NORMAL, IL GOES GREEN IN A ROUNDABOUT WAY

Can urban renewal start with a traffic circle? Normal, Illinois, is banking on it. Home to about 50,000 people as well as Illinois State University, the city has chris- tened a new roundabout, at the center of which stands a park that is both a welcome public gathering place and a showpiece for the city’s surprisingly ambitious green initiatives. In spite of a student population, downtown Normal had been in decline since the 1950s, when malls pulled business from its main streets. Worse yet, five roads converged at the core of the city in an inelegant solution to downtown traffic. So in the late 1990s, city planners hired Chicago-based Farr Associates, known for promoting continued on page 4

MIDWEST SCORES FEDERAL DOUGH FOR RAIL/BUS EXPANSIONS

The familiar clang-clang of trolleys and rumbling of streetcars will soon be heard again in cities across the Midwest, as the Feds turn to federal transportation aid. With the support of the mayor, the aldermen, and even unions that have long opposed it, Walmart is coming to the South Side of Chicago. What will be joining the 150,000-square-foot Super Center on the sprawling 180-acre site remains less certain. Whatever gets built, it will bring economic activity to a depressed corner of the city, part of the reason Walmart succeeded against such stiff opposition. continued on page 6

WALMART CLEARS COUNCIL FOR FAR SOUTH SIDE PROJECT 

A BARGAIN FOR PULLMAN?

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In a high-speed world, it can be heartening to remember that architecture is slow. During the real estate bubble, architecture grew quicker and flashier as it shaped everything from condos to museums. Just because we can build new forms, some critics wondered, should we? Though no consensus on such questions has emerged, this period of introspection has not been without benefits, as many architects are devoting themselves to research as well as figuring out how they can practice given the changed marketplace.

Without a doubt, the Great Recession has been brutal for architects (ditto publishing), but light, it seems, is beginning to be visible at the end of the long tunnel. In working on our annual issue devoted to the development community, it was encouraging to hear that things are beginning to look up. All the developers we spoke to indicate that banks are beginning to lend again, and groundbreakings should pick up in the fall. Still, no one expects a return to the boom years.

Our feature story this month is devoted to profiles of three development companies that have focused much of their energies and investments in central Chicago, especially in areas neighboring the Loop. These companies, and their leaders, have contributed to the city’s strength, and for many different reasons their cities have declined over the last decade. It will take time for the city to absorb all these new units of housing, as well as new commercial and retail space. In the meantime, projects will likely be smaller-scaled and programs will shift (hotels and rental buildings are currently easier to finance than condominiums).

There are other indications that the downturn may still yield opportunities. On the far South Side of the city, we take a look at the Pullman Park project, anchored by a Walmart and other big-box retail. The development is the result of years of debate over allowing Walmart to expand into the city. Whatever you may think of the world’s largest retailer, they are committing to a part of Chicago that other retailers have long ignored.

In addition, we offer a couple of views of the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland, designed by Foreign Office Architects. During the downturn, and drawing from an economically challenged community, the scrappy institution has raised enough money and, with the help of a private developer, is on schedule to break ground this fall. The small, tightly budgeted building could do what the New Museum by SANAA in New York did three years ago: remind us that economy of means does not have to scale down architectural ambition, and that there need not be a choice between form and function.

So where does that leave the profession? Time will tell. Most of us have been humbled by this recession and have learned to do more with less. In architecture, as in life, limitations can be liberating.
September 24, 2010

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The design team behind Las Vegas’ Playboy Club, James Geier and Karen Herold of 555 International, recently completed the interior of the anxiously awaited restaurant Girl & The Goat. There may not be a Hefner behind this project, but there is Stephanie Izard, winner of the cooking show Top Chef. As guests enter the front door, the first sense triggered is smell, from the smoky wood-burning oven. The second is sight, via charred cedar paneling and a host stand that complement the earthly aromas wafting from the open kitchen. The designers created two areas for a more interactive and intimate dining experience: two bar chairs at either end of the serving station for couples, and a long king’s table next to the open kitchen that sits on a tile “rug.” The oven, central to Izard’s food, is further evoked by the installation of a long king’s table next to the open kitchen that sits on a tile “rug.” The two bar chairs at either end of the serving station for couples, and created two areas for a more interactive and intimate dining experience: is sight, via charred cedar paneling and a host stand that complement triggered is smell, from the smoky wood-burning oven. The second cooking show Hefner behind this project, but there is Stephanie Izard, winner of the anxiously awaited restaurant Girl & The Goat. There may not be a real Italian, Fendi-clad women in gravity-defying heels. Eavesdrop got jittery with HOK staff in attendance, after last month’s column where we accidentally disparaged one of their projects. We didn’t mean it! Eavesdrop is a lover, not a fighter. But it was Perkins + Will that dominated the party, with a gaggle of representatives hanging out near the back. We couldn’t tell if they were there for the sanitary surfaces or the salumi—in this market, probably the latter.

