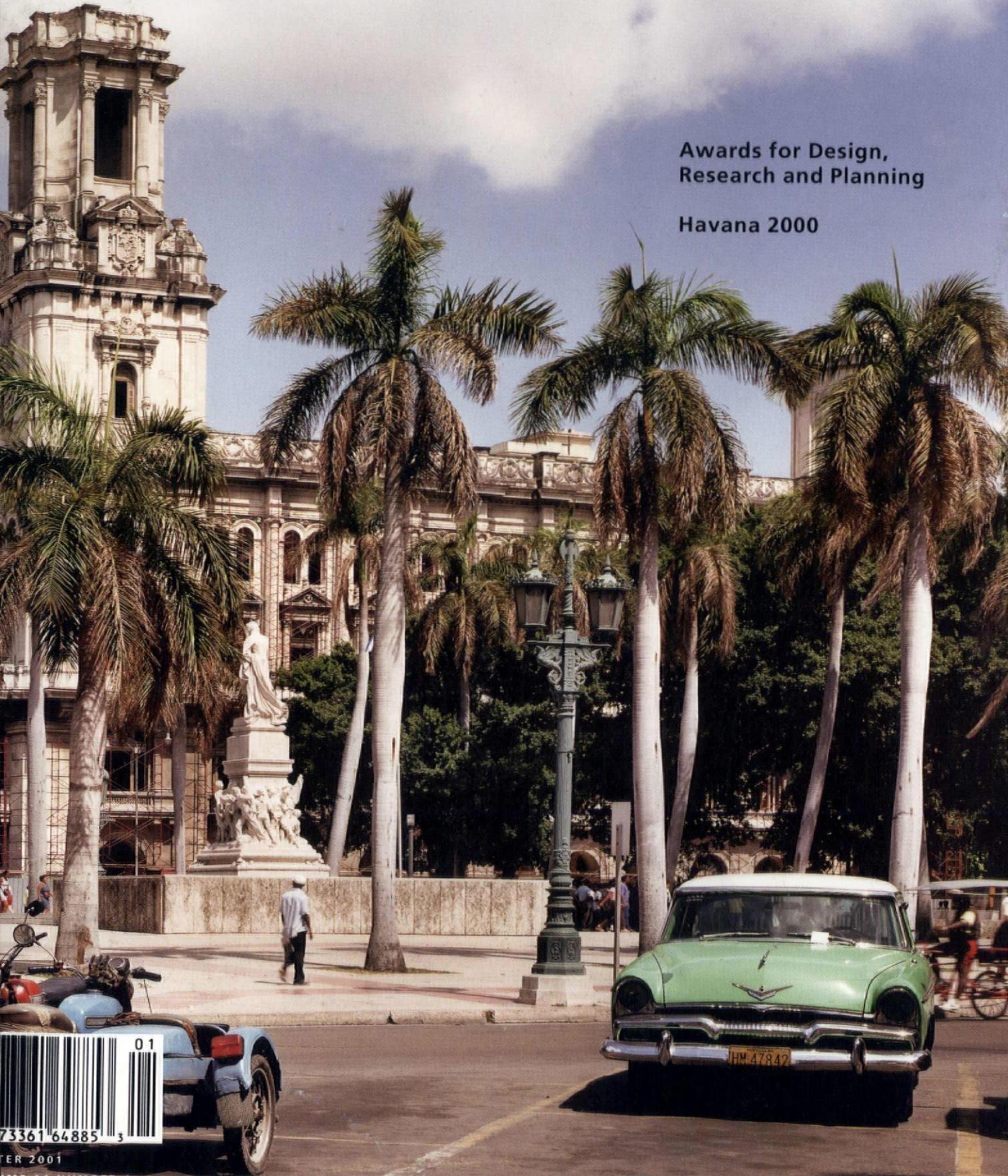


# PLACES

Awards for Design,  
Research and Planning

Havana 2000



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*Places: A Forum of Environmental Design* is published three times a year by the Design History Foundation, a nonprofit, charitable organization that sponsors a range of educational, publishing and research activities. The Foundation's mission is to establish forums in which designers, public officials, scholars and citizens can discuss issues vital to environmental design, with particular emphasis on public spaces in the service of the shared ideals of society.

#### **About the cover:**

This view of Havana's central square, the parque Central, and its monument to José Martí looks east from in front of the hotel Inglaterra (across the hotel parking lot and the vintage vehicles there). Beyond the park rises the clubhouse of one of the Spanish regional societies, the palacio del Centro Asturiano, erected in 1927.  
Photo: Cervin Robinson

# CONTENTS

Donlyn Lyndon	2	Caring about Places
EDRA / PLACES AWARDS		
	4	Introduction
Todd W. Bressi	6	Place Design: Rosa Parks Elementary School
Todd W. Bressi, Ilaria Salvadori	10	Place Design: Lafayette Square
Todd W. Bressi	14	Place Planning: Hindman/Knott County Master Plan
Kevin J. Krizek	18	Place Planning: Portland Pedestrian Master Plan
Barbara Stabin Nesmith	22	Place Research: Three Public Neighborhoods
Todd W. Bressi	26	Place Research: <i>Healing Gardens</i>
Karen A. Franck	30	Juror Comment: What is This Place? What Could it Be?
Randolph T. Hester, Jr.	34	Juror Comment: What Makes Participation Exemplary?
Stephan Klein	38	Juror Comment: Participation in Place
Jean-Paul Thibaud	42	Frames of Visibility in Public Places
PORTFOLIO		
Cervin Robinson	48	Havana 2000
Kathleen James-Chakraborty	56	Kirchsteigfeld: A European Perspective on the Creation of Community
John Ruble	64	Kirchsteigfeld and Karow Nord
DISPATCH		
Fred I. Kent, Andrew G. Schwartz	66	The Return of the Civic Square
FORUM		
AIA Committee on Design Robert Campbell	68	Baltimore and Seattle: Cities on the Edge
GSA Center for Urban Development	72	The Federal Impact
Todd W. Bressi	75	Federal Spaces, Civic Places: Patient Acts of Progress
Congress for the New Urbanism Steven Bodzin, Ellen Greenberg	76	What to do with Greyfields?
80 CONTRIBUTORS		

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The environment  
changes apace;  
its transformation  
has become a cultural  
obsession.

What do we need  
to make this frenetic  
change serve us well?

We need design that invests spirit in relationships that matter, planning that sets up viable futures for place and research that seeds new ground, traces the rhythms of inhabitation and can support our actions with confidence.

We need the ability to learn in many ways—through discoveries made while designing, through the study of both valued places and messed-up spaces, and through visions of opportunity. We need to make room for passion, juxtaposition, rigor and play, for the opinions of others and for experimentation. We need to be informed by disciplined observation and by calculations that reveal patterns not discernable in direct experience. All of these feed the creation of good places; none should be discounted.

We need the energy to see places whole. This takes special effort, because our immediate interests are always narrowly defined. Our responsibilities are delimited in order to make them manageable; our enthusiasms and ways of working follow familiar tracks and lend bias to our views. Although those with whom we work each have their own specific interests in mind, good places can evolve within a dynamic of mutual interference and support.

To endeavor to see places whole is not to assume that they should be uniform or subjected to a single controlling vision, or that they serve some deterministic purpose; it is to imagine that the places we inhabit should be full of life and buoyant with opportunity. Good places should engage our interests and bring them into a cohesion that is rewarding.

To seek consequence beyond the satisfaction of a professional assignment competently performed, or beyond the fulfillment of a personal ambition, requires the will to recognize that the interests of a larger polity (be it ever so silent, fragmented and confused) must be served by the cumulative result of our many disparate actions.

We need to make a concerted effort to peer through the mirage of unfolding opportunity that our economy has created, abetted by the doctors of fraudulent spin. We need to see beyond the foreground evidence of prosperity, to poke holes in the scrim and confront a larger world that is besieged. It is a world with suffering that will likely grow more (and natural resources that will certainly grow less), a world where tawdriness and cruelty infest large segments of our proudest cities and regions, and a world that desperately needs attention, generosity, knowledge and commitment. Billions of dollars in missile defense will not protect against the daily misery of neglect.

We need to take the spotlight off the scrim, light the ubiquitous surrounds and search there for purpose. In order to summon up the intelligence, the poetry and the driven determination that are necessary to bring life to places—and thus to make places suitable for the conduct of our lives—we must summon forth the best that our minds can think, our hearts can understand and our hands and machines can do. We need to foster effective guiding intelligence.

Places that we can identify and hold in our minds, places that embellish and enhance our lives, require being endowed with care and invested with imagination. The *EDRA/Places* awards program reported in this issue seeks to focus attention on developing patterns of thought, and to provide a context for the nurture of ideas and critiques that will lead, bit by bit and through the actions of many, towards a world of good and fitting places.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*

2000

EDRA/*Places*

Awards for  
Place Design,  
Planning &  
Research

This issue presents the six exemplary design, research and planning projects that have been named winners of the 2000 EDRA/*Places* Awards.

Place Design awards, for completed projects that demonstrate excellence as human environments, were given to **Lafayette Square**, in downtown Oakland, which involved the redesign of a park in a manner that accommodated multiple users, and the **Rosa Parks Elementary School**, in Berkeley, whose design and participatory process have enabled it to be a significant community focal point.

Place Research awards, for projects that investigate the relationship between physical form and human behavior or experience, were given to the book *Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations*, which examines the therapeutic role that outdoor space plays in a variety of health care environments, and **Three Public Neighborhoods**, an ongoing study of the rise, fall and revival of three public housing developments in Boston.

Place Planning Awards, for projects that make proposals for the future design, use or management of a place, were given to the **City of Portland Pedestrian Plan**, a twenty-year vision for increasing opportunities to walk in the city, and the **Appalachian Community Development Initiative**, which seeks to jump-start growth and development in Knott County, Ky., and its county seat, Hindman.

The winners were chosen from 117 entries received from practitioners and scholars around the world. The winners were recognized at a banquet and symposium at EDRA's annual conference, held May 2-6 last year in San Francisco.

This is the third round of EDRA/*Places* Awards, whose purpose is to highlight the relationship between place-based research, planning and design. The program is open to practitioners and researchers from a wide range of design and social science backgrounds—including architecture, landscape architecture, planning, urban design, interior design, lighting design, graphic design, environmental psychology, sociology, anthropology and geography—as well as to public officials and citizens. As in past years, the program has been supported by funding from the Graham Foundation.

A call for entries for the fourth round of awards can be found in this issue. For more information, contact EDRA at (405) 330-4863 or [edra@telepath.com](mailto:edra@telepath.com).

#### *Jury*

Karen Franck: *Professor, New Jersey Institute of Technology, School of Architecture*

Maxine Griffith: *Executive Director, Philadelphia City Planning Commission*

Randolph T. Hester, Jr.: *Professor, University of California, Berkeley, Department of Landscape Architecture*

Stephan Klein: *Professor, Pratt Institute, Department of Interior Design*

Laurie Olin: *Principal, The Olin Partnership; Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Department of Landscape Architecture*

# Rosa Parks Elementary School



Location: Berkeley, California

Sponsor: Berkeley Unified School District  
(Jack McLaughlin, Superintendent; Rebecca  
Wheat, Rosa Parks Elementary School Principal;  
Kristin Prentice, Building Committee Chair)

Design: The Ratcliff Architects (Christie Coffin,  
Kava Massih, Don Kasamoto and Don Crosby)



The Rosa Parks Elementary School, opened in September, 1997, replacing a school that had been destroyed eight years earlier by the Loma Prieta Earthquake.

The school is remarkable for its design but also for the impact it has had on the community: It serves about 400 students in a diverse, mixed-income residential district along the light-industrial western edge of Berkeley, Calif., as well as providing space for a broad range of health, social and community education programs.

And it is remarkable for its long, inclusive planning process, which not only fostered the design of a complex, generous, human place, but

also helped see the project through funding cut-backs and pressures to change the design.

“For many of the families in this community who are traditionally suspicious of institutions, this site has become an extension of their daily lives. The activities that occur here are seen as helpful, not threatening,” commented Mary Friedman, Executive Director of the Berkeley Public Education Foundation.

#### **Gathering Ideas and Resources**

Before the earthquake, the school (then called the Columbus School) was the only public building in the area and the only green space and play

Rosa Parks Elementary School,  
play yard and classroom clusters  
Photo: Christie Johnson Coffin



Top: A small courtyard that serves a handful of classrooms and provides a connection to the neighborhood

Above: Classroom interior

Photos: Kirsten Walker

area that neighborhood residents could reach without crossing busy arterials. Its demolition created a dangerous gap in the neighborhood, and left the community without its most important institution.

The participatory process—involving not only parents, staff and children but also local police, librarians, social workers, parks staff and neighbors—began well before the school design started. After the earthquake, when Berkeley citizens initiated a bond measure to rebuild and retrofit earthquake-damaged schools, the neighborhood organized to deliver the highest “yes” vote in the city. It was also the first to organize a site committee.

The site committee then expanded the group that would have input into the school design, recruiting architects who were willing to work intensively with the community, then organizing five Saturday-morning workshops (all bilingual and all offering child care in order to encourage participation). One workshop divided participants into five groups and asked them to organize the elements of the school on the site. Among the

outcomes: each group suggested moving the school entrance, all to the same location, an idea the architects incorporated into the design.

This wide and deeply involved community network subsequently provided a foundation for raising \$1.3 million (with the help of the Berkeley Public Education Foundation) to incorporate elements such as community space, science facilities and computer resources, and to enlarge the multipurpose room for sports and other community activities.

### Designing a School and Community Center

The design is civic at the entry and vernacular and houselike along two residential side streets. As the designers put it, the school is meant “to unfold to the community like a flower opening”—with different scales of space patio, courtyard, playground and park—providing different levels of privacy and openness to the city.

Classrooms are designed as houselike structures, each of which shares a patio and office-resource space with the next. The classrooms are grouped in four clusters around courtyards, which provide a child friendly scale and protected play areas for younger children, and which support the idea of “little schools” that tackle curricular initiatives.

At the main entrance, school and community offices; specialized spaces for science, music, computer and reading instruction; and the multipurpose room are clustered. The athletic field and public park are located at the corner of two important streets.

The school also includes a family resource center, a small, welcoming area of offices for family private meetings with families and an open space with a kitchen for informal gatherings.

The tall, barnlike classrooms have both north and south windows, providing ample natural lighting and ventilation; climate control systems are operated on a classroom-by-classroom basis,



which provides easier adjustment for comfort, is more reliable and is less expensive to build and operate.

Children and families can take advantage of various community services at the school, including health and counseling services, hot breakfasts and after-school activities. Parents can attend evening classes in various topics, soon to include computer skills, home repairs, early childhood education, literacy and English as a Second Language.

Community use of the facilities is increasing, as well. A multi-purpose room is used for public meetings, rehearsals of the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, celebrations and performances. The design supports these activities by allowing portions of the complex to be used while others are not.

The school has been coupled with several social support systems. The Columbus Collaborative, a Head Start initiative, helps disadvantaged children. Parent Advocates, trained and paid low-income neighbors, assist families in taking advantage of available social, medical, food and educational services. The school also offers extended day care, with one-third to one-half of the student body participating.

After the earthquake, school district officials wanted to transfer the students to other facilities rather than building anew on the site. The community's determination won the school back, and its collaboration with the architects resulted in a place whose design fosters community connectedness and social goals. Now the Rosa Parks school has become one of the top choices in the district for a wide variety of families. It is helping to make learning visible in the community, and the community a viable part of the education.

—Todd W. Bressi

#### Jury Comments

**FRANCK:** This project demonstrates so clearly good participation, good design and good consequences—and the connections between all three.

**HESTER:** It shows an extraordinary sensitivity to the neighborhood and the residents of the surrounding community. Although a necessarily large institutional program, the school fits into the residential scale of nearby buildings.

**KLEIN:** I was taken with the open, inviting way the school relates to the wider context. The multipurpose room opens onto a public park at a street intersection.

**FRANCK:** It's a community school at several levels. Small groups of classrooms share bathrooms and courtyards, each becoming a small community in itself. The school as a whole is a rich community resource, housing an after school program, orchestra rehearsals, performances, athletic events and adult classes and meetings.

**HESTER:** It's clearly not a school that was plopped in the neighborhood and is locked up at night.

**KLEIN:** This is about place making, both in the way it was produced and in the way it is used. This project has provided real benefit to a racially and economically diverse community, yet one that is primarily composed of the disadvantaged.

**FRANCK:** Originally, the school district had not intended to rebuild the old school. Now children from all areas of Berkeley apply to get in.

**KLEIN:** It's significant that the process of planning the school came out of the empowering of the community. This was not token participation, it involved true user control. The building committee selected the architects, organized the participatory workshops and created the program for the design.

**HESTER:** There's proof of meaningful participation and specific examples of how citizens' ideas formed the design. We haven't seen many projects that do that.

**KLEIN:** And the community's sense of ownership and control of the project engendered the initiative to raise the extra \$1.2 million needed to complete the plans it had envisaged.

**HESTER:** There is attention to ecological and social detail throughout the plan, down to the detail of the natural ventilation and a teacher-controlled energy management system. The designers clearly used existing research in school design and supplemented it with participatory processes.

**FRANCK:** It's an incredibly encouraging story of how design contributes to what is possible in a facilitative way. That is, facilitating the ideas of others to emerge, translating those ideas into physical reality and facilitating the emergence of a special kind of place and the activities and relationships it can house.

Left: Community design workshop

Above: Model, Rosa Parks Elementary School

Photos: Ratcliff Architects

# Lafayette Square



Lafayette Square, central  
hillock, located on the site  
of a historic observatory  
Photo: Walter Hood

Location: Oakland, California

Sponsors: Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation,  
The Downtown Gateway Neighborhood Collaborative,  
Berkeley-Oakland Support Services, First Unitarian Church  
of Oakland, and Gateway Center for Art and Social Change

Design: Walter Hood, of Hood Design, Oakland, Calif.,  
in collaboration with Willie Pettus (architect, community  
facilitator) and Rich Seyfarth (landscape architect).



Historic oak tree and newly built public restroom

Photos: Lewis Watts



Horseshoe pit and trellis for new plantings

Lafayette Square is located near downtown Oakland at the confluence of residential, office, convention and historic districts. Its redesign and reconstruction have created a common ground for its diverse users—from residents of newly built condominiums to jobless and homeless people who have frequented the park since the Great Depression—while addressing the park’s historic roots.

Lafayette Square’s history goes back more than a century, when it was one of five blocks set aside as a park in the city’s original plan.

A decade ago the park was beset by maintenance problems, unsanitary conditions and drug use; at one point police tried to forcibly evict its homeless users. Community and social service groups protested and persuaded the city to launch a redesign that involved park regulars, as well as businesses, public safety officials and social agencies.

Now Lafayette Square plays several roles at once, civic square, green space and community gathering place. It includes a quiet hillock, lawn and picnic area; game tables, horseshoe pits and barbeque areas; a performance area, playground and restroom. A subsequent phase will include a

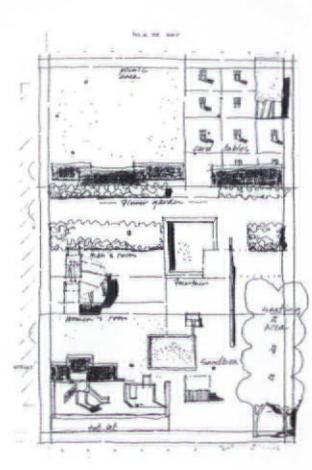
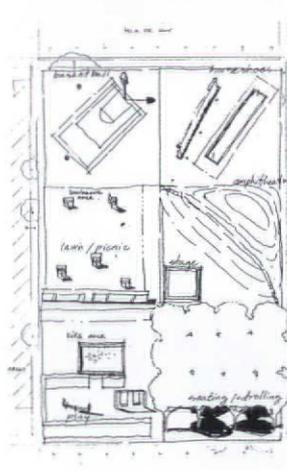
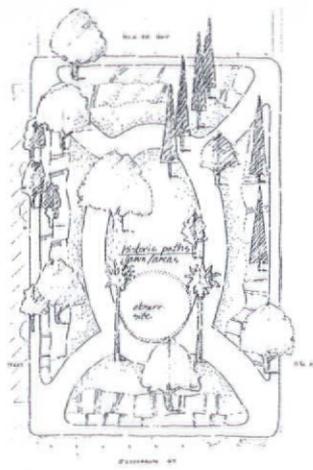
small facility for employment and social service programs. The design also borrows from the park’s original layout and functions, recalling historic patterns of vegetation, use, physical movement and form, and re-interpreting historical lighting, ironwork and benches.

Since the first phase was completed in summer, 1999, a wider range of people are using the park without displacing the transient community. Various groups are also exercising stewardship: some transients have been employed to assist with keeping up the space, and condominium residents have organized a community group to assist with programming and events.

The designers noted that archival research and interviews were critical to developing the program and conveying the importance of the park’s rehabilitation to residents and users. The \$1.8 million project has received city and state open space funding and a grant from the National Park Service; the master plan was funded by the Center for Urban and Family Life with a grant from the LEF Foundation.

—Todd W. Bressi

Analysis of different urban characteristics of Lafayette Park, historic, recreation and social



## A Bold Act of Faith: Inclusive Design at Lafayette Square

*A place new and old.*

The interplay between new and old is the essence of downtown Oakland, where a sense of a decaying urbanity mingles with glimpses of an opulent, optimistic past.

Lafayette Square sits in a historic district just a few steps away from this decaying beauty. The park's graceful layout appears as a melancholic vision of past and future. New and old layers interact playfully: a low seating wall curves elegantly around two old iconic palm trees; four dawn redwoods, remnants of an old diagonal path, when the square was oriented around a central space, now connect a historic oak tree with a corner plaza that will soon feature game tables and chairs.

*A park, a square, a lawn, a mound, a chess ground, a playground, a barbecue area.*

Lafayette Square's patiently crafted landscape speaks of many people, functions and activities. The park's design invites a diverse group of users, but instead of addressing their different needs by creating a homogenous setting, it accepts their diversity by offering a complex array of features, woven together in time and place.

Children run and bike over the mound, experimenting with the thrill of its topography. A Mexican boy sits alone on the sensuous, curvilinear wall, contemplating his just-received paycheck; not far away, a group of downtown workers enjoy their camaraderie over lunch. Transients find their niches under the trees.

