The staff at the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive may be on their way to discovering a new appreciation for Streamline Moderne. After ditching plans for a costly Toyo Ito-designed building, the institution has decided to revamp a 1939 printing plant on the planned site, at the intersection of Central and Oxford streets. Museum director Laurence Rinder told AN that the current plan is to renovate the existing 48,000-square-foot structure and build a new addition that will double its size, giving the institution the added space it needs for a viable expansion. The museum board is expected to vote yea or nay on the plan this month.

“It’s really an undiscovered gem, and another great part of the project is to bring the neighborhood into the cultural mainstream,” Rinder added. “It’s a great opportunity to create something that will be a source of pride for the community and a place that they can feel ownership over.”

Opened in the mid-1950s, the 700-unit Jordan Downs public housing complex in Watts is a cold collection of repetitive and faceless brick buildings that, like its cousins in places like Chicago, New York, and St. Louis, become a grim emblem of urban poverty, gang violence, social isolation...

The Family Violence Prevention Fund, a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, broke ground last month on its new $18 million headquarters at the much-scrutinized Presidio Main Post. The project will be located a few buildings from the Walt Disney Family Museum, which opened in the fall, and just down the road from where the recently scrapped Contemporary Art Museum.

It’s been some time since the West Coast had its last earthquake, but local planning departments recently experienced big tremors. First, Raymond Gastil, Seattle’s city planning director since August 2008, resigned on January 28. And on February 1, Richard Bruckner, former director of the Pasadena Planning...
Modernus offers the largest range of custom solutions for interior doors in the US market.
Last month, we received the news that McGraw-Hill’s Architectural Record had lost the ten-year contract as the preferred publication of the American Institute of Architects to Hanley Wood, owner of Architect magazine. My friends at Record (I was news editor there from 2003 until 2006) tell me that in many ways they’re relieved to be free of the burden of AIA oversight. But losing out on the AIA contract could be the kiss of death. It happened to Architecture and, indirectly, to Progressive Architecture, and it very well could happen to Record.

Losing more architectural publications would be a crisis for this community. Already we have lost valuable magazines such as Metropolitan Home and I.D. in the past year. While blogs like Archinect, Inhabitat, Curbed, and Architizer are replacing them, they’re traveling. From many accounts I’ve heard, the AIA might want Architect to be a custom-published offering of the institution (calls to the AIA went unreturned for this article). If this is the case, it’s a disservice to architectural journalism and to architecture as a whole. Without the critical voices found in independent publications, the profession will lose one of the only widespread forums for examining its faults and weaknesses, and thus the chance to improve what needs to be improved. I ask that the AIA do its utmost to maintain a type of journalism that is thoughtful and critical and that looks outside itself to find what’s most relevant to architects.

Of course, architectural journalism isn’t alone in its struggles. The entire profession has been laboring to stay aloft at a time of decreased ad revenues and shrinking attention spans. We too need to adapt to these changing times, identifying what’s most important to our readers, and improving the quality of our products. I’m confident that despite these challenges, there will always be a place for quality writing about architecture. We just need to keep striving for a journalism that maximizes integrity as well as profit, accessibility as well as depth.

SAM LUBELL

THE CENTER OF CITYCENTER

I enjoyed reading your recent piece on CityCenter in Las Vegas (“City of the Game’d.”) AW01_01_27_2010. Melendez was the landscape architect for Vdara and Harmon Circle, and we’re incredibly proud to be associated with such a momentous effort. CityCenter challenged our urban sensibilities, given traditional hotel and gaming standards, but we took the opportunity to test our design philosophy and provide an engaging, dynamic, interactive environment within a large-scale Las Vegas development.

Much has been made of the architecture of CityCenter, and rightly so, but more subtle urban successes can be found. Pedestrian connections throughout a project such as this are new to Vegas. Crystals and the Las Vegas Boulevard streetscape have transformed their connections from visitors, staff, and residents requires a significant infrastructure. Harmon Circle effectively handles the multitude of required movements while creating individual arrival experiences for Vdara and Aria, and connects the properties to one another using landscape and amazing public art.

Vegas is nothing if not an experiential locale. Traditionally, this has focused on a money-making and thematic approach. CityCenter’s architects and landscape architects made a concerted effort to elevate the experience above that tradition and into the public realm.

DUANE BORDER

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Sanctuary  Pure form stirs the senses – USM harmonizes with your individual lifestyle.
IN HOC SIGNO
What cooler way for a Hollywood celeb to show some love than to save the most famous local landmark of all—the Hollywood sign? That seems to have been the thinking of the many who have reached into their pockets to help the Trust for Public Land try to purchase 134 acres on Cahuenga Peak—just to the left of the “H”—from Chicago-based Fox River Financial Resources. Fox River has been trying to sell large parcels on the peak since 2002. The Trust has already raised about $6 million from the likes of Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Virginia Madsen, Tippi Hedren (animal rights activist and Hitchcock heroine), Aisha Tyler (X-Factor, John Slattery (Mad Men), and Kathryn Morris (Cold Case). Now all that’s left is for the group to raise another $6 million by April 14 to seal the deal. Calling Brad and Angelina!

SHADY BUSINESS
Douglas Burnham of San Francisco firm Envelope A+D has run afoul of the city’s “shadow law,” which restricts development that would shade a public park, in his design of a condominium development on Octavia Boulevard. Analysis of the building found that it would cast a six-foot-long pall on Hayes Green between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m. on December 21, the shortest day of the year. Horrors! Luckily, there is a “shadow budget” that is being developed for those Octavia parcels, rather than redesign his building, Burnham will be able to spend some shadow funds out of that shadow account. Is it just us, or does this all seem like dark doings?

DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF ENNUI
Not since Edificial closed have we seen snarky, satirical commentary about the design media. Enter the Unhappy Hipsters (unhappyhipsters.com), a blog that pokes fun at images mostly from Dwell magazine of homeowners in their modernist houses. The authors pluck photographs from recent issues and rewrite their captions with faux earnestness. Our favorite is a father-and-child shot, where the two face off from custom-sized seating: “The debate—whether the ubiquity of suburban neo-modern developments was really an upgrade from the new-money McMansions-ended in a standoff, mired by the generation gap.”

TIMBER!
Proving how difficult times are, even William McDonough’s über-cool San Francisco office had to cut its staff in half recently, going from six to three. Said a spokesperson, “We’re dealing with this downturn any way we can, but this client base is incredibly important to us.” So much for the Jolly Green Giant.

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Downtown LA has been called the national epicenter of homelessness, with some preferring to sleep on the streets for years rather than risk their health and possessions in overcrowded temporary shelters. This problem was exacerbated in the 1990s by the widespread demolition of old SROs that failed to meet a tougher seismic code. Several local nonprofits have built humane, low-cost housing for these urban refugees, but the designs have often been compromised by the exigencies of budget. The New Carver Apartments, located beside an elevated freeway on the southern edge of downtown, have set an exemplary standard for something better.

The challenge for the architects was to make the best use of a confined lot and to infuse a block of small, single rooms with a strong identity. The trust decided to invest in high-quality construction to reduce the cost of maintenance. The absence of graffiti suggests that even vandals respect what he and project architect Kristina Loock have accomplished.

The cellular structure of the block is transformed into a dynamic hub that seems to spin as you speed past at fourth-floor level. The cylindrical form minimizes exposure to the freeway, and the angles orient windows away from the roar of freeway traffic. The building is far superior as a work of art than at fourth-floor level. The cylindrical form minimizes exposure to the freeway, and the angles orient windows away from the traffic while catching the flash of headlights passing by. Close up, the building has a powerful presence. The wood-and-concrete frame is clad in white stucco with brilliant yellow accents. Axial corridors link the lobby to rooms for medical services and communal areas. Concrete steps rise up through the courtyard to connect residential levels to the ground floor. Ninety-five rooms are angled outward on five levels, and open onto galleries that encircle the inner courtyard, and onto two upper-level decks. Structural columns and service ducts on the inner surface of the cylinder are clad in galvanized metal, and these dramatically angled fins support the gallery’s handrails. They also serve as baffles to give residents—who may live here indeﬁnitely and treat the apartments as their permanent home—a sense of privacy. Walls are heavily insulated and the small windows are triple-glazed to shut out the roar of freeway traffic.

