GAME CHANGER

Healthcare giant Kaiser Permanente recently announced the winners of its “Small Hospital, Big Idea” competition, which challenged architects to rethink healthcare facilities in Southern California. Winning ideas will guide development of its moderately sized hospitals in the region. San Bruno, California-based Aditazz and Portland-based Mazzetti Nash Lipsey Burch (M+NLB), with the New York office of Perkins+Will (P+W), shared the... continued on page 5

GETTING GREENER

With catchphrases like “green,” “eco-friendly,” and “environmentally sustainable” adopted by everyone from Leonardo DiCaprio to Target, it can be difficult to distinguish significant change from commercial marketing ploys. Attempting to better integrate the green agenda into local... continued on page 14

Figueroa Comeback

One of LA’s most important urban projects is back on track after the dissolution of California redevelopment funding almost shut it down for good. Since 2010, the MyFigueroa project had tried, through street, landscape, and land-use planning studies, to pave the way for the city’s most innovative... continued on page 7

GETTY’S CONSERVING MODERN ARCHITECTURE INITIATIVE

Preserve or Prolong?

With the Charles and Ray Eames House taking a cornerstone position, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) launched the Conserving Modern Architecture Initiative (CMAI) last month. The institute is hardly new to architectural... continued on page 12
How Guardian SunGuard helped build a better school.

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On April 6 Woodbury University hosted the event “Architects Beyond Architecture,” a panel discussion featuring “six architecturally-trained creatives who work in fields alternative to conventional practice.”

The panelists included Won Ju Lim, a visual artist; Brett Farros, an architect/developer; Yeekai Kim, owner of Cognoscenti Coffee; Natasha Case, owner of Coolhaus ice cream; Carmen Salazar, a sculptor; and Sebastian Munoz, a designer at design product manufacturer Arkurta.

None of these trained architects works as architects. And with architecture jobs still in short supply, it makes perfect sense. Why should they sit on their hands and wait for only when kind of job when they are so well-equipped to do so many other kinds of work?

According to a report from the National Architectural Accrediting Board, 6,191 people graduated from accredited programs in 2010–2011 academic year (and about half of those will go on to become licensed architects). “If we look at pure labor statistics we should shut down half the schools,” said Waldrep, who is now embroiled in controvesry, “and about half of those will go on to become licensed architects.”

“Instead, he suggests that students “If we look at pure labor statistics we should shut down half the schools,” said Waldrep, who is now embroiled in controvesry, “and about half of those will go on to become licensed architects.”

Case, owner of Coolhaus ice cream; Carmen Salazar, a sculptor; and Sebastian Munoz, a designer at design product manufacturer Arkurta.

One of the Woodbury panelists, Natasha Case, studied undergraduate architecture at Berkeley and graduate architecture at UCLA. She now owns a business selling gourmet ice cream sandwiches that has expanded to four cities and grown by over 100 percent a year since starting in 2009.

One of the most important things architecture school taught her, if not explicitly, was how to think creatively and how to brand herself. “Having to be in front of a jury and talk about your work, you think about what sets you apart? We start to develop a signature and a style and hone in on what interests us,” Case said.

She was critical that architecture school did not prepare her for the business of architecture, noting “I don’t think we ever discussed a project’s budget.” But it did help her establish an identity.

A “creative person will be attracted to many ways of being creative instead of one way that’s set in stone,” she said. Now she uses more of her design skills to develop logos, sandwiches, trucks, and stores than she ever did in conventional practice. She and others talked about learning the language and creative organization of architecture and applying those abilities to less traditional paths.

This, of course, doesn’t mean that all architecture students need do something else. In times of economic retraction, the tradition of architects turning to other lines of work—Rem Koolhans doing the research for Delicious New York, in one famous instance—is well established as an important way to stoke creative energies for the return of work. But even those who leave the fold for good often still consider themselves part of the profession, using those skills and playing an integral part in the design discussion. Besides, architects are creative people. Why should they all stay inside a box?
California’s high-end car dealerships tend to all look the same. Full of glass, steel, and bravo, they’re more about wealth and ambition than architectural innovation. But things had to be different for a Palo Alto dealership selling McLarens as well as Fiskers, California-based manufacturers of plug-in hybrid vehicles whose sleek designs give Tesla a run for its money.

