Norman Foster’s mottled blue tube tower, part of Las Vegas’ $9 billion star-studded CityCenter project developed by MGM Resorts International and Dubai World, will never join the ranks of glittering hot-spots on the Strip. Citing the potential for structural collapse, the Harmon hotel is now slated for demolition pending the settlement of a lawsuit claiming design flaws.

The Harmon was to anchor a prominent corner, adjacent to The Crystals, a massive 500,000-square-foot retail and entertainment mall by Daniel Libeskind and Rockwell Group. Following structural problems with rebar installation on floors six through 20 and a resulting lawsuit, the Harmon Building was first cut in half—from 49 to 27 floors—and now owner MGM has submitted an engineer’s report that finds the building could fail in a strong earthquake.

After discovering deficient steel reinforcing in early 2009, MGM left the shortened tower an unfinished shell but is now moving to implode the structure, citing safety concerns. Alan Feldman, senior vice president of public affairs at MGM, said the company had submitted an engineering recommendation and demolition action plan to Clark County, Nevada detailing the structural shortcomings of the Harmon. “The city asked us to respond to the engineer’s report to determine the best way forward,” said Feldman. “We decided the best move is to take the building down.” Feldman continued on page 5

Controversy is swirling around the fate of a 1960 library building designed by Edward Fickett and located in the new West Hollywood Park. The current flap started in June when Joyce Fickett, the architect’s widow, started receiving calls with the news that the building was slated for demolition.

“The city tried to sneak it in quickly and quietly, and they continued on page 7

Are you ready for some football? California sure is. Despite their beleagured economic conditions, cities across the Golden State are now angling to get in on what has become one of the greatest stadium scrambles in its history. Los Angeles, City of Industry, San Diego, Santa Clara, San Francisco, and Oakland are all vying to build new facilities in the hopes of luring either the Chargers, the Raiders or another team altogether. And architects are more than happy to help, proposing designs intended to make the facilities more appealing to teams, cities, and residents through better game experiences, greater flexibility, continued on page 9

Rendering of Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive. The schematic design for the new Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive by New York based architects Diller Scofidio+Renfro (DS+R) was unveiled at a community open house on September 14. continued on page 4

CITIES ACROSS CALIFORNIA CHASE FOOTBALL STADIUMS

PLAY BALL

Bad Hand

Norman Foster’s mottled blue tube tower, part of Las Vegas’ $9 billion star-studded CityCenter project developed by MGM

Mgm Pushes to Raze Foster’s Vegas Tower

Outcry over Fickett Library

WeHo No

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On September 9 the California state senate passed SB392, a bill that if signed by Governor Brown will speed up the environmental review process for Farmers Field, the new football stadium proposed for Downtown Los Angeles designed by Gensler for AEC. The bill would allow legal challenges to the stadium’s Environmental Impact Report to be heard immediately in the California Court of Appeal, which would then have to make a decision within 175 days. That’s much quicker than the normal California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, often held up by court scheduling, lawyer-engineered delays, further litigation and so on.

Of course, LA hasn’t nailed down a football team yet, so it could all be moot. But while this bill has hogged the attention, a similar bill, AB900—inspired by SB392 since other stadium projects want the same kind of fast track—has also been passed by the legislature that could have more far reaching effects. AB900 allows for a streamlined environmental review for qualifying projects, that is those over $100 million that meet several green building standards and labor restrictions and that are approved both by the Governor and a joint budget committee.

This new bill, contingent on the passage of SB392 by the Governor, would be a godsend for architecture. As the AIA/LA put it in a recent statement, many of CEQA’s environmental regulations do more harm than good. They often allow opponents to hold up a project for months and even years, with no regard to the environment at all. According to AIA California Council’s Director of Legislative Affairs Mark Christian, “CEQA can be used to dump thousands of pages of documents on a project to hold up the process.”

One of the biggest champions of CEQA reform was late West Hollywood Urban Designer John Chase, who grimaced at the very mention of CEQA. And he had a point. What good are environmental guidelines if they are hijacked in the name of other agendas? Streamlining CEQA would return it to the rightful realm of the environment rather than of politics and development, incentivizing sustainable land use, and helping to realize—rather than hampering—the goals of laws such as SB375 (California’s Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act) and AB112 (California’s Global Warming Solutions Act).

Of course, like everything in government, the bill isn’t perfect. One complaint from the AIA California Council is that it holds projects to a LEED Silver standard. This isn’t because the group doesn’t favor environmental regulations, but rather because LEED ratings aren’t given out until after a building is completed and when it is too late for improvement. The AIA also complains that LEED is a standard that has been adopted outside of the California public process.

Still, there’s no reason not to streamline CEQA. Developed with the best of intentions, it has become outdated and easily manipulated by the wrong players. A similar California staple that needs to be reformed is the ultimate third rail of local politics: Prop 13, the 1970’s era legislation severely limiting property tax increases on homes and businesses. The legislation made sense when it was first enacted, but now, when state and city funds are woefully short and governments are enacting massive cuts, that money would be a blessing. Prop 13 needs to be rethought.

L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has proposed reforming the collection of taxes from commercial properties (but not homeowners) and this is a start. He has said that decreasing Prop 13’s protections for commercial property owners could yield anywhere from $2.1 billion and $8 billion in new revenue for the state that could go towards the kind of infrastructure improvements so desperately needed.

Of course, apart from reforms, environmental regulations still need to be enforced and property owners can’t see ridiculous tax increases. In this troubling time, no chance to spur our economy and save our government should be kept off the table. Legislation is developed with good intentions in mind, but whenever it falls short of serving its public purpose, it needs to be adapted and reformed according to the needs of now.

SAM LUBELL
Computer nerds, it's time to get excited. Finally the Computer History Museum—long an institution without a home—has opened a permanent building that once belonged to tech giant Silicon Graphics in Mountain View, to be completed by next summer.

