One of the most anticipated projects in the Bay Area, the new home for the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives, has succumbed to the economic downturn. The new structure would have been the U.S. debut of Toyo Ito, the Japanese architect known for his highly conceptual work. But citing shortfalls in fundraising—with only $81 million of the estimated $200 million needed—UC Berkeley, which owns the museum, announced last month that it was returning to square one.

"I want to emphasize that our primary goal has not changed, we are going to have a museum on the new site," said Lawrence Rinder, the museum's director. "Moving forward, I'm optimistic that we will have an aesthetically remarkable structure, something..."
WE WERE GREEN BEFORE GREEN WAS COOL.

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At last fall’s Monterey Design Conference, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill partner Craig Hartman, who has years of experience practicing in China, talked about the differences between working there and working in San Francisco. Over the span of two years in San Francisco, he said, his firm went through 170 public meetings on just one project—the Parkmerced redevelopment—and was just barely able to secure entitlements. In the same time frame in China, much of Guangzhou was built, including key parts of its central business district and 30 miles of subway. The comparison will surely resonate with architects across California and beyond.

So the question arises: How can the United States and California in particular remain competitive, creating necessary and even visionary architecture and infrastructure in an age when its major competition doesn’t have the burdens of planning review, community meetings, and environmental standards?

Obviously, it won’t work to become a totalitarian state where people and buildings can be displaced on a whim and the government controls all deals. Nor should we rush to develop as much as humanly possible. After all, just a month or so after the Monterey conference, the economy of one of the world’s other lightning-speed builders, Dubai, was submerged in a sea of debt brought on by overdevelopment and speculation.

But as we emerge from our own economic debacle and begin to build again, it’s time to think about streamlining the system. Certainly, we need to reform environmental review processes, like California’s Environmental Quality Act, which has sometimes become a political tool to block projects regardless of their environmental effects, such as when Westfield sued to challenge EIR approval of a new neighboring (and competing) mall, the Shops at Santa Anita in Arcadia.

Hartman shared his own ideas on how to speed up the process, by making planning rules clearer and more binding, and removing the lengthy negotiations that occur on large-scale projects. Such politically charged give-and-take between planning departments, local leaders, and neighborhood groups inevitably, he said, slows down the process, makes it much murkier, and too often leads to watered-down designs.

I agree with Hartman. Input from neighbors and officials is vital, but in addition to focusing on a local level, it should be used to help create a more general template of regulation for development, rather than sticking to a case-by-case scenario that can make any project take years.

I reached out to other local architects and planners and heard plenty of incisive ideas. My favorites include the following: Simplify the permit process to make it concise and transparent, not something that only those with training in bureaucracy-speak can understand. Limit the stringent and onerous parking requirements that all projects seem to have in California—we’re moving out of an age of car dominance, and our approach to urbanism needs to reflect that. Finally, ensure that applicants submit plans that are complete and don’t have to be sent back for re-shaping over and over again.

I’d like to hear more, and would encourage you to post your ideas on our new Facebook page. We’ll be leveraging social networking as a way to broaden the conversation about this and other challenges facing our cities and our architecture. —S. Lubell
NEW OFFICES BURNISH PORTLAND’S REP FOR MORE THAN SUSTAINABILITY

GOOD WORKING NEIGHBORS

Portland is often called the greenest city in America, its new architecture included. Now three daring new office buildings—Twelve West by Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects (ZGF), Ziba headquarters by Holst Architecture, and bSIDE6 by Works Partnership Architecture—have brought this local ethos to commercial construction, a function of the city’s increasing popularity with creative workers.

Exterior of Twelve West boasts a long list of sustainable checkpoints, and they’re all in the process of applying for a rating of LEED Gold or higher. The 23-story Twelve West boasts hot-water-heating solar panels, a ceiling-integrated chilled water cooling system, and a storm water retention system that diverts more than half a million gallons of runoff to watering the landscap- ing and flushing the toilets. Four building-integrated wind turbines generate electricity on site, and planted terraces covering half of the roof increase insulation values. The result is a mixed-use building that uses 40 percent less energy than comparable structures. The ground floor will be dedicated to retail, ZGF will occupy the four floors above, and the remainder will be given to 277 apartments.

Nearby sits Ziba, a clean black box floating on a ground-story plinth ofcumaru wood. Steel panel siding is placed in a chevron pattern, giving an otherwise simple building a textural overlay and refracting sunshine subtly off the panel’s angles. Inside, the building is similarly unadorned. “It’s not a gilded building; there aren’t any extraneous materials,” said architect Cassidy Bolger of Holst. Ninety-five percent of post-construction waste was recycled.

Across the river, the sleek seven-story bSIDE6 features ribbons of black steel that wrap around a skin of glass. The architects’ green goals were centered on using as few materials as possible in construction. The frame is concrete, chosen because of its durability and ready availabil- ity, as well as its thermal mass. Rainwater is entirely handled on site, directed into pipes and gravel under the foundation. Inside, there are few finishes. The ductwork, electrical wiring, and pipes are exposed, and the only drywall appears in a scant few panels that act as office dividers and define the nine window bays that project out from the building.

What’s perhaps most notable about these buildings is their broader definition of sustainability. “In Portland, sustainability is more than a prescriptive checklist,” said Scott Lewis, CEO of sustainable consulting firm Brightworks. “It’s about a holistic approach to building in question needed much larger spaces. Plans for new buildings were drawn up for both branches. After review by the planning department, which deemed it not a significant historical resource, the Ortega Branch was demolished this past September. The demolition drew the attention of the HPC, which decided to hold off on landmarking two other Appleton & Wolfard branches currently undergoing ren- ovation, but to include North Beach.

