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IN THIS ISSUE/NEIGHBORHOODS

18 San Francisco's Downtown Plan, by Sally Woodridge

24 Creative Workspace for S. Claus, by Donald Reeves, AIA

26 Neighborhoods, a Photography Competition

30 Bethel Island R/UDAT, by Janice Fillip

COVER

Downtown San Francisco. Photographer: Stephen Proehl. This photograph was achieved using a 35mm Nikon FA, Fujichrome film, and a Hughes 300 helicopter.

DEPARTMENTS

7 EDITORIAL

8 NEWS

12 AROUND THE STATE

15 FROM THE FLOOR: Legislative Triumph for Architects, by Jayne Madamba

16 THE COUNCIL: Temblor de Tierra, by Christopher Arnold, AIA

34 EDUCATION: Beyond Technology, the Study of Values, by Arthur E. Stamps III, Ph.D., AIA
Monterey Design Conference '86

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Common Ground

When I bought my house last fall, I thought about the neighborhood only in cosmetic terms. It struck me as a good sign that nobody was dismantling a car in the driveway. (Buddy didn't start to rebuild his V-8 until I had acquired my deed of trust.)

Although the houses were built in a simpler time when one facade fit all, each was customized over the years through the festive application of the entire Montgomery Ward exterior latex earthen tone palette, and the inventive use of landscape, featuring the occasional ceramic flamingo. The familiar lines still discernible amid this rich decorative variety suggested a comfortable genealogy, rather like the way the Hapsburg nose conferred pedigree before the age of rhinoplasty.

Soon after I moved in, I discovered that the ancient concept of “neighborhood” is as much about kinship as it is about proximity of dwelling.

A demographic analyst would say that my neighbors and I have very little in common, and she'd be right. But we share more than a floorplan and an infestation of mistletoe in the Modesto ash. Each of us has an individual attachment to our private place that extends beyond our lot lines to the common ground delineated by a block-long strip of asphalt. We meet on that common ground impulsively and, every now and then, to celebrate ritual occasions.

Most weekends, at least one household rolls up its garage door and sets up shop in the driveway. The street becomes a bazaar. Commerce floods the neighborhood with transient treasure hunters. The neighbors congregate to schmooze. Something of usualy changes hands.

When the seasons change or the current issue of Sunset arrives, cultivation is the common ground. Cuttings, bulbs, starter sets are shuffled from garden to garden with a rapidity that gives new meaning to the term “cross-pollinate.” Baskets of vegetables from Doris’ garden suddenly appear on the doorstep. Sunday evening is animated by the lanky figure of Bert, as he sorts through the legion of lawn bags stacked curbside up and down the block, and carts the “clean” debris away through the twilight to fuel his compost pile.

Special events are an excuse for celebration by the neighbors who are, by and large, party animals. The personal milestones — Sally and Bill remodel the living room, Mitchell goes to college — are observed in individual homes. Since each house duplicates the others’ spatial arrangement, these gatherings are subject to frequent spells of deja vu. But the best party (with the possible exception of my housewarming where, at 3 A.M., the neighbors formed a conga line and bunny-hopped through the backyard) was held on our common ground. The neighborhood literally took to the street this year to commemorate the Fourth of July.

Excitement charges any day that unites kids with fireworks, so the party had an edge from the start. Food, drink and the exchange of recipes filled a hazy afternoon, punctuated by one or two bursts of premature pyrotechnics. After dark, the dads and big brothers got down to business, unwrapping huge bagsful of fireworks and igniting them with the solemnity of fire marshals or priests. Since few things are as magical as skysrockets, we were all fairly giddy when the dancing started. Then Alex found a cache of sparklers.

No one in Alex’s family is inclined to skimp on exuberance, so all the sparklers were lit and passed out among the dancers. Soon the street was ablaze. Everyone, from toddlers to grandmothers, spun sparklers above their heads, and twirled around each other chanting “born in the USA” long after Springsteen’s recorded voice had moved on to other lyrics. The scene might have inspired Thomas Hardy or even Hunter Thompson. The moment was archetypical. For us, it was a declaration of unity, as well as independence.

My neighborhood is not the sort you'd find featured in an architecture magazine or documented in a film (although the home video of the luau Dan and Verna threw to initiate their new family room has some remarkable footage). It’s just a sleepy little suburban street where four generations of strangers live side by side. As neighbors.

The neighborhoods people create are the subject of this issue of Architecture California, thanks to Tim Street-Porter, who tossed out the idea as the topic of our annual photo competition just before he hopped a jet to Rome. The neighborhoods featured in this issue—Normal Heights, Mexico City, San Francisco, Bethel Island —share a great deal of common ground. The efforts described here to protect neighborhoods from the disfiguring impact of unchecked development, to rebuild in the wake of devastating natural disasters, to preserve human scale and open space, are issues that concern us all as neighbors in a global village.

MaryAnn dropped by the other night to collect money for a Mexican relief fund. “We have to help our neighbors,” she said. When she left, I picked up my copy of John Donne and reread:

“No man is an island, entire of itself
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main...”

—JF
On June 30, 1985, the neighborhood of Normal Heights was ravaged by the most destructive fire in San Diego's history. Over 80 homes were completely destroyed, causing more than $8.5 million in damages, and leaving over 200 people homeless.

In cooperation with the Normal Heights Community Development Corporation and the city of San Diego, the San Diego Foundation of the American Institute of Architects, San Diego Chapter sponsored a community workshop program and a design charrette session to help the residents raise their neighborhood from the ashes.

The Mountain View District is an older (50 to 60 years) community of San Diego with unique demographic statistics and special conditions. Most residences were underinsured or had replacement cost coverage. The majority of the people did not want to rebuild the same 900- to 1300-square-foot house that had two small bedrooms, one bathroom, kitchen, dining and living areas, and a single-car garage. Since their policies will not cover the cost of building larger residences, they most likely will need to obtain a SBA Disaster Loan. Most of the existing residences were within the three-foot sideyard setback required by the 1982 Uniform Building Code and current zoning standards. No penetrations (windows, doors) are permitted within the setback by the building department, and all portions of the structure in the setback area are required to be of one-hour fire-resistive construction. Rebuilding to these requirements becomes very difficult when the typical lot is only 40 to 50 feet wide. A majority of the residents are senior citizens and are unfamiliar with the processes of development, design, construction, and obtaining permits.

The charrette process enabled the design team to identify all the key issues and establish a methodology that focused on the form-of-the-neighborhood and the form-of-the-house. The rebuilding plan for the neighborhood, based on the workshop program, concentrated on five environmental issues:

- to rebuild within the framework of the existing neighborhood character;
• to provide technical assistance and documentation for the reconstruction process;
• to provide landscape guidelines that will address the immediate need of erosion control and ultimately of fire suppression;
• to provide architectural guidelines that will be consistent with and an enhancement to the Mountain View District by identifying potential styles, materials, "image-ability," and urban design considerations; and,
• to develop a land-use plan based on the adopted community plan.

Specific features of the report include: an implementation plan, the ABC’s of rebuilding, who to call, landscape and architectural guidelines, do’s and don’ts, and a land-use plan for the community.

It was particularly important to complete the report and have it in the hands of the fire victims within 30 days after the fire, in order to assure them that something was being done right away. Major portions of the “Rebuilding Plan for Normal Heights” were incorporated into the community plan. In addition, Pardee Development and Construction Company donated over 70 mature palm trees (typical of the neighborhood) to the residents.

The combined effort of 24 architects, planners, and designers contributing over 1,500 hours in the 30-day period produced a valuable tool to rebuild the Mountain View District into a distinctive community and enhance all of Normal Heights in the process.

—Joseph P. Martinez, AIA

GATEWAYS TO SAN JOSE

Four monumental sculptural gateways will be built at the entrance to downtown San Jose through a civic arts program conceived by the Downtown Working Review Committee and sponsored by the San Jose Redevelopment Agency. The purpose of the gateways “is to teach community values and commemorate the communal past as art has historically done,” said Tom Aidala, principal architect for the redevelopment agency and author of the gateway program.

The history of San Jose serves as the theme for the gateways. Each sculpture celebrates a specific economic era in the city’s evolution. “The four gateways are columnar in nature, with a spreading capital of agricultural and horticultural products with which the valley has been blessed,” the program states. “The basic structure and pedestal for the sculptures will be crowned by a bound sheaf of wheat, which is the city’s seal.”

The symbol representing each economic era will be left open to the interpretation of the sculptor, with the stipulation that the piece be representational rather than abstract. The selection committee that will choose the artists and the metal foundry to cast the bronze pieces includes Russell Moore, former director of the San Jose Museum of Art; Nathan Olivera from the art department at Stanford University; Consuelo Killins of the California Arts Council; and Tom Aidala. The project will cost from $1.5 to $2 million.

