In a deal announced just two days before his death from cancer, Don Fisher, the founder of the Gap clothing chain, bequeathed his billion-dollar modern and contemporary art collection to SFMOMA, quelling months of rumors that the collection would leave the city.

The 1,100-work collection includes some of the biggest icons of the last 60 years in art, from Andy Warhol to Richard Serra to Roy Lichtenstein, and is considered one of the best private collections of contemporary art worldwide. The move boosts the San Francisco museum further into the upper echelons of contemporary art institutions. The announcement dovetailed with continued on page 5
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You hear it constantly. Sure, LA has fantastic residential architecture; but its public architecture is not so impressive. There are a few recent exceptions, namely Disney Hall and Caltrans. From there, it’s a steep drop to a level of mediocrity underving of a major U.S. city.

There’s certainly no lack of talent in town. So what’s the problem? It’s the city’s procurement process. And even if LA isn’t bound to the lowest bidder, as some others in California are, the standards for getting a public project are not based on design excellence, but on experience, size (generally the very largest firms), connections, and what contractors and engineers you can team up with.

Luckily the AIA/LA is trying to remedy this problem. On its October 16 legislative day, members went to city hall armed with resolutions aimed at changing the game. The recommendations are highlighted by the proposed launch of a city office of architecture and urban design, charged with overseeing design review, selecting designers (in many cases through competitions), organizing community outreach, coordinating regulating agencies, and administering project delivery. Another resolution recommends changing the city’s project delivery method from design-bid-build—which also favors better-connected firms that know the right contractors and engineers—to more egalitarian and better-organized methods like integrated project delivery and design assist.

“The main thing we care about is making this change so that it empowers better architecture,” said Roger Sherman, co-chair of the AIA’s political outreach committee. And as the AIA’s own resolution puts it, “Good design not only contributes to making a place healthier, safer, more livable and delightful, it also engenders marketing and brand value that attracts prestige and prosperity.”

Without better public architecture, workers in public buildings will suffer, and so will the neighborhoods around them, along with the city as a whole. Great residential architecture is important. But with a poorly built public environment, the city will continue to lose talent, and investment, to cities that are becoming, quite frankly, better places to live.

And as Sherman points out, procurement should not only be improved for public projects, but for any project—like the struggling Grand Avenue development—that receives any percentage of public money.

“There’s been a de facto process of people in power just deciding what’s going to happen. We need to change that, instead of just having Eli Broad operating behind the scenes,” Sherman said. “It’s time the city grows up a bit.”

There are plenty of examples of cities with active architecture and design departments helping assure that public projects are vetted from a design perspective. They include London (where architects like Richard Rogers have played a major role in developing policy and overseeing designs), Paris, Barcelona, and, in the U.S., New York City. Los Angeles needs to follow their lead, especially in this rough economic climate, where the vast majority of ongoing work is publicly financed. If it doesn’t adapt to any project, not just big high-profile ones, it will suffer, and so will the neighborhoods around them, along with the city.”

Eli Broad operating behind the scenes,” Sherman said. “It’s time the city grows up a bit.”
A small, unassuming 1950s brick house on Robertson Boulevard gives little clue outside that it’s a portal to a world of fashion fantasy, apart from the signature scarlet awnings and a giant parrot (a Rose Bowl flea market find). But step through the forged iron gate subtly emblazoned with his name, and you’re immediately transported to the fabulous alternative reality of the iconic French shoe designer Christian Louboutin.

Having designed 14 boutiques for the brand since 2004, New York firm 212box has mastered the language of Louboutin. True to the label's image, the design plays with ideas of reflection and symmetry. The front room is anchored on one side by mirrored, arched display niches, which showcase distinctive shoes. A white-on-white tile wall bearing mysterious hieroglyphs graces the other side. The stairwell leading to the second story is clad in antique mirror panels, with a screen of Syrian handblown glass bubbles side. The stairwell leading to the second story is clad in antique mirror panels, with a screen of Syrian handblown glass bubbles.

In four diameters with single or double glass cylinder construction.

Yo rk fi r m

Having designed Chandeliers with hand-blown, three-ply opal glass for LIMBURG Collection, a Parisian lighting house established in 1890, Thom Mayne’s team included Clark Construction, Thornton Tomasetti engineers, and UCLA’s School of Architecture and Urban Design. The house base is composed of polystyrene foam coated in glass-fiber reinforced concrete that contains all of its mechanical and electrical systems, so as to make constructing the rest of the structure—which consists of modular red fiber-cement panels and exposed galvanized steel—easier and cheaper. The 945-square-foot house will cost about $150,000, amounts to about $150 per square foot. Like many of Make It Right’s houses, it’s meant to be mass-produced not only in New Orleans but for communities across the world, especially those in flood zones. It’s also meant to be green: with rooftop solar panels, rainwater cisterns for water use (an inverted gable roof supports collection), energy-efficient electrical systems, and even geothermal heating and cooling. The house is aiming for a LEED Platinum rating.

Mayne said that the firm is now looking for government and private sponsorship to help get the house made on a larger scale. It which consists of modular red fiber-cement panels and exposed galvanized steel—easier and cheaper.

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A wonderful world of Walt continued from front page

Created from the modern age. Created by walking off the courtyard that separates the barracks’ two wings, it houses the largest gallery, adding an additional 15,000 square feet of space. The move shows that even if Don Fisher’s vision of a glass box on the Main Post was not to be, the Presidio is still open to some architectural creativity.

“It was very tricky to make everyone happy,” said Jay Turnbull of Page & Turnbull, the firm that renovated the building. Among the challenges faced by designers, the Trust wanted the old exterior walls to remain visible. In the end, the brick walls of the wings are exposed within the glassed-in gallery.

Interior architecture and exhibition design is by the Rockwell Group, the firm’s largest museum project to date. The New York design firm is known for creating slick interiors for hotels and restaurants, and some of that razzle-dazzle shows up here and there. The elevator looks like a vintage train car, with pull-down shades and red velvet curtains; the bathrooms foreground context with brightly colored sinks set in white, curved Corian countertops; and the lower level is exuberantly tiled with a pattern based on a Disney illustration. The showpiece gallery, inside the addition, has a long walkway that curves around a scale model of Disneyland as Disney originally envisioned it. Suspended above is an immense “video ball.”

For the most part, though, the museum is a fairly straightforward recount of Disney’s past. (For those wondering why the Walt Disney Family Museum is here in San Francisco instead of LA, Orlando, or Disney’s hometown of Marceline, Missouri, it’s largely because his surviving daughter, Diane Disney Miller, has lived here for the last 20 years.) The displays, alas, do not include animatronics à la Country Bear Jamboree. The most newfangled element at the museum is the “touch tables,” which allow visitors to navigate video and images by touching icons projected onto wide tables. After the display cases set in rooms with exposed brick, one of the last galleries provides a welcome dose of Tomorrowland. Interior and exterior design come together in a narrow space with a sculptural white wall on one side and glass on the other—a sky box with a panoramic view of the Golden Gate Bridge. On the wall, the nature documentaries that Disney produced are playing. But the real star in this gallery is the architecture of San Francisco, past and present. 

Lydia Lee

Wonderful World of Walt continued from front page

MAYA LIN’S LATEST MEMORIAL COULD BE HER LAST

Heeded for Extinction

Last month’s unveiling of Maya Lin’s What Is Missing?—a tribute to extinct animal species, and the second of the artist’s two permanent works commissioned for the Renzo Piano–designed California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco—raised a nagging question: Is this really Lin’s last memorial?

