Developer Dudley Webb of the Webb Companies didn’t make any friends when his company razed an entire block of downtown Lexington, Kentucky dating to the 1820s. The demolition was to make room for a massive mixed-use tower called CentrePointe, which ended up stalling in the recession. But now...

No one associated with the proposal to redevelop Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago’s Lincoln Park holds any illusions. The project is complex, and the surrounding community is vocal. After an intense competition to purchase the six-acre site, the hospital decided that McCaffery & Antunovich’s mixed-use residential and retail proposal, which beat out eight other entries, was the most viable.

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While many of Mayor Daley’s initiatives promoting citywide sustainability were visionary, transportation is one area where new thinking is still needed. Chicago traffic is among the worst in the country, and its air quality suffers as a result. Mayor Emanuel’s planning policies are just beginning to take shape, though we are heartened with his selection of Gabe Klein as department of transportation commissioner.

Emanuel saw Klein’s work first hand in Washington, where, as the capital city’s DOT head, he added hundreds of miles of bike lanes and implemented the nation’s largest bike sharing program. Klein, like his better-known peer in New York, Janette Sadik-Kahn, is one of the new breed of transportation planners who are seeking to give pedestrians and cyclists a bigger share of the road. For too long we have designed our streets with primarily the car in mind, to the detriment of street life, the environment, our health, and our cities. It also makes bad economic sense. The era of cheap oil is over.

Innovative commissioners like Klein and Sadik-Kahn, recognizing their relative autonomy and the vast portfolios of public spaces under their control, are changing things quickly. Sometimes these changes ruffle feathers, but Washington and New York are seeing bigger increases in cycling and significant improvements in pedestrian safety. It has also helped make them celebrities in planning circles. Bike sharing, complete streets, sidewalk extensions, and pedestrian scramble intersections change the look and texture of streetscapes, usually for the better. They help transform streets from pass-throughs into destinations. With its wide streets and flat topography, Chicago seems primed to be a leading bicycling city, expanding its already active and visible cycling population.

Architects, directly and indirectly, have been part of the monoculture problem. In order to meet parking requirements most new high rises include vast parking podiums, which, even with ground floor retail, deaden street life and pull eyes off the street, to paraphrase Jane Jacobs. An overabundance of parking encourages casual, even constant, car use, and helps generate traffic and sprawl. But that could change. In a recent interview with the smart transportation blog “Grid Chicago” Klein said he wants to reduce sprawl. But that could change. In a recent interview with the smart transportation blog “Grid Chicago” Klein said he wants to reduce the parking requirements for new construction: “I think we should have a maximum and no minimum.” I couldn’t agree more.

Klein also reiterated the Emanuel Administration’s commitment to building the Bloomingdale Trail. While that project is routinely compared to New York’s High Line park, the Bloomingdale Trail is being conceived as a transportation artery, not merely as a place for a romantic promenade. It will be the most protected bike lane of all. I can’t wait to take a spin down it, preferably using a shared bike.

ANARCHISTS MIA continued from front page

ARCHITECTS MIA continued from front page

NEWS

MARTHA THORNE / ANDREW ZAGO / JOHN ZUKOWSKY
NICHOLSON / DONNA ROBERTSON / RAYMUND RYAN /
AARON BETSKY / SARAH DUNN / ZURICH ESPOSITO /
MOYNIHAN / BRIAN NEWMAN / AARON M. RENN
CINDY COLEMAN / SARAH F. COX /GUNNAR HAND /
CONTRIBUTORS

NEWS

In late July Monaco-based developer Bill Davies stunned Chicago with a proposal for a massive West Loop retail and entertainment complex topped by office, residential, and hotel towers, including a 120-story skyscraper. Working with Laurence Booth, principal of Booth Hansen, the full build-out would include 6.2 million square feet of retail, restaurants, and entertainment space, 3.8 million square feet of residential space, 2 million square feet of offices, 7500 hotel rooms, parking for 12,000 cars, and a 20 acre “skyline park” green roof. The massive old Post Office building, which Davies acquired in 2009 for $20.8 million, will anchor the project’s first phase, which would also include a 40 story hotel tower atop the 10 story base.

He’s very taken with the building,” Booth said of Davies. “What he saw was 3 million square feet sitting on top of every possible transportation mode. You just have incredible access.” Davies and Booth believe the site has the potential to draw visitors from the suburbs, the city, as well as tourists, and envision a retail/entertainment/leisure destination that could rival the Mall of America, but more upscale and more urban in atmosphere. “The first phase has to work and build momentum,” he said. “You have to deliver a high quality experience for people.” Booth envisions a theatre, movies, restaurants by top-tier Chicago chefs, along with a mix of retailers. Pending interest from tenants, Davies wants to break ground on the first phase in two years. 50B

TALLEST CHICAGO TOWER PROPOSED
IN POST OFFICE MAKEOVER

MAIL MALL MONOLITH

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It's Civil Rights!

Helmut Jahn's new Mansueto library at the University of Chicago and the Light Sabers on the Midway Plaisance made Blair Kamin's list of the best new architecture, so we headed south to check them out. We drove down to Hyde Park and tacked on requisite stops at the Co-op Bookstore, the Hyde Park Art Center, and the Robie House. Last on the list: Mansueto, with its beautiful glass dome-capped reading room and subterranean, robot-managed vaults.

Eavesdrop is quite used to weaseling our way into a party. So you can imagine the shock when the receptionist at the library proved to be the strictest bouncer we've encountered in a long time. UC is infamous for its pajama-wearing, sandals-with-socks-scootin' co-eds, so it wasn't our attire that got us turned away. "Sorry, sir, Chicago residents cannot enter the library, only out-of-state residents."

Now why would they have that policy? It wouldn't be to keep the homeless and low-income (mostly racial minorities) from the surrounding area out would it? Gosh, Eavesdrop hopes not!

Until that changes, us locals can only enjoy the dome's exterior, which looks like it would be fun to climb on (and stage an architectural sit-on...I mean sit-in).

Dueling Banjos

Whoops, y'all, a development team left another hole in the ground. The ambitious robot-attacking-downtown-Louisville skyscraper known as Museum Plaza is dead. And this was just on the heels of Lexington–Louisville's distant, dumpier rival (Eavesdrop lived in both, so we knew)–announcing plans for an entire block by Studio Gang. Lexington's skyline show-stopper will be Gang's bundle of tubes tower, leaving Louisville's skyline with the '80s-tastic Michael Graves-designed Pomo Humana Building as its most prominent player. This is the city's second skyline miscarriage, as the Pei Cobb Freed-designed Vencor tower died, too.

Hope in Joplin

continued from front page

Manager, said, “We have been overwhelmed by the volunteerism and involvement in response to the tornado. We would like to see this carry over into the planning segment of the recovery process.”

