NISHIZAWA AND SEJIMA SHARE THIS YEAR'S PRITZKER PRIZE

On March 28, when Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa of SANAA were named the 2010 Pritzker Prize Laureates, architecture's highest honor, it was a vote for clarity and precision in architecture. Partners for more than 15 years, the pair have designed a body of work including houses, museums, and educational buildings—both in their native Japan and around the world—of singular refinement. Among their best-known works are the O-Museum in Nagano, Japan; the Toledo Museum of Art's Glass Pavilion in Ohio; the New Museum in New York; and the new Rolex Learning

continued on page 2

FRANK LIKES IKE

Dwight D. “Ike” Eisenhower—U.S. president, commander of Allied Forces in Europe during World War II, and architect of the nation’s interstate highway system in the 1950s—is finally getting his due. On March 25, the Eisenhower Memorial Commission (EMC) unveiled the design by Frank Gehry of the 34th president’s monument, an open green space in the heart of

continued on page 2

RIDING THE FUNICULAR OF THE PAST IN THE FUTURE

HELLO, ANGELS

On March 15 the 109-year-old, 289-foot funicular, Angels Flight, reopened on LA’s Bunker Hill, and I wondered if anyone actually used it. Not just rode it—in fact, the Flight counted 30,000 boardings within the first two weeks of reopening—but actually used it. Downtown is now full of seemingly

continued on page 7

LA CUTS COULD MEAN HEADACHES FOR ARCHITECTS

SLOW CITY

Simon Pastucha used to be one-half of the City of Los Angeles’ urban design studio. But since his co-worker Emily Gabel-Luddy recently retired early under a municipal austerity program, he is now the head and sole employee of a bureau that seeks to improve the aesthetic

continued on page 11

CENTURY CITY PASTORAL

Architecture enthusiasts in LA can breathe a sigh of relief now that the Annenberg Foundation has purchased A. Quincy Jones’ much-beloved barn, the architect’s home and studio. The barn had been on the market for over two years, and many worried it might fall into the wrong hands. The foundation bought the property last November and this month began a renovation, which is being undertaken by Frederick Fisher, who also designed the foundation’s Annenberg Community Beach House in Santa Monica. Chora, an Annenberg-sponsored arts incubator, will occupy the home and

continued on page 6
Spring is in the air, even for architects. U.S. housing starts in March were up 1.1 percent, the third straight month of increases. And the AIA’s On The Boards survey showed that index up two points in February, a welcome change.

Are architects ready to take advantage when things bounce back? After attending a screening of the new documentary William Krisel, Architect at the Getty on April 13, I was struck by how far removed most architects are from the kind of mainstream construction Krisel did, and did well. Midcentury architects like Krisel, along with developers like Bob Alexander and Joseph Eichler, made successful careers out of “quality work for the masses.” Today, too much of the best work is reserved for esoteric academic ideas and ultra-high-end houses. The business of designing living, shopping, and working spaces for average people is the job of mediocre, corporate-controlled “building,” not architecture.

Why can’t architects once again work closely with the developers who are building most of the country? The top ten homebuilders in the U.S. are Centex, D.R. Horton, Pulte Homes, Lennar, NVR, K. Hovnanian Homes, Toll Brothers, KB Home, Beazer Homes, and Ryland Homes. How many of these guys have you heard of or heard from? Without meeting them, how else are they going to learn that there might be another way, that there might be people who want housing that’s more up-to-date and appropriate than a faux-Tuscan Mansion?

As Krisel told me in a recent interview, architects need to convince developers that they can do things faster and cheaper, and that the results will pay off. Despite an often-accurate perception that developers are stuck in tradition, Victor Mirowschuk, Chairman at EDI Architecture, a national home architect, told me that many homebuilders are actively looking for innovative designs that will help them stand out from their competitors. “We’re seeing a demographic shift, where builders are trying to cater to the new generation of homeowners,” he said. “This is the IKEA generation. They want simple, modern stuff.”

Mirowschuk shares the worry of many architects that they are strangers to doing things cheaply and realistically, and that they don’t recognize that their aesthetic stubbornness is a turn-off to clients. On the other side of the equation, architects need to reach out to builders; they are not the enemy, banality and joblessness are. Hop a ride to a trade show and enter homebuilders’ competitions like the Best American Living (BALA) and Gold Nugget awards. There are a few architects dabbling in homebuilding. Michelle Kaufmann has partnered with modular homebuilder Blu Homes. Office of Mobile Design and Marmol Radziner have reputations for both designing and trying to sell prefab models to large audiences. But prefab as a niche product isn’t practical enough. As the wheels don’t spin, why should we support a design profession that is locked in the past?

**FRAK LIKES IKE continued from front page**

Washington, D.C., next door to the National Air and Space Museum. In April 2009, the EMC and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) selected Gehry Partners’ concept after a three-stage competition conducted under the GSA’s Design Excellence program. Other firms to submit schemes included Krueck & Sexton of Chicago, Rogers Marvel Architects of New York, and PWP Landscape Architecture of Berkeley, California.

Located on four acres at the base of Capitol Hill on Independence Avenue between 4th and 6th streets SW, Gehry’s design establishes a contemplative space that nods to traditional monument design while at the same time breaking new ground. Thirteen massive limestone columns enclose the site, a homage to the neoclassical Jefferson and Lincoln memorials. At the center of these stands a grove of oak trees through which visitors will walk to view presentations on Eisenhower’s many accomplishments. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the design is a series of massive woven stainless-steel tapestries that hang from the colonnade. The tapestries will reveal scenes from Ike’s life on a grand scale. Gehry Partners also carefully arranged the memorial’s elements to preserve the view corridor along Maryland Avenue to the Capitol.

“The approach to the design was to create a cohesive and important civic space and urban monument in the heart of the capitol region that provides a quiet and contemplative space for learning about the vast accomplishments of President Eisenhower,” Gehry said in a statement. “He was a masterful but modest leader. My aim was to capture that spirit with the design.”

The Eisenhower Memorial will be the first presidential tribute constructed in the 21st century, and only the seventh in U.S. history. The last such monument was built in honor of Franklin D. Roosevelt and opened in 1997. EMC was formed by Congress in 1999 and includes Eisenhower’s grandson David Eisenhower among its 12 commissioners.

Last October, President Obama signed a congressional appropriations bill that included $19 million for the project, securing funding for the completion of the design. In January, Gehry and the Gilbane Building Company signed a design contract with the GSA. In all, the project is expected to cost between $90 million and $120 million, and completion is expected within five years.

AARON SEWARD

**WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM**
SLOTLIGHT LED

"...solid design..."

"...attractive placement of LEDs..."

"...diffusion lens and color-rendering qualities [are] impressive."

"...a nice alternative to fluorescent [products]."

CAREENA™

"...uniform luminosity and good brightness control..."

"...unique picture frame lens design..."