Although reports that Lin had designed her last memorial have circulated since 1982 when she completed her first, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Lin’s office claims that What Is Missing?, funded by the city’s Arts Commission, is her last, as Lin herself has been saying in presentations. In her 2000 book Boundaries, Lin described plans for her fifth memorial as focused on the environment, and dispersed in different locations. Completed nearly a decade later, What Is Missing?, her first multime-

dia work, has arrived.

Set on the academy’s east terrace, the piece’s physical component is the “Listening Cone,” a quietly imposing cast-bronze form lined with reclaimed redwood. It draws visitors in with the sounds of 50 extinct or endangered species and landscapes, sourced from research archives worldwide. Within the cone, compelling quotes, statistics, and images emerge on an eye-shaped video screen. Lin, an active environmentalist, described the cone as a portal focusing attention on the slow yet catastrophic loss of species and the habitats that support them. As Lin sees it, awareness is the first step toward action: “How can we protect them if we don’t even know they’re endangered?” she said.

“The Empty Room,” a traveling component of the memorial, also opened last month in the Beijing Center for the Arts and at the Storm King Art Center in New York. A billboard installation in Times Square and the launch of the What Is Missing? website are scheduled for 2010.

Yosh Asato

SUDDEN LEGACY continued from front page

An ambitious expansion plan announced last spring that will triple its gallery space, consolidate its offices, and house more educational and conservation programs. The expansion, estimated to cost between $65 and $85 million, would take the museum’s footprint to 150,000 square feet without disrupting the facade of the building.

“San Francisco is where we raised our family and opened our first Gap store, and we want to give back to the city we love by sharing the art that means so much to us,” said a Gap press release. “Doris [Fisher’s] wife and I share a vision with SFMOMA to enhance its collections and programs and we are prepared to make a substantial gift to strengthen the museum’s standing as one of the world’s great contemporary art museums.”

Since opening its Mario Botta–designed building in 1995, the museum has outgrown its space, doubling its collection to 26,000 works. The expansion, slated to go along its southern face, would free up administrative offices for new gallery space in the main museum and offer additional exhibit space in a new wing.

Hurdles remain, as the museum has yet to receive city permits and an environmental and design review. In a city where the planning review is lengthy and activists routinely stall projects, the expansion is likely to take about two years. The museum’s $24 million rooftop garden, originally scheduled to open last fall, was delayed for eight months and didn’t open until last May.

Finances will also play a large role in the expansion. While the Fisher family will likely make a financial contribution, the museum must still detail a fundraising strategy. It has already purchased adjacent land, but still needs to cobble together some additional parcels in the surrounding area.

There has been no formal contract signed between the museum and the Fishers, who will retain ownership of the collection and administer the collection through a renewable 25-year-trust. Rather than be relegated to a permanent gallery, the Fisher collection will be exhibited throughout the museum and displayed alongside other works in SFMOMA’s collection.

The deal follows the deflation of the Fishers’ original plan to build their own museum in the Presidio. A few years ago, the Fishers submitted plans to build a modern museum in the midst of the historic Presidio parade grounds. In July, the couple withdrew their proposal after running into a buzzsaw of controversy with environmental and community activists who didn’t want to mar the historic centerpiece of the former military post. The city has since been rife with rumors over whether the Fishers would pull their art collection out of San Francisco and send it elsewhere.

WRNS Studio, which worked on the latest incarnation of the Presidio museum after Gluckman Mayner Architects, will now give way to Gensler, which is conducting initial expansion planning for the museum. Arthur Gensler, who is on SFMOMA’s board, declined to comment on how the Fishers’ gift will impact the museum expansion.

Kristina Siewory

Maya Lin, What Is Missing? (DOUG)

Top: Rare Mickey Mouse memorabilia; Above: A minute’s worth of stills from Steamboat Willie, Mickey Mouse’s debut in 1928.

Simone Ferruzza
OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Despite economic woes, art galleries expand

It’s no secret that luxury providers—from real estate to fashion to food—have been severely hit in this economy. You might expect art galleries to be among them. Yet despite the gloomy economic forecast and the closure of several local art spaces, a wave of Los Angeles–based galleries are expanding, driven by real estate opportunities or by the completion of plans envisioned when the economy was still booming.

The attitude among many galleries is that with property prices and construction costs dropping significantly, it’s a good time to expand. Gallerist Michael Kohn, who nearly doubled the square footage of his eponymous gallery in Beverly Grove recently, summed up the mood of many. “There was a confluence of factors where either I do it now, or I may never do it.”

Sussanne Vielmetter, who operates the Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects in Culver City, recently signed a lease for a new space on Washington Boulevard. She commissioned architect Peter Zellner to give her a place with higher ceilings and better natural light. “A year or two ago, we couldn’t find anything that was reasonably priced,” she said. Now, she claims, it’s much easier to negotiate advantageous terms with landlords. Zellner added that city permitting for this and other projects has been smoother than usual, probably because the slowdown has reduced the backlog for city administrators.

Major contemporary art gallery Blum & Poe, which kicked-started the Culver City art scene with its Escher-Gunewarden–designed gallery on La Cienega Boulevard in 2003, just opened a new 27,000-square-foot building across the street. The new gallery, designed by the same firm, features flexible ground-floor exhibit spaces, an outdoor garden, private showing rooms upstairs, and even a small apartment for visiting artists. Another arts heavyweight, Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills, recently began plans for a major expansion overseen by Michael Palladino, a partner in the Los Angeles office of Richard Meier & Partners Architects. The expansion will double Gagosian’s square footage to 11,600 square feet, and is expected to open next year.

Others joining the parade include ACME gallery in Miracle Mile, which expanded last fall with a job overseen by Wayne Schlock at Blue Point Architecture & Interiors; and Roberts & Titton, which just moved into a larger space—a former roasting factory rebuilt by Johnston Marklee.

Most galleries justify expansion as a competitive advantage during the recession by making them more attractive to artists, who often need more room as their work grows in scale. Blum & Poe plans to add more up-and-coming artists to its roster, while Gagosian plans to exhibit artists for longer shows. Vielmetter plans to use her additional space for private viewings.

Pressure for outdoor space is driving some expansions. Gagosian’s larger gallery will include a rooftop sculpture garden. “Outdoor space is what LA uniquely has to offer. When the opportunity to do a roof garden came up, how could we not?” said Deborah McLeod, gallery director at Gagosian. Even a smaller gallery, like the Chung King Project in Chinatown, is moving to a slightly larger space later this year, with a back patio that owner Francois Ghebaly will do himself. With a few exceptions, many galleries have adopted a do-it-yourself approach over hiring an architect, moving into a relatively raw space or a previously occupied gallery.

But some architects are getting the call. Zellner has worked on ten private commercial gallery commissions, half of which are in LA. The architect’s “less is more” design philosophy for galleries has proven popular, eschewing the high-end luxury retail spaces popular almost a decade ago for more raw, industrial spaces. Even Gagosian, known for its luxe aesthetic, is striving for a simpler design. “We wanted something less finished. It’s a bit of a surprise when you walk in,” said McLeod.

Not all galleries are expanding. In the past year, closings have included Carl Berg (who has since moved to a rent-free space in the Pacific Design Center without his former gallery partners), Bonelli Contemporary, David Patton, and Mesler & Hug, to name a few.

With such comings and goings, one question looms, said Zellner: “Is it a zero-sum game?”