And this is just the beginning: Horton is planning a square-foot addition to the building that once belonged to tech giant Silicon Graphics in Mountain View, to be completed by next summer. In addition, to be completed by next summer.

It's being designed by Van Sickle & Rolleri. In fact the pattern on the walls actually spells out the museum's mission statement from a computer punch card. Exposed steel bracing provides a structural feel to the museum and contains the flashy and colorful exhibits designed by Van Sickle & Rolleri. And this is just the beginning: Horton is planning a 10,000-square-foot addition, to be completed by next summer.

Behind Banham

In last issue's Eavesdrop we noted that world famous LA architectural writer Reyner Banham (Architecture of Four Ecologies), who died back in 1988, now has a Facebook page with over 600 friends, many of whom are convinced he's still around. Well we've discovered who's behind the fake page. Architect Parsa Khalili tells us he started it for an assignment in a seminar course at Yale School of Architecture in 2008. The assignment was to use social media to recreate a dialogue about architecture and design between Banham and Ernesto Rogers. Khalili says he forgot about the account until one day he signed in and saw 30 people waiting to be his friend. Since then Banham has accrued friends from around the world, sending him birthday wishes and thank him for the great honor of friending them. "Honestly I have no idea why I even bother but it has become such an absurdity it's hard to totally let go," explained Khalili.

Home Frontal

After almost five years inside a Silver Lake home, AV West Coast finally has a proper office, and it's in a fantastic location: LA's American Cement Building, next to MacArthur Park, just west of downtown. The unique building, covered by a grid of giant x-shaped concrete components, was designed by DMJM in 1960, and has become a magnet for architects. Among the offices hunkering down here are Coop Himmelblau, DMJM, Eames Office, and Kelly Architects, Lee & Munwiler Architects, Platform for Architecture + Research (PAR), WROAD, FreelandBuck, Volkan Alkanoglu, Studio Bonner, and Synthesis Design + Architecture. And architects aren't the only ones drawn to the building. According to a friend in the film business, the structure has also drawn porn productions, perhaps attracted to the unique backdrop created by the building's facade. We are, of course, still investigating.

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SEND ZOMBIE THEORISTS AND AERON CHAIRS TO EAVESDROP@ARCHPAPER.COM
What's Up With Watts

BAD HAND continued from front page

The Watts Towers have always been an icon of Los Angeles, or, as LA Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) Executive Director Olga Garay says, “a beacon to the power of the individual.” Created over three decades—from 1921 and 1964—this National Register Historic Listed landmark created by self-taught artist Simon Rodia may soon have a few new neighbors in its shadow. They include a new skate park, a spruced-up train station, a theater, a shopping center, and a new series of walking paths, helping to turn the neighborhood surrounding the towers into a real destination after years of neglect.

In July DCA announced it would receive a $250,000 Our Town grant, the largest amount available, from the National Endowment for the Arts to design the Watts Historic Train Station Visitors Center and Artist Pathways. DCA partnered with the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which is already providing initial studies toward conservation efforts for the Towers, and it has reached out to several organizations in the area to find partners to cover the costs.

The Visitor’s Center would convert a 1904 late Victorian single-story wood-frame train station (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) into a LEED-certified exhibition space celebrating the Watts Community. No architect has been named yet. The Pathways would consist of an approximately two-mile “green” walkway designed by Katherine Spitz Associates Landscape Architecture, which will connect the Visitor’s Center to the Towers, will run through the heart of the neighborhood, and will wind through green spaces and other landmarks, creating a walking environment in Watts, while the Los Angeles Harbor-Watts Economic Development Corporation has $400,000 that it received from the state’s River and Mountains Conservancy.

More funding could come from the LA Department of City Planning’s Project Renew. Meanwhile WLCAC and DCA will be competing for community attention with the LA Recreation and Parks Department who are considering a $250,000 skate park right across from the Watts Towers. The facility, likely to be designed by a company called California Skateparks, has both received applause and raised concern in the community. Watts Towers lovers fear the repercussions in the relatively tourist-friendly area, while many younger residents are looking forward to a safe, public space where they can play.

“We’re sort of in a holding pattern,” said Miki Vuckovich, Executive Director of the Tony Hawk Foundation. The foundation contributed $80,000 and received a grant from the Annenberg Foundation for $275,000 toward the design and construction of the park, which LA City Council placed solely under the jurisdiction of parks on June 17.

Vuckovich said that the skate park will be built in a plaza style unlike traditional skating bowls. “It’s all at grade or above and low profile. It can be used for public events, festivals and that kind of thing,” he said. There are likely to be many more conversations before any plans for the skate park moves forward. The Tony Hawk Foundation, however, remains hopeful. “We’re committed to bringing the kids at Watts a great skate park that I benefit them greatly. Hopefully, that happens much sooner than later.”

CARREN JAO

A historic, iconic landmark

DCA's project for Watts

HISTORIC WATTS TOWERS MAY GET A FEW NEW NEIGHBORS

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CARREN JAO
It’s been almost six years since the Orange County Great Park—1,360 acres of recreation area built on the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Irvine that’s almost twice the size of New York’s Central Park—was first awarded to New York landscape architect Ken Smith. But until recently, the most notable element was a giant orange balloon floating over a former runway. While impressive and popular (over 100,000 visitors have taken a ride), a balloon hardly made the place worth visiting.

Finally, it is starting to look like the park it is supposed to be. New additions completed over the summer have more than doubled its completed space. The first was the Palm Court, a 7.5-acre courtyard, lined with 54 palm trees shaded by white steel awning structures ringing the perimeter, and containing an art gallery and artist-in-residence spaces located in former 1940’s Marine administration buildings.

