As Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood continues to evolve, residents are experiencing a kind of tension unfamiliar in its recent history: conflicting opinions over the appropriate design of new buildings. The topic of debate is Mercer Commons, a proposed $54 million mixed-use development by the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC), which received unanimous approval from the Cincinnati Planning Commission on November 18. The protracted review process, however, has raised questions about new development in one of the region’s most historic neighborhoods.

The new addition to the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills, MI does not add new galleries, lobbies, or grand entrances. But to call it simply “storage space” would demean the complicated inner workings of a building that allows the historic museum to operate as Eliel and Eero Saarinen intended when it was completed in 1942. Closed during the last two and a half years of renovations, the original 45,000-square-foot Saarinen structure is now fully restored and reopened to the public. The new space amounts to a very sophisticated warehouse to expertly house the extensive art collection which includes paintings, sculpture, furniture, works on paper, and architectural models. This isn’t the building’s first add-on (Raphael Moneo designed the Studio Building, completed in 2002) but it is the most substantial at

Sometimes ordinary facades conceal complex histories. Such is the case with the nondescript looking building occupied by Columbia College next to the Spertus Institute on South Michigan Avenue. The midcentury facade replaced the building’s eclectic original, which was designed in 1913, and now that that facade is failing Gensler has devised

 booster shot

Like most cities, growth in Louisville, KY continues to push out to the city’s suburban fringe, eating up undeveloped land surrounding the city. Recognizing the pristine farms and woodlands that would otherwise be developed into ubiquitous suburban housing tracts, a group of civic and business leaders headed up by Dan Jones organized the non-profit 21st Century Parks in 2005 to undertake one of the nation’s largest new park projects to protect over 3,700 acres of prime land along a winding watershed. The so-called Parklands of Floyds Fork will encompass four large, distinct parks—each named for a tributary to the waterway—designed
PEAVEY PUSHERBACK

Regarding the article “ Parsing Peavey,” (MWV 09/11.11 2011) the term “alter” seems very benign and might be a tacit way to soften, say, discussion of what’s done to characters in the recent Almodovar film, The Skin I Live In, and Boxing Helena and soon enough to Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis. In fact, what we see in those films, and what lies ahead for Peavey, is gross disfiguration. But that seems to be part of a larger pattern since facts and public process were also grossly disfigured in the past year as the City of Minneapolis determined Peavey’s future. One of the grossly disfigured facts that constantly reappears can be found in a quote at the end of the article: “The old plaza was not designed for programming or for interaction.” Politely put, that is categorically untrue. As Peavey’s landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg has emphatically stated, the Plaza was most definitely designed for programming and interaction. That was part of the project’s initial mission. Trotting out butchered and grossly disfigured facts and repeating them ad nauseum does not make them true. Saying the proposed redesign of Peavey Plaza “alters” Friedberg’s original design does a disservice to Mr. Friedberg and encourages similar obfuscation in discussing other extant and future revitalization projects.

CHARLES A. BIRNBAUM

PRESIDENT
THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION

With constant news of economic uncertainty at home and abroad and ever escalating levels of absurdist political theater gripping state and federal governments, one hair-raising piece of news should not get lost in the din. A new report by Global Carbon Project released in early December shows the largest spike in carbon emissions in a single year since the Industrial Revolution. Dangerous, dirty emission rates climbed nearly six percent, reversing a slight dip the previous year, which had been attributed to the economic downturn.

The implications of this news are hard to overstate. Without a drastic rethinking of energy use, transportation, and settlement patterns, we face devastatingly severe weather and other destructive consequences of climate change in coming decades.

For those of us tracking sustainable design and smart growth the news is at once demoralizing and cause for some head scratching. In the decade since Chicago’s City Hall Green Roof opened—a powerful symbol of urban sustainability that signaled a new compatibility between city governments and green design agendas—countless green projects, retrofits, and tools have been deployed across the country and around the world. Technologies and theories have moved from the fringe of the green design world to the mainstream, or at least much closer to it: compact fluorescents, LEDs, green roofs, white roofs, photovoltaics, geothermal systems, hybrid cars, car sharing, bike sharing, smart growth, New Urbanism, Landscape Urbanism, soft infrastructure, the list goes on and on from small scale to region-wide interventions. While the spreading of these tools and technologies is heartening—and shows a degree of willingness among the general public to accept change—one has to ask if these kinds of modest steps are meaningful at all. And is there honest discourse about the degree of change needed to mitigate the crisis?