*A place to rest, eat, work, play and think; a place to find each other tomorrow and the day after.*

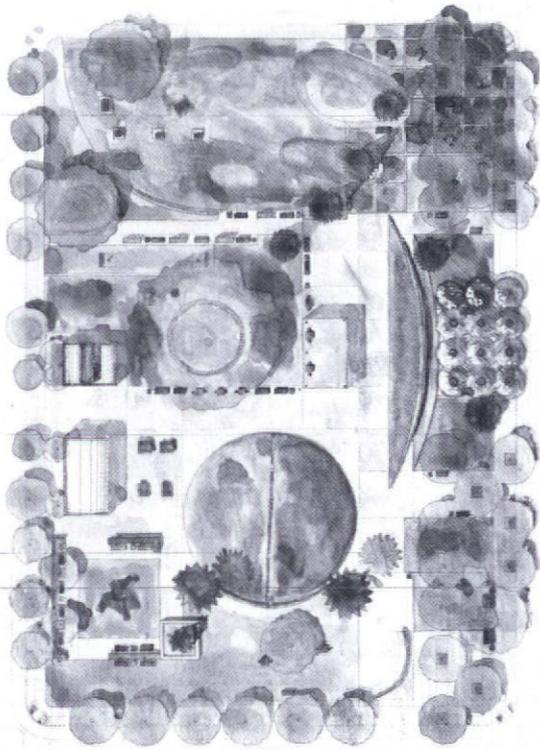
The sense of community one experiences in the park springs from the everyday activities that take place here, enacted without inhibition, constraint or excessive control.

Gathering here means to play, to meet again tomorrow and the day after, for another round. Chess and domino boards, mounted on steel tables, bring together old and new players. Many of them gather between the hillock and the oak; the tables and the benches, disposed in an informal manner, make this the most intensely used space of all.

People meet here to play, hang out, talk or read, creating new rituals or reinterpreting old ones, such as the horseshoe game, now played on an adjacent rectangular dirt field, designed as an homage to a local African-American cultural practice.

The game area and a public restroom nearby act together as an outdoor living room for the community. The restroom's architecture is the opposite of what one might typically expect from such a building; it is elegantly designed, with a vocabulary reminiscent of Ricardo Legoretta and Luis Barragan's metaphysical landscapes. This is therefore a space that speaks to everybody—clean and dignified; colorful with purple and yellow walls; interesting with clocks and bulletin boards outside; useful.

The character of this highly used area is enhanced by the park regulars, people who come to the park every day. One of them opens up the tap outside the restroom to fill up his water bottle, then rejoins the crowd hanging out at the tables. Inside one of the restrooms, somebody set up a small barbershop. The doors are always open, so activities can be monitored from outside.



Lafayette Park, master plan

**Jury Comments**

FRANCK: I like what they were intending to do, not shipping the homeless people out but providing them with some kind of liaison to social services.

OLIN: I could never have done this design, it goes against my formal training and background. It's not how I see things, draw things, imagine things, so I didn't go for it initially. When I saw this project presented by the designer before it was built, I didn't know how it was going to work, but I was intrigued by what he said he was intending to do, how he was working with the community and what the community would get out of it. Now people are using it exactly as the designer thought they would; he said it would succeed if they worked with each other to make places for each other. So I learned something. The process was exemplary. The product is surprising, and you can learn a lot about how people can cohabit and use space in a multiple set of ways.

HESTER: I would have said this space needed to be simplified, not made more complex, that there really needs to be a central feature that everyone uses. However, the designer said, the only way this park is going to work for the most marginal people, is to create something that's not central, the little hillock area; and then allow all these different and maybe incompatible activities to happen along the street edges.

FRANCK: Everyone has a kind of a niche.

GRIFFITH: So do kids romp all over the playground structure?

HESTER: Yes. The kids are coming from Taiwanese and Hong Kong families who live nearby. Their parents really don't like these old men.

OLIN: This part of Oakland was once a kind of seedy blue-collar white place, which was taken over by blacks after the Korean War. Then they struggled and struggled, and now you've got these different ethnic groups who are all disadvantaged, all contesting the space. This designer and his process found a way to give them their space and to coexist. You want social process, this is social process.

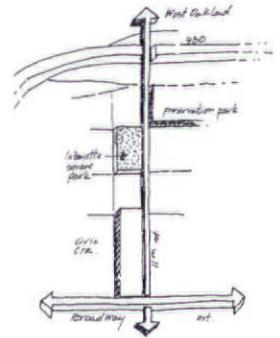
HESTER: They're all coexisting, and it's precisely because the designer did what Laurie and I would not have done.

GRIFFITH: I wonder whether designing something so specifically for a certain set of circumstances, for a certain moment in time, is the way to go? Suppose the nearby residents are Japanese instead of Chinese, is the microdesign too specific? Do you design in this way, or do you design for mutability and flexibility over time?

HESTER: The argument is that the inhabited edge is all that matters.

KLEIN: I should also point out that it was done on a shoestring budget.

OLIN: And a lot of other people with shoestring budgets would give up, or they would give you something that doesn't work socially.



Location of Lafayette Park in relation to downtown Oakland  
Graphics: Walter Hood

Somebody sets up a stereo system by one of the entrance doors. Music fills the air, a great soul song. The wind is blowing, the palm fronds sway. Somebody starts a dance, many repeat the words of the refrain, singing its irresistible tune. Once in a while a D.J.'s voice reminds us that this is Soul Radio, 99.3 FM, in the city of Oakland.

*A park, a square.*

Although parts of the park completed so far are used very successfully, they act as separate pieces, each with a life of its own, not really linked to the park as a whole. "The different parts are floating," explains designer Walter Hood. "It will be interesting how the dynamics change when the edges encroach the spaces inside."

Yet it is precisely along the edges that the park's character is revealed. The critical line between the park and the more unpredictable public space of the street, a line that in so many other places fences and excludes, speaks elegantly about inclusion. Flexible and open, complex and interesting, the edge invites you, and before you know it you are in the park. This edge speaks most clearly about the park's character, an act of faith in social design and a bold act of inclusion.

—Ilaria Salvadori

# Hindman–Knott County Master Plan



Location: Hindman, Kentucky

Client: CDI Steering Committee, Bill Weinberg, Chair

Design: Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, P.C.,  
Elisabeth Lardner, Principal; R.M. Johnson Engineering, Inc.,  
Ron Johnson; ERA, Elaine Carmichael; Allan T. Comp, Ph.D.;  
Mary Means and Associates, Inc., Mary Means;  
Sandra Blain, Arrowmont

Downtown Hindman sits  
astride the Troublesome Creek  
between the steep, narrow  
valleys of Eastern Kentucky

Photos: Elisabeth Lardner

Eastern Kentucky is a place that survives because of, and in spite of, its landscape. The starkly beautiful mountain terrain provides for the region's livelihood through resource extraction and nurtures a rich literary and craft heritage—but it is also isolating.

Knott County and the city of Hindman, its county seat, are in the heart of this region. Hemmed in by steep slopes and narrow valleys, the town has no rail connections, just recently became accessible by divided highway and is susceptible to floods. Not surprisingly, the area's unemployment rate exceeds that of both the state and the nation.

So when the state decided to choose two communities as models for rural economic development, the city and county—fearful that lack of safe, convenient building sites would push development out of town, and desiring a sounder long-term economic base—leaped into action. Citizens assembled and wrote a proposal, "Using our Heritage to Build Tomorrow's Community," and won the state's support.

Over the course of the following year, the community and its consultants developed a plan for using the area's arts and education legacy as an economic spark. The plan calls for strengthening cultural institutions and economic development networks, upgrading outdated infrastructure and configuring development so that streets and creek-related open space become positive aspects of the public realm. Altogether, the plan represents a comprehensive and remarkably cohesive effort to ground the community's future on those aspects of its history and landscape that most strongly define it as a place.

### **Economic Development: Institutions and Infrastructure**

Hindman is proud of its traditions in education and Appalachian regional culture. The area has produced regionally noted artists, writers and his-

torians, and for a century has been supported by the Hindman Settlement school, which offered basic education for many years and now supplements local schools with adult education and programs that support local folk art, music and crafts.

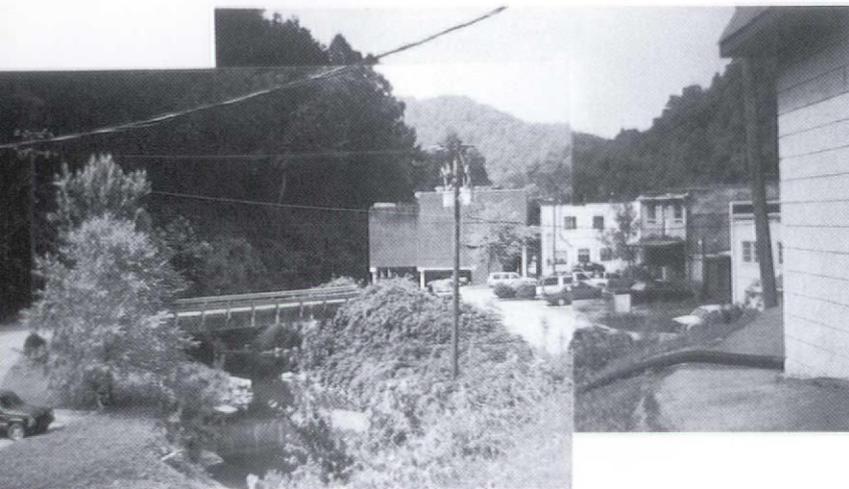
The plan seeks not only to strengthen arts and educational institutions but also to generate entrepreneurial activity so that arts and crafts education, manufacturing, marketing and distribution become part of an integrated local economy. It proposes two new entities to link the arts and economic development: the Kentucky Technical College of Arts and Crafts and an Artisans' Marketing Center. At the college, students could learn the skills necessary to produce marketable arts and crafts products. The marketing center would provide support services, such as advising the school on curriculum and technology, researching economic information that will help craft producers improve their businesses, and assisting business start-ups and marketing efforts.

The plan also proposes extending educational opportunities more broadly by opening a branch of the local community college and a satellite center that offers access to other universities.

A parallel set of initiatives would upgrade basic infrastructure in Hindman and its environs. The key concerns are inadequate water supply and sewage treatment capacity, which would constrain any economic expansion; extending the reach of the town's water and sewer networks to provide new sites for housing and commercial development directly adjacent to the town; and upgrading bridges whose foundations cause water to back up during heavy flows.

### **Grounding the Plan in Place**

What ties the plan together is a vision for placing these activities in the physical realm. That vision uses the hills and creekway, normally seen as a constraint (as in the name "Troublesome Creek), as the basic framework for the town's



Above: The creekway behind Hindman's main street would become a string of open spaces and pedestrian connections

Right: Main street.

form. It seeks to encourage growth in small steps that fit into the landscape, as well as into improved networks of streets, sidewalks and open space, reflect vernacular building patterns and makes the most of scarce opportunities.

The creekways will be regarded as a pedestrian spine for the town; the plan calls for restoring the native landscape, building pedestrian walkways, and creating usable open space in the bottomlands. New and expanded buildings would be oriented to the creekway as much as to streets.

The plan suggests constructing two new buildings and expanding and renovating others. The planning team wrote language that was included in the request for architectural services for the new and renovated buildings, urging projects that "reflect the best character, style, materials and traditions of the Appalachian region," particularly its Works Progress Administration-era architecture, and encourages use of indigenous building materials. For the new community college library, it also wrote guidelines for siting, grading, access and architectural massing and materials.

Finally, the plan points out how to make the most of the money available for improvements. It recommends grouping the local public library and the libraries for the community college and arts school in one building, to help create a new gathering place. It suggests that when a bridge is

raised, a sidewalk might be added at the same time and connections to a parking garage improved, or that a water retention basin could double as an amphitheatre.

### Moving Ahead

Citizens were involved in developing the plan through public meetings and workshops, and the final plan met with general public approval. Since the plan was approved in 1999, implementation has proceeded apace. Last summer, a new city hall was dedicated. Two buildings in town were purchased to serve as home to the Artisan's Marketing Center and Foundation offices; they are strategically located at either end of downtown, they will provide space both for anchor activities and start-up businesses. Creek, water and sewer improvements are underway.

The most significant impact of the plan, however, may have been to give Hindman and Knott County the expectation that their economy can grow in a way that respects what people value most about the place—its architecture, its landscape, its traditions. As one elected official told the local newspaper: "People think things are possible now. Whatever happens, we are ready for it."

—Todd W. Bressi



## Jury Comments

OLIN: This plan deals with family issues, economic issues, ecological issues, flooding; with the dilemmas of the intellectual capital of the community; and how to reinvest. This community knows it has to plan for all those levels at once, and how those levels interact. That is really good thinking.

KLEIN: The shared library was interesting. They have pulled the libraries out of three separate institutions, combined them and made it a community facility. You'll find children and old people there, along with college students.

GRIFFITH: It's the idea of stranded assets. Many communities have assets that aren't being used in a way that's well thought out, that maximizes their use. It's a problem-solving tool that can be used by any community.

OLIN: I'm a sucker for hardscrabble towns that are trying to figure out what to do that's not based on nostalgia or K-Mart.

FRANCK: Of tourism.

GRIFFITH: Many towns like this, when they hit an economic brick wall, say "Let's get a Walmart" or "Let's sell tchotchkes down by the country store." This community has said, "Let's have education." It is encouraging to see, given the options, including the usual suspects, creative and courageous thinking.

HESTER: Many rural towns that have been left behind just make bad decisions. It seems like this community is thinking extremely complexly and going in the right direction.

OLIN: They're proposing a series of very incremental, fine-grained pieces that will put this place together, despite the fact that it's a strip in a valley with highways and parking. They are being very realistic. Yes, they are lucky, they have a little college in their plan, but somebody else would have captured that college if this place hadn't had the smarts.

GRIFFITH: I'm still trying to figure out why this place is not grabbing me. Somehow, the plan is more operational than geographic.

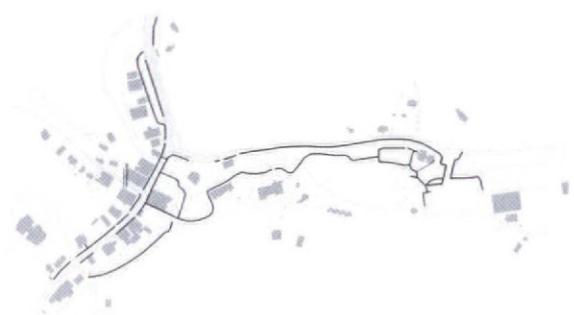
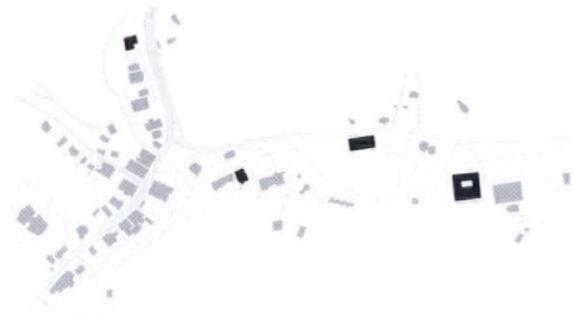
OLIN: It's a mountain town that's strung along a creek at the bottom of a deep valley. It does not have the more conventional centrism of urbanization that you are used to.

GRIFFITH: But how is this plan moving it towards place?

OLIN: They want to invest the town with activities and buildings that will make it the place it never quite was. By the time they're done, the buildings, the roads and the paths will all be related to the creek in a way that they weren't before. They're saying, "If we are going to come into town, and if we are going to park our car and walk, then there has to be more than just the road and the sidewalk." The town is an essay in how to inhabit a linear path with enough episodes of quality that it becomes vital.

HESTER: It is all in the capital improvements plan. It's a perfect case of disjointed incrementalism, which is going to add up to more than the sum of parts.

OLIN: That's why I fell for it. I thought, "Ah ha! That's how you'd build a community. That's how you'd pull it together."



The master plan proposes bridge improvements that will minimize flooding, new educational and civic buildings (including a consolidated library), new open spaces and new walkways (including a creekside trail).

# Portland Pedestrian Master Plan

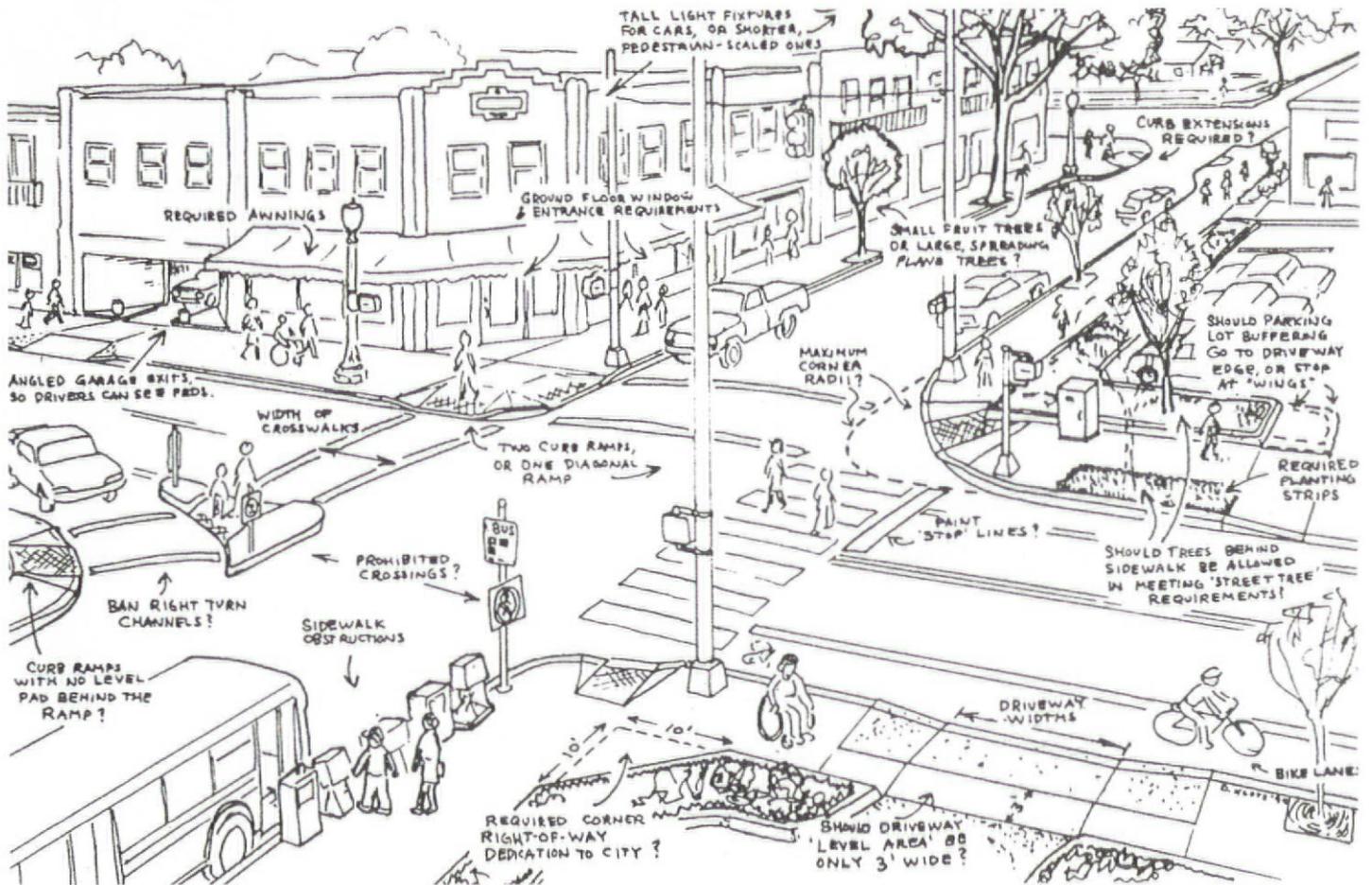


Diagram of the various issues to consider in making a street intersection more accommodating for pedestrians

Graphics: City of Portland, Office of Transportation

Location: Portland, Oregon

Sponsor: City of Portland Office of Transportation (Charles Hales, Commissioner; Vic Rhodes, Director)

Pedestrian Design Guide Project Staff: Ellen Vanderslice, Project Manager; Matt Brown, Jean Senechal

City planners asked people to “pin the tail on the problem” to help identify pedestrian trouble spots

The Pedestrian Master Plan 5-2-95 Problem Number 

## Pin the Tail on the Problem

Use this card to describe a pedestrian system problem at a particular location.

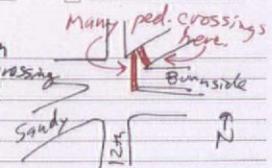
**Where is it?**  
 Street name Burnside / 11th / 12th  
 First cross street 11th  
 Second cross street 12th  
(Leave blank if problem is at an intersection)

**Facility type**

<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk	<input type="checkbox"/> Stair
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crossing	<input type="checkbox"/> Bridge
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

**What's the problem?**  
Pedestrians cross on the most convenient leg of crossing regardless if it's signed for pedestrians

*Many ped. crossings here.*



You may use the back of this card to continue your comments or to include your name.

Many people consider Portland to be the exemplar of all that is right about land-use and transportation planning. They admire the walkable scale of its downtown and special pedestrian places like its waterfront and park blocks. They appreciate the decisions the city and region have made over the years to combine transit and public space investments downtown with a growth boundary at the metropolitan edge.

Beyond the core, however, much of Portland suffers from a built fabric similar to that of other cities, one that does not easily facilitate transit, cycling or walking. The pedestrian master plan, adopted by Portland's City Council in 1998, sets out a twenty-year vision and a detailed workplan for increasing opportunities to walk in these areas.

Portland has plenty of planning tools—federal (ISTEA and its successor, TEA-21), state (Oregon's Transportation Planning Rule), regional (the 2040 Regional Framework Plan) and local (Portland's comprehensive plan)—at hand for promoting a more balanced, affordable and efficient transportation system. It has vibrant pedestrian advocates, and several neighborhood-scale projects have embraced walking as the cornerstone of a healthy and sustainable community.

Yet none of these provided a clear program of specific improvements necessary to make walking easier. The master plan is the nuts-and-bolts document the city needed: it sorts through disparate requirements to establish priorities for projects the city should undertake and offers guidelines, sometimes in excruciating detail, for designing the

pedestrian realm. The plan—whose five sections cover pedestrian policies and street classifications, design guidelines, priorities for capital improvement projects and recommendations for funding—has helped refocus how the city plans, pays for and builds transportation projects.

### Setting Priorities

The document is notable because of three inter-related elements: establishing a set of priorities at the city scale, engaging the public and linking to the city's capital improvement budget. It is also significant for recognizing that successful pedestrian environments depend on a variety of factors, not simply putting in sidewalks where there aren't any.