DESIGN COMPETITIONS

The 1986 CCAIA Design Awards program is now underway. All CCAIA members are eligible to submit projects located anywhere in the world, and all AIA members are eligible to submit projects located in California. Projects must have been completed on or after January 1, 1979. Jurors for the CCAIA Design Awards include Paul A. Kenyon, FAIA, president and design principal for CRS Strrine in Houston, Texas; Peter Papademetriou, AIA, professor of architecture at Rice University; and Tod Williams, AIA, principal of Tod Williams & Associates in New York. Deadline is December 16, 1985. For further information, contact Brook Ostrom at CCAIA, (916) 448–9082.

An open, two-stage national design competition for the development of a 10-acre urban open space along a major edge of Houston’s central business district is being sponsored by Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc. and Rice Design Alliance. The Sesquicentennial Park Design Competition celebrates the birth of Houston and Texas 150 years ago. Design of the park offers an opportunity to create a downtown waterfront respectful of the natural systems of Buffalo Bayou, one-quarter mile of which is on-site. The area is proximate to Houston’s cultural center. Five first-stage winners will receive $10,000 each and promotion to the second stage. First prize is $20,000; second, $10,000; third, $5,000; and two fourth prizes of $2,500 each. Registration deadline is November 23, 1985. Programs and registration forms are available for $25 prepaid from Theodore Liebman, AIA; Professional Adviser; c/o Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc.; 2040 Two Shell Plaza; Houston, TX 77002. Make check payable to Central Houston Civic Improvement, Inc.

BULK BUSTERS

The escalation of property value and the population pressure squeezing Santa Clara County have destroyed the village-like character of many towns on the Peninsula. Small-scale residential neighborhoods are losing their proportion as new homes increasingly are built to the maximum size permitted under the local ordinances. In Los Altos, a group of residents called the Bulk Busters is determined to preserve the intimate scale of their neighborhoods.

"The appearance of larger houses started a groundswell of public opinion," said Richard Campbell, Los Altos Planning Commissioner. "Their size was inappropriate for the neighborhoods." A typical older home in Los Altos covers 3,000 square feet, or 30 percent of the typical 10,000-square-foot lot. Within existing ordinances, a 6,000-square-foot house can be built on that same lot, boosting the FAR to 60 percent. Certain that bigger is far from better, the Bulk Busters prompted the city council to draft a new ordinance to control the bulk of buildings in residential neighborhoods.

The planning commission proposed a "daylight plane" that sets a cap over a piece of property beyond which a building or roof projection cannot extend. The commission also is considering the adoption of a 35 percent FAR. So far, the daylight plane has been a success, according to Campbell. "Most applications are designed within the limitations," he said. In the rare instances where the plane was exceeded, compliance was achieved by simple modifications to the roofline or dormers. Campbell reports that the daylight plane probably will become a city ordinance at the end of this year.

HOUSE PLANTS BATTLE INDOOR POLLUTANTS

Several species of plants have been found to cleanse the air of three potentially dangerous chemicals commonly found in the home—carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and formaldehyde. Researchers studying the removal of air contaminants from sealed environments at the National Space Technologies Laboratories in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, discovered that the spider plant, the golden pothos, the peace lily, and the Chinese evergreen effectively filter pollutants from the atmosphere through tiny leaf openings called stomata. A common spider plant sealed in a chamber with 12,975 micrograms of formaldehyde, rid the chamber of 85 percent of the chemical within 24 hours. The air-cleaning plants share two characteristics: all require relatively little light, and not one is a flowering plant.

November/December 1985 Architecture California 9
Library Architecture

The San Francisco University High School Library was among five projects selected to receive Awards of Excellence for Library Architecture in the 11th Library Buildings Award Program sponsored jointly by The American Institute of Architects and the American Library Association.

The library was designed by Robert Herman Associates Inc. of San Francisco to create a human-scale orientation and homelike comfort for students at a small private school. Built on top of an existing two-story steel and concrete auditorium, the 7,200-square-foot library addition contains both braced and movement-resisting steel frames with long-span girders.

The jury commented that the architect’s solution admirably plays off design elements of the original school building and then deftly inserts a new level under the recreational surface of the roof. The library plan layers stacks and study spaces around an open center that may be utilized for gatherings or for individual study. The librarian’s work space is treated like its own freestanding building in the center of the space. The library is comfortable and inviting for use by all. It features a certain elegance and panache that establishes the space as a special domain within the school environment.

Other recipients of the Award of Excellence were the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.; New York University Graduate School of Business Library; University of Michigan Law Library, Ann Arbor; and the Vail (Colorado) Public Library.

Extraterrestrial Architecture

NASA Ames Research Center has awarded a $15,000 grant to the Institute for Future Studies at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-ARC) to develop alternative internal design configurations for one of the living modules in the planned NASA Space Station. The project scope includes the design of the wardroom, the galley and associated activity areas, and the living environment for the six-person crews slated to occupy the space station for up to 90 days. SCI-ARC faculty and graduate students will conclude the study with the construction of a full-sized mock-up of the proposed design alternatives.

Design Firm Financial Performance Improving

After declining for many years, the financial health of design firms is improving. Profits and liquidity are up while overhead rates are down, according to the “1985 Update: Financial Performance Survey For Design Firms,” published by Birnberg & Associates, Design Professions Business Consultants in Chicago.

Profit before tax on net revenues after discretionary distributions for bonuses and profit sharing jumped to 37 percent, up from 3.2 percent in 1984. Profit before tax and after distributions on total revenues rose to 3.0 percent from 2.4 percent last year. For many firms that do not customarily pay bonuses and profit sharing and do not consider these a cost of doing business, profit before tax and distributions on net revenues rose to 8.1 percent in 1985, from 6.8 percent in 1984.

The overhead rate after discretionary distributions has dropped, from 171 percent (overhead as a percent of direct labor) in 1984, to 163 percent. This figure still exceeds the survey findings of 135 percent in 1982, 145 percent in 1980, and 133 percent in 1978. Overhead before discretionary distributions now stands at 131 percent, down from 156 percent in 1984.

The length of time required to collect receivables decreased to 60 days, from 64 days in 1984. Only slightly more than one-third (36.4 percent) of firms charge interest on delinquent receivables. Those firms that charge interest do so after a median time of 30 days and at a median rate of 1.5 percent per month. Just over half (51.1 percent) regularly marked up receivables and at a median rate of 10 percent over actual cost.

Copies of the complete survey are available for $25 prepaid plus $3 for shipping. Contact Howard Birnberg, Design Professions Business Consultants, 1905 North Halsted Street, Chicago, IL 60614, (312) 664-2300.

Multi-Purpose Modules for the Physically Handicapped

A low-cost system of kitchen, grooming, office, and exercise modules has
been designed for use by physically challenged persons who want to live and work independently.

"The movable, adjustable modules can be custom-designed to fit the needs of a wide range of users — and at a fraction of the cost of ordinary home or office remodeling," says Bertram Berenson, the architect who designed the system. "Retrofitting a typical kitchen for use by a paraplegic can cost up to $10,000. With one of these self-help modules, a complete kitchen unit can be assembled for less than $1,000."

Although the modules may have the widest application in use by the mobility-impaired, the needs of persons with neurological and physiological deficits also have been taken into account. "The instructions for assembling the modules will include adaptations for special needs," Berenson explains. "The design criteria for the kitchen unit, for example, were based on the physical limitations of a paraplegic. But the unit may also be operated with a head or mouth stick."

To reduce costs and permit simple alterations, Berenson used inexpensive materials that are readily available in lumber yards, fabric shops, and hardware stores. The prototype modules’ cubes and rectangles are constructed of polyurethane-coated particle board, for example, and the telescoping standard that supports them is a modified hydraulic automobile jack.

The design project was funded by the World Rehabilitation Fund and the National Institute for Handicapped Research, part of the U.S. Office of Education. Prototypes of the modules are now being field-tested at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine, Madison, and the Santa Barbara Rehabilitation Hospital. The system should be commercially available next spring. For further information, contact Bertram Berenson at (714) 626-3083.

**DAMPNESS IN BUILDINGS**

Excerpts from the best known European text on diagnosis and treatment of dampness in buildings — *Risanamento Igienico dei Locali Umidi*, by Giovanni and Ippolito Massari, are now available in English from the Association for Preservation Technology. Preservation architects involved in the analysis of moisture in historic structures will find that this selected material, including 54 diagrams and photographs, provides a sound introduction to the subject. To order, send $5.50 to APT Publications, Department 7BNR, Box 2487, Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5W6.