RENEE MARTIN COURTESY ZELLNERPLUS

Photos by Wayne Schlock at Blue Point Architecture + Interiors; Point Architecture + Interiors; Rjc Builders, Inc.; Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects; King Project in Chinatown.
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Q&A>

CECILIA ESTOLANO

NEWS

AND FOR THE FORWARD-THINKER.

INTERIOR SLIDING DOOR SOLUTIONS

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Cecilia Estolano is chief executive officer of LA's Community Redevelopment Agency, making strategic investments to improve urban life. In August, the state siphoned about $70 million from its 2010 budget to help balance its own shortfall, with plans to take $900 million over the next three years. Estolano discusses this challenging situation, and the agency's future plans.

The Architect's Newspaper: How will the state-initiated cuts affect the agency?

Cecilia Estolano: They effectively wipe out our new tax increment financing [derived from local property taxes], and we've had to slash our entire program: small business loans, infrastructure, new parks, work with private developers. The cuts are so deep that in some cases, we've had to dig into our affordable housing funds.

We have reserves that we're using to fund a work program of about $380 million. We've been trying to spend 30 percent of our available resources, distributed in 32 project areas all around the city. We're still in business, but we're not able to add new projects. Last year, we were able to put $180 million worth of investments on the street. It's going to drop a lot this year. We still have $140 million in commitments for projects that we're going to try to get out the door this year.

Had you prepared for the economic downturn? We anticipated a 46 to 47 percent decline in tax increment revenues, but then the state came along and balanced its budget on our backs. Still, because of the bleak situation, we need to lay the groundwork for an economic recovery: infrastructure, business assistance, and program EIRs to make it easier to develop once money starts flowing; funding biomed and entertainment; establishing a Clean Tech corridor on the east side; and developing the Crenshaw corridor where it intersects with the Gold Line. Was the state's action legal? It was unconstitutional. Helping us pay off its deficit is not how much the state can collect to raise taxes, and Prop 13 limiting the way in devising more efficient structures.

COURTESY CRA/LA

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Click 311

INTERIOR SLIDING DOOR SOLUTIONS FOR THE HOME, THE WORKSPACE, AND FOR THE FORWARD-THINKER.
Sun, surf, and sand are the quintessential views for any California homeowner. So when Culver City–based Ehrlich Architects were asked to design the Zeidler House on an ocean-front bluff in Aptos, California for a dynamic couple of empty nesters, their approach was to let the home act as a modernist backdrop for the landscape outside and the vibrant lifestyle of the homeowners inside. “Most of our firm’s projects explore enjoyment of the California climate and merging the indoors and outdoors,” explained principal Takashi Yanai. “This project took those ideas to the nth degree.”

Two buildings are drawn together in a rectangular shape and oriented around a central courtyard. Inside the 3,000-square-foot main building (above) is a master suite, small study, and living and dining areas. The other 1,500-square-foot building houses three guest rooms for the constant stream of visitors. Both structures have large sliding glass doors that open completely onto the courtyard. “It’s the great room of the house,” said Yanai of the courtyard, which includes a lap pool, spa, outdoor shower, and built-in barbeque. Additional outdoor spaces include a pétanque court in front of the main building and a sculpture garden to one side.

The space appears as one long unobstructed line when all of the doors are open, with the main connection being the outdoor courtyard. Even from within the core of the house, the four-story, stainless steel-and-walnut staircase is fronted by a long panel of glass, so that anyone climbing the stairs looks directly over the courtyard scene. In addition, there’s no air conditioning. Instead, transom windows open at the top of the stairwell, as do most of the other expanses of glass, providing natural ventilation through the breezes coming off the ocean.

Though the courtyard is central to the living space of the house, the ocean provides the main views. Every primary room of the home, from the living room to the study to the guest rooms, has a glimpse of the water. The floor-to-ceiling wall of windows in the living and dining rooms (right) looks right over the breaking waves below, an effect enhanced by the double-height ceiling in the living room, providing expansive views of both water and sky. To protect against sun damage, high-performance glass and mechanized shades were installed throughout. A roof terrace with a glass balcony tops the main building.

As for the architecture itself, it’s understated and subdued to highlight the surroundings. A fluted cast-glass wall flanks the entrance to the house and is a “riff on the play of light on the ocean surface,” said Yanai of its milky opacity. The glass flows smoothly into an exterior siding of white burnished stucco, and extends around the boundaries of both buildings. A long wall of the courtyard is concrete block, as is the fireplace wall in the main building. Inside, walls are all white, and the ground floors are stained concrete. The only punctuations of color are the warmth of walnut millwork and the homeowners’ eclectic modern art collection that hangs on the tall living room wall and throughout the rest of the house. Even the light fixtures are all recessed can lights, so that there aren’t the distractions of hanging pendants or wall sconces. The overall effect is a cool, monochromatic canvas of smoothly conjoining geometric forms devoid of any curves or extraneous fittings.

AMARA HOLSTEIN
INSIDER JOB continued from front page

San Francisco runs an architecture department that is atypically large. Within the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Bureau of Architecture has a 65-person staff, including 27 licensed architects, 28 associates and assistants, and ten support staff. Among private firms in San Francisco, it would definitely be one of the larger operations. It is in charge of maintaining some 400 buildings owned by the city, and does design work and project management for construction of new city buildings. Of the bureau’s 134 current projects, 70 percent are designed by the bureau, the rest by consultants. Twenty of the city’s largest projects, like Laguna Honda Hospital, are handled by a separate group, the Bureau of Project Management.

It’s not uncommon for cities to have an architecture department, but not all major metropolises have evolved in the same way. LA has an architectural division of about 80 people, which contracts out about 80 percent of its design work. Meanwhile, in New York and Chicago, nearly all new building design is contracted out.

Many architects agree that outsourcing is a great way to support small firms while guaranteeing high-quality work. Craig Hartman of SOM, who worked in Chicago before coming to San Francisco in 1990, said in an interview, "You certainly need a city advocate for architecture, to help the city commission architects who can provide the best design quality and services. But is it the right thing to have a public architecture firm, operating on taxpayer dollars, that has no competition? Fire stations and libraries are the kinds of projects that would be perfect for the city’s small, highly talented design firms. In any economy, you want to have architects that are competing based on architectural excellence and their ability to deliver projects on time and within budget."

While private architects are loath to speak critically about the bureau because of their interest in getting work from the city, landscape designer Topher Delaney has publicly raised issues about the quality of the bureau’s designs. At a February SF Arts Commission meeting, Delaney commented that the bureau’s proposed structures for the Public Utilities Commission didn’t “measure up to work being done around the world.”

The Bureau of Architecture has been even larger in the past: in the early ’90s, it doubled to about 100 people after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. There was lots of seismic retrofitting to be done: the renovation of the City Hall, Opera House, and Civic Auditorium, along with several police and fire stations. For the last three years, the bureau has been helmed by Gary Hoy. With the organization since 1991, Hoy believes the current level of staffing is "appropriate."

The "city has the authority to do its own architecture, there is consistency in the level of quality they get, and they can save money over the private sector," Hoy said. "Part of the reason I joined is to help the city be a good client to the private sector."

One way that the department could speed work to outside firms would be to have a list of prequalified architects and contractors, as other municipalities have done. The department is working on a proposal but has not formally submitted it to the city board for consideration. Of the current RFP/RFD process, Hoy admitted: "We don’t rate design criteria as highly as the quality of service provided: things like change orders, errors and omissions, and delivering on time. Those aspects are far more important to the city, because they’re about controlling costs."