Portland planners invented two tools to help them identify priorities for improvements—a “potential index” and a “deficiency index”—which they used to evaluate the nearly 32,000 street segments in the city. The potential index measures the presence of factors that support walking (land-use mix, connectivity in the street network, and presence of local destinations), proximity factors (closeness to schools, parks, transit and neighborhood shopping) and policy factors (how streets are designated in various other plans). The deficiency index measures the importance of improving a particular street segment, considering sidewalk continuity, street connectivity and the ease of crossing streets (manifested by auto-pedestrian accidents, traffic speed and volume and roadway width). Projects

on street segments with high potential and high deficiency are ranked as high priority.

This analytical exercise was supported by a planning process that engaged the community in further helping to identify and select needed projects. In workshops, citizens were asked to “pin the tail on the problem” by mapping pedestrian problem areas in their neighborhood. Community leaders and a Pedestrian Advisory Committee helped the project team glean a better understanding of pedestrian needs throughout the city.

The project team ranked each potential project by combining information from the analysis and the public comments. Final adjustments were made for projects especially related to pedestrian safety and for those that take advantage of existing opportunities. The end result is a list prioritizing each possible project for each of the city’s seven transportation districts.

The plan does not venture into politically volatile water by addressing questions about the relative importance of improving auto environments versus walking environments, or about the ensuing urban form. It does, however, provide pedestrian projects with a stronger basis, allowing them to compete better for city capital improvement and regional transportation planning funds.

### Links to Research

Decades have passed since several seminal works offered a better understanding of the ingredients of successful pedestrian environments. It is reassuring to see many of their findings infiltrating public planning documents prescribe pedestrian improvements. For example, William Whyte taught us about the importance street corners play in pedestrian life; the design guidelines devote an entire chapter to curb radii and obstruction-free areas at street corners. Jan Gehl reminds us of the space requirements for pedestrians; the plan devotes several tables to recommended widths for sidewalks and clear zones.

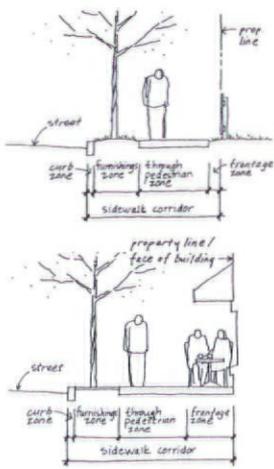
Some important aspects of good walking environments, however, are not explicitly attended to. For example, Christopher Alexander offered myriad guidelines about how far people will walk for services. Donald Appleyard found that the height, continuity and solidity of buildings affect the amount of street life. Kevin Lynch emphasized the importance of strong termini along walking paths. Regrettably, these factors are generally taken up as land-use, urban design or site planning matters that are regarded to be beyond the planning jurisdiction of this document.

It is also difficult to consider the plan (or the planning process) as completely integrated with Portland’s active planning apparatus. Portland’s design commissions, streetscape plans and progressive zoning code specify various pedestrian improvements under different agendas. The master plan provides little information about how these play out with respect to the improvements it recommends.

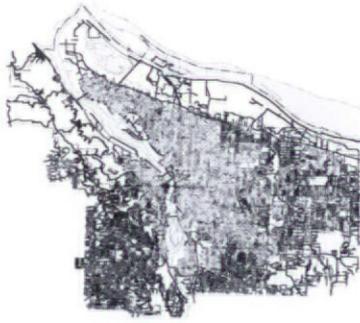
Nonetheless, Portland’s Pedestrian Master Plan provides a framework that is useful to other cities. Downtowns continue to wrestle with the influx of sports stadia, arts and entertainment districts and other tourist draws. Suburbs continue to mature with apartments, offices and stores being built in close proximity to each other. Too often, these developments occur haphazardly, precluding successful pedestrian environments from emerging. The tools developed by Portland could easily be adapted for settings like these.

Portland’s attempt to reconcile such issues does so in a clear and simple manner, providing a public document accessible to people from various walks of life. Most importantly, the plan serves as a valuable, officially adopted record for the entire city’s pedestrian needs—which in itself is no small feat.

—Kevin J. Krizek



The plan includes detailed standards to guide the design of new pedestrian connections.



**Jury Comments**

OLIN: People are still doing this kind of planning for automobiles, but almost no one is doing it for pedestrians. Yet you can move more people per lane per hour on the sidewalk than you can in any other mode.

FRANCK: The measures they have for figuring out what areas are pedestrian friendly versus which ones are pedestrian deficient areas are good.

OLIN: This is not a proposal for the historic center, because the center is okay. The project they are showing is alternative paths that go up and down the river, over the hill and across the river, into the neighborhoods, out to the suburbs. That is where so much has been without sidewalks or with inadequate walks; downtown there are rules, there are sidewalks, and people can get around.

FRANCK: They paid very close attention to the details. They considered the material that the manhole covers are made of, to make sure they are not slick when it rains. There is even attention to the downspouts, the drainpipes, to make sure that they follow ADA requirements. It just could not be more precise and comprehensive.

GRIFFITH: Except perhaps for its linkage to the capital budget, this looks like a lot of other pedestrian plans I have seen.

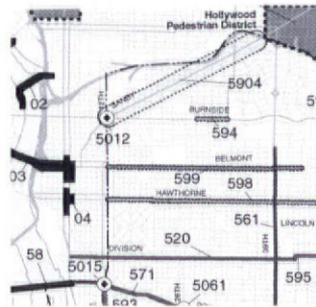
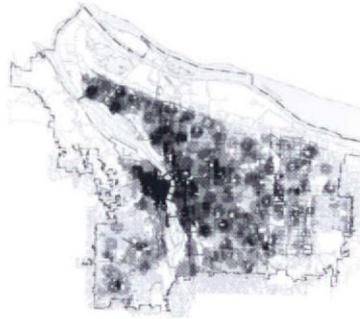
HESTER: I don't think that I have ever seen a pedestrian plan on the scale of this large, citywide plan. The capital improvements plan goes far beyond just saying we are going to pave sidewalks and seems to me to be an important innovation.

OLIN: One of my favorite phrases here was "pin the tail on the problem." The planners got people from the community to look at paths and routes that they took, to figure out where the opportunities for improvement were, and where there were problems on all those routes.

Throughout the city, they had the community identifying their preferred routes, along both vehicle and pedestrian routes, helping them invent alternatives to unpleasant or unworkable or problematic routes. So, there is an extremely successful integration with the social process that led to specific results with a means of following through.

KLEIN: I just wish it went further. If there are other plans, or if this is part of the overall Portland plan, then maybe my looking at this as a totality when it is just a piece of a larger picture is skewing it. However, if the goal is to have people use their feet more and automobiles less, then issues about zoning and land use are more critical than what you do with the sidewalk corner. Or whether you put planting in. Its heart is good, and it is well thought through on the micro level. Still, I just do not think it is innovative or goes far enough.

OLIN: The dilemma is, how do you make a good town once everybody has to have an automobile? This plan does everything right. What we're saying is keep going, do not stop, do more.



Portland's Pedestrian Master Plan combines analyses of deficiencies in the pedestrian network and opportunities for encouraging walking to set priorities for pedestrian improvements. The "deficiency index" considers breaks in sidewalk continuity and street connectivity, as well as the ease of crossing streets. The "pedestrian potential index" considers the presence of factors that support walking; such as land-use mix, closeness to schools, parks,

transit and neighborhood shopping, how streets are designated in various other plans. The plan then suggests projects that should be included in the city's capital improvement program, as well as suggesting other funding sources.

Graphics, photos: City of Portland, Office of Transportation

# Three Public Neighborhoods



Location: Boston, Massachusetts

Author: Lawrence J. Vale

Principal research assistants: Sharon Greenberger, Kristen Harol, Daniel Serda. Additional researchers: Anne Beamish, Charles Bradley, Carolyn Brown, Lisa Cole, David Fernandes, Susan Lilly, Lisa Makuku, Noah Maslan, Carla Morelli Francazio, Tony Petropulos, Lisa Picard, Lisa Rosan, Judy Su, George Samuels, Jeff Shumaker and Genevieve Vachon.

West Broadway,  
after renovations

Photos: Lawrence J. Vale

When Lawrence J. Vale began exploring Boston's most troubled public housing neighborhoods fifteen years ago, planners and policymakers had already begun a long-term debate about turning such places around.

Yet little was known about how residents themselves assessed these communities. Did they regard these places as unlivable environments that required wholesale demolition or major reconfiguration? Given a choice, what did they think was worth saving or modifying?

Vale's findings, often surprising, remain timely as federal and local housing officials are engaged, through the HOPE VI program, in a wide-ranging reconsideration of the physical, social and management structure of public housing. He argues that public housing has not failed everywhere equally, and urges a careful examination of the specifics of each community—one that regards design as one of many factors that should be considered in reviving these places.

Vale, an Associate Professor in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Urban Studies and Planning, concentrated his inquiry on three developments—Commonwealth, West Broadway and Franklin Field—that the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) considered to be among its most troubled. All could be characterized as large developments that comprise their own neighborhoods, although their configurations differ and the communities surrounding them vary considerably.<sup>1</sup>

The developments, originally built for World War II veterans and their families, had come to house tenants with lower incomes and a greater need for support services. By the late 1970s, they were plagued by severely deteriorated structures, high crime rates and poor management (as were a number of other BHA properties). Vacancy rates as high as fifty percent made redevelopment more feasible, as tenants could be relocated on site while it took place.

From 1992 to 1994, Vale and his graduate student assistants cultivated relationships with tenant groups and leaders at each development. His independence from the BHA (funding came from foundations and MIT) and his research approach helped him gain the residents' confidence and candor. Vale's team worked with tenants to develop a 100-question survey, then trained and paid tenants to administer on-site interviews, which were conducted in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.<sup>2</sup>

By the time interviewing began, improvements had been completed at all three developments.<sup>3</sup> The design approaches were derived from a combination of Oscar Newman's "defensible space" research, state standards and the desire to make the appearance of public housing more middle class and less institutional.<sup>4</sup>

### Findings

One of Vale's most striking findings was that the developments could be a source of empathy and community for residents, who often expressed a strong ambivalence about whether it would be better to remain in their neighborhoods or to leave. He described this type of place attachment by coining the term "empathological," which "marks the uneasy confluence of social center and economic wasteland."

The changes the residents sought most strongly, and which they ultimately appreciated most, involved private, interior spaces. The larger apartments, which accommodate family needs better (larger dining areas allow families to eat together at one sitting), were valued more highly than the public space and site design changes.

The interviews provide strong support for Newman's "defensible space" research, which has so influenced the design of new and redeveloped public housing. Residents spoke of feeling safer, and began leaving personal items such as lawn chairs in their front yards. Even after the

West Broadway, buildings not renovated in first phase of project



West Broadway, after renovations



Commonwealth, after renovation



renovations, security trumps other concerns at all three developments, suggesting the limits of a defensible space approach in affecting either the perception of crime or actual crime rates.

Vale suggests that an evaluation of the overall success of the redevelopment efforts might be better represented by seven measures that capture the complex interaction among physical and non-physical factors. Indeed, his research concluded that the most successful redevelopment took place at Commonwealth, which BHA had predicted was best suited for redevelopment. BHA's multi-factorial analysis of the potential for renovating its projects, which considered design as only one of eighteen factors, was perhaps on the right track in suggesting the limits of design alone in trans-

forming public housing. Since the interviews were conducted, Vale has maintained contact with tenants and management at the three projects, which provides a longer-term perspective to his findings. Vale argues that there is no one moment at which the success of a place can be assessed, and that longitudinal follow up, or what he calls "trans-occupancy evaluation," is necessary.

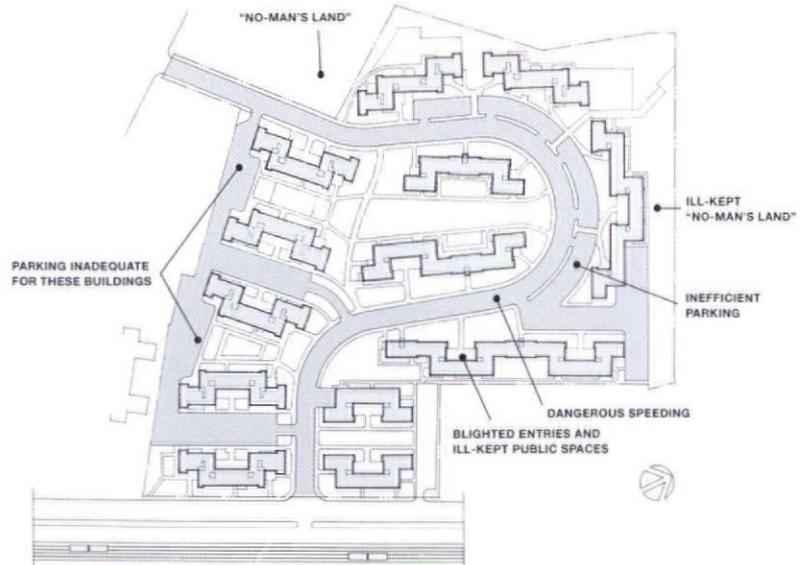
Vale's findings have already expanded the national discussion about the options for public housing, through publication in eight articles and book chapters since 1994. He is now completing two related books that will provide the citywide and local historical context for the three public neighborhoods.

—*Barbara Stabin Nesmith*

#### Notes

1. West Broadway, located in Irish Catholic South Boston, opened in 1949 with 972 units; Commonwealth, located in predominantly white Brighton, opened in 1951 with 648 units; Franklin Field, built in a predominantly Jewish part of Dorchester that quickly became African American, opened in 1954 with 504 units.
2. Interviews were conducted at the three developments being studied and two other BHA developments, Orchard Park and Bromley Heath, that had not undergone redevelopment.
3. Approximately three quarters of West Broadway's three-story buildings had been redeveloped between 1977 and 1991; an additional phase of redevelopment is now underway. Franklin Field's redevelopment was completed in ten years (1977–1987) and Commonwealth was entirely redeveloped in six years (1979–1985). Altogether, the BHA spent an average of \$400,000 per unit in current dollars.
4. Major changes included reconnecting dead-end streets with the street grid; decreasing the overall density; increasing apartment sizes; replacing some units with community facilities, such as a day care center; redesigning entryways to provide more individual or semi-private access to units; adding private outdoor space, such as back yards or porches, for some units; eliminating most common stairwells and public access to roofs from stairways; and adding design elements such as pitched roofs, color or variations in materials.

Commonwealth housing,  
site analysis  
Graphic: Stephan E.  
Tise, R.A.; Mark Wilhelm



### Jury Comments

GRIFFITH: There's a strong correlation here between research and design. And then the loop back, the fact that they looked at the product of design that had been tied to research. And then validated and reinforced the research.

KLEIN: The research method involved tenants in shaping the questions that were asked in tenant interviews, and hiring, training and paying residents to do the interviews. The researchers looked at these places from inside the world of the people who lived there, in terms of how they see it.

GRIFFITH: The study closes the circle of a stream of thinking, this sort of Oscar Newmanesque thinking, becoming part of the culture of design. Someone went back to take a look, asking, "Let's see if this really works, or if we're just mouthing off." They found out that the things that were done are important and meaningful. However, it is an equally important finding that not all the things are important to the degree, or with the energy, that we think they might be.

KLEIN: Another interesting point was the trans-occupancy evaluation, in which the place was seen as mutable and changing, so that there was no one time at which the success could be assessed definitively. Also, this issue of what the researchers call "ambivalent place attachment," which was seeing how, from the residents' point of view, the housing project, which from the outside might seem like an undesirable environment, was a place. It was a practiced space.

OLIN: The news is a little surprising, because it says these places aren't as universally bleak and grim as we have been led to believe. I found the research disturbing because I had assumed that I knew what was wrong with those kinds of places, and what to do about them.

FRANCK: I really appreciate how thoroughly they investigated what was done, and how it was done, the process. This isn't just going in and seeing afterwards what the results were, it's also really documenting how those places were redesigned.

KLEIN: The research doesn't assume any kind of architectural determinism. The measures of success include, besides such things as recognized design quality, issues such as tenant organization capacity, progress on economic development.

GRIFFITH: It doesn't take *A Pattern Language* off the shelf.

OLIN: I worry that some of this work will be used as an excuse to hide behind existing conditions and not make changes, to a kind of relativism that makes people afraid to make decisions or judgements. The study does give us new information and sets us free in another way. So I guess we have to learn to live with it, this much more uncertainty.

FRANCK: I think the research presents the issues as being more complex than that. I don't think people can easily say, "Oh, there's no point." Some of the differences the study talks about vary from project to project, so in one place a change might make a difference and in another place it might not, but there are all kinds of possible explanations for that.

### Measures of Success in Public Housing Redevelopment

What measures might be used to evaluate the success of a public housing redevelopment? Vale notes that many different criteria have been used, and that "personal and professional identities often dictate the lens through which redevelopment is seen." He suggests that there are at least seven dimensions of success, all of which matter to the overall success of a project: "redevelopment efforts can fall short because of a failure in any one of these seven areas, and a failure in one area exacerbates problems in all others."

*Smooth implementation.* Adhering to budgets, timetables and performance standards for construction and relocation.

*Recognized design quality.* Awards from professional organizations, tenant recognition of physical improvements, and overall public opinion about the new development's look and feel.

*Improved tenant organization capacity.* Increased quantity and quality of tenant participation in tenant organizations, as well as recognition by tenants and management of the importance of their collective contribution to redevelopment and ongoing maintenance.

*Enhanced maintenance and management performance.* Improved performance on measures such as work-order turnaround times and overall cleanliness, as well as higher maintenance standards and better staffing.

*Improved security.* The reduction of crime through design changes, better maintenance, stricter management and increased policing.

*Progress on socioeconomic development.* Providing opportunities for residents to address the root causes of poverty, such as offering educational or employment opportunities on-site.

*Resident satisfaction.* Residents' overall evaluation of satisfaction with the development, expressed in terms such as desire to stay or desire to leave for a dissimilar type of housing.

### Source

Lawrence J. Vale, "Public Housing Redevelopment: Seven Kinds of Success," *Housing Policy Debate* 7:3 (Washington, D.C.: Fannie Mae Foundation, 1996).

# Healing Gardens



Staff office in a Portland hospice

Images and graphics:  
Marni Barnes and  
Clare Cooper Marcus

Co-Editors and Authors: Marni Barnes, Principal, Deva Designs and Partner, Healing Landscapes; Clare Cooper Marcus, Professor Emerita, University of California Berkeley, and Partner, Healing Landscapes

Contributing Authors: Terry Hartig, Robin C. Moore, Deborah L. McBride, Naomi Alena Sachs, Martha M. Tyson, Roger S. Ulrich, John C. Zeisel

A few years ago, Clare Cooper Marcus, a landscape architecture scholar known for her research on housing and open space, received what she considered to be an unusual telephone call. An editor at John S. Wiley and Sons, a large publisher of books for design professionals, wondered whether she might write a book on the design of outdoor space in health care settings.

For Marcus this was a welcome turn of events; after all, scholars usually have to persuade publishers that there is a market for their research. She teamed with Marni Barnes, a psychotherapist and landscape architect, to produce a book that combines both practice and research on what amounts to a new genre of space: the “healing garden.”

Though interest in the therapeutic role that gardens can play has been growing, research on these places has been sporadic. The book addresses basic questions about the health benefits of outdoor settings, such as gardens; the kinds of spaces that medical facilities currently provide and how well they meet user needs; the specific needs of different patient populations; and research that still needs to be undertaken.

The fundamental proposition of the book, called *Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations*, is that individuals who are exposed to natural, garden-like settings can experience reductions in stress, improved immune functioning, better pain control management and improved physical and emotional well being.

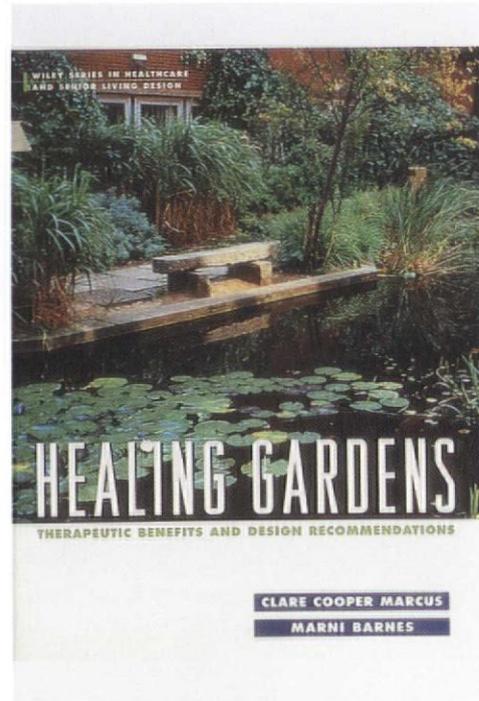
To make this case, chapters by Roger S. Ulrich and Terry Hartig provide detailed accounts of research on the restorative power of nature, stress reduction and the meaning of health. Also presented are post-occupancy studies of hospital gardens and observations of health-care landscapes in the u.s., Canada, Australia and England.

The bulk of the book focuses on the application of this research in the design of outdoor spaces for the use of patients, staff and visitors in

acute-care hospitals, psychiatric facilities, children’s hospitals, Alzheimer’s facilities, nursing homes and hospices. Each chapter describes the medical conditions it is considering, lays out the requirements of patients and the role of the medical facility, presents case studies of existing therapeutic spaces and distills the findings into a set of design principles and approaches. Chapter contributors include, in addition to Ulrich and Hartig, Deborah L. McBride, Robin Moore, Naomi Alena Sachs, Martha M. Tyson and John C. Zeisel.

*Healing Gardens* has been received enthusiastically by designers and researchers, who comment especially that the book’s clear prose and illustrative plans make it easy for students, researchers and practicing professionals to use.

The book’s accessibility to health care professionals is particularly important, notes w. h. Tusler, an architect and health care planner, so they can consider the role of therapeutic open





Candles illuminate this snow sculpture outside Hesttoniemi hospital in Taivassalo, Finland, during the long winter nights.

spaces at the earliest stages of a master planning or site selection process. But its methodological rigor is valuable, too, he added: "What many of us architects feel intuitively does not cut it with most of our clients. *Healing Gardens* provides the necessary scientific framework."

The topic itself seems to have struck a particularly receptive chord as well: "It deals with basic life and death issues, how we face them and endure, and how we heal ourselves," observed Susan Saegert, Director of the Center for Human Environments at the City University of New York, who added that the book inspired her to start an indoor garden club in CUNY's new office building.