The EF-5 (Enhanced Fujita Scale 5) tornado destroyed a mile-wide swath of southern Joplin, Missouri. In its wake it left 159 dead and approximately 8,000 properties destroyed, including 500 businesses, 33 churches, nine schools, and one of two regional hospitals in the cities of Joplin and Duquesne as well as Jasper County.

After nearly two straight months of cleanup, the area ravaged by the storm has mostly been leveled, leaving assorted piles of rubbish, concrete foundations, and stripped trees. On June 22, the City of Joplin put a 60-day moratorium on all demolition efforts to allow debris trucks and utility crews to complete their work. The moratorium was put in place to expedite the clean-up efforts before the local match for debris removal is adjusted from 10 to 25 percent on August 7. Local leaders fear that if widespread clearing continued after the adjustment, the $3 million per day costs would bankrupt the city.

Before the first community meeting on July 12, decision makers and concerned citizens formed the Citizens Advisory Recovery Team that will provide expertise and coordinate community input throughout the reconstruction in six areas:

Infrastructure and Environment, Housing and Neighborhoods, Schools and Community Facilities, Economic Development, Sustainability, and Community Vision. Brian Ross, Community Development Specialist for the Harry S Truman Coordinating Council, the local regional planning authority, explained, “The intent is to create a bottom-up approach where residents have a say in how their neighborhoods will be redeveloped.”

Thus far, $509 million has been paid out from insurance agencies, and with an estimated $3 billion in damage, the path to recovery is long for the Joplin metropolitan area. A majority of local residents did not have insurance, and with no guarantee of public assistance in the future, some are beginning to sell their parcels to private developers and leaving town. Additionally, Joplin High School, which currently lies in a floodplain, needs to be rebuilt, and St. John’s Regional Medical Center, which will be demolished after a direct hit from the tornado twisted the building from its foundation, is considering moving across the city.

With these huge planning issues at stake, Joplin has the opportunity to change its future for the better. Based on the initial feedback of its citizens there is a desire to rebuild a safer and more sustainable city to honor all that was lost. “The city, state, and the feds have and will continue to put an incredible effort into making Joplin a better place,” Ross said.
community support for the project is on the rise thanks to the involvement of Studio Gang, brought on board to reevaluate the project at the behest of Lexington mayor Jim Gray and Dean Michael Speaks of the University of Kentucky College of Design. Firm principal Jeanne Gang revealed her redesign at a packed public meeting in July. Original plans for CentrePointe released in 2008 called for a luxury hotel, condos, office, retail space, and parking housed in a single $250 million building bounded by Main, Vine, Limestone, and Upper streets. The project featured a central tower rising 35 stories designed by Lexington-based Sherman Carter Barnhart Architects, which sparked widespread criticism for its design and scale.

Gang approached the two-acre project site, now a grassy field surrounded by a horse-farm fence, as a series of smaller-scale interventions that could be built over time, not as a single structure requiring complete financing upfront. Webb appreciated the phased approach. “It’s a little easier with this concept to get financing because you can find investors to do smaller buildings, unlike finding one investor for one large building,” he told the Lexington Herald-Leader. New designs call for each piece of the project to be designed individually, responding to specific site conditions on the block. An eight-story glass shard filled with offices occupies one corner and a series of low-rise structures on Main Street—to be designed by local teams—reflect the scale of historic buildings across the street. Another corner facing an existing high-rise is anchored by a 30-story residential and hotel tower comprised of a bundle of tubes.

Gang told the Herald-Leader, “The benefit of the tubes is you can go inside and on top of them and have public spaces.” Different height tubes are bundled together providing landscaped rooftops that create outdoor public rooms. Arrangement of the vertical tubes and voids where the tubes are split maximize air flow and sunlight to the building.

Gang was inspired in part by horse farms surrounding Lexington. Project elements are organized within a cellular grid abstracted from local topographies. Gang hopes for a pedestrian passage and sculpture park to cross the site’s sinuous grid and unite various elements of the design. Webb must still find financing for the project, but interested tenants are already coming forward since the unveiling of Studio Gang’s redesign. Over the coming months, designs by local teams will be presented at a public meeting before the entire project begins to move through the public review process again.
BUILDING IN CONTEXT

As architect of the JELD-WEN Field renovation in Portland, Oregon, AECOM created an electric atmosphere for Major League Soccer in the heart of the city. The transformed stadium invites the public into its plazas and fans onto the pitch, connects to transportation and strengthens a vibrant downtown community.

Building in context means architecture with a view to infrastructure, ecology and local culture, to the full process of project delivery and to the perspectives of our partner disciplines.

Ellerbe Becket, now practicing as AECOM, has long been a leader in designing successful sports, healthcare and urban mixed-use developments. As AECOM, we offer creative and technical services from concept to construction. Together with our clients and their communities, we create, enhance and sustain the world’s built, natural and social environments.

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MATERIAL WORLD

Rising material prices continue to affect the design and building industries, often in unpredictable ways. Causes range from natural disasters to the availability of raw materials, but architects and manufacturers are learning to innovate within the labyrinth of a shifting market through increased collaboration with manufacturers and new approaches to material selection.

In many cases, a spike in prices comes down to a perfect storm of events. Take cotton, for example. Due to flooding in production countries like Pakistan and Australia, combined with increased demand from China, the fiber is at its highest price in nearly 150 years. “Those two things mean that cotton has gone through the roof and everyone is trying to find alternatives,” said Andrew Dent, vice president of material research for global materials consultancy Material Connexion.

In many cases, though, it’s difficult to find an exact substitute in price and volume, especially as even commonplace plastics like polyethylene and polypropylene—used in everything from vinyl wall coverings to packaging—are rising with the price of oil. Recycled material manufacturers also face uncertainty as they search for reliable scrap and trust that virgin material prices stay high. “How do you build a business based on hoping oil prices will go up?” asked Dent.

For structural materials like steel and concrete, which held 58.4 and 20.3 percent market shares respectively in the first quarter of 2011, there is no substitute. Sometimes changes in materials prices may not affect a project as much as one would think—because fabrication and erection comprise most of a structural system’s cost, a 10 percent rise in steel pricing would mean about a 3 percent rise in overall project costs for an average steel or reinforced concrete project. But large fluctuations can happen: steel scrap saw its highest and lowest prices since 2004 in just four-month span in 2008. That’s why protection from swings is critical for fabricators. “As with anything, the real question becomes who holds the risk for those types of changes,” said John Cross, vice president of American Institute of Steel Construction, a not-for-profit technical institute and trade association for the steel industry. “Some fabricators will submit a bid with an escalation clause, and some submit it without,” he said. “You have to be very careful in terms of what you are specifying.”