"...good color qualities and overall brightness."
Last year’s announcement that San Francisco’s Presidio Parkway relocation would force the Crissy Field Center to find a temporary home left officials scrambling. They had less than a year to find a space for the center, a joint educational venture between the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and the National Park Service. Enter Project Frog, a San Francisco–based manufacturer of smart and sustainable buildings that is the brainchild of architect Mark Miller. The firm created a 2,500-square-foot facility composed of four FROGs (Flexible Response to Ongoing Growth), structural steel and glass modules, which, with walls made of pre-engineered 4-by-8-foot panels, could be quickly assembled. With their 12-to-19-foot sloped ceilings and clerestory windows, the FROGs are light and airy, and intelligently house their infrastructure underfoot, freeing up ceilings and walls from heating, cooling, and electrical systems and making future add-ons easy. The project broke ground in July, and the center recently hopped into its new home, a picturesque waterfront location with the Golden Gate Bridge as backdrop. The center will remain in its new location for five to seven years. In addition to the center, with its ecological programs that serve urban youth, the facility also houses the Beach Hut Café, which serves coffee and muffins. LEED Gold certification is pending.

WAY TO GO, CLIVE

The unofficial mayor of Silver Lake, Barbara Bestor, once again transformed local Mexican restaurant Casita del Campo into a sweaty mash pit for architects and other designers at the end of March. Among those dancing like teenagers were Clive Wilkinson and his beautiful, young (maow alert!) girlfriend Cheryl Lee Scott, a local real estate agent. Back when we reported on his fantastic new house in West Hollywood, we couldn’t help but notice that it seemed an empty place for a bachelor.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

Of the two Johns involved with San Francisco’s Public Architecture—that’s John Cary, who was the executive director, and John Peterson, the founder—the former has announced his departure from the nonprofit organization, without any other immediate plans. Peterson, who has been the public face of the pro-bono, 1-percent work program, will continue as president. Said Cary: “I got the organization up and running, and we’ve been able to build a great staff and attract incredible firms to our cause.” With Peterson having come on board full-time in 2008 as president, however, Cary’s 100-percent commitment didn’t seem to cut it. He can at least go out on a high note, that being The Power of Pro Bono, his magnum opus due out from Metropolis Books/Distributed Art Publishers this fall.

WHO KNEW?

Looks like it takes a massive slowdown to discover that architects know how to do something other than solve design problems. Design collective De Lab (Design East of La Brea) took advantage of the moment and invited a gaggle of creative LA architects and designers to sell their artistic and non-architectural products at their pop-up store at a manic and crowded LA Artwalk on April 8. This included the irresistibly mischievous dolls of Debi Van Zyl, the live air plants of Kara Bartelt/HO Holden, the vintage and classy stationery of Cartoules Letterpress, the hip accessories of Poketo, the always-trendy Peri Lamps, and many more. Oh, and speaking of hidden talents, we just learned that LA architects David Martin and Olia Tiara are both motorcycle racers. Really? When did these folks pick up these skills? Have architects in fact been living, and not just working all this time?

SEND CUSTOM DUCATI SUPERBIKES TO EAVESDROP@ARCHPAPER.COM

UN GLOBAL COMPACT SUSTAINABILITY CENTER & CLEAN-TECH OFFICES

There are high hopes for this adaptive reuse project in San Francisco’s Hunters Point neighborhood, which is gearing up to be a model business district of the future and underpin the area’s economic growth. The building at Crisp Road and Spear Avenue will contain the local offices for the UN Global Compact, devoted to promoting sustainable business practices worldwide. The rest of the space is conceived as an incubator for clean-tech startups. Appropriately, the winning bid will have to be very green, with LEED Platinum (for core and shell, since this is a remodel) as the goal. There’s plenty to work with: The 1948 Navy warehouse has 260,000 square feet of space and was built to last with a sturdy steel frame. The project is being managed by the city’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) in partnership with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The federal government has chipped in $7.25 million to come up with a plan and do some initial renovation in a first phase. The overall budget is estimated at $35 million. “We’re really excited to see what people come up with,” said Kelly Pretzer, a project manager at the OEWD. The RFQ is seeking a project management team that will include architecture, engineering, and construction, as well as financial analysis and marketing expertise. Find more RFQ information at sfredevelopment.org, issued April 9.

JOANNE FURIO

RFQ ALERT
SUBSCRIBE
WEST COAST ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN
WWW.ARCHPAPER.COM

FREE
for Architects
and Architectural Designers

*Must provide RA number or firm letterhead
**Must provide copy of valid student I.D.

SIGN UP TODAY!
The Architect’s Newspaper, The West’s only architecture and design tabloid is the place for news, projects, products, gossip and more.

Please check your subscription region:
East (20x) □
West (12x) □
Midwest (11x) □

Midwest/West Rates:
*Architectural Designers FREE: □
1 year $29 □
2 years $58 □
**Student $19 □

East Rates:
*Architectural Designers FREE: □
1 year $39 □
2 years $69.95 □
**Student $25 □

To subscribe, mail this form with a check payable to: The Architect’s Newspaper, LLC. The Architect’s Newspaper 21 Murray St., 5th Floor New York, NY 10007
or fax the bottom half of this page to 212-966-0633
or visit us online at www.archpaper.com

Name                                                                          Date
Company
Address
City/State/Zip Code
Email                                                            Phone
RA License Number
Credit Card Number                                                             Exp. Date
SIGNATURE REQUIRED

INDUSTRY
□ Academic
□ Architecture
□ Construction
□ Design
□ Engineering
□ Government
□ Interior Design
□ Landscape Architect
□ Planning/
Urban Design
□ Real Estate/Developer
□ Media
□ Other

JOB FUNCTION
□ Academic
□ Architect
□ Designer
□ Draftperson
□ Firm Owner
□ Government
□ Intern
□ Managing Partner
□ Project Manager
□ Technical Staff
□ Student
□ Other

FIRM INCOME
□ Under $500,000
□ $500,000 to 1 million
□ $1 to 5 million
□ $5 million
□ +$5 million

EMPLOYEES
□ 1-4
□ 5-9
□ 10-19
□ 20-49
□ 50-99
□ 100-249
□ 250-499
CENTURY CITY PASTORAL continued from front page

The structure, located in LA’s Century City, is Jones’ redesign of an old barn, completed in 1965. The large, open space has 35-foot ceilings, large sliding doors, a pitched roof, redwood paneling, elegant built-in cabinetry, and carefully-oriented windows that allow rich natural light to flow in from several angles. Annenberg would not disclose the price paid for the house. The previous owner was Jones’ widow Elaine Sewell Jones, who stayed there until the end of 2009.

The renovation will not change the barn structurally or aesthetically, but will provide for a cleanup and stabilization. “We’re using a very light touch,” stressed Fisher, whose own office is located in a Jones building just down the street. Work includes updated lighting fixtures, window upgrades for sound and thermal insulation, and new ventilation systems. Fisher wants to leave much of it feeling the way it always has. “The place really felt like you had stepped back in time,” he said.