Owner Adam Simms asked Chicago-based Valerio Dewalt Train Associates to design two striking showrooms that show off the dealership’s cars with a variety of materials more likely to be found in a contemporary house or art gallery: layers of transparent polycarbonate sheet panels, polished concrete floors, aluminum- clad facias, exposed steel beams, sustainably harvested wood panels, and gray porcelain floor tiles. The McLaren showroom has a circular glass enclosure shaded by a large roof overhang. Fisker’s rectangular building opens up to the outdoors via large sliding panels.

Eighty percent of the construction materials can be recycled, a rare nod to eco-friendliness in an industry that leaves its showroom lights on 24 hours a day. The project is designed to achieve the equivalent of a LEED Silver rating, required by the city of Palo Alto. SOL
NBBJ’s Gates Foundation Enlivens Surroundings to Inspire Workers

“All lives have equal value,” declares the motto of Seattle’s Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest private foundation in the world. With an endowment of over $33 billion, its efforts span six continents, centering on education, global health, and poverty.

The foundation’s Visitor Center opened last February, providing a glimpse into the organization’s inner workings with its near-exclusive use of local building materials and interiors by local firm Olson Kundig Architects. The center provides the history and context of the institution but its headquarters, recently completed by NBBJ, reveals the true planning, strategy, workplace design, and organization for the foundation.

On an unusually cold day in March, NBBJ’s Christian Carlson, lead designer for the headquarters, gave a tour. The Gates campus, with its LEED Platinum–certified buildings, is located in uptown Seattle, just across the street from the Seattle Center, and next to the Experience Music Project Museum, created by the other Microsoft founder, Paul Allen, and designed by Frank Gehry. The Gates’ design could not be more different. Where the museum is loud, bright, and sculptural, the foundation is streamlined, organized, and symmetrical. Not often do such contrasting nonprofit buildings stand at such close urban quarters, but in the tech-saturated new wealth that shapes Seattle, they can.

The goal of the design was to provide an improved workspace for foundation staff with an emphasis on collaboration, flexibility, and communication, and also to convey the foundation’s mission. Offices reside in two six-story V-shaped buildings. Cantilevered upper stories rest on bases centered on an urban courtyard, landscaped by Seattle firm Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, aligned toward the local Seattle urban grid. Granite stone pavers and bridges across a plaza. As Carlson explained, “With limestone we drew upon civic building types—courthouses, city halls, civic centers—but we also grounded the design in practical materials such as corrugated aluminum and copper wall cladding.”

Before the move, the Gates Foundation operated out of five buildings, including the former SeaFirst Bank check-processing facility in Eastlake, which was notorious for its lack of windows and daylight for the Gates staff, according to Gates spokesperson Melissa Milburn. The building was unassuming and under-cover, with not even a sign to announce its tenant, said NBBJ’s Carlson. After analyzing several urban and rural sites, Gates and NBBJ ultimately chose a 12-acre plot with a more visible presence and convenient access to downtown, and that would provide a needed boost to an area that had seen its economic and social fortunes deteriorate since the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair. Much of the site’s early history as a wetland marsh. Granite stone pavers and bridges across a plaza. As Carlson explained, “With limestone we drew upon civic building types—courthouses, city halls, civic centers—but we also grounded the design in practical materials such as corrugated aluminum and copper wall cladding.”

The design pulls from civic-minded archetypes. Facades are cloaked in limestone masonry, while windows are ten feet high rather than the traditional corporate five. The primary entrance is set back from the curb across a plaza. As Carlson explained, “With limestone we drew upon civic building types—courthouses, city halls, civic centers—but we also grounded the design in practical materials such as corrugated aluminum and copper wall cladding.”

Walking through the campus, the meticulous focus on maximizing interior daylight was evident, with expansive walls of glazing in the four-story atrium, hallways, and department offices. Slender-by-corporate-standards, 65-foot floor plates ensure that foundation employees are no farther than 30 feet from daylight. Open floor plans provide varying kinds of spaces for collaboration and independent work. There are bullpen-style offices, focus rooms for impromptu small groups, larger conference rooms that can be tailored via demountable partitions, touchdown rooms for visiting employees, and separate workspaces at the end of hallways with expansive views of the city for quiet thinking.

