Santa Monica’s Bergamot Area Plan, which plots the course for a 140-acre mixed-use and transit-oriented creative district timed for the arrival of the Expo Line in 2015, is moving ahead after its passage in February. But the project, which branches north of the area’s Bergamot Station arts center, is already facing serious hurdles. One of its largest pieces, the Bergamot Transit Village, designed by Gensler and developed by Hines, was resoundingly sent back to the drawing board by Santa Monica City Council on March 22. Meanwhile the namesake for the district, Bergamot Station, seems to be in jeopardy as the city has thus far refused to grant it a lease extension.

At the museum. In an interview Urbach expressed gratitude for the opportunity but indicated that he was ready to move on. “I feel with this suite of shows, and the almost 450 objects that I’ve been able to bring into the collection, this chapter has come to a timely and graceful close,” he said. “At this point what I’m really excited about is drawing upon what I’ve learned here and taking my project—which is to try and develop fresh, compelling ways for people to encounter architecture and design—into a new context that offers a different set of opportunities and constraints. Many opportunities have come my way that I have not been able to explore because of my very full-time work.” SFMOMA was the first museum on the West Coast to establish...
To say that the public building sector in Los Angeles is overrun with corruption is the understatement of the year. Last month the Los Angeles Times ran a series of devastating investigative articles revealing a staggering amount of foul play at the LA Community College District’s building program, from conflicts of interest to an egregious lack of oversight. The exposé was followed shortly by the firing of the head of the program, Larry Eisenberg. Not long after that, James Sohn, the relatively new chief of the LA Unified School District’s construction program abruptly resigned as well under a cloud of suspicion for conflicts of interest. Also in early April, two members of the LA Building Department were arrested on allegations of taking bribes.

The list of offenses goes on and on. And the side effects are just as extensive from undermining the quality of the city’s major construction projects to relegate quality public architecture to the realm of an afterthought, behind greed and incompetence. Something must be done. But what?

Officials at the LA Department of Building and Safety recently called for the agency to electronically track its employees whereabouts via GPS. Another idea came from the AIA LA, that suggested the LAUSD and the LACCD each hire a district architect to oversee capital improvement programs: “Those who manage the facilities capital investment program require the skills, technical capabilities, construction-management experience, judgment in critical values, and integrity that only those with training and experience in the realm of public building, design and construction can offer—short, an architect,” said the AIA’s statement.

While keeping track of employees is always a good idea, GPS tags seem to grossly violate civil liberties. Of course I agree that architects have the valuable skills needed to oversee construction management projects, but hiring an architect doesn’t overcome the corruption problem. Any professional is susceptible to misdeeds.

The answer comes from where it usually does: the top. Don’t just blame individual employees, or even department chiefs, for taking bribes. Blame the organizations themselves for not fostering a culture of responsibility, for not catching misdeeds before they get out of control, and for not setting up a suitable system for carrying out deeds fraught with temptation.

A few good steps can be gleaned from the Corruption Fighters Toolkit from Transparency International, a group that terms itself a “global coalition against corruption.” (The group largely fights Third World corruption, but many of the same issues are at play here.) Some of that kit’s key insights include: “raising awareness of corruption within an organization; providing clear and transparent information to employees and to the public; streamlining and improving the organization; establishing strict codes of business ethics; strengthening diagnostics of all activities; strengthening anti-corruption rules and penalties.”

This and similar groups demand in short that organizations take clear responsibility for promoting an ethical culture with clear policies against corruption and clear methods for fighting it. From what I can tell LA’s building programs have done precious little to this effect. In March 2010, for instance, the LACCD touted a new Office of Inspector General and whistle-blower program. Apparently failed.

The results not only damage the agencies and the city, but also the physical world we inhabit. Some results of the egregious construction errors found in the LA Times series on LACCD read as pure travesty: Concrete steps were uneven; heating and cooling units were installed upside down; floors were cracked, and windows were loosely attached. Architects were sometimes fired without proper notice or asked to radically change their plans at the last minute. Meanwhile overpaying for financing ended up costing millions to make a good product.

Why shouldn’t public agencies be held to higher standards? Instead the laxity of the culture in Los Angeles sets the bar lower for curatorial vision and exhibition design, beyond traditional frameworks of the art historical survey, retrospective, and other familiar forms of museum experience," said Cary Bernstein, a San Francisco architect and chair of SFMOMA’s Architecture + Design Forum. "It is never just about the ‘stuff’ in the gallery for him, but the deliberate engagement with the ‘stuff’ that is equally important to unlock its meaning."

"I have tremendous respect for what he accomplished, in particular his inventive attitude about how museum spaces themselves—can become immersive architectural experiences—he used the language of architecture and design to exhibit architecture and design," said David Meglen, Director of Research and Planning at San Francisco’s California College of the Arts.

Urbach had not been a particularly visible figure in San Francisco. Said one insider, "People generally thought he was an improvement over his predecessor, but I’m not sure he did such a good job at building relationships with the community." The department has three other employees, and the search has not yet been opened for a successor.

In 2008, the city of Santa Monica, which owns 20 low-income units out of the 72 homes at Mountain View, decided to update their aging facilities, commissioning new, modernized homes to replace the 20 trailers. The improvements were intended to “dramatically improve the quality and technology and improve lives,” and to achieve the same quality as the city’s other affordable housing offerings, according to Jim Kemper, housing administrator with the city.

Marmol Radziner traveled with the manufacturer Golden West Homes and was chosen through a process involving residents, city officials, and a review board. “It was a great exercise in applying our experience to a project with really challenging cost constraints,” said Ron Radziner, a designer principal at Marmol Radziner. Many of the firm’s high-end prefab homes have cost more than five times the price of these homes.

Each mobile home occupies units between 400 and 1,000 square feet and looks less like a traditional trailer and more like a bungalow. Multiple windows make the interiors bright with daylight, but light exterior colors help keep the homes naturally cool.

In addition to these passive energy efficiency features, the homes are constructed with formaldehyde-free wood products, walls are painted with zero-VOC paint, and floors are covered with Marmoleum, a natural linoleum.

The homes are also equipped with renewable energy sources such as a 2kW solar photovoltaic array that sends energy back to the grid and a solar heated hot water system. Additional green features are available for purchase, such as porches with awnings, trellis screens for exterior walls, and a multifunction “Green Box” storage cabinet equipped with a rain barrel, compost bin, and a small kitchen garden.

Installation of the homes began in late February and move-in began early this month. Residents of Mountain View who do not qualify for the city-owned units can purchase their own versions of the homes at a reduced price directly from the manufacturer.
Daniel Monti describes the house he and his firm Modal Design created for his parents in Venice as “a collision of opposites.”

The rectilinear nature of the house’s two levels contrasts with a huge stone pine that juts over the rear of the structure, while the shimmering play of light and shade through its branches is echoed in the patterns cast by the upper level’s perforated accordion-like facade. Circles are punched in a folded screen of rough hewn and solid Cor-ten steel wrapped around the bedrooms, which sit atop a smooth, light, and long glazed bar of living spaces. The steel will weather like the bark of the tree, offsetting the smooth white expanses of the interior walls.