“We’ve come to realize the therapeutic value of good design,” said Mike Alvidrez, executive director of the trust. “There’s an optimism about our buildings. They indicate that there’s a solution to a seemingly intractable problem. On the street, the homeless wonder if anybody cares whether they live or die. Michael understands how to integrate architecture with our program and send a message to the larger community.” He saw how the contractor and subs shared his sense of pride, requesting copies of the rendering as a memento of what they built. The word “hope” in several languages is emblazoned across the lobby wall and it aptly expresses the project’s potential.

It is this mix of realism and idealism, functionality and inspiration that makes the New Carver Apartments (named for old property that was torn down) such an important achievement. The building is far superior as a work of art to most so-called “luxury” apartments, with the power to transform lives and reshape public perceptions. Most architects would like to share their skills with a larger public but have found few opportunities to do so. Though the trust has to compete for funds and relies to a large extent on federal subsidies, they have hired such firms as Koning Eisenberg and Killifer Flaming to put up new buildings and rehabilitate old ones. They own 22 downtown properties containing 1,500 units. In the New Carver Apartments, they’ve raised the bar and created a model of affordable housing.
CALIFORNIA ISSUES FIRST STATEWIDE MANDATORY GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS

A January 12 announcement from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger concerning the nation’s first mandatory state green building standards (CALGreen) was met with something rarely seen in real estate and architecture: the public support of more than a dozen prominent trade associations.

In a letter to the California Building Standards Commission (BSC), which unanimously adopted the code, 16 trade groups, including the American Institute of Architects California Council (AIACC), voiced support for CALGreen. The near-universal consensus was unanimous adoption of the code, 16 trade associations.

The code was developed under an appointed committee that included an architect, a construction representative, a building official, and an environmental specialist. BSC also solicited public comment.

Among other requirements, under CALGreen, every new building constructed in the state will have to reduce water consumption by 20 percent, divert 50 percent of construction waste from landfills, install low pollutant-emitting materials, and include separate water meters for use in non-residential buildings. In addition to the mandatory requirements (Tier 1), the code allows for more stringent voluntary provisions (Tier 2), such as a 65 percent waste-diversion mandate.

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Matthew Hargroove, senior vice president of governmental affairs of the California Business Properties Association, said that instead of being confusing, the code has the potential to clarify issues for architects working across the state. Currently there can be 30 different jurisdictions with LEED-equivalent programs, but no set standard, he said. “Now, across the state, Tier 1 will be the same within any 30 cities that have adopted [CALGreen’s] module,” Hargroove explained.

Throughout many of the new code to LEED, CALGreen relies on local building departments rather than third-party inspectors. Exceptions apply to schools and hospitals, which will be overseen by the Division of the State Architect (DSA) and the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD), respectively.

Gubernator’s Reid questioned if leaving inspection to local building departments would open the code to too much interpretation, but Walls was quick to discount those concerns.

Because the code applies to all buildings, regardless of size and purpose (with the exception of federal buildings and those constructed on Native American land), some say it could pose challenges for design and building professionals who will have to comply on projects big and small. Robin Bass, a senior associate with Huntsman Architectural Group, pointed out that residential construction is very different from commercial and may be better suited to separate guidelines, like those in San Francisco. But Reid thinks the code will make certain services more attainable. “Everyone will have to comply,” Reid said. “It will be easier to find contractors who can meet waste-diversion goals (for residential projects).”

Regarding the additional costs the standards could bring at a time of economic crisis, Walls said the state conducted cost-benefit analyses on all aspects of the code and found some parts, such as the moisture-sensitive irrigation systems required for larger projects, will increase projects’ first-time costs. “We did end up moving some mandatory items to voluntary and vice versa,” he said. CALGreen compliance, however, does not require any additional verification fees, such as those incurred with LEED, and, as Reid pointed out, requirements like more efficient toilets shouldn’t cost any more.

For now, the code only takes new construction into consideration, ignoring existing building stock. Bryan Jackson, partner at Allen Marks’ Leck Gamble Mallory & Natsis, thinks California will have to move in that direction at some point, if for no other reason than to comply with Assembly Bill 32, the Global Warming Act.

Though Reid and others expect to see revisions in the next version of the code, due in 2013, it is too early to say how different that version will be; the mandatory code did not turn out much differently than the voluntary version. At least in its first iteration, CALGreen seems to pose little threat to the LEED program, which has grown to include neighborhoods and existing buildings. “The USGBC has marketing panache. I don’t see them going anywhere,” Jackson said. “I predict people will pursue both CALGreen and LEED and hang both plaques with pride.”

JENNIFER CATERINO

LA Flush With Freeway Cap Park Proposals

Plans to develop four so-called freeway cap parks have recently been announced in Los Angeles. The cap concept, which essentially covers a portion of a freeway with a planted concrete lid, has gained popularity in the last decade as an urban “greening” solution. The multibillion-dollar projects are meant to knit together previously disparate neighborhoods, theoretically creating cohesion and larger-scale community gathering places without having to destroy or displace existing infrastructures.

The four projects are spread across Hollywood, downtown LA, and Santa Monica. Hollywood Central Park would be built atop the 101 Freeway on a proposed 44-acre site between Santa Monica Boulevard and Bronson Avenue. Park 101 would be built atop the “Big Trench” over the 101 Freeway downtown. Santa Monica is hoping to cap portions of the 10 Freeway between Ocean Avenue and 4th Street, and between 14th and 17th streets, creating five- and seven-acre parks. The cap park frenzy here can largely be credited to Don Scott, an investment banker and former chairman of the Hollywood Central Park coalition, also former chairman of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. Scott said that his inspiration for the Hollywood Central Park came from an article he read about Boston’s Big Dig. “I remember driving over the Hollywood freeway and thinking about the connection between the two environments.” After some research, Scott discovered other freeway cap parks in various phases in Cincinnati, Seattle, Phoenix, the District of Columbia, Boston, Hartford, CT, and Charlotte, NC. In LA, a small freeway cap park was built over the 210 Freeway in La Canada-Flintridge; another is under review in Ventura County. The rest of the chamber was quick to support Scott’s idea, and it took off. According to Francie Stefan, community and strategic planning manager for the City of Santa Monica, no two freeway caps are the same. “Some are glorified bridges, some need center supports, and some just span the whole distance,” she said. Structural design is influenced by whether you get support from outside walls or from center posts, and have mechanical or natural ventilation and lighting.

The largest and furthest along Hollywood, downtown LA, and Santa Monica. Hollywood Central Park would be built atop the 101 Freeway on a proposed 44-acre site between Santa Monica Boulevard and Bronson Avenue. Park 101 would be built atop the “Big Trench” over the 101 Freeway downtown. Santa Monica is hoping to cap portions of the 10 Freeway between Ocean Avenue and 4th Street, and between 14th and 17th streets, creating five- and seven-acre parks. The cap park frenzy here can largely be credited to Don Scott, an investment banker and former chairman of the Hollywood Central Park coalition, also former chairman of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. Scott said that his inspiration for the Hollywood Central Park came from an article he read about Boston’s Big Dig. “I remember driving over the Hollywood freeway and thinking about the connection between the two environments.” After some research, Scott discovered other freeway cap parks in various phases in Cincinnati, Seattle, Phoenix, the District of Columbia, Boston, Hartford, CT, and Charlotte, NC. In LA, a small freeway cap park was built over the 210 Freeway in La Canada-Flintridge; another is under review in Ventura County. The rest of the chamber was quick to support Scott’s idea, and it took off. According to Francie Stefan, community and strategic planning manager for the City of Santa Monica, no two freeway caps are the same. “Some are glorified bridges, some need center supports, and some just span the whole distance,” she said. Structural design is influenced by whether you get support from outside walls or from center posts, and have mechanical or natural ventilation and lighting.

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AECOM’s Hollywood Central Park.

DRIVING GREEN

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PYRAMID SCHEME continued from front page

A gently twisting cylinder is intended to play off the angles of the Pyramid, whose owner, Aegon Group, is backing the project. As part of the development, the private Redwood Park next to the Transamerica building would be expanded and reclaimed as a public park, and a new pedestrian piazza with restaurants and widened sidewalks would be added to the street corner.

The 350-page draft environmental impact review was released for comment last March. The planning and parks and recreation commissions—both have oversight of the project—finally scheduled the matter for review on February 11, in a meeting that turned into a bureaucratic fiasco. The commissioners were expected to approve the draft EIR, approve the variances, and then take an up-or-down vote on the project.