Much of the bureau’s work is not very glamorous: interior renovations of courthouses, bringing holding cells up to code, ADA upgrades, and public utilities boxes. But these days, that work might sound pretty good to San Francisco’s struggling firms.

"There’s contention (about public work allo- nation) during downtimes," said Charles Higuera, an architect who spent 25 years in private practice before joining the Bureau of Project Management. "When everyone’s busy, no one cares."

ELLEN RUSSELL

CANTOS MUSIC FOUNDATION NATIONAL MUSIC CENTER

A small hotel in Calgary is about to be transformed into one of Canada’s major cultural institutions with the help of Allied Works Architecture.

In late September, Brad Cloepfil’s Portland-based firm bested four notable

competitors (Jean Nouvel, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, SPF:architects, and Saucier + Perrotte of Canada) to be named designers of the Cantos Music Foundation’s new National Music Center.

The $75 million, 80,000-square-foot complex will include an education research center, a museum, recording studios, a radio station, and a live music venue.

The complex will consist of a 96-foot-tall tower, each perforated with elliptical voids meant to engage the raw and open landscapes of Canada, according to Cloepfil. Copper and wood will dominate the interior, bouncing light and sound and providing warmth, while bridges will stitch spaces together.

The lobby is dominated by an informal amphitheater, with a performance space located on the floor above. A central stairway serves as the transition to individual galleries on the upper floors. Each gallery will be configured for acoustical separation and customization. Windows, clerestories, and the voids will provide visual connections to the city.

The main building will connect via skybridge to the historic King Eddy Hotel, once a mecca for jazz in the city, which Allied Works will expand into a new music venue. Construction on that phase is expected to be completed by 2012, with the rest of the complex finished the following year. "It’s not about image or form but a quality and spirit," Cloepfil said. "It’s grounded in the nature of the institution and site."

HARTVINA DOLEJSOVA
Architect: Allied Works Architecture
Associate Architect: BKDI
Location: Calgary, Canada
Construction: 2013
First School on Ambassador Hotel Site Opens

History Lessons

It's only been about three years since Myron Hunt's Mediterranean-style Ambassador Hotel—home of the Rat Pack, the Oscars, and, more somberly, the shooting of RFK—was unceremoniously torn down. But already, out of its rubble the skeleton of a major new school complex is rising. With an elementary, middle, and high school, the Central LA Learning Center No. 1, as it's called, borrows much of its form from the immense Ambassador Hotel whose decorative fittings were sold at a public auction in September 2005.

On the south end of the complex, the first phase, the new elementary school, opened its doors to 800 K-5 students on September 9. The two-story, 92,000-square-foot project was designed by Pasadena-based Gonzalez Goodale Architects, who are working on all three new schools in the 4000+ student complex, which share cultural and athletic facilities.

Considering its historic site, the K-5 school is notably contemporary, hinting at a new direction for the LAUSD and a focus on modern design throughout its multibillion dollar bond program. "We're helping create a new image for the LAUSD," commented project architect Chung Chang.

The building is clad throughout with dark zinc paneling—which wraps around most of its corners—offset with painted plaster and perforated metal flashes of orange, gray, yellow-green, and white. Inside a lofty entrance portal, the school stresses transparency and connection: Most of the public spaces are open air, including outdoor hallways, an exposed grand stair, open flanking stairs, al fresco cafeteria seating, and skylit canopies. The east and west branches of the school are connected by two large courtyards. Circular skylights and perforations above provide more exposure.

The double-height library, patterned in colorful orange and white and fronted with a large glass curtain wall, is the most dramatic public space in the school. Meanwhile, on top of the parking lot is a large track and playing field, which will be shared with the adjacent middle school. Public art pieces like murals and a large mosaic embedded into a play area add decoratively instructive touches.

The K-5 school, which houses two pilot schools—the NOW Academy and the UCLA Community School—literally looks up to the middle and high schools, which are several feet higher in grade. Those will be finished next fall. Much of the middle school's exterior features similar wraparound zinc panels, while the 2,440-student high school is shaped to echo the form of the Ambassador, with its monumental entry and angled wings. Finishes, however, will be contemporary, highlighted by a multi-floor glass curtain wall that will allow onlookers on Wilshire Boulevard to see into the classrooms in use. The school auditorium will take the same dimensions of the former Cocoanut Grove nightclub, incorporating that classic club's eastern wall and one of its original canopies. As they prepare for future events, administrators will perhaps be challenged in a good way to compete with the ghosts of a past that once inhabited the nightclub.
**STOPOUT ON CONQUER continued from front page**

It comes down to the nature of the work at hand. The U.S. military, for example, is in the habit of calling for bids on a variety of projects. Sometimes, they get a response. Sometimes, they don’t. But the military’s not in the business of losing money. It’s not in the military’s best interest to pay for something that’s not going to get done. The same goes for any business that’s in the habit of losing money. It’s not in the business’s best interest to pay for something that’s not going to get done.

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**STADIUM REPROVIVE**

On October 14, the California state senate voted to exempt a proposed NFL stadium in Industry from review under the California Environmental Quality Act. At press time, the plan was still awaiting approval by Governor Schwarzenegger. If signed, the bill would also nullify a lawsuit by Walnut-based group Citizens for Community Preservation, who claimed that Industry approved the project without sufficiently studying its environmental impact.

**BIG WIN IN MISSION BAY**

Despite complaints that SF can be slow to hand out public projects (see article on page one), the team of HOK and Mark Cavagnero Associates has been tapped to design San Francisco’s $200 million Public Safety Building in Mission Bay, which will serve as the new headquarters for the city’s police department (currently housed in the Hall of Justice) and the district’s police and fire station. The partnering firms also conducted the initial study to determine the best location for the building. It will incorporate an old firehouse, one of the few historic buildings in the area. The city’s Bureau of Architecture is designing the interiors.

**COURT RULING**

NBBJ has been selected to design the new Shasta County courthouse in Redding, according to an announcement by California’s Administrative Office of the Courts. The 173,350-square-foot project, whose site has not yet been selected, will have 14 courtrooms with space for expansion to replace the existing courthouse on Court Street. It would also replace the courthouse annex, the John J. Balmia Justice Center, and the Shasta County Juvenile Court. The project has an estimated cost of $211.8 million and is scheduled for completion in 2014.
Craig Hodgetts and Ming Fung have unusual backgrounds for architects, and that has made all the difference in the work of their Culver City firm, Hodgetts + Fung. Hodgetts studied auto engineering at the now-defunct GM Institute, music and drama at Oberlin, and architecture at Berkeley and Yale. He worked on film and television set design, and at one point hoped for a career in screenwriting. He then went on to help found CalArts and LA-based practice Studio Works. “I would jump into anything,” said Hodgetts of his multi-dimensional career. Fung grew up with a movie producer father in Vietnam, moved to the United States in 1971, worked in theater set design, studied architecture at UCLA and at the American Academy in Rome, and started a firm with Hodgetts that was originally more about movie production than architecture.

Since then, the two have parlayed their skills into a body of work that combines drama, artistic flair, and a deep focus on structural intricacy. Hodgetts says he always incorporates what he considers his most important lesson, gleaned from his Yale architecture professor James Stirling, that “buildings have this incredible emotional dimension and can have a personality and be dramatic.” The two pride themselves on heavily researched, contemporary designs that reward experience over image-making. The firm often works closely with engineers and acousticians to develop designs, much as films are made. “I believe in working with anybody in an ensemble,” said Fung, who added, “We always find ways for the building to perform.”
Opened in September, the new 3,200-square-foot music pavilion for CalArts hosts both performances and classes, indoors and out. Hodgetts said he wanted to make it light and sinuous, in contrast to the large, geometric forms of CalArts’ five-level main building nearby. Fung said it was meant to be almost like a sail; a poetic, temporary universe.”