As everyone in the building industry learns to count on rising costs, architects are using the integrated project delivery approach for more and more projects. A few years ago, Renzo Piano and FxFowle worked with three contractors who were paid $200,000 each to develop curtain wall mockups for The New York Times Building. FxFowle managing partner Guy Geier estimated that the $600,000 investment saved at least $2 million on the project. Now, on a yet-to-be announced corporate headquarters in Toronto, the entire design and engineering team as well as the primary contractors and owners are making decisions together, he said. The firm has also been able to leverage simultaneous work on projects in Riyadh to get better material pricing. “Because there’s not much work in Europe, the competition for work in Riyadh is intense; we’re able to get very competitive prices on the curtain wall systems we’re using,” said Geier.

Ultimately, some materials continue to defy any cost-cutting measures. The huge spike in rare earth elements—necessary for military technologies and smartphones as well as solar cells, wind turbines, and HVAC equipment—caused by soaring demand coupled with China’s market control could drive manufacturing prices to new heights. “It’s the lesser known materials that have a big impact,” said Dent of Material Connexion. But competition and lean times lead to innovation, he added. “Just because you’ve got an unlimited budget doesn’t mean you’re going to produce anything better.”

ARCHITECTS COPE WITH RISING COMMODITIES PRICES

GREEN GIANT continued from front page

When folks wait in line for the Adler Planetarium’s rehabbed space theater, they won’t be staring at a bland hallway. The new Clark Family Welcome Gallery, designed by Thomas Roszak Architecture corrals the queue at the theater’s entrance. The goal for its design: “We wanted people to stop thinking about driving and parking, and start thinking about the mysteries of the universe,” says Adler president Paul Knappenberger. Roszak answered with a tense structure of aluminum tubing covered by elastic polyester fabric—similar to his Burnham Pavilion with Zaha Hadid. The materials work as a projection surface—for educational and interactive digital games—and a backlit skin that signals the movie’s start by glowing in a rainbow of, appropriately, otherworldly colors.

MADELINE NUSSER

STRETCHING FOR THE STARS

PHOTOVOLTAIC CHARGING STATIONS PROVIDE ENERGY TO THE PROPERTY AND CAN FUEL ELECTRIC VEHICLES.

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MADELINE NUSSER
Pandora’s Box
Joseph Cornell Unlocks the MCA Collection

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Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Support for this exhibition is generously provided by Harris Bank.

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It’s not often that a modern office speaks so clearly and boldly of its context and its history. The recently completed second phase of the Metropolitan Capital Bank (MetCap) on Chicago’s Magnificent Mile, however, is a pitch perfect synthesis of the two. The Chicago office of Cannon Design has developed a holistic two-phase design including a renovation of the 1912 Tree Studios annex and a recently completed interior in the adjacent Courtyard building. “The client wanted to establish his company and create a new brand,” said Mark Hirons, lead designer for corporate interiors at Cannon. “The interior had to have a sense of character which aligned with the MetCap brand to create a sense of trust and longevity.”

The 7,000-square-foot flagship office, located on Ohio Street in the North River neighborhood, was completed two years ago and marked the launch of the MetCap Bank. Designed to respect the building’s original Arts and Crafts style and at the same time reflect a modern, forward-looking start-up with embedded technology and custom-built furniture, the derelict interior was restored with its historic features, including the fireplaces (converted to gas) and balustrades. The spaces were also reconfigured to accommodate a contemporary working practice—for example, restrooms were installed on the ground floor, and the upper level bedrooms were converted into private offices. While the boardroom was treated to a cubic lighting system by Cannon, in which four lights contained within elongated boxes of amber and a lighter frosted glass stem from a concentric square ceiling plate. Along with the 30 foot wooden bench lining the wall, which anchors the large window, the sculptural massing was intended to break up the volume and maintain an intimate scale.

To accentuate the unique, atypical design, Cannon kept the majority of furniture and lighting design in-house, manufactured by Decca. “The drawers are carved out of solid wood—like sculptures,” said Hirons. Indeed, the recently completed expanded space in the adjacent Courtyard building followed this concept of sculptural furniture and cubic massing. The custom-built dark wood lounges upholstered in Edelman Leather are designed to act as a piece within a space as opposed to anchored objects, “like the inverse of a plinth,” said Hirons. The design, using level changes and grouped geometries to demarcate spaces in the flowing open plan, takes its cue from the Prairie Style by architects like Frank Lloyd Wright (who once took a studio at Tree Studios’ artist enclave), which referenced the broad landscape. In the reception of the Courtyard office, wooden box frames stacked to create screens are fitted with amber glass, referring to the feature glass in Prairie School-designed doors. Along with Cannon’s bespoke geometric glass tile wall hanging above the fireplace, the screens refract the light and cast a warm light even when the fire is left unlit.

The bank also doubles up as an art gallery. With a rotating exhibition every three months, the interior was designed to maintain a sense of continuity with the former function as well as impress and gently bait potential customers viewing the art. The interplay of dark and medium walnut stain throughout the two separate offices, a reference to the original wood selection, contributes to the overall luxurious and well-established atmosphere. The resulting interpretation of the modern Prairie Style firmly asserts MetCap’s location with roots in Chicago’s history as well as in its future.
Room to operate continued from front page

country,” Dan McCaffery said in a statement. McCaffery acknowledged that the initial ideas that won him the contract would now have to be vetted by the city. Alderman Michele Smith, and the community.

“Should be a new neighborhood crossroads that’s great for residents and visitors alike,” said Alderman Smith. “There’s real opportunity to have communication between all the arts venues. After the hospital leaves, the biggest industry in my ward will be live entertainment.”

It’s no surprise that the developer turned to Antunovich Associates to help lay out a plan of action. Besides building a relationship with the developer on projects in the Washington D.C. area, Antunovich had already navigated the neighborhood for the last thirty years while working for DePaul University. “It’s a difficult community, but for the right projects they’re supportive,” said Joe Antunovich. In addition to his experience on the ground, Antunovich said the firm cruised the neighborhood websites to gage the conversations about the project before submitting their proposal.

The architect said that among community expectations, preserving the older buildings tops the list, while developing a strong retail corridor along Lincoln Avenue runs a pretty close second. Creating a center of gravity for the project will be key to fulfilling the developer’s stated mission of creating “a new town center” for Lincoln Park. With the areas north and south of the site well-established, the space left behind when Children’s moves to Streeterville in 2012 will offer significant opportunities.

The architect said that the hospital’s 800 parking spaces would likely remain, though neighbors can hope for a spurius up version of the garage with street level retail. The modern white brick buildings will probably be torn down to make way for residential properties, more retail, and “special gathering places.” The heights of the new buildings are not expected to exceed those there now. Despite reassurances, the community remains vigilant, though most are adopting a wait-and-see stance. “I’ve told a lot of people be prepared because something big is going to go there,” said David Varnerin, secretary for the Lincoln Central Association, whose neighborhood includes the parking garage. “People say they want retail, but I think it’s going to be mostly residential.”