But one planning commissioner could not attend because of a family emergency; and another was recused from the vote. After a four-hour public comment period, three of the remaining five planning commissioners voted against the draft EIR. Because it takes at least four commissioners to approve any motion, the meeting stalled. All three votes will be taken up again on March 18.

Among those leading the charge against 555 Washington are residents of nearby Telegraph Hill, who have taken issue with a dramatic height variance (doubling the allowed height from 200 to more than 400 feet) and the demolition of two buildings, among other objections.

“This proposed project would impact the residents and visitors of North Beach and Telegraph Hill and have profound implications on the urban form of San Francisco,” a neighborhood group wrote in response to the draft EIR.

Meanwhile, former San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin, who lives in the area, has been outspoken in condemning the scheme. This has left some project supporters to cry foul, partly because the three commissioners appointed by Peskin and the board were the ones who voted against the draft EIR. “This is essentially the whole city against Aaron Peskin,” said the project’s architect Jeffrey Heller. “We have SPUR [San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association], we even have [San Francisco Architectural] Heritage. We have a dozen important San Francisco institutions on our side.”

If the March meeting goes as planned, and the project is approved, there is still the final vote by the board of supervisors, which would take place this summer. Heller is optimistic that public support will help see it through. “I think our chances are fairly decent,” he said. “But that is a whole new world.”

LYDIA LEE

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Sculpture: Gyre, Thomas H. Sayre, N.C. Museum of Art
The Millard House, the Frank Lloyd Wright–designed landmark tucked into its own idyll near Pasadena’s Rose Bowl, has been on the market for more than a year. But realtor Crosby Doe, who specializes in houses of architectural significance, said he wasn’t worried. Even in better economic times, architectural masterpieces like the Millard House often take longer to sell than other upscale properties of less historic provenance. Now with an unusually large inventory of other early- and mid-20th-century landmark houses for sale in the LA area, Doe believes it will take time to find a buyer with the right taste and pockets deep enough to approach the current $5.9 million asking price.

The textile-block house with a Mission flavor, also known as La Miniatura, combines the stunningly beautiful spaces and the eccentricities of other Wright residences. There are landmark rules governing what a new owner can change, plus the prospect of Wright fanatics peeking at the surprisingly ungated property and jungle-like garden. “I would say that architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and John Lautner created houses that were singularly unique to the client who hired them,” said Doe during a recent tour of the Millard House, built in 1923. “So the challenge now is to find somebody who not only loves it aesthetically, as many people do, but someone who says ‘this is the lifestyle I want to live.’ ”

Another Frank Lloyd Wright textile-block design—the larger 1924 Ennis House in Los Feliz—is also for sale. The foundation that owns it could not afford upkeep even after government and private sources funded millions in earthquake and storm repairs. Houses by Rudolf Schindler, Richard Neutra, Lloyd Wright, Rafael Soriano, Ray Kappe, and Lautner are also in need of interested buyers.

In some cases, asking prices are coming down. The Millard House started at $7.7 million. The Ennis House in early February dropped from $15 million to $10.495 million. Schindler’s 1925 How House in Silver Lake—a Los Angeles city historic cultural monument like the Ennis House—went on the market for nearly $6 million in fall 2008 and is now priced at $2.79 million. Lloyd Wright’s 1922 Taggart House, another landmark in Los Feliz, dropped from $3.2 million to $2.6 million. Neutra’s 1951 Logar House in Granada Hills is $998,000, down from $1.5 million.

Linda Dishman, executive director of the Los Angeles Conservancy, said that the large number of important houses for sale may also reflect general economic uncertainties and the sense among potential buyers to wait for better deals. Dishman, who serves on the board of the Ennis House Foundation, said the buyers need enough additional resources to repair and maintain the properties.

Aaron Kirman of Hilton & Hyland realtors, one of the listing agencies for the Ennis, acknowledged that architecturally significant houses aren’t immune from the rest of the market,” but also said that he has sold a number in the past year—including a 1942 Neutra in Westwood that sold recently after six months on the market at $1.8 million, just 14 percent below its original asking price. Most buyers at that level are unaffected by the mortgage tightened, he said.

One concern among preservationists is that landmark houses might decay if they are not properly maintained while waiting out a sluggish market. Dishman said most sellers have a vested interest in maintenance to protect a property’s values. But finding that ideal steward is not easy. The 1950 Hollywood Hills house has been on the market for about two months at $2.49 million. Offers came close, but deals died when Heller realized the buyers wanted to drastically alter the house. A recent tour given by Doe of the three-story Millard House in Pasadena revealed such treasures as the double-height living room with a gorgeous redwood ceiling and balconies inside and out. And since it was raining, a few buckets were on hand to catch small leaks. “Although there are always compromises of living in a great work of architecture,” Doe said, “what it gives back to you is more than it ever takes.”

L.J. GORDON

LA LANDMARK HOUSES SITTING EMPTY AND LOOKING FOR PROTECTORS

WAITING GAME

DOWNS GETS UP continued from front page and the ability of architecture to hurt, not help, lives.

But the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) is hoping to turn that around. A new master plan for the complex would tear down and replace the current facilities, create civic activity and economic opportunity, and connect the complex to the surrounding area. The scheme, which is being overseen by the authority and by planning and architecture firm WRT Solomon E.T.C., was proposed in the fall, and the agency at press time was set to kick off the EIR process with a scoping meeting on February 20. The agency hopes to finalize the EIR by this September.

The masterplan would replace the 49-acre complex’s 700-plus townhouse-style units with 1,600 to 1,800 units built in a much more diverse mix of sizes and styles, including bungalows, courtyard housing, and stacked apartments. According to John Ellis, WRT Solomon’s director of urban design, the diversity is intended to make the area “feel like part of the surrounding neighborhood, not like a segregated and isolated piece of development, as it has been in the past.”

The units would also be mixed-use and mixed-income, meant to create a diverse community, explained Larry Goins, director of development services for the HACLA, who is overseeing the project. “We want services for all types of incomes: drycleaners, restaur-

ants, grocery stores, coffee shops,” he said. Goins noted that many public housing projects in LA and elsewhere “were not planned as a community, but as a place for people to be housed only.” He wants to change that.

The new facility would be organized around a central park, located on what is now a 21-acre, mostly-vacant industrial zone in the area, connecting Jordan Downs’ divided north and south areas and providing much-needed green space. The project’s facilities will also be built to LEED standards. They will include a new Family Resource Center, creating a civic hub for what is now a faceless community. Meanwhile, the facility’s pattern of permeable streets and blocks would further reconnect Jordan Downs to its surroundings.

The plan is to be carried out in four phases to stagger resources and avoid disruptions. The first phase of new residential building will be carried out on adjacent land, so residents won’t have to relocate. The second phase will include more homes and the creation of the park, and the third and fourth will phase in more homes and civic redevelopment projects in the surrounding area.

Goins adds that it is still too early for the project to attract funding, which he admits is an issue in this economy. “Projects like this get funded as you get approval,” he said. “As we get a little closer and plans get into place, we’ll start securing funding.” Possible funding sources, he added, would include private developers, community redevelopment dollars, and local bank funding. He said that once it moves forward, the project should be built in five to seven years. Since funding and entitlement could take up to three years, the project could be completed approximately ten years from now.

The plan, added Goins, has made its way through five “very open” community meetings, along with two dozen other meetings with local residents of the smaller Jordan Downs Community Advisory Group. “You never can get 100 percent, but the majority has been very positive,” he said.

Solomon’s Ellis noted that such undertaking, often associated with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Hope VI program, have been successful all over the country, even in notorious places like Chicago’s Cabrini Green and Robert Taylor Homes. He compares Jordan Downs to his firm’s recently completed Othello Station Holly Park in Seattle, where a sad collection of buildings was turned into a neighborhood of varied townhouses on a grid of streets that actually helped lift home values in its area by over $100,000. “You can build public housing that is an asset to its neighborhood,” he said.

Plans for Jordan Downs include a new central park.
Architect Dennis Gibbens has created a home for himself that is the closest thing to a nest that one could ever find on Venice’s swank and hectic Abbot Kinney Boulevard. The project, located on the second and third floors over a Japanese housewares shop, is part of a mixed-use project. Once you walk upstairs from the hubbub of the road, the board-formed, poured-in-place concrete walls provide a textured and substantial shell surrounding a more refined palette of lacquers, stones, mirrored glass, smooth-troweled stucco, terrazzo, and polished metal.