Gartz Court, Pasadena, owner; and was the oldest remaining bungalow court in Pasadena, where the bungalow court concept of high-density housing is thought to have originated. The project was a joint venture between the city of Pasadena and Pasadena Heritage, with Stefanos Polyzoides as restoration architect. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse of the Moir Building (1894) in San Jose was presented to Jerome King, AIA, architect; Robinson/Swenson Partnership, owner; and Barry Swenson, builder. An Honor Award for the interior restoration of Home Federal Savings and Loan (1927) in San Diego went to Buss, Silvers, Hughes Associates, architect; Gale Petrie, IBID, interior design; Home Capital, owner; and Illig Construction and Sixteen Penny Construction, builder. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse was given to Del Monte/Calpak Plant No. II (1925) in Sacramento. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse for the Hubbard/Upson House (1836) went to Bob McCabe and Gary Herrlinger, architect; The Castle, owner; and Shepard Johnson, builder. An Honor Award for historic rehabilitation for the John McMullen House (1890) in San Francisco was presented to Arnold Lerner of the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage, architect; Katherine and Leroy Looper, owner; and CK Construction and Transworld Construction, builder. Jurors were Milford Wayne Donaldson, AIA; John E. Beach; Paul Gleye; Bruce Judd, AIA; and George Stieckainen.

GARTZ COURT, Pasadena. Restoration Architect: Stefanos Polyzoides. Project team: Peter de Brettenville, Stefanos Polyzoides, Ed Burian, Kimon Onuma. Jury comment: To avoid imminent demolition, Gartz Court was moved two miles to a neighborhood of single-family low- to moderate-income housing dating from the early 1900s through the 1950s. The court was relocated in exactly the same configuration around the central rose garden. Historic landscape elements were duplicated. Only minor changes were made to the interiors, which were refurbished in original detail. The resultant project provides six units of moderate-income housing and saves a historic landmark.


California Preservation Foundation Awards

Gartz Court, built in the English Craftsman style in 1910, received a special award for Outstanding Merit in the Third Annual California Preservation Foundation Awards Program. Gartz Court is believed to be the oldest remaining bungalow court in Pasadena, where the bungalow court concept of high-density housing is thought to have originated. The project was a joint venture between the city of Pasadena and Pasadena Heritage, with Stefanos Polyzoides as restoration architect. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse of the Moir Building (1894) in San Jose was presented to Jerome King, AIA, architect; Robinson/Swenson Partnership, owner; and Barry Swenson, builder. An Honor Award for the interior restoration of Home Federal Savings and Loan (1927) in San Diego went to Buss, Silvers, Hughes Associates, architect; Gale Petrie, IBID, interior design; Home Capital, owner; and Illig Construction and Sixteen Penny Construction, builder. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse was given to Del Monte/Calpak Plant No. II (1925) in Sacramento. An Honor Award for adaptive reuse for the Hubbard/Upson House (1836) went to Bob McCabe and Gary Herrlinger, architect; The Castle, owner; and Shepard Johnson, builder. An Honor Award for historic rehabilitation for the John McMullen House (1890) in San Francisco was presented to Arnold Lerner of the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage, architect; Katherine and Leroy Looper, owner; and CK Construction and Transworld Construction, builder. Jurors were Milford Wayne Donaldson, AIA; John E. Beach; Paul Gleye; Bruce Judd, AIA; and George Stieckainen.

Los Angeles Conservancy Awards

Tom Owen, a staff member of the California History Department in the Los Angeles Central Library, was the only individual recognized by the Los Angeles Conservancy in its annual Preservation Awards Program. Recipients of the awards have demonstrated exceptional achievement in the preservation of historically significant buildings or sites, or have made a tangible and important contribution to historic preservation in Los Angeles. Owen was honored as an indispensable resource to cultural heritage research for the information files he developed on the Los Angeles built environment. Among the projects receiving Preservation Awards were the Garfield Building in Los Angeles, designed by Claud Beelman in 1929, Charles Kober Associates restoration architect; Elizabeth Bard Professional Center, a 1902 Mission Revival hospital in Ventura rehabilitated by Thomas R. Lee; the relocation and restoration of the Garza Court bungalows as moderate-income housing, a joint venture by the city of Pasadena and Pasadena Heritage with restoration architect Stefanos Polyzoides; the Storer House, 1923, one of the five concrete-block homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Los Angeles, Eric Wright restoration architect; and 34 East Holly Street in Pasadena, a small-scale vernacular commercial building restored by Robert H. Taylor, AIA. Jurors for the Preservation Awards were Scott Carde, AIA; Don Bowers; Robert S. Harris, FAIA; Mel Green; Roger Holt; and Ruthann Lehrer.
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During this time, Edith Heath, in partnership with her husband, Brian, continued to experiment with California clays and glaze materials while developing small-scale manufacturing techniques to make national distribution possible.

This innovative process has continued through the years, with a hands-on approach to designing and manufacturing. From it has emerged Heath's retail line of dinnerware, restaurantware, and award-winning (AIA Gold Medal, 1971) architectural tile. All are custom-made, by 50 craftspersons in this small, family business in scenic Sausalito, California.
Legislative Triumph for Architects

Architects Win Parity on BAE and Clarify Liability Issues

By Jayne Madamba

After two years of preparation and a long series of legislative struggles, the CCAIA has moved two important bills to the governor's desk where they were signed into law to take effect January 1, 1986. The bills, SB 784 (Madady) and SB 790 (Seymour), both carry provisions that will significantly influence the practice of architecture in California.

SB 784 provides that architects and engineers may not be held liable for failures resulting from change orders they did not approve, nor are they required to provide construction-observation services unless specifically required in the contract with the client. The bill was drafted to deal with a common situation in which design professionals often find themselves: when clients choose not to contract for construction-observation services, or seek unauthorized change orders to save money, the architect or engineer loses a significant and vital aspect of control in the realization of a finished project. Under prior law, it was possible for the design professional to be held liable for failures that result from these choices, even though they had no choice in the matter themselves. SB 784 relieves the burden of this unfair assignment of liability.

"Even though SB 784 represents a solution to only two aspects of the problems contributing to our liability crisis, it is a step in the right direction," said CCAIA Vice President for Governmental Relations, Ralph Bradshaw, AIA. "I'm hopeful we can build on this success as we continue to seek the roots of the problems and define appropriate solutions."

SB 790 is an "omnibus" measure that deals with a variety of issues confronting the practice. First, it clarifies the Practice Act exemptions with regard to licensed contractors and to storefronts, interior alterations, and additions. The clarification was needed to ensure that local building departments are aware of the original intent of the law, which was that contractors may not design non-exempt structures simply because they are providing contracting services for those structures, and that unlicensed people may not design storefronts, interior alterations or room additions unless those projects are non-structural in nature and have no adverse effects on the public health and safety.

Second, SB 790 "dovetails," or makes identical, the exemptions to the Architects Practice Act and the Engineers Practice Act, which define the areas within which unlicensed people are permitted to perform design services. Under prior law, the two sets of exemptions were different for several reasons that have become obsolete. A good example is that registered building designers were permitted to practice in the differences between the two sets of exemptions, which is the only thing that distinguished their practice from the practice available to unlicensed people. Because of the passage of AB 2196 (see below), there will be no more registered building designers as of January 1, 1986. Making the exemptions identical eliminates individual and official confusion about what unlicensed people are permitted to design. (This provision used to be in AB 2313 (Condit) but that bill was stuck in a Senate committee that failed to meet before the end of the legislative session, and its contents were rolled into SB 790.)

Third, SB 790 adds an architect member to the Board of Architectural Examiners, resulting in a 10-member board composed of five architects and five public members. This provision represents a significant accomplishment in that it changes the existing public member majority, which many feel will improve the board's efforts to enforce the Practice Act and license the profession. On two previous occasions, CCAIA bills to re-establish the professional member majority were sidetracked by legislators who wanted additional appointment authority over the board or who wanted to maintain the public member majority but add architectural expertise at the same time, resulting in as many as six new proposed members. Both bills previously were vetoed at the governor's desk.

"We are pleased that the governor saw his way clear to sign SB 790, even though it adds one person to the size of government and might cost an extra $2,000," said CCAIA President Virgil Carter, AIA. "We worked hard to convince him that's a minor tradeoff, considering the benefits that additional architectural expertise can bring to the BAE."

Another bill signed into law, AB 2196 (Frazee), sponsored by the Board of Architectural Examiners, provides that as of January 1, 1986, all current registered building designers will become architects, eliminating the registered building designer title from state protection. Currently, there are an estimated 400 registered building designers actively practicing, compared to about 14,000 California architects. The enactment of this bill will seriously discourage future attempts to reopen the title and will eliminate confusion about the difference between an architect, a registered building designer, and an unlicensed person.