“Contrasting textures, light conditions, color, and materials, make each appear to stand out more,” said Monti. “It’s the manner in which a material is used and its relationship to other elements, not the material itself, that increases awareness on the part of the viewer.”

Monti was born in Venezuela, and had lived in seven countries by the time he turned 18, exposing him to a diversity of cultures and architectural traditions. He received his M. Arch from the Harvard GSD, and worked for Marmol Radziner before establishing Modal Design in 2004. His experience feeds into his precocious mastery of form, space, and light, all evident in the Walnut house, which is named for the street in Venice on which it sits.

The home first appears as a composition of three volumes: the chocolate stucco cube of the garage to the left, the recessed band of glazing to the right, and the upper-level screen, cut away to frame windows. The open-plan living areas are treated as an architectural promenade through layered spaces, in which each step brings a new sensation. A small glazed office behind the garage frames the linear pool along the south face of the house, and the living areas open onto this walled side yard and onto the century-old pine, which finally reveals its immensity. Seating and kitchen cabinets are treated as floating islands.

A primary goal of the design was to exploit the plentiful Southern California light. Folds in the Cor-ten screen cast changing shadows over the exterior, and the circular openings act as sundials to record the hours and seasons inside. Light becomes a sculptural presence that adds depth to every space and surface. A linear band of skylights reveals the extended branches of the stone pine, which cast a dappled pattern of sun and shadow across the polished concrete floor, balancing the light flooding in through wide glass sliders. The staircase balustrade is composed of the steel discs that were laser-cut from the Cor-ten screen, spot-welded to create a tactile enclosure that mirrors the thousand points of light playing over oiled walnut floor boards.

The house feels more spacious than its 2,700 square feet would suggest, thanks to its good proportions, refined detailing, and the intimate connection with the outdoors. Though a delicate and skillfully balanced composition, more than anything, the Walnut house feels livable.

MICHAEL WEBB

Clockwise from top left: The house’s folding Cor-ten steel skin reflects light in textured patterns; its small perforations create geometric shadows in master bedroom; a central stair unifies the interior; sliding doors and skylights connect to the outdoors; the L-shaped house is nestled under a huge pine tree.
ASHLAND YOUTH CENTER

If Governor Jerry Brown’s proposed cuts go through, there may be fewer projects like the Ashland Youth Center, which was organized and funded by the Alameda County Redevelopment Agency. A woefully under-served community in the East Bay, Ashland is getting a 31,000-square-foot youth center, whose various recreational facilities (public café, fitness center, art room, computer lab, library, etc.) will hopefully draw an audience that can also benefit from the health clinic, career center, and counseling office.

Sonoma-based RossDrulisCusenbery Architecture, a specialist in public work, has developed a design that engages the surrounding four-acre park and creates a distinctive presence on an arterial thoroughfare. The facade plays with scale, mimicking a three-story building that is really two. Aiding the illusion are bands of light boxes, used to augment the real windows, making them appear taller. The windows alternate with blocks of porcelain tile. To bring the energy of the park indoors, the building is arranged around a central courtyard, and some of the spaces flow right outside. For instance, a dance studio opens up through folding doors to create a stage with outdoor seating.

The architects held regular meetings over three months with a group of local teenagers, and incorporated their preference for dark, sober colors and an urban edginess. “We were looking for a way to create an iconic image, which would be respectful and relevant for many generations,” said principal Mallory Cusenbery. “There is a strong difference between what youth want and what adults think youth want.”

Architect: RossDrulisCusenbery Architecture
Developer: Alameda County Redevelopment Agency
Location: Ashland, CA
Scheduled Completion: Late 2012
Budget: $15.5 million
Diller Scofidio + Renfro has prevailed yet again. On Thursday, Stanford University announced that it had picked the firm to design a new 90,000-square-foot arts structure, the Burton and Deedee McMurtry Building. No designs were released.

Jhaelen Eli, the firm’s director of business development, said in an email, “We’re at the very beginning of the process, in the programming phase.” The price tag has also not yet been finalized, though the building’s namesakes have chipped in $30 million.

After sending out an RFQ last summer, Stanford chose the architects from a shortlist of 15 firms, which was narrowed down to two: DS+R and Ennead Architects. “Diller Scofidio + Renfro see themselves as artists, and that is particularly important at this moment on this campus,” said Nancy Troy, chair of the department of art and art history.

The new building will house the university’s art and art history department, including programs in studio art, film and media studies, and documentary film, which are currently dispersed in various buildings across campus. The architects of record will be Boora Architects of Portland.

“One of the important goals was to bring all the programs together but also to make sure that we had the very best facility that we could provide to move the arts forward on campus,” said Matthew Tiews, executive director of arts programs at Stanford. The building is part of the Stanford Arts Initiative, a broader campaign to raise the university’s profile in the arts. The initiative has raised $250 million to date to bring in new faculty, programming, and buildings—including the Bing Concert Hall by Ennead Architects, currently under construction nearby.

DS+R comes to the project after receiving positive reviews for Brown University’s Creative Arts Center, a performing arts building with a 200-seat recital hall, which opened in February. In California DS+R was recently selected to design a new home for the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives and was on the shortlist for SFMOMA’s expansion. They are also designing The Broad, Eli Broad’s new contemporary art museum in downtown Los Angeles.

The new building will be located in back of the Cantor Art Center, Stanford’s art museum, and not far from the university’s most prominent work of modern architecture, the Jane Lathrop Stanford Center for Computational Neuroscience at Stanford, completed in 2003. Groundbreaking for the DS+R building is expected to take place in 2012.
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GLENDALE APPROVES MUSEUM OF NEON ART

In late March Glendale City Council approved the lease and design for the Museum of Neon Art (MONA), a potentially transformative new building on the city’s busy Brand Avenue that will display an eclectic collection of neon art, ranging from beer signs to roadside billboards. LA-based Shimoda Design Group is leading the design.

The museum, founded in 1981, is now located in a small temporary space on 4th Street in Downtown LA. It has had locations in the Downtown Arts District, at Universal City Walk, and at what is now LA Live. The Glendale space—which offers a 15-year, affordable lease from the City of Glendale, said MONA Executive Director Kim Koga—will finally give the museum ample room as well as a permanent home. Glendale is also kicking in up to $1 million for initial tenant improvements.

The two-story, 10,000-square-foot project is anticipated to become the southern anchor for Glendale’s emerging arts and entertainment district. It should do that effectively, not only because of its “beautiful,” contemporary design, as Emil Tatevosian, Glendale’s Deputy Director of Policy and Innovation, described it, but also thanks to the neon art flashing from its exterior. This will include a recreation of the Virginia Court Motel Diver, a large, bright red and white marquee dating from the 1940’s that will be placed on the museum’s roof; and a 20-foot-tall Clayton Plumbers Sign, with its giant neon faucet and neon blue drips, which will be located in the open air plaza. A rotating selection of others signs will hang from the building itself, Koga hopes.

The dark, glossy brick structure, wrapped largely in glass, will include the re-use of two empty storefront buildings across from the Americana At Brand, a popular new mixed-use development. Its main components will include a glazed storefront entry showing off a café, store, and neon fabrication shop; a main exhibition space; a mezzanine; and an outdoor plaza. The mezzanine, known as the “light box,” will cantilever dramatically over the plaza and “light up like a lantern,” according to Shimoda Design principal Joey Shimoda. The plaza, which is being designed by AECOM, will merge the street’s existing diagonal pavers with a wooden surface that will wrap up to form a far wall. The project will also include a classroom space, offices, and outdoor storage.