“I’ve created my own private bunker up here,” said Gibbens. Bunker hardly seems the word for this sophisticated lair. Viewed from the outside, the home’s juxtaposition of rough and smooth is hinted at in a facade of alternating gray concrete and white plaster. Inside, the U-shaped second-floor space—which includes a kitchen, sitting room, dining room, and living room—is divided by a glass-enclosed entrance courtyard that cuts into the middle, drawing light and air into all corners. The finishes are at once simple, artful, and elegant: a balancing act of the serenely austere and the dynamically modern. Gibbens designed much of the furniture in the formal living room, including a movie screen that the architect made from honeycomb laminate cut in an off-kilter shape reminiscent of Googie modernism. Much of the other furniture was found in some of the top-tier furniture stores on Abbot Kinney itself. A cutout terrace off the living room opens the cloistered space to the street, if so desired. And most of the utilitarian functions of this floor—closets, a bathroom—are bunched on the south side, leaving the space remarkably uncluttered.

Upstairs rooms continue to offset careful restraint with strategic “wows”: a square skylight in the master bedroom that looks like a James Turrell skyspace, a glass floor in the hall that looks down to the living room, glass walls in the guest room that suggest a boutique hotel, and of course a roof deck, where the walls are high enough to provide privacy but low enough to be open to the sky, the surrounding palm trees, and the lovely sunsets. The 29-foot-wide house, at about 3,500 square feet, was a labor of love for Gibbens, who was general contractor for much of the work himself to preserve details and save money. The entire ground floor is a mat foundation, a two-foot-thick pad of concrete. Throughout the building, several steel moment frames, relatively disguised, help support the structure, accompanying a more conventional wood frame. Gibbens said the most challenging part, besides getting the eclectic elements to come together as a whole and casting exposed concrete for the first time, was pouring that concrete so close to adjacent buildings, and calling for a tight gap to complete any form work. “It was more gratifying than nerve-racking,” said Gibbens, of the construction. “It’s fun. I like the construction process.” And, he added, “I was getting exactly what I wanted.”
A PRACTICAL MATTER continued from front page

story is that it also happens to be a WPA project,” said Rinder, of the building. Designed by San Francisco firm Masten & Hurd, the printing plant was commissioned by UC Berkeley and funded in part by the federal Works Progress Administration. According to a 1992 Page & Turnbull report, the plant qualifies for a National Register of Historic Places listing. This means there could be substantial restrictions placed on any renovation. However, the museum might also be able to tap preservation tax credits to help fund the project.

Some of the architectural highlights include a spiral staircase and sawtooth roof. The addition would likely be built beside the plant, which closed some years ago and has been taken over by squatters. Its interiors are lined with graffiti—some of which might be kept in the renovation, said Rinder.

The museum is working on the renovation plan with EHDD, the local firm that would have been the architect of record on the Ito building. Whether another firm will be brought in to design the addition—where there would be the chance to do something distinctive, if not quite as bold as the Japanese architect’s vision—has yet to be determined. The budget for the new building has not been finalized, though the museum had raised $80 million toward its new home. (That it had not raised more was the key reason for abandoning the Ito project.)

Rinder pointed out that the site itself, at the main entrance to the campus, would be enough to give the museum new prominence, regardless of the architecture. “You could get away with putting a Quonset hut there,” he said. 12

DIE ANOTHER DAY

On February 11, the owners of Minoru Yamasaki’s Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles announced plans for a revised development project that would preserve the hotel, which had been slated for demolition. The revised project will include the existing hotel along with a mix of residential, office, and retail uses on the property. Owner Next Century Associates has retained Pei Cobb Freed and Gensler as the project’s architects, Rios Clemente Hale as landscape architects, and Marmol Radziner as preservation architects. “Preservation of the hotel could only be achieved if sufficient additional development was permitted on the site,” said Michael Rosenfeld, executive manager of Next Century Associates. Time will tell just exactly how Next Century plans to take advantage of this apparent act of goodwill.

IT’S CURTAINS

Burdened by millions of dollars of debt, the Pasadena Playhouse closed its doors on February 7. The nonprofit company that operates the theater intends to “explore viable options of financial reorganization, including bankruptcy, to determine a responsible solution for its ongoing operations,” according to a statement issued in early February. All of which leaves uncertain the fate of Frank Gehry’s pro bono, two-phase project for the playhouse, which included a redesign of its balcony performance space and a new theater across the street.

GETTING WINGS

SFMOMA is narrowing down a list of international architects to design its new 100,000-square-foot wing. The shortlisted firms will be asked to submit proposals. According to the museum, the selection will be made this fall, and the building will be completed in 2016. The museum is getting the new wing primarily to house the contemporary art collection of Donald Fisher. According to the SF Examiner, when asked which firms were on the list, museum director Neal Benezra said, “Right now, all of them. We have a very tight urban space, so we need someone who is a problem solver.”
The ARCHITECTS LIBRARY
COMPREHENSIVE ONLINE DIRECTORY FOR THE AEC

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or call 212-966-0630
California Science Center Phase II

Constructed from a BIM model created by Morley, the 170,000 sf Phase II Expansion of the California Science Center features science museum exhibits, administrative office space and back-of-house support spaces. The exhibits include living habitats, interactive museum elements and Ecosystems, featuring a 188,000 gallon kelp forest tank.

MORLEY BUILDERS
BUILDING SMARTER

2901 28th Street, Suite 100  Santa Monica, CA 90405  www.morleybuilders.com
**SOURCED UP**

It’s that time again. Time for West Coast architects to share their favorite sources with us. This is our most complete list ever, and we think an incredibly useful resource for finding the right contractor, engineer, facade consultant, lighting designer, or fabricator. While the economy may still be slow, the people who do great work have never been more eager to dig in. We say look them up before they get booked.

| GENERAL CONTRACTOR | OVERALL CONSTRUCTION | AJ Engineering & Construction | 4554 Ellerton Ave., Tarzana, CA; 818-343-5787
| Cahill Contractors | www.cahill.cc | *510-412-9090, Richmond, CA; 1300 South 51st St., Construction
| Crownwill Construction | 11586 Bix St., Studio City, CA; 818-506-6647 www.crownwill.com | Oliver & Company
| DPR Construction | 1050 Sansome St., San Francisco; 415-782-3700 www.dprinc.com | *562-903-2277, Santa Fe Springs, CA; 9814 Norwalk Blvd., Matt Construction
| Grupo Omega | Cordillera de los Andes 310, Col. Lomas de Chapultepec, Del Miguel Hidalgo, México; +52-5000-9090 www.grupo-omega.com | *415-285-6930, San Francisco; 1060 Capp St., Matarozzi/Pelsinger Builders
| Hinerfeld Ward Construction | 3734 Motor Ave., Los Angeles; 310-842-7929 www.hinerfeld-ward.com | *818-774-2202, Tarzana, CA; 19420 Santa Rita St., Mark Stevens Construction
| Horizon General Contractors | 1012 11th St., Santa Monica, CA; 310-393-3329 www.horizontgeneral.com | www.matpelbuilders.com
| J Baer Construction | 818-841-6883 www.jbaerconstructioninc.com | DPR Construction
| Kevin Slagle, KSDB | 1734 13th St., Oakland, CA; 510-893-0428 www.ksdesignbuild.com | *www.crownwell.com, Studio City, CA; 11608 Blix St., Crownwell Construction
| Mark Stevens Construction | 10420 Santa Rita St., Tarzana, CA; 818-774-2202 www.mattconstruction.com | 415-986-0600, San Francisco; 425 California St., Cahill Contractors
| Matarozzi/Pelsinger Builders | 1590 Carpe St., San Francisco; 415-285-6930 www.matpelbuilders.com | DPR Construction
| Matt Construction | 5814 Norwalk Blvd., Santa Fe Springs, CA; 562-933-2277 www.mattconstruction.com | *www.horizongeneral.com, Santa Monica, CA; 1512 11th St., Horizon General Contractors
| Oliver & Company Construction | 1300 South 51st St., Richmond, CA; 510-412-9090 www.oliverandco.net | DPR Construction
| Vance Brown Builders | 3197 Park Blvd., Palo Alto, CA; 650-849-9900 www.vancebrown.com | DPR Construction
| WeiB Architecture | 600 Montgomery St., San Francisco; 415-546-9900 www.wiebarchitecture.com | DPR Construction
| ZellnerPl | Peter Zellner | DPR Construction
| Zellner Plus | Peter Zellner & Associates | DPR Construction

