

**GRAPHIC DESIGN  
OBSERVER**

Top of the Heap:  
Searching for the Next  
Great Graphic Designer  
Karen Cheng

**ART MATTERS**

Leaving History Behind:  
The Unused Furniture  
of Michael Jackson  
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**BOOK REVIEW**

*Design and Truth*  
by Robert Grudin  
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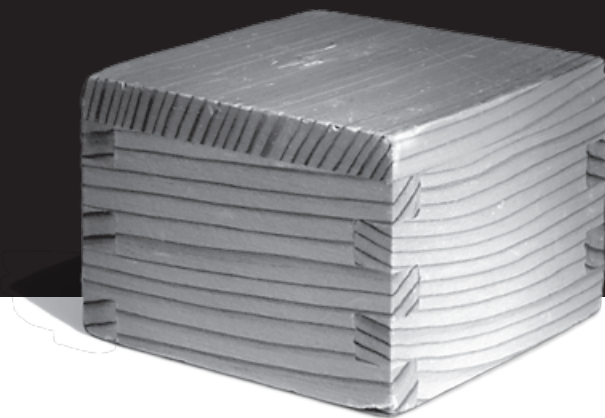
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## FROM GRITTY TO GLOSSY: METHODS OF DESIGN

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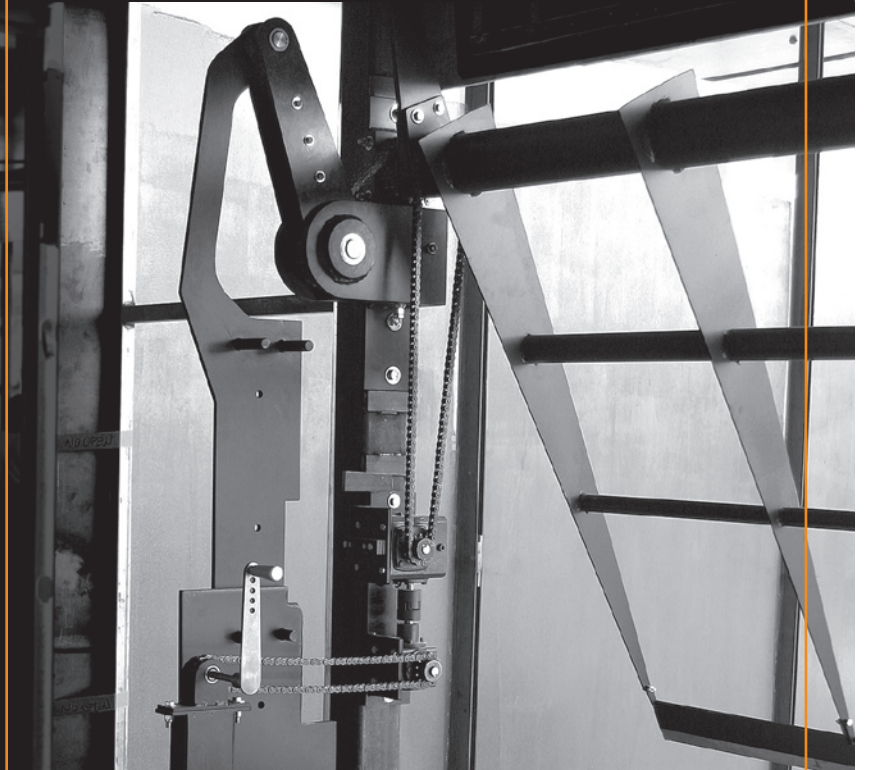
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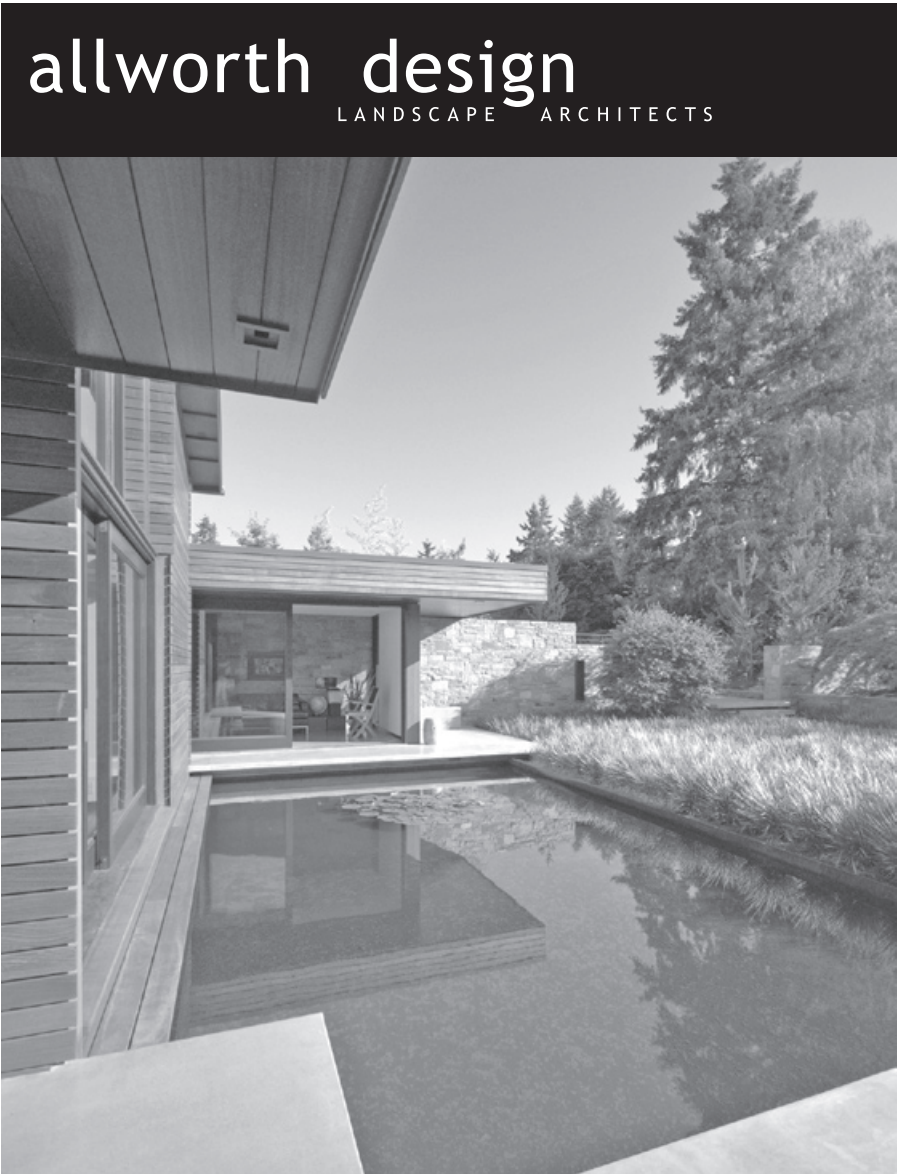


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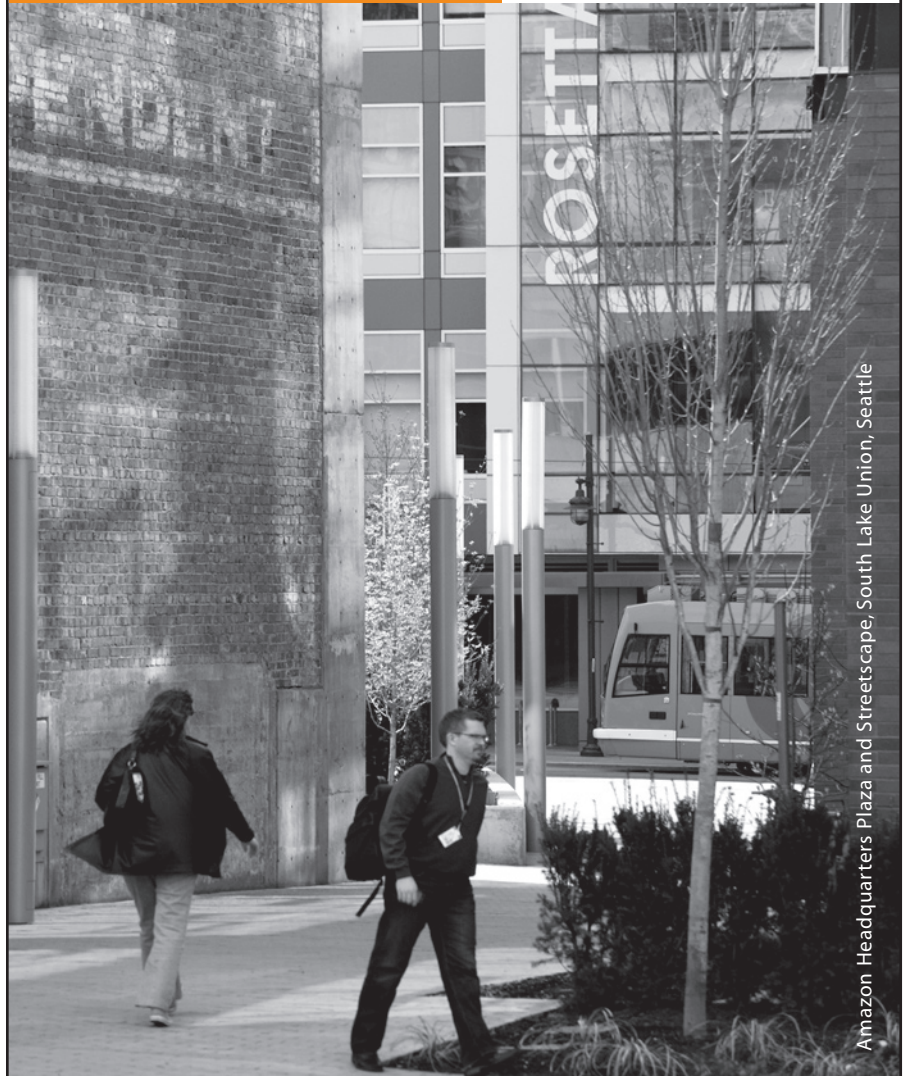
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# Top of the Heap

## SEARCHING FOR THE NEXT GREAT GRAPHIC DESIGNER

**Karen Cheng**

Last June, I received an email from M—, a creative director at a local design firm:

I was bit peeved at what I thought was an unwarranted sense of entitlement (after all, this is a studio that has a major account for dog food packaging). But hey, at least they are hiring during the recession! And I suppose no sensible person actively seeks to employ the bottom of the heap (or even the middle of the heap). One mustn't be judgmental, all projects are worthy, it's hard to find clients with money, etc. Therefore, after grouching to my colleagues (and anyone else who would listen), I eventually sent back a list of names, along with some insincere good wishes.

But later, I began to think about being “on top of the heap”—in terms of both work and attitude. What does that mean, really?

Of course, it's easier to define what makes a good attitude. Are you easily frustrated or unnecessarily anxious? Find it difficult to take criticism? Plagued by negativity? Tend to procrastinate? If so, switch majors! The design field is not for you. Every design project (even a sack of dog food) requires the development of multiple variations in concept and form. Your ideas will be questioned and negotiated in minute detail over numerous client discussions. To survive, you need to stay positive, flexible and resilient in the face of adversity. Good designers learn to see problems and restrictions as opportunities in disguise (although some private whining to friends is quite understandable).

Finding a designer who can come up with smart ideas is much harder than finding a good visual stylist.

Now, for the more difficult question: What kind of design work is at the “top of the heap”? At the most basic level, I suppose this means design that looks good. But of course, looking good means many things to many people. I personally prefer a modernist aesthetic—hard edges, use of grids, strong contrasts, clarity of composition. I know this isn't everyone's ideal, and I'm always nervous when

Hi K—

I took a look at the UW website for this year's [graduation] show—some good work in there. Would you mind sending a few of the best students my way?

We're looking for interns, and I'd love to talk to whoever you think is on the top of the heap (both in terms of work and attitude). Hope all is well.

Cheers,  
M—

dealing with designers who worship other gods (the god of grunge, the god of irrational whimsy, the god of dancing sprites, for example). I once received an e-mail from a designer at Starbucks, who chastised our program for failing to produce graduates who could embrace the Starbucks visual brand attributes, which were: “handcrafted, artistic, sophisticated, human and enduring.” I like to think our program has some humanity – and even some sophistication – but I suppose not everyone agrees. At any rate, there's no point in sending these sorts of complaints. No school can be all things to all people, and anyway, one must teach from one's own design philosophy. It's difficult, if not impossible, to change design religions.

Perhaps when looking for the top of the design heap, it's wiser to think about design on a deeper level than style (or brand attributes). The graphic designers that I admire certainly have control over aesthetics (they know how to make things look good), but I admire them most for their ability to really surprise you with interesting ideas. Sometimes a good idea is transformative—it makes a mundane product into a surprisingly appealing object of interest. Other times, a good idea is analytically brilliant—it works to simplify or clarify a complex topic. Some of the best design ideas are visual concepts—for example, graphic marks that can simply yet eloquently communicate the essence of an organization.

Finding a designer who can come up with smart ideas is much harder than finding a good visual stylist. You are searching for an individual who combines visual judgment with intelligence—someone who has curiosity about the world and an understanding of the different tribes, cultures and societies that populate it. You're looking for someone who is a good listener, who can figure out what it is that a client really needs (not always what clients think they need). And of course, you'd probably like to have someone who works hard, is disciplined, is organized, is ethical, pays attention to detail and takes responsibility for his or her actions. Is this too much to ask? Probably. Therefore, this magical paragon, as described above, only lives in the rarified air at “the top of the heap.”

KAREN CHENG is a professor of Visual Communication Design at the University of Washington and the author of *Designing Type* (Yale University Press, 2006).

# Rewriting the Urban Text of Derivé

R. Stuart Keeler

In today's world, in many places, the automobile is often held up as a sacred object—as a necessity. Because of this notion, walking is considered by many to be a subversive transit system. It can be said that in most North American urban landscapes, the experience of city-walking has been reasoned to be foreign and mandated to disappear.

Within a French philosophical perspective, city-walking has been explored by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The chapter “Walking in the City” describes “the city” as a linear construct created by the walker as they enter a state of emotive response. Here, there is an interesting space of between, in and out of the institutional identities, which produce hardscape items such as maps, texts and signs that describe the city from a governmental or civic agency point of view. The walker can choose to ignore these and forge his or her own pathway or spontaneously create a new writing or translatory framework based on a personal narration of the path en route at that moment. The intuitive ability of each citizen to rewrite his or her own city based upon perceptions of individuality can become part of the collective whole of a nomadic and meditative urban experience—a personal *bricolage*.