The second, the North Lawn, is an 18.5-acre space dominated by manicured grass planes that can be used for soccer, picnics, and concerts. The lawn includes undulating bioswales full of native plants, helping filter and drain water. Meandering walking and biking paths lace the edges. Once adjacent soccer fields are completed next year, the $65.5 million first phase of the park’s “Western Sector” will be complete. Other first phase elements include a carousel, a preview park, a 150-acre farm and food lab, a play area, a former hangar used for cultural events, and a farmers market to sell produce grown on site.

The park is being built by the Great Park Corporation, a non-profit formed by the City of Irvine after developer Lennar contributed the land in exchange for the rights to develop about 3,500 acres of adjacent property. When the entire park is done, and much of it is still contingent on financing, it will include a 165-acre sports park; a two-mile long and 60-foot-deep canyon; a cultural terrace containing several museums and performing arts spaces; and a wildlife corridor.

While local attention has focused on the park’s slow progress—a function of a moribund economy and overeager projections—the park is unquestionably shaping up into a real attraction. There are serious obstacles ahead, nevertheless. For one, the hundreds of trees that are being planted still don’t provide enough shade, nor do they succeed at breaking up the monotony of so much flat land. The park is a vast plane, which is its real challenge. Smith has tried to combat it with as much variety as possible, but the parade-ground aesthetic still dominates, and the more shapely elements are the ones that will be implemented far off in the future.

In the meantime, Smith is creating what he calls a “contemporary mosaic” of plantings, which he often arranges in a pixelated pattern, staggering them for maximum effect. Each zone of the park, meanwhile, is separated by a barrier, such as the wooden bridges that ring the great lawn. Other elements that break up the visual tedium include elegant wood tables and benches, several walking paths, roadside edges, including one formed from an old runway’s concrete, and in particular the graphically-rich signs created by LA artist April Greiman.

For the New York designer, getting people into the park and out of their cars is another challenge. “People are willing to walk further than they think they will,” said Smith, who shows his East Coast bias when deconstructing the habits of Orange County residents. Still he’s listening to them. One way is through the Preview Park—an area with prototypes demonstrating proposed designs—where he has received feedback to change quite a bit already, including scrapping the use of scaffolding for shade, employing “slicker” finishes, and adding more shade structures and trees.

“People aren’t shy,” summed up Smith. Nor can they afford to be. Unless the Great Park Corporation is able to secure more funding, the next phases of this great experiment, which are expected to take as long as 15 to 20 years to complete, will be flat for the foreseeable future.
The Santa Barbara Center for Art, Science and Technology (SBCAST), when it opens in 2012, will include photovoltaics, passive solar water heating, and rainwater capture. “Its rough, incomplete appearance is by design, allowing the space to be adapted according to its needs,” said Macy. The project will break ground early next year and be completed by the end of 2012. SBCAST, a privately funded, non-profit organization, is the brainchild of Alan and Cindy Macy of Macy Cornerstone, a non-profit developer that specializes in supporting the arts. The center will also include educational and outreach programs and have a close relationship with the University of California Santa Barbara, City College, and local high schools.

VERONICA ALIF

The new WeHo Library

Edward Fickett was a prolific designer in the 1950s and 60s whose imprint can be seen in the city’s wealthiest neighborhoods and in public spaces like the Port of Los Angeles, as well as all over the San Fernando Valley, where he pioneered low-cost housing concepts.

Until recently, Joyce Fickett had been told by the city that the library was safe because of a 2003 amendment (classified as an “Errata”) to the master plan for the city’s new library and park that stated: “Delete reference to demolition of the existing Edward Fickett Library as part of this project.” Steve Ward, a member of the volunteer Los Angeles Conservancy Modern Committee, helped Fickett wade through thousands of pages of city and county planning documents to help reconstruct what exactly later transpired and to determine if plans for demolition were legal under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Ward, who is considering a lawsuit against the city, has started a “Save West Hollywood Library” Facebook page and rallied nearly 60 people to attend a recent city council meeting. He asserts that the community did not have sufficient time or notice to participate in public comments. “The city is being stupid and short-sighted,” said Ward.

“This library has won awards and its architect is known world-wide.” According to West Hollywood city attorney Michael Jenkins contends that the old library, about to be replaced by an adjacent new building designed by Johnson Favaro, was evaluated in a historical analysis for the new park Master Plan. That analysis concluded the library was not significant enough to avoid demolition and that consequently the 2003 Errata was no longer applicable. He also stated there was a CEQA-required notice for public comment and there was ample opportunity for anyone to protest the finding. “It is our position that this is over,” Jenkins said. “The decision was made in 2004 and we intend to go forward with our demolition plans.”

John English, an architectural historian hired to evaluate Fickett’s work in 2004 for the city confirmed the report’s findings, but he also stated his analysis focused mostly on the architect’s multi-family work in the area. “There is no question that Fickett is a terribly important architect and much of his best work is in the City of West Hollywood,” English said.

Other observers acknowledge that since 2004 appreciation for architecture from Fickett’s era has grown significantly. “This is a great little gem of a building,” said the Los Angeles Conservancy’s Adrian Scott Fine. “If a historical analysis were done today, it might have a completely different outcome.”

This current case of he-said, she-said is sure to cause more acrimony. The new library is slated to open in October, so the fate of Fickett’s original structure will soon be determined. Mina Chow, an architect and professor at the USC School of Architecture (which houses Fickett’s archive), said the bigger issue is one of sustainability and community. “Clearly a lot of people care about this library, and it’s sad that no studies of any kind have been conducted for adaptive re-use of this exquisite little building,” she said. “I just hope we will learn to value our resources and not destroy our assets before it’s too late.”

STACIE STUKIN
The Oz house is the latest in a series of crisp, clean-lined modern residences that Robert Swatt has designed around the Bay Area since he established his office in Emeryville in 1975. Two years ago he merged with George Miers, a like-minded contemporary, and their 20-member firm has remained busy through the recession. San Francisco is still a bastion of tradition, but the affluent region that surrounds it is more progressive.