Chora, a part of Lauren Bon’s Metabolic Studio (well-known for its Not a Cornfield project, which converted a former industrial site just outside of downtown LA into a plant-rich public park), will move its offices to the barn’s small studio later this year and hopes to have its first artist-in-residence move in by the fall. The organization also plans to use the space for features and events, said Chora director Carolyne Aycaguer. In addition to its new artist-in-residence program, Chora provides grants and an annual prize to artists.

The barn, said Bridget Kelly, program associate at the Annenberg Foundation, was chosen in large part to lend inspiration to visiting artists. “You walk in and you just are in awe of every detail,” she said. Another reason for the choice, said Kelly, was Jones’ long history with the Annenberg family. Jones designed Sunnylands, Annenberg’s Palm Springs Estate (Metabolic Studio’s Bon is Walter Annenberg’s granddaughter and grew up visiting Sunnylands), as well as the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California. The foundation, added Kelly, has made historic preservation a top priority. In addition to renovating the barn and transforming the recently-acquired Marion Davies pool and guesthouse into the Annenberg Community Beach House, the foundation is converting the landmark Beverly Hills Post Office into the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

On April 5 at SCI-Arc, the winners of AIA/LA’s Arch is award were celebrated for their youth and talent: Oyler Wu Collaborative and Tom Wiscombe/Emergent. Both are pushing the envelope in terms of design, engineering, and program, and are even starting to build things.

Oyler Wu is known for its aluminum-tube installations like Pendulum Plane, a movable armature for exhibitions at the LA Forum’s new gallery space in Hollywood, and Density Fields, a daringly angular installation at the M&A Gallery in Silver Lake. But with a new commission to build one of 100 houses at the Ordos development in Inner Mongolia, the firm is now creating architecture. The house (top, right) is around 10,000 square feet, and features faceted concrete geometries wrapped around an internal void illuminated by light wells. The firm is also hoping to get approval for a new housing tower in Taipei (bottom, right) that uses dynamic stainless steel sun screens and flowing balconies to mask the simple, repetitive units behind.

Emergent is fusing biology and architecture, with structures that conduct heat, air, and water like natural organisms. Its proposal for the Garak Fish Market in Korea (top, left) has a kaleidoscopic roof with colorful gardens and pleats that carve out niches for program elements. Another project, the Flower Street Bioreactor (bottom, left) for downtown LA but recently scuttled—would have been a backlit, molded acrylic aquarium inserted into the facade of a building, containing alage colonies producing oil through photosynthesis.

The barn includes a lofted central room (left) and more compact office and storage space (right).
abstract form inspired by the
the new project is a soaring
of his theater workshop,
to the village-like character
capital of Nigeria. In contrast
gateway to Abuja, the new
design for a symbolic
with a competition-winning
he has returned to the source
Nigeria while he was teaching
designed an open-air univer-
architecture and then
imagery of African vernacular
absorbed the lessons and
Peace Corps, Steven Ehrlich
During his years in the
ABUJA GATEWAY
UNVEILED
ABUJA GATEWAY
During his years in the
Peace Corps, Steven Ehrlich absorbed the lessons and images of African vernacular
architecture and then
designed an open-air univer-
sity theater workshop in
Nigeria while he was teaching
there in the mid 1970s. Now
he has returned to the source
with a competition-winning
design for a symbolic
gateway to Abuja, the new
capital of Nigeria. In contrast
to the village-like character of his theater workshop,
the new project is a soaring abstract form inspired by the
twin trains, named Sinai and
Olivet, trade places every few minutes, from 6:45 a.m.
to 10 p.m., like two caterpil-
lars inching up and down a
bougainvillea-covered hill-
side of Angels Knoll park.
On a sunny April morning
I rode Sinai three times, up
and down its jingly, wooden
diagonal, enjoying the
view and the time-traveling
aspects. But I encountered
only joyriders like myself.
On my last round trip, Sinai
paused at Hill Street and a
woman with a camouflage
backpack appeared on the
seat in front of me. As we
started the ascent, I looked
closer and realized she had a
familiar flush to her cheeks.
"Do you work up at California
Plaza?" I asked. She nodded.
"Do you ride this to work?"
She grinned. "I do some-
times," she said. "Especially
when I'm late. It's nice not
walking up the stairs any-
more." Score one for the rail
renaissance. ALISSA WALKER
While common in some places, it is rare for an LA firm to build its own projects. One of the great exceptions is the small downtown firm LeanArch, founded in 2000, which has its own general contractor license and loves to get involved with the construction side of things. Their co-founder, James Meyer, lights up at words like site, location, construction, or boots. “It’s all about getting your hands dirty,” he said. LeanArch has built a number of LA houses in this manner, including three in the Hollywood Hills alone. Perhaps the most dramatic is the Wild Oak House, perched in a tranquil spot in Griffith Park, with views to the horizon, not to mention toward the Hollywood Sign. (They’ve also built houses nearby on Green Oak and Park Oak drives.)

The home was first made possible through an immense effort to level out a very steep hill and create a huge deck for the cantilevered pool and party area. The owner, music businessman Tony Yanow, throws legendary parties here. The firm went through five sets of permits stretching over six years to accomplish this and to build a 20-foot perimeter retaining wall that now disappears under this plinth, which includes not only the blue-tiled infinity pool but a small pool house as well.

The project itself is a fairly simple rectilinear design—somewhat reminiscent of a Case Study House with a contemporary twist—that jets over the hillside with multiple steel cantilevers and large glass walls, spreading itself over the scenery “like a bird,” as Meyer puts it. A darkly colored aluminum underbelly maximizes the steel frame structure’s floating aspect by allowing the white stucco walls to dominate above. These walls shade the house’s large windows beneath elements that fold out like modernist origami.

Inside, the open plan allows spaces to flow into each other, with attention focused on the marvelous views. The overall 3,200-square-foot size is relatively small, but effective in this setting. No space is wasted: A hallway in the center of the house doubles as the owner’s library. Simple but low-key and elegant material choices include Montauk Black Slate, polished concrete floors, stainless steel guardrails, and white oak cabinetry. Strategic cantilevers over the pool and on the sides of the house, as well as glass walls on the north and west elevations, allow one to move out to the exterior immediately. The roof is covered with solar thermal panels, which heat the pool.