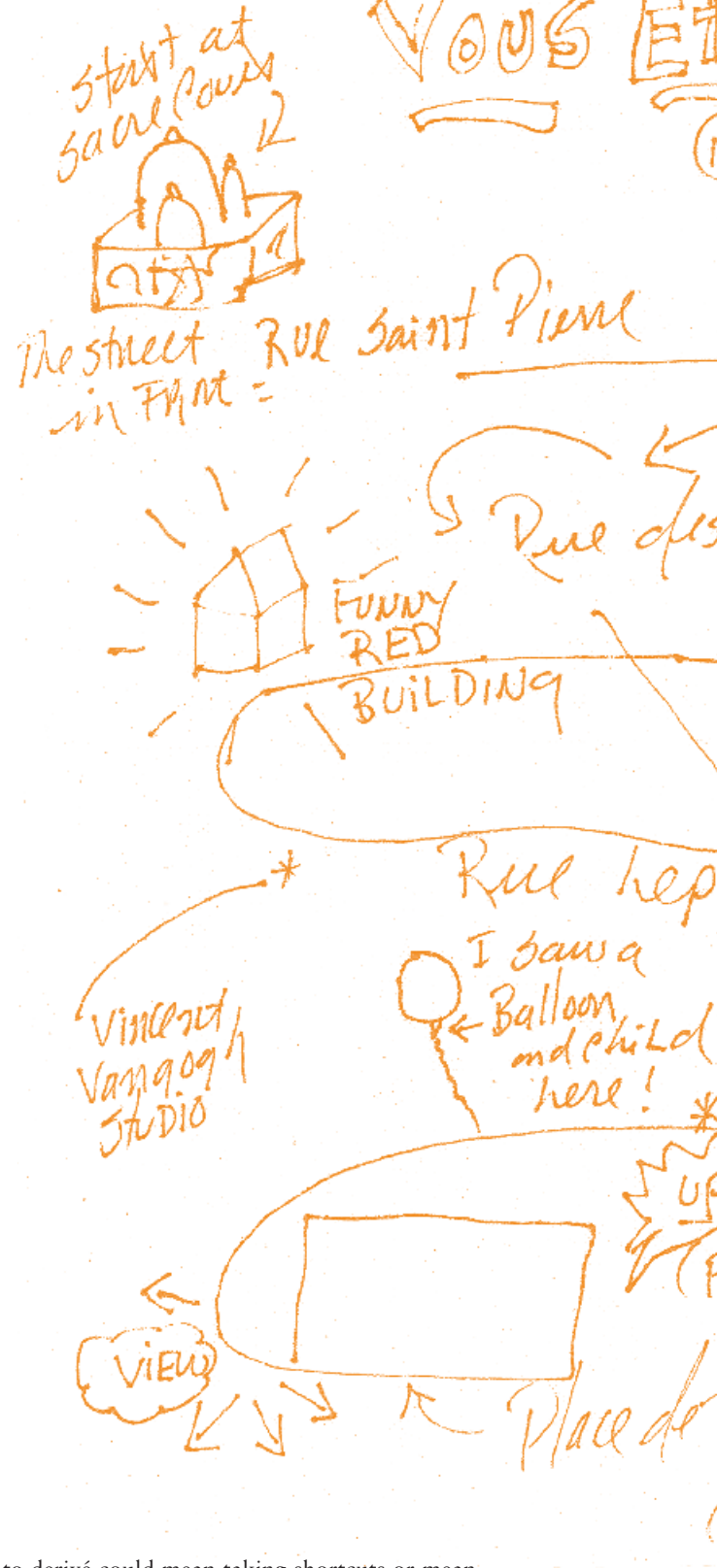
Walking, we create a new meaning of, with and for the city. The philosopher Guy Debord defined this sort of path-making as psychogeography or *derivé*. The *derivé* is an activity of quiet, subtle acts, gestures, strolls and encounters. Often, the individual committing the act is the only one who is aware of it, thus creating a play between physical experience and the space of contemplation that walking can produce. In this framework, the walker creates paths based on an intuitive navigation formed by an emotional experience of personal choices not determined by the plans or structures of any organizing city or government overlay (public signs, information systems and maps).

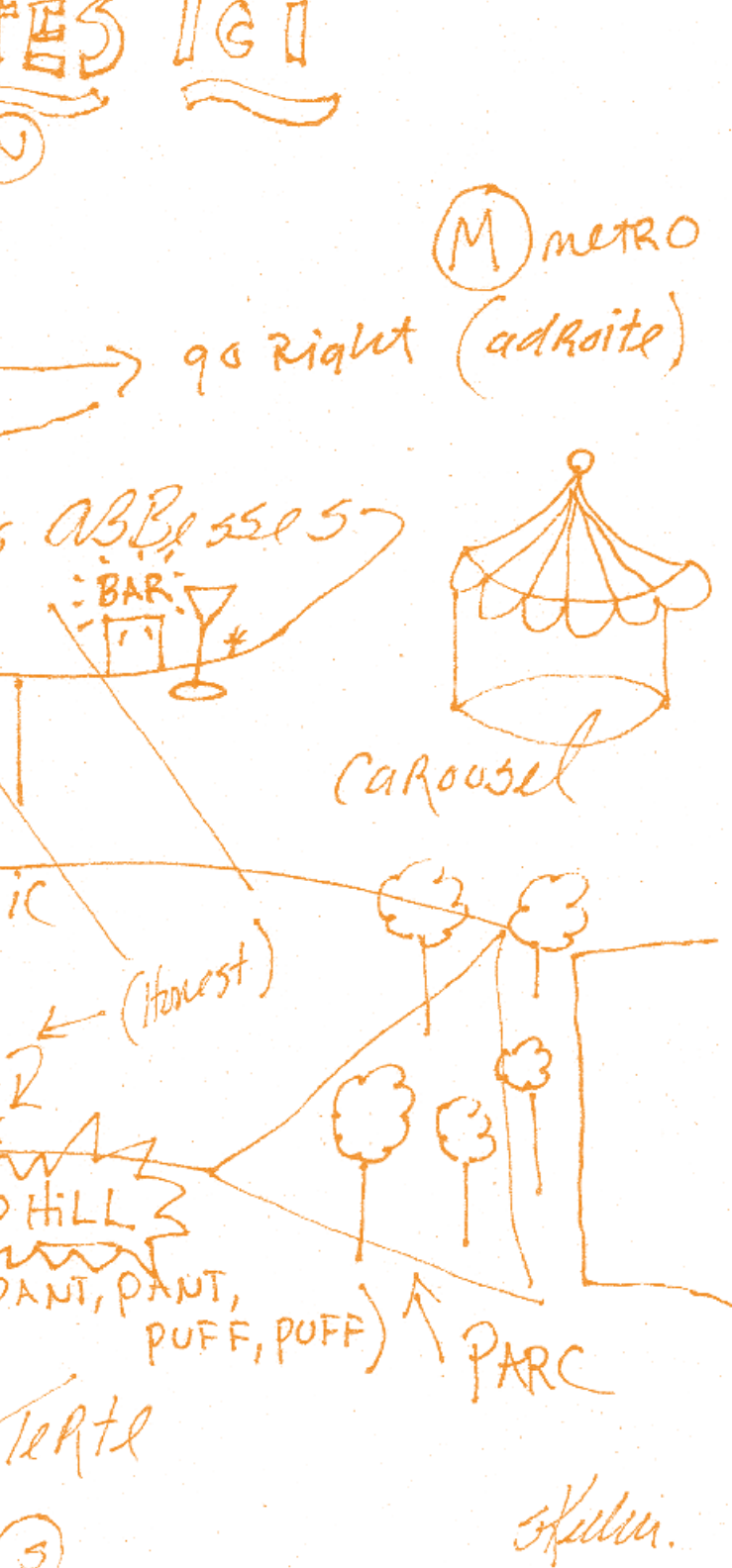
In a contemporary sense, to *derivé* could mean taking shortcuts or meandering aimlessly in spite of gridded streets, creating lingering paths en route to a destination, or merely walking to experience the environment. With each step and gaze in the city landscape, de Certeau asserts that we are all writing our own “urban text” of the city experience as a simultaneous occurrence. Any morning or evening on Seattle's Pike-Pine Corridor, a pedestrian trickle from Capitol Hill to downtown is on view alongside the ebb and flow of rush hour traffic. Here, the act of *derivé* is on full view—this essential urban stage is elevated above the blasphemy of I-5 and performed for the mostly immobile motorists. The act of walking has become a public event, a rigorous art for all to see. Pedestrians are performers who are watched.

Walking animates and permits us to explore our own private thoughts. It is a public meditation while in motion, a nomadic art within a public place that creates context through exploration. Whether the location is rural, urban, interior or imaginative, walking stimulates and implies a perusal of both mind and city in a shared simultaneous performative act. This illustrates de Certeau's idea that everyday life works by a process of borrowing from the territory of others, recombining prescribed rules and commodities already existent in culture in a way that is influenced, but never fully determined, by the same rules and products.

For example, recently in Paris, France I chose to walk everywhere, avoiding cars, trains and the public Metro transit. Within a city that I know quite well, by refusing the prescription of the paths that are created by signage and maps, I learned I could navigate better on my own with an intuitive sense of direction. By doing this, time moved effortlessly. When the ability to know where I was at all times was removed, the act of walking determined my experience. Legends, stories and self-contextualized urban myths were invented while I was in motion, and I can now claim a new and very personal connection to the city space. It is argued that signs do not create a “place”; however, they can command a conceptual refocus of personal direction which can disrupt the meditative act of strolling.

While in Paris, I calculated that I walked 21 miles one day, navigating the albatross of the almighty *Le Periphery* (Ring Road). In this lapse of mind, I solved many world issues, spoke with 13 people along the way, nodded a greeting of *bonjour* to nine people, helped a woman up a flight of stairs, jumped rope with three children and had a good lunch of Algerian food.





Walking, we create a new meaning of, with and for the city.

Periodically, I observed a few other solitary walkers en route. I realize now that the space of time had shifted – *zut alors!* – and so had my understanding of this magical place. All I needed was time, an imagination, comfortable shoes and my inner sense of *derivé*.

And when the Seattleite returns after visiting cities where walking is celebrated – Paris, Rome, Florence, Hong Kong, Teheran, San Francisco, Toronto, etc. – how does he or she then see the seven hills of Seattle? Up hills, down hills, up stairs, down stairs – the Seattle topography speaks intuitively to the pedestrian beyond MapQuest directives and GPS monotones, carving the landscape with thought, view, vista and memory.

In the 1984 film *Paris, Texas*, director Wim Wenders depicts a world-weary, fatigued stranger walking out of a monochromatic desert landscape into the abyss of modernity—a place of cars and an immediate social reasoning for existence. We reach a point where we too cross from a monochromatic landscape—we see the city and claim it in a new manner after a day or an hour or even 15 minutes of walking. Our cities are always evolving and changing landscapes, and their dynamic nature is based upon our ability to reclaim the space we experience through our own lens of mental and physical engagement. Walking is a conceptual space, where the mind can wander while in progress—walking is a functional act of public meditation with pixilated footsteps of contemporary actions of *derivé*.

**STUART KEELER** is an artist, curator and writer whose work explores the territory between the public realm and the role of the artist in the built environment. His frequent work in media including installation, sound, drawing and performance often explores the multiple histories, private functions, public mythologies and questions of human landscapes.



# The Problem of Venue

Bond Huberman

Answering the “what” or “why” of one’s work is the driving quandary of being an artist. Figuring out the “where,” however, is a more formidable and redundant challenge.

Last year, I helped write and produce an original play with a group of friends, which later grew into an artist-run nonprofit. Naively, we assumed that local theatre owners would greet us with open arms, ready to lavish discounts upon anyone brandishing a play that could “change the world.” Turns out, until you have nonprofit status, artist resumes or friends in key places, you’re no different than the greasy-haired garage band that walked in before you.

Unable to secure a legit theatre space, we researched big and small spaces around Tacoma, Columbia City and Capitol Hill in Seattle. We looked at cabarets and coffee shops, at spaces above bars and even in historical churches; we considered spaces that clearly violated fire codes. Every place, however, only offered one or two of our four requirements: a) right size b) available c) offered necessary equipment d) affordable.\*

Finally, we rented Freehold’s space in Seattle’s Belltown neighborhood and things went over just fine. But the search for a suitable and affordable venue reared its head again with our second performance. And our third. And it still, over a year later, remains the biggest obstacle in the steeplechase that is creating arts programming.

Seattle is a lush place to experience art. There’s more going on in one night than I could ever hope to see. However, when you make the transition from consumer to producer, you suddenly find yourself on the other side of the ten-foot-high stone wall keeping the secret garden fenced in. You marvel at its coldness.

And you soon learn that behind every solution lies a frustrating compromise: tear-jerking monologues cannot compete with garbage trucks unloading in an alleyway. Lady Gaga rakes against concertos. Bleary-eyed bar staff may forget to show up at your load-in with keys. And choosing between amenities like air conditioning, handicap

access and a space to prepare refreshments becomes the way in which you handpick your own narrow homogenous audience, which you previously railed against in the big venues.

Add to the difficulty of finding performance space the plain difficulty of creating work that relies on more than one person working together. Unless you’re a mime – or a spoken word poet – creative collaboration of any kind is like National Lampoon’s version of a family canoe trip through the Amazon. Someone is complaining of the heat, someone else can’t figure out how to paddle in time; others are so scared of what’s lurking in the water that your own steely confidence soon begins to chip. Before you know it, what started as a collective adventure starts to feel like a lonelier version of *Aguirre Wrath of God*. Except without all the glory and resounding drum rolls of storybook myth.

When talented artist groups break up, I’d wager it’s less often about “artistic differences” and more because the strain of finding a place to meet, getting there on time with everything you need and still having the energy to collaborate once you get there became too much. When the work becomes more about the administration and facilitation of art – instead of just creating it – people tend to waver. It really does come down to space.

In Boston and New York, several community arts facilities raised with public and private support have helped turn otherwise forgotten neighborhoods around. Elsewhere, Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC), a ten-year, national initiative funded primarily by large corporate and family foundations, provides programs that have effectively increased financial and material options for artists working in all disciplines. Scanning

LINC’s Artist Space database, a plethora of equally exciting arts spaces exist right now in the heartland: the Armory Arts Village in Jackson, Mississippi; ARTworks in Beaufort, South Carolina; Zootown Arts Community Center in Missoula, Montana; and the Emporium Center for Arts & Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, to name a few.

These spaces repurpose derelict buildings, support individual and group artists working across disciplines and, at some level, are getting government funding to do so because they inject new life into neglected neighborhoods. Why? Because it’s been proven that arts activity is a key part of a healthy community (and economy). From a distance, what seems really successful about these buildings is their mission to foster space for collaborating artists in multiple disciplines to both work and to present. These aren’t just a stack of studios or just a theatre. They are working spaces that facilitate both process and presentation.

The only Seattle space listed in the LINC database is the Tashiro Kaplan lofts: one city block in Pioneer Square dedicated to visual art and some retail space and the home of 4Culture, all of which come together as a beacon of exciting activity during First Thursday Art Walks. I want to know: Where is the TK for performing artists? Does one exist in Seattle?

A new work lofts space just opened downtown, called INSCAPE. It’s a former Immigration and Naturalization services building, which sat empty for four years, was going to be repurposed as office space and now (after a much cheaper renovation) is being offered up as artists studio space for rent. Spaceworks in Tacoma is partnering artists and developers to make temporary, creative use of empty storefronts. A similar project, “Storefronts Seattle,” will make vacant storefront space available for creative use in the Pioneer Square and Chinatown/International District neighborhoods in our city.

But all of these spaces are threatened by too much temporariness. I don’t feel that performing artists should have to be squatters in the same city where they pay taxes (on income *and* ticket sales) just because their needs are more complicated than a 4’ x 6’ room with a power outlet. And I think we can dare to dream a little bigger than glorified unfinished office space, which artists will be allowed to use until it’s needed for something else (remember Federal Center South?).

I want a permanent space that is equipped specifically for performing arts – dance, theatre, music and everything in between – that refuses to be categorized. I want it designed (or refurbished) from the ground up with performing and collaborative arts in mind: flexible walls, efficient storage, sound proofing and welcoming common spaces (see fig. 1.1)—everything performing artists need to meet, work, build, store and present. And I want the cost it takes to build it subsidized by city funds, which could be offset by membership dues, revenue generating activities and rental “deductibles.”

What the city doesn’t need is another exclusive theatre space open to only some kinds of art or some kinds of the public, like those gleaming cruise ships parked like a mirage in our harbor. I want a place that rolls up in its community like a neighbor’s brand new RV, where everyone comes out to climb on board to marvel at all its crazy features (they’re not crazy because you haven’t seen them before but because you’re seeing them in a whole new context!).

Build it. We have already come. We are already standing in line.

---

**BOND HUBERMAN** is a writer and online editor for *City Arts* magazine. She is also cofounder of The Heroes, a collaborative performing arts group based in Seattle.

## \* **Fig. 1.1** – A Dream Home for Performance Art: Amenities

1. Three separate performance spaces: a black box, a proscenium and a thrust (seating capacity should range 60-500). These are performance *and* rehearsal ready with flexibility in terms of seating, similar to a high school gym, where bleachers would unfold from the wall whenever you needed to host a crowd. Sound and lighting capabilities should be suitable for all manner of music, dance and theatre.

2. A street-side retail shop where member artists rotate sellable wares on a first-come-first-served basis and where other local artists can donate merchandise to support the cause.