CORRECTING THE COMPETITION

There’s a new design rag in town, Design Bureau, a thick, full-color glossy containing everything from graphic design to jewelry and fashion to architecture. The launch—yes, another boozy cocktail soiree—was stylishly set in Chicago’s Children’s Discovery Museum. But perhaps the Children’s Discovery Museum. But perhaps the city’s got some friendly folks hanging out near the back. We couldn’t tell if they were there for the sanitary surfaces or the salumi—in this market, probably the latter.

SECRET AND SPIES

Studio Gang threw a tasteful little party with the Natural Resources Defense Council, and let us tell you something: Jeanne Gang’s got some friendly folks on her staff, leaving us with nary a catty comment to make. The point of the party was to show off some of the greener components of the firm’s work—we think?—but Eavesdrop was more interested in the juicy gossip, people, and new projects. One model on view gave us severe déjà vu, like haven’t we heard that song before? And another seemed to be a model highlighting a suspiciously vacant footprint in a very recognizable location. Jeanne’s rascally associates stashed the building in the closet before the party, but once they got a little boozy, lips loosened. We can’t tell you exactly what we heard, but after the open bar we could barely walk in a straight line. Fingers crossed for you, Jeannie!

GUZZLE AND GO

The summer party train continued over in River North at the opening of Fiandre, the Italian architectural surfaces showroom, where a new bacteria-resistant and actually handsome solid surface was on display alongside the natives: Bodies of real Italian, Fendi-clad women in gravity-defying heels. Eavesdrop got jittery with HOK staff in attendance, after last month’s column where we accidentally disparaged one of their projects. We didn’t mean it! Eavesdrop is a lover, not a fighter. But it was Perkins + Will that dominated the party, with a gaggle of representatives hanging out near the back. We couldn’t tell if they were there for the sanitary surfaces or the salumi—in this market, probably the latter.

The city then hired Chicago-based Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects to design a centerpiece for the plan in 2002—a traffic roundabout with an outdoor room ringed with LEED-certified buildings. Last month, the circle opened, and is already crowded with children from the first completed building, the Children’s Discovery Museum. But perhaps the project’s most significant feature is below ground, where designers placed an extensive rainwater collection system.

“I wanted a modern, innovative statement of where Normal was headed,” said firm principal Peter Schaudt. To that end, he worked with a team of consultants to integrate stormwater into the site’s irrigation and its aesthetics. The process begins in an abandoned underground storm sewer, repurposed as a 76,000-gallon holding tank. After passing through a filter and ultraviolet sanitizer, the water is pumped into a filtration bog before gravity pulls it through four pools and into a fountain. The landscape is both welcoming and durable, with a 56-foot sloped lawn and 12 London Plane trees surrounding by concrete elements able to accommodate foot traffic and the occasional bump from a beer truck on its way to campus. The project is an urban planning model in more ways than one. For Schaudt, it anticipates a future where cities have stricter environmental laws. “The future of landscape, in our lifetime, is that municipal governments won’t allow potable water to water landscapes,” he said. The surrounding LEED-certified buildings will also fall under Uptown District requirements that any new construction over 7,500 square feet adopt minimum LEED standards—the first ordinance of its kind in the country.

According to town planner Mercy Davidson, Normal has received inquiries about its plan from around the nation. Earlier this year, the city gained attention when it unveiled a $47 million multimodal transit center, designed by Indianapolis-based Ratio Architects and funded in part by a $22 million Department of Transportation TIGER Grant. As the central stop between Chicago and St. Louis, the existing Amtrak station is the second busiest in Illinois, and though the poor economy has stalled the three privately owned building sites surrounding the circle, the town is confident they will find solid ground soon.
A BARGAIN FOR PULLMAN?
continued from front page

When the council approved the new store on June 30, with it came a masterplan for hundreds of units of housing and hundreds of thousands of square feet of retail and recreation space. The developer, David Doig, said those elements will be phased in over the next decade, after infrastructure work is completed on the site and Walmart opens, possibly by the spring of 2012.

Walmart's campaign to increase its Chicago presence has been underway for several years. The company was unsuccessful in landing a store in the middle-class South Side neighborhood of Chatham. Local businesses opposed the project because they feared the competition, and unions and community groups argued Walmart's notoriously low wages and business practices would undermine workers citywide.