This extensive exhibition, open through August 31, presents projects developed by Hodgetts and his partners between 1965 and 1978, with still-relevant themes like prefabrication, new materials, entertainment, and large-scale housing. Colorful vacuum-formed models, sketches, drawings, and storyboard panels are all contained inside a series of steel armatures that resemble geodesic domes. The experiments include Maxx, a housing “megastucture” made up of plug-in residential units; Linc, prefab housing that combines automotive assembly line manufacturing with on-site assembly, and Ecotopia, a film treatment. An exhibition introduction sums up this free-thinking period as “a time in which architects were remade as tinkerers in garages who rev up muscle cars, start rock bands, cook up plastic aliens, and, finally, re-imagine the architectural universe.”

The 500-seat venue was designed to attract world-class performing groups to sleepy Menlo Park. The $28 million, 30,000-square-foot building, located on the campus of Menlo-Atherton High School, features a stage that can accommodate a full symphony orchestra. The exterior is painted in Kynar metallic paint to give the illusion of metal cladding. Inside, an acoustical scrim is laser-cut with a pattern based on the surrounding historic oaks. Hodgetts–whose team beat out Antoine Predock and Rob Quigley for the commission–said the high school principal’s vision was that the “theater should not be an upholstered, bourgeois experience, but something a bit more confrontational.” The official opening was October 11.

For a sustainable housing competition sponsored by Architecture For Humanity, Hodgetts + Fung fashioned a home made out of scrapped Hummers, their chassis bound together to form a habitable skeleton. Inspired by the Cash for Clunkers program, the project, said Fung, gives commentary on the Hummer’s obsolescence and on the attitude of people who use such cars. “It’s taking a car that’s useless and making it into something useful,” she said. “Instead of using storage containers, which is common, why not use a Hummer, which is just as big and has all sorts of features that make it as big as a living room."

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Lighting Strikes  Today’s designers must meet a changing spectrum of demands for lighting that is technically robust yet versatile, while also achieving a high level of atmospheric sophistication. AN looks at a trio of lighting firms, new and established, that are standouts in a field emerging with new dynamism and impact.

Lam Partners Lighting Design
Cambridge, MA

Paul Zaferiou, a principal at Lam Partners Lighting Design, loves skylights. On a recent Thursday, Zaferiou set out a dozen or so scale models, each a variation on a design for a major museum project. Some were outfitted with fritted glass, others with louvers and electric shades, and still others with shading in the form of origami-like geometric shapes. He plugged each into the firm’s heliodon, a waist-high contraption that looks vaguely like an exercise machine and enables daylight testing. “Look how beautifully light falls across the wall in this version,” he said. “We really enjoy the physical model. The clients and curators get it intuitively, which we continue, is working with the architect early on to conceive the building—even its massing and how it’s sited—so that the lighting becomes part of the architectural narrative, both inside and out.”

One of the firm’s chief tools is the heliodon (Helios is Greek for “sun”). Created by a Lam staffer with an industrial design background, the device combines new and old technology. The mechanics of the heliodon allow the designers to adjust the relationship between a horizontal plane and a beam of light to match the daylight conditions of a given latitude. Using commonly available software that can replicate light conditions anywhere, at any time, and in any season, Lam designers are able to test lighting effects on building models under actual solar conditions. They can even use it in conjunction with the real sun by taking the gadget onto the roof. The heliodon was very useful in Lam’s lighting scheme for Randall Stout’s Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Virginia, which opened in 2008. The building features curving surfaces inspired by the surrounding countryside and a glass entrance pavilion that resembles the prow of a great ship. “The entire building is conceived as a metaphor of a river running through a mountain landscape,” Zaferiou said. One challenge was to make the main entry both energy-efficient and dramatic—after all, it’s an event venue meant to generate income for the museum. “We came up with a luminous stairway,” he said. “The treads are glass, and we put fluorescent lamps underneath to illuminate them.” The museum’s glass entry pavilion created another challenge for the designers. Lam had to ensure that it was not too transparency. “Bill Pedersen’s biggest challenges was getting the building to be luminous in a place known for long, gloomy winters. “Bill Pedersen’s challenge to us was ‘Make the building glow,’” said Lam partner Keith Yancey. Located at the edge of the campus, the building’s most striking feature is The Colloquium, a space consisting of two glass volumes. The volumes crown the structure and cantilever dramatically over two of its edges. “Since this is essentially circulation space,” Yancey said, “we placed the lighting on the floor. It makes people look they’re in the footsteps.” There’s also an all-purpose student gathering space called, appropriately, Winter Garden. A soaring skylit room, it features blade-shaped reflectors that bounce daylight deep into the interior spaces. “The Winter Garden is so popular,” said Yancey, “they have to throw kids out at midnight.”

JAMES MCCOWN IS A BOSTON-BASED WRITER SPECIALIZING IN ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, AND REAL ESTATE.
Michael Webb wasn’t interested in lighting design at first. In the early ’90s, he earned a bachelor’s degree in architecture from Virginia Tech and then headed out West to find work. “My plan was to stay for a while and then go back to Maryland, where I’m from,” said Webb, “but when I got there, I realized I didn’t have much money.”

At the time, the country was in the midst of a recession, and in pre-dotcom San Francisco, the opportunities for a fresh-out-of-school architect were few. When Webb was offered a job as a draftsman at local firm Architectural Lighting Design, he considered himself lucky. He worked there for four years before striking out again to pursue what he considered his true calling.

“My intention was to be a full-on architect,” said Webb. “I wanted to learn how to do walls and put a roof on and all that cool stuff.” He worked for a time with a residential architect, and then got a job at Architecture & Light, a firm that does both architectural and lighting design, where he exchanged his expertise in one for an apprenticeship in the other. A year later, he had more projects than he could handle and asked an old colleague at Brand + Allen, Philip Noble, to join him in a 50/50 partnership. “He said, ‘No, why would I want to be just a lighting designer?’” said Webb. “But 12 hours later he called back and said he’d do it.”

Two of Revolver’s current projects highlight the firm’s pragmatic philosophy perfectly. The owners of 185 Post Street, a 1908 office building in downtown San Francisco, wanted to modernize the structure after Prada decided not to use the site for a Rem Koolhaas-designed store. In answer, Brand + Allen coated the ornate masonry facade in epoxy paint and then encased the entire edifice in an all-glass curtain wall. Revolver lit the exterior by outfitting the window wells with simple fluorescent fixtures that interact with the translucent glass to emphasize the project’s modernist shell.

Fluorescent fixtures came into play at Energy Foundation as well, an office interior that earned a LEED Platinum rating. While meeting the watts-per-square-foot requirement for the LEED point didn’t require much design, Revolver worked with the architect to arrange the fluorescent strips—the project’s sole light source—in a staggered pattern that broke up the monotony of the space.

