 15

EVENT
Moroccan Court and Rooftop Cocktails:
Tour of the newly opened Moroccan Court
at the Met with Landscape
Architect Aicha Stein
6:00 p.m.
Metropolitan Museum of Art
6 East 82nd St.
cfa.aiany.org

SATURDAY 16

EXHIBITION OPENING
Kevin Roche
Architecture as Environment
10:00 a.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, DC
nmb.org

WITOLD RYZCZYNISKI
The Biography of a Building:
How Robert Sainsbury and Norman Foster
Built a Great Museum
6:30 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, DC
go.nbm.org

SYMPOSIUM
Less Is More: Retrofitting Modernist Facades—
Yale Rudolph Hall and IT
Corwin Hall
Theodore H.M. Prudon,
Elizabeth Skowronzek, Russell M. Sanders, et al.
6:00 p.m.
AIAB Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
cfa.aiany.org

Diwali
The High Line
12:00 p.m.
Washington, DC
thehighline.org

Beth White and Ben Helphand
Beyond the High Line:
Transforming Chicago
6:30 p.m.
The High Line
West 14th St.
thehighline.org

TUESDAY 19

LECTURES
James Sanders, Mark Korinsky, Luc Sante, et al.
Joseph Mitchell’s Harbor
6:30 p.m.
Malvina Gallery
South Street Seaport Museum
213 Water St.
mcy.org

Eric Firley
Book Talk:
The Urban Towers Handbook
6:30 p.m.
The Skyscraper Museum
39 Battery Pl.
sky scraper.org

Louise Muzingo
Smart Growth: The Suburban Office—Understanding
the Past to Redesign the Future
12:30 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, DC
go.nbm.org

WEDNESDAY 20

LECTURES
David Fishahy
Philadelphia’s Portico Row: Vietnam Ceiling Medallion
Remanufacture
6:00 p.m.
New York School of Interior Design
170 East 70th St.
classicist.org

Withold Rybczynski
The Biography of a Building:
How Robert Sainsbury and
Norman Foster Built a Great Museum
6:30 p.m.
National Building Museum
401 F St. NW
Washington, DC
go.nbm.org

SYMPOSIUM
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Corwin Hall
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6:00 p.m.
AIAB Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
cfa.aiany.org

Common Boston Forum: Downtown Boston: Past,
Present, and Future
Anthony Papano, Rosemarie E. Sansome, Ed Kame,
et al.
8:00 p.m.
Paramount Theatre
500 Washington St.
Boston, MA
architects.org

EVENT
Tours & Talks:
High Line Design Tour
with Lisa Svitkin
6:30 p.m.
The High Line
theshighline.org

2012 NEW PRACTICES NEW YORK
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Place
June 14-September 8

Since 2006, the biennial New Practices New York competition has served to acknowledge and advance New York City’s new and innovative architecture and design firms. Only firms located within the five boroughs founded since 2006 are eligible for consideration. For the second year, the competition is open to multidisciplinary firms, allowing designers and young professionals under the process of licensing to enter the competition. This year, from fifty-one entries, the panel of jurors recognized Abruzzo Bodziak Architects, Christian Wassman, Formless Finder (above), HOLLER architecture (top), The Living, Mark Farnsworth & THEREMYND, and SLO Architecture. New Practices 2008 winner Marc Clemencov Ballay, AIA, wrote in a statement: “With the announcement of the selection of seven recently formed firms for AIAANY honors, the New Practices Committee and selection jury address how firms survive and inspire during tough times.”