Without the support of the local alderwoman, the project was practically dead on arrival.

Walmart then turned its attention to Pullman, where Doig and Beale had struggled to find tenants for the retail component of their Pullman Park development. “No one else was interested in our community,” Beale said. The recession aided Walmart’s efforts in an unusual way. The city was desperate for development, as were the construction trades, whose workers were experiencing widespread unemployment in the downturn. This allowed Walmart to pit one group of unions against the other, though the company did eventually agree to a starting wage of $8.75, 50 cents above the state minimum though short of the $9.25 the retail unions were seeking.

Beale and the overwhelming support he enjoyed from his community ultimately won over the recalcitrant council. Many of the area’s working-class residents must leave the area to go shopping. “It would be very hard to mix, in one place, a walkable, pedestrian neighborhood and big-box store,” Pappageorge said. “What we did was place them side-by-side, with the necessary ingredients so they can thrive independently and together.”

The project has bike lanes throughout, and a bus route will be drawn in at 111th Street, terminating at the stores. Even preservationists and planners, including the Congress for New Urbanism, have expressed some support for the project. “This can’t do any harm to the historic district, and it’s our hope that it will help restore it,” said Lisa DiChiera, director of advocacy at Landmarks Illinois.

“I believe, at the end of the day, Walmart will prove everybody wrong and be a huge supporter of the city of Chicago,” Beale said. The council finally seems to believe so, as it voted on July 28, less than a month after the Pullman vote, to approve a Walmart for Chatham. MATT CHABAN
Like many residential campus buildings of the late 1950s and early ’60s, Michigan State University’s Owen Hall was built to house an influx of students taking advantage of educational benefits for war veterans. Its concrete-slab-and-column construction had gone up quickly and filled the bill for on-campus graduate student housing, but nearly 60 years later, it wasn’t living up to the East Lansing campus’ needs. An originally grand floor-to-ceiling glass entrance had been mirrored over to create private offices, and students found the dark interiors unappealing, compared to modern off-campus housing nearby.

With a tight timeframe of just nine months for design and construction, and a budget of $9 million, the school called upon SmithGroup to refurbish the building, making it into a space that met students’ needs. An originally grand floor-to-ceiling glass entrance had been mirrored over to create private offices, and students found the dark interiors unappealing, compared to modern off-campus housing nearby.

A second glimpse of the lower level occurs beyond the relocated security desk, which now offers a view of people entering from every direction. In the evenings, students can be seen relaxing in the basement study area. Green walls provide the path, drawing students downstairs or into the building’s main-floor study spaces.

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‘That’s the peek,’’ said Varga. ‘‘The idea of people studying is what Owen is all about. It’s graduate students; it’s not just fun.’’

Green walls provide the path, drawing students downstairs or into the building’s main-floor study spaces.

The refurbishment restored views out of, and into, the building while incorporating a student-centered space that could compete with off-campus housing.

RESOURCES:

Acoustical ceiling tiles: Armstrong WoodWorks Canopy www.armstrong.com
Cafeteria lighting: Waldmann RL70E Series www.waldmannlighting.com
Carpets: Shaw Contract Group www.shawcontractgroup.com
Cafeteria fabric: Carnegie (banquette seats) www.carnegiefabrics.com
Vitra Upholstery (banquette backs) www.unikavex.com
Cafeteria chairs: Westin-Nielsen Sita Chair and Stool www.westininielsen.com
Cafeteria tables: Berco Vortex Tables www.bercoins.com
Linear color-changing LED: Color Kinetics iColor Cove QLX www.colorkinetics.com
Lounge seating: Charter House Innovations custom seating www.gotoshi.com
Markerboard wallpaper: Walltackers www.walltackers.com
Tile: Dal Tile Quarry Tile www.daltile.com
Translucent plastic: Veritas Resin Panels www.veritasideas.com
Flooring: Forbo Linoleum Sheet Flooring www.forbo-flooring.com
Bamboo plywood, woven plywood: Smith & Fong Plyboo Surfaces www.plyboo.com
Windows/doors: MechShade ElectroShade www.mechoshade.com
the museum's space by 40 percent. The project in the U.S. Though the first museum and first for the first time in its 40-year history, MOCA will give MOCA a street presence through the glazed portions of the building’s roofline. The building has six facets, some sloping and others flat, creating a subtle but sculptural presence. Through a combination of tinted glazing and mirror-finished stainless steel cladding, the building will look darkly monolithic during the day but animated at night, when light shines through the glazed portions of the facade.