HPC will weigh in on more build- ings going forward, as new historic districts from the city’s neighbor- hoods survey—including SoMa, the Mission, MidOctavia, and Bayview—come online. “If this collection of libraries becomes landmarks, one wonders what the selection criteria will be for deter- mining a landmark,” said Marsha Mayum of Leddy Mayum Stacy. “It has ramifications for how we can evolve as a city and address challenges in the future.”

LYDIA LEE

Twelve West’s light-filled interior (left); bSIDE6 features a black steel frame that wraps around a skin of glass (center). Ziba’s metallic and glass box is surrounded by timber- clad elements (right).

COURTESY OF THE SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

MIDCENTURY MADNESS? continued

The North Beach Branch Library, as it stands today.

COURTESY OF STEPHEN A. MILLER

Twelve West stands in Portland’s West End, a somewhat neglected neighborhood of single-family housing, grocery stores, and small busines- ses. bSIDE6 is on lower Burnside, a rather gritty thorough- fare. Ziba occupies a former brown- field site. The architects of each building hope new construction can invigorate what are otherwise slowly developing neighborhoods, a sustainable goal that reaches far beyond your basic accumulation of LEED points. AMARIA HOLSTEIN

THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER DECEMBER 16, 2009

THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER DECEMBER 16, 2009
HITCHIN’ A RIDE

With its price hikes, worker strife, and bureaucratic image, LA Metro doesn’t exactly set the standard for good press. But that appears to be changing as the transit authority has hired two of our favorite writers to supply in-house news and consulting. After being laid off by *The Los Angeles Times* in March, transit reporter Steve Hymon was hired by Metro to put together its new transit blog, *The Source*. On November 20, *AN* contributor Sam Hall Kaplan announced that he had been hired by Metro to be a transportation planning manager, with a focus on “crafting a user-friendly interface in Downtown LA between the Metro and the proposed California High Speed Rail,” in particular for stations and streetscapes. Eavesdrop hopes there’s one more spot for a guy who would like to check out the coolest cities and their metro systems for ideas—say Paris, Rome, Berlin, and Tokyo.

AVE ATQUE VALETAS!

Bad blood is stirring between the William Morris Endeavor talent agency and developers George Comfort & Sons, as the agency tries to extract itself from a lease at a building now under construction at 231-265 North Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills. Earlier this year, WME contended that Comfort & Sons had violated the lease, because the agency would be forced to share a valet service and parking with a competitor (God forfend!) in a neighboring building. Prior to William Morris’ mega-merger with Endeavor, the agency had hired Gensler to design the interiors for 231. Enter Ari Emanuel, then head of Endeavor, who now runs the WME shop—where egos in excess outstrip even the most brazen architect. The agent fired Gensler and hired Neil Denari. Then came word that Emanuel was trying to leave the Beverly Drive address entirely. Now, no one is talking at least not to us. Or is it Eavesdrop’s Corvair? Gensler declined to comment, while Denari’s firm tells us they’re still on hold. As for the valets, they hear they’re deeply offended. Naturally.

WHY TV APPEARANCES MATTER

Why take ourselves seriously as architecture critics when we can be lampooned on *The Colbert Report* in order to sell a few books? Whoops, that’s not Eavesdrop’s game. That’s *New Yorker* critic Paul Goldberger, who sat gamely grinning in the hot seat on November 19 while Colbert ridiculed—uh, make that—discussed world architecture and Goldberger’s new book, *Why Architecture Matters*. After a rocky start (Colbert mis-pronounced Goldberger’s name in the intro), Colbert proceeded to grill the author on the possibility of landmarking the Colbert Report set. Then, he suggested putting a toilet handle on the Guggenheim, and asked if he could skateboard down the Gugg’s ramp (Why not? Krens would have—might have—motorbiked it if he had the chance). Finally, Colbert pondered aloud that if architecture reflects who we are, as Goldberger’s book claims, then how come our houses aren’t getting fatter? Goldberger took it all in stride, relishing the rare chance among architecture authors to bathe in the brighter lights of TV-bound public attention. Fair warning, though: Eavesdrop’s game. That’s *New Yorker* critic Paul Goldberger, who sat gamely grinning in the hot seat on November 19 while Colbert ridiculed—uh, make that—discussed world architecture and Goldberger’s new book, *Why Architecture Matters*. After a rocky start (Colbert mis-pronounced Goldberger’s name in the intro), Colbert proceeded to grill the author on the possibility of landmarking the Colbert Report set. Then, he suggested putting a toilet handle on the Guggenheim, and asked if he could skateboard down the Gugg’s ramp (Why not? Krens would have—might have—motorbiked it if he had the chance). Finally, Colbert pondered aloud that if architecture reflects who we are, as Goldberger’s book claims, then how come our houses aren’t getting fatter? 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**THE LIBRARY NEXT DOOR**

The Los Angeles Library Bond Construction Plan is a rare success story for the city’s often-troubled public programs. Launched through a $178.3 million bond measure passed in 1998, the plan has brought about 36 solid, sometimes even artful buildings from talented architects like Hodgetts & Fung, Stephen Ehrlich, and Barton Phelps. And somehow the program has remained on budget and on time—a modern-day miracle.

The last of these projects is emblematic. M2A Architects’ Silver Lake Library on the corner of Glendale and Silver Lake boulevards was not completed on a huge budget ($12 million) or at a huge scale (13,600 square feet). But it delivers serious architectural impact, nonetheless. And it has given the neighborhood an unmistakable symbol, encouraging more people to explore an impressive library collection while potentially pushing the city toward more ambitious architecture.

To approach the split-level library, which sits on a raised base above a ground-level parking structure, one progresses through a concrete-floored courtyard designed by landscape architect Mia Lehrer. It’s inviting, with flora on the periphery, benches shaped like stacks of books, and charming artwork by Silver Lake local Christina Ulke. The only barrier part is an awkward security gate. Still, compared to some of the Berlin Wall–sized gates the city puts up around its public buildings, this is a picket fence.