While China recently surpassed the U.S. as the single largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the U.S. still holds the lead per capita—by a long shot. That we use—and waste—so much energy should be of no surprise, given the energy intensive landscape we built following the Second World War. Nayssers argue that for every hybrid car or compact fluorescent U.S. consumers purchase, the effect is eliminated by a Chinese consumer buying his or her first car. While this acknowledges the reality that carbon emissions are hazardous regardless of their country of origin, it also ducts the West’s responsibility for the century of pollution that created the current crisis. The U.S. has so much room for improvement that we can still make a very significant impact on our emissions. This will give us greater credibility when making the case to the Developing World to not repeat our mistakes.

This won’t happen without noisy calls for action and bold leadership. These consumer-based scenarios, and local and state level initiatives are not substitute for bold government-led standards and incentives at the Federal level. We must stop fiddling at the margins while the planet burns.

ALAN G. BRAKE
FACADE LIFT continued from front page a solution that addresses the building’s history as well as its contemporary context. Acknowledging the Michigan Avenue streetscape, a historic district with design review guidelines became the guiding principles of the design. The site, and much of downtown Chicago, is also in the migratory paths of many species of birds. Gensler’s highly efficient new double glasse curtain wall features a pixilated image of the historic facade, rendered through a series of tiny bird silhouettes that will deter avian collisions. The architects located the building’s original drawings and then scanned them to help create a ghost of the historic facade that will be digitally printed on the new curtain wall. The design recently received approval from the Commission on Chicago Landmarks.

Also part of the context was Krueck + Sexton’s distinctive folded facade for the Spertus next door. “The budget is very tight, so we couldn’t do something like what Krueck + Sexton did,” said Elva Rubio, the project’s principal architect, referring to the Institute’s bold, contemporary facade which also received Commission approval. “We wanted to create a contemporary response that also referenced the past.”

The resulting facade is designed to be as clean and as minimal as possible. “The graphic will give it a sense of place,” she said. Gensler has worked on dozens of projects for Columbia, and previously renovated the entire interior of the Michigan Avenue building. “We’ve been helping them build an urban identity,” she said.

EAVESDROP> THE EDITORS

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MENAGE A TROIS NOT

Short marriages have been in the news a lot lately. They say money is one of the biggest stressors in many unions. Still we were surprised to hear about the break-up of the new-ish firm Brininstool Kerwin and Lynch. As the economy was tanking longtime partners David Brininstool and Brad Lynch—known for their high-design, boutique practice—teamed up with former SOM principal Thomas Kerwin—known for large international projects—in an effort to tap into new markets abroad. Apparently, all has not gone according to plan. According to a statement from Kerwin, Brininstool and Lynch have gone back to practicing together, as Brininstool + Lynch, while Kerwin is moving ahead with his own firm now called just BKL (Sounds like there was letterhead). Kerwin is keeping the firms current large project, a 40-story tower on the edge of Lake Shore East for Magellan Development. Eavesdrop reached out to Lynch for his side of events, but as of press time, he has not responded, giving Kerwin the last word for now.

DUELING ART FAIRS

After leaving Merchandise Mart Properties where he ran the dwindling Art Chicago fair, Tony Karman is launching a new art fair called Expo Chicago at Navy Pier to premier next September. He’s enlisted Jeanne Gang to design temporary context.

Magellan Development firms current large project, a 40-story tower on the edge of Lake Shore East for Magellan Development. Eavesdrop reached out to Lynch for his side of events, but as of press time, he has not responded, giving Kerwin the last word for now.

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ACKNOWLEDGING THE HISTORY AS WELL AS ITS CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT.
POLISHING A GEM continued from front page 11.