Meanwhile, the architects have been pouring over historic photos of lost detailing on the older red-brick buildings on the site. Antunovich said restoring those elements was a way to reach out to the community almost immediately. “If we brought that back, it could be marvelous,” said Antunovich. “The outreach is staring you in the face on Orchard Street.” — Tom Stoelker

10

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Most of the white brick buildings will likely be demolished.
Since the 2008 financial crisis, there’s been one question in real estate that just won’t go away: Have we hit bottom yet?

Chicagoans, hoping they could finally answer “yes” to that question, were frustrated to learn in May that numbers released by the Illinois Association of Realtors earlier this year, which showed improvement in median home values, were the result of a “technical error,” according to a statement from the association.

The actual data showed an eight percent slump in median home prices, from $265,000 in May 2010 to $243,000 this year.

But any agent will tell you real estate is hyper-local. In Chicago, three neighborhoods are bucking the trend in an otherwise sagging market. The West Loop, Hyde Park, and the area formerly home to the Cabrini-Green projects boast commercial and residential development plans. Change is coming for all three neighborhoods that may lay the groundwork for a citywide real estate recovery.

WEST LOOP

Residents of the 39-story Skybridge highrise at West Washington Boulevard and Halsted Street live in the tallest building west of the Dan Ryan Expressway. It seems a sign of the times, then, that they’re worried about the potential shadows from a 50-story highrise planned across the street, at One South Halsted Street.

The designers, FitzGerald Associate Architects, declined to comment until the project reaches the Chicago Plan Commission. If developer David Friedman of Skokie-based F&F Realty sees the project through, tenants of the 514 rental units could use room service and other amenities from F&F’s adjacent Crowne Plaza Hotel. The plan also includes about 10,000 square feet for retail along Halsted Street.

“We want to make sure what goes in the West Loop fits in the West Loop,” said Martha Goldstein, executive director of the West Loop Community Group. But what fits in the West Loop is evolving.

Bulls and Blackhawks games draw hoards of visitors to the nearby United Center, and since 2005 the Pitchfork Music Festival has attracted thousands to the neighborhood’s Union Park. But aside from sports bars surrounding the venues, Goldstein said, West Loop businesses don’t benefit much from the come-and-go crowds.

The Chicago Transit Authority plans to open a new Green-Pink Line stop at Lake and Morgan Streets next year, before most of the neighborhood’s new...
Goldstein said she hopes the new infrastructure will help make the neighborhood itself a destination, game night or not. One South Halsted isn’t the only West Loop development trying to drum up more retail dollars with a mixed-use highrise. It isn’t even the only one on Halsted Street. Skokie-based Taxman Corporation’s Gateway rental tower at Halsted Street and Monroe Street is on track to receive $7 million in tax increment financing (TIF) money from the city to build 95,125 square feet of retail space on three floors, 71,000 of which will be devoted to a Mariano’s grocery store. Gateway will also house 228 apartments in a 312-foot tower.

“These are big because we haven’t had anything like this since Skybridge,” Goldstein said. That project was completed in 2002. “It will bring people to the neighborhood, which is a good thing,” said Alderman Walter Burnett. “The business community is one hundred percent excited about it, but it could also help to stabilize the real estate market in the neighborhood.”

Alderman Burnett’s church, First Baptist Congregational, is involved in a development deal of its own. In a partnership with Heartland Housing, the church is converting the 81-year-old Viceroy Hotel at 1519 West Warren Boulevard into 89 studio apartments, a café, and a community garden. All the units will serve tenants with incomes at or below 60 percent of the area median income. The city has signed off on $3.8 million in TIF dollars for the project.

Heartland’s director of real estate development, Hume An, said they have begun the application process for federal historic tax credits, which could offset project costs $2.5 million to $3 million. “We’re hoping to restore it to its original glory and make it an asset to the community,” An said. Heartland is working with the Chicago engineering firm dbHMS to make the building more sustainable, retrofitting the Chicago landmark with geothermal heating and cooling, permeable pavement in the parking lot, and a partial green roof.

Target plans to break ground next month on a four-acre plot bordered by Van Buren, Jackson, and Aberdeen Streets about ten blocks from One South Halsted. Goldstein was enthusiastic about the big box department store’s West Loop development. “The great thing about Target is that they don’t disrupt neighborhoods,” she said. The retailer, she believes, blends better into urban contexts than most big box stores.

FORMER CABRINI-GREEN SITE

Target has fared especially well in the wake of the financial crisis. A Cabrini-Green location, should it pass the rest of its municipal hurdles, will be the store’s twelfth in Chicago. The proposal for the former site of Cabrini’s William Green homes just north of Division Street says a lot about the new face of Near North neighborhood. Demolition began March 30 on 1230 N. Burling Street, the last of the notorious Cabrini-Green housing projects. Cabrini-Green was once home to more than 15,000 people and became synonymous with gang violence and discontent with urban renewal nationwide. The coveted Near North Side real estate it occupied also became extremely valuable as the nearby Gold Coast, Old Town, and Lincoln Park neighborhoods developed in the 1990s.

At 840 West Blackhawk Street, Adam Berkelhamer and Antunovich Associates’ SoNo East tower is under construction. Move-in dates for the 324 units are still uncertain but the structure is expected to be up and fully enclosed by the end of the year. The building also includes 50,000 square feet
of ground floor retail space, although commercial tenants have not been announced. The SoNo west tower was completed in 2008 by Booth Hansen Associates, where Berkelhamer worked at the time. He has since gone solo and redesigned the eastern tower, which was originally envisioned as a mirror image of the 2008 structure.

“The new design really opens up the space between the towers,” Berkelhamer said. He staggered the units to improve the views for the whole building. Another difference between SoNo’s east tower and its pre-financial collapse kin: its residential units are rentals, while SoNo west has 200 condos.

“This building, along with its neighbor, will help anchor the residential presence on this side of North and Halsted,” Berkelhamer said. Retail is dynamic in the nearby neighborhoods, and Cabrini-Green’s absence leaves a residential opening close to downtown that SoNo hopes to help fill.

Coming on the heels of residential development, the expected arrival of Target seems to confirm suspicions that Cabrini’s prime Near North real estate will not languish much longer. “I think Target can be a shot in the arm,” said Alderman Burnett, whose 27th Ward includes the property as well as most of the West Loop. If the deal is approved, Target would hire 75 Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) residents (of a likely 200-employee staff), including some for supervisor or management jobs. To acquire the site at Division and Larrabee Streets, the company would swap 3.6 acres in a land agreement with CHA.

Target representative Molly Snyder confirmed that the Minneapolis-based company is in discussions with the CHA to bring a store to the area but would not confirm a timeline for the project. The Plan Commission approved the project July 21, but it still has to clear the zoning board and city council.

HYDE PARK
“Hyde Park is very much a company town,” said Peter Cassel, director of community development for Antheus Capital, which owns more property in the neighborhood than anyone except the University of Chicago. “As the University grows, so too does the neighborhood.” It follows then that as the University announced plans to revitalize commercial activity along its 53rd street corridor in 2008 with a project called Harper Court, Antheus revealed plans for its own 500,000-square-foot mixed-use development, City Hyde Park, at 51st Street and South Harper Avenue.

