leadership awards

residential

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top firm winner michael pyatok delivers high-design housing to low-income residents

> hall of fame: hugh newell jacobsen / rising star: estes/twombly architects

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residential architect / june 2002 CONTENTS



Affordable housing's dedicated champion, Pyatok Architects, wins this year's Top Firm award. Cover and top photo of Michael Pyatok by Robert Cardin. Other 2002 Leadership Awards winners are Hugh Newell Jacobsen, Hall of Fame (center photo by Max Hirshfeld), and Estes/Twombly Architects, Rising Star (above photo of Jim Estes and Peter Twombly by Bob Gothard).

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For nearly two decades, Pyatok Architects has designed affordable housing in some of the least affordable communities in the country and it's done so beautifully. By Cheryl Weber

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Instantly recognizable, abidingly elegant, Hugh Newell Jacobsen's Modernism pays its respects to the past while living solidly in the present. *By Bruce D. Snider*

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After establishing itself as a top-flight do-all firm, Estes/Twombly Architects sets its sights on smaller and more daring work. *By Meghan Drueding*

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"What is the victory of a cat on a hot on it, I guess, as long as she can..."



tin roof? I wish I knew. Just staying – Margaret, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

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When the great playwright Tennessee Williams wrote Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, he created formidable, enduring roles. But, when the Columbus, Mississippi, Chamber of Commerce decided to restore his birth home, one thing was clear – Williams' front



{Tennessee Williams' home ~ Columbus, Mississippi}

porch hadn't been built of the same stuff as his



characters. Restorers looked into possible materials. Most would require aggressive maintenance, something the Columbus Chamber of Commerce really wanted to

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architect Vitruvius. With a strong residential focus, Peter's designs are as functional as they are stunning. How do Corian[®] and Zodiag[®] surfaces live up to such principles? Quite well. "They stand the test of time aesthetically and structurally," Pennoyer

says. "And they're available in a wide range of unique colors and

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from the editor

walking on water

do your clients expect a great house or a perfect one?

by s. claire conroy

f you love houses—and I'll take a wild guess you do—you really ought to stop by Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater while it's under renovation. What's more, your clients should take a look too. I was there for the first time just recently, at a preview sponsored by PPG Architectural Finishes (thank you very much), and I came away with two very strong impressions.

The first was a renewed appreciation for the power and potential of custom architectural design. Really, how often does a production builder ask a customer whether they'd like to keep that lovely boulder on site and build the living room around it? The way the architecture is built into and out of the land is the greatest strength of Fallingwater.

It's also the greatest weakness. Right now, if you visit, you can see uncovered portions of the sagging cantilevers. You can view cracks caused by structural miscalculations in the house's design. And you can glimpse interior water seepage from weeping rocks and flat, gutterless roofs. But, they seemed to me forgivable inadequacies. This house is a living, breathing organism—with all the failings inherent in such creatures. It's a triumph of architectural invention. From this comes my second impression: Something can be successful without being perfect.

Would that all your clients could see that too. Granted, they should expect a measure of function and personal safety in their house. But they also need to understand that each custom home is a grand experiment, cooked up between them and their architect. Perfection really is too much to ask if the primary goal is to stretch, tweak, or reinvent the paradigm.

Architects often use the idea of the cost-quality-size triangle to explain to their clients how the important elements of a custom home work together. Presuming the budget is fixed, you can have more size only if you sacrifice quality; or, you can have more quality if you reduce the size of the house. I think that geometry is a little misleading or, more accurately, incomplete. Emphasizing quality is generally a good thing—quality of materials, construction, and so forth-but it may also set the expectation of perfection among clients.



Most people associate high quality with a lack of flaws.

Perhaps a better shape to conjure is a square: cost, quality, size, and creativity. If the house is simply a lovely new box, with beautiful but tried and true materials, built on a flat building pad, then the creativity quotient may be low and problems should be few. But if the house wraps itself into a hillside and dips its toes in a rushing stream, well then, maybe the homeowners should expect to apply a higher level of maintenance and scrutiny to the house over the years.

While he occupied Fallingwater, Edgar Kaufmann Sr. regularly measured the deflections of the terraces to make sure they weren't

Mark Robert Halper

in danger of collapse. Unfortunately, its subsequent steward, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, wasn't quite as vigilant. The conservancy is now making up for lost time with an \$11.5-million restoration that should shore up the building for a good long time. It's a labor of love, because Fallingwater-although flawed-is one of the best houses ever designed and built. It is so much greater than perfect. ra

Questions or comments? Call me: 202.736.3312; write me: S. Claire Conroy, *residential architect*, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005; or e-mail me: cconroy@hanley-wood.com.



lett_rs

keep those cards, letters, and e-mails coming, folks.

en garde on gardner

hame on you for featuring an architect and a philosophy that disrespect the environment, flaunt sitespecific design, and ignore the importance of creating communities ("Mr. Plan Man," January[endash]February, page 44).

This cover and feature article glorify Donald Gardner's success in making money. Just because people buy products does not mean the products are good, ethical, or healthy. "Give them what they want" is not a forward-thinking approach to improving our built environments; it is a thinly veiled justification for making money without being accountable.

The architect admits that his work is looked down upon by some design professionals because he designs speculative house plans. In fact, I respect the goal of providing excellent, sustainable, well-designed plans for people to adapt to their local landscapes and communities. However, his interpretation of creating house plans is hollow, regurgitated, and irresponsible.

There is no merit in an architect who ignores our profession's tenets to use

natural resources responsibly and to cultivate livable communities.

Mr. Plan Man does not refer to sustainability, to environmental impact, or to the social ramifications of his "100,000 houses stretched across the U.S." and the wider world. This is a disgusting and horrifying image to me, given the sketches of his homes.

I say shame on you for swallowing this man's marketing hook, line, and sinker, without any critical thought or commentary. You show your magazine to be out of touch with the increasing interest in sustainability among the general world population.

Genevieve Urban Ratcliff Architects Emeryville, Calif.

write to take issue with Messrs. Kaufman and Graybeal, who wrote letters expressing puzzlement and disturbance about your choice of subject matter ("Letters," April, page 15).

In more than 20 years of practicing architecture as a service business, I have come to see firsthand how much damage the elitist and condescending attitude of practitioners such as these two gentlemen have done to



this profession. The very reason that Mr. Gardner and other plan providers exist is because the architectural community has failed miserably to understand the needs of the vast middleclass segment of the housing market, and has failed to participate in directing the growth and character of that market.

By valiantly trying to save humanity from itself and make it aesthetically safe for the cognoscenti, the architectural profession has chosen to cater to the esoteric taste of our cultural elites and virtually ignored the huge market of the middle-class home-buying public. We chose instead, as a profession, to concentrate on the tiny niche market of residential design where we can showcase our talents without having to worry about such things as affordability, buildability, and practicality. We are still busy building "houses for Mother" while the typical

residential developer cranks out houses for the rest of the world.

It should have been the mission of the architectural profession as a whole to address this market. The problems of "suburban sprawl" and unimaginative design for mass housing have been around since World War II. It does no one any service to come around now and criticize those who have recognized this market and chosen to serve it.

We can argue about Mr. Gardner and his aesthetic all day long, but he and his colleagues are not the problem. The real problem is that our profession has lost its way by refusing to stay involved in the mundane, prosaic activity of creating a housing base for the middle class and its middleclass tastes, warts and all.

This is really a shame. The middle-class market is huge, and many an architect could make a very nice living serving it, provided there is a willingness to set ego aside and serve the market the way a country doctor serves his patients: by solving problems based on the client's needs.

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esidential design is an often-overlooked specialty within the architecture profession. The world is fond of praising grand buildings commissioned by governments, corporations, and



institutions, but regularly snubs smaller, quieter structures designed for individuals. How-

ever, in the case of

Portrait: Reiner Blunck

this year's Pritzker Architecture Prize, it took notice of a champion of environmentally sensitive, regionally appropriate custom homes, Australian architect Glenn Murcutt.

In Australia, clients wait years for a house by Glenn Murcutt. Shown left to right: the Federicks House exterior and interior, 1981–1982; the Magney House, 1986–1990; and the Marika-Alderton House, 1991–1994.