The prevalence of glass on the exterior is meant to welcome outsiders wandering around the city, like those leaving the Americana. “We love the idea of an accessible museum,” commented Koga. “We really wanted to connect with the community.” Pieces on display in the main gallery will include a classic sign from the old Brown Derby on Hollywood and Vine, as well as a mid-century Chief Motel sign that shows off a bright neon headdress.

The museum will also, according to Tatevosian, help “refine” a city that is looking to draw more people with its arts, retail, and nightlife offerings. “People from neighboring cities don’t usually come to Glendale,” he said. “But that’s changing.”

The project’s budget has not been finalized, and a completion date has not been set, though the museum hopes it will be able to open sometime next year. SL
programmatic elements that
Ship Terminal” as well as “additional
improvement at the World Cruise
terminal, adding a new $10.8 million,
cosmetic changes like repainting the
facelift of the terminal that included
undertook an in-house $42 million
focus on knitting the neighbor-
hood together with a series of play
areas, an amphitheater, an exhibi-
tion zone, and a linear park, all con-
ected to public transportation.
Sanfield said. The original
year, so changes needed to be done
outlay he describes as “a hoax.”
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barely pay for painting the terminal,”
his. “They're just using us, and
to this. It just kind of went away,”
described William Taylor, an
architect at TFO Architecture.
TFO’s scheme included a large
green roof over a new parking
lot that tied the cruise terminal
to the surrounding neighborhood,
but averted security concerns by
keeping public access away from
the cruise docks themselves. “What
was really missing—and is still
missing—was public space. A con-
nection between the terminal and
the waterfront,” explained Taylor.
Anil Verma Associates’ plan
focused on knitting the neighbor-
hood together with a series of play
areas, an amphitheater, an exhibi-
tion zone, and a linear park, all con-
ected to public transportation.
Verma is particularly nonplussed
with the Port’s approach to the
competition, whose $10 million
outlay he describes as “a hoax.”
That amount of money would
barely pay for painting the terminal,”
his. “They’re just using us, and
it’s kind of sad that they’re doing
that in a down economy.” Verma
and Taylor both explained that their
firms spent more than four times
the $10,000 competition stipends on
their proposals.
Meanwhile two of the competition
teams say they never heard anything
from the Port on the competition’s
outcome. “It was a little disappoint-
ing; there wasn’t a formal resolution
to this. It just kind of went away,”
said TFO’s Taylor.
The Port says it informed all four
of the teams that it would not select
them in letters dated August 19,
which the Port provided to AN.
Meanwhile RFP cancellations—and
the scrapping of public work in gener-
al—are much more prevalent in these
trying times for public agencies.
“I think it’s one of the biggest
challenges in the profession,” said Andrew Goldberg, Senior Director
of Federal Relations at the AIA, of the
recent abandonment of investment
in public projects. The AIA is currently
working on an initiative putting
together a list of “Stalled Projects”
to raise attention to the issue.
“People will just invest in what
they have and get by,” said Russell
A. Davidson, President of KG&D, a
Mt. Kisco, New York firm that has had
four county projects shelved recently.
“They decide to replace a building,
and then that project loses momen-
tum and it becomes ‘let’s put a band
aid on the existing facilities and let
the next generation deal with it.’”

NO WINNERS HERE continued from
front page and its bleak environs.
But AN has learned that it was
abandoned in favor of a less ambi-
tious in-house redesign, angering
the architects involved and
dashing hopes of an area rebirth.
Meanwhile, after a year of waiting,
half of the teams claim they were
never informed of the outcome.
The RFP for the competition called
for “conceptual design for a short-
term (five to ten years) aesthetic
improvement at the World Cruise
Ship Terminal” as well as “additional
programmatic elements that
contribute to and/or enhance exist-
ing cruise terminal operations,
community interaction, commercial
viability, pedestrian and vehicular
circulation, marketing concepts, and
maintenance feasibility.”
Four architectural teams participat-
ed in the competition: Tetra Design,
MVE Institutional, Anil Verma
Associates, and TFO Architecture.
Instead of awarding the project to
one of these firms, the Port recently
undertook an in-house $42 million
facelift of the terminal that included
cosmetic changes like repainting the
terminal, adding a new $10.8 million,
71,500-square-foot solar array on its
roof, installing new audio, video, and
lighting systems, and adding new
glass-enclosed gangways to boats.
According to Port spokesperson
Philip Sanfield the decision not to
choose any of the contestants was
based on timing and economics.
Disney decided to bring a new
cruise ship to the Port by early this
year, so changes needed to be done
fast, Sanfield said. The original
scope of the competition was for a
$10 million project, later considered
too small to make a difference.
“Although we may reconsider
design work in the future, that
would be a decision made by the
Los Angeles Harbor Commission,”
said Sanfield in an email. “Presently
there are no plans to do so.”
So the desolate area surrounding
the terminal remains untransformed,
and the architects are not happy
about how it happened.
“You go there in the middle of the
day and the fountain is going and
the music is blaring, and there’s nobody
there,” described William Taylor, an
architect at TFO Architecture.
TFO’s scheme included a large
green roof over a new parking
lot that tied the cruise terminal
to the surrounding neighborhood,
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IT TELLS A STORY.

Ettore Sottsass

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balance of lighting quality
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The problem with hand-me-downs is that one almost always has to make alterations. The same goes for buildings, as evidenced by the case of an entirely new theater being built within the footprint of a partially demolished historic landmark in Glendale.

Just in time for its 20th season, Glendale’s classical repertory company A Noise Within (ANW) will be moving into Pasadena’s Stuart Pharmaceutical Company building, designed in 1958 by Edward Durell Stone. Stone, the lead architect for Radio City Music Hall and the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, is best known for his distinctive facade of the structure.

When the building was turned over to ANW, it had already been partially demolished to make way for a subway parking garage. What remained “looked like a single story building, but was actually a two-story building,” said Sherman Oaks preservation architect Robert J. Chattel, who worked with ANW to construct the new space in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

The building’s lower level once included glazing and exposed concrete floors and gypsum board ceilings. The STC-rated walls and doors along with a concrete wall also help mitigate the constant noise coming from the Foothill Freeway just across the road. The existing elements also presented another challenge in construction. It “made for a very tight construction site when erecting the steel,” said construction architect Mark Giles of DLR Group WWCOT, one of the contractors. But the team seems to be managing well. Construction has progressed quickly since its groundbreaking last July and should wrap up sometime in the fall.

Whether in design or construction, simplicity has been the dominant theme at ANW. After its groundbreaking last July and should wrap up sometime in the fall. Whether in design or construction, simplicity has been the dominant theme at ANW. After half a century, Stone’s elegant design has proven timeless—an appropriate home for a repertory theater company that continues to breathe new life to the classics.
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When anyone thinks of U.S. immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they picture Ellis Island. But the West Coast’s counterpart was the U.S. Immigration Station, a 1910 collection of modest timber buildings at Angel Island, located off the coast of Thomson, just north of San Francisco.