Both plans drew mixed public comments. While many residents welcome the new retail, “we’ve heard a very strong desire to retain what people currently like and find special about Hyde Park,” Cassel said. “The challenge for us is to maintain that balance.”

Harper Court and Antheus’ City Hyde Park project are the twin hubs of an apparent development boom that also
includes University acquisitions of a former Borders Bookstore building as well as the renovation of commercial and theater buildings along 53rd Street. Antheus, for its part, is also converting two historic hotels into apartment buildings and building a new mixed-use project called City Hyde Park with the help of Aqua Tower architects Studio Gang.

Gang’s Hyde Park partnership with Antheus also includes the 26-story residential Solstice on the Park project, which was stalled when the economy sagged. “We’re excited because we think Hyde Park has a lot to offer,” principal Jeanne Gang said.

In September the Del Prado Hotel, located at 53rd and South Hyde Park Boulevard, will open its doors to new renters—23 leases have already been signed, Cassel said. “We’re thrilled to reintroduce one of Hyde Park’s real gems,” he said.

Renovation of the Shoreland Hotel is still ongoing. Gang said the studio is trying to update the interior and landscape design while treading lightly on the 1920s landmark. “You’ll see a new palette show up,” she said.

Whole Foods will be the anchor tenant at Gang’s 110,000-square-foot City Hyde Park, which includes a 22-story tower. Cassel said Antheus is working on securing a second major commercial tenant, but some space will remain for offices and boutique stores. The 179 residential units—it’s still undecided whether they will be condos or rentals—won’t be open until at least 2014. “It’s almost impossible to know what the residential market will look like at that point,” Cassel said.

Gang said the design intends to de-emphasize the car. All of the building’s programming faces out to the street, and Metra riders should be able to see City Hyde Park’s green roof from the 51st/53rd Street Hyde Park stop just two blocks south. “The greenest thing you can do is get people to live near a train station,” Gang said.

The first phase of the University’s Harper Court, which will include 150,000 square feet of office space, a 130-room Hyatt Place hotel, retail offerings, and parking, is scheduled for completion in fall 2013. Sophie Bidek, a principal at project architects Hartshorne Plunkard, said the design promotes pedestrian use with 40,000 square feet of open space. “What we’re trying to do is really create a 24-hour environment,” Bidek said.

Susan Campbell, a University spokesperson, said the University found people were leaving Hyde Park for retail needs. “We’re hoping that our efforts will catalyze the market so that 53rd Street will be a vibrant place to shop as well as a destination for entertainment,” Campbell said. The commercial tenants are still undetermined but expected to include a mix of retailers, restaurants, and casual dining to serve the lunch crowd.

Meanwhile, despite its prime location, the pace of development in the Cabrini-Green area lags that in Hyde Park or the West Loop. Nearly all of the neighborhood is still under the purview of the Near North TIF district which won’t expire until 2020. If development is to continue, it will have to be with considerable support from the city. Development is collaborative and affects neighborhoods both physically and demographically. And while community voices and TIF concerns have helped to fine-tune deals in each area, the new faces of West Loop, Hyde Park, and Cabrini-Green are in large part the result of a few private entities. If the relative success of West Loop and Hyde Park especially heralds anything for the market at large, it’s that major companies are investing in some Chicago neighborhoods long ripe for redevelopment.

CHRISTOPHER BENTLEY IS A CHICAGO-BASED REPORTER.
While architects and designers are focusing on the grand gestures—where to place a door, a stair, or a walk-in shower—the individual parts of those elements can be overlooked due to tight budgets or timeframes. But hardware components like handrails and doorknobs are crucial not only to a design’s safety and function but also to its longevity. In the world of component hardware, manufacturers are upping their customizable options to cater to a range of indoor and outdoor needs, from high-traffic public spaces to high-design residences. And in the bath, often-neglected details like drains, grab bars, and even speaker covers are getting a modern makeover. From the front door to the kitchen cabinet, quality hardware always adds a luxury finish, while high-caliber components make a solid impression from the very first touch.

JENNIFER K. GORSCH
Cambridge Architectural offers full design, engineering, and collaboration services on a wide range of interior and exterior architectural mesh systems including stair railings and enclosures. The company recently introduced several new open-weave stainless steel mesh styles while continuing to offer classic patterns and attachment systems for a range of projects.

www.cambridgearchitectural.com

DecorCable’s X-Tend2 line is a timesaving solution for interior and exterior balustrade applications. Mesh panels available up to 78 inches long and in heights of 28, 33, and 37½ inches are pre-installed on stainless steel frames. These attach to the company’s universal mounting system, available for post, floor, wall, or handrail applications. Diagonal panels are available in a range of sizes.

www.decorcable.com

Silhouette pre-engineered railings integrate a range of options and materials usually only available for custom installations. Drawing from Form+Surfaces materials palette, the expanding line includes interior and exterior systems. Stainless rails can be specified with an embedded continuous LED light strip powered by low-voltage DC current. The lens assembly is weather resistant and can be angled depending on the desired effect.

www.forms-surfces.com

Though not for use as a hand railing, Gera’s Light System 8 is a light rail suitable for horizontal or vertical use. The aluminum luminaire has a variable width and hides technical components, emphasizing the adjustable screen, which is available in metal, translucent glass, or custom decorative options.

gera.public.net
Until now there was no easy way to lug a bike up stairs. Korean company Neomerce has introduced a new solution, an anti-skid public bike ramp that allows bicyclists to safely roll their bike alongside a stair rail. Rounded edges prevent users from injury, while a narrow, extruded aluminum design leaves as much room as possible to pedestrians.

bike-pullway.com/en

Architectural rope manufacturer Brugg has created a line of outdoor accessories designed to fit with its range of high-grade steel railing systems via vertically adjustable rods. The modular system includes shelves, weatherproof lighting, bird baths and bowls, and privacy screens. Attachment systems for steel handrails and glass railings are available.

www.brugglifting.com

Santa&Cole’s line of outdoor urban elements includes the Línea handrail, a simple stainless steel line that serves the dual purpose of pedestrian barrier and resting place. Suitable for any public space where a subtle barrier is required without the visual obstruction of a full fence.

www.santacole.com

Contemporary street furniture manufacturer Onn’s Sloper handrail is designed to complement the other elements of the angular Sloper line, including a lighting beacon, bollard, and fencing. Available in two heights, the cast aluminum post can be fitted with two or three stainless steel rails and an optional glass panel.

www.onnoutside.com

Four-year-old company Ee stairs has developed a range of bespoke balustrade and stair designs for commercial and residential applications. Beginning with a patented 1m2 staircase that requires only one square meter of space, designers moved on to develop a range of designs including the FlagRhythm balustrade (pictured) with a horizontal infill of steel tubes or wire and (on page 23) the TransParency 1-06 balustrade.