Designed by Detroit-based SmithGroup, the Collections Wing gives the Art Museum a more sophisticated way to store pieces not on view in the gallery so that educational tour groups have better access to the archives. Elements include glass walls allowing views into the ceramics collection, sliding metal panels for paintings, and a courtroom for meeting in the midst of it all. The two buildings connect only underground, below an exterior staircase designed by the Saarinens. A metal, vault-like door slides back to reveal the new wing, a space that mixes the simplicity of concrete block walls and exposed-duct ceilings with grand features like a sliding wood door made of Sapelli, a reddish wood very similar to mahogany. Paul Urbanek, a principal designer, explained that the goal was to renovate the historic gallery in a way that did not signal change. For instance, the firm restored the coffered lighting system that had not been used since the 70s to work the way that the Saarinens intended. Urbanek observed how forward-thinking this element had been in its time. Daylighting became popular in museum design after Saarinen experimented with the diffused light that gave the ambient effect of skylights. SmithGroup also brought the building up to current museum climate standards.

Working within the building taught Urbanek to appreciate the genius of its design in new ways, such as the elegant use of interior volume and of wall framing that protects the art from shifts in temperature and moisture. One room of the gallery features the work of Sol LeWitt, painted onto four walls as a loan to Cranbrook (the museum must agree to paint over it after the loan ends). It took eight workers 21 days to paint the swirling shapes in preparation for the November 11 opening. Also on view is a grand model of Eero Saarinen’s design for Dulles airport in Chantilly, VA, outside Washington D.C.

Eliel Saarinen’s lasting contributions to the bucolic Cranbrook campus includes his 1930 home and the Kingswood School for Girls that opened in 1931; the last piece was the museum and adjacent library buildings. As Reed Kroloff, director of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, explains, “Eliel Saarinen’s DNA is here. The campus reveals his brilliance as a planner, how he was able to operate at all scales of design with equal fluidity. That was not so with Eero. There is no other place in the U.S. where you can see one architect working through a campus from the picturesque and heroic to a more modern and modest style.”

As Paul Goldberger wrote in the New York Times in 1984, Cranbrook has long been compared to Germany’s Bauhaus as both were created to encourage 20th-century design while breaking down barriers between disciplines. However, he concluded, “Eliel Saarinen’s campus itself became Cranbrook’s greatest legacy.”

SARAH F. COX

PUBLIC REALM TO BE TOPIC AT BIENNALE

Chipperfield Takes Venice

Political tensions have stalled preparations for the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, as the event still has no officially appointed curator. Though it is generally accepted that British architect David Chipperfield, who won the Mies van der Rohe Prize for his Neues Museum in Berlin in June, will take up the post, he wrote a letter to Building Design in late November denying his involvement. Earlier this year Chipperfield was reported as the favorite from a list including Spanish architect Eduardo Souto de Moura, but his disapproval of the proposed appointment of Giulio Malgora, an Italian food importer and friend of Silvio Berlusconi, as Biennale director, usurping Paolo Baratta from his long-held post, stalled his commitment and threw the Biennale into a state of uncertainty. The divisive atmosphere dissipated with the Italian prime minister’s resignation in November. Seemingly at odds with his architecture, which is often sober and austere but also profoundly contextual, the London-based designer doesn’t shy away from wily politics: in 2006, on receiving the RIBA Stirling Prize, he denounced the British system of procurement as “a dysfunctional relationship between client and architect.”

Vicky Richardson, Director of Architecture, Fashion and Design at the British Council said: “Chipperfield has always emphasized the role of the architect as a public intellectual. He has been a brave critic and does not shy away from controversy or from confronting difficult issues.” If appointed, Chipperfield will be the third Brit to curate the Architecture Biennale in the past six festivals, following Deyan Sudjic, currently director of London’s Design Museum, in 2002, and Ricky Burdett, Professor of Urban Studies at the London School of Economics in 2006. All three were roommates in the 80s at the fledgling Blueprint magazine and 9H gallery office. Though Chipperfield lacks the accoutrements that are the stuff of current-day starchitects, his contribution to the international architecture scene is undeniable. Chipperfield’s long-standing concern for historical context and specificity—evident in projects from the Neues Museum to the Stirling Prize-winning Museum of Modern Literature in Germany—will likely take the festival in a wholly different direction from last year’s theme People Meet in Architecture, by Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima of SANAA. “My guess is that his important contribution to the biennale will not be to bring a particular aesthetic,” said Richardson, “but to take a more profound look at the relationship between architecture and the public.”