3. A street-side café, where member artists and people in the neighborhood can gather for conversation, coffee, WiFi and good scones. A small stage should be included in order that this space can easily accommodate small performances, readings or open mics.

4. A street-side or basement pub (like Third Place Pub in Ravenna). Replace coffee and scones with mac'n'cheese and beer. Add karaoke and trivia nights. Don't forget the stage. Any gathering space at this center should be ready to host performances at some scale.

**5. Private artist studios available at an affordable rent. These generate revenue and ensure the building is populated with working artists 365 days a year.**

**7. Individual-sized practice labs for musicians to rehearse or conduct private lessons. Another revenue generator.**

**8. Men and women's bathrooms: some designed for public access. Others complete with showers and built in such proximity to performance space that they serve as dressing and/or green rooms.**

6. Three multi-purpose "classrooms," which can function as meeting rooms, rehearsal rooms or conference rooms (perhaps separated by temporary walls so this can be opened up to serve as an additional large performance space/rehearsal hall). Small business owners or neighborhood organizations would be welcome to rent these spaces for town hall meetings.

**9. A small 50-seat theatre designed specifically for viewing and screening films or giving multimedia presentations.**

10. A computer lab available to members only for emailing, surfing, writing, printing, scanning, photo/video editing, website designing, audio composing, or just docking a laptop. Part-time tech support person on site to help on those days that technology hates you.

**11. An office available to members complete with fax, copy machine, inboxes for mail and internal communication, and boom boxes or iPod docks and laptops available for check-out in classroom or rehearsal uses. Occupied by small, friendly full-time staff that manages building operations, space scheduling, maintenance and membership. These are experienced arts administrators who know how to deal with artists: sympathetic to the "struggle" but don't take any guff.**

12. A communal kitchen: fridge, coffee maker, teakettle, microwave and dishwasher. Vending machines too, if any local companies want to donate them. Large tables where groups can meet and eat. Dry erase boards for brainstorming, internal communication or playful doodling. A magazine rack where trading of good articles is encouraged.

**13. A lounge. Simple open space where people can gather informally without taking up work-spaces. Couches would be large enough to accommodate napping or overnight stays. If set-up in an amphitheatre fashion, could also work as another casual performance space (similar to where nine "o'Clock" Lab Bands at University of North Texas perform in the student center).**

14. Equipment lockers available at a cheap rate. So you don't have to schlep your paper *mâché* Bottom's head and fairy wings on the bus between rehearsals.

**15. Workshop for heavy-duty making, equipped with tools, paint and cleaning supplies and space for artists to assemble and store set building materials. This should include a loading dock to give access to larger set materials and supervised by a resident "tool master." An experienced artist willing to work for free space.**

16. Rooftop terrace or an outdoor common space that can also be host to a small reading or open mic. Hopefully has a pretty decent view so killer fundraisers or community building "block" parties can be hosted on site regularly.

18. Twenty-four hour access and security. Key cards, badges or IDs employed to keep artists and materials safe.

17. A garden, where interested artists can grow things (herbs and vegetables could be used in the café). Because it's Seattle.

**19. Bike racks, underground parking and bus routes to ensure that the space can be accessed easily and routinely.**

20. A welcoming but open reception area to ensure it doesn't feel like a community gym or school. I would start with a wide-open space that can be quickly transformed into a gallery or a facility-wide meet-'n'-greet area.

**21. Windows. Light. Access. Openness. The theme of the design at all times inspires connection, inclusiveness and shared, flexible multipurpose space. This should be a place free of insurmountable walls.**

Erin Langner

# Leaving History Behind

## THE UNUSED FURNITURE OF MICHAEL JACKSON



**ABOVE:** Colombostile Michael Jackson Commissioned Sofa. Courtesy Shaan Kokin/Julien's Auctions.

**This June, on the mezzanine** of the Planet Hollywood Casino in Las Vegas, Julien's Auctions presented their 2010 Summer Sale, merging the belongings of various deceased celebrities into a public exhibition. Almost all objects for sale were linked by the perceived value of their relationships with Hollywood icons. The most bizarre collection within this ostentatious pop culture *Wunderkammer* was the set of furniture Michael Jackson purchased for the home in Kent, England he would never live to occupy. While the musician commissioned the twenty-two lots slated for auction, it is unlikely he ever physically encountered any of them. The value of the cultural icon's estranged domestic objects was not, like the other handled and worn celebrity objects in the exhibition, the result of their use by the icon.

The auction exhibition was housed within a labyrinth of black curtains, each gallery secluded from the next, creating a dark path of interlocking showrooms. Jackson's colossal red velvet and 24-karat gold couch was given center stage in the first gallery. Handmade in Italy by Colombostile, the sofa was sixteen-feet in length, upholstered in shimmering red velvet and embellished with gold scrolls. The other pieces in the space were similar in style and excess, many described as "Baroque/eclectic" in the catalog. Three bergere chairs christened by designer Hierro Desvilles formed a group in one section of the display: "Wild Cat" was swathed in faux leopard skin with ostrich feathers protruding from its back; the pastel green "Shells" was encrusted with hundreds of sea shells; and "Swarovski," said to have been commissioned for Elizabeth Taylor's use during house calls, was upholstered in metallic silver leather and rhinestones. A set of metallic silk armchairs and matching sofa stood in a corner of the room, accented with golden candelabras.

Anyone who has seen the residences on MTV's celebrity-home tour show, *Cribs*, is familiar with the extravagance typical of celebrity furniture preferences. The auction's press release promised to "execute the recreation of Jackson's Kent home for public viewing," but there was little to suggest any sense of personal residence. Most pieces were grouped by designer rather than by taste. The collection's unused state provided an inherent lifelessness; attempts to picture Michael Jackson reading in the sixteen-foot sofa, or his children watching television from the silk armchairs, felt like exercises in theatrics. Although most of the furniture shown on *Cribs* easily falls into the "Baroque/eclectic" category and belongs to jet-setting stars who rarely use it, Jackson's pieces maintained a particularly curious distance from their utilitarian roles.

The royal motifs of crowns and double-headed eagles found throughout the collection reflected Jackson's constructed identity, the "King of Pop," while simultaneously questioning the degree to which Jackson separated his personal life from his career. The sixteen-foot sofa was most emblematic of this dichotomy; standing alone under the spotlights, its excess in scale and décor seemed more like an overblown performance of furniture than furniture itself.

Yet, Jackson was often said to be most comfortable while performing. During his public memorial service on July 7, 2009, Magic Johnson, describing a dinner at Neverland Ranch, noted that while the musician's chef prepared grilled chicken for Johnson, Jackson came to the meal with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. This was an at-home lifestyle performance: Jackson staged a meal for his guest while indulging in his own standard fare. Similarly, Elizabeth Taylor would have been offered her rhinestone chair in the Kent home,

leaving other guests to lounge in the communal gargantuan sofa or sit among ostrich feathers and seashells. We are then left to wonder where, among this performed opulence, would Michael Jackson have sat?

It is tempting to believe the items in the exhibition would have been used by the superstar, if not for his death. However, the end of Magic Johnson's story suggests otherwise. He recounted having the greatest time, "sitting on the floor, eating that bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken," providing an image of Michael truly at ease, away from the furniture and prepared food of his own home. In this regard, the greatest value of Michael Jackson's unused furniture is its pristine quality. The objects in the 2010 Summer Sale may have ultimately been as much on display in Michael's home as they were in Planet Hollywood, thus accounting for the rigid formality of their arrangements in the exhibition. For those seeking to own furniture authentic to the existence of Michael Jackson, lack of use is the quality to be desired; the untouched silks and empty sofas are the props through which we can experience aspects of the performer's life otherwise left unseen.

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**ERIN LANGNER** works in the Adult Public Programs department at the Seattle Art Museum. She writes on the arts and visual culture at her blog *Peripheral Vision* ([peripheralvisionblog.wordpress.com](http://peripheralvisionblog.wordpress.com)).

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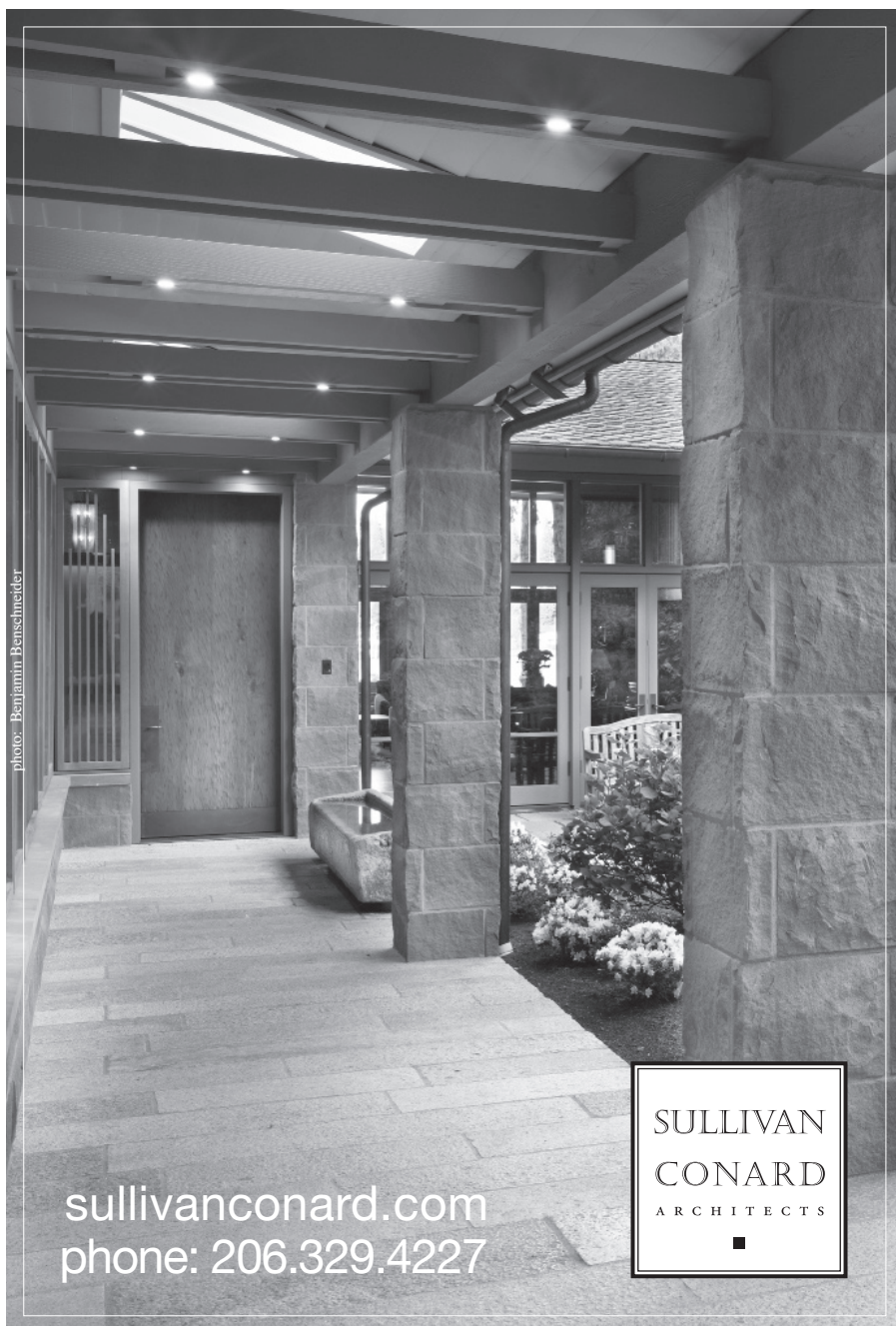


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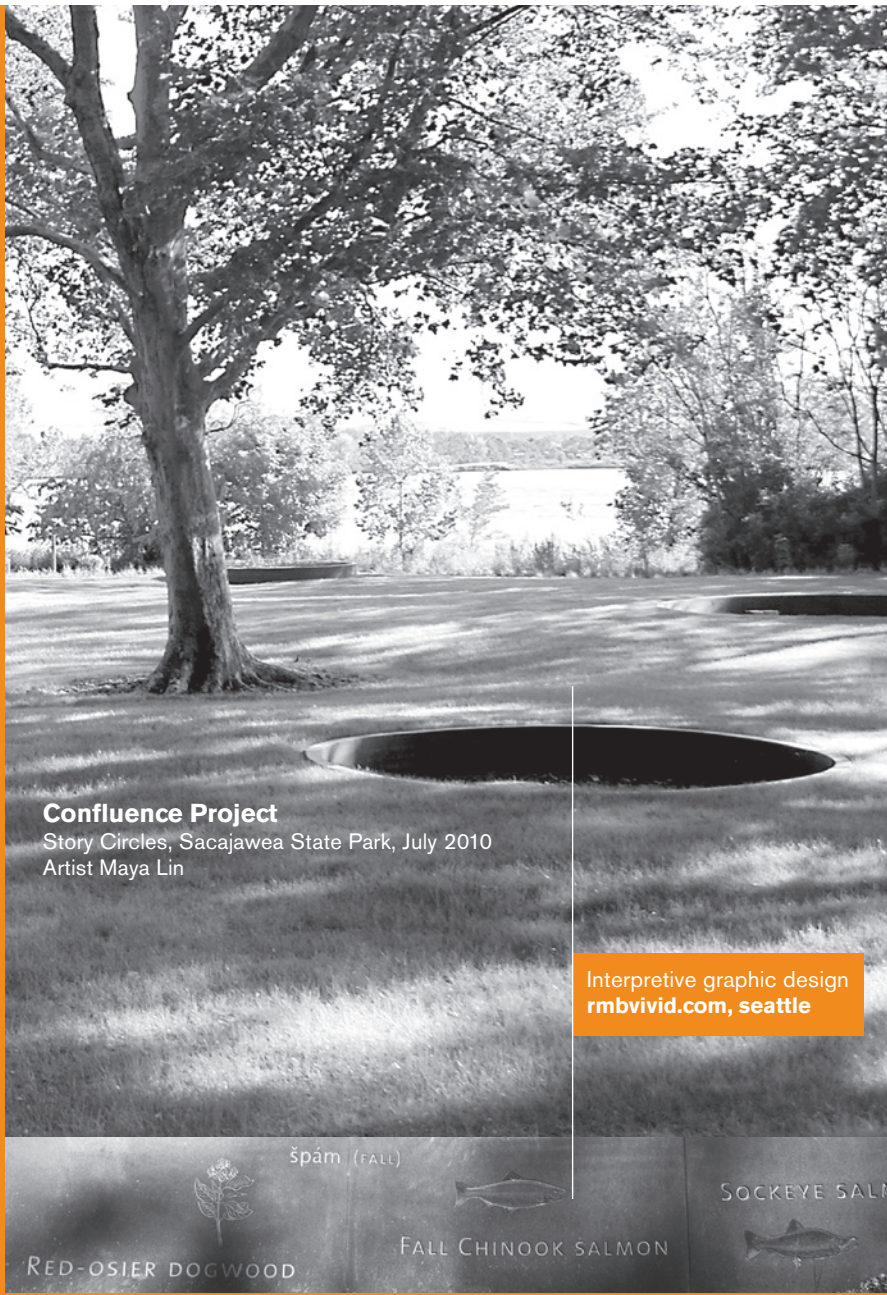
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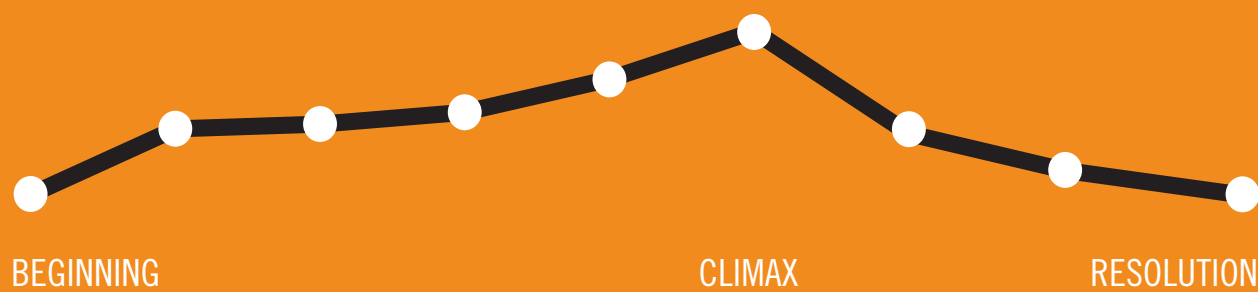
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# FROM GRITTY TO GLOSSY: METHODS OF DESIGN



PHOTO: Chase Jarvis

**BUILD llc**

**As a design-build firm** in the Northwest, a typical day for us involves everything from conceptual design sketches to fabricating a connection between steel and wood. Because the path of design and construction covers such a wide spectrum of thinking and doing, there are many potential stopping points along the route to considering a designed object “finished.” When and how we choose to declare a design complete is often just as important as the designed object itself. The whereabouts of a project’s final resting point in the continuum between the rough sketch, raw material, worn object or, conversely, immaculate polished work, is not only negotiable—it can determine the very success of the design.