www.eestairs.com/en
1 ADVANTIX VARIO SHOWER DRAIN
VIEGA

The Vario drain’s customizable length allows it to integrate seamlessly with the walls of enclosed shower areas. Suitable for new construction or renovation, the 47-inch basic channel can cut as short as 12 inches in length. Its recessed design is less than one inch wide, allowing for a nearly uninterrupted floor surface.

www.viega.com

2 ZENTRIX SHOWER DRAIN
DALLMER

Partnering with the CeraNiveau drainage system from Dallmer, the rectangular Zentrix drain can drain more than 12 gallons of water per minute. Designed to eliminate the risk of flooding in level-access shower designs, a polymer concrete collar secures the drain in the screed while providing a solid bond for waterproofing beneath bath tiles.

www.dallmer.de/en

3 STARCK SPEAKER MODULE
AXOR

The basis for Philippe Starck’s Axor shower collection is the square—all elements in the line are derived from a 5-by-5-inch module. The high-performance watertight speaker module follows the formula with a 40-watt speaker encased in a sleek aluminum membrane with a rubber seal. Available in chrome or aluminum the unit is rated for indoor use only.

www.hansgrohe-usa.com

4 CERAMIC SHOWER DRAIN
ROYAL MOSA

Netherlands-based tile producer Mosa recently released a ceramic shower drain that eliminates any visible stainless steel. Available in twelve finishes, the 6-by-36-inch drain is installed in combination with an Easy Drain shower channel leaving a barely visible drainage opening, less than half a centimeter thick, around its perimeter.

www.mosa.nl/us

5 SHOWER GRID DRAINS
WATERMARK DESIGNS

Brooklyn-based Watermark Designs recently launched a new collection of six shower grid drains designed to complement contemporary or traditional baths. Drains are held in place with rare earth magnets, creating a clean finish without visible fasteners. The 5-by-5-inch grids are available in 37 finishes including polished chrome, antique brass, and charcoal.

www.watermark-designs.com

6 EMPIRE DRAIN PLUG
WATERWORKS

A modern adaptation of late 19th-century styles, Waterworks’ Empire collection includes a chain and plug waste drain. The drain includes a removable grate for cleaning and servicing. The hardware is designed to complement the company’s Empire tub and is available in nickel (pictured), matte nickel, and chrome.

www.waterworks.com
Careful craftsmanship meets modern styling.

1 TED BOERNER COLLECTIONS
ROCKY MOUNTAIN HARDWARE

Artist and designer Ted Boerner has collaborated with Rocky Mountain Hardware to create five hardware collections. Cast in recycled, art-grade bronze, the collections include 27 pieces of hardware and cabinet pulls available in nine standard finishes. Pictured is the 12⅛-inch Shift grip shown in white bronze and brushed patina.

www.rockymountainhardware.com

2 FLUX
JADO HARDWARE

German manufacturer Jado’s new Flux door handle has a seamless form made from a single piece of metal sculpted downward and affixed to a softly rounded square doorplate. Coupled with a durable chrome finish, the shape is made to resist dirt accumulation and complement a range of door styles.

www.jado-hardware.com

3 ROUND DOOR SET
REJUVENATION

Rejuvenation has added new exterior door hardware to its Mid-Century Modern Collection. Cast in iconic shapes from the 1950s and 60s, the collection includes square, star, and round (pictured) knobs designed to fit the Schlage Orb door set. Sets are made with solid brass and are available in three finishes: brushed chrome, polished chrome, and lacquered brass. Matching doorbell buttons are available.

www.rejuvenation.com

4 C CLASS
ARCHITREND

Compatible with most locks and latches, the C Class door handle is a patented design with a concealed tie-bolt and self-adjusting spindles. Approximate dimensions are 3⅛ inches by 1 inch with a 2-inch depth. Constructed with solid brass and stainless steel components and three standard finishes, the knob is available in special finishes on request.

www.architrend.com.au

5 SANCTUARY KNOB
TOP KNOBS

Inspired by Asian architectural details, Top Knobs new Sanctuary collection of knobs and pulls emphasizes delicate details wrought so that they do not compromise durability. The full line is available in eight finishes including brushed satin nickel, flat black, German bronze, oil rubbed bronze, pewter antique, polished chrome (pictured), polished nickel, and Tuscan bronze.

www.topknobs.com

6 TALIESIN DESIGN
REVEAL DESIGNS

Designed in partnership with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, Reveal’s new Taliesin collection includes three series: Series 630 and 631 can be mixed and are available in 4¼- or 7¼-inch round or rectangular pulls finished in stainless steel and beech, walnut, oil rubbed bronze, or as solid stainless pieces; Series 632 handles (pictured) have a solid wood and metal form and are available in three sizes.

www.reveal-designs.com

www.hafele.com/us

www.architrend.com.au

www.topknobs.com

www.reveal-designs.com

www.rockymountainhardware.com

www.jado-hardware.com

www.rejuvenation.com

www.hafele.com/us

www.architrend.com.au

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www.rockymountainhardware.com

www.jado-hardware.com

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www.hafele.com/us

www.architrend.com.au

www.topknobs.com

www.reveal-designs.com
AUGUST

WEDNESDAY 10
LECTURES
Modern Wing
Highlights
2:00 p.m.
The Art Institute of Chicago
111 South Michigan Ave.
Chicago
www.artic.edu

THURSDAY 18
EVENT
Walking Tour - Wolf Point, the Wigwam, and the West Loop: Exploring the Bank of the River
5:30 p.m.
Chicago Architecture
Foundation
Merchandise Mart, riverside entrance between Wells & Kinzie Sts.
caf.architecture.org

SATURDAY 20
EXHIBITION OPENING
Pathways to Stable Housing
11:00 a.m.
Loyola University
Museum of Art
820 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago
www.luc.edu/luma

EVENT
Summer Evening Sampler at the Robie House
4:00 p.m.
Robie House
5757 South Woodlawn Ave.
Chicago
www.govwright.org

WITH THE KIDS
Go Figure Mixed Media Workshop
19:00 a.m.
Smart Museum of Art
5550 South Greenwood Ave.
Chicago
smartmuseum.uchicago.edu

EVENT
100 Acres: The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art and Nature Park Tours
11:00 a.m.
Indianapolis Museum of Art
4000 Michigan Rd.
Indianapolis, IN
www.imamuseum.org

SATURDAY 3
EVENT
31st Annual Art in the Park
10:00 a.m.
Flat Iron Park
Center St. & Wrigley Dr.
Lake Geneva, WI
www.artfairkalend.com

WITH THE KIDS
Family Workshops: In Place
10:30 a.m.
St. Louis Art Museum
One Fine Arts Dr.
St. Louis, MO
www.slam.org