Until the end of World War II, thousands of immigrants arrived here; most from the Far East. And while Ellis Island was no picnic, Angel was an even harsher place. Technically a detention center, its crowded barracks held hundreds of people for up to a year at a time. Thanks to the California State Parks’ recent $20 million renovation and Angel Island’s many of whom had remained mum for more than fifty years, many fearing deportation—have finally begun talking about their experiences at Angel Island now that its history is being shared with the world.

“It’s been a wonderful project,” explained Hyland. “We’re discovering something new all the time.”

To capture the detainees’ authentic experiences, the architects left the barracks virtually as they found them (plus a renovated entry stair and support infrastructure and minus the grime from the crowds of huddled masses) with holes in the walls, peeling paint, and even etchings in the walls in several languages.

“What you see is what was there,” explained ARG principal Aaron Hyland, whose firm has been working on the project for the past five years (including a two-year stall).

With the help of exhibit designer Daniel Quan, they also recreated vignettes, using artifacts like tables, chairs, and clothing that had been in storage. The next phase of work to be determined by an international competition will include a large art installation on the site of the old administration building and a new education center, built into the island’s former hospital.

Meanwhile the project has already had one major impact. Its former inhabitants—many of whom had remained mum for more than fifty years, many fearing deportation—have finally begun talking about their experiences at Angel Island now that its history is being shared with the world.

“It’s been a wonderful project,” explained Hyland. “We’re discovering something new all the time.”

Left: A vignette of life in detention. 

ANGEL ISLAND REVEALS ITS SECRETS

ELLIS ISLAND WEST

When anyone thinks of U.S. immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries they picture Ellis Island. But the West Coast’s counterpart was the U.S. Immigration Station, a 1910 collection of modest timber buildings at Angel Island, located off the coast of Thomson, just north of San Francisco.

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ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT continued from front page. Bergamot Station. It’s the largest of a number of new projects planned for the once industrial area.

In turning back the project, city officials stated their desire for the development to be redesigned with greater variety of roof heights, a mix of styles, and a variety of visual elements, all to break up its “monolithic” feel, and make it a more pedestrian-oriented environment.

“There appears to be little attempt to create an interesting skyline,” said the city planning department’s staff report. “The Community has been clear that Bergamot Transit Village should feel, look, and function like a village.”

At the meeting Hines Senior Vice President Colin Shepherd told the council that the firm would look at the comments they received and “see how we could incorporate the majority of them.”

But the firm and the planning department seem to differ on their approaches to a “village.” One person involved with the project, who declined to be named, questioned the ability to break up the street wall on a short block into various buildings given code requirements.

In an interview with AN, Santa Monica Planning Director Eileen Fogerty said that besides creating different buildings, other options include “re-articulating the mass of the buildings, creating variation in the rooflines, and creating more public spaces.”

She didn’t seem worried about the pace of development.

“This is not something people do quickly or that there is a formula for. When people create successful places, there’s a lot of attention to detail and attention to creating a place that’s going to attract people,” she said. Meanwhile Fogerty said that discussions about Bergamot Station—a favorite cultural destination in LA with its close to 50 galleries located on the site of a former Red Line trolley stop—will begin in about a month. The arts center has yet to be offered a new lease by the city. Its current lease runs out in 2015.

“We have no guarantee that we can continue here,” said Wayne Blank, Bergamot’s owner, who said he has already lost tenants who are worried about the complex’s future and that he has been unable to move forward with updates because of the uncertainty.

“Because this goes the scariest it gets for the current tenants,” he said. Blank conceded that once the light rail line comes through, the city could rent the area out for more than he can pay, but he noted that this would mean the loss of the cultural heart of the area.

“What the city doesn’t need is another two-year stall,” he said. Blank conceded that once the light rail line comes through, the city could rent the area out for more than he can pay, but he noted that this would mean the loss of the cultural heart of the area.

“The absolute goal of the whole planning effort is to keep the art galleries and keep that arts focus,” said Fogerty in response. “The next phase will be looking at how you do that in the long run in a way that works for everyone.”

SL
The Architect’s Newspaper introduces a new, local online resource guide for the design community, allowing users to search their city for the products and services they need.

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Your City.
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Six years after Hurricane Katrina leveled much of New Orleans, the still-struggling city is beginning to show signs of rebirth. Projects underway amounting to billions of wide-ranging investment include new and renovated schools, hospitals, libraries, commercial corridors, boulevards, waterways, parks, and even entire development zones. Efforts like the Claiborne Avenue Corridor will link sections of the cities that have been divided by an interstate for decades.

Construction that began a few years ago is now starting to finish up, while the city’s new Mayor Mitch Landrieu has launched a program to instigate 100 city-initiated projects that will begin or even be completed in the next three years. In total, according to William Gilchrist, the city’s Director of Place-Based Planning, over $13 billion in federal, state and local investments will go into effect. In many ways, said Gilchrist, the city has become a laboratory for new ideas in architecture and urban planning.

Architects and landscape architects are playing a major role here, and creating designs that are in some cases shockingly contemporary.

One of the largest, and most architecturally ambitious, city plans now underway is called Reinventing the Crescent, a $300 million riverfront redevelopment plan, with contributions by a star-filled team including Eskew Dumez Ripple working on a master plan with Chan Krieger Sieniewicz and Ten Arquitectos; Michael Maltzan Architecture; David Adjaye; and Hargreaves Associates.

The Crescent, coordinated by the public-private New Orleans Building Corporation, calls for six miles of redevelopment along the banks of the Mississippi, including a continuous linear path, iconic landmarks, mixed use development, and parks and gathering spaces.

Stretching from Jackson Avenue to the Holy Cross site near the Industrial Canal, the project takes on the river’s crescent shape. It doesn’t just revitalize the riverbanks, but it reconnects these banks to the rest of the city—a connection that has deteriorated over the years with barriers like freight train tracks and floodwalls.

The first phase of the project, the 1.3 mile-long Crescent Park, is being paid for by a
$30 million federal Community Development Block Grant. It started construction about five months ago and should be completed by 2012. Further phases should move forward when funding is secured, said Alan Eskew, principal at Eskew Dumez Ripple, who hopes that much will be ready by the city's tri-centennial in 2018. Already, said Eskew, the area is already seeing new adaptive reuse and development projects. “Once construction started, suddenly there’s a lot “of activity in those neighborhoods,” he said.

Maltzan jumped into the challenge of overcoming the infrastructural segmentation of the area by literally creating a bridge between the waterfront and the rest of the city. Maltzan’s long, serpentine Mandeville Crossing, which stretches high over the railroad and the floodwall all the way to the city’s famous French Market, is what he calls “an elongated signpost for the community,” made of a series of vertical gold-colored anodized aluminum tubes that, as you move along, create a shimmering effect of light and color.

At the end of the pedestrian bridge, the firm is leading the revitalization of the city’s historic Mandeville Wharf for events and markets, maintaining the entire steel structure with its long span steel trusses and installing a new roof with a series of skylights to inject light into the building. The firm will also install a new indoor/outdoor platform for performances, new benches, and a new wall for movie screenings, all merging with the landscape outside and becoming the center for the Crescent’s performances.