Photos: Max Dupain (above, center, and right); Glenn Murcutt (far right)

practice residential design almost exclusively, he does so exclusively as well: He is a sole practitioner. He prefers a small, Sydney-based shop and small projects, allowing him greater freedom to experiment with issues of site, climate, program, and materials. With dozens of award-winning houses and a long list of clients awaiting his services, those experiments are obviously largely successful. Jorge Silvetti, a member of the Pritzker jury and chairman of Harvard University's Graduate School of Design,

Not only does Murcutt



notes that, "His work does not fall into the easy sentimentalism of a chauvinistic revisitation of the vernacular. Rather, a considered, serious look would trace his buildings' lineage to modernism, to modern architecture. ..."

Although he works by himself on the other side of the world from most star





Anthony Browell

architects, 66-year-old Murcutt keeps fresh and stimulated by teaching and lecturing around the globe.

The 26th architect and the first Australian to win the Pritzker, Murcutt receives \$100,000 in prize money and a bronze medallion based on designs by Louis Sullivan. —*s. claire conroy*



residential architect / june 2002

writing on the wall

ust because something's functional doesn't mean it needs to be homely. Braille Tiles by Toronto, Ontario-based designer Dennis Lin are so beautiful, tactile, and, well, communicative, you may want to spec them simply for their appearance.

Offered by Klinik in Toronto, the 28 tiles represent each character of the braille alphabet plus blank and # signs, allowing you to create words or phrases. The 6-by-12-inch wall tiles are made from cast polymer and are finished with a gel-coat surface. The tiles can be affixed to walls with the same adhesive used for ceramic tile, but they can also be attached to other surfaces—indoors or outdoors—with the company's mounting



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ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN MUSEUM LOS ANGELES

1 a star

l.a. story

rchitect Stephen Kanner never imagined he'd be attending the opening of Los Angeles' new Architecture + Design Museum barely a year after he proposed the concept: "We had about 3,000 people at the opening [in January], so there's a real desire to have something like this in the city." Kanner, director of the Los Angeles AIA, credits the museum's rapid development to a donation of



Courtesy Frank O. Gehry & Associates

rent-free space in the city's historic Bradbury Building and in-kind contributions underwriting its conversion into an exhibit hall.

Because admission is free, the A+D Museum will continue to depend on charitable support to reach its goal of four shows a year—three devoted to architecture and one to design. "Our mission," Kanner explains, "is to tell the story behind each project, so the public might better understand the architectural projects of L.A."

The A+D Museum's opening exhibition is a trilogy of shows titled "Urban Innovations." Part one, "Urban Innovations: Shrine to Junipero Serra," ran from January to April and displayed entries for a local cathedral-design competition. Part two, "Urban Innovations: L.A. Competitions," which surveys significant architecture generated by and for the Southern California region over the past decade, runs through June 6. The last segment of the trilogy opens June 20 with "Urban Innovations: Next Phase: 2x8." It will feature selected works by two students from each of the eight architecture/design schools based in the area. For more information, visit www.aplusd.org or call 213.620.9961.—*shelley d. hutchins*

home front

calendar

good design 2002

chicago athenaeum: museum of architecture and design entry deadline: july 1



Any product produced and/or designed since 2000 is eligible, including furniture, housewares, lighting fixtures, appliances, and textiles. Scoot, designed by Johan Liden and Yves Behar, of fuseproject, San Francisco, was one of the 2001 winners. The entry fee is \$150 per entry, and winning submissions will be exhibited from October 2002 to January 2003. For details, call 847.895.3950 or visit www.chi-athenaeum.org.



laboratories

canadian centre for architecture, montreal through september 15

In the wake of September 11, the CCA has overturned its 2002 exhibition schedule and organized this unusual initiative. Installations by six young Montreal-based architecture firms in collaboration with curators, artists, critics, and the public express ideas of how people may live in the future. Interactive guided visits encourage museum visitors to comment on the

Michel Legendre, © Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal

> exhibition. In addition, a series of symposia, family workshops, roundtables, and lectures invites further discourse. Shown: installation by Atelier Big City. Visit www.cca.qc.ca or call 514.939.7026 for further details.

out of the ordinary: the architecture and design of robert venturi, denise scott brown and associates

museum of contemporary art, san diego june 2-september 8

The first retrospective on the 35-year partnership of husband-and-wife team Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. The exhibition contains 250 models, drawings, photographs, videos, and objects regarding such works as

the Vanna Venturi House, 1959–1964 (shown). The exhibition is on display in the museum's La Jolla location, which was renovated by the firm in 1996. Call 858.454.3541 or visit www.mcasandiego.org.



Rollin La France, courtesy Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates

housebroken

rena bransten gallery, san francisco june 13-july 20



This group exhibition explores the materials and ideas that make up the concepts of home and domesticity. Included are sculpture, drawings, photography, furniture, floor coverings, and wallpaper designed by artists and architects such as Bruce Tomb, An Te Liu, and Kate Pocrass. For gallery hours, call 415.982.3292 or visit www.renabranstengallery.com.

pcbc 2002

moscone center, san francisco june 25–28

Choose from more than 70 educational programs with tracks in design, business, marketing, construction, and land development. AIA learning credits are now available at this year's trade show and conference. Keynote speakers are Steve Wynn, Francis Ford Coppola (shown), Jim Collins, and J. Walker Smith. To register, visit www.pcbc.com or call 800.956.SHOW.

sustainable city 2002

segovia, spain july 3–5

The second international conference on urban regeneration and sustainability presents architects, city planners, and environmental engineers with opportunities to discover recent advances in the field and collaborate with experts from around the world. Visit www. wessex.ac.uk/conferences or call 44.0.238.029.3223 for additional information.

continuing exhibits

Ten Shades of Green, through June 29, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, Calif., 949.759.1122; An Eye for Detail: Architectural Elements from the Permanent Collection, through August 25, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 404.733.4400; Skin: Surface, Substance, and Design, through September 15, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, New York City, 212.849.8400; The Chair: Sculptural Form in Wood 1880–1960, through January 12, 2003, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 612.870.3200.

-shelley d. hutchins





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have you figured out yet who'll share your air rights?

by cheryl weber

ichard Winston, AIA, and William Becker, AIA, are only in their 50s, but they've seen the handwriting on the wall. The two founded Becker and Winston Architects 14 years ago in Philadelphia, building a firm specializing in residential and institutional work into a thriving enterprise that supports 20 people. As the firm grew during the '90s boom, the partners' management tasks began taking them away from the passion that drew them into business in the first placedesign and relating to clients. Simultaneously, some of the firm's rising stars were running out of air rights. Those factors, and the growing recognition that the firm needed to be reshuffled to ensure its continuity, led the partners on a soulsearching quest for the meaning of promotions, ownership, and Becker and Winston itself.

"There was a firm culture we had to come to recognize," Winston says. "Perhaps more important, we had to understand how to assemble a larger decisionmaking body and have it work effectively."

The biggest step for a first-generation firm,

28



David Plunkert

whether it's a sole proprietorship or partners who've chosen each other, is figuring out how to widen the inner circle. Even if sharing financial ownership is far down the road, to be competitive you have to keep talented people. Ralph Steinglass, FAIA, founder of the Manhattan management consulting firm Teambuilders, says it's not enough simply to pay deserving employees higher salaries, which may be difficult to sustain in slow years, or confer titles that too often are empty promises.

"In some offices, there's a skepticism that comes with titles," Steinglass says.

"They give the impression of moving up, but they don't mean the people receiving them know more about how the firm operates. The issue of giving staff increasing responsibility, authority, and recognition is even more critical now than before, because people seem to be *continued on page 30* OUNTAIN LANDSCAPE, BY HERMAN FUESCHEL • ROOF BY CERTAINTEED

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practice

looking for more of a stake in the firms they're part of."

Becker and Winston is still hashing out its longterm succession plan, but recently it put a rung in the corporate ladder by promoting three project managers to associates. The partners are guiding their investments by involving them in marketing and sales calls. The associates parcel out weekly staff assignments and interview job candidates. They participate in strategy discussions about what kinds of jobs to pursue and help update the vision statement every year. "We wanted to give them a certain amount of policy-making decisions and build up a training period," Winston says. "They're

not only in a position to bring in jobs, but also to say, 'Is this really in line with our goals for the firm?""