Of course, some feel that open offices don’t provide enough private space for the kind of solitary thinking that the foundation encourages. As a result, some staff plug into headphones at their open desks. Supporters laud the open space for its democratization and ability to facilitate greater transparency between departments, staff, and colleagues. “This is the most challenging aspect of workplace design,” Kelly Griffin, senior associate at NBBJ admitted, about designing workspaces to meet physical requirements and organizational needs for independent and collaborative thinking across all levels of an organization. “There is always a trade-off, and the key is to find a balance. It’s important to listen, and listen well.”


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Difficult constraints require creative solutions. Perhaps the perfect case study for this age-old maxim is Simon Storey and Anonymous Architects’ Eel’s Nest in Echo Park.

The tall, narrow townhome, located on the corner of a winding street near the neighborhood’s commercial center, is built on a 15-foot-wide lot, with a 780-square-foot footprint.

In response to this impossibly tight site, Storey took borrowing space to the next level, almost bringing the whole neighborhood inside. The house is located on the site of a shabby 350-square-foot home that Storey himself briefly inhabited before tearing down. He kept the garage intact (strengthening it with poured-in-place concrete) and put in new footings, above which he built what he calls a vertical extrusion of the landscape, with living space sandwiched between.

When you look up, the roof terrace sprouts with trees and plants. Floating above a void-like black building, it almost looks as if the ground were lofted above the block. Inside, the small house never feels cramped, thanks to several creative solutions: an open plan and terraced back garden on the first floor; a sense of movement and anticipation through compartmentalized floor plans and skylights on the second; and, the most important feature of all, gigantic windows on both floors that cover almost the entire expanse of wall. The siting of the house is such that you appear to be floating over the street itself, watching cars move straight toward you. It’s a view that I’ve only seen once before, in New York City at the High Line, where a seating section drops below the rails in the middle of 10th Avenue.

Does this extreme openness make Storey feel as if he’s living in a fishbowl? The architect said he doesn’t mind. He said he likes his neighbors, and that lifting the blinds two feet gives him almost complete privacy when he needs it.

From the roof terrace, you get a full sense of the neighborhood and beyond with a panoramic view of Echo Park and the Santa Monica Mountains all the way to the San Gabriels. Made of simple framing lumber set with modest but elegant benches, the terrace makes you feel as though you’re on top of some sort of architectural mountaintop.

“It’s all about the house in relation to its surroundings,” said Storey.

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PRESERVE OR PROLONG? continued from front page preservation, but the GCI’s honed expertise makes them especially qualified to take on the kind of preservation conundrums that plague modern architecture as, for example, the Eameses’ use of untested-by-time mass produced flooring or Corbusier’s use of concrete. For now, the focus is on the inaugural project.

The Eames project came to the attention of the GCI when LA-based restoration architects Escher GuneWardena asked Wim de Wit, head of architecture and design at the Getty Research Institute, if he could recommend conservators for the house’s mass-produced materials. “We wanted to treat this like a very precious painting,” said principal architect Frank Escher. “A project of this sort of complexity would require all kinds of specialists.” De Wit passed the request on to the Conservation Institute, which in turn decided to take up the project as a test case for CMAI.

Susan Macdonald, the GCI’s head of field projects, said the timing was perfect. “We wanted to have a field project, and they were at a moment where they wanted to take a long term look,” she said. It didn’t hurt that the project was of international importance yet close to home. She added that GCI was still mapping out priorities for the institute’s scientific analysis merged with theoretical debate.

After water infiltrated the concrete slab beneath the asbestos-riddled vinyl, the team concluded that the concrete needed to be sealed and the light gray vinyl replaced. But the Eameses intentionally chose mass produced flooring, and so replacing it with a custom floor could strike some as a sacrilege. But by going the mass produced route, how then to honor Ray Eames’ notorious brilliant sense of color? In the end, the team chose to replace the vinyl with a custom floor. Back at the GCI, scientists analyzed if the movement is to be preserved. Not just modernism is at risk. Preservation debates surrounding Brutalism are a case in point, said Macdonald. Here, too, the concrete needs to be studied and properly analyzed if the movement is to be preserved.