Three facets, including one that is transparent, will face a broad public plaza, which will be programmed with events. “We’re part of an emerging district called Uptown that’s being developed through a private developer and the university,” said Jill Snyder, executive director of MOCA. Field Operations is designing the public spaces and landscapes throughout the district, including the plaza, the design of which will be presented for review at the end of August. Inside the building’s atrium, a monumental staircase containing both an open stair and a fully enclosed fire stair draw the eye up to the building’s four levels, which include a double-height event space, shop, cafe, educational and staff facilities, and galleries. “I think it’s clear that museums, especially non-collecting museums, are best as blank buildings,” FOA principal Farshid Moussavi told AN. “We want to use the social and administrative spaces as a way to break through what would otherwise be an opaque building. We want to animate the section.”

The largest gallery is located at the top level, a 6,000-square-foot, column-free space covered by a lightweight roof and divided by movable walls. “We’re developing a system that will be a combination of beams and cables to relieve the top floor of columns,” Moussavi said. “Really, the gallery is the very point of the project.” A lounge with views of the city and a room for film and video art are also placed on the top floor. The museum plans to break ground late this fall.

FDA FACET-NATES continued from front page. museum will give MOCA a street presence for the first time in its 40-year existence. It is also FOA’s first museum and first project in the U.S. Though still intimate in scale, the new building will increase the museum’s space by 40 percent.

The design calls for a building with a hexagonal base that transitions to a square at the building’s roofline. The building has six facets, some sloping and others flat, creating a subtle but sculptural presence. Through a combination of tinted glazing and mirror-finished stainless steel cladding, the building will look darkly monolithic during the day but animated at night, when light shines through the glazed portions of the facade.

After putting ripples in the Chicago skyline with their award-winning Aqua Tower in 2008, architectural firm Studio Gang added one more curve to the city this spring with a pavilion at the Lincoln Park Zoo. Part of the studio’s $6 million renovation of the Zoo’s South Pond, the pavilion is built of prefabricated wooden planks milled into parabolas and joined together at their ends, creating a loosely woven pattern that arcs from one edge of the boardwalk over to the other. Translucent half-pods are set into the negative spaces created by the frame, giving the pavilion the feeling—fittingly, for an aquatic habitat in a zoo—of a tortoise shell. They also provide shelter from the elements, turning the pavilion into a popular space for community meetings, classes, and recreational activities like yoga. The pavilion sits on a boardwalk encircling the four-acre pond, which Studio Gang converted from a shallow, dirty, manmade pool fed by city tap water into a natural, self-cleaning habitat that now doubles as an educational exhibit. Especially at night, with floodlights illuminating it from below, the pavilion beckons pedestrians from across the pond, drawing them around the boardwalk and through its arc.

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“Who needs another Richard Serra sculpture plunked down on a lawn?” asked Indianapolis Museum of Art Director Max Anderson. “What we wanted was something that was a space, an experience that was art, a landscape that would always be changing.” 100 Acres, the museum’s new art park of that size, manages to fulfill that vision: a place where art appears out of, or is part of, the landscape, creating spaces and inhabitable objects that may or may not outlast the passing of a few seasons.

The site for this new showcase—a hybrid of landscape, art, and architecture increasingly prevalent around the world—is a former gravel pit between a bend in the White River and a tow canal that separates the new park from the Olmsted & Olmsted landscape of the museum grounds proper that holds more traditional “plunk art.” After the pit was donated to the museum several decades ago, it continued as a wilderness, its void, denuded of Indiana limestone, filling up with water and becoming a popular swimming hole. Once the museum raised enough money to recuperate the area, it hired landscape architect Edward L. Blake, principal of the Hattiesburg, Mississippi-based Landscape Studio. Blake’s work in itself is a lesson in what (landscape) architecture can and increasingly does do: It is an act of recuperation and subtle adjustment, wherein he removed most of the non-native “blow-ins” and planted trees and bushes to define larger and smaller spaces, winding paths through the park to connect it all together. Spaces appear and sequences evolve, what can be is preserved, and the new appears as a comment on or in contrast to the old.

A small visitor center, designed by the Arkansas architect Marlon Blackwell, serves not so much as a focal point but as a respite in the woods, providing geothermally produced warmth or cooling in a triangular volume lifted off the floodplain between a sandwich of Ipe wood planes. It is the only piece of more or less traditional architecture. The one other inhabitable and enclosed space is a fiberglass volume, a well-carved out by the usually shifting, and elusive perfection of current theories on computer-assisted form-making, but for the artist it is a simple, non-referential form.