"It's been a big year for the CCAIA Governmental Relations program," said Bradshaw. "We have resolved several major issues, leaving us free to address new problems like liability and tort reform."

Jayne Madamba is Director of Governmental Relations for the California Council, The American Institute of Architects.

November/December 1985 Architecture California 15
Temblor de Tierra

Total collapse, Regis Hotel.

CEDAT in Mexico City

By Christopher Arnold, AIA

At 7:18 A.M. on September 19, 1985, an earthquake with a Richter magnitude of 8.1 occurred off the Mexican Coast, 200 miles southwest of Mexico City. Rippling through the soft ground of an old lake bed upon which downtown Mexico City was founded, the earthquake completely destroyed some 60 large buildings, severely damaged hundreds of others, injured countless people and killed a number not yet totaled, but approaching 10,000. This earthquake is by far the most devastating to human life to strike North America since the continent was populated; the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 killed about 700 people, half of them by the resulting fire.

In response to the disaster, the California Council, The American Institute of Architects sent a California Emergency Design Assistance Team (CEDAT) to Mexico City. Our mission was twofold: to bring formal messages offering assistance to the Mexican president, to the mayor of Mexico City, and to our colleagues in the Colegio de Arquitectos de Mexico City; and to assess the nature of the disaster from an architectural perspective, to learn what lessons it may have for architects in California and on the West Coast. Team members included CCAIA President Virgil Carter, AIA; Paul Neel, FAIA; Christopher Arnold, AIA; and Del Hobbs, AIA, president of the Washington Council, The American Institute of Architects.

Flying into Mexico City, and approaching one of greatest urban population centers of the world (17 million inhabitants), we made a sweep around the downtown area. Familiar landmarks were clearly visible—the green oasis of Chapultepec Park, the 44-story Torree Latino Americano, newer high-rises around the immediate downtown area, and the great shells of Candela’s central market. Gray in the afternoon light, Mexico City seemed its normal, bustling self.

Driving toward downtown we began to see evidence of the earthquake: some broken glass, a curtain-wall building with crumpled panels leaning against a stronger building, a building whose top floors collapsed onto itself, and cranes working on a tangled mass of rubble. We stopped our taxi and joined masked workers poking delicately at the rubble of a hotel, while cranes moved chunks of concrete, and a quiet group of onlookers sat and watched.

We discovered an important paradox: the most devastating earthquake to attack North America since the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 still had not affected the basic life of the city, and had not resulted in area-wide destruction. The earthquake sought out and destroyed individual buildings but these buildings represent a very small percentage of the total building stock in Mexico City.

The damage, at first glance, seemed random—an apparently undamaged building stood near a collapsed tomb—although we knew this was not so. The reasons why one particular group of buildings suffered heavy damage is well understood. Records of ground motion obtained at sites within the affected area showed a strong shaking duration of about 60 seconds (a very long duration; the San Fernando, California earthquake of 1971 lasted about 12 seconds), followed by a long period of vibration of about two seconds, which one would expect from a distant earthquake and from the soft soil of the old lake bed. When the period of vibration of the ground shaking coincides with the natural vibration period of the building, great amplification of motion within the building is likely. This occurred at Mexico City because buildings over about eight stories, depending on their construction and proportion, had periods of vibration of approximately two seconds.

Modern high-rises, predominantly steel framed, generally have longer periods of vibrating, and so are not subject to such severe amplifications; they may...
saway considerably, but will not come apart. Older buildings in Mexico City are predominantly reinforced concrete frames (with no shear walls) with no ductility—the ability of a material to distort but not collapse, as is the case with steel. So the long-period, long-duration motion in Mexico City was amplified in these large nonductile concrete-frame buildings and, by an unfortunate combination of characteristics, devastating damage resulted.

Although this large group of hazardous buildings can be identified, only a small percentage of them received devastating damage. Why, within this group, any particular building suffered heavy damage will need much research. In the Nuevo Leon housing area, where a 14-story housing unit totally collapsed, partially on its side, it is possible to hypothesize on the fatal combination of characteristics by inspecting an adjoining identical unit that still stands.

These tall, rectangular slabs were built 20 to 25 years ago. Their reinforced concrete columns looked too slender for their task, and the reinforcing projecting from shattered beams and columns looked inadequate. A clear architectural weakness was visible: the first floors were open, and heavy-braced infilled walls ended at the second floor, introducing a structural discontinuity. The total collapse of this building, and that of the Juarez Hospital in which hundreds of staff, patients and doctors were still entombed when we were there, represented the two worst incidents in the disaster. The death toll from these two buildings was still uncounted, but may be over 1,000. Visiting these scenes brought home to us a new vision—the building as killer.

Unlike the Coalinga earthquake in California in 1984, in which the unreinforced masonry buildings in downtown were virtually wiped out, this earthquake affected large architect- and engineer-designed buildings. Small and medium sized unreinforced masonry buildings suffered little damage, except in an adjoining barrio at Tepito, where buildings are self-built and often virtually propped together. Old Baroque churches stood unharmed alongside shattered reinforced concrete buildings; simple brick commercial structures adjoined collapsed reinforced-concrete hotels. These masonry buildings, which we found to respond dangerously to short, sharp jolts in Coalinga, rode unscathed over the long period swell of this earthquake.

Although a considerable amount of broken glass was visible in Mexico City, the lack of such damage is more typical. Huge glass curtain-wall structures stood unscathed: the glass facade of the Latino Americano tower, built in 1948, survived serene and perfect. Once more this building vindicated the design philosophies of its engineer and architect. But huge glass store-front facades also stood unscathed.

Ten days after the earthquake the rescue teams seemed well organized. Tents, emergency vehicles, and heavy equipment used by the rescue workers covered city parks and squares in neighborhoods that experienced severe damage. Some of the European rescue teams were on their way home, and the Mexicans had settled into the long task of demolition and removal. In some areas tents and shelters had appeared, in which Mexican families now live, still close to their own neighborhoods.

Meanwhile life in Mexico City continues. The government talks of reconstruction and decentralization of government offices hard hit by the damage. Planners talk of demolishing Tepito and rebuilding the Thieves Market, heavily damaged by the earthquake. Both these moves meet with resistance, partly because they have long been proposed, and the earthquake simply provided a convenient opportunity for government planners to act. Nationally and internationally the earthquake aftermath has become a political football game: estimates of replacement costs of the damage run as high as $5 billion, a disastrous sum for a country struggling with high foreign debts.

For us, this brief visit showed a new vision of the architect's responsibility. One cannot see workers picking over rubble for bodies without being moved to a new sense of design responsibility. While we architects are quick to claim responsibility for buildings that give joy, grace, and efficiency, are we also willing to accept responsibility for death, and to move to ensure that it will not happen in the future? As people who know about buildings and cities, our responsibilities extend beyond design. In this disaster, people looked to us for help as experts. In Mexico City people seemed to understand that we had come in a spirit of sympathy and help, from the shouted amigos from the taxi driver next to us, to the nurses and young English-speaking volunteers who asked us to evaluate their cancer hospital ward for safety. We were not prepared to do this, but perhaps next time we should be. We must be trained to assess a building's safety without the support of our consultants, and we must find ways in which human needs can override issues of politics and legal liability.

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San Francisco’s Downtown Plan

On September 17, 1985, San Francisco’s Mayor Diane Feinstein signed into law one of the most publicized and scrutinized pieces of planning legislation in this country’s history—the Downtown Plan. Although the plan is now operative, controversy continues about its effects. Architects and critics alike question whether it will achieve its goal of improving San Francisco’s downtown architecture; real-estate market analysts prophesy that it has assured Los Angeles’s future as the financial capital of the West; and slow-growth advocates complain that it will do next to nothing to curb development. All of the above could be true, but the plan may instead prove to be a creative prototype for controlled urban development.

Overall, the Downtown Plan is conservative in the best sense of the word. Its immediate achievement is a guarantee that the parts of the city cherished by residents, tourists, shoppers, and entertainment seekers in general will have sunny streets and an old-shoe familiarity. Although the city’s dramatic physical setting is its greatest aesthetic asset, the combination of panoramic views and distinctive, walkable neighborhoods has provided the kind of urban excitement usually associated with Europe. The tourist industry, a crucial part of the city’s economic base, dates from the Gold Rush era when San Francisco became both an instant city and a major tourist attraction. The vastly expensive preservation of the cable car system testifies to the public’s awareness of the importance of the past.