Peeling the clear protective film off a new cell phone reveals a level of finish that is hyper-perfect; it is as if the designed object has never been touched by the human hand. The slightest nick or thumb-print on its flawless, rounded edges would detract from the experience. At the other end of the spectrum is a rusted steel table, reused as a found object. Intentionally held in a raw and crude state for its antiquated qualities, it is enjoyed precisely for its rough texture and weathered coloring. Each object is considered “finished” at a different and contrasting moment, but each has been designed with a deliberate stopping point, and subsequently, each designed object is successful in its own way. Between these extremes there exists an entire range of stopping points when, depending on the object’s purpose and the designer’s intent, an object is considered finished. Stopping points may be determined by budget, by time constraints, by the method of production itself or by the designer’s philosophy. Often these points are intentional and planned, although sometimes they are surprises realized only upon execution of the object. While the refined connections of a Danish chair conform to a precise geometry, the wood itself has a unique grain and character that can only be controlled to a certain extent by the designer. The nature of the wood is imperfect, even if beautifully so, and the quality of the chair is greater precisely because the design is not taken to the level of pure perfection. The design would lose its poetry if each chair was completely identical all the way down to the wood’s grain pattern. It’s the infinite series of stopping points between the gritty and the glossy that compel us.

There is mastery in knowing when to stop designing and call something complete. The very act of stopping adds an additional dimension to the delicate process of design, which can reveal an object’s history or give the viewer a peek at what lies below the surface. The reward for finding this magic point is to give an object soul.

A designer’s decision of *when* to consider an object complete has far reaching implications. It affects how the object will be used, can dictate the selling price and may even determine whether the product becomes disregarded and disposable or timeless and cherished. All of these issues establish a measuring stick that allows us to analyze the rationale and the poetics of these stopping points. In this issue of *ARCADE* we’ve selected nine extraordinary designers from a tribe of like-minded thinkers, each exploring a different philosophy of what it means to “finish” a product. Each represents an important place on the continuum between the gritty and the glossy, and each is producing work that fascinates us for this very reason. ▮

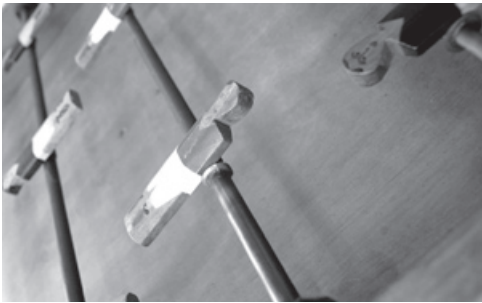
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**BUILD llc** is an industrious design-build firm in Seattle run by Kevin Eckert and Andrew van Leeuwen. BUILD llc’s forward-thinking approach to architectural work focuses on permanence, sustainability and efficiency. BUILD llc maintains an architectural office, a furniture workshop and a development company.

In addition to creating residential and commercial buildings, BUILD llc has been widely published internationally and is most known for their cultural leadership expressed in frequent posts on their BUILD blog (<http://blog.buildllc.com>).

THE RELENTLESS  
PURSUIT OF  
IMPERFECTION

Kirk Albert



**Long before opening** Kirk Albert Vintage Furnishings, my showroom in Georgetown (Seattle), I was drawn to what I describe as *perfect imperfections*—artifacts that are distinctive precisely because of their unique flaws. I believe there is an extraordinary quality to objects that have been handcrafted, or aged over decades, that simply cannot be replicated. I've never seen a faux finish that can compete with Mother Nature—there is simply no substitute for time and exposure to the elements.

While I could never be accused of having a highly organized approach to my work, everything selected for the showroom goes through three specific stages.

DISCOVERY

During the first stage, my role is closer to that of an archaeologist or curator than designer. Finding those pieces that aren't just imperfect, but *perfectly* imperfect, is like searching for the proverbial needle in a haystack (or vintage, over-sized calipers in a haystack, as the case may be). Some objects are found within driving distance of the showroom, but I discover most pieces during my cross-country buying expeditions.

I'm guided mainly by my intuition at this stage, but there are several questions that I find myself asking over and over:

- Did this make me smile? It may sound silly or trite but when the corners of my mouth start to creep upwards uncontrollably, I'll take a closer look.

- Will setting a drink on this surface add or detract from its beauty or singularity? Will the piece be made more or less compelling? If the answer is less, then it's not right for the showroom.

- Does it have a story to tell? Vintage artifacts frequently have led rich and varied lives before we meet them. A century-old telephone pole may not be beautiful in the traditional sense, but if you think about its history - the effort taken to create it, what it took to maintain and how it connected people over its lifespan - it's incredibly powerful. Putting that telephone pole into a new context changes its meaning once again. What was originally created to be purely functional may now be valued entirely for its decorative qualities.

Finding those pieces that  
aren't just imperfect, but  
*perfectly* imperfect is like  
searching for the proverbial  
needle in a haystack.

EXPLORING  
SEWERS

Steve Duncan

LONDON

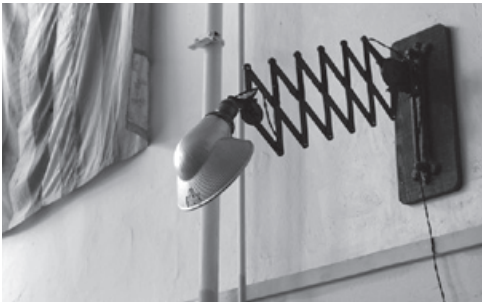
Late one night in London, I climbed down into a rusted hatch in the sidewalk and made my way down two ladders and a set of winding stone stairs. Well below street level, it was utterly silent except for the noises of my two companions behind me and completely dark except for our headlamp beams. We turned into a narrow brick tunnel and followed it to where it opened into a cavernous space. This was a giant sewer tunnel nearly twenty feet in diameter, with a flow of water and sewage about a foot and a half deep. The air in the tunnel was fetid, thick, humid and rank with the smells that came from decomposing organic matter, human waste and the detritus washed from the streets and gutters of the city. Set into the brick wall next to me was a sign, too obscured by muck to be readable; I wiped it clean with my gloved hand and read "Fleet Main Line." This was where we wanted to be. I tightened the straps holding my chest-high waders tight to my body and then stepped down into the flowing liquid.

Even for the most ardent urban explorer, wading through sewage is a nasty business. The worst part is seeing anything recognizable: tampons, condoms, maxi-pads, streamers of half-disintegrated toilet paper, and, of course, the shit itself. But neither the smell nor the sight of floating shit could detract from the excitement I felt. This was the great Fleet River. Once a natural watercourse, it had been vital in London's growth over the centuries, like the other streams

that once flowed through the city. These watercourses were used as canals to transport goods, provide drinking water and flush away refuse. The Fleet River was the largest of these streams, and cargo ships sailed up it as late as the 18th century. The rapidly flowing water also powered innumerable waterwheels and mills—something the tidal Thames could not do.

The city grew, but it quickly became so large that the small rivers that had fed it became nothing more than an impediment—makeshift sewers and barriers to city traffic. The "Fleet Ditch," as it came to be known, was clogged with sewage and trash as early as the 13th century; the city dredged it back into a navigable channel, and over the following centuries this cycle was repeated many times. Over time, however, the river's flow lessened—too much of its water was siphoned off for watermills and for irrigation, and the gradual paving of the urban landscape left it unreplenished by rainfall. Eventually, a tunnel was built around it in the 1860s as part of a massive Victorian sewer-building program, though in dry weather only a tiny fraction of the river's original flow remains.

As we walked, we saw a palimpsest of London's history from Victorian times to the present: the remnants of old stone pillars, now integrated into the tunnel walls, showing where a bridge had once spanned the river before it was covered; the amazingly graceful brickwork of the tunnel itself; old



### DESIGN

During the second stage, I play the roles of both art restorer and product designer.

A central theme running through all my work is authenticity of materials. My goal is always to capture or enhance what’s happened to a surface before I selected it—never to age or renew it. If I must alter an original finish for functional reasons, whether removing layers of loose dirt or applying a finish to lock in the unique patina, the goal is *always* to enhance the intrinsic flawed beauty of the object. Flaws are celebrated rather than masked—they are the signatures of a one-of-a kind piece.

I then determine what function these items will ultimately serve. Should that stack of vintage gears be hung on a wall, displayed on a table or combined with a mercury glass shade to form a one-of-a-kind light fixture? I consider lighting to be the most

important design variable in a space, so if there’s an opportunity to transform a found object into something that’s artistic, functional and luminescent, I usually jump at the chance.

There is also a practical element to this stage. I want everything I offer to be take-home ready. If it’s lighting, we rewire everything to be UL certified. If it’s a stand-alone sculptural piece (like the 7’ tall grinding wheel that’s now in a construction executive’s board room), we’ll create a custom display stand for it. I’ll do whatever it takes in order for something to be enjoyed immediately.

### DISPLAY

Finally, I act as both merchandiser and interior designer. For me, eclecticism rules, and I’ve always said, “The magic is in the mix.” It’s why I compulsively redesign the entire gallery every few days. There’s an ongoing dialogue between varied objects, and I’m always seeking to form unexpected connections and contradictions that surprise, delight or perhaps provoke.

The story doesn’t end here, however. Once these pieces are purchased, they move on to a new chapter in life. Whether they are installed in a retail environment or made useful in a new restaurant, an office or residence, I’m always thrilled when someone shares my appreciation for *perfect imperfections*. 🍷

**PHOTOS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:**  
Jeff Culver, ModuloIILc.com  
Jeff Culver, ModuloIILc.com  
BUILD IILc  
Jeff Culver, ModuloIILc.com  
Hannah Marie,  
hannahmariephoto.com

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**KIRK ALBERT** is the founder and proprietor of Kirk Albert Vintage Furnishings (formerly Great Stuff), one of the nation’s premier sources for found objects, vintage furniture and lighting, art and accessories. Albert’s revolving collection of “perfect imperfections” has been widely recognized, and his showroom in Seattle’s industrial Georgetown neighborhood is now a destination for many of the nation’s leading retail buyers who are searching for distinctive, one-of-a-kind objects. Additional information is available at [kirkalbert.com](http://kirkalbert.com).

flagstone floors; and sewer connections, draining from the buildings above us, that ranged from Victorian brick to modern plastic.

Aboveground, there is little trace of the Fleet River today except for a few eponymous streets and alleys. To all appearances, the river is gone. The city has cannibalized its past as it has grown—except, of course, that the river is still there. Its existence is taken for granted every time someone flushes a toilet in that particular region of London. Both the river and the city itself have changed unrecognizably since the Fleet last flowed aboveground. These changes often imply rupture and destruction of the past, but there is a deep continuity as well in the evolution of the ever-changing relationship between the two. ▶





## ROME

I entered Rome's underground through a tunnel no older than the 19th-century Fleet sewer, an overflow channel into the Tiber River from one of the city's main collectors. What I was looking for, however, was something much older: the *Cloaca Maxima* sewer of the ancient Roman Empire, constructed about 2,600 years ago by King Tarquin the Proud (or possibly by his predecessor, Tarquin the Elder). Most likely, the original *Cloaca Maxima* was just a single channel leading to the Tiber River, but over the following centuries it was expanded into a multi-branched system.

In the first century BC, some five-hundred years after the *Cloaca* had first been dug, the historian Livy described Tarquin's achievement:

*"...faciendos cloacamque maximam, receptaculum omnium purgamentorum urbis, sub terra agendam; quibus duobus operibus vix nova haec magnificentia quicquam adaequare potuit."*

*"...and he constructed the Cloaca Maxima, receptacle of all the filth of the city, which is carried underground...the like of which even modern splendor has scarcely been able to reproduce."*

—Livy's *History of Rome*: Books I, XXI, XXII

However, Livy's statement is misleading. It had not been intended as a sewer in the modern sense of the word; rather, it was primarily meant to drain the Velabrum, the marshy lowland between the Esquiline, Viminal and Quirinal hills. The newly dry land eventually became the Forum Romanum, the iconic center of the rapidly growing metropole of the Roman Empire.

What Livy saw as the cause of the *Cloaca*'s construction – the filth and excrement of a teeming, populous city – was actually, to some extent, an effect of that construction. It was the newly habitable land that helped the city grow to the size that it was in Livy's time, with a population dozens of times larger than it had been in the time of the Tarquin kings. As with the Fleet Sewer, what the *Cloaca Maxima* expresses is not merely the imposition of ordered or finished infrastructure on pre-urban natural topography. Rather, it shows the city's constantly changing relationship to both natural terrain and to the built environment.

Amazingly, the main tunnel of the *Cloaca* is still used in Rome's present-day sewer system, and this is what I had hoped to find in exploring the tunnels. Instead, I found a connection to a smaller, unused branch of the ancient sewer. What a difference in perspective a couple thousand years can make; the *Cloaca* that Livy lauded as the "receptacle of all filth in the city" now seemed tiny and mundane next to the huge sewer tunnels of the modern era.



## NEW YORK

In New York City, the first enclosed sewer was constructed around 1812, when a stone-lined drainage ditch running along the course of the present-day Canal Street was covered with a broad, shallow, brick arch. Wading through the sewer today, the brick still arches over the 12-foot-wide channel except where it’s been cut by newer construction. Below the bricks, heavy stone blocks make up the walls and the floor.

The construction of the wide, stone-lined channel occurred in the late 1700s; before that, it had been nothing but a ditch that helped drain the swampy area known then as Lispenard’s Meadows—a huge expanse of bogs and oversaturated fields that now forms part of SoHo and Tribeca. It also carried the overflow from the Collect Pond, the original source of drinking water in early New York. Before that, when the water was particularly high and the tide was in, it had been possible to paddle a canoe along the route of Canal Street from the Hudson River to the Collect Pond—almost crossing Manhattan.

A few feet overhead, Canal Street is one of the city’s busiest thoroughfares, and hundreds of thousands of commuters ride through the subway lines that were rammed through the brick arch of the sewer tunnel. Nonetheless, some of the water that splashes across my boots when I wade through the sewer still comes from the same underground springs that had long ago supplied the

Collect Pond. The actual water, of course, is not the same from moment to moment, much less from century to century. The flow itself is the only thing that remains the same, providing a line of continuity between the past and the present and reminding us that, for a living city, the only constancy is change. ■

**STEVE DUNCAN** is a veteran of urban exploration. He has been exploring tunnels and other inaccessible underground places in New York since 1996 and has photographed tunnels beneath Paris, London, Rome, Naples, Stockholm, Berlin, Montreal, Toronto, Chicago and many other cities. He began taking pictures because he was fascinated by what he found underground in the city and wanted a way to capture and convey what he was seeing: labyrinths of utility tunnels, glorious cityscapes from inaccessible rooftops, graffiti murals that only a handful of people would ever see, or century-old underground spaces.

His photos have appeared in publications including *The New York Times*, *The New York Post* and *The New York Sun*. In 2004 and 2005, he hosted the Discovery Channel show “Urban Explorers,” and more recently, he has appeared on the History Channel as an expert on New York City’s underground.