"The environment-behavior field has been done a great service by the quality of this book and the manner in which the authors are using it to inform a wide range of health professionals, planners, designers and facility managers," Saegert said.

—Todd W. Bressi

### Jury Comments

**KLEIN:** Looking through the book, I decided I was going to get it because I can use it for my students in a number of situations. I think it will be valuable for me in my teaching.

**GRIFFITH:** It so easily, naturally, and sort of organically met the criteria. I think I also have a bias for research that you can take and use, that you can put under your arm and put by your drafting table. Where the connection between research and design, the receptacles are already out there, waiting for you to plug in.

**FRANCK:** The other thing I like very much is that while there are design guidelines in here, and very clear implications, it isn't simplified.

**OLIN:** It's not a how-to book.

**FRANCK:** It introduces people to an incredible range of issues and detail without making it easy to just jump to the back and look at the little diagrams. Those diagrams are really dangerous.

**GRIFFITH:** It's not *Time Saver Standards for Healing Gardens*.

**KLEIN:** It deals with quite a number of settings and populations.

**FRANCK:** It has an unbelievable range—psychiatric, nursing homes, children, adults, acute care—they've really covered the gamut.

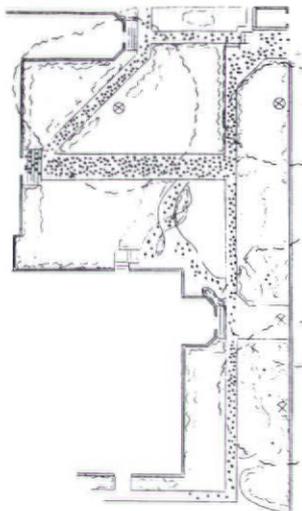
**OLIN:** I really choked up on the part about children. It's very disturbing to be with and work with children who are so sick or have such difficulties. I'm struck by how subtle, perceptive and thorough it was. It wasn't one person's slice, just a few children that were studied. It was actually broader, and more reflective. It really did recognize the diversity of the different sorts of situations that children might have, without trying to iron them all out in the generalizations. Although it is unafraid of coming to conclusions and making generalizations, it doesn't lose its content for that, which is difficult in this world.

**FRANCK:** I'm sure that all over the world people were designing these places, but did they know there was something called healing gardens? Weren't they doing something that they thought would be useful in that location? But once you pull those out, all those different places, and define the type as a "healing garden", already that begins to suggest that more people are going to think about it. So just that act, of saying this is a healing garden, may cause people to say we never thought of it that way. That's really useful.

**GRIFFITH:** I'm going to buy the book, I'm going to get a garden and I'm going to heal.



The Sensory Garden at the Lucas Gardens School in Canada Bay, Australia. The image shows several activity rooms and a wheelchair/standing frame table. The banners, windsocks and giant butterflies respond to the breezes, adding movement and color.



Map showing aggregation of people passing through the garden during eight hours of observation.



The garden provides a green retreat near the entrance to several busy outpatient clinics.



An art grant in the early 1990s resulted in the addition of granite features by artist Peter Richards.



A border of flowering perennials forms a colorful focus, lining a path that leads to the street and a bus stop.

## Case Study: The Comfort Garden

The Comfort Garden is a small, well-used outdoor space in the sprawling campus of San Francisco General Hospital, most of whose buildings date to 1915-20. The garden is located next to buildings that house a variety of clinics, including those for TB, HIV, methadone maintenance, family health and child abuse.

The feeling of this garden area is of a residential-scale, green and colorful retreat. When asked to describe the garden, some users referred to it as “an oasis.” We suspect this image is evoked by two things: the lush and colorful planting, and the relatively enclosed feeling of the garden.

This is clearly a garden that has been created—and is maintained—with love and care. There are no weeds, nor is there any litter, yet the garden has a casual rather than a manicured appearance.

Typical users of the garden were staff members who came out alone or in pairs, on a break or to enjoy lunch, and visitors or patients who sat for a while or lay dozing on the lawn. On the weekends, when the clinics are closed, neighboring families were observed to come and picnic and play ball on the lawn.

Fifty people who were spending time in the garden were interviewed. For most, the garden facilitated a change in mood that was positive. They left after a medical appointment, or returned to work in the hospital feeling less stressed, refreshed, more content.

Social opportunities offered by the garden were valued as well. It served as a gathering place for support groups from the clinics, and was also used casually by the patients.

*Excerpted from Clare Cooper Marcus and Marni Barnes, Healing Gardens, Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations (New York: Wiley, 1999), 176-181.*

# What is This Place? What Could it Be?

Karen A. Franck

It's so easy to take places for granted. And it's so easy to make the same kinds of places over and over again, repeating the same park, the same school, the same street.

What is the same is not necessarily the appearance of the place, although it may well be. Rather, what is repeated is the activities and relationships the place is expected to support and the manner in which these expectations are made manifest.

One might consider this repetition advantageous. It makes life more predictable and easier, since we do not have to discover what each place we encounter is for. We can simply assume from past experience that a park, school or street is the same kind of place it always is and serves the same purpose it always does, and that we can occupy it without paying much attention to what it really is or could be. Yet it is these same questions—what is this place, what could it be?—that can be fruitfully posed in planning, design and research.

Serving on the EDRA/*Places* Awards jury gave me an opportunity to reflect on how good projects uncover and realize the potential of a place. In each winning project, a particular array of actions, experiences and relationships was made more apparent and more possible. In each, daily life and the often mundane but crucial requirements it generates received careful consideration. In each, the designers, planners or researchers positioned themselves inside the place, engaging its present or anticipated life.

## Place Type

A place type, such as a school, has embedded within it a web of connections between form, use and meaning.<sup>1</sup> As the type is repeated over time, the connections become so regularized that the type is made in the same way (form) with the

same expectations about use and meaning.

Many projects that were not contenders repeated formulas of type in an almost stereotypical fashion (the many New Urbanist projects come to mind). The best submissions (including several not chosen as winners) broke with those expectations, responding to the particular relationships at hand or proposing new ones.

The Rosa Parks Elementary School in Berkeley, for example, explores and extends the conventional meaning of school, both in the form of the building and its outdoor spaces and in the activities and relationships it supports and encourages.

Christie Coffin, one of the architects, wrote, "The school is designed to unfold to the community like a flower unfolding," and so it does: Each classroom opens to a courtyard shared by four to seven other classrooms; each courtyard opens to the playground; the multipurpose room opens to a public park; the front door and entry courtyard open to a major street.

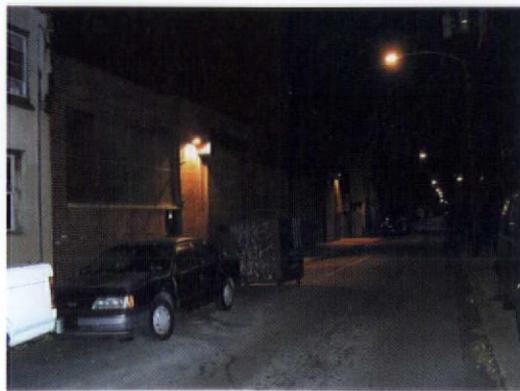
The activities in the spaces unfold in much the same way. The school is designed so that specific rooms can be opened or closed after hours, making it feasible to stage a range of community activities there. The multipurpose room is used for Berkeley Symphony Orchestra rehearsals, meetings, athletics, performances and celebrations; other spaces are used for activities like adult classes and counselling.

Thus the school is truly a community place, generating an openness to the surrounding neighborhood in use while maintaining a degree of enclosure and privacy in form that fosters a sense of concentration and even serenity for the classes and the neighborhood functions.

Cobra-head fixtures mounted on poles illuminate the street but leave buildings, sidewalks and workyards in deep shadow.

A lighting plan calls for adding pedestrian lighting, illuminating building facades and railroad bridges, and improving lighting for signage, entrances and loading areas.

Photos and graphic: Brown and Keener Urban Design



## Enabling Everyday Places: PRIDE Industrial Park

Sustained attention to everyday activities, in all their practicality and grittiness, is exemplified by the plan for the PRIDE Industrial Park.

The plan focuses on a deteriorated, twelve-square-block area in Philadelphia that is home to a number of manufacturing businesses. With information collected from local business people and from walking tours of the area, the plan recommends a range of physical changes. These include a comprehensive signage system, circulation and street design strategies that accommodate truck turning movements, truck waiting and loading; standards for improvements to sidewalks, fences and streetscape; and a lighting plan.

Significantly, the plan recognizes that the spaces and infrastructure in the area must do multiple duty—supporting the needs of pedestrians, cars and trucks at the same time—and be effective for use both day and night.

—Karen Franck

Sponsor: Port Richmond Industrial Enterprise, Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation

Consultants: Brown and Keener Urban Design, Cloud and Gehshen, The Lighting Practice, The Atlantic Group, Lager • Raabe Landscape Architects, Becker + Frondorf

### Being Inside

In each of the winning projects, attention was paid to the occupants, to their current and future experiences and needs. Instead of being neglected or treated as a burden, patterns of use informed and, more importantly, enriched planning and design decisions

How strange that something that should be expected as the norm becomes remarkable. Regrettably, the culture of architecture still prizes aesthetic innovation at the cost of providing for the ease and comfort of human inhabitation. Michael Benedikt put it succinctly in a recent essay: *Look around at the state of our architectural culture... . The dominant strategy for class supremacy remains attached to the ascetic/minimalist/modernist program of neediness denial, with all sensuality, all richness, all tradition, all need for physical and psychological comfort surrendered to the unadmitted need for art-world prestige.*<sup>2</sup>

This denial of human needs is part of the generally favored position of the architect as observer, not occupant. Too often, design and planning professionals maintain a detached, objective stance in regard to the places in which they work, failing to imagine, or determine, with information from elsewhere, what the experiences, activities and desires of inhabitants might be. De Certeau characterized this difference in perspective as that of the difference between “voyeurs” and “walkers.” “The panorama-city is a ‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture ...,” he wrote. “The voyeur-god created by this fiction ... must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them,” while the walkers below “make use of spaces that cannot be seen.”<sup>3</sup> Through their everyday practices they create another city, one of activity and movement.

Because architects are specialists in designing form and manipulating materials, because they rely so heavily on visual representations, because

they hold the values of appearance and aesthetics so dear (and rightly so), there is a natural tendency and need to adopt the position of being outside, of being a maker. Problems occur when that position is the only one adopted and when everyday life and its many practical requirements are viewed with disdain.<sup>4</sup>

In the winning projects, designers, planners and researchers alternated between positions of outside and inside, of observing and making or occupying. Since a professional rarely has the direct experience of occupying the place in question, “being inside” requires drawing information and insights from a variety of other sources. For the design and planning projects, this meant comprehensive and intense participatory processes that involved a variety of parties with different interests and expertise. Such processes are hard work; they demand energy and patience, not a one-off workshop session, as some submissions suggested. The implication is not so much that research or participation matters but that people do. The best projects will demonstrate thoughtful, insightful concern for human inhabitation, pursued in an appropriate and hopefully creative way.

This is not to say that the jury gave no weight to aesthetic issues in design. We did so without a doubt; thus we, too, alternated between being inside, considering how user needs were met through design, and being outside, considering aesthetic decisions and judgments. No project could have been chosen on aesthetics alone; no project could have been chosen if needs were met only in a rudimentary or obvious fashion. This was true as well of the winning research projects, which attended to the relationships between design and use in a comprehensive and highly nuanced manner.

### Everyday Life, Special Occasions

I was struck by the degree of attention the winning projects gave to the small, often mundane details of daily life, as well as to special occasions. We all live at both levels, the practical and the celebratory, yet in recognizing design excellence, practical considerations are often overlooked. One project not chosen as a winner, a plan for the Pride Industrial Park in Philadelphia (see sidebar), also intrigued the jury because of its thorough attention to such detail.

In the winning Lafayette Square project, the designers learned from community activists that many of the homeless people who frequent the park do not have watches; now a handsome clock graces the building housing the bathrooms. Providing safe bathrooms was also important to prevent opportunities for crime or drug abuse; thus the bathroom cannot be closed (individual stalls can be latched and a sign outside indicates whether the stall is occupied).

Ironically, these latter design features were not presented in the competition submission; I learned of them during a subsequent visit to the park. While attention might be paid to the mundane, it still may not be deemed appropriate to write about in an award submission. Text about the everyday is becoming more fashionable in architectural discourse, apparently inspired by the ideas of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre,<sup>5</sup> but the discussion remains quite remote from descriptions of how bathrooms operate, and we have yet to see what the consequences for architectural culture will be.

In his discussion of voyeurs and walkers, de Certeau suggests that while the physical city presents possibilities for and constraints upon movement and actions, walkers also create their own possibilities through their own choices. The architect and the planner can provide opportunities but whether people will embrace them, or create other ones, cannot be ensured.

The jury did not evaluate design and planning projects on the basis of the success of their use but rather on the possibilities for use they offered. The energy and determination required by some forms of occupancy, such as adult programs in the Berkeley school or performances organized by residents in Lafayette Square, are so great that one wonders if occupancy or inhabitation shouldn't be another awards category.<sup>6</sup> If there had been such a category, I might have chosen "The Labyrinth of Rue," an installation-performance held in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery; three hundred rue plants were planted to form a reflective walkway and the performance of a civic ritual of repentance for slavery.

So far the EDRA/*Places* Awards have recognized those who make places through long-lasting physical interventions and those study places so made. Perhaps it is time to recognize those who also make places through the ways they inhabit and modify them, uncovering through human action and physical adaptation what a place can (also) be.

### Notes

1. Karen A. Franck, "Types are Us," in K.A. Franck and L.H. Scheneekloth, eds., *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 245-372.
2. Michael Benedikt, "Class Notes," *Harvard Design Magazine* 11 (Summer 2000), 8.
3. Michel Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93, 94. Trans. Steven Rendall.
4. See Karen Franck and Bianca Lepori, *Architecture Inside Out* (London: Wiley-Academy, 2000), for further discussion of the positions of "inside" and "outside."
5. See, for example, John Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski, eds., *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999) and Steven Harris et al., eds., *Architecture of the Everyday* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).
6. This idea was stimulated in part by reading a draft of the article Stephan Klein prepared for this issue of *Places*. The category I am suggesting could also include various kinds of temporary installations, in museums and elsewhere.

# What Makes Participation Exemplary?

Randolph T. Hester, Jr.

The last few decades witnessed the unprecedented rise of two singular habitat-shaping forces: ecology and democracy. The political influence of ecological science spread into placemaking at a rate unimaginable at mid-century. Likewise democracy. There are twice as many democracies in the world today as there were only twenty-five years ago. It appears inevitable that ecological science and democratic desire will combine to shape the future.

In the ecological democracy upon which we are embarking, participatory design, New Urbanist design and sustainable design are intrinsically good, essential to the good functioning of society. In that sense, most of the submissions to the EDRA/*Places* Awards were good. But, often, entrants used “New Urbanism,” “sustainability” and “participation” as buzzwords while providing little evidence of inquiry, substance, outcome or advancement. This was particularly true in regard to participation, which is now required *de jure* or *de facto* across the U.S. and practiced with obligatory ritual.

With so much rote participation going on, how did the jury separate the standard or even the good from the exemplary? Reflecting on our discussions, I think there were several aspects of participation that were especially important to us. We sought participation that included the excluded, advanced the state of the art, influenced the outcome, dealt with difference, engaged the designer, integrated complex thinking or made place regional. The jury discussed projects that offered clear and specific evidence of one or more of these—not just “we did extensive public participation”—at length. This included all of the winning projects, as well as numerous others.

## Include the Excluded

One of the most vexing problems for participatory planners is that the process often over-represents some people and excludes others, most notably the less affluent and less powerful, new immigrants, youth and, in many cultures, women. We applauded several projects for consciously overcoming this problem.

Each of the design and research winners involved extensive participatory research with groups frequently excluded from expressing their needs. But the most exemplary project in this regard was the master plan process for Forest Park, in St. Louis. In addition to the normal surveys of park users, the Forest Park planners surveyed 200 non-users who stated clearly that lack of safety, inadequate facilities and lack of information about the park kept them away. The master plan makes a serious effort to rectify these issues. This seems to be an obvious strategy for so many underused and unloved urban spaces. Then why is it so seldom done?

## Advance the State of the Art

Participatory design has developed standard procedures and techniques. The jury found several small advancements and inventions in the technology. Two made me smile. The Portland Pedestrian Master Plan, a winner in the planning category, introduced a technique called “Pin the Tail on the Problem.” I imagine that it was fun, engaging and revealing. Another project, Hickory by Choice, a city visioning process, used a technique called “Planning Day at the Minor League Baseball Game.” This reached people who probably hadn’t thought much about the comprehensive plan before. Such place specific and culture-sensitive techniques, modest as they are, advance our ability to do participatory design well.

### **Influence the Outcome**

Much participation remains isolated from design. Few projects showed a specific nexus between citizen input and the planning program; fewer still gave concrete examples of how the public helped give form to the place. But both of the place design winners did.

Consider just one of multiple examples from the Columbus School project. At one workshop, small teams of community members independently developed site plans for the new school. All of the groups changed the main entrance from that of the existing building to a similar location for the new school. The designers made that the main entry. Today, citizens see their ideas in the final plan and feel that they designed the school.

One byproduct: when an extra \$1.3 million had to be raised to avoid trimming the project, the local community, one of Berkeley's poorest, did so by appealing (with help from the Berkeley Public Education Foundation) to local businesses and philanthropists.

### **Deal With Difference**

There is an alarming overemphasis in participation today on consensus without vision. Given the recent participatory gridlock from advocacy planning, consensus building often comes at the expense of important subculture differences and environmental justice.

Walter Hood's design for Lafayette Square in Oakland, a design award winner, is a welcome example of dealing forthrightly with social class differences. Rather than trying to create a public commons where everyone pretends to be one big happy family, he turned the traditional concept of a civic park inside out, with street-oriented activities and interior curvilinear spine creating small settings for different uses just in the place where the centering big open space would historically have been located.

Both Laurie Olin and I remarked upon how

this seemed counterintuitive to civic parks that we have created—Dana Park in Cambridge and Bryant Park in New York came to mind. Both use a large open space as the public center around which disparate activities are ringed, all in view of each other. In contrast, Lafayette Square allows for new residential users, downtown workers, parents with young children, old men, homeless and informal economy users to occupy separate territories without viewing each other's activities. In fact, a hillock blocks the view from one group to another. This likely explains how such a small place is able to accommodate so many different and, in some cases, incompatible, users. More attention of this sort needs to be paid to designing for social differences.

### **Engage the Designer**

Too often, participation is misrepresented as requiring a designer to simply draw what citizens want. This is an excuse for laziness, a passive aggressiveness on the part of professionals who feel disempowered by citizens, and a retreat from civic responsibility.

Democratic design requires more from the designer, not less. The designer needs to structure the framework not only for public involvement but also for decisions about civic space. How do citizens need to look at the problem? How can citizens be aided in understanding spatial consequences? What alternatives do citizens need to consider? What is the full public cost? This process is transactive; the designer is responsible for providing the place language, the mechanisms to focus the dialogue and make difficult choices, and often the inspirational gestalt that breathes life into a place.

Each of the winning plans evidenced willingness on the part of the designer to truly engage. Another project, a series of charrettes sponsored by the University of Washington, struck me in the same way. There, through carefully conceived and

highly structured charrettes, citizens and designers engaged in spirited dialogue and debate about contentious and complex issues. The results provided visions that would never have emerged without designers who are willing to lead and risk failure.

### **Integrate Complex Thinking**

An ecological democracy requires more complex thought from its citizens than the immediate gratification that both participatory planning and market research presently provide. They may well determine what sports coat I'll wear next year or even what exclusionary zoning I'll choose to improve my quality of life, but neither will serve to reduce our ecological footprints, enhance systemic long-term thinking or create meaningful and lasting places.

Instead, participatory processes should engage citizens in integrated, complex thought about their communities. Both the City of Hindman/ Knott County initiative in Kentucky (a planning award winner) and the design for Octavia Street in San Francisco did this. The Hindman plan provides a series of multipurpose and interconnected actions that, if followed, will provide much more than the sum of their incremental parts for a community whose problems are so difficult that it can ill afford superficial, Band-aid solutions.

The Octavia Street plan represents uncharacteristically "unknee jerk" thinking about how to move lots of vehicles through a city. Going against the simpleminded, single-purpose thinking that gave us high-speed freeways through most American cities as well as fragmented neighborhoods that suffered island effects, the designers produced a boulevard that handles traffic equal to the freeway and knits a neighborhood back together.

In a situation where years of adversarial planning and contentious legal actions had pitted neighborhood groups against each other and only

produced simplistic plans, the Octavia Street plan forced more thoughtful, holistic consideration from the public. Citizens will think about design complexly and produce splendid democratic places only when participatory designers help them to do so.

### **Make Place Regional**

Most citizens become participants in planning because of a personal, local concern. Participatory techniques emphasize local concerns—home, neighborhood, school and park. Less attention has been paid to participation in citywide or regional concerns. This is an emerging frontier.

The Phoenix Desert Preserve was one of a few submissions this year that engaged citizens far beyond their neighborhood interests to create a plan that will provide an open space framework for the sprawling Phoenix region. This is more than a recreation and open space plan, more than a greenbelt to herd Phoenix growth. It is informed by principles of conservation biology, a level of scale and complexity that planners and citizens have come to embrace only recently.

Place is at once global, regional and local. Important regional advances can only be made with both meaningful participation and thorough ecological science. When regional science inculcates the participatory culture, participants will be better citizens of locality and region, and better-stewarded regional places should result.

### **Conclusion**

These cases stood out. Based on the evidence presented to the jury, they are the exceptions, not the rule. High quality, inventive and purposeful participation is obviously needed. Few produce it. One wonders why, if participation is so critical, so little of it is exemplary.



## Listening to Lost Voices: Forest Park, St. Louis

Interviews and surveys of park users found one group of people who liked to fish but were not permitted to do so along the stretches of riverfront they frequented, so fishing was extended to those areas

Photos: Forest Park Forever

The master plan for Forest Park in St. Louis, a masterwork conceived in 1876, involved ecological restoration, landscape preservation and a fresh look at weaving the park into the social and cultural life of the region's 2.5 million residents.