TUESDAY 6
EXHIBITION OPENING
Design Inspiration:
19th-Century American
Builder’s Manuals and Pattern Books
10:30 a.m.
The Art Institute of Chicago
111 South Michigan Ave.
Chicago
www.artic.edu

THURSDAY 8
LECTURE
Culture and Security
6:00 p.m.
The Art Institute of Chicago
111 South Michigan Ave.
Chicago
www.artic.edu

EVENT
Elmhurst Memorial Hospital New Main Campus Tour
5:30 p.m.
Elmhurst Memorial Hospital
New Main Campus
155 East Brush Hill Rd.
Elmhurst, IL
www.aiachicago.org

FRIDAY 9
LECTURE
Stanley Tigerman: Thinking Into the Future: The Robie House Series on Architecture, Design and Ideas
6:00 p.m.
University of Chicago
Law School
1111 East 60th St.
Chicago
www.gowright.org

TUESDAY 13
LECTURE
12 x 12 Artist Talk: Dan Gunn
6:00 p.m.
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
220 East Chicago Ave.
Chicago
www.mcaционgo.org

EVENTS
Through December 11
In Process and Artistry in the Soviet Vanguard the Smart Museum examines Soviet propaganda of the 1920s and 1930s, including a number of art pieces that set the creative precedent for mass-produced works. The show features artists Gustav Klutsis and Valentina Kulagina, from their informal drawings, collages, and visual studies to completed designs, posters, and printed material. Concerned with the “politicization of art making,” the works of Klutsis and Kulagina begin to tell a story about artistic expression, political institutions, and mass production. The show presents both experimental modes of representation and what became the iconic graphics associated with propaganda, such as Klutsis’ Glory to the Red Army of workers and peasants – loyal guard of Soviet borders’, 1935, pictured above.
buildings scarcely number 60, he
Swiss-French architect, namely his
through the most significant output
attempt to work systematically
comprises nothing so much as an
Le Corbusier, Homme de Lettres
18 years later, M. Christine Boyer's
in 1993 and finally published
A massive undertaking initiated
19 years ago, M. Christine Boyer's
in Pruitt-Igoe as some of the
those willing to listen that
things didn't need to turn out
that way. Former residents
in Pruitt-Igoe as some of the
best of their lives. The real
villains, we hear, were neglect,
racism, and abandonment.
Making a film sympathetic
to Pruitt-Igoe is a bit like argu-
ing that Jimmy Carter should
be president again—well-
meaning, perhaps, but not
worth serious consideration.
The Pruitt-Igoe Myth
revisits the late 1940s in the
black and white palette of
newsreel to exhume
the post-war ideals that set
the project in motion. It wasn't
all idealism. Developers
supported slum clearance in
St. Louis. Employers wanted
their labor force to be nearby,
especially if the government
paid.
For the first few years,
shown in nostalgic archival
footage, it all went harmo-
niously. But when budgets
sank, maintenance
suffered. As the build-
ings deteriorated, the tenants
began to leave. Abandonment
led to vandalism and more
neglect. The projects were
stigmatized as a black hole
of crime and inexhaustible
spending. Few risked defend-
ing the place, certainly not
politicians seeking re-election.
Academics and former
residents rhapsodize about
the early days of Pruitt-Igoe.
And why not? The slums
that were cleared on the site
were fetid places. The same
choruses agree in the film
that the problem at Pruitt-Igoe
(and in most public housing)
was not overspending but the
failure to fund its operations,
which doomed it to ruin. Once
a place of 33 buildings and
2,780 apartments, there were
600 people living there when
the fuse was first set on
March 16, 1972.
In St. Louis, other factors
were at work. Public housing
in Missouri wasn't legally
desegregated until 1954 when
the first building opened, so
Pruitt-Igoe (named for a black
World War II pilot and a white
congressman) was all black. It
was easy for white people to
fear and for white politicians
to exploit that fear. Pruitt-
Igoe was a black and white
promise of a new life in the
suburbs, the once-vibrant city lost
its population, and the industrial
jobs which new arrivals from the
rural South expected simply
weren't there. Men were unem-
ployed, and families surviving on
welfare were denied benefits if there
was a father in the house. The
spiral headed downward.
St. Louis, with its relatively
tight municipal borders,
seemed to be aiming at more
than the physical obliteration
of what was considered a
factory of crime and decay.

Aerial view of Pruitt-Igoe shortly after completion in 1955.

The Pruitt-Igoe apartments were a place, but they have a
greater presence as an epithet. dynamited by St. Louis
authorities on live television
in 1972, and eventually leveled
over the next four years, the
housing projects became
a concrete argument against
high-rise, high-density public
housing, and against spending
money on the undervesting poor. The demolition
created a mushroom cloud of urban
planning textbooks. With it,
the nostrums of liberalism
and the modernist structures
that sheltered its hopes came
tumbling down.

The Pruitt-Igoe Myth:
An Urban History, a new
documentary by Chad
Friedrichs, tries to persuade
those willing to listen that
things didn't need to turn out
that way. Former residents
of the project recall their years
in Pruitt-Igoe as some of the
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ployed, and families surviving on
welfare were denied benefits if there
was a father in the house. The
spiral headed downward.
St. Louis, with its relatively
tight municipal borders,
seemed to be aiming at more
than the physical obliteration
of what was considered a
factory of crime and decay.
The complex coming down in 1972.

If the African-American residents of Pruitt-Igoe had their homes leveled, there would be nowhere for them to live in St. Louis. Once out of the projects, they would be out of town, out of sight and out of mind. Abandonment of the residents, the film tells us, seemed a deliberate policy.

Strong in sociology, and edited deftly to keep the film as "inquiries into the magical mise en scène of cities." We might wonder how Corbusier’s writings from the mid-1930s when traveling in South America reflect Mauss’ dictum, describing them as "inquiries into the lyrical materiality of objects and the magical mise en scène of cities." We might extend Boyer’s analysis to Corbusier’s groundbreaking 1923 volume entitled Vers une architecture, in which Corbusier famously juxtaposed images of automobiles and steamships with classical temples so as to underscore his belief in the crucial yet delicate relationship between form and function.

Boyer’s greatest accomplishment is in providing a handy compendium of anecdotes from Corbusier’s writings that will help anyone focusing on a single topic—say, his views on antiquity, to cartography, to the United States—find a sufficient number of quotes and passages to help flesh out his famously poetic and (to me) ineffable words. Along the way, Boyer also manages to shed light on the way in which Corbusier had a nearly pathological need to express, literally and figuratively, the thoughts and ideas roiling in his head. Just as visually he vacillated between tiny drawings of single figures to sprawling visualizations of entire cities, discursively he shifted effortlessly from the epistolary to the platitudinous. The written word and the rendered image exist in perfect equipoise, and Boyer needs to justify neither her book’s existence nor its necessity. For as with all things related to him, Corbusier provides his own perfect, inviolable justification. In his final interview of May 1965 (two months before his death), he explained it all as follows: “As it turned out later that, not being able to build certain things, I could draw them; but not being able to explain them entirely in drawing, especially when it came to urbanism, I had to explain them, so I wrote.”