DESIGN FOR THE REAL WORLD REDUX
White Box
329 Broume Street
June 18–July 15

Forty years ago, the Austrian designer and scholar Victor J. Papanek wrote in his influential book Design for the Real World. “Design, if it is to be ecologically reasonable and socially responsive, must be revolutionary and radical.” His aim was to alert designers to their impact on the world, arguing for sustainable design generations before the term became a buzzword. This exhibition, organized by the Victor J. Papanek Foundation at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, in partnership with the Austrian Cultural Forum New York, will showcase four winning entries and thirteen finalists from the inaugural international competition Design for the Real World REDUX. The winning projects include a social mapping platform for local sustainability initiatives, One Laptop Per Child XO-3 Tablet computer by Fuguworks, and Planetary ONE — Terraform ONE’s Urbanizing Brooklyn 2110: Ecological City of the Future, and wind powered streetlights by Alberto Vasquez (above).
In a way, Esther McCoy was the Aida Louise Hustable of the West. True, she never had a soapbox as substantial as The New York Times, but she was the most enthusiastic chronicler of the invention of West Coast modernism. While Hustable was decoding the glass office buildings of Gordon Bunshaft and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe for a befuddled, sometimes outraged, public, McCoy was striving to elevate the architectural significance of “The California Houses,” from the turn-of-the-century Craftsman bungalows of Greene and Greene to the lean modernist homes of R. M. Schindler. McCoy’s books, Piecing Together Los Angeles: An Esther McCoy Reader, edited by Susan Morgan and published by East of Born Books, part of an online arts magazine, presents a complex and generous portrait of the writer. She was driven by a passion just as the leading cheerleader for Southern California as the fertile crescent of a Europe-inspired but thoroughly Americanized modernism; she was a versatile literary talent. McCoy (1944–1988) grew up in Kansas and, at a young age, in Greenwich Village. She worked as research assistant to Theodore Dreiser and, in the 1920s, befriended novelist and bohemian, Boyne Grainger, who secured her a tiny apartment in the Bohemian enclave of Patchin Place. McCoy’s memoirs of her early life in New York and her stay in Malibu, where she moved to recover from pneumonia, are among the unexpected pleasures of this collection. A 1948 work of fiction, The Important House, published in The New Yorker, is a wonderfully incisive commentary on the troubled relationship between architects and their clients. McCoy eventually settled in Santa Monica and, during World War II, became a draftsman at Douglas Aircraft, an experience that qualified her, in 1944, to work for Schindler in his Kings Road studio. McCoy was thus an insider, a fly on the white concrete wall. Schindler, she noticed, spent his days on-site, supervising construction and arguing with the contractors about every detail. McCoy observed: “Someone called him an architect in an ivory tower during the years I was in his office; he was more like a field hand with a short hoe.” At their best, her essays induce a present-at-the-creation sensation. You find out, for example, that it had never occurred to Pierre Koenig, most famous for Case Study House #22, the aerie immortalized in that iconic Julius Shulman photo, to design in any material other than steel. According to McCoy he worked from “an innovation of wood.” From a retrospective look at the Case Study Houses we discuss the discussion of ruins in culturally embedded images of catastrophe and the “contemporary state of ruins” defined by various states of architectural or political collapse and environmental disaster. There is something both chronologically and timelessly in the observations making up Ruins:

“Ruins embody a set of temporal and historical paradoxes. The ruined building is a remnant of, and portal into, the past; its decay is a concrete reminder of the passage of time. And yet by definition it survives, after a fashion: there must be a certain (perhaps indeterminate) amount of a built structure still standing for us to refer to it as a ruin and not merely as a heap of rubble. At the same time, the ruin casts us upward in time; it predicts a future in which our present will slump into similar despair or fall victim to some unforeseeable calamity. The ruin, despite its state of decay, somehow outlives us. And the cultural gaze we turn on ruins is a way of losing ourselves from the grip of punctual chronologies, setting ourselves adrift in time.”

Following Dillon’s powerful Introduction, the “confused and the “contemporary state of ruins” various chronological” in Ruins are arranged in four distinct categories: “The Ruins” and chronologies of an Industrial Sublime,” “Drosscape,” “The Future Now.” The artists and writers exhibited include and the ability to reverse one’s concept of time in terms of the illusion of viewer control or its suspension thereof. Analogy, metaphor, notions of originality and authentication form other conversational tangents or aesthetic mechanisms employed by the writers to explain this ephemeral subject. It is the collective authors’ chauvinism of a defacing of ruins that makes this unique volume two very fascinating reads.

Ultimately, the ruin seems to evade any particular urban or rural zone. It might best be described as a transcendent moment of astonishment with various subjective consequences, all of which result in the acknowledgment of our own mortality, the half-lives of art and architecture, and their shared vanishing points. Dillon’s “Modernologies” (2010) suggests that running parallel to the more experiential facets of the thinking on ruins, there is a deep desire to know what comes after postmodernism. The discourse on ruination has something to say about our inability to fully escape the modernist past, which this curator perceives, in terms of contemporary art, as a haunting. Dillon’s preoccupation with this subject is, in the end, hopeful of an escape of sorts.
In 1944, Esther McCoy started to work as a draughtswoman (right) at Schindler’s house and studio on Kings Road, today.

learn that the legendary architects faced the same impediments that innovative practitioners encounter today: “Banks, for instance, deplored a kitchen in the front of the house on the grounds that the house would have no resale value.” Charles Eames redesigned his house on the spot, after the steel was delivered. This flexibility, McCoy wrote, “makes one wonder what architecture lost when Eames chose to stick to furniture.”