"A lot of our clients have taken risks in business and they are not afraid of trying new things," said Swatt. "Building Grandma’s house is not the way they want to go."

A young couple with three children found a 2.8-acre site in Silicon Valley and commissioned the architects to replace an unsightly old house with an expansive dwelling where they could walk around barefoot and commune with nature. He moved to the U.S. from South Africa; she grew up in a New York brownstone, and they shared a Mediterranean-style house in Palo Alto before deciding to break loose. Swatt, meanwhile, was inspired by memories of an old hotel in Maui with a lofty, open-sided lobby, and the central feature of the Oz house is a double-height great room that is fully glazed at the entry level and clad in Honduran mahogany boards at the upper level. You enter under a low wood canopy and then, as in Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses, emerge into a soaring sky-lit space and take a few steps down into the living area. A wood soffit is suspended over the dining area to give it a feeling of intimacy; the space above is a children’s playroom.

The great room links a pair of two-story white stucco wings, one of which is set at an angle to define an L-shaped plan. Radiant-heated epoxy terrazzo floors flow out into the kitchen-family area at one end and into a media room and guest room at the other. Stairs lead up to the master suite and the children’s bedrooms, which are linked by a steel-framed glass bridge that overlooks the living area.

The clarity of the geometry and the abundance of natural light make the house an ideal foil to the landscape and to the giant oak that shades it. Cross ventilation provides sufficient cooling on all but the hottest days, while white roofs, photovoltaic panels, well-insulated walls, and double glazing minimize energy consumption.

Swatt is a protégé of Ray Kappe—they are both Berkeley alumni and were shaped by the woody tradition of Bay Area modernism before moving off in a different direction. The consistency in Swatt’s residential designs is founded on a few timeless principles, which he defines as: knitting the building to the land; open planning (both vertically and horizontally); and connecting inside and outside (both visually and physically). The Oz house has far exceeded its owners’ expectations and may encourage admiring friends to be more adventurous. What a contrast with many upscale communities of Southern California, where houses are valued for their excessive size and are forced into a straitjacket of stylistic conformity.

**MICHAEL WEBB**

Clockwise from top left: A wood-clad entry pavilion connects two wings; the living room; the second-floor glass bridge and skylight; the entrance. Below from left: Profile of the bridge; master bath; a small pool at the entry; living and dining open to the outdoors.

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**MICHAEL WEBB**
for communities,” noted Metcalf. “We need stadiums are a net positive or negative “The jury is still out on whether football Planning and Urban Research (SPUR).

Metcalf, Executive Director of San Francisco mass in a sea of parking, pointed out Gabriel type that is still notorious for being a hulking with urban centers, among other things.

such innovations are vital for a building building up to the neighborhood and sidewalls with glass corner atriums and additional openings, and making the building “as transparent as possible and not heavy.” Gehl will coordinate with Danish firm Gehl Architects and local firm Melendez Design Partners, who are overseeing a redesign of the Figueroa corridor streetscape for AEG. Neighborhood connections are being stressed by most of the state’s would-be stadium designers and their clients. While LA’s biggest competitor for the Chargers, San Diego, doesn’t have a new stadium design yet, Mayor Jerry Sanders recently undertook a three-city stadium tour, traveling to Kansas City, Indianapolis, and Denver to get ideas from the Sprint Center, Lucas Oil Stadium, and Sports Authority Field, all known for enlivening their surroundings.

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As building owners and developers request a return on investment within three years of purchasing an energy efficient HVAC system, LG has developed a cost-effective Multi-V system suitable to a range of facilities. According to the company’s research, the Multi-V Synch II, designed for applications at hotels, high-rise residences, and multiple tenant shopping centers, can reduce the annual HVAC operating expense for commercial buildings to an average of $0.84 per square foot.

www.lg.com

Lutron’s GRAFIK Eye QS Wireless is a customizable way to control electric light and daylight from one simple keypad, allowing users to save energy while meeting the functional requirements of commercial or residential spaces. By using the GRAFIK Eye QS Design Tool, designers can select the desired number of light zones and shade groups, and even keypad color and engravings, on the Lutron web site. The GRAFIK Eye QS PC Programming Tool allows the entire system to be configured via PC desktop.

www.lutron.com

Schindler Elevator Corporation’s new Personal Occupant Requirement Terminal (PORT) can ensure that elevator passengers move through a building in the most efficient way possible. The system incorporates an Energy Control Option (ECO) mode, which defines the average acceptable elevator waiting time for a building, placing unnecessary elevators on standby or sleep mode and saving energy throughout the day. PORT is compatible with new or existing elevator systems from any manufacturer.

www.us.schindler.com

Developed by design, planning, and engineering firm Arup, the MassMotion pedestrian and crowd analysis tool is now available to the public via software maker Oasys Limited. The software predicts the movement of up to hundreds of thousands of pedestrians, each with individual personalities and unique agendas based on detailed human behavior research. MassMotion can simulate a range of situations, including multi-floor, station, special event, and evacuation scenarios, ultimately saving time and money during the design and construction process.

www.oasys-software.com

While typical water management designs discharge water from the site or store it in an open reservoir, taking up valuable space, Firestone’s Environmental Passive Integrated Chamber (EPIC) is an onsite water management and reuse system designed to collect, filter, retain, and distribute water below ground. Depending on its location and application, the customizable system minimizes the amount of pollutants that enter groundwater and can irrigate a site using 50 to 85 percent less potable water than traditional systems.

www.firestonesp.com

IES VE (Virtual Environment) software is designed to predict the future energy use and sustainability of a broad range of building models. When used early in the design process, the software allows for corrections like building orientation to wind direction and placement of glazing. Tools like the Carbon Assessor can be applied to a group of buildings and managed by several users via the web, allowing building owners to comply with carbon reduction plans over the course of several years.

www.iesve.com

www.iesve.com
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As building technology races ahead, science propels it to help meet new and ever-changing standards. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the breakneck tempo of progress was fueled largely by physics and chemistry, delivering a host of tools to the architect, from reinforced concrete and steel frame construction to PVC and low-emissivity glass. Today, it’s biology, as promising technologies are emerging from nature and involve stepping beyond mimicry to literally harnessing living organisms and systems to build ecologically. Le Corbusier’s steel and glass “machine for living in” may soon give way to a “living machine” or, as Salvador Dalí wrote of the future of architecture in 1933, “It will be soft and hairy.”