Park planners gathered public feedback from through conventional and unconventional means. They staged a "summit conference," held open meetings and organized a 67-member steering committee that heard from more than 1,000 individuals, groups and institutions. But they also conducted user observations and compiled nearly 1,000 surveys—telephoning park users and non-users alike, and interviewing people visiting the park. This revealed, for example, that schools did not see the role the park could play as an environmental laboratory (a newly created schools program is focussing on the re-established waterway and forested area).

Thus the participatory process not only helped forge a new public consensus on a vision for the park, but also inspired numerous adjustments to the plan that will help Forest Park better accommodate a diversity of activities and users.

Client: City of St. Louis Department of Parks, Recreation, and Forestry

Design: City of St. Louis/St. Louis Development Corp.  
Consultants: AAI/Campbell, Inc., Hale Irwin Golf Services, Kwame Building Group, L.E. Haefner Enterprises, Inc., O'Donnell Communications, Dave Tylka & Associates, D.R. Felton & Associates and W.E. Seffens & Associates.



New educational programming helped schools recognize the park as a teaching resource



Covers of publications generated by the Seattle Charrettes, including Douglas Kelbaugh's book, *Common Place*, a retrospective that also considered broader questions of regional planning and design.

## Cultivating a Civic Vision: The Seattle Charrettes

A series of eight design charrettes organized in the Seattle-Tacoma region by the University of Washington from 1990 to 1995, effectively linked citizen participation to urban design research, teaching and practice in a metropolitan area that was coming to grips with regional growth and design issues.

The charrettes considered topics such as public housing, transit-oriented development, reclaiming closed military

bases and infill development. The configuration of community involvement depended on the project; community members helped write the programs, acted as team leaders and made up the bulk of the audience.

The charrettes generally produced multiple visions, providing a healthy foundation for continued, spirited public debate and sometimes setting the stage for specific policy changes. Just as important, they provided a forum for academics, citizens and design professionals to take leadership on framing civic design issues and putting them on the public's agenda.

# Participation in Place: Notes for Future Design Juries

Stephan Klein

Central and salient among the shared values that enabled this year's EDRA/*Places* Awards jury to select six winning projects was a concern for user participation in design and planning. Although we based our decisions on other criteria as well, participation was a gate through which projects had to pass in order to be considered for an award.<sup>1</sup>

By my count, about ninety percent of the projects that reached the final round employed some form of user or public participation, compared to about forty percent for the design and planning submissions overall. And all the winners, in every category, employed participation. For example, research winner "Three Public Neighborhoods: Assessing Public Housing Development" involved project residents in conducting the research; research winner *Healing Gardens* used the findings of user studies and evaluations to help set design guidelines.

Participation can be a desirable part of the design, planning or research process, and could even be considered a form of research. But reflecting on the jurying process, my sense is that the consideration of participation was sometimes too obligatory in both the submissions and the jury discussion. We need to enrich and embolden our consideration of participation, to regard it as less of an end in itself and more in terms of how it makes places that encourage a democratic society, and ask whether participation in the design, planning or research process is necessary or sufficient in determining the merit of a project.

I would suggest that we expand our view of participation to include the idea of "participation in use," examining how people use and are involved in managing places. I would further suggest that we evaluate projects based on how they

catalyze participation in the development of a democratic and shared society. These concerns should not be revelatory, especially to *Places* readers and EDRA members. As *Places* editor Donlyn Lyndon once wrote: "Good places make people feel that they belong, that they have a stake in the world that they share with others."<sup>2</sup>

## Projects that Make Good Places

Like many juries, we operated with a mostly tacit, generally shared set of values, criteria, definitions and priorities that allowed us, within our limited time together, to make our final selections with little conflict. Our interests, as reflected in our selection of winners, included enabling pedestrian activity, promoting social inclusiveness, creating urban open space and using the full power of nature to enrich our environments.

At the same time, I believe we all subscribed to a meta-value, that award-winning submissions should also somehow encourage the making of place. But what does that mean? Although the jury members may have held similar values about the qualities necessary to transform space into place, the definition of place remained inchoate throughout the deliberation process, in part because our work of reading through the submissions, discussing them and reaching final decisions filled our allotted time.

After we finished making our selections, *Places* executive editor Todd W. Bressi asked, in a debriefing session, why we thought that none of the numerous New Urbanist submissions had made the final cut. Juror Karen Franck suggested that we showed little interest in them because they seemed instant, quick-stop, ready-made; that the quality of place was sought, unsuccessfully,

solely through design and not won through the practices of use and the making of histories.

Franck's comment recalls various writings about place attachment. Michel de Certeau asserted that place is "practiced space"; Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires propose that place is "space to which meaning has been ascribed."<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this line of thinking begins to suggest a definition of "place" that future juries could use: juries should be considering not only the practices that places engender or prohibit, encourage or discourage, and that invest places with history, memory and meaning, but also evidence of participatory practices in use, not just in the process of production.

It is also important that juries look for participatory processes and places that empower their users, politically, economically and psychologically, rather than affirming existing power asymmetries. They must look to places that create communities that encourage people to reach outward, rather than focus inward, places that recognize and celebrate diversity—not within the dialectic of a totalizing humanity such as that portrayed in the "United Colors of Benetton," but in terms of recognizing the tensions and contradictions in the ways different people live in the world and in the narratives they create to make sense of it. They should turn their attention to places that educate, encourage and inculcate these values, beliefs and actions. Among the projects we selected this year, the Rosa Parks Elementary School was notable in this regard.

### Product Versus Process

These expanded definitions of participation suggest a number of critical questions, and open new avenues of possibility, for future juries:

- If one can consider a design or plan as a hypothesis for the future use of a place, should the hypothesis have been tested, the results be made available for evaluation? Could a jury evaluate

designs that have not been tested through use, plans that have not shaped some concrete outcomes?

- If one is to look for evidence of use, what evidence should be accepted? In this respect, research winner *Healing Gardens* was noteworthy in providing numerous documented examples of not only the use of gardens but also their therapeutic benefits.

- Can one consider evidence that users have claimed and appropriated spaces in ways not intended by the designers, if the result is to invest these spaces with unexpected meaning? Could such action be viewed as an act of participation, or of empowerment? In design winner Lafayette Park, we learned, one park user was operating a shoe-repair shop out of a public rest room. Did participatory processes lead to this outcome, or did it occur independently of the process of producing the facility?

- Are participatory design and planning processes necessary to create places that promote participatory practices? This seemed to be the case in the Rosa Parks School, and the hoped-for outcome in the Portland Pedestrian Master Plan.

- Do places, whether or not their production involved participation, encourage movement towards a truly democratic society?

### Misusing Participation

One hopes that user participation in the creation, use and management of a place will lead towards meaningful social and environmental change. However, in the contemporary world, participation all too often becomes an instrument for solidifying status quos and maintaining current, often asymmetrical power distributions.

This was reflected in the award submissions. Too many of them included statements such as "the public participated in a series of workshops," without ever mentioning who the "public" consisted of, what the workshops accomplished, or

whether participants had decision-making power or only offered suggestions or provided information about existing conditions.

We also need to be aware of the problem of participation essentializing the community, of seeing it as unified and homogeneous, of not allowing for conflicting goals and agendas. Participation can become the expression of and reinforce power discrepancies within heterogeneous groups of users, with those in control taking control of the process and purporting to speak for all, thus reinforcing status quos.

We should look for projects, whether they use participatory techniques or not, that address social injustices and inequities, or the misapprehensions that perpetuate such situations. For example, the winning research project, "Three Public Neighborhoods," investigated popular conceptions that public housing has failed and found that this has not been universally true and that many residents of public housing attach great meaning to their homes and communities.

#### **Whom to Award?**

Focusing participation efforts solely on the planning and design phases of a project, ironically, often treats the user as an "other," not as a subject with agency but as an object to whom participation is applied and who will benefit by taking part. But if we are to consider how participation can be part of the forging of place from space we must grant agency to users. The success of a project on these terms owes as much to the users and the narratives they create as it does to the designers. Perhaps, then, the awards program should honor not only design and planning teams but users as well.

#### **Notes**

1. The EDRA/*Places* awards criteria do not mention participation per se. Design submissions are asked to provide evidence that a place is important to its inhabitants or users, or that a project has broadened or strengthened the constituency for this place. Planning submissions are asked to describe the planning methodology, especially strategies for involving people in forming the plan and helping people understand the significance of the proposals.

2. Donlyn Lyndon, "Caring About Places," *Places* 6:1 (Fall 1989), 3.

3. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press, 1984); Erica Carter, James Donald, Judith Squires (eds.), *Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London, Wishart, 1993), xii.

# Call for Submissions

## 2001 EDRA / *Places* Awards

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*Places* and the Environmental Design Research Association announce our fourth annual awards for Place Design, Planning and Research. We seek nominations for exemplary projects from any design or related discipline, such as architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, planning, lighting design, interior design, graphic design, geography, sociology and psychology. Awards will be presented in July, 2001, at EDRA's annual meeting, at which there will also be an exhibition and symposium. Winning projects and commentary will be published in the Fall, 2001, issue of *Places*.

*Place Design* awards recognize projects that demonstrate excellence as human environments and a strong relationship between research investigations and design outcomes. Projects can consist of individual structures or spaces, or groups of elements that work as a unit. They can involve the design of something new or the reuse of existing resources. The scale can be large or small, ranging, for example, from a community playground to a regional greenway. Projects must have been completed within the last five years, but long enough ago to assess how well they function for users.

*Place Planning* awards recognize projects that establish direction for the design, management or use of a place and demonstrate a strong basis in research and participation. Nominations can include master plans, specific plans or elements, management plans, vision documents or charrette proposals. The scale of consideration can be large or small, ranging from a specific area to a region. Plans can consider a variety of issues, such as urban design, open space, preservation, environmental management, capital projects, housing, public art, social services or economic development. Plans must have been sponsored by an

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*Place Research* awards recognize projects that investigate the relationship between physical form and human behavior or experience, and which seek to inform design practice. All types of research about the design, use and management of places can be nominated—including projects that document the form or perception of places, evaluate the use or management of places, or provide background for specific designs or plans. Research should address how people interact with places from a behavioral, social or cultural perspective, how people experience places, or the processes through which places are designed, built and occupied.

### To Enter

Official entry forms are available now; the receipt deadline for entries is March 2, 2001. For more information, contact:

Janet Singer, Executive Director  
Environmental Design Research Association  
1800 Canyon Park Circle, Building 4, Suite 403  
Edmond, OK 73013  
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Submitters may wish to review write-ups of past award winners and jury comments. A package of the three awards issues of *Places* published is available for \$30, plus \$5 shipping. A package of articles by former jurors on themes of research, participation and preparing nominations is available for \$10, plus \$4 shipping. Please contact *Places* at 718-399-4313, or <placepratt@aol.com>

## Frames of Visibility in Public Places Jean-Paul Thibaud

A place is generally considered to be public when it is accessible to all, when every person can be physically present and circulate freely within it. Conversely, a place is considered private when access is controlled, reserved to certain people.

Yet physical access is simply one mode of access among others, since our body experiences space through each of its senses: sight, of course, but also hearing, touch and smell. A place can provide partial accessibility without the actual presence of one's body since "the actual senses which measure proximity, which qualify presence, are senses at a distance."<sup>1</sup> For example, looking through an office window at what is happening in the street or listening to a conversation taking place in an adjacent room are potential modes of access to public places.

Public places can thus be characterized according to their degree of porosity, or according to the possibilities they offer for perceiving objects and people at a distance. Rather than considering the publicness of a place solely as a function of its architectural and spatial form or its degree of openness, it is appropriate to question a full range of sensory qualities of a place.<sup>2</sup>

### Between Light and Sight

This paper is based on two fundamental assumptions. First, it is necessary to consider the ordinary experience of city dwellers. While urban planning tends to objectify places by being removed from them,<sup>3</sup> we are instead interested in the exercise of vision the way it occurs at the eye-level, *in situ*, for pedestrians, in their day-to-day practices. In this sense, the built environment organizes the various viewpoints of passersby; it can be considered as a context that orients our ways of seeing and interacting in the street. As Deleuze put it: *If architectural structures, for example, are visible, places of visibility, it is because they are not only figures of stone, orderings of things and combinations of qualities, but first and foremost,*

*forms of light which organize the clear and the obscure, the opaque and the transparent, the seen and the unseen, etc.*"<sup>4</sup>

Second, an interdisciplinary approach that involves both architecture and sociology is essential. Public space is simultaneously a built environment and a social setting. Analyzing the visual qualities of urban public space can improve our understanding of the relationship between spatial forms and social interactions. Interaction in public space requires the possibility of seeing, and being seen by, other people. In return, it requires rules of conduct that regulate the exchange of glances between passerby.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, buildings can increase or decrease the luminosity of places; they modify light by directing, reflecting, absorbing or bouncing it. Thus, the built environment conditions interpersonal observation, producing diverse circumstances of reduced, contrasted or hypertrophied visibility. How does the luminous dimension of the urban environment relate to the visual dimension of social interactions?

### Frames of Visibility

Exposure is one of the basic categories for characterizing people's visual experience of each other in public. It involves being visible and observable by others, and behaving accordingly. Richard Sennett has argued that "fear of exposure" is the main problem of modern public space and that city dwellers have lost the ability to expose themselves and interact with each other.<sup>6</sup>

Although the idea of exposure helps to qualify the nature of interpersonal visibility in public, it is a generic term that fails to account for the full range of conditions that can occur in the luminous urban environment. The notion of "frame of visibility" can help to distinguish different types of exposure, specify the way that architecture conditions seeing in public, and better explain the relationships between light and sight in urban space.

A frame of visibility is a methodological device that helps describe the various luminous contexts in which interpersonal observation occurs. It enables us to specify the basic conditions in which people see and appear to each other. This notion focuses not on what people see in public places but how they see, depending on the place they are in. Each frame of visibility stands between two extreme cases that prevent any form of vision: complete brightness and complete darkness.

The five frames of visibility that occur most frequently in the visual experience of city dwellers are overexposure, enclosure, filtering, blurring and silhouetting. These basic phenomena are not exclusive from each other, they sometimes combine or overlap according to the spatial position of the observer, and nor is the list exhaustive.

#### **Overexposure**

Overexposure involves creating a differentiation between and a hierarchy among objects in the visual world. It consists of increasing the visibility of a specific object, such as a monument or an individual. This frame of visibility displays passersby, attracts their visual attention and points out what can or should be seen by anybody.

Such a phenomenon can be produced in two different ways: either by making use of contrast between lit space and obscure space (as for example at bus shelters, under awnings or in telephone booths at night), or by offering a view from above of what is happening underneath (as, for example, at the terrace of the Rockefeller Center skatingrink or at the belvedere entrance of the Louvre Pyramid). In this kind of situation, people are more or less observable depending on where they are located.

Whatever interpretation we give to this phenomenon, it involves a splitting of status between the passersby: in one case there are actors (in the "box" or below the terrace) and in another there are spectators (outside the "box" or on the ter-

race). These urban devices increase the awareness of being potentially watched and intensify the impression of being on stage. They tend to enforce the rules of conduct in public places as well as emphasize the scenic character of the place.

#### **Enclosure**

Enclosure involves the delimitation and fragmentation of what can be seen in the built environment. Its function is to structure and direct the visual field of passersby, to shroud a portion of the place while revealing other parts and unifying what is visible. Enclosure both reveals and hides, depending on the spatial position of the observer. This phenomenon introduces a differentiation between areas that could be considered upstage and backstage.

Passageways, narrow streets without shops and subway corridors are places characterized by a strong sense of enclosure; they tend to orient people to what is directly in front of them by preventing views to the side. Places like these make people visible to each other for extended periods of time.

Windows and other types of penetrations in walls that offer restricted vistas of a place also emphasize enclosure. People look at each other as in a picture frame; they appear when they are situated in the frame and disappear when they walk out of it. Such a phenomenon brings people together for only a brief moment. It produces short glances between passersby and a limited period of time of interpersonal observation.

Enclosure is possibly one of the most basic experiences of living in a city. It enables us to understand how the built environment conditions the way people temporarily relate to each other and offers specific views of the urban landscape.

#### **Filtering**

Filtering involves the quality and the propagation of light in the built environment. By passing

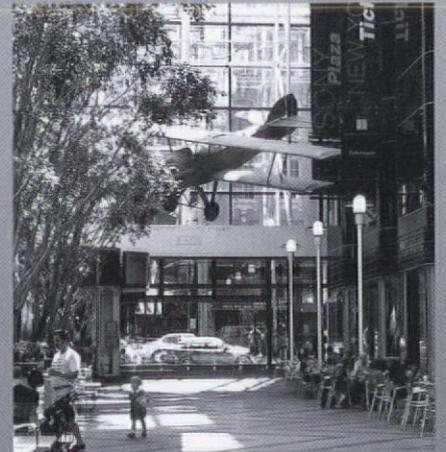
Overexposure



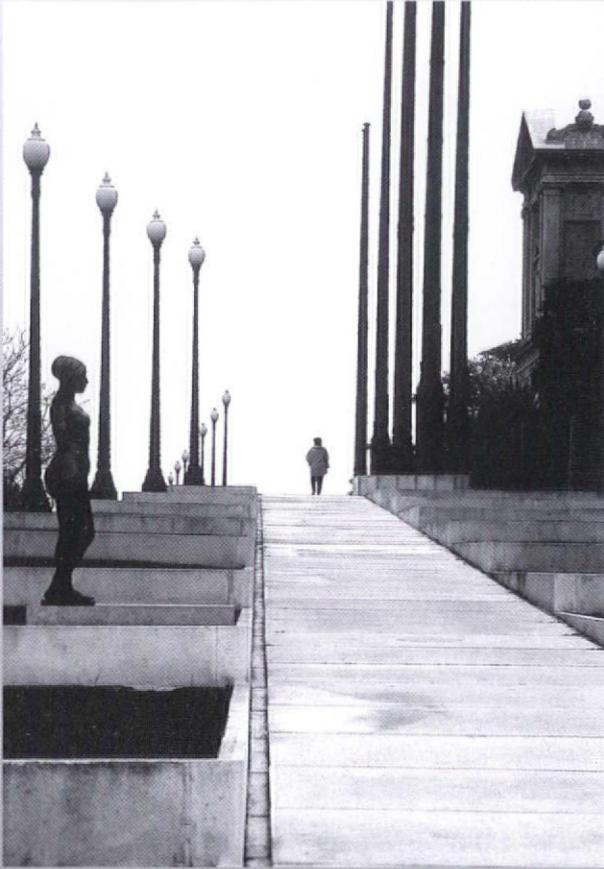
Enclosure



Filtering



Silhouetting



Blurring



Photos courtesy  
Jean-Paul Thibaud

through a physical milieu (such as glass or foliage), natural light can be refracted, absorbed or reflected. Filtering produces an ambiguous relationship between the inside and the outside, and creates various types of luminous surroundings depending on the weather, the season or the time of day.

This phenomenon occurs frequently in places with glass roofs, such as atriums or train stations, and along arcades or shaded paths. In places like these, the lighting of the place is neither completely bright nor totally obscure; instead, the light produces a mottled atmosphere. Such an impressionistic surrounding enhances and transfigures the shapes and the colors of the place.

This frame of visibility creates the sensation of bathlight or a luminous envelope shared by everybody. Such a diffuse light increases the coherence and the unity of the place. People located in this kind of surrounding feel physically bonded with the environment and can also sense the time passing by. The way people appear to each other is constantly changing, depending on the light and shade projected onto their own body.

### **Blurring**

Blurring involves the reducing of visibility of people, making it difficult to perceive the contours and the shapes of objects and bodies. Such a frame relies primarily on a rather problematic relationship between the figure and the ground: the former tends to merge with the latter. Blurring emphasizes the dilution of the visible forms and limits the perception of depth.

This phenomenon occurs naturally in certain weather conditions, such as fog, mist or smog. Some urban waterfalls, tinted glass windows and other types of translucent screens interposed between people can produce a similar effect. In this case, the observer can barely identify the presence of someone else located at the opposite side of the screen. In places that are dimly lit at

nighttime, passersby can have difficulty distinguishing the location of obstacles.

Blurring enables people to reduce their visual interaction with other, even to hide; it can be used as what Goffman called an "involvement shield."<sup>7</sup> A feeling of insecurity, mystery or surprise can result from this luminous context: the pedestrian cannot really anticipate what will be in his path. Such a frame may also be interpreted as a means to enhance the secretive character of a place and dramatize the experience of urban space.

### **Silhouetting**

Silhouetting emphasizes the contour of objects or individuals instead of the details of their surfaces. This frame involves a particularly pronounced figureground relationship; it produces a clear differentiation between several juxtaposed planes or visual elements. Backlighting is the most common example.

The transition from a dark, artificially lit place to a bright, naturally lit place, such as the exit from an underground place into the daylight, is the most common context for experiencing silhouetting.

Such a frame reduces the visibility of people's faces, especially their expressions, and tends to make passersby anonymous, since visual recognition is difficult. However, the perception of the outline occurs only one way around, when the brighter area is in front of, not behind, the perceiver. Thus, this phenomenon involves a nonreciprocal visual relationship between passersby, a completely different experience depending on the location and orientation of the subject. From an architectural point of view, silhouetting makes it possible to strongly accentuate the transition between two places and clearly differentiate the foreground from the middleground and background.

### **Conclusion**

The notion of frame of visibility is an attempt at linking the design of an urban space to the

social relations that occur there. The aim of this paper was not to advance one particular frame of visibility to the detriment of others; it does not argue that any particular frame should be systematically sought out or avoided. Rather, my purpose was to point out some basic criteria that could be useful to architects and urban planners. Three main issues have been suggested:

*The relationship between the built and the visible forms.* In terms of visual perception, architecture is not merely a juxtaposition of buildings to be seen, it also helps establish the conditions of visual reception. For instance, the built space can open or block vistas (enclosure), offer a glimpse of specific objects or places (overexposure), emphasize their contours (silhouetting), dilute the visible forms (blurring) or transform them (filtering). Thus, one of the issues in the design of urban space is to consider the patterns of ambient light and the viewing conditions that buildings create.

*The reciprocity of interpersonal observation.* Architecture can be analyzed as a device that structures the way people relate to each other visually. Each frame of visibility mediates the way that people see each other: differentiation between actors and spectators (overexposure), short glances between passersby (enclosure), creation of a shared luminous milieu (filtering), reduced mutual visibility (blurring), asymmetrical visibility between passersby (silhouetting). The goal for architecture should be to incorporate and promote the "civility of the eye" in the design of public places.