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**“We’ve done many projects with AJ Engineering, and four have won AIA awards. So we have a good track record of doing quality work with them.”**

Travor Abramson Abramson Teiger Architects

**“I like Hinerfeld Ward for quality of work, execution, and client care.”**

Peter Zellner ZellnerPlus

**“Construction in a dense urban setting is extremely difficult, and DPR coordinated the logistics for building One Kearny masterfully. They shut down MUNI on Market Street for a weekend to erect the tower crane, and then did it again six months later to take it down. No simple feat to be sure!”**

Charles F. Blozies Office of Charles F. Blozies

**“SJ Amoroso was a great team to work with on a complicated project type. They worked as part of the team with a common goal. They offered possible solutions with field issues—everything a good contractor should be and then some. They made sure that what we designed was actually built without a ton of change orders. They understood the design intent. When issues did come up, they came to the table armed with cost and schedule-conscious solutions.”**

Tracy Wong DES Architects + Engineers

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**SOURCES FOR FINDING YEAR-ROUND FUN**

- AIA San Francisco
- San Francisco Design Center
- Website for San Francisco Design Week
- SF Design Week

**FAVOURITE SOURCES FOR FINDING WORK**

- AIA Descriptions
- SF Weekly
- San Francisco Magazine
- California Architect
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Curbed SF

**FAVOURITE SOURCES FOR FINDING INFORMATION**

- AIA News
- San Francisco News
- SF Weekly
- SF Chronicle
- Curbed SF

**FAVOURITE SOURCES FOR FINDING IDEAS**

- AIA Design
- San Francisco Design Center
- Website for San Francisco Design Week
- SF Design Week
- AIA Descriptions
- SF Weekly
- San Francisco Magazine
- California Architect
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Curbed SF
“What sets Buro Happold apart is their ability to engage in the architectural discussion—regardless of the degree of engineering difficulty. Their involvement often results in a growth of the architectural ambitions, rather than the more typical dumbing down. In other words, they do more than simply solve the problem. They help better define it.”

Dwayne Oyler
Oyler Wu

“O’Callaghan Structural Design, who do all of the structural and glass engineering for our Apple work, are in a league of their own. Very young, very bright, and very cutting-edge. Good collaborative people.”

Denis Schofield
Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

“IBE Consulting Engineers are committed to a sustainable approach and innovative solutions. Great in developing concepts.”

Fabian Kremkus
CO Architects

“Sherwood Design Engineers are a very forward-thinking group. Sustainability leaders. Very creative.”

Charles F. Biossies
Office of Charles F. Biossies

“SGH are excellent engineers and envelope consultants.”

Thomas Schneider
Barton Myers Associates

“Peter Yu of Yu Strandberg combines a creative vision for problem solving and a quick mind for engineering solutions when he works with us to achieve the artistic goals of our custom homes. In the Tea Houses, he elegantly detailed a series of freestanding cast-in-place concrete structural cores to support steel channel rim joints, which form cantilevered roof and floor platforms. The engineering design reflects the guiding design principles to minimize impact on the landscape and provide a quiet simplicity for these structures, which are designed for intimate gatherings and creative thinking.”

Stevan Slapt
Swatt | Miers Architects
“I like Specialty Hardware’s designer downdraw; they have excellent lever handles, entrance handles, and joinery.”
Peter Zellner Zellner+Zellner

“As longtime friends, clients, and collaborators, Cisco Brothers proved to be the perfect match for our Guadalajara Book Fair project. Cisco and his wife and partner Alba were born outside of Guadalajara, and in addition to fabricating all of our modular display and furniture pieces, they were tireless in coordinating with the local civic groups in arranging for all of those pieces to be donated to the city’s public library system. As founders of the first company to produce a completely sustainable line of modern furniture, they embody everything one could wish for in a collaborator.”
Alice Kimm
John Friedman Alice Kimm

“Details has perhaps the best curated selection of modern hardware in Los Angeles.”
Warren Techentin
Techentin Buckingham

“Shadbolt Collaborative’s creativity knocked our socks off! We had a narrow lot to deal with and they helped us figure out a way to maximize the seating. They offered multiple design solutions for the facility, which had to be flexible enough to house cinema, music, dance, theater, and lectures—all of which have some times diametrically opposed requirements.”
Tracy Wong
DES Architects + Engineers
**FEATURE**

**MATERIALS**

**COMPOSITE/LAMINATE**

CoveringsETC
7610 North East 4th Ct.,
Miami, FL;
305-757-6000
www.coveringsetc.com

Duratru
www.duratru.com

GI Plasma
1373 West Smith Rd.,
Ferndale, WA;
360-394-2800
www.giplasma.com

Parklex
Zalain Auzoa, 13,
31780 Vera de Bidasoa,
Navarra, Spain;
+34 948 625-980
www.parklex.com

**FABRIC**

Birdair
85 Lawrence Bell Drive,
Amherst, NY;
800-622-2246
www.birdair.com

Ettei & Frantz
222 Robbins St.,
St. Paul, MN;
651-646-4811
www.etteifranz.com

Ferrous Studios
634 Ohio Ave.,
Richmond, CA;
510-235-2747
www.ferrousinc.com

Lavie Roofing Services
1211 East Wakeham Ave.,
Santa Ana, CA;
714-973-6233
www.lavieyroofing.com

Metal Sales
545 South 3rd St.,
Louisville, KY;
800-406-7387
www.metalsales.us.com

Sarnafil
3100 Highwoods Blvd.,
Raleigh, NC;
919-874-7173
www.sarnafil.com

**STONE, AND TILE**

Centria
800-759-7474
www.centria.com

Devincenzi Architectural Metals
1650 Rulina Rd.,
Burlington, CA;
605-692-5800
www.devmetal.com

Ehrlich Architects
700 Palms
B+U
BIRDAIR
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ARCHITECTURE
MARK HORTON
PARKLEX
SEBASTOPOL WINE BARN

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www.metalsales.us.com

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919-874-7173
www.vmzinc.com

**CONCRETE, MASONRY,**

**Plyboo**
Plyboo
www.plyboo.com

**FABRIC**

Bertozzi Felice di Rovai
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Pietrasanta (LU), Italy;
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www.bertozzifelice.com

**PLASTER**

**Board & Batten**

**WOOD**

**CoveringsETC**
7610 North East 4th Ct.,
Miami, FL;
305-757-6000
www.coveringsetc.com

**Fabric**

www.trendgroup-usa.com
866-508-7363
Miramar, FL;
Trend USA

www.stonesource.com
213 880-1155
Culver City, CA;
Stone Source

www.quarrastone.com
608-246-8803
Madison, WI;
Quarra Stone Company

www.pacificdecorative.com
916-349-1200
Sacramento, CA;
Pacific Decorative Concrete

www.azahner.com
816-474-8882
Kansas City, MO;
Azahner

www.vimzinc.com
919-874-7173
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714-771-7670
www.raymond-co.com

Wood Sales
999 South "A" St.,
Springfield, OR;
888-787-9999
www.woodsales.com

J-esal Enterprises
347 Locust St.,
Watsonville, CA;
831-768-3838
www.jessalenterprises.com

Produce
Banana San Miguel, s/n,
20.250 Legorreta,
Barrio San Miguel, s/n,
Prodema

www.9wood.com
888-767-9990
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999 South "A" St.,
9Wood

www.ferrousinc.com
510-235-2747
Richmond, CA;
Ferrous Studios

www.ettelfranz.com
651-646-4811
St. Paul, MN;
Ettel & Frantz

www.coveringsetc.com
305-757-6000
Miami, FL;
CoveringsETC

Barton Myers
www.700palms.com
Barton Myers Architecture

Trevor Abramson
Trevor Abramson Architects

Bohlin Cywinski Jackson
www.bckj.com
Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

Abramson Teiger
Trevor Abramson
Abramson Teiger

Denis Schofield
EHRLICH ARCHITECTS
Ehrlich Architects

“Quarra Stone has a pretty good gig as the only U.S. distributor of the Vals Quartzite material, but they do their job very well and work with architects to provide the product they’re looking for.”
Denis Schofield
Bolton Cywinski Jackson