Meanwhile, in New York, the Institute for Urban Design has announced that it will be representing the United States at the biennale with a theme complementary to Chipperfield’s own austere activism, called tactical urbanism.

GWEN WEBBER

UNVEILED

FEDERAL OFFICE BUILDING

Since the Oklahoma City bombing, most Federal buildings have been barricaded with bollards, boulders, and yards of hardcore. A new design for a Federal Office Building, designed by Chicago’s Krueck + Sexton, takes a different tact, emphasizing architectural lightness with a building set in the soft, marsh landscape of the Florida Everglades.

The six and seven story, roughly 375,000-square-foot building—two bars linked by a bridge—sits on a 20 acre-site, formerly a gravel-filled lot, which will be restored to a natural, wetland condition. This landscape strategy, developed with the local landscape architects Curtis + Rogers, serves many functions, while also creating a beautiful backdrop for the machine white building: habitat creation, storm water management, cooling for building mechanicals, as well as security. Enclosed by invisible he has, the soft terrain will also create a substantial buffer around the building. “We set out to create a high performance, contemporary building, set in this remarkable Everglades landscape,” said Mark Sexton, a principal at Krueck + Sexton. The building itself, actually two 60-foot, 400-foot-long buildings with curved and faceted glass facades, looks fragile, but is engineered to withstand the region’s powerful hurricanes. An adjacent service building and 700-car parking structure topped with a solar array, will keep more than half of the site open space, and additional photovoltaics could be added to the office building. The GSA hopes the building will be net zero by 2030.

Architect: Krueck + Sexton
Location: Miramar, Florida
Client: GSA
Completion: 2014
A GREENER EDGE
continued from front page
by Philadelphia-based
landscape architects WRT,
formerly Wallace Roberts &
Todd.
Building off a rich parks
legacy in Louisville that
brought about three large
parks and dozens of smaller
projects a century earlier
by Frederick Law Olmsted,
Sr. and his successors, The
Parklands hopes to redefine
the fringe conditions of
a growing city. “This park
is similarly developed on the
fringe as were the Olmsted
parks,” said WRT Principal
Ignacio Bunster-Ossa. Since
then, the area surrounding
Olmsted’s parks has filled in.
“Where will Louisville be in
100 years?”
Construction began this
May, and the $113 million
project’s first phase, the
616-acre Beckley Creek Park,
includes plans for a 23-acre
tree-lined “egg lawn” and an
axial tree-lined promenade
providing structure to wood-
lands, meadows, wetlands,
and recreational fields. “The
Fork is a wonderful mean-
dering feature, but the valley
itself doesn’t have dramatic
power in and of itself,” said
Bunster-Ossa. “We had to
create a series of places that
are distinctive to reveal the
drama of the landscape.”
AERIAL VIEW OF THE EGG LAWN
at Beckley Creek Park. Below:
Silo Adventure Center at
Turkey Run Park.

The promenade forms a rigid
line across the rolling land-
scape to reveal the subtleties
of the landscapes changing
contours. Angular pavilions
and auxiliary structures
designed by local architecture
firm Bravura are distributed
throughout the park. The
first phase will be completed
in 2013, and following phases
will be complete in 2015.

Floyds Fork is a narrow
stream in a very wide flood
plain, but the site’s topogra-
phy can vary up to 200 feet
in height as the fork slices
through steep hills and
limestone cliffs. While this
creates challenges for park
management, it also means
that much of the land sur-
rounding the park is unbuild-
able under current codes.

With a perimeter of
nearly 50 miles, the park will
undoubtedly spur increased
suburban development, but
21st Century Parks incorpo-
rated their masterplan into
Louisville’s comprehensive
plan, Cornerstone 2020,
distinguishing design guide-
lines for the area. Structures
built along the park’s perime-
ter roads must face the park
and street trees must be
incorporated into the design,
among other requirements.
“A city has both a core and an
edge,” Jones said. “You can’t
ignore the edge condition.”