PHOTO: Steve Duncan

A high-contrast, black and white close-up photograph of a man's face and hands. The man has dark, curly hair and a beard. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. His hands are clasped together in front of his chest, with fingers interlaced. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the textures of his skin and hair. The background is a plain, light color.

THE UNDERLYING  
DECEIT OF GLOSSY

Chase Jarvis



**When I was** a less experienced artist, I thought that less gloss meant less talent. For, after all, it seemed to me to be commonly assumed in our culture that talent resided only in the gloss, the perfection and the polish. If your art didn't have polish, it was only because you weren't able to apply it.

Now, I tend to feel just the opposite. Gloss, more often than not, acts as a substitute for soul, a clear vision, intent. It's certainly more challenging to find the perfect vintage car to purchase than it is to select a new Porsche. It seems like too often gloss is the easy way out.

Photographically, for me, this translates away from traditional, more "perfect" images and toward the more real moments. It's the off moments, or rather the "un-moments," that make stronger, more emotionally charged images. These images feel more like my life—far more imperfect and far more relevant.

In my own work, an example might be the photographic portraits from my recently completed *Seattle 100: Portrait of a City* project (forthcoming October 2010). It was always my goal to catch this "un-moment" of which I write—that instant just before and just after the photographic moments that have been so historically revered in our culture. My growing experience tells me that the sliver of time that captures the spontaneous and the genuine and pierces through the façade of a conventionally "perfect" portrait more accurately reveals the truly human.

I contend that these same principles can be applied to architecture and design. Certainly, while exceptions to my hypothesis abound - where polished architectural spaces, posh interiors and high designs succeed - it's simply my hope that we suspend our *de facto* acceptance of the new and polished as "design" and recognize that it's more often something gritty that challenges us to find a deeper aesthetic, take a longer vision and seek more soulful connections. Put simply, "gritty" may require more emotional and metaphysical investment from the viewer, but it is far less deceitful than "glossy" and creates a far greater opportunity for culturally-relevant, creative success. ▮

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**CHASE JARVIS** is well known as a visionary photographer, director and social artist with his personal work earning the attention of gallerists and curators in the US and abroad. He has won numerous awards for his commercial campaigns and has been featured in hundreds of print, web and broadcast pieces worldwide. Learn more at [www.chasejarvis.com](http://www.chasejarvis.com).

**PHOTO:** Chase Jarvis

We may never reach a state of final completion on a particular project, but approaching it from as many angles as possible does help us spot the magical moments where the pieces align beautifully.

Graypants

**How does one make a beautiful object?** What’s the source of the beauty? Is it the physically pristine product, or does it have more to do with the user’s reaction? Graypants was created as a responsible design studio out of a simple but very focused effort to return to the joy of crafting with our hands, and we found that the latest technologies actually support an organic and craft-based design process surprisingly well. We’ve learned to embrace the notion that beauty can come from nothing, or as Brian Eno so eloquently put it, “Beautiful things grow out of shit.” Some of the most beautiful sculptural objects and buildings come from seemingly arbitrary seeds of inspiration or references to nature. Is this a result of function, form, process, technology, material or magic? Truly embracing these unexpected forces becomes the soul of our design process and thus the final product, and one of the greatest lessons learned through allowing Graypants to evolve is to above all support and encourage discovery.

Go on a treasure hunt. Furniture designer John Reeves moved to Vietnam where he began collecting old scooter engine blocks. He melts them down to create cast-aluminum furniture. It’s a filthy process recognizable in the final product through the almost-charred, industrial textures left behind, and yet his chair gleamed like a diamond in the rough at New York’s bustling ICFF trade show this last summer. If you’ve yet to discover that life-changing design moment during a focus group or over the plastic-water-bottle-littered conference table (damage done within the sixty minutes allotted for the meeting), look elsewhere. Ideas are free, and there are trillions of them

floating all around us at any given moment. Reach out and grab one from the sandbox out back, the dusty box in the attic or a dream.

Scribble, too. Scribbling is about sharing. Whether with crayons on the wall or a stick in the mud, it’s really fun and the process of designing is much more enlightening when messy and organic. We try to share our ideas almost immediately. It’s okay to shout them out loud and fling them across boundaries where they have more opportunity and a chance to evolve. Sir Ken Robinson speaks of a more agricultural approach to education, where we simply create conditions in which we think an individual could flourish. Instead of providing a linear path of bullet-pointed goals, an opportunity of discovery is gifted early on. Our cardboard Scrap Lights were born out of an experiment in which we created one-offs of a single chair design using as many random household materials as possible. We used *Stranger* newspapers, cardboard, plywood scraps, pallet slip-sheets and at some point had to deal with containing a disastrous concoction of trash bags, glue and expanding foam. After all that, we woke up the morning of the gallery exhibition featuring the chairs and said, “Let’s make a lamp super quickly to hang above the chairs—we can pull it off.” There’s a willingness to expose one’s self, possibly fail, and then fail harder that is encouraged by this kind of process, and we think many of us now recognize this and take it to heart.

Finally, blur all the lines together. The best advice is usually unexpected, and we’ve found that it comes in random waves from the mailman or a next-door neighbor. Why not have a local chef or musician critique your architectural design? There’s a grassroots level of collaboration available that is often overlooked that many times exposes critical points within a design



PHOTOS: Graypants



process. I can consult my seven-year-old niece for design advice via a video call from my regular Seattle bus route. We can share sketches, and while I’m often instructed to “make it pink” or “add flowers,” I always leave inspired and with a new perspective. We may never reach a state of final completion on a particular project, but approaching it from as many angles as possible does help us spot the magical moments where the pieces align beautifully. These moments are wonderful gifts. When this happens, take a snapshot and share it with the world!

We have no recipe for creating beauty, but through collaboration and a readiness to create and maintain an inspiring environment, we do know that it can be encouraged and harvested along the way. Most of all, we like to sum up our collective approach with a quote from the Persian poet Rumi: “Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.” 🍷

**GRAYPANTS** is a responsible design firm. Our projects range in scale from print media to furniture to architecture. By simply using discarded corrugated cardboard boxes gathered from local businesses in Seattle, we have developed Scrap Lights. Scrap Lights breathe new life into once lifeless materials by giving a face lift to the idea of what a cardboard box is and can be. Graypants now serves as an innovative model for what is possible when designers return to using their hands, think responsibly and craft outside the lines.



**fin·ish**

**v. fin·ished, fin·ish·ing, fin·ish·es**

- n. 1. The final part; the conclusion
2. The reason for one’s ruin; downfall.
3. Something that completes, concludes, or perfects, especially:
- a. The last treatment or coating of a surface: *applied a shellac finish to the cabinet.*
  - b. The surface texture produced by such a treatment or coating.
  - c. A material used in surfacing or finishing.
4. Completeness, refinement, or smoothness of execution; polish.

THE FREE DICTIONARY BY FARLEX

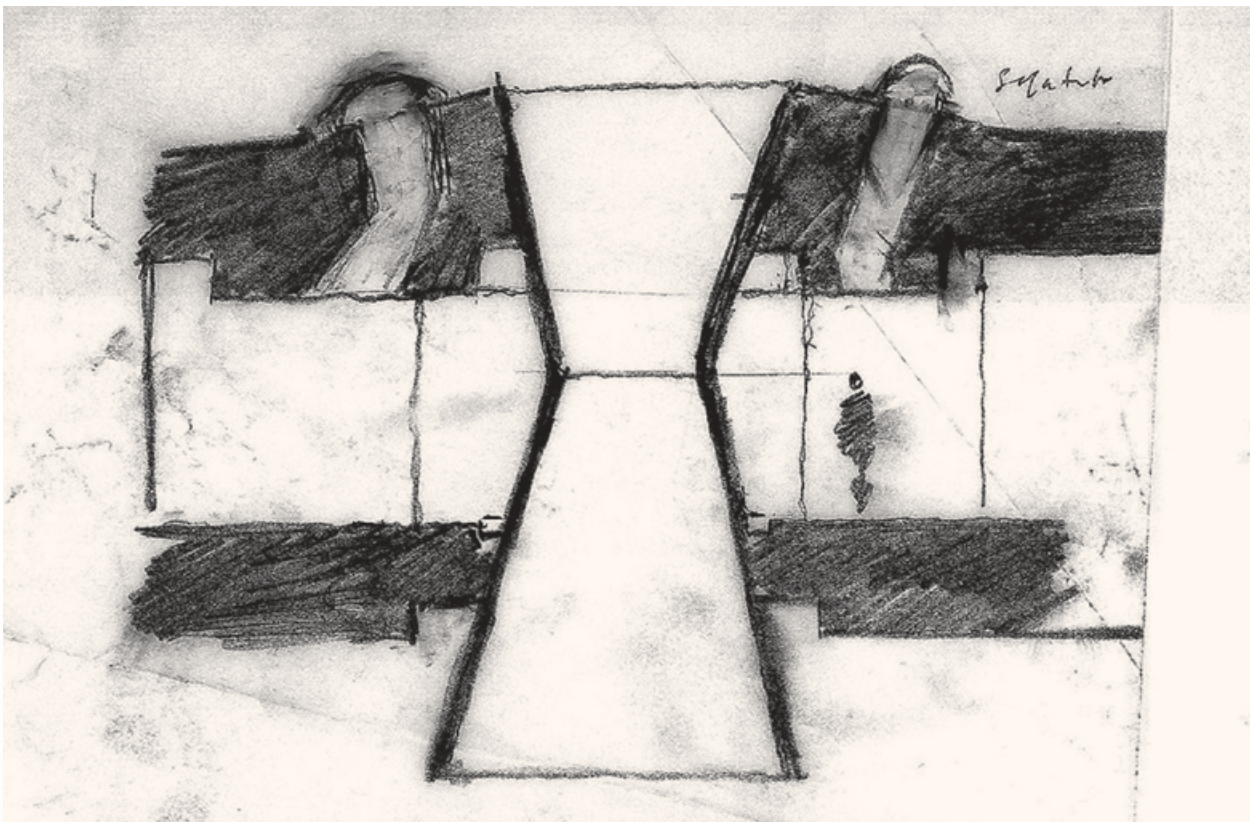
**FINISH(ED):  
STAGES  
OF EVOLUTION**

**Carlyle Fraser**

To finish is to enact a moment of pause and to reflect on the path taken. Often the creation process involves patience and becoming attuned to the spirit of the subject at hand. It is also a moment to recalibrate and make adjustments during the application of making; the end of one track of work can quickly turn into the beginning of another, provoking the question: is the completed object the goal or merely the manifestation of choices taken and not necessarily the ideal? Can one ever really complete an object permanently and call it finished?

Our work at Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects is largely founded upon the notion of permanence. The intention is for the architecture produced to last ▶

**Sometimes during the act of making, the stopping point is a temporary stage in a journey that provides a higher level of understanding.**



far beyond conventional standards and to take on new character throughout its life. Whether the project is of a large public scale or a small residence, many of the buildings produced are composed of stone and concrete because of their enduring qualities of weight and substance. The selection of materials is based on their innate properties and how they appeal to our senses. Favorite material choices are those that show evidence of human craft, like the Tombasil plates that comprise the façade at the Museum of American Folk Art in New York. The panels harness natural light and shield the building from some of the harsh elements of the city life.

As we craft our work, we constantly ask ourselves:

- Does the design work?
- How will the space be used?
- How exposed are the conditions?
- How much will this (object/space) be used?
- Is what we've done dignified?

These questions help to inform our choice of finishes and shape our design decisions. Frequently Tod pushes the studio to explore ways of creating heavy groundscrapers that touch the earth carefully; Billie inspires us to find ways of leaving traces of the hand and its sensual influences, such as in the ceramic-tiled panel at the core of the Skirkanich lab building at the University of Pennsylvania. Here, custom made tiles impregnated with a fingerprint registration are dispersed in a binary matrix to create a golden field that serves as a greeting board and compass as the user navigates the building. Light is also a factor that is always conscious in our work. It is an intangible finish that activates the spaces we design and the experience we strive to create. These themes constantly resurface in many different forms throughout the body of our work.



During the design investigation, we look to precedents that contain similar values to those noted above and to ones that continue to develop basic design concepts in further iterations. In the works of master craftsman Louis Kahn, recurring themes seem to weave their way back into later projects in order to take on new form. At Kahn’s Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, light is a theme that is an integral component of the building. The use of narrow slits between vaults that are open to the sky, with perforated metal reflectors below, wash the ceilings of the vaults with indirect light that changes the feeling of the interior throughout the day. Through this act of revelation, idiosyncrasies of the seemingly unfinished wall and ceiling treatment are provoked to render another version or instance of the material—a unique finish that can only be experienced at that moment in time. In a later project at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, Connecticut, Kahn recalls the use of another filtering device that manipulates natural light to provide a diffused atmosphere that complements the experience of the art.

Sometimes during the act of making, the stopping point is a temporary stage in a journey that provides a higher level of understanding. These stopping points can be informed by the craftsman’s ability during a particular period of time. As a result, revisiting past subjects is a necessary procedure that allows true evolution to take place. In our

recent version of a skylight at Banyan Park for the Tata Consultancy Services in Mumbai, India, the accent of light is not the only finished product created by the material’s form. The body of the light apparatus is an object that is physically present within the space and engaged as an architectural element. The objects that were used to mold the final finished product become residual artifacts of the process and take on a life and spirit of their own. These objects may be finished in terms of their contribution to the final product, but they are also unforgettable lessons in the education processes that inspire the rules we use to invent new possibilities. ■

**CARLYLE FRASER** is an architect at Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects and recently held the position of Visiting Assistant Professor at Pratt Institute School of Architecture.

**OPPOSITE TOP PHOTOS:** Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects  
**OPPOSITE LEFT AND ABOVE PHOTOS:** Samuel Barclay

# DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, HAND AND MIND: MAKING BETTER ARCHITECTS THROUGH BUILDING

Dan Rockhill



**Studio 804**, which takes its name from the final design studio within the graduate architecture program at the University of Kansas, compresses every aspect of a design/build practice into an intensive, five month experience. In the twelve years since the studio began, we have progressed from small-scale projects to creating affordable housing for the city of Lawrence in which students design, build and install prefabricated homes for entry-level buyers in Kansas City. This experience paved the way for the most recent string of projects, the Studio's first commercial building that has also achieved the highest standards for sustainability, LEED™ Platinum and one LEED™ for Homes Platinum. Another LEED™ Platinum house, as well as Passive House Certification, is pending since the completion of our most recent work in 2010. Although we are a not-for-profit corporation and are clearly associated with the university, our projects are funded independently; each year begins with nothing but the bank balance left by the previous graduating class and ends with a completed building, a satisfied client and an invaluable learning experience.

If there's a difference between Studio 804 and most other design/build academic programs, it's that Studio 804 is truly a comprehensive experience. We start with the tiny seeds of ideas and end with a very tangible, ready-to-be-lived-in result. That means the students work not only with clients, neighborhood associations and community development corporations (CDCs) but with uniform and international building codes, structural engineers, inspectors, trades people, appraisers, real estate agents, etc. While great admiration goes to those programs that produce smaller-scale projects, Studio 804 gives students a chance to experience the complexities of building for the contemporary marketplace, preparing them for issues they'll confront as young professionals engaged in practice.

In fact, this approach may well represent an important paradigm shift in the way architecture schools teach studio. Previous to Studio 804, many former students, after several years of work, would return expressing disappointment in the difference between the rarefied environment of the studio experience and the challenges

posed by practice. I often give a personal example; in my own practice, the first question I ordinarily ask of prospective clients is how much money they have for the project they are inquiring about, which is in marked contrast to the educational studio experience, in which the one item never, ever mentioned is the budget. While studio offers many positive opportunities to work on problems related to design, the absence of such powerful connections to reality means that young people are deprived of the essential tools required to produce work in today's market. As many have come to recognize, this does a disservice, not only to students, but to the firms that employ them and to the building industry in general.

The process has been the same for all Studio 804 projects: Beginning with a two-week design charrette in January (usually before there's a site), each student brings in and presents a new, three-dimensional model every day. Within half a week, designs with similar characteristics are clustered, and these groups of students work to develop and refine ideas which are ultimately combined into a single scheme. Great care is taken to keep the process democratic by not favoring a particular student or concept; if irreconcilable proposals emerge, the class takes a vote and all commit to the outcome.