Two years ago, Noble died and since then, Webb has continued to operate the firm on his own. “I have a few people help me with drafting and bookkeeping,” he said, “but otherwise I do it all: production, design, aiming the lights. It’s a one-man show.”
Anne Militello followed a variety of different pathways to architecture, most of them in entertainment. Before moving to Hollywood and founding Vortex Lighting, she lived in Manhattan working on and off Broadway—designing sets for stage plays and illuminating them—a career that has earned her an American Theater Wing nomination and an Obie Award. She also did lighting for punk bands and got her first go at architecture after meeting Patricia Field and lighting her store on 8th Street. “All the punks and New Wavers shopped there,” said Militello. “I went down to the Bowery and went into all the shops where the Hasidic men explained to me what down lights were. The project turned out great, but I faked my way through it.”

In the late 1980s Militello started working for Disney. “I heard that Michael Eisner was in New York recruiting Broadway designers to build Euro Disney,” she said. “I was interested in doing something else. They hired me and I wound up in LA working for Disney Engineering for four years, training with them and then doing theme park rides.” Though she never worked on Disneyland Paris, she contributed to just about every other Magic Kingdom in the world. “It was a great proving ground for architectural lighting,” she continued. After leaving Disney, Militello outfitted the 200-foot facade with a computer-controlled display of flashing colors that change rapidly, creating a different light show every night of the week. The original installation was primarily made of tungsten halogen lamps, but in 2007 Militello replaced those with LEDs—1,000-watt fixtures for 30-watt fixtures—reducing the energy consumption by approximately 90 percent.

These days, Militello’s architectural work is split between artistic installations on building exteriors and hospitality environments, though she has also worked on some museums. “We deal a lot with environment and mood because of my background,” she said. The designer sees a common thread between lighting for the stage and for hotels and nightclubs. “I’m doing the same thing,” she said. “When lighting a play, the first thing you figure out is what’s the story on stage? Here it’s real life, but it’s also a sexy mood play. People have to look good. I certainly know how to do that after working in the theater with these old divas who don’t want their wrinkles to show.”

One of Militello’s most recent projects is The Playhouse, a 750-person capacity nightclub in Hollywood’s Fox Theater designed by New York firm iDRAVE. While another firm did the dance floor lighting, Militello designed custom fixtures for the space, and equipped the bar’s back wall with LEDs. “We got value engineered out the wazoo, but as long as I’ve got dimmers I can create a mood,” she said.

Militello still does stage lighting, and currently has two concerts on the road: Leonard Cohen and The Decemberists. She also works on her own art and has done gallery shows. She sees these and the architecture work as a triumvirate that keeps her in balance. “I’ve had the opportunity to go crazy on stage, to take color and splash it all over and have a disco party. When I do my own work I can do what I want. With architecture I have to make it simple and elegant and non-intrusive and just calm and beautiful. That’s a challenge that I’ve been working with in the last few years.”
New lighting for 2009 combines resonant shaping with a spare elegance that will guarantee its appeal for years to come.

**FINE FIXTURES**

1. **L’ALE**  
   *Ivalo Lighting*  
   William Pedersen of firm Kohn Pedersen Fox designed the marionette-like L’Ale suspension light in 2006. This year, Ivalo introduced a 27-inch-high cast-aluminum sconce to the family. Powered by tiny LEDs, the L’Ale sconce is available in matte titanium, matte slate, and matte graphite finishes with a straight or angled frontispiece.  
   www.ivalolighting.com

2. **AX20**  
   *AXO Light*  
   The new Axo Light collection by designer Manuel Vivian is made of brass and iron with a chrome-plated finish. The swiveling head and arm allows all of the Ax20’s styles—wall, ceiling, floor, and tabletop—to be tilted and swiveled, ensuring the light beam always hits the spot.  
   www.axolight.it

3. **CONVERSE**  
   *I TRE*  
   For wall or ceiling, the versatile Converse is easily adaptable for residential, office, or commercial use. The opal-polished, white acrylic fixture measures from 16.5 inches by 6.25 inches to 27.5 inches by 11 inches.  
   www.itresrl.com

4. **MONO**  
   *Bald & Bang*  
   Mono achieves eloquent simplicity, taking the most basic shape of the socket and extruding it into a shade. Fabricated entirely of black Bakelite with a black textile cord, Mono offers a distinctive 5-inch-by-7-inch silhouette.  
   www.bald-bang.com

5. **CHERRY**  
   *ALT LUCIALTERNATIVE*  
   Designed by Alessandro Crosera, Cherry is composed of two fixed semi-spheres with a light fixture at their intersection. The duo-tone diffuser is made of Plexiglas, making this suspension light not only cheerful and bright, but lightweight, too.  
   www.altlucialternative.com
5 MODULAR

Providers of fixtures for Zaha Hadid’s Phaeno Science Centre in Germany, Modular is a leader in the field of architectural lighting. The MO6 is encased in a broad (9.5 inch) base plate with an asymmetrical groove in anodized black aluminum, rounded corners, and tilting lamp rings that can be customized by color.

www.supermodular.com

6 FLY-FLY

A winged form molded from a single piece of polycarbonate makes Foscarini’s new Fly-Fly, designed by Ludovica and Roberto Palomba, a featherweight fixture that provides 360 degrees of illumination. The 26-inch shape projects light while acting as its own screen to reduce glare.

www.foscarini.com

7 TATÌ

The new Kartell table lamp from designer Ferruccio Laviani references art deco style, but with a clean, rectangular shape meant for contemporary environments. Tatì’s internal diffuser of white or black methacrylate or pleated cream fabric is surrounded by a transparent polycarbonate body over a chrome base, allowing it to have a different appearance depending on whether its bulb is on or off, bright or dimmed.

www.kartell.it

8 AUREOLA

Japanese designer Kazuo Motozawa revisits one of his most popular—and collectible—designs of 1960, reinterpreting the chrome-ringed Aureola with a light touch. The halogen lamp is made of steel and available in a chrome or white finish, measuring 5.5 to 7.5 inches tall.

www.yamagiwausa.com

9 ZEBRA

The architectural lighting company Luxit puts an emphasis on technology, and Zebra is typical. Drawn aluminum frames—rectangular, square, or rhomboid—suspend T5 fluorescent tubes behind a translucent polycarbonate screen. The series includes wall-mounted and ceiling-suspension models.

www.luxit.it


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**TUESDAY 5**

**LECTURE**

**EXHIBITION OPENING**

**EXHIBITION OPENINGS**

**R. NELSON PARRISH: SURFACE TENSION**
Edward Cella Art + Architecture
1800 W. 80th St., Los Angeles
Through December 5

Having somewhere on the border between sculpture and painting, R. Nelson Parrish's color-saturated works in Surface Tension at Edward Cella Art + Architecture are a playful riff on West Coast minimalism. His series of standing rectangular totems and wall panels arrest the eye with the vibrant splashes of color, weaving together two disparate cultures: the aesthetics of the Pacific Northwest tribes in his native Alaska, and the exuberant stylings of Southern California surfboard and car design. In panels like Unfolded, #26 (2009, above), blocks of thickly applied resin and inde-terminate fields of color are given structure by a rhythm of straight edges and colorful “razor strips” that weave under and over organic elements. Parrish’s ebullient sur- faces grab the eye, but a closer look reveals surprising depth beneath them. The effect stems from the artist’s laborious creative process, which begins with native Alaskan wood that he gradually, over the course of months, builds up with layers of paint and hand-rubbed coats of resin. Atmospheric hairs and overlapping brushstrokes add to the sensation of an abstract world receding into the picture plane, ending with the wood’s natural grain dimly visible in the distance.

TARA DONOVAN
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego
1301 11th Ave., San Diego
Through February 28, 2010

Tens of thousands of unremarkable objects—styrofoam cups, drinking straws, paper plates, toothpicks, adding paper, straight pins—coalesce into remarkable forms by nothing more than gravity and friction in the shape of a rocky landscape.