*The variability of the urban scenery.* Too often, places or buildings are described as if they were always experienced the same way, as if they had no temporal dimension. Each frame of visibility emphasizes factors that can change in time and contribute to the visual diversity of a place: body orientations and spatial positions (overexposure, enclosure), weather conditions and time of the day of night (blurring, filtering), directions of walking and transitions from a place to another

one (silhouetting). The goal for architecture should be to integrate the plurality of conditions into the singularity of a place, the temporal to the spatial dimensions of the urban environment.

#### Notes

1. M. Dufrenne, *L'oeil et l'oreille* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1991).
2. G. Chelkoff and J. P. Thibaud, "L'espace public, modes sensibles," in *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* 57-58 (1993), 716.
3. M. DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
4. G. Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1986).
5. E. Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places* (New York: The Free Press, 1963).
6. Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1990).
7. Goffman.

## Havana 2000

Cervin Robinson

What do we ask of a set of photographs that describes a city, Havana in this instance? Clearly, we want it to present architectural documentation as articulately as possible. We also want a sense of when "now" was for the photographer (ambiguously dated photographs seem loose at their moorings) and a sense of where the pictures fall along the timeline of the city's development (historic buildings illustrated without their present contexts seem prevarications fit mainly for coffee table books).

In the twentieth century, the changes that have occurred in most Western cities (those that are not museums to their own pasts) have been ones of replacement and redesign. And in most of these cities, the most reliable visual indication of when architectural photographs were taken is the date of automobiles. In photographing these places, one juxtaposes the old and the new and keeps an automobile in view. But in Havana, the topographic changes during the last two-thirds of a century have been minimal: the juxtapositions one can make are often ones that could have been made seventy years ago. And, of course, Havana's almost half century-old American automobiles are famously still in use.

In the pictures of Havana shown here, juxtapositions, rather than apposing time past to time present, describe architectural conversations that have been going on for the better part of a century. The topics have rarely changed in the last forty years, however, giving the city an aura of the past that an American city attempting to retain so-called historic districts must envy. The clothes of the citizens (and perhaps the mere fact that the pictures are in color) tell us that the photographs were taken recently and provide the present context. The old American automobiles, besides affirming that the city is indeed Havana, serve, by their yearly increasing age, the function of an ever receding temporal (and historical) shoreline.

—*Cervin Robinson*

Color reproduction of  
"Havana 2000" was made  
possible by Hardy  
Holzman Pfeiffer Associates



Morro lighthouse and  
Máximo Gómez monument



The city from El Morro,  
Capitol at center,  
Gómez monument to left



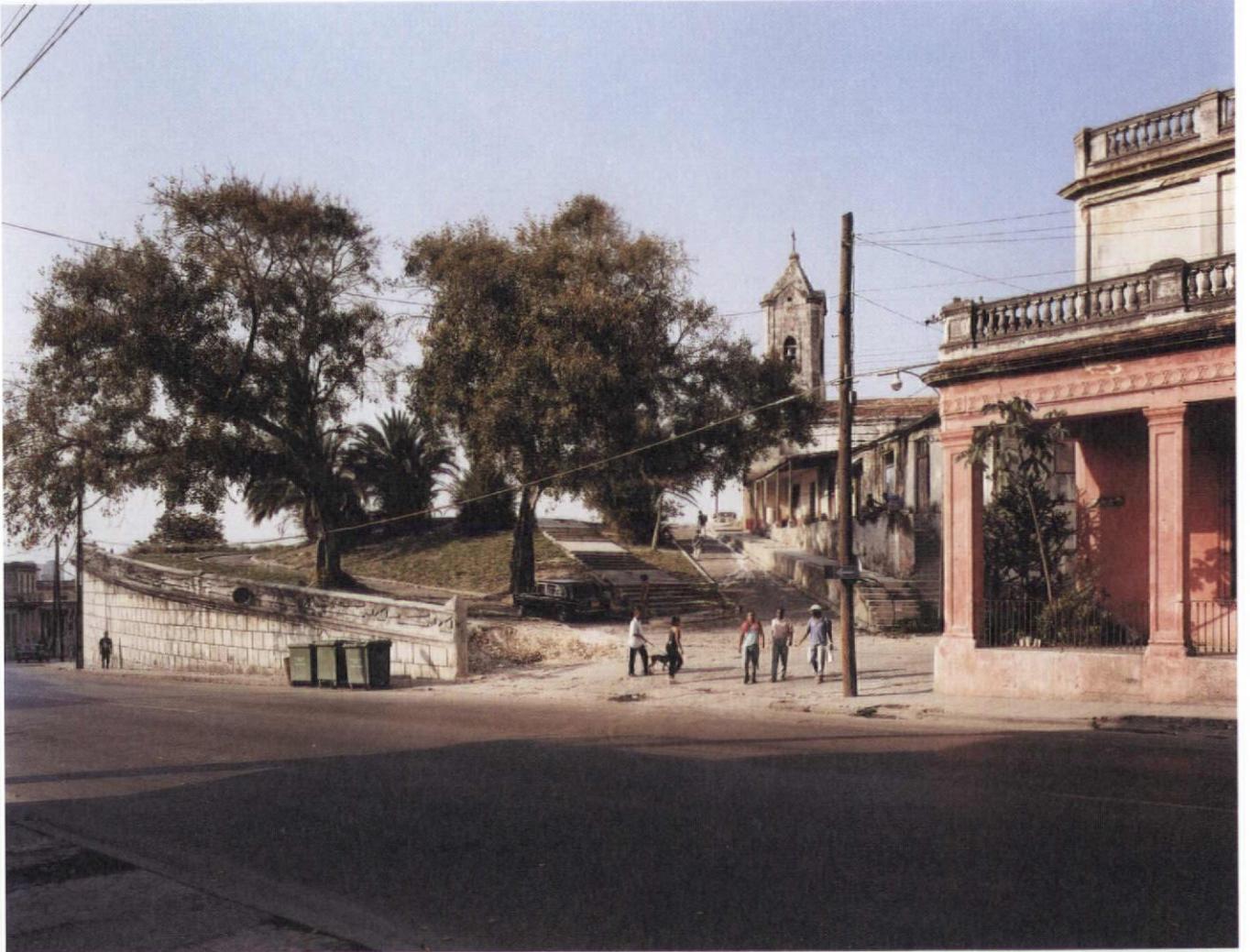
Monument to José Martí  
in Parque Central, with  
National Capitol and palacio  
del Centro Gallego (teatro  
García Lorca) behind



Assembling for a demonstration  
for Elián Gonzalez, Vedado



Julio Antonio Mella  
monument and steps  
of University of Havana



Church of Jesús del Monte  
seen across Calzada de  
Dies de Octubre



Park on Avenida Sta, between  
Calles 24 and 26, Miramar

# Kirchsteigfeld— A European Perspective on the Construction of Community

American admirers of New Urbanism would almost certainly be delighted by a visit to Kirchsteigfeld. This new district of Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin, features various hallmarks of New Urbanist planning. Public spaces recreate earlier urban patterns; a well defined network of streets intertwines with ample greenswards; the housing is relatively dense. It was designed between 1991 and 1993 by the architectural firm of Rob Krier and Christoph Kohl, and individual buildings were executed by several architectural firms from Central Europe and the United States.

Kirchsteigfeld's planners and architects revived many traditional features of central European towns and cities, updating them to accommodate contemporary demands for greenery and parking. At Kirchsteigfeld's core stands a church; one of the first built in eastern Germany since World War II, it was designed by Italian architect Augusto Romano Burelli. This instant landmark is ringed on three sides by public spaces lined with storefronts. Beyond those are residential districts and community facilities, such as schools.

Most streets are lined with three- to five-story apartment buildings with colorful facades. Neighborhood-scale features include a horseshoe-shaped plaza that opens onto a rondelle. A canal bisects the community, its beautifully landscaped

banks bordered with serpentine benches. Communal gardens are inside each block, providing further green spaces and access to parking tucked discreetly to the side. An excellent streetcar link to the center of Potsdam provides a convenient alternative, however, to the use of private cars.

At Kirchsteigfeld, planning models developed to suture the gashes World War II opened in Berlin's urban fabric were applied to an undeveloped site on the metropolitan periphery. This shift created both opportunities and challenges. The results illustrate the close relationship between even the most carefully considered design on the one hand and cultural and market forces on the other. They also tie the community to a series of often unacknowledged sources whose success Kirchsteigfeld is not always able to match.

## Roots in IBA

Since the 1970s, Krier has called for reviving Europe's nineteenth-century pattern of high-density, low-rise apartment buildings built to the street edge, though he proposes to make it more habitable by creating through-block communal courtyards. His influence has been enormous in Europe, where the urban forms he seeks to revive are associated with the good life of an earlier time, just as small towns are in the United States. Most

notably, his precepts were adopted by the planners of the International Building Exhibition (IBA) organized in West Berlin in the early 1980s. Instead of the high-rise apartment towers built during the sixties and seventies to replace buildings damaged during the war, IBA planners erected buildings that mimicked the scale of pre-war apartment blocks and villas.

This emphasis on typology (fostered as well by the popularity in Germany of Aldo Rossi's *Architecture of the City*), however, was seldom accompanied by overtly historicist designs for building facades or interior plans. Although punched window openings predominated, the character of individual buildings recreated the proportions of their predecessors in terms that were indisputably of their own time.

The IBA exhibition also established a precedent for the way in which high-profile architects could be lured into designing everyday housing. Organizers invited firms to compete for the design of the master plan, promising them the opportunity to build some of its constituent pieces. Lavish government subsidies for middle-class housing, combined with strict German construction standards, all but guaranteed the quality of the results, which quickly attracted international attention as a showpiece of postmodern architecture and urbanism.

Groth + Graalfs, a firm that acts both as developer and building contractor, executed one of IBA's best-known projects, the Rauchstrasse quarter, which Krier had laid out. In 1991, when the firm acquired sixty hectares of open land on the south edge of formerly Communist Potsdam, it returned voluntarily to the IBA formula, adding a workshop among the competing designers to encourage collaborative thinking about the plan. The workshop resulted in Krier and Kohl being chosen to create Kirchsteigfeld's plan and ensured that talented architects from Europe and the U.S. would contribute to its execution.

The IBA exhibition was a collection of fragments. On any given block, new construction might stand alongside old. The results were punctuated by the towers in the park erected in the district in the interim.

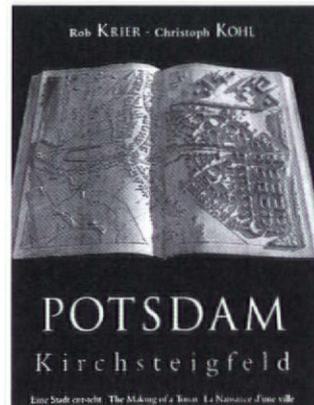
At Kirchsteigfeld IBA precepts were applied to a blank slate. Here the tensions were ironed out of the IBA collage. Kirchsteigfeld's planners took advantage of local landscape and infrastructure features, including an alley of oak trees and a highway, to establish boundaries between it and its neighbors, which include the remnants of a rural village as well as monotonous Plattenbau, prefabricated apartment slabs that were the post-war housing type most favored by Eastern Europe's Communist governments.

Within these intended lines one finds, for the most part, an extremely cogent collection of lively facades that frame relatively narrow streets on one side and generous courtyards on the other. Few of the individual buildings are as original as the best contributions to IBA (by Peter Eisenmann and Jaquelin Robertson, Office of Metropolitan Architecture, Aldo Rossi and Moore, Ruble, Yudell, which participated in both developments), but they share much the same spirit. Stucco facades, into which balconies are cut or from which they project, recreate in the proportions of their details an earlier urban pattern without imitating its ornamental decoration. In both cases, architects have respected precedent while avoiding sentimentality.

### Transferability

Americans tempted to reconstruct Kirchsteigfeld at home will be frustrated to find that it is as much the product of specifically German political and economic conditions as of the New Urbanist approach to community design.

Many of Kirchsteigfeld's most appealing features were mandated by local regulations, and public funding played a large role in the realization of its ambitious design. The regulatory envi-



A relief of Kirchsteigfeld's plan, depicted as the pages of a book, greets visitors to the town.

# Kirchsteigfeld



Aerial photo, showing central axis and Hirtengraben Park  
Photo: Werner Huthmacher

Early plan sketch by  
Rob Krier and Christoph Kohl  
Graphic: Krier and Kohl





Hirtengraben Park, detail  
Photo: Werner Huthmacher



Mid-block apartment building  
Photo: Werner Huthmacher



Corner tower type  
Photo: Werner Huthmacher



The Rondelle, lined with buildings designed by Krier and Kohl, opens onto Horseshoe Square.  
Photo: Kathleen James-Chakraborty



Plattenbau, housing built under the former German Democratic Republic near Kirchsteigfeld  
Photo: Kathleen James-Chakraborty

ronment that demanded high-quality construction, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and a sensitive approach to the local ecology does not exist in the United States. Moreover, the combination of public and private funding that built Kirchsteigfeld (though considered in Germany to be a significant example of privatization) would be unthinkable in the U.S., where no public agency would lavish so much money on middle-class housing. Nor would a local American government be likely to contribute a streetcar, as happened here.

Kirchsteigfeld's location in a formerly Communist suburb on Berlin's edge places it in a housing market very different from that of American suburbs. Potsdam's Communist-era housing crisis was exacerbated, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, by its proximity to the city. But Potsdam's pre-war buildings were in poor repair; conditions in the newer Plattenbau were often little better. Thus there were many people eager to occupy Kirchsteigfeld's apartments, despite a density that ensured that the standards of privacy and spaciousness demanded by most middle-class Americans would be absent. Finally, the degree of involvement that Groth + Graalfs continue to have in Kirchsteigfeld as property managers is unusual even in Germany, as was their responsibility for erecting most of the community's infrastructure.

### Compromises

Krier and Kohl, along with the developers for whom they worked and the other architects who assisted them, created an extraordinarily attractive suburban environment. They were able to take advantage of a Communist-era housing crisis, general German agreement about planning principles similar to those of New Urbanism (albeit often within the aesthetics of International Modernism), generous government subsidies and the organizational legacy of Berlin's recent IBA to achieve this impressive result. Yet even these conditions, so essential to the construction of a well-

defined, well-designed, well-maintained, amenity-rich community of this density and configuration, have not proved sufficient to ensure an ideal mix of uses or to protect the integrity of the design from market imposed revisions.

Half of the community was built according to the original plans. But in the southern sections the apartment blocks Krier called for have given way to single-family row houses. These have little relationship to the street or to the central public space they abut, which consequently now lacks the strong spatial definition that makes its counterpart to the north so attractive.

This is not the only compromise with Krier and Kohl's vision that one finds upon visiting the community. For example, Krier and Kohl were determined that the development not become merely a bedroom community. But with the continued absence of the workplaces their plan proposed, this nonetheless has happened.

Kirchsteigfeld's relatively low population and the small size of the individual shops have conspired against the evolution of a lively commercial center. Perhaps a third of the few shopfronts remain empty, and one can buy little more than basic groceries without traveling outside the community's well-defined boundaries. Although most Germans continue to shop in downtowns, village centers or the neighborhood shopping districts that line streetcar routes, Kirchsteigfeld's inhabitants overwhelmingly favor the new American-style shopping centers just to the north.

Finally, for all the glamour it has acquired through its association with Krier and its status as a showpiece for New Urbanism, Kirchsteigfeld still feels like a set piece, a stage set in which it is not yet obvious that the quality of community will match the thoughtful design of most of its constituent pieces. Some of the beautifully-landscaped communal areas seem to have been designed more for display than use. On a stunning autumn morning not a single toddler was to be found playing in



The rowhouses the developer has recently substituted for the apartment blocks called for by Krier and Kohl have an awkward relationship to the street, with small front gardens that correspond more to the usual backyard, complete with sliding glass doors and gardening shed. Photo: Kathleen James-Chakraborty

any of the courtyards, where prominent signs forbade dogs, soccer balls and bicycles—three staples of German recreational activities.

### Precedents

Through most of the twentieth century, Germany has proven fertile territory for experiments in escaping what the German sociologist Georg Simmel identified as the alienating character of modern metropolitan life. Germans have a proud recent history of providing thoughtful urban planners and architects with the opportunity to re-inject a sense of community into the urban forms that the society as a whole continues to value as a repository of its cultural traditions.

In their published accounts of their intentions at Kirchsteigfeld, Krier and Kohl ignore these important precedents, many of them located in neighboring Berlin, and distort the character of their design's relationship to earlier patterns of European urbanism. Their point of departure is not as timeless as they would like to think. The apartment building, whose organization around a courtyard they explode to the scale of an entire block, became the prototype for housing in northern Europe only during the nineteenth century; before that time the townhouse with a small garden in the rear predominated. In truth, they have made no attempt to replicate the density of either model, both of which supported an active commercial life at street level.

At Kirchsteigfeld, Krier and Kohl instead placed apartment blocks in a landscaped setting that recalls early twentieth century garden city developments, such as the Margaretenhohe in Essen and Staaken on Berlin's western edge. While the architecture of these settlements was overtly nostalgic in its recall of pre-industrial village life, something that is entirely absent at the more urbane Kirchsteigfeld, these communities have had more success than Kirchsteigfeld in creating viable centers that replicate the commercial

and institutional mix of village life because the modest scale of their public spaces are more in keeping with the size of their populations.

Nor is Kirchsteigfeld entirely independent of Modernist models. Both the planning apparatus and the community's scale and density have more in common with the workers' housing erected around Berlin's periphery during the 1920s than with any earlier German architecture. In particular, the combination of the way in which the blocks are split open to reveal the courtyards and the brilliant coloring of individual facades recall the Britz and Onkel Tom's Hutte (Uncle Tom's Cabin), two of the developments laid out by Bruno Taut, although, of course, Krier and Kohl eschew Taut's standardized plans and flat roofs.

Ironically, developments like Bochum's Uni-center, a 1970s megastructure with little aesthetic appeal, recreate the active pedestrian life characteristic of successful cities much better than Kirchsteigfeld does. In Bochum, where an irregularly shaped plaza sits atop two levels of parking and is ringed by shops and apartment towers, a huge student population ensures that the relatively banal space, which doubles as a protected play space for children, is occupied virtually around the clock. Without such a high number of workers and residents, Kirchsteigfeld is not yet and may never become the viable, free standing community its planners envisioned.

Nonetheless, Kirchsteigfeld is a welcome addition to Germany's rich legacy of planned communities. It offers hope that Germans will, through a combination of thoughtful public and private planning, continue to avoid the worst ramifications of the suburbanization brought on by their enormous prosperity. If Kirchsteigfeld proves almost impossible to replicate in the U.S., where government policies and market demands are different, this only demonstrates the degree to which Krier and Kohl's design is rightly embedded in the culture whose aspirations it so effectively mirrors.

## Karow Nord



Aerial view of Karow Nord shows various housing types, including courtyard buildings in the foreground, villas along the lake and perimeter blocks behind.

Photos: Werner Huthmacher



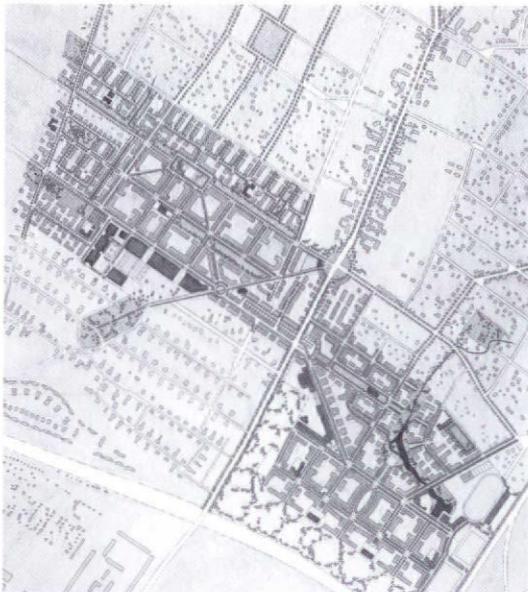
Retail street



Vista over the water park



Midblock pedestrian walk



Karow Nord's plan includes a street system integrated with its context, axial streets and vistas like in Berlin, a hierarchy of streets and open spaces, long bands of park in an "agri-grid," a mix of housing types and scales, and a tapering down of scale from the center to the edge.

Graphic: Moore Ruble Yudell



Day care center

# Kirchsteigfeld and Karow Nord

John Ruble

Kirchsteigfeld and Karow Nord could be thought of as sisters, fraternal twins, sent to grow up in different parts of the world, who have returned as adults to live in the same county, if not next door. One can see the resemblance in the bones perhaps, but the difference in manners is much more striking.

Visiting Kirchsteigfeld we proceed as in a large house, through a series of rooms, the doors and windows closed, with a bit of heat going, and Rob Krier's warm presence there to greet you, like the portrait or the statue in the entry hall. Karow has left all the doors and shutters wide open, with a cool breeze sweeping through, and everyone outside in the garden.

Analogies aside, both places share a common ideal, which is to be called a town, a place of dwelling and community richer and more memorable than what we usually have in mind when we say "suburb" or "gartenstadt." Programmatically, however, both developments are much closer to the latter, which in turn is far richer than what we have in mind when we say "housing project."

Given common ideals, the relative coolness or warmth carries through each project quite consistently in terms of process—intensive review of the many architects' designs in Kirchsteigfeld, almost none in Karow (not our preference!)—as well as in terms of the built result, which in Karow is somewhat looser, a bit larger-grained, with a more equal status given to buildings and open space.

Another implication of being a town, and one very much valued by both urban design teams, is the sense of authenticity. The quality sought is vitality, which in visual terms means the tension between the clarity of a planned form or pattern,

and the accidental details of its execution over time. Since both projects are being built all at once, there really is no execution over time, and therefore little opportunity for accidents, spontaneous details and changes. But imperfection is, happily, readily available to the town planner, even on a fast track. Involving as many architects as possible in executing the plan virtually assures that no one gets it exactly right.

In order to understand the potential for each project to hold the visual richness that we associate with historically developed communities (and we are here talking principally about built form, rather than social or cultural responses), it is useful to compare briefly the process by which both plans were built out.

Housing, by far the major component of each project, was divided into design–construction phases of some three hundred to six hundred units each, with multiple architects in each phase. In Kirchsteigfeld there were generally more architects in each phase. In a typical district, perimeter blocks were divided into a series of "houses"—three- to four-story apartment houses of ten or twelve units each, with a different architect for each house. This produced a very fine grain in terms of scale and variety, and required a close coordination of the different architects by Krier and Kohl. At Karow, the developers Groth + Graalfs moved away from this more detailed approach (which Krier favored for its closer simulation of historic development patterns) towards giving each architect larger pieces of the plan. On most streets in Karow one sees facades by one architect stretch for an entire block on one side, clearly giving a larger scale. This different quality is reinforced by other features—wider streets with more on-street parking in Karow, for example.