Construction documents are completed within days, and typically a building permit is acquired by the end of the month. That leaves the students February and March to physically build the building and six weeks for site and finishing work after the modules (typically there are five or six of them) have been moved and assembled in early April. The Greensburg project varied slightly from this schedule. Due to the distance

from the university, the class moved to the Greensburg area for over two months, going home only for the celebration of the university's NCAA National Basketball Championship.

As for the construction process, the entire building is finished, inside and out, in a warehouse in Lawrence. Prefab imposes a helpful discipline in both the design and construction processes. The restrictions imposed by such immutables as the size of the warehouse door, the length and width of the flatbed truck and the dimensions of the infill lot leave less room for argument and help to focus and mature the students' abilities. Students do all their own construction, including site work—pouring concrete, connecting to utilities and sewers, controlling storm water, etc. In every way that matters, the class is truly the author of the end result.

A mainstay of the Studio 804 approach has been common sense building. I have always adhered to this model in my own practice and apply it willingly to the 804 model. As an example, cross ventilation and adequate shading on a building's broad south exposure keeps the volume of space from overheating in the summer, while concrete floors absorb the sun in the winter, helping to warm the space in the evening. Although passive attributes can provide for the majority of thermal comfort within the building, there is still a dependence on a forced air system. Studio 804 has built a reputation by analyzing typical building systems and modifying them to optimize energy consumption. The sustainable prototype and the houses that followed encompass all aspects of the passive energy gain, but they also attempt to introduce active systems.

The benefits of exposing students to the design/build ethic are incalculable. In a conventional process, the lines drawn between responsibilities can be uncertain; in design/build, students learn to be responsible for everything and to not make excuses. Similarly, Studio 804 alumni find themselves strongly connected to nearly every aspect of the design and construction industries, with a deep-seated understanding of process that teaches accountability. Most of all, students learn the value of working and communicating with others to achieve a result—which lies, of course, at the heart of the design/build educational model.

The synthesis of design and craft achieved by the students is gratifying and impressive, and hopefully my goal of ultimately making them better architects by this process is achieved. ■

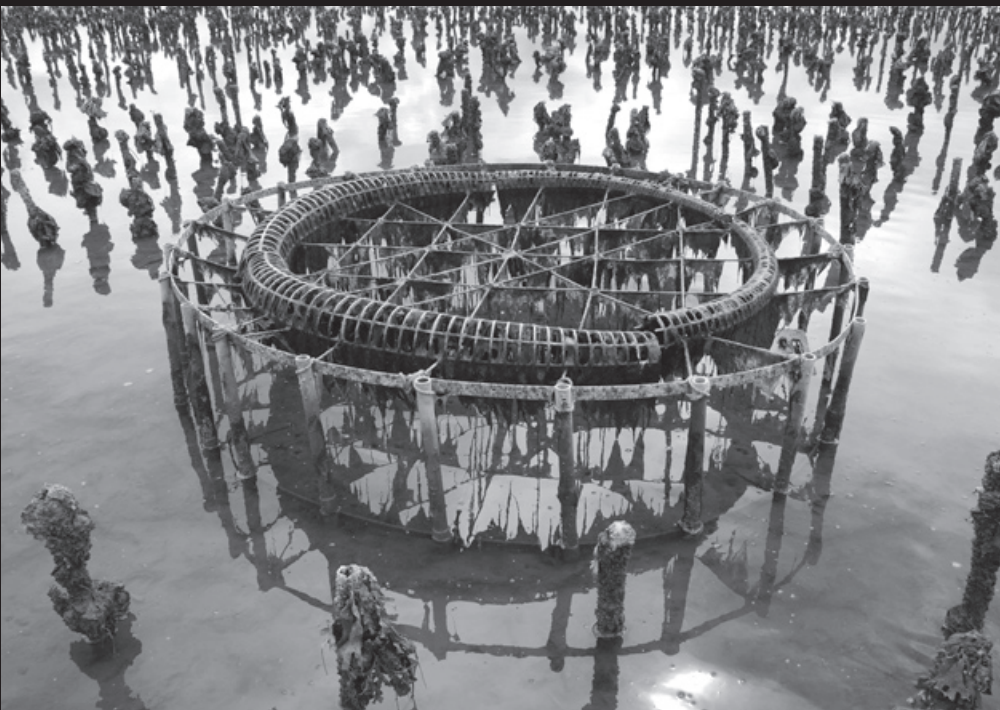
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**DAN ROCKHILL** is the J L Constant Distinguished Professor of Architecture at the University of Kansas, Executive Director of Studio 804 and principal in the firm Rockhill and Associates. Studio 804 and his professional work (which includes three LEED™ Platinum projects) have received many awards – including three AIA Honor Awards, two "Home of the Year" awards from *Architecture Magazine*, and *Residential Architect's* Firm of the Year – and has been published in over two hundred international books and journals.

**We start with the tiny seeds of ideas and end with a very tangible, ready-to-be-lived-in result.**

PHOTOS: Courtesy of Studio 804





**Ten years ago,** I began making sculpture that was inspired by landscape, and gradually, I became interested in shaping sculptures directly within landscapes. This exploration has come to include juxtaposing disparate landscapes and focusing on how a sculpture can travel through them in a compelling way, gathering an imprint of an environment through a journey, and altering it in a subtle way as well. Anticipating and predicting forces within these landscapes has become a central concern and point of departure for formal and structural decisions within each of my projects. It is important to me that with each sculpture I balance the imposition I am inherently making upon a landscape with a vulnerability of form or material, so that unexpected detours can come about over the course of each work. I think of many of these projects as a kind of choreography of collapse and aim to more fully embrace improvisation as each work evolves.



Collector

Wood, 1 x 7 x 7 feet  
2006 – 2008  
Willapa Bay, WA. Escalante Plateau, UT.

*Collector* was initially designed to fit precisely into a specific gap within a slot canyon in a remote area of Utah’s Escalante Plateau. Floodwaters surge through these canyons each year in late summer. By siting the sculpture in this flood route, I wondered if the water would completely destroy my work, leave it in broken pieces or just scour it clean. Prior to wedging it into the canyon, I anchored *Collector* in Willapa Bay on the Washington coast for 16 months. I wanted the sculpture to remain under the water until the oysters that grew on it were large enough to eat. To balance my intention for the piece with an element of chance or vulnerability, I loosely floated the sculpture within a net of yellow webbing that could potentially wear through and release the sculpture from its anchor. A “hundred year storm” hit the bay that winter, and though it failed to break loose the sculpture, it tore all of the brown seaweed from the sculpture’s surface. This muted seaweed was eventually replaced by a different species of bright grass-green seaweed that grew in a kind of halo around the sculpture—it was the only place in the bay where this new variety of seaweed took hold. After removing the sculpture and harvesting its oysters, I bolted the wet sculpture with its mane of crustaceans and seaweed to the front of my truck so that it would frame my view like blinders as I drove south to Utah. The sculpture’s surface dried, and flakes of it dispersed before accumulating a crust of dead, black bugs and ochre dust on the way to the canyon. In the end, it was not the desert flooding that washed the sculpture of its remaining barnacles, clams and vestiges of seaweed; it was the wrens that picked it clean.

*Collector* is currently on view at Cynthia Reeves Gallery, New York, NY.

The Elephant Bed

Corn-based resin, methylcellulose  
20 forms, each 24 x 6 x 6 feet  
2009 – 2010, Fabrica, Brighton, UK.

*The Elephant Bed* was initially exhibited at Fabrica in the UK. The twenty forms that comprise this installation are made of materials designed to rapidly deteriorate through exposure to moisture. Each form is 24 feet high and made with corn-based plastic and binder-free methylcellulose skins. Half of the exhibition space, a former church, was flooded with India ink. Over the run of the exhibition, half of the forms were gradually lowered, disappearing into the pool of ink. At the conclusion of the exhibition, the remaining forms were carried in a procession through narrow city lanes and walked directly into the English Channel where they immediately disintegrated into the waves.

Microscopic calcium shells that protect phytoplankton called coccolithophores inspired the sculpture’s fluted forms. Huge blooms of these organisms occur annually, discoloring the surface of the sea and lasting several weeks. As the organisms die en mass, their protective shells fall to the ocean floor. These incremental deposits made over thousands of years have formed a stratum geologists informally call The Elephant Bed, and make up much of England’s shoreline, including the White Cliffs of Dover.

A third version of the project is in the planning stages and will be exhibited in Valenciennes, France and New York City. ▮

COLLECTOR  
&  
THE  
ELEPHANT  
BED

John Grade

JOHN GRADE is a Seattle-based artist. His most recent installation, *Circuit*, was exhibited at Cynthia Reeves Gallery, NY in June 2010. *Circuit* will be exhibited in Seattle at Davidson Galleries, September 1 – 30, 2010. Made of glazed, ceramic plates bonded with a gypsum-polymer to corn-based resin that is set in marine netting, the 10,000-lb structure will be carried in 400 parts up the mountain simultaneously by 200 volunteers (in the snow) in January 2011. Designed to crack apart through exposure to extreme temperatures, the sculpture will gradually change shape over the course of one year. Because the ceramic is laminated to a corn-based resin that becomes pliable through exposure to moisture, the cracking ceramic will remain unified rather than falling into pieces, taking on subtly different shapes echoing wind patterns and snow fall/melt. One year later, the sculpture will be carried down and off the mountain and exhibited in its new configuration.

www.johngrade.com  
www.cynthia-reeves.com  
www.davidsongalleries.com

PHOTOS: John Grade



# WHEN IS DESIGN FINISHED?

Alex Calderwood



**ABOVE:** The worn leather of a chair at the Ace Hotel tells a story about its history and brings a depth of character to the room.  
**PHOTO:** Jeremy T. Pelley

## IT IS WHAT IT IS

We're OK with not getting too precious about covering every imperfection when designing our hotels. In some cases it brings texture or a tactile quality to the space, like the way someone will do their home if they're on a budget. A soulfulness comes through when you decide to just leave something as it is.

At Ace NY there are pipes on a column running up through the restaurant that jog weirdly to connect to the electrical source upstairs on the ceiling. Some people might have covered it with drywall or whatever, but we thought it was fine for the pipes to be visible—they are what they are.

At several points in the design process, we will just say, "It is what it is." It helps us bring a sense of honesty or truth to the space, instead of being overly concerned with trying to hide imperfections. People might not consciously sense it, but they get it unconsciously. In this way, in our in Seattle and Portland hotels, the lighting in the hallways has the conduit exposed with the light attached to it. We like that toughness and honesty. Or the concrete floors in Palm Springs—Wade, one of the owners, had a house and stripped the wall-to-wall carpeting and cleaned up the concrete. Not only do we like this imperfect look, it's a good solution. A lot of people spend money on tile or terrazzo. Ours is a natural solution that saves money, and we like the qualitative effect. And it works with the desert heat.

To me, you can walk into a room and if it's overly dry-walled it just feels cold. It's appropriate for some environments like a gallery or when dealing with pure modernism, but in general, a newly dry-walled space just feels sterile. We had that challenge in some of the rooms in New York, where we did a lot of renovation. We are willing to accept an imperfect wall because it feels a little more human.

## HAPPY ACCIDENTS

In our Portland and New York buildings, wherever we could refinish the existing wood floors we did so, even if it wasn't a perfect wood floor. Same with the marble tile floor in the New York lobby. Because it had been really damaged and covered up several times over 100 years, when we finally excavated, there were a lot of areas that needed to be filled in. For financial reasons, instead of replacing it perfectly we just filled with concrete, but in the end, we liked what happened. It was one of those happy accidents.

## FOUND OBJECTS

Found objects, I think, give a residential quality and a personal sense to spaces, so they are not just store-bought images out of catalogs or design showrooms. A guiding principle is what Coco Chanel said—how you should have a mirror by the door so when you're ready to go out at night, you can look in it and take one thing off. That applies to design in general and certainly to decor in a room. It's a good principle to always keep in mind.

## WHEN IS A ROOM FINISHED?

It's never finished—we're always tweaking, adjusting, adding or taking away layers. It's an evolving process. It's the same as in your home—you're always evolving, adding and taking things away as your taste transforms and your personality changes. A space should never feel perfectly static. We're still adding and changing things in our Portland and Seattle hotels even though they have been open for years. **■**

**ALEX CALDERWOOD** is co-founder of Ace Hotel, with hotels in New York, Palm Springs, Seattle and Portland.

# A BOX

Greg Lundgren

**Donnie No moved** to the United States in 1979. He was only three months old when his parents arrived in Cincinnati to start a new life. Neither of his parents spoke English, but they were ambitious, hard working and determined to make a better life for their young family. Mr. No purchased an old truck and roamed the industrial areas of Cincinnati for abandoned wood pallets, crates and other discarded building materials. He repaired and rebuilt these pallets and crates and resold them to a local shipping company. He named his company No Pallets and Crates but soon changed it to Navis Pallets and Crates, and later to Navis Pack and Ship. His company now owns a 50,000 square foot commercial building in Cincinnati and is one of the largest providers of pallets, crates and shipping services in North America.

It was not until Donnie No was five-years old that he was diagnosed as a deaf-mute. His young parents had no experience in child rearing and directed the bulk of their attention towards the financial security of the family. But at some point they could not deny that Donnie could neither hear nor speak and with heavy hearts realized that their only son was not a normal child. Given the gravity of his impairment and the new country to which the No family was still adjusting, Donnie was never enrolled in kindergarten or elementary school and instead grew up amongst the broken pallets, handsaws and shipping crates.

Despite his inability to hear or speak, Donnie was a very bright child and spent his days watching his father work and absorbing the family trade. While some child prodigies learn Mozart or study Gödel, Donnie No became a master craftsperson at a very early age. But what separated Donnie from other craftspeople (and the other employees at Navis Pack and Ship) was that he constructed boxes as his primary form of communication. It was through his constructions that Donnie asked for more food, expressed his frustrations and displayed his deep understanding of math, physics and science. If Donnie was upset, his boxes would have violent angles and sharp edges. If Donnie was hungry, his boxes would be tall and empty with an open top. If he wanted to be left alone, his boxes would have no lid and one-hundred nails to a side.

Design quickly became Donnie No's adopted language. He made boxes out of cardboard and wood and disassembled pop cans. He taught himself to weld and cast and

mastered origami by the time he was ten. But for all of the objects he fabricated, each box had a specific purpose—it was a statement, and as his voice, his language, he never spent any more time than was necessary to communicate what his vocal cords would not accommodate.

When other people looked down in sympathy or made him feel stupid, he would create boxes of great scientific marvel. One small box could be thrown to the ground and unfold into a crate large enough for an elephant to walk into. Another could roll around a room as if it were a ball.

When he got a little bit older and wanted a girlfriend, he designed boxes that were decorative treasures inside of treasures. He would polish teak until it was as soft as a newborn baby. He created boxes that made girls' hearts flutter and the palms of their hands sweat.

There were times when Donnie was at total peace and he would make no boxes at all.

But never was his voice tangled with useless words or flowered Victorian speak. If he wanted to kiss a girl, he would never construct a box that wandered in ambiguity—his box would say, "I want to kiss you." If he felt his father was making a bad business decision, he would not construct a box that pondered the weather; he would construct a box that said, "You are making a bad business decision." His mastery of language was complete and concise—just not delivered with tongue and throat but with his hands and the materials available to him.

In June of 2007, Donnie's parents passed away, and he took to the task of building their caskets. Though Mr. and Mrs. No rarely socialized outside of their tightly-knit Korean family, everyone who witnessed the pair of matching caskets wept openly at their beauty and sentiment. Donnie had spoken without vowels or adjectives but through a perfect clarity and understanding of the language of design.