In the area of plastics, Macdonald said scientific research already carried out by the GCI in contemporary and modern art will be indispensable for repairing its use in architecture. At the Eames house, the level of detail for restoring a vinyl floor provided an interesting example of where the institute’s scientific analysis merged with theoretical debate. The building’s fluid, undulating exterior will be clad with the campus’ required red brick and store-front glazing below, and perforated metal panels and covered breezeways above. The curves take their cue from the eroded forms around them. But much of the design, explained Cannon Design associate principal Carl Hampson, had to do with solar shading and with “what students wanted to look at while they were exercising—the pool, the mountains, and parts of campus. The curve found a way to reconcile those interests.”

The two-story building’s upper level is a completely open plan (save for opaque upper level is a completely open plan (save for opaque

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Located on the northern boundary of the University of California Riverside campus, near a natural arroyo, Cannon Design’s student recreation center expansion takes its cues not only from student needs but from the natural surroundings. The building’s fluid, undulating exterior will be clad with the campus’ required red brick and store-front glazing below, and perforated metal panels and covered breezeways above. The curves take their cue from the eroded forms around them. But much of the design, explained Cannon Design associate principal Carl Hampson, had to do with solar shading and with “what students wanted to look at while they were exercising—the pool, the mountains, and parts of campus. The curve found a way to reconcile those interests.” The two-story building’s upper level is a completely open plan (save for opaque lockers and bathrooms), containing fitness machines, training facilities, and a running track. The lower level includes the entryway, more fitness facilities, and a large pool. A double-height gym will unify the space, which connects via an enclosed bridge to the original recreation center built by the firm in the 1990s. Surrounded by drought-resistant landscaping, the complex will be a vital perk for the school to attract students. SL

architect: cannon design

location: riverside, california

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KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

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In an ever more interconnected and globalized world, the concept of regionalism seems both out of step and more relevant than ever. And the architects associated with an architecture of place are keenly aware that—whatever the wider world thinks—their work is not based on a menu of fixed typologies but on adaptive values. Regionalism today is not about quoting barns and silo-shaped houses but rather actively engaging with the deeper forces driving specifics of form—whether it’s time, culture, climate or cost.

Critic David D’Arcy re-examines Kenneth Frampton’s canonical essay on Critical Regionalism with fresh eyes, while AN editors survey projects and practitioners that are carving out new principles as they engage with—or resist—the notion of regionalism.
St. Nicholas Eastern Orthodox Church
Springdale, AR
Marlon Blackwell Architect
**STRANGELY FAMILIAR**

“Working within a particular region establishes a baseline. There is a preconception of what regionalism is, but we also look at it in a way that is unfamiliar. We look for something familiar and yet new.”

Roberto de Leon

**INVISIBLE PARAMETERS**

“Architecture is a political process... As a term, regionalism has a negative connotation. Using it would be a way of distinguishing oneself. A ‘region’ can be a subdivision or a city block, in terms of scale.”

Mary Ellen Carroll

It was a global landscape haunted and threatened by “the freestanding high rise,” “the serpentine freeway,” “the apocalyptic thrust of modernization,” and “pathological philistinism.”

This was the condition, not just of the built environment, but of architecture, said Kenneth Frampton, who accused architects of responding with eclectic historical nostalgia and a rapturous futurism. And it was only 1983.

Frampton’s response was a jeremiad deploiring it all. And there was much to deplore. His alternative was critical regionalism, seizing on a term first deployed in 1981 by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. It was a warning, a manifesto, and a call to arms.

Frampton termed it “a critical basis from which to evolve a contemporary architecture of resistance—a culture of dissent free from fashionable stylistic conventions, an architecture of place rather than space, and a way of building sensitive to the vicissitudes of time and climate.”

Frampton’s enemy then was post-modernism. He and others felt besieged by a tendency that was dragging critics and resources and young talent into nostalgia or into technological rootlessness.