“Trespa is a maintenance-free substitute for real wood and it can be installed as a rainscreen, which keeps the building thermally stable and has other environmental features. It’s highly durable, it’s very crisp.”
Trevor Abramson
Abramson Teiger Architects

“Trex is a fantastic material because it’s made of recycled materials (plastic and sawdust), it’s durable and low-maintenance, and although it is marketed for decking, it can make an interesting building skin material as a rainscreen.”
Steven Ehrlich
Ehrlich Architects

“Parklex provided a very soft and natural material juxtaposition to the hard-edged metal siding and roofing. It allowed the building to appear to belong in its agrarian setting.”
Mark Horton
Mark Horton Architecture

“Paul Phillips, Samafi regional director, is excellent to work with. He will review details for appropriateness and is also very good at translating our design intent into buildable solutions.”
Thomas Schneider
Barton Myers Associates

“CoveringsETC looks both utilitarian and fancy at the same time.”
Barbara Bastor
Bastor Architects
“Jada Beyer at Sierra Woods was fantastic. We met him on the Creekside House, where he fabricated an integral cedar slat and glass wall. When we were having trouble finding someone to produce acoustic ceiling panels, he was able to knock those out, too. We then used him again for the window system at the Lake Tahoe residence we did.”

Denis Schofield Bohlin Cywinski Jackson

“When it comes to specialized glazing conditions, we have found that Giroux has tremendous skill with in-house design and construction.”

Michael Lehrer Lehrer Architects

“Our experience with Taylor Brothers has been incredibly positive, particularly in the area of follow-up. They really stand behind their products, and work with you through all of the inevitable challenges that come with customization and intricate detailing.”

Dwayne Oyler Oyler Wu

“Waterworks have a beautiful selection of bathroom tiles.”

Peter Zellner Zellner Plus

“Royal Mosa is our favorite new alternative to tile from Spain and Italy.”

Sascha Wagner Huntsman Architectural Group

“Beautiful and specialized, Bulthaup’s designs are just getting simpler and more elegant.”

Michael Lehrer Lehrer Architects
**FEATURE**

**FADE AND CURTAIN WALL**

- Alumicor
  - 33 Racine Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; 416-746-4222
  - www.alumicor.com

- Benson Industries
  - 18285 Northeast Halsey St., Portland, OR; 503-907-2200
  - www.bensonindustries.com

- EFFO
  - 100 Country Rd., Munott, MO; 417-235-3193
  - www.effocorp.com

- Jameshardie
  - 26300 La Alameda, Mission Viejo, CA; 949-542-7343
  - www.jameshardie.com

- JA Weir Associates
  - 600 South Catalina Ave., Redondo Beach, CA; 310-316-2654
  - www.jaweirassociates.com

- Josef Gartner
  - 321 North Clark St., Chicago; 847-256-8133
  - www.josef-gartner.de

- Permasteelisa
  - 123 Day Hill Rd., Windsor, CT; 860-298-2000
  - www.permasteelisausa.com

- R.A. Heintges & Associates
  - 126 Fifth Ave., New York; 212-452-2996
  - www.heintges.com

- Seele Facade
  - Gutenbergstrasse 19, D-80368 Karlsruhe, Germany; +49 811-6330-140
  - www.seele.com

**LIGHTING**

- Artemide
  - 48 Greene St., New York; +1-212-298-2000
  - www.artemide.com

- B+U
  - Design, make them with a good sense for capabilities, together and fabrication digital engineering.

- Chermayeff & Geismar 
  - “Seele has the best-quality facades you can imagine. Fantastic engineering.” Stefan Behnisch Behnisch Architekten

- FX Lighting
  - “FX Lighting’s fixtures are good-looking and simple. It’s hard to find good minimalist lighting.” Barbara Bestor Bestor Architecture

- Gensler
  - Kap Malik

- Seele Facade
  - Unilever HQ

- Seele
  - “JA Weir Associates does great things around the world. They bring great engineering knowledge to their work.” Kay Malik Gandel

- Seele
  - “Seele is a team player, through and through. They showed a knack for listening and understanding the design intent. They offered us budget-wise solutions and worked collaboratively to come back with a few different, workable options.” Tracy Wong DES Architects + Engineers

- Seele Facade
  - Bestor Architecture

- T-Trax
  - “FX Lighting’s fixtures are good-looking and simple. It’s hard to find good minimalist lighting.” Barbara Bestor Bestor Architecture

- Seele Facade
  - Unilever HQ

- Seele
  - “JA Weir Associates does great things around the world. They bring great engineering knowledge to their work.” Kay Malik Gandel

- Seele
  - “Seele is a team player, through and through. They showed a knack for listening and understanding the design intent. They offered us budget-wise solutions and worked collaboratively to come back with a few different, workable options.” Tracy Wong DES Architects + Engineers

- Seele Facade
  - Bestor Architecture
FEBRUARY/MARCH 2010

DIARY

Sat, 27

LECTURE

Gerald Incandela
New Photographic Drawings

Gallery Talk

11:00 a.m.

Edward Cella
Art Architecture

6018 Wilshire Blvd.

Los Angeles

www.edwardcella.com

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

Luisa Lambri
Being There

The Hammer Museum

10899 Wilshire Blvd.

Los Angeles

www.hammer.ucla.edu

Mark Grotjahn
Blum & Poe

2727 South La Cienega Blvd.

Los Angeles

www.blumandpoe.com

TOURS

How Many Billboards?
Art in Stead

Mak Center for Art and Architecture

835 North Kings Rd.

West Hollywood

www.makcenter.org

Celebrating African American Achievements:
Paul R. Williams
9:00 a.m.

Beverly Hills Hotel

9461 Sunset Blvd.

Beverly Hills

www.aiasf.org

WITH THE KIDS

International Children’s Film Festival

12:00 p.m.

California Theater

631 West 2nd Ave.

Los Angeles

www.redcat.org

Sat, 27

LECTURE

Judy Filkin Art Talk

3:00 p.m.

Contemporary Art

250 South Grand Ave.

Los Angeles

www.moca.org

EXHIBITION OPENING

American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1975

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

5905 Wilshire Blvd.

Los Angeles

www.lacma.org

EVENT

Does Architecture Create Great Communities or Do Communities Create Great Architecture?

4:00 p.m.

Art Center College of Design

700 Lida St.

Pasadena

www.artcenter.edu

WITH THE KIDS

Teen-Led Architecture Tour

2:00 p.m.

Contemporary Jewish Museum

736 Mission St.

San Francisco

www.thejc.org

March

Sat, 6

EXHIBITION OPENING

Channa Horwitz
SolwayJones

900 North Hill St.

Los Angeles

www.solwayjonesgallery.com

TUESDAY 2

EXHIBITION OPENING

Building the Medieval World: Architecture in Illuminated Manuscripts

J. Paul Getty Museum

1200 Getty Center Dr.

Los Angeles

www.getty.edu

WEDNESDAY 3

LECTURE

Raimund Abraham
The Prophets of Solitude

7:00 p.m.

960 East 3rd St., Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

THURSDAY 18

EVENT

Urban Marketplace 2010

7:00 a.m.

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

151 North Grand Ave.

Los Angeles

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TUESDAY 23

LECTURE

Michael Forsberg
America’s Great Plains

7:00 p.m.

California Academy of Sciences

55 Music Concourse Dr.

San Francisco

www.calacademy.org

WEDNESDAY 24

LECTURES

Michael Kohn
Publishing Practices

7:00 p.m.

960 East 3rd St.

Los Angeles

www.sciarc.edu

Paul Groth
Social Connections, Cultural Landscapes, and Architecture

6:00 p.m.

USC School of Architecture

Harris Hall, University Park

arch.usc.edu

SYMPÓSIO

Visual Rights to the City

Toby Miller, Rick Robinson, Christine Polisek, et al.

7:00 p.m.

ALOUD at Central Library

630 West 5th St., Los Angeles

www.lfla.org

FILM

San Francisco as Seen Through the Construction of Golden Gate Park

Two Film Documentaries

6:30 p.m.