San Franciscans vote their convictions about the city’s development. Whether in stopping freeways or waterfront high-rise buildings, residents have an impressive record of initiatives to control urban form. In recent years these actions have concentrated on slowing growth as the means of preserving the city’s celebrated image. The strong political consensus on this issue explains why the real-estate and development lobbies are weaker here than in other comparable cities in the United States. A perennial chamber of commerce lament is for the lack of red-carpet reception given to developers. The Downtown Plan reflects the voters’ desire for stability, even for the status quo.

When Richard Hedman, the city’s principal urban design planner, was drafting the height-and-bulk and open-space controls for the Downtown Plan, he premised them on his conviction that significant urban form entailed continuity with the past and, therefore, the need to selectively preserve the past. This conviction explains the importance given to preservation in the plan. Most of the downtown’s stock of historic buildings dates from after the 1906 earthquake and fire. Since most of the buildings to be preserved are low-rise by today’s standards, the creation of six conservation districts strengthens the presence of the past and ensures that sunlight will reach the streets in these important areas. Of all the groups that have lobbied their concerns during the plan’s two-year approval process, the preservationists are the most pleased. Having previously lost major battles, today they appear to have won the war.

Among the real-estate marketeers, there is a decided feeling of loss. The rush to build before the plan took effect has destabilized the market. The vacancy rate is climbing, and soon San Francisco will have an over-supply of office space when the million-plus square footage of current construction is completed. San Francisco is not the only city facing this situation; vacancy rates are already around 25 percent in Los Angeles. But the threat of a negative absorption in San Francisco is greater. Developers’ financial obligations under the plan to create housing,
transit, artworks, a downtown park, and childcare centers have added an estimated $13 per square foot to the cost of their projects. Still, it is unlikely that developers will abandon this city, even in face of the draconian review process that awaits new projects. As Piero Patri, FAIA observed, things have not been getting easier for developers over the last 20 years. Enough of them may concede that the price of doing business in San Francisco is still affordable.

PERPETUATING A TRADITION OF VARIED FORMS

From the professional point of view, the issues of architectural and urban design addressed in the Downtown Plan continue to be controversial. Dean Macris, director of the San Francisco Planning Department, and his principal staff members, Richard Hedman and Lou Blazej, saw preserving the traditional urban context as their mandate. Traditional, in this case, means the pre-1970s skyline before the stand of squared-off towers south of lower Market Street was built. A survey of downtown's architectural heritage conducted by Heritage (Foundation for the Preservation of San Francisco's Architectural Heritage) gave top ranking for preservation to nearly 300 buildings and secondary rating to over 200 more. These ratings were adopted by the planning department, but the figures have since been whittled down to 250 and 182, respectively.

What the older buildings suggested to Hedman was a variety of forms and detail from top to bottom as expressed in roof and belt cornices, ornamental projections, and the lively rhythms of bays with pedestrian-scaled elements at the street level. He found that the modern structures with strong horizontal lines were in conflict with a hilly terrain. Dark-colored towers violated the city's generally light-toned, Mediterranean palette. The 1971 Master Plan's urban design element—a previous bench mark in planning legislation—adopted height and bulk controls relating new buildings to the surrounding, existing patterns. However, provisions implementing the policies proved too permissive. Bonuses to developers for plazas, convenience to transit, and other amenities made possible the skyline resembling refrigerator cartons, which, in turn, produced shock and then revision.

The Downtown Plan's primary means of controlling density and building form are through reduced height limits and FARs. As things now stand, the lowering of the highest permissible FAR from 14:1 to 9:1 is complemented by reducing the area of highest permitted heights and shifting downtown office expansion south of Market Street. The new bulk controls will produce smaller, more slender towers. In the language of the plan: "All buildings should be massed or otherwise designed or articulated to create a visually distinctive termination of the building facade. The intent is to return to the complex visual imagery of the surrounding hillsides and to the complex architectural qualities of older San Francisco buildings. However, this does not mean that literal employment of historical detailing is encouraged, although that may be called for in particular circumstances. What is desired is the evolution of a San Francisco imagery that departs from the austere, flat-top box—a facade cut off in space."

The effects of the new bulk controls will be both aesthetic and environmental. Faceted buildings do not generate the tortuous wind speeds at ground level that bulky high-rise buildings do. Sun-access criteria ensure that new buildings will not block light from sidewalks in the Union Square area and other important corridors such as Market, Kearny, New Montgomery, and Second Streets during the critical lunchtime hours. These criteria are stated, as the plan says, "in terms of the plane above which a building across the street would cast shadows on the sidewalk. That plane, described by the sun-access angle, also establishes a maximum street wall height for the buildings."

Maintenance of the "street wall" is an important objective of the urban form policy. While breaking the traditional tight relationship between streets and buildings by means of plazas used to be considered refreshing, many of those open spaces now seem random and purposeless. The intensity of the urban experience now appears to come more from the street pattern itself. Exceptions are permissible, but, in general, context is the determining factor. Open space is no longer a good thing per se.

Belt cornices to terminate the building's base and thereby provide spatial definition for the pedestrian are back in force. Whereas they used to be restricted in size and elaboration, these elements are now encouraged to be bold. The old regulations produced smooth, thin-walled buildings by measuring gross floor area along the exterior face of the building. This area now will be measured from the average line of the window glass. Thus deep-set windows and projecting exterior ornament will
The plan’s requirements for more expressive, sculptured building tops—popularly termed “hats”—have drawn more hoots and cat-calls than any other feature of the plan. Dan Solomon, FAIA observed, “We used to have crew-cuts; now we have fancy hats—but they’re more fun to design.”


Hats. Courtesy of the San Francisco Planning Department.

Massing models of downtown San Francisco compare the current skyline with build out under the new height and bulk controls. Studies courtesy of Peter Bosselman, Environmental Simulation Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley.
The urban design controls in the Downtown Plan are flexible, as well as proscriptive. Set-back averaging, site exemptions, variations in base height, and tradeoffs between height and bulk and between encroachments and recesses all can be creatively manipulated to increase an architect's design options under the plan.

be wooed back to increase architectural plasticity. Although there is a formula for calculating the height of the building's base, the need for flexibility is acknowledged. Variations in base height will be decided on a case-by-case basis in design review.

Architects are apprehensive about the bureaucratic design review process, with some justification. The definition of the camel as a horse made by committee is applicable to many products of design review. The sheer multiplication of opinions in design review is diluting. The temptation to try to accommodate every suggestion in the hope of terminating the hemorrhage of time and money may prove disastrous. Although design review may be useful in persuading tight-fisted clients that quality design is their only passport to approval, the adversary nature of the process militates against the relaxed atmosphere needed for creativity.

The plan's requirements for more expressive, sculptured building tops have drawn more hoots and cat-calls than other features. "Hats" is the current nomenclature for these elements. Designers' reactions are mixed. Dan Solomon, FAIA observed, "We used to have crew-cuts; now we have fancy hats—but they're more fun to design."

The reactive urban form policy is meant to turn the design process around so that buildings are designed much more from the outside-in. Designers will have to cultivate an awareness of the visual qualities of the buildings immediately adjacent to their site as well as those on the general skyline. It should be a very educational process and, in fact, the contextual approach has been part of recent architectural education.

In recognition of the contribution of art to the quality of life, the plan requires developers to invest one percent of the total construction cost of a new project in artwork (two percent in city buildings). Corporate use of art for self-promotion and status purposes is by now a tradition in itself. From my observation, many works of art procured for these purposes scarcely reach beyond tokenism. They may tug at the corner of the eye, but they are rarely integrated with the project in an uplifting way. If these features achieve the integrated quality of those in, say, the 1925 Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Building or the 1929 Shell Building, that will be cause to rejoice.

**DESIGN IN A POLITICAL ARENA**

An eleventh-hour political battle at the board of supervisor's level over the growth issue produced a cap on annual development of 950,000 square feet or 2.85 million square feet for the next three years. (The mayor proposed the first figure; two members of the board of supervisors had proposed lower caps of 750,000 and 500,000 square feet.) The exemptions to the cap—large mixed-use complexes such as Yerba Buena Gardens, Mission Bay, and Executive Park, as well as a number of small building projects such as Embarcadero Center West, the Hills Brothers complex, Trinity Plaza, and the International Hotel—total millions of square feet. Furthermore, buildings under 50,000 square feet are exempt from the cap. In light of these figures, many critics have concluded that the cap's effect will be nil; downtown density will continue to multiply.