Frampton heaped blame, not just on the postmodernists, but on the circumstances weighing upon them. Modernism, however, tended to be left off the hook. Just root it in a real place, he counseled. Here’s how he hovered around a definition, vaguely enough to be big tent: “Critical Regionalism depends upon maintaining a high level of critical self-consciousness. It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in a tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site.”

Back in the 1980s, Frampton and others would foresee another persistent factor. This regionalizing trend that they hoped for would not be a revolution. “The scope of activity available to the potential regionalist is interstitial rather than global in nature.” Frampton wrote in 1988, “which will be seen to some as a deciding advantage.” Frampton also called that work marginal—not the most effective term for recruiting.

It’s now clear that Frampton underestimated the challenge—and the flexible advantage of regionalism. It was several financial crashes ago, before the Internet enabled almost everything besides dwelling to be virtual rather than tactile, and before destination architecture turned a battleground like Bilbao into a tourist mecca and turned an elite of architects into boldfaced names.

Some three decades later, regional architecture is a sensibility, rather than a movement. Like most tendencies that move from the bottom up, there are no clear rules, other than a tactility, a commitment to place, and an ethical attitude about community, all of which fuse into an approach to sustainability, a term that escaped the earliest formulations.

In a 2006 lecture, Alexander Tzonis updated the challenge: “Mindlessly adopting narcissistic dogmas in the name of universality leads to environments that are economically costly, ecologically destructive, and catastrophic to the human community.” As Yogi Berra might have said, it’s apocalypse all over again.

Like anything regional, solutions will vary from location to location. These are paths that lead to hybridization, rather than purity.

No surprise, it’s leaderless. But there are plenty of prophets, like Alvar Aalto, whose brick Synatsalo Town Hall of 1952 was a triumph of tactility for Frampton. Another one of Frampton’s heroes was Luis Barragán, whose 1947–48 Casa Estudio—an office, home, and garden in Tacubaya, a working-class suburb of Mexico City—is now being scrutinized in a new documentary by Rax Rinnekangas and the Finnish architect and critic Juhani Pallasmaa.

And adherents are growing, hailing from...
“Time is a regionalist perspective. Objects in a landscape age in a certain way; maintenance has to be anticipated and understood. Architects need to plan for time.”

Tom Kundig

“We look at the culture that wraps around a site. We look at the operational and aspiration aspects. And then, only then, we play with form and pattern. Having a quiet voice at the beginning is important.”

Julie Snow

Applied farther afield both, in geographical and intellectual reach. In Nova Scotia, architect Brian MacKay-Lyons has been gathering architects—under the suitably oblique banner Ghost—to appraise the future of master building in terms of landscape, material culture, and community. Both Frampton and Pallasmaa have contributed but the range of engaged architects is wide, among them Deborah Berke, Wendell Burnette, Ted Flato, Vincent James, Rick Joy, Richard Kroeker, Tom Kundig, Patricia Patkau, Dan Rockhill, and Brigitte Shim.

Among them is Marlon Blackwell, who is all too keenly aware that he has been scripted as American architecture’s regional everyman. Based in Fayetteville, Arkansas, he has developed an approach as likely to draw on mud towers in Yemen as the state’s ubiquitous long-haul trucks. For the Porchdog House, a post-Katrina dwelling, Blackwell rejected a retreat to the sentimental vernacular. Instead of a granny-style porch with geraniums and rockers, the Biloxi house sits on 11-foot pillars—a new prototype responsive to the elements, but also affordable enough to replicate.

Blending the mass-production possibilities of the prototype with locally resonant design defines a hybrid approach being taken by regional firms like Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, designers of the Apple Store. The product is a paradox—multiple corporate retail stores are also transparent physical gathering places for corporeal Apple customers who spend much of their time in virtual worlds. The stores are potent advertising logos, as well as local destinations.

Is this a case of regionalists already jumping ship or selling out? Only if the already-slippery definition of regionalism is seen as a rigid pledge or a straitjacket, which hasn’t been suggested by any architect. There is no required vow of poverty, chastity, or obedience. So far, no one has been excommunicated from Ghost for taking on corporate clients.