The increased urgency to lower the negative environmental impact of architecture is difficult to overstate. The life cycle of buildings is responsible for roughly half of CO₂ emissions worldwide, a proportion that grows as urbanization intensifies, with the majority of the world living in cities since 2008. The resulting natural resource scarcity, pollution, and decreasing biodiversity threaten both social stability and long-term environmental health. In short, current practices pose tremendous risks for the future, and approaches once thought impractical or radical may need to invent a new one to communicate.

One recent project that creatively and presciently addresses these issues is the footbridge at Lake Constance near the University of Stuttgart in Germany. This design incorporates engineering with living plants to integrate architecture with its immediate environment. The designers Ferdinand Ludwig, Oliver Storz and Hannes Schwentfeger call this approach Baubotanik, which they developed as part of their PhD research at the Institute of Modern Architektur und Design IGMGA at the University of Stuttgart. The bridge blends research and application and takes a critical stance: by embracing what the architects call an “aesthetic of uncertainty” in its use of continually changing, living materials, Baubotanik is meant to undermine the implicit claims of traditional architecture to be stable, permanent, and self-sufficient.

Baubotanik utilizes trees as load-bearing systems and harnesses what the designers call their “constructive intelligence,” as branches naturally strengthen in response to stress or increased loads. At the same time, the practice exposes...
structures built with trees can be several species. In effect, the creation of habitats for trees, such as soil quality, and healthy conditions for the structure’s owner to maintain benefits: an incentive for the long-term environmental and requires 100 small trees. 90-square-foot footprint 30 feet in height with a test structure is a slim tower limited weight. The tallest useful, and plants support almost a year old to be with plants needing to be constructed from thickly planted willow, a tree with uniquely aggressive, strong and deep roots, known for piercing drain pipes ten or more feet underground. Robust like a tremendous weed, willows grow rapidly, can be readily bred from small cuttings and can be grown crosswise to form a stable meshwork.

The architects believe that this process, by forcing the builder to navigate the conflicts and lack of control inherent in the materials, creates a form of architecture characterized by serendipity, learning and risk (a fungal disease can kill several trees in nature). Baubotanik test structures have been completed in Germany to date, and the technique, which involves a complex procedure of grafting and stressing trees to bend and strengthen them, is now a focus of study at the University of Stuttgart. The approach is also being considered by the non-profit LiloRann as a means to build green walls to halt desertification in North Gujarat, India. A similar but potentially more far-reaching development is the creation of self-healing BioConcrete, which is essentially traditional concrete infused with specialized bacteria and nutrients. The material’s “infection” is harmless to humans and has the effect of filling eventual cracks in the concrete through a natural process called biomineralization. The bacteria secrete limestone that effectively fills any fissure that appears from normal wear and tear. After proving the concept many times in the laboratory, Henk Jonkers of the University of Technology at Delft, The Netherlands, is now focused on testing to find precise conditions under which this new technology can be reliably and safely applied. Jonkers’ objective is “to use bio-based materials and processes for civil engineering practices in order to reduce environmental pressure, acknowledging that in nature no waste is produced as everything is continuously recycled.” The positive impact of BioConcrete is potentially vast, as it can lengthen the lifespan of concrete while lowering the cost of its maintenance. In fact, a full five percent of human-made carbon emissions arise from the energy-intensive process of making billions of tons of concrete every year, so any marginal improvement in its performance can yield far-reaching effects. If widely applied, BioConcrete may become the 21st century analogy to re-enforced concrete, designed for better ecological performance in the long term by integrating a symbiotic and invisible living process into architecture.

A third project that integrates living systems is HOK/Vanderwell’s visionary Process Zero proposal, a retrofit solution for a hulking, 1960’s era General Services Administration (GSA) building in downtown Los Angeles. The proposal won Metropolis magazine’s Next Generation Design Competition in 2010, which called for a zero-footprint retrofit. The design reduces the structure’s overall energy demand by 84% while generating the remaining 16% on-site with natural algae and photovoltaic film. The principle strategy guiding HOK’s team, led by Sean Quinn, was to consider the “building as a cell” interdependent with its environment. From this point of view the team aimed to choreograph natural systems with mechanical processes to achieve its goals.
We explored the inherent abilities of algae to purify air and water, and then investigated the means to harness energy from it,” explains Quinn. This is achieved through bioreactors that convert oils from algae into energy, a technology already in use on several university campuses. The system would cover 25,000 square feet of the building’s envelope with a network of tubing, capturing sunlight and naturally absorbing CO2 from the air. Coupled with this system, more than 60,000 square feet of photo-voltaic film would cover parts of the roof and facade for both shading and energy collection.

To develop this unique bio-integrated solution, Quinn and his team consulted with biologist Thomas Nassif to understand the potential of growing algae as they envisioned, and architecture and engineering professor Soolyeon Cho to calculate potential energy generation. Quinn notes: “These interactions might have been unusual a few years ago, but it’s more common now and absolutely essential to engage outside experts to develop environmental solutions. Their role, as it expands in the coming years, will be invaluable.”