*Hanging somewhere on the border between sculpture and painting, R. Nelson Parrish’s color-saturated works in Surface Tension at Edward Cella Art + Architecture are a playful riff on West Coast minimalism. His series of standing rectangular totems and wall panels arrest the eye with the vibrant splashes of color, weaving together two disparate cultures: the aesthetics of the Pacific Northwest tribes in his native Alaska, and the exuberant stylings of Southern California surfboard and car design. In panels like Unfolded, #26 (2009, above), blocks of thickly applied resin and inde-terminate fields of color are given structure by a rhythm of straight edges and colorful “razor strips” that weave under and over organic elements. Parrish’s ebullient sur- faces grab the eye, but a closer look reveals surprising depth beneath them. The effect stems from the artist’s laborious creative process, which begins with native Alaskan wood that he gradually, over the course of months, builds up with layers of paint and hand-rubbed coats of resin. Atmospheric hairs and overlapping brushstrokes add to the sensation of an abstract world receding into the picture plane, ending with the wood’s natural grain dimly visible in the distance.*

*By nothing more than gravity and friction in the shape of a rocky landscape.*

*Hanging somewhere on the border between sculpture and painting, R. Nelson Parrish’s color-saturated works in Surface Tension at Edward Cella Art + Architecture are a playful riff on West Coast minimalism. His series of standing rectangular totems and wall panels arrest the eye with the vibrant splashes of color, weaving together two disparate cultures: the aesthetics of the Pacific Northwest tribes in his native Alaska, and the exuberant stylings of Southern California surfboard and car design. In panels like Unfolded, #26 (2009, above), blocks of thickly applied resin and inde-terminate fields of color are given structure by a rhythm of straight edges and colorful “razor strips” that weave under and over organic elements. Parrish’s ebullient sur- faces grab the eye, but a closer look reveals surprising depth beneath them. The effect stems from the artist’s laborious creative process, which begins with native Alaskan wood that he gradually, over the course of months, builds up with layers of paint and hand-rubbed coats of resin. Atmospheric hairs and overlapping brushstrokes add to the sensation of an abstract world receding into the picture plane, ending with the wood’s natural grain dimly visible in the distance.*
Bicycle Diaries, the new book by the musician and artist David Byrne, is a collection of musings about everything from art and the art world to politics, language, urban planning, music, anthropology, architecture, and the psychology of warfare. And, of course, bicycling. Byrne organizes his chapters around cities he has visited, generally on concert tours or for art projects. His diaries therefore reflect the importance he places on physical context. As he says in the beginning of the book, cities are, to him, reflections of their inhabitants’ values, “not so much as individuals, but as the social animals we are.”

Byrne, formerly of the band Talking Heads, writes about Manila, Istanbul, Berlin, Sydney, London, Buenos Aires, and San Francisco. He also discusses New York City, where he currently lives, as well as his native Baltimore, Detroit, Niagara, and others. Everywhere he goes, he brings a collapsible bicycle in a suitcase and rides around; he finds that his bike provides a wonderful vantage for seeing a city, and the speed and sociability of bike riding lend themselves well to taking in the sights and getting a feel for each place.

At a karaoke party in Manila, someone loads “Burning Down the House,” the hit Talking Heads song, perhaps hoping he will sing. In the Australian Outback, Byrne helps a family whose car is stuck in a dry riverbed, only to find the patriarch intent on continuing his original path, even if it means getting trapped in sand again. In San Francisco, he attends an exhibit of “outsider” art, and riffs on the relative merits of art by professional artists and outsider (untrained, often unsocialized) artists. The only difference he sees between professional art and outsider art is that the latter doesn’t deal “with the hermetic and convoluted dramas of the art world itself”—a wonderful line.

Diaries is a collection of riffs. Byrne goes to a private social club in London, and riffs on the British caste system. In his chapter on Manila—one of the most interesting in the book—he riffs on national narratives and mythmaking after seeing paintings commissioned by the Marcoses. Byrne observes traditional vernacular architecture: “Beautiful architecture without architects.” And when he visits a market, he wonders if the “human scale and the pleasant chaos” inherent in such places isn’t part of some “unconscious, though thoroughly evolved, plan,” something we carry in our DNA.

Diaries is not geared to architects and planners. Rather, it’s a book for lovers of cities, of travel, of bicycling, and of people. His observations about the built environment, like all of his observations, are somewhat brief, and he seems to be interested in the built environment only insofar as it represents the character and aspirations of the people who inhabit it or travel through it. Byrne gently mocks “starchitecture,” describes the work of noted Danish urban planner and architect Jan Gehl in Copenhagen, London, and Melbourne, and praises Berlin’s streets (“I’m kind of in shock—it all works so well!”). But Diaries is ultimately a travelogue for anyone interested in cities and bicycling.

A cranky reader might complain that Diaries is just a series of ramblings, and be further frustrated that the book’s title inoculates Byrne against this criticism. Experts may find some of his musings about their respective fields to be lightweight. But it is unfair to criticize Byrne for straying; for one thing, his writing is eminently readable, and by virtue of being pulled from his journals, the book’s sections are short and punchy. For another, his musings are enlightening, fun, and thought provoking: I keep being struck by the intensity of Byrne’s curiosity and by his open-mindedness. And in the end, the premise clearly freed Byrne from any inhibition. As a result, Diaries is a fresh, unpretentious, and deeply humanist look at the world.

I have to wonder if the bicycle doesn’t have something to do with Byrne’s lack of pretension and his humanist outlook. Navigating foreign roads—and New York City streets, for that matter—on a bike is a humbling experience, as well as exhilarating and liberating. Perhaps this has contributed to Byrne’s perceptions about the people around him. Like so many self-professed shy people, he often comes back to and celebrates humans as social animals, and his interest in people informs his views about all the disparate subjects he covers in Diaries, including the cities we animals create.

Above, left: Cyclists crossing the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, New York City.

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Beyond Archigram: The Structure of Circulation

Hadas A. Steiner
Routledge, $43.95

Were Archigram the last Victorians or the first Postmoderns (if there is any distinction between these two)? What is the relevance of the architectural provocation of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s to contemporary theory and practice? The new book by Hadas A. Steiner, Beyond Archigram: The Structure of Circulation, addresses the question of legacy as forthrightly as possible by first conceding that the project of the legendary British group was always less about the architectural product than it was the process of architectural representation and the circulation of architectural ideas. Thus Steiner adopts the rather tricky strategy of dwelling less upon the well-known Archigram iconography, and focusing more upon the medium of its transmission: the titular publication that appeared in nine volumes between 1961 and 1970. For Steiner, “the journal project itself was a form of architectural practice, one in which information about architecture emerged, self-referentially, with an architecture of information.”

“This fascinating merger occurred incrementally over the lifespan of Archigram magazine, and was reflected in the progressive (if heuristic) embrace of ever-more ephemeral and transient architectural modalities, from a fetishistic fascination with the prefabricated hardware of architectural structure, to the ‘invisible’ software of communications networks. Steiner sees in the evolving content and form of the journal an implicit argument about the status of architectural representation—an argument that has profound resonance in the current professional culture of digitization.

The implicit question here is: Can digital technologies (with which Archigram were just beginning to grapple) provide truly new models of imagining architectural and urban spaces, or are they simply more efficient means geared toward the same old ends? Steiner argues in her conclusion that the historical example of Archigram, while answering yes to the former proposition, also demonstrates the deeply problematic nature of the technology of architectural representation—an aspect largely suppressed by today’s design systems that still “prioritize finite objects over organization.”