Yet there is a more insidious interpretation of the cap's effect. First, approved projects have already just about used up the first year's quota. Developers are in a state of understandable anxiety over which projects will be chosen. The "beauty contest" that will decide the winners is controlled by Dean Macris and his staff. San Francisco Chronicle critic Allan Temko has registered
the outrage felt by the design and development community over the planning director's unprecedented power. Even if Macris uses his power responsibly—and many think he will—his successors cannot be counted upon to follow suit.

As a way out of this predicament, Temko proposed the appointment of a panel of distinguished architects who would, as he put it, give what's left of downtown an architectural chance. Mayor Feinstein has accepted the recommendation. Upon signing the plan, she instructed the planning commission to establish a panel of three to five members chosen from among the country's most outstanding architects. The panel will meet for an annual review of individual projects.

Do architects see this action as bettering their lot? The answer is no. Judgment by one's peers is not all it's cracked up to be. Even if unquestionably qualified people are appointed, will they do their homework? And will they suspend their judgments in favor of a conceptual understanding? In any case, this is one more hurdle in an already complex obstacle course.

A closer look at the approval system brings more cause for alarm. Following the initial submission of the project's concept comes the environmental impact review period. During the time—now running about a year—until the first public hearing on the EIR draft report, architects carry out design development. Following the hearing there typically has been a two- to three-month period to respond to comments, followed by a final submission and approval of the project immediately thereafter. Before the imposition of the cap it appeared that this process would take less time under the new plan. Now there is no apparent procedure for scheduling the final round. The specter of an indeterminant waiting period conjures up a death-row image for developers who have already spent considerable sums just to enter the process.

At this writing, it is too early to answer all the formidable questions raised by the political process, but we can begin to answer the question foremost in the minds of architects: What will it be like to design under "The Plan?" As spokesman for Heller & Leake, the only architectural firm to have brought a project through the whole approval process, Jeff Heller, AIA has high praise for the plan. Formerly a principal designer for Kaplan McLaughlin Diaz, Heller has worked within the plan's anticipated regulations on several building projects. By his account, the urban design controls are both sophisticated and flexible. In answer to the charge that the new controls will merely produce a new set of cookie-cutter buildings, Heller says that the buildings he has worked on do not look alike. Once architects become accustomed to working within the rules of the Downtown Plan, he believes that they will be won over.

Heller points out that exceptions, or adjustments, exist to the rules governing the ways in which buildings must step back from the street wall as they rise. Set-back averaging and the exception for buildings on sites less than 75 feet wide offer a variety of design options, as the graphics on page 22 illustrate. Further creative opportunities lie in the design of buildings under 50,000 square feet, now exempt from controls. Heller maintains that the smaller towers mandated by the plan harmonize better with older buildings. In recent decades these compact buildings have not been economically attractive. But now that the lid is on, they have a bright future.

Heaven knows, the city needs one.

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Creative Workspace for S. Claus

A WORKSHOP FOR MR. & MRS. S. CLAUS
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25 DECEMBER, 1985

1984 GHOST & CHRISTMAS PAST
Neighborhoods

A Photography Competition

If the entrants in this year’s photography competition are an accurate barometer, the character of California’s neighborhoods is undergoing a curious transformation. Where, one wonders, have all the people gone?

With few exceptions, the commentary on neighborhoods focused on the built environment, rather than on the living environment of which buildings are a part. This probably reflects the tendency in architectural photography to treat architecture as a sculptural object rather than as a people space. In fact, this tendency is precisely what we hoped to overcome by selecting the neighborhood as the subject of this competition. What we saw instead were mean streets, with the occasional human making a token appearance as a focal point of alienation. One juror remarked, “If these are neighborhoods, we should stop making them.”

Most entrants took the subject of neighborhoods at face value, primarily recording residential scenes. No one addressed the workplace as a neighborhood, and only a few looked at the proximities inherent in commercial and civic spaces. The richness of neighborhoods existing in the natural environment were only peripherally considered. Those photographs that did expand the dimension of neighborhoods are among the prize winners.

A number of memorable images were passed over because they simply were not good photographs. A series of night views of Westwood, for example, particularly delighted the jury with their vibrant life, yet lacked the technical discipline to qualify as a prize winner. The jury felt that none of the color submissions demonstrated technical excellence.

The photographers whose work appears on these pages did more than point a camera and click a shutter. They thought about what they saw, and carefully eliminated extraneous elements to create a precise photographic statement. What is captured has the power of life observed.

The editorial board of Architecture California served as jury for the competition. We will continue to sponsor an annual photography competition to encourage architects and the observant public to comment on architecture through the medium of photography. The subject for next year’s competition is “architectural detail.” Competition guidelines will appear in upcoming issues of Architecture California.

FIRST PRIZE—
BLACK & WHITE
VISIONS FROM LA MISSION
BALMY ST., SAN FRANCISCO
PHOTOGRAPHER:
FRIEDA BROIDO
SAN FRANCISCO

Jury comment: A sense of the social interaction of the community is depicted in this photograph. People have put their stamp on the neighborhood in a way not usually accomplished. The architectural decoration and cultural trappings add interest to the street—an immediate relationship exists between the cars and the people. Cars are a part of most neighborhoods, a sort of street furniture.
FIRST PRIZE—COLOR
ECHO PARK, LOS ANGELES
PHOTOGRAPHER: DAUNA WHITEHEAD
LOS ANGELES

Jury comment: This artful composition captures the subject of the competition on many different levels. The neighborhood is put into its context as part of a larger environment, of an ecosystem. Visually and technically, this photograph is in a different class than the other entries, and reflects a high level of thought by the photographer.

SECOND PRIZE—COLOR
REPOSE, MARYSVILLE
PHOTOGRAPHER: J. SCOURKES
MARYSVILLE

Jury comment: This photograph is thoughtful rather than exploitative, showing that our aesthetic sense has matured from the time when the derelict was thought to be picturesque. Although this is the poorest neighborhood depicted in the competition, it is the only place where we saw an expression of real comfort. The timeless quality of this photograph awakens a nostalgia for the sort of homey neighborhood where people feel safe enough to fall asleep on the front porch. This entry provides a humane contrast to the sterile neighborhoods featured in other submissions.
**Third Prize—Color**

Alley, Santa Monica
Photographer: David Kaplan
Santa Monica

Jury comment: The photograph turns the neighborhood inside out. This surreal view of the backside of a typical neighborhood suggests that the alley may be more interesting than the street. The designer of these simple buildings obviously saw the potential for life in the alley among the dumpsters and the telephone poles. The alley is reminiscent of a classic medieval street. The presence of people is strongly felt, despite their absence in the photograph.

**Honorable Mention—Color**

Marina Edge #2,
San Francisco
Photographer: Neil Hart
San Francisco

Jury comment: The roof forms speak to the contrasts of the city, the curious juxtaposition of buildings used for different purposes.

**Honorable Mention—Color**

De Jesus Sandwiches To Go,
San Jose
Photographer: Steve Kolm
Los Altos

Jury comment: This neighborhood may be more genteel than the wrought iron suggests. After all, the telephone is still in the telephone booth.
SECOND PRIZE—BLACK & WHITE
CHEVRON REFINERY, POINT RICHMOND
PHOTOGRAPHER: KENNETH SEKIGUCHI
BERKELEY

Jury comment: The architecture of tank farms is fantastic in the true sense of that word. This landscape photograph gives an overview of all kinds of neighborhoods, and speaks to the way different structures are integrated into the terrain. The photograph is of such high quality that you can almost smell the natural gas.

THIRD PRIZE—BLACK & WHITE
LOFT BUILDING, SAN FRANCISCO
PHOTOGRAPHER: KENNETH SEKIGUCHI
BERKELEY

Jury comment: the photographer has a marvelous eye for composition and captured an unusual collection of graphic shapes. The pavement lines are a great commentary.

HONORABLE MENTION—BLACK & WHITE
STREET CAR SHEDS, DALY CITY
PHOTOGRAPHER: KENNETH SEKIGUCHI
BERKELEY

Jury comment: Is a neighborhood of trolleys called a clutch? The ambiguous geometries of this photograph play up the image of 19th-century technology.
DEVELOPMENT THREATENS WEEKEND RETREAT

BY JANICE FILLIP

Everyone has a place they want to escape to,” says Lloyd Pereira. “Bethel Island is our great escape.” His sentiments are universally shared by other residents who inhabit one of the few “urbanized” islands in the Delta area of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers. Most of the islanders preserve the recreational and open character of their community. The R/UDAT Team—J. J. Champeaux, FAIA, chairman; community planner and developer David W. Ames; Stanley Keniston, AIA; geotechnical engineer David Lourie, PE; sociologist Richard Madsen; and planning and development consultant Alan Mallach—concluded “...there is little time in which to undertake careful and systematic planning and implement serious measures for more effectively controlling the extent, nature, and pace of land development.”