The L-shaped building’s facade features a textured combination of thin vertical panels of clear channel glass and patterned limestone. The glass composition is subtle but lively and rhythmic, while the stone keeps the rectilinear project from feeling too institutional. The architects have chosen strategic moments to wow, most importantly the 35-foot-tall corner window that reveals the main reading room. It invites people inside, giving them a clear view of the library’s inner workings. “We took every chance we could to connect the inside with the outside,” said M2A principal Barry Malofsky. The library’s connectivity and its embrace of the neighborhood is a direct nod to former Silver Lake resident Richard Neutra and his indoor/outdoor aesthetic. In fact the library sits next to one of Neutra’s office buildings and just down the street from several of his most famous houses on the Silver Lake Reservoir.

Inside the cavernous entrance hall, one feels an immediate sense of lightness, brought on by 30-foot-plus ceiling heights, ubiquitous windows and skylights, and a constant connection to the outside—including cleverly-framed views of nearby trees—that makes everything seem even larger. The outside is brought inside here with dark stone tile floors picking up on the exterior, and glass gardens made of colorful shards that mimic flowing water near the corners. The useful if unexceptional multipurpose room across from the entrance hall, lit from above by clerestories, accommodates lectures, seminars, and community meetings.

The main event, atop the narrow, light-infused stairway, is the giant reading room, which feels as if it is perched over Glendale Boulevard thanks to its streetfront sitting and massive corner window. The rest of the library interior is not exactly edgy, but it feels comfortable and uncluttered. Its unified plan subtly separates various uses—the library stacks, a children’s room, teen area, multimedia center—through changing ceiling heights, small canopies, and varied furniture configurations.

The building is seeking a LEED Gold rating, and includes 168 solar panels on the roof, low-flow plumbing, rapidly renewable woods, recycled and local construction materials, substantial daylighting, automatic light sensors, and more.

The library isn’t an icon that will redefine Los Angeles, but that’s the point. It’s architecture that impresses but also fits well into its setting. A sleek, artful, and entirely contemporary building couldn’t be more at home than in a creative place like Silver Lake. With buildings such as these, the city will become what it was always supposed to be: a collection of distinct neighborhoods that together make up a dynamic whole.

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**BOULEVARD GALLERY**

A striking new three-story project on the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood designed by Marcelo Spina and his firm P-A-T-T-E-R-N-S opened in mid-November. Originally conceived as a boutique, the space is now a contemporary art gallery called Prism. Its facade is composed of lapped and undulating resin-based polycarbonate panels that mimic Sunset Boulevard’s twisting traffic patterns, its hilly curves, and even the radiators of its whizzing cars. Shifting fins angle in various directions, eventually leading the eye toward the gallery’s large glass vitrine and entry “like a tractor beam,” said Spina. Inside, large angular stairs offset pristine white spaces with varied heights and dramatic strips of lighting. The entry’s curves are reflected in a swooping interior overhang. The gallery will feature an always-changing array of national and international artists, a bookshop, and a lecture and film schedule.
Architects, is the architect of Turk Eddy. The eight-person firm has a second stimulus project on its books: two blocks of the Hunters View revitalization project that was awarded $6 million in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ARRA funds through the San Francisco Housing Authority.

The project, whose master architect is WRT/Solomon E.T.C., will start on abatement and demolition this month. “We’re lucky right now,” Taggart said. “I’m talking to other architects who are not so lucky.”

Taggart might be right to chalk up her firm’s stimulus success to luck. Though California leads the nation in ARRA funds—as of November 22, $18.5 billion had been awarded to, and more than $8 billion received by, the Golden State—the impact on architectural billings has been modest. National Architecture Billings Index data released by the American Institute of Architects in August found 15.7 percent of American Institute of Architects Billings Index data released by the American Institute of Architects.

Still, architects hoping to land stimulus-project pursuits, it is not actively tracking ARRA work. “In most cases, it’s brought up by our clients,” Mascia said. “It’s not like we said, ‘The government is going to dump a lot of money into public housing, for example, so let’s chase that.’” He concluded, “We focus on the things we know how to do and know how to do well.”

For those interested in stimulus work, tracking ARRA projects requires navigating a complex network of federal and state websites listing contract and grants opportunities. Because ARRA provides state and local governments with several new financing mechanisms, including new categories of tax-exempt and tax-credit bonds, communication with local municipalities is key. It also may necessitate a willingness to be flexible about the project type and delivery method. Another AIA finding showed that stimulus projects are more likely to include renovations/rehabilitations of existing facilities and to have design/build requirements.

Still, for those with the inclination and means to track it, the stimulus can be a prime business development opportunity, as well as another way to serve existing clients. William Tippin in the Government Services Group at AECOM said his firm has taken a proactive approach to ARRA projects, focusing on stimulus work available through the General Services Administration. “We looked at the ARRA budget and broke it down by agency, focus area, and client,” he said. “There was an effort on our part to establish a program management office in the U.S. and abroad to be prepared to respond to opportunities.”

Margaret Campbell, a project manager with the John Stewart Co., which is part of the Hunters View Community Partners development team, said even when architects aren’t the prime player in a stimulus fund application, they have opportunities to assist in the pursuit. “Some stimulus funds include a green component, particularly competitive grants. In these cases, we’ve coordinated with architects to figure out what we could commit to,” Campbell said. “For example, when we did our storm water visions, we did assessments to see what we could feasibly incorporate without backtracking on the project. We had to be creative.”

In total, the state estimates that ARRA will provide $86 billion in benefit to California. More than $30 billion of that amount is designated for tax-relief initiatives, including several that could spur design and construction projects. For example, ARRA authorized $10 billion in Recovery Zone economic development bonds and $15 billion in Recovery Zone facility bonds that can be issued in 2009 and 2010. According to the state’s economic recovery portal, California housing initiatives, transportation, and energy are designated at an estimated $2.1 billion, $4.7 billion, and $3 billion respectively.