The abstractness of these concerns is offset by the itinerary of the journal through what constitutes a veritable typology of period alternative architectures: space frames, pods, balconies, networks, robots—all collected and displayed with Archigram’s characteristic pop sensibility and masterful grasp of the art of public relations. A nice section of color plates conveys the visual and thematic richness of the magazine, with several large images of page spreads that are wonderful to behold. Fortunately, however, Steiner does not cede total control of the argument to the content of the issues and the (frankly somewhat arbitrary) editorial selections made at the time by Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron, and Michael Webb.

She often allows one or two issues in which Archigram was both central but also highly controversial. But given the emphasis on the magazine medium and the “dissemination of architectural ideas,” it seems strange that Steiner chooses not to contextualize Archigram as one of many small architectural magazines being produced in several countries at the time (which, as recent publications and the 2007 exhibition Clas/Fold/Stamp have reminded us, it certainly was). Even when her discussion touches upon other participants in the samizdat culture of the ‘60s, like Austrian Hans Hollein, or the French groups Architecture Principe and Utopie, they are not characterized as writers and publishers but merely as designers who had some contact with Archigram. What is lost in this case is a nuanced picture of an intense and polemical network of architectural debate, in which Archigram was both central but also highly controversial.

The agenda of Beyond Archigram, however, is less about clarifying a historical record or outlining an ideological context than about provoking contemporary designers toward historical reflection about their own practices and values, and today’s culture in which “the representation of ephemeral and virtual environments continues to play itself out within digital discourse as an idiomatic form.” As such, Steiner implicitly urges the reader to look beyond Archigram’s only slightly satirical embrace of mass culture, their objectification of women, their subculture, and to see instead a meditation on the vicissitudes of architectural image-making.

How can the traditional act of drawing (digital or otherwise) capture the fleeting, situational complexity of movement and social interaction, of the subjectivity of individual perception; of life itself?


Julie Mehretu, Immanence (2004).

Cartoonish Seriousness

As with the Vertovian view in the making of a film, the eye from the 1920s to the 1950s imagines the new. A lot of what is manifested in the page spreads that are wonderful to behold. Fortunately, however, Steiner does not cede total control of the argument to the content of the issues and the (frankly somewhat arbitrary) editorial selections made at the time by Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron, and Michael Webb. She often allows one or two issues in which Archigram was both central but also highly controversial. But given the emphasis on the magazine medium and the “dissemination of architectural ideas,” it seems strange that Steiner chooses not to contextualize Archigram as one of many small architectural magazines being produced in several countries at the time (which, as recent publications and the 2007 exhibition Clas/Fold/Stamp have reminded us, it certainly was). Even when her discussion touches upon other participants in the samizdat culture of the ‘60s, like Austrian Hans Hollein, or the French groups Architecture Principe and Utopie, they are not characterized as writers and publishers but merely as designers who had some contact with Archigram. What is lost in this case is a nuanced picture of an intense and polemical network of architectural debate, in which Archigram was both central but also highly controversial.

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Julie Mehretu, Immanence (2004)
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TENDING GARDENS

It's probably too early to know if urban agriculture is a passing fad or the next chapter in the movement to restore the connection between the city and its sources of food and drink. The connection was severed after World War II as "progress" put a higher premium on convenience than on taste and variety, and urban "victory gardens" lost their necessity and official backing.

What urban agriculture posits is the cityscape as a commons—and an active citizenry prepared to cultivate it. This wonderful word, cultivation, is much missing now in the metropolis. The cityscape has become an odd place, full of settings that seem alive until you actually experience them. If we accept that everything outside of buildings is potentially "cityscape," a frightening amount of it seems to belong to no one. Between a public sector that approaches cityscape as something to be minimally and mechanically maintained, and a citizenry that often sees its obligations as almost non-existent, we are left with a patchwork of private sponsorship.

Without a citizenry willing to cultivate, you can't even sustain a victory garden. The difference between what was installed in San Francisco's Civic Center and the allotment gardens at Fort Mason, for example, is an active community keeping it in good shape. Interestingly, the latter are administered by the National Park Service, which charges a nominal annual rent for a 5-by-20-foot plot and administers a long waiting list. There's a degree of turnover, but slow enough that newcomers can benefit from old-timers, that the community can share some of its costs, and that there's a tradition that encourages diversity, but also demands a level of participation.

When Shunryu Suzuki, propagator of Soto Zen in northern California, arrived here, he may have been thinking of "Instructions for the Cook," an essay by Eihei Dogen, the 13th-century founder of Soto Zen, one of the three sects of Japanese Buddhism. He notes that being a cook at a monastery is a shortcut to enlightenment if you take the work seriously. Even hanging out with the cook can be helpful, he notes, telling of his encounter with an old man, a cook, gathering firewood in the hot noon sun. "Shouldn't someone else do that for you?" he asked. The old man glared over: "Other people aren't me," he said. Suzuki proposed an ethic of self-sufficiency for his community in which raising vegetables and preparing food had a central place. There is something in that gesture that is directly relevant—the medicine we all need—to cure the barrenness of most cityscapes. Urban agriculture has similar motives: learn to cultivate here, and you may cultivate there—and there. Rooted in cooperation, cultivation is also innately personal, an expression of who we are.

The University of California at San Francisco recently commissioned Topher Delaney and Seam Studio to design, install, and maintain a small garden around a building that it owns in the city's eastern neighborhoods, across from a public park. The garden fits between the building and the street, triangulated so what's planted there can really be seen and experienced as you walk along. The raised beds are protected by metal barriers from dogs and debris. Written on them are the plants' Latin names. This is a medicinal garden, a source of remedies for people whose cultures still use them. They come and take leaves and cuttings. It's likely that other gardens will be planted in the neighborhood, now that people see that it can be done. The medicinal garden is tended by a real person, Oscar Fuentes, who made the metal barriers and planted everything that grows there. In an area where the streets are often bare of vegetation, the medicinal garden is thriving. It makes the park seem untended by contrast.

It is untended. Like other public settings, the amount of human involvement in its cultivation has steadily diminished. What if, on the other hand, it was run jointly with the community? What if neighbors had actual plots that they could garden on their own? What if the streets became an extension of the park, with the city's encouragement for people to garden there, too? What if the public realm was restored as a commons, in other words, rather than as the no man's land it has become, controlled by cities that can no longer afford to cultivate it, as they briefly did? The commons is not a private realm, but it exists for the community that shares and cultivates it.

As long as the cityscape is someone else's problem, it will be full of dead zones. As long as the public sector and its employees assert a monopoly over it, preventing its cultivation, it will stay as uninviting as it is—or get worse. It doesn't have to be this way. If local designers, gardeners, and artisans in the private sector are enlisted in its cultivation, as UCSF did with its medicinal garden, then its imagination, knowledge, and best practices can be an inspiration for others—a crucial step in reclaiming the cityscape as a commons and involving citizens in its cultivation.

Cultivation is work. You don't put lettuce on the table without planting it, watering it, warding off the pests, and harvesting it at the right time. Urban agriculture is really a metaphor for any and all efforts to reengage the community in cultivating the cityscape, at every level that makes sense.

Cultivation requires small-scale, fine-grained, locally-sustainable approaches—it's more work, but it's the only way to revive the cityscape as a commons—urbane, alive, uniquely ours.
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