For Meyer, the greatest validation came when photographer Julius Shulman came to shoot the project, spent the day, and gushed about how much he liked the house. “That afternoon was a life changer for me,” said Meyer.
TRUE GRIT

While Stanley Saitowitz has been given the brush-off by his home-town art museum, SFMOMA (he does not appear to be on the short-list for its upcoming expansion), his newly completed Tampa Art Museum (TAM) shows his ability to deliver bang for the buck. Saitowitz’s design was not the first considered by the museum, whose collection had long outgrown its size. In 2001, TAM hired Rafael Viñoly, whose $76 million proposal ended up being too costly. The Saitowitz design cost a mere $26 million, meaning that the 66,000-square-foot structure went for about $400 a square foot in hard costs. The architect describes his priorities as a virtue of the project: “It was driven first and foremost to display art, instead of conceived as an independent artwork,” said Saitowitz, adding, “It makes a statement in its reticence rather than in its singularity.”

The design’s spare orthogonality is classically modernist, with no curving lines or jagged angles. The entry level is clear glass, and the two stories above, which contain all the art (raised safely above flood levels), are contained in a metal box that cantilevers over the first floor. The shimmering cladding is made of two layers of perforated anodized aluminum, separated by a gap and slightly offset to create interesting moire effects. Within, the galleries are completely white, with concrete floors to better show off the artwork. Two big cutouts—one is a covered sculpture terrace, the other an open-air void with a bridge across it—hint at the modular nature of the design. The museum has a very regular floor plan, consisting of two square units, each containing nine blocks. One presumes that in this case, the architect will be invited back to do any future expansion. LL

SF ARCHITECT DESIGNS AN ART MUSEUM IN FLORIDA

2010 Commercial Construction Show

After eight successful years, the show is a primary product, information and networking source for design, construction and maintenance professionals in the retail, hospitality, restaurant, healthcare and other commercial construction arenas.

New in 2010:
• Efficient, two-day format
  To accommodate your busy schedules, the show begins on Wednesday morning and concludes mid-afternoon on Thursday. You can experience the whole show in just two days.
• Easy convenient registration
  For retail, hospitality and restaurant executives, as well as architects, engineers and landlords, one affordable registration fee now includes complete access to the exhibit hall, networking events, seminars and keynote speakers.
• Save money — register early
  To help you make the most of your critical travel budgets, we will offer significant savings on registration if you register early.
• Thursday keynote speaker
  Employee recognition expert Chester Elton teaches how simple praise and recognition techniques will result in productive employees who feel noticed, valued and appreciated. This compelling presentation is packed with examples and best practices from leading companies.

Chester Elton spoke to rave reviews at the 2008 Commercial Construction Show.

SHOW SCHEDULE

Tuesday, June 8th
8:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Attendee & Exhibitor Registration Open
9:00 AM - 10:15 AM
Seminars, Track 1
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM
Seminars, Track 2
12:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Bridges, Art & Design, Networking Roundtables
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Networking Reception
6:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Gala Casino Night

Wednesday, June 9th
8:00 AM - 7:00 PM
Attendee & Exhibitor Registration Open
9:00 AM - 10:15 AM
Seminars, Track 1
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM
Seminars, Track 2
12:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Industry Executive Reception - End-Users Only
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Networking Reception

Thursday, June 10th
8:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Attendee Registration Open
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM
Keynote Speaker - Chester Elton
11:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Exhibit Hall Open
2:00 PM
Show Closes - See you next year in Orlando!

For more information call 678-765-6550 or visit www.cc-show.net

Mark your calendars for June 9-10. Minneapolis is a convenient flight from almost everywhere in the United States — and a short drive from much of the Midwest!
Inside the offices of Portland-based Allied Works Architecture (AWA), there are mock-ups of textured concrete tiles, plaster models, inspirational pin-ups, quick sketches, and even more models. Many are used to explore material and the connectivity of spaces, a telling example of the firm’s design approach that is less about form-making, more about space-making.

Principal Brad Cloepfil founded the firm in 1994. He’s a protégé of Swiss architect Mario Botta, whose geometry and play with light is a clear influence. The firm’s style can also be likened to the experiential minimalism of architect Tadao Ando. There is an emphasis on exposing new uses of concrete, wood, glass, and the emotive qualities of materials. Much of the firm’s work exploits different qualities of light and transparency to provide richness and complexity, along with new thresholds connecting interior and exterior.

In the past five years, AWA has increasingly focused on cultural and educational buildings within urban centers, arts districts, and academic campuses. The firm recently added Alice Wiewel, former director of capital planning for the Oregon University system, as new managing principal. Her addition brings the firm more expertise in higher education, urban development, and space planning.

Cloepfil’s decision to stay in the Portland region of his childhood shows that an architect can make big waves without being in one of the major five cities. Furthermore, the Northwest’s dramatic settings continue to serve Cloepfil well, who points to “the power of the landscape” as his biggest inspiration.

A continuous cast-aluminum surface creates a rich interior landscape that weaves together spaces into an open, fluid and cohesive whole. The carving of numerous voids and interior courts into the body of the building unites the formerly disconnected foot pavilion. (OMA was selected.) Their entry to filter into the gallery spaces, and affording glimpses out to the neighborhood. An adjacent park would have extended through the building to the city and the street, allowing soft light to filter into the gallery spaces, and affording glimpses out to the neighborhood. An adjacent park would have opened up the heart of the museum facade of glass and a perforated shield with warm materials such as a local stone. The firm also developed a masterplan for the entire 21-acre campus that addressed issues of building size, budget, and core design aspirations. Much of the firm’s work exploits different qualities of light and transparency to provide richness and complexity, along with new thresholds connecting interior and exterior.

In the past five years, AWA has increasingly focused on cultural and educational buildings within urban centers, arts districts, and academic campuses. The firm recently added Alice Wiewel, former director of capital planning for the Oregon University system, as new managing principal. Her addition brings the firm more expertise in higher education, urban development, and space planning.

The firm is designing a new feature animation facility for Pixar Animation Studios in Emeryville, California. The 160,000-square-foot, three-story building is scheduled to open in early 2011. The flexible project is set to provide production space will be located on the floor above. The lobby will include an informal amphitheater, while a performance space will be located on the floor above.
SLOW CITY continued from front page quality of new developments and streetscapes.

Pastucha is worried that the staffing reduction could interfere with new projects referred to his office, especially once the economy picks up. Delays in city reviews could also postpone groundbreakings. “Approval of a project means there are jobs and there is investment,” he said. “If you are slowing the construction industry, that could slow any recovery.”

Concerns are rumbling through City Hall and the architecture community as the deficit-plagued city takes steps to reduce its payroll through early retirements, furloughs, and layoffs. The Planning and Building and Safety departments are taking hits expected to make it more time-consuming for designers and developers to get the zoning variances, plan checks, inspections, and certificates they need.

The actual size of the reductions is still in flux, depending on political decisions and negotiations with city unions. The Building and Safety Department so far has seen 110 employees, or 11 percent, leave mainly through early retirements, with more than half of them inspectors, according to department spokesman Bob Steinbach. The Planning Department has lost 44 employees, or about 15 percent, mainly to early retirements, including principal planner Jane Blumenfeld. It also instituted furlough days and eliminated overtime. Meanwhile, by increasing fees and reducing its general revenue dependence, the department has supported its funding future, according to Planning Director S. Gail Goldberg.