Residents realize their best hope of preserving the island as a sanctuary depends upon their ability to control the area’s inevitable growth. Local architect Constance Brady, AIA, backed by the East Bay Chapter of The American Institute of Architects, brought a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) to Bethel Island this past summer to advise islanders on how to preserve the recreational and open character of their community. The R/UDAT Team—J. J. Champeaux, FAIA, chairman; community planner and developer David W. Ames; Stanley Keniston, AIA; geotechnical engineer David Lourie, PE; sociologist Richard Madsen; and planning and development consultant Alan Mallach—concluded “...there is little time in which to undertake careful and systematic planning and implement serious measures for more effectively controlling the extent, nature, and pace of land development.”

Since 1970, Contra Costa has been the fastest growing county in the Bay Area. The once-distinguishable towns of Walnut Creek, Pleasanton, and Concord are melding into a continuous regional center, dubbed ContraCostapolis by the local media, that stretches to the north and east to Pittsburg, Antioch, and Brentwood. One-half million people live in the area now. Around 6,500 building permits for new homes are issued annually.

The central core of Contra Costa County has become a commercial center in its own right. Over 30 million square feet of office space was built or under construction in the county in the last decade, equaling half the square footage built in San Francisco’s financial district since the 1960s. At least 20 percent of the people who formerly commuted to work in San Francisco or Oakland now are employed within the county. The rat-race is catching up with Bethel Island. The quiet weekend fishing and recreation retreat is now within comfortable commuting distance of a major employment center. No significant buffer of open land remains between Bethel Island and ContraCostapolis’s urban/suburban belt. According to the R/UDAT, “Bethel Island finally has been reached by the development pressures engendered by the Bay Area; the effects of those pressures will inevitably shape the future of the community.”

THE ISLAND CONTEXT

Like most of its Delta neighbors, Bethel Island is technically under water, resting ten feet below mean water level. An encircling levee system, built by Chinese farm laborers in the early 1850s, protects the 3,500-acre island from surrounding waters. Lashing winter storms routinely break through Delta levees, inundating farms and settlements, but Bethel Island’s levee system never has been breached. It is considered one of the most stable and best maintained in the Delta system. The levee forms the prominent edge for the island, and gives the single greatest definition of form to its built environment. “Almost all urbanization in the area has taken place immediately adjacent to the levees,” the R/UDAT said. “From the air, development
appears like a string of residential beads ringing the island, leaving the extensive center open for agricultural use.

The two-lane timber bridge that connects the island to the mainland is the nucleus for commercial development on Bethel Island. The restaurants, shops, and services located at the bridge form a "cluttered, somewhat 'funky' commercial district" that lacks a unifying building design criteria or signage, according to the R/UDAT. "The streetscape is difficult to comprehend, does not reinforce a clear parking scheme, and does not encourage pedestrian flow." In fact, pedestrian and vehicular traffic are brought face-to-face at the bridge with perilous regularity. Secondary commercial sites are emerging along the levees to provide water-oriented services.

The island's interior is comprised of wetlands and unstable soil composed of soft peat overlaying silty sand. The wetlands support local and migratory wildlife, and wetroot tolerant species of grasses and trees. The water table is very high, and ground-water quality is poor. (Since ground-water recharge mechanisms are not well understood, the R/UDAT supports a recommendation by the county geologist to establish an independent ground-water study group to assess the population load that can be serviced by existing wells before the island is endangered by subsidence or settlement.) "The central area establishes the non-urban, undeveloped character of an open countryside," the R/UDAT said. "This overall landscape perception is considered essential to island identity."

Although islanders are drawn together by their appreciation of a particular environment and style of life, they "have no strong common visions of their public responsibilities toward one another," the R/UDAT said. Rather than a unified community, Bethel Island is "a mosaic of contending factions." The permanent population of 2,500 falls roughly into three socio-economic categories. A large contingent of retired or semi-retired people from solid middle-class backgrounds forms the political core on the island. Virtually none of these people are members of ethnic minorities; most are over age 65. They are especially active in the island's many social clubs.

A younger element is predominant in the visitors who swell the weekend population upward to 10,000, but this group has little influence in the island's affairs. In recent years, a younger generation of permanent residences with school-age children has settled on the island. This group generally is of modest means, and does not actively participate in community affairs.

The few off-islanders who do wield influence in the community are the owners of large land tracts in the island's interior. These investors intend to develop the land to improve the quality of life on the island and to make a profit. "When development is over, Bethel Island will be Treasure Island," remarked Bud Weisenberg. Each landowner has a private scheme for development of his property, primarily to provide residences for middle- and upper-income working householders who commute to work in ContraCostapolis. Most of these schemes propose to reconfigure the levee system to create inland bodies of water and hence multiply the options for waterfront development. The R/UDAT found that, while no one scheme would be harmful, the cumulative impact of all schemes proposed would be to eliminate all the island's open space, destroying the wetlands and the area's aesthetic quality.

Despite the residents' diversity, one idea surfaced again and again during the public hearings held by the R/UDAT: that "progress" should come to Bethel Island through gradual, reliable, controlled growth that retains the peace and quiet, open space and water-oriented recreation which currently characterize the island.
R/UDAT PROPOSES CONCEPTUAL PLAN

“If development is permitted to turn Bethel Island into something largely indistinguishable from any other Bay Area suburb, it may well lose its attractiveness and distinctiveness as a water-oriented recreation community,” the R/UDAT said in proposing a conceptual plan for development of 35 percent of the island's total acreage. Low density and the perception of openness are critical elements in the plan.

The total potential housing demand for Bethel Island will hit 3,000 units by the year 2000, according to the R/UDAT estimate. While planned development is expected to upgrade the image and market character of Bethel Island, the R/UDAT emphasized that new development should not be priced out of the reach of people similar to those now inhabiting the island. The conceptual plan proposes that existing street neighborhoods be preserved as social and physical areas, and that new development be focused on the northwest sector of the island.

A combination of residential densities ranging from two to ten dwelling units per acre is proposed for the 1,500 acres comprising the northwest sector. The residential area will be surrounded by land reserved for a golf and tennis center. Appropriate commercial development in this area would include a marina, motel, restaurant, convenience store, chandlery, and possible public campsite and public access points. The R/UDAT urged that Bethel Island Road be reconfigured to channel visitor traffic directly to public water recreation and boating areas. Property that is not part of the proposed harbor development will be developed at a lower density of four units per acre.

To minimize the apparent density throughout the island, the R/UDAT states that the natural features of the island's interior which have been lost must be re-established. The R/UDAT proposes identifying low, poorly drained areas and excavating them to establish a new inland marsh habitat for wildlife, a new drainage system, and a buffer zone between development areas. The drainage system, which must be in place before substantial growth can occur, offers the potential of becoming an extensive lake system, providing opportunities for additional inland harbors and public access to waterways. Excavated fill placed strategically in mounds to screen development areas also would serve as a backup system to the existing levees.

Now most of the unbuilt land on the island is zoned for one dwelling unit per 10 acres. Since the conceptual plan's density and open space objectives unevenly affect each landowner, the R/UDAT suggests a method to ensure equity among all landowners. The R/UDAT proposes creating a land bank by assessing property owners with substantial development opportunities and using the funds to buy land from those without great development potential, and to buy wetlands outright.

Commercial development is expected to expand to service a growing population. The R/UDAT recommends that commercial activity be focused at the Island Center, and that the entrance bridge to the island be reconfigured to improve pedestrian circulation and reduce traffic hazards. Landscaping, signage control, and infill building were suggested to enhance the visual impact of the commercial zone.

ISLANDERS MUST CONTROL THEIR DESTINY

“Decisions over the future of the island, and particularly those governing which projects are to be approved and which denied, are being made by a body that is remote both geographically and in terms of values and attitudes,” the R/UDAT said, referring to Contra Costa County's Department of Community Development, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors. “We sensed a strong, nearly unanimous sentiment on the part of residents of Bethel Island for greater control and for greater involvement in decisions affecting their destiny.”

Three avenues were suggested to increase the islanders' participation in the decision-making processes affecting them. First, the R/UDAT urges that the principles of the Contra Costa County General Plan and the conceptual plan be translated into a Specific Plan for Bethel Island. A Specific Plan is a precise plan to control the nature and extent of development, and includes issues such as land use and location of open space; development of facilities such as transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid-waste disposal and energy; and standards for development and preservation of natural resources. The R/UDAT warns that the Specific Plan must be totally independent from manipulation by developers, and suggests that it be funded by donations from the public sector that would be reimbursed by assessments on developers making application under the Specific Plan.