Or for creating a destination. And what, if not a destination, is the new and exquisite Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, a gambit hyped as a tourist site by destination-obsessed Denver and designed by Brad Cloepfil, a Frampton pupil at Columbia University who established himself as a practitioner of Pacific Northwest
Outpost
Central Idaho
Olson Kundig Architects
EMERGENT VERNACULAR

“I think about a more fragmented way to look at the landscape. There are vestiges of another society apart from the barns, silos, and shotguns, elements more about mobility and part of the reality of what we see and experience around us. RVs, truck trailers and campers are all sources of inspiration, too.”

Marlon Blackwell

Regionalism? Rather than create another billboard for the city, Cloepfil responded with a restrained design at a restrained budget. If the Clyfford Still Museum says anything about regionalist work, it is that it can be purposefully local without aesthetic compromise.

As regional work once thought destined for the interstices surges through the cracks, consider the food analogy. Declining quality, rising cost, and waste alarmed a small core of eco-minded consumers and producers, and spawned the locavore movement. Some three decades later, it has bastions throughout North America and Europe and beyond. Restaurants and producers have lifted local economies, which continue to grow, benefiting everyone from architects to sommeliers (and throwing off profitable vernacular subsections).

With architecture, as with food, the challenge is to move beyond the elite clients, and into the regionalists’ heartland, where the vernaculars of poor nutrition and cheap generic construction meet at the strip mall and sprawl outward.

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Chinese American Museum, 425 North Los Angeles Street, Los Angeles
Through June 3

Breaking Ground: Chinese American Architects in Los Angeles (1945–1980) examines the previously unheralded Chinese-American contribution to Los Angeles’ iconic modernist architecture. Its impressive roundup of work includes Los Angeles International Airport, CBS Television City, the Choy Residence, and Norm’s restaurants. The show is the first architectural exhibit at the museum since it opened in 2003.

Originally conceived as a much larger exhibition featuring work by Chinese-American architects practicing globally (I. M. Pei, for example), Breaking Ground was reduced in scope to complement the Pacific Standard Time initiative organized by the Getty Research Institute. It now tells the story of the life and work of four mid-century Chinese-American architects—Gilbert L. Leong, Eugene Kinn Choy, Helen Liu Fong, and Gin D. Wong—often ignored talents whose buildings, residences, interiors, and designs contributed significantly to the built environment of Los Angeles.

Some of the work highlights ancient Chinese motifs and techniques. For example, Leong’s Bank of America (1972) in Chinatown, the city’s first major national bank for Chinese Americans, features a facade with an imported jade-green tile roof over extended wood beams, and an interior detailed with wood-beamed ceilings and Chinese characters.

The exhibition argues, however, that the architects were just as much a product of LA as they were of their Chinese ancestry. Eugene Kinn Choy’s Choy Residence (1949) in Silver Lake was constructed to meet the needs of a modern family living in a fast-developing metropolis. It uses contemporary techniques and materials, including a setback from the street to create privacy and floor-to-ceiling windows to connect indoors with out-of-doors, a particular characteristic of Southern Californian living. Helen Liu Fong’s design for Norm’s Restaurant (1955) in West Hollywood applies asymmetrical forms to create a highly visible and playful architecture. These and other works demonstrate the incredibly diverse styles that were developing in Los Angeles in the late 1940s and early ’50s.

According to curator Steve Y. Wong, “Architecture is a very esoteric form of art that oftentimes makes it difficult to engage a larger public.” To counter this, the show shares the personal stories of the architects and their work in the context of LA modernism. The exhibition begins in a second-floor gallery with a plaster bust of a Nubian woman, circa 1935, superimposed with a series of architectural drawings by Leong. Through such subtle contrasts viewers begin both to understand the ways these architects practiced and to appreciate architecture as its own art form. The show successfully merges architecture with design through the inclusion of modern furnishings like the Eames Wire Chair, the Eames Stephens Tru-sonic Horn Speaker, and George Nelson’s Platform Bench, displayed alongside images and documentation of the Choy Residence. The furniture both complements the design ethos of the day and provides insight into Choy’s interior plan for his Silver Lake property.