Donnie Schmidt, a senior associate at Lorcan O’Herlihy Architects, was upset recently to learn that a city plan-check official was taking early retirement in the middle of reviewing one of the firm’s residential projects. “It definitely slowed us down. And we accrued additional costs,” Schmidt said.

Since the construction industry is relatively slow, Building and Safety has kept up with plan checks and most inspections. But mechanical and electrical plan checks are showing delays, stretching from the usual 12 days to 16 days, said Steinbach. And with many inspectors working just four days a week because of furloughs, some inspections take 48 hours after the request, not the 24-hour turnaround the city has prided itself on. Most of the department’s funding comes from fees, not the city’s hard-pressed general revenue pot, so if construction and fees pick up, there’s a good chance demand will be met.

“It’s fair to say we are not getting things done more quickly. We obviously don’t have as many people working on it as we should,” said Goldberg. But the real concern seems to be that the cuts are causing the city to lose a skilled workforce it may have trouble replacing when the economy rebounds. “The city is losing a vast amount of expertise and human knowledge,” said Will Wright, AIA/Los Angeles’ director of government and public affairs. The AIA wants to work with the city to help preserve such know-how, possibly through volunteer efforts. Wright hopes the budget crisis pushes the city to proceed with proposals to streamline a daunting review process. Budget shrinkage, he said, could result in “a culture to expedite projects so time and money are saved.”

L.J. GORDON

Robbie Ferris loves InsulBloc!

"Truly effective design drives energy performance."

“When I’m designing a building I begin at the nexus of design assumptions and real-world building performance: the envelope.

I specify InsulBloc® high performance spray foam insulation because I know and trust it. InsulBloc® gives me great flexibility in my designs, and can be used with poured concrete, primed steel, wood, CMU, and most other construction materials. InsulBloc® adds solid LEED points, is safe, and can save up to 40% in energy costs.

If you want energy efficient, comfortable, sustainable, and healthy buildings you have to design and build them with great materials. InsulBloc® by NCFI is the ideal way to start.”

Robert W. Ferris, AIA, REFP, LEED AP

CEO and Co-Founder of SFL+a Architects,
Co-Founder Firstfloor, Inc., providing turnkey development solutions to educational institutions.

*To hear more from Robbie Ferris visit www.insulstar.com/FerrisAN
www.insulstar.com

Love starts on the inside

Choose InsulBloc®

high performance spray foam insulation for buildings that save on energy costs everyday!

Sculpture: Gyre, Thomas H. Sayre, N.C. Museum of Art

Click 203
1 CISTA
Moss Sund Architects and Figforty
Born out of a collaboration between Toronto-based architecture firm Moss Sund and industrial designers Figforty, the CISTA is an 8-foot-high stainless-steel cistern that holds up to 100 gallons of rainwater. Its vertical arrangement and raised tank create the water pressure needed to operate an attached hose, and a compartment in the base conceals space for a climbing plant that can be trained up the exterior trellis. The system, still a prototype, can expand horizontally or vertically.
www.moss­sund.com

2 DELTA­­FLORAXX
Cosella-Dörken
A new membrane from Cosella-Dörken is a combined water retention system and drainage board for garden roofs. Delta-Floraxx, made of a high-density plastic, substitutes for a gravel drainage layer, reducing the height and weight of materials and making it appropriate for green roof retrofits. The octagonal dimples give the layer a high compressive strength and can retain up to 22 fluid ounces of water per square foot, while allowing surplus water to drain out the bottom.

3 A DROP OF WATER
Bas van der Veer
Young Dutch designer Bas van der Veer designed A Drop of Water as a prototype, but expects to soon put the rainwater collection pod into production. The raindrop-shaped barrel integrates a watering can, which is filled by a drainage pipe attached to any exterior structure. Once the can is filled, surplus water overflows into the rest of the reservoir and can be used to refill the can via a tap in the barrel’s base.
www.basvanderveer.nl

4 WATERPROOFING ADMIXTURES
Hycrete
Hycrete waterproofing admixtures make concrete hydrophobic, greatly reducing its water absorption. The integral waterproofing system can work in conjunction with membrane waterproofing systems, adding protection to vegetated roofs. The Cradle to Cradle-certified material can make membrane installation easier by reducing concrete’s drying time after rainfall. For applications like plazas and podium decks, the admixture can eliminate the need for a membrane system altogether, lowering installation costs by more than 30 percent.
www.hycrete.com

5 EXTENSIVE GARDEN ROOFS, SLOPED
Hydrotech
Hydrotech’s sloped garden roof soil stabilizer allows a green roof to be installed with a pitch up to 45 degrees, not only permitting vegetation to be installed on a broader range of rooftops, but also increasing visibility of the roof from below. The company’s Extensive systems are designed for safe installation where structural capabilities are a concern, incorporating low-maintenance plants in as little as 3 inches of soil.
www.hydrotechusa.com

6 GROUND HOG
Rainwater Hog
Another use has been found for the award-winning Rainwater Hog. For several years the modular tanks have been used to harvest rainwater for irrigation, household use, and emergency water supplies, reducing a building’s city water use up to 50 percent. Now, under the name Ground Hog, the tanks can be used as a thermal mass unit, outperforming concrete of the same area. Individual Ground Hogs, 6 feet tall and 1.5 feet wide, cost $250 each. For orders of 20 or more, the units can be produced in any color.
www.rainwaterhog.com

WATERSHED MOMENT
HIGH TIME TO GET SMART ABOUT SAVVY RAINWATER MANAGEMENT.
BY JENNIFER K. GORSCHE
More West Coast firms are getting involved with public work, but it’s easier said than done.

BY SAM LUBELL
With most private markets dried up, the real game in town for architects right now is the public sector. The federal government is shelling out record amounts of money—both federal stimulus-related and otherwise—to get the economy on track, and states are still paying out large bond measures and other monies promised before their budgets began to crumble. Even cash-strapped cities are still handling projects, albeit many fewer than several years ago. And so the rush is on among architects to land government buildings, hospitals, parks, transportation centers, public schools, and university structures, among others. The amount of work is still encouraging, and most say they enjoy building for the common good, but the competition is fierce, and for many unexperienced in the labyrinthine bureaucracy and strange pecking order of the public realm, it can be close to impossible.

“Firms are chasing whatever projects they’re hearing about, and right now that’s public work,” said Kermit Baker, the AIA’s chief economist. “It’s the only place that anybody is working,” added Veda Solomon, director of business development for HOK’s LA office. For firms like HOK, a mainstay in the public realm, this scenario means there is suddenly more competition for jobs that once fell into their laps. But they still get the lion’s share thanks to their experience. The firm has worked in the public sector since its founding in the 1950s. Its California offices are now working on the U.S. Mint in San Francisco, the new ARTIC high-speed rail and transit center in Anaheim, the Contra Costa Courthouse, the VA Hospital in Long Beach, the Adelanto Correctional Facility in San Bernardino, and the NOAA Pacific Region Headquarters in Hawaii, to name a few.