In addition to increased billings, it was hoped that the stimulus would stave off rising unemployment. But despite leading the nation in creating jobs, California also boasts one of the country’s highest unemployment rates at 12.5 percent.
he said proudly. “They will see it’s a nice place.” If his commentary was personal, verging on emotional, it was well founded. His firm Barrio Planners, which is located in East LA, is uniquely intertwined with the project. They not only served as lead architects with AECOM, but also performed some of the earliest community outreach to bring a subway to the area two decades ago, and designed Boyle Heights’ Mariachi Plaza, which the line passes beneath, as well as several of the transit-oriented development projects along the way. Barrio also selected a roster of designers who paired with artists to work together on each station, choosing a theme that nods to each neighborhood.

East LA was denied its proposed extension of the Red Line subway, which runs from downtown to North Hollywood, thanks to anti-subway sentiment in the 1990s perpetuated by city legislators. A prompt by then-Mayor Richard Riordan briefly resurrected the idea as a busway. But when it was determined that a busway over LA’s historic bridges and narrow streets would require as much infrastructural development as a light rail line, the planners invented an alternative: a light rail-subway hybrid capable of traveling on former right-of-ways from streetcars, and below-grade or underground when required. The challenge then became to sell what was considered to be a “second-best” alternative for the marginalized community, said Metro planner James Rojas. “We had to convince the community that light rail was just as good,” he said.

A ride on the Gold Line is one of the most dramatic routes in the city. New, silver bullet-like trains head south out of Union Station over a newly-constructed bridge built above the 101 freeway, with sweeping views of downtown. After stopping in Little Tokyo, the train snakes over the LA River on the 1st Street Bridge into Boyle Heights, where it makes one stop before slipping underground to two of the best stations: Mariachi Plaza and Soto (both designed by Barrio). Mariachi Plaza is successful because the space itself was designed as a subway station when Barrio created the plaza in 1993 (a renovation was completed last year). The ascents from both underground stations are crowned with elements from traditional Mexican dress: for Mariachi Plaza, colors evoke the bright embroidery worn by mariachi and canopy cables strung like violin strings, and the instrument at Soto, the twirling, multi-colored layers allude to the skirts of female dancers, while canopies are copper to resemble ornamental cones.

Resurfacing again, the train stops at one of the six above-ground stations, which all loosely follow the same basic structure, using steel-framed, tensile Teflon canopies that peak and dip in different ways. The only above-ground station that bucks that trend is the exuberant East LA Civic Center. Here, the canopies explode into bright orange California poppies, a collaboration between Villalobos and artist Clement Hanami.

While the whimsical stations are said to nod to the neighborhoods, my fear while riding the Gold Line was that in the bid to make them representative of the local residents, so over-the-top ethnic, they’ve become stereotypical. The East LA stations do not need to be flashy. These are the city’s most transit-dependent neighborhoods, and they don’t need great design to encourage resident users. Instead, the stations have become—however misguided, in some cases—civic pride translated into the built environment: new, tourist-friendly landmarks for a community on the brink of reinventing itself that say, “Come see us now!”

Perhaps this is how we need to see our quickly expanding rail lines: as the city’s new cultural corridors, convincing more than the transit-dependent to ride them. Perhaps a fluorescent orange steel poppy, or a tensile Teflon canopy that looks like the snow-capped peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains, are just the touches needed to entice more people to explore, embrace, and understand this under-appreciated part of LA.
Preservationist Michael LaFetra is no stranger to the complexities that a midcentury fixer can pose. He is a serial rehabilitator and restorer, owning and selling over the past decade numerous iconic midcentury homes in LA, including Pierre Koenig’s Case Study 21, John Lautner’s Wolff House, and two more Case Study houses by A. Quincy Jones and Thornton Abell. But it’s Rudolph Schindler’s How House in Silver Lake, which he finished restoring this fall, that presented his greatest challenge yet.

LaFetra bought the dilapidated house in early 2005 after the previous owner, UCLA professor Lionel March, retired and returned to his native England. With the help of Jeff Fink, a contractor and architect with experience on other Schindler homes, he began a massive restoration. “Tears welled up when I first walked into the space,” LaFetra said. The How House is sited on a steep ridge and is angled to the street, necessitating a limited footprint. Built in 1925 for psychotherapist Dr. James How, the house is essentially made of two discrete geometric parts using materials often associated with Schindler—concrete, redwood, and glass. The top portion is made of California redwood slats stained green-gray to complement the existing landscape, while the lower portion is “slab-cast” concrete. The concrete was horizontally scored to match the upper portions, and is only visible from the backside of the site.

The layout of the house is almost completely symmetrical. The interior consists of multiple, interlocking forms that meet in opposing right angles, with a continuous pattern of horizontal lines. The central volume is a cube, with smaller spaces extending from it. The house has four bedrooms, a dining room, and a sitting room, with offices downstairs. A Richard Neutra–designed garden from the original plans has finally been realized outside the kitchen terrace.

With LaFetra’s extensive experience restoring mid-century homes, he knew there would be unexpected complications, but he admits even he was surprised by the extent of the deterioration he faced. “You couldn’t tell by looking at it what kind of shape the redwood cladding was in, since it was painted,” he said. Stripping the wood uncovered extensive termite damage. There were also leaks on the deck. “We knew there was water intrusion, but didn’t know why,” LaFetra recalled. “When I bought the house, I didn’t realize I would be rebuilding decks.”

LaFetra has a strong sense of the architectural integrity of the homes he restores, working obsessively to ensure the materials he uses are as close to the original as possible. When faced with the choice of replastering or doing a less-expensive skim coat, LaFetra chose to replaster. “The acoustics between the two are different,” he explained. “Materials in a room play differently. It may not seem like a big deal, but I can tell the difference the same way some people can tell the difference in a grade of leather.”