The other major element of the Crescent Park will be Piety Wharf, featuring a grassy park and Adjaye Associates’ timber pavilion, a structure—still awaiting funding—that lies flush with the water, and appears to float. Adjaye is also designing a bridge, the Piety Crossing, which spans over floodwalls and rail tracks leading to a visitor parking lot along Chartres Street.

For Maltzan, who spent a lot of time in New Orleans when he was a young architecture student, the project is a homecoming of sorts, and a chance to give back to a city that has long inspired him. “I think the park has the opportunity to be a very important step in not only moving beyond Katrina, but creating an image of what the city can be and its future.”
MAKE IT RIGHT

Brad Pitt’s Make It Right foundation has already gotten a lot of attention for building contemporary-style, highly sustainable (from solar powered to rainwater harvesting) homes in the Lower Ninth Ward—the hardest hit of all of New Orleans’ neighborhoods. So far 80 of the 150 homes have been completed, including ambitious designs by LA firms Morphosis and Pugh + Scarpa as well as others by Adjaye Associates, MVRDV, Gehry Partners, Shigeru Ban Architects, Graft, Hitoshi Abe, Kieran Timberlake, and Trahan Architects. Participant Larry Scarpa equates it to a modern-day Case Study program: “There was an idea to give people an opportunity to have a new and different way to live—to provide normal people with quality design.”

“Most visitors to the neighborhood love it, a few hate it,” said Make It Right spokesperson Taylor Royle. “But the most important thing to us is that each homeowner says that their design is the best one and can give you ten reasons why they’re right.”

PLANTERS GROVE

Planters Peanuts has launched a program in which noted landscape architect Ken Smith is designing Planters Groves in New York, San Francisco, D.C., and New Orleans. The parks—described by the company as “part urban revitalization, part art”—use locally reclaimed materials and native trees and plants to turn vacant lots into valuable urban spaces. New Orleans’ park, the first of the bunch, just opened.

New Orleans Grove appears on the site of a once trash-littered lot in the struggling Central City neighborhood. Elements of the 80 by 80 foot park include recycled concrete pavers, an open trellis wall made of recycled windows from homes destroyed in Hurricane Katrina, 16 bald cypress trees, solar-powered lights, common planting areas, and a bog garden made up of local plants. The garden’s main spaces—the bog garden, the community gathering spot, known as Legume Plaza, and the space enclosed by the trellis—are shaped in plan, not surprisingly, like peanuts.

“It’s not a playground, it’s not a community garden, and it’s not a conventional park,” said Smith. “The community can use it however they choose.”

LAFITTE GREENWAY

This project aims to turn a former railroad right of way into a public park, pedestrian, and bike path, similar to New York’s High Line. The three-mile-long Greenway would extend from Basin Street, at the back of the French Quarter, all the way to Canal Boulevard in Lakeview, near Lake Ponchartrain. While recently held up by a lack of funds, the city has gotten the project back on track thanks to an $11.6 million Community Development Block Grant. If completed it would become the city’s first continuous urban greenway.

For New Orleans, many questions remain—including how the city’s neighborhoods will—or won’t—continue to be planned and developed, an effort that will include a myriad of agencies, from the Department of Capital Projects to the Department of Public Works. But the results are vital, and there’s no doubt that the city is committed. As Gilchrist put it, “From public housing to health care to education to infrastructure planning, New Orleans’ rebuilding efforts are setting the stage for American renewal.”
Architects struggle to cope with the demands of workplace and family.

**BALANCING ACT**

Last year, LA-based CO Architects had nine babies born among their 75 employees. According to Associate Principal Frances Moore, their moms work the same amount of time as their male colleagues.

“Some of the women having babies are the most driven women we’ve ever had at the firm,” she said. According to the Family Work Institute (FWI), a non-profit center that researches the changing workplace, this is the new norm. Their 2008 “National Study of the Changing Workforce” found for the first time that men and women—with children or not—of the Millennial Generation express an equal desire to hold jobs with increased responsibility. Moore notes that CO’s new moms are married to professionals with equally demanding careers, meaning that somewhere along the line there’s less time to focus on parenting and, inevitably more tension in balancing work and life.

So with 70 percent of couples now dual earners, families are dividing responsibilities at home and at work in less traditional ways. Meanwhile small and large firms across the country and organizations like the AIA are taking steps to mitigate the issues that invariably result when parents butt up against a notoriously hard-working culture.

“You can’t both do and do a good job at either,” comments Linda Taalman of Taalman Koch Architecture of work and life responsibilities. Taalman spends most of her professional day at Woodbury School of Architecture, where she leads studios on building technology. Her husband, Alan Koch, who is also her business partner, takes the role of caregiver in the evening because it’s not unusual for her to teach until 8:00 p.m. on some nights. “But I do the mornings. At home, it’s divide and conquer. We divide our efforts to maximize our time,” she said.

For another husband-wife architecture partnership, Tim Durfee & Iris Anna Regn, an at-home studio allows them to not have to choose between their young daughter and work life—even allowing her to participate in some aspects of the design process. Yet despite these novel efforts the pressure on architects can often be too much, and firms have had to step up to help architects with families survive.

“Parents are critical to any profession or organization because they represent the mid-gap and the future leadership,” said AIA Director of Diversity and Inclusion Sherry Snipes. Through the Diversity and Inclusion program, the AIA promotes policies like medical benefits for domestic partners, paid or partially paid maternity/paternity leave, telecommuting, and flexible hours to support and retain parents. The organization also tries to set an example through its own policies, allowing its staff to work flexible hours and telecommute.

“The upside for the firm is employee engagement, which drives productivity, lack of absenteeism, staff retention and overall business success,” added Snipes.

As CO Architects in San Francisco, there is little in the way of these formal policies, but “promoting family and personal lives, makes our employees happier and more efficient—and more valuable to us,” said Principal Mark Schatz. “We like working with interesting people, and interesting people like more than just architecture.” The firm accommodates new parents by adjusting schedules to get them re-engaged. Even though project managers can be frustrated when people aren’t there full-time, Schatz added, “We always find a way to work around it.”

The firm has one program that any parent would particularly appreciate: a paid sabbatical, which is available to every associate and partner. Iris Anna Regn is optimistic, “When I first began practicing, architecture offices were run like a grad school model—everyone was single and expected to work all night. There was little talk about balancing work and life.” She continued, “But now, flexibility is more possible than ever.” The current generation of parents has made this choice consciously. They’ve become parents a little later and have decided that they want to spend time with their kids. “Because men are now also voicing concerns, it’s no longer just a women’s issue. After all, the way life outside affects design is the core of work itself,” she said.

**FEATURE**

Clockwise from top: Field Paoli sponsors employee events put on by the firm’s “Fun Committee,” a group started by architect Yann Taylor’s son, Pitt; architects Durfee and Regn’s Growth Table is designed for both kids and adults.