Second, the R/UDAT recommends creation of a Bethel Island Municipal Advisory Council, elected by islanders, to coordinate efforts within the community and with the county. This group would enable the community “to speak effectively as one on issues of importance in its dealings with the outside world.”

Finally, the R/UDAT urges that formal approval responsibility for development in the east county area be vested in a reconstituted East Diablo Planning Advisory Committee, to be comprised of representatives from throughout the East Diablo area, including Bethel Island. “Such a body will be far more responsive to legitimate concerns of the community, by virtue of their proximity and intimate familiarity with the area, than is necessarily the case with the current county planning commission,” the R/UDAT said.

Altering the decision-making process at the county level was deemed the bottom line in Bethel Island's bid to control development. The R/UDAT concluded that Bethel Island and the entire East Diablo area are “at the whim of site-specific permit decisions on land uses without the benefit of proper contextual considerations. To continue such a state of regional decision making can only be seen as irresponsible county government.”

Janice Fillip is editor of Architecture California.
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Beyond Technology, the Study of Values

What is worth doing?
By Arthur E. Stamps III, Ph.D., AIA

Some important issues in architectural education have been circulating recently at the national level. The two issues, which are closely related, are projecting the future from technology alone, and whether we should teach architects to think or act. These issues are important and deserve more consideration than they are attracting in the current discussion.

The issue of projecting the future from technology alone was raised by the vision of "telespherization" in which, among other things, homes will become telecommunications centers, buildings will interact with their ambient environments and with their occupants, and the need for office buildings will be eliminated. This vision claims that the world is moving away from the social forms of industrialization.

Architects are wise to take these projections with a grain of salt. Brief glances through computer journals like PC World or through Sweet's Catalog show that we already do have the technology to turn the house into a telecommunications center and a building into a mechanical nanny. The question is whether this technological capacity is a sufficient condition to eliminate the need for office buildings or to change the basic forms of our society. If so, we should emphasize information about technology in our educational system; if not, we should include other types of information in our education.

I suggest that technological capacity is not a sufficient condition for understanding the future. Take the issue of the need for office buildings. Social-scientific research suggests that communication is most effective when the participants have the widest variety of ways of sending messages to each other. Personal presence is best, because we can use words, posture, physical distance, body language, and timing to communicate. A telephone is limited to voice and timing, while a letter can be verbal or visual, but does not allow for immediate feedback. A person who works at home through a computer will have highly restricted communication capacities. Businessmen know that personal presence is absolutely necessary; witness the rise of the central business district office space in spite of telecommunications capacities. Or take the case of the academic community, which is distributed over space in much the same way as a "telespherized" society would be. It would seem that physical propinquity is not a major need. But the research on the "non-place community" suggests otherwise: the living core of the academic community is the mutual physical presence of scientists at informal meetings at highly specified physical locations.

People have communication needs that are not satisfied by mere data transmission. If we want to understand those needs, we will have to look beyond technological capacity. This thought has occurred to others, of course. The current thinking in marketing research, for example, is based on a redefinition of social classes defined by their values and lifestyles.1 Arnold Mitchell's work suggests that one-third of the American public are "belongers"—people who value community over almost anything else. Only about 20 percent of the people have "inner-directed" lifestyles that might fit in a "telespherized" society.

The point is that information about values is necessary to anticipate the effects of design. This statement seems trivial until one tries to apply it. Application of value judgments in design requires some familiarity with both ends (values) and means (technology). As C.P. Snow pointed out in the late 1950s, it is common to find technologists who are proud of not knowing about the humanities, and humanists who are proud of not being able to add and subtract.2 More recently the
lead article in the National Academy of Science's new journal *Issues in Science and Technology* noted that although technology is once again perceived as the source of solutions (public support for science had slipped to 52 percent in the mid-1970s), science would not be able to provide the solutions unless it also addressed issues of value.  The implications are that information about technology is not a sufficient basis for design, and that if the architectural community wants to stay even with the scientific community, we will have to start including the study of values in our education and practice.

**To Think or To Act?**

The second issue is whether we should teach students to think or to act. This issue has been discussed in *Architecture* (August 1984, page 36 and October 1984, page 8), and currently is under consideration by the national AIA Committee of Architects in Education. The problem here is that the formulation of the issue has the unfortunate quality of precluding a solution. If we want to get an answer, we must first rephrase the question.

As it stands, the issue forces us to choose between thought and action. It is highly doubtful that such a choice is meant to be taken literally; who wants an architect who acts thoughtlessly? In the AIA committee the problem was reinterpreted in terms of entry-level job training (lettering, drafting, detailing, specification writing, etc.) and a liberal-arts education. The liberal arts are those parts of education that were considered to be worthy of a free man, as opposed to servile or mechanical duties. In 1400 the liberal arts were grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy; today they might be better characterized as the humanities. We now have a concrete issue: How much of the architectural curriculum should cover the humanities? But even this choice forces an unwanted division between technique and purpose. This division has the tangible form of schizophrenia in the design curriculum: academics give lecture classes, designers give studios, and seldom the two shall meet. Why? Because we still think in terms of a choice between thought and action. But suppose we change our question to something like: How should we think about our acts? If we can answer that question, we will have a way of unifying thought and action.

Take the specific case of the judgments required in a design studio. Some decisions are relatively easy, such as how much insulation is required for an R-19 rating, or which structural system will

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cost the least. These decisions are determined by technological factors. Other decisions—the ones typically the hardest to make—are not determined by technology. These decisions generally involve a determination of goodness. For example, an architect usually is interested in deciding whether a given building is a “good” one. Is the Bank of America in San Francisco a good building? Are high-rise buildings good? Take another case: Making design trade-offs requires a decision regarding which alternative is “better” than the others. Is it better to have a solar house or a usable south patio? Are two bedrooms better than one bedroom and a family room? Take a third case: In large-scale enterprises people often attempt the “best” solutions by examining economic costs. But what is the economic cost of a project like Mission Bay in San Francisco?

All these judgments are based on the criterion of “goodness.” Without some conception of goodness, an architect has no reason upon which to select his actions. Moreover, there are a great many conceptions of goodness floating around, but very few suggest that mere technological possibility is a sufficient reason for judging something to be good. Another criterion—one that is not based on the possibilities of technology—is required.

What I would like to suggest (finally) is simply this: There is a field of knowledge that deals explicitly with the unification of thought and action. The core question is, what is worth doing? That field is ethics, and its purpose is to investigate the subject of goodness. What is missing in architectural education—and what is causing all the current flap about thought and action—is design ethics.

THE PURSUIT OF ETHICS

The academic pursuit of ethics is relatively straightforward. First, the preliminary issues would be discussed: whether ethical judgments are merely personal opinions, or expressions of particular societies, or something more general; whether there is a difference between ethical and aesthetic judgments; whether man is completely determined by technical and economic factors, or whether he is capable of thinking (and acting) from other principles. These questions lead to a conception of freedom which is conducive to design. Once aware of this freedom of choice, students can investigate the implications of applying ethics to different issues. For instance, people interested in choosing a good lifestyle can begin with Adler’s Grand conceptions of goodness are listed in the Inter-
national Bill of Human Rights and, of course, there are the classics: Aristotle’s Ethica Nicomachea and Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason. Class assignment is easy: write a paper outlining what is worth doing and how one might go about doing it. (Writing the paper is a little harder.)

The studio pursuit of ethics is tricky but not impossible. The central issues are, What is worth doing? (ends), and, How can we do it? (means). What is necessary here is to have the students outline what they think is worth doing for a given project, execute the project, and then repeat the process with a different ethic. For instance, one could adopt a design ethic of matching one of the lifestyles from Mitchell’s book, and then do a housing project based on that ethic. On the second pass, a naturalistic ethic could be used. The design differences would be dramatic and hence would highlight the effects of ethics in the design process. Or one could adopt the classic virtues of friendship and community and try to design a building that would support that ethic. The point is that it is perfectly possible to reconcile thought and action in a studio. There is ample material with which to work; we have only to go out and get it!

In the beginning of this article I suggested that the two issues of technological forecasting and reconciling thought and action were closely related. The relationship is simple: Anticipation of consequences is required for both technological forecasting and for architectural design. We cannot anticipate the consequences of our acts without having knowledge of both fact and values. The study of what is worthy of a man with free choice (i.e., the liberal arts, especially ethics) is required for effective design.

4. See Bob Beckley’s article in Architectural Record (October 1984): 101–03.

Arthur E. Stamps III, Ph.D., AIA has an architectural practice in San Francisco and teaches architecture at the California College of Arts and Crafts. He is a member of the AIA Committee of Architects in Education, and currently is writing a book on the improvement of design judgment.

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