AIA San Francisco

130 Sutter St., San Francisco

www.aiasf.org

THURSDAY 25

LECTURE

Henry Urbach
Constant’s New Babylon

6:30 p.m.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 3rd St., San Francisco

www.sfmoma.org

FRIDAY 26

EXHIBITION OPENINGS

Cerca Series: Laid Corbin
Cerca Series: Mara De Luca
Laëtitia Lata
Ruben Ossio

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego

1100 Kettner Blvd., San Diego

www.mcasd.org

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HOW MANY BILLBOARDS? ART IN STEAD

The MAK Center for Art and Architecture

Schindler House, 835 North Kings Road, Los Angeles

Through March 12

Supergraphics, blinking LED banners, and large-scale billboards have become the bane of Los Angeles. Thankfully, 21 of these mega-canvas-vehicles have been repurposed for meditative works of art, commissioned by the MAK Center for Art and Architecture, How Many Billboards? Art In Stead offers a critical take on the commercialization of public space. Drivers idling in traffic are treated to some of California’s leading conceptual artists, including Michael Asher, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Renée Green, Susan Sont, and Kori Newkirk. The projects all comment, in one way or another, on the nature of public space. Siltor’s If Say So (2010, top) is an excerpt from a 1961 telegram sent by artist Robert Rauschenberg, pointing to the power of the authoritative voice. Newkirk’s untitled piece (2010, above) shows the artist’s face looming speechlessly over the city, an enormous snowball in his mouth. Accompanying these outdoor attractions, an exhibition at the Schindler House offers an overview of the project, as does a helpful website, www.howmanybillboards.org, that maps the city-scaled installation.

Ewan Gibbs: San Francisco

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 3rd Street, San Francisco

Through June 27

The British artist Ewan Gibbs first came across old knitting patterns at a London flea market. Over the last 15 years, he has made this pixel-like language his signature in meticulous gridded drawings on graph paper. Initially known for views of hotel rooms based on photographs found in travel brochures, he moved on to baseball players, as well as landmarks from London, Paris, and New York City. Recently, he has focused on San Francisco, visiting popular destinations such as the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and the Coit Tower. Deliberately selecting familiar sites, Gibbs took several thousand black-and-white snapshots and translated them into his neo-pointillist works. The 18 exhibited works, all titled San Francisco (2009), were commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art to celebrate its 75th anniversary. Gibbs’ predilection for generic places helps us to focus our attention on how these images are made, and how we perceive them. At the same time, his pale drawings abstract the metropolis, turning it into a postcard or a distant memory.
Like fast-food serving sizes and the national deficit, museums have spent the past decade growing bigger—adding ever-larger exhibition space to house monumental paintings, installations, and sculptures. Referred to as “museum elephantitis” by Deyan Sudjic, the director of London’s Design Museum, the race to expand has become a global epidemic. But to expand has become necessary for museums have found an intriguing antidote to the increasing monumentality of contemporary art by mounting an intimate exhibit of British artist Rachel Whiteread’s drawings. Whiteread is known primarily for her gigantic public projects, including a concrete cast of a Victorian house in East London (1993) and the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial in Vienna (2000), a 10-by-7-meter cast of library shelves turned inside out. Rachel Whiteread Drawings is the first major museum survey of her works on paper, featuring 156 drawings, eight sculptures, and two vitrines of small objects and postcards she’s collected and arranged.

While Whiteread has achieved greater acclaim for her architectural sculptures, some of her most moving work has been her concrete and resin casts of negative space, often domestic and usually worn by time and use. She—like Bruce Nauman before her—gives form to the immaterial, such as her casts of the spaces beneath chairs or a staircase between a building’s levels. Equally moving and perhaps less familiar are the drawings—usually done in ink, pencil, varnish, and (ironically, perhaps) correction fluid—on softly colored graph paper in tonally complementary colors. She uses these to work through the minute details of a home: the door knobs, light switches, and floor planks. In fact, the galleries are divided by architectural themes such as “Tables and Chairs,” “Floors,” “Beds and Mattresses,” “Doors, Windows, Doorknobs and Switches,” and “Baths, Plinths and Slabs.” The drawings are often deceptively simple, belying the intricacy of herringbone-patterned floor planks, for instance. The graph paper lends the drawings a slightly mechanical quality, as she works through the details of a home’s oft-ignored accents. Other drawings are collages, lending her images of a rooftop resin water tank an even more ethereal quality juxtaposed with photographs of New York City’s landscape. Each of the rooms includes a conceptually related sculpture or maquette, allowing visitors to experience multiple creative expressions and to witness the creative process as it progresses from one medium to another.

Whiteread has denied that her drawings are studies for her sculpture, claiming they are done independently and are akin to a diary for her. But the drawings echo graphs of New York City’s landscape. Each of the rooms includes a conceptually related sculpture or maquette, allowing visitors to experience multiple creative expressions and to witness the creative process as it progresses from one medium to another. Whiteread has denied that her drawings are studies for her sculpture, claiming they are done independently and are akin to a diary for her. But the drawings echo graphs of New York City’s landscape. Each of the rooms includes a conceptually related sculpture or maquette, allowing visitors to experience multiple creative expressions and to witness the creative process as it progresses from one medium to another.

Above: Study for “Village” - Irf (2004); Below left: Table (1989).

Ford’s new book for Princeton Architectural Press’ “Writing Matters” series, Five Houses, Ten Details, sets things right. It presents a compelling, concise, and accessible narrative documenting in-depth explorations of the ideologies and methods of detailing, as applied to the design of five very different houses, all designed by Ford, all for himself and his family, and all for the same site in the Virginia Piedmont, at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Each of the designs is explicitly concerned with a different approach to detailing: the various ways it abstracts or connects to place and historic moment; how it engages material assembly; how it expresses structure; how it gives voice to a particular constructional system; and how detailing can highlight important juxtapositions in the building’s design. Ford states his reverence for Frank Lloyd Wright early in the book, and each section is prefaced with a pertinent excerpt from Norris Smith’s important eponymous study of Wright’s life and work.

Ford writes in a casual, personal style that reads more like memoir than textbook or theoretical exegesis. In the course of describing his explorations into the nature of detailing, he invokes his personal history both as an aspiring author and academic, writing openly about his anxieties as a designer and a newcomer to this Virginia community. One of the most charming, illuminating aspects of Ford’s book is his frankness in discussing the elements of the prospective designs that ultimately didn’t work so well, and that led to their eventual abandonment. Dispensing with neologism and jargon, Ford demonstrates in lucid, engaging fashion the ways that well-formed architectural theory can be applied to actual design practice, for better and worse. Too often, especially in contemporary practice, the marriage of
Ford is a terrific writer, and throughout Five Houses, Ten Details, his love of literature more in-depth treatment than the earlier, of his fourth and fifth proposed experiments, to build primarily incorporates elements experiential outcomes, each with unique can lead to radically different formal and breaking, but their variety is startling, and things in the world, or the most ground- organizational, and formal peculiarities. The designs themselves aren't the prettiest designs themselves aren't the prettiest organized elevations, perspectives, and sections, the better to highlight their theoretical, organizational, and formal peculiarities. The designs themselves aren't the prettiest things in the world, or the most ground-breaking, but their variety is startling, and further underscores Ford’s main point: that shifting one's approach to detailing can lead to radically different formal and experiential outcomes, each with unique benefits and drawbacks.

The house that Ford eventually went on to build primarily incorporates elements of his fourth and fifth proposed experiments, although aspects of the earlier houses are present as well. The final structure is given more in-depth treatment than the earlier, jettisoned experiments, and is documented with more drawings and color photos. The final design is presented as an effective summary of Ford's previous explorations, bringing elements of each into a purportedly cohesive whole. After so much poise and rigor, however, this overly busy melange is a little surprising, even anti-climactic. It seems to contradict many of Ford's earlier arguments about maintaining a clear, single-mindedness of approach to detailing (whichever one might choose), and the reader is left wishing the final house announced itself with the clarity and boldness that marked the aborted designs, or at least with the sure-footedness present in Ford's writing. Nevertheless, Five Houses, Ten Details succeeds on multiple levels. Ford has effectively crafted a fine study not only of an indispensable element of architectural practice that's often misunderstood or overlooked, but also an engaging and illuminating look into the maturation of an individual designer's process, and the influences and elements of personal history that led him to approach design the way that he does.