Donnie now runs the family business and is a young father with two young children of his own. He doesn't have the time to build clever mechanical boxes or the interest to woo young women with objects of beauty, but every once and awhile he will surprise his wife and daughters with an imaginative toy or testament of his love. He has very little to prove and is comfortable with his place in life. Mainly, he just makes really good crates. Nothing too fancy, nothing excessive, just strong, well-constructed boxes. You can tell just by looking at them. ■

## The End

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GREG LUNDGREN is a Seattle-based artist and designer. He is the founder of Vital 5 Productions, Artists For a Work Free America (AFWFA) and Lundgren Monuments.

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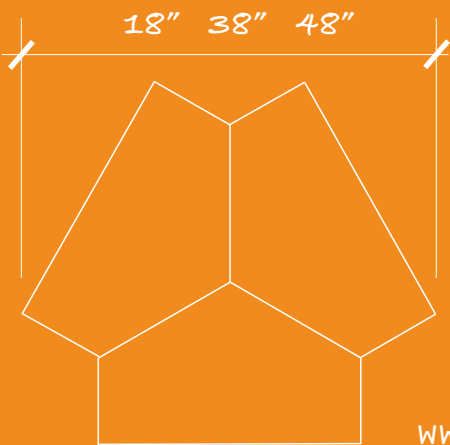
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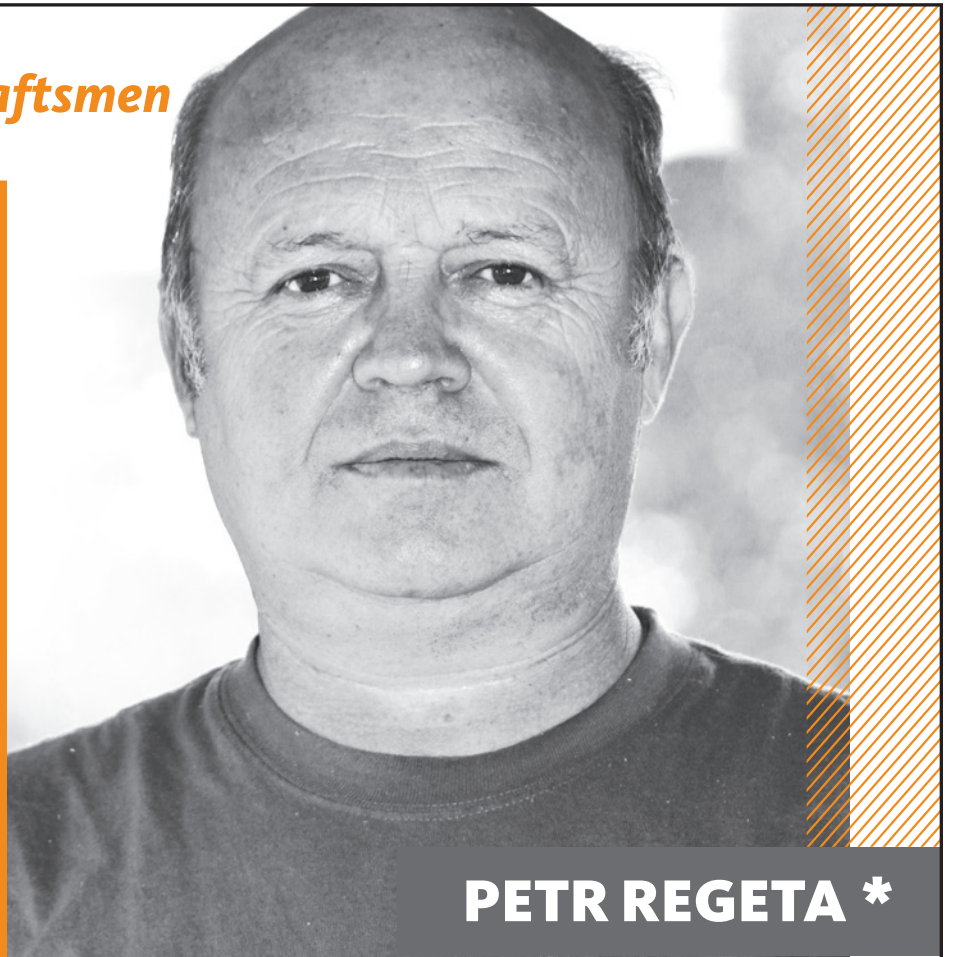


### Profile of a Craftsman

\* Petr came to the U.S. from the Ukraine in 1995, spent 2 years at South Seattle Community College learning English and started working for Krekow Jennings on July 27th, 1998.

While living in the Ukraine (120 km from Kiev, 220 km from Chernobyl), Petr was trained as a carpenter and mason, and learned all other aspects of home construction. He built his own house there out of stone masonry.

Petr has been married for 37 years, and has 5 children and 6 grandchildren. He became a U.S. citizen in 2008.



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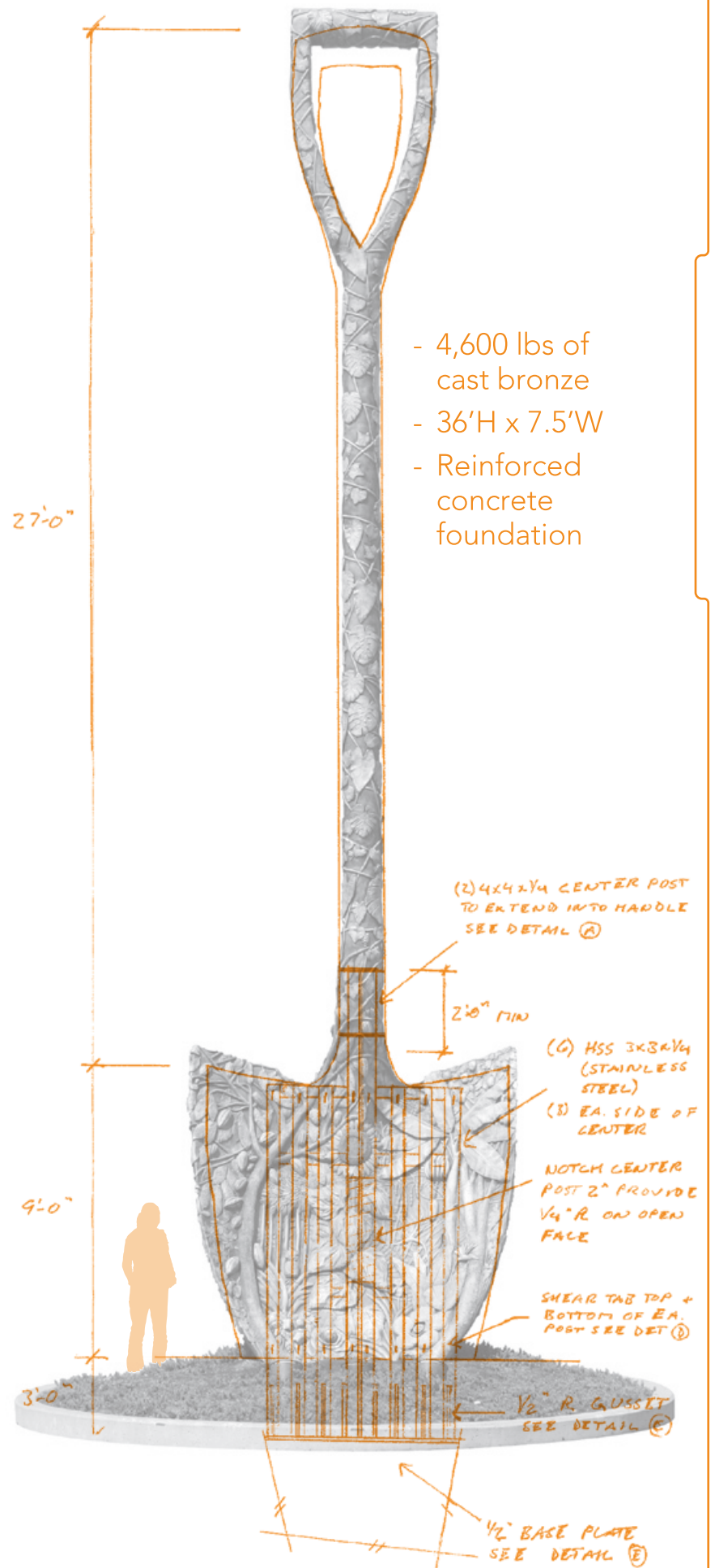
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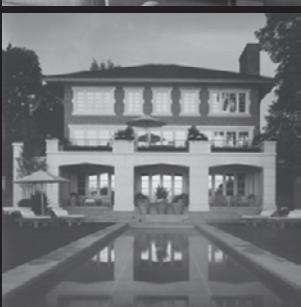
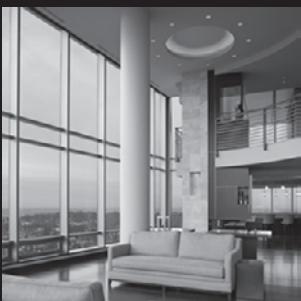
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Trevor Boddy

# Schmaltz and Smarts

## SPARKLING HILL RESORT'S MULTIFACETED DESIGN

In the minds of cutting-edge Modern Movement thinkers a century ago, notions of crystalline forms in glass were fused together with an interest in alpine architecture.

German poet Paul Scheerbart was an enthusiast for a new architecture crowning cities and natural landscapes with shining forms. His book *Glass Architecture* was deeply influential on Bruno Taut, notably in his glass pavilion design for the 1914 Deutscher Werkbund Cologne exhibition, where Scheerbart's texts graced the walls of a building with prismatic facets for a roof. For his part, Taut had written a book on *Alpine Architecture* and then initiated a correspondence between key modernists on these topics, resulting in yet another collection of writings, *The Crystal Chain Letters*, one of the foundational documents for the new design sensibility. This proved to be an influential text as modernism progressed from manifesto to manifestation after World War I, notably in the 1919-22 hypothetical glass tower projects of an admirer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Mies' sketches established the architectural bloodlines that lead directly to the glass towers of today.

This whole excursus into the early history of Modern architecture was my mental refuge as I tried to come to terms with a strange, tacky-yet-wonderful luxury hotel and spa complex just completed on a mountaintop in BC's Okanagan Valley. There are many aspects of this ridge-topping complex near Vernon that are a little bit off, including its interior design embellishments and even its name, "Sparkling Hill Resort" (lakes can sparkle but can hills?). At the same time, its architecture is muscular, the most impressive new lodging building constructed in years in our mountainous hinterland.

The key to both its schmaltzy, crystalline embellishments as well as its investment in superior architecture is Sparkling Hill's patron, Austrian Gernot Langes-Swarovski. Yes, that Swarovski family, of the crystal-peddling boutiques in every shopping mall on every continent. While the Canadian hotel is a personal, not a corporate undertaking, the only retail space facing the lobby is a Swarovski store, filled with the usual range of gorgeous prisms and less-than-gorgeous multi-colored confections in

glass (see the "Elvis Out of the Blue" pendant in the Current Collection or the Classic Collection's "Kris Bear Blowing Kisses").

Via interior designers Seeton Shinkewski Design Group of Vancouver, the patron's wishes are executed with crystals set into backlit boxes along banisters, festooning the backs of dining room chairs, and dangling by the beaded thousands in the light-filled lobby. The real strangeness, however, is reserved for the guest rooms, which feature a Swarovski "cold fireplace" in crystal shards lit by flickering mood lights, a trianguloid greeting box of white crystals at the entrance and crystal-prism-primed spotlights over the picture-window-centered soaker tub. And just when you are trying to get to sleep after performing your evening bath ritual to an audience of falcons and eagles gliding outside, you notice oblique, nite-lite shapes projecting through crystals onto the ceiling above your bed. Talk about over-crystal!

This said – and this seen, as it can hardly be avoided – the architecture by project designer Chris Rowe of the BC office of Cannon Design has some surprising strengths. The most important of these are the siting and massing of the 152 room Sparkling Hill Resort, set along a line of bare rocks parallel to Okanagan Lake at the crown of the swanky Predator Ridge golf resort development. A site had to be created to exploit the almost-aerial quality valley views from the mountaintop's steep slopes, so the most important design intervention was blasting a platform along the ridgeline to create a seat for the hotel, then cutting a cross-axis through the living stone so that rock frames the entrance car arrival turnaround. Passing through this gap into the lobby, a splendid panorama view appears on its other side. Looking back, the car

turnaround and entrance windows are framed by the same rough-cut slit in the stone. By virtue of this artful site-making, this wall of living stone thus becomes the most important element in entrance and lobby elevations.

Each of the three-level, 50 room trio of guest blocks is set on slightly different alignments to exploit view potentials, preserve unique natural elements, reduce the perceived bulk of the hotel, and create spaces for unique suites at junction points. Every room has a window-wall with an all-glass Juliet balcony, and alpine air and views are at least as important a restorative to guests as the two dry saunas (Finnish and Panorama), five wet steam rooms (Rose, Salt, Herbal, Meditation and of course, Crystal) and two cold saunas (plus 45 degrees and minus 100 degrees Fahrenheit) in the German-style spa below (the geothermal field underneath supplies over 100 percent of the hotel's heating and cooling needs). Rowe's disposition of the outdoor and indoor pools is splendid, and the tea-room and aerobic salons are invigorating.

In Rowe's original design, the lobby was an all-glazed gap between the mesa-like room blocks. The client demanded more according to Rowe: "He said it should look like a giant crystal from outer space had crashed through the hotel." The teams at Cannon Design and RJC Engineers have delivered on this unambiguous demand, with a beguiling arrangement of glass panel facets (whose geometry was developed in consort with Swarovski's Austrian imagineers) tied on the inside to metallic frames and cable turnbuckles. Around this over-sized gem are

Rowe's only facile architectural details—Libeskind-style, randomized, slit-windows inside, counterpoints to the Gehry-esque borrowings around the entrance elevation.

I appreciated Cannon's design more only a couple of days later, while staying at the similarly high-end Spirit Ridge Resort in Osoyoos. As Tom Kundig did for his Mission Hill Winery outside Kelowna, this hotel by Calgary's S2 Architecture uses an updated New Mexico meets California Mission look, but with none of the Seattle architect's finesse in details or artful space-making. What hit me is that few object when Taos-goes-to-Santa-Barbara becomes the public face for new architecture in BC's semi-desert Okanagan Valley. You see, there is schmaltz that slides up the Interstate, and then there is schmaltz that slams in from outer space, evolves up from the early Modern Movement, or spills out of design magazine pages.

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**TREVOR BODDY** is a Vancouver-based architecture critic, curator and urbanist.



PHOTOS: Derek Lepper Photography

The client demanded more according to Rowe: "He said it should look like a giant crystal from outer space had crashed through the hotel."

JM Cava

Lie  
To  
Me

## THE HIDDEN POWER OF DESIGN

*Design and Truth*  
Robert Grudin  
Yale University Press. 2010  
216 pp

**Let's face it.** There are certain concepts our humble brains have the capacity to imagine yet cannot define. I mean define in our traditionally Western sense; putting something under glass with a little card next to it, describing its assigned seat in the Great Hall of Ideas & Things, from which it never moves. This is a maple leaf, it belongs on a maple tree which grows over here if you treat it right. We like this approach—it orders the world and separates sense from nonsense and supposedly helps us get through the general muddle of life. But we all know it's missing something big about the world and it's one reason we love children's stories, ghost stories, fantasy and magic. To recapture this, we could always try the Zen approach—no seats in the Great Hall, no Ideas even, just Things hanging about in momentary clusters in time. But for those of us stuck here in the Occidental mode, there is a third way that blends a little of East and West. Elvin Jones the jazz drummer, once described jazz in this way: in jazz, he said, you don't play *on* the beat—you look for the beat and then play *around* it. And there it is, clear as day. Yet try to grab it in your fist and it's gone.

Robert Grudin, a former English professor at our own University of Oregon, uses this method in his entertaining new book, *Design and Truth*. He takes us on a roundabout journey in the form of a loosely choreographed cultural dance, seeking out the hidden influences of “design” in our lives, from the mechanical and specific (a TV remote) to the political and general (social liberty in human society). Between these extremes he pirouettes around the history and impact of bad design (St. Peter's, the Edsel), tragic design (the World Trade Center towers), functional design (the Norton Dominator), forward-thinking design (Mannerist art, the Palazzo Te) and reveals the power and potential of corporate design (good and bad). Along the road, we visit Hitler, Churchill, Thomas Jefferson, and William Blake among others, each one employing design to either dig their way into dark holes of malevolence or construct lasting edifices of joy and well-being. It's anything but a boring journey, and everyone will emerge at the end with more insight than when they went in, which is about all one can ask of any experience.