Becker and Winston discussed the changes openly with all its employees, laying out the road map for getting ahead. They know that promotion is based not just on years of service, but also on their ability to work on different levels, such as relating to clients and consultants and growing into support roles for management tasks. Winston says. Meanwhile, he and Becker are working on defining how the firm will measure and share profits, the criteria for offering ownership, and a structure in which their

continued on page 32

firm for sale

hen should you start putting together a transitionof-ownership plan for your firm? Management consultant Mike Hall, Poulsbo, Wash., says 15 years prior to retirement is optimal, though it can be pulled off in 10 years. Rather than hiring only a tax attorney, Hall recommends starting with a management consultant who specializes in design and engineering companies. That's because most tax attorneys base their advice on their own industry. Accounting firms, for example, sell at one times annual revenues. Architecture practices sell for less than that, Hall says-between 30 percent and 60 percent of net revenues.

When you're setting up the basis for how shares are offered, the goal is to come up with an evenhanded approach that works for everyone and whatever the eventual size of your firm. "You don't outgrow it," Hall says. "The system is driven by ratios and percentages, not numbers, and it's not tailored to one person."

Karen Cooper, of Cooper Robertson Architects, New

continued on page 32

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practice

young associates will be able to purchase ownership by deferring profits.

a piece of the rock

In offices with broad-based ownership opportunities, not all shareholders are expected to become partners. Nor does holding company stock necessarily translate to voting power. But in most architecture firms, the offer sends a message to individual employees that they're on the right track. "When somebody owns even a little piece of the pie, there's a little swelling of pride, a feeling of their fate being in their own hands," says Kirk Gastinger, FAIA, Gastinger Walker Harden Architects,

Kansas City, Mo. He and his partners began offering shares to some of their people 15 years ago. Now, 11 of the 30 employees own various-sized pieces of the firm, which means they are skilled enough to attract new clients, manage multiple projects and team members, and perform officewide responsibilities such as hiring and heading up continuing education.

"If I thought of firms as being organized either militarily or around a family, we'd fall on the family side," Gastinger says. "In our office, 'owner' is a fairly fluid title. Our people know what the path to ownership requires, because I talk

continued on page 34

York City, says writing a succession plan was a positive thing, because it forced her firm to get its accounting in order. And once the offers went out, the reception from employees proved they'd done it right. "We were shocked that people had the resources to buy in," she says. "But we do pay a salary plus bonus, and we'd made the offering around bonus time. We try to make salaries and bonuses healthy enough that if people choose to participate, they have the resources to do it, and we don't have to finance it."

Your share price must indeed be supported by company cash flow. "Does your firm make a good profit and pay employees so that they're well-off enough to buy the offers you're making? Can they buy it affordably over a period of time? Can the system work over a generation?" Hall asks. "There's a huge spreadsheet that demonstrates how it will work, a financial wheel that has to turn round and round. Next, you write the legal document to support that. Then, you deal with the leadership and management issues to make succession happen."-c.w.

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practice

about it during performance reviews. It happens two ways—they'll come to us saying they're getting ready to make a career choice that is more secure, or we'll see their star rising pretty fast and pursue them. Ownership entails increased responsibilities, but we're really looking for a person who's continuing to mature."

Mike Hall endorses that methodical but low-key approach. The Seattle-area management consultant, whose clients include the large Memphis, Tenn., firm Looney Ricks Kiss, says the criteria for offering shares in a firm don't have to be formal. "Look for good design, good client relationships, project management or budget performance, and people who can mentor and motivate staff," Hall says. "No one has everything, but put together a team that has all those skills. In the end, all you have to know is that that's the person you want working for you instead of [for] someone else."

Hall recommends a system whereby two-thirds of the annual profits are paid out to the partners and onethird to staff, with more going to the people you've targeted as eventual shareholders. "The owners of a firm will either make an employee an offer or not make them an offer," he says. "Not paying someone a bonus, or not giving a stock option, is a signal, and those signals are loud and very good at correcting behavior." In the healthiest firms, he says, offers of ownership are often made to the loyal receptionist, the marketing coordinator, or the junior architect who doesn't have a license. A common rule of thumb is that 45 percent of your employees may be shareholders, and another 10 percent are principals.

the inner circle

Over the long haul, that arrangement is like a live-in courtship between partners and promising employees. It allows both sides to observe each other through thick and thin and make decisions about the relationship incrementally, so the outcome is better for both. "The partners have been making an offer every year, the employee is choosing to reinvest the bonus, and suddenly he or she is invited to the inner circle, for nothing more than buying another block of stock," Hall says.

As its in-house talent slowly matured, Cooper Robertson Architects, a 15year-old New York City firm, recently made that leap. Two members were made partners, bringing the total to nine in an office of 85 employees. Cooper Robertson positions itself all over the board, from highend single- and multifamily housing to new-town plan*continued on page 36*





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practice

ning and educational facilities-projects that can take years to complete. "In the work we've won over the years, we'd competed against firms that were not a full generation ahead of us," says principal Karen Cooper. "Yet, on several occasions, we heard that those competitors seemed older and tired. I think people do begin to wonder if they should hire firms with people in their 70s, especially in this competitive New York market."

Cooper Robertson spent the better part of a year crafting its future. Part of the discussions centered on whether the firm should merge with another company. But the partners decided there was a strong enough tier of people under them to sustain it, and so they adopted a studio structure that opened up eight leadership positions. One studio is responsible for small specialty buildings and newtown planning; the other takes on larger architectural commissions such as highrises and other urban infill projects. The top tier of each studio functions as a team, with one person overseeing three managers responsible for marketing, business, and technical issues. The shift is invisible to outsiders, but it allows the firm to plump up the bottom line while providing a flexible system for advancement. "It's a management tool that gets decisions made closer to the

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drawing table," Cooper says. "The partners aren't making decisions on every project."

a merging of minds

Two years ago, Fox and Fowle Architects, another Manhattan firm, brought two new principals on board when it merged with Jambhekar Strauss Architects, also of Manhattan, But it faced its first major hurdle in 1996, when three inhouse architects were invited to join the founding partners, Bob Fox, AIA, and Bruce Fowle, FAIA. One of those named principal was Sylvia Smith, AIA. "I had pretty good mentoring from Bruce Fowle, who has great talent and a strong ethical

base," Smith says. "As I did major work with him, his clients became my clients. He said, 'I want people to call Fox and Fowle because they want to work with you.' There was always an understanding that he was cultivating people to take over for him."

To back up their own intuition, the principals worked with a management consultant who interviewed each of the candidates, testing their entrepreneurial spirit. Questions focused not just on their accomplishments but on who had the stomach for handling crises. In the final discussions during a weekend retreat, Smith says, "there was a catalytic *continued on page 38*

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moment when the consultant asked us, 'What would you do if, God forbid, something happened to Bruce and Bob?' The three of us got on the edge of our seats and said, 'OK, here are the steps we'd take.' Right away, that reflected on the dynamic of the group. One person who didn't have that dynamic said, 'You know, I don't belong here. I don't think that way. I need someone to guide me.""

Fox and Fowle also put to practice their long-held belief in openness and collegiality. They called a meeting with the other associates to work out who would succeed to

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partner and who would not, and the principals to be were asked to talk about their aspirations for the firm. "It certainly was tumultuous," Fowle says. "We had in writing the criteria as to what was appropriate for senior associate vs. associate, but for partner, it's mostly subjective criteria. There was some painful fallout."

"It was a pretty intensive process," Smith agrees. But in the end, "there was an acknowledgment and appreciation of that group among the others. This office puts a lot of emphasis on community and mutual respect. There's no star system here."

According to Mike Hall, partners make a fundamental mistake when they assume they're the best people to choose their successors.

"The leadership is really chosen by the next generation," he says. "If your decision isn't supported by the people left behind, the day you retire is their last day."