To facilitate cross-pollination among disciplines, the Synthetic Aesthetics project was launched this year by the University of Edinburgh and Stanford University with funding from the National Science Foundation. It formed six scientist-designer teams from around the world to “help with the work of designing, understanding and building the living world.” Each team is developing a research goal based on shared interests and points of connection between issues in participants’ respective fields. In one example, the architect and Columbia University professor David Benjamin and postdoctoral researcher Fernan Federici
from the University of Cambridge are exploring how to use biological systems as design tools that might augment or replace conventional methods. Specifically, they are investigating ways to fabricate synthetic composites by creating novel morphogenetic mechanisms in bacteria and plants, a process that contrasts with digital fabrication and CNC machines with fixed and predetermined physical outputs. The Synthetic Aesthetics project takes the position that synthetic biology will inevitably be critically important to numerous disciplines—from art to urban planning, and that cooperation among fields of study at this early stage is essential to enable the very best inclusive and responsive technology development.

Pioneering in this new space is the Brooklyn-based One Lab, recently launched by New York University professor and urban planner Mitchell Joachim. The two-week program offers instruction to students, architects, biologists, urbanists, and artists interested in collaborating across disciplines. Activities focus on harnessing living matter for design and range from instruction in synthetic biology and the basics of genetic engineering, to computation and parametric design. The program’s goal is to encourage, cultivate, and achieve synergies that would otherwise be missed because practitioners and educators are often siloed in their particular areas of expertise. Joachim’s firm Terreform1 recently won a Victor Papanek Social Design Award sponsored by the Museum of Arts and Design and the University of Applied Arts in Vienna for their Urbaneering Brooklyn proposal, which imagines Downtown Brooklyn 100 years in the future as a integrated organism.

Taken together, these design experiments and collaborations anticipate exciting developments in architectural education, such as integrating curricula with basic biology courses and lab work. The new crop of architects may need to know their way around a microscope if they mean to create a next generation of responsive building materials or to find optimal methods for integrating built and natural environments. And they’ll need to adopt a new aesthetic outlook by relinquishing the control traditionally so fundamental to the practice and by integrating the uncertainty of biology. Such change won’t be easy: research has shown that scientists and designers encounter obstacles reconciling differences in methodology, expectations of timeframe, and even language. Yet, the life sciences offer a link to those natural processes operating with astounding efficiency in terms of energy and materials—all powered by the sun. In the age of climate crisis and with increasing demands on building performance, collaborations that learn from and harness the living world will multiply, and may even remake the world a little more like Dalí imagined it.

WILLIAM MYERS TEACHES AND WRITES ABOUT THE HISTORY OF DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE. HIS UPCOMING BOOK BIO-DESIGN WILL BE PUBLISHED BY THAMES & HUDSON IN 2012.
and people living as they did in images of a place lost to time: a land now filmmakers are bringing back recent years, photographers and a trickle of adventurous travelers. In to go, but that has wowed a steady limits, Cuba has long been forbidden So close to our shores, yet so off

**EPHEMERAL EDEN**

Unfinished Spaces: Cuba’s Architecture of Revolution Directed by Alysa Nahmias and Ben Murray, 86 minutes Architecture and the City Festival, Main Library, San Francisco, September 21 Architecture and Design Film Festival, Tribeca Cinemas, New York, October 13

So close to our shores, yet so off limits; the place we’re not supposed to go, but that has wove a steady trickle of adventurous travelers. In recent years, photographers and now filmmakers are bringing back images of a place lost to time: a land of old cars and decaying buildings, and people living as they did in the 1960s. But beyond these first impressions, fraught with clichéd vignettes, there are so many more reasons to take a closer look. Among them is a chance to explore Cuba’s National Schools of Art, incredible buildings that I had never heard of before watching the new documentary Unfinished Spaces, by directors Alysa Nahmias and Ben Murray. The film charts the buildings’ rise, fall, and subsequent re-emergence years later, a chronicle that also happens to mirror the initial thrills and subsequent disappointments of Cuba’s communist revolution. Commissioned in 1961, shortly after the revolution, by Fidel Castro himself, the schools were built on the site of a former golf course near Havana by architects Ricardo Porro, Roberto Gottardi, and Vittorio Garatti. The fluid, highly expressive structures, made mostly of layered and vaulted concrete and terra cotta tiles, were an example of visionary modern architecture and engineering. They embodied a nation’s striving to provide an arts education for all social classes. The film records how when they first opened—and even before construction was completed—they were celebrated as perfect examples of a merging of cultures and artistic talents, from music to dance to visual arts. Apparently, they were also havens of free expression where free love thrived under the excite ment of early revolutionary times.

“It was a beautiful experiment,” says Manuel Lopez Oliva, an artist who studied at the schools, and is interviewed in the film. “Like a great structure that unleashed our dreams and visions.” The film goes on to describe the fall from grace. Once the Castro government woreared of creative, free expression and embraced Soviet-style building, the once-laud ed schools were no longer favored. By the mid 1960s, construction was shut down altogether. The government’s sad change of heart is mirrored all too graphically in the fate of these lovely buildings, once scenes of so much life and promise, but ultimately abandoned to the jungle. And then finally, as communism itself becomes a global after thought years later, we see the country, and Castro, doing yet another about-face, hoping to save the buildings—and save face—but staring down a severe lack of government funding to do so.