Original furniture and built-ins were refabricated, with interior design by Kristin Kilmer. Using original drawings, Kilmer designed pieces that were built on the same mathematical module of 16 or 32 inches used by Schindler. Certain pieces were enlarged to signal they are derivative. “I don’t want people to think I was trying to fool them, I wanted everyone to know what was original and what was Kristen’s,” said LaFetra.

The restoration took about two years. The How House was declared a Historic-Cultural Monument in 2007, and recently LaFetra put it back on the market after a brief hiatus.

HOUSE OF THE ISSUE > MICHAEL LAFETRA

Schindler’s How House (1925) restored. Original built-ins (right) were refabricated for the interior.

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If offered a half-empty glass of water, Osborn Architects would not only say it’s half full, they’d make good use of what’s left. That’s because the Glendale firm thrives on creating within apparent limitations. Michael Pinto, design principal, credits former CEO and principal Ted Osborn, who always provided opportunities for his staff to shine: “Ted would throw smart people in over their heads. But he was a good teacher and showed them a certain amount of trust.”

Since Osborn’s retirement in 2006, Pinto and fellow principal Tim Ballard have carried on the management style, guiding their small firm through complex projects, ranging from their own 10,500-square-foot office in Glendale to Animo Venice Charter High School, the first public school to receive California’s High Performance Incentive Grant for sustainable features. Pinto says the challenges presented by budget or space limitations spur the firm’s most creative problem-solving. “I like to get people to be more alert, to discover the resources that are available for design,” Pinto said.

The firm offers construction management and design services on the process and costs of building. They’ve also integrated a landscape design arm, and a graphic design studio, Hand Built, which provides opportunities for his staff to shine: “Ted would throw smart people in over their heads. But he was a good teacher and showed them a certain amount of trust.”

Since Osborn’s retirement in 2006, Pinto and fellow principal Tim Ballard have carried on the management style, guiding their small firm through complex projects, ranging from their own 10,500-square-foot office in Glendale to Animo Venice Charter High School, the first public school to receive California’s High Performance Incentive Grant for sustainable features. Pinto says the challenges presented by budget or space limitations spur the firm’s most creative problem-solving. “I like to get people to be more alert, to discover the resources that are available for design,” Pinto said.

The firm offers construction management services on the process and costs of building. They’ve also integrated a landscape design arm, and a graphic design studio, Hand Built, which recently launched as an independent entity. Their blend of intellectual rigor and common sense has proven particularly useful for complicated public and education projects, which are the bulk of their work.

The firm finds opportunities to make a campus identifiable and to help students see how they fit into their city or community. This may be through the subtlety of a design feature, significant investment in sustainability, a technically interesting assemblage of materials, or identifying graphics. Ultimately, Pinto notes, school architecture today is about building consensus and translating educational goals into shapes and volume. And with that much consideration behind the creation of a school building, what student wouldn’t be inspired to learn?

ALLISON MILIONIS
DESIGNING MORE INTELLIGENTLY

Architecture at AECOM reflects the experience of former firms DMJM H&N, Spillis Candela, HSMM and Citymark. Now Ellerbe Becket complements this expertise and strengthens our ability to design buildings that serve essential social and cultural functions. Our global architecture practice has deep connections to the adjacent fields of planning, engineering, and landscape architecture. By creating high-performance places to work, learn, heal, or gather, we increase the sustainability of our built communities and social infrastructure, helping to mitigate climate change and conserve resources.

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It's easy to think of architecture as an interdisciplinary field. At its most basic level, art and science combine to create buildings that are both beautiful and functional. In much the same way, architects are now relying on a broad spectrum of professional fields for sharing their work. From film to video games to documentary photography, architects are stretching beyond their own circles to present and explain their projects in new and even entertaining ways.

Some of the biggest leaps have occurred within the realm of architectural animation. With the rapid expansion of computer rendering and 3-D modeling software, converting models into animations has become exponentially easier and an increasingly popular way to present new projects.

Amid Amidi, an animation historian and co-creator of the animation blog Cartoon Brew, said that in recent years he's been seeing much higher levels of complexity in architectural presentations, and much more artistry in the process. “You can illustrate not just the idea, but show how people are going to interact with that environment in a way that can't be shown with a little man in a model,” he said. “You can actually demonstrate interactions between user and environment. We're only on the verge of what can be done.”

Architectural drawings have been given the animation treatment for years, but most fall into a utilitarian mold: a 360-degree rotation around a model of the building and a “flythrough” that takes the viewer inside. The result is a compelling visual for the client, but ultimately it’s a plain-cake approach.

“It has become completely mainstream now,” said Tapio Snellman, a director at Neutral, the London-based design and animation studio behind a string of films for such clients as Zaha Hadid, OMA, and Herzog & de Meuron. Neutral's films tend to be impressionistic in approach, as opposed to what Snellman bemoans as the typical “hyper-realistic” film. “All they do is show the reality and the way the building's going to be as close as possible without really talking much about the process or explaining why it is the way it is or how the design evolved,” he said.

That's a sentiment that has invaded the field, both among filmmakers and architects. “People have become really anesthetized to architectural visualizations,” said Vivian Rosenthal, co-founder of New York–based Tronic Studio, which produces a variety of visual displays for architects, including animations. Because she and co-founder Jesse Seppi were trained as architects, not filmmakers, they say they offer a fresh approach and perspective to architectural filmmaking. They use their understanding of the field’s scientific and artistic interplay to break away from the standard video model. “The client and the public expect more from these kinds of architectural films,” said Seppi.

Their recent film for a now-stalled Manhattan residential tower by...
Herzog & de Meuron gets cinematic in its display, showing columns and walls and ceilings falling down from the sky like an architectural Tetris game. As the building rises floor by floor, viewers venture into and around the residences, flying through living rooms and out over the 57-story building’s staggered balconies. In two flashy minutes, viewers watch the building grow up and blend into the neighborhood.