"I've seen people who are excellent designers and who keep clients happy still not made principal until they dealt with the issue of how they work with staff," Hall adds. "To make someone a partner who isn't good at empowering staff is the beginning of the firm's backward slide. It will reverse its success as soon as it gets a partner who's in it for himself."

So how do you cultivate a second generation that sticks together? Both Bruce Fowle and Richard Winston use the Myers-Briggs test to analyze the different personality

continued on page 40



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types on the management team and understand what makes each other tick. "It gave us a tremendous understanding of what are the corporate rules for each of us given our proclivities,"

Fowle says. About once a year, as new associates rise, the group checks in with the same facilitator, who introduces them to Myers-Briggs concepts and ideas about what causes conflict, how to communicate, and how to listen actively.

Becker and Winston is continuing to work with Steinglass on interpreting Myers-Briggs test results. Winston believes it's crucial



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www.superiorclay.com PO. BOX 352 • Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683 • 740.922.4122 • 800.848.6166 to understand how your peers make decisions. Otherwise, he says, you're in for surprises. "You'll have people who don't come along with what you thought was consensus, people who follow their own agendas, not through ill will but lack of recognition of differences. If some people are more intuitive and others are more analytical, how do you get those two styles to mesh and come up with a collective decision? I think a firm needs to know how each individual fits into the core decision-making culture."

However incrementally it happens, the act of letting go of something you've built with your own hands is emotionally laden. Will the people who fill your shoes-and perhaps use your namehave the same instincts, the same design philosophy, and carry on the same culture? Will you feel comfortable being there as a founder, without having full control?

Fowle has faced those questions. But he puts them into perspective. "Now, we're in halfway mode where a tremendous burden is being picked up and I can focus on things I like to do," he says. "There's always the conflict. These people are trying to make a name for themselves after I'm gone. It's a balancing act to make sure they get enough fulfillment and recognition, and I get the satisfaction of participating in meaningful work." ra

Cheryl Weber is a contributing writer in Severna Park, Md.

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LONG LIVE THE HOME



Circle no. 6

early every issue of our magazine highlights an impressive architect. Yet, once a year we single out three architects or firms for special accolades. We call this editors' pick our Leadership Awards, and they come in three flavors: Top Firm, Hall of Fame, and Rising Star. Our winners are more than impressive, they are exemplary. They set standards that honor themselves and their profession. Please join us in congratulating them on their achievement.

leadership awards

top firm: pyatok architects

in a country where most professionals strive to do well, michael pyatok wants nothing more than to do good.

by cheryl weber

ome years ago in a nice Seattle suburb, Pyatok Architects designed a group of condominiums for low-income renters. As construction on the buildings neared completion, people would drive by and ask the

crew when the condos were going up for sale. "We'd love to buy one of these," they'd confide, "but we're worried about that stuff next door." In contrast to the firm's beautifully proportioned and detailed buildings, the neighborhood's market-rate housing appeared prosaic.



Michael Pyatok is interested not just in doing top-notch design for the poor, but also in helping them create communities they can invest in long term.

It is not unusual for architect Michael Pyatok's subsidized-housing projects to be mistaken for upscale condos. Pyatok, FAIA, who heads up a staff of 27 architects and planners in Seattle and Oakland, Calif., turns class discrimination on its head by designing below-market housing that would blend in with the best-designed residential developments. In the past decade, the firm has won more than 50 local and national design awards. But just as important, Pyatok is a

savvy politician. He is a

master at overcoming zoning



restrictions, the fears of suburbanites, and the chaos of a poor community itself to create a local infrastructure of services and income opportunities, so that tenants cannot only live safely and comfortably, but also invest in their surroundings.

"There's a political role to design," Pyatok says, "and that is the message it sends to the people living there and the generations afterward who live around it. If it's done well, it's like saying all those folks who collaborated to make the place—the community, the lenders, the developer, the insurance company, the architect—had a high degree of respect for the people getting housing."

the man with the vision

As a low-income-housing advocate, Pyatok is uncompromising in his commitment to clients. When the Oakland Community Organization asked his firm to help rezone and develop a five-acre site across from an abandoned cannery in the Jingletown neighborhood, it was interested in not a fast-track Section 8 project, but one that hardworking families could live with long term. It took eight years to navigate the bureaucratic zoning and funding process and build the project. Pyatok hosted design sessions at the local Catholic church, hiring bilingual architects to make sure he could communicate with all the residents of the 100-year-old neighborhood, many of them of Portuguese and Mexican descent.

The result, in 1997, yielded 53 units, softly colored and articulated with bays, trellised balconies, and clean grids of windows. On the smaller homes, buyers were provided with blueprints for adding an attic bedroom and bath. Some homes have adjacent spaces for future garages with a bedroom above. Others have living rooms on the second floor and a bedroom on the first floor to allow for a home-based business. And many are paired as duplexes to blend in with the neighborhood's single-family Victorian and Craftsman-style homes.

"Mike was the person who believed in our vision and said it could be done when we felt like industry



Architectural photography: Michael Pyatok





Photos: Russell Abraham (top and above); Michael Pyatok (opposite)

Twenty sources of funding went into Swan's Marketplace, a historic landmark in downtown Oakland. The complex includes a fresh-food market hall, restaurants, stores, co-housing condos, low-income rental units, live/work spaces, offices, and a children's museum. and the banks turned their backs on us," says Jingletown organizer Susana Villarreal. Later, the cannery was transformed into a retail shopping center, and a charter school followed. "Because of our relationship with Mike, the next projects came in," she says. "Mike made sure we got things right. He was like a regular guy to us. People grew fond of him."

Pyatok is that rare species of architect who eschews the star power that comes with high-end commissions. But he hasn't escaped celebrity status in his chosen niche. Tasneem Chowdhury, coordinator of the affordable-housing program at the University of Illinois' City Design Center, Chicago, likes to call Pyatok the "rock star" of affordable housing. "He is to affordable housing what Frank Gehry is to museums," she says. "He can do a lot with little money to achieve a very upscale look." Professor Jim Stockard, curator of Harvard Design School's Loeb Fellowship, which Pyatok received in 1983, agrees: "Michael gives up nothing to the people who'd consider themselves designers with a capital 'D.'"

But Pyatok is not exclusively an architect of affordable housing. His other projects range from Oakland City Hall Plaza to Potrero Square Lofts the conversion of a warehouse in San Francisco to market-rate housing—to Swan's Marketplace, a mixed-use historic public market. Currently in construction is Landmark Place, an elegant, \$12-million condominium project in the heart of Oakland's Victorian district.



Four years ago, the firm designed some student housing with Esherick Homsey Dodge & Davis, San Francisco, which specializes in institutional work, aquariums, and high-end homes. "We had a good time working together," Pyatok says. "When I visited their offices, I marveled at their sample library and remarked that they had a completely different set from us—real wood, real marble, real granite, brick, and metals I'd never seen before. I have these brief moments of, 'Gee, what did I do with my life?' But they only last about five minutes."

education of an architect

Pyatok was deeply influenced by his upbringing in a rent-controlled tenement in Brooklyn, N.Y. His mother was a strong advocate for tenants' rights. "Despite the meager physical conditions-a density of 100 units to the acre and 600-square-foot apartments-many things about those old neighborhoods worked well," he says. Because the rent was fixed, working-class families didn't have to spend more than 25 percent of their income on housing. And with the transit system nearby, a dime could get them to a network of employment opportunities anywhere within four boroughs. Other amenities made Pyatok's neighborhood livable too. Prospect Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, was a short stroll away. And a two-block walk in any direction provided access to the drugstore, hardware store, fish and meat markets, and the local school.



At Swan's Marketplace, part of the existing roof was peeled away, exposing the network of trusses. The trusses enliven outdoor common areas between housing units (left) and indoor common areas for co-housing owners (opposite, bottom).

Says Pyatok: "Those are lessons I brought to my professional work later on."

In 1966, Pyatok finished the five-year undergraduate program in architecture at Pratt Institute. While in school, he lived at home, using a drafting board set on top of his bed, and commuted by train. "The realities of the conditions in which I was surrounded contrasted quite sharply with the kind of education I was receiving," he says, "which depicted history as a string of heroes and major institutions as the main source of architecture."