What’s amazing about this movie is first how it so lovingly and viscerally documents these mod ernist treasures that few outside Cuba (besides those who have seen John Loomis’ 1998 book Revolution of Format have continued on page 18

**A RAD READER**

*Utopie: Texts and Projects, 1967–178*
Edited by Craig Buckley and Jean-Louis Violeau MIT Press, $24.95

When Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau brought out S,M,L,XL in 1995, one of the more subtle aspects of this megalithic project was the book’s marginalia, where counter currents and trivia were interspersed with OMA’s stampede of images and full blown texts. Among the many critically inspired sources Koolhaas was channeling for his opus was the pioneering publication Utopie, a highly eclectic mixed media platform that some two decades earlier experimented with hypertext, graphic illustrations, and overlaid scribbling. Assembled together into one comprehensive volume edited by Craig Buckley and Jean-Louis Violeau and translated by Jean-Marie Clarke, *Utopie: Texts and Projects, 1967–1978* packs a lot of intellectual ammunition. With the likes of Antoine Stinco, Hubert Tonka, Jean Aubert, Jean Baudrillard, Henri Lefebvre, and Isabelle Arroicoste reflecting on art, media, obsolescence, urban culture and the ins and outs of utopia, there is no shortage of incredibly astute and insightful reflections on contemporary culture, urban, architectural, or otherwise. Perhaps most unexpected is how the succession of reprints can be read as formulas for political contestation, as relevant to these post 9/11 times as they must have been during the Cold War era when they were written. Specifically, Utopie took shape during the peak years around the French cultural revolution, bringing together one of the most intriguing collectives to emerge during this turbulent post-war decade. But this is not simply another visitation on the sixties that renders one nostalgic and therefore hopelessly removed from the subject. Rather Utopie can be seen as a use ful manual, something in the manner of the Whole Earth Catalogue, but instead of herbal remedies for the garden or instructions on how to build geodesic domes, you would find game tactics on how to subvert the dominant class or run a workshop on consumption and pop culture. Anything or anyone could end up their target: Utopie published brilliantly perceptive and deeply empowering critiques that dared to take on both the conservative and the Left wing establishments using some very common everyday concepts, including graphic comics, hypertext in the margins, reproductions of articles and advertisements taken from odd sources, as well as piercing analyses and loads of dry humor. There are numerous examples where dazzling displays of graphic images are wittily put to use to undermine the main point presented in the central text, calling into question the fundamental intentions of the authors. Ultimately, Utopie played on one’s basic judgment, questioning one’s intuitive trust in the printed page. As such,

continued on page 18

Left: Collage illustrating the 1968 essay “Architecture as a Theoretical Problem.”
Porro’s School of Modern Dance, Right: Garatti’s School of Ballet.

EPHEMERAL EDEN continued from page 17 ever heard of before—

and later we see them as otherworld-
put on a hyper-fast track and were
something out of a dream, were first
out of the explosive energy of the
even anatomical forms that grew
the film documents a story of these

A RAD READER continued from page 17 Utopie conjures up
a kind of unique textual-graphical
“improv,” extemporizing in the
margins, playing with blank pages
and comic spreads, ultimately
developing their colonne critique
into a staple editorial device
that evolved up until 1971. The
magazine persisted for another
seven years, but the initially
fervent hypertextual energy gave
way to more subtle, less graphic
and clearly less architecturally
inspired perspectives.

The first issue of Utopie
presented blank rectangular
frames stamped on blank paper
suggesting an unusual editorial
frankness, an anti-dogmatic posi-
tion atypical of the mainstream
Marxist press. Craig Buckley in
his introductory text explains
the early pamphlets as a combination
between Pop and Marxism,
with plenty of collaged images
from major publication sources,
both as well as photos taken from
random parts of the city, buildings
as well as close-up architectural
details. According to Buckley,
“the emphasis upon construction
stresses the formation of theory
rather than the application of
doctrine, it mirrors Utopie’s own
desire to place themselves in a
provisional, blank spot within
the era’s intensely factional gauchiste
politics, it evokes the disparate
materiality of an intellectual proj-
ject assembled from the contrasts
between fashion advertisements
and sociology, police bulletins,
and works of philosophy, but it
also speaks to the recurrence of
architecture, both metaphorical
and literal with the group’s writings.”

Utopie did pay close attention
to the key trends in design, art,
and architecture: references
included Archigram, Architecture
Princepe, Cedric Price, Hans Hollein
and Kisho Kurokawa, among
others. But according to Buckley,
Utopie, unlike Architecture
Princepe, remained open to a much
broader vision on society then
would otherwise be considered
in the narrower domain of
architecture. The city would
therefore remain Utopie’s most
fertile cultural platform.

And there is no question that
the editors of Utopie wanted
for their principal goal to expose
the failings of the modernist
project. It demonstrates the
inconsistencies and ambiguities
that kept society inchoate and
hopelessly alienated.

One of the main lessons to
be learned from reading Utopie
is that looking straight at the
problem gets you nowhere. You
need to look at the margins.

PETER LANG IS AN ASSOCIATE
PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS A&M.

Required Application Materials:
1. letter of application including a brief statement outlining teaching, research/scholarship/practice, and academic administration/leadership qualifications
2. a full curriculum vitae
3. one portfolio
4. a list of five references with telephone numbers, mailing addresses, and email addresses.

All applicants should submit the materials in hard-copy format to the following address.
Digital submissions can supplement or duplicate these but cannot replace them. Please note that application materials will not be returned.

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Edgar A. Tafel Professor / Director of Professional M Arch. Program
Department of Architecture, Cornell University
139 East Sibley Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

Phone: (607) 255-7612 | Fax: (607) 255-0291 | Email: arch_chair@cornell.edu

Review of applications will begin on October 1, 2011 and will continue until the position is filled.

Architecture at Cornell dates back to the founding of the institution; it is one of the oldest
programs of its kind and has a long and distinguished tradition of design, scholarship,
and teaching. Degree programs in the Department include a professional B Arch.,
a professional M Arch., a post-professional M Arch., an M.Arch., Ph.D. in the history of
architecture and urban development, and an M.S. in architectural building technology
and computer graphics. New facilities (including the recently-opened Milstein Hall
designed by OMA) and evolving degree programs reflect both a continuing commitment
to excellence and an ongoing renewal of architectural education at Cornell. The professional
Master of Architecture degree was launched in 2004 and fully accredited in 2009. This
M.Arch. program enrolls approximately 90 students in a 7 semester curriculum, including
one semester in the College’s New York City facility.