The Parklands’ operation
and maintenance will be
funded by a private endow-
ment that is looking beyond
traditional investments
in stocks and bonds. The
endowment acquired three
ailing, partially developed,
adjacent subdivisions—
ranging from 30 to 600
acres—during the economic
downturn and plans to adapt
their designs to create a
model subdivision that will
take into account aesthetics,
connectivity, density, and
environmental protection.
“We are interested in explor-
ing what a model subdivision
means,” Jones said. “We
would like to find ways to
create neighborhoods that
are beautiful and done in
a way that’s sensitive to the
landscape.” No firm design
guidelines have yet been
established, but Jones hopes
both the park and the model
subdivisions will guide future
growth in the area.
“We have a big concern
about how the city grows
around The Parklands,”
Jones said. “This project gives
Louisville an opportunity
to do planning at the city’s
edge.”
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Though River North is now seen by many as a desirable, mixed-used extension of downtown, the idea of building a major new Class-A office space seemed far-fetched even a decade ago. Today, the northern side of the Chicago River is home to one of the city’s most refined offices, the 680,000-square-foot headquarters of the law firm Kirkland & Ellis, located in a 60-story tower designed by Pickard Chilton. With interiors by SOM, Kirkland & Ellis has an atmosphere of tailored elegance that is geared to attract younger workers while also conveying a sense of understated luxury suited to senior partners and their well-heeled clients.

Located along the Riverwalk, the offices have a two-story terrace at the river level, one open to the public with a café and white tablecloth restaurant, and one above for the firm. The connection to the river and views of the Loop are emphasized with additional terraces at the sixth and 24th floors. SOM placed public and communal spaces on these levels as well, including a sixth-floor conference center—also used for firm parties—and an additional cafe on the 24th. “The uniqueness of the site was very important to the firm, as was the idea of having a social space along the river,” said Jaime Velez, director of interiors at SOM.

Velez said the firm wanted a highly functional space with a restrained elegance. After a long investigation into the firm’s culture and goals, Velez and his team looked at the design of high performance, subtly luxurious spaces, like sail boats, for inspiration. The reception area for the conference center emphasizes this high efficiency approach, with many elements doing double duty. The curved Corian reception desk also serves as a bar during firm functions. Lounge seating can be easily removed for larger events.

Fourteen-foot floor to ceiling motorized wall panels rotate to open an adjacent conference room up to the lobby. “Many law offices use rich materials to convey luxury,” said Velez. “We emphasized height and views.” Carefully edited signature elements keep the space from feeling too austere. A custom light installation hangs overhead, and the windows overlooking the terrace are edged with live plants on both the interior and exterior. The offices have very clean lines and neutral colors. “We designed the firm’s old offices in 1974, and it still looked good 35 years later,” he said. “They wanted something equally timeless for the new space.” Low partitions and clerestories allow natural light deep into the floor plates. All the partner offices are outfitted with furniture from Unifor, and, working with SOM, equity partners were able to choose from a wide variety of pieces from the line to customize their offices.

The offices also feature a series of commissioned artwork organized by the well-known Chicago gallerist Linda Warren. In all, SOM has created a space that is both serene and social, which is as close to a balanced work environment as many workaholic attorneys are ever likely to find.
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ARCHITECTS KNOW THAT BUILDING INFORMATION MODELING IS CHANGING THE WAY THAT BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED, CONSTRUCTED, AND MANAGED POST-OCCUPANCY—BUT ARE THEY REALLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HOW MUCH IT CAN DO? AARON SEWARD CONSIDERS THREE PROJECTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF WHAT’S POSSIBLE.
BIM processes were used in every aspect in the design and construction of USC's School of Cinematic Arts. The integration was so thorough that the design team was able to deliver the client an information-rich 3-D model of the building specially designed for the use of facilities management.

Opposite page, below: The school's Spanish mission stylings belie the 21st century technology that underpins the project.

Below and right: SHoP Construction has developed an iPhone app to track progress on fabrication and installation for Atlantic Yards.