Also compelling are photographs by Julius Shulman that capture the form and beauty, not to mention the efficiency and standardization, of such works as the Los Angeles International Airport and CBS Television City, both designed by Gin D. Wong, the only architect from the group still living. Shulman’s iconic images (mostly originals, some reproductions) tell the story of time, place, and history as effectively as the adjacent wall texts chronicling the life and work of each featured architect. The individual compositions bring to the forefront not only the architectural ideas and techniques the architects favored but also the hope of a progressive future, so prevalent in their work.

Breaking Ground draws welcome attention to an important yet often overlooked component of California modernism. The emblematic work of these Chinese-American architects, with their modern interpretations of traditional practice, breathes new dimensions into our own understanding of modernism.

DANIELLE RAGO IS AN ARCHITECTURE WRITER, CURATOR, AND CO-DIRECTOR OF ASAP.
Sea is a compact photo-essay of intriguing images and historical research that tells the story of ill-conceived human manipulation, abandonment, and exquisite decay. Coupled together, her use of facts and images allows us to conjure the ambitious, original vision of the Salton Sea while ultimately recognizing the folly of technological arrogance. Stringfellow’s collection conveys in her subtitle, was a reprint of the 2003 original, “Greetings from the Salton Sea: Folly and Intervention in the Southern California Landscape, 1905–2005” which pushed the sea to its current, troubled state.

Beginning with an image of the flood that created the lake, Stringfellow brings us through the Sea’s timeline of arrogant interventions to present-day images of abandoned motor homes and eutrophic waters teeming with dead fish. She aptly reveals the intertwining social, political, and environmental pressures at play throughout the Sea’s history. Early on in its life, the Sea was designated a federal repository for agricultural run-off. Nearly 90 percent of the sea’s yearly inflow was supplied by a staggering “1.36 million acre-feet of irrigation water.” It would be an additional 25 years before the banks of the Sea expanded, a boom of real estate development and became a destination community.

Unfortunately, this engineered oasis with a golf club and sports fishery was mostly abandoned by the 1980’s. Incapable of sustaining its existence, the Sea was overcome by the environmental pressures of flooding, increased salinity, and an influx of excessive nutrients from agricultural runoff. Through the benefit of hindsight supplied by Stringfellow, we understand the Sea’s conception and subsequent development did not—and admittedly could not—maintain its fragile ecology. The Sea and its surroundings are still interconnected, its health both dependent upon and influenced by a larger ecosystem. To make this point, Stringfellow highlights the present-day subsistence fishing by nearby trailer-park communities, the public-health impact of toxic dust from the dried-up seabed, and lastly, the detriment to endangered, migratory waterfowl that rely on the Sea’s fish supply for food.

In a candid afterward to this reprint of the 2003 original, the author struggles with the inability of such interconnectedness alone to spur remedial action. She points toward the seemingly insurmountable lack of political will and public finance to revitalize this one-time oasis. Rather than suggest a plan of action, Greetings from the Salton Sea leaves the reader with an unanswered dilemma: what is it that we are restoring? At present day, the Sea represents an altered ecosystem that can never be brought back to its original state and an abandoned development that seemingly has no driving force behind its revitalization. Perhaps in the interest of retaining optimism for the region’s future, Stringfellow draws attention to attempts at a transition from decay through creativity. Her examples include the upbeat and spiritual art of local resident Leonard Knight and the lovingly restored North Shore Yacht Club, now the Salton Sea Museum & Visitors Center. These glimmers of rebirth are perhaps the author’s plea for innovative and enlightened design, planning, and engineering approaches to such dilemmas.

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The 1959 ASM Headquarters in Ohio includes an extraordinary double-dome by Buckminster Fuller. Recently renovated by The Chesler Group, the project has been photographed by Jeff Goldberg.
G&A>TADAO ANDO

A DELICATE BALANCING ACT

This year, Cal Poly Pomona College of Environmental Design presented its annual Richard J. Neutra Award for Professional Excellence to 70-year-old Tadao Ando. Previous winners have included Renzo Piano, Thom Mayne, and Ray Kappe, although the Osaka-based Ando is the only architect to have won the discipline’s four most prestigious prizes: the Pritzker (1995), the Carlsberg Imperial (1996), and the Kyoto Prize (2002). While sitting at Neutra’s VDL House a few hours before accepting the award, Ando, speaking in Japanese and with a translator, sat down with AN contributor Jonathan Louie to discuss his views on architecture and its relationship to nature and academics, as well as the role he believes that architects should play in society.