With McCoy you always get her perspective, highly idiosyncratic, of the ongoing technological and cultural revolution, combined with her dispassionate descriptions of the buildings themselves, informed by a draftsman’s understanding of detail. Many of the pieces in the book were written contemporaneously, as events were unfolding, while others were retrospective, written later—sometimes much later—in life. Indeed, the only problem with this otherwise marvelous collection is that the writings are grouped thematically, not chronologically and the relevant dates can only be found in the back of the book. Occasionally that thrilling present-at-the-creation effect is, not an illusion exactly, but a sensation intensified by hindsight.

KARRIE JACOBS IS CURRENTLY A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AT METROPOLIS AND TRAVEL + LEISURE, AND A FACULTY MEMBER AT THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS’ GRADUATE PROGRAM IN DESIGN CRITICISM.
The 1959 ASM Headquarters in Ohio includes an extraordinary double-dome by Buckminster Fuller. Recently renovated by The Chesler Group, the project has been photographed by Jeff Goldberg.

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Laurie Olin, recent winner of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Gold Medal, has worked on transforming public spaces around the world with Frank Gehry, Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman, Cesar Pelli, and Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, among many others. He sat down with AN West Coast editor Sam Lubell shortly before receiving his award, as an architect, and his thoughts about landscape urbanism and the state of public space on the West Coast.

The Architect’s Newspaper: Describe the role of landscape architects in the development of cities.

Laurie Olin: The great anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss said cities aren’t an architectural problem, they’re a cultural landscape. That might be troubling to some architects. But the aggregate is that this is a problem beyond the individual single project or single structure.

Most people still think of architecture as being about a building. In the mid-20th century we divided everything up into a bunch of different disciplines. Most architects had, through their training, the limitation of being building-centric. So my generation, a bunch of us, had to go find a way to work on something that intrigued us more, which was the ensemble. We didn’t stop liking architecture; we started liking other problems and other pursuits. And so we had to take on systems. Systems aren’t just transportation and social systems, but they’re also natural systems. And, it turned out, for most of my career, landscape architecture has been the only discipline at the table that represents the natural world.

In the last decade or so, many architects have become deeply engaged in ecology and energy and systems—the way landscape architects have always been, which is good and healthy and proper. And so we now realize cities aren’t just architecture. For a long time people tried to solve something called urban design. Some people tried to make urban design a discipline. We in landscape architecture would argue that urban design isn’t a discipline, it’s an activity, that lots of disciplines do together. It’s ensemble work. None of us can control it and none of us can do it all. So if you have a real ecological point of view, then you can do architecture, you can do landscape architecture, you can do planning. But you can’t do it all in your office.

And you think architects are more open to that than they were ten years ago?

All the guys I work with, yes. They’re interested in what I do, but they just can’t do it all themselves. I don’t want to try to do a lot of the stuff that they’re doing. And I worked in architecture and I was pretty good.

You’re trained as an architect?

I am. I have a Bachel from the University of Washington. Then I worked for some of the top architects in Seattle and then moved on to Ed Barnes’ office in New York. But I wandered off. It wasn’t that I was unhappy. It was that I was more in love with something else.

There are a lot of people from my generation who came to landscape architecture from architecture because it was seeing the limit of one’s field and seeing the potential of another. It was like when Paul Klee decided not to be a musician when he was a student in Germany. It was because he knew his limitations as a musician and he didn’t know what his limits were in art.

It seems like a huge advantage to have that knowledge. You can transform cities.

Cities are very natural formations. And they’re very organic. We can help direct the change. But no one person, no one architect, no one landscape architect, no one planner, no one agency or mayor directs it all. They can get a chunk for a period. It’s like a forest. It’s the big bundle of problems for our time. We’re becoming more urbanized. Around the world, cities are growing everywhere. We like to be together. We need to be together. So learning how to make cities rich and fecund and great places to be so we’re comfortable and healthy and happy is the biggest problem we face.