**New York-based Goshow Architects’ HR Manager, Joel Peterson, described his firm’s Work/Life Choices program in which most of the employees participate. Features include benefits for part-time staff working at least 30 hours per week, and creative weekly time splits: four ten-hour days (which are standard office hours during summers), and nine-hour days with a day off every other week. At its core, the program allows employees to offset choices like going to the gym or leaving early for their daughter’s soccer game by putting in the hours missed on another day. Goshow also offers job sharing where two part-time employees share the responsibilities of a single project role.**

“ar makes it easy for project teams to communicate and share information with their colleagues working from home. The firm also uses video conferencing and Webex to reduce travel demands by working remotely with clients and construction teams on site. Regn, of Tim Durfee & Iris Anna Regn, sees a shift happening within creative professions, where family is more than ever a part of the thought process. Her interest in parenting’s influence on the creative professional led her to start an initiative called Broodwork, along with artist Rebecca Niederlander, to explore the reactions of those who found an unexpected change in perspective after becoming parents. Broodwork has been presenting the work of creative parents through exhibits and events since 2009, with their latest, Broodwork: It’s About Time, to open on April 30 at OTIS College of Art and Design’s Ben Maltz Gallery in Los Angeles. Regn is optimistic, “When I first began practicing, architecture offices were run like a grad school model—everyone was single and expected to work all night. There was little talk about balancing work and life.” She continued, “But now, flexibility is more possible than ever.” The current generation of parents has made this choice consciously. They’ve become parents a little later and have decided that they want to spend time with their kids. “Because men are now also voicing concerns, it’s no longer just a women’s issue. After all, the way life outside affects design is the core of work itself,” she said.
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TUESDAY 5 LECTURE
Louise Nebesky
Pastoral Capitalism: Corporations, Suburbs, and the Metropolitan Landscape 6:00 p.m.
White Stag Block 70 NW Couch St., Portland, OR www.aaa.uoregon.edu

Michael LoGrande, Ed P. Reyes, Bill Roschen
Civic Affairs and the Culture of City Planning 6:00 p.m.
Lehrer Architects LA
2140 Hyperion Ave. Los Angeles, CA www.aiasf.org

WEDNESDAY 4 LECTURE
Neil Hovshary, David Alumbaugh, Kevin Carroll
The Future of Elemental's Wharf 12:30 p.m.
SPUR Urban Center 654 Mission St. San Francisco www.spur.org

SYMPOSIUM
2nd Annual USF Architectural Student Symposium 6:00 p.m.
Atx San Francisco 130 Sutter St. San Francisco www.usf.edu

THURSDAY 5 LECTURE
Howard Frankau, Maxine Hayes
Leaders in Liveliness 5:30 p.m.
Daniel's Recital Hall Fifth Ave. and Marion St. Seattle www.aialosangeles.org

EVENT
Frank Gehry: Building with Recyclables 1:00 p.m.
Museum of Craft and Design 201 Third St. San Francisco www.mcmd.org

SATURDAY 15 EVENT
Venice and Santa Monica: Architecture Juxtapositions 11:00 a.m.
Tour site addresses to be emailed upon RSVP Venice Beach, CA www.aiasf.org

TUESDAY 17 LECTURE
Ted Egan, Jennifer Matz
San Francisco's Economic Strategy 2:00 p.m.
SPUR Urban Center 654 Mission St. San Francisco www.spur.org

SUNDAY 2 EVENT
Artist Demonstration: Korean Furniture Making 2:00 p.m.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art 5905 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles www.lacma.org

MAY SUNDAY 1 LECTURE
John Kalki, Gerhard Mayer, Neal Poynter, Katie Spitz
City...Again...Beautiful: Creating Sustainable Cities and Communities 2:00 p.m.
Wells Fargo Theater 4700 Western Heritage Way Los Angeles www.aiaslan.org

MAY MONDAY 9 LECTURE
Kathryn L. Glasson
Digging Up Design: Discovering the Origins of Landscape Architecture 12:30 p.m.
Lawrence Hall University of Oregon 1190 Franklin Blvd. Eugene, OR www.aaa.uoregon.edu

TUESDAY 10 LECTURE
John Martinis
Sentience at the Golden Gate From the Cold War to the Cold War 7:30 p.m.
Fort Mason Conference Center Laguna St. and Marina Blvd. San Francisco www.aiasf.org

Leone Sandrock
Finding Our Way: Film as Planning Intervention 5:30 p.m.
Fort Polk State University University Place 310 SW Lincoln St. Portland, OR www.pdx.edu

WEDNESDAY 11 LECTURE
Michael Morebtt, Mike Bulher
From Carnegie to Koolhaas 3:00 p.m.
Nisei Valley Library 461 Jersey St., San Francisco www.sfl.org

SYMPOSIUM
2011 Speaker Series
Community Development
2:00 p.m.
Portland State University Urban Center 506 S.W. Mill St. Portland, OR www.pdx.edu

SYMPOSIUM
2011 Speaker Series
Civic Affairs and the Everyday 12:00 p.m.
Seasons Rotissiera & Grill 2031 Mountain Rd NW Albuquerque, NM www.aiasbq.org

CAROLYN CHEEVER
Paying For Regional Transit: Transit Sustainability Project Update 12:30 p.m.
SPUR Urban Center 654 Mission St., San Francisco www.spur.org

PHRASILA MANOHAR
International Sustainable Community Development 2011 Speaker Series 1:00 p.m.
Portland State University Urban Center 506 S.W. Mill St. Portland, OR www.pdx.edu

FRIDAY 20 LECTURE
Matthew Kohler
Closing Lecture for High Performance Craft 5:30 p.m.
Architecture Hall University of Washington NE 45th St. and 15th Ave. NE Seattle www.caup.washington.edu

SATURDAY 21 LECTURE
Jay Turner
Revisiting a Through Arts and Design 9:30 a.m.
New School of Architecture & Design 240 F St. San Diego www.friendsofadarch.com

SUNDAY 22 WITH KIDS
Furniture: Build It! 12:30 p.m.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art 5905 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles www.lacma.org

TUESDAY 24 LECTURE
Artisans and the Economy 10:00 a.m.
SPUR Urban Center 654 Mission St. San Francisco www.spur.org

SYMPOSIUM
Carnegie to Contemporary: Building San Francisco Libraries 6:00 p.m.
Koret Auditorium San Francisco Main Library 100 Larkin, San Francisco www.aiasf.org

THURSDAY 19 LECTURES
All Simon
Master and Servant: Reflections on the Heroic and the Everyday 12:00 p.m.
Seasons Rotissiera & Grill 2031 Mountain Rd NW Albuquerque, NM www.aiasbq.org

Travel, especially early in life, can have a long-lasting impact on one’s worldview. Growing up in a military family, photographer John Humble draws from his own globetrotting childhood to capture images of the everyday with fresh eyes, whether they’re of his adopted hometown of Los Angeles or a lone highway somewhere in the country’s heartland. Known for his captivating shots of LA, he decided to turn his camera on the rest of the United States. Humble’s photographs from his great American road trip evoke a nation of colors and contrasts, like the Hindi temple in Indianapolis that’s more reminiscent of a big box store than a typical house of worship, or the startling intersection of industrial and residential, as seen above in 17th St Street at Manhattan Plaza, Torrance, September 20. The show also features his images of LA’s famed Venice Beach, which capture the neighborhood’s chaotic energy and vitality and provide an interesting contrast to the sparer, and seemingly lonelier, photographs that of the “Other Places” mentioned in the show’s title.