KEVIN GREENBERG IS AN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER AND WRITER.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has purchased a 1960 model of a skyscraper for its architecture and design collection. Called Vertical City, this is not just any run-of-the mill model of midcentury highrise living, but a very rare architectural proposal by Dutch artist, self-proclaimed architect and urbanist Constant Nieuwenhuys. The object—actually a series of five highrise models of varying dimensions on a wood base—was brought into the collection by Henry Urbach, the museum's curator of architecture and design, who purchased it as an extraordinary example of visionary architecture that he is emphasizing and collecting for the museum. The nearly 6-foot-tall Vertical City, along with several other works by Constant, is on view as part of the museum's yearlong exhibition, "75 Years of Looking Forward: The Anniversary Show.

Urbach believes that visionary architectural objects "draw viewers away from understanding architecture as fact, and toward an understanding of architecture as a thought or project." But he dislikes the prophetic associations that often accompany the word "visionary," and prefers to emphasize the analytical and speculative nature of the experimental work. The tinted acrylic and painted wood Vertical City model is very much a product of Constant's research into what he called Constant's "sculpto-urbanism" models, and they were designed as stand-alone constructions, as well as proposals for much larger constructions. In these metal objects, the riveting or welding by craftsman or preserved part of their elegant aesthetic. In addition to Vertical City, Urbach has purchased three of Constant's New Babylon drawings for SFMOMA's collection, with their build-like objects floating, whirling, or barely pinned to the ground of an everyday urban landscape—powerful relics from a visionary time.

WILLIAM WENKING IS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER.

/mmccreary@sfchronicle.com

The Anniversary Show
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
151 3rd Street
Through January 16, 2011

SKY HIGH

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Q&A>WILLIAM KRISEL

For modernist icon William Krisel, the last few months have been good ones. The 85-year-old architect, who has built over 40,000 housing units and counted other buildings in Southern California (most with his business partner Dan Palmer), was honored in October with both the AIA California Council’s and the AIA Los Angeles’ Lifetime Achievement Awards. On February 14 a new film about his career, William Krisel, Architect (directed by Jake Gorst), premiered at Palm Springs’ Camelot Theater as part of the city’s Modernism Week. Krisel talked to AN’s Sam Lubell about these recent accolades and his latest ventures, as well as how today’s architects measure up to his own generation and—his biggest concern—the state of the profession.

The Architect’s Newspaper: You are known for being outspoken about the profession of architecture. Where do you think things are going now? William Krisel: I’m 85 years old and I’ve been an architect since 1950, so I can really look back at the road that architects have traveled down and how they’ve taken the wrong forks and ended up in a ditch. My general feeling is that architects in the old days were the captains of the team. That meant that any building venture where the architect was involved, he was the captain. He picked the team, he picked the players, and he guided the team to its conclusion. I like to think that the architect is like the composer and the conductor. We can’t have the situation that exists today, where all the various consultants are trying to do their own thing. You have to have a common purpose, a common goal, and a common direction, and you can’t have everyone doing his own thing. When the architect is not the head of the team, all these consultants feel they want to get their part of the job the way they want it. So there is no real master concept that an architect contributes. With everyone doing his own thing, you get a mish-mash. Architects have put themselves in this position. They’re not the captains of the team; they’re not even players and sometimes they’re not even on the bench or invited to play. And the reason this happened was that they abdicated their role as captain. Historically, whenever a void is created, somebody fills that void. Today, the self-anointed “designers” have made themselves the captain of the team. A lot of architects are finding they need to say they are the architect and designer. My feeling is the public now thinks the architect is someone who just does blueprints.

How did this happen? When did architects begin to lose their dominant role? I would say in the late 1970s. Part of it came because of litigation and architects got scared of having too much responsibility. The truth is, the responsibility is shared with the consultant. If he recommends the consultant to the client and the client signs a separate agreement, then the architect is not liable for the consultant’s performance. The basic reason we abdicated those rules is that we said, “I’m not sticking my neck out for those guys.” They didn’t know there was a way you could do both. They were given incorrect advice.

How would you fix that? By architects proving their value and showing they can perform this role, which they used to do. The problem is they’re given it away for such a long time that it’s going to be tough to go back. I think the AIA needs to start a publicity campaign to educate the public about the true role of the architect. It doesn’t mean other players need to disappear from the face of the earth. We need to use engineers and architects. All of them play a role. But they can’t all go their own way. The only way to do that is to put the architect at the head. That means the architect needs to educate himself in all those areas, and know enough about those fields so that he’ll know what they’re talking about and be able to take their information and his design experience and meld them together. It’s a combination of architects and consultants putting pieces together to come up with the right design.

You’ve had great success working with developers, such as with Robert Alexander on the famous Alexander Tract. How did it work? Do you have advice for today’s architects on that front? An architect has to first show a builder that there’s value. My key is that I told them I could give them good design but do it for less than they were spending. The only way to do that was to be knowledgeable about construction and construction costs. I built things on my own. I talked to builders and tried to convince them to use me. I found out how much a chimney costs, how much a door costs, how much a corner costs. When I was in college, I did research on that and found I liked tract housing as a challenge. It was right after World War II and Southern California was extremely fertile. There were thousands of houses being built by non-architects. I saw it as a great opportunity. Some of my friends were from builder families. I was able to convince one builder to go to his father and say we ought to try some of these. He thought we were nuts. He thought he’d teach us a lesson and gave his son ten lots and said, “Do your thing.” It was a big success and that opened the eyes of his father. This was Gordon Palmer. Once that was a success, all builders are like sheep; if the competitor is making money they say, “I want to do what he’s doing,” and they came to me. At one time, of the ten largest homebuilders in the U.S., seven were my clients. I kept it going. I gave talks and slide shows, talked at building conventions. Builders all over the U.S. wanted what I did. I had to adjust the type of construction to fit the area. In Florida, I had to do concrete block. In Texas, they only wanted stucco over concrete block.

I always thought of myself as an architect who believed in what I was doing. After all these years, people have told me I was a very great salesman. Another problem is that schools have not prepared architects for the real world. I can’t tell you how many people I’ve employed who’ve asked, “Why don’t they teach this in school?” I’ve always appreciated USC for my education in architecture. Even though they were criticized about it at the time, they stressed presentation.

What is your opinion of today’s home builders and their designs? Contemporary design has also abdicated its leading role. They allowed what we used to call Cinderella houses to come into favor. The great push forward of our houses and the Case Study houses got overrun by some cute little houses. It’s amazing to me that the style of today is so far behind what they were in the ’50s. They can’t even design a decent floor plan. The exteriors are even worse. They’ve gotten bigger and uglier and uglier.

Is it true that a builder is re-creating your houses? A large builder from Canada, Max Livingstone, rented one of my houses for his family in Palm Springs. They came to the conclusion that this was a pretty clever house. Then they started looking at Palm Springs and saw more of my houses and wondered why what was being built today was so bad. They thought it was time for my house to come back. They contacted me and we made a deal where I licensed them to build my houses. I helped bring the house up to present codes. And we built the first model house. They wanted to build a tract but the land costs were too high. On the first tract, they had an offer to buy the model at full price. They sold it, and then they sold four more. We built a total of six so far, even in this economy when no one is building anything new. The designs are based on my Alexander houses. They originally wanted to prefab it, but the cost of shipping was too high.

Do you think prefab is the future of housing? I don’t think prefab will ever be [that], because I think components can be prefab but I don’t think complete prefab houses make sense, and they can’t compete with stick-built houses. You can’t get the variety of models and you can’t build a tract of all one component. They look like container boxes with holes built into them for windows. I don’t consider Ray Kapper’s new [LivingHomes] prefab as anything but custom. I think the future for tract housing is prefab components. You can come out with prefab variations on kitchens and baths that will allow you enough flexibility in floor plans and exteriors or designs so it won’t look like it’s a prefab house.

What else can architects do to save the economy? I think it’s the period when architects should do exploitation. If I were young, I’d be doing components and designing hypothetical tracts to take to builders meetings and sell my wares. When everything is moving very quickly, most people don’t want to be innovative. They just do what they’re doing with the same twist.

Can you tell us about your new movie? It’s an 88-minute documentary. PBS will air it. I’ve seen the rough cut and I’m very pleased with it. A lot of people were interviewed in the film, mixed in with pictures of my work. Jake Gorst is the filmmaker. His grandfather was an architect. He is extremely interested in architecture.
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