Both consultants explained that without BIM, the project would not have been possible, at least not within its current time frame (the design schedule was 20 months) and budget of $12.6 million. "In this project, the sheer complexity of geometry requires 3 D," said Case partner, Federico Negro. "There are more than 1,000 panels, all of them different, and there are four to 15 connections per panel, shooting out in all different angles. If you don't have a good way to find objects, get to them quickly, and understand how relationships work, then you don't have a way to manage the design. You can't draw an elevation of this skin. It's never orthogonal."

The geometrical form-finding capabilities of certain BIM software make it easy to develop and rationalize complex shapes. It also makes it easier to guide those forms through fabrication and construc-
tion. Case took Trahan's Maya and Rhino design files and used Digital Project to panealize the geometry. Once the panelization was complete, the structural engineers got their turn at the model, using Rhino and Grasshopper to do structural form finding and analysis, and to design the connections. The software's parametric modeling capabilities allowed Method Design to find 80 percent of the project's load paths and connection points with the click of a button, leaving the remainder to be puzzled out manually. Doing that work by hand in 2-D drawings would have taken enough man-hours to make the project unfeasible.

"The technology allows you to minimize the thinking you have to do," said Reese Campbell of Method. "All of the steel goes through a series of algorithms that read the connections, rationalize intersections, and conduct structural analysis."

After the structural work was done, the model went back to Case, which took the panels—now outfitted with fully detailed connections—and sent them out for automated fabrication. The BIM model also helped during installation. Method printed out a 72-page connection catalogue that construction workers used on site to understand how each panel connects to the steel structure.

In addition to providing tools for designers who want to create projects of great geometrical complexity, BIM is helping the profession keep track of a project's budget. SHoP Architects, who has been working with BIM since its very first project, an environment for P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, used the process to address both form and finance at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn. "When we were developing the facade design for the arena, we used BIM processes to understand the geometry and the material, how each material fed into the cost matrix, and to share information with the client and the facade manufacturers," said Jonathan Mallie of SHoP.
Above: The rectilinear exterior of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and Regional History Museum gives way to a complex and organic interior geometry.

Below: BIM’s parametric capabilities allowed designers to quickly develop a structural system. The software itself found and analyzed 80 percent of the connections between the steel frame and the cast stone cladding.

Opposite page, top to bottom: The high level of detail in the BIM model allowed the design team to give the construction team a book of connection details that facilitated installation of the exterior and interior cladding system.
“During the design phase the real key for us was to manage the form and link it to a definable budget.”

SHoP worked with Rhino and CATIA during initial form finding, then with CATIA to link the design of the facade’s panels to seamlessly flow into fabrication. Once the form was found, the model was brought back into Revit for the coordination of the base building structure, the HVAC, and MEP.

SHoP chose weathered steel panels for the exterior, and developed an iPhone application that allowed the architects and the client to track the weathering process of the panels, as well as their installation. “Having the technology enables us to push design further,” said Mallie. “It takes a lot of ambiguity and gets it out of the way, and because it’s a model, it’s something people can see, and we can get everyone on the same page.”

It would be a mistake, however, to think of BIM as merely enabling unconventional form-making. While advanced geometric modeling tools like Rhino and CATIA get a lot of attention for the designs that they are used to produce, 3-D modeling software within the BIM process is more often used and valued for the sheer level of information (and thus the high degree of detail) that can be programmed into models. At the University of Southern California’s new School of Cinematic Arts Complex, the potentialities of these models have not only been used for the design and construction of the three-phase project, but also are being used for post-completion management of the building.

The university’s approach is unusual for academia according to Ray Kahl of Urban Design Group (UDG), the architect on the project: “Their facilities and capital development people work together. You rarely see that. When that happens you get a situation where you can justify what may not be the lowest upfront cost for a project but will be lower over the lifecycle of the building.”

UDG delivered a model for the arts school embedded with all of the data points necessary for the university’s facilities group to maintain the structure, including data relating to materials, machine names, and model numbers. While the model is replete with information for building management, it allows the facilities team to develop personas that filter the data to only show information that applies to certain functions, such as cleaning, or repairs. The architects also worked with Honeywell to integrate the BIM model with a building monitor system that gives facilities managers a visual representation of the building showing every room, whether the lights are on or not, and what the temperature is at different times of day. The feature has led to 20 percent greater efficiency in the building’s energy usage than originally expected.