MICHAEL C. MCMILLEN:
TRAIN OF THOUGHT
Oakland Museum of California 1000 Oak St. Oakland Through August 18

The Oakland Museum of California’s new exhibit looks at four decades of work by Michael C. McMillen, a California-based mixed-media artist. Curated by Philip Linhares, who is also a long-time collaborator of McMillen’s, the retrospective includes sculptures, tableaux, paintings, drawings, films, and large-scale installations. Found objects have long played an important part in McMillen’s work since childhood, when he began crafting toys for himself out of old radios and other discarded items. The artist’s creations often call to mind the cinematic landscapes of a Hollywood picture, somewhat appropriate given that he once worked making miniatures, like the motel model above, and props for films, including such sci-fi classics as Blade Runner and Close Encounters of the Third Kind. McMillen often uses architectural references and clever visual cues to transport viewers into an altered reality. He wants viewers to “come away from the experience seeing the world in a slightly different way,” McMillen said in an artist’s statement.

MICHAEL C. MCMILLEN:
OTHER PLACES/VENICE BEACH
Craig Krull Gallery, Bergamot Station 2525 Michigan Ave. Santa Monica Through May 7

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Obscure Objects

ParaDesign
Tobias Wong
SFMOMA
151 Third Street, San Francisco
Through June 19

Often formulaic, most museum presentations contain beautiful models, large photographs, a video interview, and occasionally ephemera from the design process. When shows have big budgets and a lot of space, like MOCA's famous History and Legacy of the Case Study Houses exhibit of 1989, you can even get a reconstructed house or two. SFMOMA's modest show ParaDesign really pushes these boundaries. This is because it's a show of the marginalized or in-between pieces of an architecture and design collection. Attention is paid to the pieces that don’t really fit. Instead of forgetting them in storage, curators Henry Urbach (who just announced his departure from the museum), Joseph Becker, and Jennifer Dunlop Fletcher decided to foreground the pieces and dub them "ParaDesign." In defining the "other," they have been relieved of the burden of a traditional presentation format. And for the most part, they have succeeded.

ParaDesign and the adjacent show on the work of the late designer Tobias Wong serve to slow us down. The two shows, which work together, allow us to explore the practical and aesthetic limits of design production. We need to think about what is happening alongside art, architecture, and design as we make it, they seem to suggest. Although it was conceived after the main attraction, the Tobias Wong exhibit feels like the catalyst for the larger show. This is appropriate given the memorial nature of this first museum presentation of Wong's work since his tragic death in 2010. More than a memorial, the curators made the architecture is eye-catching, the sculpture free. This is a lot of valuable storage. At turns, these photographs evoke a sense of nostalgic abandonment, only later to confront our gaze with the density and noise of messy, informal occupation, which is, after all, the most striking aspect of most photographs. There then is the comfortable middle ground where the program has been fulfilled...somewhat. The school is a school. The library, a library.

I Love You But You’re Bringing Me Down, the title spelled out in Morse code with wood beads. Acutely aware that Wong has recently died, the curators made the other gallery spaces somber. The bold use of color, a strategy commonly used to enliven design shows, is unnecessary here. Instead, the curators are bold in their use of space. If you are going to make an argument for bringing marginalia forward, the pieces need room to breathe. Diller + Scofidio’s witty Soft Sell, a video projection of scarlet red female lips, welcomes the visitor into the show. The walls in this first gallery are black and the objects mostly clustered in the center of the room, as if a sheet were going to be thrown over to paint the room. There are no identifying tags, a move that invites viewers to walk around the pieces and look longer.

In the larger gallery, the walls are mostly white. A line of exhibit cases marches down the center, holding an array of wonders. Diller + Scofidio’s Dispensary, from the series Vice/Virtue, is haunting. If these are their sketchbooks, it’s no wonder their buildings are getting so much media attention. A highlight is Hessomedown, which was made by Rick Sears using new modeling software and techniques exploring the terrain of architecture and material. An older piece, Passformica #1, by Ax + Curb, is a tribute to the vocabularies of modern but outdated medical equipment. Their photograph entitled Interior #1 looks familiar until one realizes that it appears to be a passage-way covered in human skin. The curators borrowed the stacked style of 19th century exhibition design to show the work of illustrators and photographers. While some distance works well enough for some paintings, it doesn’t work so well for Lebbeus Woods’ finely detailed drawings. But that is the cost of experimentation. Suspended from the ceiling is the triumph of the show, Clouds, by An Te Liu. Its sculptural air purifiers bring to mind Moshe Safdie’s Habitat ’67, except the shape is more horizontal. You can observe patrons reaching up and trying to feel the air movement as they hear the whirring fans. Perhaps the most brilliant move was to leave the walls on either side of the floating sculpture free. This is a lot of valuable real estate to give up, but it shows that this new movement is about space and sound as much as the visual. Unfortunately, the design of the exhibit’s information placards makes them confusing to use. But that’s a small price for this victory of experimentation. ParaDesign and its ancillary Tobias Wong exhibit demonstrate that you can rescue and foreground the uncharted territory with thoughtful deliberation and a few bold and insightful moves.

KENNETH COWELL IS A MARKETING CONSULTANT AND DESIGN WRITER BASED IN THE BAY AREA.

The enduring debate over the deployment of new materials in architecture—for formal experimentation, performance innovation, or both—found a contemporary angle at SCI-Arc’s Material Beyond Materials conference in late March. While the conference drew heavily on the engineer ing and fabrication industries, offering a refreshing emphasis on real-world applications and case study analyses, the form/function inquiry concluded the conference on a somewhat open-ended note.

Architecture’s anticipated adoption of high-tech composites employed in the sailing, automotive, and aeronautics industries recalls the early-20th-century incorporation of industrial steel, whose comparative strength, cost, and weight redefined the terms of architectural space. But the ability to manipulate new composites makes the current conversation about their role in architecture unique. On the one hand, most industrial composites are engineered for a very specific function—take North Sails’ 3Di, an adhesive fiber tape technology being developed for high-tech polymers like North Sails’ 3Di are commonplace in competitive sailing, but are just beginning to take hold in architecture.

When confronted with such possibilities, architects can no longer draw on historical precedent to ask, “What is it wants” to be. Traditional material and tectonic limits may eventually be supplanted by a new set of design values, completely shifting the architect’s creative decisions and responsibilities. As always, there is the risk of over-radicalizing the present, as Bill Kreysler’s (of Kreysler & Associates) slide of a primitive straw-clay wall suggested. Composites have likely been around for as long as humans have been making shelter. But the control with which we can now engineer material is revolutionary, even if that control is the result of an imperfect experiment fraught with both success and failure. The conference’s most approachable presentations conveyed the exhilaration of this risk-taking process. Wolfgang Rieder’s “fibrec” panels (glass-fiber-reinforced concrete) resulted from years of iteration and refinement, but his efforts now define the curvilinear skins of Zaha Hadid’s Zaragoza Bridge Pavilion and Boogertman & Partners Johannesburg’s 2010 World Cup Stadium. Other explorations are coming from Kreysler & Associates, whose acoustic fiberglass reinforced plastic wall panels line São Francisco’s Davies Symphony Hall designed by SOM. Similarly, 3Form’s architectural division, spearheaded in 2004 by Ruben Suare, one of the conference panelists, was instrumental in developing the translucent wood that clad Diller Scofidio + Renfro’s Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center.