The firm’s LA office has only dropped 15 out of 165 workers since 2008, said Solomon, an incredibly low figure in this economy. There’s been such an influx of new public work, she added, that the firm has had to restructure to move more architects into the public sphere.

“Basically the whole firm is looking at public projects,” she said.

Another public regular in LA, 83-person CO Architects, is busy as well, with about 70 percent of its work coming from the public realm. “It’s been less stressful for us than for others,” said principal Scott Kelsey.
Currently underway includes courthouses in Porterville and Southeast Los Angeles, an addition for Santa Monica–UCLA Medical Center/Orthopedic Hospital, the new Palomar Medical Center outside San Diego, a UC Merced Academic Surge Building, the UC Davis School of Nursing, and projects for the LA Unified School District and LA Valley College, among others. (At press time, they unveiled plans for another public project, a new North Campus at the LA County Museum of Natural History.)

Even smaller design firms are getting into the game. Santa Monica–based Pugh + Scarpa, with its 15-strong staff, has signed a five-year at-will contract with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), which limits fees to $12 million a year ($12 million, points out principal Larry Scarpa, would double the firm’s usual fees for a year). The firm is also building parking structures for the city of Santa Monica, a parking garage for UCSD, and is working with Olin Partnership on the new Plummer Park in West Hollywood, which includes a new parking structure and theater. Eight-person San Francisco firm Paulett Taggart Architects is working on two stimulus-related projects, the Turk/Eddy Affordable Housing development and a portion of the Hunters View revitalization project. San Francisco–based Mark Cavagnero Associates, another small firm, has made a specialty out of quiet but striking institutional work like the Salvo Pool in San Francisco, the Clovis Memorial District Conference Center in Clovis, CA, and the just-completed renovation of the Oakland Museum of California. Other boutique firms going public recently include Lorcan O’Herlihy Architects, which has signed on with the City of Santa Monica to build 360 shelters for the city’s Big Blue Bus. The canopies are a kit of parts that can be reconfigured to maximize shade depending on conditions. Richard Meier and Partners, while hardly small, is still interested in branching into the public realm and is working on the San Diego Federal Courthouse, a design that uses materials like natural stone, terra cotta, and pre-cast concrete. The firm also completed a large new city hall and civic center for the City of San Jose.

But although firms large and small have made an entry, getting a strong foothold in this realm has become increasingly difficult. The cutthroat competition means that even the most seasoned public veterans have to work harder than ever to get in the game.

“I’ve noticed a lot of big firms are going after smaller projects,” said HOK’s Christopher Roe, HOK’s strategic director of marketing and business development. “Hundred-page forms that require signed affidavits from 20 references are common. Even for firms like HOK that have the experience and connections, working in the public realm brings new bureaucratic challenges that can stymie even the most stalwart. “You wouldn’t believe the bureaucratic hoops you have to jump through just to get your name on the list,” said Christopher Roe, HOK’s strategic director of marketing and business development. “Hundred-page forms that require signed affidavits from 20 references of previous clients and have to be notarized at the state, county, and federal level. It’s a paperwork nightmare of epic proportions.”

Public agencies themselves are struggling, and with their own budgets faltering, they are doing their best—like everyone else—to get as much work for as little as possible. Roe said that architecture and planning fees
are down about 20 percent for federal projects from just a few years back. "We're being squeezed on many levels," he said.

For smaller firms doing public work, the inevitable starts and stops of public projects can be disastrous. Scarpa mentions that every time a project is halted for an EIR review, he has to lay off staff. Steven Ehrlich faced similar problems working on a new project for UC Irvine, one of well over 30 projects halted for some time in the university system, many of them because of budget issues.

But Scarpa knows he is still one of the lucky ones because he got started before the boom. "My friends ask me how to get involved and I tell them it's not gonna happen instantly. We've been doing it for five years." Already he is looking ahead to new kinds of work in universities, museums, and overseas commissions.

So the question remains: will firms get too entrenched in public work just as they got too involved in commercial and residential before? What happens when the economy changes and the public sector becomes less sexy? Already, public institutions like universities are running out of funds and slowing down expenditures.

The public sector will always provide work, pointed out the AIA's Baker, so getting caught flat-footed is more difficult. Nor does the sector provide the dizzying profits available in the private market. Persistent adaptation, as always, is the key to preserving the long-term health of architecture firms.

"We've realized that the only constant in the world is change," said Gensler's Jernigan. "In today's world, this notion of getting into one niche and staying in that niche is over. We're constantly asking, how do we broaden ourselves and diversify our offerings so we can stabilize things?"

SAM LUBELL IS AN'S WEST COAST EDITOR.
London Eight, an exhibition of architectural drawings presented at SCI-Arc, is a dazzling display of inventive draftsmanship by graduates and faculty of the Bartlett, the architecture school of London University, selected by Peter Cook, its former chair. It’s a must-see.

In his catalog introduction, SCI-Arc director Eric Owen Moss likens digital software to a set of regulations that limit creative expression, as MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) has for music. He claims it has devoured architectural representation, and welcomes Cook’s eight as artisans exploring fruitful alternatives. Cook concurs, arguing that “Modernism never took hold in Britain. We’ve always been fiddlers, craft-oriented, and that explains the survival of drawing… Certain ideas have a boiling point that can be captured in a drawing but may be lost in the building.”

Only two of the eight architects—Laura Allen and Mark Smout—were born in the U.K., but all have absorbed the English love of whimsy and speculation as a complement, rather than an alternative, to serious building. C.J. Lim, a Bartlett professor and head of Studio 8 Architects, exemplifies this duality, veering from inspired fantasy to visionary, and sustainable, city plans that might change the face of China. The exhibit features drawings from Lim’s upcoming book Short Stories: London in Two-and-a-Half Dimensions. Light-hearted and chaotic, but still graphically precise, they include fantastical imaginings with bizarre names like Battersea Dogs Home: A Dating Agency, and Sky Transport for London: Redevelopment of the Circle Line.

Pascal Brkonjic has collaborated with Lim, but offers his own vision of New Malacovia—a Portable City Blueprint, which looks back to extinct civilizations and forward to sustainable communities of the future. The spirit of Italo Calvino hovers over these meticulous delineations of a multi-layered megastructure of flattened windows and fiber optics resting on a bed of corks, and harvesting renewable energy from potatoes impaled on pins. A similar aesthetic is carried further in the three-dimensional drawings of Johan Hybschmann, who was inspired by The Russian Ark, a film by Alexander Sokurov that telescopes time and space as the camera moves uninterrupted through the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Laser-cut constructions that suggest the intricate mechanisms of a watch abstract the rich décor of the palace, drawing us into a delicate labyrinth of cogs and connecting rods.