Near the Zittel piece, a rusty boat appears to make its way across the lake. It is part of Eden II, an installation by Tea Makipaa, and includes a guard tower on the shore. In this bit of set design, invisible performers, whose voices you hear in the tower, worry about illegal immigrants trying to come onshore, and gunfire rings out somewhere in the woods. You can watch it all from an undulating bench, a work by Kendall Buster, which traces the shoreline and provides a place for local fishermen to pass the day. Another set of benches designed by Jeppe Hein pop up throughout the park. They are part of a continuous ribbon of benches designed by Jeppe Hein appear to meander around the park, serving as focal point but as a respite in the park, surfacing midway through the park, guiding you into a tunnel that curves or swerves to give you a place to sit and rest.

The most complete space is a square carved out by the usually strident political artist Alfredo Jaar, Park of the Laments. A path guides you into a tunnel that slopes into the ground before you rise on steps into a raised platform surrounded by loose stone walls. It is an isolated, empty, demarcated space, where he encourages you to contemplate all those who have been displaced or lost in wars. It might, however, also become a party space, a place for a picnic, or a site for sunbathing. It is above all a clearly human-made space, a monument of sorts that stands in contrast to the near-chaos of the landscape surrounding it.

The Park of the Laments is, however, not the best space in the park. Much more successful is Team Building (Align) by the artist duo calling itself Type A. It consists of two aluminum rings suspended between trees. At the summer solstice, they project a perfect circle in the middle of the little clearing they define, but the rest of the time they inscribe a much more complex and allusive space, a moment of the difficult, shifting, and elusive perfection you find, like Adolf Loos’ grave-marker, in the middle of the woods.

The most exuberant space, however, is Los Carpinteros’ Free Basket. Its blue- and red-painted steel loops surround two basketball backboards, mimicking possible throws and leaps. It forms the park’s back door, and has become a popular place for neighborhood kids to play in and with the art. Here, 100 Acres achieves its goal of art as a real part of community everyday life, which comes out of and provides an alternative to both the natural and the human landscape from which it arose. Over the years, Anderson said, the museum might add a few pieces, and a few might fade into the landscape as they deteriorate. But 100 Acres will remain a place where landscape becomes art, and that looks an awful lot like good architecture.
The undulating balconies of Aqua are the newest landmark on the Chicago skyline, and the building has cemented Studio Gang’s reputation as one of the city’s leading high-design firms. It has also signaled the ambitions of the project’s developer, Magellan Development Group, as one of the most innovative and design-minded in Chicago. As impressive as Aqua’s profile in the skyline may be, it is only one piece of the Lakeshore East development, the large mixed-use area just north of Millennium Park developed entirely by Magellan, which has helped infuse downtown with residents and activity. When it is complete, Lakeshore East will have approximately 5,000 units.

Over the last decade, Chicago’s downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods have seen a renaissance in design-driven development. Alan G. Brake talks to three developers that have been instrumental in that growth about their business philosophies, the downturn, and their predictions for the future.
of housing—3,000 of which have been built—along with 1,500 hotel rooms, 2.2 million square feet of commercial space, and a 6-acre park. Built on 26 acres of a former golf course, Lakeshore East is one of the largest developments within a central business district anywhere in the United States. “This site was in front of all of our eyes,” said James Loewenberg, co-CEO of Magellan. “Timing and luck are the most important things. And the timing was right for Lakeshore East.”

Based on a masterplan by SOM and built around a park designed by the Office of James Burnett with Site Design Group, the project includes buildings designed by DeStefano + Partners, Solomon Cordwell Buenz, Studio Gang Architects, and Studio Gang, all within walking distance of the Loop and the lakefront. Aqua is only the latest amenity in this quickly evolving neighborhood. “Aqua is a one-of-a-kind building, and it’s definitely got a lot of cachet in the architecture community,” Loewenberg said. “From the beginning, we wanted buildings by different architects with different points of view. We think variety is a really good thing, as long as we maintain high quality.”

According to Loewenberg, the build-out of Lakeshore East is on schedule, with eight of the 13 major buildings completed. Though the most recent buildings are smaller scale, such as the Studio Gang–designed townhouses known as the Parkhomes at Aqua, the market is picking up again. “There has been a dramatic turnaround in the last 60 to 90 days,” he said. A new building, likely rentals, is in the works, designed by Brininstool, Kerwin and Lynch (BKL), a firm in which Magellan is an investor. “The condo market is still fractured, but rentals have improved dramatically here,” he said. A condominium building by Arquitectonica is on hold from his time at SOM. “It’s a dramatic turnaround, and the other buildings are performing just as well. And, the developer adds, Lakeshore East’s prospects look strong to banks. “There’s a lot of lending interest out there,” he said.