While BIM has yet to become the industry standard for project delivery—in part because it’s still too expensive for smaller firms to use—its influence is growing with each success story. The process is still evolving as players compete with Darwinian energy to see what works best and fastest. Software companies in particular are trying to figure out what complementary systems will prove most advantageous. “People are saying, I can use BIM to look at different business models of how I deliver my project, I can use it to drive digital fabrication, I can use it to help me take on a much stronger sustainability agenda,” said Bernstein. “It’s in the process of changing roles and relationships.” Architects are still discovering the implications of these different uses and the transformative effect it may have on the profession. Bernstein continued, “I believe in ten years people will be working in fundamentally different ways than they are now.” And clearly those who best anticipate the range of transformations possible will be in the best position to control the new shape of building.
DISCIPLINES UNBOUNDED

Groundwork: Between Landscape and Architecture
Diana Balmori and Joel Sanders, Monacelli, $50

Landform Building, Architecture’s New Terrain
Edited by Stan Allen and Marc McQuade, Schirmer/Mosel, $65

Edited by Stan Allen and Marc McQuade, Schirmer/Mosel, $65

For the last decade, with landscape architecture on the rise and architecture increasingly ceding territory in the urban realm, a new book appears on shelves every few years arguing for the integration of landscape and architecture. Beginning with Aaron Betsky’s Landscape of 2002 and Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak’s Inside Outside of 2003, these books are typically part coffee table tome and part manifesto, filled with images of the latest vegetated surfaces, creeping parasitically over walls and roofs. Embedded within the volumes are calls to arms, arguing that the two disciplines are one, and that the way forward is the breaking down of disciplinary bounds.

This year, almost ten years on from the publication of the aforementioned books (and some fifteen years after Charles Waldheim coined the term “Landscape Urbanism“) marks the publication of two such volumes, Diana Balmori and Joel Sanders’ trim, glossy Groundwork: Between Landscape and Architecture, and Landform Building, a fat block of text and photographic images is born out of Princeton University’s 2009 conference of the same name, edited by Stan Allen and Marc McQuade.

Balmori and Sanders introduce their subject matter through a pair of essays, the first, a well-researched historical framework laid out by Sanders, and the second Balmori’s more manifesto-like argument for an interdisciplinary practice. The pair note in their preface that their interest and approach stem in part from “urgent ecological concerns” that they suggest would be better answered by a more integrated practice model, and in part from the simple creative potential they argue is inherent in the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries—an approach they term “interface.”

The book divides “interface” into three interconnected categories, Topography, Ecology, and Biocomputation, each presented via a brief introductory timeline and essay followed by a series of projects. The projects range in scale from small built components—the aggregative blocks of Aranda/Lasch’s Grotto or the floating sensors of Amphiobius Architecture, a project by Columbia University’s Living Architecture Lab—to large urban interventions—Weiss/Manfredi’s Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle or the Park de Atlántico by Batlle i Roig Arquitectes in Santander, Spain. In between stretches a broad spectrum of buildings and landscapes. Included in the compilation are a wide variety of unbuilt competition entries, research projects, and built projects, spanning from the relatively unknown to the iconic.

If this appealing volume suffers from one thing, it’s its very inclusiveness. The three categories are so open-ended as to become almost meaningless, particularly in that topography clearly underlies the vast majority of them. The selection of projects is similarly broad and uneven. Some projects, like Peter Eisenman’s City of Culture in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, ongoing since 1999, appear at this point like relics of a pre-Landscape Urbanism era of form-making. Meanwhile, many of the unbuilt projects, such as Höweler + Yoon’s Eco-Pod and Balmori and Sanders’ own NYC 2012 Olympic Equestrian Facility, remain firmly within the realm of the fanciful without approaching the depth and nuance that evolve out of grappling with the realities of constructing such spaces. At the same time, some of the built projects feel conceptually thin, like one wonders at their inclusion. Also notable is the omission of certain practitioners and projects, the term “interface” is something of an aesthetic catch-all.

However, the strength of the book—and this is not to be taken lightly—lies in its framing of ecology, and its strong stance on the potential power of integrating landscape and architecture to address ecological issues through built form. Balmori and Sanders write:

‘Rather than oppose space and matter, and as a consequence architecture and landscape, designers need to see them as an accumulation of independent processes as complex as any...”