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As we ponder the present and future of the field of architecture, it might be helpful to look at the history of design. Different versions of many of the debates currently being played out in the design media, in academic conferences, and in our classrooms were rehearsed at the advent of the industrial revolution. Here revisiting them may shed light on our present predicaments.

As early as 1797, Goethe deliberated the relative merits of handmade versus machine-made production. In his essay “Art and Handicraft” he argued with artistic contempt against the value of mechanically produced objects, which he found less “pura,” not as “sensitive” or “pure,” than their counterparts made by hand. It is fair to say that this debate and its moralistic undertones dominated much of the design theory of the 19th century. As technological advances and economic changes fundamentally transformed material production, despite their ideological differences, A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin, Henry Cole, Richard Redgrave, Gottfried Semper, and William Morris among others, spent their time lamenting that machines had usurped the craftsman’s control over the process of the product. They believed that the effect of industrialization had been to change creative practice by separating responsibility for the appearance of a product (design) from the task of fabricating it, with the consequence that the quality of design had deteriorated. This is partly true—design as a profession was born out of industrial production’s need to separate tasks.

While the issues around the nature of design as a practice are of course very different for architects, in Architecture, this separation between design and fabrication is at the inception of the discipline. Architecture was born out of the distance between those who delineated (designed) a building and those who actually erected it. What these 19th century designer-critics failed to see is that in fact most goods at the time were not made by machines but by repetitive cheap labor. A. W. N. Pugin, for example, exposes the fallacy of the idea that it was the craftsmen who were unable to produce the products, whereas their critics, whose practices by and large included architecture, were unable to produce their projects, which were often alternative to the trends of the times where they sought to demonstrate their points of view.

Today we see traces of these 19th century arguments about technology and their latent anxieties in discussions regarding current formal sophistication enabled by parametric modeling and the potential to materialize these forms by digital fabrication. There are many who misunderstand the techniques that are now available at our disposal as merely automatic—“somehow removing the ‘hand’ of the architect (or rather her/his head) from the act of creation, as if software may automatically design. Tim Love is one who, in his essay, “Between Mission Statement and Parametric Modeling,” for DesignObserver.com, argues that current technology has removed design from the architect’s responsibility and that it is “rather controlled indirectly by the design of the software that controls inputted information.” This critique runs the risk of over-simplification as the reality of digital design continues to evolve and increasingly more sophisticated. It is true that complexity of form in many cases may mask the lack of ideas in a student’s school project, but I would venture to say that it does so, no more than shades and shadows did for the students of my generation. In Venezuela (where I am from) to render drawings is known as envenenar (to poison), a reference to the technique of making drawings as seductive in the hopes your teacher may not notice how bad a project is. The reality is that software, like pencils and parallel rulers, are tools that enable the creation and development of ideas through form. There is a difference between what we can do digitally versus what we can do through pencil and paper. Thus while the output will differ, the presence of the author in the final outcome is, at the end, no different. Parametric modeling and scripting, for example, are often named as the usual suspects in the automatization of design. In actuality, parametric modeling software depends on the user designing form and then crafting the parameters for its variations. Scripting, on the other hand, is a computer programming language that allows control over software by the end user (the designer). They are both tools, whose intent is precisely to give us more control over the design.

Potentially more troublesome is how these misconceptions—regarding the relative merits of technological advances in design and fabrication—are also currently cast in opposition to social concerns and environmental stewardship. For many, geometric complexity, mathematical precision, capacity to produce variations, in short, our ability to design very sophisticated forms, has gotten in the way of doing the right thing. I would argue that architecture has been focused for too long on advancing certain disciplinary problems—I have written in the past about the conundrum of specialization for design and other disciplines. (Focusing on disciplinary problems is also precisely what has allowed us to advance the field in ways previously unimaginable.) However, by constructing digital technology and its corollary disciplinary advances in opposition to our engagement with the world, one precludes the possibility that form may play a vital role in the solutions to our more pressing problems. In this sense, the debates of the 19th century might serve as a good lesson. While architects such as Pugin and Ruskin were arguing about styles in relationship to “good” craft, a whole building industry was being invented around them. It is in the 19th century that standardization of materials across large geographic areas came into being, forever transforming the way buildings are produced. The consistency of dimensional lumber or “modern” brick sizes and their implications have been very much part of the reality of building today. These new techniques were developed without the critical input of those outside the building industry, propelled almost exclusively by economic forces, with unexpected societal and environmental consequences. The efficiency of dimensional lumber and its ease of assembly, enabled by the wide spread use of balloon framing, for example, resulted in the boom of the lumber industry, but its unexpected side effect was that two-thirds of the net loss of forests in the United States occurred between 1860 and 1900. (Building alone is not responsible for this dramatic depletion of resources—the growth of the building and the furniture industries also had an impact in the consumption of wood during this period.) Formal concerns played no role in this architectural history. Thus, I cannot help but wonder that if form had been reconsidered in relationship to means of production, different criteria for efficiency might have emerged with dramatically different results.

Today we find ourselves at a similar crossroads. The digital revolution that has radically transformed how we acquire goods, communicate, and socialize, also has had a tremendous impact in the way that the buildings and construct buildings. However the consequences of these techniques have not yet been exhausted. There is a potential for design to radically impact the building industry and thus the material world around us. While I am one who argues that architecture, in the end, is not the most effective tool for changing the world (not like political action and/or legislation), I do think that built form does have transformative potential. And I would argue that recent disciplinary advances will become precisely the platform that will allow such transformations. While in the 19th century, industrialization tended the promise of mass production, today the combination of computer aided design software and digital fabrication offers us the potential for mass customization. This has powerful consequences. Among others, formal variation opens up the possibility of engaging multiple publics. New technology enables permutations within a single project without added cost, possibility of allowing us to design for many instead of for the average few. Similarly, geometric complexity facilitates requiring that we re-examine many programs that might require compound solutions. The formal precision now possible with digital tools permits us to advance mathematical topics, which have historically been at the center of our discipline, and thereby re-examine traditional notions of efficiency through a broader lens (material, structural, functional, economical, and cultural efficiency). Equally important, the new technologies can afford a level of detail and craftsmanship that is, throughout the 20th century was out of reach for most. Technique, and its corollary technology, has always been related to architecture. The influence of technology on the discipline is undeniable but need not be its only raison d’être. As technological advances change the production of architecture, new forms of practice are bound to arise that will impact not only the design of the constructed objects, but also our clients’ needs and greater engagement in the design process ( Morphosis has mastered this mode of practice). In addition, by creating a direct link between the architect’s means of production (drawing—in this case computer aided design) and the builder’s means of production (digital fabrication) the traditional divide between design and making has that marked the profession from its inception and brought into question, thereby appropriating craft for the discipline of architecture.

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