Even as the firm works to complete Lakeshore East, Magellan is looking for new opportunities in the Chicago area and beyond. Through working on a proposal for the athletes’ village for Chicago’s Olympic bid, Loewenberg formed a relationship with Thomas Kerwin, who was then working for SOM. When Kerwin decided to join David Brininstool and Brad Lynch in starting a new firm, Loewenberg sensed there was an opportunity for further collaborations. An architect by training and a principal of Lakeshore Architects—also affiliated with Magellan—Loewenberg believes the company’s relationship with BKL will allow it to pursue development opportunities abroad (Kerwin has extensive experience on large-scale projects in Asia from his time at SOM). “It’s a part of the natural evolution of things. They’ll go after a project on their own, and we’ll pursue things together when it’s appropriate,” he said.

Back at home, Magellan is working on a proposal for a grocery store, retail center, and parking garage to be built on a surface lot in the Ravenswood neighborhood. Smaller projects like these are part of Magellan’s pragmatic strategy. The company has a strong relationship with the owners of Roundy’s Supermarkets, and realized that the site, close to transit lines and a compact residential neighborhood, was ideal for a grocery tenant. The company is waiting for approval for tax increment financing funds from the city. “We’re always looking for opportunities,” he said.

Loewenberg credits the company’s success to following the market, along with a large measure of good luck. At Lakeshore East, good planning, innovative design, and an incredible central location might also have played a role. “My love has always been designing and developing highrises,” he said. “I knew that was a niche we could fill.”

SELLING HIGH DESIGN CMK COMPANIES

With 1,977 units and $1.1 billion in construction under their belt, CMK Companies can hardly be called an emerging development firm. Founded in 1995 with a few single- and multi-family projects, the company quickly gained the confidence of lenders, allowing them to move up to larger projects. A commitment to contemporary design runs through all their work, which quickly and steadily began to attract buyers.

“Our projects have a more modern feeling, with clean lines that stand apart in the marketplace,” CMK founder and president Colin Kihnke said. “A lot of buyers can tell it’s one of our projects just looking at the building. You enter the unit and you can sense it.”

Scott Osterhaus, principal of Osterhaus McCarthy, who worked on a number of smaller and mid-scale projects for CMK in the late 1990s as well as more recently, said Kihnke was a good client from the start. “He was looking for something that was interesting and more modern than was the norm in the speculative market. He’s always been a bit of an architecture buff,” Osterhaus said. He believes Kihnke not only connected with buyers but also helped to push residential design forward in the city.

Ralph Johnson, design director of Perkins + Will in Chicago, agrees. “For a long time the city was pushing really retro stuff. That was what you needed to get approved. Colin really worked to resist that,” he said. “It’s been a breath of fresh air for Chicago.”

continued on page 12
referring to the firm’s president design director of HOK Chicago, buildings,” said Todd Halamka, creating value out of classic old North in the ‘70s, and began buying up properties in River truly innovative. He started the Loop.

central business district beyond has also extended Chicago’s office space above, River North to retail and restaurants with many buildings converted mixed-use neighborhood.

“Now it’s the hottest area in the city.” The company manages more than 50 properties, many in River North, with a total of more than 4 million square feet of holdings.

Through historic preservation projects—like the conversion of Reid Murdoch Center from a warehouse into a combination of office, retail, and restaurant spaces—and new construction, Friedman has been a leader in turning the area into a vibrant, and highly sought after, mixed-use neighborhood.

With many buildings converted to retail and restaurants with office space above, River North has also extended Chicago’s central business district beyond the Loop.

“Albert Friedman has been truly innovative. He started buying up properties in River North in the ‘70s, and began creating value out of classic old buildings,” said Todd Halamka, design director of HOK Chicago, referring to the firm’s president and founder. “He has a good eye for design, and a commitment to well-crafted buildings, and he understands the importance of human, street-level scale.” HOK has worked with Friedman on a number of projects, including the recently completed Greenway Garage.

The sustainably designed garage shows the company’s commitment to adding contemporary new construction to its extensive portfolio of rehabilitated properties, as well as its continued belief in mixing uses and adding urban amenities. Built on the site of a former surface parking lot, the garage has ground-floor retail and a multi-story corkscrew wind turbine at the corner, which will generate enough electricity to power the garage and even supply a couple of electric car-charging stations. Cisterns collect rainwater, and the building will have a green roof that will be accessible to a new 40-story residential tower next door, developed by AMLI with Friedman.