Like Tronic Studio, architects, urban designers, and planners make up the majority of Neutral’s staff. This experience in the design of buildings and spaces plays into their films’ focus on the context of the projects and how they fit into their urban surroundings. A recent film Neutral produced for a waterfront project in Copenhagen by OMA shows the building integrating with the city piece by piece, then shows it in its complete form from the perspective of a pedestrian touring its interior and exterior. Snellman said he and his team are more interested in the presentation of architectural ideas than in actually designing. With a good display, he said, “You’ll be able to understand where the idea comes from and why it needs to be the way it is.”

A common frustration for Neutral, Tronic, and others working in architectural animation is that context is regularly overlooked in most flythroughs commissioned by architects. “A flythrough is as relevant to the view of something as a sketch on a napkin. No one ever sees anything from the perspective of a flythrough. Unless you’re a drone,” said Peter Frankfurt, co-founder of Imaginary Forces, a design studio with offices in Los Angeles and New York that produces film titles, commercials, interactive spaces, and a variety of visual elements and experiences.

Frankfurt and Imaginary Forces routinely work with architects, and were part of the multidisciplinary consortium United Architects, whose pre-visualization film became one of six finalists in the competition to redesign the World Trade Center. Rather than focusing solely on the proposed design, the film imagines the complex already built and tracks the reactions of people as they see it for the first time, jutting out from the skyline and peeking through the forest of skyscrapers of Lower Manhattan. He says the common thread in all his firm’s work— from the beginning of a Hollywood movie to a car commercial to an architectural visualization—is a solid and engaging narrative. “It’s really about, how do you tell a good story? That’s basically the bottom line,” said Frankfurt.

The bulk of Imaginary Forces’ film work is of the Hollywood variety; they’ve done teasers and opening credits for films like Minority Report, Terminator Salvation, and the Transformers series. But elements of architecture have found their way into much of the firm’s work, especially in the realm of experience design. One project for New York City’s Museum of Modern Art was New City, an architecturally based immersive media environment that envisioned a “living virtual world parallel and simultaneous to ours.” Frankfurt said this type of work helps to emphasize the connection between entertainment and architecture.

These sorts of thematic and impressionistic displays are much more than marketing presentations. Some architects are actually using animation as part of their design methods. “It becomes part of the creative thought process,” said Kulapat Yimnrasat, a principal at wHY Architecture in Culver City. “By doing the video, you learn how to communicate the idea more clearly, which sometimes refines the idea itself.”

For one residential project in the Hollywood Hills, wHY took inspiration from the neighborhood’s history in the film industry to create a sort of film-noir animation of the house’s design. Taking cues from Alfred Hitchcock and the early days of movies, wHY’s film shows the house from the perspective of a private detective investigating a crime. The “investigation” takes the detective and the viewer up the drive to the home and through each of its rooms. The crime isn’t exactly solved, but the narrative style turns what could have been a drab flythrough into an engaging exploration.

Frankfurt said the growing use of animation throughout the design and marketing process can cross-pollinate between architects and filmmakers that’s likely to continue. “I think it’s just architects’ comfort level and fluency increasing,” he said. “They’re using the process of making the film as a kind of design charrette for elements of the project itself, and I think that’s where there’s real interesting push and value.”
The editors of AN pored over the architecture books of the season to bring you our definitive list of the most intriguing, compelling, seriously gorgeous, data-driven, cool, and fascinating books—in our opinion. Read on!

**BOUNTIFUL BOOKS**

1. *Living West* by Carter Emmart
2. *Alvar Aalto: Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics* by Eero Liisa Eriksson
4. *Foster in View* by Ben Johnson
7. *Gio Ponti* by Ugo la Pietra
1. Living West: New Architecture in Southern California
   Sam Lubell
   The Monacelli Press
   $50.00
   Young talent in CA captured in the words of AN’s California editor.

2. Alvar Aalto: Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics
   Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen
   Yale University Press
   $45.00
   The world beyond those fantastic, sinuous designs.

   Edited by Brett Steele and Francisco González de Canales
   Architectural Association
   $60.00
   The seeds of greatness from Aldo to Zaha, with commentary by their contemporaries.

   Wolfgang Scheppe, et al.
   Hatje Cantz
   $120.00
   More than 1,300 pages of Venetian glory, from Senegalese vendors to cruise ships to flood charticles.

5. Architecture of Change 2: Sustainability and Humanity in the Built Environment
   Edited by Kristeen and Lukas Fesel
   Gestalten
   $65.00
   Plotting our sustainable future.

6. Foster in View
   Ben Johnson
   Prestel
   $75.00
   Johnson photographs Foster as inspiration for his paintings.

7. Gio Ponti
   Ugo La Pietra
   Rizzoli
   $85.00
   How the Italian grew from designing fine china to fine art museums.

8. The Iconic House: Architectural Masterworks Since 1900
   Dominic Bradbury
   Thames & Hudson
   $65.00
   The most important 100 homes of the last 100 years.

9. Pittsburgh: A New Portrait
   Franklin Toker
   University of Pittsburgh Press
   $34.95
   The Steel City is having a moment.

10. Paper in Architecture
    Shigeru Ban
    Rizzoli
    $65.00
    An artist at recycling materials.

11. Unbuilt Masterworks of the 21st Century
    Ila Berman and Mona El Kafif
    William Stout
    $60.00
    A double-sided look—literally—at the research and results of Tulane’s rebuilding efforts in New Orleans.

12. Carlo Mollino: Arabesques
    Lisa Ponti, Carmen Guerrero, and Fulvio Ferrari
    Mondadori Electa
    $60.00
    From pornographic Polaroids to baroque boudoirs.

13. Hearts of the City
    Herbert Muschamp
    Knopf
    $50.00
    Selected works. Don’t miss the memoir at the end.

14. Urbanisms: Working with Doubt
    Steven Holl
    Princeton Architectural Press
    $55.00
    Holl’s cri de coeur disguised as a monograph—or is it the other way around?