The prevailing perimeter block pattern in both projects is relieved by a variety of other housing formats, such as urban villas, and, more importantly, by other functions—commercial

centers, day-care centers, public schools and open space. Karow has a greater variety of housing patterns and types—perimeter block, urban villas in different scales, two-story mews and a special pattern called Karow Courts. (The Karow Court was based on farm house patterns in the historic village: a two-story, multi-unit house is combined with small L-shaped blocks of flats around an intimate courtyard, giving a feel of the original farmer's court or *bauernhof*.) Individual architects were assigned various combinations of these types, but rarely splitting them or sharing a party wall.

Written guidelines for both projects were relatively spare, although in the case of Karow they were deliberated by an independent panel of architects and landscape architects over many months. Controls included roof slopes and conditions at the ground, particularly built edges in relation to streets and open spaces, as well as building entrances and projections. Quite different color palettes were developed for each project by consultants, with quite different outcomes.

A major difference in approach was the extent of design review. In Kirchsteigfeld, Krier and Kohl conducted workshops, with scale models and compiled colored elevations, to see how the individual building designs added up. In Karow this process was not supported by the developers or the city, and each of the several building firms conducted independent efforts with their own architects. Moore Ruble Yudell had scant opportunity even to find out about the designs of the architects and no chance to influence the work beyond the written guidelines. Thus a project that began with intense exchange among peers in a master planning competition was executed by strangers with no collegial interaction; in other words, the same way buildings are done in most towns around the world.

Public buildings in Karow were watched over much more closely, at least by the City of Berlin.

Architects for schools and day-care centers were chosen through design competitions with almost curatorial care. The variety, consistently thoughtful contemporary design, and quality of material and construction of these buildings make an extraordinary contribution to Karow's public realm.

There is no question that Kirchsteigfeld has a kind of quirky charm. It is in some ways a more unusual, more colorful and more unified place than Karow. In that sense it is consistent with its inspiration and context, the city of Potsdam. Karow is, by virtue of its greater range of scale and its variety of patterns set into a strong and somewhat axial framework of streets and landscape, more like Berlin. This is very much the kind of result that we and Krier and Kohl would have hoped for.

#### **Kirchsteigfeld**

*Sponsor:* Groth + Graalfs Industrie und Wohnbau

*Design:* Rob Krier • Christoph Kohl (master planner, coordinating architect), Muller Knippschild Wehberg (landscape architect)

*Workshop participants:* Augusto Romano Burelli; Eyl Weitz Würmle; Rob Krier • Christoph Kohl; Krüger Schuberth Vandreike; Moore Ruble Yudell; Nielebock & Partner.

*Architects:* Benzmüller + Wörner; Brandt/Böttcher; Augusto Romano Burelli and Paola Gennaro; Dewey & Muller; Eyl Weitz Würmle; Faskel & Becker; Feddeson, V. Herder & Partner; Ferdinand + Gerth; Foellbach Architekten; Hermann & Valentiny; Wilhelm Holzbauer; Jürgens + Mohren; Kamman und Hummel; Kohn Pederson Fox; Rob Krier • Christoph Kohl; Krüger Schuberth Vandreike; Lunetto + Fischer; Moore Ruble Yudell; Johanne Nalbach + Gernot Nalbach; Nielebock & Partner; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Steinbach & Weber.

#### **Karow Nord**

*Sponsor:* Groth + Graalfs Industrie und Wohnbau

*Design:* Lunetto + Fischer (executive architect), Moore Ruble Yudell (associated architect), Muller Knippschild Wehberg (landscape architect)

*Engineering:* Hildebrand and Seiber (structural), Wegmann & Partner (mechanical), Unruh & Partner (electrical)

*Contractor:* Ingenieurbüro Ruths

## The Return of the Civic Square

Fred I. Kent, Andrew G. Schwarz

Despite the misty-eyed memory that many people have of the American town commons or village green, the plain truth is that most of our cities no longer have a good central, civic square.

But in our travels and in our conversations with citizens and public officials, we are beginning to see a remarkable change. After decades of ignoring the viability of the city center as a social, outdoor environment, suddenly nearly every mayor and planner seems to want a central square. Our office is being contacted at an astonishing rate by large and small cities for help in building squares and plazas that attract people and reinvigorate public life. Another indication is that the U.S. Conference of Mayors named parks as its theme last year. Parks aren't civic squares, of course, but it appears that mayors are finally beginning to understand the power of public places in their cities.

Here are some concrete examples. Downtown Detroit has been regarded by some as an urban basket case, its empty skyscrapers a testament to an era of American urbanism that is long past. Now the city is trying to re-energize its nearly vacated downtown with new office buildings and an open space plan as part of the city's tricentennial celebration.

Detroit 300, a task force of civic leaders appointed and steered by Mayor Dennis Archer, has developed a bold revitalization plan for a five-block area adjacent to the government center on Cadillac Square. New tenants have leased significant amounts of office space in the area, but the lynchpin of the concept is Campus Martius, a two-acre central plaza that will replace a traffic island at a complicated intersection with a conservatory, fountain and plenty of room for events. A design for Campus Martius is being prepared by Rundell Ernstberger Associates, of Muncie, Indiana.

Downtown Fort Worth, though busy by day and increasingly lively at night, suffers from an inattention to public space that has resulted in a

familiar scene: buildings that don't generate much life along the street, and wide streets and parking lots that fragment whatever spaces there are.

A plan is in the works to string together six leftover scraps of land to make a new city-owned square that will serve government offices, a convention center and a cluster of bus stops where riders transfer among lines. The square will be the focal point for housing, transit, farmer's market and convention-center expansion projects. Through public workshops and an Internet survey, people who work in or visit the area have conveyed an interest in having a lively place with activities, places to eat, and places to relax.

It's not every day that a city resolves to create a civic square right in the center of town. The number of successful new squares created in the last quarter century could probably be counted on one hand, despite the extraordinary expansion of metropolitan areas and more recent resurgence of center cities. Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square and Boston's Post Office Square, both built where parking garages once stood, are the premier examples.

These projects, and others like them, are coming about now because public officials, planners and citizens are starting to understand that public life—meaning active, vital street life—is essential to rebuilding downtowns. Anchor retail stores, public buildings, entertainment zones and downtown housing are only part of the picture; people also need common, sociable, outdoor places, as well as things to do that are not explicitly commercial.

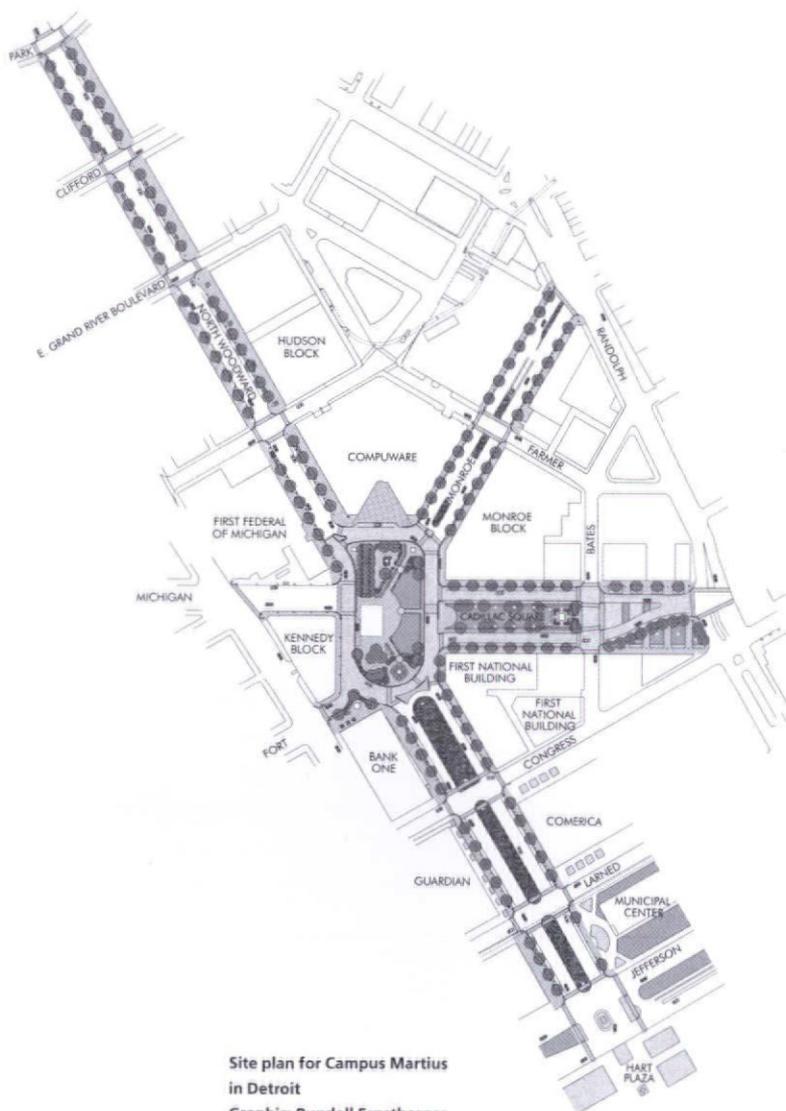
The challenges these squares face are similar. Often, the traffic that passes by them is too fast and the streets that surround them are too wide to create an atmosphere conducive to walking and gathering. Often, the blank walls and vacant lots that surround them are deadly to foot traffic and make people feel the area is unsafe. Civic leaders can still fall victim to designers whose priority is to

create signature spaces that look good in glossy magazines, rather than designing in support of the myriad and unpredictable uses and activities that make a place truly public. And sustaining a great square takes resolve; even the best places can go to seed if management and maintenance are not given the highest priority.

Only a sustained commitment to a civic vision can overcome obstacles like these. Such a vision might begin with an idea at the top, but the details and creativity so often come from the community. People's ideas for events and concessions, their labor as volunteers and their ability to draw support from various organizations are critical to the success of such projects. This commitment must come from every sector—community groups, merchants associations, public officials, neighborhood leaders, the list goes on. Problem solving needs momentum and consensus to succeed, otherwise the naysayers, those who say "It can't be done," will win the day.

Some of America's longest-lived public spaces—Santa Fe's Plaza and the greens and commons of so many New England towns—have survived for centuries because they have been able to adapt to the changing times, playing different roles as circumstances change. Their designs are so simple that they can function as blank tablets upon which towns or cities can inscribe their cultural and civic legacy. That is the model new civic squares should emulate: be flexible enough to respond to the various possibilities that exist now and mutable enough to evolve as urban society does over time. That's how a square becomes a place that people return to, day after day, year after year, a place that is so embedded in a city's regular rhythms that no one can remember what it was like before the return of the civic square.

Recent conditions at the site of Campus Martius, a historic square in downtown Detroit that may soon be revived  
Photo: Project for Public Spaces



Site plan for Campus Martius in Detroit  
Graphic: Rundell Ernstberger Associates

The American Institute of Architects  
Committee on Design

Robert Campbell, FAIA

## Baltimore and Seattle: Cities on the Edge



These forum pages are produced under an agreement between the Design History Foundation and the American Institute of Architects. AIA's Committee on Design program last year included meetings in Baltimore and Seattle, covered in this article. For information about membership and upcoming programs, call 800-242-3837 or visit [www.e-architect.com/pia/cod](http://www.e-architect.com/pia/cod).

The work of the American city today is the work of manufacturing the experience of city life. At least, that's my take on two recent, fascinating visits to Baltimore and Seattle. Both cities are very different from the city of production, the city of finance or the city of government. But they're not, maybe, so different from cities of the more distant past. In eighteenth-century London, Samuel Johnson and his circle spent a lot of time talking in coffee houses. "There are two Starbucks on this block," one of our guides informed us, "which is a rather low density for Seattle."

After the interregnum of the Industrial Revolution, we are seeing a return to the idea of the city as a place where we go to seek social and cultural exchange as members of a community. One hears now of people who work in, say, Silicon Valley and take a weekend hotel room in downtown San Francisco to "have a life." In the past, we worked in the city and went to the country to recreate. Today, we often work in the burbs and head downtown for recreation. It's a major flip-flop.

What kind of urban recreation do we pursue? Ballparks, festival marketplaces, waterfronts, art museums, concert halls, sidewalk cafes. We are not always that intensely focused, though, on what we are ostensibly seeing. When I was young and went to the ballpark, half the fans had their ballpoints out, keeping score in their programs. At games in Baltimore and Seattle, I saw not a single person doing that. In the crowded art museums, the visitors often seem only vaguely aware of the art.

We really seek something else: to experience ourselves as members of a public. Isolated behind the screens of our cars and televisions, we are starved for that lost experience. And publicness is the very essence of city life. The coffee and food, the base paths and Van Goghs, the music and shopping, are not so important in themselves. They are the game boards around which we

gather. Feeling that we're in public, that there is such a thing as a public: that's the point.

The two visits, Baltimore in April and Seattle in July, were undertaken by the American Institute of Architects Committee on Design, chaired this year by Henry (Dusty) Reeder, FAIA, of Cambridge. Each year, the committee investigates two or more cities, studying their architecture and urban design by means of tours, lectures and seminars. Baltimore and Seattle are waterfront cities, of course, and Reeder titled his two-city conference "The City at the Edge." By this he meant not only the physical edge against the water but also the "edge of failure" against the inner city. Both city visits were immensely fruitful.

The first thing one noticed was the water itself, and how different it felt in the two cities. Baltimore's harbor, when viewed on a map, looks like a section through a birth canal. No surprise that it's called the Inner Harbor: there's a unique inwardness to the water here. In Seattle, even though the city isn't directly on the ocean, the harbor is perceived as an edge, a periphery. When you're there, you feel you're looking outward to the world.

But why this obsession with water, anyway? Why are Americans of this era mesmerized by urban waterfronts? Aside from the obvious fact that waterfronts are newly available, thanks to the decline of industry, two explanations come to mind. One: the sheet of water establishes a connection with the rest of the world. Put your finger in the water and you're touching an apprehensible substance that also touches Rotterdam and Hong Kong. Water becomes a metaphor for globalization. Two: water is sensual. It smells of salt and wind; it rustles and crashes with sound; it is cold and wet. In a world in which, to an amazing degree, sensual experience of the environment has given way to the mediated, abstracted experience of the digital monitor, we reach out in desperation for something palpable.



The Baltimore (above) and Seattle (below) waterfronts have significantly different configurations. Baltimore's Inner Harbor is like a room, enclosed by the city, while Puget Sound provides a great open edge for Seattle. Photos courtesy American Institute of Architects

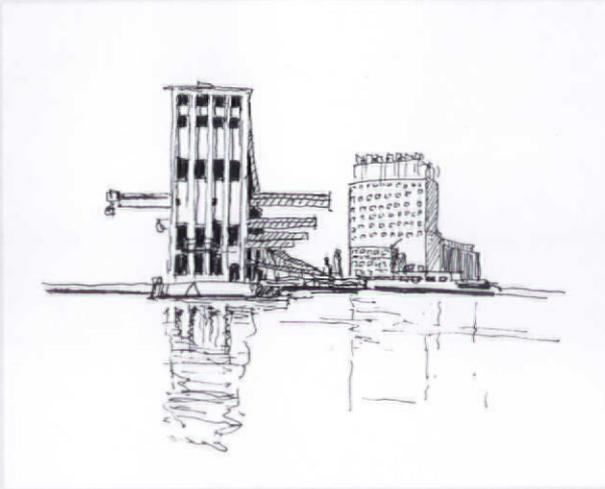


That sense of a need for material reality also came up when we toured the former factories and warehouses on Baltimore's harbor, many of which are now being converted to house the "dot-coms" of today. Bill Struever, who is turning a former Procter and Gamble plant (now "Tide Point") into 800,000 square feet of leasable dot-com space, told us that what the young entrepreneurs desire is something called "cool space." They find it in the massive brick, timber and steel of the old buildings, not in the slick curtain-wall packages of the recent past. Cool space is perceived as not mediated: raw, real, physical, material—everything, in fact, that the technology of the dot-com world is not. Cool space hasn't been tailored to your needs. You feel as if you have discovered it yourself and are camping out in it. It speaks of your individual initiative and informality, not of a developer's standard program.

Impressive as they were, the dot-coms along the harbor—the "digital harbor," as it's now being

called—proved to be, disappointingly, a handsome crust on an often decaying city. Another kind of crust was Fells Point, a lovely restored waterfront neighborhood that proved, on inspection, to be only a few blocks deep. Perhaps as visitors we exaggerated, but our sense of a city divided, front-stage and backstage, water-music and blues, was strong.

I was reminded of Fells Point when one speaker, Charles Duff, who rehabs old neighborhoods, talked of the generic rise and fall of American fad neighborhoods—some newly built, some restored—in which a whole population moves in all at once and maybe, thirty or forty years later, disappears all at once too. You couldn't help thinking, in that connection, of how rootless the dot-coms are. Unlike the great shipping and manufacturing establishments that preceded them, they have no investment in physical plant. With the click of a mouse, they can drop their cool space into the recycle bin.



Two views from Baltimore Harbor  
Sketches by Phillip Kennedy-Grant

Does the amazing renovation of the harbor mean that Baltimore is coming back? Or is energy merely being displaced from one part of town to another? It's easy to be pessimistic. Jay Brodie, FAIA, of the Baltimore Development Corporation, however, spoke persuasively of two demographic trends that may fuel the urban revival for a long time to come. These were, first, a growing pool of empty nesters, as people live longer and healthier lives, and second, a large population of younger people who delay having children. Both groups gravitate to the city. Other forces favoring the city, Brodie said, are the "Atlanta effect" of unacceptably long commutes and the appeal of funky old buildings to people raised in the "boring" suburbs.

Seattle, of course, was very different. This is a wealthy city trying to manage success, rather than stimulate it. Seattle is taking a deeply responsible position that I wish would be adopted by other cities. This is the understanding that the only solution to suburban sprawl is the densification of cities. Either we grow across our farms and forests, or we grow inside our cities.

John Rahaim, the city's urban design chief, told us without panic that Seattle expects to accommodate 1.5 million people—a fifty per cent increase—in the near future. It plans to accomplish that on only thirty per cent of its land, so as

to leave single-family neighborhoods untouched. Architect and writer Mark Hinshaw, AIA spoke of new mixed-use towers in Seattle with retail on the ground floor, offices above and housing above that. The perfect mix, you'd think, for an American downtown, yet very rare.

The Seattle waterfront is a lesson in mixed-use and the vitality it brings, with heavy and light industry, housing, recreation, culture, shopping and much else jammed in an unembarrassed way into the same precinct—very different from the digital and tourist monocultures of Baltimore's harbor. Deliberately grungy Pike Place Market, and even the ugly automobile viaduct, project a sense of comparatively unfaked reality. Seattle's working harbor still hosts 1,000 ships a year, second on the West coast only to Long Beach.

But Mayor Paul Schell, Hon. AIA, in the wrap-up panel, while endorsing the goals of high density and mixed use, lamented his lack of power to implement them. As a metaphor for the weakness and dispersion of government, he noted that a Chinook salmon must swim through thirty-six jurisdictions to reach its spawning ground. "There is," he said, "no constituency for change in Seattle."

In both cities, we saw wonders. I was delighted by the "Boathouse," the office and studio of glass sculptor Dale Chihuly, a wood pier on a lake filled

with idiosyncratic moves: shelves of old boys' novels used as decor in a bathroom, school lunchboxes as a frieze along a corridor, a lap pool with a colored glass bottom, an eighty-eight-foot table carved from a single piece of wood. Steven Holl's St. Ignatius Chapel at the University of Seattle was a marvel of sculpted light; as one speaker pointed out, it "helped the public understand that buildings can be more than enclosure." Frank Gehry's Experience Music Center, a rock museum, must be making that point too, although the architecture is little more than a shapeless colored tent. At the Seattle Symphony's new Benaroya Hall, the block-length lobby along Third Street was a superbly ambiguous space, functioning as both lobby and covered sidewalk, open all day to the public with a Starbucks to attract passersby.

Both cities boasted impressive new ballparks and both parks, like the game itself, were deeply nostalgic. Baltimore's recalled the age of massive masonry, Seattle's that of intricate erector-set steel. Both parks offered an important lesson: the right place for a ballpark is a disinvested neighborhood within walking distance of downtown. Seattle and Baltimore fans can walk to the park after work, stopping for a drink or a meal before or after the game and thus revitalizing a neighborhood. In a stroke of urban design genius, Baltimoreans preserved an enormous brick warehouse parallel to the ballpark and created a street between the two. The street is pedestrian at game time; you pass through it to enter the park, and it becomes a vital center of public life, rather like that block-long lobby in Seattle.

Much that we saw in these cities—the nostalgic ballparks, the garage-rock esthetic of the "cool space" dot-coms, even St. Ignatius Chapel (where, we were told, Holl hoped "everything would be made by hand") suggested that we are now in the midst of a new Arts and Crafts movement. The original movement, a reaction against the Indus-

trial Revolution, advocated a return to handcraft. The new movement, by contrast, is a reaction against the digital revolution, and what it advocates is a return to sensuousness and materiality. The materiality may be the chill and splash of harbor water or it may be the rough brick of a warehouse—in which case, ironically, it is the Industrial Revolution we are harking back to. Each revolution reverses the last.

For both cities, there's a danger. If the work of the city is indeed that of manufacturing the experience of city life—city life understood as something more public, more material, more diverse and less predictable than the life of the windshield and the television monitor—it will be hard to keep that experience authentic. From the moment we become self-conscious about creating experience, that experience tends to become scripted theater rather than reality.

For architects, the challenge is to create buildings that serve city life without making a self-conscious fetish of it, and to create public spaces that are not so obvious they look as if they ought to have a sign saying "public space." A few years ago, I happened to be staying at a Times Square hotel on the night the hated Yankees won the first of their recent string of World Series victories. It would be hard to imagine an urban space less suited to public assembly than Times Square. But it succeeded magnificently that night. Everyone in greater New York seemed to know exactly where to go. The cops closed off the side streets, but they left Broadway open for an endless parade of honking cars and yelling fans. The city wasn't catering to those fans. It wasn't offering them preconceived urban space. The experience of city life was at its most intense because the city was simply being itself.

*Robert Campbell, FALA, is architecture critic for the Boston Globe.*

## The Federal Impact

Nearly ten times a day, every day, the U.S. General Services Administration makes a decision about where to lease or build space in one of the 1,600 cities it which it manages federal real estate. Nearly ten times a day, GSA makes a decision that can shape a community's development for years to come.