According to Lopatin, vacancy rates are very low and new businesses, especially restaurants, continue to open in the neighborhood, even in the slow market. “Younger people are living in the city again,” he said. “They want the amenities close by.” With these demographic trends and the company’s long view, Friedman’s commitment to River North looks like a good investment that will continue to grow over time.
In The Grid Book, Hannah B. Higgins presents a sequence of ten emblematic grid types, framing the human condition in terms of departures from the grid and its implications for social control. Exploring the coalescence of real-world organizational principles and the virtual realm of musical notation, mapping, space-time, and Deleuzian logistics, Higgins suggests that there is a dynamic “biography of grids” that exists in a state of constantly evolving, discursive circumstances.

A professor in the art history department of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Higgins reveals her multidisciplinary approach in the book’s introduction, subtitled “A Meditation on Mrs. O’Leary.” Using the Chicago fire of 1871 as a springboard, Higgins suggests that there are numerous examples of grids throughout history less obvious than the urban plan from which they spring. In doing so, she begins to describe a phenomenon ultimately more complex than modernist painting and architecture’s visual mode, concerned with boxes and frames. Higgins counterintuitively returns grid discourse to the terms of fundamental human expression, nature, and “living material.” She thereby uncovers a mythology that has less to do with mass production and more to do with the reconfiguration of Western society. The following chapters, each devoted to a grid type and its fundamental unit, include the brick, the cartographic representation of the world, the dissemination of religious ideas through musical notation, and the invention of movable type as components of this continually evolving grid genealogy.

Through the lens of the grid, Higgins has found a way to write about everything. The mélange of characters, events, and aesthetic shifts in The Grid Book is seriously thrashing. More than in his earlier documentary photographs of buildings and street scenes in Cuba, Russia, Vietnam, and New Orleans, Moore’s emphasis here is on epiphanies of scale, and on the subjective experience of time. The dramatic beauty and pictorial perfection of large-scale photographs of the Packard Motor Car Company plant or Michigan Central Station lend them a gawp and romantic grandeur and theatricality, which is perhaps misleading. Neither tragic, ironic, nor nostalgic, they take a long, very contemporary look at the way various types of degradation bring forth utterly strange, transitional vistas.

Some of the buildings Moore observes in this way are seminal structures. He conveys the vastness of Albert Kahn’s 1907 Packard Plant, the first industrial building in America constructed with reinforced concrete. Castellated tile battlements glow in afternoon light at the Packard Motor Car Company plant or Michigan Central Station lend them a gee-whiz romantic grandeur and theatricality, which is perhaps misleading. Neither tragic, ironic, nor nostalgic, they take a long, very contemporary look at the way various types of degradation bring forth utterly strange, transitional vistas.

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The past 100 years have witnessed the best and worst of times for American transportation infrastructure. A relatively short evolution from dirt streets and horse-drawn carriages to bullet trains and commercial jet aircraft has forever altered the design of transportation infrastructure. These systems require design that is not only functional but also beautiful, responding to the natural features of the locale and fostering a sense of community value and identity. As architects, planners, and engineers, we have a civic obligation to reinvolve ourselves in the design of infrastructure initiatives, just as we did more than a half-century ago. When America’s love affair with automobile travel began in earnest during the years following World War II, a new system of roads was celebrated for both its engineering feats, this new system of infrastructure. A relatively short evolution from dirt streets and horse-drawn carriages to bullet trains and commercial jet aircraft has forever altered the design of transportation infrastructure.

As the highway movement gained momentum, beautification campaigns, many led by the federal government, lobbied to remove billboards and junkyards from the nation’s highways and to replace them with wildflowers and parkland. Wayside oases sprang up along the highways, offering food, lodging, and entertainment for weary travelers. Throughout these changes, America led the charge in the design and development of infrastructure and transportation systems, and good design remained at the forefront of planning initiatives.

Today, however, political competition, exhausted government funds, and an influx of more appealing projects have left the American landscape littered with crumbling roads and bridges that are perpetually in need of repair and desperately outdated. Gridlocked traffic, overcrowded airports, and limited access to travel have become the norm. Expansions or repairs that manage to get pushed through the system are often quick fixes and lack any architectural sensibility. Just as we did almost a century ago, America now stands at a critical juncture as we anticipate the introduction of a new generation of railroads onto our land-scape: high-speed trains. Europe and Asia have embraced high-speed rail as the future of intercity travel, and we are poised to have the same extraordinary opportunity to transform the way American cities connect. Once again, trains are becoming viable solutions for American travelers—but these are not like any trains we have seen before. High-speed trains offer travel times comparable to some airplanes, with speeds reaching 220 miles per hour. With this new mode of rapid transit comes a responsibility to re-examine and reflect upon the way we design and implement transportation and infrastructure systems. Looking back, the past century is filled with examples of infrastructure projects from which we can learn important lessons.