After graduating, Pyatok left home to continue studies at Harvard Design School. Professors from the Modernist movement, such as Walter Gropius, Jerzy Soltan, and José Luis Sert, reinforced his passion for addressing social-justice issues through community design. Assignments included designing affordable housing for countries around the world, researching their needs and systems of construction. "All of that was fairly eye-opening," Pyatok says. "Harvard opened up some doors in showing me intellectually what others had been thinking along those lines."

democratic design

"Each one of Pyatok's projects is unique," says Professor Jeffrey Ochsner, FAIA, who heads up the University of Washington's Department of Architecture in Seattle, where Pyatok is a tenured professor. "If he has a trademark, it's his response to "there's a political role to design, and that is the message it sends to the people living there and the generations afterward who live around it." —michael pyatok, faia



Jingletown's 53 homes for first-time buyers slip graciously into the Victorian and Craftsmanstyle neighborhood, thanks to carefully combined colors, and details such as deep eaves and picket fences. Auto/ pedestrian courts without curbs create a plaza feel.

"mike was the person who believed in our vision and said it could be done when ... industry and the banks turned their backs on us." —susana villarreal, jingletown community

organizer

the people who are being served. Because his breadth of knowledge is so deep, he can respond to what his clients know."

Pyatok is considered a trailblazer in his participatory approach to design. Under his guidance, community

groups plan their own neighborhoods using a scaled site model and a kit of parts that includes residential and nonresidential elements. For an hour, each team assembles all the ingredients for the site and a several-block radius. Then, the groups present their ideas and try to reach a consensus.

In the next workshop, they look at unit layouts, exploring the possibilities for unconventional living and working arrangements. "Maybe someone wants a space to do untidy manual labor," Pyatok says. "How does that occur so it doesn't overpower the house?" A final session plumbs attitudes about what domestic architecture should look like. "Neighborhoods with rich cultural diversity are looking for a jacket that may hark back to their origins but also fit the context of neighborhoods built in the early part of the [20th] century," Pyatok says.

Because of small budgets, the firm has had to be clever. Many of the homes are simple boxes, but the

Photos: Michael Pyatok

use of bay windows makes small rooms feel bigger and brings in more light without adding to the foundation. And they lend a sense of security by allowing the resident to step into the space and look up and down the street. The firm

also tries hard to create orderly roofscapes by collecting all the vents in the attic and bringing them up through a chimneylike cupola. "It costs a little more," Pyatok says, "but we try to hold onto those with cost savings elsewhere."

A core group of experienced and socially committed contractors makes that job a little easier. The firm prefers a negotiated bid in which the contractor is on board at the schematic stage. Engineering consultants accustomed to market rates or commercial conditions tend to overdesign, notes Pyatok. "The contractors show us ways of making savings in all those systems that don't necessarily affect the touch, feel, and look of the place."

into the future

Over the past several years, Pyatok Architects has had to tweak its own formula for profitability. The firm now seeks out institutional work, such as the



residence halls it's designing for the University of California at Berkeley. Those commissions pay 12 percent of construction costs, compared with the 6 percent to 8 percent paid by nonprofits—often too small a fee to cover community process and construction administration. The new work has

enabled Pyatok to offer paid vacation, holiday, and sick leave for the first time in the firm's 17-year history. "In order to sustain a conventional approach to salaries and benefits, we can't just do nonprofit work," he says. "Moving away from that is a concern to me and something we'll be monitoring as we go along, to make sure we don't lose sight of the primary purpose of the office, which is to help the households most in need."

Pyatok oversees the firm's design work, but he's training junior partners William Bonville, Thomas Eanes, and Peter Waller to carry on its mission and institutional memory. In another five years, Pyatok plans to have accumulated enough war stories for a second book about affordable housing. His first book, *Good Neighbors: Affordable Family Housing* (McGraw-Hill, 1996), written with Tom Jones and William Pettus, covered dozens of case studies from



around the country.

"I'd like to do another book about our own work, to try to help others achieve high-quality affordable housing," Pyatok says. "The mission for the office is to set the bar as high as we can, to encourage everyone else to realize the debt they owe to the poor for performing

work that's not well-paid but that makes the country strong."

He's optimistic about the future of affordable housing. Nonprofit corporations are patrons of architecture, he says, because they're driven to provide the best for the people they're serving. And good design is good business, because it proves to politicians and lenders that they're not decreasing others' property values. Buoyed by his triumphs, Pyatok lectures constantly to universities and neighborhood groups nationwide, making sure the grass-roots affordable-housing movement spreads evenly, not just in the aesthetically and politically sophisticated Bay area. And that's good news for everyone. ra

Cheryl Weber is a contributing writer in Severna Park, Md.

At Villa del Norte, in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., low-income rental units are organized into clusters of six that face an intimate courtyard. Each stucco-clad home has a front porch, a fenced back patio, and a master-bedroom balcony.

"if [pyatok] has a trademark, it's his response to the people who are being served. because his breadth of knowledge is so deep, he can respond to what his clients know."

-jeffrey ochsner,

faia

leadership awards

hall of fame: hugh newell jacobsen

the master of modernist historicism proved that residential architecture can move forward while looking back.

by bruce d. snider

t is typical in design award programs that entries
 conceal the name of the architect. For a select few, however, that anonymity is difficult to pull off. The judges in a recent residential competition (not this magazine's) pegged one entry immediately as the work of a particular prominent architect, and they gathered around to admire it. The house expressed its central idea with directness and clarity, seasoning an urbane Modernism with knowing historical references.



Portrait: Max Hirshfeld In the fifth decade of a celebrated and prolific career, Hugh Jacobsen still says his best building is "the one I'm working on now." The plan unfolded effortlessly, matching practicality with a stately classical order. The seamless execution of details showed the hand of a master. One judge commented that this was a house he would love to spend time in. The panel nodded approvingly, then voted unanimously to grant the entry no award. After all, this was obviously the work of Hugh Jacobsen, and, as one judge remarked, "He's been doing this forever."

Well, not exactly forever. But Jacobsen has been designing superb houses, reflecting and influencing the course of American residential architecture, and winning assorted honors for long enough to be judged—fairly or not—by a standard higher than that applied to other architects. Jacobsen enters a lot of award programs, but there are few venues in which he doesn't risk being viewed as something of a ringer.

It is a circumstance that Jacobsen views with a mixture of pride and bemusement. For, if many in the world of architecture take his achievements for granted, his success as inevitable, he has never been among them. And while entering award programs has always been his favored marketing strategy, he competes not simply to gain exposure or heap up accolades, but to have his work critiqued. "It is your obligation to trot out that building for judgment before your peers," he says. "The last crit you had was in school. When you do get one, it's very painful, but you learn. You go back and you try harder. We enter practically everything going by. It tells you a lot."

It tells one a lot about Jacobsen, too, that four decades into one of the most celebrated careers of his generation, he still looks for approval, still seeks the perspective of others to improve his work. Such solicitude is surprising not only because of Jacobsen's stature, but because his houses, with their cool logic and effortless wit, seem so





inevitable, as if Jacobsen himself operated by a different set of rules. Of course, none of it-the fine work, the recognition, the great career-has been, from the architect's perspective, either effortless or inevitable. Or planned. As Jacobsen explains, with the deceptive simplicity that characterizes both the architecture and the man, "I've just been doing what I was taught to do when I was in school."

true calling

School was Yale in the 1950s, where Jacobsen studied under Louis Kahn and Vincent Scully. That scenario, too, may support the illusion of inevitability, but to a young Jacobsen growing up in Michigan and, later, Washington, D.C., the road to Yale and a career in architecture seemed anything but predestined. "I am dyslexic," he explains. "They didn't know about that as I was growing up." As a boy, he read a great deal but had difficulty with math and with academics in general. After struggling through high school, he applied to nine colleges. "All nine shot me down." After a stint in night school, Jacobsen



Architectural photography: Robert C. Lautman

Jacobsen's 1988 Palmedo House refracts a Long Island, N.Y., farmhouse form into six pavilions in a descending order of scale (above). The rear of the house opens to the site in classical Modernist fashion (left).