From here it’s a leap into the alternative reality of marcosand-marjan, the experimental practice that Marcos Cruz and Marjan Colleti established ten years ago. In that decade, they’ve explored the links between architecture, biology, and human emotion, drawing imaginary cities while building real expo pavilions. Their research and seductive imagery feed into competition entries continued on page 19.
Wooden pallets usually seen on loading docks are stacked as towers that define room-like spaces. Lengths of rebar, invisible within sidewalks and walls, become a viney forest that filters daylight above a twisting path.

This is the scene from Mexican-American artist Ruben Ochoa’s newest installation, which occupies most of the 10,000-square-foot Peter Farrell Gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego’s downtown facility. The gallery is a former baggage warehouse at the back of the historical Mission Revival Santa Fe Depot (1915) designed by Bakewell & Brown. The artist employed his family to help with the installation over a two-week period.

The space is divided by a white wall, with the pallet structures on one side and the rebar forms on the other. The gallery walls are mounted with graphite-and-rust paintings of grids of lines, some horizontal and vertical, others slanting in perspective.

Upon entering the gallery, the pallet forms come first. Stacks of them form towers as high as 40 or more, and the towers join together as walls, covered on the entry side with drywall. These white walls conceal intimate spaces behind, wrapped by the exposed edges of pallets. The pallets bear the faded names of their original owners: Fritolay, Shell, Toma-Tek, Barton, and others.

In the adjacent space, the snaky lengths of rebar angle overhead like spindly tree branches, tied together by twisted wires, anchored into holes drilled in the concrete floor. Slanting pallets rest atop the rebar “trees” like scattered fragments of Dorothy’s storm-twirled house. The rebar clusters define a serpentine path beneath them, from one end of the long space to the other.

At first one is struck by such monumental and energized forms from common, utilitarian materials, but time reveals a dialectic: blue collar/fine art, loading dock/gallery, laborer/curator, invisible/spectacular, anonymity/visibility.

According to his introductory note, Ochoa hopes to elevate the everyday and unseen to the level of Richard Serra, Doris Salcedo, Louise Bourgeois, and Gordon Matta-Clark. The exhibit reminds architects, planners, and others who shape the built environment that materials can have meaning even when they aren’t seen, that anonymous laborers are the ones truly responsible for the structures around us, and that common, often-invisible materials can be exposed and combined into thoughtful works of art.

Michael Webb is a LA-based architecture critic and frequent contributor to AA. Yousef Al-Mehdari is more explicitly concerned with human anatomy. He re-imagines a Byzantine church in Istanbul that was gutted to serve as a museum, transformed into a hammam; bodies exploding from a wall of crumbling bricks; and a disturbing hybrid of bone and human features that evokes Giger’s monster in Alien. Smout Allen’s theme is “Envirographic Architecture,” exploring the relationship of nature and technology in specific locations, from the eroding coastline of eastern England to the volcanic island of Lanzarote. Their drawings have a formal beauty that would earn them an honored place in any museum.

It’s encouraging to see that the basic tools architects have used for centuries to conceive and represent their work still have validity as an adjunct and alternative to software. The drawings exhibited here remain cutting edge, despite being non-digital—the latest successful manifestation of a long tradition.

The West Coast Energy Management Congress (EMC) is the largest energy conference and technology expo held in the U.S. West Coast specifically for business, industrial and institutional energy users. It brings together the top experts in all areas of the field to help attendees set a clear, optimum path to both energy cost control and implementation of clean energy innovations.

Attendees can explore promising new technologies, compare energy management options, view alternative energy solutions, and learn about innovative project implementation strategies. The multi-track conference, seminars, trade shows and workshops cover a variety of topics, many specific to the region.
The Architect's Newspaper Marketplace showcases products and services. Formatted 1/8 page or 1/4 page ads are available as at right.

CONTACT:
Sarah Theobald
21 Murray Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10007
TEL 212-966-0630 / FAX 212-966-0633 / stheobald@archpaper.com

IT'S NOT TOO LATE!
Make plans to join us at the Green Valley Ranch on May 20-21.

AEC Technology Strategies 2010 Conference is the eleventh annual information technology conference for business and IT leaders in architecture, engineering, and construction. Discover the latest tools and tactics at work in innovative firms today, and learn strategies for adapting and thriving in tomorrow's AEC business.

To find out more and to register visit www.aectechstrategies.com or call (224) 632-8212.

Marin Living: Home Tours
Saturday, May 15, 2010
10:00 am – 4:00 pm

www.aiasf.org/hometours

Innovative Manufacturing in Architectural Ceramics

The Colburn School of Performing Arts
Los Angeles, California
Architect: Pfeiffer Partners Architects

BOSTON VALLEY TERRA COTTA
1.888.214.3655 www.BostonValley.com

AIA Booth # 535
THE WORLD’S SLIMMEST SIGHTLINES.

The 3/4” profile Vitrocsa sliding and pivoting system. Absolutely nothing else compares. Proven and tested since 1993, with over 25,000 Vitrocsa units installed in over 20 countries.

GOLDRECHT USA INC.  
1512 11TH STREET  
SANTA MONICA, CA 90401  
PHONE: 310 393 3540  
WWW.GOLDRECHT-SYSTEMS.COM

VITROCSA

radiiinc
architectural models - imaging - effects - done well
Contact: Ed Wood or Leszek Stefanski
66 Willow Ave, Hoboken, NJ 07030 201.420.4700 (p) 201.420.4750 (f)
www.radiiinc.com

Esto

Photograph © Peter Aaron/Esto
ENPAC at RPL, GRIMSHAW with Davis Brody Bond Aadas, Architects
www.estocom
Helping small businesses strategically grow their revenues

Specializing in the architectural building products market

Communications  |  Brand Development  |  Strategic Initiatives

Donovan & Associates will analyze your current business initiatives and provide cost effective strategies to help create opportunities in these challenging times.

Call Shawn Donovan at 813-220-0039 to discuss our services and how we can support your marketing efforts. For more information please visit our web site: www.donovan-assoc.com

GlassFilm Enterprises

“we have designs on your glass”

Supplier of a variety of film+glass applications that enhance the appearance of glass. One of the newer, most exciting products is LUMAGY, which makes glass change from translucent to transparent, depending on the angle from which it is viewed. Also available is DECORITE, a series of translucent decorative films, with or without patterns, that simulate the appearance of frosted or sand-blasted glass. All films can be purchased in rolls or professionally installed.

www.glassfilm enterprises.com
Or call 978-263-9333

GlassFilm Enterprises, Inc.

 Creek Street

San Francisco, CA 94134

Windorsky, Inc.
Windorsky, Inc.