That's why it is critical for GSA's Public Buildings Service and local officials to understand the full range of impacts that federal locational decisions can have. With that information, GSA can work with localities to make decisions that best serve our client agencies, taxpayers and local communities alike.

Some impacts, such as the number of construction jobs that a new building will generate, or the number of office jobs that a new facility will bring, can be quantified easily. Though we don't yet have strong information on the economic impact that government employees and operations have on the local economy, we think this can be measured as well, and have asked several economic analysts to research this.

There are other impacts, less quantifiable, that might have a longer-lasting, more dramatic effect on a community. Consider, for example, the value of the commitment the federal government is making to a place when it constructs a new office building or courthouse, or when it enters into a long-term lease for private space. This can send a powerful signal to property owners, developers and local officials about the future prospects for an area. We already have anecdotal evidence of this effect.

In the late 1980s, Tacoma's historic Union Station was suffering from decades of neglect and facing demolition. GSA renovated the station and built a new structure alongside it to serve as a federal courthouse, which opened in 1993. The project has triggered the revival of downtown Tacoma; since then, the University of Washington has renovated numerous nearby warehouse buildings for its campus, and the Washington State

History Museum was built next to the courthouse.

Oakland's federal building, completed in 1997, had two important impacts. It came along during a local economic lull, creating confidence among private investors that downtown Oakland would survive the slowdown; numerous developers are now putting up housing and office space nearby. The building not only helped reinforce Oakland's transit-oriented core, reversing a trend toward development in an automobile-oriented section of downtown, but also set a new design standard, helping to extend downtown in a pedestrian-oriented manner.

In Galveston, the historic U.S. Customhouse was until recently a landmark property at risk: It no longer provided functional space for federal offices and would be costly for GSA to restore and maintain. GSA was able to enter a long-term lease with a local historical foundation, which raised private funds for restoring the building and could use it for offices. The Customhouse anchors one end of Galveston's Strand District, an area of nineteenth-century buildings, and restoring it was important to maintaining tourist activity and revenue.

The Center for Urban Development's mission is to support GSA's efforts to maximize the benefit federal investment decisions can have for urban communities. That may mean helping local GSA staff collaborate with a local mayor, planners and property owners. It may mean finding ways to apply the resources we are bringing in a manner that also addresses current community goals. It may mean recognizing the long-term value of the federal government's commitments and assets, and using them to help secure a community's long-term future.

All these efforts mean that GSA must engage the places where the federal government has business interests. We are constantly helping address new challenges in cities across the country, and constantly being surprised by the rewards we reap by working to be a good neighbor.



These forum pages are produced under an agreement between the Design History Foundation and the U.S. General Services Administration, Center for Urban Development. For more information, contact:

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# Patient Acts of Progress

Todd W. Bressi

For more than a year, GSA's Center for Urban Development has been nurturing a series of quiet experiments in bringing neglected public spaces to life—part of its charge is to make the federal government a full player in local efforts to promote livable communities.

In some cases the center acts as a catalyst, bringing a sense of possibility to places where none was thought to exist. In others it plays a supporting role, providing expertise and resources in places where attention is coalescing. In still others, it challenges the terms of engagement with places, suggesting that the problems being grappled with should be redefined.

Three projects now underway illustrate the productive role the center is playing in helping revitalize local civic spaces.

## Denver: Expanding Horizons

The Federal District in Denver would be a big part of any downtown. It includes two courthouses and two office buildings, with another courthouse on the way. It covers four blocks and is used by some 5,500 workers.

But "we've always been kind of an island. There's been distinct separation between us and the city," said Paul Prouty, assistant regional administrator of GSA's Rocky Mountain Region.

The public spaces around the buildings were drab and lifeless, and the district felt neither cohesive nor well connected to the rest of the city, observed Janet Preisser, who manages special projects for GSA in the region.

The Byron Rogers Courthouse, in particular, bunkered down while it hosted the Oklahoma City bombing trial a few years back. So in summer 1999, GSA launched a "First Impressions" project for the courthouse and an attached office building, hoping "to improve the experience of entering a federal building, to make people feel comfortable but secure," said Tim Horne, Director of GSA's Colorado Property Management

Center. "We can't soften security, but we can ease up its presence."

As the project got under way, Prouty invited the center in for consultation. That process resulted in two key shifts: looking more broadly at the whole neighborhood, and looking more strategically for steps that could be taken quickly.

In November, 1999, the region hosted a community workshop that began mapping out a "federal district master plan," which consultants Gensler and Civitas are helping prepare. This is no ordinary master plan, participants say. "Instead of the plan leading the process, the building operators are leading it and using the designers as a resource," explained Fred Kent, president of Project for Public Spaces, which is consulting with the center on the project. "We've shifted the balance. They are trying things and seeing how they will fit into a plan. It's a good way to grow places."

Last spring, GSA unveiled some small experiments: planting flowers, installing new benches and garbage cans, bringing in vendors, organizing events. "We're operational people. It's hard for us to be patient and wait for a plan to develop. We're trying to generate some movement," Horne said.

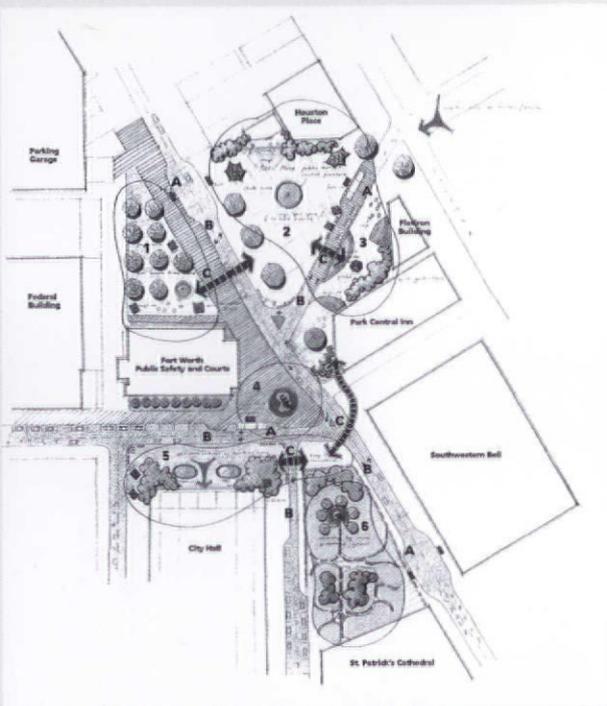
Mid- and long-term plans include improving identification and wayfinding signage throughout the district, installing fountains and public art, narrowing streets and changing paving materials, and trying to influence development adjacent to the district.

The real power of the endeavor may be in the new partnerships that are emerging:

- The regional transit agency planted new trees along the segments of its rail line that pass through the Federal District.

- The Denver-based Harmsen Foundation is loaning some of its art holdings for an exhibition in the Byron White Courthouse.

- The Denver Botanical Garden has proposed a series of beautification, education and event opportunities throughout the Federal District,



Left: Preliminary concept plan for Hyde Park

Above: Minor improvements to Federal Plaza last summer included a food vendor. A redesign and reconstruction of the space is in the works. Courtesy City of Fort Worth

### The Fort Worth Downtown Public Square

1. A park-like setting for lunchtime use, with food and information kiosks.
2. A public plaza with trees at the edges and a stage. It would be large enough and open enough to host events, such as performances or a market.
3. A quiet garden-like space with a gazebo and cafe.
4. A major focal space with a large sculpture.
5. An entrance plaza for city hall, accentuated with fountains and a cafe.
6. A formal garden.

A. Bus stops would be located a short walk from each other, facilitating transfers and generating pedestrian activity.

B. Narrower streets would slow traffic and facilitate pedestrian crossings.

C. Pedestrian crossings could be established at strategic points.

Graphic: City of Fort Worth, Project for Public Spaces

including planting gardens, providing material for planters, and replanting bluegrass areas with native grasses.

- The University of Colorado at Denver architecture school is organizing two studios that will consider the future of the Federal District and the transitional area adjacent to it.

### Fort Worth: Providing Critical Backing

In summer, 1999, Fort Worth planners asked consultants for advice on how to configure a bus transfer station near its government center. Little did they expect the project would metamorphose into an endeavor that few cities have had the ambition to consider lately: building a new civic square.

The idea was hatched last year when Kent suggested the city should facilitate bus transfers by dispersing stops for various routes within a concentrated area, rather than directing them to a centralized facility—the better to create dynamic pedestrian activity. One location he proposed was a confluence of streets near city hall and several other local and federal office buildings. That precipitated the idea that the streets and six under-used spaces in the area might be reorganized into a civic square.

Though the project was initiated and is being led by the city's planning department, GSA's support so far—has been critical to the project's survival in a number of ways:

- The center is providing consulting services through Project for Public Spaces. PPS staff attend planning and design meetings, and helped draft concept and phasing plans for the civic square.

• GSA hopes to help fund a study that will show the economic and social returns created by money spent for improvement to civic squares. "If we can argue how projects like this have paid for themselves through economic and social benefits, the city council will be much more inclined to finance part of this," said Fernando Costa, Fort Worth's planning director.

• GSA's Greater Southwest Region office is gearing up to redesign and reconstruct the plaza that adjoins the federal building as part of its First Impressions program—the first major section of Hyde Park that would be redone. GSA is executing a license agreement with the city, which will allow it to commission a design and pay for improvements.

GSA says the project supports its long-term business interests. "If we can have quality places for eating or shopping or recreation, it helps us in terms of customer satisfaction and in recruiting and retaining employees," said Harold Hebert, a regional GSA asset manager. "We have vacant space in this building, and the improvements we're talking about are going to make it easier for us to find tenants."

Most importantly, perhaps, GSA's commitment to the project has provided an important political

boost. "The more we were able to say GSA was using Fort Worth as a model, the more people started listening," city planner Mike Brennan said.

### Washington, D.C.: Finding Lost Space

At times the plaza at the Department of Education (DOE) headquarters in Washington, D.C., seems like an orphan of L'Enfant's plan for the city. The triangular space is within view of the immensely popular Air and Space Museum but separated from it, and the rest of the Mall, by two major streets.

Last summer, as GSA and DOE celebrated the completion of renovations to DOE's building, they realized the plaza was an important bit of unfinished business. Regional staff linked up with the center, which is coordinating discussions between DOE, other agencies, cultural institutions and property owners in the area.

Like in Denver and Fort Worth, GSA hopes to bring a broad range of players, such as the Air and Space Museum and the National Park Service, into the fold. Like in Denver, GSA hopes to jumpstart the revitalization of the plaza with incremental changes that could be made as early as this spring and summer.

"The first meetings are to get people to realize there is the possibility of doing something together," said Kent. "People look at this space and have zero in mind. They see nothing but a void until you start showing them the possibilities; then the light bulb turns on."

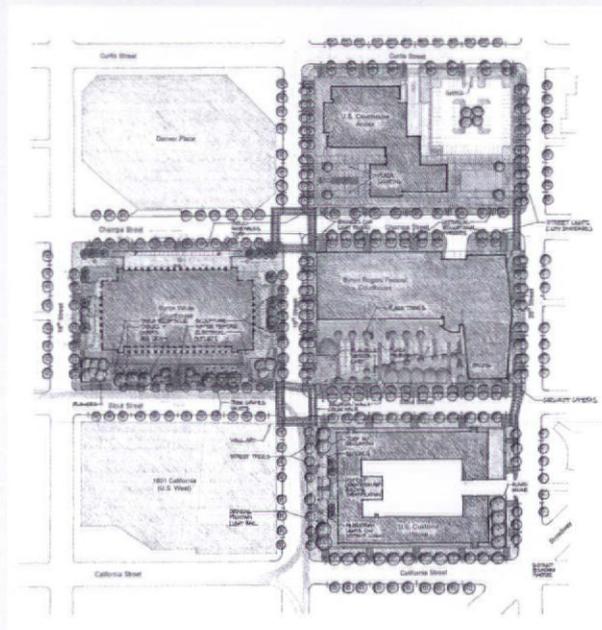
While the initial focus will be on connecting the DOE plaza better with the museums, GSA hopes that talks will eventually include other plazas and parks along Maryland Avenue. Most people don't know, Kent pointed out, that that is the most direct route between the museum area and a Metrorail station.

The strategy of considering new uses for the space, and pursuing quickly implementable ideas, has caught attention, according to Tony Costa, assistant regional administrator for GSA's National Capital Region. "In the past people probably looked at the plaza from a design perspective, rather than a use perspective. That probably meant a fair amount of money to fix it, and people might not have wanted to go down that road.

If we talk about programming, there is hope that they will see an opportunity."

### Cultivating Whole Places

In one sense, the center's projects in Denver, Fort Worth and Washington are simple acts of constituency building—forging relationships that address the challenges of making good places. Then, ongoing management strategies are put in



Preliminary draft of Denver's Federal District Master Plan. Graphic: Civitas

place, and on that foundation, longer-term design interventions can be made.

In another sense, the projects are about the wonder of discovering what balance of management, design and programming will work best in each particular place. They are experiments built from the ground up, and are establishing a hopeful foundation for further accomplishments.

Together, these projects demonstrate the broadening of the federal commitment to excellence in public service design. The emphasis is not on architecture, preservation or public art per se, but on the whole being of places, the ways people use and experience them, and the ways they are related to the larger city.

"This is a chance for our people to be more proud of our buildings. And, to some extent, I hope it can make the public at large feel better about government," Prouty said.

## Failing Malls: Getting to the Heart of the Issues

Steven Bodzin, Ellen Greenberg

CONGRESS  
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One task of the Congress for the New Urbanism is to help fix the biggest errors in conventional development. One challenge that cries out for research and creative solutions is dead malls.

It's tough for New Urbanists to find infill sites big enough to incorporate the full range of New Urbanist principles, including design, circulation and mixed use. But the search for sites has yielded a possible treasure trove of redevelopment opportunities: the obsolete shopping centers (which CNU has termed "greyfields"), that mar urban landscapes from coast to coast. Unfortunately these malls pose potential redevelopment problems. For the past year, CNU has been working with retail and development experts to find ways to build New Urbanist neighborhoods on greyfield sites.

Greyfields are generally in center cities or first-ring suburbs. These cities tend to have great transportation connections, and are often in need of new development—perhaps a real downtown, perhaps housing. According to Victor Dover of Dover Kohl Associates, New Urbanist mall reconstruction is a matter of "turning the mall inside out." The goal is to give buildings and storefronts street faces with actual addresses. The mall should connect with its surroundings, rather than isolating itself behind a parking lot. Civic space with public events provides a reason for outsiders to visit the neighborhood, and residences guarantee a twenty-four-hour human presence. The new neighborhood does not have to be dominated by shopping—it doesn't even have to have retail space.

The CNU study focuses on regional malls, defined as having 35 or more stores, generally with more than 400,000 square feet of gross

leasable area—because of their size and sphere of influence. Elected officials, mall owners, retail tenants and developers are painfully aware of the toll that mall failures take on their towns and cities. New Urbanists in particular see the opportunity to redesign and rebuild on these large infill sites as a chance to improve communities with projects that incorporate New Urbanist principles. CNU's task is to find out how these opportunities can be realized.

CNU has completed several steps in its ongoing study. The initial efforts included a 1999 study proposal by CNU members Mark Falcone, Will Fleissig and Todd Zimmerman. Fleissig and Rick Peiser held a studio at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (CNU) to investigate design strategies. CNU also commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers' Global Real Estate Research Group (PWC) to identify financial and geographic characteristics of troubled malls.

The Harvard studio, held in fall 1999, examined four declining retail properties in California, Colorado and New York, and offered solutions for reinvestment. Notably, the studio's analysis demonstrated that New Urbanist revitalization requires public subsidy, most frequently provided in the form of assistance in purchasing ground leases and upgrading infrastructure.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers study examined a group of 150 malls identified through an initial screening that used sales per square foot as a preliminary indicator of greyfield status. Using a publicly available database, PWC went on to identify and quantify the symptoms associated with mall decline—symptoms that affect between 300 and 600 troubled malls nationwide.



Above: Cinderella City Mall,  
Englewood, Colo., which has  
since been partially redeveloped  
as part of a mixed-use civic,  
residential and retail center

Below: Crossroads Mall,  
Boulder, Colo.

Photos courtesy  
Continuum Partners



Plaza Pasadena, which once won architectural design awards, is being torn down. The mall had closed off a street that comprised a main axis of Pasadena's historic civic center plan and blocked a view of Pasadena's Civic Auditorium, the terminus of an important axis. Photo: Stefanos Polyzoides.



Sketch of Paseo Colorado, which will replace the former mall, showing re-established street connection and view to the Civic Auditorium, the terminus. Graphic: Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut and Kuhn.

### Making the Case

The pwc results show that greyfield mall properties have generally suffered from disinvestment and fierce competition from newer, bigger malls nearby. Though the need for infusing these troubled properties with new life is obvious, it is less clear that there is a compelling case for New Urbanist approaches to revitalization. In fact, pwc's findings related to competition and disinvestment could be taken as a call for improved maintenance and modernization, rather than the more fundamental changes required to create true New Urbanist neighborhoods on mall sites.

We believe a New Urbanist approach would result in enduring value for both owners and host communities—in contrast to the largely cosmetic changes that create the now-popular town-center style retail malls. New Urbanist convictions, however, have to withstand the skepticism of many

within the shopping center industry. At a CNU presentation to the International Council of Shopping Center's Research Advisory (ICSC) Task Force in September, 2000, an ICSC member asked how a New Urbanist model would differ from conventional malls in its ability to withstand competition and escape obsolescence. Others asked how a model that requires many years for full development can provide the near-term financial returns that satisfy investors.

New Urbanist research needs to respond convincingly to these and related questions. Like any researchers, we are obliged to consider the complex dynamics that create problems and offer the potential for change, and to subject our findings to professional and scholarly critique. The greyfield mall study is proceeding to do both.

As the study continues, we will be working on parallel tracks. On one, we will advance our

## Diagnosing a Greyfield

understanding of the strategies needed to stimulate mall redevelopment generally. For example, there might be legal or financial mechanisms that can speed greyfield conversion. We will pursue this research through further work by PwC, which will conduct a number of detailed case studies of greyfield mall properties to identify the public and private sector actions that are needed as catalysts for change.

At the same time, we will document successful New Urbanist greyfield revitalizations. We will track the status and performance of New Urbanist greyfield redevelopments and will document their design features. We also hope to investigate how these models of re-use stand up over the long term.

The eventual goal of the study is clear: we want to replace greyfield blight with real neighborhoods. We hope to compile enough useful data and expertise so that developers can work with greyfields, with much less risk than currently exists.

*Steven Bodzin is communications director and Ellen Greenberg is research director for the Congress for the New Urbanism.*

What is mall decline? You know it when you see it. But for would-be mall healers, it helps to know the symptoms of a troubled mall. The CNU/PricewaterhouseCoopers research found that greyfields are distinguished from healthy malls by a myriad of characteristics.

*Small size.* In general, the factor that best predicts a mall's success is size. The bigger the mall, the more it can pull in shoppers. Among regional malls (those with more 400,000 square feet of gross leasable area), greyfields tend to be smaller than healthy malls. The 150 worst-performing malls average 500,000 s.f., while the best-performing average 900,000 s.f.

*Advancing age, disinvestment.* There is no correlation between age and sales per square foot. However, continued strong sales require active management and reinvestment. The average worst-performing mall was last renovated in 1991, as compared to 1999 for the best-performing. One reason for this might be ownership; greyfield malls are disproportionately owned by private firms and partnerships, which might have less access to investment capital than publicly traded companies.

*Less affluent neighborhoods.* Greyfield malls tend to be in neighborhoods where income growth is slower than in the region as a whole.

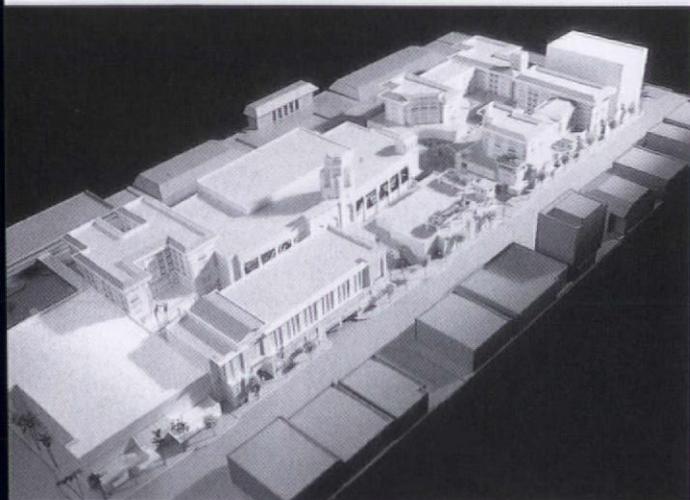
*Stiff competition.* On average, a greyfield mall competes with 22 other shopping centers, containing 2.3 million s.f. of space, within five miles.

*Middle or low-end stores.* Greyfield malls tend to have discount commodity-based department stores or drug stores as anchor tenants, rather than upscale department stores.

*Vacancy.* Low rents can bring high occupancy, masking a mall's decline. Still, among the greyfield malls studied, occupancies dipped as low as 52 percent, while healthy malls are generally in the low to high 90s.

More information about the study is available on-line at <http://www.cnu.org/malls>.

—Steven Bodzin, Ellen Greenberg



Model of Paseo Colorado  
Courtesy Ehrenkranz, Eckstut  
and Kuhn

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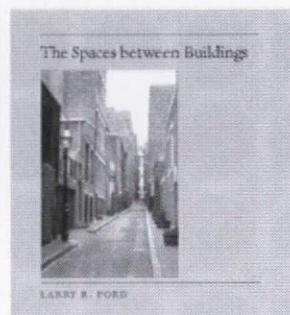
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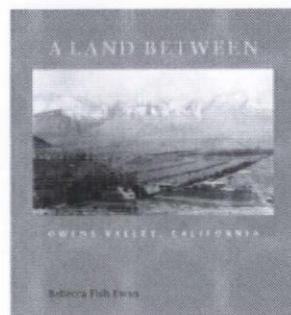
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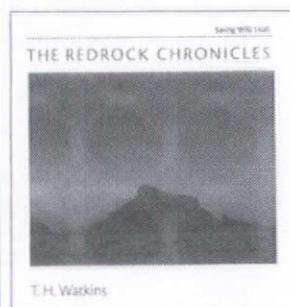
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