Photos: Robert C. Lautman

Jacobsen's discreet and respectful renovation of Piedmont, an 18th-century manor house (1990), reflects both problem-solving ingenuity and a deference to the building's historical value. Modern necessities, such as plumbing fixtures and appliances, are either completely hidden or treated simply as furnishings. studied business and accounting at the University of Maryland. He was on the verge of flunking out when he switched his major to fine arts and later graduated with honors. After a brief apprenticeship with a painter, he landed his spot at Yale.

"It was like I had found God," he remembers. "My whole life opened up because there was something I could really do." In a class of 11 that also included Robert A.M. Stern and Stanley Tigerman, Jacobsen absorbed Kahn's interpretation of the

International Style. "At Yale, the cry was that everyone was doing Mies or Corbu. Lou came in with an entirely different approach," says Jacobsen, who was deeply influenced by Kahn's historically aware, spiritually inclined Modernism. A half century later, the experience remains fresh in his mind. When he is on the verge of a misstep, Jacobsen says, "I hear Lou, saying, 'Don't go down that path.'"

After graduation and a tour of duty in the Air Force, Jacobsen worked briefly under Philip Johnson, then returned to Washington, D.C., to found his own firm. "I got my license in 1958, and I hung my shingle with one client." The timing could not have been better. "I hit this town just when they were looking for another wave of Modern archi-



tects," Jacobsen says. He and his wife, Robin, located in the Georgetown section, then on its way to becoming the city's most fashionable neighborhood.

respectful modernism

In his sophisticated, forward-thinking neighbors, Jacobsen found not only kindred spirits, but a natural clientele. "I just started out doing this Modern architecture," he says. "I started remodeling. That's how I learned to build." In the four decades he has lived and worked in Georgetown, he has made his mark

on more than 100 houses in the neighborhood, only one of which he designed from scratch. "I went into these old, 18th-century houses and just gutted them," he says, with a slight wince. Preservationists might do more than wince at the thought of all the crown molding Jacobsen has removed from the Georgetown Historic District. But his early work there established the dominant theme of a career that has done much to promote the value of America's architectural heritage.

To be sure, he gutted the row houses he remodeled, fitting them out in the spare Modernism his clients expected. But he did so in a way that managed to respect, even celebrate, the original building and its context. His work demonstrated how much



Modernism one could add to an old houseand how much old material one could remove-while not only preserving but distilling and intensifying its original character. From the start, Jacobsen showed an unerring eye for what is essential and what is expendable. In Georgetown, he saw, "The thing that is



more important than the individual house is the progress of the street." By maintaining the appropriate overall scale and proportion of building elements, preserving the rhythm of the street wall and the line of cornices, he could take extraordinary liberties in other aspects of the building.

"Abstracting the vernacular," he calls it, and with the exception of an occasional foray into pure Miesian Modernism, Jacobsen has applied and refined this approach in the design of more than 400 houses around the world. His work on existing buildings has ranged from the gut remodels of his Georgetown portfolio to exquisitely gentle restorations of historic buildings. In his new houses, he has typically sought to isolate the essence of a vernacular building type—Gothic Revival

ple to pull off. One might be tempted to call his work Postmodernist, if that term had not become identified with a certain 1980s pop-arch detour (and if Jacobsen himself did not heartily detest any such association). Unlike much Postmodern work, Jacobsen's historicism, however playful, has always been respectful and affectionate rather than ironic. He has drawn on vernacular building types as a basis of authority and a source of emotional connection, not simply as a costume. To improvise at this level while avoiding kitsch requires an intimate understanding of the history of Western architecture. Again, Jacobsen credits his teachers. "I was trained as a historian. I was always taught to look back—Lou was very big on that."

Perhaps fittingly, Jacobsen runs his practice as an

farmhouse, New Mexico adobe, Quaker meetinghouse, Greek temple—with which he then animates a classical Modernist plan.

This fusion of historicism and Modernism is a simple and beguiling idea, but, as attested by the abundance of lackluster Jacobsen knockoffs, one that is anything but simIsland House (1989) marries a formal Modernist plan with forms and colors that reflect its Caribbean location (above). Jacobsen's early work in the Georgetown district of Washington, D.C., remains fresh more than 40 years after it was built (left).

"i was trained as a historian. i was always taught to look back—lou [kahn] was very big on that."





Photos: Robert C. Lautman

The Greene House, on Maryland's Eastern Shore (1992), deploys five pavilions of equal size in a "V" formation surrounding a smaller, entry pavilion. The scheme reduces the building's apparent scale, creates a powerful entry sequence, and dramatically opens interior spaces.

"it's a series of promises the house makes. the driveway is the roll of the drums. you must see the front door ...

old-fashioned autocracy. At his Georgetown office, "It's my ball and my bat. I have 16 guys here, and they each have a vote. And I have 23. I do all of the design. I watch the progress of the drawings. I red-line every stage. I do all the lighting." And while he shares construction administration with three senior architects ("I do cover Paris and the south of France," he admits), he is in nearly constant motion between projects around the world. "I usually hit each jobsite about six times," he says, including

every final inspection. His stature with prospective clients allows him to insist on control over interior design, which is specified in every contract he signs.

pavilion as archetype

Because they draw so heavily on local context, Jacobsen's buildings vary dramatically in their source materials. But they are bound by the common threads that make his work so recognizable. The eggcrate bookcases and ceiling-height doors are constant motifs, but a closer look reveals the classically derived order and schematic clarity of plan that also characterize the work.



Jacobsen's buildings are often assemblies of connected pavilions. And while skeptics might dismiss the approach as a mere trademark gesture, it offers clear functional benefits. For one thing, the idea of putting 7,000 square feet of house "in one lump at the top of a hill" gives Jacobsen hives. Broken up into modules, he explains, the same square footage takes on quite a different character. "It sits down on the land, and it doesn't shout, 'Look at me-I've won!'" Pavilion houses also respond flexibly to changing occasions

and family configurations. "They can grow and shrink." And all that surface area (heat-loss considerations notwithstanding) graces the spaces inside with daylight, views, and the curiously satisfying feeling of being in a room that has its own roof. "It makes happy people."

The pavilions reflect Jacobsen's style of work, too, which inclines toward small sketches on ad hoc materials. With a straight face, he allows, "I do most of my design work on the back of barf bags on airplanes." Working with modular pieces "frees up the architect considerably. It's almost like the bubble diagram." The pavilion form has served as



the primary vehicle for Jacobsen's exploration of archetypal shapes, most notably "that Monopoly form that I've been trying to purify." This gabled box, stripped to its simplest elements, shows up in numerous guises in Jacobsen's work. "That form exists in about 14 cultures around the world. It is the symbol for



'house,'" he explains. "And a house should look like a house, not a pickle factory."

Almost anyone can make a house look like a house. To capture so subtly and refract so variously the very heart of the concept requires an extraordinary fluency in both historical vernaculars and the aesthetic language of Modern architecture. In Jacobsen, that fluency meets an undergraduate's prolific enthusiasm for ideas and a master's skill in execution. It is a powerful combination. A popular one, too. In a field whose leading practitioners rarely achieve more than local fame, Jacobsen has made a national name. His work has been the subject of museum retrospectives and too many magazine features to remember. He is among the vanishingly small group of architects who can begin a sentence with the words, "In my second monograph" One might forgive an awards-program judge for subconsciously setting the bar a bit higher for him.

But that would overlook another—and not the least—of Jacobsen's achievements. Robert A.M. Stern notes Jacobsen's contribution in upholding "the clarity of the Miesian tradition while at the same time opening himself to context and stylistic play." But he also applauds his old class-

mate for mustering "the energy, the commitment, the talent, the orchestration of events that make it possible to do work of such quality over a long period of time." And, despite appearances, Jacobsen has produced this outstanding body of work while playing by the same rules as every other architect. One might be forgiven for viewing his portfolio as merely a beautiful slide show, forgetting that each building responds to a specific site, local climate, and owner program. But in these remarkable houses, as in any house, there must be a place for the vacuum cleaner, the roof must shed water, the neighbors must be appeased. Before a house can be great, it must meet the stringent standard of simply being good. And Hugh Jacobsen designs a good house. ra

Bruce D. Snider is a senior editor of CUSTOM HOME, a sister publication of residential architect. Jacobsen's bestknown vernacular reinterpretations, including the neo-Gothic Kahn House (1985) and the telescoping Buckwalter House (1982), have entered the contemporary architectural vernacular in their own right. Their continuing influence, while difficult to measure, is impossible to deny.