328 Amherst St.
San Francisco, CA 94134

(800) 397-3330

www.windorsky.com

NFRC Rated for Title 24 Compliance

PRODUCT FINDER

To learn more about products and services advertised in The Architect’s Newspaper, just note the advertiser’s number and log on to www.archpaper.com. Click on our Red Dot Product Finder, and you can easily search by number to get free information about the latest products, design professionals, business services, and more.

COMPANY RS #

Arizona Cabinet Pros 341
Bison Deck Supports 119
Boston Valley Terra Cotta 274
Donovan & Associates 310
Esto 314
Glass Film Enterprises, Inc. 159
Goldbrecht USA 161
Jakob, Inc. 307
Kim Wendell Design 186
Modernus 329
NCFI Polyurethane 203
Omnia Industries 210
Radii, Inc. 225
Windorsky Inc. 343
Zumbobel Staff Lighting 271

www.donovan-assoc.com

www.glassfilm enterprises.com

www.windorsky.com
Hasty Habits of Mind

Intellectuals in architecture form a tiny subculture in which most know most others and thus want to offend none. Architects’ careers are precarious and need protecting. We are trying to earn respect for good architecture in a culture that is not that interested. So we believe that we should stay positive. All this produces a reluctance to be bold and candid when we come across shamb and junk.

Negative criticism can seem mean-spirited. It’s more pleasant to be post-critical. But the prices we pay are to have too many delusions—especially delusions of grandeur—and to waste too much time foraging dead ends. It took a ferociously demanding critic, F. R. Leavis, to save my generation of English majors from having to spend much time foraging dead ends.

We are often intellectually malarious because we clutch the narrow set of ideas that we perceive, mainly through talk at juries and conferences, to be the only currently legitimate ones. If we look back 30 years, we see a parade of short-lived must-fol-lows: Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze. The fold. Datascape. The surface. Patterns and tessel-lation. Words ending in -ry. And a coming-to-acclaim of designers and design modes that are marginalized within two or three years.

With this comes a scorn for passé ideas. OK, Polen was wrong. But was Chaucer “wrong”? Was Paul Rudolph “wrong”? Beyond science, the category doesn’t apply. Why are we recycling ourselves? We history after we offers us a huge banquet? In Harvard Design Magazine, someone said, about Sorkin’s position, “It’s so ‘60s.” Of course times change, and we must change with them, but when something was created doesn’t determine its value.

In fetishizing newness, we ensure obsolescence: Issues of ANY were exciting in the ‘90s, but do we turn to them now? And how carefully were they read back then? Robert Sokolow wrote in the final Assemblage: “Out of the 240-odd items published, I read about 12 all the way through. No shit. Five percent. Three of those were mine.” Many au courant ideas we don’t really think through, but merely think about, or, worse, think that we should think about. Our subculture has a hard time keeping off the smudges of the adjoining larger cultures of fashion and status-seeking con-sumers. Architects reach many more people through the pages of Elle Decor, Icon, Architectural Digest, and Wallpaper than they do through Log, Volume, Grey Room, and Praxis. The style sections of newspapers breathe down our backs and tempt us to bend our values. Is serious culture always the domain of a tiny elite? Should it bother us that there are over half a million purchasers of Elle Decor but only one or two thousand for periodicals like Grey Room, Log, and Praxis? Does intelligence in the latter publications eventually trickle down to the former?

Columbia’s Buell Center and its director Reinhold Martin recently posed this question to guide explorations in a 2009 con-ferece: “How is contemporary architecture discussed and evaluated in public?” Here are some possible answers.

For every 200 of “us” there are two million like the person who wrote on Morphosis’ new Cooper Union building: “Aliens, please park spacecraft else-where.” Indeed, within our subculture, there are common modes of “serious” discourse that we should find troubling, and all have to do with a compulsion to move fast while frantically scooping up or tossing out tiny morsels along our paths. Let me offer a few examples:

Tossed-off tweets are fast food for the mind, no chewing required. We see this in blogs, but increasingly also in academic discourse. Tweets must be short. This doesn’t force them to be shallow, but it sure nudges them in that direction.

Increasingly content is composed of sound bites. Conferences are overloaded with speakers who are underloaded with time to develop thoughts and present information. So books become clip binders for conference papers and talk transcripts—loose compendia of qualitatively uneven short essays, prose quips, flashy graphics, and glamorous data presentations. Creating book content becomes merely accumulating.

Information overload induces ignorance. This lazy tossing in of everything that can be grabbed partly explains the publication of a few doostop architectural books of a thousand pages or more. Can and does anyone read such books? Are they not made just to be flipped through like magazines, with at most five minutes of reading now and then? Putatively serious essays are of bite-sized brevities. Then there are “boogazines,” which occasionally present scads of information through complex but almost-legal charts—the overall look of the page is dizzying and this very dazzle discourages the patient taking-in of details. Sometimes this can be seen in exhibitions of countless words and images graphically arranged on walls. It would take a viewer many minutes to absorb just what is before the eyes, much less a whole gallery’s worth. Overall, there is a reluctance to be discriminating, to decide what is not worth thinking about. Data, data, data datat.

Machines mindlessly to be zipped through once a month.

Lastly, we partake in a culture of gib, gnomic generalizing. Easy yet world-encircling assertions of meaning reflect the vast influence of Rem Koolhaas, with his profound originality and revelatory perceptions, present-ed with shards of evidence but still striking one as diagnosti-cally dead on. (See his essays on Atlanta and Singapore in S,M,L,XL.) But from Delicious New York on, he has also produced plenty of bloated, ungrounded utterance. His fol-lowers, lacking his astounding acuity, imitate just his mode of offering huge generalities about “contemporary conditions.”

The name of the game seems to be: Assert whatever you can about some special newness in our social/cultural moment. So when you cryptically write, for instance, about “the current crisis,” we join in pretending to know precisely what you are talking about. We nod our heads in jivery conspiratorial intimacy. We suppress acknowledging that we don’t really know what is at hand. This mental smoke screen has recently been most obfuscating among Dutch and American elites; in France it is long familiar.

Intellectualism becomes a mental maneuver. Research—laborious, lengthy, uncompromisingly careful and responsible investiga-tion—slacks into barstool musings. The compulsion to say something new leads to things like this real example from Volume: “Treating the [retail] big box as a potential form of high art could lead to an aesthetic breakthrough.” Or not.

Carefully cooked slow food for thought is still available for those willing to pull off the main drag. The New York Review of Books, for instance, offers lots of solid fare. There is even some on the main drag. Just take the pedal off the metal.

WILLIAM S. SAUNDERS IS EDITOR OF MARQUIS MAGAZINE AND HAS WRITTEN SLOWER ESSAYS ON KOOLHAAS AND ON CRITICISM.
Designed and Made in Italy
Since 1964

OMNIA
Manufacturers of Locksets & Architectural Hardware

Phone: (800) 310-7960
www.OmniaIndustries.com

Available through authorized showrooms