Yet the feeling persists that Grudin sometimes imagines he is playing around the beat, but it eludes him; he's circling something significant, just not to the tune at hand. Grudin makes a courageous effort at reeling in the larger philosophical

notions of design, showing them at work in daily life, his daily life. I say courageous because as a rule, *his* daily life as a university professor in Eugene, Oregon seems comfortable and predictable—hardly *Mission Impossible*, even at the philosophical or metaphorical plane. But the intended message (if I got it right) is that design is not just a tool used by the great and powerful to manipulate our world (for better or for worse) but is present in everything we do, potentially ennobling our most humble everyday activities.

Suffused through these stories – the themes are presented as a series of loosely connected narratives – is the tale of Sen no Rikyu, the 16th century Japanese tea master and cultural Zen icon. Rikyu's values of simplicity, equality and integrity conflicted with those of the ruling warlord, Hideyoshi, who celebrated power with ornament, display and inequality. The stand-off between the two ultimately led to Rikyu's tragic and untimely forced suicide. Rikyu had designed what Grudin calls “a cultural matrix that would bring his nation into the modern world,” yet it was no match for the brute force of politics. In our time, Grudin fears the unbridled power of the corporation and its short-term world-view will stifle the supportive aspects of design that enable us to achieve happiness and fulfillment. To that end, he's proposed a thoughtful, albeit somewhat Utopian, corporate philosophy, for which Google is held up as the poster child. Perhaps, as Grudin implies, Google does indeed represent a 21st century Rikyu, better armed this time around with a laptop and global influence. But you don't have to look far beneath Google's cheerful countenance to discern the outlines of a shadowy figure within. Say hello to Hideyoshi; he's back and he's tougher than ever.

JM CAVA is an architect in Portland, where he teaches, writes and designs buildings and gardens.

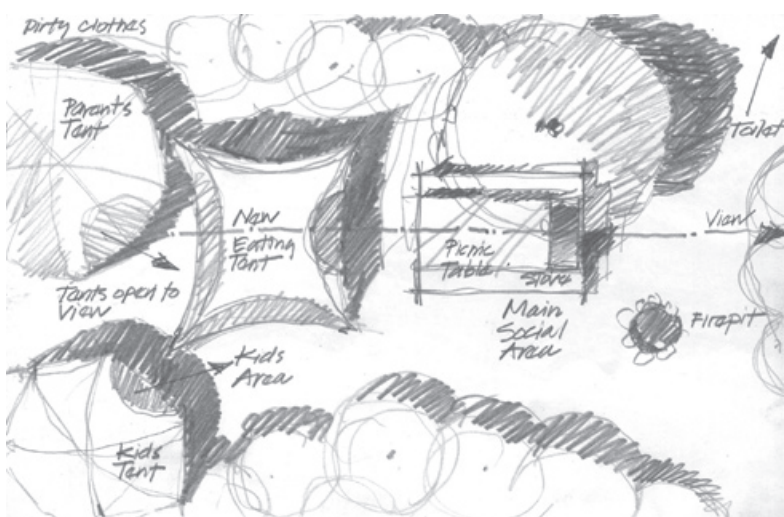
*Design shapes, regulates, and channels energy, empowering forces that might otherwise be spent chaotically...In an enlightened marketplace, good design reigns paramount; in a debased marketplace, design is either dismissed entirely or rudely contorted, sometimes into monstrous form...*

ROBERT GRUDIN, *Design and Truth*

# Camping with Architects

Ron van der Veen

The first issue my family deals with each year is “tent envy.” Inevitably, someone brings a new tent that can only be described with adjectives used for spec homes on the Issaquah Plateau.



**Every year for the last decade**, my family goes camping with a bunch of architects. Families from several firms in town convoy together to the stable weather of Eastern Washington and create a weeklong rudimentary design commune of up to 25 people. This adventure has become a tradition that my kids especially look forward to because it marks the beginning of summer, and the daughters of the designers we go with are starting to become beautiful teenagers (you faithful readers might recall that I have three boys, ages 12, 14 and 16 who all lack... let's say “architectural aptitude”). Our favorite spot to camp is Pearygin Lake near Winthrop. The natural landscape in the area is breathtaking as the North Cascade Mountains ease into the Okanogan Plains. The lake itself is warm, accessible, crammed with farm trout and relatively safe.

Before I go on, for those of you who have some romantic notion that I am going to describe a sort of early Taliesin West or Arcosanti, let me give you the real scoop.

The first issue my family deals with each year is “tent envy.” Inevitably, someone brings a new tent that can only be described with adjectives used for spec homes on the Issaquah Plateau. My problem is that I purchased our family tent at a garage sale over a decade ago, so it is probably close to 20 years old by now—it looks and smells like it. In those days, tents were made compact and sturdy so they lasted a long time. Now, bigger is better, and a lot bigger and a lot snazzier is *way* better. On top of that, these new, huge tents are cheaper than my garage sale find was (I spend an exorbitant amount of time each vacation trying to understand the economics of this). No matter how rough I am with our humble abode, I can't seem to wreck it enough to justify buying one of these new nylon manors.

One of the most interesting aspects of camping with architects is setting up the actual site because it brings the urban planner out in all of us. How each family assembles their assortment of canopies, tents, fire pits, picnic tables, cars, even towel-drying ropes tells a lot about the architect's sense of spatial composition and organization. With proper planning and collaboration, an

authentic sense of village might even be achieved. This is where I often drive my wife a bit crazy! I like EVERYTHING set up just right: things aligned, objects rationally placed in a clear organization, views considered, balance achieved... I even consider details like where the openings of the tents are and where to place my reading material. My kids mess everything up within an hour, but heck, since we are on vacation I try not to let these things affect my blood pressure.

There is one area of creativity we all timidly participate in religiously each trip: group watercolor painting. Not blistering heat, nor down pours, nor maniacal bugs, nor dust that coats water, nor hangovers deter us from tackling these magnificent mountain scenes with our brushes and paints. The biggest impediment we face is the simple fact that none of us paints or draws regularly anymore, so it takes us most of the week just to warm up! Next year I am determined to bring a laptop so I can capture these panoramas in what I do best: REVIT and Photoshop!

The greatest perplexity for me concerning our trips is how little we actually talk about architecture. And when we do it is usually to complain

about our jobs! You would think that bringing a bunch of designers together in a majestic setting like this with plenty to drink at night would initiate great deliberations about art, beauty, design and truth—like you read about from the old masters. I think because we all have teenage kids, by the time we get to camp, we are fried from the past school year and partially brain dead. The best we can muster every night is bringing out a few guitars and singing a hearty round of Beatles songs—and yes, our teenage kids know the words!

I guess what I have comprehended over the years is that camping with architects is really more about camping than architects. When the kids start throwing rocks at marmots and farting around the camp fire, when warm beer starts to taste decent, when dirt and tans start to comingle, when we all forget the second verse of “Yellow Submarine,” it's kind of nice to lose this god-forsaken profession for a few days. Best of all, this is probably the single biggest reason we don't drive our spouses crazy by the third day!

---

**RON VAN DER VEEN**, our esteemed Side Yard columnist, is a rugged architect who loves camping, backpacking, roughing it and painting watercolors of poor quality. For Side Yard ideas and commentary, please contact Ron at [ronv@mithun.com](mailto:ronv@mithun.com).



Beckes Residence, 2008, Mercer Island, WA (top left); BPR Residence, 2010, Mercer Island, WA (left); Crow Residence, 2010, Sammamish, WA (right)

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# ARCADE's Friday Night Live

## BENEFITTING DESIGN IN THE NORTHWEST



**ELIJAH CRAIG**  
KENTUCKY STEAKHOUSE BOURBON WHISKY



The **BottleNeck Lounge**

**DRY**  
SODA CO.

**FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:**  
Scott Szloch of 12th Avenue Iron shows his talents as he forges nails and bracelets for the party.

FNL volunteer Blake Fisher escorts Susie McGee, Michael McCarthy, Lisa Whitfield and Mark Lowdermilk to the party.

Bartender extraordinaire, James Zerkel, creates specialty drinks.

Deirdre Doyle and Carol Chapman enjoy the night.

The Careless Lovers entertain the crowd late into the night.

**PHOTOS:** Michael Burns



Last May, ARCADE invited our nearest and dearest to a night of forging metal, swing dancing, luscious liquors and loud music, all to benefit ARCADE. That night we packed over 200 people in 12th Avenue Iron to raise over \$12,000 that will go directly toward the production of *ARCADE* magazine and our surrounding programs.

Thank you to all those who put Friday Night Live together!

### HOST

Your 12th Avenue Iron hosts Mark Christiansen & Stephen Marks, with their metalworking crew: Scott Szloch, Rob Hill, Chris Overly, Shane Eazor, Jim Wilding, Jeremy Blair, Stephen Silva

### DESIGN

RMB Vivid, Inc.: Brian Boram, John Silverman, Björn Soneson  
Wolken Commuica: Kurt Wolken

### PRINTING

Printing Control, RMB Vivid, SRG Partnership

### PRODUCTION

Gregory M. Bishop, Krekow Jennings, Richard Manderbach

### ENTERTAINMENT

**Master of Ceremonies:** Mark Siano

**Sonny Clark Memorial Sextet:** Geoff Harper, Wayne Horvitz, Al Keith, Stuart MacDonald, Andy Roth, Chris Stover

**Sister Kate:** Gabriella Cook, Katie McLaughlin, Casey Schneider

**The Careless Lovers:** Kevin Buster, Freddie Dickinson, Mike Falteseck, Brett Nakashima, Shua Welter

### DRAWING DONATIONS

Don Ewing / Barbara Swift, Erich Ginder, Graham Baba Architects / dBoone Construction, Dennis Haskell, Roy McMakin, Metalworks & Design Studio, Peter Miller Books, David Rutherford, Schuchart Dow, Steve Skonieczny Furniture Maker LLC, Lara Swimmer, Rick Sundberg, Suyama Peterson Deguchi, Dehanna Jones / Totally Blown Glass, Laura Yeats, Rick Zieve

### WINE & SPIRITS

360 Vodka, Elijah Craig 12 Year Old Bourbon, Victoria Reed, James Zerkel, The BottleNeck Lounge

### SUCCULENT & TASTY STUFF

Cupcake Royale, Dante's Inferno Dogs, DRY Soda

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Burns

### VOLUNTEERS

Brett Barbakoff, Leslie Batten, Andrea Becker, Jennifer Blase, Jason Boller, Monica Cavagnaro, Oliver Chung, Anne Cline, Rebecca Denk, Bonnie Duncan, Annalise Finkler, Blake Fisher, Abigail Guay, Joanna Hardie, Mindy Huffman, Amy Johnson, Chris Johnson, Luke Kakizaki, Nancy Lauterbach, Carrie Numata, Andria Orejuela, Min Park, Jana Rekosh, Jaime Roberts, Kitsy Roberts, Devlin Rose, Kate Sackett, Lynda Sherman, Lieta Siano, Ondrej Sklenar, Björn Soneson, Sarah Thomas, Jenni Whitney

### FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE COMMITTEE

Andrea Becker, Greg Bishop, Brian Boram, Rebecca J. Denk, Abigail Guay, Kate Sackett, Björn Soneson, Sarah H. Thomas, Rick Zieve

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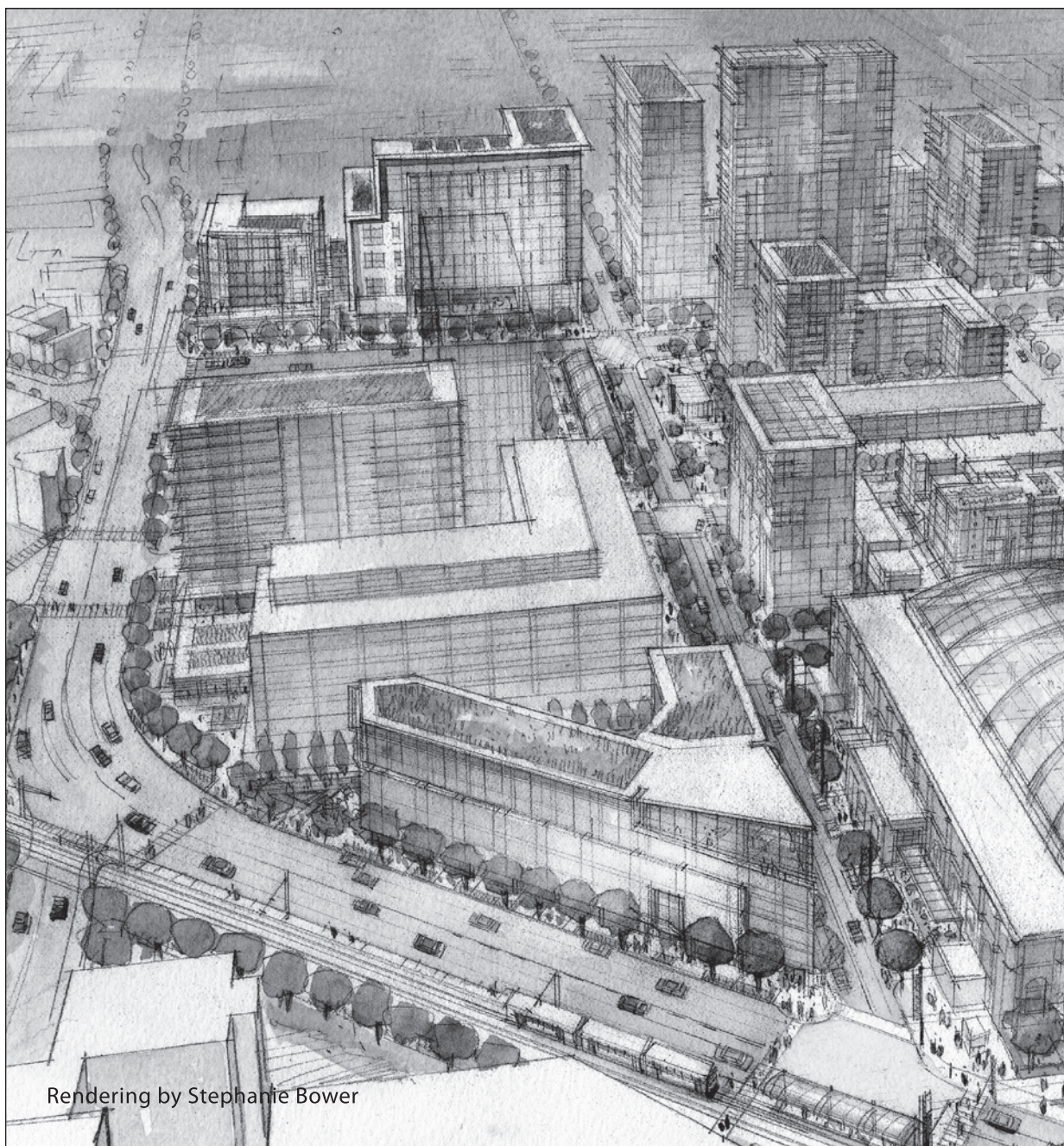
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## ARCADE 29.2 DECEMBER 2010

ENERGY EFFECTS

ART AND ARTIFACTS FROM THE  
LANDSCAPE OF GLORIOUS EXCESS

FEATURE EDITORS:  
PAUL ANDERSEN + ADAM LERNER



Rendering by Stephanie Bower

## Urban Vitality/ District Planning

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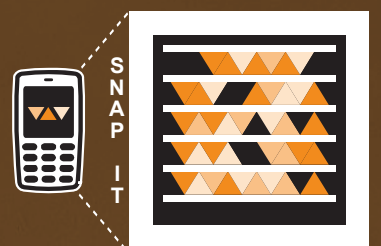
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