15. Urbanisms: Local/Global
    Ilia Berman and Mona El Kafif
    William Stout
    $60.00
    A double-sided look—literally—at the research and results of Tulane’s rebuilding efforts in New Orleans.
Paul Virilio’s photograph of an observation post on the English Channel (left), and a firing tower in Brittany (right).

GRAFT’s Shotgun House for Make It Right.

BUNKER BLOCKS

Bunker Archeology
Paul Virilio
Princeton Architectural Press, $45

In Bunker Archeology, Paul Virilio investigates the territorial impact of some 15,000 Nazi bunkers built along 2,796 miles of French coastline during World War II. The study looks at the implementation of the blockhaus, originally intended to defend against an Allied invasion by establishing what Hitler referred to as the “Atlantic Wall.” This seminal work, written in 1958 but not published until 1975 (and only in English in 1994), proved influential in developing Virilio’s early speculations on military tactics, geopolitics, and transport velocity, as well as on the aesthetics of the monolith and the aesthetics of disappearance.

In an interview with scholar John Armitage that appeared in the internet review Chessy.net in 2000, Virilio explained his motivations for writing Bunker Archeology:

“...At the time that I did the research for that book, I was very young. My aim was to understand the notion of ‘Total War’... I was among the first people to experience the German Occupation of France during the Second World War. I was seven to 13 years old during the war and... we in Nantes were denied access to the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. It was therefore not until after the war was over that I saw the sea for the first time, in the vicinity of St. Nazaire. It was there that I discovered the bunkers. But what I also discovered was that during the war, the whole

Brad Pitt

Brad Pitt’s initiative to bring sustainable architecture to a devastated New Orleans neighborhood, may be seen as the latest in a long series of utopian communities. Most of those visionary schemes remained on paper; others expired with the charismatic leader who created them. Make It Right has a much better chance of success because it’s a collaborative venture in which architects work closely with residents and allow them to choose what they want to build. Pitt has leveraged his fame to build support, win trust, and expedite construction. The handsome model houses that would provide sustainable, storm-resistant shelter. Fourteen firms responded to the call to study local typologies, provide high design at low cost, and forgo their fees. Morphosis developed a house that would float, buoyed by polystyrene foam and a fiber-reinforced concrete base tethered to steel posts. New Orleans architects participated alongside such international stars as MVRDV, Shigeru Ban, and David Adjaye. Each worked closely with representatives of the community, and eligible residents chose which model to build. The Make It Right Foundation assists those who are unable to secure a loan to cover the $150,000 purchase price, drawing on the $32 million it has raised.

In a second phase, seven more architects were recruited: Gehry Partners, which is currently reconstructing its storm-battered Ohr-O’Keefe Museum of Art on the coast of Mississippi, designed an ambitious double house, as did Atelier Hoshi Abe. Pugh + Scarpa, MVRDV, and GRAFT, who participated in the first phase, each created...
of Europe had become a fortress. And thus I saw to what extent an immense territory, a whole continent, had effectively been reorganized into one city, and just like the cities of old. From that moment on, I became more interested in urban matters, in logistics, in the organization of transport, in maintenance and supplies.”

In the United States, Virilio is always introduced as an urbanist, a political theorist, and a postmodern critic. Too often overlooked are his roles as an architect, a professor emeritus of architecture, and the former director of the École Spéciale d’Architecture de Paris—the dissident school created by Viollet-le-Duc in opposition to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. When considering Virilio’s diverse areas of expertise, it is not surprising that Bunker Archeology has had an important influence on French architectural discourse. At the time of the book’s first publication, Brutalism had been a leading movement, marking poured concrete) in the context of modern architecture, representing the ultimate expression of a post–World War II formal aesthetics initiated by Virilio, Parent, and the too-often-forgotten André Bloc, whose role was critical. This book presents the legacy of Virilio’s influence through the work of Jean Nouvel, who worked for Parent, and of other architects, such as Bernard Tschumi, Odile Decq, Benoît Cornette, and Roche DSV & Cie. The Biennale bore witness to the formal achievement of more recent architectural work, including three by Nouvel: the Theater of Tokyo (1987) in collaboration with Philippe Starck, the Opera of Lyon (1993), and the Palais des Congrès in Tours (1993). Decq’s design for the FRAC Collection in Rennes in 2005 represented the ultimate expression of the historical evolution of French design culture since Bunker Archeology and its monolithic expression. It is unfortunate that the publisher missed the opportunity in the book’s reprinting to include an introduction stressing the impact on French architecture that the book has had for more than 30 years. Now relegated to the recent history of postmodern thought, Virilio’s interpretations have lost their intellectual intrigue with time. The most interesting portions of the book remain Virilio’s poetic discovery of the seashore, the remapping of World War II, a chapter on Albert Speer, and some of his brilliant remarks that punctuate the text. Most intriguing are excerpts from Hitler’s letters envisaging the creation of the Atlantic Wall, which give insight into the master architect of World War II. These elements confirm the historical value of Bunker Archeology and its important contribution to history, theory, and modern architecture.

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The LA office of GRAFT produced this 480-page book, which is organized chronologically in chapters that document the storm, the community, and the concept and realization of Make It Right, along with analyses of the 26 selected designs. Texts and photo essays alternate with sketches, plans, and construction photos. The concluding sections explain how the project was organized and financed. The book inspires many emotions: anger at the failure of government agencies and institutions, exhilaration at the rapid response of dedicated individuals, and wonder that so much has been accomplished in a couple of years. If Make It Right realizes its potential and inspires others to aim high, then it will fulfill the modernist dream that architecture can transform society. Too bad it takes a tragedy like Katrina to spur such a project.