The only way we’ll get crazy is to build beautiful, rich, life-enchanting cities. It’s challenging to convince developers and officials that building those spaces that are not buildings are equally important if not more important for cities.

It’s what we have in common. The majority of open spaces in cities are streets. That means the street system is too important to leave to transportation engineers. They’re too way important to leave to just moving traffic. So I’m interested in cities because they are the design problem for a habitable planet.

You are working on projects all over the world.

Yes, but there are large chunks of the world we’re not in and shouldn’t be in. I think we need to work in places where we can be effective and we actually understand the culture somewhat. A lot. We need to be able to be effective and not just some colonial exploiter that’s mining the place. I think we need to be working on a model that’s a better model than the discredited models of our own culture. At the moment I have a couple of projects in France and one in London and one in Toronto and a few on the West Coast.

What about LA? It is the most park-poor city in the country right now.

For a long time with West Coast cities, at the end of the street there was the country, there was the ocean, and the mountains. They didn’t pay attention to what they were doing with their cities because they could get out of them so easily and then they became too big, then the mess they had made became obvious. So now it’s very hard to go back and rip up old parts and do good public and civic space at the right scale.

In LA, I always think of the title of Roger Trancik’s book, Finding Lost Space. I love that phrase. Because there’s so much lost space in cities. A lot of our projects have been finding those and transforming them.

What’s a good example?

Columbus Circle in New York City. There never was a social space there until we said it could be done. People thought were nuts. Who would go out in the middle of a five-way intersection with Central Park right next to it? Well, you go there and it’s full of people. It’s a place that never existed. You can make these places that people need if you make them right. We just did a little park in Portland, Oregon, that’s full of people.

But one of the problems in Los Angeles is there’s this wonderful tradition of big private space and absolutely squab public space. Private splendor, public squalor. There are a lot of rich people in Los Angeles and a lot of money sloshing around that’s never been very civic. I can’t think of another city that has so much money yet has so few patrons of the public realm and of public art. I’m astonished. The movie industry, those people spend vast fortunes on themselves on silly stuff, and yet they could do so if I’ve always been troubled by that aspect of Los Angeles.

When Ricardo Legorreta and I did Pershing Square, which everybody hates now, we gambled on the fact that Anglos would come down from the towers and Hispanics would come over, and of course they haven’t. The citizens group that was the client collapsed and went away. One of the biggest disappointments of my life was our thinking that we knew what we were doing in that situation and we didn’t.

OLIN’s redesign for Columbus Circle, New York City.

That’s full of people.

Did you argue with Legorreta over adding more green to Pershing Square?

I didn’t argue with him, but I should have. We were doing a place in the sun. It was heavily influenced by Latin America. But nobody wanted to come.

People don’t use parks in downtown LA. If there was a good one I think they would. They’re starting to move back. I think the LA River plan, if that happens, will help. I think the notion of some of the little infill spaces, making nice spaces next to where people are, is very important. If one were to build a few pieces of really superb public landscape, people start. They don’t have to be put in a park.

Can you talk about your new office in LA?

Yes, we have a new office in LA. We’re in Hollywood. So after all these years of resisting the West Coast we’re finally here. We have a little park called Plummer Park under construction now in West Hollywood. We have Constellation Park in Century City. We’re also working on a master plan for the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden.

We’ve worked with a lot of firms in LA. We worked with Richard Meier on the Getty. We work with Johnson Fain and Rios Clementi Hale. I work with Frank Gehry all the time. I love Frank. We’ve done three plans for Grand Avenue and they’ve all failed miserably. Right now I’m working with him on a new house. He had one going in Venice for a while. He dropped that but now he’s doing a house in Santa Monica.

Los Angeles is one of the great world cities. Everybody knows it. And it has money and it has energy. It needs some direction, something physical. The transience of things gets on your nerves.

It seems like the merger of landscape and architecture is a fascinating new direction, especially when you have low open space.

I see that a lot of projects that are like what we’ve tried to do. I did Zea Park. Done. Even in America. When I was working with ZGF on a conference center in Salt Lake City, it’s an enormous space. The roof is six acres. Four acres of which is an alpine meadow, and the sides are like a canyon with native vegetation. It’s beautiful. We’ve been working on structures for over 30 years, but now it’s the new normal.
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