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NEAT NECESSITY

Design with the Other 90%: Cities
Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum at the United Nations
465 East 46th Street, Through January 8, 2012

This exhibition, the first of several expected to follow, demonstrates the power of design to effect social change. The show opened just before the final meeting of the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development, which had been established in 1977 “to assess the progress of the international community in implementing the principles and goals expressed in the World Environment Conference.”

The opening is a visual reminder of the stakes of rapid urbanization around the world. The show, which features projects from all over the world, demonstrates the optimism and ingenuity of many designers today. From the very first project, an early morning market in Durban, South Africa, the exhibition has a sense of wonder and hope, even as it acknowledges the challenges of creating meaningful social change.

The exhibition is divided into three sections: “Interface,” “New Terrain,” and “New Topography.” Each section features a series of projects, represented in greater depth via photographs or rendered views, and drawings. The show includes examples of projects from around the world, from the simple creative potential of unbuilt competition entries to the more manifesto-like argument for an interdisciplinary practice.

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DISCIPLINE UNBOUND continued from page 12

machine or, indeed, any creature. This awareness of the environment as a complex system puts architecture and landscape on equivalent terms and will encourage practitioners to create designs that approach the efficiency and performance standards of a living being.

One might argue that the focus on ecology is part and parcel with the integration of systems—and disciplines—put forward in the book, and in fact should underscore all of the projects within its pages, as opposed to being just one of three categories. The handful that do not fit this description—the vast shadeless surfaces of Eisenman’s City of Culture are, again, a striking example—perhaps do not belong in the book at all.

In contrast, Landform Building puts forth a far more singular and strongly grounded premise. In many ways, the book follows conventions first introduced by S,M,L,XL back in 1995: low-res, full-bleed photographic images interspersed throughout the volume pack a punch, providing a sort of unifying framework. But the book fails to perform as contemporary landscapes intricate, bears no capacity on its own form. Nowhere is this more evident than in the images selected for the publication—spread after spread of photographs and renderings of mountain-like objects. Despite a riot of images, we do not encounter a sectional drawing until page 119; throughout the book, sections appear only a handful of times. The exploded axonometric, the preferred visual trope of Landscape Urbanists everywhere, is equally scarce.

Representation choices are telling. While the section and the exploded axonometric have the capacity to express layers of information, systems, elements in relation to one another, the photographic image and the rendering—particularly as used in this book—only depict the surface and its overall formal expression. The emphasis on the singular, outer shell of the building as object—unusual or landscape-like form not withstanding—betrays a dismissal of the very advances made possible by the contemporary landscape techniques that Allen calls out in his introductory essay. The surface of a building, however intricate, bears no capacity on its own to perform as contemporary landscapes do—to organize systems from ecological, hydrological, infrastructural, and climatic to programmatic. Indeed, although many of the buildings contained within the pages of Landform Building engage programmatic and formal complexities, most seem to stop short of addressing these other layers of information and potential influence. As for landscape itself, it generally fails to appear in anything more than its nineteenth-century incarnations: a framed view; an outdoor room; a lung for the city.

Ultimately, Landform Building presents a strong, coherent treatise on one potential direction for architecture, illustrating its points through a broad array of well-selected projects within a consistent and compelling graphic framework. But the book fails precisely in the area in which Balmori and Sanders’ Groundwork prevails. Allen and his compatriots at the Landform Building conference appear locked in the same fight for disciplinary autonomy that has pushed architecture into its current corner. Still regarding the urban realm as a disjointed jumble that can only be made intelligible by oversized architectural iconography, the proposition forgoes the possibilities inherent in a cross-disciplinary, performative, systems-based approach.

Figuring prominently in both text and images in not only Groundwork, but also Landform Building, the Seattle Olympic Sculpture Park, that poster child for Landscape Urbanism, remains perhaps the most concrete example of this approach thus far. The project successfully integrates landscape, architecture, infrastructure, program, and ecology on a formerly derelict site. And, yes, it also operates as a formally compelling icon within the city. ELIZABETH STEEL is a writer and designer based in New York City.

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