Los Angeles-Based Critic Michael Webb Is a Frequent Contributor to A+D.
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A Bolt of Zumthor

Peter Zumthor is cooking up something big for Los Angeles. The Swiss architect, winner of this year’s Pritzker Prize and designer of well-received art museums in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, has been visiting LA this year to look at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. LACMA’s seven buildings—mainly from the 1960s and ’70s—are spread disjointedly over 20 acres, and the museum has sought a more distinguished home for years even as it has expanded toward Wilshire Boulevard.

Three years ago Michael Govan, when he became LACMA’s CEO and director, said this creative, forward-looking city is the only one in the world today with the chance to redo its major museum. Govan’s plan to tell new stories of the city is the only one in the world today when he became LACMA’s CEO and long-term plans in the works.

Edward Lifson: You only accept commissions that deeply interest you. Why accept the transformation of LACMA?

Peter Zumthor: Well, I knew Michael [Govan] from New York, from the Dia Foundation. We tried to do a project there for the artist Walter de Maria. After Michael took over in LA, he called me and said, “Look at this collection! We have to start to think about a new building for this.” I started last April. With a large team from LACMA, we’re thinking about this campus and about what a new building for the entire collection could be like.

The entire collection! It probably won’t be a sequence of period galleries with a long corridor. We’re talking about rebuilding the whole east part of this campus, from the two new Renzo Piano buildings all the way over to the tar pits.

The prehistoric La Brea tar pits next to LACMA. For your baths at Vals in Switzerland, you used the local primordial stone. What will the materials be here? Will we see tar in this project?

[Laughing] I don’t know yet what the materials would be. Well, since the museum has a beautiful collection with nice anchor pieces of pre-Columbian art, there is a proximity to the old history of the continent, and it would be nice to integrate the proximity of the tar pits into the new project. But we’re designing from the inside out, that’s the most important thing. The personality and the character of the collection is what’s interesting. You know, every collection has a different personality. We want to bring out the character of this one. We’ll identify five or six anchor pieces of art for the building. Pre-Columbian and Indian art are very strong here, and of course, one anchor in this place, Los Angeles, will be cinema. Around the anchor pieces we’ll leave space for interesting juxtapositions with other art—more of the same or completely different art—which somehow has to do with it.

There will also be space for atmospheres. We’re talking about building into the architecture a critical thread. A dark space. A line going through the museum in which you can make critical commentaries on the art by using photography, film, drawing, etc. So a complex cellular idea starts to develop in my mind—and I have no damn idea of what this will be architecturally! I know about the “architectural tissue” for the building, but I have no idea how this could be done in real architecture.

Michael knows I need two to three years to come up with the solutions, and this is a ten-year project. But when he approaches funders they’ll want to see drawings in half a year at the latest. So we’re starting now so that when he’s ready to go to funders, we’ll be prepared.

Also, we should think about conservation and storage and all that, and of course those people should get a presence in the building. And then Michael says things like, “It has to appeal to children! It would be a great thing if a million children came to visit, maybe two million!” Nobody in Europe would ever talk about that. I think a very interesting part will be the early American art, colonial art—it’s filled with lies. So we’ll have to introduce contemporary art, such as film and so on to comment on it, because the whole thing has to be true. And I think I would like to talk about when American art became a part of the world in the 1960s in a big way, and many of these artists were Californians. So it’s fascinating and exciting. In the end, it could have intellectual and emotional parts—to make relationships across different kinds of art.

Endless cross-relationships, like Los Angeles itself. How will you connect with the city architecturally?

The way the current buildings hardly relate to Wilshire Boulevard, this kind of contrast, I think, is very American. I’m not fighting it at the moment, I’m just absorbing it. But we would maybe try to offer something not so well-known in Los Angeles, which is public space. With open-air cinema and so on, we’d like to make the whole place open to the people. Michael and I have the feeling that all of Los Angeles is waiting for some real public space.

When you look around the existing museum campus of LACMA for inspiration, what do you see?

Typical American themes, you know, everybody has made a piece, not looking left and right: “I do this, I do that, and tomorrow I do this and then I do this.” As a European, I’m trained more to say, “Maybe, could we maybe do a whole of the place? Maybe more than a collection of singularities?” I take pleasure in that, and we laugh a lot. I’m sorry to say, but today what they have here are strange buildings that clog up any public spaces. It’s a little bit of a mess now on this site, so we’re trying to think, how could we get rid of this?

Your project will involve demolition of existing LACMA buildings?

Yes.

Others have tried to redesign this campus and failed, notably Rem Koolhaas. How will you avoid failure?

I can’t answer that.

It’s one thing for you to build in Switzerland, Austria, or Germany, but here you are in Los Angeles, which is so different.

Maybe I’m too naive. I’m always like a little boy, getting excited. I look at this project and I get excited, I think I can do it. I’m aware you have to learn, but it’s not so different from Switzerland or Norway. It’s a small world. I was here in the ’80s teaching at SCI-Arc, and to my surprise I got to like LA. It felt good. The city didn’t give me the feeling, “You don’t understand me, go home!” And so I’ve come back. When Michael called me I had the same feeling: I can work there.

What, specific to Los Angeles, are you drawing on for inspiration for this project?

I’m coming now from the snow and the cold in Switzerland, so this eternal good climate. Here it’s light and serene, and lush vegetation. Yesterday, we went to the Huntington Gardens; it’s incredible. I’ve been looking at the John Lautner houses and Frank Lloyd Wright houses, all that. For me it’s something easy, something I like. There are formal aspects of life here, but they are maybe not as stiff as in other areas of the world. Los Angeles has a steady pace and flow.

WRITER, CRITIC, AND LOEB FELLOW EDWARD LIFSON BLOGS ABOUT ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN AT HELLO BEAUTIFUL! FOR ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION WITH LACMA DIRECTOR MICHAEL GOVAN, GO TO ARCHITOUR.COM/ZUMTHOR.
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