The Architect’s Newspaper

You have been successfully in practice for over four decades and are self-taught. In the past, you have talked about modernist masters playing a large role in your education. What lessons have you learned from Richard Neutra and California modernism? Tadao Ando: First of all, I know the work of Richard Neutra as he worked with Frank Lloyd Wright, in the sense that he relates to that legacy. But when you come here and look at the house, it has such a strong sense of modernism as it relates to the Case Study Houses and the tradition of his generation. At the same time, when you come to the house, it has a sense of the bright future because of the openness and the way the architecture is designed. For me, I feel like I learned through Neutra’s work about the spirit of the new world. Architectural historian Kenneth Frampton described you as an exemplar of critical regionalism for the way you’ve successfully blended cultural tradition with the tenets of modernism. Was there a turning point or event in your career that influenced your perception of architecture?

For me, architecture is really a condition of what it will be. Whether you make architecture in Los Angeles, in New York, or in Japan, the context of architecture—the culture, the environment, the people that create architecture, and people that use architecture—are all completely different. For that reason, I think it’s more interesting for people who contemplate architecture to think about it with that context in mind, and for people who use architecture, to use it in that context. So it’s not something that happens because of what you have to do, but it’s something that reflects the philosophy of the people—not only the people that make it but also the people that live in it—and that’s the kind of dialogue that’s important for people to think about in architecture. Your Malibu House is currently nearing completion in LA. Can you tell us more about the design concept and execution?

First of all, there are three houses that I designed, and two are under construction. For me, it’s important for any house that I design to have a sense of living with nature in its particular context. And especially in this case, I would like to see the overlapping and integrating of Western and Eastern ways of living. In Malibu, the idea that you could really merge and live together with the ocean is something that’s very strong in my mind, and I tried to integrate that into the context of how the house works. It seems that an important aspect of your work is an emphasis on authenticity, a response to nature, and an interest in craft. Conversely, the current architectural world relies heavily on the digital realm. How do you mediate between the two?

When you talk about being digital, it’s very true that it’s of the times. But also, as human beings, we have sensibilities and emotions that derive from feeling and touching things that are handmade or based on part of your being. Because of that, it’s important to try to balance between the two. Especially at the same time, the logic that comes from digital fabrication and architecture makes it very difficult to feel an attachment or even an emotional response to things that are mass-produced. So when you come to a place like the VDL House and you see the detailing and materials, you have a response that makes you feel human. It’s important for architects to work in both digital technologies and emotional sensibilities in order that you can touch someone’s hearts with your work.

To students who are currently learning about the discourse of architecture, particularly in the age of the computer, what would you say? About advice I think there are two levels that should be talked about: First of all, on the global and social level, I think it’s important to advise young students—and future generations—that we live in a time when materials, resources, and food are going to be limited. With these limitations, we all have a big part to play in the profession and in our designs and to do work that recognizes the condition that we live in. In doing so, we have the ability to service—with intelligence—future generations.

And on the architectural level, I think my advice is that it’s very important for architecture to touch people and to have a role in inspiring them. And we have to do that with the means—which is the digital technology—we have in our hands. But at the same time, it is important to really touch people with the sensibilities that we have to perceive architecture, and to create architecture in a way that still has meaning for people. That’s what I think is important for young people to understand. You were heavily involved in the Kobe earthquake reconstruction. What responsibility does the architect have to engage with the environment around him or her? First of all, architecture, if you can call it an art form, is about the expression of the will of the architect.

On that note, we are all on our own, based on the talent and level that we can express using the medium that we chose. But at the same time, as an architect you are a participating member in society, and you know that your architecture can never survive without being part of that society. For this reason it’s very important for architects to realize the role that they have as professionals in relationship to society, whether it’s responsibility for the environment that their designs may impact or having an influence in the political and social realm. Architects have to have the power to express, and they have to have the ability to relate to society in a meaningful way.

We all live in the global environment together; for that reason you have to be aware of your existence and your impact. But, also, on an artistic level, you are alone in your own world of thinking about your work, so these have to both be integrated—your work and the role that you play.
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