Despite evidence of such advances, there was still a sense of unmet possibility for the dynamic qualities of advanced materials. Here, the discussion turned away from both form and function to address the physics of the environment and the behavior of matter. Michelle Addington, author of Smart Materials and Technologies in Architecture, encouraged further exploration of responsive compositions such as electrochromic glass, which changes opacity with the application of voltage. In a similar vein, Achim Menges’ research addressed how wood’s natural reaction to changes in humidity can be exploited to create an animated skin. High-speed video footage of his delicate wood screens makes them appear to breathe.

The conference’s concluding remarks, by Marcelo Spina, EvanDougis, Greg Lynn, Michelle Addington, and Achim Menges, rearticulated the central concern: to what end should architecture pursue new materials, and how and when will they become a larger part of practice? Most panelists seemed to agree that their application for form-making alone was superficial at worst, and efficient at best. There was disagreement, however, about the value of research efforts focused on existing materials like wood, compared to the benefit of innovating new materials from scratch. Although such skepticism bolstered the future-thinking fervor, it also belied an assumed tension between tradition and novelty, and discounted the possibility that research and control at the molecular scale may reveal unforeseen performance potentials of any material, “natural” or manufactured. Despite its diverse perspectives, the conference drew to a close with general agreement on several issues that will continue to arise as new materials develop, such as the need for software that better embeds material properties and fabrication workflow within the design process, and the need to diminish the distance between the architectural profession and the fabrication and manufacturing industries.

Panelists also acknowledged that while small-scale experimentation on new materials and fabrication techniques exists, in order for these innovations to find a use within a larger architectural context they must become culturally relevant beyond their ability to allow architects to, as Greg Lynn said, “realize their renderings.”
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CICLAVIA FOUNDER SPEAKS ABOUT PROJECT'S SUCCESS, EXPANSION, AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

RIDE ON, LA

Los Angeles embraced its first “CicLAvia” last October when an estimated 100,000 bicyclists, walkers, skateboarders, and rollerbladers took over a 7.5 mile no-auto route from East Hollywood to Boyle Heights. The concept of closing city streets to car traffic for an informal (non-racing) event on Sundays was adopted from Latin American cities. And its LA success was good news for Aaron Paley, the event’s producer and one of its founders.

The president of the organization Community Arts Resources, Paley is now preparing the expansion of CicLAvia to three Sundays in 2011. The group started on April 10 (with double the crowds of their previous event) and will host future events on July 10 and Oct. 9. It is an expensive and complicated affair, involving money and cooperation from the city bureaucracy, local businesses, charitable corporations and foundations. Paley, 53 and a Los Feliz area resident, says he hopes to schedule the event six times in 2011 and monthly by 2013. At his office in the Art Deco landmark Pellissier Building on Wilshire Boulevard, Paley recently discussed CicLAvia with writer L. J. Gordon.

Do you think Los Angeles is more or less receptive to something like this than more pedestrian-oriented cities like San Francisco or New York?

More receptive. And the reason I say more receptive is because it’s different. I mean we don’t have parades on Fifth Avenue every weekend. We don’t have these regular things that move throughout our streets and engage people in this way. I think LA is actually hungry for this.

Why not make this every Sunday? Or are there too many obstacles to that?

There are huge obstacles. Once a month is already daunting. I believe it’s definitely doable but this project is only sustainable if it’s a public-private partnership, something along the lines of the Olympics in 1984. There also are some cultural issues with liability, which are very different than in South America. In South America, if your driveway is blocked, you can call a volunteer from the organizing company (to guide it out). It is no big deal. But that is absolutely taboo here. We cannot have vehicles in the road once we declare it open for CicLAvia.

And doing it every week here is too much to ask of the people along the route—that every Sunday they would have the same inconvenience.

I see the route is the same for April 10 as it was last year. What about extending it?

We are hoping by October we will be able to add an additional spur. Either we will be able to go south to the Exposition Park area or further into Boyle Heights. And we are looking to go through Chinatown to the L.A. River.

Are you doing anything different now?

One of the major things is to get the message across that it is more than just a bike event. So we are encouraging people to come out on foot, in wheelchairs, on skateboards, and roller skates, or just to hang out and realize you don’t have to be on a bike.

Another difference is that we are looking at how we can encourage more opportunities for businesses along the way. In Little Tokyo, we are hoping to have a bike valet and coupon program. So you park your bike, and it would be free to park if you go to a local restaurant or store and get validated, and you could get a coupon that also will give you a discount.

And we are asking the community to bring their creativity out and do things on the route. Last time we had yoga classes, dodge ball games, and a marching band. About 50 things were happening. That’s what I want to expand. I want the creativity of the city to be on display. This is kind of like the Burning Man idea. Come out and do it yourself.

Last year seemed dominated by bikes and seemed almost dangerous for walkers. Have you considered separate lanes for pedestrians?

We don’t want to do that. In these other cities, it works [without separate lanes]. And we’re just starting here. We came out with our first event and the bike community really got the message to come, bless their souls. We want them to come again. We also want everyone else to come. And what we need to get across to everyone on bikes is to respect the pedestrian as well. It could be better. We are working on the rules of the road and trying to get that message out.

How do you want people to interact with the city?

We look at this as molding and shaping public space through this temporary intervention. We’re hoping this is the kind of thing that reshapes the way people perceive their city, which will change the way they use their city and change their expectations for the city. We think this can have as big an impact as building a park. We are adding this whole element of new public space, which can be done efficiently and sustainably and cheaply without actually building something.

And what about people just observing or going into areas where they’ve never been before?

The thing that people said to us was: “Oh my God, I didn’t realize how small L.A. is. I didn’t realize I could get from here to Boyle Heights in ten minutes.” The feeling was that L.A. is much more intimate, and who knew how beautiful it is? There is a right to be able to look at your city and own your city when people are not in their cars.

Was there an area on the route that was most surprising or attractive to you last year?

Of course, being able to ride over the (Fourth Street) bridge is spectacular. But actually I think the New Hampshire Avenue part between Melrose and Third Street was an eye-opener for me and a lot of other people. It was so beautiful in that neighborhood. The urban fabric is intact, with the pattern of the buildings, the setbacks for the duplexes and triplexes, and all the palm trees. It is so stately and graceful.

Do you think your event has any impact on getting permanent physical change to the city, especially for bike riders?

I think it does. First by way of example, it opens up people’s eyes to possibilities that they didn’t think were imaginable. People ride on Seventh Street and wonder why it isn’t a major east-west route for bicycles all the time. The concept doesn’t seem so foreign or off the charts. If you do create something like this on a regular basis, it changes the landscape and some infrastructure can follow.

What about any effect on implementing the city’s new bicycle plan for extensive bike routes and better safety?

I think this is definitely giving that a boost. You can clearly see that bike culture has exploded in L.A. in the past five years. All these people are proud of their bikes and what they’ve done to them. The sense of who we are as Angelenos is being translated into the bike culture. And when you give them CicLAvia, they ask: why isn’t it like this the rest of the time? It creates a lot more momentum for making separate bike lanes and taking the next steps. I do think it will have a long-term impact.

L.J. Gordon is a Los Angeles-based writer.
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