Consider, for instance, the story of three New York City bridges: the Williamsburg Bridge (1903), the Manhattan Bridge (1909), and the George Washington Bridge (1931). The awkward and starkly utilitarian Williamsburg Bridge, designed by architect Henry Hornbostel and engineer Leffert L. Buck, shows us how unfortunate the results can be when a project is built solely for a functional purpose, with little consideration for design and form. The Manhattan Bridge, on the other hand, was designed with McKim, Mead & White as consulting architects and, while undeniably beautiful with its ornate ironwork, serves as an example of what can happen when engineering details are neglected. While visually successful, the Manhattan Bridge has shown its deterioration over the years much more visibly than its neighbors.

The Depression-era George Washington Bridge, a collaboration between engineer Othmar Ammann and architect Cass Gilbert, demonstrates that a bridge can be both structurally sound and extraordinarily beautiful. Gilbert’s influence is especially seen in the distinctive architectural features of the bridge’s approach. Le Corbusier once declared the George Washington Bridge “the most beautiful bridge in the world.” Still as graceful today, its integration of solid engineering and architectural qualities stands as a testament to careful planning and design-minded leaders.

Elsewhere during the 1920s and 1930s, the notion of “the bridge as art” captured the attention of builders and government officials. Joseph Strauss, chief engineer of the Golden Gate Bridge (1937) in San Francisco, hired local architect Irving Morrow to design architectural treatments and flourishes for the bridge. The streetlamps, railings, pedestrian walkways, art deco towers—even the burnt red-orange hue—were the artistic vision of Morrow. On a much smaller scale, architect Edward H. Bennett’s Michigan Avenue Bridge in Chicago, one of the most visible pieces of infrastructure in the city, unites historically cutting-edge engineering with art and sculpture. Completed in 1920, the bridge was built as part of Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago, still the preeminent example of integrating urban planning with architectural sensibility.

Depleted budgets and increased demands for speedy road and bridge expansions and repairs have, in many instances, left today’s infrastructure projects devoid of any aesthetic richness or value. Architects, planners, and engineers should embrace these projects as highly visible ways to begin rebuilding America’s transportation infrastructure systems. A recent and extremely successful project, one that shows the inherent potential for a fresh vision, is the new Interstate 35W bridge in Minneapolis. In August 2007, while undergoing structural repairs, the bridge collapsed during the height of rush hour. Instead of simply replacing the bridge that had once been, which possessed no aesthetic qualities and offered limited river views, the Minnesota Department of Transportation hired FIGG Engineering Group to create a sleek, modern and functional performance replacement bridge.

Not only was the new bridge completed three months ahead of schedule (with financial incentives for early completion), but careful thought and consideration were given to the visual impact of the bridge on the cityscape. This new bridge is made of white concrete instead of steel, and curved piers gracefully frame the river. Meanwhile, pedestrians and drivers on adjacent bridges are offered a view of the city uninterrupted by rusted steel trusses. Embedded sensor technology detects even the smallest of problems, meaning that the new bridge serves as both a beautiful piece of infrastructure and a model for other bridge designs.

The impacts of well-designed infrastructure projects like the 35W bridge can be felt almost immediately. By contributing to these projects and sharing their ideas and visions, architects, planners, and engineers can become critical members of the planning and engineering teams. Looking ahead to the big picture of American infrastructure, a fully realized high-speed rail system will not only provide new visions but planning has already begun. We have immediate opportunities to become involved in the planning of this initiative, and have the knowledge and insight to support and enable the process, rather than simply watching from the sidelines, or confining our efforts to station design.

High-speed rail seeks to use existing freight right-of-ways, meaning that grade separation will need to be designed. Raised rail lines and road underpasses will have an enormous impact on the American landscape. This is an opportunity for architects, planners, and engineers to ensure that comprehensive and thoughtful design is incorporated into this new system, establishing high standards and becoming the voice for alternative solutions that beautifully bring together form and function.

Looking ahead, the potential of nationwide high-speed rail, determining where these new trains and tracks go will significantly affect the future of our cities, their development and growth, and how communities and local economies are interlinked. It is not too late for American architects to join the effort. We can be a voice for issues that might be overlooked in early planning stages, expressing the playing field and positioning ourselves to work with engineers and planners. By articulating the vision of high-speed rail and becoming involved in the process from the beginning, architects can become a new voice for the passengers of train travel and make their mark on the future of American infrastructure.

PETER RUGGIERO IS A DESIGN PARTNER AT SOM CHICAGO.
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