... and the front door must tell you it's better inside. and once you get inside, the house must deliver on why you've gone inside."

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leadership awards

rising star: estes/twombly architects

it was an evolution for estes/twombly to get choosy with its clients. now, there's a revolution under way in its design studio.

by meghan drueding

or 11 years, Jim Estes, AIA, and his family lived in an 1890s shingled cottage in Jamestown, R.I. Then, in 1996, he began designing a new Estes residence for a lot just a few streets away—this time infusing it with ideas he'd been itching to try out. The nowcomplete new house contains elements of local building forms, such as gabled roofs and a modest



Bob Gothard

Estes/Twombly partners Jim Estes (left) and Peter Twombly have refined their designs to produce spare, minimally detailed projects like Estes' own house (background). scale, but its pared-down, Modernist-influenced aesthetic represents something altogether different from the old cottage.

The evolution of the firm Estes founded, Estes/ Twombly Architects in Newport, R.I., is happening in much the same way. No longer content to design the large, historically inclined homes that paved their way to becoming one of the most respected residential firms in New England, Estes, partner Peter Twombly, AIA, and their five-person staff are trying to limit their work to smaller, more daring projects. "Good houses burn an

image in your mind," Estes says. "It's hard to keep a strong image going with a big house." Gale Goff, AIA, who's worked at the firm 11 years, agrees. "We don't want to be spitting out a 1902 house in 2002."

This challenging new design direction has been a long time

coming for Estes. The Vermont native and Dartmouth College grad fell in love with architecture during a summer spent building houses in a Vermont development called Prickly Mountain, under the tutelage of architect David Sellers. During architecture school at the Rhode Island School of Design, Estes supported himself by working as a carpenter and contractor, continuing to do so for several years after graduating in 1971. In 1980, he opened a practice in Providence, R.I., with architect William Burgin, and they moved their business to Newport in 1988. A year later, Estes broke off and started his own firm, Estes & Co. Architects, in a former Baptist church in Newport's historic district. "When I went out on my own, I became interested in architecture all over again," he says. "I was much more intellectually involved than I had been in the past."

For Twombly, too, the path to designing increasingly rigorous houses has been a circuitous one. Like Estes, he worked as a carpenter and attended design school at RISD, graduating in 1980. After



stints working in Providence and in the New York office of Rafael Viñoly, he took a job as an associate at Michael Graves Architects in Princeton, N.J. During his five years with Graves, he served as job captain on a renovation of the Newark (N.J.) Museum that ultimately won a national AIA Honor Award. While Graves' firm, which employed 60 people at the time, differed greatly in size and scope from Estes', Twombly has noticed a common thread. "At Estes, like at Graves, the architect can bring a project to a very high level of resolution," he says. Also on his résumé are a job at HLM Design in Iowa City, Iowa, and five years practicing on his own in Providence. He joined Estes & Co. in 1995 and became a partner (precipitating the name change to Estes/Twombly) in 1999.

change orders

Which brings us to where Estes/Twombly is now and that's an exciting place to be. The design mindset of a New England coastal town like Newport or



Estes and Twombly like to break down the massing of large houses. This 3,500square-foot house in Jamestown, R.I., is divided into two "houses," one for the owners and one for their children. A sunfilled great room, left, connects the parts.

Photos above: Warren Jagger



Photos: Michael Mathers



The open floor plan of this shingled cottage, completed in the early 1990s, served as a forerunner to the more Modern work the firm is doing today. Instead of designing a separate entry, living room, dining room, and family room, Estes combined these uses in one central space in this 1,800-square-foot house in Jamestown, R.I.



its neighbor Jamestown is inherently conservative. Throughout the 1990s, Estes and his staff designed many renovations to older houses, or new houses that tweaked the Shingle Style vernacular with some butt-jointed glass here, an asymmetrically placed window there. The houses that came out of their office tended to be witty and sparingly detailed, and many of them won awards or were published in magazines and books. But they were never as minimal as Estes wanted. "I don't like to lay on a lot of trim and all that junk," he says. "Natural materials should speak for themselves."

About five years ago, the firm arrived at the point where it could afford to turn down more work than it took on. Estes and his employees made a conscious decision not to expand, to keep accepting the same number of projects but to be more selective about the ones they chose.

That turned out to be a wise move. Their work, already known for its good looks and livability, has only gotten stronger. And it's evident from looking at an Estes/Twombly house that whoever designed it must have enjoyed the process. A gentle sense of humor pervades each project, without degenerating into wackiness. The firm's tiniest built house to date, a 1,040-square-foot space on Block Island, R.I., attains "compound" status with its separate entry shed. (For more on the house, which won a merit award in the 2002 *residential architect* Design Awards contest, see May, page 63.) In a Warwick, R.I., subdivision, a graceful, shingled house whose

3,800-square-foot size is mitigated by skillful massing seems to smirk at its overblown, pastiche-laden neighbors. "It's big," says owner Bob Paciti. "But it doesn't feel impersonal to us the way a bigger house can." Playful elements such as dumbwaiters, pop-up roof lanterns, and unexpected color schemes appear in Estes/Twombly's other recent projects. It seems the firm's self-imposed restriction—only take on interesting projects with interesting clients—has netted it more customers who are willing to take risks.

Not that the new direction of Estes/Twombly's work is without context. The architects Estes most admires-Lake/Flato, Miller/Hull, Rick Joy, and Peter Bohlin, among others-are all known for their regionally appropriate work, and he doesn't plan to stray from the example they've set. Rather, he and Twombly just want to take the prevalent local building types-turn-of-the-20th-century Shingle Style houses and more rustic agricultural structures-a few steps further than they've done in the past. They and Goff, who serve as chief architects on most of the projects that come through the office, like to play with traditional forms, breaking up a sedate gabled house into two pieces with a flat-roofed connecting walkway. Their houses still contain oldschool New England materials like wood shingles and fieldstone, but these elements are used in surprising ways, often in combination with more Modern, industrial items such as sheets of glass and galvanized metal.

Utilitarian materials are another signature Estes/Twombly element. Estes' home contains barn siding applied horizontally rather than in the usual vertical fashion and barnyardgrade galvanized-steel roofing.

"i don't like to lay on a lot of trim and all that junk. natural materials should speak for themselves."

-jim estes





Like all the firm's projects, this house in a Providence, R.I., suburb is sited to maximize solar gain during winter. Deep roof overhangs provide shade during warmer months.

"at estes, like at graves, the architect can bring a project to a very high level of resolution."

—peter twombly

business school

Estes and Twombly's choice to stay small didn't just affect their designs, of course. Reducing the number of big projects they do also means reducing the big fees those houses command. "It's hard to do small custom houses and make a reasonable living," says Estes. "It takes just as long to design a house in the 2,000-to-3,000-square-foot range as it does a larger house, but the fees are smaller." They don't have a magic formula, but they do have a streamlined design process that allows them to use their time as efficiently as possible. "We've done enough small houses so that we know what to do to be profitable," Estes continues. "We have to constantly be on our guard against going off on tangents while designing a project. Also, we can't undercharge for our services."

Everyone at the firm draws by hand, because it's the quickest way for them to get a design down on paper. Unlike many of their peers, neither partner pursues sidelines like teaching or writing books. Instead, they invest money and time in having their best work professionally photographed, then marketing themselves to book and magazine publishers. Students and young architects read design publications as much as consumers do, and Estes and Twombly know that in order to attract new talent as well as new clients, they've got to keep their name out there.