For more information about the Department, the College of AAP, and Cornell University,
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Q&A

MAN OF THE HOUSE

AN: Tell me about your latest project. I recently completed a three-unit prefab project for Living Homes in Los Altos. It was the first multi-family project that I did for them. I’m also working on four single-family houses in a little grouping in Canada. I have a large $3 or $4 million custom house in Beverly Hills, and there’s a five-unit condo in connection with a hotel on Pico and Beverwill in Beverlywood.

Your work for Living Homes has been well documented. Do you consider it a success?

Sometimes it’s worth it to push prefab. But for me, until they really do a lot of them, it doesn’t work. It’s not economical. When I did the first Living Home it was $125 a square foot. That was a two-story, simple house. That seemed great. Then the fabricator underbid the glass too much so that the price popped up, and there were some change orders that got it up to around $140 a square foot. And then the houses went on the market at $250. That isn’t the way that the normal housing market works when you do quantity housing. When the market changed, the picture changed, and we weren’t getting our prices to where we should have them. It was still cheaper than custom work, but we were essentially doing custom houses.

You’ve been passionate about prefab for a long time. I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about prefab as well as energy systems. Probably twenty years of my life were spent in those two areas. When I couldn’t get modulars built as modulars, I would play around with the idea anyway. The point was to get away from the box and into spatial qualities like you’re seeing in Living Homes. You mention spatial qualities. In many peoples’ opinions you’re a master at organizing space and views and light. Can you talk about what differentiates your approach?

I don’t really do like some architects do—I don’t force volumetric space. My house was really created by the site and the relationships to the site and solving the site. The space evolves rather than this preconception set up ahead of time. However, if there is a place where you can explode in section you do. That’s where you get the excitement. Most architects do that today, I think when I did my house it wasn’t so common. Wright obviously did something. Some did. Architects are always looking for any place where they can open the building up and get something going where it’s more exciting. But often if you open something up you lose square footage, and if you lose square footage you lose value. There’s often not enough gain for the owner. I’m certainly someone who cares about the economics of a project, so I use that mentality. Architects who deal with prime jobs like museums usually have a lot of freedom. I’m sure if you asked them, they’d say there are tight constraints. But it’s different. They seem to have more room to move and play around.

It’s also the layering and making the site prominent, right? Most of us were always given difficult sites, which I like. That’s my favorite type of job. I have a much harder time on a simple flat site. I’m not really an architect who deals in conceptual work. I deal in problem solving and solutions. I’m pretty much a straightforward architect. I don’t try to think of ideas that will play in the architectural media. And students are almost taught to do that, because they’re very seldom working on real sites or real problems or real conditions or constraints. In school you’re taught to think about what will make your projects more interesting. You get no knowledge of what really happens when you’re out there.

Let’s talk more about school, beginning with SCI-Arc’s recent purchase of their building in the Downtown LA Arts District.

You’ve complained that SCI-Arc’s founders were excluded from that conversation. From the very beginning we always wanted to buy our building. We started leasing because I didn’t want to start with a mortgage. The school was built on zero dollars. But we were reasonably successful after a couple of years, and we always tried to buy our building. I was a little bit critical that the term “vagabond” was used for our situation when in reality each move we’ve made was for reasonable—and usually for financial—reasons. Buying our building was always part of the agenda. You can’t run a school without having some economic savvy. Sure, the education part is most interesting, and it’s why you’re there in the first place. But if you’re going to get into your own school you have to think of it as a business. You can’t run it in the red. So I ran the school in the black. I knew what was going on.

Between Cal Poly and SCI-Arc, you have quite a legacy with education in Southern California. It’s sort of funny, I never intended to do that. The Cal Poly thing intrigued me because people saw that you could do what SCI-Arc was doing, and schools like Woodbury wound up doing a similar thing.

Do you have any favorites working now? I’ve always liked Piano. If I had his career. And I don’t really care about promotion, nor do I have the personality that wants to put in the energy it takes. I watch what Thom Mayne has done with his career. I watched Frank Gehry grow up as he wanted to. I’m very self-satisfied. I think Thom is to a certain degree, I don’t think Frank will ever be. Why? I don’t know. I would be if people thought about me the way they think about him. I’m more interested in my family and my life.

I’m glad my career was where it was early on so I didn’t have to end up in this world of being in the air all the time in order to get work all over the world. It was nice being a local architect. I enjoyed walking down the street to my job. Some people like that or at least can do it for ego reasons I guess. I’m kind of a do it myself person. I get embarrassed by promotion. Do you have to send everything to everybody?

Your firm doesn’t even have a web site, correct? No. I should have one. I sort of retired twenty years ago. Our firm was terrible at marketing, because we didn’t have to most of the time. Nowadays they get 35 or 40 applicants for every job. And then you’re competing against these huge firms that gobble up everybody so they can do everything. How does the little guy do it? The only thing I feel sorry about is that I never had enough community jobs. Jobs that were medium scale and could have some meaning in society. The fact that what’s available today for planning and urban design firms just blows my mind. That was the stuff that we would have given our right arm for. We were the only small firm doing planning work at that time. We were going against the DMJs and A.C. Martins and doing okay, but just a small firm.

Do you like the way you had chosen your work and the way you think about his work. It’s based on the full range of principles. It’s not form. It’s based upon structure and environmental control systems and site use. It comes down to the person in the architecture as well as the rational decision making. The intuitive stuff that comes through.

So what does your own house say about you? I don’t know, you’d think I was an egomaniac. I can stand a few compliments and be happy with it. It just evolved in a rather natural way. The heights weren’t predetermined. I like the varying heights and shapes and sizes. As you draw the plan you’re walking through the whole process in your head of what’s going on. It’s a function of how I was taught to design. You start to think of space and dimensions, and what it looks like on the outside is from what those decisions were entirely form from models. I made models for clients, but I didn’t design from them. Today people design from computer modeling. So the ones that I was still thinking about what it looks like externally, usually fitting the internal parts in some way or another.
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