Occasionally, they'll decide to sell a floor plan, though they don't market that part of their business. "If someone calls and asks, and they're not planning on building the house anywhere near here, and the client agrees to it," says Twombly, "then we'll sell them the plan. But always with no modifications." They're aware that many of their colleagues would condemn this practice, but if it means they can design one more

ongoing challenge

Goff, also a RISD alum, thinks the education she, Estes, and Twombly received has had a major impact on the firm's design ideals. "What I took out of RISD was the idea that a design philosophy should be coherent," she says. "It should follow throughout the project. Peter, Jim, and I all have different styles, but the idea that you should be consistent has really been hammered into all of us." Hence Estes/Twombly's commitment to taking on only intellectually demanding projects. More demonstrations of this new direction are in the pipeline. Among the firm's on-the-boards projects are a Modern house on a 20-by-28 footprint, an addition to a 1960s Modern kit house, and a sustainably designed home for a retired clergyman.

house that pushes the envelope rather than a big, pleas-

ant Shingle Revival, they'll take that trade-off.

Estes and Twombly are their own worst critics. To walk through a finished project with one of them is to hear everything they should have done differently, or everything they wish their clients had let them do. But perhaps that dissatisfaction is the key to the ever-growing quality of their designs. They keep pushing themselves, their staff, and their clients, and relish the constant change this course of action inevitably sets in motion. Ask Estes what he thinks the firm's work will look like in 10 years, and he'll tell you he has no idea. That's just the way he likes it. ra

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STALL OF

When was the last time you showed home buyers the real inside of the house?

1

what's in a frame?

there's no need to stick with wood framing when steel may be just as sweet.

by nigel f. maynard

emember the good 'ole days? Not the heady times when the NASDAQ flirted with 5,200, but the days when you could design a house and rest assured that your wood-framed walls would stand straight and last well into the future. Well, those days are gone: The NASDAQ spends most of its time below 2,000, and it's getting harder for architects to spec wood framing and sleep soundly at night.

Wood framing has been the number-one choice for architects and home builders as far back as anyone can remember. The versatile material performs well, is inexpensive and readily available, and offers excellent natural insulation. With such impressive defining qualities, it's easy to understand lumber's lofty position in the building products lexicon.

Deciding on wood used to be a no-brainer, but depending on where you ply your trade, the decision might now require a panel of experts to ruminate on the pros and cons. That's because volatile lumber prices, environmental issues, lumber quality, and the onslaught of the Formosan subterranean termite mean wood is no longer the ineluctable choice.



Courtesy Steel Framing Alliance

Steel framing will give you straight walls and protect your finished work from fire and termites, but how much its thermal inefficiency and installation will cost is still up for debate.

framing the issues

If you practice in, say, Hawaii, an army of voracious termites may be poised to eat your finished work. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* reported last year that of the more than \$1 billion in damages subterranean termites cause annually in the United States, \$100 million occurs in Hawaii alone. (Florida, New Orleans, and San Diego are also especially tasty locales for the pest.) Depending on whom you believe, lumber quality is a substantial problem as well. Some in the industry claim that lumber is now prematurely harvested from juvenile trees, and the resulting wood is more prone to shrinking and warping. Architect Lee Mueller, with LWM Design Associates in Apple Valley, Calif., says this is a serious problem for production builders in arid Las Vegas.

"When lumber is cut and assembled and plated with

trusses, it has one level of moisture content," Mueller says. "But by the time it's installed and covered with envelope material and subjected to heat, there are huge problems with cracking and shrinking."

McLean, Va., architect Randall Mars says he, too, has seen a steady decline in the quality of lumber. "When you have to pick through so many more wood studs to get straight ones, it would be much easier if you just used metal." Which is exactly what more architects and home builders are doing.

steeler's wheel

"There are tons of attributes that make steel a better building material than wood," says Lisa Stevens, director of marketing and branding services at the Steel Framing Alliance in Washington, D.C. "It's not organic like wood, so you don't have issues of shrinking, cracking, and expansion and contraction. Your corners will be square and your walls straight."

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chance of a pull-out in high winds is low. Steel is also fire-resistant, relatively inexpensive in price, stable in price, consistent in quality, and impervious to termites.

doctor spec

Architect Bob Lazo, AIA, says termite resistance is the main reason almost 60 percent of all stick-frame housing in Hawaii is done with at least some steel. The principal of Robert Alexander Lazo Architects, AIA, Honolulu, uses steel framing in about half of his homes. Mars also likes steel, because he can get tighter stud placement and because the studs come with precut openings so he can run plumbing and wiring through them with greater ease.

trouble spots

But steel does have some drawbacks. First, it hasn't gained wide acceptance for residential application, because waiting for the conservative home building industry to adopt new techniques is like waiting for Godot.

Another issue is the contention that steel studs will corrode over time and cause the house to collapse, says Nader Elhajj, a project manager at the National Association of Home Builders Research Center in Upper Marlboro, Md. However, an ongoing study by the center so far disproves this theory, he says.

But the main concern with steel appears to be cost. "The building industry is sensitive to the bottom line," says Mueller. "Therefore, the question is, would [steel] be more economical or cost-competitive?" The answer so far appears to be no—at least in the short run.

According to the NAHB Research Center study, steel-framed homes generally cost more than their wood-framed counterparts. The material cost for steel is low—only a \$1-to-\$2.50per-square-foot premium over wood. And individual assemblies such as interior wall studs and floor framing may not cost more than lumber or engineered-wood assemblies. But the product is less energy-efficient than wood, so applying remedies—such as a thermal break—adds to the overall expense, the research center says in the study.

Lazo says cost depends on the project, the part of the country, the price of lumber, and the contractor. "Some contractors can come in cheaper than wood when using steel framing," Lazo says. "Some can come in at around the same price. If you have a contractor who's familiar with steel and has some experience with it, the advantages become more apparent."

Building-code acceptance was once a major hurdle as well, but Stevens says steel is on the cusp of full adoption by various code bodies. The International Residential Code and the International Building Code have provisions for steel framing, and Stevens says it's only a matter of time until they become universal. (The Council of American Building Officials [CABO] has had provisions since 1996, but they cover only certain parts of the country, Stevens says.)

Despite the unresolved issues, some architects are already sold on steel. Lee Mueller's current project, a 3,600-square-foot custom home in Riverside, Calif., has no wood framing at all. It employs a fast-track foundation system with corrugated panels as the stem wall and a corrugated form pan for the concrete floors. Its shear walls are made from a panel product called Sure-Board, manufactured by CEMCO in City of Industry, Calif., which consists of light-gauge steel laminated to standard drywall. When the drywall is installed, the shear diaphragm is installed as well.

"Steel provides architects with tremendous design options," Mueller says. "You just have to think outside the box. It's simply another material that requires some basic understanding of what its potential is and what its limitations are." His advice? "If you have never worked with it before, align yourself with someone who has." **ra**

steel away

Steel framing is no cakewalk—a basic understanding of its potential and pitfalls is important. The following sources provide a good foundation.

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continued on page 74

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lace veneer

"We couldn't do custom cabinetry without Bacon Veneer," Skylar says. Bacon offers veneers in nearly every wood species and in virtually unlimited sizes; if a particular wood is not available in cut veneer, the company can often find a matching species. Mastro & Skylar prefers wood without stains if possible, so it is very careful about selecting species for color and pattern. Here, the duo chose lacewood for the upper cabinets in their own kitchen. Bacon Veneer, 708.547.6673; www.baconveneer .com.



in and out

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plain geometry walter 1. dodge house, los angeles, 1914–1916

irving gill

"any deviation from simplicity results in a loss of dignity."

—irving gill



rving Gill's desire to eliminate all architectural ornament took
shape with his design for the Walter L. Dodge House in
what's now the West Hollywood section of Los Angeles. This
residence for a Midwestern couple featured pure cubist forms,
layered to provide the owners with as much access to the outdoors as possible. In addition to the 6,500 square feet that the
house itself occupied, terraces and porches encompassed another
1,100 square feet. Gardens by landscape architect Wilbur David

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Cook complemented the exterior's geometric forms.

The Dodge House set an example for architects struggling with the local problem of making buildings earthquake-resistant. Between its two, 8-inch-thick layers of reinforced-concrete walls, Gill placed a felt membrane and a steel latticework, intended to strengthen the house against a quake's impact.

Sadly, a developer demolished the Walter L. Dodge House in 1970.—*meghan drueding*